

Travelling Women in Sophie von La Roche's novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* and Caroline Auguste Fischer's short story *Justine*.

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Abstract: This article investigates to what extent a new concept of female development is presented in two texts written by German women writers, Sophie von La Roche and Caroline Auguste Fischer. In both texts travel motif is used as an expression of the desire to become independent. Travels of the protagonists Sophie and Justine can be interpreted as an escape from their former lives into a new way of life, where they have to prove that they can survive as single, independent working women.

Keywords: 18th century German literature, German women writers, travel, fiction of female development, Sophie von La Roche, Caroline Auguste Fischer, gender roles, education

Travelling and waiting constitute two crucial experiences of human life. Reflections about these two experiences have frequently been used in literature. Usually, men are the travellers and women the ones who wait for their return. Women, because of their role as caretakers of the nuclear family, are primarily shown in the realm of either their parents' or their husbands' houses. Women wait for their parents' decision regarding their education or marriage arrangements, they wait for men to propose marriage, to return home from work, from war, and from a long trip abroad. "Women's literature from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf is mostly a literature about waiting, and usually waiting for love. Denied the freedom to roam outside

themselves, women turned inward, into their emotions."¹ One could say that until the late 18th century or even later the more passive roles such as caring, nurturing, and waiting were central female experiences, which determined the nature of the portrayal of women's life in literature. *Waiting* was a woman's duty, it was part of her role as a wife and a mother, it was the means for the patriarchal society to control her life and body. The freedom of the traveller, of the explorer of the world, and the right for "Selbsterkennung" through the experience of seeing other countries and cultures was granted to men only.

The late 18th century marks a shift in the attitude of German upper- and middle-class women toward taking an active role and exploring the world and the possibilities one has in life. In a letter from 1819, Rahel Levin encourages her sister to travel : "Geh an Orte, wo neue Gegenstände, Worte und Menschen Dich berühren, Dir Blut, Leben, Nerven und Gedanken auffrischen. Wir Frauen haben dies doppelt nötig."² Travel offered a unique opportunity for women, associated as they were with the new ideology of domesticity that linked them to the private sphere: „Reisen war mit großen Schwierigkeiten verbunden, die sich nicht nur auf das Finanzielle beschränkten, sondern gerade für Frauen auch mit Transport- und Unterkunftsschwierigkeiten zusammenhingen. Außerdem bedeutete die Reise einen Verstoß gegen die Rollenvorstellungen jener Zeit, die Frauen den Bereich des Hauses zuwies. [...] Frauen reisten also trotz gesellschaftlicher Vorurteile."³ Writing was - like travelling - a liberating experience and offered women a possibility to examine the dichotomy between the public and the private spheres. German women writers, influenced by English and French writers, recognizing their longing for new experiences, broke the silence about women's lives,

¹ Morris, 25.

² Frederiksen, 147.

³ Frederiksen, 148-149.

their needs, fears and anxieties, and spoke out about their isolation from each other and from the public sphere.⁴ Travel books and travel motives in novels can be, therefore, read as implicit celebrations of freedom.

Travelling becomes one of the favorite topics of women writers of the period of Goethezeit, in addition to writing about the intimate lives of women, about experiences which were central to their lives, such as love, motherhood, and marriage. Women's travelogues turn out to be a very popular literary genre in the last 30 years of the 18th century. According to Elke Frederiksen⁵ the number of travelogues published in Germany by women increased by at least five times between 1770-1800. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Letters from the East* (1763) became a model for German women. Writers such as Sophie von La Roche, Johanna Schopenhauer, and Ida Hahn-Hahn wrote travelogues in either epistolary form or as a journal, and described selective facts of their personal experiences, and their rational or emotional reactions. Through writing, women "travelled" into a fantasy world of their own creation, in order to reflect upon their ordinary life and search for and create a new life in literature.

The era of German women's novel (*Frauenroman*) began according to Jeannine Blackwell with the 1771 anonymous publication of Sophie von La Roche's first novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*. "It was simultaneously the first German Sentimental novel,

⁴ One has to note, however, that most professional women writers expressed ambivalent feelings about their profession. "Therese Huber [betrachtet] die literarische Tätigkeit nicht als angemessene weibliche Beschäftigung." Household chores and motherhood duties made it difficult for women to concentrate on writing fiction. It was their experience to face "den Widerspruch zwischen der festgelegten bürgerlichen Bestimmung der Frau, die ihr Wirken auf den privaten Bereich der Familie beschränken muß, und ihrer literarischen Tätigkeit, die von der Frau ein Heraustreten in die Öffentlichkeit und damit eine Grenzüberschreitung ihrer Geschlechterrolle verlangt" Schlimmer, 142.

⁵ Frederiksen, 148.

the first known novel by a woman in the eighteenth century, and the first in LaRoche's long list of publications."⁶ For the majority of women, writing was an opportunity to create stories about the intimate life of women, to come to terms with pivotal life experiences, such as love, motherhood, and marriage. Writers such as Sophie von La Roche, Wilhelmine von Wobeser, Johanna Schopenhauer, and Friederike Unger, who wrote novels, short stories, travelogues, and letters in which they described various aspects of women's lives, did not intend to radically change the institution of the nuclear family, but rather looked for ways to improve women's lives within the system. The most radical writers, such as Caroline Auguste Fischer⁷ spoke out against traditional family life and against patriarchal family values, which restricted women to the house only, and searched for new forms of relationships, in which both partners could be equal. "Kritisch und ironisch arbeitet Fischer das sozial-räumliche Schema heraus, in dem die bürgerlichen Geschlechtscharaktere verankert sind und legt, wie keine andere Autorin der Zeit, dessen repressive Strukturen für die bürgerliche Frau frei."⁸

In this article I focus on two German women writers who used the travel motif in their fiction - Sophie von La Roche and Caroline Auguste Fischer. Heroines of their works: Sophie (*Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 1771) and Justine ("Justine", 1818), young women who lost their parents, are forced by circumstances to travel abroad in order to establish independent lives. I view their travel, born out of necessity, as a wish to become independent, as a desire to explore the unknown, and to pursue the dreams that made them

⁶ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* was very popular; it went through eight editions by 1787 and was translated into three languages in the first three years after it was first published in 1771. Blackwell, 101.

⁷ Purver lists two tendencies which are characteristic for Fischer: her choice of taboo subjects and her stress on the destructive potential of male-female relationships. Purver, 1995, 620.

⁸ Krug, 283.

leave Germany and search for a new life in England. The trip to England is presented in both works as an opportunity for the heroines to expand their horizons and to create a more fulfilling life. Their travels can be interpreted as an escape from their former life into a new way of life, where they have to prove that they can survive as single, independent working women. Justine becomes a famous singer, and Sophie continues to work in the area of education. Spitzer notices a connection between these two texts: „Es drängt sich der Gedanke auf, dass Fischer sich in der ‚Justine‘ im sternheimschen Sinne eine papierne Tochter geschaffen hat, an die sie ihre Lehren weitergab.“⁹ Purver notes that Fischer’s short story presents ideas which even today, 200 years later, sound provocative: ”Manche ihrer Bemerkungen haben trotz der verbesserten gesellschaftlichen Stellung der Frau im heutigen Europa an Relevanz kaum eingebüßt und wirken immer noch provokativ.”¹⁰

The writers' search for a female protagonist role model - a fictional heroine, who is an acting subject, rather than a passive object of love and desire of men - became a unique artistic and educational endeavor. The 18th-century German female writers had to develop a model of the female protagonist with which female readers could associate. Sally Winkle believes that Sophie von La Roche’s novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* deals with a conflict in a heroine who is active but is still a product of ideology that designates women as passive recipients of men’s love and desire: “With Sophie von Sternheim La Roche represents a woman in conflict with herself: she provided a new insight and a female perspective on women’s lives, but she was also influenced by an emerging ideology that designated women as more passive than active, as more receptive than creative.”¹¹

⁹ Spitzer, 203.

¹⁰ Purver, 1997, 66.

¹¹ Winkle, 77-78.

One can view women's writing as a wish to become independent, a desire to explore the unknown, to pursue their dreams and to search for and create a new life in literature. Writing is a journey into their own creation, and its goal is to reflect upon their own situation, broaden their world, and influence their female readers. Exploration of literary fiction can be, therefore, interpreted as an escape from a former life into a new way of life - as an independent creator and a working woman. What is even more important is that writing constituted an attempt to create a female sphere, in which the most intimate women's experiences could be shared.

The fictional protagonists' search for their own identities as modern women gave the writer an opportunity to explore women's feelings and desires. Writing became an instrument by which women emancipated themselves to a level from which they could think their way into independence, at least the intellectual one. It was a liberating experience for normally housebound women, because it brought at least partial fulfillment of their desire for new experiences, for their self-actualization as individuals, and for the opening of new frontiers. Many women turned to writing to support themselves and their families financially. Such was the case of Therese Huber, who during her second marriage and later as a widow was supporting not only herself but also her family. Caroline Auguste Fischer had to earn money through writing for herself and her son. According to Jeannine Blackwell, they "became professional authors and journalists out of financial necessity as well as out of cultural and social interest."¹² Writing was instrumental in gaining independence, breaking barriers and establishing a community reaching beyond the domestic sphere - a community in which women, confined by gender restrictions to the domestic circle and discouraged by other family members from active participation in the public sphere, would break the isolation and support each other.

¹² Blackwell, 101.

Women either wrote and thought in isolation, or had to turn to men for mentorship or encouragement (Sophie von La Roche to Wieland, Caroline von Günderrode to Karl Savigny, Caroline Wollzogen to Friedrich Schiller). In their intellectual work they were denied the right to institutional support, such as universities, societies, publishers, reading circles, etc. They were not only excluded from educational institutions, but also deprived of participation in informal networks that would allow them intellectual exchange and interaction with their readers. Finally, they lacked the resources to gain knowledge about their own history as women and about the cultural achievements of previous generations: “Women, ignorant of their own history, did not know what women before them had thought and taught. So, generation after generation, they struggled for insights others had already had before them.”¹³

Being aware of the need to establish a support network for their intellectual work, women devoted their attention to formation of some sort of alliance, where the potential for writing and making their writing marketable might be realized and enacted. The creation of the female audience was pivotal for the work of women writers. It was an important step toward building a community of women sharing ideas: “Certainly it is possible for talented individuals to write in isolation and without the response of audience, but intellectual development depends on response, encouragement, the ability to improve one's work by criticism and the testing out of ideas in social interaction.”¹⁴

Sophie von La Roche, being the author of the first German *Frauenroman* and the editor of a magazine for women *Pomona*, became a role model for others in these endeavors; „Es gelang ihr, sich und die Ihren mit dem Schreiben zu ernähren; zudem vermochte sie einen Platz als Schriftstellerin auf dem sich herausbildenden

¹³ Lerner, 19.

¹⁴ Lerner, 223.

literarischen Markt zu erobern.”¹⁵ La Roche broke many societal barriers: she did not restrict her life to her domestic duties only, but instead published novels and women’s magazine, belonged to writers’ circles, and, finally, travelled alone. Caroline Auguste Fischer, Therese Huber, and Sophie Mereau-Brentano, representing a later generation of women writers, continued La Roche’s model and became free-lance writers. In their literary works, these women described the process of building women’s community. Fiction was the only means to propagate these ideas among women.

Sophie von La Roche (1730-1807) was born in a bourgeois family in Kaufbeuern. In 1753 she entered an arranged marriage with Frank de la Roche and moved with him to Mainz. Her first novel, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, edited by her cousin Wieland, was published in Leipzig in 1771 and has been called the first German *Frauenroman*. La Roche’s career as a writer began with this novel. After 1771 she published novels, short stories, and a weekly magazine for women *Pomona*. She was the first well-known German woman to travel alone to western European countries. Between 1787-1788 she published three travelogues: *Tagebuch einer Reise durch die Schweiz* (1787), *Tagebuch einer Reise durch Frankreich* (1787) and *Tagebuch einer Reise durch Holland und England* (1788). In Sophie von La Roche’s first novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* the author created a heroine who had to face the world herself with no support from her family.

Caroline Auguste Fischer (1764-1834) was born in the family of a court musician. Her life was defined by personal conflicts and a struggle for economic independence. After divorcing her first husband, she had an intimate relationship with Hofmeister and later Würzburger Professor Christian A. Fischer. They were married in 1808, but the relationship ended shortly thereafter. She then chose a difficult life as a free-lance writer. Through writing she tried to secure a decent life

¹⁵ Meise, 200.

for herself and her son. She opened an educational home in Heidelberg, and a library in Würzburg. Caroline published regularly starting in 1801, but it was not until 1823 that she started to sign her works with her own name. Her works include: a novel *Gustav's Verirrungen* - (1801), *Honigmonathe* (1802)- an epistolary novel, Fischer's critical response to the bestseller *Elisa, oder das Weib, wie es seyn sollte*, *Der Günstling* (1809), and *Kleine Erzählungen und romantische Skizzen* (including *Justine*)(1819).

La Roche uses the motif of travel for the first time in her novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*. The novel's protagonist Sophie loses her mother in early childhood and is raised by her father, a military officer. After his death, she is sent at the age of 19 to her relatives, and is introduced to court lifestyle. During her stay with her aunt and uncle, Sophie meets two Englishmen: Seymour and Derby. Sophie's relatives arrange an intrigue to make her become the mistress of the local German Prince. After she finds out about her family's plans, she accepts Derby's offer to escape with him, and agrees to marry him. Shortly after a fake wedding ceremony Sophie finds herself abandoned by Derby, who had become bored with the relationship and left her. While recovering from this experience, Sophie establishes a school for poor girls, and then goes to England where she works as a companion for another woman and continues her educational projects.

Justine is a short story about a young woman whom we meet at her 18th birthday, which she is celebrating with her father. Since her mother is dead, her father is worrying about his daughter's future and hopes that she will marry his assistant Walther. Justine refuses a convenience marriage and announces to her father her emancipatory ideas about women's oppression. After Walther goes to war and her father dies, Justine is left alone. She goes to England, where she becomes a professional singer. After her return to Germany she meets Walther and his family. As a result of this meeting, and long

discussions with Walther's wife Sophie, Justine realizes the impossible limitations of her life concept and shortly afterwards she commits suicide. Just like in her novel *Honigmonathe*, Fischer places Justine between two worlds: the traditional world represented here by Sophie, and the modern life, that of an artist. Justine functions, similarly to Julie, one of the heroines of *Honigmonathe*, as „Vermittlerin zwischen zwei konträren Welten“, as „Akteurin der Grenze.“¹⁶ Justine shatters upon realizing her inability to break away from the social structure, from which she has tried to escape.

In these two texts, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* and *Justine*, travelling functions metaphorically as an instrument by which Sophie and Justine emancipate themselves to a level from which they can think their way into independence. Travelling means fulfillment of their desire for new experiences, for their self-actualization as individuals, for the opening of new frontiers. Travelling stands for freedom, for breaking barriers and for establishing independence. It means founding a community outside the domestic sphere, away from the power of male family members. For women, confined by gender restrictions to the domestic circle and discouraged by other family members from active participation in the public sphere, the new independent social spheres had to be created separately from the domestic sphere, outside the family. The creation of this independent sphere is the leading motif of these two works.

18th century German female writers faced the challenge of constructing a model of the female protagonist with whom their female readers could identify. With Sophie von Sternheim "hat La Roche einen aktiven, handlungsfähigen Frauentyp geschaffen, der selbständig und mündig werden kann - eine weibliche Tradition, die der viel später erst einsetzenden Emanzipation vorarbeiten kann."¹⁷

¹⁶ Krug, 286.

¹⁷ Becker-Cantarino, 296.

On the surface, Sophie and Justine represent two different prototypes of a middle class woman. At the beginning of *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, Sophie is a religious countrywoman whose wish is to have a traditional family, and to enjoy simple country life far away from the court life that she despises. Soon after she is forced to leave the mainstream domain, however, she assumes a new identity (changes her name to Madam Leidens) and starts to create her own sphere, in which she can be recognized for her abilities and her innovative ideas, and not be judged by the status of her family and her demeanor. "Sophie von Sternheim versteht sich nicht mehr als ein schönes Supplement zu einer männlichen Totalität, sondern als selbstständige Initiatorin ihres eigenen Wirkungsfeldes."¹⁸

Sophie von Sternheim comes from a non-typical family. Her father is bourgeois, half German - half English, her mother comes from an aristocratic family. Sophie does not feel like a member of a particular class, but rather considers herself an outsider. Sophie's parents did not enter an arranged marriage, but married for love. Sophie is raised in a belief that a family should be based on mutual love and respect, and not based on an arrangement. Sophie's mother dies in childbirth when Sophie is still a child. Herr von Sternheim, Sophie's father, does not accept the loss of his wife and views his daughter as her replacement. The confused Sophie dresses in her mother's clothes and believes that being a woman means playing the role of her mother. With the mother dead, Sophie has no role model to follow: "und dann führte Herr von Sternheim das zwölfjährige Fräulein bei der Hand zu dem Bildnis ihrer Mutter, und sprach von ihrer Tugend und Güte des Herzens mit solcher Rührung, daß das junge Fräulein kniend bei ihm schluchzte, und oft zu sterben wünschte, um bei ihrer Frau Mutter zu sein."¹⁹ Being raised by her father and in isolation, Sophie does not have any female role models (except for

¹⁸ Möhrmann, 21.

¹⁹ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 41.

her dead mother) nor does she understand roles and ways of behaviour prescribed for women.

After Sophie comes to her aunt's house, she has to adapt to her new environment. First her hair is cut and styled according to the newest fashion. Sophie has to be prepared for her *Erscheinung*. She gives her aunt, who represents society values such as arrogance, vanity and greed, values, which Sophie will in the end reject, the power to determine her appearance and at the same time her life: "meiner Tante (der ich dieses Stück von Herrschaft über meinen Geschmack gerne einräume)."²⁰ Shortly after arrival at her aunt's house Sophie reflects upon her change: "überfiel mich der Gedanke, wie unähnlich ich ihr [der Mutter] in kurzer Zeit in diesem Stück sein werde!"²¹ Sophie devotes large parts of her letters to Emilia to her appearance, and describes in details her clothes and hair. She expresses satisfaction with her new "self": "Ich hatte mein weißes Kleid an, welches mit blauen italienischen Blumen garniert worden war; mein Kopf nach der Mode in D. gar schön geputzt."²² To other people she appears to resemble a ghost (play with words Geist *ghost* and Geist *intellect*). Sophie herself acknowledges the resemblance to a friendly house ghost and agrees with the status of an outsider: "Ich bin wirklich eine Gattung von Gespenstern, nicht nur in diesem Hause, sondern auch für die Stadt, und den Hof."²³ She defines the ghost as one who came to the world with knowledge of people and "verwundern sich über nichts, was sie sehen und hören, machen aber, wie ich, Vergleichen, zwischen dieser Welt, und der, woher sie kommen ... die Menschen aber bemerken an ihnen, daß diese

²⁰ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 51.

²¹ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 52.

²² *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 52.

²³ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 53.

Geschöpfe, ob sie wohl ihre Form haben, dennoch ihrem innerlichen Wesen nach nicht unter sie gehören."²⁴

Gradually Sophie accepts her new image, follows her aunt's orders and devotes a lot of time to *Putz*. And now she cares about the results, too: "Doch diesmal war ich am Ende wohl zufrieden, weil ich wirklich artig gekleidet war."²⁵ She feels, however, disturbed by this change and tries to find excuses for her vanity: "Ich war nur deswegen über meine wohlgeratnen Putz froh, weil ich von zween Engländern gesehen wurd, deren Beifall ich mir in allem zu erlangen wünschte."²⁶ Sophie realizes that among aristocracy her appearance is the most important part of her identity. Through her clothes and hairstyle she will be identified and perceived as a woman and will make a good impression. From now on Sophie will be viewed only according to her *Weiblichkeit*. Other aspects of her personality, such as her love for books, have to be disguised even more.

Sophie's views of her disguise change after she realizes how dangerous and destructive her new environment is. When the local duke expresses his desire for her through looking at her body in a sexual way, she becomes for the first time aware of her sexuality. After her escape with Derby, Sophie does not mention her clothes anymore. The turning point comes when she is assaulted by Derby.²⁷ In the rape scene Derby tears Sophie's clothes off, which symbolizes the destruction of her aristocratic image and the beginning of her new

²⁴ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 53.

²⁵ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 57.

²⁶ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 57.

²⁷ The first scholar who acknowledged that Sophie was raped was Jeannine Blackwell. In her view, Sophie "is no longer a virgin but on a deeper level, her virtue cannot be violated" Blackwell 117-118. More on the disussion in Heitmann, 261.

life. Sophie finally can focus on her inner development and not on her looks.²⁸

Soon after she is forced to leave the mainstream domain, however, Sophie starts to create her own sphere, in which she could be recognized for her abilities and her innovative ideas, and not be judged by the status of her family and her demeanor. After fleeing with Derby from her aunt and uncle's house, she decides against the intrigues of her family and at the same time gives up her chance to marry and to settle down somewhere in Germany. She is aware of her difficult position, but searches for the positive side of her new situation, proclaiming: "Was bleibt mir übrig, als meine Augen auf den Weg zu heften, den ich nun vor mir habe, und darin einen geraden Schritt bei klarem Licht fortzugehen?"²⁹ With no role models to follow, she discovers her new calling and devotes her entire attention to the education of two nieces of her landlady. "Meine ersten

²⁸ The scene of the assault is built slowly with Derby coming into Sophie's bedroom where she was sitting and brushing her hair. The look of her hair and her white dress made him desire her. Sophie looked innocent, like a Greek virgin and it was this innocence that Derby was about to destroy. He wanted her in the same way Prince desired her while she was dressed in a costume of a peasant girl from Alps. Derby, impatient with Sophie's refusal to take her clothes off, violently tore them off and *gelangt zu seinem Endzweck*. The fake marriage ceremony permitted Derby to do it. He knew that Sophie was powerless and could not do anything against his violent act. Derby described the scene:

Zween Tage hernach kam ich an ihren Nachttisch, just wie ihre schönen Haare gekämmt wurden; ihre Kleidung war von weißen Musselin, mit roten Taft, nett an den Leib angepaßt, dessen ganze Bildung das vollkommenste Ebenmaß der griechischen Schönheit ist; wie reizend sie aussah! Ich nahm ihre Locken, und wand sie unter ihrem rechten Arme um ihre Hüften. Miltons Bild der Eva kam mir in den Sinn. Ich schickte ihren Kammermensch weg, und bat sie, sich auf einen Augenblick zu entkleiden, um mich so glücklich zu machen, in ihr den Abdruck des ersten Meisterstücks der Natur zu bewundern. Schamröte überzog ihr dezu; ich drang in sie, und sie sträubte sich so lange, bis Ungeduld und Begierde mir einaben ihre Kleidung vom Hals an durchzureißen, um auch wider ihren Willen zu meinem Endzweck zu gelangen. *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 222

²⁹ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 184.

Erquickungsstunden hab ich in der Beschäftigung gefunden, zwei arme Nichten meiner Wirtin arbeiten und denken zu lehren."³⁰ The idea of this women's circle seems to threaten Derby who forbids Sophie to educate the girls.

Sophie continues to dream about having her own house in England, but finds herself instead abandoned by Derby. Left alone, she changes her name to Madam Leidens, and almost immediately starts to educate girls from lower class families. She refuses to accept the money and presents that Derby left for her, and escapes without notifying anyone about her new place of residence. Only her girlfriend Emilia and Emilia's husband are still in touch with her. La Roche symbolically establishes a new sphere for Sophie, through her new identity as Madam Leidens and her "verändertes Selbstverständnis als Frau."³¹ Sophie creates a new space of action for herself, using her high moral values, teaching abilities and the education that she received in her father's house: "Meine Erziehung hat mich gelehrt, daß *Tugend* und *Geschicklichkeiten* das einzige wahre Glück, und *Gutes tun*, die einzige wahre Freude eines edlen Herzens sei; das Schicksal aber hat mir den Beweis davon in der Erfahrung gegeben."³² In the new sphere Sophie devotes her entire attention to other members of her gender, and through her educational activity she establishes a place in which she can teach women her own values and ideas with no outside interference. Sophie's sphere is not determined by patriarchal society values such as money, power, or ownership. In this new sphere for women, social values such as *Tugend*, *Herz*, and *Geist* are represented. "Die Schaffung dieser Werte kann Madam Leidens vollkommen ohne Bevormundung und Inanspruchnahme von Männern - finanziert wird alles von Frauen- vorantreiben."³³ Sophie recognizes

³⁰ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 184.

³¹ Morrien, 244.

³² *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 203.

³³ Becker-Cantarino, 300.

her limited sphere of activity, but uses it to the fullest. She finds a female sponsor, Madam Hills, for her plans to educate other women who would otherwise be deprived of education. Madam Hills decides to sponsor Sophie's educational plans, and offers Sophie's students a classroom in her house, as well as books, clothes, and food for the school. In the future she wants to establish *ein Gesindhaus* in which poor girls will be educated to become maids and nannies.

Through her educational philosophy, which Sophie creates entirely by herself, she gains recognition for her actions and builds her self-confidence. "Es ist angenehm um sein selbst willen geliebt zu werden."³⁴ In her letters to Emilia she no longer presents herself as a victim of a court intrigue, but comes across as a strong-minded and focused woman who discusses her educational ideas with her friend Emilia: "Ich wollte an meinen dreizehn Schülerinnen die Probe machen, und teilte sie nach der Anlage von Geist und Herzen in Klassen.

1. Sanfte, gutherzige Geschöpfe bildete ich zu Kinderwärterinnen;
2. die Anlage zu Witz, und geschickte Finger zur Kammerjungfer;
3. nachdenkende und fleißige Mädchen zu Köchinnen und Haushälterinnen; und
4. die letzte Klasse von dienstfähigen zu Haus-, Küchen- und Gärtenmägden."³⁵

Sophie is taken out of the mainstream domain and set into an entirely female sphere through educational projects she sets up specially for members of her own gender. The source of the change in Sophie's attitude towards her own life is the support for her projects provided to her by other women, who replaced her mother as role models and mentors. Even though Sophie was motherless, she had, in fact, motherly figures in her life, women who supported her. The establishment of an active female network devoted to educational projects for other women not only makes the project successful but

³⁴ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 203.

³⁵ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 204.

also helps Sophie to overcome her depression and to look forward to her life: "... beobachten sie es, was für schöne Stützen meine schwankende Selbstzufriedenheit gefunden hat, und wie ich allmählig zu der Höhe eines großen Entwurfs emporgestiegen bin."³⁶

Through Madam Hills, Sophie meets Lady Summers, an Englishwoman who wants to follow Madam Hills' example and wants to establish a private school for girls. Coming to England was Sophie's long-time dream that she herself makes true. The trip to England is the final step in Sophie's freeing experience of creating a female sphere to propagate her ideas and social values. This happens through a network of women who believe that change in society can happen only through redefinition of existing values and through spread of new ideas that are based on "innere Verbesserung" - and not power, status, and money: "Die Frauen, Sophie, Madam Hills, Lady Summers und Witwe von C., suchen in Opposition zum dominanten Wert- und Bezugssystem ihrem Leben Sinn zu geben. Sie wollen die Pflicht der Tugend außerhalb der Ehe erfüllen."³⁷

The focus of Fischer's story *Justine* are contradictory desires of a woman: her wish to become independent, and her desire to find love: "Fischer gibt nur sehr spärliche Hinweise darauf, wie dieser Mißstand zu beseitigen sei. Keine andere deutschsprachige Autorin der Zeit hat ihn jedoch so eindringlich geschildert."³⁸ The heroine of Fischer's story, Justine, comes from a very progressive, rich bourgeois family. Her mother had radical feminist views and recognized the institution of marriage as the main source of women's misery and oppression. Even her father accepts his daughter's attitude towards life and tells her, after her confession that she does not want to get married: "Mädchen!... ich liebte dich; jetzt fang ich an dich zu achten."³⁹

³⁶ *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, 204.

³⁷ Kim-Park, 88.

³⁸ Purver, 1997, 68.

³⁹ *Justine*, 30.

Justine shares her mother's views and beliefs. She represents 18th century feminism, believes in equal rights for women and equal relationships between men and women, and rejects traditional marriage: „Die Titelheldin Justine verkörpert die emanzipierte Frau, das nur für Männer gültige bürgerliche Ideal des selbstverantwortlichen autonomen Individuums.“⁴⁰

Fischer makes the character of Justine's mother a strong opponent of an arranged marriage. The mother conveys to Justine what an arranged marriage means to women: "Die glücklichste Ehe, liebe Tochter, sagte meine Mutter, ist die, wo sich die Frau am besten zu verstellen weiß."⁴¹ Justine is certain that she would not marry unless she could find a friend, an equal partner in a relationship: "Daß ich keinen Herrn heirate, sondern einen Freund. Daß ich gegen die Anmaßungen des ersten die von meiner Mutter angerathenen Mittel nicht gebrauchen will, weil ich sie meiner unwürdig halte, und daß ich nicht die mindeste Hoffnung habe, den andern zu finden oder, wenn ich ihn fände, ihn nicht, sobald es ihm gut dünkte, in den ersten verwandelt zu sehen."⁴²

The death of Justine's father and Walther's participation in the war give her the opportunity to escape from a woman's obligation to get married. This makes it possible for Justine to establish an independent sphere of living, in which she makes her own decisions about her personal and career life. Since she comes to this realization "schien ein neues Leben sie zu beseelen."⁴³ She goes to England, becomes a famous singer, gains recognition and personal and financial independence. Justine is an explorer who goes far beyond the social boundaries and expectations set for her gender. Fischer

⁴⁰ Spitzer, 201.

⁴¹ *Justine*, 23.

⁴² *Justine*, 29.

⁴³ *Justine*, 31.

shows what a woman, relying almost solely on her own determination, could - and did accomplish.

In this short story, which Spitzer calls Fischer's „literarisches Testament“⁴⁴ the author presents radical views and mobilizes women to protest against patriarchal society and against rigid *Geschlechtsrollen*. “Ob Weiber des Heldenmutes im höchsten und tiefsten Sinne fähig sind, bedarf keines Beweises. Warum vereinigen sie sich denn nicht unter allen Himmelsstrichen zu einem eigentlichen Kriegen gegen ihre schändlichen Unterdrücker? und stürzen gegen sie an mit dem Feldgeschrei: Menschenrechte?”⁴⁵

She recognizes ways in which patriarchal society institutionalizes women's oppression and points out that theories about the feminine character of the female sex made discrimination against women possible: “Diesem Worte [Weiblichkeit] haben die Chinesinnen ihre verkrüppelten Füße, die Morgenländerinnen überhaupt ihre Riegel, Mauern und Wächter, die Amerikanninen ihre originellen Wochenbetten, die schönen Engländerinnen ihre Stricke um den Hals und ihre übrigen europäischen Schwestern alles dasjenige zu danken, was ihre vollkommene Nullität im Staate beweist.”⁴⁶

We have seen that the writers Sophie von La Roche and Caroline Auguste Fischer send a message that only a woman who is free from the pressure of her immediate family (parents) is able to pursue her career and gain experience through travelling abroad. Through travelling to England the two protagonists, Justine and Sophie, leave all the attachments to the patriarchal society behind and establish themselves in a new place through their exceptional abilities. The travel offered them the opportunity to do what they wanted

⁴⁴ Spitzer, 201.

⁴⁵ *Justine*, 27.

⁴⁶ *Justine*, 27.

without restrictions from their relatives, friends, and the patriarchal society.

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