WOMEN IN THE WORKS OF LOU ANDREAS-SALOMÉ
NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

Muriel Cormican
Women in the Works of Lou Andreas-Salomé
Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture
Women in the Works of Lou Andreas-Salomé
Negotiating Identity

Muriel Cormican

CAMDEN HOUSE
Rochester, New York
Dedicated to my mother, Bridie
Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

1: Woman versus Women: Gender, Art, and Decadence in “Der Mensch als Weib” and Eine Ausschweifung 15

2: Marriage and Science: Discourses of Domestication in Das Haus 45

3: Untamed Woman: Talking about Sex and Self in Jutta 69

4: Motherhood, Masochism, and Subjectivity in Ma: Ein Porträt 81

5: Returning the Gaze: Uppity Women in Menschenkinder 107

6: Articulating Identity: Narrative as Mastery and Self-Mastery in Fenitschka 136

Conclusion: Women Who Move Too Much 160

Works Cited 171

Index 179
Acknowledgments

Many people and institutions have provided support of varying sorts during the writing of this book. William Rasch introduced me to Lou Andreas-Salomé a long time ago and oversaw my first readings of her works. Raleigh Whitinger’s intellectual generosity has been incredible. Although I have never met him in person, he commented on my work, shared insights with me, and encouraged me for years. The advice of someone whose work I respect so much enriched the book and my intellectual life in general. I am indebted to my colleagues and friends in the field and at UWG who organized conference sessions and read parts of the manuscript over the years: Cynthia Chalupa, Nikhil Sathe, Mary Beth O’Brien, John Blair, Gary Schmidt, Amy Cuomo, and Mark Weiner, among others. The support of the people at Camden House, in particular Jim Walker, has meant a great deal, as have the immensely helpful responses of the anonymous readers for Camden House. I am grateful and proud to have benefited from the work with all of those mentioned. Any shortcomings that remain are my own.

My home institution, the University of West Georgia, as well as the Carl von Ossietzky Universität in Oldenburg offered contexts in which I could deliver newly emerging readings and receive immediate feedback. UWG supported my conference travel and CvO gave me the opportunity to teach a Hauptseminar on the topic of this book in the summer semester of 2007. The students in that course were a delight to work with, and I thank them too. The libraries of both institutions also provided support. I thank their staff, particularly the interlibrary loan staff at UWG. I also thank Channa Cole, our departmental secretary, for last minute, long-distance help with some quotations.

My mother, Bridie Cormican, has always been a model of strength and tolerance for me, and I am thankful to her and to all my family for their steady companionship and support. But it is to John Blair that I owe and extend my deepest gratitude. He has been my reader and partner for so many years and in so many ways, that I cannot imagine having arrived at the point of writing acknowledgements without him, mo chroidhe dbhí.

Oldenburg, July 6, 2009, MAC
Introduction

Because of her associations, correspondence, and collaboration with Nietzsche, Rilke, and Freud, Lou Andreas-Salomé (1861–1937) has always been of interest to German literary scholars. Until the mid-to-late 1980s scholarship on her was dominated by biographical studies inspired by a fascination with the great literary and cultural giants she befriended rather than by curiosity about the woman herself and her literary works.1

In assessing the need for Rudolph Binion’s extensive study Frau Lou: Nietzsche’s Wayward Disciple in the late sixties, for example, Walter Kaufmann pointed to the importance, above all, of her “successive friendships with Nietzsche, Rilke, and Freud.”2 In 1984 Angela Livingstone similarly assumed that her contemporary readership’s interest in Andreas-Salomé would center on her subject’s “acquaintance with . . . influential persons.”3 Early biographers such as Peters, Binion, and Livingstone typically acknowledge Andreas-Salomé’s intellectual deftness, deferring to the high regard in which her well-known modernist contemporaries held her, but write off her literary works as veiled recastings of her own experience, as essayistic, and thus lacking in artistic merit.4

Beginning in the 1980s, a series of German biographies written almost exclusively by women sought to redress the one-sided focus of their predecessors and shed new light on elements of Andreas-Salomé’s life that had previously been ignored: her own intellectual endeavors, long term and intimate relationships with less famous men (Paul Réé and Friedrich Pineles), her connections to women (Frieda von Bülow and Helene Klingenberg), and her position vis-à-vis the German women’s movement.5 Leonie Müller-Loreck’s Die erzählende Dichtung Lou Andreas-Salomés: Ihr Zusammenhang mit der Literatur um 1900 (Lou Andreas-Salomé’s Narrative Works. Their Connection to Literature around 1900, 1976) is the first study to focus on Andreas-Salomé’s fictional works in their contemporary literary context, tracing their thematic ties to Jugendstil (art nouveau).6 With the exception of this book and some cogent and path-breaking readings by Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Uta Treder in the mid-eighties, it was not until the early 1990s that literary readings of Andreas-Salomé’s fiction began to constitute the norm.7

On the heels of these critics, critics in the 1990s began to emphasize the engaging subtlety with which Andreas-Salomé treats prominent themes and problems of the day in her fictional works. Book-length studies by Biddy Martin, Caroline Kreide, Birgit Wernz, and Chantal Gahlinger
treat Andreas-Salomé’s fiction from varied perspectives. Reevaluating her relationship to German modernity, Martin analyzes her life as much as her texts, and as if it were a text, rejecting the idea that the suppression of biographical details was an adequate response to the cult of biography around Andreas-Salomé (2). A long overdue, thorough, and complex study, Woman and Modernity devotes only one chapter to Andreas-Salomé’s fiction, namely to the 1898 pair of novellas, Fenitschka and Eine Ausschweifung (Deviations, 1898). Basing her findings on close analyses of a number of the non-fictional works, Caroline Kreide weighs in on an ongoing debate about Andreas-Salomé’s relationship to the German women’s movement and feminism in general, convincingly demonstrating that while Andreas-Salomé was not a self-professed or politically engaged feminist, there can be little doubt that her thoughts and ideas paralleled those of a variety of contemporary feminists, radical and otherwise. Except for in the final chapter, in which Kreide analyzes the marriages in Das Haus: Eine Familiengeschichte vom Ende vorigen Jahrhunderts (The House: A Family Saga from the Turn of the Last Century, 1921), she too pays limited attention to the fictional works. Although Birgit Wernz offers numerous interesting insights into Andreas-Salomé’s fiction in Sub-Versionen: Weiblichkeitsentwürfe in den Erzähltexten Lou Andreas-Salomé, reading a selection of works through the lens of deconstruction and French Feminist theory, her clear and detailed explications of the theories tend to relegate the analysis of the literary texts to second place. Chantal Gahlinger’s Der Weg zur weiblichen Autonomie: Zur Psychologie der Selbstwerdung im literarischen Werk von Lou Andreas-Salomé addresses questions similar to my own (path to individuation; female psychological development) but from a decidedly psychological perspective and with more emphasis on the possibility of achieving closure. My intention with this study, then, is to build on and complement the pioneering work of these and other critics.

Brigid Haines, Raleigh Whittinger, Gisela Brinker-Gabler, and Julie Doll Allen have variously and cogently interpreted Fenitschka, Eine Ausschweifung, and Menschenkinder (The Human Family, 1899) in article-length publications. All of these path-breaking studies go a long way toward remedying the earlier negative scholarly reception of Andreas-Salomé’s fiction by demonstrating how she contributed substantively, critically, and innovatively to literary developments of the time. These critics have paved the way for the study at hand by challenging the arbitrary notions of artistic merit responsible for the frequent dismissal of Andreas-Salomé’s fictional works. They have spearheaded the work that Ruth Ellen Boetcher Joeres deems necessary in the case of women authors not entirely lost to literary history, namely the removal “of past interpretive ideological layers” before one can see what other interpretations or representations of their works are possible. In its close readings of the by-now-relatively-well-known pair of novellas, Fenitschka and Eine
Ausschweifung, as well as of still further neglected prose works — Ma: Ein Porträt (Ma: A Portrait, 1901), Jutta, Das Haus, Menschenkinder, and Ródinka: Russische Erinnerung (Ródinka: A Remembrance of Russia, 1923) — this book emphasizes the variety and complexity of the critical dialogue that Andreas-Salomé carried on a century ago in her fiction with conventional conceptions of identity, sexuality, and gender and the narrative structures and conventions that represented them.¹⁴

My analysis of Lou Andreas-Salomé’s texts has a twofold agenda. First, I hope to offer an account of a larger body of her literature, deemphasizing biographical and psychoanalytical/psychological perspectives without ignoring the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural contexts in which her works were written. Second, I hope to add to contemporary theoretical discourses on gender, feminism, and identity and to show how Andreas-Salomé’s work prefigures discourses of identity politics that have emerged in feminist and queer theory in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Close readings of the wide range of representations of women and men in her fiction, together with a resolve to let contradictions in and among her texts stand rather than pursue coherent and definitive statements, uncover the many points of convergence between Andreas-Salomé’s understanding of gender, identity, sexuality, and narrative, and the understanding of more recent commentators on the same, such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva.¹⁵

As far back as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Andreas-Salomé’s fiction drew attention to what is now commonly acknowledged as a shortcoming of feminist discourse: its claims to universality. More than simply presenting thematic explorations of women’s changing roles in society, her works investigate how narrative shapes thought and influences the conceptualization of woman’s experience. In a global sense Andreas-Salomé is as much concerned with a cultural crisis of femininity and masculinity as with the identity crises of her individual women characters, exploring how even subtle shifts in women’s and men’s understanding of themselves, their sexuality and their identity, might affect cultural norms from something as practical as the division of roles in marriage to something as abstract as narrative formulas and narration.

Andreas-Salomé’s position vis-à-vis the women’s movement was complex and contradictory. In her lifetime her works met with significant acclaim and were widely read by members of the women’s movement, who saw in her a model for woman’s social and sexual freedom, even as they heavily criticized some of the views on women she espoused in her essays, views that seemed in stark contrast to her own approach to life.¹⁶ On the one hand, her personal choices — she was intellectually and artistically active, married but involved in other love affairs, not tied to the home — and her fiction about the struggles of women who wanted more than traditional roles implied that she could only be in favor of the
changes feminists sought for women. On the other hand, she explicitly criticized feminism and promoted an active appreciation of a naturalized motherhood and submission to a husband’s will and desire, sometimes pointing to both as panaceas for women’s identity crises. “Der Mensch als Weib” (“The Human Being as Woman,” 1899), for example, represents motherhood as a state of uniquely mystical wholeness that eludes all women who cannot or do not reproduce.17

In “Reaktion in der Frauenbewegung” (“Reactions within the Women’s Movement,” 1899), Hedwig Dohm criticized the neo-Romantic essay “Der Mensch als Weib” for what she argued was its betrayal of the feminist cause.18 Although the essay delineates and argues for the superiority of the feminine principle, that superiority is rooted in a passive, self-effacing, and submissive attitude. Woman, as figure, becomes an all-encompassing natural phenomenon, incapable of producing art because she remains at one with the universe, does not complete a process of individuation, and thus fails — and herein, paradoxically, lies her success — to achieve the kind of differentiation necessary for reflection and artistic distance. Silvia Bovenschen refers to “die imaginierte Weiblichkeit” (“imagined femininity”) in 1979 in her book of the same name, suggesting that when women in the real world do not attain this mythical state, they are subjected to rejection and condemnation; this imagined femininity constitutes the focus of Hedwig Dohm’s 1899 socially and economically aware criticism of “Der Mensch als Weib.”19

In her fiction Andreas-Salomé similarly invokes romantic idealizations of women as wives and mothers but then complements and complicates these ideals in two ways. She depicts each woman’s psychic life as complex and replete with contradictions and uncertainties, and she fills her texts with a variety of women — submissive, independent, feminist, masculine, sexually liberated — all of whom are granted legitimacy. Although she repeatedly suggests that the “ideal” woman, or at least the most serene woman, is one who finds happiness in an implicitly natural marriage of subordination and in motherhood, she also consistently makes it clear that not all women can or want to conform to such a life. At a time when women were under attack from many sides, not least from themselves — those who chose or advocated more conservative routes in life were criticized by feminists; those who challenged the conservative routes were criticized by antifeminists — Andreas-Salomé validates a myriad of life choices, attempting to draw her readers’ attention repeatedly to the discursive construction of a femininity deemed natural. She depicts how the judgment and self-judgment of an individual in accordance with prescriptive and frequently internalized ideologies of “the natural” function in the messy internal churning out of a sense of self, as well as in attempts to articulate that sense of self.20 In her first-person narrative stories such as Jutta and Eine Ausschweifung, she demonstrates how the creation of
subjectivity is tied to telling, how the act of narrating is not the representation in writing of something that already exists but part of the act of creation itself. These novellas also show how the creation of a narrative about self-doubt, a loss of control, and confusing confrontations between desire and duty provides a forum in which control can be reconstituted. Andreas-Salomé suggests that feminist tendencies can just as easily be inscribed in an organic and natural femininity as are traditionally sanctioned female roles. In the contradiction between her own construction of femininity in her essays and her treatment of her female characters in her fiction, she most clearly reveals not only how femininity is a discursive construct but also how that construct has very real impact on the shaping of both women’s and men’s identities, sexualities, and lives.

This book underscores how identity emerges in Andreas-Salomé’s works as a process of endless negotiation. Moving back and forth between close readings of individual texts and the identification of overarching patterns, it attempts to let the details of her narratives stand without forcing them into a neat and tidy set of authoritative conclusions. Andreas-Salomé points to how new ways of understanding male and female identity come about in a confrontation and intertwining of theoretical thinking, narration, social realities, and acquired and inherited characteristics. If there is a constant in Andreas-Salomé’s depiction of women, then this constant is, paradoxically, that there is no constant. Whereas her representation of women’s identity negotiations frequently involves what might be seen as uniform conflict between an ingrained desire to submit and an instinctive drive toward self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment, the process of and results of the negotiation are anything but uniform. In *Menschenkinder*, for example, each story presents a different female “type”: some are outspoken feminists, some timid wives, some are masculine individualists, but all of them, and the male figures too, find themselves in endless negotiations with themselves and others with regard to their place in the world and their desires and needs. Her characters present us with instances in which internal psychic concepts of sexuality, identity, gender, and self come into contact with external historical, political, and social realities of identity politics. Like Wernz, I read the works published at the turn of the century as counter-narratives to the dominant scientific and psychological narratives of femininity that had appeared in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and indeed continued to appear, by authors as varied as Freud, Weininger, Scheffler, Krafft-Ebing, and Schopenhauer. Her corpus also offers, I argue, a corrective to the narratives of both conservative and radical representatives of the women’s movement.

Andreas-Salomé’s fiction indicates that she recognized in the German women’s movement a fault that Judith Butler has tackled in her book *Gender Trouble*, namely the failure to see that the unified subject whom feminists speak of as “woman” and claim to represent is as much
a questionable projection and discursive creation as the “woman” of the patriarchal ideology they seek to undermine. Butler argues that “the construction of the category of woman as a coherent and stable subject” is “an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations” and that it is perhaps the case that “representation’ will be shown to make sense for Feminism only when the subject of ‘woman’ is nowhere presumed” (5–6). Butler’s criticism of certain aspects and assumptions of feminist discourse offers a useful model for understanding Andreas-Salomé’s more implicit critique of the German women’s movement. Women have certain recurring characteristics in Andreas-Salomé’s works — as do men — but her repertoire of characters is so expansive and diverse that any attempt to settle on a unified concept of woman or female subjectivity or identity fails. Although Andreas-Salomé deals to some degree in stereotypes in her texts, nowhere are they unthinkingly validated. Neither are they rejected and dismissed, however. They are performed, weighed, and examined in a manner that makes her implied questions about gender, identity, and sexuality, as well as the subsequent muddling through such questions, more important than the arrival at definitive answers to them.

The works that form the focus of this study — written, though not all published, in the two decades surrounding 1900 in the midst of a discursive explosion on (and by) women — deal predominantly with women’s roles in society, and women’s sexual and psychic lives. Andreas-Salomé’s exploration of the themes outlined above leads to reflections on the formal aspects of narrative. Additionally, these themes force a consideration of the meaning of concepts such as decadence and modernity for women. Although her investigations of identity and subjectivity tend to be played out almost exclusively in female characters, they are unmistakably of general human interest, underscoring identity as multicentered, overdetermined, performative, and fluid, or, in Jane Flax’s words, as “a shifting and always changing intersection of complex, contradictory, and unfinished processes.” Andreas-Salomé’s characters, whether male or female, Jews or gentiles, middle or working class, feminist or antifeminist, constantly negotiate with both themselves (internalized expectations and roles) and others (social expectations and roles) in their search for a satisfying relationship to the world. In short, in her fictional texts she develops a fundamental and programmatic ambivalence toward cultural norms and their scientific justifications in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe, particularly, though not exclusively, as they pertained to female identity. In its reflection of the general uncertainty that surrounded the woman question at the time, her rhetorical ambivalence is insightful and provocative and presents her readers with a critical point of entry into the multifaceted and pervasive fin-de-siècle discourse on woman.

While one could not accuse Andreas-Salomé of a radical aesthetics, in that she does not conspicuously disrupt the mimetic illusions of the realist...
and naturalist traditions, the novels, novellas, and short stories analyzed here include a manipulation of literary narrative and form, an unresolved tension between differing viewpoints on contemporary issues, and a lack of narrative closure. Her constant return to a depiction of unresolved tensions constitutes a performative insistence on a more inclusive epistemological system than the public and professional discourse tolerated at the time, namely the inclusion of the layperson’s perspective and experience. The refusal of narrative closure highlights her important questioning of the Western Cartesian concept of the subject so central to the development of the then emerging field of psychology and to narrative traditions in general. Undercutting the teleological narrative of identity — a narrative that begins with a sexed body, leads it through prescribed and definite stages of development, and has it emerge in the end into its “natural” gendered self — she impresses on the reader at the end of her narratives that the negotiation of identity that dominated the narrative has by no means been resolved. As Whitinger argues in his studies of the relationship of both *Fenitschka* and *Eine Ausschweifung* to the tradition of the Bildungsroman, Andreas-Salomé questions the standard notion of *Bildung* as the progressive striving toward a viable and rewarding sense of completion and wholeness.

The manipulation of narrative and form in the service of her exploration of female identity provides for an irony and aesthetic self-consciousness that underscores her critical engagement with literary and artistic traditions and the limitations of those traditions. For Andreas-Salomé, narrative is more than the literary organization of a story; it is an everyday tool that helps shape one’s life, and that one can consciously use to attempt to do this. Like any tool, it provides a certain amount of freedom in how it is used, but it also has limits and determines to some degree in advance the kinds of shaping that it can achieve. Narrative structures and forms, she suggests, are replete with unquestioned ideological perspectives that force any articulation of identity toward preestablished categories. She grapples with both the difficulties and the possibilities of authoring one’s own life within limiting and limited rubrics, and she seems particularly interested in how these questions apply to women. However, she does not see the dilemma she examines as singular to women. The biggest question she asks is how one might be able to adapt the narrative conventions and structures available in such a way as to provide a satisfying fit between the personal and the general, between individual identity and the socially acceptable categories for men and women as described, defined, and prescribed in narrative. She harps on the human being’s need for absolutely contradictory things, privileging the coexistence of contradictions as something that provides for insight and truth. In terms of narrative, for example, she foregrounds our contradictory needs to negotiate between the general and the particular, between the linearity imposed on
a life by narrative and the episodic and fragmentary nature of an actual life that no narrative can adequately represent and which seems, nonetheless, absolutely incomprehensible without the imposition of some kind of narrative structure. Dealing in aporias, Andreas-Salomé questions the possibility of radical and revolutionary breaks that would allow for the easy and clear determination and articulation of individual and collective identities. There is, she submits, only a patient and persistent chiseling that might slowly give way to new orders.

Each of Lou Andreas-Salomé’s fictional works deals with numerous strands of women’s identity and examines how those strands interweave. Emphasizing the impossibility of completely prying these strands apart, she considers repeatedly how art, marriage, sexuality, masochism, narrative, decadence, nationality, and their inherent gendered connotations play into the development of a sense of self. Mimicking what I perceive to be the movement in Andreas-Salomé’s own work, the movement of this book may appear contradictory in that I attempt to discuss the elements listed above separately from each other, cognizant nonetheless of the fact that any such separation is artificial and unsustainable, and thus I tolerate slippage and overlap. Each chapter focuses on the role of a particular one of these in the negotiation of identity and on Andreas-Salomé’s exploration of it in particular works.

Chapter 1 examines one of her theoretical excursions on female identity, analyzing, in particular, woman’s relationship to art and artistic production in “Der Mensch als Weib.” In this essay she polarizes artistry and femininity, positing the former as a phenomenon that takes over the human being in such a way as to render him practically genderless and the latter as a mythical serenity and union with the cosmos. The contradictions that come to light reveal an understanding of a discursively constructed femininity as an ideal that the engagement with art can only pervert. Comparing then her essayistic pronouncements on figurative woman’s (das Weib) relationship to art to her narrative investigation of a particular female character’s relationship to art in Eine Ausschweifung, I argue that Andreas-Salomé experienced theory as a realm of the imagination in which aesthetics played as fundamental a role as it did in poetry or art. Reading “Der Mensch als Weib” and Eine Ausschweifung in tandem brings to light Andreas-Salomé’s larger and lifelong project of maintaining a clear distinction between theoretical discourses, in which woman functions as a figure, and concrete circumstances, in which women must function as freely as possible as people. Interested in an aesthetically and theoretically pleasing ideal of femininity to which both women and men (“der Mensch”) might aspire, she nonetheless warns against allowing such ideals to shape real-life expectations.

Chapter 2 tackles the role of marriage in women’s negotiation of identity, specifically in Das Haus, written six years later in 1904, though not
published until 1921. In contrast to most of the other works addressed in this study, *Das Haus* steers our focus toward women who choose traditional paths in life. Although it conveys criticism of the repressive and authoritative underpinnings of bourgeois marriage and the family, the novel nonetheless reflects Andreas-Salomé’s ambivalent position vis-à-vis the feminist project of woman’s emancipation. Reluctant to reject either conservative or progressive perspectives on female identity and women’s lives, she depicts women and men of varying generations and outlooks who are all forced to navigate through and balance a series of conflicting desires and expectations. In both Anneliese and Anneliese’s daughter, Gitta, she reconciles the somewhat contradictory poles of femininity and autonomy, showing that whatever their choices ultimately, women rarely slip easily and without ongoing compromise into social and familial roles. Because this is a novel in which women who choose traditional paths in life are shown to be active, intellectually engaged, and very aware of the limitations and benefits of their choices, it must have been a breath of fresh air in a discursive arena defined by overly simplistic oppositions such as the old and new woman.

While *Das Haus* raises questions of the expression and containment of female sexuality within marriage, *Jutta*, a novella written in 1898 but not published in German until after Lou Andreas-Salomé’s death, looks at a young woman’s irrepresible sexual attraction to her brother’s friend and at the psychological consequences of acting on this attraction. Jutta indulges in premarital sex, and chapter 3 examines the novella, which masquerades as her diary entry about this lapse. This diary entry allows us insight into Jutta’s complicity in a moral code according to which she would now be categorized as dishonorable. While she does not explicitly criticize or question the double standard of this code, her attempts to understand how she could have instinctively behaved in a manner that she intellectually rejects hints at the critique she proves unable to articulate. Jutta is not caught in the act, but her formidable superego causes an identity crisis by constantly returning her to a moment in which she gives in to her physical urges. Even if Jutta does not manage to verbalize the problems of the double moral standard, the novella effectively communicates them.

Like marriage, the subject of motherhood has always been intimately linked to the subjects of woman’s identity and sexuality. The maternal instinct is not unusual in Andreas-Salomé’s female characters, even if it is not always linked to biological motherhood. Anneliese of *Das Haus* feels motherly toward her husband, Branhardt, for example, and Adine of *Eine Ausschweifung* feels motherly toward Benno, her former fiancé, at the end of the novella. In Anneliese and Adine, as well as in the theoretical woman of “Der Mensch als Weib,” motherhood represents more than a biological phenomenon, becoming practically synonymous with empathy.