

NORSE WOMEN AS MATERIAL FOR MODERN WRITING

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ABSTRACT. In the dawn of modernism, when most European cultural forums began to redefine the new structures of authority that better suited the social and political paradigms of their new turfs, the Northern countries were suddenly faced with original social and artistic movements prompted by the so-called “women emancipation”. In the 1870’ Denmark and Norway, this new wave was boldly christened the Danks/Norlsk Kvindesamfund (Danish/Norwegian Women Society), which is otherwise known as the next logical step towards restructuring social policies, while the first step was to legalize the United Left or the Liberal Party which supported the reforms brought on the continent by the international workers’ associations. Just like in the social sphere, these revolutionizing ideas about women’s role in public and private life were promoted in literature by the contribution of already established male writers who gave voice to iconic female characters, and the case of Ibsen creating his *Nora* based on a real model is axiomatic. In what follows we will be looking at such “materials” in both masculine and feminine writings throughout 19th century Norwegian literature, with a hint to the messianic, visionary, realistic, and shocking perspectives that this sort of material had to offer to their respective readers. An important conclusion will be that the type of woman born under their pen name is not even remotely the fitting feminist profile of today’s novels; it rather mirrors the idea of normality which these writers wished for their country, and a reminder that social power networks are superfluous without women’s lucidity.

KEY WORDS: Norwegian literature, realism, modern women, literary style

By Way of Introduction

Why do we need to talk about women’s literature, why especially in the context of Norwegian culture, and why is it necessary to even divide between two types of literature, one authored by men and the other by women? Is the latter not comprised in the body of Norwegian works? Was Norway not fairly represented at the top of the 19th century European culture? Are there really two ways of sensing and writing, and is a woman’s mind structured in a different manner as to work for different purposes and ask different questions? To all these questions the answer is “no”, since both men and women writers in the 19th century seem to have dealt with the same social and political phenomena and suffer the same consequences of: industrialization at the very onset of the new scientific era; the breaking of con-

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servative norms and policies which hindered the then Norway, as a Swedish colony, from its true social potential; the new social conditions brought by the increase of population; the new paradigm of the Norwegian emigrant, etc. Both men and women writers had to face these changes as spectators, thus the only logical question is how felicitous was the raise of another “literature” in the then political and social atmosphere? Because it developed in the middle of these historical permutations, the issue of women writers needs to be investigated in its multiple settings. It was not just the outcome of Ibsen’s *Nora* or the “Laura Kieler affair”: since such realistic and naturalistic women portraits existed long before Kieler, discussion about economic restraints and bankruptcy made the first page of newspapers on a daily basis, and these traits were not the only features that best delineated a woman’s role as material for writing. What this paper is, however, trying to bring to the surface is the fine print, the peculiar notes that a woman’s self brings in male writings as compared to the inner image of a woman in female writings. In 19th century Norwegian literature, they are both indefinite, showing too many unpolished facets in both men and women works, which only proves that since women themselves lacked a cultural model of their own, woman as material for writing is just that, a simple attempt to deal with herself, without a concrete, preexisting basis for such experiments.

The Literary Experiment in Norway. How it All Began

The question of Norse literature, and especially its feminine counterpart, is still in the 21st century as sensitive and difficult to explore in its entirety as Norse culture itself. The task of exploring the depths of Nordic cultures is not always at hand for Continental scholars, thus for the purpose of this study we will here concentrate on the 19th century women’s writing in Denmark and Norway, with shorter references to these countries political and social contexts after the Napoleonic wars in 1814. When after the Treaty of Kiel, Sweden received Norway from the then Kingdoms of Denmark and Norway, as it was formerly agreed on it with Russia; in the meantime, Denmark received Swedish Pomerania respectively, and the small Norwegian bishoprics of Christiansand, Bergen, Akershus, and Trondheim became trading goods between these Nordic superpowers.

Consequently, these provinces’ quest for political identity was from the very beginning not only a quest for national independence from both Denmark and Sweden, but also a *movement* of bodies and minds to preserve their own constitution, as the construction of Modern-day Norway apart from powerful Sweden was not possible until 1905. Recent studies show great concern for the Scandinavian political affairs during late 19th century Norway (Derry 1968), and also for Norway’s subsequent status as an inde-

pendent nation (Sejersted 2014). In those tumultuous circumstances, it follows only logically that Denmark's main influence in Norway at the turn of 18th-19th centuries was not cultural in the midst of unrest, consequently Norwegian education and civic life was but an emulation, only a century later, of the much more developed Danish culture. Even Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), for instance, is widely considered to be the pioneer of modern Norwegian literature through his vast array of interests (he wrote poems, essays, novels, etc.), but also a promoter of Norway's first public theater through the many comedies he composed to be played at the open stage. However, the Bergen-born Holberg was himself unhappy to learn that the Danish king, in the attempt to hire a more fashionable Italian crew for his royal theatre, proceeded at firing the old French cast, and in 1728 Norwegian theater was completely dissolved for almost twenty years. A humanist himself, belonging to the Danish-Norwegian monarchy era, Holberg however managed to maintain his multi-faceted personality alive, and he also composed law treaties which made his fame last well up into the 20th century. This being said, it appears that there was not much support in Norway for an informed and widely spread original literature before mid-19th century.

The image of isolation and the sentiment of being colonized functioned in early 19th century Norway like in all the other colonies, *i.e.* as an overflow of religious life based on didactic Christian works translated from German, such as Luther's *Small Catechism* with its dialogic model based on questions and answers and intended for spreading the Christian alphabetization to all social strata and ages. A perspective on the preliminaries of Norwegian secular literature and publications is well presented in the recent works of Swedish scholar Per Ledin (quoted in Bandle 2005: 1484), who offers a chronological follow-up of Norse literary conscience at beginning of the said study.

The fact that this borrowed practice ensured fundamental instruction within society was most honorable. Nevertheless, these efforts were as exclusive in nature as the practice itself, since learning based on a catechism involved repetitive doctrinal statements taken from fragmentary texts with no marginalia, however implemented and imposed with authority by the church. As it happens, change came slowly for the general public, and the term "movement" played just as important a role in the whole rebirth of Norwegian society as it did for its cultural position beginning with the raise of Pietist oral teaching through secular preachers. It should be noticed, though, that with every new attempts of modern European powers to impose on Norway (see the Treaty with Sweden in 1751, the Treaty of Kiel in 1814, The Convention with Russia in 1826, etc.), the intent from inside the country was towards revolutionary gatherings, constituent assemblies, in-

ternational legitimacy, and finally independence understood as decolonization from both Denmark and Sweden. However, the recurring consequences were internal and external threatenings, fiscal unrest, lack of support for Norway at the Swedish court, and new diplomatic missions from Copenhagen and London. They were probably sent not only because of Norway's military potential, but also as a reminder of its medieval past dominated by invasions and intrusive attacks against both Denmark and England (see Hough 2013: 71-78; see also <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/region/scandinavia/xnorway.html>, accessed October 2016).

In their missionary travels, those pioneers of spirit and mind popularized a new editorial style, though still too rudimentary to be called literature, mainly in the form of the so-called tracts or booklets for personal devotional time and group discussions, thus encouraging wit and enthusiasm onto lecture and public debate both literary and politically. This cultural drive springing from the Pietist field work is belittled today though, and critics tend to associate it with later developments of the novel particularly preferred in Norway's bourgeois circles, since both the tracts and the mid-19th century realistic novel are narrative in style and conduct a mimetic rendering of reality be it moral or social-economic. Such critics somehow elude the real reason why the more selective circles of early to mid-19th century Norway chose poetry as representative for their state of mind. They prefer to only concentrate on the stylistic effect that readers find in poetry as compared to the lacunary sort of picture a novel could put together, hence their labeling of poetry as *les belles lettres* (Per Ledin, quoted in Bandle 2005: 1485). They scarcely follow the romanticism found in poetry back to its true origin in the European Romantic movement of the time, but instead consider its sentimental allure as representative for the individual secular accommodation with true culture and literature. A probable cause for their position is that only in 1871 has the Danish novel critic Georg Morris Cohen Brandes given his lectures on the "Major literary currents in the 19th century", where he advertised the novel as well as poetry and warned fellow writers of all sorts to take on full personal and social responsibility for their works, thus pointing to the conscientious writer. This new paradigm which Brandes coined and defined in 1871 as a "Modern Breakthrough" was intended with reference to modern Scandinavian literature (see Dirk Johannsen, in Adogame, Echtler, and Freiburger 2013: 36 fwd.). It is therefore believed that the secularization of Norwegian literature and culture was tantamount with urbanization and its new challenges, including the need for new jobs and social structures.

For instance, William Mishler (quoted in Naess 1993, vol. 2: 201-201) mentions that this new trend amounting to the replacement of old rural

rules and trades, from farmers to factory employees, that is, was due to a special sense of optimism that Norway began to experience in the aftermath of the 1905 events. Along with the economical and geographical effects which this demographic growth of almost 100% had on Norwegian industry, emigration towards urban areas and the USA boosted by the end of the 1900s, thus new laws and liberties were in high demand. All these permutations can be later seen in the nostalgic, however, realistic depictions, of rural Norway confronted with modernism in both men and women's writing, such as in Johan Bojer, Gabriel Scott, Nini Roll Anker, Sven Elvestad, etc. (see also Per Ledin, quoted in Bandle 2005: 1485). Moreover, Norway's opening towards the world could not ignore the new literary trends en vogue at the end of the 19th century, which questioned the sense of cultural hierarchy and monopolies, such as women literature against its masculine counterpart, women rights, and woman emancipation in the 1880s.

Starting from these troubled days, the first male literati depicting their homeland as conscientious writers were so to appear. When, for instance, Henrik Arnold Wergeland (1808-1845) first tried his talent, he had his father Nicolai as a role model living in Bergen, Norway already at the end of the 18th century, and was inspired by his father's subjective ideas of a separate university in Norway apart from the Danish educational program. To exemplify, Nicolai Wergeland was one of the prominent voices at the Norwegian Constituent Assembly to plead for the right of Prince Christian Frederick to rule as regent in Norway instead of kneeling his country to the Swedish king who nurtured hopes for a greater vassal army in the international battle against Napoleon I, and his speech within the Assembly, in which he summons his citizens to "seize the (revolutionary, messianic) moment" that the particular event represented for the country, is sharply noticed by Karen Gammelgaard and Eirik Holmøyvik, eds. (2015: 128 fwd.). Also, he dreamed of a separate Norwegian state apart from the cruel Denmark. Thus, Henrik Wergeland's formation was foremost theological as his father, a priest wanted, but rather moderate in doctrine, as his poems gathered under the title *Creation, Man, and Messiah* (1830) professed (see Naess 1993, vol. 2: 87-90).

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), a Christiania and Bergen citizen in his youth, and famous author of works like *Brand* (1865), *Pillars of Society* (1877), *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts/The Revenants* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), *Rosmersholm* (1884), and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), gave a staunch reply to the 19th century lowering morality of high society. His everlasting insistence on the "modern world" as paradigmatic for the new age which his work "inaugurated" is another attempt to show that the said work was to be perceived as messianic by its own nature rather than a mere synthesis of Christian traditional messianic texts.

These accents in their plays and short stories made Henrik Wergeland and Henrik Ibsen the most notable writers of this period in Norway's modern cultural history. If we also consider Ibsen's friendship with and letters to the esteemed Danish critic Georg Brandes from Copenhagen, written in his Dresden years in the 1870s, the reason for Ibsen's European fame and the appearance of a conscientious Norwegian reading public becomes clear (Naess 1993, 2: 122). This is the same public that had been officially informed about the antithesis between provincialism and urbanism, or illiberalism and the New World as found, for instance, in the drama written in 1875 by Bjørntjerne Martinus Bjørnson (1832-1910) and titled *En fallit/ The Bankrupt*. As expected, Bjørnson's play was performed in Christiania, the then Norwegian capital city, about four years before Ibsen began to write his play *A Doll's House* which also revolves around such issues as bankruptcy, lawyers, and the times' most conspicuous and immoral peculiarities of a corrupt high society. It turns out, however, that this circle of great Norwegian literary classics would be incomplete if we failed to mention the novelist and also well-off factory owner Alexander Kielland and, last but not least, Bjørnson's and Ibsen's schoolmate from the University of Christiania, Jonas Lie (1833-1908), with his 1870 fairy-like tale *The Visionary* (or *Pictures from Nordland*). The latter is particularly noticeable for his lifestyle at the end of his literary career, which is very similar to Ibsen's, who travelled and lived for long periods of time in Italy and Germany in search of a more suitable climate both geographically and morally.

The Aftermath. Norwegian Female Writers in the 19th Century

Ibsen made a signaling attempt to prove somehow bluntly that in his contemporary society women's rights were at stake and he himself could see it everyday. Thus he used a real-life woman to portray not just a middle class marital situation, but also a fellow woman writer and long time friend in crisis. As known, Ibsen made clear reference in *A Doll's House* to his contemporary Laura Kieler (her full name Laura Anna Sophie Müller Kieler, married Petersen, see Siddall 2008: 10), who in trying to emulate his talent, wrote her first novel titled *Brand's Daughters* in 1869. That was after she visited Ibsen in Germany and 4 years before she got married to Victor Petersen. As a result of their turbulent marriage (which ended up in her being sent to a mental institution, while later on she lived as a subject wife until Victor's death), she became the anti-model of Ibsen's Nora, a character she always hated to have been compared to back in 1879 (for more details about Laura Kieler's life as model for Ibsen, and also her long life in Denmark after Victor's death (see Templeton 2001: 137 fwd.)). Apart from Ibsen, however, Norway's female literature is rich in content, representatives, and affiliates. At times, these writers can be situated in the vicinity of the four

Norwegian classics through their passion for natural life and landscapes in their beloved Norway. Yet other times they surprise with an unexpected attitude towards the very traditional norms in which they were taught to raise and care for their family, and which supposedly went hand in hand with their beautiful, untouched and wild landscapes. Until, however, the bourgeois lifestyle came to the fore.

Women writers lineage in mid-19th century Norway begins with names belonging to a romantic-realistic influence. Among the most representative a matriarchal figure should be mentioned first, namely Gustava Kielland (1800-1889) (see, for details on this writer, Olsen quoted in Brøgger 1936, 7: 296-297). Her name is particularly related to those first attempts made by Norwegian Pietist to sharpen people's mind into discerning the truths of the Gospel, and also to the "tracts" movement which led those evangelists to organize group discussions and question what they were taught, in such a way that through their oral character these regular home meetings would eventually flourish into a model for Norway's external missionary work, too. An interesting act about Kielland was that she started these gathering in her own home and then in public institutions out of remorse for not having done that sooner, while her later work inspired a sort of universal passion for missions: "While it could not claim to be the first association, the women's mission association started in 1845 by the pastor's wife Gustava Kielland became the model of a number of similar mission associations that were springing to life all over the country" (Hestad Skeie 2013: 28, esp. note 41). Her efforts offered economic support to such missionary efforts in the colonies, too, which is another way of saying that these first women associations left their fine mark upon the new world as far as Norwegian women's involvement in social and biblical work is concerned.

At the other end of the story, there is Marie Colban (1814-1884) (details in Brøgger 1926, volume 3) and her passion for French Romantic literature, from which she translated extensively while also writing her own novels, and also Camilla Collett (1813-1895) (see details in Wilson 1991: 263-265), sister of Henrik Wergeland and General J. F. Oscar Wergeland, a figure quite controversial and rather socially inapt, whose influence will soon become relevant as a role model for kindred modern spirits. Vilhelmine Ullmann (1816-1915) was their unusual contemporary: also born in Christiania, she was educated by her own mother, who was a school principal herself. Vilhelmine authored various articles for newspapers and periodicals, and in later years a collection of tales. It is worth mentioning that even before 1839, when she got married, Vilhelmine managed to make an independent living, which later on, as a mother of six and after 15 years of marriage was probably an incentive for her to get divorced and support herself anew by writing (<http://nordicwomensliterature.net/writer/ullmann->

vilhelmine for a short survey of her life and work). Her model left a distinctive trace on the personal evolution of women writers like Skram, Anker, and Jølsen, whose careers also make the subject of this paper:

With Anna Magdalene Thoresen (1819-1903) (see details in Beyer 1975, 3: 555-558) a new vogue of women writers and theatre supporters installed in Norway's cultural life, even more so as she was the stepmother of Ibsen's wife and the living embodiment of female key characters in his *Rosmersholm* and *The Lady from the Sea*, both showing an uneasy past and guilty conscience in their relationships with the other characters. In *Rosmersholm* (1884), Rebecca West (a.k.a. Ibsen's mother in law) appears as an indirect killer who only pretends not to be involved with the man whom she loves and whose wife she recently pushed to commit suicide, another modern theme in Norwegian literature.

While it could be said that Thoresen was a matron of the arts in close premises, since she offered her home to gatherings intended for lectures of plays and various short-stories, Mathilde Schjøtt (née Dunker, 1844-1926) (see, for details about Mathilde's work as literary critic and her political views, <http://nordicwomensliterature.net/writer/schj%C3%B8tt-mathilde>, retrieved October 2016), on the other hand, is of a different stock. She is foremost known as a literary critic with an eye on the literary productions of Alexander Kielland as exemplified in her *Alexander Lange Kjelland; liv og værker. Et fem og tyve aars minde, 1879-1904* af Mathilde Schjøtt, født Dunker (<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100506310>, retrieved October 2016), whom she helped make known to the public through the analytical studies of his work. At the same time, she tried her own talent by writing and publishing under pseudonym *The Conversations of Female Friend on the Subjection of Women* in 1871. Mathilde studied languages in Brussels and Paris and, being raised in the liberal circles of Christiania, co-founded the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights in 1884, much in opposition with former Norwegian women associations. She was the one to make the literary portrait of a controversial writer and public speaker Camilla Collett for the first time, whom she took after in both her capacity as feminist pioneer in Norway and as a daughter raised by a liberal father who encouraged women's emancipation. Although 30 years Schjøtt's senior, just like the latter Collett engaged in making women ideas known to the Norwegian male public, and they both had a propensity towards elevating especially those women whose destinies were sealed from birth: marriage arrangements with their mediaeval undertones were just as much a social setback in their eyes as they were morally depreciating. This is also a theme that European realistic writers of the time employed whenever they portrayed the bourgeois society and their redundant, ordinary lifestyle based on *mésalliances*.

At the onset of naturalism in Norway, described by Brandes to be a “modern/(realistic) breakthrough” in the then literature and culture, Amalie Skram (1846-1905) is a writer who lucidly revolts mainly in her work (see her *Lucie* from 1888; and *Fru Ines* from 1891; and *Forraadt/Betrayed* from 1892), and less lucidly in the public sphere. As the naturalistic movement announces, she takes especially against old traditional themes such as the romantic hero and the platitudes of irrational love. In turn, Amalie reverts to more actual subjects partially inspired by her much older and disloyal husband, such as social and sexual insecurity, her own mental issues, divorce, remarriage, and similar women struggle in a refractory society. Most importantly, as these themes proved to be recurrent in her second marriage, Skram’s prose is a testimony about rank, illness, mental hospitals, sexual misconduct.

About this last mentioned theme, it should be noticed that Skram is among the first Norwegian female writers to write openly on it and she develops it quite interestingly in her novels. In 1850-1880 Norway, there was a general social perception that the common woman (*i.e.*, of the street, like seamstresses, for instance, who only kept this appearance of normality at daylight, but in reality at night most of them worked as prostitutes to be able to live on themselves) could afford to have sexual drives, while higher class women were “devoid of strong sexual desires and needs”. Amalie (being a wealthy doctor’s wife), and many other middle class and well-off female writers, for that matter, reviled this status/perception, and for the first time in Norway’s literary accounts on women, 19th century novels and short-stories deal with a turnaround: upon a visit to the USA, Bjørntjerne Bjørnson himself had to convince himself that “a woman’s sex drive equalled that of a man”, and so he made time to attend some scientific conferences on this specific point (see Engelstad and Øverland at http://www.reisenett.no/norway/facts/culture_science/norwegian_woman_writers.html, retrieved October 2016). At this stage, however, things were hardly about gender equality—as some literary and cultural historians maintain today (see Blom 1987: 17; Blom 1998: 1-16), but rather about obtaining equal rights for men and women both in legal and social matters. It is beside the point to stress what the above mentioned breakthrough later meant as writing material in both literary and psychoanalytic circles (hence for later deconstructivists such as Lacan and Derrida, see Garton 1993: 266, esp. chapter 10). It is also worth saying that after Amalie’s death at the sanatorium, the many cases of women being admitted and the soar conditions in there became subjects of social debate and accelerated important changes in public institutions and services (Brøgger 1958, volume 13; also, Beyer 1975, 3: 488).

Elise Aubert (née Aars, 1837-1909), was raised herself, just as Jonas Lie, in Finnmark, which is located in the extreme northeastern Norway, bor-

dered by the Lapland region of Finland, Russia, the Atlantic with its shores up into the Arctic Ocean and all the way through Barents Sea. As part of Norway's non-fiction literature, she wrote under pseudonyms for various newspapers. Elise was well acquainted with Hans Christian Andersen's prose, for instance, and she favored his characters, but not the language he employed, which was still, of course, the imposed imperial Danish, and she would later condemn it as rather emasculated, "nauseating": "Heavens, what a language it is!... completely without strength and tonal quality" (Hult 2003: 168-169).

Marte Hult explains these pronunciation differences which the other Scandinavians found disturbing within spoken Danish as no more drastic than the variations between Oxford and American English, a difference in tone rather than a lexical variation: "When we add to these (other changes) that the central Scandinavian tones of Norwegian and Swedish have been replaced by glottalization, leaving what sounds vaguely like a hiccup in a word like *mand* (male/man, translation ours), it is not surprising that other Scandinavians find Danish difficult to understand when spoken... To the Norwegian, a Dane speaks as though he has porridge in his mouth, words disappearing into undifferentiated sounds in the throat..." (Hult 2003: 168). This must have sounded strange and fake to her, quite the opposite of the other Scandinavian languages and dialect, of which Sami must have been a dear accent. To be sure, even if the written forms of both Danish and Norwegian are similar, the pronunciation is what must have been envisaged here, one that resembled the Nordic oral style of legends and fairy-tales that Elise found in her native territories. Nevertheless, the fact that Elise ironized spoken Danish in favor of her native Norwegian is a reminder that the writer walks in Andersen's romantic footsteps and her nationalistic drive clearly influenced her reading public (see, for instance, her first published short-stories gathered in *Hjemmefra. Fortællinger for de Unge/ Home. Tales for the Young* from 1878, and even her *Forføngelighed. Fortælling/ Vanity, a story* from 1890, composed when the writer was probably already living in mainland Norway, close to Christiania where she died).

As a comment to Elise's take on the Romantics, it seems only interesting that, on the one hand, while Norwegian female writers find in Romantic authors nothing but kindred spirits when it comes to their nostalgic view on rural life and traditional, nature and childhood, for instance, in other particular and recent matters they do not coop well with Romanticism, see the 19th century concept of marriage in the bourgeois Norway, which is as far from romantic as possible not only because it lacks the so-called "romantic love", but also because it is saturated from the very beginning with the alternatives to a romantic marriage, *i.e.* divorce, the sense of independency, the hierarchical climb, and the all-present society. Many of the 19th century

female writers vouch for these traits through their personal lives (Laura Petersen Kieler, Amalie Skram, Vilhelmine Ullmann, etc., are either on the verge of mental collapse, divorced or on the way there). Consequently, most of these modern writers are not only self-inspired when they write, but their experiences also inspire fellow male writers, and even the Norwegian classics Ibsen—who in his *Nora* warned that “a woman cannot be herself in modern society, which is an exclusively male society...”—Wergeland, and Bjørnson).

Nini Roll Anker (1873-1942), situated at the end of the 19th century through her many novels, is yet another woman writer who finds a good material for her works in herself and her rich experiences as daughter of a bureaucratic aristocrat, as a young woman raised on the More coast of Norway (where Bjørnson was born, too), and as a twice married lady who divorced her first wealthy husband in 1907, when she was already an established writer under the pseudonym Jo Nein. Nini's second husband from 1910 made a sound career in naval engineering as yacht designer and member of the Norwegian olympic team in 1908 and 1912. Both him and Nini were descendants of a line of notable Norwegian politicians and landowners.

Nini's two marriages offered her the context, if anything, to self-evaluate both her writing style and her women characters, since she did not find it easy that in her society a woman writer should have to choose her subjects from what the dominant male class defines as “female”. In this struggle for a “good” character, Nini feels (as no radical feminist nowadays does) the inconsistencies of norms and the double standards according to which women should be models for their children, while they are widely noticed for their charms with no reliable intellectual traits. Nevertheless, as scholars point out, she is neither a feminist *per se* nor a conservative when she asks before, during, and especially after the Great War that men show more wit, more cohesion with the values of their forefathers, see her *Benedicte Stendal* from 1909, *The Weak Sex* from 1915, and her later trilogy between 1922-1927. The quest for a newly defined traditionalism, not according to her women characters' standards, but in accordance with the old Norwegian roots, is perhaps what prompted her critics to wrongly include her under the nominal brand “neo-realism” manifesting a “group and racial solidarity”. Not to mention the fact that such coinages were made very early among the attempts to establish a valid category for Anker's prose, so early that the term mainstream feminism was dubbed a mere extension of “feminine literature” (see for these coinages Jorgenson 1939; reprinted 1970: 504-505).

Finally, Anker's contemporary, Ragnhild Theodora Jølsen (1875-1908) is perceived as a reactionary writer who decries the outcomes of industrial society which she deems in contrast with her own rural existence on her

family's farm back in Akershus. In fact, she is known to have moved back and forth between Christiania and her family's farm whenever she was in crisis: after her father's bankruptcy as a former match factory owner, during her experience as governess working for relatives, and towards the end of her otherwise bohemian life, as she perceived even more like an outcast due to her relationship with the married and temperamental painter Carl Dørnberger. Jølsen was known in her time for her lifestyle between her family's fairy-like farm surrounded by dark mysterious forests, and her family's life in a flat in Christiania as a result of her father Holm Jølsen's bankruptcy, as well as her extremely bohemian structure and excesses up to her supposed suicide (Garton 1993: 67-83). What caught her critics' eye overtime was no so much the writer's intense escapades and the nature of her prose, such as *Ve's Mother* from 1903, an intricate triangle love story with naturalistic overtones due to the sexual drives of the mother combined with her mental collapse and culminating in the birth of a mentally disturbed child. For what is worth, this first novel oscillates between the "elegiac" and the "tragic" and it resembles Skrams' prose in many ways. To be sure, though, Jølsen's novels are considered "modern" as compared to the others' precisely because of their impersonating characters who announce the beginning of a new, modernist century also bohemian in nature (Downs 1966: 199 fwd). It was more the extant of this bohemian sort of character represented by the writer herself, at times too scandalous to be real. This is why even her contemporaries thought of her writing style as stemming from imagination, and the author being a man rather than a woman, since reading her depictions of various drives and personal experiences, they found it hard to believe that such confession belonged to a female writer (see, for instance, Jølsen's *Fernanda Mona* from 1905).

Conclusions

From this survey of 19th century women literature with their accents and themes it is clear that the preferred subjects slowly but surely moved from the former concentration on the stylistic effect of the writing or the old pre-occupation with the relationship work-reader found in 18th century literature. Modern Norwegian writers soon left behind *les belles lettres* for themes that better suited their troubled days, and the need for a conscientious writer.

Apparently overnight, great Norwegian classics such as Henrik Arnold Wergeland, Henrik Ibsen, Bjørntjerne Martinus Bjørnson, Alexander Kielland, and Jonas Lie seemed to be aware that their hierarchical society left women's basic rights unresolved, and their choice to present real-life women and their middle class situation instigated female writers, though still

under pseudonyms, to bring forward their own crisis or other cases emulating their social struggle.

Their attempts took many shapes. Gustava Kiellan's group discussions questioned what the public was usually taught to think by the established church in matters of faith, and her missionary alternative and regular house meetings became a worldwide recognized model of mission work. Nevertheless, at the other side there are writers such as Vilhelmine Ullmann, Camilla Collett and Mathilde Schjøtt, that take a rather flexible approach on themselves and their homes, and this shows ostensibly in their prose, where the new preferred *tabu* is divorce and liberalism as, interestingly enough, inner signs of emancipation. It seems, however, that said emancipation was to be understood as repetitive attempts towards this purpose in quite redundant forms. Female writers in 19th century Norway found themselves at times sympathetic towards previous Romantic authors in their nostalgic landscaping, however this was not a constant trait in their private life and the idea of love as depicted by the Romantics was long overdue in their case, not necessarily, as their life experiences show, because of a social stigma or a brutal household.

Thus, women as good material for 19th century Norwegian writing is a topic that should be carefully considered as emblematic for all writers, whether male or female, since what they actually were about (divorce, remarriage, mental illness, sexual drives, etc.) fell short from their intention and instilled a sense of guilt which brought real-life characters on the verge of physical and psychological destruction. But their signal still stands, and the reason for this is multifaceted.

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