Shattering Fragility: Illness, Suicide, and Refusal in Fin-De-Siècle Viennese Literature

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Shattering Fragility: Illness, Suicide, and Refusal in Fin-De-Siècle Viennese Literature

Abstract
How fragile is the femme fragile and what does it mean to shatter her fragility? Can there be resistance or even strength in fragility, which would make it, in turn, capable of shattering? I propose that the fragility embodied by young women in fin-de-siècle Vienna harbored an intentionality that signaled refusal. A confluence of factors, including psychoanalysis and hysteria, created spaces for the fragile to find a voice. These bourgeois women occupied a liminal zone between increased access to opportunities, both educational and political, and traditional gender expectations in the home. Although in the late nineteenth century the femme fragile arose as a literary and artistic type who embodied a wan, ethereal beauty marked by delicacy and a passivity that made her more object than authoritative subject, there were signs that illness and suicide could be effectively employed to reject societal mores. I offer a queer feminist reading of writing on and by women in Vienna 1900 that complicates our understanding of female subjectivity and sexuality at the time. My study explores works by both canonical male authors—Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Stefan Zweig—and less known female authors—Betty Kris, Else Kotányi, Elsa Asenijeff, making a necessary contribution to existing scholarship on fin-de-siècle Vienna and to feminist criticism that aims to uncover overlooked texts by women. Furthermore, the dissertation is an example of how a queer feminist methodology serves literary analysis by providing new questions and entry points when approaching both canonical and less known texts and figures. Part one, "Fragility," establishes the foundation for understanding feminine fragility in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Chapter one provides an overview of women in Vienna 1900 and outlines their options at the time, while chapter two locates the Viennese hysteric in a history of hysteria and of the femme fragile. Divided into three chapters, part two, "Shattered," considers literary suicide and death as a kind of feminine strategy of refusal. Throughout I address the role writing plays in a fragility that both shatters and has been shattered: letters, diaries, case studies all contribute to a newly complicated fragility.

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SHATTERING FRAGILITY:
ILLNESS, SUICIDE, AND REFUSAL IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE VIENNESE LITERATURE

Melanie Jessica Adley

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Melanie Jessica Adley

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For Peter and Sabine Adley
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Writing a dissertation is a funny thing. It is a deeply personal endeavor, requiring much introspection, isolation, and long lonely hours. But it is also a work destined for a greater public (if even a very small one) and its completion is reliant on all forms of support. Fredric Jameson tells us “history is what hurts.” I do not think there is a single academic who would not locate some pain and embarrassment in their scholarly past: “smart” can denote a sharp, stinging pain as much as it does intelligence. I find myself looking back at the path I have followed to get to this finished dissertation and at all the help I have received along the way: it has not all been painful—far from it.

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The Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at the University of Pennsylvania was my home for 6 years. I am thankful for inspiring and supportive faculty and colleagues. Caroline, Kerry, Matt, and the honorary department member Leif have been both top-notch peers and also great friends. So, too, dear Jos across the hall in Comp Lit. My dissertation committee members—Heather Love, Simon Richter, and Jean-Michel Rabaté—have provided excellent feedback on my project and have helped me shape the way I see my work. The Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program provided a second home and safe space for me on campus. I would like to thank Shannon Lundeen for being both a role model and friend.

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ABSTRACT

SHATTERING FRAGILITY: ILLNESS, SUICIDE, AND REFUSAL IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE VIENNESE LITERATURE

Melanie Jessica Adley

Catriona MacLeod

How fragile is the femme fragile and what does it mean to shatter her fragility? Can there be resistance or even strength in fragility, which would make it, in turn, capable of shattering? I propose that the fragility embodied by young women in fin-de-siècle Vienna harbored an intentionality that signaled refusal. A confluence of factors, including psychoanalysis and hysteria, created spaces for the fragile to find a voice. These bourgeois women occupied a liminal zone between increased access to opportunities, both educational and political, and traditional gender expectations in the home. Although in the late nineteenth century the femme fragile arose as a literary and artistic type who embodied a wan, ethereal beauty marked by delicacy and a passivity that made her more object than authoritative subject, there were signs that illness and suicide could be effectively employed to reject societal mores. I offer a queer feminist reading of writing on and by women in Vienna 1900 that complicates our understanding of female subjectivity and sexuality at the time. My study explores works by both canonical male authors—Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Stefan Zweig—and less known female authors—Betty Kris, Else Kotányi, Elsa Asenijeff, making a necessary contribution to existing scholarship on fin-de-siècle Vienna and to feminist criticism that aims to uncover overlooked texts by women. Furthermore, the dissertation is an example of how a queer feminist methodology serves literary analysis by providing new questions and entry points when approaching both canonical and less known texts and figures. Part one, “Fragility,” establishes the foundation for understanding feminine fragility in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Chapter one provides an overview of women in Vienna 1900 and outlines their options at the time, while chapter two locates the Viennese hysteric in a history of hysteria and of the femme fragile. Divided into three chapters, part two, “Shattered,” considers literary suicide and death as a kind of feminine strategy of refusal. Throughout I address the role writing plays in a fragility that both shatters and has been shattered: letters, diaries, case studies all contribute to a newly complicated fragility.
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Introduction :: Shattering Fragility

I write because I have nothing else to do in the world: I was left over and there is no place for me in the world of men. I write because I’m desperate and I’m tired, I can no longer bear the routine of being me and if not for the always novelty that is writing, I would die symbolically every day. But I am prepared to slip out discreetly though the back exit. I’ve experienced almost everything, including passion and its despair. And now I’d only like to have what I would have been and never was.
— Clarice Lispector, The Hour of the Star

Hope is the opposite of security. It is the opposite of naïve optimism. The category of danger is always within it.
This hope is not confidence...
- Ernst Bloch. “Something’s Missing”

This dissertation offers a queer feminist reading of writing on and by women in Vienna 1900 and complicates our understanding of female subjectivity and sexuality at the time. Specifically, I investigate representations of mainly bourgeois women and their fragility in order to reconsider illness and suicide as potential gestures of authority and refusal. The contributions of this project are twofold. Firstly, it is a necessary addition to existing scholarship on fin-de-siècle Vienna and to feminist criticism that interrogates works to uncover forgotten or overlooked texts by women. Secondly, it is an example of how a queer feminist methodology serves literary analysis by providing new questions and entry points when approaching both canonical and lesser-known texts and figures. In this introduction, I begin with a reading of Stefan Zweig’s Brief einer Unbekannten in order both to model the kind of analysis the project will provide and to establish recurrent themes of fragility, fragility, and refusal. I then provide an overview, first, of the queer feminist theory that structures and guides the project and, second, of fragile femininity in
fin-de-siècle Vienna. I undertake these feminist investigations from the off-center perspective afforded queer inquiry in order to show how illness and suicide became strategies of refusal for bourgeois women. In bringing queer feminist analysis to Viennese literature from 1900, Shattering Fragility expands views on feminine fragility, sexuality, and subjecthood.

**Shattering Fragility and the Writing Cure**

Stefan Zweig’s *Brief einer Unbekannten*, first published in 1922, breaks chronologically with the majority of the texts that are to come in this project. Schnitzler published *Fräulein Else*, too, after the Second World War, but its setting is clearly Vienna 1900. The time of Zweig’s novella’s composition is unknown, and the setting is ambiguously early twentieth-century Vienna. Seemingly removed from the fin de siècle, *Brief einer Unbekannten* provides, however, an excellent vantage point to both look back at the beginnings of the century but also look forward to the dissertation to come while considering the relationship amidst femininity, fragility, and writing. Framed with scenes in which an omniscient narrator paints the letter’s recipient, the novelist R., as he receives the letter and then reacts to it upon its completion the bulk of the novella is an unmediated letter from an anonymous female author. Along with R., the novella’s reader encounters the letter’s contents and with it the unknown woman’s life and death.

In brief summary, the unknown woman tells R. her life story, which is simultaneously the story of her love and devotion to him, the man who never knew her. Hers was an obsessive love and her life was one guided by her infatuation with the novelist. In her lifetime they had three series of encounters: she was the young girl next
door, secretly in love with him; a beautiful young woman—intriguingly forward and familiar—with whom he spent three intimate nights; and finally a bold and attractive woman, from whom he purchased the pleasures of one night. Despite the intimacy of the second encounter and the fact that, unknown to him, a child was borne out of the brief affair, R. has no recollection of her. The unknown woman, however, devotes her life to him. She never marries another man and deflects any commitments in spite of devoted and kind suitors. She raises her son with great care, supporting him by selling herself as a kind of high-class escort. Through her son, she feels close to R., and, despite the stigma of prostitution of any form, people are kind and generous to her. She writes R.: “Alle, alle Menschen haben mich verwöhnt, alle waren zu mir gütig – nur Du, nur Du, Du hast mich vergessen, nur Du, nur Du hast mich nie erkannt!”¹ With the death of their child and the loss of any chance for recognition by the novelist, she feels entirely alone. This was a woman who only existed through her relationship to the two men she loved: R. and their child. Without them she finds no reason to continue living. It is in writing, however, that she is able to find her own voice and to tell her story, but this ability comes only in death: autonomously, she only exists in the letter and, at that, after death. Her life’s story becomes a postscript.

Upon returning to his apartment on his forty-first birthday, the novelist R. finds a mysterious letter awaiting him. The narrator introduces the letter as one with unfamiliar handwriting and that initially appeared too lengthy to investigate. Once R. is settled with tea and a cigar, however, he returns to the mysterious missive:

Es waren etwa zwei Dutzend hastig beschriebene Seiten in fremder, unruhiger Frauenschrift, ein Manuskript eher als ein Brief. Unwillkürlich betastete er noch einmal das Kuvert, ob nicht darin ein Begleitschreiben vergessen geblieben wäre. Aber der Umschlag war leer und trug so wenig wie die Blätter selbst eine Absenderadresse oder eine Unterschrift. Seltsam, dachte er, und nahm das Schreiben wieder zur Hand. “Dir, der Du mich nie gekannt”, stand oben als Anruf, als Überschrift.²

Already the handwriting reveals insight into the unknown sender: the many handwritten pages have been written by someone who appears to be an agitated woman. What does it mean that someone, some woman, sat down and hastily composed this lengthy letter?

The agitation that the script communicates adds to the mystery around its unknown author. Defying standard letter-writing practices, there is no return address, no signature, and only the mystifying address at the top of the letter: “Dir, der Du mich nie gekannt.”

The woman writing never signs her name, nor does she address the novelist by name. Anonymity cloaks the novella and the letter, and, yet, despite the lack of names or bodily presence, the written communication offers a deeply intimate and personal account. The letter begins simultaneously somber and dramatic: “Mein Kind ist gestern gestorben—[…].”³ Already the juxtaposition of the informal address, “Du,” and the accusation that he never knew her raises the question how this woman could be on such personal terms with a stranger. The abrupt beginning of the letter—the announcement that her child has died—jars the reader and presumably R., although we do not break from the narrative of the letter and return to him until the very end. This most intimate fact—the death of a child, of her child—not only acts as an additional element of

² Ibid 151
³ Ibid 152
anonymous intimacy, but also serves as a structural trope throughout the letter. The unknown woman grounds herself and the history she recounts with this sobering piece of information. Each time one phase of her narrative ends, she returns to the death of her child.⁴

The unknown woman prefaces the writing of the letter as an act of deep loneliness. Her son has just died, and the act of writing serves to keep her from falling victim to deep despair: “Denn ich kann nicht allein sein mit meinem toten Kinde, ohne mir die Seele auszuschreien, und zu wem sollte ich sprechen in dieser entsetzlichen Stunde, wenn nicht zu Dir, der Du mir alles warst und alles bist!”⁵ She questions early on in the letter whether or not she will be able to finish the letter: “Manchmal wirds mir ganz dunkel vor den Augen, vielleicht kann ich diesen Brief nicht einmal zu Ende schreiben – […].”⁶ On the one hand, her tragic circumstances make it clear that the completing of a coherent narrative seems a daunting task. On the other hand, the difficulty in writing and actually completing such a narrative raises a question: what would happen if she finished the letter? The letter she writes is her life’s story; thus, one might infer that finishing the letter wraps up her actual life, as well. R. holds the completed letter, in which she will reveal all her secrets to him, and she reassures him of the above inference, namely that she is dead:

Zu Dir allein will ich sprechen, Dir zum erstenmal alles sagen; mein ganzes Leben sollst Du wissen, das immer das Deine gewesen und um das Du nie gewußt. Aber Du sollst mein Geheimnis nur kennen, wenn ich tot bin, wenn Du mir nicht mehr

⁴ Ibid 152, 167, 178, 183, and 194.
⁵ Ibid 153
⁶ Ibid 153
She continues to write that she is speaking to him, “sprechen.” She is speaking to him and not with him: a one-sided, controlled conversation. In her isolation and sadness, writing to him provides her company, but it also fulfills the urgent need to disclose the deepest confidences of her life. Although the letter’s contents compromise the unknowing novelist, the morose promise of her death should, in part, protect R, from what the reality of these facts might mean, were she still alive. More importantly, though, her death protects her character and her story from contamination. R. cannot interject and influence the way in which the unknown woman narrates her life, and because of the distancing imposed by her death, she feels removed from the obligation to tailor her history so as to avoid hurting the man she loved so deeply and who also caused her so much pain.

For the unknown woman living means to be silent and dying means to be able to speak out—in writing. The relationship between embracing death and reading your own life and, then, taking your own life and forcing others to read your death resonates strongly with Zweig’s novella. Like many women of her time, the unknown woman only existed through her relationships to men: to the novelist, to her son. Her existence was all the more fraught, however, as her relationships were compromised ones and secret. No one knew of her infatuation with R. and no one knew who the father of her son was. By

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7 Ibid 153
8 Margaret Higonnet proposes in her article on feminine suicide that “To take one’s life is to force others to read one’s death. […] To embrace death is at the same time to read one’s own life” (103-104).
placing her entire life’s purpose in these particular men, especially in R., she forced herself to silence her own voice and story. The reader never learns the specific circumstances of her death, but she clearly loses the will to live, and she surrenders to death, embracing it. In this embrace, she does seem to read her own life, but she also writes it out and sends it away, fixing her story in this epistolary form. In some ways, her letter is an extended shout, a complaint, but also a vindication for how she lived: “Elf Jahre habe ich geschwiegen davon, und werde bald stumm sein in alle Ewigkeit: einmal mußte ich’s ausschreien […]”

By welcoming her death and sending R. the letter, she forces him not so much to read her death as to read her life that led to her inevitable inability to live without the men who justified her being.

Like the female characters I discuss in *Shattering Fragility*, the unknown woman finds her independent voice in writing. She writes that which in life she could not speak aloud; death facilitates the reading of her life by others. Death frees the words and makes them autonomous, mirroring the autonomy that, it would seem, some women could only find in death: a removal from societal expectations and obligations. Their words come alive once their bodies have ceased to exist. Writing as a woman for whom death seems a welcome solution and not a feared problem, Zweig’s unknown woman’s writing begins to mirror her own bodily dissolution. In the last two paragraphs of her letter and life, ellipses begin to break up her narrative for the first time, or, rather, they begin to break it down: “Ich kann nicht weiter schreiben . . . mir ist so dumpf im Kopf . . . die Glieder tun mir weh, ich habe Fieber . . . ich glaube, ich werde mich gleich hinlegen müssen.”

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9 Zweig 182
Vielleicht ist es bald vorbei, […] Ich kann nicht mehr schreiben.”\textsuperscript{10} The strength and purpose her life and narrative once held disappear now that the recounting of her tale is over and her narration has returned to the ineluctable present, i.e. to the death of her son and to the resulting loss of any connection she had to R. She mentions a few times that she has not even a single written line from or a picture of R. to tie her to him: “Keine Zeile habe ich von Dir in meinen letzten Stunden, keine Zeile von Dir, dem ich mein Leben gegeben.”\textsuperscript{11} Her son became a reminder and symbol of her life-long infatuation: the loss of him and the completion of her recollected past leads to a shattered present that can only look backwards or to death.

For the unknown woman the present is unbearable and there is no future in which she can actively participate. Her death and letter allow for an alternative kind of future: her story haunts R. and her words become a testimony of a life devoted to him. At the very end she remembers that with her death the only hint of her existence in R.’s life would come to a close too: the white roses she anonymously sent him every year on his birthday would no longer arrive. Although he never sent her any memento, the regular presence of her unspoken devotion in his life validates her: “Aber wer . . . wer wird Dir jetzt immer die weißen Rosen senden zu Deinem Geburtstag? Ach, die Vase wird leer sein, der kleine Atem, der kleine Hauch von meinem Leben, der einmal im Jahre um Dich wehte, auch er wird verwehen!”\textsuperscript{12} The demise of even this seems much more tragic to her than the loss of her own life. The ellipsis after “wer” and the repetition of “wer” points to

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid 195-196
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid 178, also cf 195
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid 196
a splitting of self. She should be this “who,” but the unknown woman who bought him roses only existed if there were a tie to R. That tie, her son, died and she cannot continue living, and yet she wants to retain a part of her in R.’s life. She wants to live on immortal and immutable in the letter and, also, once a year in the roses—a token of her love.

The final paragraph of her letter develops the notion of how she will live on in his sphere: through the letter and roses. Now that he has learned about her, she asks him to honor her memory by keeping up the tradition of the roses. The final lines of the letter repeat this desire: “[…] ich glaube nur an Dich, ich liebe nur Dich und will nur in Dich weiterleben. . . ach, nur einen Tag im Jahr, ganz, ganz still nur, wie ich neben Dir gelebt . . . Ich bitte Dich, tu es, Geliebeter . . . es ist meine erste Bitte an Dich und die letzte . . . ich danke Dir . . . ich liebe Dich, ich liebe Dich . . . lebe wohl.”13 The increasing number of ellipses and the repetition of her love perform the transition of her bodily existence into a presence that should remain purely within R. as her love and investment in him. The novella concludes with his reaction: “Er spürte einen Tod und spürte unsterbliche Liebe: innen brach etwas auf in seiner Seele, und er dachte an die Unsichtbare körperlos und leidenschaftlich wie an eine ferne Musik.”14 If only for a moment, the unknown woman achieved her intended goal with the letter: R. knew her, knew of her love, and felt her presence in him, in his home.

As has become clear in the foregoing, Zweig’s Brief einer Unbekannten demonstrates a relationship between writing, fragility, and the potential for authority and refusal. Writing offers the possibility for fragile women to act beyond their expected

13 Ibid 196
14 Ibid 197
limitations. In diaries, they freely voiced societal critiques or sexual desires; in letters, they made demands, asserted agency, and controlled their own narrative. Although psychoanalysis is frequently associated with what one of its earliest patients Anna O. (i.e. Bertha Pappenheim) dubbed the “talking cure,” writing, too, offers curative possibilities. Freud comments at length on the role writing plays for hysterics as observed by Jean-Martin Charcot in the first part of the Dora case study:


Freud touches on something particularly insightful about the relationship between hysteria and writing, but then quickly veers away from it in order to support his normative narrative of a young girl in love with an older man. In the case of Dora, according to Freud, her aphonia results from Herr K’s absence: writing became, then, her  

only means of communication while she pined for the object of her affection. The emphasis of the young girl in love narrative distracts not only from the broader symbolism behind young women who stop speaking, but also from the potential that writing offers them. There is a difference between *losing* speech and *refusing* speech. Speech might be *lost* even through an unconscious *desire* to stop speaking, and not only because a lover is out of town. By not speaking, women create a divide between themselves and the rest of the world. By writing they can find, sometimes, a different voice, a means of communication they can control, or even a blank page to write themselves anew or away.

The “writing cure,” then, implies that, beyond stepping in to replace speech, the act of writing might alleviate an hysterical of symptoms, offer a space of agency or authority for women made submissive by family and society, or even bring about a cure. But what is a cure? And what is the cure that writing could offer, or psychoanalysis, or death? Society shatters fragile women; but fragile women also shatter expectations. In “shattering fragility,” perhaps the notion of a cure or of being healthy, whole, and “normal” is shattered, as well. To be cured does not translate necessarily into falling in step with the gender expectations determined by society. There might be a cure desired by society that differs from the cure desired by an individual woman, or even the cure that seems the best (or only) option for that woman. Death or illness may actually play into this cure, when the problem is the oppressiveness of family life or the impossibility of changing the course offered young women. Similarly, writing allows women who feel stuck or oppressed to be silent and also to speak. A diary allows for the private airing of
grievances; a letter allows them to be sent away. They write that which could not be said aloud in the settings in which they find themselves confined. The cure is the relief from these unspeakable feelings. In death, the writings replace the authors: the words, ideas, and complaints stand autonomous and assume an authority that the women otherwise could not have embodied in life. These remaining writings after death can be seen, too, as the remains of what was shattered: the shards of a fragile life. Sometimes these writings are sharp and seen by some as dangerous, as we will see in Vera’s fictional diary, *Eine für Viele: Aus dem Tagebuche eines Mädchens* (1902), in chapter three. Like looking through broken glass, these writings can offer an alternative perspective or altered perception of what is real in the past and present, and what is possible in the future.

The writing cure can also take the shape of writing other women’s undoing in place of one’s own. In chapter five, I treat the *Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten* (1902), in which Irene writes about the demise of the *femme fatale* Hella and of her school friend, while she follows her emancipated path. Just as reading about Vera’s struggle and ultimate succumbing to the injustice of the double moral standard could have influenced and assisted other young people, writing these things too could be therapeutic. Writing can free one from the burdens of the mind and stand in not only for that which cannot be spoken aloud but also for lives that cannot be lived. The act of writing—be it writing in diaries, writing letters, or writing and publishing fiction—provided women with a compensation for the lives they had to live. The written form became an outlet especially for bourgeois women, who were educated and enlightened and yet still victim to traditional expectations of marriage and family.
What is more, the space of writing enables the founding of a community for the isolated, fragile, and weak that crosses continents, epochs, and generations. A story of despair and struggle, for example, might seem depressing and hopeless to many, but to someone who feels alone in her own oppression it offers a beacon of something akin to hope: someone else knows or once knew what you are feeling. These authors and their readers are, in fact, not alone in their suffering; their feelings are not wholly unique. Reading someone else's despair dampens the sharpness of what one feels. Perhaps a dialogue can begin: a fragile, young woman reads of grief and writes out her own woes in diary or a letter. Maybe the interlocutor is not physically present, or even alive or real, but the act of writing has the potential to assuage the pain and isolation. The externalized internal pain, although deeply personal, assumes an autonomy and sense of containment. In sending away the creative output of sadness, another person somewhere unknown in time and space will recognize part of themselves in what they read.

The space of a text thus provides the possibility for empathy: it allows fragility and despair to exist and to rest easy, ridding them of some of their more shamefully self-seeking and self-destructive implications. The coping with or curing of melancholy and neurasthenia through marriage and family life need not be the only path; rather, a woman might embrace pain and fragility and learn how to recognize it elsewhere, and how, possibly, to find the potential of this misconstrued weakness. Fragility might take some other free-standing form that can exist in the world and perhaps reach an audience of others suffering similar fragilities. Nevertheless, the fragile woman, who has transformed fragility into an external product, or who has been the recipient of a sad missive from
some other time and place, remains fragile; at least she is perceived this way. There is no sanguine solution, but instead a resolution that fragility simply is and that that is not always negative.

The community of fellow fragile yet resistant young women, then, not only offers companionship, but also reassurance that maybe fragility can be productive. Being fragile does not always directly translate into being weak. Submitting to sadness, sickness, and grief might, on occasion, serve some purpose. Young women in fin-de-siècle Vienna found a community of fragile young women who, in novels, stories, and fictionalized diaries, questioned the world they were expected to inhabit. In the imaginative and empathetic space created by the text there was to be found a kind of unexpected utopia where isolated women could meet on the page and find some hope in not being entirely misunderstood.

In the following chapters, the interrelation of femininity, fragility, and writing acts as a recurrent theme. I intend to complicate and expand a feminist literary history, to broaden the canon, to reconsider illness and literary representations of suicide as not always negative. Central to all of this is the role writing played for women. The medium of writing offers a space to communicate femininity perhaps differently or alternatively than might be accomplished in person. Letters and diaries provide a canvas for women to control their narratives and to refashion their language. The silent gain a voice and the fragile find unexpected strength in writing. It is the act and space of writing that shatters fragility and that complicates notions of fin-de-siècle femininity.
Shattering Fragility and Queer Feminism

In a recent issue of *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (*PMLA*), the prominent English scholar Michael McKeon uses the occasion of an article printed in the same journal a year earlier to espouse the point of view that queer feminist scholarship appeals only to a very limited audience and cannot contribute anything to a larger body of criticism and analysis.\textsuperscript{16} Although himself interested in questions of early modern sexuality, McKeon takes fault with the author for not providing those whom he imagines to be the average readers of *PMLA* with a lesson in early modern studies or a history of early modern sexuality that more closely resonates with his own scholarship.\textsuperscript{17} The accused author, Melissa Sanchez, in fact takes the time in her article, “‘Use Me But as Your Spaniel’: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Early Modern Sexuality,” to carefully articulate how a queer feminist theoretical framework allows for an expanded understanding of women’s sexuality in the early modern period, one that does not overlook sexual fantasies and desires that are neither healthy nor egalitarian.\textsuperscript{18} In order to make this framework clear to an audience that may not be familiar with queer feminist scholarship, Sanchez provides a clear overview of how certain assumptions both in queer and feminist theory arose from the sex wars. She effectively explains how queer theory can be reintegrated into investigations of female sexuality in early modern studies. Peculiarly, McKeon chastises Sanchez for her preoccupation with “political encounters” and accuses her of alienating the “actual readers” of the *PMLA*, who—according to


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid

\textsuperscript{18} “‘Use Me But as Your Spaniel’: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Early Modern Sexuality,” *PMLA* 127.3 (2012): 493-511
McKeon—it would seem, have no interest in work that draws from queer or feminist theory or work that is either “political” or new. As Sanchez writes in her response to the complaint, “[McKeon] shrugs off a key insight developed by studies of gender, sexuality, race, class, colonialism, and globalization: *all* historical and literary studies do political work, whether these studies conserve or contest dominant values—and whether they own up to their politics or not.”

I mention this exchange here to elucidate how common it is still for queer or feminist scholarship to be dismissed as work preoccupied by matters not relevant to the object of study or to a broader audience. Alarmingly, McKeon dismisses an entire article for “disappointing” him and readers by not offering an “account of what we know about early modern sexuality,” because of its queer feminist framework. Of course, one would hope that original scholarship would offer us something we do not know about a topic, and Sanchez provides readers with very convincing readings of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590) and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (c. 1594–96) that broaden our understanding of early modern women’s sexuality. A reaction like McKeon’s makes evident that work that is queer and even feminist continues to be disregarded regardless of the quality of the work or the innovation and importance of its contribution. Although I do not focus specifically on homosexual desire or explicit sexual behaviors, queer and feminist methodologies guide the way I approach my research. In particular, the anti-social strain of queer theory provides me with a structure to attend to

19 Ibid 474
21 McKeon, 473
failure, passivity, and fragility in fin-de-siècle Vienna, thereby enabling me to contribute new insight into a rich field of study.

Before Teresa de Lauretis purportedly coined the term “queer theory,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggested that the current state of an incomplete and fractured critical analysis would benefit from and be made more complete by assuming the “relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory.” For the queer theory that comes after Epistemology of the Closet and for my own methodology in this project the notion of shifting the vantage point of analysis away from center opens a door to an almost infinite array of necessary and beneficial critical work. By looking out from a point removed from the centered and dominant majority onto not only minority objects but also back to that very centered and dominant majority the off-centered critic discovers new angles, shadows, and previously hidden surfaces, just like the letters and diaries of fragile women offer new perspectives in and on fin-de-siècle Vienna. Already the perspective afforded past and present feminist criticism has yielded a body of scholarship that casts light onto how gender plays out in literary and cultural-historical texts. Critics have assumed too the lens of race and class or intersections of race, class, and gender when approaching texts. These approaches can, of course, be both centered or decentered. The decentered queer perspective, however, provides the potential for rediscovery or reassessment regardless of lens or subject of study, and it is from this decentered perspective that I approach a feminist topic.

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Inherent to queer studies is a strong presence of injury and damage, which, as Heather Love writes, "has made critics in this field more willing to investigate the darker aspects of queer representation and experience [...]". The "dark side" of modern queer representation is of theoretical interest when considering female figures rejected by a feminist historiography looking to exalt past women's victories. Queer and feminist theory, however, have a reputation for being at odds with one another, and yet, queer theory stems in part from feminism and the sex wars of the 1980s. In the article McKeon takes issue with, Sanchez elegantly demonstrates how queer and feminist theory work together as queer feminism to attend to questions that neither quite can tackle individually. For example, she points out how female heteroeroticism can hardly be considered either feminist or queer. Queer feminism, however, creates a framework to consider female sexuality queerly, that is to say, from a perspective that allows for sex for women that is not egalitarian, monogamous, or tender.

Both feminism and a queer theory that is strictly adherent to same-sex relations run the risk of narrowing possibilities and enforcing a limited understanding of “healthy” sexuality. Sanchez writes:

I explore representations of seemingly unfeminist sexual fantasies, along with equally unfeminist displays of competition, overinvestment, selfishness, and anger—not because I think that such impulses are unquestionably positive or liberatory but because I believe that unless we grapple with their persistent appeal, feminist work can end up policing or pathologizing desires.

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25 Consider, for example, the work of Gayle Rubin. 26 Sanchez, “Use Me But as Your Spaniel,” 493. 27 Ibid 494
that do not readily conform to ideals of mutuality, cooperation, and egalitarianism.\textsuperscript{28}

Incorporating queer studies into feminist work serves to prevent such pathologization by providing additional perspectives and a different, and thereby broader, scope for both feminist and queer studies. From the decentered queer perspective feminist work can reconsider female sexuality and behavior that previously has been coded shameful or disempowering.\textsuperscript{29} This queer, decentered feminist take, in turn, allows for a consideration of meekness, suicide, and illness: “[…] by adopting a queerer and more pluralistic view of feminist sexuality, we can come closer to dispelling fictions that locate happy endings only in the “normal world.”\textsuperscript{30} Queer feminism, to put it in the terms of this dissertation, allows us to think differently about the plight of young women who write melodramatic diaries and end their lives, who choose death over life and marriage, illness over health.

Along these lines, Judith Halberstam introduces in \textit{The Queer Art of Failure} a kind of queer feminism that she refers to as “shadow feminism.” Although Halberstam’s own archive is pop cultural and her relationship to literary analysis is fraught, what she proposes as “shadow feminism,” even in its embryonic form, provides a frame of reference for reassessing feminine fragility in literature:

This feminism, a feminism grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence, offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing, and forgetting as part of an alternative feminist project, a shadow feminism which has nested in more positivist accounts and unraveled their logics from within. This shadow feminism speaks in the language of self-destruction, masochism, an antisocial femininity, and a refusal of the essential bond of the mother and

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid 496-497
\textsuperscript{29} cf Ibid 496-497
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid 506
daughter that ensures that the daughter inhabits the legacy of the mother and in doing so reproduces her relationship to patriarchal forms of power.\footnote{Judith Halberstam, \textit{The Queer Art of Failure}, Durham, NC: Duke, 2011: 124.}

Although our methods differ, the alternative feminist project suggested by Halberstam, with its roots in territory otherwise considered shameful or negative, inspires a line of questioning I find productive when approaching \textit{fin-de-siècle} Viennese literature. For example, we see how its potential plays out in \textit{Eine für Viele}, which I analyze in detail in chapter three. In a fictionalized suicide letter and diary, Vera, the protagonist and author’s pseudonym, acts out her unusual protest in refusal and passivity, by creating her own absence and in being audibly silent: she refuses expectations by removing herself from them through the sacrifice of her health and life. Her absence negates compliance. Her death or mediated voice—through the text—creates a kind of active muteness: hers is the passive voice. If we push Halberstam's idea of “shadow feminism” further, the notion of a shadow suggests a negative of the kind of feminism that is in the light. Feminism insists on change, demands expanded rights and opportunities; its shadow, in turn, fails to conform and to thrive and thereby refuses the future in order to expose the present. Suicide and illness, in the case of the \textit{femmes fragiles}, performs a shadow-feminist, or, rather, a queer-feminist gesture.

The fictional Vera in \textit{Eine für Viele} writes out her protests in her diary and in a suicide note, and her final statement is her own death. She offers us a model of the outright rejection of a young woman's options by removing herself from them in death, allowing her diary and suicide letter to serve as an anonymous vehicle to be distributed
after her suicide to the Viennese public. Other young fragile Viennese women also found spaces where they were free to reveal their failures and hardships, in which they could work through and forget by speaking out in the privacy of a soundproof room, on the psychoanalyst’s famous couch. These women self-destructed, submerged themselves in illness, and, in rejecting health, resisted social norms. In being ill or dying young, they jeopardized or even denied motherhood and the reproduction (both literal and figurative) of the present state of affairs. The *femme fragile* in literature and the fragile, psychoanalytic patient refused to live in the manner in which she was expected to live.\(^{32}\)

If, as Lee Edelman argues, the future is simply a repetition of past circumstances that insists upon politics inherently detrimental to certain populations, then illness and suicide become defiant as they signal either a retreat from or negation of this harmful cycle.\(^{33}\) From the critical perspective Edelman and other anti-social queer critics offer, we see how a suicide letter allowed the fragile, young, Viennese woman to write “the end” to her participation in a bourgeois play of the submissive, angelic wife and the dominant, “tainted” husband whom she must redeem by her purity. Playing along would only

\(^{32}\) In suicide, they also refused to the “cruel optimism” that Lauren Berlant describes as “maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object.” Optimism, in Berlant’s assessment, finds an individual, or a people, hoping for something that ultimately will not bring resolution, happiness or change. The figure I study rejects attachment to an optimistic narrative of a profitable marriage and children that would only sustain this problematic attachment to a way of living, ultimately limiting and oftentimes damaging for women. (Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Durham, NC: Duke, 2011: 24). More often than not, this problematic object is life itself, and life is precisely what Vera rejects. Berlant titles an essay she posts at her blog “Supervalent Thought” “The Failure to Fail to Thrive is Life”. September 17, 2012 <http://supervalentthought.com/2011/09/06/the-failure-to-fail-to-thrive-is-life/>.

\(^{33}\) Lee Edelman points to the repetition driving life, but Edelman’s understanding of repetition is not simply that it maintains a certain status quo and assuages a prior shock: “the future is mere repetition just as lethal as the past” (*No Future*, Durham, NC: Duke, 2004: 31). The “future” for Edelman has everything to do with existing heteronormative expectations and anti-queer structures, structures insistent upon reproduction and family. Saying “no future” means refusing present circumstances, refusing the repetition of practices and expectations that exclude alternate modes of being. cf Edelman 1-31.
perpetuate the problem: Vera writes in her diary: “das ist der Weg, der langsam und sicher zu einem furchtbaren Verfall führt.”34 Because women like her were not educated in the reality of the world they inhabited, they raised their sons to sin and their daughters to be chaste and innocent. Vera knows that she could not avoid participating in this cycle. Although she does not always explicitly criticize family structures (more often than not marriage gets the brunt of her critique), it is not a stretch to see a clear repudiation of the present terms of fin de siècle, bourgeois male and female expectations in her writing and suicide.

I argue that this repudiation is queer, in the sense outlined by José Esteban Muñoz: “Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”35 What is being rejected and the world insisted upon is, in the case of my project, largely feminist. Insofar as young women of the fin de siècle rejected what society offered them as the “right” path to being a woman, they were feminist figures, but how they rejected the expected path—in illness and suicide—was queer. They were queer feminists in their rejection of the affirmation of family, marriage, of even sexuality; they “embraced” their negativity and fragility and acted within those confines.

This is not to say that all representations of fragile femininity at the fin-de-siècle carried a message of refusal and defiance. Competing notions of fragility existed at the

34 Vera Eine für Viele 91.

35 José Esteban Muñoz, Cruising Utopia, New York: New York University, 2009: 1. The “concrete possibility” for Muñoz, of course, is tied up with Ernst Bloch and utopia. Muñoz is in many ways responding to and against Lee Edelman, and putting the two together here is, admittedly, a bit unnatural, but for my purposes they serve as two sides to a coin.
time. There were *femmes fragiles* who followed very much the tradition of the passive, ethereal, wan woman. Yet there were representations of *femmes fragiles* in which their delicate suffering or even suicide can be read as self-authored statements: some young women wrote their own conclusion to the lives that were otherwise very much out of their control. There were also the patients of Freud, for example, whose families read their neurasthenia as pure illness, but whose suffering and life gained a new kind of legibility through psychoanalysis, both on a personal level for the patient in the analyst's office and publicly, albeit anonymously, in the case study. In "real life" as well as in literature and the arts, fragile women both suffered as victims of their time and also found ways within the limitations of their existence to remove themselves from an undesired path.

**Shattering Fragility and fin-de-siècle Vienna**

Expectations of demureness, virtuousness, and fragility in women culminated in physical and psychic decline at the *fin-de-siècle* across Europe. The successful containment and cultivation of the weak, submissive woman, who, nevertheless, was meant to represent innocence and purity, canceling out the sinfulness of man in the public realm, left in its wake a population of women plagued by neurasthenia. At the dawn of the twentieth century, when great progress and innovation was sweeping Europe and America, women, especially in the privileged classes, were left looking backwards at outdated and unrealistic models of behaviors and actions. Their fragility became chronic and illness seemed inevitable, suicide likely. Domesticity, antiquated
gender expectations, and a moral double standard for men and women set the limits of the isolated woman’s potential for defiant action. These women often succumbed to physical and psychic illness and some chose to end their lives.

This project seeks to complicate existent understandings of feminine fragility in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Even in this era of decline and the limitation of women’s options, illness and suicide sometimes allowed these women to refuse the limited expectations offered them, and here I see a shattering. But what does shattering fragility actually mean? And is it the fragility that is shattered, the fragile woman who is shattered, or is fragility or even the fragile doing the shattering? “Shattering fragility” should imply precisely all of these notions. The fragile may be easily broken, but the shards left behind might be sharp and might be able to cause some damage. Or perhaps the subtle distinction between being victim and ill versus escaping through illness or in death offers a different way of conceiving fragility. In this dissertation, I propose that the fragility embodied by young women in fin-de-siècle Vienna could play out in expected ways but with unexpected intentions and consequences. A unique set of circumstances, not least of which was Freudian psychoanalysis and its early preoccupation with hysteria and talk therapy, created spaces and platforms for the fragile to find a voice that revealed the detrimentally contradictory circumstances of women. Literature and art at the turn of the twentieth century often represented the femme fragile as victim. Yet there were signs that illness and suicide could be effectively employed to reject societal mores. In sickness, a woman retreated to the isolated bedroom; she was freed from sexual and family obligations. Psychic illness led her to the private therapy room, in which she spoke of her
trauma in a safe space. The anonymous case study brought her story to the public, if even a limited public. More dramatically, suicide offered a final refusal of the present. Through suicide a woman rejected a life that would never change for her. In fictionalized representations of the choice of death by women, we find someone who died, potentially, for a cause: the present did not offer fair and sustainable conditions for most women. Revealing the inequity through writing and demonstrating suicide as a defiant act brought the plight of women to a wider audience and could occasionally inspire steps towards reform.

Throughout this project I consider who the femme fragile was in 1900 Vienna and look at ways in which her fragility—through illness, suicide, and writing—facilitated a possible refusal of societal mores. I distinguish both between the femme fragile and other ‘types’ (or tropes) of women and between the type of the femme fragile and notions of fragility more broadly conceived. While the femme fragile is a type of woman that appears both in expectations for real life women and in literary and artistic representations, fragility (both psychic and physical) can be read as a symptom indicative of a particular moment in history. I will be focusing on feminine fragility, but in many ways emphasizing the feminine is redundant as fragility was considered inherently feminine or, when not in women, as signaling effeminacy, which was most certainly negative. To be feminine, or effeminate, was to be fragile, and fragility relayed any number of associations from physical frailty, to psychic despair, to suffering, to

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Nevertheless, to act on fragility, to express fragility, suggested a certain privilege: lower-class women could not afford to be recumbent and frail. To lie on the couch, remain in the darkness, and be alone in a room, paradoxically, required a societal, cultural, and familial framework that would enable the circumstances in which fragility was both cultivated and its repercussions supported. Throughout this dissertation, I attempt to isolate feminine fragility in fin-de-siècle Vienna in order to investigate its manifestations, its implications, and its potential effectiveness. How did the fragile woman in Vienna 1900 align with the tradition of the femme fragile? In what ways could fragility serve women, and what characteristics of fin-de-siècle Vienna facilitated the possibility for manifestations of fragility that defied expectations instead of simply being a negative effect?

**Fragility: Shattered**

Part one, “Fragility,” establishes the foundation for understanding feminine fragility in fin-de-siècle Vienna. In the first chapter, “‘Ein Luder will ich sein, aber nicht eine Dirne’: fin-de-siècle Vienna for Women,” outline the choices available to women in Vienna around 1900. An overview of how male intellectuals and artists viewed and represented women and female sexuality leads into who women “actually” were, historically, at the time. The women’s movement, while certainly progressive, held a bourgeois privilege that pushed for surprisingly conservative values. Motherhood and

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37 The feminine non-female, i.e. the effeminate male, twisted those qualities prized in women—delicacy, passivity, frailty—as well as the already negative side of “feminine” qualities—weakness, fickleness—and thereby represented the “worst” of humanity. The effeminate was a grotesque version of man and could not be trusted. The effeminate man was a sign of modernity’s corruption and imminent downfall.
monogamy, however, were not the goal of all women. Arthur Schnitzler’s novella *Fraulein Else* (1924) provides an example of a young woman for whom the options offered by the women’s movement were neither appealing nor realistic.

In the second chapter, “Flucht in die Krankheit: Hystерия and the *femme fragile* in Vienna,” I consider the Viennese hysteric as part of an expanded history of the *femme fragile*. Before outlining a genealogy of the *femme fragile*, I trace the study and analysis of hysteria from Paris, where a young Freud studied with Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpétrière, to Vienna, where Freud entered private practice and began treating the young daughters of his social circle, many of whom were displaying hysterical symptoms. The chapter follows the shift from the observation of hysteria and of a particular kind of hysterical patient in Paris to the analysis and treatment of hysteria and a very different class of patient in Vienna. The Viennese hysteric was both bourgeois and fragile, whereas the French was poor and highly erotic. Joseph Breuer and Freud’s case studies—“Anna O,” “Fräulein Elisabeth von R,” and “Dora”—set the scene for an investigation of a trend of young women plagued by neurasthenia. They were torn between the oppression of their gendered, familial expectations and the progress and innovation beyond the walls of their sheltered existence, which resulted in hysterical outbursts.

Their illness did not merely allow these young women to recede within the confines of their homes, but also opened up the possibility of the liminal space therapy provided them. The "talking cure" and the possible publication of the story turned therapy into a medium through which the reality of these women came to the public. The therapy offered middle- and upper-class women a safe space to talk out the way in which the
contradictory expectations of women led to psychic despair, and the psychoanalytic case study brought this reality to a wider audience without implicating the individual woman. Illness—psychological illness—provided fin-de-siècle Viennese women with an escape that allowed them to refuse certain obligations and to possibly bring to voice anonymously the ill effect of the double moral standard.

In part two, “Shattered,” I consider literary suicide and death as a kind of feminine strategy of refusal. Women who choose death might take their body to transform oppression and victimhood into reaction and refusal. The three examples of fin-de-siècle literature I investigate in this chapter reveal female literary figures who engage in an exploration of the problematics of women's lives at the time via a variety of minor genres—chatty inner monologue, notes, diary entries, letters. Sometimes the discussion assumes a serious, pensive tone; other times the tone is flippant and melodramatic, reflective of young, privileged women. Regardless of tone, the present circumstances these women depict throughout the works establish a reality in which they simply cannot exist. They are unwilling to conform to the normative expectations of their time and they recognize that in their small world, the ability to change the course of their personal future is impossible. Therefore, they choose to die. Their bodies become a vehicle to make a final statement: to write the end, to compose their final scene, to control the final image of their body and life. Their bodies become their parchment as they compose a missive of refusal.

In an article on representations of feminine suicide in the nineteenth century, Margaret Higonnet intriguingly juxtaposes two statements, each assuming a slightly
different point of perspective, concerning suicide, specifically feminine suicide: “To take one’s life is to force others to read one’s death” and then “To embrace death is at the same time to read one’s own life.”\(^{38}\) Suicide results in laying out your abandoned, sacrificed, refused life for others to consider; in reading your death they contemplate the life that preceded it. The act of acknowledging and even welcoming—generally premature—death leads to the assessment of life: perhaps it was the reading of the life lived that resulted in choosing to die. That Higonnet introduces these two statements in this particular order warrants a moment’s consideration. Should not the act of embracing death actually precede suicide? Should not the reading of one’s life occur before others can read your death and thus life? Logically, it would seem so. But perhaps these actions are concurrent. One takes one's life and thus embraces death. The consequential legibility of your death for others, who in turn assume control of your posthumous narrative, results in a reading of your own life as preparation for an exit begins.

Higonnet’s order proves to be revealing in literary instances. In chapter three, “There’s a Future in Dying: The Case of Vera,” I discuss the diary novel *Eine für Viele*. In it, Vera’s suicide letter comes before the diary entries included. We read her suicide before we then observe her writing and thus reading her own life, ultimately embracing her own death. The fictionalized diary as a performed posthumous publication of the musings of a young woman whose life was intentionally cut short by its author (i.e. by the young woman herself) plays out in a complicated set of relations between taking life and writing/reading death, embracing death and reading/writing life. We could push it

\(^{38}\) Higonnet 103 and 104
one step further then and consider that the woman who writes her own death sentence erases the life that would have been ahead of her and leaves behind her death and past life as something to be read and contemplated by others. Chapter four, “Writing and Erasing the Body: Venus am Kreuz,” reveals the same to be true of Else Kotányi’s heroine, Garda, in her novella. The reader encounters Garda’s notes presumably after she has killed herself; so too in Elsa Asenijeff’s Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten, which I discuss in chapter five. The protagonist’s friend, Hella’s, most intimate writings only came into her possession after Hella committed suicide. Reading these women’s lives and reading both their hopes and critiques is contingent on their demise. Suicide is their refusal, but it also seems the key to making others confront the reality of what they were refusing, regardless of whether the message is well-received or not.

While their written critiques are sharp and scathing, the means of death these fragile, fin-de-siècle Viennese heroines choose are far from brutal or violent. Higonnet put forths the following thesis: “Gradually, in what we may call a development of the Ophelia complex, the suicidal solution is linked to the dissolution of the self, fragmentation to flow. The abandoned woman drowns, as it were, in her own emotions.”\(^{39}\) A solution in dissolution seems an apt wordplay, although Higonnet chooses to remove any possible agency from the feminine solution. I see the direct alignment of the feminization of suicide with the “denial of a woman’s ability to choose freely” as more complicated. The dissolution of self need not always be purely passive. Suicide, even one characterized by disintegration and drowning (literally and or figuratively) is,

\(^{39}\) Ibid 106
ultimately, a choice. That is how dying becomes refusal. A woman fashions herself an end to life: escaping and fleeing prove themselves valid means of refusal for *femmes fragiles* who desire to break with norms and expectations. The representation of feminine suicide does not always imply the destruction of feminine individuality and identity. At times precisely the opposite can be the case: in death, in suicide, women assume an identity and allow themselves to break from norms and expectations and be an individual.

At first glance, a figure, a feminine figure, marked as fragile might seem an unlikely candidate for defiance. Especially in a moment where there were women who are participating in first wave feminist movements, the *femme fragile* is easily either forgotten or dismissed as an insignificant victim. Nevertheless, as Heather Love writes, “[t]he history of Western representation is littered with the corpses of gender and sexual deviants.” 40 There is something to be gained by looking back to weaker figures, to the corpses left behind, in the process, taking account of the ways in which some fragile, feminine figures found ways to enact refusal within the boundaries of their limited existence.

The three literary examples in part two serve the double purpose of illustrating the possibility of defiance through suicide and of introducing authors and texts that are less familiar to the canon. The purpose of my dissertation is not to feature women writers simply because they are women, but rather because their work represents important literary and social trends of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Recuperating these texts and bringing them into dialogue with better-known and respected texts by male authors should both

40 Love, 1
complicate and broaden our understanding of Viennese Modernism. The act of writing plays a central role for these women writers, as well as for Schnitzler. The interaction of these women both literally writing notes, diaries, and letters and figuratively writing their own conclusions to their lives with their own bodies points to the potential of a legacy and of a future that comes out of death.

I sketch briefly the biographies of the main three female authors in this dissertation at the beginning of chapters three, four, and five to serve both as further illustration of women and women's history at the fin-de-siècle in Vienna and also as a tale about archival research and the difficulty in recuperating female authors lost to literary history. The story of the archive as institution is sometimes a troubled one: an archive should represent a reliable source of biographic and historic detail about individuals. This is, of course, not always the case. A complete and accurate archive requires those who are archived to have lived a life that might be ‘archivable,’ by which I mean both lived and documented. Women, although we know they wrote in diaries and authored numerous letters, have not, historically, left as easily traced impressions in history as men. Feminist and queer historiography have made efforts to recuperate some of the historical and archival materials lost, but it is nearly impossible to recover everything. It is easier to recreate the biographies of intellectual and artistic female figures, but attempts are being made, too, to recover the archives of everyday women in history.\footnote{One such archive that hosted me is the Sammlung Frauennachlässe in Vienna, which since 1989 has been collecting an archiving letters, notes, documents, and small possessions from Austrian women from the 19th century to the present.} This excursus on archives functions in part as a disclaimer for the incomplete and at times contradictory
pictures of the women below. The very incompleteness and contradictoriness of their biographical stories only stresses the need to continue the important work of expanding our perception of history, and also points to the very fragility of historical evidence and fact.
Part 1 :: Fragility
Chapter 1 :: “Ein Luder will ich sein, aber nicht eine Dirne”: *fin-de-siècle* Vienna for Women

Also auch Sie schwärmen für die moderne Frau, für jene armen, hysterischen Weiblein, welche im somnambulen Jagen nach einem erträumten, männlichen Ideal den besten Mann nicht zu schätzen verstehen und unter Tränen und Krämpfen täglich ihre christlichen Pflichten verletzen, betrügend und betrogen, immer wieder suchen und wählen und verwerfen, nie glücklich sind, nie glücklich machen und das Schicksal anklagen, statt ruhig zu gestehen, ich will lieben und leben, wie Helena und Aspasia gelebt haben.

- Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus im Pelz*

*Fin-de-siècle* Vienna presented women simultaneously with new opportunities and very few real choices. On the one hand, the city was undergoing rapid modernization and, on the other hand, it was stuck looking back to family traditions and gender expectations dating to earlier in the nineteenth century. Women, in particular, felt the effect of this paradox as, especially in the bourgeoisie, family structures, despite an active women’s movement and increasing access to education, and still largely restricted women’s options. In general, Vienna represented a disparate empire whose glue seemed suddenly soluble in the upheaval at the end of the nineteenth century. By 1918 not only would Europe have suffered previously unknown bloodshed and a reconfiguration of borders and political alliances, but also the Austro-Hungarian Empire would have met its end, leaving Austria, Hungary, and its citizens with uncertain allegiances. Before World War I, however, Vienna was teeming with the promise of a new century.\(^{42}\) The arts were flourishing, with pioneering circles developing in all arenas: for the visual arts there was the Secession, for literature Jung Wien, for music the Second Viennese School—proponents of all of these circles remain influential to this day. While the arts, sciences, and philosophy underwent

\(^{42}\) The city was to have a new face with the development of the Ringstraße, with its ornate grand buildings. At the same time architects such as Adolf Loos (1870-1933) began to push towards a more minimal, clean-lined approach to buildings.
innovative transformations, politically speaking Vienna found itself under the Catholic conservative, anti-Semitic rule of the mayor Karl Lueger (1844-1910), and the middle and upper classes largely adhered to traditional and conservative family structures and to gender expectations that were not wholly reflective of changing times.

Stefan Zweig recalls in his memoir, Die Welt von Gestern, the security and optimism of the nineteenth century that marked his early childhood and the lives and mindset of his parents’ generation:

Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert war in seinem liberalistischen Idealismus ehrlich überzeugt, auf dem geraden und unfehlbaren Weg zur 'besten aller Welten' zu sein. Mit Verachtung blickte man auf die früheren Epochen mit ihren Kriegen, Hungersnöten und Revolten herab als auf eine Zeit, da die Menschheit eben noch unmündig und nicht genug aufgeklärt gewesen.

The nineteenth century as Zweig depicts it had a certain innocence and naiveté: “everyone” believed in progress and no one ever thought that the best of all worlds would not come to fruition. He describes the century of his parents' Vienna as a "Jahrhundert der gesicherten Werte." The certain values and strong faith in "Fortschritt" blinded an entire generation, multiple generations even, to the reality that the idealistic world of progress and security stood on the thinnest of ice, with demons of unknown dimensions beneath. In contrast to this idyllic vision


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43 Like many governments in Europe, the rise of liberalism in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was closely related to increased resistance against the aristocracy. After 1848 liberals came to power, making their initial success more a default assumption of authority after the defeat of the old forms of power than of their own achievement. Particularly in the Austro-Hungarian empire, where the Emperor Franz Joseph reigned from 1848 until 1916 and was revered by his people, liberalism shared the stage with imperial bureaucracy. Already in the 1880s parties arose to challenge the liberals: Christian Socials, Pan-Germans, Socialists, and Slavic nationalists. In 1895 Karl Lueger was elected as mayor of Vienna. Franz Joseph refused to sanction Lueger as mayor and it was not until 1897 with the intervention of Pope Leo XIII that he assumed his seat. By this time the writing was on the wall, and the once liberal and middle-class haven Vienna, capital of an empire in decline, had turned conservative. For a full account of the political history see Carl Schorske, Fin-De-Siecle Vienna; Peter Gay, Schnitzler's Century; Philipp Blom, “Rebelling in a World of Façades.”

45 Ibid 20
of progress, Elaine Showalter compares the end of the nineteenth century in Vienna to the most recent turn of one century to another in terms of financial crises and a certain looming sense of apocalypse.\(^{46}\) In a 1892 essay, “Fin-de-siècle,” the essayist, publisher, and translator Marie Herzfeld describes the “Fin-de-siècle Stimmung” as one marked by “das Gefühl des Fertigseins, des Zu-Ende-gehens.”\(^{47}\) Focusing on the personalities and tendencies of fin-de-siècle Vienna, Herzfeld emphasizes the sense of disillusionment: the future seemed to hold nothing and there was a sense of being stuck in a present moment without end. The present represented a sustained end, a constant dissatisfaction.\(^{48}\) Despite scientific innovation and burgeoning creativity the hopefulness of the prior generation fell flat and many inhabitants of the fin-de-siècle turned inward to a dark psychic space, which, sometimes, proved productive.

**Representing Women in a Sexually Charged fin-de-siècle Vienna**

In fin-de-siècle Vienna artists and intellectuals were no less fascinated with femininity than their predecessors; nevertheless, the rise in interest in and discourse on human sexuality in the late nineteenth century influenced how women were being perceived and represented. In the realm of science and psychology, women were included as objects of study in larger discussions of human sexuality and desire. In the same year that Freud published his case study of Ida Bauer (Dora), which will be discussed in chapter two, he also published his essays on sexuality, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1905), entering into an existing conversation about sexuality and sex in Vienna and beyond. Havelock Ellis in England, Magnus Hirschfeld and Richard von Krafft-Ebing in Germany, and Vienna's own Otto Weininger were among the fin-de-siècle

\(^{46}\) Elaine Showalter refers to the apocalyptic in *Sexual Anarchy* (1).


\(^{48}\) In *Sexual Anarchy*, Elaine Showalter discusses the origination of the term *fin-de-siècle* in France during the 1880s to describe the sense of "terror and decadence" that comes after revolution or great change (2).
proponents of a new sexological discourse. Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886) demonstrated that sexuality was a legitimate field of scientific study and that sexual desire and orientation played an important role in psychology and psychiatry. His approach to treating patients can, in some sense, be seen as a precursor to psychotherapy.49

Seventeen years after Krafft-Ebing’s study and two years prior to the Dora case study and Freud’s essays on sexuality, Otto Weininger made another contribution to the discussion of human sexuality and gender with a psychological, anthropological, and scientific treatment of male and female sexuality and its implications in his 1903 *Geschlecht und Charakter*, which he published only months before committing suicide at the age of twenty-three. After developing a “biological” foundation of male and female gender in the first part of his work, Weininger expanded his main goal to participate not only in a discussion of sexuality, but to tackle the “Frauenfrage” of the time. He set out to answer once and for all, with scientific and psychological proof, the question of whether or not men and women were equal and whether women were capable of those things typically mastered by men. He found that women were not equal to men. Indeed, they were of a lesser-developed consciousness than men and, in fact, were purely sexual. As Weininger claimed the act of sex to be immoral, women then, precisely due to what he viewed as their inherently sexual being, could be nothing other than immoral. With this immorality and inferior consciousness came a certain selfishness: Weininger viewed women as unable to do anything selflessly unless they were doing something to please the men they loved. Women were more likely to be able to act in accordance with their men and, in turn, act morally for them if there was a balance in female- and maleness between the two partners.50 Otherwise, women must

50 Weininger attempted to introduce the notion of percentages in regards to male- and femaleness in a given man or woman. A man might be 30% female and 70% male. A female of complimentary proportions (70% female and 30% male) would be a suitable match for such a male. Females with a higher percentage of
be viewed as impure, according to Weininger, who urged men to protect their moral beings through chastity and prudence. The oversexed female Weininger introduced harkens back to the *femme fatale*, and suggests that the expectations of feminine fragility and modesty were, themselves in fact, “unnatural.” Weininger’s opinions were certainly extreme and often offensive, but that women were sexual and had desires that perhaps clashed with the demand to be almost asexual underscores the problematic nature of the figure of the *femme fragile*.

Although Freud often has been read by subsequent generations of gender scholars as anti-feminist and even misogynistic in his preoccupation with male sexuality and the male phallus, his treatment of female sexuality and of sexuality in general diverged greatly from Weininger’s and opened up a space in which sexuality could be discussed—female sexuality included. His discussion of sexuality was not the utterly condemnatory one introduced by Weininger. For Freud sexuality is human, as is the suppression of common sexual urges and fantasies, which results in a number of psychological and physical disturbances. The role of the psychoanalyst, then, was to assist a patient in uncovering these issues so as to understand his or her formerly mysterious manifestations. This space that psychoanalysis opened up proves central to understanding representations of women in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, as well as to a reconsideration of fragility and its potential ability to refuse norms.

Overall, from Krafft-Ebing to Freud, the development of and preoccupation with psychoanalysis and sexology fed into a growing trend of representing the troubled psyche and sexuality in both literature and the visual arts. Schnitzler’s *Lieutenant Gustl* (1900) demonstrates

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51 Not to be overlooked is that Otto Weininger introduced a parallel between women and Jews. Women were immoral beings, inferior to men; Jews were immoral and inherently feminine, inferior to Christians, who were seen as more masculine. Considering Judaism as a “geistiger” phenomenon and not a racial one, Weininger prophesized that Jews and females acted as menaces and posed a threat to society.
an innovative use of stream-of-consciousness narration to capture the psychological turmoil of a young man; his drama *Reigen* (1897) pushed the limits of what level of sexuality could be put on the stage by capturing the sordid realities of Viennese sexuality in ten acts. Gustav Klimt’s oeuvre captured well the way in which women were perceived in the cultural imagination of late-nineteenth century Vienna. His rendition of Judith [Figure 1] reveals the sexuality and seductive nature embodied by the *femme fatale* through her provocative gaze, head tilted back, and the display of one breast. Her confident posture seems to dare the viewer, while her ornate costume with its pattern reminiscent of screaming, angry faces lends her an exotic and dangerous air. The full effect of the *femme fatale* is made all the more apparent when set in opposition to Klimt’s portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer [Figure 2]. Adele Bloch-Bauer represents the wan and ethereally
beautiful upper-middle class daughters of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Compared to Judith, her posture seems hesitant, and the positioning of her hands and her sloped shoulders suggest frailty. Her gaze is distant and somewhat indifferent, while the eyes on her dress might suggest to the viewer that she, the *femme fragile*, is to be looked at and not touched. The costume and setting are just as ornate and gilded as that of *Judith I*, but here the young woman seems overwhelmed by and lost in her setting, firmly fixed in and restricted by it, while Judith emerges from it. Adele Bloch-Bauer's positioning in the portrait both mirrors the position of women of her class in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and reflects upon the actual life of this particular young woman. Young daughters were expected to complement the wealth and success of their families. The privilege surrounding them, however, overwhelmed their autonomy; they faded into the gilded fabric of their circumstances. Nevertheless, the real Adele Bloch-Bauer, the *salonnière*, played host to intellectuals and artists in Vienna and thereby exhibited her cultural capital in Viennese society. Ornamentality and passivity, though, were the attributes that marked her as successful in her role as host to and object of the great men who attended her salon.53

52 In the following chapter I will discuss in detail these female types, in particular the *femme fragile.*
Visual artists such as Egon Schiele began to isolate the individual and attempted to represent the raw psyche and sexuality. His oeuvre consists of numerous sketches of angular nude bodies. Women and their anatomy are often the focus [Figure 3]. Unlike Klimt’s models, who often came from bourgeois circles, Schiele's muses are of a very different pedigree. If we consider the portrait below, we see a woman, posed coquettishly. Her lips are painted and eyes lined; her hair tousled; her figure is entirely naked except for her stockings, giving her a lewd air. The fully exposed genitalia and the one visible nipple render her an eroticized female body, highly sexualized. At the same time, however, there is a nearly clinical element to the portrait. The lines are raw and exact, there is no elaborate gilded background (indeed, no background at all), the angles of her body and the visible ribs and hipbones indicate malnourishment, and yet the charcoal smudges lend an air of street dirt: this woman very likely comes from the world of
prostitution. We see two three sides of fin-de-siècle women in the works of Klimt and Schiele. Klimt represents the fragile middle- to upper-middle-class woman in all her oppressive finery, while Schiele is revealing what lies beyond the ornamentation and the bourgeois repression.

The difference we see in the kinds of models that Klimt and Schiele work with parallels the difference in hysterical patients for Charcot in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century and for Freud in Vienna at the turn of the century. Charcot and the other male physicians played the role of observer and diagnostician, much like Schiele, who put a sexualized working-class object on display in his portraits. Freud, on the other hand, used talk therapy and deep analysis of the psyche to break through the layers of bourgeois repression that become tangible through layers of gold and ornamentation nearly drowning the female subjects in some of Klimt's portraits.
(figure 2, for example). The relationship between male artist and female muse or the male doctor and female patient relates to the ways in which femininity has been cultivated. When we turn in part two to women writers, we can consider how the representation of fragility changes (or does not) when the direct male gaze and voice of the male painter or author is absent.

**Women and the Changing Times in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna**

The idiosyncratic nature of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna set the stage for many different kinds of inhabitants, who were living sundry experiences, both positive and negative. No less than others, women both benefitted from and suffered at the hands of shifting times and dispositions. As we will see in the next chapter, the *femme fragile* in Vienna around 1900 was indeed fragile, but her fragility challenged an overly simplified understanding of fragility as weak, victimized, and voiceless. Women, whom society had isolated in the home, cultivating their fragility and innocence in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, found themselves in a fraught position at the *fin-de-siècle*. The choice the fictional Fräulein Else faces in Schnitzler’s novella—between being sold by her family or giving/exposing herself and thereby taking her life—reflects the plight of certain women. Vienna was not an entirely modern place. Great innovation was coupled with stifled tradition and conservative politics.In *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, gender roles, especially in the family, remained firm enough that the promise of new opportunities and a variety of freedoms clashed with societal and familial expectations. The middle- and upper-middle-class daughters of *fin-de-siècle* inhabited this contradictory space marked by the promise of a new era and smothered by conservatism and oppression.

Nevertheless, the great wave of change that swept over Europe at the time also had some positive influence for women: an increasing number of women's newspapers, groups fighting for
women’s rights, and opportunities for women in professional and educational arenas developed. In the late nineteenth century, a robust feminist movement began to take shape in Vienna that sought not only women’s suffrage, but also access to education and equal rights and worker compensation. As elsewhere in Europe, starting shortly after the failed revolution of 1848, women in Vienna began to organize themselves around the labor front as well as education rights. Harriet Anderson, in *Utopian Feminism: Women’s Movements in fin-de-siècle Vienna*, thoroughly outlines the history of the women’s movement in Vienna in an effort to fill in the missing historical accounts of Viennese feminists in the scholarship surrounding the renewed interest in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Anderson attempts in her methodical investigation to shed light not only on the practical politics of women at the time, but also onto feminist theory and feminist imaginative literature. The study draws attention to the kinds of backgrounds from which participants in the women’s movements came—diverse, although, largely, bourgeois: the stultifying home lives of many of these women pushed them into the movement and allowed them to find liberation and individuality in feminism.

54 A brief selection of the newspapers: *Allgemeine Frauenzeitschrift; Dokumente der Frauen; Neues Frauenleben; Die Wählerin;* and *Wiener Hausfrauenzeitung*. A selection of the organizations: Allgemeiner Österreichischer Frauenverein; "Athenäum" - Verein für die Abhaltung von wissenschaftlichen Lehreund für Frauen und Mädchen, Wien; Christlicher Frauenbund Österreichs; Demokratischer Frauenverein; Hilfsverein für Lehrmädchen und jugendliche Arbeiterinnen, Wien; and Neuer Wiener Frauenklub. Of the papers and the organizations there were many more. The website “Frauen in Bewegung: Diskurse und Dokumente der österreichischen historischen Frauenbewegung,1848 – 1918,” affiliated with the Nationalbibliothek Österreichs and Austrian Literature online, offers a comprehensive overview of newspapers, organizations, and active women related to women’s movements in Austria (http://www.onb.ac.at/ariadne/vfb/index.htm, 5 June 2013).

55 There are a few excellent studies, both historical and more cultural analytical, of women in Vienna at this time period which provide a much more thorough overview than is here necessary. For example see Agatha Schwartz, *Shifting Voices*; Alison Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*. Helga Hofmann-Weinberger and Christa Bittermann-Wille have constructed an excellent web resource at “Ariadne” which features not only a chronology of the women’s movement in Austria from 1848-1918, but also biographies and bibliographies of female writers and access to a number of digitized texts and periodicals from the time (http://www.onb.ac.at/ariadne/vfb/index.htm).

Literary representations of feminists tend to offer the not always flattering male perspective of the women’s movement. In Arthur Schnitzler's novel *Der Weg ins Freie* (1908), Therese Golowski is a strong-minded, political woman. She gives herself to the "politisches Leben," leaving her little time for familial and societal obligations: "'Ja, leider läßt mir mein Beruf wenig Zeit, Familienverkehr zu pflegen,' erwiderte Therese und schob ihr Kinn vor, was ihr Antlitz plötzlich männlich und beinahe häßlich machte."\(^{57}\) Her strength, political interest, and career focus take away from Therese's femininity in this moment. The feminist, as represented here by Therese, especially in upper-class circles, seemed at best a novelty and at worst an ugly symptom of changing times. Intellectual circles were skeptical of women like Therese’s unrefined, unsophisticated approach to society and politics. Intellectuals turned inward and questioned the nature of self, while ruling politicians pushed for progress that often neglected the needs and demands of women. A number of women, however, were ready to take their concerns into their own hands.

At the *fin-de-siècle* women such as Marianne Hainisch (1839-1936) were pushing for educational reform; others, such as Rosa Mayreder (1858-1938), were fighting for professional rights; still others, such as Grete Meisel-Hess (1879-1922) or Irma von Troll-Borostyáni (1847-1912), were contributing to the feminist philosophical discourse of the day, adding their voices to discussions of the "sexuelle Frage" of the day, which made public discussions of women's sexuality and the double moral standard that existed around male and female sexuality. While Anderson makes a point of assuming the perspective of the *fin-de-siècle* feminists in order to avoid a too condemnatory stance against the seeming conservatism of the women’s movement, for the sake of my project and for present-day feminists looking back to 1900 it seems important to stress the inherent conservatism of the movement and the emphasis—largely if not

\(^{57}\) Schnitzler, *Der Weg ins Freie*, 77.
exclusively—on monogamy, motherhood, and the feminine. When in part two I look to women writers from the **fin de siècle**, I will consider how fictional texts offer space for a potentially more subversive, self-reflexive stance, or for a stance that is more perplexingly subtle, than in philosophical and political texts. Anderson does consider literature at the end of her book, but the limited examples she gives overlooks texts by women, some by the same women she does touch on in her investigation, that promote a murkier side to feminine refusal.  

One example of **fin-de-siècle** Viennese feminist thought is Grete Meisel-Hess's lengthy treatise on sexuality and women's rights, *Das Wesen der Geschlechtlichkeit: Die sexuelle Krise in Ihren Beziehungen zur Sozialen Frage & zum Krieg, zu Moral, Rasse & Religion & insbesondere zur Monogamie* (1916), in which she exalts motherhood ("Die Sehnsucht nach dem Kinde ist der heiligste Instinkt, den die Natur in das Herz der Frau gelegt hat."). She prioritizes the practical over the romantic in marriage: the man should support the woman and his family.  

Denouncing a notion of compulsory marriage as the cause of sexual crisis in women, Meisel-Hess argues that the crisis stems from within the institution of marriage itself: "In Wahrheit aber liegt die Krise in den Zuständen, die die trotz und neben und in der Ehe noch immer herrschende Paniximie [sic] schafft, / in der Tatsache, daß die tiefste Idee der Ehe in der Praxis noch zu selten ihre Realisierung findet." Monogamy, according to Meisel-Hess, is the new sexual order, and she praises this above all else. Marriage fails and a sexual crisis exists at the time, because monogamy is not practiced. In praise of monogamy, she writes: "[Das Wort monogam] ist das

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58 For example, Anderson considers Else Jerusalem’s 1909 *Der heilige Skarabäus* but neglects to touch on her earlier novellas, including *Venus am Kreuz*, which I investigate in depth in chapter 4.
60 Ibid 309
61 Ibid 249
Alpha und Omega, zu dem ich beim Untersuchung des Sexualproblems gelangt bin. Hier liegt das Kriterium zwischen rein und unrein, nirgends sonst konnte ich es finden! . . . Nur monogamen Verbindungen gebührt die gesellschaftliche Achtung."63 This brand of feminism that prioritizes motherhood and monogamy did not always translate obviously into circumstances like the one Else faced. Daughters whose families demanded an immediate fulfillment of their “daughterly” duties (i.e. the selling of their beauty and sexuality) could not easily trumpet such chaste virtues.

For the largely middle- and upper-middle-class women I treat in this project, the women’s movements influence on education reforms had a direct influence, feeding into the dissonance that developed around expectations of marriage and domestic life. Previously, bourgeois women's education had been limited to Volksschule, in which they trained to become either governesses or teachers, or to Töchterschulen, where middle- and upper-class women learned how to fulfill their role in society, learning history, literature, drawing, music, languages, etc. Educational reform for women in Vienna finally began to take hold in the 1890s. Prompted by the first Lyzeum for women opening in Graz in 1866, a number of such schools opened in Vienna. The Lyzeum was a secondary school for women that also offered mathematics and physics. Graduates of such schools were allowed to attend Austrian universities part-time, although they did not receive enough credits in certain subjects to pass the Matura and attend full-time. A ministerial decree passed in 1897 finally allowed women the right to full-time enrollment. In 1900 women were also allowed to officially study medicine in Austria. In 1906 the secondary girls' schools gained the title of Mädchenobergymnasium, although women still sought the Matura exam at select boys' schools. 1908 saw the first co-educational grammar schools, the Reformgymnasien, which

63 Ibid 58
properly prepared all students for university. These schools eventually replaced the girls’ Lyzeum.  

For all the promise and positive change to come from the women’s movement at the time, the kind of feminism promoted by many of these women provided little recourse for young women who for whom limitations of family expectations or the general frustration with present circumstances made direct feminist action or ideology either impossible or unappealing. Educational reform certainly opened up new possibilities for some women, but it also increased anxiety and melancholy when many families still hoped for daughters to look pretty and marry well. Monogamy and motherhood irrefutably legitimized certain women and their lifestyle choices, but these were not universal solutions, especially for women who either wanted to lead sexually active lives involving non-monogamous relationships or who had no interest in bearing children.

Fräulein Else’s Choice

Schnitzler’s novella Fräulein Else offers a literary model for when gender expectations and physical fragility limit the range of possibilities for assuming authority, leaving only the female body to enact refusal. These limitations transform the body into a site of refuge and a medium for communicating protest: illness—psychic of physical—or death become queer feminist strategies. First published in the Neue Rundschau in 1924, the novella opens to a young woman, Fräulein Else, seemingly far removed from her hometown, Vienna, while she vacations with her wealthy aunt at an Alpine resort. She receives a letter from home explaining her father’s financial crisis and enlisting Else to acquire a sum of money—initially 30,000 Gulden, later 50,000—from an old family acquaintance, von Dorsday, in order to prevent his imprisonment.

64 cf Schwartz, Shifting Voices, 45ff.
Dorsday complies, but he insists on seeing Else’s naked body in exchange for the money, thereby putting a monetary value on her sexuality. Her family, specifically her father, compromise Else’s innocence and force her into a situation in which beauty and youth are her strongest assets. Torn between morality and familial obligation, Else composes her own response to the letter’s request, not in a physical letter, but with her body: she takes control of the situation by making the terms her own and exposes herself in a crowded hotel common room. Faced with either being sold or giving herself, Else chooses to give up her body to all the hotel guests present in the common room instead of being sold by her father to von Dorsday alone.\(^65\)

The novella begins with Else excusing herself from a game of tennis with her cousin Paul and Frau Cissy, with whom, as Else rightly suspects, Paul is having an affair. She refuses to continue playing, despite pleas otherwise. As Elisabeth Bronfen observes, "nein" is the first word Else utters: "Du willst wirklich nicht mehr weiterspielen, Else?—Nein, Paul, ich nicht mehr. Adieu."\(^66\) The very first two lines of the novella foreshadow Else's unwillingness to continue participating: here in the tennis game, but, ultimately, in the bourgeois game of her day. She has excused herself from a game amongst young people and removed herself from the city; but what


\(^{66}\) Schnitzler 557; Bronfen “Weibliches Sterben an der Kultur” 469
is it really that she refuses and from where does she remove herself? Fräulein Else recalls an earlier moment in Viennese history than its 1924 publication date suggests. The obvious influences from the new field of psychoanalysis and the focus on the dissolution of the young, upper middle-class daughter bring us to around 1900. Fräulein Else announces the date as September 3rd and Astrid Lange-Kirchheim speculates that the year is 1896, situating the novella at the height of hysteria treatment in Vienna. In 1922, Freud famously explained to Schnitzler how he had avoided personal interaction with him “aus seiner Art von Doppelgängerscheu.” He recognizes in Schnitzler’s work psychoanalytic insight and discovery that Freud could only express in scientific terms and that Freud believes may have affected Schnitzler’s popularity negatively. He continues:

Ja ich glaube, im Grunde Ihres Wesens sind Sie ein psychologischer Tiefenforscher, […] und wenn Sie das nicht wären, hätten ihre künstlerischen Fähigkeiten, Ihre Sprachkunst und Gestaltungskraft freies Spiel gehabt und Sie zu einem Dichter weit mehr nach dem Wunsch der Menge gemacht.

Without insinuating that Schnitzler's work is either anachronistic or dated, we can still insist that Fräulein Else harks back to the fin-de-siècle both in its content and its narrative style—a return to the stream-of-consciousness made famous by Schnitzler’s own Lieutenant Gustl.

At the outset of the novella we find Else in a space of compensation, and yet her refuge, as we, the readers, know it, has never been free from intrusion. She refers to a telegram she has received earlier in the day that alerted her to an impending express letter from her mother.


69 Ibid 653

70 Drawing on Marc Augé’s ideas of the “non-place” as he outlines them in Non-Places: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity and Foucault’s understanding of heterotopias in his 1967 lecture “Of Other Spaces,” we can read the hotel as a space of compensation, escape, and illusion.
implying, then, that Else finds herself involved with the epistolary from the very beginning.

Before the letter is even mentioned in the monologue it already is motivating her actions. She is concerned about her father; she wonders whether he ever deceived her mother. Her father’s relationship to sexuality seems to be a compromised one. She considers her own poor economic situation, while domestic concerns overlap with superficial commentary:


Only due to her aunt’s kindness can Else enjoy a seemingly carefree life in the hotel, since she is her aunt’s companion. Despite her silk sweater and stockings, she is but the poor relative who might have to return to the city, leaving her temporarily privileged position at the hotel.

She fears the letter and the message it might contain. The letter introduces the domestic issues and concerns surrounding her father that mark Else’s day-to-day existence in Vienna.

Significantly, it is her mother’s letter (“Mamas Brief”): the reader learns that the father has the problem, but the women must both communicate and deal with it:


71 Schnitzler 558
72 Ibid 585
The subtle and unjust division of gender expectations does not escape Else’s careful attention. Men, fathers, make risky business decisions, and when they fail, it is the women, the mothers and daughters, who must silently agree to ameliorate the situation. Else too is on her way to play her expected role, but with a twist. The corrupt space of Vienna and the idyllic space of the hotel orbit this letter. The closer the actual arrival of the express letter comes, the more Else’s thoughts turn to familial affairs. The receipt of the express letter tips the scale and the letter’s content ends Else’s vacation time. She mourns the loss of her refuge:


The news from home, from Vienna, has put an end to the possibility of a carefree life, even a staged one.

With Else, we read the letter in its entirety, although its narrative is littered with Else’s interjections and reactions. Choosing to begin reading the letter at the end, she evokes the prioritization of farewell and refusal that hangs over the novella from its very beginning:

Ich will mir vor allem den Schluß anschauen. –, “Also nochmals, sei uns nicht böse, mein liebes gutes Kind und sei tausendmal” – um Gottes willen, sie werden sich doch nicht umgebracht haben! Nein, — in dem Fall wär ein Telegramm von Rudi da.74

Her mother’s desperate plea is not entirely her own: she writes of “uns,” as the message is, in fact, the father’s, although the letter is in her mother’s hand. This jars Else, as does the

73 Ibid 559
74 Ibid 562
melodramatic tone at the end, but an evaluation of different types of written correspondence allows her to rule out the possibility that this letter is a suicide letter: an express letter suggests important matters, but a telegram is reserved for the most serious of affairs, such as death. Her interruptions build tension and allow for a reminder both of Else’s immaturity and, at the same time, of her savvy and realistic perception of her parents’ affairs. At one point, she superficially makes a remark about her mother’s handwriting, but then later she very practically and somewhat fatalistically acknowledges her father’s situation: “Wenn er lieber nicht aufwachte, das wär das Beste für ihn.” Her father’s economic circumstances are hopeless: completely wrapped up in the corruption of his urban affairs, the only solution would be his death, because he will never change. The father will not seek his own death, however.

The letter is driving the story, adding appropriate background, hinting at the future, and initiating Else’s demise. The express letter signals the beginning of the end: the narrative accelerates, returning time and again to the letter. Else repeats the line “Adresse bleibt Fiala,” her thoughts always circling back to the intended destination of the money she should coax Dorsday into giving her. The repetition of this line (“Adresse bleibt Fiala”) acts as a hallmark to the ever-present letter in Else’s thoughts. What I am calling here “epistolary space” traps Else, but it is also the space that enables Else to assume authorship of her fate.

75 Ibid 565
Elisabeth Bronfen has already pointed to the exceptional way in which femininity, writing, and death intersect in *Fräulein Else*. Bronfen focuses on the specific notes that Else pens, both actual letters and the figurative missive she composes with her body, but the letters from Else’s mother are equally important in understanding Else’s demise and dissolution. These letters introduce the father’s problems into Else’s safe vacation getaway. In the narrative, Else’s thoughts combine with her mother’s letters, and the reader gleans a sense of her current life, of the path others would provide her, and of the limited options for agency she actually possesses. The juxtaposition of how Else authors her destiny with how others both literally and figuratively write it for her makes evident the defiant and authoritative potential of Else’s eventual wordless actions.

In the letter, the parental/paternal urban world and the fantasy/refuge world of the hotel meet, creating a type of third space. Lacan says of Poe’s purloined letter: “[…] we cannot say of the purloined letter that, like other objects, it must be or not be somewhere but rather that, unlike them, it will be and will not be where it is wherever it goes.” This spatial ambivalence quite accurately depicts the space created by the letter in *Fräulein Else*, as it is playing the role of mediator. The words are sent away and the sender recedes into the background and there remains

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76 Elisabeth Bronfen offers a pioneering and influential contribution to the singular relationship and the history of the death and femininity in her essay in the collection *Weiblichkeit und Tod in der Literatur* and in her own book length study, *Over her Dead Body*. Fräulein Else serves as a central example for *Over her Dead Body*, which Bronfen then extends in her essay “Weibliches Sterben an der Kultur. Arthur Schnitzlers Fräulein Else,” for the collection *Die Wiener Jahrhundertwende: Einflüsse, Umwelt, Wirkungen* (1996). Bronfen’s analysis of Fräulein Else already outlines the way in which “Weiblichkeit, Schreiben und Tod” are interconnected (479).

only the message (in this case, her father’s message). The letter represents the problems of home for Else, but it also exists wholly within her refuge at the resort, and creates its own space. The epistolary space exists between place and non-place: in it Else becomes aware of the paternal problem, finding space in which she can contest the represented reality. Existing on an epistolary level Else has no human companion; she is completely alone, isolated in an intermediary position: “Es gibt Telegramme und Hotels und Berge und Bahnhöfe und Wälder, aber Menschen gibt es nicht.” In order to contest the problem, Else uses the letter. She confronts Dorsday, but not without the letter in hand. It both motivates her and lends her security:


She uses the letter to discuss the matter with Dorsday. In this way she distances herself from the event: the problem stems from her parents’ house in Vienna and not directly from her. Revealing the letter to Dorsday, however, brings with it finality: the private is publicized; it is impossible to undo this action; she must move forward for there is no turning back. Else’s acknowledgement of there being no return for her reveals the fact that the third, epistolary space created by the letter can never be left. The representation of reality in the letter spoils Else’s time in the hotel; she cannot return to a carefree existence, because her temporarily masked worries have been forced upon her again. A return to the city, to her family, too seems unthinkable; it is her own parents who have placed her in a shameful position that threatens to compromise her decency.

78 Schnitzler 602
79 Ibid 575
Despite her father’s money problems, which confirms the economic value of her sexuality, Else contests the reality of the issue represented in the letter, and thereby refuses to be an object and inverts the circumstances. In Fräulein Else, the letter becomes its own epistolary space. Within this space the paternal/urban world and its problems meet Else and her hotel/fantasy world. In other words, the epistolary space, as Foucault describes the heterotopia, is “capable of juxtaposing in a single […] place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.”\(^{80}\) I have omitted one word from Foucault’s statement, namely the word “real.” A heterotopia is capable of such juxtaposition within which reality is simultaneously “represented, contested, and inverted.” Can epistolary space be seen as heterotopian? If, for Foucault, heterotopias are “real” spaces, can we nevertheless call epistolary space a “real” space? In light of the linguistic and literary origins of the heterotopia for Foucault, the concrete medium of the letter seems as real a space as any.\(^{81}\) The letter is a space in which other opposed spaces meet and in which reality, indeed, can be “represented, contested and possibly inverted.”

Else refuses to become an object and turns to making the private matter public through her own body. Knowing now that Else has already received the notice of the express letter’s imminent arrival, we read the farewell and “no” from the beginning of the novella as a refusal of more than a simple tennis match: Else refuses to play along in a world where she, the attractive young daughter, is valued more for her economic value than anything else; she bids farewell to a certain simplicity and innocence. Dorsday was the intended audience for the affair, and he requested a private viewing of her naked body. Else seizes what independence she can find in this dishonorable affair, and chooses to reveal her body to the entire hotel—thereby assuming authority. Earlier Else makes the distinction between selling herself and giving herself: “Nie

\(^{80}\) Foucault “Of Other Spaces” 25

\(^{81}\) cf Foucault, The Order of Things: xviii-xix
werde ich mich verkaufen. Ich schenke mich her. […]E ein Luder will ich sein, aber nicht eine Dirne.” By contesting the “expected” solution of selling herself to Dorsday and instead offering herself up to the entire hotel for public viewing, Else takes matters into her own hands. She becomes a sort of “open letter,” publicly responding to the private letter, thus both fulfilling, in some way, the unvoiced request made by her father through her mother and protesting a society that allows women to be prostituted clandestinely for the benefit of men.

The repeated thoughts and dreams of death (both hers and her father’s) engender another inversion. At the beginning of the novella Else sees her father’s death as the only solution. After her confrontation with Dorsday, she begs her father to kill himself in her thoughts: “Nein, nein, ich will nicht. Warum sag ich es denn nicht. Bring dich um, Papa!” But it is Else who commits suicide. Just as her mother had to communicate her father’s problem, Else must be the one to resolve the problem. She takes an overdose of veronal and fades away in ellipsis: “Ich fliege … ich träume … ich schlafe … ich träu … träu – ich flie …” Else’s death provides an exit from the epistolary space or, conversely, captures Else and immortalizes her by means of the epistolary: like the writer of a letter, Else as “writer” or “agent” disappears and only her message (her body and what the act of revealing her body represents) remain. As an affirmative response to Elisabeth Bronfen’s unanswered question—“Bezeichnet dieser Akt eine vollkommene Unterwerfung oder eine Subversion ihres Wertes als Tauschobjekt?”—Else both submits to her role as an object of exchange and subverts it. Else’s choice as a young Viennese woman at the fin-de-siècle is to sacrifice her life and give her body to the public.

82 Schnitzler 585
83 Ibid 583
84 Ibid 620
85 Bronfen “Weibliches Sterben an die Kultur” 479
Chapter 2 :: Flucht in die Krankheit: Hysteira and the *femme fragile*

The language may shift—the womb travels, vapors rise, sympathy transmits symptoms through the body—but the message remains the same: women are sick, and men write their bodies.

- Helen King, “Once Upon a Text: Hysteira from Hippocrates”

Some of the young bourgeois women in Vienna 1900 who did not enlist in the feminist movements and associations of the time, who felt too restricted by familial and gender expectations to benefit from the change more publicly progressive women attempted to offer them, or who simply could not see how progress would ever offer them anything different found a strategy of refusal in illness. Just as Fräulein Else used her body to compose her own response to Dorsday’s proposal and her family’s expectation, some women found illness—neurasthenic or physical—to be a strategy of escape. The exaggeration of expected feminine delicacy translated into an extreme fragility that broke women, but these women broke such that they also broke from lives they would rather not participate in. In a footnote added in 1923 to his case study of the famous hysteric Dora, Freud introduces to the case the notion of a “flight into illness”:

> Das Krankwerden erspart zunächst eine psychische Leistung, ergibt sich als die ökonomisch bequemste Lösung im Falle eines psychischen Konflikts (Flucht in die Krankheit), […]. Überdies können äußere Momente, wie die als Beispiel angeführte Lage der von ihrem Manne unterdrückten Frau, Motive zum Krankwerden abgeben und so den äußerlichen Anteil des primären Krankheitsgewinnes herstellen.  

The very apt example given by Freud—that of the woman oppressed by her husband—reflects the kind of patient and hysteric typical for *fin-de-siècle* Vienna: bourgeois women exhibiting a perplexing array of symptoms that analysis often revealed to be the result of sexual abuse and repression. Illness became for these women a refuge from and compensation for dissatisfying lives. Hysteira is one example of how fragility pushed to its breaking point allowed for

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86 Freud, *Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse*, 44.
withdrawal, and in hysteria some women come to express critique or dissatisfaction they would otherwise silence due to the limitations of their position in society and within the family.

Freud’s early patients, while fitting into a typology of feminine fragility in fin-de-siècle Vienna, represent an important moment in the history of hysteria. Psychoanalysis served as medium for translating hysteria into the Viennese context: into a new class, a new method of treatment, into a new kind of woman.\textsuperscript{87} I focus here on the study of hysteria specifically as it moves from Paris to Vienna, from the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot to Freud, from impoverished city streets, to the comfortable homes of the bourgeoisie, from the public auditoriums of the Salpêtrière to the psychoanalyst’s private therapy room, from the hysteric performer to the hysteric recumbent analysand, in the process casting light onto hysteria’s barometer as it read for women in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Women gained (and paid for) the right to a safe and private space in which to voice (and not perform) their trauma with Freud. Nevertheless, Freud wrote the hysteric’s stories as case studies with anonymous patient names and published them, for a readership beyond medical practitioners: in Vienna, publication and anonymity characterized the public side of hysteria, protecting the privacy of the individual patients. The shift from lower-class women in Paris to the bourgeois daughters of Freud’s own social circle also indicates a pronounced difference in the way hysteria was conceived in Vienna.

Before Freud entered private practice and began to treat the neurasthenic women of his

\textsuperscript{87} The hysteric’s history is a well-documented one. Her tale (more often than not, the hysteric is feminine) has been told and retold, from Hippocrates, to nineteenth-century France, from Freud, to French feminists of the 1970s, up until more recent reimaginations of the figure (for example Mark Micale, \textit{Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations}; Martha Noel Evans, \textit{Fits and Starts A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France}; Sander Gilman, \textit{et al, Hysteria Beyond Freud}; Elisabeth Bronfen, \textit{The Knotted Subject}; Elaine Showalter, \textit{Hystories}; etc.). The hysteric and her affliction weave in and out of history disappearing for decades, centuries, and then reemerging only to have gained new cultural, historical, social, and even medical significance. G.S. Rousseau points to the import of hysteria, dubbing it a "barometer" that "respond[s], through its finely tuned antennas, to the perpetual stresses of gender and sexuality" (Rousseau, G.S. "‘A Strange Pathology’: Hysteria in the Early Modern World, 1500-1800." \textit{Hysteria Beyond Freud}. Sander Gilman, \textit{et al.} Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 1993:106). How symptoms manifest, what class and type of women—or even men—are affected, and even how society receives and treats hysterics offers a unique vantage point from which to assess that society.
own social circle, he spent three months in the winter of 1885/1886 in Paris where he interned with the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière. Charcot’s public treatment and observation of hysterics contrasted strongly with what would become Freud’s private therapy room. In a laudatory essay written on the occasion of Charcot’s death in 1893, Freud reflected on the man who influenced the impressionable young doctor. The essay offers a vantage point for understanding the significance of Charcot’s role for Freud and for an assessment of Charcot’s character according to Freud:

> Er war kein Grübler, kein Denker, sondern ein künstlerisch begabte Natur, wie er es selbst nannte, ein visuel, ein Seher. Von seiner Arbeitsweise erzählte er uns selbst folgendes: Er pflegte sich die Dinge, die er nicht kannte, immer von neuem anzusehen, Tag für Tag den Eindruck zu verstärken, bis ihm dann plötzlich das Verständnis derselben aufging. Vor seinem geistigen Auge ordnete sich dann das Chaos, welches durch die Wiederkehr immer derselben Symptome vergetäuscht wurde; es ergaben sich die neuen Krankheitsbilder, gekennzeichnet durch die konstante Verknüpfung gewisser Symptomgruppen; die vollständigen und extremen Fälle, die ‘Typen’, ließen sich mit Hilfe einer gewissen Art von Schematisierung hervorheben, und von den Typen aus blickte das Auge auf die lange Reihe der abgeschwächten Fälle, der formes frustes, die von dem oder jenem charakteristischen Merkmal des Typus her ins Unbestimmte ausliefen. [...] Man konnte ihn sagen hören, die größte Befriedigung, die ein Mensch erleben könne, sei, etwas Neues zu sehen, d. h. es als neu zu erkennen, und in immer wiederholten Bemerkungen kam er auf die Schwierigkeit und Verdienstlichkeit dieses ‘Sehens’ zurück. 88

The distinction here is clear: Charcot was a man of vision and sight and Freud a man of language and sound. Charcot looked at and diagnosed women—poor, theatrical women—while Freud listened to and “cured” women—bourgeois, fragile women. The way Freud described Charcot’s process of seeing, however, recalls Freud’s own analytic process: Charcot would look at disparate sights until suddenly a diagnosis came to him; Freud would listen, have the patient free-associate until suddenly a door opened and the analyst gained insight into the possible cause of the patient’s neurosis. Here we already see how Freud’s process of translating Charcot’s work was not simply

88 Freud I 22-23
from one language into another, but from one sense into another.

In a breakdown of his weekly routine, Freud touches upon the Monday lectures, which were “nicht so sehr Elementarunterricht in der Neuropathologie, als vielmehr Mitteilungen der neuesten Forschungen des Professors [waren] und wirkten vor allem durch ihre beständige Beziehung auf den vorgestellten Kranken.”

They involved meticulously prepared notes on the newest research and findings in neuropathology. In his 1893 essay, Freud commented on the polished form of these Monday sessions: “Als Lehrer war Charcot geradezu fesselnd, jeder seiner Vorträge ein kleines Kunstwerk an Aufbau und Gliederung, formvollendet und in einer Weise eindringlich, daß man den ganzen Tag über das gehörte Wort nicht aus seinem Ohr und das demonstrierte Objekt nich aus dem Sinne bringen konnte.”

That some criticized Charcot’s lectures for being “theatrical,” Freud put down to an unfamiliarity with the French style and also to the fact that Charcot’s lectures were superior, which was, apparently, misidentified as theatrical, due to the fact that he only gave one formal lecture a week:

[...] wir konnten etwa verstehen, wieso übelwollende Fremde dazu kamen, der ganzen Vorlesung den Vorwurf des Theatralischen zu machen. Die so sprachen, waren wohl die Formlosigkeit des deutschen klinischen Vortrags gewöhnt oder vergaßen, daß Charcot nur eine Vorlesung in der Woche hielt, die er also sorgfältig vorbereiten konnte.

Even more impressive than the Monday lectures were, of course, the Tuesday lectures, the “Consultation externe,” which Freud would later translate into German.

The Tuesday lectures diverged from the Monday lectures not only in their content but also in their format and delivery. While Monday’s lecture could be viewed as possibly more sober and organized, the Tuesday “performances” allowed for an element of surprise. These lectures were open to the public, held in an auditorium that sat up to five hundred attendees (both medical

89 Freud “Bericht” 133
90 Freud I 28
91 Ibid 29
and celebrity), \footnote{Including Henri Bergson, Emile Durkheim, Guy de Maupassant, Edmond de Goncourt, Sarah Bernhardt, and Jane Avril (Evans 21).} and contributed to what Charcot’s rival Hippolyte Bernheim referred to as a \textit{hystériculture} in Paris. \footnote{Evans cites Bernheim from his 1891 \textit{Hypnotisme, suggestion, et psychothérapie} (Paris: Octave Doin: 21).} Charcot publicly consulted and diagnosed patients, who were mainly impoverished women interned at the Salpêtrière. \footnote{The historical and social conditions of nineteenth-century France determine the shape hysteria and its treatment took. Political upheaval—the coup d’état in 1851, the Franco-Prussian War, the siege of Paris at the end of this war, the Third Republic established in 1871 and its constitution implemented in 1875—resulted in a shift of power from the aristocracy to the new industrial bourgeoisie. Socio-economic shifts that came with the political events of the nineteenth-century resulted in changes for women of all classes. While upper- and middle-class women found themselves increasingly restricted to the home, lower class women fulfilled the need for cheap labor in mining and textile industries. Women made up a large percentage of the workers who migrated from rural areas to urban centers, in particular? Paris. One-third of the workers in France in 1866 were women (Evans 11). They lacked familial support and earned wages well below subsistence levels. Dijkstra and Evans both point to a connection between such trying conditions for lower-class young women and the increase in numbers of prostitutes in Paris (Dijkstra 354-363 and Evans 11). After 1871, the feminist movement in France rallied around a reformist, bourgeois group, whose causes neglected the needs important to workers and lower-class women. Working-class women, then, not only suffered renouncement? by the “virulent misogyny” (Dijkstra viii) affecting all classes of women, but also by feminists in France. This combination of socio-economic hardships provides some insight into the unique hysteria epidemic in France at this time: working-class women outnumbered upper-class women as hysterical patients.} These women played as central a role in Charcot’s successful lectures as the great doctor himself: they were the actresses and he their director. In all of his praise and careful detail, Freud said very little about Charcot’s patients. If Freud, in fact, saw himself, at least early on his career, as following in the footsteps of the great Charcot, the discrepancy in the patients Freud treated and the ones he observed at the Salpêtrière should have been significant.

In \textit{Medical Muses: Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century Paris}, Asti Hustvedt discusses the ways in which the female patients of the Salpêtrière not only participated in the culture of hysteria at the hospital, but also, even in their potential manipulation, found an environment that was, in many ways, less oppressive than the lives they had fled. Hustvedt isolates three of the most famous Salpêtrière hysterical patients: Blanche, Augustine, and Geneviève. \footnote{Cf Hustvedt, \textit{Medical Muses: Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century Paris}, New York: Norton, 2011.} These women were as much great actresses and models as they were seriously ill and traumatized patients. Performance and
public appearance became a way to concretize the agency of their illness while simultaneously lending these women a language to express their trauma. As Charcot was “famously uninterested in patients’ words” and focused on physiological symptoms and gestures, the language that was most effective for the female patients was body language. The hysterics under Charcot’s care found a captive audience before which they would writhe, faint, and exhibit stages of hysteria, in the process escaping impoverished and abusive—often sexually abusive—living situations.

As André Brouillet’s painting *A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière* (1887) [Figure 4] demonstrates, the great doctor would attempt to determine the cause of his patients’ ailments with varying degrees of success before a captive audience of mainly men. The cases ranged from “typisch” to “rätselhaft.” Freud quotes Charcot as having described his process as one of diving

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96 cf Ibid, 5.
97 Ibid 188
98 Freud “Bericht” 133
Although the “chaos” of the Charcot’s lectures is dubious due to the potential rehearsed nature of his patient’s performance, allowing oneself to enter the chaos of something unrevealed and unknown (unconscious/subconscious) is uncannily reminiscent of the methods that become central to Freud’s treatment of hysteria and his development of psychoanalysis. The “talking cure,” free association, and the process of interpreting dreams allow diagnosis and understanding to rise out of “pandemonium” and Freud admired this in Charcot’s technique. Freud suggests that the Tuesday lectures were the less artificial talks held by Charcot: “so empfand [Charcot] doch auch das Bedürfnis, seinen Hörern ein minder verkünsteltes Bild seiner Tätigkeit zu geben.”

Perhaps they were less artificial, but the visual that the audience received in the Leçons du Mardi could not have been viewed as any less theatrical:

Charcot, as Freud sees it, truly performed his authoritative method in front of his students, demonstrating openly both his mastery and, supposedly, his uncertainties.

**The Hysteric Becomes Fragile**

Back in Vienna, Freud quickly became aware of his financial obligations. To marry Martha Bernays, Freud had to establish himself financially, which did not necessarily overlap

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99 Ibid 133
100 Freud I 29
101 Ibid 29
with his initial professional goals. The conditions in Vienna and with his fiancée motivated Freud to accept his former mentor Joseph Breuer’s offer to pursue private practice instead of the less initially lucrative research track. The combination, however, of the social and cultural climate of fin-de-siècle Vienna and the particular kinds of patients that Freud’s early private practice brought him created a scenario out of which psychoanalysis was born and, in which fragile, young, bourgeois women found unique means and spaces of resistance to the oppressions and limitations they faced at the time.

Joseph Breuer's study of Anna O and Freud's own study of Dora represent the two best-known case histories in hysteria, both of which I will discuss shortly. “Anna O” introduces the notion of the "talking cure" and puts forth an intelligent, middle-class young woman as the typical fin-de-siècle, Viennese hysteric. In the case of Dora, Freud discusses explicitly the significant role of sexual desire and trauma in the hysteric patient's history and also showcases psychoanalysis as a new science and therapeutic method, including dream interpretation. Before Dora and less often cited than Anna O in the Studien über Hysterie, Freud's case history of Fräulein Elisabeth von R not only offers insight into the development of what will become Freud's psychoanalytic process, but it also offers commentary on Freud's relationship to the case study and the relationship between the analyst and the poet. Furthermore the case sheds light onto the intersections of writing, psychoanalysis, fragility, and illness:

Ich bin nicht immer Psychotherapeut gewesen, sondern bin bei Lokaldiagnosen und Elektroprognostik erzogen worden wie andere Neuropathologen, und es berührt mich selbst noch eigentümlich, daß die Krankengeschichten, die ich schreibe, wie Novellen zu lesen sind und daß sie sozusagen des ernsten Gepräges der Wissenschaftlichkeit entbehren. Ich muß mich damit trösten, daß für dieses Ergebnis die Natur des Gegenstandes offenbar eher verantwortlich zu machen ist als meine Vorliebe; Lokaldiagnostik und elektrische Reaktionen kommen bei dem

102 Breuer describes how Anna O would enter a hypnosis and talk out that which disturbed her. She gave the procedure the “guten, ernsthaften Namen ‘talking cure’ (Redekur) und den humorischten ‘chimney sweepy’ (Kaminfegen)” (Breuer 50).
Studium der Hysterie eben nicht zur Geltung, während eine eingehende Darstellung der seelischen Vorgänge, wie man sie vom Dichter zu erhalten gewöhnt ist, mir gestattet, bei Anwendung einiger weniger psychologischer Formeln doch eine Art von Einsicht in den Hergang einer Hysterie zu gewinnen. Solche Krankengeschichten wollen beurteilt werden wie psychiatrische, haben aber vor letzteren eines voraus, nämlich die innige Beziehung zwischen Leidensgeschichte und Krankheitssymptomen, nach welcher wir in den Biographien anderer Psychosen noch vergebens suchen.¹⁰³

The epicrisis to the final case study in the *Studien über Hysterie* begins with what reads both as a self-defensive apology and a justification for a method: hysteria is not like other ailments, and, although he was trained rigorously in the traditional, expected procedures of a neuropathologist, the nature of hysteria insists on methods that might seem more fitting to the poet.

At the same time self-conscious and, perhaps, daring, Freud refers to the case studies—as they are presented in this collection—as novellas. He claims to find this strange, and, nevertheless, the poet's methods have an advantage when depicting the patient's soul and her tales of woe, which are, in fact, so closely bound up with the symptoms and psychosis. When he initially decided to be a scientist and not lawyer, it was Goethe who inspired this decision. At age seventeen, shortly before his exams, Freud heard Carl Brühl read Goethe’s essay on nature (“die Natur”).¹⁰⁴ On the 17th of March 1873, he informed his childhood friend Emil Fluß in a letter that he would no longer pursue a career in law, but rather had found a higher calling:


It is tempting to associate the desire to study nature with his later aptitude for studying human

nature: just as he imagined himself listening in to the perpetual process of mother nature, Freud would sit behind his fully relaxed, recumbent patients, eavesdropping on their most intimate and repressed thoughts, desires, memories. The verb “belauschen” recalls a very Romantic notion of natural studies, and—without diminishing the credibility and rigor of his scientific endeavors—Freud’s own pursuit of the natural sciences retained a Romantic sensibility that allowed him still to acknowledge the wonders and mysteries of mother nature that lay beneath the surface. In these case studies on hysteria, we begin to see this process of listening into the secrets of (human) nature.

When Freud refers to the novella, then, it is not unreasonable to consider that he may have been thinking of the great poet again. Goethe famously described the novella as “eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebeheit.” The case study, the story of the hysteric, also appears to mirror this contained form of the unprecedented event. Drawing on Freud's deep appreciation of theater, which is evident from his letters, however, we might also consider Theodor Storm's thoughts on the form:

Die Novelle ist nicht mehr, wie einst, “die kurzgehaltene Darstellung einer durch ihre Ungewöhnlichkeit fesselnden und einen überraschenden Wendepunkt darbietenden Begebenheit”; die heutige Novelle ist die Schwester des Dramas und die strengste Form der Prosadichtung. Gleich dem Drama behandelt sie die tiefsten Probleme des Menschenlebens; gleich diesem verlangt sie zu ihrer Vollendung einen im Mittelpunkt stehenden Konflikt, von welchem aus das ganze sich organisiert (...). 

Was Freud likening his scientific writing to the "strictest form of prose poetry"? Storm goes beyond Goethe in his definition and establishes the novella as the literary form to tackle the most significant of human problems, akin to drama. The hysteric acts out her inner turmoil through her symptomatology, and the case study is the written account of her soul's anguish. Along the way, in its telling, the hysteric's tale—her "discourse" if we invoke Lacan—reveals the source of her hysteria and releases her from her symptoms: she is cured.\(^\text{108}\). The sister to drama becomes the best vehicle to present hysteria scientifically, according to Freud. Although for Freud, the novella takes on the content of the nineteenth-century, bourgeois novel, with a happy ending of a cured and married former hysteric.

Why is it significant that Freud aligns himself with the poet and that he sees his case study, apologetically and defensively, as similar to the novella? What are the implications when male analysts mediate and publish the hysteric's own discourse in a form akin to literature? Freud translated the study and observation of the hysteric into a uniquely bourgeois, Viennese setting, into a Vienna marked by the preoccupation with language and sexuality in the arts, sciences, and philosophy. The new kind of therapeutic procedures that emerged out of Freud and Breuer's private practice also created new "safe" spaces for women. Perhaps men distorted or over-sexualized their stories, and sometimes even under-sexualized, when the analyst censored the case study to avoid scandal, but women still could air grievances in a way they could not in their homes, with their families, in open society. The publication of the case studies introduced a way to talk about female sexuality, even if the analyst’s interventions ultimately limited the breadth of the discussion. It was a starting point, and it influenced poets and artists as they grappled with representing the human psyche in their work.

\(^{108}\) cf Lacan Seminar XVII 50
The case histories lent hysterics a coherent language to narrate their trauma, symptoms, and their "cure." From hypnosis, which Breuer thought enabled an artificial hysteria, to the "talking cure" or cathartic method, the Viennese approach to treating bourgeois women and their hysteria gave women their own voice to talk about everything and anything within the safety of their treatment space. The recorded and published case studies mediated the women's stories, removing any damning individual agency from the cases while still communicating a fragility complicated by sexualization, familial pressures, and female intelligence and autonomy. Breuer and Freud emphasized in the case studies their female patients' intelligence, their role in the family and how contradictory and unjust circumstances negatively affected their patients and were not, in fact, exceptional. They were sexualized bodies and beings who suffered injustice, and they were also intelligent and respectable: these bourgeois patients represented "normal" women.

Joseph Breuer treated the hysteric patient Anna O (Bertha Pappenheim) from 1880-1882. By the time the second edition of the *Studien über Hysterie* came out in 1908, Breuer had distanced himself from the practice and findings in the volume. Of course, Freud too found that, in the thirteen years since the first edition, much had changed in his practice and in his findings in the study of hysteria, but in both cases of Anna O and, in particular, of Elisabeth von R seeds exist of what would become Freud's psychoanalytic process.

Freud may have invented psychoanalysis, but Anna O—both the case and the patient—provided the foundation for the future field. Hysteria has been called the daughter of psychoanalysis, but the hysterics, in particular Anna O, are much more the mothers, representing the, at least initial, matriarchy of psychoanalytic therapy. Anna O's case offers up the beginnings

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110 That is to say, before Freud ever went to Paris.
of what would grow into psychoanalysis and, as will be true in psychoanalysis, the analyst, Breuer, learned as much from his analysand as she learned from him. Her case shows how the gaps in memory associated with hysterics can be filled through the patient's talking; she coined the "talking cure"; and her character sets up what will become the standard profile for a Freudian patient. In particular, it is Anna O's high intelligence, which Breuer emphasizes from the very start, that makes her seemingly exceptional, but, in fact, typical for hysteria.

In first establishing the scene of Anna O's treatment and hysteria, Breuer outlines her family psychological-medical history and sets up Anna O's character:


From the very beginning, we learn that Anna O—both as a specific patient and as a representative of specific kind of young woman—suffers from the boredom that comes with being an intelligent young woman whose family and society prevent from receiving appropriate intellectual stimulation despite the increased access to education that young women like her had starting in the late nineteenth century. This kind of boredom when coupled with intense pressure or trauma could lead to hysteria. Anna O's intelligence, highlights a trend where intelligent women suffered due to the limited opportunities granted them as young middle- to upper-middle-class women.

It is her high level of education that feeds her hysteria: unconsciously or consciously, Anna O's flight into illness manifests itself in a confusion of language (she speaks different languages) and a complete loss of speech. She escapes trauma surrounding her father, for whom she
tirelessly cared as he lay dying, by rejecting speech, rejecting her "father" tongue. Breuer describes how she underwent "eine tiefe, funktionelle Desorganisation der Sprache":

Zuerst beobachtete man, daß ihr Worte fehlten, allmählich nahm das zu. Dann verlor ihr Sprechen alle Grammatik, jede Syntax, die ganze Konjugation des Verbums, sie gebrauchte schließlich nur falsch, meist aus einem schwachen Particip praeteriti gebildete Infinitive, keinen Artikel. In weiterer Entwicklung fehlten ihr auch die Worte fast ganz, sie suchte dieselben mühsam aus 4 oder 5 Sprachen zusammen und war dabei kaum mehr verständlich. Bei Versuchen zu schreiben schrieb sie […] denselben Jargon. Zwei Wochen lang bestand völliger Mutismus, bei fortwährenden angestrengten Versuchen zu sprechen wurde kein Laut vorgebracht.\footnote{Ibid 45-56}

Anna O's hysteria acts out in a breakdown of language and communication and this same hysteria leads her to a space in which she can regain her own language to talk out, to talk away ("wegerzählen") her distress.\footnote{Ibid 55} It is Anna O and not Breuer nor Freud who coins the term "talking cure." Breuer recognized the benefit of this and cultivated a practice of the patient freely talking out her disturbance while under hypnosis.

Much indebted to the guidance and mentoring of both Breuer and Charcot, Freud also integrated hypnosis into his practice. Like Breuer, he saw the potential in his (female) hysterical patients talking through their hysteria in their own words under the guidance of an analyst. Yet, for Freud, hypnosis proved to be unreliable, and he found other means of relaxing his patients and of maximizing the benefit of a patient's voice. When a patient was resistant to hypnosis Freud would instead have the patient relax and close her eyes while he held his hand over her eyes, trying to simulate the relaxed, uninhibited state of hypnosis. Here we see the beginnings of the traditional psychoanalytic technique established by Freud, in which the analyst would sit behind the analysand so as to allow the patient to talk and free associate without interference from the analyst. In the case of Elisabeth v. R, we see Freud develop this strategy together with his patient:
Die Leidengeschichte, welche Fräulein Elisabeth erzählte, war eine langwierige, aus mannigfachen schmerzlichen Erlebnissen gewebte. Sie befand sich während der Erzählung nicht in Hypnose, ich ließ sie aber liegen und hielt ihre Augen geschlossen, ohne daß ich mich dagegen gewehrt hätte, wenn sie Zeitweilig die Augen öffnete, ihre Lage veränderte, sich aufsetzte u. dgl. Wenn sie ein Stück der Erzählung tiefer ergriff, so schien sie mir dabei spontan in einen der Hypnose ähnlichen Zustand zu geraten. Sie blieb dann regungslos liegen und hielt ihre Augen fest geschlossen.114

This case illustrates Freud's own evolution as a psychotherapist, an evolution heavily influenced by his female patients. Elisabeth v. R demonstrated that by relaxing and closing her eyes in order to shut out visual distractions, she instead could focus on her memories, allowing her thoughts to form organically and spontaneously, eventually leading her to relevant insights into her history. The twenty-four year-old Elisabeth v. R came under Freud's care in 1892 after a colleague recommended the case to Freud. She had suffered a particularly difficult streak of familial tribulations, from the death of her father and sister to her mother's need for a serious operation. The patient presented herself to Freud as an intelligent and physically normal young woman. She bore her many sufferings with a "belle indifference" that Freud viewed as typical for hysterics.115

Her symptoms consisted of a pain that originated in her right upper thigh that caused her pain when walking: "Der Schmerz war unbestimmter Natur, man konnte etwa entnehmen: eine schmerzhafte Müdigkeit."116 Piece by piece we learn in the case study of Elisabeth v. R's background and Freud reads out of her recollections the source of her hysteria, of which Freud initially assumed she herself was aware:

BeiFräulein Elisabeth war mir von Anfang an wahrscheinlich, daß sie sich der Gründe ihres Leidens bewußt sei, daß sie also nur ein Geheimnis, keinen Fremdkörper im Bewußtsein habe. Man mußte, wenn man sie ansah, an die Worte des Dichters denken. "Das Mäskchen da

115 Ibid 154
116 Ibid 154
weissagt verborgenen Sinn."\(^{117}\)

In a footnote, however, Freud adds that this assumption proved false: "Es wird sich ergeben, daß ich mich hierin doch geirrt hatte."\(^{118}\) It is precisely the "es wird sich ergeben" that points to the novelistic element of the case study and, also, the groundbreaking nature of this hysteria treatment. Like the case of Dora later and as Freud himself pointed out in the epicrisis, the case study reads as literature. In its displacement of meaning and denial of truth, the psychoanalytic process involves a narrative stemming from the patient that closely resembles modernist fiction.\(^{119}\) The analyst, much like the literary critic, must interpret the hysteric's discourse in order to find the deeper meaning and cause of hysterical symptoms.

Elisabeth v. R's story, then, has many layers for Freud and his patient both to sift through. The top most layer of her tale reveals the youngest of three daughters who, due to both her mother's own health and nervous condition, formed a very close bond with her father; she was the son he never had and he would often warmly joke that she was "keck und rechthaberisch," attributes more fitting an actual son. "[M]it ihrem Mädchentum recht unzufrieden," the young Elisabeth v. R enjoyed offering her father intellectual companionship and had great plans to educate herself in music, while the thought of marriage and the loss of her right to judgment appalled her.\(^{120}\) Upon moving to Vienna, she enjoyed the comfort of a brighter and wealthier existence, until the next layer of her tale set in and a series of losses began. Quite suddenly her father fell ill and there was a year and a half of intense care. The death of the father was followed by a decline in social standing, the marriage of her one sister to a disagreeable man, a serious eye operation for the mother, whose mental distress increased after the death of her husband, and

\[^{117}\text{Ibid 157}\]
\[^{118}\text{Ibid 157}\]
\[^{119}\text{Steven Marcus discusses Dora as a piece of modernist fiction in his essay "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History" 56-91}\]
\[^{120}\text{Freud, "V. Frl. Elisabeth v. R." 158}\]
finally the loss of her dear second sister, who had married and bore a child, which was followed by a quarrel between the two brothers-in-law.

The extent of this hardship and the stress of loss, moving, and conflict between the brothers-in-law could easily seem to be at the root of the young woman’s—once her father's independent and bold darling—pain and immobility, a pain that set in two years after her father's death. In the process of therapy, however, Elisabeth v. R initially does not improve and Freud is alerted to a deeper layer, a repressed internal conflict for which the patient had developed strategies of resistance. During her sister's illness, Elizabeth v. R fell in love with her brother-in-law, and the problematic and confusing nature of this attachment resulted in an unconscious method of converting her psychic pain into physical symptoms:

Dieses mädchen hatte ihrem Schwager eine zärtliche Neigung geschenkt, gegen deren Aufnahme in ihr Bewußtsein sich ihr ganzes moralisches Wesen sträubte. Es war ihr gelungen, sich die schmerzliche Gewißheit, daß sie den Mann ihrer Schwester liebe, zu ersparen, indem sie sich dafür körperliche Schmerzen schuf, und in Momenten, wo sich ihr dieses Gewißheit aufdrängen wollte [...] waren durch gelungene Konversion ins Somatische jene Schmerzen entstanden.121

The treatment did not end here, as the patient resisted this conclusion at first. Yet the symptoms did eventually diminish, and—unlike many actual pieces of modernist fiction, though similar to Dora, as we will see—Freud provides a "happy ending" to his case study. A year after the treatment ended, Freud had the opportunity to witness Elisabeth v. R "im raschen Tanze dahinfliegen." He then concluded that she had married. The famous case study of Dora, "Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse," offers its reader similar encouragement at the conclusion: Dora has married, thereby reclaiming her life.122 Of course, the happy ending of marriage is one of the effects of the case study's mediation of femininity. That marriage offers the proof of a successful analysis and a young woman's cure from hysterical ailment reveals the taint of society

121 Ibid 170
and its expectations. Freud wrote into the case history the ideals of a society whose expectations contributed to the hysteria in the first place, as if the realization of marriage for a young woman always indicated health and happiness.

From the excellent volume of essays on Dora edited by Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism* (1985), to the journal *Psychoanalytic Inquiry’s* 2005 special volume for the 100th anniversary of the case history, there is no shortage of debate and analysis, be it psychoanalytic, literary, historical, cultural, or feminist, around what has become one of Freud's most famous cases and patients. Just as it has served critics a variety of purposes in their interpretation, the case study also served various functions for Freud: from a confessional of an analysis that was cut short, to reinforcement of his theory on dreams, to a platform from which to discuss the relationship of repressed sexual desire to hysteria. Here, I will focus not so much on retelling Dora's tale or analyzing Freud's own analysis, but, rather, as in the other two cases above, I draw out the elements of this case study that make evident hysteria's role in expanding our way of understanding feminine fragility in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

Published ten years after *Studien über Hysterie*, five years after the actual analysis, and four years after its composition, *Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse* is both one of Freud's best-known and also most perplexing publications. More so than any other case history, perhaps, the case of Dora illustrates the mediation of women, femininity, and fragility. Seemingly an exercise in modernist narrative techniques, the case plays out in a series of disclaimers, explanations, footnotes, and reconsiderations. Groundbreaking about this fragment, in part, is the open discussion of sex. In the foreword, Freud prepares his reader for this as follows:

> In dieser einen Krankengeschichte, die ich bisher den Einschränkungen der ärztlichen Diskretion und der Ungunst der Verhältnisse mütigkeit erörtert, die Organe und Funktionen des Geschlechtslebens bei ihren richtigen Namen genannt, und der keusche Leser mich nicht gescheut habe, mit einer jugendlichen weiblichen Person über solche Themata in solcher Sprache zu verhandeln. […] Ich nehme einfach die Rechte des
Repressed sexual desire lies at the heart of hysteria and Freud insists that in this case he will address sexuality and not shy away from the appropriate terminology. Social codes of morality and propriety prevented young women from speaking openly about their sexuality, but through careful measures to protect the patient's identity—one of the reasons for the delay in publication—and through the authoritative voice of the man of science, sexual anatomy and feminine desire can be spoken freely: "Ich gebe Organen wie Vorgängen ihre technischen Namen und teile dieselben mit, wo sie—die Namen—etwa unbekannt sind. 'J'appelle un chat un chat.'" Of course, Freud does not always express freely and without further mediation sexual desire and anatomy; he does not call a cat a cat, or, rather, he does, but in French. The doctor presents himself and his intention not to tip toe around sex rather coyly: "Von der Unvermeidlichkeit der Berührung sexueller Themata muß man überzeugt sein, ehe man eine Hysteriebehandlung unternimmt, oder muß bereit sein, sich durch Erfahrungen überzeugen zu lassen. Mann? sagt sich dann: pour faire un omelette il faut casser des oeufs." Nevertheless, regardless of French sayings and the need to belabor the imagery of jewelry boxes and purses, Freud does still manage to discuss the sexuality of women and children, and break taboos by expressing the idea that a young girl might both know and think of oral sex.

Even Freud, however, struggled both with initially recognizing and being able to write directly in his text the same-sex desire that Dora harbored for Frau K. Only in two lengthy footnotes does Freud explore the homosexual object of Dora's desire that he failed to

123 Ibid 120
124 Ibid 49
125 Ibid 50
acknowledge and impart to his patient before she prematurely broke off analysis. In his essay on Lacan's treatment of Dora, Jean-Michel Rabaté reminds us that Lacan stated that hystéricas "have a problem with being an object of heterosexual desire; moreover, the hystéric’s object is fundamentally homosexual (Lacan, 1957, p. 138)," because they love by proxy. Although Freud would later discuss bisexuality and homosexuality, at this moment, and in reference to a specific, albeit anonymous, young woman, homosexuality is relegated to the footnotes. First at the very end of the second dream interpretation, at the end of a lengthy footnote, Freud utters the possibility of Dora's attraction to Frau K:

Endlich gehört es dem vierten, am tiefsten verborgenen gedankenkreise, dem der Liebe zu Frau K. An, daß die Deflorationphantasie vom Standpunkte des Mannes dargestellt wird [...] und daß an zwei Stellen die deutlichsten Anspielungen auf zweideutige Reden [...] und auf die nicht mündliche Quelle ihrer sexuellen Kenntnisse (Lexikon) enthalten sind.\footnote{Freud. \textit{Bruchstück}. 109.}

Even here, the statement is convoluted and the proposed homosexual desire buried. It is in the afterward, and again in a footnote, that Freud offers a lengthier consideration of the repressed desire for Frau K:


\textit{Un chat est un chat} and homosexual desire is a footnote for Freud. The normative heterosexual desire trumps all "perversity" and repressed desire, for the true sign that Dora is cured, according to Freud and his bourgeois circle, is her marriage to a young man. Regardless of the risk of male


\footnote{Freud. \textit{Bruchstück}. 109.}

\footnote{Ibid 117}
mediation, fragility and its less fragile implications of sexuality and desire exist in the pages of
the case study, altering the public’s view of women while still protecting those women whom
societal and familial expectations constrained.

I looked at these three cases in order to show the ways in which early psychoanalysis and
its preoccupation with hysteria participated in the facilitation of spaces for women to have a voice
to express that which might be otherwise censored in society and for the creation of a discourse,
albeit initially a medical one, that seemingly objectively addressed feminine oppression,
sexuality, and suffering. Hysteria in fin-de-siècle Vienna created not only a flight away from
unfair and imbalanced expectations for women, but also enabled a complication of feminine
fragility that would be picked up in literature and the art. The hysteric, then, as she existed in fin-
de-siècle Vienna broke from the kind of hysteric we saw in Paris with Charcot. The Viennese
hysteric belonged equally to a tradition of fragile female figures, to the femmes fragiles.

Fragility: defined and redefined

The figure of the femme fragile embodies a frailty and delicacy often praised in women
and considered inherent to feminine nature, but this very frailty pushes the femme fragile close to
the limits of a physically and psychically healthy being. The femme fragile is both the feminine
ideal as well as an extreme exaggeration of gender expectations. Her fragility paradoxically sets
her apart and also makes her invisible to scrutiny or observation—by society and critics alike—
due to both the slightness of her figure and the assumption that she is the norm. To define her, in
some ways, is only possible in terms of negativity—negativity as an absence and as negation: she
is not healthy, not strong, not overtly erotic, not exceptional. Tellingly, the Oxford English
Dictionary fails to offer either definition or etymology for "femme fragile," although “femme
fatale” warrants an entry. The femme fatale, a type against which the femme fragile is frequently
(and again, often negatively) defined, dates back to 1800 or earlier and is, clearly, of French origin, although the use of the French should not suggest that the figure did not exist before or in different contexts. The popularity of this type in nineteenth-century France influenced the adoption of the French term in other languages. The *femme fatale* is “an attractive and seductive woman, esp. one who is likely to cause risk to or the downfall of anyone who becomes involved with her.”¹²⁹ This pantheress of a woman became an iconic figure in art and literature: from Lilith, Salome, Judith, Delilah, to variations of Lulu, Lola, and the twentieth-century figure of the vamp, sexually provocative and dangerous women have served as compelling figures of male and female fantasy centuries. Innumerable studies of the *femme fatale* in literature, the visual arts, theater, and cinema exist, and the figure in her various incarnations remains a popular object of study and fascination.¹³⁰

To distinguish the *femme fragile*, one must look a little harder. Perhaps she is more difficult to define or more elusive to pin down because, in many ways, the *femme fragile* is merely a slight exaggeration of the standard expectation of women. The most cited and authoritative study of the *femme fragile* in critical studies remains Arianne Thomalla's 1972 *Die 'femme fragile': Ein literarischer Frauentypus der Jahrhundertwende*; despite its age, it remains the only monograph on this female type. There are book length studies that touch upon the figure in the context of death and femininity, hysteria, and illness, such as those by Elisabeth Bronfen, Renate Berger, and Sigrid Weigel in the German tradition, or Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and

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Elaine Showalter in the Anglo-American tradition. Recently scholars like Sabine Wieber have shown renewed interest in the *femme fragile*, but a more contemporary exhaustive study of the figure has not been written. This lack bears witness to the claim put forth by Thomalla forty years ago that the *femme fatale* is the more exciting and sexy figure for critics. Appropriately, the *femme fragile* quietly eludes critical attention and yet finds representation, oftentimes indirectly, as is the case in the aforementioned critics, in several studies.

In a classic study on death and femininity, Elisabeth Bronfen outlines specific feminine types that emerge in the nineteenth century:

> [...] firstly, the diabolic outcast, the destructive, fatal demon woman, secondly, the domestic ‘angel of the house’, the saintly, self-sacrificing frail vessel, and thirdly a particular version of Mary Magdalene, as the penitent and redeemed sexually vain and dangerous woman, the fallen woman.

On the page and on the canvas, images of women appeared that reflected, reinforced, and influenced expectations of women in society. The first type Bronfen outlines clearly aligns with the *femme fatale*, the overtly sexual and sensuous woman who preys on man's desire. The second type is the *femme fragile*, playing off the idealized, desexualized woman imprisoned in the domestic sphere. The third type interestingly combines the first two: the *femme fatale* falls victim to her own sinfulness, but emerges pure and forgiven for her past sins. A narrative develops

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133 Thomalla begins her monograph as follows: “Als weibliches Bildsymbol literarischer Dekadenz faszinierte die *femme fatale* Autoren und literarisches Publikum. [...] Daß diese literarische Gestalt [die *femme fragile*] bisher so vernachlässigt beziehungsweise gar nicht als einheitlicher Typus erkannt wurde, ist einmal auf ihre wesensbedingte Unscheinbarkeit und auf die Überwertung der *femme fatale* [...] zurückzuführen, zum anderen aber auch auf das Fehlen eines festgeprägten Terminus” (Thomalla 13). My research began similarly, with the sense that the *femme fatale* as a figure overshadowed her more fragile sister.
134 Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body*, 218. These are simply three types, although, of course, other types of women existed both in artistic representation and in the real world at the time. In the nineteenth century we do start to have competent domestic types from Esther in *Bleak House* to the Brontë sisters.
around this type as a woman saved by a man. The real-world potential of such a feminine type seems dubious, however, as strict societal expectations did not allow for such redemption for women, who were held to far higher standards of chastity and innocence than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{135}

![Figure 5: John Everett Millais, Ophelia, 1851/1852](image)

Early literary and artistic representations of female fragility existed in Shakespeare's Ophelia or Dante's Beatrice, and, in some ways, these figures came to be seen as nineteenth-century ideals. The Pre-Raphaelites, a seven member "brotherhood" of mid-nineteenth century British painters, introduced images of Ophelia and Beatrice into the cultural consciousness of mid-century Europe.\textsuperscript{136} These images, however, were playing off an idea of women that resonated

\textsuperscript{135} Stephanie Catani extends this list to include nine types of women: the ‘demon’ woman, \textit{femme fatale}, the “Dirne”, the child-woman, the \textit{femme fragile}, the “süßes Mädel”, ‘legitimate’ femininity, the wife, and finally the mother (\textit{Das Fiktive Geschlecht: Weiblichkeit in anthropologischen Entwürfen und literarischen Texten zwischen 1885 und 1925}. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005: 88-124).

\textsuperscript{136} Founded in 1848 by the painters William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was soon joined by William Michael Rossetti, James Collinson,
with eighteenth-century expectations of wives as the household nun. This was a gentle, self-sacrificing woman who found protection in the domestic space and was responsible for keeping safe a man's soul. The man, in contrast, had to exist in the public sphere where he was under constant attack from the sins of the world. While women's purity served to cancel out men's sinfulness, this very purity needed its own safeguarding. Domestic walls then served to protect the household nun from external impurities. Bram Dijkstra highlights the way in which the treatment of these women resembled that of flowers: protected by the garden's walls and cultivated, they were beautiful, pure, and simple. Visual representations of women often depicted women as and among flowers. John Everett Millais' 1851 representation of Ophelia [Figure 5] shows a young woman whose beauty is arrested in her death as she floats in the water, surrounded by a lush and fairytale-like wood. The flowers speckle the setting, she is holding flowers, and it would even appear that her entire dress is woven out of delicate wildflowers. Not only is her beauty preserved in death, her very being is shrouded in passivity and submission. Dijkstra writes that "woman and water [are] united forever in a passive voyage to eternity among the reeds." She

Frederic George Stephens, and Thomas Woolner. The painters rejected classical influences on painting as corruptive and sought influence in Medieval art as well as in a realistic portrayal of nature. For more information concerning the painters see Sophia Andres, The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel: Narrative Challenges to Visual Gendered Boundaries, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2005.

137 Albrecht Koschorke discusses how marriage in a Christian sense is modeled on the Holy Family and involves a “de-carnalization” of the social dimension: “This de-carnalization traditionally starts with the female gender. The closure of woman reaches its high point in the body of the Madonna. The exorcism of the female sex not only claims biographical victims but also creates a broad psychopathological syndrome; much has been written about the path that leads from the Madonna to the hysterical woman. Yet the succession to Mary finds its greatest momentum not in the separation of the two character strands that flow from the Virgin and mother but in what is, in the final analysis, an impossible convergence. For the Christian endeavor of purification has consequences even for mothers who follow the model of Mary. They can participate in the quality of purity in their own way: either by preserving a chaste soul and submitting to their husbands without feelings of lust, as medieval confessors prescribed, as a way of at least approaching the unattainable ideal of chastity; or by using tools—placed at their disposal—for giving their motherhood a higher, spiritual interpretation. The bourgeois female image of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which elevated an asexual motherhood into the gender norm, still bears the imprint of the cult of Mary” (The Holy Family and its Legacy, New York: Columbia University, 2000: 46).

138 While Shakespeare has Ophelia ‘read’ the symbolism of different flowers as an act of interpretation the flowers here are rendered purely ornamental.
is "floating prettily but uselessly in the water," depicting a "lack of control over her own fate, her touching expendability, her inherent debility."\footnote{Dijkstra 43} Ophelia became a figure of the nineteenth century not only in visual representations, but also as a model of female suicide, the "Ophelia complex." Margaret Higonnet writes: "Gradually, in what we may call a development of the Ophelia complex, the suicidal solution is linked to the dissolution of the self, fragmentation to flow. The abandoned woman drowns, as it were, in her own emotions."\footnote{Margaret Higonnet. “Suicide: Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century.” Poetics Today Vol. 6: 1-2 (1985), 103-118: 106.} I will further discuss suicide in chapter three, but it is worth noting here the imagery of water and floating, of ethereality and passivity that comes from such a "passive" death.

Middle- and upper-class circles expected women to be the embodiment of fragility. Nevertheless, they were not meant to break or succumb to any number of physical or psychic ailments that would be logically associated with such safeguarded and cultivated fragility. Paradoxically, because they were also the center of the family and the protector of the man's own soul, they were expected to be stable and resilient in their fragility. Their self-sacrifice and self-negation served men and was not to affect their demure, passive, and receptive shell. The ballerina serves as an excellent model for this kind of mid-nineteenth century feminine paradigm. The nineteenth-century ballerina was a man's vision: ethereal, wan, graceful, gentle, but at the same time impossibly strong so as to be able to perform effortlessly innumerable pirouettes, leaps, and extensions. Alexandra Kolb writes of the impossible demands placed on female bodies by male choreographers in \textit{Performing Femininity: Dance and Literature in German Modernism}.$^{141}$ The women imprisoned in the domestic realm should have been like the ballerina: they should never betray the real efforts required to serve as the ever supportive, peaceful heart of

\footnote{\textit{Performing Femininity: Dance and Literature in German Modernism}. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2009: in particular 51-90.}
the household. As the nineteenth century wore on, however, this ideal proved more and more unrealistic. This early- and mid-nineteenth-century male conception of women fed into an era of neurasthenia and hysteria. A shift occurred from ideal of the receptive, submissive woman who was physically frail but nonetheless resilient to the expectation of a receptive, submissive woman who was physically and psychologically frail to the point of breaking.

The evidence that expectations for women to be wholly fragile, submissive, and weak were unrealistic started to become more prominent and problematic in the second half of the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century male expectations rooted in the good household nun led to what Dijkstra calls "an entirely new set of psychopathological responses in the women, who found themselves being forced into the position of having to prove their worthiness to be wives by means of impossible feats of virtue, and who, once they had become 'modern madonnas,' could only retain their coveted position by playing the role of cringing household pets." Either figuratively or literally, the once idealized flower was domesticated and beaten into nervous submission. Dijkstra continues: "[...] It was a foregone conclusion that many would fail in their attempts to conform, and that in their failure their mental equilibrium and their physical health would be the first casualties." Imprisoned by domesticity and the demand to be saintly and fragile, the household nun became the household invalid, retreating to her bedroom, often finding early death. The notion of the "safely dead" woman could be proposed as the more favorable outcome for the sickly, fragile woman than an extended debilitating illness: an early death preserved youth, beauty, and innocence, while long suffering would degrade the feminine form and demystify the feminine mystique.

Artists and writers were attuned to the dissolution of the feminine type as she existed in the domestic sphere, and they were sensitive to the contradictions surrounding feminine

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142 Dijkstra 20
143 Ibid 21
expectations and representation. As Sabine Wieber points out, however, late nineteenth-century portrayals of the *femme fragile* strayed from the saintliness of the Pre-Raphaelites. She describes the "modern femme fragile" as a new type of woman "characterized by an exquisitely transient beauty reminiscent of a butterfly or a delicate flower. Her splendor was ethereal and exuded a sensual eroticism not anchored in this world."¹⁴⁴ In literary and artistic representation artists and writers translated illness into ethereality and radiant delicacy and death into a preservation of beauty, while in reality women were pushed to the limits of their physical and mental health.

This darker side has its history, too: there are already signs of the breakdown of the ideal of the good submissive, fragile woman in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the German literary tradition. In Goethe's Gretchen, the young woman he wrote into the Faust tradition in *Faust I*, we encounter an image of the good, submissive young woman who is corrupted at the hand of the sinfulness she encounters due to her chance meeting with Faust in the town square.¹⁴⁵ She becomes pregnant with Faust's child and resorts to infanticide, because the shame of a child outside of wedlock is too great; it is evidence of her sexuality, and would clash with feminine expectations. The end of *Faust I* is also the end of Gretchen's life, as the mad young woman is sentenced to death, although she does find religious-salvation in her demise. Goethe also introduced a very significant “Stiftdame” to the *femmes fragiles* of the German-speaking tradition in *Wilhelm Meister*. The legacy of the schöne Seele is one that brings together feminine writing, the case study, strength and independence through physical frailty, a sensitivity to those broken or weak, and a heightened intellect and spirituality that moves toward bodily dissolution. Already at the age of eight, a hemorrhage leaves a permanent mark on her, but not a

¹⁴⁴ Wieber 69
physical one: “in dem Augenblick war meine Seele ganz Empfindung und Gedächntis.”

This event also serves as the introduction to her own confessions that then trace her education, development, and relationships, which lead her to Pietism and a spiritual life—a higher existence. The schöne Seele is a very different representation of feminine fragility than Gretchen: Gretchen falls victim to male expectations while the schöne Seele transcends them.

In Romanticism, too, the sickly and pathological side of fragility began to enter both the literature and literary, cultural circles. The fragile figure in this era, however, was not only feminine. The male poet's genius resulted in physical and psychic frailty; an early death seemed in line with a creativity aligned with youthful suffering. Novalis (1772-1801), for example, was the young poet genius whose life was characterized by his ill-fated love for a young, equally frail girl, Sophie Kühn (1782-1797), who died after a two-year illness. Fragility—male and female—was both idealized and proven to be unsustainable. But there was something in this unsustainability that became romanticized, both with a capital "R" and a small "r". The "safely dead" woman as depicted in literature and the visual arts, or male artist in the Romantic poet's case, allowed for the beauty and purity of the fragile young woman to be preserved forever, free from the fear of sinful contamination, which was Gretchen's unfortunate fate. The masculine "fragile," however, "das Kranke" that Goethe saw in late Romanticism, became less prominent in literary depictions as the nineteenth century wore on and fragility, physical and psychic illness, and ethereality became a "uniquely" feminine trait again.

Ariane Thomalla and scholars like her locate the "golden age" of the femme fragile in the French Decadent movement, although the femme fragile existed in British, American, and

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146 Goethe Wilhelm Meister 410.
147 cf Dijkstra 50-51
148 Goethe famously stated: “Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde und das Romantische das Kranke." Maximen und Reflexionen, Nr. 1031. The statement, of course, is misleading, because Goethe did in fact work closely with earlier Romantics, but he recognized a shift and made this statement to Eckermann in April of 1829.
German traditions, among others. The Belgian author Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) in his work "La Princesse Maleine" (1889) introduced a classic example of this feminine type known for her fair skin, willowy figure, and ethereal beauty, who played the role of delicate and mysterious young woman in the upper classes, and lacked political motivation. Her figure is romanticized and shrouded in mystique, both drawing men to her and allowing her to be the perfect complement and contrast to a strong male lead. This French tradition was imitated in various cities, including Vienna, where it inspired authors such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Late nineteenth-century artists transfigured the illness and neurasthenia that became more and more prominent in the nineteenth century into a heightened spirituality and intellect. Remaining physically beautiful in her frailty—not to be confused with the wasting and decaying body of the truly consumptive or those plagued by terminal illness—the femme fragile symbolized a romanticized notion of illness. Thomalla writes: "Krankheit war für das Fin de siècle identisch mit geistiger Verfeinerung. Man verachtete die 'banale et triviale santé' und feierte den Zustand der Krankheit als eine höhere und elegantere Form des Lebens." Young, fragile women in literary, visual, and staged-representation cultivated malady.

150 cf Thomalla 38
151 Ibid 21
153 Thomalla 28; Bram Dijkstra also writes: "To be ill was actually thought to be a sign of delicacy and breeding” (Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture. New York: Oxford, 1986: 27); while Weiber too points to the way in which nervosity was classed and also gendered in Vienna 1900 (72).
While Thomalla’s study of the *femme fragile* remains invaluable in its depth and also its uniqueness, there are several ways in which her work falls short. In part, her study fails to investigate any ways in which fragile women might exhibit any agency. She also writes that the figure of the *femme fragile* faded into non-existence after 1900, not taking into consideration Viennese hysterics at all.\(^{154}\) However, fragility continued and continues to exist, and the *femme fragile* did endure as a literary and artistic type, although, especially in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, the implications surrounding her fragility began to shift. The *femme fragile* in the literature and visual arts of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna offered a twist to the tradition of representations of feminine fragility that is idiosyncratic. The self-knowledge and introversion gained through writing, as we will see in part two, and the space of the psychoanalyst’s office added a level of agency to her frailty, which previously had been largely a male projection. Fragility, as it was manifested in illness and even suicide, opened a door for formerly agentless *femmes fragiles* to enact refusal. Perhaps it was the political climate: women were fighting for more rights to both education and employment. Perhaps the scientific and cultural discussion of sexual drives allowed not only the *femmes fatales* to represent feminine sexuality, but also the *femme fragile*. Sabine Wieber points to the way in which the Viennese *femme fragile* borrowed from the *femme fatale’s* eroticism, while remaining abstinent.\(^{155}\) The fragile female’s sexuality was often an asexuality, drawing on a fetishization of chastity, innocence, and purity. Their sexuality was at times an asexuality.

The fragility at stake in this project then comes out of the fraught position young middle and upper-middle class women occupied in Vienna at the *fin-de-siècle*. These *femmes fragiles*

\(^{154}\) cf. Thomalla, 96

\(^{155}\) Sabine Wieber writes: “[…] I contend that in Vienna 1900, the femme fragile operated as a construct of femininity that mediated the two opposing qualities of innocence (saintly angel) and fearsomeness (femme fatale). In painting and sculpture, the femme fragile shared some of the aesthetic conventions of the femme fatale, but she was able to contain the latter’s more threatening aspects through her vulnerability and frailness. Her implicit abstinence from sexual relations was seen to enable the femme fragile to reach a pure, more spiritual state of being: […].” (70).
were daughters and patients, hysterics and women so frustrated with their position that they rather chose to die than survive in the status quo. The *femme fragile* was an exaggeration of norms and expectations, and the defiant twist to fragility turned the obvious effects of forced submissiveness and virtuousness—illness, death, mental breakdown—into affects serving these women, offering them escape. Because fragility resulted from a series of limitations and unjust demands, the fall into illness or even suicide obviously points towards victimhood. Sometimes, however, it is possible to read illness or suicide as a conscious act of refusal or defiance. To fall ill enabled a retreat from a family and society that placed unfair demands on a young woman. Suicide acted as a very final refusal of both a status quo and a future contingent upon present circumstances. Victimhood could turn into subjecthood.

**Part 2 :: Shattered**
Chapter 3 :: There's a Future in Dying: The Case of Vera

In her influential work on death and femininity, *Over her Dead Body*, Elisabeth Bronfen underlines the potential of the aesthetic treatment of death as it is experienced by the viewer or reader: “In the aesthetic enactment, we have a situation impossible in life, namely that we die with another and return to the living.”\(^{156}\) The enactment of death serves, then, as a sort of sacrifice. In the case of literature, we read death, but we do not die. Instead, our life extends beyond the literary death we experience. What purpose, what effect, could this death, which is experienced but not realized in reality, have? Furthermore, what is the implication of a female character who pens her own death? That is to say, what does writing the end mean for both its reader and author? Does writing suicide lend the act lasting authority for its author and a displaced refusal, a kind of sacrifice, for its reader? In this chapter, and the chapters to follow, I consider how melodramatic suicide fiction from *fin-de-siècle* Vienna picks up on existing trends of fragile femininity, including hysteria and repressed sexuality, and allows women to author their own refusal.

\(^{156}\) Bronfen *Over her Dead Body* x
Betty Kris: A Biographical Sketch

Bettina Dorothea Kurth (née Kris, aka Betty Kris), who published her one and only literary work *Eine für Viele: Aus dem Tagebuche eines Mädchens* (1902) under the pseudonym Vera, plays a central role in this dissertation; however, she was very nearly lost to literary history. There are no separate archival holdings for Betty Kris, but fortunately her daughter, Gertrud Kurth’s, records found their way to the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. Among Gerturd Kurth's papers is a thin file containing some personal documents of her mother’s. Kris was born in Vienna on October 5th, 1878 to the Viennese lawyer Dr. Samuel Kris and Hermine Kris (née Morawetz). After her initial primary and secondary education, she passed examinations to teach French and German, which she did for several years at Weiser’s Language-School. After this she pursued higher education and was promoted to doctor in Art History and Archeaology at the University of Vienna in 1911. Kris was among the first women to receive a doctoral degree in Vienna.

In 1904 she married a lawyer and archeologist, Dr. Peter Paul Kurth, whom she had known since they were both sixteen. Paul Kurth, born Kohn, rejected his Judaism and was known to be extremely anti-Semitic. Betty converted to Lutheranism from Judaism, which might seem an anomaly in the very Catholic Vienna. They had one daughter, Gertrud Kurth (1904-1999) who wrote fiction and non-fiction, largely concerning women’s issues, before being forced to emigrate. While Betty Kris immigrated to England, her daughter fled to the United States. In New York City, Gertrud Kurth pursued a master’s degree at the New School of Social Research, where her uncle, Ernst
Kris, taught. Ernst Kris was a renowned art historian before becoming a psychoanalyst. As a boy, he spent a great deal of time with the Kurth family. Gertrud completed a doctorate in clinical psychology at Columbia.

Because of the lacking archive, much more is known about Gertrud Kurth's life than her mother's. Even in recent literary histories of Austrian female authors, her biography is brief and at times inaccurate. The most complete biography comes from Betty Kris herself, in a narrative curriculum vitae quoted below in its entirety:

Dr. Betty Kurth

Curriculum vitae

Born in Vienna 5.10.1878, daughter of the well known Viennese lawyer Dr. Kris. I am Lutheran, but according to the Nuremberg laws, non-Aryan. In 1904 I married the renowned lawyer and archeologist Dr. Peter Paul Kurth, who died in 1924. After 10 years at school I passed examinations for the teaching of languages and for several years taught French and German at Weiser’s Language-School in Wiedener Hauptstrasse. After that I finished the Grammar School and passed my final examination in 1908. Furthermore I studied at the University of Vienna History of Art and Archeology (pupil of Prof. Dvorak and Hofrat Prof. Stryzygowski) and was promoted doctor in 1911. As a young girl I wrote my first book “Vera, Eine für Viele”, Leipzig, Seemann. This book was very successful, had 23 editions and was translated in English, French, Russian, Czech. Since then I have only worked scientifically. Besides I taught history of art (I have considerable experience and success in teaching) and lectured at our Highschool “Urania” and elsewhere. I am a specialist for all sorts of textile works and also for European art of the Middle Ages. I have a fair knowledge of German, French, English, Italian and a little Spanish and Dutch.

We do not know when she wrote this CV, but it was either shortly before or after she immigrated to England in 1939, as the biography is part of a contact to acquire new

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157 For example even Agatha Schwartz, who offers one of only two existing analyses of Eine für Viele records Betty Kris’ date of birth as 1876 and not 1878.
158 LBI archives Gertrud Kurth Collection; AR 10905; Series V, Subseries I Box 2 / 21-27; Family, 1877-1948, Documents 1884-1941; Leo Baeck Institute.
employment. It is interesting to see what Betty Kurth (née Kris) highlights in her life as significant to her professional life. Obviously, with a sensitivity to the time and political climate in which she was writing, she made careful note of her Lutheranism. She did not state explicitly that she was Jewish, only that the Nuremberg laws listed her as "non-Aryan." We learn from an interview with her daughter, Gertrud Kurth, that Betty Kris converted in 1906, two years after her marriage to Kurth.

Before Betty Kris married Paul, before she began her graduate studies, she wrote and published her first and last novella, *Eine für Viele: Aus dem Tagebuche eines Mädchens* in 1902—she was twenty-four years old. The novella was wildly successful: issued twelve times in 1902 alone, with twenty-three editions in total, as Kris points out in her vita. It was translated into English, French, Russian, and Czech. The slender volume by the unknown and anonymous author received a great deal of critical attention along with twelve spin-offs, including both parodies and imitations.\(^{159}\) We do not know why Betty Kris did not publish further fictional works. She was a successful academic, specializing in and publishing on medieval tapestries. In an interview with the feminist and historian Amy Hackett, Gertrud Kurth suggested that her father forbade his wife to publish any more embarrassing fictional pieces. She also insinuated that her mother was partially inspired by her relationship to Paul; Kurth claimed to have heard her parents arguing about Betty’s suspicions of homosexual affairs Paul had before they were married.\(^{160}\) In the end it is the novella itself, the thematization of suicide, the role of

\(^{159}\) The after-life of the novella I will address in chapter three.

\(^{160}\) A paper Amy Hackett wrote about *Eine für Viele* can be found in the Gertrud Kurth Papers at LBI.
young daughters in fin-de-siècle Viennese society, and the future connected to the fictional Vera’s suicide that are of interest for this project.

Kris's education mirrors that of a new class of educated young women. Her schooling initially prepared her to teach, which, as Agatha Schwartz highlights in her work, became an option for women in 1902. An ambitious young woman, Betty Kris chose to expand her education and professional opportunities beyond language education and pursued a doctorate in Art History. In the CV she does make reference to the novel she wrote as a "young girl," and to its great success, but she emphasizes her more mature move to "scientific" or research-oriented work in the domain of “textile works.” After completing her dissertation, she worked as a lecturer and specialist of medieval tapestries at the Institut für Kunstgeschichte at the University of Vienna. In 1923 she published a monograph, Gottische Bildteppiche aus Frankreich und Flandern and in 1926 the Deutsche Verein für Kunstwissenschaft published her three-volume study Die deutschen Bildteppichen des Mittelalters. In England she was affiliated with the Warburg Institute, where her nephew Ernst Kris had great influence. Her final academic contribution was a catalog for the tapestries of the Burrell Collection at the Glasgow Art Gallery. She died in an accident in 1948. Unlike her protagonist and unlike most of the women featured in this dissertation, Betty Kris did not fall victim to the dissonance between increased educational rights and stagnant familial and social expectations for women.

161 Schwartz 46
From its very beginning, Vera’s Eine für Viele: Aus dem Tagebuche eines Mädchens carries a strong message of refusal: it is a text with a queer feminist agenda tucked away in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Like the notion of “shadow feminism” Halberstam introduces, the feminism in Eine für Viele relies on refusal, passivity, and absence, and uses self-destruction in order to put forward a call for a reconsideration of sexual education and unjust gender expectations. The text reaches across various genres: the epistolary, the autobiographical, the diary novel, and the Viennese modernist, stream-of-consciousness narrative. While evoking and revoking these literary forms Eine für Viele uses suicide as a springboard to make public sharp societal critique and to inspire change. Vera writes herself into both existing literary traditions and a history of martyrs and masochistic figures. Her masochism, however, is queer and her defiance passive. As a queer feminist text, it subverts literary form and uses themes of (auto)masochism, martyrdom, and refusal through death and posthumous readership to make a case for a future that has no ties to present circumstances. The fragility at stake in Vera’s life comes out of the fraught position young bourgeois women occupy in Vienna at the fin-de-siècle. Vera is one of many femmes fragiles, who are daughters and patients, hysterics and women so frustrated in their position that they would rather choose death than survive in the status quo.

Vera is the pseudonym Betty Kris assumed for her one fictional work, as well as the name of the protagonist. It suggests veracity, vera causa: Vera speaks the truth and

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163 cf Adley “Introduction” 12 and Halberstam 124.
offers a looking glass to more clearly see the reality of her present moment. The very first line of Nietzsche’s preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* poses the question “Supposing truth is a woman—what then?” Lacan, in his *Seminar XVII* pushes this further and supposes truth is, in fact, a sister, sister to *jouissance*, bringing truth and women into a central discourse, that of the hysteric’s discourse. Her discourse leads man along the path to truth. The name Vera, then, imbues the text with the purpose of one young woman, who stands for many, bringing truth to her readers. Furthermore, Katharina Gerstenberger, in her study of women’s autobiographies at the turn of the century, points out how the act of writing your name on the cover of an autobiography creates a promise to tell the truth. Taking the name “Vera” and putting it on the cover of a fictionalized diary, a fictionalized form of a deeply personal autobiographic genre, clearly plays off of this notion of autobiographic text and truth telling.

The act of taking a pseudonym, which also happens to be the name of the protagonist, additionally reflects the distance she created between herself and her writing. The protagonist’s actions in the novel mirror this distancing. Vera sits down on the eve of her wedding day and composes a suicide letter to send her fiancé, Georg, along with the pages from her diary, which trace the trajectory that has brought her to this unavoidable end. She writes the end of her life, but not without painting a picture of suffering, injustice, and ultimately of martyrdom. Moral expectations for young women in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna that insist on modesty, polished manners, and subservience to men

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165 cf Lacan *Seminar XVII* 55
suffocate, repress, and sometimes threaten to traumatize. Unfair and unequal demands are placed upon daughters, who both should be chaste and innocent while also standing ready to serve their family by acting as an attractive object or through profitable marriage matches, and in the novel Vera finds herself struggling against personal desires and familial and societal expectations. Vera feels she does not have the strength to change society. She turns to her fiancé, Georg, to carry out her legacy and to fight her battle. Unable to voice her cause directly, she sets out to distance her words from herself. She includes diary entries with her letter and implores Georg to publish them under a different name to make her case, the case of young women, public. In the novel Georg acts as an envoy: he is simply the carrier of her message. Georg plays a trivial role as silent publisher, who does not insert his thoughts or commentary into the published text. At the same time, he also provides further distancing and mediation to the writing of feminine fragility in his function as male publisher. Vera not only assumes a pseudonym, but she sends her diary entries and suicide letter to a man, suggesting that the message she desires to communicate can only be made public through this male mediation. It is Vera’s life that should act as an example for other young men and women, and her “unmediated” suicide letter and diary serve as a medium through which she and her cause come to voice.

Vera takes her “shortcomings” and translates them into a message of effecting change through death and defeat. The suicide letter and personal diary offer up Vera’s own failure to thrive as a negative model that might possibly touch one or two young men or women. Vera writes her end by writing herself into the literary traditions of
autobiography, the epistolary novel, and the diary novel. The former insists on truth and accuracy, while the second suggests intimacy and personal detail, and the third combines elements of the autobiographical and the epistolary, offering the reader missives an individual writes for oneself. All historically have been considered feminine forms.\(^{167}\)

The red volume, denoting possibley sinful contents, with “Vera” underlined twice on the cover, promises scandal and controversy [Figure 6]: i.e., the undiluted thoughts of a young girl. The writing style itself, marked heavily by dashes and ellipses, not only evokes the stream-of-consciousness introduced into the German literary canon by Arthur Schnitzler in 1900 with *Lieutenant Gustl*, but, also, what might later be theorized as *écriture féminine* by French feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

The message in the text throws into question traditional tropes of love and marriage, and demands action. Furthermore, in what follows, we will see how her style, when coupled with the imagery of chains, bondage, and whips, invokes Sacher-Masoch: dashes, too, mark the dialogue in *Venus im Pelz* (1870). Embedded within the feminine, the autobiographical, the epistolary, and even the modernist, there is the masochistic: a feminine masochistic martyr, who commits suicide, but first ensures that her death will have an afterlife that allows for passive defiance. Vera writes herself into a masochistic

discourse in which the contract is posthumous (a suicide letter) and the inflicted pain comes from society at large. The stuttered and ruptured thought, as played out on the page, paints a scene of a young woman struggling with the figurative restraints keeping her from living a life free from bourgeois expectations.

With the very first sentence of the novel and suicide letter, Vera sums up not only her particular story, but that of many young, bourgeois women in fin-de-siècle Vienna: “Georg! Ich kann nicht die Deine werden.”168 “Die Deine,” with its implied masculine possessive—Georg’s, his—is something Vera will not and cannot become. A young

168 Vera 3
woman’s primary option at this time is to become a man’s object, his possession. There seems to be no choice. Become “die Deine” or be single and alone, which quickly translates into being a drain on your family and on society—a social failure. But Vera refuses this. The novel’s opening, and the first sentence of her suicide letter, reveals a bold statement: “Ich kann nicht die Deine werden” (emphasis mine). The “nicht” negates what should have been an obvious decision. Eine für Viele begins with a direct refusal of societal expectations, a refusal of all the implications of “die Deine.” The refusal comes not without great effort and consideration: “Ich habe versucht, den Abgrund zwischen uns mit der Kraft meines Willens zu überbrücken.”

The double standard around male and female sexual education and development has resulted in this great abyss. The expectation that women are to be chaste and men are allowed sexual experimentation creates an insurmountable gap between Vera and her fiancé. Once Vera learns that Georg has had sexual relations before their relationship, she cannot turn a blind eye to the inequality. To act as if all is as it should be would be a lie, and this lie would be the end of her own and of Georg’s happiness: she predicts a future in which she would rot at his side due to this perpetual lie—“an einer ewigen Lüge verfaulen müssen.”

This lie defines the current and, most likely, future terms of marriage, family, and bourgeois societal structures. Vera’s act of refusal, however, is not purely self-serving. She regards her gesture as one that could also save Georg and possibly make other young men and women aware of the lies that they live. An air of conscious martyrdom hangs around her

169 Ibid 3
actions. She writes, “Meine Liebe ist stärker als mein Wille zum Leben,”\textsuperscript{171} turning her decision to end her life into the choice to honor her love for Georg and to prevent his suffering at the hand of a bitter and distraught wife.

Georg—or any young man—should not be blamed, according to Vera, for the imbalance between men and women. He did not create the double standard. He has played no role in establishing a sexual education that differs so starkly for young men and young women.\textsuperscript{172} Yet the realization that Georg has no fault in the matter marks a turning point in Vera’s young life. The young, fragile woman’s burden, Vera’s burden, is then all the greater: she is both naïve victim and all-knowing martyr for those bourgeois young adults who suffer an unjust culture. This great sensitivity and awareness is too much: “Meine Empfindungen sind nicht zu bändigen.”\textsuperscript{173} The presentation leans heavily on her use of language, which takes on a masochistic imagery—chains, victimhood, being restrained and beaten down. Later on in her diary, for example, she describes how she struggles unsuccessfully with the chains society lays on her: “ich rassle mit den Ketten, ohne die Kraft, sie zu zerbrechen,”\textsuperscript{174} or how she cannot build herself up underneath the “ewigen Peitschenhieben.”\textsuperscript{175} Historically, women have not often been associated with masochism as either a sexual perversion or an adopted strategy, because they have been

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid 1
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid 3
\textsuperscript{172} Vera writes how sexual experimentation was a “notwendiges Genussmittel seiner Jugend, ein Requisit der Gesundheit . . . Die Aerzte erklärten es sogar als unerlässlich. - - - Und dann – die andern machten es ja nicht anders!!” (59).
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid 3
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid 40
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid 106
viewed as inherently inferior: Krafft-Ebing considered them naturally masochistic. Not only were women meant to be inherently masochistic and submissive, in the nineteenth century, sexologists attributed to women the role of taming male sexual instincts: women were mild and moral, while men possessed “baser animal instincts.” Nevertheless, extensive scholarship exists refuting this nineteenth-century assumption and investigating the potential of female masochism. Vera’s masochism is defiant, and also edifying: she wants to break the chains and free herself and then educate other young men and women about the double moral standard concerning sexuality. Vera’s role is very different from Sacher-Masoch’s dominatrix, Wanda, who willingly enters the masochistic contract as the one to mete out punishment. She is not a dominatrix: she does not wield the whip, nor chain the masochistic male. Instead she finds herself the masochistic subject of a cruel society. She truly is a subject, though, as she finds a way to sink deep into her restraints and free herself by giving in. Freedom and defiance come in death: the shattering Leo Bersani associates with sexuality becomes Vera’s greatest statement. Vera is a victim, and yet she rejects her society’s bondage: she is a rebellious masochist, a defiant educator of her peers. Clearly, defiance here does not preclude the possibility of passivity and weakness. Defying through renunciation, her gesture involves retaining a certain feminine, caregiving role. Not only, then, does Vera complicate masochism by

176 cf Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886)
making it an assumed feminine strategy of defiance, she also breaks with the cold masochism we find in *Venus im Pelz* and assumes a kind of moral masochism that cares and wants to give back. Her dramatic act is as much for her as it is for Georg and for other young men and women.

In her suicide letter, Vera gains a voice that musters authority from her weakness and suffering: “Ich bin ein Opfer unserer Gesellschaftsordnung...das Erste nicht — und noch lange nicht das letzte...ich bin zu schwach, den gigantischen Kampf aufzunehmen — und zu einsam.”

Again, one sentence summons up not only Vera’s whole story, but an entire history of martyrdom. She is “das Erste nicht”: this recalls a genealogy of victims of a society that privileges men and that allows for love built upon lies and deception.

One notable figure in this lineage would be Goethe’s Gretchen. At the end of Faust I, in “Trüber Tag: Feld,” when Faust laments the misery and suffering that Gretchen now must endure due to his careless flirtation, Mephistopheles cruelly and yet wisely points out that “[s]ie ist die erste nicht.”

Gretchen was neither the first nor last to suffer and die at the hands of an unfair culture with unequal gender expectations and treatment. Now Vera writes herself into this same history, but she writes herself into the history: she pens the narrative, she chooses her end. Gretchen died a victim, while Vera will die a martyr, offering up her life for a cause, dying on her own terms: she is, after all, “Eine für Viele,” and she sacrifices her own life for the sake of the many women like her.

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181 Vera 4
182 Goethe *Faust* 155
183 Writing her own end, then, recalls Goethe’s Werther, whose suicide Werther himself writes into the letters he sends his friend Wilhelm. cf Johann Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1998.
184 For example the “Schöne Seele,” which I discuss in chapter one.
She is not the first and will not be the last, but yet, despite this past and future community of suffering women, Vera is alone. Her victimhood is determined by her specific time: it is “unsere[r] Gesellschaftsordnung,” fin-de-siècle Vienna, which casts her as victim; it is this moment in time which allows her to turn her victimhood into martyrdom. And despite the long list of victims past and present who would suffer as she does, as she sits writing in her diary she is solitary. To martyr oneself is an isolating process, as is the act of writing. Vera finds authorship and authority in her ability to write her own death sentence and thereby refuses the social structure that would make her a victim and that would make Georg suffer. She writes “the end” for her own corporeal existence in this history of victimhood, but her fight lives on in her written words. Her dying has a future—or rather it creates the possibility of a future that breaks with the conditions of the present that threaten to endure if not for their rejection in the here and now.

Vera’s last request is that Georg takes up her fight. She includes for Georg the last entries in her diary along with the suicide letter. They outline her story and show the trajectory of her downfall. These diary entries make up the rest of the novel. The suicide letter stands in for a framing apparatus for the fictionalized diary entries, although, actually, there is no contextualizing frame: simply the letter and then the diary entries without any editorial introduction, conclusion, or commentary. The incomplete frame mirrors the nature of a suicide letter: the suicide letter is a one-sided epistolary exchange. The recipient will never be able to respond, because the sender is, presumably, dead. This breaks with a literary tradition of fictional letters or diaries being introduced to the public.
by an editor or by an authority, who has come into possession of these “personal” writings and chooses to publish them. Instead, we have only Vera’s unmediated words: “Es ist jedes Wort ein Fetzen meiner Seele.” With Vera, “the truth,” written large on the red cover of the novel [Figure 6] and Vera’s suicide letter and diaries inside, the reader receives Vera’s plight in Vera’s words without the contamination of a third party. She hopes that these fragments of her soul, which she sends to Georg, will make some minor change when Georg publishes the letter and diary entries anonymously. It is enough for her if her story affects even one person. Her cry for an altered future is not obviously revolutionary. It is couched in martyrdom, masochistic imagery, and anonymity; her dying brings refusal of the status quo and a muted cry for change. Her final greetings to Georg are forged out of both love and suffering (“Liebe und Leid”) in equal measure. In her present, as in the past, and even in a future in which many are deaf to her warnings, she, a figure of fragile femininity, exists as a weak being who loves and therefore must suffer. These two states—“Liebe und Leid”—cannot be separated: not in life. In death, however, Vera breaks the chains of suffering and writes the chance for a new and more hopeful future that would challenge the double moral standard for men and women.

In the enclosed pages of her diary, the first entry from September 18th already highlights Vera’s sleeplessness: “ich finde schon seit einigen Tagen keinen festen

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185 Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) acts as a classic example where the letters are introduced, “convincing” the reader of their veracity.
186 Vera 4
187 Ibid 4
befreienden Schlaf.”¹⁸⁸ The freedom she seeks, the release from her imprisonment, exists in a deep sleep that appears out of reach: she eventually finds such a slumber in death, as the reader already knows from the suicide letter. The language resonates with the masochistic tone from the letter: for example, the storm whips the window; the darkness imprisons her (“Der Sturm peitscht [...] die Finsternis kerkert mich.”).¹⁸⁹ Although, as I will discuss shortly, critics dismissed the novel’s language at the time as melodramatic and exaggerated, the protagonist performs perfectly the tone of the angst-ridden, emotional outpourings of a young woman writing in her diary. Vera’s diary entries provide singular insight into the alternative means of fragile resistance: personal writings, publication through and beyond suicide, and making the personal public through anonymity.

Within the diary entries we find not simply the self-centered or perhaps childish tangents and ruminations of the distraught Vera, but also serious social critiques. Amidst superficial remarks, she sharply appraises the status of young women and the unjust expectation for daughters of her class. Like Joseph Breuer's hysteric patient, Anna O., the fictional Vera suffers from the dissonance between her education and the boredom with the lifestyle “appropriate” for the fair sex.¹⁹⁰ She imagines the rejuvenation that would come with the obligation to work and to think, activities which would spare her the pessimism and despair that she is often led to in her idleness, and then offers the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid 5
¹⁸⁹ Ibid 5
¹⁹⁰ Breuer notes the following: “Of considerable intelligence, remarkably acute powers of reasoning, and a clear-sighted intuitive sense, her powerful mind could have digested, needed even, more substantial intellectual nourishment, but failed to receive it once she had left school” (Freud and Breuer 25). The stifling of her high level of intelligence and creativity partly played into her neurasthenia.
following judgment: “Aber dieses satte Geniessen in ewiger Unzufriedenheit, dieser 
bourgeoisé Behaglichkeits-Fanatismus, die ertöten nicht allein die Fähigkeit zu ernster 
Arbeit, sondern auch das Verlangen danach. Und in diesem ziellosen 
Unvermögensbewusstsein liegt das raffinierte Elend.” Vera believes that for precisely 
this reason nervous disorders are a rarity amongst the working class and all the rage in 
her own class: “In unsern genusskranken Kreisen ist die Heimat der Neurasthenie.”

The institution of marriage receives special scrutiny in Vera’s reflections. She 
believes that she loves Georg and thus she writes of her longing for him and of her sexual 
frustration. She is, in fact, very aware of the social mores that determine the stages of her 
life and the actions she may or may not take, and she finds them oftentimes downright 
disgusting. Vera writes that she suffers due to her erotic longing and quickly realizes 
that she is sickened by society’s conservative traditions:

Ich leide unter dieser erotischen Sehnsucht. . . .
Ich kranke an den atavistischen Begriffsüberbleibseln
meines Milieus. Die Unze Goldes, die zum Ehering
geschmiedet wird, soll mir das Recht geben, meinen Körper
zu verschenken—und meiner Liebe ist dieses Recht
verwehrt?
Das Champagnergelage der Hochzeitsgäste und ihre frivolen
Spässe sollen mir den Augenblick weisen, in dem ich meinem
Geliebten ganz gehören darf?
Inzwischen soll ich meine Sinne einschläfern, meine Impulse
ertöten und mich in einen Käfig von Konvenienz sperren?
Und dann aus der Kirche ins Hochzeitsbett, das die Sanktion der
Gesellschaft geheiligt hat. . . . [...]
So ökonomisch notwendig die Ehe als gesellschaftliche
Institution für die Masse mir erscheint, so entehrend erscheint es

191 Vera 8
192 Ibid 9
193 Ibid 39
The ellipsis between “Sehnsucht” and “Ich kranke” performs her contemplation and the shift in tone. It is not that Vera only suffers from erotic desires, but, also, society, her milieu, and their outdated beliefs and expectations make her sick. She spells out her economic value: an ounce of gold. The wedding band buys her the approval to give her body away. Furthermore, she questions the ceremony and rituals that exist around marriage, which quickly translates into the sanction of marital conjugation. Vera understands that marriage is economically necessary, although the wait involved burdens her. The stifling gender expectations become the figurative chains that oppress the fragile young woman.

Vera introduces the notion of the abyss that separates her and Georg already in her suicide letter, and she returns to the specifics of Georg’s previous sexual affairs halfway through the diary entries. A chance encounter with a former lover leads Georg to confess his past affairs to his fiancée. Once Vera gains this insight, however, the figurative chains overwhelm her. He has led the life of most young men: “Leichtgelöste Verhältnisse ohne Gefühlsketten, bezahlte Liebe in wahllosem Sinnenbedürfnis, ein Leben, das das Edelste verschwendete, ohne dessen Wert zu kennen. [...] Ja, er hatte nie das Bewusstsein von dem Werte dieser Reinheit.” She hints at the double moral standard of men and women: Georg, like all young men of his class and era, knew not to value his own purity.

\[194\] Ibid 39-40
\[195\] Ibid 58
The expectation simply did not exist, and the consideration of what was expected of women his own age and of his own class did not seem to play a role: “Er dachte nie, nie einen Augenblick, daran, dass das Wesen, das sich ihm einst geben würde in vollster, reinster Hingabe—diese Reinheit von ihm for dern könnte. Nein. Er war diesem Wesen seit einem Jahre treu, seit einem Jahre—das erschien ihm wahrscheinlich schon als grosses Opfer” 196 Social norms granted men the freedom for sexual experience while requiring women to lock up their sexual desires and needs until marriage; and even after marriage, female sexuality must remain modestly in line with the expectations for a bourgeois wife.

In her earlier diary entries we find a clear tension between skepticism towards the institution of marriage and a much more simple and nearly primal examination of her own desires and wants. But the personal encounter with the double moral standard pushes Vera to deny her sexual wants and to reject Georg: “Er weiss nichts von dem Zerstörungswerk, das er entfesselt. Ich bin ihm entrückt. Ich versperre mich vor ihm. Ich will mein Elend nicht mit ihm teilen!” 197 It would seem that although Georg releases (entfesselt) the destructive forces, he is not allowed to partake in the misery itself. Again we see a turn to the automasochistic: Vera locks herself up with her suffering, a misery she refuses to share. The wounds opened by the realization of the double standard and Georg’s youthful promiscuity become instead a pleasurable site of reflection and masochistic indulgence: “Es war mir Wollust, in dieser Wunde zu wühlen.” 198 Vera has

196 Ibid 58-59
197 Ibid 61
198 Ibid 57
been wronged and she takes a moment to indulge her pain. Taking into account that Vera chooses to die and open her suicide letter and diary for public consumption after her death, however, adds another level of meaning to this pleasure. For the masochist there is pleasure in pain. For the martyr there is satisfaction and purpose in giving one’s life to a greater cause. Vera experiences both: she finds a perverse satisfaction in revisiting the pain Georg’s past actions caused her, but, additionally, in sinking into this pain, she finds a way to translate her suffering into a posthumous call for change. She is lost; yet others might benefit from her experience and be spared.

Before Vera chooses death, however, there is one moment in which she contemplates suppressing her disgust at the state of affairs in order to assume the role of the “good woman.” She notes down that she has written a melodramatic, embarrassing farewell letter to Georg, but decides to tear it up. Instead, she chooses to be patient: “Ich will erwachen aus diesem Ohnmachtsrausch meines Willens. Ich will stark sein und überwinden. Ich will mich verschwenden in Liebe, ohne etwas dafür zu empfangen. [...] ... Ich will schenken, ohne zu messen. . . .”199 The repetition of “Ich will” creates an overwrought tone that invokes the struggle the young Vera endures: she wants to give and be strong, she wants to participate in the kind of love society expects from her. But for all the wanting, she never can do those things. This desire, it turns out, is also one society has pushed onto her. On the one hand it is real, but, on the other hand, Vera cannot fully inhabit it, and the pain associated with this tension between imposed

199 Ibid 85-86
impulses and actual inclination leads her to suicide. We never see this version of the letter, only the suicide letter that opens the novel.

Vera presents us here with two competing notions of masochism: the expected feminine masochistic love in which the woman is patient and suffers for the man. Patience is a virtue at which young women are expected to excel: “Das Weibe wächst in seinen Innerlichkeiten, wenn es dulden muss. Darum lässt man es so viel dulden.”200 The blame is not merely on men: women cultivate these attributes and seek refuge in them. Vera, too, finds herself ready to give into the masochistic feminine ideal. Yet the other notion of masochism, a much more self-serving, society-defying, “unnatural” masochism, is the one that ultimately subsumes her. She locks herself away from Georg and the world. Instead of allowing the world to suffocate her slowly, she kills herself. Her choice is deliberate, and as we read in her suicide note, she hopes that her private and personal act will be made public through anonymous publication: “Und manches reines, feinfühlende Weib, das von meinem Schicksal liest . . . . wird es mir verstehen - - vielleicht erleiden und erleben. . . . Und wenn ich nur ein einziges Steinchen zu dem Wunderbau einer reinern, keuschern Zukunft zu tragen vermöchte... es wäre nicht zu teuer erkauft mit meinem Leben.”201 Ellipses and dashes slow down her final statement. The words are deliberate, the decision final, and the sentiment ultimately grand. These are the final words of her diary and thus the last words of the novel, allowing Eine für Viele to end on an unexpectedly idealistic and hopeful note: Vera’s death finds, or, she hopes, will find, a future in the women who read her diaries and suicide letter.

200 Ibid 87
201 Ibid 110
Vera’s failure to thrive within the terms of her society resulted in a bestseller. In 1902 alone, *Eine für Viele* saw twelve editions. Richard Wengraf, in his 1902 essay “Frauenbücher” (“Women's Books”) in the journal *Das litterarische Echo* (*The Literary Echo*), credits “Vera’s” success to savvy publication and press tactics:

> Was aber hat denn nun den Erfolg der Vera begründet? Einzig und allein ein paar geschickt in Tagesblättern herausgebrachte Notizen über die Person der Verfasserin. „Ein junges Mädchen aus der besten Gesellschaft, die Tochter eines angesehenen viener [sic] Rechtsanwalts“, so hieß es in den ersten Reklamen, so hieß es bald darauf in zahllosen spaltenlangen Artikeln und Feuilletons […], sei die Schöpferin dieses „menschlichen Dokumentes“ und die weltfremden Zeitungsschreiber, die auf dem roten Umschlage die Worte „Eine für Viele“ lasen, glaubten wirklich (oder theten sie nur so weltfremd?) an die Aktivlegitimation des Fräuleins Vera, im Namen ihrer Mitschwestern vor die Öffentlichkeit zu treten. So kaufte das Publikum das Buch in dem guten Glauben, es gewähre Einblick in die Gedanken- und Empfindungswelt des jungen Mädchens von heute.²⁰²

Otherwise, Wengraf, in his scathing critique of female authors at the time, dismisses *Eine für Viele* as the very worst example of melodramatic works, displaying absolutely no writerly ability.²⁰³ Wengraf’s criticism was not isolated. Most *fin-de-siècle* critics deny not only Vera but also the majority of female authors at the time any literary talent. When an established male author like Arthur Schnitzler writes the rambling thoughts of a young man or woman, he is considered a master in capturing the human psyche. When female authors do the same, it is simply because they themselves are hysteric and could not write otherwise.

²⁰³ Ibid 98
Wengraf rightly points out that some of the responses assumed the actual existence of Vera as a nonfictional character and reacted accordingly. Thus in the *Wiener Hausfrauenzeitung* we encounter the following: “Es war notwendig, daß ein Arzt sich der Aufgabe unterziehe, die kranke Psyche der Vera zu analysieren und zu kurieren. […] denn die bedauernwerte Vera ist krank, geistig nicht normal, konfus und total unfähig in der Beherrschung und Lösung einer Aufgabe […] Vera hat viele reine Seelen infiziert und würde eigentlich verdienen, daß sie ständig unter ärztlicher Kontrolle stehe.”

This Viennese woman takes Vera not as a fictional heroine, but as a young woman who really lived and suffered, and whose legacy is the infection of a great number of young people. It is noteworthy that the discourse is of psychic disease and analysis. Both Vera the author and Vera the protagonist are perceived as hysterical: analysis might have prevented her suicide, as well as the desire to have her diary entries published, and therefore also the effect her actions had. Furthermore, the fear of contagion adds an intriguing twist: Vera might infect the younger generation with her scandalous ideas of equal and just sexual education and experience. Like syphilis, *Eine für Viele* threatens to contaminate young men and women at the time.

While Vera scandalizes the housewife, prominent literary and cultural figure journalist Karl Kraus finds the work conservative. He offers a dismissive reaction in his popular cultural journal *Die Fackel*, pointing to the untimeliness of *Eine für Viele*. Not taking into account that young men were also impassioned readers of the text, he writes:

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204 *Wiener Hausfrauenzeitung* Letter to the Editor, Nr. 16. 1903, 159

205 Vera is published six years after Freud and Joseph Breuer publish their *Studies in Hysteria* and at a time when hysteria is a prevalent ailment amongst young bourgeois women in Vienna.

206 Schnitzler’s *Reigen* (1903) plays too with the fear of syphilis passing from one person to another through a variety of sexual encounters, one couple at a time.
“Und so ist schliesslich auch der Sensationserfolg Veras zu erklären, der Verfasserin jenes läppischen Tagebuchs, in dem eine Dame mit anatomischer Jungfräulichkeit den Katzenjammer ihrer unzüchtigen Träume zu der Forderung missbraucht, der Mann müsse unberührt in die Ehe treten. Das ist in einer Zeit, die die Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter in der Befreiung der Frau von conventionellen Schranken ahnt, nicht klug gedacht; […]"207 Putting aside the negative critique, that such a well-respected journalist would bother commenting on Vera indicates the popularity and cultural significance of the text. His comments, however, are wholly dismissive, and Kraus focuses on the absurd notion that men would be chaste, as opposed to a more open-minded interpretation that there should be perhaps the same sexual expectations for men and women. Nevertheless, a group of young men claimed they wanted to adhere to Vera’s “wishes” and chose to be chaste until marriage. The term “Veraismus” came to represent the ideology packed into the slender novel.208 Kraus disregards the cultural impact of the novel along with any potential literary value and instead offers a very cursory interpretation of the work. For Kraus, equal rights for men and women translate into both sexes engaging in premarital affairs. He does not consider that equality could also result in neither men nor women having sex before marriage, nor does he seem willing to recall that there are many moments in Eine für Viele in which the protagonist Vera provides cutting criticisms of conventional marriage practices. She, in fact, makes a call for a radical chastity. Like the exaggeration of expected femininity embodied by the femme fragile, Eine für Viele

208 The term “Veraismus” can be found in a volume compiled by the publishing house Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, the same house that published Eine für Viele, Neue Frauen? Neue Männer! ein Buch für moderne Frauen und Männer (1902).
provides readers with an exaggeration of the modesty upstanding women were meant to embody. Kraus believes that the radical action would be for women to mimic male sexual behavior, while Vera insists that men follow the conservative sexual expectations pushed on women.

Despite Kraus’s disregard for Vera, a volume also published in 1902 and aptly titled *Neue Frauen? Neue Männer! Ein Buch für moderne Frauen* centers the discussion of literary and textual representations of the new woman and the new man in modern society in *Eine für Viele*. This novel warrants such status, because among the reactions there were numerous parodies and thought pieces.209 *Neue Frauen? Neue Männer!* is an excellent resource, because it provides lengthy excerpts from these parodies, imitations, and reactions to *Eine für Viele*, which otherwise have been lost, along with the critical reactions to these works. This volume delineates the widespread influence this volume had in Vienna at the turn of the century. Furthermore, “Das rote Verabuch” inspired Oskar Friedländer and Else Jerusalem to publish scholarly studies in 1902, as well.210 Friedländer used Vera as a catalyst for a philosophical reflection on the principles of sexuality and askesis in an essay in *Die Gesellschaft*. Jerusalem wrote a treatise on the

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210 *Eine für Viele* had a soft red cover, along with its deviant content, which lent the book its nickname, the red bringing with it an air of seduction and the forbidden.
sexual education of women, *Gebt uns die Wahrheit*: an education that attempts to rewrite the previous pedagogy of sexual ignorance, just as the fictional Vera would have wanted.

Of course, the majority of these reactions focus on the cultural and social implications of *Eine für Viele* and not the literary. Even today there exists a real need to recuperate such texts not simply because they are by women, but also because of their cultural and literary significance. Although *Eine für Viele* disappeared from literary history in a sea of canonical modernist Viennese texts penned by men, and the progeny-parodies are even more difficult to find than Vera herself, it would seem that the fictional Vera’s suicide note and her diary entries did in fact touch more than one reader. The battle she would not fight found willing advocates. The literary depiction of suicide mobilized young bourgeois men and women to demand a different future.

**Chapter 4 :: Writing and Erasing the Body - Venus am Kreuz**

If every refusal is, finally, a loyalty to some other bond in the present or the past, refusal is simultaneously preservation as well.

- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*

While the majority of the women I investigate in this dissertation—authors, patients, and protagonists—are bourgeois, in Else Kotányi’s novella we find a young woman whose life story reflects more Charcot’s patients than Freud’s. Kotányi herself, however, represents the kind of educated middle-class woman that existed in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. It is her figures who are poor and desperate. Evoking mystical texts and foreshadowing écriture féminine, *Venus am Kreuz* portrays a young woman’s demise
through her own words. The fictionalized diary performs the act of finding a language to describe the oppression and pain the protagonist, Garda, has experienced. The novella is psychoanalytic, modern, and queer feminist in its expression of a darker side to feminine sexuality and its raw depiction of suicide as a welcome solution. For Garda death allows her to silence the disturbing voices from her past and present.

**Else Kotányi: A Biographical Sketch**

Unlike Betty Kris, Elsa Kotányi established herself as both a professional literary author and a feminist. Nevertheless, her biography retains many holes, and what little is known is contradictory. She was born in Vienna in 1876 to an upper-middle-class Jewish family of Hungarian descent, but, like Kris, she converted to Lutheranism in 1911. She too had access to a better education than women a generation before her: She went to secondary school and completed continuing education courses so that by the age of sixteen she enrolled, of her own accord, as a special guest auditor for philosophy and German literature at the University of Vienna. She studied for four years and was already taking courses at the university in 1897, when women were officially allowed enrollment. After completing her studies she worked as an elocutionist and writer, eventually focusing on topics of women's emancipation. In 1899 she published her first collection of novellas, *Venus am Kreuz*, all of which dealt with the topic of women's sexuality and prostitution. This collection, along with one very brief tale in the journal *Simplicissimus*, is the only work she published under her maiden name. In 1901 she married Alfred Jerusalem and assumed his name. They had two children who presumably

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stayed with their father after they divorced. Even in her second marriage she maintained the name Jerusalem due to the success she had had under that name. Her greatest literary success came in 1909 with Der heilige Skarabäus, which saw multiple editions and received much critical attention. She moved to Argentina in 1912 with her second husband, Dr. Victor Widakowich, a professor at the University of Buenos Aires. Evidence of a continued literary career in Argentina is lacking. The couple had one son. She died in Buenos Aires in 1942.212

Else Kotányi’s protagonist in Venus am Kreuz (1899), Garda, finds herself torn between the submission to and subversion of her role as a sexual object of exchange, much like Schnitzler’s Fräulein Else. Kotányi’s novella—published a quarter of a century before Fräulein Else, and three years before Eine für Viele—from 1899 presents itself as an exemplary piece of literature which mirrors, if not foreshadows themes and style indicative of fin-de-siècle writing, especially in Vienna. In particular, Kotányi’s early novella suggests a relationship to Schnitzler and his oeuvre: Leutnant Gustl and Fräulein Else might be the literary heirs of a tradition Kotányi introduced into the Viennese literary world. The literary canon has prevented us from seeing such a genealogy; Schnitzler counts as the figure who introduces stream-of-consciousness into German literary history, as well as the master of representing the fragile and hysterical psyches of young Viennese women. For Kotányi there is no evidence of an impressive reception history. Else Kotányi seemed to have won little critical attention prior to the publication of Der heilige Skarabäus (1909), with perhaps slight critical attention at the time that she

212 http://www.onb.ac.at/ariadne/vfb/bt_fl_konvertitinnen.htm
published her treatise on the sexual education of women in reaction to *Eine für Viele.*

There does exist, however, limited archival evidence of personal interactions between Schnitzler and Kotányi: namely, a letter, a few notes, and some staccato diary entries.

On the 20th of May, 1909, Else Kotányi-Jerusalem introduces herself to Arthur Schnitzler for the first time in a letter. Six days later, as can be noted in Schnitzler’s diary, she visits him. Between the 7th of March and 6th of September 1909, her name appears five times in the diary. Shortly before their first encounter, Schnitzler noted that he had begun reading *Der heilige Skarabäus:* “ein sehr merkwürdiges Buch.”

Otherwise, the two met a couple of times to dine, generally with their significant others. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that Schnitzler ever read any of her earlier texts or that they discussed them when they met. The entry from the 26th of May indicates that their conversation took a similar course as the letter written a few days prior:

Frau Jerusalem, die Dichterin des heiligen Skarabäus, hatte sich angesagt, kam und erwies sich als kluge sympathische Frau. Über die Entstehung ihres Buchs, über ihre Jugend, ihre Pläne.—Ihre grammaticalischen Fehler, ihre Unfreiheit, Befangenheit bei Wassermanns; Juliens komische Erziehungsversuche . . . (‘Worte wie Brunst dürfen Sie vor Hofmannsthal nicht sagen.’)

This brief, stenographic commentary, typical for Schnitzler’s journaling style, reveals respect for the younger female author, but provides little concrete information about the nature of their discussions of her plans and literary relations.

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213 aside from the early novellas, Else Kotányi published her writing under her married name “Jersualem”. Because I am concerned with the lesser known early work, I will refer to her as Kotányi, although she is better known as Jerusalem.
215 Ibid 56
216 Kotányi 69
The one letter found in the archive from Else Jerusalem to Schnitzler unfortunately also does not reveal much of a professional relationship between the two. After a promising introduction ("Lieber Herr Schnitzler! Verzeihen Sie, aber so geht es wirklich nicht. Ich muß meine Sache selbst in die Hand nehmen, denn alle Welt verspricht mir Ihre Bekanntschaft und keiner hält es."), there is no reference to the similarities between the two authors’ works. The strong desire to make Schnitzler’s acquaintance thus has nothing to do with the trailblazing nature of her early novella, which might have been influential for Schnitzler. Instead, Kotányi writes about her childhood, during which she dreamed of meeting great authors such as Schnitzler. She describes herself as a young writing woman, emphasizing how she had begun working as a writer already twelve years earlier. The career of a writing woman, however, is not as charmed as that of her male counterparts. She lacked the good connections and conditions that “prominent” men like Schnitzler had. And to fulfill her dream of meeting someone like him, she had to first write something “important.” One can safely assume that Der heilige Skarabäus had a significant enough reception to prompt Kotányi to dare write Schnitzler and then visit him. The tone of the letter remains obsequious, and aside from a few descriptions of a young girl with a strong will (mit “starken Willen”) and an unusually high level of consciousness, she says very little about her own writing or abilities. Schnitzler’s diary entry suggests that during the visit they discussed the production of her novel, but not of her earlier texts.

There is hardly any contemporary literature that comments upon Kotányi’s earlier work and the criticism that does is often dismissive. Der heilige Skarabäus, however, was
very successful. Already eight weeks after its initial publication there was call for a tenth printing.\textsuperscript{217} By reading through the many reviews of the novel, it is possible to get an overview of the opinion of “Frauenliteratur” at that time, as well as of Else Kotányi’s writerly abilities, at least as it was perceived by many male critics. The insight into the literary and cultural climate of the time which the reviews offer us, especially in regards to gender, lead to questions and concerns that extend beyond simply this novella or even this chapter or dissertation. Although the majority of the reviews are quite positive, they praise \textit{Der heilige Skarabäus} as a “cultural document” because they view it as an unsuccessful attempt as a poetic work. According to the reviewers, a woman can present facts and depict an historical or cultural moment quite well, but she certainly cannot write creatively. The novel is seen generally as her first work, but if earlier works are acknowledged, they are described as embarrassing and immature: she has far outgrown her youth’s scribbling, in the reviewers’ opinion.\textsuperscript{218}

Writing the Body / Erasing the Body

Among the “embarrassing” works of Kotányi’s early career is \textit{Venus am Kreuz}, a novella exemplary not only in its representation of female fragility and suicide as a means of escape, but also as a work which heralds the interdependence between literature and the developing field of psychoanalysis in \textit{fin-de-siècle} Vienna. A year before \textit{Lietnani}
Gustl, the same year as Die Traumdeutung, twenty five years before Fräulein Else, Venus am Kreuz offers a raw depiction of a young woman’s tortuous thought process as she navigates her own conflicting desires between love and lust, innocence and promiscuity, truth and madness.

Garda, the protagonist of Venus am Kreuz is the product of rape. When Garda is still a child, her mother dies, leaving her an orphan. Her one altruistic caretaker’s death leaves her to fall prey to sexual victimization, as well: her elderly teacher rapes her and takes her as a lover—Garda is only sixteen. This early encounter with male dominance and brutality awakens in Garda a hunger to embrace her own sexuality and to control it. She both exploits her own sexuality and denies sexualization by men. Thus begins the duality that will ultimately drive Garda mad: the desire to live erotically—to use her sexual prowess to dominate men—and the realization that the society she lives in—even the hyper-sexualized, decadent Viennese society—rejects women “like her.” For Vera, the double standard concerns sexual education and for Garda it concerns sexual norms. By night, Garda drinks champagne, receives roses, and experiences orgies. But she must accept that were the families of the daughters to whom she has taught music since her early teenage years to learn of her double life, they would consider her a moral leper, unfit to be in contact with “finer” society. And here we meet Garda in her notes; she is ready to “cash in” on the multiplicity of her female desires, about to return “zum Militär”—as a prostitute. In the end victimization leads her to addiction and suicide. As her addiction and madness escalate, her narrative grows increasingly incoherent and

219 And Garda loves these little girls, each one a symbol of purity and simplicity, as much as she loves her night-time existence.
distorted. Similar to Fräulein Else hallucinations, delirium, and fear mark the last pages of her life story. Suicide by overdose ends the narrative and Garda’s life.

Kotányi’s haunting novella is structured by the paradoxical relationships between truth and madness, erasure of the body and writing, self-disintegration and self-construction, as well as by the relationship between suicide and writing the body, feminine writing and a kind of “mystériqual” relationship which is beyond language and which seeks a divine/masochistic pleasure. The protagonist, Garda, begins to write her life in note-like reflections at the outset of the novella. While the fractured notes are not dated, they both progress and refer back to earlier entries as a diary might and also attempt to record her repressed past, like a memoir. The notes are often incomplete, threaded with breaks and ellipses—the hallmark of a discourse that breaks from logocentrism, a precursor to écriture féminine, but also indicative of stream-of-consciousness, a literary technique that Schnitzler’s Leutnant Gustl becomes famous for a year later. Violence seems to drive the narrative and her life, breaking Garda’s body and her train of thought. Particularly traumatic moments of her past receive the charged “Will nicht darüber sprechen,” creating a silence as statement along with the silence in punctuation.

Garda seeks healing in writing; near the beginning of the novella she writes: “Ich will es niederschreiben, will endlich diese tausend kleinen Gedanken, die hin- und herhuschen, festhalten und bannen, dann wird mir wohler sein.” But the wellbeing she hopes to find in the act of writing proves tortuous:

220 Kotányi 1
Is the act of writing beneficial or harmful? Garda has become mad and restless—because she writes. She seems ill and feverish. Yet, does not the action of tearing apart her innermost being bring her relief? The onomatopoeic German “zerreißen” rings with the violence of this act. She feels lightened. Writing—tearing up—makes her both agitated and calm. The word stares at her with its unmerciful gaze from the page, confronting her with the truth of the injustice of her situation as a woman: she cannot actually be sexually active and fulfilled, not in fin-de-siècle Vienna. This truth or reality banishes the empty peace of mind to which she once clung. So, the act of writing is both beneficial and harmful. Writing brings her closer to the truth. The truth might indeed drive her crazy, but perhaps this madness aids her ability to reject the injustices of her life and society.

In “Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous contends that a woman does not actually speak, rather she “physically materializes what she’s thinking; she signifies it with her body.” As Else Kotányi demonstrates in her novella, signification materializes corporeally when women assume authorship. Cixous resists ideas of over simplified equality between men and women.
and women that might turn women into slaves of male discourse. She believes that women are unique and therefore the language with which they would communicate this difference and their agency must be idiosyncratic to them. Thus she states:

> Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word “silence,” the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word “impossible” and writes it as “the end.”

The violence of wrecking partitions and cutting through discourses resonates with Garda’s insistence that writing tears her apart and makes her mad. In her notes, Garda invents an “impregnable language” that would make her unassailable to other damning discourses. Once the writing begins, once the body is set into motion, “silence” can be broken through writing and performance. There is nothing not subversive about a woman writing, in particular, about a woman writing her body: writing with her body and simultaneously erasing her body.

The violence inherent to such a physical form of communication and the potential damage done to the medium of feminine writing (i.e. the body), similarly invokes Luce Irigaray and the unique language she vividly describes in *La Mystérieuse*. Just as Cixous implies a potential brutality to the physical language of women, Irigaray introduces *la mystérieuse* as exclusively feminine, characterized by violence, pain, masochism, and divine ecstacy. In Irigaray’s text, the hysterical woman is redeemed by an affiliation with past mystics. She can break from the discourse of masters and philosophers and return to

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\[225\] Ibid 267
the darkness—to a darkness in which one might encounter a flame of truth or divinity.

Irigaray writes:

She is torn apart in pain, fear, cries, tears, and blood that go beyond any other feeling. The wound must come before the flame. But already there is delight and longing in this torment, if she has entrusted herself to a skill subtle enough in its strength.\(^{226}\)

The ability to find delight and longing in the pain and fear encountered in the darkness allows for the rejection of the light provided by the philosopher’s discourse, by male-controlled society and to embrace the darkness and possible torment involved in refusing an easy, empty existence and in seeking the Truth. Just as Kotányi foreshadows écriture féminine, seventies French Feminism foreshadows queer feminism in its interest in a darker side of femininity.

Some notes Garda devotes to her past, but her circumstances continue to interrupt the already convoluted flow of her recollections. She reminds herself carefully of her background, of her life, of the injustices she has suffered, although with some silences or direct refusals to go into detail surrounding the more brutal moments of her past: the rape that led to her birth; her own rape by the elderly teacher; the life she is forced to lead as a poor young woman, without family or proper rights. She teaches music during the day and either loses herself to pleasure at night or relives the past in her writing, in the process rebelling against the reality of her and other women’s lives as revealed by her accounts. The conflict of writing for Garda—writing as an act that makes the mind insane and the body feverish and yet nevertheless reveals a necessary truth—persists throughout

the novella: she could fill pages with “Wahnsinnsbildern”, but there are moments when she prefers to accept “die dumpfe Ruhe” that comes with indifference, and therefore she at times contemplates stopping writing. Chloral — to which she becomes increasingly addicted — soothes her and her madness, and thus she can continue her writing and her confrontation with the truth which ultimately leads to the dissolution of her body. The notes towards the end of the novella leave both past and present behind as she becomes more and more obsessed with an imagined future of a union with a divine man who would save her that bears no relationship to the unsatisfactory present in which she finds herself.

We learn that Garda not only views her writing in incongruous terms, but also the female figures and stereotypes prevalent at the time. Garda rejects associating with the figure of Maria Magdalene, the biblical fallen woman who ultimately turns away from and repents her past sinful ways and seeks a holy, reformed, pious existence. Garda does not desire such repentance:

Diese Sentimentalität, -- nun kann ich herzlich lachen! Und thut mir mal mein Herz, dieses arme, närrische Ding allzuweh, dann nehme ich gutes, gutes Chloral. Mein Lebensschifflein ist flott gemacht, -- hinein ins Meer des Lebens. Bin nicht Maria Magdalena, bin Venus Anadyomene, Rosen her, Becher her, [...]!!

In contrast to the Christian Maria Magdalene, Garda associates herself with Venus rising from the sea, the Roman goddess of love, who represents both a figure of eroticism and

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227 Kotányi 37
228 Ibid 64
229 Recall that Elisabeth Bronfen lists three popular female types in 19th century literature: 1) diabolic outcast, the destructive, fatal demon woman; 2) the domestic ‘angel of the house’, the saintly, self-sacrificing frail vessel; 3) a particular version of Mary Magdalene, as the penitent and redeemed sexually vain and dangerous woman, the fallen woman (*Over her Dead Body* 218).
230 Kotányi 40
The sea perpetually renews her virginity. Garda also can dip into the sea ("ins Meer des Lebens") and renew herself, and enjoy the roses and glasses of champagne that her wild nights bring her. Unlike Venus, however, she does not renew her virginity, but rather she renews her joy in living. The image of the sea and its eternal washing away of sin evoked by the naming of Venus resonates with Garda’s recurrent language that invokes a sense of “washing over,” “rushing by”, for example: “Mein Schicksal: Alles geht an mir vorüber.” The language in the text signals a sense of feeling overwhelmed. Yet even as Venus, Garda cannot survive the injustice that hounds her. Although she does not want to repent, she realizes she must choose between being holy or being a whore. She longs to separate body and soul: her body yearns for pleasure and excitement, while her mind and soul desire sanctity. Maria Magdalena turned her back on bodily pleasure. Venus seemingly remains sexual while regaining her own brand of a purer existence as she is born time and again from the sea.

As Garda’s “madness” escalates, so does her association with Venus—with an oddly mystical Venus who now carries the cross, making her also a Christ-like figure, martyr, herself: “Venus ist krank, -- Venus trägt das Kreuz, - Venus geht nach Golgatha.” The novella is titled, after all, Venus am Kreuz: Venus at the cross, Venus on the cross, Venus crucified. Garda decides to go to Rome with the military and Venus goes to Golgotha, to the site of Jesus’s crucifixion, and she bears the cross. But

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231 Though not entirely relevant to the argument of the chapter, the mixture of religious motifs (Christian and Roman mythology) is especially intriguing as penned by a young Jewish woman.
232 Kotányi 22
233 Ibid 35
234 Ibid 42
235 Although the title also does recall Sacher-Masoch’s Venus im Pelz. The male author cloaks his Venus in furs, the female author crucifies her.
still Garda/Venus is not Maria Magdalena; she is not penitent. The God she prays to would save her and not have her flee to a nunnery; she would rather seek out the figure of the savior whom she loves. She first dreamed him, this savior, earlier in the novella; he waits for her: "mein Erlöser stand da, sein Auge blickte groß und gebietend [...] Er schüttelte den Kopf und sagte ernst und traurig: 'Ich warte'." As her despair heightens, she prays:

Großer Gott im Himmel, -- wenn du bist, -- du bist, du bist, -- du mußt sein, errette mich von diesem Leben, mach, daß der Kinderkuß mich heiligt, mach, daß ich mich wieder erheben darf, ... – dann will ich dein Magd werden, dir dienen, in ein Kloster flüchten. ... – Nein, nein, großer Gott, ich lüge dir mitten ins Herz hinein, -- auf meinen Knien will ich den einzigen Mann suchen, -- nicht ermüden, -- die Welt aussuchen, nach dem Einen, -- der mich erlöst. ...

[...]  
"Ich glaube, jetzt möchte ich gerne sterben .... Laßt den Tod herein!"

At this moment, when she begs God to save her—initially promising to serve him, then acknowledging her deception, wanting instead to be praying on her knees—like a martyr in search of the One man—she finds herself ready to die. Garda refuses to serve God and yet conjures up the figure of a man whom she would worship and who would save her, as the son of God would do for faithful Christians. She creates, in turn, a fascinating perversion or subversion of the female mystic or the nun who gives herself to Christ.

The narrative grows increasingly more incoherent and distorted. More dashes, more ellipses, more incomplete thoughts. Dreams, delirium, and a fixation on her savior mark...

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236 Kotányi 38-39
237 ibd 58
the last pages of her life story. The one she loves, the savior who came to her in a dream, does indeed return to her:

Du, Du, das war er, ich sah ihn einmal schon, weißt Du noch? – Und ewig, ewig mein ganzes Leben lang habe ich ihn geliebt – nach ihm gebangt, geschrien. ...
[...]
Und als die Sonne unterging, als ich zwischen wallenden, wogenden Feldern stand, meine Hände in die seinen legte, mich ihm verlobte für ewig?
[...] Er streifte den Priestermantel von der Schulter, -- sah mich mit seinen geliebten, leuchtenden Augen an und sagte: “Ach Garda, ich warte so lange schon, kommst Du gar nicht mehr”?

She does go to him and to write her conclusion. She chooses an end that allows her to turn to darkness and find the light of her savior, allowing her body to disintegrate while her soul rises—echoing medieval mystical texts and anticipating Irigaray’s *La mystérieque* in both the writing style and in the sexualized mysticism that evokes a nineteenth-century notion of hysteria. Suicide ends the narrative and her life: death becomes a final communication. In her book *Over her Dead Body*, Elisabeth Bronfen claims that “an aesthetically staged performance of death may [...] signify a moment of control and power [...].”239 Staging death, actually dying, indicates authorship. Bronfen continues arguing that a woman might use death as “a form of writing with her body, a materialisation of the sign, where the sheer material factualness of the dying and dead body lends certainty, authority and realness to this attempt at self-textualisation.”240 A woman killing herself is a woman writing herself. Her body becomes a text that she

238 Ibid 73
239 Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body*, 141
240 Ibid 141
fashions and contextualizes by ruling over her own mortality—she assumes, possibly steals, the right the power, to sign her own death sentence. Bronfen continues:

Dying is a move beyond communication yet also functions as these women’s one effective communicative act, in a cultural or kinship situation otherwise disinclined towards feminine authorship. It involves self-reflexivity in so far as death is chosen and performed by the woman herself, in an act that makes her both object and subject of dying and of representation [...] The choice of death emerges as a feminine strategy within which writing with the body is a way of getting rid of the oppression connected with the feminine body. Staging disembodiment as a form of escaping personal and social constraints serves to criticize those cultural attitudes that reduce the feminine body to the position of dependency and passivity, to the vulnerable object of sexual incursions. Feminine suicide can serve as a trope, self-defeating as this seems, for a feminine writing strategy within the constraints of patriarchal culture.  

Of course, death seems an odd performance—a rather dramatic and final one. And what if the performance goes badly (as is the case of Werther, Goethe’s hero, who stoically shoots himself, but must suffer a further twelve hours until he may finally meet the end he chose himself)? One cannot stage a redo; but that must simply be the risk taken when using the body to write the end, and also write oneself out of patriarchal suffocation.

Self-imposed death is Garda’s final act of agency and her final refusal to the cycle of victimization which bore her and which controls her. She writes herself a happy-ending in which she is the bride of a Christ-like savior. Evoking the ending of Fräulein Else (“Ich fliege … ich träume … ich schlafe … ich träu … träu - ich flie ….”), the ellipses of the final sentence break down her final words, slowing the rhythm of her
statement as she sinks into her last sleep: “Alles ist still . . . Die ganze Welt ist still . . . Ich bin so glücklich . . . Nun will ich schlafen, -- schlafen gehn.”243 Venus rising from the sea embraces a secularized Christian cross and drifts into an eternal sleep. In the end, Garda dies; she finds the same kind of sleep that the sleepless Vera longed for in her diary entries and ultimately finds, also in suicide.244 The ellipses and dashes echo the dissolution of her body, her writing effaces her. Nevertheless, her notes remain as an echo of her trauma which recalls the very similar lives that young women led in fin-de-siècle Vienna, lives marked by suffering and repression. Like the case of Vera, however, Garda's haunting echo of the fragile and yet subversive nature of young fin-de-siècle women in Vienna has faded away in a literary history dominated by men.

243 Kotányi 80
244 Although in Eine für Viele we never learn how Vera kills herself.
Chapter 5 :: Writing the Other—*Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten*

Wie Orpheus spiel ich auf den Saiten des Lebens den Tod
- Ingeborg Bachmann

In this final reading of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese melodramatic suicide fiction, the author, Elsa Asenijeff, and her protagonist, Irene, are both Viennese intellectuals who fled Vienna. In Leipzig Asenijeff authors her texts and it is in Leipzig that Irene writes about her life as well as other women’s lives. Unlike Vera and Garda, Irene does not kill herself; instead, a new friend, Hella, and an old acquaintance, “die Schriftstellerin,” die. Hella’s suicide and the depiction of the struggles that led her to kill herself belong to a kind of play within a play: a diary within a diary novel. Irene inserts Hella’s diary into her own with no comment or criticism. The account of “die Schriftstellerin’s” life and death are much harsher and in Irene’s own words. She casts her old school acquaintance as the promising woman who threw away her life and talent for marriage: the oppressive state of matrimony weakens and kills her. Asenijeff and Irene write other women as they themselves would not care to be written: others are sacrificed in words as the two female authors—the real and the fictional—struggle to pursue their own feminist agendas.

**Elsa Asenijeff: A Biographical Sketch**

Of the three female authors I highlight in this project, Elsa Asenijeff stands out in three ways: firstly, more scholars recognize her name and some even know her work, although this is largely because of her relationship to the painter, Max Klinger (1857-
1920), and his artistic representations of her. Secondly, while her story remains very much Viennese, she left Vienna for Leipzig to pursue her career as a feminist author. Thirdly, Asenijeff’s writing about women and their suffering and struggles and the injustice around their lives in fin-de-siècle Vienna reflected some of her own hardships: she spent the last two decades of her life in asylums for the mentally ill. Elsa Asenijeff was the pseudonym for Elsa Maria Packeny, who was born in Vienna in 1867. She married the Bulgarian Ivan Johannis Nestoroff in 1890 and with him had a son, Assen, in 1891, who died that same year. The death of her firstborn marked her life and work in significant ways: she created the pseudonym "Asenijeff" in the memory of her son, and returned to the topic of motherhood time and again in her writing. Her second son with Nestoroff, the Theophil Heraklit (who became a composer), was born in Paris in 1896. In 1898 she met Max Klinger and traveled with him; she began to live with him in 1900. Her divorce with Nestoroff was finalized in 1901, a year after the birth of a daughter with Klinger, Désirée Ottima Klinger. Although there are gaps in her biography, it would seem that neither of Asenijeff's surviving children was raised by her, adding to the conflicted relationship Asenijeff had to motherhood in her writing.

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245 Her departure is different from that Else Kotányi, who moved to Argentina and, apparently, stopped writing. The majority of Asenijeff’s literary production occurred in Leipzig and yet her writing remained distinctly Viennese and dealt very much with the need to separate oneself from that city as a woman, especially in Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten. Furthermore, she remains an outsider in Leipzig, as the end of her life demonstrates.


Asenijeff’s relationship to Klinger played out in real life as much as it did in the works of Klinger. She was his model as much as she was his lover [Figure 7]. In the nude representation of Asenijeff we see a beautiful and proud woman. Her expression seems one of some skepticism, but also of great intellect. On the canvas Klinger's lover becomes an idealized figure of femininity: soft, pale, radiant. Her stance highlights her figure but also lends her an air of confidence. She is ashamed neither of her figure nor of her femininity. As an author and feminist, Asenijeff depicted femininity and the female body in her own writing. Her brand of feminism was both supportive of female rights and progress, but also critical of a feminism that was too masculinized. The daring way in which Asenijeff models for Klinger seems indicative of an embrace of femininity that is both critical of societal mores and in favor of a strong female figure that is not at all masculine. Her portrait is not that of a femme fragile.

[Figure 7: Max Klinger, Elsa Asenijeff als Akt, 1896]
Although her writing career began in the 1890s, she first began to experience significant critical recognition in 1910, when some of her poems were set to music and she was invited to hold readings and lectures. Nevertheless, professional success did not make Asenijeff any less of an outsider and it was followed quickly by her own personal and financial decline. Already in 1917 she was arrested due to debts she was unable to pay. At the advice of his new romantic attachment, Gertrud Bock, Klinger distanced himself from Asenijeff. After Klinger had a heart attack in 1919, he named Bock and not Asenijeff as partial heir, and upon his death in 1920, Bock was named full heir. At this point Asenijeff was in financial ruin and suffered great psychological distress. In 1921 she was arrested and released as "insane." By 1923, however, Asenijeff was forced into a clinic at the University of Leipzig without any real diagnosis. She remained in institutes and asylums until 1941, when she died under unclear circumstances. The only diagnosis she received was a suspicion of schizophrenia, and any form of protest on her end was considered a sign of her disease. Asenijeff was entirely alone, isolated from and rejected by any relatives. Otherwise, she might have been released into familial custody as early as 1927. Asenijeff lived in Leipzig as an outsider, her work received mixed reviews, and her efforts to refute the doctors who labeled her insane marked her as psychologically weak and ill. Elsa Asenijeff attempted for years to both depict and embody alternative paths for women, but ultimately she was left to live out her last twenty years of life as a patient and outcast.

248 cf Jorek 161
249 Ibid 141
Writing Sacrifice

Asenijeff’s *Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten* (1902) follows suit with the *fin-de-siècle*, female literary mode employed in both *Venus am Kreuz* and *Eine für Viele*: excerpts from a diary of a young woman who commits suicide. In this case, however, it is not the main diarist who traces the trajectory of her demise until suicide. Instead, we have Irene, “die Emancipierte,” who narrates her life through diary entries that are interspersed with her impressions of other women’s lives as well as their own diary entries. It is the impressions and the additional layer of notes which make *Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten* a particularly fruitful case study for this project. Irene does not commit suicide. Indeed, she establishes herself as a model of emancipation and female strength. Of course, we do read of her struggles, but her opinions and reflections lack the melodramatic and tortured tone of Vera or Garda, or even of Fräulein Else. We have Irene, the *femme forte*, who creates an epistolary landscape which, amidst various pages and voices, houses a *femme fatale*, Hella, who kills herself, and a consumptive *femme fragile*, an unnamed childhood acquaintance, "die Schriftstellerin," whose suppressed creative talents and existence as a housewife weaken her until she dies.250 We have two examples then of feminine death—one of which is a straightforward suicide, the other which seems more to be a succumbing to death—as told by a woman who chooses neither to conform to gender norms nor to die. Writing the death of other women is Irene’s act of refusal. She records the death of another and allows herself to live.

250 The actual strength of her “femme” figure is open to debate. “Forte,” “fatale,” and “fragile,” although specific terms to denote unique types seem fluid when truly projected onto the feminine figure and character, especially as she is depicted by female authors.
Asenijeff portrays three unique female characters in *Tagebuchblätter*: Irene, Hella, and "die Schriftstellerin." Hella and “die Schriftstellerin” act as a kind of sacrifice enabling Irene to survive her own struggles by writing their demise. *Tagebuchblätter einer Emancipierten* offers a twist on Higonnet's statement quoted earlier: suicide forces others to read your death, while choosing death is simultaneously reading your life. Instead of reading Vera's death and reading how she writes out (and reads) her life in the months leading up to her suicide, we read Irene's reading of others' suicide and death. Writing and reading suicide and demise in the lives of other women allows Irene not to choose death and not to disintegrate in the same way that other women have in this chapter.

Before we can address the women whom Irene discusses in her diary, we must first take a closer look at Irene’s own description of herself. The diary is a private form, not intended for public eyes. We can imagine then that the portrayal Irene provides is wholly accurate, or, at least, a wholly accurate portrayal of Irene as she fashions herself. The diary form allows for embellishment, both positive and negative. One’s hopes or self-indulgent views of one’s strengths or ideals can be written as one would see them be realized in reality, just as misfortune and struggle can be tainted with an extreme negative perspective, as we have seen in Vera and Garda’s personal notes. Writing a diary allows for the authoring of self, and to read this self as a third—or second, really—party is to bear in mind the element of self-fashioning at play. The woman we encounter in the

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251 I do not care to fall into the trap of stereotyping women, although, of course, this entire project is devoted to a “type”, the *femme fragile*, these types are, again, fluid. For the sake of comparison though, I would like to set up Irene, Hella, and the childhood acquaintance as three sides to coin, as it were.  
252 Higonnet 103-104
Tagebuchblätter is Irene, the emancipated, in her simultaneously most censored and uncensored form.

Already on the first page of the undated journal, we are introduced to a woman who differs from the female characters we have been introduced to thus far: “Nun sind endlich die Ferien zu Ende und ich bin wieder in Leipzig. Bereits immatrikuliert.” This Wienerin has fled not only her paternal home, but also her hometown, and she has chosen to pursue an education in Leipzig. What is more, she is divorced, which we learn in the second diary entry.

Wie bin ich froh, dass ich endlich geschieden bin—uf! fast mein ganzes Vermögen ist daraufgegangen. Diese lieben Retter, die Rechtsanwälte sind kostspielige Freunde. Nun, jedenfalls bin ich frei, das ist schon etwas!

Es ging eben zu schwer. Mein Gemahl hatte mich lieb. Er ist ja auch ein guter Mensch, aber immer so ein paar Stufen tiefer als ich. Das kann doch ein Weib nicht ertragen, die Hinabsteigende zu sein—eben weil sie Empfangende im generellen Sinne ist.


Beyond the mention that the marriage was just too difficult ("es ging eben zu schwer"), we do not learn of a specific cause for the divorce: she mentions neither infidelity nor abuse. The divorce seems to have been largely of her volition. Irene was dissatisfied and felt the marriage detracted from her mission to aid her entire sex. Furthermore, and

253 Asenijeff 1
254 New entries are indicated by a long dash in the center of the page
255 Asenijeff 3-4
perhaps unexpectedly, Irene does indicate that her husband's lower stature motivated her, at least in part, to pursue the divorce. There is a certain romance in the notion of loving beyond class boundaries. Irene, however, wants nothing of something so impractical and frivolous. She feels her energies would be better served if dedicated to a greater purpose. So, as we have seen also with Vera, Fräulein Else, and Garda, Irene refuses a life in which she must limit herself to being a wife and a mother. Instead of dying, however, she flees Vienna and attempts an emancipated, albeit lonely, life.

Her diary entries offer us an insight into her philosophical musings and opinions on love, youth, and women. Conjuring up her own youth, she paints a scene of unrest and desire: "Es war eine Zeit in meiner Jugend, wo ich die Dirnen beneidete, die küssen dürfen. Allerdings, damals wusste ich noch nichts von all den Brutalitäten. . . . " Unsaid, but implied, is the fact that young women are not allowed to kiss, and thus their repressed desires lead to inner turmoil and sometimes psychic illness. Irene questions: "Krampf, Sehnen, Brand--ist das Jugendglück?" Society, according to Irene, raises young women to feel such unrest and to idealize "Liebe.” A woman’s only happiness comes from love and yet the marriages women inevitably enter are only ever a disappointment:

Dann steckt man uns in die Ehe, die mit der Liebe nichts zu thun hat. Wir zappeln wohl ein wenig zwischen den Eisengittern des Gehorsams und der elterlichen Autorität, aber endlich geben wir nach. Und dann lächeln wir als Bräute und fixieren unsere Gedanken auf die erste Schleppe, die sich so schön am Boden hinringelt, damit wir nicht weinen. S'ist ein Elend.

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256 Ibid 13  
257 Ibid 13  
258 Ibid 14
She continues to struggle with her own inclination to fall in line with expected feminine emotions and reactions. Irene does believe, in fact, in "die große Liebe," but the search for it results only in women throwing themselves away and becoming sullied. Searching, yearning, dependency: these are the things that motivate a woman's life. These motivations, however, have been so ingrained into a woman's psyche that she cannot imagine a life not structured by them. Irene seeks exactly that what most women are refused: "Ich suche Ruhe, Alleinsein, Nachdenkenkönnten! All' das, was man Frauen verwehrt." Breaking with stereotypes of women at that time, Irene desires the ability to lose herself to her thoughts, her education, to be able to be independent and strong. She wants to educate herself and other women.

Irene is not only critical of how society traditionally has raised and treated women, she also sharply critiques the typical emancipated woman:

> Die Assistentin kam zu mir. Ein knabenhafter Leib, einstweilen noch fast "de rigueur" für eine Emancipierte. Sie ist klug. Alles Tändelhafte, ob es Spitzen oder flatternde Gedanken seien, verachtet sie.

> Die Quintessenz ihrer Lebensbetrachtung: das Weib fängt erst jetzt an, ein Mann zu werden.

> Alles, was noch hinter diesem Stadium leigt, wird verhöhnt.

> Ich aber sage, das Weib fängt erst jetzt an, Weib zu werden und alle, die so denken, recken sich in die Höhe.  

Deeply suspicious of forms of female emancipation that, in her opinion, merely transform women into men, Irene adheres to a variation of feminism that seems wholly feminine and anti-masculine. Feminism here has nothing to do with playing with and questioning

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259 Ibid 15
260 Ibid 97
the limits of gender and sexuality, but truly focuses on femininity and the respect and potential of women. To Irene, the young woman's androgynous figure seems less a sign of successful emancipation and experimentation than it seems a cheap way of gaining rights by masking the feminine and assuming the guise of the dominant gender. The young woman represents a different kind of feminism than that to which Irene herself subscribes. Irene’s feminism is that of Grete Meisel-Hess, for example, whose treatise on women’s sexuality and rights Das Wesen der Geschlechtlichkeit: Die sexuelle Krise in Ihren Beziehungen zur Sozialen Frage & zum Krieg, zu Moral, Rasse & Religion & insbesondere zur Monogamie (1916), extols conservative feminine politics.²⁶¹

Hella's, notes come into Irene’s possession after she Hella commits suicide. Irene and Hella both reject the existing relationship norms between men and women. Both seek to avoid the cycle of victimization at play in gender expectations at the time. Yet Irene and Hella take two very different paths. Irene, “die Emancipierte”, chooses to turn her back on men altogether and to focus on her own creative space. Hella, by contrast, chooses to embrace the world of “man” with great passion; she leads the life of a femme fatale. This path, as it is depicted through both Irene’s diary entries and through Hella’s own diary entries leads her to break down and to commit suicide. Her death marks a rupture in Irene’s life and marks the end of the first unnamed part of the work and the beginning of second part “Seelengangrän.” An investigation of the influence Hella has in Irene's life and of Hella's own story complicates Irene's own presentation of "ideal” femininity.

²⁶¹ I outline Meisel-Hess’s feminism in chapter one.
The *femme fatale* as she is written by Elsa Asenijeff (and also by Else Kotányi, see above) differs from the usual male depiction of the *femme fatale*. Here this well-known female figure seems less fatal to her male suitors than she does to herself; Asenijeff’s (and Kotányi’s) *femme fatale* reveals the fatal side to her daring nature. Hella’s choice to play the *femme fatale* results from a refusal of the mores of civilized Viennese culture around 1900 in which women should play victim to the man. Ultimately, however, despite Hella’s refusal, she does return to the role of victim. Hella enters an intensely spiritual love affair with an artist. Their love is so strong that their communication is beyond language; they disintegrate as subjects. Hella eventually loses her entire being in this relationship and ends her life. She, like Vera, falls victim to society, to relationships, to the gender expectations of her times and chooses her own death. Yet her death, I believe, can be read as Hella’s conscious interruption of an all-consuming love affair. She regains her agency in suicide and Irene gains a sacrifice in her fight for women.

Irene first introduces Hella in her diary as "das exotische Frauenzimmer," which is the nickname the students—largely androgynous feminist-types—have given this mystifying woman, who negates their emancipated ideals. From their first encounter, Hella proves to be a problem for Irene, as well as an object of fascination: she is a conundrum that defies expectation. In describing her first experience of "die Exotische," she writes: "Die Studentinnen können sie nicht leiden. Sie wittern, dass das eine ist, welche nicht von ihrer Emanzipationspartei. Die Exotische jeddod macht sich nichts daraus. Sie hat einen lächelnden Hohn im Gesicht, wenn sie mit einer von ihnen

262 Ibid 29
263 “Wenn ich nur wüsste, was an Frauen die Anziehung ist. Hella beschäftigt mich als Problem” (Ibid 33).
spricht, als möchte sie sagen: Aergere dich nur, Kleine, das schadet dir nichts!“

Irene, initially, appears both horrified and completely captivated by this woman, whom she at first views as unattractive although men find her beautiful and who disregards the opinions of others with a shrug of her shoulders. Fascinated by the way that Hella attracts men, shocks women, all the while seemingly indifferent to the opinions and influence of others, Irene gathers the amusing anecdotes she learns about her and notes them down in her diary. From the perplexing circumstances surrounding Hella's marriage—she is married, but her husband lives in the south where she too comes from—to the way she mocks married couples and their bourgeois play, Hella represents a woman who is both entirely feminine ("Ja, der geht das männliche Fluidum nicht auf die Nerven.") and independent.

Once the two finally are introduced officially, Irene's intrigue feeds into a friendship that is marked by fascination but also a meeting of two surprisingly like-minded women. Irene, who seems to both praise femininity above all else and also exhibit great skepticism toward women, sees in Hella the potential of rare female friendship. "Frauen untereinander sind ausgesucht langweilig[…].“ but Hella breaks this trend. She, like Irene and also Grete Meisel-Hess, dismisses love as impractical and yet all of her energies are devoted to attracting men. Her advances are cold and her interests cruel and fleeting: Hella represents the *femme fatale* to Irene. Irene's chosen *femme fatale*, however, is not the two-dimensional caricature found in many male

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264 Ibid 29  
265 Ibid 30  
266 Ibid 52
depictions. She does not simply seduce men and represent the opposite of the good wife, befitting male fantasy. Hella seduces men, but to her own pleasure and purpose: "Ich sah die edle Menschen, die sich verbergen, geringer oder anders scheinen wollen, aber für [Hella] existiert absolut niemand. Es ist ihr gleich, ob man gut oder schlecht über sie denkt."\(^\text{267}\) As Irene sees her, and the female author, Elsa Asenijeff, writes her, the *femme fatale* seduces men, indifferent to man's desire or interest, and discards them, impervious to love.

Hella's seeming disinterest in men and cynicism toward love, however, falters: the *femme fatale* as conceived by women ultimately is more fatal to herself than to the men around her. Irene describes in her diary her last encounter with Hella in ominous terms:

> Vielleicht, sagte sie verträumt! Und dann schalkhaft: Wir sind ja alle beide sozusagen nach derselben Richtung hin verrückt. Nicht wahr, so nennen es ja die Leute.
> Dann sass sie wieder still und sann vor sich hin. Ich sah zum Fenster hinaus. Es war eine ganz merkwürdige Stimmung. Jede dachte etwas anderes und dennoch war es ein Hinüber- und Herüberströmen unseres innersten Wesens zu einander. Wir neigten uns seelisch gewiss nie so nahe zu einander als jetzt.\(^\text{268}\)

The closeness and the waggish innuendo surrounding the rare female friendship introduced for the first and only time in the novel breaks with Irene's variation of a feminism that is in favor of womanly and, in many ways, traditional women and against

\(^{267}\) Ibid 52
\(^{268}\) Ibid 71
the more "androgynous" variation of emancipated, masculine women. Although, on the one hand, Irene presents herself as liberated and against institutions that suppress women, she is also cynical about alternative expressions of gender and sexuality. The female friendship and suggestion that Irene and Hella are women who "lean in the same direction" made by Hella indicates lesbianism, although this is never developed further in the work. Perhaps Hella suggests that there is only the possibility of a female friendship because they are not lesbians. Only lesbians can have this "rare female friendship."

The hint of non-heterosexual relations is fleeting, as Hella's coyness transforms into a kind of prescience. Bitterly, Irene senses she is losing her friend and will be alone again, without the kindred spirit she had found in Hella. Presumably reading her thoughts, Hella expresses the following confounding statement, which seems to contradict the philosophy of independence and anti-love that these women espouse:


Ihr Blick starrte visionär in das Grau der Dämmerung: "Sehen Sie nur, der Freund kommt zu Ihnen, den Sie noch nicht kannten -- sehen sie nur, schauen Sie hin, es ist unmöglich, dass ich mich irre. Ich irrte mich noch nie."

Mich schauderte. Als ich mich nach ihr umsah, war sie verschwunden.269

Moments before we learn of Hella's suicide, she offers Irene a ray of hope to find "the one." This rings too with the fixation on the one "savior"-type figure in Venus am Kreuz. Even the femme fatale sees finding the one man as woman's salvation. It seems an odd twist to the story of the "emancipated woman" to include the uncanny prediction of

269 Ibid 72-73
finding “the one,” which stands in as a comfort to looming loneliness. Hella complicates the purview Irene offers in her own story, as she relates it in her diary. Hella is *femme fatale*, cold, independent, indifferent, man-seducing, soothsayer, and ultimately sacrifice.

Irene learns of Hella's surprising suicide by drowning from an acquaintance, "der Doktor." He comes to her with the news as well as pages from her diary, which Irene adds, unmediated, to her diary. Irene is outraged that the doctor clearly has looked at Hella's diary: she reads this as a posthumous violation of a woman. She struggles herself with reading Hella's diary, but curiosity overcomes her; she needs to know why Hella would take her own life. By simply inserting the pages from Hella's diary into her own and not offering any commentary or analysis of Hella's thoughts, Irene respects Hella. The female author, Elsa Asenijeff, plays with the fictionalized diary form by layering the written female voices in the text. The voices are raw and unfiltered. The doctor dishonored Hella by reading her private thoughts with his eyes, casting judgment on her actions. Asenijeff, however, removes Irene from the realm of defilement by not representing Irene's interpretation of Hella's final diary entries and suicide.

The novel marks the shift in diarists with the simple heading "Aus Hellas Aufzeichnungen" and italic text. Hella's notations complete the first, untitled half of the diary novel. From the very beginning, Hella's diaries begin with the fateful encounter of her "one": der Künstler. Melodramatic swooning reveals a previously unknown side of the cool, indifferent Hella:

> Da spöttle ich und habe dabei fieberrote Augen. O ihr Sterne: Ist dies die grosse Seligkeit??

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270 Ibid 77-92
The encounter with this man sends Hella to an irrational place of burning desire, ecstasy, and, ultimately, of surrender. She who did not believe in love or did not care about the opinion or affections of others, finds herself completely besotted. This purported happiness instills in Hella the desire to take her own life. Here we might consider that Asenijeff is subverting the effect of melodramatic suicide fiction by isolating and escalating the level of irrationality surrounding Hella's suicide. Recall that Irene does not kill herself, rather her friend dies. The supplemental diary stands in as a sacrifice and negative example. Hella dies, Irene lives on.

Hella's language in her notes picks up on many Romantic motifs: undecipherable writings, the wind, the musical spring, her crying soul. Very much like the fragility of the German Romantics I discussed in the second chapter, these Romantic tendencies play off "das Kranke" Goethe recognized in late Romantic writings and behaviors. Furthermore, the role that Hella assumes in this love is one of pure object. Her love interest is an artist, a painter. She becomes his object of study—he paints her portrait in his studio, much like Klinger did Asenijeff’s. Hella places herself in a fantasy relationship where she has no agency. Her whole being she devotes to an unattainable, an idealized love— the

\[\text{Ibid 78-79}\]
realization of which frightens her as much as not attaining it. Similar to the quotation above referring to the multiple scripts over one another, the notations present the reader with the love-sick young woman through her own confused mixture of self-reflection, description, hallucination, and story telling. She describes her feelings and encounters, slips into the third person, quotes letters she does not send, and assumes a pseudo religious tone, referring to her artist as a savior and near god-like figure.

Here, again, Asenijeff really seems to be picking up on motifs and rhetoric from other female texts at the time. She then exaggerates them, offering up Hella as a sacrifice to love and melodramatic expectations of romance. Hella's "Aufzeichnungen" begin to evoke Venus am Kreuz, in particular. Thinking of her sordid relationship past in which there were duels and seduction, she writes:


Like Garda Hella waits and longs for this one man. Recall how Garda dreams of her savior and embraces death. The savior and a hyper romanticized notion of love do not motivate Garda's decision to die, however. The mystical dreamscape of “the one” who waits for Garda offers itself up as an alternative to the hard reality of a life marked by poverty and sexual abuse. Hella, on the other hand, sacrifices herself for love because of

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272 Ibid 89
love: "Seiner Erhabenheit will ich ein Opfer bringen." Her "master's" love and the reality of a relationship will ultimately disappoint. It is the greatness of love and the longing and idealization that goes with it that compels Garda. A relationship would destroy love, rob her "master" of his godlike status and returns her to a mundane world of subordination.

Also similar to *Venus am Kreuz* and later to *Fräulein Else*, ellipses and dashes dominate Hella's notes. Breaks in the narrative flow here too signal a breakdown in the diarist's psyche and a move towards silence: "Mein Mund ist stumm. Aber meine Seele spricht ihn an: meine Seele tanzt vor dir." Hella's need and ability to articulate fade away as her soul begins to speak for her. Yet again, we have an example of bodily dissolution mirrored by a gradual fading away of the authorial voice. Right before uttering her intention to die, Hella repeats this the line: "Mein Mund ist stumm, aber meine Seele spricht zu ihm. / Ich werde sterben." The final words of Hella's *Aufzeichnungen* signal both the silencing of her voice and her suicide, both in melodramatic terms:

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Last line: "Knieender Gott! Flehender Held! -- --
-- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- du! du! --
nein!!"276
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The abrupt conclusion and startling "nein!!" that ends this excerpt and part one of the novel forces the reader to recall that these notes are a contained entity and the figure that dies is not the diarist: Irene survives. The integrity of the feminist tone of Asenijeff's

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273 Ibid 79
274 Ibid 89
275 Ibid 90
276 Ibid 92
diary novel does not suffer from Hella's succumbing to love and patriarchy. While Garda and Vera's diaries and deaths can be read in queer feminist terms, as I argue earlier in the chapter, Hella's death is explicitly unfeminist. She represents a sacrifice to Irene's attempt at feminine existence that breaks with gender expectations.

The second half, aptly titled "Ein Seelenganganrân," comes directly on the heels of Hella's final written words. In this part of the diary novel, we encounter Irene's second female victim, who does not justify the same objective distance and respect that Hella does. Irene's old school acquaintance, "die Schriftstellerin," who does not even warrant an actual name, gets a very brief excursus and one final aside toward the end of the novel. Critique and horror characterize Irene's description of the woman as she finds her upon their reunion. Although "die Schriftstellerin" comes to represent the consumptive woman, a victim of oppressive gender expectations that crush feminine initiative, Irene remembers her as her rival: the bold student, who went on to achieve some success with her writing. To frame the occurrence of the visit she intends to describe in her diary, Irene jots down some memories of "die Schriftstellerin":

Noch in Erinnerung aller damaligen Koleginnen Blieb aber ein Geschichtsvortrag über Maria Theresia, die, wie die Lehrbücher erzählen, (und sie all vom Manne, dem unobjektivsten aller Geschöpfe geschrieben) gut regierte, "weil sie von vorzüglichen Ratgebern umgeben war."

Alle sassen still horchend da, denn die Lehrerin war streng. Steht da nicht der Kleine Bengel von Dichterin auf, abwechselnd zornrot, dann wieder ganz blass und interpelliert die Lehrerin, warum denn immer von Herrscherinnen gesagt werde, sie hätten gute Berater gehabt, weshalb ihre Regierung segensvoll gewesen

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277 Lorna Martens refers to the explicitly feminist nature of the work in *The Diary Novel*, although she does not comment on the embedded stories of alternate female figures in the work (176).
The passage here serves a variety purposes in Asenijeff's novel and in Irene's introduction to the desolate scene she will soon paint. Firstly, Irene's feminism comes through strongly: even as a schoolgirl she balked at the unjust and sexist depiction of female historical figures. This is as much Irene's message as Asenijeff's. Secondly, Irene introduces "die Schriftstellerin" as a young girl who would stand up and speak out against such injustice when others didn't. She was bold and smart. Finally, the envy and awe that Irene and her schoolmates felt for "die Schriftstellerin" Irene recalls with irony— show the mighty have fallen.

The last time Irene saw "die Schriftstellerin" was three years prior to the diary's present. "Balltoilete, wellengleissender Stoff. Gefährlicher als schön, verträumt, blühend, lebesngefährlich," is how she describes her at that time. Directly after this last encounter, "die Schriftstellerin" disappeared into silence: "Seit ungefähr 3 Jahren schweigt sie sich aus. Sie ist -- jauchzet ihr Himmlischen! glücklich verheiratet." Irene's disgust with the institution of marriage and her assumption that, most likely, this marriage cannot, in fact, be a happy one and certainly not advantageous for "die Schriftstellerin" are apparent in her mocking tone. Her suspect reaction to "die Schriftstellerin's" marriage prepares the reader for the domestic scene Irene encounters, which is, unsurprisingly, bleak. A small country house, not particularly orderly and with the door unlatched, in the

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278 Asenijeff 156.
279 Ibid 157
280 Ibid 155
The suburbs of Berlin sets the stage for "die Schriftstellerin's" home life. Irene offers a quick survey of what she finds: a smoking petroleum stove; a handsome husband gone to seed who picks his nose; surprising lack of tidiness; and the former vixen her friend. Here the critique gains a tone both harsh and sad: "Nun sieht sie empor: o, diese Augen! Es giebt Blicke, die aussehen wie Auszehrende. So die ihren. Auch zu voll geworden ist sie, ein ungesundes, molles Melancholikerfett." The assessment raises feelings of disgust and also sympathy in Irene.

Irene's former rival, the once successful writer now must steal moments here and there to write, and the strain from the tension between her intellectual desires and her now domestic life as a housewife shows in her eyes and in also in her physical appearance. She cannot devote much time to writing, her true calling, because of the demands of running the household. After making a few disparaging remarks about women ("dass Frauen nie etwas liesten werden und wie Sparsamkeit doch die grösste Tugend des Weibes sei."), the husband leaves the two women alone briefly. In the few minutes they have, Irene describes a tragic scene in which "die Schriftstellerin" defends her new life, admits to suffering, considers running away, and then ultimately succumbs to her very feminine fate. The excuses that she gives for her husband and for the limitations to her intellectual stimulations enrage Irene: "Du gehst zu Grunde, warum schiedest du dich nicht!" "Die Schriftstellerin's" response paints the picture of the

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281 Ibid 158
282 Ibid 160
283 Ibid 161
intelligent woman's struggle when forced to conform to the gender expectations of the time:


Despite, or precisely because of, the weariness and suffocating despair that accompanies her life as a wife and homemaker, she remains committed to her fate. For a few charged moments it seems that she will go with Irene and start a new life, but her exhaustion overwhelms her.

Nevertheless, "die Schriftstellerin" musters her remaining pride and attempts to take charge of her own demise. Proudly she tells Irene, "Wer erlaubt dir, dich um mich zu kümmern, wer rief dich, wer wünschte dein Eindringen? Ich kann zu Grunde gehen, wenn ich will, versteht du? Ich bin Verantworter meines Lebens, mein Leben ist mein Sklave . . . da!"285 Perhaps it is out fear of failure, fear of financial limitations, a true love for her husband, or simply the realization that she is already too far gone to be redeemed, but for "die Schriftstellerin" a small victory lies in submission. To Irene and other feminists her life might look sad, but the proud young woman chooses to struggle along. Some time later in her diary, Irene includes an aside about "die Schriftstellerin":

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284 Ibid 161-162
285 Ibid 165
Nachricht von der Schriftstellerin. Infolge einer Lungenentzündung gestorben. War sie nicht schon tot?
Am Krankenlager hat sie ihren herrlichen Stolz von einst wiedergefunden. Ihr Mann durfte nicht zu ihr. Sie wollte allein sterben.\footnote{Ibid 191}

The old school acquaintance, as Irene saw her in her sad landhouse, represented the kind of living death that Irene sees in marriage and existing gender roles. In the hospital, however, "die Schriftstellerin" could live for a few final moments independently. Facing death, she shunned her husband; solitude allowed her to end her life proudly.

Irene neither dies nor does she find the kind of love she believes superior to the bourgeois unions. Her diary remains a testament of an emancipated woman's struggles against both the stifling expectations for women of her time and class, as well as against notions of emancipation that, in her opinion, only reinforce a patriarchy, i.e. women acting as men. The two women she introduces in her diary and on whom she spends time illustrating, or simply showing in the case of Hella, represent foils to her path: she offers their deaths as sacrifices. These women died so that she does not have to. In reading Irene's unmediated diary, the reader experiences Irene's interpretation of these women: "die Schriftstellerin" seems a sad, lost cause, a woman who could have been great, while Hella appeared so different initially, although her final diary entries revealed the same melodrama of which Irene is so skeptical. Yet, the \textit{fin-de-siècle} readers of the diary too could bring his or her own interpretation. We see how Hella fits into women's writing at the time; we are able to contextualize "die Schriftstellerin's" demise into late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century circumstances for intelligent women like her. The various
threads of reading and writing woven into Tagebuchblätter create a novel that promotes an ultimately failed feminist agenda while representing multiple types of women who fail differently. Their failure, however, reveals possibly unanticipated triumphs, however fleeting.
Last Words :: Elektra’s Silent Dance

No, I don’t really want to die.
I only want to die in your eyes.
- David Berman, “How to Rent a Room”

This dissertation concludes with a reading of a play that evokes the recurrent themes of femininity, refusal, and death while simultaneously complicating notions of fragility and authority. Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Elektra* (1904) puts on the stage a female protagonist who does not write letters or diaries and who does not quietly suffer. She screams and plots revenge, but ultimately she lacks authority for action. She acts for her murdered father’s honor through her brother, but her only personal performance is to be silent—to die. Elektra leaves behind no written account, instead her brother lives on in the glory he achieved through her instruction. All that remains of Elektra is silence. *Shattering Fragility’s* last words serve as a further complication of who the *fin-de-siècle* Viennese *femme fragile* is: a strong woman who becomes a threshold for voices and lives to pass through and whose own voice she sacrifices to the men she needs to act for her. The dissertation began with a woman who could not live without the living, breathing link to her one love and it ends with a woman whose life could be abandoned once the man who bore her was properly avenged. Elektra’s strength is for men, and her wild exterior reveals a fragile and mute interior.

Be Silent and Dance

Based on the Greek and yet heavily marked by the influence of psychoanalysis and *fin-
de-siècle Vienna are apparent. Elektra serves as a metaphor for the interrelation between women and illness and for women stretched to the point of breaking. The figure Elektra, especially as staged in the opera based on Hofmannsthal’s libretto, is known for her piercing scream that cuts through the injustice and suffering that make up her existence. Elektra plots to avenge her father’s death by planning the murder of her own mother, Klytämnestra, and the mother’s lover, Aegisth. She openly voices her despair, rage, and violent wants. Indeed, everything about Elektra counters presumptions of fragile, meek women. Nevertheless, I believe a close look at Elektra complicates and expands the understanding of female fragility and of the connection between competing depictions of women, death, and illness as I have outlined them in the preceding chapters. Elektra’s madness and death are a performance of an end of not only her life, but of a participation in the abuse of women and daughters, and her performance externalizes a struggle many women in fin-de-siècle Vienna suffered internally.

Beginning with the end of the drama, we find framed by the rebellious siblings’ names—Elektra and Orest—Elektra’s final words: a call for silence, a call to dance:


CHRYSOTHEMIS (erscheint wieder an der Tür, hinter ihr Fackeln, Gedräng, Gesichter von Männern und Frauen).
Elektra!
ELEKTRA (bleibt stehen, sieht starr auf sie hin).
Schwieig, und tanze. Alle müssen herbei! Hier schließt euch an! Ich trag’ die Last des Glückes, und ich tanze vor euch her.
Wer glücklich ist wie wir, dem ziemt nur eins: schweigen und tanzen!
(Sie tut noch einige Schritte des angespanntesten Triumphes und stürzt zusammen.)

287 The influence of the Studien über Hysterie specifically, but also of what Jung later coins the “Electra Complex” in 1913, make this restyling of a Greek tragedy around 1900 particularly significant for my project.
Already in the stage direction, Greek mythology confronts the discourse of nineteenth-century hysteria. The maenad—the mad, raving, follower of Dionysus, whose dance and erotic contortions traditionally are accompanied by shrieks and screams—calls here for silence. The maenad, Elektra, seems to demand the aphasia common for the hysteric: silence is the only possible response to the series of events that has led to the vengeance of Agamemnon. Her father is dead, her mother is dead, her brother has blood on his hands; this happiness truly is a burden that she, the daughter, must bear (“Ich trag’ die Last des Glückes”). She carries the weight of her family and of the expectations of tradition and gender, and yet her desire to move beyond some of these expectations—to honor her father and thus exact retribution for his murder, which far exceeds the possibility for a young woman—drives her first to what is perceived as lunatic raving and ends in her silencing. But her silence comes with the return of Orest, with the granting of a voice to the son and brother. Elektra collapses, her movements freeze, her voice fades away, and it is the cry of Orest’s name that we hear last, as if his name replaces her.

The frame we find at the conclusion of Elektra, the frame of the two siblings, of the calling out of Elektra’s name by Chrysothemis, and the calling out of Orest’s name also by Chrysothemis, can be extended to a frame of the naming of Elektra at the very beginning of the drama and of Orest’s naming at the end:

ERSTE (ihr Wassergefäß aufhebend).

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289 The role of Chrysothemis as the forgotten or the insignificant sibling, who is unable or unwilling to rebel in the way her siblings do, and yet whose voice really carries such considerable importance throughout the play is worth consideration, but is also worth an entire separate study.
Wo bleibt Elektra?\textsuperscript{290}

Whereas Andreas Thomasberger might see this introductory question as a direct response to Goethe’s Orest in \textit{Iphigenie auf Tauris},\textsuperscript{291} I see the question as one that will guide the work. Much as the letter drives Fräulein Else throughout Schnitzler’s novella, the question of where Elektra is and, more specifically, where she is and how we hear and perceive her (and how she hears and perceives herself) propels the narrative of the drama. “Wo bleibt Elektra” begins the drama; “Orest! Orest!” marks the conclusion of the drama. Separated by one long act, this call and response epitomizes the play and Elektra’s story. Elektra, her voice, and her agency rest in Orest and in the male tradition he embodies. Despite the wild cries, bold talk, and contortions, Elektra displaces her own authority into the men of her family: her murdered father, Agamemnon, and her cast-off brother, Orest. Her mania stems from an inherent need to please and honor the men of her family; she chooses silence, collapses permanently, once Orest has fulfilled her father’s vengeance which she had envisioned, thus freeing from the cycle that trapped her.

Although the origin of her madness may well lay in her intelligence and in her role as strong daughter in a society dominated by men, Elektra’s hysteria presents itself after the death (in this case murder) of her father. The five servants report her hysteric behavior, which occurs consistently at the same hour each day, and quote her purportedly lunatic words. They describe her as a wild animal “giftig,” “wie eine wilde Katze”: she demands that they leave her and refuses eye contact.\textsuperscript{292} The fifth and youngest servant, however, reveals the other side to Elektra’s plight:

\begin{quote}
\textsc{FÜNFTE (eine ganz junge, mit zitternder erregter Stimme).}
\textit{Ich will}
mich vor ihr niederwerfen und die Füße
ihr küssen. Ist sie nicht ein Königskind
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{290} Ibid 63
\textsuperscript{291} “Noch fehlt Elektra” \textit{Iphigenie auf Tauris} III, 3) and this might indeed be the case, but textually it is more complex (Thomasberger, “Nachwort” \textit{Elektra}, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001, 71).
\textsuperscript{292} Hofmannsthal 63
und leidet solche Schmach! Ich will die Füße
ihr salben und mit meinem Haar sie trocknen.

[…]

FÜNFTE. Es gibt nichts auf der Welt,
das königlicher ist als sie. Sie liegt
in Lumpen auf der Schwelle, aber niemand
(schreiend) niemand ist hier im Haus, der ihren Blick
aushält!

[…]

FÜNFTE (in die Tür geklemmt).
Ihr alle seid nicht wert,
die Luft zu atmen, die sie atmet! O
könnt' ich euch alle, euch, erhängt am Halse,
in einer Scheuer Dunkel hängen sehen
um dessen willen, was ihr an Elektra
getan habt!²⁹³

After initial disparaging remarks concerning Elektra’s person and behavior, this youngest
servant—herself described as a susceptible, hysterical type with quivering and excited voice—
introduces Elektra’s noble heritage and casts her as victim to unjust circumstances past and
present. She who becomes a raving animal at dusk is in fact a king’s child, regal even in her
wretchedness. This description of her nobility coupled with her madness sets the stage for a
disturbed and yet wise, a savage and yet noble young woman, who will assert her last remnants of
voice to reestablish the order that was—a patriarchy—and then give into silence.

Elektra acts in accordance with gender expectations: she must honor her father, she waits
for her brother to avenge Agamemnon’s death; yet, she seems disgusted by motherhood. An
ancestor to the denunciation of reproductive futurism, Hofmannsthal’s Elektra finds ample
opportunity to condemn children and other’s desire to have them.²⁹⁴ Already the servants mention
this particular brand of malice, which they find shocking. According to them, Elektra yells upon

²⁹³ Ibid 65
²⁹⁴ cf Lee Edelman, 1-31
seeing their children: “nichts kann so verflucht sein, nichts, als Kinder, die wir hündisch auf der Treppe im Blute glitschend, hier in diesem Haus empfangen und geboren haben.”

For Elektra, Agamemnon’s blood still floods the threshold of the house where he was murdered. This blood symbolizes the past transgression against the patriarchal order, against her father. The fact that she still sees it on the steps indicates the continuation of the iniquity. Having children and blindly allowing them to be raised in such a corrupt order will only perpetuate the tainted order: the future will only be a repetition of past and present. That the children stem from that very house, that they were born within those walls only compounds the matter.

It is Chrysothemis who makes explicit in the text the role bearing children has with a traditional understanding of being a woman: to become a woman, one must bear children. In reaction to Elektra's masochistic need to martyr herself while awaiting justice be done to honor her father, Chrysothemis protests:

Ich will heraus! Ich will nicht jede Nacht bis an den Tod hier schlafen! Eh' ich sterbe, will ich auch leben! Kinder will ich haben, bevor mein Leib verwelkt, und wär's ein Bauer, dem sie mich geben, Kinder will ich ihm gebären und mit meinem Leib sie wärmen in kalten Nächten, wenn der Sturm die Hütte zusammenschüttelt!  

She equates life with having children. She would rather be dead than live a life that does not fulfill this assumed female destiny: “Nein, ich bin ein Weib und will ein Weiberschicksal.”

Elektra sees Chrysothemis’s notion of womanhood as one that leads to the destiny of their own mother, Klytämnestra. Klytämnestra slept with one man while awaiting another to murder him coldly and then punished her own children. Motherhood as Chrysothemis would idealize it has been corrupted entirely, and for Elektra there is no way of rectifying this damnation without an

295 Ibid 66  
296 Ibid 70  
297 Ibid 71
utter refusal. Elektra is caught between the refusal of the feminine that she associates with her own mother and her feminine desire to honor the patriarchy, as well as between this subservient feminine role and a very masculine desire to act and avenge Agamemnon.

Elektra plots both the murder of her mother and of Aegisth, and yet waits for her brother to carry out the plan. Lacan informs this seeming contradiction by complicating Freud’s own question “What does woman want” (italics Lacan’s) and asking what the hyster wants; she wants a master:⁴⁹⁸

[The hyster] wants a master. That is what resides in the top right-hand little corner, for want of giving it another name. She wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things, but at the same time she doesn’t want him to know so much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. She reigns, and he does not govern.⁴⁹⁹

Here we have to consider the extent to which the hysteria is purely malady and to which it is part of a solution, an escape, an attempt at agency. In a relationship that harks back to Hegel, the hyster (here always a woman) needs her master. In this Lacanian relationship, however, the hyster holds her own store of knowledge. According to Lacan, the hyster's discourse leads to truth: the hyster has a hidden truth. If we use Elektra to understand this relationship we can see how she looks to Orest as her master.²⁰⁰ It is, in fact, Elektra who plots the murder of Aegisth and Klytämnestra, but she waits for Orest to act out the actual killing. Her aspirations are that of a man's, yet she does not carry out the task herself, but rather she delegates the action. She would serve Orest by preparing him and by instructing him; nevertheless, in her carefully plotted plan, he holds the power. When Elektra believes he is dead, she considers doing the killing with her own hands, enlisting the help of her unwilling sister. Orest, however, lives, and with Elektra's instruction and precautions he successfully kills both his mother and her lover, and he is revered

²⁹⁸ Lacan Seminar XVII 129
²⁹⁹ Ibid 129
³⁰⁰ Hofmannsthals Elektra and Lacan seem to be informing one another.
as a hero.

The relationship between master and hyster, between masculine and feminine, brother and sister ends here. "Wo bleibt Elektra?" Orest and his discourse eclipse Elektra. Her voice is silenced, and yet her silence rings with Orest, with his act, with the melody of his victory:

ELEKTRA (auf der Schwelle kauernd).

This remarkable statement locates Elektra both within and outside of the events that occur in the courtyard. She guided Orest in the murder and now the celebration flows through her body. Yet she remains cowering at the threshold and does not actively participate. This stage direction is not without significance: the use of “kauernd” likens her again to a frightened animal, one who inhabits the space in between. Elektra is the threshold: pass through her, as the music does, and you will come to the truth to which the hysteric’s discourse will lead. The music passes through her without her direction and yet the dance, “der Reigen,” demands her direction. And here she must refuse: she can only be inactive, passive, fragile. With the exaltation of Orest, Elektra calls for silence and for the maenadic dance. The court is transformed: all cry tears of joy and rejoice their male hero. The truth that the hysterical represents can be found in Orest's deed. Yet she, the hysterical Elektra, no longer exists now that Orest has performed the murder. She submits to his role as hero and avenger, but she does not submit to following female suit and celebrating him

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301 Hofmannsthal 109-110
entirely. She acts as vessel for the dance and music, but then turns her own performance inward: she collapses and dies.

**Bibliography**


