Between Literature and Pamphlet: Women Writers on Sexual Transactions in the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough

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Writing about the Modern Breakthrough (MB) means opening a vantage point on a remarkably dynamic phase in the history of Scandinavian literature during the last three decades of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the First World War.¹ During this period, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were closely tight to each other in the literary marketplace, in which the Danish literary critic Georg Brandes (1842–1927) played a central role. Brandes proclaimed a new paradigm in modern Scandinavian literature in late 1871, advocating a literature that should engage with social issues and societal problems. In practice, he functioned as a European “literary intermediary,” both introducing new developments in contemporary French, German, and English literature to a Scandinavian readership and, at the same time, being recognized as “one of the main advocates of Scandinavian literature throughout Europe” (Van der Liet 2004, 93–5).

¹. This article concentrates on the period between 1872 and 1914, roughly covering the final phase of the so-called “long nineteenth century,” which Eric Hobsbawm (1987) coined “The Age of Empire 1875–1914.” The reason is twofold: (i) the lectures of Georg Brandes on the tasks of a new *engagé* modern literature were for the first time published in 1872; and (ii) 1914, the beginning of World War I, marks a relevant historic turning point in European (literary) history (Brouwer-Turci and Van der Liet 2018).
Among the social issues that literature was called to discuss, many regarded women’s rights, including gender inequality and women’s role in the patriarchal society, of key importance. Also delicate questions, such as the role of the Church, arranged marriages, and women’s economic independence, were at the heart of Scandinavian art in this era (Ahlström 1947; Bredsdorff 1973; Hjordt-Vetlesen 1993; Garton 1993). Last but not least, femininity, female sexuality, and—within this discourse—the social phenomenon of prostitution were central and widely debated themes in Scandinavian society and culture during the MB. The double moral standards and the existing regulatory system allowed men to satisfy their sexual desires without disturbing “respectable” (young) women—from both the upper and middle class—whose sexuality was considered, and expected to be, dormant (Lundquist 1982; Smith 1989; Blom 2006; Jansdotter and Svanström 2007). In this regard, Garton (2002) speaks about “et spilttet syn på seksualiteten” (32) [a split perspective on sexuality], highlighting the idea that, unlike lower-class women, middle- and upper-class women should remain untouched until marriage and were not supposed to enjoy sexual life. This dichotomy, and the biblical connotation of lust as sinful, classified women who, for one reason or another, could or would not meet that strict norm, as moral outcasts (Engelstad 1984; Hjordt-Vetlesen 1993; Forsås-Scott 1997; Logan 1998). All this was within a context in which notions such as women’s intellectual inferiority as a consequence of their reproductive role, the absence of female sexual desire, and prostitution as a manifestation of an innate criminal nature were firmly anchored in the scientific discourse of that time (Bredsdorff 1973; Brantly 1991; 2004).

During the MB, prostitution was one of the most important societal issues that needed to be discussed. As demonstrated in our previous paper (Brouwer-Turci and Van der Liet 2018), different forms of prostitution and women engaging in sexual transactions were commonplace and transcended the borders between social classes. A prostitute could be a girl of the profession working on the street or in a brothel, but

2. In this regard, Heggestad (1991) points out that money, young age, and beauty could be considered the “nodvändiga tillgångar för att kvinnan ska framstå som ett attraktivt object på äktenskapsmarknaden” (63) [necessary resources for making a woman an attractive object on the wedding market]. In cases where women lacking these resources would nevertheless find a husband, these marriages were very seldom a product of love, but rather a “pliktkänsla” (63) [sense of duty], the answer in the search for economic stability for herself and/or her family.
just as well a working girl who, during times of unemployment and lack of sufficient income, only occasionally prostituted herself. In addition, we find servants who had to contend with the sexual advances of their employers in order not to lose their jobs. Last, but not least, when seen from a broader perspective, prostitution was also common in marriages; especially, middle-class women were often forced into unhappy (arranged) marriages for the sake of economic stability.\(^3\) Heggestad (1991) conceptualizes prostitution even beyond the physical sphere. Indeed, she argues that during the MB, many women, particularly those trying to become an artist, a singer, or an actress, literally felt that they were selling themselves as an artistic product in front of an audience they were totally depending on: “Medan författarinnan och målarinnan sålde sin product var skådespelerskan och sångerskan och att stå på scenen innebar alltså att bjuda ut och att sälja sig själv” (178) [While the writer sold her product, the actress and singer were identical with hers. To be on the stage, then, was to offer oneself for sale].

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910), Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847–1885), Alexander Kielland (1849–1906), August Strindberg (1849–1912), and Herman Bang (1857–1912) are some of the most well-known Scandinavian writers and dramatists who, although from different perspectives, represented the social issues that needed to be discussed in literature. Generally, less recognized but no less significant, are the female contemporary artists, including Amalie Skram (1846–1905), Olivia Levison (1847–1894), Anne Charlotte Leffler (1849–1892), Victoria Benedictsson (1850–1888), Agnes Henningsen (1868–1962), and Ragnhild Jølsen (1875–1908) (Ahlström 1947; Bredsdorff 1973; Dahlerup 1983; Garton 1993; Brantly 2004).

For example, in the novel Pengar (1885; Money), by the Swedish Victoria Benedictsson, Selma, a sixteen-year-old girl, has to renounce her dream of becoming a free and independent female artist able to provide for herself. Instead, she accepts being sold off in a marriage

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3. Based on the analysis of Skram’s Lucie (1888); Jølsen’s Rikka Gan (1904); and Leffler’s “Aurore Bunge” (1883), in our previous paper (Brouwer-Turci and Van der Liet 2018), we differentiate between three forms of prostitution: (i) in Lucie, one could speak of “a socially constructed form of prostitution as a shadow hanging over a marriage” (62); (ii) in Rikka Gan, where the unmarried and unemployed Rikka becomes the mistress of a rich and selfish married man in exchange for a place to live for herself, we talk about “a relational form of prostitution parallel to a marriage” (62); and (iii) we argue that Aurore exemplifies prostitution within the marriage.
of convenience with a much older man she does not love, but who is ready to provide for her in exchange. Selma, maybe curious, but most of all completely unaware about sexuality, is devastated by the sexual experiences with her husband. Eventually, she finds the strength to ask for a divorce and admits to him “jag inte kan uthärda att dina händer röra vid min kropp!” (Benedictsson 1885, 322) [I cannot stand your hands touching my body!]. Even in her subsequent, and this time loving relationship with her cousin, sexuality remains denied.

Another interesting MB novel dealing with the complexity of female sexuality and prostitution within the marriage is the Danish novel *Konsulinden* (1887; The Consul’s Wife) by Olivia Levison. In this novel, the protagonist Elisabeth, coming from the petite bourgeoisie, cannot marry the poor painter Brandt, the man she loves, but instead is married off by her dominant mother to a rich and older Consul. In exchange for a luxury life, she suffers a traumatic sexual experience on her wedding night with long-lasting consequences.

The novel *Forraadt* (1892; Betrayed), written by the Dano-Norwegian Amalie Skram, also is a typical MB novel, dealing, among others, with early marriage, (female) sexuality, and the consequences of different moral standards for men and women and of an upbringing that supports this. This time, the curiosity and the obsession of a seventeen-year-old spouse, Ory, about her husband’s sexual intercourses (right) before their marriage, led to unbearable comments: “Kyssed Du hende, før Du stod op?” . . . “Jeg la 18 shillings paa hendes Toiletbord.” “Var det nok, tror Du?” . . . “Og Dagen efter rejste Du lige hjem og holdt Bryllup” (Skram 1892, 296) [“Did you kiss her before you got up?” . . . “I left 18 shillings on her dressing table.” “Was that enough, do you think?” . . . “And the next day you went home and had a wedding?”]. What is interesting about this novel is that these questions do not devastate her, but him, eventually leading to his suicide.

Selma, Elisabeth, and Ory are merely three examples of Scandinavian women’s writings dealing with the complexity of female sexuality and prostitution within a marriage, representing a much wider reality of Scandinavian female writers engaged in the sexual morality debate, whose work, as argued by Dahlerup (1983), was too often eclipsed by their male colleagues.

We, too, hold the opinion that more attention to the production of MB female authors is desirable, especially when it concerns a theme such as prostitution, an issue that at that time was so strongly related to the identity and social position of women. Indeed, as suggested by
Logan (1998), only female authors can both write about and from these women’s perspectives in an authentic way. In this context, it is important to mention that in the vein of the MB, the social engagement of many female writers found its representation not only in literary works such as prose, theater, and poetry, but also in the active involvement in social manifestations, women’s associations, and the foundation of political parties, schools, or institutions to take care of “fallen” women and girls (Melby et al. 2001; Jansdotter and Svänström 2007; Pedersen 2007). Furthermore, and even more important for the scope of this study, many MB authors also produced political and other (non-)literary works that stood up for women’s rights, including translations, reviews, letters, articles in (political) magazines and newspapers, pamphlets and essays (Bredsdorff 1973; Dahlberup 1983; Hjordt-Vetlesen 1993). Remarkable examples of female writers who regularly expressed their opinion on topics such as marriage and the debate on sexual morality, promoting the liberty of women next to their literary production, are Swedish Sophie Adlersparre (1823–1895); Danish Olivia Levison (1847–1894) and Elisabeth Grundtvig (1856–1945); and Norwegian Aasta Hansteen (1824–1908).4

In both the classical studies Det moderna genombrrottet i Nordens litteratur (The Modern Breakthrough in Nordic Literature) and Den store nordiske krig om seksualmoralen (The Great Nordic War over Sexual Morality), respectively written by Ahlström (1947) and Bredsdorff (1973), the importance of the societal debate about sexual morality, its social and cultural characteristics, and the different perspectives among authors and dramatists in the MB, is thoroughly documented. Given the scope of our research, it is important to point out that especially Bredsdorff not only discusses the authors’ prose, theater, and poetry, but also other genres, such as polemic articles about each other’s books, often with the purpose of influencing the course of public opinion about confiscated novels dealing with prostitution. Even if the above studies are of great significance for the understanding of the literary and social debate during the MB, women’s writing on prostitution remains largely shaded and is not exhaustively analyzed. Other authoritative

4. See, for example, Levison’s article in the Danish newspaper Politiken about the importance of girls’ and women’s education and freedom from convenience marriages; or Grundtvig’s lecture in Dansk Kvindesamfund (Danish Women’s Society) asking for sexual abstinence from men before marriage (Grundtvig 1887, 12), which align with the well-known and widely discussed Norwegian-problem play En Hanske (1883; A Gauntlet) written by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (Hjordt-Vetlesen and Mortensen 1993).
studies, however, did address the voices of female writers and their social engagement during the MB, encompassing *Det moderne gennembruds kvinder* (Women of The Modern Breakthrough), by Pil Dahlerup in 1983; *Fången och fri* (Captive and Free), by Eva Heggestad in 1991; and *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria* (The History of Nordic Women’s Literature, Vols. II and III), composed by different scholars such as Hjordt-Vetlesen (1993), Mortensen (1993), Iversen (1993), and Nordin Hennel (1993). For instance, Dahlerup’s (1983) notable contribution on women’s writings of the MB analyzes various (mostly) fictional texts, while examining different themes including motherhood, femininity, the role of young women in patriarchal society and in marriage, and women’s search for self-realization. Heggestad (1991) explores typical and contradictory issues in the work of female MB authors, encompassing double moral standards, (female) sexuality, freedom, self-fulfillment, and equality. She does so by addressing women’s roles at home, at work, and in the arts. Apart from the facts that Dahlerup’s study only focuses on Danish female writers and Heggestad’s work is confined to the “belles lettres” by Swedish authors, in both works, the phenomenon of marital prostitution is touched upon merely in passing. The same goes for the *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria*. In this work, different scholars certainly provide an exhaustive study on the literary and non-literary Nordic women’s writings on sexual moral debates, women’s emancipation, and women’s rights. Still, when it comes to sexual transactions, with their different forms and nuances, a systematic analysis of women’s writings remains largely lacking. Accordingly, although since the 1940s, many scholars and researchers have given attention to the phenomenon of prostitution with its social implications, characteristics, and protagonists represented in the Scandinavian literature of the MB, there remain important gaps in our knowledge. Apart from a few studies, including our own (Brouwer-Turci and Van der Liet 2018), where we provide an in-depth analysis of three Scandinavian literary works of female writers discussing the representations and forms of prostitution during the MB, this important theme has not yet been fully explored.

The purpose of this article is to help address this gap, by analyzing and comparing various representations of prostitution in MB Scandinavian female writers’ fiction as well as social-political texts, to elucidate how these two forms relate to each other. Following Brouwer-Turci and Van der Liet (2018), we hereby view prostitution broadly and define it as any sexual relation between two persons in which the weaker
party’s sexuality is characterized by an absence of personal desire and free choice and is traded for money or other benefits in return. Hence, we talk about sexual transactions. These could have diverse forms and gradations, and they transgress social and economic boundaries. As mentioned before, it should be stressed that prostitution in the MB was part of a delicate, complex, and changing interpretation of female sexuality. The focus of this study will be on the representations and forms of sexual transactions as such. Its novelty is that we analyze two different kinds of texts from one and the same author: one literary text, for example, a novel or a short story, and one social-political contribution. In specific terms, we aim to better understand to what extent the forms of—and message about—prostitution these writers discuss in their social-political contributions are reflected in their literary work, that is, to analyze both commonalities and differences between the two forms of expression.

To this end, this study analyzes and compares the following sets of works: Elfride Fibiger’s Nutidens Ansvar og Forpligtelser overfor Døtrene af Arbejderklassen og anden ubemidlet Stand (1889; Today’s Responsibilities and Obligations to the Daughters of the Working Class and Other Impecunious Classes), hereafter referred to as Nutidens Ansvar og Forpligtelser,5 and her epistolary novel En Magdalenehistorie, en virkelig Begivenhed (1877; A Magdalene Story, a Real Event); Amalie Skram’s pamphlet Om Albertine (1887; About Albertine), and her 1885 novel Constance Ring (1905); as well as Frida Stéenhoff’s essay Penningen och Kärleken (1908; Money and Love) and her novella Det heliga arvet (1902; The Holy Heritage). The reason why this study focuses on these works is that their strong relation with prostitution as a complex social phenomenon with its different forms and gradations is recognized by various historians and scholars, including Dahlerup (1983), Garton (1993), Hjordt-Vetlesen (1993), Nordin Hennel (1993), Carlsson Wetterberg (2001; 2010), and Hamm (2005; 2006).

This study’s analyses consist of thematic close readings of the above-mentioned pairs of texts, where relevant, complemented with some stylistic considerations, such as the figure of speech that each author has used to reinforce her point of view, an image, or a feeling related to the representation of prostitution. Accordingly, and notwithstanding the central place of the three above-mentioned social-political works,

5. Except when otherwise indicated, all English translations are by the authors of this article.
this article is explicitly not a sociological or political study about Scandinavian women’s writing. The three nonfictional texts will rather be used as an additional lens to get a more comprehensive understanding of the topic of prostitution during the MB.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section provides a brief historical contextualization of prostitution as a regulatory system and of abolitionism, as well as an explanation of the economical/juridical position of married women during the MB. The third, fourth, and fifth sections are the heart of this study and include the analyses of the above-mentioned six works. Each of these analyses is accompanied by a concise contextualization of the author’s life and oeuvre and concludes with a comparison between the nonfictional and literary text. In the concluding section of this article, we make a cross-comparison of the pairs of works in order to identify commonalities, patterns, and differences on what these historical works say about the phenomenon of prostitution/sexual transactions and their representations.

**Regulatory System and Women in Matrimony**

The last decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by numerous economic and societal changes including new ideas about the necessity of equality between men and women. This transformation was, among other things, related to the Industrial Revolution. As pointed out by Sjögren (2010): “Great economic structural changes with industrialization, urbanization and emigration led to changed family structures” (20–1). The need and right to get a proper (higher) education played an important role, too, not only concerning the life of single working-class women, but also for women of the upper-middle class. The legal and economic position of married women also called for transformation, such as the right to divorce and the right to own property. And it was the willingness to respond to this call that female activists, via a wide range of women’s societies, associations, and journals,6 worked with intensely, to nudge the legislative authorities

6. Just to mention a few, the Danish and the Swedish associations Dansk Kvindesamfund (Danish Women’s Association) and Fredrika Bremer-Förbundet (The Fredrika Bremer Association), founded in 1871 and 1884, respectively, worked for the improvement of economic and legal women’s rights and the right to education; in Norway, the Norsk Kvinnesaksforening (The Norwegian’s Association for Women’s Rights), founded in 1884, was striving for women’s equality (Garton 1993; Forsås-Scott 1997).
in new directions that would enhance legal gender equality (Hjordt-Vetlesen 1993).

Even though the economic position and the role of married women were changing, and even if between 1874 and 1889, equivalent laws were passed, full equality between the spouses was not established immediately. For instance, married women still had no legal custody of their children, and although they did earn the right to dispose of their own income, their authorities in economic matters remained limited (Melby et al. 2001; Sjögren 2010). Moreover, during the MB, it was still rather common for girls under eighteen to be married off to older and, in general, more experienced men, in order to obtain economic stability (Garton 1993). As a result of the reform acts in Scandinavia that were passed between 1909 and 1929, significant improvements were established, such as the termination of the husband’s legal power over his wife. Furthermore, marriage was from now on seen as a bond between two independent entities, and the minimum age to marry was raised for both women and men. Last but not least, husbands and wives could now both dispose of the property they had brought into the marriage (Melby et al. 2001; 2006).

These societal and legal transformations were also reflected in the regulations regarding prostitution. Indeed, at the beginning of the MB, in Scandinavia, as in most other European countries, prostitution was regulated by law. This regulated prostitution system, also referred to as the “French system,” first introduced under Napoleon in the beginning of the nineteenth century, was mostly present in the larger cities, and was in Denmark in force between 1874–1906, in Sweden between 1847 and 1918, and in Norway between 1840 and 1888 (Smith 1989; Lundquist 1982; Blom 2006; Pedersen 2000). According to Ripa (2016), despite different priorities regarding, for instance, public health, morals, and identification of the girl of the profession, four common elements could be observed within the different European regulatory systems of prostitution. Firstly, prostitution was tolerated as long as it was in compliance with state law. Secondly, prostitution was seen as a “necessary evil” based on the conviction that men regularly needed sexual intercourse, which shouldn’t be repressed for the security of the social order (Larsen 2021). Thirdly, the system was seen as preventing the spread of venereal diseases. Telling in this regard is that only the prostitutes and not their clients were blamed for spreading diseases. The fourth common element, according to Ripa (2016), was the discriminating consensus in the European approach to prostitution: while sparing the clients, the figure of the prostitute
was surrounded by dehumanizing associations and banished from many parts of society.

During the MB, this regulatory system was also increasingly viewed in Scandinavia as a system based on gender discrimination, denigration, and humiliation. The leading figure of abolitionism, which started in 1875, was the English Josephine Butler (1828–1906), who condemned regulationism for the way it humiliated women (Bredsdorff 1973; Walkowitz 1980; Ripa 2016). In Scandinavia, abolitionism, which started in Sweden in 1878 and was soon followed by the other countries, took shape in different ways. Whereas in Sweden, abolitionism was mostly preoccupied with prostitution as a threat to social order, and less so with its consequences for women, in both Denmark and Norway, it was first and foremost a pledge for the same sexual morals for men and women. In Denmark, this was accompanied by a strong sense that extramarital sex for men could no longer be condoned, whereas in Norway, the brutalization of women as well as the false claim of preventing infections inherent in regulationism were the prime targets (Blom 2006).

**ELFRIDE FIBIGER**

Elfride Müller Fibiger (1832–1911) was a Danish socially engaged writer, editor, philanthropist, and school founder, whose engagement is reflected in both her literary production and her social and political involvement. She grew up in a culturally and politically active family. Especially, her father played an important role in her school education and nourished her passion for patriotism, social issues, and practical solutions. After her husband died in 1868, she divided her time between raising her children, writing, and philanthropic activities (Fibiger and Clausen 1939). Fibiger’s belief was that a structured, proper education for future housemaids would counteract prostitution and immorality (Haastrup 2003).

Fibiger’s inclination to help women was reflected in activities such as publishing the *Tidskrift for Kvinder i de tre nordiske Riger* (Journal for Women in the Three Nordic Countries) and establishing the first Københavnske Kogeskol (Copenhagen Cooking School), which later transformed into the Københavnske Uddannelsesskole for Tjenestepiger og vordende Husmødre (Copenhagen School of Education for Domestic Maids and Future Mothers), with its focus on education and the improvement of the quality of life for young girls who would work as domestic maids (Haastrup 2003; Larsen 2010).
Women’s sacrifice is a prominent theme in Fibiger’s novels and short stories, including *En Magdalenehistorie, en virkelig Begivenhed* (1877; A Magdalene Story, a Real Event), analyzed in the second part of this section; *Askepot* (1880; Cinderella); *To Fortællinger* (1886; Two Tales); and *Præst og Læge* (1890; Priest and Doctor). Her nonfictional writings include, among others, *Ogsaa et lille Ord om Kvinden* (1880; Also a Minor Note on the Woman), which shows a profound Christian faith that she explicitly connects to the woman as a central figure in society. *Vore Tjenstefolk* (1881; Our Servants) illustrates her concern about the condition of Danish girls from the less fortunate classes, who, due to a lack of education and means, were more vulnerable and more exposed to falling into temptation and perdition. *Kvinden: et Virkelighedsbillede* (1893; Woman, an Image of Reality) was a direct call for equal rights for both sexes. *Nutidens Ansvar og Forpligtelser* (1889), analyzed in this part of the section, is a remarkable example.

In this social-pedagogical text, Fibiger’s belief is voiced, that proper and practically oriented school education for future housemaids and working-class girls could counteract and prevent them from ending up in prostitution.7 Throughout this work, in which she underlines her personal mission as philanthropist “at vække almindelig Forståelse” (Fibiger 1889, 1) [to awaken general understanding], she emphasizes that girls without means are important to society, and that accordingly, society should recognize their value and provide them with (financial) support to prevent their moral decay.

Practically oriented schools would not only give girls without means the skills, attitudes, and structure needed to work as domestic maids, but more importantly, they would learn them to value themselves [“at værdætte sig selv”] (Fibiger 1889, 2). Interesting to note is the writer’s position concerning the sexual morality debate and what she defines as the main cause of moral decay in Denmark and beyond: “Sædelighedsspørgsmålet” (3) [the question of the double moral standard]. Indeed, the author argues that this was caused by the prevailing philosophy at that time: “at leve og nyde Livet i saa store og fulde Drag som blot mulig” (3) [to live and enjoy life to the maximum of one’s abilities]. According to Fibiger, this is strongly linked to the arbitrary and individual opinions concerning the truth, as well as,

7. On January 17, 1889, Elfride Fibiger gave a lecture on “Den ubemidledde Klasses Døtre,” with the idea that “der burde gjøres mere, end der hidtil er blevet gjort, for at uddanne de unge Piger og holde dem borte fra Fristelserne” (*Kvinden og Samfundet* 5 [2], 1889) [More should be done than hitherto, to educate the young girls and keep them away from the temptations].
the institutional context that “man tør bruge for at fremme sin egen Begjær og egen Lyst” (4) [one dares to follow and promote one’s own appetite and lust]. Fibiger’s social appeal for preventing perdition and moral decay involved many institutions:

Til Frelse for Faldne og Fordærvede have vi Institutioner, som ikke blot støttes, men bæres af Staten. Bedre er det dog at forebygge Fald end at skulle rejse den Faldne. Med dette for øje har Godgjørenheden ved Oprettelsen af Vuggestuer, Plejeforeninger og Børnehjem støttet Asyler og Skoler. . . . Har man virkelig til Hensigt at ville forbedre Samfundsforholdene, maa man følge Barnet en Strækning videre paa Vej, om man vil haabe at formindske antallet af faldne og fordærvede, som ellers senere skulle frelses. (Fibiger 1889, 5–6)

(For the salvation of fallen and depraved people, we have institutions that are not only supported, but also under the auspices of the state. However, it is better to prevent falling than to raise the fallen. Charity has, to this end established nurseries, nursing associations and orphanages and supported asylums and schools. . . . If one really intends to improve the conditions of society, one must follow the child a little further along the way, if one wants to reduce the number of fallen and deprived, that otherwise would have to be saved later.)

In the above excerpt, Fibiger not only discusses the importance of state support for the salvation of fallen girls, but she also focuses on another important aspect, which is to also support potentially vulnerable girls after their school trajectory ends and they accordingly may no longer be in contact with any official institution: “but one must follow the child a little further along the way.” And thus, she sees this as a necessary condition, “if one wants” a reduction of fallenness and depravation.8

In the passage below, the author establishes a link between depravation and morality, and how important it is to strive for honorable conditions for vulnerable girls:

Det samlede Antal for hele Landets Vedkommende kan anslaas til mellem 75 å 80,000 Tjenestepiger. Destoværre er det den usminkede Sandhed, at der bag dette store Mennesketal skjuler sig ikke blot et Utal af Strid, Splid, Nød og Elendighed, men fremfor Alt et Utal af Usædelighed og Umoralitet. Det er ikke alene Meddelelserne fra Politiet

8. In the same text, the writer also highlights some juridical aspects, which she regards as aggravating factors for fallenness and perdition: (i) the gap between the age of eighteen, when a Danish girl by law is not a minor anymore, and age twenty-five, when she becomes “fuldmyndig” (fully adult) on issues like succession, debts, and marriage; and (ii) the Tyendeloven from 1854, the Danish law regarding conditions of domestic maids (Fibiger 1889, 6–7).
og Hospiterne, det er ogsaa den skematiske Oversigt fra Land og By over uægte Børns Fødsler, der stadfæster, at det først og fremmest er den ubemidlede Klasses Døttre, og navnligen Tjenestepigen, som er det egentlige Usædelighedens Offer, og ikke Arbejdersken, saaledes som der stadig gjøres Paastand paa. . . . Hvor ligger Veien, og hvor de rette Midler, der kan føre til Maalet? (Fibiger 1889, 8–9)

(The total number of maids for the entire country can be estimated at between 75 and 80,000. Unfortunately, it is the unvarnished truth that, behind this large number of people, not only hides a myriad of struggle, dissent, need, and misery, but above all a myriad of depravity and immorality. It is not only the notifications from the police and the hospitals, it is also the schematic overview of the country and the city about illegitimate childbirth, which confirms that most of all, it is the daughters of the impecunious class, and especially domestic maids, who are the real victims of immorality and not the female workers, as is claimed so often. . . . Where is the right way, and what are the right measures that can lead to this goal?)

In this excerpt, Fibiger juxtaposes and uses numbers and facts “between 75 and 80,000 maids—notifications from the police and hospitals,” and “schematic overview of the country” to illustrate problems such as “struggle, dissent, need, and misery.” This enumeration culminates with her essential message that “most of all, it is the daughters of the impecunious class, and especially the maids, that are the real victims of immorality.” This climax clarifies that the dichotomy between immorality and young maids is hazardous. By raising the question at the end, she invites the reader to search for solutions in order to reach the ideal of honorable maids that remain strong even in the face of unpleasant work conditions and bad lordship. Fibiger was convinced that poorly educated girls without means could have a greater “Hang til Luxus i Klæder og Trang til Fornøielse” [penchant for luxury in clothing and urge for pleasure] (Fibiger 1889, 16) and were more vulnerable and exposed to the risk of getting involved in sexual transactions since they would be “ofte lokket af Udsigten til højere Løn” (17) [often lured by the prospect of better pay]. However, she truly believed in the value of schools that could teach them about “at finde sin Ære og sin Glæde i Pligtopfyldelse” [finding their own honor and joy in the fulfillment of duty], which could prevent and “modarbeide” (18) [counteract] prostitution.

Published in 1877, Fibiger’s short epistolary novel En Magdalenehistorie, en virkelig Begivenhed (A Magdalene Story, a Real Event) tells about a bourgeois Christian woman, who, as the first-person narrator, reports
to her addressee about a “fallen” young woman, Birgitte Larsen, whom she once tried to save by offering her a decent job and a place to stay, but failed. For this reason, the writer of the letter (hereafter referred to as E. F., the initials with which the letter was signed) emphasizes the demand for a “Magdalenestiftelse” (Magdalene foundation),9 which, in her view, could mean the salvation of girls like Birgitte. In the same vein, E. F. shares her personal preoccupation and feelings concerning the life and destiny of the prostitutes. For instance, she mentions that every time she sees one of those girls at night “der gaa frem og tilbage langs Gadens Fortov, friserede, pyntede saaledes som Nutidens ærbare Kvinder” (Fibiger 1877, 6) [walking back and forth along the sidewalk, with their hair dressed, adorned like today’s honorable women], she empathizes with them and starts deliberating:


(“If I just dared to approach and talk to her! If I only would dare to take her hand, asking her quietly and lovingly to follow me home.” . . . You see, how her poor tormented heart comes to life and starts beating fast and hopelessly! What then? Are you keeping her, or is she leaving the next morning? But you can’t and should not keep her, even if she wanted to stay, for you cannot guard and protect her. That’s why you’d better let her go.)

The questions “What then? Are you keeping her or is she leaving the next morning?” highlight the difficulty of trying to save these girls. The phrasing “how her poor tormented heart comes to life and starts beating fast and hopelessly” depicts the sadness of these women and awakens empathy. In the following passage though, a solution is provided:

“Muligt, at hun da kommer engang til Dig af sig selv, maaske allerede næste Aften og dette er allerede et stort Skridt fremad. Thi gaar hun strax efter engang at have været hos Dig, naar kommer hun saa igjen?

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9. The philanthropist Thora Esche (1850–1920) founded the first Magdalenehjem (Magdalene home, named after the biblical Mary Magdalene) in Denmark in 1877, with the aim to educate and train former female prostitutes in alternative occupations (Pedersen 2007).
Both the questions “When will she come again? Isn’t this a horrible thought?,” as well as the answers that E. F. anticipates, “Probably never! Ah, Madam!,” express how worried she is for the sake of these “fallen” young women. However, these feelings of lack of power are counterbalanced by the possibility of establishing “a home of this kind, a shelter,” that is to say, through the Magdalene foundation. Indeed, the importance of this institution is a leitmotif throughout the novel.

The story E. F. shares in her letter is intense and shows respect and affection toward Birgitte, a gentle, vulnerable, and hardworking twenty-two-year-old woman, who sells herself to soldiers. From the moment she knocks on E. F.’s door up to the day she leaves, Birgitte shows a strong motivation to do well in her new and temporary job as domestic maid: “Jeg skal være lydig, underdanig og tro, jeg skal gjøre Alt, hvad Fruen ønsker og befaler” (Fibiger 1877, 12) [I will be obedient, submissive and faithful, I will do whatever the lady wishes and commands]. Birgitte speaks openly to the lady and is not afraid of asking for help: “Lad mig ikke gaa igjen, tag Dem af mig! forsøg det med mig!” (12) [Do not let me go again, take care of me! Give me a chance!] At the same time, we learn that she is often tired and suffers from a lack of appetite. When asked if she feels sick, she persistently states she does not. Birgitte is fragile, and often looks anxious.

The kindness Birgitte experiences from her benefactor and her husband, her feelings of gratitude, together with her inability to forget what she does for a living, scare and push her away. She doesn’t want to “besmitte dette Hjem” (Fibiger 1877, 36) [contaminate this house] as a way of thanking them for the nice way she was welcomed. Birgitte is not proud of her lifestyle, but nonetheless her desperation to return
to the street increases: “Lad mig gaa! lad mig gaa! kjære, velsignede Frue!” jamrede hun, “jeg er fortapt, jeg kan ikke frelses” (34) [“Let me go! let me go! dear, blessed Lady!” she lamented, “I am lost, I cannot be saved”]. When E. F. tries to understand her better, asking her where she wants to go and why, Birgitte answers that she has to see men (“Mandfolk”) (35), who make her feel like someone and silence an internal voice provoking her to prove herself. Birgitte is sad, desperate, and trapped in her destiny as a prostitute, knowing that “Intet kan mere forandres eller udslettes” (37) [now nothing can be changed or erased].

Even after the girl has left for good, the gentle woman thinks about her with compassion: “jeg har aldrig glemt hende, det stakkels unge Væsen” (Fibiger 1877, 46) [I have never forgotten her, that poor young creature]. In fact, when other women try to warn her about Birgitte, who has been seen going away with soldiers, and speak very negatively about her: “snavs Tøs” (15) [dirty lass] or “uforskammet Tøs” (28) [shameless tart], the good woman defends her. Last but not least, a deep faith gives her encouragement in trying to help Birgitte “som Brødre og Søstre” (36) [like brothers and sisters], as well as not to take a judgmental position toward a girl who is selling herself: “jeg dømmer aldrig noget Menneske, derpaa kan Du forlade Dig” (37) [I will never judge any human being; you can rely on that]. Toward the end of the letter, an important insight about saving Birgitte is revealed:

Eet stod klart for mig, og det var den forfærdelige Sandhed, at jeg havde ikke Magt, Gaver eller Evner til at frelse hende, og dog vilde jeg saa nødig lade hende gaa, thi hun maatte og kunde frelses, ifald hun kom paa rette Sted og under passende Forhold, og maaske gives tilbage til Samfundet, muligt endog sandere og ydmygere af Sind og Hjerte end Mangen. (Fibiger 1877, 42)

(One thing was clear to me, and it was the terrible truth that I had no power, gifts or abilities to save her, and yet I so reluctantly let her go, since she should and could be saved if she would come to the right place and under appropriate conditions, and perhaps would be returned to society, possibly with an even truer and humbler mind and heart, than many others.)

In the passage above, the awareness that she can’t be saved by a single individual, and the enumeration “no power, gifts, or abilities to save her” clearly illustrates the importance of professional help: “Havde der, dengang hun kom til os, existeret en Magdalenestiftelse, da havde vi
As demonstrated in the analysis of *Nutidens Ansvar og Forpligtelser* and *En Magdalenehistorie, en virkelig Begivenhed*, both texts deal with the phenomenon of sexual transactions in relation to girls without means. In the former, the author attempts to convince the reader about the importance of trying to prevent girls from getting involved in sexual transactions, in a rather broad context. Indeed, in this social and pedagogical writing, Fibiger does so by demonstrating facts, numbers, and social factors, as well as by providing practical solutions of how these vulnerable girls could be saved, and through the use of different rhetorical devices such as enumeration and metaphors. In the epistolary novel, instead, the message concerning sexual transactions is centered on the emotional and tragic story of one particular girl, Birgitte, and the good intentions of a benefactor who seeks to help, protect, and save her, albeit in vain. In the pamphlet emerges a rather moralistic vein, intrinsically linked to young girls in perdition. The repetition of the words “fallen,” “depraved,” and “perdition,” as well as the writer’s reference to the prevailing philosophy at that time—“live and enjoy life to the maximum of one’s abilities” as the main cause for moral decay—are exemplary in this regard. In the novel, instead, a salvific, compassionate, and non-judgmental Christianity emerges. In *Nutidens Ansvar og Forpligtelser*, Fibiger writes about girls of the working class and, more specifically, about domestic maids who, due to a general lack of self-esteem and school education, are more vulnerable and at risk of falling into a form of prostitution, unlike in *En Magdalenehistorie, en virkelig Begivenhed*, where no explanation is given of what such a fall would implicate. Indeed, in the novel, she explicitly speaks about girls doing the profession. In the same vein, it is interesting to note how, in the two works, the girl(s) involved in sexual transactions are named. In the pamphlet, Fibiger uses the term “fallen” or “victims of immorality,” whereas in the novel, we find a variety of expressions. For instance, when the benefactor speaks about Birgitte, she uses words such as “my sister” or “that poor young creature,” denoting compassion and salvation. Other characters, such as those feeling threatened by Birgitte, use words with a negative connotation—such as “shameless” or “dirty lass.”
Both texts stress the need for practical solutions, either to prevent girls from becoming the victims of sexual transactions or for those who already are selling themselves. In *Nutidens Ansvar og Forpligtelser* (1889), Fibiger advocates a proper and practical school education for future housemaids, which would not only give these girls adequate training and structure in daily life, but it would also teach them how important they are for society. In this manner, they would gain a sense of self-esteem enabling them not to succumb in front of their lord, lured by fake promises and the desire for luxury. In *En Magdalenehistorie, en virkelig Begivenhed* (1877), the essential message is the need for establishing a Magdalene foundation, but also the hope that under “appropriate conditions,” the women could re-integrate into society. In fact, Fibiger stresses the role of society throughout both works. For instance, in her nonfictional work, she speaks about “society’s obligations to the daughters of the working class and those in other conditions without means.” In the novel, the role of society is mostly expressed in the open and repeated request that the good madam poses to her addressee about the possibility of establishing a Magdalene foundation. At the same time, Fibiger does not fear to criticize society, especially when she talks about the double moral standard, in her view, a depraved philosophy of the individual, which is supported by an institutional context that permits that “one dares to follow and promote one’s own appetite and lust.”

Regardless of the clear difference in style between the social-pedagogical writing and the novel, the former rather rational and the latter interspersed with emotions, tears, and suffering, it is interesting to note that Fibiger in both texts uses the technique of raising direct questions, such as “When will she come again?” in the novel, and “What are the right measures that can lead to this goal?” in the other text. In this manner, she directly addresses her readership and seeks to awaken their involvement.

**Amalie Skram**

Amalie Skram (1846–1905) is one of the most recognized Scandinavian female voices of the MB. As a socially engaged writer, she was involved in various social-political issues of her time, including women’s rights in the strong patriarchal society, the hypocrisy of the double moral standards, the legal system of prostitution, and prostitution within marriages of convenience. Skram was a typical MB author who used
her work as a medium to denounce inequalities and call for societal change. Her social and political engagement was not only reflected in her novels and short stories, but also in her reviews and journalism, as well as in this study’s central pamphlet *Om Albertine* (Engelstad 1981, 1984; Garton 1993).

As the title suggests, *Om Albertine* (Skram 1887) is about *Albertine*, the bohemian novel written by Skram’s colleague and friend Christian Krohg (1852–1925). Albertine was published by the radical publisher Ola Huseby in December 1886, and led to a lot of turmoil in Norwegian public opinion. For this reason, shortly after its publication, the novel was confiscated and banned by a decision of the Norwegian court (Bredsdorff 1973). The novel narrates the tragic life of a seamstress coming from a very poor background and working in Kristiania (now Oslo) who, as Irene Iversen noted, “med en blandning av fasa och lust” (Iversen 1993, 444) [with a mixture of horror and desire] becomes the victim of an abusive police officer, who seduces and exploits her until she becomes a prostitute. Krohg’s novel dared to denounce the brutality of the mandatory inspections of prostitutes under the regulatory system, as well as the corruption of the juridical system. Iversen also observed that the female public received Krohg’s *Albertine* positively and recognized it as an important contribution to the campaign against the regulatory system for prostitution: “Och demonstrationerna som romanen satte igång fick till följd, att det så kallade regleringssystemet, som fungerat som en offentlig legitimering av prostitutionen, avskaffades” (Iversen 1993, 444) [The demonstrations that were set in motion by the novel resulted in the abolition of the regulatory system, which functioned as public legitimation of prostitution].

Skram was certainly not alone in her plea. Indeed, after Krohg’s book’s confiscation, several literary critics and writers started to defend *Albertine*. Female writers, in particular, didn’t miss the chance to react, aligned with the broader movement, since the 1880s, in which women writers started to use the work of their male colleagues as tools to engage in societal debate (Bredsdorff 1973; Garton 1993). As Christine Hamm pointed out: “Man sa at romanen hadde nådd frem med sitt politiske budskap” (2006, 255) [It was said that the novel’s political message had come across].

10. Christian Krohg was a famous Norwegian naturalist painter, illustrator, author, and journalist. He often painted subjects stemming from everyday life, poverty, sickness, and also prostitution (Sjåstad 2017).
In line with this, Skram wrote her *Om Albertine*, and by doing so, she not only publicly showed her support to her colleague, but also demonstrated a profound compassion with women in prostitution. Furthermore, she tried to convince the public of their innocence, and the cruelty and injustice of the regulatory system, which might have been legally acceptable, but certainly not morally tolerable. *Om Albertine* reads as a petite book, but it is nevertheless strong in its statements and lines of argumentation. Skram wants her reader to understand that

> “Albertine” er fra bogens første til dens sidste side et gjennemført kunstværk. . . . Den samme troskab mod virkeligheden, den samme evne til at ramme det karakteristiske gjenfinder vi på alle bogens 211 sider. . . . Hvis der nu spørges, om denne bog, foruden sin fremragende betydning som kunstværk, også indeholder ethiske værdier, så blir svaret i høj grad bekræftende. Den har f. eks. fremlagt et troværdigt dokument for, hvordan det går til, at en ung kvinde med gode instinkter og sædeligt alvor i sit sind på utrolig kort tid forvandles til en offentlig skjøge. (Skram 1887, 5–6, 12)

(From the first page of the book until its last, *Albertine* is an accomplished artwork. . . . The same fidelity to reality, the combined ability to hit the characteristic, we find it on all 211 pages of the book. . . . If one would ask whether this book, in addition to its excellent meaning as an artwork, also contains ethical values, the answer is very affirmative. For example, it has produced a credible document on how a young woman with good instincts and moral seriousness transforms into a public harlot, in an incredibly short time.)

Through Skram’s choice of adjectives and adverbial phrases—the artwork is “accomplished,” the fidelity to reality lasts “all 211 pages,” the meaning of the novel is “excellent,” the answer to the question of whether the novel also contains an ethical value is “very affirmative”—she attributes great importance to Krohg’s work. In addition, by talking about “fidelity to reality,” and about the “credibility” of the document, she tries to convince the public to trust the novel. Last but not least, by underlining that the public harlot’s instincts are “credible” and that her seriousness rests on sound moral judgments, Skram highlights that Albertine is an honorable person.

When referring to the young Albertine and talking about other girls involved in sexual transactions, Skram’s discourse is full of compassion, and she also stresses that Albertine lives in very poor circumstances, that the outside world is tempting, that she is vulnerable, and above all, that she remains “den fuldkomment uskyldige unge pige” (Skram 1887, 10) [the perfectly innocent young girl].
Hamm (2006, 254) rightfully shows that Skram sees Krohg as a great painter writing scenes as if they were “tableaux,” which helps the reader to sympathize with Albertine, and to see her not as a mere object, but as a poor soul with a suffering heart.11

With Om Albertine, Skram, for her part, shows profound understanding of girls like Albertine, and evokes empathy from her readers:

De, som har set på disse faldne kvinder som uhyrer i menneskeskikkelse—og hvem iblandt os har ikke det—som forvorpent udskud, der falder langt udenfor grænsen af det, man spilder tanker, end sige medlidenhed på, vil måske efter læsningen af denne bog få et glimt forståelse af, at de er slet og ret mennesker, som vi andre. (1887, 13)

(Those who have seen these fallen women as monsters in human form, and who among us did not, like depraved scum that falls far beyond the boundaries of what people waste any thought, let alone pity on, may, after reading this book, get a glimpse of understanding for the fact that they simply are humans, like the rest of us.)

By using the simile “fallen women as monsters,” Skram wants to appeal to her readership so that they can better imagine the common degrading and dehumanizing associations connected with these women. Also, some hope is expressed that after reading Albertine, the public may change its opinion.

Almost at the end of her pamphlet, Skram emphasizes that “der er exempler på, at såkaldte offentlige fruentimmere er blevne gode, trofaste, dygtige og selvopofrende hustruer” (1887, 15) [there are examples in which the so-called public ladies turned into good, loyal, capable and self-sacrificing wives], hereby challenging the stereotype of “once fallen, always fallen.”

Another interesting element of Skram’s text is the fact that she also questions the role of the client:


11. For a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christian Krohg’s ability to write scenes as if they were tableaux pervaded by the talent of a great painter, see Krohg’s painting Albertine i politilegens venteværelse (1885–1887; Albertine at the Police Doctor’s Waiting Room), oil on canvas. Today, this painting is part of the permanent collection of Nasjonalmuseet in Oslo, https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/samlingen/objekt/NG.M.00776.
(And what about the men? After all, it is the men’s demand and desires which allow the condition that Albertine represents. After all, it is the men who lure and lead them out on the path that ends in this boundless humiliation. ... And what about the men? After all, the men do exactly the same thing, live with them, make themselves flesh with them, without this fact in the slightest weakening their reputation.)

In this passage, Skram is clearly questioning and denouncing the role of men. By referring to them in their active role “the men’s demand and desires, which allow the condition,” the repetition of the question “And what about the men?,” as well as the anaphora “after all” in combination with the verbs “lure” and “lead them,” Skram is trying to make the reader understand both the responsibility of men and the absence of this responsibility, stressed by the use of the anaphora “without.” Furthermore, Skram condemns the inhumanity of the gynecological inspections during the regulated system:

Og hvad der under denne rædselsfulde oplevelse foregår i den elendige pige’s sjæl er fortalt med en så minutiøs nøjagtighed, en så rammende psykologisk forståelse, at læseren hele tiden lider lidelsen med hende. Bare man tænker på det, er det som man føler et greb af to iskolde jernfinger om hjæteroden. (1887, 10)

(And what goes on during this horrific experience in the soul of the miserable girl, is told [by Krohg] with such meticulous accuracy, with such a remarkable psychological understanding, that the reader constantly suffers the suffering with her. Just thinking about it, is like feeling the grip of two icy iron fingers around the bottom of the heart.)

In this passage, by using “such meticulous accuracy,” Skram not only praises Krohg as a great writer, but also denounces the “horrific experience” of gynecological visitation, thereby questioning who the true monsters might be. By appealing to her reader’s attention, she shortens the distance between the reader and Albertine. Moreover, the use of a verb and a noun from the same family and with the same alliteration “suffers the suffering” helps to transfer the emotion she wants the reader to experience. This culminates with the simile “it is like feeling” and the metaphor “a grip of two icy iron fingers around the bottom of the heart” to make sure that her audience visualizes and understands the terrible experience of gynecological inspection.

Together with Lucie (1888), Fru Inés (1891; Miss Inés), and Forraadet (1892; Betrayed), Constance Ring, analyzed in this part of the section,
Sexual Transactions

belongs to Skram’s so-called “ekteskapsromanene” (matrimonial novels), in which a dysfunctional and destructive man-woman relationship in a traditional male-dominated society is a common feature. Skram’s matrimonial novels deal with topics such as loveless marriages of convenience, sexuality within and outside the marriage, infidelity, prostitution, and double moral standards during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Constance Ring is a tragic, multidimensional, and provocative novel (Engelstad 1984).

The novel is about the unhappy life of Constance, a young woman, who, for the sake of economic stability, marries twice, and ultimately commits suicide out of desperation and feelings of guilt. Mr. Ring, her first husband, is a wealthy broker, 16 years older than Constance, who came from a respectable family. Constance’s aunt plays a determining role in convincing her to marry this “godt Parti” (Skram 1905, 6) [“good catch” (Skram 2002, 4)]. Despite rare moments of happiness and affection, Constance generally feels disgust and anger toward him. Ring, on the other hand, keeps telling her how much he loves her. At the same time, however, he patronizes her, is unfaithful, and drinks too much. Although Constance ends up hating him, she can’t find the strength to divorce him. After Ring dies in a boating accident, Constance eventually follows her friend Marie’s advice that the best thing to do as a widow with no money is to remarry. And so, she accepts the proposal of a family friend from the past, Doctor Lorck, a good person who in fact is in love with her. Constance learns to love him sincerely, but when she learns about his past promiscuous behavior, she gets disillusioned and stops loving him. Trying to find consolation in the arms of the young and radical composer Meyer offers no solace and leads to a very tragic end, with no way back.

In Constance Ring, marriage is depicted as a fundamentally hypocritical institution, in which men can behave as they please, while sexual freedom for women is not accepted, as this would be considered “impure.” In the course of the novel, many characters pursue this double morality. Constance’s mother, for instance, stresses that “det var hendes Pligt at elske ham og hendes Kald at gjøre ham lykkelig” (1905, 26) [“it was her duty to love him and to make him happy” (2002, 20)]. This, not in the last place, because of the social and economic stability.

12. All English quotations from Constance Ring are from the 1988 translation by Judith Messick and Katherine Hanson. We follow the edition published in 2002 by Northwestern University Press.
that Constance would obtain by marrying Ring. The same way of thinking about marriage and love is put forward by Constance’s aunt and friends, who believe in a traditional role division where there is no space for a young woman to develop herself beyond being a good wife, becoming a mother, and remain silent in the face of her husband’s infidelity. For example, when a desperate Constance, after having seen Ring kissing their housemaid Alette, confides to her friend Marie about her idea of leaving him, Marie not only starts telling her about “al den Uterlighed, Ægtomændene bedrev, og Konerne saa gjennem Fingre med” (1905, 120) [“the affairs married men were conducting while their wives turned their heads the other way” (2002, 92)], but she also explains that this behavior is common, and that Constance should accept Ring’s love unconditionally, despite his infidelity.

Constance’s mother, aunt, Marie, and her other friends, as well as the Reverend F. B. Huhn, all support the idea that husbands “are allowed” to be unfaithful, that their wives have to accept that, but that it would be a sign of depravity if they would behave in the same way as their husbands. At the same time, when Constance asks the Reverend point blank what he instead would advise a man to do when his wife would be expecting a child from her lover, he replies that this would be “en saa stor Foredrelse, en saa dyb moralsk Fordærvelse” (1905, 146) [“a sign of such degradation, such moral depravity” (2002, 112)].

No wonder that when Constance wants a divorce, the Church, her friends, and her family all agree that “af alle Ulykker er en Skilsmisse den værste—” (1905, 151) [“of all misfortunes, divorce is the worst” (2002, 115)]. In other words, it is better to remain married to an unfaithful husband you don’t love than to live as a divorced woman. But Constance is not like them; she is opinionated and believes in a society where the same morals count for both men and women. She wants to divorce but has insufficient strength to do so. And therefore, she stays with him, first as a kind of sister, but under pressure from both Ring and her aunt, ultimately as his wife again, although it feels like prostituting herself:

Hun havde jo alt længe havt en Fornemmelse af, at det vilde ende saaledes, men ikke havt Mod til at se Sandheden i Øjnene. Det kunde ikke nytte at staa imod længere; siden hun havde samtykket i at vende tilbage, var der ikke andet for. . . . Hun tenkte på Rings forlibte Fagter, paa hans Forsikringer om, at han elsked hende, og gjøs.—Give sig hen i Samliv med en Mand, som hun foragted!—Men det gik vel over, naar hun blev vant til det.
She had felt all along that it would end like this, but she had lacked the courage to look the truth squarely in the face. There was no use in resisting any longer; since she had agreed to come back to him, there was nothing else to do. . .

She thought about Ring’s infatuated antics, his vows of love, and shuddered. Agreeing to live with a man she despised! But perhaps it wouldn’t be so bad when she got used to it. She had never really loved him! But she had made an honest attempt to love him. . . . She felt as she were deliberately prostituting herself for her keep. “Yes, that’s what it is!” she said to herself, clasping her head in her hands. “Well,” she whispered a little later, “there are so many others who do it—it’s no worse for you than for anyone else.” (2002, 151)

This fragment shows that Constance is fully aware of her role, her emotions, and the fact that she is lost for agreeing to be with a man she hates, primarily “for her keep.” The statement “she felt as she were deliberately prostituting herself” highlights how complicated and destructive the relationship with Ring is. As Irene Engelstad (1984) has observed, Skram herewith shows that the marriage is a “økonomisk kontrakt der kvinnen blir brukt som et bytteobjekt” (66) [economic agreement where a woman is used as an exchanging object]; moreover, she also illustrates “hva de tvungne kjærlighetsplikten betyr for Constance” (Engelstad 1984, 66) [what those sexual marital duties mean for Constance]. With the free, indirect speech “she despised! She had never really loved him! ‘Yes, that’s what it is!’ she said to herself”; in this manner, the neutral point of view of the third-person narrator changes into a more personal and subjective style, hereby bringing the reader closer to Constance’s feelings of hate and entrapment. However, even after Constance half deliberately, half forced by her husband and aunt, has accepted to prostitute herself within the marriage, Ring goes on with his promiscuous behavior. Later on, during a conversation with her friend Sunde, Constance speaks—again—about marriage as “en styg Institution” (1905, 219) [“an ugly institution” (2002, 166–7)], reaffirming her repulsion, and awareness at the same time, about a woman “som lever af at leve med
It is important to mention that, after Ring’s death, Constance, to some extent, explores ways to live her life as an independent unmarried woman, but soon doesn’t consider this as a realistic option: “Hvad skulde der nu bli af hende? . . . Leje? Hun havde jo ingen Ting—at betale med. . . . Det Sludder om at ta ud som Laererinde,—hun k u n d e jo ingen Ting. Eller styre for en Enkemand—aldrig i Verden!” (1905, 255) [“What would become of her now? . . . Rent? She had no way to pay it— . . . That nonsense about going out to be a teacher—she didn’t know anything. Or keeping house for a widower—never in the world!” (2002, 193)]. Indeed, after realizing she is running out of money, and considering different options about what to do, including even committing suicide, Constance concludes that her best option is to remarry and to accept Lorck’s proposal: “Ja vist, ja,—det var dog bedre at gifte sig end at dø en Selvmorders gyselige Død (1905, 262) [“Yes, of course marriage was better than some hideous death by her own hand” (2002, 198)]. Not out of love, but to maintain a certain standard of life. However, also in this marriage, we find a repetitive pattern of hate toward her husband for his promiscuity.13

The text-analyses of the pamphlet Om Albertine and the novel Constance Ring have shown that both works deal with the phenomenon of prostitution. In the former, in a rather unambiguous manner, and in the latter, in a much more complex approach. Indeed, Skram’s message of the pamphlet is rather unequivocal, and not only because it is written in defense of Krohg’s novel Albertine. Also from the perspective of prostitution, the message is rather straightforward: (i) prostitution is depicted in its classical form, on the street; (ii) the protagonist is portrayed as a good yet suffering person easy to sympathize with, who clearly is a victim of an immoral society; and (iii) the solution of necessary changes are presented in a direct form. The novel Constance Ring, on the other hand, introduces much more room for complexity and

13. As Irene Engelstad (1984) points out, Amalie Skram, with Constance Ring, creates a female figure, who, on the one hand, protests against the institution of marriage, double moral standards, and the related economic interests, and in doing so, tries to put the truth and emotions above economic interests and social status, but on the other hand, is not able “å ta konsekvensene av sin innsikt og oppgi de fordelene eksteskapet likevel gir henne” (Engelstad 1984, 69) [to accept the consequences of her ideals and to renounce the benefits marriage nevertheless offers her].
ambiguity. Firstly, the representation of prostitution is multi-layered. Although the classical form of prostitution is certainly mentioned in relation to the immoral behavior of her former husbands, the main and most intense form of prostitution discussed is located within the marriage. As pointed out, Constance feels that she is selling herself as a commodity to a man she despises, in order to live a comfortable life, which she equates to prostitution. Secondly, the protagonist clearly has a more complex character, which is not always easy for the reader to sympathize with. Finally, the solution the author proposes is less clear. Whereas in Om Albertine, it is evident that men and the regulatory system must change, in Constance Ring, we learn that the problem of the double moral standard is, in fact, propagated by the Church, her own friends and family, and—not in the last place—by women, and thus is intrinsically interwoven within society itself.

Besides these differences, there are also clear similarities. For instance, both protagonists symbolize a broader whole, a larger group of women. Whereas Albertine is representative of all poor girls involved in the profession, Constance stands for all women who, like herself, sold themselves into marriages for their keep. Furthermore, in both Om Albertine and Constance Ring, the elements of being forced and the lack of an alternative are present, although—again—in different modalities. Albertine is raped by a policeman who is clearly in the wrong. Constance, on the other hand, is convinced to stay in her marriages by family and friends, and ultimately decides to stay because she thinks that is the only option she has. Furthermore, although Constance is by no means as poor as Albertine, we find that in both works, the economic element is stressed in this connection as the pivotal issue.

Finally, both texts, in one way or another, deal with ethics and morality. Again, in the pamphlet, we find a world with clear boundaries: for example, the prostitute is innocent whereas the police officer and the male clientele represent the evil. In Constance Ring, instead, the boundaries are fuzzy. This ambiguity is even reflected in Constance, both in her rational considerations as well as in her psyche. She feels compassion to herself, but also a sense of blame. She wanted to be strong, but when a window of opportunity to a free life occurred, she decided to remarry. She felt Ring was wrong, but knew society allowed him to be promiscuous. What is, however, made clear in both works is that Skram is aware that customs that may be legal are by no means also morally justifiable. By representing different forms of sexual
transactions, Skram shows how complex, brutal, and multifaceted this topic is.

**Frida Stéenhouff**

The Swedish writer Frida Stéenhouff (1865–1945), “well-known during her time” but “later forgotten,” was one of Scandinavia’s leading figures on topics concerning women’s rights, female sexuality, motherhood, and prostitution in the broader meaning of the word (Carlsson Wetterberg 2016, 61). Stéenhouff was, on the one hand, an appreciated dramatist, intellectual, and internationally oriented freethinker, whereas on the other, she was also seen as controversial for her views on motherhood, the economic independence of women and children, and her ideas on sexuality (Carlsson Wetterberg 2001; 2010).

Stéenhouff was the daughter of a priest and accordingly grew up in a religious environment. In her early twenties, she married a doctor who actively tried to improve the quality of life of prostitutes under the regulatory system, and who gave Frida his full support for her literary, social, and political engagement (Persson 1988; Nordin Hennel 1993; Carlsson Wetterberg 2010). Her thirst for social change is reflected in both her literary works as well as in her numerous essays, lectures, pamphlets, including *Feminismens moral* (1903a; The Morality of Feminism), *Den reglementerade prostitutionen* (1904; The Regulated Prostitution), *Äktenskap och demokrati* (1912; Marriage and Democracy), and *Kärlek som kulturproblem* (1912; Love as a Cultural Problem). As the historian Carlsson Wetterberg (2001) observed, her essay *Penningen och Kärleken* (1908; Money and Love) is probably one of Stéenhouff’s most debated writings (Carlsson Wetterberg 2001, 71), in which the author further develops the fundamental line of reasoning that she first introduced in *Feminismens moral*. This work not only deals with the new feminism Stéenhouff had introduced in Sweden, but also with the importance of love liberated from money, love as commodity, and the fact that it was often for the sake of their children that women were forced into a subordinate role with no economic independence. Dramas by Stéenhouff such as *Lejonets unge* (1896; The Lion Cub), *Sin nästas hustru* (1898; Thy Neighbour’s Wife), and the play *Det heliga arfvet* (1902; The Holy Heritage), which is analyzed in the next part of this section, all criticize the double moral standards, the hypocrisy of marriages of convenience, and the economic independence of women.
Penningen och Kärleken, a written adaptation of a series of lectures, was first published in 1908. By a series of arguments and authentic examples, this work makes critical considerations about the negative bond that can occur between love and money as well as different forms of prostitution, including prostitution within the marriage, which basically is caused by the economic dependence of the married woman (Zade 1935; Nordin Hennel 1993; Carlsson Wetterberg 2001). In Penningen och Kärleken, according to Stéenhoff, love and money are the two big motors of our world; they exist as separate powers, but also in connection with each other.

Dessa två makter, penningen och kärleken, har sedan urminnes tider varit sammankedjade med många och starka band. Enstaka individer har kunnat lösgöra dem och sig från dessa band, massan av människor ännu aldrig. För det mesta har penningen och kärleken levat i klok förening, eller i tvungen fred, någon gång i öppen strid. (Stéenhoff 1908, 12)

(These two powers, money and love, have been linked together with many strong ties since ancient times. Single individuals have been able to extricate themselves from these ties, unlike most other people. Usually, money and love coexist in a wise union, or in a forced peace, sometimes even in open conflict.)

In this brief excerpt, we learn that Stéenhoff believes that the relationship between love and money can be both positive “in a wise union” or negative and destructive as in “a forced peace” or “open conflict.” Stéenhoff argues that money may not be more important than happiness or freedom, but that it certainly is useful to earn them. Paid love has always existed. For many women, selling themselves could be a (temporary) solution: “För flertalet kvinnor är det ännu så länge typiskt, att de draga ekonomisk vinst av kärleken, antingen genom ingående av gifte eller genom tillfälliga förbindelser” (Stéenhoff 1908, 9) [For most women it has been, and still is, very typical to derive financial gain from love, either through marriage or through temporary relationships]. In this sentence, Stéenhoff not only talks about working women whose income sometimes could be so low that they found no other solution than to enter into “temporary” prostitution, but also acknowledges that women may prostitute themselves to their spouses.

An interesting example of prostitution within a marriage, which Stéenhoff provides in her essay, is based on a true story about a seamstress coming from Copenhagen, which received a lot of attention in the press. This girl, due to a too-low income “såg hon sig tvungen att
skaffa pängar även från annat håll” (Stéenhoff 1908, 9) [found herself obliged to make money, also, from another source]. She was arrested for prostitution but was set free after the court found her not guilty. By presenting this case, Stéenhoff not only criticizes the role of the law and the penal system, but also argues that people should pay more attention to “penningens förhållande till kärleken, som blir ödesdigert för flertalet människor och särskilt tyranniskt för kvinnan” (11) [the liaison between love and money, which becomes fatal for most people and tyrannical for women especially].

According to Stéenhoff, all people who sustained the bond between love and money didn’t really try to look into all the different forms of what she referred to as female slavery, such as “den gifta kvinnans ställning” [the position of the married woman] and “den vita slavhandeln” [the white slave trade], which she calls “den yttersta konsekvensen av penningens förmåga att utplåna varje spår av människorätt” (Stéenhoff 1908, 27) [the ultimate consequence of money’s ability to wipe out every trace of human rights]. Marriage, explains Stéenhoff, has become a place for legitimized slavery: “Kärleken blir även i äktenskapet alltför ofta slav under penningen, därigenom att hustrun icke är en oberoende ekonomisk enhet” (29) [In marriage, too often love becomes a slave to money, because the wife is not an independent economic entity]. By using the metaphor “love becomes a slave to money,” Stéenhoff reinforces how negative and inhuman the relationship between love and money can be. No less important is that this happens because the wife lacks economic independence. Furthermore, Stéenhoff acknowledges that loveless marriages where legitimized slavery can occur may be seen as the best option for many women, who decide to remain in that pattern for the sake of their children: “Genom att offra sig, undviker hon troligen en värre olycka för sig och barnen. Hon har i själva verket intet val” (30) [By sacrificing herself, she probably avoids a much worse misfortune for herself and the children. In fact, she has no choice but to sell herself]. Another interesting point in relation to paid love is that, according to Stéenhoff, it follows its own moral. For instance, well-positioned rich men would never engage in sexual transactions with girls within the same social class, as those girls are supposed to remain “pure” until marriage, but these men don’t seem to regard it as immoral when that happens to girls from a less privileged class who are seen as “mindre farliga” [less threatening], “rättslösa” (51) [without rights], and consequently powerless.

At the same time, in Penningen och Kärleken, Stéenhoff also expresses her ideas about a possible positive social transformation that is waiting
for women, as well as the need for more favorable jobs, to reduce the compulsion to use love as source of income. Fortunately,

nutidskvinnan har förstått, att, man inte kan vara moraliskt fri utan att vara materiellt fri. Utan levebrödet är hjärtats, intelligensens, vår-
dighetens krav en dröm. Den som för att leva måste sälja sig på gatan eller i hemmet, står på ofri grund. (Stéenhoff 1908, 31)

(the modern woman has understood that one cannot be morally free without being materially free. Without the livelihood, the demands of the heart, intelligence, and dignity remain a dream. Anyone who, in order to live, has to sell themselves on the street or in their home, stands on unfree ground.)

In the above passage, “one cannot be morally free, without being materially free,” the writer emphasizes one of her key messages. Indeed, the use of the anaphora “free . . . free” helps to remind the reader that the intrinsic value of freedom is strictly linked to economic independence. The metonymy “stands on unfree ground” with its use of the concrete “ground” for the abstract living a life without liberty, reinforces the contrast freedom/no freedom, and its meaning for those women, who in different ways, have to sell themselves for a living. In Penningen och Kärleken, the ideal and the meaning Stéenhoff gives to the concept of pure love is “helt enkelt den från penningen befriade kärleken” (Stéenhoff 1908, 14) [very simple, a love liberated from money]. This conception of love is the one Stéenhoff believes should exist for every human being in a society without prostitution. She concludes by explaining what she thinks is needed to create a better society:

Vi kunna ta parti för kärleken mot penningen, i förhoppning om, att det osköna, låga, fördärvliga, som nu ofta vidläder kärlekens yttringar, efter befrielsen lättare skall kunna försvinna. Ett nytt, ädlare släkte i ett skönare samhälle vill ha ett nytt, lyckligare, skamfriare kärleksliv. Utan den tron vilar evigt mörker över alla land. (Stéenhoff 1908, 55)

(We can take side with the love against money, in the hope that the evil, the vile, and the corrupt, who now often permit the manifestations of love, will disappear more easily after its liberation. A new, nobler family in a more beautiful society wants to have a new, happier, love life free of shame. Without that belief, the eternal darkness will rest upon all lands.)

Originally written as a play, Det heliga arfvet (1902; The Holy Heritage) was reworked into a novella and published by Wahlström & Widstrand.
Carlsson Wetterberg explains that the meaning of the title and the novella’s essence rely on the fact that the two central female protagonists of this story, trapped in their economic dependence, tradition, and prejudices, yet willing to provide a future and stability for their children, are forced to remain in

ett olyckligt äktenskap och därmed offra sitt heliga arv, det vill säga sin rätt och plikt att allsidigt utveckla sin personlighet. (2010, 138)

(an unhappy marriage, and thus to sacrifice their holy heritage, that is to say, their right and duty to comprehensively develop their personality.)

Since both protagonists become the victims of their motherhood and of their economic dependence, they will never be able to pursue or realize their “holy heritage.” Indeed, *Det heliga arvet* tells the sad destiny of Maria and Anna, two young and intelligent women who believe in female emancipation. Just the same, they both find themselves trapped in marriages with husbands in whom they are deeply disappointed and no longer love, but with whom, for their keep and for the sake of their children, they “chose” to stay, hereby renouncing this so-called holy heritage. Anna is married to the officer Sigward, whereas Maria is married to Sigward’s rich uncle, the director Hans Berman. In *Det heliga arvet*, prostitution is mostly represented within the marriage, and especially as part of a sacrifice that a mother makes to provide economic stability for her child.

Before her marriage, Anna was an opinionated teacher working in Stockholm who desired to live by her ideas and to be liberated from traditions. In this vein, her relationship with the young lieutenant Sigward was, to them, equal to being married. However, after she gives birth and for that reason loses her job, she accepts Berman’s offer to provide for their child, including his “only” condition to first marry Sigward.

As time goes by, Anna becomes unhappy and disillusioned about Sigward and his circle of friends. One day, during a conversation with Sigward’s aunt, Anna admits her unhappiness and feelings of entrapment. Moreover, she dares to express her thoughts about how society should be, that is to say, a society “där skulle icke kvinnan köpas och säljas för bröd, ty kärleksfrågan och brödfrågan voro skiljda åt”

14. Stéenhoff wrote this play in 1902 but, despite much effort, didn’t get it printed until 1903. It was, however, performed in 1902 (Carlsson Wetterberg 2010).
(Stéenhoff 1903b, 70) [where no woman can be bought and sold for bread, because the issues of love and bread would be separated]. In yet another important conversation, Anna opens up to Maria:

“Du har verkligen inte kommit på din rätta plats.”
“Jag har kommit in i . . . mödrarnas prostitution.”
“Jag förstår dig inte? Det var ett styggt uttryck.”
“Är det svårt att förstå? Jag tycker, att det är ohyggligt tydligt . . . Att barnet skall kunna, skall tillåtas vara det, som drar modern nedåt! . . .”

Hennes själs verksamhet vred sig som ett hjul kring en enda punkt: att hon var gift mot sin vilja. (Stéenhoff 1903b, 84–5)

(“You really haven’t found the right place for you”
“I’ve gotten into . . . maternal prostitution.”
“I do not understand you! That is a nasty expression.”
“Is it so difficult to understand? I think it is awfully clear. . . . That the child will be able, will be allowed, to be the one pulling their mother down!” . . .
Her soul’s activity revolved like a wheel around a single point: that she was married against her will.)

By saying “maternal prostitution,” Anna explicitly refers to the form of prostitution she is involved in. Furthermore, by using “will be able, will be allowed to” she clearly highlights that this is happening in a society that facilitates and allows it. The last words of the narrator describe again Anna’s tragedy and entrapment.

Maria, the other central protagonist of this novella, is, like Anna, intelligent and opinionated. But in her case, as we learn from the third-person narrator, she is the combination between her emancipated mother and more traditional father: she “tänkte hvad hon ville, fast hon aldrig gjorde hvad hon ville” (Stéenhoff 1903b, 14) [was used to thinking whatever she wanted, but never did what she wanted]. This character trait is reflected in her decision to accept the marriage proposal from the rich Hans Berman. Maria, pretty aware of her father’s preoccupation for her future and stability, marries him “utan inre böjelse” (Zade 1935, 115) [without inner affection]. At first, she hopes for children, but they do not come. Later on, even when Maria realizes that she didn’t even want Berman as the father of her children, she decides to stay with him out of a sense of duty. As time goes by, her negative feelings toward him only increase and become almost unbearable:

Hvad fransmånnen kalla “hudens antipati” är en hemlighetsfull naturlag, som gör sig gällande inom många äktenskap och martyrstrida de
makar för hvilka pliktbegreppet är ett nattligt spöke, som tvingar till tillmötesgående. (Stéenhoff 1903b, 14)

(What the French call “antipathy of the skin” is a mysterious natural law that occurs in many marriages and torments the spouses for whom the concept of duty is a nocturnal ghost, which forces one to be accommodating.)

In this excerpt, the metaphor of the “antipathy of the skin” expresses Maria's physical aversion. The third-person narrator says “in many marriages” in order to stress the universality of Maria’s suffering.

One day, Maria meets an old friend, the young architect Gunnar, and a little later, they fall deeply in love with each other. When Maria confesses this to Berman and decides to leave him, she hopes that he will let her go and live with the man she really loves. Berman, however, refuses it firmly, not least because he is aware that he would never be able to cope with the social shame of a divorce. When he tells her that she can, though, see other men if that pleases her, Maria gets angry and feels that he is treating her like his property. Indeed, Berman treats her like he does own her:


Han tryckte henne intill sig och kysste henne på ett sätt som gjorde henne utom sig af vrede ochblygsel. Hon försvarade sig af alla krafter. Hon såg på honom och vareblef ett otäckt drag kring hans mun. . . . Hvad hon afskydde honom! (Stéenhoff 1903b, 78)

(“You will love me. I demand it. I am your husband.” . . . “If I want to hold you, then I hold you. I have definitely chosen wrong tactics. I’ve been too modest. One must use one’s power in another way. Brutal, ruthless. This is certainly what women like better. I’ve treated you like a princess . . .” He pulled her next to him and kissed her in a way that she was just beside herself with anger and shame. She defended herself with all her force. She looked at him and noticed a wicked sneer come over his face. . . . How she despised him!)

In this passage, Berman's behavior is aggressive and dominating. The man is the one who decides, and the wife must submit herself to him. In addition, the adjectives “brutal” and “ruthless” show how violent he is. At the same time, the words “horror” and “despised,” relating
to Maria, are equipollent to Berman’s destructive force. A disgusted Maria starts questioning the meaning of what is happening to her:

“He thinks he has the right to behave the way he wants toward me, because I am his legal spouse,” she thought. “And maybe he actually has it? Maybe the law allows a man to rape his wife? What a shame! What a deadly humiliation! Does a woman then have no human value anymore when she is married?”

In this passage, Maria reflects on the institution of marriage, its morality and meaning for the position of women. The use of terms like “legal spouse,” “rape,” and “shame” lead to the critical question of whether, under the veil of a legalized marriage, women lose all their rights and dignity and solely have to cater to their husband’s whims.

After Maria carries Gunnar’s baby, she is, however, determined to truly leave Berman, but before she does so, Gunnar tragically dies during an accident at work. Now, even if she despises Berman, the only option left to Maria is to stay with her husband, that is, prostitute herself, for her keep and for her son’s sake. When Maria’s son is baptized, she reflects on her position and concludes, after all that “man får icke skaffa sig barn, när man icke kan stå för sig själf med barnet på armen” (Stéenhoff 1903b, 98) [you cannot raise a child when you cannot stand for yourself with the child on your arm]. By acknowledging this, Stéenhoff, through Maria’s thoughts, urges the necessity of economic independence of mothers. Indeed, in a last dialogue with Hans Berman, Maria’s condition of living in a sort of maternal prostitution can’t be more absolute and intense:

“Nu har jag rehabiliterat dig inför världen.”
“Tack.”
“Ditt barn har jag gjort till mitt.”
“Tack.”
Maria’s ögon sökte hans. Om han kunnat läsa i dem skulle han sett en ångestfull bönn: ‘Begär ingen betalning! Gör en gång en sak för intet! Drag inte in mig i den långa, dödande lögnen!’... Barnets framtid stod på spel...
“Älskar du mig en smula?”
“Ja,” svarade Maria nästan ljudlöst.
“Ge mig då en kyss,” hviskade han, i det han slog armarna om henne.
Maria kysste honom. (Stéenhoff 1903b, 98)

(“Now I’ve rehabilitated you to the world.”
“Thank you.”
“I have made your child mine.”
“Thank you.”
Maria’s eyes searched for his. If he could read hers, he would have seen an anxious prayer: ‘Ask no payment! Once, do something for nothing! Do not drag me into this long, deadly lie!’ . . . The future of the child was at stake. . . .
“Do you love me a little?”
“Yes,” Maria replied almost silently.
“Then give me a kiss,” he whispered as he wrapped his arms around her.
Maria kissed him.)

Here above, in this last dialogue between Berman and Maria, Maria’s last desperate silent prayer “‘Ask no payment!’ For once, do one thing for nothing!” together with Berman’s gesture and request “Then give me a kiss,” represent the ultimate expression of a relationship based on sexual transaction.

The text analyses of the essay Penningen och Kärleken and the novella Det heliga arfvet have demonstrated that both works deal with the weak position of women, including the issue of prostitution in the broadest meaning of the word. In both texts, the need for economical means and independence plays an important role.15

In Penningen och Kärleken, Stéenhoff predominantly discusses the breadth of prostitution, occurring “either through marriage or through temporary relationships,” and accordingly, both provide examples of women who sell themselves in marriages, as well as of working-class girls having sexual contacts in exchange for economic benefits. In addition, she also names “the white slave trade” as one of the cruelest forms of prostitution, in which girls under false pretenses end up in the profession.

15. Here, Stéenhoff’s standpoint on prostitution resonates with that of the (anti-) feminist writer Laura Marholm (1854–1928) who, as Brantly (1991, 154) points out, “goes so far as to set aside her antagonism toward the women’s movement and agrees that prostitution is the worst kind of exploitation of women.”
In the novella *Det heliga arvet*, Stéenhoff doesn’t so much explore the breadth of prostitution, but instead adds depth to one particular form of sexual transaction, which she explicitly names as “maternal prostitution,” a form also mentioned in the essay. This form of prostitution relates to women who primarily for their keep and for the sake of their children decide to remain in unhappy marriages. In *Penningen och Kärleken*, Stéenhoff provides an example of “maternal prostitution,” when a woman without economic independence marries to avoid “a much worse misfortune for herself and the children.” In the novella, where two young women are renouncing their holy heritage, that is, the human being’s natural duty to develop its own personality as much as possible (Zade 1935; Carlsson Wetterberg 2010), the very same issue is voiced by Anna when she confides to Maria that she feels like a prostitute in her marriage, which she merely upholds for the sake of her child. The same fate was reserved for Maria when she decides to remain with a husband she hates because “the future of the child was at stake.”

In both the essay and the novella, Stéenhoff opposes all forms of prostitution. Indeed, whether it is about a more traditional form of prostitution or prostitution within a marriage, the issue is invariably accompanied by negative words and cruel images. In the essay, this phenomenon is described by the words “eternal darkness,” “female slavery,” and “tyrannical,” whereas the novella talks about “sense of entrapment,” “rape,” “violence,” “anger,” and “shame.” Finally, both works appeal to concepts of justice and morality, that is, pure love, one that is liberated from money, versus the state of being wrong and immoral, that is, in paid love, which by definition “stands on unfree ground.”

Indeed, in both the essay and the novella, Stéenhoff highlights the conditions of what she sees as an ideal society. In the former, we see this ideal society reflected in the idea that love should be “liberated from money,” as well as in the notion that contemporary women “cannot be morally free without being materially free.” In the latter, although less tangible, the very same idea is articulated by Anna when she talks about a society “where no woman can be bought and sold for bread, because the issues of love and bread would be separated.”

**CONCLUSIONS**

As outlined in the introduction, the purpose of this article is to elucidate the representations of prostitution in MB Scandinavian female
writers’ fiction as well as in their social-political works, to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between their artistic production and social engagement.

The in-depth analysis of the six individual Scandinavian works as presented in this study, along with the brief comparative analyses provided for the three central writers, have shown that the representations of sexual transactions during the MB are varied, ranging from public harlots, to marriage as a legitimized form of slavery, to “fallen” girls, to the white slave trade, and to what Stéenhoff calls “maternal prostitution.”

In the nonfictional works *Nutidens ansvar og forpligtelser*, *Om Albertine*, and *Penningen och Kärleken*, Fibiger, Skram, and Stéenhoff clearly express their own perspectives on sexual transactions. They all do so with multiple purposes: Firstly, to awaken understanding and compassion about how innocent, morally good, vulnerable, and valuable those young women were. Secondly, to search for or introduce “the right path,” to teach manners to save and prevent young women from engaging in (sexual) relationships, including marriages, not out of love but as a commodity. Thirdly, Fibiger, Skram, and Stéenhoff aim to show how morally and ethically wrong, brutal, and male-centered the double moral standards on sexual mores and regulative systems of prostitution were, together with the—at that time—generally accepted attitude of men “to follow and promote one’s own appetite and lust.” Lastly, to share their hope for improving, and their need to improve the economic, social, and private situation of many girls trapped in prostitution, so they could be liberated from their sad destiny of standing on “unfree ground.” Indeed, all three works illustrate how poor these girls often were: Skram talks about the poor seamstress Albertine; Fibiger focuses on domestic maids; and Stéenhoff focuses on working-class girls, with the only difference that she also includes petite bourgeoisie and middle-class married women and mothers in her work.

Another element all three nonfictional works have in common is that they show the injustice within the broader juridical system. Skram does so by showing how brutal and wrong the mandatory medical inspections under the regulatory system were, but also by mentioning the story of a police officer who exploited Albertine, driving her into prostitution. Stéenhoff mentions the case of a Danish seamstress who “found herself obliged to make money, also from another source,” and therefore ended up in prison (even if the court found her not guilty).
Fibiger mentions as an aggravating factor for falling into prostitution, the gap in the juridical system for women between the age of eighteen, when they become legally adult, and the age of twenty-five, after which they become “fully adult,” and she also writes on issues like succession, debts, and marriage. Next to the emphasis on the wrongness and cruelty of prostitution in general terms, Fibiger, Skram, and Stéenhoff picture a dimension of transformation, hope, and change. Fibiger talks about appropriate school education for future domestic maids; Skram speaks about “examples in which the so-called public ladies turned into good, loyal, capable and self-sacrificing wives”; and Stéenhoff refers to an ideal society where love will be detached from money.

Many representations of the above-mentioned and discussed sexual transactions are also present in the novels Constance Ring, En Magдалenehistorie en virkelig Begivenhed, and in the novella Det heliga arfvet, whose protagonists are all engaged in forms of prostitution. Constance within the marriage, Anna and Maria both within their marriages, but also in motherly prostitution, and Birgitte in the more traditional form, that is, on the street. All protagonists involved in prostitution within their marriage do not love their husbands (any longer), but lack the strength or financial means to liberate themselves—a condition that is, according to these women themselves, not unique. Furthermore, it becomes clear that they cannot search for their “holy heritage,” as explained by Zade (1935) and Carlsson Wetterberg (2010), the natural sense of duty of humans to cultivate their own personality as much as possible. For instance, we have seen that Constance actually never loved Ring, but for her keep is deliberately prostituting herself, notwithstanding the fact that the more she realizes this, the more desperate and humiliated she feels. Also, Anna, who is married against her will, feels that she is caught in a trap but stays in order to secure both her own and their daughter’s economic stability. Somewhat similar is the position of Maria. She remains married to a husband she despises, for the future of her son, even if this means enduring his violence, domination, and tyrannical ideas about husband-wife relationships. Birgitte, instead, is engaged in a more traditional form of prostitution. Unlike Constance, Anna, and Maria, she is not locked into a marriage nor into motherhood, but nonetheless just as trapped. Her sense of entrapment is caused by an internal dark and silent figure, literally asking her to go and sell herself. In this almost pathological imprisonment, Birgitte feels lost, beyond help, and forever lost.
The focus on the protagonists’ suffering, personal tragedy, and hopeless destiny is reinforced by two main elements. Firstly, by the emphasis that is placed on the goodness of the characters. For instance, we learn how much Birgitte’s benefactor is positively impressed by her, and how innocent and honorable she is. In the same vein, we read how much Maria, Anna, and Constance make honest attempts to love their husbands. Secondly, by the focus on the falsehood of society. Indeed, in all the fictional works, the double moral standards in matrimonial morality are criticized; or the unfortunate position is explained concerning women who didn’t get the chance to study and learn something useful in order to be economically independent; or the lack of supporting institutions that could keep girls like Birgitte from prostitution is discussed. Apart from the fact that these societal critiques reinforce the intensity of the protagonists’ suffering, they also prepare ground for a number of societal changes and ideals put forward by the three authors—solutions that were also expressed in the three discussed nonfictional works.

We end this conclusion with three observations. First, we observed that Skram, Fibiger and Stéenhoff, both in their novels (or novella) or nonfictional works, and well-aligned with Georg Brandes’s call for a social engagement of MB authors (Ahlström 1947; Bredsdorff 1973; Hjordt-Vetlesen 1993), all clearly demonstrate a mission to contribute to societal change, that is, to create actual improvement. In the nonfictional works, they do so, not only by showing empathy for girls engaged in sexual transactions, but primarily by providing facts and figures, by addressing the reader directly with questions, and by using rhetorical devices and logical lines of argumentation. In the novels and novella, they do so by staging four central female characters who act, re-act, feel, and express emotions related to their fate of being unfree, humiliated, and having to sell themselves against their will. On a more abstract level, this mode of expression presents a clear analogy with the well-known head, heart, and hands approach.16 Indeed, in both genres, the authors aim for practical, down-to-earth change to improve the conditions of women vis-à-vis sexual transactions and the society at large (hands, i.e., doing). In the nonfictional works, they seek to realize this change by primarily making an appeal

16. This approach is, for instance, widely used in transformational learning theory and holistic approaches on ecoliteracy, and is consistent with the three dimensions of attitudes identified in social psychological research (Breckler 1984).
to the readers’ intellect (head, i.e., cognition), whereas in the literary works, they mainly do so by playing on the readers’ emotions (heart, i.e., affection).

Second, we conclude that the inclusion of nonfictional works in this study as a lens to better understand the phenomenon of prostitution during the MB has clearly provided an added value in the reading of the three literary works. In more specific terms, we believe that (i) it has given insight into the female writer’s perspective and her militant side, about one of the most pressing issues of the MB; (ii) it has provided additional cultural, social, and economic context for this specific historical era (the MB) as viewed by the authors; and (iii) therefore, has made the reading of three socially engaged literary works on prostitution more complete.

Third, to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of sexual transactions in the Scandinavian literature and society of the Modern Breakthrough, we recommend future research to draw on an extended research design that allows, for example, an examination of how selected female writings were received during the time of publication by contemporary critics and social commentators. Other promising lines of future research would be to look into other manifestations of prostitution, such as voluntary prostitution and male prostitution, to connect sexual transactions in the Modern Breakthrough to present-day phenomena such as “slut-shaming” as well as the white slave trade represented in documentary genres and films.

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