

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE, HISTORY OF IDEAS AND RELIGION

***RETHINKING INTIMACY IN WOMEN'S READING AND WRITING
AT THE PERIPHERIES OF EUROPE***

EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

26–27 March, 2020

Abstracts

Key note:

Making Modern Romania: Women, Books and the Cultural Politics of Intimacy

PhD Carmen Dutu, Associate Professor and Director of the *Anglo-American Intercultural Studies* MA programme at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, “Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University in Bucharest.

Key words: cultural politics, cultural transfer, intimacy, women writers, nineteenth century, public and private, periphery, fringes,

My study explores the mapping of the term *intimacy* and its definitions in line with its traditional perception (a private sphere matter; Giddens, 1991), as well as with the more recent developments on the matter (Seidman, 2011; Hines and Taylor, 2012; Taylor and Addison, 2013). But, when applied to specific contexts configuring a map requires a route, as well as boundaries, peripheries, fringes. The challenge is to decide what stays within the borders and what is rejected by subjects and spaces. Moreover, boundaries, peripheries and fringes reflect the idea of both the geographical position of non-central cultures within the larger European context, and marginalized research. And, when confronted to intimacy, how is the map shaped and contoured, and re-shaped again? And what is the gendered reaction to all this? Thus, the contours of a politics of intimacy appear on the less defined boundaries between the personal and the public space, between the masculine/public and the feminine/private divide, where intimacy shapes and is shaped by space— from the domestic to the national and beyond.

In view of the above, my analysis aims at looking at intimacies as a key tool of investigating the cultural transfer of modernity in 19 century Romania. In this process, my focus is on Romanian women writers' narratives of the intimate in the context of modernization. I will be examining a few representative women prose writers – representative from both the point of view of their relationships and attitudes towards intimacy, and their characters' discourses on intimacy.

Presentation of new research -project:

Spatialized intimacy: Literary Mapping in Writing and Reception of the Russian–Finnish Cultural Mediator, Marie Linder (1840–70)

Prof. Yvonne Leffler, PhD, University of Gothenburg, Adj Prof. Viola Parente-Čapková, PhD, Turku University (Kati Launis, Natalia Mihailova, Arja Rosenholm and Jasmine Westerlund)

Key words: transnational, periphery, intimacy, gendered space, Marie Linder

The presentation discusses the novel *En qvinna af vår tid: karaktersteckning af Stella* (A Woman of Our Time, 1867) written by the Russian-Finnish author, countess and feminist Marie Linder (née Musin-Puškin, 1840-1870, using Stella as her nome de plume). As Linder was a cultural mediator and a carrier of cultural transfer between Russia, European and Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Denmark), space assumes a great importance in her real and imagined life. Since we claim that Linder, as a cosmopolitan author, makes sense of the world by narrating, i.e. mapping it through both real and imagined places, we draw on the ‘literary cartography’ and the concept of gendering of spaces. The figure of ‘mapping’ is applied to study the transnational reception and the intertextual connections, whereby the literary analysis focuses on spaces of intimacy. We ask:

- What are the real and imagined spaces/places represented in the novel to make sense of the “world”, and how is intimacy produced and experienced in relation to gendered agency in private and public spaces?
- How does Linder’s transnationalism, multilingualism, and her social position as a Russian-Finnish noblewoman, resonate with narrative means, genres, aesthetic conventions, literary idols (esp. women writers) and contemporary discourses (e.g. marriage vs. education)?
- What kind of a cultural space of the mid-nineteenth century Finland is constructed by the conflicting reception of her novel?
- How did Linder’s protagonist place herself in relation to other female protagonists in contemporary novels written by women in Finland and in Russia?

The presentation utilizes the digitized collections of historical newspapers and other digital sources, engaging in the practice of *data-rich literary history*.

Collaborative paper and presentation of new volume in the Brill series:

Intimacy between women writers reading each other across generations: Isabelle de Charrière’s position in between the 17th and 21st centuries.

Guest Senior Lecturer Suzan van Dijk, PhD, Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands (Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences) Amsterdam

Key words: authorship, female predecessors, closeness, inspiration

The kind of intimacy I want to discuss in this session is the one that can exist between writers sharing important aspects of their *authorship*. This “intimacy”, expressed and recognized in words, is different from the “normal” one in the sense that it can be experienced (on the reading side) between persons from quite different generations, without any feeling of

inappropriateness. Such (virtual?) closeness is often extremely helpful for those who consider *becoming* a writer.

The particular aspect of authorship I will consider is: *writing and publishing as a woman* in the male-dominated cultural field. Writings by female predecessors can be helpful and important for a woman. In the book we will present at the end of/in this session, the Hungarian writer Anna Menyhért connects with five of her Hungarian foremothers, who were publishing at the end of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century.

Anna Menyhért's search for predecessors can be put in a larger context. Here I want to discuss the case of an 18th-century woman author for whom we can document these "intimacies" in *both* directions: to the past and to the future, being herself clearly inspired by female predecessors (as we can read in her correspondence), *and* inspiring present-day women who declare being influenced by her.

Indeed, the Dutch/Swiss author Belle de Zuylen/Isabelle de Charrière (1740-1805) wrote about her admiration and closeness to several women authors, in particular 17th-century Marie de Sévigné and the Margrave de Bayreuth. But Charrière herself held a similar position for 21st-century Dutch writers Josephine Rombouts and Nelleke Noordervliet. In several ways, both expressed that they have been "helped" or felt supported in becoming a writer by reading Charrière's letters.

Papers:

Lacking Intimacy in Axelsson's *April Witch* and Alem's *Fatma*

Assoc. prof. Gillian Alban PhD, Istanbul Kültür University

Key words: intimacy, sexual, relationship, taboo, frustration, lack, abuse, spiritual, physical

Bringing together the disparate works of Majgull Axelsson's intensely psychological, Swedish *April Witch* (1997), and Raja Alem's magical realist *Fatma* (2002) of Saudi Arabia, may seem to burst strict categorization, yet in their different approaches to Intimacy they bear fruitful comparison. The fascinating *April Witch* relates the lives of intertwined foster sisters and their should-be sister, the 'monstrous' super-child Desirée. Each of the foster sisters of this novel is burdened with painful struggles while maturing, as the reader appreciates the psychic and physical limitations of even twentieth century Sweden, leading these girls to battle into independent life and partial emotional fruition, with their lives connected in an unreal, magical realist way through the *April Witch*, Desirée. As for Raja Alem's *Fatma* of contemporary Saudi Arabia, serious consequences emerge from the abusive relationships that the eponymous protagonist undergoes, deprived of any intimate outlet, as she achieves imaginative release through her interactions with snakes. In her lonely and abusive marriage with a snake-handler, Fatma finds fulfilment in a world of emotional and spiritual embrace, interacting with her snake shadow, as she becomes the supreme snake dealer, in despite of her husband's hatred and envy, learning self-expression and gaining a divine life force. Countering her husband's persistent rape with her own vagina dentata, she reaches apotheosis as he discards her to death, while he loses not only her but all his snakes, who prefer to die with her. These disparate works from the peripheries; north west Europe to the Middle East, on the cusp of the twenty-first century, unite in relating women's struggle for meaningful emotional self-expression and interaction. They relate women's struggle for intimacy between psychological realism to magic-realism, indicating that where there is no other way, release must be found in imaginative expression.

The New Woman as an Evolutionary Necessity, or: The New Woman's Desire Revisited
Senior Lecturer Cecilia Annell, PhD, Högskolan i Gävle

Keywords: Eros, desire, feminism, feminist eugenics, 1900

Rarely has the concept of *eros* been so existentially and politically charged as it was for women writers at the turn of the 20th century. Swedish authors such as Ellen Key, Hilma Angered-Strandberg, Elin Wägner, Frida Stéenhoff and Anna Branting made connections in their writings about *eros* to individual life goals, as well as to social and political ends. This included representations of erotic and intimate relationships, and the way in which their needs and desires might be realised politically. The demand for female suffrage and independence, along with the desire to change sexual morals.

Often radical writers would turn to the new sciences, not least evolutionary theory or eugenics, to provide a basis for their theses. With reference to evolutionary theory female inferiority was “proven”, or else one could find evidence for the opposite: female spiritual and moral authority. Above all the scientific worldview at the turn of the century was a weapon for feminists to use in the struggle against a dogmatic Christianity, which had hitherto dominated views on humanity and sexual morality in a way that was utterly oppressive of women.

How do writers portray feminine desire during a time that in many ways denies, or condemns, it? The sexual morality of 1900 did not permit an open expression of female sexuality. What literary strategies were adopted by female authors to portray feminine desire and to renegotiate relations of power and resistance? The association of truth, individuality and erotic was an inheritance of the female writers of the 1880s, but how did this develop in the early 20th century?

The Doors of Tears Love, Space, and Intimacy in Hanne Ørstavik's Prose
Postdoc. Irina Hron, PhD, University of Gothenburg

Key words: love, intimacy, spaces, transgression, disturbances, literary texts, Hanne Ørstavik

In the fifty-first note of Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* the annalist gives an intriguing depiction of the unknown room next door: “One can easily imagine any sort of room, and often it more or less fits. But the room that one has next to one is always quite different than one thinks.” (MLB 51, *emphasis added*) In my proposed paper, I will focus on several intimate spaces such as the haunted art gallery next door or the carceral room behind an oppressively locked door: indeed, both prove to be “quite different than one thinks” (ibid.). By analyzing selected contemporary prose texts by Norwegian Hanne Ørstavik (*48 rue Defacqz* [2011, novel]; *Like sant som jeg er virkelig* [1997, novel]; *I morgen skal det være åpent for alle*, [2007, play]), I seek to illustrate how vicinity, in contrast to the common notion of community, can be conceptualized as a violent transgression of spatially and spiritually intimate space. More specifically, what does the enigmatic and fragmented address in Ørstavik's title reveal about the relation between the pair of twins, living *in* the house, and the lonely young woman that “stands *outside* the house”? Equally disturbing is the interruption of intimacy in *Like sant som jeg er virkelig* where the claustrophobic bed room proves to be “padded like a cocoon”. Against this background, my reading will focus on figures of love, space and intimacy that, according to Rilke, “are known only by the disturbances they cause in certain textures” (MLB 49) – namely, in the texture(s) of literary texts.

White Slavegirl: Melodrama, Intimate Nationality, and the Queer

Adj. Prof. Elsi Hyttinen, PhD University of Turku

Keywords: nationality, citizenship, intimacy, melodrama, queer

In my presentation, I will be discussing Eva M. Vitkanen's novel *Suomalainen orjatyttö: ainoa alkuperäinen suomalainen novelli valkosesta orjakaupasta* (A Finnish Slavegirl. The Only Original Finnish Novel on the White Slavetrade), published in Finnish in the US in 1917. Well versed in its contemporary low-brow culture, the novel relies on melodramatic narration and the white slave trade motive made popular by early Hollywood cinema. In depicting a young woman's journey from the intimate space of the immigrant home to the dangerous intimacies of brothels, and back, the novel articulates turn-of-the-century nationalism with the immigrant condition. The core notion in my analysis is Lauren Berlant's concept of national sentimentality (Berlant 1997, 11): Finnishness is represented as the very core of the melodramatic heroine's intimate self, restored in its value at her deathbed by a remorseful suitor.

The novel is part of the material I am working with in my project on Finnish literature published in 1910s, the decade stretching from the installation of our first modern parliament in 1906 to the country's declaration of independence in 1917. The basic hypothesis of my research is that the decade was extremely charged in terms of negotiating the limits of proper citizenship, and that that negotiation was very much about organizing sexuality, resulting in what Berlant and Warner have called "national heterosexuality" (1998, 553).

Intimacy in the poetry of Slovene Vida Jeraj

Assoc. Prof. Alenka Jensterle Doležalová, PhD, Charles University, Prague

Key words: fin de siècle, poetry, Slovenian Modernism, writing as self-discovery and rebellion, Vida Jeraj

In the period of fin de siècle Slovene women writers were no longer silent and hidden, women authors take on life and energy. The first Slovene female lyric poet was Vida Jeraj (1875–1934), passionate and subversive female author of poetry, who began to write about intimacy and feelings.

She was the most distinguished poet of the female writers' circle of *Slovenka* (Slovene Women – newspaper published in Trieste) and she was also connected to the leading figures of Slovene 'moderna' circle in Ljubljana. She was a nomadic Central European person, part of the 'Habsburg myth' with a bilingual, hybrid identity: Slovene and Austrian, just as all the other Slovene modernists. As the other members of Slovene 'moderna' she decided to write in Slovene. She lived in different parts of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire (for 18 years in Vienna). Her impressionistic, sometimes decadent poetry is very autobiographical: her poems represent a diary of her turbulent life. Writing was for her a kind of self-discovery and also a rebellion from the social norms of the patriarchal society. Light, etheric poetry full of tender feelings proclaimed the new credo and also the philosophy of the ascending modernism in Slovenian poetry: she wrote about the moments in nature and the blessing of the meetings of lovers but

also about parting and death. Until nowadays she was never really accepted as an important poet in the Slovene literary history.

New Sexual Ethics in Spanish Feminist Literature (1907-1939)

Assoc. Prof. Elena Lindholm, PhD, Umeå University

Key words: Spain, feminism, sexuality, eugenics, literature

Within the Spanish women's movement during the first decades of the 20th century, the focus was on issues of education and suffrage, but within radical spheres, questions about women's sexuality came higher and higher on the agenda. Both within the anarchist movements of eastern Spain and within the more socialist-oriented central Spanish feminism, the sexual reformist movements followed the debates in the rest of Europe, where Germany with the Bund für Mutterschutz organization was leading. Characteristic of sexual reformist-oriented feminism in both Spain and Germany was the Nietzschean view on woman as a both physical and spiritual being, as well as the eugenic ideas that permeated their thinking and which in Germany went under the designation *Neue Ethik*. In Spain, novels were written by women who were deeply involved in sexual reformist-oriented feminism, such as Margarita Nelken, Carmen de Burgos and Federica Montseny. In my research, I want to explore how the ideas of sexual reformist feminism manifested in their depictions of woman as a loving subject. The starting point are the ideas that were conveyed in Europe via, for example, the Bund für Mutterschutz. However, the aim of the study is not to exert direct influences, but rather to find out whether in Spain, a proper sexual reformist thought community within feminism developed and how it was manifested in literature. The study will be based on a thematic interpretation of the literary sources, on *topoi* such as 'free love', 'conscious motherhood' and 'female desire'.

Middle-class Marriage in the Writings of Fin de Siècle- Women Playwrights

Prof. Katja Mihurko Poniz, PhD University of Nova Gorica

Key words: female playwrights, fin de siècle dramas, Zofka Kveder, marriage of convenience

Women writers entered the field of dramatic genres as a group not earlier than in the 18th century. Previous periods saw some female playwrights (Hroswith von Gandersheim, Elisabeth Cary, Aphra Behn ...), however, we cannot speak of female dramatic tradition before the bourgeois era. This is associated with the societal status of women – they were not supposed to take part in public life and theatre was seen as a place of dubious moral standards and therefore completely inappropriate for »decent« women in the role of producers. The entrance of middle-class women in public life coincides with the raise of the domestic tragedy and bourgeois tragedy (Bürgerliches Trauerspiel), where the protagonists are ordinary citizens who promote values like virtue, humanity, individuality and genuine feelings. The development of the middle-class and the emancipatory efforts of women in the 19th century also changed the roles of men and women in the intimate sphere and the conflicts within the marriage became the frequent drama topic. Ibsen's Nora encouraged female playwrights all across Europe to touch upon the issues of middle-class marriage. In the fin de siècle period women playwrights depicted the distresses of middle-class wives struggling with the double moral standards of the bourgeois society and the discomforts of young women forced by their parents into the marriage of convenience. In my contribution I will briefly present the history of women playwrights and then focus on the plays of Zofka Kveder (1878-1926), a Slovenian

author, whose works were staged in the first decade of the 20th century in four European capitals: Prague, Zagreb, Belgrade and Ljubljana. Her dramatic writings are thematically and formally connected with the plays of her female contemporaries from other European literatures and fit into the complex representations of intimacy in the works of female playwrights from the European peripheries and so called small literatures.

Shaping the New Croatian Woman? On Gender, Modernity and Intimacy in Jagoda Truhelka's Novel Plein Air

M. A. Dajana Vasiljevićová, Charles University, Prague

Key words: modern intimacy, artistic production, The New Croatian Woman, equality, family life, Jagoda Truhelka, *Plein Air*

In the Croatian society of the 19th century, the concept of women was both marginalized and mythological, heavily under the influence of essential religious and conservative androcentric intellectual concepts. As a result, Croatian female authors, similarly to authors from neighbouring regions, that had been margin of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Europe, were rarely acknowledged within respected literary canon. The negative assessment of their works was often prevalent because of their focus on private sphere, domestic family life and expression of intimate sensibility that were often considered to be of lesser literary value. That is the reason why Jagoda Truhelka (1864–1957), author from Osijek, multi-ethnic cultural centre of Slavonija region and her works were usually overlooked.

In the blended feminist and family romance, novel *Plein Air* (1897) Truhelka offers intriguing portrayal of modern intimacy and female artistic production that could be considered her answer to the concept of New Croatian Woman. As the heroine Zdenka, working artist in Vienna requests from moneyed gentry hero Hinko different forms of intimacy as well as new forms of affective joint activities, novel anticipates the shift toward shared equality and modern perspective on creating family life. Truhelka's artistic blue stocking heroine advocates the concept of a woman's right to live a public as well as private life on her own terms, yet feels that happily opts for marriage and motherhood, conclusion that is not surprising considering author social status as a teacher that must stand for middle-class morality and pro-patriarchal catholic values.

Mother-and-Daughter Intimacy: Two 1816 Travelogues by Polish Women writers, Izabela Czartoryska and Maria Wirtemberska

Assoc.Prof. Magdalena Ozarska PhD, Jan Kochanowski University

Key words: travel journal, mother-and-daughter intimacy, sentimentalism, imitation of Sterne, emotional expression

In the summer of 1816, two Polish women writers, Izabela Czartoryska and her daughter Maria Wirtemberska, each set out on her journey. Czartoryska went to Bad Warmbrunn in the Habsburg Empire to take the waters, while Wirtemberska travelled to Italy and Switzerland through Silesia, Bohemia and Austria, for a purpose which has still not been sufficiently documented. Both wrote travel accounts of their journeys, but each is of a different kind. Czartoryska's travelogue is factual, while her daughter's text had become the first ever sentimental journey, modelled after Sterne, written in the Polish language. Both texts, however, centre around the topos of intimacy between these two women: Izabela the beloved mother, and Maria the loving daughter. In both these travelogues, the absent figure of the mother/daughter

features prominently and serves as a springboard to the actual meeting of the two women at Bad Warmbrunn. Much is written about the anticipated meeting, about the meeting actually happening, and – when the meeting is over – about the regret occasioned by the fact that it can no longer be reasonably anticipated. Maria, however, is accompanied by another woman, officially her charge but in fact her mother's illegitimate daughter, Cecylia Beydale (aka Beydall). Izabela in turn has with her her own charge named Zofia née Matuszewicz, who also wrote a journal of the trip. It is interesting that while Izabela uses the travellers' real names, her daughter Maria chooses to hide behind the fictional identity of Malvina, the eponymous protagonist of her best-selling 1816 romance, and changes the name of Cecylia to that of Lydia.

Intimacy, Reading and Writing in the Novels and Short Stories of Regina di Luanto

Assoc. Prof. Ulla Åkerström, PhD, University of Gothenburg

Key words: Italian literature, friendship, marriage, reading, writing

The Italian writer Regina di Luanto (*nom de plume* of Guendalina Lipparini, 1862-1914), today almost forgotten but quite well-known in Italy around the turn of the century 1800-1900, explored various forms of intimacy in her books (altogether eleven novels and two collections of short stories). In the Italian reception, she was seen as an audacious writer and known for her “morbid success”. She dealt with female friendship and the relations between men and women, arguing against marriages based on hypocrisy and falsehood, instead of the ideal marriage between two rational individuals who work together in harmony creating a family and educating children. Of particular interest is her novel *Libera!* (1895), in which the protagonist, a young widow, leads a life full of intellectual interests and friends with whom she reads, discusses literature and develops ideas. Another important novel is *Un martirio* (1894), a diary novel in which a young wife strives to share intellectual thoughts with an uncomprehending husband. The writing and reading of the young woman are at the centre of this novel about lacking intimacy. These thematics are recurrent in Regina di Luanto's texts, in which a positivistic view of the world is mixed with a profound belief in science and art as a means to create a better world. Intimacy, as well as the lack of it or distorted forms of it, is at the centre of many of her novels and short stories.

How to Write as a Woman: Character-Bound Narration in Kaymak Tabağı

Post doc. Müge Özoğlu, PhD, Leiden University/ Lund University

Key words: narration, Ottoman Turkish literature, eroticism, the act of writing, *Kaymak Tabağı*

Kaymak Tabağı is one of the most famous popular erotic narratives of the early twentieth-century Ottoman Turkish literature. It was published anonymously and without a publication date. *Kaymak Tabağı* is an epistolary narrative written entirely in letter format through which the character-bound narrator Kaymak Tabağı – whose name is taken from a real-life prostitute – tells the development story of her sexual awareness that expands by means of secretly looking at people engaging in sexual intimacy.

Because the author is anonymous, this paper does not scrutinise *Kaymak Tabağı* as part of women's writing outright assuming intimacy as a unique female experience conveyed through the act of writing. Instead, regardless of the gender of its author, this paper explores the ways

in which the narration of sexual intimacy by a female character-bound narrator becomes a performative act that suggests certain presuppositions on writing/narrating sexual intimacies from a female perspective and at a meta level. In other words, this paper concerns itself with the 'gender-free' author's choice of representing women's writing on intimacy rather than discussing women's writing on intimacy per se. Thus, *Kaymak Tabagı* offers us a very productive reading of the writing process of a gender-oriented writing practice performed by a woman and enables us to look at women's writing practice in fiction.