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Introduction

In the not-too-distant past, the genre of literary biography became suspect as a result of the overuse and abuse of biographical information in interpreting literary texts.[1] This is an issue, however, that primarily plagues scholars of canonical authors, for whom the wealth of biographical information can prove a hindrance to the consideration of the purely artistic or theoretical merits of a given literary text. With regard to authors inhabiting the fringes of literary history, however, a dearth of information generates its own kind of obstacles. Much more basic questions present themselves: Who was the author? What did he or she write? Why did he or she fall into obscurity?

At its inception, this project was meant to be more a study of Laura Marholm's works than of her life. Quickly it became evident that basic information about Laura Marholm's person was lacking, and what information did exist was often erroneous. Most of Laura Marholm's writing is thoroughly a product of the historical age in which it was written and without a knowledge of this context, her work makes little sense to a modern reader. For these reasons, this monograph evolved into a study of both her life and her work.

Until Ingvar Holm's valuable book, *Ola Hansson. En studie i åttitalsromantik* (1957), if scholars knew anything about Laura Marholm, they knew her as "Frau Blaubart," the domineering woman who sought to unman August Strindberg in Berlin. As might be expected, Strindberg's appraisal can hardly be considered fair. Overall, the latest Ola Hansson scholarship, especially Arne Widell's *Ola Hansson i Tyskland* (1979) and Inger Månesköld-Öberg's *Att spegla tiden – eller forma den* (1984), has provided the most useful and accurate information about Laura Marholm. Even so, it has not been within the scope of these studies to paint a complete portrait of Ola Hansson's wife.

In recent years, Laura Marholm's name has been mentioned in contexts independent of Ola Hansson. In the late 1970's, the Nordic Institute at Kiel launched a research project dealing with the reception of Scandinavian literature in Germany. The project generated a series of handsome monographs and valuable

[1] For a penetrating discussion of the issues surrounding literary biography, see: Jeffrey L. Sammons, "Dilemmas of Literary Biography: The Case of Heine," *Heinrich Heine. Dimensionen seines Wirkens*, eds. Raymond Immerwahr and Hanna Spencer (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1979).

bibliographies, in which Marholm is mentioned not a few times. In 1966, George Schoolfield had called for an investigation of German translators of Scandinavian literature, mentioning Laura Marholm in particular "who labored valiantly, and erratically, to bring the North to Germany, and Germany to the North."[2] Alken Bruns answered this call with *Übersetzung als Rezeption. Deutsche Übersetzer skandinavischer Literatur von 1860 bis 1900* (1977), although his attention is primarily focused on translators other than Marholm. In Barbara Gentikow's *Skandinavien als präkapitalistische Idylle* (1978), Marholm receives mention as an early critic of Bjørnson's *En fallit* and Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* and also in terms of her relevance to the reception of Ellen Key's *Missbrukad kvinnokraft* in Germany. Walter Baumgartner invokes Marholm's polemic with Paul Ernst over Arne Garborg's authorship in his study, *Triumph des Irrealismus. Rezeption skandinavischer Literatur im ästhetischen Kontext Deutschlands 1860 bis 1910* (1979). Each of these studies illuminates a facet of Marholm's career as a translator and critic, but understandably these facets lack a context within the overall production of Laura Marholm.

This decade has witnessed a rapidly growing interest in turn-of-the-century women, and, of course, Marholm's name appears in this company as well. Marholm had a part in the drama between Victoria Benedictsson and Georg Brandes which unfolds in the recently published diaries of Benedictsson (1985), expertly edited by Christina Sjöblad. In Margaret Stetz' Harvard dissertation "'George Egerton': Woman and Writer of the 1890's" (1982), Marholm emerges as a correspondent and admirer of George Egerton. Marholm crossed paths with Lou Andreas-Salomé, and thus she receives mention in both Rudolph Binion's *Frau Lou* (1968) and Angela Livingstone's *Lou Andreas-Salomé* (1984). For a time, Marholm and Ellen Key exchanged similar ideas about the nature of women, and so, with good reason, Marholm is included in Kay Goodman's study of the cult of motherhood in Germany at the turn of the century (1986).[3] Marholm has even been accorded a study of her own by Marilyn Scott-Jones in her article "Laura Marholm and the Question of Female 'Nature'" (1982).[4] Marholm seems to have achieved sudden popularity in the eighties; however, each of the above-mentioned studies would have benefitted from a more extensive acquaintance with Laura Marholm's life and work.[5]

[2] George C. Schoolfield, "Scandinavian-German Literary Relations," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 15 (1966), p. 31.

[3] Kay Goodman, "Motherhood and Work: The Concept of the Misuse of Women's Energy, 1895–1905," *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, eds. Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[4] Marilyn Scott-Jones, "Laura Marholm and the Question of Female 'Nature,'" *Beyond the Eternal Feminine: Critical Essays on Women and German Literature*, eds. Susan L. Cocalis and Kay Goodman (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1982).

[5] In general, readers of Scandinavian languages have been more successful in their treatments of Laura Marholm, since they have had access to the Ola Hansson scholarship.

Among historians of the women's movement, Marholm is remembered as the author of *Das Buch der Frauen*, her greatest commercial success.[6] The central theme of this text is best summarized in the winged words: "Des Weibes Inhalt ist der Mann."[7] Marholm's relationship to the women's movement was, however, much more complicated than is indicated by this single book from 1895. Eight years earlier, she had espoused a rather different position: „Was weg soll, ja, das ist der mosaische Begriff, daß für den Mann Alles da ist und daß das Weib für den Mann da ist."[8] Fourteen years after *Das Buch der Frauen*, Marholm changed her mind again: "Und soweit Menschen zurückdenken können, ist das Weib mit Argwohn betrachtet, niedergehalten, gefürchtet, unterworfen worden. Der Kranz und der Schleier waren das Zeichen der Unterwerfung, – das Zeichen des Verzichts auf das eigene Wesen."[9] How does one account for these contradictions? Marholm's position changed through time as a result of the cultural, political, and scientific waves that passed through Europe, as well as of personal factors. Thus a biographical and historical perspective is necessary to make sense of the apparent contradictions in her work. In many respects, the progression of Marholm's reasoning on these matters is representative of changes within the age itself. Marholm wrote in the preface of the last book she ever published:

German and English-speaking scholars tend to make more mistakes. One example can be taken from Angela Livingstone's book on Lou Andreas-Salomé, where Livingstone writes: "Ola Hansson-Marholm, who lived in Friedrichshagen from 1889 to 1900, was writer and spokesman for Danish poets. [. . .] His wife, Laura Marholm, wrote plays and novellas." (p. 232) Hansson would surely have complained bitterly at being called Ola Hansson-Marholm. The fact that Andreas-Salomé herself called him this is an insult which seems to have escaped Livingstone. As a Swede, Hansson would hardly want to be remembered as a spokesman for Danish poets, and the Hanssons lived in Friedrichshagen with interruptions only from 1890 until 1893. Marholm wrote more than plays and novellas, and it was no doubt her essays on women which were of the greatest interest to Andreas-Salomé. A specific source of misinformation in German about Marholm can be found in Elisabeth Friedrichs' otherwise excellent *Die deutschsprachigen Schriftstellerinnen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1981), p. 116. Friedrichs lists the year of Marholm's death as 1905, twenty-three years too early.

[6] See for example, John C. Fout, "Current Research on German Women's History in the Nineteenth Century," *German Women in the Nineteenth Century. A Social History*, ed. John C. Fout (New York: Holms & Meier Publishers, 1984). Marholm is also presented as such in the above-mentioned books on Lou Andreas-Salomé and Kay Goodman's study on Ellen Key in Germany. In each of these cases, the common source for the characterization is Hedwig Dohm's article "Reaktion in der Frauenbewegung," *Die Zukunft*, 29 (18 November 1899), pp. 279–291, which characterizes and compares the work of Marholm, Key, and Andreas-Salomé.

[7] Laura Marholm, *Das Buch der Frauen* (Paris and Leipzig: Albert Langen, 1895), p. 44.

[8] Laura Marholm, "Norwegische Dichter in Paris," *St. Petersburger Zeitung* 7 and 8 May 1887.

[9] Laura Marholm, "Zum Wahlrecht der Frauen," manuscript in Lunds Universitetsbibliotek.

> Der innere Zusammenhang ist ja in allen meinen Büchern vorhanden, da er so organisch ist, wie das Leben selbst. Ich habe jedesmal gesagt, was und wieviel ich wußte und begriff, und darin ist jeder Zeitraum eine Stufe. Darum habe ich auch nichts zurückzunehmen und nichts hinzuzufügen.[10]

It would not be totally inappropriate to consider Marholm's life and literary career as a case study in the intellectual history of the turn of the century.

The reconstruction of Laura Marholm's life and its effect on her work has presented various practical difficulties. Most of what Marholm wrote appeared in German and Austrian newspapers, which are no longer readily accessible. Regrettably, no comprehensive bibliography of German newspaper articles from this period exists. Although some references could be gleaned from Robert Fallenstein and Christian Henning's *Rezeption skandinavischer Literatur in Deutschland 1870 bis 1914* (1977) and from Hansson scholarship, many of the articles in Laura Marholm's bibliography were uncovered and collected by the laborious process of tracking down clues in her correspondence and searching through years of journals and newspapers to which she was known to contribute. I have tried to be as thorough as possible, but I suspect that a few items have probably eluded my search. I console myself with the thought that even Marholm lost track of what she had written. Toward the end of her life, she wrote: "Det er meget sandsynligt at der ligger rund i disse Tidningar og Tidskrifter, endnu ganske mange, bortglemte baade af ham og mig, Artikler, Studier, Skizzer, Novelletter og lignende [sic]."[11] A few of them lie there even now.

My quest for Marholm material was in part made more difficult by the problem of Marholm's many names. Modern systems of library and archive cataloguing were not designed with women writers in mind. Women writers are often fond of pseudonyms; they may go by their maiden name or by one or, sometimes, several married names. In Marholm's case, libraries have not reached a consensus about which name Marholm should be catalogued under. In the Lund University Library, she is filed under "Mohr," but in Stockholm's Royal Library, she is located under "Hansson." German libraries show a preference for "Marholm." *The National Union Catalogue* in the United States is unaware that Laura Hansson and Leonhard Marholm are the same person. Quite early in my research I learned to supply libraries with all of Marholm's names. Furthermore, since Marholm has been regarded as only a marginal figure in literary and intellectual history, her name does not always appear in general catalogues of manuscript holdings. For this reason, I often discovered treasures by checking under the names of people I guessed had been among Marholm's correspondents. In this way, for example, I found her letters to Maxi-

[10] Laura Marholm, *Zur Psychologie der Frau I* (Berlin: Carl Duncker Verlag, 1903), p. ix.

[11] Laura Marholm, "Omrids til en Biografi," manuscript in Göteborgs Universitetsbibliotek. "It is quite likely that lying around in these newspapers and journals there are still many – forgotten by both him and me – articles, studies, sketches, novellas and the like."

milian Harden. Once again, I have tried to be as thorough as possible in my search for archival material, but it is quite possible that letters from her hand still lie undetected in some corner of the globe. In this work, I have chosen to refer to Laura Marholm-Hansson, geb. Mohr as "Marholm." When referring to both Laura Marholm and Ola Hansson, I often resort to "the Hanssons."

Such are the difficulties raised by the seemingly simple questions: "What did she write?" and "What was her name?" Another problematic issue is establishing Marholm's nationality. One of the reasons for Marholm's obscurity is no doubt the fact that she cannot be fitted neatly into the regular categories of nationalistic scholarship. Marholm was never very clear on this issue herself and, in fact, succeeded in confusing a number of her contemporaries. The confusion worked to her advantage when she was able to receive higher honoraria in both Sweden and Germany as a native author. Putting the matter of her national allegiance as clearly and succinctly as possible: Marholm was a German-speaking Dano-Russian from Latvia with Norwegian relatives and a Swedish husband. Marholm preferred to think of herself as Russian, although she did not speak a word of the language. Regarding her in terms of the culture by which she was the most influenced and upon which she had the most effect, I tend to place her in the German tradition. Marholm herself, however, would most likely not have approved.

It is especially difficult to define the language, or languages, in which she wrote. Perhaps Oscar Levertin came closest to describing it when he accused the Hanssons of writing in Mesopotamian. Marholm's native tongue was German and although her father was Danish, little or no Danish was spoken at home. Her acquaintance with the writings of Georg Brandes prompted Marholm to begin learning Danish late in life, and her mastery of the language was never perfect. While living in Copenhagen, Danish began to interfere with her German and characteristically German mistakes pervaded her Danish. Once she married Ola Hansson, her Danish became infiltrated with Swedicisms. Swedicisms are particularly prevalent in Marholm's letters to Swedish correspondents. Marholm frequently could not be bothered with adopting a consistent orthography and would happily use both "å" and "aa", "ä" and "æ", "ö" and "ø" in the same sentence. When citing from her Scandinavian correspondence and manuscripts, I have chosen not to correct these orthographic inconsistencies or grammatical errors. In most cases, her language is still comprehensible, and the mistakes are interesting in and of themselves. Rather than peppering her quotations with "sic" or other editorial marks, I have chosen to insert one 'sic' at the end of Marholm's Scandinavian quotes, in order to assure the reader that the quote is as it was in the original manuscript. I have not, however, attempted to reproduce Marholm's various linguistic foibles in my translations of the Scandinavian quotations.

In piecing together Marholm's biography, I have relied heavily on primary sources, but, often, evaluating the reliability of these sources has been somewhat problematic. Marholm had a penchant for writing autobiography, both fictional and non-fictional. She began her memoirs in the years between 1900 and

1905, the period in which Marholm's psychotic episode escalated to its peak. Obviously, such sources must be treated with a good deal of scepticism. In other cases, Marholm did not make a strong distinction between fiction and biography. For example, the first version of Marholm's essay about Victoria Benedictsson is called a psychological sketch, whereas the second version is given a literary frame and called a novella. Marholm offers a dangerous temptation to her biographer – to mine her fiction for biographical information. When making use of Marholm's memoirs and autobiographical fiction, I have always tried to indicate that I refer to subjective interpretations of actual events. In doing so, I have also made it a policy to confirm that a given event did take place through some outside source. Overall, the guiding force that I used to navigate my way through the hazards of evaluating letters, articles, anecdotes, and memoirs was my best judgment.

I believe that a study of Laura Marholm's life and letters is a useful project on many counts, even if for no other reason than to prevent future scholarship from committing further regrettable factual errors. Marholm was a significant landmark on the intellectual horizon of the *fin de siècle*; in the mid-nineties, Marholm was much more widely read than her now famous contemporaries, Ellen Key and Lou Andreas-Salomé. She was well known, both personally and through her writing, to many of the major literary figures in Scandinavia and Germany during this period. Germany learned of several Scandinavian authors through her mediation. Furthermore, Marholm was a major force in shaping the understanding of the psychology of women during the gestation period of psychoanalysis.

Marholm's story is also a contribution to our expanding understanding of women's history. In our age, which has begun to draw away from demands of sexual equality toward exploring the special qualities of women, Marholm's example underscores the fact that one should be on guard against myths of femininity. To define the feminine is often to confine the feminine. Once ideas about femininity are solidified into a definition, they are immediately restrictive in individual cases and doomed to obsolescence. Any definition of the feminine needs a historical context. The "eternal feminine" is always in flux.

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