

WOMEN  
IN GERMAN  
LITERATURE



# Popular Fiction in the Age of Bismarck

E. Marlitt and her Narrative Strategies

Peter Lang

Terrill John May

E. Marlitt was a bestselling author of the late nineteenth century whose romance novels dominated the German literary market between 1865 and 1888. Her novels appeared in thirty languages, with as many as five different English translations circulating simultaneously in the United States alone. While her name is virtually absent from histories of German literature, recent scholarly studies of individual novels suggest the need to reassess her contributions.

This study is the first in English to examine E. Marlitt's complete fiction. It situates her prose against the backdrop of women's discourse and nineteenth-century historical developments in the German Empire. It synthesizes findings of both American and German scholarship to show how her social constructs advanced a liberal political agenda while resisting the conventional view of "natural" gender roles. The book provides a context for recognizing Marlitt's clever use of the conventionality and acceptability of the romance genre to reposition the image of middle-class women. Her emphasis on personal autonomy, educational opportunities and new fields of professional engagement for women advanced altered images of family, class and national identity. Ultimately, this study of a popular author illuminates domestic, middle-class issues that underwent significant transformations equal to the Empire's public developments under Bismarck's politics.

Terrill John May completed his PhD at Cornell University and taught German and French for most of his career at St John Fisher College in Rochester, New York, where he also directed the college Foreign Study Program. His interest in E. Marlitt grew during a sojourn as a visiting guest professor at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität in Jena, Germany, near Marlitt's hometown in Thuringia. His research interests include the ironic novel, German cinema and East German literature.



# Popular Fiction in the Age of Bismarck

# Women in German Literature

Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, University of Oxford  
Series Editor

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PETER LANG

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## A Note on Sources

Textual citations in English are my own renderings of the original German of Marlitt's texts, closely following translations of A. L. Wister published by J. P. Lippencott and Co. The original German is included throughout. Pagination refers to the unabridged versions of E. Marlitt's *Gesammelte Romane und Novellen* (Leipzig: Verlag von Ernst Keils Nachfolger, 1897) unless otherwise noted, for this edition is accessible via online postings at <<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/autor/399>>. Individual novels are identified in the citations with the abbreviations referencing the original German title as noted below. Numerous English-language translations of E. Marlitt cause an element of confusion because of the variation in their titles for a work. While I cannot correct the publication history, I can opt for clarity and simplicity for all who wish to read Marlitt in English. To foster this aim, I have chosen to use the English titles currently available online at <[http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/search?amode=start&author=Marlitt%C2%20E.%20\(Eugenie\)%2C%201825-1887](http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/search?amode=start&author=Marlitt%C2%20E.%20(Eugenie)%2C%201825-1887)>.

Sources and abbreviations:

*E. Marlitts gesammelte Romane und Novellen*. 10 Bde., Leipzig: Verlag von Ernst Keils Nachfolger, 1897

Vol. 1 *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell* (GM) or *The Old Mam'selle's Secret*

Vol. 2 *Das Heideprinzeßchen* (HP) or *The Little Moorland Princess*

Vol. 3 *Reichsgräfin Gisela* (RG) or *Countess Gisela*

Vol. 4 *Im Schillingshof* (SH) or *In the Schillingscourt*

Vol. 5 *Im Hause des Kommerzienrates* (HdK) or *At the Councillor's*

Vol. 6 *Die Frau mit den Karfunkelsteinen* (FK) or *The Lady with the Rubies*

Vol. 7 *Die zweite Frau* (ZF) or *The Second Wife*

Vol. 8 *Goldelse* (GE) or *Gold Elsie*

- Vol. 9 *Das Eulenhaus* or *The Owl's Nest*, completed after Marlitt's death by the popular writer Wilhelmine Heimburg (Berta Behrens), is not treated in this study.
- Vol. 10 *Thüringer Erzählungen* (TE). Citation pagination refers to the second edition. Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1894. It includes:
- Die zwölf Apostel* or *The Twelve Apostles*
  - Blaubart* or *Bluebeard*
  - Schulmeisters Marie* or *School Master's Marie*
  - Amtmanns Magd* or *The Bailiff's Maid*
  - Eugenie John-Marlitt. Ihr Leben und ihre Werke* by Alfred John

## Introduction: E. Marlitt Reconsidered

I regard any model that places personal life in a separate sphere and that grants literature a secondary and passive role in political history as unconsciously sexist. I believe such models necessarily fail to account for the formation of a modern bureaucratic culture because they fail to account for the place of women within it.

—NANCY ARMSTRONG, “Some Call It Fiction:  
On the Politics of Domesticity”<sup>1</sup>

E. Marlitt (1825–87) remains an enigma in the world of literary criticism. While critics, analysts of popular culture, and historians concur that she is unquestionably one of the most widely read German authors of the nineteenth century, traditional German literary histories overlook her phenomenal popularity; either they exclude her altogether, or they dismiss her novels as *Trivialliteratur*, that is, a trivial reinforcement of the status quo, lacking all originality, or the epitome of literary Kitsch.<sup>2</sup> Although her novel *Reichsgräfin Gisela* still garnered sufficient esteem in 1920 to appear in the collection *Meistererzähler der Weltliteratur* (Mitteldeutsche Verlags-Anstalt in Halle),<sup>3</sup> Marlitt’s writings, like most by women, fall victim to

- 1 In Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds, *Feminisms, an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, 2nd edn (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 913.
- 2 Horst A. Glaser, ed., *Deutsche Literatur: Eine Sozialgeschichte, Vol. 7, Vom Nachmärz zur Gründerzeit* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1982), 254. Wolfgang Beutin, et. al, *Deutsche Literatur Geschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1979), 248, 279, 284. *Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftsteller* (Leipzig, 1975), 74.
- 3 Hans Heinrich Klatt, “E. Marlitt. Zwischen Apologie und moralischem Anspruch,” in Gustav Seeber, ed., *Gestalten der Bismarckzeit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1978), 188.

“canonical amnesia”,<sup>4</sup> “for there is no female novelist prior to [the 1970s] who forms part of the German literary canon.”<sup>5</sup> By the late twentieth century, even groundbreaking studies of women writers overlook this author’s literary contributions.<sup>6</sup> When one does find mention of E. Marlitt, it is revealing that most texts repeat the same clichéd phrases penned over one hundred years ago, in spite of their glaring errors, suggesting a rather blatant perpetuation of the dominant male-centered literary establishment without the pretense of an individualized evaluation.

A striking shift of focus marks recent critical appraisals; these are less concerned with Marlitt’s failure to meet some ideal of classic literary form than with the uncontested reality of her vast readership. It is this latter factor which piques contemporary interest, a consideration of her influence upon the nineteenth-century cultural consciousness. Her novels hit the market at an opportune moment of historical change when German unification in 1871 opened up the possibility of a national audience and advances in literacy were greatly expanding the reading public. Katrin Kohl clearly identifies the historical factors:

Three developments are crucial both for Marlitt’s poetics and for the reception of her work: the rapid expansion and diversification of the readership, which had previously been confined largely to learned circles and the upper echelons of society; the increasing importance of market forces in place of court patronage as factors

- 4 April Alliston employs this apt term in reference to women’s sentimental novels of the eighteenth century to define the “subsequent exclusion from the standard canon despite decades of success following publication” (525), “Aloisa and Melliora,” in Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, Vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 515–33.
- 5 Katrin Kohl, “E. Marlitt’s Bestselling Poetics,” in Charlotte Woodford and Benedict Schofield, eds, *The German Bestseller in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), 184.
- 6 This is the case with Elisabeth Friedrichs, *Die deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1981). Gisela Brinker-Gabler’s detailed presentation *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen* (München: C. H. Beck, 1988) includes a single sentence, noting only that Marlitt’s liberal positions address important contemporary problems in her own manner (Bd. II, 225).

determining a writer's success; and the inclusion of women among the writers and readers of literature.<sup>7</sup>

The publication of Marlitt's fiction in serialized format helped catapult the family magazine *Die Gartenlaube* from its successful circulation of 100,000 in 1861 to a record-breaking 375,000 copies per issue in 1867.<sup>8</sup> As the most successful German-language magazine in the latter half of the nineteenth century, *Die Gartenlaube* is recognized as having contributed substantially to the formulation of a national identity; it was even distributed to the German colonists in the United States, Brazil, and Australia.<sup>9</sup> Since Marlitt's novels are acknowledged as promoting the financial success of this singular publication, the coincidence of a record-breaking publication and readership should suffice to justify a re-examination of her fiction. If one further considers that these novels subsequently appeared in book form and circulated as pirated translations in all of the major European languages, the scope of interest expands considerably. Recognizing that the novels are still readily available today, in print as well as in online versions, one must at least question the incongruity between their alleged "triviality" and their continued contemporary appeal.

The uniquely successful family-orientated publication *Die Gartenlaube* has been the focus of innumerable studies on the emergence of mass culture, the construction of national identity, and the representation of bourgeois ideals during the Age of Bismarck.<sup>10</sup> As early as 1967, Heide Radeck

7 Kohl, "E. Marlitt's Bestselling Poetics," 188.

8 Achim Barsch and Peter M. Hejl, eds, *Menschenbilder: Zur Pluralisierung der Vorstellungen von der menschlichen Natur (1850–1914)* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2000), 379.

9 Kirstin Belgum, "A Nation for the Masses: Production of German Identity in the Late-Nineteenth-Century Popular Press," in Scott Denham, Irene Kacandes, and Jonathan Petropoulos, eds, *A User's Guide to German Cultural Studies* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 165.

10 See particularly Heide Radeck, "Zur Geschichte von Roman und Erzählung in der 'Gartenlaube' (1853–1914). Heroismus und Idylle als Instrument nationaler Ideologie" (dissertation, Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1967); Heidemarie Gruppe, "Volk" zwischen Politik und Idylle in der "Gartenlaube" 1853–1914 (Bern: Herbert Lang,

demonstrated in her dissertation the subversive nature of the journal's claim to apolitical entertainment, addressing an editorial assertion contained within the dedication of the first issue. This maneuver "actually only served to circumvent the censors and to deflect attention from the political intent lying behind the emphasized harmlessness" [tatsächlich nur dazu diente, die Zensur zu umgehen und von dem hinter der betonten Harmlosigkeit stehenden politischen Zweck abzulenken].<sup>11</sup> Curiously, literary criticism fails to apply the same logic to the star author of the publication, E. Marlitt. Until the advent of feminist literary theory, critical receptions generally followed gendered expectations according to which strategic planning is attributed to the male editor, while only sentimental acquiescence to norms is acknowledged in his partner in success, the female author.

Since the 1990s, the sheer volume of criticism on Marlitt published in both German and English attests to re-emerging scholarly interest in the phenomenal success of this writer whose eight novels and short stories appeared in over thirty languages during her lifetime. Biographical evidence stresses several unusual features of her personal identity formation. Friederike Henriette Christiane Eugenie John (1825–87) was the second daughter of a businessman who at one time ran a lending library of popular literature. The early support of an aristocratic patroness, the Princess Mathilde von Schwarzburg-Sondershausen, permitted the young bourgeois girl to receive an education within aristocratic circles, train as an opera singer in Vienna, observe life at court first hand, and experience the theater in the cosmopolitan centers of Munich and Vienna. Critics invariably repeat the same incorrect information that stage fright at her debut at the opera in Leipzig in 1847, singing the role of Gabriele in *Das Nachtlager von Granada*, terminated her career. They cite a misleading phrase in Moritz Neckar's biographical sketch of the author, truncated from Ernst Pasqué's reminiscence of Eugenie's 1847 debut; Neckar falsely

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1976); Kirsten Belgum, *Popularizing the Nation. Audience, Representation, and the Production of Identity in "Die Gartenlaube" 1853–1900* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

11 Radeck, *Zur Geschichte von Roman und Erzählung*, Preface V–VI.

concluded that the initial shyness meant failure.<sup>12</sup> However, Pasqué's recollection of the 1847 event as her co-performer, not written until 1884, concludes with considerable praise for her artistry:

Angst und Aufregung raubten der armen, jungen Sängerin vollständig die Fähigkeit, ihre Stimme, ihr Talent auch nur zum kleinsten Theile geltend zu machen. (...) Doch bei unserem Duett änderte sich dies ... mein leisegeflüstertes Zureden wirkte wie ein Wunder auf die arme Gabriele, und sie gab diesmal wirklich ihr Bestes. Rauschender Beifall folgte dem hübschen Ensemble-Andante. (*Frankfurter Zeitung*, Feuilleton 10 October 1884)<sup>13</sup>

[Fear and agitation completely robbed the poor young singer of the ability to validate her voice, her talent, even in the smallest fashion. (...) However, this altered in our duet ... my softly whispered encouragement had a miraculous affect on poor Gabriele, and this time she really presented her best. Tumultuous applause followed after the pretty ensemble andante.]

The second half of the citation aligns with the historical record, which documents, however scantily, the continuation of her career. The princess arranged for Eugenie to be appointed court singer or “Hofsängerin” to practice performing at the court theater in Sondershausen. Two years later Eugenie went on tour, properly chaperoned by her mother; she performed engagements in Linz, Graz, Cracow, and Lemberg. When the Vienna Opera moved to Olmütz during the revolution, Eugenie appeared before the Emperor Franz Joseph and the Viennese court.<sup>14</sup> On February 26, 1849, her letter to Leopoldine von Nischer-Falkenhof rejoiced in her success in *Der Freischutz* with curtain calls alongside the prominent tenor Josef Erl,<sup>15</sup>

12 See Moritz Neckar, “Eugenie John-Marlitt. Mit bisher ungedruckten Briefen und Mitteilungen,” in *Die Neue Gartenlaube*, 5/14 (March 1899, A. Scherl Nachfolger).

13 Cited in Cornelia Hobohm, *Die Bestsellerautorin Marlitt: Meine Geisteskinder* (Erfurt: Sutton Verlag, 2010), 16.

14 Jutta Schönberg, *Frauenrolle und Roman* (Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, 1986), 22. See also Brigitte Waldinger-Tillement, *E. Marlitt, son reflet dans la presse allemande* (Doctoral dissertation, Université de Nancy, 1994), 36.

15 Josef Erl (1811–74) performed as solo tenor at the Vienna Court Opera from 1838 to 1868. Albert Josef Weltner, *Mozarts Werke und die Wiener Hof-Theater* (Kessinger Publishing, 1896), autobiographical note in the *Verzeichnis*, 64.

while that of March 20, 1849 recounted a successful concert performance. The truncated version of failure from the operatic debut belies the record of the intervening years of performance.

When a hearing ailment forced the termination of Eugenie's operatic aspirations, her patroness again offered support with a salaried position as reader, secretary, companion, aid to the children, and nurse as required. Through residence at various courts and later in Munich, she personally experienced the boundaries imposed between bourgeois and aristocratic circles in German and Austrian society.<sup>16</sup> Her letters detail the prejudicial treatment directed against middle-class individuals when the princess preferred her services over those of aristocratic ladies-in-waiting.<sup>17</sup> Marlitt served the princess from 1853 until 1863 when arthritic symptoms further constrained her activities.

At the age of thirty-eight, she determined to try her hand as a writer. She resigned from her position to return to her bourgeois roots in the small

16 Cornelia Hobohm, "Wiederbelebung einer Autorin. Ein Ringen um das Werk der E. Marlitt," in *Archive in Thüringen (Sonderheft 2004)*, 90. See also Hans Heinrich Klatt, "E. Marlitt. Zwischen Apologie und moralischem Anspruch," 178.

17 See the letter to Leopoldine Ritter von Nischer-Falkenhof of April 13, 1861: "Vor einiger Zeit hat die Fürstin ihren zwei Hofdamen auf unbestimmte Zeit Urlaub gegeben und mich als alleinigen Umgang bei sich behalten. Das hat böses Blut am stolzen Hofe zu Sondershausen gemacht, weil der *Bürgerlichen* diese Auszeichnung nicht gebührt; und nun rühren sich allerlei Gerüchte über mich, von denen das empörendste ist, daß ich während meines Wiener Aufenthaltes zahllose Liebesverhältnisse gehabt und dort ein so unanständiges Leben geführt habe, daß mein Verlobter in der Heimath, von dessen namenloser Existenz ich, nebenbei gesagt, erst durch diesen Fall Kenntnis erhalten, mich deswegen verstoßen habe" [Recently, the Princess furloughed her two ladies-in-waiting indefinitely and kept me with her as her exclusive companion. This created bad blood in the proud court of Sondershausen, as this distinction is inappropriate for the *bourgeois* woman. Now all manner of rumors stir concerning me, the most outrageous of which is that I had countless love affairs during my sojourn in Vienna and led such a scandalous life that my fiancé in my hometown, of whose nameless existence I, by the way, first learned through the rumor, rejected me on this account.] Cornelia Hobohm, ed., *Ich kann nicht lachen, wenn ich weinen möchte. Die unveröffentlichten Briefe der E. Marlitt* (Wandersleben: Gleichen Verlag, 1996), 26. Cf. letter to Fürst Hermann v. Pückler-Muskau of April 2, 1868, 116.

Thuringian town of Arnstadt, not as the guarantor of financial security for her extended family as a singer as she had hoped, but as a woman seeking her brother's protection. Needlework and piano and singing lessons provided a minimal income before she dared to submit a text for publication and remuneration.<sup>18</sup> Her initial attempt garnered encouragement, for the editor of *Die Gartenlaube*, Ernst Keil, responded enthusiastically to the tale *Die zwölf Apostel* by including the invitation to submit additional work, a gesture which softened his rejection of the co-submission *Schulmeisters Marie*. She debuted under the gender-neutral pseudonym E. Marlitt in 1865 with *Die zwölf Apostel*, and Keil modified his journalistic format to accommodate the full novel *Goldelse* via serialization in 1866. Several critics surmise the name to be an acronym signifying the writings from her hometown of Arnstadt, "Meine arnstädter Litteratur".<sup>19</sup> Her patroness, the Princess Mathilde von Schwarzburg-Sondershausen, employed a similar pseudonym, M. Dornheim, for publication of her dramatic poem, *Jadwiga, Königin v. Polen*, and a later collection of poetry.<sup>20</sup> Eugenie's gender was only revealed to the reading public after serialized publication of two novels had established a loyal readership.

By 1871, she was virtually confined to a wheelchair due to rheumatism and increasingly to a world of limited sound. As early as 1862, her letter to Leopoldine Ritter von Nischer-Falkenhof described her symptoms which limited her receptive abilities to a single conversational partner at a time,

18 Brent O. Peterson, "E. Marlitt," in James Hardin and Siegfried Mews, eds, *Dictionary of Literary Biography. Vol. 129: Nineteenth-Century German Writers, 1841–1900* (Detroit, London: Gale Research, 1993), 224.

19 Cornelia Hobohm, *Ich kann nicht lachen, wenn ich weinen möchte*, 166.

20 Sophie Pataky, *Lexikon deutscher Frauen der Feder*, Bd. I (Berlin: Verlagsbuchhandlung von Carl Pataky, 1898), 165. Dornheim may well refer to a village under the regional control of Arnstadt in Thuringia. Jadwiga is known historically as King of Poland, the gendered term signifying that she was a monarch in her own right, not the consort of the king. She gained legendary prominence in Polish literature in the nineteenth century as well as in the culture of the Hapsburg Empire; in addition to the dramatic poem Princess von Schwarzburg-Sondershausen published in 1857, no fewer than three operas treat this historic woman who ruled a nation, at least according to legend, if not in actual practice.

hearing only cacophony in a group. She particularly lamented the loss at the princess's intellectual gatherings:

Sobald ich mich speziell mit dem Einen oder Anderen unterhalte, wobei Alle so liebenswürdig sind, mir mein Übel möglichst wenig fühlbar zu machen, dann geht mir im Gewirr der Stimmen der Faden des Gesprächs verloren und ich büße vieles ein, was für mich von höchstem Interesse sein würde.<sup>21</sup>

[As soon as I enter into conversation with one or the other, where all are so kind to make me feel my malady as little as possible, the thread of conversation gets lost in the jumble of voices and I lose a great deal which would be of greatest interest.]

The detail of the description suggests impaired auditory performance with competing acoustic signals, perhaps more readily recognizable today than at the time when Michael Kienzle presumed a psychosomatic disorder.<sup>22</sup> Judging by letters and family annals, Eugenie enjoyed a fulfilling family life of intimate celebrations and birthday dinners for the young nephews and nieces, with few outside visitors other than her publisher and friend, Ernst Keil.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on her unusual experience between social worlds, the author successfully conveyed the tensions between the classes in literary form and captivated the popular imagination through her representations of young women's emancipatory struggles against both aristocratic hegemony and gendered restrictions.

21 Letter to Leopoldine Ritter von Nischer-Falkenhof of January 11, 1862, in Hobohm, *Ich kann nicht lachen*, 35.

22 *Der Erfolgsroman. Zur Kritik poetischen Ökonomie bei Gustav Freytag und Eugenie Marlitt* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1975), 56.

23 An American journalist proudly recounts the exception as his great fortune in gaining admittance to the author's home for an interview. He reports a lively discussion revealing "an amiable and intelligent interest in all questions of art and literature"; conversation is facilitated by Alfred John who repeats phrases in a loud voice when Eugenie cannot hear. "A Visit to the authoress of *Goldelse*," in *Appleton's Journal: A Magazine of General Literature* 4/75 (1870), 285; no author cited.

The simultaneous circulation of three English-language translations of Marlitt attests to her nineteenth-century appeal in the United States,<sup>24</sup> while reviews in early American magazines, *Appleton's Journal*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Nation*, and *The Ladies' Repository* (a monthly periodical published by the Cincinnati Methodist Episcopal church), applauded the decorum and propriety of the "major European writer." It is interesting that she was hailed as "one of the most renowned authors of our time,"<sup>25</sup> while *Literary World* counted her among the "best continental novelists" whose works appealed directly to the "modern American woman."<sup>26</sup>

In his summary of recent criticism on E. Marlitt, Thorsten Stegemann highlights Cornelia Brauer's attempts to align Marlitt's novels thematically and contextually with bourgeois realism, *Eugenie Marlitt. Bürgerliche, Christin, Liberale, Autorin. Eine Analyse ihres Werkes im Kontext der "Gartenlaube" und der Entwicklung des bürgerlichen Realismus* (Edition Marlitt, 2006). Stegemann acknowledges that Erika Dingeldey's 2007 publication, *Luftzug hinter Samtportieren. Versuch über E. Marlitt*, presents a viable theory rejecting the long-postulated notion of the author's "triviality," yet he rejects as exaggerated Dingeldey's position, which connects the Enlightenment impetus of Marlitt's prose to erotic tension. In all fairness, he notes that Elke Liebs first argues against triviality in her 2004 article "Wer hat Angst vor Trivialliteratur? Eugenie Marlitts ruhige Revolution." While Stegemann claims that this interpretive stance is "long overdue," he leaves it entirely up to the reader to pursue Liebs' "argument," for he provides no clarification. Yet an exploration of Liebs proves illuminating. She claims that Marlitt's fictional works should be approached via the modern notion of

24 Tobias Klein, *Von deutschen Herzen: Familie, Heimat und Nation in den Romanen und Erzählungen E. Marlitts*, Dissertation Humboldt-Universität (Hamburg: Kovač, 2012), 45, incorrectly asserts nine; single translations appeared as reprints with more than one publishing house. See Chapter 3 for specific examples.

25 This assessment appeared in the announcement of a new translation of the novel *Die zweite Frau* by Margaret P. Waterman entitled *A Brave Woman*, in *The Critic* (March 21, 1891), IV, 377.

26 Ute Hinkeldein, "Steine im Rucksack – neue Ansichten zu Eugenie John Marlitt," in *Jahrbuch der Interessengemeinschaft Marlitt*, 5 (2004), 53.

intertextuality: they cleverly make use of “proven compositional principles to produce an accepted frame,” yet introduce “astonishing ruptures” with traditional gendered images such that these are ultimately disavowed.<sup>27</sup> The discourse strategy employs outmoded conventions, which are subtly unveiled as devoid of realistic reference to practices of her era; this indirect strategy permits her to propagate self-determination for women.<sup>28</sup>

Scholarly interest in the writings of Marlitt has built continuously over the past two decades, beginning with the more positive assessments of Herrad Schenk's *Die Rache der alten Mamsell* (1986), Claudia Wilkie's “Eugenie Marlitt vor 100 Jahren gestorben” (1987), Hans Arens' *E. Marlitt. Eine kritische Würdigung* (1994), and W. A. Coupe's *Eugenie Marlitt: In Defence of a Writer of Kitsch* (1996). New critical voices emerge with analytical readings of individual works: Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres (1998), *The Second Wife*; Todd Kontje (1998), *At the Councillor's*; Kirsten Belgum (2002), *The Lady with the Rubies*; and Charlotte Woodford (2011), *Goldelse*. These scholarly reflections all claim Marlitt to be a rich source of material for investigating the construction of gender values of the nineteenth century. However, as they analyze aspects of individual novels, they cannot address overall structural or thematic interconnections within the entire corpus of Marlitt's fiction. The same lacunae appear within literary scholarship in German where even ostensibly comprehensive studies, such as Berthe Potthast's dissertation *Eugenie Marlitt* (1926) and Hans Arens' *E. Marlitt. Eine kritische Würdigung* (1994), limit the commentary to general plot summaries of several of her works. The glaring absence of critical analyses of the entire corpus suggests new critical avenues of investigation.

This study concurs with the basic interpretive stance of Dingeldey and Liebs that Marlitt strategically employs a conventional literary format, the romance, but cleverly utilizes the conventionality and acceptability of the form to avoid threatening bourgeois social convention. Conventionality permits her to disseminate gendered images which effectively reconfigure

27 Elke Liebs, “Wer hat Angst vor Trivilliteratur? Eugenie Marlitts ruhige Revolution,” *Feministische Studien*, 22/2 (November 2004), 178.

28 <<http://www.city-trends.de/bibliotheca/marlitt.htm>>, accessed October 23, 2009.

definitions of feminine opportunity. She “turns her characters into representations of a new feminine ethic and aesthetic,” combining the “revolutionary and the reactionary in order to overcome gendered role models, bridging the gap between the *popular* and the *elite*, between emotional culture and rational self-confidence.”<sup>29</sup> The sentimental novels project a search for identity which is successful precisely because it deviates from the gender-specific limitations and role models of her era. As Stefan Bollmann explains, “The essential subversiveness of women’s writing may be part of the reason why, throughout history, so many works by women have been undervalued and under-recognized.”<sup>30</sup>

Michael Kienzle advances the first overview of Marlitt’s entire literary corpus in his study *Der Erfolgsroman* (1975), acknowledging, however, that he selects a psychological approach to demonstrate how the author’s personal timidity and middle-class status produce trivial results and the failure to recognize the validity of socialism. Kienzle insists upon a repetitive plot configuration in each novel, in spite of contrary evidence, and dismisses Marlitt’s topical references to social change as “the immaturity of wish-fulfillment.”<sup>31</sup> The predetermined rejection of bourgeois culture which underlies this Marxist-influenced reading blocks considerable nuance, while it belittles the efforts Marlitt represents to advance the education and employment potential of women.

The more recent scholarship of Dingeldey and Liebs theorizes the basis of his misreading, for Kienzle accepts the literary texts at face value, without addressing the discourse strategies underlying the popularized format; his readings discern no distinctions between the vehicles selected to guarantee publication and the strategically encoded configurations themselves which disseminate radically different messages from the conventionally safe forms of closure. While there were still two German nations, West German critics

29 Liebs, “Wer hat Angst vor ‘Trivilliteratur’?” 163.

30 Reinelda Baucic, *Educating for Women’s Rights in Three Late Eighteenth-Century Bestsellers: La Roche, Inchbald, and Rowson* (Dissertation, New York University, 2010), 2, quoting from Stefan Bollmann, *Women Who Write*, trsl. Helen Atkins (London: Merrell, 2007), Foreword, 9.

31 Kienzle, *Der Erfolgsroman*, 217.

tended to write off the popularity of romance literature, while East German critics generally dismissed petty bourgeois depictions of capitalist society of the 1870s and 1880s on ideological grounds.

This new analysis reveals how Marlitt could and did break with gendered conventions of the upper-middle class with virtual impunity, precisely because family magazines lay outside the range of earlier literary criticism. Consequently, the vehicle of publication removed the texts from serious analysis by the dominant agencies of power. Historically, as will be demonstrated, identifiable critical voices objected more to her authorship as a woman than to her changing representations of women. The early dismissal of her “Cinderella motif” as fantasy, in an otherwise highly favorable 1870 review by Rudolf von Gottschall,<sup>32</sup> apparently overshadowed the steady appearance of women employed for a wage within her texts; these startling gendered configurations seemed to slip past critical attention, or at least without comment. Admittedly, Marlitt mollified chauvinist sensitivities by affixing conventional conclusions to her texts; on the surface, a marital union appeared to acknowledge the status quo, the dictates of patriarchy, the clergy, and the moneyed classes. However, the discerning reader cannot help but notice considerable variations in the alleged repetition of a Cinderella figure, nuanced transformations which emerge through a comparative analysis of each text. More importantly, such juxtaposition illuminates the calibrated scale of increasingly independent and employable women. These are striking fictional creations whose influence transforms the men around them, whose endeavors break ever more literary taboos, yet whose figures seem contained by the demands of a conventional romantic conclusion.

A new reading requires the patience to explore the entire corpus, enabling a reader to advance beyond generalizations passed along by generations of critics who often fail to distinguish between heroines and titles, even mixing up names or characters between novels. While these

32 *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung* 19/5 (May 1870). Cited by Alfred John, *E. Marlitt. Ihr Leben und ihre Werke. Romane und Erzählungen. Bd. 10. Thüringer Erzählungen* (Union Deutsche Verlag, 1894), 418. References to this text will be cited with the abbreviation TE and page as (TE 418).

pronouncements suggest superficial readings and over-generalization, a more grievous error overlooks the highly nuanced strategies employed within each separate novel, for the resultant simplification or misrepresentation is set forth as proof of the preconceived notion of triviality. The acceptance of “sentimentality” or “the fairy-tale atmosphere” at face value disregards the literary function of irony and serves to obscure topical references to social change. As a hallmark of early publication announcements, these very aspects were recognized initially as prominent features of Marlitt’s novels. Today, critics acknowledge that reprinted editions frequently abridge the texts, expunging most historical references. This practice effectively sanitizes romance of intellectual connections in order to reinscribe it in the gender-specific realm of the ladies’ salon, a practice which simultaneously severs all original linkages to the male readership of the family magazine with its interest in politics and developments exterior to the home. There is a perceptual blurring of cause and effect when the interpretive misrepresentation of E. Marlitt appears to justify the truncation of reprints: a critical failure to acknowledge the import of social references permits the editorial deletion in artificially altered texts.

Dingeldey’s revisionist approach is initially so refreshing and commendable precisely because it commences with that which has long been overlooked, a sketch of the general historical/social background for each novel. While her political readings overly idealize the extent of Marlitt’s projections of democracy, her attention to intertextual references illuminate important interpretive paths for exploration and consideration, employing an equal emphasis on literary format as well as topical association. The social atmosphere and mores of the Bismarck years constrain advances for women, while demographic developments lead to an opposing expansion. The reality of a surplus of unmarried females forcibly opens new avenues of employability for this growing segment of the population.<sup>33</sup> While Marlitt’s

33 Möhrmann defines 1869 as a key year instituting free trade, lifting the guilds’ exclusion of women within Germany, and recognizing the need for unmarried women to work for a living; by 1890, almost one-half of all women in the German-speaking area were unmarried. See Renate Möhrmann, “Women’s Work as Portrayed in Women’s Literature,” in Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes, eds, *German*

novels straddle this divide between conventional middle-class mores and the new demographic trends, they consistently privilege education as the primary enhancement for individual opportunity as well as overall societal advancement. The author's fictional creations challenge the traditional view of marriage as the primary goal for all women in an age when historical evidence now suggests that fully fifty percent of women between the ages of sixteen and fifty were unmarried in 1850. The "realistic" infiltration of "romance" provides one more justification for a fresh analysis of Marlitt's literary position as a nineteenth-century bestselling German author.

Tobias Klein's dissertation for the University of Hamburg, *Von deutschen Herzen – Familie, Heimat und Nation in den Romanen und Erzählungen E. Marlitts* (2012), has significantly advanced critical perspectives on E. Marlitt. By brilliantly synthesizing the methodology of Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions* (1991), a study of Latin American romance novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with key concepts of national identity construction in Kirsten Belgum's *Popularizing the Nation. Audience, Representation, and the Production of Identity in "Die Gartenlaube" 1853–1900* (1998), Klein convincingly illuminates codified structures within the romance to reveal their political import.

Sommer's writing on Latin American romance opens interpretative possibilities to illuminate the literary representation of the national movement of the German states. "Problematic love stories between the protagonists of novels are to be read as metaphors for a program of national consolidation, reconciliation between various groups, which show a tendency for stark opposition." When Klein applies this notion of group representation to a comparative survey of nineteenth-century German popular writers, he identifies vital cross-currents between fictional images and the growth of nationalism, which illustrate Sommer's contention that "Impossible love between historically antagonistic lovers (sectors) underlines the urgency for a national project that would reconcile the

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*Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. A Social and Literary History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 64.

antagonisms.”<sup>34</sup> Sommer’s hypothesis regarding the essentiality of romance as a component of the consolidation process shifts the spotlight from the allegedly private to the public sphere. Klein’s application draws two vital consequences from Sommer:

If one reads the love stories of Marlitt in this sense as exemplary models for the creation of a harmonious society, two characteristics of her works, which are critiqued as aesthetic deficiencies of the author and serve to align her with *Kitsch*, emerge as structurally necessary: For one, the “idealized image of unique love,” for another, the stereotypical *Happy End*.<sup>35</sup>

The strategy of integration commences by necessity with oppositions, a recognition which invites reader scrutiny of representational configurations as opposed to their dismissal as “black/white” oversimplification. Additionally, the preponderance of ethnically and religiously mixed couples in Marlitt’s corpus immediately gains coherence in this theory as a strategic component of national identity construction – it builds toward reconciliation and integration, not Kienzle’s dismissal as “daydream.” *The Twelve Apostles* commences by uniting an alienated Italian orphan with a German husband; families feuding for generations reconcile in *Bluebeard*; the ostracized half-Polish orphan marries the master of the house in *The Old Mam’selle’s Secret*; a lonely aristocrat embraces the democratic endeavors of an industrialist in *Countess Gisela*; impoverished Protestant nobles overcome obstacles to join with Catholics as entrepreneurs in *The Second Wife*; Käthe successfully achieves a happy marriage, rejecting aristocratic pretensions in *At the Councillor’s*; the Hispanic Mercedes assimilates to Germanic culture in *In the Schillingscourt*; a young industrialist overcomes his abhorrence of feminine education in *The Bailiff’s Maid*; and Margarete successfully unites disparate members in a new “family” in *The Lady with the Rubies*. Through love, the outsider is socially integrated, opponents are reconciled in a unified effort, and the liberal goal of eventual democratization is visualized for the readership.

34 Klein, *Von deutschen Herzen*, 151, quoting Sommer, 174.

35 Klein, 252.

Casting romance as a metaphor for political integration realigns the critical contention of Marlitt's allegedly apolitical texts as a misunderstanding of the nature of romance; it forces a re-evaluation of the traditional stance which asserts that "The final reduction of all problems to individual matters of the heart is precisely a characteristic of Marlitt's limited world view."<sup>36</sup> If individuals represent cultural positions, then the family romance reflects the national discourse via its representative constructs of families. To substantiate this perspective, Klein applies Sommer's concept of integration/reconciliation to Belgium's seminal investigation identifying *Die Gartenlaube* as a key reflection of the unification movement: "In the period when national identity in Germany most needed defining, the *Gartenlaube* and other popular magazines came forward to represent the nation to a mainstream readership."<sup>37</sup> The magazine's editor proclaims the nationalist tendency outright: it is to be a "deutsches Blatt" [German publication] with "gute deutsche Autoren" [good German authors] to reflect "deutsches Leben und Streben" [German life and endeavors] with the purpose of illuminating "Liebe zum deutschen Vaterlande" [love for the German fatherland].<sup>38</sup>

The magazine's ability to define a national identity in late-nineteenth century Germany was directly tied to its familial appeal. (...) The idealized vision of the domestic family (...) depicted an extended family. (...) The *Gartenlaube* continued to identify the mass readership it gained during its first two decades as a nation living within the private space of home and family.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the family "could be imagined as the sublimation of the nation, as the place of unity, as the place of the collective memory,"<sup>40</sup> permitting an

36 Urszula Bonter, *Der Populärroman in der Nachfolge von E. Marlitt. Wilhelmine Heimbürg, Valeska Gräfin Bethusy-Huc, Eufemia von Adlersfeld-Bellestrem* (Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 2005), 20.

37 Kirsten Belgium, *Popularizing the Nation*, XI.

38 Klein, *Von deutschen Herzen*, 33.

39 Belgium, *Popularizing the Nation*, 15.

40 Klein, *Von deutschen Herzen*, 248, citing Angela Koch, *Druckbilder, Stereotype und Geschlechtercodes in den antipolnischen Diskursen der "Gartenlaube" 1870–1930* (Köln/Weimar/Wien 2002), 35.

iconographic organization of signifiers which envision advances in the integration process as progress toward national unification. The usage incorporates an extended national family, for

the German nation was identified as existing wherever and as far as the pages of the *Gartenlaube* reached. This inclusive definition (...) enabled the magazine to address all of its readers, that is, potentially any German speaker anywhere in the world, as part of the German nation it was in the process of describing.<sup>41</sup>

Klein analyses the portrayal of various groups (French, Italian, Indian, Polish, Spanish, Negro, Jews) and finds rather superficial stereotypes, which he argues ultimately serve to demonstrate harmonious integration within the German nation with a happy ending “to give the national project an optimistic perspective.”<sup>42</sup> The demonstration of political dimensions to the fictional constructs significantly enhances the scholarly understanding of E. Marlitt’s contributions to the national discourse.

In spite of his numerous observations of discontinuities and ruptures, Klein maintains a traditional alignment of Marlitt’s fictional configurations with the conservative writings of the nineteenth-century sociologist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, particularly with his major study *Die Naturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes*, Vol. 4: *Die Familie* (1854). Klein’s methodology underscores the import of representational images; nevertheless, by privileging the pronouncements of male fictional figures over female figures, willingly overlooking the many ruptures and shifts Marlitt introduces, and shifting class orientation by semantic maneuvering, he reads the texts as reaffirmations of patriarchy and conservatism.

This present study breaks new ground by identifying a developing narrative strategy within the entire corpus. Exploring the totality reveals Marlitt’s modernist construct of family and develops a composite image of a disintegrating system of class distinctions and separations, not their fictional restitution. The analyses emphasize gendered images which reconstitute roles and resist pat categories. Identification of the narrative strategy

41 Belgium, *Popularizing the Nation*, 53.

42 Klein, *Von deutschen Herzen*, 254.

of irony underlying the authorial approach clarifies how the writer deconstructs the very traditionalism which Klein asserts.

The initial chapter of this study, “Liberalism in the Early Works of E. Marlitt,” lays a basic foundation by exploring authorial treatment of social exclusion and inclusion, a key discussion within the public domain for the German-speaking peoples in the era immediately preceding German political unification in 1871. Her literary debut via the short story *Die zwölf Apostel* (1865) suggests a conventional feminine realm of inquiry via religious allusion, and biblical verses do indeed serve to justify her central convictions. The text itself, however, primarily addresses issues of social equality and opportunity for women. The comparative analysis of this initial tale with the first full novel *Goldelse* (1866) and the third novel *Reichsgräfin Gisela* (1869) reveals expanding thematic interests addressing ethnicity, class, and gender. The author cleverly masks the transgressive elements which broach topics traditionally considered the purview of the male gender by appealing to religious views and practices. As a narrative strategy, this authorial practice suggests an acceptable feminine focus on individual moral behavior rather than the more masculine interest in the collective actions of political groups.

Marlitt’s earliest extant short story was only published posthumously, whereas Ernst Keil enthusiastically accepted the tale *Blaubart* for his journal. In Chapter 2, “Developing Parameters: *Schulmeisters Marie* to *Blaubart*,” a comparison of these short fictional works discerns the stylistic role of irony and a significantly broadened sociological scope in the latter by addressing certain inalienable rights pertaining to the entire human race. The “otherness” of ethnicity, national origin, and gender emerge as axiomatic concerns of the author, a conclusion which reinforces the theological emphasis on human equality developed in Chapter 1.

Chapter 3, “*Das Heideprinzeßchen*: The Pedagogical Process,” reads the novel as Marlitt’s adaptation of Pestalozzi’s stages of learning to envision an expansion of educational possibilities for women. It questions how the author modulates the prevailing psychological image of the weaker sex to champion a woman’s right to greater access to educational advances. The questions posed help define the unique stance employed in this text as a naïve protagonist struggles to acquire a sense of self-worth. It portrays

progressive psychological steps which permit the female sensibility to develop confidence within the domestic sphere before she may address demands external to the home.

Chapter 4, “The Kulturkampf in the Domestic Realm: *Die zweite Frau* and *Im Schillingshof*,” explores Marlitt’s more direct participation in the strident religious and political conflict of the Bismarck years following national unification. Readings of *Die zweite Frau* (1874) and *Im Schillingshof* (1879) clearly relate shifts in the legal framework of family law to the narrative framework. Comparison with acknowledged male writers of the Kulturkampf helps to demarcate the unique focus of Marlitt on the domestic sphere and draws particular attention to disruptions in educational philosophies. The novels so fundamentally reconstitute the female position within marriage as to reconfigure the concept of patriarchal authority altogether. Textual references to historic shifts in liberal policy legislation respond to public policy formation and define the political tendencies of her fiction.

Chapter 5, “E. Marlitt, Feminine Representation, and Codified Closure,” shifts the approach to an analysis of dualistic structural patterns and closure that resist and subvert standard images of gender. Marlitt’s texts reflect the shifting values of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie versus the waning influence of the aristocracy and the redefinition of roles for women. Her female figures bow to public authority, in order to realign their efforts along an alternate path. A comparative approach permits the recognition of striking patterns of structural parody in three novels, *At the Councillor’s* (1876), *In the Schillingscourt* (1879), and *The Lady with the Rubies* (1885). The study effectively deconstructs conventional interpretations by identifying strategic ploys within the historical critical context. The findings suggest a realignment of the author within the history of literary realism.

While each chapter applies a different approach to the corpus of E. Marlitt’s writings, collectively they track the author’s reconfiguration of gender constructs. Chapter 6, “E. Marlitt’s Secondary Characters as Models and Mentors,” shifts attention from the protagonists to evaluate the secondary figures throughout the corpus. Exploring all eight novels elucidates considerable variety and nuanced renderings of even fleeting characters. It traces the emerging emphasis on a community of women whose solidarity

promotes self-improvement. A detailed reading of the penultimate novel *Amtmanns Magd* (*The Bailiff's Maid*) reinforces awareness of the author's playful sense of intertextuality and literary parody. The chapter synthesizes findings which underscore Marlitt's authorial play with literary citation, biblical allusion, and structural parody, demonstrating how literary technique permits her gendered repositionings to address both a female as well as a male readership.

A reassessment of Marlitt's total literary output fills lacunae in our historical consciousness of nineteenth-century culture. It moves well beyond the conceptualization of a Bismarkian era of "blood and iron" to recognize the equally powerful advances in human potential which issues of gender, class, and ethnicity brought for major portions of the population. The study provides ample evidence of the repositioning of gendered images as well as the public circulation of progressive constructions of class. Consequently, these novels occupy a space which refutes several prevailing notions of late nineteenth-century public consciousness. Collectively, the chapters demonstrate the expansion of women's writing and the literary process by which a writer contributes to the construction of social awareness. As the first study in English to address the entire literary corpus, it is hoped that a far wider public may gain access to representations which serve to readjust our modern perception of the values and priorities in nineteenth-century letters.

## 1 Liberalism in the Early Works of E. Marlitt

Charges of timidity, conservatism, and bourgeois conformity have been leveled at the novels of E. Marlitt, the pseudonym disguising the gender of the author Eugenie John. In Germany in the 1860s, however, male writers dominated literary associations and women writers were scarcely taken seriously. Yet Marlitt's popular texts are recognized as the impetus for the phenomenal increase in circulation between the 1860s through the 1880s of the trend-setting publication, *Die Gartenlaube*. In 1861, 100,000 copies of the magazine were printed; by 1867, serialization of Marlitt's story *Die zwölf Apostel* and her first novel *Goldelse* led to print runs of 250,000. Publication of *Die zweite Frau* increased circulation to 325,000, and with the appearance of *Im Hause des Kommerzienrates* in 1878, it peaked at 375,000.<sup>1</sup>

By the founding of the empire, the *Gartenlaube* had become *the* journal of the German middle-class family, the most representative organ of its tastes and preoccupations ... In its first generation, the *Gartenlaube* was a dedicated champion of bourgeois *Bildung* and the virtues of progress and science – an ideal example of the nineteenth-century journalism that brought the public sphere into the bourgeois realm of domesticity, literally, as its title indicates, into the family arbor.<sup>2</sup>

Publication of Marlitt's story *Die zwölf Apostel* in 1865 and serialization of her first novel *Goldelse* coincided with a one hundred fifty percent increase in circulation. The progressive publisher Ernst Keil then revealed the female gender of his new star author at the publication of her third novel without any adverse effect on sales. In 1870 Marlitt herself penned a preface to her

- 1 W. A. Coupe, "Eugenie Marlitt: In Defence of a Writer of Kitsch," in *German Life and Letters*, 49/1 (January 1996), 42.
- 2 Michael B. Gross, *The War against Catholicism. Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 137.

latest novel, *Reichsgräfin Gisela*, to define her social stance. This programmatic declaration is all the more striking for so publicly positioning Marlitt within the liberal, progressive political camp. Has success emboldened her to announce her political and social convictions or can one discern another stratagem behind her announcement?

Before attempting to answer this question, it is important to establish the context of publication within *Die Gartenlaube*. Ernst Keil commenced his journalistic activities during the years of the 1848 Revolution and served a short prison sentence in 1852 on account of his activism. It was during this hiatus that he carefully planned his new endeavor, a family-oriented magazine which would appeal broadly to the middle class. Officially, the *Gartenlaube's* editorial position abjured all political factionalism and sectarian strife. However, most analysts read the magazine's published pronouncement in its first issue as a reassurance to the censors of 1853. Kirsten Belgum has perhaps phrased it most succinctly in her illuminating study, "Domesticating the Reader: Women and 'Die Gartenlaube'", which identifies various strategies employed to educate the middle-class reader.

Keil's response to the censorship of the restoration period was to cast the intentions of the magazine as neutral and apolitical. Thus, the magazine's self-introduction to its readers on the first page of the first issue appears cautious and tentative: "Fern aller raisonnierenden Politik und allem Meinungsstreit in Religions- und anderen Sachen, wollen wir Euch in wahrhaft guten Erzählungen einführen in die Geschichte des Menschenherzens und der Völker" [Far from all rationalizations of politics and all controversy in religion and other topics, we wish to introduce you through truly good stories to the history of the human heart and various nations.]<sup>3</sup>

Considering the topical content of the early *Gartenlaube*, Keil unquestionably masks his true social and political project behind a broad range of texts aimed at the entire family: literary, biographical, historical, scientific, and ethnological.

3 Kirsten Belgum, "Domesticating the Reader: Women and *Die Gartenlaube*," in *Women in German Yearbook*, 9 (1993), 93. All translations into English are my own.

Keil's objective was to reach and enlighten the broadest possible segment of the German middle classes, because (as an early *Gartenlaube* article put it) freedom is only possible "in einer ziemlich gleichmäßig gebildeten, gleichmäßig tugendhaften Gesellschaft mit gleichen Interessen" [in a fairly uniformly educated, uniformly virtuous society with common interests].<sup>4</sup>

The liberal philosophy predicates a democratic future upon the gradual education of a broad public to national concerns. Keil's magazine may serve this goal by offering stimulating yet comprehensible articles and literature, "so daß sie die gewöhnlichsten Handwerker, besonders aber die Frauen verstehen können" [so that the most common tradesmen, but especially the women can understand them].<sup>5</sup> Belgum's discussion of the narrative features of *Goldelse* persuasively demonstrates how Marlitt's fiction addresses a specifically feminine readership, advancing liberal appeals, constructing a model gender identity for German women, and yet ultimately domesticating this "liberated" reader within the safe confines of a family structure and married life.

This study argues that Marlitt is no less deliberate than Keil in employing a masked strategy. Belgum's sophisticated reading of *Goldelse* admirably addresses the import of gender identification within romance fiction as part of the process of national identity construction. What remains to be demonstrated is how Marlitt fulfills Keil's demand for clarifying the tenets of democracy in readily comprehensible form for the reader. The present analysis is less interested in romance per se, or in the construction of female identity, than in the specific image of social and political reality Marlitt creates. It explores how her advocacy of liberal precepts permits her fiction to project visions of a German society with a "happy ending," a requirement of romance. It concedes that she conforms to the closure of romance, while endeavoring to illuminate ever bolder inclusions of transgressions against late nineteenth-century social conformity.

Achim Barsch, in his analysis "Massenmediale Unterhaltungsliteratur und soziale Wirklichkeitskonstruktion: Zum Menschenbild in der

4 Belgum, "Domesticating the Reader," 93.

5 Belgum, "Domesticating the Reader," 94.

*Gartenlaube* am Beispiel der Romane von E. Marlitt,” asserts a striking commonality in the political convictions of the publisher Ernst Keil and his star author. Barsch argues that Marlitt’s political orientation fully coincides with that of Keil, for she deliberately advocates the bridging of class divisions and key aspects of bourgeois liberalism to encourage the positive and progressive forces of nation building, which are explicit goals documented by the notes and schematic plans of Ernst Keil for the magazine. Barsch indicates that both Keil and Marlitt consider Otto von Bismarck the political guarantor who can realize their political concepts in a unified nation.<sup>6</sup>

Bismarck, the realist politician, shifted positions throughout his long and varied career; thus, one must clarify which particular political positions Marlitt supports and how this support is manifested. Looking beyond her construct of appropriate feminine models, how does Marlitt explain politicized and social positions in laymen’s terms such that “even women can understand them”? Keil’s reference to “craftsmen and women” implies that the magazine intentionally structures a general understanding of political concerns by illustrating and contextualizing them for comprehension. Central political concerns can be identified in the early corpus of Marlitt’s literary career, not only after economic success afforded her the luxury and freedom to dare greater engagement as a female writer. As political subject status was generally denied to mid-nineteenth-century European women, the discernment of political dimensions throws into question the allegations of triviality and conformity against an author of sentimental tales. Marlitt’s evolving political orientation emerges clearly through a comparative study of *Die zwölf Apostel*, her debut publication of a novella in 1865; *Goldelse*, the first full novel which appeared in 1866; and *Reichsgräfin Gisela*, the third novel in 1869. All three texts develop recurring religious motifs. Strategically, the illusion of conformity becomes the vehicle for transgression.

6 Achim Barsch and Peter M. Hejl, eds, *Menschenbilder: Zur Pluralisierung der Vorstellungen von der menschlichen Natur (1850–1914)* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2000), 379.

*Die zwölf Apostel* (1865)

Marlitt's novella *Die zwölf Apostel* [The Twelve Apostles] was her first work accepted by Ernst Keil for publication in 1865 in *Die Gartenlaube*. Until recently, most critics cited her brother's posthumous claim in the first edition of the collected works that he originally mailed the manuscript to the publisher, noting Eugenie's innate shyness. However, the Preface to *Reichsgräfin Gisela* (1870) clearly asserts that she herself initiated the contact which proved so rewarding for her literary development. Ernst Keil's acceptance letter stressed the suitability of the novella's perspective for his new literary endeavor and specifically requested the author, addressed as "Dear Sir," to submit additional short texts when available. Surely he must have been surprised to receive the full-length novel *Goldelse* in reply, yet he expressed a willingness to alter the format of his magazine to include a serialized project of this length, if she would consider some cuts. Keil conveyed his esteem for the nature of her fiction by suggesting an ongoing collaboration.<sup>7</sup>

*Die zwölf Apostel* appeals to the fundamental tenets of democracy through the voice of a carefully selected protagonist, an orphaned and socially alienated child. Magdalene is brought back to Thuringia from Naples at the death of both her German mother and Italian father. With coal-black hair and a dark complexion, Magdalene soon feels ostracized in a world of blond and fair-haired children. Mocked as a "Tater" [gypsy child], she recalls in adulthood the refusal of class-conscious mothers to permit their daughters to play with "hergelaufenen Kindern" [children of unknown origin]. A Mediterranean skin tone, foreign origin, orphaned status, and economic insecurity mark her difference and exclusion in a generally xenophobic community. Otherness is specially reinforced, for she dwells outside the norm in the semi-ruins of an ancient nunnery, protected by her maiden aunt, a washerwoman. Her life experience gives her a critical

7 Magdalene Zimmermann, ed., *"Die Gartenlaube" als Dokument ihrer Zeit* (München: Heimeran, 1963), 14.

eye with which to observe social practice. The emphasis on Magdalene's perspective gains further significance when we learn that her artistic talent, inherited from the paternal Italian line of sculptors, assures Magdalene a livelihood through her drawings of weddings, christenings, and portraits. Alienation, exclusion, critical awareness of community shortcomings, an artistic sensibility which can communicate this perspective, all lead to the marketable qualities of difference which promote Magdalene's sense of independence. She eventually evolves a perspective which asserts that she is equally as entitled to the basic rights of all human beings as are the more privileged classes. She categorically rejects her aunt's warnings to answer with bowed head and humility when addressed by wealthier citizens and articulates her rationale:

Weil ich mit diesen meinen Händen mir mühsam den Unterhalt gewinnen muß, darum bin ich schlechter als der, den das Glück in eine goldene Wiege legte, der seine feinen Finger ansieht und meint, sie seien nur da, um seinen hochgeborenen Körper zu vervollständigen ... Weint und lacht das reiche, in Spitzen gewickelte Kind etwa anders als das im groben Kissen? ... Und sieht das brechende Auge des reichen Sterbenden in einen anderen Himmel als das des Bettlers? ... ich kann bewundernd zur Geistesgröße aufblicken, kann mich demutsvoll vor der Tugend beugen, kann das Talent verehren – aber niemals werde ich dem Mammon huldigen, der seinen Fuß grob und schwerfällig allem und jedem auf den Nacken setzen will und da schonungslos und kalt hintritt, wo der wärmste und weichste punkt im Herzen des Armen sitzt! (TE 228)

[Because with my own two hands I arduously earn my own keep, therefore I should be inferior to someone, whom fortune laid into a golden cradle, who gazes upon his delicate fingers and imagines they only exist to complete an upper-class body? ... Does the rich child wrapped in lace perhaps cry and laugh differently than the one on a coarse pillow? And does the fading sight of a dying rich man look into a different heaven than the beggar? I can look up in admiration to intellectual greatness, can humbly bow before virtue, can honor talent – but never will I worship Mammon, who wants to set his foot coarsely and heavily on the neck of each and every one and unsparingly and coldly treads where the warmest and softest spot of a poor man's heart lies.]

Magdalene's external circumstances dictate humble attire and the necessity of earning her own daily bread. A childhood beating by schoolmates

leaves both physical and emotional scars, for she never forgets the appalling injustice that no member of the community came forward to defend her human dignity. In her childlike innocence, she reasons that all of God's children essentially respond in equal fashion to the stimuli of the world, just as all may be welcomed into a single heaven after pursuing their separate paths on earth. The fundamental theological unity of existence suggests a unity of human worth. Marlitt here transposes the democratic political concepts of "equality" and "brotherhood" into images which may appeal to readers of various social backgrounds. By configuring the mistreatment of a lonely child, she elicits an emotive response; the enumeration of the admirable qualities of intelligence, virtue, and talent argue intrinsic value over social position or financial worth. The inherent dignity of each individual human being provides the theoretical basis for the acceptance of democratic social equality.

Cleverly, Marlitt appeals to religious images, for in the reactionary climate which prevailed after the failed revolution of 1848, political commentary by women aroused widespread disapproval, even among liberal forces. Nevertheless, brave voices of European feminists emerged through the emancipatory spirit of the revolution and circulated across the continent. While scholars recognize the existence of German activist writers like Mathilde Anneke, Louise Aston, Fanny Lewald, Malwida von Meysenbug, and Louise Otto, all of whom argued for reforms to end legal subordination of both woman and workers, the backlash of the Restoration cannot be overlooked. Prevailing social conventions and gendered clichés of the 1850s opposed women's direct participation in the public forum. The socialist leanings of Anneke's publications during the revolution aroused sufficient displeasure among Restoration authorities to force her emigration from Germany to Wisconsin in 1849.<sup>8</sup> The official response to Louise Aston's radical feminism was to banish the writer from Berlin,<sup>9</sup> and even the founders of the German

8 Wisconsin Historical Society, <<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/topics/anneke/>>, accessed March 27, 2012.

9 Friederike Ursula Eigler and Susanne Theresia Kord, eds, *The Feminist Encyclopedia of German Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 26.

Women's Association bowed to the prevailing spirit by excluding Aston on the basis of her "hedonistic and atheistic emancipation."<sup>10</sup> Likewise, von Meysenbug's socialist sympathies met with official opposition. In an age when schools for girls were restricted by class, religious orientation, or purpose, and virtually none carried the systematic education of girls beyond their fourteenth year, von Meysenbug participated actively in the short-lived experiment of the breakaway German catholic movement in 1850 to offer higher education to "women of all classes under non-confessional, secular auspices," the Hamburger Hochschule für das weibliche Geschlecht. Official reaction to the school turned hostile as the women volunteered to educate the poor in a city without compulsory education; the Lutheran church and state exerted sufficient pressure to force the congregation to close the school on the grounds of jeopardizing church and state. When a denunciation by von Meysenbug's reactionary brother involved the police, she fled to London to avoid arrest in 1852.<sup>11</sup> Her autobiography, *Mémoires d'une idealiste (entre deux revolutions) 1830-48*, includes solid argumentation supporting the need for female education to permit emancipation, as well as considerable political commentary; it appeared anonymously, in French in 1869, and later in German as *Memoiren einer Idealistin* (Stuttgart: Auerbach, 1876). While her analyses of authoritarian control over class and gender through the aligned efforts of the Prussian government and church are particularly astute, the publication record demonstrates how her political pronouncements remained inaccessible to the German territories until well after national unification and her "influence was restricted to a small circle of protégés."<sup>12</sup> By the time a second, augmented edition of the *Memoiren einer Idealistin* appeared under her own name in 1898, social conditions and opinions concerning women's education had advanced sufficiently to arouse interest in the historical views penned four decades earlier.

10 Hans Adler, "On a Feminist Controversy," 197.

11 See Catherine M. Prelinger, "Religious Dissent, Women's Rights, and the Hamburger Hochschule fuer das weibliche Geschlecht in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Church History*, 45/1 (March 1976), 47.

12 Carol Diethe, *Towards Emancipation: German Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 105.