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**The Contribution of Feature Writer Laura Marholm  
to the Discourse on Women's Emancipation  
in the German-language Press of Latvia  
at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries**

**Publicistes Lauras Marholmas pienesums  
sieviešu emancipācijas diskursā  
Latvijas vācu presē 19. un 20. gadsimta mijā**

**Keywords:**

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translator,  
difference feminism,  
anti-feminism,  
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**Atslēgvārdi:**

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sieviešu psiholoģija

## Summary

The Riga-born playwright, feature writer and translator Laura Marholm (1854–1928) was a distinctive albeit contradictory public figure and was well-known in Latvia, Germany and Scandinavia. With the conviction that a woman can succeed in reaching her goals through the intercession of an intermediary, most often a man, Marholm was in conflict with representatives of the women's emancipation movement. Her contemporaries called her an anti-feminist; reference literature listed her as a difference feminist who, among other things, contributed to the promotion and development of the cult of motherhood. In Latvia, press publications referred to Marholm as an authority in the field of women's psychology. She was a popular amateur who dealt with a fashionable theme of the era – psychology. Together with her husband, Swedish writer Ola Hansson (1860–1925), she corresponded with famous personalities in Scandinavia, Germany and France. The Hanssons came into conflict with many of them which, in turn, increasingly pushed to the couple into creative self-isolation. This article investigates Marholm's influence on the discourse about women's emancipation in the German-language press of Latvia from the late 1870s up until the late 1920s.

## Kopsavilkums

Rīgā dzimusī dramaturģe, publiciste un tulkotāja Laura Marholma (1854–1928) bija spilgta lai arī pretrunīga personība un pazīstama Latvijā, Vācijā, Skandināvijā. Ar pārliecību, ka sievietē savus mērķus var sasniegt ar otra cilvēka starpniecību, visbiežāk vīrieša, viņa nonāca konfliktā ar sieviešu emancipācijas kustības pārstāvēm. Laikabiedri dēvēja viņu par antifeministi; izpētes literatūra viņu ierindo kā diferencēto feministi, kura cita vidū deva pienesumu mātes kulta veicināšanā un attīstībā. Ap 1900. gadu daudzas preses publikācijas Latvijā atsaucās uz Marholmu kā uz autoritāti sieviešu psiholoģijas jomā. Viņa bija populāra amatiere, kura aizskāra laikmeta modes tēmu – psiholoģiju. Rakstnieces apgalvojumi mainījās līdz ar viņas personisko pieredzi. Viņa kopā ar vīru, zviedru rakstnieku Ūlu Hansonu (*Ola Hansson*, 1860–1925) komunicēja ar pazīstamām personībām Skandināvijā, Vācijā un Francijā. Ar daudzām no tām pāris nonāca konfliktos, kas savukārt arvien vairāk noveda viņus līdz radošai pašizolācijai. Rakstā pētīta Lauras Marholmas ietekme uz sieviešu emancipācijas jautājumu diskursu Latvijas vācu valodā izdotajā presē no 1870. gadu beigām līdz 1920. gadu beigām.

## Introduction

The obituary devoted to Laura Marholm in the newspaper *Rigasche Rundschau* in October 1928 imparted to readers news of the recently deceased writer who had been popular at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, but had now fallen into obscurity: "At a time when the women's movement in Latvia was at the centre of attention and almost everything had been set at extremes: blue-stockings or little housekeepers, Laura Marholm was almost the only woman who, with the greatest determination, emphasised women's powerful erotic tendencies and, because of this, determinedly warned against the kind of women's emancipation prevalent at the time that basically envisaged intellectual learning. In old Riga, the freedom that Laura Marholm demanded for women aroused horror and disapproval, and in 'certain circles' her books were read in great secrecy, [books] such as, [for example], *Zur Psychologie der Frau* and others, likewise her many articles on the subject that were published in German newspapers."<sup>1</sup> (Eckardt 1928)

Born in Riga and later actively working both in Denmark and in Germany, the playwright, feature writer and translator Laura Marholm (1854–1928), was a distinctive albeit contradictory public figure of her time, especially in the context of the history of women's emancipation. Her reflections on a woman's role – the fulfilment of her goals through an intermediary, most usually a man – elicited contradictory responses among her peers and contemporaries. Her ideal was woman as the inspiration for a genius, a man. Although she did speak about the interaction and further development between two independent, mature personalities, the woman nonetheless was supposed to be subordinate to the man. At the same time, Marholm criticised the traditional upbringing that stifled a woman's natural instincts, for example, her sexuality and quest for love.

One of the most prominent feminists of the German women's movement of the time, Hedwig Dohm (1831–1919), criticised Marholm's views and deemed her an 'anti-feminist' (Dohm 1902: 84–104). Present-day researchers Ebba Witt-Brattström and Sophie Wenerscheid have dubbed Marholm a 'difference feminist'

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1 "In einer Zeit, in der die Frauenbewegung im Mittelpunkt der Interessen stand und so ziemlich alles auf die beiden Spitzen gestellt war: Blaustrumpf oder Haustöchterlein, war Laura Marholm so ziemlich die einzige Frau, die mit der größten Entschiedenheit die starke erotische Veranlagung des Weibes betonte und deswegen vor der damals üblichen Frauenemanzipation, die es vor allem auf geistige Schulung absah, auf das entschiedenste warnte. Die Freiheit, die Laura Marholm für das Weib forderte, erregte natürlich im alten Riga Grausen und Entsetzen und man las bei uns "in den Kreisen" nur sehr heimlich ihre Bücher, wie "Zur Psychologie der Frau" und andere, sowie die vielen Artikel, die sie uz diesem Thema in deutschen Zeitschriften veröffentlichte." (Eckardt 1928)



Fig. 1. Portrait of Laura Marholm, 1889. Brantly, Susan. *The Life and Writings of Laura Marholm*. Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie, Bd. 21. Basel, Frankfurt am Main: Helbing & Lichtenhahn Verlag, 1991.

(in German *Differenzfeminismus*) (Witt-Brattström 2007: 147; Wennerscheid 2014: 134, 146). This concept, as opposed to the description used previously, does not repudiate nor simply express negative criticism about her activities and views, but rather analyses her authorial position and includes her in the overall panorama of women's activism in the period around 1900.

Without a study of Marholm's activities, a comprehensive overview of the women's emancipation movement at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in Latvia, and likewise in Germany and Western Europe, would be incomplete. Marholm's articles and books on women's psychology were popular at the time, they were widely read, talked about and much discussed in Latvia also – both in German-language as well as Latvian-language periodicals (F. K. 1895; W. 1902; Seska 1914; Celms 1937).

For the purposes of this article, the author when researching press publications from the turn of the 19th-20th centuries takes the women's emancipation discourse to mean the consideration of issues relating to a woman's intellectual, social, economic, political independence and the recognition of equal rights and opportunities, for instance, the right to study at university (Becker-Cantarino 2010: 70).<sup>2</sup>

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2 During the period in question, not all of these freedoms were available to men as well, as Latvia and the Baltic in the 19th century was subjugated by Tsarist Russia, with a class system of social inequality in existence. In this article the focus is on women's equal rights in comparison with those granted to men, which can be compared in a situation of social inequality as well.

Although during Marholm's time the concept of 'women's emancipation' did exist, the term most often used was 'the woman question' (in German: *Frauenfrage*).<sup>3</sup>

For the greater majority of the reading and writing world Laura Marholm ceased to exist in 1905, when she and her spouse Ola Hansson (1860–1925) were constrained to spend several months in psychiatric institutions, after which she was no longer actively published. Some 20th century history of literature compendiums and studies have even presented 1905 as the year of her death (Brantly 1991: 1–3). Marholm's return to the history of literature and the women's movement began in the 1970s–1980s, and has continued, with increasing intensity, until the present day. This evolved in connection with studies about the creative output of her husband Ola Hansson, and his influence on Scandinavian and German literature (Brantly 1991: 1–2; Fuchs 1997), with particular emphasis on the writer's Berlin Period at the beginning of the 1890s (Glossmann 1999; Niemiowski 2000). Another direction of study is related to a more intensive and in-depth research of the history of women's activism, where it is Marholm's contribution to Scandinavian literature (drama, journalism) as a female writer that is highlighted (Scott-Jones 1982; Diethe 1996; Bland, Müller-Adams 2003; Colvin 2003; Witt-Brattström 2007). Studies carried out during the last ten years highlight Marholm's complex nature – her ability to be an active and animated communicator or networker – largely through written correspondence, her published works and personal contacts – in this way intensively shaping and influencing her own and her husband's spheres of activity, even if only for a brief period (Jiresch 2013; Wenerscheid 2014).

The book published in 1991 by language and literature scholar Susan Brantly, *The Life and Writings of Laura Marholm* (Brantly 1991), is currently the only existing monograph about the writer. The work was translated into German and came out in 2004 (with a 2nd edition printed in 2013)<sup>4</sup> and it was produced by the association Kulturhistorischer Verein Friedrichshagen e.V which these days popularises Marholm's Berlin Period and her participation in the Friedrichshagen Poets' Circle (*Friedrichshagener*

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3 In the latter half of the 19th century, the word 'emancipation' was popular in the press and much used, for example, when speaking of 'peasants' emancipation', 'Jewish emancipation' etc. The concept 'woman question' has been analysed by the Latvian culturologist Deniss Hanovs, revealing this to be a form of expression created by men (Hanovs 2002: 23); the usage of this term simplifies the discussion around issues of women's emancipation. Marholm herself, inter alia, has written about the 'men's question' (*Männerfrage*) in her work *Zur Psychologie der Frau. I* (Witt-Brattström 2007: 147: 155).

4 The German translation is technically poor, in particular the arrangement of the scientific framework. In order to understand both the text and framework, the English edition is necessary.

*Dichterkreis*). Former chairman of the association, Ronald Vierock, has published popular essays about her (Vierock [2014]; Brantly 2013: 7–18).<sup>5</sup>

This article analyses the influence Laura Marholm had on the discourse around the issues of women's emancipation in the German-language press of Latvia from the late 1870s up until the late 1920s, that is, starting from Marholm's first published writings until her death in 1928. The sources used in the research are press publications printed in Riga and in Liepāja.

The article consists of two basic narrative parts: the first presents an overview of the life of Laura Marholm and a description of her chief works. The second part is an analysis of the German-language press in Latvia that published articles about women's emancipation issues in the context of Marholm's activities; in this section Marholm's articles in the Latvian press are examined separately from reviews of her published works by other authors. The publications reviewed cannot claim to represent the German press in Latvia in its entirety, rather they are selected fragments, chosen according to certain criteria and presenting a precise insight into the attitudes adopted by German-language periodicals with regard to issues concerning women's emancipation. The criteria for selection were articles by Laura Marholm that had appeared in the German-language press of Latvia and references about her activities, reviews of her works or the application of her ideas, and the citation of them.

## Marholm's life story and her chief published works

### The Riga Period: up until 1885

Laura Marholm, birth name Laura Katarina Mohr, was born in Riga on 1 May, 1854 (19 April), in the family of Danish sea captain Fredrik Wilhelm Theodor Mohr (1820–1915) and his wife, Baltic-born German Amalie Mohr (nee Roeder, 1823–1897). As so many educated middle-class women of her time, Marholm was educated to be a home tutor. Her passions, however, were literature and the theatre, about which she learnt as an autodidact, despite her parents' – her mother in particular – efforts to stop her from doing so and to bring her up as a housewife according to the strict traditions of Baltic Germans (Brantly 1991: 8–10; Jiresch 2013: 367).

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<sup>5</sup> In the foreword to the German translation Vierock has expressed his own views about Marholm (Brantly 2013: 7–18). Unfortunately, Vierock's works lack precise references. Thus, for example, Vierock asserts, without foundation, that Marholm had been the inspiration for the famous work *The Scream* (1893) by the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (1863–1944) (Vierock [2014]: 2). Munch himself has spoken about the evolution of this work and its inspirations, but Marholm was not mentioned (Plaga 2008: 90–93).

Apparently Marholm spent a great deal of her time in the Riga city library which formed part of the Dom (Cathedral) precinct (Reinhardt 1933). The city librarian Georg Berkholtz (1817–1886) was one of the founders and publishers of *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, he was also either the publisher or editor of other periodicals as well: *Baltische Monatsschrift*, *Rigasche Zeitung*. The reading of *Baltische Monatsschrift*, as one of the leading publications of the Baltic press, definitely would have been part of Marholm's process of self-education during the Riga period. From the 1870s onwards the monthly also featured articles devoted to the issue of women's emancipation – both explanatory as well as negative, nonetheless it was possible to glean from them information about currents of Western European thought (Cohn 1870; Wilhelmi 2008: 50). In the context of Marholm, the publication in the *Baltische Monatsschrift* of a lecture by the socio-economist Gustav Cohn 1840–1919<sup>6</sup> at the Riga Polytechnicum in 1870 should be mentioned. In the lecture Cohn both expounded on the causes that gave rise to the women's movement (in his opinion, fundamentally poverty) and also made a comparison of the situation in Latvia and in Germany, concluding that women's emancipation in the Baltic was being hindered by poor socio-economic conditions and the "modest level of culture" ("*einfacher Culturzustand*"; Cohn 1870: 413). Marholm's later criticism of Baltic provincialism echoed this notion of the spiritual poverty of her surroundings ("*geistige Armut meiner Umgebung*"; cited in Brantly 1991: 14). Later on, in the discourse of the Baltic press, and also in Marholm's works, some other ideas expressed by Cohn in the article can be recognised, for example, about "a woman's life vocation", when speaking of woman as mother ("*weiblicher Lebensberuf*"; Cohn 1870: 414). Although, as opposed to Marholm's later ideas about women's incapacity to be equal to men, Cohn did not deny that a woman had the natural ability to be so, however, he considered that philosophy and science were not accessible for women because of their inadequate education, that is, due to human-created conditions, and hence deemed this possibility as a misconception ("*Irrthum*"; Cohn 1870: 428). In Marholm's view, conversely, a woman was not able to be equal to a man because of her essential state of being, as decreed by nature.

Laura Marholm published her first literary works – plays and essays – in the late 1870s in Riga, under the pseudonym Leonhard Marholm. Part One *Gertrud Lindensten* of the play *Johann Reinhold Patkul* was published in 1878, Part Two – *Patkul's Tod* – in 1880, and even before the books were published, some excerpts of these appeared and were discussed in local periodicals. The censorship of the Russian Empire did not

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6 Later, in Germany, Gustav Cohn became a well-known national-economist (socio-economist); at the beginning of his career, from 1869 until 1872 he was a docent at the Riga Politechnikum; inter alia in 1896 he published a book, *Deutsche Frauenbewegung*, in Berlin.

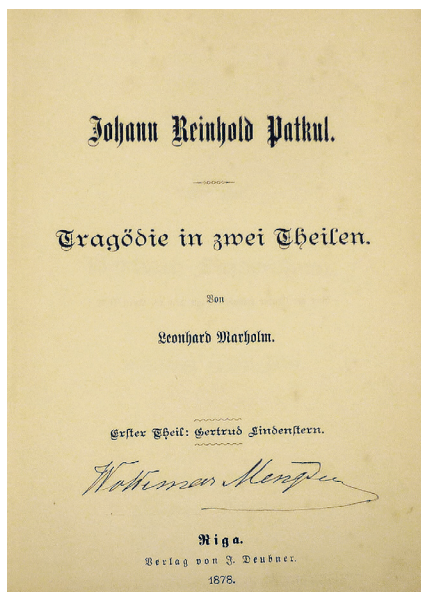


Fig. 2. First play of Laura (Leonhard) Marholm, published in 1878.  
Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage

permit this, her first play, to be staged: it was only allowed to appear in print.<sup>7</sup> The second play *Frau Marianne*, on the other hand, was staged in theatres in Riga, Berlin and Amsterdam ([Anon.] 1895a; Brantly 1991: 18–19).<sup>8</sup>

Literary critics remarked on the talent for language, and sharp and witty mind of “the new playwright” Leonhard Marholm, but there were mixed feelings about his touching on historic themes that Baltic Germans found sensitive (Schiemann 1884; Ungern-Sternberg 1882).<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that both Marholm’s publishers and

7 It was representative of the ‘literary play’ typical of the time.

8 The play *Frau Marianne* had a history of controversy; the reviewer slated Marholm’s choice of a hero with a weak character, the poet Johann Christian Günther (1695–1723) (Ungern-Sternberg 1882: 602). It should be noted that this “hero” or motif was popular in the German language area in the late 19th century, when at least three plays were written about him, and Susan Brantly has pointed out that only one has been staged, that is, the one by Marholm, albeit without any particular success (Brantly 1991: 18–19). The play was published in book form in 1882 with the support of Marholm’s employer, the newspaper *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, i.e. by its publishing house.

9 At the end of the 19th century, in parallel with Marholm’s play and reviews about it, and afterwards as well, the German-language press of Latvia published articles by historians on Johann Reinhold von Patkul (1660–1707), a historic figure of the so-called Swedish era in Livonia [present-day Latvia and Estonia] who was condemned to death. Against the background of the personality of von Patkul, the local Germans began to examine their history and presence in the Baltic, an especially topical subject given Tsarist Russia’s policy of Russification at this time.

the Riga critics knew that she – a woman – was the actual author.<sup>10</sup> Similar criticism was expressed on publication of the short story *Im Dienste Zweier Herren. Eine Episode aus der Zeiten der Kalenderunruhen*, which appeared in the *Rigascher Almanach* (Marholm 1882). Alongside the chief male protagonists and real-life historic personages, Marholm assigned a significant place to her female heroines who for the most part were the fruits of her imagination, an embodiment of the ideal woman who sacrifices herself for the good of others. In the subtexts of the plays there was a perceptible socio-economic criticism of society (Scott-Jones 1980: 87–88; Jiresch 2013: 368, 389). In reviews of her work, however, the main emphasis was on the treatment of historic themes and personages, and against this background her female characters were only mentioned as if in passing.

The success of her first publications led to Marholm working as an editor, and also theatre and literature critic, at the Riga newspaper *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*<sup>11</sup> where she signed her articles with “–m.”, but in 1885: “L. Marholm” (Marholm 1885b; Reinharde 1933; Brantly 1991: 17). During the Riga period she was also published in other German-language publications in the region: the *Baltische Monatsschrift* of Riga, the monthly *Nordische Rundschau* of Tallin, and the *St. Petersburger Zeitung*.

Susan Brantly considers that in 1883 a sea change occurred in Marholm’s worldview and moral stance, including her attitude towards women, when after an intensive study of history<sup>12</sup> and on making a closer acquaintance with the social realist dramas of Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) she came to doubt the ruling authorities (Brantly 1991: 20–21, 39; Jiresch 2013: 368). As a no less significant event in Marholm’s life during her time in Riga, a painful personal experience must be mentioned: her first great love had not dared to propose to her due to his lowly social status and impecunious background. She felt very acutely the pain of the “injustices of the prevailing marriage system, where money and social status were primary considerations, but talent, character, and, most of all, love were merely of secondary importance”

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10 For example, the librarian, publisher and editor Berkholtz.

11 From 1894 onwards *Zeitung für Stadt und Land* was published under the title *Rigasche Rundschau*.

12 After the failures (or relative success) with performances of her play *Frau Marianne*, Marholm turned to the study of history, as an autodidact, with increased enthusiasm (Brantly 1991: 19–20). In the Riga Cathedral precinct, alongside the library there was also the city archive. In about 1883 Marholm gave a series of lectures about Baltic history for women in Riga, a total of no less than 25 lectures. She later acknowledged that the writing of history in the Baltic was being politicised: “I recognised that the method by which the history of the Baltic was being driven here was motivated by a political goal rather than a critical assessment of history.” (*“Ich erkannte, daß die Methode, nach der baltische Geschichte bei uns getrieben wird, aus einem politischen Zweck, nicht aus historischer Kritik hervorging”*) (quoted after Brantly 1991: 20).

(Brantly 1991). This episode had an influence on the themes she later explored in her literary and journalistic works: both with regard to the necessity of a woman sacrificing herself for the benefit of the man – genius, in the case where financial circumstances were precarious, and also about the choice of married partner made by the woman herself in order to serve society more productively.

In 1885 Marholm moved to Denmark to live, as relations had broken down with her high-born Baltic publishers, including her benefactor Georg Berkholtz and also the publisher of the *Baltische Monatsschrift*, Friedrich Gustav Bienemann (1838–1903), because of the criticism she had expressed about the literary darlings they and other members of the social elite had taken to their hearts, about the provincialism of the region, and about their socio-economic tenets, for example, their endeavours to preserve the privileges of the Baltic German ruling class (Marholm 1885c; Eckardt 1928; Brantly 1991: 23–24)<sup>13</sup>

### **The Copenhagen Period (1885–1890)**

In Copenhagen, with the assistance of writer Georg Brandes (1842–1927), Marholm gained access to Danish literary circles and met her future husband – ‘the misunderstood genius’ Ola Hansson. As Ronald Vierock writes, in Denmark “[.] for this purpose she, as a greying 34-year-old, acquired as husband, this Ola Hansson, who with his descriptions of perverse relationships (*Sensivita amorosa*) had made himself a social outcast in Sweden. Marholm, on the other hand, was excited about it.” (Vierock [2014]: 8).<sup>14</sup> Shortly before she became acquainted with Hansson, in a letter to the Norwegian playwright Jonas Lie, (1833–1908), Marholm had admitted: “My strength doubles when I can bear another person up – one is of course, a woman, one must be something for others in order to feel life completely.” (quoted after Brantly 1991: 49, 65). In Hansson Marholm found such a person, through whom and with whom together she would be able to fulfil her life goals; the couple married in 1889. Marholm, though, had not wished to get married officially: she married under pressure from her father, who had threatened to cut off his financial support (Brantly 1991: 61).

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13 Marholm defined herself as a representative of this community and its traditions, stating “we Balts” (“*wir Balten*”, Marholm 1885c), which during the period in question and in this context was understood to mean Baltic Germans.

14 “*So kommt sie mit damals für diesen Zweck schon eisgrauen 34 Jahren endlich auch an ihren Ehemann, eben jenen Ola Hansson, der sich gerade durch Schilderungen perverser Partnerschaften (“Sensitiva amorosa”) in Schweden unmöglich gemacht hatte. Laura Marholm ist aber davon begeistert [...]*”.

In Denmark Laura Marholm made her name as a translator, and she was later recognised as an invaluable propagator of Scandinavian literature “who labored valiantly, and erratically, to bring the North to Germany, and Germany to the North.” (George C. Schoolfield, quoted after Brantly 1991: 2). Marholm, among other things, made a considerable contribution to the dissemination and popularisation of the ideas of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) in the German-language space, being the translator of essays by Hansson and Brandes (Fuchs 1999: 19; Plaga 2008: 45–46; Jiresch 2013: 371)<sup>15</sup>.

It was due to Marholm that Ola Hansson entered into the history as one of the first who revealed or explained Nietzsche in the German-language press. Even though the essay by Georg Brandes had been written earlier, based on his own lecture about Nietzsche, Marholm delayed translating it until the one by her husband had been published (Fuchs 1999: 19; Plaga 2008: 42).<sup>16</sup> There were other instances where the biographers of both writers draw attention to the collaboration between the spouses, and also to the fact that Marholm had regarded herself and her husband as a literary partnership and basically worked as translator in order to promote her husband’s works (Brantly 1991: 70).

During the Copenhagen period, Marholm continued to contribute to periodicals published in Riga, Tallinn and St Petersburg; she also continued to translate works by Scandinavian authors for publication in the *St. Petersburger Zeitung* (Jiresch 2013: 389; Brantly 1991: 32, 37). From about 1884 onwards the writer signed her works

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15 Nietzsche was unable to enjoy his late found popularity that had started to emerge only in the 1890s, as by then he was seriously ill.

16 The argument about this translation culminated in Hansson’s quarrel with Georg Brandes, which resulted in the Hanssons leaving Stockholm. At other stages of their life the couple came into conflict with prominent personalities, and instead of reconciliation they changed their place of residence. In history books these disputes are judged variously. Roland Vierock, for example, seeks to understand Marholm: “Throughout her life, Laura Marholm’s bold and uncompromising stand led her into conflicts with powerful personalities. This can happen. But her pride prevented any kind of reconciliation: the clash with Brandes drove her away from Copenhagen, with Strindberg – from Berlin, with Bjørnson – destroyed her in Bavaria.” (Vierock [2014]: 33) (*Laura Marholm bestimmtes und nachdrückliches Auftreten führt sie lebenslang immer wieder in Konflikte mit starken Persönlichkeiten. Das kann passieren. Aber ihr Stolz verhindert danach jede Auflösung: Der Konflikt mit Brandes hat sie aus Kopenhagen vertrieben, der mit Strindberg aus Berlin, der mit Bjørnstron ruiniert sie in Bayern.*) The people mentioned here are the Swedish playwright Johan August Strindberg (1849–1912) and the Norwegian writer and Nobel Prize laureate in 1903, Bjørnstjerne Martinius Bjørnson (1832– 1910). A comprehensive account of the disputes can be found in the monograph by Susan Brantly (Brantly 1991) and other publications about Marholm (Jiresch 2013). It must be noted that in their dispute with Brandes, the Hanssons revealed their anti-Semitism, and this did not enhance their popularity among their contemporaries; likewise, when their activities are analysed today, this aspect is taken into account (Fuchs 1997: 19).

'L. Marholm' (Marholm 1884), but at some time around 1890 the recently married Mrs Mohr-Hansson began to publish her writings under the pen-name 'Laura Marholm', that is, as a female author.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Germany Period (1891–1905)**

The year 1890 was for the Hansson family a year of travelling and exploration in Switzerland, Germany and Sweden. During this time their son Ola (1890–1958) was born, and in 1891 the family moved to Friedrichshagen, near Berlin,<sup>18</sup> and joined the poets' circle active there (*Friedrichshagener Dichterkreis*). The Berlin Period, up to 1893–1894, was for the Hanssons an active, creative and productive time: Laura was able to fulfil her mission as the handmaid of a genius, she became more self-confident and devoted herself to self-fulfilment, this time as the heart and soul of a literary salon (Glossmann 1999; Niemirowsky 2000). Many drafts and manuscripts for future books were developed during this time (Glossmann 1999; Niemirowsky 2000).

From 1894 onwards the Hansson's place of residence was in Bavaria, by the lake Schliersee, and here "they first became Catholic and then went mad" (Vierock [2014]: 15).<sup>19</sup> From Catholicism Marholm derived new impulses for her theory of a woman's vocation. The couple converted from Protestantism to Catholicism in 1898, and the following year they moved to Munich (Brantly 2013: 149). In the history of literature and ideas their contribution to the promotion and development to the so-called cult of motherhood is appreciated. A woman's vocation to devote herself to a man in Marholm's interpretation extended to the duty to procreate and bring up children. At around the turn of the 19th–20th centuries and later, influenced by World War I and revolutions, for Marholm this vocation was further augmented with the mission to devote herself to society: in her ideas, Catholicism was intermingled with currents of social thought Brantly 2013: 16; Wennerscheid 2014).

During the Germany period Laura Marholm translated a great deal, she was widely published in the German press (reviews, essays) and she published 10 books, mostly devoted to women's psychology. Between 1894 and 1899 her best-selling book *Das Buch der Frauen: Zeitpsychologische Porträts* was reprinted at least five times

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17 Already in 1886, in a discussion with Strindberg that appeared in the press it was noted that "Leonhard Marholm" was "Miss L. Mohr in Copenhagen" (*Politiken* 25.01.1888, quoted after Brantly 1991: 45). In this same year *Libausche Zeitung* included Marholm among the most talented female writers of the Baltic (E.K. 1888)

18 A suburb of present-day Berlin.

19 "wo sie zuerst katolisch und dann verrückt wurden"

in German, it was translated into eight languages and “reached a wider audience than anything Ola Hansson ever wrote” (Marholm 1899; Brantly 1991: 183).<sup>20</sup> The book featured portraits of six well-known women of the period: Ukrainian-French artist Marie Bashkirtseff (1858–1884), whose posthumously published diary in 1887 acquired cult status among European women’s activists; Swedish writer Anne Charlotte Edgren-Leffler (1849–1892); Italian actress Eleonora Duse (1858–1924); a female author writing in English under the pen name George Egerton (1859–1945); Norwegian-Danish writer Amalie Skram (1846–1905); and Russian mathematician and professor at Stockholm University, Sonja Kowalewska (1850–1891).

During the Germany period Marholm also produced *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter* (1895);<sup>21</sup> the two-part *Zur Psychologie der Frau. I–II* (1897, 1903);<sup>22</sup> and *Die Frauen in der sozialen Bewegung* (1900).<sup>23</sup> Her literary works during this time were the play *Karla Bühring* (1895); a collection of short stories, *Zwei Frauenerlebnisse* (1895); the autobiographical short story *Frau Lilly als Jungfrau, Gattin und Mutter* (1897); the collection

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20 The first edition of the book was dated 1895, although it was actually published in mid-November, 1894 (Marholm 1899: VII; Brantly 1991: 106). Marholm updated the editions, and wrote additional introductions. The book was published in Swedish, English, Norwegian, Russian, Polish, Dutch, Czech and Italian; although Marholm had a contract for the book to be translated into French, it was never published (Brantly 1991: 106).

21 Seven poets were reviewed in the book: a Swiss, Gottfried Keller (1819–1890); a German, Paul Heyse (1830–1914); two Norwegians: Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson; a Russian, Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910); a Swede, August Strindberg; and a Frenchman, Henry René Albert Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893). In the 2nd revised edition of 1896 an eighth poet was added, another Frenchman: Jules Amédée Barbey d’Aurevilly (1808–1889), as well as Marholm’s concluding essay ‘*Wo stehen wir?*’ (Marholm 1896: 271–295).

22 Marholm was not a specialist, i.e. had not received an education or had practised in the field of psychology, despite that she had read widely on the subject. The book was not highly regarded. Susan Brantly considers that “public taste was changing, and Marholm’s revelations about female sexuality were no longer titillating” (Brantly 1991: 151). After the lack of success of Part I, Marholm had been forced to write the second part by her publisher. In 1903, both parts were published as one book. The work is peculiar and it would be more appropriate to call it “*Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter II*, since five out of eight essays have to do with literature” (Brantly 1991: 159).

23 The book touches on the aspect of socio-economic consciousness more than her previous works. Marholm’s ideal society at that moment was “a type of Catholic socialism, which she believes to have existed in the Middle Ages.” Ideally women were wives and mothers, whose rights were defended by the Church. “A woman may find fulfilment through being the wife of a good man or a bride of Christ” (Brantly 1991: 153–154). Marholm had already presented a critique of society and ideas of social utopias in her book *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, writing about potential welfare institutions that would be financed by a special “men’s tax” and which would protect women and help them, about a women’s (sisterhood) state within the state (*Schwesternstaat im Staat*), and about “a universal feeling of motherhood” (*Allmüttergefühl*) (Brantly 1991: 142; Witt-Brattström 2007: 154).



Fig. 3. The fifth reprint of the book *Das Buch der Frauen*, with a portrait of the Ukrainian-French artist Marie Bashkirtseff, 1899. Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage

*Der Weg nach Altötting und andere Novellen* (1900);<sup>24</sup> and a collection of partly autobiographical short stories, *Buch der Toten* (1900).<sup>25</sup>

Other authors referred to Marholm as an authority on women's psychology. Professional psychologists read her, too, and she communicated with them: she kept up correspondence and sent copies of her books, and they, for their part, used Marholm's writings as proof of women's weakness because these were, as Marholm herself had said, "a woman's utterances about her gender" (quoted after Brantly 1991: 111).<sup>26</sup> Marholm in her works mentioned, among other things, the so-called (ineluctable) differentiation or split of the modern woman's personality which allegedly leads to internal conflicts and psychological problems (Marholm 1899: VI, 136).

24 The short stories in the collection are characterised as "Catholic", one is also "anti-Semitic" (*Scwesterliebe*); the story *Im Bann* is the culmination of Marholm's literary offering – about the relationship between the deceased mother and her daughter, where she confesses her mother's sins to the priest (Brantly 1991: 152–153).

25 The book "is probably Laura Marholm's most curious work" (Brantly 1991: 154). It comprises three essays: *Aus Liebe* about a young woman who becomes Marholm's follower after reading *Das Buch der Frauen*; *Die kleine Fanny* about her childhood in Riga; *Dreimal* about the three attempts the Hanssons made to live with Ola's parents in Sweden.

26 "[...] eine Äusserung einer Frau über ihr Geschlecht."



Fig. 4. *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter*, 1895.  
Berlin State Library –  
Prussian Cultural Heritage

A woman's inner conflict, frailty and ill health occurs because she is split or differentiated<sup>27</sup> in her choice between developed, educated individuality, inculcated to be sexless<sup>28</sup> and the natural instincts or sexuality that, in Marholm's opinion, had been retained by the peasantry. In this case the "uneducated", or unspoilt, in the perception of Marholm, peasantry was being idealised. In her texts, the dislike for the existing educational system and institution of marriage oriented towards the preservation of the class order in society and the suppression of women's natural instincts that had emerged while still in Riga was mixed with the latest currents in European thought that she had found out about in Copenhagen and Berlin, ideas such as Nietzscheism, pan-Germanism, Darwinism, naturalism, biologism, some of which even for late 19th and beginning of the 20th century Latvian readers were no longer unheard-of (Eglāja-Kristsone 2015: 210–216, 239–240, 242). It must be pointed out that contemporaries criticised Marholm for her fondness for foreign terms and her inclination to use them too often in addition to ideas, at times even

27 Marholm used the adjective 'differentiated' (German: *differenziert*) to express a woman's split (German: *geteilt*) personality; her use of this adjective bears no relation to the later concept 'difference feminism' attributed to her by some researchers. For an analysis of the latter, see further (in Conclusion).

28 In the book *Zur Psychologie der Frau* (1897, quoted after Brantly 1991: 139).



Fig. 5. The autobiographical short story *Frau Lilly als Jungfrau, Gattin und Mutter*, 1897. Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage

contradictory, expressed chaotically and vaguely, having been crafted in expansive texts that had been superbly formulated from a literary aspect ([Anon.] 1895b; Dohm 1902: 86, 88).

The Hanssons, having come into conflict with other public figures of their time and becoming marginalised, likewise developed an idea that the more brilliant the personality was, the more deniers and naysayers there would be (Jiresch 2013: 375). “During the worst of her mental illness, Marholm constructed an astonishingly complex paranoid system of conspiracies” (Brantly 1991: 156). In 1905 the couple were ordered, by police injunction, to seek medical treatment; for six months Laura, diagnosed with paranoia, was hospitalised in the Munich district psychiatric institution (*Kreisirrenanstalt*). However, as their son Ola was later to write, despite the problems that bedevilled the family both before and after this crisis, these including financial difficulties, the Hanssons remained united (Brantly 1991: 171–172).<sup>29</sup>

In her book, *Die Frauen in der sozialen Bewegung* (1900), Marholm wrote about herself: “My life would have undoubtedly been easier if I hadn’t been so intensively

29 Ola junior himself was separated from his family for seven years from 1899, when his parents left him during school term time with a housekeeper in Schliersee (Brantly 2013: 149).

preoccupied with the woman question but instead would have written short stories and novels" (quoted after Brantly 1991: 154).<sup>30</sup>

**After 1905** After 1905, the Hanssons entered into a period of creative self-isolation. Together with her husband, Marholm often sojourned in France, with intervals in Austria, Switzerland and Sweden, staying in each place for about half a year; they also travelled around. In 1907 they spent a month in Riga, staying at Laura's parents' house.<sup>31</sup> The Hanssons could have participated in the cultural life of Paris, though they did not make use of this opportunity. In 1906, Ola Hansson received a grant from the Bonnier Foundation (*Bonniers stipend*), but later, in 1911, a Fröding scholarship (*Fröding stipend*), and this improved the couple's financial situation. From 1909 until 1914 they lived in Meudon, in the south-west suburbs of Paris (Brantly 1991: 172).

During World War I, the family lived in several different places in Switzerland and France, but after the war they went to Denmark and then moved on to Sweden, where Ola Hansson had book contracts. In 1922 the family set off on a journey through Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey where, in 1925, Ola Hansson died.<sup>32</sup> In 1926, students at Lund University organised the transport of Hansson's mortal remains from Turkey and a funeral in Sweden; meanwhile Marholm bequeathed to Lund University her husband's archive that she was preparing to publish. After her spouse's death, Marholm spent the rest of her life together with her son in Latvia, where she retired and lived anonymously in an apartment on Jomas iela in Jūrmala (Majori). She was there from 1926 until the autumn of 1928, but her acquaintances did not even know that she was living in Latvia (Brantly 1991: 180–183; Eckhardt 1928).<sup>33</sup>

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30 "Es wäre mir gewi sehr viel besser im Leben gegangen, wenn ich mich mit der Frauenfrage nicht so eifrig befasst und statt dessen Noveletten und Romane geschrieben hätte"; the book came out at a time when her creative activities began to be beset by failure, even though around this time she was being published extensively (Brantly 1991: 151, 154; Jiresch 2013).

31 Marholm's mother had died but her father had started a new family and did not wish to meet. Later, in 1911, with the help of consuls Marholm sought to make contact with her father, but he refused allow his address to be passed on (Brantly 1991: 172).

32 In 1922 they had abandoned Sweden in a hurry because Marholm had not wished act as witness in a court case to do with the authorship of a translation of a work by Strindberg (Brantly 1991: 180).

33 Marholm died on 6 October and she was interred on 11 October in the *Lielie kapi* (Great Cemetery) of Riga (Brantly 1991: 183; Reinharde 1933: 212). Laura Marholm's archive, like the Ola Hansson materials, are held in the library of Lund University (Brantly 1991: 185–186).

As World War I continued, Ola Hansson became melancholy, often ill, introverted, and dwelt on the past, while Laura Marholm, conversely, was inspired by the war to write journalistic articles with left-wing content about social problems, namely a melange of social ideas, Catholicism, women's rights and duties (implied meaning: responsibilities) and racial issues (anti-Semitism). Marholm was published, though not as prolifically as before 1905, mostly in the Scandinavian left-wing press (Brantly 1991: 173–179; Fuchs 1997: 19; Witt-Brattström 2007: 155).<sup>34</sup>

## Marholm and issues of women's emancipation in the German-language press of Latvia

### Marholm's articles in the German-language press of Latvia

As previously stated, after the success of her first play Marholm started working for the newspaper *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, writing reviews about theatre and literature.<sup>35</sup> The frequency of Marholm's reviews for the paper was about once a month, and in these pieces she did not touch upon the so-called woman question; if she expressed any criticism, then it was about the socio-economic conditions in the Baltic (Marholm 1885a).

The most significant writings by Marholm that can be placed within the discourse on women's emancipation, although without any further direct resonance in the Latvian press, were Marholm's articles in the *Rigasche Hausfrauen-Zeitung* (henceforth – *RHZ*) in 1884 and in 1887 about the employment of women. The first article, as a series of five instalments, was published at the close of 1884: *Über die Tätigkeit der Frau: Betrachtungen über das Alltägliche* (Marholm 1884). In it she critically examined the traditional, conservative role of woman in the family, in society, and described disparagingly the institution of marriage which was seen as the only conventionally approved place for a woman to fulfil herself. She was critical of the fact that outside the family there was no recognition of female work or occupation. Likewise she deprecated women's education and training which was geared towards the preservation

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34 The first work by Marholm published after 1905 was an essay *The Woman of To-day* about contemporary woman; it appeared in a collection of works *The Woman Question* published in 1918 in New York (Brantly 1991: 191). Her son Ola averred that in 1906, while living in France, Marholm had recovered and had started writing again, and that in 1906 several of her articles had been published in the Swedish press under Ola Hansson's name (Reinhadre 1933: 210).

35 The first review by Marholm that has been possible to identify as hers, signed "–m.", was published on 18 August, 1881 (–m. 1881). Two of Marholm's articles, overviews about the Riga city theatre, were published by *Nordische Rundschau* in 1884 (Brantly 1991: 187).

of the existing social structure. Even though Marholm found fault with the conservatism of the educated, well-to-do class – its attitude to life, aspirations and prejudices, she did not offer any answers as regards alternatives or solutions (Marholm 1884).

At the end of this exhaustive account Marholm, having elevated women slightly above the clouds and come to the conclusion that there were many professions and occupations (but not all) where a woman could be educated and independent, she did not, however, concede woman as being of equal status with a man. In Marholm's opinion a woman's self-development as an individual was limited, that is, it was biologically preordained by nature. In her view, a woman did not possess enough psychological resilience, her delicate nervous system had not been created to endure long-term pressure (not mature enough) in order to carry out that same tasks as men. Marholm asserted that sustained mental strain rendered women prone to ill health (Marholm 1884).<sup>36</sup> Marholm's compilation is slightly confusing: criticism of society's conservatism together with unproven assertions about women's inadequate psychological development in comparison to men, which in fact corresponded to the attitude of the conservative majority she herself had just criticised, one that saw a woman's role in society as being subordinate and was oriented to maintaining the existing social structures. As already mentioned, later, after Marholm's popular books had been released in Germany, Hedwig Dohm commented on her chaotic and contradictory style and difficult to follow exposition of ideas along with outstanding literary language (Dohm 1902: 86, 88).

A second article by Marholm was printed in the newspaper *RHZ* in January 1886, shortly after she had moved to Copenhagen: *Frauenarbeit hüben und drüben. Flüchtige Umrisse* (Marholm 1886). In two of the three parts of the article she described her impressions at an applied arts and crafts exhibition in Copenhagen, but in the third part she turned to a description of children's shelters. What was in common for both themes was that they both examined the work of women's organisations.

The organizer of the applied arts and crafts exhibition was a women's drawing school (*Zeichenschule für Frauen*)<sup>37</sup> and Marholm likened it to the Jung-Stilling schools in Riga, "if one conceived of combining together a drawing school and a school of

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36 "Für eine ununterbrochene, geistig anspannende Thätigkeit [...] hat die Frau [...] gar nicht die hinreichende physische Ausdauer. Ihr Zartes Nervensystem ist den Anstrengungen auf Länge nicht gewachsen, sie wird blaß, mager, kränklich und verblüht von der Zeit, oder ihr Wesen erhält etwas unerfreulich Gesteigertes."

37 Referring, possibly, to the *Tegneskolen for Kvinder* founded in 1875.

applied arts” (Marholm 1886).<sup>38</sup> The Copenhagen school was more elite than the one in Riga, apparently, and was not oriented towards attracting women from the lower classes to whom it could impart practical skills that would be useful in life. On the one hand Marholm criticised this “production of luxury items” (*Produktion von Luxusgegenständen*), but on the other she admired and described in detail what she had seen: the things women had made, created. In the article Marholm thematised two important aspects of women’s emancipation: women in paid employment and the higher education of women. At the exhibition Marholm saw the potential of women’s productivity and independence, and expressed an opinion – if only at the level of conjecture – that women working could cause a crisis in the existing economic system and at the same time that it was an inevitable process.<sup>39</sup> Marholm likened the activities of the Copenhagen drawing school and its artworks to the Academy of Art,<sup>40</sup> which women were not permitted to attend. With warm approval Marholm informed that at one of the schools of higher education in Saint Petersburg women were allowed to attend as external students, for example, in the Faculty of Medicine.<sup>41</sup>

The third part of the article was devoted to children’s shelters in Copenhagen, and mentioned as an example the work of the Young Children’s Welfare association (*Das kleine Kinder-Wohl*). In this section Marholm drew attention to the poverty of the lower class that compels women to avoid having children. After a critique of the inequality of socio-economic classes and ruminating on the traditional and humane duty to help children, she arrived at the conclusion that giving birth to and bringing up children was a woman’s “most beautiful and natural profession” (Marholm 1886).<sup>42</sup>

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38 Marholm was speaking about the *Jung-Stillingsche Zeichen- und Malschule* in Riga, a private school for women established in 1873 and run by Elise von Jung-Stilling (1829–1904), and the *Mädchen-Gewerbeschule des Jungfrauen-Vereins* founded in 1876 and headed by Luise von Jung-Stilling (1842–1921).

39 “Wer wollte es leugnen, daß die Frauenarbeit überhaupt eine zweischneidige Waffe ist? Ausgezeichnet geeignet die Würde, den Werth und die Entwicklungsfreiheit der Frau nach außen zu schützen aber zugleich abhängig von so mannigfaltigen und unberechenbaren socialen und wirtschaftlichen Constellationen, so angeordnet und zufällig in ihrem Verhältnis zur allgemeinen Production, daß sich schwere Krisen und gewaltsame Rückschläge mit Sicherheit voraussehen lassen.” (Marholm 1886)

40 Obviously referring to the *Det Kongelige Academie for de skjønne Kunster* as it was at the time.

41 Even though Marholm was sympathetic to female external students, in her later book *Das Buch der Frauen* she criticised women’s education because even though this created a few female doctors [and] elementary school teachers, for the most part it led to ill health in women (Jiresch 2013: 390–391).

42 “ihr schönster und natürlichster Beruf”

It has not been possible to find in the Latvian press any reviews of these works by Marholm, but they are in alignment with the themes tackled by *RHZ* with regard to the education of women and work that was aimed at the improvement of social welfare, whilst retaining society's traditional structures (Proveja 2017).<sup>43</sup> In essence Marholm's *RHZ* articles conformed with the conservative Baltic German majority worldview dominated by the belief that a woman needs only just enough education to be able to offer the required assistance to her family and society – in the case of Marholm, society only, since she had severely criticised the institution of family as the preserver of social status – so that it could continue to exist economically and culturally (Wilhelmi 2008: 51–53, 87–89, 104, 107).<sup>44</sup> Marholm's opinions did slightly differ from those of the *RHZ* in that she breached the approved framework for women in the Baltic and accepted as admissible the development of the woman as an individual outside her age-old, established community; she found appealing the idea of women having the chance to be educated in tertiary institutions and thus enabling them to serve society beyond their predetermined narrow social stratum.

After Marholm left Riga, articles written by her in the German-language press of Latvia were a rarity. In 1890, the *Düna Zeitung* printed Marholm's essay *Tolstoi als Frauenschilderer* (Marholm 1890 a, b).<sup>45</sup> While still in Riga, as part of her repertoire of activities she had already begun to write longer essays about various writers, and continued to do so in Denmark and in Germany.<sup>46</sup> Some of the essays, including the one about Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910), were included in her book *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter*. In it, she called the Russian writer a *Weiberhasser* – that is, a misogynist (Marholm 1896: 179). In the *Düna Zeitung* article she examined several of Tolstoy's

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43 *RHZ* printed articles about, for example, the education of women, teaching them how to carry out the duties of family life. *RHZ* was a publication organised by women and intended for women, and it came out from 1883 until 1906. Its readership was made up of middle and upper-class women, and included existing pedagogues and those in the making (Baranius-Molien 1895; Proveja 2017: 127; Zigmunde 2009).

44 As the ruling class, Baltic German interest in the issue of women's emancipation was limited to (stopped at) the education of women for the strengthening of the family and society, for the promotion of its welfare. Everything that transpired outside this was viewed as a threat to the stability of society, and in the case of the local Baltic Germans – also as a threat to the position of the ruling class.

45 Although in the Riga publication there was a note that it had been reprinted from *Neue Freie Presse* (Wien), the essay had been published a week earlier in the *Düna Zeitung*.

46 The essays about Ibsen and Keller were published in *Nordische Rundschau* in 1884 and 1885, the one about Brandes in *Rigasche Zeitung* (1885), and the essay on her future husband Hansson appeared in *St. Petersburger Zeitung* (1888) (Brantly 1991: 187–188).

works, characterising his depiction of women in each of them. Marholm found that the Russian authors, and Tolstoy especially, adopted an intuitive approach to women, their nature, and she was critical about the way they treated a woman as an object. For these writers a woman was a naive child of nature with her indefinable attractiveness, with her impatience untrammelled by thought, a kind of physiological private property for the man. This way of regarding a woman was no more than a process from the animal world, presented as a mystery of psychology (Marholm 1890).<sup>47</sup>

In this essay Marholm once again confirmed her knowledge of literature and also her talent for language. Nonetheless, one cannot escape the feeling that Marholm was not only criticising Tolstoy, but was also studying and drawing on ideas. The most popular of her later works on women's psychology scrutinised precisely these natural, physiological instincts, except that now it was from a woman's viewpoint.

## Reviews of Marholm's works in the German-language press of Latvia

During Marholm's first phase of creative activity – the Riga Period and Copenhagen Period – “Leonard Marholm”, and later Laura as herself, were unequivocally acknowledged as a new talent – a genius that had finally emerged in the Baltic provinces. Unfortunately, “Leonard's” literary women passed by unnoticed (Schiemann 1884; [Anon.] 1894a).

At some time around 1888, Marholm began to be included among the most talented female writers in the Baltic. The newspaper *Libausche Zeitung* published reviews by one certain E.K. (either male or female), in which the writer employed prejudiced phrases about educated women as ‘bluestockings’ and simply counterposing one female author against another (E. K. 1888; 1889). Marholm received a positive appraisal by the said critic and they contrasted her to “watery, standardised blue-stockingery” (E.K. 1889).<sup>48</sup>

The greater majority of the critiques, reviews and mentions that appeared in the German-language press of Latvia and reflections on the so-called ‘woman question’ were in relation to Marholm's most popular book *Das Buch der Frauen*. As early as December 1894, the *Rigasche Hausfreun-Zeitung* published a review of the work. Basically it was a summarisation of the book's contents, about the people portrayed,

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47 “unreflektiertes Naturkind”; “das Weib bloss als Geschlecht mit seiner undefinierbaren Anziehung mit seiner gedankenlosen Ungeduld [...]”; “physiologische Eigenthümlichkeit”; “Es ist eigentlich nichts als ein Prozeß des Tierlebens als psychologisches Geheimniss hingestellt [...]”

48 “wässrigen, schablonenhaften Blaustrümpferei”

and allowed that even though one could disagree with Marholm's depiction of a woman's essential being, it was not possible to deny her compelling and sure-footed style. Although the style was praised, the reviewer particularly marked out and criticised the language for the fact that there were so many comparisons with death, illness and division, which for the educated reader of *RHZ* was, apparently, too harsh. The reviewer (either male or female – not specified) emphasised that the title of the book was also misleading: in accordance with it a reader might be led to think that Marholm had researched and generalised knowledge about women as a whole. Here, as in other reviews of the book, it was underlined that the six women chosen by Marholm were exceptions ([Anon.] 1894b).

In September, 1895, Marholm's former place of employment – now known as *Rigasche Rundschau* – published a review of her book. It was actually a reprint of a review that had appeared in the *Kölnische Zeitung* ([Anon.] 1895a). This review, like the one previously mentioned, emphasised that the women selected were not representative of all women. Marholm had chosen six women-foreigners (the first edition of the book and the reprinted review had been published in Germany), who were one-off exceptions in society. There had been such like that throughout the ages, among representatives of the male gender as well. That was why, on the basis of these women, it was not possible to express generalised views about all women, nor were these views applicable to the women of Germany, it did not correspond to reality. The critique concluded that the work was superficial and that the author did not even know all the biographical details about the people that she had written about.<sup>49</sup> Likewise Marholm's method of drawing conclusions about creative personalities based on their creative (visible) activities was criticised, for instance, about the Italian actress Eleanora Duse on the basis of the roles she had played, and this was not a fair reflection of the person, just as it would not be correct to make judgements about literary figures according to the literary (fictional) protagonists they had created ([Anon.] 1895a).<sup>50</sup>

Unlike the reviewer published in the *Rigasche Rundschau*, the critic – gender unknown – of the newspaper *Düna Zeitung* in the article *Ein Buch einer Frau* of

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49 Other reviewers also wrote about Marholm's errors in the biographies of her subjects (Dohm 1902: 85; Bjørnson 1895)

50 Possibly many of the assumptions Marholm made about creative people and other women were based on her own personal experience, also she treated the life stories she described as literary works, that is, as fiction, dramatizing the contents and exploiting it to suit her own aims. Many of her own literary works were autobiographical or included her own life experiences. For more on these kinds of reflections in her works, see the analyses of her works in the monograph by Susan Brantly (Brantly 1991).

October, 1895, not only presented a review of Marholm's book but also offered an extensive array of their own opinions with regard to the issue of women's emancipation in the Baltic. The author of the review declared that Marholm was not one of those "now usual Amazonian women squealing about equality with men" ([Anon.] 1895b).<sup>51</sup>

Marholm's assertion that the modern woman had made herself ill due to the division that had come into the world together with the woman question, [and] as a result of the split between reason and woman's dark nature, was Marholm's rationale upon which the entire book was based (Marholm 1899: VI; [Anon.] 1895b).<sup>52</sup> The 'dark nature' was obviously supposed to be understood as a woman's need for love and devotion to a man (*Hingabe*), which supposedly forms part of the basic characteristics or fundamentals (*Grundzüge*) of the great creator – nature. The reviewer in *Düna Zeitung* disputed this, stating that "an understanding woman will seek to avoid this kind of conflict and without any question will hasten to her most difficult yet most beautiful profession", i.e., that of being a mother ([Anon.] 1895b).<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the author disputed Marholm's use of the concept 'women culture-bearers' (*Cultur-trägerinnen*) and meaning of the term, and presented their own interpretation of it. For Marholm these women were representatives of so-called high culture, but for the reviewer a 'woman culture-bearer' was a wife, a mother, an upbringer, a teacher, that is, one who preserves and passes down the traditions of family and her people, that is – in keeping with Baltic German tradition and necessity.

The *Düna Zeitung* reviewer warned readers about the dangers of women's emancipation which "is haunting all countries and also in our little land is casting an uncomfortable shadow" ([Anon.] 1895b)<sup>54</sup> and would soon create countless girls without a provider and a source of support in their lives.. At the same time, the author expressed approval for so-called conservative advocates of women's rights, who

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51 "... daß sie nicht in jetzt übliche Amazonengeschrei der Frauen nach Gleichstellung mit den Männern einstimme."

52 "Sie alle waren krank an einer inneren Spaltung, die erst mit der Frauenfrage in die Welt gekommen ist, an einer Spaltung zwischen ihrer Verstandesrichtung und der dunklen Basis ihrer Weibnatur."

53 "werständige Weib [...] wird den Conflict vermeiden, [...] wird ganz fraglos seinem vielleicht schwersten, aber schönsten Berufe zueilen"

54 "Frauenfrage, die in aller Herren Ländern spukt, und auch in unsere Ländchen ihren unbequemen Schatten wirft"

help impoverished women with education and work so that they can maintain their family, and society, because in that way it all develops naturally.<sup>55</sup>

The reviewer asked a rhetorical question: how did Marholm manage to research these six people and will they not refute her, as the book is not by any means a monument to these women but rather it brings to the fore the morbid, neurotic, erotically inclined character traits of their personalities.<sup>56</sup> The *Düna Zeitung* author also stated that Marholm “was no longer one of us, she has become completely Scandinavian-ised” ([Anon.] 1895b).<sup>57</sup> The lengthy critique and explication about conditions in the Baltic finished with the assertion that “a man strives for freedom, but a woman for tradition (*Sitte*)” ([Anon.] 1895b).<sup>58</sup>

A few months after this lengthy review, the *Düna Zeitung* published yet another review, though this one more brief and concise, about Marholm’s collection of short stories *Zwei Frauenerlebnisse*. The reviewer, like others, praised the writer’s talent: “intimate painting of the soul demonstrates her talent as a keen observer”(A. 1895)<sup>59</sup> but was not in agreement with the souls she had described: “Possibly I may not yet be

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55 “Denn man darf nur ja nicht vergessen, daß bittere Noth die Frauenfrage in’s Leben gerufen hat, deren Voraussetzungen das Weib am schwersten treffen. Auf dem conservativen Flügel der Frauenrechtlerinnen wickelt sich Alles ganz naturgemäß ab [...]”. It should be emphasised that the author was not speaking of women’s emancipation, but of women’s rights, which in his text he did not elaborate on. It can be understood that he was not referring to the self-organisation of women who were the poorest or the proletariat, but about the care and concern of the well-off stratum of society for its most impoverished members, that is, charity, which is in itself conservative, and dispensed so-called rights only so far as this did not disrupt the existing social structure. At the same time, it should be noted that the women’s emancipation movement in Germany and Europe in its proletarian left wing also encountered structural problems and conservatism that hindered the dissemination of its ideas (Schtreichhahn, Vincent 2020: 50–55).

56 Three of the six women written about in the book were still alive at the time. Here the characterisation of Marholm by Georg Brandes in 1897 is apposite: “She is a completely ignorant woman [...], a fairly good head, but without a trace of originality, moreover impudent, perverse, common, filled with the coarsest ruthlessness in elbowing her way forward. She and her husband have developed into a pair of literary bandits according to this Recipe[.] She lives as an authoress by having made the discovery that women are sexual beings and by having made espionage visits to the homes of famous men” (quoted after Brantly 1991: 63).

57 “Sie gehört nicht mehr zu uns. Sie hat sich ganz und gar skandinavisiert.”; here one can observe the exclusion, albeit symbolic, of those who think differently, who were not working for the good of the community, the preservation of its traditions and status.

58 “[.] für uns steht es felsen-fest, daß der Mann nach Freiheit, das Weib nach Sitte strebt.”

59 “Das Talent componierend lebensvoll zu malen, ist hervorragend, ihre [...] intimste Seelenmalerei zeigt von scharfer Beobachtungsgabe”

'differentiated' enough to understand women's nature as depicted according to Laura's heart" (A. 1895).<sup>60</sup> The reviewer further elaborated on this differentiation from several angles, attempting to employ it stylistically, with irony, thus referring to Marholm's short story: "We women are already too differentiated" (quoted after A. 1895).<sup>61</sup>

After the first wave of reviews that followed the publication of *Das Buch der Frauen*, there were no further expansive articles as regards reviews of Marholm's works. Editors and reviewers evidently had formed their opinions about Marholm, placing her works in the category of being unsuitable reading material for conservative Baltic German society and thereafter she was mentioned only in more generalised contexts – whether in overviews of literature (Büttner 1897) or specifically literary works by women (m. 1897; W. 1898). On the one hand, it was not possible not to mention Marholm, but on the other, there was nothing more than the occasional invocation of her name or a brief criticism as, for example, in a *Baltische Monatschrift* article of 1896 about women's literature (Sintenis 1896).<sup>62</sup>

A similar token mention of Marholm's name can be observed in the case of the *Rigasche Hausfrauen-Zeitung*: in an article of 1895 titled *Brautpflichten* (*The Duties of Brides*) about a woman's preparation for married life (Baranius-Molien 1895). The article refuted Marholm's thesis that in married life a woman takes on from the man all that is good, but as for the bad she is inclined by nature to deny.<sup>63</sup> The *RHZ* accepted

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60 "Es mag sein, dass ich noch nicht genug "differenziert" zu vermag, um die Weibernatur nach dem Herzen Lauras zu begreifen [...]"

61 "sind wir Frauen jetzt schon zu differenziert".

62 The article presented a comprehensive survey of women's literature from the earliest beginnings of the written word, through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance up to the end of the 19th century and women's emancipation literature in Germany. The article finished with a brief reflection on Marholm's *Das Buch der Frauen*. The article in question should be viewed in context with the first *Internationaler Kongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen* which took place in Berlin in September, 1896. It should be mentioned that the participants of this congress dubbed Marholm *Die Feindin der Frauenbewegung* ["Enemy of the Women's Movement"] (Brantly 1991: 109).

63 Marholm in her creative oeuvre idealised this kind of attitude of a woman and was of the opinion that a woman takes only what she wants (i.e. what is in her nature to want) if she allows natural development to run its course. Marholm considered that a woman has to choose for herself who she marries. Later, influenced by Catholicism and World War I, Marholm spoke of the duty of a woman to choose a husband with whom she could develop together, and through him and their family serve society. All Marholm's opinions and amplifications in her world view system need to be interpreted through the prism of her own personal experience, taking into account the experiences in her private life, both of her youth and her adult years, and also keeping in mind the fact that she was more talented, knowledgeable and full of life than many of her readers – men, at least until the culmination of her career circa 1900.

the possibility of this, but only for the duration of a so-called transitional period, until it is overcome – evidently, when the woman has become reconciled to her fate. Essentially this article in the *RHZ* had little to do with Marholm's creative oeuvre or ideas, and the citing of her name here can be deemed to be a matter of form.

In the Latvian-language press, the activities of Laura Marholm were mentioned in association with her biography. Marholm was reviewed and commented upon in the press as a well-known public figure, and when observing her personal life, the writer's views on women were invariably mentioned and thus the so-called 'woman question' was indirectly thematised. The events in Marholm's life that drew particular press attention were her marriage in 1889 and her conversion to Catholicism (1898), her commitment to a psychiatric institution (1905) and her death (1928).<sup>64</sup>

The editorial office of *Rigasche Rundschau* had reviewed Marholm's works formally and dispassionately by, for example, reprinting the review from a newspaper in Germany. However, according to a Bavarian press publication, the editorial office of the Baltic publishers in their criticism of Marholm's conversion to Catholicism had reacted in emotionally heightened manner ([Anon.] 1899a). *Rigasche Rundschau* denied this, and once more reaffirmed the support it had given to Marholm at the start of her career, when she was given ample opportunities to be published in the Baltic.

Even though at the start of Marholm's career the Liepāja-based newspaper *Libausche Zeitung* had published bigoted articles, characterising educated women as "bluestockings" (E.K. 1888; 1889), then over a course of ten years it had changed its position and in 1898 published a progressive article by H. Aronstamm, either an author or authoress in Berlin, about the women's movement and women's studies in which it was stated that "nowadays it is generally acknowledged that a woman's intellectual capacity as well physical ability are scarcely less or no less than those of a man" (Aronstamm 1898).<sup>65</sup> At the same time, the article criticised Marholm's views about a man's psychological supremacy over a woman and the fact that her female protagonists suffered erotic madness.<sup>66</sup> The article expressed support for women's right to study, meanwhile criticising German politicians who sought to block this. The author gave a figure for the number of female external students at German

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64 A typical path for the spread of news in the press about the course of Marholm's life was: the German-language press in the Baltic would reprint information from publications in Germany, this then would be picked up by publications in the Latvian language.

65 "Es wird allerseits immermehr anerkannt, dass die Leistungsfähigkeit der Frau der des Mannes in geistiger Beziehung sowohl wie auch in physischer Beziehung wenig oder gar nicht nachsteht."

66 "Des Mannes, des Mannes ... das Grundgedanke, der die Marholm stets durchdringt, die ihre Heldinnen im erotischen Wahnsinn enden läßt."

universities, and concluded that having to permit women to study was inescapable: "A woman should not leave her strengths and abilities unused, she must not be condemned to housekeeping duties, but must be allowed to put her talents to good use outside the house as well – endeavours that should meet with the approval of every modern human being" (Aronstamm 1898).<sup>67</sup> In ten years, the position of *Libausche Zeitung* had radically turned around in favour of women being educated at tertiary institutions, but after publication of her most popular book *Marholm*, from being a much-lauded, talented young writer, had become a degrader of women's souls (Aronstamm 1898; Büttner 1897). In the views expressed by the newspaper *Libausche Zeitung* there was evident progress, even if this was only a fleeting occurrence.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

The first writings by Marholm that overtly dealt with the so-called woman question appeared in the *Rigasche Hausfrauen-Zeitung* in 1884 and 1886. These were about women's work and put into words the ideas that she had hinted at indirectly in her first literary works: a woman is a free individual, but in order to find fulfilment she needs a man to whom she can devote herself because women have not yet sufficiently developed, they do not have psychological endurance. These kinds of views about a woman's psychological feebleness, lack of endurance and morbidity accorded with the opinions of male psychologists at the time. Through the *RHZ* articles Marholm did not prove her thesis, but instead expressed it as an assertion. On the grounds that there was no further discussion about the issue, it may be assumed that both the editorial office and the readership of the newspaper were content with this. It must be taken into account that during Marholm's lifetime the science of psychology was only at a developmental stage, and any pronouncements in the field, especially if well (in Marholm's case – even outstandingly well) formulated could inspire credibility and claim to be the truth. In addition, it should be borne in mind that at the time when the *RHZ* was being published, for the readers Laura was still 'Leonards', that is, a male author, which would enhance the level of believability, as it thus fitted in with the traditional male dominated (masculine) world order and did not divert attention away from an assessment of the woman's role (Hacker 2007: 107; Eglāja-Kristsone 2015: 205).

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67 "Frau soll nicht ihre Kräfte und Fähigkeiten ungenützt lassen, sie soll nicht lediglich auf den häuslichen Pflichtenkreis angewiesen bleiben, sondern auch außerhalb ihres Hauses ihre Talente verwehren dürfen, Bestrebungen, die gewiß die Billigung eines jeden modernen Menschen finden müssen."

68 For the present the author of this article has examined *Libausche Zeitung* articles only in the context of Marholm's activities.

Marholm attempted to provide proof for her assertions about women's inadequate psychological development in her subsequent books on women's psychology, by now writing as a female author. Influenced by the circle of creative personalities of Sweden and Germany, and her husband Ola Hansson, Marholm became increasingly carried away by Nietzsche, pan-Germanism, naturalism and also, unfortunately, anti-Semitism (Wennerscheid 2014: 148; Fuchs 1997: 19). At the centre of this chaos of theories there was Marholm's neurotic, sickly, sexually frustrated woman whom she "degraded to a sexual creature that only with the assistance of a man would be able to develop as an individual" (Büttner 1897).<sup>69</sup> Her preoccupation with the ideas of Catholicism and social thought in her later years, and her elevation of the role of mother, did not effect any change on her basic thesis of the woman who must sacrifice herself for the good of others.

Marholm's focus on women's psychological idiosyncrasies and, in her opinion, psychological frailty is not, however, compatible with the theory of difference feminism, as proposed by Sophie Wennerscheid and Ebba Witt-Brattström (Witt-Brattström 2007: 147; Wennerscheid 2014: 135, 146).<sup>70</sup> In accordance with Barbara Holland-Cunz's categorisation of feminisms, proponents of difference feminism, taking into account the positions of equality and inequality between the sexes, view as separate the notions of natural inequality and social inequality (Holland-Cunz 2003: 124–125). However far biological (whether physical or psychological) inequality were to extend in Marholm's theoretical construct, she did not place woman on equal social footing with a man.

Despite that Marholm was not a typical representative of women's movement activism, it was in connection with her writings, and especially after her book *Das Buch der Frauen* was published in 1894, that the Latvian press began to discuss issues of women's emancipation. The most vigorous conservative criticism targeted at Marholm came from the *Düna Zeitung*. Thus Marholm gave her contribution, however contradictory, to the discourse in the German-language press of Latvia. Readers were able to find out more about the currents of thought in women's literature, and more specifically Marholm's ideas, meanwhile the local press, for its part, defended all the more fiercely its conservative position in reaction to them.

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69 "Laura Marholm degradiert das Weib zum bloßen Geschlechtswesen, das sich erst mit Hilfe des Mannes zur Individualität entfalten kann."

70 Wennerscheid states this while highlighting biological differences between the sexes, not only as diminishing a woman's worth, but occasionally also underscoring its superiority, for example, the capacity of becoming a mother.

Even if it were not possible to include Marholm, despite her originality and uniqueness, in the phenomenon of turn of the 19th–20th century current of feminism, she definitely forms part of the anti-feminist community to which she had already been consigned, during her lifetime, by Hedwig Dohm and the women's congress held in Berlin in 1896 (Dohm 1902: 84; Brantly 1991: 109). At the turn of the century, when among society issues of women's emancipation were being actively discussed, anti-feminist currents and writings began to surface (Planert 1998; Becker-Cantarino 2010: 70; Streischhahn 2020). One can only agree with Ebba Witt-Brattström that "the example of Laura Marholm points to the limits of theorising living people during various [historical] periods", and that, at the same time, her "texts are important, because they awaken the joy of contradiction and in the process we are given the opportunity to define ourselves".<sup>71</sup>

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71 "Das Beispiel Laura Marholm verweist auf die Grenzen des Theoretisierens lebendiger Menschen in unterschiedlichen Epochen."; "Diese Texte sind wichtig, weil sie die Lust zum Widerspruch wecken und uns in diesem Prozess die Möglichkeit geben, uns selbst zu definieren."

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