

## The many facets of a diamond: space, change and identity in Selma Lagerlöf's *The Miracles of Antichrist*

Elettra Carbone and Kristina Sjögren

In Selma Lagerlöf's novel *Antikrists mirakler* (1897, *The Miracles of Antichrist*), public space is used as a catalyst for social change. In this novel the fictional Sicilian town of Diamante<sup>1</sup> (the Italian for 'diamond') becomes the setting of great transformations that affect not only the characters' personal development but also that of the whole community. In this essay we examine how public spaces are used to problematise issues related to identity, gender, and social class, all of which, in line with the ideas of the Modern Breakthrough, were highly topical in Scandinavian literature of the time. Rural idylls, dramatic scenes of poverty, social conformism, women's struggle for emancipation, technological innovation, and workers' and peasants' uprisings—these are just some of the aspects that make this fictional Sicilian town one of the most multifaceted spaces in Swedish literature.

Four years after her acclaimed début with *Gösta Berlings saga* (1891, *Gösta Berling's Saga*), Selma Lagerlöf undertook a long Italian tour from October 1895 to summer 1896 together with her friend Sophie Elkan. In 1897 she published *The Miracles of Antichrist*, a novel clearly influenced by her trip to Italy, and especially by the month she and Elkan spent in Sicily. Lagerlöf and Elkan followed in the footsteps of many Nordic artists who, particularly since the beginning of the nineteenth century, had travelled to Italy in search of direct contact with an 'exotic' nature and rustic life, classical culture, and Renaissance art. However, while most Nordic writers and artists travelled to Rome *en masse*, fewer ventured further south to Sicily like Lagerlöf and Elkan.<sup>2</sup> As Giorgia Alù rightly points out in her study on British women who lived in Sicily in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the island was geographically as well as conceptually set apart from the rest of Italy (Alù 2008, 22).

*The Miracles of Antichrist* received mixed reactions when it was first published and has so far been largely neglected by scholars. Some exceptions are Bengt Ek, with his important analysis of Lagerlöf's representation of socialism in *The Miracles of Antichrist* in his doctoral thesis *Selma Lagerlöf efter Gösta Berlings saga* (1951), and Vivi Edström, who in her *Selma Lagerlöf: Livets vågspel* (2002), dedicates a chapter to a general analysis of the novel in the context of Lagerlöf's experiences during her Italian journey and her general interest in Italy and its folklore. Ulf Olsson has contributed a sophisticated reading of the novel as an allegory in his essay 'I det svarta' (2007).<sup>3</sup>

However, *The Miracles of Antichrist* is a complex novel in which much can be discovered both about Lagerlöf's textual construction of spaces and about the different ways in which characters interact with these spaces. Lagerlöf represents Diamante as a 'social space', a space that—according to Henri Lefebvre's definition—is defined by social practices and implies and contains social relationships (Lefebvre 1974, 1, 26, 82–3). In other words, space and its inhabitants are linked by a dialectical relationship:

‘society shapes spaces according to its needs, but equally, space plays a formative role in the construction of social life’ (Thacker 2003, 17). How, then, does space change the characters in the novel, and how do the characters change the spaces in which they live?

The story opens with the arrival in Diamante of a copy of the statue of Christ preserved in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Rome.<sup>4</sup> The traditionally religious inhabitants rebel against poverty, and start showing greater interest in their material wealth and progress. The female protagonist, Micaela, goes through a classic journey modelled on that of the female *Bildungsroman*, progressing from a traditional subjugated housewife to an entrepreneurial leader and female hero.<sup>5</sup> In the process she engages in a passionate love story with Gaetano, who develops from a religious artisan into a working-class revolutionary leader.

Few Nordic authors from this period have succeeded in placing their Italian characters in a setting as complex and detailed as the one Lagerlöf constructs in her novel. In *The Miracles of Antichrist*, Italy is not represented as a foreign and unfamiliar country, where the Italians remain mere exotic background figures to the main (usually Nordic) characters.<sup>6</sup> In *The Miracles of Antichrist*, the third-person omniscient narrator refuses to confine the Italian characters to the role of the Other and places them in a realistic Sicily. The characters exist in a multifaceted Italian setting, showcasing a variety of Italian spaces: idyllic depictions of the Sicilian landscape go hand in hand with close-ups of the poverty of the lower classes and of their struggle for survival, while colourful images of the Sicilian local traditions are represented together with the arrival of technological innovations such as the railway. It is rather Northern Europe, represented by England and English characters, which in this novel becomes the Other: within the Italian domain England and all things English remain a foreign dimension, whose intervention, whether positive or negative, is represented as an intrusion. As we will demonstrate, this small Sicilian town well beyond the main itinerary of foreign travellers is represented as a quintessentially reactionary space. This natural idyll with its religious festivals and traditions masks a deeply conservative society affected by dramatic social problems. As Micaela and Gaetano try to find a balance between tradition and modernity one thing becomes clear: if change is possible in Diamante, it is possible anywhere.

### **Paradise and poverty**

Sicily was famous among nineteenth-century travellers for its unique natural features: here the typical Mediterranean vegetation was enlivened by more exotic plants and dramatic geological and geographical features. The island, perceived as a ‘liminal land, on the border between Africa and Europe’, was often associated with an attractive yet dangerous fairytale world where idyllic landscapes were made more exciting by the sudden possibility of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes (Alù 2008, 22; de Seta 1992, 17–26). In line with this tradition, fascination and excitement are the keywords that characterise the very first representations of Sicilian Nature in *The Miracles of Antichrist*. The reader is introduced to the Sicilian landscape around Mount Etna by Donna Elisa as she tries to convince the young protagonist, the orphan Gaetano, to come to Diamante to stay with her. Mount Etna is portrayed as an imaginary world, where natural elements transform themselves into fictional characters. Etna, according to Donna Elisa, is the biggest mountain in the world; it is so big that it takes three days to reach its top; it is so big that there is space on it for fifty-one towns, fourteen big forests and two hundred hills. The list of exaggerations continues until Mount Etna and

Diamante become an irresistible world of adventure that a child cannot wait to see and explore, and Gaetano finally agrees to come and live there. Equally fantastic is the representation of the landscape that the protagonist Micaela sketches when, as a girl, she arrives in Diamante for the first time. In this case, the world surrounding the small Sicilian town is the anteroom leading to the gates of heaven. The beauty of the landscape with Mount Etna silhouetted against the sky and illuminated by the sunlight makes Micaela wonder if she has arrived in paradise, 'one of heaven's cities' (Lagerlöf 1910a, 63).<sup>7</sup> Diamante is thus represented as a kind of colourful and lively Arcadia, a location that, in the Romantic imagination, was perceived as an idyllic place, a wonderful utopia (Peucker 1980; Lewan 2001).

As lively, colourful and exciting as the representations of Sicilian Nature are those of Sicilian folk life. Sicily is defined by the narrator as 'the noble island of Sicily, where there are more old customs left than in any other place in the south' (Lagerlöf 1910, 48).<sup>8</sup> Scenes of folklore are often connected to the manifestation of the Sicilian characters' material religiosity. The inhabitants of Diamante are in fact often shown as engaged in parades, material offerings, and rituals, by means of which the saint, in Durkheim's phrase, is forced to 'come out and show himself' (Durkheim 2002, 40–1).

However, the representation of Diamante as a utopia does not remain unchallenged for long; it soon becomes obvious that more complex realities hide behind its fascinating appearance. The adjective 'fattig' (poor), often used about Diamante in the course of the novel, is an indication of this. Drawing on Michel Foucault's terminology, Diamante is not a 'utopia' but a 'heterotopia', a place constituted by the juxtaposition of a number of complex spaces that, at a first glance, might even appear to be incompatible with each other, but that are in fact closely connected (Foucault 1986, 22–7). Idyll and poverty are not antithetic, but blend into each other. The beauty of the Sicilian landscape cannot solve social problems. On the contrary, Nature, though fascinating, can inflict only greater sorrows on the inhabitants of this region, where people become poorer and poorer, and where want spreads like a plague:

That autumn no clear, light October air lay over the Etna region. As if it had been in league with the famine, the heavy, weakening wind from the Sahara came over from Africa, and brought with it dust and exhalations that darkened the sky. (Lagerlöf 1910a, 128)<sup>9</sup>

As they become older, Gaetano and Micaela realise that Diamante is no paradise, and they become increasingly aware of the limitations of their surroundings. This realisation triggers changes in the protagonists that, in turn, have consequences for the social and technological development of the town itself. Sicilian conservative mentality cannot prevent the infiltration of modern ideals that threaten the pillars of this society, or stop the arrival of technological innovations such as the railway. Having grown out of Donna Elisa's representation of Mount Etna as an exciting fairytale world, Gaetano becomes aware that life in Diamante has its limitations and undertakes a formative journey to England that will introduce him to socialist ideals. Micaela starts out as a traditional, patriarchal, submissive wife, but later becomes the initiator of a 'modern breakthrough' that connects Diamante with the outer world and opens it up to modernity.<sup>10</sup>

## **Leaving home**

*The Miracles of Antichrist* was published at a time when gender roles were much discussed in the Scandinavian and other Western societies and first wave feminism

stirred up strong emotions. Micaela radically transgresses the gender boundaries of the time by changing into a modern New Woman.<sup>11</sup> The way space is represented in the text to promote feminism and more modern and equal gender roles is one of the most interesting aspects of the novel.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, public space had belonged almost exclusively to men. Around the *fin de siècle*, however, middle-class women started appropriating public space for the first time due to professional employment, suffragist politics and increased consumption of factory-made goods. Middle-class women in public space were a controversial concept, and they were accidentally approached as prostitutes. At the same time, the competition with men in the labour market and in politics increased. Women did not only threaten men's domination of public space: by entering it they threatened masculinity itself. By occupying space both in the streets and in the public debate in the arts and the press, women displaced the very meanings of public space, writes Sally Ledger (1997, 150). Dichotomies such as the identification of private space (the home) with femininity and public space with masculinity were used to position and construct the genders in relation to each other. Griselda Pollock writes that this split into a private and a public sphere also *defined* the genders. To retain an acceptable femininity, women should not cross the border into the public sphere (2003, 96).

In literature at this time, a character often moving into public space was the New Woman: a professional, usually unmarried character, frequently represented as wicked.<sup>12</sup> Micaela develops from traditional femininity, living as a fragile young woman who has never left the house unaccompanied, into a New Woman working with traditionally masculine tasks outside her home and moving about in public space.<sup>13</sup> In Lagerlöf's text Micaela is not represented as wicked: her development is necessary, almost forced upon her by social change. At the same time Micaela is the motor of social change, a role traditionally defined as masculine. Prior to taking on this role, however, Micaela is constructed as the ideal middle-class woman of the nineteenth century, the representation of her recalling Ibsen's Nora: 'She had never been allowed to go alone on the street. She had never worked. No one had ever spoken seriously to her. She had not even been in love with anyone' (Lagerlöf 1910a, 77).<sup>14</sup> This representation of femininity involves confinement inside the home and removal from all public life, including professional work and serious discussion. To complete the picture of the passive woman in a patriarchal system, Micaela is married off to a much older man whom she does not love, for *his* benefit. As a deeply religious woman, leading her life between the walls of her home and totally dependent on her husband, Micaela is especially frightened of the socialist movement which, thanks to Gaetano, has by now reached Sicily.

The nineteenth-century patriarchal view that a woman is of little value without her husband is illustrated by Micaela sitting at the wake following the death of her husband, reflecting that a widow 'would be nothing, mean nothing; ... because they no longer had a husband; because nothing any longer gave them the right to live' (Lagerlöf 1910, 139).<sup>15</sup> Like a clinging vine, brought up within the confines of a traditional notion of femininity, she almost dies in her husbandless state.

Micaela secretly loves the young Gaetano and she now expects him to take over her late husband's role as her protector against the world: however, the text denies Micaela this patriarchal protection, demanding her growth instead. Gaetano is no patriarchal man, and before Micaela can have him, she must become his equal, the text implying

that equality underpins the relationship between men and women in modernity. Micaela has to leave the obedient, self-sacrificing, feminine role behind and step into modern, active, and self-reliant femininity. A prerequisite for this is intimately connected with her use of space: in order to become independent, Micaela has to leave home. In text after text, Lagerlöf uses the concept of leaving home as a metaphor for her characters achieving freedom and emancipation.<sup>16</sup> It is not until Micaela summons the courage to walk out of her own front door and share public space with men that she becomes a free, emancipated human being who obtains both modernity and Gaetano as a lover.

Gaetano too must leave home. His skill in carving images of the saints as a way of serving God is not fully appreciated in the small town of Diamante, where nobody buys his figurines and nothing new needs to be added. Gaetano therefore emigrates to England, in the novel represented as the source of modernity. Here, thanks to his English master—an artist and a socialist—he not only develops his artistry but also finds the key to the solution of the social problems afflicting his hometown in Sicily.

### **Moving into public space**

It is after Gaetano has been imprisoned for his socialist ideas that Micaela, left without masculine support, has to rely on her own strength. Her emancipation goes hand in hand with her decision to bring the railway to Diamante. The building of a railway should be seen as a philanthropic act, one of the few activities open to women at the time and a means of exercising political influence,<sup>17</sup> but also as a symbol of modernity, capitalism, enterprise, technology and progress, all traditionally associated with masculinity. Micaela must cross several gender boundaries, and do so while Diamante's inhabitants resist her efforts by means of anger, unhelpfulness, and mockery:

When Donna Micaela was gone they laughed at her. A railway, a railway! She did not know what she was thinking of. There would have to be a company, shares, statutes, concessions. How would a woman manage such things? ... Everyone was against her; no one would help her. They did not even like her to show herself on the streets or to talk business. It was not fitting for a well-born lady. (Lagerlöf 1910a, 188, 214)<sup>18</sup>

Diamante views business activities requiring movement in public space and interaction with men as improper for a woman of the middle or upper classes. The phrase 'How would a woman manage such things?' also indicates the low confidence in women being able to accomplish anything in the public sphere. Women's lack of experience, education, and money would effectively have stopped them at the time.

When Micaela finally gains the support of her old friend, Donna Elisa, the two women seem to throw all traditional femininity overboard. They do not only move about in public space: they confront the most dangerous and powerful men in Sicily, and they set out to do business and make money to support the building of the railway. But not only do the women cross the boundaries of traditional femininity: they also cross the boundaries defining how business activities are traditionally handled. The goal of their entrepreneurialism is a typical socialist utopia: a non-profit cooperative between people for the common good. When they criticise 'the engineer and the fine gentlemen' (Lagerlöf 1910a, 253)<sup>19</sup> for driving up the costs of everything, they criticise traditional capitalism and its strong links to the upper classes. The people who end up helping with the railway are marginalised individuals who offer not money, but the work of their hands.

Micaela is gradually able to make use of any public space and even ventures to the old stone quarry, where no man dares to go, to talk to the robber chief. She facilitates the progress that, in the long run, will save her town from poverty. Her breaking of gender codes and developing of a new, modern femininity is represented as something positive: instead of punishing the New Woman protagonist by divorce or death, this text makes the change into modern femininity the prerequisite of a happy ending for Micaela. She, the female entrepreneur and New Woman, is the one who joins material spaces by building a railway that allows Diamante to connect with the outside world, to become modern.

In *The Miracles of Antichrist* entering public space is the trigger of social change, not only for women, but also for the working classes. Public space was traditionally controlled by men, but not any men—by the men of the upper classes. The conservative establishment did not only fear feminism at the time but also the working classes, often represented as large, anonymous masses threatening the status quo. In Lagerlöf's novel the socialist leader Gaetano and his followers take over public space in Sicily to protest against their social conditions. On his return to Sicily, Gaetano is involved in a key historical event, namely the uprisings of 1893 and 1894, which were instigated by the Fasci Siciliani—organisations for the rights of workers and peasants—and which received extensive coverage in the local and international press (Ek 1951, 247–53). In the novel the uprisings fail, as in real life, and their leaders are executed, jailed, or exiled. Yet, in the long run the uprisings inspired a series of social reforms aimed at improving the conditions of peasants and workers (Hobsbawm 1971, 101–105).

By taking over public space Gaetano and Micaela are able to change the society they live in. But although they are the initiators of this progress, they act inspired by their English role models, Gaetano's artisan master and the wealthy Miss Tottenham.

## **Two-way appropriation, or, Othering the English**

In *The Miracles of Antichrist*, England becomes an idealised space, a symbol of emancipation and modernity. For this reason, the interaction with and involvement in the Italian way of life by the English characters always brings an element of novelty and progress to the plot. As mentioned above, Gaetano's English master is responsible for Gaetano's conversion to socialism, which, in turn, changes Diamante. Similarly, the immensely rich Miss Tottenham from England, who is travelling around Italy in her large coach collecting art, has a decisive influence on Micaela. When she arrives in Sicily, Miss Tottenham is already doing what Micaela must learn to do: she is moving confidently in public spaces and engaging in business. She is determined to bring progress to Diamante and to help battle poverty. Miss Tottenham's good deeds appear to be dictated by an egocentric drive to overcome her Otherness, to be loved and accepted by the locals. Yet, she remains a non-Italian, an outsider. The only way for the Englishwoman to be accepted by the Sicilian people is to sacrifice her innovative ambitions, get married to a local man, and become an ordinary Sicilian wife. Paradoxically, by the end of the novel, the Sicilian Micaela is on her way towards emancipation and independence from men, while the rich, independent globetrotter Miss Tottenham is confined to her home in conventional femininity and subservience.

As the Sicilian Gaetano longs for England as a different place where he can develop his art and learn about politics, English characters living in Italy, like Miss Tottenham, desperately try to establish themselves in this country by purchasing as many Italian

holy treasures as they can. While the English in *The Miracles of Antichrist* try to appropriate part of Italian culture and traditions by gathering a great number of works of art, Selma Lagerlöf also had her own way of using the spaces she visited during her Italian journey. Lagerlöf was fascinated by Italy's local legends, which she used as the material of some of her short stories.<sup>20</sup> In addition, there are several cases of *ekphrasis* in the novel, with Lagerlöf transforming Italian works of art into narrative material.<sup>21</sup> Although the change and progress of the two protagonists and the town of Diamante can be seen as consequences of more general international trends related to technological and social transformations, in the novel they are all linked to the legend that opens the novel, about the Sibyl warning the Emperor Augustus not to build a temple in his own honour on the Capitoline Hill, as this would be an act of hubris. No matter where and when they happen, all the events that make up the plot of *The Miracles of Antichrist* refer more or less directly to this prophecy. The Sybil's words were not a specific warning to Augustus, but a universal message addressed to all humanity. Moreover, the Antichrist—a copy of the image of Christ preserved on the Capitoline Hill, commissioned by an Englishwoman—is represented in the novel as an 'English' creation. The image of the Antichrist, which bears the inscription *Mitt rike är endast av denna världen* (Lagerlöf 1897a, 20; Lagerlöf 1910a, 14 'My kingdom is only of this world'), is said to urge people to seek material welfare and becomes the symbol of general socialist ideals such as harmony, philanthropy, and solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged. For this reason, when it finally arrives in Diamante thanks to Miss Tottenham, another Englishwoman, the influence of the Antichrist statue brings change to what had been for centuries a typical small Sicilian town set rigid in its traditions.

In Lagerlöf's novel the typical small Sicilian town of Diamante, initially represented according to recurrent topoi linked to the exotic natural and folkloristic features of the island, becomes the only place where progress, including social and gender equality, can be achieved, and where a profound and traditional Christian faith can be reconciled with socialist ideals (Ek 1951, 246). The Antichrist is the ultimate cause of transformations that are not destructive, but constructive. As Olsson has pointed out, Lagerlöf in her texts invariably returns to a confrontation between modernity and a conservative restoration (2007, 88). *The Miracles of Antichrist* not only promotes reconciliation between conservative and socialist ideals, it also opens up space for new gender roles.

## Summary

In *The Miracles of Antichrist*, the fictional Sicilian town of Diamante is represented as a complex and dynamic space, combining features reminiscent of fairytales with terrible poverty, and strict and long-lasting traditions with progress. Particularly interesting are the connections between public space and individual and social emancipation. In this novel the two Sicilian protagonists, Micaela and Gaetano, embark on a process of development that will result in them taking control over their own lives while at the same time dramatically changing the space in which they live. Provincial Diamante therefore becomes the unexpected setting of radical social and technological changes that are linked to both local and transnational trends. With its all-Italian setting and characters, apart from Miss Tottenham, *The Miracles of Antichrist* discusses issues that were high on the agenda in Scandinavia in the late nineteenth century, such as the rights of the working classes, the position of women in society, and the role of religion in everyday life. Throughout the novel Lagerlöf maintains a difficult balance between local colour and her attempt to demonstrate that this remote region, considered by

foreigners a specific geographical, social, and economic entity set apart from the rest of Italy, could be affected by the same social reforms and progress that pertained in nineteenth-century Scandinavia and other European countries.

---

<sup>1</sup> Diamante bears a similarity to the small Sicilian town of Paternò on the Mount Etna, but also of other Italian cities such as Taormina, Palermo, and even Rome (Ek 1951, 214–15).

<sup>2</sup> As Ek (1951, 249) points out in his study, Sicily lay outside the traditional Grand Tour itineraries. The island became a more popular destination in the nineteenth century, especially after Italian unification in 1861 (Alù 2008, 22–3).

<sup>3</sup> Others who have discussed *The Miracles of Antichrist* are Erland Lagerroth in ‘Selma Lagerlöf som siciliansk hembygdsdiktare’ (1971) and Henrik Wivel in *Snedronningen* (1988).

<sup>4</sup> Fredrika Bremer wrote about the ceremony when the statue of Christ (*Il Bambino*) is displayed in the church of S. Maria in Aracoeli in her *Livet i Gamla Världen* (1860–62, *Life In the Old World: Or, Two Years In Switzerland and Italy*). There are several stories about how the crowned child has been subjected to thefts and forgeries. Hans Christian Andersen also refers to the image of Jesus in the Church of Araceli in his Italian novel *Improvvisatoren* (1835, *The Improvisatore*). In *En julbild från Rom* in *Ord & Bild*, 1893, Carl Bildt, Swedish Ambassador in Rome, retells a legend about the forged Christ child—‘Selma Lagerlöf probably knew about this article, and also about Claes Lagergren’s essay in the same issue of *Ord & Bild* about Pope Leo XIII and his view of socialism’, writes Edström (2002, 199–200).

<sup>5</sup> The literary female hero is characterised by agency, unlike the ‘heroine’, the term implying passivity and dependence upon a male hero. See, for example, Susan A. Lichtman, *The Female Hero in Women’s Literature and Poetry* (1996).

<sup>6</sup> In novels such as *Fra Piazza del Popolo* (1866) (‘From Piazza del Popolo’) by the Danish writer Vilhelm Bergsøe, *Nattevagt* (1894) (Nightwatch) by Henrik Pontoppidan, also from Denmark, and *Jenny* (1911) by the Norwegian author Sigrid Undset, Italian characters are mainly used as a backdrop for the leading characters, who come from the Nordic countries. Lagerlöf was critical of her ability to represent the Italian characters in *The Miracles of Antichrist* adequately, claiming that she could not make them sufficiently credible (Lagerlöf, ‘Hur jag fann ett romanämne’, in Edström 1996, 60).

<sup>7</sup> ‘en af himmelens städer’ (Lagerlöf 1897a, 68).

<sup>8</sup> ‘den ädla ön ... där det finnes mera kvar af gammal sed än på något annat ställe i södern’ (Lagerlöf 1897a, 52).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Och denna höst låg icke mera den klara, lätta oktoberluften öfver Etnatrakterna. Utan som om den skulle vara i förbund med nöden, kom den tunga och förlamande ökenvinden öfver från Afrika och förde med sig stoft och dunst, som förmörkade hela rymden’ (Lagerlöf 1897a, 141).

<sup>10</sup> Cranny-Francis et al. define ‘patriarchy’ as ‘a social system in which structural differences in privilege, power and authority are invested in masculinity and the cultural, economic and/or social positions of men’ (2003, 15); Connell points out that this ‘massive structure of social relations’ involves ‘the state, the economy, culture and communications as well as kinship, child-rearing and sexuality’ (2005, 65).

<sup>11</sup> A very short definition of the concept of the New Woman is that she is a professional, financially independent, usually unmarried, and sexually liberated woman (see, for example, Witt-Brattström 2004 or Ledger 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Examples of wicked, punished New Women can be found in texts by August Strindberg, Ola Hansson, and Annie Quiding-Åkerhielm.

<sup>13</sup> Edström writes that *The Miracles of Antichrist* develops into a grand feminist novel where the naïve, upper-class girl turns into an independent, enterprising woman (Edström 2002, 203). Her comment is in line with the concept of the literary New Woman, where independence and personal development express feminine emancipation.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Hon hade aldrig fått gå ensam på gatan. Hon hade aldrig arbetat. Man hade aldrig talat ett ord allvar med henne. Hon hade icke en gång varit förälskad i någon’ (Lagerlöf 1897a, 85).

<sup>15</sup> ‘ingenting skulle vara, ingenting betyda, ... därför att de ej mer hade en man, därför att ingenting mer gaf dem rätt att lefva’ (Lagerlöf 1897a, 152).

<sup>16</sup> Examples of well-known texts in which Lagerlöf uses the theme of departure are *En herrgårdssägen* (1899, *The Tale of a Manor*), *Jerusalem* (1901–1902), *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* (1906–1907, *Nils Holgersson's Wonderful Journey through Sweden*) and *Kejsarn av Portugallien* (1914, *The Emperor of Portugallia*). She also spoke of women's emigration and departures in 'Hem och stat' ('Home and State'), her speech to the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in Stockholm in 1911, in which she endorsed women's emancipation from the home.

<sup>17</sup> It was common for middle-class women to do philanthropic work at this time (see Jordansson and Vammen 1998), and Selma Lagerlöf herself would sometimes help out at coffee mornings while working as a teacher in Landskrona, just as her fictional character Micaela does (see Carlsson 2009–2010).

<sup>18</sup> 'När Donna Micaela var gången, skrattade man åt henne. En järnväg, en järnväg! Hon visste icke hvad hon tänkte på. Det skulle vara bolag, aktier, stadgar, koncession. Hur skulle en kvinna kunna ställa med sådant? ... Alla stodo emot henne, ingen ville hjälpa henne. De tyckte ej en gång om att hon visade sig på gatan, att hon talade affärer. Sådant var opassande för en fin dam' (Lagerlöf 1897a, 207, 235).

<sup>19</sup> 'ingenjörer och fina herrar' (Lagerlöf 1897a, 277).

<sup>20</sup> In addition to *The Miracles of Antichrist*, Lagerlöf published a collection of short stories in 1904 entitled *Kristuslegender (Christ Legends and Other Stories)*, with many of the texts based on Italian legends. Several other legends can be found in her works: 'Fiskarringen' ('The Fisherman's Ring'), which is inspired by a legend from Venice, 'Santa Caterina af Siena' ('Santa Caterina of Siena') and 'Ljuslågan' ('The Sacred Flame'), both of them inspired by legends from Florence, were printed in collections of legends in 1899 and 1904. She wrote down the legend of Lucia, but never published it in her lifetime, and it was published posthumously in *Från skilda tider* (1943–5). 'Kejsarens syn' ('The Emperor's Vision'), a legend from Rome, begins *The Miracles of Antichrist* and was later reused in *Christ Legends*. 'Den heliga bilden i Lucca' ('The Sacred Image in Lucca') was published in *Troll och människor* (1915–21, *Trolls and Humans*) (Edström 2002, 194).

<sup>21</sup> The scene with Augustus and the Sybil in the text is strikingly similar to a painting by Paris Bordon, *Augusto con la sibilla tiberina* (1535). The novel closes with an image from *La predicazione dell'Anticristo*, part of a bigger fresco known as *Il Ciclo dell'Apocalisse e del Giudizio Universale* (1499–1504) by Luca Signorelli. On this occasion the painting is clearly mentioned when Father Gondo and the Pope discuss it in the final chapter of *The Miracles of Antichrist*. Lagerlöf emphasised that seeing the painting had inspired her to write the novel (letter to Ellen Key, 15 Dec. 1897, in *Brev, i: 1871–1902*, 1967).