Disappearing Acts
The Erasure of Anna Wahlenberg

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If things are excluded generically—we do not see them.
If things are classified in certain generic ways—we cannot perceive them in any other way…
Hence, the cementation of […] gender hierarchies made by genre.
Petra Ragnerstam (2005:11)

For much of the *fin de siècle* and early 20th century, Swedish author Anna Wahlenberg (1858-1933) was not only prolific but also very popular across broad audiences and in a variety of media. As early as the mid-1870s, she had begun writing serials [*följetonger*] for various newspapers and magazines, but her core literary work began in the early 1880s. Her body of work includes 19 novels; 9 plays; 23 collections of short stories; 194 different children's stories and fairy tales [*sagor*]; more than 15 children's plays; 30 collections of fairy tales; individual stories included in 40 edited story collections of works by various authors; the first translation/adaptation of the *1001 Nights* into Swedish for the *Barnbiblioteket Saga* series; and critical articles and pieces of fiction in newspapers and women's magazines including *Idun, Dagny*, and *Framåt*. Wahlenberg became so popular

Anna Wahlenberg *(1858-1933), Written on the back: "Ida Branders saml." Unknown photographer, 1900. Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, Svenska Teaterns arkiv, SLSA 1270_34_foto_1865. <https://sls.finna.fi/Record/sls.SLSA+1270_SLSA+1270_34_foto_1865>.*

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that just seven years after her debut with her short-story collection *Teckningar i sanden* [Drawings in the Sand] (1882),[1] the women's magazine *Idun* could remark, "Now there probably aren't many Swedish homes […] where one or another of Anna Wahlenberg's works has not found its way" (Nordling 1889: 237).[2] And yet she is forgotten today; going from anonymity to ubiquity, and ultimately to obscurity. Most of Wahlenberg's work has long been out of print and has received scant academic attention. Surveys of late-nineteenth-century Swedish women writers merely list Wahlenberg alongside other female authors of the *Åttiotalsgenerationen* [the (18)80s generation], although their "feverish female activity" [*febril kvinnlig aktivitet*] (Hjordt-Vetlesen 2011) outpaced that of their male counterparts (Sjöblad 2011; Heggestad 1991).[3] Despite their prolific production, this generation of women writers is most often a side note to dominant discussions of the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough, which, in Sweden, concentrated heavily on Strindberg (Williams 1997: 55-62).

This article focuses on Anna Wahlenberg and the discursive strategies that effected her systematic erasure from the canon and from literary history in the context of a pervasive gender ideology. Hardly unique, Wahlenberg's story is an exemplar of those of most of the Swedish women writers and artists of the late 1800s. Examining the discursive strategies that led to her disappearance from literary history necessitates viewing literary history, definitions, genres, epochs, evaluations, and methods as they pertain to female authors with skepticism and suspicion, and recognizing these as "products of long-term temporal chains of censorious events" (Lindh Estelle 2023: 28). Revisiting Wahlenberg's work in historical contexts rather than through the lens of established literary criticism and its imposition of generic strictures, and re-evaluating how she negotiated within and around imposed regulating structures, I seek to break the "historiographic chains of silencing events" (Ibid).

Anna Wahlenberg and the Men of the Modern Breakthrough

As women[3] in the arts increasingly sought to break down the barriers to conventionally male spheres, they precipitated a crisis in the gendered social order, and although the men of the Modern Breakthrough presented

[1] Written under the pseudonym "RIEN" ["nothing"].

[2] "*Nu torde väl icke manga Svenska hem finnas*, […] *dit ej et eller annat af Anna Wahlenbergs arbeten hittat fram*" (my translation throughout).

[3] Georg Brandes, a main advocate of the literary movement known as the Modern Breakthrough, is considered to have introduced the concept in a series of lectures he gave in 1871, but his *Det moderne Gjennembruds Mænd* [*The Men of the Modern Breakthrough*] (1883) unequivocally asserts the gendered nature of the concept he first articulated a decade earlier. Bracketed between the years 1870 and 1890, the Modern Breakthrough was defined as a rejection of Romanticism in favor of Realism in literature and art.

themselves as artistically innovative and anti-establishment, the movement was male-dominated and gender conservative. In the predictable backlash to the challenges posed by women, the full force of the literary and cultural establishment soon collectively closed ranks to bring about the erasure of the women of the 80s generation from literary history, with a few notable exceptions such as Victoria Benedictsson and Anne Charlotte Leffler. Critics like Brandes, who had initially supported women's rights, were by the 1880s part of this backlash, and became "more and more defensive, or even openly negative" (Sjöblad).[4]

The ideological work of the backlash ultimately was performed by an entire system of institutions that included authors, publishers, critics, academics, and literary theorists. Gedin has identified this as "an unholy alliance of (male) conservative and radical writers and critics (and eventually a few historians) who together retroactively develop the notion that female artists of the eighties were lacking in artistic merit, regardless of the urgency of their political and social message and despite the audience's appreciation" (2005: 289-90).[5] August Strindberg, friend to both Georg Brandes and his brother, publicist and critic Edvard, took up the cause in Sweden.[6] Strindberg's novel *Giftas* [(*Getting*) *Married*][7] exemplifies the shifting attitudes toward women and gender relations on the part of the men of the Breakthrough during the late 1800s: *Giftas Part I* (1884) includes stories which suggest egalitarian relations between the sexes, although "his suspicious attitude to writing women is evident." By *Part II* (1887), the tone is "decidedly aggressive and venomous toward what he calls […] "the cultured woman" (Sjöblad).

Anna Wahlenberg, whose first novel, *Små själar* [Small Souls], was published in 1886, was at the center of this storm. *Små själar* captured the crushing psychological effect that expectations of feminine domesticity had on middle-class women. The novel's focus is a trenchant critique of the "education" that middle-class girls received in preparation for domestic (married) life, which provided no options for emancipation. In *Små själar*, Wahlenberg makes explicit the connection between money, power, and women's independence:

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[4] Both Benedictsson and Leffler died early enough [1888 and 1892 respectively] to be chronologically contained within the *Åttiotalsgenerationen.* More importantly, their inclusion in the canon has allowed for the exclusion of the bulk of the women authors who were their contemporaries.

[5] "*… en ohelig allians av (manliga) konservativa och radikala författare och kritiker (och så småningom litteraturhistoriker) som tillsammans retroaktivt utvecklar föreställningen om de kvinnliga åttitalisternas avgörande brist på konstnärligt värde, oavsett angelägenheten i deras politiska och sociala budskap och trots publikens uppskattning.*" (my translation)

[6] Strindberg's fame throughout Scandinavia, and the promotion of the deeply misogynist agenda in his writing arguably gained considerable help from the efforts of Edvard Brandes.

[7] *Mariés,* in French.

formal education/training was a means to work, which was a means to money, and thus to independence and power over one's destiny. The typical middle-class upbringing for young women, geared towards polite social skills, was thus, for Wahlenberg, an impediment to earning money and gaining independence.

Wahlenberg's personal life/domestic life informed the political in *Små själar*, in which the domestic realm was the site of despair brought on by males. She attributed her motivation and inspiration for *Små själar* to the resentment, humiliation, and the financial hardship brought on by her father's bankruptcy, framed within the larger context of the social restrictions imposed on women by the constraints of the normative family. *Små själar* is a critique of the family romance: a depiction of a dysfunctional family with no *pater familias* filled with weak males who retrenched into their positions of authority and clung to the notion that middle-class girls should not work.

More than an appeal for gender equality, Wahlenberg described *Små själar* as a cry to save the pride and human dignity within women so that they would no longer be little souls (1928). Writing many years later, Wahlenberg remembered that she felt the book would be eye-opening: that parents would realize their responsibility to teach their daughters to stand on their own two feet, and that even the staunchest opponents of women's emancipation would be swayed (1902: 136). So confident was Wahlenberg of the affective power of her novel that she sent a copy to Strindberg, only to be rewarded with his scorn. In his response he asks if she is not ashamed to imagine that her insights could match his and calls her a spoiled brat. He also says that he has nothing to learn from her, but that she might continue to study his writings.[8]

Strindberg's rejection of *Små själar* and his evaluation of its inferiority in comparison to his own novels reveal the co-constitutive construction of gender and genre that has privileged the male perspective and that has worked to create and maintain systems of value, hierarchy, and knowledge. Strindberg's dismissal of *Små själar* not only coincides with the backlash against women writers generally, but it is indicative of how the novel, which had been a low-prestige, but highly popular female genre in the first half of the nineteenth century,[9] was claimed by the men of the Breakthrough in the late 1800s, who then used their control over literary institutions to transform the novel into a male preserve, what Cohen, in the context of the French novel has called

[8] Letter from August Strindberg to A.W. dated 14 nov. 1886, cited in Lagerström (1974: 8). The letter states: "*att ni inte skäms öfver ett sådant oförstånd. Och ni anser er ha sett djupare än jag! Man ska vara ett bortskämdt fruntimmer för att komma med sådan inbilskhet. Jag har ingenting att lära af Er, men ni kan med behållning fortsätta att studera mina skrifter.*"

[9] Marie Sophie Schwartz (1819-1894) was the most-read woman writer in Sweden in the nineteenth century. She published over 60 books, many of them serialized, from 1851-1894 (Busk-Jensen 2011).

a "hostile takeover" (1999: 6).[10] That Wahlenberg would seek acceptance by Strindberg is a telling indication of the success of the genre's appropriation and redefinition by the male literary establishment. And yet, Wahlenberg's debut novel, appearing seven years after Strindberg's own debut novel *Röda rummet* [*Red Room*][11] (1879), posed enough of a threat to his claim on the genre on which a great deal of his personal capital was based that he categorically rejected it.

Strindberg's dismissal of Wahlenberg was ultimately not based on her writing but hinged on prevailing presumptions of female inferiority on the basis of sex (Sjöblad). The notion of women's "innate"[12] inferiority, revived during the Breakthrough's backlash against women authors, resulted in the reification of the evolutionist construction of separate, unequal gendered spheres (Heggestad 1993: 506; Conrad 2021:103), which was spatialized in the public/domestic divide and temporally mapped onto the present/past. Accordingly, woman's "natural" destiny was in the home and in a time prior to modernity. This gender ideology, masquerading as biological determinism, was reinforced and reiterated by male contemporaries who had disproportionate access to public platforms. Strindberg proclaimed that women artists and writers were "whores" who had "lost the characteristic of their sex = passivity" (Strindberg 1992, letter nr. 233, pg. 311).[13] A similarly revelatory proclamation on the "nature" of women is Strindberg's description of the character of Miss Julie in the Preface to his 1888 play of the same name (*Fröken Julie* [*Miss Julie*]),[14] in which he describes his titular character as "half-woman" (although he attributes the deficiency of her character at least in part to her "monthly sickness" [*hennes månadssjuka*]) (Strindberg 1888: ix). For Strindberg, Miss Julie was a modern, tragic character engaged in a "desperate struggle against nature" [*en förtviflad kamp mot nature*] (Strindberg 1888: xii), that is, her own nature fought the "natural" disposition of her sex.

The backlash also played out in the popular press—in magazines and newspapers. Often owned by the same publishing conglomerates that published literary works, and in whose pages new novels were often pre-released in serial form, magazines and newspapers also published reviews of those literary works, while serving as a means of advertising in the book publishing market. As advertisements and reviews of newly released books would enhance their circulation and shape opinions, and since reviewers and critics such as Brandes and Strindberg were disproportionately male, women writers, as competitors, were at a disadvantage. This closed system cultivated a gender-biased literary

[10] Tuchman (2012) writes about the same phenomenon in Victorian England.
[11] *La Chambre rouge* or *Le Cabinet rouge* in French.
[12] Throughout this article, I use quotation marks for certain words—innate, high and low culture, women's work, etc.—to indicate their constructed nature.
[13] In a letter to Ola Hansson, March 1899.
[14] *Mademoiselle Julie* in French.

aesthetic that was inherently prejudicial (Williams 1997: 18,183), resulting in a self-select canon on which literary historiography was constructed, as well as a persistent and pervasive literary aesthetic based on that canon.

Disproportionately negative, reviews of Wahlenberg's work were infused with explicitly gendered language. In a letter to Ellen Key, Wahlenberg expressed dismay about a review in *Stockholms Dagblad* of her novel *Vid avgrundens rand* [At the Edge of the Abyss] (1913), an experimental novel which consists entirely of interior monologue, with the character's thoughts written in italics. The review compared the book to "poorly seasoned home cooking".[15] Such a summary dismissal highlights the limitations of genre dictates and demonstrates how both gender and genre are classificatory systems that have worked to the exclusion of women and impoverished the field of literary analysis. Even "positive" reviews in women's magazines, such as an 1889 feature story on Wahlenberg in *Idun*, displayed an overt sexism which held the work of male authors to be the norm and the goal: "Anna Wahlenberg's style has a character of masculinity and power that is quite rare in female writers" (Nordling: 237).[16] Similarly, an 1899 profile of Wahlenberg in *Idun* dwells on Wahlenberg's appearance and demeanor, and remarks on what a good mother and housekeeper she is *despite* being an author, praising the behind-the-scenes supportive role of her sister Eva, never mentioning the fact that Eva Wahlenberg was an author and noted translator in her own right, and without ever mentioning Wahlenberg's work (René 1899: 1-2).

Wahlenberg's erasure has been effected by the highly gendered narratives *about* her that abridge and misrepresent her deeply connected personal and professional histories. She is described as middle-class and married (Jeppson 1981:127); a bourgeois wife who did not need to work. In reality, from the time of her father's business failure, which threw the family into disarray and precarity, through her marriage (1888-1896), and especially after the death of her husband, only one year after her second son was born, Wahlenberg experienced continuous economic precarity. Living as a single mother and her family's sole provider for 37 years after her husband's death, she wrote for a living out of necessity, and her prolific output in multiple genres and media reflects this economic reality. This downplayed aspect of her life story does not conform to the domestic ideal, but it does capture the reality of many middle-class women of the day, many of whom were single or the sole income earner in their families, working in the public sphere's new industrializing economy. This reality is obscured by the analytic convention of framing women authors' life stories in terms of a heteronormative, domestic ideal, or by psychoanalyzing their writing as reflecting the (female) depressive state that centers around the

[15] "*till en ej alltför kryddad husmanskost*" (my translation). 29.11.1913 brev till Ellen Key, Kung. Biblio. MS. Section.

[16] "*Anna Wahlenbergs stil har en karaktär af manlighet och kraft, som är Ganske sällsynt hos qvinliga skriftställare*".

loss of the father/husband (Dahlerup 1983: 281-3). In contrast, Wahlenberg worked throughout her marriage, and after her husband died, moved back to her childhood home and lived with her unmarried sister Eva, together raising her two sons. Both sisters worked as authors and translators to support the non-conventional family in a female-headed household.

Wahlenberg's enthusiasm for the righteousness of her first novel, her unvarnished depictions of the failures of the status quo, and her direct challenge to the prevailing gender order would all work to consign Wahlenberg's writing to the so-called "literature of indignation" ["*indignationslitteraturen*"] (Fahlgren 1986; Nolin and Forsgren 1988: 319-323)—itself a condescending, gendered, and pejorative concept attached to the women writers of the *Åttiotalsgenerationen*.[17] This literature of indignation is said to have peaked by the mid-1880s, after which, frustrated that their works were not met with the anticipated positive response, women writers are said to have turned away from "serious" literature like the novel and drama, and redirected their energies to other genres—short stories, travel writing, and especially fairy tales and children's literature. That is, not accepted into the men's world, they turned to the more typical "women's genres" of fairy tales and short stories. Thus, Wahlenberg and others, consigned to "women's work", were also dismissed by the patriarchal and exclusionary constructions of "high" and "low" literature. The reductive and selective biography attributed to Anna Wahlenberg in most standard literary histories is typical of those of many Swedish women writers and artists. Discarded to the dustbin of history that is "women's work"— "inferior" genres best suited to the abilities of women—their work was quarantined outside of the canon and the theories that have emerged from it. David Gedin describes the process:

> many of the women turned to (also) writing children's and youth literature (Fahlstedt, Roos, Kerfstedt, Wahlenberg). This meant that they (like Alfhild Agrell and Mathilda Kruse) withdrew from the part of the field where the large incomes of symbolic capital were available, which also—since they were still in the literary field and thus continued to invest their symbolic capital - meant that they gradually lost what they had accumulated. By more or less voluntarily applying to a low-valued genre, they certainly had the opportunity to gain both success and income, but it contributed to writing them out of the "ordinary" literary history to appear only under the special genre designation "children's literature." […] That is to say, the women writers become more or

[17] The term "*indignationslitteraturen*" was first coined by author Mathilda Kruse ("Stella Kleve") in the autumn 1886 issue of *Framåt*. Misappropriated and decontextualized, the term was quickly adopted by contemporary male authors to differentiate themselves from their female counterparts and subsequently came to dominate literary historiography for the next hundred years.

less involuntarily involved in the polarization in which their careers will define the culturally low-valued writings (2005: 289).[18]

Thus, at the same time as women were entering the literary world in large numbers, and as Wahlenberg was finding her voice through her writing, the silencing of women writers had also begun (Gedin 2004: 354). Women writers like Wahlenberg found themselves in a difficult bind: unable to fully sever ties with influential male-dominated networks, they were not accepted as equals if they were allowed entry. Seeking recognition and acceptance from the powerful actors of the Modern Breakthrough, the women writers of the 1880s failed in both—either rejected outright or dismissed as inferior. The persistence and ubiquity of such negative and gendered views effected a long-lasting gender bias in literary history: in the 1916 edition of *Illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria,* women authors constitute 44 % of all authors, and yet only receive 20 % of the text allotment. More to the point, the number of lines allocated to Strindberg is 4242 (Schück and Warburg 1916, v. 5: 421-522) in comparison to Wahlenberg's seven (v. 5: 560-61).[19] More recently, in Forsås-Scott's *Swedish Women's Writing, 1850-1995* (1997), written to "redress the balance" caused by Strindberg's dominance in the reception of Swedish literature in the English-speaking world by presenting a "number of major Swedish women writers" (1), there is no mention of Anna Wahlenberg at all.[20]

Re-visiting Swedish Women Authors to Re-construct the Literary Episteme

Feminist scholars have begun to include some of the women writers of the *Åttiotalsgeneration* into the literary history of the Modern Breakthrough, seeking to address its lop-sided male dominance (Dahlerup 1983; Hjordt-Vetlesen 2011). Many have argued that women writers embraced the realism

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[18] "*så många av kvinnorna övergick till att (också) skriva barn- och ungdomslitteratur (Fahlstedt, Roos, Kerfstedt, Wahlenberg). Det innebar att de (liksom Alfhild Agrell och Mathilda Kruse) retirerade från den del av fältet där de stora inkomsterna av symboliskt kapital fanns tillgängliga, vilket också—eftersom de fortfarande befannsig på det litterära fältet och därmed fortsatte att satsa sitt symboliska kapital—innebar att de successivt förlorade vad de ackumulerat. Genom att mer eller mindre frivilligt söka sig till enlågt värderad genre fick de visserligen möjlighet att få både framgång och inkomster, men det bidrog till att skriva ut dem ur den "vanliga" litteraturhistorien för att endast förekomma under den speciella genrebeteckningen "barnlitteratur" (till skillnad från "litteratur").* […] *Det vill säga att de kvinnliga författarna blir mer eller mindre ofrivilligt delaktiga i den polarisering där deras karriärer kommer att definiera de kulturelltlågt värderade författarskapen.*"

[19] Also noted in Williams, 1997: 216-217.

[20] Broomans, 1999, has also shown that *Illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria* is more inclusive regarding women writers than literary histories published later.

of the Breakthrough, which allowed them to write against a literary and social construction of woman that was based on "deceit and lies" (Dahlerup 1975: 30). Given the legacy of the Breakthrough, this is optimistic. To insert women writers into a male-defined and dominated system obfuscates the fact that such schemata are "structured in and structuring of gender power relations" (Pollock 1988: 55), which are not undone by the after-the-fact insertion of women.

The men of the Modern Breakthrough distinguished themselves based on two basic premises—that they represented an abrupt break with the past, in particular Romanticism, and that their writing was characterized by Realism.[21] The male writers of the Breakthrough claimed this as a particularly masculine style because of its putative insistence on facts and objectivity, putting it in apparent opposition to the emotionalism and sentimentalism of women writers. From this developed the common hypothesis that women's literature during the Breakthrough was "steeped in unhappiness" and from that emerged the (unfounded) presumption that the work of the male writers was, in contrast, if not happy, then at least not unhappy. This convention, ironically advocated most explicitly by Dahlerup, has persisted into the present (Degn et. al. 2025: 3).[22]

Revisiting the work of popular women writers, it is clear that they, too, employed realistic techniques—attention to detail, a concern with the everyday, and, as delimited by social and literary convention, a focus on the domestic sphere. With the women writers, these provided the basis for their examining, critiquing, and challenging of conventional gender roles. Male writers of the Breakthrough would also use the domestic sphere, particularly the sitting room of the stage, whose missing wall opened the physical intimacies of family life to audiences to great effect as a transparent depiction of everyday life. The (feminized) domestic interiors of the women writers, however, in contrast to those of their male counterparts, were diminished and trivialized in the hands of their (male) critics. This repudiation and distancing from "the trivialities and banalities of everyday life" has been "one of the constitutive features of a [male-centered] modernist aesthetic" (Huyssen, 1986: 190), but the decoupling of the female everyday from the putative realism of the Breakthrough required some discursive *jujutsu*. In the gendered and circular world of literary criticism, women's everyday was conflated with the domestic, and thereby

[21] Realism conventionally is defined as a style that focuses on "ordinary, accessible subject matter, close observation, objectivity, and an emphasis on facts" (Becker 1963: 23-29).

[22] Degn, et al., use quantitative methods and a vastly expanded data base to challenge this "Unhappy Text" hypothesis. What they found was that women's works that reflected positive emotions, i.e., happiness, were consistently disproportionately reported and analyzed. Their work raises questions about literary analyses that are "totally dependent on a type of writing that first and foremost has been a male undertaking" (20).

rendered trivial, overly emotional, and thus inferior, whereas in contrast, the male writers' use of the domestic scene was offered up as an unvarnished presentation of daily life. The "female domestic everyday" was thus deployed as a mechanism of exclusion; the banality of the subject reaffirming the innate inferiority of its creators. Caught in this double bind, Wahlenberg's work was dismissed as less interesting than that of her male counterparts. Not limited to this assessment however, Wahlenberg's novels were also criticized on the basis of their *departure* from realism and for lacking aesthetic value, both concepts masquerading as neutral and absolute.

The claims of the men of the Modern Breakthrough can also be deconstructed in terms of their timeline. The word "breakthrough" suggests spontaneity—a burst of (male) creative genius, and a violent rejection of the past. But the remarkable output of the *Åttiotalsgeneration* women writers was neither spontaneous nor was it a rupture with the past: it was the result of the work, both literary and political, of the generations of Swedish women who had preceded them, themselves part of a larger international phenomenon of nineteenth-century women authors and advocates for women's rights.[23] The 182 books of Emilie Flygare-Carlén (1807-1892) and Marie Sophie Schwartz's (1819-1894) 145 publications were cultural, if not literary phenomena (Holm 1981). Among Schwartz's works are polemical novels that advocated for increased equality for women (Leffler 2018) long before Brandes' call for literary forms to engage in the so-called morality debate (Da. *Sædelighedsfejden)*. Feminist writer and reformer Fredrika Bremer (1801-1865) published her novel *Hertha* (1856) over two decades before Strindberg's *Röda rummet* [*Red Room*] (1879), so that *Hertha* must awkwardly (and anachronistically) be identified as the "first *Feminist* novel in Swedish Literature" (Wieselgren 1978) in order for *Röda rummet* to retain the title as the "first Swedish novel." The publications of these women writers preceded the Modern Breakthrough, and their use of realism and focus on the everyday challenge the Breakthrough's temporal and categorical boundaries. Wahlenberg's writing rested on this tradition of women authors, but, arguably, the men of the Breakthrough were also part of that continuum, rather than a radical break from it. The writings of the women authors of the *fin de siècle* substantively and chronologically challenge the artificial time limit and definitional criteria of the Modern Breakthrough as articulated by Brandes, a breakthrough that could only be effected through

[23] In the US and England, for example, at least half of all novelists were women before 1840 (Tuchman: 7), while the so-called sentimental women writers in the US mid-century outsold their more high-brow male contemporaries. In France, Jardine points out that the period from 1800 to 1848 "produced as many women writers as had the entire eighteenth century" (1985: 96-97).

the exclusion of female writers, for as Witt-Brattström points out, thinking in terms of epochs and genres tends to edge women out (2004: 1).[24]

Thus, at the moment in which masculinity in Sweden was under siege from the social changes embodied in the figure of the "New Woman,"[25] the fight to exclude women writers on the basis of their failure to adhere to the (selective) imperatives of the Breakthrough can be seen as a proxy battle between male writers and the female writers whose popularity was increasing. The men of the Modern Breakthrough, rather than demolishing gender conventions, were fighting to maintain them and thereby to control the literary field.

How, then, would it be to reconstruct literary analyses and historiography to include the female writers' perspectives and experiences? How would their inclusion necessitate a new literary model? How would an analysis that does not depend on justifying the women writers' conformity (or non-conformity) to the criteria set by the Breakthrough deconstruct the male literary schemata, whose foundational purpose was to marginalize their female counterparts?

Rereading nineteenth century novels through the works of Scandinavian female authors can reveal a different kind of gendering of the genre. The appropriation of the novel by male authors had resulted in the privileging of the bourgeois male subject, but Anna Bohlin has demonstrated that in writing from a female subject position women authors could depict female subjectivity as the site of containment, exclusion, abjection, and rage, creating novels that she calls "affect producing machine[s]" (2021: 2). Bohlin also found that women authors interwove a variety of anti-realist elements—melodrama, pre-Freudian psychoanalysis, fantasy, the uncanny, and inner dialogue—into their realistic depictions of the everyday to effect an emotionally complex genre. Wahlenberg herself, despite being grounded in the everyday, eschewed the exclusive use of realism and sought to engage the reader at the level of affect in her hybrid forms, which have yet to be adequately explored because of the analytic imperatives and gender prejudices that inhered in the conventions of genre and realism as defined by the Breakthrough.

[24] There is one additional way in which women's writing could conveniently be overlooked: as will be described further below, because of their economic precarity, many women writers published in new, popular mass media—particularly newspapers, journals, and magazines, as well as subscription libraries and book clubs, mostly aimed at women consumers. These were denigrated media, outside of the purview of literary critics.

[25] A category that emerged in the late 19th century in the West to refer to educated, bourgeois, progressive feminists who sought progressive reform to gender relations and thus were often seen as a threat to the conventional gender order.

Different Genres, Expanded Historical Contexts, Different Literary History

So far, this article has focused on the discursive processes by which women writers of the 1880s were removed or disallowed from Swedish literary history and has argued for a more expansive and inclusive understanding of the literary works of the time that includes women writers. To continue to deny the role and impact of Swedish women writers (and artists) in the overall response to modernity that the Modern Breakthrough was seen as embodying, several other discursive moves were necessary: ignoring the system of women's networks that supported actual working women in the public sphere; excluding the role these networks played in the world of publishing, particularly the explosion of women's magazines that contributed to significantly challenging and affecting dominant gender discourse; and dismissing the place of children's literature, and in particular children's magazines and children's publishing in radically restructuring pedagogy and gender ideology. What is necessary is an interdisciplinary re-historicizing of the period to break away from the narrow confines of literature, and to recreate the context in which to more adequately situate women writers of the *Åttiotalsgenerationen.* This is not to abandon literary forms, but to expand the focus, which has primarily been concentrated on the novel—the quintessential genre of modernity. To continue to privilege the novel over other genres—the short story, the fairy tale, the travel narrative—would be to reaffirm the gendered logic by which women's writing has been exiled from the literary canon and dismissed as "women's work" and not within the purview of literary analysis.

Women's Networks

Women-created networks, organizations, workspaces, and publications facilitated women's entering commercial, industrial, and political arenas, undoing hierarchies of gender by providing the space in which to maneuver: "elbow room, freedom of choice, self-determination, new or larger arenas to move around in" (Eduards 2002: 16) that nonetheless operated within an overarching structure of unequal power. Women's associations and networks provided the mechanism by which women could enter new commercial industries—including mass publishing and commercial illustration—which in turn were being brokered and marketed in novel ways. Within these spaces in which women's work at once served political and economic functions, the terms of a new gender order were being shaped and contested.

Women's networks spanned generations, classes, and professions, and were ideologically diverse, but all advocated for women's rights in a changing society. Individual members were also aligned and active across multiple organizations, conflating the personal, the professional, and the political. The first such organization, *Fredrika Bremer-förbundet* (FBF) [the Fredrika Bremer

Association], was founded in 1884 by Sophie Adlersparre and was dedicated to "realizing equality between women and men with the same opportunities, rights and obligations in home, professional life and society."[26] This was followed by a host of other women's organizations, professional and political, that promoted women's roles in modern Swedish society. This "weave of alliances" (Wängnerud 2012) between women's groups not only agitated for women's inclusion into politics and the public sphere but also encouraged and enabled cooperation among women across social classes, and one of the main focuses of many such associations was to advance their message to a broad-based readership through their publications—women's magazines.

Women's Magazines

Women's magazines, emerging in the mid- to late 1800s, were a favorite platform for women to engage in social debate, critique, and dialogue (Nordenstam). These magazines also posted information on jobs, educational opportunities, and personal ads, providing women with various means of entering the public sphere and employment. Located at the border of the private and the public, women's magazines carved out a place in which women could write, and, although excluded from political, academic, and public spheres, participate in public discussion.

In 1859, Sophie Adlersparre (1823-1895) and Rosalie Olivecrona (1823-1898) founded *Tidskrift* för *hemmet* [Magazine for the Home], the first women's magazine in Scandinavia (Nordenstam *Historisk*). *Tidskrift* för *hemmet* served as an early platform for debates on women's rights, gender roles, and feminism in Sweden, while its advertisements and classified sections, which were addressed exclusively to women, were a source of information on jobs, educational opportunities, and living accommodations both at home and abroad. Articles announced important new work by women authors and artists, providing a much-needed redress to the one-sided coverage of the mainstream press. In 1886, *Tidskrift för hemmet* was taken over by the Fredrika-Bremer Association under the new name *Dagny: Tidskrift för sociala och litterära intressen* [Journal for social and literary interests] and shifted its focus to include both women's literature and also literary criticism, areas in which women had been grossly underrepresented in mainstream magazines.

A year later, the magazine *Idun* was founded. Initially directed at women in the home, around 1900 *Idun* shifted focus and began to emphasize emancipation and education. Focusing on women and featuring women authors, *Idun* was nonetheless initially edited by and also featured articles by male authors, and thus was more mainstream, with a large distribution (Stål 2014).[27] Perhaps only second to Fredrika Bremer in her promotion of women's rights and suffrage,

[26] From the foundation's website: <https://fredrikabremer.se/om-oss/>.

[27] In 1909 its circulation was roughly 50,000 copies.

Elin Wägner (1882-1949) became Assistant Editor-in-Chief at *Idun* (1907-1917), and during her tenure, Anna Wahlenberg was a regular contributor. Wahlenberg's short stories during this period exemplify the changes in her style as well as in social relations in the years since her breakthrough novel. A revisitation of her stories, read not through the limitations of genre, suggests a different, more hybridized form that challenges genre and therefore gender definitions.

Her short story, "Trollkarlen" [Troll King][28] alludes to a well-inscribed fairy-tale trope, but rather than exploiting that reference for a layered intertext, as does Benedictsson's *Den Bergtagna* (1890), the story focuses instead on the emotional and social negotiations of a young, unmarried woman, Rut. She lives at home but also works in the law offices of her uncle. Every year for the past two years, she has gone to Stockholm, and there has kindled a love interest, which she'd hoped to revisit during the current year. This hope is dashed when she learns that it is her sister who is to visit the capital this time. The bulk of the story focuses on Rut's machinations and manipulation of her family members and their comic inability to address her request, constantly sending her to another family member, all of which illuminate the dysfunctional bourgeois family while simultaneously demonstrating the persistence of familial control over unmarried daughters despite their working outside the home. The dialogue between family members is interspersed with Rut's own interior monologue, advancing the narrative but also giving psychological insight. In the end, the "happy" resolution is delivered by the uncle, who has invited Rut's love interest there, so that no trip to Stockholm is necessary, making all her schemes irrelevant. It is the uncle who has worked this out, and it is he who is the "wizard" (*trollkarlen*) in the story, a clear indictment of the persistence of patriarchal authority since Rut is entirely dependent on others.

Wahlenberg's "Skyddsängeln" [The Guardian Angel][29] is written in a style that is in line with what Ebba Witt-Brattström has called "New Woman fiction" (2004), which she identifies as the lost link between the "indignation literature" of the 1880s and female modernism. For Witt-Brattström, New Woman fiction invites us to "revise the canon, with its persistent cult of the male genius, in favor of the more dialogical model of women's literature, a model with includes an untiring investigation of the violence inherent in subject-object relations, especially gendered ones" (2004: viii). Recognizing Wahlenberg's work in women's magazines and novels during the second and third decades of the new century as part of a continuous process disallows the perpetuation of the narrative in which women writers turned to fairy tales and other "gender-appropriate" genres after their disappointment in the 1880s.

"Skyddsängeln" is a complicated and ambiguous story. Greta, a married woman, has a chance encounter with a love interest from her past—Allan

[28] *Iduns Julnummer* 1921, p. 34-37.
[29] *Idun* Årg. 31, Nr. 34, Aug. 25, 1918, p. 540-541.

Björk. She is out alone in the evening, as she explains to Allan, engaged in a kind of reciprocal taunt with her husband, who also goes out at night. She gives music lessons on these outings, but she is not a working woman, her husband being too wealthy for that to be necessary.

Through the inner monologues of both Greta and Allan, we see that he surmises that she is unhappy in her marriage, an idea which Greta also encourages in thought and action. In their flirtations, which progress to a café where they linger, both of their hopes of reuniting are stoked. In the heat of the moment, they develop a plan whereby they will continue to meet, to further Greta's "career," in Göteborg, where Allan lives and has connections. Greta asks him to come by her home the next day when, she says, her husband, Erik, will be out, so that they may cement their plan. Upon Allan's arrival, however, Greta's demeanor has significantly changed. Erik is indeed at home—a large, but cordial, looming presence. Erik thanks Allan for his friendship with his wife and then leaves to allow Greta and Allan to say their goodbyes, as old friends. Greta thanks Allan for being the catalyst that has repaired her marriage, explaining that Erik's momentary jealousy upon learning of their encounter has allowed them to resolve their problems, and that Allan is a "guardian angel" for helping them.

Characteristic of New Woman fiction, the ending is ambiguous. We do not fully know what transpired between Erik and Greta to "restore" their marriage, but the tension in the scene with the three characters suggests an uneasy resolution, one in which patriarchal order is restored, but in a diminished form. We are left with the uneasy feeling that the marriage is anything but solid, and even with a vague sense of menace that seems to lurk behind Erik's cordial demeanor. Also characteristic of New Woman fiction and distinct from the literature of the 1880s is the sexual awareness of women characters: Greta is not only sexually aware, but she also manipulates that awareness in her flirtation, apparently deriving pleasure in the encounter, and encouraging Allan to act further on his impulses. Ultimately, there is no happy ending for any of the characters—an indictment of a situation in which women can temporarily escape the claustrophobia of marriage and unequal power relations within it by flirtatious dalliances, but who will inevitably return to the marriage. Wahlenberg goes further, however. Allan's closing thoughts after his rejection are of revenge, and he weaponizes marriage to that end, vowing to marry "tomorrow or the next day […] just to tease [Greta]" (to show her that he's not pining after her). Wahlenberg's dismal assessment of gender relations is that all are adversarial.

Children's Publishing and Magazines

The rise of children's publishing in Sweden is the result of a unique set of conditions in which women's networks provided the spaces within which old forms of "women's work" were reconfigured in industrial capitalism to

create new everyday practices in new material conditions—specifically, the publication of children's stories in mass-produced, illustrated, and widely distributed children's magazines. The networks of femininity and the work they performed in producing children's material represent a sustained engagement with the shifting complexities of the modern in relation to gender politics.

At the end of the 19th century, the push for literacy created an increased demand for elementary school teachers. The resultant growth of teacher training schools and the professionalization and organization of the mostly female teachers played a significant role in advancing literacy for all, and, not unrelatedly, for the expansion of women's rights. In addition to teaching, teachers organized and shaped modern curricula and pedagogy. Related to this was the creation of their own publishing houses to ensure that their reform-oriented pedagogical goals were being met in the classroom. Important to these was the belief in the necessity of aesthetics in children's material, advocated by the likes of Ellen Key, but also the Social Democratic ideal of universal literacy across all classes, which required reading materials to be cheaply and readily available.

The main publishers of children's magazines during this period were two distinct and competing educational presses: The first—*Svensk Läraretidnings förlag* [Swedish teachers' magazine press] under the leadership of liberal pedagogues Fridtjuv Berg, Emil Hammarlund, and Amanda Hammarlund, published the first ever children's Christmas annuals—*Jultomten* and *Tummeliten*—and the series *Barnbiblioteket Saga*. The second—Stina Quint's (1859-1924) *Folkskolans barntidnings förlag* [The elementary school child's magazine press], published the weekly *Folkskolans Barntidning* along with a host of Christmas annuals. Both presses were dedicated to the belief that education reform was the responsibility of educators who were best positioned to select material that contributed to a child's education, character development, and aesthetic education. Amanda Hammarlund and Stina Quint both serve as critical nodes in understanding Anna Wahlenberg's career.

Not only were Amanda Hammarlund and Stina Quint both pedagogical reformers, they were also feminists. Following the practical agenda of putting women to work espoused by Sophie Adlersparre, the two women editors encouraged and promoted women authors and illustrators. It was, in other words, not because nurturant females made better children's books, it was because the editors of these magazines actively hired women. The space of children's book publication provided women with careers enabled by the active work of a network of women: Sophie Adlersparre promoted Stina Quint and financially supported her start-up publishing venture; Ellen Key and Anna Wahlenberg regularly corresponded; Amanda Hammarlund was the one to encourage Wahlenberg to first take up writing fairy tales (Krey-Lange 1928: 455); Wahlenberg published for both Quint and Hammarlund; Stina Quint overwhelmingly hired women authors and illustrators; and Wahlenberg also worked heavily with female illustrators, most often with Aina Stenberg Masolle.

Of all the children's magazines and publications, the most profitable were the popular Christmas annuals. In contrast to weekly publications, these lavishly illustrated magazines were highly prized, and within them, most of the writers and illustrators were female, and it was the fairy tale (*saga*) that was the most popular genre.[30]Anna Wahlenberg as a fairy-tale writer worked within this system but also worked the system. She negotiated her fees with the magazine editors and importantly retained the rights to her work so that later she could assemble them into collections published by the commercial publishing house Bonniers after trying them out in the more forgiving magazines. Of her 194 stories, 64 % were first published in children's magazines, reflecting her systematic and deliberate publishing plan to only re-publish the most popular and well-received in her fairy-tale collections. And yet, to read the truncated biographies of Wahlenberg, one would think that her fairy tales first appeared with the 1895 collection *Bengts sagor*, not with her individual stories that began appearing five years earlier in children's magazines.

Fairy Tales

The majority of Swedish fairy-tale[31] authors of illustrated children's magazines of the early 20th century were women, and Anna Wahlenberg was by far the most prolific of them, and Anna Wahlenberg is remembered, if at all, as an author of fairy tales. Rather than a retreat from the world of literature, however, not only did she continue to write novels and short stories while she also wrote fairy tales for children, but the system in which she wrote children's stories/fairy tales was importantly linked to women's networks, not least among them teachers' organizations and the publishing houses that emerged from them. However, this came at a cost—her exclusion from the literary canon through the value-laden, hierarchical, and gendered logic of literary genre formation whereby denigrated "women's genres" such as the fairy tale fell outside the purview of literary analysis.

The processes by which Wahlenberg's authored tales were disqualified from serious literature are multiple: Wahlenberg's tales were praised for their fidelity to the putative oral origins of the form, that is, for their "authenticity." Gurli Linder, one of the great champions of children's literature and herself part of the network of women actively promoting social reform (Kåreland) wrote, in a review of Wahlenberg's fairy tales in *Dagens Nyheter,* that if one were to get hold of one of Wahlenberg's fairy tales, one would know that it was

[30] Sonja Svensson (1983) notes that the percent of magazine content devoted to fictional stories, in particular fairy tales, rose to 65 % by 1914.

[31] As this article focuses of the discursive processes and historical contexts in which Wahlenberg has been erased from literary history, and is not focused on literature per se, this will not be an in-depth literary analysis of her fairy tales, a fruitful topic that I will take up in a future article.

"authentic" ["*äkta*"],[32] and that she was the best at capturing the "true essence of the folktale" ["*äkta folksagans väsende*"].[33] Despite her overall praise, Linder's use of "authenticity" as a measure of Wahlenberg's work serves to diminish her creative agency, suggesting that writing fairy tales, like other forms of "women's work," lacked innovative (male) genius. This is underscored by the references to Wahlenberg as a "storyteller," with the implication that hers was a pre-literate form. In this way, well-intentioned feminists reiterated genre criteria that were already always gendered.

Analytic approaches to fairy tales reiterate the meta-narrative of patriarchal privilege: the typological analysis developed by folklorists Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (1964) was heavily influenced by the collected tales in the Grimms' *Kinder- und HäusMarchen* (1857), while Vladimir Propp's structural analysis (1968) was developed from a selection of 100 of Afanas'ev's much larger collection of Russian tales (2014, 2015, 2021). Both of these analytic frameworks have been criticized for the inherent gender bias that inheres in the data from which they are derived (Lundell 1986, Conrad 2014).

The fairy tales in Swedish children's magazines were literary, authored fairy tales, however, not the fairy tales of folklore, and analytic models cannot be directly transferred. Utilizing traditional motifs, these new tales were reshaped and reconfigured for modern pedagogical and social goals, often with very different themes and end results. The fairy tales of the women authors often mediated the modern, and modern gender relations, even as they appeared to work with traditional material. A closer look at Wahlenberg's tales shows how she modified antiquated structures and formulae and proposed dissonant characters (diverging from type), writing beyond and outside of the conventions of typology and structure that are usually applied to the fairy tale. Rather than criticize or dismiss Wahlenberg's fairy tales for not adhering to such (flawed) models, I elsewhere (forthcoming) explore her tales for their deviation from such models to exemplify how creatively she worked within generic constraints to create new forms. An analysis of her fairy tales highlights the inadequacies of conventional analytic frameworks, limited by their own gender ideologies, and suggests that through the re-reading and incorporation of her work (and that of other women writers), the analytic models themselves could be changed.

In addition to structural and typological challenges that Wahlenberg's work poses, her stories also frequently deviate from thematic conventions of the fairy tale. Fairy-tale analytic models were derived from material collected from both oral and written sources, which were conflated, edited, reconfigured, and constantly recirculated in the context of an entrenched gender ideology. Based on the resultant canon, fairy tales are now recognizable by certain taken-

[32] DN 15.12. 1920 (after the publication of the collection of stories *Dvärgprinsessan* 1919).

[33] DN 23.5.1928. (note here the use of "capture," not "write".)

for-granted characteristics that include active heroes who embark on quests to rescue passive heroines, vanquish monsters, and ascend to the throne. Swedish children's literature analysis has similarly constructed a conservative and constricting definition of the fairy tale: Göte Klingberg wrote in 1972 that "moralistic chimera tales" [*moralisk chimärberättelse*] are characterized by a magical world which has its own logic, but that nonetheless convey a moral message" (19), a particular morality with which Wahlenberg's tales do not always align and which is replete with its own gender bias. Critical of such masculinist narratives, Donna Haraway has referred to these as the "prick tales of the Anthropocene" (and the monomyths of human dominance they represent, Weiss 2019). In such "man-making" stories, the hero is on a "quest to kill and bring back the terrible bounty" (Haraway 2016: 39), and in the process, dooms humanity through his hubris (Haraway 2016: 49). Wahlenberg plays with these canonical expectations to tell the story of such encounters as non-confrontational and non-violent. The protagonist in roughly 50 % of her tales is a female, there is no violent "solution", and kindness prevails over violence. Her productive endings do not lead to inevitable death and vanquishing of a foe or marriage, thereby valorizing neither heteronormative relations nor male aggression.

Wahlenberg authored such a large corpus of fairy tales, which she edited and changed over successive editions, that it is difficult to generalize about her material. Many of her tales do conform to the structure and themes of tales in circulation, motivated in part by the economic pressures of publication. But there are those that significantly deviate from convention, and in these ruptures, I find evidence of alternative gender configurations and alternatives to the "prick tale."

Epilogue: Gender, Genre, Canonicity

The Swedish women authors of fairy tales like Wahlenberg not only lost accumulated cultural capital by working in a low-value genre, but they continued to be dismissed because their tales did not conform to those meta-genres that classify literature by pre-defined generic criteria and which were inherently gendered. Although Anna Wahlenberg today is almost exclusively associated with fairy tales, the compartmentalized, linear, and downward progression into the fairy tale in her standard biographies is belied by her concurrent production of all genres, something that continued throughout her life. The re-configuration of her history as a downward teleology ignores the significant socio-historical context and radical pragmatism of Wahlenberg and other women writers in securing steady employment as children's book and magazine authors, while it disregards the economic realities behind their decisions, as they negotiated and participated in modern economies. Women writers were dropped from the Breakthrough and thus literary history based

on criteria set up by male authors derived from a select body of their work—elevating their own "masterpieces" on which they based an aesthetic canon that was gendered and intentionally exclusive. In this context, the professed (although not practiced) criterion of realism of the men of the Breakthrough was positioned in opposition and superior to the sentimental fairy tale—the default genre of many of the women authors, thus establishing a "retrospective teleology, perpetuating a narrative of literary history as progress" (Cohen 1999: 5-6).

In Literary Theory, Wahlenberg's exile in children's material and fairy tales reflects the male-dominated and masculinist history of modern Scandinavian literature that continues to map women authors onto existing schemata that are structured in and structuring of power relations. Identifying how women authors like Anna Wahlenberg subverted those schemata rather than erasing their contributions altogether offers not only a challenge to the doxa, but to the larger structuring social narratives of our time. This paper has reexamined the relationship of gender and genre, and the cultural power that genre exerts, arguing that the after-the-fact articulation of genre is itself a strategy of exclusion in the larger power struggle that women's networks have attempted to mitigate.

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