

The Life and Moods of a Danish Nineteenth-Century Lady of the Manor

Cultural and Emotional Practices between Ideals of Femininity, Domestic Virtues and Household Management
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Molly Tang, the lady of the manor in the mid-nineteenth century at *Nørre Vosborg*, a manor near the west coast of Denmark, kept a highly detailed diary.¹ Every single day, she recorded her chores, her pleasures, her activities, and her interaction with other people. As a child of the early nineteenth century, an era of emotion and romanticism, she also wrote about moods, both her own and those of others, on a regular basis. Consequently, as a source, her diaries provide an unusually detailed insight, not only into everyday life in a medium-sized Danish manor house, but also into an emotional practice, both of them presented from the perspective of an individual. The main objective of this article is to use this special source material to shed light on Molly Tang's multifaceted role as the wife of an estate owner, both in a practical sense and as an examination of her self-reflection and emotional practice in the light of the ideals and cultural milieu of the era in Scandinavia.

Arrival – to Nørre Vosborg in 1838 and to the Study of Manorial Life

On a beautiful spring day on 14 April 1838, the 31-year-old Marie Elisa Tang (1807–1885) – known since her childhood as Molly – arrived after an exhausting week-long journey from Copenhagen across Denmark at Nørre Vosborg in Western Jutland. Her arrival marked the start of her new role as the lady of the house. She was accompanied by her husband, the estate owner Andreas Evald Meinert Tang (1803–1868), to whom she had been married a few months earlier in the district of Christianshavn in the heart of Copenhagen, where she had spent her childhood and youth.

“I was very emotional,”² wrote Molly in her diary that evening in her exquisite description of the day's events. As the day drew to a close, the couple arrived at the manor house, where the tower and picket fence had been painted for the occasion and the flag hoisted on the rampart. The couple were affectionately welcomed by Tang's mother, the dowager Marie Cathrine Meinert (1776–1855), who also resided at Nørre Vosborg. There was a romantic and emotional moment on the threshold of the manor house as the landowner took his wife by the hand, looked into her tearful eyes and wished her God's blessing for her future life there. Though everything seemed to be going wonderfully, she still had qualms. “Yet,” wrote the young wife, “what was this? Perhaps merely my old caprices, eclipsing my Heaven?”³ (The diary of Marie Elisa Tang: Saturday 14 April 1838. Henceforth referred to simply as *Diary: date.*)⁴

The issue of being “very emotional” and sometimes having an inappropriate mixture of feelings is a significant theme in Molly Tang's diaries. Alongside the run-of-the-mill descriptions of the routine events and chores of everyday life, her diary is rich in accounts of relationships and moods – both her own and those of the people around her. She kept a diary for most of her life, and the diaries she wrote from 1829 until her death in 1885 have been preserved virtually intact. For the purpose of this article, the initial focus is on the entries from 1829, which provide an introduction to her youth and formative years in Copenhagen, and thereafter mainly the entries recording Molly Tang's early days at Nørre Vosborg in 1838. This was a life-changing year, during which she took on the roles of lady

of the manor, wife and mother. The article then compares these entries to those written in 1861 by the middle-aged lady of the manor who now had extensive experience in her various roles and of the manorial milieu. By their very nature, the diaries do not represent an objective description, but reflect Molly Tang's own presentation and understanding of her reality, and it is principally these matters that this article examines in the source material.

From 1849 to 1861, with significant intervals, Molly Tang also wrote her memoirs of her upbringing and youth. This article also uses these accounts as background for its examination of Molly Tang's self-presentation. Of course, whenever we

read memoirs, we must be aware that the writer is depicting things in retrospect, with all that this entails in terms of erroneous recollections and hindsight, selectivity, and an ambition to narrate within a particular genre. Tang's memoirs are a good example of this. Her narrative is detailed, featuring countless observations in her attempt to convey specific information about places and people. The fact that they are dedicated to her children indicates that her memoirs are also an account of their family and the things that shaped their mother's origins. However, they also have a literary ambition: they are interpretive and based on meaningful narratives (Marie Elisa Tang's memoirs 1849–61: *To My Children*



1. The Danish manor Nørre Vosborg is located close to the west coast of Denmark. Following land reforms in the late 1700s, many manors in West Jutland were closed. This was not, however, the case for Nørre Vosborg, a manor house that despite financial challenges became a focal point for new initiatives, development and not least festivity in the 1800s. The manor was then, as now, famous for its historic ambiance. It was the home of Molly Tang (1807–1838) from 1838 to her death in 1885. *Prospect: F. Richardt, circa 1865.*

(hereafter referred to as *Memoirs: Page*)). The memoirs were thus not only written for Molly Tang's own use but for the purpose of being shared with at least the daughters, while the diaries to a greater extent were kept private. It was however not uncommon during the period, as described for example by Rebecca Steinitz, that even primarily private diaries were sometimes shared (Steinitz 2011:77ff). Although the diary first and foremost seems to be a personal tool for Molly Tang, the same is true in her case. For instance, she says that she has read passages from the diary covering the early years in Copenhagen aloud to her adult daughters many years later (*Memoirs:53*).

The era in which Molly Tang lived was philosophically, artistically, and idealistically coloured by the golden age of Romanticism. It was a time when the acknowledgement and expression of emotions was key, accompanied by a fascination with, and recognition of, the uniqueness of the individual. The age was absorbed by the urge to understand the profound forces that impact a person's life: whether the driving force was positive and creative, ending in harmony; or destructive and restless, culminating in irresolution. "Profound emotional introspection" was a theme in the art and literature of the age (Berlin 1999:7; see also Busk-Jensen 2009; Baunvig 2018). Both diaries and memoirs must be understood in this context as a personal practice and as a genre. The nineteenth century has, not without reason, been described as the century of diaries, partly because the practice of keeping diaries and journals was so widespread in the middle and upper classes (in the homes of literacy) as individual forms of expression, partly because they also, especially towards the end of the cen-

tury, became popular as a printed literary genre in both a biographical and a fictional context (Steinitz 2011). In several ways, they were thus included as a tool both in the individual's self-examination and in a more collective development and processing of cultural forms and ideologies of the period (Steinitz 2011:6).

The early nineteenth century was also a time when family ideals were rooted in a modern understanding of the sequestered nuclear family as the natural centre of existence and society. In turn, the nuclear family encompassed various elements, including a division of male and female roles and spheres, within which the individual could achieve meaningful self-realization (Busk-Jensen 2009:85ff). These notions of emotion and family are often described as the ideals of bourgeois and intellectual upper- and middle-class urban environments. In recent years, however, manorial research in Scandinavia has, as described below, begun the description of how, during the nineteenth century, these ideals also made their way into manorial environments in the Scandinavian countries, albeit in other contexts and in forms that could be integrated into these environments. In general, Danish society was characterized by fundamental social changes during the nineteenth century, which also had an impact on Denmark's manor houses and the world of the owner families. Industry began to offer a reliable alternative to manorial life as a basis for wealth and prestige, and new kinds of elite, first and foremost the urban bourgeois elite, played an increasingly important role and influenced the ideals of the time (Rasmussen 2006).

Studies have thus examined the possible distinctions emerging in the period's man-

or environments, viewed in relation to the changes of the time in general but also to the period's mixed landscape of noble and bourgeois owner families (e.g. Andersen 2005; Boeskov 2013; 2017; Lyngby 2015; Sumner 2004). It is thus described in several contexts how owner families of both noble and bourgeois origin made use of expressions, for instance in their material surroundings, that communicated ideals identified by research as "middle class". However, it is important to point out that the same families also used expressions that research has identified as traditionally aristocratic (Boeskov 2017), and that perhaps precisely the union of these different characteristics in various combinations and degrees can be seen as a distinctive feature of manor environments of the time.

Molly Tang's diary provides insight into an individual story, which in practice consolidates urban life, manorial life and a reflection of contemporary forms of family. The diaries also express continuous self-reflection and an awareness of emotional life and its significance for the path through life of Molly Tang as an individual. The purpose of this article is, therefore, two-fold. Firstly, based on her own selection, it sets out to shed light on her concrete role and life. Research-wise, in recent decades the manorial milieus of the eighteenth and 19th centuries, manorial life and even the ladies of the manor have gained a certain amount of attention. However, it is striking that this attention has primarily been directed at certain types of manorial, or even castle environments: chiefly large manors, well-established milieus and long-standing noble families (e.g. Dyrmann 2021; Ilmakunnas 2012; Laursen 2009; 2017; Lyngby 2015; Rosenblad 2005; Rundquist

1989; Steinrud 2008; Venborg Pedersen 2005). Consequently, the research has quite often focused on examples of women from the aristocratic elite, and their cultural practices and characteristics.

In terms of representation, this reflects an imbalance, given that in Denmark, as in Scandinavia in general, the period naturally featured many medium-sized and small manorial environments too (<https://www.danskeherregaarde.dk/1900>; Ulväng 2019; Åström 1993). What is more, a number of manorial families were of bourgeois origin, and a number of these families' members, including Molly Tang at Nørre Vosborg, were even total novices in their role and formed by other milieus. Thus, one of the aims of this article is to put into perspective the role and function of a lady of a manor: in this case, as a practical leader of, and participant in the household and work processes, alongside her social duties as a hostess of a medium-sized manor far from the centre of power and the aristocratic networks.

Although several studies of ladies in manor environments involve the individual's perspective and personal observations, for instance, through extensive letter studies (e.g. Rundquist 1989; Steinrud 2008; Dyrmann 2021) precisely the perspective of emotional practice is not often at the centre. As the following analysis will hopefully illustrate, this perspective can however provide an insight into identity formation associated not just with individual circumstances but also probably in relation to ideals and different cultural environments of the time. The second aim of the article is therefore to create insight into Molly Tang's own perception of manorial life and her part in it, based on an examination of

the many emotional and reflective observations of which the diary is also full. These observations were prompted by interaction with others or challenges in relationships. They were prompted by her efforts to cope with and handle the tasks and roles of her life as a wife, mother and housewife. They were also prompted by her encounter with what might be referred to as inappropriate emotions: in other words, when, according to her diary entries, Molly Tang apparently experienced feelings inappropriate to a particular situation or context – for example (as previously mentioned), upon arrival at the manor, when happy, romantic feelings were clouded by unwelcome dark, feelings, which she dismissed as “caprices”. The article will thus link the two aspects – her practical role and her identity-related role – in a comprehensive examination of her life as an estate owner’s wife and lady of the manor.

Consequently, the article is interested in the nineteenth-century ideal female role which has been identified as middle-class or bourgeois, and it seeks to answer the question of how such ideals, on an individual level, were integrated in a manor environment. And, secondly, whether some of the almost contradictory qualities associated with this role could be manifested in the meeting with the manorial environment?

Female Ideals of the Nineteenth Century

Although different focus areas and main interests such as material surroundings, consumption, movements in public and private spheres, and patterns in everyday lives have been chosen for the different studies mentioned above of aristocratic manor environments and the women in them, be-

tween them they identify some characteristic practices and ideals. Central features are the roots of the noble communities in an ideal paternalistic understanding of society, affecting relations to, for instance, servants or the population of the local area; an active lifestyle in a distinguished public sphere; a strong awareness of lineage and historical roots; the identification with the family properties and houses; and the importance of connection with equal families and not least with court and royalty. For the study of practices and ideals of aristocratic women, all the above applies, but in a variant where the female descent and ability to produce the next generation and keep the lineage intact is emphasized (e.g. Trumbach 1978; Venborg Pedersen 2005; Rundquist 1989). In addition to this, a well-developed set of manners through upbringing that ensured the appropriate and specialized behaviour suitable for activities such as entertaining (e.g. Dyrmann 2021), combined with detailed knowledge of how to run a large household with authority (e.g. Rundquist 1989; Steinrud 2008). As mentioned, however, these characteristics are increasingly portrayed in integration with certain ideals of family and femininity often understood as bourgeois.

These ideals as a phenomenon and their connection with the development of the bourgeoisie and general society, of public and private spheres, open and closed households, are well described in research (e.g. Frykman & Löfgren 1979; Davidoff & Hall 1987; Poovey 1988; Gillis 1996; Hougaard 2008; Busk-Jensen 2009; Lyngby 2015; Baunvig 2018). For instance, the social and cultural historians Leonore Davidoff and Cathrine Hall’s studies of English middle-class homes of the early nineteenth

century shed light on the role of gender in general and ideals of femininity associated with domestic virtues in this period. They argue that such ideals were central to the shaping of the cultural characteristics and strategies of middle-class milieus and in some respects different from traditional ideals of the aristocracy (Davidoff & Hall 1987:19ff; Trumbach 1978).

The bourgeois female role is thus described in a number of studies as key to the notion of family at the time: as the loving mother with an instinct for maternal love and an understanding of children; as the housewife and the ever-present, governing figure in the home; and as the active force vis-à-vis the maintenance of loving feelings between family members, for instance by reinforcing the loving relationship between fathers and children (e.g. Busk-Jensen 2009; Davidoff & Hall 1987:329ff). This reflected to a great extent the age's expectations of romantic marriage founded on love, which created another task mainly for the housewife, namely, to pave the way for the young family members to fall in love with appropriate partners (Gay 1986). The American historian John R. Gillis refers to these emotionally-related areas of responsibility, which were principally the domain of the female head of the family, as "the labors of love" (Gillis 1996:144ff).

While the responsibilities were many for the housewives and mothers of the period, it was at the same time considered a female virtue to show gentleness and a certain personal self-annihilation in sacrifice for the family's well-being (e.g. Davidoff & Hall 1987:152f, 395). Likewise, to exercise indirect influence through femininity rather than direct discussion, power and position in the family and in a po-

tential family business (Davidoff & Hall 1987:183). Ideologies of gender were reflected through various channels and institutions of the age as shown by, for instance, the professor of English Mary Poovey in her analysis of law, medicine, care work such as nursing, and not least the art and literature of the age (Poovey 1988), and the women – and men – of the time were confronted with and reproduced such expectations in many contexts.

Pre-Manor Life

Before Molly Tang became the lady of Nørre Vosborg, her world consisted of central Copenhagen and a broad network of relatives and other relationships. Marie Elisa Fenger was born in 1807, the first child of Johannes Fenger (1767–1829), a merchant and manufacturer, and Christine Lorentze Meinert (1779–1834), who went on to have two more siblings. The family lived in the central neighbourhood of Christianshavn. Her parents owned a large townhouse – called Abraham Lehns Gård in Strandgade – from which they also ran the soap manufacturing and trading company that Molly Tang's paternal grandfather had founded under the name Borre & Fenger. Molly Tang's maternal grandparents had also run a business in Christianshavn, and the Fenger and Meinert families were connected by several inter-marriages, including that of Molly's parents. Accordingly, Molly Tang grew up with grandparents and a number of Copenhagen uncles, aunts and cousins as a close, integral part of her everyday life. Her "Grandmama", her maternal grandmother Maren Kirstine Meinert (b. Noe, 1755–1842), who moved into a large flat in the Fenger family's townhouse in 1819, became a particularly key and unifying figure.

The neighbourhood Christianshavn was originally built in the seventeenth century as part of the fortifications of the capital and its port. Although the district to some extent maintained its function as a military area, in Molly Fenger's childhood Christianshavn was a residential, trade and industrial district integrated in central Copenhagen. The demography was mixed, but especially the prominent street Strandgade, where the Fenger family lived, housed a number of large townhouses built and for centuries owned by shipowners, large merchants in the overseas trade, and the upper class in general. The Fengers thus belonged to the upper-middle class of Christianshavn, but as was the case for many businesses at the time, it was a challenge for Molly Fenger's father to maintain a healthy economy. The first decades of the nineteenth century were a time of crisis in Denmark and not least in Copenhagen. The Napoleonic Wars had cost the country a great deal and Copenhagen became the target of a violent English bombardment in 1807, which caused great destruction and expense to the city. Subsequently, inflation continued to grow until the point in which the state in 1813 had to introduce drastic monetary reforms, and there was a general crisis in all trades. The Danish king at the time, Frederik VI, and in general the state government of the period, encountered some resistance from the increasingly influential Copenhagen bourgeoisie and intellectuals.

All the Copenhagen branches of the Fenger and Meinert families more or less belonged to the capital's upper-middle class, making their living as factory owners, wholesalers, clergymen, doctors and civil servants (*Diary: 1829–1837; Memoirs: 1849–61; Barfod 1922*). Molly

Tang's memoirs reveal that, in the 1820s and 1830s, the family circle held both conservative and modern views, and that things got heated when the older conservative uncles and the young uncles, who were "Freethinkers" and passionate advocates of the liberal ideas of the age, gathered around the dinner table. This included discussions about Frederik VI's reign during the period of crisis and the economic conditions for the trade class to which parts of the family belonged. The mixed attitude towards the royal house led, among other things – as the middle-aged Molly Tang concluded in her memoirs – to equally mixed emotions for her as a child, when the extended family's otherwise beloved Sunday trip took them to the park Frederiksberg Have, where they could experience with a crowd of cheering Copenhageners the royal family sailing on the canals of the park (*Memoirs: 52*).

The memoirs depict the adult women who surrounded the young Molly Fenger during her childhood and adolescence in Copenhagen as efficient, skilled housewives with a strong work ethic, a sense of order and countless practical chores to see to, including, especially in the case of her grandmothers' generation, active involvement in the family business. As described in an English context by Davidoff and Hall, the generation that Molly Tang belonged to was among the first to point to increasingly separate spheres for men and women, including the separation of women from the professional business of the family and a female focus on the house, family, and a suitable social life, as a distinction of the middle class. Davidoff and Hall show that it was even a matter that could cause conflict between the generations, who wondered with some indignation at each

other's respective focus areas and understanding of good behaviour (Davidoff & Hall 1987:357ff). This development is confirmed to a certain extent in Molly Tang's memoirs, where the practical regime of the previous generations is emphasized, and where it is suggested that Molly herself had some difficulty fitting into this – although she remembered it with some respect.

It is however characteristic that, looking back, Molly Tang highlighted her female ancestors' appropriate preference for domesticity as opposed to sociability or an exclusive lifestyle. This is, for example, how she describes her maternal grandmother:

My grandmother was an effective, enterprising, extremely capable housewife, who demanded of her children and subordinates the same orderliness and meticulousness as her own, and they learned at an early stage that they were not in this world to be posh ladies⁵ (Memoirs: 5).

Inevitably, however, a woman's position in this social circle necessitated a number of social activities such as visits and dinner parties. The memoirs tell us that mastering all that this entailed, either as a guest or a hostess, and in general running a household befitting one's status, was a task that did not come equally naturally to all the women in the family but was a regular part of the task portfolio. The fact that it even took up quite a lot of time, at least in Molly's adolescence, is confirmed by the ongoing diary entries from her youth, which reveal that the family either received guests, paid visits or attended other social gatherings almost every day. On the rare occasion that nothing was on the programme, it was quite often because one was "indisposed" due to illness, toothache or the like.⁶

It was back in the 1820s that the young Molly Fenger began keeping a Diary, first sporadically, and then every day. The daily entries from 1829 established a form with which the diaries would comply throughout her life, a form which, at least thematically, in many ways can be recognized from other known diaries from the period (Steinitz 2011:13ff). Each evening, or perhaps the following morning, she would open the notebook dedicated to that year's entries and describe the day's activities from morning to evening in anything from a few lines to entire pages. But the entries featured far more than just events. For instance, the description of a day might also explain with whom she had spent time during the day – quite often followed by an assessment of what it had been like.⁷ She also assessed the day's activities, both duties and pleasures. How much had she accomplished, and how demanding had it been? Had an experience been enriching, and what had made a special impression in a sermon, a novel or an outing? She recorded and commented on news from near and far, on the day's letters or visits, and on weather and health. Finally come what really provides an insight into an emotional practice: the impressions we get of Molly's changing moods, whether expressed between the lines and reflected in her choice of words, humorous comments and anxious outbursts, or articulated in actual descriptions and evaluations of the emotions themselves.

If the diaries and memoirs are anything to go by, Molly Fenger's everyday life in Copenhagen was rather active. Between the ages of 7 and 14, she attended Christianshavns Døttreskole (The Christianshavn School for Daughters) to-

gether with other upper- and middle-class girls. We learn from later accounts that, while she struggled with school *life*, she found school *work* extremely easy and much preferred it to domestic duties (Memoirs: 31f, 41, 50, 53). After leaving school, she continued to study subjects such as language and art, and she was a keen reader. Her family and social circle kept up with all the latest novels, poetry and drama, reading them both in groups and alone. Various types of needlework occupied many hours. The work was extensive and varied, and Molly, her mother, her sister and the women in their circle would sew both by themselves and together. They worked mainly on garments and accessories, and on personal projects. The city's offerings – theatre, art exhibitions, going to church to hear particular preachers, shopping and outings – also featured on the programme of everyday pleasures and activities. There was also constant involvement in household tasks such as laundry, spring cleaning, gardening, pickling and so on (Diary: 1829). Last but not least, there were the endless visits to this or that home in what was at the time a small Copenhagen city centre, and during the summer to country homes of their social acquaintances in Copenhagen's hinterland, which could involve travelling back and forth several times a day.⁸

Even though young Molly Fenger's world largely comprised the upper-middle-class milieu and everything that Copenhagen could offer, there was one place which, from a very early stage, represented the moon vis-à-vis her Copenhagen planet: The manor of Nørre Vosborg in West Jutland. Her extended Copenhagen family was linked to the manor's Tang

family in several ways. Molly's grandmother's family had roots in West Jutland, and a long friendship with the Tang family had resulted in several marriages between the families (Barfod 1922). The most significant was that of Molly's maternal aunt, Marie Cathrine Tang (née Meinert), who in 1797 became the estate owner's wife at Nørre Vosborg. There were frequent letters between the manor and the Copenhagen homes. The aunt and cousins sometimes made the long journey to the capital, staying in the townhouses of Christianshavn on week-long summer visits. Sometimes the Copenhageners visited them. For example, at the age of 17, Molly travelled to West Jutland with her maternal uncle (Memoirs: 559ff).

However, the middle-aged Molly Tang's recollection of her childhood in the memoirs features an interesting narrative that goes beyond her regular contact with her relatives and her interest in their life at the West Jutland manor house reflected in the diaries. It is the story of a special personal longing and an inner leaning towards Nørre Vosborg. In retrospective terms, this journey towards the manor began with the warm-hearted friendship, which the school-girl Molly struck up with her West Jutland cousin, Mathilde, who was two years older:⁹ “her glowing descriptions of Nørre Vosborg filled my mind with a curious longing for the West”¹⁰ (Memoirs: 31).

Molly Tang's memoirs are not only descriptive, but also at times analytical in their portrayal of the emotional life and personal development of her childhood and youth. Thus, in her understanding of herself at the time, she often described herself as a child with “a timorous and apprehensive spirit”¹¹ or as a young person who was almost out

of place, restlessly longing for something different (e.g. *Memoirs*: 38, 40, 49, 57). As the memoirs progress in chronological order, this longing becomes increasingly associated with Nørre Vosborg. The older Molly recalled that the young Molly keenly, but somewhat confusedly, daydreamed of adventure, freedom and travel, but also, more precisely, was affected by a zeitgeist which, in reaction to Denmark's strained conditions during the Napoleonic Wars and economic crises, focused on past greatness and longed for a revival of historical Nordic glory (e.g. *Memoirs*: 56–58). Nørre Vosborg could apparently deliver all of this: "There was, however, a knight's castle, there were ancient memories, there were legends, and there was freedom. There was everything I longed for"¹² (*Memoirs*: 57).

The familiar reality in Copenhagen was disturbed when Molly Fenger and her younger brother and sister lost both their parents within the space of a few years, while Molly was in her twenties and her younger siblings were teenagers. Although this meant that they had to sell the soap business, and that the three siblings were now on their own, they continued to live in Christianshavn, surrounded by their family and network, and to a great extent their lives carried on as before. The major change occurred when, following her second visit to Nørre Vosborg, Molly got engaged to her cousin, the then estate owner Andreas Evald Meinert Tang, and became Molly Tang after their wedding in December 1837 (Graugaard 2014a: 199ff. *Diary*: November 1837–April 1838).

Everyday Life at Nørre Vosborg

In 1824, as the third generation of estate owners in the Tang family, Andreas Evald

Meinert Tang (whom Molly called Evald) had taken over Nørre Vosborg manor. Since the thirteenth century, the manor had been under the ownership of a number of Danish nobles, and a few bourgeois families. In 1786, the two brothers Søren and Peder Tang (Evald Tang's grandfather) bought Nørre Vosborg at auction. Their story was a special one. They were born on one of Nørre Vosborg's copyhold farms as sons of a copyholder family, but came into money, moved up the social ladder and eventually became estate owners.

When Evald Tang took it over, Nørre Vosborg was not one of the biggest estates in Denmark, but it was significantly large and important in regional terms. During the tenure of Evald and his wife, it cemented its status as a stately home and one of the region's gathering points and historical highlights (Boeskov 2017:32ff, 134ff). When Molly Tang arrived in April 1838, she came to an active manorial milieu. From the very start of Evald Tang's tenure, the estate's finances represented a fundamental challenge. However, by 1838, he had been working for a decade to get the estate on its feet and was both practically and politically involved in the development of the agriculture and progress both of the estate and of the region as a whole. When he arrived with his new wife, the manor buildings were also being refurbished, and a new wing for the manorial family had been planned and initiated (Graugaard 2014a:200).

Changes in the Danish manorial landscape during the period led on many estates to an even greater degree of large-scale agriculture, which also included, for example, estate dairies and other small industries. This required a large number

of agricultural workers, and the period is thus known for the many employees on the estates engaged both in agriculture and as domestic servants (Boeskov 2021; Turner 1962). As in many nineteenth-century manorial environments, the Nørre Vosborg estate was a gathering point for a large number of people. A leaseholder couple by the name of Ægidius, who were the same age as the owners, lived on the estate in the tenant dwelling. They were in charge of a staff of around twenty men and women, who attended to running the estate and the leaseholder couple's household, while a small group of gardeners and artisans dealt with the maintenance of the house and garden. As previously mentioned, Tang's mother/Molly's maternal aunt, the previous estate

owner's wife, still lived in the manor, where she had her own chambers and a personal "lady's companion" as her servant. The owner couple's household staff included a housekeeper, a cook and a scullery maid, together with a coachman and servant (Diary: 1838 and Ulfborg Parish Census 1834 and 1840). The estate also encompassed a number of copyholds and industries with all the staff that these required (Graugaard 2014b). Additionally, the manor was surrounded by a network of family, acquaintances and business partners, who frequently gathered at Nørre Vosborg for family get-togethers or general socializing. Molly Tang now assumed the important role of the lady of the manor and the practical role of the female head of the household.



2 & 3. Portraits of estate owner Andreas Evald Meinert Tang and his wife Marie Elisa Tang, born Fenger, called Molly, from the year 1838 in which she was married and moved from Copenhagen to 'the far west' and Nørre Vosborg as the new lady of the manor. The portrait painter Rask stayed at the manor house in December 1838, where he painted the young couple. Molly Tang's diary reveals that it was not a distinct success. Rask talked willingly and often about his own talent, and it was boring and time-consuming to pose for him. In addition, the result was disappointing: "*My Portrait finished. E[vald] unfortunately not satisfied*" (Wednesday 19.12.1838). *Portraits of Andreas Evald Meinert Tang and Molly Tang. Portrait Painter Rask, 1838. Owner: Sverre Barfod.*

Unsurprisingly, everyday life now took on a different shape from life in Copenhagen (all examples of the course of everyday life in this section come from the diary's description of Molly Tang's first year at Nørre Vosborg, *Diary: April 1838–April 1839*¹³). Her social circle was new, the household was new and there was a lot to learn. Molly Tang had married a busy estate owner who, in addition, was heavily involved in the development of his local area. For a large part of the time, her "beloved Evald" was busy with his duties, development plans, travel and social gatherings, which did not include his wife. Many evenings she went to bed alone and, whenever this happened, expressed how much she missed her husband. For many days, she was left alone to deal with all the new matters at the manor, including some of the responsibilities that the estate owner himself took care of when he was at home. For example, ten days after arriving, when Evald Tang had driven to one of the nearby villages, the young lady from Copenhagen had to juggle the slaughter of a cow with a polite conversation with a wealthy farming couple who had turned up unannounced (*Diary: 24 April 1838*).¹⁴ This is a striking situation, which in many ways perfectly captures the everyday life that Molly Tang entered into as the lady of a medium-sized manor, entailing as it did both practical and social aspects.

Of course, the days at the manor varied, and everyday life differed from the parties, celebrations and other special occasions. According to the diary, however, most days included a number of practical activities associated with the housekeeping of the manor. She describes how a group of people in the household worked together on major tasks. In this context, Molly Tang

often refers to "we" or "our": for example, "we" washed, or "our" laundry. On occasions, the context suggests that, in practice, "we" sometimes indicates that Molly Tang kept an eye on, and probably organized the work, but that it was the housekeeper or maids who actually did it, and that on other occasions she herself joined in such tasks. Most of the time, however, she does not distinguish linguistically between the two types of tasks and her practical involvement or non-involvement. This may reflect not only the notion of a (working) community at the manor, albeit with an internal division of roles and tasks, but also the fact that, in principle, the lady of the house was in charge of all household tasks.

Everyday tasks also involved communication with employees and the hiring of staff. The diary often indicates that the housekeeper was a key figure, and probably a link between the lady of the house and the household – as it was her usual function in manor environments and larger households (Turner 1962:117ff; Davidoff & Hall 1987:383ff; and e.g., *Diary: 15 May, 24 July and 19 September 1838*). In the diary, Molly Tang also expresses concern about the well-being of staff members in the event of illness or other issues. By and large, the state of health of the entire household including family members and what care might be required was clearly an important issue for Molly Tang, both emotionally and in terms of her responsibility. The relationship with the estate's employees and subordinates was thus, on the one hand, characterized by responsibility and care, and on the other hand by a well-defined hierarchy, where the lady of the house was positioned as one of the leading figures in the estate community.

Molly's activities were influenced by or bound up with those of her husband. She entertained his guests or business partners. She was involved in major projects at the manor, for example the construction and decoration of the new manorial family wing. Occasionally she also relieved him of his administrative duties. Like life in Copenhagen, life in Nørre Vosborg also featured extensive socializing with the surrounding network, either in the shape of guests at Nørre Vosborg or Tang family visits to people in the local area. They entertained the nearest family in the area at the manor house several times a week, and the Tangs often reciprocated these visits. There were also occasional visits from or to further-flung acquaintances, business partners or the estate's tenant families, not to mention parties to celebrate life events and special occasions.

If the diaries are to be believed, the first year at the manor was a busy one, with less time for leisure pursuits than in Copenhagen. There are occasional references to reading aloud, but the frequent records of, and thoughts about, the most recent publications of the time etc., which figured in her youthful years, are absent from 1838–39. Occasionally, amongst all the various chores, there was still time for needlework. The difference, however, was that this only rarely involved personal projects such as making Christmas gifts, but was devoted much more to practical tasks – repairs or sewing curtains etc. Remarkably, in her diary entries during that first year, Molly Tang does not express any longing for books, theatre or art exhibitions. There was apparently just one activity she missed in her new life at the manor in West Jutland: regular church attendance and

the religious stimulation it provided. Her family and social circle in Copenhagen attended church regularly. The diaries indicate that for Molly only illness stood in her way. In contrast, there are many indications that the attitude at Nørre Vosborg, to which she had to submit upon arrival, was that one often attended church on Sundays, but that, even more often, other considerations took priority. If things were busy on the farm, if there were guests to attend to, if the carriage needed to be used for some other purpose etc., Molly did not make it to church. On countless Saturdays, in a state of anxious anticipation, she would attempt to ascertain whether she could attend the Sunday service, and the final decision would trigger either great disappointment or great joy.

The Head of the Manorial Household

The lady of the manor's role as leader of the household and organizer of its activities has been described in detail in Angela Rundquist's insightful book about women's life in the aristocratic, noble milieu of nineteenth-century Sweden (Rundquist 1989). In this milieu, the noblewoman was, first and foremost, a leading figure in the household. She made the overall decisions, took care of the administrative aspects and supervised the work. With few exceptions, she did not take on the practical tasks herself, but was ultimately responsible for their successful execution. This picture is confirmed in the equally noble, but slightly more modest manorial milieu, which is the subject of Marie Steinrud's interesting study (Steinrud 2008). Again, the ladies are portrayed, primarily, as leaders of the household who followed the cycle of the agricultural year, but also as occasional par-

ticipants in the execution of tasks (Steinrud 2008:135ff). In this context too, there is no doubt that household management was one of the clearly defined and indisputable areas of responsibility for the manor's female head: an area of responsibility which daughters in that milieu were raised to tackle efficiently and with authority.

In studies of the English primarily urban middle-class families and the associated feminine role, an interesting observation is made of certain challenges of household management. There is some contradiction between the expectations that the women were met with when it came to domestic and "wifely" qualities such as feminine softness, motherly kindness, gentleness, self-sacrifice, and separation from the family livelihood vs. the practical reality of a larger household, where the housewife had to act as an authoritarian and effective household leader (Davidoff & Hall 1987: e.g. 383ff, 395). As mentioned above, studies show that the latter was not least essential in connection with manorial households which by definition were large and required supervision of a considerable variety of work tasks. For a manor the size of Nørre Vosborg the household management was also closely linked to other practical and economic activities of the estate.

The diary entries relating to Nørre Vosborg paint a clear picture of how, from her very first days on the estate, Molly Tang was expected to take the lead in the manor's household and to participate in the work. Activities and ruminations described in the diary reveal that not only did the manorial community expect it, but that to a great extent Molly Tang expected it of herself. This expectation was very likely coloured by her memory of her female rel-

atives in their homes in Copenhagen and her recollection of their excellent abilities as housewives. Growing up in Copenhagen among them had no doubt prepared her for both domestic and social tasks. However, the household of the manor, and perhaps in particular, its association with the agrarian cycle and the manor as a gathering point for the area, entailed many new duties. Molly Tang threw herself into all this, not only with a will to learn and to tackle the task, but also with many worries, especially in the difficult early months. For example, a few weeks after arriving at the manor, she wrote:

I am feeling so anxious this afternoon. Everything weighs heavily on me. I have to start governing this household, and I simply do not know the ins and outs¹⁵ (Diary: 27 April 1838. Also, e.g.: 17, 18, 29 and 30 April, 5 May, 1 September).

The result of her efforts and her mood were both erratic. On some days, the reflective moment spent writing her diary revealed that she had emerged victorious from her struggle with her duties: for example, when she was given the task of organizing a staff party. The party was a success, everyone had a great time and danced and would not go to bed (Diary: 11 August 1838). On other days she made mistakes, and these occasions and her general sense of utter uselessness in the face of the well-oiled manorial machinery were particularly overwhelming. For example, just a few days after the successful party, following an oversight, she wrote that she lay awake most of the night, weeping over her own "ineptitude" (Diary: 23 August 1838).

Though Molly Tang had to play her new role alone, she was not entirely lacking

practical assistance and guidance in the early days. The manor had a highly proficient housekeeper, from whom the young wife learned in the early days with great reverence, when it came to the practical tasks. She observed the efficient work being done and wanted to acquire the same skills (Diary: 19 April 1838). Molly Tang had also brought her sister, Johanne Marie Cathrine Fenger (1817–1873) (a.k.a. Hanne), who was ten years younger, with her to her new home. Hanne too had to adjust to the new environment but was eventually able to help relieve her sister of her responsibilities.¹⁶ Also available were women with first-hand experience of life as a lady of the manor at Nørre Vosborg, so it was obvious to seek guidance from them. First and foremost, there was Evald Tang's mother, Marie Cathrine Meinert, and secondly, his sister, Mathilde Krarup (1805–1899), who had grown up in the manor and was now an experienced housewife. She was married to Pastor Ove Krarup (1799–1862), the parish clergyman in the neighbouring village of Ulfborg, meaning that the couple lived in a rectory just a few kilometres from the manor.

As previously mentioned, since childhood and the Tang children's visits to Copenhagen, Mathilde Krarup had been Molly's bosom friend, and in the middle-aged Molly Tang's memoirs Mathilde is associated with the young Molly's passionate conception of the glories of the ancient manor and her attraction to the west of Denmark. The friendship continued after Molly's arrival to the manor, the Krarup couple soon became a reliable and affectionate anchor for Molly, and she spent a lot of time with them. Her mother-in-law – whom Molly Tang called “Mother” – was

an equally constant presence in her life. Unlike the busy husband, most of the time her mother-in-law was physically present at the manor with Molly Tang. According to the diary entries, the two women met up on a daily basis. Her mother-in-law also attended most of the social gatherings with the young couple, whether at home or away. Some entries dating from the first months at the manor also indicate that Molly Tang sought her mother-in-law's advice whenever she was worried about household matters, and that she received a friendly response.¹⁷ However, the general impression is that the new and the old lady of Nørre Vosborg did not share the practical household management, but that those tasks were Molly Tang's territory and the dowager had withdrawn from such responsibility.

There seems to have been a spirit of friendliness between the two women in this early period of their divided community, and both parties seem to have understood and accepted the division of roles. Nonetheless, it was hard for Molly Tang when on more than one occasion it was clearly apparent that she was the less experienced, both at the manor and in the familial relationship – something that happened, for example, when her mother-in-law and sister-in-law were together. She bemoaned her troubles, for instance, in her diary on 17 May 1838. Evald had been away, and the Krarups had been at the manor in the evening. Molly was annoyed because she felt that her mother-in-law treated her like a weak person the moment Mathilde was present. During the evening she had felt rather dejected in the company.¹⁸ But then her beloved Evald came home: “and then everything is fine” (Diary: 17 May 1838).¹⁹

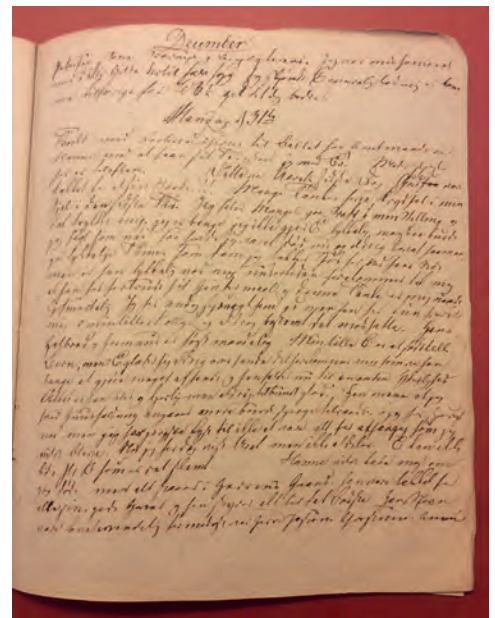
As both this situation and the sorrows and joys described above associated with trying her hand at household chores illustrate, the diaries, perhaps more than ever before, were also a forum for Molly Tang's self-assessment and the depiction of her emotional life. In addition to her brooding over the household, the diary also recounts many other emotional situations during these early days at the manor – both the joyful and welcome, and the troublesome “caprices”.

Molly Tang and Her “Caprices”

So, everything was fine when Evald was by Molly's side. The feelings of love, happy moments and harmony between the two constituted a favourite subject in the diary, and there was an undeniable honeymoon spirit. On 8 June 1838, she fondly described how her Evald got up early to depart, but more than once had to return to her in the bedroom to say goodbye. She slept in and then drove with her sister to the rectory to pay a visit to her sister-in-law. On the way, thinking of her beloved, she enjoyed the mild spring weather, even though it was actually raining. Aware of the uniqueness of the manorial milieu, she felt like “the happiest wife”²⁰ as she drove across the old bridge over the moat, enjoying the fragrance of the balsam poplars above her head (Diary: 8 June 1838). Overall, the relationship between the spouses regularly gave rise to emotional and evocative descriptions. Molly Tang expressed joy and gratitude when her husband was supportive and caring. She described her sense of loss and loneliness when he was away. She expressed concern when he was ill or out in bad weather. She also described how awful she felt on the rare occasion there was any

bad feeling between them, or he was in a bad mood, and how relieved she was when harmony was restored.

Another, much darker thread that runs through the descriptions of her moods in her diary is a recurring melancholy or bad temper.²¹ She records this tendency a few times most months as a troublesome element in her summary of the day in question. Moreover, the descriptions of her low spirits are often followed by comments that give the impression that Molly Tang had



4. The diary was a constant companion for Molly Tang throughout most of her adult life. The pages are closely written and contain details about big and small issues and about both the outer and inner life. At the end of the year, as here in 1838, she usually took stock of joys and sorrows in the year that had passed, and thanked God for His grace and patience despite all the worries. *Marie Elisa Tang's diary, 31 December 1838, Personal archive, The Danish National Archives.*

found herself hovering between what she thought she *should* do and what she had *actually done*. It was usually in situations where she considered she should have done something better or differently that this depressed mood cropped up. But the diary also features interesting examples of the fact that it was these very feelings that emerged in a given situation, which she considered to be inappropriate, and which then led to the depressed feeling of having failed.

In addition to adapting to new roles, her new home, housekeeping and new relationships, the wedding was soon followed by yet another demanding change: pregnancy and the birth of the couple's first daughter Christine in October. The diary often features references to fatigue, discomfort, and malaise during the pregnancy. Even though the people around her seem to have encouraged her to rest, there was nothing that triggered the crestfallen moments more than the sense of not being able to be useful. If she considered that she had been idle or lazy – for example, on the rare occasions that she slept in the morning, took a rest, or had not worked sufficiently hard during the day – she often expressed concern and despondency:

I was totally downhearted about myself that day. I bring no joy, accomplished nothing, and could so easily be dispensed with. I am just in the way here. Alas, if only things were different!²² (Diary: 6 August 1838).

After her daughter was born, motherhood and family life did not always engender the desired and expected feelings. Discrepancy between what she thought she should feel and what she actually felt emerged in this

context too. For example, one day, shortly after giving birth and a period of being confined to bed, when she resumed everyday life, she felt tired and anxious, despite all her intentions to be delighted about the wonderful events. In the evening, alone with her diary, she bewailed her troubles and the fact that her mood was what it *could* be and not what it *should* be. She blamed herself for not sufficiently appreciating the well-being of her child and the grace of God and went so far as to refer to herself as “bad” (Diary: 23 October 1838). She also remarked on the new family's first Christmas Eve at Nørre Vosborg. Bustle, but also a positive sense of working together had prevailed for many days, and now all her nearest and dearest came together in the home of the estate-owner couple, ate together and celebrated Christmas at the manor. It was exactly what Molly Tang had wanted, but, frustratingly and inappropriately, some of the expected and deepest feelings were absent. Accordingly, when the Christmas festivities were over, she wrote:

It was the very picture of a Christmas Eve that I had been imagining for some time. But external circumstances can be misleading. The best, the heartfelt joy was lacking²³ (Diary: 24 December 1838).

The picture is one of an emotional practice, which not only reflects certain expectations of her own skills and behaviour, but also, in no uncertain terms, her own moods and ways of feeling. In Molly Tang's opinion, certain moods – for example, those associated with the romantic bond between spouses, with a feeling of happiness or fervent gratitude for life's gifts – were not merely more *acceptable*; it seems they were also

expected in certain situations, in which any absence of them triggered troubled reflection and negative self-assessment.

The constant interplay between records of the day's events and her emotional evaluation provides us with an insight into something significant about being, or perhaps rather becoming, a lady of the manor in the mid-nineteenth century – at least in Molly Tang's case. On the last day of an eventful 1838, taking stock of her situation in her diary, she starts in a spirit of dismay: "I feel a lack of strength in my position, and that depresses me" (Diary: 31 December 1838).²⁴ In the lines that follow, she evaluates various key aspects of this position and elaborates on the challenges it posed to her. These ruminations summarize and to a great extent confirm the aspects of her new life as a lady of the manor, which she had been grappling with and worrying about during the year.

There was the marriage. Her beloved Evald was her be-all and end-all. Nonetheless, she was scared she could not make him sufficiently happy. There was parenthood. She appreciated having a lovely child, but worried about family life, because the relationship between child and father was not always as deep and heartfelt as she wished. Above all, of course, there was the bothersome household, which she still did not feel she was on top of. She had been advised to seek more guidance, but she was reluctant to follow that advice. In her own assessment, she had already sought more than enough guidance – probably from her mother-in-law – and feared losing her autonomy as the manager of the household if she asked for more. In other words, Molly Tang's position in life as a lady of the manor involved the huge, mul-

tifaceted task of running a manorial household, with all that this entailed in terms of practical and social tasks and doing so with strength and autonomy. In keeping with the ideals of femininity and family of the time – and apparently her own expectation – this was also associated with the ability to play the role of wife and mother and, in general, to be the rallying point for the family and, not least, to do so when under the influence of certain moods and deep feelings.

It is thus interesting to observe that Molly Tang on this occasion and throughout the year identifies both certain domestic virtues, the responsibility for the so-called "labors of love" (Gillis 1996:144ff.) and the need to stand strong and powerful at the head of the household, as central to her position and as areas of responsibility that she felt had to coexist in her filling of this position. At this point in her life, the encounter with the role as the lady of the manor was generally not perceived as harmonious. Her strong desire to live up to both practical standards and emotional ideals was challenged by the realities of everyday life and what she experienced to be her own personal limitations.

1861 – A Seasoned Lady of the Manor?

Every new beginning is difficult. But, as previously mentioned, the continuing story of the activities of the Tangs at Nørre Vosborg reveals how the spouses became increasingly efficient in their joint efforts in an active period in the manor's history. Even after just a few years, Molly Tang's diaries begin to reflect that she was increasingly getting to grips with her various roles.

Many years later, in 1861 at the age of 54, she completed her memoirs of her



5. Molly Tang c. 1860. An active but also difficult period in the history of the manor. Most days, Molly Tang was the quiet driving force that got the manor machinery running with its many activities, guests, household and not least six young daughters. *Portrait of Molly Tang, c. 1860. Photo: Tönnies, Aalborg. The Royal Danish Library.*

childhood and youth. As we know, they are all about life before the manor. But the final pages also feature her memory and reflection of her first personal encounter with Nørre Vosborg when, at the age of 17, she accompanied her uncle on a trip there. As she remembered it, her first wondrous impression was probably influenced unrealistically by the 17-year-old girl's fanciful expectations of Nørre Vosborg, which she had been longing to see for quite some

time. But part of this “enchantment” was still intact in the 54-year-old Molly Tang’s experience of this place that had now been her home for 23 years (Memoirs: 59–63). The memoirs conclude with a regret (more of this later), because 1861 and the years thereabout were not an easy time.

As an estate owner, Evald Tang was an inventive and active person, and he played a major role in the development of the area and its agriculture, infrastructure, organization, and political conditions (Graugaard 2014a&b; Boeskov 2017). Throughout his adult life, and thus also in the 1860s, he was busy and worked from early morning to late evening. He was constantly on the road in connection with his activities, not least because he also had a career in national politics, which often required his presence in parliament in Copenhagen. His struggle to establish a solid financial position for the manor or at least to keep it just about afloat never succeeded, though, and the 1860s were especially tough. In 1865 it got to the point where the estate was placed under administration (Schacke 2014). During the same period, Tang’s health gradually deteriorated, posing an increasing threat to himself and his family during the 1860s until his death in 1868.²⁵

At the same time, in many ways life was flourishing and busy at the manor house. Evald and Molly Tang had no fewer than seven daughters, of which six survived childhood. In 1861, their ages ranged from 15 to 23. At this point they were all unmarried and lived at home, their lives taken up with education, language, music, needlework, literature etc. under the supervision of their mother. They also took an active part in the social life of the area and socializing with other young people of their cir-

cle. The manor itself hosted many meetings and events associated with Evald Tang's activities and, generally speaking, formed a setting for social events and parties for family members and networks. Over the years, Evald and Molly Tang had established Nørre Vosborg's status in the area, which made the Tangs obvious representatives when any dignitaries visited West Jutland (Boeskov 2014; 2017). In this respect, 1861 was a particular highlight, when the Danish King Frederik VII, his wife and a huge entourage stayed at the manor for a week while on a summer visit to the area. The dowager, Tang's mother, had died in 1855, but a few years earlier the Tangs had a detached house built – "Vosborglille" – near the main building as a home for the estate owner's elder brother, Peder Tang (1797–1876) and his small family and household, just as Molly Tang's sister, Aunt Hanne was still part of the extended family and household in 1861. Despite all the challenges, the manor still had a large farm to run and a large household and staff. All in all, the manor formed a setting for the lives of approximately 50 people (see, e.g., Ulfborg Parish Census 1860).

Even in 1861, Molly Tang was faithfully keeping her diary. Her records of the manorial life to which she belonged indicate that she was very much the stable figure in its midst, while her husband and, to some extent, her daughters led more outgoing lives. If we compare her diary entries from the first year at the manor with those from 1861, the number of her tasks and challenges which she describes was no smaller, but her evaluation of her own capacity to tackle them is somewhat different.

To put the comparison in a nutshell, in 1861 Molly Tang comes across as a sea-

soned household manager. She was still personally involved in certain practical tasks – particularly laundry and, in general, anything to do with the textiles of the house (see also Rundquist 1989:194). However, it would seem that it was the management of the domestic servants, the planning of the practical tasks and the weekly book-keeping of the household's accounts that constituted her main focus in the household (Diary: 1861). The tone of the diary suggests that the years had invested her with the authority she felt she was lacking in 1838. With a sense of leadership, she made notes of, for example, the dynamics among her domestic servants (e.g., Diary: 30 July 1861), apparently not hesitating to reprimand or give praise where it was due (e.g., Diary: 13 and 20 July, 9 August 1861) and efficiently making sure that the staff and their jobs were taken care of, for example, in the event of illness (e.g., Diary: December 1861).

In addition to the authority that came with experience, the practical explanation why many tasks were delegated may also have been that Molly Tang now had to take care of many other matters. In 1861, notes of manorial operations and agricultural routines come across as stable throughout her diary. As already mentioned, the estate owner himself was frequently absent, and even though operations were entrusted to a farm manager, the attention she pays to the annual agricultural cycle, animals, dairy and employees testifies to the fact that she was involved in the daily routines. Planning and holding the many social events for which Nørre Vosborg had gradually become a hub also took up a great deal of Molly Tang's time. There were many of these events, and some of them



6. The household accounts and thus the overview of the household was one of the indisputable responsibilities of a manor house lady. As an experienced household manager in 1861, Molly Tang kept her accounts every Saturday. After Molly Tang, her daughter Christine Valeur, born Tang, became the lady of the house, and she is here captured at her desk at Nørre Vosborg in 1903 concentrating on the accounts. *Sketch by unknown artist from Nørre Vosborg's estate archive. "Mrs. Valeur at the accounts 1903"*.

were extraordinarily large. The royal visit has already been mentioned. It had also become a practice at Nørre Vosborg several times a year, in celebration of special family or national occasions, to assemble a large number of people in the house or garden (Boeskov 2010, 2014 & 2017:191ff). Molly was personally in charge of organizing these events, but she was also the leader of such a well-functioning staff and helpers in the shape of her sister and elder daughters that, the day after her return from a ten-day trip to Copenhagen, for example,

she could entertain a hundred guests at a well-organized party to celebrate her husband's birthday (Diary: 25 May 1861).

Emotional Practice in 1861

What about relationships, emotions and self-evaluation? The life of the now 54-year-old Molly Tang was still fraught with worries, including, of course, the financial hardships, the occasional pressure of time and work and the well-being of her nearest and dearest. Reading the diary, however, it seems that living up to the ex-

pectation of being a mother and wife was no longer a tribulation. The daughters and their activities feature frequently in her daily entries, often the subject of their mother's warm feelings or concern: particularly in relation to her eldest daughter's serious illness during the autumn, when she, like several others in the area, contracted typhus. The 54-year-old Molly Tang personally and resolutely cared for her isolated daughter around the clock. In her diary, she expressed her anxiety and sorrow, her plea to God for her daughter's survival, and subsequently her relief and gratitude when her life and health were again secured (Diary: October–December 1861). Parenthood and the feelings associated with it were present, but, as with the household, it would seem that the role was now a familiar one and that she performed it with greater assurance.

The same could be said of the marriage, which in 1861 gave rise neither to the same myriad of loving remarks as in 1838 nor to insecurity or inferiority in the relationship. Throughout the diary in the year 1861, Molly expresses loyalty to Evald and his projects, care for his health and well-being, and a sense of community with him in relation to the children and the manor, and she often refers to the time she spent with her husband as "pleasant". This was the case, for example, one rare, tranquil moment on an evening in July, when it happened that the family's many members were scattered all over the place, so for once she and her husband could sit alone on the steps of the pavilion, disturbed only on a single occasion (Diary: 14 July 1861). Of course, life had its worries, but there were also happy, warm feelings triggered by spending time with her family, enjoying the nature around

the manor, and reading books, for which she now had more time.

Even though Molly Tang was now a fully-fledged lady of the manor, she had not ceased to reflect on her place in the world and the moods this provoked in her. The diaries reveal that, even at this stage of her life, she reflected on her own efforts. Mistakes and abortive situations could still frustrate her. However, there are much longer intervals between such considerations and even longer intervals between her self-recriminations. In fact, she often evaluates imperfect situations with humour, or simply manages to forgive herself. For instance, she had a dinner party, at which she was not entirely satisfied with her own efforts, because she had been tired after a few busy days and a myriad of tasks. There had been an endless stream of visitors and, in Evald's absence, she had to serve as "both host and hostess". At the end of the day, her level-headed conclusion was that, given the circumstances, she had done her best and hoped that her guests would view the matter in the same way (Diary: 3–4 August 1861).²⁶

"Halfness Has Been My Misfortune"

When Molly Tang considered herself as a person in 1861, the focus was new. Whereas in 1838 she had been naturally preoccupied with her new life situation and overcome by the powerful feelings it engendered in her, now her self-reflection was more to do with looking back on her life in an attempt to understand what had formed her as a person. In the diary, this interest appears sporadically,²⁷ but it was particularly in her memoirs of her childhood and youth that these considerations came to the fore. While the memoirs primarily

featured descriptions of the milieu that had shaped her as a person in Christianshavn, as already mentioned they also identified the emergence of personality traits and, in particular, the young Molly's yearning for Nørre Vosborg as a means of fulfilling all her notions and dreams. It is reasonable to regard the end of the memoirs, her personal union with the manor, as the fulfilment of both her dream and the destiny that had summoned her.

And yet not. In 1861, when Molly Tang wrote the last lines of her memoirs, the future of the manor was uncertain and the financial situation was hard pressed. So, everything had not ultimately come to pass as in the dream, and she believed that her answer to the question of what she had accomplished was: "Nothing whole, everything half. Halfness has been my misfortune"²⁸ (Memoirs: 62). Of course, this deliberation applied to the material fate of the manor, but there was also an emotional awareness of a personal fate that was only half fulfilled. As during her early days at the manor, when she occasionally found a discrepancy between external and internal circumstances – for example, despite a happy situation, being dissatisfied with the depth of her own feelings and those of others – she could also detect a discrepancy now. With great expressiveness, she described her constantly strong, enchanted and heartfelt relationship with Nørre Vosborg. However, she also described how this relationship contained an existential riddle, which she had never been able to solve, and which, she was forced to confess, meant she had probably never really understood how to lead a life in the manor. Despite the fact that the diary's records of anything and everything and of her day-

to-day tasks indicate that she mastered the practical aspects of manorial life, in 1861 she still expressed a longing for a genuine union with it. Whatever the case, she wished to live the rest of her life, and end her days at Nørre Vosborg. If things should turn out differently, she would always hanker after the place as if yearning "for Canaan"²⁹.

Exit and Conclusion

Molly Tang's diaries indicate an awareness of an emotional life and a practice, in which she actively and continuously related to herself as a person and sentient individual. The memoirs she wrote in the middle of her life confirm this, albeit with the addition of her retrospective interpretation of her personal development and the subsequent rationalization and designation of patterns and paths through life. It is well known that the source material for shedding light on the lives of women in history can be scanty, even in the often relatively well-documented milieus of the upper class (as stated, e.g., in Steinrud 2008:12 ff). The material that Molly Tang wrote is rich, conveying her own highly subjective view of her life as a woman and of her emotional life. While it goes without saying that this subjective and overtly emotional influence leads to certain limitations in the material as evidence in any factual surveys, it can nonetheless pave the way for an insight into a conceptual universe and self-understanding that is rarely available for posterity.

As this analysis has shown, this includes identifying an ever-present relationship between everyday life and emotional life, centred around the special areas, which both in a practical and identity-related

sense, fell within Molly Tang's expectations vis-à-vis her various roles and activities as lady of the manor at Nørre Vosborg. Through an attention to emotional practice as reflected in the material, certain domestic virtues, the responsibility for the emotional work and relationships of the family and the authoritative and powerful role as the head of the household are identified as important areas for her work and identity, areas that in other research contexts have been identified as female ideals of the time. It appears from her reflections how Molly Tang actively related to her own efforts as a woman and her role through life, and that she strove for the ideal qualities which her contemporaries praised and which she, just like her equals, most likely became acquainted with via the art, novels, and debate of the romanticists. It was not only qualities that could be achieved through actions but also internalized qualities that brought about special moods and emotions in special situations. However, as this analysis has shown, life is very rarely arranged according to ideals, which in this case is manifested not least in the encounter with a different cultural environment in the context of the manor and in a historical period where an inward-looking perspective and a particular emotional practice were part of the ideal and self-expectation. A concrete insight from the analysis is thus that a stressful factor was the great pressure of the housewife role combined with an ideal of active emotional work, exclusive family time, personal religious practice and so on. In other words, a conflict between domestic realities vs. normative expectations as expressed both in the past and in our academic understanding of its ideological order.

Some of the insights previously described in research on both the practical and the symbolic role of the manor lady, and the women of other upper- and middle-class homes, are confirmed through this example. However, material like this offers both an unusually detailed insight into matters such as the actual tasks of the household management and not least in a manor milieu that in many ways differs from a general perception of the gilded manor life in the large and well-established houses of the time. Thus, it can help to qualify our understanding of the varied overall picture of the manors of the period and the cultural characteristics of manor life. It also suggests that the social changes that the manor families of the period were increasingly confronted with, such as the integration of both persons and ideas shaped in bourgeois environments, could give rise to confrontation on many levels, even in emotional life. The example of Molly Tang represents a personal transition from the bourgeois urban life to the rural manor life and as mentioned perhaps the story of a conceptual universe including certain ideals of femininity formed in this context and transplanted into a manor environment. Thus, it complements descriptions in Scandinavian research of what it implied to be born and raised to be a manor house lady with an insight into what it took to become one.

Molly Tang lived on for seventeen years after the death of her husband and stuck by Nørre Vosborg through thick and thin until her death at the manor in 1885. Her diaries and memoirs mainly tell the highly personal story of an individual. However, her experience in the role of a lady of the manor in the mid-nineteenth century also implies this role's inextricable connection

to the manor as a social milieu, gender and its associated practical and identity-related responsibilities, and not least to the ideals of the time, which called for a conscious emotional practice.

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Notes

- 1 Since 2004 Nørre Vosborg has been owned by the Realdania Foundation and is now a hotel, restaurant, conference venue and cultural centre. The history of the manor is well described not least because it through eight years was the subject of the interdisciplinary research project “Nørre Vosborg i tid og rum” (Nørre Vosborg in time and space), which among other things resulted in the publication: Anders Bøgh, Helle Henningsen & Kristian Dalsgaard (eds.), *Nørre Vosborg i tid og rum*, Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2014. However, the diary material used in this article has not previously been analysed on a large scale or for the purpose of shedding light on the manor lady’s work and role on the manor.
- 2 Original: “Mine Følelser var mange”.
- 3 Original: “nu, hvad var det, andet end mine gamle Grillen, der formørkede min Himmel”.
- 4 Marie Elisa Tang’s diary: Saturday 14 April 1838.
- 5 Original: “Min Bedstemoder var en rask, driftig, overordentlig dygtig Huusmoder, der af sine Børn og Undergivne fordrede samme Orden og Nøiagtighed som hun selv, og de lærte tidligt, at de ikke var til i Verden for at være Stadsdamer”.
- 6 For example, in 1829, when Molly Fenger turned 22. From 1 January to 31 August, there are only 28 days during which no visits to or by the family or the other social circle are recorded. The visits could be formal visits, short sick visits to the close family, hours of interaction in the context of needlework and chores, eating lunch together, tea or an evening party. Diary: January–August 1829.
- 7 This was true of both the dynamics involved in close relationships and assessments of new acquaintances: for example, 1 January 1829, when Molly Fenger’s uncle, Nicolai Meinert, “was uncooperative” or on 16 January 1829, when, on a visit, she met a lady and her daughter for the first time. The first she found pleasant, while she thought the latter was “badly brought up”.
- 8 For example, on Sunday 15 March 1829, the young Molly Fenger went to Slotskirken to hear J.P. Mynster preach. From there she proceeded to the home of her uncle Christian Fenger and his family who lived in the nearby street of Ny Kongensgade. Her uncle was ill, and Molly came to find out how he was doing. Then, also in Christianshavn, she visited the Oppen family, close acquaintances of the Fengers (the daughter Ingeborg was Molly Fenger’s closest friend in adolescence), “to chat for an hour.” While Molly’s younger brother Nicolaj attended a funeral in Lyngby in the afternoon, she buttered sandwiches for her aunt, “Tante Helene”, who was throwing a party that evening. The party’s guests included the Fengers and four or five other families from their circle of acquaintances.
- 9 Susanne Mathilde Krarup (née Tang) (1805–1899).
- 10 Original: “ved hvis glødende Beskrivelser af Nørre Vosborg mit Sind med en underlig Længsel stundede efter Vesten”.
- 11 Original: “et forknyt og ængsteligt Sind”.
- 12 Original: “Der var dog en Ridderborg, der var gamle Minder, der var Sagn, og der var Frihed. Der var alt, hvad jeg længtes efter”.
- 13 The days of 24–27 July 1838, for example, were representative for most other days at Nørre Vosborg. The diary recounts how Molly helped with the laundry – the servants rolled, while Molly and her sister ironed and organ-

- ized linen. She visited one of the rectories in the area, drank tea in her mother-in-law's quarters at the manor and entertained guests. She preserved gooseberries, worried about Evald's health and everything she had not achieved, and celebrated the first anniversary of the visit to Nørre Vosborg, during which she got engaged – "What a momentous day!!!" Diary: 24–27 July 1838.
- 14 Marie Elisa Tang's diary: Tuesday 24 April 1838.
- 15 Original: "Min Sjæl er ængstelig bekymret i eftermiddag, alting ligger saa tungt paa mig. Denne Huusholdning jeg skal begynde at styre, og jeg veed hverken ud eller ind."
- 16 The sister stepped in especially in connection with Molly Tang's maternity periods and later with raising the children: for example, 20, 21 and 26 September 1838.
- 17 For example, Sunday 29 April: "Visiting Mother to talk about housekeeping – she was so friendly."
- 18 Original: "viskagtigt behandlet" – in other words, as if she were a weak-willed or feeble person.
- 19 Original: "og saa bliver alt godt".
- 20 Original: "den lykkeligste Kone".
- 21 Molly Tang has various ways of describing these negative feelings: for example, "mine gamle Griller", "Sorte Skikkelser" lurking in the background, being "snavs", "melankolsk" or, above all, "forknyt". Marie Elisa Tang's diary: for example, 14 and 15 April, 8 December, 8 and 15 June, 11 March and 29 January, 14 Graufbruary, 24 June, 1 July, 18 and 19 August 1838.
- 22 Original: "Jeg var ret hjertelig forknyt den Dag over mig selv, der ingen Glæde, ingen Nytte gjør i Verden – og kan saa vel undværes – ja, som er i veien her til lands. Ak var dette anderledes!!"
- 23 Original: "Det var det Billede af en Juleaften, som længe har foresvævet mig. Dog lurer det Ydre, thi det bedste, den inderlige Glæde, manglede".
- 24 Original: "Jeg føler Mangel paa Kraft i min Stilling, og det trykker mig".
- 25 The manor remained in the family's ownership after the death of Evald Tang, although the financial situation remained difficult. Molly Tang was the owner during her widowhood from 1868 to 1878, until her eldest daughter and her husband Henrik Stampe Valeur took over the estate. However, he died early in 1880, so it was Molly's daughter Christine Tang (married Stampe Valeur) who, as a widow, was lady of the house for 43 years. Her nephew and niece took over the estate in 1923, followed by the descendants of Evald's sister Mathilde Krarup. Today, Nørre Vosborg is owned by the Realdania Foundation. Following restoration, it is now a hotel, restaurant, conference company and cultural centre.
- 26 Original: "baade Vært og Værtinde".
- 27 Such musings about the course of life appear in the diary, for example, in relation to Molly Tang's reading of the popular literary memoirs of the time, in recollections of her youth or when confronted by the life choices or dreams of acquaintances.
- 28 Original: "Ingenting heelt, alting halvt. Halvhed har været min Ulykke."
- 29 Original: "som efter Canaan".

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