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Malwida von Meysenbug's Journey into Nachmärz

Political and Personal Emancipation in *Eine Reise nach Ostende* (1849)

This essay focuses on Malwida von Meysenbug's (1816-1903) rebellious 'travel diary'¹ entitled *Eine Reise nach Ostende* (1849) and her 'extravagant'² travels to the Belgian seaside resort, which she undertook together with her girlfriends Anna Koppe and Elisabeth Althaus during June and July 1849. This text, which was written during the late summer and early autumn of 1849 and published posthumously in 1905³ by Gabriel Monod, is both a very personal, almost intimate representation of the failing revolution and a performance of transgression by an unmarried 33-year old female member of the lower ranks of aristocracy. Today, the progressive educator, political activist and accomplished author Malwida von Meysenbug is mostly remembered for her friendship and correspondence with Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, and Romain Rolland. Her writings, such as her remarkably successful autobiographical *Memoiren einer Idealistin* (1869)⁴ or the posthumous

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- 1 Malwida von Meysenbug's *Eine Reise nach Ostende* was edited by Gabriel Monod for posthumous publication in 1905. In his preface, he calls the book a "Tagebuch einer Reise" (p. 5). Malwida von Meysenbug, *Eine Reise nach Ostende* (1849). Berlin and Leipzig: Schuster & Loeffler, 1905.
 - 2 According to Malwida von Meysenbug's mother, Ernestine Rivalier, née Hansell. See Malwida von Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin*. Stuttgart: DVA, 1922, p. 179.
 - 3 Gabriel Monod. "Vorwort." *Eine Reise nach Ostende* (1849). Berlin and Leipzig: Schuster & Loeffler, 1905, pp. 5-8, here p. 7. Despite the late publication, handwritten copies of the text found an eager readership at the Women's College in Hamburg, where Malwida von Meysenbug studied and worked from 1850 to 1852.
 - 4 Meysenbug's *Memoiren einer Idealistin* were originally published in French in 1869 and in German in 1876. The 1922 edition of her memoirs was published as the first volume of Malwida von Meysenbug's *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Berta Schleicher. According to Martin Reuter, the 1922 version is page identical to the first German publication of the text by Schuster & Loeffler in 1879. See Martin Reuter. *1848, Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratiegeschichte*. Kassel: Jenior, 1998, p. 395. Ulrike Helmer also published *Ausgewählte Schriften* by Malwida von Meysenbug (Königstein: Helmer, 2000)

publication *Eine Reise nach Ostende*, however, have largely been swept into oblivion despite efforts to revive some of that memory in 1998 when a shortened version of *Memoiren einer Idealistin* was edited by Renate Wiggershaus and published by Ulrike Helmer Verlag – at a time when the German public was to be reminded of the affecting political struggles 150 years ago.

Malwida von Meysenbug's *Eine Reise nach Ostende* (1949)⁵, both a 'travel diary' and a revolutionary pamphlet, is shaped by the author's idealism and her stubborn belief in the inevitability of political and social reform, as much as it is marked by a sense of not belonging and otherness. Her family considered this trip "eine abermalige Extravaganz" confronting Malwida time and again with their disappointment caused by her unwillingness to conform to the role model prescribed for a woman of her time and social space. Her mother, Ernestine Rivalier, née Hansell, her two brothers Carl and William, as well as her brother-in-law August Funk von Senftenau, persistently reminded Malwida of her failings with regard to ideal womanhood. She was deemed opinionated – in their mind a clear indication of her selfishness and arrogance –, and her political activism was considered a both infantile and treacherous extravagance bound to destroy her (and potentially other women's) virtue, as well as, potentially, August Funk von Senftenau and Carl von Meysenbug's careers at the royal Lippe court. Her provocative political views had caused a scandal at the Lippe court in Detmold, not least because

containing letters, biographical essays, and short sections of *Eine Reise nach Ostende*, *Memoiren einer Idealistin*, *Stimmungsbilder*, *Individualitäten* and *Lebensabend einer Idealistin*. I shall quote from the shortened but more easily accessible 1998 version of *Memoiren einer Idealistin*, whenever possible.

- 5 Unlike Meysenbug's *Memoiren einer Idealistin*, which was published in 1998 in an abridged version edited by Renate Wiggershaus, her travel diary has not received much attention, despite a surge of interest in 1848 and its political authors generally around the time of the revolution's 150th anniversary. Beth Muellner subsequently published two engaging articles on Meysenbug's travel diary, mobility and deviance (inspired by Ruth-Ellen Joeres's book *Respectability and Deviance: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers and the Ambiguity of Representation*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998): "Abweichen in Anstand: Malwida von Meysenbug fährt Eisenbahn." *Jahrbuch der Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft* 7 (2000): 140-151. My thoughts here are based on my earlier essay on "Über die Eisenbahnfahrt ins politische Schreiben. Malwida von Meysenbugs *Eine Reise nach Ostende*." *Malwida von Meysenbug. Durch lauter Zaubergärten der Armida. Ergebnisse neuer Forschungen*. Ed. Karl-Heinz Nickel. Kassel: Wende-roth, 2005, pp. 77-92.

Malwida von Meysenbug promoted the abolition of aristocracy in favour of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*. Not surprisingly and shunned by her class, everyday life with her disapproving family had become unbearable, and during the winter of 1848/49, the unmarried democrat suffered from depression and was both physically and mentally unwell. Earlier in the year, her enthusiasm for the revolution and hope for change had helped her to cope with both the death of her father and the break-up of her relationship with political activist Theodor Althaus. But as the year 1848 was drawing to a close, news of the deaths of Robert Blum and other revolutionaries on the one hand and the passing of Julie Auguste Christine Althaus (her loving and sympathetic “zweite Mutter”⁶) on the other, left her utterly devastated.

By the spring of 1849, the comprehensive failure of the revolution was only a matter of time, and the obedient return from the military chaos of Berlin to her safe and ultra-conservative family home a few months earlier had taken its toll. In her memoirs, Malwida von Meysenbug describes her life in Detmold as sad and painful⁷, and the journey to Ostend was to be not only an opportunity to recover physically and mentally, but rather a first step towards true emancipation and independence from the ‘triple tyranny’ of dogma, convention and family.⁸ It was the views held by her conservative family – especially the notion that only a submissive female can produce and sustain a healthy family and thereby contribute to community and nation alike –, which was to become the battleground that shaped and nurtured Malwida von Meysenbug’s opposition and provided the necessary impetus for both journey and writing.

Her first lengthy prose, *Eine Reise nach Ostende (1849)* presents a mosaic of observations, descriptions of unexpected encounters, memories and interpretations, reflecting the various shapes and shades of the author’s political ‘programme’. This account of modern train travel and fairly conventional seaside relaxation is more about crossing personal than national frontiers. Travelling is experienced as an act of mobility than enables insights otherwise unavailable due to a life (and gender) utterly fixed. Malwida von Meysenbug, Anna Koppe and Elisabeth Althaus board the train in Cologne, second class. When a woman with a small dog enters the compartment, her fate as an impoverished exile captures the attention of her fellow travelers much more than the beautiful, fleeting landscape; a fact the author notes

6 Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin*, 1922, p. 170.

7 Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin*, 1922, p. 179.

8 Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin*, 1922, p. 172.

almost apologetically: ‘Es dauerte nicht lange, da waren wir [...] ganz hingegeben dem Interesse für das Schicksal eines menschlichen Wesens, so dass darüber die Naturschönheiten, welche die Eisenbahnfahrt von Cöln bis Brüssel schmückten, namentlich auf der Strecke von Aachen bis Lüttich, unsere Blicke nur flüchtig anzogen” (RnO 36). But her consideration for this human being over landscape or inanimate objects – however beautiful – is deemed appropriate and once again exemplifies Meysenbug’s affinity to both Hegel’s concept of ‘Geist’ and Schopenhauer’s notion of ‘Mitleiden.’⁹

The three friends interrupt their train journey at Brussels, a city Malwida von Meysenbug portrays as ‘truly impressive’. Here, the old and the new, the historical and the modern cityscape stand side by side, one part evoking the beauty and character of the past, the other being elegant, clean and neatly modern (RnO 45). During a visit of St. Michael and St. Gudula cathedral, Meysenbug praises its imposing architecture (RnO 46), but typically focuses on works of art that allow reflections on the revolution and true humanity, such as the sculpture of Prince Frederic de Merode, who died as a hero of the Belgian revolution in 1830. The description of the sculpture inevitably progresses into a declaration of the author’s understanding of true aristocracy, i.e. enlightened leadership based on reason and defending the rights of the people (RnO 47).

Whether it is a description of the Place des Martyr in Brussels and another 1830 memorial (RnO 50), which turns into a scathing critique of the blind obedience of the army, a visit to the Art Gallery in Antwerp, which leads to a statement of commitment to Christian and revolutionary values (RnO 62), or a lighthouse in Ostend with a remarkable lighthouse keeper’s wife that inspires reflections on true and natural womanhood (RnO 77), Malwida von Meysenbug’s political beliefs mold and shape the representational choices made in her travel diary. The travelogue begins with a third-person narrative, an account of a story told by a train conductor¹⁰ that reflects the author’s own idealism and hopes for a democratic nation state. In this first chapter, the train conductor’s three encounters with a young woman reflect the different stages of the revolution: hope, struggle and devastation. The conductor’s story closes, when the young woman’s fiancé’s death prompts her

9 See for example Ruth Stummann-Bowert’s book *Malwida von Meysenbug – Paul Rée. Briefe an einen Freund*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998, p. 12.

10 Meysenbug, *Reise nach Ostende* (cf. note 1), pp. 15-33.

desire for revenge, thus deciding to educate the next generation and thereby rendering her lover's ideals everlasting:

Meines Freundes hohes innerstes Leben in mir fortsetzen und ausbilden zur Vollendung, es ergießen in viele andere junge, warme Herzen, das sei mein Werk, um dessentwillen ich noch leben will. So räch ich ihn an denen, die ihn vernichten zu können meinten, so ist er unsterblich, den sie töten wollten, so wirkt er fort für das heilige Werk der Freiheit, dem sein Leben geweiht war und keine Macht der Welt kann ihn daran hindern. (RnO 32-33)

Even though this story might be inspired by true events, especially the conclusion seems to fit too neatly into Malwida von Meysenbug's own political aspirations, formulated after her return from Ostend in her essay "Ein Frauenschwur"¹¹, which was published by Carl Volckhausen in the *Mainzer Tagblatt* in 1950. Mirroring the first chapter in *Eine Reise nach Ostende*, "Ein Frauenschwur" is fuelled by hatred for the murderers of those heroically fighting for freedom, basic human rights and dignity. In this short essay, Malwida von Meysenbug vows to educate women in order to ensure the survival of revolutionary ideals, thus taking revenge on the murderous reactionary forces that had once again gained control all over Germany.

Sie haben der Freiheit Werth und ihre Rechte erkannt und wenn die Väter todt sind, werden sie sie ihren Söhnen lehren. Sie werden ihnen den unver-söhnlichen, den heiligen Haß in das Herz pflanzen gegen Euer hassenswür-diges Prinzip und wenn Ihr auch für den Augenblick noch einmal sieget, vor dem Geschlecht, das wir auferziehn, da stürzen Eure falschen Götter, da bricht Euer Hochmuth, da kracht die sündige Welt in Trümmer und begräbt den Egoismus unter Schutt und Asche.¹²

Travelling is a vital first step towards achieving this goal, and it is in the travel diary itself that we witness changes occurring in the author. As the journey progresses, Malwida von Meysenbug's text gains political clarity and the author increasingly displays the self-assurance that before long enables

11 She mentions this essay in her memoirs as "Der Schwur einer Frau" (*Memoiren einer Idealistin*, 1998, p. 111). "Ein Frauenschwur" was published on 22 September 1850 in *Sonntagsblätter. Beiblatt zum Mainzer Tagblatt*. It is reprinted with an introduction by Ruth Stumann-Bowert in *Jahrbuch der Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft* 5 (1996): 197-199.

12 Malwida von Meysenbug, "Ein Frauenschwur." *Jahrbuch der Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft* 5 (1996): 198.

her to leave her family and take control of her life. Her seaside holiday with its many pleasant conversations, walks by the sea, unpretentious food, and Beethoven's 9th symphony on the beach, clearly had a soothing effect on this unmarried woman, who had tried so hard to be true to herself while placating her irritated family. In an unpublished chapter of *Eine Reise nach Ostende*, Meysenbug writes: "Bei jeder Kur sollte der Mensch eigentlich in jenen Zustand des Unbewußtseins zurückkehren, der noch halb der Kindheit und ersten Jugend angehört."¹³ During this journey to Ostend, Malwida von Meysenbug overcame her depression and not only regained her optimism and love for life, but found the strength and courage to take sides and publicly speak her mind. While still hiding behind a third-person narrative at the outset of her travelogue, the final pages of *Eine Reise nach Ostende* quite clearly unveil her agency as she outlines her own political agenda:

The main elements of her programme are based on the most progressive ideas of the Free Church and Theodor Althaus's *Die Zukunft des Christentums: seine Wahrheit, seine Verkebrung und Freiheit und Liebe* (1847), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (1822-30) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1808), as well as on Julius Fröbel's *Das System der socialen Politik* (1846/7), time and again formulating and incorporating her ideals of equality, harmony, reason and freedom. Inspired by Hegel's thoughts on freedom and nationhood, the author is convinced of the inevitability of her principles, since it is "das Prinzip der Zukunft"¹⁴ as she calls it in her *Reise nach Ostende*. While worshipping the 'cult of aestheticism'¹⁵ in her youth and engaging in charitable works and striving towards an ideal of Christian mercy in her twenties, Malwida von Meysenbug now formulates ideas for a progressive nation based on the

13 Meysenbug. *Reise nach Ostende*. Unpublished chapter 16. Hand-written manuscript, p. 128. Goethe-Schiller-Archiv, Weimar. Two chapters were excluded by Gabriel Monod from the 1905 edition of *Eine Reise nach Ostende*. These unpublished chapters are moderately free of political declarations and focus instead on local residents, Beethoven's 9th symphony and two brand-new publications: Fanny Lewald's novel *Prinz Louis Ferdinand* and Adolf Stahr's *Die Republikaner in Neapel* (both published in 1849).

14 Meysenbug. *Reise nach Ostende*, p. 46. Quotes from this text will now appear as (RnO page number) within the main text.

15 See her first letter to Johanna Kinkel (16 October 1848). In: Malwida von Meysenbug. *Briefe an Johanna und Gottfried Kinkel*. Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1982, p. 19. Also quoted by Reuter (1998), p. 65.

freedom of its citizens.¹⁶ A re-evaluation of women's place in society is as inevitable and as vital as their education, she writes, moved by Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* and his idea of a national education.

Die Notwendigkeit, diese Erziehung auch auf die Frauen auszudehnen, wurde mir klar. Dieser Gedanke beschäftigte mich Tag und Nacht. Wie könnte ein Volk sich selbst regenerieren und frei werden, wenn seine eine Hälfte ausgeschlossen wäre von der sorgfältigen, allseitigen Vorbereitung, die die wahre Freiheit für ein Volk ebensowohl wie für die Individuen verlangt?¹⁷

While accepting the need for violent action in particular circumstances, she did not envisage female revolutionaries in male attire and armed to their teeth, but rather emancipated women, who would instigate change by raising children in an enlightened environment. She does not consider emancipated women to be interested in emulating men or in eliminating the boundary that separates male from female life. She even regards that thought as absurd (RnO 135). She demands, however, that women should be recognized as human beings rather than as 'Weiber', i.e. as wives and mothers, sisters and daughters. Intellectual ability deserves to be cultivated, for it is only via education that women will achieve inner peace and external independence. Only then will they become "real women" (RnO 135f). Malwida von Meysenbug is adamant that women should have equal rights to men, especially with regard to the development of their intellect. She is, however, also quick to add, that once women are equal to men intellectually, this would not at all imply that women had to become professors, lawyers, or politicians. She is interested in what she calls a "deeper truth": "je allseitiger, je individueller" (RnO 138). A multi-dimensional education will undoubtedly produce individuals, and who knows what women will be able to accomplish once they are given the chance? Her argument here reveals her sophistication: while pleasing the critical, concerned reader she still keeps all doors open and makes no concessions.

In Meysenbug's view, marriage should neither be entered out of financial necessity nor in order to exchange the dependence of a daughter for that of a wife. In her view, women should be equal to men in marriage (RnO 140),

16 For a more detailed examination of Hegel's influence on Meysenbug's thoughts, see my "Über die Eisenbahnfahrt ins politische Schreiben. Malwida von Meysenbugs *Eine Reise nach Ostende*." *Malwida von Meysenbug* (cf. note 5), pp. 77-92.

17 Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin*. 1922, p. 157.

respected intellectually and able to support themselves financially. Not surprisingly and in her usual overly enthusiastic manner, Malwida von Meysenbug praised Johanna and Gottfried Kinkel's relationship as being just such a union of equal spirits¹⁸, and she considered Johanna Kinkel's emancipation exemplary. In a letter written in July 1851, she states that Johanna Kinkel's intellectual and financial independence, her devotion to her family as to life in general, her 'heroic' character, her boundless energy and abundance of love, with her 'natural feeling' still intact made her the ideal 'new woman': "das Weib der neuen Zeit."¹⁹ For Malwida von Meysenbug, Johanna Kinkel is proof that her ideal of the 'new woman' is not sterile theory, but potential reality for any woman willing. Only if girls are taught to be independent intellectually and economically, Malwida von Meysenbug believes, can they bring to fruition a "Dasein in Freiheit und Würde" (RnO 141). To aid women in achieving a life in freedom and dignity was the author's main goal at the time of the revolution – as a women's rights advocate and as a patriot. For the future of the state, she argues in *Eine Reise nach Ostende*, women's emancipation is vital.

This idea of the link between woman's place in society and the health of the nation is developed in her travelogue, based on her study of Hegel and Fichte, but also shaped by painful experiences within her own family, conversations during her trip and chance encounters with a number of individuals from the lighthouse keeper's wife to a Jesuit priest. In Meysenbug's view, family and state dynamics reflect one another. If a marriage is not a bond between two independent, equal individuals, but rather a marriage of convenience lacking dignity and respect, the progeny of this union will inevitably fail in becoming a strong and independent individual him/herself. It is the family that provides every individual with the basis of his or her value system. In a dictate that in hindsight may make the contemporary reader shiver, she declares: "nur der gesunden Familie entsteigt der gesunde Staat" (RnO 141). It is obvious that for Malwida von Meysenbug "der gesunde Staat" means a democratic republic based on reason and freedom. And since a healthy family is the cradle of a healthy nation, the emancipation of woman is absolutely vital in ensuring the development of a progressive nation state. It is not sufficient that women work for this ideal of a future nation in the silence of their home.

18 See for example her *Memoiren einer Idealistin*. 1998, p. 146f, 236f.

19 Letter written in Hamburg on 11 July 1851. See Meysenbug, *Briefe an Johanna und Gottfried Kinkel*. (cf. note 15), p. 75.

As her trip and travelogue nears its end, her political programme gains clarity. Her favoured political system is now, quite clearly, a mixture of socialism and Christian ethics: “Das Christentum predigte die Liebe; der Sozialismus fordert das Recht. Aus der Vereinigung beider wird das Wahre entstehen” (RnO 150). The philosophical connection between the two is vital for Malwida von Meysenbug, who regards Christianity as the beginning of socialism – a vision of a world without a class system.²⁰ The political significance of Christianity is its ideal of human nature, and the consequence of socialism is the generalization of this epitome (RnO 149). Ideally, she tells her readers, every individual would strive towards ethical, physical, and intellectual perfection rather than be limited and paralyzed by an authoritarian state. In her view, private ownership should be allowed in order to reward hard work and agency, but it should remain limited to the original owner in order to control the power of capital. Only by abolishing inheritance would equal rights and opportunities for all be safeguarded. Solely the inheritance of intellectual riches should enable an individual to make the most of his or her life professionally and personally. And while no society could do without laws, ideally a good education based on Fröbel, Pestalozzi and Fichte would produce individuals who could live according to Kant’s categorical imperative. She dreams of a nation that is home to all people – “in dessen weiten Hallen das *Volk*, das freie Volk, wohne” (RnO 109).

In July 1849, when Rastatt in Baden fell – the place where the German revolution began –, the author’s hopes for a new Germany were dashed. Witnessing these disappointing events from afar, she includes a critique of the ‘Germans’ in her travelogue. In her mind, her fellow countrymen are well capable of theorizing about reason, freedom, and individuality, while apparently not being ready for the consequences of change. The failing revolution is proof that her beloved nation is one of philistines, good-natured people of habit, and slaves of tradition. She is proud of thinkers such as Friedrich Schiller, Ludwig Feuerbach, Immanuel Kant, or Johann Gottlieb Fichte, but questions the merit of theories if the people are unable to put them into practice. As Malwida von Meysenbug wrote her *Reise nach Ostende*, the liberal, democratic movement in Germany, as in France, Hungary, and Italy, was mostly eradicated, and by the autumn of 1849, the European revolution was completely crushed. Nevertheless, her criticism of *Heimat* is followed by a romantic declaration of belonging and a desire to return home

20 Cf. Theodor Althaus. *Die Zukunft des Christentums: seine Wahrheit, seine Verkehrung und Freiheit und Liebe*. Darmstadt: n.p., 1847.

to 'Germany' – "Und dennoch war dieses Deutschland meine grösste Liebe, doch zog es mich zurück zu ihm" (RnO 155).

However, the fertile ground needed for Malwida von Meysenbug's enlightened dreams was not yet to be found in her own nation. In her view, only North America provided the freedom necessary to bring progressive ideas to fruition – "jenseits des Atlantischen Ozeans, auf dem freien, wohl vorbereiteten Grund der nordamerikanischen Republik" (RnO 163). Not surprisingly, her diary *Eine Reise nach Ostende* ends with the exclamation: "Nach Westen!" – a call heeded not only by Anton and Maria in Fanny Lewald's *Auf rother Erde*. Pressed by her mother to stay in Germany, Malwida von Meysenbug, however, never carried out her plan to join 'the land of the free', but rather joined the "Hochschule für das weibliche Geschlecht" in Hamburg in 1850, where she remained until it was forced to close in 1852.

Berta Schleicher, who promoted and edited Malwida von Meysenbug's works after her death, chooses a quotation by Friedrich Lienhard (1865-1929) in order to reconcile Malwida von Meysenbug's political idealism²¹ with her biography: "Ein Verzicht auf Behaglichkeiten der Welt um einer grossen Idee willen; dies Tun und diese Kraft nennen wir Idealismus." While her writings often exhibit a rapturous yet passive enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause, the need to change at least her own life prompted her decision to leave her family and to become an educator first in the newly created institute of higher education for women in Hamburg and then, from 1853, of Alexander Herzen's daughters in London.²² Even during the first 18 months of her exile when her means were very restricted, she refused to become a governess; preserving her independence was more important to her than a secure source of income. Only at one point during her exile in London did she become politically active when helping the Italian revolutionary and former triumvir of the short-lived Italian republic Guiseppe Mazzini to organize a workers' union and drum up support for him among the German emigrants.²³ Like so many other members of the London exile community, Malwida von Meysenbug and Guiseppe Mazzini shared both the dream of

21 For an account of the development of Meysenbug's idealism see Siegrun Kraschewski-Stolz. "Realität und Idealismus des Weiblichen." *Jahrbuch der Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft* 1 (1986): 23-41.

22 See Hannelore Teuchert. "Malwida von Meysenbug als Erzieherin Olga Herzens." *Jahrbuch der Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft* 3 (1990): 53-56.

23 See *Memoiren einer Idealistin*. 1998, p. 231; Barbara Leisner. *'Unabhängig sein ist mein heißester Wunsch': Malwida von Meysenbug*. München: Econ, 1998. Here p. 175.

a unified, democratic nation state and the experience of forced exile. The fight for a workers' union, however, was unsuccessful, and disappointed with the result of her efforts, she soon returned to pen and paper. Writing and translating became her main occupation and a way of reminding herself of her ideals of freedom and nationhood. She published numerous articles in journals edited by members of the exile community – such as in Mazzini's *Dio e il Popolo* –, she translated among other texts the memoirs of Alexander Herzen (*Aus den Memoiren eines Russen*, 1855-59)²⁴, and left her mark with her mainly autobiographical works. Eventually, or so she hoped, the seed of freedom would take root: “Und wir werden arbeiten, wie zerstreut auch, wie weit getrennt der eine vom andern. Nur um desto gewisser tragen wir den Samen der Freiheit hinüber und er wird aufgehen und Frucht bringen allerorten” (RnO 115).

Malwida von Meysenbug's Ostend 'diary' or travel log was her first more substantial political text and inevitably crosses the boundaries of her own class and conservative upbringing, while accounting of the complex dialectic between the glorious political hopes of the recent past and the desperation of a shameful present. Ostend signifies the turning point in Meysenbug's life that ended passive observation and suffering and brought about involvement and agency. While the failing of the revolution had become an inevitable, miserable fact and only a matter of time, Meysenbug's journey – the act of traveling – triggered: “eine physische und moralische Auferstehung”. It was in this Belgian seaside town that the idea of a written text took root, that centred on her thoughts regarding the goals and consequences of the failing revolution and shed light on the conflict between the author's own aristocratic upbringing and her revolutionary ideals. *Eine Reise nach Ostende*, infused with her understanding of the works of Julius Fröbel, Fichte and Hegel, as well as her own enthusiasm for the ideals of the 1848 revolution, gives evi-

24 Translations by Malwida von Meysenbug mentioned in *Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen, 1800-1945* (Eds. Gisela Brinker-Gabler, Karola Ludwig, Angela Wöffen. Munich: dtv, 1986, p. 219) are Alexander Herzen's *Memoiren* (1856) and *Gesammelte Erzählungen* (1858). Hoffmann und Campe did indeed publish Meysenbug's translation of Alexander Herzen's *Aus den Memoiren eines Russen* from 1855: vol. 1 *Im Staatsgefängniß und in Sibirien* (1855), vol. 2 *Neue Folge. Petersburg und Nowgorod* (1856), *Dritte Folge. Jugenderinnerungen* (1856), *Gedachtes und Erlebtes* (1859). See also the list of publications in Martin Reuter's 1848, *Malwida von Meysenbug und die deutsche Demokratiegeschichte* (cf. note 4).

dence of the changing constitution of Malwida von Meysenbug as a woman, a daughter and an independent mind.

This text cannot easily be placed alongside other 19th century travelogues, since there is little palpable desire to travel in order to explore the unknown or even exotic. Malwida von Meysenbug set out on this trip to a well-known seaside resort in order to rest and to recover from depression. The *terra incognita* explored, here, is the author herself and the potential for change in the future, both in terms of the emancipation of women in general and an aristocratic daughter in particular, and a nation in dire need of political renewal. *Eine Reise nach Ostende* maps new imaginary landscapes, dreams women's emancipation and a democratic German nation, and makes the complex, painful dialectic between reality and ideal all too poignant.