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“Og indrette Alt til alle Parters Tilfredshed”

Discourses of Love and Production in Thomasine Gyllembourg's Montanus den Yngre (1837)

AV ANNEGRET HEITMANN

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife”.¹ In this famous novel-opening, the beginning of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, marriage and gender relationship are not linked to love and passion, but to profane economic circumstances. This nexus was first discussed in a paper by Ellen Moers entitled “Money, the Job and Little Women”, which later formed a chapter in her book *Literary Women*, one of the founding texts of gender-conscious literary criticism.² The feminist impetus behind Moer’s textual analysis was soon, as we all know, widely received and her theses on female realism were applied to female Scandinavian authors such as Camilla Collett, Fredrika Bremer and Thomasine Gyllembourg.³ Whether we can adhere to Moer’s conviction that “Austen’s realism in the matter of money was [...] an essentially female phenomenon”⁴ is of course rather questionable. It is not just that the theme of money is in need of differentiation and historical contextualisation, it is equally clear that the aspect of authorial production is not exhausted by being treated in a solely biographical context. For these reasons my contribution will focus on the questions of production and productivity — not so much on the biographical as on a thematic and a poetological level. This issue is of importance, because in the notion of production the discourses of economy, gender, and art meet and overlap.

I. Montanus den Yngre and its pretext

In what follows I will concentrate on Gyllembourg’s narrative *Montanus den Yngre* (1837),⁵ the very title of which alludes to Ludvig Holberg’s play *Erasmus Montanus* (1731). With this intertextual reference the author seems to be following the agenda of her son, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, who in his essay *Om Vaudevillen* (1826) proposed to rejuvenate Danish theatre by looking back to its founder Holberg.⁶ From Holberg’s well-known comedies, which by then had been sidelined by romantic conceptions of art, Heiberg adopted the conjunction of local and every-day themes with entertain-

ing und amusing ones. He also intended to refine the taste of his audience through the artistic refinement of the play without sacrificing popularity and public appeal. As production-records show, he managed to fundamentally influence the theatre of 19th century Denmark for almost three decades, transforming it into an institution that helped shape the tastes of the time. So when Gyllembourg begins with a reference to Holberg,⁷ she might be intending to use the popularity of the theatre to establish the far less canonical prose form⁸ by drawing on canonical texts or to engage in a dialogue with the theatricality specific to Holberg's characters. With reference to the question of female production concepts, one must also wonder how an anonymous female producer of literature such as Gyllembourg, who always imposed modesty and demureness on her exemplary female protagonists, dealt with the demand for publicity inherent in the Heibergian agenda, which goes: "thi en Digter uden Tilhørere [...] er ligesom et Lys uden Lysning, en Tone uden Klang."⁹

As a rule, Gyllembourg's stories possess complex structures but can be reduced to a simple core. In this particular case one might say that we are dealing with two couples, two brothers and two girl-friends, who eventually arrive at a double happy ending. The most important complicating element in the story is already hinted at by the title: the main male protagonist, Conrad, is a character with the same faults as Holberg's Erasmus Montanus: he has acquired knowledge while travelling abroad, but overestimates his own abilities, so that his development can be summarised by the saying "pride goes before fall". Just like Holberg's protagonist, Conrad has to undergo a process of repentance before attaining happiness, which makes the question of development and ability to change one of the central themes of the narrative. But while this particular play by Holberg is often treated as a typical case that exemplifies the theatricality of his characters — that is their identity appears to be defined by the context and is realised in performative acts,¹⁰ so that identity becomes role — the Heibergian school represents rather an idealistic belief in principles of "dannelse" (development and education) whose goal it is to bring together interior and exterior, "Sein" and "Schein". The ironic ending of *Erasmus Montanus* even requires the protagonist to give up his belief that the earth is spherical in order to re-establish order and achieve a happy ending. At the end he succumbs to external pressure; an argument from the sphere of "Schein" defines the "Sein" of his personality, which is probably only superficially reformed — a conclusion that would seem unacceptable to Johan Ludvig Heiberg's ideal of "dannelse".

II. Contested values: The semiotic nature of the monetary discourse

The development of Gyllembourg's male protagonist takes place in a field that seems to be structured by dichotomous concepts: the basic opposition between "Sein" and

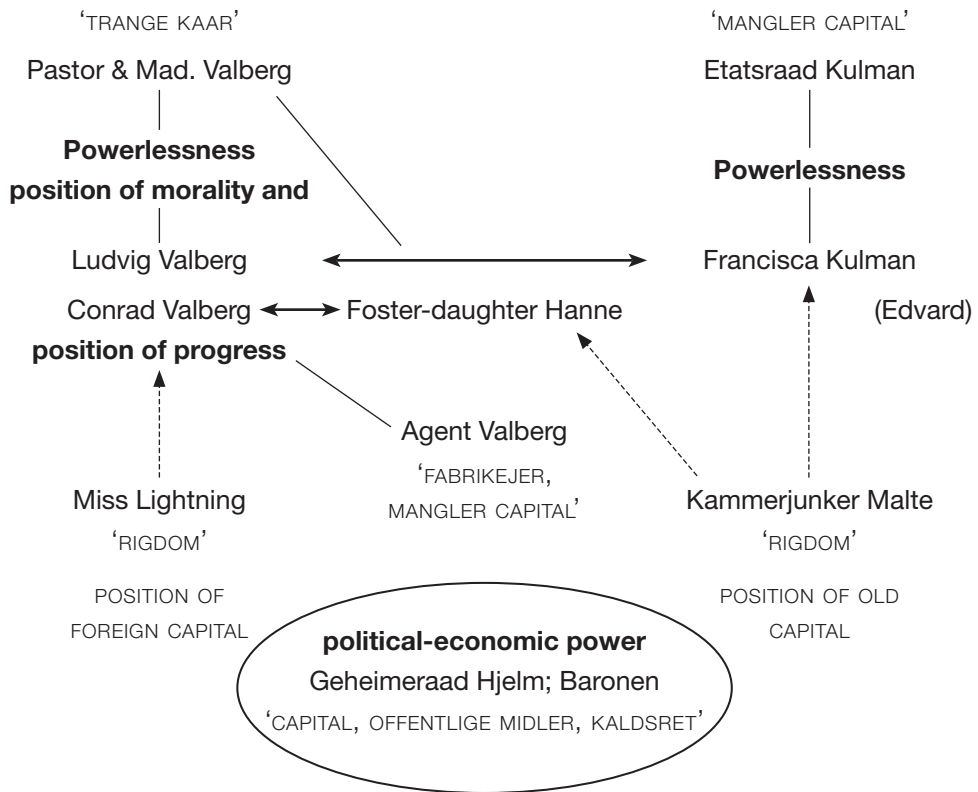
“Schein” is picked up in the opposition between materialism and idealism. Related to this are the oppositions between progress and tradition, abroad and home, science and art, sense and sentiment. The dominant reception of this text sees it as a love story, but the happy ending for the two couples is based not only on feelings and felicity, but also — just as in Jane Austen — on their economic circumstances, which always play a part in the negotiation of happiness.¹¹ This becomes clear if we consider that the theme of “forandring”, of change, applies both to the development of the characters and to the economic level of the text: on the one side we have maturation and repentance, on the other modernisation and progress. The monetary discourse forms an interface between the public and the private sphere in which the latter is structured by the relationship between the sexes: in order to bring a loving couple together in matrimony certain economic requirements have to be met which, in Gyllembourg’s time, were proximately fulfilled by the husband’s income, but more importantly by the inheritance of the husband and/or the dowry of the wife. This also means that genealogy, fatherhood, and progeny, as well as being entitled to family-wealth play an important part in the happy ending scenario. This complex constellation requires compatibility of both heart and coin, which can of course lead to conflicts and thus provides the stuff novels are made of.

Convergence and potential conflict can be traced in the homologous use of terms such as “Værdi”, “fortjene” or “eje”, all of which are important in this context. Not only the financial level is concerned with words such as “Capital”, “Formue”, “Renter”, “Rigdom” or “indskrænkede Kaar”, with “Regnskab”, “Omkostninger”, “Beregninger”, “of-fentlige Midler” or “Vexler”, but the monetary discourse of the 18th and 19th centuries is inherently semiotic as a whole, a fact that is mirrored by other discourses and by language itself.¹² In the text I am discussing here, this homology is manifest in the use of the word “Værdi”, value, to which various characters assign different meanings: what for one (Conrad) is “uden al Værdi”, by which he means the value of money, is for another (Hanne) her “most prized possession” (MdY, 38–39), by which she means the emotional value of a gift of love. Barbara Herrnstein Smith has spoken of a “double discourse of value”¹³ which is typical of the time: romantic economic criticism upholds purely spiritual and aesthetic values in the face of utilitarianism. This antagonism is referenced at the beginning of Gyllembourg’s narrative and presented as a conflict between two lovers. As a result both the discourses of love and economy and gender-typical perspectives collide inside this word. Femininity is hereby ideally constituted by an appreciation of symbolic capital, whereas the representation of economic capital is restricted to the male actor. But other characters in the novel — especially Conrad’s brother Ludvig — show that this typology of gender is not biologically determined. Gyllembourg’s texts in general are remarkable for the fact that although they construct

a firmly ordered gender-dichotomy as an ideal, they also put it in perspective by transgressions of various kinds and thereby clearly expose the culturally constructed nature of the concepts of male and female.

*III. Force fields and necessary contingencies:
a short “socio-analysis” of the narrative*

As my argument and the terminology I have been using suggest, the plot of the novel can be summarised in the form of a socio-analysis in the vein of Pierre Bourdieu,¹⁴ as visualised in the following scheme:



The most important level of the plot, which takes place in the younger generation, is located in the centre of the image; above and below it I have arranged the family backgrounds and certain groups of interest, all of which belong to an older generation and function as helpers or catalysts. Among the characters we have members of two families, the Valbergs and the Kulmans, who are linked by a mutual bond of friend-

ship. Etatsraad Kulman has a daughter named Francisca, who is a close friend of the adoptive daughter of parson Valberg and his wife. She is in love with the elder Valberg son Ludvig, who has studied theology, whereas her friend Hanne is in love with the younger son Conrad, who is himself returning from five years spent abroad and is now supposed to take over the factory belonging to his uncle and adoptive father, Agent Valberg. These romances are disturbed not only by the arrogance and callousness of the newly worldly-wise Conrad or the financial inadequacy of the theologian Ludvig, but also by the interventions of Kammerjunker Malte, who hankers after first the one, then the other of the two girls, and finally by Ludvig’s unconsummated love affair with a certain Miss Lightning, who does not actually appear in the text in person, during his time abroad. The arrows accordingly represent amorous relationships, the dotted lines denoting unsuccessful ones, and the broad arrows successful ones. The straight vertical lines represent biological/genealogical relationships, whereas the angled lines show the relationships between adoptive parents and children.

Speaking with Bourdieu, these characters are situated in a social field (“champ social”) composed of positive and negative forces, whose interplay constructs the world of the dominant class, “dont les éléments, unis par une combinatoire quasi systématique, sont soumis à l’ensemble systématique des forces répulsives ou attractives qu’exerce sur eux le champ de pouvoir, c’est-à-dire le champ des positions constitutives de la classe dominante”.¹⁵ In this well-known essay on Flaubert’s *Education Sentimentale*, he suggests that the author created “une groupe de quatre adolescents, [...] tel que chacun de ses membres soit uni à chacun des autres et séparé de tous les autres par un ensemble de similitudes et différences distribuées de manière à peu près systématique.”¹⁶ Although I am obviously not suggesting that there are any similarities between the depictions of society in Gyllembourg and Flaubert, this aspect of fictional construction nevertheless constitutes a strong parallel. As Bourdieu observed, we have “le pôle du pouvoir politique et économique” and “le pôle opposé”,¹⁷ “le représentant de l’argent et des affaires”,¹⁸ “les héritiers”¹⁹ and “la transmission de pouvoir entre les générations [qui] représente toujours un moment critique de l’histoire des unités domestiques”²⁰ — all these points from Bourdieu’s socio-analysis apply equally to the construction of Gyllembourg’s social space. What we also have in Gyllembourg are “les accidents nécessaires”²¹ — another quotation — which serve to get the game started. The economic situation and the power potential of the various agents that results from it are crucial for these conflicts and their resolution.

These relationships take the following shape: whereas the parent generation of both the Valbergs and the Kulmans, including the factory owner, are dependent upon external capital, especially when it comes to the marriages and futures of their children, Chamberlain Malte and the English Miss would both be prepared and able to invest

significant amounts of capital. This economic power that would provide the factory with a future and Francisca with a husband is in conflict with the emotional attachment of the main characters that was explained earlier. This conflict is intensified by the fact that economic power coincides with social capital and social status. As the scheme shows, there is only one entity capable of introducing an element of flexibility and motion, namely Ludvig, who functions as an agent of progress, whereas all the others have to support themselves by drawing on traditional values and old forms of capital. But before a solution to this conflict between economic deadlock and social blockade can be produced, the privy councilor, Geheimraad Hjelm, who had been angered by Conrad's arrogance, first needs to be won over, so that he can resolve the situation by introducing a new source of capital, namely public money. Crucial for the satisfactory solution of the private conflicts — i.e. the two marriages — is the intervention of political and economic power, represented by Hjelm and the Baron, whose “kaldsrettighed” (MdY, 143), that is the right to appoint the priest on his estate, finally also procures a lucrative position for our persevering hero Ludvig and also enables him to marry — another “necessary contingency”, as Bourdieu would put it.²² Thus the core elements are love and marriage (arrows), but also old and new money (small capitals) and power and powerlessness (shadowed lettering).

This makes a sociological reading of the narrative highly appropriate and also puts the presence of the monetary discourse beyond doubt. That the discourse of trust, which is always implicit in financial engagements, also plays a part in this scenario is exemplified on the plot level by the relationship between the two central female characters. In the course of events they pass from trust to distrust and finally to new trust, and constitute a model case for the modest and homely ideal of femininity, which is thereby reinforced. The diagram also shows that although femininity is the focal point of desire, it is also dominated by the contingency of events and possesses a very limited potential to act on its own. And yet the crucial move is made by a brave act of female willpower, when Hanne supports Conrad in spite of everything. The position of femininity is not only stable, but reinforced, whereas masculinity, as presented by the novel, is in need of change. In this respect, the course of events not only implies a reassertion of female values, but also a criticism of male ones and male norms of behaviour. The Holbergian intertext serves to problematise and intensify this even further, though it may not be intentional. For in the same way as Erasmus Montanus only undergoes a superficial, theatrical repentance, Conrad's sudden change of mind is not fully convincing: the ideal of male identity appears to be produced by too many contingencies.

IV. Steam engines and national welfare: a socio-historical and discursive approach

The sociological reading that I embarked on earlier can be supported by social history and a discursive approach. The economic conflict presented by the novel was highly topical in Denmark in the 1830s. After the defeat in the Napoleonic Wars and the state bankruptcy in 1814, the economy of the country was in a sorry state. Trade had been flourishing in the 18th century, but the first decades of the 19th were dominated by an all encompassing economic crisis, exaggerated by the government's erroneous monetary policy. The resulting inflation caused a wave of bankruptcies among the big trading companies and in unprofitably managed parts of the industry amounting to a general collapse of economy and trade.²³ The situation became catastrophic during the agricultural crisis, which led to plummeting grain prices between 1818 and 1828, and coincided with a drop in overseas trade with the Caribbean islands, which had in the 18th century, thanks to the trilateral slave-trade, contributed significantly to the wealth of the big entrepreneurs. A fundamental problem was the lack of investment in new technologies and the underfunding of the industrial sector, making Denmark an industrially underdeveloped country by the European standards of the 1830s.²⁴

By choosing to place a textile factory in the centre of her plot, Gyllembourg selects the most important traditional industry in Copenhagen and Seeland,²⁵ where the narrative is set, with the possible exception of the arms industry, for which reliable data, for obvious reasons, are scarce. In the 1830s, the time frame in which the text is set, the textile industry, which had been prosperous, was especially affected by the general crisis; by the end of the century the number of factories was halved and the number of people they employed had fallen to about 100.²⁶ Denmark was no longer competitive in this industrial sector which in other countries, especially England, had profited from substantial modernisation and mechanisation. One main factor was the invention of new machines that were able to produce much more tightly threaded and smoother materials than had hitherto been possible. These were of course in high demand and were imported from abroad on a large scale. The second aspect was the generation of power, closely connected to the basic mechanisation with steam engines, which in Denmark did not begin on a larger scale until the 1840s, for although the first steam engine in Denmark was already introduced shortly before 1800, it was situated in a closed military zone at the Orlog shipyard; by 1820 there were only four steam powered machines in the entire country. According to Ole Hyltsoft, the first steam engine to be employed in the Copenhagen textile industry was not put into operation until 1847.²⁷

If these figures are correct, Gyllembourg's novel is not only topical, but verges on

the prophetic. For the level of the plot that is concerned with the economy deals extensively with the innovations that Conrad, having returned from his stay abroad, wants to introduce into his uncle's now unprofitable textile factory. "Jeg kan ikke forklare det jer", he says, "men store, gennemgribende Forandringer vare nødvendige. Nye Maskiner, som drives ved Dampkraft, nogle faa Mennesker fra Udlandet, som ere vante til at haandtere dem [...] Flere slige Ting har jeg bestilt fra England og noget fra Frankrig." (MdY, 31) Denmark's backwardness by comparison with England was also partly due to the fact that the so-called *Tool Acts* were in force until 1825, which imposed significant impediments upon the free market for machinery and new technologies.²⁸ But now, in the 1830s, innovations such as those envisaged by Conrad were necessary in order to restore competitiveness: "Et kapitalistisk produktionsapparat baseret på teknologioverførsel fra England måtte derfor blive et offentligt anliggende",²⁹ writes Dan Ch. Christensen in his study *Det modern project. Teknik og kultur i Danmark*. And a "modern project" of this kind is exactly what Gyllembourg's protagonist Conrad Valberg is pursuing.

But Conrad is not only concerned with the practical. He has also written a critically acclaimed study while he was abroad, entitled "en Afhandling om de forskjel- lige Landes Industrie", (MdY, 8) in which he has laid out his thoughts on modernisation. This pamphlet caused the temporary disagreement between him and his uncle and Hjelms. Conrad was banking on their trust and support when he signed the bills of exchange for the expensive new machinery while he was abroad, so this contretemps plunges him into a financial and existential crisis, which finally produces his catharsis. The bill of exchange therefore semanticises the turning point of the narrative: by functioning as a "semiotic intermediary",³⁰ as a sign both for money and for trust, its signature possesses a certain fictional power that is in control not only of failure and success but also of happiness and unhappiness. By continuing to have faith in Conrad, Hanne creates, one might say, a reciprocal relationship between those narrative levels that focus on love and those that focus on economy. Her faith in him ultimately prevents him from committing suicide. In this way, trust not only becomes indispensable in the abstract and intangible business of financial transactions but also appears as a quality of female love that accords social relevance to female ability to act independently. The discourse of trust links the psychological and the sociological fields; personal feelings come to benefit the general public.

The readers of the novel only encounter the content of Conrad's controversial study in a very rudimentary form; the few hints we are given just reveal that it is concerned with progressive thought, linking profit and prosperity to the freedom and equality of all working men and placing it in the service of the nation. The comparative treatment of various countries prefers Republican America to England and sharply criticises the

condition of Danish trade and industry, something which annoys its audience, especially the influential privy councilor Hjelms. It is unlikely that the fictional treatise is a summary of one of the contemporary theories of economics; the most prominent of these texts by leading economists such as David Ricardo (1772–1823) or Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834) deal with far more specialised and complex matters.³¹ Neither a theory of foreign trade nor a fiscal or a population policy are mentioned; Gyllembourgs narrative merely alludes to the fundamental social problem of unemployment caused by increased mechanisation.³² It is far more likely that the general points of Conrad’s treatise are drawn from the founding text of modern economics, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, which, although written as far back as 1776, long remained influential and whose basic points were widely known. Smith too was concerned with the comparative analysis of various national economies and with the public benefit of productive work. Like his fictional representative Conrad, he argues in favour of free competition and against mercantilism: the other themes, such as the division of labour, the statutory capping of interest rates, and the denunciation of slavery and British colonialism do not appear in Gyllembourgs text. Smith’s most famous phrase is the “invisible hand”,³³ which in his theory links the individual’s pursuit of wealth and happiness to the promotion of public welfare, the “wealth of nations”, which is derived from the productivity of its members. According to Smith, labour is destined to replace possession of land as the basis of economic prosperity.³⁴ He also mentions the higher productivity of the United States by comparison with England,³⁵ which he attributes to their greater degree of freedom, and touches on England’s dominance in the textile industry. The English manufactories, he writes, can produce much finer cloth than the Continental companies and are therefore capable of exporting very profitably.³⁶ By the way, this entire economic scenario, both Conrad’s version and Smith’s original, completely ignores women and Smith has also been criticised for it.³⁷

In the narrative as a whole, however, women play a very important part, and not only because the two heroines represent the power of trust; much more important is their function as wives and potential mothers. For while the economic and monetary plot level is concerned with increasing productivity, which in turn benefits national and individual welfare, the maintenance and preservation of these efforts for the future requires genealogical stability. It follows that the marriages that form the centre of the love plot not only need a financial basis but are in fact the crucial prerequisite for long-term economic success. The childless uncle and the frequently recurring theme of adoptive children³⁸ in Gyllembourgs work illustrate the need for a long-term stabilisation of private property and assets which can only be attained by biological productivity. The textile factory not only needs new machines and capital but also requires an heir, who then needs heirs of his own, for the investments to pay off. In this respect the

women do after all play an important part in the economic considerations — a point that is made far more explicit in the novel than in economic theories. In this text, we therefore have another invisible, because unmentioned force, which is dependent on the female sex and operates alongside Adam Smith's "invisible hand", namely biological productivity.

We can conclude that the discourse of production and productivity occupies a key position in the novel. It is therefore not surprising that the text devotes another level of the plot to productivity; a level that self-reflexively mirrors this theme and allows inferences as to its own understanding of production. Although we do not have any fictional artists,³⁹ whose works or opinions are often used to discuss theories of artistic production, there are nevertheless some episodes that allow an insight into this self-reflexive dimension, the "economics of authorship" as Woodmansee and Osteen have called it.⁴⁰

V. "Economics of authorship": Cultural discourses of production

Conrad's theory of production is exclusively concerned with attaining economic prosperity and is explicitly opposed to the arts. This is problematised by a number of other approaches, partly in scenes of open discussion, partly by implicit contrast with other models of production. The narrative opens with the description of the attic room that Hanne has affectionately decorated on the occasion of her fiancé's return: she has made, and arranged some new furniture, curtains, blankets, bedcovers and pillowcases, wallpaper, pictures and embroideries, and has thereby proven that she possesses some of the important characteristics that constitute ideal femininity, such as industriousness, aptitude, and good taste. Because she has hardly any money at her disposal, the furnishing of the room is also another example of the predominance of symbolic over economic capital with which the female gender is associated. Her future brother-in-law Ludvig is full of praise for her efforts: "En saadan Skjønhedssands, en saadan Gratie, som her aabenbarer sig, maa visselig regnes til de skjønne Kunstner. Det er dette Hele, som er et lille Kunstværk. Dette tilforn saa fattige Kammer, hvor er det nu forvandlet" (MdY, 17). In this passage Ludvig develops a conception of art in which — besides the aspects of skill, material, and hard work — the aspect of art's effect is important: the transformation of the room should also have a transforming effect on the recipient: "I Sandhed, kjære Hanne, du har forstaaet at berede din Ven et sandt Hjem, et Tilflugtssted mod ond Lune, mod Uro og Mismod [...] thi Alt dette har Du med en Kjærligheds Haand beredet for ham, I lang Tid arbejdet med Glæde og Æmhed." (MdY, 17)

In this long initial scene we thus find everyday female activity being given the sta-

tus of art; its value results from the diligence and effort of the production aspect as well as from the effect it is intended to achieve. Unfortunately in vain: in his arrogance Conrad fails to notice the changes and even criticises Hanne’s work as unproductive: “Der er synd”, he says to his future wife, “at du har anvendt saa megen Tid og udmat- tet dine Øine med at pynte op til mig” (MdY, 34). As far as he is concerned Hanne’s hand-embroidered blankets would have had more economic significance, if they had been woven in a factory. Whereas her understanding of production derives the value of a product from the amount of labour involved, Conrad’s conception of productiv- ity emphasises efficiency and speed. The oppositions between materialism and ideal- ism or between progress and tradition are crucial here, but we should not ignore the is- sue of effect which Hanne fails to achieve and which, according to Ludvig, is required to make mere craft into art. In this respect, Hanne’s efforts do remain unproductive af- ter all.⁴¹

This point is also made by the most controversial item in the room, a copper en- graving showing Abelard and Heloise. Ludvig has already expressed his surprise at the choice, whereas Hanne only sees the pretty surface, thus betraying both her lack of ed- ucation and her taste for the sentimental. Because she does not know the details of the story of the French lovers, she cannot perceive a level of meaning in the picture that parallels her own activity. After his castration and their withdrawal to separate lives in religious houses, Abelard and Heloise come to signify deep and passionate but ul- timately unproductive love, and thus form an opposition to everything that Gyllem- bourg’s characters and her narrative stand for. As my reading of these episodes as self- reflexive passages shows, the productivity of art and culture results from the combi- nation of intention, material, the manufacturing process, and finally effect. All this is absent from the engraving due to Hanne’s ignorance; it had already been thrown away by someone else and she had simply been taken in by its decorative surface, without thought or intention and without achieving any effect: Conrad cannot stand the pic- ture.

Production and effect result in economic productivity, the aim of the economic level of the plot, which in turn requires a necessary addition of biological productiv- ity in order to maintain and stabilise itself over time. Art and culture, which some of the characters present as the opposite of economics and science,⁴² share both the as- pect of creation and the aspect of function with economics. Such views are repeatedly put in the mouth of Ludvig, who seems to come close to functioning as an authorial mouthpiece,⁴³ when he subverts the dichotomy of economy and culture. How art can become productive is shown by two discussion-scenes in the novel, in which cultural goods produce the effects they are capable of: reflection and revelation, on one occa- sion it is consolation and appeasement, or, on another, it is criticism and comprehen-

sion. On the one hand we have Ludvig's sermon, which is "saa poetisk, saa dybsindig og dog saa populair" (MdY, 142) that it has an impact on all its hearers, from peasant to baron. It combines its Christian message with an entertaining mode of presentation so that the uneducated peasants can grasp its essence without comprehending its content and also has the agreeable side effect of inducing the baron to offer him the living on his estate. As a result even this disinterested and unsuspecting cultural product inherently possesses an economic subtext.

The second instance is a lengthy controversial discussion about the well-known Aesopian fable of the two jugs that appear as an iron and a clay pot in Christian Winther's Danish translation. This scene also shows the productive effect of culture, which consists in exchanging opinions and gaining insights. And it highlights the exceptional productive force of an indirect, camouflaged statement. The sermon scene already differentiated between the literal and the metaphorical levels of meaning; in this second scene Ludvig once again functions as an authorial mouthpiece and emphasises the value of the indirect, poetical or even camouflaged message, as opposed to pragmatic Conrad, who prefers direct statements and undisguised opinions. The scene itself also proves that it is precisely the metaphorical ambivalence, the allusive nature of a message that is merely hinted at, which constitutes the productivity of the fable. What appears as "Nonsense" (MdY, 74) in Conrad's literal reading can be substantiated in various ways and thereby made productive — this is of course also the reason why the fable has survived throughout the ages. Another scene, Hanne's initially misunderstood letter, indicates that the realisation of meanings requires a hermeneutic ability, the lack of which leads to delays in the resolution of the plot. A text written with a certain intention can often not be understood without having first been decoded; the production of such a text involves the anticipation of a reciprocal relationship. This quality becomes even more important when dealing with artistic texts like the one by Gyllembourg — and the episodes I have mentioned allow some interesting insights into its poetics.

VI. Poetics of the "invisible hand"

Just like the textual turning point, which is semanticised by the unsecured bill of exchange that Conrad signed while he was abroad in order to revitalise trade and prosperity in his home country, culture, art, and literature evidently also function as "semi-otic intermediaries", as Richard T. Gray has termed the abstract paper money that was introduced in the first half of the 19th century.⁴⁴ The bill of exchange which figures so prominently in Gyllembourg's narrative is also made of worthless paper, but this material vehicle obtains a fictional value by means of the signature it bears. The aspect of

deception is therefore an integral part of its existence, it is written into its very material, making both risk and trust inherent factors as well. Necessary pre-requisites for its productivity are the realisation of this potential for deception and the trust in the fictional value of such bills, which was crucial for large-scale financial transactions before the institutionalisation of banks, and functioned as an important catalyst for economic growth.

In the shape of fictionalisation, deception is also a basic characteristic of literature, and of Gyllembourg's authorship in particular. It is widely known that she operated under the pseudonym “Forfatteren til en Hverdags-Historie”, publishing anonymously in her son's weekly periodical *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, and carefully protected her true identity.⁴⁵ Her texts became very popular; they were successful in the book market and helped to increase both the magazine's circulation and her own financial standing.⁴⁶ The secrecy about her authorship benefitted her market value even more and the much discussed masking of the author generated exactly the kind of effect that was postulated in the passages about art in *Montanus den Yngre*. For the author, her first few successful publications also brought about high productivity: although she was already 53 years old when she made her debut, she wrote 29 stories, novels and plays over the course of the following 17 years, totalling over 3000 printed pages, as most of the so-called *Fortællinger* are of novel length. A look at the public debates about the authorship of her work, which have often been studied,⁴⁷ shows that, besides the themes of her texts themselves, it was her anonymity that appealed to the public and triggered a dialogical effect.

In trying to answer the question as to how this dialogical effect is created, previous research has often concentrated on the gender-specific aspects and pointed to a fact that is important for Gyllembourg's aesthetics of production, namely that she claimed to have written everything using the ink well belonging to her son Ludvig as a child. Marie-Louise Svane deduces from this “hvor fast hendes kreativitet var sammenbundet med opfattelsen af sig selv som mor, men den indicerer samtidig, hvordan hun symbolsk ‘låner’ sønnens seksuelle køn i skabende øjemed. Skriveakten viser sig på én gang som moderlig selvbekræftelse og — i den konkrete figurering af pen og blæk — som en fallisk aktivitet.”⁴⁸ This at least partially corresponds to Gyllembourg's own statement in her so-called “literary testament”, in which she also primarily presents herself as a mother who wrote her contributions to the periodical to help her son.⁴⁹

But if we take a closer look at this ink well, it quickly loses its alleged innocence.⁵⁰ It consists of an (implausibly deep) half cockle-shell against which a naked putto rests his folded arms. His gaze is directed towards a flame that emerges from a platform that covers half of the shell. Attached to this platform are two small containers for quills. The shell rests on a bed of smaller double-shells, obviously evoking the sea. Al-

though we must allow that there were no real toys for children in the modern sense when Thomasine's father gave her son the ink well sometime around 1800, this item is definitely not intended to be used by a child. Although it is small and delicate and the putto might even be described as cute, its delicacy suggests a utensil for *billets-doux*, for the writing of secret love letters. This is emphasised by its symbolism: the putto becomes Eros or Amor, if we pay attention to the semiotic content of the ink container, which is shaped like an open sea shell, the symbol of Aphrodite or Venus, the goddess of love, eroticism, and productivity. This symbol is widely known from Botticelli's famous painting, but has a long iconographic history. A Corinthian terracotta statuette of the 4th century BCE⁵¹ for example depicts Aphrodite in the sea shell, as a sign of her birth from the ocean-foam. This iconographic scheme was widely imitated in Greek and later art, carrying far-reaching connotations of femininity: "A[phrodite] stellt im griech. Pantheon die gesamte Ambiguität der Weiblichkeit dar, den verführerischen Charme ebenso wie die Notwendigkeit der Fortpflanzung und ein Potential an Täuschung";⁵² it is thus not at all surprising that Gyllembourg preferred this ink well. Aphrodite herself is not present on it, she is merely hinted at by the oddly shaped red flame in its centre, which of course alludes to the burning passion of love. The supports for the quills would even allow the addition of a phallic element, if you want to stress that aspect.

The usual assumption of Gyllembourg's motherly and innocent nature is subverted by an image of eroticism and productivity. The allusiveness of the image fits perfectly with her poetics of masquerade and deception. Just as the materiality of the writing springs from this well of ink, so it is the origin of her dialogical poetics, with their focus on success and the needs of the market. The utensil can be seen as a symbol of the productive power of her writing, of masquerade and deception. In the same way as eroticism and female productivity form the tacit centre of the ink well, they also form the unexpressed centre of Gyllembourg's work. This secret productivity corresponds to her unadmitted position on the market; she speaks of love for her son, while at the same time earning substantial amounts of money with her publications. The moral impetus of her literature does not seem to clash with its status as a product intended for commercial success, which is itself necessitated by the search for an audience, without which — according to Heiberg — a "note" has no "sound".

Authors such as Charles Dickens or George Eliot represent the market as a "tragic but inescapable mechanism",⁵³ which needs to be balanced out by a soothing, humane private space that functions as a corrective or palliative. Gyllembourg's work, however, is capable of combining female, artistic, and economic productivity. This refers both to her dialogic poetics, whose effectiveness is at least in part due to veiling and omission, and to the fictional world of her narratives, where economics, love, and sexual

productivity interact and reciprocally promote and depend on each other. The passion of castrated Abelard and Hanne’s purely industrious efforts at interior design are both equally far from being ideal. At the critical moment when the bill of exchange threatens to fail, the female protagonist has to employ her love as a pledge of trust in order to bring new hope to the plans of her fiancé. In this respect she, as the representative of modest domesticity, shows a potential for audacity and a capacity to act, which, while not exceeding the norms of female behaviour, does question her status as a mere object. When the narrative finally succeeds “at indrette Alt efter alle Parters Tilfredshed”, this not only reconciles the various spouses as well as love and economics, but also expresses a basic confidence in the “invisible hand” of the productive market that has its parallel in Gyllembourg’s carefully employed deception strategies.

(translated from German by Henry Heitmann-Gordon)

NOTES

- 1 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, R.W. Chapman ed., vol. 2., London 1959³, p. 3.
- 2 Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, London 1976.
- 3 See eg. Stig Dalger & Anne-Marie Mai, *Danske kvindelige forfattere*, vol. 1., København 1982, p. 157.
- 4 Moers 1975, p. 71.
- 5 Thomasine Gyllembourg, *Montanus den Yngre*, in *Samlede Skrifter af Forf. Til ‘En Hverdagshistorie’*, vol. 7, Kjøbenhavn 1867, p. 1–175, hereafter quoted in the main text as MdY.
- 6 Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *Om Vaudevillen som dramatisk Digtart og om dens Betydning paa den danske Skueplads. En dramaturgisk undersøgelse*, in *J.L. Heibergs Samlede Skrifter. Prosaiske Skrifter*, vol. 6, Kjøbenhavn 1861, p. 1–111. On Gyllembourg’s reference to Holberg see also: Johan de Mylius, “Om Holbergs genopstandelse i guldalderlitteraturen”, *Nordica* 26, 2009, p. 61–77.
- 7 See Henning Fenger & Frederick Marker, *The Heibergs*, New York 1971, pp. 142 f. Fenger and Marker write: “*Montanus the Younger (Montanus den Yngre)* was a direct attempt to adapt Holberg’s classical comedy *Erasmus Montanus* to novel form and modernise the subject.” (p. 149)
- 8 Fenger & Marker 1971, p. 142.
- 9 Heiberg 1861, p. 5.
- 10 This concept of theatricality is exemplified in the scene, when Nille in a performative act is ‘turned into a stone’. See Ludvig Holberg, *Erasmus Montanus*, in *Værker i tolv bind*, F. J. Billeskov Jansen ed., vol. VI, København 1970, p. 160.
- 11 An early feminist reading of Gyllembourg’s work was entitled: *Penge og kærlighed*. See

- Anni Broue Jensen, *Penge og kærlighed. Religion og socialitet i Thomasine Gyllembourgs forfatterskab*, København 1983.
- 12 See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital. The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, Chicago & London 1993.
- 13 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value*. Cambridge, Mass. & London 1988, p. 33.
- 14 Pierre Bourdieu, "L'invention de la vie d'artiste", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 1, no. 1.2, 1975, p. 67–93.
- 15 Bordieu 1975, p. 78.
- 16 Bordieu 1975, p. 78.
- 17 Bordieu 1975, pp. 73 f.
- 18 Bordieu 1975, p. 70.
- 19 Bordieu 1975, p. 79.
- 20 Bordieu 1975, p. 70.
- 21 Bordieu 1975, p. 83.
- 22 Bordieu 1975, p. 83.
- 23 See Jens Vibæk, "Reform og fallit 1784–1836", in John Danstrup & Hal Koch (eds.), *Danmarkshistorie*, vol. 10, København 1964, pp. 436–439.
- 24 See Vibæk 1964, pp. 451–460.
- 25 See Ole Hyldtoft, *Københavns industrialisering 1840–1914*, København 1984, p. 74.
- 26 See Hyldtoft 1984, p. 86.
- 27 See Hyldtoft 1984, p. 80.
- 28 See Dan Chr. Christensen, *Det moderne projekt. Teknik og kultur i Danmark 1750–(1814)–1850*, København 1996, p. 267.
- 29 Christensen 1996, p. 266.
- 30 Richard T. Gray, "Buying into signs: money and semiosis in eighteenth-century German language theory", in Martha Woodmansee & Marc Osteen (eds.), *The New Economic Criticism. Studies at the intersection of literature and economics*, London & New York 1999, pp. 95–113, here p. 99.
- 31 David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, London 1817; Thomas Robert Malthus, *Principles of Economics*, London 1820.
- 32 The problem of the labour thereby made redundant is resolved in in a naively optimistic manner: The forman in the factory and representative of tradition, Olsen, is to lose his place in the firm in the new age of machines and technology, but will be supported financially by the uncle: "[...] om ogsaa Maskinerne gjorde et mindre Antal Folk nødvendigt, saa vilde den forøgede Drift erstatte dette Savn, og især give mange Dagleiere Arbeide." (MdY, 60)
- 33 Smith uses this much quoted phrase only once in his work, in Book 4, chapter 2, in the context of limitations on trade. "By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he [every individual] intends only his own security, and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end

- which was not part of his intention.” (Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 3 vols., vol. 2, fourth edition, London 1786 [1776], p. 181)
- 34 See Smith 1786., book 1, chapter 5.
- 35 See Smith 1786, p. 106 (book 1, chapter 8).
- 36 See Smith 1786, p. 116–117 (book 3, chapter 3).
- 37 Helen Winter & Thomas Rommel, *Adam Smith für Anfänger: Der Wohlstand der Nationen — eine Lese-Einführung*, München 2006³, pp. 143–146. The authors refer to James Buchan, *The Authentic Adam Smith*, New York 2006.
- 38 See also Lise Busk-Jensen, *Romantikens Forfatterinder*, vol. 2, København 2009, pp. 865 f.
- 39 Only the story *Extremerne* (1835) explicitly thematises a female artist and artistic work by a woman.
- 40 Woodmansee & Osteen 1999, p. 6.
- 41 Busk-Jensen also quotes this passage, but reads it only as an expression of the gender-dichotomy and a male renunciation of female “intimsfærefærdigheder”. (Busk-Jensen 2009, p. 891)
- 42 Kammerjunker Malte is the most explicit representative of unproductive, purely sentimental art.
- 43 See also de Mylius 2009, p. 72.
- 44 Gray 1999, p. 99.
- 45 See f.ex. Klaus P. Mortensen, *Thomasines oprør — en familiehistorisk biografi om køn og kærlighed i forrige århundrede*, København 1986; Busk-Jensen 2009, pp. 846–849.
- 46 See Busk-Jensen 2009, pp. 846–849. The lively reception at the author’s time is another indicator of success. It is documented in detail by Busk-Jensen. See Busk-Jensen 2009, pp. 898–905. See also Birgit Mortensen & Marie Louise Sodemann, “Fuldendelsens noveller. Om Thomasine Gyllembourg”, in Elisabeth Møller Jensen (ed.), *Nordisk Kvindelitteraturhistorie, vol. 2*, København 1993, pp. 229–241, here p. 241: “Helt fra den første novelle [...] var den økonomiske sidegevinst ved skrивerierne af ikke uvæsentlig betydning for den altid vaklende fælles økonomi”. Mortensen and Sodemann illustrate this statement by means of letters, in which the author complains about her financial situation.
- 47 See eg. Mortensen 1986.
- 48 Marie-Louise Svane, “Muser, mødre og døtre. Prosaens forfatterinder”, in Steffen Auring et al. (eds.), *Dansk litteratur historie*, vol. 5, København 1984, pp. 442–482, here p. 462.
- 49 See Thomasine Gyllembourg, “Fru Gyllembourgs litterære Testamente”, in *Samlede Skrifter* 1867, vol. 1, pp. 1–5.
- 50 The ink well can be seen in Bakkehus Museet in Copenhagen.
- 51 See János György Szilágyi: *Ancient Art*. Department of Antiquities. Handbook of the Permanent Exhibition, Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest 2003, p. 65.
- 52 Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, “Aphrodite”, in *Der neue Pauly*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmut Schneider, vol. 1, Stuttgart 1996, p. 838–843.
- 53 Elaine Freedgood, “Banishing panic: Harriet Martineau and the popularization of political economy”, in Woodmansee & Osteen (eds.) 1999, pp. 210–228, here p. 212.