

# Only a bullet through the heart can stop a lesbian vampire

Emmy Carell's novel *Kan Mænd undværes?* (1921)

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This study investigates a forgotten confessional novel *Kan Mænd undværes?* ('Can One do without Men?') from 1921, which contains some of the first depictions of lesbian sexuality, and is thus one of the earliest cases to exemplify the conflict between morality, law, and lesbianism in twentieth-century Denmark. A chapter in the yet unwritten history of Danish homosexual and lesbian literature, it also documents the discourses of female same-sex desire in the interwar period.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the complex concept of same-sex relations in Western Europe moved from the Church to the law and to science. Doctors, scientists, and lawyers gradually replaced priests as the authorities on (homo)sexuality, but from the beginning the modern homosexual has inhabited an ambiguous, precarious, and fluid position between moral and religious condemnation and legal semi-protection.<sup>1</sup>

The modern figure of the homosexual that gradually developed during the latter half of the nineteenth century, with Berlin as its birthplace, inherited some of the ecclesiastic condemnations of sodomy, but already in the early twentieth century it was considered an enlightened, civilized stance in many Western European countries not to interfere legally in what discreet, consenting adults did

in the privacy of their own homes.<sup>2</sup> The focus was almost entirely on men; there was serious debate whether women had desire and sexuality at all. In the UK female homosexuality was considered non-existent, a belief that was initiated by Queen Victoria, who refused any talk about criminalizing sex between women, as it was seen as an impossibility.

In the Nordic countries, only Finland and Sweden had laws against female homosexuality, and in Denmark and Norway sexuality between adult, consenting males had in reality been decriminalized before the First World War, although the laws were not explicitly rewritten until the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> After the first large-scale public scandals in Denmark and Sweden in the first decade of the twentieth century, police and lawmakers decided not to interfere in private, adult, non-commercial same-sex exchanges. Instead, the focus was on the young, prostitution (especially underage sex workers and soldiers), and sex in public.

In the political and public debates on homosexuality, it was not only journalists, politicians, moralists, doctors, and lawyers who intervened, but also writers and playwrights.<sup>4</sup> The first decade of the last century in particular saw the publication of a number of novels and plays depicting homosexuality in Denmark and Sweden (and to a lesser degree Finland and, somewhat later, Norway).<sup>5</sup> Again, the focus was almost entirely on men. Thus, a literary history of homosexuality cannot be constructed without paying due attention to such contextual factors as the law, sexual politics, and censorship. To depict homosexuality without explicitly, unambiguously condemning it was to play with fire. Yet many writers and playwrights were drawn to the subject. Transgressing or at least questioning boundaries was, of course, an inherent characteristic of modernist literature in general, and both heterosexual and homosexual writers treated this titillating topic.<sup>6</sup>

From the very beginning, Danish homosexual literature had been in conflict with the law. The critic and writer Clemens Petersen (1834–1918) had to flee to the US after a homosexual affair in 1869, and in 1889 the young writer Joakim Reinhard (1858–1925)

followed in his footsteps. The author of conservative patriotic plays and poems Martin Kok (1850–1942) was involved in a homosexual scandal in 1888 and had to stop writing in his own name, but the first widely known homosexual person in the Nordic countries was without a doubt the Danish writer and journalist Herman Bang (1857–1912).

From the start Bang met with censorship when he published his first novel *Haabløse Slægter* (1880, *Hopeless Generations*), which was declared pornography that same year.<sup>7</sup> Although it contains no explicit accounts of homosexuality, it has cross-generational sex scenes between a young effeminate man and a middle-aged, demonized woman and scenes in a brothel, while the weak, degenerate, gender-nonconforming protagonist William Høg does not die at the end of the novel, and thus challenges the norms of both heteronormativity and heteronarrativity.<sup>8</sup> It is telling that in the revised version of the novel that passed the Danish censors in 1884 the end was altered, this time implying that the protagonist takes his own life—his last letter now has the character of a suicide letter. Bang had learnt that in a moral depiction of a sexual deviant in literature the protagonist dies at the end.

A novel about a lesbian had been published only the year before, in 1883: Otto Martin Møller's (1860–1898) first novel *Nina: Et psykologisk Studie* ('Nina: A psychological study'), a surprisingly early example of this modern sexological category entering Danish literature.<sup>9</sup> The young writer tells the story from the point of view of a young male writer, who becomes engaged to a woman who reveals she is a lesbian. Her confessions at the end of the novel anticipate her death of pneumonia, which might explain why the novel was not censored. Furthermore, the view is that of an outsider and there are no explicit sex scenes. This was also the case in the next appearance of lesbianism in Danish literature, Vilhelmine Zahlé's story from 1890—'Ogsaa en Kærlighedshistorie' ('Also a love story')—although the protagonist Martha Grüner does not die at the end, but embarks on a loveless marriage. Death or marriage seems the only respectable ways to close a story about female homosexuality in literature.

## The lesbian scandal novel

The first and only lesbian novel in Danish literature to be banned was a very different kind of book: an unpleasant kiss-and-tell *roman-à-clef* by an unknown writer, Emmy Carell (1887–1969). Most likely based on Carell's affair with a famous Swedish actress, her first novel had the titillating title *Kan Mænd undværes?* and rolled off the presses in 1921 in a minor publishing house, Galsters Forlag, in the remote town of Thisted in Western Jutland.<sup>10</sup> It became an instant success, and was reprinted four times in its first year before it was confiscated by the police in January 1922 and charged with immorality. No fewer than 3,400 copies were seized. In July, Vestre Landsret (Western High Court) found it immoral and fined the publisher Johan Galster (1874–1922) 200 kroner. A fortnight later he died.<sup>11</sup>

For the first time in history, Danish readers could read explicit depictions of the joys of lesbian sex. There is no doubt that the success of the novel was partly because of erotic descriptions that were shocking for the time, such as the following: 'Once your lips have sucked the sensitive parts of a female body, this woman will yearn for you, and even if she is away from you, nothing can kill the devouring yearning for your sucking lips and wonderful hands, those hands that caress until one *screams* for joy'.<sup>12</sup>

Its commercial success, the press coverage, and its many reprints were all factors in the authorities' intervention. The explicitness with which the protagonist expresses her carnal pleasure and physical longing for her elusive female lover, a publicly known figure, undoubtedly came as a shock for readers in 1921, who most likely consumed the book as 'Galant Litteratur' ('chivalrous literature'), a euphemism for pornography. And they could dwell on the exotic, butch figures of Nisse and Max, two sad monsters in the Swedish diva's freakish entourage. Nisse is a friend who functions as housekeeper, Max is a young groupie. Both are of course, like most other characters in the novel, unhappily in love with the actress.

## A warning tale?

Carell's second book *Hugo fra Paris* ('Hugo from Paris') containing three short stories was also published in 1921 and ran to two editions in its first year.<sup>13</sup> In the title story the narrator Ursula comments on her first book, which is difficult not to read as a reflection on *Kan Mænd undværes?* 'Most people buy the book out of slimy curiosity for its titillating topic. Love between women. I was a pioneer in that field in my country. No one had dared to write directly about it.'<sup>14</sup> Both in interviews and in her second book Carell claimed that the purpose of *Kan Mænd undværes?* was completely misunderstood: it was first and foremost a warning tale. 'Few people will understand that the purpose of my book was not financial gain based on a sleazy topic. The purpose was to warn. A warning, so profound and serious, to all the many young girls and women who are secretly exposed to the same temptations.'<sup>15</sup>

Ursula shares many biographical details with Carell. She too has a three-year-old daughter called Yvonne, is a single mother devoted to her daughter, and has published a controversial, misunderstood novel about lesbian love.<sup>16</sup> One big difference between Carell and her suffering female protagonists, however, is that, whereas the latter either commit suicide or appear to be on the verge of emotional and/or physical death, Carell lived to be 82. Unlike her fictional heroines, love, whether gay or straight, did not kill her.<sup>17</sup>

## A pioneer

*Kan Mænd undværes?* is certainly groundbreaking in its explicit portrayal of the physical aspects of lesbian sexuality. The attraction between the two protagonists, Mrs Maja and Mrs Esther, is clearly the foundation for a relationship that displays little focus on spirituality, sympathy, shared interests, or love. Shockingly for the time, it is—almost—all about sex.<sup>18</sup> Compared to Møller's and Zahle's earlier works, Carell is far more judgemental about lesbianism both

in her books and, particularly, in later interviews, when she called female homosexuality a ‘cancer’.<sup>19</sup>

In *Kan Mænd undværes?*, however, the attractiveness of the female body and same-sex female sexuality is never disputed. Lesbianism is depicted as a temptation and a pleasure open to any woman, and that is what makes it so dangerous. It is certainly condemned, demonized even, but this only adds to the sexualization of the concept.<sup>20</sup> At the end of the novel, Mrs Esther is still under Mrs Maja’s diabolic spell. Mrs Maja never loses her attractiveness, even after her deceitful, promiscuous, and destructive nature is exposed. The only way to put an end to her evil magic is Esther’s suggestion that Maja shoot herself—‘Oh, Maja, I think that if you had any remaining concept of honour, you would put a bullet through your heart.’<sup>21</sup> As Maja seems to express no desire to end her life, the book itself appears to be Esther’s way of if not literally killing her, then at least killing her in print. *Kan Mænd undværes?* can thus be read as an attempt to drive a stake into the lesbian vampire’s heart.<sup>22</sup>

The references to vampirism are continuous throughout the novel, both as a complement to Maja’s sexual abilities (‘You little enchanting vampire’) and as a reproach: ‘I thought, Maja had to be a vampire in order to be able to play in this way with Max, this child, who earlier on had tried to take her own life out of love for Maja.’<sup>23</sup> Esther several times calls Maja ‘The most wonderful vampire on earth.’<sup>24</sup>

Mrs Esther, the protagonist of *Kan Mænd undværes?*, shares many traits with Carell, just like Ursula in *Hugo fra Paris*, which in many ways seems a direct chronological continuation of *Kan Mænd undværes?* Ursula and Esther appear to be the same person—Ursula being Esther three years on—and they even utter almost the same lines (*KMU* 70; *HFP* 14). The stories are never dated explicitly, but the end of the First World War is mentioned with the proclamation of the peace treaty (in June 1919). Furthermore, Esther’s daughter, Yvonne, is 10 months old—pointing to Carell’s daughter, Yvonne, who was born on 10 September 1918—while on her death 1 September Ursula leaves a 3-year-old daughter, the same age as

Yvonne Carell in September 1921.<sup>25</sup> The love affair between Esther and Maja takes place over a couple of summer months, which can credibly be dated to 1919. Esther last writes to Maja in November, so the love affair blooms in the summer months and withers away in the autumn. Like Mrs Esther, Carell had a French husband whose health deteriorated as a prisoner-of-war in Germany. None of the women live with their husbands. Mrs Esther gets a divorce during her affair with Mrs Maja, while it is unclear if Emmy and Georges Carell divorced.<sup>26</sup>

After the publication of *Kan Mænd undværes?* the Danish newspaper *Ekstrabladet* speculated that the novel was a sensationalized but authentic depiction of Carell's affair with a Swedish actress who had been filming in Copenhagen in the summer of 1919. Many aspects of the text seem to support such speculations. All of Esther's letters are in Danish, all of Maja's in authentic Swedish. There is little doubt that the model for Mrs Maja was the Swedish actress Maja (Maria) Cassel (1891–1953), a beauty whose lesbianism was a well-known 'secret' at the time.<sup>27</sup> Mrs Maja, the narrator tells us, has been married for a short time, and gets a divorce when she gives birth to a son (*KMU*, 8).<sup>28</sup> Maja Cassel was married from 1914 to 1918 and again 1928 to 1940. In 1919 she would have been a 27-year-old divorcée. Esther encourages Maja to train her voice, and Cassel did have a career as an operetta singer. Cassel spent the summer of 1919 at the studios of the Swedish film company Palladiumfilm in Hellerup, north of Copenhagen filming *Skomakarprinsen* ('The shoemaker prince'), an adaption of the Ludvig Holberg's 1722 play *Jeppe paa Bierget* ('Jeppe on the Hill'). The film premiered in Copenhagen on 29 January 1920 and a month later in Sweden. The beautiful Swede's stay in the Danish capital naturally attracted media attention, and the Danish public would know who Carell was referring to in the introduction to the novel: 'The darling of the Stockholmers, the beautiful blonde Mrs Maja had arrived in Copenhagen to spend the summer filming for a large Swedish film company.'<sup>29</sup>

## Carell versus Cassel

The status of the letters in Carell's novel raises questions of both a philological and an ethical nature. Did Carell include actual letters from her affair with Cassel? Are all of the letters authentic, or only some, if any? Was Maja Cassel, voluntarily or involuntarily, co-author of the novel if her actual letters were part of the text? In the novel there is a scene where Esther demands her letters back and Maja holds them in her hand (36), but their fate remains unknown. It can probably never be proven if this is a work of pure fiction, an authentic documentation of a fleeting affair gone bad, or—more probable—a mixture of the two.

The text is composed of an introduction to Mrs Maja and Mrs Esther, their backgrounds and first meeting (*KMV*, 5–18), followed by eight long letters from Esther to Maja and two short letters from Maja to Esther (*KMV*, 18–33).<sup>30</sup> The dramatic turn of events when Esther discovers Maja's promiscuous nature is narrated in 'Loose diary pages in Mrs Esther's desk' ('Løse Dagblade i Fru Esthers Skrivebord'), an almost Kierkegaardian fictionalization (*KMV*, 33–52), while the rest of the text comprises only letters, the majority from Esther to Maja, but some from Maja to Esther (*KMV*, 66, 73–4, 78–80, 81–2, 83–5, 86–7). All in all, Maja is only represented by eight letters, while the majority of the text is made up of Esther's letters and excerpts from her diary. Thus, Esther's view of the affair is dominant, to say the least, with Maja defamed and chastised. The publication of the text, it seems, also has revenge as a hidden motive. Esther certainly gets the last word—but that word is 'Maja!!!' (*KMV*, 93).

## Revenge or warning

Just as it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction and biography from literature in the case of *Kan Mænd undværes?*, it is also difficult to argue that there are impenetrable borders between Carell's two books. Not only does *Hugo fra Paris* reflect on the writing and

reception of *Kan Mænd undværes?*, it reads like a chronological and thematic continuation; basically a later chapter in Emmy Carell's life. Carell's first novel ends with a fragment of Danish poet Jens Peter Jacobsen's 1875 poem, 'one pays the price for many years— Oh, Maja!!'<sup>31</sup> This poem introduces the late Ursula's diary in *Hugo fra Paris*, now quoted as the first verse (out of four) (*HFP*, 8), thus bridging the two books while hinting at their common theme: unrequited love resulting in loneliness, tragedy, and untimely death.

The preface is by a friend of Ursula's, who has adopted Yvonne and promised to publish the dead woman's diary. Again, the text denies (rather unconvincingly, given its floridly romantic clichés) that it is revenge on the elusive and deceitful lover. Like *Kan Mænd undværes?* it claims to be a warning tale.

Whereas *Kan Mænd undværes?* addresses lesbian desire, *Hugo fra Paris* warns against desire in general. All three of its proto-feminist tales depict the tragic or disastrous effects of female desire under the patriarchy. Just as Maja was the villain of the first book, men are the villains of all three tragic love stories in the second. Desire seems to be the root of all evil, whether lesbian or heterosexual. And yet love is also depicted as the only real thing worth living (and dying) for. The eponymous villain of *Hugo fra Paris* actually comes from Finland, but is Swedish-speaking like Maja (the novel features short letters from him in authentic Swedish). Hugo is an attractive, cosmopolitan man, but like Maja a selfish and ruthless lover who cares little about the lives he destroys. Swedish seems the language of both love and deceit in Carell's universe.<sup>32</sup>

### A female Dorian Gray

Carell's style shares all the weaknesses and clichés of a Harlequin romance: evil characters are ugly and often fat, and good people have kindness, if not beauty, written all over their faces. Consequently, what makes Mrs Maja so threatening is exactly the fact that she is the exception to this rule, for in spite of her beauty and her attractiveness she turns out to be a dangerous, selfish, and deceitful

lover—a demon or a vampire. Appearance and reality collide. Maja's lesbian desire is invisible, unlike her two fellow sufferers Nisse and Max, whose butch appearances and attire make their perversion extremely visible and thus less of a threat. In Esther's narrative, young and old butch alike are both wholly unattractive and tragic, if not slightly comical, whereas the apparent 'femme' turns out to be a beautiful, seductive butch (*KMU*, 29).

Maja's 'dangerous' femininity, which attracts both men and women, is also her disguise. There is nothing to reveal her perversion. The parents of the 17-year-old Max, whose life is ruined because of her love for Maja, suspect nothing when their daughter brings home the Swedish actress: 'Mrs Maja's blonde feminine appearance and ladylike demeanour let us not for a moment grasp the relationship she had to our child.'<sup>33</sup> Esther, meanwhile, evokes one of the most famous homosexual references of the time, the evil queer protagonist of Oscar Wilde's gothic first novel from 1890: 'You are a female "Dorian Gray".'<sup>34</sup> The Wildean contrast between a beautiful facade and depraved character is, of course, enhanced by Maja's profession as an actress. Pretending to be someone else is both her profession and her nature.

### Lesbian menaces

Esther states time and again that she is a normal woman, not a lesbian. She was only seduced by Maja. Although she explicitly enjoys the sex, craves it even (*KMU*, 32, 61, 63, 68, 83, 90), she expresses deep remorse as well as exhilaration. Her feelings about Maja range from worship to hatred, from homage to denigration. Nisse is not dangerous both because her lesbianism is so obvious and because it is her fate to be permanently unhappy in love. There is little risk that she will ever have physical relationships. When Nisse falls in love with Mrs Esther, the Danish woman feels no attraction whatsoever. Max, the young naïve 'child' is no threat either, as she is committed for life to a mental institution as a direct consequence of her affair with Mrs Maja. Max, though, bears some blame, since it was she

who to Maja's surprise awakened her homoerotic passion (*KMU*, 9). Homosexuality is seen as a contagious curse, passed from Max to Maja to Esther, where it stops definitively.

What saves Esther from being ruined like Max is her age, maturity, intelligence, willpower, and, most of all, her little daughter (*KMU*, 32, 51–2): 'I have probably been as much in love with you as she, but I *refused* to let myself be destroyed, because I understood, this meant destruction, and I had my little daughter to live for.'<sup>35</sup> Mothers and daughters play a large symbolic role in *Kan Mænd undværes*?<sup>36</sup> Part of Maja's attractiveness is her resemblance to Esther's mother (*KMU*, 32, 91), and both Maja and Esther are themselves young mothers, which is a constant source of worry for Esther. She sees Maja's treatment of Max as that of a destructive, perverse mother.

The real danger is Mrs Maja, who is vilified beyond humanity and recognition. And not even her monstrous lesbianism is a stable fact. She has a suspicious friendship with a Jewish millionaire who is in love with her, and towards the end of the novel she is beginning to flirt with another man. Perhaps her lesbian desire is only a phase: 'I have been to a big party, and I discovered that it amused me and that the male gender is not as disgusting as I imagined lately. Maja happy!!!!!!'<sup>37</sup>

### The cure

Esther in the end renounces her lesbian desire, explaining it (away) as a substitute for her husband, a way to forget her hurt pride when Georges left her (*KMU* 92). This contradicts earlier statements that the reason for her divorce was her relationship with Maja. Lesbianism hereby changes status from cause to substitute.

Maja's passion is also dangerous because of its unpredictability. Despite her ultrafeminine appearance (*KMU*, 5 *et passim*), Maja is depicted as 'the man' in bed and Esther as the 'passive', 'feminine'. So Maja's dangerousness comprises both the volatile and the versatile nature of desire: she can be both 'man' and 'woman' in bed, she is attracted to both sexes, and everyone is attracted to her (*KMU*,

8). Her appetites apparently have no limit. Nisse seems doomed to a life of solitude, servitude, and unrequited love; Max is institutionalized for life; Esther will never again love a woman: but Maja leaves the text as unrestrained and uninhibited as she entered it. She is totally unfit as a mother, a lover, and a wife. Suicide is the only moral option for this danger to society.

The nature of lesbian desire seems mysterious, to say the least. Nisse and Max are sad embodiments of perversity, but in Maja's and Esther's case it seems more like a volatile addiction or a contagious disease that they might recover from. Where the former are depicted as static, both Maja's and Esther's desires are dynamic.<sup>38</sup> Esther clearly portrays herself not as a pervert or a sexual outcast: her desire derives only from Maja and is only for Maja. Ursula elaborates on this: 'Even though the woman, who I wrote about, was "the only woman in my life", I knew people would think that I was a perverse individual; few would understand that a person like me only has such a feeling once in her life.'<sup>39</sup>

### Lesbian vaccination

Both Esther at the end of the novel and Ursula present themselves as being as far from lesbianism as imaginable, exactly because they have encountered it (once). This precludes them from ever doing it again. Both texts contain an element of lesbian exorcism, at its most unsuccessful and unconvincing in *Kan Mænd undværes?*, where there is no erotic alternative to Maja. The chaste love of the baby daughter is the only salvation, just as the dead mother and Jesus Christ are called on to guide Esther in her crisis (*KMU*, 77). *Hugo fra Paris* can in this respect be read as a way to repair the damage done by the first novel.

Paradoxically, both Esther and Ursula's falling in love with a woman function as a kind of vaccination against homosexuality. They are now more heterosexual than women with no experience of homosexuality. Thus, *Kan Mænd undværes?* can be read as a warning tale that can bring other heterosexual women to the same

level of knowledge as Esther and Ursula, but without the traumatic (and also exhilarating) experience that an affair with a ‘vampire’ entails. Once bitten, twice shy.

The story about Ursula’s past that potentially questions her femininity and heterosexuality is followed by a ‘diagnosis’ by the male expert, Hugo: ‘You not only characterized me, but you also found that in me everything was exactly how it should be, that I, when I was one-on-one with a man, was the most womanly woman you had ever met.’<sup>40</sup> Hugo functions not only as the doctor who can exorcise the effects of gender trouble caused by the lesbian vampire, he is also the Crown witness who attests to her normality and femininity. The scene, of course, ends with Hugo and Ursula’s first, fateful and passionate lovemaking. But it is a love that is just as fatal as Maja’s. The difference is that at this point the woman is financially bankrupt and Hugo refuses to help. Whereas Esther determined to live because of her young daughter, Ursula decides to commit suicide because of her child, knowing that her insurance will secure Yvonne’s future.

### A legal riddle

Both *Kan Mænd undværes?* and *Hugo fra Paris* are lamentations and literary (if not literal) discussions of the price of love. Despite their heteronormative frames and explicitly homophobic overtones, they contain powerful feminist messages, in the one case a passionate and criminally explicit description of the joys of lesbian sex (and a demonization of the heterosexual institution of marriage), in the other a devastating critique of men’s hypocrisy and the perilous situation of women who invest in sexuality and love.

Therefore, like Carell, we may well wonder why her second book was not banned as well: ‘That my book *Hugo fra Paris*, which was published shortly after, was not forbidden too is a riddle to me, but humans and their moral guardians sometimes play a rather fascinating game with one another.’<sup>41</sup> One answer could be that the fallen women either die or end unhappily. And perhaps it is

easier to accept the survival of selfish male womanizers than that of a lesbian vampire.

One could speculate that the true provocation of *Kan Mænd undværes?* is the fact that not only is the lesbian demon—and with her same-sex female desire—not sufficiently exorcised from the text—the protagonist keeps yearning for her till the very end—but she also survives and thrives, displaying no intention of ending her own life nor any kind of remorse for the victims of her desire. If Emmy Carell could not put a stop to Mrs Maja and her lesbian menace, at least the Danish authorities could try to stop the spread of her story.

## Notes

- 1 There are significant variations across Northern Europe. The UK had harsh laws forbidding any sex between men; in Germany homosexuality was outlawed under the (in)famous §175, which was upheld until the 1960s (and not abolished until 1994); most Nordic countries officially decriminalized homosexuality in the 1930s, and though, as von Rosen 1993 points out, homosexual acts between consenting adults were de facto decriminalized around 1900, the law still remained (see Rydström 2007).
- 2 Foucault 1976, 59.
- 3 von Rosen 1993, 679–780; see also Rydström 2007.
- 4 Nyegaard 2018; von Rosen 1993, 679–780; Eman 1999.
- 5 For Denmark, Heede 2017; for Sweden, Borgström 2016.
- 6 See also the introduction to this volume for scandal and provocation as defining features of modern literature.
- 7 It is important to stress that pornography is not just an object, a text, or an image but a cultural war zone, a discussion, an argument, and an area of regulation. See Thing 1999.
- 8 See Heede 2017.
- 9 Radclyffe Hall's famous novel *The Well of Loneliness* from 1928 is often characterized as the world's first lesbian novel. Møller's book preceded it by 45 years. Hall's novel was confiscated in the UK and tried for obscenity. A number of prominent writers, among them Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, protested at the verdict. Hall's novel was translated into Danish in 1929.
- 10 Carell 1921a; Carell 1924 said that the title was the publisher's suggestion, and that she found it sensationalist and tasteless and would have preferred 'Typer' ('Types'). Galster's publishing house lasted only one year but published eleven

books, including a volume of poetry by Galster himself, *Ral* (*Beach pebbles*). Other publications included poetry by neighbours and friends such as the writer Knuth Becker (1891–1974) and a memoir by Ira Uchtomsky, a Russian refugee who had ended up in Thisted with her husband. Vladimir Uchtomsky tried to commit suicide when rumours of their supposed criminal background reached the Danish police from Berlin and they were called in for questioning, which Galster, who was also a lawyer, filed a formal complaint about. The incident, known as the ‘Uchtomsky Affair’, received massive publicity. Ira Uchtomsky’s memoir, *Sandheden om Fyrstinde Uchtomsky* (‘The Truth about Countess Uchtomsky’), written in Danish, a language Ira quickly mastered, claimed that she was the daughter of a Russian nobleman. In Carell 1924, she stated that Galster’s encounter with the Danish police because of the Uchtomsky Affair was instrumental in the case against her book, and she regretted choosing the Jutland publisher.

- 11 Carell’s dramatic claim that he had poisoned himself cannot be substantiated; see Sørensen 2008.
- 12 *Kan Mænd undværes?* (hereafter *KMU*), 90: ‘Naar Dine Læber først har suget et Kvindelegemes følsomme Steder, længes den Kvinde imod Dig, og er hun end borte fra Dig, intet kan døde den fortærende Længsel efter Dine sugende Læber og vidunderlige Hænder, de Hænder, der kærtegner, indtil man *skriger* af Fryd.’ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
- 13 Sørensen 2008, 161 mistakenly claims that *Hugo fra Paris* was Carell’s first book, and this error is reproduced in other sources (for example, *Dansk Bibliografisk Leksikon*, s.v. ‘Carell, Emmy’). Both books appeared in 1921, but *Hugo fra Paris* (hereafter *HFP*), 13–14 explicitly refers to the reception of *Kan Mænd undværes?*
- 14 *HFP*, 13: ‘De fleste køber Bogen af slimet Nysgerrighed for dens pikante Emne. Elskov mellem Kvinder. Jeg var jo Banebryder paa det Felt i mit Land. Ingen havde vovet at skrive lige ud om det.’ Neither Møller’s novel nor Zahle’s story had a wide reception so Carell is unlikely to have known these texts.
- 15 *HFP*, 14: ‘De færreste vil forstaa, at Hensigten med min Bog var ikke en pekuniær Succes paa et slibrigt Emne. Hensigten var en Advarsel. En Advarsel, saa dyb og alvorlig, til alle de mange unge Piger og Kvinder, der i al Hemmelighed udsættes for de samme Fristelser.’ See also Carell 1924.
- 16 See *HFP*, 8 and Carell 1924. Official information on Carell is found in the police statement appended to the copy of *Kan Mænd undværes?* in the Danish Royal Library, dated 27 February 1953. In 1938 Carell changed her name to Darlet and lived the rest of her life in Copenhagen.
- 17 See also the contributions of Schatz-Jakobsen, Arnberg, and Lindsköld in this volume, on disputing the impact of literary texts.
- 18 In the same shocking vein Maja dismisses the young Max because sexually she turned out to be ‘a big disappointment’, see *KMU*, 44.

- 19 Carell 1924.
- 20 Foucault's remarks on the infinite spirals of prohibition and desire spring to mind, see Foucault 1976, 67.
- 21 *KMU*, 91: 'Aa, Maja, jeg synes, at dersom Du ejede et Æresbegreb tilbage, skød Du Dig en Kugle gennem Hjertet.'
- 22 The vampire theme is underlined in Esther's reference (*KMU*, 72) to the recent Swedish novel *Vampyrer* (1918) by Algot Sandberg, which was plainly a literary model for *Kan Mænd undværes?* Although lacking Sandberg's masterful and captivating style, the story of Esther and Maja reads as a fourth contribution to Sandberg's three chapters, which each contain the story of an innocent, healthy woman who because of unfortunate circumstances is seduced and corrupted by a treacherous, dangerous lesbian. The first victim is a defenceless, inexperienced orphaned girl who comes to the big city and ends taking her own life; the second, an abandoned embittered wife and mother who is separated from her spendthrift husband; the third, a retired, disillusioned actress. Sandberg's novel is a warning tale about the hidden dangers of lesbianism in modern society, a powerful tool of antihomosexual propaganda.
- 23 *KMU*, 29: 'Du lille bedaarende Vampyr'; *KMU*, 91: 'Jeg syntes, Maja maatte være en Vampyr for at kunde lege saaledes med Max, dette Barn, der tidligere havde forsøgt at berøve sig Livet af Kærlighed til Maja.'
- 24 *KMU*, 83 and 89: 'Jordens dejligste Vampyr'. The trope of the lesbian vampire was common in nineteenth-century gothic literature since its introduction in 1872 in Joseph Sheridan la Fanu's novella *Carmilla*, and it survives in a great deal of twentieth- and twenty-first-century popular culture.
- 25 *KMU*, Police report.
- 26 The police report in the Royal Library's copy of *Kan Mænd undværes?* mentions that Lieutenant Carell was thought to have died in Aarhus in 1922.
- 27 Lena Einhorn's novel about Greta Garbo (*Blekingegatan* 32, 2014) quotes a letter from Garbo to her actress friend Mimi Pollak referring to her infatuation with 'Mrs Maja', a woman who drove men crazy because they knew she was unobtainable. I wish to thank Professor Eva Borgström of the University of Gothenburg for helping me identify Mrs Maja.
- 28 Both Carell and Cassel were new mothers in 1919 having had a baby girl and baby boy respectively in 1918, just like Esther and Maja. Maja's son is with her mother in Stockholm.
- 29 *KMU*, 5: 'Stockholmernes Kælebarn, den smukke blonde Fru Maja, var kommet til København for at filme Sommeren igennem hos et større svensk Filmsselskab.'
- 30 Actually there are three letters from Maja, because before their affair Maja writes Esther a love letter that Esther subsequently tears up (*KMU*, 17). The letter is only quoted in parts and in Danish, perhaps because the Swedish original is no longer in existence.
- 31 *KMU*, 93: 'Det bødes der for i lange Aar'—aa Maja!!!'

- 32 See Arnberg's and Helgason's contributions in this volume on the significance of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction.
- 33 *KMU*, 88: 'Fru Majas blonde kvindelige Ydre og dameagtige Optræden lod os ikke et Øjeblik ane, I hvilket Forhold hun stod til vort Barn.'
- 34 *KMU*, 89: 'Du er en kvindelig 'Dorian Gray.' Oscar Wilde served two years in prison for homosexual acts in 1895 in a cause célèbre that also involved *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). *Hugo fra Paris* has references to Herman Bang.
- 35 *KMU*, 90: 'Jeg har sikkert været ligesaa forelsket i Dig som hun, men jeg *vilde ikke* ødelægges, thi jeg forstod, det betød Ødelæggelse, og jeg havde min lille Datter at leve for.'
- 36 The mother is a central figure in lesbian fiction in general (Björklund 2014).
- 37 *KMU*, 85: 'Har varit på en stor festlighet och upptäckte, att det roade mig, samt att det manliga släktet ej var så vedervärdigt, jag på senare tider inbillat mig. Maja glad!!!!!!'
- 38 Nisse and Max both embody the strange, 'frozen' character of the classic pervert in Foucault's description (1976, 61).
- 39 *HFP*, 14: 'Endskønt den Kvinde, jeg skrev om, var "den eneste Kvinde i mit Liv", saa vidste jeg, Mængden vilde tro, jeg var et perverst Individ; kun de færreste vilde forstaa, at en saadan Følelse har et Menneske som jeg kun een Gang i sit Liv.'
- 40 *HFP*, 12: 'Ikke alene skildrede Du mig, men Du fandt, at alt hos mig just var som det burde være, at jeg, naar jeg var paa Tomands-Haand med en Mand, var den mest kvindelige Kvinde, Du nogensinde havde mødt.'
- 41 Carell 1924: 'At min kort derpaa udgivne Bog "Hugo fra Paris" derimod ikke blev forbudt, er mig en Gaade, men Menneskene og deres sædelige Vogtere leger af og til et ret fængslende lille Puslespil med hinanden.' In the interview Carell mentioned a forthcoming English translation of an extended version of *Kan Mænd undværes?* It was not forthcoming, and it is difficult to imagine it would have passed the much stricter censorship laws in the UK. Had it happened, Carell's autobiographical novel might have predated, if not replaced, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* as the first lesbian autobiographical novel in English.