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## Self-Fashioning and Gender Construction in Franziska zu Reventlow's *Amouresken*

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**A**utobiography is the art of self-exposure. It involves disrobing in public, inviting judgment, both praise and blame. German women in the early twentieth century were generally hesitant to risk such scrutiny. Many women wrote but did not publish their autobiographies, while others arranged to have them published by men or under pseudonyms. Trying to account for the historical reluctance of women to publish their life histories, Sidonie Smith suggests that, "for women, [...] to take a voice and authorize a public life are to risk loss of reputation" (10). By attempting to assert the legitimacy of her life and experiences in writing, a woman thus runs the risk of social condemnation. Sigrid Weigel agrees with Smith that the decision to enter the male-dominated realm of autobiographical literature has been a difficult and socially dangerous one for women. She explains that

women's reluctance to flaunt themselves on the literary market is a result of their experience in the private sphere. Their exclusion from economics, politics and culture implies that authentic women's literature at first could only give voice to 'merely' personal and subjective feelings and concerns. The publication of women's subjectivity is, however, not equivalent to her liberation, for it has consequences (often unpleasant ones) for her personal happiness. (66)

Fear of negative consequences did not, of course, deter all early twentieth-century women from publishing their autobiographies. Women who did risk such exposure, however, often felt a need to protect themselves by making their self-representations conform to society's standards for an ideal, virtuous woman. As a result, the typical female autobiography, which



Smith describes as "a convention of patriarchal culture" (10), has rarely been representative of the realities of women's social and individual experiences.

In light of this tradition, Franziska zu Reventlow's autobiographical novel *Amouresken: Von Paul zu Pedro* is particularly striking, for Reventlow dares to flaunt herself as an independent woman, playing with the reader's expectations and literary norms. She combines anecdotes from her unconventional love life with daringly ambiguous autobiographical strategies in order to convey the realities of her experiences without explicitly challenging social expectations and incurring censorial punishment. Reventlow's choice of the epistolary novel, long regarded as a particularly female genre, links her to earlier German women writers such as Sophie von la Roche. Yet her aim in invoking this tradition is to subvert it and present her own bold view of the reality of a woman's existence. She refuses to masquerade as an ideal, unblemished woman; instead, she celebrates her transgressive behavior and calls Wilhelminian gender roles into question. Through her playful manipulation of language, both spoken and unspoken, Reventlow uses *Amouresken* as a vehicle for self-fashioning and exploring social constructions of gender, femininity, and identity.

When *Amouresken*, Reventlow's second novel, appeared in 1912, the author was already well-known, but not for her writing. Instead, she was known for her adventurous life and sexual emancipation. Born into an aristocratic family in Schleswig-Holstein, Reventlow first became famous as "[die] Göttin der Schwabinger Bohème" around the turn of the century in Munich. She describes these early years of heady freedom in her first novel, *Ellen Oestjerne*, published in 1903. The novel draws extensively on Reventlow's diaries and letters from her teenage years in Lübeck, where she began to rebel against the repressive expectations of her conservative family. In *Ellen Oestjerne*, Reventlow describes her first encounter with the works of Henrik Ibsen and the fever they inflamed in her, prompting her to flee to Munich in search of artistic and erotic emancipation. Her devotion to her illegitimate son Rolf earned Reventlow the designation "eine heidnische Madonna" from Ludwig Klages and a central role in the *Mutterkult* of the *Kosmikerunde* headed by Klages. At the same time, her sexual escapades, both for pleasure and for money, earned the title "die Skandalgräfin Schwabings." In 1909, the destitute Reventlow left Munich for a utopian colony in Ascona, Switzerland, where she entered into a marriage of convenience, arranged by Erich Mühsam, with the alcoholic

Baltic Baron Rechenberg. According to their bargain, she received half of the Baron's inheritance, but she was left penniless once again when the bank failed soon after. Ten years after the publication of her first novel, Reventlow returned to writing, producing four more novels before her death in 1918 at the age of 47 from complications of an operation. Her colorful life has continued to attract the attention of historians and scholars, who tend to concentrate primarily on her erotic adventures rather than on her writing.

Although contemporary reviews such as Joseph Hofmiller's comments in "Anmerkungen zu Büchern" in the *Süddeutschen Monatsheft* from July 1912, remark positively on Reventlow's "anmutige und geistvolle Verteidigung der äußersten Flatterhaftigkeit in allen Liebesdingen," later critics tend to disregard textual analysis in favor of the author's scandalous biography. This is due in part to the large chronological gaps between republications of her works. *Amouresken* was included in Reventlow's *Gesammelte Werke*, published in 1925 by Langen Verlag, but not again until 1969, when Rowohlt produced an edition retitled *Von Paul zu Pedro oder von der Schwierigkeit, nur einen Mann zu lieben*. In the mid-1980s, Ullstein Verlag reissued nearly all of Reventlow's novels in paperback, combining *Von Paul zu Pedro* with *Herrn Dams Aufzeichnungen* in 1987. Finally, in 1994, Martus Verlag printed an elegant hardcover edition under the original title. In the meantime, however, Reventlow herself reappeared in various journalistic reincarnations, as the embodiment of the now-vanished Schwabinger Bohème in the various articles from the 1920s, the quintessential devoted mother in the Nazi newspaper *Germania* in 1933, a model for the strong women needed to rebuild Germany in *Der Tagesspiegel* in 1946, and the sexually-liberated feminist ideal in a wide array of German newspapers and television programs throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. Oda Schaefer, in a review of Reventlow's works in the *Deutsche Zeitung* from August 27, 1958, speaks for most critics when she comments rather apologetically that "sie [Reventlow] konnte nur schreiben, was sie erlebt hatte." In their haste to claim Reventlow's life for their respective causes, the majority of critics have overlooked her contributions to German literature or dismissed them as merely "autobiographical."

However, Reventlow's skillful use of language and form in *Amouresken* dispels the myth that her life was more worthy of critical attention than her writing. While Reventlow did have many adventures, it is her ability to fashion her own experiences in such a way as to present her



emancipated lifestyle as a valid alternative to traditional female roles that demonstrates her literary talent. The novel's strength is not its plot line, which is minimal, but rather the way in which it challenges conventional autobiographical accounts. In her October 2, 1976 review of Reventlow's novels in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, Sibylle Wirsing summarizes the plot in a few words:

nichts anderes [kommt vor], als daß die Erzählerin, die Verfasserin vertraulicher Briefe, eben das, was man einen Roman nennt, nicht erlebt, sich aber mit erotischen Impromptus über diese Lücke hinweghilft. Dem Leser wird von den Liebeleien immer nur der Nachtrag mitgeteilt, die Gefühle vom Tag darauf. ("Das gewagte Vergnügen")

These teasing glimpses, balanced by a healthy dose of self-critical irony, make *Amoresken* memorable. The tone and structure of *Amoresken* is much more relaxed and daring than that of *Ellen Oestjerne*, due perhaps to Reventlow's escape from the restrictive patriarchal censorship of Wilhelminian Germany into the eccentric freedom of pre-war Ascona.

Reventlow deliberately chose an epistolary format for *Amoresken*, both for the literary tradition that it represents and for the *Spielraum* that it allows, particularly concerning the narrative status of the text. German women writers have been associated with the epistolary novel since the Enlightenment, when the genre was viewed as a "safe" and pedagogically effective way for women to develop their minds. The epistolary novel is well-suited to Reventlow's purposes for the way in which it blurs the distinction between private and public writing, giving her the freedom to discuss topics of a provocative nature in a public arena without appearing to flaunt her rebelliousness. While Schaefer assumes that Reventlow "wählte die persönlichste Form der Aussage, das Ich in Brief und Tagebuch" ("Schwäbinger Gräfin"), Reventlow in fact remains coy about whether or not the *Ich* of the letters refers to herself, preferring instead to play with the reader's expectations and suspicions.

At no point in the text does Reventlow specify whether the text is historical or fictional autobiography, though many of the narrator's anecdotes correspond directly to experiences that Reventlow recorded in her diaries and letters. Of course, as Smith points out, the narrative *Ich* in an autobiography necessarily becomes a fictive persona since "the

autobiographer can never capture the fullness of her subjectivity" (46). Reventlow neatly sidesteps this debate by leaving the question of the narrator's identity unclear. The letter's author never names herself, she does not sign her letters, and no one addresses her by name in the conversations she reports. By default, the author's name becomes associated with the letter's author and her experiences, apparently confirming the autobiographical tendencies of the novel. Yet although Reventlow provides no information to contradict a reading of the novel as an autobiography, she does not explicitly label it as such, preserving the liberating guise of fiction. Weigel, in explaining what women writers sought to gain by cloaking autobiographical texts as fiction, suggests that

disguise in the form of literature gives protection as well as the chance to overstep the boundaries of the real and to postulate utopias. Fiction is a space in which to learn to walk, to fantasize, and to experiment in order to open up a creative way out of the tension between the limitations of the strategies and the unsuitability of the desires in the real lives of women. (67)

By situating her novel in the gray area between fact and fiction, Reventlow uses the protected creative space that literature occupies to legitimize and celebrate the "unsuitable desires" of her real life.

This ambiguity of form allows Reventlow to argue for her individuality without directly confronting society. Smith asserts that women who draw public attention to their lives by labeling their writing as autobiographical "cross the line between private and public utterance, unmasking their desire for the empowering self-interpretation of autobiography as they unmasked in their live the desire for publicity" (44). Reventlow tries to avoid such an unmasking while still claiming the empowerment of self-interpretation and self-determination. She teases the reader, both inside and outside of the text, with provocative opinions and experiences, but refuses either to disown them or to claim them. Instead, she fashions a self within the text that both is and is not her own, blending actual personal experience and literary fantasy into a new and autonomous public self. Stephen Greenblatt argues for the feasibility of this type of identity construction, noting that self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life. It invariably crosses the



boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves (3).

In *Amouresken*, Reventlow blurs the boundaries between her own life and the experiences recounted by the narrator. She alludes to the historical facts of her life but does not supply them. For example, the narrator is probably referring to Reventlow's short-lived marriage to Walter Lübke when she laments, "das eine Mal, wo ich dann doch heiratete, wurde der Mann erst eine gute Partie, als ich schon wieder über alle Berge war (Sie wissen ja, wie lange meine Ehe gedauert hat)" (82), but she doesn't provide any more details than one can infer from her parenthetical comment.

On a linguistic level, Reventlow assumes an equally slippery narrative stance. As in Goethe's *Werther*, the correspondence in *Amouresken* remains one-sided, allowing the narrator complete control over what the reader can know about her. Her omissions are often as revealing as her admissions. The first letter begins, "Ja, nun sind Sie wieder fort, lieber Freund— Sie fehlen mir sehr, und ich denke mit einiger Wehmut an unser Beisammensein, vor allem an unsere 'Teegespräche' zurück" (5). Through the introductory greeting "lieber Freund," the reader recognizes that the recipient of the letters is male, which suggests the potential for sexual tension with the female letter-writer, but the exact nature of their relationship remains unclear. The narrator eventually addresses her correspondent as "Doktor R.," but since none of his replies are included in the novel, the reader is left to piece together an image of him from her compliments and chastisements. He comes to represent the patriarchal norm against which the narrator reacts and which she challenges. She flirts with him, performing a sort of verbal striptease in revealing and concealing the details of her activities and amorous adventures. For example, she asks him, as she begins to tell of a new lover, "Soll ich Ihnen 'alles' erzählen?— Nein, ich erzähle nie alles" (94). At the same time, she insists that he play by her rules, warning: "Sie dürfen mir jetzt auch brieflich nicht zu seriös werden und mich nicht wieder als 'Problem' behandeln— ich bin keines— sonst propheziehe ich unserer Korrespondenz einen frühen Tod" (6). That he does not mend his pedantic ways is apparent from her ironic self-critiques in later letters. In one, she scolds him,

Ich bitte Sie, liebster Doktor, schelten Sie nicht schon wieder über meine Zerstreutheit— gerade Sie haben verhältnismäßig wenig darunter zu leiden gehabt, ich verwechsle Sie schon längst nicht mehr mit anderen Bekannten— ich weiß immer, wer Sie sind und wie wir miteinander stehen. (32)

While seeming to apologize for her own shortcomings, the narrator cuts Doktor R. down to size, making it clear that she does not accept the societal expectations that he would apply to her.

Despite her vaunted light touch, Reventlow relies heavily on rhetorical devices in creating a text that appears trivial enough to lull conservative contemporary critics into dismissing *Amouresken* as "eine schmeichlerische Nichtigkeit," as M.M. Gehrke does in a 1918 review in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, while actually questioning patriarchal discourses about gender. Reventlow uses familiar literary tropes to create a false sense of security in the complacent reader, but this veneer of conventionality is a thin disguise for her actual aim of asserting her right to live her life as she pleases. For example, Reventlow's narrator seems to exhibit the coquetry and self-deprecation expected of a woman writing letters to a man that Caroline Lucius, an eighteenth-century woman who corresponded with Enlightenment thinker Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, comments on in her own letters (Watanabe-O'Kelly 162), but her irony exposes these traits as farcical. The narrator of *Amouresken* provides an amusing example of this false self-deprecation in her account of being "psychoanalyzed" by her friend Sir John. She confesses to Doktor R. that Sir John "hat das 'Problem' meiner Seele doch besser erraten als Sie" (127), for John "hat neulich festgestellt, die Grundnote meines Wesens sei Faulheit" (128-29). She appears at first to accept this patronizing judgement at face value, but her sense of humor prevails as she elaborates on her alleged character flaw:

Faulheit, wenn ich überhaupt etwas tue oder unternehme, denn es geschehe immer nur, um etwas anderes nicht zu tun— Faulheit, die Art, wie ich es anstelle, nämlich ungestüm und ungeduldig, um es so bald wie möglich wieder hinter mir zu haben [. . .]. Und lieber lasse ich die unangenehmsten Konsequenzen über mich ergehen— andere Leute hielten das irrtümlich für Seelenstärke—, als dass ich mich rechtzeitig auffaffe, um sie zu vermeiden. Ja,



aus lauter Energielosigkeit lege ich manchmal eine auffallende Energie an den Tag. (129)

She sees the fallacy in Sir John's critique, which she implies that Doktor R. would second, and counters his earnestness with humor. She refuses to take the men or herself very seriously. On occasion, the narrator ventriloquizes a "male" voice in order to make fun of herself. For example, in conversation with a young poet, she professes contempt for women writers: "Es hat so viel peinlichen Beigeschmack— eine schreibende Frau—schrecklich" (113), although Reventlow is herself "eine schreibende Frau."

Reventlow's liberal use of irony and metaphor supports Smith's explanation that such interpretative figures in female autobiography are "always motivated by cultural expectations, habits, and systems of interpretation pressing on her at the scene of writing" (47). Reventlow responds to the cultural expectations she underlies by distancing herself narratologically from discussions that are personally relevant to her, for example, financial difficulties. After a cheerful account of a former lover who cannot help her because she has never been his wife, the narrator explains, apparently disinterestedly, how inconvenient it is for a woman "wenn das äußere Dasein sich nicht angenehm und schmerzlos abwickelt" (81). The irony contained in this flippant statement becomes apparent when one recalls the financial and physical misery that Reventlow endured while raising her son, supporting herself by poorly-paid translation work and occasional prostitution. Yet the narrator never details her own hardships; instead, she remains aloof, using the metaphor of a woman being like a painting, alluding perhaps to Wedekind's Lulu with the remark: "[Eine] Frau in Geldschwierigkeiten ist immer wie ein Bild, das schlecht gerahmt ist und am unrechten Platz hängt" (81-82). Then, unexpectedly, the narrator drops her mask and shifts to a personal, even more ironic tone, commenting:

Teurer Doktor, da wir nun doch einmal von mir reden— seit ich aus meinem wertvollen alten Familienrahmen entfernt wurde, hat mir wohl keiner mehr ganz gepaßt. Mancher war recht gut, mancher wieder sehr mittelmäßig, und es gab auch Zeiten, wo das Bild nur mit Reißnägeln an die Wand geheftet war. (82)

Remorseless even in her distress, Reventlow's narrator refuses to accept the conventional equation of financial difficulties with divine punishment

for moral waywardness, which has been used to explain Lulu's squalid end after her portrait was removed from its frame and tacked to the wall. Instead, the narrator insists on the legitimacy of her own (and implicitly Reventlow's) transgressive sexuality, which is the thematic focus of the novel.

The narrator's use of the term "Teegespräche" to characterize her conversations with Doktor R. implies that they are casual, superficial discussions, perhaps concerning the weather. However, it soon becomes obvious that the real subject matter, both of the "Teegespräche" and of the letters, is love, sex, and intimate relationships, topics which were generally considered taboo in polite society at the time. The narrator establishes her attitude toward her love affairs as one of unreflective enjoyment of the present moment, remarking "Lieber Gott, ich denke ja auch manchmal nach, aber es ist immer ungemütlich" (6). However, as her correspondent seems eager to delve into the topic, she is willing to discuss openly "das vielbesprochene Abenteuer, dem ich mein Hiersein verdanke" (6). She assures Doktor R. that she much preferred to chat with him than with "ihm," the lover she had followed to the town from which she is writing and where she had had her cozy conversations with the doctor. She trivializes both the sexual affair and the socially deviant nature of her behavior with the ironic assurance: "Ich habe ihn auch nie mit hergenommen, aus Pietät für Sie— in solchen Dingen bin ich sehr pietätvoll, Sie können ganz zufrieden sein" (7). Her piety is reserved for trivialities, while she treats social norms with lighthearted contempt. By way of introducing the story of her latest love affair, the narrator repeats the opening statement of the novel, now altered for the lover: "Also, er ist fort" (6). She then adds crucial details that alter the reader's perspective on her amorous adventure, changing it from a mere clandestine tryst to an adulterous breach of social convention, thereby confirming her awareness of and disregard for social norms: "— zu seiner Frau und seinen Kindern. Lächeln Sie nicht so niederträchtig, ich kann doch nichts dafür, daß alle möglichen Leute Frau und Kinder haben. Man darf schon froh sein, wenn sie sich nicht scheiden lassen wollen, um einem 'fürs Leben anzugehören'" (7). Not only is she unrepentant about her affair with a married man, but she is also contemptuous of the prevailing social doctrines of monogamy and fidelity.

Like many of the "Bohemians" Reventlow associated with in Schwabing and Ascona, the narrator exhibits an almost pathological fear



of commitment. In Ascona in particular, Reventlow was surrounded by people experimenting with a wide range of relationships outside the parameters of monogamous marriage. While Reventlow was familiar with the various ideological camps, she did not belong to any of them. She had come to Ascona on Erich Mühsam's advice to marry Baron Rechenberg and remained there primarily because she was penniless and life was inexpensive in Ascona, although she certainly appreciated the lack of a dominating social order among the expatriate Germans living there. The Monte Verità community, as the Germans called their utopian settlement, had long been a refuge for advocates of alternative lifestyles, including nudists, vegetarians, communists, and proponents of free love. At one extreme, many of the women, including the painter Marianne Werefkin and the feminist theorist Ida Hofmann, chose never to marry in order to preserve their independence, though several lived for long periods in common-law unions. At the other end of the spectrum, Freud's student Otto Groß preached the importance of erotic emancipation, insisting that women should only bear their lovers' children. He considered passion a more legitimate motivation for sexual intimacy than legal contracts or social convention. Groß, his wife Frieda, his lovers Elsa Jaffe and Frieda Weekley, and his disciples Edgar Jaffe and Ernst Frick attempted for several years to live out this erotic freedom, changing partners often and openly, but the resulting legal and emotional entanglements eventually brought an end to their experimentation.

Despite or perhaps because of her wild "Bohemian" past, Reventlow is not as idealistic as Groß and his followers about revolutionizing society. She treats the subject of marriage flippantly, admitting that she has had many chances to marry, but that she could never, with a few exceptions, make up her mind to do it. At one point she laments, "Wenn ich eine gute Partie machen konnte, hatte ich immer gerade keine Lust zu heiraten" (82). The only kind of marriage she claims she might find acceptable is "eine Distanzhe mit sehr, sehr viel Geld, so daß jeder seinen eigenen Flügel bewohnte, seinen eigenen Train und seinen Verkehr für sich hätte" (82-83), a situation that would allow her complete freedom and mobility. In contrast to many mid-nineteenth-century social novels by women authors, such as Louise Aston's *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, which sharply criticize marriages of convenience and affirm an ideology of true love, *Amoursken* apparently praises such marriages, like the one Reventlow herself entered into with Baron Rechenberg, as the best possible marital

relationship and dismisses true love as an impossibility. The narrator explains:

Unter Liebe verstehe ich— nun, eine seriöse Dauersache. Aber Sie dürfen mir diesen Begriff nicht zu optimistisch auffassen. Dauersache ist alles, was— sagen wir, was monatelang dauert— seriöse Dauersache, wenn es viele Monate sind; über ein Jahr— dann wird es schon Verhängnis mit einem Stich ins Ewige. (20)

The narrator's casual dismissal of true love overthrows Groß's theories of erotic emancipation just as offhandedly and devastatingly as she rejects social constructs of marriage.

Like Reventlow herself, whose diaries reveal her blunt honesty about her paramours, the narrator takes love seriously, but not her lovers, each of whom she reduces to an "objet aimé" (9). She teases Doktor R. with oblique characterizations of the categories or "Sammelnamen" under which she classifies her various lovers, such as "Paul," "der fremde Herr," "die Begleitdogge," and "der Retter." For her, each of these names refers back to "eine bestimmte Art von Erlebnis." For example,

Paul ist eine Begebenheit, die immer von Zeit zu Zeit wiederkehrt [. . .]. Paul ist immer etwas Lustiges, Belangloses, ohne Bedenken und ohne Konsequenzen [. . .]. Paul kann alles mögliche sein, verheiratet oder Junggeselle, Leutnant, Ingenieur, junger Arzt, Afrikareisender — es kommt auch vor, daß er gar keinen Beruf hat. Manchmal ist er auch 'drüben' geboren, dann nennt er sich Pablo und rollt das R. (14)

She defines men according to the type of erotic encounter they occasion. While "Paul" describes a vacation affair, "der fremde Herr" can refer to a kiss from a stranger in an empty elevator or a nocturnal visitor who always appears in top hat and tails and never stays until morning. "Die Begleitdogge" is a good-looking, well-dressed escort for all occasions without further significance, whereas "der Retter" [. . .] hält sich eben für den, der imstande sei, unser zerflattertes Liebesleben einzufangen und auf einen Hauptpunkt, nämlich auf sich selbst zu konzentrieren" (25). In response to Doktor R.'s jealousy of these other men, the narrator dubs him her "Konversationsliebe," acknowledging the role he plays in her life, but limiting his relevance and influence. No matter what situation she



may find herself in with a man, Reventlow seems determined to stay in control.

In general, her approach to love is eminently practical but ultimately fatalistic. She allows Doktor R. a glimpse of her strategy in regard to relationships, noting that "für mich dauert jede Liebe, auch die ganz ernsthafte, nur so lange, wie ich eben die stärkste Attraktion für den in Frage kommenden Mann bin. Dann hört sie ganz von selbst auf" (59). Eminently egoistic, she makes self-fulfillment her highest priority and demands absolute devotion of her lovers. She disavows the social construct of the monogamous woman, but offers in exchange her own lighthearted, independent approach to eroticism:

'Man' tut doch schließlich in erster Linie, was einen freut, und weil es einen freut. Und das ist natürlich jedesmal etwas anderes. Es kann wohl manchmal Liebe und 'große Leidenschaft' sein, aber ein andermal— viele, viele andere Male ist es nur Plaisir, Abenteuer, Situation, Höflichkeit,— Moment—, Langeweile und alles mögliche. Jede einzelne Spielart hat ihre besonderen Reize, und das Ensemble aller dieser Reize dürfte man wohl Erotik nennen. (19)

The narrator's assertion of her right to erotic freedom, not because she is a woman but because she is an individual, is supported by her use of the impersonal pronoun "man." She refuses to be constrained by conventional definitions of love and eroticism, insisting instead on the necessity of individual experience and experimentation for sexual and personal fulfillment. She doesn't attempt to establish a universal platform for political change or feminist agitation; she simply declares that the rules don't apply to her.

Rather than theorizing about her position, Reventlow demonstrates it by inverting the traditional paradigm of male trade in women that Luce Irigaray attacks nearly seven decades later in her article "Commodities amongst Themselves." Irigaray argues that, under this system, "woman exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself" (575). Reventlow, however, chooses not to protest the injustices done to women as Irigaray does, but instead to ridicule the system itself by inverting the paradigm and making men the commodity which women transfer between

themselves. The narrator compares relationships with married men to borrowing a coat or a fur from a female friend and bemoans the difficulties inherent in such an exchange:

dann gefällt er mir, kleidet mich besonders gut, und ich ärgere mich, wenn ich ihn zurückgeben soll. Man kann es auch vergessen oder etwas daran ruinieren, und dann ärgert sich die Freundin. Es gibt immer leicht Unannehmlichkeiten für beide Teile. (9)

Her reference to the women as "beide Teile" involved in the exchange effectively excludes the man in question from active involvement and reduces him to an accessory. Her flippant tone parodies male attitudes towards sexuality and reveals the absurdity of prevailing social mores. The narrator implies that preserving her relationship with a female friend is of far more consequence than the man himself or the sexual relationship with him. Without apology, explanation, or political agitation, Reventlow upsets the traditional relationships of sexual power by simply assuming for herself the sexual freedom and agency that men have long enjoyed. The implicit endorsement of the patriarchal order underlying this step is problematic, but Reventlow is not interested in crafting a political platform for a women's movement. She employs subversive tactics against patriarchal society, but only on her own behalf. She doesn't appear at all concerned with what other women do; her arguments are utterly personal.

The subtlety of Reventlow's strategies in *Amoresken* differs markedly from the confrontational tone of her earlier, more polemical writings. In *Das Männerphantom der Frau*, an article she wrote for Oskar Panizza's *Zürcher Diskussionen* in 1898, Reventlow criticizes the product of society's expectations for young women "bei uns im lieben Deutschland," where

ein wirkliches unverfälschtes, fast möchte ich sagen, chronisches Gretchen vorkommt, das stille deutsche Mädchen, das in Gedanken, Worten und Werken stets auf dem vorgeschriebenen Wege bleibt, mit Scheuklappen vor den Augen und einem unerschöpflichen Vorrat von himmelblau und rosa gestreiften Illusionen durch die Welt geht, die böse Welt, die ihm selbst beim besten Willen nicht den Schmelz von den Flügeln zu streifen vermag. (220)



In *Amoresken*, she abandons her bitingly sarcastic tone and contents herself with a mocking sigh, "ja, wenn wir nur einaml an den Rechten gekommen wären— wie anders, Gretchen!" (25). In *Viragines oder Hetären*, which she wrote in 1899 for the same magazine, Reventlow summarizes what society expects women to accomplish in life, concluding with a blatant Bible parody:

Vor allem handelt es sich darum, daß das Leben möglichst glatt und anständig, ohne lärmende Konflikte abläuft. Die erste Bedingung dazu ist, daß von der Frau möglichst wenig Wesens gemacht wird. Daß sie sich ihren tadellosen Ruf bewahrt und einen gutsituierten Mann, also eine auskömmliche Versorgung, bekommt. In diesen zweien Geboten hanget das ganze Gesetz und die Propheten. (237)

She approaches the same subject in *Amoresken* from a number of different angles. As mentioned above, she bemoans the inconvenience for women "wenn das äußere Dasein sich nicht angenehm und schmerzlos abwickelt" (81), echoing her earlier statement but overlaying it with self-conscious irony born of hard experience. She addresses the problem of reputation with the humorous lament, "der schlechte Ruf verpflichtet. Man kann sich so vieles nicht leisten, was eine unbescholtene Frau ruhig tun darf" (41), and dismisses "das ganze Gesetz und die Propheten" with the irreverent analogy: "Wie oft habe ich mir gesagt: liebes Kind, es muß nun einmal sein [...]. Der Ernst des Lebens [...] Schulaufgaben müssen gemacht werden, sonst gibt es kein Dessert" (85). Laughing at herself and all the world, Reventlow refuses to grant society's regulations, as hateful as homework, any kind of validity or respect. Though she no longer polemicalizes as she had a decade earlier, Reventlow still insists on her right to determine the course of her own life.

Yet although German feminists in the 1970s held her up as a model of sexual emancipation, Reventlow was not a political feminist. In *Männerphantom*, she mocks the disillusioned women who

gehen hin und werden Bewegungsweiber. Der Mann ist ihnen fortan etwas, das überwunden werden muß. Und das Bewegungsweib konstruiert sich ein seltsames Phantasie-

gebilde zurecht und sagt: das ist der Mann, so ist der Mann, wir haben ihn endlich erkannt. (223)

In *Viragines*, she criticizes the politicized women's movement of her day for destroying femininity and demands for herself the right to free sexuality, which she calls *Hetärentum*. Reventlow distances herself ideologically from the women's movement, describing "die Frauenbewegung" as "die ausgesprochene Feindin aller erotischen Kultur, weil sie die Weiber vermännlichen will" (*Viragines* 248). She makes it clear in *Amoresken* that she does not want to overcome men; she wants to enjoy them on her own terms. She regards herself not as part of a community of women seeking emancipation, but as an individual in control of her own identity. Reventlow's arguments anticipate those of modern gender theorists like Judith Butler who are critical of feminism's attempts to "locate a common identity as the foundation for a feminist politics" and the way in which that effort may "preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself" (ix). In *Amoresken*, Reventlow challenges the concept of a common female identity. She remarks mockingly, "Von Frauen weiß man überhaupt sehr wenig, wenn man selber eine ist" (62). In her opinion, the coincidence of a common biological makeup is not a compelling enough basis to justify generalizations about women. Like Butler, Reventlow opposes the feminist agenda as limiting to both men's and women's options for individual identity formation. She rejects the notion that there can be such gender absolutes as man and woman or categorical definitions of love and eroticism and defies "das diktatorische: die Frau, der Mann," asking: "wer sind diese Frau und dieser Mann?" (19). For Reventlow, the construction of one's identity is an intensely personal and individual quest, not something that can be proscribed indiscriminately for all members of a biological gender class.

As part of her self-fashioning, Reventlow tries to unsettle gender definitions, not only by inverting relationships of sexual power, but also by exposing the artificiality of social conceptions of gender. *Amoresken* explores the performative nature of gender, in particular the role of cross-dressing in gender construction. For instance, in the second half of the novel, the narrator goes to Rome, where she becomes involved with Pedro, a safely engaged Sicilian man, as well as with the British Sir John and his poet prodigy Bobby. One night while Pedro is in Sicily smoothing things over with his fiancée, the narrator goes out on the town with John and



Bobby, dressed as "einen ganz sympathischen Knaben" (145). Reventlow herself was fond of dressing as a man for parties, particularly during the Fasching revels in Schwabing. According to Butler, such imitation is "the kind of gender performance that will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire" established by Freud (139). This kind of destabilization is exactly what results from the narrator's experimentation with cross-dressing. Reluctant to go back to her hotel after the night out and too tired to return to her "voriger Zustand," she sleeps in John's bed in her men's clothes. When she awakens the next evening, Bobby informs her that Pedro has arrived. As Pedro storms in, she reflects: "ich muß zugeben, daß der Schein gegen mich sprach—Bobbys Anwesenheit—Johns Zimmer—der Knabenanzug—und es tat mir furchtbar Leid, den armen Pedro so empfangen zu müssen" (146). The erotic confusion caused by her gender play calls the configuration of desire between the narrator, Pedro, John, and Bobby into question, opening up new erotic possibilities for the future, which the narrator, at the close of her last letter, is eager to explore: "Die nächste Programmnummer wird heißen: 'Bobbys Insel'" (150). The ease with which she can manipulate her relationships with the people around her simply by donning a man's suit and some makeup exposes, and thus validates, the fundamental artificiality of gender norms. This supports Reventlow's overall argument that identity should not be determined by social constructs and obsolete traditions, but by individual desires and interests.

Claiming this same freedom from convention for her literary works, Reventlow uses *Amoresken* as a vehicle for reflecting upon the choices that have guided her in her own self-fashioning as well as to control the construction of her public self. She fashions herself in the novel according to her own desires and on her own terms. Doing so requires her to break away from the tradition of self-effacing female autobiography that conforms to patriarchal expectations and risk possibly devastating public censure and loss of reputation. Yet she defends herself against such an attack by using the literary tools of patriarchal society against it. To recall Smith's words, she "takes a voice and authorizes a public life" that transgresses social norms, but her elusive language veils the extent of her rebelliousness while she exposes her life. The narrator confesses to Sir John that "das Prinzip meines Lebens ist, daß alles umgekehrt geht" (151); Reventlow demonstrates this principle by using apparently trivializing the

novel's radical message precisely in order to get it past the Wilhelminian censors. The narrator's flirtatious language disarms the reader's possible objections to her subversion of gender stereotypes, drawing attention instead to the absurdity and artificiality of the stereotypes themselves. She flaunts conservative propriety outrageously with the erotic adventuring and lack of remorse that she documents in *Amoresken*, but she gets away with it because she recognizes no other authority in the matter of her self-fashioning than herself.

Reventlow's insistence on total freedom in the construction of her literary self from both patriarchal and feminist conceptions of femininity defies established norms and proclaims the right of individuals to determine their own identities. Although she does not call for widespread political and social change, Reventlow's literary moves are nonetheless revolutionary. At a time when even socially impeccable women hardly dared publish accounts of their lives, Reventlow seems to revel publicly in the transgressive life she has led. Yet although she teases the reader with hints and innuendoes about her escapades, her narrative playfulness and the novel's formal ambiguity make her impossible to categorize. She refuses to accept the labels that society tries to apply to her and she calls the validity of social conventions into question, at least as far as she is concerned. At the end of the novel, the narrator concludes, after reporting on her adventures with Pedro, Bobby, and Sir John, that "ich werde von jetzt an nie mehr das tun, was sicher das Beste wäre und das Gescheiteste" (152-53). Her determination to live life and to write autobiography on her own terms reminds the reader that "das Beste [. . .] und das Gescheiteste," in life and in literature, is open to debate.

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## Wer ist dieser Büchner? Aspekte zur Rezeption Büchners und seines *Danton* im neunzehnten Jahrhundert

Martin Bäumel und Stefan Manns

### I.

**A**ls Georg Büchners Geschichtsdrama *Dantons Tod* im Frühjahr 1835 im Verlag J.D. Sauerländer in Frankfurt am Main erschien, erzeugte es keine nennenswerten Wirkungen. Abgesehen von einigen kurzzeitigen Interessensbekundungen stieß es weitestgehend auf Ablehnung und Desinteresse und wurde bald schon wieder vergessen. Es war allen voran die konservative Kritik in einem restaurativen Deutschland, die dem Werk „mangelnde [...] Originalität“ vorwarf und es voreilig als „dramatisiertes Kapitel des Thiers“ disqualifizierte (Büchner 350).<sup>1</sup> Diese ablehnende Haltung kennzeichnete nahezu zwei Drittel des neunzehnten Jahrhundert und Karl Gutzkow, der sich selbst als Entdecker und Protegé des jungen Schriftstellertalentes wählte, mußte einsehen, daß das von ihm so hoch geschätzte und viel gelobte Historiendrama beim Publikum durchfiel.<sup>2</sup> Auch eine erneute Auflage des Dramas, eingebunden in die von Büchners Bruder Ludwig 1850 edierte, aber „überhastet, dilettantisch und unzuverlässig in die Öffentlichkeit“ (Goltschnigg 10) geworfene erste Werkausgabe Büchners trug nicht dazu bei, daß er auf breitem literarischem Felde wiederentdeckt wurde.

Erst die von Karl Emil Franzos herausgegebene Edition *Georg Büchner's sämtliche Werke und Handschriften*, die erstmalig auch das Woyzeck-Fragment enthielt und 1879 in Frankfurt am Main erschienen war, löste eine unvermutet intensive und letztlich bis in die heutige Zeit anhaltende „Büchner-Renaissance“ aus, wie Dietmar Gotschnigg aufgezeigt hat (15). Doch war das Publikum ebenso gründlich und gewissenhaft wie die Gesamtausgabe vorbereitet worden: Franzos verwies bereits in einem 1875 in der Wiener *Freien Neuen Presse* vorab erschienenen, sensiblen Portrait des Autors auf die für ihn so charakteristische Verbindung von Dichtung