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# **Scripts, Skirts, and Stays:**

## *Femininity and Dress in Fiction by German Women Writers, 1840-1910*

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in German

2015

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the importance of sartorial detail in fiction by German women writers of the nineteenth century. Using a methodology based on Judith Butler's gender theory, it examines how femininity is perceived and presented and argues that clothes are essential to female characterisation and both the perpetuation and breakdown of gender stereotypes.

Based on extensive research into the history of dress including historical studies, fashion journals and conduct books, the thesis indicates how clothes were scripted for bourgeois women in nineteenth-century Germany. Women were expected both to observe the expensive dictates of fashion and to prove themselves morally superior.

Arranged chronologically, this thesis analyses how this paradox is approached by female authors. It concludes that the revolutionary spirit of the 1840s was evident in the ways in which Louise Aston (1814-1871) and Fanny Lewald (1811-1889) portrayed dress, although both rely on sartorial traditions. 'Natural' beauty is at the centre of their characterisation, but the 'natural' is shown, not necessarily consciously on the part of the authors, to be an achievement. This is also true in the didactic works of Eugenie Marlitt (1825-1887) who surrounds her 'natural' protagonists with women who mis-perform their gender by dressing ostentatiously. Progressive writers at the end of the century are more direct in their treatment of the dress paradox. Such authors as Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919) and Frieda von Bülow (1857-1909), create heroines who feel vulnerable and awkward because of the pressure to be sexually attractive.

This thesis concludes that dress is used in different ways to show how the dictates of fashion correspond to the dictates of patriarchal society; how sartorial details literally and metaphorically shape women; and how female writers accentuated the way dress functions as a means of oppression or attempted to overlook dress as a way of emphasising other feminine attributes.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Acknowledgements .....	4
Introduction .....	7
Methodological Framework .....	9
Judith Butler's gender theory and its applications .....	9
Fashion Theory .....	17
Femininity and clothes in nineteenth-century Germany .....	22
Thesis Outline .....	29
Chapter One - The History of Women's Dress in Nineteenth-Century Germany....	31
Introduction .....	32
Secondary Literature .....	37
Empiremode: the early nineteenth century .....	39
Biedermeiermode: 1830-1840.....	42
Vormärzmode: 1840-1850 .....	44
'Zweites Rokoko': 1850-1860 .....	46
1860-1870 .....	49
Die Gründerzeit: 1870-1880 .....	50
1880-1890 .....	52
The 'Belle Epoque': 1890-1914.....	56
Dress Reform .....	65
Aesthetics and Dress Reform .....	66
Medical Arguments for Dress Reform.....	69
Dress Reform in Fashion Journals .....	72
Criticism of Dress Reform .....	74
Conclusion .....	77
Chapter Two - Fanny Lewald and Louise Aston: Clothes as protest or diversion in novels of the 1840s .....	79
Introduction.....	79
Fanny Lewald (1811-1889).....	86
Secondary Literature.....	89
<i>Diogenes</i> (1847).....	90
<i>Clementine</i> (1843) .....	91
<i>Jenny</i> (1843) .....	96
<i>Eine Lebensfrage</i> (1845).....	100
Louise Aston (1814-1871) .....	110

Secondary Literature.....	111
<i>Aus dem Leben einer Frau</i> (1847).....	112
<i>Lydia</i> (1847).....	120
Conclusion .....	129
Chapter Three - Eugenie Marlitt: Bourgeois Morality and Dress in the 1860s and 1870s.....	131
Introduction.....	131
Secondary Literature.....	136
<i>Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell</i> (1867).....	138
<i>Das Heideprinzeßchen</i> (1871).....	151
<i>Die zweite Frau</i> (1874) .....	159
Illustrations .....	162
Conclusion .....	168
Chapter Four -- Thematising male fantasy in turn-of-the-century fiction .....	173
Introduction.....	173
Hedwig Dohm's theoretical writings .....	177
Dohm's <i>Wie Frauen werden</i> (1894).....	185
Frieda Freiin von Bülow (1857-1909) .....	192
<i>Lass mich nun vergessen!</i> (1902).....	195
<i>Die stilisierte Frau</i> (1902) .....	200
Bülow: Between Emancipation and Submission .....	204
Maria Janitschek (1859-1927) .....	206
Dora Duncker (1855-1916).....	216
Conclusion .....	220
Conclusion .....	224
Bibliography .....	229
Primary Sources .....	229
Contemporary Sources.....	233
Contemporary Journals .....	236
Secondary Sources .....	237

## Introduction

Methodological Framework .....	9
Judith Butler's gender theory and its applications .....	9
Fashion Theory .....	17
Femininity and clothes in nineteenth-century Germany .....	22
Thesis Outline .....	29

Academic studies that explore dress usually start with an apology. Only recently has the academic world acknowledged the study of fashion as a serious discipline. Only recently, too, has the concept of *Trivalliteratur* ceased to be used as an excuse to avoid including such novelists as Eugenie Marlitt in literary histories. Focusing on clothes as a key aspect of literary analysis and as a means of enhancing cultural understanding is rare. Yet in the nineteenth century no conduct book overlooked the importance of clothes in a woman's life as skirts and stays effectively functioned as one way of scripting femininity. What to wear, when to wear it and how to wear it were common issues when it came to defining appropriate feminine behaviour. To read literature by women is to engage with this world where clothes are central to the formation and embodiment of the self, the soul, the 'essence' of womanhood. And to read their heroines requires an understanding of what their clothes mean within the contemporary fashion context.

Yet despite the importance of clothes for women in nineteenth-century Germany and the increasing interest over the past few decades in social history and female writers, there has yet to be an academic study of the representation of dress in fiction by women at this time. The aim of this thesis is to explore literary conventions in the use of sartorial characterization; how they were informed by the fashion industry and *Benimmliteratur* (didactic conduct literature which became ever more popular over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century); how they reflected views about what it meant to be a woman; and how they were challenged by progressive women writers with the development of the *Frauenbewegung* and the dress reform movement.

Clothing 'provides a powerful analytical tool across many disciplines'<sup>1</sup> because it embodies the implicit assumptions of the codes of social behaviour. Far from merely serving to keep us warm, dress functions as a social sign, providing a visualisation of the identity of its wearer. Gender, social status, professional affiliation and economic position are all conveyed through one's clothes. For women in the nineteenth century in particular, clothes were 'powerful expressions of

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<sup>1</sup>Lou Taylor, *The study of dress history* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 1.



gender hegemonies'.<sup>2</sup> At the time, bourgeois and aristocratic women were effectively excluded from a productive role in the economy with the rise of industrialisation and the development of a deeply divided patriarchal society. Indeed, as historian Marion Grey points out, 'The economic values of the nineteenth century formed the basis for a new cultural production of gender.'<sup>3</sup> The definition of female gender centred on the bourgeois housewife and the cult of domesticity which confined women to the private realm of the house and made them entirely dependent on their fathers or husbands. There emerged a doctrine of gender compartmentalisation that was evidenced through feminine fashions which reinforced the subordination and passivity of women. Indeed, women in the nineteenth century were defined largely according to what they wore, for it was at this time that 'Fashion became an important instrument in a heightened consciousness of gendered individuality'.<sup>4</sup> As a central attribute of gender during the period focused on here, it makes sense to explore dress in relation to gender theory.

All the authors discussed in this thesis are bourgeois and aristocratic women since they were mainly the ones writing and wearing fashionable skirts and stays in the nineteenth century. For the sake of coherence, working-class women do not feature as central characters in the fiction I have chosen to discuss here.<sup>5</sup> Nor are they included in the discourses regarding the female gender mentioned below, despite the success of the socialist movement from the 1860s. Members of the bourgeoisie tended to reflect on the world with their own class in mind. Moreover, because women of the proletariat worked, their dress was functional rather than decorative; they could not share the typical feminine characteristics of the more wealthy, who were required in essence to advertise their passivity and leisure. What is more, while many took part in the production of clothes, working-class women were economically excluded from the consumption of fashion until

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<sup>2</sup>Diane Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 236-237.

<sup>3</sup>Marion Grey, *Productive Men, Reproductive Women: The Agrarian Household and the Emergence of Separate Spheres during the German Enlightenment* (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 302. In her essay 'Women and Men: 1760-1960', however, Ann Goldberg suggests that the polarisation of gender roles was not as straightforward as we are given to believe, since many bourgeois households could not afford for their women not to work. Nonetheless, 'a dichotomized view of the nature of the sexes as opposites' was the norm. See Goldberg 'Women and Men: 1760-1960' in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 73.

<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 120.

<sup>5</sup> While working women emulated the dress of their wealthy countrywomen, the need for practical clothing outweighed the desire for decorative attire; fashion remained a symbol of leisure and wealth. See: Kathleen Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), Marcelline Hutton, *Russian and West European Women, 1860-1939* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001) and Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998). Nonetheless, there would certainly be a case for examining the ways in which working women were portrayed through dress, in particular towards the end of the century when they could afford to emulate their wealthier countrywomen more and more convincingly.

the end of the century when mass production allowed for the cheap acquisition of popular garments.<sup>6</sup>

## **Methodological Framework**

The theoretical basis for this thesis is informed by Judith Butler's gender theory, fashion theory which emphasises the cultural significance of dress, and conceptions of the relationship between women and dress developed by nineteenth-century male philosophers, sociologists and women themselves. These theoretical frameworks demonstrate the importance of dress as a means of establishing and upholding gender identity as well as of sustaining or challenging patriarchal authority in nineteenth-century Germany. Far from simply being a means of creating realist detail, literary depictions of dress serve to characterise, tapping into a network of ideas concerning what it means to be a woman. In a century where women were on the one hand particularly passive and domesticated, but on the other were also demanding more and more rights, sartorial descriptions reflect attitudes towards the *Frauenfrage*; they provide an opportunity to reinforce, question or even re-define the boundaries of femininity and thus function as socio-political statements.

Indeed, dress descriptions in the novel illustrate the historical situation of the heroines and possibilities for gender development. By analysing the use of sartorial characterisation, we can begin to understand how German women conceptualise their gender and the extent to which they perceive clothes as 'designed to guarantee the socialization and institutionalization of personal identity'.<sup>7</sup>

## **Judith Butler's gender theory and its applications**

In exploring the way in which women writers portray their female characters through vestimentary description, it is important to understand the relationship between dress and femininity, how dress is perceived as an external sign, as the visualisation of an internal gendered being, and how as a result clothing is defined according to gendered codes. For Butler, both sex and gender are cultural constructions, 'something like a fiction'.<sup>8</sup> They are subject to regulatory norms, effectively scripted. Her understanding of sex being as phantasmic as gender – in fact functioning in the same way to the extent that there is no difference between them – is one of the main points that differentiates her from other feminist thinkers who see sex as a biological reality.

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<sup>6</sup>See Frank Tipton, *A History of Modern Germany since 1815* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2003), 155.

<sup>7</sup>Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the frame: boundaries, dress and body* (London: Berg, 1998), xvi.

<sup>8</sup>Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), xv.

For her, both gender and sex are ‘the stylisation of the body’.<sup>9</sup> To use Butlerian theory to analyse literature is therefore to acknowledge that the authorial ‘I’ must be understood as writing from within the gender/sex matrix. For the sake of ease, I refer in this thesis to gender, rather than sex. Butler’s gender theory, however, provides a useful framework for this study because of the way in which women express the gender of their female characters as tenuous and changeable through their clothing.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler investigates the concept of gender ‘as a shifting and contextual phenomenon [which] does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations.’<sup>10</sup> Gender is therefore dependent on its context, the historical moment and social situation for definition; what it meant to be female in Wilhelmine Germany is vastly different to what it means to be female in today’s European society. According to Butler, people acquire identity through their gender: “‘persons’ only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.”<sup>11</sup> One of these standards – perhaps the most obvious and certainly the most visually evident – is clothing, although Butler does not identify it as such. In fact, through her discussion of drag in *Bodies that Matter*, she refutes any simplified comparison of dress with gender, for ‘To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that “imitation” is at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarisms [...]’.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in her explanation of Butlerian theory, Sara Salih uses a sartorial analogy to demonstrate how gender is performative, socially constructed and vetted. Although Butler resists equating dress with gender, dress provides a clear and convincing illustration of her theory.<sup>13</sup> Clothes, especially the fashions prevalent in the western world throughout the nineteenth century, exemplify femininity in opposition to masculinity. Butler argues, ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.’<sup>14</sup> On this basis, women can be seen to experience and enact their gender through sartorial performance. Indeed, it is (at least in part) the sartorial expression of femininity that gives the wearer her gender.

Butler uses language and imagery that evoke clothing, albeit without referring to it explicitly. She insists, for example, that to do one's gender requires ‘repeated stylization of the body’,<sup>15</sup> where

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<sup>9</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 45.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 14.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, 22.

<sup>12</sup>Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London: Routledge, 1993), 125. Butler’s italics.

<sup>13</sup> See Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (London: Routledge, 2002), 50.

<sup>14</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 45.

stylization can be read almost literally, although by no means exclusively, to mean dress. The body, she writes, is ‘a cultural sign’<sup>16</sup> and gender a ‘surface signification’<sup>17</sup> which is always acquired. What is more, ‘Gender is what is *put on*, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure (...)’.<sup>18</sup> Whilst the gender performance cannot be reduced to dress – it can never be discarded as a piece of clothing might – clothes make up a key visual component in the expression of gender. We ‘put on’ clothes daily under the constraints of the society we live in and clothes are acquired according to gender, a cultural construct, formed and re-formed by society. In nineteenth-century Germany these codes were formalised in conduct literature, as will be discussed in Chapter One. The ideal features of the bourgeois woman's wardrobe are described in detail, including advice regarding colour and cut. At a time when advances in technology were accelerating the circulation and development of fashion, there was increasing variety in feminine clothing. As a result guidance or codification was ever more important. Despite the variety, there were garments that were necessary for the bourgeois woman; the skirt and the corset were fundamental to the demonstration of femininity and the corset in particular can be taken as an example of how the feminine is enacted through and determined by clothes, and how clothes are developed and manufactured according to expectations of the feminine ideal. A woman of leisure was immediately distinguishable from working women by her restrictive clothing, and clearly distinguishable from men given the emphasis on the womanly silhouette – in other words the hourglass figure and the accentuation of the bust and hips. Dress historian Leigh Summers argues that the corset is an instrument of sexualisation which objectifies the wearer. The corset ‘simultaneously evoked the entire continuum of sexual stereotypes from chaste innocence to erotic perversion.’<sup>19</sup> It also evoked the marginal position of women in society. This ability to stylise the body into stereotypes of the female gender, to give it ‘surface signification’, makes the corset an evident example of Butler’s theory regarding the cultural meaning of the body.

*Gender Trouble* is characterised by probing, unanswerable questions about what it means to perform a gender. Butler problematizes the difference between ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ modes of being and asks,

From what strategic position in public discourse and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? In what language is ‘inner space’ figured? What kind of figuration is it, and through what figure of the body is it

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 96.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 192.

<sup>18</sup>Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’ in *Theater Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Dec. 1988, 531. My italics.

<sup>19</sup>Leigh Summers, *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 8.

signified? How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?<sup>20</sup>

I suggest that the language of inner space that formulates gender is, at least in part, configured by dress. The ‘fantasied and fantastic figuration of the body’ can be seen as achieved through the corset, for instance, which literally re-moulds the body in order to cater to social views of womanhood. The predominance of the corset indicates that gender in the nineteenth century had to be continually reinforced through clothing; and the fact that sartorial practices had to be carefully controlled reveals an angst that gender could somehow slip if not firmly kept in its place. Clothes as a kind of ‘second skin’<sup>21</sup> function as the closest visual expression of the body and are easily perceived as an expression of the inner essence of womanhood. They adhere to gender norms prescribed by society; for the period focused on here these norms were akin to ‘prohibitive laws’, strict definitions of what in particular womanhood was.

Butler asks what it means to be a woman and problematizes a number of theoretical arguments which focus on the relationship between the masculine, the feminine and the body, and which are very useful in this thesis. Firstly, Butler cites Monique Wittig’s hypothesis that ‘the masculine is not the masculine, but the general’ and that the feminine is therefore marginal.<sup>22</sup> I would suggest that since throughout the nineteenth century women were largely excluded from public space, from culture and professionalism, their clothes are in essence a symbol of this exclusion since they suggest, if not enforce, immobility and leisure. As I will show, the female author often emphasises the marginal, domestic position of her female characters through sartorial characterisation. Male characters are not characterised in the same way and reference to their clothes is scarce. Literary critic Friedrich Vischer (1807-1887) made the point, which can be applied both to reality and to the literary representation thereof, that ‘men’s clothing is not supposed to say anything for itself at all, only the man himself within it may assert his personality through his features, bearing, figure, words, and deeds.’<sup>23</sup> In Butlerian terms, we can infer that a man’s ‘inner essence’ is seen as powerful enough to materialise without the need for

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<sup>20</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 183-184.

<sup>21</sup>Marilyn Horn entitled her study of fashion *The Second Skin: An Interdisciplinary Study of Clothing* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), implying an important link between clothes and the body. The psychologist Elizabeth Hurlock writes that ‘We are apt to think of clothes as we do of our bodies, and so to appropriate them that they become perhaps more than any of our other possessions, a part of ourselves [...]’, *The Psychology of Dress* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1929), 44. And Johanne Entwistle continues in the same vein, describing dress as a ‘part of our epidermis – [lying] on the boundary between self and other.’ Entwistle, *The Dressed Body* (2003) cited in *The Fashion Reader*, ed. Linda Welters & Abby Lillethun, (New York: Berg, 2007), 93. In Butler’s terms, clothes are not so much ‘a part of ourselves’ as the surface signification of the body which is thought of and identified as a gendered being.

<sup>22</sup>Cited in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 27.

<sup>23</sup>Friedrich Vischer, *Fashion and Cynicism*, (1879), in *The Rise of Fashion*, ed. and translated by Daniel Purdy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004), 156.

reinforcement through clothes. There is an apparent correspondence between what a man ‘is’ and what he ‘does’. The ‘essence’ of woman, however, needs continual reinforcement and/or controlling so that it emerges appropriately; thus suitable dress becomes more imperative for women than it was for men.

Secondly, Butler draws on Lévi-Strauss’s understanding of the feminine as a reflection of the masculine. The bride, for example, is “‘a sign and a value’”.<sup>24</sup> Butler summarises the argument: the bride ‘does not *have* an identity, and neither does she exchange one identity for another. She *reflects* masculine identity (...)’.<sup>25</sup> The pertinence of this interpretation of gender to this thesis becomes particularly clear when viewed in the light of Thorstein Veblen’s theory of female fashion. For Veblen a woman’s identity is conveyed through her clothes which are a reflection of her husband’s status and wealth.<sup>26</sup> Her role is to express the success of her husband.

Butler expands on these ideas, arguing that men are seen as active agents of culture while ‘the body and nature are considered to be the mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject.’<sup>27</sup> To be a woman is therefore something one becomes, a process of subjugation and socialization determined by men, a notion explored in particular in Hedwig Dohm’s works, discussed in Chapter Four. Simone de Beauvoir’s observations seem to me particularly accurate: ‘humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him (...) She determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her (...)’.<sup>28</sup> Woman is perceived as the other and the performance of womanhood is rooted in the body; dress is used to locate women within patriarchal culture. Butler takes issue with Beauvoir; while Beauvoir sees gender as gradually acquired, Butler contends that it is impossible to be without gender. However, it seems to me that Beauvoir makes extremely perceptive points about what it means to be female in gender; these points illustrate the oppressiveness of gender norms and are therefore relevant to this thesis. In *Le deuxième sexe* (1949) Beauvoir argues that women have no means of expression apart from their bodies, and by extension their apparel, which is confining rather than liberating. In her words, while men can transcend their bodies, women are ever trapped within theirs, for:

(...) the woman who suffers from not *doing* anything thinks she is expressing her *being* through her dress. Beauty treatments and dressing are kinds of work that allow her to

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<sup>24</sup>Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, cited in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 52.

<sup>25</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 52.

<sup>26</sup>See the discussion of Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption below.

<sup>27</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 50.

<sup>28</sup>Simone de Beauvoir, *The second sex*, translated by Constance Borne & Sheila Malovony-Chavallier (Paris: Vintage, 2010), 5-6.

appropriate her person as she appropriates her home through housework; she thus believes that she is choosing and re-creating her own self.<sup>29</sup>

In these terms, clothing (in particular the skirt) gives woman her identity and any shift in or reform of dress says something about the position of woman within society as well as about the individual woman herself and the limitations she faces. Beauvoir effectively hypothesises that a woman's vanity is a product of her restricted social position, rather than a cause of it, contradicting the alternative argument put forward by Vischer, which is discussed below. Both arguments acknowledge the centrality of dress to the female gender, and the fact that Butler refers so much to Beauvoir indicates how relevant the French philosopher's views on gender are for Butlerian theory.

For Butler, gender is not fixed or narrow; and while it prescribes and scripts, it also allows for variety. It is for this reason that theorists David Clover and Cora Kaplan expand on her ideas and argue for the pluralisation of femininity – a suggestion Butler would surely endorse – in *Genders*:

(...) it is perhaps more useful to think of femininity in the plural – femininities – and to see femininity both as an umbrella term for all the different ways in which women are defined by others and by themselves, and as a semi-detached property of the self, not identical to the biologically sexed body.<sup>30</sup>

This idea is extremely useful for this thesis: for the nineteenth-century woman, there were a range of gendered stereotypes she could associate herself with, even if all these stereotypes were clothed by the corset and the skirt, essential components of the bourgeois woman's wardrobe and therefore a key means of demonstrating femininity. Summers refers to a 'continuum of sexual stereotypes' evoked by the corseted figure; through dress alone a woman could mark herself out as a bluestocking, an intellectual, a devoted housewife, a coquette, a Pietist, a prostitute, to name but a few.<sup>31</sup> All of these types appear in nineteenth-century German literature. The task of the writer with emancipatory beliefs and a desire to broaden the scope of her gender is to ensure that her female characters are not simply parodies of these types and that they legitimise actions that fall outside of the feminine category.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid, 585-86.

<sup>30</sup>David Glover and Cora Kaplan, *Genders* (London: Routledge, 2000), 4.

<sup>31</sup>In a manner that suggests the extent to which women were aware of the power and pitfalls of sartorial characterisation, Louise Otto emphasises that members of her sex are easily categorised according to their appearance as 'Ein Original, einen Blaustrumpf, eine Pietistin'. Louise Otto, *Der Genius der Menschheit: eine Gabe für Mädchen und Frauen* (Leipzig: Hertleben, 1870), 197.

Butler links gender to sustained repetition: ‘The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable repetition itself.’<sup>32</sup> Gender is mutant, subject to evolution and a reflection of changing social values, it is ‘an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*...’<sup>33</sup> She therefore insists on the changeability of gender, which is fluid and open to ‘resignification and recontextualization’ through ‘parodic proliferation’.<sup>34</sup> It is important, however, to distinguish between the changes in conceptions of ‘womanhood’ that occur over time and do not disrupt the understanding of an ‘essence of womanhood’ that underpins gender, and those moments of ‘performative’ intervention that do challenge our understanding of gender as something that ‘is’, showing us that it is actually something we ‘do’. Butler calls for the latter, for a challenge to gender categorisation and the unveiling of gender as a performance. Since the evolving role and portrayal of women is central to this thesis, we must ask if there is a deviation from the gender norm which results in a re-definition of the ‘essence of womanhood’ or if there are moments which, consciously or unconsciously on the part of the author, reveal gender to be performative. Butler writes that ‘The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found [...] in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.’<sup>35</sup> The Vormärz writer Louise Aston, who herself dressed as a man and created a heroine who does the same, was identified as deviant by her contemporary critics; but Butler would see her behaviour as an illustration of the concept of gender as a performative act, for ‘in imitating gender, (cross-dressing) implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself (...)’.<sup>36</sup> By dressing like a man, and effectively engaging in a masquerade, Aston reveals gender as a construction, as something that one ‘wears’. An alteration of that gender norm would have required many women emulating Aston. They did not; for women in the nineteenth century, doing their gender meant wearing a skirt.

The question then is how did women writers in Germany between 1840 and 1910, a period of failed revolution, industrial progress and, eventually, dress reform, assert ‘new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms’?<sup>37</sup> And, in Freudian terms, to what extent does their *ego* – both that of the author and the created ego of the characters – subjugate any impulse to rebel? For Butler, ‘The ego ideal (...) serves as an interior agency of sanction and taboo (...) As a set of sanctions and taboos, the ego ideal regulates and determines masculine and

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<sup>32</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 203. Her italics.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid, 191. Her italics.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid, 188.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, 192.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, 187. Her italics.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid, 199.



feminine identification.<sup>38</sup> The reaction by other women to those who ignored the feminine dress code is a case in point. The latter were met with widespread ridicule, taunted with the label ‘Mannweib’ and held up as unnatural by society. ‘Performing one’s gender wrong’, Butler writes, ‘initiates a set of punishments’; dressing as a man is an example of mis-performing femininity. Such flagrant disobedience of sartorial rules caused the downfall of such women as Aston and illustrates the power of visual identity. For most German women’s rights activists it was essential to be *seen* as feminine and to avoid such punishments. To cite the founder of the German women’s movement, Louise Otto (1819-1895):

Alles, was uns vom Standpunkt der weiblichen Emanzipation auf diesem Gebiete zu thun obliegt, ist, daß wir uns von jeder Mode zunächst das Aesthetische und Schöne und dasjenige auswählen, was unserer Individualität am besten entspricht und daß wir diejenigen Moden, welche jene höheren Forderungen der Sitte oder Schönheit verletzen, nicht mitmachen und uns ihren Szepter nur so weit unterwerfen, als wir es müßten, um nicht aufzufallen und die Lacher herauszufordern.<sup>39</sup>

Here Otto suggests that by adhering to the dictates of fashion, which conflates the terms ‘Sitte’ and ‘Schönheit’ – custom is what determines the boundaries of beauty itself – one avoids excessive attention and ridicule. For her, society enforces a strategy of apparent conformity. Self-imposed sanctions regarding feminine dress were somewhat loosened with the advent of the dress reform movement in the 1890s which introduced, with the support of prominent designers and medics, an alternative, more natural feminine silhouette. Crucially, however, the reform dress was still a dress; while the corset and its stays were being phased out, the skirt, which had functioned as the woman's uniform for centuries, was still prominent. It took the destabilizing force of world war to displace the skirt and to make cross-dressing into dressing for women.

For Butler, as for Beauvoir, gender is ‘a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation’ and consists of ‘a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time’.<sup>40</sup> Butler is vague when it comes to demonstrating how subversive actions might function outside of the world of modern drag artists; she does not give examples of how, apart from through sartorial imitation, gender can be subverted. This fact encourages the close association between the gender script or performance and dress in this thesis. The depiction of dress can be used to map the evolving understanding by women of their own gender; because ‘gender is basically an innovative affair’, every attempt to portray it represents a chance to renew

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid, 85.

<sup>39</sup>Louise Otto, *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich – Moden* (Leipzig: Schaefer, 1876), 96.

<sup>40</sup>Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, 523.

it. However, any overt ‘contesting [of] the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations’<sup>41</sup> could exclude the possibility of publication and literary success. The ensuing dilemma for any progressive thinker invites us to investigate the extent to which women writers in nineteenth-century Germany manipulate visual perceptions of femininity in order to excuse or allow cross-gender performance in other aspects of their lives. It is not a question of showing how they pre-figure Butler, but rather how they themselves rely on concepts about ‘true’ and ‘natural’ femininity and demonstrate how they are themselves caught in the gender matrix.

## **Fashion Theory**

There are many theories put forward from the 1800s to the present day about the evolution of fashion and its relationship to female gender. They enhance our reading of clothes descriptions in the nineteenth-century text and can offer additional weight to Butler’s arguments about gender as a construction since clothes were, and are, ‘powerful expressions of gender hegemonies’<sup>42</sup> which work ‘to imbue the body with significance, adding layers of cultural meanings, which, because they are so close to the body, are mistaken as natural.’<sup>43</sup> Even the most progressive women writers discussed in this thesis tend to see their gender as a natural phenomenon and certain sartorial practices as proof of the innateness of particular feminine characteristics.

Theories developed by economists and sociologists in the nineteenth century suggested that women displayed their enforced leisure through conspicuous sartorial consumption, and that fashion evolved through a process of imitation with members of the lower classes emulating their wealthier peers. For the American economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), fashion was a fundamental means of competing for social status; this was especially true in the mid to late nineteenth century with the rise of the nouveaux riches. As the bourgeoisie displayed wealth through conspicuous consumption, their leisurely dress emphasised their rise in society. Bourgeois women were central figures in this display; since they were not in themselves expected to serve in public life, they could indulge in fashion which served no useful purpose apart from self-adornment. While Veblen criticises the reliance on dress in social interaction in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), he also recognises its force and focuses on the female consumer. In his criticism of the crinoline as proof of female folly, for instance, he shows how a woman's attire defined her as an inactive possession of man, for, ‘In woman's dress there is obviously greater

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 531.

<sup>42</sup> Crane, *Fashion and its social agendas*, 236-37.

<sup>43</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* (London: Polity Press, 2000), 141.

insistence on such features as testify to the wearer's exemption from or incapacity for all vulgarly productive employment.<sup>44</sup> Although he is writing about the late nineteenth century, Veblen's ideas are also relevant to earlier generations. The following citation, for instance, is equally descriptive of the 1840s when fashion dictated impractical tight sleeves and large bell-shaped skirts:

At the stage of economic development at which the women were still in the full sense property of the men, the performance of conspicuous leisure and consumption came to be part of the services required of them. The women being not their own masters, obvious expenditure and leisure on their part would rebound to the credit of their master rather than to their own credit; and therefore the more expensive and the more obviously unproductive the women of the household are, the more creditable and more effective for the purpose of reputability of the household or its head will their life be. So much so that the women have been required not only to afford evidence of a life of leisure but even to disable themselves for useful activity.<sup>45</sup>

What is more:

[...] the high heel, the skirt, the impracticable bonnet, the corset, and the general disregard of the wearer's comfort which is an obvious feature of all civilized women's apparel, are many items of evidence to the effect that in the modern civilized women's scheme of life woman is still, in theory, the economic dependent of the man [...]<sup>46</sup>

While Veblen uses the phrase 'in theory' here, other writers go further to indicate that women were also dependent on men in practice; moreover, what was true of his contemporary American society was certainly true of European culture in the period on which this thesis focuses. Describing a woman's clothes was, as Veblen has shown, one way of communicating the perimeters of her life, and her attitude towards them.

Georg Simmel's theory of fashion evolution runs parallel to Veblen's; his *Philosophie der Mode* was published in 1905, six years after Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, but there is no indication that Simmel read Veblen's book, which was not published in German until 1958. The German sociologist (1858-1918) also argues that fashion changes due to a process by which members of the social elite are emulated by their social inferiors. Once trends have trickled down to the masses, they must be replaced by new ones. The result is that fashion is an expression of

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<sup>44</sup> Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899] (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004), 100.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

the present moment and is transitory in nature.<sup>47</sup> Tendencies towards imitation fed into the culture of conspicuous consumption and waste and reinforce the fact that women were expected to spend money on their appearance because they were judged on how they looked. The more beautiful and shapely a woman, the better her ability to follow the latest trends to her advantage and the better off the family appeared to be. Since women could find self-fulfillment only in the domestic, 'So scheint es, als wäre die Mode gleichsam das Ventil, aus dem Bedürfnis der Frauen nach irgend einem Maß von Auszeichnung und individueller Hervorgehobenheit ausbräche, wenn ihnen dessen Befriedigung auf anderen Gebieten mehr versagt ist.'<sup>48</sup> Simmel thus argues, like Veblen, that women are more interested in fashion than men, but unlike Veblen, he emphasises that women use clothes as a creative outlet because they have no other means of self-expression.

Whilst clothes were also, of course, a means of preserving modesty, they often had the effect of sexualising the wearer and served an erotic purpose both in reality and in literature. The sexualisation of women through dress was discussed in detail by nineteenth-century theorists, such as the German philosopher Friedrich Vischer. Vischer produced a critique of women's sartorial habits in *Mode und Cynismus* (1879) which caused an outcry among the moralists of his day. He described ladies' fashion in derisive terms – but with what he called 'unerbittlicher Logik' - as 'eine Hurenmode.'<sup>49</sup> His logic is based on the belief that the tight-fitting dresses of the late 1870s make women appear 'in Kleidern nackt,'<sup>50</sup> and that women go to sartorial extremes in order to gain attention and find husbands. While Vischer undoubtedly has a point, the fact that women were anxiously trying to prove their value to society by attracting an advantageous match inculpates not the women themselves but rather patriarchal society. Vischer, however, ascribes the blame entirely to the female sex. According to him, this 'Wuth des Überbietens im Mannfang'<sup>51</sup> causes trends to develop towards ever more pronounced sexual provocation to the point that ladies cannot be differentiated from prostitutes. As a result, he writes, the number of complaints by women who have been accosted by men is on the rise. In *Aesthetik und Cynismus. Eine Entgegnung auf die Vischerische Schrift 'Mode und Cynismus'* (1879), Elise Löwenheim-Röhn writes that Vischer's 'wollüstige Phantasie' and 'infernalische Erfindungsgabe'<sup>52</sup> caused him to interpret clothes in a perverse manner. In apparent acknowledgement of the confusing expectation that women appear a-sexual as well as sexual, Vischer seems to advocate the reform

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<sup>47</sup> See David Frisby, *Simmel and since: Essays on Georg Simmel's Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), 126.

<sup>48</sup> Simmel cited in Eva-Christiane Schwippert, *Die Frau in der Mode. Überlegungen im Anschluss an Georg Simmel*. (Munich: Grin, 2011), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Vischer, Friedrich, *Mode und Cynismus* (Stuttgart: Konrad Wittwer, 1879), 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Elise Löwenheim-Röhn, *Aesthetik und Cynismus. Eine Entgegnung auf die Vischerische Schrift 'Mode und Cynismus'* (Berlin: Elwin Stande, 1879), 5.

style of dress as more modest than fashionable trends: ‘Spannt das Kleid über den Bauch, so wird Hüfte, Schenkel, und Schwellung gegen hinten in den Umrissen natürlich ganz anders aufgezeigt, als wenn ein Kleid in fließenden Falten fällt.’<sup>53</sup> However, Vischer does not engage in the reform debate directly, nor does he suggest that women should prefer the ‘Kleid [das] in fließenden Falten fällt’ because they would be able to move more freely in such apparel, which was the main argument in favour of reform. His article focuses on how current women’s fashions act as advertisements for the wearer’s sexuality and how a woman’s inclination to be aesthetically pleasing is undermined by such a show of perversity.

Meanwhile the trickle-across theory, developed by Dwight Robinson (1958) and Charles King (1963), saw fashion as evolving not so much down the classes, but across them as individual groups emulate and compete with each other.<sup>54</sup> For bourgeois women of the nineteenth-century who aimed to attract a husband, this element of competition through dress is particularly relevant; women were effectively marketing themselves through their clothes.

Since the social situation of women throughout the nineteenth century and through much of the twentieth was ‘increasingly constructed as a spectacle even as they remained culturally invisible’,<sup>55</sup> fashionable dress could be seen as a way of compensating for their lack of public position.<sup>56</sup> David Kunzle and Valerie Steele, for instance, suggest that women in the nineteenth century were active agents in their dressing and used clothes as a means of sexual power.<sup>57</sup> Far from being a means of restriction and oppression, the corset was seen as empowering, a sign of sexual and social assertiveness. Steele goes as far as to call for a re-evaluation of theories concerning the relationship between women and dress in the nineteenth century because she sees eroticism as central to fashion at the time. Women accordingly were not victimised by their clothes, but rather found fulfillment in them, exploiting their erotic effect. For Butler, however, agency is problematic and any power conveyed on women by dressing would have been limited as their sartorial performances were in effect pre-scripted to conform to a standardised norm.

Modern scholar G.G. Bolich makes persuasive links between gender and dress which emphasise many of the points Butler makes. For example, Bolich sees ‘*gender socialization through dress* as

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>54</sup> See Crane, *Fashion and its social agendas*, 7 and Valerie Steele, *The Berg Companion to Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 322.

<sup>55</sup> Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology, an introduction to fashion studies* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Leigh Summers reinforces this interpretation of dress as constricting in her study, *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> See David Kunzle’s *Fashion and fetishism* (Charleston: The History Press, 2006) and Valerie Steele, *Fashion and eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

beginning at birth and [as being] lifelong.’<sup>58</sup> Because ‘gender is a code dictating societal expectations and beliefs about identity, roles, privileges and duties’,<sup>59</sup> and because dress symbolises all these, the relationship between dress and gender is intricate. Bolich contends that ‘*Dress participates in the construction of gender.*’<sup>60</sup> By symbolising what a culture believes about a gender, clothes themselves shape the construction of gender. Material and colour, for instance, are key to gender definition; lace, gauze and bright colours were only to be found in a woman’s wardrobe in the nineteenth century. Indeed, while men since have begun to wear pinks and purple, even today lace is a distinctly feminine material. In essence, Bolich concludes, the fact that gender itself does not naturally exist is proven in our clothing. This point is particularly clear in patriarchies. Bolich cites dress historian James Laver: ‘In a patriarchal society... the clothes of men and women are vastly different. But in a matriarchal society the clothes worn by the two sexes become more and more alike.’<sup>61</sup>

In sum, clothes are a fundamental means of communication, the social presentation of the self. As fashion historian Robert Schorman contends, dress provides an opportunity to self-express and both represses the individual and enables control and creativity, conformity and rebellion.<sup>62</sup> Making explicit the paradox noted above in the discussion of clothing as both concealing and revealing sexuality and the erotic, Schorman declares that ‘The fashion system [of the nineteenth century] controlled the body *and* offered it the opportunity to act out,’ albeit all within the boundaries of distinct genders. Reading the meaning of clothes, however, is not straight-forward, for ‘fashion incorporates multiple meanings and responds to many influences, even to the point of incorporating contradictory points of view or a paradoxical conjunction of divergent attitudes.’<sup>63</sup> Fashion is ambiguous and ambivalent and the result is that it materialises and represents opposing values and competing perspectives.

Where does this leave us, then, when interpreting clothes symbolism in the novel? For dress theorists and Butler alike, gender is perceived as both conscious and unconscious; clothes are put on according to custom and fashion without any particular thought necessarily being given to the implications they have. They also have the power of communicating subversive social statements. The novelist dresses her heroine and novels include such details as the sartorial for a reason. Theories concerning the evolution of fashion alert us to the extent to which dress is a status symbol; descriptions of dress attest to the wearer’s class and ambitions – or those of her family.

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<sup>58</sup> Bolich, *Conversing on Gender* (Raleigh: Psyche, 2007), 289. His italics.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 290.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 291. His italics.

<sup>61</sup> James Laver in an interview in 1967, cited in *ibid*, 295.

<sup>62</sup> Rob Schorman, *Selling style: Clothing and Social Change at the Turn of the Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 13. Schorman’s focus is on American society in the 1890s.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 9.

Meanwhile, theories explaining the relationship between gender and dress invite questions concerning the politics of clothes; are the heroines of nineteenth-century novels by women empowered or suppressed by what they wear? Do they use dress as a visual clue to conformity and undermine suppositions about what it is to be feminine through their actions or is dress a key means of expressing the limits of gender stereotypes? How do nineteenth-century German female novelists in fact engage in theorising the sartorial in their work?

### **Femininity and clothes in nineteenth-century Germany**

As Chapter One of this thesis shows, the nineteenth century is a fascinating period in terms of fashion. It constantly altered the female silhouette, saw the advent of *haute couture* and early feminist efforts at dress reform. The fluctuations in fashion and their impact on the female form correspond to women's substantially domestic role which was challenged by revolution, sport and the desire among some members of the middle and upper classes to enter a profession. Strict social decorum characterised the century, and prescribed multiple changes to a woman's apparel according to the situation and time of day. How women were perceived, both as individuals and as a gender group, relied in part on their relationship with dress.

Nineteenth-century social commentators argue that women's clothes trivialised them by displaying an interest in what was viewed as superficial and frivolous, and objectified them, suggesting that a woman's value was dependent on her appearance. Patriarchy identified women with sartorial concerns, labelling them vain, superficial and incapable of intellectual thought. Indeed, traditionally fashion has served as a justification for sweeping characterisations of women, and/or a reflection of them. Fashion is linked to guilt, vanity and jealousy, all supposedly symptomatic of the female sex. Accordingly, philosophers, historians and writers alike have commented throughout the ages on sartorial fashions, many expressing the view that a woman, regardless of her nationality, is, as Vischer puts it, 'a coquette from head to toe; not one of her traits is nobly naïve; she watches herself in the mirror every second; she carries the mirror with her, in her, right in her soul.'<sup>64</sup> This widespread conception of the mirror, and of fashion, worn externally, as an indication of the internal qualities of women, is crucial to the reading of sartorial symbolism in nineteenth-century women's writing. The woman writer confronts the challenge of describing dress in order to suggest positive attributes. She writes in the awareness that, as Fuchs points out, 'Die Mode ist ein grimmiger Feind der Frau [...]' for it portrays her as superficial and

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<sup>64</sup> Vischer, 'Mode und Cynismus' in Daniel Purdy, *The Rise of Fashion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004), 157.

makes her the perfect prey for caricaturists.<sup>65</sup> Hence any mention of clothes in relation to women must be offset contextually in order to avoid such traditional associations of dress with negative qualities.

Whilst a variety of discursive literature on dress reform was published between 1890 and 1918,<sup>66</sup> prior to this, German women were less radical than their American and English counterparts in their attitude towards clothes. Scholar Amy Hackett makes the point that ‘far more than American feminists, they wished to maintain, even to cultivate and exalt, traditional “feminine” qualities – especially women’s maternal, nurturing “instincts” - as unique and valuable additions to culture.’<sup>67</sup> A campaign for rights, Hackett explains, was considered unladylike and hence ‘German feminists skirted rights with anxiety or coupled their requests with duties or responsibilities.’<sup>68</sup> A similar argument is made by such critics as Stanley Zucker and Eda Sagarra, who explain that discourses on women’s rights in the 1840s were generally conservative, despite the progressive political views voiced by both women and men at the time; ‘pronounced feminist ideology was not a prerequisite for involvement in the struggle for political progress in Germany.’<sup>69</sup> Hence Germany’s women’s rights activists of the mid-nineteenth century embraced traditional feminine qualities, championing women as domestic goddesses, devoted mothers and wives. As a result words such as ‘emanzipieren’ held negative connotations. Such ‘Emanzipierte’ as the French novelist George Sand and her German counterpart Louise Aston were condemned in Germany as ‘Mannweiber’ because they opposed preconceived ideals of their gender by adopting masculine habits; they smoked and dressed like men.

Both in the lead-up to the 1848 revolution and later when the dress reform debate that emerged in the 1870s gained momentum, political writers acknowledged that women’s fashions reflected their social, political and economic inferiority to men. Some women writers accept that an obsessive interest in clothes indicates shallowness and self-absorption, but emphasise that young women are encouraged to limit their interests to the sartorial. The radical philosopher Louise Dittmar, for example, founder of the feminist journal *Soziale Reform* (1849) and arguably ‘the

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<sup>65</sup> Eduard Fuchs, *Die Frau in der Karikatur* (Munich: Langen, 1906), 8.

<sup>66</sup> For a thorough overview of dress reform in Germany see Patricia Ober, *Der Frauen neuer Kleider* (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2005).

<sup>67</sup> Amy Hackett, ‘Feminism and Liberalism in Wilhemine Germany, 1890-1918,’ <http://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/histcourse/suffrage/document/femlibea.htm#title> viewed 10/04/07. This paper was first presented at the convention of the American Historical Association, December 1971, in New York.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Stanley Zucker, ‘Female Political Opposition in Pre-1848 Germany: The Role of Kathinka Zitz-Halein’ in *German Women in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John C. Fout (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1984), viewed 10/04/07, <http://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/histcourse/suffrage/document/move184a.htm#title>



most perceptive of contemporary German thinkers on the question of women in society',<sup>70</sup> campaigned vehemently for better education for women and against marriage as an oppressive institution. Women, she suggests, were encouraged to focus excessively on their looks in order to attract a husband who would ultimately disappoint. In her allegorical tale 'Affenmärchen' (1845), for instance, Dittmar likens apes to girls being effectively paraded for sale in sartorial pomp in order to attract attention. Exploiting a striking metaphor, she implies that women are treated with no more respect than animals and that their dress gains them only superficial attention. Her argument is taken up and explained more clearly by Otto in her polemical *Frauenleben im Deutschen Reich* (1876), in which she argues that a girl's education is based on superficial, vain occupations because appearing attractive comes first and foremost in the hunt for a husband. Rather than campaigning for dress reform, she implies that clothing should be only peripheral – instead of central – to a woman's life. Otto recognises the problem of vanity in girls and suggests that its solution lies in giving them the chance to develop their intellect. The reproach that girls are superficial and intellectually limited stems not from something innate to the female, but rather from the way girls are brought up.<sup>71</sup> Otto is also clearly aware of the signifying value of women as status symbols. Men, she writes, give women vestimentary gifts 'weil sie selbst mit der Toilette ihrer Dame prunken wollen.'<sup>72</sup> Women are denied any sense of their own identity because men perceive them to be a reflection of their own wealth. Otto notes: 'Wir kennen Beispiele, wo die Frau sich einfach und anspruchslos kleidet, der Mann aber es nicht duldet, wenn sie sich an seiner Seite zeigt und ihr selbst kostbare Sachen aufnöthigt, nur damit sie dadurch seine Stellung in der Welt würdig repräsentiere (...)'.<sup>73</sup> As I will show, in literary descriptions of dress by female authors, the nineteenth-century German woman is similarly shown to be a representative of her husband's *Stellung*.

However, the solution to the problem was not seen as being a definitive rejection of feminine fashions. Kathinka Zitz-Halein founded and led the women's organisation Humania in Mainz in 1848 in order to unite women in the search for political recognition within the limits set them by patriarchy. While she encouraged women to dress in gymnast costumes adapted to the female form to allow free movement, she did not start any widespread campaign for dress reform. Rather it was evident to her that women should not overstep traditional barriers by seeking to emulate men in dress or in profession. Zitz-Halein's focus on conventional, domestic roles for women, as

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<sup>70</sup> Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, *Out of line/Ausgefallen: The Paradox of Marginality in the Writings of Nineteenth-Century German Women* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), 297.

<sup>71</sup> See Louise Otto, 'On the Domestic Education of Girls' (1876) cited in *German Feminist Writings*, ed. Patricia Herminhouse & Magda Mueller (London: Continuum International, 2001), 35.

<sup>72</sup> Louise Otto, *Der Genius der Menschheit: eine Gabe für Mädchen und Frauen* (Leipzig, Hertleben, 1870), 196.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

well as her problematisation of them, is reflected in her poem 'Farbenwechsel' (1859), which describes a woman's life through the colours of the clothes she has worn. The woman is clearly identified with dress as an old woman recounts how she wears grey to show her indifference after passing through the stages of childhood innocence in white, of love 'im Kleid der rosenrothen Liebe/ Und in der Hoffnung heilig-schoenen Gruen,' of conjugal devotion 'im blauen Kleide,' of pain and passion in 'Purpurgluten' and of black-clothed mourning for 'ein verfehltes Leben'.<sup>74</sup> The poem acts as a call for engagement in working for the good of the fatherland and as an argument for the importance of women in society regardless of their age. Zitz-Halein's use of clothing and colour symbolism emphasises the extent to which women were typified and characterised through dress. The narrator identifies herself with the colour of her gowns, but finally expresses a desire to disassociate herself from her grey clothes and reject indifference, rekindling life and passion by devoting herself to her country: 'Fuer's Vaterland, fuer grosse Zeitinteressen/ Wird nimmermehr mein Herz gleichgueltig sein.'<sup>75</sup> By concluding her poem thus, Zitz-Halein suggests that women must turn their gaze outwards, ceasing to identify themselves merely as domestic, emotional beings whose lives are predetermined to follow the traditional path of marriage, birth and death as indicated by their clothes.

Since fashion prescribed domestic concerns and served to distract women from any other interests, clothes were seen as a hindrance to women's social progress. The progressive novelist Fanny Lewald reflects in letters written in 1869 on the difficulties posed by dress. She regrets that wearing anything masculine was perceived as an offense to femininity, meaning that cross-dressers were quickly condemned. Lewald writes that it was

töricht und kleinlich, dass man sich gerade in Deutschland so leidenschaftlich gegen die Emanzipation erbitterte, weil ein paar in ebenjener Revolutions- und Reaktionszeit oftmals genannte Frauen durch ihr kurz geschnittenes Haar, durch das Rauchen von Zigaretten, durch ihr Erscheinen an öffentlichen Orten und vielleicht auch durch manche Ausschreitungen in sittlicher Beziehung Anstoss erregt hatten.<sup>76</sup>

Lewald goes on to suggest that the emancipation of women is contingent upon their liberation from pervasive 'Gewohnheiten', practised by most of the female population, which consume time and money and undermine their attempt to be taken seriously. Addressing her female readers, she asks:

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<sup>74</sup> Kathinka Zitz-Halein, 'Farbenwechsel' in *The Defiant Muse: German Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Susan Cocalis, (New York: Library of Congress, 1986), 30.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Fanny Lewald, 'Neunter Brief, Karlsbad, im Juni 1869' in *Freiheit des Herzens*, ed. Günter de Bruyn & Gerhard Wolf (Berlin: Der Morgen, 1987), 292-93.

Glauben Sie, dass ein verständiger Mann Ihnen irgendeine ernsthafte Bedeutung zutrauen kann, wenn er Sie auf Stelzenschuhen, in einer Kleidung, die von hinten und von vorn in ihren Aufbauschungen aussieht, als wäre ein altes Gardinenbett Ihr Schönheitsideal und als liessen Sie Ihre Kleider bei dem Tapezierer machen – glauben Sie, dass man Ihnen einen ernsthaften Gedanken zutrauen kann, wenn man sieht, wie es keine Abgeschmacktheit in Kleidung und Frisur mehr gibt, die Sie mitzumachen und womöglich noch übertreiben nicht sofort beflissen wären, um durch diese Übertreibung die Blicke der Männer an sich zu ziehen?<sup>77</sup>

Lewald objects primarily to this display of excess and lack of taste. She refers to what is seen as the newest fashions, or ‘Geschmack’, as ‘Ungeschmack’, since they involve emulating the sartorial habits of prostitutes and dressing ‘noch auffallender’ than they do. In essence, she reproaches her countrywomen for dressing to attract attention from men and in so doing undermining any claim they might have to equality. Lewald even looks back nostalgically to the decorous 1840s when – she admits – women enjoyed self-adornment as much as in the late 1860s, but without calling attention to themselves through their apparel.<sup>78</sup> She states plainly, ‘Die frühere Strassenkleidung war bescheiden, die jetzige ist frech’ to the point of being a ‘Zurschautragen der Verschwendung.’<sup>79</sup> It seems that she would have agreed with Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption and waste, but she also believes in the power of ‘Zucht und Sitte’ in German women. She encourages her readership to take pride in these characteristics and opposes the ‘Nachahmung einer fremdländlichen und sittenlosen Frauenwelt [...], in der alles hohl und alles leer und alles käuflich ist wie jene Frauenzimmer selber.’<sup>80</sup> Lewald refers here to France and suggests that a rejection of French fashions through modest dress would reinforce German values, uniting German women and earning them a more real emancipation than any that could be administered by law.

Nobel Prize winner Bertha von Suttner similarly suggests that women have been held back by the social dictates which compel them to think primarily of their appearance: centuries of judging women on the basis of their beauty have meant that they are effectively ostracised from intellectual engagement to the detriment of the evolution of society at large:

Wenn man bedenkt, dass der Gang der Zivilisation und damit die Entfaltung menschlicher Gesittung und Wohlfahrt von dem Masse der zurückgelegten intellektuellen Fortschritte abhängt, und wenn man daneben berechnet, wie viel Nachdenken, wie viel

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<sup>77</sup> Fanny Lewald, ‘Vierzehnter Brief, Karlsbad, im August 1869’ in *ibid*, 305.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 306.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 307.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 308.

geistige Anstrengung, wie viel Talent von seiten der halben Menschheit an die Bekleidungsfrage gewendet wurde, so lässt sich ermessen, um wie vieles das Glück unseres Geschlechts durch das Schönseinwollen des sogenannten schönen Geschlechts verzögert worden ist.

Suttner is dismayed, 'wie oberflächlich, wie thöricht, wie zeit-und geldraubend, gesinnungserniedrigend die weibliche Putz- und Gefallsucht an sich [ist]'.<sup>81</sup> For her, the female obsession with dress as a way of pleasing men is both expected by society (women are led to believe that 'reizen' constitutes 'höchstes Frauenverdienst') and a threat to society as women add nothing constructive to their country by serving fashion as 'ein Heer von Sklavinnen und Priesterinnen und Hohepriesterinnen.'<sup>82</sup> The nouns Suttner uses here suggest that dress and appearance are worshipped by patriarchal society; clothes effectively become women's religion and play a part in restricting them to any other role other than the domestic.

The psychologist Mathilde Vaerting in an essay entitled 'Wenn Frauen Männer und Männer Frauen sind' (1888) takes a similar viewpoint. She sees the enforced luxury of the bourgeois and aristocratic woman as responsible for her preoccupation with her toilette. While Suttner traces society's ills back to the gap between the genders, Vaerting concentrates on the erotic implications of self-adornment. The burden of an undemanding domestic life, as opposed to a man's professional existence, means that women seek to express unfulfilled erotic longing through their apparel:

Putz und Schmücken wird zum Zeitvertreib. (...) Durch die Musse wird der erotische Sinn gesteigert. Da der Geschlechtspartner diese Musse nicht teilt, *so sucht sich die einsame Erotik einen Ausweg durch das Schmücken des Körpers*, welches ursprünglich und auch noch heute unzweifelhaft als vorbereitender Liebesakt empfunden wird.<sup>83</sup>

Vaerting explicitly likens the state of a woman's body to that of her soul under patriarchal rule: 'Was für des Weibes Leib gilt, gilt in gleichem Masse von seiner Seele. Die weibliche Eigenart im Männerstaat ist ebenso ein Missgestalt der Weibeseele wie die Korsettfigur ein Zerrbild des Weiberkörpers ist.'<sup>84</sup> Hedwig Dohm suggests the same in her statement, 'Die Sitte zwingt die Frauen in ein geistiges Modecostüm.'<sup>85</sup> This relationship between clothes, the soul and personality is central to the depiction of dress in literature. Other women authors, such as the

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<sup>81</sup> Bertha Von Suttner, 'Die Frauen', 1889 in *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Hamburg: Fischer, 1978), 56.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>83</sup> Mathilde Vaerting, *Wenn Frauen Männer und Männer Frauen sind* (1888), in *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Hamburg: Fischer, 1978), 83 [Vaerting's italics].

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 89-90.

<sup>85</sup> Hedwig Dohm, 'Die Eigenschaften der Frau' (1876), in *ibid*, 39.

aforementioned Austrian Mayreder, also see the wealthy woman as imprisoned in her desire to please, a longing which forfeits her right to individuality. ‘Das Weib als Dame,’ Mayreder writes, ‘scheinbar auf den höchsten Gipfel der schönen Menschlichkeit erhoben, führt als Individualität ein Leben innerhalb eng gezogener Schranken.’<sup>86</sup> These spatial ‘Schranken’ are both literal and metaphorical. In 1909, author Gretel Meisel-Hess observed, ‘Dort, wo die Weiber am meisten geschmückt sind, nehmen sie in Wahrheit die untergeordnetste Stellung ein.’<sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile, in her essay ‘Abrüsten!’ (1900) Else Spiegel argues that the progression of women within society relies on a reconsideration of the role of clothes. No longer should fashion be imposed upon any individual woman. Rather she should choose her clothes for herself according to her own identity: ‘Die Art des Kleides, Farbe, Stoff und Façon sollten eben immer zum Individuum, das es trägt, passen. Denn so gänzlich machen Kleider denn doch nicht Leute; dafür sollten aber alle Leute ihre Kleider nach sich machen.’<sup>88</sup> Such an attitude was voiced by many campaigners for dress reform at the end of the nineteenth century, but the idea that clothes should be original and individual was not easy for most to accept. While the largest department store in Europe, the Wertheim Kaufhaus in Berlin, sold a line of reform-style dresses designed by Else Oppler (1875-1965) who advocated the personalisation of dress in an essay entitled ‘Das Eigenkleid’ (1903), it remained a struggle to convince the public that they should express themselves rather than follow each other. Even the free-spirited and disillusioned heroine of Gabriele Reuter’s *Ellen von der Weiden* (1901), for instance, mocks the poet who insists that she wear gowns that reflect her character – he suggests fabric ‘mit Kupfer und Braun gestickt, in unruhigen und nervösen Verschlingungen.’<sup>89</sup> Ellen replies, “‘Sie glauben wohl nicht, dass es möglich ist, in Linien und Formen ein Menschenwesen auszudrücken? Ach, Sie Ärmste, wie weit sind Sie noch zurück.’”<sup>90</sup> In this discussion Reuter’s poet character echoes Spiegel’s notion that dress is an essential aspect of the self and a reflection of society. However, Ellen’s insistence that dress cannot serve as self-expression indicates the extent to which patriarchal society refuses to accommodate the individual. Ellen sees dress as a socially imposed code that imprisons the spirit, rather than inviting creativity.

From these various appraisals of fashion and women’s dependence on it many questions arise. To what extent do the fashions of the nineteenth century allow for individuality? Does the female author have her heroine oppose the fashions of her day in the belief that ‘Mode und Individualität,

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<sup>86</sup> Rosa Mayreder, *Die Dame* (1905) in *ibid*, 151.

<sup>87</sup> Gretel Meisel-Hess, *Das sexuelle Elend der Frau* (1909) in *ibid*, 230.

<sup>88</sup> Else Spiegel, *Abrüsten!* (1900) in *ibid*, 228.

<sup>89</sup> Gabriele Reuter, *Ellen von der Weiden* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1997), 39.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

das sind ja unerbittliche Widersacher’?<sup>91</sup> And how do sartorial descriptions by women of women change over the course of the century when revolutionary zeal was replaced by the conservatism of the *Gründerzeit*, when the cross-dressers of the barricades were subjugated by social censure and when women began to engage critically with the dictates of fashion and the dress reform movement came into being?

## Thesis Outline

The first chapter of this thesis is devoted to the history of women’s clothing and attitudes towards dress in nineteenth-century Germany. A thorough knowledge of the various sartorial developments over the course of the century is vital for an understanding of the meaning of dress as portrayed in the fiction. Whilst many garments, such as the corset, are prevalent throughout the century, the free-falling empire gown of the 1820s which immediately pre-dates the period covered in this thesis contrasts sharply with the moulded crinoline figure of the 1860s. Year by year women were challenged by the evolution of fashion and the need to follow trends so as to avoid standing out or being seen as financially restricted. With changes in fashion came a rigid set of sartorial rules about what to wear when and women were expected to study advice in conduct books as much as the trends in the latest fashion journals. Both conduct literature (*Benimmliteratur* or *Anstandsliteratur* in German) and the fashion journal inform and reflect how femininity was perceived at the time and are crucial to this chapter.

In Chapter Two, I examine the extent to which two women writers who took an active stance in the revolutionary years of the 1840s used sartorial symbolism as a means of political expression. In their novels of the 1840s, Fanny Lewald (1811-1889) and Louise Aston (1814-1871) both espouse conventional notions about the nature of femininity but also problematize certain negative constructions of femininity which they portray as performative. Whilst they share some of the liberal tendencies of intellectual circles in the lead-up to the 1848 revolution, their use of dress to reinforce the morality and inherent beauty of their heroines demonstrates how they themselves function within gender boundaries and depend on acknowledged feminine traits to characterize the women they portray.

Chapter Three focuses on the ways in which the novels of the 1860s and 1870s by the popular author Eugenie Marlitt (1825-1887) include unusually detailed descriptions of dress that are fundamental to the characterisation of society and the individuals she depicts. Marlitt was celebrated in part because she appealed to the reader’s fantasy and created an image of ideal,

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<sup>91</sup> W. Fred in *Psychologie der Mode, Band 28*, ed. Richard Muther (Berlin: Marquardt, 1910), 41.

modern femininity more than any other author of her generation; this image relied on references to dress and suggested how women could contribute to the construction of the nation by accentuating their inner femininity. Marlitt's works share some of the progressivism of Lewald and Aston and also betray how much the view of true femininity as natural and good still prevailed.

Chapter Four focuses on literature of the turn of the twentieth century and reveals how many women of the time explicitly took issue with dress without, however, challenging the idea that there is a natural, inner femininity that contrasts with a false, frivolous one. Various fictional works by Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919), Frieda Freiin von Bülow (1857-1909), Maria Janitschek (1859-1927) and Dora Duncker (1855-1916) reiterate the message that women are controlled and held back by their husbands because men effectively impose sartorial interests upon them, suppressing their natural femininity. More than the novels discussed in Chapters Two and Three, these short stories, novellas and novels show that clothes are both the expression and the means of the oppression of women and the development in literary form allows the authors to experiment with different narrative stances and make strong use of irony and caricature to express their convictions.

In the Conclusion, I will suggest that women in nineteenth-century Germany present clothing, from stays to skirts, as a fundamental expression of femininity. They rely on the notion of an inner feminine identity which manifests itself in 'natural', modest attire in order to emphasise the strengths of their sex. At the end of the century, as in preceding generations, women writers use descriptions of clothes as a way of depicting how 'bad', confused or powerless women are. Just as these authors struggle to depict a successful emancipation for their heroines, they also struggle to free themselves from sartorial conventions and show how they function within gender compartments, even as they strive for women's rights.

# **Chapter One - The History of Women’s Dress in Nineteenth-Century Germany**

Introduction.....	32
Secondary Literature.....	37
Empiremode: 1789-1830 .....	39
Biedermeiermode: 1830-1840 .....	42
Vormärzmode: 1840-1850.....	44
‘Zweites Rokoko’: 1850-1860 .....	46
1860-1870 .....	49
Die Gründerzeit: 1870-1880 .....	50
1880-1890 .....	52
The ‘Belle Epoque’: 1890-1914 .....	56
Dress Reform.....	65
Aesthetics and Dress Reform.....	66
Medical Arguments for Dress Reform.....	69
Dress Reform in Fashion Journals .....	72
Criticism of Dress Reform.....	74
Conclusion .....	77



## Introduction

Before discussing nineteenth-century sartorial trends, it is necessary to establish the importance of dress for women at the time. There are several issues to address including the role of class in determining clothes; the rise of fashion and the fashion journal as a commodity; the moral overtones of clothes; and how men and women perceived the relationship between women and dress.

As explained in the Introduction, clothes are essential signs of social standing. They identify the class and aspirations of the wearer and are one of the main visual signs of his/her adherence to a gendered norm. Within a generation of the French Revolution, the bourgeoisie across Europe sought to emulate court styles. Middle-class women were instrumental in exhibiting their family's wealth and to do so they followed the latest fashions set by ladies, princesses and queens. The role of the bourgeois woman in nineteenth-century German society was therefore very different from that of previous centuries and was reflected in and constructed by her clothes. For the first time she developed an identity which was almost exclusively domestic and distinct from her male counterpart's.<sup>92</sup> As this chapter demonstrates, middle-class women's clothing was purposefully impractical, showing that they did not engage in manual labour. However, with industrialization fashion became more affordable and even poor factory workers could follow the same trends as their wealthy countrywomen to some extent. By the mid-1800s many working women wore crinolines, albeit smaller, cheap varieties; and by the end of the nineteenth century health books emphasized the importance of investing in well-made corsets, such was the degree to which poor women endangered their health through badly made corsetry. Exploiting both the technological advances in clothes manufacturing and the desire of the middle-classes to distinguish themselves from the working class, the fashion industry sped up the process of trend-setting. Whilst the first decades of the nineteenth century saw similar styles adopted for years at a time, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a plethora of trends came and went within a season. People were wary of new trends at the beginning of the nineteenth century; because '[man] alles Neue als verdächtig ablehnte und verbot'<sup>93</sup> new fashions were hard to establish. However, by the 1890s women were 'verschwenderisch wie kaum zuvor'<sup>94</sup> and supported a thriving and capricious fashion industry. This thesis examines the bourgeois woman who was regarded as the moral compass of society because she had the leisure to devote herself to her household, but who, because of this leisure also had to resist the temptation to copy the aristocratic model too much as it was still marred by

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<sup>92</sup> See Ann Goldberg, 'Women and Men: 1760-1960' in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71-73.

<sup>93</sup> Erika Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms* (Leipzig: Henschel, 2010), 309.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

its legacy of frivolity and excess. Wastefulness due to industrialisation was a by-product of mid to late nineteenth-century middle-class society and is obvious in sartorial practices. It was perceived as a danger to the morality of the *bourgeoise* and meant that she had to take care to be modish without being frivolous.

However, the fashion journal, buttressed by the rise of the textile industry, substantially ignored reproaches that women were becoming wasteful and encouraged consumerism. While popular conduct books advised thrift, they also encouraged women to be trendy when it came to fashion and a large number of bourgeois women in the second half of the century subscribed to a fashion journal in order to do just that. There they were bombarded with images of the latest trends and advertisements concerning where and how to purchase them. In the early 1900s, one German journal concerned with the number of economic constraints on the average household appealed to women as ‘the chief agent of consumption’ whose responsibility it was ‘to balance the expenditures for housing, food, and clothing.’<sup>95</sup> As the journal explains, the fashion industry made astronomical demands on the household budget and in so doing ‘speculate[d] upon the intellectual immaturity of women and exploit[ed] their lack of understanding of the requirements of sound economics.’<sup>95</sup> Whilst the fashion industry encouraged expenditure, it also facilitated it. As Simmel attests in his ‘Philosophie der Mode’ (1905), fashion had become a means of public fulfillment for women who had no other means of satisfaction.<sup>96</sup> Women were particularly vulnerable to the marketing tactics of the fashion industry.

Since to be a good bourgeois woman meant embodying German values, women’s dress had to accommodate values such as cleanliness and simplicity in order to adhere to the ‘norms of cultural intelligibility’.<sup>97</sup> When it came to clothes, certain key traits prevailed as symbols of Germanness and were expected of both sexes. Four necessities for appropriate dress were typically cited throughout the century. A German gentleman and gentlewoman had to ensure that their clothes always exhibited: ‘Reinlichkeit’, ‘Ordnung’, ‘Nettheit’ (meaning that they should be in harmony with the age and the body shape of the wearer) and ‘Geschmack’, taking account of both custom and fashionableness. Tastefulness required wise judgement for ‘Wer blindlings der Mode folgt, hat keinen Geschmack.’<sup>98</sup> It also meant dressing carefully, paying attention to ‘die

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<sup>95</sup> This excerpt from an unspecified German journal is translated and cited by American feminist Katharine Anthony in ‘Some realizations in dress reform’ (1915). See Daniel Purdy, *The Rise of Fashion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004), 121.

<sup>96</sup> See George Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, ed. David Frisby, (London: Sage, 1997), 199.

<sup>97</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23.

<sup>98</sup> Dr Falk, *Verkehr in der feinen Gesellschaft: ein Handbuch des guten Tones und Anstandes insbesondere für junge Damen und Herren* (Leipzig: Neuwied, 1884), 37. Falk’s advice is echoed by Franz Vogt in his *Anstandsbüchlein* (1897) for men, where ‘Kleide dich reinlich’ is the first rule of thumb. See Franz Vogt, *Anstandsbüchlein: Unterweisungen über das anständige Benehmen in verschiedenen Lebenslagen, zunächst für bürgerliche Kreise* (Donauwörth: Auer, 1909), 30-33.

Harmonie der Farben'<sup>99</sup> and avoiding standing out in any way. Whatever the trend of the day these values were to prevail in dress as in the household. Scholar Nancy Reagin discusses how treatises by Schiller, Goethe and Campe emphasizing thrift, order and cleanliness appeared in household advice manuals, journals and school texts throughout the century. Schiller's *Das Lied der Glocke* (1799) was particularly influential and women embroidered and framed couplets from the poem and sayings promoting domestic virtue.<sup>100</sup> Hygiene was celebrated as a particularly German value.

Due to this moral dimension of dress, *Benimmliteratur* for women regularly addressed the issue of clothes at one point or another and emphasized the importance of cleanliness and simplicity. As Hermann Klencke writes in 1897, 'Der Anstand fordert von der Bildung des Weibes, daß seine Kleidung geschmackvoll, sauber, einfach, adrett, dabei aber gesundheitsgemäß, bequem und praktisch sei'<sup>101</sup>. This was as true of the beginning and middle of the century as it was of the end. Repeatedly, women were reminded to adhere to the dictates of simplicity, in particular in public. Even when fashion was at its fussiest and most ornate, women were to choose simple clothes to reflect their virtuousness. Anti-fashion discourse often emphasized the lack of simplicity in contemporary styles and the fact that these originated in France meant that some critics called for a German style of dress. Although their efforts did not materialize as they wished, they reflect both how clothes were read as an indication of national character and the anxiety that accepting foreign fashions meant a loss of Germanness at a time when the very nature of what it was to be German was still being determined.

Clothes were seen as a predominantly female concern. Whilst eighteenth-century aristocratic men dressed as decoratively as women, and on some occasions more so, standard dress for a man in the nineteenth century was characterised by sobriety. This feature of masculine fashion in the 1800s has been interpreted as a means of rejecting corrupt aristocratic behaviour, although many men did find sartorial concerns important and dandys who wore girdles and prided themselves on their elegance were not unusual.<sup>102</sup> However, fashion was perceived as changeable and fickle in contrast to logical and reasonable masculine concerns.<sup>103</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, sociologists such as Simmel and Vischer linked fashion with feminine nature, reflecting popular

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<sup>99</sup> Falk, *Verkehr in der feinen Gesellschaft: ein Handbuch des guten Tones und Anstandes insbesondere für junge Damen und Herren*, 38.

<sup>100</sup> See Nancy Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and Nation Identity in German, 1870-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 43-44.

<sup>101</sup> Klencke, cited in *ibid*, 270.

<sup>102</sup> See Fred Davis, *Fashion, culture and identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 38-39.

<sup>103</sup> See Astrid Ackermann, *Paris, London und die europäische Provinz*, (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2005), 235.

opinion.<sup>104</sup> Most nineteenth-century magazines aimed at women included regular fashion reports and fashion journals were aimed at a female readership. The latter often also included serialized novels, reports on exhibitions, articles on health and children and practical advice on a variety of domestic matters.<sup>105</sup> *Der Bazar*, for instance, one of Germany's most popular journals in the 1870s, had 140,000 subscribers at its highpoint in 1872<sup>106</sup> and featured pages devoted to hats and coats alongside reports on exhibitions, songs and advice on hair styles. Fashion articles also aimed to educate and inform, reporting the habits of American, English or French women and advice regarding how to make clothes. *Mode* itself is also both feminine in gender and referred to in the feminine, often called a 'Tyrannin'<sup>107</sup> in encyclopedias, histories and fashion journals. It is also referred to as 'die tyrannische Göttin',<sup>108</sup> '(die) gebieterisch(e) Madame Mode'<sup>109</sup> and 'die Lieblingsgöttin der Damen'.<sup>110</sup> The association between 'das schöne Geschlecht' and an interest in appearance and fashion was rife; for the nineteenth-century woman, to be her gender included literally 'the repeated stylization of [her] body'.<sup>111</sup>

Even as society emphasized that fashion was tyrannical and a sign of frivolity, clothes were also seen as one of the most important concerns in a woman's life; fashion was considered a domain in which women could perfect their 'Geisteskräfte'.<sup>112</sup> According to the journal *Allgemeine Moden Zeitung*, a woman's affinity with fashion was natural, a means 'den Geist (...) [der Frauen] aus dem Schlummer aufzuwecken, ihre Talente zu entwickeln, ihren Scharfblick zu üben und ihren Geschmack auszubilden'.<sup>113</sup> Male editors suggested that women should direct all their intellectual energy towards the study of fashion. However, the fact that they do so is also a subject of derision and women are identified as the creators of their own sartorial folly. Journalist Carl Heinzen writes in the magazine *Pionnier* (1868):

Die undenkliche, gewissenhafte, sklavische Fügsamkeit, ja der cultusartige Eifer, womit das weibliche Geschlecht jeder Mode huldigt und sich auch für die abscheulichste Verunstaltung begeistert, die ihm von Paris aus oder anders woher dictirt wird, zeugt von

<sup>104</sup> See George Simmel, 'Die Mode' (1901) and 'Weibliche Kultur' (1911) in *Philosophische Kultur* (1911) discussed in Mila Ganeva *Women in Weimar* (New York: Camden House, 2008), 8-11 and Friedrich Vischer 'Mode und Cynismus' (1879) in Daniel Purdy, *The Rise of Fashion*, 153-164.

<sup>105</sup> See Emil Niewöhner, *Der deutsche Zeitschrift-Buchhandel* (Stuttgart: C.E. Poeschel, 1934), 25.

<sup>106</sup> See *Börsenblatt*, 7. Oktober, 1872, p.3693.

<sup>107</sup> See for example *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encykopädie für die gebildeten Stände*, Vol. 7 (Leipzig: F.A.Brockhaus, 1827), 437; *Allgemeiner anzeiger und nationalzeitung der Deutschen* (Gotha, 1817), 876; *Die Gegenwart*, Vol. 3 (G.M.B.H., 1881), 286 & et al.

<sup>108</sup> *Neue Wiener Modebriefe*, November 1882 cited in Gerda Buxbaum, *À la mode: Die Modezeitschriften des 19. Jahrhunderts*, (Dortmund: Harenberg, 1983), 235.

<sup>109</sup> Here 'Madame Mode' opposes 'Herren Fabrikanten'. *Neue Wiener Modebriefe*, 1882, cited in *ibid*, 175.

<sup>110</sup> *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, November 1812, 759.

<sup>111</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.

<sup>112</sup> *Allgemeine Moden Zeitung* (1810) cited in Ackermann, *Paris, London und die europäische Provinz*, 236.

<sup>113</sup> *Allgemeine Moden Zeitung* (1820) cited in *ibid*, 235.

einer Gedankenlosigkeit, Unselbstständigkeit und kindischer Gesinnung, welche in der That an Kinder erinnert oder an Wilde und wohl im Stande ist, die Frage hervorzurufen, wie solche Wesen fähig und berufen sein können, in ernsten Fragen des Staatslebens und öffentlichen Wohls eine Stimme abzugeben.<sup>114</sup>

For Heinzen, women prove their intellectual inferiority and immaturity by concerning themselves so much with fashion. In so doing they demonstrate a readiness to imitate the French even when tensions between France and a nascent Germany were high. Whilst the above citations were published decades apart, they illustrate a fundamental paradox which was present in women's lives throughout the nineteenth century; women were both told to think about clothes and denied respect for doing so.

As the women's movement gained momentum, women addressed this paradox outright. They argued that women were obsessed with fashion because men excluded them from professional occupations. Women were capable of contributing to society, but because they were kept in the home they had no other way of occupying themselves than studying to become what the founder of the German women's movement, Louise Otto (1819-1895), calls 'Putz- und Modepuppen'.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, 'sehr oft ist die Langeweile die Hauptursache der Modesucht.'<sup>116</sup> This all-consuming 'Modesucht' should not be read as proof of any innate thoughtlessness in women, but rather as proof that they are victims of their upbringing. As Otto points out, girls are encouraged to create 'allerlei niedliche Costüme' for their dolls; told 'sie müsse[n] den hauptsächlichsten Werth auf ihr Aeußeres, ihren Anzug, legen, man beurtheile sie zumeist danach, nur durch Nettigkeit und Geschmack an ihrer Toilette'. Their 'Lebenszweck' is to appeal to men.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, most women, desperate to be admired, follow fashion unthinkingly, 'Viele nur aus der bloßen Sucht nach Veränderung, nach Neuem, Viele, um Aufsehen zu erregen, und bewundert zu werden, zumeist von den Männern (...)'.<sup>118</sup> In short, society nurtures an excessive interest in fashion as a feminine pastime; those who resist it risk failure in finding a husband, caricature and ridicule, punishment for diverting from the gender norm.

The fact that society also expected sartorial simplicity means the overly fashionable woman could be seen as equally subversive as the bourgeois woman who refused fashion completely. While neglecting sartorial matters was seen as demonstrating a lack of self-discipline, over-indulging in

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<sup>114</sup> Cited in *ibid*, 187.

<sup>115</sup> Louise Otto, *Der Genius der Menschheit: eine Gabe für Mädchen und Frauen* (Leipzig: Hertleben 1870), 190.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 191-192.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

them was considered a potential threat to the nation and a sin against aesthetics. Conduct writer Rose Stolle summarises this view: ‘Soll eine Frau die Verkörperung der Schönheit sein, darf sie die Ausschreitungen einer bizarren Mode nicht mitmachen; denn lächerlich und schön sind Gegner.’<sup>119</sup> What constitutes the bizarre, however, is open to interpretation and the consensus seems to be that in order to be beautiful, a woman must avoid anything that has not been accepted as the norm.

An overview of trends in dress from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth provides insight into how consumerism developed with the world of fashion. It also reveals the extent to which women had to study sartorial etiquette and fashion reports in order to succeed at ‘doing’ their gender and shows how sartorial practices influenced the patterns of a woman’s daily life. These included what and how much she ate due to the general desire to be slim; where she went; how long she needed to prepare for social events; what she talked about and how she spent her time. As scholar Susan Bordo argues, the restraint and normalization of the female body through such means as dress is ‘an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control.’<sup>120</sup> This was particularly true of the nineteenth century when dress acted more than ever before or thereafter as a ‘central organizing principle of time and space’.<sup>121</sup>

## Secondary Literature

I have based my research into the history of dress in the nineteenth century on several secondary sources. The most useful comprehensive study of sartorial trends, Erika Thiel’s *Geschichte des Kostüms* (1960), has been reprinted eight times and provides insights into European fashion from a predominantly German perspective. Thiel includes images of women’s wear and gives some details which go beyond descriptions of the clothes themselves, including the cost, manufacture and purchasing of dress as well as accounts concerning the process of dressing itself. She also cites fashion journals and critics of the time. Thiel sets out, however, to provide an overview of European trends ‘von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart’ and tends to generalise and draw from French sources when discussing nineteenth-century fashion.

Penelope Bryde’s *Nineteenth-Century Fashion* (1992) is a useful source for English fashions and shows the extent to which England and Germany took inspiration from France. Bryde’s descriptions are therefore relevant to this chapter, but do not give us an indication of how

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<sup>119</sup> Rose Stolle *Schönheitspflege. Winke und Ratschläge zur Erhaltung der Schönheit des Weibes* (Berlin, o.J: 1899), 6.

<sup>120</sup> Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 166.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

common European trends were received by the German public. Gerda Buxbaum's *Mode aus Wien* (1986) provides an account of nineteenth-century dress in Vienna. Since the city competed with Paris when it came to trend-setting and produced a number of fashion journals at a time when Germany was issuing very few, Buxbaum's book is a valuable source. However, it has limitations when it comes to dress history in Germany.

Several studies were informative in determining the popularity of fashion journals and the rise in fashion consumption in nineteenth-century Germany. In *Die deutsche Modezeitschrift* (1935), Lore Sporhan-Krempel draws attention to the importance of the fashion journal in the propagation of sartorial trends, giving an overview of sales figures rather than a detailed account of individual magazines. Brunhilde Dähn in *Berlin Hausvogteiplatz* (1968) and Ernst Staneck in *125 Jahre Berliner Konfektion* (1962) chronicle the rise of the department store in Berlin. Dähn is thorough in her approach and provides historical detail concerning the establishment of the ready-to-wear business in Berlin. Staneck also includes interesting facts but makes scant reference to primary sources. Both authors focus on Berlin as the centre of clothes manufacture and there is limited mention of what is happening elsewhere in Germany at the time. Erwin Wittkowski also provides a history of the industrial boom in *Die Berliner Damenkonfektion* (1928). Such literature demonstrates the extent to which Berlin succeeded in establishing itself as a centre of clothes production, if not trend-setting, at the end of the century.

My commentary on the sartorial advice found in conduct literature is informed by Katrin Schrott's *Das normative Korsett* (2005). Schrott discusses *Benimm-* and *Anstandsliteratur* with extensive reference to dress and cites a variety of works which were useful for my primary research. Elisabeth Mixa's *Errötern Sie, Madame! Anstandsdiskurse der Moderne* (1994) also gives a reliable summary of the expectations on women and the importance of conduct literature in the education of girls at the time.

Meanwhile, Patricia Ober's *Der Frauen neue Kleidung* (2005) gives a detailed account of the German women's dress movement. Ober includes excerpts from essays by reformers and describes the efforts of designers and the popularity of reform organisations and exhibitions. Patricia Cunningham provides a helpful study of European dress reform in *Reforming Women's Fashion* (2003) and includes some relevant information about the movement in Germany. Sabine Welch's *Ein Ausstieg aus dem Korsett* (1996) and Ulrike Adamek's *Reformkleidung als Fortschritt?* (1982) also proved valuable historical studies of the dress reform.

I have also relied on a number of primary sources including fashion journals. They demonstrate not only what women wore when but also how they were approached as consumers. From the 1870s, the number of journals produced in Germany grew rapidly and magazines from this time

indicate the extent to which fashion relied on subscribing readers. Such journals as *Der Bazar*, *Die Illustrierte Frauenzeitung*, and *Das Blatt der Hausfrau* provide various illustrations, fashion commentary and reports (often from Paris) that contribute to an understanding of sartorial practices during this period.

I consulted a variety of works of conduct literature by men from the latter part of the century, including Hermann Klencke's *Das Weib als Gattin* (1886) and *Das Weib als Jungfrau* (1887), *Der Damenfreund* (1880) by Arthur Grünau and Eugen Hammer, and Friedrich Lesser's *Der Führer der Jungfrau und Frau im häuslichen und geselligen Leben* (1882). This genre was particularly popular at the end of the century, with a wide range of works published by women as well as men. Women conduct authors provide an interesting contrast to their male counterparts; some reinforce what men have written whilst others encourage a different point of view informed by a desire to contribute to the struggle for women's rights. Anna Kübler's *Der Haushalt* (1892), Ilse von der Lütt's *Die elegante Hausfrau* (1892) and *Frauenrechte* (1896) and Natalie Bruck Auffenberg's *Die Frau comme il faut* (1902) were particularly interesting because of their detailed advice regarding various aspects of a bourgeois woman's life. Discussions about dress are included amid chapters on cooking, caring for the sick, conducting visits and even smoking, demonstrating the extent to which German middle-class women were expected to study their domestic roles and how difficult it was to play the part of a lady to perfection. Such writing reveals how women operate within a strict gendered framework which describes a number of rules.

Discussions of dress reform at the end of the nineteenth century ranged from medical tracts to aesthetic works. C.H. Stratz's *Die Frauenkleidung* (1904) and Paul Schultz-Naumberg's *Die Kultur des weiblichen Körpers als Grundlage der Frauenkleidung* (1910) are detailed accounts of how fashionable dress was threatening to women's health. Both works are scientific studies which focus on the detrimental effects of corsetry and promote alternative reform wear. Artist Henry Van de Velde's *Geschichte meines Lebens* (1896) describes the aesthetic motivations for his involvement in the dress reform movement, while essays issued by the 'Verband für Deutsche Frauenkleidung und Frauenkultur' and several articles which appear in particular in journals in the 1890s allude to the aims of the reformists and to the different available reform designs.

### **Empiremode: the early nineteenth century**

Whilst this period predates the literature discussed in this thesis, it marks the rise of both the bourgeoisie and the fashion journal and shows how the female silhouette went from being relatively free after the French Revolution to increasingly restricted and styled. Fashion gained



importance for the middle classes at this time and with it came the expectation that bourgeois women in particular follow it carefully and rigorously.

One of the first fashion journals – where ‘fashion’ covers far more than simply clothes –, *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, published 40 issues between 1786 and 1827. In its first issue, editors of the journal, founded by Friedrich Bertuch, claimed that ‘Je reicher und verfeinerter eine aufgeklärte Nation ist, desto bequemer, schöner, geschmackvoller und mannigfacher sind ihre Moden. Genie, Caprice und Zufall sind meistens ihre Schöpfer (...)’.<sup>122</sup> The suggestion is that Germans were expected to keep abreast of the latest sartorial trends in order to compete with other enlightened European nations. The journal’s ethos held great appeal; soon after it was first established it was publishing 2,250 copies monthly (an impressive number for that time). It was also affordable and attracted about 25,000 readers in Germany and neighbouring countries.<sup>123</sup> Fashion was no longer the domain of the aristocracy alone.

Numerous references to London and Paris in the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* show that fashions for women were mainly set in France.<sup>124</sup> While the Revolution had meant that many fashion designers fled Paris, by the beginning of the nineteenth century most fashion magazines were again produced in France and those that were not often used the French language to describe sartorial trends.<sup>125</sup> Some Germans resisted the dictates of the French fashion industry, however, and encouraged their countrymen and countrywomen to develop their own national dress code. Daniel Chodowiecki put forward his suggestions for a ‘deutsches Frauenreformkleid’ as early as 1785, followed by Ernst Moritz Arndt in ‘Über Sitte, Mode und Kleidertracht’ (1814) and Karoline Pichler in ‘Über eine Nationalkleidung für deutschen Frauen’ (1815).<sup>126</sup> Arndt argued that because fashion was ‘ein unruhiges, gaukelisches, launisches, und üppiges Ding, gleich einer Buhlerin, die noch unschuldig scheint und grade durch diesen Schein am meisten verführt’, it was necessary to develop ‘eine Volkstracht’ which was in harmony with the country of its origin. He envisaged men and women wearing national dress which would symbolize their heritage, gender and honesty, for ‘alle ehrliche Frauen, die nicht für schlecht gehalten werden wollen’ could assert their virtue by wearing it.<sup>127</sup> In essence he proposed that fickle and ‘feminine’ fashion be replaced by a ‘masculine’, logical arbitrator of sartorial custom. With the rise of industry and technology,

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<sup>122</sup> Cited in Walter Steiner and Uta Kühn-Stillmark *Friedrich Justin Bertuch: ein Leben im klassischen Weimar zwischen Kultur und Kommerz* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), 93-94.

<sup>123</sup> See *ibid.*, 94.

<sup>124</sup> The January 1787 issue, for example, includes in its section on (women’s) clothes a report on French then English fashions (11-20).

<sup>125</sup> See *ibid.*, 310.

<sup>126</sup> See Ernst Moritz Arndt, ‘Über Sitte, Mode und Kleidertracht’ (Frankfurt am Main: Körner, 1824) and Lore Sporhan-Krempel, *Die deutsche Modezeitschrift* (Munich: Tageblatt Haus, 1935), 89.

<sup>127</sup> Ernst Moritz Arndt, ‘Über Sitte, Mode und Kleidertracht’, 55-56.

however, the differentiation between dress in European countries was to become less and less distinct and the idea of a *Volkstracht* did not convince the German public.<sup>128</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century neo-classical styles were popular throughout Europe as the period following the French Revolution saw a sartorial reaction against the aristocratic styles of the 1780s which included wide panniers, wigs and make-up for women. The empire silhouette modeled on naturalness and classical lines was linked with republican virtue and modesty and meant that women appeared more equal to men than they had before the Revolution. Fashions of the early 1800s suggested 'Bürgerpflicht, Biederkeit und Genügsamkeit', essential bourgeois virtues.<sup>129</sup> Women wore high-waisted, ankle-length gowns, the *Empirekostüme*, with loose, flowing skirts and their short stays and few layers created an ensemble which was neither bulky nor confining. However, trends set by Napoleon's court meant that many women favoured very thin fabric even in cold weather. Silk and short sleeves were popular and dresses often had a long train. Fashion journals at the time were quick to assert that these trends were undesirable as they did not reflect German women's morals. Whilst the expensive designs of the eighteenth century had been replaced by simpler patterns, the impression was that women had gone from being over-dressed to under-dressed and Germans referred to the gowns of the beginning of the century as both 'antike Mode' and 'Nacktmode'.<sup>130</sup> Bourgeois thrift was not to come at the expense of modesty.

When compared with later and earlier decades, dresses during this period seem simple, comfortable and light, weighing scarcely half a pound.<sup>131</sup> However, as early as the 1820s the *Mieder* or girdle was developed to model the body and was tied tightly in order to accentuate the feminine figure. It also helped to produce a desirable pallor which was considered fashionable throughout the century. As the waist became more defined, the skirt became fuller and sleeves puffier. Dresses were generally white, as it was considered the most elegant colour and were made of muslin, cotton or linen.<sup>132</sup> Such apparent simplicity differed strongly from the flowered, bright prints of silk and velvet with many frills and ruffles produced in previous generations.

Whilst male clothing became ever simpler, female fashions became more decorative and elaborate and drew inspiration from the French court.<sup>133</sup> The contrast between the dress designs of the early 1800s and the elaborate, heavy and bulky dresses of the following decades emphasizes the central role of clothes in gender categorization in the mid and late nineteenth century.

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<sup>128</sup> See Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms*, 308.

<sup>129</sup> See *ibid*, 309.

<sup>130</sup> See *ibid*.

<sup>131</sup> See *ibid*, 293.

<sup>132</sup> See Penelope Bryde, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion* (London: Butler & Tanner, 1992), 23.

<sup>133</sup> See *ibid*, 310.

## Biedermeiermode: 1830-1840

In the 1830s women's fashions became broad, weighty and fussy as femininity for women was becoming an increasingly decorative affair.<sup>134</sup> Whilst large hats and skirts and low narrow waists were fashionable, it was the sleeves that made the dresses most distinct as they widened with a puff that started at the shoulder and descended to the elbow. The sleeves were referred to by a number of hyperbolic names including *Hammelkeulen*, *Schinkenärmel* and *Elefantenärmel*. Louise Otto, writing in her historical work *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich* (1876), remarks in particular on the ever-growing 'Steifärmel' of the period.<sup>135</sup> Otto argues her point that the sleeves reminded the wearer of her female duty, describing the difficulty of the 'Toilettenwechsel' since women attached separate sleeves to their dresses by means of '4 Bändchen, die mit 4 andern im Kleid korrespondirten'.<sup>136</sup> As a solution to the problem of impracticality, Otto mentions that a feather stuffing eventually replaced the sleeves' fishbone frame. This was particularly uncomfortable in summer 'bei 20–30 Grad Sommerhitze!'<sup>137</sup> It was not much better in winter, however, since any garment worn over such sleeves appeared 'vollends unförmlich', all the more so because coats were thickly padded. As a result, most women wore 'wattirte seidene Ueberröcke von dunkler, meist schwarzer Farbe'<sup>138</sup> accompanied by a fur boa and a muff. For Otto, the boa was almost as incommensurable as the 'Steifärmel'. Heralded as the new 'Ideal der Damenwelt' the boa had to be long ('Fünf bis acht Ellen mußte ein solches Ungeheuer messen') and worn around the neck 'womit es so reizend und kokett sich spielen ließ'.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, it was a key part of the toilette even in the ball room. Otto describes how boas were often tripped over and lost.

The link between fashionableness and domesticity became particularly strong in the 1830s. Otto reports that whilst George Sand was reminding her readers of the enslavement of women and radical thinkers in Germany were demanding the emancipation of the flesh, 'die guten deutschen Hausfrauen beeilten sich, zu verstehen zu geben, daß sie keinen andern Gedanken hätten, als wirtschaftlich zu sein und [...] für ihre Töchter auf den Bällen Tänzer und Männer zu suchen.'<sup>140</sup> German housewives of the time may have read controversial books in secret, but outwardly domesticity reigned. Otto recalls how 'der Sinn für stille Häuslichkeit' was documented in 'zierlichen Tändelschürzchen mit kleinen Täschchen' made of white linen and decorated 'mit den

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<sup>134</sup> See Penelope Byrde, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion* (London: Butler & Tanner, 1992), 38.

<sup>135</sup> See Louise Otto, *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich* (Leipzig: Moritz Schäfer, 1876), 62-63.

<sup>136</sup> Otto, *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich*, 63.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 68.

zierlichsten Stickereien, Garnirungen und bunten Bändern'.<sup>141</sup> Women often embroidered their own scarves and handkerchiefs and 'liebten es daheim, am Schlüsselhaken, am Gürtel oder am klirrenden Chatelet von Stahl ein Schlüsselbund zu tragen, um so die pflichtgetreue Häuslichkeit in etwas forcirter Weise anzudeuten.'<sup>142</sup>

Skirts in the 1830s began to widen and fashions began to vary season by season. In the summer, for example, white dresses were embellished by 'bunte Röcke und Gürtel und in jenen hellfarbige Shawls, vorzugsweise aus himmelblauer, rosa, lachsfarbener, gelber oder weißer Gaze, welche man »Wolken« nannte.'<sup>143</sup> Heavy fabrics such as brocades replaced light layers and outfits were made more cumbersome by restricting corsets and layered petticoats. By 1835 skirts became longer too, dropping from ankle-length to the floor. Even more burdensome than the costumes themselves, perhaps, was the necessity to suit one's dress to every time of day and occasion, which meant that numerous changes were required. A bourgeois woman's mornings were taken up with domestic tasks requiring a fashionable but plain gown. The afternoon visiting hours demanded more elaborate dress, adapted to the occasion, while dinner was always attended in evening dress and balls were the occasion for dresses with a décolleté.<sup>144</sup> Particularly from the 1830s, the bourgeois German woman's life, as that of her European counterparts, was defined by the importance of being appropriately dressed.<sup>145</sup> This social necessity of dressing for the occasion lasted throughout the nineteenth century, despite the difficulty women often faced of getting in and out of hoops and skirts. In a conduct book of 1882, Friedrich Lesser writes:

Man geht (...) nicht des Morgens wie am Nachmittag, im Hause nicht wie auf dem Balle, auf der Straße und auf der Reise nicht wie in Gesellschaft, bei Begräbnissen oder Condolenzvisiten trägt man keine hellen Farben, und auf einer Hochzeit keine dunklen.<sup>146</sup>

Such a comment shows just how true Bordo's comment is about the impact of dress on the organization of a woman's time.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>144</sup> See Vanda Foster, *A Visual History of Costume: The Nineteenth-Century* (London: BT Batsford, 1984), 16.

<sup>145</sup> See Patricia Ober, *Der Frauen neue Kleidung* (Kempten im Allgäu: Schiler, 2005), 126.

<sup>146</sup> Friedrich Lesser, *Der Führer der Jungfrau und Frau im häuslichen und geselligen Leben* (Erfurt: Bartholomäus, 1884), 80.

## Vormärzmode: 1840-1850

The 1840s was a decade of revolutionary zeal and progressive thinking regarding women's rights, but women's clothing continued on the whole to reinforce established gender norms. Narrow sloping shoulders, low waists and bell-shaped skirts supported by layers of underskirts lengthened the female figure. In 1836 the large sleeves began to shrink and were replaced by sleeves so tight that they did little to aid the mobility of the wearer.<sup>147</sup> Meanwhile, muslin and cotton gave way to heavy velvet, silk and brocade. Due to the long skirt, the Pagan was created, a sort of ribbon attached to the skirt that allowed the wearer to lift the gown when walking. Evening attire included a train and the décolleté, a feature of day wear in previous decades, was exclusively worn on social occasions in the evening. Skirts had gathered folds making underclothing particularly important as the bell-shape was created by horsehair padding and an increasing number of underskirts; in the 1840s a woman needed half a dozen underskirts for an elegant evening gown. Underclothes were white and meant to dazzle with cleanliness; it was seen as immoral to wear anything but white.<sup>148</sup> As Otto indicates, at this time the *Wespentaille* was 'das höchste Schönheitsstreben aller Mädchen, aller Mütter für ihre Töchter und es galt als höchst unelegant und aller Grazie Hohn sprechend, wenn ein Gürtel weiter als dreiviertel oder eine ganze Elle gemacht werden mußte.'<sup>149</sup> The girdles required more and more fishbone so that the garment was very expensive until artificial bone was used.<sup>150</sup>

The revolution of 1848 had a small impact on women's clothing. That year fashion journals were not published and social gatherings did not happen so frequently. Women demonstrated revolutionary sympathies by wearing a broad-brimmed *Barrikadenstrohhut* instead of the usual *Schute*, a mixture between a hat and a cap. The *Oktobernymphen* are reported as having worn the uniform of the national guard while the 'vorher so arg verpönte Farbenzusammenstellung' black-red-gold was popular among women. Otto recounts that the German industry responded to revolutionary zeal by producing 'Bändern, Cravatten, Tüchern, Schals, Haarputzen, Stickereien, Ränder um Briefbogen u.s.w.' in those colours.<sup>151</sup> Yet throughout the 1840s colourfulness had been seen as vulgar and the gingham patterns popular in the 1830s had fallen out of favour as being undistinguished. Any sort of colour contrast was only permissible between the garment and over-garment, and colours and shiny materials that reflected the light were preferred in the evening.<sup>152</sup> The popularity of black, red and gold during 1848 is hence all the more striking.

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<sup>147</sup> See Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms*, 319.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 322.

<sup>149</sup> Otto, *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich*, 74.

<sup>150</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 75-76.

<sup>152</sup> See Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms*, 325.

However, Buxbaum insists that this tendency towards stark revolutionary colours was not widespread and when they were adopted they did not figure as a part of the dress itself, but rather in the use of ornaments such as cockades.<sup>153</sup> Meanwhile Isabelle Betling cites a journal from March 1836 which refers to fashion as ‘das eigentliche Gebiet des weiblichen Geschlechts (...) und man kann sie einigermaßen die Politik der Damen nennen.’<sup>154</sup> Yet rather than suggesting a means of interacting with governmental politics, this assertion seems to allude to power relations among women which are negotiated through clothes. However, in more radical cases, dress played a more politically expressive role.

Women who cross-dressed, asserting ‘new possibilities for gender that contest[ed] the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms’,<sup>155</sup> including such ‘Freischärflerinnen’ as Louise Aston (see Chapter Two), Mathilde Franziska Anneke and Emma Herwegh, were judged harshly. Dressing like a man was perceived as an attempt to deny the decorous ‘nature’ of femininity and usurp masculine power. Herwegh, who acted as a spy and messenger for the Deutsche Demokratische Legion, a revolutionary organization presided over by her husband, Georg Herwegh,<sup>156</sup> is described in the *Karlsruher Zeitung* of 5 May, 1848 thus:

Frau Herwegh erschien einigemal in Männertracht und zwar in spanischem Kostüm von blauem Samt mit weiten Bein Kleidern, hohen Stulpenstiefeln und weissem Schlapphut. Natürlich fehlten hierbei nicht die Pistolen im ledernen Gürtel. Die Amazone drückte ihren Unmut über die Treue der Soldaten, deren Eid ihnen heilig und kein leerer Wahn ist, bei verschiedenen, öffentlich gehaltenen Reden heftig aus, bis sie zuletzt mit ihrer Rede- und Verführungskunst scheiternd, ebenfalls die Flucht ergriff...<sup>157</sup>

Not only is Herwegh depicted as artificial with her ‘Verführungskunst’, she also appears foreign, Spanish rather than German. Her trousered costume and boots seem both a matter of practicality and political statement; she was in the midst of revolutionary turmoil. The journalist suggests that she is hypocritical, however, by mentioning the velvet of her costume and its foreign origin. The 1848 Revolution did not reach Spain and velvet was an expensive material unfitting for the barricades. Herwegh’s behaviour is hence depicted as both complete with all the necessary accoutrements and ridiculous; she fails and takes flight demonstrating her utter inability to emulate true soldiers. Documents relating to the participation of women in the 1848 Revolution are replete with such caricature as misogyny was widespread among anti-revolutionaries.

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<sup>153</sup> Buxbaum, *Mode aus Wien*, 81.

<sup>154</sup> Isabelle Belting, *Mode und Revolution: Deutschland 1848/49* (New York: Olms, 1997), 28.

<sup>155</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 198.

<sup>156</sup> See Loreley French, *German Women as Letter Writers* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 244.

<sup>157</sup> Ute Gerhard, *Unerhört: Die Geschichte der Frauenbewegung* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 59.

Herwegh, like Struve and Franziska Anneke, left Germany after 1848; all were exiled due to their belief in democracy and women's rights which was reinforced by their appropriation of masculine dress.<sup>158</sup> It is important, however, to recognize that dress was not a major factor in their expulsion. Nonetheless, it drew attention to them and the radical nature of their political beliefs. Their fate demonstrates the importance of appearing feminine and the reasons why women who supported the revolutionary struggle had to be careful to show sartorial support by means of innocuous accessories alone.

### **'Zweites Rokoko': 1850-1860**

The failure of the revolution led to the reinforcement of social and gender distinctions. These distinctions were manifested in fashion which metaphorically and literally provided a 'highly rigid regulatory frame'.<sup>159</sup> Over the course of the 1850s the long, full skirt continued to grow, necessitating the advent of the crinoline, a large hooped petticoat, which was popularized by 'the supreme arbiter of fashion,' the French Empress Eugénie.<sup>160</sup> The steel cage crinoline which was worn with pantalettes was produced from 1856 and allowed for ever larger and more cumbersome skirts, depending on the extent of a woman's wealth and stature: the more aristocratic the lady, the wider and heavier the dress. Yet the crinoline was in some ways an improvement on previous garments - even the American dress reformer Amelia Bloomer had to admit that it was an improvement on the many layers of heavy skirts.<sup>161</sup> Because it replaced horsehair pads with a metal frame, the crinoline was much lighter. Nevertheless, the skirt continued to be awkwardly long and voluminous.<sup>162</sup>

Otto emphasizes that the crinoline originated in France: 'Von dem Tage an, wo Eugenie Kaiserin von Frankreich geworden, war die Geschichte der Mode eigentlich nur eine Geschichte der Einfälle Eugeniens (...).'<sup>163</sup> German women's wear followed European trends and was a slave to French fashion:

In Konzerten, Theatern, Eisenbahn-Waggons – überall inkommodierten die Damen einander, sich selbst, überall mußten sie die Witze und aufgebrachtten Blicke der Männer

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<sup>158</sup> For a summary of Herwegh's life see Volker Hobrack, *Frauen in Berlins Mitte: Frauenstrassennamen* (Berlin: Berlin Story Verlag, 2007), 24. Sabine Freitag, *Exiles from European revolutions: refugees in mid-Victorian England* (Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2003), 3-4 provides an account of Struve's exile. See also Anneke's biography: Susan Piepke, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: The Works and Life of a German-American Activist* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>159</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.

<sup>160</sup> Oswald Curtis, *Nineteenth-Century Costume and Fashion* (Courier Dover Publications, 1998), 147.

<sup>161</sup> See Penelope Byrde, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion*, 58.

<sup>162</sup> See *ibid*, 59.

<sup>163</sup> Otto, *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich*, 83.

ertragen, die neben diesen aufgebauchten Kleidern sich kaum mehr zu rühren wußten und unsichtbar wurden – aber es war Alles vergeblich – allmählig trug sogar jede ländliche und städtische Magd ihre Krinoline so gut wie jede Künstlerin auf dem Theater, selbst wenn sie eine Johanna D’Arc oder Venus darzustellen hatte!<sup>164</sup>

Ridiculous it might be – as Otto’s exclamation implies – but any attempt to overlook the crinoline was an act of social segregation:

(...) wagte eine Dame ohne jede Krinoline auf dem Theater zu erscheinen, so lächelte die *jeunesse d'oré* und das Parterre lachte – und hatte eine Dame den Muth, überhaupt keine zu tragen und so über die Straße zu gehen, so sahen ihr die Leute staunend nach als einer Abnormität, bezeichneten sie vielleicht höhnisch als Sonderlingin, Gelehrte, Blaustrumpf, Emanzipirte! Und der Ehegemahl, der, wenn er mit seiner Gattin am Arm promeniren wollte und bei jedem Schritt, den er that, mißmuthig darein sah, weil er immer von ihren Stahlreifen gestoßen und inkommodirt ward, fand daheim, daß seine Gattin sich und ihn vernachlässige, wenn sie beim ersten Frühstück ohne Krinoline unter dem Schlafrock erschien – mochte dieser noch so sauber, das ganze Negligé noch so elegant sein, sie sah ihm »salopp« aus, sobald das Kleid nicht von dem gewohnten Aufbau getragen ward.<sup>165</sup>

Otto’s description suggests that some women may indeed have dared to go out without a crinoline, but that if and when they did, they quickly thought the better of doing so again. The crinoline became a requirement for the German bourgeois woman, an essential sign of her gender and seemingly as important as cleanliness. In short, ‘Alle, die nicht auffallen wollten, mußten sich mit zum Tragen der Krinoline entschließen’.<sup>166</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century the most important rule for a woman was to avoid standing out.

The exaggerated features of the female silhouette constricted movement, confining women to the places her crinoline could accommodate. The continued need for changing one’s dress and wearing such garments was time-consuming and expensive as ladies needed the help of maids to dress and the skirts required huge amounts of fabric and the skill of a seamstress to piece together. The crinoline continued to grow until 1862 when the skirt flattened at the front. Comprising shaped panels in solid-coloured, heavy silk, the skirt then looped up to reveal a matching underskirt. The fashion of the Zweites Rokoko meant that women of the middle and upper classes found their days absorbed by sartorial concerns including dressing, undressing, re-dressing, caring

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 88.



for the outfit whilst going about their daily tasks and coordinating their clothing with their surroundings.

Moiré, silk and taffeta were favourite materials for daywear whilst gold or silver brocade was popularised by the Empress who claimed that she chose such expensive fabric in order to support the French textile industry. In the 1850s and 60s lighter fabrics were worn such as muslin and gauze. However, the thinness of the fabric meant that they could not be worn many times. The cost of the gown rose with such decorations as frills and flounces. By the late 1840s nine flounces were enough; a decade later, it was common to wear gowns with twenty-five flounces.<sup>167</sup> Daywear was high at the neck and worn with three-quarter length sleeves that widened into *Bischofs-* or *Pagodenärmel* and were embellished by puffed sleeves.

At this time fashion was being democratized; ready-made clothes began to be marketed thanks to the invention of the sewing machine in 1853 and the first department stores were opened. Synthetic dyes were also developed resulting in a preference for vivid hues that lasted into the 1870s. Skirts were mass produced, but girdles were still tailor-made so factory-made skirts were usually delivered to the seamstresses where they were perfected to fit individual customers. Fashion designer Charles Worth, whose involvement with the Empress Eugénie from 1859 marked the beginning of haute couture, sold models that were then produced cheaply for the masses.<sup>168</sup> With the mass industrialisation of sartorial production came what fashion historian Christopher Breward calls an ‘avalanche of advertising ephemera, mail order initiatives, and magazine publicity stunts’ that made the 1850s the start of a fashion revolution throughout Europe.<sup>169</sup> Superfluous accessories were in vogue; Otto reports that women spent more on self-adornment than ever before:

*Falsches Haar und falsche Zähne* wurden bald ein nothwendiger Luxusartikel – das dafür von manchen Damen verausgabte Geld wiegt oft allein das auf, was vor dreißig Jahren die ganze Jahrestoilette einer in anständigen, aber nicht glänzenden Verhältnissen lebenden Dame kostete.<sup>170</sup>

Cost was an issue, especially for the astute German housewife whose virtue depended on simplicity, modesty and her ability to manage the household accounts. Theoretically clothes were becoming cheaper. By the 1860s a cheap crinoline weighing only half a pound could be bought

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<sup>167</sup> See Thiel, 344.

<sup>168</sup> See Thiel, 348.

<sup>169</sup> Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 147.

<sup>170</sup> Otto, *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich*, 82. Her italics.

for just a few Taler and the garment was worn by mistress and maid alike.<sup>171</sup> However, in order to reassert class divisions, the skirt grew and grew. A sort of pyramid form emerged: first the crinoline encased the knee then belled out even further. Moreover, a fear of the democratization of fashion meant that trends altered quickly and became ever more extreme. Despite the fact that more was being produced for less, expenditure on clothes and accessories increased.

## 1860-1870

In 1865 an article on the title page of *Die Modenwelt*, a fortnightly Berlin journal, announced a new phase of fashion characterised by simplicity. It claimed: ‘Gediegene Einfachheit ist das Streben der edleren Richtung der Neuzeit, die müde von dem rastlosen Haschen nach Flitter und nach Effect, gleichsam Ruhe und Erholung verlangt; Einfachheit in unserer Toilette wünschen sehlichst unsere Gatten und Väter (...)’.<sup>172</sup> The reference here to ‘Gatten und Väter’ reasserts power divisions; gender practices obliged women to please men by enacting their fantasy which depended on the semblance of naturalness.<sup>173</sup> It was particularly necessary to reinforce this illusion of simplicity and naturalness when women’s fashions were becoming even more elaborate.

The mid-1860s did not bring about a complete revolution in dress, however. From the start of the decade the skirt, consisting of shaped panels, fell flatter at the front but was longer at the back where the train could be up to two metres long. Dresses were cut from one material, the crinoline became narrower and tunics and other over-clothes served as decoration. Skirts were often made to match different bodices, some being designed for the evening and some for the day; and the day bodice was very different to its evening counterpart. In short, contrary to the convictions published in *Die Modenwelt*, sartorial trends were not becoming simpler even if they were meant to create the illusion of simplicity.

The ready-to-wear industry grew substantially in the 1860s causing trends to change even more quickly.<sup>174</sup> By 1860 the *Berliner Konfektion* employed thousands of tailors and seamstresses and numerous *Konfektionsfirmen* were founded. Historian Brunhilde Dähn mentions twelve on Hausvogteiplatz alone.<sup>175</sup> The largest firm was Kaufhaus Gerson, founded by Hermann Gerson as Berlin’s first department store in 1848. By 1894 it was exporting large quantities to Britain and

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<sup>171</sup> See Thiel, 344.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 95. Her italics.

<sup>174</sup> See Werner Dopp, *125 Jahre Berliner Konfektion* (Berlin: Staneck, 1962), 40.

<sup>175</sup> See Brunhilde Dähn, *Berlin Hausvogteiplatz* (Frankfurt: Musterschmidt-Verlag, 1968), 65-66.

employed about eight thousand female employees.<sup>176</sup> Among the latter were live models who displayed the latest trends. This concept of shopping was revolutionary and appealed ever more to women as consumers.

### **Die Gründerzeit: 1870-1880**

In January 1874 a reader wrote to the journal *Illustrierte Frauen-Zeitung* and asked how long fashion journals had been around, since her grandmother could not remember seeing any in her youth. The printed answer was eleven years.<sup>177</sup> While this is not strictly true – fashion journals had been around for decades – the rise of the *Modezeitschrift* in Germany coincided with the advance of the industrial revolution and the *Wirtschaftswunder* of 1871. Berlin printed just nine fashion journals between 1849 and 1870; between 1871 and 1914 that figure rose to sixty-two. In Vienna, Europe's third largest city after London and Paris, four journals appeared from 1849 to 1870. Between 1871 and 1914 there were 41. These journals contained reports and images from Paris, London and Vienna. Images were particularly important and commentary tended to be dry and descriptive, aiming to give the reader an accurate depiction of the latest garments and how to attain them. Readers often wrote in asking for practical advice on sartorial issues and it was partly this possibility of dialogue that appealed to the public. The fashion journal *Die Modenwelt* which started in 1865 had 25,000 subscribers within a year and was translated into several languages including English and French. By 1890 its subscribers numbered 439,000.<sup>178</sup> However, women's fashion continued to be determined in Paris and distributed, substantially by means of the fashion journal, throughout the western world. As a result frequent mention is made of Parisian women; fashion reports contain commentaries on trips made to France; and fashion jargon is greatly influenced by French terminology.

Typically, weekly journals such as *Der Bazar: Illustrierte Damen-Zeitung*, founded in 1854, published fashion reports and images alongside serialized novels, accounts of exhibitions, songs, advertisements and correspondence. Illustrations appealed to the reader's sense of fashion as well as her domestic calling and often featured women with their children. Children's clothing was included almost as much as women's wear and regular articles such as 'Die Schule des Strickens' suggest the importance of homemade clothes to the ideal German housewife. Whole pages of the journal, however, are devoted to illustrations of hats, dresses, coats and hairstyles that entice the female consumer and at the end of each issue advertisements for such items as 'Cosmetische

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>177</sup> *Illustrierte Frauen-Zeitung* (Berlin: Franz Lipperheide, 19. January 1874), 32.

<sup>178</sup> See Sporhan-Krempel, *Die deutsche Modezeitschrift*, 93-94.

Mittel’, ‘Trauer-Waaren’ and ‘Cashemire de Berlin’ are common.<sup>179</sup> Descriptions of the garments tend to describe the material used and the pattern or colour of the garment, since the illustrations are all black and white. Sometimes they include vague instructions as to how to achieve the look cheaply. Fashion articles appear occasionally, but not in every issue. They often feature advice and advertise where the latest fashions can be acquired, whetting the reader’s appetite but never mentioning price. The fashion industry clearly relied on the *Modejournal* to attract consumers and *Bezugsquellen* are often mentioned alongside descriptions.

The requirement to be economical and simultaneously fashionable formed a central contradiction in the life of women at this time and made getting femininity ‘right’ an increasingly challenging task. When faced with articles proclaiming the arrival of a new season and the latest trends, the reader of the fashion journal is quickly captivated. Often the latest trends could not be constructed by altering what one already had in one’s wardrobe. When, for example, ‘Kaschmir scheint durch Sicilienne verdrängt zu werden,’ and ‘Die beliebtesten Farben sind Grau, Grün und Kastanienbraun,’<sup>180</sup> adhering to fashion meant acquiring new dresses. The good news was that because the clothes industry was thriving, rather than acquiring new dresses by paying a seamstress, women could buy many garments and materials cheaply from ready-to-wear businesses. Interestingly, far from impeding industrial progress, the Franco-Prussian war encouraged the development of German *Konfektion*. From 1872 Germany began to export ready-made clothes to England and America and became one of the most important clothes producers in the west. By 1875, the Germany’s clothes industry had a 22 ½ million mark turnover and exported to the United States, Canada, England and Holland.<sup>181</sup>

In the 1870s the female form took on a new silhouette as the crinoline was replaced by the *Tournüre*. Comprising horsehair pads and a steel frame, the *Tournüre* was tied around the figure, creating a large puff at the back, the *cul de Paris*. This ‘Bizarrie’ was, like the crinoline, ‘vielbesprochen und belächelt’.<sup>182</sup> The train remained an important feature of women’s wear, as did the girdle which resembled a vest and was tied tightly. Thinness was highly fashionable, and underclothes tended to be made of chamois leather; only one underskirt was worn over a pair of bloomers. The general rule regarding the décolleté still applied; it was reserved for balls, but was then so revealing that the sleeves barely covered the shoulders. Evening wear tended to be made of heavy and elaborate silk while day wear was made of wool.

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<sup>179</sup> See *Der Bazar: Illustrierte Damen-Zeitung*, Nr. 36, 21. September 1874, 292.

<sup>180</sup> *Der Bazar*, Nr. 34, 7 September, 1874, 275.

<sup>181</sup> See Erwin Wittkowski, *Die Berliner Damenkonfektion* (Leipzig: Gloeckner, 1928), 9.

<sup>182</sup> Wilhelm Mensinga, *Die heutige Modeblätter und die heutige Mode* (Berlin: Neuwied, 1889), 3.

The *Tournüre* was as incommodious as the crinoline; it quickly narrowed and almost disappeared at the end of the decade. In the late 1870s skirts clung to the length of the body down to the calf at which point they spread out, puffed up by numerous folds, ribbons and lace. Far from liberating women, the skirts were so narrow that it was hard for women to walk. Despite the continuous lack of comfort and the decorative tendencies in female fashions, magazines celebrated the fact that the skirt had risen slightly so that the feet were freer and proclaimed that women's fashion was becoming simpler. 'Der größte Luxus,' writes one fashion journalist, 'zugleich aber auch die höchst praktische Einrichtung der heutigen Mode beruht auf der Abtheilung unserer Toilette in das kurze, ganz fußfreie Costüm, das halblange Kleid und die ceremonielle Schleppeprobe.'<sup>183</sup> For the modern viewer, however, women's clothes in the 1870s are far from simple and practical and judging by the accompanying images, it is clear that 'fußfrei' did not mean that the whole foot was visible. Illustrations nonetheless emphasize the shorter skirt by showing the toe of one shoe poking out beneath the skirts. The train was also a particular favourite in the 1870s. 'Der Rock des Costüms, das zu Hause, wie im Concert und Theater, zu Dinern und selbst in kleinen Gesellschaften unsere bevorzugte Tracht bildet, wird gern mit ein wenig Schleppe geschnitten (125-130 Cent. Hintere Länge zu 100 Cent. Vorn).'<sup>184</sup> In fact the train remained popular up to the turn of the century since, provided it was worn gracefully, it suggested 'die feinste Eleganz' as well as 'eine an das Edle streifende Schönheit'.<sup>185</sup> However, it was easy to spoil this effect; as the reformer Else Spiegel writes, 'Die Kleider sind nämlich so wahnsinnig lang, dass es einer gewissen Uebung und natürlicher Geschicklichkeit bedarf, um nicht zu stolpern oder sich den Saum abzutreten.'<sup>186</sup> The train's circumference meant that a woman's clothes in the late nineteenth century, as a generation before, dictated where she went and what she did.

## 1880-1890

As the women's movement progressed and discussions about gender became ever more contentious, debate concerning the health implications of body-distorting undergarments and the dangers of promoting overly-thin figures was rife. Conduct books and health guides emphasized the harmfulness of tight corsetry even as the *Tournüre* and the S-shaped figure returned. Indeed, the *cul de Paris* reached its largest proportions in 1885; then it became smaller and smaller till the end of the decade when it disappeared altogether. The top of the dress was tight and stiff with straight sleeves which began to puff out towards the end of the decade. The combination of a separate shirt and skirt was imported from England and referred to as a *Kostüm*. Although clothes

<sup>183</sup> *Die Illustrierte Frauen-Zeitung*, Nr. 43, 16 November, 1874, 337.

<sup>184</sup> *Illustrierte Frauen-Zeitung*, Nr. 13, 1 April, 1874, 97.

<sup>185</sup> Lütt, *Die elegante Frau*, 254.

<sup>186</sup> Else Spiegel, 'Abrüsten!' in Brinker-Gabler, *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, 226.

production had become cheaper, Simmel's theory of fashion evolution can be used here to explain why outfits at this time were in fact as costly as ever. As the lower classes began to adopt the fashions of their wealthier peers, high fashion developed garments which included numerous expensive trimmings. As a result, the dresses worn by the wealthy bourgeoisie in the 1880s were as costly as the silk crinoline gowns of the 1850s.<sup>187</sup> The gap between the classes was no longer visible in the silhouette of the dress, but rather in its fine details, folds and ribbons.

Long before the modern debate about photoshopping, Dr. Mensinga, a medic interested in the relationship between dress and health, raised concerns about the unnatural body shapes in fashion journals. Women were being presented with a gender ideal that was pure fantasy:

Was Wunder also, dass z. B. ein junges Mädchen sich unverantwortlich fest einschnürt, um eine solche Form, wie das Modejournal sie vorschreibt, zu erhalten; während dadurch einesteils die inneren Organe in der Tailleengegend einem höchst bedenklichen Drucke ausgesetzt sind, werden andererseits die Brüste so in die Höhe geschraubt, dass sie eine ganz abnorme Lage einnehmen (...)<sup>188</sup>

Mensinga is concerned that when it comes to fashion journals, 'man zwingt die Natur in die Kunst hinein, worin erstere untergehen muss'.<sup>189</sup> He blames 'das schablonenhafte Verfahren der Modezeichner'<sup>190</sup> where the bosom plays 'eine ganz intensive Rolle'.<sup>191</sup> Unhealthy practices, he argues, should be replaced by a natural *Trikottaille*. For others the continued trend of the train was a more obvious health threat since 'Die Schleppen auf der Straße sind durchaus sanitätswidrig, indem sie den für die Lungen so schädlich und gefährlich den feinen Staub und Schmutz aufwirbeln (...)'.<sup>192</sup>

Conduct authors and scientists both worried about the health effects of fashion and reiterated their belief that 'aller Schönheit Boden ist Gesundheit'.<sup>193</sup> Exaggerated sartorial practices were blamed for all sorts of ills. In *Das Weib als Gattin* (1886), for instance, Dr. Hermann Klencke asserts that sickly children, 'kümmerliche Bleichlinge',<sup>194</sup> have become the norm in urban families. He expresses particular concern for the 'bleiche, abgemagerte, hinfällige, hohläugige, hohlwangige, haarlose, schwachathmige, kraft- und saftlose Gestalten' who betray anaemic dispositions 'trotz der Chignons aus den Haaren rotwangiger Bäuerinnen und der künstlichen Aufputzung durch die

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<sup>187</sup> See Thiel, 361.

<sup>188</sup> Mensinga, *Die heutige Modeblätter und die heutige Mode*, 2.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>192</sup> Lesser, *Der Führer der Jungfrau und Frau im häuslichen und geselligen Leben*, 80.

<sup>193</sup> Altwegg-Weber zur Treuburg, 1877, cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 120.

<sup>194</sup> Hermann Klencke, *Das Weib als Gattin* (Leipzig: Kummer, 1886), 106.

Pariser Toilette'.<sup>195</sup> Fake hair and artificial ornaments may disguise sickness, but they also prove an unhealthy interest in fashion. Klencke goes into detail about the importance of good clothing during pregnancy: women should dress comfortably and warmly, in particular around the 'Unterleib' and breasts:

Schnürbrüste, schwere Unterröcke, enge Queder und Bänder um die Taille, auch enge Strumpfbänder, sind durchaus verwerflich. Hier muß die verständige Frau sich von den Rücksichten der Zweckmäßigkeit leiten lassen und der Mode und Eitelkeit angemessene Opfer bringen.<sup>196</sup>

He warns in particular against any 'künstliche Beengungen' and suggests a wide, woollen 'Bauchbinde' as underwear.<sup>197</sup> Such detail suggests that many pregnant women used the very 'Schnürbrüste, schwere Unterröcke, enge Queder und Bänder um die Taille' that Klencke warns against. In so writing, Klencke joined a widespread debate that is explored further later in this chapter.

In many conduct books, fashion was also portrayed as hazardous to moral health. In *Das Weib als Jungfrau* (1887), for example, Klencke presents French customs as dangerous for young German women: 'Die "decolletirten" Moden des Pariser Salons haben schon manches deutsche Mädchen sittlich verdorben [...]'.<sup>198</sup> For him anything that is coquettish is 'lächerlich', 'frivol' and even 'widerlich'.<sup>199</sup> A typical nineteenth-century moralist, he believes that virtue and beauty go hand in hand: 'Die Jungfrau soll niemals übersehen, daß alles Schöne auch eine moralische Wirkung haben muß (...)'.<sup>200</sup> The low plunging neckline of the décolleté is perceived as a particularly corrupt trend; Klencke sees it as comparable to a state of undress and 'ein Zeichen entsittlichter Zustände im Volksleben', the home of which can be found in Paris.<sup>201</sup> Other countries that adopt it are prone to 'den Verfall der guten Sitte'.<sup>202</sup> Other moralists take a similar viewpoint, linking exaggerated sartorial trends to moral decline: 'Es ist geschichtlich nachzuweisen, dass mit dem Verfall der Sitten eines Volkes, auch der Verfall des guten Geschmacks eintritt, was an der Uebertreibung der Mode leicht erkenntlich'.<sup>203</sup> Elsewhere, however, French women are still celebrated as role models. In his conduct book, *Der Führer der Jungfrau und Frau im häuslichen und geselligen Leben* (1882), Lesser admires French women who, he claims, have just one dress

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 104-105.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Hermann Klencke, *Das Weib als Jungfrau* (Leipzig: Kummer, 1887), 269.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Sophie Christ (1888) cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 116.

for every occasion which they wear until they need a new one.<sup>204</sup> Lesser regrets that German women think otherwise and his assertion appears to be a tactical attempt at getting his countrywomen to be more economical – French women coveted a variety of clothes just as German women did. Lesser would have agreed with Klencke that women should dress ‘geschmackvoll, sauber, einfach, adrett, dabei aber gesundheitsgemäß, bequem und praktisch’ and that it is equally important to be ‘schicklich und sittsam’.<sup>205</sup> Yet at the time being ‘schicklich und sittsam’ meant following fashions that compromised health, comfort and practicality; such assertions reinforce the paradox facing women who strove to ‘do’ their gender well.

Women’s concern with beauty was understandable considering the emphasis society put on appearance when judging a woman. In *Der Damen-Freund*, a conduct book published in 1880, the male authors describe perfect feminine features in detail but readily admit that it is a woman’s toilette rather than her forehead, nose and eyes, that first attracts men:

Im Winter wähle man schwere winterliche Roben. Besonders gut gefallen den Männern weiche und geschmackvolle Pelzwerke. Sie erhöhen die Anziehungskraft ihrer Trägerin und tragen wesentlich zu jener Damenmajestät bei, die den Männern so interessant erscheint.<sup>206</sup>

Even if the trend is unattractive, because it is worn by ‘jungen, angesehenen und reichen Leuten’ men are sure to like the overall effect.<sup>207</sup>

A woman’s success at being her gender and finding admirers relied on the appropriate choice of attire and the need for dress to harmonise with the occasion, the time of day and the age of the wearer continued to be a concern in the 1880s. Lesser sums this up clearly in a chapter entitled ‘Von der Toilette’:

In Kleidung soll Harmonie herrschen und das individuell Kleidsamste soll man wählen, wie es die wahrhaft gute Gesellschaft von Intelligenz und Geschmack verlangt. Nicht auffallend oder gar lächerlich, wie der ungebildete Theil der Geldaristokratie oder die Frivolität der Halbwelt sie mit Vorliebe zur Schau trägt.<sup>208</sup>

Lesser writes for a bourgeois reader, who aims to distinguish herself from the morally suspect classes he mentions: the ‘Geldaristokratie’ and the ‘Halbwelt’. His recommendations are fairly

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<sup>204</sup> Lesser, *Der Führer der Jungfrau und Frau im häuslichen und geselligen Leben*, 83.

<sup>205</sup> Klencke, *Das Weib als Jungfrau*, 270.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Lesser, *Der Führer der Jungfrau und Frau im häuslichen und geselligen Leben*, 78.



specific: gloves should be no darker than the dress itself, all underclothing should be white, and women must consider the weather, avoiding light colours when it rains and opting for dark clothing in the autumn and winter.<sup>209</sup> Lesser also reminds his readers that white makes one appear stronger and is unflattering, but black makes one seem thinner. Ultimately, Lesser emphasises the need to develop one's judgement to ensure that the clothing chosen matches one's features and reflects one's inner 'Geist, Anmuth und Würde'.<sup>210</sup> Form is also considered more important than the material of the dress which might be muslin or velvet as long as the silhouette remains elegant and the colours harmonise. It is particularly important that a lady is always dressed for a visit and Lesser regrets that 'Manche Damen glauben, in der Haustoilette sich mehr gehen lassen zu können; das ist nicht zu billigen, weil es im Widerspruch mit dem guten Ton steht.'<sup>211</sup> He reflects public opinion by asserting that 'selbst (der) Morgenüberrock (Negligé) muß sie niemals in Verlegenheit zu setzen vermögen.'<sup>212</sup> A lady was always supposed to be presentable and fully dressed. In particular the authors discussed in Chapter Four demonstrate the anxiety this social expectation caused.

### **The 'Belle Epoque': 1890-1914**

According to the fashion journal *Das Blatt der Hausfrau*, it was typical for women to ask themselves at the beginning of a new season "Was ist modern?" oder vielmehr "Was wird in der nächsten Zeit modern sein?"<sup>213</sup> Such magazines encouraged the reader to show that she could afford the latest designs and to ensure that she was as fashionable as possible. The result is that the reader felt she had to identify with her peers; to be a 'normal' woman was to study fashion. The journal presents an opportunity to trace how femininity is constructed and how the gender performance is maintained and propagated by society. By the end of the century, the magazine claims that these questions were more easily answered since women had acquired more sartorial flexibility:

(...) wir sehen anliegende Formen mit theils kurzem, theils langem Schoß, halb anliegende Modelle, besonders für die Jugend geeignet, und sogenannte Russenjacken, die wie eine Nachahmung des Blumenleibchens wirken, aber ebensowohl aus dem Stoff des Kostüms wie aus Mantelstoffen hergestellt werden.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>211</sup> Lesser, *Der Führer der Jungfrau und Frau im häuslichen und geselligen Leben*, 82.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>213</sup> *Das Blatt der Hausfrau*, IX. Jahrgang, 1898/99, Heft 1, 34.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

Despite such assertions about the variety of garments, materials and patterns, fashionable dresses were very similar in form and style.

Technological advances and the development of world trade account for the plethora of sartorial trends at the end of the century when women's fashion became 'verschwenderisch wie kaum zuvor.'<sup>215</sup> The sleeves began to widen to accentuate the slimness of the waist. *Hammelkeulen* and *Schinkenärmel* which had been popular in the 1830s resurfaced and descended to the elbow. Even ball gowns, which had been sleeveless for decades, acquired puff sleeves until 1896 when the sleeves became tight again. The dress consisted of a high-necked blouse and a long skirt which clung to the hips and became bell-shaped at the knee. The term *Glockenrockkrinoline* referred to the voluminous folds of the skirt which was long enough to brush the ground. As a result women needed to raise their skirts in order to walk properly; just how a woman managed this could determine whether she was coquette or not.<sup>216</sup> Braids, lace, embroidery, sequins and feathers were just some of the many decorations that made the outfit particularly extravagant.

The blouse was all the rage in the 1890s. Underneath the blouse, women still wore a girdle, reinforced with fish bone. The blouse was high-necked, but the material used at the top was often made of chiffon or crêpe de chine and was transparent; the effect was more suggestive than prudish. Because it was comfortable, the blouse was popular amongst working women; it was also easy to produce, adding to the success of the *Konfektion* industry. Soon the blouse was even acceptable at balls and by the end of the century blouses could be found 'von den einfachsten bis zu den elegantesten Formen in Seide, Wolle und Waschstoffen'.<sup>217</sup>

A woman's underwear consisted of an underskirt, or *Jupon*, which was often more expensive than the dress itself as it was made of silk and could be seen when the train was lifted. The *Jupon* accounted for the sound of the 'Frou-frou', silk rustling against silk, which often announced the approach of a well-dressed lady at the end of the century. Other under-garments became very decorative and corsets were very tightly strung – 55 cm being the widest acceptable circumference of the waist – and continued to be S-shaped. A wealthy woman reflecting on the discomfort of the corset at this time described 'Die Frau von 1900' as 'eine Märtyrerin, die mit heldenhaften Lächeln Leiden erduldet und verbarg'.<sup>218</sup>

Women of slimmer means coped with worse. Whilst a cheap factory-made corset cost between ½ and 2 ½ Taler in the 1860s (equal to a week's wages for a factory worker in Saxony), towards the

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<sup>215</sup> Thiel, 364.

<sup>216</sup> Thiel, 366.

<sup>217</sup> *Das Blatt der Hausfrau*, IX. Jahrgang, 1898/99, Heft 16, 369.

<sup>218</sup> Cited in Sabine Welch, *Ein Ausstieg aus dem Korsett* (Darmstadt: Häusser, 1996), 8.

end of the century corsets were more affordable. By 1906 a female factory worker earned between 2 and 2.5 marks for a ten-hour day and the price of a simple corset was between 1.80 and 3 marks.<sup>219</sup> However, the poor quality of such garments made them especially uncomfortable. In 1903, Natalie Bruck-Auffenberg published an essay with a playful title, ‘Die Schnürleber der Köchin’, in the Zeitschrift *Jugend* in which she wrote: ‘wenn auch die stählernen Planken ringsum in der Mitte abgebrochen sind und sich wie Pfeile in ihr armes Fleisch bohren, denn sie haben kein Geld für ein neues Folterwerkzeug und ohne Mieder gehen sie um keinen Preis der Welt vor die Thüre.’<sup>220</sup> Women of all classes were prepared to put themselves through pain and discomfort in order to achieve the desirable figure.

The democratisation of fashion reinforced the need to differentiate the classes. It was easy to make distinctions regarding the quality of clothes and the genuineness of jewellery, but a great emphasis was also put on a woman’s attitude towards fashion as a way of determining her social background. For instance, Isa von der Lütt insists that the *Halbwelt* tends to wish to please and exaggerate trends to the point of offending the natural ‘Zurückhaltung der Dame’ and the ‘vornehmsten Kreisen’.<sup>221</sup> She sees that women are interested in dress as a means of pleasing and being noticed and that the mistake of the *Halbwelt* is over-emphasising the latter; unrefined women pick the biggest hats and the loudest dresses.<sup>222</sup> Getting it right when it comes to fashion is not self-evident; some choose to be extravagant, but in most cases the effect is not elegant, but rather ‘komisch’,<sup>223</sup> such as when women wear riding caps but do not ride; others opt for ‘Das gesuchte Einfach’.<sup>224</sup> A lady ‘vermeidet (...) alles Auffallende oder gar Herausfordernde im Anzug wie im Benehmen.’<sup>225</sup> For this reason ‘Schmuck ist nie auf der Straße gestattet, ausgenommen (...) die Uhrkette, eine einfache kleine Schlußnadel und etwa ein Armband (...)’<sup>226</sup> and travelling garments must be simple, woollen and practical without any sort of eye-catching ornament. Indeed, jewellery was to be worn with modesty and even then only at balls, evening assemblies or the opera. At such occasions the *Gesellschaftskleid* allowed ‘alles, was prächtig, glänzend ist, so lange es in den Grenzen des Schönen bleibt’.<sup>227</sup>

Conduct books are particularly concerned with what makes a lady and reinforce how gendered intelligibility relied on clothes. ‘Die Dame wird in allem, was zum Anzuge zählt, von unserer

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<sup>219</sup> See *ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>220</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>221</sup> Lütt, *Die Elegante Frau*, 239.

<sup>222</sup> See *ibid.*, 240.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-248.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

Kardinalregel durchdrungen sein, daß alles nur am gehörigen Platz elegant wirken kann.<sup>228</sup> This meant that a morning jacket could not be worn to the table – even if guests were not present. Interestingly, the elegante Dame ‘wird niemals einen klaffenden Unterschied zwischen den im Haus benützten Kleidern und solchen in Gesellschaft getragenen machen, das heißt, sie - wird nicht zu Hause stets im geflickten Kattunkleidchen und in Gesellschaft nur in Seide erscheinen.’<sup>229</sup> Moreover, what is not seen should be just as elegant as what is: a velvet coat with cotton stuffing is shocking because it suggests hypocrisy. The implication here is central to this thesis and is reiterated by even the most progressive thinkers of the nineteenth century: the internal must always correspond with the external. Outer beauty was meant to reflect a pure, moral soul:

Ein durchgehend seidenes Futter, statt nur der Streifen, der gesehen wird, ist eleganter als eine Feder auf dem Hute, ein seidenes Unterkleid mit einfacher Tarlatanbekleidung eleganter als ein Satinunterkleid mit kostspieligem Spitzenüberwurf, ein teurer Schlafrock eleganter als ein teures Straßenkleid.<sup>230</sup>

The *Hauskleid* or *Negligé* was considered ‘das Siegesgewand der Frau’,<sup>231</sup> a symbol of the importance of both the dress itself and the domestic calling of the bourgeois woman. It could be worn to receive visits but must be faultless, ‘sehr fein und elegant’.<sup>232</sup> It was seen as ‘eben eine im gewissen Sinne zeremonielle Gattung von Morgenkleid.’<sup>233</sup> Neglecting one’s house dress, meanwhile, could have dire consequences. Bruck-Auffenberg attributes unhappiness in marriage to the neglect of one’s *Negligé*. How, after all, is anyone to respect a woman who does not take upmost care of her appearance at all times?<sup>234</sup>

Housework was a reality for many bourgeois women although it tended to be overlooked by fashion journals which offered patterns for aprons to be worn over house dresses at most. The loose *Morgenanzug* was considered by one conduct writer as particularly comfortable and practical.<sup>235</sup> Aprons had to be taken off in order to receive guests, however, although it was considered acceptable for young girls to wear them with the *Empfangskleid* as a symbol of their hard-working characters. Since a woman’s appearance was seen as a reflection of her family, it

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Bruck-Auffenberg cites this as a proverbial saying in *Die Frau comme il faut* (Vienna: Verl. der “Wiener Mode”, 1902), 392.

<sup>232</sup> Lütt, *Die Elegante Frau*, 246.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> See Bruck-Auffenberg, *Die Frau comme il faut*, 392-3.

<sup>235</sup> Kübler, *Der Haushalt*, 134.

was important to show ‘die idealtypischen weiblichen Eigenschaften’ and be ‘sauber, ordentlich, fleißig, einfach usw.’<sup>236</sup>

When in mourning nineteenth-century women wore simple black clothes without ornament. Lütt describes three phases of mourning: ‘Die tiefe, die einfache Trauer und die Halbtrauer’<sup>237</sup>, each requiring a different *Traueranzug*. The first stage comprised a woollen dress ‘mit Kreppbesatz’, a long veil, crepe hat and wool shawl.<sup>238</sup> The second stage allowed for more shiny wool materials and even dull silk. It was acceptable to replace one’s black dress with a shade of grey. After six months a girl might start to wear simple white wool dresses, a detail that is particularly important for my discussion of Marlitt’s *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell* (Chapter Three).

Outside mourning, the black silk dress was a favourite throughout the decade. As black was considered the most flattering and slimming colour, many women opted for it on social occasions. Lütt complains that its popularity spoils the atmosphere at many events, but that it is always appropriate at concerts, worn with light gloves and white ‘Spitzenknopf als Kragenschluss’.<sup>239</sup> At concerts and at the theatre Lütt suggests that it is best to avoid anything lively, presumably in order to avoid any association of the public with the performers.

Glove etiquette was complex and a lady was to know both which to choose to go with her gown and ‘de[n] richtige[n] Zeitpunkt des An- und Ablegens.’<sup>240</sup> It was unseemly, for example, to take off one’s gloves too soon in company. Even a woman standing at a window, looking down at a street fair, was supposed to keep her gloves on.

In Gesellschaft ziehen wir die Handschuhe erst dann ab, wenn wir uns zum Behufe des Essens an einem Tische niederlassen, ja in wirklich großen Abendgesellschaften sogar nicht bei einem an gedeckten Tischen im “Sitzen” gereichten Thee, wenn dieser nur einem Souper vorangeht, sondern erst bei diesem selbst.<sup>241</sup>

Rules stipulated that gloves be worn when leaving or arriving at a place and never be taken off outdoors. A travelling woman would only take them off if she were to eat at a train station and only then if she needed to break bread with her own hands. Despite a general focus on the importance of clean gloves, Lütt notes that it is considered chic if the Danish or ‘Waschlederhandshuh’ is dirty because then it has served its purpose.<sup>242</sup> Nonetheless, a lady

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<sup>236</sup> Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 113.

<sup>237</sup> Lütt, *Die elegante Frau*, 248.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 251-53.

<sup>240</sup> Lütt, *Die Elegante Frau*, 259.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>242</sup> See *ibid*, 261.

would always choose a fresh pair of gloves the next day. As another conduct writer points out, gloves should not only be in absolute harmony with the garments worn, but also made of fine leather and fit perfectly in order to make a good impression.<sup>243</sup> In fact a lady could be identified by her gloves, as they distanced her from any association with manual labour, and an outdated dress was considered preferable to ‘das Tragen schäbiger Handschuhe’.<sup>244</sup> Such glove etiquette provides us with insight into the behaviour of Caroline in Lewald’s *Eine Lebensfrage* (Chapter Two) and Adele in Marlitt’s *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell* (Chapter Three).

Whilst conduct books advised thrift, careful alteration to garments and the re-use of the dresses one has chosen carefully to outlast passing trends, magazines of the period encouraged expenditure. The advent of every new season was an excuse to appeal to the reader as a consumer: ‘Die Zeit des Frühlings naht, und bei Müttern und Töchtern kommt neben all den andern Erwägungen, die diese schöne Zeit mit sich bringt, auch die Toilettenfrage zur Berathung.’<sup>245</sup> The practical, thrifty characteristics of the German housewife are not entirely overlooked, but they are side-lined in favour of fashionableness. Late in the summer, for example, *Das Blatt der Hausfrau* recognises that ‘die Neigung, noch neue Kleidungsstücke für diese Saison anzuschaffen, ist bei der practischen Hausfrau gering.’<sup>246</sup> The assumption is that the reader has already ensured that she has enough new clothes for the season so that by *Hochsommer* there is no further need to acquire new garments. Nonetheless, summer issues feature the latest accessories and dresses and anticipate the autumn, featuring reports which encourage readers to invest in a new modish wardrobe:

Bei der “ewig wechselnden” Mode hat der Umschwung vom unschönen übermäßig Weiten zu dem Engen, das die natürlichen Formen wieder mehr zur Geltung kommen läßt, sich ganz allmählich vollzogen, und wenn wir uns heut die schlanken, modernen Gestalten ansehen, können wir uns kaum denken, daß wir vor verhältnismäßig kurzer Zeit noch Gefallen an den Ballonärmeln, an den Glockenröcken und Dütenfalten Gefallen finden konnten.<sup>247</sup>

By denigrating past trends, the writer encourages a new outlook on fashion and whets the appetite for a new purchase.

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<sup>243</sup> See Kübler, *Der Haushalt*, 132-33.

<sup>244</sup> Bruck-Auffenberg, *Die Frau comme il faut*, 390. Bruck-Auffenberg states with confidence that ‘Am Handschuh und am Schuhwerk erkennt man die Dame (...)’ (117)

<sup>245</sup> *Das Blatt der Hausfrau*, IX. Jahrgang, 1898/99, Heft 12, 273.

<sup>246</sup> *Das Blatt der Hausfrau*, IX. Jahrgang, 1898/99, Heft 24, 561.

<sup>247</sup> *Das Blatt der Hausfrau*, IX. Jahrgang, 1898/99, Heft 26, 603.

Conduct literature of the 1890s condones neither an obsession with fashion, nor the reform movement. It represents the mid-way point between the fashion journal and the reform treatise. In her book *Der Haushalt* (1891), Anna Kübler warns women against neglecting their appearance, but also warns against vanity. The ‘breiter Weg’ between the two extremes is what women should aim for, and Kübler regrets that German women are controlled by fashion, when it should be the reverse.<sup>248</sup> Women who do not attend to their appearance are ‘tadelnswert’<sup>249</sup> and those who skimp on other household expenditures for the sake of clothing are to be reproached. However, since women are apt to be lured in by fashion journals, and since it is expected that they look fashionable at all times – doing otherwise would draw attention – Kübler suggests they put aside an affordable sum for clothing each year and not exceed it. They should avoid expensive materials and invest in garments that they will wear regularly. For this reason, rather than for health reasons, Kübler advises woollen garments for everyday use. She adds that dark cashmere is suitable for visits and outdoor wear while light cashmere dresses are perfect for social gatherings, balls and parties. Kübler even advises against choosing fashionable colours and patterns since they are ‘zu einem zu raschen Wechsel unterworfen’.<sup>250</sup> In particular house and street wear should not be striking since they should be worn as long as possible. The most important consideration is the durable quality of the material and its ability to outlast trends, and the author goes into detail concerning when to wear what and the most appropriate thickness of the fabric. Kübler’s arguments centre around one key point:

(...) eine Frau, der an der Wahrung ihrer Würde, an der Liebe ihres Gatten und an der Achtung der Welt gelegen ist, wird vom frühesten Morgen an für eine saubere anständige Kleidung sorgen, in welcher sie sich vor jedermann sehen lassen kann, ohne erröthen zu müssen.<sup>251</sup>

This argument is reflected in the plots of many of the novels discussed in this thesis, in particular those in Chapter Four.

As earlier in the century, make-up was considered acceptable only on special occasions. Bruck-Auffenberg is more specific than most concerning what is particularly improper: ‘Unter Schminken versteht und mißbilligt man im allgemeinen hauptsächlich nur das Auflegen von Roth auf die Wangen und Lippen, [und] die flüssigen oder festen weißen Tünchen, mit denen die ganze Haut überzogen wird.’<sup>252</sup> The bourgeoisie tended to see make-up as a feature of frivolous

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<sup>248</sup> See Kübler, *Der Haushalt*, 117.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>252</sup> Bruck-Auffenberg (1896), cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 131.

aristocratic lives and it is associated with masquerade and sin. Red lips in particular were seen as highly suggestive and lascivious, typical of actresses and prostitutes. Moreover, medical reports suggest that cosmetics, which were often metallic, were unhealthy. Perfume, like make-up, was to be employed as little as possible.

Throughout the nineteenth century hair was considered a natural accessory: ‘den schönsten Schmuck der Frau’.<sup>253</sup> ‘Nett und sorgfältig frisirt, gewinnt jedes Köpfchen bedeutend an Lieblichkeit, der natürliche Haarwuchs ist ja ein billiger Schmuck, mit dem sich das ärmste Mädchen schmücken kann (...)’.<sup>254</sup> Hair was therefore a vital fashion concern. Lesser is among many writers who emphasise the charm of well-dressed hair: ‘Eine kleidsame, einfache und schöne Frisur, nicht auffallend und unschön complicirt, erhöht nicht nur die Schönheit und Anmuth des Gesichtes, sondern die Schönheit der gesamten Toilette; sie bildet die Krone derselben.’<sup>255</sup>

Lesser is specific about hair decorum: dark hair should always be smooth, whilst blond should be ‘gewellt’. Hair decoration should be simple: ‘Am Haupte vermeide man alles Prahlende und Auffallende’;<sup>256</sup> flowers suit youth, but should match the colour of the gown and should be spare, since, according to Grünau and Hammer ‘Eine Ueberladung ist...unfein.’<sup>257</sup> Yet hair styles were often voluminous and, in particular in the 1870s, required false hair. Feathers grew as fashionable as flowers during this period. The most popular hairstyle in 1880s consisted of slightly waved hair tied over ears in a bun at the back of the head. At the front the hair was parted or curled into a *Pony-* or *Simpelsfransen* which attracted much critique. Vischer was a sharp critic and deplored the fashion ‘den Tempel der Gedanken, mit Haar zu verfinstern’.<sup>258</sup> At this time hair typically took an hour to dress as numerous hair pins were required to attach false curls and braids. As one wealthy woman describes: ‘Oft waren die Hüte nur auf eine Seite mit Blumen und Bögeln garniert, so daß das ganze Gewicht auf eine Stelle drückte.’<sup>259</sup> The effect was discomfort from head to toe: ‘Nach zehn Minuten bekam man Kopfschmerzen, das Korsett ließ einen nicht atmen, die Kragenstäbchen bohrten sich in den Hals ein, die ungeheuren Ballonärmel hinderten jede freie Bewegung.’<sup>260</sup>

Yet at the same time that women were being pinned and corseted in such a way that ‘freie Bewegung’ was impossible, watching and practising sport became common pastimes for women

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<sup>253</sup> Kübler, *Der Haushalt*, 121.

<sup>254</sup> Grünau & Hammer, *Der Damen Freund*, 58.

<sup>255</sup> Lesser, *Der Führer der Jungfrau und Frau im häuslichen und geselligen Leben*, 80-81.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>257</sup> Grünau & Hammer, *Der Damen Freund*, 58.

<sup>258</sup> Cited in Thiel, 356.

<sup>259</sup> Cited in Sabine Welch, *Ein Ausstieg aus dem Korsett* (Darmstadt: Häusser, 1996), 8.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*



as well as men. By the 1890s there was a different dress for every sporting activity and although competitive sport was still seen as unfeminine, a range of physical activity including riding, archery, tennis and dance meant that women were increasingly outdoors and outside of their corsets. Even fashion journals advocated the *Reformcorset* because it allowed for movement. One argues that ‘die geschlossenen Rockhosen’ could not be recommended enough: ‘sie erleichtern die Unterkleidung um ein bedeutendes’.<sup>261</sup> At the same time, people expected the attire worn to the races to be flamboyant with a similar shape to normal day dress,<sup>262</sup> while riding dresses and *Schlittschuhkleider* were dark and heavy. The *Radfahrkleid* was also made out of heavy materials to prevent the skirt being blown out of place by the wind. In a chapter entitled ‘Die Radfahrerin’ in *Die Frau comme il faut* (1902), Bruck-Auffenberg provides an example of where conduct literature could be seen to encourage the fashion industry, even spurring it on to respond to a woman’s desires, despite its general wariness against supporting extreme expenditure. Bruck-Auffenberg insists on the appeal of cycling but implies that cycling dresses were not attractive enough to entice women to cycle:

Sagen wir es offen: jede Frau sehnt sich danach, frei auf dem Rade dahinfliegen zu können, wenn ihr die liebe Eitelkeit auch die Haltung auf dem Rade für sich selbst undenkbar erscheinen lassen sollte. Sähe das Radfahren etwas günstiger aus, so säßen wir alle längst droben.<sup>263</sup>

Bruck-Auffenberg’s comment sets beauty in conflict with liberty; when it comes to choosing between them, beauty triumphs. She seems to invite fashion designers to reconcile the two. Not long before the turn of the century there had been another obstacle between women and greater physical freedom: Hedwig Dohm’s daughter, for instance, described how she needed to register with the police with official permission from her husband in order to be able to ride a bike around Munich in the 1880s.<sup>264</sup> The fashion industry both reflected and instigated a change in attitude towards exercise as it became increasingly aware of the importance of developing sportswear which was comfortable and appealing. It was clear that anyone who wanted to ride a bicycle, climb mountains, row, sail or play tennis, ‘der kann nicht geschnürt in ein enges, langes festes Kleid und mit einem grossen, schweren, geschmückten Hut angethan sich daran machen.’<sup>265</sup> This meant that even before 1900 women’s trousers were accepted as sportswear. Gymnastics clubs appeared throughout Germany and women were encouraged ‘to do physical exercises twice

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<sup>261</sup> *Das Blatt der Hausfrau*, IX. Jahrgang, 1898/99, Heft 18, 417.

<sup>262</sup> Lütt, *Die elegante Hausfrau*, 257-258.

<sup>263</sup> Bruck-Auffenberg, *Die Frau comme il faut*, 375.

<sup>264</sup> See Heike Brandt, *Die Menschenrechte haben kein Geschlecht: die Lebensgeschichte der Hedwig Dohm* (Landberg: Beltz and Gelberg, 2000), 66.

<sup>265</sup> Else Spiegel, ‘Abrüsten!’ in Brinker-Gabler, *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, 226.

weekly, free of the inconvenience of tight linen gymnastics clothing’, as well as ‘outside the gymnasium to reject and cast off each and every restriction to the body which hinders movement and thus damages health.’<sup>266</sup> Early in the nineteenth century Friedrich Jahn, now known as ‘Turnvater Jahn’, developed a concept of gymnastics which ‘was an expression of nationalism and [...] a means to overcome the feudal order that had divided Germany into a patchwork of antagonistic states.’<sup>267</sup> Gymnastics was banned by Prussia from 1820 to 1842, but then flourished with the establishment of men’s clubs. Sport was not considered a woman’s domain, yet when clubs were established at the end of the 1840s women, too, had access to sporting opportunities. Over the course of the century physical education for women provoked debate; it only became a part of the curriculum in girls’ schools in 1894. As physical activity was accepted, the view of women as the weaker sex was challenged. In the words of the reformer Else Spiegel, ‘Bewegung ist Alles, Fortschritt, Leben, Besiegung aller Hemmnisse.’<sup>268</sup>

## **Dress Reform**

The ‘Verband für Deutsche Frauenkleidung und Frauenkultur’ was established in 1897 and quickly developed, spreading from Berlin to cities and towns across Germany where a further eleven dress reform associations were established with a total of (a still rather modest) 1,000 members in 1901. Previously arguments regarding the impracticality of women’s fashion had not attracted widespread support because, at least in part, the bourgeois housewife did not need to be able to move about in order to fulfil her wifely duties. With the founding of the ‘Verein für Deutsche Frauenkleidung und Frauenkultur’ this began to change. Many reformers contended that what women wore was a matter of female liberation.

The association was initially led by the writer Margarete Pochhammer (1841-1916) and aimed to popularise a healthy reform dress and do away with restricting corsets, heavy underclothing and the impractical train. The reform dress was to allow women more physical freedom, liberating them from the social and psychological burden of restrictive fashion. Indeed, Pochhammer saw the fashions of her day as a reflection of social expectations of women, the consequences of which included:

Kränklichkeit, Mattigkeit, Reizbarkeit schon von den ersten Wochen der Ehe an; zerstörte Hoffnung oder schweres Wochenbett mit langsamer Erholung; Unterleibsleiden, die

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<sup>266</sup> The statutes of a Frankfurt women’s sports club cited by Ute Frevert, ‘Feminism in Germany’ in *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford: Berg, 1989, original German edition 1986), 73-82.

<sup>267</sup> Ilse Hartmann and Gertrud Pfister, *Sport and Women* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 53.

<sup>268</sup> Else Spiegel, ‘Abrüsten!’ in Brinker-Gabler, *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, 227.

kostspielige Operationen oder Badekuren erfordern; oft ein dauerndes Siechtum und der letzte Schauplatz der Tragödie in vielen Fällen die Nervenanstalt.<sup>269</sup>

Here the ‘Einengung’ created by the corset is perceived as the means of attracting a husband and the cause of inevitable tragedy. Nonetheless, Pochhammer was aware that the reformed attire she advocated would have to be attractive. The organisation’s motto for female clothing was ‘gesund, praktisch, schön’. Former advocates of dress reform, such as the American Amelia Bloomer, failed to popularize alternative dress styles because they were perceived as ugly. Bloomer’s trousered costume designed in the 1850s was judged aesthetically unpleasing, especially by many Germans who associated the outfit with Turkish dress. Wary of such antagonism, Pochhammer’s Verein worked together with journals such as *Modewelt* and *Illustrierte Frauenzeitung* in order to promote its ideals and advertise healthy alternatives to the corset.<sup>270</sup>

### **Aesthetics and Dress Reform**

The *Reformkleid* celebrated by Pochhammer’s association was loose-fitting and modeled on designs by progressive artists in Austria and Germany, including the Belgian Henry Van de Velde. Van de Velde promoted artistic dress in Germany by lecturing, writing, planning exhibitions and designing reform dresses. As demonstrated in an essay on art principles in women’s clothing published in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (1902), Van de Velde saw women as victims of fashion and set out to coordinate women’s dress with modern artistic trends. He believes a woman’s dress should harmonise with her character, rather than with society at large or with historical sartorial trends.<sup>271</sup> His approach was emancipating: ‘Er bezog Frauen als Akteurinnen in die gewünschte Ästhetisierung des Alltags ein und ermöglichte ihnen, ihre Persönlichkeit selbstbestimmt zu entfalten.’<sup>272</sup> Nevertheless Pochhammer objected to his lack of emphasis on the hygienic and health benefits of reform dress. Neither did Van de Velde’s argument detract from perceptions of women as ornamental, an idea explored critically in Bülow’s *Die stilisierte Frau* (Chapter Four).

Many exhibitions of women’s artistic dress took place throughout Germany and Austria. Berlin hosted a continuous exhibition of reform designs from 1899 and by 1905 every German town had

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<sup>269</sup> Cited in Ober, *Der Frauen neue Kleidung*, 108.

<sup>270</sup> See Sabine Merta, *Wege und Irrwege zum modernen Schlankheitskult* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 410.

<sup>271</sup> See Ober, *Die Frauen neue Kleidung*, 99.

<sup>272</sup> See *ibid*, 125.

a few artists producing reform clothing.<sup>273</sup> Munich was the centre of the Jugendstil and the home of many aesthetic designers, including Peter Behrens and his wife Lilli, whose styles were plainer than those of Van de Velde and Alfred Mohrbutter.<sup>274</sup> ‘Die Neue Frauentracht’ exhibition took place in Berlin in 1903 and demonstrated the forward-thinking attitude of the Germans and Austrians who became forerunners in trend-setting at the end of the century. Artists who contributed to arguments for aesthetic dress included Emilie Flöge and Gustav Klimt. Many authors provided ethical and aesthetic arguments that reinforced the aims of dress reform designers. Architect and designer Paul Schultze-Naumburg also argued for the need to liberate the female body in his study *Die Kultur des weiblichen Körpers als Grundlage der Frauenkleidung* (1902). In *Das Kleid der Frau* (1904), Mohrbutter agrees with Van de Velde, arguing that women think they dress individually when in fact they are fashion’s slaves. In *Die Frauenreformkleidung* (1903) the pioneer of the ‘Freikörperkultur’, Heinrich Pudor, discusses the philosophy, hygiene and aesthetics of women’s attire. He likens dress to a symbol of class slavery; promotes nudism as a means of breaking down social boundaries; and argues that women’s dress should be visually appealing and comfortable. More radical than most dress reformers, he campaigned for the invention of women’s trousers and shunned the corset which he considered a garment worn by immodest women.<sup>275</sup> Indeed, he went as far as to call it a ‘Hurenerfindung’ and argued that it damaged a woman’s fertility and symbolized a sick, lewd society.<sup>276</sup>

As mentioned in the Introduction, women’s fashion oppressed women not only in a physical sense by holding the body in, but also in a social sense, since dress represented the only opportunity women had to participate in public society and associate herself with a group. A woman’s desire to identify herself with other women meant that she forfeited her own individuality and, unlike men who were arguably in a similar position, she was not able to express this individuality elsewhere. Simmel, who posited this viewpoint, concluded that sartorial fashions were de-humanising.<sup>277</sup> It was in this context that Van de Velde encouraged women to make their own dresses according to a similar classical cut, but with their own unique touch in order to allow for sartorial self-expression. Other sociologists, such as Adolf Thiele in *Zur Philosophie der neuen Frauentracht*, also produced philosophical treatises on the function of clothes and the necessity of a reform, while in the 1880s Dr. H. Lahmann wrote that ‘Die Reform der Frauentracht ist eine Mitbedingung und wahrlich eine nicht geringe bei der Befreiung der Frau; denn die Modesklavin

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<sup>273</sup> Patricia Cunningham, *Reforming Women’s Dress, 1850-1920* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 184.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>275</sup> See Cunningham, *Reforming Women’s Dress*, 147.

<sup>276</sup> See Welch, *Ein Ausstieg aus dem Korsett*, 14.

<sup>277</sup> See Ober, *Der Frauen neue Kleider*, 95.

ist für die Wiedergeburt der Menschheit unbrauchbar.<sup>278</sup> Lahmann's mention of 'die Wiedergeburt der Menschheit', depending on fashion reform, women's liberation and female biology, suggests the extent to which dress reformers were envisaging 'new possibilities for gender',<sup>279</sup> even if they could not imagine a world where men and women dressed and performed entirely alike.

Female artists who shared such views, such as Else Oppler-Legband and Anna Muthesius, were also progressive designers of reform dress. Oppler-Legband was the artistic director of the arts and crafts department of the Wertheim Kaufhaus in Berlin while Muthesius contributed theoretical texts to the debate. Muthesius's understanding of artistic dress as an 'Eigenkleid', a highly individual garment for liberal-minded women, demonstrates the extent to which sartorial freedom was considered a sign of female autonomy. By designing their own clothes, female designers laid claim to creativity traditionally associated with men and showed a combination of logic and self-expression. Muthesius argued for the aesthetic value of reform dresses and defended the designs against criticism from stylish women, for 'Bei diesen [neuen] Kleidern kann man [...] gar nicht mehr von dem allzu Legèren, Uneleganten reden, was die pariserisch gekleidete Frau an der neuen Mode tadelte.'<sup>280</sup> She also appealed to the German national spirit by indicating that the techniques used to produce these dresses, both in terms of the design and the machinery, were all of German origin. Her only criticism is that the materials for the aesthetic costumes had to be imported from England and France. She calls on Wertheim to stock more appealing cloth to enable women to make or have made entirely German, modern clothing. Such persistent and inventive artists eventually influenced the celebrated French designer Paul Poiret who was instrumental in establishing the lasting popularity of aesthetic designs.<sup>281</sup>

Writer and social activist Lina Morgenstern (1830-1909) criticised women's dress in an article for the journal *Blätter für Volksgesundheitspflege*: 'Die Mode ist Spekulation auf den Unverstand, die Nachahmungssucht, die Eitelkeit und Gefallsucht der Frauen.'<sup>282</sup> Morgenstern indicates the extent to which woman, through her association with dress, is inhibited from developing an individuality on par with her male counterparts. Because her exterior might show her to be concerned with her appearance, her interior is negated, summarised as 'Unverstand'. And it is this desire to 'belong' to her gender and to please (men) that means that women are followers not leaders. Morgenstern

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<sup>278</sup> Cited in Thiel, 361.

<sup>279</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 198.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> See Katharine Anthony, 'Some realizations in dress reform' (1915) in Purdy, *The Rise of Fashion*, 119; Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-siècle France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 89-114; and Mary Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion and Modernism*, (London: University of California Press, 2006), 22-47.

<sup>282</sup> Cited in Steele, *The Corset*, 92.

believed that by freeing themselves from popular fashion, women would be able to distance themselves from what is in essence a degrading gender trait, a performance of blind capitulation.

### **Medical Arguments for Dress Reform**

The relationship between women's health and what they wore was the subject of a number of studies before and during the nineteenth century. Doctors focused both on the materials used and the form of the garments themselves. The high-heeled shoe, the corset and the train were the most controversial. Dr. Heinrich Lahmann was particularly engaged in the debate, had his own shop and agreed with Gustav Jäger concerning the best materials for reform clothing. The latter claimed 'Des Menschen Wolle ist sein Himmelreich'<sup>283</sup> and believed a corset should be made of sheep's wool. Dr. Spener concluded in 'Die jetzige Frauenkleidung und Vorschläge zu ihrer Verbesserung' (1897) that women's bodies had become so dependent on the corset that the back muscles needed some form of artificial support. He advocated a reformed corset without fish bone, made of natural materials. Such corsets were produced and marketed with names such as 'Hygiea', 'Liebling' and 'Freiheit'.<sup>284</sup>

In *Die Frauenkleidung und ihre natürliche Entwicklung* (1900), Stratz examines how such trends as the corset and high-heeled shoes affected women's posture and health. He refers to the corset as a 'Marterinstrument' and sees it as responsible for various illnesses from its inception in the eighteenth century:

Dass eine derartige Vergewaltigung des weiblichen Körpers nicht ungestraft geschehen konnte, ist selbstverständlich. Die schwere Störung des Blutkreislaufs machte sich in der verschiedensten Weise geltend, und die Migräne, die Vapeurs und andere Modekrankheiten danken dieser Zeit ihren Ursprung; auch die Schwindsucht nahm in erschreckender Weise zu.<sup>285</sup>

Stratz's language is strikingly violent; images of rape and punishment shock the reader who is used to the flattering rhetoric of fashion journals and the mild advisory tones of conduct literature. There was an evident need for such shock therapy, however, and the vehement writing of (male) professionals was met with interest.<sup>286</sup> This interest can also be explained by the emphasis on 'natürliche Entwicklung'. By emphasising nature as the primary motivation for reform, Stratz

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<sup>283</sup> This was Jäger's motto according to *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* (Munich: Der Kommission, 2008), 76.

<sup>284</sup> See Welch, *Ein Ausstieg aus dem Korsett*, 19.

<sup>285</sup> Stratz, *Die Frauenkleidung*, 331. For other illnesses attributed to corsetry, see Welch, *Ein Ausstieg aus dem Korsett*, 15.

<sup>286</sup> See Ober, *Der Frauen neue Kleider*, 182-83.

appeals to the nineteenth-century psyche which, as evidenced in fashion and *Benimmliteratur*, prioritised (the illusion of) nature. Stratz saw the reformed *Kostüm* of the 1890s as inspired by Grecian garbs that respected the body's natural form since 'das Kleid sich ohne irgend welchen Zwang der normalen Form anschmiegt'.<sup>287</sup> For Stratz, exaggerated, unhealthy and unpractical trends such as the crinoline betrayed 'grosse Geschmacklosigkeit'<sup>288</sup> and had drastic consequences, including: a deformed liver;<sup>289</sup> a *Spitzbauch* which is created when the stomach protrudes from under the corset; a *Hängebauch* which occurs underneath the belly button where fat accumulates, also leading to a *Froschbauch*.<sup>290</sup> Poorly made corsets were particularly harmful and could lead to a woman gaining weight rather than making her appear slim.<sup>291</sup> Mohrbutter suggests rules that should be taken into account when considering a corset. The first is 'Lassen Sie sich Ihr Corset von einer Meisterin von Rang anfertigen!'<sup>292</sup> His argument seems to derive from the belief that the body is best flattered by a well-made corset that fits exactly, but indicates how common it was to opt for a cheaper make. Meanwhile, Stratz concludes that corsets should not be tied too tightly or worn too high. Finally, he suggests that a change in women's fashions would allow women to achieve as much, and perhaps more, than men.<sup>293</sup>

Schultze-Naumburg's *Die Kultur des weiblichen Körpers als Grundlage der Frauenkleidung* (1910) is a similar study to Stratz's, but advocates a complete abolition of the corset. He argues that the corset has led to the weakening of muscles that would have otherwise produced the desired effect of a corset naturally.<sup>294</sup> Rather than support reformists who aimed at developing a healthy corset, he believes that the ribcage should be completely free of any pressure and that all corsets are harmful. Moreover, he asks, 'Was in aller Welt kann den überhaupt ein ganz loses Korsett für einen ausdenkbaren Sinn haben?'<sup>295</sup> In essence, he writes, men's and women's clothes should not really be any different to one another. The fact that they are shows the extent to which women in particular have suppressed their natural reactions against repressive clothing in order to attract men.<sup>296</sup> Schultze-Naumburg sees the corset first and foremost as a means of sexualising the wearer and finds it ridiculous that people think that not wearing a corset is 'unanständig'.<sup>297</sup> Radical though Schultze-Naumburg is for his contemporaries, he readily acknowledges the social consequences of not wearing a corset:

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<sup>287</sup> Welch, *Ein Ausstieg aus dem Korsett*, 335.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 338.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 368.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 373-74.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, 381-82.

<sup>292</sup> Alfred Mohrbutter, *Das Kleid der Frau* (Darmstadt: Koch, 1904), 10.

<sup>293</sup> See Welch, *Ein Ausstieg aus dem Korsett*, 388.

<sup>294</sup> See ibid, 103.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>296</sup> See ibid, 106.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 144.

Ich weiß, eine Dame, die es wagt, ohne Korsettaille zu gehen, und Stiefel trägt, wie sie ein unverbildeter Fuß fordert, hat ein Märtyrertum durchzumachen. Ganz abgesehen von ihrer Familie, die sie peinigt, ihrer Gesellschaft, die sie boykottiert, muß sie auf der Straße Spießbruten laufen.<sup>298</sup>

Like Stratz, Schultze-Naumburg uses strong language. The woman who dresses alternatively is a martyr, an embarrassment who rejects society and is consequently rejected herself. Between them, the doctors suggest a situation where women are martyred regardless of their social and sartorial decisions. Like many others who advocate reform at the beginning of the twentieth century, Schultze-Naumburg anticipates that it is a matter of time before the corset falls out of fashion and women are no longer shamed for failing to adhere to restrictive fashions. In effect, he awaits an era where women do not have to be martyrs.

The abolition of the ‘Strassenschleppe’ was as important to the Dress Reform Movement as that of the corset. As mentioned earlier, the train became a fashionable feature in the 1870s when the afternoon gown had a low back. In the 1880s the society and ball dress included a long train and from 1892 even the ‘Strassenkleid’ began to lengthen. As Ober explains, while the train was criticised for hygienic reasons, ‘Sie diente vielmehr auch dazu, die Kritik an einem Frauenbild zu transportieren, das mit Hilflosigkeit und Bewegungsbehinderung verknüpft war.’<sup>299</sup> The journal *Die gesunde Frau* reported in 1900 that in order to avoid dirt women should lift the skirt when in public places. Despite being highly impractical, the train continued to be popular and by 1901, a woman’s dress could weigh up to 4.5 kilos as a result.<sup>300</sup>

A number of authors who did not belong to the medical profession also joined in the debate and mentioned nature as a motivation for reform. Lütt, for instance, criticises overly tight corsetry for doing nothing to embellish feminine beauty. Rather, by emphasising ‘eine unnatürlich dünne Taille’<sup>301</sup> it distorts the body and destroys any chance of grace. She suggests that women should ask themselves whether what they wear is good for their health and argues that some have done themselves great harm through ‘zu starkes Schnüren’ which has even led to death.<sup>302</sup> Lütt encourages women to ask themselves whether their garments are ‘logisch’; the *Tournüre*, for instance was ‘weder anständig, noch geschmackvoll, noch logisch’<sup>303</sup> because the female body is not naturally S-shaped. Lütt’s comments are motivated by a pursuit of beauty and stem from the

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ober, *Die Frauen neue Kleidung*, 117.

<sup>300</sup> See *ibid.*, 125.

<sup>301</sup> Lütt, *Die Elegante Frau*, 270.

<sup>302</sup> Kübler, *Der Haushalt*, 127.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.



common belief that prettiness depends on good health,<sup>304</sup> but her comments on the *Tournüre* come when the trend was already disappearing. It is a common trait of writing on fashion that past trends are treated as unattractive, even ridiculous. When they are fashionable, however, conduct writers are quick to assert the importance of adhering to them. Anna Kübler, who insists in *Der Haushalt* that women must take care neither to follow fashion blindly nor ignore it, is more direct in her criticism of fashion than Lütt.<sup>305</sup> She believed that fashion needed to be reformed not only because it was unattractive, but also because it threatened the ability of the German woman to manage her household effectively:

(...) abgesehen davon, daß (die Mode) wirklich viel Häßliches, Lächerliches und sogar geradezu Verwerfliches hervorbringt, trägt sie einerseits in einem weitaus zu geringen Grade den Anforderungen der Zweckmäßigkeit Rechnung, während sie andererseits wieder zu einem oft ganz unverhältnismäßigen Luxus führt, die auf das Wohl der Familien aller Kreise (...) die verderblichste Wirkung übt.<sup>306</sup>

Conduct writers therefore joined the debate for dress reform, apparently motivated above all by a desire to promote health and thrift.

### **Dress Reform in Fashion Journals**

In the late 1890s dress reform featured sporadically in a number of journals.<sup>307</sup> Subscribers of such magazines as *Dekorative Kunst*, *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* and *Illustrierte Frauen-Zeitung* were presented with arguments in favour of reform, ways to acquire recent reform designs and details regarding exhibitions on reform dress. Some journals manifest a desire to instruct. *Mein Haus ist meine Welt: Halbmonatsschrift für die praktische Frau*, for example, provides an overview of the debate in an article entitled ‘Die Reform der Frauenkleidung’ which documents the arguments of Dr. Spener and the rising popularity of the ‘Verein zur Verbesserung der Frauenkleidung’. It cites in particular the harmful effects of the ‘Marterpanzer Corset’ detailed by Frl. Dr. med. Bluhm and her advice for reform, consisting of four fundamental rules: ‘1. Keine eingeeengte Taille. 2. Vereinfachung der Unterkleidung durch Entlastung der Hüften. 3. Weite

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<sup>304</sup> For further discussion of the link between beauty and health see Ober, *Der Frauen neue Kleider*, 165-170.

<sup>305</sup> See Kübler, *Der Haushalt*, 124.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>307</sup> See Sabine Merta, *Wege und Irrwege zum modernen Schlankheitskult* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 408 and Ulrike Adamek, *Reformkleidung als Fortschritt?* (Marburg: Lahn, 1982), 128-129. Adamek cites a business report from one of the organisation’s *Mitteilungen* which states: ‘Die Arbeit des Vereins wurde (...) wesentlich gefördert durch die Haltung der Presse, die sich von Anfang an seinen Bestrebungen geneigt zeigte und seine Fortschritte mit denkwertem Interesse begleitete.’ The *Deutsche Frauenzeitung* also printed the speeches given at the Verein’s assemblies in full. (Adamek, 128-129).

geschlossene Beinkleider zur Verhütung von Erkältungen. 4. Fußfreier Straßenrock, um Staubeinatmungen zu vermeiden.<sup>308</sup> The magazine reports that meetings are held weekly at its headquarters on Leipzigerstraße and that only women may attend. The statement reads like an invitation. *Die Modewelt* is reported as the first journal to have printed reform designs; many followed its lead. The article then describes reform dress in detail and refers to certain traders, but interestingly does not include any of the common illustrations that often accompany articles on dress.<sup>309</sup> The *Beinkleider*, it is explained, are buttoned to the corset and can be made at home using old dresses. In summer light fabrics are used and ‘man kann sich dieses Kleidungsstück auf allerbilligste und allerluxuriöseste Art herstellen.’<sup>310</sup> The article finishes with the assertion that once such underwear is worn, it will never be given up. In this way, the journal appeals to the reader’s desire for comfort, practicality and thrift.

In an article entitled ‘Reformbekleidung’ which appeared in *Pionier: Zeitschrift für volkswirtschaftlichen und sittlichen Fortschritt, für Schulwesen, Hygiene und Medicinalreform* in 1897, journalist Ida Barber insists that fashion listen to reason. Barber discusses the advantages of wool according to Dr. Jäger and of ‘das geschlossene Beinkleid und das Normalcorsett’.<sup>311</sup> Later in the year, she published another article, ‘Ausstellung des Vereins für Reformkleidung’. Reviewing an exhibition which included twenty different kinds of corset, Barber celebrates the fact that the reform corset is now bought by elegant ladies, despite its nickname ‘Faulenzer’. She describes how those at the exhibition admired the girdles with ‘Gummischnüren’, the ‘Elastik-Zügen’, the ‘ganz aus gummistoff gewebte Mieder’ and ‘Korsets mit Schnüreinlagen’. The *Hemd hose* and *Rock hose*, ‘eine Art loser Stofftaille mit angeschnittenem, geschlossenem Beinkleid’ are depicted as particularly sensible and warm. However, whilst she concludes that ‘Die Bequemlichkeit ist für die Berlinerinnen das halbe Leben (...)’, Barber also anticipates, correctly, that it will be a while before the reform corset becomes fashionable, for ‘das Groß der Frauenwelt kleidet sich doch lieber nach französischen Mode-Journalen’. The newest designs for the corset remain ‘(das) Unterkleid der Zukunft.’<sup>312</sup>

While some readers expressed interest in reform dress, most fashion journals continued to publish extensive reports inspired by Parisian designers. While the journal *Von Haus zu Haus: Wochenschrift für die deutsche Frauenwelt*, for instance, did not devote much space to fashion, one reader writes in to ask ‘Woher und für welchen Preis beziehe ich ein

<sup>308</sup> *Mein Haus ist meine Welt*, Berlin März II, 1897 Heft 12, 283.

<sup>309</sup> See *ibid.* In *Berliner Damen-Zeitung*, 1897, the emphasis on advertising is more explicit in an article entitled ‘Die Reformkleider bei Hertzog’.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* According to Adamek, however, reform clothing was mainly produced by small firms. See Adamek, *Reformkleidung als Fortschritt?*, 130.

<sup>311</sup> Barber in *Pionier*, Berlin, 22. February, 1897, Nr. 4, 29.

<sup>312</sup> Barber in *Pionier*, 7. Mai, 1897, Nr. 9, 70.

Gesundheitsreformcorsett? Muß ich noch Maß außer Taillenweite angeben?’<sup>313</sup> Reform styles were substantially overlooked in favour of the fussy, extravagant and largely uncomfortable trends of the day. It would take the advent of World War I and its challenge to gender categorisation through ‘hyperbole, dissonance, [and] internal confusion’<sup>314</sup> to revolutionise dress and the lives of women throughout western society.

### **Criticism of Dress Reform**

The dress reform movement also drew criticism. Corset-makers apparently sent letters to councils which allowed dress reformers to meet in school buildings and city halls, protesting against the movement.<sup>315</sup> Although Puder claimed in 1903 that the Reformkleid could be worn in the streets ‘ohne Scheu’, many claimed otherwise.<sup>316</sup> The dress was perceived as unflattering and masculine. One critic points out in the journal *Für und wider die Reformkleidung* that the costume is only appealing if the wearer is slim:

Wer Geschmack und eine schlanke Figur hat, wird im Reformkleid oder lose sitzenden Prinzesskleid sehr vorteilhaft aussehen können. [...] Die Mehrzahl jener, die mit Leidenschaft sich dem neuen Gewande zuwenden, finden in dem weniger Beengtsein und damit Gesündersein dieser Bekleidung Entschuldigung (!), so zu gehen, sich gehen zu lassen!<sup>317</sup>

While reformers proclaimed that the unnatural appearance of women in corsets was unattractive, they had to admit that many disagreed; as indicated by the emphatic, horrified exclamation point mid-sentence, ‘unästhetische Unförmigkeit’<sup>318</sup> was not beautiful. Reformers risked being viewed as ‘sexually puritanical’ if they dwelled too long on the practical benefits of loose clothing.<sup>319</sup> Indeed, initially progressive dress designs were decreed ugly; the name given to the *Reformkleid* was the ‘Reformsack’, hardly an enticing concept for the fashionable nineteenth-century woman. An image (see Figure 1) by the ruthless caricaturist Bruno Paul, ‘Streit der Moden’ from the journal *Simplicissimus* (1904) demonstrates the extent to which the new styles were deemed unattractive and could be used to ridicule women’s rights activists. The caricature depicts both the fashionable lady and the reformist as ridiculous. Whilst the first seems menacing and overly

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<sup>313</sup> *Von Haus zu Haus*, Leipzig, 1897, No.25, 689.

<sup>314</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

<sup>315</sup> See Katharine Anthony, ‘Some realizations in dress reform’, in Purdy, *The Rise of Fashion*, 121.

<sup>316</sup> See Thiel, 378.

<sup>317</sup> Cited in Merta, *Wege und Irrwege zum modernen Schlankheitskult*, 415.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 60.

ornate in her – notably outdated – crinoline, the second is formlessly thin with none of the curves that women’s fashion accentuated throughout the nineteenth century.



Figure 1: Bruno Paul ‘Streit der Moden’, *Simplicissimus* 1904, (Jg.9), Heft 36, 354.

Fuchs devotes a large section of *Die Frau in der Karikatur* (1906) to fashion and takes issue with dress reform because he believes that fashion, and particularly the corset, is ‘ein erotisches Problem’, its aim being ‘die pointierte Herausarbeitung der erotischen Reizwirkungen des weiblichen Körpers.’<sup>320</sup> The corset is necessary because it makes women attractive. In fact, Fuchs agreed with many of the main arguments for reform. He suggests that ‘der edlere Geschmack’ must find excessive ‘Einschnürung der Taille häßlich’ since the practice is so contrary to nature; argues that long dresses that hide the legs and feet only sexualise them further since attention is drawn to the foot when the skirt is raised in order to walk;<sup>321</sup> and refers to the current fashion of ‘das Schleppenrudiment’ as ‘der übermäßig lange Rock, mit dem die Dame jahraus, jahrein in ekelregender Weise die Straße fegt.’<sup>322</sup> He even writes: ‘Die praktischen Reformbestrebungen waren gewiß sehr oft sehr löblich’ and seems to regret that they have had ‘fast in allen Fällen die Satire mehr gegen sich als für sich (...)’.<sup>323</sup> The issue for Fuchs is that reform dresses masculinise the wearer. The ‘Wirklichkeit korrigierende Korsett’ is an essential garment because it

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<sup>320</sup> Fuchs, *Die Frau in der Karikatur* (Munich: Langen, 1906), 263-64.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid*, 297.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid*, 310.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid*, 344.

emphasises the wearer's femininity; it is the 'Hilfsmittel' that women require in order to look pretty.<sup>324</sup>

Caricaturists reserved the right to mock whatever was perceived as strange by the majority, but tended to take a more serious approach to social issues. Writers in *Simplicissimus*, one of the most popular satirical journals at the turn of the century, were willing to entertain radical viewpoints and joined some women's rights activists in their campaign for the rights of mothers, for instance, and the support of illegitimate children.<sup>325</sup> When it came to education and sport, however, the paper was more traditional. The educated woman was caricatured as an odd, comic figure,<sup>326</sup> while the female cyclist and her stuffy traditional critics were both ridiculed.<sup>327</sup> Indeed, the woman of the fin-de-siècle could be celebrated as independent and self-assured in one issue and ridiculed as 'frivolous and cynical'<sup>328</sup> in the next. What Fuchs's overview of caricature suggests is that women's fashion was a key focus for satirists whenever women were the subject. Yet the crinoline, the bustle and puffed sleeves were more easily exaggerated and ridiculed than the sensible reform dresses of the turn of the century.

Despite the numerous attractions of the reform dress, the majority of women did not emulate the reformists. The golden 'Mittelstraße' between fashion extremes was still the ideal; women had grown up learning that following prevalent trends was a social necessity, for 'In der Kleidung gilt eigentlich das für schön, was modern ist, ohne auszuarten.'<sup>329</sup> Indeed:

Wenn große Hüte modern sind, kann man nicht ein Ding wie ein Vogelnäpfchen aufsetzen, wenn hohe Hüte getragen werden, nicht mit einem flachen Teller auf dem Kopf herumgehen; aber man muß der Mode auch nicht bis an die äußerste Grenze folgen, man muß nicht die allergrößten und allerhöchsten Hüte, nicht einen ganzen botanischen oder zoologischen Garten darauf tragen.<sup>330</sup>

To be different, even if for one's own comfort and practicality, was reprehensible and meant running the risk of social segregation and ridicule. Since the cue was still being taken from Paris, it was not until reform styles appeared in French magazines that German women began to do

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>325</sup> See Ann Taylor Allen, *Satire and Society in Wilhelmine Germany* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1984), 143. Allen indicates that it was the more moderate and socialist nature of the German Women's Movement that invited favour; the paper was quick to criticise the English suffragettes. See page 168.

<sup>326</sup> See *ibid*, 177.

<sup>327</sup> See *ibid*, 157.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

<sup>329</sup> Else Spiegel, 'Abrüsten!' in *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, 227.

<sup>330</sup> Hohenwart (1910) cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 118.

away with the restrictive corset en masse. Mimicing gender as well as contributing to it, fashion required prolific repetition in order to evolve.

## **Conclusion**

This overview of nineteenth-century trends shows that throughout the period discussed in this thesis women were expected to wear clothes that were fussy, elaborate, multi-layered and time-consuming. Fashion was something to be studied and continually perfected; it was characterised by frills and ruffles, corsets and bustles, skirts and trains, puffs and lace, and included a number of accessories from gloves to hairpins. With the rise of the ready-to-wear business and the development of cheap ways to manufacture clothes, fashion became ever more capricious and ornate. Such attention to detail can be attributed at least in part to an anxiety that dress would be fully democratised. The tension between classes grew as working women were able to emulate the look of their wealthy peers. Trends came and went ever more quickly and even members of the leisure classes had to take pains to keep up with them.

The paradox women faced became increasingly apparent: they were encouraged to associate sartorial simplicity with virtue and yet were told to follow fashions that were anything but simple and which they had to spend a considerable time studying. Simplicity and fashion seem incompatible during much of the nineteenth century. However, conduct writers and fashion journalists are careful to respect one another. Both were particularly successful in the nineteenth century when, as scholar Karin Schrott explains, ‘alles bis ins Kleinste geschlechtsspezifisch verregelt wurde’<sup>331</sup>; conduct books were instrumental in defining gender rules which, as Butler theorises, had to be followed in order to avoid punishment or even martyrdom. Authors of these books encourage their readers to abide by the dictates of fashion, without forgetting their domestic duties or exceeding their budgets. Meanwhile, fashion journalists allude to the need to make savings by producing one’s own clothes and refer their readers to reasonable retailers. A successful woman negotiated the advice from both. What distinguished a lady from a commoner was the ability to decipher the golden ‘Mittelstraße’ between exaggeration and unfashionableness. This challenge only grew as the century progressed.

While the tension between classes intensified, so too did the tension between the sexes. The fashion industry continually reinforced the difference between men and women, reflecting the polarised roles they played in society. While men’s clothes changed little throughout the century and were designed to be relatively practical, women’s clothing entirely re-shaped the female form

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<sup>331</sup> Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 32.

and compromised movement. Its volume and weight made it impossible for women to move about in the same places frequented by men. Moreover, its frills and flounces required expensive materials that meant that women tended to avoid places where their skirts could become dirty. Finally, the caprices of fashion functioned as a form of social control, determining, as Bordo argues, both a woman's use of time and space. As a result activists called for a reassessment of dress alongside their campaign for rights for single mothers and illegitimate children and access to higher education, professional training and jobs.<sup>332</sup> German women's rights activists were wary of being too extreme and the more radical wing of the movement which originated in the 1890s and drew attention to the situation of prostitutes and even called for the vote faced sharp criticism and was all but silenced around 1908.<sup>333</sup> The moderate wing was more successful and established in part because it tried to reinforce women's femininity as a reason for social reform. Their reasoning was that because women were society's moral guides, because they were mothers and responsible for the country's children, they should be afforded more respect. Referred to as '[die] Bewegung organisierter Mütterlichkeit',<sup>334</sup> the German women's movement encouraged dress reform as a socio-political statement. Since women were supposed to be concerned with clothes, it was an obvious step to address sartorial repression as an issue.

Finally, clothes show how women in the nineteenth century understood their gender. The dresses they wore symbolised their femininity, which patriarchal society defined as delicate, weak and domestic. Women were supposed to approach sartorial matters with their destiny as wives and mothers in mind. The belief that women were first and foremost predetermined to be mothers was the driving force behind arguments for social reform.<sup>335</sup> Women's gender in nineteenth-century Germany was constructed around this conviction and was constantly underpinned by the prescribed, reiterated and sustained sartorial performance.

In the following chapters, I will show how German women writers of the nineteenth century subscribe to traditional views about the importance of sartorial simplicity in showing the virtue of their female protagonists and how they rely on clothes as a means of portraying the 'essence' of femininity as positive and pure, rather than frivolous and wasteful.

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<sup>332</sup> See Herrad Schenk, *Die feministische Herausforderung* (Munich: Beck, 1988), 21-23. Schenk does not mention the dress reform here, but makes a summary of the other aims and objectives of the various strands of the German women's movement.

<sup>333</sup> See *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>335</sup> See Ann Goldberg, 'Women and Men: 1760-1960' in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 77.

## Chapter Two -

### Fanny Lewald and Louise Aston: Clothes as protest or diversion in novels of the 1840s

Introduction.....	79
Fanny Lewald (1811-1889) .....	86
Secondary Literature.....	89
<i>Diogena</i> (1847).....	90
<i>Clementine</i> .....	91
<i>Jenny</i> .....	96
<i>Eine Lebensfrage</i> .....	100
Louise Aston (1814-1871).....	110
Secondary Literature.....	111
<i>Aus dem Leben einer Frau</i> .....	112
<i>Lydia</i> .....	120
Conclusion .....	129

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the use of sartorial description in relation to feminine identity in the works of two writers who are generally seen as politically liberal: Fanny Lewald (1811-1889) and Louise Aston (1814-1871). Both women challenged gender norms and participated in protests against the subjugation of women; they discussed women's rights in salons and contributed articles to political journals. In so doing they joined a growing debate that demonstrated how women could and should leave the microcosm of the home in order to contribute to society as a whole. My discussion of the novels they published prior to the 1848 revolution focuses on how their sartorial imagery expresses their understanding of femininity and questions how this reflects their aims for female liberation at a time when radical statements were subject to strict censorship.

The 1840s were characterised by radical ideas and political engagement, patriotism on the part of an increasing number of liberals and a hope for German unity and a democratic republic. When Friedrich Wilhelm IV came to the Prussian throne in 1840, he initially loosened state press



ensorship, only to revoke the policy soon thereafter.<sup>336</sup> Whilst he gained a reputation as a lover of the arts and he was not always lenient towards intellectual thinkers; Hanna Ballin Lewis characterises his reign as full of ‘rhetorical confusion and political uncertainty’ with moments of authoritarianism.<sup>337</sup> Heavily restricted by the Napoleonic Code, adopted by many German states as the *Rheinisches Recht* from the beginning of the century, women held a legal status similar to that of minors and had no control over their property.<sup>338</sup> From 1815, the home was a space of ‘complete male domination’ as the subordination of women intensified.<sup>339</sup> Yet as widespread disappointment with the Prussian king heightened social tensions, men became more outspoken against the state, and women followed suit; they began to attend political assemblies, contributed to journals and were important voices in some intellectual salons. The *Achtundvierzigerinnen* were not insignificant in number, as Irina Hundt’s account *Vom Salon zur Barrikade: Frauen der Heinezeit*, attests.<sup>340</sup> Both Fanny Lewald and Louise Aston were well connected in liberal circles and engaged in the political scene. Lewald, a respected journalist, novelist and travel writer by the late 1840s, put together *Erinnerungen aus dem Jahre 1848* (1850) upon her publisher’s request, expressing therein her disappointment that German hopes for unity were failing to materialise. She is particularly sensitive to the German public mood. More injudicious and brazen than tactful, Aston saw women and the working classes as both needing liberation from the Church, marriage and the king and joined the fighting on the barricades. She was far from the only woman to do so and many women were among the dead.<sup>341</sup>

Lewald’s and Aston’s political sympathies do emerge in their fictional writing, but they both depict their heroines in exemplary, conventional clothes, a fact which arguably attenuates the subversive message of the novels. In both authors’ works the female protagonist’s position at the centre of the novel is legitimised through her clothes which are invariably different to those of the other female characters who are offered as anti-models: false, vain and even un-German. Both authors portray a variety of sartorial behaviour including two instances of cross-dressing. However, the clothing depicted does not necessarily challenge the way women were viewed or represent ‘the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity’<sup>342</sup> which might theoretically lead to a change in the way femininity was perceived. This chapter will show that the subversive performance which must ‘both mime and displace (gender) conventions’<sup>343</sup> cannot easily be

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<sup>336</sup> See Hanna Ballin Lewis, *A Year of Revolutions: Fanny Lewald’s Recollections of 1848* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1997), 13.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> See Caine, Barbara, ed., *Gendering European History* (London: A&C Black, 2002), 23.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>340</sup> See Irina Hundt, *Vom Salon zur Barrikade: Frauen der Heinezeit* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2002)

<sup>341</sup> See Gerhard, *Unerhört*, 54-56.

<sup>342</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, 84.

identified in either Lewald's or Aston's use of dress. Both authors use a third person omniscient narrator to create the illusion of objectivity whilst generating sympathy for their heroines. They manage to represent traditions and simultaneously suggest how expectations of women should change, using sartorial conventions in subtle ways to reinforce and simultaneously deflect from their arguments in favour of women's rights and their depiction of strong, creative and political female characters. Arguing at a time when women were deemed by many to be unfit for mental exertion, Lewald's claim that women were capable of intellectual thought clearly threatened patriarchal structures.<sup>344</sup> It can be seen as a strategy on her part that social critique of anti-Semitism and stringent divorce laws seem at times more prominent than her argument in favour of women's intelligence. Aston, meanwhile, centres her argument for women's rights around female sexuality. Firstly, she thematises the exploitation of women as sex objects within marriage, imagining the devastating consequences of laws which stated that it was a woman's conjugal duty to meet the demands of her husband.<sup>345</sup> Then she explores female sexual desire, celebrating the female libido, while many of her contemporaries saw overt signs of such desire in white middle-class women as evidence of mental abnormality and nymphomania.<sup>346</sup>

Chapter One has provided an overview of sartorial trends in the nineteenth century, illustrating the extent to which bourgeois women were expected to accept a domestic, private role. Yet, in order to understand Aston's and Lewald's use of sartorial characterisation and to identify any 'deformity' within it, however subtle, it is also necessary to examine their historical and theoretical context, including the influence of the Saint-Simonian movement of the 1820s and 1830s on German attitudes towards sexuality; the progressive agenda of the short-lived women's journals of the 1840s; and the effect of censorship on literature of the Vormärz.

Saint Simonianism represented an affront to conventional values and challenged the gender rules women faced by advocating a new social hierarchy based on merit and inclusive of both sexes.

Whilst Saint Simon himself died in 1825, his followers continued to develop his theory of

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<sup>344</sup> See for instance, Schopenhauer, 'Ueber die Weiber' (1851) and Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1854), 225-226. Schopenhauer writes, 'Schon der Anblick der weiblichen Gestalt lehrt, daß das Weib weder zu großen geistigen, noch körperlichen Arbeiten bestimmt ist. Es trägt die Schuld des Lebens nicht durch Thun, sondern durch Leiden ab, durch die Wehen der Geburt, die Sorgfalt für das Kind, die Unterwürfigkeit unter den Mann, dem es eine geduldige und aufheiternde Gefährtin seyn soll.' See Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1908), 649.

<sup>345</sup> See Arne Duncker, *Geschlecht und Ungleichheit in der Ehe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2003), 676.

<sup>346</sup> See Judith Worell, *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender* (London: Elsevier, 2001), 1009 and Marion Lenz, *Möglichkeit der Bekämpfung von Genitalverstümmelung im internationalen und nationalen Kontext* (Norderstedt: Grin, 2009), 43-45. Lenz describes how experiments with the removal of the clitoris in the 1860s in Stuttgart were seen as a successful 'cure' for masturbation. See also Karoline Lazaj, *Die weibliche Sexualität als sozialgeschichtliche Konstruktion* (Norderstedt: Grin, 2007), 13. Lazaj explains that any sign of diversion from the passive norm was treated as an indication of illness which meant that dancers, actresses and intellectual women were all thought to be unwell.

equality based on utopian socialism where the individual – female or male – was supreme. The French movement was rife prior to the July revolution of 1830 and inspired many writers throughout Europe well into the 1840s. Although the influence of Saint-Simonian thought on German writers, including Lewald and Aston, should not be exaggerated, several critics emphasise the importance of the movement in Germany.<sup>347</sup> The Young Germans, for instance, based their political ideals in part on the Frenchman's socialist agenda and championed equality in all aspects of society, including between the sexes.<sup>348</sup> They resisted patriarchal norms which meant that wealthy men inherited privilege and power and theorised that society would profit from a meritocracy in which inheritance rights were abolished and women were enfranchised. Such notions met with disapproval and the Bundestag denounced the Young Germans in 1835. Authors such as Heinrich Heine, Karl Gutzkow and Heinrich Laube were vilified, their work too political to be ignored by the state.

Arguing in favour of a society based on science instead of religion, sensual happiness instead of rigid elitism, the Saint Simonian school also posited theories about the body and free love which made the personal political and influenced contemporary depictions of female sexuality. Whilst Saint Simon's approach to the body was interpreted in different ways, Prosper Enfantin, the leader of the movement in France after Saint Simon's death, understood his work as an endorsement of free love. Enfantin argued that a couple's relationship should not be regulated by Christian law and that marriage was an oppressive institution. This aspect of Enfantin's philosophy was widely condemned as immoral, but it interested such writers as George Sand, who strongly influenced Aston. Writing in tacit acknowledgement of Saint-Simonian theory, Aston explored female sexuality in a way which was considered so morally offensive that she was banished from several German states. Aston was aware that she expressed views that, like Enfantin's, were deemed sacrilegious and the fact that the state saw Aston as a political threat, as it had seen the Young Germans a decade earlier, shows the extent to which the moral well-being of the population was viewed as a political issue. Aston's emphasis on the 'freie Persönlichkeit', defined as being '*das Recht, unser eigenstes Wesen ungestört zu entwickeln [...]; die Harmonie der Seele durchzubilden, mag sie auch ein Mißklang scheinen gegenüber dem herrschenden Glauben der Welt*'<sup>349</sup>, and 'freie Liebe' is central to her writing in which she repeatedly emphasises both the importance of sexuality and woman's right to control her own body. Her use of dress as a sort of

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<sup>347</sup> See Friedreke Eigler, *The Feminist Encyclopedia of German Literature* (Westport: Greenwood, 1997), p. 579-80; Werner Suhge, *Saint-Simonismus und Junges Deutschland* (Berlin: Dr. E. Ebering, 1935) and Eliza Butler, *The Saint-Simonian Religion in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926).

<sup>348</sup> See Peter Uwe Hohendahl 'Emancipation and Critique' in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. David Wellbery, (London: Belknap, 2004), 566-572.

<sup>349</sup> Louise Aston, *Mein Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung* in Germaine Goetzinger, ed., *Für die Selbstverwirklichung der Frau: Louise Aston*, 62.

‘second skin’<sup>350</sup> and a means of articulating sexuality is therefore of great interest. Since dress is prescribed, as it was in far stricter terms in nineteenth-century Germany than it is today, how does a woman empower herself through her clothes? Does she lay claim to her body and to her right to individuality by dressing differently than expected? Or does her relationship to clothing reflect her social subservience to the extent that she is unable to realise her ‘freie Persönlichkeit’? As I will show, the answer to these questions is far from straight-forward; Aston both draws on convention and attempts to defy it, illustrating a profound understanding of the trouble she has with the rigid compartmentalization of femininity.

More respectful of propriety than Aston, Lewald is careful not to tackle issues of sexuality outright and whilst she was aware of Saint-Simon’s writings, she did not associate herself with his philosophy. In *Für und Wider die Frauen*, published in 1870, Lewald proposes that the early connection between the Saint Simonian attitude towards free love and women’s rights actually damaged the feminist cause.<sup>351</sup> Lewald thus asks key questions about the behaviour of women and how they were to acquire social equality. She, like Otto and Kathinka Zitz-Halein (discussed below) saw ‘mannish’ behaviour such as cross-dressing as offensive and reprehensible. However, Lewald, did hold controversial views and supported, for instance, the dissolution of loveless marriages. A Jew by birth, although not by upbringing, she does not write from a conventional Christian standpoint. How then does her fiction demonstrate her support of women’s rights whilst acknowledging the demands of a society which was shaped by bourgeois Christian propriety?

Saint-Simonianism was one of many influences that inspired writers in the 1820s and 30s to express socialist views; it had an impact on the less formalised and more widespread Vormärz movement which similarly advocated a re-working of the social order. Yet, as Lewald’s case shows, the influence of Saint-Simonianism and other progressive thinking was limited and it was not until 1843 that the issue of women’s rights was widely discussed in political journals. Historian Ute Gerhard stresses the significance of this year as the ‘Neubeginn’ for German feminism.<sup>352</sup> When Robert Blum’s declaration ‘Die Theilnahme der weiblichen Welt am Staatsleben ist nicht nur ein Recht, sie ist eine Pflicht’ was published in the *Sächsischen Vaterlandsblätter* in 1843, a large number of German women wrote to the journal expressing their relief that they were not the only ones to feel that women were subjugated and ignored.<sup>353</sup> A young Otto responded to Blum, arguing that since ‘Frauen dienen als Barometer der Staaten’,

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<sup>350</sup> See footnote 21.

<sup>351</sup> See Fanny Lewald, *Neunter Brief*, June, 1869 in Ursula Linnhoff, *Zur Freiheit, oh, nur zur einzig wahren* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1983), 189.

<sup>352</sup> See Gerhard, *Unerhört*, 37.

<sup>353</sup> Cited in *ibid*, 37.

their position within German society reflected an oppressive and unjust state.<sup>354</sup> Within a few years women were establishing their own journals as a forum for “feminist” thought. Mathilde Franziska Anneke’s *Frauen-Zeitung*, Louise Dittmar’s *Sociale Reform* and Aston’s *Der Freischärler* all aimed to establish an agenda for women’s rights. Following such publications, gender inequality was actively discussed although most women’s rights activists limited themselves to demanding better education and working conditions for women. Talk led to action. The Frauen-Bildungsverein, established in 1848, for example, sought to provide girls with a strong moral grounding and give women access to teacher training. Although Otto, Lewald and others supported attempts to improve women’s education, they met with resistance from the state. Within months the above journals struggled to attract readers and ceased publication, their challenge to gender norms too brazen for the German public.

To avoid state intervention and win over readers, writers had to be sensitive to decorum and comply with gender expectations. The Prussian law of 1819 stipulating that censors should ban everything ‘was die Moral und gute Sitten beleidigt’<sup>355</sup> was strictly applied and any assertiveness concerning women’s rights could easily lead to a work’s being banned. Those who did argue for female emancipation therefore tended to emphasise the traditional role of woman as moral arbitrator: they argued that because women were wives and mothers they should have more rights. This position, which was particularly prevalent in Germany, was maintained later in the century by the moderate wing of the German women’s movement; as the campaigner Jenny Hirsch wrote for the American Theodore Stanton’s collection of writings in favour of women’s rights, the ‘particularity of the German character’ had to be taken into account and with it the need for small conservative steps rather than rash radical ones.<sup>356</sup> Historian Richard Evans characterises the situation well: early German feminists ‘aimed at nothing less than the moral regeneration of society in conformity with the ideas of bourgeois liberal morality.’<sup>357</sup> Whilst Evans writes about the following generation of women’s rights campaigners, this statement can also be applied to those of the 1840s. The author Kathinka Zitz-Halein (1801-1877) provides a good example of how the association of ‘das Ewig-Weibliche’ with moral integrity influenced what women wrote. Zitz-Halein led ‘Humania’, an organisation she founded in 1849, which aimed at convincing German women that they were responsible for furthering revolutionary progress alongside men. She writes in 1854 that women will not improve their situation ‘durch ein widerliches Manngebahren, durch unweiblichen Trotz’ but rather ‘durch Ausübung aller Frauentugenden [...]’

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<sup>354</sup> Cited in *ibid*, 38.

<sup>355</sup> Cited in Katy Heady, *Literature and Censor in Restoration Germany* (London: Camden House, 2009), 35.

<sup>356</sup> Jenny Hirsch in Theodore Stanton, *Selections from the Woman Question in Europe* (Arden Media, 1974), 103. Hirsch seems to have written in English for Stanton’s publication.

<sup>357</sup> Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1933*, (London: Sage Publications, 1976), 20.

indem sie den Mann dadurch zur Anerkennung ihres hohen sittlichen Werthes zwingen.<sup>358</sup> We can infer that one way of affirming their femininity or ‘Frauentugend’ was by visible conformity with patriarchal expectations, for example by dressing according to established social rules. Zitz-Halein’s writings are reflective of the cautious approach adopted by most early women’s rights activists in Germany and her example shows how difficult it was to balance acceptable femininity with progressive views. Despite her support of exercise (which required special gymnastic clothing<sup>359</sup>) and political involvement for women, Zitz-Halein was adamant that, ‘Jede Unweiblichkeit, jede exzentrische Ansicht war uns stets fern’ and that everything was done ‘Ohne aus den Schranken der Weiblichkeit herauszutreten’.<sup>360</sup> While I would not argue that Zitz-Halein prefigures Butler, this statement reflects Butler’s understanding that “‘persons” only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with the recognizable standards of gender intelligibility’.<sup>361</sup> Certainly Zitz-Halein’s assertion was crucial if she was to modulate the impression of radicalism and shows that the ‘Schranken’ of femininity had to be accepted in order to gain certain rights for women. As critic Stanley Zucker points out, in Zitz-Halein’s case, actions spoke louder than words and while she published articles in support of patriarchal conceptions of femininity, she was more comfortable acting in progressive ways, including participating in the 1848 revolution, than expressing overly liberal ideas in her writing.<sup>362</sup> Zitz-Halein’s wariness hints at the power of the written word; in mid-century Germany much writing was viewed with suspicion and was grounds for persecution and even expulsion.

The fear was well-grounded: literary censorship in the mid-nineteenth century was enforced because of the belief that popular fiction could have an impact on society. Far from being an innocuous form of entertainment, the novel was viewed as a genuine threat to civil obedience in part because it was a forum where gender ideas could be contested as well as repeated. For women, the novel is a place where possibilities for gender reform are imagined. Authors were certainly aware of their vulnerability, their responsibility and the importance of imagery.<sup>363</sup> In *Eine Lebensfrage* (discussed below), Fanny Lewald’s protagonist states explicitly: “‘So lange das Volk nicht frei seine Meinung sagen darf, so lange, muss der Dichter in Bildern fuer sein Volk sprechen und in Bildern erklaren, was die Nation bedarf und fordert.’”<sup>364</sup> Thus the novel traditionally served, as one critic writes, as ‘a platform on which an ideal of womanhood was

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<sup>358</sup> See Stanley Zucker “1848 and the Birth of Politics in Mainz” in *The Consortium on Revolutionary Europe Proceedings 1976* (Lee Kennett ed. Athens, Georgia: 1978), 231.

<sup>359</sup> See footnote 266.

<sup>360</sup> See Zucker, “1848 and the Birth of Politics in Mainz”.

<sup>361</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 20.

<sup>362</sup> See Zucker, “1848 and the Birth of Politics in Mainz”.

<sup>363</sup> See Gerhard, *Unerhört*, p. 42 for a discussion of how women writers of the Vormärz used floral symbolism to evade censorship.

<sup>364</sup> Fanny Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1845), 108.

constantly being set up but rarely being explored with realism.<sup>365</sup> In other words, the phantasmic affair of gender was constantly at play. As I have already shown, domesticity was viewed as a key attribute to ideal femininity; thinkers of the early nineteenth century - including Kant, Fichte, Schiller, and Humboldt – reasoned that women did not possess the power of logic which would enable political commitment and creativity. This chapter will examine how descriptions of women's clothes reinforce and undermine this idea. How do women writers approach such a conundrum as they, creative and political themselves, seek serious acknowledgement? In revolutionary zeal are skirts traded for trousers or are they the symbol that helps disguise the vehemence of the revolutionary message as they appear to uphold the domestic ideal?

This theoretical and historical context provides the framework for my discussion of the way clothes can be seen both to reinforce and undermine gender ideals in Lewald's *Clementine* (1842), *Jenny* (1843) and *Eine Lebensfrage* (1845) and how Aston's sartorial descriptions in *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* (1847) and *Lydia* (1848) can be read as a commentary on female sexuality. In both sections I examine the extent to which these authors can be considered subversive and how they express their ambivalence towards traditional femininity through their use of vestimentary symbolism.

### **Fanny Lewald (1811-1889)**

Lewald's polemical works provide a necessary context for her novels; she comments on fashion and gender and examines how German women might best campaign for gender equality. Lewald was profoundly aware of the restrictive and prescriptive nature of fashion and the impact it had on gender. In the fourteenth letter of *Für und Wider die Frauen* (1869), for instance, she addresses her female reader, asking whether demands for female emancipation can be taken seriously when women follow outrageous fashions: 'Kann ein Mann Sie in diesen 'Kostümen' oder in Ihren Salon-Toiletten, die in allen Farben des Regenbogens schimmern, wirklich für seinesgleichen halten?'<sup>366</sup> Lewald's tone is acerbic and vehement. She suggests that women have been shaped literally and metaphorically by clothes which effectively encourage them to treat themselves as objects; the recognised standard involves self-adornment with the aim to attract. Such practices are limiting and Lewald argues against extravagant dress and consumerism because they prevent gender equality. Lewald calls for self-emancipation 'von der Nachahmung einer fremdländischen und sittenlosen Frauenwelt [...], in der alles hohl und alles leer und alles käuflich ist [...]'<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Lesley Sharpe, 'The Enlightenment' in *A History of Women's Writing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*, ed. Jo Catling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 64.

<sup>366</sup> Lewald, *Für und Wider die Frauen*, in *Freiheit des Herzens*, Brief 14, 305.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid*, 308.

Negative terminology here is exploited in part for nationalistic reasons – Lewald tries to distinguish Germany from immoral foreign nations. As discussed in Chapter Three, she is writing here at a time which was profoundly sensitive to the need to establish what it meant to be German. However, by rejecting elaborate, French sartorial customs, Lewald does not assert a new gender possibility for women. Instead she writes nostalgically about women’s fashions of former years (she does not specify when), which she sees as more decent and German, since dresses used to be ‘bescheiden’, long, and subtle in colour. Lewald admonishes women for being vain enough to keep up with fashions that force them to be wasteful. The ‘Zurschautragen der Verschwendung’<sup>368</sup> is distasteful to her on moral grounds and is declared un-German in order to make a point about the positive attributes a German woman should have, namely simplicity, modesty and good sense. Instead of displacing gender norms, she seems to reiterate them, echoing conduct discourse by discouraging consumerist indulgence. Lewald thus contributes to the paradox which dictates and simultaneously vetoes a consideration of fashion. This may make her seem conventional, but her reinforcement of accepted gendered traits is also used as a way of encouraging women to cultivate their intellect. The above passage could be read quite differently. Lewald overtly rejects the stereotype that associates women with superficial concerns in favour of other traditionally feminine traits; but she does so not out of any desire to constrain women but rather in order to urge them to devote their energies to the development of their minds. Lewald draws on the importance of morality in gender categorisation out of apparent conviction, but she also does so in order to appear conventional even when demanding something very unconventional: that women see themselves as equal to men.

Indeed, Lewald’s life was not conformist; she was a self-sufficient woman writer who embraced independence and abhorred stagnant domesticity – she referred to the years spent housebound after her refusal to accept an arranged marriage as her ‘Leidensjahre’.<sup>369</sup> She circulated in Europe’s salons and hosted her own after marrying the divorced author Adolf Stahr. However, as Boetcher-Joeres points out, Lewald often avoids depictions of emancipated women in her novels since they tend to be associated with negativity and caricature. As a result her female characters are often wives and mothers. Indeed, the argument in favour of traditional gender ideals is recurrent in her work and is an example of the apparent conservatism for which she is often reproached by modern scholars. Critics have recognised Lewald’s desire for the democratisation of Germany, the improvement of girls’ education and professional opportunities for women as well as for social equalities, but they have also been disappointed at Lewald’s lack of liberalism when it comes to arguing for women’s rights in her novels. There Lewald seems to reinforce

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid, 307.

<sup>369</sup> See Diethel, *Towards Emancipation*, 82.



rather than ‘contest the rigid codes of hierarchal binarisms’.<sup>370</sup> Margaret Ward defends Lewald’s stance, arguing that comments that seem biased towards the patriarchy were ‘specifically tailored to the immediate Prussian situation’.<sup>371</sup> Because Lewald was aware of the need for ostensible conformity, it is in the undertones of her polemical and fictional writing that we must search for the ‘Bilder’ that express ‘was die Nation bedarf und fordert’.<sup>372</sup> Indeed her request that her correspondents destroy her letters as a discretionary measure illustrates the extent of her own self-censorship. In 1847, Lewald writes in a letter to Stahr:

Ich schreibe nur, wenn ich positiv etwas zu sagen habe und bitte jeden, auch Sie von Herzen, jeden Brief, den Sie von mir erhalten, sofort zu vernichten, wenn Sie ihn gelesen haben. Dies ist eine Notwehr gegen die Indiskretion der Zukunft, ueber die ich beruhigt sein muss, wenn ich im schriftlichen Verkehr die ganze Wahrheit sagen soll.<sup>373</sup>

Lewald wrote vast amounts in a number of genres, and the shortcomings of the novel as a political forum were clear to her: ‘die ganze Wahrheit’ had to be edited for publication. She confessed in a letter written in February 1862, ‘Ich habe innerlich manchmal die groesste Lust, alle meine Arbeiten liegen zu lassen und Pamphlete zu schreiben.’<sup>374</sup> But she did continue to write fiction and it seems its appeal lay in the fact that it allowed the public and the author to imagine certain possibilities for, if not an entire re-working of, the female gender.

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<sup>370</sup> See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 199.

<sup>371</sup> Margaret Ward, *Fanny Lewald: Between Rebellion and Renunciation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 175.

<sup>372</sup> Lewald, Fanny *Eine Lebensfrage* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1845), 108.

<sup>373</sup> Lewald cited in Gabriele Schneider, *Fanny Lewald* (Munich: Rowohlt, 1996), 7.

<sup>374</sup> Letter to Johann Hacoby, cited in Carol Diethe, *Towards Emancipation* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998), 82.

## Secondary Literature

Since the 1980s, Lewald has been the focus of considerable interest and several studies have been particularly useful for my analysis. Critics tend to look at Lewald as an early feminist whose fictional plotlines reflect the tension between conformity and resistance that we also find in her life and polemical works. Whilst I agree with this premise, what is still needed is a discussion of the extent to which imagery upholds and/or undermines gender norms in her work.

Todd Kontje provides detailed summaries and discussions of Lewald's novels in his extensive study *Women, the Novel and the German Nation*.<sup>375</sup> He argues convincingly that Lewald's plots illustrate her ideals and her sense of reality which prevents any far-fetched denouement. Boetcher-Joeres devotes a chapter to Lewald in *Respectability and Deviance* in which she points out that Lewald, like Aston, has been labelled 'the German George Sand'.<sup>376</sup> Certainly Lewald's popularity – she was one of the most-read women writers of the 1840s – and her liberal views are comparable to Sand's. Boetcher-Joeres stresses that in life as in her fiction, Lewald was also sensitive to 'the clash between external expectation and self-representation'.<sup>377</sup> Ward's *Fanny Lewald: Between Rebellion and Renunciation* echoes Kontje's and Boetcher-Joeres's arguments, stating that Lewald 'characteristically tried to enlist the trust of her largely middle-class audience by assuring them of her own model domesticity before unleashing her more radical ideas (...)'.<sup>378</sup> This assertion is well illustrated in the extract above. Ward also includes details about Lewald's life and contemporary writings on gender issues and explains that Lewald's female characters are often stereotypically feminine in their tendency towards self-control and altruistic love, but does not show how their femininity is performed through dress. Krimhild Stöver's *Leben und Wirken der Fanny Lewald* concentrates on Lewald's campaign against arranged marriage and anti-Semitism. Like Carole Diethel in her brief chapter on Lewald in *Towards Emancipation*, Stöver provides a general account of Lewald's life but she also devotes chapters to context, focusing on the extent to which publishing in the mid-nineteenth century was perceived as unfeminine. None of these critics mentions dress as a prominent theme, but, as I have shown in Chapter One, dress was a major concern in every bourgeois woman's life and warrants examination here. Below I explore the extent to which critical judgements of Lewald are justified by investigating the way her sartorial characterisation 'mimics' gender conventions.

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<sup>375</sup> See Todd Kontje, *Women, the Novel and the German Nation, 1771-1871: Domestic Fiction in the Fatherland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 152-170.

<sup>376</sup> Ruth Ellen Boetcher-Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 51.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Ward, *Fanny Lewald: Between rebellion and renunciation*, 16.

### ***Diogena* (1847)**

Exaggerated and comic, Lewald's parody *Diogena* illustrates the affectedness of the 'natural' in terms that anticipate Butler's post-psychoanalytic understanding of gender as the repeated stylisation of the body. In her satire, Lewald mercilessly mocks her rival, the prolific, and at the time much read, author Ida von Hahn-Hahn. Both women fell in love with the same man, who chose Hahn-Hahn over Lewald, but Hahn-Hahn is also the perfect target for Lewald's parody because of her different writing style.<sup>379</sup> The first-person narrative and mocking depiction of the vain, aristocratic heroine serve as powerful authorial tools to debase her rival and set her up as a poor example for middle-class women to emulate. Indeed, parody works here to expose a particularly vacuous way of being a woman; the fact that Hahn-Hahn comes from a noble background and depicted aristocratic heroines, making a point of their good lineage, enables Lewald to criticize her all the more successfully. At the beginning of the story, Diogena proudly recounts that her family dates back to ancient Greece and flaunts her noble heritage. By providing an aristocratic example not to follow, alongside bourgeois examples that, as I will show, should be followed, Lewald participates in the formation of bourgeois femininity at a time when the middle class was becoming dominant.

Lewald's critique of Hahn-Hahn's style and characterisation depends on the superficiality of the main character and the fact that she makes women seem vain, frivolous and irrational. 'Feminine' flaws are exaggerated as the caricatured protagonist frequently admires her own reflection, describes how attractive she is and chooses clothes that accentuate her charms. The fact that the story is recounted in the first-person means that the impact on the reader is particularly nauseating. Diogena declares that she abhors vestimentary "Kleinlichkeiten" and "Gêne" and avoids "Chemisettes und Cravatten und Manschetten und all den tausend aimables riens, in denen andere Frauen ihre Freude suchen."<sup>380</sup> Rather than seeming modest and unaffected, however, Diogena comes across as the opposite. She tries to distinguish herself from other women in a sentence punctuated by French terminology which undermines any attempt to distance herself from the fastidious women she pretends to abhor. Diogena is a shameless hypocrite; she claims to be effortlessly graceful only to insist that her maid travel with her because of her 'grosse Toilettengeschicklichkeit'.<sup>381</sup> Going against crucial sartorial advice, she even wishes to stand out. Once estranged from her husband, she boasts, 'Ich hatte bei den ersten Putzhändlerinnen so enorme Bestellungen gemacht, daß man sie selbst in Paris surprenirend fand und gespannt war,

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<sup>379</sup> See Dieth, *Towards Emancipation*, 84-86. Dieth indicates that female solidarity was not always strong amongst nineteenth-century women writers and explains the animosity between Hahn-Hahn and Lewald.

<sup>380</sup> Lewald, *Diogena*, (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1847), 34.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

mich, diese vielgepriesene Frau, zu sehen.<sup>382</sup> She then insists that her clothes are simple and distinguished, but her exaggerated language, replete with such affected adjectives and adverbs as ‘enorme,’ ‘surprenirent,’ and ‘vielgepriesen’ suggests the opposite. At every turn the impression of purity she wishes to convey is offset by her vanity and self-indulgence. On one occasion, for example, she describes herself incongruously as ‘strahlender als je’<sup>383</sup> in a nun’s habit. Other details include: a ‘breiter weißer Kragen’,<sup>384</sup> chosen because it shows off her neck and bust; a brown riding dress, which is clearly expensive and ‘an einer Seite in die Höhe geknüpft’;<sup>385</sup> and a medieval costume with sleeves which ‘zeigten meine superben Arme [die] mit schwarzen Steinkohlen-Braceletts geschmückt [waren]’.<sup>386</sup> These details are not direct references to the latest fashions outlined in Chapter One; rather they reveal Diogena’s attempt to lay claim to the feminine ideal of effortless grace and her failure to achieve it, as the complexity of her outfits and/or the way in which they are chosen merely to flatter undermine her endeavours. She imagines herself to be natural, but proves herself pretentious. Lewald’s narrative is overtly ironic; Diogena is hyperbolic and amusing, a monstrous version of a certain kind of femininity. Lewald’s critique of Hahn-Hahn stems in part from her objection to such affected, aristocratic heroines who neither represent the bourgeois German reader nor present her with a model of feminine behaviour.<sup>387</sup> Her presentation of Diogena critiques superficial, exaggerated performances of femininity whilst, as discussions of Lewald’s other novels will show, the pretence of ‘naturalness’ is also sustained, albeit more subtly, by Lewald herself.

### ***Clementine (1843)***

In her first novel *Clementine*, Lewald depicts the frustrations of unrequited love and a loveless marriage in what appear to be conventional terms; yet this illusion of conventionality masks Lewald’s discomfort with the norms of femininity that impose submission. Her heroine, Clementine, is docile, beautiful and dutiful, bound by her gender to follow social dictates. Her renunciation is torturous and she is certainly not without progressive ideals (she wishes, for instance, to have intellectual discussions with her husband), but ultimately, as Kontje explains, Clementine ‘speaks boldly, but acts obediently’, oscillating ‘between self-assertiveness and submissiveness.’<sup>388</sup> Convinced that her youthful infatuation with Robert Thalberg is no longer mutual, Clementine marries an older doctor on the urging of her family. Her marriage is unhappy

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>387</sup> As critics are quick to point out, Lewald’s *Diogena* might have also been inspired by the fact that both Lewald and Hahn-Hahn were attracted to the same man. See Kontje, *Women, the Novel and the German Nation*, 152 and Diethe, *Towards Emancipation*, 85-87.

<sup>388</sup> Kontje, *Women, the Novel and the German Nation*, 155.

since she does not love her husband, and when she meets Thalberg again, after many years, she realises that her love for him has not diminished and that he returns it. Clementine finds herself torn between her desire for the young man and her duty as a wife; she cannot forsake her marital vows, which she sees as binding and holy. Lewald argues, like her contemporaries Hahn-Hahn and Aston among others, against arranged marriage as a form of subjugation and insists on the importance of love and respect within conjugal relationships. Lewald's depiction of Clementine suggests no revision of femininity but rather proof of how the author herself works as a gendered being in conformity with recognised standards. Lewald is caught between her desire to assert Clementine's independence and her acknowledgement of social constraints. The result is ambivalent; as Ward and Kontje indicate, Lewald's depiction of Clementine is full of contradictions. Ward's discussion of the novel illustrates how 'Clementine is neither angel nor monster, neither Madonna nor whore, but a real woman in conflict with duty and desire (who) wishes to cast off the hated angelic mask.'<sup>389</sup> However, the metaphorical 'angelic mask' is not disputed as Clementine never fails to dress in accordance with feminine ideals.

An analysis of the novel shows the extent to which dress allows the modern reader insight into nineteenth-century 'gender trouble' by revealing Clementine's inner battle and reflecting her resignation. Clementine's conformity and her unhappiness with her marriage are expressed through her appearance and clothes. While her beauty is admired, it is complemented by her unpretentious attire. Lewald describes her twenty-seven-year-old heroine as 'heftig, geistreich und zu tiefem Fühlen geneigt'.<sup>390</sup> Years before, however, she attracted Thalberg's attention because she was 'hübsch und in der Mode', a fact that sets him up as a far from ideal hero since he is drawn to her fashionableness and beauty rather than her character. By the start of the novel she is introverted and pensive, a stark contrast to her sister Marie whose life revolves around family, balls and 'ihre Toilette'.<sup>391</sup> Marie is happily married, content with her world – she is, Lewald points out, the sort of woman most men desire – while Clementine pines for her lost sweetheart, marries a man she does not love and externalises her depressed state in her choice of clothes. A friend remarks that Clementine always dresses 'wie eine Nonne' '[in] ewigen, dunkeln Kleider[n]'<sup>392</sup> with tediously simple headwear. Despite the attentions of her husband who showers her with 'Schmuck und Putz,' she remains 'die Dame im schwarzen schlichten Kleide.'<sup>393</sup> Whilst Chapter One describes how women were expected to be dressed in dark clothes in the morning, Clementine dresses constantly in the same way. There is also no sense of the corsetry and complex layering of skirts that characterised women's fashion in the 1840s; the heroine's simple

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<sup>389</sup> Ward, *Between Rebellion and Renunciation*, 97.

<sup>390</sup> Lewald, *Clementine*, (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1843), 4.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid*.

attire suggests something very different. Such details seem too intimate for Lewald, who leaves the impression that Clementine derives no pleasure from appearing feminine. Her friend accurately concludes that Clementine's sartorial sobriety must be an indication of unhappiness. Her choice of clothes also suggests a passive rebellion against her husband, who has given her jewellery, as well as against social norms which presume that women desire self-ornamentation. Clementine is more interested in politics and art than her own attire. Presumably so as not to appear unfeminine, however, Clementine takes more care with her clothes but continues 'ihr gänzlich Verzicht auf jene Bewunderung, die durch eigene Schönheit und durch Pracht der Kleidung hervorgerufen wird.'<sup>394</sup> Importantly, however, her simple attire suits her and actually attracts attention. At a ball her friend remarks that she is in awe of her beauty, especially since she is simply yet 'stylvoll angekleidet' and looks 'so eigenartig (...), dass es jeder Einzelne bemerkt. Du hast immer etwas Besonderes, das man fühlt und sieht, aber nicht nachmachen kann – heute indeß bist Du ganz reizend!'<sup>395</sup> Clementine does not stand out in a negative way, as warned against by conduct writers (see Chapter One). Her 'etwas Besonderes' seems to have nothing to do with the frilly caps and heeled shoes that were *de rigueur* at the time but she is nonetheless 'stylvoll', a description which is maintained discursively through lack of detail. Somehow Clementine represents the feminine ideal of this period, effortlessly beautiful and 'naturally' modest, stylish but not frivolous, but precisely because her clothes are not described in depth she also appears elusive and unreal.

Clementine's successful mimicry of gender ideals, namely her distinctive and model simplicity, attracts Robert. He writes that he could recognise her hat and gloves out of a hundred different ones, since 'Es ist ein Zauber von Weiblichkeit und Reinheit in Allem, was zu ihr gehört.'<sup>396</sup> Clementine's clothes are a part of her, a second skin to the extent that they are perceived as a 'natural' extension of her very self. The 'Zauber von Weiblichkeit und Reinheit' represents the ideal that Clementine impersonates, but cannot entirely inhabit because it is a 'surface signification' put on, though never taken off, unlike the gloves. And, as explained in Chapter One, 'Reinheit' is a particularly important characteristic for the ideal German. Like Goethe's Werther, who is captivated by Lotte when he first observes 'das reizendste Schauspiel'<sup>397</sup> of her feeding her siblings, it is when Robert sees Clementine with the neighbour's children that he is most charmed. The cap she quickly puts on is described oxymoronically as irresistibly 'züchtig'.<sup>398</sup> Lewald continually reinforces the attractiveness of modesty; her heroine is beautiful and desirable because

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>397</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, (Leipzig: Weygandsche Buchhandlung, 1827), 32.

<sup>398</sup> Lewald, *Clementine*, 92.

her appearance is ‘natural’, not because she has paid it undue attention as many women do. She dresses modestly for the ball during which she presents Robert with the young woman she has chosen as his future bride. Lewald emphasises her beauty, dressed as she is in a black gown with a string of pearls with her hair smoothly parted and unadorned. In contrast the bride-to-be is dressed in pink with a wreath on her head. The symbolism is obvious: Clementine’s dark attire suggests mourning for the loss of her lover and a renunciation of sexuality while the girl’s dress is youthful and bridal. In emphasising Clementine’s innate attractiveness, Lewald follows traditional codes of sartorial description and reinforces Clementine’s place as a conventional heroine.

The author’s use of conventional codes can be interpreted as a way of urging the reader to sympathise with a heroine who is somewhat at odds with society. Clementine holds progressive views about women’s rights, but is careful to couch her opinions in rhetorical, subjunctive speech, hiding ‘behind the mask of witty conversationalist’<sup>399</sup> in company just as she is careful to dress appropriately. At a tea party, for instance, a painter argues adamantly in favour of female emancipation while Clementine replies cleverly but evasively to his arguments. (Lewald’s tendency to have male characters advocate women’s rights is strategic; the male ‘voice of reason’ is more likely to be taken seriously than the female ‘voice of sentiment’.) Clementine does, however, intimate that she would have liked more educational opportunities, jokingly proffering that she would have made a good student. Her husband teases her back “‘ich bin überzeugt, Du wärest der niedlichste Professor im Mousselinkleide geworden’”.<sup>400</sup> Muslin was a common, light material for women’s clothes at the time (see Chapter One), whilst bourgeois menswear tended to be made of hardier cotton fabrics. The muslin therefore seems to serve as a reminder of Clementine’s gender as much as the dress itself. The mention of it, as well as the trivialising adjective ‘niedlich’, is belittling. Indeed, the dress almost appears as a reason why Clementine is prevented from attaining any semblance of equality. Clementine’s husband is quick to counter the painter’s arguments with his own conviction: “‘Politik und Liberalismus *kleiden* die Frauen nicht.’”<sup>401</sup> What metaphorically and literally clothes women, it is suggested, should convey their sensitivity, the “‘Scharfsinn des Herzens’”<sup>402</sup> that they are expected to have. The muslin dress therefore symbolises the limited possibilities for women and relegates them to the status of object to be admired; it appears to be both the symptom of female subordination and the cause.

Clementine’s propensity towards subdued attire is symbolically significant. Firstly, it appears to be a comment on the relationship between morality and dress. The heroine is virtuous, insistent on the sanctity of marriage even when she is tempted by the man she loves, and her adherence to her

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<sup>399</sup> Ward, *Between Rebellion and Renunciation*, 97.

<sup>400</sup> Lewald, *Clementine*, 83.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid*, 81. My italics.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

conjugal vows is reflected in her clothes. Initially Clementine's 'mourning' attire suggests a rejection of marriage (she does not believe she will ever marry the man she loves and therefore renounces marriage as a possibility), and later as ambivalence towards her role as wife. She does not feel that she can fully embrace her conjugal position because she does not love her husband. As a result Clementine ignores his desire for 'Schmuck und Putz'<sup>403</sup> and wears nun-like garments. Her simple clothing therefore functions as resistance to the feminine role of obedient, loving wife. Yet, Clementine insists on the sacredness of marriage and refuses to support any radical vision of emancipation. When pushed, she explains her conviction that "Emancipirt wird das Weib (...) durch die Liebe und in der Ehe."<sup>404</sup> For her, any effort at changing the situation of women should focus on preparing them better for their domestic vocation.

The heroine's preference for black should also be interpreted more as a futile attempt to escape objectification and patriarchal constraints than a desire to appear thin and fashionable according to popular advice (see Chapter One). The reader takes her seriously partially because she does not display any 'Abgeschmacktheit in Kleidung und Frisur'<sup>405</sup> which Lewald identifies later as belittling, ridiculous and, unfortunately, typical of women. Yet the fact that for Clementine love and marriage are not combined means that the emancipation she describes never occurs. Clementine's sartorial behaviour complicates the illusion of resignation by suggesting a frustration with gender expectations. This illusion is only complicated further by Lewald's insistence on presenting her heroine's behaviour as more 'natural' than the 'Schmuck and Putz' others expect her to wear. Lewald distinguishes here between social femininity which relies on sartorial accessory and Clementine's 'natural' gendered self which resists such social expectation. Lewald thus seems to understand that there are different forms of femininity: a good 'natural' one which is manifested through sartorial simplicity and a bad, acculturated one which is superficial and confining.

Radical undertones in the novel tend to be overpowered by the re-assertion of feminine gender traits as the reader ends up with an impression which is typical of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature: the helpless, pretty heroine renounces her own happiness in favour of moral rectitude. Clementine's status as beautiful heroine is legitimised by her preference for sartorial simplicity, a key attribute for any honourable female protagonist; she reminds the reader of such characters as Sophie de la Roche's heroine in *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771) and Gretchen in Karoline Fischer's *Margarete* (1812) who favour simplicity and are celebrated as models of virtue. Lewald's modernity and liberalism are to be found in the contrast between La

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>405</sup> Fanny Lewald, 'Vierzehnter Brief, Karlsbad, im August 1869' in *Freiheit des Herzens*, 305.



Roche's and Fischer's utopian endings and Clementine's realistic fate. Lewald's attitude, reflected in Clementine's black garments, can be seen as defeatist. The resignation and respectability that critics are quick to identify in her novels expose harsh reality; and the most admirable of heroines (who earn their position at the centre of the novel in part due to their ability to master the clothes paradox) meet an inescapable, unhappy end. As Anna Richards points out, whilst Clementine is resigned to her marriage by the end of the novel, when she reappears as a minor character in *Jenny*, she is clearly deeply unhappy.<sup>406</sup> Viewed in a post-modern, feminist light, her depression can be interpreted as an implicit criticism of gender ideals which seem to promise happiness to those who uphold them but only disappoint.

### ***Jenny* (1843)**

In her next novel, *Jenny*, Lewald takes a bolder approach which problematizes gender in more obvious terms than in her previous work: Jenny Meier is an original heroine in the way that Clementine is not and her novelty is reflected in the author's different use of sartorial characterisation. Rather than asserting her physical attributes, Lewald emphasises Jenny's lively mind and as a consequence clothes are all but irrelevant in descriptions of her. Sartorial details are related at times, however, and their presence is remarkable since they tend to be conveyed not in the narrator's voice but rather by male characters whose appreciation of Jenny, it is suggested, is superficial.

The novel is richly polemical; it argues against certain imitative practices that were treated as characteristic of gender and supports Saint-Simonian socialist theory by proposing gender equality as an ideal. The novel is above all about religious affiliation and discrimination against the Jewish faith, but a central theme is the development of its heroine as she seeks an existence which will allow her independence and the freedom to acquire knowledge. Determined at first to renounce her Jewish heritage in order to marry Reinhard, a Christian theologian, Jenny realises that she cannot honestly convert to her fiancé's faith. Such a marriage would entail the sacrifice of her identity both as a Jew and as a relatively autonomous woman. Jenny's brother Eduard confronts similar challenges. He refuses to be baptised in order to become a municipal doctor and loses his beloved, Clara, because society does not accept mixed faith marriages. Clara, a school friend of Jenny's whose parents have never approved of her affection for a Jew, also loves Eduard but, ever submissive, marries her cousin instead. Feminist critics, such as Diethe, suggest that Lewald portrays Clara's apparent contentment as self-delusion.<sup>407</sup> She readily submits to parental and social pressure and acts according to traditional expectations. Jenny, however, resists these expectations and lives for years as her widowed father's caretaker following the end of her

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<sup>406</sup> See Anna Richards, *The Wasting Heroine in German Fiction by Women*, 129.

<sup>407</sup> See Diethe, *Towards Emancipation*, 83.

engagement. While this, too, appears conventional, Jenny is able to develop her intellect through extensive reading and seems to strike a balance between tradition (as a dutiful daughter) and liberalism (as an educated woman). At this point she meets Graf Walter, whose attitude towards marriage reflects Jenny's; they both see man and woman as equal, like two trees growing upwards, their roots intertwined. The novel concludes tragically: the count takes offence when Jenny is mocked as a 'Judenmädchen' and is killed in a duel. The fact that Lewald creates a situation which seems to offer harmony and fulfillment for an intellectual woman, only to destroy it with this ending, suggests that society is not ready to accept progressive ideals. Jenny, personifying this interpretation of female liberation, dies with it, shortly after the count's death. Lewald's fatal denouement illustrates feminist critical theory that suggests that overt subversion of gender norms results in punishment and marginalization in both the novel and real life.

While the narrator focuses on the heroine's character, emphasising that Jenny, who possesses a 'fast unweibliche Energie',<sup>408</sup> is not typically feminine, Lewald's male characters concentrate on Jenny's appearance and perceive her in relation to the gender norms she problematises. There is a gap between the intelligent heroine and perceptions of her. Reinhard fantasises about Jenny 'in glänzender Toilette'<sup>409</sup> with her long dark curls surrounding her pale face, reinforcing the unsuitability of the match as his interest in feminine appearance is out of step with Jenny's intellectual interests. Reinhard is attracted to the heroine's youthful charm: it is through him that we know she is beautiful and that her attire accentuates her beauty. Later the narrator addresses her readers who value only appearance, indirectly criticising the theologian's substantially artificial appreciation of Jenny:

Ihr seht nur die schimmernden Tautropfen auf dem Rosenkranz in ihren Locken, nur die Perlen, die den schönen Nacken zieren, und ahnet nicht, dass hinter dem feuchten Blau des Auges, das euch entzückt, Perlen und Tautropfen glänzen, viel kostbarer und reiner als der Tand, den ihr bewundert.<sup>410</sup>

Here Lewald argues that sartorial charms such as pearls and frills appeal to the male gaze which fails to perceive the character and intelligence behind them. Lewald infers that this prejudice affects women as well as men, as both sexes are enticed by beauty and equate female worth with physical attractiveness: her use of 'ihr' is all-inclusive. Lewald thus takes a stand against the 'gendered norms of cultured intelligibility'<sup>411</sup> which define women according to their physical attributes. Moreover, the fact that floral accessories and pearls were typical ornaments for young

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<sup>408</sup> Lewald, *Jenny* (Berlin: Buchverlag der Morgen, 1967), 32.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>411</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23.

women at the time (see Chapter One) makes her reproach all the more immediate for her contemporary readers who are invited to contest a version of femininity that values attractiveness over intelligence.

Jenny's sense of self is complicated and reveals the 'conflicts, convergences, and innovative dissonances within gender configurations'.<sup>412</sup> As well as 'unwomanly', sophisticated, studious and political – she fights with her brother for the emancipation of the Jews – she is apparently indifferent to her looks and, like Clementine, displays none of the vanity associated with women. Indeed, she is never described as concerned with or even conscious of her appearance. Rather, sartorial associations are imposed upon her. This is particularly clear when Erlau, Jenny's art teacher, creates tableaux vivants where Jenny is portrayed as the daughter in Eduard Bendemann's 'Trauernde Juden', as Recha from Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* and as Rebecca from Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. Jenny accepts being painted as Rebecca since she believes the portrait will later be given to her fiancé, but, conscious of propriety, she worries that Reinhard might object. Meanwhile, the assembly are in awe of her beauty, for 'Sie war blendend schön in der prachtvollen Kleidung, das Haar mit Brillanten durchflochten, den feuerfarbenen Turban auf die schwarzen Locken gedrückt [...]'.<sup>413</sup> This situation works as a strategy for Lewald who both establishes Jenny's attractiveness in accordance with conventional expectations and distances her from it by asserting her modesty. Indeed, while everyone admires her in costume, Jenny herself seems uninspired by this opportunity to dress exotically and enjoys only the proximity of the man she loves. While Reinhard worries that he will not have the means to provide his future wife with pearl necklaces, cashmere shawls and gems, Jenny is indifferent to such ornaments and even asks her father not to give her jewellery for her wedding, but rather a more practical carriage. Such moments legitimise Jenny as a traditional German heroine whose virtue is proved by her disregard for frivolous sartorial concerns and yet who manages nonetheless to be graceful and alluring. They also depict her as an emancipated woman who seeks to transcend her body in order to obtain intellectual liberties. When she meets the count one evening it is her dress that announces her presence: 'Ein weißes Kleid schimmerte glänzend aus der Dunkelheit empor.'<sup>414</sup> Lewald's image is conventional, that of a virtuous maiden; as Chapter One indicates, white was a typical choice for young women, especially those with a good figure. However, in emerging out of the darkness like a light the impression the dress leaves is more symbolic. It seems to accentuate Jenny's powerful individuality, the couple's hope and state of enlightenment. Like the shimmering gown, this state seems fleeting and ethereal. Gender norms catch up with her and the author, and, in tacit

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>413</sup> Lewald, *Jenny*, 128.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid, 265.

acknowledgement of the fact that gender is 'socially compelled', Lewald has her heroine die in a typical 'feminine' fashion of a broken heart.

Unlike Jenny, Clara appreciates the advantages clothes give a young woman seeking an eligible husband and she dresses fashionably and flatteringly, appearing altogether more in harmony with gender expectations than the heroine. The narrator describes in detail what she wears when visiting the Meiers:

ein hohes Kleid von seegrüner Seide, das eng anliegend die hohe, volle Gestalt markierte, ohne die feine Taille zu verbergen; ein kleiner Sammethut hob die frische Röte, den zarten Teint des Gesichtes nur mehr hervor und stach schön gegen die langen, hellblonden Locken ab, die ihr bis auf die Schultern herabfielen.<sup>415</sup>

Clara's clothes are depicted as elegant, flattering and of good quality. She is dressed in perfect accordance with the situation; an afternoon visit in the 1840s required a high-coloured gown while silk was popular and suitably expensive. Most importantly, Clara's clothes suit her; silks and velvets match her 'feine Taille' and 'zarten Teint', emphasising her wealth and adherence to conduct advice (see Chapter One). Meanwhile her blond curls reinforce her Christian heritage - the Jewish heroine's curls are dark. Her attire is matched by the 'Ton von Demut in ihrer Stimme'<sup>416</sup> which completes the image of feminine docility and complies with patriarchal expectations of what a woman should be. Lewald is careful not to criticize the conventional and conformist Clara. Rather she describes her as ignorantly happy. The fact that she is not the heroine, however, suggests that it is Jenny's slight deviance (her displacement of gender conventions) rather than Clara's respectability (mimicry of phantasmic norms) that is to be admired.

Throughout the novel, Lewald seems to refute dress as one of the main vehicles of self-expression for a woman who is troubled by the limited ways in which she can perform her gender and has strong convictions. Jenny is not distracted by the 'Salon-Toiletten' of which Lewald disapproves in her later work and whilst she is beautiful, she clearly does not conform in the way that Clara does. If, as critics Diethe and Möhrmann suggest, Clara's escapism takes the form of traditional contentment and stylishness, Jenny's escapism comes through her own efforts to disassociate herself from conventional feminine frivolity of any sort.<sup>417</sup> Whilst her lack of interest in clothes is fairly typical of nineteenth-century heroines, her intellectual energy is not: in this novel the

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> See Carol Diethe, *Towards Emancipation* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1998), 83 and Renate Möhrmann, *Die andere Frau* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), 138.

tension is not between dress and morality but rather between dress and the intellect, and the battle between them is also one between established gender conventions and a revised notion of femininity.

### ***Eine Lebensfrage* (1845)**

In *Eine Lebensfrage* Lewald mimics female gender conventions in a way that makes the reader aware of the ‘imitative practices’ that constitute femininity in mid-nineteenth-century Germany. From a theoretical perspective, clothes also feature as ‘hyperbolic exhibitions of “the natural”’<sup>418</sup> which reveal the problematic character of femininity. The novel also makes a bold political statement by arguing in favour of a change in divorce laws and portraying an ill-matched couple who are chronically unhappy together. It was published one year after Prussia raised divorce fees and made attempts at reconciliation obligatory before divorce was granted. A marriage was over only once a pastor had confirmed that everything had been done to save it. As a result attitudes towards divorce were strict and unforgiving and the rate of divorce fell sharply.<sup>419</sup> To make a case for divorce in her novel, Lewald had to adhere to social expectations and depict the conjugal situation as unsustainable. To do this she relies on contrasting portrayals of women and the more dress is used in these characterisations, the more censorious she invites us to be. In this way gender preconceptions are cleverly exaggerated and manipulated in order to justify a liberal argument.

In the novel, the poet Alfred von Reichenbach is continually harassed and abused by his wife, Caroline, whom he no longer loves. Miserable in the marriage, he determines to get a divorce, despite his Catholic heritage and his wife’s philistine piety. Central to the novel is the social and legal prejudice that he faces as a result of his estrangement from his wife and his love for the woman he once wished to marry, Therese Brand. The final divorce comes only as a last resort and means that Alfred must give up his estate as well as his son’s right to it. Lewald presents Alfred as an alter-ego whose views on the purpose of literature as a vehicle of political and social ideas reflect her own. Through Alfred, Lewald calls for personal freedom and a reform of marital law. It is he who argues that the poet must ‘in Bildern erklären, was die Nation bedarf und fordert.’<sup>420</sup> Yet Alfred’s story not only creates an argument for marital reform, it also provides a commentary on the women surrounding him which is often informed and justified by what they wear.

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<sup>418</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 200.

<sup>419</sup> Whilst in 1840 about 4,000 divorces were reported in Prussia, this number fell to about 3,100 in 1850 and just over 2,700 in 1869, despite a rise in overall population. Even informal separations had to be reported to the state. See Andreas Gestrich, *Geschichte der Familie im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 1999), 33.

<sup>420</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1845), 109.

Indeed, his wife's unattractive character and transgression of gender ideals is conveyed substantially through sartorial detail. Caroline over-does her gender by exaggerating the characteristics of superficiality and frivolousness that patriarchal society readily associated with femininity. Her interest in clothes has the effect of making her both un-desirable and un-German. It even prevents her from being a good wife and mother, serving at times as an excuse for not embracing her familial role. At the beginning of the novel, for instance, Caroline is unwilling to continue with a family walk, ostensibly because her shoes are uncomfortable. Whilst Lewald seems to comment here on the limitations of female attire as much on her character's preoccupation with fashion, impractical clothing and an obsession with the latest trends continually encroach on Caroline's relationship with her son and her husband. Again, Lewald avoids specific contemporary fashion details; the tight sleeves and confining corsetry that characterised women's dress in the 1840s do not figure. Nonetheless, her contemporary readers would have been keenly aware of the impracticality of the bourgeois trends described in Chapter One. It seems speculative but nonetheless possible that Lewald's reluctance to portray Caroline's fashionableness in much detail may be due to the fact that she did not want to alienate her readers who would have followed the same fashions. Her narrative seems to warn against becoming over-interested in fashion, especially as Caroline's son, Felix, who is used to his mother's sartorial fussiness, sees Therese as an honorary aunt, and is impressed by her practical approach to clothes. He tells his mother "die Tanten machen's lange nicht so gefährlich mit ihren Kleidern" as, he believes, mothers do.<sup>421</sup> The boy's remark emphasises the extent to which Caroline forsakes her motherly duty in favour of vanity as Felix is prevented from playing with her and enjoying her company because of her impractical attire. Caroline is also portrayed as a negligent wife. Even when desperate to save her marriage, she entreats her husband to return to her in a letter only to end:

Ich will vergeben und vergessen, darum komme nur bald zurück. Zugleich könntest Du mir ein Dutzend Handschuhe, halb hell, halb dunkel mitbringen, und der B. sagen, daß ich einen Herbsthut in rosa und einige Hauben spätestens kommende Woche haben muß. Adieu, lieber Alfred!<sup>422</sup>

Lewald presents the reader with a humorous caricature, as Caroline writes with more urgency regarding the requirements of her wardrobe than she does in favour of reconciliation, and Alfred aptly sees the letter as proof of the 'Unbildung ihres Geistes und Herzens.'<sup>423</sup> The mention of caps and gloves here may seem unusual to the modern reader, but, as discussed in Chapter One, both

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<sup>421</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage*, 270.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

garments were worn throughout the nineteenth century to the extent that every middle-class woman's wardrobe included many different caps, hats and pairs of gloves (albeit most likely not a dozen new ones at one time). It is therefore more the timing of Caroline's request than the request itself that is striking. Elsewhere Caroline's existence seems increasingly determined by frivolous concerns; when she meets Therese she is weighed down 'unter der Last ihres überladenden Anzugs.'<sup>424</sup> Her attire allows Therese to understand why Alfred cannot love his wife, although it is ironically meant to help win him back. Repeatedly Caroline's frame of reference is limited to appearances. Bemused at Alfred's love of Therese, she asks herself 'Wie kann Alfred mir, *eben mir* dieses bleiche, nicht schöne Mädchen vorziehen?'<sup>425</sup> And later, when the couple is temporarily reconciled, Caroline returns to clothes as a point of comparison and openly criticises Therese to her husband: "Es ist möglich, daß die Brand weniger bedarf als ich, aber wie armselig ist sie auch gekleidet! Freilich ist sie auch so verblüht, daß ihr die glänzendste Toilette nicht helfen könnte" [...].'<sup>426</sup> It is such shallow comments that convince Alfred and the reader that there is no other solution but divorce. Caroline's clothes alienate her from her husband, making it clear that she fails to 'do' her gender with sufficient propriety. Lewald thus portrays a wrong way to perform femininity, without, however, questioning whether the 'right' way might also be socially constructed.

Caroline's exaggeration of feminine stereotypes, whilst in one sense compliant with the nineteenth-century understanding of her gender, is almost as marginalising as a subversive performance of femininity. Her violation of the gender ideal – that 'goldene Mittelstraße' – is met with censure and, eventually, punishment in the form of the divorce. As Butler states, "'coherent identification' has to be cultivated, policed, and enforced; and [...] the violation of that has to be punished [...]."<sup>427</sup> Caroline's violations are numerous. When Caroline appears at a midday meal in ostentatious apparel, for instance, a guest remarks critically, "'Wie Frau von Reichenbach zu einem Mittagmahl unter Freunden sich nur so mit Brillanten beladen kann! Sie ist blendend und schimmernd in allen Farben des Regenbogens.'"<sup>428</sup> As detailed in the previous chapter, the importance of dressing appropriately for every occasion was paramount in mid-nineteenth-century Germany. Caroline's shimmering jewellery hardly corresponds to the 'Voilekleid' and discreet ornaments that were considered the norm for afternoon visits. We are also reminded of the criticism of exaggerated self-adornment in conduct literature and the conviction that the difference between a lady and the *Halbwelt* lies in her ability to avoid too much sartorial

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, 239. My italics.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid, 256-7.

<sup>427</sup> Butler in an interview with Liz Kotz, 'The Body you want' in *Artforum International*, 3. Nov. (XXXI) 1992, 84.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, 274.

accoutrement.<sup>429</sup> Caroline's transgressions against propriety are clear as Lewald continually uses exaggerated language to depict her attire. The image of a burden – 'Last,' 'beladen,' 'überladend' – creates the impression that Caroline's reliance on clothes functions as an outlet for her frustration as she externalizes her feelings of neglect and seeks attention. Such sartorial descriptions emphasise her vacuity and her inability to engage positively with society, but they can also be interpreted from a feminist perspective as creating some understanding for the lonely, unloved wife desperately seeking attention.

Lewald makes clothes a fundamental form of self-expression for several secondary female characters and sets them up as consumers at a time when conspicuous consumption was perceived as a female activity, albeit not yet in those precise terms. As the case of Therese's friend, the young widow Eva von Reichenbach, shows, Lewald's aim is to problematize a certain kind of construction of femininity. From the moment Therese first meets Eva while travelling in a carriage, she is depicted as particularly concerned with her appearance; her preoccupation with herself is reinforced by the unusual amount of contemporary detail in descriptions of her. When the vehicle breaks down, for instance, Eva leaves it only 'nachdem sie sich fest in den rothen Plaidmantel gehüllt, die seidene Capotte aufgesetzt und sich überzeugt hatte, daß das Spitzenhäubchen nicht vom Schläfe gelitten hätte.'<sup>430</sup> The fact that her coat is fashionably checked and her travelling cloak is silk indicates that she considers clothes carefully and spends money on them. This is not in itself incriminating; however, Lewald tends to provide specific sartorial details to highlight the negative characteristics of a female character. Accordingly, whilst Eva's attentions might be read as proof of modesty and decorum, later she continues to give an impression of superficiality which invites a critical reading. When she welcomes Alfred to her overly decorated rooms, for instance, she dresses 'in weißem, mit rosa Bändern geziertem Negligée.'<sup>431</sup> In Chapter One, I explained how the *Negligé* was considered to be 'das Siegesgewand der Frau',<sup>432</sup> a faultless, light-coloured morning gown was seen as a reflection of its wearer's domesticity and purity. Eva's elegant and decorative dress seems to be a conscious effort to adhere to such expectations; still, her appearance reminds Alfred of 'jene Wachspüppchen, die man in Nuß- oder Eierschalen verbirgt'.<sup>433</sup> Indeed, such a detail as 'geziert' undermines the impression of simplicity that Eva seems eager to create. Rather than being a virtue, her sartorial perfection is read as proof of her limitations, in other words the 'Unbildung ihres Geistes'<sup>434</sup> that also defines Caroline. Lewald seems to speak through Alfred (who represents the voice of reason

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<sup>429</sup> See Lütt's comments in Chapter One.

<sup>430</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage*, 29.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Bruck-Auffenberg cites this as a proverbial saying in *Die Frau comme il faut*, 392.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.



more than the voice of patriarchy) when he concludes that Eva's childish mannerisms and fashionable clothes are put on in order to disguise the fact that she is a flirt, but views this not as a moral fault, but rather as the product of society:

Eva ist eins von den vielen harmlosen Mädchen, die von ihren Müttern für den Heirathsmarkt erzogen und mit jenen oberflächlichen Reizmitteln geschmückt worden sind, die die Käufer anlocken und blenden. Wie leer diese armen, kleinen Odaliskinnen selbst dabei ausgehen, wie ohne innern Halt sie dabei bleiben, wenn das Leben ihnen später eine ernstere Seite zeigt, das berücksichtigen die Mütter [...] wenig [...] <sup>435</sup>

Alfred openly criticises the upbringing of girls as limiting and superficial. His portrayal of the vacuous marriage market that relies on modish clothing – ‘oberflächlichen Reizmitteln’ – is typical of Vormärz literature; we are reminded of Dittmar's *Affenmärchen* discussed in the introduction to this thesis and published in the same year as *Eine Lebensfrage*.<sup>436</sup> Lewald suggests through her hero that a marriage determined on such superficial grounds cannot help but fail and indicates that it was perhaps just such ‘marketing’ that led to Alfred's own marital unhappiness. Eva, like Caroline before her, is infantilised and made dependent on clothes because her education is so limited. But Therese's brother Julian finds Eva attractive precisely because of her limited intellect and traditionally feminine attributes: “‘Sie ist hübsch, gutmüthig, reich und gar nicht geistreich, also leicht zu beherrschen. Sie ist eitel, kindisch und naschhaft, also bequem und leicht zu erfreuen.’”<sup>437</sup> For him, at a time when men are plagued by “‘gebildete und geniale Frauen’”,<sup>438</sup> Eva's qualities are rare. Rather than seeing Eva's vanity as reprehensible, Julian responds to it in a way which characterises him as a typical patriarchal figure, eager to dominate women. While Caroline seems to use clothes as a way of consciously manipulating others, Eva seems to know no better. Both women dress to please men like Julian. Eva's behaviour in particular anticipates Strathern's and MacCormack's anthropological theory of female nature as constituted by subordination by patriarchal culture whereby, as Butler summarises, ‘the body and nature are considered to be the mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject.’<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid, 203-4.

<sup>436</sup> The image of the marriage market, and of the woman as a commodity, is prevalent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. The successful woman attracts a husband without openly advertising herself, ‘gleich einer Waare, die nicht ausboten werden darf (...)’ Joachim Campe, *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter: Ein Gegenstück zum Theophron. Der erwachsenen weiblichen Jugend gewidmet* (Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandlung, 1809), 37. Campe's description of marriage as the ultimate goal for women reinforces his market imagery which is used by many others.

<sup>437</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage*, 56.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 50.

Yet Eva's concern with dress is not portrayed as a 'natural' gender trait, but rather as the fault of her education, and her development in the novel is signaled through her changing attitude towards clothes. At one revelatory point she complains that her dresses are decorative instead of practical. When she comes upon an impoverished family and realises for the first time the need that many people face, she can only give money: 'Ich wollte auch gern von meinen Kleidern geben, aber was für nutzlose Lappen besitzen wir in unserer Garderobe! Ich fand kaum ein vernünftiges Stück, das die Leute brauchen konnten, nichts als elenden Atlas und Flor und solch dummes Zeug.'<sup>440</sup> Eva's language both emphasises her intellectual shortcomings and her frustration with her gendered role. Her nouns are simplistic – 'Stück' and 'Zeug' – while her adjectives are strikingly negative: '[un] vernünftig,' 'elend,' 'nutzlos,' and 'dumm.' Eva is clearly no Fräulein von Sternheim, who easily donates her clothes to the poor. Rather she is arguably a more realistic depiction of a nineteenth-century middle-class woman whose main interest is her ability to accentuate her beauty.<sup>441</sup> Again, Lewald merely alludes to the impractical and incommodious bell-shaped skirts, multiple underskirts and girdles that characterised female fashion in the 1840s. By omitting further details, Lewald seems reluctant to launch an attack on her readers who, after all, would have worn the same garments as her self-important characters. Her point is that sartorial concerns can easily override good intentions as well as intellectual fulfilment; Eva soon forgets the poor as she begins preparations for a masked ball. She persuades a young man, Theophil, to be her partner, only to admit that his promise to accompany her wins her the most beautiful bracelet in Berlin since she was involved in a bet with a baroness. Yet towards the end of the novel when Julian falls ill, Eva thinks about her own death and asks Agnes to dress her 'ganz schlicht, ganz weiß, wie Julian mich gern sah, und das goldene Kettchen mit dem Flacon, das laß mich auch im Grabe behalten, es war Julian's letztes Geschenk.'<sup>442</sup> Eva's insistence on attire which was attractive to her admirer sentimentalises death and reinforces how much she depends on male attention to the point that without it she believes that she will (prematurely) die. There is no simplistic transformation from superficiality to modesty: Eva seems, like Caroline, to fail to realise that there is more to life than appearances. Although she recognizes the importance of sartorial modesty, Eva remains inappropriately concerned with her appearance, but Lewald seems to excuse her on the grounds that she is a child who naively reflects society's obsession with image. For Butler, 'all gender-specific affinities are the consequence of internalizations'<sup>443</sup> and

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<sup>440</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage*, 159.

<sup>441</sup> Schopenhauer's comment that the European lady should not exist at all because of her lack of domestic sense and her haughtiness seems to derive in part from such portrayals as this. Eva is too interested in herself to be useful in society. See Schopenhauer, 'On Women' in *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale. (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 87.

<sup>442</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage*, 322.

<sup>443</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 83.

this portrayal of Eva as a romantic white-clad maiden, dying of a broken heart (like Jenny), is an example of how Lewald herself internalised ‘feminine’ images that were common in her time.

Caroline and Eva are described in contrast to the heroine, Therese, who is portrayed in apparently conventional terms as a paragon of femininity because she gives the ‘illusion of an abiding gendered self’.<sup>444</sup> In other words, Therese seems to prove that being a certain kind of woman is a ‘natural’ disposition. She is often busy with domestic tasks and her clothing which, like Jenny’s, is rarely described and is characterised by the sort of extreme simplicity that is typical of nineteenth-century German heroines. When Alfred first sees her after many years of separation, he is convinced that she has noble ancestry, despite – or indeed because of – her vestimentary simplicity and inconspicuousness. Her pallor, blond hair and calm presence are so well matched by her simple apparel that her clothes ‘nicht als etwas Besonderes an ihr auf[fallen].’<sup>445</sup> Therese’s attitude towards costume is revealed in her discussion with Theophil about an upcoming masked ball. Theophil declares that the German spirit is not matched to such hilarity, since “‘wir taugen mit unserm Ernst nicht dazu, und sind gewiß in dem Domino oder im Panzerhemde eben so unbeholfen und ungesellig, als im schwarzen Frack.’”<sup>446</sup> Therese agrees: “‘all diese Maskeraden, die lebenden Bilder, das Komödienspielen und Musicieren in unsern Gesellschaften sind nur Beweise, daß es an wahrer Geselligkeit fehlt.’”<sup>447</sup> Like La Roche in *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, Lewald uses her heroine to criticise aristocratic superficiality which is portrayed as a threat to German bourgeois society. Masked balls, for instance, are depicted as a challenge to virtue. Therese overcomes this challenge with ease, as she proposes, “‘ich kann nicht aus mir heraus gehen, ich bin immer ich, gleichviel in welchem Kleide, in welcher Umgebung.’”<sup>448</sup> Therese’s insistence here on a consistent self-identity can be read as Lewald’s way of reinforcing her legitimacy as a model of her gender and proof of the extent to which Lewald herself is caught up in gender ideals.

While Eva and Caroline appear superficial and Therese is a model of ‘natural’ femininity, Lewald provides another type of woman in the actress Sophie Harcourt. Brazenly associating herself with ‘unnatural’ performance, Sophie uses clothes as costumes both on and off stage and is clearly aware of the role they play in making her attractive. Her profession means that explicit performance is only to be expected; but for her real life too is a theatre which requires dressing up. The dubious reputation of actresses at the time means that Lewald allows herself liberties with Sophie and depicts her in intimate moments that reveal much more profoundly than the depictions

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>445</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage*, 31.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid, 208.

of other secondary female characters the extent to which clothes are chosen as a way of pleasing men. Indeed, Sophie even cross-dresses in order to gain the attention of the man she loves, anticipating in some ways Aston's unconventional character, Alice, in *Lydia* (see below). As Julian's mistress, Sophie is adept at teasing him by using clothes to create erotic fantasy. Julian first saw Sophie dressed as a man, a fact that he refers to later when she greets him in masculine attire again: "Kokette! Du wußtest wohl, wie reizend Du bist in dieser Männertracht, in der ich Dich zuerst sah."<sup>449</sup> She entreats him to admire her costume and how well it suits her. Describing how she poses both before the mirror and her lover, the narrator admits 'man konnte in der That kaum höhern Liebreiz finden. Sie war groß, schlank und kräftig gebaut, ohne große Fülle zu haben. Die Männerkleidung stand ihr vortrefflich und die schwarzen Augen sahen blitzend und zärtlich unter der gepuderten Perrücke hervor.'<sup>450</sup> Both Sophie's stature and her costume are striking: the fact that she is 'kräftig gebaut' rather than voluptuous makes her seem more masculine and suggests that her cross-dressing could be homo-erotic for Julian, while her powdered wig recalls eighteenth-century fashion and the hedonism of that pre-revolutionary era. Sophie knows that Julian finds her attractive in male attire and appeals to him to remember the first time he seduced her.<sup>451</sup> It is then that the pair's estrangement and Sophie's desperation to win back her lover become apparent. The narrator draws attention to the actress's eyes whose 'Zärtlich[keit]' suggests the affection which motivates the costume changes. Her performance may be explicit but it is motivated by genuine feeling and is far from lewd. Indeed, Sophie relies on clothes to express her love for Julian and changes from her masculine garb into a theatrical costume to stand 'in den Sammetescarpins, weißseidnen Strümpfen und einer Weste von Goldbrokat vor ihm, die genau Taille und Hüften bezeichnete, fast bis an das runde Knie hinabreichte und ihren wundervollen Wuchs noch mehr hervorhob.'<sup>452</sup> This time her clothes accentuate her feminine figure and the mention of her hips and knees are particularly striking to the contemporary reader. Fashions in the 1840s may have been suggestive but they exposed very little flesh and only a coquette would have been portrayed in literature with explicit reference to body parts.<sup>453</sup>

Certainly Sophie is depicted here as coquettish, her attire both excessively revealing and expensive (gold, velvet and silk). Such detail indicates her success as an actress and as a mistress; her ability to use clothes to perform for her lover encourages his loyalty. However, this scene suggests desperation more than control as Sophie changes yet again, this time into a silk gown

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid, 58-9.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>451</sup> Julian's fetish could be read in Butlerian terms as a sign of gender melancholy where the heterosexual subject must hide any homosexual tendencies. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 93.

<sup>452</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage*, 62.

<sup>453</sup> See Ulrike Döcker, *Die Ordnung der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1994), 87.

tied at the waist, her hair pinned back. Lewald seems to enjoy describing Sophie in private exhibitionism, but she also intimates ambivalence towards the cross-dressing woman: Sophie wears masculine clothes to seduce her lover and by doing so she panders to his fantasy. She does not attempt to adopt a masculine persona, although she oversteps traditional moral boundaries by admiring her own sensuousness and hinting at sexual desire. After her exhibitions, Julian declares that he loves her more than all the virtuous women in the world and the performance of seduction is an undoubted success.

Ultimately Sophie's clothes, like Caroline's and Eva's, are determined by her desire to appeal to men and reflect patriarchal discourse which defines the 'nature' of women as subservient to and dependent on men. At first they appear to be a vital means of seduction, but their limitations are particularly clear when Julian ends the relationship and Sophie resolves to give up acting and retreat to a nunnery. She begins to wear dark, nun-like dresses and a cap that covers her face. She even dresses in this sombre apparel for the masked ball, where, far from seeming affected she appears 'so ungesucht', 'so ungekünstelt'<sup>454</sup> that Therese is drawn to her. Echoing the heroine's conviction that the internal is more valuable than the external and that appearances can be deceptive, Sophie tells Therese not to assume that she is virtuous simply because of her apparel; it is Therese who is a good woman, for 'Du trägst die Nonnentracht unter dem farbigen Kleide.'<sup>455</sup> The 'Nonnentracht' is presented here as a metaphor for the 'true self'. Sophie seems a transformed woman, for 'selbst ihre Kleidung, schwarz und von einfachster Form, trug dazu bei, sie gänzlich verändert scheinen zu lassen.'<sup>456</sup> Lewald's use of the verb 'scheinen' is significant, as it reminds the reader that Sophie is an actress, adept at using clothes as a means of self-presentation. However, the very choice of garment reveals that the former mistress is not only sexually vivacious as previously depicted, but also sensitive and affectionate. Her black robes, albeit somewhat melodramatic, emphasise her love for Julian and make her a more sympathetic figure for Lewald's contemporary readers. Her renunciation of love, men and with them vestimentary glamour, recalls the fate of many a romantic heroine, from Karoline Fischer's *Margarethe* (1812) to Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's *Ledwina* (1819) and she finally appears to take on a more 'natural' form of femininity.

As this analysis has shown, the personality of Lewald's female characters and their experience of gender conventions are expressed in what they wear - Caroline's clothes reflect her boredom and desperation while Eva's reflect her ignorance and loneliness and Sophie's her devotion to her lover. Lewald seems to use their preoccupation with dress to make a point about the restricting

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<sup>454</sup> Lewald, *Eine Lebensfrage*, 206.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

force of gender categorisation and her work illustrates Butler's notion that performativity can involve the 'repetition of oppressive and [often] painful gender norms' and explores 'the trap that [women are] inevitably in'.<sup>457</sup> Lewald's characters are not all trapped in the same way: some manage to do their gender 'naturally' and therefore succeed at being appropriate heroines and models of femininity. Interestingly, however, this by no means guarantees their happiness. Meanwhile, the women in *Eine Lebensfrage*, for example, seem to have little choice but to attempt to gain attention through their attire; they do not so much accentuate any fundamental vanity in women as establish the frustrations women face with the gender performances patriarchal society assigns. Society is clearly obsessed with both female modesty and female display and the result of this is that the women in the novel are destined to be unhappy whichever way they perform their femininity.

Lewald's female characters' dependence on clothes originates in their inability to rebel against gender norms. Those who do dress ostentatiously are either secondary characters or caricatures and do so in order to gain male approval and feel the power of seduction, limited though it is. For Lewald, heroine-ism (by which I mean an ideal way of being a woman) is earned by rising above such dependence, as she argues that women's rights equality can only be attained by transcending the frivolous characteristics associated with women, although she does not escape the conventions of female dress but rather replaces some for others. Lewald's novels of the 1840s reflect her belief that women have the capacity to match men in intellect. Clementine and Jenny who stand out because of their studiousness and intelligence are dressed 'naturally' and still outshine others in their beauty, indicating that they are performing femininity correctly. Meanwhile, those who, like Caroline and Diogena, indulge vanity by prizing good looks as woman's ultimate advantage are disappointed with their lives. Lewald's use of clothes to characterize her female protagonists is not unlike that of her literary ancestors: the legacy of purity in simplicity and moral dubiousness in sartorial extravagance, set up by La Roche in *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771), continues to persist. It is through dress that Lewald both illustrates her argument that women have a worth beyond their appearance and portrays the desperation of women to gain attention in patriarchal society. Lewald's novels often seem to illustrate the advice found in conduct literature of the nineteenth century on what not to wear. As I have shown, however, model behaviour promises nothing: Lewald's heroines might be paradigms of elegance, but their happiness is tenuous at best, threatened by a society which Lewald recognises is not ready for her liberal message.

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<sup>457</sup> Butler in an interview with Liz Kotz, 'The Body you want' in *Artforum International*, 3. Nov. (XXXI) 1992, 84.

## Louise Aston (1814-1871)

Unlike Lewald, Aston courted controversy by openly challenging gender norms. Her infamous cross-dressing, for example, was an affront to German propriety, an externalisation of her democratic convictions and her refusal of gender limitations. Her behaviour illustrates the instability of gender, exposing and contesting patriarchal concepts of femininity. Surprisingly, Aston did not explain her predilection for masculine attire herself, but her cross-dressing appears not so much a part of sexual fantasy as in the case of Lewald's Sophie, but rather a means of attaining parity with men by undermining visual gender distinctions. Aston is one of the most famous cross-dressers in nineteenth-century European history and is often compared to George Sand, whom she revered. As Sand's letters reveal, dressing as a man was a liberating experience; not only was she able to move more freely and even ride astride, she could also pass for a gentleman. As a man she felt important and respected.<sup>458</sup> Interestingly, like Sand's, Aston's liberal contemporaries who defended her emphasise her feminine elegance. The poet Robert Gottschall, for instance, referred to Aston as a perfect 'Dame', a model of delicacy.<sup>459</sup> However, an anonymous letter to state authorities labels her a dangerous, immoral 'Mannweib', a word which itself suggests an affront to nineteenth-century gender ideals which distinguished the two sexes as polar opposites.<sup>460</sup> Aston's actions and beliefs were perceived as unwomanly, atheistic and treasonous. Her claim to equality was too overt to avoid scandal: she was expelled from Berlin in 1846 – and from numerous other cities after that – and was spied on wherever she went. Aston's sartorial practices demonstrate the extent to which early women's rights activists were exposed to censorship if they did not comply with gender norms.

In anticipation of twentieth-century feminist theory, Aston argues for emancipation because she objected to the fact that women were treated as objects and believed in gender equality. The ornamental nature of feminine attire in the 1840s only reinforced the extent to which women were seen as status symbols and objects to be admired. Aston's willingness to appear both as 'Louise' and 'Louis',<sup>461</sup> both in dresses and in trousers, both sexually alluring and politically subversive, embodies her Saint-Simonian challenge to patriarchal order. Instead of preaching the importance of love within marriage as Lewald did, Aston argued that love outside of marriage represented real freedom. For Aston, marriage was a legal form of prostitution, an affront to female individuality. 'Ich verwerfe die Ehe,' she writes in *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und*

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<sup>458</sup> See Elizabeth Harlan, *George Sand* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 86-88.

<sup>459</sup> Rudolf Gottschall, *Aus meiner Jugend in Für die Selbstverwirklichung der Frau: Louise Aston* (Fischer: Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 48.

<sup>460</sup> Germaine Goetzinger, *Für die Selbstverwirklichung der Frau: Louise Aston* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983), 23-25.

<sup>461</sup> See *ibid.*, 25.

*Rechtfertigung* after her expulsion from Berlin, ‘weil sie zum Eigentume macht, was nimmer *Eigentum* sein kann; *die freie Persönlichkeit* (...)’.<sup>462</sup> Such Saint-Simonian views were rare; one of the few other woman who dared to write so brazenly in favour of sexual relationships outside marriage was the Frenchwoman Clare Démar whose suicide in 1833 preceded the publication of her most liberal work *Ma loi d’avenir*. Démar’s views were far too radical for her time and a decade later, when Aston was publishing, they still were.<sup>463</sup> In this section, I will examine how Aston approached the idea of sexual liberation in her novels and question how she conveyed her notion of freedom as linked to sexual autonomy in the clothes her characters wear.

## Secondary Literature

Aston is often mentioned on the periphery as a point of reference or a footnote rather than an author worthy of detailed consideration. She is, for instance, often compared to her contemporaries to illustrate the *Zeitgeist* of pre-revolutionary Germany. Since not much is known about her life, scholars have tended to draw conclusions about her biography by focusing on her writing, published in its entirety between 1846 and 1849; and it is commonly argued that it is her life rather than her fictional works which makes her radical. Germaine Goetzinger’s *Louise Aston* provides both biographical facts and details on contemporary reception which have been particularly informative for this chapter. Goetzinger deems Aston’s fictional output ‘oft hart an der Grenze zur Trivialliteratur’, although her ‘originelle und bizarre Gestalt’ makes her an historical protagonist, notable for her utopian feminism.<sup>464</sup> Other studies examine Aston’s contradictory work and life in more detail. Boetcher-Joeres sums her up as ‘an awkward case’, an example of radicalism which is ‘pure performance’, ‘more acquiescence than conviction’.<sup>465</sup> She sees Aston as a woman torn by contrasting ideologies and categories who eventually opts for a traditional view of womanhood. Joeres emphasises that Aston’s ambivalence lies in her tendency both to protest against conventional social constructions and accept them, but does not provide examples of how this works beyond the plot of her novel *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*. Kerstin Wiedemann focuses on the same book as proof of Aston’s emancipatory attitude towards love and compares her to her role model George Sand to explain how a woman’s need for love is declared as the basis of a new understanding of female identity.<sup>466</sup> This premise is central to my analysis, but as with Joeres, Wiedemann’s analysis is cursory. In *Literatur und Politik in der Heinezeit*, Anne Kuhlmann also demonstrates how Aston’s plots and female stereotypes are stilted and

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<sup>462</sup> Aston *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung*, cited in *ibid*, 13.

<sup>463</sup> See Herta Nagl-Docekal and Cornelia Klinger, eds., *Continental Philosophy in Feminist Perspective: Re-Reading the Canon in German* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010).

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>465</sup> Boetcher-Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, 110.

<sup>466</sup> See Kerstin Wiedemann, *Zwischen Irritation und Faszination: George Sand und ihre deutsche Leserschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*, 305.



unoriginal. However, she does begin to show how Aston both draws on and distorts traditional symbolism.<sup>467</sup> Kontje goes further. In *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation*, he dedicates a chapter to Aston which explains in more detail how Aston uses ‘hackneyed literary convention to reveal the brutal reality of many women’s experience’<sup>468</sup> and ‘conventional means to achieve highly unconventional ends’.<sup>469</sup> Finally, Kontje cautions against a superficial reading of Aston’s work as sentimental *Trivilliteratur* and shows how the radical author was true to her emancipatory beliefs. He also makes a valuable point about the extent to which judging women’s writing as qualitatively good or bad is limiting.<sup>470</sup> While Joeres, Wiedemann, Kuhlmann and Kontje focus substantially on plot and theme, I consider how their interpretation of Aston as a conventional and yet subversive writer is sustained by her use of sartorial descriptions as a means of exploring feminine sexuality and gender trouble.

### ***Aus dem Leben einer Frau (1847)***

Aston’s first novel *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, published in 1847 when women’s rights were a topical issue, draws on Saint-Simonian theory and both mimics and displaces traditional conceptions of gender. *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* reads in part as a treatise against arranged marriages at a time when Hahn-Hahn, Mathilde Annecke and Malwida von Meysenburg, like Lewald, were making a similar plea. It tells the story of a pastor’s daughter, Johanna, whose father orders her to marry a rich businessman, despite her vow to wed the man she loves. Refusing to give in to her entreaties, her father maintains that wealth will buy her happiness. When Johanna insists that he does not have the right to marry her off against her will, he curses her and launches a physical attack, but simultaneously suffers a stroke in which he loses the power of speech. Remorseful, Johanna accepts his wishes and appears to be a typical female heroine in her submission; as Boetcher-Joeres points out, Aston echoes ‘everybody from Samuel Richardson to the German romantics and the Young Germans’ and allows her heroine ‘above all to be victimized by her gender’.<sup>471</sup> That gender is shown to be characterized by vulnerability and docility. Johanna marries Oburn, a fat, middle-aged man who grows so sexually excited during the ceremony that he orders his servant to find a hotel room as quickly as possible. Sexual exploitation is central to Aston’s critique of arranged marriage; Johanna’s new husband not only asserts control over her fate, but also over her body. Aston’s premise is polemical as she sets out to disprove patriarchal ideas about gender which associate men with power and the mind and women with subservience and the body.

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<sup>467</sup> See Anne Kuhlmann, in *Literatur und Politik in der Heinezeit*, 136.

<sup>468</sup> See Kontje, *Women, the Novel, And the German Nation*, 173.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>470</sup> Todd Kontje, ed., *A Companion to German Realism* (London: Camden House, 2002), 74.

<sup>471</sup> Boetcher-Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, 114.

The modern reader may hope for a realization of Aston's ideals and wait for Johanna to emancipate herself by leaving her husband, but, deep in gender trouble, Aston is full of contradictions and is apparently aware of the consequences of overtly subversive writing. Hence her heroine's behaviour is far from being a celebratory rejection of gender norms: Johanna refuses to have an affair with a man she is attracted to because she is concerned for her reputation; resists the advances of a prince who then tries to rape her; and begins a friendship with a baron who seems the most likely suitor to respect Johanna as an equal until he is killed by the prince in a duel defending Johanna's honour, a moment that evokes the count's death in *Jenny*. The plotline suggests that Aston is concerned with reputation and stops short of allowing her heroine to indulge in the sorts of relationships she was herself infamous for in order to convey the injustices of marriage with propriety. Aston's argument shifts from a focus on sexual liberation to social injustice as Oburn, who encourages his wife to dress opulently in public, exploits his factory workers and enjoys excessive luxuries. When informed of his workers' uprising against cuts in wages, he reacts mercilessly, telling his accountant to refuse them any raise and calling his wife a sentimental fool when she objects. For Oburn, politics and economic supremacy are the domain of the wealthy man. Johanna sells her jewellery in order to add to the workers' wages and insists upon dismissing the servants and running the household herself in order to save money. She retaliates against Oburn because she does not share his superficial, mercenary interests, a fact that is suggested by her disregard for clothing and jewellery. When his bank goes into debt, Oburn is suddenly ruined. He plans to prostitute his wife to the prince for enough money to save his business, but she takes a stand, declaring, as she did to her father at the beginning of the novel, that he has no right to control her. This time, however, Johanna acts on her word and leaves her husband without a farewell. The end of the story and Aston's conclusion that her heroine upholds the sanctity of marriage by revolting against marital abuse – '*Sie rettete die Heiligkeit der Ehe, indem sie dieselbe zerriss!*'<sup>472</sup> – are notably awkward. Boetcher-Joeres describes it as 'a highly problematic conclusion that mixes the triumph of the heroine's departure from her marriage with the amorphous phraseology of a hymn to love.'<sup>473</sup> What the ensuing freedom could mean for the divorced heroine in a society which imposes so many constrictions on women is unclear. The conclusion feels tenuous as Aston seems wary of the importance of upholding the illusion of gender stability even as she undermines it.

As Chapter One indicates, sartorial exuberance was most often associated with women, and paying attention to clothes was a fundamental way of showing that they complied with

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>473</sup> Boetcher-Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, 114.

‘recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.’<sup>474</sup> Yet Lewald insists that Clementine’s husband is the one who wishes her to dress ostentatiously and Aston, too, makes sure that men are shown to be more interested in clothes than her heroine. Oburn and the prince, both of whom are morally corrupt and sexually perverse, dress ostentatiously and treat Johanna as a kind of doll. Aston’s portrayal of them suggests that women do not dress for themselves but rather for men either in an attempt to attract them, because they insist upon it or, as Veblen argues at the end of the century, in order to show off their husband’s wealth.<sup>475</sup> Indeed, she does not seem to understand sartorial concerns as innately feminine. The men’s obsession with decorative clothing evokes the excess of pre-revolutionary France and, predictably for a bourgeois heroine, Johanna resists emulating the aristocratic and nouveau riche society that upholds debauchery just like La Roche’s famous heroine a generation earlier. Fräulein von Sternheim wears a costume for the masked ball provided by her aunt, but unbeknownst to her it was designed by the prince who is pursuing her and whose insistence on choosing her clothes suggests that he owns her. When she discovers his intentions, the heroine tears off her dress and ornaments, which disgust rather than attract her.<sup>476</sup> Aston’s protagonist is similar in her disregard for sartorial riches and her reluctance to sell herself for the sake of splendour. Johanna first refuses to obey her father even though his proposed son-in-law will provide her with jewels and expensive dresses. The satin dress and gems that are laid out on the table in her father’s home are designed to tempt her into submission, but Johanna insists on favouring love and a simple life over material ease. When she does give in, it is out of filial guilt and fear for her father’s life. Her reluctance is apparent in her choice of plain attire when she appears at her wedding like ‘ein bleiches Engelsbild’, ‘ein echter Madonnenkopf’ beside the groom, a ‘Feuerkönig’ who wears ‘modisch-elegante Kleidung’.<sup>477</sup> In such descriptions, Aston’s use of a third person omniscient narrator is strategic: it emphasizes the villainous personality of the secondary characters whilst drawing attention to their often elevated positions in society. She provides an objective yet ironic description of Oburn, a short, red-faced man of fifty with a pot belly that is, the narrator sardonically reports, dignifying. Oburn’s sartorial pomp contrasts with Johanna’s simplicity; his appearance recalls the extravagance of eighteenth-century aristocratic fashions while she conveys the values of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, appearing ‘schmucklos und einfach’ in her white gown. Aston, an atheist, allows herself a critique of institutionalised religion as the chaste heroine can only look up to heaven whilst the priest conducts a pompously Christian ceremony, pronouncing Oburn, who has just been likened to the

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<sup>474</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22.

<sup>475</sup> See Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class* (Forgotten Books, 1965), 109-110.

<sup>476</sup> See Sophie von La Roche, *Die Geschichte des Fräulein von Sternheim* (1771) (Munich: Wieland, 1976), 160-174.

<sup>477</sup> Louise Aston, *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* (Hamburg, 1847), 21.

devil, her lord and master, ““(…) er soll dein Herr sein.””<sup>478</sup> Through such ironic associations, Aston exposes patriarchal society as immoral, since it essentially preaches the enslavement of womankind. Later, too, the difference between immoral husband and virtuous wife is conveyed through clothes as Johanna ignores her husband’s wishes that she dress more alluringly and less like a nun. Her nun-like apparel symbolises simplicity but also inviolable chastity; her predilection for such garments suggests a desire for protection from her husband and other men. Angered by her modesty, Oburn rails, ““Ich will nicht, daß meine Frau wie eine Nonne einhergehen soll! Rasch! Putze Dich! Zieh’ ein reiches Gewand an, und schmücke mit den Rubinen Deinen weißen Hals.””<sup>479</sup> Defiant, Johanna opts for a plain white dress reminiscent of her wedding attire. Her refusal to dress as he wishes is clearly an attempt to assert herself and fight against patriarchal order. The heroine’s sartorial simplicity and Oburn’s contrasting obsession with sartorial pomp also reads as Aston’s means of validating the eventual breakdown of the marriage. In this respect, Aston’s vestimentary symbolism is similar to Lewald’s in *Eine Lebensfrage*. Oburn’s immorality is portrayed in part through his concern for his wife’s appearance and his encouragement of excess while Caroline’s is portrayed through her concern for her own. In both cases the partners are to be judged unworthy in part because of their willingness to adopt a system whereby women are objectified and associated with frivolous concerns. However, as Chapter One indicates, the same system warns against excessive vanity, expensive clothing and conspicuous jewellery. Therefore the case against Oburn and Caroline is two-fold: not only do they treat women as objects, they also fail to uphold bourgeois German values. In portraying Oburn thus, Aston seems to be drawing attention to the inherent contradictions in patriarchal order while criticising the social system.

Aston conveys socialist ideals through her heroine who, despite the socio-political notions she expresses, appears as classically ‘feminine’ as her counterparts in Lewald’s novels. In conventional terms, Johanna is effortlessly beautiful; she receives attention without seeking it and with one possible exception is exempt from vanity. Amidst the aristocratic splendour of Karlsbad, for instance, Johanna continues to dress modestly, but never fails to attract attention because of her striking beauty. Graf Reitzenstein and Baron Stein admire her as she passes ‘in einfacher eleganter Kleidung’.<sup>480</sup> Aston mirrors contemporary conduct advice, celebrating the combination of simplicity and elegance as essential to the feminine ideal. The count insists that given her face, stature and graceful toilette she could not possibly be bourgeois. The suggestion is that middle-class women are physiologically different to their noble peers and that they try harder to appear expensively dressed; as a result they often fail to look graceful. Yet, Johanna’s tasteful dress

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, 32.

reinforces the impression of moral (bourgeois) superiority, for she remains noticeably separate from the corrupt (aristocratic) society that surrounds her. That is not to say that her wardrobe is limited to white and black, which, as Chapter One describes, were considered safe, modest and elegant colours: later, for example, when out riding with the baron whom she has befriended, the heroine is charming in a 'stahlgrünen, enganschliessenden Reitkleide'.<sup>481</sup> Basic colour symbolism prevails as the green garment evokes hope, peace and life, complementing the natural setting. After confiding her marital woes to the baron, Johanna is happier, able to ride graciously and confidently and the fact that her dress is 'enganschliessend' suggests her sexuality and desirability; it is clear that the generous-hearted Stein finds her attractive and that their friendship could develop into something more amorous. While she wears sombre colours and outfits that look excessively chaste in her husband's company, she seems eager to appear attractive before a man whom she respects and who respects her. Johanna dresses differently in society and her discomfort around the prince and Oburn is illustrated by her choice of sartorial styles that symbolise sexual inaccessibility; she appears either as a virgin or a nun. When preparing for the prince's ball, for instance, she is indifferent to her own reflection and the narrator observes: 'Ein echtes Weib ist nur dann eitel, wenn sie den Geliebten durch ihre Reize beseligen will.'<sup>482</sup> Here Aston allows women vanity when in love, and by using the adjective 'echt' suggests that this applies to all 'real' women, who cannot be stereotyped as simply good or bad, virtuous or narcissistic. In her attempt to resist traditional assumptions about female vanity, however, Aston actually reiterates gender ideals. In Butlerian terms, the 'echt' itself appears deceptive; it is an attempt to suggest that there is a concept of real gender underneath social perceptions of it and thus indicates the extent to which Aston herself perceives gender as 'natural'.

Aston draws further on gender conventions as depictions of other female characters reinforce the link between femininity, powerlessness, love and clothes. They also allow Aston to distinguish between aristocratic practices and bourgeois respectability. Johanna is a bourgeois heroine in a book full of aristocrats and the story presents a number of socialist ideas. The aristocratic women Johanna encounters dress to please men and appear shallow and vain. But if the 'echtes Weib' becomes vain in order to seduce her lover, then the description of the ball exposes seduction as the main activity for such women and Aston proposes that Johanna is exempt only because she is not in love. At the ball bourgeois integrity is set against aristocratic depravity as Johanna's simple, but pretty dress contrasts with the ostentatious attire of the prince's wife and his mistress, the Gräfin Lichtenfels. Once again, the bourgeois heroine evokes images of Christian virtue, while the aristocratic women excel at artifice and call up pagan associations. Johanna is dressed

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<sup>481</sup> Aston, *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, 79.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

fashionably, wearing ‘ein weisses Blondenkleid, mit Rosa-Atlas gefüttert, einen Kranz von natürlichen Rosen in den langen braunen Locken, und um den marmorweissen Hals eine Schnur echter Perlen.’<sup>483</sup> As Chapter One explains, delicate floral and pearl ornaments were often used to accessorise a young woman’s costume in the middle of the nineteenth century. Such detail here emphasises the heroine’s naturalness and paleness as well as her vulnerability and virtue; Johanna’s maid Lisette proclaims her mistress ‘engelsschön’.<sup>484</sup> The whiteness of the dress, the natural roses and the string of pearls are all obvious evocations of Christian symbolism where white stands for purity, roses are associated with the Virgin Mary and Christian martyrdom, while pearls represent Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>485</sup> Despite Aston’s own atheist stance, she seems to be making a conscious appeal to her readers to sympathise with Johanna by using Christian symbolism. Meanwhile, the prince’s wife wears diamonds and make-up, a rare detail in literature of this period which reinforces traditional associations between cosmetics and moral laxity (see Chapter One). The princess’s make-up is deceptive and ineffective: ‘vergebens borgten ihre eingefallenen Wangen von der Schminke einen lügenerischen Glanz.’<sup>486</sup> The adjective ‘lügenerisch’ is particularly striking and makes Aston’s narrative into an illustration of advice found so often in contemporary conduct literature which condemned cosmetics as lewd and immoral. The prince’s mistress also contrasts with Johanna, as she flaunts her adulterous affair by wearing a revealing gown:

Es war eine Junonische Figur (...) Ihr Teint war blendend weiss, ätherisch gehoben durch ein feuerrothes Creppkleid, das den üppigen Busen, die Schultern und Arme frei liess. Aehren und Diamanten waren überreich in die Locken genestelt und zeugten von dem feinen Geschmack und dem Reichthum der Dame.<sup>487</sup>

This description evokes the image of the sinful Magdalene and the pagan goddesses Juno and, as the countess is later called, Circe. Aston’s pagan and Christian allusions make up a patchwork of fallen women which emphasizes the extent to which Aston is willing to engage in conventional discourse. The reader is clearly meant to see these women in a negative light. While décolletage was the norm in evening attire throughout the century, the fact that Aston mentions the mistress’s bosom, shoulders and arms and dresses her in red draws attention to her sexuality. As scholar Ulrike Döcker points out, in the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie considered that ‘Nur die Buhlerin und die Kokette besitzen (...) einen sinnlichen Körper – er ist aber irritierend und

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> See Lucia Impelluso, *Nature and Its Symbols* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2004), 118 and Watchman Nee, *The King and the Kingdom of Heaven* (Richmond: Christian Fellowship Publications, 1980), 177.

<sup>486</sup> Aston, *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, 48.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid, 48.

bedrohlich, ein Werkzeug des Teufels.’<sup>488</sup> In contrast to the timid Johanna, the countess parades her body, her wealth and her affair with the prince shamelessly and threateningly, despite the princess’s presence. Her colouring is artificially whitened by the deep hue of her gown, whilst Johanna’s marble-white neck needs no contrast to embellish it. Described in such negative terms and blamed for the princess’s marital distress, the countess represents a demonic seductiveness, an obvious ‘monster’ to oppose the ‘angelic’ heroine. Such stereotyping relies on an awareness of sartorial standards; both the princess and the mistress ‘put on’ a certain kind of negatively characterized femininity, enacting their desire and desperation to be noticed by exerting power in the only way they know how. Beauty is depicted here as the way women compete with one another and wield influence over men; the competition is full of affectation and pathos that highlight the restrictiveness of female gender.

Aston draws from contemporary discourse on ideal German femininity and the vilification of her secondary female characters depends on their failure to be Germanic models of modesty. By 1848, a year after the publication of *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, journals were celebrating German sartorial simplicity and the role women played in supporting the German economy. As Sabine Kienitz describes in her article “‘Aecht deutsche Weiblichkeit’ – Mode und Konsum als bürgerliche Frauenpolitik 1848’, the ‘Leitsatz (der) bürgerlichen Moral war Bescheidenheit’<sup>489</sup> and “‘Einfachheit” wurde zum Kampfbegriff der demokratischen Bewegung, die Luxus, Konsum und Mode mit aristokratischem Lebensstandard gleichsetzte und diesen ebenso ablehnte wie ständische Privilegien.’<sup>490</sup> Women were called upon to dress ‘naturally’ and to avoid any sort of ostentatious embellishment. Newspapers such as *Sonne* addressed women specifically and associated sartorial pomp with foreign corruption: ‘Alles Zwecklose verbannet! Eben das Zwecklose ist das Unvernünftige, das Unvernünftige das Geschmacklose und Unnatürliche (...) Verbannet den fremden Prunk, der euch zu den Affen der Nachbarstaaten (...) machte.’<sup>491</sup> Such statements were part of a long-standing debate about what it meant to be German and the importance of characterizing national identity in opposition to that of neighbouring countries. By depicting aristocratic women as false and dependent on ornate clothes, Aston participates in this debate. Aston creates a bourgeois heroine who manages to avoid the ‘unbegrenzt(e) Modesucht’<sup>492</sup> that was seen as a French disease infiltrating Germany and seducing its women. Aston’s aim seems to be a celebration of the rise of the middle-class and nationalism, and to achieve that she is compelled to exemplify the phantasmic norms of femininity.

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<sup>488</sup> Döcker, *Die Ordnung der bürgerlichen Welt*, 87.

<sup>489</sup> Sabine Kienitz, “‘Aecht deutsche Weiblichkeit’- Mode und Konsum als bürgerliche Frauenpolitik 1848’ in *Schimpfende Weiber und patriotische Jungfrauen*, ed. Carola Lipp (Moos: Elster, 1986), 316.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid*, 317.

<sup>491</sup> *Sonne*, 19/7/1848 cited in *ibid*, 318.

<sup>492</sup> *RMC* 5/11/1847 cited in *ibid*, 312.

As Boetcher-Joeres remarks, gender (revision) and nationalism are prominent themes in Aston's work, but the latter often eclipses the former.<sup>493</sup> In making her heroine a representative of emancipated and virtuous femininity, Aston presents us with an 'angel'; but an analysis of her writing in view of Gilbert's and Gubar's premise that 'a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male authors have generated for her [in order to achieve creative freedom]' challenges the reader to look for ways in which Aston dismantles the stereotypes she regurgitates.<sup>494</sup> Aston clothes Johanna in seraphic garb; has her, like Lewald's Therese, condemn social artifice (Johanna describes society to Stein as the 'Marionettenspiel einer innerlich hohlen Gesellschaft' full of 'platten, indifferenten Gesichter (...)')<sup>495</sup>; and makes her the model of charity in a Christian sense, where charity consists of an unlimited loving-kindness towards others and is the greatest of the three theological virtues. All these features uphold the angelic ideal, but Aston presents a number of contradictions by trying to transcend this label and show how Johanna does not abide by patriarchal values. When she refuses to consummate her love for the doctor, for example, it is not out of piety, but rather because she is proud and realises that society prevents her from loving freely. She declares,

Ich bin keine von den christlichen Hausfrauen, welche die heissen Wünsche ihres Herzens, aus Furcht moralischer Abkanzelung oder ewiger Strafe, unterdrücken, und in ihrem Tugendbewusstsein reichlichen Ersatz für alles geopferte Glück finden. Ich bin nichts weiter – als *stolz* – ich will keine Seligkeit, die ich mir stehlen, über die ich vor der Welt erröthen müsste.<sup>496</sup>

The use of 'heisse Wünsche' and 'Seligkeit' indicates the desire for a sexual liaison as something semi-religious. Johanna resists her own desires out of pride and has more principles and integrity than anyone else in the novel, but she clearly follows a different system of belief than that upheld by patriarchal Christianity and is no pious housewife. Aston depends on the fact that Johanna fulfills many expectations of the angelic ideal in order to legitimize her convictions concerning the oppressiveness of marriage, but she invites confusion and by presenting contradictions she reveals gender to be shifting and fluid.

Aston's use of sartorial characterization reassures the contemporary reader that Johanna's breach of conjugal duty – and in turn her transgression of the 'feminine' norm of renunciation and passivity – are justified. While Oburn expects her to perform the unspeakable (delineated in hyphens in the text) and offers her to the prince, Johanna appears 'nicht mehr so frisch und

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<sup>493</sup> See Boetcher-Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, 114-15.

<sup>494</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), 17.

<sup>495</sup> Aston, *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, 42.

<sup>496</sup> *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, 37.



blühend' but nobly pale in a 'schlichten, tiefschwarzen Kleide'.<sup>497</sup> Rather obviously, the black colour suggests widowhood, elegance and resolution, whilst the nun-like simplicity of her costume reinforces her propriety. Johanna responds accordingly, "Du hast kein Recht, über meine Liebe und meine Ehre zu bestimmen. Ich werde die heiligsten Rechte meines Herzens und Lebens wahren – dies ist die Stelle, die uns auf ewig trennen muss."<sup>498</sup> Crucially, she does not leave her husband for another man, but rather takes it upon herself to sever the marital bond. In so doing she claims what in Christian terms is a divine right. Johanna places herself above patriarchal society that allows such wrongs as she has suffered. She evokes '*das Recht der freien Persönlichkeit*' that Aston defines in *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung* as 'Unser höchstes Recht, uns're höchste Weihe'.<sup>499</sup> Her words are easily understood in the context of Saint-Simonian theory as a celebration of the individual and a problematisation of gender identity.

The conflict between conformity and radicalism, phantasmic norms and gender trouble, is as evident in *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* as it is in Lewald's work. Johanna is a victim heroine, but she is not self-destructive as are so many of her literary ancestors;<sup>500</sup> she is held up as a Christian model of virtue, but also declares that she is not a typical Christian housewife; she displays none of the vanity moralists warn against, but she is not above wearing a fashionably tight and attractive riding dress when in the company of a man she likes. Boetcher-Joeres alludes to the 'ambiguity of many voices'<sup>501</sup> in Aston's work and concludes that her 'heroines cater openly and willingly to the patriarchy not because they are subtly undermining the system but because they seem to want to be part of it, perhaps even to support and further its values.'<sup>502</sup> This examination of Johanna's sartorial practices proves her point; in the novel Aston seems to imitate models of femininity, but the values she puts forward nonetheless present a challenge to mid nineteenth-century German society. Aston appeals to the link between women and sentiment, accepting gender stereotypes in order to argue for more choice and, in this case, the element of gender subversion that exists is to be found in Johanna's insistence on marital separation.

### **Lydia (1847)**

Aston's second novel, *Lydia*, is more varied in its use of dress to explore gender performativity and sexuality. Anna Richards suggests that the novel is progressive because it shows the belief

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>499</sup> Aston, *Mein Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung* in Goetzinger, ed. *Für die Selbstverwirklichung der Frau: Louise Aston*, 61-62. Original italics.

<sup>500</sup> See Kontje, *Women, the Novel, And the German Nation*, p.173.

<sup>501</sup> Boetcher Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, p.114.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid, p.113.

that women lack sexual desire to be ‘a dangerous patriarchal myth.’<sup>503</sup> The heroine is not conscious of her own libido, but dress descriptions – as well as her physical and mental instability – demonstrate her instinctual desire and need for sexual fulfillment. Where Kontje identifies a ‘bizarre variation on the old theme of seduced innocence’,<sup>504</sup> there is a story of female longing and disappointment as well as violation and abuse and this story depends on the naivety of the heroine, Lydia. Lydia’s complete ignorance about the ways of the world makes her attractive to the Baron von Landsfeld whose experiment into the trustworthiness of the female sex forms the basis of the plot. He investigates the nature of the female libido at a time when (moral, bourgeois) women were presumed to lack sexual urges and to submit to sex in order to please their husbands and to procreate.<sup>505</sup> The woman Landfeld plans to marry in the hope that she will restore his faith in women by remaining sexually pure even after their marriage is naïve and artless. She is a sharp contrast to the sexually assertive Cornelia von Hohenhausen and the emancipated Alice von Rosen, Landsfeld’s former mistress. Again we are met with an apparent angel (Lydia) and a monster (Cornelia), but the portrayal of Alice and the suggestion of Lydia’s sexual frustration represent a challenge to conventional gender categorisation.

As a summary will show, the plot is melodramatic and contrived, full of moments where women transgress against gendered norms. The melodrama detracts from Aston’s serious message about the plight of women, but it also enhances it. After insulting Arthur Berger (Lydia’s fiancé) and Alice, who are conducting an affair, Landsfeld takes part in a duel with Berger. Interestingly, this takes place just after Alice and Cornelia cross swords in a parody of the masculine tradition of defending one’s honour by fighting. Landsfeld informs Lydia of Berger’s disloyalty, upon which Lydia breaks her engagement. Having moved to Berlin, Lydia falls in love with and marries Landsfeld, whom she trusts blindly. He, however, has no qualms about visiting Cornelia’s salon and humiliating Berger further by seducing an actress whom Berger has been admiring. The marriage between Landsfeld and Lydia is not consummated, and Lydia becomes restless and moody, without knowing why. Neither her mother nor Landsfeld have enlightened Lydia about sex, but she guesses that there is something she does not yet understand when her married friend, Therese, calls her prudish for being shocked at the idea of sharing a bed with her husband. Meanwhile Cornelia encourages Berger to get revenge on the baron and his wife by kidnapping Lydia. Alice hears about the plan and informs Landsfeld, urging him to action. In the end it is she who stops Berger and Cornelia from carrying out their conspiracy. Having imprisoned Lydia, Berger is about to rape her, but Alice threatens him with the dagger she always carries. After this

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<sup>503</sup> Richards, *The Wasting Heroine in German Fiction by Women*, 124.

<sup>504</sup> Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation*, 176.

<sup>505</sup> See Richards, *The Wasting Heroine in German Fiction by Women*, 123-124 and Rüdiger Schnell, *Sexualität und Emotionalität in der vormodernen Ehe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2002), 409.

incident Lydia's mother dies and Lydia falls into a nervous fever. Once recovered, she accepts a visit from the now pregnant Therese. The latter realises that what she thought was prudery was in fact virginal ignorance. Lydia appeals to her husband to tell her the truth, "Richard, bin ich Deine Gattin, Dein Weib, im vollsten Sinne des Worts?" Landsfeld enlightens his wife by deflowering her. The effect is devastating: Lydia cries for her mother, declaring "Er hat mich nie geliebt.- Ich bin entehrt."<sup>506</sup> She becomes dumb and mad. Months later Alice meets Landsfeld, who commits suicide over the body of his dead baby son, the result of Lydia's deflowering. Alice then visits Lydia, who is cured from madness upon seeing her husband's corpse. The novel concludes with Alice and Lydia in mourning attire on their way to Italy.

Aston's heroine Lydia embodies the feminine ideal: she is innocent, passive, weak and ignorant, but also frustrated, confused and deeply unhappy. In contrast to Johanna, she is seldom portrayed through dress even though the other female characters in the novel are typified by their clothing. This unequal emphasis on clothes suggests two things: firstly, that Lydia is distinguished by her emotional, sexual and psychological confusion, rather than her appearance. Her clothes serve limited purpose in depicting her state of mind. Secondly, and arguably paradoxically, the fact that Aston does not focus on her heroine's dress indicates that Lydia never assumes the 'freie Persönlichkeit', the complete fulfillment and liberation of the public and private self, that would enable her to be treated as a complete human being and which seems, at least in part, contingent upon sexual awareness, although this awareness is also depicted as demeaning and as a way of subjugating women. The implication is that her dresses are assigned to her, rather than chosen by her. Modestly robed in white, Lydia seems entirely ignorant of the lures of vanity and fashion. The nineteenth-century reader might have been tempted to see this as a sign of her moral superiority, but Aston seems rather to aim at emphasizing her ignorance; it is ignorance that contributes to Lydia's eventual insanity. Indeed, throughout the story Lydia's lack of character is remarkable. She is powerless against the machinations of her husband and his foes and does not even understand herself. After breaking her engagement with Berger, for instance, she finds: 'Sie war sich selbst ein Rätsel. Dies machte sie unruhig, und, was ihrem sonstigen Wesen ganz fremd war, launisch.'<sup>507</sup> Later, on her wedding night, she tells her nursemaid that she is anxious, but cannot say why, "ich kann es nicht beschreiben – unnennbar – überwältigend – tief beseligend – angsterfüllend.---"<sup>508</sup> Aston's punctuation reinforces Lydia's sense of incompleteness and confusion as the hyphen, often indicative of sexual consummation, represents here the heroine's longing and powerlessness. She does not forge her own fate, but rather succumbs to it. It is no

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<sup>506</sup> Louise Aston, *Lydia* (Magdeburg: Emil Baensch, 1848), 276.

<sup>507</sup> Aston, *Lydia*, 132.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

surprise, then, that Lydia appears ‘naturally’ female, mostly in modest, white clothing that reinforces the impression of her (enforced) chastity and inexperience.

Yet one garment, the cap, does evoke Lydia’s sexuality in a way which challenges the illusion of gender, and what it meant for nineteenth-century bourgeois women. As Chapter One indicates, headwear was a vital accessory throughout much of the nineteenth century. In Lydia’s case, caps are particularly important sartorial features. They act as a metaphoric barrier to her sexuality by covering her hair and are the most-mentioned garment in descriptions of her. At the beginning of the novel, for example, she is depicted looking out her window at dawn, wearing a ‘sehr reizende[s] Morgenhäubchen (...) eben so untadelhaft, wie das lange faltige, blendend weisse Morgenkleid, das bis hoch über die Schulter hinaufreichte.’<sup>509</sup> Despite this virginal unrevealing attire, Lydia’s ‘Blick in die Ferne’ suggests that she unconsciously awaits a sexual awakening. Her morning cap is, significantly, ‘sehr reizend’. On her wedding night the sensuality of her hair is particularly evident. When the baron comes to his bride, he objects to the ‘zierlich gestickten [Nachthäubchen], welches Lydiens Haar gefangen hielt’<sup>510</sup> on the premise that art cannot compare to nature. Immediately Lydia throws aside the imprisoning cap, letting loose a mane of shining gold curls. Here Aston picks up what historian Nicole Tiedemann describes as ‘das Motiv der sexuellen Energie im langen, lockigen Haar’.<sup>511</sup> Galia Ofek argues that nineteenth-century male authors ‘participated in the cultural production of gendered identities through their representations of women’s hair’,<sup>512</sup> in Judea-Christian history hair is ‘a locus of sinfulness, corruption and unbridled sexuality’.<sup>513</sup> Aston draws on the same points of reference; Lydia’s unleashed hair can be read as a ‘sign’ of her sexuality and her instinctive desire to consummate the marriage. In this context, Landsfeld’s objection to her nightcap seems to be a test of her own innocence as well an indication of his own desires. However, hair is also imprisoning, ‘a cage of domesticity’<sup>514</sup> which evokes what Ofek calls the ‘Rapunzel fantasy’.<sup>515</sup> Lydia’s long blond locks suggest her innocence and helplessness and, like her fairy-tale counterpart, she attracts her partner through her hair. On her wedding night it seems it might lead to her deflowering. The fact that Lydia is so quick to take off her cap indicates that she instinctively awaits the consummation of her marriage. Rather than enlightening her, however, the baron tests her sexual awareness, playing with her nightdress while he asks whether she does not wish to be entirely his. Confused as to what he means, Lydia answers innocently, but welcomes his kisses even when they are planted on her naked breast. In a

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid, 70-71.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>511</sup> Nicole Tiedemann, *Haar-Kunst* (Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 2006), 171.

<sup>512</sup> Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2009).

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, 108.

farcical twist on the deflowering act, Landsfeld pricks Lydia with a needle while trying to fasten her nightgown together, while she opens her dress without inhibition and responds to his renewed caresses with kisses of her own:

Sie öffnete jetzt selber mit rührender Unbefangenheit das Kleid. In der That quoll an der Stelle, worauf sein Mund so lange geruht, ein Purpurtropfen.  
„Laß ihn mich ausküssen“ – bat er. Sie erlaubte es lächelnd, indem sie sein Haupt umschlang und einen Kuß darauf drückte.<sup>516</sup>

Lydia's instinctively welcomes physical intimacy, yet when Landsfeld does finally deflower his wife, the effect is drastic. Rather than react receptively, as she does here, Lydia loses her sanity. Her attitude towards her cap and nightgown in this scene, however, implies that she would welcome a sexual awakening. As Lydia de-clothes, taking off the white garments which symbolize her virginity, she subconsciously rejects the legacy of chastity and patriarchal preconceptions concerning women's lack of libido. As well as a Rapunzel, Lydia can also be seen as a Medusa; her hair suggests that she is sexually threatening and aroused even in her ignorance. Since Lydia is both virginal and curious about her body, Aston invites a re-evaluation of traditional views of women as passive beings, indifferent to sex, and alludes brazenly to what Döcker calls the 'Unaussprechliche und Private' of the female body. Aston depicts the bourgeois woman who was supposed to be 'quasi körperlos, alle Aufmerksamkeit auf die Seele lenkend'<sup>517</sup> as a sensitive physical being whose limited education has the effect of dangerous self-alienation. On a theoretical level, Aston both 'state[s] and enforce[s] culture's sentences'<sup>518</sup> here, but by presenting a young woman as having instinctual sexual desires, Aston also draws on Saint-Simonian theory and challenges gender stereotypes.

Aston is clearly troubled by the limits imposed on the ways that she can do her gender but is too influenced by the norms of femininity to make a convincing stand against them. Moreover, any subversive message in this scene is quickly overshadowed by the behaviour of the other female characters. The angelic Lydia, as one contemporary critic writes, is seen as 'Die einzige reine Gestalt unter den vielen unreinen'; elsewhere we find examples of transgressive femininity, a 'Gesellschaft der emanzipierten Frauen, Zigarren rauchend, in männlicher Kleidung mit männlichen Liebesintrigen'.<sup>519</sup> This critic is disgusted by 'die hier dargestellte [Gesellschaft...]

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<sup>516</sup> Aston, *Lydia*, 212-213.

<sup>517</sup> Döcker, *Die Ordnung der bürgerlichen Welt*, 87.

<sup>518</sup> Gilbert and Gubar cited in Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture*, 118.

<sup>519</sup> *Eine Rezension in den 'Blättern für literarische Unterhaltung'*, cited in Goetzinger, *Für die Selbsterwirklichung der Frau: Louise Aston*, 116.

nebst den ebenfalls so genau beschriebenen Toiletten der Anwesenden.<sup>520</sup> Interestingly, the fact that Aston mentions dress in some detail seems to offend social morals; certainly the critic's comment about Aston's descriptions explains in part why the novels in this study do not contain more sartorial detail and reference to fashion. Such a comment emphasises the importance of clothes in what the critic defines as bad society and, accordingly, we find the female 'monsters' of the text clothed very differently to Lydia. Landsfeld's female friends are not meant to be celebrated as models. Their libertine, sadistic ways have caused the baron's disillusionment with women and justify the critic's dismay. Cornelia, for example, is a Machiavellian prototype. Antagonistic towards other women, she plots the demise of her former friends. As the narrator points out, 'Bei ihr war es reine Freude am Bösen – hämische Zerstörungssucht (...)'.<sup>521</sup> Whilst she manipulates other characters, they do not fail to see her for who she is. At one point Berger, for example, tells Cornelia, "'Sie sind ein wahrer weiblicher Mephisto (...); Sie verstehen sich vortrefflich darauf, den moralischen Henkersknecht zu spielen.'" <sup>522</sup> Cornelia is portrayed as a perversion of womanhood; like Mephisto and the 'Henkersknecht', she seeks to destroy when women, biologically, are destined to give life. The evil queen in *Schneewittchen* provides another point of reference. Like her, Cornelia is 'a plot-maker, a schemer, a witch, an artist, an impersonator, a woman of almost infinite creative energy, witty, wily, and self-absorbed [...]'.<sup>523</sup> She, too, attempts an assault on a young, innocent girl (Lydia) out of jealousy, and, like the queen, she has the equivalent of fiery red shoes that 'parody the costumes of femininity'<sup>524</sup> and reveal gender as a social construction. Indeed, she uses dress as a disguise, making a mockery of simplicity in an effort 'den natürlichen Reiz der Jugend, welcher der Zügen ihres Gesichts bereits entflohen war, durch künstliche Mittel mit Gewalt an sich [zu] fesseln.'<sup>525</sup> The parallel between Snow White's stepmother and Aston's schemer is ever clearer as the story unfolds; while the queen tightens Snow White's stays in order to harm her stepdaughter, Cornelia undresses Lydia in order to facilitate the planned rape. Both aim to attack the young women they envy, using clothes as weapons. Both also manage disguise well, in Cornelia's case, entirely in accordance with advice found in conduct literature:

Ihre Kleidung schien (...) jede auffallende Abweichung vom herrschenden Geschmack der Mode *absichtlich* zu vermeiden, ohne indeß sowohl in Rücksicht auf die Wahl der Stoffe, als auf deren Zusammenstellung, den reinen Geschmack und den feinen Sinn für

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> Aston, *Lydia*, 23.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid, 194.

<sup>523</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 38-39.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Aston, *Lydia*, 3.

elegante Einfachheit und ungezwungene Harmonie zu bekunden, worin jener eine eben so große Zartheit als Sicherheit besaß.<sup>526</sup>

The fact that Cornelia is adept at following the dictates of good taste, and does so ‘absichtlich’, is clearly meant to be read as evidence of her manipulative character. When we first meet Cornelia she is a model of elegance, culture and wealth and is careful to appear to follow every piece of sartorial advice to the letter. The ‘italienischer Strohhut, mit einer Straußfeder geschmückt’ and the ‘chinesischer Sonnenschirm’ make up the sum of her sartorial décor and show her to be a well-traveled and refined woman. Yet the foreign origin of her garments could invite some criticism at a time when German bourgeois women were encouraged to show patriotism in supporting national industry, even if fashion journals fostered an interest in wares from overseas and those who could afford it purchased garments from abroad.<sup>527</sup> All in all, this costume is an accomplice in Cornelia’s duplicity; it helps make her attractive to men (she entices both Landsfeld and Berger) and earns her respect in society. Yet her actions show her to be conniving, lewd and unscrupulous. Like Lewald, Aston seems to warn against seeing clothes as an accurate reflection of character in her portrayal of Cornelia. Clothes take part in an illusion, and it is just that illusion which theoretically reinforces the extent to which clothes form part of the performance of gender.

Arguably the real heroine of the novel, Aston’s alter-ego Alice, is the most interesting and least conventional figure substantially because, like Aston herself, she takes the liberty of dressing in men’s clothes and allows the author to parody ‘the notion of an original or primary gender identity’.<sup>528</sup> In the novel’s sequel *Revolution und Contrerevolution* (1849), she dons masculine attire apparently because it enables her to be more mobile. On her way to fight, however, she puts on what she calls her “Festkleide”<sup>529</sup> and the impression is confusing: are her sartorial choices pure theatre? Does she need trousers to get around or to earn respect from fellow revolutionaries? It would seem a simple matter of practicality, but Alice’s agency is fundamental. As Ruth Whittle and Debbie Pinfold explain in *Voices of Rebellion*, cross-dressing women are found elsewhere in novels about the 1848 revolution. However, the heroines of these novels, including Friedrich Albrecht Karcher’s *Die Freischärlerin* (1851) and Leopold Storch’s *Caroline, die Wiener Barrikadenheldin, Jäger Carl genannt* (1850), are given men’s clothes by their (male) superiors and the ‘Geschlechtsordnung’ is therefore upheld.<sup>530</sup> In contrast, Alice picks her own wardrobe,

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid, 24-25, my italics.

<sup>527</sup> See Sabine Kienitz, “‘Aecht deutsche Weiblichkeit’ – Mode und Konsum als bürgerliche Frauenpolitik 1848’ in *Schimpfende Weiber und patriotische Jungfrauen*, ed. Carola Lipp (Moos: Elster, 1986), 316-20.

<sup>528</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187.

<sup>529</sup> Aston, *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, Bde. 1–2, Band 2, (Mannheim 1849), 78.

<sup>530</sup> See Ruth Whittle and Debbie Pinfold, *Voices of Rebellion: Political Writing by Malwida von Mayensbug, Fanny Lewald, Johanna Kinkel and Louise Aston* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 146.

appearing at odd times ‘als junger Mann’.<sup>531</sup> Her doing so may seem to be an affront to gender compartmentalization and a reflection of her desire to be seen as equal to men in *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, but in *Lydia* the impression is different. There her cross-dressing evokes the role of seductress; when Alice visits her former lover Landsfeld, for instance, she uses masculine garments in an effort to appeal to him and appears

(...) in Männerkleidern, über die sie einen weiten, faltigen Mantel geworfen. Schweigend wies Landsfeld auf das Sopha. Sie ließ den Mantel fallen und stand vor ihm da in jener geschmackvoll phantastischen Tracht, die Landsfeld für sie in Venedig nach eigener Erfindung hatte fertigen lassen und in der sie so oft mit ihm Ausflüge auf die Lagunen gemacht.<sup>532</sup>

Alice does not cross-dress here out of caprice or for reasons of practicality. Her masculine attire is a kind of masquerade designed to draw attention to her female sexuality and individualism. In this respect it is not unlike Sophie’s cross-dressing in Lewald’s *Eine Lebensfrage*. The reference to the carnival atmosphere of Venice excuses her sartorial extravagance by suggesting that it is a part of a self-conscious show, an explicit cross-gender performance just as Sophie’s profession in part excuses hers. Moreover, Alice deliberately wears a costume which was commissioned for her by the man she still loves, one which, the narrator highlights, is both tasteful and fantastical. Cross-dressing reinforces gender hierarchies, since Alice’s choice of costume is ultimately (like Sophie’s) not designed to challenge gender boundaries, but rather to attract her former lover.

Alice both draws on and resists gender compartmentalization. Just as Johanna’s modest attire denotes her refusal to enter into sexual relationships and Lydia’s caps establish her nascent sexuality, Alice’s clothes represent her vibrant sexual desire. In order to seduce the baron, she draws attention to her costume, recalling memories of their affair which ended because of her need for sexual freedom. In symbolic terms, her clothes suggest both emancipation and approval of free love. Later Aston summarises her Saint-Simonian philosophy of freedom and love at Cornelia’s salon: “‘Des Weibes Glück ist die Liebe,/ Aber das Glück der Liebe ist die Freiheit!’”<sup>533</sup> Yet the costume also suggests that her love is enslaving, since her obsession with the baron leads her to choose what she wears according to his taste, rather than her own. These multiple interpretations of Alice’s behaviour indicate the difficulties Aston faces, when campaigning for a woman’s right to her own ‘freie Persönlichkeit’. Hampered by her adoration of Landsfeld, Alice’s clothes are determined both by her love for him and her desire for liberty. It is in the latter that we find a note of subversion because it illustrates Butler’s idea that gender is ‘a

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<sup>531</sup> Aston, *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, Bde. 1–2, Band 1, (Mannheim 1849), 218.

<sup>532</sup> Aston, *Lydia*, 56.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid, 172.



norm that can never be fully internalized; the “internal” is a surface signification’.<sup>534</sup> Alice’s cross-dressing thus represents a failure to ‘be’ feminine in the conventional way of her time.

The reaction to Aston’s writing by her contemporaries suggests the extent to which her texts were read as an affront to gender norms. Contemporary critics took Alice’s cross-dressing to be a perversion of feminine delicacy and the undertones in her novels which the modern reader might interpret as reaffirming traditional gendered identity were overlooked. Indeed, Aston’s own behaviour outraged women’s rights campaigners, such as Emilie Spreu, who describes in her poem ‘An Louise Aston’ how she lost her admiration for her dedicatee. Once ‘eine Geistverwandte’ and ‘ein Vorbild dem Geschlecht’, Aston becomes Spreu’s enemy when she insults feminine propriety and virtue in her campaign for free love.<sup>535</sup> Meanwhile, for Otto, Aston was ‘diejenige, die das Wort *Emanzipation*, indem sie es mehr im jungdeutschen Sinne als *Emanzipation des Fleisches* interpretierte, besuldete.’<sup>536</sup> As this analysis has shown, Aston’s dress descriptions in *Lydia* as in *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* allude to feminine sexuality and this emancipation of the flesh. Boetcher-Joeres’s impression that Aston’s novels support patriarchal models is evident in the depiction of sexuality. However, the reaction of her contemporaries is also telling: by claiming a right to sexuality Aston does do something that is radical. In her fictional writing we see the very tension between femininity and women’s rights that make clothes important to literary historiography. Aston struggled to make her feminine figures admirable enough to evade accusations of impropriety. Strong-minded female characters are offset by stereotypical heroines and complicated by their inconsistency. The trouser suit comes across as an arbitrary theatre costume, a way of gaining male attention, while the simple white or black dress reasserts itself as the essence of a woman’s wardrobe, whatever it might represent. The contradictions that are characteristic of Aston’s work reflect her frustrations with gender prescriptions, her own awareness of ‘gender trouble’. She is herself caught up in a performance, destined to repeat patriarchal sentences, but within those sentences are subversive messages which call for a re-evaluation of women’s right to control their own bodies and embrace their sexuality. In Butlerian terms, Aston seems at times to police her own work, aiming at the ‘coherent identification’ that would win her approval, if not admiration.<sup>537</sup> Yet the fact that her work was condemned, as was its author, suggests the extent of her violation of cultural norms. The reader is left with a confused impression of the author whose work at times adheres to a

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<sup>534</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192.

<sup>535</sup> Emilie Spreu, cited in Goetzinger, *Für die Selbstverwirklichung der Frau: Louise Aston*, 139.

<sup>536</sup> Otto cited in Boetcher-Joeres, *Die Anfänge der deutschen Frauenbewegung: Louise Otto-Peters* (Fischer, 1983), 19.

<sup>537</sup> See Butler’s interview with Liz Kotz, ‘The Body you want’ in *Artforum International*, 3. Nov. (XXXI) 1992, 84.

standard gender script and at others rebels against it. The above analysis indicates just how extensively dress reinforces that impression.

## **Conclusion**

Lewald and Aston use dress to different effect, but they both rely on sartorial conventions to portray their female characters. The fact that their heroines manage to get dress right can be seen as an attempt to legitimise transgressions against conventional perceptions of femininity elsewhere. Certainly, the tension between ‘respectability and deviance’, which critics have identified in the works of nineteenth-century German women writers is evidenced in the use of clothes as a means of characterisation in these *Vormärz* novels. The lead-up to the 1848 revolution sees new political themes in literature by women but no radical re-definition of womanhood. Whilst Lewald considers the issue of dress in relation to female emancipation only later in her letters, and Aston does not explain her cross-dressing at all, for both women dress poses problems. These problems are echoed in other works of the time including such novels by Hahn-Hahn as *Zwei Frauen* (1845) and *Gräfin Faustine* (1841) which also explore the tension between female independence and notions of femininity, between alternative and traditional dress symbolism. The latter novel is particularly interesting as its aristocratic heroine is not interested in society and does not dress in the latest fashions. She even wears one dress all summer long simply because it is comfortable, sparking comment from those who see her, and greets guests in an unflattering smock she wears to paint. A common trait of all these novels is that dress is a symptom of inequality which, while obvious, is difficult because it cannot be easily altered. The power of social prescription means that these women writers revert to a puritan, simplistic uniform to emphasise the heroine-ism of their female protagonists; models of femininity are constantly imitated and portrayed as ‘natural’ in fiction of this time.

It is significant that both authors use a third-person omniscient narrator to create the illusion of objectivity whilst creating sympathy for their heroines. In Aston’s novels this technique emphasizes the extent of the misogynist and villainous activity of the secondary characters who, at least for the most part, manoeuvre the plot. Lewald’s narrative stance does more to depict social ills, in particular the patriarchal prejudice that victimizes her protagonists. The overriding feeling the reader gets with Aston is that she is criticizing a world in which such men as Oburn and Landsfeld can dominate and her denouements which allow her heroines to take some form of control over their lives involve more escapism than realism. With Lewald the impression is more credible and complicated as both Jenny and Clementine, for instance, struggle to resist societal pressure and seem to an extent conformist in their domestic roles. Jenny’s rebellion and sudden demise and Clementine’s resolution to obey society at the cost of her own happiness invite the

reader to take a critical approach to recognizable patriarchal structures. Arguably Lewald's sensitive depiction of emotional upheaval has a deeper impact on the reader than Aston's rather caricatured narratives and her one parodic novel, *Diogena*, bears the relics of a personal vendetta rather than an ironic expose of the shortcomings of society the likes of which I discuss in Chapter Four.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, post 1848 regulations meant the end of an era of outspoken literary activity. Aston, banished from Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden, ceased publishing altogether and Lewald's novels became less and less politically charged. Both women married (in Aston's case for a third time) and 'settled down' and any sort of 'gender trouble' they may have incited was attenuated over time as they seemed to become increasingly orthodox in their own lives. In the next chapter, I examine how one of the most popular women writers of the *Gründerzeit*, Eugenie Marlitt, negotiated the dictates of sartorial convention and the rise in consumerism in the 1860s and 1870s whilst continuing to celebrate traditional feminine ideals.

## Chapter Three -

# Eugenie Marlitt: Bourgeois Morality and Dress in the 1860s and 1870s

Introduction.....	131
Secondary Literature.....	136
<i>Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell</i> (1867).....	138
<i>Das Heideprinzeßchen</i> (1871).....	151
<i>Die zweite Frau</i> (1874).....	159
Illustrations.....	162
Conclusion.....	168

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on how dress and hair reflect a character's morality; how an interest in dress conflicts with intellectual interests, and how sartorial habits define the German bourgeois woman in an unprecedented way during the *Gründerzeit*. The works of Eugenie Marlitt (1825-1887) provide a good example of how fiction by women developed after the 1848 Revolution and how it responded to the growing need to define what it meant to be German. A hugely popular author in her day, Marlitt was admired for her ability to encourage morality, modesty and integrity in her fellow Germans.<sup>538</sup> To do this she relies predominantly on a third-person narrative technique which allows her to develop a didactic voice as she invites the reader to consider the morality of the characters she portrays. Her realism depends on the depiction of a range of predominantly middle-class figures and her ability to draw out their weaknesses without explicit narrative comment. More than any other author discussed in this thesis, she uses dress to characterise her female protagonists, and her novels provide an interesting study of the relationship between dress and gender 'rules' as they present models of bourgeois femininity in a time of growing consumerism. Marlitt's appeal for her contemporary readers seems to lie in the reiteration and celebration of gender norms; she condemns contemporary hypocrisy and consumerism and presents a model for feminine behaviour which demonstrates how women should and should not 'do' dress.

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<sup>538</sup> See Kontje, *Women, the novel and the German nation*, 184.

Marlitt's historical situation was very different to that of Lewald and Aston. The period post 1848 was detrimental to the progress of women's rights as the *Vereinsgesetz* of 1851 made it illegal for women to attend political assemblies and introduced other repressive measures against them and liberal thinkers.<sup>539</sup> Before and after unification in 1871, Prussia dominated, with its ruling Junker nobility at the helm. The Junker land-owners had vast control over the state and its administration, ensuring that a conservative outlook pervaded German politics and society.<sup>540</sup> Nationalism and German unification, however, were increasingly on the political agenda: at the time Marlitt was writing the novels discussed in this chapter, Germany was at war with Denmark, Austria and France; Bismarck was unifying the forty-one separate German states and solidifying Prussia's predominance in the new nation; and the economic *Gründerboom* was in full force, making Germany a capitalist state.<sup>541</sup> With momentous economic advances and the progress of the Industrial Revolution came a social transformation, as Germany became a leading world trader and globalisation brought world-wide investment opportunities to Europe.<sup>542</sup> Female consumerism was thriving, a symptom of economic prosperity and growing middle-class wealth. Meanwhile, writers were contributing to the cultural construction of Germanness and, in particular at a time when Catholics were opposed as a part of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, of what it meant to be a Protestant German. With nationalism firmly on the agenda, women were mobilised to show patriotism; *Vaterländische Frauenvereine* were formed, amassing 30,000 members by 1873. Their aim was to support and feed soldiers and supply them with provisions. The *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein* (ADF), founded in 1865 when the state sought to appease the liberals and relaxed its legislation against women, could boast only a few thousand members in the 1870's.<sup>543</sup> Although the focus on military supremacy and unity deflected from the women's cause more generally, the ADF showed that the women's movement was finally being organised. Under Auguste Schmidt and Louise Otto, it took as its 'Freiheit zur Arbeit' and advocated better education for middle-class women.<sup>544</sup> As a woman writer who was not only unmarried but also self-sufficient, thanks to her writing, it is hard to imagine that Marlitt was anything but sympathetic to the aims of the ADF. Indeed, by portraying female protagonists who are hungry for education and work, Marlitt engages positively, if discretely, with the objectives of the women's movement, even if the marital denouement ultimately averts the need for her bourgeois heroines to support themselves.

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<sup>539</sup> See Diethel, *Towards Emancipation*, 138.

<sup>540</sup> See Helmut Walser Smith, 'Authoritarian State, Dynamic Society, 1878-1914' in Smith, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, 316.

<sup>541</sup> See Cornelius Torp, 'Germany Economy and Society, 1850-1914' in *ibid.*, 339.

<sup>542</sup> See *ibid.*, 337.

<sup>543</sup> See Gerhart, *Unerhört*, 74-75 and 91.

<sup>544</sup> See *ibid.*, 77.

Yet it is Marlitt's idolisation of domesticity which explains her popularity. The women's movement may have been gaining momentum, but the majority of Marlitt's readership had a large appetite for pastoral, domestic romance. Arguably it was Marlitt's skill at giving them what they wanted that ensured the success of the journal *Die Gartenlaube*, which enjoyed the largest circulation of any nineteenth-century magazine while serializing her novels. Aimed specifically at the middle-class family audience, the estimated readership of *Gartenlaube* in the 1870s ran into the millions since, while the largest circulation stood at 382,000 in 1875, the *Gartenlaube* was found not only in homes but also in lending libraries and cafés.<sup>545</sup> Popular reading in late nineteenth-century Germany played a central role in the formation and negotiation of a national identity. Appealing to the public's aspirations was rightly seen to be crucial to their feeling of participation in the creation of national identity; it was also crucial to the proliferation of a gendered ideal. For the woman reader of *Die Gartenlaube*, the magazine is 'her access to (...) images of femininity and Germanness (and) a mirror of her own desires, expectations, and abilities.'<sup>546</sup> In 1875, *Die Gartenlaube* featured a reproduction of a painting of Eugenie Marlitt surrounded by her heroines. The accompanying article on the magazine's most celebrated novelist included letters from readers expressing their admiration for her novels which are filled 'mit dem Zauber edelschöner Weiblichkeit'.<sup>547</sup> Marlitt's feminine touch and her depiction of femininity are perceived as fundamental to her success; she invokes the provincial, bourgeois, *German* ideal and gives her stories parabolic resonance thus bypassing any contentious issues, including explicit discussion of the *Frauenfrage*.

A Butlerian reading of Marlitt suggests that the author's popularity is due in part to her ability to set up the gender ideal as something that is achievable, realistic and 'natural'. While Lewald alluded to this ideal and Aston struggled both to contest patriarchal gender norms and to put forward new ideals, Marlitt depicts patriarchal notions of femininity in domestic settings without suggesting any great discomfort with her gender. Indeed, her novels serve as illustrations of the power of gender as a social construct and the way in which femininity as a performance is sustained and proliferated. She seems to want to get at the essence of womanhood, but Butler would argue that Marlitt's characterisation of 'raw' gender traits is ultimately contingent upon her own experience of gender. Marlitt does not challenge boundaries as much as she reinforces them by emphasising the best qualities in traditional assessments of women and celebrating them. This chapter will show that in order to do this, Marlitt depends on sartorial characterisation.

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<sup>545</sup>See Kirsten Belgum, 'Domesticating the Reader: Women and *Die Gartenlaube*' in *Women in German Yearbook*, Vol. 9 ed. Jeanette Clausen, 92.

<sup>546</sup>Ibid, 96.

<sup>547</sup>*Die Gartenlaube*, 1875, 105.

Marlitt's heroines all seem from the outset to have the potential to disrupt gender norms. They are positioned outside class, their parentage and heritage often unclear; they suggest un-feminine desires to move more freely in the world and engage in professional or at least intellectual occupations; and they contrast with ladies of society who are often depicted in simplistic terms as vain, selfish and even villainous. However, Marlitt's plots track the socialisation of the heroine and in the context of patriarchal society this means, inevitably, her domestication. Even if they retain a certain unaffected character, the heroines go from being wild, instinctive girls who wear practical, albeit unseemly, clothes to proper, model brides. Marlitt thus explores the development of the self outside society, then within it; and her conclusion seems to be that feminine traits are intuitive and that society can be a positive force, but that it can also corrupt. Hence ideal feminine characteristics are inherent and 'natural'. The success of the nineteenth-century woman depends on her ability to follow the right feminine example and Marlitt's stories are full of female characters who reveal their weaknesses by misinterpreting sartorial advice.

Marlitt writes within the gender matrix, unable to escape stereotypes of femininity. She echoes advice from sartorial manuals and conduct books and reiterates the ideals they put forward through her heroines.<sup>548</sup> Their heroine-ism depends on the fact that they adhere to advice: they are clean, which symbolises their moral purity; and they are modest, which proves their integrity and honesty. Both characteristics are portrayed through clothing, but Marlitt cautions the reader against any simplistic conclusions based on appearances since clothes also reveal hypocrisy. For example, in *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, discussed below, Adele's white attire makes her appear virtuous, but is actually expensive and impractical as her maid has to spend a lot of time washing her mistress's clothes. Furthermore at times it is not so much what the heroines wear that characterises them, but rather their attitude towards their clothes. By abiding by advice regarding female conduct, Marlitt creates female protagonists who are not affected by the consumerist hype of the 1860s and 1870s yet still seem believable. They both comply with patriarchal ideals and make room for intellectual pursuits. Marlitt's sartorial portrayal therefore works both as a reiteration of feminine ideals and as a means of reclaiming other interests beyond the frivolous. In *Die zweite Frau* (also discussed below), for instance, Marlitt creates a heroine with intellectual preoccupations who shows no interest in self-adornment. A more detailed discussion of this novel will show that the tension between dress and the intellect is not reconciled without a compromise which complicates any feminist reading.

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<sup>548</sup> Since Marlitt left no diary and wrote very few letters there is no evidence that she read conduct literature herself. However, the boom of *Anstandliteratur* from the 1870s suggests that she, as an extremely popular writer herself, was acquainted with what middle-class women were reading. See Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 77-79.

Whilst Marlitt's heroines are able to assimilate the right feminine characteristics, their hair is not appropriated and as a part of the body it can be viewed as an indicator of a 'natural' predisposition. In Chapter One, I explored how hair can be seen as sartorial; one 'wears' a hair style and modifies one's hair as one does one's clothes. Scholar Galia Ofek argues convincingly that the nineteenth-century author's descriptions of hair inform 'the cultural production of gendered identities'<sup>549</sup> and 'recurrent images of women's hair (in the nineteenth century) not only reflected existing models of womanhood, but also questioned, revised and redefined assumptions about the nature and making of femininity (...)'.<sup>550</sup> All of Marlitt's heroines have distinct, even rebellious hair which suggests that the author did wish to engage with gender issues and, perhaps, question gender norms. Hair is unruly and wily (Felicita in *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*), uniquely red (Liane in *Die zweite Frau*), and dark and curly (Leonore in *Das Heideprinzesschen*). Marlitt simplifies hair symbolism, making hair part of the heroines' initial wildness, which could be read as a metaphor for their reluctance to accept their femininity without compromise. Yet, hair is also part of their final acceptance, their successful domestication, since it attracts the hero's attention, being noticeably 'natural' and beautiful. Through her depiction of hair, Marlitt seems to suggest that women are instinctively drawn to their female vocation, but also that there remains a capacity for rebellion that must be quelled. The redness will be faded out, the wildness controlled so that the heroine represents a German ideal of womanliness.

In her novels, Marlitt explores femininity in the context of social class, championing bourgeois identity and values which she characterises in opposition to aristocratic excess. It is easy to distinguish between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy and their respective values by analysing what her female characters wear. Rich, idle ladies are often depicted as preoccupied with fashion but rather than being attractive and edifying as they hope, costly attire is shown to get in the way of feminine duties. There is, for example, little that separates the self-absorbed, over-dressed actress in *Das Heideprinzesschen* and the selfish widow in *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell* who prioritises her appearance over maternal duty. The heroines are often perceived by others as inferior due to the lack of clarity in their heritage, but they are most associated with bourgeois traits. While wealth and leisure are represented as corrupting, middle-class values are favoured, and hard work, honesty and genuine charity are linked with modesty and cleanliness. Marlitt appeals to the majority of her contemporary readers by making her heroines dress in affordable, simple clothes but does not entirely overlook the desire to be attractive. While aristocratic heroines such as Sophie von Sternheim or Aston's Johanna demonstrate positive bourgeois values, Marlitt imbues middle-class heroines with similar traits. She celebrates the woman whose

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<sup>549</sup> Ofek, *Representations of hair in Victorian literature and culture*, 147.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, x.



heroine-ism is to be found in her domestic qualities and thus perpetuates German ideals of femininity.

In appealing to her bourgeois readers as the centre of the German community and the epitome of virtue, Marlitt also sets out to distinguish between German values and foreign ones and illustrates how the body, as de Beauvoir later theorises, is a way of dramatizing and recreating an historical situation.<sup>551</sup> Marlitt's celebration of national morals manifests itself foremost in her criticism of France, home to haute couture and the centre of sartorial consumerism. (As explained in Chapter One, French fashion magazines and the textiles industry were the most powerful in Europe throughout most of the nineteenth century. Only after unification did Germany gradually establish itself in clothes production). In so doing, like Lewald and Aston, Marlitt draws on a rich tradition of anti-French sentiment at a time when animosity towards France was particularly high, despite the fact that women continued to look towards France in matters of dress. Wealthy, vilified ladies and ambitious middle-class ones are characterised in Marlitt's works in part through their interest in French fashion, as demonstrated in particular in *Das Heideprinzeßchen*.

## Secondary Literature

Due to her popularity and productivity, Marlitt has been the subject of many critical studies; some recent works have focused on her construction of femininity and Germanness and have been particularly useful for this chapter. While she was dismissed in the 1960s and 1970s as a sentimental author, since then she has attracted more positive attention and both her tumultuous life as a stage singer who became deaf and her poetic realism have been examined in detail by scholars.<sup>552</sup> Urszula Bonter provides a thorough analysis of the common traits of Marlitt's novels, emphasising the crime motifs, the portrayal of villains, class issues, and the central Cinderella theme and its variations, amongst other things. She, like many other critics, including Lynne Tatlock,<sup>553</sup> illustrate the way Marlitt reinforces patriarchal gender ideals. Bonter claims, 'Marlitt verhält sich affirmativ zur sozialen Norm, soweit sie ihrem Verständnis von einer heilen Welt förderlich ist und blendet sie immer aus, wenn diese die Gemütlichkeit der darzustellenden Welt zu gefährden droht.'<sup>554</sup> As a result, she adds, Marlitt includes almost no historical detail. For the most part this is also true in her descriptions of dress. While depictions of fashionable women might include the odd contemporary detail regarding style, the heroines' clothes tend to be

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<sup>551</sup> See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 16.

<sup>552</sup> See Urszula Bonter, *Der Populärroman in der Nachfolge von E. Marlitt*, (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005), 22-23.

<sup>553</sup> See Lynne Tatlock, *Publishing Culture and the Reading Nation: German Book History in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Camden House, 2010), 118-155.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

characterised by qualities rather than details. For Tatlock, Marlitt is no modernist; she skirts the issue of women's rights by creating parabolic novels that may help to create national identity, but do not encourage any change for women in German society. Marlitt, like *Die Gartenlaube's* editors, 'could imagine women's independence only in a narrow sense'.<sup>555</sup> It was therefore 'sentimental domesticity' that informed femininity and, by extension, nationalism and national identity.<sup>556</sup> However, Tatlock recognises that Marlitt's heroines do play an important role in reforming the society they live in; they are responsible for the heroes' transformations from insensitive often brutish men into lovable husbands. They also encourage bourgeois values and the prominence of the family, as Kontje points out in his chapter on Marlitt in *Women, the Novel and the German Nation*. Kontje emphasises that Marlitt believed that 'the bourgeois family (was) the bedrock of the newly unified nation-state'<sup>557</sup> and argues that her work continues the efforts of the Vormärz authors by praising middle-class qualities as opposed to aristocratic vice; by advocating free-thinkers; and by creating heroines who are clever and autonomous, even if they end up reinforcing the status quo. Certainly, Marlitt's popularity in her time can be explained by the fact that she celebrates German virtue at every turn. As I will show, this virtue is reflected in the way her heroines dress.

An emphasis on the importance of creating a sense of national identity through literature in the *Gründerzeit* is a common trait in these studies of Marlitt. Kirsten Belgum's article 'Domesticating the reader: Women and the *Gartenlaube*' focuses on the popularity of the journal which serialised Marlitt's novels and the way in which it and Marlitt developed a programme where 'the explicit inclusion of women readers was central to its establishment of the middle-class family as the basic building block of German national identity.'<sup>558</sup> Belgum insists that Marlitt maintained her readership through her 'gendered construction of pleasure'<sup>559</sup> defined, for women, by domesticity. She goes further than other critics in explaining Marlitt's appeal as a domesticating and unifying force and provides a particularly interesting example in the 'goldhaariges deutsches Mädchen', the protagonist of *Goldelse*. The heroine's beauty, manifested predominantly in allusions to her hair, is depicted as moral, unifying and edifying; reminiscent of the fairy-tale Rapunzel, but also a powerful encouragement of nationalism.<sup>560</sup> Instead of suggesting her outspokenness, Goldelse's golden locks can be seen as a way of emphasising her internal purity and legitimising her

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<sup>555</sup> Tatlock, *Publishing Culture and the Reading Nation: German Book History in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 121.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid, 119-120.

<sup>557</sup> Kontje, *Women, the Novel and the German Nation*, 185. See also Boetcher-Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, 226.

<sup>558</sup> Kirsten Belgum, 'Domesticating the Reader' in *Women in German Yearbook 9* ed. Jeanette Clausen (University of Nebraska, Feb.1994), 93.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>560</sup> In Grimms' story Rapunzel has 'lange, prächtige Haar, fein wie gesponnen Gold'. See Brüder Grimm, *Kinder und Hausmärchen*, Bd 1, (Göttingen: Verlag der dieterischen Buchhandlung, 1843), 78.

potentially subversive desire for intellectual satisfaction. Marlitt's other heroines display sartorial practices which function in a similar way.<sup>561</sup> Belgium's conclusion that feminine beauty is a necessary characteristic of nationalist literature indicates how patriarchal gender norms are constantly reaffirmed in Marlitt's novels and that it is this which makes them attractive to her contemporaries. This chapter examines Belgium's notion that Marlitt was a crucial author because she contributed 'to the solidification of a national identity' by exploring how she envisioned the role of the domestic 'angel of the house' through sartorial and hair symbolism. I suggest that a study of how Marlitt's dress descriptions support these interpretations will enrich our understanding of gender performance in and outside of the novel in the 1860s and 1870s.

This chapter discusses the relationship between femininity and dress in three of Marlitt's novels. The first novel examined here, *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell* (1867), is particularly interesting due to the link between sartorial descriptions, morality and hypocrisy. The second novel, *Das Heideprinzesschen* (1871), which was published at the time of the Franco-Prussian war and German unification, demonstrates how clothes function as a way of defining German characteristics in opposition to foreign, French features. The last novel discussed here, *Die zweite Frau* (1874), echoes Lewald's writing in its depiction of the tension between sartorial and intellectual interests. Finally, I investigate how Marlitt's novels have been re-published and what illustrations in contemporary and modern editions say about sartorial characterisation and feminine identity over time.

### ***Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell (1867)***

In *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, Marlitt draws on contemporary perceptions of femininity and uses sartorial motifs to create the illusion of a 'natural' gendered self. Written in the third person, the novel examines how women interpret sartorial codes and emphasises the importance of reflecting one's simplicity and modesty in one's clothing, a piece of advice which is also central to conduct literature.<sup>562</sup> Dress is used for characterisation particularly for the two anti-heroines, Adele and Frau Hellwig, while the heroine, Felicitas, provides a significant contrast because she is characterised not so much by her clothes themselves as by her attitude towards them. The story is one example of the extent to which Marlitt's fiction is constructed as a 'realistic' fairy tale. The novel is complete with wicked stepmother (Frau Hellwig) and 'step-sister' (cousin Adele), fairy godmother (Tante Cordula) and innocent beauty (Felicitas) who, in

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<sup>561</sup> Ofek discusses how hair contributed to the formation and mitigation of gender identity in *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture*, 103-108.

<sup>562</sup> Mixa discusses 'die Bestrebungen, das Innere und Äußere in Einklang zu stimmen, das Innere am Äußeren zu identifizieren' in *Errötern Sie, Madame! Anstandsdiskurse der Moderne*, 89.

the end, marries the prince (the Professor, Johannes). Marlitt's realism modernises the fairy-tale motifs and places them in a particularly German nineteenth-century setting where descriptions of clothing provide a commentary on a generation of philanthropic women, illustrating the risk of hypocrisy and showing that egotism often underlies charitable deeds. In order to be worthy women, readers must avoid emulating this behaviour and examine how Felicitas ensures that positive values, or in theoretical terms, notions of the feminine ideal, prevail. The story might have elements of the fairy tale, but the object is to create the sort of realism that enables identification and the proliferation of gender norms.

A brief summary of the novel indicates the extent to which stereotypical feminine behaviour and rivalry shape the plot. The heroine Felicitas d'Orlowska is adopted at the age of four by Herr Hellwig after the death of her mother, the beautiful Meta d'Orlowska, who was of noble birth but scandalously married a showman. She died when a skit involving a mock shooting went wrong. Felicitas is tormented in the Hellwig household, in particular after the death of the protective Herr Hellwig, who respected Meta's wish that her daughter should not be raised in show business. Frau Hellwig, a strict, pious and yet ungenerous woman, treats Felicitas resentfully, depriving her of an education and keeping her as a servant, although she never ceases to complain of the waste of money spent on the girl's upkeep. Eventually Felicitas discovers the existence of Tante Cordula, the 'alte Mamsell' of the title. Cordula is mysteriously shunned by her Hellwig relatives and lives locked away in a separate part of the house like the insane Mrs. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).<sup>563</sup> Felicitas develops a friendship with Cordula and continues her education secretly under her instruction. When Felicitas is eighteen, Johannes, the eldest Hellwig son and a distinguished doctor, returns home for the holidays. Felicitas harbours great resentment against him, since he is now her guardian and seems, by saying nothing against it, to condone his mother's strict and loveless treatment of her. She has always been keenly aware of the Hellwig prejudice against her as a showman's daughter, and no one expresses this prejudice as directly as Johannes.

The doctor is accompanied by his pretty widowed cousin, Adele, who is a vain and proud hypocrite, ostensibly charitable but clearly only interested in her appearance and in attracting Johannes. She even neglects her daughter Ännchen. Adele overlooks the domestic sphere in favour of public (often sartorial) display and goes against contemporary advice that women

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<sup>563</sup> There are notable parallels between Marlitt's novel and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*: unlike other German works of the time, Marlitt focuses on a heroine who has humble, even scandalous beginnings which mean that she is viewed, like Jane Eyre, as a member of a sub-standard class; both heroines grow up in a servile position; both have their fate sealed by a 'madwoman in the attic' – in the case of Jane Eyre the woman is clearly insane, whilst Cordula is locked away because she knows too much; and both women end up with men who mistreat them initially but who are also changed by them.

should 'Liebe, Wohlsein und Lebenswärme überall hin verbreiten; durch [ihre] Milde und Sanftmut, durch [ihre] Freundlichkeit und Klarheit [...] Frieden stiften [...] den Scepter der Sitte führen [und] die Leidenschaft überwältigen [...]'.<sup>564</sup> When Cordula dies, Felicitas genuinely grieves the loss of her friend and determines to find a book that Cordula vowed should not outlive her. She eventually finds it and discovers that most of the Hellwig fortune was stolen. Felicitas makes to flee in order to destroy this evidence, but Johannes surprises her and professes his love for her. She refuses his proposal, insisting that his prejudice against her class will not change. As she departs Adele accuses her of theft; the book is produced despite Felicitas's protests, and the content is revealed for the first time to Johannes. Consequently Felicitas leaves the Hellwig house, and the doctor renounces the stolen wealth, disassociating himself from his mother who cannot abide his desired marriage to Felicitas. The conflict is resolved when Felicitas's maternal grandfather, the rightful heir to the Hellwig fortune, appears and Felicitas agrees to marry Johannes, the process of her socialisation and acceptance of gender norms complete.

Heavily dependent on gender conventions, Marlitt's portrayal of the widow Adele is much more detailed and reliant on clothes than other depictions of anti-heroines discussed in this study. Adele constantly associates herself with positive feminine characteristics and in so doing illustrates the element of performance, both conscious and sub-conscious, in 'doing' her gender. What makes her fail as a model of femininity is the fact that she does not possess internally the ideals she seeks to represent externally. As Chapter Two has shown, true heroines must maintain the myth that gender is 'natural' and internal whilst anti-heroines are demonised because they do not embody their gender or because they internalise negative female characteristics rather than positive ones. It is the superficiality of Adele's façade of ideal femininity which Marlitt repeatedly emphasises. Adele's attempts at deception depend on dress; she readily voices fashion etiquette, creates the illusion of simplicity and naturalness and reproaches the heroine for being unkempt. Interestingly, Marlitt draws attention to her shortcomings mainly through Johannes's friend, the lawyer Frank. It seems to require a male voice to discredit a woman who almost manages to present herself as modest and virtuous. In drawing on gender norms where men represent reason and woman are prone to vanity, Marlitt indicates the extent to which gender is a construct regulated by society and how, as theorist Joan Riviere puts it, women wear 'womanliness' as a mask, where the performance of femininity is a masquerade.<sup>565</sup> Riviere hypothesises that the masquerade is a way of repressing the desire to be masculine among bisexual and intellectual women. Whilst I do not propose that we use this theory to interpret Marlitt's characterisation of Adele, Riviere's image of

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<sup>564</sup> Christian Wilhelm Spieker, 'Ueber weibliche Würde und Bestimmung' in *Emiliens Stunden der Andacht und des Nachdenkens*, (Leipzig: L.Boss, 1848), 220-21.

<sup>565</sup> See Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' in Athol Hughes, ed., *The Inner World and Joan Riviere: Collected Papers 1920-1958* (London: Karnac, 2011), 90-103.

appropriated womanliness, where femininity functions (metaphorically) as something that is worn, can be seen literally in Adele's attempts to wear a certain feminine identity. In Butler's discussion of Riviere, she asks rhetorically whether 'masquerade (is) the means by which femininity itself is *first* established?'<sup>566</sup> and argues that there is no identity beyond the masquerade, no self beyond the gendered self. An analysis of Marlitt's portrayal of Adele reveals how the anti-heroine uses masquerade, manipulating a sartorial mask to suggest that she embodies the ideals of femininity while internalising other, notably negative, feminine norms. Marlitt's premise is therefore the opposite of what Butler proposes, as she presents the inner self as naturally gendered.

A few examples of how Adele manipulates her clothes show how she fluctuates between feminine norms without at any point contesting them. Firstly, Adele is always careful to appear angelic by dressing in white and in accordance with the premise explained in Chapter One that 'Gediegene Einfachheit ist das Streben der edleren Richtung der Neuzeit.'<sup>567</sup> The colour suits her and is her way of marketing herself as young and marriageable despite her widowhood. At one point the narrator asks suggestively, '(...) wer hätte bei diesem vollendeten Gepräge unschuldvoller Naivität an die Bezeichnung "Witwe und Mutter" denken mögen?'<sup>568</sup> The implication is that Adele conveys an impression of herself which is false. At a time when women were ideally meant to be simple and honest, the 'unschuldvolle[...] Naivität' is clearly out of place. Yet Adele's deception is practised and impressive. Frank remarks to Johannes that she is 'stets in weissem Mull' and surely "die Verwirklichung (seines) Ideals"<sup>569</sup> The lawyer observes sarcastically that she must be pious because she is constantly seen in church "mit [...] schwärmerisch emporgerichteten schönen Augen"<sup>570</sup> Frank clearly believes that Adele is hypocritical, vain and shallow, so eager to maintain her charitable image that she disdains knowledge, "Sie verabscheut alles Wissen, Denken und Grübeln, weil es dem Wachstum ihres Strickstrumpfes oder ihrer Stickerei hinderlich sein könnte (...)"<sup>571</sup> Adele's attempts at creative charity are undermined by the lawyer's use of the diminutive 'ei' suffix on 'Stickerei'. Frank clearly sees 'Wissen' and 'Denken' as compatible with femininity and reproaches Johannes for dismissing "die moderne weibliche Erziehung"<sup>572</sup> By reducing Frank's sardonic praise of Adele to her dress, her oxymoronic ostentatious simplicity and her amateur handiwork, Marlitt draws the reader's attention to her hypocrisy and underscores the excessiveness of what is, in effect, a

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<sup>566</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 70. Butler's italics.

<sup>567</sup> *Die Modenwelt*, 1 October, 1865.

<sup>568</sup> Eugenie Marlitt. *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 1991), 234.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid*, 113-114.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

conscious performance. By stressing simplicity, Adele appears to follow advice regarding what it means to be feminine and the fact that she disdains intellectual development suggests that she is to be viewed in opposition to the women's rights activists of the day; in short, Adele tries to reinforce traditional assessments of femininity. Frank's sarcastic observations indicate that the significance of Adele's garments is to be found in the discrepancy between what they are meant to suggest and the reality beneath them.

Adele's behaviour in company reveals her vanity and eagerness to celebrate herself as an ideal woman; when read in Butlerian terms, it also indicates the extent to which gender is unconsciously portrayed both by Adele and by Marlitt as an accomplishment. At the Hellwigs's garden party the company is made up of well-dressed women 'meist in hellen Messelin oder Gaze gehüllt'.<sup>573</sup> Adele proudly proclaims, "Mein Wahlspruch ist: 'Einfach und billig!'(...) Ich trage grundsätzlich im Sommer keinen Stoff, der mich über drei Taler kostet."<sup>574</sup> She is promptly reminded by an amply ornamented lady who casts a 'boshafter Blick über [Adeles] gerühmte einfache Toilette' that she always has the fabric embellished with expensive embroidery which would triple the cost of the dress. While the lawyer noted the fact that Adele's white garments suit her, it takes a jealous woman to appreciate the finely ornamental dress material and assess how fashionable and expensive Adele's garments are. Moreover, the fact that Adele's toilette is 'gerühmt' suggests that she stands out in the best society as suspiciously elegant and that she is openly boastful of her ability to adhere to sartorial codes. As shown in Chapter One, adhering to these codes successfully also requires not standing out, and Adele's success is therefore called into question because her clothes are remarked upon. The sartorial rivalry between Adele and the well-dressed guest is a comic matter for the on-looking, clear-sighted lawyer. Frank mocks the ladies, first by alluding to the edifying nature of clothes in the conditional, comparing them to 'Duft', then by referring to the heavy, suspect bracelet the widow Adele is wearing: "Bah, wer wird diesen Duft nach prosaischen Thalern berechnen! (...) Man sollte meinen, er trüge die Damen himmelwärts wären nicht – ja wären nicht zum Beispiel solche dicke, goldene Armbänder, die unzweifelhaft wieder zur Erde niederziehen müssen!"<sup>575</sup> This ostentatious jewellery is in fact shamefully exposing and brings out a taint in the character of the woman who makes 'den Gesamteindruck eines Engelkopfes',<sup>576</sup> spoiling the angelic impression she gives by metaphorically, if not literally as Frank imagines, bringing her down to earth. Not only does the bracelet contravene contemporary advice in conduct literature (described in Chapter One) to avoid excess and draw undue attention; it is also proof of the widow's deceptiveness and complicity in

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<sup>573</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid, 76.

theft. Try as she might, Adele cannot accomplish her gender and feminine ideals remain for her phantasmic, unattainable.

Marlitt has Adele present herself as an arbiter of fashion morals, a claim which paradoxically draws attention to her failure to internalise the values she condones. The widow is particularly harsh with Felicitas and her judgements are both unfounded and voiced in such a way as to characterise her as a bully rather than a motherly advisor. Just after the bracelet incident, the widow confronts Felicitas, forbidding her to serve the company in a washed-out, short calico dress, “‘Wie mögen Sie sich nur in diesem kurzen, abscheulichen Rocke vor Männeraugen sehen lassen! Es ist geradezu unanständig (...)’.”<sup>577</sup> Significantly, this is Felicitas’s best dress and it is meticulously clean and ironed. Adele’s reproach reveals not only her own reprehensible interest in appealing to ‘Männeraugen’ but also her ungenerous character; she fails to comprehend that the girl’s clothes are exemplary of her family’s parsimonious charity. Moreover, the conviction that such short skirts on a young woman are inappropriate reinforces the reader’s impression of Adele’s sanctimonious behaviour. She has abruptly left the company, eluding any further explanation regarding the bracelet, and her objections to Felicitas’s vestimentary impropriety appear to stem from a need to detract from her own. Given that the heroine’s ‘sogenannter Sonntagsrock’ is presumably something she has received from the Hellwig family, the dress itself is more a reflection of the shortcomings of Frau Hellwig as surrogate mother than an indication of the wearer’s character. The key to the latter is in the care she has taken with the dress; ‘Freilich war [der Rock] verwaschen und bereits ziemlich mißfarben,’ remarks the narrator, but the fact that the dress is ‘verwaschen’, for instance, suggests that Felicitas washes it regularly, prizing that all-important virtue of cleanliness which was meant to be an ideal German characteristic (see Chapter One). What is more, the dress is also clearly practical, withstanding a great deal of wear and rigorous washing; it is set in contrast to the light, elegant gowns of Adele and her guests. However, the worn look of the dress is a source of reproach rather than approval for Adele and Frau Hellwig even though it is the latter who has supplied the dress. Felicitas, who has put up with her lack of sartorial provision ‘stillschweigend und klaglos’<sup>578</sup>, smiles bitterly in response to their criticism. Felicitas’s smile emphasises the irony of the situation, drawing attention to Adele’s hypocrisy and reinforcing the way in which we are to read dress symbolism as heavily reliant on context for meaning.

Adele’s understanding of feminine ideals is superficial, visual, almost limited to the sartorial; it leads to a preoccupation with her own appearance that means that she does nothing to save her daughter when her clothes catch fire. Adele’s impractical light clothing, like Caroline’s in

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid, 118.



Lewald's *Eine Lebensfrage*, seems to prevent her from thinking of anything but herself. It is Felicitas who rescues Ännchen, yet Adele's initial reaction is to admonish her for not looking after the child. When the heroine points out that Adele herself forbade her to appear before the guests, the widow protests that that was only natural, given the state of Felicitas's hair. She attempts to turn this point to her advantage by insisting how considerate she is, "Ich wollte ihr und uns den üblen Eindruck ersparen, den Nachlässigkeit stets hervorrufen muß."<sup>579</sup> Whilst before she chided Felicitas only on account of her inappropriate dress – which showed none of the negligence of which Felicitas is accused – her insistence now on the heroine's hair is a desperate attempt to attack her. As indicated in Chapter One, a woman's hair was meant both to reflect her modesty and attract admiration and in the 1860s tight buns were the norm whilst fussier styles evolved in the 1870s. Marlitt's contemporary readers would have therefore understood Adele's disapproval of Felicitas's hair which has become loose and disordered during her dramatic attempt to rescue the girl. However, this disapproval is clearly out of place given that the state of her hair is to be explained by her heroic actions. Later, too, when her daughter falls ill, Adele is not convincingly maternal.<sup>580</sup> While Felicitas's fearlessness in saving Ännchen would have been expected of a man – the men in the company were not as quick as the heroine –, caring for the feverish child should come naturally to the widowed mother. However, yet again Adele is most concerned about her appearance. The nursemaid, Rosa, is too busy preparing her mistress's dresses to see to the child while Adele herself claims to be out on a charitable mission. When she returns she reproaches Felicitas for tending to her daughter, denies ever having ordered Rosa to wash and iron her clothes and is then pushed away by the delirious child, who fears she will be beaten by her mother. The author draws attention once more to Adele's vanity by mentioning that in the midst of all this, Adele removes 'ihre feinen dänischen Handschuhe.'<sup>581</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, gloves were a key accoutrement for a lady throughout the nineteenth century; conduct authors recommended that they be worn almost continuously and advice tends to be given as to when it is appropriate to take them off rather than when it is best to wear them.<sup>582</sup> When Adele removes her gloves at the sick bed, she does so ceremoniously, as though she has such advice in mind. At such moments Marlitt seems to imply a criticism of the superciliousness of sartorial practices in her day and age. While Adele clearly adheres to social rules regarding the

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>580</sup> Nursing was viewed as a feminine occupation and one of the few professions that would be appropriate for a woman. In an article in the first issue of the magazine *Die Frau* (October 1893) entitled 'Was wir wollen,' women's rights activist Helene Lang refers to the term woman as bringing forth: 'an abundance of pictures and thoughts... the poetry of the domestic hearth, the creative and protective mother, the faithful nurse and educator (...)' Nursing is a key aspect to the maternal, nurturing process. Cited in Catherine Dollard, *The Surplus Woman: Unmarried in Imperial Germany 1871-1918* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), 1.

<sup>581</sup> Marlitt. *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, 140.

<sup>582</sup> See Lütt's and Bruck-Auffenberg's discussions on the etiquette of gloves in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 125-126.

wearing of spotlessly clean gloves, her care in removing her evidently expensive gloves at her sick daughter's bedside shows her to be more absorbed by her own appearance than genuinely interested in charitable deeds and justifies the reader's impression that Adele is lying when she claims that Rosa misunderstood her orders. Later, while Felicitas kneels at the child's bedside, Adele appears repeatedly in an attempt to reassert herself as a pious, devoted mother. The difference between Felicitas's sincerity and Adele's hypocrisy is stressed by the narrator who claims that no one can remain beautiful while overcome by tears; Adele's weeping does not mar her beauty in the least, 'es war ein so vollendet künstlerisches Weinen, wie es sich der Maler zu einer Mater dolorosa nicht schöner denken kann (...)'.<sup>583</sup> The act is refined and simultaneously undermined by Adele's punctual appearance 'in elegantem Schlafrock', with a 'wunderfeines Spitzenhäubchen' embellishing her face. When she is turned away by Johannes she disappears 'sanft weinend und klagend', only to bear no trace of distress in the morning, when she emerges 'frisch wie eine Mairose'.<sup>584</sup> Adele's pretence of feminine virtue is almost convincing, but it is repeatedly eclipsed when vanity takes precedence over all else, including her daughter's health. Through such descriptions of Adele, Marlitt consciously indicates the extent to which people act out gender ideals without internalising them.

Profoundly aware of the growth of consumerism amongst women (see Chapter One) and in anticipation of the theory of conspicuous consumption, Marlitt has Adele try to hide her own consumeristic tendencies behind claims of virtuousness and modesty. Drawing on typical negative, feminine characteristics in her portrayal of the widow, Marlitt emphasises first her propensity to prioritise her appearance, then her desire to triumph in an increasingly materialistic age; the author works within the gender matrix in both instances as Adele at no point contravenes conventional feminine characteristics. At one point she returns home with new fabric and boasts: "So sehr mein Herz gegen weisslichen Putz gestählt ist, so wenig widersteht es den Verlockungen einer Leinenhandlung (...) eine echte deutsche Hausfrau kann nun einmal ihren Leinenschrank nicht voll genug haben!"<sup>585</sup> Adele parrots traditional perceptions of what it means to be a model German woman, including the importance of keeping an ordered and clean linen cabinet. Amongst others, her words evoke Schiller's famous lines in *Das Lied von der Glocke*, '(die deutsche Frau) sammelt im reinlich geglätteten Schrein/ Die schimmernde Wolle, den schneeigten Lein'.<sup>586</sup> In *Sweeping the German Nation*, historian Nancy Reagan illustrates the importance of such writings as Schiller's poem in the construction of a cult of domesticity and cleanliness. She shows how 'Various media of popular culture promoted the norms of snow white

<sup>583</sup> Marlitt, *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, 146.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>586</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Das Lied von der Glocke*, in *Fr. V. Schillers Sämtliche Werke: Gedichte, Fünfter Band* (Carlsruhe: 1816), 57-58.

cleanliness, relentless thrift, and the maintenance of good household order,' and that 'The linen cabinet in particular seems to have become a national domestic symbol in trivial forms of popular culture.'<sup>587</sup> Adele's reference to her own propensity for linen fits Marlitt's work into the 'media of popular culture'. However, Adele uses the image self-consciously to manipulate others into thinking well of her as a virtuous woman. In this respect the reference to linen functions in the same way as descriptions of her clothes to show how femininity is superficial and performed. Because Adele's interest in fabric displays her narcissism and self-indulgence, instead of supporting a charitable and generous image of her countrywomen, she undermines the benevolent ideal of the German wife. Later she even protests against Johannes's suggestion that she put the material to good use by turning it into clothes for the poor. Marlitt clearly understood her gender in terms of patriarchal bourgeois ideals which expected women to uphold Christian morals and practise philanthropy, but her characterisation of Adele suggests that those ideals are less common than society perceives. Adele exhibits 'typical' feminine traits: she does not displace feminine norms but rather draws on stereotypical categorisation only to find that her inner self contrasts with the self she presents to the world.

Those conventions provide a spectrum of negative and positive possibilities to imitate and Marlitt's manipulation of them to depict not only Adele but also Frau Hellwig can be seen to illustrate Butler's theory that 'the "being" of gender is *an effect*.'<sup>588</sup> Marlitt also relies on sartorial motifs to emphasise Frau Hellwig's negative characteristics. For the older widow as for the younger, clothes are essential accoutrements to a performance and, in line with fairy-tale stereotypes, she is depicted as a cruel, jealous step-mother like the Queen in *Schneewittchen*.<sup>589</sup> While the Queen uses a comb, stays and an apple to hurt her step-daughter, Frau Hellwig forces her adopted daughter to wear dark clothing and strict hairstyles which function 'as essential or at least inescapable parodies of social prescriptions.'<sup>590</sup> While the Queen has in mind the death of her step-daughter, Frau Hellwig seems to aim at the social demise of her future daughter-in-law. However, Frau Hellwig's persecution of Felicitas cannot be explained by a desire to compete against her in an imagined beauty contest. The reader does not encounter any fairy-tale interest in being the fairest of the land; rather, Frau Hellwig seems obsessed with appearing to be a paragon of female virtue and understands this as necessitating a complete rejection of her sensuality. Her appearance has 'etwas Puritanerhaftes'<sup>591</sup>; a cap always covers her hair and her dress is tight, black (even before widowhood) and simple in design. Marlitt's exaggeration of the gendered ideal of moral rectitude serves as a parody; certainly her contemporary readers, who were used to the

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<sup>587</sup> Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation*, 42-44.

<sup>588</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.

<sup>589</sup> See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.54.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> Marlitt. *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, 17.

extravagant trends detailed in Chapter One, would not have seen Frau Hellwig as a model to follow.

The extent to which Frau Hellwig enacts a feminine extreme rather than a feminine norm is clear in the way she hides her hair. She is the opposite of Felicitas's mother, who is described at the beginning of the novel in a virginal white gown with her hair loose. Meta gives the impression of being pure and unaffected because she is also depicted as maternal and caring. When her daughter first appears in the Hellwig house, for instance, her 'reizendes Köpfchen voll kastanienbrauner Locken' and 'hellblau(s) Wollkleidchen, dessen Bändchen und Säume zierliche Stickerei zeigten'<sup>592</sup> show particular attentiveness that, the narrator suggests, would be enough to move anyone, for 'Wie verhärtet mußte das Herz der Frau (Hellwig) sein, daß sie nicht sofort beide Arme ausbreitete und das Kind kosend an die Brust drückte!'<sup>593</sup> As described in Chapter One, women's magazines in the 1860s were full of images of children's clothes, patterns and advice to mothers; these details concerning the young heroine's dress suggests that her mother was just the sort of maternal type who gave thought and time to her daughter's attire. This was clearly a trait with which Marlitt's readers were meant to identify and yet rather than evoking compassion and admiration, the girl's clothes have the opposite effect on her new mother, 'gerade der elegante Anzug, der ungezwungene, geniale Fall der Locken auf Stirn und Hals, die graziösen Bewegungen des Kindes empörten die Frau.'<sup>594</sup> She suggests that the child's appearance – "das zudringliche Ding mit den wilden Haaren und der entblößten Brust"<sup>595</sup> – is reason enough to send her away. Such words as 'wild' and 'entblößt' evoke the rhetoric used to describe fallen women; to use them to describe a child is strikingly incongruous and Herr Hellwig reacts with disgust at his wife's "Härte und Grausamkeit" which overrides maternal feeling. He orders her to provide "weiblichen Schutz".<sup>596</sup> Reacting to his appeal to her femininity, Frau Hellwig obeys his orders by accepting the child but her insistence on combing back the heroine's hair and dressing her in drab clothes indicates extreme and aggressive prudery. As Louise Otto points out in a contemporary chapter on fashion, it is all too easy to characterise women according to their sartorial habits as clichéd types, 'Ein Original, einen Blaustrumpf, eine Pietistin.'<sup>597</sup> Descriptions of Frau Hellwig border on caricature: she is hypocritical and ridiculous as well as reprehensible, having raised Felicitas as a subordinate being. Indeed, she overlooks all motherly duty, including ensuring that Felicitas is aware of fashion and that she eventually acquires a husband. Felicitas's plain clothing is actually a failing even though it is not of her own making, for, as a contemporary

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>597</sup> See Otto, *Der Genius des Menschheit: eine Gabe für Mädchen und Frauen*, 197.

conduct author points out, 'die Mode muß natürlich berücksichtigt werden',<sup>598</sup> Frau Hellwig fails to consider fashion at all and in that respect is as blameworthy as Adele who considers it too much. Both women mime feminine conventions without excelling in their performance of them.

Frau Hellwig's actions are not so much crimes against feminine norms as a misreading of gender ideals; she remains recognisably 'feminine' but her behaviour is far from perfect. In fact she repeatedly confronts images of femininity – and suggestions of female sexuality – and actively rejects them. Although she acts in the name of virtue, her behaviour implies that her incentives are unnatural, fuelled by jealousy and greed. After the death of her husband, the first thing she does is remove her mother-in-law's portrait from Herr Hellwig's study. Marlitt suggests that in the picture the late Frau Hellwig is poorly dressed 'in jener Tracht, welche so unschön die altgriechische nachzuahmen sucht.'<sup>599</sup> The white silk gown is too revealing and clashes with the virginal ornament in the bunch of violets attached to her belt. The narrator seems to imply that the mistress of the house would be justified in disapproving of the painting. As detailed in Chapter One, the low cut neckline was unacceptable in daywear in mid-century Europe, whereas it was the norm at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. The idealization of sartorial modesty in Marlitt's society meant that such Grecian cuts and light fabrics that characterised post-revolutionary European dress were considered too revealing. Thiel explains that even then the 'antike Mode' was referred to as 'Nacktmode' and cites the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*: 'Man darf die Sittlichkeit unserer modernen Berlinerinnen keineswegs nach ihrer Kleidung beurteilen.'<sup>600</sup> The revealing clothes of the post-revolutionary era contrast with Frau Hellwig's tight, subdued gowns. Her removal of her mother-in-law's portrait, which could have been attributed to the figure's unchaste appearance, is actually motivated by her resentment of the late Frau Hellwig who disapproved of her son's choice of bride. The servant Heinrich calls his late mistress 'selig', 'eine fidele Frau', suggesting she was to be trusted, and refers to the animosity between the women which was fuelled by the elder's designation of her daughter-in-law as a 'Betschwester' (a falsely pious woman) and a 'Madame' (a highly-born woman with a penchant for fashion).<sup>601</sup> These accusations are particularly bitter: 'Betschwester' is an effective way of suggesting hypocrisy, while 'Madame' disassociates the younger Frau Hellwig from her pretensions to German pietism, reinforcing her behaviour as a facade and linking her to French pretence. While Marlitt does not propose the former Frau Hellwig as a better example of femininity than her daughter-in-law, she does indicate that the elder woman was no hypocrite and therefore preferable to the deceptive 'Betschwester'.

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<sup>598</sup> Lütt, *Die elegante Hausfrau*, 216

<sup>599</sup> Marlitt, *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, 43.

<sup>600</sup> See Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms*, 294.

<sup>601</sup> Marlitt, *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, 44.

Adele and Frau Hellwig provide an illustration of how not to behave (sartorially and otherwise) and they are suitably punished for their sins against feminine ideals: they earn Johannes's censure at the end of the story and the readers' dislike throughout. Their example leads us to wonder how the heroine will negotiate clothes. While Adele's attire is often described in some detail and Frau Hellwig's is a key part of her characterisation, Felicitas's modesty and subservient position mean that sartorial depictions of her are relatively limited. As mentioned above, she has little say as to what she wears, since she acts as a servant in the Hellwig household and requires robust clothes in order to complete her tasks. Felicitas is kept in her place in being refused the sort of feminine accoutrements that Adele relies upon and by being given practical dresses. Hence Felicitas's virtue is evident not through the clothes she is forced to wear, but rather in the fact that she always ensures that they are clean and ironed, and does so herself (rather than exploiting others as Adele does). Her cleanliness is proof of her feminine purity. Moreover, she never expresses any desire for sartorial embellishment, but is rather content with that 'Einfachheit' which, as explained in Chapter One, is all-important for German women. Marlitt thus feeds into the view that 'Der schönste Schmuck eines Mädchens liegt in dem 'Adrettein' und das schlichteste Kattunfähnchen besticht durch seine Sauberkeit.'<sup>602</sup> The 'Kattunfähnchen', a cheap calico dress, might look inexpensive, but the wearer can still impress if the dress is spotlessly clean. Felicitas's clothes are clearly a consequence of her position. Notably, she does show some interest in clothes – a fact that makes her more sympathetic to Marlitt's female readers who were likely to have subscribed to fashion journals and taken an avid interest in dress. As a girl, Felicitas discovers the clothes she wore when she was first adopted packed away and admires the light blue embroidered dress that, the narrator reports in indirect speech, had long been replaced by an 'abscheuliches, dunkles Kleid'.<sup>603</sup> The reason the dress is 'abscheulich' has at least in part to do with its dark colour; as indicated in Chapter One, girls were expected to wear white and pastel colours at a young age.

While Felicitas was presumably in mourning for her mother when adopted, she should not have worn dark clothes throughout her childhood, as is implied here, since social custom stipulated that a child should wear mourning for only a year after the death of a parent.<sup>604</sup> The heroine recalls how her mother, in sharp contrast to Frau Hellwig, used to dress her with maternal care. These colourful home-made possessions represent Felicitas's former freedom. While she accepts the charity of her adoptive family, her reverence for her mother overcomes any sense of obedience. On one occasion she visits her mother's grave instead of going to church and returns home without her new shawl. For Frau Hellwig such carelessness is regarded as proof of unworthiness, although, the narrator is careful to point out, the girl is normally meticulous about her clothes.

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<sup>602</sup> Speeman, 1913 cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 115.

<sup>603</sup> Marlitt, *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, 62.

<sup>604</sup> See Bruck-Auffenberg, *Die Frau comme il faut*, 167-68.

However, by valuing the memory of her mother over her clothes, Felicitas esteems one virtue over another and it seems that Marlitt is aware of providing a role model of femininity in her heroine.

Felicitas's hair also reinforces the impression of her beauty and purity and sustains the myth that femininity is 'natural'. The heroine's reaction to Adele's criticism of her hair after the fire incident indicates both her adherence to social guidelines and her energy and allure:

Felicitas griff bestürzt nach ihrem Kopfe; sie war sich bewußt, ihr Haar mit ängstlicher Sorgfalt geordnet zu haben; aber der Kamm, der nie recht fest sitzen wollte in den dicken, widerspenstigen Wellen, war entschlüpft – er lag höchstwahrscheinlich im Mühlbache. Das aufgelöste, wundervolle Gelock wogte wie ein Glorienschein um Wangen und Schultern, noch bestreut mit einzelnen Perlen des aufgepeitschten Wassers.<sup>605</sup>

The water pearls appear more 'natural' than real pearls; they adorn Felicitas's hair making it resemble a 'Glorienschein' whilst expensive genuine pearls would not have had the same effect. The heroine's hair might be glorious, but, loose and flowing, it also contravenes social conventions. However, the fact that Felicitas dressed her hair with care prior to the accident excuses her from any accusation of negligence and the narrator's description shows that her hair is not a sign of wildness and disorder, as the Hellwigs like to think. Rather it appears wonderful and glorious, an indication of her 'natural' inclination towards moral behaviour. In Butlerian terms, Marlitt's emphasis on the natural disposition of her heroine towards typically 'feminine' qualities – her hair effortlessly forms a halo – can be seen as an example of how the author, influenced herself by patriarchal culture, contributes to the construction and perpetuation of gender identity. Hence she has Felicitas grow out of any girlish wildness so that her heroine reconciles all aspects of conventional virtue in the marital conclusion. By the end she is by her own admission “ein demütiges Weib”<sup>606</sup> and this submissiveness is reflected in her attitude to her hair which she smooths down carefully before receiving company.<sup>607</sup> As Kontje acknowledges, this transformation of the heroine 'from plucky heroine to submissive bride'<sup>608</sup> is a fundamental feature of Marlitt's fiction. Cultural dictates overcome even the smallest transgression against patriarchal values and Felicitas ultimately acts and dresses in keeping with social expectations.

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<sup>605</sup> Marlitt, *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, 121.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid, 311.

<sup>607</sup> See ibid, 304.

<sup>608</sup> Kontje, *Women, the Novel and the German Nation, 1771-1871*, 194.

In this novel the gender ideal appears as an accomplishment which the anti-heroines fail to perfect, but the heroine manages to embody to the extent that it appears *natural*. However, the central paradox of nineteenth-century perceptions of femininity is that female nature is meant to be ‘natural’ and yet takes instruction in order to achieve. As I will show, the need for instruction is clearer for some of Marlitt’s other heroines than it is for Felicitas.

### ***Das Heideprinzesschen (1871)***

The tension between the narcissistic and the modest woman recurs throughout Marlitt’s novels and is often linked to national character; vanity is associated with France and sartorial humility with Germany. To ‘do’ femininity successfully in Germany meant not only being clean and careful with one’s attire, but also avoiding excess. *Das Heideprinzesschen* in particular depicts excessive narcissism as a French trait. In so doing the narrative mirrors contemporary arguments such as Klencke’s, that French fashion is to blame for making women into an ‘Augenweide(n) der Lüsternheit’<sup>609</sup> (see Chapter One). Various eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers such as Christoph Wieland, Friedrich von Schiller and Ernst Brandes warned women against emulating the French.<sup>610</sup> Taking up French fashions was seen as a challenge to German integrity. In Marlitt’s novel, the narrator traces her own development from ‘verwilderte(s) junge(s) Mädchen’<sup>611</sup> to civilized woman and indicates that her education and domestication are achieved by realising which of the women around her are to be held up as role models. The first-person narration in this novel is an interesting deviation from her usual third-person technique because it cleverly invites her contemporary reader (who would have typically known several of her novels already) to identify even more powerfully than usual with the heroine. As Leonore recounts her own development, Marlitt makes it particularly clear that choosing a female model to emulate is a challenging task. The overall message is a familiar one – modesty and domestic charm are fundamental feminine attributes – but the ‘ich’ gives a special immediacy to the story.

When the heroine, Leonore von Sassen, is sent from the ‘Heide’ to live with her father upon the death of her grandmother, she is first advised in sartorial matters by her adoptive sister, Charlotte. Pretentious and affected, the latter deems herself French “‘mit Leib und Seele’”<sup>612</sup> due to her

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<sup>609</sup> Klencke, (1897), 269. While Klencke writes this years after the publication of Marlitt’s novel, it is a prevalent view in nineteenth-century Germany and is reflected in the writings of many authors of conduct literature, see Chapter One.

<sup>610</sup> See Helen Fronius’s discussion of Wieland’s *Allgemeine Damenbibliothek*, Schiller’s *Kalendar für Damen* and Brandes’s *Ueber die Weiber* in *Women and Literature in the Goethe Era: 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 38-39.

<sup>611</sup> Eugenie Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzesschen* (Klagenfurt: Eduard Kaiser Verlag, 1976), 83.

<sup>612</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzesschen*, 94.



noble French ancestry and declares that she has “eine empfindliche Pariser Haut.”<sup>613</sup> For her the French ‘Seele’ is manifested by vestimentary ornaments, a fact which both exposes her as superficial and suggests how Marlitt engaged in a national attempt to vilify the French at the time of the Franco-Prussian war.<sup>614</sup> As outlined in Chapter One, even in the 1870s Germany looked towards Paris for fashion advice and Marlitt’s depiction of Charlotte seems to be an attempt at exposing the foreign focus of the industry and the need for reform. Thus Marlitt writes as a sort of creative Germania, defending both German ideals of femininity and the illusion of a gendered core being against the superficial norms of the enemy.

Marlitt depicts Charlotte as a kind of gender hybrid: she is cast both as interested in fashion, a francophile *and* a mannish woman. Her confused behaviour can be read as an illustration of the sort of stylised acts that constitute gender and proof of her inability to internalise gender norms. The result is a parody that threatens to disrupt the illusion of the stability of femininity. Charlotte transgresses against gender norms in several ways. Firstly she tries to emulate the emancipated French women of her day: she is loud, outspoken and even smokes cigars. Secondly, she is overly concerned with her appearance and yet, thirdly, she is also prepared at times to overlook sartorial propriety altogether. Marlitt emphasizes Charlotte’s un-feminine traits: she is tall and ‘starkgegliedert’<sup>615</sup>, “raucht wie ein Schornstein”<sup>616</sup> and, when the house is on fire, she helps ‘wie ein Mann’.<sup>617</sup> Charlotte’s smoking, however, like her frequent mocking laughter, appears to be an accessory to her rebellion against social norms as smoking, first acceptable for women at the beginning of the twentieth century, was deemed a masculine practice in the nineteenth.<sup>618</sup> When she smokes, Charlotte seems to be playing a part, seeking attention without any understanding of the significance her actions she might have and the effect can be read as a parody of gender. Ilse, who acts as a mouthpiece for social decorum and who has raised Leonore, describes the smoking as “eine greuliche Mode”<sup>619</sup> upon which Charlotte, who has temporarily cast herself in the role of the ‘Emanzipierte’, tries to turn the tables on Ilse by suggesting that she is only concerned that the smoke could ruin “die brillanten Pensees auf Ihrem Hute”.<sup>620</sup> In so doing Charlotte suggests that Ilse is herself vain and superficial. Each woman accuses the other of being overly interested in fashion and therefore of transgressing against ideals of femininity. In

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<sup>613</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>614</sup> Such an agenda is also clear in *Reichsgräfin Gisela* (1869), in which Marlitt speaks through a blind German woman who despises the French. “Frankreich hat stets gemeint, Deutschland müsse nach seiner Pfeife tanzen.” Heroic German behaviour overthrows this idea and reveals Germany as the stronger, more moral nation. See Eugenie Marlitt, *Reichsgräfin Gisela* (Hamburg: Xenos Verlag, 1976), 42.

<sup>615</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 59.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>618</sup> See Karin Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 189.

<sup>619</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 118-119.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid, 119.

Ilse's case the accusation bears no weight, for she is obviously out of touch with contemporary trends and continues to sew amateurish garments even as the ready-to-wear industry is beginning to flourish (see Chapter One). Charlotte's case is quite different since she both openly condones and rebels against the fashionable ideal. Yet it is only when Charlotte is reprimanded by a man, her adoptive father, Herr Claudius, that she is ashamed of her excessive behaviour. He remarks, "den milden keuschen Glanz der Weiblichkeit überzieht (der Tabaksrauch) mit einem häßlichen Ruß."<sup>621</sup> Disapproval from a man, who defines femininity as 'mild' and 'keusch', appears to have more weight with Charlotte than that of a woman.

Charlotte's behaviour can be seen as Marlitt's comment on the subversive acts of such women as George Sand and Louise Aston. Rather than achieving positive attention, the woman who copies men by smoking – if not cross-dressing – exposes herself to ridicule and cannot be taken seriously, because there seems to be no rational thought process behind her actions. This is especially so in Charlotte's case. As a family friend, the Prinzessin, whose sympathies with the women's movement are implied since she has met Charlotte at a 'Frauenverein', remarks that the young woman is "zu kolossal, zu emancipiert und herausfordernd [...]"<sup>622</sup> Such adjectives are strikingly negative for the contemporary reader. To be 'kolossal' was to be masculine and unattractive, for a beautiful woman, as conduct writers Grünau and Hammer explain, had to possess 'Ein(en) schön(en) regelmäßig(en) Körperbau, Fülle der Glieder bei *mittlerer* Statur'.<sup>623</sup> 'Herausfordernd' suggests demands that contravene the image of ideal femininity which was typically described using such adjectives as 'keusch', 'bescheiden', 'einfach' and 'gefällig', while 'emancipiert' was synonymous with indelicacy and a failure to accept gender prescriptions. Charlotte is defined here by excess and 'un-womanliness' and such violation of feminine codes is punished as Herr Claudius puts her to shame.

Certainly, Charlotte's performance of femininity is unstable and when not overtly mannish in her appearance and behaviour, she veers in the opposite direction, seemingly aiming to appear delicately feminine. Leonore observes her at one point overwhelmed by decorative clothing; she sits on a sofa 'halb versunken in die metallisch glitzernden Wogen einer mit Bauschen und Volants überladenen grünen Seidenrobe.'<sup>624</sup> Again, in particular when read with a contextual understanding of the importance of modesty detailed in Chapter One, the impression is negative, excessive, as such a wordy depiction of her dress as billowing and frilly indicates French fussiness, which is alien to the modest German ideal. Charlotte's clothing does not adhere to contemporary recommendations for what makes successful feminine attire: it is not 'einfach',

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<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>623</sup> Grünau and Hammer (1886) cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 113. (My italics).

<sup>624</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 204.

‘adrett’, ‘praktisch’. Instead she appears unrefined; as Klencke writes in 1872, ‘Rohe Menschen lieben das Auffällige, Ueberladene, Herausfordernde, Contrastierende (...).’<sup>625</sup> Moreover, in her eagerness to resist ‘Schablonen’ and bourgeois values, she overlooks basic social decorum and even appears in her ‘Morgenanzug’ before Herr Claudius. Such brazenness causes both her companion’s and then Herr Claudius’s eyes to widen with censure and, although Charlotte often seeks to shock, she blushes in shame when Herr Claudius remarks on her unseemly appearance. Marlitt’s portrayal of Charlotte reads as an illustration of conduct advice and a warning against excess. Gender prescriptions ultimately triumph and any temptation on our part to see Charlotte’s behaviour as a parody of femininity that might, theoretically, encourage repetition is overcome by her inconsistency. Nevertheless, her trajectory demonstrates the limitations women faced and the frustrations that those limitations caused and suggests that Marlitt herself is aware of gender as troubling even if she cannot entirely condone subversion.

Indeed, as in *Die Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, Marlitt presents a mother-daughter pair to illustrate different ways of getting femininity wrong and thus problematizes femininity itself. Charlotte’s mother Christine is depicted in even more negative terms than her daughter as her obsession with self-adornment means that she is irresponsible and unable to manage her money. Christine not only has French heritage, she is also a professional singer whose clothes indicate foreign exuberance and theatrical frivolity, both reprehensible to the bourgeois German reader. Desperate after losing her voice, Christine appears first in a velvet dress, so heavily made up that even Charlotte is taken back, remarking of Leonore’s “‘Komödiantante’” (she is not yet aware that the woman is also her mother) “[...] die Schminke sitzt ihr ja fingerdick auf dem Gesicht!”<sup>626</sup> At a time when cosmetics were scarcely mentioned unless to describe fallen women (see Chapter One), Marlitt’s description directs us to see Christine in a negative light. Marlitt’s portrayal of a bourgeois woman who depends on make-up is more striking than Aston’s aristocratic women who do so in *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* since middle-class women in the nineteenth century were expected to show a stronger moral consciousness than their aristocratic counterparts.<sup>627</sup> Christine fails in this regard. When hidden away by Leonore in a modest dwelling, for instance, she complains that the mirror is too small for her to dress. Ilse is quick to criticize any tendency towards self-adoration and when Leonore imitates Charlotte by dressing up and admiring her reflection, Ilse calls her a “‘Spiegelnarr.’”<sup>628</sup> Vanity is perceived as a distraction, foolish and financially ruinous. Christine cannot regulate her money and in the nineteenth century when the

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<sup>625</sup> Klencke, cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 113.

<sup>626</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 219.

<sup>627</sup> Karin Schrott examines how nineteenth-century Germans linked make-up to the aristocracy and their love of masquerade. Schrott mentions that ‘Sich zu schmincken ist für die bürgerliche Frau tabu’ except on very special occasions. Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 134.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid, 131.

German housewife was responsible for the household accounts and managing domestic expenditure, this is particularly reprehensible. As indicated in Chapter One, the emphasis on sartorial simplicity in contemporary *Anstandsliteratur* is linked to the need to be and appear economical.<sup>629</sup> When given several hundred Taler by the heroine in order to set herself up as a singing teacher, Christine squanders it on luxury items. She also lacks skill in other household matters. Even the once wild Liane is astonished at finding her room dirty and untidy: ‘Die Tische und Kommoden deckte eine undurchdringliche Staublage und hinter dem Bettvorhang lagen Kissen und Kleidungsstücke unordentlich durcheinander [...]’.<sup>630</sup> The room, with its sweet scent of ‘Veilchenparfüm,’ resembles its inhabitant as Christine tries to hide her age and distress. Christine’s most flagrant transgression, however, is the abandonment of her children which violates the nineteenth-century expectation that women were first and foremost meant to be mothers.<sup>631</sup> An ‘entartete Mutter,’ and ‘pflichtvergessende Frau’,<sup>632</sup> the singer serves as an example of what women should not be: dissembling, vain and negligent of maternal duty. In her case vanity is apparently part of the cause of the downfall of the family and, by extension, a great threat to the German nation which places its values and hope of unity in the bourgeois home.<sup>633</sup> Marlitt clearly understands contravening feminine norms as particularly damaging and threatening and the extent of this threat is evident in the fact that Christine takes after her mother and hence similarly fails to uphold social values.

The fate of mother and daughter reveals the consequences of any deviation from the moral, gender-specific code. Ashamed and regretful of her unseemly behaviour, Charlotte returns to school in order to train as a governess, while the repentant Christine becomes a deaconess, a decision which would have required a complete sartorial transformation as the standard attire for deaconesses consisted of a simple black dress with a white cap.<sup>634</sup> Charlotte’s fickle sartorial habits are also changed by her decision since governesses would have been expected to dress demurely, setting an example to their charges by wearing modest and simple attire. They were also servants in the household and were therefore dependent on a limited salary for sartorial expenditures. In Franz Hoffmann’s novel *Die Gouvernante* (1865), the governess heroine is reproached for appearing to be better dressed than her mistress. Hoffmann emphasises, however, that she is wearing a dress which is ‘einfach’, ‘bescheiden’ with ‘keinerlei Schmuck’, appropriate

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<sup>629</sup> See also Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, p. 162.

<sup>630</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 248.

<sup>631</sup> See for example Joachim Campe, *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter: Ein Gegenstück zum Theophron. Der erwachsenen weiblichen Jugend gewidmet* (Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandlung, 1809).

<sup>632</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 258.

<sup>633</sup> See *The Feminist Encyclopedia of German Literature*, ed. Friederike Ursula Eigler, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 145,

<sup>634</sup> See Jutta Schmidt, *Beruf: Schwester: Mutterschaftsdiakonie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1998), 140-142.

for 'ein anständiges und sittsames Mädchen' and entirely in accordance with the sartorial advice outlined in Chapter One.<sup>635</sup> The reform of the anti-heroines and the resolution of the gender trouble they cause depend on such sartorial improvements.

Through Charlotte and Christine the heroine observes how women misinterpret their gender scripts; the female reader is clearly meant to identify with Leonore. For scholar Kirsten Belgum, this is the main attraction of Marlitt's fiction since 'the appeal of such texts to (...) female readers seems to be tied to a domestication of the reader.'<sup>636</sup> In the novel female identity is meant to be formed both by imitation and dis-association. Belgum makes this point in relation to *Die Gartenlaube* and the magazine's tendency to report on American women: 'Identity, be it German identity or German female identity, is often defined by contrast, through comparison with another model.'<sup>637</sup> Because Leonore grows up divorced from society, a *Heideprinzessin*, whose epithet links her both to the provincial German landscape and to nobility, her socialisation is a key aspect of her domestication. Clothes are central to this socialisation as the heroine only becomes aware of herself as a part of society when she realises how her attire excludes her from it. Leonore's initial wildness is conveyed primarily through her disregard for clothes; she returns home from the heath barefooted in a practical 'Leinenhemd' and a 'Wollrock',<sup>638</sup> an image that is used to portray her lack of education. Her tanned skin and resistance to domestic tasks, such as knitting, combined with 'der unzählbare Trieb, barfuß zu laufen' comprise 'die schauderhaften Grundzüge des Porträts' which is to change during her time in her father's house.<sup>639</sup> An awareness of the coverage given to children's attire in fashion journals of the *Gründerzeit* allows the modern reader to appreciate just how abnormal such practical, comfortable and scant clothing was even for a young girl. Marlitt's heroine is constantly aware of her feet, her desire to run around on the heath and the need to quell that desire. She is oblivious to sartorial considerations until she observes the women 'mit feinbeschuhten flüchtigen Füßchen' who are guests in her father's house and notices Charlotte with her tall, beautiful allure, her white dress and gold-embroidered jacket and 'stolze Leichtfertigkeit'.<sup>640</sup> Her reaction is telling: unconsciously she removes her hat and 'die große, weite Halskrause'<sup>641</sup> that Ilse had attached in an effort to prepare her for her introduction into society. Unused to such garments, Leonore finds her dress 'pressend', 'eng' and 'drückend'<sup>642</sup>, but is aware of it as a source of social discomfort as well as physical discomfort

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<sup>635</sup> See Franz Hoffmann, *Die Gouvernante* (Stuttgart: Schmidt & Spring, 1865), 81-82.

<sup>636</sup> Belgum, 'Domesticating the Reader: women and *Die Gartenlaube*' in *Women in German Yearbook*, Vol. 9, 100.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>638</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzessin*, 15.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid, 80. My italics.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid, 50.

only when she meets her relatives. By taking off the hat and ruffle, Leonore indicates her longing for the corporeal freedom of the heath, but also implies an awareness of how inappropriate outdated articles appear in well-dressed society. Due to her attire, she is welcomed as ‘ein Zigeunermädchen’,<sup>643</sup> different and uncivilised. Despite her lack of social awareness and sartorial ignorance, Leonore’s feminine ‘instinct’ awakens quickly and she reflects on ‘das Wunder des erwachenden weiblichen Instinkts an dem wilden und verwilderten Kinde’.<sup>644</sup>

As I have explained in the Introduction, our reading of the text is enriched by Butler’s understanding of gender as ‘the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a *natural* sort of being.’<sup>645</sup> Marlitt clearly perceives the process of becoming feminine as ‘natural’ and emphasises that it is this gendered ‘instinct’ that makes Leonore wish to peel potatoes for her father, tidy up the house and – when it comes to clothing – imitate Charlotte. Apparently as a result of her feminine sensibilities, she also admires the fine stockings (‘ein wunderfeines, zartes Spitzengewebe’<sup>646</sup>) Charlotte acquires for her, which are a stark contrast to her thick, home-made stockings and which Ilse promptly vilifies as a waste of money. It is not just their appearance which charms, however. When Leonore tries them with her new satin gown ‘war es genau so, als sei ich wieder barfuß, als flösse die Heideluft schmeichelnd um meine Füße.’<sup>647</sup> Her new attire gives her wings – “‘Ist’s nicht, als hätte ich Flügel, wirkliche Flügel?’”<sup>648</sup> Here Marlitt seems to accept the contemporary appetite for sartorial consumerism and arguably endorse it in an effort to appeal to her readers who were typically middle-class consumers themselves. Fashionable attire is portrayed as preferable to homemade garbs and modern finesse trumps old-fashioned handicrafts. While Leonore’s new *Hoftoilette*, chosen by Charlotte, leads to her ‘allererst(e) Selbstbeäugelung’ and Ilse’s chastising, Marlitt emphasises that the heroine’s transformation does not lead to vanity and greed. Leonore quickly agrees that it is ridiculous ‘mit sich selbst zu liebäugeln’<sup>649</sup> and thereafter there is no further emphasis on her clothing or any mention of her use of mirrors. The heroine thus manages to ascertain which advice and example to follow in order to become an apt model of her gender for the nineteenth-century female reader.

However, Marlitt does create tension between the pre-socialised self, which upholds the illusion of a feminine core, and the cultured self, which acknowledges the imitative practices of gender, and this tension is particularly obvious in descriptions of the heroine’s hair. Just as Leonore is

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>645</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.

<sup>646</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 121.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>649</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 131.

content on the heath to ignore what she is wearing as long as it is practical, so too does she neglect her hair. As a small child she recalls the attentions of her governess and how ‘[ihre] langen, schwarzen Haare allabendlich aufgewickelt [wurden].’<sup>650</sup> As soon as the governess leaves, Leonore demands that Ilse cut off her ‘langen, unbequemen Locken.’<sup>651</sup> The heroine feels free and unburdened with short hair. Later, when she wears her *Hoftoilette* and admires herself in the mirror, it is the natural glory of her hair that amazes her most: ‘[ich] fand plötzlich, daß mein nie beachtetes Haar doch eigentlich in prächtigen, glänzend schwarzen Ringeln über den Rücken hinabwoge.’<sup>652</sup> Leonore’s hair, which she has hitherto neglected, has grown again and become orderly and beautiful of its own accord in the same way that Felicitas’s hair forms a natural halo after her heroic rescue of Ännchen. Marlitt seems to imply here a criticism of the fussy styles prevalent in the 1870s. The heroine learns to love her hair when it is long and loose, rather than tied back and curled artificially. As explained in Chapter One, contemporary fashion relied heavily on false hair; the fact that Leonore’s hair is particularly charming without being dressed at all seems to suggest that Marlitt found this practice as excessive and reprehensible as many moralists of the time who emphasised the importance of modesty, simplicity and the ‘natural’. Marlitt’s ‘liberal compromise’<sup>653</sup> seems to lie in the fact that she allows her heroines initially to be independent and self-willed, aloof from society (Leonore runs around the heath barefooted and short-haired) but she portrays their domestication as a ‘natural’ process (Leonore’s hair naturally grows back, adhering to the social norm). Marlitt understands positive feminine characteristics as instinctual rather than constructed. An awareness of this indicates how she subconsciously maintains ‘the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core [...]’.<sup>654</sup>

Thus the heroine’s socialisation and domestication depend on a change in her appearance and are depicted as ‘natural’ processes. When she ceases to consider clothes as practical necessities, which can be discarded when they get in the way, Leonore earns the admiration of those around her. What is interesting is how she manages to find the ‘goldene Mittelstraße’<sup>655</sup> between vanity and disregard for fashion, for there is no female model in the story for her to emulate. Charlotte is too brazen and, as the insightful Herr Claudius remarks, “‘hat noch viel zu viel mit sich selbst zu tun’”<sup>656</sup> to make a suitable role model; Christine manipulates clothes to convey a false image of herself; and Ilse fails to prepare Leonore for society, so that she stands out as hopelessly ill-dressed and wild. Moreover, the latter over-emphasises practicality to the detriment of comfort

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<sup>650</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>653</sup> See Kontje, ‘Eugenie Marlitt: the art of liberal compromise’, in *Women, the Novel and the German Nation*, 183-202.

<sup>654</sup> Buter, *Gender Trouble*, 186.

<sup>655</sup> Lesser (1884) cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 76.

<sup>656</sup> Marlitt, *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, 118.

and aesthetics and her censure is restrictive and excessive. The test of Leonore's heroine-ism lies in the navigation away from the examples of these women and in her ability to assert key German values. Her success comes as a result of her ability to do so and she wins Herr Claudius's love because of her self-taming which manifests itself most clearly in her vestimentary transformation and her increasing awareness of what is wrong with Christine's and Charlotte's sartorial habits. As in *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, Marlitt explores how women who seem to internalise feminine ideals are rewarded with marriage; as Butler puts it, 'performing [one's gender] well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity'<sup>657</sup> and for Marlitt herself that performance is constituted by creating situations which celebrate 'natural' femininity.

### ***Die zweite Frau (1874)***

While Marlitt explores issues of class and servitude in *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell* and childhood development in *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, *Die zweite Frau* has the most potential to disrupt gender norms as the heroine is a mature, married and (importantly) unhappy woman. As Chapter One shows, in the nineteenth century to be female meant cultivating beauty, not knowledge. The tension between a concern with dress as an essential ornament to beauty and the development of the mind is explored with particular emphasis in *Die zweite Frau*, and Marlitt's return to the third-person omniscient narrative indicates that she was aware of the need to explore such contentious issues from various angles. When the heroine Liane, who comes from a noble but impoverished family, weds the widower Baron Mainau, she is dressed simply like Aston's Johanna. Her bridal gown which is entirely unadorned – 'Die einfachste Bürgerbraut konnte nicht bescheidener geschmückt sein'<sup>658</sup> – suggests her reluctance to marry a man she does not love more than modesty, since it means the rejection of his gift of an ornate wedding dress which she sees as offensive charity. For modern readers, the extent of Liane's rebellion becomes particularly clear once they are familiar with contemporary fashion journals which are referred to in Chapter One. At the wedding Liane's mother, Gräfin Trachenburg, is horrified at her daughter's appearance and orders, "Du gehst sofort auf dein Zimmer und machst Toilette"<sup>659</sup>. She reads her daughter's simplicity as disrespectful to her groom, whom she is meant to please and attract. Indeed, for Mainau her modesty is far from desirable, it is unattractive to him and out of keeping with her station as well as an obvious insult to him. Liane's sartorial behaviour means that she resembles a middle-class woman more than a member of the nobility.

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<sup>657</sup> Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' (1988), 528.

<sup>658</sup> Eugenie Marlitt, *Die zweite Frau*, (Klagenfurt: Kaiser, 1988), 27.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.



Marlitt's portrayal of the young wife is controversial; Liane seems unhappy because as a woman her fate is decided for her and as a result she resists traditional feminine traits. While she eventually adopts an elegance suited to her aristocratic position, she remains shy in the presence of her aggressive husband, even hiding her loosely fashioned hair, despite his reassurance that "unsere heutige Damenwelt in dieser Haartracht selbst vor der Öffentlichkeit erscheint."<sup>660</sup> Liane is unimpressed with the Baron's knowledge of women's fashion; she writes to her sister criticizing his good looks and lack of intellectual curiosity, thus suggesting that he has some typically feminine attributes and she some more masculine ones. In other words, she wishes to engage with others on an intellectual level whilst he is more interested in appearances. Such a comment seems to challenge Marlitt's depiction of femininity as intuitive and distinct. However, the Baron is depicted in clear terms as the patriarchal masculine prototype who prizes looks over intellect in women and rails against the "Blaustrumpf in nachlässiger Kleidung, mit ungeordentem Haar."<sup>661</sup> In fact, Liane is not negligent; rather she seeks to conceal her beauty and character "in der Nonnentracht der strengsten Zurückhaltung"<sup>662</sup> because she does not want to attract Mainau who has treated her as his inferior. In this respect she is very much like Lewald's Clementine and Aston's Johanna (see Chapter Two). As a result, Liane's clothes suggest an intelligent, wilful mind. Indeed, before her marriage Liane supported her family by selling her own artwork, a fact that horrifies her entourage but which she defends once it has been discovered. Previously she had taken care to avoid advertising the fact that she earned her own living and when her brother published a book on fossils, including her 'reizend ausgeführte Zeichnung(en)<sup>663</sup>, on her request only his name was mentioned. The fact that Liane earns money through her artwork is unfitting for a woman of her station, but painting itself was viewed as a suitable pastime for women. Like Marlitt's other heroines who are voracious readers (Felicitas) or adept at accounting (Leonore), Liane pushes gender boundaries by applying herself so seriously to her art and seeing it as professional work. However, drawing, reading and managing household accounts were acceptable feminine occupations;<sup>664</sup> Marlitt may push boundaries but she does so only slightly. Nonetheless, it is valuable to read her rebellion in the light of Butler's remark that 'If subversion is possible, it will be subversion from within the terms of the law'.<sup>665</sup> The subversive potential of her heroine is illustrated in Mainau's response to his wife's creative intellect which is similar to his censure of her sartorial modesty. For him, "Die Frau ist reizend in

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>664</sup> See Julia Kellner-Evers, *Bürgerliche Mädchenbildung in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Norderstedt: Grin Verlag, 2007), 20-25 and Franziska Wilhelm, *Bildungspolitik und Schulreform* (Norderstedt: Grin Verlag, 2009), 12-13.

<sup>665</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 127.

ihrer Hilflosigkeit und Furcht (...)”<sup>666</sup> and therefore Liane’s “Heldenmut”<sup>667</sup> is unappealing. He fails to perceive that his wife is reluctant to adorn herself and appear vulnerable because she dislikes him and – crucially if Marlitt is to maintain the illusion of femininity being ‘natural’ – her rebellion appears to be against him rather than gender prescriptions as such.

Liane’s attitude towards her husband and, indeed, like Marlitt’s other heroines, towards her gender, is particularly clear in descriptions of her hair before and during her marriage. When the reader first encounters Liane, her hair is ‘bis an den Scheitel aufgelöst’ and hangs down to the hem of her dress ‘wie ein Mantel’.<sup>668</sup> Traditionally a sign of sensuality, her hair explains why the heroine’s mother is horrified that both she and her sister are “derangiert” and when offered the explanation that Liane’s sister has loosened her hair because she has a headache, she labels their behaviour ‘Kinderei’.<sup>669</sup> However, while she finds Ulrike’s dark red hair offensive to the point of being a ‘Strafe’, the countess recognises Liane’s hair as ‘[ihren] schönen Schmuck’<sup>670</sup> and insists that her fiancé sees it down. Liane’s future step-son, however, has heard from his father that she is red-headed “wie unser Küchenmädchen”.<sup>671</sup> Red hair is associated with a lack of refinement, and Ulrike is depicted as ugly, freckled, red-haired, ‘eine Dame von auffallender Häßlichkeit’.<sup>672</sup> Marlitt’s insistence that her heroine’s hair is reddish blond, rather than entirely red, means that Liane is disassociated from her sister’s unfortunate ugliness and the kitchen maid’s lowly status. In the nineteenth century Grünau and Hammer define female beauty as including ‘schönes weiches, langes Haar’; colour is insignificant, but the comment is added that ‘röthliches ist in der Regel nicht beliebt’.<sup>673</sup> Hence to make Liane red-haired would be to resist social prejudice; Marlitt’s compromise lies in the fact that she does not propose any radical reform of social stigmas. To appeal to the imagination of her readers, Marlitt maintains the stereotype. For this reason it is the heroine’s sister, rather than the heroine herself, who has distinct red hair. In fact the ‘reiche, stark rötliche Blond’<sup>674</sup> is as appealing to her husband as her mother has envisaged and Liane thus takes her place alongside other blond German heroines such as the similarly beautiful Goldelse in *Goldelse* (1866) and Gisela in *Reichsgräfin Gisela* (1869). While Felicitas and Leonore are dark-haired, their long curls are equally enticing and radiant. Marlitt, like Aston, makes use of ‘das Motiv der sexuellen Energie im langen, lockigen Haar’;<sup>675</sup> the baron is repeatedly tempted to touch his wife’s hair, but Liane shrinks back, until her fear and dislike of

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<sup>666</sup> Marlitt, *Die zweite Frau*, 107.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>673</sup> Grünau and Hammer cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 113.

<sup>674</sup> Marlitt, *Die zweite Frau*, 15.

<sup>675</sup> Tiedemann, *Haar-Kunst*, 171.

him is replaced by love. Seen allegorically, her hair appears to prove that becoming a woman is a ‘natural’ process; in theoretical terms, it maintains ‘the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core’<sup>676</sup> by representing Liane’s sexuality and femininity as intuitive.

It is only after the couple fall in love and after the Baron acknowledges her ‘als treue Gefährtin und Beraterin’<sup>677</sup> that Liane accepts her gender completely. Marlitt’s message appears to be that love cures any aberration from feminine norms, or that it is the reward for an acceptance of them. With the development of mutual love and respect, Liane is able to tame her own rebellion, avoiding unacceptable intellectual pursuits and displaying an awareness of her femininity in her choice of dress. The change is marked by her ‘veilchenfarbenes Kleid’ which provokes the narrator’s comment, ‘o, sie war kokett geworden. Sie wollte Mainau gefallen.’<sup>678</sup> Her sudden, but notably subtle, flirtatiousness, signalled by the change in attire, is legitimized because she aims at impressing only her husband. At a ball her husband’s former mistress demonstrates truly coquettish behaviour by attempting to seduce the Baron. In a description not unlike Aston’s depiction of the princess and the mistress in *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, a yellow gown artfully highlights her beauty, revealing her shoulders, while her dark curls fall ‘glutvoll’ and ‘ungezwungen’. Meanwhile, like Lewald’s Jenny, Liane wears a ‘milchweiße[s], silberbestreute[s] Kleid’ which is compared to ‘ein Mondstrahl unter all den bunten Gewändern.’<sup>679</sup> The mistress’s manipulation of dress to serve beauty contrasts with the wife’s ‘natural’ attractiveness. In the end Liane settles into the role of devoted wife. She is allowed some intellectual fulfilment, but ultimately she adheres to gender norms and is above all the “sanfte Pflgerin” desired by her husband.<sup>680</sup> Her change in attire reflects her success at reforming her husband and emphasises both her virtue and her sensuality. The white dress in this final scene reconciles two extreme feminine stereotypes as the Madonna and the whore converge. Like all Marlitt’s heroines, Liane manages to find the sought-after ‘goldene Mittelstraße’<sup>681</sup> and is ‘heroine-like’ for appearing to embody her gender so ‘naturally’.

## Illustrations

When Marlitt’s novels were re-published posthumously in the 1880s and 1890s they included illustrations of dresses which are incongruous with the setting of the novels and that suggest in themselves both the importance of the sartorial to late nineteenth-century readers and how the

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<sup>676</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 186.

<sup>677</sup> Marlitt, *Die zweite Frau*, 182.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>681</sup> Lesser (1884), cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 76.

visual works to establish, proliferate and determine feminine behaviour. The crinolines which, as described in Chapter One, were the norm at the time Marlitt set her novels, do not feature. Instead, the S line of the female figure is predominant in the illustrations. This discrepancy indicates two things. Firstly, it proves how the values Marlitt expounds are meant to be seen as ageless; the publishers give the stories a contemporary setting in order to encourage the female reader to identify with them more easily. Secondly, it shows that despite the change in fashions between the 1860s and 1870s and the 1890s, the various trends in nineteenth-century Germany can all be seen as upholding domestic values and propagating patriarchal feminine norms. The way of interpreting dress is largely the same – the over-dressed woman who stands out is clearly inappropriate, while the heroine whose attire is modest and clean is celebrated. The fact that a reader in the 1890s would have been able to recognise what she herself had been wearing and/or seeing in fashion magazines in the books' illustrations suggests the importance of visual identification for the nineteenth-century audience when it comes to gender proliferation.

These illustrations interpret Marlitt's vestimentary depictions, highlighting the significance of the nation and the 'natural' in feminine identity. Sartorial descriptions are not always illustrated – as though to put too much emphasis on condemning vanity would somehow enhance it – but when they are, the effect is particularly striking. For example, in one image (see Figure 2) from *Reichsgräfin Gisela* (1870), a baroness is shown preparing herself for a ball. She revels in her beauty, which is depicted as artificial and un-Germanic even though it is clear that she is making a conscious effort to appear natural. The illustration features her in the foreground with a maid knelt down behind her, busily putting the final touches on her gown while two women look on. The baroness admires herself in a mirror and her face 'strahlte im Triumph.' The accompanying text reads: 'Die Baronin stand vor dem Ankleidespiegel und hielt Anprobe, jedenfalls ein blutsaures Geschäft, denn der Kammerfrau, die mit flinken Händen ordnete und arrangierte, standen die hellen Schweißtropfen auf der Stirne.'<sup>682</sup>

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<sup>682</sup> Eugenie Marlitt, *Reichsgräfin Gisela*, (Leipzig: Verlag von Ernst Keils Nachfolger, 1886-1890), 219.



Figure 2: Eugenie Marlitt, *Reichsgräfin Gisela*, (Leipzig: Verlag von Ernst Keils Nachfolger, 1886-1890), 219

The tremendous effort of dressing, which is ‘blutsauer’ and sweaty, is emphasised both textually and visually and demonstrates the thoughtless narcissism of the aristocracy and its willingness to exploit others. The narrative brings out another motif, as Marlitt comments on how Parisian tailors ‘offenbar mit hoher Intelligenz auf die Ideen der schönen Frau eingegangen (sind) - die Toilette repräsentierte den Wald (...)’. The French are exposed as artful, but the resulting effect is artifice, even if the point is to represent something natural: ‘Weniger heilig und dem keuschen Hauch des deutschen Waldes entsprechend war die Form des Gewandes, das ohne Aermel, nur mittels einer schmalen grünen Spange auf den Schultern zusammengehalten wurde.’<sup>683</sup> The baroness’s gown is conceived to idealise nature but its execution contravenes conduct advice. While Marlitt admits that the wearer’s beauty is accentuated by the dress, her arms and neck are shamelessly exposed. Marlitt goes on to comment ‘es war doch gut, daß sie keinen deutschen Namen mehr trug.’<sup>684</sup> The image and the text work together to reinforce an anti-French – and by extension anti-fashion – message. The initial year of publication saw Prussia at war with France and the relationship between Germany and France at the end of the century continued to be tense and antagonistic.<sup>685</sup> As shown through the depictions of Charlotte, Christine and Adele and earlier in Lewald’s *Diogena*, the strategy of debasing the enemy by exposing the immorality of their women is a common one; Marlitt anticipates the conclusion made by Klenke in 1872 that French

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<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

<sup>685</sup> See Katja Marmetschka, *Feindbeobachtungen und Verständigung* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2008), 77-79.

fashions make women into ‘Augenweide der Lüsternheit’ and that, by following them, German women contribute to the downfall of their nation:

Das Streben nach Enthüllung in der Kleidung des weiblichen Geschlechts ist immer ein Zeichen entsittlicher Zustände im Volksleben; deßhalb konnte die leider maßgebend gewordene Mode dieser Art ihre Heimath in Paris finden, und wo sie in anderen Völkern willkommen geheißen wird, verräth ihr Gastrecht schon den Verfall der guten Sitte.<sup>686</sup>

France is perceived as a sort of siren, its fashion magnetic and alluring, but also destructive. The baroness’s self-exposure can be seen as evidence of French depravity and the danger of French influence on German culture. Marlitt’s role as an author is to convey to her (female) readers that the German woman is to serve, as Schrott writes, ‘als Bewahrerin der Sitte im “Kulturkampf”’ where fashion is linked to social decline: ‘Die Bedrohung, die von den “Modeirungen” ausgeht, erschüttert (...) die Gesellschaft in ihren Grundpfeilern. In Gefahr ist die Familie und mit ihr die ganze Nation.’<sup>687</sup> The text and image work together here to enhance this message, although there is there is also a notable tension in the depiction of the dressing baroness between the text’s apparent condemnation of French fashion and the illustration’s appeal to the reader’s aesthetic pleasure; it is hard to imagine that the female reader would not have admired the floral detail and small-waisted figure in this illustration. Yet it is Marlitt’s warning against frivolity that predominates and comes through as central to the social conscience which determines the imitative practices which make up German gender identity.

In an 1889 copy of *Im Hause des Kommerzienrates* another type of aristocratic sartorial outrage and consequent threat to German gender ideals is depicted in the illustration of the *Kaisertochter*. Published initially in 1877 when fashion trends were exuberant and elaborate, the textual description emphasises the concern that wealthy women were likely to over-indulge in vanity.

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<sup>686</sup> Kléncke (1897, 269) cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 116.

<sup>687</sup> Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 117.



Figure 3: E. Marlitt, *Im Hause des Kommerzienrates*, Verlag von Ernst Keils Nachfolger, Leipzig, 1927 (Zweite Auflage), 72.

The *Kaisertochter* is portrayed as a slave to fashion, so concerned with her figure that she endangers her health to achieve the perfect ‘Wespentaille’:

Die hinfällige Gestalt mit ihren eckigen Linien in dem knapp anliegenden Ueberkleid von glänzenden Farben balancierte förmlich und auf übergemäßig hohen Absätzen. Sie atmete so kurz und hastig und sah so grellbund, so kokett und dadurch fast lächerlich aus. Aber sie hatte in den letzten zwei Tagen an häufig wiederkehrenden Erstickungsanfällen gelitten...<sup>688</sup>

The *Kaisertochter*'s breathlessness and frequent ‘Erstickungsanfällen’ appear to be linked to her tight dress and her desire to please; such behaviour is succinctly berated by Marlitt’s choice of the word ‘lächerlich’. Marlitt appears to side with the argument put forward by physicians in the late

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<sup>688</sup> E. Marlitt, *Im Hause des Kommerzienrates*, Verlag von Ernst Keils Nachfolger, Leipzig, 1927 (Zweite Auflage), 72. My italics.

nineteenth century linking poor health to sartorial habits. The princess violates the advice given by conduct writers that a woman's dress should be 'geschmackvoll, sauber, einfach, adrett, dabei aber *gesundheitsgemäß*, bequem und praktisch.'<sup>689</sup> Indeed, the dress is not only too tight but accompanied by a 'seitwärts aufgenommener Schleppe,'<sup>690</sup> a feature which was particularly fashionable in the 1870s but that was also considered to be harmful to health since it swept up dust that was then inhaled. The overall effect of the gown on the princess's health reinforces the contemporary rationale that, as one conduct author puts it, 'Aller Schönheit Boden ist Gesundheit.'<sup>691</sup> She appears particularly ridiculous because, as a result of her coquettish attire, she cannot breathe. Yet the illustration of this passage introduces another aspect of the 'Kulturkampf': the princess is not only shown to be excessively fashion conscious, she is also depicted – notably without any textual justification and incongruously given her excessive feminine attire – as an *Emanzipierte*. Her hair is short and she is smoking a cigarette; under her skirts her legs are crossed. This image suggests indecency; smoking was a taboo for women while good posture was extremely important for women. Klencke even links poor posture with emancipatory tendencies: 'Wie unschön und deßhalb von jeder guten Sitte verworfen ist beim Weibe das emancipirte Ausstrecken der Beine beim Sitzen, *das Ueberschlagen des einen Beines über das andere*, immer das Bild der Gemeinheit schon aus Gründen der Naturästhetik.'<sup>692</sup> A generation after the first serialisation of the novel,<sup>693</sup> at a time when the women's movement was well under way, the illustrator combines the condemnation of the vain woman with that of the 'Mannweib.' He categorises aristocratic egotism and unfeminine behaviour together as detrimental to German society. Judging by Marlitt's 'savage caricature'<sup>694</sup> of mannish women in other novels, such as Charlotte in *Das Heideprinzeßchen*, it is a categorisation with which she would have agreed. Writing in tacit acknowledgement of contemporary scepticism towards women's rights activists, Marlitt tends to categorise emancipated and excessively fashionable women as extremes that contravene gender ideals.

Modern volumes of Marlitt's work have also included illustrations that divert from the text and tend to be marketed, perhaps unsurprisingly, explicitly to a female public in a way which indicates the extent to which similar gender norms still prevail. Since there is a predominance of sentiment in her work, editors imply, it will first and foremost appeal to women. Illustrations

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<sup>689</sup> Klencke, 1897, S. 270 (my italics) cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 113.

<sup>690</sup> E. Marlitt, *Im Hause des Kommerzienrates* Verlag von Ernst Keils Nachfolger, Leipzig, 1927 (Zweite Auflage), 72.

<sup>691</sup> Altwegg-Weber zur Treuburg, cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, 120.

<sup>692</sup> Klencke, 1897 cited in Schrott, *Das normative Korsett*, p. 138. My italics.

<sup>693</sup> The Ernst Keils Nachfolger, Leipzig volumes of Marlitt's novels, viewed here in their second edition, were first published 1886-1890.

<sup>694</sup> Kontje examines this aspect of Marlitt's work in *Women, the novel and the German nation, 1771-1871*, 191.



produced on re-prints of Marlitt's novels in the late twentieth century overlook fashions of the 1860s and 1870s. The heroines depicted on the jacket covers wear clothes that range from the modern (such as Deutscher Literatur-Verlag's copy of *Schulmeisters Marie* in 1987 where the female figure is short-haired and wears a collared shirt) to a vague image of late nineteenth-century apparel (such as Weltbild Verlag's issue of *Die Frau mit den Karfunkelsteinen* in 1993 where a woman features in a dress from the very end of the century). The majority of twentieth-century cover illustrations attempt to popularise Marlitt as a romance writer and the focus is on the relationship between the female and male figures on the front. There is, however, a different emphasis in the twenty-first century as Marlitt's legacy is accepted as more extensive than the remit of *Trivilliteratur*; electronic publishing company Bibliobazaar brought out translations of Marlitt in 2010 with images of bookshelves as the cover illustration while other publishers have chosen only text or simply a picture of Marlitt herself on the front. In theoretical terms, these images suggest that gender is 'a shifting and contextual phenomenon'.<sup>695</sup> Our context is very different to that of the late nineteenth century and the fact that Marlitt's works are now the subject of a range of critical studies suggests how women authors, even those previously scoffed at for writing 'sentimental' fiction, are ever more respected in today's society. Where once the 'alt überkommenen Marlittstil'<sup>696</sup> was belittled by literary critics, now Marlitt is appreciated for her 'art of liberal compromise'.<sup>697</sup>

In including illustrations in the re-publication of Marlitt's novels, late nineteenth-century publishers appear to take note of the importance not only of exploiting advances in printing technology, but also of attracting the female reader and illustrating the gendered models she is meant to emulate and those she is to avoid. While the reiteration of feminine ideals works both textually and visually, Marlitt's serialised novels were not accompanied by illustrations and, as I have shown, an analysis of the text on its own also provides an understanding of how the reader is indulged and how the balance between under-doing, mis-doing and over-doing dress is achieved.

## Conclusion

Marlitt's novels contain female characters who, when analysed in the light of Butler's gender theory, show how to 'do', and how not to 'do', their gender. Marlitt uses sartorial description to indicate the qualities of the various women she depicts and reveals the differences between the morally inferior characters by exposing their often contrasting approaches to dress. In so doing

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<sup>695</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 14.

<sup>696</sup> Theodor Fontane cited in Katrin Kohl, 'E. Marlitt's Bestselling Poetics' in *The German Bestseller in the late Nineteenth Century* ed. Charlotte Woodford (London: Camden House, 2012), 197.

<sup>697</sup> See footnote 640.

she also demonstrates how challenging it is for women in the nineteenth century to ‘get it right’ when it comes to dress and gender itself. There is a balance to strike between the preaching tone of conduct books that promote simplicity and that of contemporary fashion magazines that encourage expenditure and fashion-consciousness. *Die Gartenlaube* did not include fashion advertisements, but, as outlined in Chapter One, there were a great number of popular fashion magazines circulating in Wilhelmine Germany which promoted the latest fashions to its female readership. In the 1870s in particular, a new dimension of femininity was emerging with the advent of the department store; the woman became a consumer for herself and had to negotiate a sharper contradiction, namely that ‘between the transcendental innocence of the model wife and more, and the demands of exhibiting status made of the domestic feminine sphere by the public masculine world.’<sup>698</sup> Marlitt’s stories are about formulating and transferring values which overcome and reconcile such contradictions. These values are expressed as ‘natural’ qualities which are manifested through the heroine’s clothes and yet, importantly, they have the illusion of internal norms that are meant to outlive vestimentary trends.

According to Butler’s gender theory, ‘The binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely “imposes” meaning on nature [...]’.<sup>699</sup> Marlitt is far from such an understanding; she perceives gender as ‘natural’ even if she unconsciously presents it as something that requires instruction. Reading her works with Butler in mind allows the reader to appreciate how she accepted norms of femininity as intuitive. Indeed, Marlitt’s novels themselves are cultural works that impose notions of femininity on the reader by creating heroines who first represent the unruly nature which awaits cultural coding but who become ‘real women’ by accepting social rules, for ‘gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity.’<sup>700</sup> The process of finding the perfect balance of femininity is long and laborious and involves close observation of other women and an increasing sensitivity to social expectations. By the end of the stories, the heroines have succeeded. They have become cultured German women: educated, reflective, independent, yet also domestic and submissive. Like Sophie von La Roche generations previously, Marlitt to a certain extent ‘endeavored to broaden the mental horizons of women within the limits of an established gender-based protocol.’<sup>701</sup> She encourages intellectual pursuits as long as they are exercised within a domestic framework. This was what Kontje calls her ‘art of liberal compromise’ and it ensured her publication and popularity. Otto, whose ambitions for her sex

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<sup>698</sup> Christopher Breward ‘Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal’ in *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (1994), 75.

<sup>699</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 50.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>701</sup> Helga Watt, ‘Sophie La Roche as a German Patriot’ in Patricia Herminghouse, ed., *Gender and Germanness*, 36.

were far more radical than Marlitt's, wrote her eulogy in 1887: 'Wie dankbar sind nicht die Tausende einsame Frauen, die in langen Winterabenden keinen anderen Genuß haben, als zu lesen.' Marlitt, she suggests, was read by all sorts of women, from housewives to elegant ladies, 'Ihnen allen hat die Marlitt zahllose Wohltaten gespendet (...)'.<sup>702</sup> Marlitt's depiction of the feminine ideal won her many mainly female readers. In this way her fiction can be seen, as Kontje points out, as didactic: 'To a certain extent (...) domestic fiction served a didactic purpose designed to transform its female reader into another *Elisa oder das Weib wie es seyn sollte*.'<sup>703</sup> Marlitt's heroines endure the heroes' reprehensible behaviour and by dint of their patience eventually transform them.

The outcome of Marlitt's novels is disappointing for modern feminist critics as the heroines marry conventionally and do not pose any enduring challenge to the patriarchal system. Yet Marlitt's failure to provide an overtly feminist model is counterbalanced, as Bonter points out, by her bourgeois optimism and support of positive social values.<sup>704</sup> It is important also to appreciate the political dimension to Marlitt's novels in which the portrayal of the female protagonist as an exemplary bourgeois woman serves as a challenge to perpetual aristocratic rule. Marlitt engages through her writing with the struggle of middle-class society to assert itself against the Junker nobility and its hold over German affairs and social values. Acknowledging this allows us to value Marlitt more as a modern thinker of her day than a traditional and unoriginal story-teller.

Marlitt exploits sartorial depiction more extensively than any other author I discuss in this thesis and her descriptions of dress serve as a commentary on femininity which at times indicates an understanding of femininity as a troubled performance and at other times upholds it as a 'natural' state of being. It is central to her realism which could be characterized in the terms of poetic realism as an enriched reality which is both idealistic and indicative of the 'inhuman rigidity of social conventions'.<sup>705</sup> It is also central to her female characterisation, to her edification of the heroine and to the education of her readers, whom she presents with a model attitude towards clothes: her heroines do not rely on clothes for charm, they do not squander money on them or dress elaborately, but they do respect their garments, care for them and ensure they are modest. The vain woman, the 'Spiegelnarr', is contrasted with the virtuous heroine who earns herself the love of a man. Moreover, the female protagonists reform the often stern and patriarchal heroes by adhering to the conventional female role of moral guide. Their success at conforming to the

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<sup>702</sup> Louise Otto cited in Bonter, *Der Populärroman in der Nachfolge von E. Marlitt*, 12-13.

<sup>703</sup> Kontje, *Women, the novel and the German nation, 1771-1871*, 10.

<sup>704</sup> Bonter, *Der Populärroman in der Nachfolge von E. Marlitt*, 71.

<sup>705</sup> Kirsten Belgium, 'E. Marlitt: Narratives of Virtuous Desire' in *A Companion to German Realism, 1848-1900*, ed. Todd Kontje, p. 269.

feminine norm means that they are rewarded by a romantic conclusion in which the bourgeois 'Hausfrau' existence is set up as the ultimate goal of every woman.

As Belgum argues, this plot progression from dystopia to utopia can be seen as an allegory for the state of Germany before and after unification: the German readers from a variety of disjointed states begin to acknowledge common values and head towards an ideal harmony which is grounded in morality and gender divisions. Marlitt participates in the forging of a unified Germany at an exciting time of national development. This development relied on women and men adhering to and perpetuating gender norms, and focusing on self-improvement in order to contribute positively to a national moral conscience. Marlitt's conception of utopia is in line with that of her German feminist contemporaries. Less radical than the American and English strands of feminism, German women followed Otto's example in calling for certain rights while championing traditionally feminine values. A key part of the new national identity was reinforcing Christian values by providing a gender script which encouraged women to be modest, simple and orderly in their actions and attire.

Marlitt's use of the third person in all the novels discussed above, with the exception of *Das Heideprinzesschen*, allows her to develop a didactic voice as she invites the reader to consider the morality of the characters she portrays. Her realism depends on the depiction of a range of predominantly middle-class figures and her ability to draw out their weaknesses without explicit narrative comment. The first-person narrator in *Das Heideprinzesschen* is an interesting deviation from her usual technique because it cleverly invites her contemporary reader (who would have typically known several of her novels already) to identify even more powerfully than usual with the heroine. As Leonore recounts her own development, Marlitt makes it particularly clear that choosing a female model to emulate is a challenging task. The overall message is a familiar one – modesty and domestic charm are fundamental feminine attributes – but the 'ich' gives a special immediacy to the story.

In 1905, women's rights activist Rosa Mayreder wrote in her essay on family literature, 'Niemals noch ist die herrschende Vorstellung vom Weibe, das "Ideal" des Weibes so sehr versimpelt gewesen wie im 19. Jahrhundert.'<sup>706</sup> Marlitt portrays her heroines as perfect examples of femininity: they are pure, virginal, uncomplicated women whose characterisation depends on clothes which illustrate the extent of their virtue and modesty, key attributes of the perfect German housewife. They fulfil the ambition of Marlitt's contemporary readers by achieving a domestic ideal and do so by adhering to feminine norms which are upheld as the condition of their centrality in the novel. This does not mean that Marlitt's subversions are entirely insubstantial;

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<sup>706</sup> Rosa Meyreder, 'Familienliteratur', *Das literarische Echo* 8 (1905), col. 411.

she does have her heroines display an independence of mind that counteracts the prejudice that women are not able to engage on an intellectual level. Liane's drawing, Felicitas's avid reading and Leonore's accounting are just a few examples of how her heroines engage with a masculine world in a 'feminine' way. However, ultimately this aspect reinforces the domesticating message; when the astute, well-read and 'wild' heroine opts to abide by cultural norms and demonstrate her innate and perfect maternal qualities she suggests that this is in fact the ultimate ideal. The 'Vorstellung vom Weibe' is illustrated as a natural construct, one that is chosen by women because of their natural dispositions, rather than a prejudice inflicted upon them. The relationship between culture and nature is complicated; nature must be tamed to adhere to cultural dictates, but, for Marlitt, it lends itself to taming and it is this that reinforces Butler's theory of gender as a construct which is internalised to the extent that it is perceived as natural.

## Chapter Four --

### Thematising male fantasy in turn-of-the-century fiction

Introduction.....	173
Hedwig Dohm's theory.....	177
Dohm's <i>Wie Frauen werden</i> (1894) .....	185
Frieda Freiin von Bülow (1857-1909).....	192
<i>Lass mich nun vergessen!</i> (1902) .....	195
<i>Die stilisierte Frau</i> (1902).....	200
Bülow's Heroines .....	204
Maria Janitschek (1859-1927).....	206
Dora Duncker (1855-1916).....	216
Conclusion .....	220

#### Introduction

Feminist theorist Susan Bordo argues that 'the exacting and normalizing principles of diet, makeup and dress [were] centralizing organizing principles in the time and space of many women'<sup>707</sup> in the 1800s in the western world. Certainly at the turn of the century clothes served as one of the main organizing principles in the lives of middle- and upper-class German women, and the extent to which this principle was projected onto women as a way of forming and maintaining their femininity is explored extensively by women writers at the time. Anticipating some of Butler's theories, the authors discussed in this chapter, Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919), Dora Duncker (1855-1916), Frieda Freiin von Bülow (1857-1908) and Maria Janitschek (1859-1927), demonstrate an understanding of femininity as reliant on the repetition of imitative acts and constructed substantially around such principles as clothes. They present femininity – or at least some aspects of it – as a fantasy created and maintained by men. As a result they reject the idealised romances popularised by Marlitt and return to the problematisation of married life that is evidenced in the *Vormärz* literature discussed in Chapter Two and, in a different way and unusually for the author, in Marlitt's *Die zweite Frau*. At times, Lewald, Aston and Marlitt depict

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<sup>707</sup> Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 166.

what the authors in this chapter make explicit, namely the feeling that women were not responsible for perpetuating the legacy of vanity but rather were responding to the expectation that they should perform as objects of male fantasy. The difference between the authors of the mid-century and the *Gründerzeit* and those at the turn of the century is that the latter thematise marital oppression and the stylisation of the body to the extent that it shapes the entire plot of a novel or novella and explore thereby how patriarchal society regulated, encouraged and maintained the link between women and sartorial concerns.

The fiction discussed in this chapter must be understood within the context of an increasingly powerful but still staunchly conservative nation. By the end of the century, Wilhelmine Germany was a united and economically dominant country with particular strength in the steel and chemical industries;<sup>708</sup> an interest in colonisation, in particular of West Africa;<sup>709</sup> and a rapidly growing population due to immigration and a high birth rate.<sup>710</sup> The industrial boom was in full swing: department stores were no longer few and far between and consumerism was thriving. Conspicuous consumption among the middle class had become an addiction as well-off wives found themselves in a position where shopping could be classed a pastime and rather than being cautioned against, expenditure was expected of them.<sup>711</sup> Meanwhile, the late 1880s brought a new focus to the Women's Movement as more and more women campaigned for the right to attend university on an equal footing to men and study subjects that had previously been considered alien to the female intellect. Women had been attending Swiss universities as *Hörerinnen* since the 1840s and by 1883 many European nations had given women access to university, including Britain, France, Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Belgium. Lagging behind, Germany abided by a Rousseauist philosophy whereby women were educated only as far as was required for them to please men and educate their own children and girls' schools provided a limited syllabus with a domestic focus.<sup>712</sup> Intellectually engaged women, such as the authors discussed in this chapter, recognised that the fight for power and education had to take place alongside a fight against capitalism and marital repression, both of which reduced women to consumers, trophies for their husbands. Whilst much of the literature written by female authors of this time thematised the

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<sup>708</sup> See Cornelius Torp, 'German Economy and Society, 1850-1914' in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, 339 and 346-7.

<sup>709</sup> See Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2-3.

<sup>710</sup> See Torp, 'German Economy and Society, 1850-1914' in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, 351.

<sup>711</sup> See Antony McElligott, *The German Urban Experience, 1900-1945: Modernity in Crisis* (Oxford: Psychology Press, 2001), 129-130.

<sup>712</sup> See Gerhard, *Unerhört*, 138-140.

desire to study, the stories in this chapter depict the domestic sphere as a particularly repressive and superficial place where women are dominated by their husbands.<sup>713</sup>

The study of these different authors will show how important the exploration of marital subservience was in early 'feminist' fiction and how central dress was in the politics of marriage. The depiction of conjugal life in fiction of the era is often characterized by the husband's attitude towards his wife's appearance and his insistence on literally styling her. The men in these works equate the female gender with certain imitative sartorial practices that they expect their wives to follow. The difficulty, as explored earlier in this thesis, is that the notions of just what those practices should be were contradictory and apparently irreconcilable: was the wife to use dress to allure and seduce; was she to follow the Parisian fashions and spend vast quantities on sartorial elegance; or was she to dismiss frivolity and adhere to a vision of German modesty? While the heroine of the *Jahrhundertwende* is often tempted to do the latter and does not display a personal interest in clothes, to the point of entirely overlooking them as a means of inciting desire, her husband frequently encourages sartorial affectation and excess. Louise Aston's portrayal of the manipulative spouse in *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* (see Chapter Two) pre-empts this theme, but it first becomes prevalent in fiction by women at the end of the century. Instead of supporting the fantasy common in Marlitt's writing of a husband who appreciates the modest heroine for her intrinsic worthiness rather than her appearance, women writers of late Wilhelmine Germany create men who are obsessed with their wives' apparel. Their stories attempt to disprove the notion that the fussy fashions detailed in Chapter One were desired by women and in so doing can be seen as asserting the alternative, modest model of German femininity. However, read contextually, they also indicate a need for rebellion against stereotypes, including the tendency to categorise women as either a Madonna or a Magdalene. Any attempt to fuse these two roles resulted in a dilemma that, as historian Christopher Breward writes, stemmed from the 'central contradiction between the transcendental innocence of the model wife and mother, and the demands of exhibiting status made of the domestic feminine sphere by the public masculine world.' The prevalent 'moral condemnation of material display' and the emphasis on feminine beauty created a 'dual femininity (...) that was almost impossible to reconcile.'<sup>714</sup>

As discussed earlier in this thesis, stereotypes were particularly restrictive for women as society presumed them to be vain and unintelligent by disposition, and clothes were treated as both the cause and the product of their shallowness. Progressive women writers contested these ideas by

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<sup>713</sup> Ilse Frapan's *Symbiose* (1895) and *Wir Frauen haben kein Vaterland! Monologe einer Fledermaus* (1899) are particularly vivid in describing the experience of misogyny for women who sought to attend university.

<sup>714</sup> See Christopher Breward, 'Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal', in *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (1994), 75.



exploring how young ladies were obliged to conform and thus question whether women were intrinsically vain and stupid. The answer to the latter was not seen to be a radical denial of sartorial codes; we recall the vilification of the cross-dressing Aston in real life and the ridicule by her readers and the state authorities of her mannish character, Alice, in *Lydia* (see Chapter Two). However, there was also a move away from Marlitt's strategies: as shown in the previous chapter, Marlitt disputed misogynistic preconceptions by simplifying sartorial issues and distinguishing between modest, clean dress and expensive, foreign fashions. Whilst these basic distinctions are still important, sartorial depiction becomes more complex towards the end of the century as women became more assertive in their writing and, in order to understand how women perceived femininity and contested sartorial norms, it is important to view the novels and novellas discussed below in the light of the feminist discourse and misogynist critiques of the time. Chapter One surveys how nineteenth-century theorists and philosophers criticized sartorial trends as a woman's means of attracting male attention: Vischer called female fashion 'Hurenmode'<sup>715</sup>, while he, Fuchs and Veblen suggested that the corset served as proof of female folly. For them, women were responsible for their own shallowness. Meanwhile, Lewald overlooked the issue of agency but questioned how women could be taken seriously when they dressed so fastidiously and the Women's Movement responded to such critique by calling for change and instigating dress reform. For the reformers decorative and dainty fashions reinforced traditional associations that linked women to 'superficial' concerns. Clothes served as an organising principle of women's lives because they took a long time to put on and take off and custom required numerous changes each day. Women's rights activists and artists called for creative self-expression and practicality in sartorial matters. Dress was to be modest, de-sexualised and aesthetic; individualised whereas hitherto it had reflected patriarchal structures. Muthesius's insistence on the need for an 'Eigenkleid' suggests that society reinforces the idea that women themselves did not act as independent agents in the choice of clothes and that they are therefore not responsible for the frivolous image such men as Fuchs and Veblen effectively created of them.

The following novels and novellas by Dohm, Duncker, Bülow and Janitschek rely on clothes to investigate the forms of control a man exerts over his wife. In the stories, dress reform styles are occasionally hinted at, albeit not explicitly, and there seems to be a tension between the fashionable attire that men expect women to wear and the less restrictive designs that some characters clearly prefer. As described in Chapter One, reform styles were not widely fashionable and were mainly followed by an intellectual elite. Whilst all four of these writers belonged themselves to an intellectual elite, there is little evidence that they participated in the reform movement and their aim seems at least partly to be to describe experiences to which the average

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<sup>715</sup> Friedrich Vischer, *Mode und Cynismus* (Stuttgart: Konrad Wittwer, 1879), 7.

bourgeois woman could relate. However, by depicting male artists, writers and eccentrics they also begin to suggest how reform styles were regarded in domestic circles and how rarely they symbolised freedom or indeed realised any sort of emancipation for their wearer.

Of these four writers, today Dohm is the most widely read, in particular due to her theoretical writings. Her liberal philosophical ideas give shape to her notably pessimistic/realistic fictional work, and more than any other author discussed in this thesis, Dohm sets out to expose the arbitrariness of gender compartmentalisation. As I will show, in her polemical writings she investigates the characterisation of women and the association of women with clothes. An exploration of how these writings inform her fictional output also sheds light on the themes examined by Bülow, who was Germany's foremost colonial writer of the time, by the lesser-known Duncker, and by the progressive Janitschek, all of whom would certainly have been familiar with Dohm's theoretical work.

### **Hedwig Dohm's theoretical writings**

Feminist critics have reason to celebrate Dohm as one of the most radical women's activists of the nineteenth century within and beyond Germany. In a short film on Dohm produced in March 2011, the author and actor Gerd Buurmann acknowledges Dohm as a precursor of such twentieth-century theorists as Butler because of her hypothesis that gender is a cultural construction, while the prominent German feminist Alice Schwarzer credits her for having formulated arguments used by second-wave feminists decades later and for having exposed 'feminine' attributes as being 'man-made.'<sup>716</sup> Indeed, long before second-wave feminism, Dohm asserted 'die Frauen in ihrer Gesamtheit lassen sich nicht unter einen Hut bringen.'<sup>717</sup> To refer to 'women' as a single group was depriving 'them' of individuality. Moreover, Dohm asks what it means to be 'ein echtes, ein wahres Weib' in a similar way to that in which Butler questions what it is to be a 'natural woman' and thereby invites her contemporaries to see femininity as problematic.

Dohm anticipated the work of late twentieth-century feminists and theorists in her investigation of the 'nature' of femininity. In her essays, she illustrates the superficiality of gender scripting,

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<sup>716</sup> The film, *Hedwig Dohm!*, was made by the FernUniversität in Hagen as part of an exhibition on Dohm, "Die Menschenrechte haben kein Geschlecht": Hedwig Dohm 1831-1919. Schriftstellerin, Philosophin, Radikale der Frauenbewegung', which took place in March and April, 2010. Film viewed 20/07/13, [http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ausstellung/hedwig\\_dohm](http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ausstellung/hedwig_dohm).

<sup>717</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Reaktion in der Frauenbewegung* (1899), in *Ausgewählte Texte: ein Lesebuch zum Jubiläum des 175. Geburtstages mit Essays und Feuilletons, Novellen und Dialogen, Aphorismen und Briefen*, ed. Nicola Müller (Berlin: Trafo, 2006), 282.

listing the characteristics applied to women by men who act as the ‘Schöpfermund.’<sup>718</sup> In ‘Die Eigenschaften der Frau’ (1876) she approaches the issue systematically, posing the questions:

1. Welche Eigenschaften haben die Frauen nach dem Dafürhalten der Majorität der Menschen?
2. Aus welchen Eigenschaften sollte oder müßte der Geschlechtscharakter des Weibes bestehen nach dem Verdikt der Männer?
3. Warum verlangen die Männer gerade diese Eigenschaften von den Frauen? Welche Eigenschaften haben die Frauen wirklich?
4. Bilden diese Eigenschaften den Geschlechtscharakter des Weibes?<sup>719</sup>

Dohm’s answers to these questions are formulated in reported speech indicative of the patriarchal viewpoint: ‘Die Frau sei fügsam und nachgiebig’ so that she becomes a dutiful wife; ‘Die Frau sei bescheiden, einfach und anspruchslos’ so that she does not long for expensive ‘Sammet und Seide’; ‘Die Frau sei häuslich’ so that she feels entirely fulfilled by the domestic existence.<sup>720</sup> Wives should also be shy and reserved, ready to honour their husbands even if they commit adultery. Yet, as the change to the indicative shows, Dohm herself believes that women who display a different set of characteristics are likely to be more appealing, for ‘das capriciöse Weltkind, die kokette, muntere Salondame, (und) die kecke Amazone’ will probably attract ‘mehr Treue und Liebe’<sup>721</sup> than ‘das stille, harmlose, bescheidene Frauchen.’<sup>722</sup> As a result, pleasing a man entirely is impossible. Moreover, citing and disproving arguments by a number of male critics, pamphleteers, scientists and philosophers, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Stirner and Theodor von Bischoff, Dohm illustrates that such ‘feminine’ characteristics are constructed by patriarchal culture. Due to their inherent contradictions, their desire to please their husbands and their inability to do so, women find themselves in ‘ein chaotischer Nebel’, which is restrictive and, as shown in Dohm’s fiction, destructive. This cloud, or ‘Potpourri der allerentgegengesetztesten Eigenschaften’<sup>723</sup> means that women internalise contradictory notions of what it means to ‘be’ feminine, notions which are contrived and unnatural in Dohm’s view. Without presuming to speak for all women, Dohm does feel able to conclude that ‘Lüge ist das Erbtheil der Frauen’<sup>724</sup> since women remain ‘eine Abstraktion von Regeln und Sitten.’<sup>725</sup>

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<sup>718</sup> Hedwig Dohm ‘Die Eigenschaften der Frau’ (1876), *Der Frauen Natur und Recht*, 11.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid, 32.

In order to distance themselves from the restrictive roles allocated to them and win the ‘Kampf zwischen *Natur* und *Dressur*’,<sup>726</sup> Dohm anticipates that women will need to unite and be patient. Her argument strikingly precedes Butler’s: reformulating gender requires persistence, repetition and time. She would doubtless have acknowledged Butler’s belief that ‘The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender to *displace* the very gender norms that enable repetition itself.’<sup>727</sup> For Dohm, ‘(das) innere Drängen des Weibes,’ ‘die inbrünstige Sehnsucht’<sup>728</sup> for freedom from the confines of patriarchal society meant that women would come together to re-configure their femininity and ‘nach einer höchsten Vervollkommnung zu ringen.’<sup>729</sup> In ‘Die Eigenschaften der Frau,’ Dohm envisages a distant future where nature is victorious, an idea that Butler would problematize since she sees culture as always and necessarily prescriptive and dominant in the nature-culture dichotomy.<sup>730</sup> Yet this idea of a return to nature as being synonymous with a more developed culture is perceived by Dohm as a crucial argument for emancipation, suffrage and freedom to be educated for a career and she envisages a future where women are freed from the ‘Schranke[n]’ which confine them.<sup>731</sup> If we are to view Dohm as a precursor of gender theorists, we must acknowledge that her context is vastly different to Butler’s. For Dohm, the re-formation of gender meant allowing the individual access to the sorts of choices which to an extent were a norm in Butler’s late twentieth-century America. Dohm’s ideal of individualising the self, the *Menschwerdung der Frau*,<sup>732</sup> is a reaction against patriarchal gender law for women which is aptly symbolised by the tight, imposing corset. For a bourgeois woman, ‘doing’ her gender in fin-de-siècle Berlin did not allow for radical variation; it was restrictive and binding and it is this acknowledgment that informs the tragic plotlines of Dohm’s, Bülow’s, Janitschek’s and Duncker’s work.

The extent to which Dohm is herself limited by her femininity is clear in Jenny Hirsch’s critique of her essay ‘Jesuitismus im Hausstande’ in the journal *Frauen-Anwalt* (1873). Hirsch (1829-1902) was a leading women’s rights activist; she translated John Stuart Mill’s *On the Subjection of Woman* (1869) and edited *Frauen-Anwalt*, yet attacked Dohm for her subversive progressivism which she saw as too radical a deformation of feminine norms. In her review, Hirsch reproaches Dohm for her reckless determination, aggressive campaigning for women’s suffrage and lack of respect for the small contributions of women who took a more tentative approach to advocating the improvement of education for girls. For Hirsch, Dohm violates the modesty of the German

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<sup>726</sup> Ibid, 36. Dohm’s italics.

<sup>727</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 203.

<sup>728</sup> Dohm ‘Die Eigenschaften der Frau’ (1876), *Der Frauen Natur und Recht* (Berlin: Tredition, 2013), 36.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid.

<sup>730</sup> See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 50.

<sup>731</sup> Dohm, ‘Eigenschaften der Frau’, *Der Frauen Natur und Recht*, 37.

<sup>732</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Die Wissenschaftliche Emancipation der Frau* (Berlin: Tredition, 2012), 21.

women's movement, doing no favours to its attempt to win women professional and educational rights. Hirsch conceives of a way forward that is more in line with conventional femininity: in *Selections from the Woman Question in Europe* (1884), edited and translated by the American Theodore Stanton, she writes that the German character and social situation mean that the goals she herself shares with Dohm are to be achieved by 'good, modest German women'.<sup>733</sup> For such readers as Hirsch, Dohm's essays were both welcome in their radicalism and worryingly unfeminine, for Dohm defies traditionally feminine characteristics by being scientific in her analysis, aggressive in her attacks and immodest in her expectations.

Alongside her essays, which were written primarily in the 1870s and the early 1900s, Dohm also wrote plays, novellas and novels. Her fiction does not produce radical role models, but rather seems to acknowledge Hirsch's argument that patriarchal conceptions of femininity are reaffirmed rather than de-constructed by overt demands for change. Campaigning for women's rights by depicting manly 'Emancipierte', for instance, is counter productive, as such women are easily ridiculed and dismissed as abnormal. Hence, no matter how positively portrayed, they appear unappealing examples to emulate. Hirsch's premise that there is a need to accommodate 'the peculiarities of the German character' and that 'slow and conservative, rather than hasty and radical, steps would (therefore) be better in the end'<sup>734</sup> came from the conviction that radical subversion simply backfires. What might be viewed as Dohm's wariness to put her theories into practice is evidenced – even before we discuss her fictional output – in her life. Dohm was in many respects a conventional woman, although she does betray signs of feeling that her gender is 'a norm that can never be fully internalized.'<sup>735</sup> As a daughter she felt alienated from her mother; as a wife she was disappointed with her husband's repeated infidelity;<sup>736</sup> and as a mother she publically regretted the lack of opportunities open to old women once their child-rearing days are over.<sup>737</sup> Although she trained as a teacher, Dohm never worked; she married at twenty-two and had five children.

In a chapter entitled 'Ungebunden' in her biography of Dohm, Heike Brandt describes a rare family photograph from 1865 as illustrative of Dohm as a mother.<sup>738</sup> The chapter's title suggests a potential loosening of social conformity, but the picture itself seems to indicate the opposite.

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<sup>733</sup> Jenny Hirsch in her 'General Review of the Women's Movement in Germany' (1884), cited in Bell and Offen, *Women, the Family and Freedom* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1983), 510.

<sup>734</sup> Hirsch in *Selections from The Woman Question in Europe*, 101.

<sup>735</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192.

<sup>736</sup> See Diethe, *Towards Emancipation*, 152-158.

<sup>737</sup> See Hedwig Dohm's essay 'Die Mütter'.

<sup>738</sup> This photo can be found on the back of Berta Rahm's edition of Dohm's *Erinnerungen* (Neunkirch: Ala, 1980).

Dohm's daughters are 'damenhaft gekleidet'<sup>739</sup> and their figures are slim; there seems to be no visual divergence from the sartorial norms of the time. However, Dohm and her daughters wear their hair short and loose, suggesting a rebellion against gender codes, a variation on the 'feminine.' As described in Chapter One, women in the mid and late nineteenth century typically wore their hair long and elaborately styled. At the beginning of the century there had been a vogue for short hair in France which was heavily criticised due to the fact that hair was perceived as women's most beautiful ornament and short hair was 'a sign of punishment, sacrifice or pain.'<sup>740</sup> In a cultural history of hair, Royce Mahawatte points out that hair works 'as a debate about the nature and authenticity of idealized beauty and the gender assumptions that go along with it.'<sup>741</sup> Tiedemann emphasises the symbolic weight of hair which signifies 'politische Haltungen und Lebenseinstellungen' acting as 'die Verkörperung von Wertvorstellungen (...) bei der der physische zu einem sozialen Körper transformiert und zum Gegenstand sozialer Verhaltensvorschriften gemacht wird.'<sup>742</sup> In the light of these perceptions, Dohm's short hairstyle undercuts the sartorial conformity that suggests an adherence to patriarchal gender law. While Dohm avoids any flagrant violation of sartorial codes - her 'ego'<sup>743</sup> seems to sanction using dress as a means of overt subversion - her variation on fashion by wearing her hair short seems to challenge notions of femininity. The fact that her daughters also have short hair is testimony to the necessity for and power of repetition and imitation. The mother serves as the model and precipitates shifts in feminine identity. Furthermore, judging by the photos taken of her, Dohm is consistent in her repeated rebellion against fashions in hair-styling. While her clothes are typical of her time, her hair is either long and loose or short and practical; in her adult life it never seems to be in line with the 'norm'.

Primary to Dohm's critique of feminine identification in nineteenth-century Germany is the link between women and the body and by extension sartorial concerns. While men are identified with the mind, culture and agency, women are reduced to their exterior, making visible symbols of identity particularly important as a way of expressing acceptance of or discomfort with their femininity. In her essay 'Ein Amazonentöter', for example, Dohm criticises the presumption that

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<sup>739</sup> Heike Brandt, *Die Menschenrechte haben kein Geschlecht: die Lebensgeschichte der Hedwig Dohm* (Weinheim: Beltz & Gelberg, 1989), 63.

<sup>740</sup> Carol de Dobay Rifelj, *Coiffures: Hair in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>741</sup> Royce Mahawatte 'Hair and fashioned femininity in two nineteenth-century novels' in Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang, ed., *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion* (London: Berg, 2009), 202.

<sup>742</sup> Tiedemann, *Haar-Kunst: zur Geschichte und Bedeutung eines menschlichen Schmuckstückes*, 132-133.

<sup>743</sup> In Butler's discussion of Freud and gender, she identifies the ego as the intermediary between law and the subject. 'The ego ideal ... serves as an interior agency of sanction and taboo... As a set of sanctions and taboos, the ego ideal regulates and determines masculine and feminine identification.' Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 85.

men are concerned with the internal while women are interested only in their appearance. She summarises:

Während in dem männlichen Gehirn das Wahrgenommene sich mehr seiner Innerlichkeit nach ausdrückt, beschäftigt sich das Weib fast ausschliesslich mit dem äusseren Kern, mit Kleidungsstücken, Haartracht, Ringen, Uhrketten und anderen langweiligen Anhängseln.<sup>744</sup>

Dohm goes on to demonstrate that at the same time as condemning women because they exhibit frivolous obsessions, men claim credit for forming women and determining the characteristics of their gender. She cites Nietzsche: ‘Der Mann macht sich das Bild des Weibes und das Weib bildet sich nach diesem Bild,’ and adds herself emphatically, ‘Wie wahr! Wie wahr!’<sup>745</sup> Again the emphasis is put on appearance; ‘das Bild’ is clearly to be taken literally as well as figuratively. According to Dohm ‘die Frau soll sich die von Nietzsche gelobten Laster abgewöhnen.’<sup>746</sup> For her it is disappointing that her femininity is characterised by compliance; while Nietzsche celebrates the fact that women model themselves according to the *man*-made ‘Bild’, Dohm sees doing this not just as a sign of weakness, but of vice, a ‘Laster’. For her, women should not define themselves in terms of their looks but rather in terms of their potential intellectual capability.

Dohm exposes the association of women with the exterior as a projection by men for men by mocking another learned male opponent. In a book published a generation before Dohm’s *Die Antifeministen*, the unnamed doctor writes and she cites: “Zahllos sind die Jungfrauen und Weiber, welche guter Wahl von Kleidungsstücken und Putzsachen die Eroberung von Ehegatten verdanken, von Anbetern, deren Feuer manchmal in geradem Verhältnis steht zu dem Putz der Herzensdame.”<sup>747</sup> Dohm’s response is brief yet powerfully ironic: ‘Na, er muß es ja wissen als Mann.’<sup>748</sup> Rather than women electing to associate themselves with clothes, which is, in essence, what Lewald reproaches her contemporaries for doing several decades earlier (see Chapter Two), Dohm implies that men themselves display superficiality by loving women only for their sartorial elegance and making it a pre-condition for their success in the marriage market. She also argues that men exploit this association as a reason to link women to their bodies further, barring them access to education and professions and thus ensuring that men remain the privileged sex. Dohm describes in *Die wissenschaftliche Emancipation der Frau* (1893), for instance, how the scientist Theodor von Bischoff undermines the possibility of professional female authority (in particular in

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<sup>744</sup> Hedwig Dohm, ‘Ein Amazonentöter’, *Die Antifeministen* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1902), 16.

<sup>745</sup> Hedwig Dohm, ‘Nietzsche und die Frauen’ in *ibid*, 22.

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>747</sup> Dohm, ‘Ein Amazonentöter’ in *ibid*, 17.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid*.

medicine) by referring to “das frisirte Haar und die rauschenden Röcke” that he assumes they would wear.<sup>749</sup> Dohm retorts by pointing out that woollen clothes, unlike the silk gowns that make up the ‘Gesellschaftstoilette’,<sup>750</sup> do not rustle. Her caustic remark reveals Bischoff’s reasoning as short-sighted and illogical. Women are, after all, conditioned by patriarchal society to love clothes. In *Was die Pastoren von Frauen denken* (1872), Dohm cites the pamphlet ‘Zur Frauenfrage’ (1871) by the protestant theologian Herr von Nathusius. His “Ratschläge für nützliche Zeitausfüllung” prioritise “die Sorge für die eigene Kleidung”.<sup>751</sup> By emphasising the supposition that women are interested primarily in their own appearance, men are shown to feed their own egos. In ‘Die Eigenschaften der Frau,’ Dohm explores masculine ‘Eitelkeit und Ehrgeiz’ as determined by how admired their wives are and how women are prone to react to the desire of men to be respected in society by becoming ‘die Salonpuppe oder die sentimentale Pagode (...) die Marionette, die an Drähten gezogen wird (...)’.<sup>752</sup> The image of women as puppets reinforces their lack of agency in patriarchal society, anticipating Lévi-Strauss’s argument that the bride is perceived as “a sign and a value”,<sup>753</sup> lacking in her own identity and serving to reflect her husband’s.

Dohm makes an important point: because men themselves produce clothes, they effectively inflict a love of the sartorial on women. Dress production is ‘eine Industrie, die mehr Männer als Frauen beschäftigt’.<sup>754</sup> Dohm implies that as men are agents in the making of women’s garments that are impractical in the work-place and designed to attract *male* admiration, they are responsible for the oppression of women. Since girls are to see marriage as their ultimate goal and catching a husband is a matter of choosing appropriate bait – in other words of dressing elegantly – clothes are crucial to a woman’s success at ‘being’ feminine. This idea is explored in the essay ‘Von den alten und der neuen Ehe’ (1902). Citing the 1779 act of Parliament which denounces make-up and women’s toilette as a means of seduction, Dohm states, ‘Es ist nicht allzu lange her, da scheint man den Ehetrieb des Mannes direkt an die Damentoilette und des damit bewirkten Zaubers geknüpft zu haben.’<sup>755</sup> Dohm’s hypothesis is that modern marriages should be based on love rather than on the seductiveness of the bride’s toilette. Indeed, for Dohm constrictive clothing serves as an apt metaphor for forced marriage; she alludes to arranged marriage as ‘[eine] Zwangsjacke des Glücks,’ thus reinforcing the notion of masculine culture being responsible for

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<sup>749</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Die wissenschaftliche Emancipation der Frau* (Berlin: Tredition, 2012), 94.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>751</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Was die Pastoren von Frauen denken* (Berlin: Tredition, 2012), 45

<sup>752</sup> Dohm, ‘Die Eigenschaften der Frau’ in *Frauen Natur und Recht*, 32.

<sup>753</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté* (1949), cited in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 52.

<sup>754</sup> Dohm, *Die wissenschaftliche Emancipation der Frau*, 14.

<sup>755</sup> Hedwig Dohm, ‘Von der alten und der neuen Ehe’ in *Die Antifeministen*, 140.



female subjugation.<sup>756</sup> As a supporter of women's right to work, Dohm expresses annoyance at the presumption that women are concerned foremost with sartorial fashions and would spend all their earnings on clothes if they could. She cites a male feuilletonist who suggests that women need more expensive clothes for work, presumably because a profession requires yet another change of attire and more attention to detail: 'Der Toilettenaufwand der früher einfachen Frau wird immer grösser – sie ist das ihrem Beruf schuldig – und so gehen die Einkünfte wieder in den Wind.'<sup>757</sup> Dohm's hope for women to have access to work is highly ambitious if women's work merely exacerbates their need and desire for clothes. At every turn, in the real as well as in the fictional world, Dohm sees women as constricted by their association with dress; the other authors discussed in this chapter give a similar impression.

While a woman's clothes are identified as produced and advertised by men, Dohm does acknowledge the part women play in accepting and maintaining such associations. In her reflections on her own childhood she describes a woman's world as 'klein, engbegrenzt' for 'Mütter und Töchter hatten die gleichen Interessen, die gleiche Lebensführung, die gleichen Ziele. Daher die Ähnlichkeit in ihrer geistigen Physiognomie.'<sup>758</sup> Women resembled each other outwardly except for variations in what they wore as they aged. As a result, when it comes to fashion, Dohm argues, 'Nur in langen Zwischenräumen wechselten die Moden.'<sup>759</sup> Daughters imitate their mothers and 'Die kleinen Fräulein wußten sich zu helfen, verfielen auf die Schmalheit der Taille. Die Wespentaille war Trumpf. Welchen Mägdleins Leibesmitte sich mit den zehn Finger umspannen ließ, das hatte den Rekord geschlagen.'<sup>760</sup> Dohm emphasises both the consequences of repetition, asking 'Wieviel Frauen mögen den Frevel dieser Einschnürungen mit späteren chronischen Leiden gebüßt haben?'<sup>761</sup> The 'Frevel' that is the corset and the quest for the tiny, waspish waist is an inheritance for girls not only of Dohm's childhood but also at the time of her writing her *Erinnerungen* when corsets had certainly evolved but still dominated a woman's wardrobe. Dohm's reflections seem to be aimed at her contemporary female readers as a warning and an attempt at inciting further, more drastic change.

Dohm's polemical writings call for a re-evaluation of the norms, sartorial and otherwise, that characterise femininity. They read as a sharp defence of her sex and a bitter critique of the way women are shaped, literally and metaphorically, and of how they accept repressive patriarchal laws. Dohm launches a fight against presumptions about women's dependence on clothes that is

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<sup>756</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>758</sup> Hedwig Dohm, 'Erinnerungen einer alten Berlinerin', *Als unsre Dichterinnen noch kleine Mädchen waren* (Leipzig: Moeser, 1912), 27.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

thematised in the fiction discussed in this chapter; it is a fight shared by Bülow, Janitschek and Duncker.

### **Dohm's *Wie Frauen werden* (1894)**

Critics Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, Sandra Singer and Carol Diethe have all remarked upon the 'dilemma of theory and practice' in Dohm's writing.<sup>762</sup> There is certainly a disparity between Dohm's polemical writing in which femininity is explored and her fiction where female identity and the role clothes play in that identity are depicted. Joeres provides an explanation for this: 'fiction is radically employed as a sober and pertinent and pragmatic message, one that indicates the clear barriers to outspokenness and progressive thinking, and certainly to overt action on the part of a middle-class German woman.'<sup>763</sup> This raises the question of whether Dohm's depiction of dress behind those barriers gives us any clues to a practical vision of how to change femininity? Dohm's novella *Wie Frauen werden* begins to answer this question; its title which suggests a polemical message also promises an investigation into the reality of gender and how it is constructed. As this analysis will show, dress as an act, gesture and enactment has a profound effect on the development and self-image of the heroine of the novella as she becomes a prototype of her gender.

The story portrays the unhappy married life of Katharina Böhmer, a weak and naïve young woman who accepts and reproduces social expectations of women only to find that those expectations are contradictory; her conformity to the advice found in conduct literature of the time does not ensure marital success. The title suggests that she can be seen as typical of her sex and that, in Dohm's view, the majority of middle-class women in late nineteenth-century Germany share the protagonist's fate. At first Katharina is a hopeful bride – her girlhood has been filled 'mit vulgären Liebesgedanken'<sup>764</sup> – but she becomes disillusioned shortly after her marriage when she realises that her husband, Michael Böhmer, wed her for her dowry in order to boost his fame and popularity. Michael alienates his wife because she does not appreciate his art – due to her lack of formal education she is from the outset unable to do so – and, more importantly, because she does not conform to his notion of the ideal woman.

The extent to which women are defined through their dress is evident from the opening paragraph of the novella:

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<sup>762</sup> See Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, 130; Diethe, *Towards Emancipation*, 155; and Singer, *Free Soul, Free Woman*, 20.

<sup>763</sup> Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, 135-136.

<sup>764</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Wie Frauen werden* (Vezensy: ngiyaw eBooks, 2007), 7.

Katharina Böhmer, die junge Gattin des vielbewunderten Malers Michael Böhmer, ging unstät in ihrem Zimmer auf und ab. Sie war in einfachster Promenadentoilette, ein braunes Kapothütchen auf dem Kopf. Sie wartete auf ihren Mann.<sup>765</sup>

Dressed simply, hair covered in unflattering brown, Katharina is described in physical terms as the wife of a much-admired man. Brown frocks make up her wardrobe, whether she is preparing for a walk or spending time at home. This might make her seem to be the model of domesticity and modesty Dohm describes in 'Eigenschaften der Frau' as the patriarchal ideal for a married woman and an ideal the modern reader recognizes in mid-nineteenth-century conduct literature as well as in fiction of previous generations from Lewald's *Clementine* to Marlitt's *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*. Historian Nancy Reagin cites a school inspector of the period who defines the key characteristics of a German housewife as being 'cleanliness and orderliness, thriftiness and industriousness, simplicity and good taste'.<sup>766</sup> Katharina appears to want to embody all these attributes, but interestingly it is her inability to appreciate contemporary fashions that makes her tragedy inevitable. As explained in Chapter One, during the 'Belle Epoque' dressing for the occasion was a crucial part of a woman's life; the house dress, for instance, was considered to be the 'Siegesgewand der Frau'.<sup>767</sup> Any neglect of it was treated as a possible reason for the failure of a marriage. Meanwhile, in society women were expected to wear silk and follow decorous trends. Katharina's simple attire stands out for being superlatively 'einfach' and it seems that she misses the 'breiter Weg' between the extremes of fashionableness and indifference or rebellion, even if her dress's simple colour meant that it was durable and easy to wash.<sup>768</sup> In fact, Katharina's failure to follow that middle path has a direct impact on her happiness. Rather than earning her Michael's respect and admiration, her sartorial habits are in fact the object of his disdain. At one point he complains to his friend Lorenz von Hellbach that it would be worthless to try to educate his wife; it would mean "leeres Stroh dreschen", since they are speaking of "Eine Frau, die mit einer braunen Kutte und einem Umschlagetuch im Hause umhergeht und sich vor einem decollierten Kleide fürchtet."<sup>769</sup> This is hardly the 'Siegesgewand' that might save Katharina's marriage: the 'Umschlagetuch' was a sort of shawl to be worn outside rather than in the house and along with her avoidance of the décolleté suggests the extent of Katharina's social shyness as well as her unconscious unwillingness to accept sexuality. Moreover, for Michael Katharina's paleness and dark hair are 'recht preussisch' and therefore 'unmalerisch',<sup>770</sup> her traditional, puritan German appearance reflects her modest character and offends his liberal

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<sup>765</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>766</sup> Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation: domesticity and national identity in Germany, 1870-1945*, 47

<sup>767</sup> See Bruck-Auffenberg, *Die Frau comme il faut*, 392.

<sup>768</sup> See Kübler, *Der Haushalt*, 117 and Chapter One.

<sup>769</sup> Dohm, *Wie Frauen werden*, 15.

<sup>770</sup> Dohm, *Wie Frauen werden*, 15.

values. There is no sense here of Marlitt's romanticised association of attractiveness with moral purity and sartorial modesty. What Katharina wears is an identity badge and her unwillingness to reveal her flesh, like her horror at seeing her face in her husband's painting of a red-haired Venus, betrays her conservative outlook more than any desire to be valued for herself rather than for her looks. At a time when some women are taking part in artistic reform movements and participating in a number of sports, whilst others invest in fake hair and the restrictive *Glockenrockkrinoline* (see Chapter One), Katharina appears unattractively old-fashioned and fails to conform with fin-de-siècle feminine norms.

Katharina's wardrobe reveals extreme naivety and ignorance and functions as what Dohm calls 'ein geistiges Modekostüm', reflecting the fact that she 'muss die einmal acceptirten Attribute ihres Geschlechts zur Schau stellen'.<sup>771</sup> Yet, by wearing dull, modest clothing the heroine exhibits her intellectual limitations and rather than being something positive as evidence of her not being vain, her attire is a symbol of her social ineptitude. There are many instances that attest to Katharina's ignorance of worldly matters. She regards the persistent painter Lorenz as her best friend, for instance, and it is he who inspires her to consider her reflection and become aware of her own beauty, seemingly because he wishes to seduce her. Apparently sympathetic to Katharina's lack of attention to clothes, the narrator describes her eventual realisation of the importance of self-adornment as 'den Tropfen Gift',<sup>772</sup> alluding to preconceptions concerning the immorality of self-admiration and suggesting a possible disillusionment with a society based on appearances. However, Katharina is not the agent behind this 'poisoning', not the Eve who first eats of the apple; rather, as Dohm shows, it is men who sow the seeds of vanity. At the same time, the realisation is not entirely negative: in its wake, Katharina dresses with care, begins to see Lorenz's romantic qualities and loses some of her naivety and ignorance.

Katharina's inexperience and prudishness are particularly evident when she is compared to her husband's mistress, Dörthe, whose appearance forms a sharp contrast to her own. The former actress embodies the lewd woman of literary stereotypes: she has dyed red hair, wears elegant and often exotic clothes, smokes cigars, drinks copious amounts of alcohol, and has adulterous affairs. Her attire is both unusual and appealing - 'ihre reiche und elegante Kleidung hatte einen kleinen Stich ins Phantastische'<sup>773</sup> -, clearly designed to accentuate her femininity, as she readily admits. The "Gepuffe und Gepumple" of her dress make her look more voluptuous than she is, for "Hätte ich bleiben wollen, wie die Stiefmutter Natur nicht gewollt, kein Hahn – worunter ich

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<sup>771</sup> Dohm, 'Die Eigenschaften der Frau' in *Frauen Natur und Recht*, 31.

<sup>772</sup> Dohm, *Wie Frauen werden*, 46.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

[...] die Männer verstehe – hätte nach mir gekräht”<sup>774</sup> She understands men to be simple creatures, interested only in beauty, whilst nature, contrary to most nineteenth-century ideology, is perceived as conflicting with contemporary standards of ideal femininity. And, interestingly, although she is an adulteress, Dörthe is portrayed as a self-confident and happy woman, and she is a great success with men. In making her such, Dohm exposes the feminine ideal as contrived, an effect, in much the same way as it was understood by Butler.

Dohm does not present Dörthe in the most flattering light - her smoking and drinking are ‘masculine’ habits of the sort that were seen to damage the cause for women’s rights – but it is hard not to like this woman who clearly enjoys life and resolves to help Katharina secure her husband’s love. When the latter confides in her tearfully, recounting her marital problems, she receives advice that goes against conventional notions of virtue and illustrates how helpless she is. Dörthe reproaches Katharina playfully for being ‘[ein] allerfeinster Tugendspiegel’<sup>775</sup> and comes up with a plan to ensure that her husband will love her, a plan which depends on the destruction of that mirror of virtues. We recall Dohm’s warning that the woman who is ‘bescheiden, einfach und anspruchslos’ is ultimately less desirable than the capricious, flirtatious ‘Weltkind’ or ‘Salondame’.<sup>776</sup> Dörthe effectively advises that her friend replace one feminine role with another; in her view Katharina has modeled herself on the wrong ‘Bild’. To increase her appeal Dörthe plans to change the interior design of Katharina’s house as well as her appearance through cosmetic and sartorial enhancements. Dörthe exclaims that her friend’s exterior is “‘das reine Pendant zu Deiner Stube”” and insists that without artifice she herself would not be attractive and popular. In so doing, she attempts to make Katharina a model of seductiveness and domesticity by rejecting the ‘natural’, since in her eyes nature is detrimental to beauty, a “‘Stiefmutter””, while the social teachings of virtue are “‘verderbungsschwanger””.<sup>777</sup> Dörthe’s language is highly allusive; such an oxymoronic term as ‘verderbungsschwanger’ links pregnancy and the giving of life with ruin and metaphorically suggests that such biological cycles are appropriated by society in order to convey a moral lesson. Unlike Katharina, Dörthe is intelligent and well read, equipped to break free of ‘natural’ constraints. With reference to fairy tales and Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew* as well as to the myth of Tristan and Isolde, Dörthe supports her arguments by telling how female characters in literature have always used magic and art to enhance their charms and beguile men. She sets out to prove her convictions by visiting Katharina without any of her usual

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<sup>774</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid, 29. Dohm also explores the association of sartorial modesty and social ineptitude in *Schicksale einer Seele* (1899) where the heroine’s simple dress sense is perceived as ‘Dummheit’ originating from a ‘Pflichtbewußtsein’ which is comparable to Dörthe’s concept of the ‘Tugendspiegel.’ A display of virtue is depicted as detrimental in society and in order to become a social success the heroine must dress ‘nach dem Geschmack der Sinnlichen.’ (Dohm, *Schicksale einer Seele*, (Berlin: Holzinger, 2013), 245).

<sup>776</sup> Dohm, Eigenschaften der Frau, in *Frauen Natur und Recht*, 25.

<sup>777</sup> Dohm, *Wie Frauen werden*, 32.

beauty treatments. According to Lorenz who sees her thus, Dörthe resembles an ‘altliche[r] unschöne[r] Blaustrumpf’.<sup>778</sup> Both with and without her fancy gowns and make-up, still much disapproved of in late nineteenth-century Germany (see Chapter One), Dörthe seems to be the antithesis of the literary heroine. She goes against feminine ideals by behaving like a ‘Blaustrumpf’, namely by engaging with books, and yet is far from emancipating herself from the confines of female gender identity, as she finds herself further entrenched in a prescribed role: the very books she mentions are in fact instrumental in characterising the type of seductrice she emulates. By juxtaposing Katharina and Dörthe, Dohm exposes the contradictory roles that are assigned to women (in particular those of the Madonna or the Magdalene) and the impossibility of transcending stereotypes.

Feminine categorization relies substantially on appearance, as Dohm makes particularly clear when Dörthe transforms Katharina by dressing her in a purple gown for her introduction to bohemian society. As her usual brown is replaced by violet, the impression Katharina makes on others is entirely different. For the first time in her life she is surrounded by admiring men and ‘Der Erfolg hatte etwas Dämonisches.’<sup>779</sup> This event causes her to realise that her former shyness came of having nothing to say apart from a few polite phrases and she cannot flourish in society any more than she can embrace what she feels to be pure and immoral affectation. She returns home ‘erschöpft, unbefriedigt, degoutiert’,<sup>780</sup> revolted by the frivolity of society, by men who desire sartorial embellishment and by women who perform in accordance with this desire. The reference to ‘etwas Dämonisches’ seems to refer to the heroine’s depressing realisation of how superficial society is. Katharina’s reluctance to be painted by her husband runs parallel to her dislike of sartorial exuberance, for both make her into an object and suggest that her worth as a woman lies solely in her capacity to attract. This impression is further reinforced by the fact that Katharina’s transformation wins over her husband who is attracted to her coquettish looks and behaviour. Katharina is sharp enough to deduce that he is drawn only to her changed appearance and she does not enjoy her victory. Consequently in both Dörthe and Katharina we encounter a frustration with feminine prescriptions and examples of Butler’s notion that resisting such prescriptions does not result in self-stylisation or any escape from categorization as ‘feminine’; ‘the style is never fully self-styled, for living styles have a history and that history conditions and limits possibilities.’<sup>781</sup> It is, for instance, especially when Katharina consciously plays the part of a flirt that she acts out a prescribed feminine role. Rather than successfully challenging Michael and winning him over by showing any intellectual development, Katharina feeds a misogynist

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<sup>778</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>779</sup> Dohm, *Wie Frauen werden*, 61.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>781</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 177.

ideology and in so doing illustrates the devastating effect it has on women. Interestingly, her domestic refurbishments include a painting by Lorenz of a woman on a bridge, her back to the viewer. The image evokes sadness and implies a symbolic portrayal of Katharina herself, spatially divided – on a bridge – between values (traditional ‘German’ virtue and the modern emulation of ‘French’ vanity), men (Michael and Lorenz) and hope and despair.

Finally, it is the heroine’s inability to confront issues, to face her future and make her own decisions that results in indifference and numbness. When the man who loves her and has held her trust throughout her life, Carl Nort, proposes that she divorce her husband and marry him, she entreats him to force her into a decision:

‘Nicht böse sein, Carl, ich bin so kindisch, ich kann es noch nicht fassen [...] Hilf mir doch, Du Liebster, Bester! überlasse mir doch nicht Alles selbst, ich bin so hilflos. Entführe mich! brauche Gewalt! so dass ich gar nichts dreinzusprechen habe.’<sup>782</sup>

Reiterative exclamations demonstrate the gravity of Katharina’s desperation. She appeals to the conventional masculine roles of decider, saviour, hero and even violator, taking on the part of a submissive, incapable woman. She accepts misogynistic theories and sets herself up as ‘kindisch’, unable to comprehend and take responsibility. When, unwilling to make the decision for her, Carl leaves, she misses him and wishes she were with him in the promised land beyond her native Germany. When he dies a year later, however, expatriation becomes unimaginable. The passive woman is helpless against her dystopian fate and the dream of living with a loving man beyond the patriarchal contradictions of fin-de-siècle Germany remains unattainable. The narrative concludes with rumours of an affair between Katharina and Lorenz; it is implied that the painter has taken the initiative and seduced the once so principled heroine who no longer loves her husband. Dohm’s story is tragic because her heroine apparently exchanges the conventional role of dutiful wife for that of sinful adulteress; Katharina is unable to reconcile the contradictory nature of female stereotyping.

Dohm sustains a spatial analogy throughout the story which complements her use of clothes descriptions and illustrates the power of convention in a way which anticipates Butler’s gender theory. Through Dörthe, she likens women to geese who are trained to wander within a chalk circle and who lack the will to cross over the line because they believe it to be a fence. Katharina reflects on this anecdote: ‘Der Kreidestrich, dachte sie, kann zweierlei bedeuten: aus dem Conventionellen hinauf zu einer freieren, reineren Sittlichkeit, oder hinab zu fin-de-siècle

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<sup>782</sup> Dohm, *Wie Frauen werden*, 116.

Frivolität.<sup>783</sup> Convention, she realizes, is physically confining, but crossing the chalk line even for the sake of freer, purer ‘Sittlichkeit’ is not a viable option, and she concludes that she, like the other geese, has never dared to cross over the chalk circle. She does, however, play at being a courageous goose, imitating Dörthe, but finds only emptiness in coquetry. That is not to say that the heroine thereby falls outside the chalk circle; while adultery by a woman is not viewed as socially acceptable, it was not perceived as unfeminine. Rather Katharina goes from Madonna to Magdalene without being able to develop her own individuality. Consequently there is no sense that she succeeds in finding self-fulfilment and happiness. The novella might therefore be seen as an encouragement to the nineteenth-century female reader to counteract the traditional passivity of her sex and determine her future herself. According to the formula of her story, Dohm can be interpreted as saying to her countrywomen that in order to widen their horizons and earn respect as intelligent beings they should not act like geese within a chalk circle, but rather test social boundaries, which are so often artificial and unnecessarily restricting. There is, however, no suggestion as to what clothes would be liberating in this way.

It is noteworthy that the geese metaphor is offered by Dörthe, who – far from being portrayed merely as a damnable adulterous – proves that by recognising and manipulating social values women should be able to gain autonomy of a sort. Dohm offers a defense of such women as Dörthe in her essay ‘Die Eigenschaften der Frau’, where she asks why society scorns the frivolous:

Haben sie nicht recht? Bieten nicht in der That Tanz, Theater und die Toilettenfrage immer noch mehr Anregung für Geist, Herz und Phantasie als Clavierklimpern, Staub wischen, Tapiserie sticken, Wasser auf Thee giessen und die Ueberwachung des Schlüsselkörbchens?<sup>784</sup>

Here Dohm suggests that of these two conventional feminine scripts, women are better off opting for that of social butterfly over diligent Hausfrau. The trinity of ‘t’s in ‘Tanz,’ ‘Theater,’ and ‘Toilettenfrage’ suggest the pace of life outside the home, while the lengthy description of monotonous domesticity is unappealing. Can there be anything duller than ‘die Ueberwachung des Schlüsselkörbchens’? Both Katharina and Dörthe adhere to social prescriptions, but while one fills her life with such onerous tasks, the other is apparently self-aware, confident and gay. Ultimately, Dohm seems to encourage women to abandon both roles and expand on another; since her female characters are frustrated with the limitations inflicted upon members of their sex, they explore ways of doing their gender in the hope of finding self-fulfilment. The reason that Dohm’s

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<sup>783</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>784</sup> Dohm, ‘Die Eigenschaften der Frau’ in *Der Frauen Natur und Recht*, 34.



fiction lacks the emancipatory zeal of her essays is that she does not illustrate alternatives. Either inside or outside the chalk circle, accepted or expelled, there does not seem to be any real possibility of ameliorating the situation for women in nineteenth-century society. In light of this, Katharina's progress away from the confines of the house and her frustrated attempts to please her husband could be treated as a conscious decision to choose the lesser of two 'evils'.

In this novella, as in her polemical works, Dohm stipulates that the success of the women's movement depends on women being appreciated for things other than their appearance. For Katharina, the importance of clothes in society leads to a crisis in identity and by using self-adornment metaphorically, Dohm suggests how dress reflects the wearer's state of mind rather than simply the extent of her integrity and wealth. This re-definition of sartorial symbolism came out of the dress reform movement and represents a new attitude towards clothing which made it possible for women to imagine more practical attire suitable to physical and intellectual development meaning that women could be active subjects rather than passive objects. Indeed, according to Dohm, the women's movement depended on the de-popularisation of the corset. Its progress was measured by the transition in women's fashion from the constricting and impractical crinoline to the more natural and comfortable *Reformkleid*. In so far as the corset represents the supposed vanity of the female sex, the objectification of women and a means used to attract a husband, its disappearance seems key to the evolution of the heroine. As Chapter One indicates, in 1894 dress reform and the ideology behind it were not widely accepted and the result is that the typified heroine, Katharina, has little choice but to accept clothes that define and constrict her. However, by portraying a confused and frustrated conformist in Katharina, Dohm exposes the dangers of passivity and not accepting agency and thus suggests the need for societal reform. Dohm supports a revision of female gender codes in part by arguing that clothes should not be an organising principle in the life of the bourgeois woman; she contests feminine prescriptions through discursive writing and such fictional accounts of the detrimental effects of gender law on women, indicating that femininity must be re-defined and re-scripted.

### **Frieda Frein von Bülow (1857-1909)**

Frieda von Bülow shared many of Dohm's progressive views about gender and the role of clothes in maintaining patriarchal conceptions of femininity. Like Dohm, Bülow explored femininity critically and argued that women were exploited, limited and even deformed by society. She wrote that women and men were created 'in gleichwerthiger Zweigestalt' as 'Zwillinge des Himmels'.<sup>785</sup> Society, however, had subjugated woman to the point that she had become

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<sup>785</sup> Frieda Bülow, 'Das Weib in seiner Geschlechtsindividualität' (Vezensy: *ngiyaw* eBooks, 2007), 19.

‘unwahr’, alienated from herself, ‘weil sie als die Schwächeren unterdrückt und geknechtet worden [ist]’.<sup>786</sup> The implication of this suppression was that boys were ‘belehrt und mit Welt und Leben bekannt gemacht’ while girls ‘blieb[en] in der Kinderstube eingesperrt, verzärtelt und dabei der Langweile und [...] fremden Träumen überlassen.’<sup>787</sup> As a result, she writes, women have become ‘Meisterin[nen] von Gefallsucht’,<sup>788</sup> their culture defined by their clothes. She cites the French critic Jules Lemaître:

Man hat es sich zur Aufgabe gesetzt [...] alle Formen des weiblichen Körpers, die die Natur diesen verliehen hat, besonders hervorzuheben [...]: der Gürtel, wie ihn unsere Zeitgenossen tragen ist nicht mehr der bequeme, geschmeidige Gürtel der Frauen des klassischen Alterthums, sondern er gestaltet den Körper der modernen Frau gänzlich um, um besser dessen Formen zu zeigen.<sup>789</sup>

Bülow’s reaction to this citation indicates that her understanding of the effect of women’s fashions corresponded in some ways to both Dohm’s and to those of such doctors and reformists as Lahmann, Stratz and Stulze-Naumburg whose medical arguments against the corset in particular are discussed in Chapter One. Bülow objects to the fact that women are sexualised by their clothes and that they are literally as well as metaphorically formed by society. She then argues that ‘Die geistige Kultur des Weibes’ is such that ‘selbst bei hervorragenden weiblichen Individuen die hilflose Einseitigkeit, das vernichtende Übergewicht des Sexual-Empfindens, entstehen (...)’.<sup>790</sup> This leads Bülow to draw similar conclusions to those of her contemporary Laura Marholm, who writes in *Buch der Frauen* (1894) that women are impulsive creatures who seek and find fulfilment in relationships with men. However, Bülow’s point is that they are nurtured to become this way. Read alongside Butler’s statement that “‘persons’ only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility”,<sup>791</sup> the thrust of Bülow’s argument seems to be an attempt to revise the standards that dictate excessive sartorial practices.

Bülow emphasised the importance of women writers in changing what it meant to be a woman. She defends the right to female emancipation on a literary as well as on a social level, claiming that such descriptions as ‘weiblich’ and ‘echt frauenhaft’ have hitherto been used as stylistic

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<sup>786</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>788</sup> Cited in *ibid*, 18.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>791</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22.

objections to fiction by women, but that they are no longer relevant as such.<sup>792</sup> Rather, she suggests, ‘der gebräuchliche Männer-Massstab’<sup>793</sup> is outmoded, for the generation of newly emancipated women demands an appreciation of the feminine voice as individual and original, which frees them from traditional literary models provided by men. Moreover, she repudiates the objections against radical women’s rights activists, who were often criticised for trying to be men, stating:

Die Emanzipation der Frau ist gerade Gegentheil einer Vermännlichung. Sie ist das Besinnen der Frau auf ihre vollwerthige und vollkommene Weib-Eigenthümlichkeit: und daraus folgt, dass die weibliche Besonderheit in der Literatur bewusst hervorzutreten wagt.<sup>794</sup>

Literary activity, therefore, is viewed as a valuable tool for the ‘emancipated’ woman in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, as Lora Wildenthal, one of the few literary critics to focus on Bülow, indicates, there is a discrepancy between her life and polemical work, and her novels.<sup>795</sup> Bülow was among the first to set novels in German colonies in Africa and as such is often labeled the founder of German colonial literature. She befriended Helene Lange, Lou Andreas-Salomé and Rainer Maria Rilke; taught at a girls’ school; owned a plantation in Africa; glorified the colonial task as the civilisation of the wild; and openly attacked such misogynists as the respected gynaecologist Max Runge. Yet, as Wildenthal shows, whilst Bülow’s non-fiction calls for the integration of women into society, better education and career opportunities for women, a reform of family law and respect for the female individual, her fiction seems to overlook such emancipatory arguments and depicts women as subservient to men.<sup>796</sup> However, an examination of Bülow’s use of dress in her depiction of female characters suggests their discomfort with their social position and the limitations they face. Indeed, in theoretical terms, Bülow seems to view dress as presenting ‘possibilities of doing gender [that are repeated and displaced] through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation’.<sup>797</sup> Yet, as in Dohm’s fictional work, radical revisions do not dominate; rather, in the novellas discussed below, published together in 1902, *Die stilisierte Frau*, *Lass mich nun vergessen* and *Zwei Menschen*, dissonance and internal confusion prevail as means of criticising contemporary norms and drawing attention to the tragedies that result from female subordination. Nonetheless there is a

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<sup>792</sup> Frieda Bülow, ‘Männerurtheil über Frauendichtung’ in *Die Zukunft*, Jg.7 (1898/99), Bd.26, H.15 (7. Januar 1899) p.29.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>795</sup> See Lora Wildenthal, ‘“When Men are Weak”: The Imperial Feminism of Frieda von Bülow’ in *Gender and History Vol.10* (Oxford: Blackwell, April 1998), 68.

<sup>796</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>797</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

striking development in these works which suggests that Bülow saw reform dress as reflecting a new identity for women of the twentieth century; arguably works such as hers helped to effect a change in fashion, encouraging society to accept sartorial liberties.

### ***Lass mich nun vergessen!* (1902)**

In *Lass mich nun vergessen!* Bülow depicts the milieu of the *Empanzierte* with conviction. She explores the way in which women experimented with dress and the reaction that their practices elicited. The contemporary reader is challenged to consider femininity in different terms when presented with, amongst other characters, a thirty-year-old unmarried heroine (Gunhild) and a radical cross-dressing lawyer (Senta). The author reflects on the confusion and discontent felt by women at the beginning of the twentieth century even as she concludes traditionally that love, and by extension a certain dependence on men, is the ultimate key to happiness.

Gunhild wavers between conformity and rebellion as she conforms to the standards of sartorial fashion and rebels against spatial constrictions. For her, clothes are an embellishment which she accepts as part of a social performance. However, those who judge her on her appearance are scorned; one suitor's idiocy is made clear not only by his clumsy and unromantic proposal, but also by his shallow admiration for 'ihre Haltung und ihre Schlepprobe von altrosa Seide'.<sup>798</sup> Despite leading an athletic lifestyle, Gunhild adheres to fashionable norms; the silk 'Schlepprobe' corresponds to contemporary fashions which favoured the train (see Chapter One). The narrator makes this particularly clear since the suitor finds Gunhild attractive because of her beauty and modish taste, not her character. Meanwhile Gunhild's former lover is portrayed favourably; when they meet again they talk for hours about his travels and the only mention of Gunhild's appearance is just prior to their meeting, when she arrives at a friend's house having walked through the cold. After discarding her practical 'Galoschen, Pelzmantel und Mütze,' she laughs at her reflection in the hall mirror, 'Sie mußte lachen über das rotgefrorene Gesicht mit der blanken Nase und den glitzernden Augen, das ihr aus dem Spiegel entgegensah.'<sup>799</sup> Such details imply that Gunhild lacks the vanity so often associated with members of her sex and yet she clearly dresses according to the latest fashions. It seems that she is doing more than just treading the 'goldene Mittelstraße'; by rejecting the suitor who values only her looks and laughing at her reflection, she exposes the superficiality of those who surround her – with the exception of her former lover – and draws attention to the fact that patriarchal society appreciates femininity largely as an act that is played out visually.

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<sup>798</sup> Frieda von Bülow, *Lass mich nun vergessen!* in *Novellen über Frauen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1990), 186.

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

Perceptions of Gunhild vary; she is both ‘ein Juwel von Häuslichkeit,’<sup>800</sup> and ‘ein seltsames Mädchen.’<sup>801</sup> She enjoys her independence, although she lives in a claustrophobic house with her aunt and grandmother. She does not regard herself as a domestic gem. In fact, her only domestic pastime is cooking, which she sees as an art rather than simply a diversion, for she enjoys “‘in meiner Kunst zu schwelgen.’”<sup>802</sup> She continuously reflects on her status in society and is determined to make the most of every opportunity. While her grandmother is sedate in a wheelchair, suggestive of the inactivity and enslavement of her generation of women, Gunhild practises her morning gymnastics in front of an open window, evoking a mobility and a freedom that, though still indoors, are emerging into the public realm. Gunhild also goes walking alone in the evening, attracting the attention of hopeful men, whom she wards off. On one walk Gunhild recognises the divide between women and men, musing that men pass their evenings in inns, drinking and eating with one another, while their wives are at home. The man’s world is shared between work and this male companionship, whereas the woman’s is domestic and enclosed. Gunhild resists such enclosure by leading an active life. She goes out to concerts and attends a women’s society run by Senta, which is decorated like a men’s club with oriental rugs, handsome paintings, a desk laden with newspapers and journals and even a billiards table. The women there drink beer, play billiards and converse on political matters. The contrast between this atmosphere and that of Gunhild’s home indicates the extent to which the generation depicted was in search of a place in which women were not required to be domestic.

Senta’s sartorial practices in particular make her more problematic. She openly parodies gender with her cross-dressing, objecting to contemporary fashions which she feels violate the female figure. She calls corsetry ‘verflucht’,<sup>803</sup> suggesting that it is unnatural and horrific to wear such garments. Her reasoning is logical and persuasive, in line with contemporary medical arguments against feminine undergarments: “‘Wenn ich gerade Flächen sehe,’” she announces, “‘wird mir immer ganz schlecht. Als ob wir aus Platten und harten geradlinigen Kanten beständen!’”<sup>804</sup> She appears in men’s dress, complete with ‘russischen Kniehosen, Gamaschen und russischer Bluse’ and a ‘Wagnermütze’<sup>805</sup> (a cap worn at a slant), an ensemble which the narrator indicates, and which Bülow’s contemporary readers would have easily appreciated, is quite daring. Not only does she reject the tight corsetry, lace and frills that were the rage in the ‘Belle Epoque’, she also rejects the alternative reform dress. In opting for short trousers and a masculine ‘Wagnermütze’, Senta aims to alter and contest the perception of femininity. Whilst previous cross-dressers

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<sup>800</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>801</sup> Ibid, 194.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid, 108.

discussed in this study, Aston's Alice von Rosen in *Lydia* and Lewald's Sophie in *Eine Lebensfrage*, play at being masculine mainly for an erotic effect (in Sophie's case only in private), Senta is the first character to set out to question the fixity of femininity publicly and thereby 'the notion of a true gender identity'<sup>806</sup> by suggesting that a woman should be active, professional and ambitious. Senta is 'wie ein Wirbelwind',<sup>807</sup> always the centre of attention, eccentric and unpredictable; her charisma and cross-gender behaviour make her a more fascinating figure to follow than the moderate heroine and the impression she leaves is that Bülow wanted both to explore the appeal of gender-bending and reveal the limitations and consequences of it.

At times, Senta is more modern than radical, however. When, for instance, she encourages members of her club to cycle around the city in sporty costumes, she expresses a common support of exercise at the start of the century. As outlined in Chapter One, clothing for specific sports was featured in fashion magazines on a regular basis, but, as Bruck-Auffenberg writes in *Die Frau comme il faut* (1902), cycling might be an ever more attractive and acceptable sport, but the sort of attire which was necessary to ride a bicycle was off-putting for many women.<sup>808</sup> Meanwhile Dohm saw cycling as a means of self-emancipation from the corset: 'Die hygenische Wohltat des Fahrrades haben die Frauen sich selbst verordnet. Die Abschaffung des Korsetts und die Einführung der Reformtracht [...] ist das Werk von Frauen, die in der Frauenbewegung stehen.'<sup>809</sup> The moment when women began to cycle revolutionized their dress code, making way for a crucial variation in femininity. In this context, Senta's cycling seems to be a statement against vanity as well as for free physical movement. Her appearance attracts criticism: the doctor Edmund initially finds her attire horrifying to the extent that he refers to it as "[ein] schreckliches Pagenkostüm",<sup>810</sup> as though it offends Christian morals to dress in a masculine way. Edmund sees Senta's rejection of feminine clothes as a denial of her gender and therefore a pagan rebellion against her (God-given) biology. Meanwhile the conservative women's rights activist Irene Schmidt believes Senta endangers her feminist cause by such sartorial 'Unfug'.<sup>811</sup> The narrator brings out an inherent contradiction in Senta, since she despises men, but alienates women by seeking to act like a man. Senta's transgression against social morals is highly stylised; she even greets her club members with a masculine gesture, raising the whip she always carries to her cap. Ridiculous though it often seems, Edmund finally comes to appreciate Senta's eccentricity, 'das Auffällige in Kleidung und Wesen',<sup>812</sup> and the fact that she stands out seems part of the point

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<sup>806</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 186.

<sup>807</sup> Bülow, *Lass mich nun vergessen!* in *Novellen über Frauen*, 109.

<sup>808</sup> Bruck-Auffenberg, *Die Frau comme il faut*, 375.

<sup>809</sup> Dohm, *Werde, die Du bist*, 122.

<sup>810</sup> Bülow, *Lass mich nun vergessen!* in *Novellen über Frauen*, 171.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

since Senta only begins to cycle and smoke after he announces that they are repulsive habits and that his ideal woman would not engage in any emancipatory actions. Consequently Senta's actions seem provocative and suggest that they have been conceived as a way of capturing his attention and of proving to him that the “niedliche kleine Dinger”<sup>813</sup> (the insipid, boring love objects of his past) do not represent models of femininity. In this respect she is very similar to the other cross-dressing characters discussed in this thesis. It is in fact difficult to determine whether we are to read Senta's behaviour as merely a pose or the expression of deep convictions. Regardless of the intent, however, Senta's behaviour suggests a discomfort with the situation of women at the turn of the century. Yet Bülow seems at pains to attenuate any impression of rebellion and concludes Senta's story with a statement about the importance of compromise and the fulfilment women feel by gaining a man's love.

Bülow seems to comment on the undesirability of the masculinisation of women by putting a dramatic stop to Senta's cross-dressing. The young woman wishes so much to be a man and ‘[hat sich] so lebhaft in ihre Hosenrolle hineingedacht’<sup>814</sup> that she feels like one and acts accordingly. Yet, when her heroic and successful attempt to save an old man from being run over ends in her own injury, the author can be seen as suggesting that women who transgress feminine norms are destined to fall. After the accident, Senta acquires a feminine bearing. She is attended by the suddenly smitten doctor, Edmund, who finds her in a cream-coloured woollen dress, her hair longer than at the beginning of the novella, when it is, significantly, boyishly short. Her clothes become increasingly feminine, comparable to garments designed by artists of the reform movement which also advocated the use of wool and other natural materials, and it is only at this point when she performs her femininity more conventionally that Senta is appreciated and loved by a man.<sup>815</sup> Ultimately, following vestimentary norms at least to an extent is portrayed as beneficial for it leads to love and a celebration of femininity while simultaneously allowing for some progressivism, albeit a less radical progressivism than that Senta initially represents.

Portrayals of other secondary characters further indicate how dress contributes to performances of femininity. Gunhild's childhood friend, the distinguished Marion van Lennep, is always adorned in faultless Parisian toilette which makes her the beauty of every gathering. She is deaf to Gunhild's progressive ideals and, when challenged to think of the desperation many women face, concludes, “Aber was fehlt denn den Frauen? Jede Frau kann es doch so gut haben; wenn sie will.”<sup>816</sup> According to one perceptive guest, Marion “[hat sich] zum Sklaven gesellschaftlicher

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<sup>813</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>814</sup> Bülow, *Lass mich nun vergessen!* in *Novellen über Frauen*, 157.

<sup>815</sup> See Patricia Ober, *Der Frauen neue Kleider* (Kempten im Allgäu: Hans Schiler, 2005), 129.

<sup>816</sup> Bülow, *Lass mich nun vergessen!* in *Novellen über Frauen*, 184.



Torheit [gemacht].”<sup>817</sup> In the age of conspicuous consumption where elaborate self-adornment was the norm amongst wealthy women, Marion revels in consumerism to the point that she sees a particular appearance as the hallmark of femininity. Clothes are equally important to the playwright Philippine Weisung, whose vestimentary perfectionism is linked to her constant nervousness. She first appears ‘etwas sonderbar, aber elegant in wallenden Gewänder gekleidet.’<sup>818</sup> Whilst Bülow does not describe her clothes in detail, suggesting nothing of the fussy styles of the beginning of the twentieth century detailed in Chapter One, her adjectives both indicate her character’s individuality – she is ‘sonderbar [...] gekleidet’ – and conformity – she is ‘elegant’.<sup>819</sup> Philippine’s obsession with her looks means that even at the première of her first play she is more concerned that her appearance should not be outshone by the actresses than that the work itself be well received. Gunhild sympathises with Philippine, suggesting that such worries regarding one’s appearance are common among women in patriarchal society. In her opinion, Philippine is right to be concerned with how her physique and toilette are appraised. However, it is perhaps as a result of the dramatist’s cultivated look, characterized by the ‘kindlich Hilflöse’,<sup>820</sup> and her attention to clothes that reviewers criticize Philippine’s play as sentimental and feminine. For Marion and Philippine, clothes both accentuate their power as attractive women and expose their powerlessness. They seem to allow clothes to be an ‘organising principle’ in their lives, to the extent that their understanding of their femininity relies on a sustained sartorial performance.

Here the emancipation of woman is as much a question of allowing her access to sexuality and the ability to celebrate it as it is of her entitlement to intellectual activity. The role of clothes is in part to accentuate a woman’s sexuality, but they are worthy of only secondary consideration. While Senta defines herself through them, and Philippine relies on them for success, both choosing excentric costumes, Gunhild follows fashion without interest, refusing to let it dictate her actions and thoughts; clothes are not the central organising principle of her time. In this respect she differs from many of her contemporaries but still succeeds in convincing the reader of her ideals more than any of the other women in the novella because she appears to be a ‘legitimate’ model of her gender in that visually she is typically feminine. In the novella femininity is contested, modified and exaggerated and the image of the new twentieth-century woman is portrayed as unstable; Bülow is at once insistent on new possibilities of womanhood and wary of the cost of displacing feminine conventions.

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<sup>817</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

<sup>820</sup> Ibid.



### ***Die stilisierte Frau (1902)***

In her novella *Die stilisierte Frau*, Bülow examines the politics of marriage in patriarchal society and the way in which clothes can both dis-empower and empower a woman, serving as the husband's means of controlling his wife and as a wife's means of dissembling her eventual rebellion. Scholar Julia Bertschik provides an interesting discussion of the novella within the context of the reform movement. She describes how the heroine is subjugated by her husband and becomes the 'Spielball der exzentrischen Phantasie eines alternden schwerkranken Dandys.'<sup>821</sup> The plot is similar to Aston's *Lydia* in recounting the life of a virginal young wife, Ledwina, the distorted fantasies of her husband and the epiphany she has when she finally discovers sex. However, in Ledwina's case the discovery leads to empowerment rather than madness. The title indicates how we are to read the novella and its use of sartorial description: Ledwina is representative of her gender and she is stylised by society and her husband in such a way that she is deprived of self-knowledge, not to mention worldly knowledge. She is styled literally and metaphorically, and the literal stylisation that occurs – because her husband decides what she wears – reveals how her gender is determined by the 'repeated stylisation of the body'.<sup>822</sup>

Bülow creates a male protagonist whose obsessive theories of how a woman should be, and more specifically how she should dress, alienate his virginal bride, not only because they seem unnatural (he never sleeps with her) but also because they do not adhere to customary fashions. Graf Joseph Gyrlani is convinced that 'das Weib ist kein eigentlicher Mensch [...] es ist eine Heilige oder eine Null oder ein Gegenstand, den man braucht, abnutzt und wegwirft.'<sup>823</sup> Such misogyny is clearly reprehensible for the author who believed that men and women were created 'in gleichwerthiger Zweigestalt' and entered into a heated exchange with the doctor Max Runge who expressed views similar to Gyrlani's in *Das Weib in seiner geschlechtlichen Eigenart: Nach einem in Göttingen gehaltenen Vortrag* (1900).<sup>824</sup> At the beginning of the story, for instance, Gyrlani greets Ledwina and her more characterful sister, both of whom are dressed in the same modish fashion, and he opts for Ledwina, purely because her eyebrows arch over her eyes rather than meeting in the middle like her sister's. He is accepted on account of his wealth. Initially Ledwina enjoys being a bride because she feels so finely dressed. Her identity seems both formed and maintained by her clothes as she instinctively passes from bride to wife and trades her wedding gown for a 'Wirtschaftsschürze' in order to take on domestic duties which represent an opportunity for responsibility she seems eager to embrace. Yet Gyrlani is quick to check this

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<sup>821</sup> Julia Bertschik, *Mode und Moderne*, 99.

<sup>822</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.

<sup>823</sup> Frieda Bülow, *Die stilisierte Frau* in *Novellen über Frauen*, 219.

<sup>824</sup> See Max Runge, *Das Weib in seiner geschlechtlichen Eigenart: Nach einem in Göttingen gehaltenen Vortrag* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1900).

instinct; he comments on the inappropriateness of her ‘Hauskleidchen’, reproaching her, “‘Fehlt es dir vielleicht an eleganten Morgenkostümen? [...] Ich möchte, dass deine Erscheinung imponiert.’”<sup>825</sup> The importance of elegant house-wear, also thematised in Aston’s *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* (see Chapter Two) and by Dohm in *Wie Frauen werden*, meant that a husband expected to see his wife impressively dressed at all times. Certainly Gyrlani sees it as such. He takes it upon himself to determine his wife’s appearance and activities and in so doing treats Ledwina like an object, denying her any identity independent of clothing. The heroine’s shy attempt to have some say in the matter of what she wears is swiftly silenced. At one point she asks if she might be allowed to remain in the ‘langem nonnenhaften schwarzen Kaschmirkleid’<sup>826</sup> that was to her husband’s liking at luncheon and which is full of negative symbolism to the reader who is familiar with unhappy nineteenth-century heroines such as Lewald’s Clementine, Aston’s Johanna and Marlitt’s Liane. Indeed, rather than timelessly elegant, as fashion would have it (see Chapter One), in literature by women of this time black attire tends to symbolise the rejection of and/or disillusionment with men. Ledwina has little control over what she wears, however. Gyrlani insists that she change into something appealing to him. Her initial choice of a ‘hellrosa Batistkleid’ disturbs him since the colour and the fashionable cut do not correlate with his picturesque ideal. Batiste material was light and fine and corresponded more with fashionable ideals than those of the aesthetic movement, to which Gyrlani seems to belong, which favoured warm materials. Indeed, for Gyrlani, ‘Sie musste ein weisses *schweres* golddurchwirktes Damastkleid tragen mit weiten offenen Ärmeln. Und der Hals musste frei sein.’<sup>827</sup> As Bertschik points out, Gyrlani is interested in the wide-armed and scoop-necked artistic dress produced by progressive designers in Vienna at the turn of the century and even tries his hand at designing himself. Just a year before the publication of this story, Van de Velde delivered a lecture in an effort to popularise these designs which remained exclusive because of the progressive ideals they suggested. However, Gyrlani’s progressive tastes are clearly not indicative of progressive ideals. Like the husbands portrayed by the other authors discussed in this thesis, who want their wives to follow the latest trends, Gyrlani insists that his wife follow his rules and suggestions; by capitulating the heroine accepts ‘the fantasied and fantastic figuration of the body’<sup>828</sup> projected upon her.

Accordingly, after a year of marriage the heroine appears transformed into her husband’s creature. He has decided how she is to enact her femininity and she has accepted his prescriptions. When her family visits, her mother is shocked at finding her daughter in what seems to be a

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<sup>825</sup> Bülow, *Die stilisierte Frau in Novellen über Frauen*, 248.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid, 255. My italics.

<sup>828</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 184.

“Maskenanzug”, echoing Ledwina’s own comparison of the clothes chosen by her husband with those at a masquerade. The baroness is horrified by Ledwina’s gown which is described in detail:

Sie trug eine schleppende Damastrobe von altem Rosa und darüber eine resendafarbene lose Jacke mit Silberfuchs verbrämt. Statt des glatt zurückgestrichenen Haars von früher trug sie ganz lose, tief über die Ohren fallende Scheitel, und das Haar im Nacken so lose geschlungen, als wolle es eben ganz herabfallen.<sup>829</sup>

This description suggests that Gyrlani has unusual tastes which use both expensive and natural materials and are reminiscent of Renaissance and Empire styles; they are designed to emphasise Ledwina’s femininity and decorative status, although they allow more physical movement than conventional styles and appear similar to the reform styles of the time. Bülow creates a contradiction here as the supposedly liberating reform clothes are in fact not liberating at all. They may allow for more physical freedom than mainstream trends, but because the heroine has not chosen them, they seem limiting. Indeed, they function as a way of subjugating the heroine, revealing her powerlessness and subservience as a wife in patriarchal society even as they distance her from society at large by suggesting that which the Baronin Stubben fears most, ‘den Menschen ohne Verkleidung’, in other words the naked body. The apparel chosen by Gyrlani for her daughter is shocking in particular because it reveals not only his unvoiced desire but also suggests that of her daughter.

Depressed and unhappy, Ledwina begins a timid and slow rebellion, which is checked by her constant fear of transgressing and is dependent on the illusion of conformity that her clothes create. Even her perusal of the Bible given to her by her mother seems somehow wrong, since she has never been allowed to read it unsupervised. Whilst initially she adheres unwaveringly to her husband’s vestimentary taste and earns his approval, Ledwina is not unquestionably obedient when it comes to Gyrlani’s sartorial caprices. After submitting to her husband’s whims and experiencing his domineering ways, she wonders to herself whether marriage consists merely of ‘Sich schön anziehn, kritisiert oder bewundert werden, sonst nichts?’.<sup>830</sup> Obviously disappointed and as yet ignorant of her own sexuality, Ledwina is nonetheless aware that she might make some decisions alone as long as she *appears* to be upholding her husband’s wishes. Her efforts to take control rely on secrecy as she is anxious to avoid Gyrlani when wearing her ‘Hauskleid’ lest he should forbid her only occupation apart from the time-consuming changing of clothes, namely the running of the house. Before her husband’s orders, however, she is powerless, and she accepts mutely the new wardrobe he orders from a Viennese tailor, although it makes her feel ‘wie auf der

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<sup>829</sup> Bülow, *Die stilisierte Frau in Novellen über Frauen*, 280.

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid*, 256.

Maskerade.<sup>831</sup> While Ledwina wants to be ‘natural’, her husband insists upon clothes that emphasise artifice. It seems that Bülow would agree with Dohm when she suggests through Dörthe in *Wie Frauen werden* that men ultimately desire and expect that women use sartorial and cosmetic devices to make themselves attractive.

In anticipation of Freud’s theory that intellectual inferiority stems from the repression of sexual awareness, Bülow demonstrates in her story how empowering carnal knowledge can be.<sup>832</sup> Ledwina is curious and as she becomes aware of sex, she also becomes sharper, able to deceive her husband and thereby empower herself. At first, her isolation means that Ledwina has no friends and remains, like Lydia in Aston’s novel, ignorant as to why she does not have a child after her marriage. Her logic is immature, yet not unintelligent; she reasons that there is perhaps more to conceiving than being in a happy marriage, for she knows of a woman who, though separated from her husband, is a mother many times over. Yet her timid interrogation of the doctor leaves her with no fixed answer, for he refuses, like her mother, to enlighten her. It is hence outside the boundaries of her husband’s abode, as well as those of her former society, that she finds clues as to the course of nature. First, she listens to the gossip of the working woman who teaches her to spin, although she has been warned throughout youth to ignore such vulgar, harmful talk. Then she wonders whether humans reproduce as animals do and visits the barn in an attempt to learn. Ledwina’s sexual education is gradually completed as she experiences physical contact first with her husband, who runs his fingers through her hair and then – in a moment strikingly reminiscent of the wedding night in Aston’s *Lydia* – runs away lest he despoil her; then with the servant Rakosky, who, after helping her off with her coat, proposes a night of ecstasy. This proposal leads to a nervous collapse, although it is more akin to an epiphany than to Lydia’s descent into madness. Finally, her husband’s prescribed garbs become Ledwina’s disguise as, it is implied, she goes on obeying Gyrlani’s demands and appearing submissive even when she seduces the doctor, Sergei, who has been called to treat her. The moment of seduction is interesting; it can be read as an ironic consequence of Gyrlani’s infatuation with pre-Raphaelite styles or as a conscious exploitation on her part of the fact that his sartorial preferences are suggestive; Ledwina wears her hair loose and appears charming in white as she implores the doctor to protect her. The story concludes with this hint of self-empowerment. Knowledge and apparent subservience equip Ledwina with the ultimate ‘Verkleidung’, so that when the ignorant count pleads with Sergei to stay because he is worried about his wife, the doctor agrees, and the suggestion is that the adulterous couple will continue to go undetected.

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<sup>831</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>832</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* and Anna Richards, *The Wasting Heroine in German Fiction by Women*, 38-39.

Up until the end of the novella, clothes appear to work against the heroine; they are reductive, restrictive and repressive, a crucial part of a performance that adheres to a misogynistic gender code. Gyrlani models his wife on his ideal of femininity and, although her clothes evoke the values of the reform movement and suggest something intrinsically liberating, the fact that it is he who determines them reinforces patriarchal ideology. Interestingly, Bülow avoids any explicit reference to the clothes he chooses as reform clothes; and, whilst they are indicative of reform styles, because the heroine has no part in picking them, she is deprived of the feeling of wearing the ‘Eigenkleid’ which was so fundamental to the reform movement (see Chapter One). It is only when Ledwina learns to manipulate dress as a tool to appease her husband that she begins to become a self-affirming heroine.

### **Bülow: Between Emancipation and Submission**

Bülow sees the emancipation of women as problematic: most of her heroines strive to be ‘womanly’ in conventional terms because that is what earns them love and happiness and those who perform radically against the norms of femininity, like Senta, are obliged to reform in order to attain such a reward. Such is the fate of the protagonist of Bülow’s *Zwei Menschen* (1898), which tells the story of a woman, modeled on Lou Andreas-Salomé, who, despite the fact that she has ‘nichts von der halb instinktmäßigen weiblichen Koketterie, die darauf gerichtet ist, durch Äußerlichkeiten Männer anzuziehen’ fascinates the (notably liberal) men around her.<sup>833</sup> Initially she is “‘ein wirkliches Freifräulein’”<sup>834</sup> and one of her companions finds her attractive precisely because she is so ‘natural’ and does not wear a corset:

So einfach, beinahe nachlässig, wie sie angezogen ist, was macht sie vorspringen, wie ein beseeltes Wesen unter Marionetten? Und was macht ihre Gestalt, ihren Gang so göttinnenhaft? Sie schnürt sich nicht. Die Formen gleichen noch der Venus von Milo, ohne Wespen-Einschnitt. Die Brust ist fast breiter als die Hüften. Dabei doch nichts Hartes; alles runde und weiche Linien.<sup>835</sup>

The reference to Venus von Milo has particular resonance here. The statue of the Greek goddess of beauty was used in medical studies at the turn of the century, including those by Stratz and Stulze-Naumberg, to argue in favour of dress reform and to illustrate the extent to which the corset deformed a woman’s body.<sup>836</sup> Bülow is clearly writing in acknowledgement of contemporary arguments regarding feminine health and beauty. Later, however, men find the heroine’s readiness to adopt reform styles, to hitch up her skirt whilst mountain climbing and

<sup>833</sup> Bülow, *Zwei Menschen* in *Novellen über Frauen*, (Berlin: Ullstein, 1990), 28.

<sup>834</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>836</sup> See Chapter One and Ober, *Der Frauen neue Kleider*, 187.

dispense with gloves and hats, threatening because they are symptomatic of a rejection of patriarchal values. Ultimately she is too strong and independent for the man she loves. The phrase ‘halb instinktmäßigen weiblichen Koketterie’ is particularly telling; Bülow seems to accept flirtation in the form of sartorial elaborateness as a ‘natural’ characteristic of femininity, and yet it is only ‘*halb* instinktmäßig’ and the fact that her heroine does not have any of that ‘instinct’ suggests either that she is not ‘weiblich’ or that being ‘weiblich’ is in fact not at all a matter of predisposition. Since the heroine is clearly female and, indeed, feminine, even ‘göttinnenhaft’, it is tempting to interpret this description as indicative of the way in which Bülow conceives female gender theoretically as something social more than ‘natural’.

In her novel *Kara* (1897), Bülow shows that submitting to patriarchal expectations can be as devastating as resisting them: women seem doomed to unhappiness. The heroine’s husband, Brucking, is manipulative and shallow, appreciative only of his wife’s beauty to the extent that he insists she dress ornamentally and be a model of fashionableness. As she herself explains “‘Er legt viel Wert auf Chic und sieht alles. Er sagt, eine hässliche oder unscheinbar aussehende Frau würde er niemals lieben können.’”<sup>837</sup> As a result Kara trades in her practical yet appealing clothing for corsetry and fashionable frocks. Whilst before her marriage she declares that she would happily wear rags rather than clothes that inhibited her desire to enjoy fresh air and exercise, later she has a French maid and follows her husband’s sartorial whims. It is only when she becomes disillusioned with him as a young mother that she rebels against him through her body. When, upon the birth of her child, her husband forbids her to breastfeed since he believes that it would ruin her figure, Kara becomes depressed and thin.<sup>838</sup> When the baby dies after Brucking has persuaded her to follow him on his travels, she neglects her appearance entirely. Throughout the novel, dress and the body are powerful metaphors for patriarchal dominance and the tragedy facing women who might have liberal views, but who are held back by their dependence upon men who do not.

Wildenthal suggests that Bülow’s plots are ultimately anti-feminist and that the secondary characters who express progressive views are caricatured. The stories do often feature women who are forced to lead lonely and dependent lives (as in the case of Ledwina and Kara) and show how rebellion is tamed (in the case of Senta). Yet sartorial details can lead the reader to a different interpretation to that proposed by Wildenthal. There are admirable, as well as caricatured, traits in the emancipated figure of Senta that invite an open-minded judgement, yet the author’s assertion

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<sup>837</sup> Frieda Bülow, *Kara* (Stuttgart: Gottaschen, 1897), 275.

<sup>838</sup> Breastfeeding was encouraged by doctors from the mid-1800s so Kara’s desire to nurse her child would have been considered normal by Bülow’s contemporary readers. See Brigitte Borrmann, ed., *Stillen und Müttergesundheits* (Göttingen: V&R, 2006), 37.

that ‘Die Emanzipation der Frau ist gerade Gegentheil einer Vermännlichung’<sup>839</sup> prevents the reader from seeing Senta, with her radically masculinised dress, as an entirely positive figure. Indeed the latter’s transformation into a feminine and loving person in more conventional dress suggests that Bülow shared some of the prejudices against nineteenth-century women’s rights activists. Between patriarchal reality and idealist fantasy, her fictional writings conclude on a disappointing note for today’s feminists, but suggest nonetheless that Bülow’s is finally an emancipatory message. As her friend and biographer Sophie Hoechstetter writes, Bülow was a ‘Revolutionärin’ who inspired others to follow her in her fight ‘gegen alle Engherzigkeit, gegen Vorurteile, gegen die Ueberlegtheit alter Institutionen, gegen geistigen und moralischen Zwang.’<sup>840</sup> Such libertarian fervour is palpable both in her polemical writings and in her stories. The constraints of nineteenth-century society might finally prevent the emancipation of the heroine, and might even lead to her willingness to conform, but the overall impression is that social and sartorial reform and a more flexible attitude from men and women alike towards the ‘Frauenfrage’ would work in favour of both sexes.

In Bülow’s sartorial descriptions we find both an emancipatory consciousness and respect for the constraints of a patriarchal era. The extent to which her heroines are supportive of women’s rights in their actions and dress varies. The impression is that the female characters who advocate change, wear liberal clothes and move independently are radical and secondary figures, whereas the female protagonists present more average (that is timid, unconfident, wary) violations of convention, if any at all. In the end, her fictional work suggests that Bülow believed that love, whether romantic or maternal, is the overriding force behind a woman’s actions and often determines her clothes. Such a premise supports traditional associations of women with sentimental matters, but the very fact that she allows her heroines to act according to their hearts, rather than to accept love passively, challenges convention. She illustrates the often catastrophic consequences of passionate love which involves a woman’s submission to a man who is more culturally aware and powerful than she. This submission is depicted through dress and characterizes gender reality for women in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Germany.

### **Maria Janitschek (1859-1927)**

Maria Janitschek’s work is as critical of the subjugation of women as Dohm’s and Bülow’s and similarly provides an exploration into the way in which dress shapes, confines and sustains the

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<sup>839</sup> Frieda Bülow, ‘Männerurtheil über Frauendichtung’ in *Die Zukunft*, Jg.7 (1898/99), 27.

<sup>840</sup> Sophie Hoechstetter, *Frieda Freiin von Bülow* (Dresden: Carl Reissner, 1910), 4.



feminine performance. Janitschek engaged from an early age in journalistic activities and wrote poetry, short stories, novellas and novels which examined the position of German-speaking women in society and in the home at the turn of the century. Critics such as Theresia Klugsberger, Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager and the nineteenth-century author Leo Berg have praised Janitschek's multi-perspectival writing and her confidence in dealing with such issues as euthanasia, female lust, homosexuality and sex education.<sup>841</sup> They show that an interpretation of her work is never straightforward because of her use of irony and the way in which she rewards 'Frauen mit den ausgeprägten individuellen Krankheitsbildern' while 'die gesellschaftlich Emanzipierten scheitern grösstenteils an ihrem Anspruch.'<sup>842</sup> Their conclusion is that whilst Janitschek's message seems to be emancipatory, her conclusions often seem to undermine that impression because her most progressive characters do not always prosper. What these critics have missed, however, is the extent of Janitschek's parodic caricature. The satirical nature of her narrative voice suggests the potential of parodic repetition as a means of changing femininity: she presents us with parodied anti-heroines that challenge the contemporary reader to define herself in opposition to the types of femininity these women exemplify. In making use of this unusual strategy, Janitschek comes very close to Butler's theoretical understanding of the way in which gender might evolve.

Janitschek's narrative stance and contradictory depictions of emancipation also made her a controversial author and in 1909 her collection of novellas *Die neue Eva* was banned, seven years after its publication. She was contentious long before that, however: as early as 1889, she courted controversy by including in her collection *Irdische und unirdische Träume* a poem entitled 'Ein modernes Weib' which concludes with a woman asserting herself over her assaulter by challenging him to a duel and shooting him. The poem ends: "So wisse, dass das Weib/ Gewachsen ist im neunzehnten Jahrhundert."/ Sprach sie mit grossem Aug', und schoss ihn nieder.'<sup>843</sup> Anticipating Helene Böhlau's female protagonist in *Halbtier!* (1903), who feels empowered after shooting her assaulter, the heroine defends her honour and women's right to independence by killing her offender.<sup>844</sup> The fact she is clad in chaste apparel consisting of 'Trauerkleidern' and a veil suggests that she has hitherto conformed to social expectations. Yet, while the heroine of the poem is striking for her words and actions rather than for her appearance,

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<sup>841</sup> Klugsberger's and Schmid-Bortenschlager, 'Wider die Eindeutigkeit' in Karin Tebben, ed., *Deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen des Fin de Siècle* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999); Leo Berg's *Aus der literarischen Frauenklinik* (1895).

<sup>842</sup> Tebben, *Deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen des Fin de Siècle*, 193.

<sup>843</sup> Maria Janitschek, *Irdische und unirdische Träume*, 'Ein modernes Weib' (<http://sophie.byu.edu/literature/index.php?p=text.php&textid=1978#janitschek>, viewed 20 Sept, 2007).

<sup>844</sup> See Helene Böhlau, *Halbtier!* (Berlin: Fleischel, 1903), 350-51.



Janitschek suggests in her novellas that most women of her day are characterised by their clothing and looks rather than by their capacity to reason and act.

Janitschek's fiction explores how femininity is a troubled and limiting force characterized substantially by the sartorial. Janitschek's heroines, often after domestic abuse or disappointment, demonstrate a readiness to resist traditional assumptions about woman's place and think progressively. Yet there is a discrepancy between a society ripe for change and the stagnant traditionalism of patriarchy which means that female characters find it difficult to find a stable identity of their own. In Janitschek's short stories and novellas we come across satirized virgins who are treated as dolls to pamper and dress up ('In der Knospe'); ridiculous mature women who look to sartorial deceptiveness in order to appear more youthful ('Frau Bertha', *Olympier*); and early feminists who are mocked by male reporters who focus on their appearance and toilette rather than on their political speeches (*Die Amazonenschlacht*). The author demonstrates the extent to which women are treated as mere puppets and in so doing she argues that dress detracts from women's intellectual capabilities, symbolising their subordination and infantilisation. In the stories where sartorial symbolism is significant, Janitschek's female characters are dressed by men; dress themselves for men; or dress in order to assert themselves as men or as men's enemies. In each case they fail to earn respect for their sex as they are treated as mere objects to be played with or caricatures to be laughed at. Whilst Janitschek's point seems to be that women should be able to dress as they wish without being judged, in all these cases dress serves theoretically as a corporeal sign in a way which suggests that Janitschek was also not far off a modern feminist view of gender as a cultural fabrication.

Janitschek's story 'In der Knospe' from the novella collection *Vom Weibe – Charakterzeichnungen* (1896) reads as a heavily ironic experiment into the dynamics of femininity and a parodic criticism of double standards. The narrative begins with the rich and aging Veit Kolmann who seeks a virginal child-like bride and finds her in Sidonie Baumgartner. Sidonie herself is attracted by Kolmann's offer, excited by the clothes and possessions that will be hers, but, unknowingly, almost spoils her chaste appeal by stealing out of the house to meet an impoverished suitor. Kolmann, a Pygmalion figure very much like the baron in Aston's *Lydia* and Bülow's count in *Die stilisierte Frau*, presumes the right to form his future wife's identity according to his own idealist and conventional values. While he enjoys sexual and social freedom, he expects his wife to be angelic, ignorant and unquestioningly obedient. Sidonie is to worship her husband as a deity who determines what she wears. Ridiculous and obsessed, Kolmann woos her by telling her how he will dress her and surround her with comforts:

Ich will dich in weiche Gewänder kleiden, und seidene Schuhe an deine Füße thun, ich will Schmuck um deinen jungen Hals legen, und für frische Blumen in dein Haar sorgen.

Dein Gemach soll ganz mit Fellen und Teppichen belegt werden, und süsse Speisen sollen deinen Gaumen letzen.<sup>845</sup>

His speech, marked by the use of the first person 'ich will,' presupposes that the objectified young woman should wish to accept his desires. Furthermore, his choice of impractical silk shoes and fresh flowers reinforces the extent to which he treats Sidonie as a doll and the burlesque impression of the narrative. The latter is underscored further by the depiction of the empty-headed heroine. At the tender age of sixteen, Sidonie lacks any sense of independence. She has only just begun to wear long skirts and her vocabulary consists of only 'ja' and 'nein' as she passes time dreaming over her sewing with innocent 'Puppenaugen'.<sup>846</sup> Sidonie is, as Kolmann desires her, like a doll without intelligence or will of her own. Yet there is little sense that Sidonie is naturally this way; in Butlerian terms, her attributes 'are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility'.<sup>847</sup> They are also strategically exaggerated. Janitschek parodies her heroine, setting her up as a bourgeois adolescent girl who is victimized by patriarchal society. Her warning to any young reader is to avoid mimicking Sidonie's example.

Janitschek takes issue with that fact that women are expected to develop sartorial obsessions since they have no other way to express or occupy themselves. This idea is explored further in the story 'Frau Bertha' from the same collection which depicts a middle-aged mother whose existence is also vacuous and shaped by consumerism as she squanders vast amounts of money on a wardrobe designed to attract suitors. It would be easy to imagine Frau Bertha as an older version of Sidonie. Also caricatured, she is defined entirely by her vanity and her absurd efforts to appear younger than she is, for: 'Sie gehörte zu den Damen, die viele Ringe tragen und von Zeit zu Zeit Rechnungen für Dinge enthalten, die sie ängstlich vor ihren Männern verbergen.'<sup>848</sup> As Chapter One indicates, the dangers of excessive expenditure were increasingly real towards the turn of the century, but even as Janitschek associates her heroine with the *Halbwelt* which over-does fashion and misinterprets advice, she also criticizes the fact that superficiality is ascribed to women to the extent that her protagonist can be clearly identified as a type rather than an individual. Bertha's hyperbolic interest in clothes is the main theme of the story, for just as Sidonie dreams about her marriage, excited only by the prospect of new dresses and possessions, Bertha defines her own life by what clothes she wears and possesses. When it comes to planning her summer in Biarritz she orders a series of dresses and accessories: 'Es kamen verschiedentliche Kistchen von

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<sup>845</sup> Maria Janitschek, 'In der Knospe' in *Vom Weibe – Charakterzeichnungen* (Berlin: Fischer, 1896), 1.

<sup>846</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>847</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23.

<sup>848</sup> Janitschek, 'In der Knospe' in *Vom Weibe – Charakterzeichnungen*, 14.

Atkinson aus London, ein Koffer mit Hüten aus Paris, eine Auswahl Korsetts aus Wien [...].<sup>849</sup> Whilst Atkinson was not one of London's most famous fashion houses, Janitschek use of a brand name here, even one which was not readily known and may even have been made up, suggests the lengths Bertha goes to in order to perfect her appearance. Her cosmopolitan wardrobe evokes the suspicion which still existed post-unification towards non-German apparel, but, as Chapter One indicates, it is also congruous with contemporary expectations; fashion journals were, after all, full of reports from abroad and London, Paris and Vienna continued to be the fashion capitals of Europe. In the end Bertha's attempts to hide the fact that she is a middle-aged mother are ineffectual; a potential suitor mocks her behind her back and breaks off their flirtation by sending her an evergreen bouquet. This painful exposé of a woman's obsessive vanity demonstrates Janitschek's view of the consequences of idleness and intellectual immaturity. For Bertha, 'doing' her gender is an anxious and unhappy performance.

'Der Betrogene', a short story from Janitschek's collection *Die neue Eva* (1902), also plays on the conventional association of women with vanity in a parodic and critical way; but, read in conjunction with the aforementioned narratives, this story appears to be part of Janitschek's effort to incite a debate about womanliness through the portrayal of both subversive and conformist examples of femininity. It presents an ironic examination of the debate between the old generation of women who value their looks as a way of proving their virtue and the new generation of girls who desire sexual autonomy and corporeal freedoms. Amusingly, while the young heroine Elline argues for physical experience - "Ein unbescholtene, in Liebeskünsten unerfahrenes Mädchen ist dem modernen Elegant ein Greuel"<sup>850</sup> - she remains herself a virgin who exhibits sadistic and antagonistic tendencies by, for example, biting her suitor when he kisses her. Despite her inexperience, Elline aims to deceive a baron into believing her to be sexually enlightened, marry him and then unveil herself as a virgin in order to make him realize her deception and divorce her. Her motivation is clearly financial as she gets her husband to give her a great deal of his money before marrying him, but she also sets out to prove her conviction that modern men are not interested in female virtue. Clever and cunning, Elline confronts her mother in order to justify her own actions. She accuses Frau Tavadar of displaying contradictory values by venerating modesty and then indulging in rituals designed to maintain her looks. Elline reproaches her, 'Dein Körperkult grenzt ja ans Wahnsinnige. Wachsmaske, Haarfärberei, Massage und noch anderes [...].'<sup>851</sup> Frau Tavadar refuses to recognise her own inconsistencies, while her daughter exploits her own. For the mother, applying oneself to one's appearance is virtuous, whereas Elline exposes it as vain and exploitative. Ultimately, it is in fact Elline's ability to manipulate appearances that

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<sup>849</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>850</sup> Maria Janitschek, 'Der Betrogene' in *Die neue Eva* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1902), 12.

<sup>851</sup> Ibid, 16.

earns her success and control over the situation. Here Janitschek writes against tradition, choosing as a heroine a deceptive virgin who manages to shape her own fate by exploiting her sexuality in a more overt fashion than is deemed acceptable for a young lady at her time. Like the heroines in the previous stories, we find no example to emulate here, but that the author's aim is not to provide us with role models. Rather, her humouristic tones invite a critical response and reflection on the nature of femininity.

In the novel *Amazonenschlacht* (1897), Janitschek further explores how women are objectified by what they wear and how their bodies are both defining and limiting, this time against the backdrop of the women's movement and with a less satirical narrative voice. The heroine, Hildegard Wallner, leaves her husband in order to lead an independent life in Berlin and join the fight for women's rights, having been convinced by pamphlets written by 'die Vertreterinnen der männerverdammenden Richtung' that make her believe 'dass sie eine Unglückliche, Unverstandene sei, eine jener Tausende, die unter dem Sklavenjoch der Ehe schmachteten.'<sup>852</sup> She quickly discovers the difficulties of finding work and accommodation as a single woman, but after several weeks she realises that she is beginning to think for herself for the first time: 'Merkwürdig, früher hatte sie so wenig *selbst* gedacht. Immer mit den Gedanken Anderer.'<sup>853</sup> She recognises her previous existence to have been 'borniert', for her parents never taught her how to reflect and all her friends were 'tadelloser Gesellschaftsgänse, die keinen Schritt vom Wege thaten',<sup>854</sup> an image that echoes Dohm's analogy of the geese confined by a chalk circle in *Wie Frauen werden*. Hildegard is determined to leave the conventional path and give up her ideal of becoming 'eine Schablonenjungfrau'.<sup>855</sup> In so doing she abandons her bourgeois roots and associates with working-class women in Berlin such as her landlady, who speaks in a strong Berlin dialect and oversees seamstresses in a factory. Janitschek gives the reader a glimpse into a world where clothes are a means of making a living and as a part of that world, Hildegard's own dresses become inconsequential. Her clothes are never described, although she repeatedly slips into a dress or undresses, always quickly which suggests that she wears some sort of reform dress or working woman's attire, since corsets and girdles were time-consuming and impractical garments. Clearly, Hildegard's clothes do not dictate her time or her thoughts and because they are not a 'main organizing principle' in her life, she manages to an extent to free herself from middle-class feminine norms.

However, it appears that Janitschek, critical as she is of the objectification of women, cannot conceive of a completely successful rebellion against feminine standards, as any attempt to escape

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<sup>852</sup> Maria Janitschek, *Die Amazonenschlacht* (Leipzig: Kreisende Ringe, 1897), 20.

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>854</sup> *Ibid*, 60-61.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

the sartorial principles that defined bourgeois gender is undermined by Hildegard's critical observation of women's rights and dress reform activists. Hildegard becomes disillusioned because she is disappointed by the progressivist forums where individuals who have only their own interests at heart claim to speak on behalf of their sex. Women's rights activists, she feels, wish to imitate men and act selfishly for 'die Frau des Fortschritts [...] will selbst regieren [...]'.<sup>856</sup> At one assembly the speakers are portrayed as ridiculous; they stutter, squeak and ramble on endlessly while the audience roars with applause. However, it is finally the issue of dress that interests the public most. While the 'Amazons' attempt to gain equality by presenting the economic and practical advantages of wearing trousers, they continue to be defined in patriarchal terms as doll-like objects. One supporter of dress reform announces 'Meine Damen, fort mit dem Korsett, fort mit dem langen Kleide. Das Beinkleid sei unser Motto',<sup>857</sup> yet male reporters respond derisively by emphasising the 'hübsche Gesichtern' and 'Toiletten' of the speakers. This moment depicts briefly but powerfully the ridicule of the reform movement described in Chapter One; because of the ready association of women with dress, they were the subject of scorn whether they dressed in accordance with fashion (and therefore at odds with their emancipatory message) or in reform styles which were seen as unflattering and even ugly. Published prior to the successful exhibitions of reform garments that began in Berlin in 1899, the novel captures the public reaction to what was treated as a radical revision of visual feminine norms. Hildegard herself joins in, responding critically to 'all diese wilden leidenschaftlichen Tiraden'.<sup>858</sup> She is clearly shocked by the lengths activists go to in order to affect change and regrets her decision to leave her husband. Yet she also objects to the 'grosse hübsche Wachspuppe'<sup>859</sup> that is the unhappy bourgeois woman and decides that the capacity to love and sacrifice is the only sort of freedom women have. In the end Hildegard returns to her husband and proposes that he paint a portrait of what she describes as 'die reine Amazonenschlacht'<sup>860</sup> in which she holds a flag in defense of persecuted men. Janitschek's heroine seems to be taking a stand not against the movement itself, but rather against the way in which its forerunners have become caricatures and its members unthinking supporters. Their own insistence on the importance of dress reform ironically undermines arguments for women's rights as attire and appearance become the focus of reports about them and emphasise that they are not taken seriously. Janitschek actively rejects any public action on the part of women and even goes as far as to ridicule those who do speak out openly, but her use of irony accentuates the problems faced by women who had very limited choice. Indeed, perhaps disillusionment is the point; a feminist reading of the text allows us to perceive

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<sup>856</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>857</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>858</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>859</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>860</sup> Ibid, 106.

‘the limits and regulatory aims’<sup>861</sup> of gender, not so much by presenting any persistent and repeated act of subversion, but rather by examining the way in which any deformity or subversion is punished by society.

Such a reading is supported by Janitschek’s more positive, although problematic, depiction of subversive sartorial habits in her novella *Olympier* (1901), in which dress is portrayed both as a valuable tool for controlling women and as a means of gaining autonomy. Janitschek describes a group of self-important and egotistical artists who call themselves Olympians. The story follows Inge, the wife of one of the leading Olympians, Rafael Zumpfen, as she struggles to win his love. Her more mature friend, the singer Bertha von Ilse, witnesses Inge’s desperation as she obeys and worships her selfish husband. Bertha finally ensures Inge’s happiness by boosting her self-confidence and teaching her how to be an independent and attractive woman. The singer herself, in love with a money-hungry Olympian, becomes the object of Rafael’s affection but remains chaste, autonomous and unmarried throughout the story. Nonetheless, she is very like Dörthe in Dohm’s *Wie Frauen werden*, although she is more emancipated and it is this that makes the ending more positive than Dohm’s as Inge, in emulating her, also becomes more independent and develops firm opinions.

The extent to which Inge is dependent on and in awe of her husband is demonstrated by the clothes she wears which are entirely chosen by him. They become a symbol of her vulnerability and passivity, a defining act of her gender which is imposed upon her. At the beginning of the novella Inge welcomes Bertha to her husband’s house and shows her the rooms that he has decorated according to his own distinct taste. Both lacking in opinions and set on being the perfect supportive wife, Inge has done nothing to influence the furnishings of the home she shares with Rafael. Nor does she exhibit any will power when it comes to self-decoration, for it is again her husband who makes every decision concerning her dress, regardless of comfort and fashion. When Bertha remarks on the thinness of her friend’s gown, Inge confesses, ‘Er will mich nur im grün oder im weiss sehen, und keine Seide ist ihm fein genug. Er sagt, er bekäme Schmerzen in den Fingern, wenn er unedle Stoffe berührt’.<sup>862</sup> Inge’s focus on his desire and reiteration of the third person pronoun emphasizes her impotence and the extent to which she exhibits her husband’s pecuniary status and aesthetic preferences rather than her own individuality. He literally styles her body according to a ‘fantasied and fantastic figuration’<sup>863</sup> as he insists she dye her hair red and remain girlishly thin in spite of the embarrassment and discomfort this causes her. When Bertha remarks that her housekeeper dyes her hair in order to appear younger than she is,

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<sup>861</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24.

<sup>862</sup> Maria Janitschek, *Olympier* (Breslau: S.Schottlaender, 1901), 6.

<sup>863</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 184.

Inge blushes and excuses her own dyed hair by referring to Rafael's tastes: 'Er schwärmt so für eine bestimmte Farbennüance.'<sup>864</sup> She goes on, however, to indicate that she perceives such insistence on artifice as petty. Aware of her own weakness, she tells Bertha enviously, 'Du stehst eben über allen diesen Kleinlichkeiten.'<sup>865</sup> She clearly feels constrained by the fantastical projections of her husband. Afraid of and intimidated by Rafael, despite her love for him, Inge allows her husband to dominate her both mentally and physically. At nineteen and without any experience of intellectual life, she cannot count herself one of the Olympians. Yet when she shows eagerness to engage with her husband and learn, despite thinking herself 'die einfaltigste aller Frauen', he dismisses her without a second thought.<sup>866</sup> He claims, however, to adhere to an ideal defined by a fellow Olympian: 'Olympisch sein, heisst frei sein. Ohne Band und Fesseln, ohne Bedenken und Furcht, ohne Erdschwere und Erdengesetze seine selbstleuchtende Sonne sein, das ist olympisch.'<sup>867</sup> This freedom is denied his wife, who, perceiving her feminine attributes as 'natural', believes such emancipation impossible.

Inge's whole life is determined by an effort to please her indifferent husband through her appearance. She begins a strict diet in order to remain his physical ideal, although she complains tearfully to Bertha, 'Seine Frau dürfe nie mehr wiegen als zweiundfünfzig Kilo [...] tausendmal lieber sterben, als ihm missfallen.'<sup>868</sup> His insistence on her thinness reflects the nineteenth-century aesthetic of frailness and can be explained as a patriarchal strategy.<sup>869</sup> As feminist Naomi Wolf theorises, 'a cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience.'<sup>870</sup> Rafael appears less interested in admiring Inge's slender body than in asserting control over her and his fear of her gaining weight can be linked to a fear of her gaining autonomy. The microcosm of this marriage seems to prove Wolf's point that culture demands that women are thin in order to deny them power.<sup>871</sup> Certainly Inge's eagerness to please subjugates her and paradoxically makes her undesirable, for to Rafael she is like 'ein schöner Papagei, der genau das nachsprach, was er ihm vorsagte.'<sup>872</sup> She is void of individuality as Janitschek makes clear when Bertha calls her "'meine kleine, ganz Symbol gewordene Inge.'<sup>873</sup> Indeed, she is reduced to a symbol by failing to mature into an individual and by considering herself her husband's property. Her gendered performance is defined by misogynist views of women and is played out anxiously and painfully in the way she dresses.

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<sup>864</sup> Janitschek, *Olympier*, 8.

<sup>865</sup> Ibid.

<sup>866</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>867</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>868</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>869</sup> See Richards, *The Wasting Heroine in German fiction by Women, 1770-1914*, 41.

<sup>870</sup> Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 187.

<sup>871</sup> See also Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, 171.

<sup>872</sup> Janitschek, *Olympier*, 106.

<sup>873</sup> Ibid, 122.

Yet it is also in part through clothes that Inge finds the key to self-empowerment and rebellion against restrictive feminine norms. By removing Inge from her husband's home and by releasing her from his aesthetic doctrine, Bertha attempts to boost her self-confidence and encourage her to think for herself. Bertha is independent, opinionated and outgoing and is hardly ever depicted in vestimentary terms. It is finally her indifference to sartorial concerns that influences Inge to emulate her friend and refuse to be defined by her husband's wishes. Bertha persuades Inge to leave Rafael for a holiday and once removed from her husband's house, Inge flourishes: her cheeks regain colour; her hair returns to its natural blondness; and she exchanges her silk garbs for woollen layers. When Rafael appears at the holiday dwelling weeks later, he criticises his wife's attire in a puerile manner that suggests he resents her autonomy: "Du siehst ja scheusslich in diesen Wollappen aus [...] Und Dein Haar sieht auch scheusslich aus"<sup>874</sup> Instead of weeping childishly at his cruelty as she might have previously, Inge defends herself using arguments that suggest that Janitschek was supportive of the medical debate which warned against the perils of fashion and maintained the benefits of loose woollen garments (see Chapter One). Inge explains, for instance, that her warm clothing is most suitable for the climate, and reasons that her hair has simply grown back to its natural colour. Despite his wife's logical reasoning, it is only on his second visit that Rafael begins to respect her. Attracted to Inge, he invites her to spend the night with him, but she refuses despite being tempted by the offer. The next morning she is described 'im blassblauen losen Kleid'.<sup>875</sup> She continues to exert her own will by choosing a light blue dress, whose looseness suggests a reform design, rather than his favourite revealing white and green silk gowns. When her husband announces his departure, she insists upon accompanying him homewards. It is important that this is her decision, since he offers no wish of his own. The final chapter opens with the heroine in a very different literal and metaphoric light to that of the beginning: 'Violette Lichtströme tauchen ihr weisses Kleid in geheimnisvolle Farben.'<sup>876</sup> The whiteness of her attire no longer symbolises the blankness of immaturity and the desire to please as it does in the beginning. Rather it suggests strength of character as it is embellished by mysterious colour which arguably captures some of the individuality so important to reform designers.

The novella concludes with Rafael's realisation that Inge is no longer passive and submissive, but rather strong and assertive: 'Und da wusste er's: der Herr in ihm hatte seine Herrin gefunden.'<sup>877</sup> Only when Inge dresses herself and determines her own movements does she become an independent woman; and for the self-proclaimed Olympian, these symbols of her independence

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<sup>874</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>875</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid, 186.



demonstrate her appeal. The transformation of the girlish wife who followed her husband's every command, and refused to leave his home lest he summon her, to the mature and commanding figure of the conclusion suggests the extent to which Janitschek believed that a woman's emancipation relied on her readiness to assert herself in sartorial matters. In order for women to develop their femininity in harmony with the emancipatory aims of the time, they had to re-evaluate the way they were perceived by changing what they wore as well as why they wore what they did.

A Butlerian reading of Janitschek's stories emphasizes the author's frustration with German society at the turn of the century. Janitschek uses dress symbolically as an act which constitutes female gender which she sees, at least in part, as a repressive law, regulated by men. Her heroines are often unhappy because they cannot fully internalize the norms projected onto them. Janitschek engages to an extent with the debate surrounding dress reform and at times defends it and elsewhere ridicules it, exposing the fact that it can have unintended consequences. In all her stories men dominate, clothing, abusing and rejecting the women who love them, until the heroine of *Olympier*, who escapes the parodic treatment of Janitschek's other female protagonists, prevails in a way that suggests that the author believed that the women of the twentieth century would incite trouble and triumph in subversion, acting and dressing differently to their nineteenth-century counterparts.

### **Dora Duncker (1855-1916)**

Dora Duncker is not one of the most celebrated female authors of nineteenth-century Germany and a critical study of her work is arguably long overdue. Whilst she was one of Germany's few female playwrights in the late nineteenth century, she is almost completely ignored by modern scholars. Daughter of the publisher Alexander Duncker, she was well published in the 1880s and 1890s and was well-known in Berlin's literary circles for her interest in feminist and socialist issues. Her fiction conveys the frustration women felt with their gender as powerfully as Dohm's, Bülow's and Janitschek's. A prolific essayist and writer of historical novels on such women as the Marquise of Pompadour and George Sand, Duncker engaged with the literary debate concerning women's rights and explored the issues faced by married women in her time. In her work, the subordination of women is emphasized by the fact that their husbands insist on choosing their apparel. These men become 'entranced by their own fictions [of femininity]',<sup>878</sup> as they reinforce conventional sartorial behaviour.

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<sup>878</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 394.

The novella *Gundula* (1907) provides a good example of how Duncker explores the mechanics of femininity through dress. The story recounts ‘die Tragödie einer Ehe’ which ends in the suicide of its heroine. Gundula despairs after years of pandering to her husband, Ludwig, a once-acclaimed poet who accuses his wife of being a burden by hampering his artistic progress with her constant presence in his house. Already there are echoes here of Dohm and Janitschek as the intellectual husband alienates his frustrated wife. When the couple gives a party in celebration of Ludwig’s latest work Gundula shies away from the sartorial exhibitionism and flirtatiousness expected of her in order to promote her husband’s verses. While Ludwig appears himself ‘in [einem] modernen Frackanzug’ and orders her to wear a fashionable and revealing dress, Gundula recalls her father’s condemnation of modern morals. The old man criticises both the notion of sexual equality and woman’s exhibitionism, insisting that ‘Diese neue Moral ist der Ruin jeder Ehe.’<sup>879</sup> The heroine is caught between different moral systems which are both expressed through dress.

The story begins and ends with sartorial descriptions that chart the heroine’s progression from discontented housewife to desperate and rejected recluse and suggest the sort of hyperbolic possibilities of doing female gender which ‘repeat and displace’<sup>880</sup> the norms of femininity. Duncker’s emphasis on Gundula’s unhappiness indicates that her story is meant to be seen as a critique of prescriptions imposed upon women, if not an overt rebellion against them. Initially the narrator portrays ‘Frau Gunde’ as she sews with cold, stiff hands. Her mood is captured in the description of her eyes: ‘Die grossen, blauen Kinderaugen blickten trübe.’<sup>881</sup> The image is of a submissive, unhappy and immature woman who, after three years of marriage, still has childlike eyes. The narrator informs us that her experience of wedded life has been disillusioning, for Gundula did not expect her poet-husband would be such a keen businessman who disliked feminine sentimentality and valued women particularly for their beauty. Nevertheless Gundula strives to be the perfect wife, keeping out of Ludwig’s way and devoting herself to domestic duties such as sewing. When she does indulge her desire for freedom and fresh air, leaving the house for a promenade, she soon feels guilty about neglecting her husband. The fact that her lone ramble brings her to witness the illicit meeting of a pair of lovers reinforces her belief that a good wife must be spatially defined by her husband’s domicile and that straying from it is dangerous. The similarities between Dohm’s Katharina and Duncker’s Gundula are stark: both are burdened by the indifference of their husbands, but still find themselves wandering within the metaphorical chalk circle and any desire to go beyond that circle is checked by conjugal duty and a fear of reverberations. Gundula’s girlhood pleasure in nature is remembered as a lost freedom, in part because her father has forbidden her to visit her former home until she has been entirely converted

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<sup>879</sup> Dora Duncker, *Gundula*, (Vezensy: *ngiyaw* ebooks, 2008), 32.

<sup>880</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

<sup>881</sup> Duncker, *Gundula*, 4.

into an obedient urban wife. Her walk quickly terminates with the conviction: ‘Es war unverantwortlich, die Ruhe ihres Gatten so lange dem Dienstmädchen überlassen zu haben!’<sup>882</sup> Yet once home she hears Ludwig complain that he can no longer write as he did before their marriage; he then humiliates and embarrasses her in front of the servants. Gundula is left feeling homeless, in conflict with the space allotted to her: ‘[sie war] wie ein armer, aufgeschreckter Vogel [der] hin und her flatterte, ohne jemals recht zu wissen: da ist dein Platz, deine Heimat, die Stelle, an die du gehörst, von der dich nichts und niemand vertreiben kann.’<sup>883</sup> Restless and unoccupied, Gundula fills her existence with efforts to please and ultimately fails; she attempts to excel in the performance of her gender only to realize that there are irreconcilable contradictions within it and that gender ideals are therefore impossible to embody.

These contradictions are particularly clear during a house party which is an occasion for Gundula to triumph as Ludwig expects her to, namely not as a traditional, dutiful wife, but rather as an alluring status symbol. He imagines the evening as a publicity stunt which will be most effective if his wife is the most elegant and charming woman present. Ludwig takes responsibility for her clothes, commanding: “‘Du wirst morgen zu Gerson fahren und dir das Chickeste und Modernste bestellen, was zu haben ist. Ich denke du nimmst blasslila Seide mit Valenciennes.’”<sup>884</sup> Ludwig speaks in superlatives which suggests his ambition and he is clearly well versed in the latest trends, showing, for instance, a predilection for pastel colours. He is happy to spend money on these trends and the most lavish materials and sends his wife to Gerson’s, the most established ready-to-wear business in Berlin at the time.<sup>885</sup> While Gundula regards such indulgence in silk and Valenciennes lace as extravagance, Ludwig does not consider the expense. Rather, he shows his eagerness to exploit her looks to the utmost by determining not only the colour and material of her gown but also the cut which is to be “‘Tief ausgeschnitten natürlich.’”<sup>886</sup> In fact décolletage was only acceptable in the ball room at this point and would not have been *de rigueur* at a house party.<sup>887</sup> It is more likely that Ludwig’s insistence is meant to indicate the extravagance of the party than any mis-interpretation of social conventions, however. His preference for the décolletage reinforces his tendency to see his wife as a trophy to show off, and he takes no consideration of her feelings when explaining to her that the gown must be low-cut despite her

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<sup>882</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>884</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>885</sup> See Irene Guenther, *Nazi Chic?: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich* (New York: Berg, 2004), 79.

<sup>886</sup> Duncker, *Gundula*, 31.

<sup>887</sup> See Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms*, 375.

slim figure: “‘Wenn du auch magerer geworden bist, kannst du Hals und Arme immer noch sehen lassen.’”<sup>888</sup>

In fact, Gundula’s thinness, unlike that of Janitschek’s Inge in *Olympier*, is not so much a symbol of her obedience as a symptom of her desire to rebel. As Chapter One shows, the female silhouette throughout the nineteenth century was ideally lean, especially around the waist. However, read contextually Gundula’s weight loss clearly has nothing to do with a desire to conform to social ideals, but rather represents a discomfort with her husband’s compulsion to show her off and consequently with expectations of her as a woman who is sexualized and objectified by society. Disturbingly, Ludwig discusses her physique ‘in kühlem geschäftsmässigen Ton’ as though listing the qualities of an object rather than a person. He is insensitive to the reservations Gundula voices with moralistic concern: “‘Ich finde es abscheulich, wenn Frauen aller Welt zeigen, was ihnen oder ihrem Gatten allein gehört.’”<sup>889</sup> It is Ludwig’s sartorial tastes that give the heroine her first doubts concerning her husband’s integrity. Described in cautionary terms as ‘so etwas wie ein Zweifel’, Gundula’s reservations about her husband stem from the discrepancy between her regard for a woman’s morality and his superficial appreciation of women; as Lina Morgenstern comments in 1900 fashion appears to be ‘Spekulation auf den Unverstand [...] und Gefallsucht der Frauen’.<sup>890</sup> While he follows fashions and refers to foreign models for guidance – her gown is to be ‘chick’ and decorated with Valenciennes lace – Gundula asserts a puritan, German stance by wishing to cover herself up. She resists both the presumption of ‘Unverstand’ and the ‘Gefallsucht’ attributed to her.

Here Duncker picks up on the contradictory nature of perceptions of women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and alludes to the gender trouble caused by the radically different and incongruous expectations imposed on women. Whilst being lectured on aspects of virtue and the necessity of avoiding vanity and exhibitionism, women actually profit from appearing in suggestive, vibrant gowns. At the party Gundula’s looks are admired but her inability to flirt or even converse confidently lead to her ridicule. Ultimately the fact that she cannot assume the role of alluring wife causes her break-down. Ludwig sends her to a sanatorium, the fate of many fin-de-siècle heroines, including Dohm’s Agnes in *Werde die du bist* (1894) and Agathe in Gabriele Reuter’s *Aus guter Familie* (1895). When Gundula receives a long letter from her husband in which he demands a divorce, she bites her lip to stifle a cry and blood drops onto the collar of Ludwig’s favourite white dress. The symbolism here is obvious yet poignant: the despoiled yet morally pure wife bleeds for lost love, recalling the loss of virginity as her blood stains her dress.

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<sup>888</sup> Duncker, *Gundula*, 31.

<sup>889</sup> Dora Duncker, *Gundula*, 4.

<sup>890</sup> Lina Morgenstern, ‘Zur Verbesserung der Frauenkleidung’ in *Blätter für Volksgesundheitspflege*, cited in Ober, *Der Frauen neue Kleider*, 92

The dress itself suggests her determination to cling to traditional values as much as it indicates the contradictory desire that Ludwig shares with other men of his age, namely the desire for both a characterless, modest woman in white and an enticing seductress. Finally Gundula's suicide by drowning proclaims her ultimate release from her body and the prison of her prescribed position as wife in her husband's house and as madwoman in the sanatorium. Duncker's depiction of her heroine's demise suggests the oppressive force of industrialised patriarchal society; rather than opening up new opportunities for women, she conservatively implies, the development of fashion at the turn of the century has led to a destructive indulgence in conspicuous consumption which has meant that the bourgeois woman is no longer what she was a generation before.

Duncker portrays a woman who is neither individual nor strong enough to embrace the reform dress which was well-established but still heavily debated at the time the novella was written, nor ready to accept the values of modern consumerism. Her dated moral stance means that she is at odds with her surroundings and fails to conform to contemporary standards of female gender intelligibility. What Ludwig describes as 'Ihre keusche Weltfremdheit'<sup>891</sup> in fact represents Gundula's confusion as she stands between tradition and fin-de-siècle modernism; her father and her husband; her longing for pastoral freedom and her urban, domestic bondage; her preference for sartorial modesty and the exuberant fashions she must adopt out of wifely obedience.

Duncker's exploration of her heroine's discomfort with her husband's authority over her clothing and body reflects the feeling among many women's rights activists at the turn of the century that dress inevitably defines and inhibits women. To wear white attracts complaints from the liberal-minded, to dress eccentrically invites mockery and to wear expensive and ostentatious garments earns the censor of moralists. In the face of such unavoidable derision and condemnation women seek happiness in vain; their feminine scripts are unavoidable and ultimately tragic.

## **Conclusion**

The works discussed in this chapter show how dress dramatized and reproduced the situation of women at the turn of the century and the extent to which they were dominated by men. The tragedy in the fiction of this period is that women are continually expected to please and attract men and to rely on clothes in order to do this. For the male characters in these stories, clothes are foremost an indication of a woman's sexuality and the wealth of her husband. Fashionable wear is therefore prescribed and contributes to the subjugation of women by symbolising their dependence on men, their desperation to please and their immobility as they are limited to small

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<sup>891</sup> Ibid, 66.

domestic realms. If gender is ‘the stylisation of the body’,<sup>892</sup> then in figurative and literal terms the stylisation of the heroine’s body through clothes is shown to be constructed and maintained by men. Thus Dohm, Duncker, Bülow and Janitschek seem close to an understanding of femininity as a patriarchal formulation characterised by submission and ‘frivolous’ concerns such as fashion. What they reveal is that men are more caught up in appearances than their heroines. By reacting negatively to these preconceptions, they start to expose ‘the illusion of an interior [...] gender core’<sup>893</sup> even if their intent is to suggest that their heroines possess a ‘gender core’ which is different to that imposed upon them. The notion that feminine attributes are ‘natural’ is shown to be an *illusion*.

As the above analysis has shown, the uncovering of ‘fundamental’ ‘feminine’ attributes as fabrications does not mean that the authors come up with radically different ‘un-gendered’ protagonists; as Butler would contend, gender remains both for the writers and for their heroines an inescapable construct. Arguably, it is even perpetuated by Pygmalion female figures (such as Bertha and Dörthe) who fashion the heroine in order to help her appeal to men. Strong and autonomous women who challenge visual norms are therefore hard to come by in these stories. Even Senta, who is confidently radical throughout much of Bülow’s *Lass mich nun vergessen!*, is ‘tamed’ by love and gives up cross-dressing. Her sartorial transformation should not be seen as a rejection of emancipatory ideals, however. In fact, in terms of her progressive zeal she is very much like popular novelist Elisabeth Heinroth’s (1861-1920) heroine, Muthe, in *Ein Moderner* (1902). Like Senta, Muthe is an independent, strong-minded woman. She is a talented artist and always appears in harmony with nature, even though it means that her large, brown-skinned healthiness contrasts with the child-like thinness and elegant daintiness of fashionable women. This, Heinroth suggests, is a ‘natural’ woman, free of the oppressive preconceptions inflicted on her sex. She goes cycling in shortened skirts, wears a sailor hat and sandals which she is happy to remove whenever she pleases, and is strikingly original, a fact that attracts the hero, who is also an artist. After seeing her at a ball, he likens the other women of his acquaintance to ‘künstlich dressierte Äffchen’.<sup>894</sup> This is yet another instance in which the market analogy used by Louise Dittmar in ‘Affenmärchen’ is employed to make a point about how young women are bought up to become overly concerned with how to attract men through vestimentary adornment. Paradoxically, the reason Muthe is so attractive, namely that she is unaffected, is also a source of embarrassment and signals the end of their relationship. Fascinated as he is by her vivaciousness and unaffected appearance, the hero cannot get over the fact that she is inelegant and oblivious to

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<sup>892</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.

<sup>893</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 186.

<sup>894</sup> Elisabeth Heinroth under the pseudonym Klaus Rittland, *Ein Moderner*, (Berlin: F. Fontane & Co, 1902), 114.

social expectation and he is overwhelmed by 'eine Art Grauen vor [ihrer] elementaren Weibeskraft'.<sup>895</sup> Yet he is the hero of the title, the modern man who is at once impressed by her vision of a more equal and free society where individuality is celebrated and afraid of unorthodox behaviour and the punishment of social exclusion that might occur should he fail to emulate such husbands as those described above. What Heinroth and Bülow both demonstrate is the force of feminine norms and that non-conformist behaviour is treated as a sort of developmental failure, regardless of how attractive and positive that behaviour might be.

Literary form varies in this chapter as the authors exploit a range of narrative techniques to problematise both traditional gender codes and progressive ideals. Whilst the novel, as in previous eras, is favoured to develop characters and situations, shorter genres are adopted to convey a message in a more condensed way and in these distilled literary forms we often find dress as a central motif. The short story is used to parody certain types of women whilst the novella allows the writers to develop the female protagonist without suggesting she has more power over her fate than she does. In her short stories, for instance, Janitschek takes advantage of the genre's succinct form to mix playfulness with a sense of purpose. She excels at this 'jolly art'<sup>896</sup> by using exaggeration and parody to suggest the need for social progress. Others use the novella to draw attention to the domestic frustration of the late nineteenth-century *bourgeoise*. It is worth noting that by the end of the nineteenth century the novella had been embraced as a particularly German form and many German men had contributed to its development as a form that should adhere to certain rules. Interestingly, the novellas here are not written entirely in accordance with two central imperatives: Friedrich Schlegel's expectation that the novella should be new and surprising and Ludwig Tieck's prescription that it involve a striking *Wendepunkt*.<sup>897</sup> In fact, some of the plots are disturbingly predictable as the heroine is unable to break out of her monotonous middle-class existence; and in several of the novellas nothing much happens, unless we are to count the passing of naivety as a turning point. Arguably only Janitschek makes full use of an element of surprise, exploiting an unpredictable *Wendepunkt* in *Olympier* as her heroine emancipates herself on her own terms. Janitschek's narrative stance is brazen because it optimistically calls for change from within the system, as the untraditional plot clashes with a traditional form. The other writers discussed here use the particularly accessible form of the novella to accentuate a feeling of frustration and inevitable disappointment as if to say that men might enjoy the excitement of momentous events, but to obey the confines of realism is to acknowledge that for the vast majority of women such excitement never happens.

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<sup>895</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>896</sup> H.G. Wells cited in Gulnaz Fatma, *A Short History of the Short Story: Western and Asian Traditions* (Ann Arbor: Modern History Press, 2012), 1-2.

<sup>897</sup> See Beutin, Wolfgang, ed., *A History of German Literature: From the Beginnings to the Present Day* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 185.

Fiction published on the eve of the First World War begins to show a different use of sartorial characterisation as attitudes towards women and clothes began to change remarkably. In Gretel Meisel-Hess's (1879-1922) novella, *Fanny Roth* (1910), for instance, the heroine is a virtuoso violinist and composer who rejects marriage in favour of a professional life. Whilst vestimentary descriptions play a part in evoking her sexual desire for her fiancé at the beginning of the story and act as a thin protective cover from his advances in the middle, by the end they are not mentioned at all. It is as though Fanny, by determining to emancipate herself from marital subjugation, opts for a life characterised by the creativity of the mind rather than the beauty of the body. For Dohm, allowing and encouraging a woman to study and work professionally, like Fanny, meant giving her the chance to focus her energy on her mind rather than on her body. This metamorphosis is based on the belief that 'Die Frauen sind nicht oberflächlich und trivial von Natur, sondern die Erziehung behaftet sie mit diesem Makel [...]'<sup>898</sup> and that '[das] innere Drängen des Weibes nach Entwicklung ihrer Kräfte ist nicht eine Corruption der Natur, sondern die inbrünstige Sehnsucht, zu ihr zurückzukehren.'<sup>899</sup> It may be that countless women rely on sartorial elegance to find a husband, but Meisel-Hess begins to envisage a future where this is not the case.

Dohm concludes her essay 'Die Eigenschaften der Frau' with a vision of what women might eventually become once free of the legacy of ignorance and vanity. Like the other authors in this study, she maintains a belief in nature: 'Aus der Zukunft [...] wenn der freien Entwicklung des Weibes keine Schranke mehr gesetzt ist, wird ein Geschlecht emporblühen, dessen Herrlichkeit wir heut kaum ahnen, ein Geschlecht voll Schönheit und Grazie, voll Kraft und Intelligenz, den schließlich bleibt die Natur immer Siegerin [...]'<sup>900</sup> The works in this chapter indicate that that future is still some time off.

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<sup>898</sup> Dohm, 'Die Eigenschaften der Frau' in *Der Frauen Natur und Recht*, 34.

<sup>899</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid, 37.



## Conclusion

German women writers in the nineteenth century used clothes symbolically to depict the wearer's morality, her place in society, her amorous ambitions and her relationship with her husband. Conduct literature and fashion journals indicate that dress played a substantial role in the life of a bourgeois woman, and there were countless rules and trends that had to be followed. This study has shown that conduct advice remained at the forefront of the writer's mind whenever dress was mentioned, but that the caprices of fashion were treated as ephemeral and often superfluous. Sartorial descriptions serve complex and at times subversive purposes in literature of the nineteenth century; they are used to depict and reveal, define and complicate a character rather than merely to set the scene, and in so doing they played an important role in contemporary debates such as that of reform dress. In serving this complex function, clothing comes to represent the character's approach to and understanding of femininity in a way which problematises what a woman signified in nineteenth-century Germany, an issue at the centre of ongoing research today.

Radicalism in nineteenth-century Germany is not comparable to our twenty-first-century understanding of the term. Even at their most critically ascerbic, the women writers discussed here were cautious and in some ways conformist. Pictures of them do not show trousered rebels and there was no suffragette movement in Germany of the likes of that in Britain. Change occurred within the terms of the understood gender law: these women writers were for the most part married, if not mothers, and those who were not, such as Marlitt, suggested a strong wish that they were. Even within the reform movement, the importance of traditional femininity prevails so that, fascinatingly, traditional and radical ideals co-exist. Indeed, success was contingent upon the acceptance of certain gender traits as being 'natural'.

While theoretical writings such as Butler's help us to appreciate the extent to which clothes work as visual signs denoting a feminine identity and the ways in which they inscribe that identity on the wearer, further theoretical work about the meaning of dress remains to be done. All the authors discussed in this thesis are keenly aware of their position as women, of the values they are expected to expound and of conventional depictions of their sex as weak, fragile and ornamental. Lewald's reflections on fashion and Aston's cross-dressing are testimony to their own discomfort with sartorial associations and implications, yet they are reluctant to overlook symbolic conventions in their fiction. Marlitt's insistence on core values and her vilification of consumerist exuberance suggest that she, like Lewald and Aston, saw the link between femininity and fashion as far from obvious. Writers of the *Jahrhundertwende* are bolder in calling attention to the way dress is used by men and patriarchal society to victimise and control women in an effort to sustain the myth of femininity as passive and naive. An analysis of dress in their work reveals the uneasiness these authors felt with the way in which women were limited by clothes not so much

literally – even if trends of the time indicate this was a reality for bourgeois women – but metaphorically as clothes symbolized their subservience.

Dohm's conception of female gender draws attention to the way in which some of Butler's theory was anticipated by early feminist thinkers and suggests that more research has yet to be done into the overlap between nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminist philosophy. Dohm sees femininity as a socially constructed idea and uses sartorial details to symbolise not only a woman's powerlessness, ignorance and hopelessness but also her frustration, confusion and delusion. Some of the women she portrays use dress to compete for male attention and 'wetteifern miteinander in der Dekolletiertheit ihrer Kleider'<sup>901</sup> (*Sibilla Dalmar*, 1896); others are utterly compliant 'unbeschrieben(e) (Blätter)'<sup>902</sup> (*Schicksale einer Seele*, 1899) or even so fashionable and modern that they have no identity beyond that of 'ein Kunstprodukt'<sup>903</sup> (*Christa Ruland*, 1902). Dohm also invents heroines who anticipate an era when women are freer; her heroine Christa is a 'Toilettenkassandra'<sup>904</sup> who wears eccentric dress in private, if not in public, whilst Sibilla is a clever, well-read 'Übergangsgeschöpf'<sup>905</sup> who is all too aware of the link between sartorial exuberance and social success. This link is devastating to the women, including the writers discussed in this thesis, who wish to celebrate the intellectual capacity of their sex.

Throughout the nineteenth century the association between women and sartorial concerns was sustained and fed by contemporary theories of sex difference, sociological studies and, to an ever-increasing degree, by the fashion industry, all of which provide a context not yet fully explored by scholars today. Women were criticised for being excessively interested in clothes by a society that all but demanded sartorial interests as a feminine norm. Indeed, women were considered to be 'naturally' frivolous, incapable of profound thought and therefore intuitively concerned with their appearance: Arthur Schopenhauer emphasised the 'gewissen Leichtsinn'<sup>906</sup> in women in *Ueber die Weiber* (1851); the neurologist Paul Julius Möbius (1853-1907) declared in his essay 'Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes' (1900) that 'Körperlich genommen ist (...) das Weib ein Mittelding zwischen Kind und Mann und geistig ist sie es (...) auch'<sup>907</sup>; and Otto Weininger concluded in 1903 that 'Das Weib (...) ist als Ganzes Un-sinnig, un-sinnig.'<sup>908</sup> Whilst these views were extreme, even at the time, keeping up appearances and being attractive made up a vocation for women of the middle and upper classes, and, as Chapter One shows, conduct

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<sup>901</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Sibilla Dalmar* (Berlin: Holzinger, 2013), 95.

<sup>902</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Schicksale einer Seele*, 135.

<sup>903</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Christa Ruland* (Berlin: Holzinger, 2013), 24.

<sup>904</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>905</sup> Dohm, *Sibilla Dalmar*, 313.

<sup>906</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Kunst, mit Frauen umzugehen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010), 37.

<sup>907</sup> Paul Julius Möbius, *Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes* (Halle: C. Marhold, 1907), 14.

<sup>908</sup> Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Stoughton: BoD, 2012), 345.

literature and the fashion industry worked both in concert and at odds with one another, each fundamentally supporting preconceptions about femininity. On the one hand women were urged to read *Benimmliteratur*, which advised them to be economical and simple in their sartorial decisions; on the other, they were encouraged to buy the latest accessories and reminded that standing out was an unforgiveable breach of social etiquette. In short, following fashion was a must; as writer Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830-1916) famously puts it ‘Man darf anders denken als seine Zeit, aber man darf sich nicht anders kleiden.’<sup>909</sup> The ‘goldene Mittelstraße’ between behavioural advice and the blind observance of every modish caprice was the ideal, but novels of the era show that attaining that ideal remained elusive for many and descriptions of heroines who seem to find the ‘Mittelstraße’ are often vague to the point of suggesting that that ‘Mittelstraße’ cannot in fact be realised at all.

As the century drew to a close ‘anders denken’ and ‘sich anders kleiden’<sup>910</sup> were finally becoming acceptable for progressive women, at least to an extent. The advancement of women’s rights could be seen in changing sartorial trends as women had more choice and restrictive, excessive styles – the same that the writer Friedrich Vischer referred to as ‘Hurenmode’<sup>911</sup> (1879) and the doctor Paul Schultze-Naumberg later called ‘(eine) Uniform der Prostitution’<sup>912</sup> (1901) – were no longer the only options offered to middle-class women. The *Eigenkleid*, for instance, the dress of the reform movement, was to be determined by the wearer herself rather than any reform designer. For artist Anna Muthesius, it was ‘das Ergebnis [des] Denkens [des Weibes] und zugleich den Maßstab für seine Intelligenz’.<sup>913</sup> Rather than sexualising the wearer and demonstrating her obedience to the norm, dress could symbolize her intellectual ability and creative spirit. It was only at the turn of the century with the advent of such heroines as Heinroth’s Muthe that we begin to see that clothes could be that ‘Maßstab’ in literature by women; until then they served as a way to measure a woman’s morality and social expertise and ‘anders denken’ did not mean ‘sich anders kleiden’ for the heroine. Work has yet to be done on how this tension was explored in twentieth-century fiction by women who found their gender increasingly re-shaped by war, suffrage and work and, indeed, whether such tension continued to exist at all.

More often than not sartorial characterisation prior to 1900 was used either to define the negative attributes of a secondary female character or, in the case of the heroine, to bring out her frustration with life and/or emphasise her virtue. The fact that the novelists discussed in this thesis

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<sup>909</sup> Marie Ebner-Eschenbach, *Gesammelte Schriften von Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Bd. Aphorismen. 4. Aufl. Parabeln, Märchen und Gedichte. 3. Aufl.* (Berlin: Paetel, 1893), 67

<sup>910</sup> Ibid.

<sup>911</sup> *Mode und Cynismus*, 1879

<sup>912</sup> Cited in Bertschik, *Mode und Moderne*, 91.

<sup>913</sup> Anna Muthesius, *Eigenkleid der Frau* (1903) cited in Bertschick, *Mode und Moderne*, 95-6.

seem unwilling to depict their protagonists with the same vivid sartorial details as they do their secondary characters suggests a tacit acknowledgement of the extent to which fashion subjugates women as well as the fact that an excessive interest in clothes was considered unpatriotic and even immoral throughout the century. As Chapter Four argues, by the end of the 1800s women writers were direct and passionate in their depiction of how dress oppressed women. They anticipated Simone de Beauvoir's statement that 'The goal of fashion to which [woman] is in thrall is not to reveal her as an autonomous individual but, on the contrary, to cut her from transcendence so as to offer her as a prey to male desires (...).' <sup>914</sup> The authors in Chapter Four display fashion as restrictive and dis-empowering; a 'Tyrannin' in quite a different sense to that implied by much of nineteenth-century discourse, for it is not so much the 'Lieblingsgöttin der Damen' <sup>915</sup> as a mechanism by which men control women.

The history of fashion presented in Chapter One gives today's reader an appreciation of how scarce specific allusions to sartorial trends are in fiction of the period. Clothes become clear terms to illustrate the integrity of a character: those who dress expensively and elaborately are to be reviled; those who are unclean and slovenly (unless their circumstances excuse it, as do those of Felicitas in Marlitt's *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*) are equally reprehensible; meanwhile those who are tidy and simply attired are invariably worthy of admiration. Once writers start to problematize these categories by suggesting that the clothes depicted express their heroine's emotional state (as in Chapter Two) or by emphasising the influence of men in women's dress (as in Chapter Four), an emancipatory message becomes particularly clear.

The chronological nature of this study allows us to start to appreciate the slow and erratic progress of the women's movement. Social attitudes did not evolve steadily, but fluctuated as the liberalism of mid-century revolutionary thought gave way to national conservatism during the *Gründerzeit*. This study suggests that Aston and Lewald argue for the emancipation of women in their novels and use clothes to express their frustration metaphorically. Marlitt's use of clothing is notably different: she criticises overly fashionable women in the same way as Lewald, but her heroines' conventional beauty and sartorial simplicity earn them happiness and wedded bliss, while the beauty and simplicity of Aston's and Lewald's heroines help guarantee marriage, a poor prize for their moral integrity. The novels of the turn of the century return to the ideas nascent in texts of the 1840s which reveal dress as an imposed feature of femininity. Women might resist fashion and gravitate – quite conventionally – towards sartorial simplicity that reveals moral purity, but at every turn they find themselves condemned by society for doing so. Far from being

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<sup>914</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Random House, 2010), 586.

<sup>915</sup> *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, November 1812, 759.

considered virtuous, dressing modestly is criticised by a patriarchal society now fuelled by consumerism; conspicuous consumption has taken over.

As I have shown, women writers do not radically re-imagine literary conventions when it comes to sartorial characterisation, but they do complicate dress codes by revealing how femininity relies on visual representation. These female authors of nineteenth-century Germany occupy a liminal space in which the 'nature' of femininity is at once celebrated and problematised, reaffirmed and contested. Their eagerness to draw on tradition and recognisable standards when describing clothes indicates that Butler's gender theory is as illuminating of European society in the 1800s as it is of the late twentieth-century America of which she wrote. This thesis therefore opens questions about how male writers use dress to portray women; how men were confined by sartorial rules and characterised by what they wore; and how the First World War affected literary perceptions of women, femininity and dress. The thesis also calls into question our understanding of the 'natural' by exposing how femininity is constantly being redefined in accordance with social and historical changes. Admittedly, just as literature is not history, literary representation is not reality. Literary codes are uncontestedly a highly stylised representation of reality; Butler's theory allows us to think critically about the works of German women writers and the extent to which they themselves participate in the culture that maintains gender divisions. I am suggesting that what these women have achieved is a multi-layered exposure of femininity as a 'literalising fantasy'<sup>916</sup> and that their depiction of dressing as self-representation is in fact more profound than even they may have imagined.

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<sup>916</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 95.

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