UNIVERSITY OF NOVA GORICA

LITERARY FOREMOTHERS

Women Writers in Dialogue with Tradition of Their Own

Katja Mihurko Poniž

University of Nova Gorica Press

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Image on the cover: Berthe Morissot: *Portrait de Mme Morisot et de sa fille Mme Pontillon ou La lecture* (The Mother and Sister of the Artist – Marie-Joséphine & Edma) 1869/70 Wikipedia

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ABOUT THE BOOK AND HOW TO USE IT

"We think back through our mothers if we are women."
Virginia Woolf, A room of One's own

"Thus each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again consciousness of their sex."
Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own

"Women, ignorant of their own history, did not know what women before them had thought and taught. So, generation after generation, they struggled for insights others had already had before them resulting in the constant inventing of the wheel."
"Every woman should study women's history for at least a year, no matter what she does. Every woman changes when she realizes that she has a story. "
Gerda Lerner

This textbook is designed within the project of the framework *"Open education for a better world".* The

UNESCO Open Education for a Better World (OE4BW) is an international mentorship pairing initiative which pairs Project Leaders with Project Mentors, scholars and practitioners in their fields from across the globe. This textbook can be used as a learning or teaching material in the courses related to the history of women's writing. The aim of this textbook is threefold: to present the richness and importance of women's writing, to show how digital tools can help us in researching and studying women writers, especially their reception, and to make the recipients aware that women have a history of their own which is an equally important contribution to the history of humankind as the history of men.

The textbook *Meet Your Literary Foremother* focuses on the history of female authorship and in doing so, it also develops students' digital competence. Different texts written by women writers (short stories, novels, poems, essays) which are touching upon the works of their literary ancestors or contemporaries will be presented and discussed in this textbook. It will be shown how this information can be stored and found in different databases and virtual research environments, especially in the VRE Women Writers in History.

Women's literary history and Digital Humanities are closely related nowadays: digital libraries and data-bases allow us to rediscover important women authors, their written production as well as their reception. Consequently, we gain a better understanding of women's roles, especially in the

literary scene of earlier periods. We can achieve this goal in the field of literature through teaching and discussing the works of women writers, as such works very often touch upon the issue of women's position in society.

The concepts that are discussed in the textbook will hopefully trigger thinking about different constructions of gender in and through literature. You will learn about the rich female literary tradition and, moreover, especially female students among you will be empowered in terms of your own agency in the field of literature as well as in everyday life. The case studies will be embedded in the wider historical context of the female literary authorship, providing you with the knowledge from the literary history and leading to the comprehension of literature as the literary system in which women writers have a special place.

The work with the textbook requires some prior knowledge in the field of literary criticism and literary history in order to meet all its objectives. However, even if you are not a student of literature you can read the texts about women writers, think about the topics and issues discussed and compare it with your own experiences.

The textbook consists of 8 chapters, 5 hours content engagement and solving tasks per chapter, adding 8 hours for further reading per each chapter. All links open in a new tab. The textbook is intended for the beginners course in women's writing research. By reading texts by women writers you will be introduced to their world and their reactions to predecessors

and contemporaries. Furthermore, you will be able to find information about women writers in the digital databases and use them for learning and research and, furthermore, understand the importance of the category of gender as a crucial factor that constitutes the social and symbolic order at various levels. With the help of theoretical insights of feminist theory and theories of gender studies, you will be able to discuss, to a certain degree (depending on your knowledge in the field of literary history), gender issues in literary texts, compare different texts, argue different aspects of the reception of female authors and learn the strategies used by women writers to fight the biased views on the female and male literary creativity. You will acknowledge the importance of digital tools: you will be able to find information about women writers in the databases and use this information for your own study and research. Moreover, you will develop the sensibility for the importance of solidarity among women and be able to develop your own views on the importance of female literary tradition. Last but not least, if you are open for the messages that women writers communicated through their texts and you enter into the dialogue with them, it is pretty certain that you will change in the way that Gerda Lerner describes when she envisions the final result of studying women's history.

The textbook is dedicated to authors from three different literary traditions: Anglo-American, French, and German. Their works were originally written in English, or translated into English a long time ago, so the translations are not bound

by any copyrights, so I was able to use them in this textbook with the licence CC BY- NC – SA. I would very much appreciate translations of this texbook into other languages, and moreover, it would be great if the textbook expanded to other linguistic environments, and would thus get chapters on female writers from other literary milieus. This is something that I did in the last, eighth chapter, where I talk about the reception of a German-Baltic writer Laura Marholm by Slovene writer Zofka Kveder.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a professor of literature and researcher of women writers at the University of Nova Gorica in Slovenia. I grew up in Yugoslavia in the communist and socialist society where the equality of women was written in the constitution. My grandmother and my mother were employed and I could study what I wanted, so I chose Comparative Literature, German and Dramaturgy at the University of Ljubljana. I had some female professors but they were mostly assistant professors or language teachers at the Department of German studies. That was kind of a strange experience because all my female teachers at the grammar school had been women. I was wondering why there was none of them at the comparative literature and dramaturgy departments. Perhaps they were not so clever as my distinguished male professors? However, there was one full

professor at the Department of German studies and she lectured about women writers. That was also something that I would not experience at other study programs. Listening to her, a new world opened to me. My MA thesis in Comparative Literature and in German were about women writers and I was among the first students at the doctoral programme in Women Studies and Feminist literature at the University of Ljubljana. Slowly, I began to realize how little I know about women writers and how enriching and inspiring the study of their writings can be, not just on professional level but also in my private life. Through my studying of women writers, I became more self-confident; I suddenly realized how rich, diverse and also complex the female literary tradition is. In the recent two decades, I have tried to pass on this experience to my students and anybody who wants to listen to me.

In my academic career I have taught the following courses on gender and women writers – University of Nova Gorica, 2005-2020: courses in Gender in the Age of Modernity, Representations of Gender in Slovenian literature, and European Women Writers. I was a visiting professor at the University of Vienna during the Spring semester of 2016. I taught the course titled Gender in Slavic Cultures (Department for Slavic Studies). Moreover, I taught a course at the University of Ljubljana in the Spring semester of 2009, namely the course Female discourses in German Literature at the Turn of the Century (Department for German Studies).

I wrote numerous articles about women writers, a

monograph *Written with her pen: a deviation of early Slovene female writers from the paradigm of national literature* which was awarded with the state's Zois award for achievements in the field of scientific research and development.

Since 2005, I have worked also as an editor of the critical edition of the collected works of Slovenian/Croatian writer Zofka Kveder.

I strongly believe that teaching and learning about women writers can enrich and empower us.

Bertha Wegmann: Portrait of a reading woman

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Leonora Flis is a Slovene literary scholar, an Associate Professor of Literature (University of Nova Gorica and University of Maribor) and a Lecturer of English language at the University of Ljubljana. Flis also does literary translation, hosts roundtables, writes book reviews, and creates radio programmes for the National Slovene Radio. She is a writer of short stories (Upogib časa, 2015; she has an upcoming new collection) and teaches creative writing workshops. In 2011/12 she was a postdoctoral Fulbright scholar at Columbia University in New York.

Flis's main research interests are modern and contemporary British and American Literature, Film Studies, Graphic Novels

and Literary Journalism. She has had several articles published in Slovene and foreign academic journals and books. She is the author is Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel(2010).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This textbook was developed in the online mentoring program Open Education for a Better World (OE4BW), which supports the development and implementation of open educational resources on topics with social impact according to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When writing this book, I received a lot of help from prof. Robin DeRosa. Her advice on how to create materials with open access led me to search for solutions on how to arrange the textbook in such way that it could be used as an open access book. Her engagement in open education is inspiring and opened up in me a new, different way of looking at education as such. Similarly, I received encouragement from prof. Naomi Wahls, who is the European Hub Coordinator. That made my work easier as well.

My gratitude also goes to prof. Tanja Urbančič from the University of Nova Gorica, as she is one of the people who is most intensely involved in and responsible for the success of the OE4BW program. She introduced the program to me and encouraged me to apply for it. Moreover, what I found very useful were also the webminars, organized throughout the course of the project by the OE4BW.

My work is profoundly tied into the activities of the work

group Women Writers in History, which is part of the Pan-European network DARIAH. Dr. Amelia Sanz, dr. Suzan van Dijk and dr. Marie Nedregotten Sorbo played an important part as consultants when I was writing the book.

I would also like to thank dr. Leonora Flis for translation and for her close reading of the materials, which resulted in, for me, an important exchange of opinions.

When writing the textbook, which was in fact during the CORONA lockdown, I used parts of the book also as material for flipped learning at my European Women Writers course (part of the Master's program in Slovene Studies). The comments that I got from the students Dominika Prijatelj and Lara Vončina were very important to me when editing this textbook.

I am very grateful to my reviewers, Emer. prof. dr. Neva Šlibar and Prof. dr. Biljana Dojčinović for their suggestions on how to make this textbook better.

REVIEWS

The Literary Foremothers textbook is an open type of a textbook (of 225 pages) in English, namely, it is constructed as hypertext which can expand and grow, and moreover, it allows for free online access. The book offers an insight into the life and work of accomplished female literary authors who serve as a model of women's writing and literary creation. Mihurko Poniž developed a dialogical structure, which is particularly meaningful and convincing: the eight chapters guide us into the lives of some of the most important female authors, from Sappho to Elizabeth Barett Browning and George Sand, with the book ending with the portrait of a forgotten author Laura Marholm Hansson. Even though the portrayals of the authors contain essential biographic and bibliographic data (mostly taken from fundamental lexicographical works) and Mihurko Poniž also includes video and documentary materials from other media portals (which is savvy from a didactical point of view), the included texts and exercises for students focus most distinctly on the reception of particular female writers, as seen in their successors or admirers whose work was inspired by specific female writers. At this point, the textbook moves to the level of the metaphysical, theoretical and poetological

thinking, predominantly related to women's writing and women's literary activity and creativity.

The included texts are – considering their time of creation and distance from today's lexica – linguistically quite demanding. The texts will possibly also sound foreign to native speakers of English, which has its advantage, namely, it calls for greater focus and a more detailed analysis. For other readers, the texts can represent a challenge already from a linguistic point of view. The textbook incorporates a set of analytical and detailed questions which call for the students' active participation. These questions can be appropriated by the users (linguistically and based on their study environment). Even though the textbook doesn't expose contemporary feminist women theoreticians, it offers, not only in the Introduction but also through the analyses, an insight into the essays of some of the principal literary theoreticians.

Emeritus Prof. Dr. Neva Šlibar, University of Ljubljana, Department of German, Dutch and Swedish

Literary Foremothers: Women Writers in Dialogue with Tradition of Their Own by Prof. Katja Mihurko Poniž is a textbook which consists of an introductory part and six central chapters. The chapters first present feminist theory and its search for women's literary tradition, and then move on to authors Sappho, Aphra Behn, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf. These authors don't stand alone, or in separation,

rather, they are engaged in literary dialogues, displaying their interconnectedness. For instance, Aphra Behn's importance for literary tradition is presented via Virginia Woolf's famous statement about her in *A Room of One's Own*; Emily Dickinson's perspective on George Eliot reveals a lot about both authors. This is the method which enables students to comprehend both the concept of literary tradition and the importance of women's literature tradition. It is structured in such way that databases connect the depicted authors, showing the liveliness of literary exchange.

Literary Foremothers: Women Writers in Dialogue with Tradition of Their Own by Prof. Katja Mihurko Poniž is a well written and carefully structured book. The author followed all the important rules in creating a textbook – the appropriate length of the lectures, the vivid and illustrating examples, theoretical framework, and provocative topics for discussion which bring to light ideas and questions for further research. The material is presented by a clear academic voice, applicable to students ranging from high school to postgraduate level. The special trait of this online textbook is the usage of the media (namely hyperlinks). The author made sure to include important and trustworthy internet sources, such as articles, videoclips, movies, databases, so that students can immediately learn more about a certain topic or term, and be inspired to look for additional material. This way, the textbook *Literary Foremothers* promotes both women's writing and digital humanities.

Prof. dr. Biljana Dojčinović, University of Belgrade, Deaprtment of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory

1.

THINKING ABOUT FEMALE LITERARY TRADITION

Learning Objectives

In this chapter you will learn:

- what is literary tradition,
- what is gender essentialism and gender anti-essentalism,
- about important feminist works on female literary tradition
- how an American poet Amy Lowell reflected on her literary foremothers in the poem The Sisters.

Looking for literary mothers means focusing on a group which shares the same gender (and presuming that gender is a stable

category). As a feminist criticism has shown, this can be problematic: "Generic gender essentialism holds that there is a commonality of experience or a characteristic that unites all women, a core of properties that constitutes the generic Woman and that must be satisfied if something is to count as a woman." (Witt 1995: 322)

Many feminists have therefore objected this theory and understand themselves as "anti-essentialist feminists" who "reject the thesis of gender essentialism in both its forms. They deny that there are any properties that I have necessarily insofar as I am a woman. Or, to use the variant, they reject the existence of a generic Woman; there is no single, shared property or properties that must be satisfied in order to count as a woman. As a woman, I am not necessarily anything at all, and supposing that I am necessarily one way or the other is taken to be a symptom of theoretical incorrectness, a sign of lingering maleness." (Witt 1995: 322)

Mary Eagleton states: " Such "essentialist" or "biologistic" viewpoints imply that there is something both intrinsic in the experience of being female and common to all women. The danger is that gender is privileged at the expense of class or race and that the approach can too easily become ahistorical and apolitical in the assumption of an unproblematic unity among women, across culture, class and history." (Eagleton [2]1996: 2)

However, some experiences can be shared by a certain group, and (comparative) researches of writings by female authors of a certain period have shown their common motives,

genre preferences, narrative strategies and other similar literary devices. We must be aware of the difference between female and feminist experience though: "Behind the frequent confusion of feminist with female texts is a complex web of assumptions. It is, for example, often assumed that the very fact of describing experience typical of women is a feminist act. On the one hand, this is obviously true: since patriarchy has always tried to silence and repress women and women's experience, rendering them visible is clearly an important anti-patriarchal strategy. On the other hand, however, women's experience can be made visible in alienating, deluded or degrading ways: the Mills and Boon accounts of female love or Anita Bryant's praise of heterosexual love and motherhood are not per se emancipatory reading for women." (Moi 1989: 120-121)

Anthologies of women writers have been edited and published from the 19th century onwards (although criteria of inclusion were often problematic, as Margaret J. Ezell showed in her book *Writing Women's Literary History,* 1996) and scholarly works with the focus on feminist issues in female writings have been written especially since the second-wave feminism. Exploring female authorship does not necessarily mean that we believe in a "generic" woman but it means that we are aware that in a certain time and place women share experiences which can influence their literary creativity, and still they are not perceived as a monolithic group. In this regard, we can use the term female literary tradition for a

corpus of writings written by women from a certain period (as E. Showalter in her "Literature of One's Own shows) or for the writings which have common traits. Nevertheless, we have to be aware of different meanings that a term "tradition" has, as it is clear from the definition in the Merriam Webster dictionary:

Tradition

is:

1: a: an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (such as a religious practice or a social custom)
b**:** a belief or story or a body of beliefs or stories relating to the past that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable
2**:** the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction
3**:** cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions
4**:** characteristic manner, method, or style.

In order to comprehend the connection between tradition and literature, it is useful to explore the word "literary" in Oxford Dictionary, which says that literary is

"concerning the writing, study, or content of literature, especially of the kind valued for quality of form".
When we connect both notions, the definition of "literary tradition" could be as follows:
"In one sense, literary tradition simply means such an accumulative process of handing down texts for future generations. In another sense, however, tradition often involves a selective process whereby the most important (most 'valuable') works are singled out as the ones that each generation should know. Taking a term from biblical studies, where the 'canon' means those books which are regarded by authorities as authentic, written under divine inspiration and therefore worthy of inclusion in the Bible, such a selection of literary works has been also called the canon. The literary canon as defined by literary critical, educational or sometimes political authorities, thus comprises those centrally important and eminently valuable 'great' or 'classic' works which all educated members of a given community should read. Since, however, judgements of what is important and valuable do undergo changes, and as the number of literary works continues to grow due to new works (and the discovery of temporarily lost works), the canon itself is also subject to revisions." Literature and Tradition
However, this definition omits a very important activity in the process of "handing down texts for future generations" and this is the dialogue between the texts from the author who is perceived as an inspiration. This dialogue has always taken

place in the history of literary authorship, as Hans Robert Jauss has shown in his article Modernity and literary tradition or as T. S. Eliot put in his essay Tradition and the Individual Talent:

"No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism."

The act of revision is, as Adrienne Rich, stated already in 1971, especially important for women:

Adrienne Rich: When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision

Adrienne Rich

"Re-vision—the act of looking back, ofseeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. ... A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh." (Rich 1979: 33)

Adrienne Rich wrote inspiring texts and poems about female and lesbian experience, however, one of the earliest literary scholars who had been interested in the female literary tradition was Ellen Moers, who explored the literary

matrilineality in her seminal book **Literary women (1976)**, where "[E]xamining the lives and works of a number of women authors, Moers argues that new genres and new insights were born as female awarenesses and assertions became part of modern literature. She charts the strengths women writers have drawn from each other: George Eliot from Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Gertrude Stein from George Eliot, and Willa Cather from George Sand." (Literary Women) or in her own words: .

Ellen Moers: Literary Women

"Not loyalty but confidence was the resource that women writers drew from possession of their own tradition. And it was confidence that until very recently could have come from no other source. Male writers have always been able to study their craft in university or coffeehouse, group themselves into movements or coteries, search out predecessors for guidance or patronage, collaborate or fight with their contemporaries. But women through most of the nineteenth century were barred from the universities, isolated in their own homes, chaperoned in travel, painfully restricted in friendship. The personal give-take of the literary life was closed to

> them. Without it, they studied with a special closeness the works written by their own sex, and developed a sense of easy, almost rude familiarity with the women who wrote them." (Moers [2]1985: 42-43)

In the last years of the seventies another two seminal books exploring the female literary tradition have been published: **A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing** by Elaine Showalter in 1977 and two years later **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination** by Sandra Gubar and Susan M. Gilbert. Their importance for the feminist literary criticism was summed up by Marion Shaw in 2000:

"Showalter, as her title indicates, gave women writers their own tradition; Gilbert and Gubar, as indeed their title also indicates, looked at the authorial anxieties of women writers and their subtexts of passion and anger. In a sense, feminist criticism had come of age with these books, actively establishing its own identity rather than reading to the dominant tradition. Although many sophisticated developments would follow in the next two decades, our debt to these books is huge and should never be forgotten. They have nurtured women's writing and feminist criticism courses

in colleges and universities, they have stimulated research and prompted the publication of neglected women writers, and they have helped many young women go out in the world to speak and act for themselves." (Shaw 2000)

Read some lines from both books concerning female literary tradition:

Elaine Showalter: A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from to Lessing to Brontë

Women have generally been regarded as "sociological chameleons", taking on the class, lifestyle, and culture of their male relatives. It can, however, be argued that women themselves have constituted a subculture within the framework of a larger society, and have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviours impinging on each individual. It is important to see the female literary tradition in these broad terms, in relation to the wider evolution of women's self-awareness and to the ways in which any minority group finds its direction of self-expression relative to a dominant society, because we cannot show a pattern of deliberate progress and accumulation. (Showalter 1999: 11)

Susan Gubar, Sandra M. Gilbert: The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination

"In comparison to the "male" tradition of strong, father-son combat, however, this female anxiety of authorship is profoundly debilitating. Handed down not from one woman to another but from the stern literary "fathers" of patriarchy to all their "inferiorized female descendants, it is in many ways the germ of a dis-ease or, at any rate, a disaffection, a disturbance, a distrust, that spreads like a stain throughout the style and structure of much literature by women, especially — as we shall see in this study — throughout literature by women before the twentieth century. For if contemporary women do now attempt the pen with energy and authority, they are able to do so only because their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foremothers struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture. Thus, while the recent feminist emphasis on positive role models has undoubtedly helped many women, it should not keep

us from realizing the terrible odds against which a creative female subculture was established. Far from reinforcing socially oppressive sexual stereotyping , only a full consideration of such problems can reveal the extraordinary strength of women's literary accomplishments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." (Gubar/Gilber ^{2}2000: 51)

In her introduction to the chapter **Finding a Female Tradition in the reader Feminist Literary Theory** (1986, ^{2}1996) Mary Eagleton summarises key problems in discussion about female tradition and offers insights that broaden our perception of it, and moreover, enable thinking about female tradition from new perspectives.

Mary Eagleton: Finding a female tradition

Lesbians, both Black and white, and heterosexual 'women of colour' criticize white, heterosexual feminists for creating a literary history which is almost as selective and ideologically bound as the male tradition. Sexism is challenged in the white, heterosexual work but heterosexism or homophobia

or racism or ethnocentricity may not be. Unpalatable as this may be for white, heterosexual feminists, their failure to recognize difference, the presumption that what is said about white, heterosexual women's writing will count for all women has been repeatedly demonstrated by lesbians and Black women. (Eagleton [2]1996: 3)

[...]

To talk of the female tradition of writing can reinforce the canonical view which looks upon literary history as a continuum of significant names. Rather than disrupting the individualistic values by which the mainstream has been created, feminist critics may merely replace a male First Eleven with a female one: so you can study Aphra Behn instead of Dryden, Edith Wharton instead of Henry James, Dorothy Wordsworth instead of William. The very approach which has always seemed to find the majority of women writers lacking is transposed uncritically, to a separate female tradition, and the humanist ethic which supports that approach is accepted as basically valid, only in need of extending its franchise. (Eagleton [2]1996: 4).

[...]

While Anglo-American critics are looking for women

in sphere of history, French women writers, Elaine Marks tells us, are: 'looking for women in the unconscious, which is to say in their own language. "Cherchez la femme" might be one of their implied mottos; where repression is, she is'. Thus, although we may uncover a whole list of forgotten novels by women, or films with female directors, feminists of this school are unwilling to see that as a necessarily female tradition. They want to ask the questions that Shoshana Felman asks: Are these novelists and directors speaking as women or are they 'speaking in the language of men'? Can they be said to be speaking as women simply because they are born female? For instance, do the Prime Ministers and Presidents of recent history speak as women or are they, regrettably, ventriloquist dummies for the male voice?

Felman questions raise a further issue echoed in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work. The problem is not only who is speaking and how is she speaking but to whom she is speaking and on whose behalf she is speaking. Following Derrida's double focus, Spivak stresses: 'Not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?7 (Eagleton [2]1996: 6)

In this textbook we will follow the reactions of women writers as a dialogue in which female authors asked precisely those questions that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak adduces: "Who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?" In this sense the female literary tradition is not perceived just as a static corpus of texts written by women but as a corpus of texts where women communicate with other women about the anxieties and rewards of literary authorship.

Activity 1

Read the poem The Sisters by Amy Lowell and underline the names of women writers whose works you have read.

Amy Lowell: The Sisters

Taking us by and large, we're a queer lot
We women who write poetry. And when you think
How few of us there've been, it's queerer still.
I wonder what it is that makes us do it,
Singles us out to scribble down, man-wise,
The fragments of ourselves. Why are we

Already mother-creatures, double-bearing,
With matrices in body and in brain?
I rather think that there is just the reason
We are so sparse a kind of human being;
The strength of forty thousand Atlases
Is needed for our every-day concerns.
There's Sapho, now I wonder what was Sapho.
I know a single slender thing about her:
That, loving, she was like a burning birch-tree
All tall and glittering fire, and that she wrote
Like the same fire caught up to Heaven and held there,
A frozen blaze before it broke and fell.
Ah, me! I wish I could have talked to Sapho,
Surprised her reticences by flinging mine
Into the wind. This tossing off of garments
Which cloud the soul is none too easy doing
With us to-day. But still I think with Sapho
One might accomplish it, were she in the mood
To bare her loveliness of words and tell
The reasons, as she possibly conceived them,
Of why they are so lovely. Just to know
How she came at them, just to watch
The crisp sea sunshine playing on her hair,
And listen, thinking all the while 'twas she
Who spoke and that we two were sisters

Of a strange, isolated little family.
And she is Sapho—Sapho—not Miss or Mrs.,
A leaping fire we call so for convenience;
But Mrs. Browning—who would ever think
Of such presumption as to call her "Ba."
Which draws the perfect line between sea-cliffs
And a close-shuttered room in Wimpole Street.
Sapho could fly her impulses like bright
Balloons tip-tilting to a morning air
And write about it. Mrs. Browning's heart
Was squeezed in stiff conventions. So she lay
Stretched out upon a sofa, reading Greek
And speculating, as I must suppose,
In just this way on Sapho; all the need,
The huge, imperious need of loving, crushed
Within the body she believed so sick.
And it was sick, poor lady, because words
Are merely simulacra after deeds
Have wrought a pattern; when they take the place
Of actions they breed a poisonous miasma
Which, though it leave the brain, eats up the body.
So Mrs. Browning, aloof and delicate,
Lay still upon her sofa, all her strength
Going to uphold her over-topping brain.
It seems miraculous, but she escaped
To freedom and another motherhood

Than that of poems. She was a very woman
And needed both.
If I had gone to call,
Would Wimpole Street have been the kindlier place,
Or Casa Guidi, in which to have met her?
I am a little doubtful of that meeting,
For Queen Victoria was very young and strong
And all-pervading in her apogee
At just that time. If we had stuck to poetry,
Sternly refusing to be drawn off by mesmerism
Or Roman revolutions, it might have done.
For, after all, she is another sister,
But always, I rather think, an older sister
And not herself so curious a technician
As to admit newfangled modes of writing—
"Except, of course, in Robert, and that is neither
Here nor there for Robert is a genius."
I do not like the turn this dream is taking,
Since I am very fond of Mrs. Browning
And very much indeed should like to hear her
Graciously asking me to call her "Ba."
But then the Devil of Verisimilitude
Creeps in and forces me to know she wouldn't.
Convention again, and how it chafes my nerves,
For we are such a little family
Of singing sisters, and as if I didn't know

What those years felt like tied down to the sofa.
Confounded Victoria, and the slimy inhibitions
She loosed on all us Anglo-Saxon creatures!
Suppose there hadn't been a Robert Browning,
No "Sonnets from the Portuguese" would have been written.
They are the first of all her poems to be,
One might say, fertilized. For, after all,
A poet is flesh and blood as well as brain
And Mrs. Browning, as I said before,
Was very, very woman. Well, there are two
Of us, and vastly unlike that's for certain.
Unlike at least until we tear the veils
Away which commonly gird souls. I scarcely think
Mrs. Browning would have approved the process
In spite of what had surely been relief;
For speaking souls must always want to speak
Even when bat-eyed, narrow-minded Queens
Set prudishness to keep the keys of impulse.
Then do the frowning Gods invent new banes
And make the need of sofas. But Sapho was dead
And I, and others, not yet peeped above
The edge of possibility. So that's an end
To speculating over tea-time talks
Beyond the movement of pentameters
With Mrs. Browning.

But I go dreaming on,
In love with these my spiritual relations.
I rather think I see myself walk up
A flight of wooden steps and ring a bell
And send a card in to Miss Dickinson.
Yet that's a very silly way to do.
I should have taken the dream twist-ends about
And climbed over the fence and found her deep
Engrossed in the doing of a humming-bird
Among nasturtiums. Not having expected strangers,
She might forget to think me one, and holding up
A finger say quite casually: "Take care.
Don't frighten him, he's only just begun."
"Now this," I well believe I should have thought,
"Is even better than Sapho. With Emily
You're really here, or never anywhere at all
In range of mind." Wherefore, having begun
In the strict centre, we could slowly progress
To various circumferences, as we pleased.
We could, but should we? That would quite depend
On Emily. I think she'd be exacting,
Without intention possibly, and ask
A thousand tight-rope tricks of understanding.
But, bless you, I would somersault all day
If by so doing I might stay with her.
I hardly think that we should mention souls

Although they might just round the corner from us
In some half-quizzical, half-wistful metaphor.
I'm very sure that I should never seek
To turn her parables to stated fact.
Sapho would speak, I think, quite openly,
And Mrs. Browning guard a careful silence,
But Emily would set doors ajar and slam them
And love you for your speed of observation.Strange
trio of my sisters, most diverse,
And how extraordinarily unlike
Each is to me, and which way shall I go?
Sapho spent and gained; and Mrs. Browning,
After a miser girlhood, cut the strings
Which tied her money-bags and let them run;
But Emily hoarded—hoarded—only giving
Herself to cold, white paper. Starved and tortured,
She cheated her despair with games of patience
And fooled herself by winning. Frail little elf,
The lonely brain-child of a gaunt maturity,
She hung her womanhood upon a bough
And played ball with the stars—too long—too long—
The garment of herself hung on a tree
Until at last she lost even the desire
To take it down. Whose fault? Why let us say,
To be consistent, Queen Victoria's.
But really, not to over-rate the queen,

I feel obliged to mention Martin Luther,
And behind him the long line of Church Fathers
Who draped their prurience like a dirty cloth
About the naked majesty of God.
Good-bye, my sisters, all of you are great,
And all of you are marvellously strange,
And none of you has any word for me.
I cannot write like you, I cannot think
In terms of Pagan or of Christian now.
I only hope that possibly some day
Some other woman with an itch for writing
May turn to me as I have turned to you
And chat with me a brief few minutes. How
We lie, we poets! It is three good hours
I have been dreaming. Has it seemed so long
To you? And yet I thank you for the time
Although you leave me sad and self-distrustful,
For older sisters are very sobering things.
Put on your cloaks, my dears, the motor's waiting.
No, you have not seemed strange to me, but near,
Frightfully near, and rather terrifying.
I understand you all, for in myself—
Is that presumption? Yet indeed it's true—
We are one family. And still my answer
Will not be any one of yours, I see.
Well, never mind that now. Good night! Good night!

Activity 2

Write an essay about a book by a woman writer that impressed you.

Further Readings

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2.

GOING BACK TO THE ROOTS: SAPPHO AS A FIRST LITERARY FOREMOTHER

Learning Objectives

In this chapter your will learn about or refresh your knowledge on the first European poetess Sappho. Then you will read a text about Sappho written by French medieval writer Christine de Pizan. In addition, you will learn more about her inspiring text City of Ladies and reflect upon her vision of female role models.

Sappho (detail from the vase, 480 B.C.

Sappho of Lesbos (c. 620-570 BCE) was a lyric poet whose work was so popular in ancient Greece and beyond that she was honored in statuary and praised by figures such as Solon and Plato. Very little is known about her life and of the nine volumes of her work (which were widely read in antiquity) only fragments survive. Contrary to popular opinion on the subject, her works were not destroyed by closed-minded Christians seeking to suppress lesbian love poetry but were lost simply through time and circumstance. Sappho wrote in the Aeolic Greek dialect, which was difficult for Latin writers (who were well versed in Attic and Homeric Greek) to translate. They were aware that once there had existed a highly praised female poet from the works of others, and they preserved those Sappho's poems which others had copied, but they did not copy others simply because they did not know her dialect . Some kind of written works were composed during her lifetime or shortly after because the outline of her life was known by later writers, aside from the inscriptions such as the Parian Marble (a history of certain events in Greece between 1582-299 BCE), it is not known what these works were. Her name has leant itself to `lesbian' and `Sapphic', both relating to

homosexual women, because of her extant poetry which concerns itself with romantic love between women.

Mark, Joshua J. "Sappho of Lesbos." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Ancient History Encyclopedia, 02 Aug 2014. Web. 13 Mar 2020. CC BY-NC-SA. Read the complete article!

Watch the video about Sappho by Dr. Daniel Orrells.

Read more about Sappho in the text below:

The world of Sappho's poems is, at least as far as we can tell from the fragments that have survived to this day, a world in which the central place is occupied by a woman both in the role of the lyric subject and of the object she is talking about. Poetic rumour enlivens images from the lives of women that we look at from a different perspective than revealed in the poems of other ancient Greek lyricists.

In her poetry, both lyrical subject and object are female. This duality is perhaps most pronounced in a poem about Arignota, where the poet expresses the pain of a woman who had to leave her friends on Lesbos for marriage. The poet, along with the girl Atthis, remembers the days when Arignota enjoyed the sounds of songs sung by Atthis. Sappho not only celebrates Arignota, but also Atthis, creating a sense of connection and friendship between women; we find this sentiment more than once in the literature written by a female pen.

Now she shines among Lydian women as
into dark when the sun has set
the moon, pale-handed, at last appears

making dim all the rest of the stars, and light
spreads afar on the deep, salt sea,
spreading likewise across the flowering cornfields;

(Sappho 96, Lattimore #7)Translation from Richmond Lattimore: Greek Lyrics, Chicago, 1960).

The poet makes the woman's sadness convincing by the following turn: Arignota changes from the object of description into the subject who expresses her emotions.
Sappho expresses the pain of an ancient woman who had to leave her home and the community to marry. This feeling is perhaps even more directly expressed in the song "Honestly, I would like to die", where the poet relives the farewell of one of her girls, who is most likely leaving her for marriage.
In both poems, one can also admire the poet's rich metaphorical world in which a woman is never compared to an animal but is surrounded by a world of magical fragrances and flowers that have symbolic meaning. Violets adorn Aphrodite and muse, lotus is the flower of immortality, grass flowers belong to the cult of Persephone, as Hades abducted her when she tore them. Sappho's descriptions of the flowers and beauty of the girls surrounding her are the embodiment of the greatest virtue reflected in poetry, in a world very different from the world of warriors and famous battles sung by ancient poets. The fierceness and lack of sense of beauty is revealed to the poet as an insult to her emotions.

Nature and the maidens are one, the harmony reigns

between them and green groves and soft meadows. A woman is not subjected to nature in the way that it would overwhelm her and so that she could not control her mind. She is not represented as an irrational being, which is completely different from the representations of women by her male contemporaries. Ever since antiquity, the images of femininity in the works of art do not correspond with the actual lives of women, since in literary works they move between the poles of idealized, glorified femininity and its opposite – of the demonic woman who brings perdition. Sappho also compares girls to nature, but her verses do not reveal the fatal submission of a woman to nature, as they are merely a vicious illustration, such as a description of a girl who has not yet found a husband:

Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough,
Atop on the topmost twig, — which the pluckers forgot,
somehow, —
Forget it not, nay; but got it not, for none could get it till now.
(Translation of the poem by Dante Gabriel Rosetti).

In the late Middle Ages, we can find a discussion on Sappho's work in *The Book of the City of the Ladies* (1405) by Christine de Pizan. De Pizan calls Sappho wise and highlights her physical beauty and her graceful posture, appearance and speech. She stresses that her grand mind and reason surpass her natural charms. Namely, Sappho was skilled in many art forms as well as sciences, and her knowledge and capabilities exceeded her writing about others, as she wrote works of her own. Christine de Pizan notes that she was praised by

Boccaccio, who also wrote that the content of her writing is, according to other antiquity writers, demanding, and that even the most knowledgeable scholars have had a hard time understanding her. Christine de Pizan also writes: "Her writings and poems have survived to this day, most remarkably constructed and composed, and they serve as illumination and models of consummate poetic craft and composition to those who have come afterward. She invented different genres of lyric and poetry, short narratives, tearful laments and strange lamentations about love and other emotions, and these were so well made and so well ordered that they were named 'Sapphic' after her. Horace recounts, concerning her poems, that when Plato, the great philosopher who was Aristotle's teacher, died, a book of Sappho's poems was found under his pillow."

Christine de Pizan (also given as Christine de Pisan, l. 1364 – c. 1430 CE) was the first female professional writer of the Middle Ages and the first woman of letters in France. She was born in Venice, Italy but her family soon moved to France when her father was appointed astrologer to the court of the French king Charles V (r. 1364-1380 CE). Although she always valued her Italian heritage, she was devoted to France and the royal court throughout the rest of her life.

She was widowed when her husband died of the plague in 1389 CE, leaving her with three children and the responsibility of caring for her mother and niece. With no other options

open to her to earn a living, Christine took to writing. She penned romantic ballads for the French aristocracy which were so well-received she pursued writing as a career. Among her best-known works are:

Illumination from *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Christine is shown before the personifications of Rectitude, Reason, and Justice in her study, and working alongside Justice to build the 'Cité des dames.

- *One Hundred Ballads* (1393 CE)
- *Moral Lessons* (1395 CE)
- *Letter of the God of Love* (1399 CE)
- *Letter of Othea to Hector* (1399 CE)
- *The Tale of the Rose* (1402 CE)
- *On the Mutability of Fortune* (1403 CE)
- *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405 CE)
- *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (1405 CE)
- *The Book of Feats of Arms and Chivalry* (1410 CE)
- *The Book of Peace* (1413 CE)
- *The Tale of Joan of Arc* (1429 CE)

Although modern-day scholars continue to debate whether she can be called a "feminist", as the concept did not exist in her lifetime, there is no denying that she embodied the values and principles of feminism, specifically the idea

that women were the equal of men in every regard and should be given the same rights, opportunities, and respect. Her works would influence later writers, male and female, in particular through the early era of the Renaissance; after that they fell out of favour and were only rediscovered in the late 19th century CE. (Mark 2019)

Read the complete article about Christine de Pizan!

Activity 1

What does Christine de Pizan set above female beauty? Does this idea break with the traditional view of a woman? Justify your answer.

Why does she refer to Boccaccio when listing Sappho's virtues?

Boccaccio and Pizan use metaphors to describe Sappho's talents:

"She entered the forest of laurel trees filled with may boughs, greenery, and different colored flowers, soft fragrances and various aromatic spices, where Grammar, Logic, noble Rhetoric, Geometry, and Arithmetic live and take their leisure. She went on her way until she came to deep grotto of Apollo, god of learning, and found the brook and conduit of the

fountain of Castalia, and took up the plectrum and quill of the harp and played sweet melodies, with the nymphs all the while leading the dance, that is, following the rules of harmony and musical accord." (Christine de Pizan: The Book of the City of Ladies, Persea Books, New York, p. 67.

Transform the text into "plain" language.

Activity 2

Now read two paragraphs about *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405 CE) from the review of the English translation of the aforementioned Pizan's work, written by Joan M. Ferrante and published in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 244-247:

In the City of Ladies, Christine de Pizan takes a positive approach, constructing an allegorical city under the guidance of Raison (Reason), Droiture

(which Richards translates as Rectitude), and Justice. The walls of the city are built by legendary women (some are mythic, but all, even the goddesses, are treated as historical beings). Some of them have founded or governed lands; others of them are learned and clever women who invented or practiced various branches of art and science and craft. The inner part of the city is the contribution of prophets and of devoted daughters, wives, and mothers, whose virtues and strengths were exercised to the benefit not only of their families but often of their peoples. The roofs of the city are made by the queen of heaven (who calls herself the "chief du sexe feminin"), and by saints and martyrs. Although Christine de Pizan draws heavily on Boccaccio for many of her stories, she reorganizes the material to give emphasis to women's contributions to civilization; she presents them, particularly in the first book, as the source of laws and justice, and as founders of cities, inventors of alphabets and grammar, numbers, weaving, dying. She offers these stories to counter men's claims that women are useful only to bear children and sew, and berates men, through the words of Reason, for their "massive ingratitude. . . like people who live off the goods of others without knowing their source,"

and noting that God, "who does nothing without a reason," showed that he does not despise the sex, since he made their brains capable not only of learning and retaining the sciences, but of discovering new ones (1.37.).

Christine de Pizan makes a strong case for women's intellect. Although she does not think it appropriate for women to engage in the various branches of the legal profession because of their physical weakness and vulnerability, she does assert their mental capacity to do so, arguing that they "have been very great philosophers and have mastered fields far more complicated, subtle, and lofty than written laws and man-made institutions" (1.11.). She claims, always with the voice of Reason instead of her own, that "if it were customary to send daughters to school like sons, and if they were then taught the natural sciences, they would learn as thoroughly and understand the subtleties of all the arts and sciences as well as sons." Then she makes an added point which turns physical disadvantage to a strength: "just as women have more delicate bodies than men, weaker and less able to perform many tasks, so do they have minds that are freer and sharper whenever they apply themselves" (1.27.). She disproves the argument that education is morally

harmful to women by many examples of learned and virtuous women, several of whom were trained by their fathers to carry on in the family profession. She remarks that foolish men claim education is harmful because they do not like women to know more than they do (II.36.4). She also makes telling points when she notes that Christ praised the words of the Canaanite woman and did not disdain to discuss her salvation with the Samaritan woman at the well, who spoke "with great eloquence... on her own behalf." She asks, "How often would our contemporary pontiffs deign to discuss anything with some simple little woman [une simple femmelette], let alone her own salvation?" (1.10.5).

Sappho was the source of inspiration also for other women. In the Victorian era, Caroline Norton wrote about her.

Caroline Norton, original name in full Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Sheridan, (born March 22, 1808, London, England—died June 15, 1877, London), English poet and novelist whose matrimonial difficulties prompted successful efforts to secure legal protection for married women. She published powerful volumes of verse on social problems: *A Voice from the Factories* (1836) and *The Child of the Islands* (1845). She also wrote several novels, two of which, *Stuart of Dunleath* (1851) and *Lost and Saved* (1863), are based on her own experience of domestic misery. She is said to have been the model for the heroine of George Meredith's novel *Diana of the Crossways* (1885). After her husband's death in 1875, she married Sir William Stirling-Maxwell.

Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Norton: The Picture of Sappho

Lawrence Alma-Tadema: Sappho and Alcaeus (1881)

I.

THOU! whose impassion'd face
The Painter loves to trace,
Theme of the Sculptor's art and Poet's story–
How many a wand'ring thought
Thy loveliness hath brought,
Warming the heart with its imagined glory!

II.

Yet, was it History's truth,
That tale of wasted youth,
Of endless grief, and Love forsaken pining?

What wert thou, thou whose woe
The old traditions show
With Fame's cold light around thee vainly shining?
III.

Didst thou indeed sit there
In languid lone despair–
Thy harp neglected by thee idly lying–
Thy soft and earnest gaze
Watching the lingering rays
In the far west, where summer-day was dying–
IV.

While with low rustling wings,
Among the quivering strings
The murmuring breeze faint melody was making,
As though it wooed thy hand
To strike with new command,
Or mourn'd with thee because thy heart was breaking?
V.

Didst thou, as day by day
Roll'd heavily away,
And left thee anxious, nerveless, and dejected,
Wandering thro' bowers beloved–
Roving where he had roved–

Yearn for his presence, as for one expected?
VI.

Didst thou, with fond wild eyes
Fix'd on the starry skies,
Wait feverishly for each new day to waken–
Trusting some glorious morn
Might witness his return,
Unwilling to believe thyself forsaken?
VII.

And when conviction came,
Chilling that heart of flame,
Didst thou, O saddest of earth's grieving daughters !
From the Leucadian steep
Dash, with a desperate leap,
And hide thyself within the whelming waters?
VIII.

Yea, in their hollow breast
Thy heart at length found rest!
The ever-moving waves above thee closing–
The winds, whose ruffling sigh
Swept the blue waters by,
Disturb'd thee not!–thou wert in peace reposing!
IX.

Such is the tale they tell!
Vain was thy beauty's spell–

Vain all the praise thy song could still inspire–
Though many a happy band
Rung with less skilful hand
The borrowed love-notes of thy echoing lyre.
X.

FAME, to thy breaking heart
No comfort could impart,
In vain thy brow the laurel wreath was wearing;
One grief and one alone
Could bow thy bright head down–
Thou wert a WOMAN, and wert left despairing!

Activity 3

This activity requires a good knowledge of English as well as good interpretation skills when it comes to interpreting literature.

During your first reading, pay attention to punctuation. What is the (verbal/grammatical) mood

of each stanza? Which person narration is chosen by Caroline Norton when she speaks about Sappho? How does C. Norton present Sappho?

In the second stanza, by using an exclamation mark, she raises doubts about whether the actual Sappho matches the one we know from the literature and arts in general. Turn the archaic forms into contemporary speech.

In stanzas III and VII, the poet raises a lot of questions for Sappho, namely, questions that pertain to the legend about her death. If you are not familiar with it, use this site to gain knowledge about it.

How does Norton describe Sappho's death? Explain in your own words.

Why does C. Norton say "Vain was thy beauty's spell– // Vain all the praise thy song could still inspire–"? Do you see these lines as a display of a pessimistic outlook on women's literary creativity?

Three words in the poem are written in capital letters, why do you think that the poet decided to expose those words?

Activity 4

Go to the Virtual Research Environment NEWW Women Writers. Look for Christine de Pisan in the category Authors (write just her surname). Then click in the left column on "Reception of this author". Explore her receptions and write a short report about your findings.

Write an essay about an imagined place of your own. Which women from the history or from your own environment would you invite in this place of retreat and why?

Christine de Pisan is one of the "World-Changing Women". Learn more about them on the interactive map designed by The Open University.

For centuries, Sappho has been perceived as the first female poet. However, in 1927 Sir Leonard Wooley discovered a calcite disc with the figure of Enheduanna. In 1958, Adam Falkenstein published "Enhedu'anna, The Daughter of Sargon of Akkad", the first scholarly article on Enheduanna, ten year later the first translations of Enheduanna's hymns were published. (See also Wikipedia article about Enheduanna.)

Enheduanna, the poet of religious hymns, lived and created

approximately half a century before the creation of the most important work of the Sumero-Akkadian literature, namely, the Epic of Gilgamesh. Endehuana is the first person whose literary authorship is noted in world literature. Considering the position women had in the Mesopotamian society, this is not as surprising as it may seem. Because of social stratification in Mesopotamia, all women didn't have access to literacy, however, the representatives of the elites, wives and daughters of leaders, knew how to read and write and they even conducted business ventures. They took part in sales business, they acquired land, still, it is hard to say how free they actually were. The role of women was mostly limited to them being the bearers of male descendants whose main task was to take care of elderly people.

Women were quite active as musicians, scribes, administrative workers and priestesses. They could live in a palace or a temple, or, if they had a family, also elsewhere, and they were able to perform many activities. They were paid for their work, mostly in the form of food, clothing or other objects. It was much harder for women who had to do physical labour and got half of men's salary for it. Some were prostitutes. Supernatural powers were mostly ascribed to women, not men.

Enheduana was the only daughter of the king Sargon of Akkad, who ruled around 2300 BC and is known as the founder of the Akkadian Empire. Her father named her a priestess in 2270 BC, and married her symbolically to Nanna,

the Sumerian God of the Moon. His daughter Inanna was the goddess of fertility, love but also discord. Enheduana dedicated her praying rituals to Nanna and in her hymns, she addressed Inanna and she places Inanna in a higher hierarchical place than Anu, the supreme Sumerian deity. In her literary works, she uses Sumerian, her mother tongue. Three hymns are preserved in cuneiform, on tablets which were created approximately five centuries after Enheduana. As two of the hymns mention her name (in the first person) and the third hymns is much like other two, the third hymn is also believed to be hers. The first hymn describes the battle between Inanna and the Ebih mountain; Inanna asks Anu for help, but he rejects her, as he is afraid of the mountain. Inanna doesn't give up and eventually beats the mountain.

In the second hymn, she praises Inanna's amazing powers shown in various forms, the third hymn uses these powers in a metaphorical sense: Inanna as a dragon, the south wind, a bull, a cow and a storm, and a harp of lament. Her powers are exceptional and she shows that to the people when they pray to her: their rivers bleed, a wife doesn't say sweet things to her husband anymore at midnight she doesn't reveal her secrets and the silent longings of her heart anymore. In the second part of that hymn, the poet talks about her sad faith, after the mean Lugalane banished her nephew from the throne; she says: "I, high priestess, I, Enheduana."

Her lines have multiple meanings, they are sensual, intimate and very personal. At the end of the hyms, Enheduana is listed

as the "collector" of texts, hence it is difficult to say how many of the texts are indeed hers and in how many she merely inspired herself with the works of other male and female authors; we will probably never get the final answer. Literary studies mostly list her as the author, but also state that later additions, as with all the works that reached us through copying of other texts, are not impossible.

Further Watching

Watch Cass Dalglish's inspiration of Enheduanna's poetry. Learn more about Cass Dalglish.

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3.

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FLOWERS ON APHRA BEHN'S TOMB

Learning Objectives

In this chapter you will learn about an early English woman writer Aphra Behn. You will also be acquainted with the specific situation of one of the first female authors who earned her living through writing. In the second part, you will study a modernist writer – Virginia Woolf, who reflected upon the challenges of female authorship in her essay "A Room of One's Own". You will also learn how Woolf celebrated Behn in the aforementioned essay. This way, you will gain new knowledge on the importance of female literary ancestors.

Aphra Behn by Peter Lely ca. 1670, Wikipedia

Aphra Behn, (born 1640?, Harbledown?, Kent, Eng.—died April 16, 1689, London), English dramatist, fiction writer, and poet who was the first Englishwoman known to earn her living by writing.

Her origin remains a mystery, in part because Behn may have deliberately obscured her early life. One tradition identifies Behn as a child known only as Ayfara or Aphra, who traveled in the 1650s with a couple named Amis to Suriname, which was then an English possession. She was more likely the daughter of a barber, Bartholomew Johnson, who may or may not have sailed with her and the rest of her family to Suriname in 1663. She returned to England in 1664 and married a merchant named Behn; he died (or the couple separated) soon after. Because of her wit and talent she was hold in high esteem, namely, she was employed by King Charles II in secret service in the Netherlands in 1666. Unrewarded and briefly imprisoned for debt, she began to write to support herself.

Behn's early works were tragicomedies in verse. In 1670 her first play, *The Forc'd Marriage*, was produced, and *The Amorous Prince* followed a year later. Her sole tragedy,

Abdelazer, was staged in 1676. However, she turned increasingly to light comedy and farce over the course of the 1670s. Many of these witty and vivacious comedies, notably *The Rover* (two parts, produced in 1677 and 1681), were commercially successful. *The Rover* depicts the adventures of a small group of English Cavaliers in Madrid and Naples during the exile of the future Charles II. *The Emperor of the Moon*, first performed in 1687, presaged the harlequinade, a form of comic theatre that evolved into the English pantomime.
Source: Encyclopaedia Brittanica.

Activity 1

Learn more about Aphra Behn by listening to the BBC podcast.

Activity 2

Please, answer the questions below:

What was Aphra Behn's family background? How did she receive her education?

Where did she travel and why?

What was her artistic name?

What are the titles of her works? Which genres did she choose?

Were there any other female playwrights in her time?

Activity 3

By listening to the podcast and answering the questions you have learned some important facts about one of the most inspiring women writers in the literary history.

Before reading Virginia Woolf's text about her in the Essay "A Room of One's Own", learn more about it.

Watch the video:

An Introduction to Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own

Audio book

Now you are going to read an excerpt from Woolf's essay about Behn. Perhaps there will be some names and titles in the texts where you will need to look for an additional information in the internet.

Virginia Woolf: A Room of One's Own

And with Mrs Behn we turn a very important corner

on the road. We leave behind, shut up in their parks among their folios, those solitary great ladies who wrote without audience or criticism, for their own delight alone. We come to town and rub shoulders with ordinary people in the streets. Mrs Behn was a middle–class woman with all the plebeian virtues of humour, vitality and courage; a woman forced by the death of her husband and some unfortunate adventures of her own to make her living by her wits. She had to work on equal terms with men. She made, by working very hard, enough to live on. The importance of that fact outweighs anything that she actually wrote, even the splendid 'A Thousand Martyrs I have made', or 'Love in Fantastic Triumph sat', for here begins the freedom of the mind, or rather the possibility that in the course of time the mind will be free to write what it likes. For now that Aphra Behn had done it, girls could go to their parents and say, You need not give me an allowance; I can make money by my pen. Of course the answer for many years to come was, Yes, by living the life of Aphra Behn! Death would be better! and the door was slammed faster than ever. That profoundly interesting subject, the value that men set upon women's chastity and its effect upon their education, here suggests itself for discussion, and might provide

an interesting book if any student at Girton or Newnham* cared to go into the matter. Lady Dudley, sitting in diamonds among the midges of a Scottish moor, might serve for frontispiece. Lord Dudley, THE TIMES said when Lady Dudley died the other day, 'a man of cultivated taste and many accomplishments, was benevolent and bountiful, but whimsically despotic. He insisted upon his wife's wearing full dress, even at the remotest shooting–lodge in the Highlands; he loaded her with gorgeous jewels', and so on, 'he gave her everything—always excepting any measure of responsibility'. Then Lord Dudley had a stroke and she nursed him and ruled his estates with supreme competence for ever after. That whimsical despotism was in the nineteenth century too.

But to return. Aphra Behn proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice, perhaps, of certain agreeable qualities; and so by degrees writing became not merely a sign of folly and a distracted mind, but was of practical importance. A husband might die, or some disaster overtake the family. Hundreds of women began as the eighteenth century drew on to add to their pin money, or to come to the rescue of their families by making translations or writing the innumerable bad novels

which have ceased to be recorded even in text–books, but are to be picked up in the fourpenny boxes in the Charing Cross Road. The extreme activity of mind which showed itself in the later eighteenth century among women—the talking, and the meeting, the writing of essays on Shakespeare, the translating of the classics—was founded on the solid fact that women could make money by writing. Money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for. It might still be well to sneer at 'blue stockings with an itch for scribbling',* but it could not be denied that they could put money in their purses. Thus, towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses.

The middle–class woman began to write. For if PRIDE AND PREJUDICE matters, and MIDDLEMARCH and VILLETTE and WUTHERING HEIGHTS matter, then it matters far more than I can prove in an hour's discourse that women generally, and not merely the lonely aristocrat shut up in her country house among her folios and her flatterers, took to writing. Without those forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have

written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue. For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice. Jane Austen should have laid a wreath upon the grave of Fanny Burney, and George Eliot done homage to the robust shade of Eliza Carter—the valiant old woman who tied a bell to her bedstead in order that she might wake early and learn Greek.

All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds. It is she—shady and amorous as she was—who makes it not quite fantastic for me to say to you to-night: Earn five hundred a year by your wits.

Activity 4

Viriginia Woolf in 1902, Wikipedia

Please, answer following questions:

What was hidden behind the remark "Yes, by living the life of Aphra Behn! Death would be better!" expressed by the parents when the daughter decides to write and live from her pen?

Who are the writers that are, according to Woolf, foremothers of the 19th century women writers? Find more information about them.

The witty eloquence of Virginia Woolf must have awoken your interest in learning more about her. Find more information about her life and works on the Internet and watch the Virginia Woolf documentary.

Activity 5

Please, answer following questions:

If you compare Woolf to Behn, how different was their family background and educational background?

Why is Woolf considered to be one of the most important novelists of the 20th century?

How did Woolf transgress and subvert the rules of the biographical genre in *Orlando*?

Activity 6

Your final task in this chapter is to find information about other receptions of Aphra Behn in the VRE Women Writers.

Creativity task: write an essay or a poem or make a photo or a painting or a video using this title:

This is a flower I would put upon Aphra Behn's tomb

Further Redings and Listenings

Michael Cunningham: *The Hours* (1998).

Video about A Room of One's Own (Paddy Crowe, Prof. Connell Fanning and Dr. Laura Aguiar).

4.

WHO ARE SILLY LADY NOVELISTS? GEORGE ELIOT DISMISSING SOME CONTEMPORARY WOMEN WRITERS AND PRAISING CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Learning Objectives

In this chapter you will learn or refresh your knowledge about George Eliot. You will study her article Silly Lady Novelists and will learn more about the novelists she mentions. You will learn about the popular novels of the 19th century. You will reflect upon Eliot's negative attitude towards some of her

contemporaries and explain why she rejected them and how is her relationship towards Brontë. Finally, you will learn more about Charlotte Bronte and her reception of other women writers.

How good do you know George Eliot? Recall and summarise your knowledge about her or learn about her in the text below:

"George Eliot was an English Victorian novelist known for the psychological depth of her characters and her descriptions of English rural life. Her major works included *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1871–72), and *Daniel*

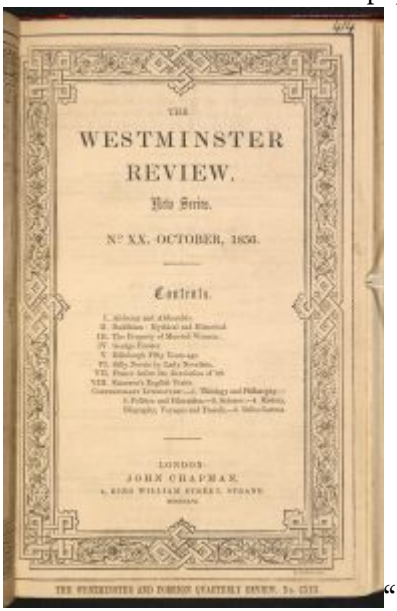
Deronda (1876). /.../ In 1851 Mary Ann Evans moved to London hoping to become a freelance writer. She worked as a subeditor at *The Westminster Review*, wrote essays, and translated German. In 1858 she published her first novel under the pen name George Eliot. Her first long novel, *Adam Bede* (1859), went through eight printings in a year./.../ In *The Mill on the Floss*, 3 vol. (1860), she returned again to the scenes of her early life. The first half of the book, with its remarkable portrayal of childhood, is irresistibly appealing, and throughout there are scenes that reach a new level of psychological subtlety. /.../ *Middlemarch* (8 parts, 1871–72) is by general consent George Eliot's masterpiece. Under her hand the novel had developed from a mere entertainment into a highly intellectual form of art. Every class of Middlemarch society is depicted from the landed gentry and clergy to the manufacturers and professional men, the shopkeepers, publicans, farmers, and labourers. Several strands of plot are interwoven to reinforce each other by contrast and parallel. Yet the story depends not on close-knit intrigue but on showing the incalculably diffusive effect of the unhistoric acts of those who "lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs."

Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

If you have not heard of her yet or if you remember just some facts from her life and titles of some of her works, then you should deepen your knowledge. You can also watch a short video about her or watch the video lecture.

Now read some lines from the paper **Critical Analysis of**

George Eliot's 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' written by Rebecca Salter. You can find her paper on Academia.


THE
WESTMINSTER
REVIEW.
New Series.
No XX. OCTOBER, 1856.
Contents.
LONDON:
JOHN CHAPMAN,

"George Eliot's 1856 publication, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' is an aesthetic and cultural critique of women's writing. Having worked as a journalist prior to publishing fiction, Eliot's critical voice is one of commanding authority and confident assertion. Her title marks her tone of dissatisfaction with these 'silly' novels and firmly establishes her subject of criticism. It is also important to note that her initial anonymity allows for a positioning outside the gendered sphere of criticism rather than marking her as a female subject. This anonymity, in combination with her authoritative lexis, grants her the adoption of a masculine persona, separating her from the novelists she is critiquing. This allows for a vantage point

outside the restricted field of women's writing, which, as Eliot demonstrates, leads to unfair critique from male readers.

The evocation of a critical voice in Eliot's essay is specifically achieved through scientific language. Her criticism of the 'species' and of 'silly novels' frames her essay almost as a scientific observation or field study, aptly tying in to her preference for realism over idealism."

Here is Eliot's essay, divided into sections. After each section you will find some questions.

Silly Novels by Lady Novelists/ introduction

Silly Novels by Lady Novelists are a genus with many species, determined by the particular quality of silliness that predominates in them—the frothy, the prosy, the pious, or the pedantic. But it is a mixture of all these—a composite order of feminine fatuity—that produces the largest class of such novels, which we shall distinguish as the *mind-and-millinery* species. The heroine is usually an heiress, probably a peeress in her own right, with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible younger son of a marquis as lovers in the foreground, a clergyman and a poet sighing for her in the middle

distance, and a crowd of undefined adorers dimly indicated beyond. Her eyes and her wit are both dazzling; her nose and her morals are alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb *contralto* and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph, and reads the Bible in the original tongues. Or it may be that the heroine is not an heiress—that rank and wealth are the only things in which she is deficient; but she infallibly gets into high society, she has the triumph of refusing many matches and securing the best, and she wears some family jewels or other as a sort of crown of righteousness at the end. Rakish men either bite their lips in impotent confusion at her repartees, or are touched to penitence by her reproofs, which, on appropriate occasions, rise to a lofty strain of rhetoric; indeed, there is a general propensity in her to make speeches, and to rhapsodize at some length when she retires to her bedroom. In her recorded conversations she is amazingly eloquent, and in her unrecorded conversations amazingly witty. She is understood to have a depth of insight that looks through and through the shallow theories of philosophers, and her superior instincts are a sort of dial by which men have only to set their clocks

and watches, and all will go well. The men play a very subordinate part by her side. You are consoled now and then by a hint that they have affairs, which keeps you in mind that the working-day business of the world is somehow being carried on, but ostensibly the final cause of their existence is that they may accompany the heroine on her "starring" expedition through life. They see her at a ball, and they are dazzled; at a flower-show, and they are fascinated; on a riding excursion, and they are witched by her noble horsemanship; at church, and they are awed by the sweet solemnity of her demeanor. She is the ideal woman in feelings, faculties, and flounces. For all this she as often as not marries the wrong person to begin with, and she suffers terribly from the plots and intrigues of the vicious baronet; but even death has a soft place in his heart for such a paragon, and remedies all mistakes for her just at the right moment. The vicious baronet is sure to be killed in a duel, and the tedious husband dies in his bed requesting his wife, as a particular favor to him, to marry the man she loves best, and having already dispatched a note to the lover informing him of the comfortable arrangement. Before matters arrive at this desirable issue our feelings are tried by seeing the noble, lovely, and

gifted heroine pass through many *mauvais moments*, but we have the satisfaction of knowing that her sorrows are wept into embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs, that her fainting form reclines on the very best upholstery, and that whatever vicissitudes she may undergo, from being dashed out of her carriage to having her head shaved in a fever, she comes out of them all with a complexion more blooming and locks more redundant than ever.

We may remark, by the way, that we have been relieved from a serious scruple by discovering that silly novels by lady novelists rarely introduce us into any other than very lofty and fashionable society. We had imagined that destitute women turned novelists, as they turned governesses, because they had no other "ladylike" means of getting their bread. On this supposition, vacillating syntax, and improbable incident had a certain pathos for us, like the extremely supererogatory pincushions and ill-devised nightcaps that are offered for sale by a blind man. We felt the commodity to be a nuisance, but we were glad to think that the money went to relieve the necessitous, and we pictured to ourselves lonely women struggling for a maintenance, or wives and daughters devoting themselves to the production of "copy" out of pure heroism—perhaps to pay their

husband's debts or to purchase luxuries for a sick father. Under these impressions we shrank from criticising a lady's novel: her English might be faulty, but we said to ourselves her motives are irreproachable; her imagination may be uninventive, but her patience is untiring. Empty writing was excused by an empty stomach, and twaddle was consecrated by tears. But no! This theory of ours, like many other pretty theories, has had to give way before observation. Women's silly novels, we are now convinced, are written under totally different circumstances. The fair writers have evidently never talked to a tradesman except from a carriage window; they have no notion of the working-classes except as "dependents;" they think five hundred a year a miserable pittance; Belgravia and "baronial halls" are their primary truths; and they have no idea of feeling interest in any man who is not at least a great landed proprietor, if not a prime minister. It is clear that they write in elegant boudoirs, with violet-colored ink and a ruby pen; that they must be entirely indifferent to publishers' accounts, and inexperienced in every form of poverty except poverty of brains. It is true that we are constantly struck with the want of verisimilitude in their representations of the high society in which they seem to live; but then they

betray no closer acquaintance with any other form of life. If their peers and peeresses are improbable, their literary men, tradespeople, and cottagers are impossible; and their intellect seems to have the peculiar impartiality of reproducing both what they *have* seen and heard, and what they have *not* seen and heard, with equal unfaithfulness.

Activity 1

1. How do you understand the words frothy, prosy, pious and pedantic in connection with the qualities of the novels? Can you explain it by giving examples from the novels you read?
2. How would you describe Eliot's tone in this section? Why does she first mimic the style of the novels she condemns?
3. Do you recognise in the description of the heroines of the silly novels any heroine from the novels you have read so far? Do you know the terms for literature which is very popular?
4. In this section Eliot also discussed social status

of “silly lady novelists”. Why do you think she emphasises the fact that they are not writing to earn their money for a living?

5. Why does Eliot expose the problem of the descriptions of “lady novelists” as unfaithful? Can you connect this kind of writing style with a certain period in literary history?

Silly Novels by Lady Novelists / mind-and-millinery novels

There are few women, we suppose, who have not seen something of children under five years of age, yet in “Compensation,” a recent novel of the mind-and-millinery species, which calls itself a “story of real life,” we have a child of four and a half years old talking in this Ossianic fashion:

> “‘Oh, I am so happy, dear grand mamma;—I have seen—I have seen such a delightful person; he is like everything beautiful—like the smell of sweet flowers, and the view from Ben Lemond;—or no, *better than that*—he is like what I think of

> and see when I am very, very happy; and he is really like mamma, too, when she sings; and his forehead is like *that distant sea*,' she continued, pointing to the blue Mediterranean; 'there seems no end—no end; or like the clusters of stars I like best to look at on a warm fine night. . . . Don't look so . . . your forehead is like Loch Lomond, when the wind is blowing and the sun is gone in; I like the sunshine best when the lake is smooth. . . . So now—I like it better than ever . . . It is more beautiful still from the dark cloud that has gone over it, *when the sun suddenly lights up all the colors of the forests and shining purple rocks*, *and it is all reflected in the waters below*.'"

We are not surprised to learn that the mother of this infant phenomenon, who exhibits symptoms so alarmingly like those of adolescence repressed by gin, is herself a phœnix. We are assured, again and again, that she had a remarkably original in mind, that she was a genius, and "conscious of her originality," and she was fortunate enough to have a lover who was also a genius and a man of "most original mind."

This lover, we read, though "wonderfully similar" to her "in powers and capacity," was "infinitely superior to her in faith and development," and she saw in him "'Agape'—so rare to find—of which she had read and admired the meaning in her Greek Testament;

having, *from her great facility in learning languages*, read the Scriptures in their original *tongues*." Of course! Greek and Hebrew are mere play to a heroine; Sanscrit is no more than *a b c* to her; and she can talk with perfect correctness in any language, except English. She is a polking polyglot, a Creuzer in crinoline. Poor men. There are so few of you who know even Hebrew; you think it something to boast of if, like Bolingbroke, you only "understand that sort of learning and what is writ about it;" and you are perhaps adoring women who can think slightingly of you in all the Semitic languages successively. But, then, as we are almost invariably told that a heroine has a "beautifully small head," and as her intellect has probably been early invigorated by an attention to costume and deportment, we may conclude that she can pick up the Oriental tongues, to say nothing of their dialects, with the same aërial facility that the butterfly sips nectar. Besides, there can be no difficulty in conceiving the depth of the heroine's erudition when that of the authoress is so evident.

In "Laura Gay," another novel of the same school, the heroine seems less at home in Greek and Hebrew but she makes up for the deficiency by a quite playful familiarity with the Latin classics—with the "dear old Virgil," "the graceful Horace, the humane Cicero, and

the pleasant Livy;" indeed, it is such a matter of course with her to quote Latin that she does it at a picnic in a very mixed company of ladies and gentlemen, having, we are told, "no conception that the nobler sex were capable of jealousy on this subject. And if, indeed," continues the biographer of Laura Gray, "the wisest and noblest portion of that sex were in the majority, no such sentiment would exist; but while Miss Wyndhams and Mr. Redfords abound, great sacrifices must be made to their existence." Such sacrifices, we presume, as abstaining from Latin quotations, of extremely moderate interest and applicability, which the wise and noble minority of the other sex would be quite as willing to dispense with as the foolish and ignoble majority. It is as little the custom of well-bred men as of well-bred women to quote Latin in mixed parties; they can contain their familiarity with "the humane Cicero" without allowing it to boil over in ordinary conversation, and even references to "the pleasant Livy" are not absolutely irrepressible. But Ciceronian Latin is the mildest form of Miss Gay's conversational power. Being on the Palatine with a party of sight-seers, she falls into the following vein of well-rounded remark: "Truth can only be pure objectively, for even in the creeds where it predominates, being

subjective, and parcelled out into portions, each of these necessarily receives a hue of idiosyncrasy, that is, a taint of superstition more or less strong; while in such creeds as the Roman Catholic, ignorance, interest, the basis of ancient idolatries, and the force of authority, have gradually accumulated on the pure truth, and transformed it, at last, into a mass of superstition for the majority of its votaries; and how few are there, alas! whose zeal, courage, and intellectual energy are equal to the analysis of this accumulation, and to the discovery of the pearl of great price which lies hidden beneath this heap of rubbish." We have often met with women much more novel and profound in their observations than Laura Gay, but rarely with any so inopportunely long-winded. A clerical lord, who is half in love with her, is alarmed by the daring remarks just quoted, and begins to suspect that she is inclined to free-thinking. But he is mistaken; when in a moment of sorrow he delicately begs leave to "recall to her memory, a *depôt* of strength and consolation under affliction, which, until we are hard pressed by the trials of life, we are too apt to forget," we learn that she really has "recurrence to that sacred depôt," together with the tea-pot. There is a certain flavor of orthodoxy mixed with the parade of fortunes and

fine carriages in "Laura Gay," but it is an orthodoxy mitigated by study of "the humane Cicero," and by an "intellectual disposition to analyze."

"Compensation" is much more heavily dosed with doctrine, but then it has a treble amount of snobbish worldliness and absurd incident to tickle the palate of pious frivolity. Linda, the heroine, is still more speculative and spiritual than Laura Gay, but she has been "presented," and has more and far grander lovers; very wicked and fascinating women are introduced—even a French *lionne*; and no expense is spared to get up as exciting a story as you will find in the most immoral novels. In fact, it is a wonderful *pot pourri* of Almack's, Scotch second-sight, Mr. Rogers's breakfasts, Italian brigands, death-bed conversions, superior authoresses, Italian mistresses, and attempts at poisoning old ladies, the whole served up with a garnish of talk about "faith and development" and "most original minds." Even Miss Susan Barton, the superior authoress, whose pen moves in a "quick, decided manner when she is composing," declines the finest opportunities of marriage; and though old enough to be Linda's mother (since we are told that she refused Linda's father), has her hand sought by a young earl, the heroine's rejected lover. Of course, genius and

morality must be backed by eligible offers, or they would seem rather a dull affair; and piety, like other things, in order to be *comme il faut*, must be in "society," and have admittance to the best circles.

"Rank and Beauty" is a more frothy and less religious variety of the mind-and-millinery species. The heroine, we are told, "if she inherited her father's pride of birth and her mother's beauty of person, had in herself a tone of enthusiastic feeling that, perhaps, belongs to her age even in the lowly born, but which is refined into the high spirit of wild romance only in the far descended, who feel that it is their best inheritance." This enthusiastic young lady, by dint of reading the newspaper to her father, falls in love with the *prime minister*, who, through the medium of leading articles and "the *resumé* of the debates," shines upon her imagination as a bright particular star, which has no parallax for her living in the country as simple Miss Wyndham. But she forthwith becomes Baroness Umfraville in her own right, astonishes the world with her beauty and accomplishments when she bursts upon it from her mansion in Spring Gardens, and, as you foresee, will presently come into contact with the unseen *objet aimé*. Perhaps the words "prime minister" suggest to you a wrinkled or obese sexagenarian; but pray

dismiss the image. Lord Rupert Conway has been "called while still almost a youth to the first situation which a subject can hold in the *universe*," and even leading articles and a *resumé* of the debates have not conjured up a dream that surpasses the fact.

> "The door opened again, and Lord Rupert Conway entered. Evelyn gave one glance. It was enough; she was not disappointed. It seemed as if a picture on which she had long gazed was suddenly instinct with life, and had stepped from its frame before her. His tall figure, the distinguished simplicity of his air—it was a living Vandyke, a cavalier, one of his noble cavalier ancestors, or one to whom her fancy had always likened him, who long of yore had with an Umfraville fought the Paynim far beyond the sea. Was this reality?"

Very little like it, certainly.

By and by it becomes evident that the ministerial heart is touched. Lady Umfraville is on a visit to the Queen at Windsor, and—

> "The last evening of her stay, when they returned from riding, Mr. Wyndham took her and a large party to the top of the Keep, to see the view. She was leaning on the battlements, gazing from that 'stately height' at the prospect beneath her, when

> Lord Rupert was by her side. 'What an unrivalled view!' exclaimed she.
>
> "'Yes, it would have been wrong to go without having been up here. You are pleased with your visit?'
>
> "'Enchanted! A Queen to live and die under, to live and die for!'
>
> "'Ha!' cried he, with sudden emotion, and with a *eureka* expression of countenance, as if he had *indeed found a heart in unison with his own*."

The "*eureka* expression of countenance" you see at once to be prophetic of marriage at the end of the third volume; but before that desirable consummation there are very complicated misunderstandings, arising chiefly from the vindictive plotting of Sir Luttrel Wycherley, who is a genius, a poet, and in every way a most remarkable character indeed. He is not only a romantic poet, but a hardened rake and a cynical wit; yet his deep passion for Lady Umfraville has so impoverished his epigrammatic talent that he cuts an extremely poor figure in conversation. When she rejects him, he rushes into the shrubbery and rolls himself in the dirt; and on recovering, devotes himself to the most diabolical and laborious schemes of vengeance, in the course of which he disguises himself as a quack

physician and enters into general practice, foreseeing that Evelyn will fall ill, and that he shall be called in to attend her. At last, when all his schemes are frustrated, he takes leave of her in a long letter, written, as you will perceive from the following passage, entirely in the style of an eminent literary man:

> "Oh, lady, nursed in pomp and pleasure, will you ever cast one thought upon the miserable being who addresses you? Will you ever, as your gilded galley is floating down the unruffled stream of prosperity, will you ever, while lulled by the sweetest music—thine own praises—hear the far-off sigh from that world to which I am going?"

On the whole, however, frothy as it is, we rather prefer "Rank and Beauty" to the two other novels we have mentioned. The dialogue is more natural and spirited; there is some frank ignorance and no pedantry; and you are allowed to take the heroine's astounding intellect upon trust, without being called on to read her conversational refutations of sceptics and philosophers, or her rhetorical solutions of the mysteries of the universe.

Writers of the mind-and-millinery school are remarkably unanimous in their choice of diction. In their novels there is usually a lady or gentleman who

is more or less of a upas tree; the lover has a manly breast; minds are redolent of various things; hearts are hollow; events are utilized; friends are consigned to the tomb; infancy is an engaging period; the sun is a luminary that goes to his western couch, or gathers the rain-drops into his refulgent bosom; life is a melancholy boon; Albion and Scotia are conversational epithets. There is a striking resemblance, too, in the character of their moral comments, such, for instance, as that "It is a fact, no less true than melancholy, that all people, more or less, richer or poorer, are swayed by bad example;" that "Books, however trivial, contain some subjects from which useful information may be drawn;" that "Vice can too often borrow the language of virtue;" that "Merit and nobility of nature must exist, to be accepted, for clamor and pretension cannot impose upon those too well read in human nature to be easily deceived;" and that "In order to forgive, we must have been injured." There is doubtless a class of readers to whom these remarks appear peculiarly pointed and pungent; for we often find them doubly and trebly scored with the pencil, and delicate hands giving in their determined adhesion to these hardy novelties by a distinct *très vrai*, emphasized by many notes of exclamation. The colloquial style of these

novels is often marked by much ingenious inversion, and a careful avoidance of such cheap phraseology as can be heard every day. Angry young gentlemen exclaim, "'Tis ever thus, methinks;" and in the half hour before dinner a young lady informs her next neighbor that the first day she read Shakespeare she "stole away into the park, and beneath the shadow of the greenwood tree, devoured with rapture the inspired page of the great magician." But the most remarkable efforts of the mind-and-millinery writers lie in their philosophic reflections. The authoress of "Laura Gay," for example, having married her hero and heroine, improves the event by observing that "if those sceptics, whose eyes have so long gazed on matter that they can no longer see aught else in man, could once enter with heart and soul, into such bliss as this, they would come to say that the soul of man and the polypus are not of common origin, or of the same texture." Lady novelists, it appears, can see something else besides matter; they are not limited to phenomena, but can relieve their eyesight by occasional glimpses of the *noumenon*, and are, therefore, naturally better able than any one else to confound sceptics, even of that remarkable but to us unknown school which maintains that the soul of man is of the same texture as the polypus.

Activity 2

1. In this section we have found some examples of the "silly novels". The author of the novel "Compensation" is Georgiana Chatterton. Look for more information about her and compare your findings with the first section of Eliot's essay.
2. What are other topics critiqued by Eliot in the three novels discussed above? Why does she prefer "Rank and Beaty" to the other two novels? Explain in your own words.
3. Summarise the characteristics of the "mind and millinery novels".

Silly novels by lady novelists – oracular novels

The most pitiable of all silly novels by lady novelists are what we may call the *oracular* species—novels intended to expound the writer's religious, philosophical, or moral theories. There seems to be

a notion abroad among women, rather akin to the superstition that the speech and actions of idiots are inspired, and that the human being most entirely exhausted of common-sense is the fittest vehicle of revelation. To judge from their writings, there are certain ladies who think that an amazing ignorance, both of science and of life, is the best possible qualification for forming an opinion on the knottiest moral and speculative questions. Apparently, their recipe for solving all such difficulties is something like this: Take a woman's head, stuff it with a smattering of philosophy and literature chopped small, and with false notions of society baked hard, let it hang over a desk a few hours every day, and serve up hot in feeble English when not required. You will rarely meet with a lady novelist of the oracular class who is diffident of her ability to decide on theological questions—who has any suspicion that she is not capable of discriminating with the nicest accuracy between the good and evil in all church parties—who does not see precisely how it is that men have gone wrong hitherto—and pity philosophers in general that they have not had the opportunity of consulting her. Great writers, who have modestly contented themselves with putting their experience into fiction, and have thought it quite a sufficient task to exhibit

men and things as they are, she sighs over as deplorably deficient in the application of their powers. "They have solved no great questions"—and she is ready to remedy their omission by setting before you a complete theory of life and manual of divinity in a love story, where ladies and gentlemen of good family go through genteel vicissitudes, to the utter confusion of Deists, Puseyites, and ultra-Protestants, and to the perfect establishment of that peculiar view of Christianity which either condenses itself into a sentence of small caps, or explodes into a cluster of stars on the three hundred and thirtieth page. It is true, the ladies and gentlemen will probably seem to you remarkably little like any you have had the fortune or misfortune to meet with, for, as a general rule, the ability of a lady novelist to describe actual life and her fellow-men is in inverse proportion to her confident eloquence about God and the other world, and the means by which she usually chooses to conduct you to true ideas of the invisible is a totally false picture of the visible.

As typical a novel of the oracular kind as we can hope to meet with, is "The Enigma: a Leaf from the Chronicles of the Wolchorley House." The "enigma" which this novel is to solve is certainly one that

demands powers no less gigantic than those of a lady novelist, being neither more nor less than the existence of evil. The problem is stated and the answer dimly foreshadowed on the very first page. The spirited young lady, with raven hair, says, "All life is an inextricable confusion;" and the meek young lady, with auburn hair, looks at the picture of the Madonna which she is copying, and—"*There* seemed the solution of that mighty enigma." The style of this novel is quite as lofty as its purpose; indeed, some passages on which we have spent much patient study are quite beyond our reach, in spite of the illustrative aid of italics and small caps; and we must await further "development" in order to understand them. Of Ernest, the model young clergyman, who sets every one right on all occasions, we read that "he held not of marriage in the marketable kind, after a social desecration;" that, on one eventful night, "sleep had not visited his divided heart, where tumultuated, in varied type and combination, the aggregate feelings of grief and joy;" and that, "for the *marketable* human article he had no toleration, be it of what sort, or set for what value it might, whether for worship or class, his upright soul abhorred it, whose ultimatum, the self-deceiver, was to him the *great spiritual lie*, 'living in a vain show,

deceiving and being deceived;' since he did not suppose the phylactery and enlarged border on the garment to be *merely* a social trick." (The italics and small caps are the author's, and we hope they assist the reader's comprehension.) Of Sir Lionel, the model old gentleman, we are told that "the simple ideal of the middle age, apart from its anarchy and decadence, in him most truly seemed to live again, when the ties which knit men together were of heroic cast. The first-born colors of pristine faith and truth engraven on the common soul of man, and blent into the wide arch of brotherhood, where the primæval law of *order* grew and multiplied each perfect after his kind, and mutually interdependent." You see clearly, of course, how colors are first engraven on the soul, and then blent into a wide arch, on which arch of colors—apparently a rainbow—the law of order grew and multiplied, each—apparently the arch and the law—perfect after his kind? If, after this, you can possibly want any further aid toward knowing what Sir Lionel was, we can tell you that in his soul "the scientific combinations of thought could educe no fuller harmonies of the good and the true than lay in the primæval pulses which floated as an atmosphere around it!" and that, when he was sealing a letter,

"Lo! the responsive throb in that good man's bosom echoed back in simple truth the honest witness of a heart that condemned him not, as his eye, bedewed with love, rested, too, with something of ancestral pride, on the undimmed motto of the family—'Loiaute.'"

The slightest matters have their vulgarity fumigated out of them by the same elevated style. Commonplace people would say that a copy of Shakespeare lay on a drawing-room table; but the authoress of "The Enigma," bent on edifying periphrasis, tells you that there lay on the table, "that fund of human thought and feeling, which teaches the heart through the little name, 'Shakespeare.'" A watchman sees a light burning in an upper window rather longer than usual, and thinks that people are foolish to sit up late when they have an opportunity of going to bed; but, lest this fact should seem too low and common, it is presented to us in the following striking and metaphysical manner: "He marvelled—as a man *will* think for others in a necessarily separate personality, consequently (though disallowing it) in false mental premise—how differently *he* should act, how gladly *he* should prize the rest so lightly held of within." A footman—an ordinary Jeames, with large calves and aspirated

vowels—answers the door-bell, and the opportunity is seized to tell you that he was a "type of the large class of pampered menials, who follow the curse of Cain—'vagabonds' on the face of the earth, and whose estimate of the human class varies in the graduated scale of money and expenditure. . . . These, and such as these, O England, be the false lights of thy morbid civilization!" We have heard of various "false lights," from Dr. Cumming to Robert Owen, from Dr. Pusey to the Spirit-rappers, but we never before heard of the false light that emanates from plush and powder.

In the same way very ordinary events of civilized life are exalted into the most awful crises, and ladies in full skirts and *manches à la Chinoise*, conduct themselves not unlike the heroines of sanguinary melodramas. Mrs. Percy, a shallow woman of the world, wishes her son Horace to marry the auburn-haired Grace, she being an heiress; but he, after the manner of sons, falls in love with the raven-haired Kate, the heiress's portionless cousin; and, moreover, Grace herself shows every symptom of perfect indifference to Horace. In such cases sons are often sulky or fiery, mothers are alternately manœuvring and waspish, and the portionless young lady often lies awake at night and cries a good deal. We are

getting used to these things now, just as we are used to eclipses of the moon, which no longer set us howling and beating tin kettles. We never heard of a lady in a fashionable "front" behaving like Mrs. Percy under these circumstances. Happening one day to see Horace talking to Grace at a window, without in the least knowing what they are talking about, or having the least reason to believe that Grace, who is mistress of the house and a person of dignity, would accept her son if he were to offer himself, she suddenly rushes up to them and clasps them both, saying, "with a flushed countenance and in p. 192an excited manner"—"This is indeed happiness; for, may I not call you so, Grace?—my Grace—my Horace's Grace!—my dear children!" Her son tells her she is mistaken, and that he is engaged to Kate, whereupon we have the following scene and tableau:

> "Gathering herself up to an unprecedented height (!) her eyes lightening forth the fire of her anger:
>
> "'Wretched boy!' she said, hoarsely and scornfully, and clenching her hand, 'Take then the doom of your own choice! Bow down your miserable head and let a mother's—'
>
> "'Curse not!' spake a deep low voice from behind, and Mrs. Percy started, scared, as though she had

> seen a heavenly visitant appear, to break upon her in the midst of her sin.
>
> "Meantime Horace had fallen on his knees, at her feet, and hid his face in his hands.
>
> "Who then, is she—who! Truly his 'guardian spirit' hath stepped between him and the fearful words, which, however unmerited, must have hung as a pall over his future existence;—a spell which could not be unbound—which could not be unsaid.
>
> "Of an earthly paleness, but calm with the still, iron-bound calmness of death—the only calm one there—Katherine stood; and her words smote on the ear in tones whose appallingly slow and separate intonation rung on the heart like a chill, isolated tolling of some fatal knell.
>
> "'He would have plighted me his faith, but I did not accept it; you cannot, therefore—you *dare* not curse him. And here,' she continued, raising her hand to heaven, whither her large dark eyes also rose with a chastened glow, which, for the first time, *suffering* had lighted in those passionate orbs—'here I promise, come weal, come woe, that Horace Wolchorley and I do never interchange vows without his mother's sanction—without his mother's blessing!'"

Here, and throughout the story, we see that confusion of purpose which is so characteristic of silly novels written by women. It is a story of quite

modern drawing-room society—a society in which polkas are played and Puseyism discussed; yet we have characters, and incidents, and traits of manner introduced, which are mere shreds from the most heterogeneous romances. We have a blind Irish harper, "relic of the picturesque bards of yore," startling us at a Sunday-school festival of tea and cake in an English village; we have a crazy gypsy, in a scarlet cloak, singing snatches of romantic song, and revealing a secret on her death-bed which, with the testimony of a dwarfish miserly merchant, who salutes strangers with a curse and a devilish laugh, goes to prove that Ernest, the model young clergyman, is Kate's brother; and we have an ultra-virtuous Irish Barney, discovering that a document is forged, by comparing the date of the paper with the date of the alleged signature, although the same document has passed through a court of law and occasioned a fatal decision. The "Hall" in which Sir Lionel lives is the venerable country-seat of an old family, and this, we suppose, sets the imagination of the authoress flying to donjons and battlements, where "lo! the warder blows his horn;" for, as the inhabitants are in their bedrooms on a night certainly within the recollection of Pleaceman X. and a breeze springs up, which we are at first told was faint, and

then that it made the old cedars bow their branches to the greensward, she falls into this mediæval vein of description (the italics are ours): "The banner *unfurled it* at the sound, and shook its guardian wing above, while the startled owl *flapped her* in the ivy; the firmament looking down through her 'argus eyes'—

> 'Ministers of heaven's mute melodies.'

And lo! two strokes tolled from out the warder tower, and 'Two o'clock' re-echoed its interpreter below."

Such stories as this of "The Enigma" remind us of the pictures clever children sometimes draw "out of their own head," where you will see a modern villa on the right, two knights in helmets fighting in the foreground, and a tiger grinning in a jungle on the left, the several objects being brought together because the artist thinks each pretty, and perhaps still more because he remembers seeing them in other pictures.

But we like the authoress much better on her mediæval stilts than on her oracular ones—when she talks of the *Ich* and of "subjective" and "objective," and lays down the exact line of Christian verity, between "right-hand excesses and left-hand

declensions." Persons who deviate from this line are introduced with a patronizing air of charity. Of a certain Miss Inshquine she informs us, with all the lucidity of italics and small caps, that "*function*, not *form*, as *the inevitable outer expression of the spirit in this tabernacle age*, weakly engrossed her." And *à propos* of Miss Mayjar, an evangelical lady who is a little too apt to talk of her visits to sick women and the state of their souls, we are told that the model clergyman is "not one to disallow, through the *super* crust, the undercurrent toward good in the *subject*, or the positive benefits, nevertheless, to the *object*." We imagine the double-refined accent and protrusion of chin which are feebly represented by the italics in this lady's sentences! We abstain from quoting any of her oracular doctrinal passages, because they refer to matters too serious for our pages just now.

The epithet "silly" may seem impertinent, applied to a novel which indicates so much reading and intellectual activity as "The Enigma," but we use this epithet advisedly. If, as the world has long agreed, a very great amount of instruction will not make a wise man, still less will a very mediocre amount of instruction make a wise woman. And the most mischievous form of feminine silliness is the literary

form, because it tends to confirm the popular prejudice against the more solid education of women.

When men see girls wasting their time in consultations about bonnets and ball dresses, and in giggling or sentimental love-confidences, or middle-aged women mismanaging their children, and solacing themselves with acrid gossip, they can hardly help saying, "For Heaven's sake, let girls be better educated; let them have some better objects of thought—some more solid occupations." But after a few hours' conversation with an oracular literary woman, or a few hours' reading of her books, they are likely enough to say, "After all, when a woman gets some knowledge, see what use she makes of it! Her knowledge remains acquisition instead of passing into culture; instead of being subdued into modesty and simplicity by a larger acquaintance with thought and fact, she has a feverish consciousness of her attainments; she keeps a sort of mental pocket-mirror, and is continually looking in it at her own 'intellectuality;' she spoils the taste of one's muffin by questions of metaphysics; 'puts down' men at a dinner-table with her superior information; and seizes the opportunity of a *soirée* to catechise us on the vital question of the relation between mind and

matter. And then, look at her writings! She mistakes vagueness for depth, bombast for eloquence, and affectation for originality; she struts on one page, rolls her eyes on another, grimaces in a third, and is hysterical in a fourth. She may have read many writings of great men, and a few writings of great women; but she is as unable to discern the difference between her own style and theirs as a Yorkshireman is to discern the difference between his own English and a Londoner's: rhodomontade is the native accent of her intellect. No—the average nature of women is too shallow and feeble a soil to bear much tillage; it is only fit for the very lightest crops."

It is true that the men who come to such a decision on such very superficial and imperfect observation may not be among the wisest in the world; but we have not now to contest their opinion—we are only pointing out how it is unconsciously encouraged by many women who have volunteered themselves as representatives of the feminine intellect. We do not believe that a man was ever strengthened in such an opinion by associating with a woman of true culture, whose mind had absorbed her knowledge instead of being absorbed by it. A really cultured woman, like a really cultured man, is all the simpler and the less obtrusive for her knowledge; it has made her

see herself and her opinions in something like just proportions; she does not make it a pedestal from which she flatters herself that she commands a complete view of men and things, but makes it a point of observation from which to form a right estimate of herself. She neither spouts poetry nor quotes Cicero on slight provocation; not because she thinks that a sacrifice must be made to the prejudices of men, but because that mode of exhibiting her memory and Latinity does not present itself to her as edifying or graceful. She does not write books to confound philosophers, perhaps because she is able to write books that delight them. In conversation she is the least formidable of women, because she understands you, without wanting to make you aware that you *can't* understand her. She does not give you information, which is the raw material of culture—she gives you sympathy, which is its subtlest essence.

Activity 3

Eliot gives many examples of the oracular novels. Why does she choose such a strategy?

Where and how does she express her judgement?

Why are the literary representations of intellectual women in the oracular novels problematic?

How does Eliot transcend the boundaries between literary field and social reality? Why can these novels harm women?

Silly novels by lady novelists – the white neck-cloth novels

A more numerous class of silly novels than the oracular (which are generally inspired by some form of High Church or transcendental Christianity) is what we may call the *white neck-cloth* species, which represent the tone of thought and feeling in the Evangelical party. This species is a kind of genteel tract on a large scale, intended as a sort of

medicinal sweetmeat for Low Church young ladies; an Evangelical substitute for the fashionable novel, as the May Meetings are a substitute for the Opera. Even Quaker children, one would think, can hardly have been denied the indulgence of a doll; but it must be a doll dressed in a drab gown and a coal-scuttle-bonnet—not a worldly doll, in gauze and spangles. And there are no young ladies, we imagine—unless they belong to the Church of the United Brethren, in which people are married without any love-making—who can dispense with love stories. Thus, for Evangelical young ladies there are Evangelical love stories, in which the vicissitudes of the tender passion are sanctified by saving views of Regeneration and the Atonement. These novels differ from the oracular ones, as a Low Churchwoman often differs from a High Churchwoman: they are a little less supercilious and a great deal more ignorant, a little less correct in their syntax and a great deal more vulgar.

The Orlando of Evangelical literature is the young curate, looked at from the point of view of the middle class, where cambric bands are understood to have as thrilling an effect on the hearts of young ladies as epaulettes have in the classes above and below it. In the ordinary type of these novels the hero is almost

sure to be a young curate, frowned upon, perhaps by worldly mammas, but carrying captive the hearts of their daughters, who can "never forget *that* sermon;" tender glances are seized from the pulpit stairs instead of the opera-box; *tête-à-têtes* are seasoned with quotations from Scripture instead of quotations from the poets; and questions as to the state of the heroine's affections are mingled with anxieties as to the state of her soul. The young curate always has a background of well-dressed and wealthy if not fashionable society—for Evangelical silliness is as snobbish as any other kind of silliness—and the Evangelical lady novelist, while she explains to you the type of the scapegoat on one page, is ambitious on another to represent the manners and conversations of aristocratic people. Her pictures of fashionable society are often curious studies, considered as efforts of the Evangelical imagination; but in one particular the novels of the White Neck-cloth School are meritoriously realistic—their favorite hero, the Evangelical young curate, is always rather an insipid personage.

The most recent novel of this species that we happen to have before us is "The Old Grey Church." It is utterly tame and feeble; there is no one set of objects on which the writer seems to have a stronger grasp

than on any other; and we should be entirely at a loss to conjecture among what phases of life her experience has been gained, but for certain vulgarisms of style which sufficiently indicate that she has had the advantage, though she has been unable to use it, of mingling chiefly with men and women whose manners and characters have not had all their bosses and angles rubbed down by refined conventionalism. It is less excusable in an Evangelical novelist than in any other, gratuitously to seek her subjects among titles and carriages. The real drama of Evangelicalism—and it has abundance of fine drama for any one who has genius enough to discern and reproduce it—lies among the middle and lower classes; and are not Evangelical opinions understood to give an especial interest in the weak things of the earth, rather than in the mighty? Why, then, cannot our Evangelical lady novelists show us the operation of their religious views among people (there really are many such in the world) who keep no carriage, "not so much as a brass-bound gig," who even manage to eat their dinner without a silver fork, and in whose mouths the authoress's questionable English would be strictly consistent? Why can we not have pictures of religious life among the industrial classes in England, as interesting as Mrs.

Stowe's pictures of religious life among the negroes? Instead of this pious ladies nauseate us with novels which remind us of what we sometimes see in a worldly woman recently "converted;"—she is as fond of a fine dinner-table as before, but she invites clergymen instead of beaux; she thinks as much of her dress as before, but she adopts a more sober choice of colors and patterns; her conversation is as trivial as before, but the triviality is flavored with gospel instead of gossip. In "The Old Grey Church" we have the same sort of Evangelical travesty of the fashionable novel, and of course the vicious, intriguing baronet is not wanting. It is worth while to give a sample of the style of conversation attributed to this high-born rake—a style that, in its profuse italics and palpable innuendoes, is worthy of Miss Squeers. In an evening visit to the ruins of the Colosseum, Eustace, the young clergyman, has been withdrawing the heroine, Miss Lushington, from the rest of the party, for the sake of a *tête-à-tête*. The baronet is jealous, and vents his pique in this way:

> "There they are, and Miss Lushington, no doubt, quite safe; for she is under the holy guidance of Pope Eustace the First, who has, of course, been delivering to her an edifying homily on the wickedness of the heathens of yore, who, as

> tradition tells us, in this very p. 199place let loose the wild *beastises* on poor St. Paul!—Oh, no! by the bye, I believe I am wrong, and betraying my want of clergy, and that it was not at all St. Paul, nor was it here. But no matter, it would equally serve as a text to preach from, and from which to diverge to the degenerate *heathen* Christians of the present day, and all their naughty practices, and so end with an exhortation to 'come but from among them, and be separate;'—and I am sure, Miss Lushington, you have most scrupulously conformed to that injunction this evening, for we have seen nothing of you since our arrival. But every one seems agreed it has been a *charming party of pleasure*, and I am sure we all feel *much indebted* to Mr. Gray for having *suggested* it; and as he seems so capital a cicerone, I hope he will think of something else equally agreeable to *all*."

This drivelling kind of dialogue, and equally drivelling narrative, which, like a bad drawing, represents nothing, and barely indicates what is meant to be represented, runs through the book; and we have no doubt is considered by the amiable authoress to constitute an improving novel, which Christian mothers will do well to put into the hands of their daughters. But everything is relative; we have met with American vegetarians whose normal diet was dry meal, and who, when their appetite wanted

stimulating, tickled it with *wet* meal; and so, we can imagine that there are Evangelical circles in which "The Old Grey Church" is devoured as a powerful and interesting fiction.

Activity 4

Eliot takes as a criterium of distinction to differentiate between the oracular and the white neck-cloth novels, namely that they are rooted in two different clerical traditions: in the High Church and Evangelical Church.

Sum up the characteristics of the white neck-cloth novels.

Learn more about the author of the novel *The Old Grey Church* Lady Caroline Lucy Scott. Does her social status confirm Eliot's description of the "lady novelist" in the first paragraphs of the essay?

What kind of literature does Eliot advocate when discussing the social structure of *The Old Grey Church*: "Why, then, cannot our Evangelical lady novelists show us the operation of their religious

views among people (there really are many such in the world) who keep no carriage, 'not so much as a brass-bound gig,' who even manage to eat their dinner without a silver fork, and in whose mouths the authoress's questionable English would be strictly consistent? Why can we not have pictures of religious life among the industrial classes in England, as interesting as Mrs. Stowe's pictures of religious life among the negroes?"

She also dismissed the language of the novel. Why?

Silly novels by lady novelists / modern-antique novels

But perhaps the least readable of silly women's novels are the *modern-antique* species, which unfold to us the domestic life of Jannes and Jambres, the private love affairs of Sennacherib, or the mental struggles and ultimate conversion of Demetrius the silversmith. From most silly novels we can at least extract a laugh; but those of the modern-antique school have a ponderous, a leaden kind of fatuity, under which we groan. What can be more

demonstrative of the inability of literary women to measure their own powers than their frequent assumption of a task which can only be justified by the rarest concurrence of acquirement with genius? The finest effort to reanimate the past is of course only approximative—is always more or less an infusion of the modern spirit into the ancient form—

> Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst,
> Das ist im Grund der Herren eigner Geist,
> In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.

Admitting that genius which has familiarized itself with all the relics of an ancient period can sometimes, by the force of its sympathetic divination, restore the missing notes in the "music of humanity," and reconstruct the fragments into a whole which will really bring the remote past nearer to us, and interpret it to our duller apprehension—this form of imaginative power must always be among the very rarest, because it demands as much accurate and minute knowledge as creative vigor. Yet we find ladies constantly choosing to make their mental mediocrity more conspicuous by clothing it in a masquerade of ancient names; by putting their feeble sentimentality into the mouths of Roman vestals or Egyptian princesses, and attributing their rhetorical

arguments to Jewish high-priests and Greek philosophers. A recent example of this heavy imbecility is "Adonijah, a Tale of the Jewish Dispersion," which forms part of a series, "uniting," we are told, "taste, humor, and sound principles." "Adonijah," we presume, exemplifies the tale of "sound principles;" the taste and humor are to be found in other members of the series. We are told on the cover that the incidents of this tale are "fraught with unusual interest," and the preface winds up thus: "To those who feel interested in the dispersed of Israel and Judea, these pages may afford, perhaps, information on an important subject, as well as amusement." Since the "important subject" on which this book is to afford information is not specified, it may possibly lie in some esoteric meaning to which we have no key; but if it has relation to the dispersed of Israel and Judea at any period of their history, we believe a tolerably well-informed school-girl already knows much more of it than she will find in this "Tale of the Jewish Dispersion." "Adonijah" is simply the feeblest kind of love story, supposed p. 201to be instructive, we presume, because the hero is a Jewish captive and the heroine a Roman vestal; because they and their friends are converted to Christianity after the shortest and easiest method approved by

the "Society for Promoting the Conversion of the Jews;" and because, instead of being written in plain language, it is adorned with that peculiar style of grandiloquence which is held by some lady novelists to give an antique coloring, and which we recognize at once in such phrases as these:—"the splendid regnal talent, undoubtedly, possessed by the Emperor Nero"—"the expiring scion of a lofty stem"—"the virtuous partner of his couch"—"ah, by Vesta!"—and "I tell thee, Roman." Among the quotations which serve at once for instruction and ornament on the cover of this volume, there is one from Miss Sinclair, which informs us that "Works of imagination are *avowedly* read by men of science, wisdom, and piety;" from which we suppose the reader is to gather the cheering inference that Dr. Daubeny, Mr. Mill, or Mr. Maurice may openly indulge himself with the perusal of "Adonijah," without being obliged to secrete it among the sofa cushions, or read it by snatches under the dinner-table.

Activity 5

What are the characteristics of modern-antique novels?

Eliot quotes in German Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's words from *Faust*, part one. Here is the English translation:

"The spirit of the ages, that you find,/ In the end, is the spirit of Humankind:/ A mirror where all the ages are revealed."

Why does Eliot confront Goethe's view about the literary representations of the past with the strategy of "lady novelists" to set a plot in ancient times? Is their strategy problematic, or is it the rendering of this strategy?

Who is the audience of the "Adonijah", according to Miss Sinclaire?

Silly novels by lady novelists / conclusion

"Be not a baker if your head be made of butter,"

says a homely proverb, which, being interpreted, may mean, let no woman rush into print who is not prepared for the consequences. We are aware that our remarks are in a very different tone from that of the reviewers who, with perennial recurrence of precisely similar emotions, only paralleled, we imagine, in the experience of monthly nurses, tell one lady novelist after another that they "hail" her productions "with delight." We are aware that the ladies at whom our criticism is pointed are accustomed to be told, in the choicest phraseology of puffery, that their pictures of life are brilliant, their characters well drawn, their style fascinating, and their sentiments lofty. But if they are inclined to resent our plainness of speech, we ask them to reflect for a moment on the chary p. 202praise, and often captious blame, which their panegyrists give to writers whose works are on the way to become classics. No sooner does a woman show that she has genius or effective talent, than she receives the tribute of being moderately praised and severely criticised. By a peculiar thermometric adjustment, when a woman's talent is at zero, journalistic approbation is at the boiling pitch; when she attains mediocrity, it is already at no more than summer heat; and if ever she reaches excellence, critical

enthusiasm drops to the freezing point. Harriet Martineau, Currer Bell, and Mrs. Gaskell have been treated as cavalierly as if they had been men. And every critic who forms a high estimate of the share women may ultimately take in literature, will on principle abstain from any exceptional indulgence toward the productions of literary women. For it must be plain to every one who looks impartially and extensively into feminine literature that its greatest deficiencies are due hardly more to the want of intellectual power than to the want of those moral qualities that contribute to literary excellence—patient diligence, a sense of the responsibility involved in publication, and an appreciation of the sacredness of the writer's art. In the majority of women's books you see that kind of facility which springs from the absence of any high standard; that fertility in imbecile combination or feeble imitation which a little self-criticism would check and reduce to barrenness; just as with a total want of musical ear people will sing out of tune, while a degree more melodic sensibility would suffice to render them silent. The foolish vanity of wishing to appear in print, instead of being counterbalanced by any consciousness of the intellectual or moral derogation implied in futile authorship, seems to be

encouraged by the extremely false impression that to write *at all* is a proof of superiority in a woman. On this ground we believe that the average intellect of women is unfairly represented by the mass of feminine literature, and that while the few women who write well are very far above the ordinary intellectual level of their sex, the many women who write ill are very far below it. So that, after all, the severer critics are fulfilling a chivalrous duty in depriving the mere fact of feminine authorship of any false prestige which may give it a delusive attraction, and in recommending women of mediocre faculties—as at least a negative service they can render their sex—to abstain from writing.

The standing apology for women who become writers without any special qualification is that society shuts them out from other spheres of occupation. Society is a very culpable entity, and has to answer for the manufacture of many unwholesome commodities, from bad pickles to bad poetry. But society, like "matter," and Her Majesty's Government, and other lofty abstractions, has its share of excessive blame as well as excessive praise. Where there is one woman who writes from necessity, we believe there are three women who write from vanity; and besides, there is something

so antispetic in the mere healthy fact of working for one's bread, that the most trashy and rotten kind of feminine literature is not likely to have been produced under such circumstances. "In all labor there is profit;" but ladies' silly novels, we imagine, are less the result of labor than of busy idleness.

Happily, we are not dependent on argument to prove that Fiction is a department of literature in which women can, after their kind, fully equal men. A cluster of great names, both living and dead, rush to our memories in evidence that women can produce novels not only fine, but among the very finest—novels, too, that have a precious speciality, lying quite apart from masculine aptitudes and experience. No educational restrictions can shut women out from the materials of fiction, and there is no species of art which is so free from rigid requirements. Like crystalline masses, it may take any form, and yet be beautiful; we have only to pour in the right elements—genuine observation, humor, and passion. But it is precisely this absence of rigid requirement which constitutes the fatal seduction of novel-writing to incompetent women. Ladies are not wont to be very grossly deceived as to their power of playing on the piano; here certain positive difficulties of execution have to be conquered, and

incompetence inevitably breaks down. Every art which had its absolute *technique* is, to a certain extent, guarded from the intrusions of mere left-handed imbecility. But in novel-writing there are no barriers for incapacity to stumble against, no external criteria to prevent a writer from mistaking foolish facility for mastery. And so we have again and again the old story of La Fontaine's ass, who pats his nose to the flute, and, finding that he elicits some sound, exclaims, "Moi, aussie, je joue de la flute"—a fable which we commend, at parting, to the consideration of any feminine reader who is in danger of adding to the number of "silly novels by lady novelists."

Activity 6

Why is it important for Eliot that the critics judge the writings of female authors with the same measures and principles as of the male writers?

If the question is too difficult read two paragraphs from the article "NARRATIVE VOICE AND THE

"FEMININE" NOVELIST: DINAH MULOCK AND GEORGE ELIOT" by J. Russell Perkin:

"It was not until the 1840s that writing and reading novels became thoroughly respectable, finding acceptance in previously hostile groups such as Evangelicals and working-class radicals. As a result of this shift, male writers, for whom literature was now a more attractive occupation, began to worry about the competition, while critics began to distinguish the 'proper spheres' of male and female writing. Apart from a few exceptions, women novelists tended to be treated differently by reviewers, and put in a separate category of their own (see Cross 164-203; Lovell, esp. 73-118; Showalter, A Literature of Their Own 3-99). This category forms the subject of George Eliot's 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' (1856), an essay which tries to create a new space for the female producer of fiction, while still operating within the terms set by male critics like G. H. Lewes and R. H. Hutton, whom I will discuss shortly."

"[...] In the 1850s, following the popularity of Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell, the literary periodicals took a great deal of interest in the subject of women writers. In a number of review articles, men express nervousness about the growing ranks

of female authors, although they were in fact a smaller percentage of the fiction-writing class than they had been in the late eighteenth century (Lovell 81-81; Showalter, A Literature of Their Own 39-40). These articles tried to assess the differences between male and female writers, after considering the question of whether a woman should be a writer at all.10 It was generally conceded that women were particularly suited to writing fiction, and especially domestic and romantic fiction, because they were thought to be more emotional and less intellectual than men. According to George Henry Lewes, women writers should not try to imitate men, but should stick to the more modest genres appropriate to them: 'The domestic experiences which form the bulk of woman's knowledge find an appropriate form in novels; while the very nature of fiction calls for that predominance of sentiment which we have already attributed to the feminine mind' ('Lady Novelists' 72). In 'Woman in France' (1854), George Eliot herself similarly observes that gender difference is inescapably inscribed in works of 'art and literature', and that 'With a few remarkable exceptions, our own feminine literature is made up of books which could have been better written by men'."

After you have read and studied Eliot's essay, you should be able to answer following questions:

How is the essay structured? Eliot builds her argumentation in five steps, as defined by Rebecca Salter:

1. dem_____

2. crit_____

3. sugg_____

4. pos_____ ass_____

5. con_____

Why does she use a critical and assertive tone? What are her intentions? What does she advocate? Just to dismiss her female peers or to send out a positive message about the female literary authorship?

Here are some additional tasks if you are interested in further analysis of Eliot's essay:

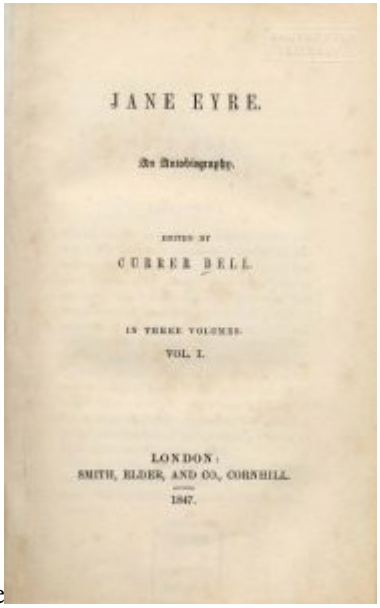
1. Look for the words or word groups with which Eliot describes women's writing and reflect upon the linguistic and stylistics tactics employed by Eliot.
2. Write instructions for women writers based on Eliot's essay. What should they omit or avoid when telling stories? What should their

language be like? Where should their themes be grounded?

To sum up what you have learn, have a look at the Prezi presentation.

Exercises

-  Learn more about Charlotte Brontë and her novel Jane Eyre. Look for information about the writer on the internet and read a text below.


JANE EYRE.

An Autobiography.

EDITED BY

CURRER BELL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., CORNHILL.

1847.

Jane Eyre

As far as the women's autobiographical discourse is concerned, *Jane Eyre* is a key 19th century work; it is groundbreaking, as it introduces a new way of autobiographical storytelling, namely, the kind of storytelling where there is no distance between the first person female narrator and her younger self that she talks about. There are also innovations in terms of the plot itself – what is especially interesting is the introducing of the "mad" Bertha Mason Rochester character and the showing of Jane Eyre's spiritual growth. Jane Eyre's voice is that of a rebel, of someone who breaks the up-to-that-time accepted rules that first person narratives about women's lives followed, i.e., the kind that Mary Brunton, Mary Martha Sherwood or Anne Brontë adopted.

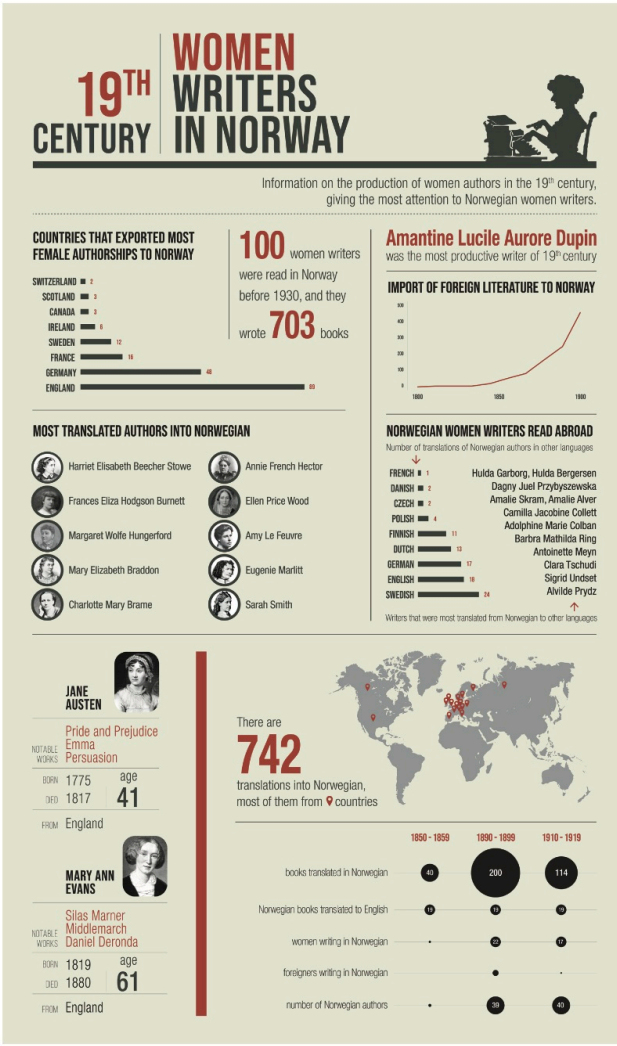
.These novels tell a governess tale; this is a tale of humiliation and of deprivation of a female character who, at the end, once she repents for her youthful sins, is rewarded with marriage to an honorable and God-fearing man. In 1847, when the novel was published, fictional autobiography was not yet a very popular genre among male writers and even less so among female writers, that is why Charlotte Brontë, by putting an equation between the narrator and the protagonist, created a novelty in the sphere of the English novel, which was defined not only by who narrates the story but also by how the story is narrated. ***Jane Eyre*** introduces a new type of a protagonist into the English novel, as the main protagonist is intelligent, independent, lively, but within the scope of the accepted characteristics, an individualist, but that of a common appearance.

Jane Eyre is also a rebel who thinks about (limited) freedoms of women and is not apologetic about her past mistakes. There is no tension between Jane as a first person narrator and Jane as a child (so the protagonist at the beginning of the narrative), in fact, a harmonic relationship exists between them. As a grown-up, Jane doesn't justify her childhood rebelliousness, instead, she explains it with the cruelty of the environment where she lived and which exposed her to daily humiliations.

Further Reading

Learn more about Charlotte Brontë by watching the documentary about her and her sisters Emily and Ann.

Look for receptions of Charlotte Brontë in the VRE NEWW Women writers. Is there an entry about the reception in your language? Can you find the article quoted there in the digital library in your country? What can you sum up about Brontë's reception looking just at the entries in VRE? Below you find some visualisations from the VRE done by the students of the University of Ljubljana based on the receptions in the VRE. What can you say about the Norwegian reception of foreign women writers, especially Brontë and Eliot? Write a short essay about it (200-500 words).



Infographics *Women Writers in Norway* was made by the students at the Faculty of Computer and Information Science, University of Ljubljana. Students: Paola Blašković, Lina Lumburovska, Andrej Petruševski. Mentor: Narvika Bovcon. Research questions: Marie Nedregotten Sørbø. 2018.

See also: MIHURKO PONIŽ, Katja, BOVCON, Narvika,

NEDREGOTTEN SØRBØ, Marie, PARENTE-ČAPKOVÁ, Viola, SANZ, Amelia, VAN DIJK, Suzan, VAUPOTIČ, Aleš. Teaching women writers with NEWW Virtual Research Environment. In: FIŠER, Darja (ur.), PANČUR, Andrej (ur.). Zbornik konference Jezikovne tehnologije in digitalna humanistika, 20. september – 21. september 2018, Ljubljana, Slovenija = Proceedings of the Conference on Language Technologies & Digital Humanities, September 20th – 21st 2018, Ljubljana, Slovenia. , pp. 254-255.

References:

Perkin, James Russell. "Narrative voice and the 'feminine' novelist: Dinah Mulock and George Eliot." *Victorian Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1992, pp. 24–42. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27794709. Accessed 7 July 2020.

5.

“IT IS ONLY CECILIA, OR CAMILLA, OR BELINDA”: JANE AUSTEN’S VINDICATION OF MARIA EDGEWORTH

Learning Objectives

In this chapter you will learn about or refresh your knowledge on Jane Austen. You will read an excerpt from the novel *Northanger Abbey* where she mentions Maria Edgeworth and discusses the importance of her novels. You will also learn about the courtship novel and explore how this definition matches Austen’s novels. Finally, you will get acquainted with The Reading Experience Database and will be able to explain the differences between

Austen's and Brontë's perception of the domestic world as it is mirrored in their writing style.

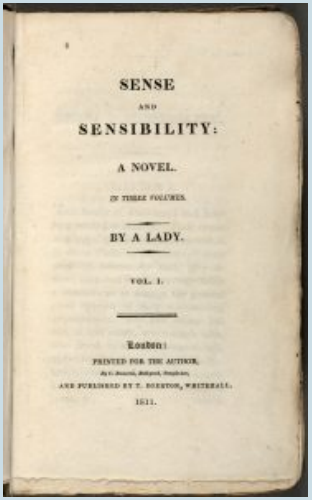
Jane Austen by Cassandra Austen,drawing,1810

Jane Austen, (born December 16, 1775, Steventon, Hampshire, England—died July 18, 1817, Winchester, Hampshire), English writer who first gave the novel its distinctly modern character through her treatment of ordinary people in everyday life. She published four novels during her lifetime: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Emma* (1815). In these and in *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* (published together posthumously in 1817), she vividly depicted English middle-class life during the early 19th century. Her novels not only defined the era's novel of manners, but they also became timeless classics that remained critical and popular successes two centuries after her death.

Brian C. Southam: Jane Austen, Enciclopaedia Britannica.

Watch the documentary about Jane Austen.

Activity 1


SENSE
AND
SENSIBILITY:
A NOVEL.
BY A LADY.
VOL. I.

- Describe the importance of the library owned by Austen's father.
- What was the status of the novel in Austen's times.
- Who were the male and female authors whose influence on Austen was of great importance?
- How is the conflict between classicism and romanticism mirrored in the novel *Sense and*

Sensibility?

- Which descriptions of characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are praised for being realistic?
- In which novel do we meet a heroine as a young girl and follow her story from childhood onwards?
- What have you learned about the publishing world?
- How does Mr. Knightley's proposal to Emma reflect Austen's matured style?
- In what ways does the heroine of *Persuasion* differ from other Austen's heroines?

Northanger Abbey

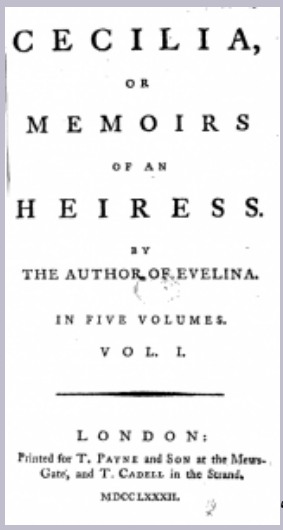
Read a summary of the novel and take the plot overview quiz. You can also watch the movie.

Jane Austen: The Northanger Abbey (1817)

The progress of the friendship between Catherine and Isabella was quick as its beginning had been warm, and they passed so rapidly through every gradation of increasing tenderness that there was shortly no fresh proof of it to be given to their friends or themselves. They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm in arm when they walked, pinned up each other's train for the dance, and were not to be divided in the set; and if a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up, to read novels together. Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and

impolitic custom so common with novel-writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding—joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us leave it to the reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne,

are eulogized by a thousand pens—there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. "I am no novel-reader—I seldom look into novels—Do not imagine that I often read novels—It is really very well for a novel." Such is the common cant. "And what are you reading, Miss—?" "Oh! It is only a novel!" replies the young lady, while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame.


CECILIA,
OR
MEMOIRS
OF AN
HEIRESS.
BY
THE AUTHOR OF EVELINA.
IN FIVE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.
LONDON:
Printed for T. Payne and Son at the Mews-Gate, and T. Cadell in the Strand.
MDCCLXXXII.

"It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda"; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the

> happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language. Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the Spectator, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name; though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste: the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation which no longer concern anyone living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it.
>
> Source: Jane Austen: The Northanger Abbey

Jane Austen names the heroines of Maria Edgeworth's novels. Ellen Moers wrote about Austen's relationship

towards her predecessors: "The fact is that Austen studied Maria Edgeworth more attentively than Scott, and Fanny Burney more than Richardson; and she came closer to meeting Mme de Staël than she did to meeting any of the literary men of her age." (Moers [2]1985: 44-45)

If you are not familiar with Maria Edgeworth, read about her below.

Maria Edgeworth was born on January 1, 1767, Blackbourton, Oxfordshire, England and died on May 22, 1849 in Edgeworthstown, Ireland. She wrote children's books and novels.

"She lived in England until 1782, when the family went to Edgeworthstown, County Longford, in midwestern Ireland, where Maria, then 15 and also the eldest daughter, assisted her father in managing his estate. By doing this, she acquired

the knowledge of rural economy and of the Irish peasantry that was to be the backbone of her novels. Domestic life at Edgeworthstown was busy and happy. Encouraged by her father, Maria began her writing in the common sitting room, where the 21 other children in the family provided material and audience for her stories. She published the stories entitled *The Parent's Assistant* in 1796. Even the intrusive moralizing, attributed to her father's editing, does not wholly suppress their vitality, and the children who appear in them, especially the impetuous Rosamond, are the first real children in English literature since Shakespeare. Her first novel, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), written without her father's interference, reveals her gift for social observation, character sketch, and authentic dialogue and is free of lengthy lecturing. It established the genre of the "regional novel," and its influence was enormous; Sir Walter Scott acknowledged his debt to Edgeworth in writing *Waverley*. Her next work, *Belinda* (1801), a society novel, unfortunately marred by her father's insistence on a happy ending, was particularly admired by Jane Austen."

Source: Enciclopeadia Brittanica.

One of her most successful novels was *Belinda* (1801). In it, themes of love, courtship, and marriage are exposed, but also, it problematizes the relationship between reason and emotions, between limitations and personal freedom, and between society and a free spirit. The main character is a young girl, who is sent to Lady Delacour, a noblewoman, in

order for the Lady to help her find a suitable husband. Lady Delacour, who is actually the real heroine of the novel, enchants Belinda with her worldliness, however, the title character also notices Lady Delacour's moodiness and her reasonableness. Lady Delacour, therefore, begins to feel exhausted, tired of the shallow social life and that causes her to become melancholy. We learn about Lady Delacour's story through her long first-person narrative told to Belinda. In her story, she also touches upon the issue of breastfeeding. She is convinced that her child died because she succumbed to the then fashion among noblewomen to breastfeed, even though it was believed that that didn't enable the best possible development for the child. In her narrative, Lady Delacour also reveals all the sadness associated with arranged marriages among aristocrats; her marriage doesn't make her happy, so she searches for distractions in flirting with other men, in shallow social interactions and in striving to achieve the leading position among high society women in London. Belinda is appalled by Lady Delacour's ruined marriage and also by the fact that their daughter Helen is raised in a middle class family. With Belinda's help, Lady Delacour manages to discard some of her bad habits. The highlight of their friendship is represented by Lady Delacour's confession about a wound on her breasts which she got when she, dressed up as a man, was in duel with another woman, also dressed up as a man. She is convinced that this wound gave her cancer and that she would soon die. Influenced by a scheming servant,

she accuses Belinda of seducing Lord Delacour, so Belinda is sent away. Belinda moves to the Percivals, a family, who is an embodiment and an idealization of the domestic values. Lady Anne Percival is gentle, maternal and sensitive, mostly satisfied with her role of a wife and a mother. She is educated, well read and represents Belinda's role model. Clarence Hervey is in love with Belinda, but he soon finds himself in a moral dilemma. He was supposed to marry Virginia, who was already being prepared for this marriage by him, but he doesn't love her. Virginia sets him free with her confession that she is in love with someone else and that Hervey can marry Belinda. At the end of the novel, the title character not only gets a husband, but also contributes to Lady Delacour's transformation. Namely, Lady Delacour becomes the main supportive figure in their home and by that, she enables her family to be happily reunited once again.Before that, she also makes sure that Belinda doesn't marry her Creole suitor and slave owner (critics identify in this element a colonial nature of the novel). Apart from the seeming simplicity of the story line, the novel nevertheless continuously moves along the lines of womanhood/manhood, inner self/ outer self, English/ foreign, home/ public sphere, white/ black. Marriage is shown as a market place, where the qualities of a girl should be advertised in the same way one would advertise goods. Belinda is, throughout the narrative, an exemplary character, but others have many flaws. In relation to Virginia, Clarence is patronizing and hides her from the world without any

hesitation – all this with the purpose of raising an obedient wife.The author is openly critical towards the Rousseau's concept of raising the ideal woman. It is very likely that the most interesting character in the novel is Harriot Freke, a woman who challenges Lady Delacour to a duel, a bold woman who doesn't care much about her femininity and the etiquettes related to it; she wears men's clothes, demands rights for women and passionately schemes against Lady Delacour when she is disappointed in Lady Delacour's behaviour. Before that, they were great friends. The narrator strictly refuses and criticizes her actions, however, her presence in the novel points to the observation that womanliness is not a uniform category. Also, the black African servant is shown in a positive light by M. Edgeworth. He marries an English peasant girl and becomes a tenant of an estate, however, this particular part was left out the third edition of the novel. The novel ends with Lady Delacour's arrangement of a "tableau vivant" (living pictures).

Belinda is a **courtship novel**. Read Katherine Sobba Green's definition of a courtship novel:

"What distinguished courtship novels from other contemporary narratives was that thematically they offered a revisionist view: women, no longer merely unwilling victims, became heroines with significant, though modest, prerogatives of choice and action. Naturally, over its eighty year history the courtship novel varied its formal expression with literary

fashion and its politics according to the class and circumstances of its author, so that it is neither desirable nor possible to specify a normative plot outline. More often then not, however, the courtship novel began with the heroine's coming out and ended with her wedding. It detailed a young woman's entrance into society, the problems arising from that situation, her courtship, and finally her choice (almost always fortunate) among the suitors. Thematically, it probed, from a woman's point of view, the emotional difficulties of moving toward affective individuation and companionate marriage despite the regressive effects of female role definition. In this sense, the novel of courtship, appropriated domestic fiction to feminist purposes. By creating a feminized space-that is by centering its story in the brief period between a young woman's coming out and her marriage-this subgenre fostered heightened awareness of sexual politics within the gendered arena of language, especially with regard to defining male and female spheres of action." (Green 1991: 2-3).

Activity 2

Where does the plot of Belinda overlap with the definition of the courtship novel?

How does Edgeworth challenge the "male and female spheres of action"?

Think about the contrast between Mrs. Anne Percival and Lady Delacour. Can you discover any traits of feminist stance in the novel *Belinda*?

Read a Jane Austen novel. Do you think that her novels could be described as courtship novels? Explain your answer and back it up with examples from the respective novel.

Now look for the receptions of Austen's novel among her readers. Go to the of The Reading Experience Database, created by the Open University, UK. Then go to the "Search" page and scroll down to 'Advanced search'. In the box 'Keyword (in evidence)' type 'Austen.' Then in the section headed 'Reader/ Listener/Reading Group', type 'Charlotte Brontë' in the 'name' box. Where it says 'search for name in', choose 'reader.' Scroll right down the page and hit 'submit'. You should find Brontë's opinion about Austen:

"I have likewise read one of Miss Austen's works "Emma" – read it with interest and with just the degree of admiration which Miss Austen herself would have thought sensible and suitable – anything like warmth or enthusiasm; anything energetic,

poignant, heartfelt, is utterly out of place in commending these works: all demonstration the authoress would have met with a well-bred sneer, would have calmly scorned as outre and extravagant... she ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound: the Passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy Sisterhood...!"

What do you think are the reasons for Brontë's reserved attitude toward Austen? If the question is too difficult, then try to find out about Charlotte Brontë's style of writing and compare it with Austen's.

Further Watching

Watch another documentary about Austen.

References:

Green, Katherine Sobba: The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820:

A Feminized Genre. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991.

Moers, Elen: *Literary Women*. Harden City, New York: Doubleday, ^{2}1985.

6.

HER LOSSES MAKE OUR GAINS ASHAMED: EMILY DICKINSON'S DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF GEORGE ELIOT

Learning Objectives

In this chapter you will learn about the American poet Emily Dickinson and interpret her poem 1562.

You will gain knowledge about feminist and other interpretations of Dickinson's poetry and her relationship to George Eliot.

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (December 10, 1830 – May 15, 1886) was an American poet.

Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, into a prominent family with strong ties to its community. After studying at the Amherst Academy for seven years in her youth, she briefly attended the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary before returning to her family's house in Amherst.

Evidence suggests that Dickinson lived much of her life in isolation. Considered an eccentric by locals, she developed a penchant for white clothing and was known for her reluctance to greet guests or, later in life, to even leave her bedroom. Dickinson never married, and most friendships between her and others depended entirely upon correspondence.[2]

While Dickinson was a prolific poet, only 10 of her nearly

1,800 poems were published during her lifetime.[3] The poems published then were usually edited significantly to fit conventional poetic rules. Her poems were unique to her era. They contain short lines, typically lack titles, and often use slant rhyme as well as unconventional capitalization and punctuation.[4] Many of her poems deal with themes of death and immortality, two recurring topics in letters to her friends.

Although Dickinson's acquaintances were likely aware of her writing, it was not until after her death in 1886—when Lavinia, Dickinson's younger sister, discovered her cache of poems—that the breadth of her work became public. Her first collection of poetry was published in 1890 by personal acquaintances Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, though both heavily edited the content. A 1998 *New York Times* article revealed that of the many edits made to Dickinson's work, the name "Susan" was often deliberately removed. At least eleven of Dickinson's poems were dedicated to sister-in-law Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson, though all the dedications were obliterated, presumably by Todd.[5] A complete, and mostly unaltered, collection of her poetry became available for the first time when scholar Thomas H. Johnson published *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* in 1955.

Source: Wikipedia

To find out more about Emily Dickinson, watch the documentary about her and answer following questions:

Activity 1

The Republican.

ORIGINAL POETRY.

The Sleeping.

Safe in their alabaster chambers,
Untouched by morning,
And untouched by noon,
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection,
Rafter of satin, and roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze
In her castle above them,
Babbles the bee in a stolid ear,
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant ecstasies:
Ah! what sagacity perished here!

College Hill, June, 1861.

"The Shadow of Thy Wing."

Weary of life's great noon, its dust and din,
Faint with its toiling, suffering with its sin,
In childlike faith my heart to Thee I bring,
For refuge in "the shadow of thy wing."

Like a worn bird of passage, left behind
Wounded, and sinking, by its faithless kind,
With flight unsteady, seeking sheltered rest,
I come for shelter to Thy faithful breast.

Like a proud ship, dismasted by the gale,
Her bonnets lost and rifled every sail,
To the deep waters to Thy love I cling,
And hasten to the refuge of Thy wing.

O Thou, thy people's confidence alway,
Their light in darkness, and their guide by day,
Their anchor 'mid the storm, their hope in pain,
Their joy in pain, their fortress in alarm!

We are all weak, Thy strength we humbly crave;
We are all lost, and Thou alone canst save;
A weary world, to Thy dear arm we cling,
And hope for all a refuge "'neath Thy wing."

How did Emily Dickinson become a legend?

How many poems were published during her lifetime?

What was her family background?

What kind of education did she receive?

How is her study of natural sciences reflected in her poetry?

What was her relationship towards religion like?

What was the longest journey in her life?

Which themes were continually occurring in her work?

With whom did she discuss her poetry?

What have you found out about her poems in the documentary?

The characteristics of her mature poetry are pithiness of expression, unusual selection of figures of speech, and the poet's connecting them into unique lyrical imagery that reflects Dickinson's precise thoughts, revelations and judgements.

She uses assonance, often times she would write words in capital letters, she also uses her own punctuation, spelling and syntax. Thematically, the poems that the author herself never titled or collected in one book can be divided into categories: friendship and love; poetry, art and imagination; nature: external scenes and deeper meanings; suffering and personal growth; death, immortality and religion.

Many studies are dedicated to the theme of love and friendship, they approach it especially from the point of view of autobiographic writing. Newer studies show that it is possible that the inspiration for many poems came not only

from her love towards men, but also towards women (or maybe both sexes), as the poet had, early in her life, many friendships. For instance, she wrote passionate letters to Susan Huntigton Gilbert, a friend, who later on became her sister-in-law. Her love poems are written in such way that it is not possible to identify the gender of the object of the lyric subject's affection, but they mostly express the belief that a happy union isn't possible. Some of her poems are addressed to an unnamed women, to "her". Her nature poems express a descriptive and philosophical string of thoughts; "the first one focuses on portraying beautiful scenes from nature, such as flowers, sunrise, sunset, or a special shade of light which is typical for a specific season or time of day, whilst the other, philosophical poetry searches for the path to the essence of the world and life as such.

As an opposite to the poems that wittingly and humorously portray natural phenomena, we find poems that reveal the dark and suffering side of the poet's personality. In addition to existential and love themes, Emily Dickinson also tackles social topics which she approaches with a substantial amount of satire.

Read an excerpt from the book *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History, and Discord* by Betsy Erkkila:

"During the years of literary maturity, Dickinson was particularly drawn to the life and work of George Eliot, whose portrait hung in her room along with those of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Thomas Carlyle (Fig. 4). Beginning with Adam Bede (1859), which was given to her by Sue, Dickinson read virtually all of Eliot's major works, and her letters are full of fervent and sometimes cryptic exchanges about Eliot's life and work. Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life (1871–1872) was in Dickinson's view a form of 'glory' that had brought Elito 'immortality' in time; and Daniel Deronda (1874–76 was "the Lane to the Indes" that offered a kind of earthly and humane sustenance." (p.83-84)

In 1883 Emily Dickinson read Mathilde Blind's life of George Eliot and in April sent a poem to Thomas Niles, the editor of the Roberts Brothers publishing house.

Emily Dickinson: Poem 1562

To Thomas Niles
From ED

April 1883

Dear friend –

Thank you for the kindness.

I am glad if the Bird seemed true to you.

Please efface the others and receive these three, which are more like him – a Thunderstorm – a Humming Bird, and a Country Burial. The Life of Marian Evans had much I never knew – a Doom of Fruit without the Bloom, like the Niger Fig.

> Her Losses make our Gains ashamed –
> She bore Life's empty Pack
> As gallantly as if the East
> Were swinging at her Back.
> Life's empty Pack is heaviest,
> As every Porter knows –
> In vain to punish Honey –
> It only sweeter grows.

Source: Emily Dickinson correspondence

Dickinson also wrote about Eliot in other letters:

"In a letter (L389) of 1873 to her cousins she had said of her, 'What do I think of Middlemarch? What do I think of glory?' And after George Eliot's death on 26 December 1880 Emily had written (L710) to her cousins, saying, 'The look of the words [stating her death] as they lay in print I shall never forget. ...The gift of belief which her greatness denied her, I trust she receives in the childhood of the kingdom of

heaven. As childhood is earth's confiding time, perhaps having no childhood, she lost her way to the early trust, and no later came (L710).'"

Source: http://www.emilydickinsonpoems.org/Emily_Dickinson_commentary.pdf: 474.

Interpretation of the metaphors in the letter: a Doom of Fruit without the Bloom, like the Niger Fig

Collamer M. Abott. explains this line in the letter in his article "Dickinson's Letter 814" and quotes Richard B. Sewall, who says the poem seems to epitomize Eliot's life according to Blind's biography, which describes a life "far from easy [...], especially the earlier years with much of the frustration and many of the spiritual anxieties Emily has suffered through". Abbott continues: "Suddenly, we realize that 'a Doom of Fruit without the Bloom' describes Emily's own poems: beautiful flowers hidden in a luscious fruit — her poetic life eclipsed. But, if Emily Dickinson is talking about something else that we can guess at only by stretching our imagination, this may be the most sexually charged of all her metaphors." (Abbott 2001:80)

If you are interested in learning more about Emily Dickinson's love life, you can find some information here. You can also read a scholarly article by Sylvia Hennerberg. Her relationship toward her friend and later sister-in-law is also depicted in the movie Wild nights with Emily.

Another explanation is offered by Karen Richardson Gee in the article "“My George Eliot” and My Emily Dickinson”.

"The image of the Niger Fig may be related to a phrase in Eliot's 1871 verse drama *Armgart*. The main character, an opera singer, has survived a serious illness, but the cost of the cure was her voice. Her doctor, thinking she should be grateful to be alive and still holding out hope that her voice will return, says: 'Tis not such utter loss. The freshest bloom Merely, has left the fruit; the fruit itself.... ARMGART: Is ruined,

withered, is a thing to hide Away from scorn or pity.' (101) If Dickinson is responding to this image, she seems to say that an important element in Evans's life has been destroyed. But as the poem enclosed with the letter affirms, Evans's loss of flower — her childhood — did not destroy her ability to create beauty."

Activity 2

Interpret the poem. Decipher the metaphors in it. If the task is too difficult, read some of the explanations below first.

Here Losses make our Gains ashamed.

Gee: Because of Dickinson's perception of Evans's life as revealed in the letters, the "losses" probably refer to Evans's loss of faith and loss of childhood.

She bore Life's empty Pack

Sandra M. Gilbert wrote a thorough study (Life's Empty Pack: Notes toward a Literary Daughteronomy) about Dickinson's poem and asks where the striking but mysteries phrases ("A Doom of Fruit without a Bloom", "Life's empty Pack", "In vain to punish Honey) come from. Gilbert argues: "Eliot represents the conundrum of the empty pack which recently has confronted every woman writer. Specifically, this

conundrum is the riddle of daughterhood, a figurative empty pack with which – as it has seemed to many women artists – not just every powerful mother but every literal mother presents her daughter. For such artists, the terror of the female precursor is not that she is an emblem of power but, rather, that when she achieves her greatest strength, her power becomes self-subverting: in the moment of psychic transformation that is the moment of creativity, the literary mother necessarily speaks both of and for the father, reminding her female child that she is not and cannot be his inheritor: like her mother and like Eliot's Dorothea, the daughter must inexorably become a 'foundress of nothing'. For human culture, says the literary mother, is bound by rules which make it possible for a woman to speak but which oblige her to speak of her own powerlessness, since such rules might seem to constitute what Jacques Lacan calls the "Law of the Father", the law that means culture is by definition both patriarchal and phallocentric and must therefore transmit the empty pack of disinheritance to every daughter. Not surprisingly, then, even while the literary daughter, like the literaral one, desires the matrilineal legitimation incarnated in her precursor/mother, she fears her literary mother: the more the mother represents culture, the more inexorably she tells the daughter that she cannot have a mother because she has been signed and assigned to the Law of the Father. (Gilbert 1985: 357)

As gallantly as if the East
Were swinging at her Back.

Greg Mattingly states: "When laboring against some adversity under especially advantageous conditions, we may speak of having "the wind at our back," aiding our efforts rather than exposing them. Here again, in this poem, the particular adversity is an experience of loss, a loss that leaves a feeling of emptiness. Emptiness, implying loneliness, is the hardest of all conditions to bear, the speaker implies, and so paradoxically, the empty pack feels heaviest. Yet *She*, the subject of this poem, *bore* it as if the warm wind of freedom were *swinging at her back*. The word "swinging" as used here is an example of Dickinson's strikingly original and effective use of common vocabulary. There is a free and easy feeling to this pulsating, assisting easterly wind." (Mattingly 2018: 67)

In vain to punish Honey –
It only sweeter grows.

Gilbert explains: "Though the 'empty Pack' of daughteronomy may be heavy, as Dickinson saw perhaps more clearly than they, it is vain to 'punish' the cultural 'Honey' it manufactures; for the daughter who understands her duty and her destiny, such honey 'only sweeter' grows". (Gilbert 1985: 378)

Further readings

To learn about Emily Dickinson's reception of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, read chapter 3/II from the book *Literary Women* by Ellen Moers.

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7.

“BEAT PURER, HEART, AND HIGHER, TILL GOD UNSEX THEE ON THE HEAVENLY SHORE.”: ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING’S TRIBUTE TO GEORGE SAND

Learning Objectives

- In this chapter you will
    - learn about Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Sand,

- learn more about Sand's oeuvre by reading a chapter from her novel *Indiana*,
- you will analyse and reflect upon Barrett Browning's sonnets about Sand,
- by reading an article by Margaret Morlier, you will be provided with a larger historical context of Barrett Browning's sonnets and you will be able to fully understand the metaphors in both sonnets.

Do you know the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning? Read two poems written

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning,
dedicated to the French novelist George Sand.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

To George Sand: A Desire (1844); To George Sand: A Recognition (1844)

Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man,
Self-called George Sand! whose soul, amid the lions
Of thy tumultuous senses, moans defiance
And answers roar for roar, as spirits can:
I would some mild miraculous thunder ran
Above the applauded circus, in appliance
Of thine own nobler nature's strength and science,
Drawing two pinions, white as wings of swan,
From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the place
With holier light! that thou to woman's claim

And man's, mightst join beside the angel's grace

Of a pure genius sanctified from blame

Till child and maiden pressed to thine embrace

To kiss upon thy lips a stainless fame.

https://poets.org/poem/george-sand-desire

To George Sand: A Recognition

True genius, but true woman!dost deny

Thy woman's nature with a manly scorn

And break away the gauds and armlets worn

By weaker women in captivity?

Ah, vain denial! that revolted cry

Is sobbed in by a woman's voice forlorn—

Thy woman's hair, my sister, all unshorn

Floats back dishevelled strength in agony

Disproving thy man's name: and while before

The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,

We see thy woman-heart beat evermore

Through the large flame. Beat purer, heart, and higher,

Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore,

Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire!

https://poets.org/poem/george-sand-recognition

Activity 2

Read some lines from the book *Literary Women* by Ellen Moers about Barrett Browning's admiration of

Sand, as seen in her correspondence with her friend and author Mary Russel Mitford:

Miss Barrett tried to persuade Miss Mitford that they should send their latest books, tied together in a parcel for courage, to the great Mme Sand. They both enormously admired her, but, as respectable English literary spinsters, they were nervous about approaching her. For George Sand not only had lovers (which was known to happen, even in England, in the high social circles with which Sand, by family background, was associated); but she wore pants when it suited her convenience as a young woman, and she always smoked—depths of depravity which only twentieth-century women can appreciate at their true value. "Suppose you send her 'Belford Regis' or another work", Miss Barrett suggested to Miss Milford,

> and let me slip mine into the shade of it? Suppose we join *so* in expressing, as two English female writers, our sense of the genius of that distinguished woman?—if it did not strike you as presumption in me to put my name to yours as a writer, saying *'we'*. We are equally bold at any rate. Mr Kenyon told me I was 'a daring person' for the introduction of those sonnets ... [the two she wrote to George Sand, and published in her

> *Poem*s of 1844]. Well!—are you inclined to do it ?Will you? Write and tell me. I would give anything to have a letter from her, though it smelt of cigar. And it would, of course!

For once, Miss Barrett's wish was not immediately gratified; there was to be no tobacco-scented letter. But there were at last to be, though Robert Browning protested, two visits to Mme Sand. (Moers [2]1985: 54)

Why do you think it was so important for Elizabeth Barrett Browning to contact George Sand? To which woman writer would you send a letter/ an e-mail of admiration? How would you express your praise? Would you praise her writings, her personal integrity, or something else?

Activity 3

- Describe your feelings about the poem and try to interpret it. Do you need more information about George Sand? Do you think that if we know who she was the interpretation is different? Explain your answer. If you are not a specialist in George Sand then learn more about her or deepen your knowledge by listening to the BBC podcast about her life and work. Answer the following questions: What was Sand's family background? What was the role of her grandmother? You can also watch a video or a French documentary about the Nohant mansion.

What was Sand's education like? Whom did she marry?When did her rebellion against social norms take place in a dramatic way for the first time?Which was her first novel? What does an eponymous heroine of the novel seek? How does she describe marriage?Could we speak about autobiographic traits in Sand's novels? How can Sand's crossdressing be explained? When and why did she wear male attire?What rights did she demand for women? Was she a suffragette? Describe the heroines of her

novels. What is typical for her writings? What influence did she have on her contemporaries and what status does she have now?Who is the narrator in her novels?Sand's gender identity was ambiguous, she decided for a male pseudonym and wore man's clothes. This poses a question – "Did she write as a woman?" What do you think? Find some arguments in the talk by Professor Belinda Jack.Now take a break and watch a video about Sand's and Chopin's stay on Mallorca. You have heard in the BBC podcast that Sand's writings display a large variety of style, cover a wide range of subjects and types of writing extremely well and that many of her heroines strive for liberation and that a marriage is depicted as a slavery of a woman.Her works have a lot of

autobiographical traits, she is more indirect here than in her autobiography. She depicts women who fight for their love despite social limitations, they fight especially hard against loveless marriages. Most of George Sand's heroines are morally superior to men with whom they were supposed to marry, sometimes even lovers fall into that inferior category. In *Indiana*, the husband is an aggressive tyrant and the lover is a cynical and heartless egoist; the lover stays cold even after Indiana bravely leaves her husband, in fact, he starts to search for new love affairs. The author first showed, without any embellishments, the relationship between the married couple, towards the end of the novel she also points to the husband's brutality when he finds his wife's diary entry. First, read an article about *Indiana* and then read a chapter from *Indiana* to learn more about Sand's style and critical depiction of a male tyrant.

George Sand; Indiana, chapter XXVI

During the three months that elapsed between the despatch of this letter and its arrival at Ile Bourbon, Madame Delmare's situation had become almost intolerable, as the result of a domestic incident of the greatest importance to her. She had adopted the depressing habit of writing down every evening a narrative of the sorrowful thoughts of the day. This journal of her sufferings was addressed to Raymon, and, although she had no intention of sending it to him, she talked with him, sometimes passionately, sometimes bitterly, of the misery of her life and of the sentiments which she could not overcome. These papers fell into Delmare's hands, that is to say, he broke open the box which contained them as well as Raymon's letters, and devoured them with a jealous, frenzied eye. In the first outbreak of his wrath he lost the power to restrain himself and went outside, with fast-beating heart and clenched fists, to await her return from her walk. Perhaps, if she had been a few minutes later, the unhappy man would have had time to recover himself; but their evil star decreed that she should appear before him almost immediately. Thereupon, unable to utter a word, he

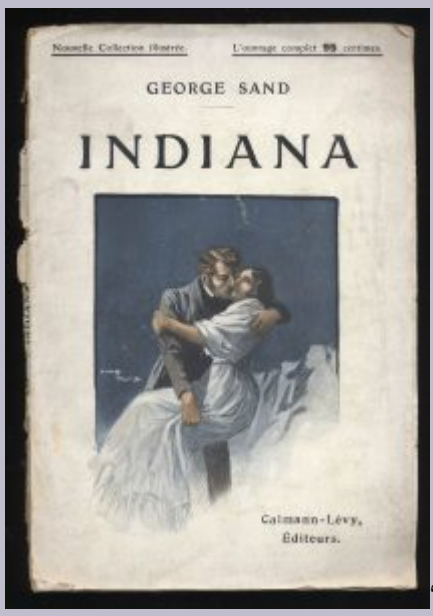
seized her by the hair, threw her down and stamped on her forehead with his heel.

He had no sooner made that bloody mark of his brutal nature upon a poor, weak creature, than he was horrified at what he had done. He fled in dire dismay, and locked himself in his room, where he cocked his pistol preparatory to blowing out his brains; but as he was about to pull the trigger he looked out on the veranda and saw that Indiana had risen and, with a calm, self-possessed air, was wiping away the blood that covered her face. As he thought that he had killed her, his first feeling was of joy when he saw her on her feet; then his wrath blazed up anew.

"It is only a scratch," he cried,"and you deserve a thousand deaths! No, I will not kill myself; for then you would go and rejoice over it in your lover's arms. I do not propose to assure the happiness of both of you; I propose to live to make you suffer, to see you die by inches of deathly ennui, to dishonor the infamous creature who has made a fool of me!"

He was battling with the tortures of jealous rage, when Ralph entered the veranda by another door and found Indiana in the disheveled condition in which that horrible scene had left her. But she had

not manifested the slightest alarm, she had not uttered a cry, she had not raised her hand to ask for mercy. Weary of life as she was, it seemed that she had been desirous to give Delmare time to commit murder by refraining from calling for help. It is certain that when the assault took place Ralph was within twenty yards, and that he had not heard the slightest sound.



"Indiana!" he cried, recoiling in horror and surprise; "who has wounded you thus?"

"Do you ask?" she replied with a bitter smile; "what

other *than your friend* has the *right* and the inclination?"

Ralph dropped the cane he held; he needed no other weapons than his great hands to strangle Delmare. He reached his door in two leaps and burst it open with his fist. But he found Delmare lying on the floor, with purple cheeks and swollen throat, struggling in the noiseless convulsions of apoplexy.

He seized the papers that were scattered over the floor. When he recognized Raymon's handwriting and saw the ruins of the letter-box, he understood what had happened; and, carefully collecting the accusing documents, he hastened to hand them to Madame Delmare and urged her to burn them at once. Delmare had probably not taken time to read them all.

Then he begged her to go to her room while he summoned the slaves to look after the colonel; but she would neither burn the papers nor hide the wound.

"No," she said haughtily, "I will not do it! That man did not scruple to tell Madame de Carvajal of my flight long ago; he made haste to publish what he called my dishonor. I propose to show to everybody this token of his own dishonor which he has taken pains

to stamp on my face. It is a strange sort of justice that requires one to keep secret another's crimes, when that other assumes the right to brand one without mercy!"

When Ralph found the colonel was in a condition to listen to him, he heaped reproaches upon him with more energy and severity than one would have thought him capable of exhibiting. Thereupon Delmare, who certainly was not an evil-minded man, wept like a child over what he had done; but he wept without dignity, as a man can do when he abandons himself to the sensation of the moment, without reasoning as to its causes and effects. Prompt to jump to the opposite extreme, he would have called his wife and solicited her pardon; but Ralph objected and tried to make him understand that such a puerile reconciliation would impair the authority of one without wiping out the injury done to the other. He was well aware that there are injuries which are never forgiven and miseries which one can never forget.

From that moment, the husband's personality became hateful in the wife's eyes. All that he did to atone for his treatment of her deprived him of the slight consideration he had retained thus far. He had

in very truth made a tremendous mistake; the man who does not feel strong enough to be cold and implacable in his vengeance should abjure all thought of impatience or resentment. There is no possible rôle between that of the Christian who forgives and that of the man of the world who spurns. But Delmare had his share of selfishness too; he felt that he was growing old, that his wife's care was becoming more necessary to him every day. He was terribly afraid of solitude, and if, in the paroxysm of his wounded pride, he recurred to his habits as a soldier and maltreated her, reflection soon led him back to the characteristic weakness of old men, whom the thought of desertion terrifies. Too enfeebled by age and hardships to aspire to become a father, he had remained an old bachelor in his home, and had taken a wife as he would have taken a housekeeper. It was not from affection for her, therefore, that he forgave her for not loving him, but from regard for his own comfort: and if he grieved at his failure to command her affections, it was because he was afraid that he should be less carefully tended in his old age.

When Madame Delmare, for her part, being deeply aggrieved by the operation of the laws of society, summoned all her strength of mind to hate and despise them, there was a wholly personal feeling at

the bottom of her thoughts. But it may be that this craving for happiness which consumes us, this hatred of injustice, this thirst for liberty which ends only with life, are the constituent elements of *egotism*, a name by which the English designate love of self, considered as one of the privileges of mankind and not as a vice. It seems to me that the individual who is selected out of all the rest to suffer from the working of institutions that are advantageous to his fellowmen ought, if he has the least energy in his soul, to struggle against this arbitrary yoke. I also think that the greater and more noble his soul is, the more it should rankle and fester under the blows of injustice. If he has ever dreamed that happiness was to be the reward of virtue, into what ghastly doubts, what desperate perplexity must he be cast by the disappointments which experience brings!

Thus all Indiana's reflections, all her acts, all her sorrows were a part of this great and terrible struggle between nature and civilization. If the desert mountains of the island could have concealed her long, she would assuredly have taken refuge among them on the day of the assault upon her; but Bourbon was not of sufficient extent to afford her a secure hiding-place, and she determined to place the sea and uncertainty as to her place of refuge

between her tyrant and herself. When she had formed this resolution, she felt more at ease and was almost gay and unconcerned at home. Delmare was so surprised and delighted that he indulged apart in this brutal reasoning: that it was a good thing to make women feel the law of the strongest now and then.

Thereafter she thought of nothing but flight, solitude and independence; she considered in her tortured, grief-stricken brain innumerable plans of a romantic establishment in the deserts of India or Africa. At night she followed the flight of the birds to their resting-place at Ile Rodrigue. That deserted island promised her all the pleasures of solitude, the first craving of a broken heart. But the same reasons that prevented her from flying to the interior of Bourbon caused her to abandon the idea of seeking refuge in the small islands near by. She often met at the house tradesmen from Madagascar, who had business relations with her husband; dull, vulgar, copper-colored fellows who had no tact or shrewdness except in forwarding their business interests. Their stories attracted Madame Delmare's attention, none the less; she enjoyed questioning them concerning the marvelous products of that island, and what they told her of the prodigies performed by nature there

intensified more and more the desire that she felt to go and hide herself away there. The size of the island and the fact that Europeans occupied so small a portion of it led her to hope that she would never be discovered. She decided upon that place, therefore, and fed her idle mind upon dreams of a future which she proposed to create for herself, unassisted. She was already building her solitary cabin under the shade of a primeval forest, on the bank of a nameless river; she fancied herself taking refuge under the protection of those savage tribes whom the yoke of our laws and our prejudices has not debased. Ignorant creature that she was, she hoped to find there the virtues that are banished from our hemisphere, and to live in peace, unvexed by any social constitution; she imagined that she could avoid the dangers of isolation, escape the malignant diseases of the climate. A weak woman, who could not endure the anger of one man, but flattered herself that she could defy the hardships of uncivilized life!

Amid these romantic thoughts and extravagant plans she forgot her present ills; she made for herself a world apart, which consoled her for that in which she was compelled to live; she accustomed herself to think less of Raymon, who was soon to cease to be

a part of her solitary and philosophical existence. She was so busily occupied in constructing for herself a future according to her fancy that she let the past rest a little; and already, as she felt that her heart was freer and braver, she imagined that she was reaping in advance the fruits of her solitary life. But Raymon's letter arrived, and that edifice of chimeras vanished like a breath. She felt, or fancied that she felt, that she loved him more than before. For my part, I like to think that she never loved him with all the strength of her soul. It seems to me that misplaced affection is as different from requited affection as an error from the truth. It seems to me that, although the excitement and ardor of our sentiments abuse us to the point of believing that that is love in all its power, we learn later, when we taste the delights of a true love, how entirely we deceived ourselves.

But Raymon's situation, as he described it, rekindled in Indiana's heart that generous flame which was a necessity of her nature. Fancying him alone and unhappy, she considered it her duty to forget the past and not to anticipate the future. A few hours earlier, she intended to leave her husband under the spur of hatred and resentment; now, she regretted that she did not esteem him so that she might make a real sacrifice for Raymon's sake. So great was her

enthusiasm that she feared that she was doing too little for him in fleeing from an irascible master at the peril of her life, and subjecting herself to the miseries of a four months' voyage. She would have given her life, with the idea that it was too small a price to pay for a smile from Raymon. Women are made that way.

Thus it was simply a question of leaving the island. It was very difficult to elude Delmare's distrust and Ralph's clear-sightedness. But those were not the principal obstacles; it was necessary to avoid giving the notice of her proposed departure, which, according to law, every passenger is compelled to give through the newspapers.

Among the few vessels lying in the dangerous roadstead of Bourbon was the ship *Eugène*, soon to sail for Europe. For a long while Indiana sought an opportunity to speak with the captain without her husband's knowledge, but whenever she expressed a wish to walk down to the port, he ostentatiously placed her in Ralph's charge, and followed them with his own eyes with maddening persistence. However, by dint of picking up with the greatest care every scrap of information favorable to her plan, Indiana learned that the captain of the vessel bound for France had a kinswoman at the village of Saline in

the interior of the island, and that he often returned from her house on foot, to sleep on board. From that moment she hardly left the cliff that served as her post of observation. To avert suspicion, she went thither by roundabout paths, and returned in the same way at night when she had failed to discover the person in whom she was interested on the road to the mountains.

She had but two days of hope remaining, for the landwind had already begun to blow. The anchorage threatened to become untenable, and Captain Random was impatient to be at sea.

However, she prayed earnestly to the God of the weak and oppressed, and went and stationed herself on the very road to Saline, disregarding the danger of being seen, and risking her last hope. She had not been waiting an hour when Captain Random came down the path. He was a genuine sailor, always rough-spoken and cynical, whether he was in good or bad humor; his expression froze Indiana's blood with terror. Nevertheless, she mustered all her courage and walked to meet him with a dignified and resolute air.

"Monsieur," she said, "I place my honor and my life in your hands. I wish to leave the colony and return

to France. If, instead of granting me your protection, you betray the secret I confide to you, there is nothing left for me to do but throw myself into the sea."

The captain replied with an oath that the sea would refuse to sink such a pretty lugger, and that, as she had come of her own accord and hove to under his lee, he would promise to tow her to the end of the world.

"You consent then, monsieur?" said Madame Delmare anxiously. "In that case here is the pay for my passage in advance."

And she handed him a casket containing the jewels Madame de Carvajal had given her long before; they were the only fortune that she still possessed. But the sailor had different ideas, and he returned the casket with words that brought the blood to her cheeks.

"I am very unfortunate, monsieur," she replied, restraining the tears of wrath that glistened behind her long lashes; "the proposition I am making to you justifies you in insulting me; and yet, if you knew how odious my life in this country is to me, you would have more pity than contempt for me."

Indiana's noble and touching countenance imposed respect on Captain Random. Those who do not wear out their natural delicacy by over-use sometimes find it healthy and unimpaired in an emergency. He recalled Colonel Delmare's unattractive features and the sensation that his attack on his wife had caused in the colonies. While ogling with a lustful eye that fragile, pretty creature, he was struck by her air of innocence and sincerity. He was especially moved when he noticed on her forehead a white mark which the deep flush on her face brought out in bold relief. He had had some business relations with Delmare which had left him ill-disposed toward him; he was so close-fisted and unyielding in business matters.

"Damnation!" he cried, "I have nothing but contempt for a man who is capable of kicking such a pretty woman in the face! Delmare's a pirate, and I am not sorry to play this trick on him; but be prudent, madame, and remember that I am compromising my good name. You must make your escape quietly when the moon has set, and fly like a poor petrel from the foot of some sombre reef."

"I know, monsieur," she replied, "that you cannot do me this very great favor without transgressing the law; you may perhaps have to pay a fine; that is

why I offer you this casket, the contents of which are worth at least twice the price of a passage."

The captain took the casket with a smile.

"This is not the time to settle our account," he said; "I am willing to take charge of your little fortune. Under the circumstances I suppose you won't have very much luggage; on the night we are to sail, hide among the rocks at the *Anse aux Lataniers*; between one and two o'clock in the morning a boat will come ashore pulled by two stout rowers, and bring you aboard."

https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/sand/indiana/indiana.html

Activity 4

The chapter is divided in three parts. Find the subtitle for each.

How does Sand depict a personal growth of the heroine?

According to critics, the novel blends the conventions

of romanticism, realism and idealism. Do you find these styles also in the chapter above? Support your answer also with citations from the text.

Now read again both poems by Elisabeth Barrett Browning and try to interpret them. If the task is still to difficult, answer the questions below first:

What kind of duality does Barrett Browning observe in Sand's appearance in both poems?

Which adjectives would you use to describe Sand after reading both poems?

Which adjectives does Barrett Browning attribute to each sex? Does Barrett Browning refute the traditional duality?

Which Sand's qualities does Barrett Browning celebrate? Who is Sand compared to in the sonnet *A desire*? Do we know a real Sand or just an image of her? How does Barrett Browning depict "an ascension" of Sand? Who will welcome Sand in heaven?

Why is Sand a role model for Barrett Browning?

You can find analysis of both poems on the website Genius (A Recognition, A Desire) and of the poem *A Desire* on this website – PoemAnalysis.

For a more profound insight, read the analysis by Susan Gubar and Sandra M. Gilbert below.

Susan Gubar, Sandra M. Gilbert: The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination

Inalterably female in a culture where creativity is defined purely in male terms, almost every woman writer must have experienced the kinds of gender-conflicts that Aphra Behn expressed when she spoke of "my masculine part, the poet in me. But for the nineteenth-century woman who tried to transcend her own anxiety of authorship and achieve patriarchal authority through metaphorical transvestism or male impersonation, even more radical psychic confusion must have been inevitable. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's two striking sonnets on

George Sand define and analyze the problem such a woman faced. [...]

The implication is that, since Sand has crossed into forbidden and anomalous sociosexual territory, she desperately needs "purification" — sexual, spiritual, and social. On the other hand, in the second sonnet ("To George Sand, A Recognition") Barrett Browning insists that no matter what Sand does she is still inalterably female, and thus inexorably agonized. [...]

In fact Barrett Browning declares, only in death will Sand be able to transcend the constrictions of her gender. Then *God* will "unsex" her "on the heavenly shore". But until then, she must acquiesce in her inescapable femaleness, manifested by her "woman-heart's" terrible beating "in a poet fire."

Barrett Browning imagery is drastic, melodramatic, even grotesque, but there are strong reasons for the intensity with which she characterizes Sand's representative identity crisis. As her own passionate involvement suggests, the problem Barrett Browning is really confronting in the Sand sonnets goes beyond the contradictions between vocation and gender that induced such anxiety in all these women, to include what we might call contradictions of genre and

gender. Most Western literary genres are, after all, essentially male — devised by male authors to tell male stories about the world. (Gubar, Gilbert 2000: 66-67)

Further readings

Read a poem *To George Sand on Her Interview with Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. Learn more about Isa Blagden and write an essay about her reading of Barrett Browning's sonnets dedicated to Sand. Read the following article: The Hero and the Sage: Elizabeth Barrett's Sonnets "To George Sand" in Victorian Context.

References:

Susan Gubar, Sandra M. Gilbert: The Madwoman in the

Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. Second edition, 2000, p. 66-67.

8.

MODERN WOMEN FROM THE FRINGES: LAURA MARHOLM'S SCANDALOUS BOOK ABOUT WOMEN WRITERS OF HER AGE

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn about Nordic author Laura Marholm and her book *Modern Women*. You will discuss the problem of the twofold reception – in author's lifetime and afterwards – and tackle the question of why so many literary foremothers have been forgotten for a long time.

Laura Marholm and her writings

Laura Marholm was born in Riga in 1854. Even though her father, sea captain Frederik Mohr was of Danish-Norwegian descent and Latvia at the time was part of the Russian empire, Marholm's linguistic and literary socialization was done in German. She grew up in the Latvian capital, was trained to become a teacher and she worked for a local newspaper. In 1880, she published her first play, a tragedy called *Johann Reinhold Patkul*, and later on another play titled *Frau Marianne* (*Mrs. Marianne*, 1882).

Laura Marholm 1889

The staging of the two plays in Riga was successful. With the help of Georg Brandes' essays which Marholm read, she became very much interested in Ibsen and Scandinavian authors and moved to Copenhagen in 1895. She worked as a translator to support herself. In 1889, she married Swedish writer Ola Hansson (1860–1925), soon she gave birth to her son Ola and started taking care of her husband's work. Because of his influence, writing about erotic experiences as the most important drive in a life of a woman became central for her work. She attracted attention

with a series of articles titled *A Woman in Scandinavian Literature;* they were published in 1890 in the *Freie Bühne* magazine. In 1981, the family moved to Friedrichshagen near Berlin. Laura Marhold joined a (entirely male) poetry club and invited August Strindberg to join them. She soon became the intellectual leader of the group. She surprised the Berlin modernism movement with her dominant act.

She attracted the attention of wider public with her collection of six essays titled *Modern Women*. After their split with Strindberg, the couple moved to Bavaria, to Schliersee and supported themselves by writing articles and feuilletons. When already living in a new place, the writer published another book of essays, *We Women and Our Authors* (*Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter*, 1895) and once again moved towards literature. This phase of her life is noted for her successful collaboration with publisher Albert Langen. However, this was later on followed by torturous court dealings between the two. She also wrote two psychological novellas *Was war es?* (What was it?, 1895) and *Das Unausgesprochene (Unspoken*, 1895) and a play titled *Karla Bühring* (1895). She understood her books as a supplement to *Modern Women* (Brantly 1991: 120). The novella *Das Unausgesprochene* is a psychological portrayal of writer Victoria Benedictsson, whom Marholm also describes in her play *Karla Bühring*. In the novella, however, she turned her into a musician.

Anne Charlotte Edgren-Leffler

In 1897 her new book of essays *The Psychology of Woman* (*Zur Psychologie der Frau*) came out and a year later the couple converted to Catholicism. In 1899 they moved to Munich, but their son Ola stayed in Schliersee due to his schooling. Marholm's psychological problems were getting worse because of the court case involving Langen (Brantly 1991: 131–132) and other blows she received (Brantly 1991: 100, Sprengel 1994: 712). She was suffering from paranoia and her drinking problem got so bad that in 1905 she needed to be hospitalized in a local hospital in Munich. When her condition somewhat improved, she first went to Austria and then to France (Meudon). She spent the last years of her life in an institution called Majorenhof near Riga. She stayed there till her death in 1928. She started writing again after 1918, but with less success than in her earlier years. She collaborated with important Scandinavian critics and artists of her time: Georg Brandes, George Egerton (Brantly 105), Arne Garborg, Ellen Key, Anne-Charlotte Edgren-Leffler, Edvard Munch and others.

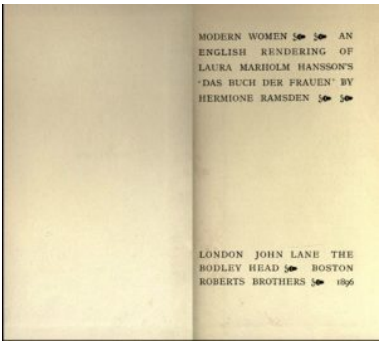
Ellen Key ignited Marholm's interest in the work of Anne-

Charlotte Edgren-Leffler and that is also how Marholm's friendship with Edgren-Leffler started. In May 1893, Key sent a biography of Sonja Kovalevsky (Sofia Kovalevskaya) (written by Edgren-Leffler) to the couple. In the summer of 1894, also the friendship between Laura Marholm and Ellen Key deepened, as they hosted Key in their Bavarian home (Brantly 1991: 105). Suffering from persecution, Laura Marholm was transferred to an institution for several months in April 1905. Later, she lived in Meudon near Paris and in Riga. She only began to work as a writer to a limited extent. She died on October 6, 1928 in Jūrmala in Latvia.

Modern Women

Modern Women came out just before Christmas 1894 (it was dated 1895) and it became the first financial success of Albert Langen, the publisher. Soon after its publication, the book got translated into Swedish, English, Norwegian, Russian, Polish, Czech, Dutch and Italian. For reasons that never got explained, Langen didn't allow the book to be translated into French, even though the contract included this possibility. On the other hand, the Swedish translation came out without the author's consent. Marholm and her publisher were good at advertising – they made sure that the review copies made it to the most influential papers. The reception was mixed. Susan Brantly names the phrases that were used to describe the book: "a dangerous book", "an absurd book", "an honest and powerful book" and "bad literature" (Brantly 1991: 107). Most of the reviewers were of the opinion that the

book was brilliantly written and that the author was a shrewd observer (Ibid.), but they connected this solely with the fact that she emphasized the importance of female independence from men and a fatal mark that a woman gets because of a romantic relationship. It was already Charlotte Broicher, Marholm's contemporary, who found out that the author gave voice to the oscillations of the soul that were to remain silent until that point, however, she also notes that the majority of women of that time found such revelations of femininity insulting. Broicher posed the question about how such a two-sided view came about (ibid.). Susan Brantly writes that the reason for such non-unified reception lies in the author's rhetoric; the fact is that it is at the same time appealing and seductive as well as contradictory. Another Marholm contemporary, Adine Gemberg thought that everything in Marholm's book revolved around one spot; it roars and resounds with grand words, but it doesn't move anywhere (ibid. 107).


MODERN WOMEN

AN ENGLISH RENDERING OF LAURA MARHOLM HANSSON'S "DAS BUCH DER FRAUEN" BY HERMIONE RAMSDEN

LONDON JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD

BOSTON ROBERTS BROTHERS

1896

English translation of Modern Women

When it was still being debated whether a woman had sex drive or not, the exposure of female sexuality was surely shocking (Brantley 108, Walkowitz 2000: 370). The feminist movement that completely distanced itself from Laura Marholm's ideas strongly rejected her book *Modern Women*. At a congress those women held in Berlin in 1896, they called Marholm an enemy of the feminist movement (Brantley 109). One of the most determined German activists fighting for women's rights, Helene Lange (1848–1930) pointed out that Marholm's book could be read as a book proposing that motherhood is the only purpose of a woman's life and thus the book can be abused and misused (ibid. 109).

A German women's rights activist Hedwig Dohm (1831–1919) was certainly one of the most severe critics of *Modern Women*. She pointed out that not all women could be treated in the same way and put in the same category. She claimed that not every single woman had a desire to marry or be a mother and that every woman should have a chance to develop her own individuality. Despite such criticism, less than a year after the book's publication Laura Marholm was proclaimed an expert on women's issues. She wrote articles for

various newspapers and magazines and received many letters from women asking for her advice (Brantly 1991: 119–120). Brantly also notes that the book was provocative because it presented problematic ideas in a convincing manner. In her work *Zur Psychologie der Frauen*, Marholm suggested – also because of the criticism related to *Modern Women* – that all women who cannot find happiness in marriage should seek happiness in a convent.

She claimed that a woman cannot create anything anew, cannot make a fresh start, rather, she believed that everything is just a by-product of or a link to something previously created. Even the best women out there cannot transform wrong thoughts into right ones, or a bad seed into a good product (Marholm 1903: 261–262). She also notes that thinking and working women are barren and their children degenerated. Susan Brantly points out that that was a common opinion of the times and advocated by dr. Max Runge and Ellen Key (Brantly 1991: 144). Marholm's book *Zur Psychologie der Frauen* also got a lot of attention, mostly in the form of negative criticism.

Modern Women thematized the then topical and lively discussion on new ideas of womanhood. As Brantly states, there was a lot of interest for women at the time; an abnormally strong interest existed in women's psychology (Lombroso, Freud). It was all centered around an image of a hysterical woman and some critics saw Laura Marholm as a prophet of such hysteria (Brantly 1991: 114). In addition,

at the end of the 19th century, Germany was a conservative country that defended women's calling to become mothers and wives.

The book was liked by those women who felt uncomfortable with all the debates on modern women who were successful in their careers. By reading *Modern Women,* they got a confirmation that they were doing fine. The truth is that Laura Marholm never denied the importance of a woman's realization through work and career, she just believed that she could not be entirely fulfilled and happy without finding love and becoming a mother. The contribution of *Modern Women* to the creation of the "new woman" idea was noticed already by Marholm's contemporaries, however, they missed its importance for the discourse on female authorship. From today's perspective, we can't overlook that which was already pointed out by Susan Brantly: the popularity of *Modern Women* created a market place for the literary works of women like Amalie Skram in Ellen Key (Brantly 106). And moreover, we need to highlight as a unique quality of Marholm's book the fact that with the help of this book, the author entered the discussion on whether women write a specific kind of literature. She raised the question of what defines a woman quite a few decades before Simone de Beauvoir.

Marholm juxtaposed the accusations that women faced for centuries – namely, that their works show no originality and breakthrough moments in literary history – with specifics of

women's writing which she described as special qualities. Her contemporaries intentionally and non-intentionally ignored this attempt and quoted (many times in a sensationalist manner) only the most provocative statements from *Modern Women*. Sometimes those statements were taken out of context as well. Therefore, it seems that a new and detailed reading, analysis and interpretation of *Modern Women*, the book that has not been discussed much so far, is essential for understanding its innovative value, as well as its entanglement into contradictions and paradoxes that authors who rejected old views and tried to pave their way through a sometimes enormous number of obstacles faced.

The writer supplemented her portrayals of six women with a lengthy introduction in which she stresses that her book is not a study of women's reason or women's creative abilities, even though all six women represent a female way of thinking and a woman's creative sensitivity. Laura Marholm is not interested in that which makes those women famous but tries to show a modern type of woman, her way of feeling and expressing emotions. This is something that comes up in their lives regardless of all the theories that they tried to develop in order to explain their way of living, regardless of ideas which they fought for, regardless of all the successes that in fact chained them more than anonymity could. The author notes that that is also the main premise of her book; she claims that all women suffered because of an internal clash that came to light only with and because of the feminist movement, the

dichotomy between reason and the dark foundation of women's nature. She concludes that the lives of most women got ruined because of that clash.

A contemporary woman who wants to break free on her way to independence is trying to escape from her life, Marholm writes. This sort of woman tries to reject taking care of someone, usually this implies being a mother, she tries to untie her knots with partners, but she also attempts to reject her idea that as a woman she is not a complete personality. However, this way, she, not knowingly, also banishes her femininity. The author supports her claims with poetic comparisons saying that modern women get stuck in front of the doors of their inner temple and thus don't hear the sounds of secret worship celebrations; rather, they tremble in sterile dread and yearn for stimulating pleasures they excluded themselves from. They look for solutions, for a way out of this clashing state of being: some push the doors open and enter and this way, once again, belong to the world of men. Others stay outside and feel miserable. Laura Marholm also states that all of the women she wrote about were individualists and that was the cause of their demise.

However, they were not consistent and persistent enough in this individualistic stance, they were looking for a way out, in fact. Some found that which frees the tied-up individuality, others didn't. That was because, as the author observes, her most prominent contemporaries are very selective when it comes to men, and on the other hand, contemporary men are

rebellious and don't have faith when it comes to searching for women. Marholm completes her introduction by saying that she identified some secret parts of the female soul with her six women and she is therefore offering this insight for those who didn't have that opportunity. In the second edition she wrote that she would like her book to initiate the creation of new books which would reveal also other parts of a contemporary woman: her essence in relation to Zeitgeist, her needs, everything that was concealed, her suffering, her mistakes and her aspirations and hopes for the future.

In the introduction, Marholm lucidly formulates the problem that many women who wanted to live the life of a "new woman" faced; namely, the life of an independent person who freely expresses her world views, is independent and feels equal to men, but at the same time doesn't want to deny her femininity. By saying that Marholm enters the feminist discourse that is based on a paradox, namely she tries to introduce an anti-patriarchal discourse while stemming from femininity. She understands her sex as equal to men and not as a subjugated one. We are dealing with female genealogy in which the maternal role seems to be the dominating one. This is something that Marholm connects with Luce Irigaray (Witt-Brattström, 149). The author states already in the introduction that she is not interested in the question of what a woman's life is like if a woman doesn't fulfil her talents professionally, but rather what it means for a successful woman to be a mother and a woman who loves and is loved.

Moreover, she also stresses the importance of women's fulfilment in sex and the deepening of her sexual relations. The problematic part of her work are surely her individual judgements on women's artistic expression, as they are written down as claims that are valid for all women.

Read the excerpt from the book.

Laura Marholm: Modern Women

Among the group of celebrated women-thinkers: Leffler, Ahlgren, Agrell, &c., who criticised love as though it were a product of the intelligence, followed by a crowd of

maidenly amazons, there suddenly appeared an author named Amalie Skram, whom one really could not accuse of being too thoughtful. It is true that in her first book there was the intellectual woman and the sensual man, and a seduced servant girl, grouped upon the chess-board of moral discussion with a measured proportion of light and shade that was the usual method of treating the deepest and most complicated moments of human life. But this book contained something else, which no Scandinavian authoress had ever produced before; her characters came and went, each in his own way, every one spoke his own language and had his own thoughts, there was no need for inky fingers to point the way, life lived itself, and the horizon was wide with plenty of fresh air and blue sky there was nothing cramped about it like the wretched little extract of life to which the other ladies confined themselves. There was a wealth of minute observation about this book, brought to life by careful painting and critical descriptions, a trustworthy memory and an untroubled honesty; one recognised true naturalism below the hard surface of a problem novel, and one felt that if her talent grew upon the sunny side, the North would gain its first woman naturalist who did not write

about life in a critical, moralising, and polemical manner, but in whom life would reveal itself as bad and as stupid, as full of unnecessary anxiety and unconscious cruelty, as easy-going, as much frittered away and led by the senses as it actually is.

/.../ Amalie Skram's talent culminated in " Lucie." In this book we see her going about in an untidy, dirty, ill-fitting morning gown, and she is perfectly at home. It would scandalise any lady. Authoresses who struggle fearlessly after honest realism like Frau von Ebner-Eschenbach and George Eliot might perhaps have touched upon it, but with very little real knowledge of the subject.

Amalie Skram, on the other hand, is perfectly at home in this dangerous borderland. She is much better informed than Heinz Tovote, for instance, and he is a poet who sings of women who are not to be met with in drawing-rooms. She describes the pretty ballet girl with genuine enjoyment and true sympathy; but the book falls into two halves, one of which has succeeded and the other failed. Everything that concerns Lucie is a success, including the part about the fine, rather weak-kneed gentleman who supports her, and ends by marrying her, although his love is not of the kind that can be called "ennobling."

All that does not concern Lucie and her natural surroundings is a failure, especially the fine gentleman's social circle, into which Lucie enters after her marriage, and where she seems to be as little at home as Amalie Skram herself. Many an author and epicurean would have hesitated before writing such a book as " Lucie." But Amalie Skram's naturalism is of such an honest and happy nature, that any secondary considerations would not be likely to enter her mind, and in the last chapter the brutal naturalism of the story reaches its highest pitch. In the whole of Europe there are only two genuine and honest naturalists, and they are Emile Zola and Amalie Skram. Her later books take, for instance, her great Bergen novel, " S. G. Myre," " Love in North and South," " Betrayed," &c. are not to be compared with the three that we have mentioned. They are naturalistic, of course, their naturalism is of the best kind, they are still un coin de la nature, but they are no longer entirely vu a travers un temptrament. They are no longer quite Amalie Skram. Norwegian naturalism we might almost say Teutonic naturalism culminated in Amalie Skram, this off-shoot of the Gallic race. Compared with her, Fru Leffler and Fru Ahlgren are good little girls, in their best Sunday pinafores; Frau von Ebner is a maiden

aunt, and George Eliot a moralising old maid. All these women came of what is called " good family," and had been trained from their earliest infancy to live as became their position. All the other women whom I have sketched in this book belonged to the upper classes, and like all women of their class, they only saw one little side of life, and therefore their contribution to literature is worthless as long as it tries to be objective. Naturalism is the form of artistic expression best suited to the lower classes, and to persons of primitive culture, who do not feel strong enough to eliminate the outside world, but reflect it as water reflects an image. They feel themselves in sympathy with their surroundings, but they have not the refined instincts and awakened antipathies which belong to isolation. Where the character differs from the individual consciousness, they do not think of sacrificing their soul as a highway for the multitude, any more than their body a la Lucie to the commune bonunt.

Source: Modern women; an English rendering of Laura Marholm Hansson's 'Das buch der frauen'

https://ia802808.us.archive.org/19/items/modernwomenengli00marhiala/modernwomenengli00marhiala_bw.pdf

Activity

Find in the text some examples of Marholm's "appealing and seducible as well as contradictory" (Brantly 1991: 107) language.

Who does Marholm compare Skram with? How do you perceive Skram after reading this comparisons?

How does Marholm touch upon class identity of women writers? How does she connect it with authorial freedom?

Marholm's books have been forgotten for decades. How do you see the importance of her work? Do you think that the problems discussed in her books are still present in today's society?

Do you know the term "*écriture féminine*"? Do you see any connections between this term and Marholm's view on women writers' creative process?

Further Reading

Mihurko Poniž, Katja. Ambiguous views on

femininity in the writings of two “New Women” in the fin de siècle : Zofka Kveder’s inspirational encounters with Laura Marholm’s modern women.

References:

Brantly, Susan, 1991. The life and writings of Laura Marholm. Basel; München: Helbing & Lichtenhahn.

9.

CONCLUSION

In the textbook, you familiarized yourself with some important female writers from three different cultural spaces. Your knowledge in literary history was upgraded with the key principles of the feminist theory. If the works of the selected authors stirred your interest, I recommend that you pick up other works by them. Find another book where the author references their literary predecessors, or, if you are into creative writing, write to a letter to your female literary predecessor. If you liked the book, let people know about it, if you have ideas for its improvement, I will be pleased to see your comments and suggestions; you can add them at the end of each chapter, in the section "Feedback/Errata."