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COMPASSIONATE AND DREAMING: ON THE EMOTIONAL COMMUNITY OF THE FIRST GERMAN WOMEN STUDENTS

Abstract

This article explores the concept of an emotional community among the first German women students around the turn of the twentieth century, analysing both journalistic and literary texts. Moving beyond terminological disputes surrounding 'emotions' and 'affects', it adopts Sara Ahmed's inclusive approach, where affect is seen as integral to emotion. The study draws on Barbara Rosenwein's definition of emotional communities as groups sharing common interests, values, and goals, often reinforced by texts. Through an analysis of excerpts from Ilse Frapan's novels, *Wir Frauen haben kein Vaterland* and *Die Arbeit*, and articles from women's magazines *Die Studentin* and *Frauen-Rundschau*, the paper investigates how specific emotions – namely compassion and a mix of pride and impostor syndrome – were expressed, cultivated, but also suppressed within this nascent community. It argues that these texts not only reflected but actively shaped the emotional landscape of early women students, highlighting the crucial role of literature in fostering a sense of shared experience and identity.

Keywords: emotional community, German women students, history of emotions, nineteenth-twentieth centuries, gender and education, literary representation

Theoretical inquiries and research into emotions, feelings, and affects have long been submerged under terminological disputes concerning, among others, the distinction between these three terms. Here, the humanist perspective commingles with the findings of neurology and psychiatry.[1] Additional complications stem from the fact that this

[1] A clear (however unbelievable that sounds) introduction to the study of emotions, useful not only to historians, is: Barbara H. Rosenwein, Riccardo Christiani, *What is the History of Emotions?* (Cambridge, 2018). This work contains a very

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theoretical inquiry takes place in several languages at the same time and is partly focused on etymology, where the English *emotion* does not correspond precisely to the German *Emotion* or the Polish *emocja*, with all the inevitable consequences for its meaning as a scientific term. In the case of *affect*, the differences in meaning are even more pronounced.[2] This wealth of theoretical consideration can be perceived as excess or even bloat. One may, however, make use of this overabundance by adopting a perspective that seems the most productive in the context of the material under analysis.[3] In this text, I operate under the assumption that "emotions" ("feelings")[4] are individual experiences rooted in the body, recognisable outside of scientific discourse and codified as social interactions. One example thereof may be shame, an emotion rich in scientific interest, which, like other emotions, is both social and individual, as well as bodily. Thus, I am hewing closely to the approach to affect and emotion that Sara Ahmed expressed in her conversation with Sigrid Schmitz.[5] I am particularly interested in her advocacy of a muddying of theoretical distinctions, or even antagonisms, between affect (bodily, beyond reason) and emotion/feeling (a subjective process, involving, in one way or another, a cognitive element). Such is the direction that Ahmed pursues when she simply asserts: "I actually use affect as part of what emotions do".[6]

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extensive annotated bibliography of secondary literature on the topic, facilitating further research.

[2] For instance, Polish does not preserve the aspect of the English *to affect something*, which involves outward agency – something that certainly negatively affects the applicability of English-language works in this area in Poland.

[3] A similar observation – and a similar conclusion – was made already in 2015 by Magdalena Horodecka in her 'Afekty i emocje w reportażu literackim. Perspektywa genologiczna i antropologiczna', in Ryszard Nycz *et al.* (eds), *Kultura afektu – afekty w kulturze. Humanistyka po zwrocie afektywnym* (Warszawa, 2015), 415–64. Since then, the amount of Polish theoretical reflection on the topic has only been increasing.

[4] I consider the terms *feelings* (Pol. *uczucia*) and *emotions* (Pol. *emocje*) synonymous, but I mostly use *emotions* because it makes it easier to refer to American scholarly discourse about emotions. This may be seen as an oversimplification; a more extensive theoretical reflection on the relationship between the two terms in Polish is needed.

[5] For more on this approach, see Sara Ahmed, 'Affect/Emotion: Orientation Matters: A Conversation between Sigrid Schmitz and Sara Ahmed', *Affect Studies – Politik der Gefühle, Freiburger Zeitschrift für GeschlechterStudien*, xx, 2 (2014), 97–108.

[6] *Ibid.*, 97.

Considering emotions in connection with texts, one should also bear in mind the affective and emotional charge of the latter – their peculiar capacity to evoke feelings and emotions. This capacity is paradoxically the easiest to analyse when it is potential – when it can be isolated within the structure of the text and carefully scrutinised.[7] It is a highly significant capacity to the extent that texts seek to move emotions – not just represent them, but also evoke them. The same feature has also been observed in historical research, where literature is so often treated not only as a reflection of a specific set of traditions or norms relating to emotions, but also as an instance of "didactics", seeking to cause specific emotions along with the behaviours and norms related to them.[8]

One can easily see texts that reflect and cause emotions (or affects) as building blocks of an emotional community. Here, I shall cite one of the definitions of the term suggested by its author, Barbara Rosenwein: "An emotional community is a group in which people have a common stake, interests, values, and goals. Thus, it is often a social community. But it is also possibly a 'textual community,' created and reinforced by ideologies, teachings, and common presuppositions".[9]

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[7] There is a strand of research into the impact of emotions and affects on the processes of meaning-making within cognitive poetics. Among studies that represent it are: Burkhard Meyer-Sickendiek, *Affektpoetik: eine Kulturgeschichte literarischer Emotionen* (Würzburg, 2005); Patrick Colm Hogan, *What Literature Teaches Us about Emotion* (New York, 2011); Sirkka Knuuttila, 'Bodily Dialogues. Indexicality of Emotion in Literary Experience', in Harri Veivo *et al.* (eds), *Redefining Literary Semiotics* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), 134–60; Gustavo Ariel Schwartz, Víctor Bermúdez (eds), *#Nodes: Entangling Sciences and Humanities* (Bristol, 2019). As significant as this aspect is, I do not reflect on it in this study since it is more invested in the politics of emotions than in their poetics.

[8] One example of an analysis of a work of literature from this perspective is Sarah McNamer, 'The Literariness of Literature and the History of Emotion', *PMLA*, cxxx, 5 (2015), 1433–42. McNamer offers an interesting interpretation of a poem as a work of literature, with all of the attendant formal features, as well as an element of the old English culture of mourning and the emotions inscribed within it. She also relates to a broad array of works that treat literature as a kind of "affective script" capable of evoking the "desired" emotions (p. 1436). A similar approach is presented in Andrew Lynch, 'The History of Emotions and Literature', in Patrick Colm Hogan *et al.* (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Emotion* (Abingdon – New York, 2022), 98–109. Lynch describes literature as an "agent in the history of emotions" (p. 100).

[9] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2006), 24–5.

Accepting this definition, I would like to reflect on a set of German-language texts – both journalistic and literary – from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, to see if it is possible to analyse the discourse of German-speaking students as an expression of their emotional community. An analysis of a handful of texts cannot be but a sketch, an experiment, a sample review that might perhaps indicate the degree to which a broader inquiry into a larger base of sources could prove productive.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TEXTS

As has been mentioned, at stake here are texts of a literary and journalistic nature written by German women students around the turn of the twentieth century. For context, I also bring up two novels by Ilse Frapan (1849–1908):[10] *Wir Frauen haben kein Vaterland oder Monologe einer Fledermaus* [We women have no fatherland, or the monologues of a bat]; first published in *Frankfurter Zeitschrift*, in book form in 1899 and *Die Arbeit* [Work] in 1903. Frapan's novels discuss the lives of women students in Switzerland and constitute typical examples of turn-of-the-century German-language writings about women students. Advocating for emancipation, they focused naturally on the struggles of women pursuing university education. Authors of such novels reflected on the

[10] Ilse Frapan, born Ilse Levien (b. 1849 Hamburg – d. 1908 Geneva), worked as a teacher in Hamburg from 1869 to 1883, ultimately abandoning this line of work for a career in literature. She wrote short stories and poems, as well as novels, dramas, and books for children and young readers. She also worked as a translator, mainly from Russian. As a writer, she tended toward German Naturalism, ideologically aligning herself with the suffrage movement and the intellectual left. Her novel *Die Arbeit* provoked a multitude of responses; Frapan's biographer, Christa Kraft-Schwenk, identified forty reviews of the book. It was typically criticised for erring too far toward the left; it also prompted a protest from the medical community in Zurich; see Christa Kraft-Schwenk, *Ilse Frapan: eine Schriftstellerin zwischen Anpassung und Emanzipation* (Würzburg, 1985), 78–91. For a while, Frapan also used the name Akunian, which she claimed from her partner, Ivan Akunian (they were not married). Despite literary (and financial) success, Frapan spent her final years in dire economic straits, likely contributed to by a debilitating disease. She committed suicide in 1908 with her friend of many years and life partner, Emma Mandelbaum. See also: Angelica Baum, 'Ilse Levien', in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (HLS), https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/045907/2008-01-18/ [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2024].

difficulties women faced in this pursuit, while at the same time reaffirming the need for women's access to universities.[11] Strictly speaking, Frapan's prose represents early fiction about women students, dating from around the turn of the century, much of which was written by women who themselves had pursued studies (though not always to completion). These novels include autobiographical elements, but are distinct from autobiography per se. In observing this distinction, I am following the opinion of literary scholar Romana Weiershausen, who notes that the first German-language autobiographies of women students by and large did not come out until the inter-war period and tended to focus on the individual experience, whereas these earlier novels were concerned with "using personal experiences to take a public stance in a particular issue".[12] The issue, of course, was access for women to universities. In other words, early novels about women students gave voice to a specific group, which facilitates the comparison with texts published in the press, which were also meant to serve that purpose.

The two journalistic texts discussed here come from two different women's magazines: *Die Studentin* [The Woman Student] and *Frauen-Rundschau* [The Woman's Review]. The very titles suggest that these periodicals were concerned, in part, with the creation of a community, since they define their addressees as "women students" or just "women", thus inviting such a self-identification. Looking through the issues of these magazines, one finds that this first impression only ever intensifies. *Die Studentin* remained in currency between 1912 and 1919, with a changing cast of editors; in issues from 1917–1919, the publisher is identified as Verband der Studentinnenvereine

[11] Thus far, the only monographic study of German-language novels about women students is the work by Romana Weihershausen, cited below. Incidentally, research into the corresponding area within Polish Studies is even less extensive; notable examples include the article by Danuta Ossowska, 'Literacki portret pierwszych polskich studentek: kontekst emancypacyjny', *Prace Literaturoznawcze*, 2 (2014), 151–62. One interesting example of an early Polish novel about women students is Maria Szeliga [Maria Czarnowska-Loevy], *Na przebój* (Kraków, 1889). I pursued a comparison of the novel with German texts in Justyna Górny, 'Autoportret z antybohaterką. Negatywne postacie kobiece w powieściach o studentkach', *Wielogłos*, xliv, 2 (2020), 67–90.

[12] Romana Weiershausen, *Wissenschaft und Weiblichkeit. Die Studentin in der Literatur der Jahrhundertwende* (Göttingen, 2004), 74.

Deutschlands e.V. [Union of German Women Students' Associations]. These issues contain a significant amount of information related to the activities of student organisations, such as debates on their shape and goals, reports from congresses, or information on new cells and their members. Beyond that, the magazine offered a platform for the publication of articles on the education of girls, the experiences of female students, and the lives of particular activists in the women's movement (such as Helena Lange) and women academics. It also included a brief section devoted to literary reviews, which featured material on books thematically related to the activities of the union, as well as scholarly works published by women. In turn, the magazine *Frauen-Rundschau: Offizielles Organ deutscher Frauenverbände und Vereine* [The Woman's Review: Official Organ of German Women's Unions and Associations], which came out in 1903–1922, was edited by leading activists in the German women's movement, such as Helene Stöcker or Ella Mensch. As the name suggests, this magazine maintained a firm interest in the public activities of women, while also representing an instance of women's self-organisation.[13]

It is this quality of the texts that lends them to the application of Barbara Rosenwein's notion of emotional communities. The women students were a relatively well-defined social group, with shared ideas and values, "practising various forms of sociability, and privileging various emotions and styles of expression".[14] One may surmise that as a social group, they also constituted a distinct emotional community. Obviously, the proximity, or even partial identity with the group of suffragettes, adds a layer of complexity, since it may be impossible to distinguish the feelings and emotions involved in the particular experience of a woman student from those related more generally to the pursuit of women's empowerment. However, one may take comfort in the conviction expressed by historian Ute Frevert that it is the complexity of feelings that makes them worthy of analytical attention. This complexity opens a perspective in which the "bearers of feelings" –

[13] *Frauen-Rundschau* was a flagship periodical for the bourgeois women's movement. It continued the work of the *Dokumente der Frauen* [Women's Documents], an organ of the Allgemeiner Österreichischer Frauenverein [General Austrian Union of Women] which remained in currency in Vienna for a period of three years.

[14] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, cvii, 3 (2002), 845.

groups and institutions, but also individuals – exist "at the crossroads of varied influences and interests".[15] Frevert highlights the dynamic and mutable nature of feelings and the forms of their expression. These aspects – one might add, completing Frevert's thought – increase sensitivity to the processual character of the analysed phenomena, especially in history, but also in literary texts. Rosenwein herself uses the image of overlapping circles to illustrate her concept of emotional communities, and also expresses the belief that an emotional community may contain several, and perhaps even multiple, smaller constituent communities, asserting that individuals can participate in more than one emotional community.[16] Each of them, in turn, has its own constituent emotions, values, and practices, which will be my main object of interest in the examples I discuss.

THE WISDOM OF AUNT FANNY

The December 1916 issue of *Die Studentin* includes an article entitled *Einige Ratschläge für die ersten Semester junger Medizinerinnen* [Some advice for the first semester for young women physicians].[17] The author, Rahel Plaut,[18] a fourth-year student, firmly stresses that her advice is

[15] Ute Frevert, *Gefühle in der Geschichte* (Göttingen, 2021), 40.

[16] Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 24–5; *ead.*, 'Worrying', 842.

[17] Rahel Plaut, 'Einige Ratschläge für die ersten Semester junger Medizinerinnen', *Die Studentin*, v, 9 (1916), 67–9.

[18] Rahel Plaut (b. 1894 Hamburg – d. 1983 Rochester), daughter of bacteriologist Hugo Carl Plaut, studied zoology and medicine in Freiburg, Kiel, and Bonn from 1913 to 1918. At Freiburg, she participated actively in women students' organisations. Between 1919 and 1924, she was an assistant professor at the Institute of Physiology of the University of Hamburg, where she conducted research into metabolism, among others. She was also employed at the university clinic Hamburg-Eppendorf. In 1923, she became the first woman to receive a *Habilitation* in medicine at the University of Hamburg. In 1924, she married Hans Liebeschütz and resigned from the Institute of Physiology; she nevertheless continued to give lectures as a *Privatdozentin*. The position was taken away from her in 1933 due to her "non-Aryan" background. In 1938, Rahel and Hans Liebeschütz emigrated with their children to Great Britain, where she performed volunteer work and took care of her children. In an interview given in 1984 (or 1985), reflecting on the conditions faced by the first German women students, she remembers the arrogance of her colleagues toward patients and women physicians alike, making a connection between this attitude and the *habitus* derived from (obviously, masculine) student brotherhoods; see: Silke Kaiser, *Jüdische*

not meant as a set of rules to be observed, since "generally speaking, each has to find her own way at the university, and it makes no sense to enforce any rules"; at the same time, she also observes "that a great deal of ease can be gained from the sharing of experiences".[19] She presents herself as an older colleague (jokingly adopting the moniker *alte Tante* – literally *old aunt* – which can be translated as "Aunt Fanny" given the context), eager to share her experiences with younger students. The gesture of giving advice becomes an act of fostering community with the readers – the author underlines the value of interaction and exchange, while also striving toward a community without hierarchies or compulsion: "Each is, after all, free to take from this whatever suits her needs".[20]

This declared community should be viewed in the context of its limitations; in other words, as what it actually was – namely, a discursive act of creation of a non-hierarchical community, rather than an account of actual relations between women students. However, even on the discursive plane, one would do well to consider the significance and function of these expressions of "soft" belonging. Using terminology related to the study of emotions, one can read this gesture as an attempt to avoid an "emotional regime" in the sense advanced by William Reddy. The women students evidently strive to maintain an emotional community as an "emotional asylum" or "refuge", which incidentally relates to the perception of studying as a path to emancipation, "liberation" from the limitations imposed on women within the gender order.

Nevertheless, the advice offered by Rahel Plaut is specific and stated with authority, making it possible to assess what attitudes, features, and values – and emotions – she considered crucial for the students.

Identität in Deutschland und im Exil: Der Lebensweg des Wissenschaftlerehepaars Hans und Rahel Liebeschütz (Hamburg, 2023), online: https://doi.org/10.15460/hup.264.2042, 102–3 [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2024]. See also the biographical note at the website for the University of Hamburg: 'Rahel Liebeschütz-Plaut', https://www.uni-hamburg.de/gleichstellung/ueber-uns/chancengleichheit-im-fokus/frauenportraits.html [Accesssed: 30 Dec. 2024].

[19] "Im ganzen muß sich ja jede allein auf der Universität zurechtfinden und es hat keinen Zweck, das einem Grundsetzte aufgedrängt werden. Aber man kann sich auch manches erleichter, wenn man sich gegenseitig seine Erfahrungen mitteilt", Plaut, 'Einige Ratschläge', 67.

[20] "Es kann sich ja jede davon merken, was sie will", *ibid*.

In her eyes, a woman student had to be possessed of a hard-working mentality, a code of ethics, and a broad intellectual development – to the degree that it was achievable, given the understandable strictures of specialisation; furthermore, she had to take an active part in the life of the community, that is, belong to a women's student association, or at least seek contact with other women students – especially outside of medicine, to prevent a premature and one-sided attachment to the practical side of the studies. Plaut also reflects on how she should conduct herself in male company and find companionship among other students.[21] My interest, however, is drawn particularly to a relatively long section, in which the author advises women students of medicine to postpone engagement in clinical work, instead volunteering over the summer as nurses – a means to facilitate the development of the right (empathetic, in contemporary parlance) attitude to patients. In this context, she contrasts individualised treatment, which she endorses, with the mass, automated form of medicine: "Having spent an entire day with the patients, having seen them suffer, having spent hours tracking the progress of the disease, having observed how every detail of the treatment impacts their condition, and often the course of the disease, does one not obtain a different impression than when patients are presented to us one by one in a clinic and not seen again until a few days later, either cured or on the pathologist's table, whatever might transpire?".[22] In the former case, the disease (and potential

[21] One of her more interesting observations states that "the forms that persist between gentlemen and ladies differ from one university to another", Plaut, 'Einige Ratschläge', 68. In general, however, Plaut recommends that women students act "natural and easy" (*ibid.*). She also speaks in a roundabout fashion about violence or mobbing, suggesting that one not allow oneself to be "terrorised … by rude people", and in case of problems, that one seek support from local women students' organisations, which "gladly stand with the students" (*ibid.*). As far as contacts with other women students are concerned, Plaut tells "women medics" to look for friends outside of their professional field, partly because the body of women students of medicine contains some that "in their essence and outlook share little with young ladies of polite [*gesittet*] society" (*ibid.*). From a contemporary standpoint, this attitude would rightly be perceived as classism. Perhaps due to the fact that it offered women access to paid employment, medicine was more likely than other departments to attract students from less wealthy families, which the author considered inadequate company for middle-class students.

[22] "Wenn man den ganzen Tag bei den Kranken ist, stundenlang sieht, wie sie leiden, stundenlang wartet, welche Wendung die Krankheit nehmen will, wenn man

cure) is an individualised process that the physician and the nurse can influence; in the latter, cure seems more like an experiment: patients are an object of a therapy, whose results are later verified (cure or death). Plaut summarises her views on the matter thusly: "Little wonder, then, that many students see the diseased as nothing more than material for study. Only when one works as a nurse does it become apparent that these are people; and it is people that we will be expected to cure, not just diseases".[23] The stipulation that every doctor should gain experience tending to patients as a nurse deserves some attention. In this context, the labour of a nurse draws its significance from the physical proximity to the patients: being with them throughout the day, observing their suffering and waiting for hours for their condition to change – these are experiences that serve to promote an emotional relationship, that make the patients visible as people. Meanwhile, the absence of such contact turns living people into abstract objects of clinical practice. One could extend the logic here and state that the very act of care – touching the body of the patient, real physical contact – prevents dissociation and renders the patients real, while transforming the disease from Latin abstraction into something visible, tangible. As loose as this interpretation of Plaut may seem to be, it is not without reason that she advocates for doctors to practice as nurses, rather than just visit their patients regularly.

Analogous observations on the emotional aspect of the labour of physicians are contained in Ilse Frapan's novel *Die Arbeit*. Its protagonist, Josefine, is the wife of a doctor and mother to their four children. She helps her husband in his practice by performing auxiliary work and laboratory analyses. When her husband is imprisoned, she decides to pursue a medical degree to take over his office and operate it on her own. Her assessment of the attitudes of the students and

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beobachtet, welchen Einfluß jede Kleinigkeit in der Behandlung auf das Befinden und oft auf den Verlauf der Krankheit hat, gibt das nicht einen anderen Eindruck, als wenn einem die Patienten nacheinander in der Klinik vorgestellt werden, und man sie einige Tage darauf je nachdem geheilt odar auf dem Sektionstisch wieder sieht?", Plaut, 'Einige Ratschläge', 69.

[23] "Es ist kein Wunder, daß viele Studenten in den Kranken nur den Stoff sehen, an dem sie lernen. Erst in der Krankenpflege merkt man, daß es Menschen sind; und die Menschen werden wir ja später behandeln müssen, nicht nur die Krankheiten", *ibid*.

older members of the teaching staff toward patients is highly critical. As she puts it, "[w]e are all alike to gods sailing among the clouds while Lazarus lies down below, covered in leprosy … . Man to us is not man, but material. Man is a numbered bed, a 'case'. He writhes in pain before our eyes, and all we do is observe the case. Oh, how I hate us all".[24] What follows is an account of the treatment that patients are subjected to in clinics, particularly the disparities of approach toward the rich and the poor and the lack of respect for the privacy of the latter. The protagonist states with vehemence that students are instilled with a dismissive attitude toward the patients: "To see these men pull such jeering faces! They jeer because the professor is rude! Jeering and rudeness in the face of death. It teaches them to be rude and jeering. Their faces change beyond recognition when he is there. One corrupts hundreds. … Oh, how I hate him! I shall never accept it".[25] This critique of the professor and of the attitude the students adopt under his influence can be read as a systemic critique. The author describes a mechanism, showcasing how a relationship of power between the professor and his students creates a conveyor belt for the transmission of attitudes and values.

Both the article and the novel can be treated as the voice of women students from a shared emotional community. It is a voice that calls for compassion, postulated as a value, an attitude, an emotion that requires tending. In the traditional bourgeois gender order, compassion was ascribed to women; perhaps one may therefore find in Frapan's novel the suggestion that it is precisely women, because of the "nature of their sex",[26] that are tasked with bringing compassion and

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[24] "Aber wir alle sind wie die Götter in den Wolken, und drunten ist der schwärenbedeckte Lazarus. … Ein Mensch ist kein Mensch für uns, ein Mensch ist Material. Ein Mensch ist eine Spitalnummer und 'ein Fall'. Er windet sich vor uns in Schmerzenskrämpfen, und wir beobachten nicht ihn, nur den Fall. Wir interessieren uns wissenschaftlich für den 'Fall'. O, wie ich uns alle hasse!", Ilse Frapan-Akunian, *Arbeit. Roman* (Berlin, 1903), 122–3.

[25] "Und so hämische Gesichter bei diesen Männern! Sie sind hämisch, weil der Professor roh ist! Roh und hämisch im Angesicht des Todes. Er lehrt sie roh und hämisch sein. Man erkennt ihre Gesichter nicht wieder, wenn er da ist. Einer entstellt Hunderte. … O, wie ich ihn hasse! Ich gewöhne mich nie", *ibid*.

[26] On the "sex character" and gender order in the bourgeois culture, see Karin Hausen, 'Family and Role-Division: The Polarisation of Sexual Stereotypes in the Nineteenth Century – An Aspect of the Dissociation of Work and Family Life',

sensitivity to suffering into a medicine that has been consumed by a desire for profit, and has therefore become dehumanised. However, I think Frapan does not present compassion merely as a womanly weapon for changing the world, but also as a means for the expression of social critique. One sees this, for instance, in the reaction of the protagonist to Ilya Repin's *Barge Haulers on the Volga* (1873): "Seeing the torment, she was consumed by boundless sadness and forgot about everything … all of it. The air around her filled with moans, and her heart began to bleed from a phantom wound. She reached to her breast, and there! There! The horrid belt pressed and cut into the soft, trembling body".[27] In the scene, compassion may perhaps represent a womanly virtue deserving of introduction into the world of medicine, but it primarily reflects the capacity to see – and feel – a social injustice.[28] Emotion and affect do indeed coexist here, since compassion with others results in real, bodily sensations as the protagonist looks at the picture. This fragment seems to echo in eerie fashion Rahel Plaut's stipulation that women students of medicine gain experience as nurses, so that accompanying the ailing, touching their bodies, in a way, fosters the conditions for the establishment of compassion for them.

PRIDE AND USURPATION

The other case that I want to discuss relates to emotions in the context of self-perception and self-definition of the women students. In 1905, *Frauen-Rundschau* published Frieda Arnold's article entitled "Lebensführung der Studentin" [The Mode of Life of a Woman Student], which

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in Richard J. Evans *et al.* (eds), *The German Family: Essays on the Social History of the Family in the 19- and 20-Century Germany* (London, 1981), 51–83.

[27] "Eine unbegrenzte Traurigkeit hatte sie befallen angesischts dieser Qualbeladenen und sie hatte alles vergessen … – alles. Die Luft um sie war voller Stöhnen und ihr Herz schien zu bluten, als sei hineingestochen worden. Sie fuhr mit der Hand nach der Brust, da! da! da preßte der entsetzliche Riemen und schnitt in das weiche, zuckende Fleisch", Frapan, *Arbeit,* 232.

[28] Incidentally, it seems that in Frapan's novel compassion belongs to different emotional communities: that of the students and that of, for lack of a better word, the left. The existence of interference between these communities, as well as between social groups, is unsurprising; Frapan's novel numbers among the many works that testify to it.

devotes significant attention to ensuring that the author's advice is read as indications, not rules.[29] She proclaims: "I shall allow myself to give a few suggestions for a healthy and considerate life of a woman student; it will be naturally understood that they do not demand to be taken as despotic laws, but should instead be modified depending on the circumstances".[30] She goes on to provide fairly detailed instructions for the daily routine of a student. According to her recommendations, students should wake up at seven, then rub cold or cool water into their bodies and perform physical exercises. Around midday, she advises a longer pause for a walk, a meal, and rest with some light reading, such as newspapers. In the afternoon, students should reserve about three hours for a second series of lectures or independent work; time for the latter is also reserved after supper. She recommends that two evenings out of every week be spent at cultural or social events. Meanwhile, Sundays are for field trips – preferably on foot or by bike. The guiding idea for this advice is that the attitudes and achievements of individual women students matter for all of them as a group. The author writes that the positive results of exams by earlier students have helped to dismantle some stereotypes, such as the notion that the presence of women in the student body would decrease the quality of the universities and lead the young men astray.[31] Thus, when Arnold preaches moderation in everything, both work and recreation, her

[29] Frieda (or Frida) Arnold (b. 1849) entered the university, by her own account, as a mature woman in 1899, joining the faculty of philosophy, perhaps at Heidelberg University. She was the granddaughter of Friedrich Hölderin's half-brother. In 1902, she published the letters of Susette Gontard, friend and great love of the Romantic poet, unearthed from among the family papers. The work was published repeatedly. Arnold also produced translations of Russian literature. In 1905–8, she wrote for the *Frauen-Rundschau* on issues related to women's emancipation. See *Hölderin-Jahrbuch*, xxi (1978–1979), ed. by Bernhard Böschenstein (Tübingen 1979), 252. See also Arnold's record at the German National Library at https://d-nb.info/gnd/116350113 [Accessed: 30 Dec. 2024].

[30] "Vielleicht ist es mir erlaubt, einige Winke zur gesunden, zweckmäßigen Lebensführung der Studentin zu geben; daß diese keinen Anspruch auf apodiktische Gültigkeit erheben, sondern von Fall zu Fall modifiziert sein wollen, ist selbstredend", Frieda Arnold, 'Lebensführung der Studentin', *Frauen-Rundschau*, vi, 11 (1905), 281–3 (at 282). The same stipulation is repeated at the end of the article, where Arnold writes that she does not seek to formulate rules (*Vorschriften*), but helpful indications (*helfende Direktive*); see: *ibid.*, 283.

[31] *Ibid.*, 282–3.

main goal is to advocate a rational dispensation of capabilities, which would be conducive to efficient labour and academic success, leading to increased respect not only for the individual but also for women students as a group. The woman student of this text is therefore a person conscious of her worth, derived, in part, from her significance for the entire group – her success belongs to the whole community.

It occurs to me that this advice brings up comparisons with one character from the prose of Ilse Frapan – in this case, the novel (or novella) *Wir Frauen haben kein Vaterland*. The comparison suggests itself because the protagonist, a woman named Lilie, does effectively the exact opposite of Frieda Arnold's precepts, and indeed fails, in the sense that she is forced to abandon the university. Though this decision is primarily informed by the dearth of resources to finance her studies, the text repeatedly refers to the protagonist's frustration with her unpreparedness for engaging in studies; unable to make up for the shortage of knowledge or even concentrate on her specific subject, she chooses her lectures seemingly at random and attends them inconsistently. Even her lifestyle is unhygienic, diverging from Arnold's "consistent, disciplined labour".[32] In addition, Lilie is not a part of the student community – she does not seek to connect with other students and lives alone; she is the titular bat. Her condition is symbolically represented by the fact that while eating at the student canteen, Lilie sits at the corner of the table, nudged by everyone without protest, as if she felt she did not deserve a better place at the student table. Lilie is therefore not representative of the women's student community; she lacks the will, or even the capacity, to accept either the privilege or the responsibility. Though she dreams of women's solidarity and representing other women, these are mere reveries. She plans to take up the law to defend women whose sex and social standing reduce them to the condition of second-class citizens. In a dream, she sees a prostitute being thus defended:

> I had a dream, and still I remain under its spell. I see a courtroom. At the bar stands the draped and hunched figure of a very young maiden. Her dress is torn and dirtied, as if dragged through the gutter. Everyone stands off, her very proximity seemingly threatening contagion; everyone, man and woman alike. But above, in front of the judges, stands another – the

[32] "… gleichmäßige, gut disziplinierte Leistung"; *ibid.*, 283.

> beautiful Portia with her curly black hair. Yes, her name is Portia, and she is a lawyer. She is not wearing the clothes of a man, like Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*, but the simple, womanly dress made of black suede. Her eyes seem to survey the surrounding world, gazing into the past calmly and the future alike, her lips graced by a gentle, mischievous smile as she parts them to speak to the men.[33]

Portia's speech does not bear citing; it is a plea for women's solidarity and in defence of the prostitute, garnished with a fiery critique of the dual morality that measures the deeds of men and women differently. What I would like to focus on here is the emotional charge of the scene, expressed, for instance, in the appearance and poses of the represented characters: the hunched, humiliated prostitute, and the proud, calm lawyer, who shows no fear in the face of a masculine tribunal – and even allows herself a mischievous smile. Within the novel, however, her triumph is problematic because the protagonist who dreams it does not identify with the proud Portia. Her dreams and reveries are not a foreshadowing of the future, but an imitation. When she thinks of herself as a student of law, she says: "Reveries, ever only reveries! Monologues of a bat! 'What is that dwarf doing in these kingly robes?' Exactly! Exactly! Preposterous, ridiculous dwarf! One to laugh at! And even more, to cry at. Yes, to cry!"[34]

The character from Frapan's novel is the very opposite of the ideal drawn up by Frieda Arnold also in the fact that she is incapable of effectively representing other women – neither the prostitute at the

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[33] "Einen Traum hab' ich geträumt, geh' noch jetzt herum wie im Träume. Ich sehe einen Gerichtsaals. Vor den Schranken tief verhüllt, tief gebeugt, ein blutjunges Weib. Ihre Kleider sind zerrissen und beschmutzt, wie durch die Gosse geschleift, alle haben sich von ihr zurückgezogen, als ginge Ansteckung von ihr aus, alle, Männer und Frauen. Aber oben, vor den Richtern steht noch eine Frau, eine schöne, schwarzlockige Portia. Ja, sie heißt Portia und ist eine junge Advokatin. Sie trögt aber kein Männergewand, wie die Portia im Kaufmann von Venedig; nein ein schlichtes schwarzsammtenes Frauenkleid. Ihre Augen scheinen ruhig die Welt zu mustern, die sie umgibt, und doch zugleich in Vergangenheit und Zukunft zu blicken. Sie beginnt zu reden; ein feines, schalkhaftes Lächeln auf den Lippen, spricht sie zu den Männern …", Ilse Frapan, *Wir Frauen haben kein Vaterland* (Berlin, 1899), 85–93 (at 85–6).

[34] "Ach Träume und immer nur Träume! Die Monologe einer Fledermaus! 'Was geht dort für ein Zwerglein in einer Königstracht?' So ist es! so ist es! ein kümmerliches, ein lächerliches Zwerglein! Es ist zum Lachen. Und mehr noch zum Weinen! Ja ja ja zum Weinen!", Frapan, *Wir Frauen*, 95.

(masculine) tribunal, nor other students facing social judgment. Both Arnold and Frapan stress the importance of companionship between the students, the establishment of groups and communities, but Frapan's protagonist is unable to partake in them – that is, she acts as if she feels out of place within them, like an impostor. Contrasted, the texts of these two women authors open a field for discussion both about the pride of women students as a group in their achievements, current and future, as expressed by Arnold, and about its obverse, an "impostor syndrome", seemingly illustrated by Frapan. Psychologically speaking, it stands to reason that the first women students would have been wracked by a sense of insecurity about their own competencies, especially given the initially inadequate preparation (at a time when girls were denied instruction at gymnasiums and prevented from passing the matriculation exam that opened access to higher education) and the negative attitudes of the majority of the society in general, and the surrounding communities in particular. One finds none of this insecurity in Arnold: rational plans for the day and systematic work almost guarantee academic success, which, in turn, automatically ensures recognition for women academics. Frapan seems unconvinced by this; perhaps her text serves as a form of exorcism: by expressing insecurities, fears, and unfulfilled dreams, it affirms the existence of the demon and attempts to root him out. In this instance, one finds that emotional communities can also be described through the emotions that they try to suppress.

WHY SO EMOTIONAL?

The comparison between novels written by some of the first women students and journalistic accounts addressed to the same group highlights certain similarities and parallels, which I attempted to illustrate using selected examples. They seem to justify the claim of the existence of an emotional community among women students in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In this context, I believe that a focus on emotions opens a perspective that deserves to be taken into account because it enables the achievement of a richer insight – for instance, once the texts mentioned above are analysed as fragments of a particular discourse, or as expressions of a habitus, set of attitudes and values. When greater stress is laid on emotions, it becomes easier, in particular, to appreciate the significance of literary works for the

establishment of the community of women students, since engagement with texts of this kind constituted a peculiar type of interaction for their readers, also on the emotional plane. Theoretical studies on literary characters have shown a great interest in the tendency on the part of readers to treat characters in books like real people, evoking similar reactions and emotions as actual persons.[35] Drawing on this observation, I would suggest that the act of reading about the experiences of Josefine made her accessible in a different, more direct manner than was the case with the characters involved in the undoubtedly well-conceived articles in student magazines or women's journals – in the same way that Josefine in the novel looks at a painting and experiences certain emotions not just intellectually, but almost corporally. In this sense, literary texts can be said to have attempted to engage readers in an emotional community of women students: by evoking particular emotions, they not only reinforced and relayed values and attitudes, but also advanced the notion of university education as a positive experience for women – perhaps even an object of reverie for the women readers.

Translated by Antoni Górny

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