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“Heimatlos in dieser Welt”: The Isolated Modern Woman
in Edith Södergran’s *Vaxdukshäft* Poetry

Kajsa M. Spjut

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages

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In this thesis, I explore how, although Edith Södergran’s *Vaxdukshäft* poems seem to support new female roles in early 20th century European society, they also reflect on the danger in changing from traditional to modern roles. As the poems illustrate, this change can create an isolated woman, who becomes trapped in her new independence and is unable to alter herself to connect with others. In order to understand what is meant by traditional and modern female roles, I present a historical background that contrasts the woman of pre-20th-Century Europe with the new woman that emerged around the Turn of the Century. I do this by focusing on marriage, motherhood, the woman’s role inside and outside of the home, valued feminine characteristics, and women's clothing.

Keywords: Edith Södergran, Modern Woman, Isolation, Early 20th Century

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	Page ii
Acknowledgements.....	Page iii
Introduction.....	Page 1
Background on Edith Södergran.....	Page 2
Review of Literature.....	Page 3
Historical Background.....	Page 8
The Traditional Woman.....	Page 9
The Modern Woman.....	Page 22
Analysis of Södergran’s Poems.....	Page 29
Theme 1: Relationships.....	Page 31
Theme 2: Role in Home/Education.....	Page 36
Theme 3: Clothing and Ornamental Imagery.....	Page 45
Theme 4: The Physical Body and Valued Feminine Characteristics.....	Page 47
Conclusion.....	Page 54
Appendix A: Poems.....	Page 56
Works Cited.....	Page 67

Introduction

*Ich aber verfluche die Einsamkeit / Und suche in der weiten Welt / Nach einem Herzen*¹

In the quote above, Edith Södergran's woman seeks a bond with another person and uses the heart to represent the capacity to love and be united. I assert that although the woman in this poem desires a connection, she is unable to find it, not because she is incapable of loving, but because of the isolation caused by societal changes in early-20th-century Europe. As traditional expectations were over-stepped and abandoned, women began to be able to experiment with and explore new opportunities. The poetry of Edith Södergran is involved in this experimentation, because it explores the possibilities available to the modern woman. In this thesis I will begin with a historical background that contrasts the traditional woman of pre-20th-Century Europe with the modern woman that emerged around the Turn of the Century. To do so, I will focus on the following themes: (1) marriage, (2) motherhood and the woman's role inside or outside of the home, (3) valued feminine characteristics, and (4) clothing. After the historical background, I will explore how, although Edith Södergran's works seem to support new female roles, they also reflect on the danger in changing from traditional to modern female roles. As her works show, this change can create an isolated woman, who becomes trapped in her new independence and is unable to alter herself to connect with others, but is ultimately able to find solace in her ability to create poetry.

¹ "22.9.1908" by Edith Södergran (337-8)

I became interested in Södergran's *Vaxdukshäft*² while learning Swedish as a part of my Master's degree. Although Södergran's poetry is not typically discussed within the realm of German studies, German authors and culture heavily influence her works. Additionally, much of her earliest poetry was written in German as she attended Die deutsche Hauptschule zu St. Petri in Saint Petersburg. For these reasons, I feel that it is appropriate to study Södergran's works as German language literature, as well as to examine the literary merit of her early poetry, with a specific focus on male and female interactions as they are impacted by modernity.

I will concentrate primarily on a selection Södergran's poems from the *Vaxdukshäft*. The poems I have selected are almost all in German; however some Swedish poems will be included. I selected these poems because they have common themes. I have translated the Swedish poems to English. The translations do not express the rhyme scheme and meter of the original Swedish, but they do express the meaning of the poems.

Background on Edith Södergran

Edith Irene Södergran lived from 1892 to 1923. She was born to Helena and Matts Södergran in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Both of her parents were born in Finland as part of the Swedish-speaking minority. While still a young child, Södergran moved to

² *Vaxdukshäft* means "the oilcloth notebook". Because Swedish adds definite articles to the ends of nouns and English does not, I will refer to Södergran's collection throughout this work as the *Vaxdukshäft*. I have not been able to ascertain whether the use of *Vaxdukshäft* is a proper title for the collection of Edith Södergran's "Ungdomsdiktningen" [childhood poetry] or merely a descriptive title, relating the nature of the notebook in which her poetry was written. This being the case, I have chosen to view it as a proper title.

Raivola, Finland (now Roshchino, Russia) on the Karelian Isthmus. During her early schooling Södergran attended Die deutsche Hauptschule zu St. Petri, often abbreviated as the Petri-Schule, in Saint Petersburg. During this time Södergran contracted tuberculosis, the disease that had taken her father's life when she was 15. After her schooling, she spent some time in sanatoriums in Switzerland. Ultimately Södergran returned to Raivola and continued to write poetry there. After being ill for many years, Södergran eventually died in 1923 at the age of 31 from tuberculosis³.

While attending the Petri-Schule, Edith Södergran wrote many poems in the *Vaxdukshäft*. She wrote most of her early poetry in German; however, she also wrote some poems in Swedish, French, and Russian. Many of the poems in her early collection were heavily influenced by people at her school and by current events of her time. In September 1908 Södergran abruptly stopped writing in the *Vaxdukshäft* in German. After that, Södergran's poetry was predominantly written in Swedish, though she wrote some in French. The reason for this change of language is not clear. Edith Södergran published her first collection of poetry, *Dikter*, in 1916. Her other publications are *Septemberlyran* [*The September Lyre*] (1918), *Rosenaltaret* [*The Altar of Roses*] (1919), *Framtidens skugga* [*The Shadow of the Future*] (1920) and the posthumous *Landet som icke är* [*The Land that is not*] (1925).

Review of Literature

Relatively little has been written about Edith Södergran's German poetry in the *Vaxdukshäft*, and most of the scholarship was written before 1990. I was only able to find

³ For a more detailed biography, see George Schoolfield's *Edith Södergran: Modernist Poet in Finland*.

a few sources relating to this portion of Edith Södergran's poetry, so in this review of literature, I am including these, although they are older sources. Jan Häll's *Vägen till landet som icke är: En essä om Edith Södergran och Rudolf Steiner* (2006) is the most recently published book I was able to find on Södergran's works. It deals with Södergran's relationship with and belief in Rudolf Steiner's teachings. This book focuses on Södergran's later works and it has nothing to do with the early poems that I will focus on in this paper.

Gisbert Jänicke's book, *Edith Södergran diktare på två språk* (1984) claims to be the first book to research Södergran's German language poetry. The book describes Södergran's technical and practical uses of German and Swedish, including many copies of handwritten works by Södergran. The book does not attempt to provide a literary analysis of Södergran's works and therefore is not helpful in my analysis.

Of the works that do address Södergran's *Vaxdukshäft*, many of them look at the collection of the poetry as an autobiographical poetic journal, and not as a collection with literary merit. An example of this is Olof Enckell's *Vaxdukshäftet: en studie i Edith Södergrans ungdomsdiktning* (1961), which includes a comprehensive biography, connecting the poems in the *Vaxdukshäft* to events in Södergran's life, but does not offer a literary analysis. Similarly, Gunnar Tideström's book *Edith Södergran* (1949) only discusses the influences that Södergran's studies and location had on her poetry. While giving a clear historical context for Södergran's writing, he does little literary examination of the texts themselves. Illustrating this point, the author Marcus Galdia writes in *Begründungsprobleme der Södergran-Philologie*, "Die Interpretationsmethode Tideströms vermag die Entstehungsumstände eines Gedichts zu erklären. Der Aufgabe

der Deutung eines Gedichts als Kunstwerk wird sie nicht gerecht" (15). I agree with Galdia that Tideström's book does not explore the meaning of the poetry as artwork. I think that Södergran's *Vaxdukshäft* does have artistic value that needs to be explored. Although Enckell and Tideström have interpreted Södergran's work to be autobiographical, I will not focus on her biography in my analysis. Instead I will focus on the way her poetry participates in the discourse about the isolated modern subject.

Marcus Galdia mentions the problems with analyzing Södergran's early works to establish her biography. Galdia also claims that Olof Enckell researches Södergran's adolescent poetry as though it were mature poetry, though it is not. According to Galdia, Enckell "untersucht die Jugendgedichte Södergrans als ob es sich um reife Kunstproduktion handelte. Die Problematik der Fremdsprachigkeit der Jugendgedichte Södergrans wird ebenfalls nicht diskutiert. Damit bleiben zwei wesentliche Probleme: Möglichkeit der Dichtung in einer Fremdsprache und der Wert der Jugendidung als Kunstwerk ungeklärt" (Galdia 16). Here Galdia calls into question the worth of poetry written by young people in a foreign language. Personally, I agree with Galdia that Södergran's *Vaxdukshäft* is stylistically and aesthetically immature; however it contains many valuable poems, which ask significant questions, such as about the purpose of life and the possibility of relationships with others. Although Södergran's poetry in the *Vaxdukshäft* was written in her youth and in a language other than her native language, I find that her works contain complex topics and ideas worth further analysis.

Ebba Witt-Brattström also notices the shortcomings of using biographical information as a critical approach to Södergran's poetry in *Ediths jag: Edith Södergran och modernismens födelse* (1997). Here Witt-Brattström mentions the insufficiency of

equating what the author produces with the intent of the author. Witt-Brattström writes that Södergran's "I" is fictitious and literary, meaning that the first person in the poetry is not Södergran herself, but rather a meta-poetic "I" which deals with the world events (*Ediths jag* 14). I am taking a similar approach in my analysis, looking at the voice in the poems not as Södergran's own voice, but as a variety of voices in each poetic experiment she conducts. Although Witt-Brattström is against a purely biographical reading of Södergran's works, she uses many biographical instances to place Södergran's poetry into context. Witt-Brattström also begins discussing the "new woman" in Södergran's works after the *Vaxdukshäft*, but I believe evidences of the modern woman or the new woman are also found in the earlier works.

The purpose of George C. Schoolfield's *Edith Södergran: Modernist Poet in Finland* (1984) seems to be to introduce the life and the works of Edith Södergran to an English speaking audience. Like many of the books already mentioned, Schoolfield gives a detailed biography of Södergran's life which is helpful to understanding where Södergran lived and the circumstances surrounding her life, but as Schoolfield writes in his preface, he "has not the space to linger over the manifold problems of interpretation individual poems contain" (3). Like Schoolfield I do not have the space to discuss all of Södergran's poems, but unlike Schoolfield, I will examine some possible interpretations of some of Södergran's works. I intend to do as Schoolfield hopes and "grapple with Edith Södergran's language" (Schoolfield 133). In my analysis, I will not solely focus on Södergran's language itself, but I will also focus on her poetry's participation in the discourse about the isolated modern female subject in early 20th-Century Europe.

Another source I found is *The Poet who Created Herself: Selected Letters of Edith Södergran* (2000), translated and edited by Silvester Mazzarella, which contains a number of letters written by Edith Södergran. The selection of letters begins with those written in 1919. The correspondences in the collection were written to Hagar Olsson (a Scandinavian writer, literary critic and friend of Edith Södergran) and Elmer Diktonius (Scandinavian poet and friend of Södergran). This collection is useful for those looking to analyze the later works of Södergran, but has little relevance to my topic.

In her article, “The Paradoxical Poetics of Edith Södergran” (2006), Ursula Lindqvist argues that Södergran’s works are both avant-garde and modernist. In a footnote Lindqvist explains that “avant-garde” is a term she uses “to describe artists who cast themselves as historical figures concerned with ‘discovery and self-transcendence’ as opposed to arbiters of fashion or taste” (831). She continues to clarify that avant-garde artists are:

the aggressive forerunners who announce the death of old, decadent art forms and the coming of new ones. Their semantics and their forms tend to be more aggressive than that of so-called Modernist and Postmodernist artists. Avant-gardists’ historical function is cyclical: their art appears at those moments when contemporary art becomes decadent in order to blaze a path for a new and more advanced art, such as so-called Modernist and Postmodernist art. My claim is that Södergran’s poetry paradoxically has functioned both aggressively, as avant-garde art, and perpetually, as canonical Modernist art and popular poetry in Scandinavia. (Lindqvist 831 see note 11)

Although Lindqvist describes Södergran's poetry as avant-garde and modernist, the *Vaxdukshäft* poetry does not fit into these categories. Lindqvist begins her study of Södergran's works with the 1916 collection *Dikter* [Poetry] and does not address any of Södergran's earlier poetry. Most of the German poetry in the *Vaxdukshäft* adheres to structured meter and rhyme schemes and would not be considered avant-garde, because it does not have an aggressive or challenging form. These poems do, however, explore some daring topics, which I will address later in this thesis.

Historical Background

As Ute Gerhard⁴, Heide Wunder⁵, Andrea van Dülmen⁶, Fiona Montgomery and Christine Collette⁷ and many others have thoroughly discussed, late 19th-Century European women's roles began to change in regard to marital relationships, motherhood, educational opportunities, professional possibilities, and feminine apparel. To understand the change, it is first necessary to explore what the accepted roles for women were. The poetry of Edith Södergran fits into a middle class European society and takes part in many of the discourses about evolving gender roles at that time. Although Södergran was living in St. Petersburg, Russia at the time she wrote the poetry in the *Vaxdukshäft*, the cultural situation in St. Petersburg was similar to that of the German-speaking world and other European cultural centers. As historian Robert McKean writes, St. Petersburg

⁴ Gerhard, Ute. *Verhältnisse und Verhinderungen. Frauenarbeit, Familie und Rechte der Frauen im 19. Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978. Print.

⁵ Wunder, Heide. "Er ist die Sonn', sie ist der Mond" *Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit*. München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1992. Print.

⁶ Van Dülmen, Andrea. *Frauenleben im 18. Jahrhundert*. München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1992. Print.

⁷ Montgomery, Fiona and Christine Collette, eds. *The European Women's History Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

functioned “as ‘a window on the West’, ... [conveying] the impression to the less discerning visitor, at least in its external appearance, of a modern European metropolis” (1). This being the case, St. Petersburg also participated in the European cultural discourses mentioned above. In order to understand how the women in Södergran’s poetry participate, we must first look at the traditional roles which European women held before and during the 19th Century. I will construct a picture of the traditional woman by focusing on (1) marriage, (2) role in the home and motherhood, (3) valued feminine characteristics, and (4) clothing, because these are the central topics which arise in Södergran’s poetry.

The Traditional Woman:

Marriage

Marriage was essential in order for a woman to have status in upper and middle class European society during the 19th Century⁸. In her 1991 book, *Frauenleben im 19. Jahrhundert*, Weber-Kellermann explains the social importance of marriage: “Die Notwendigkeit der Eheschließung war für das Kleinbürgermädchen genauso zwingend wie für ihre großbürgerliche Geschlechtsgenossin im Hinblick auf das soziale Ansehen in ihrer Gesellschaftsschicht” (149). A girl needed to marry to gain acceptance into her social class as a woman. That is important to recognize, because as an unmarried person at this time, a woman had no voice within her social sphere⁹. Women were not yet allowed to vote or have a political say. However, if a woman were married, then the connection with her husband would give her greater respect within her community.

⁸ For more information see Wunder, “*Er ist die Sonn’, sie ist der Mond.*”

⁹ See Gerhard, “Die Rechte der Frauen.” in *Verhältnisse und Verhinderungen*.

Marriage also marked a coming of age for a young woman. Weber-Kellermann writes, “In der Ehe nun integrierte sich das Mädchen als bürgerliche Hausfrau voll in ihre gesellschaftliche Schicht und dichtete die Grenze nach unten ab durch Reputierlichkeit und starre Verteidigung eines Tugendkatalogs” (155). This is important, because during this time, marital status rather than age or other experience seems to define the maturity of a female. If she were married, then she could be considered a woman and allowed to participate in society. However, unmarried women do seem not to have had the same privileged status, being seen as more of a financial burden to their families¹⁰. It is significant to note that traditionally girls would be the charges of their parents until they were married, at which point their husbands were responsible to provide for them.

The *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch 1900* contains laws regarding marriage, including the responsibility the man has to his wife and children. In §1360, the law states that the man has to provide for his wife. It reads, “Der Mann hat der Frau nach Maßgabe seiner Lebensstellung, seines Vermögens und seiner Erwerbsfähigkeit Unterhalt zu gewähren” (Hubbard 73). We can infer from this section, that the man is expected to work and provide an income for his wife and his family. Since the man is expressly given the position of provider, then we see that traditionally the woman was reliant on her husband for sustenance¹¹. Few opportunities were afforded women to work and support themselves. This is one of the reasons why it was so important for women to marry.

Because literature participates in the understanding and formation of social ideals, I will refer to examples from 18th and 19th Century fiction to show some of the

¹⁰ For more information, see Wunder, “‘Los und Ledig’: Mägde und Witwen” in *“Er ist die Sonn’, sie ist der Mond”*

¹¹ See also Gerhard, “‘Die Bestimmung des Weibes’ und die Ideologie der Familie” in *Verhältnisse und Verhinderungen* and van Dülmen

expectations held for marriage at this time. Although the stories and characters are fictitious, the societal values that these works present are representative of reality. One such ideal found in Johanna Schopenhauer's short story "Des Adlers Horst" (1830) is the traditional expectation that mothers were married women. In "Des Adlers Horst," a young woman named Molly has a son out of wedlock. A group of people visiting Scotland stays at an inn in the small town where Molly works, where they see her with her child. They ask if the child is hers, surprised because she is so young. After not receiving an answer, the visitor Mathilda exclaims, "Also wirklich Euer Kind?" [...] 'guter Gott! so jung noch, gewiß kaum achtzehn Jahre alt, und schon verheirathet und schon Mutter!'" (Schopenhauer 205). Mathilda believes that Molly must be married, because she has a child. Mathilda's reaction indicates that she is surprised only that the girl was married so young.

Molly does not speak, but instead goes from pale to fire-red and back to deathly pale and begins to cry before she runs away from the visitors, after which Mathilda asks, "Guter Gott, warum weint sie? was kränkte die Arme so? ... 'gewiß, ich wollte ihr nicht wehe thun; ist ihr Mann vielleicht gestorben? sie scheint so unglücklich und ist noch so sehr jung.'" (Schopenhauer 206). Again Mathilda assumes that Molly is wed and that her unhappiness must be due to her husband's death or sickness (Schopenhauer 206-7). This indicates the expectation that women with children must be married. Several critics¹² have also compiled significant evidence of this fact.

¹² For more details, look at Wunder, "Die Lebensalter der Frau: Lebensverlauf und Lebensläufe." in "*Er ist die Sonn', sie ist der Mond*" and Hausen, Karin. *Frauen Suchen ihre Geschichte*. München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1983. Print.

Role in Home and Motherhood

During the 19th Century in Europe, middle class families were typically comprised of a husband who worked outside of the home, a mother who worked in the home as a housewife, and children. As mentioned above, the law required that the husband provide for his wife and family if he is able to. § 1356 of the *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch 1900* reveals that the wife is “berechtigt und verpflichtet, das gemeinschaftliche Hauswesen zu leiten” (Hubbard 73). The father was the head of the household and the leader of the home. However, the mother was responsible for the upkeep of the home. She was to direct and take care of cooking, shopping, washing, and other household chores. If the family had servants, then the wife also directed their activities. The male and female roles within the home were culturally and legally enforced.

In addition to the law, other disciplines enforced the home as the only acceptable place in which women could hold responsibilities. One of the reasons why this attitude towards women existed is that many men viewed women as passive and unable to adapt to new responsibilities, only able to perform household tasks. Ann Towns’ article, “The Status of Women as a Standard of ‘Civilization’” states, “The idea that women were inert and unadaptive thrived in the 19th century, in the natural as well as social sciences” (Towns 695). Although I believe that women were and are active and capable of adaptation, it is easy to find sources from the 19th Century that display the attitude that Towns mentions. An example of this mindset is found in Otis Mason’s 1897 anthropological work, *Woman’s Share in Primitive Culture*. Here Mason claims that although men are innovative and constantly able to change, women are not. He writes,

“in transitions from savagery to civilization, and in the vicissitudes of life, women go on housekeeping” (Mason 274). He continues to explain that women in both so-called civilized and uncivilized lands perform the same functions, arguing that unlike their male counterparts, women do not change roles, because the household tasks they perform are passed from generation to generation and are semiautomatic. He states that these household tasks are generally the same, despite location or culture (Mason 274-5). I feel the assumption that women are unable to be adaptive, merely because they have traditionally only been allowed to perform household tasks, fails to consider that women often had less formal education and fewer opportunities to be active in intellectual communities than men. As a general rule, women were expected to be homemakers. In a family, someone had to take care of the home. Raising children required much time and care, so it was difficult for women to leave the private realm to work outside of the home, especially when the children were young.

Households in the 19th century were expected to maintain the appearance of prosperity and order. Women as wives and mothers had the responsibility to embrace and implement order in their households. Appearances were important within middle class society, and because of this, many attempted to show off what they had. Objective markers, such as property, income, education and profession became less important than perceived prosperity. Weber-Kellermann explains, that the subjective marker of bourgeois prestige was “von allergrößter Bedeutung” (149). In creating a façade of affluence, families could appear to have greater means than they actually had. Because society expected a home to be a certain way, women were expected to create this

atmosphere. A family would be disgraced if it appeared not to have as much money as its neighbors.

Another aspect of keeping up appearances involved the mother's restriction from talking about sexual maturation with her children. It was traditionally taboo for a mother in a middle-class home to speak about sexuality or puberty with her own children. In Karla Höcker's *Ein Kind von damals*, Höcker writes:

Über Sex und seine Folgen wurde nie ein Wort verloren. Aufklärung kam damals entweder gar nicht oder nur höchst unzulänglich vor. Die Mutter sprach nie mit dem Kind darüber. Als nähere Erklärung über bestimmte Zyklen des weiblichen Körpers unabdingbar wurden, schickte man Marga vor, das Hausmädchen, ein handfestes Geschöpf, das sich nicht davor scheute, sachliche Anweisungen zu geben...Die Mutter ...kam auch später nicht zu dem verstörten Kind, tröstete es nicht, fand kein einziges Wort für diesen wichtigen Übergang zum Erwachsenendasein...Doch das Tabu war damals noch allmächtig. (181)

The existence of this repressed attitude is another example of the societal bounds placed on a woman. As a middle class mother, a woman was not allowed to discuss physical maturation or sexuality, even to educate her own children.

From the evidence given in this section, we see that women were expected to be in the home in 19th-Century Europe. Legal and scientific documents defined women as responsible to care for the household, because women were assumed to be unable to hold responsibilities in the work field outside of the home. In the role of mother, women were to enforce gender roles and maintain the appearance of affluence in the house. One of the

ways that this was accomplished was by avoiding taboos. Later in my thesis, we will look at the influence of these taboos and how some of them were overstepped in Södergran's poetry.

Valued Feminine Characteristics

The characteristics that women were expected to possess in traditional European society can be seen from male and female perspectives, both having their own set of core values and expectations. Men often created an ideal woman in their works, whereas women did not value these ideals in the same way, sometimes ironically confronting these topics. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf writes:

women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time... Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman in fiction." (42-43)

The fictitious woman could be anything her author created her to be, but in reality the woman was not allowed to be active outside of her own home. Many women were expected to possess the qualities and positive characteristics that the ideal woman in literature possessed.

With this as a framework, we will now consider the male perspective as found in Friedrich Schiller's "Über Anmut und Würde." In this work, Schiller discusses the ideal woman, or *schöne Seele*. Schiller implies that while not every woman achieves this ideal,

it is something towards which she should strive. In “Über Anmut und Würde”, a perfected woman is one who has a combination of grace and dignity, which will show through her form. Schiller writes that women can gracefully withstand more suffering than men: “Was in einem weiblichen Gesicht noch schöne Empfindsamkeit ist, würde in einem männlichen schon Leiden ausdrücken” (64). Furthermore, “Die zarte Fiber des Weibes neigt sich wie dünnes Schilfrohr unter dem leisesten Hauch des Affekts. In leichten und lieblichen Wellen gleitet die Seele über das sprechende Angesicht, das sich bald wieder zu einem ruhigen Spiegel ebnet” (Schiller 64). It seems implied that a woman will withstand hardship and trial without expressing frustration or pain. And if the woman does express discomfort, this pain will quickly depart her expression. Schiller also writes, “Anmut wird also der Ausdruck der weiblichen Tugend sein, der sehr oft der männlichen fehlen dürfte” (Schiller 64). Grace is, according to Schiller, the expression of feminine virtue, a virtue that is not found in men.

Christoph Martin Wieland’s “Die ideale Gattin” describes the kind of blank character he expected in women, so that husbands could mold their wives to fit into an ideal. He felt that the man who married a girl should be the teacher. Wieland writes, “man muß ihr nicht allein Ideen geben und sie das Denken lehren; sie muß auch das Sprechen erst lernen, denn das gute Mädchen weiß von unserer Sprache nichts” (89). In this sort of a marriage, the wife is more like a child who needs to be reared by her husband. The husband is then able to form his wife’s opinions and ideas. Wieland continues, women should be:

Ohne Launen, gleichmütig, ruhig, gefällig, leicht zu amüsieren, [...] mit allem zufrieden, wenn sie nur in meinem Gesicht, dessen verschiedene

Ausdrucksweisen sie mit der ganzen Klugheit des Gefühls kennt ... den Ausdruck meiner Zufriedenheit oder Zärtlichkeit liest—sie bequemt sich, ohne daß es ihr Mühe oder Zwang bereitet, nach meinem Geschmack, nach meiner Laune, nach meiner Lebensweise. (Wieland 90)

One reason why Wieland writes that a woman should not be moody, but cheerful and pleasant, is that if a wife is shaped by her husband's thoughts, then she will create a household that adheres to his values. Additionally, a woman who is so easily molded to her husband's desires will raise children who also share similar values. In this way, traditional gender role expectations will not only be enforced by the husband or father, but will also be supported by the wife and mother.

The fact that a woman was supposed to assume her husband's point of view also indicates that women were traditionally expected not to be intellectuals. Wieland writes, "Ich verlange kein bißchen Geist von meiner Frau; ich habe so viel davon in meinen Büchern" (90). From this quote it appears that Wieland received enough intellectual stimulation in his work, so he did not desire to have a wife who was a scholar. Wieland might expect nothing intellectually from his wife, because as described above, many believed that a woman was incapable of the same depth of thought as a man. Returning to Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, we see that "in real life she [the woman] could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband" (43). Because women were less educated, men maintained dominance within the home and in society. An intellectual woman might threaten the man's authority, because she would create her own opinions and thoughts. Many men did not want an intelligent wife, because they wanted a spouse who would respect their intellectual superiority as the head of the household.

Although women were expected not to be intellectual, they were traditionally valued for their dedication to hard work. Heinrich Seidel creates an ideal picture of a bourgeois girl in his *Berliner Skizzen*:

sie [war] vierzehn Jahre alt und noch ein Kind, das kurze Kleider trug. Trotzdem besorgte sie die ganze Wirtschaft des Vaters... Wenn ich an meinem Schreibtisch am Fenster bei der Arbeit saß, konnte ich... einen Teil der gegenüberliegenden Wohnung übersehen und hatte meine Freude daran, mit welchem Fleiß und Ernst und welcher hausmütterlichen Verständigkeit das Kind bei der Arbeit war... Ich muß nur gleich sagen, daß sie nicht hübsch war, aber doch mochte man sie gerne ansehen, weil so eine angenehme Güte in ihrem Gesicht war. (Weber-Kellermann 149)

His work implies that a woman's qualities, such as being a diligent worker, are more important than her physical beauty. One reason that character may have been more important than physical beauty is that a woman who was dedicated to cooking, cleaning, sewing, and caring for the household would be able to make a household that appear better than it really is. Looking at a practical application, if a woman spent so much time cooking, cleaning, mending, and tending to her children, she would have had little time to keep up her own appearance. Also the strain of hard work is physically manifest in work-worn hands. Some of the work a woman was expected to perform in the home is found in "Das Lied von der Glocke" written by Friedrich Schiller:

Und reget ohn Ende
Die fleißigen Hände,
Und mehrt den Gewinn

Mit ordendem Sinn,
Und füllet mit Schätzen die duftenden Laden,
Und dreht um die schnurrende Spindel den Faden,
Und sammelt im reinlich geglätteten Schrein
Die schimmernde Wolle, den schneeigten Lein,
Und füget zum Guten den Glanz und den Schimmer
Und ruhet nimmer. (Schenk, "Schillers Idealbild" 91)

This poem praises the act of spinning wool, because through performing this act, the woman keeps her hands busy, never coming to rest. From this we see that diligence was valued. Another attribute that can be taken from this poem is organization. When spinning, the woman performs every task in order, creating harmony and beauty in her work. Likewise, a home that was kept in an orderly manner reflected the character of a woman and her family.

Unlike the previous example, the feminine perspective of Hedwig Dohm's early 20th-Century work, "Reform der Mädchenschule" presents an ironic view of the importance of handwork as a representation of the worth of a woman. Dohm writes that a girl was once expected to knit stockings in her free time; "Je mehr Touren in einer bestimmten Zeit herumgestrickt wurden, je braver war das Kind (erinnert an Aschenputtels Erbsenlesen). Was für eine große Rolle die Strümpfe damals spielten!" (Dohm 41). Dohm calls into question the validity of using handiwork to define a girl's character and worth. The mention of Cinderella accents this point. The stereotype that Dohm calls into question is the one that claims that, if a girl is diligent in her handiwork, she will develop discipline and other skills and characteristics that will make her into a

good housewife. While dedication to hard work is admirable, this quote points out the absurdity of equating knitting with future success as a wife and mother.

In middle class German society during the late 19th Century, many people sought a peaceful, planned, stable life. Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann writes that many sought after “Ordnung, Pünktlichkeit, Sauberkeit, Sparsamkeit” (149). These were essential values that have been found throughout German literature, which embodies the ideals for which real life strove. In his article “Schillers Idealbild” Herrad Schenk writes, “Aufgabe der Frau ist es, durch die bürgerlichen Tugenden Fleiß, Ordnung, Sauberkeit ihren Teil zur Erhaltung und zum Wachstum des Wohlstandes beizutragen” (91). Many times stability and order were only to be found within the home, because politics were unstable and people felt helpless, especially during the Biedermeier period. To maintain order, the father continued to be the head of the household, giving the mother responsibility to care for the children and upkeep of the home. In being able to control the environment in their homes, people were able to establish a haven from the troubles outside of the home.

In this section, we have seen that, as Virginia Woolf explains, women found throughout literature have been idealized and do not exist in reality. Schiller’s ideal was a woman who had the perfect balance of grace and dignity, and Wieland’s ideal was a woman who could be molded to think the way her husband thought and assume her husband’s point of view. I disagree that a woman should be devoid of her own, original thought or completely shaped by her husband. Södergran’s poetry also disagrees. Later we will explore how her poetry presents an independent woman who is complex and able to think for herself, unlike the ideal woman described in this section.

Clothing

Later in the analysis of Södergran's poetry, we will see images of the corset as a symbol of restraint and society's control over women. To better understand why this is such an appropriate choice of symbol, we will look at the restrictive nature of women's fashion in 19th-Century Europe. During the Victorian period, women in middle and upper classes wore corsets. Anne Buck writes, "During the 1840s and 1850s, the corsets were long, back-lacing, with gussets over the hips and for the breasts, and with shoulder-straps. They were stiffly boned with whalebone and had a busk, long and about an inch and a half wide, in wood or whalebone, inserted at the centre front" (86). The structure of the garment created an artificially small waist and accentuated the bust of the woman wearing it. The introduction of the corset made an artificial body shape more desirable, while the natural figure became less desirable. In *Lexikon der Mode*, Ruth Klein records the history of the corset. She writes, "Die Mode nimmt den Frauenkörper nicht mehr als Schöpfung Gottes hin, als ein vollendetes Kunstwerk, als das ihn die Liebenden aller Zeiten angesehen und die Dichter besungen haben, sondern sie formt ihn nach einem von ihr gewünschten Ideal" (Klein 223). As she states, the natural form of the woman had been praised by poets throughout antiquity, however fashion, namely the corset, changes the woman's body to form it to a different ideal. This change added to the restriction of women's movement, because while wearing a corset, a woman could not bend freely or move easily. Other health problems that were caused by the corset are impaired breathing, fainting, and crushed internal organs, which I will discuss later.

In addition to health problems, creating an artificial ideal form for a woman can have a negative impact on girls and young women, as well as on future generations.

During the 17th Century, young girls were expected to begin shaping their bodies to fit an ideal. Klein writes about the emphasis that fashion placed on a woman's breasts, stating, "Das ging so weit, daß man den Mädchen schon im kindlichen Alter Bleiplatten auf die Brust band und sie in ein Korsett zwängte, mit dem die Ärmsten bisweilen sogar schlafen mußten" (Klein 223)¹³. When young girls are subjected to a view that their bodies are less than ideal and require artificial restriction and enhancement to be considered beautiful, then they are more likely to have a skewed sense of self-perception. In a 2004 study on the influence of idealized media images on adolescents, Duane A. Hargreaves and Marika Tiggemann report, "exposure to idealized commercials led to increased body dissatisfaction for girls" (351). Although this research does not specifically address girls and women in the 19th century, I believe that the same findings still apply to that time period¹⁴. When young girls are dissatisfied with their bodies, then they will tend to grow into women who are likewise dissatisfied and who will rely on artificial means to help them fit into what they perceive to be ideal. This is one of the reasons why women continued to use corsets into the 20th century.

The Modern Woman:

Now that the traditional woman has been described, we can look at the changes that led to the "modern woman," who comes forth in Södergran's poetry. Modernity is a

¹³ See also: Roberts, Helene E., "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman." *Signs* 2.3 (1977). 554-569. Web. 18 October 2010.

¹⁴ See also: Clay, Daniel, Vivian Vignoles, and Helga Dittmar. "Body Image and Self-Esteem Among Adolescent Girls: Testing the Influence of Sociocultural Factors." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 15.4 (2005). 451-477. Web. 19 October 2010.

term that encompasses a large range of occurrences. As Marshall Berman explains in *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*:

There is a mode of vital experience—experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life’s possibilities and perils—that is shared by men and women all over the world...I will call this body of experience ‘modernity.’ To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth...and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. (15)

Södergran’s woman exists in a milieu like the one that Berman describes. As we will later see, her setting provides her the potential for positive outcomes. However, this surrounding also threatens her ability to establish relationships with others.

The modern understanding of subjectivity endangers the woman’s perception of her self. Sigmund Freud’s studies and works, including *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* introduced the idea of individuality to modern European society. While I do not have the space to conduct an in depth review of all aspects of modernity and isolation, a number of critics have written much about these themes. For example, Nick Mansfield explains the challenges facing the modern subject in *Subjectivity: theories of the self from Freud to Haraway*, stating, “Things and events are now understood on the level of the pulsing, breathing, feeling individual self. Yet at the same time, this self is reported to feel less confident, more isolated, fragile and vulnerable than ever. Rather than being triumphant because of the huge emphasis it now enjoys, the self is at risk” (2).

Södergran’s subject certainly exhibits the symptoms of fragility and vulnerability, which we will later examine. Another difficulty facing the modern person, male or female is

doubt. In *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*, Anthony Giddens claims:

Modernity is a post-traditional order, but not one in which the sureties of tradition and habit have been replaced by the certitude of rational knowledge. Doubt, a pervasive feature of modern critical reason, permeates into everyday life as well as philosophical consciousness, and forms a general existential dimension of the contemporary social world.

(2-3)

Just as in this quote, Södergran's poetic woman encounters the uncertainty of a shift from traditionally accepted rational knowledge to modern instability. Skepticism shapes Södergran's woman, creating in her a lack of trust in other individuals.

In addition to the understanding of the human subject, women's suffrage movements and other political changes began to create more opportunities for women's education and employment outside of the home. Later we will see how these changes lead to the conflicted, isolated modern woman found in Södergran's *Vaxdukshäft* poetry. In this section, we will focus on the Turn of the Century changes to (1) marriage and relationships, (2) career possibilities and valued feminine characteristics, and (3) clothing.

Marriage and Relationships

The reshaping of societal norms challenged the insistence that women must be married in order to have status in society. Rather than giving in to the expectation to marry right away, many women began working outside of the home. For example, in

Grete Appen's account of her own life in "Ausbildung von Arbeitstöchtern," her mother says, "Meine Tochter soll etwas Richtiges lernen, die soll nicht den ersten besten Mann heiraten. Von ihrem Beruf muß sie allein existieren können" (Hagemann 45). This quote shows a marked difference from the traditional view of marriage discussed above. Here the mother expects her daughter to learn a trade, so that she can support herself. If a woman did not have to depend on her parents or on her husband for support, then she would be able to become more self-reliant and have financial independence.

This quote also indicates that women were considered to be capable of working outside of the home. In the marriage laws of 1900, we see a similar shift in the view of women. The law states that a wife has the responsibility to provide for her husband, "wenn er außer Stande ist, sich selbst zu unterhalten" (Hubbard 73). So, although the husband is ideally supposed to provide financial means for the family, the wife should be able to work if the husband is somehow incapable. This law reflects the assumption that women were capable of working outside of the home. A change in attitudes towards women influenced the creation of this law. Additionally, the law itself plays a part in the continuing change to women's roles. Rather than the husband being the sole provider and decision maker in a family, the husband and wife began to be considered equal in their possibility of working outside of the home for the support of the family.

An additional change in traditional male and female relationships came in the form of homosexual expression. Many women, in order to liberate themselves from men and define themselves, decided to experiment with relationships with other women. Herrad Schenk writes, "Weibliche Homosexualität ist ein Ausdruck für die Suche nach sexuellen Interaktionsmustern, die nicht von männlichen Bedürfnissen vorgeformt sind"

(“Die homosexuelle Alternative“ 99). In defining their own sexual attraction, women challenged established norms, including traditional marriage and familial structure. Although some women experimented with homosexual relationships, I do not believe that homosexual practices were widespread or commonly accepted around the turn of the Twentieth Century. Again Schenk writes, “Damals gab es zwar intensive Frauenfreundschaften [...], mit Sicherheit gab es auch lesbische Beziehungen, aber sie wurden vor der Öffentlichkeit verborgen gehalten; das Thema Homosexualität war noch starker tabuisiert als Sexualität überhaupt” (Schenk, “Die homosexuelle Alternative” 99). As mentioned above, the topic of sexuality was not commonly discussed between mother and children, or in polite society. Even though some topics became less taboo around the Turn of the Century, sexuality, especially homosexuality remained a taboo subject. However, Södergran’s poetry experiments with the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not. One of her poems specifically challenges the traditional male and female marriage relationship, creating a homosexual relationship between two women, which will be discussed in the analysis section of this thesis.

Career Possibilities and Valued Feminine Characteristics

With a change in cultural opinions about women came the opportunity for women and girls to receive more education. One of the benefits of education is the possibility of being trained for a profession and the ability to provide for oneself. In “Reform der Mädchenschule” Hedwig Dohm calls for equal educational opportunities for girls and boys. She sees coeducational schools as a way to give both boys and girls the opportunity to see their equality. Recognizing the difficulty that this transition might create, Dohm

writes in a late 19th Century work, “Weibliches Studententum”, “Wie muß das männliche Geschlecht seine Begriffe vom Weibe korrigieren, wenn der Jüngling auf der Universität das Mädchen, das bis dahin für ihn nur eine Mitliebende war, als eine Mitdenkende, Mitstrebende, Mitarbeitende kennen lernt” (44). A comparison of Dohm’s position with Wieland’s opinion of women’s education presents drastic differences. While Wieland saw an uneducated woman as a canvas on which a husband can paint his own portrait of an ideal woman, Dohm sees the need for men to change their preconceptions about women. Dohm’s use of “mit” indicates that the women are working with the men, thinking with the men and striving together with the men.

In addition to being allowed to work outside of the home, modern women also began to be accepted into the academic realm. Heinrich Lee writes that 200 women were visiting students at the university in Berlin in 1897 and 1898. Two years later, women were allowed to study at the university as full-time students and not just as guests (Lee 43). The women’s ability and opportunity to study and learn created the possibilities for women to be scholars and make contributions to the academic world. Although Södergran’s works do not directly discuss schooling for girls, the female voice within the poems seems to be an intellectual, one that thinks abstractly and ponders deep questions, such as the meaning of life.

Contrary to the earlier claim by Otis Mason that women do not change their conceptions or opinions much, the modern woman was creative and produced original thought (274). In the introduction to *The New Woman and the Aesthetic Opening: Unlocking Gender in Twentieth-Century Texts* Laura Marholm is quoted as saying, “Now that woman is conscious of her individuality as a woman, she needs an artistic mode of

expression; she flings aside the old forms and seeks the new” (4). According to this quote, the new or modern woman is conscious of herself and this consciousness allows her to construct her own mode of expression. The modern woman seems to be inventive and is able to develop new ways to articulate herself, since she is no longer bound by tradition. These attributes also apply to the woman found in Södergran’s poetry.

Clothing

The new, working, middle class woman abandoned traditional styles, which were elegant and restrictive, for clothing that was more flexible and practical for a working environment. As Hedwig Dohm asserts in “Weibliches Studententum:” “Elegante Kostüme, Toilettenfirlefanz sind gewesen,” which implies that these fashions are no longer suited to a woman who studies (Dohm 44). Dohm continues, “Einfaches Wollenkleid. Kurzer Rock, Lodenmantel. Unbewimpeltes Stroh- oder Filzhütchen. Keine Handschuhe” (44). This clothing was functional for a student or a working woman. The simplicity of the clothing indicates that the woman needed more mobility than could be found with a large dress. Many women trained to be secretaries, so wearing gloves would have impeded their ability to write or type. In his book, *A History of Fashion*, Douglas Gorsline describes European women’s style around the turn of the 20th century in this way: “As women’s spheres of activity broadened, the shirtwaist and the tailored separate skirt became both fashionable and usual” (169). The introduction of a plurality of fashion arose in response to the increased professional possibilities for women. The avoidance of frivolities allowed the woman to move around her workplace and be freed from the constraints of traditional society and styles.

Among the changes in fashion at the turn of the century was the eventual disappearance of the corset. Many men and women realized the detriment of this article of clothing to a woman's health. In her discussion of about the transitional period between pro-corset and anti-corset movements¹⁵, Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann writes that many Jugendstil clothing designs were looser with flowing lines; however they still required a corset to create an elegant line (Weber-Kellermann 217). Conversely, many women attempted "endlich eine vernünftige gesunde Frauenkleidung in Mode zu bringen." Weber-Kellermann continues, "Der Hauptkampf, der besonders von ärztlicher Seite geführt wurde, galt dem Korsett, weil es Lunge, Leber und Herz gefährde" (217). At this time a woman's health became more important than fitting into a particular style. Since a corset injured vital organs, such as the heart and lungs, a woman's physical health was impaired. The corset also appears as a symbol of impaired emotional health in some of Södergran's poems, which I will discuss later.

Analysis of Södergran's Poems

Now that we have looked at the necessary historical background, we can address Edith Södergran's poetry itself. In my analyses of her poems, I presume that the poems are spoken by a feminine voice. My assumption is based on the language, themes and topics, all of which seem to be specifically female. For example, in the poem "Kranksein," the man is described as being placed on a high pedestal, and it seems that a masculine voice would not place another man on a pedestal. This poem also seems to

¹⁵ See also: Fields, Jill. "'Fighting the Corsetless Evil': Shaping Corsets and Culture, 1900-1930." *Journal of Social History* Winter (1999). Fresno: California State University. 355-384. Web.

show anger towards a man resulting from unrealized expectations of love. In “23.6.1907,” the poem sounds like a woman waiting with anticipation for a man to arrive. Also the description “seine weiche Stimme fröhlich kosen” seems to be something that a woman would wish for and not a man (Södergran 226). In the poem “14.7.1907,” the speaker blatantly states “Ich bin die Frau” (Södergran 236). In “Henri Cottier” the description of the man as encompassing everything and the references to love seem to be written from a feminine perspective. Also the topics of female clothing, such as dresses and corsets come up in many of the poems in a way that seems to express a feminine perspective. The voice in the poem “7.5.1908” speaks in the first person and says “meinen toten Körper” will be taken to Professor Lasshalt and he will say “Dieses Mädchen / Hat noch nie Korsett getragen” (Södergran 319). Clearly the speaker of this poem is female, since the doctor says that the body he is examining is the body of a girl. The poem “Den 13. Dez.” discusses menstruation, which is not typically mentioned by a male voice. Because of the evidences in these poems, I have chosen to assume that all of the poems I will analyze are written from the perspective of a female voice.

Many of Södergran’s *Vaxdukshäft* poems test the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is possible for the modern woman. I assert that the poems are poetic thought experiments that explore to what extent the modern woman can depart from idealized traditions; however, these experiments do not yield conclusive answers. The poems I have selected fall into four main themes, which we will examine in turn. First, we will explore relationships and the possibilities for relationships between a man and a woman, or between two women. Secondly, we will confront the woman’s role in the home, and educational possibilities. Thirdly, we will discover the role of clothing and

ornamental imagery as it reflects or hides the woman's soul. Finally, we will encounter the physical body and the way Södergran's use of the eyes and mouth reveal contradictions present in her modern woman. Through the analysis of the poems, we will see how Södergran's "modern woman" is isolated and trapped in her new independence, unable to connect with others, but is ultimately able to find some solace in the creation of her own poetry.

Theme 1: Relationships

The first theme that I will examine from Södergran's *Vaxdukshäft* poems is relationships. One aspect of these relationships that the poems seem to explore is love. The search for love is not only found in Södergran's "14.7.1907", but comes forward in many other poems as well. To understand what is meant by love, we can turn to Margaret E. Toye's essay "Towards a poethics of love: Poststructuralist feminist ethics and literary creation". Toye writes "that 'love' names not only a particular qualitative relation between a self and an Other, but also a process of altering oneself" (39). In Södergran's poetry, the woman seems to be unable to alter herself to develop the qualitative relation of love that Toye describes. We will see that the woman is unable to see "through another's eyes, ... literally alter-ing [herself] – becoming the other" (Toye 46). In this paper, I investigate whether or not the female in Södergran's poems is able to alter herself and connect with the Other.

One of the thought experiments that Södergran's poetry conducts examines the appropriate roles for men and women in a romantic relationship. To understand the historical context for this type of relationship, I examined Darwin's writings. Darwin

claimed “that if men are capable of a decided pre-eminence over women in many subjects, the average standard of mental power in man must be above that of woman” (873). Men have had “to defend their females, as well as their young, from enemies of all kinds, and to hunt for their joint subsistence.” (Darwin 873). Darwin continues that the completion all of these activities “requires the aid of the higher mental faculties, namely observation, reason, invention, or imagination. These various faculties will thus have been continually put to the test and selected during manhood” (Darwin 874). Darwin seems to argue that men are naturally selected to have higher mental faculties. Because of this, they are expected to be more aggressive. While this aggression led to men acting as the protectors of women, many times this aggressiveness was also been considered to indicate a pre-eminence over women. The dominance that men gained by being aggressive also led to a general acceptance of the conception that men should be more outspoken than women, including through expressing their passion and love. While I do not agree that men inherently have higher mental faculties than women, Darwin’s work is a good example of the mindset of European society around Södergran’s time.

Södergran’s poetry combats those prejudices and blazes a trail for a new woman to arise, a woman who is aware of her own abilities and conscious of her individuality. Södergran’s poem “Wär ich ein Mann” brings up the attitude that men are expected to be aggressive and initiators of romantic relationships. The poem seems to struggle against that attitude, but in this experiment, the woman is unable to overcome the traditional conceptions of appropriate interaction between men and women. The poem begins, “Wär ich ein Mann, hätt ich ihm längst / Von meiner Glut geschrieben; / Weil ich ein Mädchen bin, darf ich / Nicht frei und offen lieben” (Södergran 292). This woman is aware of her

own self and has a desire to express her passion; however she uses the traditionally defined roles of men and women to justify her inaction. The woman does not feel free enough in this poem to create her own identity as a person who can articulate love to a man. As a result, the woman is unable to initiate a romantic relationship with a man in this poem.

Another poem that experiments with male and female relationships is “Kranksein.” In this poem, the feminine voice is restrained as in the previous poem, however here she has also created an “Idealgestalt” in her mind (Södergran 213). The characteristics of her ideal man are not described, but her adoration of this man seems to lead to sickness rather than vivacity or love. The voice states, “Er hat mich müd, apathisch, krank gemacht, / Ich habe Tag und Nacht an ihn gedacht” (Södergran 213). Just thinking about a potential relationship does not produce the same result as having an actual relationship. The female voice states in the next stanza, “Und im Vergleich mit ihm erblasste wohl die Welt, / Ich habe ihn auf ein hohes Piedestal gestellt” (Södergran 213). The female becomes disillusioned with the world, because she has created for herself an unattainable ideal. One of the problems with setting a person on a pedestal is that that person can only be admired and never will be in a position to develop a deeper relationship. Adoring a man from afar does not let the woman to connect with that man. Thus, in this experiment, the woman is also unable to create a loving relationship with a man.

Likewise, the poem “28.6.1908” addresses the problems of solitude and the absence of meaningful relationships in the new woman’s life. In this poem, life may outwardly appear to be wonderful, but in the deepest heart of the speaker in this poem,

she is alone. The poem begins, “Wozu denn oben all der Rosenschein, / Im tiefsten Herzen bin ich doch allein” (Södergran 332). The poem explains that she is alone, “weil keiner mich versteht” (Södergran 332). Superficial appearances are insufficient to relieve the suffering that lies within, because others do not understand her. The woman has not expressed her solitude to others, either because she does not expect others to understand her, or because she feels unable to do so. The poem continues, “Im tiefen Herzen liegt die dunkle Qual, / Die sich noch nie auf meine Lippen stahl” (Södergran 332). From this quote we see that the woman is unable to express her solitude with speech, perhaps because speech cannot accurately portray the depth of her seclusion. Even if the woman were able to express the feelings of sorrow in her heart, she might remain isolated, because she is unable or unwilling to alter herself to speak and overcome traditional expectations that a woman should be silent.

The poem “23.6.1907” also mentions the new woman’s longing for, but inability to have a deep relationship with a man, possibly because the man is not attracted to her. In this poem, a beautiful garden is described, full of red roses and yellow sand. The subjunctive “O hört ich einen raschen Schritt am Strand / Und seine weiche Stimme fröhlich kosen” displays the hope and longing for a man to come and love her. In this poem the woman is expressing the love which the traditional woman was expected to keep hidden. The woman seems to desire a relationship in which she can experience a reciprocal love. The thought of the possibility that a man would come to join her in the lovely garden makes the woman’s heart beat wildly; “Bei dem Gedanken zuck ich schon zusammen / Und wild erregt klopft mein verliebtes Herz” (Södergran 226). The build up of beauty and excitement in the beginning of the poem comes to an abrupt halt in the

short phrase “Doch niemand kommt” (Södergran 226). The act of coming shows a departure from self into the realm of the Other; however this essential act, which would require the man to alter himself, is missing, and results in the woman’s disappointment. The woman realizes that even through this thought experiment of waiting in a beautiful garden for her love to come, nobody will come to meet her. She states that the pain of disappointment or “Enttäuschungsschmerz” quickly cools the flames of love (Södergran 226).

Apparently because each attempt at a male/female relationship ends with disappointment in these poems, Södergran’s poetry also explores the possibility of two women having a marital-type relationship, a relationship that is not shaped by men. The voice in “14.7.1907” describes a beautiful woman and then says, “Sie ist der Mann, ich bin die Frau. / Wir sind ein frohes Pärchen” (Södergran 236). Based on the aforementioned evidence, I assume that the voice in this poem is also a female voice. Here the traditional relationship of a husband and wife is replaced by a homosexual relationship between two women. In this experiment, the women are a happy couple. As stated earlier, Schenk explains homosexuality as an expression of the search for patterns of sexual interaction that are not formed by men. He writes, “Es ist auch ein Protest gegen die kulturelle Definition für ‘Weiblichkeit,’ die den Wert von Frauen an ihrer Attraktivität für Männer mißt und Liebe, Heirat und Familie zu den wichtigsten Kriterien für den weiblichen Lebenserfolg macht” (Schenk, “Die homosexuelle Alternative” 99). This poem tests the possibility of having a relationship that is not formed by male expectations. The two women, though trying to escape the traditional cultural patterns of

marriage, still use the terms husband and wife to describe their relationship. In this way, it seems that their relationship is still influenced by traditional marriage.

In continuing to examine “14.7.1907,” we can see that the inhibitions, which the woman has in other poems, also exist in this poem. It seems that the woman might be able to express her feelings and admiration to another woman, even though she is unable to express these sentiments to men. However, the voice in this poem does not seem to trust physical expressions of affection. The voice says, “Und wenn sie lacht und mich umarmt / So wehr ich mich dagegen“ (Södergran 236). The woman defends herself from her partner’s physical expressions of love, perhaps because she does not trust that the love is sincere, or she is frightened of lesbian love. From this we see that the partner’s gender is not the deciding factor in whether Södergran’s modern woman can connect with another person. The woman can admire her homosexual partner, just as she was able to admire men in the other poems, but this admiration does not lead to love. The poem states, “Ich kann für sie Bewunderung, / Doch keine Liebe hegen” (Södergran 236). Again, this indicates that a woman must decide to give up her inhibitions and change part of herself in order to have a fulfilling relationship, but being caught in her own independence, she does not.

Theme 2: Role in Home/Education

The next theme I will explore is the woman’s role inside and outside of the home, as well as the impact that education had on the woman. As was established above, motherhood is a traditional expectation; however in Södergran’s poems, the only times that motherhood is mentioned it is unfulfilled. In this way, the woman in Södergran’s

poetry breaks away from tradition and experiments with the possibility for a woman to be something other than a mother. In the poem “7.5.1908” a young woman is being autopsied after her death. The doctor “wird sagen: ‘Dieses Mädchen [...] hat auch Kinder nie geboren’”(Södergran 319). In seeking her cause of death, the doctor discovered that she has never given birth, and so distinguished her as a girl and not as a woman. She may be about the same age as Molly in Johanna Schopenhauer’s “Des Adlers Horst.” The girl in Södergran’s poem is assumed to be unmarried and a girl, because she is young; however, Molly has a child and therefore is assumed to be a married woman. The first reason why Södergran’s character might have not had children is that the girl might have just died before she was able to mature into a woman. Perhaps if the girl were able to grow and mature she would have eventually become a mother. Another possibility is that the girl may have been old enough and mature enough to have children, but did not have the opportunity to be in a relationship with a man that would lead to motherhood. Nevertheless, another possible reason why the girl did not become a mother is because she does not find it desirable to have children. If the last option is the real reason why this girl did not have children, then the voice in this poem is challenging the traditional pattern of women being mothers.

One way in which Södergran’s poetry tests the boundaries of what is acceptable for a woman is that it subverts the idea that women are bound to their homes. The woman in Södergran’s “13.3.1908” is homeless in this world. The voice states, “Ich bin heimatlos in dieser Welt, / Meine Heimat ist ein Zaubereiland” (Södergran 312). This poem seems to ask, what if a woman does not fit in this world? Only a magical island is a suitable home for this woman, not a house or a husband. The use of the word “Heimat”

indicates more than just a home as a physical building or space, but also connotes a sense of belonging to a certain people and culture. Not even relationships with others are able to bind the woman to this world.

One of the results of a woman no longer being tied to her home (regardless of whether it is a physical building or a community) is that she has the opportunity to gain a formal education. In becoming more educated, a person often considers philosophies and ideas that may otherwise not be considered. Although career possibilities for women are not directly discussed in Södergran's poems, from many of the themes it is easy to see that the increase of educational possibilities for women also led to an increase of intellectual women. As I will show below, "Kranksein," "Warum," "Wozu" and "Rätsel der Existenz" are just a few examples of Södergran's poems in which an intellectual woman is presented.

The speaker in Södergran's "Kranksein" is literate and has been so since she was a child. This young woman talks about reading and the disillusionment that comes from comparing real people with fictitious people. The poem's voice states, "Ich nehm ein Kinderbuch, 's war früher amüsant, / Jetzt lächl' ich mitleidsvoll, es fällt mir aus der Hand // Und jeden Menschen nur betracht ich kalt / Und denk: "Er ähnelt nicht der Idealgestalt" (Södergran 19). This quote indicates the trouble with unfulfilled expectations. The children's book built expectations in the woman's mind when she was still young. Reading the children's book gave the girl a chance to create her own fantasy, one that she began to suppose also would apply to reality. In this fantasy, the girl is able to practice interactions with others in their ideal setting. However, the girl's imagination leads to impaired relationships in reality. This is why the voice in the poem also states,

“Ich mag nicht lesen, mir tun die Augen weh, / Mir scheint in jedem Buche lauert diese Idee“ (Södergran 19). Often the images created in childhood shape the mindset and prejudices of adults. The woman’s lack of meaningful relationships in this poetic experiment is a result of the unrealistic ideals created in her childhood.

An unreachable ideal is also present in “13.3.1908.” Here the woman is not connected to this world, yet she wishes that she could find a connection to other people. The poem’s voice states, “Durch das Leben geht ein solcher Ton, / Dass wir ahnend, träumend und verloren / Stehen bleiben” (Södergran 312). I interpret “tone” here to mean a subconscious connection between people. This tone might be a real sound or it might just have been constructed in the thoughts of the voice of this poem. Regardless of the source for the tone, it seems to connect people on a deep, spiritual level. When conscious, most people don’t appear to pay attention to it. The woman speaking in “13.3.1908” is constantly conscious of the tone because it follows her everywhere, but her mouth “kann ihn nich[t] wiedergeben” (Södergran 313). The woman’s inability to express the connection she sees “in manchem Menschenangesicht” reflects continuing difficulty in being able to alter herself and unite with other people (Södergran 313). Referring to the tone, the woman states, “Und ich möcht’s erfassen und verstehn / aber sogleich schwindet dieser Schimmer; / Schmerzlich sinnend muss ich weitergehen / Und ich such und such, und finde nimmer” (Södergran 313). The woman is in pain, because she is aware of the connection that could be between her and others. Regardless of her effort, she is never able to find a person with whom she can connect.

The inability to connect with others leads the woman in Södergran’s “Kranksein” to be ill. At the beginning of this poem, she states, “Noch immer bin ich krank und werde

nicht gesund” and reiterates at the end, “Er hat mich müd, apathisch, krank gemacht” (Södergran 213). This illness appears to be a result of unrealized expectations. In this situation, the male “Er” disappoints the woman. Of her own accord, she is unable to recover from the sickness.

The poem “Lethargie” confronts a similar difficulty, although the reason for the female’s sickness is not explicitly stated. In this poem a beautiful, young girl lies in “heilloser” or an unable to be healed, hopeless lethargy and her state is infectious, draining life from the men who surround her. In the context of the poem, many doctors and professors visit her: “Ärzte und Professoren / Besuchten und kannten sie” (Södergran 301). These men represent authority and because of their professions, should be able to study and diagnose what caused the girl’s illness, so as to heal her. However, their titles do not give them insight into the girl or her ailment. The poem states, “Doch jede Unternehmung / War wie verhext und verflucht” (Södergran 301). The inability of the men to help the girl calls into question the validity of their authority and power. The lethargic girl has power over them, and seems to be the opposite of a muse, because instead of giving inspiration and life to those around her, she causes inspiration, life and happiness to flee from the men who surround her.

Unhealthy and unfulfilling relationships, like the one in the previous poem, lead the woman in Södergran’s poetry to question her existence. In “Warum” the woman experiments with the idea of interdependence on others. In her pondering she states, “Ich habe mich so oft gefragt / Warum ich existiere“ (Södergran 212). Here as in many of Södergran’s other poems, the meaning of existence is connected with others. The woman’s question continues, “Und wer mich braucht und weinen wird / Wenn ich das

Leben verliere” (Södergran 212). In these inquiries, the woman shows that a lack of relationships with others leads her to question the purpose of her existence. She concludes, “Wir sind ein Nichts, wie wenig wert / Ist doch ein Menschenleben” (Södergran 213). The woman appears to not value her own life or the lives of others, because of the lack of connection with others.

In “Warum” the woman begins to experiment with the idea that the only way people can connect with each other is in death. The only mention of any type of unity between people in this poem comes in the last stanza. The woman says, “Dann könnte hier auf Erden / Der Selbstmörderklub der Menschlichkeit / Sogleich gebildet werden“ (Södergran 213). From these lines, it seems that people can only be unified if they take their own lives, being linked as people who have given up hope. The term “Selbstmörderklub der Menschlichkeit” is paradoxical and seems to indicate that a group of people would be formed; however if this group were successful in its goal, nobody would remain a member of the club, because they would have all taken their lives. In this club, the living cannot participate.

Intertwined with the idea of a shared human pain is the question of the purpose of life. The woman in Södergran’s “Wozu” asks why life is so short. In this situation she does not focus on others, but pays attention to her own meaning and purpose. The woman states, “Ich weiss nicht, wozu ich lebe / Und wozu alles ist” (Södergran 225). This statement that she does not know why she lives indicates that the woman has spent time thinking about her existence. This is another example of how the educated modern woman has broken out of traditional bonds into a more erudite and reflective state. Regardless of the time spent contemplating her purpose, the woman has not discovered

an answer. The uncertainty of life leads the woman to continue, “Ein flücht’ges Menschenleben / Ist eine kurze Frist” (Södergran 225). She points out that human life only lasts for a short period of time. The question is raised, what is the point of life if it is so short? What can be accomplished in such a brief period of time and what is the point if everybody dies? “Wozu” is a short poem and does not offer any answers in its four lines; however it is thought-provoking.

The poem “24.1.1908” approaches a similar problem, but in this poem the woman also considers the purpose of human existence in general, not just her own. She states, “Auf diese Frage, die mich quält, / Werd’ ich wohl nie die Antwort finden / Das Rätsel uns’rer Existenz / Wird meine Seele nie ergründen” (Södergran 302). Perhaps by discovering the meaning of human life, the speaker could modify her own life in order to connect with others. Having a purpose could also allow the woman to accept the challenges and suffering of life. This is a possible reason why the woman continually seeks to answer the riddle of existence. Later in the poem she also expresses, “Doch meine Seele fragt und sucht / Und irrt und fleht und findet nimmer” (Södergran 302). This search is not superficial or trivial. The woman’s soul is asking, supplicating and seeking, but is mistaken and is never able to find the answer. The speaker cannot find the purpose of existence within herself or in her own understanding.

Many of Södergran’s poems in the *Vaxdukshäft* deal with the agony and pain of life, considering the purpose and solution to such suffering. In Södergran’s “7.5.1908,” the voice contemplates her own death. Here she states, “Wenn ich einst vor Qual gestorben, / Wird man meinen toten Körper / Zu Professor Lasshalt bringen” (Södergran 319). In this thought experiment, the girl dies of “Qual,” which can indicate agony,

torture, or anguish. The pain of life is so consuming that the female narrator considers what would happen if she were to die from it. In her experiment, “man” in the poem is unable to understand the woman and the reason for her death, so the woman is taken to the doctor (Södergran 319). Even though the girl is aware of her cause of death, the doctor in this scenario is unable to realize that the girl did not die of physical causes, but of emotional and mental anguish. This reflects the barrier between intellectual knowledge and emotional understanding. Without emotionally connecting with the girl, the doctor is unable to assess the actual reason for the girl’s death.

The word “Qual” also appears in some of Södergran’s other poems, including “26.6.1908” and “28.6.1908.” In “26.6.1908,” the woman also discusses a hope that nothing will come after this life, so that she will no longer have to deal with the anguish of existence. The voice states, “Ach wüsst ich, dass der Tod das Ende wäre / Und keine neuen Qualen darauf folgten, / So schnitte ich den Faden mutig durch / Wenn mir das Leben einst zu schwer geworden” (Södergran 330). Although the woman seeks a release from agony, in this experiment, the woman does not have enough courage to commit suicide, because of a sense of uncertainty about what will come in the depths of the unknown. She also worries that “man vielleicht die Lieben nicht mehr findet” (Södergran 330). This poem presents an entirely different possibility than poems I have previously discussed. Here the woman does feel a connection to “die Lieben,” which causes her to want to remain alive. This may seem like a contradiction to previous poems; however, it indicates a different possibility that reinforces the experimental nature of Södergran’s poetry.

In “28.6.1908,” the woman begins to examine her own situation, but soon extends her condition to a general human condition. She states, “Im tiefsten Herzen liegt die dunkle Qual, / Die sich noch nie auf meine Lippen stahl // Die dunkle Qual, die an dem Herzen frisst / Und doch unser eig’nes Wesen ist” (Södergran 332). In the first stanza, the woman speaks of herself and her inability to express the anguish she feels from not being able to deeply connect with others. With a short pause, the woman states that the “Qual” is not only her own, but part of ‘our own being.’ The switch in pronouns is subtle, yet meaningful. The voice assumes that her condition of isolation and loneliness is experienced by all and is an inherent part of human nature. This indicates that the woman is able to look past herself and establish at least an intellectual connection with others. Being able to recognize that others might feel the same pain that she does gives the woman hope that she is not as alone as she once assumed.

As we have seen in this section, Södergran’s woman departs from traditional roles and she experiments with new possibilities. This woman is educated and spends much time contemplating the purpose of her life and the reason for human existence. Despite her search, she is unable to find a definitive answer as to the significance of life. One of the ways in which the woman attempts to give meaning to life is by forging connections with others, based on the “tone” which she feels connects humans (Södergran 312-313). Yet, Södergran’s woman is unable to build relationships with others and the disappointment from her unrealized expectations leads to physical and emotional illness.

Theme 3: Clothing and Ornamental Imagery

Continuing a discussion of the physical aspects of Södergran's literary woman, we will now focus on clothing. Södergran uses the corset in her poems to point to the moral and emotional restraint which women were often expected to exercise. In the poem "Wär ich ein Mann" the voice states, "Denn ein moralisches Korsett/ Drückt mir die Brust zusammen" and continues "Und drinnen in der Tiefe glühn / Die heissen Liebesflammen" (Södergran 292). According to this poem, the woman feels deep passion, but these flames of love are kept repressed inside of the woman, contained by the moral corset. Men seem to be free to express themselves, because their hearts are not physically constrained and their lungs are free to breathe, giving them life and speech. Even if the woman is not wearing a physical corset, a moral corset endangers her emotional health, because it is symbolic of her repression.

The corset appears again in the poem "7.5.1908." Here the doctor notices that the girl he is autopsying has never had children. Directly before he makes that statement, the doctor says that she "Hat noch nie ein Korsett getragen." These two observations seem to imply that this girl did not reach womanhood. She did not exhibit the signs of physical injuries caused by a corset; however, the same organs that are physically injured by a corset were still unhealthy. The girl's black lungs and especially her ailing heart are indications of a moral corset that the girl was forced to wear. Her ill heart felt deeply, but was unable to express itself. Although to the doctor it seems that the girl had not yet entered the age where she would be physically restrained by a corset, the poem's voice allows the audience to see that the girl was already constrained to be reserved in expressions of passion and love, which ultimately led to her death.

The corset is not the only piece of clothing that acts as a symbol in Södergran's *Vaxdukshäft*. In "Den 13. Dezember" the universe (das Weltall) is described as a woman in a white shirt. The image of the sun shining through the fog is portrayed in this way: "Die schöne Dame, das Weltall / Hat heute Menstruation, / Ein rotes Fleckchen schimmert / Am weissen Hemde schon" (Södergran 282). The only descriptors of the woman are her white shirt and the red fleck on the shirt, which is the result of menstruation. Here we see that Södergran's poetry breaks one of the traditional taboos and discusses a physical, sex-related process. The symbol of the sun represents the possibility of giving life, however the fog obscures it. Likewise, the menstrual cycle is the woman's possibility to give life, showing that she is capable of having children. However, because she is menstruating, the woman is not pregnant and is therefore not actually in the process of creating or giving life. The next stanza continues, "Wir sehen nur die Hemd(en?), / Wir sehen nur das Kleid" (Södergran 282). The only things visible to this group of people are the shirt and the dress. Both of these allow the observers to give the universe a gender and conclude that they are gazing at a woman. Although the female universe in this poem is deeper and more expansive than superficial factors that are easily seen, such as clothing, people are unable to see past the gender and characteristics to see who she actually is. This could also extend to other situations in which the woman's character is overlooked or assumed to be a certain way based on her clothing.

A further examination of "Den 13. Dezember" reveals that one of the reasons that people do not look past clothing is because they are unable to do so. The voice states, "Jedoch das schöne Antlitz / Ist unreichbar weit" (Södergran 282). Additionally the

voice states, “Jedoch die herrlichen Augen / Die bleiben uns unbekannt” (Södergran 283). In the face and in the eyes, it seems that people can reach the substance and depth of other people. Because these features are unreachably far, the woman in this poem cannot be understood. One possible reason that the woman’s face is unseen is that she does not allow herself to be seen. This woman could be choosing to isolate herself and avoid being understood by others. If this is the case, then the woman does not allow herself to form relationships with others.

Theme 4: The Physical Body and Valued Feminine Characteristics

Finally, we will look at the physical body and how it reflects the characteristics valued by Södergran’s poetry. In this section we will focus on the eyes and the mouth. In addition to being able to encounter people’s essences by observing their faces, as in “Den 13. Dezember”, eyes are also reflections of the soul in the *Vaxdukshäft*. The poems I have selected describe female eyes and male eyes. In different situations in the poems, the eyes have different characteristics and different roles, however most of the eyes give access to the souls of the people to whom they belong.

The descriptions of women’s eyes are not uniform throughout Södergran’s poetry, indicating that the women’s personalities and other characteristics are not uniform either. The poem “14.7.1907” describes the woman as follows; “Sie ist so schön und weich und kühl, / Mit Augen so wie Märchen” (Södergran 236). Since the woman has eyes like a fairy tale, they reflect that the woman has characteristics like a fairy tale, such as whimsy and light heartedness. Fairy tales are often representations of an idealized past, a time that is easy to comprehend and where the delineation between good and bad is clearly

comprehensible. The eyes in this poem are favorable, and also represent love, care and youthful exuberance.

Unlike the eyes in the previous poem, the eyes in “Die Zukunft,” are described with the adjective *heiss*. Two examples are “Augen gross und heiss” and “Das junge, kühne, wunderschöne Weib / Mit heissen Augen” (Södergran 244-245). The adjective “heiss”, or hot, indicates that the eyes are full of vivacity and passion. Within the context of the poem, the eyes represent the future, so they are ever looking forward and never caught in memories of the past. The woman in “Die Zukunft” steadily moves onward, giving life and renewal to some and death to others. This woman does not regard the individuals she encounters, but moves on in her own pace with motivation and power.

Although the eyes of females are described differently in both of the poems mentioned above, the eyes of males are all described as dark or black. In “Henri Cottier” the man’s eyes are described as, “Hans svarta och dystra ögon” (Södergran 246). I have translated this to be “his black and dreary eyes.” The word *dystra/dyster* can also be translated as “gloomy”, “dismal” or “somber”, indicating that the eyes contain some sort of darkness instead of the life that is given by the female eyes in the poem “Die Zukunft” described above. The male eyes are dark, and in this darkness lies the unknown. This unknown is unlike the life-giving future, being full of despair instead of hope.

Furthermore, in the poem “Kranksein,” the woman states, “seine schwarzen Augen haben mich versengt” (Södergran 213). Here the man’s black eyes, or rather his gaze, has scorched the woman and caused her harm. Being observed by the man destroys the woman in this poem. The man’s eyes are unsympathetic and unforgiving. In an untitled poem, the voice says “In deinen dunklen Augen / Liegt eine düstere Glut, / Und

vielen entweicht beim Anblick / Der düstren Augen der Mut” (Södergran 225). Although this poem does not directly state that it addresses a man, based on the other descriptions of men’s eyes, I assume that the eyes being described in this poem are also men’s eyes. The significance of the man’s eyes containing a gloomy, dismal, somber glow is that the man threatens vivacity and hope. From the perspective of the new woman, the gaze of this man threatens to destroy her courage and take away her independence.

By striving to protect her independence, Södergran’s woman becomes alienated and unable to distinguish her connection with others. This alienation is present in Södergran’s “22.9.1908.” At the beginning of the poem, the voice questions who her audience is and what impact her creations and her existence have on others. As part of this questioning she states, “Ich weiss nicht, [...] vor wessen Augen stehen bleiben” (Södergran 337-8). The woman asks before whose eyes she should appear, because she wants to be certain that she is safe with that person. She seeks another soul who might understand her and respect her individuality. She continues, “Und schau in der Menschen Augen / Und such eine menschliche Seele / Die mich verstehen könnte / Jedoch ihre Augen sind mir so fremd, / Sie schauen auf andere Dinge” (Södergran 337-8). Here every pair of eyes that the woman looks to, longing for connection and understanding is unknown to her, because they do not take her in as one of their own. To the woman in this poem, there is no hope of finding a connection with other people, whether they are male or female.

In addition to the symbol of eyes, many of Södergran’s poems also present the symbols of the mouth and tongue. These organs are often metonyms for speech and the expression of one’s ideas. One example where the tongue represents speech is the poem

“5.2.1908.” Here the tongue indicates the instability and the insufficiency of communication to create a lasting relationship. Impaired and imperfect communication has an impact on all relationships, including those between males and females. The poem states, “Verfluchte Menschenzunge, / Entsetzliches Organ, / Was du berührst wird immer / Entheiligt und profan” (Södergran 306). I believe this to be an allusion to Chapter 3 in the Epistle of James in the Bible, where the tongue is described as a volatile organ, which at times can sing the highest praises, but at other times speaks the vilest of curses. In the Epistle of James, the tongue is “entheiligt und profan” because it “is a fire, a world of iniquity [...] it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell” (*King James Version* Jam. 3.6). Depending what comes forth out of the mouth, the tongue can defile and deceive. The Bible continues that every kind of beast has been tamed by mankind, “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jam. 3.8). Because of the unruly nature of human emotions conveyed by the tongue, or rather by words, the human tongue is described as cursed and profane. This instability of language leads to an inability to communicate thus making the establishment of a relationship difficult.

In this same poem, the kiss is used to represent betrayal. Making another biblical allusion, this poem states “Es ward der Kuss geschändet / Durch Judas’ Hochverrat” (Södergran). This poem points to the kiss given by Judas Iscariot to Jesus Christ, found in Luke 22. This kiss, which should be a sign of affection, devotion, and love, was ultimately used to send Jesus Christ to his death. The betrayal of this act is even more abhorrent, because the kiss was a false representation of love. Right after the first two lines, the poem continues, “Die Menschen imitierten / Variierend diese Tat” (Södergran

306). People imitate the kiss of betrayal in different ways. Although this betrayal may not be in the form of a kiss, it will still lead to destruction that is physical, mental, or emotional. The modern woman encounters this type of danger and is uncertain that she can trust other people. In order to avoid deception, she hesitates to form connections with other people.

In “Lethargie,” the kiss is also a symbol of a destructive force. Whoever dared to kiss the girl’s mouth would be dumb his entire life; “Denn wer ihr Mündchen küsste, / Der blieb sein Leben stumm” (Södergran 301). Here the kiss, which is typically a deep expression of emotion, takes away the man’s ability to speak. This seems to imply that either the man or the woman has the power to speak, but they cannot both possess that power. If the woman’s mouth has power through words, then man’s mouth has none. This quote can also be seen as a warning of the danger of associating with the modern, educated woman. If the new woman is strong, it seems to imply that the man is weak. Witt-Brattström discusses this; “For most intellectuals of that time, modernity at the turn of the twentieth century was experienced as a rise of the female and a deconstruction of the male” (*The New Woman* 6). From this quote we see that Södergran’s new woman challenged the established authority of men. As is understandable, men feared and resisted the shift, hoping to be able to protect their dominance, but as we will see later in this poem, the girl has power over the men in the poem.

Returning to another portion of the poem “Lethargie,” two students keep watch over the beautiful girl on a warm, gray-colored, spring night. One of the students decides to take a walk around the house; he states, “Ich lieb nicht die kalte Schöne / Mit ihrem Totengraus” (Södergran 301). He cannot stand to be in the girl’s presence, because it

reminds him that his authority is being challenged. The student who stays at the girl's side ends up dying. The poem says, "Der andere blieb und es wurde / Ihm bange und schauerlich, / Die bleichen Lippen des Fräuleins / Beweg/ten und regten sich / Und als der Freund zurückkam / Lag jener tot und kalt" (Södergran 301). The student does not kiss the girl, but the maiden's pale lips move, presumably representing speech, and the girl's words seem to cause the student's death. The poem does not reveal what the girl said, but she has power over the student to take away his power. In this situation, one would assume that the girl would die, because she is sick, but instead she continues to live.

One of the frightening things about this girl is that in her state of lethargy she seems like she should be dead, but she is not. However, she is also not wholly alive. Rather than being a vital, beautiful girl, she is deathly. Schoolfield compares this poem to Snow White; however he calls it a moribund, macabre version of the fairy tale (Schoolfield 29). I find the poem reminiscent of Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. In both of these fairy tales the heroine is in a death like state, Snow White due to an unfortunate piece of apple in her throat and Briar Rose because of a curse and a needle on a spinning wheel. Unlike these two stories, we are not given a reason why the girl in "Lethargie" is in a lethargic, death like state. Another difference between Södergran's poems and the fairy tales is that Södergran's girl is unable to be revived by true love's kiss. In fact, she kills with her lips.

Only one of Södergran's poems presents the kiss as a symbol of a power to overcome pain and death. In the poem "An den Gott der Dichtung", the kiss described is the kiss of the god of poetry, implying that the pains of life are not healed by living, but

by creating. The soul is expressed through the combination of words and emotions, and when offered up to the god of poetry, the sorrow and pain of unrequited love and death are taken away and healed. By creating and turning to an ideal god, instead of relying on a real human for support, the human relationship is impaired. The voice in the poem says, “Bedecke mich mit Küssen, / Allmächt’ger, schöner Gott / Denn Deine Küsse heilen / Die Liebe und den Tod” (Södergran 286). Calling upon the god of poetry heals the speaker of this poem. She states that blood returns to her heart and her mouth is pulled, presumably into a smile. She then says, “Und [...] meine Seele wird noch / Viel langsamer gesund” (Södergran 286). By encountering the divine, the woman seems to gain a hope to return to health. She accesses her own, creative power and finds purpose and solace. Although in this experiment the voice finds meaning in her life, she is still isolated from other people.

The experimental nature of Södergran’s poetry is evident through the difference in the descriptions of male and female eyes and the results of the kiss. In some instances female eyes are beautiful and in others they are ever looking into the future. The threat found in men’s dark, dangerous eyes is also found in many descriptions of the tongue and mouth. Södergran’s poetic voice reveals the hypocrisy and betrayal that can result from a false expression of love through the kiss. She also explores the woman’s power to take away vitality from men through the woman’s kiss. However, in one instance the kiss is a powerful, healing force for the woman. In kissing the god of poetry, or rather in creating her own poetry, Södergran’s woman is able to deal with her isolation and be healed from the pains of life.

Conclusion

Södergran's isolated woman is homeless in this world because she is an intellectual, modern woman, who is unable to free herself from the moral constraints of traditional society. Just as the woman in "An den Gott der Dichtung" was unable to overcome the pains of life by living, but only by crafting poetry, so too does Södergran's poetic voice find solace by creating. Many of the poetic experiments conducted in the *Vaxdukshäft* seek to find a meaning in life, with the assumption that forging deep relationship with other people will accomplish this. However, the woman in these poems is unable to establish significant associations with other people, both because she cannot alter herself, and because others do not alter themselves to connect with her. Since Södergran's modern woman cannot create meaning in uniting with others, she turns inward to create art, through which she finds purpose in her life.

By crafting her own poetry, Södergran's woman is able to produce her own world, which is a controlled environment for her experiments. In this world of her own conception, the woman is able to dictate the behavior of each of the characters in her poems. She also has control over the situations in which they are placed. She constructs characters for herself who experience disappointment and pain, while still being able to protect herself from experiencing such things in reality. In forming her own fictional world, the woman finds greater independence from the constraints of society and the power of others; however, her experiments also isolate her from others. The woman shields herself from dissatisfaction and pain that can come from not being able to have power over others' actions and reactions that lead her to experience the unknown in the

real world. Although she does not live in the world of reality, Södergran's isolated woman finds consolation and personal value in being in the world of her creations.

Appendix A: Poems (In Chronological Order)

From: Södergran, Edith. *Dikter och aforismer*. Holger Lillqvist, ed. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1990. 31-31. Print.

Warum

Kranksein

Wozu

(Untitled)

23.6.1907

14.7.1907

Die Zukunft

Henri Cottier

Den 13. Dezember

An den Gott der Dichtung

Wär ich ein Mann

Lethargie

24.1.1908

5.2.1908

13.3.1908

29.3.1908

7.5.1908

26.6.1908

28.6.1908

22.9.1908

Warum (212-213)

Ich habe mich so oft gefragt
Warum ich existiere,
Und wer mich braucht und weinen wird
Wenn ich das Leben verliere.

Wir sind ein Nichts, wie wenig wert
Ist doch ein Menschenleben
Ich nähm's mir, wüsste ich nur es würd'
Nach ihm kein andres geben.

Dann wär die ganze Welt umsonst,
Dann könnte hier auf Erden
Der Selbstmörderklub der Menschlichkeit
Sogleich gebildet werden.

Kranksein (213-214)

Noch immer bin ich krank und werde nicht gesund,
Apathisch sitz ich da und denke Stund' für Stund'.

Da draussen flimmert hell und klar der Sonnenschein
Es fegt ein kühler Wind die staub'gen Strassen rein.

Ich mag nicht lesen, mir tun die Augen weh,
Mir scheint in jedem Buche lauert diese Idee.

Mir scheint als hätt ich alles viele Mal gelesen,
Als wär ich tausendmal dabei gewesen.

Ich nehm ein Kinderbuch, 's war früher amüsant,
Jetzt lächl' ich mitleidvoll, es fällt mir aus der Hand

Und jeden Menschen nur betracht ich kalt
Und denk: "Er ähnelt nicht der Idealgestalt.[“]

Die Idealgestalt ist mir erst recht zuwider,
Vor Ekel schliesse ich die Augenlieder.

Er hat mich müd, apathisch, krank gemacht,
Ich habe Tag und Nacht an ihn gedacht.

(Und im Vergleich mit ihm erblasste wohl die Welt,
Ich habe ihn auf ein hohes Piedestal gestellt)

Von seinen Ansichten bin ich durchtränkt,
Und seine schwarzen Augen haben mich versengt.

Und ich weiss keine Rettung, suche hin und her,
Und wünsche dass ich tausend Meilen von hier wär.

Wozu (225)

Ich weiss nicht wozu ich lebe
Und wozu alles ist,
Ein flücht'ges Menschenleben
Ist eine kurze Frist

Untitled (225)

In deinen dunklen Augen
Liegt eine düstre Glut,
Und vielen entweicht beim Anblick
Der düstren Augen der Mut

Der Schmerzenszug um die Brauen
Und der entschlossene Mund,
Sie reden von tiefen Qualen
Auf deinem Herzensgrund.

23.6.1907 (226)

Im Garten blühen schon die roten Rosen,
Es glüht die Sonne auf dem gelben Sand.
O hört ich einen raschen Schritt am Strand
Und seine weiche Stimme fröhlich kosen.

Bei dem Gedanken zuck ich schon zusammen
Und wild erregt klopft mein verliebtes Herz;
Doch niemand kommt, und der Enttäuschungsschmerz
Kühlt rasch und sicher meine Liebesflammen.

14.7.1907 (236)

Sie ist so schön und weich und kühl,
Mit Augen so wie Märchen
Sie ist der Mann, ich bin die Frau,
Wir sind ein frohes Pärchen

Und wenn sie lacht und mich umarmt
So wehr ich mich dagegen,

Ich kann für sie Bewunderung,
Doch keine Liebe hegen

Die Zukunft (244-245)

Die Zukunft naht im ros'gen Morgenlichte.

Sie ist ein junges, kühnes, schönes Weib
Mit schwarzem Haar und Augen gross und heiss.
Es hebt sich aus der Flut der wundervolle Leib
So lilienschlank und alabasterweiss.

Ans Ufer wirft sie sich ermüdet hin
Und grüsst das Land im ros'gen Morgenlicht:
Der stolze Nacken einer Königin,
Ein junges schönheitsstrahlendes Gesicht.

Sie wandert durch ein blutdurchtränktes Land,
Durch Schrecken, Kampf und grenzenlose Not,
Sie geht durch Elend, Hunger Sünd und Schand
Und vor ihr flammen Städte feurig rot.

Und über Leichen führt ihr leichter Schritt,
Über Ruinen und zerstampfte Saat,
Und tausend bleiche Menschen folgen mit
Und tausend bitten sie um Brot und Rat.

Und tausend bleiche Menschen folgen mit
Und stürzen sterbend in den heissen Sand,
Doch immer weiter führt ihr rascher Schritt
Sie über ödes und versengtes Land.

Und aus der Erde spriest die neue Saat.
Es wächst ein neues glückliches Geschlecht
Mit heissen Augen und mit rascher Tat,
Und wird die Jugend kühn und ungerecht.

Das junge, kühne, wunderschöne Weib
Mit heissen Augen steht an ihrer Seit
Und niemals bebt ihr wundervoller Leib,
Und niemals denkt sie der Vergangenheit.

Henri Cottier (246-247)

Hans svarta och dystra ögon,
Hans höga och smärta gestalt,
De äro min enda tanke
För mig innesluta de allt.

Min själ och hela mitt väsen
Min himmel och hela min jord,
De äro en enda tanke
Ett enda berusande ord.

Det var en strålande stjärnekväll
Jag gick över Nevan och drömde
Om honom vars bild jag den sista höst
Uti mitt hjärta gömde.

(English Translation)

His black and dreary eyes,
His tall and slender frame,
They are my only thought
For me they encompass everything.

My soul and all of my being
My heaven and all of my earth,
They are a single thought
A single intoxicating word.

It was a shining starry night
I went over the Neva and dreamed
Of him whose image I
Concealed from my heart last fall.

Den 13. Dezember (282-283)

Aus bleichen Nebeln zittert
Die Sonne blutig rot
Und rings umher liegt alles
Verschneit, verschleiert, tot.

Die schöne Dame, das Weltall
Hat heute Menstruation,
En rotes Fleckchen schimmert
Am weissen Hemde schon.

Wir sehen nur die Hemd(en?),
Wir sehen nur das Kleid
Jedoch das schöne Antlitz
Ist unerreichbar weit.

Wir kennen die bunten Kleider,
Das schwarze Trauergewand,
Jedoch die herrlichen Augen
Die bleiben uns unbekannt.

An den Gott der Dichtung (286)

In deine Hände schwöre
Ich meine Liebe ab,
Die alten Schmerzen sinken
Jetzt bleich und kalt ins Grab

Noch blutet es im Herzen,
Noch zuckt es um den Mund,
Und (?) meine Seele wird noch
Viel langsamer gesund.

Bedecke mich mit Küssen,
Allmächt'ger, schöner Gott
Denn Deine Küsse heilen
Die Liebe und den Tod.

Wär ich ein Mann (292)

Wär ich ein Mann, hätt ich ihm längst
Von meiner Glut geschrieben;
Weil ich ein Mädchen bin, darf ich
Nicht frei und offen lieben

Denn ein moralisches Korsett
Drückt mir die Brust zusammen,
Und drinnen in der Tiefe glühn
Die heissen Liebesflammen.

Lethargie (301-302)

Es lag ein schönes Mädchen
In heilloser Lethargie,
Und Ärzte und Professoren
Besuchten und kannten sie.

Viel Ärzte, alte und junge
Sie hatten ihr Glück versucht
Doch jede Unternehmung
War wie verhext und verflucht.

Denn wer ihr Mündchen küsste,
Der blieb sein Leben stumm,
Und wer sie lange gesehen
Ging ewig traurig herum.

Es kamen Künstler und spielten
Das allerschmelzends[t]e Lied,
Es zog wie ein Frühlingschauer
Durch manches Doktorgemüt.

Einst hielten zwei Studenten
An ihrem Lager Wacht,
Es war eine warme, tolle
Graufarbige Frühlingsnacht.

Der eine von ihnen sagte:
“Ich mach eine Tour um das Haus,
Ich lieb nicht die kalte Schöne
Mit ihrem Totengraus.[“]

Der andere blieb und es wurde
Ihm bange und schauerlich,
Die bleichen Lippen des Fräuleins
Bewegten und regten sich

Und als der Freund zurückkam
Lag jener tot und kalt,
Und neben ihm schlief noch immer
Die schöne Mädchengestalt.

24.1.1908 (302)

Auf diese Frage, die mich quält,
Werd' ich wohl nie die Antwort finden
Das Rätsel uns'rer Existenz
Wird meine Seele nie ergründen.

Und meine Sinne schwelgen noch
In Duft und Klang und Farbenschimmer
Doch meine Seele fragt und sucht
Und irrt und fleht und findet nimmer.

O gebt mir die Unsterblichkeit
Und einen Gott, zu dem ich beten
Und [den ich] andachtsvoll verehren kann
Und seinen Willen übertreten.

5.2.1908 (306)

Verfluchte Menschengunge,
Entsetzliches Organ,
Was du berührst wird immer
Entheiligt und profan.

Es ward der Kuss geschändet
Durch Judas' Hochverrat,
Die Menschen imitierten
Variierend diese Tat.

So geht es immer weiter
Noch bis zur heut'gen Stund',
Verfluchte Menschengunge!
Verfluchte[r] Menschenmund!

13.3.1908 (312-313)

Ich bin heimatlos in dieser Welt,
Meine Heimat ist ein Zaubereiland,
Zu ihr führt kein Weg und keine Qual
Keine Liebe und kein gut'ger Heiland.

Durch das Leben geht ein solcher Ton,
Dass wir ahnend, träumend und verloren
Stehen bleiben. Dieser Ton erklingt
Tag und Nacht und stets in meinen Ohren.

Dieser Ton verfolgt mich überall
Doch mein Mund kann ihn nich[t] wiedergeben,
Und in manchem Menschenangesicht
Seh ich plötzlich diese Töne leben.

Und ich möcht's erfassen und verstehn
Aber sogleich schwindet dieser Schimmer;
Schmerzlich sinnend muss ich weitergehen
Und ich such und such, und finde nimmer.

29.3.1908 (315)

Och frågar du mig: "Är ditt hjärta varmt,
Och känner du sorg och smärta?"
Så svarar jag; "Jag äger en själ
Men äger intet hjärta.

And do you ask me: "Is your heart warm,
And do you feel sorrow and pain?"
So I answer; "I possess a soul
But do not possess a heart.

Och genom min sensibla själ,
Känner jag hela livet,
Men ett hjärta som gråter, ett hjärta som ler
Det är mig icke givet. ["

And through my sensible soul,
I perceive all of life,
But a heart which cries, a heart which smiles
This is not given to me.["]

7.5.1908 (319-320)

Wenn ich einst vor Qual gestorben,
Wird man meinen toten Körper
Zu Professor Lasshalt bringen,
Und er wird mich gleich secieren.

Er wird sagen: „Dieses Mädchen
Hat noch nie Korsett getragen,
Hat auch Kinder nie geboren,
Arbeitsscheu sind ihre Hände.[“

Und mit einem scharfen Schnitte
Teilt er mich in gleiche Hälften
Und mit kunstgewandten Händen
Wir er Haut und Fleisch entfernen.

Und zum Vorschein kommen Rippen,
Die er rasch durchschneiden wird
Und dann liegen zur Verfügung
Meine Lungen und mein Herze.

Meine Lungen werden schwarz sein
So wie blutdurchtränkte Erde.
Lasshalt sagt in ruh'gem Ton:
„Das kommt alles von den Lungen. [“]

Und mein armes krankes Herze
Fasst er dann mit zarten Fingern
Und es schlägt ihm auf die Nerven
Tief durch seine Gummihandschuh.

Und das andre Eingeweide
Wird er weiter drauf betrachten
Doch das alles eignet sich
Nicht zu dichterischer Schildrung.

Und an mir ist nichts abnorm
Ausser meinem kranken Herzen
Und dem Chaos im Gehirne
Die vereint den Tod mir brachten.

26.6.1908 (330)

Ach wüsst ich, dass der Tod das Ende wäre
Und keine neuen Qualen darauf folgten,
So schnitte ich den Faden mutig durch
Wenn mir das Leben einst zu schwer geworden.

Jedoch mir fehlt d[er] Mut mich in d[ie] Tiefen
Des Unbekannten jäh hinabzustürzen,
Wo nur die Ewigkeit den Müden anschaut
Und man vielleicht die Lieben nicht mehr findet.

28.6.1908 (332)

Wozu denn oben all der Rosenschein,
Im tiefsten Herzen bin ich doch allein.

Ich bin allein, weil keiner mich versteht
Und weil mein Wesen so zu nichts vergeht.

Im tiefsten Herzen liegt die dunkle Qual,
Die sich noch nie auf meine Lippen stahl

Die dunkle Qual, die an dem Herzen frisst
Und doch unser eig'nes Wesen ist.

Wozu der Liebe süsse Schmeichelein
Im tiefsten Herzen sind wir doch allein.

22.9.1908 (337-338)

Ich weiss nicht, wem meine Lieder bringen,
Ich weiss nicht, in wessen Sprache schreiben,
Ich weiss nicht, zu wessen Herzen dringen,
Vor wessen Augen stehen bleiben.

Ich hab für mich selbst gesungen
Und bin schon müde geworden,
Was ist mir jetzt das verschneite Tal
Im kalten, weissen Norden,
Dort schluchzen die Fichten meine Qual.

Ich aber verfluche die Einsamkeit
Und suche in der weiten Welt
Nach einem Herzen
Und schau in der Menschen Augen
Und such eine menschliche Seele
Die mich verstehen könnte
Jedoch ihre Augen sind mir so fremd,
Sie schauen auf andere Dinge.

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