

“Meine kühnsten Wünsche und Ideen“:  
Women, Space, Place, and Mobility  
in Late Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Germany

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is an investigation of bourgeois women educators' complex relationships with space and place in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany. These relationships were greatly influenced by the limited mobility and the restricted access to space that bourgeois women faced within the patriarchal order. At the same time, the very success of these women's professional aspirations hinged upon the securing of spaces for their pedagogical endeavors.

I argue that attention to the politics of space and to women's spatial practices, that is, women's use of space, can give us valuable insights into women's initiatives and women's agency. In my study, I therefore focus on the ways in which female educators, as portrayed in historical and in fictional texts, were able to use (built and imagined) space subversively to pursue their own interests and on the strategies they employed in order to create places in which to carry out and professionalize their work in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany.

My study reveals how resourceful women were in their use of space and in turning that space into a place, and it illuminates how women managed to have agency and take control of their lives at a time when the odds were against them. Furthermore, this study uncovers how female authors were using the themes of mobility and women's spatiality as a vehicle for social criticism and as a subversion of hegemonic gender norms. Thus, I integrate readings of literary and other historical documents in order to reach a better understanding of German women and their situation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century.

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## Introduction

*Ich weiß nicht, wie mir ward, als der Oheim so zu mir sprach. Ich sagte ihm alles, alles; daß ich mich so schwach fühlte an Körper und Geist, daß ich eine unendliche Sehnsucht habe, Gutes zu tun, aber bisher wenig vollbrachte. Ja, geliebte Eltern, ich gestand ihm, daß ich so wenig Lust bezeigte zu den täglich wiederkehrenden Geschäften des häuslichen Lebens; daß ich es oft so langweilig fände, meine Pflicht im Hause zu tun, und es mir auch so sauer würde – und doch, doch möchte ich Euch so gerne Eure Sorgen um uns Kinder erleichtern. Ich sagte ihm, daß ich mich oft zum Sterben schwach fühle, und auch oft glaubte, der Tod sei für mich das Beste, das Erlösende!*

—Henriette Breymann<sup>1</sup>

These words from young Henriette Breymann written in 1848 in a letter to her mother, describing her first meeting with her great-uncle Friedrich Fröbel, who had asked her outright what her goal was in life, made a lasting impression on me. At twenty, Breymann was old enough to be married. Yet this quote demonstrates how trapped she felt in her role as a young bourgeois woman and oldest daughter, how heavy the burden of her gender role weighed on her shoulders. Breymann felt ensnared in the narrow social role which the dominant society prescribed for her sex and which placed her in the

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<sup>1</sup> See Lyschinska 1: 63.

domestic sphere – so much so that she pondered taking her own life in order to escape her fate. The helplessness conveyed in these words is unmistakable. Furthermore, her references to the house convey feelings of confinement and a constrained mobility, and thus highlight the importance of spatiality in women’s lives and the restrictions placed upon this spatiality.

These words from the epigraph stand in stark contrast to the resolute and successful woman that Breymann became – a woman who, thanks to her great-uncle Fröbel, escaped the domestic sphere and found her calling in early childhood education and women’s education. To Breymann, these were causes worth fighting for, since she believed that through them, she would be able to make a difference in society (and train others to do the same). Breymann was not only active in the Fröbel Kindergarten movement, but founded schools and worked tirelessly for her cause. It is important to note that teaching outside of the home, including in early childhood education, was considered a male profession in Germany at the time. Breymann, however, found a way to subvert the prescribed gender norms in order to pursue a career in education and to make her mark in society. It is this defiance of dominant culture and gender expectations along with Breymann’s remarkable achievements which attracted me to undertake this study and to take a closer look at the subversive actions that women took to free themselves from the shackles imposed on them by the patriarchal culture.

When I first read about the history of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, Henriette Schrader-Breyermann's<sup>2</sup> most ambitious undertaking, it struck me how much the success of the organization hinged upon the securing of space for their educational projects.

Without space of their own, women were unable to make places for themselves and to put their ideas into practice. In this study, "space" refers "to the three-dimensionality of life – to its material form" (Domosh and Seager xxii). In contrast, "place" exists within space and refers to a space that has been imbued with meaning or that represents a center of meaning (Relph 22). Once people occupy or even own a space, they can transform it and create their own place within it by infusing it with their value system and their visions for that particular space.

For Schrader-Breyermann, gaining access to appropriate space for her school was an uphill battle. Space was a scarce commodity in late nineteenth-century Berlin due to the rapid population growth of the capital city. In addition, few landlords were willing to rent space to women who were transgressing social boundaries and challenging existing gender norms. Schrader-Breyermann's institution was forced to move seven times over a period of six years. In the end, the purchase of their own house represented a turning point and the organization was finally able to flourish. Space, it seems, is a pivotal element in the institution's history, yet its treatment in the existing critical literature<sup>3</sup> is sparse.

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<sup>2</sup> Schrader-Breyermann was her married name. Henriette Breyermann married Karl Schrader in 1872, at the age of forty-four (see chapter 3 for more information).

<sup>3</sup> The Arbeitsgruppe „Geschichte des Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hauses" published *Das Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. Fachschule für Sozialpädagogik Berlin. Entwicklung eines Frauenberufes. Katalog zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung im Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus* in 1991. Ann Taylor Allen published several articles on the Kindergarten Movement in Germany, in which she discusses the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. She also

In this study, I explore women's complex relationships with space and place in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, with a particular focus on female educators and women's attempts to professionalize their pedagogical work. These relationships were greatly influenced by the limited mobility and the restricted access to space that women faced within the patriarchal order. At the same time, the very success of women's professional aspirations hinged upon the securing of spaces for their pedagogical and other endeavors. Attention to the politics of space and to women's spatial practices, that is, women's use of space, can give us new insights into women's initiatives and women's agency. Thus, it is crucial that we not only look at the type of spaces women inhabit, but rather focus on how women make use of those spaces, and their actions within them.

I therefore focus on the ways in which female educators, as portrayed in historical and in fictional texts, were able to use space subversively to pursue their own interests, and on the strategies they employed in order to create places in which to carry out and professionalize their work in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany. This study reveals how resourceful women were in their use of space and in turning that space into a place, and it illuminates how women managed to have agency and take control of their lives at a time when the odds were against them. Furthermore, this study uncovers how female authors were using the themes of mobility and women's spatiality as a vehicle for social criticism and as a subversion of gender norms. In this way, my project participates in interdisciplinary discussions about women's spatiality and women's agency.

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dedicates a section to the institution's history in her book *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914*.

Three cultural texts containing visions for alternative women-led spaces or female spheres will be at the center of my project. I use the term “cultural text” to refer to both literary and non-literary texts and other cultural products that lend themselves to critical analysis. My goal is to integrate readings of literary and other historical documents in order to reach a better understanding of German women and their situation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. The three cultural texts are *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771) by Sophie von La Roche, *Buchenheim* (1851) by Louise Otto, and the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, a women-led organization founded in late nineteenth-century Berlin. My study will trace women’s relationship with built and imagined space and their struggles for spaces in which they could carry out their pedagogical work as well as their journey from merely imagining such places in works of fiction to making them a reality.

The late eighteenth and nineteenth century were times of great transitions, cultural and social changes, and uprisings in Germany. This time was also marked by a rise of the bourgeoisie, which established itself as the dominant social class against the already fading nobility during the nineteenth century. Industrialization also kicked into high gear during the nineteenth century, which had far-reaching effects on country and city landscapes. For German women, the pendulum swung back and forth between progress and backlashes against women’s advancement in society. As a result, these were exciting, yet also challenging times, and for bourgeois women in particular, they were marked by

the propagation of strict gender norms that prescribed a particularly restricted spatiality for them.<sup>4</sup>

These strict gender norms placed upon bourgeois women also had a detrimental effect on their attempts at professionalization throughout the nineteenth century. After all, dominant representations of ideal femininity were irreconcilable with the idea of women receiving professional training in order to pursue careers outside of the home. Möhrmann writes:

Für Töchter aus gebildeten Ständen war eine Erwerbstätigkeit nicht vorgesehen. Sie wurden ausschließlich für die Ehe erzogen, uneingedenk der Tatsache, daß die Ehelosigkeit der Frau im Verlauf des 19. Jahrhunderts kontinuierlich anstieg und um 1890 fast die Hälfte aller Frauen betraf (von 16,9 Millionen lebten nur 8,8 Millionen aller Frauen in einer Ehe). Nichtsdestoweniger stießen bürgerliche Mädchen, die erwerben wollten, überall auf Schranken. (Möhrmann, „Frauenarbeit“ 146).

For many bourgeois women, seeking professional training or paid employment was not merely a question of a desire to find fulfillment outside of the domestic sphere, but rather a matter of financial survival. Yet women were excluded from earning a university degree and for most of the nineteenth century, from professional training in most areas of the public and private employment sectors as well.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the limited scope of this study, I will focus on women of middle-class and aristocratic backgrounds. Throughout my analysis, I tend to generalize „bourgeois women,“ even though I am aware of the fact that „the bourgeois woman“ as such did not exist, just as „the aristocratic woman“ or „the working-class woman“ did not exist.

<sup>5</sup> See Albisetti for further reading on “Women and the Professions in Imperial Germany.”

Louise Otto denounced women's lack of access to professional training and to higher education as a grave injustice against women in *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb: Blicke auf das Frauenleben der Gegenwart* (1866). Specifically referring to the high rate of unmarried women in Germany, she voiced the following demand:

Aber wie man nicht den Mann, der ohne Lebensgefährtin bleibt, der keine Familie gründet, deshalb als unnützes Mitglied der menschlichen Gesellschaft betrachtet, da er ja doch einen Wirkungskreis hat [...] – so muß auch für Mädchen das gleiche Recht in Anspruch genommen werden. Auch für die Mädchen, welche ledig bleiben wollen oder müssen, ist die gleiche Achtung zu beanspruchen. Auch sie müssen sich einen Wirkungskreis suchen können, der ihrem Leben einen Inhalt gibt, ihre Existenz sichert und sie zu nützlichen Mitgliedern der menschlichen Gesellschaft macht, auch sie darf man nicht mit dem immer erneuten Fluch belasten, ihre Bestimmung verfehlt zu haben“ (Otto, *Das Recht* 21).

In the same tract, she emphasizes that women's demands are not to be seen as made “in Feindschaft und als Kriegserklärung gegen die Männer“ as, she claims, „ein Teil unserer Gegner lächerlich behaupten will“ (108). In contrast, she insists that men would in fact benefit from women's work, since they would not have to bear the burden of being the family's sole breadwinner anymore. In the above quote, Otto also touches on the fact that many women long to work and to have a “Wirkungskreis” beyond the domestic sphere that would give their life meaning. This is reminiscent of the epigraph and the young Henriette Breymann's desire to make a contribution to her family (and perhaps to society

as a whole). Similarly, La Roche and Otto's female protagonists express a longing to work, as the discussion in the following two chapters will demonstrate. Yet in all three cases (that is, for Breymann as well as for the two novels' heroines), women's striving for professionalization was an uphill battle.

In her discussion of Victorian writing and working women in England, Julia Swindells emphasizes:

that the history of the professions is predominantly and pervasively a history of gentlemen, with all the differing and accumulative meanings that the history of that term has, and that the nineteenth-century history of the professions is largely about safeguarding careers for gentlemen, and defining and redefining (the bourgeois revolution?) structures of work in relation to male power. (Swindells 24)

Even though Swindells is speaking of England, the dynamic she describes also seems to mirror the evolving concept of professionalism and the widespread resistance against women entering male professions in nineteenth-century Germany. There was fierce opposition and resistance from teachers to the idea of women entering into the teaching profession, as illustrated by the example of the Rudolstadt teacher's conference of 1848 that is discussed in chapter 3. The young Henriette Breymann was able to sit in the audience at that particular conference and she was taken aback by how fervidly some of the attending teachers opposed the idea of women's professionalization. Even once women had managed to gain entrance into the teaching profession, they faced severe

restrictions such as the “celibacy clause,” which was still in effect in Prussia and most other German states toward the end of the nineteenth century (Stratigakos xiii).

The concept of professionalism was also “expanding and changing” throughout the nineteenth century, in large part due to the effects of the industrialization (Joeres, *Respectability* 184). To complicate matters further, Joeres points out that in Germany, the term *Beruf* has a long tradition of being tied to the idea of *Berufung* and therefore has a double meaning (Joeres, *Respectability* 183). In her discussion, Joeres distinguishes between *Beruf* and “Beruf” to indicate these different meanings:

*Beruf* as such represents profession, that which is learned, and then facilitates paid work when it is practiced; ‘Beruf’ in quotation marks implies the other meaning of ‘calling,’ namely, a mystification of the concept of profession, a removal of it from the material realm of wage earning, an alignment of it indeed with the not-learned, with the intuitive. (179-180)<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, she argues, the use of “Beruf” as a calling became increasingly gendered and particularly associated with middle-class women. Furthermore, the debate surrounding (bourgeois) women and professionalization carried echoes of a discussion about women and *Gelehrtheit* prevalent in the eighteenth century: a woman could be smart, but she should certainly not become *gelehrt* or “accumulate too much knowledge” (187). Throughout the nineteenth century, women who transgressed those boundaries imposed by dominant society by pursuing professional training or by providing such training to other women, for example, had to be prepared for harsh

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I follow the authors’ or editors’ emphasis in quotations.

criticism. In order to gain entry into a male profession, many women used the argument of their work as a calling, or even as “divinely inspired,” as Otto, for example, is said to have done on occasion to justify her writing for the public (Joeres, *Respectability* 19).

At the same time, as the following discussion of La Roche and Otto’s work as authors and of Henriette Schrader-Breyman’s career in early childhood education will illustrate, we have to be careful not to accept the narrow role propagated for women as an underlying, unquestioned universal truth (Rosaldo 404). Michelle Rosaldo asserts that this discourse tried to establish the desired norm, but did not represent the social reality of women. Therefore, an analysis of “the relationships of women and men as aspects of a wider social context” is necessary to see how the “asymmetry of the sexes” actually played out for women in their daily lives (414). While the public-private dichotomy cannot be dismissed entirely as a concept, it must be used with caution. To accept a clear-cut public-private dichotomy as an underlying assumption of one’s investigation hinders an open-minded approach in examining a specific historical situation and thereby makes it difficult to see the particularities and special qualities of alternative communities (Hausen 23).

As historical and fictional documents from the period included in this study demonstrate, the pressure to conform to these dominant norms was certainly real, especially during times of political instability and uprisings, which were followed by periods of restoration and conservative backlashes throughout the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, as my study will demonstrate, women were free to make choices in their lives that transgressed gender norms. Thus, instead of assuming where a woman’s place

in society was, we need to take a look at where women placed themselves. The rigid gender ideology and restricted spatiality that is thought to have characterized the bourgeois sphere of nineteenth-century Germany must be seen within this context.

We are surrounded by space, yet its influence on our actions and on our agency in general often evades us. For the most part, space is taken for granted as the setting for our everyday lives. As a matter of fact, for a long time, space was treated as a neutral backdrop in the analysis of fictional texts and in social contexts as well. Space, in its material, three-dimensional form, was regarded as a *tabula rasa*.

However, space does not exist in a vacuum, but rather is always embedded in a social context. The spaces we frequent and inhabit are representations of this social context and as such are culturally determined. Space as we see it around us and experience it on a daily basis is always already imbued with cultural and ideological meaning. Churches, for instance, are designed to instill a reverence for God and the institution of the church, but some are also symbols of male power and female exclusion. To this day, women's role within the Catholic Church, for example, is greatly restricted and they are not allowed to be ordained as priests, let alone bishops, or pope. Its church buildings and spaces (such as ecclesiastical offices), then, also serve as symbols for the strict hierarchy and gender division of the institution. Space represents the "boundaries on the ground," the divisions of the social realm into spheres, and as such, "space reflects social organization" and power dynamics (Ardener 2).

Some theorists argue that this description does not fully capture the role that space plays within society. Yi-Fu Tuan, for example, stresses that space represents a resource

(Tuan 57-58) – the question is who controls it? Space can indeed become contested and there are countless examples in history that exemplify this dynamic, such as the *Hausbesetzungen* in Berlin and other major German cities in the 1970s and 80s. There, squatters took over large apartment buildings and turned them into communal living spaces. Their presence was unwanted, not only by the buildings' owners, but also by city officials, as they were seen as disturbing the order of the city, yet many groups managed to utilize and control these spaces for long periods of time. In some instances, peaceful negotiations with the city government and the owners of the buildings led to compromises, in other cases the squatters were forcibly removed by the police. But this dynamic of space as a contested resource is not only true for buildings, but for open spaces as well. In 2011, for instance, Cairo's Tahrir Square became the site and symbol of great empowerment of the people, as they used it successfully to demonstrate against the Mubarak regime. Beijing's Tiananmen Square, on the other hand, became a symbol of restricted freedom and state violence in 1989, when the regime cracked down on protestors of a pro-democracy movement, killing hundreds of people in the process.

Still, the deployment of power mainly takes place through built spaces (such as court houses or correctional facilities), and thus, architecture and built spaces must also be seen as a medium of power. Michel Foucault examines how discipline is facilitated and mediated through architecture, and how space is both controllable and controlling.<sup>7</sup> But prisons and other state institutions are not the only spaces falling under that category; in fact, there are certain intended uses and practices for all built spaces. That is, people

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<sup>7</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

are expected to use these spaces in specific ways and to behave in them in certain ways, complying with norms and rules laid out by society and the regime. But while some spaces, such as correctional facilities, are evidently in the service of the political and disciplinary apparatus, others may not be linked to the social power dynamics in such obvious ways.

Foucault maintains that people mostly comply with these social and spatial rules because they have internalized their position in society. Deviations from prescribed norms, on the other hand, are punished with disciplinary measures, some rather negligible and subtle (such as a verbal reprimand for violating the dress code for public buildings or for violating traffic laws), others more consequential (a substantial fine or a prison sentence, for example). Foucault's theory leaves little room for the individual's agency, and Michel de Certeau takes offense at that conclusion:

If it is true that the grid of "discipline" is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also "miniscule" and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what "ways of operating" form the counterpart, on the consumer's (or "dominee's"?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order. (Certeau xiv)

Certeau insists that while it may be true that spaces suggest a particular use or were built with a certain intended use in mind, they do not actually force people to comply with those uses. Individuals or groups may very well have found ways to reappropriate those

spaces, to subvert them for their own purposes. Thus he turns his attention to people's everyday actions and spatial practices – an aspect that, he claims, has often been overlooked and underestimated. Admittedly, Certeau is not arguing that people are able to completely escape the “nets of ‘discipline,’” rather, that many individuals and groups have found their own ways of defying the dominant regime in their daily use of space or spatial practices (xiv-xv).<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, all built environment “exerts its own influence,” it “imposes certain restraints on our mobility” and on our ability to act (Ardener 2). As the discussion in chapter 2 will illustrate, this even holds true for the domestic sphere, which seems to contradict the concept of the home as a private and protected space. The home has traditionally been regarded as the most significant place in a person's life and as “an irreplaceable center of significance” (Relph 39). As such, it is commonly described as a familiar haven which offers stability and security for the individual. However, feminist scholars have taken issue with such elevated and romanticized notions of the home. For one, the discussion about the home as a haven often has gendered undertones, as it is generally portrayed as the place to which the man returns after a long day at work. Gaston Bachelard even assigns maternal features to the house itself: “Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. [...] Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house” (Bachelard 7). The house represents the mother and wife, and women's identity is not only closely tied to, but also embodied, in

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<sup>8</sup> These possible “tactics” and “strategies”, as Certeau calls them, will be discussed further in chapter 1.

the home. Yet such a portrayal masks what the domestic sphere means to women and this takes us back to the spatiality of the home and its connection to the patriarchal society – indeed, the house itself is a reflection of the larger social order (Bourdieu 275).

In his article, “Untitled: The Housing of Gender,” Mark Wigley demonstrates how the construction of the domestic sphere was greatly influenced by and tightly linked to the gender discourse and the very production of gender in Early Modern Europe. At the heart of Wigley’s discussion is the canonical Renaissance architectural treatise, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, written by Leon Battista Alberti in the fifteenth century. In his discussion of the design of the private home, Alberti makes an “overt reference to architecture’s complicity in the exercise of patriarchal authority” and lays out how the house should function in order to effectively contain women and their sexuality and how to shield them from the outside world (Wigley 332). The “male mobility in the exterior” is mirrored by the “female stasis in the interior” (334). At the same time, the housewife’s internalization of the proper spatiality functions to domesticate her, and the spatial order implemented in the design of the private home not only ensures the containment of the woman, but also enables a system of surveillance over the housewife (338-41). As a result, a woman is subject to a panoptical male gaze even within her own home, as gender ideology clearly informs how houses are built. Homes are therefore not neutral places, but rather reflect and enforce existing gender norms and as such represent places of both structured and structuring relations. This connection between architecture, women’s spatiality, and gender production is not always obvious; as Wigley points out: “Gender is

such a concept, underpinned by a spatial logic that is masked in the moment of its application to architecture, as an extra-, or rather, pre-architectural given” (330).

In addition, women’s identity is closely tied to the domestic realm and the maintenance of a proper home is crucial to women’s respectability and decorum; in fact, a “woman’s interest, let alone active role, in the outside calls into question her virtue” (335). This holds true for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany, as Karin Hausen illustrates in her discussion of the ideology of *Geschlechtscharaktere*.<sup>9</sup> Dominant representations of bourgeois femininity allowed little room for breaking out of the domestic sphere, and within the German bourgeoisie, the pressure to adhere to prescribed gender norms was particularly high in the nineteenth century (Hausen 387), as the host of *Anstandsbücher*, *Ratgeber*, and *Lebenshilfen* specifically published for women throughout the nineteenth century attests.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hausen argues that the *Geschlechtscharaktere*, even though they were developed in the late eighteenth century, came to be popularized during the nineteenth century. These “theories” about the character of the sexes were supposedly derived from (and justified by) a mixture of biology and nature’s calling, that is, they were supposed to represent what was prescribed by nature and to be solidified by an appropriate education for each sex (Hausen 367). According to these *Geschlechtscharaktere*, women (based on their physical and psychological nature) were predestined for the domestic sphere and men for the public sphere and for cultural work. As Hausen demonstrates, these *Geschlechtscharaktere* can be found in leading encyclopedias of the nineteenth century under entries such as “Frau, Weib, Geschlecht, Geschlechtscharakter, Geschlechtseigenthümlichkeiten etc.” (366). While descriptions of the character of the sexes had previously been defined by one’s social position and the virtues associated with that position, they were now defined by one’s sex. This propagation of the ideology of *Geschlechtscharaktere* resulted in prescriptive gender norms and had enormous consequences for women’s lives and women’s education. Nineteenth-century scholars alleged that it was “scientifically proven” that women were predestined for the domestic sphere, and that women’s fragile psyche could be damaged by too much education (369). This provided a new basis for the argument that girls’ formal education be short and women be protected from too much intellectuality. For further reading on the scientific discourse that served to reinforce these ideological beliefs, see Londa Schiebinger, “Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy.”

<sup>10</sup> See Günter Häntzschel, ed., *Bildung und Kultur bürgerlicher Frauen 1850-1918: Eine Quellendokumentation aus Anstandsbüchern und Lebenshilfen für Mädchen und Frauen als Beitrag zur weiblichen literarischen Sozialisation*.

Women therefore always had to be aware of how they presented themselves both in their home and in public, so as to not put their respectability and social standing at risk. This constant threat “of being seen and evaluated” encouraged women to see themselves as located in space (Rose 146). Since women had only limited power over this space, it was experienced as “part of patriarchal power.” Thus, it goes without saying that German bourgeois women strived “to be a good representative of private-sphere ideology,” even if they took offense at women’s restricted role in the public sphere (Joeres, *Respectability* 261). Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres explores how issues of representation and self-representation led to ambiguities in the texts of nineteenth-century German women writers. She notes:

This tying to gender is obviously a practice that works on both sides of this process of representation: on the side of the labelers, who cannot avoid starting, continuing, and ending their discussions with the fact of femininity and what its designation implies and demands – but also on the side of those who are being labeled, who take frequent occasion to present, indeed to justify, themselves and their thoughts and actions as feminine. (137-38)

Women’s stepping out of line was most often accompanied by their toeing the line (137), and the texts of La Roche, Otto, and Schrader-Breymann are no exception. We have to keep this complex dynamic in mind when we examine eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German women’s actions and writing.

Beyond the physical aspects of built spaces as well as imagined places, there are also metaphorical implications. Writing for a public, for example, represented a symbolic

stepping out of the private realm and into the public space, male space. For a woman writer in the late eighteenth and even in the nineteenth century, this certainly amounted to a deviance from hegemonic norms. As a result, women writers had to think carefully about how they could justify such a step, as the example of Otto's justification of it as being a "divinely inspired" activity illustrates. Of course, many women also resorted to publishing their texts anonymously, as La Roche did with *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*. In the preface of the novel, her friend and editor Christoph Martin Wieland alleges that the text was never intended for a public audience.<sup>11</sup> In addition, he goes to great lengths to stress that he is actually publishing the novel without the author's knowledge and prior approval. Private letters between La Roche and Wieland, on the other hand, reveal that this was but a ruse, and apparently an understood narrative device at the time, since it was very common around 1800 for women to emphasize that they never intended to publish their texts (Ramm 77).

Writing for a public was considered a male profession well beyond the eighteenth century and it was an uphill battle for women to gain entrance and to earn respect from male colleagues and critics alike. Women writers found themselves trapped in a vicious cycle, as they were first denied access to higher education and "artistic training," and were subsequently reproached for their educational deficiencies (Herminghouse 89). Gisela Brinker-Gabler's article „Die Schriftstellerin in der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Aspekte ihrer Rezeption von 1835-1910,“ sheds light on how prejudices against women writers dominated their treatment (or lack thereof) in literary

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<sup>11</sup> See La Roche, *Geschichte* 9-17.

histories. Women writers were often omitted from these histories or were only mentioned briefly. In *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, for example, first published in 1879, Robert König featured some women writers, preceded by a brief introduction to the separate section entitled *Die Frauenromane*. He reported:

Einen breiten Raum in der modernen Romanliteratur nehmen die Frauen ein. [...] Fast darf man behaupten: in unseren Tagen beherrschen sie, der Zahl nach, den literarischen Markt, teils unter der Maske männlicher Pseudonyme, teils mit offenem Visier. Die meisten Frauenromane spiegeln freilich nur die Männerdichtung wieder [sic] und haben wenig Selbständiges. (König 495)

König assigned no merit to (most) female authors for their work and his use of the adjective “freilich” carries a dismissive overtone. It would appear that, even roughly one hundred years after *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* was first published, prejudice against women writers was still prevalent despite the fact that they had come to dominate the literary market, as König puts it. La Roche already addressed this lack of belief in women writers in her women’s magazine *Pomona*: “Eine höchst glückliche Vermuthung, da man glaubte, Wielands reichhaltiger Geist habe mir Gedanken gelernt, erwarb meiner Sternheim einen Beyfall, der mir schmeichelte” (La Roche, *Pomona* 2:1092). Even La Roche, who enjoyed tremendous success as a writer, did not receive full credit for her own work and later on was often mentioned in literary histories as Wieland’s *Muse*, not as a writer in her own right. König dedicated a brief section in his book to the author, albeit not in the *Frauenromane* section, but merely as a brief insert into the long section on Wieland (König 387-88).

In late eighteenth-century Germany, the novel still carried the stigma of representing a “low literary status” (Baldwin 1), as Friedrich von Blanckenburg’s remark in the preface to *Versuch über den Roman*, published in 1774, subtly indicated: “Ich sehe den Roman, den *guten Roman* für das an, was, in den ersten Zeiten Griechenlands, die Epopee für die Griechen war; wenigstens glaub’ ichs, daß der *gute Roman* für uns das werden könne” (Blanckenburg xiii). Blanckenburg stressed that as a genre, the novel has great potential, while insinuating that there are significant differences in quality among the published novels. He did not mention women writers in this context, but nonetheless, one might wonder if his comment has a gendered undertone, especially since he singled out the epistolary novel as being of lower literary quality than the other forms of the novel, referring to it openly as “der schlechtere Roman” (287).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, this lower status of the novel as a genre may have helped women to gain access to it, to break into the male territory of writing and publishing in public genres (Joeres, *Respectability* 265). Furthermore, the novel served a practical purpose, as it was seen by many as a tool for informally educating and guiding young women who were barred from higher education.<sup>13</sup> Many women writers hoped to contribute to this cause with their texts and wrote with pedagogical and/or moralistic goals in mind.

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<sup>12</sup> The timing of this comment is interesting, since it was the same year in which Goethe’s *Leiden des jungen Werthers* was published. Blanckenburg apparently wrote a review of *Werther* in 1775 which represents a reassessment of the *Briefroman* as a subgenre on his part (Steinecke and Wahrenburg 180), thus reinforcing the impression that his original assessment may have been jaded by gender prejudice.

<sup>13</sup> Women’s access to higher education remained a problem throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, Mary Jo Maynes points out that “until the third quarter of the nineteenth century, gender role expectations were so ingrained among officials that higher education for girls was not even an issue” (Maynes, *Schooling* 97).

Blanckenburg's treatise is considered the first comprehensive theory of the novel by a German literary critic (Steinecke and Wahrenburg 179). In it, he stated repeatedly that „Der Dichter soll durch das Vergnügen unterrichten“ (Blanckenburg 288). In order to accomplish this, the depiction of the novel's *Welt* with its *Begebenheiten* must be as close to reality as possible: “Das Werk des Dichters muß eine kleine Welt ausmachen, die der großen so ähnlich ist, als sie es seyn kann. Nur müssen wir in dieser Nachahmung der großen Welt mehr sehen können, als wir in der großen Welt selbst, unsrer Schwachheit wegen, zu sehen vermögen“ (314). This emphasis on *stoffliche Aktualität* and on the author's relating to the present emerged in the last third of the eighteenth century in Europe (Lehmann). In 1785, English novelist Clara Reeve gave the following definition of the novel, which emphasizes the close connection of the fictional text to everyday life as well:

The novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. [...] The novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while reading) that all is real. (Reeve 1:111).

It is believed that La Roche modeled many of the events in *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* after real-life experiences and many of the characters were based on actual acquaintances (Becker-Cantarino, Nachwort 386). Wieland, in his role as editor of the novel, went so far as to augment or possibly even correct La Roche's depiction of one of

her characters in one of his footnotes, insisting that “Herr \*\* (den wir zu kennen die Ehre haben) hat uns auf Befragen gesagt, seine Meinung sei eigentlich diese gewesen: [...]“ (La Roche, *Geschichte* 127). Wieland thus intervened in the novel’s plot – moved into La Roche’s space – in order to rectify the validity of the novel’s content.

In the nineteenth century, the social novel in particular gained popularity. Otto was among the authors who openly subscribed to the idea of *Tendenz* (L. Otto, *Die Kunst* x). The novel was used as a deliberate tool to depict current events, the political climate, and social trends in order to scrutinize and challenge the status quo. Needless to say, such poorly masked political activism was controversial and not only denounced by conservative political factions, but also deemed inappropriate for a woman to engage in (Joeres, *Die Anfänge* 63). And yet it was particularly a female audience that Otto was trying to reach with her *Tendenzromane* – and in more general terms, an audience that otherwise would not necessarily read about politics or engage in a political dialogue: “Es ist das Bestreben vieler u. das meinige, durch Romane gerade diejenigen für die Zeitfragen zu interessieren, zu begeistern u. sie über vieles in all unsren Verhältnissen aufzuklären, welche eben erst noch einer Anregung bedürfen, um geistig daran teilzunehmen“ (qtd. in Joeres, *Die Anfänge* 133). However, her texts were also subject to a strict censorship and Otto had to be careful how she packaged or presented her social criticism so that it would be published. This was particularly true for the years following the failed 1848/49 revolution when authors faced prosecution and prison sentences for openly expressing anti-government sentiments or engaging in anti-government activities. In her introduction to *Die Kunst und unsere Zeit*, published one year after *Buchenheim*,

Otto, who was known for her direct and often provocative style, vaguely hinted at the oppressive political climate:

Ich mußte diesen Standpunkt wählen, um „den Verhältnissen Rechnung zu tragen.“ [...] Meine Schrift ist ganz und gar auf die Gegenwart und ihre Zustände berechnet. Wir wissen Alle, daß unter diesen die Ideen der Neuzeit nicht zu ihrem vollen Rechte kommen können, daß sie nicht Fleisch und Blut zu werden vermögen, so lange nicht die äußeren Bedingungen erfüllt sind, unter denen dies allein möglich ist... (L. Otto, *Die Kunst* VIII)

Despite these constraints, she emphasizes that art in general must reflect the times in which it was created: “Diese Forderung ist an alle Kunst zu stellen, und wird und muß gestellt werden. [...] da darf das jedesmalige allgemeine Bewußtsein: das Zeitbewußtsein, nicht fehlen“ (VIII). Nonetheless, her guarded word choice attests to the political explosiveness of the situation, and has to be viewed within this specific historical context. In the mid-1850s, Otto was finally forced to refrain from writing *Tendenzliteratur*, since her manuscripts were rejected repeatedly by publishers, which she attributed to their political content (Hundt 27-30; *Im Streben* 163).

To be sure, *Tendenzliteratur* was also criticized for neglecting the aesthetic value for the benefit of the social and political content. Otto was undeterred in her belief in the importance of *Tendenz* and defended it keenly: “Freilich kommen nun hier die eingefleischten Aesthetiker und sagen: das sei gar nicht Kunst mehr, sondern Tendenz, wo der Inhalt mächtiger ist als die Form, so wie wir umgekehrt gesagt haben: die vollendete Form ohne vollendeten Inhalt sei gar nicht mehr Kunst, sondern Kurzweil“ (L.

Otto, *Die Kunst* 1). She further refers to literature as „die Bundesgenossin der Vorwärtskämpfer“ (1, 12) and emphasizes its close relationship to real life (2). Otto even sees it as an author’s duty to reflect on the “Zeit-Ideen” (7) in his or her texts: “Der Romandichter muß auch durchdrungen sein von dem Bewußtsein seiner Zeit, und in diesem Sinne schaffen, was ihr gemäß ist“ (7). Moreover, Otto infused her novels with issues close to her heart, like advocacy for improvements in women’s education and women’s social status. One has to be careful, of course, not to confuse fiction with reality. Furthermore, I am not advocating equating fiction with historic documents or texts, but I do believe that La Roche and Otto’s novels represent a valuable source of reflecting women’s experiences as well as their concerns, dreams, and aspirations.

In this study, I will closely examine La Roche and Otto’s novels and a variety of cultural texts associated with the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. The latter housed a kindergarten and an educational institution for middle class women and was the center of an array of activities, including courses in pedagogy, early childhood education, and the domestic arts. Among the texts included in my analysis are letters, speeches, and pedagogical materials written by Henriette Schrader-Breymann and her female colleagues, as well as historical documents, such as the association’s quarterly journal, annual reports of the board of directors, advertisements for the kindergarten, and sketches depicting the spaces of and scenes from daily life at the institution.

Unfortunately, such a wealth of documents and texts is not easily accessible when it is a matter of women educators who lived in the late eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth century. At that time, most women involved in education were working

privately as governesses and it is difficult to find records of their work. In addition, very few bourgeois women were writing autobiographies at that time (Ramm 15) – after all, such a focus on oneself and a public display thereof were irreconcilable with the bourgeois ideal of femininity, with its cardinal virtues of modesty and humility. Thus, finding information about what kind of hurdles these women educators might have had to clear in order to work professionally or what kind of dreams and aspirations they may have had (of working as teachers or of founding schools, for example) proves challenging.

I am not implying that historical documents, such as personal letters or other non-fictional texts, are in any form superior to the literary texts or that the former represent pure facts, the latter pure fiction. Such a distinction between “fact” and “fiction” would represent a misguided approach to defining literature and/or distinguishing between historical texts and other literary texts, as Terry Eagleton reminds us (Eagleton 1) and as Susanne Zantop has aptly illustrated in her discussion of nineteenth-century texts.<sup>14</sup> Any historical document is by its very nature imbued with the author’s ideology and bias. Many fictional texts, on the other hand, give valuable insights into historical moments, social and political contexts, and personal experiences.

In Elke Ramm’s discussion of autobiographies of women around 1800 and the lack thereof, she in fact sees the novel as a medium to which many female authors turned in order to incorporate their own life experiences into the fictional world they created and speaks of an “engen Verflechtung von Roman und Autobiographie um 1800” (Ramm

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<sup>14</sup> See Susanne Zantop, “Re-presenting the Present: History and Literature in Restoration Germany.”

47). Ramm further describes the fictional space of the novel as a “Schlupfwinkel weiblicher Identität und Kreativität.” Consequently, she argues, the narrow term autobiography needs to be expanded in order to capture women’s use of the novel and other genres to express their life experiences: “Ich meine nun, daß ‘Autobiographie’ erweitert als ‘autobiographische Schriften’ verstanden werden muß, damit einerseits das Genre von der männlich geprägten Tradition entlastet und andererseits die von Frauen verfaßten autobiographischen Texte in die Gattung einbezogen werden können“ (45).

Joeres makes a similar case in her discussion of Otto’s writings. Like so many female authors of her time, Otto did not write an autobiography per se, but according to Joeres, she infused her texts with her own life experiences: “Sie ist in all ihren Werken ständig und überall als Person anwesend, so daß man ihre Werke durchaus als Fragmente einer großen Autobiographie lesen kann. Manchmal liegt der autobiographische Gehalt ihrer Werke sehr offen vor uns, manchmal ist er versteckter – auf jeden Fall ist er immer präsent“ (Joeres, *Die Anfänge* 22). Indeed, Otto’s diary attests to this theory, as I will discuss further in chapter 2.

As a result, the integration of historical documents and literary texts can greatly enrich our understanding of how German women creatively engaged with built and imagined space throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Naturally, this study is not an attempt at an objective interpretation of or seeking the “truth” about women’s situation and/or spatiality; rather, I interpret these texts in light of my own particular interests and biases. To that end, my goal is to offer a new point of view and

new impressions on (some) women's interpretation and use of space and their ability to wield power and act subversively in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany.

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in spatiality and most of the scholarship on space has been conducted in social science fields, most particularly in geography and architectural history and theory, whereas only a small body of texts examines the role of space in literary texts. Therefore, I am convinced that the issues surrounding women's spatiality remain understudied in fictional texts. Most importantly, I am not aware of any study that looks at women's subversive use of space in fictional texts and in actual institutions and thus goes beyond the literary text to incorporate historical documents. However, I believe that such an interdisciplinary approach has the potential to greatly enrich our understanding of late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German women's socio-cultural situation. Attention to the politics of space and to women's spatial practices, that is, women's use of space, can give us new insights into women's actions and women's agency.

Chapter 1 is devoted to *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*. La Roche's protagonist finds herself in a variety of spaces that serve to confine her, to restrict her movement, and to curb her agency. She is forced to move several times and even gets kidnapped and carried off to a remote Scottish mountain region where she is held in captivity. How she reacts to those spaces and acts in them will be the focus of my analysis. Drawing on Certeau's concept of the "tactic," I explore how the protagonist manages to subvert and appropriate space.

Chapter 2 offers a discussion of *Buchenheim*. At the center of Otto's novel lies the juxtaposition of urban versus rural space as it relates to women's proper place and role within society. The city is coded masculine and the countryside is coded feminine. The small town of Buchenheim, in which the novel is set, symbolizes stasis and a lack of mobility for women. I investigate how Otto uses the themes of mobility and women's spatiality to question existing gender norms and an ideology that places women in the domestic sphere and restricts their movement.

The last chapter explores the ways in which Henriette Schrader-Breyman, the founder of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, and her female colleagues dealt with issues of space in Berlin between 1872 and 1900 – a time marked by a rapid population growth and a housing shortage in the capital. I focus my discussion on the ways in which this group of women educators was able to use space subversively to pursue their own interests and on the strategies they employed in order to create places in which to carry out and professionalize their work. Drawing on bell hooks' concept of the "homeplace," I explore how the institution represented a homeplace for this group of women who worked together to make the institution a success.

Even though I do proceed in a chronological order, I am not trying to establish a storyline of neat progression in women's ability to overcome their limited mobility and to access and command space. Instead, the three chapters merely represent individual snapshots and cannot, by nature, be representative for all German women. Nonetheless, the cases in this study entail interesting commonalities as well as contrasts and thus

reveal how much changed with regard to German women's relationship to space and place over the course of roughly one hundred years.

## Chapter One:

### Small Acts of Subversion:

#### The Role of Space in Sophie von La Roche's *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*

*Als Tochter eines Gelehrten, hörte ich von Jugend auf von dem Werth der Wissenschaften, und von der Ehre sprechen, welche man durch sie erlangen könne. Dadurch wurde in mir die uns allen natürliche Begierde nach Vorzug in den edlen Ehrgeiz verwandelt, mich in Kenntnissen hervor zu thun: aber Umstände verhinderten die Erfüllung meines Wunsches, daß ich als Knabe erzogen werden möchte, um ordentlich gelehrt zu werden.*

—Sophie von La Roche<sup>15</sup>

When the first volume was published anonymously in 1771, Sophie von La Roche's epistolary novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* enjoyed almost instant success. Some contemporary critics, among them Albrecht von Haller<sup>16</sup> and Johann Gottfried Herder,<sup>17</sup> assumed that Christoph Martin Wieland, the editor of the novel, was also its author. Yet the novel soon was attributed to La Roche (1730-1807), who was taken aback by the predominantly positive response to and the success of the novel (Strohmeyr 140, 154). In recent years, the scholarly treatment of the text has been mixed.

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<sup>15</sup> La Roche in 1783 (*Pomona* 1:421).

<sup>16</sup> See La Roche, *Ich bin* 153.

<sup>17</sup> See Herder 241.

Peter Hohendahl, for instance, labels it conservative and insists that it serves to justify the existing *Ständeordnung* while at the same time failing to elevate the protagonist's personal struggles to a questioning of the social and political system.<sup>18</sup> Helene Kastinger Riley disputes this view and claims that the novel indeed contains a sociocritical element. She argues that far from promoting traditional female virtues, La Roche's heroine represents an indictment of an *Idealbild* of femininity which can only lead to Sophie's demise. Kastinger Riley denies that the heroine has any agency, but rather portrays a "negative Heldin" (Kastinger Riley 30), whose behavior is "gesellschaftlich regressiv und repressiv" (40). Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, on the other hand, seems to go out on a limb with her guarded assertion "that evidence of prefeminist thought is to be found in as ostensibly conservative a novel as *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*" (Joeres, "That girl" 153).

What has not received much attention from scholars in this context of Sophie's actions and the questions of agency are the various spaces the protagonist inhabits throughout the novel.<sup>19</sup> After the death of her father, Sophie is forced to leave her home, on what becomes the beginning of a two-year journey. During this time, the protagonist lives in a variety of different places and spaces, both in Germany and abroad. For the

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<sup>18</sup> See Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Empfindsamkeit und gesellschaftliches Bewusstsein. Zur Soziologie des empfindsamen Romans am Beispiel von *La Vie de Marianne*, *Clarissa*, *Fräulein von Sternheim* und *Werther*."

<sup>19</sup> Michaela Krug offers detailed interpretations of four different novels (including *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*) in *Auf der Suche nach dem eigenen Raum: Topographien des Weiblichen im Roman von Autorinnen um 1800* (2004). She focuses on what she calls „sozial-räumliche" dimensions for "die Ausbildung sozialer und individueller Identität" (Krug 13). However, Krug fails to provide a clear definition for her use of the term "sozial-räumlich" which is at the center of her analysis. In fact, the term seems mostly interchangeable with the term *social*, whereas space and spatial relations remain in the background of her interpretations.

most part, she is unable to choose the spaces she inhabits, but rather finds herself trapped, even imprisoned at one point. One must assume that these spaces, in their material, three-dimensional form and their symbolic value, have a detrimental effect on Sophie's ability to act. An examination of her actions in relation to her limited mobility and the nature of the spaces that she inhabits can provide us with a more nuanced understanding of the protagonist's situation. In the following analysis, Michel de Certeau's concept of the tactic helps elucidate that the protagonist does indeed display some agency within these spaces, albeit of a limited nature.

In this context, teaching (in an informal, private setting) emerges not only as a subversive, but also a meaningful activity that provides a distraction to Sophie during difficult times and even seems to give her life a purpose beyond the narrowly defined social role which patriarchal society prescribes for a woman of her social background.

With her heroine, La Roche paints a generally discouraging picture of women's mobility and agency. Yet at the same time, the author offers a female protagonist who is surprisingly defiant, resourceful, and in the end prevails over the forces that conspire against her. Therefore, with Sophie's small acts of subversion, La Roche challenges existing gender norms and women's situation within society.

### **Synopsis**

The story begins to unfold at the Court of D., where Sophie reluctantly stays with her aunt and uncle, Count and Countess Löbau. Sophie critically observes life at court, all the while longing to return home. She makes the acquaintance of two Englishmen in D., the worthy Lord Seymour (and at a later point also his brother Lord Rich), and the

questionable bon vivant Lord Derby. Both men are drawn to Sophie, but only Lord Derby makes his feelings known. This visit in D. is bound to end in a debacle, as her relatives are involved in an intrigue to make Sophie the mistress of the prince. When Sophie finally finds out about the scheme, it is too late: she is publicly humiliated and her reputation is jeopardized. She rushes into marriage with Lord Derby in order to save her honor and her decorum. This turns out to be a mistake, as the immoral Derby is solely interested in a love adventure. When Sophie proves an unwilling subject, he leaves her and reveals that their marriage was a sham all along. Sophie is devastated and fears for her reputation once again. As an abandoned wife, she has to carefully consider her next steps, in order not to put her respectability at risk. After retreating to her best friend Emilia's house, she decides to take on a new identity, that of a widow, and calls herself Madame Leidens. Sophie lives with two different wealthy female benefactors, Madame Hills and Lady Summers, and works privately as a teacher and educator. Unfortunately, the past eventually catches up with her during a stay in England, when Lord Derby has her abducted and taken to a remote Scottish mountain region. Sophie defies all odds and makes it out of this ordeal alive. The novel ends happily with her marriage to Lord Seymour, to whom her heart belonged all along. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on the spaces that Sophie was confined to, that is, the spaces that represent the darker days of her journey.

### **Historical Framing**

The novel has to be viewed within its specific historical context for its subversive content to be illuminated. Naturally, such an exposition as I am providing in the

following can only represent an approximation at best to the historical and cultural context in which the text was written. Bakhtin remarked on the dilemma facing literary scholars: “Literature is an inseparable part of culture and it cannot be understood outside the total context of the entire culture of a given epoch” (Bakhtin 2). To gain such an understanding is, of course, impossible by definition and even eludes anyone living in any given epoch. To add to the difficulty facing literary scholars in their attempt to interpret a text is the fact that the author was most certainly not only influenced by his or her own cultural epoch, but also by those in the past: “If it is impossible to study literature apart from an epoch’s entire culture, it is even more fatal to encapsulate a literary phenomenon in the single epoch of its creation, in its own contemporaneity, so to speak” (Bakhtin 3).

Therefore, it seems as though my attempt to provide a historical background for La Roche’s text – or for any of my three chapters for that matter – is flawed from the outset, since it can only represent my selective attention to historical and cultural details and can by no means claim to render an objective or complete approach, for as much as such a picture would be desirable, it is also impossible to achieve per se. Yet, despite such glaring limitations, I believe that the attempt to provide some meaningful context for the following analysis is important, even if it can only represent an approximation without any pretense of completion or perfection.

Celebrated as the first German *Frauenroman*, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* was breaking new ground as much as it was breaking social taboos. The novel was published and edited by La Roche's close friend Wieland. At the time, it would have

been very unusual, but not entirely unheard of, for a woman to publish a novel under her own name. What is particularly problematic for the analysis of the novel is that one cannot be certain of the extent of Wieland's influence on the text – his intervening in La Roche's space as the author – as the following discussion will demonstrate. Wieland wrote the preface to the novel in letter form (addressing the author) and he opened it with the following words: "Erschrecken Sie nicht, meine Freundin, anstatt der Handschrift von Ihrer Sternheim eine gedruckte Copey zu erhalten, welche Ihnen auf einmal die ganze Verrätereie entdeckt, die ich an Ihnen begangen habe" (Wieland 9). He not only reveals at once that the author is female, but also claims that the novel was published without the author's knowledge or prior approval and he further emphasizes several times that the text was never intended for a public audience.<sup>20</sup>

Around 1800, it was very common for women writers to stress that they never planned to write for a public audience (Ramm 77). In the eighteenth century, women were expected to write within "private" genres, like letters or diaries, but they were not expected to write novels, much less to step out of the private realm and into the public spotlight with their texts. It is therefore not surprising that Wieland takes extra precaution to fend off criticism for his decision to publish a women writer's novel. This strategy becomes even more apparent when he starts talking about the "Mängel" of the novel (Wieland 13-15). In a move that is seemingly aimed at protecting the female author, Wieland states that "Die *Kunstrichter* haben es, in Absicht dessen, was an der *Form* des Werkes und an der *Schreibart* zu tadeln sein kann, lediglich mit mir zu tun. Sie, meine

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<sup>20</sup> See Wieland 9-17.

Freundin, dachten nie daran, für die Welt zu schreiben, oder ein Werk der Kunst hervorzubringen“ (13). He positions himself as the superior male and takes a protective stance toward La Roche. After extensive praise for the *Kunstrichter*, these „Männer von feinem Geschmack und reifem Urteil“ (13), as Wieland describes them, he argues that the novel’s shortcomings should be forgiven, since *Damen* are not professional writers:

Kurz, ich habe eine so gute Meinung von der feinen Empfindung der Kunstrichter, daß ich ihnen zutraue, sie werden die Mängel, wovon die Rede ist, mit so vielen, und so vorzüglichen Schönheiten verwebt finden, daß sie es mir verdenken würden, wenn ich das Privilegium der Damen, welche keine Schriftstellerinnen von Profession sind, zum Vorteil meiner Freundin geltend machen wollte. (15)

In other words, the novel is „only“ the product of a woman (writer) and therefore, one’s expectations should not be too high. Of course, at the time, women indeed lacked access to higher education and to professional development. It is thus difficult to avoid the impression that Wieland distances himself from the novel in order to protect his own reputation against possible fallout from his decision to publish it (Becker-Cantarino, “Leben” 143). Then again, as the editor, he also had to accomplish the task of reconciling La Roche’s achievement as a writer with the dominant representations of ideal femininity (Becker-Cantarino, Nachwort 399).

Wieland’s preface and the caution with which he introduces the novel also serve as a reminder of how important the issue of representation was. This, of course, is not only true for Wieland as an esteemed author in his own right and as the editor of the

novel, but above all for La Roche herself. Despite the fact that she was publishing *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* under a pseudonym, the author had to be aware of her social position at all times and that most certainly affected how she depicted the characters and events in the novel. Indeed, in a letter to Wieland, La Roche talks about this challenge:

Schon mehrfach wollte ich damit aufhören wegen der Schwierigkeit, die ich mir selbst zugezogen habe mit der Komposition des *Bösewichts*, denn wenn man darangeht, seine Verbrechen zu vergrößern, muß man auch seinen Ton und seine Charakterzüge verstärken; ich habe gefunden, daß er mir richtig schien für den Klang der Seele und der Phantasie eines wollüstigen Verbrechers, dieser durfte sich aber im Kopf einer Frau nicht finden lassen, und auch deshalb kürzte ich die Rolle dieser Person. (La Roche, *Ich bin* 107)

La Roche was walking a fine line between her standards as an author and her liability (and perhaps vulnerability) as a woman of her social standing. The author is said to have drawn extensively from her experiences as a *Gesellschafterin* for Graf Stadion (her husband's employer) for the novel (Becker-Cantarino, *Meine Liebe* 4). As a bourgeois woman who lived and worked in aristocratic circles, she had to be aware of her social position at all times and be careful not to overstep any boundaries or to risk her respectability and her husband's reputation (Strohmeyr 96-97).<sup>21</sup>

As a result of her class as well as her gender position, La Roche faced constraints in her creative freedom which male authors did not experience, at least not to the same

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<sup>21</sup> Her husband Georg Michael Frank La Roche was ennobled in 1775 (Becker-Cantarino, *Meine Liebe* 4).

extent as women writers did. These constraints amounted to an “innere Zensur,” as Silvia Bovenschen alleges and as the quote above demonstrates (Bovenschen 218).

Considering the remark about the “Komposition des Bösewichts” above, it is perhaps surprising that La Roche included a rape scene at all, let alone one with such graphic quality.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly enough, Wieland added two footnotes to this particular passage in the novel. First, he chides Derby for rushing Sophie: “Welche Zumutung, Mylord Derby? Konnten Sie ihre Zeit nicht besser nehmen” (La Roche, *Geschichte* 222). Then he charges that the heroine is merely overreacting: “Warum wurde sie dennoch so ungehalten? Warum sagte sie, er zerreiße ihr Herz, da er doch nur ihr Deshabille zerriß? – Vermutlich, weil sie ihn nicht liebte“ (223). The first comment reduces the incident to a husband’s *Kavaliersdelikt*, while the second footnote represents either a case of willful ignorance on the part of the editor, or is deliberately designed to downplay the incident and thereby influence the reading of it.

La Roche also had to be careful in how she presented her female protagonist. Sophie is introduced as an intelligent and capable young woman who – much like her creator – was an eager student and enjoyed an excellent education at home (La Roche, *Geschichte* 51). The narrator also adds that Sophie did not fail to learn the activities that are considered proper and traditional for a woman: “Neben diesen täglichen Übungen erlernte sie mit ungemeiner Leichtigkeit alle Frauenzimmerarbeiten” (52). The *Frauenzimmerarbeiten* come across as an afterthought, as something that has to be mentioned in order to complete the picture of a respectable young woman. Indeed, this

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<sup>22</sup> See La Roche, *Geschichte* 222-223.

passage conveys that women can master an academic curriculum and traditional needlework. The latter does not require much intellectual effort and may not be as satisfying a skill to learn for an ambitious student, as the expression “mit ungemeiner Leichtigkeit” suggests. Such a portrayal represents a transgression of the strict eighteenth-century gender ideology that discouraged women from acquiring intellectual knowledge and skills (and generally barred them from access to a curriculum providing the tools to acquire them) and might well have been seen as offensive at the time. Sophie’s portrayal prompted Wieland to address the issue of her education and her intellect in his preface to the novel:

Sie werden die Beobachtung machen, daß unsre Sternheim, ungeachtet die Vorteile ihrer Erziehung bei aller Gelegenheit hervorschimmern, dennoch ihren Geschmack und ihre Art zu denken, zu reden und zu handeln, mehr der Natur und ihren eigenen Erfahrungen und Bemerkungen, als dem Unterricht und der Nachahmung zu danken habe... (Wieland 14-15)

Wieland reassures readers and critics alike that La Roche did not intend to paint the picture of a “gelehrte” woman, just as he indicates that the author herself does not fall into that category (13).<sup>23</sup> La Roche echoes this herself in the first issue of *Pomona* in 1783 (over a decade after Wieland’s preface was published), where she assures her readers that she does not possess any “Gelehrsamkeit,” thereby distancing herself from so-called “gelehrte Frauenzimmer” (La Roche, *Pomona* 1:13-14). But the epigraph,

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<sup>23</sup> This is reminiscent of the description of Gellert’s heroine in *Leben der schwedischen Gräfin von G\*\*\**: „Fürchten Sie sich nicht [...] das Fräulein lernt gewiß nicht zuviel. Sie soll nur klug und gar nicht gelehrt werden“ (Gellert, *Leben* 5). These comments must be seen within the larger context of the eighteenth-century debate about women and *Gelehrtheit* that I mentioned in the introduction. For further reading on this topic, see Meise 71-74.

which stems from issue five of *Pomona*, published in the same year, seems to suggest that it was indeed unfavorable circumstances and hegemonic norms that prevented her from acquiring that *Gelehrsamkeit*, not her own desire to abstain from it.

Throughout the novel, Sophie's virtuousness is foregrounded, along with her benevolence and kindness toward people from lower social classes. In his preface, Wieland repeatedly emphasizes the novel's value based on its moral lessons and Sophie as a role model for young women.<sup>24</sup> La Roche even became known as the "Lehrerin von Teutschlands Töchtern" (König 1:387). However, Barbara Becker-Cantarino argues that it is a mistake to reduce the novel to *Gebrauchsliteratur* or *Tugendliteratur für Frauen* (Becker-Cantarino, "Freundschaftsutopie" 98, 112). After all, as a woman, La Roche had to be mindful of her social standing: "Deshalb konnte sie ihre schriftstellerische Produktion nicht als freie, 'autonome' Kunst konzipieren, sondern mußte sie weitgehend als Erziehungs- und Lebenshilfe für Mädchen und Frauen erscheinen lassen" (113). Within those constraints and under the cloak of *Tugendhaftigkeit*, the author managed to create a certain amount of latitude for her heroine. Still, Becker-Cantarino believes that La Roche was careful not to transgress gender norms and social expectations: "Dabei galt es, innerhalb des von der patriarchalischen Gesellschaft für eine Frau Erlaubten zu bleiben, ja sogar in diesen engen Grenzen den moralischen Triumph der tugendhaften Frau zu feiern" (Becker-Cantarino, Nachwort 406). Such an interpretation leaves out an important aspect, namely the fact that many of Sophie's actions, even if they appear humble and minor from today's standpoint, transgress the boundaries of expected

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<sup>24</sup> See Wieland 11, 12, 14.

behavior for a woman of the nobility in eighteenth-century Germany. Therefore, behind La Roche's seeming propagation of normative female traits and values, there is a subtle message of rebellion and subversion hidden for her female readers.

After the success of *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, La Roche started publishing under her own name. In 1783, twelve years after her first novel was published, La Roche embarked on yet another groundbreaking journey with the publication of her women's journal *Pomona für Deutschlands Töchter*, for which she served as both contributor and editor.<sup>25</sup> In the first issue, La Roche addressed her *Leserinnen* with remarkable assertiveness: "Das Magazin für Frauenzimmer und das Jahrbuch der Denkwürdigkeiten für das schöne Geschlecht – zeigen meinen Leserinnen, was teutsche Männer uns nützlich und gefällig achten. Pomona – wird Ihnen sagen, was ich als Frau dafür halte" (La Roche, *Pomona* 1:3). In the section entitled „Veranlassung der Pomona,“ however, she was quick to justify her decision to undertake this project: "Vielleicht fragt eine geistvolle Leserin dieser Blätter: ‚Wie kam es, daß eine Frau den Muth hatte, eine so große öffentliche Erscheinung zu machen?‘ Dieser schätzbaren Person will ich mit aller Offenherzigkeit antworten, daß kein Plan, kein langes Nachdenken, sondern der Zufall, der so vieles hervorbringt und zerstört, daran Ursache ist" (1:5). Any such rational planning and cogitation would have been considered unfeminine according to the dominant ideology of *Geschlechtscharaktere*. La Roche was not only anticipating questions regarding her decision, she also portrayed such questions as justified by

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<sup>25</sup> Sabine Schumann writes about *Pomona*: "Sie ist die erste von einer Frau herausgegebene Zeitschrift, die einen wirklichen Erfolg verbuchen konnte, was wohl primär in der Persönlichkeit Sophie la Roches begründet lag" (151).

stressing that a “geistvolle Leserin,” a “schätzbare Person” might be asking these questions. In addition, La Roche tries to forestall criticism with her emphatic reassurance that she had never planned on publishing this journal. Again, this public display of unassumingness is crucial for a woman who dares to step into the public spotlight and make such a “große öffentliche Erscheinung,” as she calls it. At the same time, this modesty seems to merely represent a façade which serves to conceal the hard work and planning that it took to write and edit a women’s magazine at that historical juncture.

Personal letters exchanged between La Roche and Wieland reveal that she knew indeed of his plans to publish *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* and agreed to it. In April of 1770, he writes: “Allerdings, beste Freundin, verdient ihre *Sternheim* gedruckt zu werden; und sie verdient es nicht nur; nach meiner vollen Überzeugung erweisen Sie Ihrem Geschlecht einen wirklichen Dienst dadurch. Sie soll und muß gedruckt werden, und ich werde ihr Pflegevater sein“ (La Roche, *Ich bin* 104). Consequently, Wieland’s assurance in the preface that the novel was published without the author’s knowledge is exposed as a mere mask or a social code. This might well have represented a necessary step in order to save La Roche’s respectability and to not commit too big a transgression against dominant gender norms. This ruse, then, as alienating as it may appear in a contemporary light, seems to have represented an understood narrative device (Ramm 75).

That same letter from Wieland reveals that conscious, meticulous planning went into the publication of the novel:

Aber es ist aus verschiedenen Gründen notwendig (das heißt aus *kaufmännischen*

*Ursachen*), daß die beiden Bände miteinander erscheinen. So wäre ich der Ansicht, sie schickten mir das Manuskript des ersten Bandes, und während ich damit beschäftigt bin, ihm, wie wir Schriftsteller sagen, den letzten Schliff zu geben und es anschließend für den Druck abschreiben zu lassen, werden Sie den zweiten Band beginnen, dem ich, während man den ersten druckt, denselben Dienst erweisen werde. (La Roche, *Ich bin* 104-105)

Wieland's tendency to explain the context and professional terminology come across as patronizing and show that he does not regard La Roche as a professional writer. To what extent Wieland actually made changes to *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* remains unclear. What is striking, though, is that Wieland added footnotes to the novel, eighteen in total. In one of those footnotes, he admits to adding content (La Roche, *Geschichte* 88n), while in another, he explains that he did not have the heart to change the content, even though he felt that it was unbecoming for this novel and that critics would most certainly find fault with it as well (130n). In some of the footnotes, Wieland corrects the author and thus presents himself as the superior writer or the professional authority and La Roche, on the other hand, as the lay person, the unlearned woman. In the preface, Wieland's tone often comes across as flirtatious and chivalrous; in the footnotes, in contrast, he mostly sounds condescending and dismissive. Consequently, the footnotes once again give the impression that he distances himself from the text in order to save his own reputation as a writer should critics condemn his decision to publish the novel. Overall, Wieland's repeated interventions in the novel's plot are not suggestive of

Wieland as a *Pflegevater* for the novel, but rather as a censor (and an overbearing copy editor).

The epistolary novel is mostly associated with eighteenth-century Europe, although its history dates back at least to Ovid (Altman 3). It did, however, enjoy its greatest popularity in the second half of the eighteenth century. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-48) were translated into French and German and enjoyed tremendous popularity. Christian Fürchtegott Gellert's anonymously published *Leben der schwedischen Gräfin von G\*\*\** (1747) was reprinted several times and was also translated into English, French, Dutch, Italian, and Hungarian (Fechner 162). At the time, the novel itself was still a developing genre and its literary value was questioned by critics. This lack of prestige attributed to the genre may help explain why Gellert, as a male author, published his *schwedische Gräfin* anonymously (Fechner 162).

When La Roche writes her first novel in letter form, she not only follows the examples of popular authors such as Gellert and Richardson, but also makes use of a genre with which, as a woman, she is most familiar and therefore most likely comfortable. To be sure, in the eighteenth century, only educated women from the aristocracy or the upper bourgeoisie were in a position (and had the ability) to write letters (Becker-Cantarino, "Leben" 131). Women from the lower classes were often illiterate and lacked postage costs. "Private" letters were rarely truly private, but were usually written with a larger audience in mind, since letters were often read out loud for entertainment and information, a passing on of news, during gatherings with family or friends (132).

The use of the letter by women writers had yet another advantage, namely it represented an easier segue into publishing, since women were expected to write (private) letters. In *Praktische Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmacke in Briefen* (1751), Gellert even attributes a special quality to letters written by women (Gellert, *Briefe* 74-75). Women, he insists, often write more “natural” and, as a result, better letters than men. Gellert bases this advantage on women’s natural disposition and his following word choice is imbued with the ideology of gender division or *Geschlechtscharaktere*: “Die Empfindungen der Frauenzimmer sind zarter und lebhafter als die unsrigen. Sie werden von tausend kleinen Umständen gerührt, die bey uns keinen Eindruck machen. Sie werden nicht allein öfter, sondern auch leichter gerührt, als wir” (75-76). Gellert further makes it clear that he is not talking about learned women; in fact, it is women’s lack of knowledge or disregard for the “Regeln der Kunst,” which results in more natural letters (77). His remarks are grounded firmly in the ideology of dominant gender norms, yet his acknowledgement of women’s talent as (letter) writers is significant.

*Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* starts with a frame narrative, provided by Rosine, the fictitious editor of the letters that compose the novel. This structure of the novel is alluded to in its subtitle, “Von einer Freundin derselben aus Original-Papieren und andern zuverlässigen Quellen gezogen.” Rosine provides the reader with the heroine’s family history before introducing Sophie. As her faithful chambermaid, Rosine has intimate knowledge of the events that befall Sophie and of her emotional state at any given time. From time to time, she intervenes in the narrative in order to fill in the gaps or to provide information in addition to the letters. Unlike Richardson’s novels or Goethe’s

*Werther*, with their single narrators, these letters stem from the protagonist and from various other people, mostly her close friends, but also the villain of the narrative, Lord Derby. Thus, the events in the novel are recounted from multiple perspectives, which not only makes an omniscient narrator obsolete, but also heightens “the illusion of reality and authenticity” (Altman 6), particularly in connection with the reference to the use of “Original-Papieren” and “andern zuverlässigen Quellen” in the novel’s subtitle.

Friedrich von Blanckenburg’s main criticism of the epistolary novel was that the format of the letters would not allow the author to portray the “Verbindung des innern und äußern Seyns seiner Personen” (287) as well as insights into the feelings of the protagonists: “Die Personen sind, den Voraussetzungen des Dichters zu Folge, oft in zu großer Bewegung, als daß sie in sich selbst zurück kehren, Wirkung und Ursache gegen einander abwiegen, und das **Wie** bey dem Entstehn ihrer Begebenheiten so aufklären könnten, wie wir es sehen wollen“ (285). Some of the letters in La Roche’s novel certainly are supposed to have been written in “grosser Bewegung” after unsettling turns of events. But the author – as if anticipating this line of criticism – circumvents this dilemma described by Blanckenburg in two ways; first, by providing her protagonist with an abundance of time in captivity, during which she can “in sich selbst zurück kehren” and “Wirkung und Ursache gegen einander abwiegen”, and secondly, by providing the reader with multiple perspectives of the events and characters in the novel.

Most of Sophie’s letters are addressed to her close friend Emilia. This writing to a “friend-confidante” allows for the revealing of innermost thoughts, feelings, and motivations, as she is reeling from and reflecting on the events throughout the novel

(Altman 69). As such intimate narratives, letters also allow the reader to feel part of this inner circle of the protagonist, and as such, to identify with her more easily. Emilia, on the other hand, represents a “passive confidant who always remains external to the action,” since replies to Sophie are not included in the novel (82).

This strategy of multiple perspectives further serves the important function of allowing the female protagonist to remain modest and humble in the portrayal of her own actions, while other correspondents fill in the gaps of the plot, embellish their accounts with colorful details, and offer profuse praise and admiration for Sophie. In this way, together with the narrator, the other voices function as character witnesses for Sophie through their letters. Moreover, the heroine herself can be selective in what events she recounts. The rape scene mentioned above, for example, is retold by Lord Derby himself in a letter to his friend. This equals a confession and confirms the corrupt and obscene nature of Sophie’s adversary. It also allows the heroine to merely make vague references to this incident, which would be most indecorous for a woman to talk or write about in any detail. Throughout the novel, the cruelty suffered by Sophie is recounted by these other characters, serving to validate Sophie’s bewildered state of mind while at the same time providing the graphic context for her personal account. Her perseverance and determination are thereby underscored and all possibility of doubt regarding her credibility is excluded.

Perhaps most importantly, though, the epistolary form of the novel functions to give this public text the air of privacy (Hilliard 54). This takes us back to the ruse according to which La Roche had no knowledge of or involvement in the novel’s

publication. As Kevin Hillard points out: “Once the cover of privacy had been established, by the arguments of the preface, by the installation of a male editor, in place of the absent author, to conduct the novel’s public business, and by the formal and stylistic features of the writing itself, unexpected free spaces opened up” (56). La Roche was able to utilize this leeway not only for her depiction of the indelicate and brazen *Bösewicht*, but also for the portrayal of her heroine’s rebellious acts of subversion and defiance. This brings us to the role of space and spatiality in the novel.

### **Space and Power**

That space matters becomes evident at the outset of the novel. The narrator of the frame story, Rosine, explains in great detail how Sophie’s father, the Oberst von Sternheim, acquired the *Gut* in which Sophie grew up. The property was carefully pre-selected by Sternheim’s dear friend and soon to be neighbor and brother-in-law, the Baron P. This is important, since the Baron is part of the *alter Adel*, whereas Sternheim was only recently awarded the title of nobility and did not inherit any land or estate. The narrator stresses that it is an “artiges Gut” and that it is “artig gelegen” (La Roche, *Geschichte* 22). In this context, *artig* conveys that the house and its location are invitingly beautiful, yet modest and befitting for its future owner, Sternheim. Then she continues:

Er bezog sein Haus sogleich, als er Besitz von der kleinen Herrschaft genommen hatte, die nur aus zweien Dörfern bestund. Er gab auch ein Festin für die kleine Nachbarschaft, fing gleich darauf an zu bauen, setzte noch zween schöne Flügel an beide Seiten des Hauses, pflanzte Alleen und einen artigen Lustwald, alles in englischem Geschmack. Er betrieb diesen Bau mit dem größten Eifer. (23)

Sternheim sets out without delay to turn the house into a mansion fit for someone who has just been ennobled, and he does so with “größtem Eifer.” Yet the narrator is careful to strike a balance between conveying Sternheim’s zeal and the expansion of the house on the one hand, and emphasizing that it is an unassuming estate on the other. This is the home Sophie grows up in and it represents the type of space that she is deserving of. After her father’s death, Sophie leaves her home and her home town unwillingly. In fact, she puts her departure off as long as she can before finally giving in to social pressure to conform to gender norms and traveling to D. to live with her aunt and uncle.

As Sophie moves from space to space throughout the novel, she provides brief descriptions of the spaces she likes and feels comfortable in, such as Emilia’s modest home, her room at Madame Hill’s house, and Lady Summers’ country house.<sup>26</sup> However, she does not provide any such description of the spaces that she inhabits unwillingly in any of her letters. The rooms in the tavern and the mountain cottage are described by her friend Lord Seymour and his brother Lord Rich. These descriptions are only provided after Sophie has already left these spaces. When Sophie first arrives at the court in D., she talks at length about her first impressions. But these do not include a physical description of what the spaces look like, which is surprising, given that it is her first visit to the city, or “die große Welt”, as she repeatedly refers to it (La Roche, *Geschichte* 68). From Sophie’s letters, it becomes clear that she does not identify with any of these spaces, as she focuses on describing the people she meets and their behavior toward her. Therefore, in assessing this new world, she chooses what is most important to her, namely the inner

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<sup>26</sup> See La Roche, *Geschichte* 235-36, 237, 277.

character of the people around her, while neglecting to or possibly even refusing to pay tribute to the physical spaces she is in.

This lack of attention to space stands in stark contrast to the beginning of the novel, where the narrator Rosine provides the reader not only with a description of Sophie's childhood home, but with a whole history of the house. Throughout the novel, the protagonist repeatedly emphasizes that she mourns not only the loss of her father, but also the loss of her home and her space.<sup>27</sup> Possessing our own space provides us with the freedom to act and can help give us our own sense of self (Tuan 52, 175). This is taken away from Sophie when she must leave her home, and she repeatedly underscores that she feels alienated in the Löbaus' residence, at court, and in the city.<sup>28</sup>

She has her own room at her relatives' house in D., but it soon becomes apparent that she does not have command over that room or over her time in her relatives' home. Her aunt dictates how Sophie spends the day, what she wears, and when and with whom she leaves the house, thereby taking charge of Sophie's behavior, attire, appearance, and her social schedule. She is under the control and constant surveillance of her guardians – a power that their house facilitates. Sophie has no choice but to submit herself to the rules governing this space which she cannot escape. As Shirley Ardener points out: “The ‘theatre of action’ to some extent determines the action. The environment imposes certain restraints on our mobility, and, in turn, our perceptions of space are shaped by our own capacity to move about [...]. So: behaviour and space are mutually dependent” (Ardener 2).

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<sup>27</sup> See La Roche, *Geschichte* 95, 179, 182-183.

<sup>28</sup> See La Roche, *Geschichte* 62, 65, 67-68.

This space-power relationship is not limited to private homes. As Michel Foucault reminds us in *Discipline and Punish*, space and architecture play an important role in the perpetuation of societal systems of power and discipline (Foucault 171-77). He asserts that architecture is designed “to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them” (172). In this remark, Foucault refers mainly to urban development, such as working-class housing and to state institutions, such as prisons, hospitals, and schools; however, this power dynamic holds true for other types of architecture as well.

While built spaces alone do not force individuals to comply with the rules governing them, these rules do work in connection with societal norms to either enable or to limit people in their behavior. Foucault alleges that this dynamic is highly effective because people have internalized power relations and maintain their position within the hierarchical system voluntarily. Built spaces are a part of society’s complex disciplinary system and therefore become an important medium of power or an instrument for the deployment of power.

This mediating and controlling role of architecture is reflected in the novel. As mentioned above, Sophie is forced to leave her own house which she inherits from her father. As a young, unmarried woman of an aristocratic background, it would violate gender norms and jeopardize her respectability for her not to live under male supervision until she gets married (and is thereby placed under further male supervision). As a result,

at age nineteen she is shut out of her own space despite the fact that she had been managing the household for her father for the past three years. Sophie feels that she cannot escape this fate, but she succeeds in delaying her departure to the court city of D. by one year by staying with the local pastor and his family (Rosine and Emilia's home). Then she bends to social expectations and sets out to live with her relatives in D. Sophie repeatedly expresses the desire to leave D. and return to her home, but her aunt and uncle deny her this wish. It becomes clear that with the departure from her home, Sophie has lost the power to decide over her own spatiality.

In fact, throughout the novel, La Roche's protagonist repeatedly finds herself trapped in certain spaces, unable to leave without a suitable male chaperone. These spaces include the court in D., where she is forced to stay with the Count and Countess Löbau against her wishes, the tavern in a small village, where her then-husband Lord Derby abandons her, and the cottage in a remote Scottish mountain region, where she is held captive after Lord Derby's men abduct her. It becomes apparent that as a woman in a patriarchal system, Sophie's mobility is not only greatly restricted, but she is also subjected to a forced mobility. This spatial enforcement of power relations is often overlooked or underestimated. Gender norms are reinforced by architecture, which contains and traps the protagonist repeatedly. Foucault's approach helps elucidate this connection by calling attention to an important aspect of built spaces: they do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they reflect existing power structures and they are built to support and perpetuate these power structures and societal norms, as the examples from the novel exemplify.

At first glance, it looks as though La Roche's protagonist complies with these societal norms and gender expectations that govern the use of space. After all, Sophie eventually leaves her home as is expected of her, she stays at her aunt and uncle's house in D. and only leaves after her secret marriage to Lord Derby. Subsequently, she waits patiently in a tavern in a small village for over a month for Derby's return. We need to keep in mind that for a young, unmarried woman during the eighteenth century in Germany, to step out of line and to violate gender role expectations could have had severe consequences. Therefore, Sophie seems to have little choice but to submit herself to societal norms.

### **Appropriation of Space**

Certeau encourages us to take a second look at people's relationship with built spaces, that is, people's behavior in and use of space. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he acknowledges the power dynamics described by Foucault, but insists that it is too rigid a view. The Foucauldian model leaves little room for individual agency and thus reduces people to compliance with the disciplinary system (Certeau xiv). Certeau posits that it is important not to assume that users of space are passive and conform to established rules a priori. Instead, he proposes to study people's behavior closely to see if they actually use the spaces in the ways they were intended or if they manage to overcome the spatial enforcement of power relations. Certeau investigates how people engage with space in everyday life: a city park bench, for instance, is designed for people to sit on for relatively brief periods of time. However, someone might turn a park bench into sleeping quarters and spend the night on it, thereby subverting its designated purpose. In the fall of

2011, for example, the *Occupy Wall Street* movement caused much debate in the U.S. about unintended use of public and private spaces in cities across the country. City parks and centrally located private parks, such as Zuccotti Park in New York City, were transformed into headquarters and tent cities for the protest movement. People's freedom of speech and freedom to protest were weighed against public safety and sanitation issues as well as political and economic interests.

While the *Occupy Wall Street* movement is an example of an organized effort to subvert space, Certeau's focus is on much smaller acts of subversion. In fact, Certeau argues that when looking closely at people's spatial practices, one can locate agency and subversion even in the most miniscule or seemingly insignificant everyday acts (xiv-xv). Certeau does not suggest that these acts amount to a significant challenge to the dominant system. This raises the question whether he overstates their relevance. Roger Silverstone accuses Certeau of romanticizing these daily acts and "interstitial practices," which Silverstone calls "utopian, plausibly even impotent" (Silverstone 84).

Lois McNay, on the other hand, maintains that Certeau's utopian concept of the everyday is useful in that it "offers a way of thinking of change as a possibility immanent in the structures of social life rather than in terms of rupture with those structures" (McNay 77). In contrast to Foucault's model of the disciplinary apparatus of contemporary society, Certeau's concept is marked by "an inherent lack of finality" (77). Tim Cresswell also underscores this point and stresses the importance of paying close attention to everyday transgressions: "No hegemonic structure is ever complete, and it is always important to study the ways in which hegemonies are contested in everyday life"

(Cresswell 21). As a matter of fact, it is often as a result of transgressions and people's reaction to them that we are able to see the already existing normative spatiality and ideology which are imposed by those in power (10). In this manner, transgressions or "actions out of place" help highlight the relationship between space and social norms and expectations (10).

Spaces and buildings codify social expectations (such as the expectation that a park bench is only intended for sitting, not sleeping), but that does not mean that everyone interprets these expectations in the same way or that some people may not try to transgress them. In addition, spaces can have different meanings for different people and thus, people's responses to spaces and buildings vary as well (Edelman 70). A court building, for instance, might symbolize authority, dignity, security, and trust in the constitution to some individuals, while it might evoke fear and trepidation in others. An individual's personal background and social position are crucial in this, as someone from the upper or middle class might have a very different relationship with state institutions than someone from a marginalized group.

Certeau makes a distinction between the intended use for a built space and the actual use of or people's actual practices within the space. This allows him to focus on the possibility that the individual, even if he or she is in a position of domination, may find a way to subvert space and reappropriate it for his/her own intentions. In this view, turning a park bench into a sleeping accommodation becomes a subversive act and a temporary victory of the individual over the system; a person without any property of her own or place to go to claims this space, if only for the night.

Certeau further distinguishes between two different means of subverting or appropriating space, namely “strategies” and “tactics” (34-39). A strategy represents the manipulation of power relationships that becomes possible once a place is secured. This place can then function as a base from which one can operate and build relations with the outside world. If people cannot secure a space for themselves within the system of domination, strategies are not available to them. This does not mean that they cannot appropriate spaces, though, as the park bench example above shows. This is where the tactic comes into play: a tactic is an action that is determined by the absence of a secured place or base from which to operate. A tactic is the action that happens within the space of the dominant order, a terrain imposed on the individual or group. “Although they remain dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances, these transverse *tactics* do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it” (29). As such, tactics remain unpredictable within the system of power. Whereas “tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces,” Certeau insists that “strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces” (30). He adds that the dominated or marginalized do not represent a homogeneous group, but that “the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong [...] lend a political dimension to everyday practices” (xvii).

Melissa Gilbert deems Certeau’s distinction between strategies and tactics as problematic because it “ignores the possibility that tactics may be transformed into strategies” (Gilbert 617n). This is an important point, since the difference between strategies and tactics may not always be as clear-cut as construed by Certeau. If we take

the example of the Berlin *Hausbesetzungen* from the introduction, for example, we can see that a minority may employ tactics in order to secure a space temporarily. In some instances, the squatters only managed to occupy buildings briefly before they were forcibly removed by the police. In other cases, they were able to stay in the buildings for months or even years and one could argue that they were able to turn their tactic into a strategy. Some groups of squatters even ended up legalizing their status through negotiations with the city and the owners of the buildings. The question arises whether this type of space can serve as a base for the deployment of strategies or whether it remains in the realm of a tactic. After all, the squatters typically only control the space temporarily. Even if they do manage to control it over longer periods of time, the threat of being forcibly removed from these buildings always looms over them. The questions surrounding spatiality can present a complexity that make it challenging to fit behavior into Certeau's model.

In spite of these pitfalls or concerns, Certeau's distinction between tactics and strategies is particularly useful in understanding the relationship between the dominated and the normative spatiality surrounding them. Furthermore, it highlights the important connection between space as a base from which to act (or a lack thereof) and agency. In the novel, Sophie ostensibly complies with the spatial enforcement of power relations as outlined above. However, we need to look more closely at her actions (or lack thereof) while she is staying in these spaces that function to not only restrict her mobility and essentially trap her, but also to render her powerless. With the letters she writes, Sophie draws our attention away from the spaces themselves and emphasizes her reactions to and

actions within them. In these letters, we oftentimes find a defiant tone. Even though Sophie does experience moments of hopelessness and weakness, in the end she always regains her composure and strength.<sup>29</sup> The question remains whether this defiance translates into concrete and calculated actions as described by Certeau. Sophie clearly does not control the spaces that are the focus here; she cannot secure them for herself. As a result, strategies of appropriating these spaces are not available to her. But I argue that she is nonetheless subverting these spaces by the use of tactics and I will give a few examples from the text to illustrate this *modus operandi*.

As I mentioned above, Sophie has her own room at the Löbau residence in D. Still, the following example demonstrates that she does not have any real power over that space, and that therefore, she is unable to develop strategies of subversion. Sophie is supposed to spend the mornings keeping her aunt company, but she refuses to do so. Rather, she spends her time reading the literature which she brought with her from home – so much so that the Countess confronts her and exclaims that she is jealous of Sophie's books. The deliberate act of reading can be seen as a tactic that Sophie employs in order to escape and subvert the dictated use of this space and of her time. Subsequently, in an effort to force Sophie into compliance, the books – Sophie's possessions – are taken away from her. But Sophie refuses to give in and proclaims that she will spend her time writing more instead: "Ein unartiger Spaß, der sie nichts nützen wird; denn ich will desto mehr schreiben; neue Bücher will ich nicht kaufen, um sie nicht über meinen Eigensinn

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<sup>29</sup> This is indeed noteworthy, as by far not all of Sophie's contemporary female protagonists manage to display such perseverance – Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*, published one year after *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, comes to mind as an example.

böse zu machen” (La Roche, *Geschichte* 81). Here, reading and writing emerge as calculated acts of subversion, as Sophie weighs her options and considers the consequences of her insubordinate actions. Most importantly, even when her first tactic fails, Sophie proves that she is resourceful and quickly comes up with another.

The second example takes us to a different space: Sophie finally manages to escape from D., only to find herself “eingesperrt” in a tavern in a rural village (213). Lord Derby, whom Sophie believes to be her rightful husband, has sent her to this remote location in an attempt to change her character, to turn Sophie into a willing subject for his carnal desires (101, 222). This space is deployed as a tool to trap and isolate Sophie, to transform her much in the same way as described by Foucault. Well aware of Sophie’s love of books, Derby leaves a stack of erotic literature behind for her, hoping it will work to prime her for intimacy with him. Sophie, however, is disgusted at the sight of these books and refuses to read them. She uses the first opportunity that presents itself to throw them into the fire and burn them to ashes.

Sophie then uses her time at the tavern to teach two nieces of the innkeepers (together with Rosine) to be chambermaids, and also gives them lessons in writing and math skills (215-216). She thus employs at least two different tactics in order to reappropriate the space for her own purpose. Derby’s ensuing anger about both of these actions testifies to their subversive nature. When his attempt to domesticate and tame her, to turn her into a submissive and willing wife or lover fails, he resorts to violence and rape. He also prohibits Sophie from seeing the girls whom she had been teaching in his absence. These developments bear testimony to the fact that Sophie’s agency is abrogated

upon Derby's return. This not only underpins her subordinate role, but also demonstrates the limitations of tactics as a means for the subversion of space. Tactics can be short-lived in nature and the ground gained can quickly be lost again.

The next example occurs near the end of the novel: Derby's schemes to change Sophie fail and he abandons her. When their paths cross again, he resorts to more extreme measures in order to silence her, and has her abducted and brought to a remote Scottish mountain region. The abduction itself represents a spatial exercise, one of a brutal forced mobility as the narrator's account of the events shows: "im nämlichen Augenblick kamen noch zwei verummte Personen, warfen ihr eine dicke runde Kappe über den Kopf, und schleppten sie mit Gewalt fort. Ihr heftiges Sträuben, ihre Bemühung zu rufen war vergebens; man warf sie in eine Halbschäse, und jagte die ganze Nacht mit ihr fort" (302). Finally, she is left with wardens in a small cottage, that is, she finds herself trapped and imprisoned in a space once again.

After a period of physical weakness and hopelessness, Sophie finds her inner strength and decides again to put her time in this space to good use. She learns the language of her wardens, befriends them, and starts teaching their daughter Maria English and domestic service skills. This particular space was designed to break her, but Sophie once again manages to use tactics in order to subvert it. Just how opportunistic some of her tactics are becomes evident when we consider Sophie's needlework instruction. The materials she uses for teaching come from Derby, who has sent them to the cottage in order to humiliate Sophie:

O Derby! wie voll, wie voll machst du das Maß deiner Härte gegen mich! Heute

kommt ein Bote, und bringt einen großen Pack Vorrat zur Tapezerei; niederträchtig spottet er: da mir bei Hofe die Zeit ohne Tapetenarbeit zu lang gewesen, so möchte es hier auch so sein; er schickte mir also Winterarbeit; im Frühjahre würde er es holen lassen. Es ist zu einem Kabinett; die Risse liegen dabei. – Ich will sie anfangen, ja ich will; er wird nach meinem Tode die Stücke kriegen; er soll die Überreste seiner an mir verübten Barbarei sehen. (311)

Her immediate reaction is to despise him, but then she uses the materials to keep herself busy and to teach Maria and Lidy.<sup>30</sup> Sophie later exclaims: “Ich klagte über das, was mein Vergnügen geworden ist“ (311). This comment bears testimony to how much of a difference a mere tactic can make in a person’s everyday life.

Earlier in the novel, when Sophie is teaching the two innkeeper’s nieces, she not only elaborates on how much she enjoys the activity of teaching and the company of her pupils, but also asserts that she likes to work (215-217). This represents a subtle, yet powerful divergence from the dominant gender division which firmly places women in the domestic sphere and only allows for charitable acts for women of the nobility.

The last tactic I want to discuss also involves writing: when Sophie finally runs out of paper in the Scottish mountain cottage, she once again proves resourceful and defiantly declares: “Mein Papier, ach, Emilia, mein Papier geht zu Ende; [...] einige Bogen Papier waren mein Glück, und ich darf es nicht mehr genießen! Ich will Cannevas sparen und Buchstaben hinein nähen” (La Roche, *Geschichte* 313-314). Here, two

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<sup>30</sup> Lidy proves to be Derby’s illegitimate child, who was born in the cottage while her mother was held there in captivity. Thus, it is revealed that Sophie was not Derby’s first kidnap victim. The question arises whether La Roche seems to suggest that violence against women was a more widespread phenomenon in contemporary society or whether this revelation simply serves to underpin Derby’s depiction as a *Bösewicht*.

powerful symbols overlap: sewing as an activity is coded feminine and not only represents domesticity, modesty, and submissiveness (Joeres, *Respectability* 7), but in this particular case, it also represents her captivity and her brutal repression. After all, it was Derby who had sent her the sewing materials and had brazenly ordered her to embroider a piece for his house. Writing as an activity, on the other hand, involves the intellect and in Sophie's case, represents the connection to the outside world, from which she is supposed to be cut off. And once more, she makes use of the materials that Derby had sent her for her subversive tactic.

It is remarkable that all of Sophie's tactics – reading, writing, and teaching (particularly of writing and math skills) – involve the intellect. As such, they are closely tied to rational skills, such as *Denken*, *Wissen*, *Abstrahieren* and *Urteilen*, all of which represent prevalent gender characteristics that were coded masculine at the time (Hausen 368). Furthermore, the other characteristics that are closely connected to Sophie's appropriation of space, her use of tactics, namely *Energie*, *Kraft*, *Willenskraft*, *Tapferkeit*, perhaps even *Kühnheit*, were all male coded as well. The fact that La Roche is applying these gender characteristics to Sophie carries a powerful symbolic value at a time when women were neither supposed to possess an interest in intellect nor spend their time on its pursuit (as the example of the confiscation of her books at the Löbau residence illustrates).

Still, there are apparent limitations to what Sophie can accomplish in this space in the Scottish mountains in which she is held captive. For one, it takes months before she manages to escape the cottage. What is more, her overall situation is dismal, even though

her wardens treat her well. The fact remains that throughout the novel, Sophie is being used, abused, and at some point even left to die.<sup>31</sup> It does not come as a surprise, then, that Helene Kastinger Riley dismisses La Roche's protagonist as having no agency: "Sophie von Sternheim ist eine negative Heldin; ihr Beispiel soll nicht nachgeahmt werden, wie Wieland meint, sondern es soll warnen" (Kastinger Riley 30). Kastinger Riley insists that the protagonist is marked by her inability to learn from her mistakes and that she remains "ein Spielball" until the end of the novel (51-52). These small acts of subversion that I outlined above may seem inconsequential, but they serve to humanize Sophie's environment for her (McNay 78), making her imprisonment and isolation bearable, as her above quoted remark about the needlework demonstrates.

In fact, the extraordinary nature of Sophie's actions becomes clear when we consider that there was another woman, namely Lidy's mother, before her who had been abducted by Derby's men and taken to the very same cottage and who actually died in captivity. When Sophie first finds out about this other woman, she is sure that her fate is sealed, as her reference to her looming death in the quote above reflects. Still, as always when she is put in a difficult space, she finds a way to engage tactics and thereby gains some agency. As the protagonist herself underscores: "Unglück und Mangel hat schon viele erfindsam gemacht; ich bin es auch worden" (La Roche, *Geschichte* 311).

When we take a closer look at the spaces in the novel and at the power dynamics that govern them, we realize just how restricted Sophie's spatiality and mobility are in the patriarchal society. She has very little control over the spaces she inhabits and she is

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<sup>31</sup> Derby's confidant John throws Sophie in a tower near her wardens' cottage in a brutal manner and locks her up, leaving her injured and unconscious. See La Roche, *Geschichte* 317-18.

unable to overcome the spatial enforcement of power relations. Certeau's concept of the tactic, however, helps us to understand that within this extensive power grid, even small, everyday actions are worth noting, since they represent acts of subversion. These small acts help Sophie overcome at least some of the limitations that are imposed on her in those spaces and thus make her situation more tolerable. Sophie proves again and again that she is able to reappropriate space for her own interests, even if all odds are against her. La Roche not only lets her heroine survive her ordeal, she also lets her triumph in the end by creating a space for her and her family that borders on the utopian and defies the normative order of patriarchy.<sup>32</sup> When Becker-Cantarino concludes that Sophie's actions represent an "Anpassungsstrategie an die Zwänge des Patriarchats" (Becker-Cantarino, "Freundschaftsutopie" 113), she sells La Roche's protagonist short. I argue that her repeated acts of subversion represent an attempt to break out of those constraints.

Moreover, Sophie has dreams and aspirations of opening a school for underprivileged girls who would receive schooling and vocational training in child care, being a lady's maid, and the domestic arts (La Roche, *Geschichte* 238). During her stay with Madame Hills, she is able to teach a larger group of girls in a more formal setting and also convinces her benefactor to found a school according to her visions (237-244). Her work with Madame Hills then leads to an invitation to accompany Lady Summers to England, in order to help her launch a similar institution there (275-276). Sophie's pedagogy does not challenge the *Ständeordnung*, but her goals to found schools go well

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<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the novel's ending, see Joeres, "That girl" 152-53.

beyond what was sanctioned for an aristocratic woman at the time. However, these ambitious plans end up being thwarted by her subsequent abduction.

La Roche uses the themes of women's oppressive spatiality and restricted mobility in the novel in order to denounce women's situation in the patriarchal system. This system is marked not only by coercive norms that put women under men's tutelage, but also by violence against women as the protagonist's rape and abduction illustrate. With Sophie von Sternheim, La Roche challenges this system, one small act of subversion at a time.

## Chapter Two:

### A Woman's Place is in the Country – or is it?

#### Mobility, Agency, and Deviance in Louise Otto's *Buchenheim*

*Als Waffen und Signale sind uns Worte,  
Die reinsten, schärfsten Waffen, die wir haben,  
Und die erstürmen die Bastillepforte,  
Die überspringen jeden Festungsgraben.*

—Louise Otto<sup>33</sup>

Louise Otto-Peters (1819-1895) is considered one of the most influential and important figures of the German women's movement of the nineteenth century. In contrast to Sophie von La Roche, Otto<sup>34</sup> was often daring and antagonistic in her use of language. This is not only a sign that times had changed during the first half of the nineteenth century, but also a tribute to Otto's strong personality and unrelenting determination to fight for her beliefs and for her rights. In addition, she fought for the rights of those whom she saw as disadvantaged in society, in particular the lower classes and women. As a member of the liberal bourgeoisie, Otto placed her hopes for societal change on the failed revolution of 1848/49. Needless to say, bitter disappointment and personal hardship followed after the uprisings had been suppressed by the authorities. The three-volume novel *Buchenheim* was published in 1851, only a couple of years after

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<sup>33</sup> L. Otto, *Lieder* 109.

<sup>34</sup> Since Louise Otto-Peters continued publishing under her maiden name after she got married, I will use the latter in this study.

the failed revolution and during a time of repression and backlash against women's rights.<sup>35</sup>

It is hardly surprising, then, that Otto chose women's social situation as a central theme for the novel. Strict gender norms, women's alleged place within society, and women's limited mobility are foregrounded in *Buchenheim*. With the small town of Buchenheim, in which the novel is set, Otto paints a picture of stasis and lack of mobility for women. As a contrast to the small town (coded private/female), the city (coded public/male) has a presence in the novel, yet is presented as completely out of reach for the main female protagonist Thekla. At first glance, it seems as though Otto is echoing mainstream discourse on the city and prescriptive messages about gender roles and women's location. But upon closer look, it becomes clear that there are incongruous messages in the novel and it is these tensions that have attracted my attention. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, tension, in a figurative sense, can be defined as "The conflict created by interplay of the constituent elements of a work of art" ("Tension"). Rather than constituting mere contradictions, which are inconsistent and contrary to one another, the tensions in the novel interact with one another and work to subtly transform what seem to be the author's "original" messages about women's proper location, gender roles, and the city, for example.

The depiction of the main protagonist Thekla represents a good example of Otto's strategy. Thekla is initially introduced as a content and quiet young woman leading an ordinary, domestic life in Buchenheim. However, this image is starting to break down as

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<sup>35</sup> Otto was a prolific writer and actually published two novels in 1851, *Vier Geschwister* and *Buchenheim*.

the reader slowly realizes that there is much more to Thekla's character than she had originally been led to believe, for Thekla's inner self is revealed to be full of unrest and dissatisfaction. It becomes clear that for Thekla, there is great tension between what social norms dictate and what she aspires to in life. This depiction forces the reader to rethink her initial impression and reading of the novel as it relates to women's spatiality and women's mobility. Thekla feels trapped in Buchenheim, but nonetheless, her relationship with mobility is complicated and cannot be reduced to a binary opposition between mobility and a lack thereof, as the following discussion will establish.

Otto was writing at a time – not only a transitional time, but also a reactionary, post-revolution, repressive time – when open criticism of the status quo, of the political system was not tolerated and certainly would not have been published. Therefore, any messages of subversion or defiance of the current system had to be packaged very carefully and with great subtlety. With *Buchenheim*, Otto subverts existing gender norms and denounces the political status quo by employing tensions within the plot and on the narrative level. She is thereby able to use the themes of mobility and women's spatiality, among others, as vehicles for social criticism at a time when doing so openly was not a viable option.

### **Plot Summary**

*Buchenheim* tells the story of a young woman named Thekla and of her quiet life in rural Germany. Thekla, the daughter of the local Pastor Frankenthal, seems to represent the ideal bourgeois femininity. The pastor himself is held in high esteem by the township and by the Count and Countess von Wildenstein, who reside in the nearby

castle. Thekla has close ties to the castle; she is even a confidante of Countess Margarete (aka Margitta). Margitta's new governess Eugenie also becomes a very close friend of Thekla.

As the title of the novel indicates, the village of Buchenheim (and its surrounding area) serves as the setting for the narrative. The unnamed *Stadt* represents an important counterpart to the village, although it remains in the background. In fact, this juxtaposition of urban versus rural space as it relates to women's proper place and role within society lies at the center of the novel. Otto seems to present an "orderly" picture in which the village represents the domestic realm of the women and the city represents the public realm of men. As such, the city is out of reach for the (middle- and lower-class) women, and their mobility is greatly limited, while the men are free to move back and forth between the city and the country.

Thekla's brother Ferdinand and his friends Dagobert and Eugen exemplify this male privilege in the novel. Ferdinand attends the university and only returns home during the semester breaks, while Dagobert, a law student, has recently been ordered home from the city by his father to neighboring Friedeburgen after his gambling habit reached excessive heights. Ferdinand meets the socially engaged Eugen Willers on his trip home from the city and is intrigued by his charisma and rich life experiences, as he has traveled extensively and even lived in America for some time. Eugen now resides in the city where he works as a journalist and hopes to build a school for orphans and indigent girls. Thekla also comes to greatly admire Eugen and longs to work alongside

him on his school project in the city – a longing that is bound to remain fruitless, since leaving Buchenheim is out of the question for her.

Yet within the small world of Buchenheim, Thekla manages to establish a remarkable field of (unpaid) activity for herself, that is, in addition to managing her father's household, she founds and helps to oversee the local kindergarten, teaches teenage girls who are no longer eligible to attend school, and carries out charitable projects in conjunction with the Countess.

Thus, the messages contained in the novel regarding women's mobility, spatiality, and women's agency are complex at best and require a close analysis. It becomes clear that *Buchenheim* needs to be read and understood not only within its historical context, but also with Otto's goals and experiences as a political activist in mind.

### **Louise Otto's Political and Literary Activities in the 1840s and 1850s**

Otto wrote her first political poem in 1831, at age twelve (Möhrmann, *Frauenemanzipation* 253). She was said to have been used to hearing politics discussed regularly at home and ultimately participating in those discussions herself (252-53). In *Der Genius des Hauses. Eine Gabe für Mädchen und Frauen* (1869), Otto describes how her father, a progressive *Justizrat*, encouraged her and her three sisters to read the newspapers regularly in order to stay politically informed (L. Otto, *Der Genius des Hauses* 133). To receive this kind of encouragement for political awareness was unusual for a girl growing up during the first half of the nineteenth century in Germany, as Otto herself stresses (134).

At a time when women's participation in political assemblies was prohibited by law, Otto turned to writing in an attempt to contribute to political change, albeit with some ambivalence as she later recalls: "Aber was nun tun? Was war nun meine Aufgabe? Schreiben ‚im Dienst der neuen Zeit‘ konnte ich mit den Männern – aber noch kämpfen, reden, handeln, wählen, organisieren? – **ich war ein Mädchen!** ‚Und ich bin nichts als ein gefesselt Weib!‘ Daß war mein Empfinden, und unter diesem Titel schrieb ich das ‚Märzlied eines deutschen Mädchens‘ [...] Schreiben also konnte ich nach wie vor und besser – aber das allein genügte mir nicht. Und was ich sonst tat und mit den Gesinnungsgenossen beriet: Es war ja alles nur ein **indirektes** Wirken" (L. Otto, „Vor“ 51). As much as she was actively supporting political causes through her journalism, prose, and poetry, it pained her that her agency in the political realm was limited simply because of her sex.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, she fought for women's rights and women's access to all parts of the public and political sphere through her various genres of writing.

In 1849, Otto made the following statement in a piece about her struggle for women's rights: "Ich habe meine Forderungen in diesem Programm nur kurz anzudeuten – mein ganzes Leben, mein Wirken und mein Schreiben geschieht in ihrem Dienst" (qtd. in Möhrmann, *Frauenemanzipation* 54). It is safe to assume that *Buchenheim* fits in this commitment as well. As a matter of fact, Otto's diary reveals that she was indeed using

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<sup>36</sup> In "Erinnerungsbilder eines deutschen Frauenlebens," Otto recalls that rumors circulated that she had fought on the barricades alongside men. However, she insists that these rumors were unfounded (L. Otto, "Erinnerungsbilder" 620).

the social novel as a vehicle for her political messages and that she needed to exercise caution in packaging those messages so that they would pass strict censorship.<sup>37</sup>

Otto had experienced first-hand how meticulously officials could comb through the content of novels when she tried to publish *Schloß und Fabrik* in 1846. At the time, she had to make numerous changes to the text before it could be published. The situation was even more delicate and serious after the failed revolution of 1848/49, when people were not only jailed, but also executed for openly expressing their political views and fighting for democracy. Her fiancé, the writer, editor, and political activist August Peters, was one of those imprisoned for his role in the political uprisings.<sup>38</sup> Her diary offers insight into how she experienced these repressive times.<sup>39</sup> On January 1, 1850, she writes:

So ist es denn da dieses 1850! – So viel Schmerz u. Leid mir auch schon manches Jahr betroffen, so viel Noth u. Sorgen – ich habe doch noch auf Keines unbefriedigt zurück geblickt, denn Keines ist vergangen ohne meine geistige Entwicklung gefördert zu haben – ja auch Keines ist vergangen das mich nicht in meinem Streben gefördert u. ihm Gedeihen gegeben hätte. Ich habe Vieles durchlebt u. beinah übermenschlich gelitten – aber das Härteste blieb doch von mir abgewendet. [...] Was es uns Allen bringen wird u. vielleicht noch

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<sup>37</sup> When Otto had finished writing *Vier Geschwister* in December of 1850, she noted in her diary: “Vorgestern habe ich meinen Roman ‘Vier Geschwister’ beendet u. gestern schon fortgeschickt. Ich habe zuletzt mit rechter Freudigkeit geschrieben – u. freue mich nun auf das Buch. Es ist der ‘äußerste’ Standpunkt darin festgehalten u. doch hoffe ich wird man dem Buch nichts thun können“ (*Im Streben* 87). Otto does not elaborate what exactly she means by “der ‘äußerste’ Standpunkt.” Her allusion to the censorship office, however, points to a political content in the novel. In the end, Otto’s publisher deemed the second volume of the novel too risky and asked her to rewrite it (105-106).

<sup>38</sup> Louise Otto met August Peters for the first time in person in January of 1849. He had been apprehended in Rastatt in July of 1848 for his role in the uprisings there. Otto and Peters got engaged in the summer of 1851, while Otto was visiting Peters in prison in Bruchsal, where he was serving a six-year prison sentence. Peters was moved several times before he was finally pardoned in 1856.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of the diary as a text form, see Boerner, *Tagebuch*.

Gräßlicheres noch mehr Thränen, noch mehr Elend u. Vernichtung über uns alle, noch mehr Märtyrerthum? vielleicht auch für mich? vielleicht auch mir den Kerker? – Sei es wie es wolle, mich trifft Alles gefaßt. Ich weiß daß ich nicht weiche u. nicht wanke. Oder bringt es einen neuen Brand? vielleicht Kampf und Siegesjubel, vielleicht Vergeltung! Mein Herz klopft hörbar wenn ich das denke – komme Alles wie es wolle. (*Im Streben* 65)

This powerful statement gives a glimpse into Otto's personal and emotional life. Despite the suffering and the despair, Otto does not renounce her political goals, nor abandon the political fight. And notwithstanding the fear and concern for her own well-being and that of her friends, she does not give up hope that things might turn around. The war terminology used toward the end of the quote is very telling and points to her hopes for a new revolution, on the one hand and the gravity of the situation and its effect on the individual, on the other. In fact, the diary further reveals that Otto lived in constant fear of being arrested, as the following entry from August 6, 1850 shows: "Ich weiß noch nicht was wird u. warte täglich aufs Verhör" (76). Her apartment had been searched in her absence roughly three weeks prior to this entry. Otto ended up being interrogated by the police three times within the next month and then again in January of 1851, according to her diary entries. Her apartment was searched twice and documents had been confiscated, among them the letters from her fiancé.

*The Anzeiger für die politische Polizei Deutschlands auf die Zeit vom 1. Januar 1848 bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch für jeden deutschen Polizeibeamten*, published in 1855, gives further insights into the political volatility of the times. It is a compilation of

names of persons who were suspected of having been involved in anti-government, that is, revolutionary activities, and are as such considered “Feinde der Sicherheit und Ordnung” and “Feinde der Regierungen” (*Anzeiger* v-vi). In the preface, the editor of the volume tries to avert any criticism of his project:

Der Herausgeber dieses Anzeigers der politischen Polizei Deutschlands glaubt vor Allem vor dem Vorwurfe sich schützen zu müssen, als habe Denunziationssucht zu Füllung der nachfolgenden Bogen ihn veranlaßt. Nicht aber Denunziation war der Zweck, der ihm hiebei vorgeschwebt; nicht im Entferntesten lag es in seinem Sinne, Unschuldige compromittiren oder verdächtigen zu wollen, sondern einzig und allein leitete ihn das von Denunziation wohl himmelweit entfernte Streben, so viel an ihm, beizutragen, daß, wie ein großer Staatsmann Deutschlands bemerkt: ,die ewigen Grundlagen der staatlichen Ordnung: **Sittlichkeit und Recht** erhalten und **immer mehr gefest**et werden.“ (iii)

It is striking that the editor wrote this justification for his project in the opening paragraph of the *Anzeiger*; it shows how politically contentious such a project must have been, even during the political reaction. Furthermore, the editor of the volume is listed on the front page only as “\*-r”, which reinforces this impression of the political explosiveness of the project. With this volume, the police of the various German states and principalities hoped to be more effective in the surveillance and possibly capture of individuals suspected of anti-government activity across state lines. Louise Otto’s name appears not once, but in three separate entries in the *Anzeiger*. In one of those entries, it is noted that she was banned from Baden in 1850 and 1851 “wegen politischer Gefährlichkeit durch

notorischen innigen Verkehr mit den bedeutenderen Individuen der deutschen Revolution und Demokratie“ (252). Otto was not only considered suspicious, she was also found guilty by association.

In addition, Otto's professional and personal life suffered because she refused to repudiate her political views after the failed revolution. In an article published in 1871, Otto looks back at the post-1848/49 years:

aber viele andere Bekannte, die sonst auch auf der fortschrittlichen Seite gewesen und die ich aus Theilnahme besuchte, um zu sehen, wie sie die Schreckenstage verlebt – erschraaken über mein Kommen, machten mir daraus sogar ein Verbrechen, eine Tactlosigkeit, gaben mir zu verstehen, daß ich sie compromittire wenn man sie in meiner Gesellschaft träfe – oder sie überschütteten mich mit einer Fluth von Verwünschungen über die Demokratie, über meine Gesinnung, mit Hohn und Schimpfreden über meine Freunde – Alles konnt' ich ertragen, nur das Letztere nicht! [...] wer je zur Demokratie gehört, wer vollends, wie ich, noch den Muth hatte, weder die eigene Gesinnung, noch die früheren Freunde zu verläugnen, wer heute nicht anders sprach und tachte [sic] wie vor dem Mai – der war gerichtet, in dessen Nähe zu weilen war gefährlich. (L. Otto, “Erinnerungsbilder” 620)

Clearly, the repressive political climate left its mark and led many to (at least publicly) abandon their progressive political stance in order to save their reputation and possibly their livelihoods, as the use of the word “gefährlich” hints at the fact that the stakes were high. Otto's account further suggests that she was taken aback not only by how many of

her old friends turned her away, but also by the degree of hostility she faced from those former friends and acquaintances. Considering the mortification, insults, and social isolation that Otto had to endure in the post-1848/49 months and possibly years, it is indeed remarkable that she refused to renounce her political leaning.

It goes without saying that the publishing landscape had changed drastically in the post-1848 era as well. The strict censorship meant not only having to deal with bureaucrats, but also risking arrest and imprisonment. What is more, the political upheaval and the repressive times following it left large portions of the readership weary of the printed word. Gerd Müller notes: “Die gesamte Buchindustrie, Verleger, Buchhändler, viele Autoren, gerieten nach 1848 in eine schwere Krise. Noch im Jahr der Revolution ging die Zahl der jährlich publizierten Titel und die Höhe der Auflagen markant zurück und erreichte erst 1868 wieder den Stand von 1847“ (G. Müller 10). In the fall of 1851, Otto comments in a letter to her fiancé how hard it is to find a publisher during these times and that even renowned authors are struggling to have their works published (L. Otto, “Aus Briefen” 36).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Otto was also writing and publishing in order to support herself financially. Her diary conveys how preoccupied she was with her sources of income, how she constantly feared that publishing deals might fall through, and that she would fall further behind on her financial obligations. In addition to supporting herself, she was also sending money to her jailed fiancé and tried to save enough money so that she could travel to see him. Nonetheless, looking back, she wrote in 1878 in a piece published in *Neue Bahnen*: “Meine schriftstellerische Laufbahn begann im Jahre 1843. Nicht die Not, noch der Wunsch zu erwerben hatte mich dahin geführt, sondern die Sehnsucht, nicht allein **in** und **mit** meiner Zeit zu leben, sondern auch **für** sie” (L. Otto, „Vor“ 50). There is a tension between her private preoccupation with personal finances and her private admission of her personal motivation for writing and publishing on the one hand, and a public appearance of writing for the greater public good, for noble reasons on the other hand. This does not minimize the fact that Otto was a political activist who believed in the importance of her work to help bring about societal change. In fact, if anything, her diary also reveals that Otto was indeed a political activist through and through, since many of her entries center on current affairs and the political climate.

Despite these difficulties and challenges, Otto continued to infuse her writing with her political views. Her poetry and her novels served as a medium for her political messages and her social criticism. While the term *Tendenzroman* has negative connotations today, this was not the case during Otto's time, and she openly associated herself with the "Tendenz" (L. Otto, *Die Kunst* 1). When the narrator in *Buchenheim* explains that an author writes in order to awaken a "reiches politisches Leben" in his fellow citizens (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:76), it is not the only remark contained in the novel stressing that it is an author's task or perhaps even duty to work in the service of political literacy. Otto saw the social novel as a pertinent vehicle to reach an audience that otherwise did not read political texts (Joeres, *Die Anfänge* 133).

It was therefore also particularly a female audience whom Otto wanted to reach with her novels (C. Otto 79). After all, women had long been responsible for continuing their education on their own through reading literature, since they were not allowed to attend institutions of higher education (L. Otto, *Der Genius des Hauses* 126). Consequently, it made sense for politically engaged authors to write literature that would speak to women, provide strong role models, and incorporate the politics of the day. Otto admitted that to get women interested in politics was an uphill battle – she blamed not only entrenched gender norms and the prescription of a narrow social role for women for this dismal state, but also women's own lack of initiative (132-133). And she saw the reform of women's education as one of the preconditions for improving women's situation across society.

To be sure, the writing of *Tendenzliteratur* was not appreciated in all political and social circles. Otto garnered harsh criticism as well as praise for her work, as she herself states: “Wohl darf ich sagen: Die Gleichgesinnten zählten mich fröhlich zu sich – die Häupter der kritischen Partei aber verklagten mich, daß ich ‚Tendenzromane‘ schriebe, die Bekannten fanden dergleichen unweiblich, die Befreundeten zitterten für mich“ (L. Otto, „Vor“ 50). Writing for a public audience in general was still considered to be unfeminine, but to get involved in political debates was an even greater infringement into male territory. Although women were able to make a living as novelists at the time, their participation in the political debates was by no means a „normal“ or everyday occurrence.<sup>41</sup> Otto even started out publishing under the male pseudonym “Otto Stern” for fear of otherwise not being taken seriously (Joeres, *Die Anfänge* 86).

In the spring of 1849, Otto launched a new project, the *Frauen-Zeitung*, with the slogan “Dem Reich der Freiheit werb‘ ich Bürgerinnen” (Ludwig, „Auch die Rechte“ 493). Otto proceeded with this project even though she must have been anticipating a major backlash. Just a few months earlier, she had experienced animosity and even received death threats for a poem that was published in the Dresden newspaper. Nonetheless, Otto was not dissuaded from publishing the *Frauen-Zeitung*. The first edition of the publication featured the *Programm*, in which Otto laid out her demands for women’s rights and called on all women to join in the fight for those rights, above all “das Recht der Mündigkeit und Selbstständigkeit im Staat” (L. Otto, “Die Frauen-Zeitung” 37). Otto warns that if women do not stand up and fight for their own rights,

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<sup>41</sup> See L. Otto, *Frauenleben* 122.

they will be left behind. The *Frauen-Zeitung* was indeed anathema for conservatives and was finally shut down in 1850, after a new *Pressegesetz* was passed in Saxony that made it illegal for a woman to head a publication.<sup>42</sup> Otto expressed in her diary that she believed that this law specifically targeted her and the *Frauen-Zeitung* (*Im Streben* 82).

The final edition of the publication features an *Abschiedswort* written by Otto in which she reiterates the importance of women fighting for their own rights because “Die Geschichte aller Zeiten und die heutige ganz besonders lehrt: *daß diejenigen auch vergessen wurden, welche an sich selbst zu denken vergaßen*“ (L. Otto, „Die Frauen-Zeitung“ 330). Otto discusses the new law in her *Abschiedswort* and demonstrates a remarkable defiance and determination to continue the fight for women’s rights despite this setback: “Scheinbar nur in die alte Unmündigkeit zurückgeworfen, sind die Frauen nie für mündiger in den Dingen des Staats erklärt worden als durch diesen Gesetzesparagrafen. Sie werden an Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstvertrauen gewinnen, was man ihnen jetzt durch Entziehung eines Rechts geraubt hat“ (332). She even addresses the question whether the *Frauen-Zeitung* should be saved by a change in editorship. After all, the shut-down could have been averted if a male editor would have taken over the publication. For Otto, however, this was out of the question: “Wir wollten und wollen unser Recht *uns selbst* verschaffen und verdienen – und wir weichen lieber der *Gewalt*, als daß wir als unmündige Kinder unsere Zuflucht zu einem Schirmherrn nehmen, dessen wir nicht mehr bedürfen.“ She further insists that the ideas of the publication cannot be suppressed and she expresses hope that the *Frauen-Zeitung* might

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<sup>42</sup> Otto was able to publish the *Frauen-Zeitung* in the Prussian Gera from 1851-1853. See *Im Streben* 94-95.

be able to continue in the future. This was written around the same time during which Otto was working on *Buchenheim*.

There are striking parallels and connections between Otto's journalistic pieces, her diary entries, and *Buchenheim*. For one, the language she uses in all three outlets is very similar, both in actual wording used and in style. As the diary entry from January 1, 1850 above conveys, Otto was a political activist through and through. Secondly, the content, that is, her political demands and criticism of social and political injustices as expressed in her journalistic pieces, are echoed in the novel as well. Concrete examples of how women's situation can be improved, particularly in the area of education, have been built into the novel's plot.

### **The City and the Countryside**

Even though, as the title suggests, the novel is set entirely in the village of Buchenheim and its surrounding rural area (including the town of Friedebrunnen), the city nevertheless plays a major role. Although it is mentioned repeatedly in the novel, it is not named, but rather identified with an asterisk. It is described as a large *Residenzstadt* and, as such, has much to offer. For the upper classes of society, the city's cultural scene and court life offer an array of entertainment and social activities, from theater to balls and soirées. The city also represents an important center of higher education. Young bourgeois boys from the rural areas, including Buchenheim, are sent to the city to be educated at *Gymnasien* and at the university, whereas girls stay behind and attend the village school. Thus, the city is masculinized and represents the public realm which is

open to boys, or rather, into which boys are introduced early on, while the village is feminized and represents the private sphere, which neither girls nor women leave.

Throughout the novel, it is implied repeatedly that the city has the potential to have a morally corrupting influence on people. Therefore, while life in the city is bound to be more exciting and varied than life in Buchenheim, it is also a place where many dangers lurk for the individual. This tone is not new; in fact, Otto seems to echo a discourse on the city that goes back to at least the eighteenth century.

Matt Erlin notes that the discourse on the German city increased when Enlightenment thinkers took a particularly strong interest in urban planning (Erlin 2). To some, the city represented progress, order, and cleanliness: “The well-ordered city serves as a concrete reminder of the superiority of the modern age, an age whose ability to impose rational order on the built environment marks a qualitative break with the chaos of the past” (4). Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Wilhelm Taube were among the many prominent voices who participated in the – often heated – discourse. Taube was very much influenced by René Descartes and his admiration for the advent of rational urban planning and dislike of the historical quarters of cities with their narrow and winding streets and dark alleys, which did not fit into the “modern” vision of symmetry and order (2-3). Others, like Rousseau, saw the modern city in general as depraved and as a representation of decadence and decline, as Erlin aptly summarizes:

In social terms, Rousseau views city residents as dissimulating degenerates, lacking the physical and moral strength of peoples of antiquity and interested in nothing but corrupt pleasure and their own self-aggrandizement. In economic

terms, they appear as parasites who depend on the hard work of those in the country and repay their benefactors with scorn and contempt. (5)

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars spoke of the rapid growth of German cities, such as Berlin. But in 1800, only about twenty-five percent of the German population even lived in cities. Then, by the mid-nineteenth century, migration to urban centers began to increase rapidly as a result of expanding industrialization, with people seeking jobs in the manufacturing sectors. Most cities were unprepared for the large influx of people, which led to problems such as housing shortages and a lack of hygiene, which in turn increased the risk and fear of widespread disease. Not only did the homeless and poverty-stricken have an increased presence in the fast-growing urban centers, but also so-called dark elements of society, such as organized crime and prostitution, and as a consequence, the situation in many cities started to feel out of control to city dwellers and outside observers alike.<sup>43</sup> Even in the late eighteenth century, German thinkers and writers had been looking abroad with great concern to cities such as London and Paris that felt the impact of industrialization earlier than German cities (Erlin 24-25).

This concern is reflected in Otto's *Frauen-Zeitung* as well. The January 26, 1850 issue, for example, features an article reprinted from *La Démocratie pacifique* under the title "Weibliches Elend," which outlines the squalid and despairing situation of working class women in London and Paris (L. Otto, "Die Frauen-Zeitung" 213-214). There was fear that such an escalation of social problems could also reach urban centers in

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<sup>43</sup> For information on the situation in Berlin see Schoeps 86-88, Schmidt-Thomsen 9-10, or Modrow 89-98.

Germany. Some critics even argued that the situation in German cities had already reached the same scale and was equally dire. In fact, a response written by Benno Haberland to the French piece was published in March of 1850, which addresses destitution among working-class women in German cities. In the opening paragraph, Haberland writes: “Nicht Paris und London allein haben dergleichen Elend-Verzeichnisse aufzuweisen, wie wir in Nr. 4 dieser Zeitung gelesen, denn auch in Deutschland wohnt das Elend in der krassesten Art, in den großen Städten, und trifft am meisten die armen Arbeiterinnen“ (L. Otto, „Die Frauen-Zeitung“ 233). By the mid-nineteenth century, a negative discourse on the city was starting to emerge in Germany (Lees 24).

Otto seems to join in the apprehensiveness that many of her contemporaries had about urban life with her depiction of the city and its residents in *Buchenheim*. Her focus in the novel, however, is not so much on problems involving crime, the housing situation, or hardship among working-class women, but rather on the social aspects of urban life. The law student Dagobert, son of a prominent physician in rural Friedebrunnen, is the character who best represents these darker sides of the city in the novel: spoiled as a single child, he is vulnerable to all of the temptations the city has to offer. He is lured into the distractions and negative influences of the city, like a decadent nightlife, gambling, and sexual adventures. Thus, the city, in its degenerate and excessive nature, morally corrupts Dagobert. As a result, his emotional and psychological state of mind makes him unable to have a genuine relationship with anyone. He seems addicted to scheming and has a disruptive influence wherever he goes – he does this mostly for his own entertainment or his self-aggrandizement. His father had previously funded Dagobert’s

student life in the city, but finally forces him to come home after it becomes clear that he is not only neglecting his academic studies, but is also deeply in debt because of his gambling habit. It is apparent that he was unable to resist the many temptations that city life has to offer.

This leads us to the novel's other focus with regard to the city, namely that of the *Stadtmädchen*. The term, as it is used in the novel, carries a negative connotation. Thekla's brother Ferdinand's and Dagobert's accounts of "Mädchen" in the city seem to imply that urban life has already corrupted these women's characters. While Dagobert proclaims that he feels disdain for all women (which he blames in part on his complicated relationship with his mother, and in part on his past relationships), Ferdinand makes a clear distinction between women in the city versus those in the country: "Die jungen Mädchen der Universitätsstadt mit denen ich oberflächlich bekannt worden, wollen mir allerdings nicht so recht gefallen. Die Meisten haben etwas Frivoles und eine erkünstelte Naivetät die mir noch widerlicher ist, als selbst eine erkünstelte Bildung" (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:104). Ferdinand clearly distances himself from the *Stadtmädchen* by emphasizing first of all that he has only had superficial relations with any of them. His word choice further hints that there is something indecent about the *Stadtmädchen*, and that the term itself carries an erotic connotation. Ferdinand's contempt for the *Stadtmädchen* is contrasted with his respect for women in general and in particular, for his deceased mother and his sister Thekla.

Given that Otto had lived in Dresden for a period of time and also was visiting Leipzig on a regular basis, it is curious that she did not include any specific details of the

urban landscape or of city life in the novel.<sup>44</sup> In fact, few nineteenth-century German women writers chose the urban arena as the setting for their works (Dennis 160). If they did, the focus was usually on interior spaces, not life in the city streets and public spaces. Richard Dennis believes that the lack of women's writing about city life is based on the fact that women had very limited access to and limited mobility in the city and thus were unable to participate in the city's public life as much as men did. As a consequence, female authors shied away from giving details about urban life in their writing. Furthermore, writing about a public sphere such as the city put women in an awkward position and "opens them up to skepticism, to accusations of a lack of authority" (Joeres, *Respectability* 182). After all, women were not supposed to have a public presence in the urban arena.

The small town of Buchenheim and the countryside in general form the counterpart to the seemingly baneful city. Buchenheim is surrounded by parks and forests, and the town's environment is described as having a serene and beneficial effect on people – especially on those who come there to recuperate from the bustling life in the city. The novel contains many long descriptions of nature, of the setting, and of the interplay between nature and animals. Nature also often reflects the mood of the protagonists or foreshadows a turn of events.

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<sup>44</sup> While the city in the novel remains unnamed, one could speculate whether Otto, who grew up in Meißen, could be basing her image of the city "\*" largely on Dresden. At the time, Dresden was the seat of the King of Saxony. Otto spent time in Dresden as a young woman where she took advantage of the court library in order to further educate herself after her formal schooling had ended. Otto also made frequent visits to Dresden while she was working on *Buchenheim* in order to spend time with her friend Auguste Scheibe and other acquaintances, as her diary reveals.

For its inhabitants, life in Buchenheim is placid, monotonous, predictable, and quiet. Those who have an appreciation for (and strong connection to) nature, like Thekla and the Countess Margitta, for example, also enjoy the beauty that the forests, parks, and lakes surrounding Buchenheim have to offer. In contrast, the male protagonists Ferdinand and Dagobert show little appreciation for nature and are almost always portrayed as out of place in the country. Ironically, Ferdinand is focusing his studies on *Naturwissenschaften* (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:16). Again, the dichotomy of the sexes is clear – while women “naturally” are drawn to nature, men are drawn to the sciences. It becomes clear once again that the city is coded as masculine, the village and countryside are coded as feminine. Yet on a few occasions, Ferdinand and Dagobert are described in feminine terms, such as the remark by the narrator that “Ferdinand erröthete wie ein Mädchen” exemplifies (1:239). Thus, tensions are visible in the dichotomous depiction of the sexes.<sup>45</sup> Joeres goes one step further and argues that the countryside has “an indirect feminizing tendency” on the men (Joeres, *Respectability* 272).

Within Buchenheim’s small town space, women clearly have their place and their duties to fulfill. At the same time, the women in Buchenheim are also under constant watch – and it is emphasized at various points that this surveillance is far easier to accomplish in a small town setting than in an urban arena. This is not only true for women, as Dagobert’s example shows. After all, Dagobert’s father, Dr. Zöllner, brought him home (to neighboring village Friedeburgen) from the city for the very reason of keeping a close eye on his son’s whereabouts and actions. But Dagobert is arguably the

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<sup>45</sup> See pages 1:59, 1:69, 1:93, and 1:98 for more examples of this gender bending.

exception among the male characters, since it is otherwise only the women who are purposely kept in the village – a place where their surveillance can be carried out more easily than in the city. This is reminiscent of Foucault’s description of society’s disciplinary apparatus.

Foucault illustrates how the disciplinary apparatus changed over the centuries. The “great spectacle of physical punishment” that was prevalent in feudal societies all but disappeared in most European countries at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Foucault 14). This does not mean, however, that “the hold on the body” or disciplinary modes in general were abolished – rather they underwent changes and became more elaborate (15). In the modern society, discipline and punishment represent a “complex social function” and a political strategy (23).

Disciplinary power [...] is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. (187)

Even though the modern disciplinary apparatus remains “invisible,” its power must not be underestimated. Surveillance plays a pivotal part in the exercise of this power. Norms serve as reference points for measuring behavior and possible transgressions. The repercussions for violating social norms are part of the punitive system and represent techniques for exercising power over the individual (23). This system is effective in large

part due to the fact that disciplinary modes and the societal norms have been internalized by the individual, at least to a certain extent. This internalization allows the individual to live and function in society in a capacity according to his or her individual rank and file. Breaking out of this conformity, of our prescribed role, has disciplinary consequences, although they may be subtle at times. In her discussion of German women's reading habits during the *Vormärz* period, Renate Möhrmann asserts that middle-class girls and young women were kept under a constant watch and that "this surveillance was hardly ever relaxed. What is more, it was sanctioned by parents, neighbors, and teachers alike" (Möhrmann, "Reading Habits" 106).

This dynamic certainly applies to both urban and rural areas. However, in the novel, it is especially emphasized for life in Buchenheim, where nothing goes unnoticed and a close watch is kept on the individual's whereabouts and actions. While this is often referred to as "the male gaze" by feminist scholars,<sup>46</sup> Edward Snow questions whether such "a unified male look" actually exists and insists that the term needs to be problematized and "its hegemony and controlling power" scrutinized (Snow 40): "Crucial as the unmasking of patriarchal/ideological/pornographic motives may be, the demystifying project runs the risk of occluding whatever in the gaze resists being understood in those terms" (31). This seems to be a valid point, in particular when we consider Otto's differentiated depiction of males and their varying attitudes toward women in the novel, as the examples of Ferdinand and Dagobert exemplify.

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Rose 145.

In addition, Otto emphasizes that this monitoring is enforced by men and women, as an example of female gossiping in the novel illustrates: Thekla runs into “mehrere Frauen” who attempt to sound her out about her brother after he had been seen in the company of strangers (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:121). This example further shows that this surveillance affects both sexes – a point that Elizabeth Grosz stresses as well: “Women are no more subject to this system of corporeal production than men; they are no more cultural, no more natural, than men. Patriarchal power relations do not function to make women the objects of disciplinary control while men remain outside of disciplinary surveillance” (Grosz 144). While this seems to hold true for the novel to a certain extent, Otto’s depiction also underscores that the standard of disciplinary control seems distinctly more lax for men. In fact, it took a series of missteps and poor decisions for Dagobert to be ordered home by his father. Women, on the other hand, are never even given the chance to leave the countryside and to assert themselves in the city. And it seems that those women who do live in the city are looked upon with suspicion and experience prejudice, as the discussion around *Stadtmädchen* demonstrates.

### **The Female Protagonist Thekla**

Thekla is first introduced in the village’s cemetery, where she is visiting her mother’s grave and where Ferdinand, returning home from the city, finds and observes her. Therefore, the first impression the reader gains of Thekla is one of filial piety and devotion. Her preoccupation with the white lilies on the grave further symbolizes her purity, virginity, and connection to nature. Sophie von Sternheim also lost her mother at a young age. Unlike Sophie, however, Thekla, who is now in her mid-twenties, was twenty

years old when her mother died, and she “strebte unablässig, die Lücke auszufüllen, welche durch den Tod der guten Mutter entstanden war” (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:15).

Thekla is the homemaker in her father’s house and states that she has no plans to get married but rather intends to stay in Buchenheim “forever” (1:122). Thekla lingers at her mother’s grave until twilight begins, much to her brother’s surprise. For a young woman to stay out in the dark by herself is unusual. It not only highlights her devotion to her deceased mother, but also her independent thinking.

Thekla, like Sophie von Sternheim, is described as above all possessing an inner beauty and nobility, not external beauty: “Ihre Züge haben ohne schön zu sein einen edlen Ausdruck” (1:6). As in La Roche’s novel, these inner virtues are emphasized repeatedly and can be seen as an attempt by the two female authors to redefine what qualities (should) matter in a woman. In *Der Genius des Hauses*, Otto dedicates a whole chapter to the topic entitled “Das Streben nach Schönheit.” Here, she denounces both dominant society’s emphasis on a woman’s external beauty and women’s own pursuit to satisfy those superficial expectations: “Leider aber concentriren manche Frauen ihr ganzes Streben nach Schönheit nur auf ihren Körper, auf ihre äußere Erscheinung. [...] Zu oft richtet sich nun ihr ganzes Thun nur darauf, ihre Reize in das rechte Licht zu setzen und Eitelkeit, Putzsucht und Koketterie, mit denen sie ihre Schönheit zu erhöhen trachten, berauben sie ihres höchsten Zaubers: der weiblichen Würde“ (L. Otto, *Der Genius des Hauses* 72). Echoing the message in the novel, Otto stresses the importance of an inner beauty and “geistiger Adel” (75).

When Thekla points to the lilies on their mother's grave, Ferdinand responds with indifference: "„Ja, ja,‘ sagte er ziemlich theilnamlos und das Mädchen am Arm ergreifend, suchte er sie mit sich fortzuziehen" (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:9). She resists but appears resigned: „Thekla schüttelte langsam das Haupt, sie entgegnete Nichts, aber sie dachte bei sich: So sind nun die Männer und so ist er auch [...] – warum ist dies ganze Geschlecht so anders geartet als wir?“ (1:9). Thekla is also referring here to his not understanding why she spends much time at her mother's grave in the first place. Thus in this first encounter between the two siblings, the contrast between the sexes is emphasized and depicted as natural.

Thekla is presented as selfless and caring. When her brother Ferdinand asks her how she is doing, she answers, smiling, "Du weißt ja, wie es immer geht, gut und still" (1:11). She continues by talking about the well-being of those loved ones and friends around her, thereby deflecting the focus from herself. At the same time, she hints at the fact that life in the village is slow, that nothing really ever changes, and consequently, that there is not much to talk about. This is also stressed by her closing comment, which she again delivers with a smile: "das ist Alles, was ich Dir zu erzählen habe" (1:12). Thekla's language is cryptic and her answers are self-negating, and the latter can certainly be attributed to proper decorum for a woman. Nonetheless, there is a detectable undercurrent of discontent in these statements.

Ferdinand, on the other hand, lives the exciting life and brings home stories about his life in the city, about the people he meets there and on his travels to and from the city by steamboat. Thekla's brother left home at a young age in order to attend the

*Gymnasium* in the city and is now attending the university. To that effect, Ferdinand's exhilarating and stimulating life of male privilege and mobility is contrasted with Thekla's quiet and monotonous life in Buchenheim. In contrast to her brother, Thekla has never left the village for more than a few weeks. Her place is in Buchenheim, under her father's roof. Thekla is described as self-sacrificing and seemingly happy: "Mit jener stillen ewig klaren Heiterkeit wie nur ein großes tiefes Herz sie sich erringen und bewahren kann, waltete sie in dem stillen Pfarrhaus, und dem ganzen stillen Dorf das ihre Heimath war, ihre Welt" (1:16). The repetition of the adjective *still* in these first few pages in which Thekla is introduced and her domestic life is described reinforces the impression that her life is perhaps not entirely fulfilled. A lost love is also hinted at and the reader learns that it is Thekla's work within the community that helps make her life more meaningful. Tensions become visible between the portrayal of the content, self-sacrificing young woman and the insinuation that something is missing from Thekla's life.

The use of the verb „walten“ in the quote above indicates that Thekla is in charge of the domestic sphere. This was a commonly used term for housewives and Thekla does indeed seem to be managing the household. She oversees the maid Christine's work and helps prepare the meals. Thekla is also the first person to get up in the morning and the last one to retire at night. However, because she is the daughter, we would expect her authority in the house to be somewhat limited.

Mark Wigley points out that in general one must be careful not to overestimate bourgeois women's reign over the domestic sphere (Wigley 348). While women were in

charge of keeping house, they usually had limited authority in the house. When her father works in his private study, Thekla is not to disturb him. Interestingly enough, even her brother Ferdinand often retreats to his room in order to enjoy some privacy while he is home between semesters. Thekla, on the other hand, does not seem to have such a private space to retreat to or perhaps does not seem to possess the privilege of retreating to her room. In contrast to the men, she keeps busy with household chores, and when she retires late in the evening (after her father and brother have already retreated to their rooms), she sits down in the drawing room – a public space within the home – and busies herself with needlework. The enjoyment of this privacy, of a private space, is clearly depicted as a male privilege.<sup>47</sup> According to Wigley, this dynamic is no coincidence, but rather dates back to at least the fifteenth century in some European countries, when men's private studies were first mentioned in literature (347). While this privilege of having a private space in the house may seem like a minor detail, Wigley alleges that the lack thereof for women symbolizes the woman's limited authority in the house.<sup>48</sup>

This is also consistent with Foucault's assertion that the objects of power always need to be visible (Foucault 187). To grant women privacy within the home would mean a lack of surveillance and ultimately, a loss of control over them. The domestic sphere therefore not only reflects, but also reinforces patriarchal gender norms. Only within the

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<sup>47</sup> In *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb*, Otto describes this kind of family dynamic as a common phenomenon and denounces it as unjust. Also touching on the disparity in mobility between sons and daughters, she writes: "In den Mädchen erblickt man eine Stütze im Hauswesen; indes die Knaben frei herumschwärmen dürfen, daheim die Gebieter spielen und meist für zu gut gehalten werden, Gänge im Interesse des Hauswesens zu besorgen, geschweige denn die geringste Handreichung zu tun, müssen die Schwestern nicht nur als Helferinnen der Mutter im Hauswesen [...] sich tummeln oder mit Stricken und Nähen die Freistunden ausfüllen, welche ihnen die Schule läßt, sondern sie müssen auch oft geradezu die Brüder bedienen" (Otto, *Das Recht* 52-53).

<sup>48</sup> Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) also comes to mind in this context.

home, the public/private dichotomy is reversed: it is men who claim the private spaces as their own, whereas women occupy the public spaces. In *Buchenheim*, this dynamic is a reminder that Thekla does live under her father's roof and therefore under patriarchal rule. In other words, what is portrayed here is the picture of a traditional bourgeois housewife.

In fact, Otto's portrayal of Thekla is very much in line with the nineteenth-century bourgeois ideal of femininity and the ideology of so-called *Geschlechtscharaktere* as described by Karin Hausen. According to this ideology, women were to busy themselves within the household, never to be idle: "das Weib ist geschäftig immerdar, in nimmer ruhender Betriebsamkeit," as it is stated in the 1815 *Brockhaus* (Hausen 366). This emphasis on the "exhaustive use" of the female body represents another important piece in the disciplining of the body (Foucault 154). It is no coincidence, then, that Thekla is kept busy with household chores or needlework.

Hausen points out that while these were the norms put forth for women, it is hard to discern how they played out in actual women's lives. Of course, such norms were inapplicable for most women from the working class, since they had to take on employment outside of the home in order to earn necessary income: "Mit Phänomenen der gesellschaftlichen Realität korrespondierte die Polarisierung der Geschlechter zunächst ganz offensichtlich einzig und allein dort, wo sie um die Wende zum 19. Jahrhundert entwickelt wurde, nämlich im gebildeten Bürgertum" (Hausen 383). These *Geschlechtscharaktere*, as described by Hausen, certainly seem to fit well for Thekla's character, even though she does not belong to the "gebildeten Bürgertum," but rather

represents a particular sub-group within the bourgeoisie. To conclude that Otto is simply reiterating these prescribed messages about the character of the sexes and of ideal middle-class femininity in her novel would be premature, since there is also a different side to Thekla's character.

It becomes apparent that Thekla occupies a privileged position among the *Dorfmädchen*. She is not only presented as intelligent, but was also able to enjoy an unusually solid education for a bourgeois girl, since she was schooled in the castle with her childhood friend, the Count's sister Amanda – thus, it is asserted that Thekla was able to enjoy the education of a *Komtess*. Perhaps at least in part as a result of this education, Thekla is shown to be an independent thinker who is highly respected within the community, including the Count. As a matter of fact, it is hinted numerous times that Thekla would be much better suited for the role of Countess than Margitta, who grew up as the daughter of the Count's gardener and consistently attracts attention for her lack of education.<sup>49</sup>

Thekla also teaches older girls in the village in “weiblichen Arbeiten,” which is reminiscent of Sophie von Sternheim's teaching activities. Still, Thekla's arrangement is much more formalized and the girls come to her house several times a week from two to four o'clock in the afternoon (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 3:158). Thekla incorporates singing and piano lessons, and makes a point of promoting the girls' intellectual knowledge base by conducting “belehrende Gespräche” with them and by reading to them, thereby intentionally trying to further these girls' education after their public schooling had

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<sup>49</sup> See L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:16-23, 2:16-22, 2:30, and 2:126.

ended.<sup>50</sup> That there is a great need for this continuing education is stressed not least by her insisting that some of the girls “sind lernbegierig, daß ich schon oft nicht weiß wie ich sie immer befriedigen soll“ (1:11). At four o’clock, the ringing of the church bells signals the end of the lesson, at which time Thekla dismisses her students, much like a teacher in a formal school setting. Teaching is described as “eines ihrer liebsten Geschäfte” (3:159). Despite the fact that her teaching arrangement is more formalized compared to Sophie’s teaching activities, it is still depicted as improvised: the pupils come to her home for the lessons and the church bells function as the school bell, for example. Furthermore, it still represents unpaid work and remains within the realm of women’s calling.

Nevertheless, Thekla works alongside the local school teacher, who is described as a young, open-minded man:

Der Schullehrer Bächlin, ein noch junger Mann, der erst seit ein paar Jahren in Amt und Würden, also auch im Dorfe war, ging ganz auf Theklas Ideen ein, die sein Vorgänger romanhaft und unausführbar genannt hatte – und beide arbeiteten an der Erziehung und Bildung der dörflichen Jugend, weniger gerade miteinander als vielmehr einander gegenseitig in die Hände. (1:118-119)

Thekla’s efforts were not always appreciated, even dismissed as “unausführbar,” and the adjective “romanhaft” seems to carry a gendered overtone: while men maneuver the public sphere and achieve great things, women’s activities are limited to reading novels and fantasizing about making a difference in the public sphere. Nonetheless, Thekla

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<sup>50</sup> This is reminiscent of Sophie von Sternheim’s teaching writing and math skills to the two girls at the inn. In fact, Sophie asserts that she wants to teach them “arbeiten und denken” (La Roche, *Geschichte* 215).

seems to have earned the respect of Bächlin and the scope of her educational work in Buchenheim is remarkable. Yet her dreams of a professional career as a teacher and of building a school for girls are unattainable because of her sex.

While Thekla seems to represent the ideal bourgeois woman and housewife at first glance, her role within the public realm of Buchenheim, that is, her teaching and community work, do not fit into that ideal. These subtle, but important deviations from the social conventions and prescribed gender norms form tensions when considered alongside ideal domestic femininity.

In Thekla, Otto paints the picture of a young woman who is well educated and who manages to uphold the image of ideal femininity and fulfill her duties in the home, while at the same time engaging in meaningful work outside of the domestic realm. She manages to carve out a space for herself within the village – a space within which she can act and exert influence – and by doing so she defies the norms which society has set forth for her sex at least to a certain extent. The message conveyed by Otto is that the narrowly defined woman's role can be expanded upon without jeopardizing a woman's virtues or her standing in the community.<sup>51</sup>

This message is consistent with Otto's political activism for women's rights. While Otto did not challenge women's duties as a housewife, she did advocate for an expansion of women's restricted social role and for changes in girls' social education and

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<sup>51</sup> This seems to reflect Otto's personal strategy. Joeres points out that "despite her notoriety, Louise Otto chose a modest, even reserved public image" (Joeres, *Respectability* 120). This was no coincidence, as she argues: "In what was no doubt a strategic move, she thereby presented an impression of modesty, silence, passivity, and deference, while nevertheless managing almost single-handedly to set into motion a women's rights movement that would change the face of German society" (121).

schooling.<sup>52</sup> In her novel *Kathinka*, published in 1844, Otto even compares German girls' upbringing to the tradition of Chinese foot binding:

Laßt uns doch ja nicht klug und ironisch über die närrische Sitte der Chinesen lächeln, nach welcher diese ihren Mädchen die Füße zusammenschnüren und verkrüppeln lassen [...] bei uns schnürt man den Mädchen den Charakter zusammen, daß er so unterentwickelt bleibt, daß bei ihm nie vom Selbststehen und Fortschreiten die Rede sein kann – was bei uns die Schönheit der Weiblichkeit heißt, ist meist eine solche Verkrüppelung geistiger freier Anlagen.  
(L. Otto, *Kathinka* 235-36)

What is more, women are passed from one patriarchal authority to the next, namely from father to husband and, as a result, stay “zeitlebens ein unmündiges Kind” (L. Otto, *Der Genius des Hauses* 196). For Otto, this situation is unacceptable and she demands the following changes: “Die Frau muß fähig sein, selbständig zu urteilen, oder sie verletzt die menschliche Würde und ihre Weiblichkeit, indem sie zum Papagei wird, der gedankenlos nachplappert, was der Gebieter ihm vorgesprochen“ (196). This is harsh criticism of the status quo indeed. In *Der Genius des Hauses*, she charges that every transgression of the norm, even the slightest deviation from this narrowly defined role, is denounced as “unweiblich” in order to pressure women into conformity (L. Otto, *Der Genius des Hauses* 195). She further claims that this pressure was particularly high in Germany, where ideology propagated a “non plus ultra der vollkommensten Weiblichkeit” (195), which left women confined to the domestic sphere and unable to make decisions for

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<sup>52</sup> See L. Otto, *Der Genius des Hauses* 194-195, 200-201 and L. Otto, *Der Genius der Menschheit* 3-5.

themselves. Considering how Otto describes this pressure to conform to the strict gender norms, it is perhaps not surprising that she deems it necessary to show that a woman can balance both her duties in the domestic sphere and activities outside of it.

That women's education emerges as one of the main topics in *Buchenheim* as well becomes clear when we look at the Countess Margarete. The daughter of the Count's gardener, who goes by the nickname Margitta, received a "normal" education in Buchenheim, one that was typical for girls from a working-class background at the time. This education is clearly depicted as inadequate not only by the narrator, but also by Thekla, and by Margitta herself. Indeed, it is portrayed as a lack of *Bildung* more than anything else. As a consequence, Margitta, even though she rose up to aristocratic status through her marriage with the Count, is set up for failure in her new role. And her lack of education makes her dependent on Thekla's advice and guidance for navigating the aristocratic life. The way in which Margitta's wish to help those in need is portrayed by the narrator exemplifies this: "Thekla's Bestreben aber war es, diese Art von leichtsinniger und unbedachter Wohlthätigkeit die so oft gemißbraucht ward, daß sie fast mehr Schaden als Nutzen stiftete, zu einer geregelten und segenbringenden zu machen..." (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:22). Not only are the Countess' attempts to do good misguided and described as "leichtsinnig" and "unbedacht", but they are also portrayed as doing more harm than good – in fact, Margitta herself is taken advantage of by people. This amassment of negative labels amounts to a portrayal of the Countess as belittled and derided.

It is further emphasized that her indifference toward literature results not only in her own suffering from boredom, but also in her inability to adequately entertain her husband and shine at his side when in public or when entertaining guests.<sup>53</sup> Margitta's lack of education is clearly blamed for this dismal state, as is stressed repeatedly throughout the novel. *Weibliche Anstandsbücher* and *Ratgeber* from the mid-nineteenth century show just how much emphasis was placed on a wife's role as a good *Gesellschafterin*. Karl Biedermann's long passage on a wife's responsibility regarding the "geselligen Verkehr" and the "gesellige Unterhaltung" illustrates how much emphasis was placed on her ability to maintain social contacts and to entertain both her husband and guests (Biedermann 79-82). Biedermann speaks of "die ächte Frau" (78) or "das ächte Weib" (80), which underscores that the pressure to conform to those expectations was quite high. Interestingly, Biedermann also mentions women's lack of education, but insists that women's gift to entertain has been bestowed upon them by nature and that they have no one but themselves to blame if they fail to properly fulfill their role as successful wives (79-80). In contrast, Otto decries this chasm between the lack of women's access to a solid education on the one hand, and the expectations placed upon them on the other with her depiction of the Countess.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, Otto tries to establish that a better education would not only benefit women, but also ultimately men, since educated women would most certainly make more entertaining and interesting wives and better companions. Christine Otto points out that

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<sup>53</sup> Margitta's lack of interest in reading is juxtaposed with Thekla's keen interest in books (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 2:16). This is reminiscent of Sophie von Sternheim's love of literature.

<sup>54</sup> I am aware of the fact that Biedermann's discussion centers on the bourgeoisie, whereas Margitta belongs to the aristocracy. However, I believe that Otto's criticism is aimed at both social classes – a not uncommon conflation at the time.

most of Otto's novels contain such a "Schreckbild," that is, the figure of a woman who is unable to be a good wife precisely because of her lack of education (C. Otto 44). This recurring theme is not surprising, considering that women's access to higher education was one of Otto's main demands throughout her long career as a political activist. In *Der Genius der Menschheit*, for example, Otto condemns women's inadequate education, particularly in rural areas, and proposes that women with access to a somewhat better schooling, such as *Pastorentöchter* and daughters of the nobility, help educate village girls (L. Otto, *Der Genius der Menschheit* 144). Therefore, Otto's depiction of Thekla's activities in the novel overlaps with her demands as a political activist – in fact, Otto incorporates concrete suggestions on how to further girls' education in rural areas and how to improve women's situation into her novel.

Moreover, the fact that Thekla is able to help Margitta handle her role as Countess demonstrates how, in general, class boundaries can (or could theoretically) be overcome – were it not for those "lächerlichen Vorurtheile der sogenannten vornehmen Welt," as Thekla puts it (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 2:19).<sup>55</sup> Thus, what sets the aristocracy apart from the bourgeoisie and the working class is mainly the access to a good education. It is also underscored repeatedly by the narrator and by various characters in the novel that what matters most in a person is not his or her title, but rather the inner qualities, such as inner beauty, innate nobility, and independent thinking – traits that many aristocrats ostensibly

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<sup>55</sup> Class prejudice affects Thekla as well, as the example with Irene, a patient with an aristocratic background in treatment at Dr. Zöllner's psychiatric clinic, shows. Despite the fact that Thekla has treated Irene with kindness and generosity, the latter keeps Thekla at a distance because of her bourgeois background, as the narrator stresses: "Aristokratischer Hochmuth hielt sie ab, ein freundschaftliches Verhältnis mit der 'Pfarrerstochter' anzuknüpfen" (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 3:95).

lack, according to their depiction in *Buchenheim*. The novel contains sharp criticism of the upper classes of society and accuses them of superficiality, irresponsible behavior, an inordinate love of pleasure, among other things. Here we see a questioning of the legitimacy of the *Ständegesellschaft* that is lacking in La Roche's novel.

### **The Role of Space, Place, and Mobility**

As we have seen, space relations and gender roles, as well as gender expectations, are tightly intertwined in *Buchenheim*. The limited physical mobility or spatial boundedness of the women in the novel, particularly the protagonist Thekla, is contrasted with a virtually unlimited mobility of the men (with the exception of Dagobert, that is). Not only do the men leave home early on in order to receive a higher education in the city, but in addition to that, they seem to be able to go wherever they please. Eugen Willers, for instance, a man whom both Thekla and her brother admire greatly, has traveled extensively and even spent some time living in America.

The one trip that Thekla took in her life was to visit her childhood friend, the former Comtess Amanda and her husband, Graf Scharfeck. This experience represents "Theklas süßeste und bitterste Erinnerungen" (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:18). During this visit, Thekla fell in love with and got secretly engaged to Ritter von Felseneck, a friend of Amanda's husband. Thekla ended this engagement later in order to free the way for Felseneck's arranged marriage to a *Staatsminister's* daughter, a union that would offer him great social and financial advantages. Since this trip left Thekla heartbroken, she has not taken advantage of Amanda's repeated invitations. Consequently, *Buchenheim* truly represents "ihre Welt," as the narrator puts it early on in the novel (1:16). The secret

engagement indicates that Thekla, while away from home, was somewhat outside patriarchal control or supervision. In *Buchenheim*, travel is portrayed as lying outside the norm for the average bourgeois woman and in *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich*, Otto describes that, around 1850, it was indeed highly unusual for a woman to travel alone (L. Otto, *Frauenleben* 100).<sup>56</sup>

We have to be careful not to equate travel with mobility. In fact, there are differing forms and notions of mobility (Gustafson 20). These range from a more limited mobility, such as “routine movements within familiar spaces, always involving the return ‘home,’” to “excessive mobility,” which is often linked to placelessness (23). Mobility may also “represent travelling, exploration, the search for new experiences and the escape from ‘imprisonment’ in a particular place” (23-24). In the novel it is emphasized that mobility represents not only the ability to travel or move from one place to another, but also the opportunity to make new social contacts and to broaden one’s horizon. Furthermore, as a stark contrast to Thekla’s quiet and monotonous life, it represents variation and possibly even adventure.

Mona Domosh and Joni Seager point out that the spatial boundedness of women does not always or necessarily represent a constraint (Domosh and Seager 120). Women, they argue, are deeply rooted in their community and are often highly involved in community life or even serve as anchors of local communities. This kind of involvement can not only be deeply gratifying, but can also lead to networks of social and emotional

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<sup>56</sup> Also see Otto, *Das Recht* 60.

support. This last part, however, does not seem to hold true for Thekla, as the governess Eugenie represents her only true confidante and close friend.

Thekla is certainly portrayed as playing a vital role in the local community, especially as it pertains to education and charity events for children. It is this work within the community that helps Thekla feel fulfilled: “Nicht wenig trug es zu dem Seelenfrieden Theklas bei, daß sie so thätig im kleinen Kreis des heimathlichen Dorfes und so segenbringend walten durfte; ihr Leben, wie still und einförmig auch immer, hatte damit doch einen Inhalt mehr gefunden, der ihr liebereiches frommes Herz mit edler Freudigkeit erfüllte“ (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:23). The adjectives *still* and *einförmig* clearly carry negative connotations in this passage. It is further made evident that the village only offers Thekla a small sphere in which to carry out her educational work. Even though these activities are described as *segensbringend*, they are not enough to fully satisfy Thekla’s aspirations. Once again, tensions are noticeable within this passage between the public image of Thekla as the humble and content housewife-substitute and dutiful daughter, and Thekla, the aspiring educator. While Thekla’s activities within the community are socially acceptable, her aspirations for a professional career in education certainly are not, as they violate dominant gender norms and expectations.

These ambitions are revealed by Thekla in a private conversation with Eugen. When he praises her work in the village, especially her founding of the kindergarten, he exclaims how indispensable women’s participation in the work for the improvement of society as a whole is. Her response demonstrates that her ambitions extend beyond the small village-space of Buchenheim: “‘Wie oft,’ sagte Thekla ‘hat sich meine Seele nach

einer solchen Mitwirkung geseht – es ist so wenig was ein Dorfmädchen thun kann“ (1:138). Thekla’s self-characterization as a *Dorfmädchen* is noteworthy. This spatial term not only reduces her to the confines of the village, but it seems to represent a belittlement of herself. Here, her use of the term carries an undertone of defeat and possibly despair.

This disheartened attitude is emphasized again when Eugen tells Thekla about his plans to open an orphanage for boys and girls and a school for young disadvantaged women in the city; he asks if Thekla would help him realize his plans. “O wie gern möcht’ ich’s!” antwortete Thekla, ‘aber was kann ich dabei thun? hier, auf meinem Dorfe!’“ (1:237). It becomes clear from the exchange following this comment that for Thekla, a move to the city is out of the question; in fact, it is never even suggested. As a result, Thekla’s dreams of working alongside Eugen, of participating in the planning and execution of innovative new education programs remain firmly out of reach for her. The immobility of the *Dorfmädchen* denotes a powerlessness that cannot be overlooked.

However, Melissa Gilbert warns that “equating mobility with power and immobility with powerlessness is too simplistic to capture the spatiality of women’s lives” (Gilbert 616). Indeed, Thekla is depicted as possessing a certain amount of power and great esteem within Buchenheim. Her close relationship with and stewardship of the Countess enables her to found the kindergarten and to carry out charity projects benefitting children.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Thekla does seem to enjoy a high degree of mobility

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<sup>57</sup> The narrator emphasizes that Thekla is the one carrying out these projects, while the Countess is providing the funding (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 3:32-33).

within Buchenheim and its surrounding rural area.<sup>58</sup> But she is not in a position to leave the village and move to the city in order to pursue a professional career as an educator (or any sort of career for that matter).

It is important to note that physical mobility not only offers freedom of movement, but also the power to escape the system of surveillance, at least to a certain extent. While Dagobert's example shows that even in the city, one's actions are not completely free of scrutiny (his father was still able to keep tabs on him), there is no doubt that a move to the city does offer a greater amount of freedom than life in the village. Also, Eugen's example shows that it is thoroughly within a man's reach to escape the disciplinary gaze altogether by moving overseas. To be spatially bounded, especially within the confines of a small village, on the other hand, seems to suggest a lack of power and an inability to escape the disciplinary gaze and grid.

The limited mobility of bourgeois women, as it is portrayed in the novel, is not primarily the result of limited financial resources or the lack of access to means of transportation. Rather, these restrictions can be ascribed to hegemonic norms which prescribe only an elementary education for girls and place them then in the domestic sphere. This immobility is depicted as self-imposed to a certain extent, as Thekla willingly adheres to the gender norms put forth by society. Nonetheless, Otto's portrayal of Thekla's "confinement" in Buchenheim clearly represents a questioning of these norms. At the same time, Otto also shows how women manage to subvert gender norms

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<sup>58</sup> For example, Thekla takes long walks by herself in the parks and forests surrounding Buchenheim. This degree of mobility cannot be taken for granted for a woman in mid-nineteenth-century Germany, as Otto's description of the limitations placed upon women's mobility in *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb* illustrates (Otto, *Das Recht* 60).

and carve out spaces for themselves, as Thekla's teaching and charitable work exemplify. Furthermore, Thekla finds peace and solitude in the parks and forests surrounding the village, if only for short amounts of time. Thus, even within the small community of Buchenheim, the disciplinary apparatus has breaches. Overall, Thekla's depiction underscores that the question of women's mobility cannot be reduced to a binary opposition of mobility versus lack thereof, but rather represents a complex matrix.

Otto's depiction of Eugenie, the governess at the castle, further illustrates this point. Eugenie also comes from a bourgeois background, but has traveled extensively by means of her occupation as a governess – one of the few honorable paid positions available to bourgeois women at the time. This well-respected young woman is said to be of a benevolent nature and to possess a strong moral character and an „innerer Adel“ (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 2:131). In fact, she is described in the highest terms and represents an idealized character: “Diese edle Bescheidenheit des Herzens vereinigte sich in Eugenie mit dem Bewußtsein großer Lebenserfahrungen und geistiger Bildung und den feinsten Formen des äußeren Benehmens zu einem harmonischen Ganzen, das ebenso anzog als blendete, immer aber überraschte“ (2:24). Like Thekla, she is described as intelligent and as an independent thinker, and the two women are drawn to each other from the first time they meet, and they become close friends. Interestingly enough, the reader has to wait until almost the end of the second volume to find out more about Eugenie's background. It turns out that as a young woman, Eugenie saw no future for herself in the social environment in which she grew up. Women's higher education was not supported by her parents, as the following passage demonstrates:

Mit siebzehn Jahren hatte sie aus eigener Wahl das älterliche Haus verlassen, theils, um den kleineren Geschwistern daheim Platz zu machen, – theils aus jenem edlen Trieb nach eigener höherer Ausbildung, der im Kreis der Ihrigen fast gewaltsam unterdrückt werden sollte, und wenigstens oft genug verspottet ward, – theils auch in der Sehnsucht nach einer nützlichen und befriedigenden Thätigkeit, bei der sie ihre geistigen Fähigkeiten nicht, wie daheim gezwungen war, verkümmern zu lassen. (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 2:182)

This description of her longing for higher education as having been “fast gewaltsam unterdrückt” and “verspottet” within her own family is striking and represents a sharp indictment of bourgeois society’s attitude toward girls’ and women’s education by the author. The story of Eugenie’s personal background underscores how difficult it must have been for a young woman to stand up to those attitudes, and to prevail without the support of her parents.

Prior to leaving home, Eugenie had secretly used her money, which she had earned through knitting and sewing, to pay for French lessons. Her foreign language skills then enabled her to obtain a position as a governess in an aristocratic family. There, in turn, she was able to further educate herself and address the gaps that her prior education had left her with. *Bildung* emerges as the crucial factor for liberating Eugenie, for allowing her to better her personal situation and to lead a more fulfilling life – which includes a career outside of the domestic sphere.

Thus, Eugenie is shown to be essentially a self-made woman who asserted herself against oppressive dominant norms and who defied women’s limited mobility and

restricted access to education.<sup>59</sup> Even though Eugenie moves in aristocratic circles, she does not make a secret of her bourgeois background, but rather insists publicly that she is proud of her humble roots. Still, she has managed to attain the respect and enjoy the merit of an excellent reputation in aristocratic circles, in part owing to her strong moral character and intellectual independence:

Wie fügsam sie auch in manchen Verhältnissen war, wie aufopfernd gegen Personen, die sie liebte und hochachtete: – nie ertrug sie, etwa um ihrer äußern Lage Willen eine unwürdige Behandlung, nie verleugnete sie ihre Gesinnung, nie beugte sie sich vor Rang und Reichtum, nie machte sie – einen Unterschied zwischen Vornehm und Gering, Reich und Arm – oder duldete auch nur, daß man dies ihr oder Andern that –. (2:183)

The narrator admits that this kind of behavior was not always well-received in some circles of the aristocracy; however, the “better” circles certainly held her in higher regard because of it. Otto lashes out at the aristocracy again, making it clear that a title alone does not make a person noble. It is remarkable that Eugenie, although her livelihood depended upon the nobility, was unwilling to compromise her value system under any circumstances.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> This is consistent with Otto’s repeated call for women’s “Selbsthilfe,” that is, her belief that women have to fight for the societal changes that they want to see happen: “Wer sich nicht selbst helfen will, dem ist auch nicht zu helfen, ja er verdient nicht einmal, daß ihm geholfen werde!” (Otto, *Das Recht* 76-99).

<sup>60</sup> Later in the novel, Eugenie becomes the victim of Dagobert’s scheming, as she is falsely accused of having an affair with the Count. In the end, she manages to leave Buchenheim on amicable terms with the Count and Countess. Through all of this commotion, Eugenie takes the high road and her moral character is never in question for the reader. Rather, it is made clear that Dagobert’s twisted lust for scheming and immoral behavior was to blame for the entire conflict. Thus, it is his doing that Eugenie is forced to leave her good position at the castle and Buchenheim, which devastates Thekla, since she loses the proximity to and daily interactions with her closest friend and confidante. This turn of events demonstrates how fragile a

## Friendships

The friendship between Thekla and Eugenie forms a central part of the novel. Its male counterpart is the friendship between Ferdinand and Dagobert, which has a much more dramatic beginning (and ending as well) than the friendship between the two women. The two young men meet when Ferdinand saves Dagobert's life, as the latter was just about to commit suicide. The men vow each other eternal friendship and want to base their relationship only on the highest ideals – those of the ancient Greeks.<sup>61</sup>

Ferdinand for his part is an open, faithful, and loyal friend to Dagobert. The latter, on the other hand, is unable to requite the friendship in the same way, although he manages to keep up the appearance of doing so. It becomes clear throughout the novel that Dagobert's moral character is too corrupted for him to be an honest and true friend to Ferdinand. He frequently lies to him in an attempt to depict himself in a better light, to conceal his true nature, and to not put their bond at risk. At some point, he threatens Ferdinand that were he to end their friendship it would be equal to committing "geistiger Mord" against Dagobert: "Wenn es dann aus ist mit uns, dann wird es wahr was ich Dir damals sagte, wo Du mir das Pistol aus der Hand geschlagen – wenn Du mich nachher verschmähst so begehst du einen geistigen Mord an mir, tausendmal schlimmer als den leiblichen, den Du gehindert" (1:191). Throughout the novel, Dagobert frequently employs such emotional blackmail in order to save his friendship with Ferdinand. In the

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single woman's position can be and how quickly her social standing and her respectability can be jeopardized.

<sup>61</sup> There is no further elaboration on this in the novel, but one can assume that it is not only a reference to the many famous friends of the various Greek myths, but also to Aristotle's philosophy of friendship, since his *Nicomachean Ethics* represents the most comprehensive study of the phenomenon of friendship written during Greek antiquity (Smith Pangle 2). For further reading on Aristotle's discussion of friendship, see Smith Pangle.

end, this friendship costs Ferdinand his life: he jumps into the water in an attempt to save Dagobert's life a second time, but Dagobert pulls him under with him, killing his friend in one last violent act: "'Treu im Leben und im Sterben!' rief er und zog den Freund umklammernd gewaltsam mit sich in die Tiefe" (3:254). The union between the two men could not live up to their ideal.

According to Aristotle, true friendship is only possible if it is rooted in "the capacity for genuine goodwill" toward each other, and he further states that a friend should be like "another self" (Smith Pangle 152-153). With Dagobert's depiction as utterly incapable of fulfilling his promise to his friend, this honorable goal is reduced to a sad and disturbing caricature in the novel. This tragic ending was foreshadowed all along, since several important milestones (such as their first meeting, Dagobert's threats, and ultimately their tragic deaths) take place in the symbolically named place "das Thal des Todes."<sup>62</sup>

In contrast, Thekla and Eugenie are depicted as sharing a strong and genuine bond. The two women confide in each other and comfort each other during times of crises. Their friendship is deep and intimate and at times, it is described more like a love than a friendship. Its intensity and intimate nature even takes Thekla by surprise: "Die Zärtlichkeit, mit welcher Eugenie Thekla entgegen kam, war dieser so neu, da sie bisher keine solche leidenschaftliche, der Liebe ähnliche Freundschaft gekannt hatte, sondern nur stille harmlose, schwesterliche Verhältnisse dieser Art" (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 2:187-

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<sup>62</sup> See pages 1:48-52 for a detailed description of the *Thal des Todes*.

188).<sup>63</sup> This type of friendship, marked by passion and an idealized commitment, is reminiscent of the eighteenth-century ideals and conventions of friendship.<sup>64</sup> However, in eighteenth-century philosophical and literary texts, this ideal of friendship was almost exclusively treated as a male phenomenon (Meyer-Krentler 19) – after all, according to dominant ideology, women lacked individuality and *Bildung*, and both were seen as prerequisites for true friendship (Heuser 141). With Thekla and Eugenie, Otto presents two heroines who defy those stereotypes, thereby subverting the eighteenth-century ideals of (male) friendship.

### **The End: A New Beginning**

After the events that cost Ferdinand and Dagobert their lives, the narrator picks up after a temporal break: “Ein Jahr ist vergangen und der Frühling von 1848 ist gekommen” (L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 3:267). Thekla’s father has succumbed to his grief over his son’s early death. Otto’s last paragraph for Thekla and Eugenie contains a surprising turn of events: “Jetzt wohnen Thekla und Eugenie zusammen in einem Haus in der Stadt \* und wirken gemeinschaftlich durch persönlichen Unterricht, durch Wort und Schrift für die Bildung ihres Geschlechtes – und wirken im Dienste – der großen Zeit, die über sie hereingebrochen“ (3:267). Even though Thekla’s dreams of helping to build a school for girls do not materialize, in the end she does find a way to work privately as a teacher. As for Eugenie, her aspirations had been vaguer. But the narrator had mentioned earlier in

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<sup>63</sup> Also see pages 2:50, 2:158-160, 2:181, 2:191, 2:199, and 2:260 for examples of how the two women’s friendship is depicted.

<sup>64</sup> For further reading on this topic see Wolfram Mauser and Barbara Becker-Cantarino, eds. *Frauenfreundschaft – Männerfreundschaft: literarische Diskurse im 18. Jahrhundert*.

the novel that Eugenie was following current events and that she had a particular interest in improving women's position in society.<sup>65</sup>

While the friendship between Ferdinand and Dagobert was the first to form and its bond was supposedly based on the highest ideals of male friendship, it is the friendship of the two women that prevails. At a time when friendship was still mainly defined as a male concept, Otto offers a powerful counter-narrative in which friendship between women is depicted as superior to its male counterpart.<sup>66</sup>

What is more, the revelation that Thekla and Eugenie now live together in the city comes as a complete surprise and forces the reader to rethink Otto's seemingly negative messages about urban life. It becomes clear from the above quote that Thekla and Eugenie are thoroughly capable of navigating urban life – even without a male chaperon to watch over them. Consequently, Otto's prior focus on male behavior seems to send a different message from what the reader was initially led to believe: maybe it is men who – even though they enjoy the male prerogative of personal freedom and independence – are more prone to succumbing to or even promoting moral decay and decadence in the city. Therefore, in *Buchenheim*, we have not so much a general condemnation of the city, but rather of the degenerate elements of urban life, which are depicted as closely tied to the masculine (bourgeois) identity.

When Thekla breaks out of her spatial boundedness or her “confinement” in the village at the end of the novel and moves to the city, it also represents a symbolic move, a

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<sup>65</sup> See L. Otto, *Buchenheim 2*:184.

<sup>66</sup> There are parallels between her depiction of Thekla and Eugenie's friendship and Otto's own friendship with Auguste Scheibe, as it is recorded in her diary (*Im Streben* 112 n.85). In fact, the language used to describe the two women's friendship in the novel is very similar and in some instances virtually identical to the language Otto uses in her diary to describe her relationship with Scheibe.

move toward personal freedom. Likewise, for Eugenie, this move symbolizes a breaking free from the aristocracy, on which she had been dependent. Now, the two women live together and make their own decisions – in the urban arena, which offers them more opportunities for employment and for personal growth than rural Buchenheim. Still, it is Thekla's father's death which finally frees her from her domestic duties and offers her this chance to escape village life. This is reminiscent of Sophie von Sternheim's forced mobility after her father's death. Only here, Thekla is not forced to leave her father's home, but rather takes advantage of the opportunity to escape village life and start over in the city – amazingly, she does the latter without a male chaperone, but rather with a female partner by her side. In this way, she manages to escape the fate that awaits most women, according to Otto, namely to be passed from one patriarchal authority to the next.

While Thekla's depiction in the novel most certainly underscores that we need to reconceptualize “power in terms of a constellation of multiple relations” and not see it as an all-or-nothing dualism (Gilbert 598), her limited mobility and spatial boundedness, if not “confinement,” in the village greatly limit Thekla's power. With her departure from Buchenheim and her move to the public realm of the city, however, Thekla finally takes command over her own spatiality. Indeed, both women claim a mobility and power over their own lives that they did not enjoy before – mobility and power that had previously been reserved for the men.

Joeres posits that deviations from social norms for women are mainly verbalized by the male character Eugen in *Buchenheim* (Joeres, *Respectability* 268-69). While this

may be a valid point of criticism, I believe that Thekla and Eugenie's actions speak even louder than those words.<sup>67</sup> In fact, had the author put those same inflammatory words into the female protagonists' mouths, the novel might well not have passed censorship. Nonetheless, Thekla and Eugenie's personal choices and actions deviate clearly from the hegemonic gender norms, as I have described above. Since women were Otto's primary target audience, it seems safe to assume that Thekla and Eugenie were to serve as role models for those female readers, and that is what makes these deviations from the prescribed gender norms so powerful. Eugenie's initiative to further her education and to seek meaningful employment, for example, is consistent with Otto's repeated appeal to women to take responsibility for their own lives, rather than to wait for times to change.<sup>68</sup>

Then, of course, there's the concrete mentioning of the spring of 1848 in which the ending is set, that is, we now no longer just have a novel whose themes echo current events, but rather a narrative whose plot culminates at the height of the democratic movement and subsequent uprising. And even if there is a lack of detail, it is stated clearly that the two women are actively contributing to the political movement, be it only "in Wort und Schrift," not fighting physically on the barricades. As the epigraph underscores, however, Otto deemed this kind of activism as a powerful tool that should not be underestimated.

On May 17, 1851, after finishing the second volume of *Buchenheim*, Otto notes in her diary: "Ich bin mit Buchenheim fertig. Die letzten Capitel habe ich in furchtbarer

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<sup>67</sup> In a conversation with Thekla, Eugen not only openly expresses his dismay about women's dismal state in society, but also clearly states his belief that dominant society, in particular men, are to blame for the status quo (see L. Otto, *Buchenheim* 1:234-235).

<sup>68</sup> See L. Otto, "Die Frauen-Zeitung" 37, 330 and also *Der Genius der Menschheit* 124 for a similar appeal.

Aufregung geschrieben. Es war mir dabei ganz wie sonst – ich bin mit meiner Stimmung zufrieden. Man wird das Buch überspannt finden – u. es wird mein Triumph sein daß diese Büchermenschen wirklich sind – daß ich, daß Andre so zu lieben, zu fühlen, zu handeln vermögen!“ (*Im Streben* 109).

These words, although somewhat cryptic, seem to offer a rare glimpse into the author’s motivation for writing, as they convey her excitement and inner turmoil upon completing the novel. She also clearly states that the text contains autobiographical material and that she fully expects to draw criticism for her work. The remark about her *Triumph* is telling and puts the novel further into perspective – it seems safe to conclude that with its deviations from the hegemonic gender expectations and its (at times harsh) criticism of the status quo, *Buchenheim* represented a highly subversive and politically charged text within the context of the reactionary time in which it was written.

Thus, when Joeres, after an elaborate discussion of *Buchenheim*, concludes that “Louise Otto remains indeed a prisoner of her times in her novel, a mostly willing proponent of an ideology that stresses the role divisions of the sexes and the related assertion of different spheres, while she hesitantly, and only inconsistently, manages to expand and change these ideological borders,” I believe that she is not giving Otto the credit she deserves (Joeres, *Respectability* 279).<sup>69</sup> As I have argued in this chapter, I see these inconsistencies or tensions as I call them, as a deliberate tool employed by the author. As Joeres herself points out, Otto was “the consummate strategist” (268), and we should not underestimate her – rather, I believe that she wrote exactly what she thought

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<sup>69</sup> Joeres is alluding to socialist feminist Clara Zetkin’s 1895 opinion of Otto’s work as an activist and writer (see Joeres, *Respectability* 86).

she could possibly get away with without jeopardizing having her work published (much as she did with *Vier Geschwister*) or worse, risking arrest and possibly imprisonment. Thus, she was pushing the boundaries as much as she thought they could be pushed under the particular circumstances. The constant threat of and her fear of persecution, her seeing people arrested and sentenced all around her – these represented real threats. In this way, Otto does indeed remain a “prisoner of her times,” albeit in a more literal sense, since she cannot escape those prevailing circumstances.

Nonetheless, it is through the employment of tensions within the text that Otto manages to mask her criticism of the status quo and the deviations from prescribed norms. This strategy represents not only a deviant act, but also an act of defiance, even an act of resistance. Despite the repressive times and the high price she paid for her political stance, both in her personal life and with regard to the persecution she faced, Otto was unwilling to yield to the pressure. The ending of the novel attests to the fact that Otto had not given up on the goals of the revolution and was holding out hope that the tides might turn. From today’s vantage point, the publication of the novel may seem merely like a small victory, but her diary entry attests that it was a significant accomplishment to Otto at the time.

## Chapter Three:

### The Making of a Homeplace:

#### The Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, “A Heaven Within”

*Sie [die Frau] muß auch volle Freiheit haben,  
sich auf jedem Lebensgebiete zu bewegen,  
denn der Mann hat keinerlei Recht,  
den Frauen irgend etwas vorzuschreiben...*

—Henriette Schrader-Breyermann<sup>70</sup>

The Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus was founded in 1873 as a *Kindergarten*, but within a few years developed into a large institution that included a kindergarten teacher seminar, a school for the domestic arts, and various other educational programs designed for middle- and upper-class women. At a time when bourgeois women were still faced with laws and gender norms that placed them squarely in the domestic sphere, the success of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus stands as a beacon for what women could achieve when they worked together. But this success did not come easily, as the women transgressed and broke with hegemonic gender norms and expectations. Moreover, their curriculum was innovative and controversial in nature and was met with skepticism and resistance from the surrounding community and the teaching profession alike. At a time when the city of Berlin experienced a rapid growth and a housing shortage, the women also struggled to gain access to space for their institution. At the same time, the very success of these women’s professional aspirations hinged upon the securing of spaces for their

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<sup>70</sup> Schrader-Breyermann in a letter to a friend dated July 20, 1899 (Schrader-Breyermann, *Henriette* 161).

pedagogical endeavors. It is therefore not surprising that it was only after they managed to secure space for their programs that the institution started to flourish. This chapter explores the ways in which this group of female educators engaged creatively and subversively with space in late nineteenth-century Berlin.

The strategy employed by Henriette Schrader-Breyman, the founder of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, to build this institution and its community can be better understood through the application of bell hooks' concept of "making a homeplace."<sup>71</sup> According to hooks, the tradition of constructing a homeplace among African-American women represented an act of subversion, a political act aimed at countering the oppression and discrimination they faced in the public sphere. For the women involved in the making of a homeplace, the latter represented an important site of affirmation and "a community of resistance" (hooks 47).

In the case of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, making a homeplace is not tied to the actual place of residence, but is extended to an alternative place. By building their institution around the tasks traditionally ascribed to women, namely childrearing, cooking, and housekeeping, the women managed to eventually gain the respect and the support of the surrounding community. The Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus was a place run by women for women and children (of both sexes) – a place where the women could not only feel a sense of belonging, but also pursue their dreams of receiving a higher education, working professionally, and living among friends. The house represented a place in which the women seemed to be protected from the disciplining gaze of the

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<sup>71</sup> See bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*.

patriarchal society (at least to a certain degree), which allowed them to transgress boundaries and societal norms. It was a place that was created by the women as a strategy of subversion of the prescribed gender norms and as an act of political resistance.

### **Brief History of the Institution**

The Berlin kindergarten which later became the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus was founded by Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Bülow in 1866 as the *Volkskindergarten der südwestlichen Friedrichstadt* (Althaus 13). After the Baroness left Berlin in 1870, interest in the kindergarten declined and it struggled to survive (*Vereins-Zeitung* 25:5). When Schrader-Breyman, who had just moved to Berlin a few months earlier, was asked to take over the leadership of the kindergarten in 1872, it was near financial ruin. Schrader-Breyman organized a grassroots effort to secure the financial survival of the institution. In 1874, the organization *Berliner Verein für Volkserziehung* was founded by her and the existing board of directors as a central force for the fundraising efforts. Two separate boards were appointed, one for the umbrella organization and one for the handling of the internal affairs of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. While an even number of seven men and seven women served on the board of the *Berliner Verein für Volkserziehung*, a separate *Damenkomitee* was responsible for the internal affairs of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. Schrader-Breyman served as a member on the board and as the head of the *Damenkomitee* (Schrader-Breyman, *Der Volkskindergarten* 3). Therefore, all of the decisions affecting the organization and design of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus

itself were in the hands of women from the beginning, which was highly unusual for that time.<sup>72</sup>

### **Henriette Schrader-Breymann**

The daughter of a pastor, Henriette Breymann was born on September 14, 1827 and grew up in Mahlum as the oldest of ten children (Berger 13). Henriette was said to have been a difficult and willful child, who was plagued by health problems from an early age on and did not show any interest in school (Lyschinska 1: 23-24). Her parents sent her to a girls' boarding school in Wolfenbüttel in the hope that she would prosper there. This hope, however, did not materialize in the three years she spent at the boarding school. She later recalled their teaching as one-sided and inaccessible: "Von all den mir gebotenen Dingen lernte ich so gut wie nichts, weil selten etwas den Kern meiner Seele traf, selten mein Inneres berührte und nichts im organischen Zusammenhang stand. Ich lernte weder richtig arbeiten, noch gewann ich nach irgendeiner Seite hin eine Grundlage, die mich später zum selbständigen Studium befähigt hätte" (Lyschinska 1: 27).<sup>73</sup> This experience stayed with her and shaped the way she developed teaching curricula for her students.

When her parents sent her younger sister to Friedrich Fröbel's school in Keilhau in the summer of 1848, they sent Henriette along as a guest. It was there that she met her

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<sup>72</sup> The prominent Berlin *Verein zur Förderung der Erwerbsfähigkeit des weiblichen Geschlechts* (later renamed *Lette-Verein* after its founder Wilhelm Adolf Lette), for example, was founded in 1866 by men. Lette and the other founding fathers championed unmarried bourgeois women's professional development, but rejected women's political emancipation. After Lette's death in 1868, his deputy Professor Franz von Holtendorff took over the leadership of the organization. It was only after he left Berlin (to take up a position at the University of Munich) that Lette's daughter, Anna Schepler-Lette was elected as the chairperson. For further reading on the Lette-Verein, see Obschernitzki.

<sup>73</sup> Mary Lyschinska, a former student, colleague, and close friend of Schrader-Breymann and her husband, published a collection of Schrader-Breymann's letters and diaries after her death. See Lyschinska, Mary, ed. *Henriette Schrader-Breymann; ihr Leben aus Briefen und Tagebüchern zusammengestellt und erläutert.*

great-uncle and was inspired by his work. In a letter to her parents, Henriette proclaims that her life is about to change: “Ich bin am Wendepunkt meines Daseins angelangt, ich erkenne seinen hohen Zweck und plötzlich ist es klar vor meinen Augen, was ich will und soll: Mein Leben der Kinderpflege widmen. [...] Mein Plan ist nun, mich ganz des Oheims Lehren zu widmen” (1:64). About six months later, she traveled to Dresden to participate in Fröbel’s course for early childhood educators (M. Müller 98). Her letters and diary entries convey that the work in the kindergarten movement was challenging, which is not surprising considering the rocky road of Fröbel’s movement itself.<sup>74</sup>

### **Excursus: The Fröbel Kindergarten Movement**

Schrader-Breymann’s personal history and the history of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus are tightly linked to the so-called kindergarten movement and to Friedrich Fröbel, its founder. Fröbel drew his inspiration for his pedagogical approach from Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s pedagogy and Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s nationalistic philosophy.<sup>75</sup> At the heart of both Fichte and Pestalozzi’s theories was the education of the next generations of citizens. While Fichte advocated the removal of children from the home for the purpose of educating them to be effective citizens, Pestalozzi saw this to be the task of mothers at home. Fröbel combined the two approaches in what he called *geistige Mutterschaft*, that is, women’s nurturing role carried out in early childhood educational institutions outside of the home. Fröbel thus based his pedagogical principles on the nurturing qualities ascribed to women and he wanted women to take on the role of the

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<sup>74</sup> In a letter to her students, published in the *Vereins-Zeitung* in April of 1895, Schrader-Breymann recounts how “die Zweifel, Abneigung, ja der Spott, die Fröbel und seine Ideen trafen“ had affected her personally and she admits: „Ich habe jahrelang viel gelitten unter diesen Angriffen“ (*Vereins-Zeitung* 33:3).

<sup>75</sup> See Allen, “Let us live” (25-26) or Boldt and Eichler for a more detailed account of Fröbel’s academic studies and intellectual development.

educators in early childhood institutions or *Kindergärten* (Marenholtz-Bülow 111-112). Children were supposed to learn qualities like compassion, respect for others, and cooperation in a loving and nurturing environment that emulated family life. Fröbel did not seek to supplant the family, but rather to supplement it for the three to four hours a day that the children attended the kindergarten.

Fröbel's insistence that women were best suited for the job as early childhood educators represented a revolutionary claim at a time when education outside of the home was a male profession. It is therefore not surprising that there was much resistance to his ideas from conservatives and male teachers alike. When Fröbel introduced his concepts at a teacher's conference in Rudolstadt in the summer of 1848, he was jeered and scoffed at for his call for female teachers. While some questioned the feasibility of finding women educated enough for the job, others openly stated their distaste for the idea based on their prejudices against learned women. Schrader-Breymann recounts the reaction of a teacher from Dresden who contested Fröbel's concept: "Fröbel erwartet, daß seine Kindergärten, von denen er so große Erfolge für die Hebung der menschlichen Gesellschaft verspricht, von Frauen geleitet, daß also seine philosophischen Ideen von Frauen ausgeführt werden sollen. Ich muß aber sagen, mir graut vor philosophischen Weibern" (Lyschinska 1:79). This comment offers a glimpse into the widespread resistance Fröbel was up against when he not only tried to introduce a new pedagogical approach, but also suggested that the male *Kindergarten* teachers be replaced by women. Fröbel was challenging a prevalent belief that served as the cornerstone for the justification of women's exclusion from higher education and traditionally male professions, as I have discussed in the

preceding chapters: a woman could be smart, but she most certainly could (and should) not match men intellectually (Joeres, *Respectability* 196).

The so-called “Lehrerinnenfrage,” that is, the debate whether women were supposed to be allowed to teach in public schools, lasted until the end of the century (Enzelberger 89). Opponents further insisted not only that a career outside of the domestic sphere was against women’s nature, but also that women were both physically and psychologically too frail for the school environment, and that they would not be able to tolerate the lack of fresh air in the classrooms (90-91). The young Henriette Breymann was in the audience when Fröbel’s ideas were attacked and mocked in Rudolstadt and she was outraged by these derisive remarks, as she describes in a letter to her family: “Mein Herz klopfte fast hörbar, ich hätte meine Empörung aussprechen mögen über die Männer, die, wie ich durchfühlte, uns als untergeordnete Wesen betrachteten” (Lyschinska 1:79). Of course, as a woman, it was not her place to speak up and give voice to her “Empörung.”

Fröbel’s approach presented women with the opportunity to enter the public arena as professionals and he offered himself as an ally in their fight for emancipation. Indeed, women’s emancipation was not merely a side-effect of Fröbel’s pedagogical approach – rather, he openly spoke out on women’s liberation from their oppression (Marenholtz-Bülow 94-96). His concept of spiritual motherhood opened up opportunities for women to use the qualities that dominant society ascribed to their nature, such as nurturing and compassion, to pursue a professional career outside the home at a time when higher education was out of reach for women in Germany.

Between 1824 and 1825, Fröbel's school in Keilhau was investigated because of accusations that he and his colleagues were involved in demagogic and inflammatory anti-state activities (Boldt and Eichler 65-66). This damaged Fröbel's reputation and he was forced to close his school. In a letter to a friend, a bitter Fröbel writes:

Aber hätte ich... meine Erziehungsanstalt recht äußerlich, recht speciell für Bediente oder Knechte und Mägde, oder für Schuster und Schneider, für Kauf- und Geschäftsleute, für Militär oder wohl gar für den Edelmann ausschließend angekündigt, dann würde des Rühmens und Preisens von der großen Nutzbarkeit und Nützlichkeit meiner Anstalt gewiß genug gewesen [sein], und man würde sie dann gewiß als eine Sache angesehen haben, die vom Staate hinlänglich zu unterstützen sey, ich wäre der Welt und des Staates Mann gewesen, und beyden um so mehr, als ich der Lebens[-] und Staatsmaschine, Maschinen geschnitzt und possirt hätte; doch ich, ich wollte freye, denkende, selbstthätige Menschen bilden... (Heiland)

To this end, he referred to his work in early childhood education as

“Menschenerziehung” and stressed that “Jeder Mensch schon als Kind soll als ein notwendiges wesentliches Glied der Menschheit erkannt, anerkannt und gepflegt werden” (Fröbel, “Die Menschenerziehung” 17). Even though Fröbel was well aware of the political implications of his work, he was not willing to give up on his ideas. When he attempted to open a new *Volkserziehungsanstalt* about five years later, however, he encountered such renewed hostility and strong resistance that he was forced to abandon his plans and left the Keilhau area (Boldt and Eichler 72).

Fröbel opened the first kindergarten which he named *Allgemeiner deutscher Kindergarten* as a private institution in 1839 in Blankenburg (94). The kindergarten was attended by fifty children of both sexes from various socio-economic backgrounds. Fröbel's goal was to revolutionize early childhood education in Germany and he called upon women to join him in his efforts (Fröbel, "Kommt" 123-125). To achieve this, he wanted to train as many kindergarten teachers as possible, so that "Fröbel kindergartens" could be opened in every German city. Finding support and funding for his institutions, however, proved to be an uphill battle and therefore, he appealed to men to support his cause by founding *Erziehungsvereine* that would lend financial assistance to early childhood institutions (Fröbel, "Aufruf" 127).<sup>76</sup>

Fröbel's pedagogical methods finally found more widespread support in the eighteen forties, after he had traveled the country to promote his ideas (Boldt and Eichler 106). Yet this success was short-lived, as the years following the failed revolution of 1848/49 proved once again a set-back for the kindergarten movement. The Prussian government shut down all Fröbel kindergartens by means of a decree on August 7, 1851, claiming that they were part of Fröbel's "sozialistischen Systems" that helped spread atheism (Boldt and Eichler 118). There was even a report of police and military entering

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<sup>76</sup> In his "Aufruf an die deutschen Männer, besonders Väter, zur Bildung von Vereinen zur Erziehung," Fröbel argues that it is in every man's interest – no matter what his socio-economic background – to support early childhood education (Fröbel, "Aufruf" 126). He insists: "Wir haben Vereine aller Art, an welchen Männer vom Fache wie Laien, d.h. Männer aus allen Ständen und Verhältnissen wie von den verschiedensten Bildungsgraden Anteil nehmen. [...] Allein Vereine erziehender Männer und Väter für Erziehung der Kinder und des Menschen haben wir nicht, und dennoch ist ein jeder, in welchem Grade und Verhältnisse es auch immer sei, bei der Erziehung, der Art ihrer Ausführung wie bei ihren Früchten auf das Höchste beteiligt" (127).

a kindergarten by force, shutting it down, and escorting the children back to their homes (Benfey 99).

Fröbel and his supporters tried in vain to fight the ban. Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Bülow, an influential supporter of the Fröbel kindergarten movement, even personally submitted a petition to the King on Fröbel's behalf to have the prohibition lifted (Marenholtz-Bülow 131) – without success. In her book *Erinnerungen an Friedrich Fröbel*, she remarks on the ban: “Fröbels Anschauungsweise stimmte nicht zu der damals herrschenden Richtung eines auf die Spitze getriebenen krankhaften Pietismus, und Volkserziehung galt für die gefährlichste Waffe in der Hand der Revolution!” (Marenholtz-Bülow 130). The ban and Marenholtz-Bülow's comments exemplify how subversive and politically charged Fröbel's work in early childhood education was. Even the Baroness feared that her public support of Fröbel could endanger her social position (131). The work of the women involved with the Fröbel kindergarten movement was undeniably political and highly controversial.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, it represented an unparalleled opportunity for middle-class women to receive occupational training and to work as professionals outside of the home. Louise Otto emphasizes this in a long article in the *Frauen-Zeitung* entitled “Aufruf an die deutschen Frauen,” published in November of 1849, which she dedicates to Fröbel and in which she calls on women to support the kindergarten movement (L. Otto, “Die Frauen-Zeitung” 187-91).

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<sup>77</sup> Otto comments on the experiences of the women involved in the Fröbel kindergarten movement in *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb*: “Die Kindergärtnerinnen jener Reaktionsperiode haben in der Tat ein Märtyrertum durchgemacht, das dem vieler um ihrer Gesinnung verfolgter Männer jener Zeit vollkommen ebenbürtig ist. Die Kindergärten wurden polizeilich verboten, und die Vorsteherinnen derselben sahen sich plötzlich ohne Existenz; auch diejenigen, welche durch Unterricht und Vorträge Kindergärtnerinnen bildeten, mußten aufhören zu lehren, und es fehlte nicht an Maßregelungen der mannigfaltigsten Art“ (Otto, *Das Recht* 104).

## Henriette Schrader-Breymann on Women and Work

During the time of the ban, Schrader-Breymann worked as an early childhood educator in various institutions and founded a boarding school for girls in her parents' house in Watzum in 1856 (M. Müller 102 n.1).<sup>78</sup> In the 1860s, after the ban had been lifted, the supporters of the kindergarten movement regrouped, and new opportunities arose for middle- and upper-class women to be active in the movement.<sup>79</sup> Marenholtz-Bülow and Schrader-Breymann traveled together and independently around Germany and Europe to promote Fröbel's pedagogy and to help found kindergartens and teacher's seminars (Allen, *Feminism* 85-90). Despite the lifting of the ban, the kindergartens' image had been tainted and many people remained distrustful toward the movement, as Marenholtz-Bülow recounts (Marenholtz-Bülow 132).

Henriette Breymann met her future husband Karl Schrader during the winter months of 1865/66 in Wolfenbüttel, where she was promoting Fröbel's ideas and where Schrader was involved in the efforts to found a *Verein für Erziehung* (M. Müller 110-111). They got married in April of 1872, when Henriette was forty-four years old. Once the couple moved to Berlin, Schrader expected his wife to give up any work outside of the home, a request she struggled with, particularly since her husband was frequently

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<sup>78</sup> The students came from Germany and abroad. Mary Lyschinska, who later edited and published a collection of Schrader-Breymann's letters and diaries, came to the Watzum school from Edinburgh when she was eleven years old. She later recalled the intimate family-like atmosphere at the school: "Ich habe in der Tat nie wieder ein Haus gesehen, wo fremde Kinder so aufgenommen und so vollständig mit dem Familienleben umgeben, ja verwoben wurden, wie in diesem Pfarrhause" (Berger 83). Most members of the Breymann family were involved in the school, either as teachers or in some other capacity. High tuition costs limited the access to girls from a middle- and upper-class background. Due to the limited space at the Breymann residence, "the number of pupils was kept to about eighteen" (Allen, *Feminism* 89). The school also offered courses for older girls in early childhood education and pedagogy, in order to prepare them for a career in those fields.

<sup>79</sup> The ban was lifted in 1860; however, Fröbel himself did not live to see this turn of events. He died in 1852.

away on business travel and she felt lonely in this new urban environment (Lyschinska 2:2-6). Schrader-Breymann soon started to visit kindergartens, schools, and orphanages on her own and witnessed first-hand the extent of Berlin's social problems and how they affected children. She had many offers to become involved in these organizations, but turned them down in accordance with her husband's wishes. He would not even give his consent for his wife to engage in charitable work, which represented the only type of respectable work a married middle-class woman could engage in at the time.

However, when Schrader-Breymann was asked in early December of 1872 to help save the *Volkskindergarten der südwestlichen Friedrichstadt*, she could not refuse the offer and agreed to get involved. This is indeed noteworthy, since by law, women were under their husband's tutelage and were not allowed to work without their husband's permission (Brinker-Gabler 56). In a letter to her mother and her siblings, Schrader-Breymann matter-of-factly writes that she accepted the offer to work for the kindergarten and adds: "Wenn ich mich mit ihnen verständige, kann ich ein Arbeitsfeld bekommen, wie ich es mir wünsche, und es ist sehr wichtig, daß die Leute kommen und um meine Hilfe bitten" (Lyschinska 2:6). This is a powerful example of a woman and a wife who seems to make her own decisions and thereby transgresses the expectations that her husband and dominant society have set for her. The letter to her family conveys not only agency, but also determination to do as she pleases and deems best for herself without apology. In the end, Karl Schrader apparently supported his wife's efforts and not only lent emotional and financial support, but also served on the board of the *Berliner Verein*

*für Volkserziehung* (the funding organization for the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus), a work he continued even after his wife's death.

Despite her own resolve to act independently, Schrader-Breymann's position toward women's emancipation and women's rights was marked by ambivalence. In fact, by returning to work, Schrader-Breymann chose a life which was different from the one that she herself promoted for married women. While she pushed for women's access to higher education and for their ability to work as paid professionals, she also maintained that women only do so if they are not married or until they get married (Schrader-Breymann, *Henriette* 17).<sup>80</sup> At that point, middle-class women were expected to tend to their own household and husband's (or family's) needs – and this was broadly followed, in the main.<sup>81</sup>

In her advocacy for women's entry into the professional workforce, Schrader-Breymann mainly focuses on areas in which women could make use of qualities that nature was said to have bestowed upon them, such as in education, public health, and care of the sick and poor. She seems to echo voices of the dominant discourse in her insistence on the difference between the sexes and also in her warnings to women against taking the emancipation efforts too far.<sup>82</sup> In an 1868 essay, she points to France, Belgium, Switzerland, and the United States, where women's emancipation has led to

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<sup>80</sup> *Henriette Schrader-Breymann* was published as part of the series *Kleine Pädagogische Texte* and edited by Elisabeth Blochmann, Herman Nohl, and Erich Weniger. It contains essays, booklets, diary entries, and letters written by Schrader-Breymann, and an excerpt from the *Vereins-Zeitung*, written by Mary Lyschinska in honor of Schrader-Breymann. Erika Hoffmann wrote a brief introduction to the volume.

<sup>81</sup> As the daughter of a pastor, it comes as no surprise that she refers to a divine plan when addressing this issue: God has created man and woman, so that they can come together in marriage and form a perfect union. In this paradigm, in order to complement her husband's career outside of the home, the wife must tend to the house and raise the children.

<sup>82</sup> For an overview of this dominant discourse, see, for example, Joeres, *Respectability* 183-195.

“zweifelhafte” results, as many women have fallen prey to the pull of materialism (Schrader-Breyman, *Henriette* 15). To prevent this, women first and foremost need to be educated in the art of *geistige Mütterlichkeit* before entering any other occupational training. She writes:

Die Fachbildung ohne diesen so notwendigen Grund schadet leicht der Weiblichkeit und birgt die Klippe, daß sie den Geschmack am Erwerben steigert, so daß die Frau dann einen größern Stolz darin setzen wird, ihren Kindern materiellen Besitz zu hinterlassen, als ihren Fachberuf beim Eintritt in die Ehe niederzulegen, um ihren Kindern ganz liebende Mutter zu sein. (Schrader-Breyman, *Henriette* 15)

These words are reminiscent of the bourgeois ideology that sees modesty, self-sacrifice, and domesticity as cardinal female values. Schrader-Breyman grounds her argument for a proper training of women in early childhood education on the urgency of the preservation of these female values. Women’s training would ensure that their “geistige Mütterlichkeit zur schönen Blüte reift” before they would be tempted by worldly goods and money (15). She emphasizes the importance of the promotion of women’s natural calling before any encouragement of or participation in any other professional training should occur. Interestingly enough, Otto makes the opposite argument in *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb*, published only two years earlier:

Wir wollen nicht, daß die Frauen einzig und allein zu Hausfrauen erzogen werden, weil sie dann unglücklich und unfähig für alles sind, wenn sie es nicht werden, und ganz dasselbe gilt von der Erziehung zur Mutter schon im frühesten

Lebensalter. Beides kann von jedem befähigten weiblichen Wesen, dessen Anlagen allseitig ausgebildet sind und das sozusagen Kopf und Herz auf der rechten Stelle hat, nachgeholt werden, sobald es gebraucht wird, während die Vorbereitungen zu einem anderen Beruf, dem man seine Existenz verdanken will, nicht [...] erst da vorzunehmen sind, wo die Notwendigkeit sich selbst zu erhalten wie ein plötzlicher Schrecken die darauf nicht Vorbereiteten überfällt. (Otto, *Das Recht* 81)

Otto brings forward the argument that many women will remain unmarried and that focusing women's education solely on preparing them for their role in the domestic sphere will set many women up for disappointment and leave them unprepared to earn a living. Furthermore, she implies that the skills to raise children and to manage the domestic sphere can be acquired more easily and more quickly than the skills it takes to be successful in a profession. This is reminiscent of La Roche's depiction of her heroine's education, where the emphasis is placed on the academic curriculum. The *Frauenzimmerarbeiten*, in contrast, are mastered by Sophie with ease and come across as a mere afterthought.

In the same essay, however, Schrader-Breymann calls for the relaxation of strict gender roles and concedes that not every woman has a propensity for educational or nursing work. Women's individuality, she remarks, needs to be respected and new professions need to be opened up so that women are able to pursue a career to their liking. If a woman desires to enter a male profession, nothing should stand in her way: "Was kann es dem Staate und dem Einzelnen schaden, wenn er einige weibliche Aerzte

und Beamte etc. hat, vorausgesetzt, sie seien als solche tüchtig? Erlaube man doch jedem Individuum, auf seine Weise glücklich zu sein...“ (Schrader-Breymann, *Henriette* 16).

Here, she goes beyond a woman's calling and advocates for a woman's access to virtually all *Berufe*, even those male professions that require a university degree or extensive professional training.

She further insists that this opportunity for professional development must be given to women from all socio-economic backgrounds, since the current situation of both upper- and lower-class women regarding work is unacceptable:

Der Adel der Arbeit ist noch nicht begriffen in der menschlichen Gesellschaft, am wenigsten aber ist er begriffen in Bezug auf das weibliche Geschlecht. Das Mädchen der wohlhabenden Stände verändelt zum großen Teile seine Zeit, das der arbeitenden Klasse muß rein mechanisch für den Lebensunterhalt sorgen, ohne daß ihm Zeit bliebe, seinen Geist weiter zu entwickeln; die Arbeit als solche ist es nicht, welche den Menschen adelt – es ist das Wie derselben. (14)

She believes that families at all levels of society would benefit from and be strengthened by women's independence and ability to work. Schrader-Breymann wishes to bridge the gap between the classes through education and she suggests that public libraries and evening or Sunday schools be founded for women from the working class, so that they could further their education if they so desired. Yet she does not go as far as Otto, who calls for an outright elimination of the social classes.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the kindergarten teacher seminar at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus was designed for young women from a

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<sup>83</sup> See, for example, L. Otto, *Der Genius der Menschheit* 11.

middle-class background, which seems to contradict her call for opportunities for higher education and professional development for women from all social classes. Some of the students enrolled at the institution, however, did apparently come from the lower middle class and were able to have their school fees waived (*Berliner* 6-7).

Overall, Schrader-Breyman's stance regarding gender roles and women's professional aspirations seems contradictory at best, especially when one considers the path she chose for her personal life. Whether it was her religious upbringing or her internalization of societal norms that led to this ambivalent perspective is unclear. Nonetheless, we cannot forget that Schrader-Breyman was a woman of her time and as such was most certainly affected by the prevalent ideology of gender norms.

On the whole, the early 1870s were years marked by ambiguities and contradictory currents for women. On the one hand, women's role as a homemaker, wife, and mother was hailed and bourgeois women's freedom of movement was greatly restricted through this prescription of a very narrow social role, and participation in the public sphere was greatly restricted by laws and gender norms. While this ideal of femininity was adhered to largely by the bourgeoisie, it was unrealistic and unattainable for the working class family that needed not only both parents to work, but also their children to help earn a living. As Mary Jo Maynes describes:

Single-earner families became a possibility on the continent only during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and then only for the highest-paid echelons of the working class. For the vast majority of European families, the reality was that women and children provided important and necessary contributions to the family

wage even at the end of the nineteenth century. (Maynes, “Class Cultures” 200)

Thus, while middle- and upper-class women were expected to dedicate their lives to the domestic sphere and to child-rearing, the majority of lower-class women were forced to work in factories.<sup>84</sup> For conservatives, the latter only heightened the sense that the family as a societal core institution was threatened and led to an even greater insistence on their part that a woman’s role is in the home so that she may cultivate family life (Obschernitzki 1).

Furthermore, the Prussian *Vereinsgesetz* of 1850, which made it illegal for women to participate in any political organization or even to attend any meetings of organizations during which political issues were discussed, was still in effect (Rowe 82).<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, women had started to organize and unite in their demands for more rights and for occupational opportunities outside the home.<sup>86</sup> And certainly by the latter years of the nineteenth century, middle-class women were working in increasing numbers outside of the home. This is particularly true for urban centers.

### **Berlin / Women and the City**

City landscapes across Germany changed drastically during the nineteenth century due to rapid advances in and the growing influence of industrialization. Berlin’s population grew at an explosive rate during the second half of the century: from about 412,000 in 1850 to 900,000 in 1871 and then to a staggering 1.8 million in 1900 – the

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<sup>84</sup> The other major areas of employment open to working-class women were the agricultural and domestic service sectors (Möhrmann, “Frauenarbeit” 146).

<sup>85</sup> For further reading on women’s legal status after the unification of 1871, see Evans (9-23) or Diethe (138-140). For an account of “the social distribution of political power” (Evans 4) in Imperial Germany, see Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933*.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Ingeborg Drewitz, ed., *Die deutsche Frauenbewegung: Die soziale Rolle der Frau im 19. Jahrhundert und die Emanzipationsbewegung in Deutschland*.

population doubled twice in only 50 years. Needless to say, the city's infrastructure was not prepared to handle such an enormous influx of people.<sup>87</sup> When Schrader-Breyman moved to Berlin, the couple lived in a hotel for four months before they were able to move into an apartment – a space which they had to share with a dressmaker for several months before she moved out (Lyschinska 2:1). Such inevitable sharing of living quarters was commonplace in Berlin at the time, even for the middle class (Braun 22). The construction of the famous *Mietskasernen* started in the 1860s and resulted in a densely built-up city center (Schoeps 61). Nonetheless, the housing situation was dire, and among the most pressing issues were a housing shortage, homelessness, and a lack of hygienic sanitation.<sup>88</sup>

Naturally, the rapid changes in the urban arena led not only to a fascination with this ever-changing modern landscape, but also to growing anxieties among city dwellers and observers from the outside alike.<sup>89</sup> In Berlin, the *Ordnung* and *Sittlichkeit* further seemed threatened by the ever-growing *Unterwelt*, the dark side of the modern metropolis. Hans Modrow writes of a prevailing “*Verwilderung der Sitten*” and of an “*allgemeine Unsicherheit*” felt by the city's population around 1900 (Modrow 92). In fact, he insists that toward the end of the nineteenth century, Berlin had the reputation of having the highest per-capita crime rate of any German city, and it was considered to be especially unsafe for women (Modrow 89-92). To be sure, (a certain type of) women were also viewed as constituting part of the problem and as potentially baneful, as the

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<sup>87</sup> For more information on Berlin's population growth and a detailed account of the city's housing crisis during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, see Braun.

<sup>88</sup> See Schoeps, esp. 86-88, Schmidt-Thomsen 2-3, 9-10, or Ladd 99-103.

<sup>89</sup> For a nuanced analysis of the antiurban discourse in Imperial Germany, see Lees.

close link between prostitution – which was widely seen as out of control at the time – and organized crime in writings of the time demonstrate.<sup>90</sup> Lynn Abrams concludes that there was a general discomfort with the presence of women in the cities: “The apparent increase in the number of young, single, independent women on the streets of German towns and cities helped fuel fears amongst the middle classes of the impending crisis of the family, a decline in moral standards, and the resulting threat to the stability of bourgeois society” (Abrams 189). Thus, it became clear that “‘women in public’ and ‘women in power’ are not synonymous” (Deutsch 289).

The figure of the morally corrupt and degenerate *Dirne* in particular was perceived as posing a threat to the social order, since she was thought to attract criminals and also lure honorable men into the depths of the Berlin underworld (Modrow 94-98). The *Sittenpolizei*, a special force within the Berlin *Kriminalpolizei*, was cracking down hard on prostitutes, while their male clients did not face prosecution (Rowe 112). Otto, denouncing this double moral standard in *Der Genius der Menschheit*, asserts that it was common practice “das käufliche Mädchen als Auswurf zu bezeichnen, dem Manne aber, der mit diesen Dirnen verkehrt, noch einen Ehrenplatz einzuräumen“ (Otto, *Der Genius der Menschheit* 120).<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See Modrow 95-96, Lees 91, Rowe 94-96, 106, 122, and Schulte 7.

<sup>91</sup> Modrow’s writing imparts these attitudes toward and prejudices against „die Dirne“: “Mußte die Kriminalistik konstatieren, daß das Berliner Verbrechen immer mehr begann, sich aus besseren Kreisen zusammensetzen, so lag der Grund dazu sicher zu einem erheblichen Teil bei der Dirne, und Berlin kann sich bedanken bei den Leuten, welche ihr übergroße Duldsamkeit entgegenbrachten. Teilweise wurde sie allerdings sehr hart behandelt, was dem Rest Menschentum in ihr nicht zugute kam, auf der anderen Seite wurde ihr aber merkwürdig viel Freiheit gelassen. Daß sie dann diese Freiheit nur in der Richtung benutzte, die ihr offenstand, braucht nicht zu wundern“ (Modrow 96). Prostitution was illegal in Germany at the time (and remained illegal until 1927). However, the focus was on regulation rather than elimination, since prostitution was seen as an inevitable part of life in the city (Rowe 83). In 1871, there were roughly 100,000 registered prostitutes in Berlin; in 1900, this number had increased to 150,000 (112). For a detailed

At first glance, this discourse on and the policies against prostitution may appear to have been at a distance from women of a bourgeois and upper class background; however, both had implications for the mobility and reputation of all women in Berlin, as the so-called “Fall Köppen” of 1897 attests to. In this particular case, a woman who was walking alone in the streets of Berlin one evening was mistaken for a prostitute and was arrested by the *Sittenpolizei*. She was subjected to questioning and forced to spend the night in jail and, what is more, was not released until a physical examination cleared her from the allegations. Women rights activists were outraged over the incident and even organized various “Volksversammlungen” to discuss the case publicly and rally support for women’s rights (Meyer-Renschhausen 104). The implications of the *Fall Köppen* were serious: when out in public, any “respectable” woman had to fear that her identity could be misunderstood, as women’s rights activist Marie Raschke commented in an article in the December 15, 1897 issue of *Die Frauenbewegung*: “Wird denn in unserer Zeit in jeder Frau, welche des Abends ohne Begleitung auf der Straße getroffen wird, eine Dirne vermutet?” (qtd. in Meyer-Renschhausen 101).

Women had to be mindful that their “everyday behavior in the public areas of the city, then, was watched carefully and monitored for propriety;” in fact, when out in public, women had to be careful “where and when and with whom they were seen” (Domosh and Seager 93).<sup>92</sup> Women’s freedom of movement and behavior in the city was thus restricted in a variety of ways, some rather subtle and expressed through societal

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analysis of attitudes toward prostitution and prostitutes’ situation in bourgeois Germany, see Regina Schulte, *Sperrbezirke: Tugendhaftigkeit und Prostitution in der bürgerlichen Welt* and Karin Walser, *Dienstmädchen: Frauenarbeit und Weiblichkeitsbilder um 1900*, esp. 59-73.

<sup>92</sup> Otto addresses some of the restrictions placed upon women’s mobility in *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb* (60, 68-69). Also see Rowe 111.

norms and expectations, others more concrete. Some bars, for example, enforced a smoking ban for women; others did not allow women to enter after a certain time at night (Modrow 235). In addition, many public spaces that were frequented by the middle-class, such as cafés and pubs, were still segregated.

Therefore, the issue of women's situation overall and women's spatiality in particular in late nineteenth-century Berlin is complex. On the one hand, the city attracted women who sought to pursue educational and professional opportunities, as the example of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus cogently illustrates. On the other hand, the regulation of women's bodies was "an exercise in spatial order" (Dennis 149) and "the city's configurations of power" were encoded in the urban landscape (Deutsch 285), as the examples above demonstrate.

Yet even though women's growing presence in the public realm of the city was viewed with unease by many and their mobility was restricted, it also offered them undeniable opportunities to get involved. For women like Schrader-Breymann, who did not always identify with the traditional role of a wife, but rather sought to be active in the community and pursue a career as a professional, this meant walking a fine line between deviance and moderation, as to not put her social standing (and that of her husband) in jeopardy. The latter was particularly important for Schrader-Breymann at a time when they were newly arrived in Berlin and still trying to break into the upper echelons of society.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> For further reading on Schrader-Breymann's adjustment to her new life in Berlin, see Lyschinska (2:1-3).

The fact that early childhood education in general was not held in high regard was not helpful in this regard, as Lyschinska recounts: “In der Tat stand die Kindergärtneri in keinem großen Ansehen bei der gebildeten Welt Berlins, als Henriette Schrader sich des zurückgehenden ‚Volkskindergartens der südwestlichen Friedrichstadt‘ annahm” (Lyschinska 2:9). Moreover, the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus was seen as a subversive and politically charged project. It was clear from the beginning that bourgeois women were not supposed to have a public presence or to occupy public space in the city (Wilson 6). To make matters worse, the program of the kindergarten was controversial both in its pedagogical methods and in the employment and training of women and as such was met with resistance and skepticism by sections of the surrounding community.

Schrader-Breymann’s personal letters and diary entries convey how much she suffered under the attacks against her person and her institution. A play was even performed in Berlin in which Schrader-Breymann and the other members of the *Damenkomitee* were mocked (Schrader-Breymann, *Henriette* 146). In an 1884 letter, Schrader-Breymann confides her frustration to a friend: “Für das Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus fehlen die Mittel; zehn Jahre habe ich gearbeitet mit Annette, kein Opfer war uns zu groß – die inneren Resultate zeigen uns, daß wir auf dem rechten Wege waren; die äußeren, daß eigentlich niemand die Bedeutung der Arbeit versteht“ (Lyschinska 2:286).<sup>94</sup> As late as 1899, Schrader-Breymann comments in a letter to a friend on how unfavorable the prevalent *Zeitgeist* still is towards women’s education and labels the training of women at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus as a type of “Märtyrertum” (Schrader-Breymann, *Henriette*

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<sup>94</sup> Annette Hamminck-Schepel was a former student, close friend, and colleague of Schrader-Breymann.

167). Despite all of this resistance and these difficulties, Schrader-Breymann never lost her belief in “die Sache,” as she refers to her educational goals on occasion, and rarely seems to have wavered in her determination to make the institution a success.

Nonetheless, the kindergarten faced many obstacles. When Schrader-Breymann took it over in 1872, they did not have their own space and the program was conducted in a back room of a local pub. Even though this exclusively male space<sup>95</sup> was less frequented during the day, the women and children found themselves bothered by a male patron who insisted upon playing pool in the very room in which the kindergarten was held, thereby challenging their presence in this space (Lyschinska 2: 7-8). For Schrader-Breymann, this situation was simply unacceptable, and she set out to find a different space for the kindergarten. However, finding a landlord who was willing to rent to them proved difficult, and as a consequence, the kindergarten was forced to move seven times within the following six years. As Mary Lyschinska later recalls: “So wanderte der arme ‘Volkskindergarten der südwestlichen Friedrichsstadt’ wie ein Geächteter von Haus zu Haus, selbst bei Zahlung hoher Mieten hatte er kein dauerndes Heim“ (2:14). Her use of the word *Heim* in this context is interesting, as it seems to suggest that the women were not simply looking for “a space” to house their school, but rather were hoping to establish a place, a homeplace. The institution’s early years were extremely difficult, as Lyschinska emphasizes:

Wir sahen, wie bescheiden die Anfänge, wie dürftig die Mittel, wie widerstrebend die Verhältnisse waren, und wenn Henriette nicht verstanden hätte, Komitee,

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<sup>95</sup> That is, the space typically excluded any respectable middle- or upper-class woman.

Leiterin, Gehilfen, Schülerinnen von dem Wert einer möglichen, idealeren Welt zu überzeugen, so wäre der Verein für Volkserziehung wie eine Seifenblase bald nach seiner Entstehung in der Luft zergangen. Es gehörte eben zu seinem Fortbestehen der Glaube, welcher Berge versetzt. (Lyschinska 2:9)

While Lyschinska speaks of hardship and obstacles, there is also evidence in her words of great initiative, energy, and agency on the part of the women.<sup>96</sup> It seems that it was to some extent a utopian thinking which helped them press ahead with their mission in the face of adversity, as they were convinced that the hope for a better future lay in the education of the next generation of citizens, and that this education needed to start at an early age (Schrader, *Henriette* 115-116). In 1880, the situation changed for the better as they were able to purchase the house in the Steinmetzstraße, a *Mietskaserne* in which they had been renting space, with the help of generous donors or “Freunden der Sache,” as Amélie Sohr puts it (Sohr 21).

In fact, under Schrader-Breymann’s leadership, the kindergarten started to thrive and expand its program offerings. In 1874, she hired her former student and friend Annette Hamminck-Schepel to head the kindergarten. Courses for kindergarten teachers were added, and in the beginning, Schrader-Breymann taught all of the subjects herself (Schrader-Breymann, *Häusliche* 4). By 1877, the first kindergarten teachers graduated and a full program was in place.<sup>97</sup> In 1878, the *Vermittlungsklasse* (a *Vorschuljahr*) and

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<sup>96</sup> The language Lyschinska uses to describe Schrader-Breymann’s initiative seems steeped in admiration for her former colleague and friend; in fact, at times it can be described as almost worshipful. Therefore, we must be cognizant of the fact that she may be romanticizing her accounts of the events and of the institution’s history.

<sup>97</sup> State regulations or officially recognized training programs and exams for early childhood education did not exist until after 1900 (see Textor, *Kindergartenpädagogik - Online-Handbuch*).

the *Arbeitsschule*, an after-school program for boys and girls age six through twelve (specifically designed for those children whose parents worked full-time and were thus unable to tend to them), were opened, and an *Elementarklasse*, a one-year program in lieu of the first grade, followed a year later (9-10).

Thus, with the addition of the *Arbeitsschule* and the *Elementarklasse*, the institution's programs were extended to cover school-age children. There was also a boarding house for the young women who were enrolled in the kindergarten teacher seminar and in the domestic arts school, which was founded in 1884 and headed by Hedwig Heyl, a former student of Schrader-Breymann's. Lyschinska comments on the expansion of the institution:

Wer diese stete Vergrößerung der Vereinstätigkeit während der ersten zehn Jahre verfolgt hat, könnte glauben, daß es ein Fortschreiten auf geebener Bahn, ohne Hindernisse, ohne Rückschritte, ja, ohne Pausen gewesen sei.

In Wirklichkeit war der Pfad ein rauher, dorniger, und Berlin war gerade damals ein ungünstiger Boden für die Verwirklichung geistig-mütterlicher Bildung in der weiblichen Welt. (Lyschinska 2:14)

Nevertheless, the ever-changing nature and expansions of the institution bear testimony to the success of the operation and the power and agency of the women behind it. Even though men were also members of the board of directors and were active in the *Berliner Verein für Volkserziehung*, the credit for the success of the institution belongs to the

*Damenkomitee*: the women had total control in shaping the institution and its curriculum, as the annual reports of the *Berliner Verein für Volkserziehung* reveal.<sup>98</sup>

In 1890, Schrader-Breyman reports that 125 children ages 2 ½-6 attended the *Kindergarten* and *Vermittlungsklasse*, 20 children were in the *Elementarklasse*, 40-45 children attended the *Arbeitsschule*, and 50-60 young women attended the kindergarten teacher seminar (Schrader-Breyman, *Der Volkskindergarten* 1). Most of the graduates of the latter lived at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, found employment in private homes of the “wohlhabenden Klassen,” or became heads of kindergartens (Schrader-Breyman, *Henriette* 76). Schrader-Breyman also mentions that some of the young women only attended the seminar in order to further their education, without intending to seek employment outside of the home. The fee for the children was paid on a sliding scale, depending on the parents’ income (Schrader-Breyman, *Der Volkskindergarten* 2). The Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus was run as a private institution and as a result, it faced a constant struggle for adequate funding. One could certainly argue that its exclusion from public funding and from the recognition of the state testifies to the oppressed status of the women involved, especially since they also fought for admission into the profession of early childhood educators, albeit in vain.<sup>99</sup>

The question arises whether such separate spheres that women inhabited can be interpreted as a sign of women’s agency, or whether they merely represent a reaction to male oppression and a reflection of women’s marginal position within society. Both sides

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<sup>98</sup> See *Berliner Verein für Volkserziehung: Verwaltungsbericht des Vorstandes für die Jahre 1889-1891*.

<sup>99</sup> The *Verwaltungsbericht des Vorstandes* for the period of 1889-1891 reveals that the organization did receive two lump sums from Berlin’s city government, supposedly part of Berlin’s “Nothstandsgeldern”; thus the board of directors must have petitioned for funding (*Berliner* 6-7).

of this question have been addressed by various scholars, including Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Ellen DuBois.

Joeres bases her discussion on the examination of a friendship between two German middle-class women at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century as expressed through their letters.<sup>100</sup> Even though these women were marginalized within the dominant society, they managed to create an alternative sphere through their friendship, a sphere that was marked by choice and agency: “These letters represent another social grouping, one centering on homosocial friendship and love and the dynamic power inherent in the matter of choice: the choice of friends, of companions, of seeking out likeness. Here, in other words, is more evidence of power: the power of creativity, of creating a sphere for one’s self and for others who resemble that self” (Joeres, “We are adjacent” 51). These women were unable to change their social reality, but Joeres maintains that through their friendship, they were able to redefine the sphere that they were confined to, appropriate it, and create an alternative sphere.

Smith-Rosenberg examines the role of American women and their alternative spheres in the nineteenth century. Again, homosocial friendship emerges as a powerful force that gives women their grounding in a patriarchal society: “Women, who had little status or power in the larger world of male concerns, possessed status and power in the lives and worlds of other women” (Smith-Rosenberg 14). Their friendships thus provided these women with support and recognition that was lacking in the male-centered culture they lived in. Yet these spheres also had their limitations and proved to be extremely

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<sup>100</sup> See Joeres, “We are adjacent.”

fragile: “Geographic separation was borne with difficulty. A sister’s absence for even a week or two could cause loneliness and depression and would be bridged by frequent letters” (12). Likewise, a friend’s departure or marriage would lead to “severe depression” and “despair”. While these statements certainly underscore the close emotional ties between the sisters or friends, they also highlight just how lonely and segregated many women seem to have been at the time. Still, Smith-Rosenberg believes that these women “did not form an isolated and oppressed category in male society,” but rather created their own separate spheres marked by friendship and support networks (9).

In her discussion of American feminism and female institution building, Freedman argues not only that separatist spheres or communities “can provide enormous personal and political strength” to women (Freedman 525), but also claims that in certain historical periods (such as the nineteenth century in the United States), separatism represented the most effective strategy for women to combat their isolation and exclusion from the public sphere (513). Considering the impressive scope and the success of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus in spite of the host of limitations female educators faced in Germany during the late nineteenth century, separatism seems to emerge indeed as a viable strategy.

This is reminiscent of Certeau’s concept of the strategy that I discussed in chapter 2. Once Schrader-Breymann and her colleagues had secured a space for their organization, they were able to turn that space into a base or a “stronghold of its own ‘proper’ place or institution” from which they could operate and build relations with the outside world (Certeau xx).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus' status as a private institution not only translated into limitations, but also gave Schrader-Breyman and her colleagues the freedom to shape and run the institution without state interference and without the need to adhere to state regulations governing public schools. As a result, they were also able to evade some of the norms and expectations imposed by dominant society.

Nonetheless, we have to be careful not to look at women's separate spheres in isolation and "to romanticize what it meant for women" (DuBois et al. 31). The political reality of women's disenfranchisement cannot be dismissed, and investigations into women's history should not be "depoliticized" (34). Ellen DuBois warns that it is problematic to view women's spheres as a separate entity without examining their relationship to the patriarchal culture. As a matter of fact, in the case of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, the institution's connection to the dominant culture played an important role, not only for fundraising purposes, but also because it was attempting to serve the community in which it was situated. Therefore, the institution did not exist in a vacuum and was not completely independent from the dominant sphere. Still, the women managed to shape the space according to their vision and create a home away from home for themselves and for the children attending the institution.

### **Homeplace**

Given the history of the private home and its role in the domestication of women as I have discussed it in the introduction, it comes as no surprise that the role of the housewife or homemaker has traditionally been associated with passivity, stasis,

confinement, a lack of choice, and a lack of agency. Many feminist theorists have denounced women's role as homemakers.<sup>101</sup> While the bourgeois wife was designated as the maker and keeper of the home, she did not actually have control over the house, as I discussed in chapter two. Not only was the realm of the family under the legal control of the husband, but in addition, the spatial order of the house was laid out by societal norms.

As such, the house is not only a reflection of the social order, but rather reinforces and inculcates the system of classification which constitutes the dominant culture – it represents “a microcosm organized by the same oppositions and homologies that order the whole universe” (Bourdieu 277). To be sure, these opposite spaces, the house and public sphere outside the home, are “not interchangeable, but hierarchized,” as Pierre Bourdieu points out: “The house is a world within a world, but one that always remains subordinate, because, even when it displays all the properties and relationships that define the archetypal world, it remains an inverted reflexion, a world in reverse” (282).

The construction of the interior of the bourgeois home was tied closely to ideological debates about “the ideal constitution and function of the family and the identity of the nation” (Belgum 2). The home was supposed to reflect both the values of the bourgeoisie and the social status and moral character of the family; as such it represented “an orderly structure of proper places” (Wigley 351). The debate about the proper construction of the domestic sphere had at its very center the debate about women's role in the patriarchal order, and female virtues were tightly linked to the fulfillment of this domestic role and women's absence from the public sphere.

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<sup>101</sup> Among the twentieth century's fundamental texts are *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (New York: Bantam, 1952) and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963).

At the same time, the home was seen as the refuge to which man retreats. At a time of increased criticism of the effects of industrialization and urbanization, the home increasingly represented the peaceful counterpart to the hostile world (379). Again, it was the woman's role to cultivate this sanctuary, and her identity was closely tied to this domestic sphere which she inhabited and presided over. This close association of women with the home has prevailed in Western culture. Gaston Bachelard, for example, ascribes to the home itself maternal features and likens it to a cradle in which man finds the warmth and comfort of shelter (Bachelard 7). Furthermore, he takes it for granted that the home is "affectionately cared for by housewives" (81). However, this is a highly romanticized view of the home, which does not take women's subordinate role in the home and in the patriarchal system as a whole into consideration.

In Marilyn Friedman's discussion of the issue of homeplace and its meaning for women, she sees the homeplace and its community, or the community of origin, as a place to which people are "involuntarily bound" and which represents what is ascribed and expected by society (Friedman 283). As a result, "communities of origin may harbor ambiguities, ambivalences, contradictions, and oppressions" that make it difficult for the individual to flourish in the homeplace (285). In the previous chapters, we first saw a depiction of the home as a place of belonging, inner peace, and security for La Roche's Sophie von Sternheim, and then mainly as a place of stasis and lack of personal growth for Otto's heroine Thekla. The epigraph from the introduction demonstrates how disillusioned and distraught the young Henriette Breymann felt about the domestic sphere and the societal expectations attached to it.

The question arises whether the homeplace can be a place of subversion for women. Friedman maintains that in order to find solidarity and mutual affection, women need to step outside the home community and participate in or found a “community of choice” – and it is particularly the urban arena which opens up possibilities for women to find such communities of choice (Friedman 288).<sup>102</sup> By forming ties with like-minded people, the individual can find an environment of shared values and social support. It is in this environment of the community of choice that one is most likely to develop a political consciousness, not in the home environment.

bell hooks offers a different view of the homeplace. She defines it as the place where one finds “the warmth and comfort of shelter” and where “the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls” occurs (hooks 41). This seems to be a rather traditional definition of home, an echo of an eighteenth-century conception which stresses both the physical and psychological aspects of the home environment, and it is reminiscent of Bachelard’s definition of the home. Still, according to hooks, the tradition of constructing a homeplace among African-American women was marked by the possession of a “radical political dimension” (42). In fact, the making of a homeplace constituted an act of resistance: “Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world” (42). Therefore, for the oppressed, the homeplace was a site of affirmation, recovery, and healing. The making of a

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<sup>102</sup> Also see Fischer 230.

homeplace represented the creation of a community of resistance, and hooks insists that it was a political act.

By advancing this notion of the “subversive value of homeplace,” hooks counters a longstanding tradition of the devaluation of (black) women’s experience in the home, of the interpretation of women’s role in the home as passive, and of equating the home itself as a symbol of passivity and stasis (47). Yet hooks does not valorize women’s role as the homemaker, but rather points out that sexism is behind delegating this task to women in the first place. Nonetheless, without a commitment to the nurturing and caring functions of the home, the construction of a homeplace as an act of resistance would not be possible. Thus, hooks’ concept calls for both an embracing and a subversion of the role as the homemaker. Akin to Certeau’s approach, hooks locates resistance in women’s everyday experience: women have appropriated this space that was originally assigned to them by patriarchal society. hooks’ concept further challenges the dichotomy of public as a political realm, and private as an apolitical one.

By depicting the home as a conflict-free place of care and nurture, hooks could be accused of romanticizing the notion of home. She fails to mention that many women’s experiences in the home are marred by familial conflicts or domestic violence, but she does acknowledge the fragility of the homeplace and remarks that it “is always subject to violation and destruction,” from the outside and also from within (47).<sup>103</sup> However, for hooks, the term home is not necessarily bound to the family of origin or the place of

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<sup>103</sup> hooks also addresses this in a more general context later in the book. She writes: “So I want to note that I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as ‘pure.’ I want to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance” (hooks 151).

one's residence. Home is not limited to just one location, but can be several locations: "Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference" (148). By giving a broad definition of home, she blurs the lines between the community of the homeplace and communities of choice.

Not everybody endorses such an open definition of home. In fact, it is often described as the ideal kind of place and as such is awarded a special status. Bachelard associates the home very closely with the place one grew up in and emphasizes that this home holds a special significance for the individual and that he or she has a lasting connection to it (Bachelard 14-15). Similarly, Edward Relph proposes that there can only be one home: "Home is not just the house you happen to live in, it is not something that can be anywhere, that can be exchanged, but an irreplaceable centre of significance" (Relph 39). But he also admits that the role of the home has changed during the age of modernity due to the increasing mobility of people. Young adults are indeed much more likely to move in order to pursue educational or professional opportunities, for example, and as a consequence might not necessarily maintain a strong sense of belonging to their home of origin. Furthermore, parents might move as well and adult children may not establish a sense of attachment to or rootedness in this new home which their parents occupy. In addition to moving more frequently, people spend a significant time away from home on most weekdays if they are working outside of the home. While Relph refers to the twentieth century in his discussion, this change in the role of the home certainly holds true for the nineteenth century as well. As a matter of fact, Schrader-

Breymann moved several times in order to pursue various educational and occupational opportunities before she got married. Moreover, her family moved and the family residence she returned to as an adult was no longer the home she grew up in. In 1872, she settled in Berlin with her husband, where she resided until her death in 1899.

Relf further stresses the importance of the physical setting in the experience of homeplace, whereas hooks places the emphasis on what is happening inside the community of the homeplace and not so much on where it is taking place. Ultimately, it is through the strategy of making a homeplace that women-centered communities of resistance are formed, as hooks argues. There seems to be a consensus among the theorists mentioned above that people need a place that has a special significance in their life, offers shelter and security and is a place where the individual can be affirmed as a subject. If people do not find this place of special significance at home, then they need to seek it elsewhere by joining with like-minded people through a community of choice, as Friedman suggests.

Yi-Fu Tuan defines place as “a calm center of established values” (Tuan 54). While the home can certainly be described as a place of established values, it was not necessarily the woman (or housewife) who was able to choose those values. Rather, in the case of nineteenth-century Germany, women were confined by strict norms that dictated that certain values be upheld in the bourgeois home. This might well have left women feeling alienated or powerless in their own homes. Tuan maintains that one’s sense of self “grows out of the exercise of power” (175). If women are unable to exercise power at home, they may not be able to develop their true sense of self at home either.

Communities of choice therefore can play an important role for women and other marginalized groups, as they can provide mutual respect, self-esteem, and friendship. Consequently, a community of choice in which the individual finds moral and social support and an environment of shared values might become of greater significance to the individual than their actual home or place of residence.

I argue that the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus represented such a place of special significance and a homeplace away from home for the women involved in the institution. Schrader-Breymann surrounded herself with old friends and former pupils to build the organization, and the women seem to have formed a tight-knit community – their epistolary relationship, at least, is marked by expressions of friendship and loyalty.<sup>104</sup> The support network that Schrader-Breymann managed to organize was impressive and multi-dimensional. In the beginning, when the financial means were meager, a number of Schrader-Breymann's female friends (many of them her former students) volunteered their time at the kindergarten. Later, graduates from the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus itself joined the faculty (Althaus 22). As the reputation of the organization grew, more and more students came from abroad to train at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. By 1883, one third of the thirty to forty women attending the kindergarten seminar came from England, the United States, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland (Sohr 35).

It seems clear that the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus represented much more to the students and their teachers than just a school – it was also an extended family. Schrader-Breymann reflects on this close bond between her and her female colleagues and friends

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<sup>104</sup> See, for example, letters from teachers and former students reprinted in the *Vereins-Zeitung des Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hauses*.

in a letter. She writes that without these women's "Verständnis" and "treue aufopfernde Hilfe," the success of the institution would not have been possible (Schrader, *Henriette* 166). She further adds: "Aber wir lebten in schönster Wechselwirkung auf einander; wir lernten mit einander, von einander und schafften so den gesunden Boden zu steter Vervollkommnung und Weiterentwicklung unserer Arbeit" (166-167). Schrader-Breymann's word choice seems formalistic and is perhaps glorifying or idealizing the relationship between the women. However, some of her colleagues also write of a very amiable atmosphere among the women; in "Aus der Geschichte des Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hauses," Hildegard von Gierke, for example, who served as head of the institution in the 1920s, stresses that the relationship among the teachers and students was marked by "herzlichen Beziehungen" (Gierke 89).

In fact, Gierke also reveals that fostering a sense of community among the women was important to Schrader-Breymann, who initiated the founding of a "Verein ehemaliger Schülerinnen" in the late 1880s, in order to cultivate a lasting connection to each other and to the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus among the graduates of the school. For this purpose, monthly gatherings were organized, which featured entertainment in the form of musical performances, lectures, and an annual *Kostümfest* (89). Thus, the *Verein* functioned like a social club, "welcher regelmäßig einmal im Monat die derzeitigen und früheren Schülerinnen gesellig vereinigt," as mentioned in the *Verwaltungsbericht des Vorstandes* (Berliner 3). The latter also describes how former students could count on receiving general advice or help with specific situations, such as finding a job, throughout their career:

Die Beziehungen der Schülerinnen zum Hause hören mit dem Verlassen desselben nicht auf. Die Schülerinnen finden bei der Erlangung von Stellen treue Hülfe und jede, die dem Hause einmal angehört hat, weiß, daß sie, ob fern oder nahe, stets als ein Glied desselben betrachtet wird und zu jeder Zeit Rath und Beistand in ihrem Berufe dort finden kann. (Berliner 3)

In addition, the quarterly journal *Vereins-Zeitung des Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hauses in Berlin* W. was founded in 1887, so that the teachers, current students, and graduates could more easily stay in touch with each other and could remain current on educational developments (*Berliner 3*). Personal letters from Schrader-Breyman and from her colleagues and friends were reprinted alongside the articles, which gave the journal an intimate feel. Former students would send in letters in which they reported on their own career progress.<sup>105</sup>

Most of these women came to the institution as students, and their entry into the school seems to have marked the beginning of a life-long friendship and commitment to Schrader-Breyman and her team. Annette Hamminck-Schepel, for instance, came to Berlin in 1874 to head the kindergarten (Lyschinska 2:9). Hamminck-Schepel, a Dutch national, was a former student of Schrader-Breyman's from her school in Watzum. The two women grew very close, as their colleague Selma Althaus describes:

Es ist nicht leicht zu beschreiben und gehört zu jenen feinen, komplizierten, undefinierbaren psychologischen Zuständen, jenes Verhältniss [sic] zwischen Henriette und Annette Schepel, welches man mitangesehen und mitgeföhlt haben

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<sup>105</sup> See, for example, *Vereins-Zeitung des Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hauses* 42:5-7.

muss, um seine Eigenart zu verstehen. Annette voll hingebender, zärtlicher Liebe zu der älteren Freundin: Henriette nicht minder voll herzlicher Liebe, der sich oft Bewunderung beimischte... (Althaus 16-17)

Althaus further emphasizes that the two women were fully committed to the institution: “So wie Henriette der geistige Mittelpunkt des Ganzen war, des Kindergartens sowohl, als auch des Seminars zur Ausbildung von Kindergärtnerinnen und Erzieherinnen, so verknüpfte Annette mehr und mehr ihr ganzes Leben mit der Anstalt“ (17). Clearly, the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus was more to these two women than just a job.<sup>106</sup>

Mary Lyschinska’s strong ties to the Schraders further exemplify just how close-knit this community of like-minded women seems to have been. As I mentioned above, Lyschinska joined the Watzum school as an eleven-year-old. She followed her motherly friend Schrader-Breyman to Berlin in 1877 and completed the kindergarten teacher education at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus (Berger 85). In 1879, she returned to her native England after being appointed “Instructor in Kindergarten Exercises” – a post that she renamed “Superintendent of Method in Infant Schools.” However, when Schrader-Breyman died in 1899, Lyschinska returned to Berlin to keep house for Karl Schrader and to teach at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. In 1913, after Schrader had died, Lyschinska moved to Wolfenbüttel to live with the Breyman family, where she remained until her death in 1937. Interestingly enough, Lyschinska did not return to her biological family in

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<sup>106</sup> Hamminck-Schepel left the institution in 1890. Althaus cites a longing to focus on her personal life and a “gewisses Ruhebedürfnis” as the main reasons for her leaving (Althaus 19-20). However, she also insinuates that Hamminck-Schepel was dissatisfied with how large an institution the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus had become (20). Therefore, there is an indication of a possible discrepancy in the vision for the *Haus* between Schrader-Breyman and Hamminck-Schepel. I was unable to find any further evidence of this apparent mismatch and thus cannot gauge whether it possibly led to factions among the women involved in the institution.

England, but showed great commitment to the Schraders and the Breymanns, who had apparently become family to her. Schrader-Breymann never had children of her own, but seems to have treated her students, colleagues, and friends like family.<sup>107</sup>

Schrader-Breymann was also in close contact with a group of female supporters who were not directly involved in the daily work at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, but who nevertheless took great interest in the institution and its progress. One such benefactor was the Crown Princess Victoria of Prussia. Apparently, it was their mutual interest in the education of the poor that brought the two women together. Not only did “Kaiserin Friedrich” support the institution financially, but she met with Schrader-Breymann almost weekly and paid frequent visits to the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus to participate in festivities or to observe exams at the kindergarten teacher seminar. The letters exchanged between the two women reveal how much Schrader-Breymann seems to have relied not only on the financial, but also the emotional support of the Crown Princess. In 1888, the Crown Princess became an official patron of the institution (Schrader-Breymann, *Der Volkskindergarten* 1).

Another important female benefactor was Maria Elisabeth Wentzel-Heckmann, widow of the *Baurat* Hermann Wentzel. She was introduced to Schrader-Breymann by one of her colleagues, and Wentzel-Heckmann generously supported the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus and later on even served on the *Damenkomitee*. When the institution had outgrown its quarters in the Steinmetzstraße, Wentzel-Heckmann had two new, spacious

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<sup>107</sup> I do rely heavily on accounts from women closest to Schrader-Breymann for my analysis – some if not all of whom might be idealizing the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus and its founder. However, since the focus of my analysis is life and use of space at the institution, such a heavy reliance on accounts provided by the women who lived and worked there is unavoidable.

houses built for it on one of her large properties in Berlin Schöneberg (Ebert and Hesse 3). It appears that networking and friendship among women played a major role in the success of the institution.

Even though Schrader-Breyman created this place outside of the home, she employed a strategy that resembles the concept of making a homeplace as described by hooks. Schrader-Breyman seems to have surrounded herself not only with like-minded people, but with very good friends and former pupils, all of whom were female. Together, they built a place of nurture and of care for the children and for the women involved in the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. The *Haus* represents a place where women could be affirmed as subjects and where they could pursue their dream of engaging in higher education and in a professional career outside of the home. The women of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus seem to have become a tight-knit community, an extended family. They took care of children in a way that emulated family life with one crucial difference: the notable absence of the father figure. Much as hooks describes it, the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus as a homeplace represented a site for affirmation and mutual support as well as a “crucial site for organizing, for political solidarity” (hooks 46-47). Their community must thus be seen both as a reaction to and a defiance of patriarchal gender norms. The Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus was a female community of choice and a homeplace where the women could exercise power to run the institution according to their own ideals and convictions.

Nevertheless, because these women based their efforts on the nurturing qualities which dominant society had ascribed to them instead of denouncing their role as caretakers, the concept of *geistige Mütterlichkeit* “has often been characterized as a

conservative ideology” (Allen, *Feminism* 93). Susanne Maurer even alleges that *geistige Mütterlichkeit* ultimately served as an “Emanzipationsfalle” for bourgeois women, since the emphasis on feminine qualities and the difference of the sexes represented a “Selbstbeschränkung” on the part of the women (Maurer 262-263).

It should come as no surprise that subversion and resistance are often not recognized as such, since they tend to be hidden in the most unsuspecting places or in everyday activities, as Certeau reminds us and as hooks’ concept of making a homeplace demonstrates as well. In fact, “resistance hardly ever has a straightforward public presence,” as María Lugones points out (Lugones x). Rather, it is oftentimes ambiguous in nature and “it is also almost always masked and hidden by structures of meaning that countenance and constitute domination” (x). This seems to hold true for the women of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, who supported notions of womanhood that we today would consider socially constructed and artificially produced by patriarchal norms. It is important that we learn to uncover these masked types of resistance, for they will allow us to gain “an alternative understanding of the realities of the oppressed” and marginalized (x). Maurer acknowledges that further investigations are necessary in order to determine in how far the concept of *geistige Mütterlichkeit* allowed bourgeois women to expand their “Handlungsspielräume” and in how far it actually served to trap them in the narrow social role which the dominant society had ascribed to them (Maurer 264). In partial answer to this question, the following discussion of Schrader-Breyman’s curriculum will help elucidate how impressive the *Handlungsspielraum* was which the women were able to carve out for themselves.

## The Curriculum and the Use of Space at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus

Schrader-Breyman developed her own teaching pedagogy, since she noticed contradictions and shortcomings in Fröbel's teachings early on.<sup>108</sup> To be sure, she also drew inspiration from Fröbel, Pestalozzi, and other theorists, but made changes to their pedagogy where she saw fit (Schrader et al. 41). Additionally, Fröbel's pedagogical methods were mainly designed for toddler- and preschool-age children who were only supposed to attend the kindergarten for three to five hours a day. Schrader-Breyman expanded this concept dramatically and her curriculum included programs for children two and a half to twelve years of age.

In 1892, the artist Fritz Grottemeyer was commissioned to observe and sketch snapshots of daily life at the institution. For this purpose, he was apparently granted full access to the institution's programs and facilities, its "täglichen Betreibens" (Lyschinska 2:17). The resulting images were displayed at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, in which the institution participated as part of the German commission for *Kleinkinderfürsorge und Frauenbildung*. For this purpose, thirty-six of Grottemeyer's sketches were published as collotype prints in a *Kunstmappe* entitled *Unsere Kinder. Skizzen aus dem Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hause zu Berlin*. Grottemeyer used a variety of materials for his assignment, such as oil, charcoal, pastel, pen, chalk, gouache, and grisaille. The artist received much

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<sup>108</sup> Schrader-Breyman talks about the fact that she saw flaws in Fröbel's pedagogy in a letter to her friend Amalie Sohr dated August 16, 1882: "Sie verstehen, teure Freundin, daß es zwei verschiedene Dinge sind, Ideen zu haben, und die richtigen, praktischen Formen zu finden, diese Ideen vollständig zu decken. Ich behaupte nun offen und ehrlich, daß Fröbel selbst, wenn ich mich so ausdrücken darf, in der Form seiner Ideen, wie sie im Kindergarten ausgeführt werden sollen, nicht weiter gekommen ist, als bis zur Kristallisation" (Schrader-Breyman, *Henriette* 153). In that same letter, she speaks with self-confidence about the pedagogical methods that she developed: „Ich sage aufrichtig, ich glaube, daß es mir gelungen ist, von der Kristallisation der Form zum organischen Leben derselben durchzudringen...“ (153).

acclaim for his work, and nineteen of the original artworks were purchased by the *Königliche Nationalgalerie* in Berlin, seven by the *Akademie der Künste*, and two by Crown Princess Victoria (Kempmann 26).

The latter also wrote an introduction to the *Kunstmappe* in which she remarks: "In dieser Mappe sind zahlreiche, von kunstvoller Hand entworfene Bilder vereinigt, welche bescheidene, einfache Szenen aus dem Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hause in Berlin darstellen" (Grottemeyer). These sketches could be considered "einfach" and "bescheiden" in the sense that the majority of them depict daily activities at the institution, whereas two images represent scenes from a Christmas party and three others show excursions, namely to a lake, to a cow barn, and to a forest. Still, one has to wonder if the Crown Princess' comment also has gender implications. After all, these images "only" depict scenes of daily lives of women and children. In that sense it would come as no surprise that they might be called 'simple' and 'modest'.

Nevertheless, far from being simple and modest, these images are remarkable in what they depict – namely an innovative curriculum that not only makes use of the spaces at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus in a creative way, but also manages to extend far beyond the walls of the *Mietskaserne* in the Steinmetzstraße, in which they were housed at the time. As mentioned above, the concept of *geistige Mütterlichkeit*, with its core mission to bring women's nurturing role into early childhood education classrooms, so that children could learn qualities like compassion, respect for others, and cooperation in a loving and nurturing environment that emulated family life, was at the center of Schrader-Breyman's pedagogy.

At the time, the kindergarten alone was attended by approximately 100 children, yet Grotemeyer's sketches impart an atmosphere of togetherness and domesticity that is surprising for a large pedagogical institution, as the following sketch entitled "Bad" illustrates:<sup>109</sup>

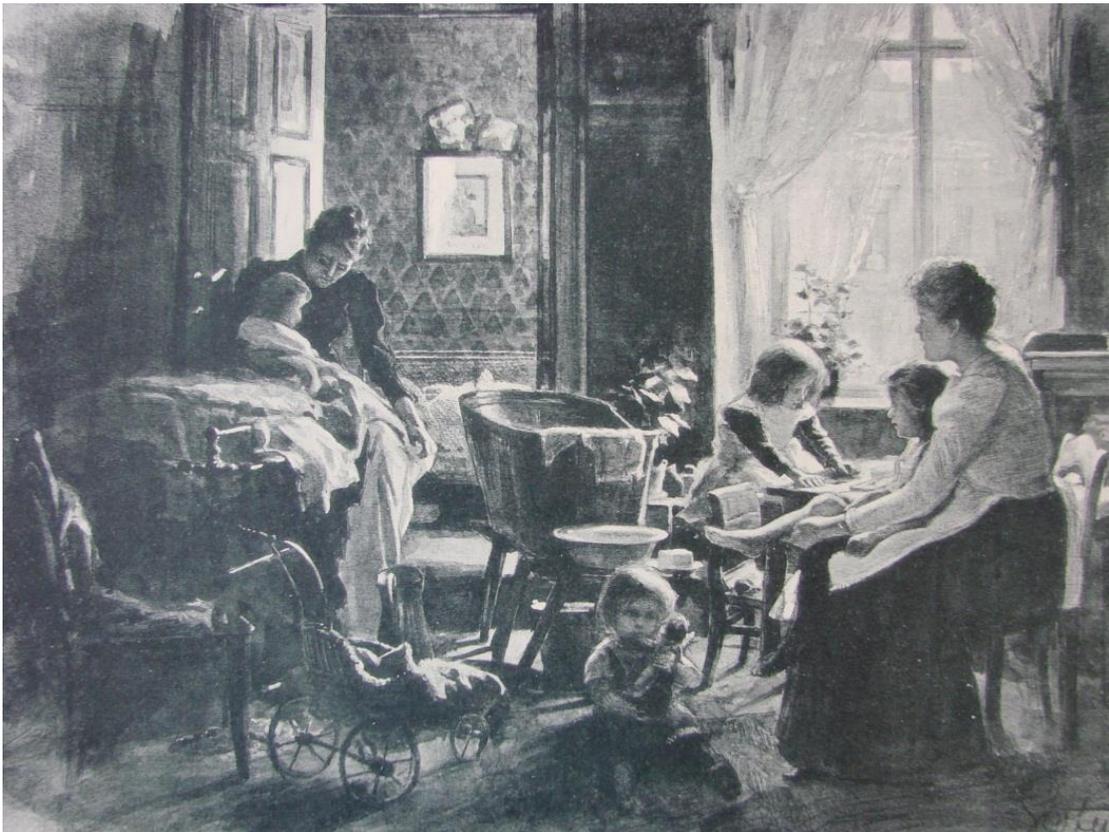


Figure 1: "Bad"

The room depicted in this drawing, with its furniture, décor, and houseplants, is reminiscent of a private parlor. The small group setting is foregrounded and the children are of varying ages, which further gives the impression of a private family home.<sup>110</sup> Each teacher has a child on her lap, adding to the intimate feel of the scene. While two children

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<sup>109</sup> The sketches and their respective titles featured in this chapter stem from Grotemeyer's *Unsere Kinder. Skizzen aus dem Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hause zu Berlin*. The volume does not contain pagination.

<sup>110</sup> The children spent a few hours each day in these small groups.

are being attended to by the women, the other two are playing with dolls or drawing. The artist's use of light creates a sentimental interpretation of the atmosphere at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. Indeed, the amount of light depicted as coming through the windows is surprising, given that the institution was housed in a *Mietskaserne* at the time. Other windows are visible across the court yard as well as a roof and some sky, indicating that the women and children are located on an upper floor of the building. Overall, this scene resembles a bourgeois home rather than an early childhood institution.

Schrader-Breymann's pedagogy represented a radical break with the authoritarian mainstream pedagogy, which sought to instill discipline, deference, and Christian piety in the children of working-class families, who were the sole recipients of public early childhood education during the nineteenth century in Germany (Schrader-Breymann et al. 16). In fact, at the time, most early childhood institutions' use of space was modeled after traditional schools and thus represented "Kleinkinder- 'Schulen,'" with classrooms that had rows of tables and chairs (Schmidt-Thomsen 14-15). At the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, this configuration of space was only found in the classrooms for school-aged children and for the students of the kindergarten teacher seminar, as Schrader-Breymann's spatial organization for the rest of the institution was aimed precisely at avoiding a school-like atmosphere (Richter 7).

If one takes a closer look at the curriculum of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus' early childhood education program and at the use of space at the institution, it becomes clear

that it represented anything but a traditional approach.<sup>111</sup> Given the amount of criticism, resistance, and hardship Schrader-Breyman had faced from the beginning, one would have expected that she would be cautious and not stray too far from accepted pedagogical methods. Instead, her program broke with societal norms and traditions on several levels.

First, the “Volkskindergarten” was attended by children from lower- and middle-class backgrounds (Richter 46), meaning that Schrader-Breyman had to gain the trust of both middle- and lower-class parents in the community. This evidently was no small feat at a time when Berlin’s society was strictly divided into social classes and hostility between the classes was palpable (Lyschinska 2:14). Marenholtz-Bülow, who founded the kindergarten that later turned into the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, had rejected the idea of an institution open to children from all social classes (Allen, “Children” 25). Not only, she argued, would parents from the upper and middle class disallow such close association of their children with those of the lower class, but in addition, the latter would not be able to keep up with children from more privileged backgrounds.

Schrader-Breyman was undeterred and saw this meeting of children from different socio-economic backgrounds as an important lesson for them in forming social awareness, compassion, and an understanding of each other (Schrader-Breyman et al. 43-44). For this purpose, the children from lower- and middle-class backgrounds were deliberately brought together in small groups, which again caused skepticism from the community and from interested parents. This approach stands in stark contrast to Sophie and Thekla’s teaching activities, since both heroines teach girls from working-class

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<sup>111</sup> For a comprehensive description of the daily activities at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, see Clara Richter, *Bilder aus dem Kinderleben des Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Hauses in Berlin*.

families and both stay within the expected realm of what is befitting for their pupils' social status (though Thekla attempts to further her girls' intellect and Sophie does the same in at least one instance, namely at the inn). Schrader-Breyman, on the other hand, consciously tries to bridge the gap between the social classes within her school setting.

It is noteworthy that Grotemeyer's sketches do not reveal in the slightest that the children come from different socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, they were published under the title "Unsere Kinder," which reflects Schrader-Breyman's commitment to treat each child with the same respect, regardless of their background. Also of significance, these small groups consisted of both boys and girls, which was also highly unusual at the time. Each small group was assigned a female educator and the goal was to create a family-like atmosphere within each group, as the following sketch again demonstrates:



Figure 2: “Frühstück”

In this drawing, in contrast to the first one, the room in the background is almost completely faded out, thus accentuating the children and their teacher in the foreground. Note that the viewer’s position is at the child’s level, thereby treating the children like equals, most certainly as important subjects. This is true for many of the sketches, and the message conveyed is consistent with Schrader-Breymann’s philosophy of treating children with respect, as well as seeing in them the next generation of citizens. The teacher’s depiction as a motherly figure, cutting bread for the children, and the vase on the table reinforce the impression of domesticity. The picture of the cow on the blackboard easel in the background, on the other hand, represents the

“Monatsgegenstand,” that is, the lesson plan for the month. As part of the curriculum, the children visited a cow barn (see sketch below) in order to see first-hand where the milk comes from, and following that visit, they were able to try their hands at making cream, butter, and cheese.

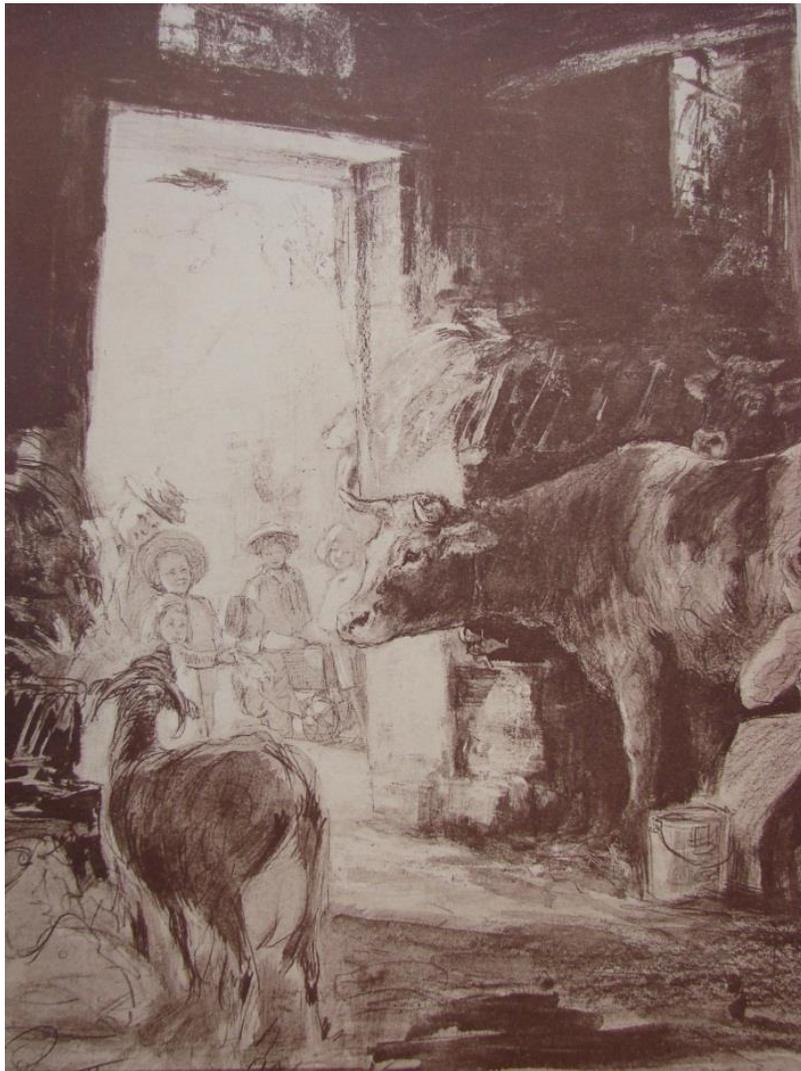


Figure 3: “Kuhstall”

In this way, the curriculum integrated theory with practice, and it was important to Schrader-Breymann that the children were able to do as much themselves as possible,

with the teachers taking a hands-off approach to teaching. This illustration again foregrounds the small group setting with children of different ages. Even the smallest children could help in their own ways and make contributions to the projects at hand, she insisted (Schrader-Breyman, *Häusliche* 14, 22).

Perhaps the most serious transgression, however, concerned the prescribed gender norms. In the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, young boys were taught alongside girls to go grocery shopping, to cook, clean, and help take care of the younger children. In the institution's kitchen, the children not only helped prepare the ingredients, such as peeling potatoes, but they were also able to help cook and serve the meals, which most of them apparently did with great enthusiasm.<sup>112</sup> How uncustomary this was is demonstrated by the following quote, in which a kindergarten teacher recounts the reaction from an appalled mother: „Na, Fräulein, sagen Sie mal,‘ kommt eines Morgens, ihren Jungen an der Hand, die Mutter eines unserer grösseren Zöglinge in den Kindergarten, ‚ist denn das wirklich wahr, der Bruno, der quält mich schon den ganzen Morgen, ich soll ihn zeitig herbringen, weil er kochen soll? Das ist doch Ihr Ernst nicht?‘“ (Richter 20). In a different anecdote, a teacher announces to the children that it is time to clean their room: “‘Au fein!’ ruft Max [...] Das ganze Gesicht strahlt. ‘Ich bin Reinmachefrau,’ verkündet Paul, ergreift die an der Wand hängenden kleinen Besen und will unter eifrigen Gebärden anfangen, das Zimmer auszufegen“ (13-14). The children were participating in actual

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<sup>112</sup> Regular hours of the *Kindergarten* were 9a.m.-12p.m. and 2p.m.-4p.m. during the week, and 9a.m.-1p.m. on Saturdays (Schrader-Breyman, *Der Volkskindergarten* 8). However, children whose mothers worked all day were able to stay at the institution for lunch.

chores at the institution, not simply engaging in pretend play, and by doing so they were crossing the boundaries of gender norms.<sup>113</sup>

Furthermore, girls were able to work with tools alongside boys in the workshop, which was led by female instructors as well:



Figure 4: “Arbeitsschule”

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<sup>113</sup> This is no coincidence, as Schrader-Breyman makes clear in an 1888 discussion entitled “Was ist unter hauswirtschaftlicher Bildung zu verstehen“ (Schrader-Breyman, *Henriette* 66). She writes: „Von ‚hauswirtschaftlicher Bildung‘ spricht man in der Regel nur in Beziehung auf die Frau. Aber auch der Mann bedarf derselben; er muß Zwecke und Mittel der Hauswirtschaft kennen, sie respektieren, und nicht rücksichtslos bloß an sich selbst denken. In beschränkten Verhältnissen soll er auch mitarbeiten, die Wohnung im Stande halten, den Garten, wo ein solcher da ist, mitbesorgen, so manche häusliche Geschäfte übernehmen“ (66).

The workshop offered a variety of tools and activities and the children were able to choose which projects they wanted to engage in (Richter 84-85). The girl to the right is holding a handsaw, whereas the younger child to the left is weaving a basket. It looks as though the boy in the center is absorbed in needlework, which represents yet another transgression of gender expectations. An art easel is also visible in the background. Everyone is depicted as engrossed in their work, with the exception of the girl in the front whose head is turned toward the boy. The painting's focus on these two older children in the front could almost be seen as provocative, or at least as foregrounding the transgression of gender norms at the institution.<sup>114</sup>

It is noteworthy that the workshop also served as the institution's repair shop, where "zerbrochene Gegenstände aus Haus und Garten" were mended by the children (Richter 85). What is more, the children were also building new toys and tools such as baskets, brushes, brooms, cutting boards, and even a doll house and a toy kitchen in the workshop. For the latter project, the children visited the institution's kitchen first in order to see what materials and equipment they needed before they started building their own kitchen (Schrader-Breyman, *Häusliche* 22). They then went to the local carpenter where they obtained the building materials for their craft project (Richter 11).

The children were also able to visit other local craftsmen and businesses, such as a blacksmith, a saddler, a shoemaker, and a bakery so that they could learn about the

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<sup>114</sup> This is particularly interesting, since in the December 1898 issue of the *Vereins-Zeitung*, it states that boys got to spend more time in the workshop than girls, while the girls were instructed in "häusliche Beschäftigungen" (such as needlework and cooking) more frequently than the boys (*Vereins-Zeitung* 48:9). Nevertheless, girls were able to enjoy time in the workshop on a regular basis while boys learned needlework and cooking as part of their curriculum, both of which constituted a transgression of dominant gender expectations and societal norms.

various trades and about the respective production processes (41, 46). These visits further served the purpose to instill respect for these craftsmen and thereby for the lower class in general in the children from (upper) middle-class families who otherwise would not be able to experience such close encounters. Maintaining good relations with local businesses was also part of a larger strategy of incorporating the children and their kindergarten into the community. Moreover, Schrader-Breymann tried to improve the kindergarten's image by reaching out to the community at large. She invited not just interested parents, but also the public to visit the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, so that they could see first-hand how the institution was run. For that purpose, regular weekly visiting hours were publicized through flyers (which, of course, also represented an important strategy for fundraising).

The final illustration depicts the teachers in their living quarters and focuses on the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus as a female sphere:

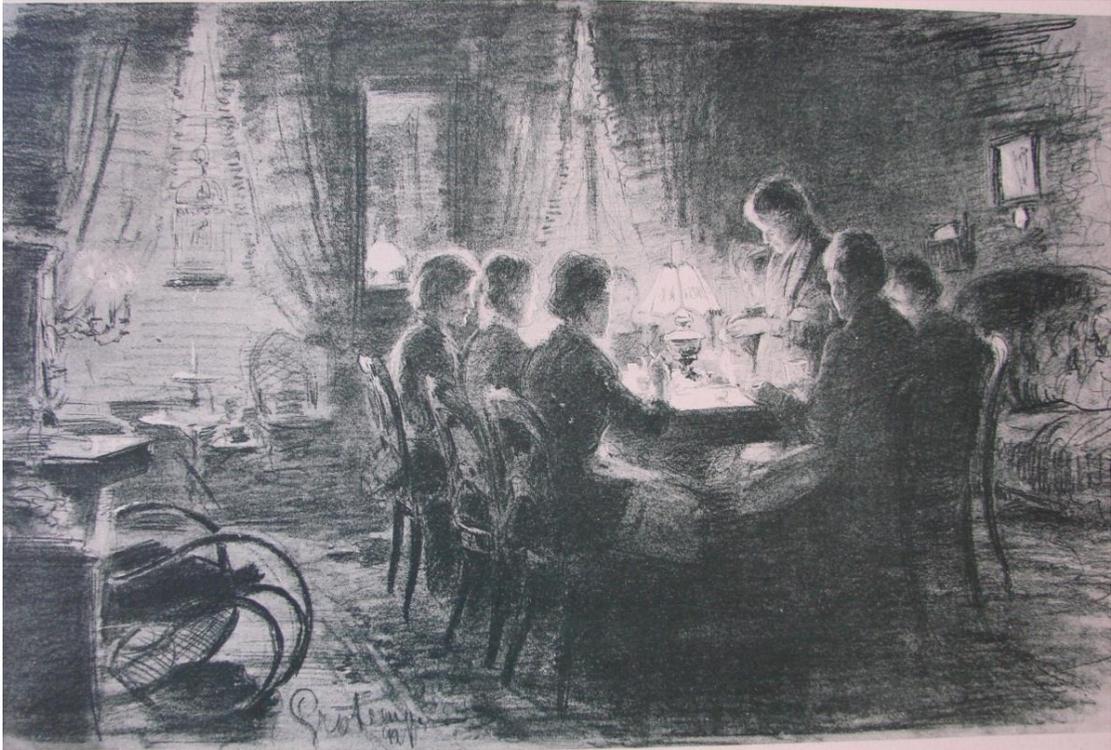


Figure 5: "Im häuslichen Kreise des Pestalozzi-Froebel-Hauses"

The light in this drawing comes from a lamp and from candles rather than the two windows, suggesting that the women are gathered at the end of the work day. In addition to the dining table, the room offers a chaise longue, a rocking chair, and at least one other seating accommodation. The sketch's title, the furniture, and the décor (including the birdcage) underscore the impression of an intimate "häusliche" atmosphere, not a workplace setting.

One could certainly argue that these sketches were commissioned and that they offer a romanticized or idealized view of daily life at the institution (much like the various writings of former students and teachers of the *Haus* perhaps tend to paint a

glorified picture of the institution and its founder). Even if this is the case, the images nonetheless convey how Schrader-Breymann wanted her programs to be viewed. As such, these images (especially in combination with the various written accounts available) allow us an intimate look behind the scenes of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, and maybe even more so, important insights into Schrader-Breymann's vision for this special sphere she and her colleagues had created for each other and for the children and female students attending the institution.<sup>115</sup> The sketches give evidence of the innovative and creative use of space at the *Haus* at a time when most kindergartens were modeled after regular schools.

The construction of a new building in Berlin-Schöneberg gave Schrader-Breymann the opportunity to optimize the use of space for her curriculum.<sup>116</sup> In addition to the building itself, the large lot offered ample space for garden beds, the keeping of animals, and a playground. Building regulations for kindergartens did not exist in Berlin at the time, which can be ascribed to the fact that most institutions barely managed to survive financially and thus could not afford to build their own spaces (Schmidt-Thomsen 4, 14). Schrader-Breymann personally oversaw the planning and construction of the new house as one of her private letters underscores:

Ich sitze nun unter Bauplänen, und morgen wollen die Herren wieder zur  
Beratung mit mir kommen. [...] Frau Wentzel scheint unbedingtes Vertrauen in

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<sup>115</sup> Written accounts of the women's communal working and living further highlight the impression of an intimate, family-like atmosphere. Althaus describes the latter as a "familienhaftes Zusammenleben" (Althaus 19) and Gierke writes: "Aus allen Berichten geht hervor, wie heimisch sich die Bewohnerinnen fühlten und wie familienhaft der Charakter des Heims war" (Gierke 93).

<sup>116</sup> The second house was built for the institution's domestic arts school which was headed by Hedwig Heyl.

mich zu setzen, sie schrieb mir gestern, daß sie die Baumeister angewiesen habe, alles nach meinen Wünschen einzurichten und sich so zu beeilen, dass am 2. September der Grundstein gelegt werden könne. Mir erscheint die ganze Sache immer noch märchenhaft. (Lyschinska 2: 571)

An article in the October 1896 issue of the *Vereins-Zeitung* demonstrates that some of her colleagues shared Schrader-Breymann's sense of wonder about the new construction: "Wer baute nicht schon ein Luftschloss für die vielgeliebte Anstalt? [...] Der Gedanke an eine Umsetzung all der schönen Pläne lag so fern! Da hiess es, sich in das Reich der Phantasie zurückzuziehen. Und nun, wie ein Wunder kommt es allen Beteiligten vor, dass die vielen kühnen Wünsche plötzlich befriedigt werden sollen!" (*Vereins-Zeitung* 39:11-12).

The two stately new houses in the Barbarossastraße, into which they moved in the summer of 1898 – 25 years after the founding of the institution – would mark the beginning of the impressive Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus campus which still houses the institution to this day.<sup>117</sup> *Haus I* housed the kindergarten, afterschool program, kindergarten teacher seminar, and the dormitory for the students, while *Haus II* was home to the *Koch-und Hauswirtschaftsschule*, headed by Hedwig Heyl (Ebert and Hesse 3).

For Schrader-Breymann, this new campus also marked a point of culmination of her long career as an educator and her struggle finding space for professional use – from the use of her parents' house in rural Watzum for the founding of her first school to the use of the backroom of a pub in Berlin as a teaching space to the acquisition of a

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<sup>117</sup> To check on the current state of the institution, see [www.pfh-berlin.de](http://www.pfh-berlin.de).

*Mietskaserne* after the short-term rental of various spaces, to ultimately, the construction of the new building in Schöneberg.

Unfortunately, Schrader-Breymann developed a kidney disease and was said to have been too ill to visit the new house in its completed form (Berger 75). Nonetheless, until her death in August of 1899, she apparently tracked the institution's progress with keen interest and was involved in decision-making processes even from her sickbed (*Vereins-Zeitung* 51:7). Without Wentzel-Heckmann's generous offer to have the houses built on one of her properties, a new construction on such a grand scale would most certainly have been beyond the women's reach (*Vereins-Zeitung* 39:12).<sup>118</sup> This shows once again that the importance of friendship and support among these women cannot be underestimated.

With the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, Schrader-Breymann created a female sphere that was unique in its scope, its size, and its goals. The *Haus* was a space in which women received professional training and in which they could also work as professionals while living among friends. The values in this space were based on the nurturing values of family life and as Grotemeyer's sketches illustrate, these values permeated the teaching and the communal living of the women. Their goals were multiple: to further the cause of women, to serve the community, and ultimately to transform society as a whole by training one teacher at a time and teaching one child at a time.

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<sup>118</sup> Wentzel-Heckmann did receive money from the institution for the site and the construction, but she offered it to Schrader-Breymann at a reasonable price that the institution could afford with the help of loans (Lyschinska 2:28).

Even though their work took place in a private institution, the women were serving the community. It was therefore public work, and also political work, as the women subverted the qualities ascribed to their nature by the dominant culture and used them to break out of the prescribed gender norms and to pursue a professional career as teachers and early childhood educators, thereby breaking into a male profession. As such, their community represents both a reaction to and a defiance of patriarchal gender norms.

Many of the women who trained at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus later founded their own kindergartens in Germany and abroad, and worked to spread the ideas of this new pedagogy that Schrader-Breyermann had developed.<sup>119</sup> In this manner, the institution was a catalyst for social change not only in Germany, but also abroad. Schrader-Breyermann's 1891 appointment to the "Central-Komitee für die deutsche Frauen-Abteilung bei der Weltausstellung in Chicago 1893" and the "Sonder-Komitee IX," which was responsible for representing Early Childhood Education (Schrader-Breyermann et al. iii-iv), underscores how influential the institution and its founder had become.

The asymmetry between the sexes and the pressure to conform to prescribed gender roles and expectations certainly seem to have persisted through the end of the nineteenth century in Germany, but as women pushed the boundaries and transgressed the norms, their relationship with the urban landscape and with the dominant culture was constantly being renegotiated and redefined, as Sarah Deutsch asserts:

The increasing ability of women to negotiate the urban terrain on their own terms was not a mere by-product of some relentless process labeled

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<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Sohr and Gierke 117-119.

‘modernization’. It resulted from the determination of individuals and organized groups to redesign the city for their own purposes. More than a back-drop, spatial configurations affected women’s abilities to meet their needs and desires. (Deutsch 284)

Schrader-Breyman’s personal story, in particular her return to work against her husband’s wishes and her complicated and ambivalent stance regarding women’s emancipation, seems to underscore the fact that these women were doing something they were not supposed to be doing. Yet Schrader-Breyman and her friends and colleagues displayed an astounding amount of agency, creativity, and professional competence to make the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus a success.

As these three chapters illustrate, over the course of roughly one hundred years, German women seem to have come a long way in their ability to take control of their own spatiality and to create places for themselves. These advances range from women writers portraying fictional heroines struggling to overcome their limited mobility to women actually moving to the metropolis in order to pursue professional opportunities as teachers, and from fictional heroines aspiring to found schools to women actually creating a large educational institution in Berlin. In the latter case, the women were not only shaping and subverting existing spaces, but also having new spaces built and thereby “physically manipulating the city” landscape and participating in the shaping of Germany’s capital (Deutsch 15).

Schrader-Breyman and her colleagues thus participated in the creation of what Despina Stratigakos boldly calls “a women’s Berlin” (Stratigakos ix). She insists that

“around the turn of the twentieth century, women began to claim Berlin as their own,” while at the same time conceding that “accounts of women as intentional and even visionary builders in Berlin are difficult to find.” Therefore, she describes “a women’s Berlin” as representing “a largely forgotten city, a site of both dreams and real spaces” (ix). As my discussion of the genesis of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus demonstrates, Schrader-Breymann and her colleagues must be considered to be among those women pioneers who left their mark on the capital’s urban landscape.

With the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, Henriette Schrader-Breymann fulfilled a long held dream. In a letter to her mother in 1849, while participating in the Fröbel seminar for kindergarten teachers, she wrote: “Ich sehne mich [...] nach einem Kindergarten, dessen Mauern mir nicht beengend sein werden sollten, denn ich werde innerhalb derselben mir einen Himmel schaffen.“ (Lyschinska 1: 111-112). She created that “heaven,” not only for herself, but for all of the women involved in the work at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus. And with that, she did what she set out to do, namely to establish “eine Wirksamkeit, die meine kühnsten Wünsche und Ideen realisieren kann” (1:112).

## **Epilogue:**

### **Contested Space and Gender: A Case in Point**

In Chapter 3, I briefly mentioned an incident that occurred in a Berlin pub in December of 1872, namely the female kindergarten teachers' presence being challenged by a male patron while the kindergarten was in session. Henriette Schrader-Breymann recounts the occurrence in a letter to her family. I want to dedicate this space to the incident and her account of it, since it is a striking example of how gender can affect the power dynamics governing spaces and one's agency within those spaces.

At the time of the aforementioned encounter, Schrader-Breymann had only recently taken over the leadership of a small kindergarten that was struggling to survive financially. Due to those circumstances, they did not have the means to rent a space for their organization, but managed to come to an agreement with the pub owner, so that they could use the back room free of charge. Unfortunately, I do not know the name of this particular establishment, or its exact location. But it was most certainly a place frequented by the upper-middle class if not upper class, as Schrader-Breymann's mentioning of the patron's elegant attire attests. As a matter of fact, it would have been unlikely for this group of bourgeois women to consider holding the kindergarten in a pub that was not regarded at least as a reputable bourgeois establishment, since Berlin was still highly segregated by class, gender, and ethnicity.

Furthermore, I think it is safe to assume that it was a venue whose clientele typically excluded any respectable, single middle-class women, and as a result, the pub must be seen as a gendered space, as a male space. Thus, by appropriating the pub to

obtain access to teaching space, thereby furthering their goal of working as early childhood educators outside of the home, the women were transgressing gender expectations and dominant norms. The question arises as to what kind of agency – if any – this group of female kindergarten teachers managed to display in the Berlin pub? Were they at all affected by the social expectations governing the use of this particular space? What role did gender play once they occupied the room?

The incident occurred one morning as the women were holding a Christmas party for the children. Schrader-Breyman recounts:

Eine echte Berliner Geschichte passierte bei der Bescherung.

...ein junger, elegant gekleideter Mann tritt mit frivolem Lächeln ein, läßt sich das Billard zurechtmachen vom Kellner und beginnt zu spielen, indem er die Kindergärtnerin und Agathe und die andern helfenden Damen mit unverschämten Blicken betrachtet, sowie den Dampf einer Zigarette in die Luft kräuselt. Ein Herr verweist ihm sein Betragen und bittet ihn, das Zimmer zu verlassen; er weigert sich mit der Ausrede, hier sei ein öffentliches Lokal. Der Herr ruft die Wirtin, sie spricht dem Unverschämten, der ein Stammgast ist, freundlich zu, sagt, daß man dem Kindergarten das Lokal für den Morgen überlassen habe und bittet ihn, mit ihr zu gehen. Er wird wütend gegen die Frau, daß sie ihm nicht gesagt, daß das Zimmer vermietet sei, und verläßt das Zimmer. (Lyschinska 2:7-8)

This is not the end of the *Geschichte*; in fact, a short while later, the proprietor returns and explains somewhat apologetically that the patron has asked how much the women are actually paying for the room, and subsequently offered to pay 25 *Taler* per hour and is

now officially renting the room.<sup>120</sup> She explains that since the kindergarten uses the room free of charge, she was unable to refuse him. The man then returns and resumes his game of billiards. The women ignore him as best they can.

Schrader-Breymann's words convey how outraged she is about the man's behavior and she refers to him twice as "der Unverschämte" (Lyschinska 2:8). Not only is he disrupting their class and challenging their arrangement to use the space for the kindergarten, but she clearly feels that he is harassing, insulting, and objectifying the women.

It is interesting to note that neither Schrader-Breymann nor any of her female colleagues speaks directly with the male patron, even though they are the ones who reserved the room. On that particular day, guests<sup>121</sup> were present for the Christmas party, guests who represented potential donors, as Schrader-Breymann professes. One of those visitors, a gentleman, decides to speak directly on behalf of the women and gets the landlady involved when the issue remains unresolved. Hegemonic gender norms most likely discouraged *Damen* from engaging in a direct confrontation with a man in this kind of a public space; it seems as though the women are "out of place" and muted in this space. The women's lack of initiative during the incident certainly underscores the assumption that the pub must be seen as a gendered space in which patriarchal power dynamics are firmly in evidence. Class may also have played a factor if the gentleman

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<sup>120</sup> On this particular day, the women had reserved two adjacent rooms in the back of the pub. However, Schrader-Breymann only mentions the use of the first of the two rooms in her account, that is, the one in which the incident occurred.

<sup>121</sup> Schrader-Breymann notes that some of the guests were members of the board of directors overseeing the kindergarten, and some mothers of pupils were apparently also present.

was indeed part of the upper class, as Schrader-Breymann's description of his attire suggests.

Nonetheless, this situation as Schrader-Breymann describes and perceives it is reminiscent of my discussion in the previous chapter of German bourgeois women's situation, where I talk about their complex and ambivalent status in late nineteenth-century Berlin. Schrader-Breymann herself repeatedly mentions in personal letters how unfavorable conditions for women's advancement were in Berlin at the time and in the particular letter quoted above, she also alludes to the fact that kindergartens in general did not enjoy much esteem (Lyschinska 2:8). Whether the latter played a factor in how the women were treated by the male patron in this particular incident is hard to say, however, since simply by working outside of the home, the women were already out of bounds and transgressing dominant representations of bourgeois femininity. In addition, in this particular situation, the women represented trespassers in an all-male institution or space (with the notable exception of the female proprietor).

The passage from the letter further highlights that space represents a resource (Tuan 57-58) and the question is who has access to it, and who controls it? Even though the women managed to gain entry to this space, they seem unable to exert much influence over it. After all, the women had reserved this particular room, yet the power dynamics governing this male space seem to favor the intruder, who, as a regular (and clearly powerful) patron, acts with confidence. Indeed, according to Schrader-Breymann's portrayal of the event, his whole demeanor exudes a hubris that seems to represent a gendered and perhaps classed response to the women. His refusal to back down and to

yield the space to them demonstrates a disdainful regard for the women's role as professionals (and most likely also as trespassers).

The patron's refusal to leave the room based on the argument that this is a public space is intriguing as well. When introducing the setting in her letter, Schrader-Breyman also refers to the establishment as "ein öffentliches Lokal" (Lyschinska 2:7). But within this public space, the women reserved back rooms, which could be seen as having the status of a private space within a public space. To complicate things further, the kindergarten itself is supposed to be open to the public or at least serving the community, even though it is a private organization. This community-based kindergarten, in turn, is holding a Christmas party which could be seen as a private event – then again, guests were present that day, so in a way, the party seems to be open to the public. The latter may not be entirely true, since the women could have extended an invitation to a limited group of people. The fact that the male patron ultimately resorts to renting the room to be able to play billiards suggests that he too is treating it as a private space, or as a public room that can be rented for private use. At any rate, as this example illustrates, the designation of public versus private can be intricate for certain types of spaces,<sup>122</sup> and in this particular case, there seem to be many layers of meanings involved. The term "öffentliches Lokal" seems to infer that everyone should have equal access to the space and be on equal terms within the space, but, as I have already discussed, it was in fact a (bourgeois) male space and the power dynamics and social expectations governing this space clearly put the women at a disadvantage. The designation of the pub as "öffentlich"

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<sup>122</sup> I want to thank Johannes Lehmann for pointing this conundrum out to me.

could also mean common, in which case women in general, but in particular bourgeois (or upper class) women would not be welcome in this space.

In this context, it is interesting to note what is at stake for the two parties involved: for the male patron, his morning pastime is jeopardized. For the women, however, the stakes are much higher – after all, Schrader-Breymann and her colleagues are in that space trying to conduct their work as early childhood educators. Indeed, as I mentioned before, on that particular day, there are special guests (potential donors) in attendance, and as a result, the women must be particularly keen on projecting a professional image. Yet it seems as though their very presence in this gendered space makes them vulnerable to being harassed – for that is clearly how Schrader-Breymann perceives the man’s behavior. It is also noteworthy that she introduces this story as “eine echte Berliner Geschichte,” possibly indicating that this was not the first time that their presence in the pub had been challenged by other patrons or at the very least alluding to the fact that the women, simply by being in a public space, a male space, were frequently subject to this type of harassment.

As far as the proprietor is concerned, she intervenes, but in the end seems powerless against the man. She may also not want to jeopardize her relationship with a regular patron. His behavior toward her – he gets angry with her and leaves the room – without doubt seems to reflect a lack of respect for her. Gender and class are most certainly at play here, for even if she is the establishment’s proprietor, it could place her in the bourgeoisie, but most certainly not the upper bourgeoisie. There is, further,

Schrader-Breymann's referring to her as "die Frau," which seems to suggest a lower middle-class status at best.

It would be extremely interesting to know whether she is in fact the owner (or perhaps the owner's wife) of the pub, or whether she is only an employee, but there is no mention of this in the letter. If the pub only represents her workplace, the question arises whether she, in the angry customer's view, was supposed to have a voice or whether she overstepped a boundary although she was expected to remain part of an "'invisible' workforce" (Clery 172). Then again, there is the other gentleman who turns to her and gets her involved in the first place, which seems to suggest that she possesses some level of authority.

I cannot help but wonder how this situation would have unfolded had the room been occupied not by a group of female kindergarten teachers and their young pupils, but rather by a group of (bourgeois or upper-class) men (like a *Männergesangsverein* or the *Schützengilde Berlin Korporation von 1433 e.V.*, for example). I would imagine that the patron would not have contested their presence, but rather would have yielded the room without further ado.

This is reminiscent of Ardener's assertion that "the 'theatre of action' to some extent determines the action" (Ardener 2). This seems to hold true for this example, since the pub does apparently place certain restraints on the women and their agency. Yet this incident also shows that spaces are often contested and that meanings and boundaries are constantly being renegotiated – even if in this particular case, the women did not gain the upper hand.

The outcome of this incident therefore may represent a temporary victory of a male patron over the women. Nevertheless, we need to look beyond this episode at the bigger picture. The fact remains that the women were able to secure this gendered space, they were able to use it subversively in order to teach outside the home, and that in itself represents a major victory, for without physical access to a teaching space their ambitions could not have been realized.

As we know, this teaching in the back room of a local pub only represents the starting point for Schrader-Breymann's kindergarten, for eventually the women were able to raise enough money to rent a space for the institution and it was able to blossom. And what started out as a small, financially ailing kindergarten turned into the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, a large, successful institution that included a kindergarten teacher seminar, a school for the domestic arts, and various other educational programs designed for women of the middle class.

Nonetheless, Schrader-Breymann's personal account of the incident discussed above not only offers valuable insights into a woman's perception of a public/male space in late nineteenth-century Berlin, but also a glimpse into women's subversive use of such a gendered space – a glimpse into a time when women's mobility and women's spatiality were greatly restricted and the city's construction as a male privilege was eminently encoded in its landscape and in many of its (public) spaces.

With this study, I intended to illustrate just how resourceful women seem to have been in their development of strategies of subversion and in their appropriation of gendered spaces, particularly as it relates to women's teaching and their attempts to

professionalize their pedagogical work in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany. Women's relationships with space and place and women's mobility were complex issues at best and attention to those dynamics and to the larger politics of space can greatly enhance our understanding of women's situation during that time – even if such an understanding, by its very nature, has to remain in the realm of an approximation.

Furthermore, women writers' use of the themes of restricted mobility and spatiality to challenge the status quo with regard to women's situation within the patriarchal society further underscores how central these issues were to women's situation at that time. With the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, Schrader-Breymann not only fulfilled her own "kühnsten Wünsche und Ideen," but also went far beyond the kind of achievement that women authors dared to create for their fictional heroines as little as twenty five years prior to the founding of the institution.

As bell hooks aptly writes: "Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice" (hooks 152). To help uncover some of these stories and unfold some of these histories by offering my impressions on the issues at hand was my goal for this study.

As I mentioned in the introduction, we are surrounded by space, yet its influence on our agency tends to evade us. As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, it is often within our power to wield that space and to create new places. In this way, the examples of women's resourceful use of space discussed in my study can not only enhance our

understanding of women's situation in a historical context, but can also serve as an inspiration for our everyday lives.

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