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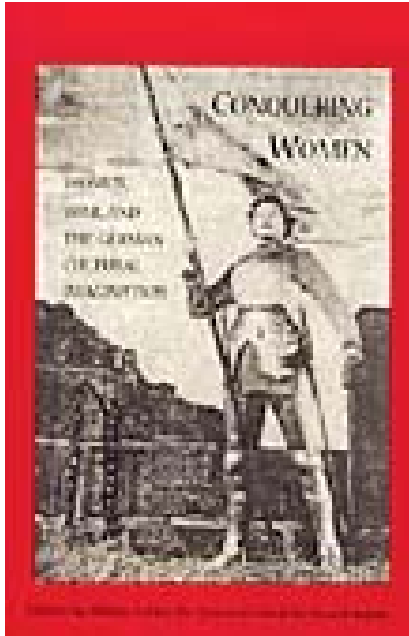
### Authors

Sy-Quia, Hilary Collier  
Baackmann, Susanne

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## Conquering Women: Women and War in the German Cultural Imagination

Edited by Hillary Collier Sy-Quia and Susanne Baackmann

### **Description:**

This volume, focused on how women participate in, suffer from, and are subtly implicated in warfare raises the still larger questions of how and when women enter history, memory, and representation. The individual essays, dealing with 19th and mostly 20th century German literature, social history, art history, and cinema embody all the complexities and ambiguities of the title "Conquering Women." Women as the mothers of current and future generations of soldiers; women as combatants and as rape victims; women organizing against war; and violence against women as both a weapon of war and as the justification for violent revenge are all represented in this collection of original essays by rising new scholars of feminist theory and German cultural studies.

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Conquering Women:  
Women and War in the  
German Cultural Imagination



Hilary Collier Sy-Quia and Susanne Baackmann,  
Editors

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

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## FOREWORD

**Atina Grossmann**  
**Cooper Union**

The March 1997 conference on “Conquering Women” which generated this volume was organized and conceptualized by graduate students in German studies. Neither the date nor the interdisciplinary but national perspective were accidental. We gathered in Berkeley for our sessions on women, war, and violence in what seemed to be the direct shadow of the war in former Yugoslavia and the reports of mass rape committed in that conflict. And despite the inclusion in the original panels of papers addressing the contemporary United States and Eastern Europe, it was the German context—and the limited case of World War II and the Holocaust which it necessarily raises—that drove our discussions about women, war, and violence and the representations and memories they produce. My own keynote address on the meanings of motherhood for Germans and Jews in the aftermath of total war and genocide from 1945 to 1949 fit somewhat uneasily among the predominantly cultural and literary studies presented but certainly reflected and engaged the general questions about identity and body, nation and memory, atrocity and trauma, which framed all of our conversation weekend. I know that my own work benefited enormously from our exchanges, among disciplines and among scholarly generations (from honored emerita to beginning graduate student), and I am delighted that this documentation is now available to a larger audience.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the conference—mischievously held in a campus building, the venerable Men’s Faculty Club, which itself carried a lot of gendered history—marked a certain point in the development of the still young field of feminist German studies.<sup>2</sup> Its cultural studies focus encompassed social history, art history, cinema studies, and literary criticism and moved back and forth between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; participants analyzed monuments and memorials, popular journals and films, as carefully as they did novels

and plays. Above all, the conference took seriously the notion of women's agency and the disturbing complexity embodied by the term "conquering women." As all the articles in this collection suggest, when it comes to war and violence, women can be both victims and perpetrators, albeit in particular gendered ways. In either case, they are agents in history and in their own lives, even if, to once again invoke Karl Marx's famous phrase from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, not under conditions of their own choosing. Moreover, they are the producers and consumers, as well as the objects, of the myriad cultural products that portray war and violence. Always, however, the authors remind us, women's experience and representation are structured by their particular vulnerability to sexual violence—rape is a frequent topic in this book—and their material and symbolic importance to nations as reproducers, of people and the body politic.<sup>3</sup>

As in many collections of new work and work in progress drawn from exciting conferences, the articles in this volume, both individually and as a whole, raise more questions than they can possibly answer. The questions raised are both daunting and at the center of current feminist historical and cultural scholarship. As readers, we are left with the nagging sense that just as the title "Conquering Women" is deliberately double-edged, so too are the notions presented here of the female body as political site. We claim that the personal is political, that women's bodies have political and ideological power, at our peril. States that make war, regimes that commit genocide or ethnic cleansing, do so, at least in part, in the name of those political bodies. Women have been granted entry to citizenship, or even claimed it for themselves, at least in part, on the basis of their ability to reproduce the next generation of soldiers. The identification of women as victims of war and violence makes visible what has too often been silenced; it also offers new and powerful means to encourage further violence and revenge.

In March 1997, we were acutely aware of these contradictions: we debated uncomfortable issues, contemporary as well as historical and literary. Does the gratifying fact that the media are finally ready to take seriously reports of rape as war crimes also open the way to misuse and manipulation of such reports in the name of further warfare and ethnic violence? What happens when the horror of war comes to be represented or defined by rape, when in fact rape is, of



course, only one of the horrors that accompany war? Do individual women and their fates disappear when the fact of rape becomes an instrument of political mobilization or propaganda? Given women's painful struggle to name and make visible sexual violence, can there even be such a thing as overreporting? How does one best alert public opinion to horrors perpetrated on women, men, and children in official and unofficial wars and establish sexual violence in the canon of war crimes and crimes against humanity?<sup>4</sup> How do we represent and analyze the female body as a privileged site of political contestation, and indeed of testimony about the traumatic effects of violence and war, without reinscribing cultural conventions about women's entrapment by and in their bodies? In one form or another, these articles all grapple with the slippage between the individual body and the national body, in personal and public histories and in the cultural imagination.<sup>5</sup>

Andrea Wuerth and Janice Monger consider how individual women's bodies, especially pregnant bodies, appear as "battle-grounds" in contemporary West and East German feminist art and how that depiction, as well as the political circumstances creating the "battleground," have changed over time. Weimar representations of women in need (*Frauen in Not*) designed to draw sympathy and mobilize political action have transmogrified, in their telling, into more "in your face" artworks intended to subvert and interrogate the inevitable link between female identity and reproduction. Jennifer Evans's analysis of a post-World War II women's magazine in occupied Germany reminds us how much careful readings of journalism, including advertisements, cartoons, and photographs, can tell us about the containment of women's stories about wars in the larger narrative of German guilt and German victimization. Women were simultaneously utterly central and marginal to Soviet occupation and communist policy as it endeavored to both repress and negotiate the legacy of Red Army rapes of German women. *Die Frau von Heute* is, as Evans suggests, as revealing in its silences and circumlocutions as it is in the shifting content of what was actually printed. As historians and as literary scholars, we are confronted with a case study of how to analyze what can be said and what cannot be said and what can be interpreted between the lines in documentary evidence.<sup>6</sup>

Ellen Rees's article on the modernist text *Sores That Still Bleed* reflects the increasing attention in cultural and historical studies to the examination of violence and trauma. Here it is women's suffering that becomes invisible as they labor to heal the wounded men of the Great War. Rees analyzes the price women pay for their men's trauma and what happens when women, in life or literature, confront the impact of male violence, during and after war.<sup>7</sup> Kristin Kopp's study of Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* reads women's literary production as a means of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, coming to terms with the violent Nazi past. Indeed, literature has served as an important forum for women's confrontation with National Socialism, when they have been so conspicuously absent in the many post-war political debates about history and memory (for example, the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s about the status of National Socialist crimes in German and comparative history, or the most recent controversies about the role of the *Wehrmacht* in a war of extermination on the eastern front).<sup>8</sup> Kopp also poses questions about the problematic links, frequently invoked by feminists, between the trauma of war and genocide, and domestic violence. Her analysis of Bachmann's displacement of the memory of individual incest onto public memory of Holocaust pushes us to consider the usefulness of broad definitions of trauma that encompass both individual and collective experience, wartime and everyday experience. Might in Bachmann's terms all women have to be read as traumatized in a patriarchal world? At the same time, Kopp reiterates a central point of trauma study: the crucial role of the listener in identifying and coping with traumatic experience. Telling the story, so many texts insist, is a necessary first step in historical and individual processes of healing or coming to terms.

Susanne Baackmann's piece on Grete Weil's fictionalized Holocaust memoir, *Meine Schwester Antigone*, reveals the gendered nature of remembering and forgetting, speech and speechlessness. She reminds us that our agitated debates about memory—so much a part of German studies—are always as much about what is forgotten, and how, as they are about remembering. Weil's reworking of myth also expresses the curious painful fact that it is usually not the perpetrators who prefer to see themselves as victims, who feel remorse and guilt, but the victims who agonize about not having done enough to save those who did not survive and about their own forced collabo-

ration with the system that meant to exterminate them. Hilary Collier-Sy-Quia's article on Christa Wolf's *Medea* continues the analysis of myth and memory. Post-unification Germans, Wolf's stories tell us, now have a triple past to confront and work through: the Nazi era and the differing forms of repression and negotiation of that past practiced by the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic. Renée Schell's analysis of Heinrich Kleist's 1808 revision of Greek myth about the Amazon queen Penthesilea asks, as in a sense does this entire volume, how female identity, particularly the experience of the body and its viewing, is shaped by war and violence. Kleist's notion of the *Frauenstaat* leads Schell to questions about women as perpetrators as well as victims and the processes by which women claim and are granted citizenship. In yet another example of silencing, "explaining away," or exploiting women's traumatic experience, Jennifer Kapczynski's discussion of Kleist's drama *Die Hermannschlacht* explores the elisions between woman and nation in the case of rape. When the nation itself is defined as victimized and raped, the specificity of women and their bodies is erased, but the violated woman is reinvented as a healing unifying metaphor. Finally, both Elisabeth Krimmer and David Neville chart the dual subversion and reinforcement of gender boundaries by "conquering women" who challenge and yet are still subjected to women's fate.

Reading these contributions, we are left, it seems to me, perched somewhere between the two references Hilary Collier Sy-Quia marshals in her introduction to this book: our attachment to Virginia Woolf's expectation in her 1938 broadside, *Three Guineas*, that women should join together to prevent war, and our periodic infatuation with powerful women who wield a gun with one arm and carry a baby in the other. Both images are part of the cultural imagination this volume studies. By asking, as these articles do, about how women participate in, suffer from, and are implicated in, warfare and violence, we also ask even larger questions about how and when women enter history, memory, and representation.

## NOTES

1. The final published version of the paper I presented is indebted to the discussions at the conference. See Atina Grossmann, "Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-Nazi Germany, 1945–1949," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 38 (1998): 215–39. The following comments are derived from my notes about the panels and are therefore entirely dependent on the words and thoughts of all the participants.
2. See the articles on "Feminist German Studies across the Disciplines," in *Women in German Yearbook* 12 (1996).
3. There is an ever-growing literature on women and war. See, for example, Nicole Dombrowski, ed., *Women and War in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Garland, 1999); Miriam Cooke, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Miriam Cooke and Angela Woolcott, eds., *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Jean Bethke Elshtain and Sheila Tobias, eds., *Women, Militarism and War: Essays in History, Politics, and Social Theory* (Savage, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990).
4. The conference presentation by Norma von Ragenfeld-Feldman, "Victimizing Women: War, Rape and the Reporting of Rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992-93," raised these questions explicitly. See also Alexandra Stiglmayer, ed., *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).
5. As a think piece, see Rada Iveković, "Women, Nationalism and War: 'Make Love Not War,'" *Hypatia* 8: 4 (Fall 1993): 113–25.
6. See Elizabeth Heineman, "'The Hour of the Woman': Memories of Germany's Crisis Years and West German National Identity," *American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 354–95, and Atina Grossmann, "A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers," in *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era*, ed. Robert G. Moeller, pp. 33–52 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).
7. See also the important work by Anna Krylova, "'Healing Wounded Souls': Soviet Identity, Gender, and Trauma in the Great Patriotic War," dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, forthcoming.
8. On this, see, for example, Geoff Eley, ed., *The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory, Nazism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This collection of essays grew out of the Fifth Annual Interdisciplinary German Studies Conference at the University of California at Berkeley, which was held in March 1997. I would like again to thank the Department of German, the Bonwit-Heine Fund, and the Center for German and European Studies for their generous financial support in making possible this and other similar graduate student conferences. Professor Atina Grossmann, our keynote speaker for the conference, deserves special mention for the engaged contributions she made to all the conference panels, as well as for her continued encouragement in publishing this volume of essays. I would also like to thank all the graduate students, faculty, and staff, as well as all the participants, who worked so hard to make the conference a success. The inspiration for the conference, and therefore by extension for this volume of papers, came in large part from a class taught at Berkeley by Professor Bluma Goldstein entitled "Women, War, and Sexuality." Professor Goldstein, since retired, is much loved and greatly respected for her thought-provoking and rigorous classes, the close scrutiny of her students' work, and her sound advice. Her involvement in the conference and in the publication of this volume of essays is evidence of her dedication and commitment and was greatly valued as such. My thanks also go to Professor Robert C. Holub, whose constructive advice on the body of essays as a publishable collection ensured the survival of the project. The collection would never have made it into print without the extensive editing of the individual essays undertaken by my co-editor, Susanne Baackmann, whose suggestions and advice to the contributors raised the caliber of the collection tremendously. All our contributors worked tirelessly to revise and refine their papers, and I thank them for that also. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank our editors at International and Area Studies: Bojana Ristich, for her impeccable editing and helpful suggestions, and David Szanton for his advice and enthusiasm for the volume. It was a pleasure working with everyone.

*HCS*

## INTRODUCTION

Hilary Collier Sy-Quia

All the papers presented here are about power. The pun in the title "*Conquering Women*" plays with the idea of power: on the one hand, it speaks to power as control and woman as victim; on the other hand, it considers power as ability and woman as agent, to borrow Judith Louder Newton's (1981) definition of the dichotomy. Volumes have been written on how to shift the emphasis from woman as victim to woman as agent, how to recognize a woman's power to be her own person, have private opinions and embark on self-defending actions, asserting her will over her own body, its organs and functions. The papers grew out of a discussion of a specific nexus at which stereotypes, symbols, and preconceptions converge and shatter: the place where women and war meet. As Jean Bethke Elshtain writes:

We in the West are heirs of a tradition that assumes an affinity between women and peace, between men and war, a tradition that consists of culturally constructed myths and memories. Thus, in a time of war, real men and women—locked in a dense symbiosis, perceived as beings who have complementary needs and exemplify gender-specific virtues—take on, in cultural memory and narrative, the personas of Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls. Man construed as violent, whether eagerly and inevitably or reluctantly and tragically; woman as non-violent, offering succor and compassion. . . . These paradigmatic linkages dangerously overshadow other voices, other stories: of pacific males; of bellicose women; of cruelty incompatible with just-war fighting; of martial fervor at odds—or so we choose to believe—with maternalism in women (1987: 4).

Militarization thus serves to demarcate gendered roles, which in turn become tropes in the myths which form the basis of our sense of identity, whether individual or communal. Furthermore, to cite Kate Darian-Smith, "Militarization . . . reformulates the relationship between the individual and the state at a historical moment of crisis" (1996: 151). Writing about Australia during World War II, Darian-Smith examines the merging of public and private and the superimposition on both of ideas of loyalty and patriotism:

Such allegiance was enforced by the emergence of a "politics of remembrance" which derived its power from the symbolic mobilization of national and gendered memories, and manipulated these in attempts to control the social and sexualized behaviours of men and women (1996: 151).

Thus these papers examine various aspects of women and war, sexuality and war, assumptions made about gender as affected by war, as well as the portrayal of women in, and their reactions to, different kinds of wars, including eternal battles over identity and the right to self-assertion and control over the female body.

Jennifer Evans's essay discusses the raped and defeated women of 1945 Berlin, whose experiences were ignored in the shaping of a postwar national identity. Her contribution looks at the ways in which certain female experiences of capitulation were negated in the editorial politics of the German Women's League and its official women's magazine, *Die Frau von Heute*. In the context of Red Army rapes, which marked Germany's defeat, the editorial collective sought to honor and promote women's membership in an anti-fascist community while impeding any official engagement with the contentious issue of women's sexual violation. Caught between celebration and silence, the pages of *Die Frau von Heute* offer a valuable opportunity to examine how this tension was negotiated by communist authorities eager to establish a new and progressive society from the ruins of the postwar era. Kristin Kopp, in a very different paper, also addresses the ignored and repressed female experience of war in a psychological reading of Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina*. She positions this highly complex text as an early, overlooked contribution to postwar *Väterliteratur*. In seeking to give voice to the trauma of the war experience, Bachmann discursively links the public and the private, pessimistically refusing the healing of the traumatized fe-

male subject within a social realm that mirrors the structures of war. Ellen Rees examines an experimental novel, *Sores That Still Bleed*, which explores German experiences of the Great War and its aftermath from the marginalized perspective of an unknown Norwegian woman writer. The text, which attempts to portray the relationship between a sadistic German veteran and a naive Norwegian student, serves as a point of departure for explicating the trope of violence against women in literary modernism.

Virginia Woolf's famous exploration, *Three Guineas* (written in 1938 on the eve of that second world war) of the constraint of women within socially constructed expectations and roles, is the reply to a male friend's plea for help in preventing the war. Certainly *Three Guineas* is less about war and more about women. Woolf proposes that war will be avoided in the future only if women are given the same education as men and are permitted to earn their own living, as each of these liberations will free them from the necessity of marriage and its concomitant subscription to the dominant ideology of their husbands and will give them an independent opinion and a voice with which to utter that opinion:

For to help women to earn their livings in the professions is to help them possess that weapon of independent opinion which is still their most powerful weapon. It is to help them have a mind of their own and a will of their own with which to help you to prevent war (1938/1966: 58).

For Woolf, independence is achieved through education—that is, through training the mind to develop and defend opinions of its own, opinions which she suggests might be quite divergent from the dominant male views of her contemporary combatant world. Female identity then would come with controlling one's own thoughts and having a recognized voice with which to express those ideas instead of being relegated to silence. Recent feminist theory of autobiography has concentrated on the connection between this and the fundamental power over one's own body, seeing perhaps in autobiography an inescapable self-reflection. A woman by necessity has to define herself in opposition to a male world using a language inherently misogynistic. Claiming a voice and control over her body come together in the contested space of identity formation.



In (re)claiming her body, the female writer has first to explore the gendered roles assigned to women. Virginia Woolf sets out on the premise that war is a male enterprise and that peace is a female thing:

To fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. Law and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or accidental. Scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman's rifle; the vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you, not by us (1938/1966: 6).

Many others have followed this same supposition, based as it is on a reductive interpretation of biology and evolution that women bear children and bring forth life, thus nurture and protect, whereas men are taught to be aggressive and competitive, and these traits inevitably lead to war. This perceived contrast between the genders is transposed into metaphor in the dualities of active and passive, nature and culture, public and private. But as Sharon MacDonald has written:

In the creation of a well-ordered ideology, dualities such as all women as potential mothers and all men as potential warriors have their own rationale, even—or perhaps especially—if they mask a much more complex reality (1987: 4).

It is the imagery that is built up around this duality that makes up a subtle and hard-to-counter form of ideology against a background in which war is the norm and peace is defined in the dictionary as the absence of war. Even where the image of a female fighter is used—especially the emotive vision of a mother with a baby in one arm and a gun in the other—the message is ambiguous. The association is one of woman as protector of new life; the image is defensive, not aggressive, and the mother's role is that of guarantor of the continuation of her society, not of exterminator of another. Many of the much cited figures that come to stand for strong, liberated women—conquering women—are also double-edged. The Amazons or even a later figure such as Joan of Arc are unsettling to the established social order, disruptive, and, because unmarried, marginal to mainstream society: "It is only marriage which successfully classifies and controls the unspoken threat that women pose to male-dominated society" (MacDonald 1987: 7). Their actions are

sanctioned only within the larger motive of patriotism, beyond which they must be controlled and brought back within the order as determined by men. Marriage both gives control over the woman (and her reproductive capacities) to the man and ensures that her identity will be filtered through that of the man to whom she “belongs.”

That the power lies in the pants is Elisabeth Krimmer’s thesis in her investigation of the intersection of gender, warfare, and transvestism in Bettina Brentano-von Arnim’s epistolary novel *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz* (1844). Her analysis juxtaposes the violence of war with the violence of traditional gender hierarchy and demonstrates how the encounter with the French Amazon incites the novel’s Bettine to reject her brother’s notions of *proper* femininity. Brentano-von Arnim uses the transvestite figure to prove that power is not an inherent quality of the body. Jennifer Kapczynski’s interests also revolve around the convergence of images of the female body in the more specific context of emerging nationalism. Her contribution to this volume focuses on the construction of nation in Heinrich von Kleist’s *Die Hermannsschlacht*, particularly as it relates to the figure of Hally. Another paper in this volume to take a Kleist text as its subject is a persuasive reading of Heinrich von Kleist’s 1808 drama *Penthesilea*, by Renée M. Schell, who uses insights from political anthropology and literary theory to explore the gendered act of looking and its function for the construction of female subjectivity in Keist’s text. The essay exposes the paradoxical way in which an internalized, abstract male gaze serves as a catalyst in the formation of the all-female Amazon state, yet this is simultaneously overcome by a radical act of violence. Ultimately, this recuperative reading offers an alternative to the cloud of resignation surrounding the notion of female self-government—and feminism in general—found in earlier readings.

In her examination of several mythical and real female leaders in war, all of whom are heralded as highly patriotic figures, Antonia Fraser has asserted that a strong female leader is accepted only as a temporary transfer of a male role and that, once her extraordinary mission has been accomplished, she must revert to a renunciation of her independence and subordinate her identity to that of a man:

The pose of being an honorary male . . . once again enables the Warrior Queen to preserve her place within the natural order. She must never forget that the original importance of the Amazon tribe to the Greeks was as a tribe of belligerent females, unnatural because they were outside the control of men, and nobody's appendage (1988: 332).

What is seen by feminists as an image of the power of women is used by others to illustrate the unacceptability of an "overly masculine" and thus unnatural woman. Maternity (within marriage!) validates a woman's place in society. This disqualifies the Amazons themselves on two counts: first, they are unmarried, and—perhaps more important—they abandon their male progeny.

In fact, the one real power exclusive to women—that of controlling the production of life, the ultimate creative potential of a female body—is seen by some as such a threat to male ideas of creativity that men have elevated death to assume greater importance than life. Christa Wolf in her most recent novel, *Medea*, cites Adriana Cavarero in this regard: "Men, who are excluded from the mystery of bringing forth life, find in death a power which, since it takes life away, is considered the mightier of the two" (1998: 183). In this context of male appropriation of the creative powers of women Carol Cohn has examined the language men use to describe the atomic testing and the dropping of the first atom bombs in 1945:

In light of the imagery of male birth, the extraordinary names given to the bombs that reduced Hiroshima and Nagasaki to ash and rubble—"Little Boy" and "Fat Man"—at last become intelligible. These ultimate destroyers were the progeny of the atomic scientists—and emphatically not just any progeny, but male progeny. In early tests, before they were certain the bombs would work, the scientists expressed their concern by saying they hoped the baby was a boy, not a girl—i.e. not a dud. . . . The nuclear scientists gave birth to male progeny with the ultimate power of violent domination over "female" Nature (1990: 40).

The connection between childbearing and warmongering has been made from a different angle also: "How long will men make war? As long as women have children"—so the conundrum goes. Both Helen Cooper/Adrienne Munich/Susan Squier and Nancy

Hurston have set out the complexities of this riddle. The first group argues for a more direct correlation between the curtailment of reproduction and the cessation of war:

Arguably, the modern woman's ability [that is, the modern Western woman's ability!] to prevent conception, resulting from wide-scale access to contraception and abortion, produces a different figuration of the gendered meaning of war in modern and post-modern writing. . . . Contraception enables the woman to refuse to bear future warriors for the war hero without curtailing her sexual pleasure: with contraception the modern woman can resist the role of circulating sexual object crucial to the war effort (1989: 19–20).

As Cooper, Munich, and Squier concede, this argument is reminiscent of Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, in which the women refuse to have sex with their husbands until they stop making war. Nancy Hurston, in a more sophisticated argument, gives the ancient riddle a cause and effect interpretation and argues that men make war precisely because women have children:

Given the fact that they cannot give birth, it is perhaps not surprising that men say they would rather not give birth; that they prefer their own distinctive "lower depths," war. The only problem is that the preferences of men often become the cultural values of humanity as a whole. This is why the tales of war are received as exalting and tragic, whereas tales of childbirth are thought to be empty gossip. If women's "wars" generate less discourse than men's "childbirth," it is partly because the latter is a planned, organized, collective phenomenon, whereas the former is experienced in solitude. But discourse plays a large part in determining the way in which we see the world. How many times have we read that a nation which never makes war becomes "sterile," and that blood must be shed in order for it to recover its "fertility"? How many revolutions have been compared to "labor pains," violent convulsions preceding the "birth" of a new society? (1986: 133).

Hurston concludes that the paradigm "women are required to breed, just as men are required to brawl" (1986: 134) has been upset in the last forty years or so due to the threat of both nuclear warfare and

a demographic explosion, for which she sees pacifism and contraception as the two replies which allow men and women respectively to deny their services to death and life.

Another fascinating element in the debate over female child-bearing and male creativity is the relatively recent shift that has occurred in the Western, developed world's process of reproduction and childbirth. I say "process" because it has become a very high-tech thing in which at times the mother seems to be just one incidental character among many parts. Science has made possible previously unimagined methods of in vitro fertilization, whereby the mother's womb comes close to the ancient view of a mere holding vessel for the active ingredient introduced from the outside. Similarly the marvels of modern medicine, which make possible the survival of a premature baby weighing less than a pound, while wonderful, at the same time suggest that the holding vessel might as well be a sterile, see-through box instead of an opaque and living belly of a walking, talking, independent human mother. It seems strange to emphasize the independence of the mother here. Yet as Janice Monger and Andrea Wuerth in their paper in this collection discuss in detail, the pictures taken in utero of a developing fetus (with which we are all familiar as emotive images) focus so exclusively on the baby and blur out the cavernous black surroundings which are the mother that they facilitate a discussion of the fetus as an independent being with equal (if not greater) rights than the mother who carries it. Through the advances of perinatal technology, father state can penetrate into the innermost parts of a woman's body in an unprecedented way, taking control over that creative process too.

There is one final issue I would like to address here, which is discussed in several of our papers from different angles. It concerns the well-trodden path of history versus herstory. Several of the literary texts which our contributors discuss deal with a woman's attempts to come to terms with memories, to negotiate their divergences from the official history—or to digest the fact that the experiences of large segments of the population are obliterated from that history, suppressed, silenced, forgotten. David Neville takes a medieval text to explore this theme. Although superficially unified by design, closer examination of Martin Luther's 1524 pamphlet, *Eyn Geschicht wie Got*, which integrates texts from both Luther and the escaped nun

Florentina, reveals divergent interpretations of women's agency and subjectivity. Whereas Florentina's account seeks to establish her as an independent subject, Luther's text aims to strengthen his political agenda by subjecting Florentina to the emergent Protestant culture. My own paper charts the imagery Christa Wolf uses in her 1996 novel *Medea* to highlight a gendered relationship between memory and history, in which memories are silenced and history is proclaimed by the powerful. It is her contention that Wolf intended to issue a warning to the united Germany to question the accepted values of the powerful and not to suppress experience or silence memories. Forty years of GDR history cannot be erased from the body of a nation; those experiences, as well as the painful encounters during the first few years of a unified Germany, leave scars.

This grappling with memory, this attempt at recollecting the past and finding that it sometimes does not match up with the commemoration implied in official history, seems to be a specifically female preoccupation; indeed for some writers it is so much their theme as to be almost an obsession with attempts to come to terms with divergent interpretations and experiences of the past. Not only is this preoccupation with memory a feminine pastime, but it is often connected to a very personal search for identity or for a redefinition of identity within the dominant society in which the female writer finds herself. The protagonist in Ingeborg Bachmann's novel *Malina* grapples with collective memories which are not even her own personal memories of the war and with the effect they have on her sense of self. Grete Weil's *My Sister Antigone* (1980) is also the exploration of a female identity through the lens of an unassimilated past. In her contribution, Susanne Baackmann examines Grete Weil's text as part of an evolving literature by women authors concerned with finding new narrative strategies to represent women's experiences of history. By rewriting Antigone's story from the perspective of a Holocaust survivor, Weil both challenges and affirms the notion of a "conquering woman." The myth of Antigone is addressed as part of a cultural tradition based on classical humanism, which has no language for the memories of a Jewish woman. Ultimately, Weil's text reframes the trope of Antigone as a "conquering woman" in favor of a less violent and a less violated female subject position. Such personal searches for identity translate into the search for voice on the part of muted groups and beg the question of how valid the idea of a domi-

nant voice and dominant history can be. In their introduction to a volume of essays exploring the juncture of gender, nation, and immigration in the identity formations currently taking place in Europe, Gisela Brinkler-Gabler and Sidonie Smith write:

The writing of/toward new identities is a writing driven by memory and amnesia (see [Benedict] Anderson). Memory is founded upon forgetting. An insistent coherence of memory and narrative implies forgetfulness. Yet coherences and discontinuities make spaces for lost memory traces, with the result that the relationship of memories to amnesias is ever adjustable, fluid, and productive of new meanings and new narratives (1997: 17).

New meaning is what several of these essays, as well as some of the texts on which they base their discussion, give to old motifs. Ranging from the construction of a “New Woman” in denial of the ruins of immediate postwar Germany to the radical reinterpretation of heroic myths, these papers all seek to question hegemonic identities and stress the subversive force of conquering women.

Ingrid Bergman, one of Hollywood’s beautiful women, starred in the title role of the 1949 film *Joan of Arc*. The year is significant for releasing a retelling of this patriotic myth. Bergman’s “New Look” of cropped curls is the most feminine element of her screen image. Her legs have been swathed in long leather boots and sturdy masculine armor; two huge swords hang on either side of her; her breasts are obliterated beneath a solid chest-plate, her arms and shoulders are now strong and massive in chain-link sleeves and her fists are clenched, one holding a tall flagpole. Behind her are a ruined wall, broken chains, and a large sky beyond. It is a triumphant image, but the male persona sits on her like an ill-fitting borrowed suit. Indeed, she is cast as the reluctant recipient of divine inspiration who wants nothing more than to fulfill the task for which she is a mere tool and then return to her “natural” place. While she seems to point a way toward the future, defying the violations of the past, her own place in that future is subject to negotiation. In George Bernard Shaw’s rendition, Joan of Arc seeks solace in the eyes of the voiceless and subjugated masses, while Schiller’s maiden of Orleans returns with relief to the accepted normality of her class- and gender-specific role. The essays in this volume chart that negotiation for space, identity, and power, using examples from within the German cultural imagination.

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## THE BODY AS BATTLEGROUND: IMAGES OF THE GERMAN ABORTION DEBATE

Andrea Wuerth and Janice Monger

### INTRODUCTION

Paragraph 218 of the German Criminal Code, the earliest version of which dates back to 1871, punishes women who have abortions, as well as persons who perform abortions. The law has been challenged by large-scale public campaigns on a number of occasions—in the late 1920s and early 1930s and on and off since 1971. The most recent controversy over abortion followed the opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, when feminists in East and West Germany mobilized against the conservative government's efforts to eliminate the liberal East German abortion law and extend Paragraph 218 to united Germany.<sup>1</sup>

Since the law's inception, socially engaged artists have contributed to campaigns against it. The images we discuss in this essay represent Paragraph 218 opposition by both prominent and lesser known artists, focusing especially on images created since the early 1970s. Many were featured in a 1993 exhibit on the history of abortion entitled "Unter Anderen Umständen" at the German Museum of Hygiene (Deutsches Hygienische-Museum) in Dresden.<sup>2</sup> The exhibit, which has traveled to several German cities since then, opened shortly after the German Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) dismissed portions of a slightly reformed Paragraph 218 in favor of a law that prohibits the state from funding abortions. Though the curators did not endorse a political position, the exhibit can be seen as a counternarrative to the official view that construed the practice of abortion as a moral and national "crisis."<sup>3</sup> Further, this exhibit followed a precedent set by artists who had organized

traveling exhibits on abortion in the early 1930s and in the mid-1970s as politicians debated reforms of Paragraph 218.

Although some studies of the German abortion debates have made reference to anti-218 images, the images themselves have not been adequately explored. In this paper, we focus on the ways in which art *is* politics. We are interested in analyzing the iconography of the images, understanding their contributions to the debate, and demonstrating how they constitute feminist representations of the body. Consequently, we employ Rosemary Betterton's understanding of feminist artworks as efforts "to change not only the visual codes of art, but the context in which representations of women are seen and used."<sup>4</sup> Along with feminist scholars who have focused on the power of fetal imagery, we suggest that popular images should figure more prominently both in the cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural study of sexual, gender, and body politics, as well as in feminist practice. The enterprise of political theorizing needs to include the contribution that images—or in this case counterimages—and their creators make to *abortion rights campaigns* in particular, acknowledging their power to advance feminist practice. By presenting a history of abortion images (mostly by women) in twentieth-century German art, this paper seeks to publicize the wealth of such images featuring women's bodies as sites of oppression and also as assertions of women's agency. These images suggest how feminists have understood women's bodies as political battlegrounds.

### THE ART OF CLASS POLITICS

The first major public debate on abortion occurred in 1931 during the Weimar Republic. The striking of Paragraph 218 was a central demand of the German Communist Party (KPD), and abortion was construed primarily as a class issue. As feminist historian Atina Grossmann notes,

The struggle for legalization represented a conscious attempt by the left to use sexual politics as a lever to mobilize women across classes against the capitalist system. . . . The resonance of this campaign revealed the centrality of these issues for any politics claiming to address women.<sup>5</sup>

Many politically engaged Weimar artists, including Käthe Kollwitz and Alice Lex-Nerlinger, as well as others like Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall, contributed works to a traveling exhibit entitled “Frauen in Not” (“Women in Need”), which was initiated by the women’s journal *Der Weg der Frau*. They intended to draw attention to women’s suffering and the plight of the working-class family, an endeavor that also reflected the limitations of the male-dominated politics at that time. According to Gisela Schirmer,

The weaknesses of the 1931 exhibit are most evident in that the abortion problem was portrayed by the mostly male artists almost exclusively in terms of the proletariat and the woman as victim.<sup>6</sup>

Only about 20 of the 120 participating artists were women.

Kollwitz’s contribution to the exhibit was a lithograph created in 1924 for a KPD poster, *Nieder mit dem Abtreibungsparagraphen* (*Down with the Abortion Law*). Kollwitz’s image of the “woman in need” demands the viewer’s sympathy as she depicts a visibly overburdened pregnant woman, emphasized by dark circles under her eyes. The woman, shielding a small child against her body and carrying another baby, represents the women most likely to be seeking an illegal abortion at this time of economic crisis—impoverished working-class mothers. The KPD slogan, “Your belly belongs to you,” suggested that the battle against Paragraph 218 was waged by the party *on behalf of* working-class women. Similarly, Alice Lex-Nerlinger’s 1930 oil painting, *Paragraph 218*, presents, in Grossmann’s words, a “conventional icon of the long-suffering solitary woman with kerchief and big belly, [which] recedes pale and faceless into the background.”<sup>7</sup> In the foreground, however, Lex-Nerlinger depicts six female figures who are “active, strong, and unified,”<sup>8</sup> working together to push over a cross with the inscription “Paragraph 218.” They thus symbolically represent women’s collective struggle against the power of the church and state. The painting by Lex-Nerlinger was removed by police order from an exhibit of Berlin artists in 1930 because of the symbolic connection between Paragraph 218 and the cross.<sup>9</sup>

Themes from the 1931 campaign were rediscovered and appropriated in the 1970s by feminists who again demanded the right to an abortion.<sup>10</sup> In 1972, the same year that the Communist East German government legalized the so-called *Fristenlösung* (abortion-on-

demand in the first trimester), the Social Democratic government of West Germany proposed a draft law that declared abortion a criminal act to which exceptions could be made under specific circumstances. Revising the old KPD slogan, West German feminists declared “*My belly belongs to me!*” and emphasized women’s right to self-determination. Similarly, feminist artists adopted the idea of Weimar artists and organized an exhibition entitled “*Bilder gegen ein K(l)assenparagraf*” (“*Images against a Classist Paragraph*”) that traveled to major West German cities in 1977 and 1978. Poster images were directed against doctors, the churches (especially the Catholic Church), the patriarchal state, and the Constitutional Court, which had proved to be a major obstacle to abortion law reform by consistently upholding Paragraph 218. While the images of the 1931 campaign intended to draw sympathy and support for needy women, the images of the 1970s sought to break taboos and expose the sources of women’s oppression. The feminist artists who contributed poster art to the exhibit regarded the images as contributions to the feminist campaign against Paragraph 218 rather than as representations of a party agenda.<sup>11</sup>

A poster designed by exhibition organizer Jula Dech suggests how class oppression and women’s oppression came together (see Figure 1). The poster features a monument dedicated “to the unknown woman and the millions of her fellow sufferers who have been driven to illegal abortion and death by Capitalism, the State and the Church through Paragraph 218.” Like monuments constructed to memorialize war victories, Dech’s monument commemorates the women who took great risks to have illegal abortions. But her structure defies artistic tradition. Rather than an idealized or allegorical woman figure, Dech’s monument is topped by a blindfolded female clad in head scarf and apron—the (unpaid) working woman, a central figure in the radical feminists’ campaign for paid housework. In Dech’s words, “This woman would not be found upon the monuments of patriarchy and capitalism!”<sup>12</sup> The woman places one hand upon her hip in a self-asserting gesture, while the other hand rests upon her pregnant belly. Dech targets the Constitutional Court judges, whose portraits are included on the monument’s base.

Many of the feminist anti-Paragraph 218 images in the 1970s were directed against the state, embodied in figures of professionally

Figure 1. Jula Dech, *Der unbekannten Frau*.

clothed men who directly violate women's bodily integrity. Women's bodies also generally figure more prominently in these posters—specifically the woman's naked and usually pregnant body. The poster *Moralismus auf dem Rücken der Frau?* (*Morality on the Back of Woman?*—Figure 2), which announces a discussion about the abolition of Paragraph 218 at the University of Stuttgart in 1971, features a priest and a judge, representing church and state, sitting on a naked pregnant woman's back. They are depicted as placing moral and physical burdens upon women, clearly illustrating how the law has a direct and immediate impact on women. Alternatively, women's strength is implied by the fact that this particular woman's back is bearing the weight of party institutions in sustaining the weight of the two men.

Similarly, a poster sponsored by the Kreuzberger Produktionskollektivs Gallery in Berlin starkly suggests how those who defended the strict abortion law are violating women's bodily integrity (Figure 3). The text reads, "The Federal Constitutional Court refers to Article 1, Paragraph 1, of the Constitution by the rejection of legal abortion in the first trimester: The dignity of humans is inviolable"—the words used by the Constitutional Court to support the protection of the fetus and to uphold Paragraph 218. The jarring image featuring caricatured portraits of the judges with enlarged hands poking and prodding a faceless, naked woman's outstretched body, suggests that the attention given to the dignity of unborn life violates and undermines the dignity of women. This poster implies that not only women's bellies but women's bodies in general are touched by the state when the life of the fetus takes precedent over that of the woman.

### THE PUBLIC FETUS

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Christian Democratic government and a number of so-called "pro-life" groups launched a public anti-abortion campaign; this expensive campaign featured what historian Barbara Duden has called "the public fetus."

In the course of one generation, technology along with a new discourse has transformed pregnancy into a process to be man-

Figure 2. *Moralismus auf dem Rücken der Frau.*

Figure 3. *Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar.*



aged, the expected child into a fetus, the mother into an ecosystem, the unborn into a life, and life into a supreme value.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Cynthia Daniels notes, "Fetal technologies merged with a powerful anti-abortion movement to create the public spectacle of fetal personhood."<sup>14</sup> One government brochure, widely distributed free of cost to all abortion counseling centers and gynecologists, featured ultrasound images and glossy color photos of fetuses at various stages of development, accompanied by a text describing the "spiritual and physical development of the child in the womb" (Figure 4).<sup>15</sup> The cover of this brochure depicts a highly developed, peach-colored fetus with its lips, nostrils, and fingers already delineated. A ball of light emanates from its "hands." Whereas the fetus is depicted as realistic and as human as possible, the womb has been rendered as a dark and abstracted abyss. This clearly fabricated graphic is intended to appear as a photograph and to be read as the reproduction of a scientifically verifiable reality.

As Duden suggests, the viewer has been "trained" to decode ultrasound images such that they appear to provide irrefutable "evidence" that the fetus is actually "a baby." Fetal imagery, or "fetal animation," as Daniels calls it, lends the impression that the fetus is an autonomous independent subject.<sup>16</sup> Thus a fetus is often depicted as though it were floating in space or swimming in a vast sea, blending out the woman's body. The dissemination of such fetal imagery has shifted public attention away from the pregnant woman to the fetus. Though German and U.S. feminists have been discussing the issue of reproductive technologies for some time now, they have yet to form an organized front against "the fetus," partly because they are divided over the benefits of reproductive technologies.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, feminist artists have thematized this issue by creating visual images to respond to the very visible public fetus.

#### **MAINA-MIRIAM MUNSKY AND ANNEGRET SOLTAU: EXPOSURE, DECONSTRUCTION**

The works of Maina-Miriam Munsky and Annegret Soltau are especially relevant and significant to the issue of reproductive technologies, since Munsky problematizes the new technology and Sol-

Figure 4. *Das Leben vor der Geburt*, cover image.

tau disrupts the way in which the “gaze” has been directed inside the woman’s body. Munsky, who works in the “critical realist” style, has painted from photographs she took in a clinic in Berlin. With a cool palette and crisp lines emphasizing the stark, sterile atmosphere of gynecological clinics, she forces the viewer to confront a harsh medicalized reality of birth processes as her works feature women and doctors in hospital rooms and fetuses in glass tubes. Munsky’s drawing, *Abtreibung ist Männersache* (*Abortion Is a Man’s Thing*—Figure 5), depicts a doctor performing an abortion. The action is implied, the woman invisible except for her foot, which is held in place by a stirrup. Munsky thereby observes a tabooed practice and starkly depicts the way in which men, who performed virtually all abortions in Germany at the time of the drawing, exercised power over women. Here Munsky suggests that women must challenge the practice of women’s health, a central demand of the feminist movement at this time.<sup>18</sup> In the late 1970s and 1980s, Munsky’s subject shifted from abortion practice to reproductive technologies. In her oil painting, *Manipulation* (Figure 6), fetuses at various stages of development are encased in a series of test tubes before a vast horizon. They are contorted with exaggerated body parts, some resembling infants, and a skeleton hangs in one of the tubes. With this critical image, Munsky expresses uncertainty and fears about this relatively new phenomenon and its possible implications, as well as concern about the future of reproduction.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas Munsky is interested in depicting reproductive technologies, Annegret Soltau’s works, which bring pregnant women back into the picture, can be read as resisting the implications of those technologies.<sup>20</sup> Cynthia Daniels suggests how Soltau’s images might be read as political contributions to the abortion debate:

The animation of fetal life through imagery did more than just personify the fetus. As the fetus emerged as a person, the pregnant woman began literally to disappear from view.<sup>21</sup>

Soltau works with video and photography; in reproducing reproduction, she seeks to refamiliarize viewers with the woman’s pregnant body and forces the eye to see only the skin, inviting the tension this elicits.

Soltau’s photo sequence, entitled *Schwanger* (*Pregnant*—Figure 7), consists of 135 photographs of her naked, pregnant body, ar-

Figure 5. Maina-Miriam Munsky, *Abtreibung ist Männersache*.

Figure 6. Maina-Miriam Munsky, *Manipulation*.

ranged in nine rows to represent each month of her pregnancy. As the pregnancy advances, the central column of photos becomes increasingly focused upon the belly, eliminating Soltau's face and legs altogether, and thus illustrating how the fetus transforms her as it becomes more and more the focus of her attention (and the viewer's "gaze"). The bordering negatives are gradually destroyed, which Soltau describes in terms of "mental violation and bodily intervention."<sup>22</sup> Thus *Schwanger* visually represents what Emily Martin has referred to as women's "fragmented" sense of body and self, attributable to the practices of scientific medicine.<sup>23</sup> We see the dis-integration of her body as Soltau (literally) deconstructs traditional viewing of the pregnant woman.

Soltau exemplifies the notion of the personal being political, as her work deals with *her* body-altering and self-altering experience of pregnancy. Renate Berger explains that Soltau is concerned with "how estranged [*fremd*] a human being can become to oneself."<sup>24</sup> For Soltau pregnancy is alienating, experienced as something that happens to women that leaves *her* body utterly transformed. As Berger describes, Soltau considers pregnancy as

the stretching and dividing of oneself, releasing the new after one has not so much housed as allowed it to grow from one's own substance . . . the unsuppressible fear of never physically being the same, to be a shell, a part dies with the new, the other.<sup>25</sup>

Soltau challenges fetal dominance and the myths of pregnancy as self-sacrificing and natural by making women's power and vulnerability visible.

Soltau's video, *Schwanger-SEIN (Being Pregnant)*, moves through nine different phases (presented on nine different screens), expressing the changes in her feelings toward pregnancy that correspond to the changes in her body (Panic, Ambivalence, Hope, Solitude, Separation, Confinement, Remembrance, Greeting, and Giving Birth). In the first phase—Panic—Soltau stands next to and in front of a photo of a fetus, thereby representing the inescapable influence of the public fetus on pregnant women. She then peels off a layer of clear latex she has applied to her face, perhaps in an effort to get below the surface of the discourses concerning pregnancy that surround her. The text accompanying the video is a consideration of the text of the current abortion law with its complicated specifications,

Figure 7. Annegret Soltau, *Schwanger*.

which Soltau presents in different combinations, followed by what might be results of a psychological study:

Four patients felt after the *Interruptio* that they suffered a LOSS. One broke out in tears immediately after waking up from the anesthesia and realized that she would rather have kept the child. Another indicated that she felt somehow empty, she was feeling a HOLE IN HER, while she previously had been SATISFIED and FULFILLED.

The text suggests that the myriad of cultural messages—especially those meant to discourage women from seeking abortions—are inseparable from how individual women “experience” pregnancy.<sup>26</sup>

In the second phase—“Ambivalence” (“Zwiespalt”)—video stills of Soltau’s curled up, stretched out, and slowly rising body feature texts that express the multitude of internalized cultural messages: “LET IT GROW . . . PLAN RATIONALLY . . . ask yourself, what you really want . . . children are a burden . . . listen to your inner voice . . . don’t give in to emotional idiocy.” In this phase she explores her inner conflicts more deeply, breaking the taboo of the “ambivalent mother,” and she contemplates abortion: “It might be your unconscious desire, to have a child . . . it is irresponsible to bring children into the world . . . LET-LIVE . . . ABORT . . .” This segment of the video concludes with a close-up of a metal dish and some surgical instruments used in some abortions. Though she has chosen to become pregnant, these thoughts connect her with the women who choose abortions.

Throughout the video, Soltau is engaged in the political enterprise of bringing the woman significantly “back in” to the public picture of pregnancy via technology—namely, the video camera. In the phase “Greeting” (“Ansprache”—Figure 8), Soltau senses the fetus and its movements and begins talking to it in a process of discovery: “I don’t know you . . . Why don’t you give me a sign . . . It’s time for you to come out of the cave, then we’ll finally see each other.” Here Soltau personalizes the relationship between mother and fetus publicly in front of the camera.

Soltau’s use of the video camera to view pregnancy can be regarded in contrast to the technology that has enabled doctors and the public to look inside the uterus. Soltau exposes the *pregnant* woman’s body and stops the viewer’s gaze upon the skin. Thus



Figure 8. *Annegret Soltan, Ansprache.*

Soltau is engaged in restoring women's bodily integrity by exploring the pregnant woman's unique relationship to her body and her fetus in her own terms. In this way, Soltau's art can be regarded as a highly political act of resistance to reproductive technologies and policies that ignore the *relational* nature of pregnancy. Her "video diary" with its carefully selected texts and images places women back into the "pregnancy script"; her work is neither realistic nor naturalistic, but rather a radical recreation of pregnancy.

### CONTESTING IMAGES IN THE CONTEXT OF REUNIFICATION

Following the opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the abortion debate again intensified, as the Christian Democratic government expressed its intention to impose Paragraph 218 on united Germany. West German legislators emphasized the moral superiority of the West German state, which "protected unborn life," and hence the moral bankruptcy of the East German state, which some legislators felt had "encouraged abortion" by legalizing it in the first trimester.<sup>27</sup> Together, East and West German feminists launched a campaign against Paragraph 218, making the debate over the law one of the most divisive issues of German unification. The Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (New Society for Fine Arts), a government-funded organization dedicated to promoting the work of politically engaged artists, organized a poster campaign against Paragraph 218 featuring the work of U.S. artist Barbara Kruger (with the translated text), *Dein Körper ist ein Schlachtfeld* (*Your Body Is a Battleground*—Figure 9). This poster combined imagery appropriated from the mass media and text featuring a clear political statement: "Support legal abortion, birth control, and the rights of women."<sup>28</sup> Approximately two thousand reproductions of this popular image were displayed in public spaces throughout the city, and in November 1991 the image was featured on the Times Square-like advertising space on the Kurfürstendamm, Berlin's busiest commercial street, as the German Bundestag debated the reform of Paragraph 218. This poster suggests how feminist art transcends state borders and brings together disparate feminist efforts to oppose strict abortion laws. Kruger's image and the ones that follow

Figure 9. Barbara Kruger, *Dein Körper ist ein Schlachtfeld.*

can be seen as deliberate efforts to influence the legislative debate (*sich einmischen*).<sup>29</sup>

The Bundestag debates on the new abortion law virtually ignored East German women, who lost their right to abortion on demand. A few popular abortion images, created by East German artists, can be read as efforts to render East German women's experiences visible in reunified Germany. When the Constitutional Court ruled in 1993 that the state has an obligation to condemn abortion and protect "unborn life," the editors of *SAX*, the city magazine in Dresden, called on readers to submit postcard-sized images expressing "thoughts, feelings, messages, angry outbursts, ideas . . . regarding the Karlsruhe decision."<sup>30</sup> They received more than eighty cards, which they organized into a traveling exhibit, "Mail Art against Paragraph 218." Just as in previous abortion debates, the creation of abortion rights imagery was one form of citizen politics, further evidence of the vibrancy of civil society in the new Germany. Many of the postcards, such as Carla Weckesser's sardonic image, *Geschenk aus dem Westen* (*Gift from the West*—Figure 10), depicting a man's hand holding a small, gift-wrapped box labeled [Paragraph] 218, suggest how the reunification process forced patriarchal West German practices and values upon East German women.

Also representing an East German woman's perspective is Anke Feuchtenberger's image, subtitled *Für Selbstbestimmung und das Recht der Frau* (*For Self-Determination and the Rights of Women*—Figure 11), a poster designed for the Berlin Green Party and the Independent Women's Association. A woman with a towering purple head of hair holds a child in one arm. Boldly and directly confronting the viewer, she stands naked, symbolizing strength and confidence. While drawing on the slogan of the West German feminist movement of the 1970s, Feuchtenberger's image develops a theme particularly brought to light by East German feminist activists in the post-Wall period—the fact that most women seeking abortions and many abortion rights activists are mothers.<sup>31</sup> This image thus serves as a reminder that promoting abortion rights is not a statement against motherhood, as many anti-abortion advocates have claimed. Moreover, this poster lends credence to the claims of Myra Marx Ferree and Donna Harsch that East German women developed a sense of feminist consciousness as a result of employment.<sup>32</sup> Feuchtenberger's mother figure is presented as empowered al-

Figure 10. Carla Weckesser, *Das Geschenk*.

Figure 11. Anke Feuchtenberger, *Mein Bauch gehört mir*.

though East German mothers are, arguably, next to noncitizens and people of color, the most displaced constituency in united Germany. The image is a bold and uncompromising portrayal of women's agency and resistance to the *Frauenpolitik* (policies for women) of the new German state.

Feuchtenberger's poster stands in stark contrast to the first image discussed, the poster by Käthe Kollwitz. The two works point to a shift in the imagery: as the political demands regarding the abortion issue have changed, the victimized woman in need has been replaced by the strong, self-determined woman defending her rights.

### CONCLUSION: THE NEW BODY POLITICS

Since the discovery of the fetus "beneath the skin" and the widespread use of reproductive technologies that enable the public to "hear" and "see" the fetus, the hegemonic fetus increasingly has appeared in legislatures and court rooms and undermined the rights and voices of pregnant women. The mandatory "pro-life" counseling clause in the new German abortion law is a glaring example of this shift in abortion discourse. The latest debate in Germany, echoing recent trends in the United States, reflects the state's continued interest in regulating women's reproduction and sexuality and suggests that women's bodily integrity is likely to be increasingly disregarded for the sake of the fetus. Many German feminists, discouraged by the latest abortion campaign and by the intransigence of the Constitutional Court, say that the development of a unified movement in the near future is unlikely, and yet a counter-movement against the "public fetus" is necessary if women are to gain the right to an abortion. Far from being over, the debate on abortion raises some complex new issues while some old ones persist—and artists are addressing both of these dimensions.

By drawing attention to a subject many German politicians feel has been resolved, contemporary artists are engaged in feminist politics. As Maina-Miriam Munsky stated,

I don't believe that the theme of abortion has passed. . . . [Women] are the ones who must go to the doctors. . . . And most of the time they are the ones who must pay.<sup>33</sup>

Yet many artists resist categorization as “feminists.” As Anke Feuchtenberger explained,

Actually, I only can talk about myself, just very privately. It becomes political because others have the same experience. . . . But I try not to sell myself to any group, not even to extreme feminists.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, when asked whether she considered her work to be feminist, Annegret Soltau replied,

What I resist is putting myself into categories. I get claustrophobic, so to speak, or I have the feeling that I’m limiting myself, or I think this or that might not fit into the category and thus cannot be. I just want IT ALL.<sup>35</sup>

These statements can be read as critiques of feminists, who insist that politics involves reaching consensus on an issue as complex as abortion; these artists’ images should be regarded as contributions to a pluralist feminist body politics.

When regarded together, as we have done here, these images suggest that feminist body politics must include the recognition of a diversity of subject positions and individual visions. Taken together, they stand as powerful critiques of dominant (technological) ways of seeing and are powerful assertions of (pregnant) women’s agency. These images together create a spectrum of feminist body politics and reflect the sort of plurality rarely appreciated in feminist movement politics, which often drown out diverse viewpoints by insisting on consensus (a singular counterposition). Artists and activists need to work together to shape what Cynthia Daniels has dubbed the “new body politics” in an effort to “rethink the concept of self-sovereignty from the point of view of the female body.”<sup>36</sup> These German feminist artists remind us that political action, like power itself, often is diffuse, occurring in multiple arenas simultaneously and necessitating a multiplicity of forms and contents.



## NOTES

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1. For a brief overview of these events, see Nanette Funk, "Abortion and German Unification," in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, pp. 194–200 (New York: Routledge, 1993).
2. Literally "under other circumstances," *unter anderen Umständen* is a German expression meaning "to be pregnant."
3. For a discussion of the conflation of national and abortion discourses in post-Wall Germany, see Andrea C. Wuerth: "Nation, State, and the Politics of Women's Rights: Abortion Law Reform in Post-Wall Germany, 1989–1993"; Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1995, and "Re-Unification and Reproductive Rights: Abortion in the German Public Sphere, 1989–1990"; Working Paper, Center for European Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (July 1997).
4. Rosemary Betterton, ed., *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 209.
5. Atina Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign against Paragraph 218," in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review, 1984), p. 66.
6. Gisela Schirmer, letter to Julia Dech, 17 February 1992, *Archives of the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin*. In this letter, Schirmer discusses her prospective dissertation, entitled "Paragraph 218 und die Internationale Ausstellung 'Frauen in Not' von 1931 in Berlin."
7. Grossmann, p. 68.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Gisela Staupe and Lisa Vieth, eds., *Unter Anderen Umständen: Zur Geschichte der Abtreibung*, rev. ed. (Dortmund: Ebersbach, 1996), p. 148.
10. For an overview of the history of feminist campaigns against abortion, especially since the 1970s, see *Frauen Begehren Selbstbestimmung! 120 Jahre Kampf dem Paragraph 218: Dokumentation*, ed. Frauenforschungs-, -bildungs- und -informationszentrum (Berlin: FFBIZ, 1991).
11. Julia Dech, personal interview, 16 July 1996.
12. Julia Dech, "Frauen Unter Denkmalschutz," *Paragraph 218—Bilder gegen ein K(l)assengesetz: Materialien zu einer Ausstellung* (Berlin: Arbeitsgruppe §218, 1977), p. 41.

13. Barbara Duden, *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 2.
14. Cynthia R. Daniels, *At Women's Expense: State Power and the Politics of Fetal Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 10.
15. Katharina Zimmer, *Das Leben vor der Geburt: Die seelische und körperliche Entwicklung des Kindes im Mutterleib* (Bonn: Bundesministerium fuer Jugend, Familie, Frauen, und Gesundheit, 1989).
16. Daniels, p. 3. See also Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," *Feminist Studies* 13, 2 (1987): 263–92; Carol Stabile, "Shooting the Mothers," *Camera Obscura* 28 (January 1992); Karen Newman, *Fetal Positions: Individualism, Science, Visuality* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996); Valerie Hartouni, *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
17. Though we feel that the visibility of the fetus has shaped the abortion debate in a way that reduces the choices and autonomy of women, we are not dealing with the larger question of whether or not reproductive technologies assist or harm women. The literature on gender and reproductive technologies is too extensive to list in full here. Some notable contributions include: Sara Franklin and Maureen McNeil, "Reproductive Futures: Recent Literature and Current Feminist Debates on Reproductive Technologies," *Feminist Studies* 14, 3 (1988): 545–60; Petchesky, "Fetal Images"; Barbara Katz Rothman, *Recreating Motherhood: Ideology and Technology in a Patriarchal Society* (New York: Norton, 1989); Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Rayna Rapp, "Constructing Amniocentesis: Maternal and Medical Discourses," in *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture*, ed. Faye D. Ginsburg and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990); Carole H. Browner and Nancy Ann Press, "The Normalization of Prenatal Diagnostic Screening," and Sarah Franklin, "Postmodern Procreation: A Cultural Account of Assisted Reproduction," in *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, ed. Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). For a German perspective, see Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, "Was ist Leben? Neue Technologien, neue Ethik: die Praenataldiagnostik," in Staue and Vieth, eds., pp. 127–34.
18. Though her message is clear in the title, the depiction of an abortion in progress conveys a more ambiguous message, especially to a contemporary viewer in the context of today's anti-abortion climate.
19. In another work, entitled *Die Welt ist Voll Licht* (*The World is Full of Light*—oil, 1979), Munsky, together with her husband, creates a very complex collage-like combination of images. In a conversation in summer 1996, she explained that this work stemmed from an incident in which their young son wandered into a sex show. The painting is divided into a dark ("negative") section, painted by Sorge, which shows darkened images of their son, blindfolded, the back of a naked woman, corpses, a masked

person, and armed men. The light ("positive") section, painted by Munsky, features their son, sun-drenched, in the bottom left-hand corner in a room looking out a window at what appears to be their neighborhood and an image of two young boys playing together; in the bottom right-hand part of this light section, Munsky includes an image of an infant in a test tube. When we asked about the meaning of this, she explained that the sleeping infant is safe. In this case, reproductive technology creates a sterile, protected space, which she has placed in contrast to the evils of the world. When we spoke with her, Munsky was reluctant to make a direct statement about reproductive technology; she is more interested in exploring the ambiguities of "life" in its contemporary context. She also has done a series on commission from a Berlin obstetrician which features infants in hospital settings; the emphasis here appears to be on the inseparability of modern life from technology.

20. Renate Berger concurs with this point. See Renate Berger, "Zwischen Leben und Tod: Zur Mutterimago bei Niki de St. Phalle, Ulrike Rosenbad, Mary Kelly, und Annegret Soltau," in *Verklärt, Verkitscht, Vergessen: Die Mutter als ästhetische Figur*, ed. Renate Möhrmann (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 1996).
21. Daniels, p. 21.
22. Cited in Annegret Soltau, *Fragmente des ichs* (Mainz: Stadtgalerie, 1991), no page.
23. Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 15–23.
24. Renate Berger, "Der Mensch als Readymade: Annegret Soltau," in *Metamorpho*, ed. Claudia Gabriele Philipp (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1992), p. 59.
25. *Ibid.*
26. This interpretation draws on Joan W. Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992).
27. For a detailed discussion of the discourse of the abortion debate and German re-unification, see Wuerth, "Re-Unification and Reproductive Rights."
28. The German translation of the text read "Dein Körper ist ein Schlachtfeld: Unterstützt die gesetzliche Abtreibung, Geburtenkontrolle, und die Rechte der Frauen."
29. This phrase was used by both Frank Wagner of the Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, with whom we spoke about the Kruger image, and Angela Stuhrberg, who organized the "Mail Art against Paragraph 218" campaign in Dresden.
30. *Mail-Art gegen den Paragraph 218: Dokumentation zur Ausstellung, zur Geschichte des Abtreibungsverbots und zu den Diskussionen um die Neugestaltung des Paragraphen 218 seit der Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands* (Dresden: Frauen-Projektgruppe "Dokumentation zur Ausstellung Mail-Art gegen den Paragraph 218," 1995).

31. See Rick Atkinson, "Abortion Splits Unified Germany," *Washington Post*, 13 August 1995, p. A28.
32. Myra Marx Ferree, "The Rise and Fall of 'Mommy Politics': Feminism and Unification in (East) Germany," *Feminist Studies* 19 (Spring 1993): 89–115, and Donna Harsch, "Society, the State and Abortion in East Germany, 1950–1972," *American Historical Review*, February 1997: 53–84.
33. Maina-Miriam Munsky, interview, 15 July 1996.
34. Cited in *Connexions* 47 (1995): 21.
35. Cited in Amelia Jones, ed. *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 152.
36. *Ibid.*

## FIGURES

- Figure 1. Jula Dech, *Der unbekanntten Frau*, poster, 1977. Reproduced by permission of the artist.
- Figure 2. *Moralismus auf dem Rücken der Frau*, 1971. Poster by the Women's Liberation Movement and the Humanist Union at the University of Stuttgart.
- Figure 3. *Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar*, 1975/76. Poster by the Kreuzberger Produzenten Galerie, Berlin. Reproduced by permission of Jula Dech.
- Figure 4. *Das Leben vor der Geburt*, 1992. Brochure by the Bundesministerium für Jugend, Familie, Frauen, und Gesundheit.
- Figure 5. Maina-Miriam Munsky, *Abtreibung ist Männersache*, 1976. Color pencil on paper. Reproduced by permission of Galerie Eva Poll, Berlin.
- Figure 6. Maina-Miriam Munsky, *Manipulation*, 1981. Oil on canvas. Reproduced by permission of Galerie Eva Poll, Berlin.
- Figure 7. Annegret Soltau, *Schwanger*, 1981-82. 135 photographs with etching. Reproduced by permission of the artist.
- Figure 8. Annegret Soltau, "Ansprache." Stills from video *Schwanger Sein II*, 1980–82. Reproduced by permission of the artist.
- Figure 9. Barbara Kruger, *Dein Körper ist ein Schlachtfeld*, 1989. Poster by the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK), Berlin, 1991. Reproduced by permission of NGBK.
- Figure 10. Carla Weckesser, *Das Geschenk*, 1993. Color postcard. Reproduced by permission of Angela Stuhrberg, *SAX* magazine, Dresden.
- Figure 11. Anke Feuchtenberger, *Mein Bauch gehört mir*, 1991. Poster.

## CONSTRUCTING BORDERS: IMAGE AND IDENTITY IN *DIE FRAU VON HEUTE*, 1945–49

Jennifer V. Evans

Citizenship, in the abstract, revolves around issues of membership and entitlements. Traditionally confined to the realm of “high politics,” the critical engagement with political “belonging” has consisted largely of studies of voting practices, juridical decisions, and constitutional debates. Despite the wide acceptance of these attributes as appropriate measurements of civic identity, they obscure the fact that the history of citizenship is often a history of unequal access. Few would take issue with the assertion that while national identity unfolds as a relational process among individuals and groups, the end result is rarely a preordained or guaranteed equality. Although concepts of the nation typically center on notions of inclusivity and cultural assimilation, the transition from subject to citizen is in fact a labored one. Too often, the exclusions which mark civic identity have profound spatial and physical ramifications, as the history of the American civil rights movement attests clearly. What remains particularly unexamined is the role of violence in structuring not only the extent to which citizens may participate in public life, but the “gendering” of the polity itself, a problematic which emerges in acute form in Germany at the end of World War II. Beginning my analysis with the “taking of Berlin” in the final days of the war and Soviet attempts to reconstruct German political and social identity according to the principles of “democracy” and “denazification,” I analyze how the negation of certain female war experiences in the editorial politics of the Soviet-backed Democratic Association of German Women (DFD) impacted and indeed impaired attempts at incorporating women’s memories of capitulation into the official public memory of the end of the war.

In the shadow of the waves of rapes which swept through the German capital in the late spring of 1945 and continued sporadically into the postwar period, I am interested in the repercussions this type of violence produced for Allied authorities promoting their particular brand of democratic renewal.<sup>1</sup> Like Atina Grossmann, Annette Timm, and Elizabeth Heineman on the subject of women's uneven involvement in the reform and rebuilding of postwar Germany, I argue that despite the precariousness of German sexual identity, disrupted in the extreme by brutal sexual assaults and postwar chaos, women were nevertheless central to Allied attempts at forging legitimacy and authority in the four sectors of Berlin.<sup>2</sup> By turning to the period of transition between capitulation and state-formation, from 1945 to roughly 1949, we are able to surmise the limitations and challenges to women's incorporation into official narratives of national belonging in the competing visions of postwar Germany. Situating the popular women's magazine *Die Frau von Heute* (known in English as *The Woman of Today*) against the relief of identity politics in the Soviet zone, this article examines the ways in which first the Soviet Military Administration (hereafter referred to as the SMAD) and then the DFD sought to make communism a palatable alternative to the legacy of fascism. Caught between soliciting women's active support and excluding any potential engagement with the effects of women's "so-called" liberation at the hands of the Soviets, the DFD sought instead to emphasize familiar Weimar and Nazi-era gender roles in order to secure a transition to a new socialist society.

Although women's bodies became the site of this struggle between the fascist past and the communist future, women's "narratives did not become part of the official public narrative about the end of the war [since they were] limited, constrained, emplotted by political (master) narratives independent of the personal account."<sup>3</sup> I suggest that an analysis of selected articles and images from the journal may help contextualize how exactly official narratives of reconstruction structured women as simultaneously central and marginal to the formation of an antifascist East German collective identity. Beginning with an historical analysis of the immediate postwar period, I shall then turn my attention to a careful reading of *Die Frau von Heute*. I argue that this journal, as both an historical and constitutive text, provides a unique opportunity to observe official efforts at molding an alternative national orientation harnessed,

structured, and organized under communist direction from its headquarters in war-ravaged Berlin. Impeding this transition was the collective trauma of mass rape, a phenomenon which marked the end of Germany's triumphalism and proved a sizable stumbling block to sovietization efforts in what would soon become the German Democratic Republic.

In academic circles the topic of gendered violence has received much attention, which was accelerated by the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Feminist philosophers, literary critics, and historians alike, motivated by the scale of human suffering, have focused on the murderous effects of nascent nationalism on civilian populations in times of both war and peace. By recasting my interpretative gaze back to the postwar period, I am not interested in mapping the extent of the physical or psychological damage endured by the population. Instead, I seek to engage a constellation of theoretical and empirical questions concerning this particular aspect of war and its relationship to the formation of national identity in order to examine the effect of collapse and ruin on the reconstruction of day-to-day conflicts of gender and sexuality. Although some historians regard modern warfare as above the scrutiny of rigorous gender analysis, what could be more gendered, as Robin May Schott argues, than a putative space "occupied primarily by men, or an activity described as performed by men only?"<sup>4</sup> Indeed, what if we were to take seriously the claims made by Miriam Cooke and Angela Woolacott that attention to gender in analyses of war and reconstruction reveals that "the prosecution of mass, legitimized, psychotic violence" depends largely on a particular "construction of gender identities"?<sup>5</sup> Refracted by and articulated through other factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, women's relationship to war is rarely simple and hardly univocal.

Yet the mass rapes which comprised the final days of the war framed the end of the conflict in a language of the familiar. Despite decades of critical scholarship, rape, enforced prostitution, and war still go hand in hand in the popular imagination as to what "naturally" accompanies social unrest. Consequently, the implications of this type of violence in forging collective identity remain relatively unexplored. It is my contention that German women's experience of sexual violence must be viewed as a constitutive part of the process of reestablishing at first a collective and ultimately a "national" sense of belonging in the years following the war. My approach

affords not simply a discussion of sexual relations, gendered coping mechanisms, and strategies of resistance, but also a tangible opportunity to understand the ways in which the silence which typically accompanies sexual aggression is actually quite explicit in the narratives employed to forge the parameters of political belonging.

With the collapse of Nazi Germany and the beginning of the Allied Occupation in May 1945, borders as well as boundaries were thrown into flux. Redrawing political demarcations appeared effortless when compared to the daunting task of organizing the rehabilitation of the German people. Against the rubric of developing distrust between the United States and the Soviet Union, which centered on divergent interpretations of "democracy," identity politics often emerged as the site of intense confrontation between the two major occupation powers. This variation notwithstanding, both the United States and the Soviets focused considerable attention toward the ideological underpinnings of German society, setting social structures themselves against the relief of the recent fascist past. During this politically charged process women's discursive bodies, both rhetorical and representational, emerged as a terrain of contested social meaning in the aftermath of the war. These contested meanings found expression not only among occupation governments struggling to denazify the populace or among Germans intent on building a new "democratic" orientation. In the end, women themselves were perhaps most conflicted in their day-to-day struggle to maintain personal and familial stability in the face of an increasingly tenuous political situation.<sup>6</sup>

In close consultation with officers of the Soviet occupation, recently returned communists took up the task of "democratizing" Nazi-era social and political structures. Realizing that most Germans were reticent about entertaining another single-party system, the Communist Party (KPD) recognized the need for restraint. Since many Germans remembered all too well the ideological underpinnings of the Weimar KPD, Communist Party officials proceeded with caution and attempted to distance themselves officially from the SMAD. From 1945 to the zone-wide elections in 1946, "in hopes of competing successfully with other parties during the brief period of marginally unrestricted pluralism," the communists tried to popularize their policies as nondictatorial and national "even as they dominated all competing organizations."<sup>7</sup> Interested in positioning



Soviet zone democracy as the leading model for a unified Germany, the KPD promised a program based on the two concepts of “antifascism” and “democracy.”<sup>8</sup>

Allowing several months to pass before openly identifying with Marxism-Leninism, the newly formed Socialist Unity Party (SED) debated how to develop “suitable rhetorical devices that carefully redefined democratic pluralism while retaining key doctrinal influences.” In order to solidify the legitimacy of their ideological position, the communists situated their practical approach in direct contradistinction to what they viewed as the Nazis’ misuse of culture. However, German communists were also sensitive to allegations of conspiring with the Russians to impose Soviet norms upon German society. Thus the process of articulating a position was partly a struggle “to locate their ideas between the two extremes.”<sup>9</sup> By speaking the language of equality and women’s “natural” propensity for peace issues—thoughts which preexisted the Nazi interregnum—the DFD sought women’s support of and integration into the antifascist platform promoted in the Soviet zone.

At the same time, the German communists went to great lengths to reassure the population that the threat of “sovietization” was fictive, and newspapers like the *Tägliche Rundschau* proclaimed that the people in the outlying regions of the zone selected freely the form of government “offered” by the SMAD. However, the scars still ran deep as many German civilians remembered what the paper sarcastically addressed as “the chivalrous behavior of the Red Army toward the peaceful population of the vanquished country.”<sup>10</sup> For both Soviet authorities and German communists committed to building a new society, official statements and policy on the issue of Red Army rapes simply reinforced the democratic, antifascist path of Soviet zone politics. In the popular German imagination, however, the large-scale rape of German women marked the end of the war with a period of total social and sexual collapse, bringing into public view such unsavory issues as venereal disease, prostitution, female promiscuity, and interracial fraternization.<sup>11</sup> Thus for both the German population and the Soviet administration, the rapes emerged as a contested site where both the not so distant past and the potential future collided. In a real sense, this tension mirrors the precariousness of a Soviet occupation mindful of the need to entice women’s support while fearing this necessity due to the pervasive memories

of recent violation. By promoting a deliberately familiar image of “the woman of today,” the editorial collective of *Die Frau von Heute*, and the Soviet military authorities by extension, could begin this process of re-education without alienating a much desired domestic base of support.

Successfully exploited as the war drew to a close, gender identity also emerged as an essential element in the process of forging a sense of national belonging in the Nazi era. Firmly established in Joseph Goebbels’s propaganda machine, the linking of filmic images to civic endeavor was achieved in newsreels and documentaries detailing the progress of the war on celluloid. In the eastern campaign, these newsreels often prepared women for the advancement of the retaliatory Russians by warning the predominantly female audience of impending sexual violence should the Reich fall to the Bolsheviks. In order to convey a sense of urgency, the newsreels employed images of the rampages of German soldiers on Polish and Russian women to serve as an implicit warning of how retaliation could take shape.<sup>12</sup> Imbued with overtones of the “stab in the back theory,” where women (among others) were blamed by the right as having lost World War I on the home front, women’s domestic identity became intertwined implicitly with the success or failure of the national campaign. Through an elaborate representational and narrational strategy, then, the Nazis demonstrated in the extreme not simply the linking of women’s bodies with German civic identity, but also how the conjoining of citizenship and sexual violence could be manipulated into a framework within which women were to understand their own contributions to the defense of the Volk. It is the popularization of specific sexual taxonomies—in this example, women’s fear of violation—which justifies the linking of sexuality to narratives of national belonging.

Like a lingering storm that refused to dissipate, the trauma stemming from the waves of Russian rapes which eventually greeted the civilian population confounded and undermined communist attempts to establish a clear and triumphant break from the ruins of the Third Reich. Indeed, when asked about his discussions with Soviet administrators on the issue of rape, the leader of the Communist Party went so far as to state that any allegations of mass sexual transgressions were most likely wielded by fascist provocateurs trying to discredit the KPD.<sup>13</sup> In no uncertain terms, women’s partici-

pation in formulating a new German identity was regarded as potentially destabilizing, characterized instead by either silence or denial. Constructed as the fascist antithesis of the new community, women's wartime experience was forcefully cast outside the narratives of "acceptable" identity, haunting the linguistic borders of the community's memory, marginal and unspeakable. And yet, as the "nazification" of women's experiences rooted them in a despised and destructive past, their discursive removal from this particularly bleak aspect of postwar socialist triumph was simultaneously central to official theory and practice.

Indeed, any discussion of German identity formation would be incomplete without framing it in the context of what Germany's "liberation" came to signify in official and experiential discourses of capitulation. To be sure, the question of the rape of German women by approaching Red Army soldiers "is intricate as well as richly and perilously overdetermined."<sup>14</sup> While recent feminist scholarship has attempted to break the silence by collecting accounts of women's sexual violation, the very discussion of women's assault on the eastern front has incurred intense debate among many German scholars. Illustrating this point, the debate surrounding Germany's understanding or handling of its past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) centers on the difficulty in acknowledging narratives which support a sense of victimhood for fear of a resurgence of nationalist sentiment.<sup>15</sup> While the *Historikerstreit* was waged against revisionist accounts of the Nazi past, similar debate has ensued on the issue of women's complicity in supporting Hitler.<sup>16</sup> In a real sense, this debate can be traced in part to the popularization of a "zero hour," which marked theoretically Germany's transition from fascism to democracy, although the ease of this tense transformation is suspect at best. Of course, the appeal of a "zero hour" can be understood in its representation of a complete and unequivocal "break" from the Third Reich and the war waged on its behalf. For the SMAD, the appeal of leaving the war (and the consequences it wrought for the German population) at a definitive moment in the past, while promising an uncomplicated and glorious point of departure, would also require a careful intervention into the personal sphere. As an integral part of the success or failure of this transition, women's memories of war's end represented a potential stumbling block to the easy imple-

mentation of socialist reforms. Yet in order to sustain such a large-scale ideological reorientation, women's support was indispensable.

Nowhere is this trepidation more evident than in the momentary relaxation of Paragraph 218 of the criminal code, which criminalized abortion. Immediately following capitulation in May 1945, doctors, health officials, and women's organizations rekindled the debates on abortion, birth control, and sex counseling that had dominated the discourse of social welfare in the Weimar period. Concerned with the plight of the rubble women (*Trümmerfrauen*), who "will give themselves for a piece of bread and not think of their husband and children," the Women's Councils (*Frauenausschüsse*), established in August 1945 by the Berlin communist-dominated Magistrat, sent out appeals to succor the immediate suffering. Pleading with the SMAD that "every household is poor and so is the entire German *Volk*," the councils rallied for improved health conditions. Of primary importance was greater access to abortion due to fears concerning alien contamination.<sup>17</sup>

The suspension of the restrictions on abortion in the spring and summer of 1945 was buttressed by the continuation of Weimar and Nazi discourses of social welfare and racial hygiene into the postwar period.<sup>18</sup> While the SMAD allowed women easy access to abortion during this window of opportunity, this act may also be viewed as a means by which to erase from public memory the remnants of Soviet "betrayal" by the so-called "liberators." Although the Nazis had prepared women for the possibility of rape through explicit newsreels documenting the Russian advance toward the heartland of the Reich, with anywhere from one out of every three of about 1.5 million women raped in Berlin alone, abortions were frenetically performed with the consent of the Protestant Church and both German and occupation authorities.<sup>19</sup>

In more ways than the symbolic, the initial suspension of Paragraph 218 must be viewed as irrevocably linked to long-standing strictures of Weimar and Nazi-era population politics (*Bevölkerungspolitik*) transplanted to Soviet-occupied Germany. Expressing their need for abortion in medical affidavits presented to health officers, women overwhelmingly justified abortion in the language of social necessity, often but not always employing racial stereotypes popularized by Nazi propaganda in order to plead their case.<sup>20</sup> By the end of 1946, with the initial emergency overcome and greater social and

political stability in place, the criteria for access to abortion tightened. The recently amalgamated SED's acquisition of power by 1947 gave rise to a "motherhood-eugenics consensus" within the party which favored legalized abortion if deemed socially, medically, eugenically, or ethically justifiable.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the heated public debates on the exact nature of abortion law reform, communist officials remained quiet on the issue of Red Army transgressions, conscious of the need to distance themselves from overt association with the Soviet administration.

While official circles tended to dismiss the issue of rape in the days and months following the war, it is undeniable that women's victimization at the hands of the Russians was addressed consistently in the documents of the Berlin health authorities since it was they who dealt with women's direct appeals for abortions and venereal disease treatment. Although these archival sources provide vivid testament of the consequences of sexual violence, these documents were never allowed, let alone encouraged, to form the basis for an official engagement with women's wartime experience in terms of memorializing the exact nature of women's "sacrifice" for the new socialist future. Hidden away in government archives and sheltered from public scrutiny, the testimonials of Berlin women for abortions were necessarily precluded from constituting a facet of German women's publicly sanctioned political identity. In other words, although there was widespread recognition of women's perilous condition at the municipal and state levels in the Soviet occupation zone, the most visible authority on women's political equality, the DFD, published images and articles devoid of any direct discussion of women's trauma at the hands of the Soviets. Despite this apparent occlusion, the residue of sexual violence and the struggle over postwar rebuilding, like the long shadows cast by the ruins of Berlin, hung over the DFD's editorial platform and can be gleaned from the pages of its journal in the way in which it elected to showcase the strength, maternalism, and (re)productive capacity of "today's woman."

As the first major effort to deal with women's hardship during the occupation of Berlin, the establishment of officially nonpartisan women's councils was of paramount importance.<sup>22</sup> Charged with the task of reaching out to the female masses to implement democratic political reorientation, the women's councils consisted of recently returned Weimar communists, in addition to new recruits from across

the political spectrum, united in their belief that the surest way of reaching their audience was through the pages of a woman's monthly magazine. With much official enthusiasm and fanfare, *Die Frau von Heute* emerged onto the scene, presenting itself as the "friend and confidant" and "reflection of today's woman."<sup>23</sup> In order to motivate and guide women's transition from fascism to democracy, the leaders of the women's council movement (and its 1947 successor, the DFD) outlined precise directives governing the political component of the women's paper. Although political articles were regarded as essential in winning the allegiance of women, the paper was careful not to alienate the prospective male audience in the quest to legitimize women's equal status in public life.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the tension surrounding women's politicization and their more traditional obligations would emerge as a recurring theme in the pages of the journal.

This tension is dramatically illustrated by the urgent reconstruction of familiar tropes of gender identification which guided both major occupation powers in repositioning the nuclear family as the basic building block of their newly democratized vision of society. Despite the attendant authoritarianism woven into the fabric of the patriarchal family in imperial and later Nazi Germany, the family would nevertheless play an important role in the reconstitution of "appropriate" gender roles for German women.<sup>25</sup> Reestablishing a sense of a wider social ordering, the family, with its notions of cooperation, sharing, and community, could be successfully incorporated into the values espoused by the military dictates of the SMAD. As an identifiable emblem of prewar German identity, the family could also help ease German men and women into a new kind of socialization through a somewhat recognizable conception of gendered harmony. With its additional attributes of feminine loyalty and quiet sacrifice, the family provided an instructive framework for women interested in making sense of their own wartime experiences.

Evidence of this layering can be found in the initial editions of *Die Frau von Heute*. In light of the official denial of women's trauma during the occupation of Germany, the role of the magazine in constituting a new democratic orientation is paramount. Despite the urgent appeal of the chief of the Soviet military in November 1945 regarding women's involvement in promoting democratization, upon first glance inside the magazine one is struck by the subtlety of the political message. Among the uplifting "greetings" from the Berlin

women's council which reinforce the magazine's objectives, the February 1946 edition curiously resembles an American housekeeping monthly from the same period. Besides a number of short stories by lesser known Western authors, one article provides tips to the readers about how to convert "outmoded, unhygienic, impractical bedrooms" into "light and airy living spaces." Blaming Hitler for "the bombings which made us tight on space," the author, identified only as F. E., demonstrates with two illustrations how to transform the dark and brooding chamber, reminiscent of imperial opulence, into a comfortable room suitable for an entire family. "Away with the pompous double bed. How about additional space for the housewife to go about her daily work?" Stripped of the dark wallpaper and the "oppressive drapes," the renovated room conveys just a hint of the modern functionality of socialist regimentation and practicality.<sup>26</sup>

Although oriented around a socialist vantage, with its disdain for "bourgeois" materialism, there is a decidedly bourgeois flavor to the identities presented to the "new" woman. Rather than representing an alternative awakening, "today's woman" bears a striking resemblance to the vision condemned as part of an earlier fascist order. Indeed, no mention is made of communal kitchens or the tyranny of housework found in previous incarnations of socialist magazines. Rather than confronting men and women with new roles after the "zero hour," the DFD found utility in marshaling women's energy into a familiar position that conveniently bridged the past and pointed to a productive future. Inviting women to "join in the struggle for a new Germany for you and your children," the trappings of this particular socialist vision would be found scattered among articles discussing theatrical productions, nutritional recipes, hair styles, and colorful fashion exposés.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the images of the journal tell conflicting stories with regard to women's new independence. While some articles instruct women how to repair their own apartment, most images reinforce the domestic bliss reminiscent of at least two of the three K's.<sup>28</sup> The covers of the 1946 editions highlight this tension and provide excellent lenses through which to view the continuation of Weimar and Nazi discourses of domesticity, home, and hearth as they become molded into socially useful examples of women's liberation and reconstruction. Framing the articles and stories are colorful full-page "cover girls" who, either always on the move or casting a wistful

glance out a window, characterize the postwar image of the “women of the day.” From March’s rubble women to October’s wholesome mother and child, the women on the cover taken collectively represent very traditional images of woman, to be sure. Seen either pulling her children in a little red wagon or collecting a jaunty bouquet of wild flowers and wheat during a stroll in the countryside, the postwar woman does not break with but instead reinforces traditional notions of femininity, evoking Weimar and Nazi-celebrated maternalism. What is most perplexing, as Ina Merkel highlights in her work on socialist women’s magazines in the GDR, is that the pervasive images of women’s strength in the early postwar period never translated into a full-scale societal critique of the remasculinization of the public and private sphere.<sup>29</sup> She argues that the association of women’s work with simple survival served to trivialize their contribution, ultimately relegating them to secondary status in what Annette Kuhn has termed the “*Refamilialisierungs*” discourse of the postwar period.<sup>30</sup> I suggest that this question cannot be resolved without first coming to terms with how these images resonated within the official memorialization of women’s experiences of the end of the war.

If, as Jean-François Lyotard remarked, “history consists of wisps of narratives,” then the writing of history collects these often disparate narrative threads and weaves them together in the form of a text.<sup>31</sup> The ways in which the narrative threads combine attach specific meaning to the historical text itself. For some time now, film criticism has asserted the “social power of images to shape perception and opinions.” As cultural documents, images “encompass philosophical, political and ethical dimensions,” carrying class and gender implications “frequently invested in national identity formation.”<sup>32</sup> As such, texts such as *Die Frau von Heute* cannot be taken for granted as isolated expressions of faceless creators but as multileveled “structures of meaning through which [individuals] give shape to their experiences.”<sup>33</sup>

Juxtaposing the cover images with the colorful advertisements on the back pages of the magazine provides evidence that the cult of domesticity continued to dominate visual expressions of women’s identity in the postwar period.<sup>34</sup> Following each edition in the first year of publication are full-page advertisements for home permanents, baking products, baby food, and perfume, all commodities



understandably unavailable for consumption at this time. Figuring prominently in almost all of the pictures are noticeably blonde women, clothed in well-fitting dresses complete with apron and accessories. Typically situated in either the kitchen or parlor, the sexualized German woman depicted in these advertisements acts as a life-size prop to realistically stage the active presentation of the product. To be sure, these bodies are reproductive bodies, scarcely affected visibly by the ravages of war. In this sense, the attempt to reconstruct a vision of "Germanness" hinged once again on the glamorization of women as reproducers of the *Volk*. Yet the production of a traditionally feminine and domestic woman must be viewed within the context of women's subjugated trauma. Negotiating the silence surrounding rape and the need to solicit women's cooperation and support, the journal also offers the means by which to heal (or disguise) physical and discursive scars. In this regard, hygiene, health, and beauty products were offered as a means to "purify" not only the contaminated body, but also a sullied (and potentially complicated) German identity. Unable to openly discuss the gendered effects of Soviet "liberation," the plethora of beauty products can be understood as a subtle yet effective means by which to address its residual presence. Under the aegis of consumerism, these products extended women the opportunity to reconstitute a vibrant and healthy self-image as both individuals *and* as part of another racially purified community. In this manner, women were able to resurrect pieces of an identity that in many aspects found little reflection amidst the wreckage of the occupied capital.

More broadly, the context of sexual violence and the need for communist legitimization are woven into the very fabric of *Die Frau von Heute*, betrayed by the journal's insistence on addressing a distant future while simultaneously tapping into a prewar sense of normalcy. Indeed, what is most startling about the journal is the lack of practical advice or engagement with the visceral difficulties of day-to-day life. Rather than providing a much needed survival guide in a time of enormous uncertainty, the editorial board chose a format which favored captivating advertisements and fashion articles, thereby obfuscating a Berlin marked by dearth, rising crime, homelessness, and Allied-sponsored ration cards. However, this particular presentation of the journal is far more than simple escapism from the grim reality of the *Nachkriegszeit*. Naturally the SED was invested

in presenting a positive image of the Soviet ability to provide for the population, although the wide assortment of goods which fill the magazine's pages would only be available illegally on the black market. More important, in light of a Soviet administration eager for legitimacy, any thorough attempt to address the realm of everyday survival could potentially engender an uncontrollable engagement with the wider background of recent events, including the explosive context of sexual violation. Mindful of the less savory aspects of Berlin's liberation while committed to enlisting women's enthusiastic support for its cause, the DFD struck a balance by focusing women's eyes on a bountiful future as it necessarily minimized the immediate and often violent struggle for survival in the present.

While the stories and photo essays in the early editions of 1946 cast a lingering glance westward, a noticeable shift in orientation ensues in the final months of the year. By 1947 and 1948 the magazine focuses attention away from the domestic environment and places greater emphasis on women's place in the public sphere. In keeping with these changes, the stories, reviews, and exposés detail aspects of everyday life in Russia and the other eastern satellites. From factory visits to interviews with Russian film stars, the overt acceptance of all things Soviet may have more than a passing connection to the political stabilization of the newly consolidated SED. However, the lighthearted tone remains constant during this transition, as does the means of framing its potential interpretation. In the October 1946 edition, informal letters to the editor ask for clarification about the events surrounding the 1918 abdication of the Kaiser, consider whether an employed girl should be addressed as "Frau," and offer a critical retort from one reader angered by an article on "Health and Beauty."<sup>35</sup>

The first year of the publication serves to resurrect women's prewar identities with images of home, hearth, motherhood, and beauty. Strengthening the stereotypes of femininity, the photos stand in direct contradiction to the prevalent assertion in the Western zones that Soviet "equality" came at the expense of womanliness.<sup>36</sup> As the emphasis transferred to public work and politics in the 1947 and 1948 editions, so too the paper changed hands officially in November 1947 from the women's councils to the DFD.<sup>37</sup> Anne-Marie Durand-Wever—a bourgeois professional "with no clear party affili-

ation and a seasoned women's and birth control advocate"—became its first president.<sup>38</sup>

Interestingly, the numerous pictures of women from Mongolia, Hungary, and Moscow, which begin to emerge in 1947, paint a broader picture than that of simple domesticity. More political discussions of the crises of the day adorn the magazine's pages in the months of 1948, and the discussions take a decidedly political bent. Contrary to Atina Grossmann's assertion that in 1947 and 1948 the DFD continued to present a nonpartisan outlook, the journal betrays its increasingly polemical stance. Gone are the racy advertisements for home permanents and perfume, replaced by the burgeoning awareness of a collective socialist identity. Indeed, virtually every discussion features the prominently displayed symbol of the DFD. However, in keeping with earlier issues, the themes of community and family continue to resonate throughout its pages. Certainly the women from Mongolia and Hungary are not presented as quaint foreign examples of national difference, but as members of a larger communist family, which German women are invited to maintain and strengthen. Adopting a more visible position in directing the journal's ideological stance, the DFD reinforced its predominance in structuring and shaping what role women could expect to play within this "eastern" trajectory.

The predominant shift within the journal corresponds to the glorification of this greater socialist legacy. Initially, early editions shrank away from any overt connection to the Weimar past. By 1948 the journal continued to sidestep the tense years, preferring either allusions to the one hundredth anniversary of the 1848 uprisings or contemporary reports from the international socialist movement. An article commissioned in observation of the 1948 International Women's Day commemorates the life of the mother of German socialism, Clara Zetkin, while simultaneously embracing the hard work of party women from Albania, China, Romania, and the newly established "Indische Republik" as important contributors to the growing international family of devoted socialists. Western women gain little mention.

The articles in 1948 converge around one theme in particular. Following the SED's self-avowed policy of antifascism and democracy, the DFD instructs the readers to take up a position as defenders of the new order. One article presents a resolution passed by the DFD

demanding the “maintenance of a unified democratic Germany,” calling on all “progressive Germans from the East and West zones” to mobilize in opposition to capitalist militarism.<sup>39</sup> While the journal advocates a unified effort to solidify democracy on both a national and a world scale, the narratives of women’s social gains made possible through the Soviet system locate the source of liberation, toleration, and indeed democratization in Russia’s example. Accordingly, women are urged to “actualize [their] role as successors to the legacy made possible first by the Soviet Union.”<sup>40</sup> Encoded in the language of democracy and internationalism, the prominent position of the Soviet standard invites women to imagine themselves within an eastern orbit as part of a tightly knit socialist community.

*Die Frau von Heute* carried its title until 1963, when it underwent a transformation and reemerged under the name *Für Dich*, at times achieving a press run of close to one million copies until its demise in 1990 with German reunification. Despite its dissolution, tension caused by women’s wartime experiences continues to haunt the linguistic boundaries of “appropriate” German identity. While Helke Sander’s memorialization of the rape of German women was one of several controversial attacks against this perceived silence and erasure, many people denounced its implications.<sup>41</sup> Fearful of rekindling fascist sympathies in a Germany rife with discord, many prominent historians have strongly resisted acknowledging the victimization of German women during and after the collapse of the Reich. While it is indeed problematic to evoke a sense of “victimhood” for Germans without potentially conflating their experiences with the millions of Jews and other Europeans victimized through terror and ultimately systematic murder during World War II, the difficulty in appraising or approaching the violence endured by German women should not necessarily lead to an unequivocal disavowal. The problem with the debate on German victimization as it now stands is that its formulation threatens to reproduce discourses employed by the communist authorities in framing women’s violation as subversive and hence unapproachable. Just as in the immediate postwar period leading to the founding of East Germany, women’s discursive bodies remain the site of conflict in the process of forging a new collective identity. Recognizing the complexity of this relationship can only serve to enhance our understanding of the past and the contested contours of social and political identity.

As the victorious Allied powers accepted the unconditional surrender of the Thousand Year Reich, the work of rebuilding the shattered country had already been set into motion. Dedicated to the creation of a new German polity in the aftermath of the Allied victory, the communist authorities recognized the need to address women in the process. Not surprisingly, the communist leaders were unenthusiastic about acknowledging the mass rapes committed against German women by the Soviet "liberators." However, the authorities went beyond ignoring the stories of rape by declaring any such discussion fascist and hence outside of the "democratic" and "antifascist" orbit established in official discourses of early Soviet-zone politics. Thus women's experiences were shunted to the borders of identity politics, framed as an "enemy" of the emerging East German state. While this process had the profound effect of marginalizing women discursively, their role was nonetheless central to any successful attempt on the part of the regime to establish its own identity in the shadow of the Soviet occupation.

With the liberalization of the abortion law in the year after the war, women's desire to erase the physical evidence of rape and violation served the purposes of the authorities as well. Mindful of the need to actively address German women in the process of rebuilding, the Soviet authorities embraced the need for women's councils to work with Germans on the ground level. As a "friend and confidant" of today's woman, the councils eagerly launched *Die Frau von Heute*, which sought to act as a template showcasing women's preferred countenance. Borrowing cultural symbols from Weimar and Nazi discourses of domesticity and hygiene, the journal resurrected familiar gender images in order to encourage women to locate their identification within the confines of the reconstructed family. Although officially antifascist and democratic, in many ways the magazine suggests a continuation rather than a radical disjuncture from the recent past. While officially silent on the issue of women's violation, the magazine's preference for evoking a prewar sense of normality while simultaneously directing women's gaze toward a glorious socialist future highlights the tension surrounding the nature of women's participation in the formulation of a workable German identity.

Corresponding to the increased stability of the SED, by the middle of 1948 the magazine underwent a transformation, becoming

more polemical and assuming a consolidated “eastward” perspective. With this transition, the predominance of beauty products waned as a more proletarian woman was foregrounded. Cast as members of a larger socialist family, women were schooled in the constructive use of their energies by strengthening and supporting this new community. Yet throughout the period of reconstruction, the self-avowed antifascist stance of the DFD hobbled its ability to act as the true “reflection of today’s woman.” By assuming the official ideological stance of the SED, the organization could never truly reflect or legitimize women’s experience since claims of sexual violence found only indirect mention in official discourses of personal survival and renewal. Inviting women’s participation as long as it corresponded to the maxim of Soviet-styled “liberation,” the editorial collective of the DFD impeded the incorporation of women’s postwar experiences into the historical narratives of the end of the war, illustrating the precarious negotiation between celebration and silence.

## NOTES

I wish to thank both the German Historical Institute and the American Historical Association for their generous support of this project.

1. Statistics themselves vary as to the number of women raped at the end of World War II, although most accounts center on Russian malfeasance and the numbers range from 200,000 to 2 million in and around Berlin. While the Russian rapes formed an integral part of an official strategy of demoralization, concentrated primarily in the offensive sweep westward in April–May 1945, martial rape was reported in other Allied zones of occupation well after capitulation.
2. For recent work which highlights this tension, see Atina Grossmann, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” *October* 72 (Spring 1995): 43–65; Elizabeth Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany’s ‘Crisis Years’ and West German National Identity,” *American Historical Review* 101, 2 (April 1996): 354–96; Annette Timm, “The Legacy of *Bevölkerungspolitik*: Venereal Disease Control and Marriage Counseling in Post-WWII Berlin,” *Canadian Journal of History* 18 (August 1998): 173–214; Maria Höhn, “Frau im Haus, Girl im *Spiegel*: Discourse on Women in the Interregnum Period of 1945–1949 and the Question

- of German Identity," *Central European History* 26, 1 (Spring 1993): 57–91; and Annette Kuhn: "Der Refamilialisierungsdiskurs nach '45," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 33, 5 (1991): 593–606, and "Power and Powerlessness: Women after 1945, or the Continuity of the Ideology of Femininity," *German History* 7, 1 (1989): 35–46.
3. John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 123–24.
  4. Robin May Schott, "Gender and 'Postmodern War,'" *Hypatia* 11, 4 (Fall 1996): 20.
  5. Miriam Cooke and Angela Woolacott, *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. ix.
  6. See Heineman for a more thorough discussion of women's personal and political struggles.
  7. David Pike, "Cultural Politics in Soviet Occupied Germany 1945–46," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989): 93.
  8. David Pike argues that "without the antifascist nimbus, the KPD would have lost its key ideological advantage and been compelled to choose more forcefully between competing democratically with other parties or taking open advantage of its special relationship with the Russians." See *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 11.
  9. Pike, "Cultural Politics in Soviet Occupied Germany 1945–46," pp. 94–97.
  10. "Ein Monat nach der Kapitulation," *Tägliche Rundschau*, 8 June 1945; as cited in Pike, *The Politics of Culture*, p. 29.
  11. Key texts in the history of sexual violence in the German perspective include: Ingrid Schmidt-Harzbach, "Eine Woche im April. Berlin 1945. Vergewaltigung als Massenschicksal," *Feministische Studien* 5 (1984): 51–62; Annetarie Tröger, "Between Rape and Prostitution: Survival Strategies and Possibilities of Liberation of Berlin Women in 1945–1948," in *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*, ed. Judith Friedlander, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Carol Smith-Rosenberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Erika Hoerning, "Frauen als Kriegsbeute. Der Zwei-Fronten Krieg. Beispiele aus Berlin," in *Wir kriegen jetzt andere Zeiten" Auf der Such nach der Erfahrung des Volkes in antifaschistischen Ländern. Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930 bis 1960*, vol. 3, ed. Lutz Niethammer and Alexander von Plato (Berlin: Verlag J.H. Dietz Nachf., 1985); Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 105–15; and Kristen Poutrus, "Die Frau ist der Feind: Vergewaltigungen in Berlin bei Kriegsende," *Freitag* 21 (1995).
  12. Stuart Liebman and Annette Michelson, "After the Fall: Women in the House of the Hangman," *October* 72 (Spring 1995): 8.

13. Walter Ulbricht, "Das Aktionsprogramm der KPD in Durchführung," *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 14 October 1945; as cited in Pike, *The Politics of Culture*, p. 30.
14. Grossmann, "A Question of Silence," p. 45.
15. The debate concerning Germany's experience of the Nazi period and how to remember fascism formed the focus of the *Historikerstreit* in the mid-1980s. For more information on the nature of the debate, see Geoff Eley, "Nazism, Politics, and Public Memory: Thoughts on the West German *Historikerstreit* 1986–1987," *Past and Present* 121 (November 1988): 171–208, and Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, the Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).
16. This debate emerged around the same time on the issue of whether German women should be regarded as victims or perpetrators in the Nazi period. See Atina Grossmann's synthesis of the argument between Gisela Bock and Claudia Koonz in "Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism," *Gender and History* 3 (Autumn 1991): 350–58.
17. Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, pp. 191–94.
18. Timm, p. 176. For a detailed evaluation of the suspension of the abortion paragraph, see Grossmann's article in *Between Reform and Revolution, Studies in the History of German Socialism*, ed. David Barclay and Eric Weitz (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), and Donna Harsch, "Society, the State, and Abortion in East Germany, 1950–72," *American Historical Review* (1997): 53–84.
19. Naimark, pp. 199–223; Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, p. 194.
20. Grossmann provides an interesting excerpt from one such medical statement which illustrates this rationale: "On the way to work on the second Easter holiday I was raped by a Mongol. The abuse can be seen on my body. Despite strong resistance, my strength failed me and I had to let everything evil come over me. Now I am pregnant by this person, can only think about this with disgust and ask that I be helped. Since I would not even consider carrying this child to term, both my children would lose their mother. With kind greetings" ("A Question of Silence," pp. 58–59). Although many women employed the language of Nazi racial indoctrination in order to make sense of their trauma, not all applicants for consideration for abortion explained their situation solely in terms of race. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the role "the recent past" played in this process of gaining formal approval for abortion. One has to remember that although these medical boards had been thoroughly cleansed of Nazis, many women may have believed it best to frame their experiences in this manner in order to attach believability to their claim. For archival references on the issue of abortion applications, see especially documents in Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 214 Bezirksamt Neukölln.
21. Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, pp. 197–98.



22. Doris Boissier, "Die Antifaschistischen Frauenausschüsse als Wegbereiter des DFD," *Archivmitteilungen* 38, 3 (1988): 85–88. Despite functioning as a tool of the Soviet-backed KPD/SED, Uta Gerhard argues that these early women's councils consciously organized around the principle of legal equality for women. See "Die staatlich institutionalisierte 'Lösung' der Frauenfrage. Zur Geschichte der Geschlechterverhältnisse in der DDR," in *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, ed. Hartmut Kaelble, Hartmut Zwahr, and Jürgen Kocka, pp. 383–403 (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994).
23. *Die Frau von Heute*, February 1946, p. 1.
24. Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO). DY 31/1154, Culture in the Democratic Association of German Women from the Directives of the Central Women's Council of the Magistrat of Gross-Berlin. Commission for Culture in the Central Women's Council and in the Women's League of Germany.
25. See Kuhn, "Der Refamilialisierungsdiskurs"; Ina Merkel, "Leitbilder und Lebenswesen von Frauen in der DDR," in Kaelble, Zwahr, and Kocka, eds., pp. 359–82; Robert Moeller: *Protecting Motherhood: Women and Family in the Politics of Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and "The Homosexual Man Is a 'Man,' the Homosexual Woman Is a 'Woman': Sex, Society, and the Law in Postwar West Germany," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, 3 (January 1994): 395–429; Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
26. *Die Frau von Heute*, February 1946, p. 29.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
28. *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*. In the pages of *Die Frau von Heute* at least *Kinder* and *Küche* remain present. For additional information, see Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, "Beyond *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*: Weimar Women in Politics and Work," in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan, pp. 33–65 (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984). Ina Merkel argues that the sole continuity in the pages of *Die Frau von Heute*, *Für Dich*, and *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* is the image of the family. Despite extreme poverty and scarcity, the image of woman as the dutiful housewife and mother represented a familiar normalcy, signifying the very possibility of survival (see "Leitbilder und Lebenswesen").
29. Merkel, p. 362.
30. Kuhn, "Der Refamilialisierungsdiskurs."
31. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Instructions païennes* (Paris: Galilee, 1977), p. 39.
32. Anton Kaes, "German Cultural History and the Study of Film," *New German Critique* 65 (Spring/Summer 1995): 49–56.
33. Clifford Geertz, "The Politics of Meaning," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 312.

34. In his review of Eric Hobsbawm's "Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography," *History Workshop Journal* 6: 121–38, the late Tim Mason outlined potential reasons for women's morally righteous depiction in early Weimar iconography. Often envisioned as Delacroix's Lady Liberty, images of socialist women act as muses for the revolutionary cause, hoisting the flag high. Interestingly, the image which accompanies the article depicts a woman sweeping away the rabble after the suppressed January 1919 uprising. While the image wishes to convey a tone of revitalization, it nonetheless employs the comfortable image of woman as *Putzfrau*.
35. *Die Frau von Heute*, October 1946, p. 18.
36. Höhn argues that the American and British zones were careful not to defeminize images of women at work in nontraditional jobs, fearing the dangers of communism, which "granted equality but robbed women of their femininity" ("Frau im Haus," p. 63).
37. SAPMO DY 31/1288 Central Women's Council (FAS) in the Soviet Zone, Reports Concerning Marshall Sokolowski's Order Nr. 254 on the Merging of the Women's Councils with the DFD. For months the supposedly non-partisan Women's Councils argued about the predominance of SED functionaries within the organization. Press reports from Soviet zone newspapers propagandize the decision to merge the organizations. Consult "Notizen der Frau," *Nacht-Express*, 18 September 1947; "Frauenbund und Frauenausschüsse vereinigt: Soziale Kommissionen im DFD—Ergebnisse im Land Brandenburg," *Neues Deutschland*, 27 September 1947; "Verschmelzung der antifaschistischen Frauenausschüsse mit dem Demokratischen Frauenbund," *Tägliche Rundschau*, 16 November 1947; "Zusammenfassung der demokratischen Frauenausschüsse: Lebhaft und freudige Zustimmung zum Befehl 254," *Sächsische Zeitung*, 22 November 1947; *Berliner Zeitung*, 28 November 1947.
38. Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, p. 192.
39. *Die Frau von Heute*, March 1948, pp. 4–5.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
41. See Helke Sander and Barbara Johr, eds., *BeFreier und Befreite: Krieg, Vergewaltigungen, Kinder* (Munich: Antje Kunstmann Verlag, 1992), and responses to the film carrying the same title published in the Spring 1995 edition of the journal *October*.

## ***SORES THAT STILL BLEED: GERMANY, THE GREAT WAR, AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE MODERNIST LITERARY IMAGINATION***

**Ellen Rees**

The wounds of the Great War may never truly heal, and the generational, gender, and geographic gaps which separate many of us from the experience make it difficult to comprehend its impact. For many contemporary readers, the poetry and fiction of the period provide the most immediate insight into the war experiences. Literature written in response to World War I not only documented a unique series of events in world history, but also attempted to create new ways of expressing unprecedented experience. Although literary modernism traces its roots back to the 1890s or earlier, the Great War served as a galvanizing force which changed the way Europeans wrote about themselves and their world.

The war experience of Germans has in many respects been ignored outside of Germany, and indeed the status of German veterans was problematic even within the country itself. Whereas French or British governments could justify the sacrifices they demanded of civilians during the war, as well as the support needed by the veterans afterward because of their victory, German veterans had no such government support. As Adrian Gregory points out, "The claim for decent treatment was more difficult to sustain than similar claims among wounded veterans of the British and French armies. The plight of the wounded was a standing reproach which could not but damage the morale of the people" (1997: 101).

One of the most interesting but little known literary commentaries on the German experience of the Great War comes to us in the form of a Norwegian experimental novel entitled *Sores That Still Bleed* (Sår som ennu blør), published in 1931. In stark contrast to Germany, the neutral country of Norway escaped the direct experi-

ence of war, suffering relatively mild economic hardships and in some cases profiting greatly through shipping. In fact, the only significant cultural debates in Norway about the war focused on the extent to which nonengagement and war profiteering were immoral.

With her novel *Sores That Still Bleed*, an unknown Norwegian woman named Karo Espeseth, living in voluntary exile in Germany, attempted to engage the Norwegian people in the impact of the war, which was so geographically close but so culturally distant. Ironically, the novel created a furor in the Norwegian literary establishment not for its intended warning about the evils of war, but rather for its portrayal of sexual deviance. *Sores That Still Bleed* graphically relates the sadistic relationship between a German war veteran and the beautiful Norwegian student he meets and seduces in Berlin. Through applications of psychoanalytic principles, the author directly links the veteran's deviant sexual behavior to his psychically devastating war experience. Espeseth presents the experience of physical and psychological violence through the perceptions of the male perpetrator rather than the victim, leaving the conquered female voice in the text muted.

While the author claims in her 1983 autobiography, *Life Went On* (Livet gikk videre), to have written the novel as a warning about the horrors of modern warfare, the fact that this novel was received by both contemporary readers and the handful of critics<sup>1</sup> who have analyzed the text as either pornography, a parody of German Expressionism, or a crude attempt at making literature out of psychoanalysis indicates the necessity of a more thorough investigation. In this essay I propose a new reading of the text. I intend first to place the novel in a critical and historical perspective with special reference to the relationship between Germany and Norway and the German experience of the Great War. I will then use this marginalized and mostly forgotten text as a point of departure for explicating the trope of violence against women in literary modernism.

Central to the struggle to understand the relationship between the veteran and the student is a set of stereotypes about German and Norwegian identity, which posit Germany as decadent and sophisticated and Norway as innocent and naive. This binary opposition is common to both Scandinavian and German discourse and reached its most extreme expression in Nazi Aryan idealism, which promoted the idea of Scandinavian genetic superiority. While Germans

have for at least a century looked to their marginalized northern brethren as a paragon of natural and noble humanity, Scandinavians turned to the Germans for skill and information, and young bourgeois Scandinavian men have for centuries spent their *Lehrjahre* in Germany. Perhaps the most widely recognized examples of this phenomenon are composer Edvard Grieg, dramatist Henrik Ibsen, and painter Edvard Munch.<sup>2</sup> Predictably, these experiences almost invariably entail a traumatic exchange of innocence for sophistication on the part of the provincial young men when faced with the cultural wealth and complexity of Germany. Espeseth's novel differs from this tradition because it documents a specifically female experience of both physical and psychological violence and because it takes place after the shattering paradigm shift created by the Great War. She works within a set of binary oppositions (man/woman; Germany/Norway; depravity/innocence) and perhaps unsuccessfully attempts to subvert them through the use of psychoanalysis-inspired exposition. Thus the protective shell of the German veteran falls away to reveal his youthful innocence and musical talent, while in a momentary lapse the idealized Norwegian student reveals her sexual nature, leading the reader to sympathize with the sadist and hope for his "cure."

The novel is set approximately ten years after the Great War and was written while the stirrings of National Socialism were beginning to attract attention. Just as the young Norwegian student symbolizes wealthy and intact Norway for the German veteran (regardless of her actual financial status), the veteran symbolizes outwardly intact but inwardly shattered German society. Espeseth herself vacillated between these two worlds, taking vacations in Norway but living day-to-day in post-World War I Germany. Her autobiography relates numerous examples of outwardly intact men she met who later revealed catastrophic psychic damage that is blamed on the war.

Because *Sores That Still Bleed* exhibited an unusual degree of experimentation with both form and content, it was violently rejected by Norwegian literary critics and remains almost completely unknown to this day. However, this novel significantly amplifies our understanding of changing and ambiguous sexual and national identities in the interwar years. The novel, narrated entirely by the sadistic veteran himself, is constructed as a confessional monologue addressed to his victim, known only as *Goldfasänchen* (Golden

pheasant). This monologue parallels Freud's psychoanalytical method of exploring dreams and childhood experiences in order to alleviate neurosis; this method had only recently been introduced in Norway to a highly skeptical audience at the time the novel was written. It is important to note that Espeseth's novel appropriates but does not reproduce psychoanalysis. The primary difference lies in the absence of the analyst. Rather than being guided by the analyst's directed questioning, the veteran relates his story to his victim, a person unequipped to cure him. In appropriating psychoanalysis in a Norwegian novel in 1931, Espeseth wildly overestimated the sophistication of her reading audience, for whom the connection between trauma and psychosis was not at all clear.

The narrator describes the conflicting emotions brought about by his intense desires to beat the young Norwegian student and his paralyzing inability to act upon these desires. The victim's voice is heard only secondarily in isolated instances when the narrator quotes her in order to explain some of the miscommunications between them. He berates her for her naive belief that he is a normal man and that they are developing a normal relationship which will lead to marriage. From the very beginning, the narrator tears apart her perceptions of reality in order to expose and explain his aberrant behavior:

You always believed  
that what you saw  
was reality.  
And that what you heard was truth.

But life is not so simple  
Little golden pheasant.  
Often reality and truth lie far  
behind all that  
you see and hear.  
Also here (Espeseth 1931: 8–9; cited hereafter by  
page numbers only).

The prose is telegraphic and vernacular, yet with the appearance of poetry on the page, and this colloquial tone is alternately caressing and condescending. The text has no formal divisions other than relatively longer breaks between narratives corresponding to phases in

the chronology of the narration. However, the narration is not purely linear, as present-time narrative comments, flashbacks, and violent hallucinations constantly interrupt the fabula. Roughly the first half of the novel relates the four months of the relationship, while the second half delves into the narrator's formative years, war experiences, and life as a psychically crippled veteran. The final episodes return to the events at the beginning of the relationship, eventually ending in a surprisingly optimistic message of healing for the veteran. No mention is made of the impact of his previous actions or present narration on his victim.

The narrator himself is a fractured or splintered subject, and his narrative authority is challenged first by a small voice inside his head and then a "stranger" who takes over his body, leaving him a dead observer of his own actions. The narrator asserts repeatedly that he is "just one of those who beats" (rather than one who has sex). The voice first appears at the moment he begins to see Goldfasänchen as something other than simply a slender body and round breasts. She becomes the embodiment of his adolescent dream of a pure woman: "And inside of me I heard a voice say something. / 'Just like . . .' / it said. / And then it said— / almost inaudibly: / 'The dream'" (pp. 31–32). Throughout the novel, this small voice struggles in vain against the narrator's overwhelming desire to beat her. The stranger appears when the couple begins engaging in sexual intercourse instead of the beatings desired by the narrator. It is the stranger who engages in sex, and over time the stranger becomes the vessel of the narrator's rage. During this juggling of identities and desires, the narrator first retreats into his identity as one who beats and eventually becomes more and more sympathetic to Goldfasänchen, although he is helpless to protect her from the cruel words and behavior of the stranger: "And I basically thought it was sad that you / were going away. / Basically I wished . . . / No / I couldn't wish any more. / For I was dead" (p. 103). Yet on her very last evening his rage bursts forth, despite his protests: "Something was going to happen. / Something . . . / The dangerous. / That which must not happen" (p. 105). Of course it does happen, and the narrator finds a belt but quickly rephrases and tries to convince himself that it is the stranger within him who does this.

As the rage grows in violence, it becomes clearer, to both the reader and the narrator, that he can no longer compartmentalize his

conflicting feelings. Simply relating the story is not enough to explain or atone: "Yet reality and truth lie much / deeper / much further in. / . . . / But now you will know. / Now I will show you" (p. 112). This serves as an introduction to the second half of the novel, which documents the exact process by which the narrator's compulsion to beat women developed. Embedded within the pseudo-psychoanalytic narrative are a few key tropes.

The narrator himself blames his sadism on his first sexual encounter, which he had with "the enemy," a young Frenchwoman whose body type serves as the model for all his subsequent victims. He claimed that his innocent ideals were shattered by the depraved stories told in the trenches and that it is these stories which he attempts to act out in his sexual encounters with the Frenchwoman. Yet it is not until he is wounded, taken prisoner, and handled roughly by a nurse that the desire to beat takes over:

And the nurse  
I wanted to beat her.  
Beat her bloody.  
. . .

And before we departed  
I would beat her.  
For women  
they were not proud.  
Not pure.

. . .  
And I remembered.  
And it hurt so much.  
But if I could just beat her  
then everything would be good again.  
And the pressure would disappear (pp. 153–55).

In his monumental work, *Male Fantasies* (1987), Klaus Theweleit explicates the trope of the nurse and divides it into two aspects: the white, sexless German nurse who functions as mother/sister, and the red nurse of the enemy, who is reduced to the trope of whore. Because the white nurses were made to embody the entirety of the soldiers' sacred idealization of women, the red nurse, who was often openly sexual, became a perversion. Although Theweleit's analysis



focuses on the experiences of the postwar Freikorps, who waged war against the Bolshevik revolution, the soldiers of the Freikorps had also for the most part participated in the Great War. Thus it is not much of a leap to identify the red nurse of the Bolsheviks with the enemy nurse with whom the veteran comes in contact. Theweleit makes a point about the soldiers' experience of nurses relevant to Espeseth's text: "[The soldier] is given into someone's care, degraded from his status as sexual object. To be a hospital patient is often to be deprived of individual right, particularly in field hospitals" (1987: 127). That the soldier becomes dependent on a red nurse becomes intolerable to him, and, as Theweleit notes, "The soldiers' safety devices were being dynamited; perverted nature was being helped to stage a breakthrough" (1987: 131).

The Frenchwoman, the nurse, and Goldfasänchen (who asks innocently whether he had taken part in the war) form a powerful constellation within the narrator's sexual identity. In volume 2 of *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar ask whether the Great War "with its deathly parody of sexuality somehow threatened a female conquest of men?" (1989: 261). Like most veterans, the narrator saw dozens of his fellow soldiers suffer and die, while the women he encountered appeared to flourish and thrive in their newly gained independence. He rebukes the Norwegian student for her native country's neutrality during the war and assumes her family is rich since many Norwegian companies profited enormously from trading with both sides. Further, Gilbert and Gubar ask whether women in their relative safety from the horrors of war might actually benefit from the war such that it was "in some peculiar sense their fault, a ritual of sacrifice to their victorious femininity?" (1989: 261). Clearly working women at home and on the front experienced an unprecedented emancipation. Nurses in particular gained a sense of independence and power. Yet Goldfasänchen herself was too young and too isolated to have experienced the war directly or attach any sense of emancipation to it. She is caught up in the veteran's psychic drama by association.

The mechanism at play in the veteran's desire to beat the Norwegian student is described by Theweleit in the following manner:

Part of the instinctual energy we've seen bottled up until now is finally discharged. At long last, the libido can seize upon an object. . . . The ability to attack and destroy [the women]—this is a bursting of bounds, a liberation. At last these men can penetrate the truth behind the joke that “women are always innocent” and carry out the appropriate sentence (1987: 181).

Espeseth's narrator attempts to convince himself, as well as Goldfasänchen and the reader, that his violence against women is justified. But instead of blaming women for his shattering experience, he disassociates and blames them for not living up to his ideal of feminine purity, and because his first sexual experiences took place in the theater of war, he cannot separate sex and violence.

Goldfasänchen, a nameless woman nicknamed after a highly prized game bird, exists in the text only through the eyes and dreams of her lover. His narrative control is so absolute that she is, with one exception, entirely muted. The reader never becomes privy to her perceptions or experience of the relationship. Her identity for the veteran is threefold: first, she has the unusual slenderness, round, firm breasts, and long legs of the female body upon which his sadism has fixated. Second, she is a naive but modern provincial whose innocent hopes he repeatedly crushes throughout the course of their affair, causing her to embrace the doctrines of sexual emancipation with a sort of valiant desperation after being stripped of her virginity and ideals. Third, she is, although he denies it, the embodiment of his adolescent idealized vision of woman. In her innocence he recognizes the iconic dream of an ideal woman he thought he had lost forever in the horrors of the war. This cluster of images mirrors the German stereotype of Nordic physical prowess, innocence, independence, and purity, while his negative depiction of the Frenchwoman (as well as the lower class women he meets at bars and beats) further mirror the coming Nazi conceptualization of *Untermensch*.

At one crucial point in the novel Goldfasänchen's voice briefly breaks out of the narrator's stranglehold. This instance gives a glimpse of female sexuality, which predictably shocks the veteran of war and sadism to his very core. During one of his repeated attempts to allow his desire for violence to overcome his competing awe of her innocence and purity, he is taken aback by her voiced desire for sexual intercourse:

What was it you had said?  
Nothing!  
Yes  
it was something.  
You said it one more time  
"Take me!"  
you said.  
...

When you said those words  
I died (pp. 56–57).

He acts upon her request, despite his horror of the sexual act, noting that her words seem to strangle the small voice in his head. The narrator, breaking in from the narrative present, comments to Goldfasänchen that the voice did not know "that something had occurred to you. / Something you never before had understood. / Something a girlfriend had told you. / . . . / that you suddenly had understood that I too was / in pain. / And that you had wanted to help. / Without yourself knowing" (p. 60). This passage complicates Goldfasänchen's expression of desire, "take me." Was it, as the narrator implies, out of her selfless desire to help him, or was it a pure expression of carnal desire? The discovery that she had been a virgin, and thus still innocent, barely atones for the threat that her expressed sexuality poses to the narrator and which had to be repressed at all cost. In giving voice to sexual desire she represents a female identity which does not fit his binary construct of female Nordic innocence versus degraded enemy decadence.

Through her body, Goldfasänchen mirrors the narrator's enemy, the Frenchwoman, while her eyes and face mirror the narrator's dream. The narrator describes the Frenchwoman as a "wild animal" and can remember her round breasts, white skin, and slender form, yet he cannot remember her features: "I had sort of never really seen them" (p. 145). Her most significant characteristic is that she is the enemy. Through some strange transference, the narrator begins a process of healing the wound supposedly inflicted by this enemy when he starts to explain his violence to his victim. Thus, in the spirit of psychoanalysis, communication is posited as the cure for psychic damage.

Espeseth's novel, ostensibly a warning about the psychic perils of modern warfare, became one of the targets of a reactionary critical campaign which came to be known as the "sex-literature" debate. *Sores That Still Bleed* was discussed along with two other debut novels published in 1931, Sigurd Hoel's *A Day in October* (En dag i oktober) and Rolf Stenersen's *Good Night, Then* (Godnatt da du). Despite this early negative association, Hoel managed to salvage his literary career through aggressive appropriation of critical authority and established himself as a major twentieth-century Norwegian critic and writer. Stenersen, who also maintained a dual career as a businessman, suffered more marginalization than Hoel, although his work was still accessible enough for him to be deemed talented. On the other hand, Espeseth, whose novel was much more challenging, suffered not only literary marginalization, but also outright ostracization to the extent that she was publicly vilified in Norway, according to her autobiography. This is perhaps not surprising given the multiple and graphic descriptions of sadistic desire and practice. There was, in a sense, no place for such a topic in the Norwegian *Zeitgeist* of the interwar years, which instead was almost exclusively focused on the self-conscious development of a uniquely Norwegian national identity in the aftermath of hundreds of years of political domination by its neighbors, Denmark and Sweden. However, with the novel Espeseth clearly responds to many of the texts written by British and Continental male authors during and after the Great War. Gilbert and Gubar cite a number of examples of wounded men and conquering women, including D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), Siegfried Sassoon's "Glory of Women" (1917), and Wilfred Owen's "Greater Love" (1917–18). Significantly, these texts focus almost exclusively on women psychologically or physically conquering men, rather than on male dominance of women. None of these texts depicts the violation of women as graphically or unrelentingly as Espeseth's text.

Espeseth's novel is deeply disturbing not simply because it relates graphic scenes of violence, but most particularly because its misogynist male protagonist is given voice by a woman writer and because this writer does not allow room for a countering female voice in her text. Whereas many creative works written about the Great War by male authors juxtapose a wounded male figure with a gloating, emancipated, and at times vampire-like female figure, we see in Espe-

seth's text the image of woman as victim, perhaps even the natural scapegoat for male suffering. Scapegoating and victimization also appear thematically in the most widely known female modernist response to the war, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). In Woolf's text, the veteran Septimus Smith and the insulated woman of society Clarissa Dalloway are inextricably identified since both are portrayed as victims. In Woolf's novel, rather than acting out against women, the soldier, unable to communicate, inflicts his violence upon himself. *Sores That Still Bleed* has much more in common with the memoirs and novels of the Freikorps than it does with more widely recognized modernist literary texts. It is a dangerous text because it combines the literary skill and experimentation of modernism with the unmitigated perversion of the fascist soldier.

Fifty years after the publication of the novel, Espeseth felt compelled to justify her project in a memoir depicting her life as a permanent exile from Norway. In *Life Went On*, she portrays the genesis of the novel as an entirely natural result of the observations she, a student of humanity, made about people on the streets and in her neighborhood while studying in Germany. She describes the uncanny sensation of seeing the invisible wounds created by the war; her fear that these wounds, or "abscesses," would explode again into violence; and her decision to write a book which would "warn" Norway about this impending danger. Shortly before writing the novel, she attended, as a journalist for a Norwegian newspaper, the infamous trial of Peter Kürten. Kürten, who exhibited an entirely proper outward appearance, admitted under oath that he had experienced sexual release during the murder of his nine victims. He, together with a physically uninjured wife-beating neighbor, became Espeseth's model for the German veteran (Espeseth 1983: 73–74).

Espeseth states that she wanted to "help" the depraved veteran she created for her novel, and that in this desire for a positive ending she created an innocent Norwegian female counterpart who would be able to heal him (1983: 79). Throughout the autobiography Espeseth maintains a stubbornly idealistic stance. She claims that "something in the air" hindered her from creating a positive cure for the veteran's invisible wound, implying that this something was the growing strength of National Socialism in Germany (*ibid.*). It appears that Espeseth so completely entered into the damaged psyche of interwar Germany that her Norwegian reading public could not hear

her warning cry, and the novel was taken as a depraved glorification of sadism instead.

In concluding, I would like to return to the title of the work, which may in fact offer a glimpse of the female experience of pain hidden behind the narration. Throughout the novel the veteran refers repeatedly to the single large psychic sore he bears. This wound, the result of his war experience, grows and throbs with every lust and confession exposed in the text. Yet the title refers to “sores” in the plural, indicating that his is not the only wound. This plurality, the possibility of other wounds, offers a fleeting opportunity for contemplating the muted female voice and the pain it expresses. As Espeseth herself stated, “The only conclusion I reached in the end was a ‘maybe’” (1983: 79).

#### NOTES

1. Harald Beyer, Philip Houm, Fredrik Ramm, Birgitta Svanberg, and Janneken Øverland.
2. Grieg attended the Leipzig Conservatory from 1859 to 1862; Ibsen first traveled in Germany as a young theater director and later resided there for many years; and Munch, in addition to participating in controversial art exhibits, was a part of the infamous Zum schwarzen Ferkel avant-garde circle in Berlin.

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## THE DISCOURSE OF TRAUMA—THE TRAUMA OF DISCOURSE: CONQUERING MEMORY IN INGEBORG BACHMANN'S *MALINA*

Kristin Kopp

Ingeborg Bachmann's novel *Malina* was published in 1971. It appeared historically at a moment when the feminist movement was forcefully coalescing behind the slogan "The personal is political." The concomitant agenda was initially one of revealing power relations within the domestic sphere. Accordingly, the understanding of private oppression was organized through the conceptual categories offered by the developing notion of a patriarchal social structure. The consciousness-raising autobiographical short story thus came to the fore, favored because it was easily accessible and utilizable in the launching of group discussion of related personal issues. Within this context, Bachmann's novel was readily dismissed as narratively opaque and thus antagonistic to a critical agenda: "Ich habe keineswegs alles verstanden," related Gabriele Wohmann in her representative critique; "ich habe immer dort nicht verstanden, wo es konkret sein sollte."<sup>1</sup>

Such pragmatically oriented impatience meant that Bachmann's rich contribution to the discussion of the relationship between the personal and the political would initially remain largely unnoticed. In the 1980s, the feminist agenda shifted gears, and *Malina* was "re-discovered" within the project of reclaiming formerly overlooked female artistic talent. The novel gained increasing attention and today carries general cult status among women's studies scholars in the field of German and is slowly making its way into the literary canon. Despite much recent attention to the text, however, it is still largely read if not as an autobiography, then as a portrait of the isolated neurosis of a private individual. Discussions attempt to locate and describe a specific "female subjectivity" in the text, showing how it is



either destroyed by and/or complicit with the patriarchal system, ultimately leading to the elimination of the female voice.

In such an approach to *Malina*, the role played by war becomes marginalized and reduced to functioning as a sign of male violence and destruction. Its presence in the text is thus seen on a symbolic level, the war itself remaining an abstract phenomenon. In this paper, I reintroduce the war as a literal event which lies at the center of *Malina*, structuring the text. I thus locate this text within the post-1968 discourse surrounding *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). Far from rejecting the work of those seeking to delineate a female subjectivity in the text, I instead take such considerations one step further, showing how the female element becomes constructed as the *site of the Other of war*.

### THE NARRATIVIZATION OF TRAUMA

*Malina* is comprised of three sections. The first, entitled "Happy with Ivan," portrays the disturbed relationship between the female protagonist (the *Ich*)<sup>2</sup> and her lover, Ivan. The situation is anything but "happy," for their relationship is marked from the beginning by a relentlessly repetitive set of self-destructive behaviors on the part of the *Ich*. Her life seems to consist of obsessively waiting for Ivan, an endless series of minutes, hours, and days marked in cigarettes and whiskey shots. This waiting is rendered as a maniacal fixation on the telephone. The *Ich* stares incessantly at the phone, waiting for it to ring. When it does not, she dials Ivan's number, temporarily placated by the knowledge of the ringing sound in the space of his apartment. This obsessive behavior is associated with a more general debilitation in the *Ich*'s life; she is unable to address the everyday tasks of paying her bills, attending to her correspondence, or stocking her refrigerator.

The *Ich* understands her crisis as an addiction to Ivan. She is addicted to the "injections of reality" with which his mere presence provides her: "Ich lebe in Ivan. Ich überlebe nicht Ivan."<sup>3</sup> This existential dependence on Ivan is often read as the love story (albeit entirely disturbed) of the text. If we were to engage this reading, we would have to come to the conclusion that this "love" has very little

to do with who Ivan is specifically and much more to do with the function he plays in the Ich's life. This is not, however, the traditional dependence of a woman needing a male to mediate her social identity, nor does she need his financial support. Instead, this relationship is to be understood on a metaphorically existential level: the Ich literally exists only given the presence of Ivan. Like the genie in the lamp who is completely dependent on the external passerby to polish the lamp and release her from its confines, the Ich is beckoned only by the calling of an external figure. In this case, the Ich exists for Ivan. In the absence of Ivan, she disappears. The Ich thus appears in reaction to some impulse generated by an originary male figure. This impulse, I argue, is the psychological displacement of war trauma. In other words, the female "protagonist" of this novel can be understood to be the voice of Ivan's displaced traumatic disorder, where Ivan stands for the male social element.

Sigmund Freud identified traumatic neuroses as a result of his work with World War I soldiers, who were brought to him exhibiting a wide range of debilitatingly compulsive behaviors from nervous ticks to repetitive, literal nightmares and character disorders. In a 1917 lecture, Freud explains that the traumatic neuroses can always be traced back to a moment of extreme shock:

[to] an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the experience is so powerful, that it essentially remains *unknown* to the conscious memory of the survivor. The healing process, according to Freud, must be one of overcoming this amnesia:

Symptoms are never constructed from conscious processes; as soon as the unconscious processes concerned have become conscious, the symptom must disappear. Here you will at once perceive a means of approach to therapy, a way of making symptoms disappear.<sup>5</sup>

There are several implications of this therapy through remembering, to which I will turn below. First I would like to collect together several pieces of textual evidence to support my reading thus far.

Ivan is the only character of the novel with a concrete history. We know that he was born in Hungary in 1935 and that his children are now of the same age as he was during the war. His children, Ivan emphatically claims, are the only people he loves, his emotions thus cut off from the rest of the world. The mother of the children is never spoken of; the Ich, however, imagines that she is dead, potentially a victim of the war. It is not, however, the traces of Ivan's wartime childhood which lead to a reading of him as a traumatized victim. It is instead his hysterical rejection of any effort undertaken by the Ich to come to explain herself, to bring any clarity to her position, to come to any knowledge of her own identity:

Denn sowie ich ansetze mit einem gewöhnlichen Satz und sage: Ich muß dir das erklären, unterbricht Ivan mich: Warum, was mußst du mir erklären, nichts, überhaupt nichts, wem mußt du etwas erklären, doch mir nicht, niemand, denn es geht doch niemand etwas an-

Aber ich muß.<sup>6</sup>

The Ich's need to explain herself is forcefully rejected by Ivan. Her desire to explain herself is an attempt to come to know the root of the trauma which brought about her existence. But if the Ich comes to truly know herself, to understand herself as the site of the displaced traumatic moment, she will cease to function as this Other; her healing would lead to a replacement of the traumatic moment back onto Ivan. Thus his forceful rejection of such attempts at self-awareness on the part of the Ich.

The second segment of the novel takes place largely in the absence of Ivan, taking the form of a prolonged series of nightmare sequences. In these nightmares, the Ich is repeatedly brutalized, tortured, and nullified in the hands of a figure who appears to her each time in the image of her father.

Repetitive nightmares are the hallmark of traumatic neuroses, and the reaction of the Ich reinforces this reading. After each cycle of dreams, she awakens showing signs of severe physical distress—she shivers in a cold sweat, she is unable to breathe, her heart is

racing. The relentlessly intrusive, repetitive nature of the dreams as well as the state of panic they elicit in the Ich mark these dreams as symptomatic of trauma.

Several of the Ich nightmares contain overt representations of National Socialist violence, from book burning to Jewish transports to gas chambers—images which have become part of the collective memory of the Holocaust. Yet this collective memory was undergoing a radical readjustment in the post-1968 German-speaking world. Here the existing moral-aesthetic debate unleashed by Adorno's 1951 statement, "nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch,"<sup>7</sup> met the student movement and its insistence that the generation of the students' parents take responsibility for its past.

Although Freud's work dates back to World War I, current theoretical considerations of trauma were largely set into motion in response to the aftermath of the Vietnam War in America, as thousands of war veterans showed signs of debilitating stress; combat stress, shell shock, and post-traumatic stress disorder all name the condition which often results in the inability to hold together family, housing, and employment under the duress of repeated nightmares and flashbacks with their terrorizing effects on the individual.

Recent events in the former Yugoslavia have mobilized experts in the field with new momentum as they race to assist the victims and victimized witnesses of mass killings, torture, and systematic rape. Meanwhile, the children of Holocaust survivors are being treated for traumatic neuroses which so strongly structured the lives of their parents as to be passed on to the next generation.<sup>8</sup> Trauma consistently accompanies war.

### THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

At the same time, the connection originally thought to exist exclusively between traumatic stress and war atrocities has proven misleading. Therapists were initially somewhat surprised to find the same symptoms of shell shock—repeated and intrusive nightmares, hallucinations, thoughts, and behaviors—in victims of childhood incest and in other forms of domestic violence. They had to discount earlier hypotheses indicating that shell shock might be the result of

an actual physical wound; they had to conclude that the cause of the symptoms might not have anything to do with war at all.

Indeed many of the Ich's nightmares do not involve war imagery, but instead are scenes of domestic violence, public humiliation, or murder. In this torturous segment of the novel, however, one element remains constant, and that is the role of the father as the perpetrator of this destruction. In the metaphorical level of the dreams, meanings often intertwine, the random public violence of war overlapping with the private violence of the domestic sphere.

In one of the first nightmares in this sequence, the Ich has been locked into a large hall by her father. She attempts to follow him out, but she cannot catch up with him. She then notices that he is removing a series of hoses from the wall, revealing openings which spout gas. She is in a huge gas chamber. Typical for these dreams of betrayal, her father alone knows where the door to this gas chamber is, and he traps her inside. As she dies, her last words are directed to him: "Mein Vater, sage ich ihm, der nicht mehr da ist, ich hätte dich nicht verraten, ich hätte es niemand gesagt."<sup>9</sup> This nightmare is screened as a gas chamber, but knowing that we are dealing with a dream sequence, we are cast into a metaphorical realm. In this case, the sexual connotations of the murderous, gas-ejaculating hoses, the symbolic betrayal of the Ich, and her ultimate promise not to betray her father fit together to allow a reading of this nightmare as the disclosure of incest.

Indeed, I was initially convinced that this entire chapter depicted the Ich's coming-to-terms with herself as an incest-survivor. I investigated current work done on incest and its ramifications for the emotional development of incest survivors and found many parallels in the underlying structures of the dreams, including estrangement from a weak and silent mother and a nonintuitive desire to idolize and protect the perpetrating father.

In her work with incest survivors, Janet Liebman Jacobs describes a woman who had suffered from traumatic dreams in which she was assaulted by Nazi soldiers, although she herself had been born after the Holocaust. She later came to see these screen images as the result of a displacement generated by the public memory of the Jewish community in which she was raised. She found that she was displacing her memory of incest onto the Nazis because it was less threatening to fear them than her own father.<sup>10</sup>

Initially this seemed a plausible explanation for the Holocaust imagery present in the Ich's nightmares. As metaphorical displacements for the real issue, which was incest, these screen images were an attempt to communicate the unutterable pain of the devastated private self in the language of public memory, or at least projected public memory. But upon closer examination, the certainty I felt in this conceptual reduction was disrupted. For if the trauma of incest can be mediated through war imagery, then why would the opposite not be true? Can we not, therefore, read these dreams as reflecting the totality of the ultimate violence of public and private oppression? This is indeed how Bachmann understands them: "Für mich bin ich ganz sicher, daß in den Träumen alles steht, was an Furchtbarkeit in dieser Zeit geschieht, und daß wir alle ermordet werden."<sup>11</sup>

Such an understanding necessarily extends our notion of the traumatic incident, for trauma is generally understood to be the reaction to a specific event or a specific series of events. The nightmare sequence, however, reveals a vast landscape of violence that no single individual could possibly have executed, much less undergone. So can these nightmares really indicate trauma?

### INSIDIOUS TRAUMA

This same question is asked of many survivors of incest who later take their fathers to court with charges of emotional damage due to trauma. The official definition of traumatic neurosis is a "response to an event outside the range of usual human experience." So the typical response in defense of the charged fathers is the following:

Statistics show that "as many as a third of all girls are sexually abused prior to the age of 16," so can you really claim that this is an "event outside the range of usual human experience? Can you really claim trauma?"<sup>12</sup>

The irony is perverse. (War, meanwhile, is an event which has defined several generations of men in recent history, and obviously no one is questioning that their experiences were outside of "the range of usual human experience.")

This outrageous line of defense has led feminist therapist Maria Root and clinical psychologist Laura S. Brown to contest this official definition. They not only contest the definition of trauma as it stands, but they are also working to gain institutional acceptance for “insidious trauma”—a condition which would reflect the “traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment, but that do violence to the soul and spirit.”<sup>13</sup> According to this model, all women are prone to suffer from insidious trauma who live “in a culture where there is a high base rate of sexual assault and where such behavior is considered normal and erotic by men, as it is in North American culture,” for example.<sup>14</sup>

This model of insidious trauma would be useful if it were also extended to encompass the totality of violence inherent in the maintenance of male power and privilege in patriarchal society. I base my reading of the nightmare sequence of *Malina* upon such an extended notion of trauma, whereby the father represents a wide range of perpetrators within both the public and private spheres.

Bachmann’s own statements regarding this father figure defend such a reading. In discussing her conception of the figure, she explains:

Ein Realist würde wahrscheinlich viele Furchtbarkeiten erzählen, die einer bestimmten Person oder Personen zustoßen. Hier wird es zusammengenommen in diese große Person, die das ausübt, was die Gesellschaft ausübt.<sup>15</sup>

## THE WITNESS

Dori Laub is a psychoanalyst and co-founder of the Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies project at Yale University. In recounting his work with Holocaust survivors, he recounts the statement made by one survivor: “We wanted to survive so as to live one day after Hitler, in order to be able to tell our story.” He reflects on this statement and its truth for many who participate in the testimonies project, but he also concludes that the opposite is equally true:

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus come to know one's story. . . . One has to know one's buried truth in order to live one's life.<sup>16</sup>

This is directly related to Freud's assertion that healing the traumatic wound involves bringing the memory of the originating shock into consciousness. Laub introduces an additional element in his insistence that this process occur dialogically, in the presence of a witness.

This argument seems to agree with the Bakhtinian notion that the meaning of an utterance is determined only through a negotiation between a speaker and his or her interlocutor. Laub similarly argues that the victim comes to know his or her experience only as it is first received by the witness to the narration of the event:

The victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. . . . The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the “knowing,” of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.<sup>17</sup>

The event which takes place “outside the range of usual human experience” must be incorporated dialogically into the victim's meaningful sense of reality. The survivor in isolation cannot come to know this event; telling the story thus becomes the necessary first step in the healing process. The problem then becomes one of finding a suitable listener.

This is also the case for the Ich. Her relentless nightmares are the expression of a breach in her understanding of her history. In order to come to know the truth of this history, she needs to give testimony to her dreams, and she needs someone to affirm the truth in her statements. Ivan, who holds the position of the historically



existing male subject, cannot serve as the Ich's discursive witness, as he, as I indicated above, maintains his identity by displacing the traumatic moment onto the female Other of the Ich. He thus participates in the forceful silencing of the Ich.

This is where Malina, the title figure of the novel, appears. His identity is the topic of much of the scholarship surrounding this text, and interpretations entertain his existence as a separate, materially present male roommate, on the one side, to a metaphorical rendition of the male side of the Ich's character on the other. In between, there are readings of Malina as the Ich's *Doppelgänger* and the physical embodiment of her sense of male rational agency. My reading, which already locates the Ich as the metaphorical site of displaced male trauma, further complicates the question as to Malina's identity. I would like to advance an interpretation of Malina as the Ich's projected witness.

The second segment of the novel thus begins with the Ich positioning the figure of Malina as the receiver of the narrative of her nightmares:

Malina soll nach allem fragen. Ich antworte aber, ungefragt. . . .  
Malina soll alles wissen. Aber ich bestimme: Es sind die Träume von heute nacht.<sup>18</sup>

The Ich has finally resolved to give testimony to her dreams, and Malina must be the one who listens. The ambiguous identity of Malina, however, is reflected in the manner in which he hears.

The nightmares of the ensuing segment of the novel are all written in a marked present tense. These dreams are thus not being mediated through the typical past-tense grammar reflecting a retelling, but instead, Malina (as well as the reader) seems to be experiencing them simultaneously with the Ich's act of dreaming. When the Ich awakens in a physical panic, Malina is there to calm her down, and their shared dialogue reflects his knowledge of the content of her nightmares. Malina then plays the role of her interlocutor. He poses a series of difficult questions, presses her to see beyond the screened father figure, and challenges her to synthesize meaning out of the bombardment of images.

The first of their conversations is barely cohesive. The Ich is struggling with an ambivalence in her desire to know the truth about the cause of her trauma, and this is reflected in her responses to

Malina's questions. She attempts to break off their conversation, to change the subject, or to provide evasive answers. As the section continues, however, their interaction becomes increasingly engaged, her reflections in response to Malina's questions more in-depth.

While I am not going to make the claim that this is the psychotherapy session which cures the Ich, I do argue that Malina's witnessing allows the Ich to begin to fill in those spaces in her history that, up until this point, she had been unable to access. In the first chapter, she has no memory of her own past. In a lengthy scene in which she is interviewed by a literary journalist, the Ich is unable to make any definitive statements concerning her personal history, going so far as to claim that she has never even thought about her youth. The journalist leaves in bitter frustration. During the conversations with Malina, however, she begins to access certain events from her childhood, and as the novel continues, she shows that she has regained at least limited access to her historical memory. She is suddenly able to recount her youthful days in Paris, for example.

This optimistic development is significant for my reading of the dream sequence as testimony, but it is frequently overlooked (because easily overlooked) in the face of the events that follow. To be successful, the Ich would need to solidly ground her agency and wrest independence from Ivan, and this she is unable to do. On the one hand, this is due to her identity as Ivan's Other, the site of all that he displaces from his own identity. On this metaphorical level, there is nothing lying underneath the neuroses on behalf of which the Ich seeks to gain a positive autonomy. Meanwhile, her momentary withdrawal from the world of Ivan into one of self-contemplation presents Ivan with the opportunity to detach himself from the burden of this Other; he apparently ends their relationship.

When Ivan ultimately leaves her, the Ich in effect becomes the genie who has fulfilled her master's three wishes and is doomed to return to the magic lamp and await the next incidental polisher. And this is, indeed, what happens. The last scene of the novel, reminiscent of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Yellow Wallpaper*, depicts the exit of the narrative voice into a crack in the wall. Yet I do not agree with those who interpret this exit as the death of the Ich. Instead, this is to be seen as a radical spatial marginalization—a space from which the Ich will make repeated, cyclical returns—the uncanny return of the suppressed Other.

On the other hand, the Ich's ultimate disappearance has everything to do with the true origins of Malina and the implications of these for his ability to serve as witness.

### THE INTERNALIZED PROJECTED WITNESS

As mentioned above, Malina somehow has direct, seemingly unnarrated access to the Ich's nightmares. I now want to indicate the sense that there is something suspicious about the extent to which this communication is not mediated. The Ich wakes up and Malina is there to comfort her, but the text does not depict any actual act of the Ich telling Malina the content of her dreams. Instead, he seems to already know them as she awakens—as if he had simultaneously dreamed the same dreams. How does Malina have this access?

Dori Laub illustrates a possible answer in the case history of one of his patients, who had been a very young boy in the Jewish ghetto of Krakow. When his parents heard rumors of an impending deportation of children, they found a way to smuggle him out into the city, where he spent the rest of the war under incredible duress, living in the streets and occupying a long series of hiding places. He later felt that the reason he had been able to survive this horrific time had much to do with the photograph of his mother which he carried with him. In moments of solitude, he would take out the photograph and he would recount to it his daily events. In giving his testimony to the photograph, the child was imagining his mother, who in turn was affirming the truth of the events. This child was thus accomplishing something very profound: he was constructing an internally projected witness. As a result, he was later able to remember his story and present it with an exceptional amount of order and clarity. This act of internalizing a projected witness is in essence exactly how the Ich has come to be sitting with Malina.

That Malina is a construction of the Ich is indicated in the prologue of the text, where we are first introduced to Malina and where the relationship between him and the Ich is depicted. Malina originates in the stories into which he is written by the Ich. He appears as an impostor or a spy but most frequently as the hero of her fairy tales. In particular, he is written as St. George, who kills a dragon so

that the Ich's birthplace, Klagenfurt, might arise from the swamp. Thus in his original inception, Malina represents the masculine agency which the Ich desires but does not have access to.

As idealized masculine agent, Malina also possesses idealized masculine qualities: he is rational, intellectually scientific, and non-emotional. Malina, in other words, possesses those qualities which the Ich needs to function in society. It is for this reason that she desires him and for this reason that, as projected masculine agency, she internalizes him. His initial role, once conceived, is to hold a steady job, to make sure that the rent gets paid, to see to it that the housemaid gets her wages.

In many ways, the internalization of Malina is a metaphorical rendering of Freud's process of super-ego formation. We recall that in this process, the authority of the father is internalized in a move necessary for the development of morality in the individual and his subsequent ability to participate in civilization. In this text, however, the father is not the revered ideal male of Freud's thought but is instead that from which the father figure in the Ich's nightmares is derived. It is thus this father that is internalized as Malina.

Malina's ties to this larger figure are subtle yet convincing, the first being his statement that he imagines all other men to be just like himself. His job in a military museum is highly significant. For here he tends that memory of war focusing on the scientific advancement of man—a clean, ordered, contained depiction of war which can be isolated from human misery while celebrating human progress.

Malina thus allows the Ich to function in patriarchal society only because he is implicated within it. It is in his best interest to maintain this societal structure, for within it he is privileged. Malina has a stake in covering for the father figure, in other words, because he is a derivative of this figure, and this gives him a share in social power.

The fact that Malina reveals such dark origins is extremely compromising for his role as witness. He is a cipher holding the place of the delusional ideology which the Ich is attempting to address, and he is thus unable to hear and unwilling to affirm the truth in her testimony. To the extent that he has not heard this truth, she, in effect, has not told it.

The role of the witness is to dialogically ground the truth of the traumatic event, but to the extent that Malina is himself complicit in

the traumatic event, he bears false witness. This is reflected in the conclusions at which the Ich ultimately arrives concerning the nature of her dreams.

The following is the passage which marks the end of the nightmare section. For the first time, the Ich initiates the conversation:

Ich: Es ist nicht mein Vater. Es ist mein Mörder.

Malina antwortet nicht.

Ich: Es ist mein Mörder.

Malina: Ja, das weiß ich.

Ich antworte nicht.

Malina: Warum hast du immer gesagt: mein Vater?

Ich: Habe ich das wirklich gesagt? Wie konnte ich das nur sagen?<sup>19</sup>

The real question, however, is how she could fail to identify the father figure for what he really is. The fact that she renames this figure as her “murderer” does not bring her closer to the truth she needs to find. As feminists have been saying at least since the 1970s, we have to name and expose the problem for what it truly is before we can begin to confront it. The grassroots of consciousness-raising groups was all about participants giving witness to each other and identifying commonalities—in other words, showing where private problems actually stemmed from larger societal structures which needed to be addressed politically.

Thus the Ich has not only been guided away from a real understanding of the identity of her perpetrator, but she has also been led to a conclusion which leaves her isolated: this is her murderer—in other words, a private, not a public, concern.

The Ich’s second conclusion concerns the nature of war. Throughout their conversations, Malina has been attempting to convince the Ich of the futility of looking for peace in her life. At one point, she reflects on the war imagery of her dreams and asks Malina how she can come to find peace. “Es ist Krieg”, he responds, and “In dir ist kein Frieden, auch in dir nicht. . . . Es ist Krieg. Und du bist der Krieg. Du selber.”<sup>20</sup>

Malina’s insistence upon the inescapability of war suits a purpose beyond an attempt to ensure his own employment within the military-industrial complex. It is, after all, in his interest to ensure the immutable nature of the social order within which the structur-

ing principle of war is inherent. It is within this system that he maintains social power.

One mechanism effective in maintaining this power is the generation of fear and hopelessness. Malina's insistence upon the eternal perpetuation of war and the Ich's acceptance of this as fact add this layer of futility onto the Ich's inability to overcome the isolation of her trauma.

Malina has indeed been a false witness. The Ich, who finally attempted to tell her story, was trapped within a delusional ideology in which she was unable to locate an external witness.

Or was she? Can we not see our own reading and deciphering of her traumatic dream sequence as an act of giving witness? The narrative voice has receded into the wall, but she will return, for she is determined to struggle against her relinquished role as conquered woman.

#### NOTES

1. Gabriele Wohmann, "Nachtwald voller Fragen: Ingeborg Bachmann: "Malina," *Der Spiegel*, 29 March 1971. As reproduced in Andrea Stoll, *Ingeborg Bachmanns "Malina,"* p. 118 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992).
2. "Female protagonist" is one of a long list of clumsy terms used to define this character. The entire novel is presented through a first-person female narrator who remains nameless. The term "protagonist" is problematic, as her status as an individual person (and not, for example, merely a voice) is debated. I will thus speak of "the Ich" (the I). The irksomeness of this term represents the effort to maintain the ambiguity of this figure.
3. Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 1971), p. 43.
4. Sigmund Freud, "Fixation to Traumas—The Unconscious," *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1966), pp. 340–41.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 346.
6. Bachmann, p. 31.
7. Theodor Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft (1951)," *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, ed. Petra Kiedaisch (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1995), p. 49.

8. See Dori Laub: "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," and "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), and "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
9. Bachmann, p. 183.
10. Janet Liebman Jacobs, *Victimized Daughters: Incest and the Development of the Female Self* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 37–38.
11. Interview with Ingeborg Bachmann in Stoll, ed., p. 71.
12. Laura S. Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychich Trauma," in Caruth, ed., p. 101.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Christine Koschel and Inge von Weidenbaum, eds., *Ingeborg Bachmann: Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews* (Munich and Zurich: R. Piper, 1983), p. 97.
16. Laub, "Truth and Testimony," p. 63.
17. Laub, "Bearing Witness," p. 57.
18. Bachmann, p. 181.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

## THE BATTLE WITH MEMORY: GRETE WEIL'S *MY SISTER ANTIGONE*

Susanne Baackmann

### I

Grete Weil's *My Sister Antigone* (Meine Schwester Antigone, first published 1980) explores the relationship between two conquering women. The narrator, a Holocaust survivor, is attempting to overcome the pain inflicted by history. On the one hand, her experiences were so traumatic that they seem beyond description; on the other hand, she has no words for some parts of the past because she was never told what happened. Although she remembers vividly how her first husband was deported, she does not know what actually happened to him. Not knowing how he died contributes to "her . . . wound," the epitome of her desperate engagement with history (Weil 1988: 9).<sup>1</sup>

As a paradigm of the rebellious woman, uncompromising and absolute in her resistance to injustice, Antigone is the narrator's counterpart, a conquering woman who, through her death, defies a senseless regal order. On one level, Weil's rewriting of Antigone's story serves as a narrative device to (re-) collect memory fragments and reconfigure contradictory fragments into a coherent narrative about painful episodes of the past. Unusual and surprising images of Antigone contrast the memories of the narrator with mythical glory and heroic resistance. On another level, Weil questions the ideological framework of myths that draw on the problematic legacy of classical humanism. Such a cultural and literary tradition has no language for the memories of a Jewish woman who barely survived the Holocaust.

The narrator encounters Antigone as part and parcel of "a so-called good education" (p. 6); her father, "educated in the humanistic



tradition" (p. 9), may have been the first to introduce her to this mythical figure. The reference to the narrator's education evokes the trope of Germany as *Kulturnation*, a country defined by its sophisticated cultural heritage, and reveals to what extent privileged elements of German culture are firmly inscribed into the narrator's memory and identity.<sup>2</sup> Yet Antigone gains personal importance only after the narrator "is confronted with violence and destruction" (p. 10), when bourgeois notions of high culture and the reality of history clash. At that point the Jewish woman enters into an intensely personal dialogue with Antigone; the complex engagement with a mythical hero of resistance takes place against the backdrop of the Holocaust. By rewriting Antigone's story from her perspective—that of the "other" of German culture—Weil reconfigures collective memory figurations in light of her personal experiences.

I examine *My Sister Antigone* as part of an evolving literature by women authors concerned with finding new narrative strategies to represent women's experiences of history. What comes to light in these texts are female memories that are silenced because they lie beyond the ideological framework of officially sanctioned projections of the past.<sup>3</sup> This rewriting of history does not regard the past as over and done with, but rather turns to the present as deeply informed by traces of history. Like many authors currently reexamining the historical legacy, Weil challenges the ubiquitous notion of the "postwar period" by illustrating to what degree the effects of World War II still shape our emotional and psychological reality. Even though Germany has sought a radical departure from the horrors of that war, fascism, and the Holocaust, the ongoing and heated debates about how to commemorate the past illustrate that the war continues in the form of a battle over memory and memories.<sup>4</sup> Weil's text confronts this battle by uncovering how and why history is transformed into ideologically charged and culturally constructed myths and memories. As a contribution to the debate about remembering and forgetting—more specifically, as a critical engagement with mythical tropes in both collective and personal memories—*My Sister Antigone* also makes clear that mourning and all efforts to recollect the past are gendered. Antigone can be regarded as a symbol "of the highly gendered asynchronicity [*Ungleichzeitigkeit*] of work and mourning, of recollection and social reconstruction, of tending to the corpses and marking the dead by dividing them into enemies and friends"

(Weigel 1992: 46). Like in so many myths, in that of Antigone we see men caught in a destructive and fatal battle for power. But in contrast to other myths, women are not allowed to do what is traditionally their role—i.e., to mourn and properly tend to the dead. In this case, caring for the victim becomes an act of female defiance. By using Antigone as a figure who uncompromisingly stands by her dead brother, Weil's text comments on the suppression of "mourning" in postwar Germany. Moreover, her appropriation of a classical text marks to what extent the voices of the victims of fascism and the voices of women have been ignored in the reconstruction "work" of a male-dominated culture.

Although for a long time both men and women refused to mourn the past, in the 1980s many artists sought new avenues to work through the historical legacy. Not surprisingly, many Jewish and women authors began to reexamine their cultural identity as overdetermined by the past, trying to find a position beyond the victim/perpetrator dichotomy. On one level, Weil tries to overcome the contradictions of her particular historical position by resorting to Antigone as a paradigm of a glorious female hero. But on another level, an identification with heroic grandeur is questioned as a strategy to avoid facing both personal and collective complicity with fascism (see Liebs 1994). *My Sister Antigone* is a complex revision of Antigone, ultimately reframing the trope of the conquering woman altogether in favor of a more differentiated and less violent female subject-position. The text portrays a woman whose defiance of terror consists in small and unrecorded acts of courage. The narrator pleaded for her husband (pp. 34ff.), worked for the Jewish Council in order to save her mother's life (pp. 63ff.), comforted her husband's grandmother before she was deported (p. 67), and even faked IDs and stamps (p. 113). Maybe most significantly, she did not take her own life but instead made survival her "goal . . . religion, . . . sport . . . politics" (p. 47). Her acts of resistance were certainly not as glorious or as spectacular as Antigone's, yet they nonetheless document her heroic refusal to become a victim.

I want to show how Weil's text engages with mythical narratives as they inform our personal and collective memory. Instead of retelling the story of Antigone from a contemporary point of view—a strategy Christa Wolf employs in different ways in both *Cassandra* (Kassandra, 1985) and *Medea* (1996)—*My Sister Antigone* reveals why,

how, and when we resort to myths and what function they serve for the personal and the collective imagination. Freud characterized our memory as a dialectical exchange between perceptions and memory traces. In her insightful analysis of the interdependence of myth and history, Sigrid Weigel describes this memory concept:

Memory is nothing the subject has control over but rather part of a process of dialectical exchange between perceptions and memory traces formed in the unconscious. This theory of memory presupposes a difference between memory and experience; memory is neither a copy nor an impression of reality (1987: 271).

Grete Weil's text conveys an acute sense of this dialectical exchange between perceptions and memory traces. The novel affirms Freud's observation that our memory necessarily distorts and dilutes painful or difficult experiences, turning them into legends that make our lives bearable. The narrator states poignantly: "I remember my own hunger only vaguely. Nothing is left of it except the legend that all experience eventually forms and about which one speaks again and again" (p. 46). At the same time, the text works through the formation of those legends, thus revealing the blind spots in the shifting narratives of memory. What becomes apparent in this process is the need for identification with a seemingly conquering woman, which drives many reassuring recollections of the past, on both the individual and the collective level.

## II

In order to understand the significance of a female discourse on history that appropriates myths, it is necessary to review conceptions and reconfigurations of memory and memorization in ancient Greek culture. My analysis of *My Sister Antigone* will show how Weil's narrative strategy traces, perhaps unknowingly, the story of the Greek muse Mnemosyne. Mnemosyne's fate indicates the patriarchal usurpation of memory and truth as the art of philosophy emerged in the fifth century B.C. At that point, conceptions of memory begin to shift from *poetic synthesis* to *philosophical analysis*. In his illuminating phenomenological study *Remembering*, Edward S.

Casey points out that originally the memorization process attributed to Mnemosyne aimed at poetically retrieving and preserving the past for the present: "It was a fateful fending off of forgetfulness" (1987: 12). Mnemosyne was called the "mother of the muses" since the transmission of history she inspired was deemed a superior art. Under her guidance, poets transported the reader into the past, providing insights and truths about history that far exceeded factual description. According to Hesiod, this muse had knowledge "about all that has been, all that is, and all that will be" (Casey 1987: 13), which points to an omniscient stance embedded in the poetic discourse about the past. Due to this kind of prophetic inspiration, the poet was able to relay and preserve history.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as Casey points out, this poetic and synthetic approach to history eventually gave way to an analytic approach:

The deification of Mnemosyne, and with her an entire mythical past, could not survive the emergence of philosophy in its specifically Platonic form in the fifth century B.C. For Plato, recollection (*anamnesis*) is less of any particular past—personal or mythical—than of eidetic knowledge previously acquired. The highly personified figure of Mnemosyne disappears, not named in the few myths which are allowed to survive in Platonic dialogues (1987: 13).

Thus it seems that in the fifth century B.C. a paradigm shift occurred from a poetic notion of memory (embodied by Mnemosyne) to a notion of truth to be excavated from within by analytic inquiry. Creative wisdom about the past and history, which was originally deemed female and provided "the equivalent of the archives of a society without writing" (Vernant in Casey 1987: 11), was abandoned in favor of an intellectual inquiry that retrieved ideas already within the male inquirer. In other words, female ways of accessing knowledge were appropriated within a male conception of abstract ideas. "Mnemosyne, supernatural power, has been interiorized so as to become in man the very faculty of knowing" (Vernant in Casey 1987: 14). In different ways, Weil's and Wolf's appropriations of mythical narratives are informed by this paradigm shift, which (irrevocably?) changed the way history was to be conceived and transmitted. By inverting and decentering gestures and tropes of well-known myths, and especially the imaginations of fe-

male heroes, women authors challenge the patterns and strategies of patriarchal historiography.

### III

It is helpful to begin the analysis of *My Sister Antigone* by examining the allegedly “autobiographical” quality of Weil’s work. She describes the most important facts of her life as follows:

Jewish woman, born 1906 at Tegernsee (Southern Germany), grew up in Munich as daughter of a lawyer, protected in an upper-middle-class home. Studied German literature in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich. 1932 marriage to Edgar Weil, assistant director of the Munich Chamber Theatre. In March 1933, he was taken into custody with the whole board of directors. . . . The others were released, but he was not because he was Jewish. My sudden understanding of fascism. . . . Then we knew that we had to emigrate. It was the Netherlands by chance, too close to Germany. . . . We felt secure, Edgar with his small pharmaceutical firm, I in my photo studio. . . . Then the Germans came. . . . In 1941, a year before the deportation of all Jews, . . . Edgar was arrested, brought to the concentration camp Mauthausen and was murdered there. I managed to slip into hiding. In 1947, I returned to Germany (Weil 1985: 54ff.).

In more or less direct ways, all of Weil’s texts address these most difficult parts of her life. To different degrees, her texts have autobiographical elements which make them both compelling and urgent. Again and again, her work raises questions about victimization by, resistance to, and complicity with the Nazi regime. Yet we should be careful not to collapse narrative voice and author, biographical facts and textual fiction. In Weil’s work facts are skillfully manipulated and negotiated by the writer’s imagination and thus significantly altered. Since Weil’s texts often have a casual and conversational quality, this reconfiguration of reality is often overlooked.

As I shall show, Weil’s rewriting of *Antigone* marks memory as an ambivalent though ultimately critical faculty that, instead of du-

plicating, interrogates history in search of a story that negotiates subjective experience and objective facts in a meaningful way. The very personal organization of narrative segments *performs* history as an unfinished project that defies closure and that intersects with both collective and private myths, which inevitably shape the formation of individual and national identity. As Michaela Grobbel has suggested, recent texts by women authors representing the past often have a performative quality. As “repetitions with a difference,” they “allow for the possibility to transform meanings of the past in the present or future” (1997: 1). It is this difference that establishes the particular significance of Weil’s narrative as a *memory text*.

In this context it becomes important to examine how and why mythology is used to reconfigure and stabilize evasive traces of memory. Instead of updating a classical narrative, Weil describes the process of writing (about) the figure of Antigone as a way to confront the past and simultaneously address the psychological need to repress painful and contradictory experiences. The writing process is difficult: “I don’t want to get back to the desk, not back to this project that demands so much and tortures me” (1988: 50). Yet this confrontation with the past is ultimately therapeutic. Weil’s engagement with the Antigone myth turns out to be what Klaus Heinrich has called a “*Befreiungsunternehmen*,” a project of liberation—i.e., a narrative account in which the tropes and constellations of collective and individual memory fragments expose the price we pay for rational order and control (1985: 336). Weil brings the story of Antigone to the fore as a comment on the civilization process that hinges on a morally conquering yet murdered (original version) or murdering (Weil’s version) subject.

Antigone’s story locates repression on two levels, the emotional/psychological and the sociopolitical. On both levels gender configurations play a significant role. On the one hand, as a morally superior being, Antigone needs to repress her fears, doubts, and anxieties as much as possible. She claims to know what is right and what is wrong beyond any doubt. What privileges and at the same time kills her is her moral absolutism, coupled with uncompromising resistance to the idiosyncrasies of power. Her combative and militant stance vis-à-vis authority marks her as “male,” especially in contrast to her compliant sister. On the other hand, her fate demonstrates that the power of the king—i.e., the (male) law—is an unjust

force and can be maintained only by suppressing the autonomy of an opposing (female) will. These processes of repression and suppression propel mythological narratives, illustrating, as Heinrich has poignantly put it, that “myths do not repress but rather exhibit processes of repression itself” (1985: 336). By using Antigone’s story as a frame for relating experiences of a Holocaust survivor, Weil’s text illustrates to what extent oppression and repression drive civilization and thus shape history—or rather our stories about the past.

#### IV

At this point we need to ask what exactly the relationship is between myth and history. Myths access history in a very specific way; they are another form of *Geschichtserinnerung*, historical memory.

Myths of any culture contain the repertoire of images and stories that depict its history, especially those moments of history that have not found entrance to language and rational explanation, because the experiences they memorize render us speechless (Weigel 1987: 269).

Perhaps most relevant to *My Sister Antigone* is Weigel’s observation that mythical narratives describe experiences that render us *speechless*, recording a memory *beyond words*. Weil’s text is less a recasting of an old myth than a study of how memory surfaces when it contains experiences that resist or even escape verbal expression. A linear narrative firmly grounded in the reassuring paradigms of cause and effect would contradict the textual exploration of the multiple intersections between past and present, personal and collective memories, remembering and forgetting. Instead, narrative constellations and textual juxtapositions record asynchronicities of experience, as well as silenced or silent memories. The most striking of these textual juxtapositions—following the narrator’s reflections on political resistance and the justifications of violence and death—may be the insertion of an eyewitness report of the liquidation of the Polish ghetto in Petrikau. The somewhat removed perspective of the narrator is sharply perforated by the unmediated

recordings of Nazi brutality, which describe precisely those parts of history the narrator chose to address in dialogue with Antigone.

In the course of the novel the complex relationship between the narrator and Antigone changes from identification to a more critical connection. The unresolved aspects of this relationship are apparent in the encounter between the narrator and Marlene, Antigone's modern equivalent, a stranger unexpectedly seeking shelter at the narrator's house. Possibly a left-wing activist, a *Sympathisantin*, Marlene is a young and uncompromising woman who believes in the armed fight against political and social injustice. By drawing analogies between female figures/heroes of opposition—Antigone, Gudrun Enslin, Sophie Scholl, and Johanna von Orléans—Weil questions whether violence can or should be answered by violence. The heroism of these women evokes guilt in the narrator, who ponders her own complicity and failed attempts to resist the Nazis, as well as what it means to be both a victim and a perpetrator. At the same time, Marlene's appearance leads the narrator to emphatically stress her pacifist stance, her absolute refusal to use violence in any form and for any end (p. 114). This encounter illustrates how difficult it is for the narrator to find an acceptable position within the contradictions of the past and the present. In fact, what constitutes the narrative core of Weil's text is the search for an acceptable personal truth vis-à-vis historical impasses.

As noted, not knowing how and when her first husband died is even more painful to the narrator than the loss itself. She begins with reflections on her most recent loss, that of her loyal companion, her dog:

Had I only found his dead body. If I only knew that he was killed by a car. Unbearable the thought that someone shot him. Or hit him. Or threw him a piece of poisoned meat. My murder complex. My wound (p. 9).

This helpless uncertainty triggers a turn to the *Gedächtnisfigur* Antigone, a character she calls her "favorite toy since ancient times" (p. 9). Faced with her failure to resist and fight the Nazi regime as emphatically as she would have liked, the narrator resorts to Antigone as an alter ego. Her lack of knowledge is bearable only when missing memory pieces are choreographed as a possible story. In other words, the mythological narrative fills a painful gap of mem-



ory, and to remember becomes a “splendid choreography” (p. 11). This points to a close connection between remembering and mourning. In his study on remembering, Casey has noted that memory and mourning are etymologically related:

This is not entirely surprising, since . . . mourning, as a process of intrapsychic memorialization, is itself a form of commemoration. “Commemoration” . . . originally meant an *intensified* remembering. One way to intensify is to give it a thicker consistency so as to help it to last or remain more substantively. Such thickening is surely the point of any memorialization, whether it be ceremonial, sculptural, scriptural, or psychical (1987: 273).

The experience of loss that haunts the narrator is contained in memories devoid of spatial (en-) closure. Writing about and performing these memories “thickens” them, in this case with a mythological narrative that helps to define a commemorative space and thus a position from which to obtain a foothold in the present. Yet this performance of memory is ultimately halted. The narrator’s “memory is erased” (p. 152) by the quest to uncover what has been fueling the exploration of the past on both the personal and the collective levels. The motion ends with the narrator’s tentative acceptance of, or even identification with, the ugly postwar environment that surrounds her: “I feel the ugliness, am the ugliness, accept it, accept myself, am happy. And tomorrow?” (p. 153). By releasing the reader with this question, Weil concludes that the work of memory is caught in a circle in which it keeps tracing the intersections between past and present in order to gain presence. In this respect, Weil’s narrative resonates with Andreas Huyssen’s claim:

The temporal status of any act of memory is always the present, and not, as some naïve epistemology might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some eradicable sense is dependent on some past event or experience (1995: 3).

In a radical way, this recasting of Antigone is characterized by the complex tension between then and now that both informs and deforms memory, marking a “tenuous fissure between past and present” (Huyssen 1995: 3). Rather than seamlessly slipping into the mythological past, Weil negotiates three time levels: the mythologi-

cal time of Antigone, the Nazi period, and 1970s Germany, a period characterized by radical political interventions from the left. The text shifts constantly back and forth, seeking a foothold in the mythological, historical, and personal past while being challenged by the present. Descriptions of the events of one day in the life of the aging narrator are constantly interrupted by memories of her past and imaginary dialogues with Antigone. The discontinuity of the narrative strains to capture an identity, or rather the formation of identity, as suspended between personal recollections, unanswered questions, the intensity and bias of personal and collective myths, and historical evidence.

Weil's differentiated use of mythology as a foil for her writing is quite remarkable, especially when seen in the German literary and cultural traditions. As part of the cultural heritage, myths have always been rewritten and appropriated in literature. In Germany, however, the rediscovery and revival of myths in the late 1970s provoked ambivalence. In the introduction to a 1987 interview with Klaus Heinrich, Horst Kurnitzky refers to the current *Mythenschwemme*, an overabundance of myths, as a cultural phenomenon that is often connected with a decisive turning away from the rational paradigms of the enlightenment (Heinrich 1987: 84). He characterizes the turn to history in the 1980s as an uncritical turn to the past via mythology:

It is no longer important to rigorously question history; instead history and myth are regarded as something that seemingly no longer needs rational understanding and discussion (Heinrich 1987: 84).

This remark evokes the standard and polemic yet ultimately unhelpful opposition between *logos* and *mythos* which is part of German intellectual history.

An excellent indicator of how mythology was discussed at around the time *My Sister Antigone* was published is the 1983 collection *Mythos und Moderne* (Myth and modernity). The very first sentence of the introduction is a warning that evokes the ambivalence associated with mythology in German cultural history: "Careful, this is not a return to myth" (Bohrer, ed. 1983: 7). According to the editor, Karl Heinz Bohrer, the intention of the collection is to retrieve the significance of myths *beyond* their ideological exploitation in the

1930s. To different degrees the contributors explore aspects of German culture that tie in or are connected with the attempted creation of a new mythological tradition in the nineteenth century. When the editor cites Thomas Mann's remark that we should not leave myths to the Nazis (Bohrer, ed. 1983: 10), he makes very clear how overdetermined by history the topic remains. In their seminal analysis, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1947), Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer demonstrated how mythology supports rather than offers alternatives for the ideological premises of rationalism. Recognizing the fatal exploitation of mythology by the Nazis as an effect of rationalism, Adorno and Horkheimer traced the logos in the seemingly irrational patterns of terrorist regimes.

Not surprisingly, after the ideological exploitation of myths by National Socialism, the mythological paradigm was thoroughly discredited. Still, some postwar writers sought, somewhat naively, to reappropriate classical mythology, hoping to locate in myths an ahistorical realm untainted by politics which could provide a "new" historical identity. The reform movements of the 1960s exposed such attempts as examples of one of the many blind illusions of bourgeois and capitalist societies. When, a decade later, myths gained popularity again, especially after their reevaluation in France by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, it was precisely the ideological trajectories of myths that were foregrounded. But even then, this kind of critical appreciation remained caught by history in that it was an attempt "not to leave myths to the Nazis."

Given this history of the use and critique of myths in Germany, we must ask what makes a Holocaust survivor like Grete Weil turn to the Antigone myth to portray her suffering during the Third Reich, when semimythological ideologies were effectively used to manipulate millions of Germans. Why did Weil rewrite the Antigone myth in the late 1970s, during another time of political violence, when Germany appeared to be under attack from the left? On the one hand, Weil's reason for turning to myth is very *personal*. Her narrator attempts to come to terms with the present, and Antigone is a *figure of memory* whose presence allows her to express experiences difficult to put into words. On the other hand, Weil appropriates the Antigone myth as part of a *collective cultural heritage* that needs to be examined critically from the perspective of a woman who was selected for elimination because she was Jewish. Ultimately, the

mythological construction of moral superiority and heroic absolutism (a notion inherent in Hitler's construction of the Aryan race) is questioned in the last encounter between the narrator and the mythological heroine. Weil's narrative strategy effectively shows to what extent mythology is used at times of social and political crisis; her *memory text* characterizes the crisis of identity thematized in German literature of the 1980s (especially the so-called *Väterliteratur*, father literature) as a crisis of memory.

## V

I shall first look at the seemingly personal engagement with Antigone and then explore the way the text engages with this myth as part of a collective identity by confronting the notion of a heroic subjectivity. While the daily routine described in detail is dominated by the painful experience of growing old and being isolated from the rest of the world, the constant flashbacks to the past convey the narrator's sense of guilt and failure. She finds herself in the middle of a historical and personal force field that challenges her individuality. As a Jew, she is a victim of history, yet the younger generation identifies her with the perpetrators. Moreover, history confirms her incapacity to resist, yet as a wife, her conscience tells her she should have tried harder to save her husband. Thus tortured by survivor guilt (like Antigone, we might speculate) and a strong personal sense of failure, she resorts to Antigone to escape a vicious circle of self-incrimination. Antigone is the sister she wishes to have, a comforting companion through pain and desperation. In one instance, when the narrator recalls a time she spent hiding in a confined space behind a bookshelf, the recollecting voice, whose authenticity and pain centers the whole narrative, is dislocated and fuses with the perspective of Antigone awaiting her death in the cave. The identification between narrator and mythical figure is emphasized by a narrative shift that obscures, if not suspends, the identity and locus of the speaking voice:

Without light behind the book wall in a hollow space, just broad enough [for me] to be able to lie down on the floor on a kapok mattress which increasingly lumped up, underneath a damp

sheet of linen, wrapped in a horse blanket, trembling with cold until sleep comes and warms. To be on the knife's edge. O bridal chamber. Abandoned by the gods. Abandoned by all. To expect death (p. 47).

The moments the Jewish woman spent hidden behind a bookshelf—an intense time characterized by her resistance to die—evoke moments of Antigone's resistance. The secret hiding place *behind* books becomes a place evoked *in* books; personal experiences of persecution intersect with cultural choreographies of oppression and resistance. In this passage memory is both informed and formed by cultural imaginings. It is spelled out as a fiction which fuses individual experiences with cultural narratives that inform our collective identity. Precisely when the individual memory about pain and suffering reaches a point of silence, a mythological figure embedded within the collective memory begins to speak, poignantly confirming Weigel's thesis that myths record experiences beyond words.

Yet increasingly the strong identification of the human narrator with the mythical figure softens to make room for significant differences between the two. The initial premise that characterized Antigone as "my princess who has been my favorite toy since ancient times" (p. 9) is increasingly taken back:

My princess. Beautiful figure of art who in many hours—not in all—fulfills my expectations. Who can be sent away and called back. Who does not destroy my being alone, but renders it more lucid. My relationship to her—eros of being alone (p. 38).

Here the psychological function of Antigone is clearly spelled out in the term "eros of being alone." As an alter ego, Antigone does not interfere with the facts of the evoked personal history but rather appears whenever the recollecting mind hesitates to go forward because of too much pain. The textual engagement with Antigone is driven by both an analytical impetus—i.e., the desire to understand the past as a narrative that makes sense—and the need for regeneration which necessitates disentanglement from the painful past. Yet the text ultimately rejects the identification with a strong hero by exposing what desire drives this need.

Klaus Heinrich's notion of "*Faszinationsgeschichte*," history of fascination, is helpful for understanding this kind of turn to a mythy-

cal figure. In keeping with Roland Barthes, who emphatically rejects the idea of "eternal myths" and insists instead on the historical basis and nature of myths (Barthes 1995: 110), Heinrich regards myths as a particular part of "*Realgeschichte*," real history:

What is fascinating throughout real history is that unresolved conflicts, unaddressed tensions, unsolved problems are always present. The history of fascination is one of *symptoms* (1985: 340).

Heinrich's reference to history as a chain of *symptoms* indicates the sensitivity of myths to the social pathology. Myths mirror social processes that, among other things, are founded on repressive cultural, historical, and gender hierarchies.<sup>6</sup> Leaving behind the much debated opposition between *mythos* and *logos*, Weil instead points to the patriarchal *logos* within the *mythos*,<sup>7</sup> asking about the ideological function of the heroic subject within the mythological iconography. Rather than simply recasting the Antigone myth from a contemporary point of view, Weil gradually spells out how myths are inscribed in the collective memory, whose interests they serve, and what psychological function they fulfill. I will illustrate this point by looking at the choreography of dialogue and rejection that gradually deconstructs Antigone as conquering woman imbued with the glory of absolute love and uncompromising resistance.

Recalling her temporary collaboration with the Nazi regime—she worked for the Jewish Council as a photographer—the narrator asks herself why she had not used this chance to sabotage the system more effectively. Why did she not help the few courageous Jews to rescue some of the doomed children and adults? She answers these painful questions with the humble insight, "I am not a criminal, not naïve, no heroine" (p. 64) and then proceeds to portray her "contribution" to the Nazi crimes. She defiantly ends with the words commonly associated with the complicity of all German citizens: "I had orders to do that; no one gets hurt by that except myself; that's why I do it. People are like that; I am also like that" (p. 65). Yet what drives this defiance is the narrator's quiet assertion of her humanity in an extremely inhumane situation. Her small but very courageous acts of opposition (pp. 66ff.) may have been less glorious than open rebellion but also more effective since she survived and found the courage to bear witness.

At this point the text begins to chart the difference between human survivor and mythical hero. Questions about Antigone's alleged moral integrity indirectly evoke the measured phrases of Hölderlin's translation:

Antigone is not like that. She is willful, self-righteous. But is she right? Ambivalent everything, measured, without measure. Right and wrong tragically veiled. . . . How would she have acted in my place? (p. 65).

This comparison between mythical figure and narrator draws a line between cultural glorification of resistance and human limitations. The uncompromising ideals of loyalty, love, and resistance collide with the contradictions of a social and historical reality that often compromises human agency. The narrator finally does what she had pondered for a while. She changes the text of Hölderlin's translation, slanting it toward a different kind of humanism that rejects violence: "to change [*verfälschen*] Antigone's ambivalent sentence, to misuse [*missbrauchen*] the sentence that brought her death for life" (p. 86).<sup>8</sup>

*My Sister Antigone* revises the Antigone figure in a final encounter between the narrator and her mythical sister at the very end of the single day described in the text. Visions of death and destruction occupy the protagonist when Antigone—up until now mainly the narrative toy of the protagonist—talks back, rigorously claiming her own voice. Rather unexpectedly Antigone relates details about the last minutes before her death, describing moments not part of the traditional narrative. At this point Antigone reclaims her death as her very own. In contrast to the ideological mission of the mythical hero, she insists that she was not following a grand plan when she resisted the king's orders but rather acted spontaneously and according to her feelings. Her spectacular and very public act of disobedience, which forms the core of the myth, is thus shifted into the realm of individual idiosyncrasy. We hear Antigone say, "I had no plan and no goal, never wanted to overthrow Creon or to become his successor" (p. 140). Proclaiming that "war is the worst solution. War should not be" (p. 141), Antigone leaves the vivid mind of the narrator only to reappear in an imagined confrontation with the *Hauptsturmbannführer*. While the narrator is sitting behind her desk as a member of the Jewish Council, Antigone confronts the Nazi official at the train station, answering his irritated questions

with an inversion of Hölderlin's phrase, "Not to love to hate I am" (p. 151) and then calmly proceeds to kill him. Reversing this famous poetic condensation of Antigone's character effectively suspends the way Greek antiquity was framed in the German cultural imagination. This slight but effective manipulation of a famous quote questions our traditional notion of Antigone and draws attention to the ideological use of myths in the production of culture. Allowing Antigone to revoke her grand mission questions those parts of the collective identity that perpetuate the idea of Germany as a *Kulturnation*, founded on and guided by the moral imperatives of humanism. By radically mobilizing the perspective of difference and otherness history has assigned to her, as both a Jew and a woman, the narrator now revises core pieces of her cultural heritage and personal identity.

In the next dream scene the narrator is waiting in the bitter cold in front of a prison when Antigone slips out and seeks comfort and warmth in her arms. But instead of leading her mythical sister to safety and warmth, she suddenly lets go of her and runs away, leaving Antigone abruptly behind. "Suddenly I let go of her; she falls down" (p. 152). Once again, the narrator's opposition to any act of violence becomes apparent. Whereas before she embraced Antigone as someone who allowed herself to be killed for justice, now she refuses to embrace Antigone as someone who killed for justice. By leaving these two images of Antigone behind, the narrative also leaves behind the violence and murder perpetrated in the name of justice. What gradually emerges in the grey postwar environment is the voice of a conflicted human woman entangled in, yet not conquered by, the contradictions and violence of history.

Weil's deconstruction of a myth as a powerful master narrative superimposed on our local stories and recollections gradually turns Antigone's story into a personal story beyond any "higher reason."<sup>9</sup> *My Sister Antigone* presents work on myth as a performative process that challenges the notion of an heroic subjectivity altogether. This kind of repetition of history does not reproduce the past as a coherent and teleological sequence. Instead it creates an idiosyncratic and shifting narrative of contradicting experiences and truths. Weil's recasting of Antigone is caught up in "remembering, repeating and working through," a process whose aim Freud noted in 1914 was to "recover the lost memories; dynamically to conquer the resistances



caused by repression" (1953: 367). In the course of treatment a patient "remembers nothing of what is forgotten and repressed, but he expresses it in action. He repeats it" (1953: 369). Freud stresses the performative and difficult nature of memory work. Much more intense than an intellectual exercise, this kind of repetition is a precarious confrontation and engagement with the past, where the patient "conjures into existence a piece of real life" (1953: 371). However, this difficult journey into a patient's personal history is not finished once the resistance is identified. In fact, Freud explicitly warns his fellow analysts not to forget "that naming the resistance [can] not result in its immediate suspension. One must allow the patient time to get to know the resistance of which he is ignorant, to 'work through' it, to overcome it" (1953: 375). As Weil's text suggests, overcoming the past may mean the deconstruction of heroic figures that for various reasons populate and "thicken" our memory. Working through our personal myths can be liberating only when we do not rely on "borrowed identities" but rather confront the intricate strategies and manipulations of our memory.

This kind of work on myths attempts to access and to perform histories repressed by the officially sanctioned body of historiography. It attempts to expose the civilization process in its core of discontentment as a process of repression and sublimation. Using mythical narratives as part of a collective memory that uses an iconographic grammar at the intersection of speech and speechlessness, women authors challenge the validity of these icons. These revisions of myths from a female point of view are so compelling because they ask the reader to look at history as a force field of open questions and unresolved conflicts. In complex ways, Weil challenges the coherent master narrative into which history eventually coalesces. This seems especially important as long as the trauma of World War II keeps propelling wars of memory about how to transmit and reconfigure Germany's difficult past for the unified nation.

## NOTES

This essay is part of a book-length study examining the intersections of history, memory, and gender in texts by contemporary German women authors. I want to thank my colleagues Natasha Kolchevska, Lorraine Piroux, and Jack Zipes for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions.

1. All quotations refer to the 1988 Fischer edition of *Meine Schwester Antigone*. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine. The "wound" referred to here was caused by the disappearance of the narrator's dog. The despair of not knowing how he died mirrors that of not knowing what happened to her beloved husband. This wound overshadows her life. See also pp. 24, 32, 36, 85, and 109.
2. Weil has often stressed how much her identity was formed by German literature and culture. As a reply to the question "Do you love Germany?," she answers, "Do I love German culture? It is a home, and I grew up with Goethe and Hölderlin, and even Shakespeare is still romantically tainted for me by Schlegel and Tieck" (Weil 1985: 58).
3. In her contribution on *Medea*, Hilary Collier Sy-Quia examines this aspect further.
4. The collective desire to leave the past behind and start with a clean slate has found expression in the term "*die Stunde Null*" (zero hour).
5. There is a strong connection between Mnemosyne and the sirens. All are omniscient female figures whose knowledge is perceived as both threatening and alluring. What makes the songs of the sirens so dangerous to men passing by is that, according to Homer, they have access to the truth of the past, present, and future.
6. Particularly Christa Wolf's literary reappropriation of myths focuses on gender hierarchies and imbalances as they inform the social and cultural texture.
7. This is also Adorno and Horkheimer's project in the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, although their rigorous critique of rationalism does not focus on gender hierarchies.
8. Weil is referring to Hölderlin's idiosyncratic and elliptic translation of Antigone's last words of defiance: "Zum Hasse nicht, zur Liebe bin ich" (Not to hate, to love I am) [1954: 246]).
9. In various ways, antiquity has always been an important reference point for German culture. Hölderlin's 1804 translation of Sophocles's drama (406 B.C.) firmly anchored the Antigone story in the German imagination, eventually elevating it to a "master narrative" of humanism.

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**“TRUTH LIES WITH THE VICTOR”:  
SCARS ON THE SKIN AND SILENCED MEMORIES—  
CHRISTA WOLF’S MEDEA**

**Hilary Collier Sy-Quia**

Whoever has emerged victorious partici-  
pates to this day in the triumphal proces-  
sion in which the present rulers step over  
those who are lying prostrate.

Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

In her 1996 novel *Medea*, Christa Wolf sets out on the Benjaminian task of brushing history against the grain, presenting us with a startling reinterpretation of one of Greek mythology’s most feared and abhorred women, tracing and rewriting the events that lead to her eventual banishment from society. The novel ends as Medea asks, “Is there a world, a time, in which I would have a place? No one there, whom I could ask” (Wolf 1996b: 234).<sup>1</sup> Fifteen years ago, in the essays that accompanied her earlier engagement with myth, *Kassandra*, Wolf warned: “What is excluded and banished should be feared” (Wolf 1983: 135). In Wolf’s version of the Medea myth, the central figure is banished not for her subversion of the societal order and the rejection of basic maternal instincts to preserve the lives of her children, but for knowledge she holds and, implicitly, for the alternative to the dominant civil order she represents. Wolf’s rewriting of the Medea myth is about conquering a conquering woman.

Wolf’s latest novel is also a reflection of the unification of the two Germanies and their continuing misalignment ten years after the push for reform in 1989. Her reflections from rewriting the myth of Cassandra on banishing the unassimilated seem just as apposite and prescient today as she charts the submersion of the GDR in the dominant Federal Republic. The collected essays and observations

written during the genesis and execution of the *Medea* project stand testimony to Wolf's urgent appeals for a pause for reflection in the helter-skelter experience of forming a new Germany out of two such disparate states. Her alarm at the assumed Western supremacy is apparent in many of the essays contained in *Parting from Phantoms* (German original 1994). Accordingly she takes it upon herself to speak up for those who have discovered "that it is terrible to be weak. That the stronger one insists on his rights without circumspection" (Wolf 1995: 251–52). Clearly, in this she has an image of her fellow East Germans in mind—those who feel they have suffered an annexation, an *Anschluß* to a more powerful regime, and who now stand silenced and disillusioned:

Who will still want to express publicly many people's sorrow, shame, remorse which I read out of their letters, see in their eyes and find in myself too, when everyone is to be occupied in the improvement of material circumstances? Who will take it upon him/herself to report resistance to particular human consequences of an economic system, whose blessings understandably enough are currently fervently wished for by most people? (Wolf 1995: 21).

Indeed, she consistently speaks of the unification process as an *Anschluß*, a process of colonization, a conquest, a marriage of the "smaller, poorer part of Germany" (Wolf 1995: 81) to the "large, rich, potent, functioning state" (*ibid.*, p. 19), employing such sexualized imagery as the weak female East and the strong and potent male West—imagery that enjoyed wide circulation in cartoons and political commentary during the year of unification. It is clear that she considers the fate of the 17 million new *Bundesbürger* sufficiently homogenous as to validate thinking of them as a minority and that she sees that minority as silenced and ignored, its experiences devalued and its actions subjected to blanket criticism (*ibid.*, p. 17). Not only its future, but the reading of its past is now in the hands of the victor in an ideological battle, and he who pays the piper calls the tune (*ibid.*, p. 331). In an interview about *Medea* in the spring of 1996, Christa Wolf stated explicitly her concern for the marginalization of certain people in the united Germany:

Now we are experiencing in the enlarged Federal Republic how increasingly large groups of people are becoming superfluous for social, ethnic, and other reasons. It began with certain groups within the GDR population, against whom the West developed an attitude of rejection during the unification process (in Kammann 1996).<sup>2</sup>

On a political level, then, Wolf would seem to argue for the experience of the former GDR as that of a minority voice in the new Germany, but her critique of a dominant hegemonic view of history goes deeper too. Although *Medea* is written against the background of German unification, it does not permit a simple equation of Colchis, whence Medea came, with the GDR, and Corinth, her new home, with the prosperous West: the critique of patriarchal power and value systems applies to both societies described in the book. Wolf's choice of Medea is pertinent: it is the woman Medea who is brushing against the grain of history, and the complex process of silencing and forgetting is presented as a specifically female form of minority experience. Indeed, Christa Wolf states clearly in the same interview mentioned above: "You will always find a female figure at the core of my text, when the conflicts that I address affect women most acutely" (in Kammann 1996).

While Wolf's novel is centered on Medea, who discovers the truth the powerful in Corinth have gone to such lengths to conceal, and while the novel then charts how Medea is betrayed and ostracized, at its core there is another woman, living in silence and unacknowledged. Wolf illustrates the devastating effect of suppression and silencing not so much on Medea as on this figure, Glauke, the daughter of the King of Corinth. Whereas Medea is always an outsider, tolerated, even respected by some (in particular for her healing abilities) but never integrated into Corinthian society, Glauke, the princess, has been born into the palace hierarchy and is destined to assume her place within the power structure—accompanied naturally by a virile husband. Wolf's portrayal of Medea is of a strong, humane, and defiant woman; by contrast, the figure of Glauke is a study of suppression by patriarchy. In this paper I hope to chart the effects of repressed memories and of a slow process of healing as Glauke comes to terms with both that knowledge and with her own sense of identity refracted through that knowledge. Ultimately

Glauke's exposure to Medea is curtailed and her attempt to break out of her multifaceted captivity fails. She reassumes the identity imposed on her by the gaze of those around her, but the brief, now lost, glimpse of the open blue sky of freedom leaves her deranged as she drowns in the well at the heart of her father's palace. It is my contention that Wolf in this novel intended to issue a warning to the united Germany to question the accepted values of the powerful and not to suppress experience or to silence memories. Forty years of GDR history cannot be erased from the body of a nation; those experiences as well as the painful encounters during the first few years of a unified Germany leave scars on the skin.

As in almost all of Wolf's previous work, the insidious process of silencing is a theme here too, though with a difference. *Sprachlosigkeit*—the lack of or loss of speech—is thematized elsewhere as an acutely personal, autobiographical experience to do with complex effects of censorship and self-censorship in the face of the unspeakable. Here, however, it is presented as a fate that awaits women specifically and as a process that silences not only speech but also presence—that is, any expression of identity through the body. Medea remembers being taught by her mother to move in a series of minute nonmovements, to hold back every breath that a normal body exhales so as to go unnoticed, to fade into the wall (Wolf 1996b: 23), as does the female character in Ingeborg Bachmann's novel *Malina*, a work much on Wolf's mind (Wolf 1983: 149). Medea herself has resisted this muting and walks through the streets of Corinth with her head held high, contrasting herself with the Corinthian women, who seem to her to be benign and silent domestic animals (Wolf 1996b: 18). Glauke, by contrast, epitomizes the depersonifying experience Wolf posits as a specifically female fate. Two leitmotifs run through the novel to illustrate this institutionalized repression: cold stone walls and vulnerable, impressionable bodies.

In the lectures she wrote to accompany her novel *Kassandra*, Wolf speaks of a walling-in of women within the expectations imposed on them by Western (patriarchal) society. Their own experiences are substituted by these expectations, silenced and suppressed. The images come together powerfully in this brief passage:

Idol from the Greek "eidolon"—an image. The living memory is wrested from the woman, the image that others make of her is

forced upon her: the terrible process of petrification, reification takes shape on the living body (1983: 148).

In *Medea* this image finds expression in the novel's very structure, and Glauke, arguably the most voiceless of all the characters, is incarcerated at the very center of that structure.

The novel consists of eleven accounts given by six different "voices." If one were to draw the structure of the novel, the diagram would resemble a set of Russian dolls, each voice fitting inside another, leaving Glauke's account of trust and betrayal buried deep in the center, itself a reaction to ideas and interpretations forced upon her, undermining her own impressions of events, thus denying any sense of a calm central core, instead suggesting a swirling chute of self-doubt (Fuhrmann 1996). It is no accident that the two voices who speak before and after Glauke are by contrast those of the court astronomers, advisers to the king, official interpreters of events, proclaimers of history. The image of Russian dolls is of course used in the quotation by Elisabeth Lenk, which Wolf chooses to put on the first page of the book. It is an interesting choice, as it describes time not as an orderly progression of epochs lying side by side, but instead as a "one inside the other." The epochs can be pulled apart, she says,

like an accordion. Then it is a long way from one end to the other. But one can also fit each inside the other like Russian dolls; then the walls of the epochs are very close to each other. People from other centuries hear the whining of our gramophone and through the walls of time we can see them raising their hands before a delicious meal (quoted in Wolf 1996b: 5).

In the preface to the novel Wolf herself picks up on this image of the contiguity of historical eras with a powerful image of simultaneously falling through time as the figure we are in search of, *Medea*, rises up to meet us. The *Verschachtelung*, the boxing in of the voices in the structure of the novel, thus suggests the contiguity of time; the six different voices also illustrate Wolf's other preoccupation with the nature of history—namely, that it is not a single, dominant, monochrome narrative, but instead a cacophony of discordant experiences. Each of these six voices does not reiterate the experience told by another; instead each tells of different events and impres-



sions which together not only augment what Medea tells us herself, but also reveal divergent interpretations of what happened. Each person's memory fails to add up to the rendition of history and the image of Medea created by the stargazer Akamas and proclaimed from his astronomer's tower for all eternity. In fact, when Wolf asks in the preface, "Or must we dare to enter the innermost core of our denial and self-deceit, simply walk, together, one behind the other, with the sound of collapsing walls in our ears?" (Wolf 1996b: 10), we have reached the heart of her project in writing this novel: once more she is concerned with efforts to come to terms with history, with our divergent and uncomfortable memories of the past. This rewriting of the Medea myth is also a plea for us not to forget, to accept the disparate voices as disparate while we watch them being silenced in part, distorted and merged into a harmonious chord of palatable history.

Running concurrently with this structural symbolism is the image of immolation which continues through the text, from the traumatic discovery of Princess Iphinoe's small skeleton, buried deep beneath the palace; to Glauke's seclusion in the palace; to her inability to walk past the well at the center of the palace's inner courtyard; to the hounding of Medea through the streets, during which she narrowly escapes being stoned to death; to her eventual arrest and incarceration. Significantly, even after she has been banished beyond the walls of Corinth and left to a presumed death in the inhospitable open space beyond, her sons, who, in complete accordance with Greek ideas on the inviolability of the *oikos*, have been kept behind in Corinth after their mother has been banished, are stoned to death as if to bury the evidence of Medea's existence.<sup>3</sup> These stonings and immolations reflect a brutal way in which the concealment of truth, the suppression of memory, and the assertion of a dominant history are all processes undertaken on the very bodies of their protagonists.

By putting Glauke's only monologue at the center of this structure, Wolf turns to another aspect of this image of walls within walls. Not only is Glauke immured deep within the structure of the novel, but she is also incarcerated deep at the heart of her father's palace, where no one can see her, no one can hear her. Before we hear from her, we have been given an impression of her in the comments of Medea and Agameda, two women who at different times take charge of the frail princess. We learn that she is sickly and prone to epileptic

attacks, during which she loses control of her body, sacrificing all self-possession. She is dressed in black, shapeless clothes to conceal her awkward body. Her father refuses to touch her or speak to her. Her mother remains silent, though for a more horrible reason. Glauke reminds us of H el ene Cixous's remark about "little girls and their ill-mannered bodies, immured, well-preserved, intact unto themselves" (Cixous 1981: 245–64). In the figure of Glauke Christa Wolf attempts to show how women are alienated from themselves, no longer allowed to have any form of self-determination, which would give them weight as individuals:

In Corinth women no longer play a decisive part, they are no longer self-determined people. I tried to show this in the figure of Glauke, the daughter of King Kreon, who was alienated from herself from the very beginning (in Kammann 1996).

The chapter devoted to her account is a breathless description of a slow confidence that emerged between her and Medea, which Glauke has now been taught to see as having ended in betrayal. In it she gives voice to these feelings and memories long locked up, and the result is a splurging of emotions in ribbon-like sentences.

The most important thing we learn about Glauke at the outset of the novel is that she suffers from fits:

An attack of weakness—this is the phrase which the doctors have agreed to use with the king, when his pale, thin daughter begins to twitch once again, throws herself to the floor where her body writhes in a horrible way, seeming as if it is being held taught in an arch, while her eyes turn inwards, so that only the whites are visible and foam appears on her distorted lips (Wolf 1996b: 81–82).

During these attacks Glauke loses control over her body and is not conscious of the contortions to which it subjects itself, though they must involve pain. Her eyes, source of sensory perception and means of communicating with her surroundings, are turned inward and away from the world; her mouth, her other means of communication, is distorted and unable to utter coherent sound. Another part of the fit is that Glauke cannot control her head; Agameda speaks of having to hold still "her head thrashing wildly from side to side" (Wolf 1996b: 82)—a thrashing which must surely cause pain,

*Kopfschmerz*, a headache. Perhaps one of the most powerful motifs in this context is that of the head: *Kopf* (head) and *Schmerz* (pain) are often juxtaposed, whereby *Kopfschmerzen* comes to stand for the pain of assimilating unpalatable knowledge. Let us bear in mind the obvious—namely, that the head is the locus of our eyes, with which we see events and communicate nonverbally with one another, as well as of our ears and mouth, with which we hear and voice our thoughts, as well as of our memory. The frequent use of *Blick* (look or gaze) and *Stimme* (voice) ties in to the overarching use of the head as an image in this text. Freedom—literally being able to call one's head one's own—having control over one's perceptive and cognitive faculties, remains a powerful theme in the novel and is expressed frequently in the image of the head. Taking away someone's liberty, including the control over his or her body, culminating in the process of silencing someone, can be easily summarized in any act that incapacitates the head.

The other person who is to look after Glauke is Turon, about whom she herself has nothing complementary to say. Akamas has put Turon in the position of being Glauke's "protector" (Wolf 1996b: 139), though it is unclear quite from what he is to protect her. Certainly Glauke describes him in terms of his body: "a pale, unbelievably thin young man with hollow cheeks, long bony fingers and a sticky way of looking at you" (*ibid.*)—a tactile gaze! She is repulsed by him, by his touch, though she cannot tell her father, in whose control it is to change Turon's appointment. Glauke's image of Turon is of his body: its shape, its touch on her body, its smell. He controls Glauke, restrains her in order to calm her, calm being preferable to (inarticulate) outburst, silence better than articulation. He does so with his hands, which he lays on her arms to control her body and on her forehead to restrain the emotions or thoughts that might precipitate a "fit." His task is to suppress any emerging feelings of identity in Glauke, any pride in her body, despite its idiosyncrasies. Medea had tried to make Glauke think of her body in a new way, but these ideas are dismissed by Turon with a clammy compassion as heartless deceit:

Deceit, mockery, Turon says, and puts his hand compassionately on my head; of course he means the mocking of a pitiable and unhappy person, disadvantaged by the gods, and the proof for

that is, now that I have been removed from her damaging influence and the dark clothes, which suit me, have been returned to me, that the deceiving agility of my arms and legs has disappeared too (Wolf 1996b: 142).

Turon looks after her but in a stifling way, keeping her as a sick person whose utterances can have no value:

He is very attentive, and he is nearby when it comes over me; he catches me, he holds me, he is responsible for making sure I do not hurt myself, he calls for help; I think the entire palace knows how often I have an attack, I can see it in the pitying and disdainful looks, I can no longer take a single step alone, I can no longer sleep alone (Wolf 1996b: 144–45).

Glauke is victim therefore of a double loss of control: first through the epilepsy itself and then through the suffocating "caregiver" who holds her, who spreads news of her incompetence all around the palace, whose role as *Vormund* (guardian) becomes literal as he takes away any self-sufficiency she might have had and urges her, as does her father, to forget any other mode she might have glimpsed: "Forget it, Turon says, forget it, Father says, now better times will come for you" (Wolf 1996b: 160).

Forgetting is precisely what Medea urges her not to do, during the time in which she gains Glauke's confidence. The contrast between her interaction with the princess and that of Turon or Agameda is extreme, though we see Medea's actions through Glauke's eyes, eyes that have been told to reinterpret the liberation as deceit and to see only Medea's abandonment and betrayal. Yet it is obvious that Medea has been able to help Glauke toward a self-understanding that would save her if only she could continue in the same vein without Medea's help.

At first both Glauke's discomfort and pain are described as purely physical symptoms. Beyond the fits themselves, there are searing headaches, which Medea can release and dispel with her hands:

She massaged my head and neck, in a way that felt unendingly good, dissolving the vibrating weight in the center of my head, which almost never left me and sometimes seemed to tear apart

my entire feeble body with terrible force, setting off this hardship (Wolf 1996b: 145–46).

Glauke's "vibrating weight" is reminiscent of Medea's "jangling in my head" (Wolf 1996b: 13). At the outset of the novel, and indeed Medea sees the root of Glauke's pain as a deeply suppressed, unresolved trauma which, like her own "jangling," must be faced and acknowledged. Her first task is to make Glauke accept and feel comfortable in her own body; only then does she move on to make her explore her memory to be able to feel at home in her own mind.<sup>4</sup> So she takes the young woman (who thinks it is only natural that her father would not want to touch "the pale, blemished skin, the thin, lank hair or the gauche limbs of a girl, even if it was his daughter—it is after all my earliest certainty that I am ugly" [Wolf 1996: 140])<sup>5</sup> and persuades her to come to terms with and like her body. She teaches her how to hold herself (i.e., to control her body), how to run (i.e., not to restrain herself), how to treat her hair; she makes her feel a different person. Then Medea entices her out of the concealment provided by her shapeless black robes and encourages her to wear bright colors that draw attention to her body, that open her eyes; she also encourages her to take all her clothes off and bathe in the sea. These encouragements have their effect: a kitchen boy who does not recognize her as Glauke, the royal (and ugly) princess, whistles after her in appreciation of her new womanhood, her new persona. More important for her, her father touches her, though not particularly gently: "Kreon grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me; my father touched me; that had never happened before" (*ibid.*, p. 142). The roughness of his contact seems immaterial; it is the recognition and acknowledgment of her as a person that is crucial in this encounter.

But Medea goes on to make Glauke reassess the contents of her memory, during which she strikes at the heart of Glauke's pain, physical and mental: "It touched me in the most secret point inside me, the point of the acutest pain" (Wolf 1996b: 141). She invites her to explore her memory by imagining a miniature version of herself descending on a rope into a dark space. Medea begins by asking her about her first memories:

She said she would be interested to hear of the first event that I could remember, and what I had felt then; I was to take as much

time as I needed and be brave and let myself down by an inner rope—because it was possible to imagine such things—into the deep within me, which was nothing more than my past life and my memory of it (Wolf 1996b: 146).

The rope then becomes a compulsion for Glauke, and what Medea has presented as an idle game does not leave her.

Eventually this process of self-exploration plumbs the depths and strikes gold: "She succeeded in leading me once more to that deep place where the images of the past lie. To that deep uncanny place" (Wolf 1996b: 157). At this point the *Seil* (rope) Medea has offered her is perceived as a rope (*Strick*) on which to hang herself, in that now there is no going back, but Glauke must confront the hidden images of the past, things she had had to forget in order to survive. But nothing is ever forgotten. Instead, as Medea explains, the trauma grows with the child, like a "dark patch" inside its head (*ibid.*, p. 148) and eventually reaches inescapable proportions. At this stage the suppressed memory has done precisely that—i.e., assumed power over Glauke so that her only liberation can lie in facing the trauma buried at its root. To do this Medea teaches her that she must not forbid herself to think: "She herself taught me that I must not forbid myself any thought" (Wolf 1996b: 150). Glauke brings herself to remember the events of the day during which her mother tore out her hair from her scalp and screamed at her father (the king), during which she herself sat abandoned on a stone step, a threshold between the "reality" of her light and airy untroubled existence in the palace and the dark passageways beneath that symbolize suppressed memory, "where I saw myself, still very young, sitting on the stone threshold between one of the rooms of the palace and the long, icy passage, crying inconsolably" (*ibid.*, p. 157). She not only remembers her sister, but she also brings herself to name her, to articulate her name: "Iphinoe. I never heard that name again afterwards, never said it, never thought it" (*ibid.*, p. 158). It is as if by not naming her, she is forgotten, unheard of, not even contemplated privately and silently; she has become a nonperson. But from that day forward Glauke is abandoned by her mother, and it is in this that the real pain lies—and which makes Medea's second abandonment, as Glauke is persuaded to see it, doubly disturbing. Now Glauke is urged to forget by those around her and sees in her union with Jason the chance to confine

once more to the subconscious the trauma dug up by Medea: "And now I shall take up my place beside this king and shall forget, forget, finally be allowed to forget again" (*ibid.*, p. 156).

The process of revelation that Medea instigates is reflected dramatically on Glauke's body—not only in the subtle changes Medea is able to bring about in Glauke's self-possession and her attitude toward her body, but more directly symbolic or symptomatic than that, in a rash that spreads over her entire body and then recedes:

It was unbelievable, but she seemed to be pleased when this disgusting rash returned; I was beside myself when it started, first in the folds of the skin, then spreading over large parts of my body, repulsive, moist, and itchy; that—she said—was a sign of healing. . . . She showed me the places on my body from which the rash was retreating, where new skin was appearing; you are shedding a skin, Glauke, she said cheerfully, like a snake. She spoke of rebirth (Wolf 1996b: 152).

Like fear, these memories break through the surface of her skin: "How difficult it is to drive out fear, how close under the surface fear hovers, ready to break forth again" (*ibid.*, p. 153). This fear Medea earlier understood all too well, comparing it to a missing limb:

[She] did not attempt to talk me out of my fear; she said I know, it is exactly as if you were missing an arm or a leg, only no one can see what you lack (*ibid.*, p. 147).

Here the fear is connected to the suppressed memory she cannot bear to confront and the analogy to the body is drawn forcefully again. The trauma remains very tangible: like the memory that begins as a small patch inside the child's mind and grows with the child to reach huge proportions, so the confined area around the well in the center of the palace courtyard, which Glauke cannot bear to enter, grows until it encompasses the entire courtyard—just as the skin rash grows and then recedes. For Medea succeeds in leading Glauke across the dreaded courtyard, despite herself. She succeeds in making her remember the cause of the fear associated with that courtyard. The tragedy lies indeed in Medea's forced abandonment, which leaves Glauke unable to rise above an assimilated trauma but which instead ends in her clothing her body in a new dress given

to her by Medea and descending literally into the bowels of the palace through that same well at the center of the courtyard, giving in to the chute of self-doubt.

Medea knows what she is looking for when she encourages Glauke to test her memories for the events that appear nowhere in Corinth's accepted history. The novel opens on the morning after Medea has found out for herself that the king's rule is founded on a dark secret. By following the silent queen, Merope, through dark and narrow passages beneath the palace, her fingers have discovered the skull and delicate shoulder blades of a young girl, Glauke's older sister Iphinoe. As soon as Medea has made the terrible discovery of Iphinoe's skeleton, she says, "I had found out what I had wanted to know; I promised myself I would forget it again as quickly as possible" (Wolf 1996b: 24). Her reaction is to try to suppress knowledge, to forget the unspeakable. But she cannot because the evidence of her discovery remains written on her body: there are scars on her skin where the rough, cold walls of the subterranean passages scraped her skin as she dragged herself forward toward her horrible discovery. Her hands, not her eyes, discovered those bones and her hands, not her mind, will remember the imprint: "Hands too have a memory" (*ibid.*, p. 14).

Throughout the novel the underground realm of silence and stifled memory is given a female aspect, from the specifically female overtones of the imagery of tight, dark spaces to the confinement of silent (or silenced) women there. Merope, the queen and mother to Glauke, has withdrawn into this twilight zone, together with her silent attendants; Iphinoe, the dead princess murdered to maintain her father's power base, lies silenced there. Glauke, the gauche royal daughter, is kept concealed in a remote part of the palace, away from the main events, away from the power vested in her father. The contrast is kept stark between the vast and sumptuous halls of the palace; the public, male space; and the clammy labyrinth beneath, private, secret, and female. Glauke, reliving the decisive memory, sits on precisely that threshold, crying, abandoned, mourning a male act of aggression on her sister. History—that is, the official interpretation of events—is constructed in the astronomers' observation tower by Akamas, while the memories are held by silent women below, each trying to forget the unwelcome knowledge they have: Merope, Glauke, Medea.



Christa Wolf is concerned that such memories are not buried and forgotten, arguing perhaps that it is the contribution of the minority—of the woman, of the East German—to question the neat, conciliatory, purged version of history. Certainly she is arguing for the inclusion of many different experiences in the writing of history, pleading for a multifaceted result. To borrow from Cixous once more:

Woman unthinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield. In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history (1981: 252).

Perhaps memories, rather than being forgotten, should be subjected to a constant process of renegotiation (Assmann 1995),<sup>6</sup> according to present circumstances and the needs of an ever-redefined identity. They leave scars on the body and on the mind. Christa Wolf writes at the outset of this novel, “The walls are porous” (Wolf 1996b: 9), implying that we can easily let ourselves rediscover the past, and yet Medea passes through walls that graze her skin and seem to crush her. As she descends into the past, pushing her body through dark, hidden tunnels, a towering edifice of official history rises above her head. Although she uncovers the truth, which invalidates Akamas’s account, the power and the light are in the palace above her: the astronomer’s rendition of history is the one that has the voice.

#### NOTES

1. All translations are my own; all page references are to the German original.
2. It seems fair initially to equate the “certain people” to whom she refers with the prominent literary figures, including Wolf herself, who suffered the vitriol of the literature debate of 1990–91.
3. The Greeks believed that the nuclear family unit of the *oikos* was inviolate and that all children belonged to the *oikos* and therefore to the man at its head, rather than to their mother, should a separation occur. See Arthur (1977): 66–67.

4. Think of Cixous: "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (1981: 250).
5. Note in the translation of *linkisch* the several meanings: gauche, ungainly, but also deceitful, as if her body is not only not under her control, but somehow also working against her.
6. Assmann bases his research on Maurice Halbwachs's study of memory. He writes: "Cultural memory exists in two modes: first in the mode of potentiality of the archive whose accumulated texts, images and rules of conduct act as a total horizon, and second in the mode of actuality, whereby each contemporary context puts the objectivized meaning into its own perspective, giving it its own relevance. . . . Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity" (1995: 130–32).

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## THE AMAZON BODY: WARTIME SEXUALITY AND FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN KLEIST'S *PENTHESILEA*

Renée M. Schell

Conquering women conquer men. No less powerfully, they conquer images of themselves created by men. Readers of Western culture have come to know the Amazon queen Penthesilea, surely one of the most compelling of "conquering women," first and foremost through the male eye of Greek myth. By analyzing what I term the power to look in Kleist's 1808 drama *Penthesilea*, I shall focus in this essay specifically on the gendered act of looking and its function for the construction of female subjectivity in the context of war, itself a metaphor in this text for the relationship between the sexes in general.

My attention to the act of looking does not, however, seek to disembodify this signifying practice from the physical, if imaginary, being to whom it belongs. Rather, the complex nature of the female body in Kleist's text and the visceral presence of such elements as desire, violence, and warfare encourage a feminist rereading that specifically addresses the problematic of the body's physical boundaries. Do looks penetrate bodies? To what extent do they disturb boundaries? Are looks evidence of communication or merely signs of attempted proximity? How do these gazes contribute to the construction—or fragmentation—of identity?

In order to approach answers to these questions, this essay first analyzes the founding myth of the Amazons to show how an internalized male image of women catalyzes the founding of the all-female state. From here, the essay moves to an investigation of female identity as it is constructed by Penthesilea's specific appeal to Achilles to gaze at her body and name her. Focusing next on the text's conflation of both sexual and military notions of domination and submission, I explore Penthesilea's "sacred vision," the imagination space to which she obsessively defers sexual experience. Finally, I

argue that her murder of Achilles radicalizes what I read as the vampirism of the Amazon state, while her suicide, often read as an act of despair, delivers her from the internalized male image of female identity. With regard to Kleist's text, then, the iconoclastic words "conquering women" signal a break with the past even as a future, however precarious, is forged from the shards of the mirror that had dictated female self-image.

After their famous battle, Penthesilea believes she has conquered Achilles and that, in accordance with Amazon law, he will be her lover in the temple of Diana. Penthesilea responds to Achilles' questions about the origin of the Amazon state, which he describes as "unweiblich" and "unnatürlich," by telling him of the pre-Amazon Scythian state (Kleist 1987: line 1903; hereafter references to *Penthesilea* will be by line numbers only). What emerges is the tale of the genocide of the Scythian men and the mass rape of the women by Ethiopian invaders. The Ethiopians killed all the men, "Greis' und Knaben" (1922), and as a result, "Das ganze Prachtgeschlecht der Welt ging aus" (1924). And yet the women succumb neither to the death of their men nor to their rape by the Ethiopians. They resist by staging a revolution and creating a state of their own, a "Frauenstaat," into which no men are admitted. More specifically, no men are allowed to *see* this society of women.<sup>1</sup> The gaze of the male eye is perceived as a violation, foreign and intrusive; it is punished by death. This prohibition of vision is key because it is ultimately this same threat of the judgmental male gaze which leads to the creation of Amazon society. Penthesilea narrates the emancipatory, enlightened roots of the Scythian women's Frauenstaat, invoking Kant's 1784 essay, "Was ist Aufklärung?," claiming "Mündigkeit," in this case, for women:

Frei . . . sind  
Die Fraun . . . .  
Ein Staat, ein mündiger, sei aufgestellt,  
Ein Frauenstaat, den fürder keine andre  
Herrsüchtige Männerstimme mehr durchtrotzt,  
Der das Gesetz sich würdig selber gebe,  
Sich selbst gehorche, selber auch beschütze (1958–61).

However, in the very moment when the queen of this Frauenstaat is to be crowned, there is heard an anonymous voice.<sup>2</sup> This nameless

voice plants doubt in the minds of the women, playing on both their insecurity and pride as it speaks the following insult:

Den Spott der Männer werd er reizen nur,  
 Ein Staat, wie der, und gleich dem ersten Anfall  
 Des kriegerischen Nachbarvolks erliegen:  
 Weil doch die Kraft des Bogens nimmermehr,  
 Von schwachen Fraun, beengt durch volle Brüste,  
 Leicht, wie von Männern, sich regieren würde (1977–82).

The disruption caused by the anonymous voice renders the earlier emancipatory declaration questionable in the eyes of the Scythian women. An odd wave of cowardice washes over the crowd: “die feige Regung [griff] um sich” (1985). Since it seems her women will lose courage as a result of the intrusive taunt, the queen, Tanais, tears off her right breast, christens her people the Amazons, and dies.

The Amazon state is thus created as an act of resistance against the voice that prophesies the inevitable failure of the women in battle. However, the queen acts not only out of the autonomous sense of a new people, but also in response to an outside provocation. The perceived threat is that of male scorn at the notion of female self-government, as well as male scorn at the intact female body wielding a weapon. With the invocation of the key term *Mündigkeit*, Kleist’s text reflects not only the misty past of the Amazons, but the early nineteenth century in Germany as well. In the wake of the French Revolution, the promise of political equality for all carried with it a powerful subtext—namely, the threat to the hegemony of male rule. Thus the social roles of women were increasingly “legislated” by bourgeois theorists calling for women to embrace their challenging roles as wives and keepers of the marriage. Penthesilea’s narration of the founding of the original *Frauenstaat* pointedly echoes women’s insistence during the French Revolution on the female right to leadership roles in government, as well as the proximity which still links Amazons to the founding moment and the sexual violence that was its catalyst.

It is no coincidence that the voice which casts doubt on women’s autonomy and the suitability of their bodies is anonymous. The patriarchal ideology behind the suggested male image of women remains hidden, undisclosed, and thus patently effective. As Mieke Bal

writes in another context, the namelessness of the voice is crucial since "this anonymity eliminates [the voice] from the historical narrative as utterly forgettable" (1988: 1). Furthermore, it is not the scorn of "real" (that is, physically present) men which causes Tanais to tear off her breast; rather, it is the gaze of "virtual" men merely suggested by the genderless voice that causes her radical action.<sup>3</sup> The queen's act of violence reflects the women's susceptibility to the male image of themselves even as she destroys it. The death of the queen embodies the Amazon contradiction—a female people that declares its autonomous nature and yet has as its birthright the ever-present necessity of rejecting the male image of women.

Tanais removes the ailing member, the "femaleness" that the anonymous voice has insulted, apparently rendering the remaining smoothness "male."<sup>4</sup> Yet this act must also be viewed as a countermove to reject the ploy for control represented by the anonymous voice. The violence of the queen's self-inflicted mastectomy both contends with the external self-image and ruptures the gender dichotomy on which it is based—a dichotomy which grants men, but not women, physical strength and prowess with weapons. In so doing, the queen refutes the voice's imputation of female weakness in a radical demonstration of social agency. Finally, on a metaphorical level, the mastectomy also signifies the symbolic removal of women from what they must view as the ailing, male-dominated society.

The text's indication that the queen mentally contends with the voice's accusation during a weighty, historic moment ("Die Königin stand einen Augenblick, / Und harrte still auf solcher Rede Glück" [1983–84]) corresponds to a phenomenon recently identified in social psychology called "stereotype threat." This argument does not focus on self-images that are internalized; rather, it elucidates "the immediate situational threat that derives from the broad dissemination of negative stereotypes about one's group" (Steele and Aronson 1995: 798). This "situational threat" echoes the voice's appearance "im festlichsten Moment" (1971).<sup>5</sup>

With each successive generation, the ritual removal of the breast, or the inhibition of its growth, is reenacted. The traditional understanding of the Amazon rite reads the removal of the breast as necessary for drawing the bow. However, any archer can dispel this myth: the absence of the right breast is not physically necessary for drawing a bow. The erroneous explanation hides the real issue: What

makes the Amazon custom meaningful is its role as a community-building element. The removal of the breast leaves a mark on the body which identifies it as Amazon, separate from other cultures. Political anthropologist Pierre Clastres (1987: 177–88) illuminates the purposes of ritual piercing and other modifications undergone as rites of passage in certain Brazilian tribes. The piercing, to which everyone must submit, serves to unite the people, cementing their sense of community. The knowledge that is written on the body is the message, “*You are worth no more than anyone else; you are worth no less than anyone else*” (Clastres 1987: 186; italics in original).

Additional light is cast on Tanais’s self-sacrifice with René Girard’s insight that only the blood of sacrificial victims can purify the blood of the community. Girard’s text illuminates Tanais’s fear that her new state was already threatened with the impurity of the threatened male gaze and the ensuing violence: “All concepts of impurity stem ultimately from the community’s fear of a perpetual cycle of violence arising in its midst” (Girard 1977: 36). Tanais’s mastectomy becomes readable as an act of self-sacrifice to protect the purity of her new state.

The notion of mastectomy should not be seen as anachronous in this context. Removal of the breast was not an unusual treatment for cancer in mid-eighteenth-century Germany and France (Wolff 1989: 56, 61; see also Lewison 1953).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it had been a controversial treatment since the days of the ancient Egyptians. While Kleist’s use of the well-known image of a cancerous state reflects the grim diagnosis of Germania under siege by Napoleon, the Amazon context allows the image of mastectomy to echo perhaps most forcefully for the troubled notion of female political identity. If the society is depicted as cancerous, the cure lies in an invasive procedure.<sup>7</sup> This reading reflects the moment of self-alienation imposed by the anonymous voice and is particularly compelling since immunologists now classify the body’s cancer cells as “non-self” (Sontag 1978: 67).<sup>8</sup>

To be sure, the fact that the Amazon ritual of breast removal began as a reaction to the male gaze calls into question the notion of women’s “real” emancipation from men, suggesting that it is not to be found in such an attempt at literal equality. At the same time, the text suggests that a powerful rite is necessary in order for cultural identity to be established. If we follow Girard’s argument, the threat of impurity through the male gaze is alleviated as the ritual is reen-

acted by each Amazon. The ritual harnesses "beneficial violence" to actively structure a female society over and against what is possible for women in a male-dominated system.<sup>9</sup>

It is telling that Kleist's text does not actually depict the ritual among the Amazons. In this way, the rite is constructed as private, visible only by the members of the culture. Indeed, the evidence of the ritual would appear to be indiscernible to outsiders: Achilles actually asks whether the custom still exists. While he admires the act of self-mutilation as long as it is safely within the realm of myth, it becomes an "ungeheure Sage" (2006) and "barbarisch" (2014) when he learns that the Amazons still perform the rite. At the news of Tanais's heroic death, Achilles' admiration burst forth: "Nun denn, beim Zeus, die brauchte keine Brüste! / Die hätt ein Männervolk beherrschen können, / Und meine ganze Seele beugt sich ihr" (1991–93). However, the great Greek warrior, while indifferent to the fresh wound in his own arm, balks at the idea of contemporary women performing this rite.<sup>10</sup> In his normative speech, he calls it not only "unweiblich" (1903), but also the more condemning "unmenschlich" (2011).<sup>11</sup> The rite may indeed be "unmenschlich," but what is also labeled inhumane, if implicitly, is the treatment of the Scythian women that caused them to declare themselves independent from *all* men, not only the Ethiopians.<sup>12</sup> The Amazons' prohibition of the male gaze reflects their rejection of the power to name that is its corollary. The undermining of this power surfaces when Achilles cannot "see" that the Amazons still carry out the rite and must instead be told. Thus one way to subvert the judgmental male gaze is to conceal what will be looked at and named. Achilles' assertion that the Amazon body is "unweiblich" justifies the Amazons' position.

Significantly, Achilles voices concern not for the integrity of Penthesilea's body, but that her female component, "[die] jungen lieblichen Gefühle" (2013), will have no home. Penthesilea herself refutes Achilles' unspoken objections that femininity will be lost if women take on "male" roles in public life and that women's femininity is bound up with their bodies, specifically with their breasts.<sup>13</sup> If women are allowed to think for themselves without guardianship, establish their own laws, and protect themselves, then men's roles are no longer defined in these terms. Penthesilea's attempt to discount Achilles' assessment of her femininity suggests a recognition



that men's fears of women's independence are also due to the fact that the revolution redefined masculinity. What becomes clear in this drama of impenetrable dust clouds and obscured battlefields is that any notion of femininity depends on who is doing the looking. What is at stake is the power to look, judge, and name.

Consider now a different male gaze that is physically present, as opposed to the abstract gaze of the anonymous voice. Earlier in the scene with Achilles, Penthesilea theorizes the process of self-image formation. Despite the prohibition of the male gaze we saw earlier, Penthesilea's sense of identity is constructed through the interplay between Achilles' look at her and her own desire for that look. The process begins when Achilles asks Penthesilea the seemingly simple question, "Wer bist du / Wie nenn ich dich" (1811–12). She responds with the odd imperative, "Nenn diese Züge, / Das sei der Nam, in welchem du mich denkst" (1815). Although she would appear to be giving over her identity to him, saying "Name me," this is a command, suggesting a desire for role-play rather than simple submission. She constructs a radically new process of identification. She does not state, "Ich heiÙe Penthesilea," "Mein Name ist . . .," or even, "Ich bin Penthesilea." Instead, she sets up a relation between, on the one hand, the notions of name, identity, and the face, and on the other hand, Achilles as "other" and the way in which he will constitute her sense of self. Thus she invents a medium in which she is to be thought: the shape and contours of her features, as seen by Achilles, constitute the name in which he is to think her. The name is not a label bestowed by her mother or by society, but is instead a process dependent on the male gaze. Penthesilea negotiates against the given Amazon identity by inventing a medium for identity, yet, by calling upon Achilles for a male gaze, remains within its constraints.

This notion of identity through the other shows how precarious the grounding of the self is for Penthesilea. If Achilles thinks of her "this" way, thus stabilizing identity for a certain time, there is no indication that this identity will abide: "Wenn dir der Nam entschwänd . . . / Fändst du mein Bild in dir wohl wieder aus? Kannst du wohl mit geschloÙnen Augen denken?" (1820–22). In Penthesilea's understanding, the self is always being mediated by an other; the key phrase "mein Bild in dir" articulates her sense of self. I am who *you* see; I am my image *in you*.

Consider the implications of this process of identity formation. When Achilles rides away from her in battle, Penthesilea cries, "Staub lieber, als ein Weib sein, das nicht reizt" (1253). With this declaration, she establishes a continuity between the original, internalized male image of women that gave rise to the Amazon state and her own perceived lack of self-worth. Without Achilles' acknowledgment of her beauty, Penthesilea would rather be the dust that is symbolic in this play of submission, humiliation, and, ultimately, the nothingness of death. Indeed, she believes she deserves humiliation, as evidenced in her masochistic comments to her friend Prothoe upon failing to conquer Achilles in battle: "Laßt ihn den Fuß gestählt, es ist mir recht, / Auf diesen Nacken setzen" (1244).<sup>14</sup> Penthesilea's desperate wish reveals that this nation of women has perpetuated two cultural imperatives of the male-dominated system. First, the Amazon state has incorporated the imperative of women's seduction of men by means of their beauty, and second—perhaps more devastating—it has internalized the imperative of female identity in the ability to seduce men.

What gives Penthesilea's statement its punch is the image of dust. Dust is *the* image in *Penthesilea* for total domination and humiliation of the other. This domination is, in turn, the metaphor for the relationship between the sexes in general. Earlier, Penthesilea united the image of dust with sexual conquest in gripping language: "Den einen heißersehten Jüngling siegreich / Zum Staub mir noch der Füße hinzuwerfen" (846). The dust through which Achilles drags Hector's corpse also signifies the desecration of the body. As Ruth Angress points out, Achilles links this humiliation and desecration to the sexual act: "Mein Will ist, ihr zu tun . . . / Wie ich dem stolzen Sohn des Priam tat" (1513–14).<sup>15</sup>

Achilles also notes the sexual nature of military submission while attempting to understand the logic of the Amazons' battle. Since Penthesilea is so beautiful, he says, she need not wage war in order to have suitors: "Du, die sich bloß in ihrer Schöne ruhig / Zu zeigen brauchte, Liebliche, das ganze / Geschlecht der Männer dir im Staub zu sehn" (1884–86). He presents her with an irresistible self-image as sex goddess: all mankind lies submissively in the dust at her feet solely because of her beauty.

But Penthesilea is not tempted by such easy displays of devotion, in which the game is over before it has begun. Rather, in tandem

with her idea of identity as a process of mutual recognition, her sexuality is characterized by role play, as well as by deferral. Recall her treatment of Achilles when she believes she has conquered the great warrior in battle. In her role as dominatrix, she fires one command after the other: "Komm jetzt . . . / Komm, lege dich zu Füßen mir—Ganz her! / Nur dreist heran! . . . / Sprich!" (1749–53). As a further expression of her control and staging of the meeting, she rejects his touch, scolding, "Nichts, nichts!" (1782). Instead of indulging in the encounter, she defers it to an unspecified time, which she, presumably, will determine: "Sobald [die Rosen] reif sind, Liebster, pflückst du sie" (1783).

Penthesilea's sacred vision of Diana's temple further exemplifies her sexual deferral. The temple where the Amazons consort with their prisoner-lovers is for her both a beloved image and profoundly foreign turf. To be sure, she has experienced the "Rosenfest" twenty-three times, but "immer nur von fern" (2100). If her sexuality is characterized by postponement, then the temple itself is not a real place but an imagination space into which sexual experience is continually deferred. Sexual expression does not actually exist here but is located only in what Slavoj Žižek calls the "grey and formless mist" of the forbidden.<sup>16</sup> It is that which she must not look upon but which, now, through Achilles, has become a frighteningly "real" possibility. Nevertheless, there is a barrier between "the real," the imagination space of her sexuality, and "reality," the events of the war:

Far from being a sign of "madness," the barrier separating the real from reality is . . . the very condition of a minimum of "normalcy": "madness" (psychosis) sets in when this barrier is torn down, when the real overflows reality (Žižek 1991: 20).

The barrier between the dreamworld of her projected sexual fantasy and the lived reality of the distance between the Amazons and the Greeks is destroyed by Achilles. He reveals that he has deceived her, that she is his prisoner, not the other way around. She now views the sacred temple with the knowledge that it will not exist for them: He causes her to see her imagination space with his gaze. The implicit violence of this forced looking makes Penthesilea realize that she is not the conqueror but the prisoner who must submit. Anger over this forced submission, as opposed to the willful submission

she of the masochistic tendencies might well have chosen, is the cause of her furious response to Achilles' renewed call to battle.

And yet Penthesilea's resolve will not end with the death of Achilles. It comes as no surprise that she herself must die, if we recall Tanais's self-sacrifice for her state. However, while Tanais dies once, Penthesilea is always already dead or shadowed by death.<sup>17</sup> The sheer volume of references to Penthesilea as dead or dying parallels the extensive martyrdom of a saint—in this case, Saint Agatha, patron saint of the breast.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, Agatha has been depicted bearing her own breasts on a salver (Lewison 1950: 419). While this image transforms the original torture into a sacrificial offering, it also underscores the notion of violence to the body undergone as sacrifice.

From her first appearance, the Amazon queen aligns herself fiercely with the possibility of death through the desire to conquer Achilles: "Ins Schlachtgetümmel stürzen will ich mich, / Wo der Hohnlächelnde mich harrt, und ihn / Mir überwinden, oder leben nicht!" (653–55). True to this claim, she is described again and again as "tot," "die Sterbende," or "entseelt," always in connection with Achilles. When the Amazon general relates that Penthesilea has fallen in battle, she cites the words of Achilles that construct a narrative in which Penthesilea is always being followed or threatened by death: "Sie sinkt, die Todumschattete, vom Pferd . . . / Ein Todesschatten da . . . / Was für ein Blick der Sterbenden traf mich!" (1127). Then, as easily as he "killed" her, Achilles lifts her from the ground and, cursing his deed, "Lockt er ins Leben jammernd sie zurück" (1142).

Most strikingly, in Scene 9, Penthesilea's death is figured as the dissolution of her identity in Achilles. While crossing a bridge, Penthesilea gazes into the water, calling to mind Narcissus, whose self-absorbed gaze at his own reflection brings about his death. However, when Penthesilea looks at the mirrorlike surface of the water, she gazes upon what must be her reflection but sees it as Achilles: she covers herself over with his image. Not only does she see Achilles' reflection instead of her own, but in her fantasy she also sees him in submission to her as he had *not* been in battle: "Da liegt er mir zu Füßen ja!" (1388). While rejoicing at his submission, Penthesilea completes this verse with an utterance that exemplifies the tension in her relationship with Achilles. It is an imperative that itself demands

domination: “Nimm mich—” The seeming contradiction between the delight in seeing Achilles in a submissive posture at her feet and the desire to be submissive herself is constitutive of Penthesilea’s sense of identity.

However, even this fantasized identification with Achilles is fraught with danger. The queen wants so intensely to be one with Achilles that she is oblivious to her physical surroundings, almost falling into the river as she reaches out for his reflection.<sup>19</sup> Her friends hold her back, but she is “leblös, / Wie ein Gewand” (1389–90). She is reduced to nothing more than an empty cloak. She is disembodied; the text encourages the reading of “leiblos” as well as “leblös.” Her body has literally disappeared from the text, suggesting, as in the above examples, her death. This “death” renders her silent; she does not speak again until Scene 14, when Achilles, whose identity she had seen in the place of her own, seeks her presence himself, thus calling her back to life as he had during battle.

Penthesilea dies not only a bodily death, but also a spiritual one. After the collapse at the bridge (1421) and again when describing the outcome of her battle with Achilles (1616), Prothoe describes Penthesilea as “entseelt.” The prefix “ent-” connotes violent separation of the self from the soul; each time, Penthesilea as “entseelt” is aligned with Achilles as “entwaffnet.” What does it mean—that when his weapons are gone, so is her soul? It would seem that her life depends on the warfare symbolized by his weapons. Achilles sees it differently: “Ich ward entwaffnet; / Man führte mich zu deinen Füßen her” (1617–18). He aligns his lack of weapons with his appearance at her feet. The text, however, not only calls into question his claim of being “entwaffnet,” but also couples this supposed lack of weapons not with his appearance at her feet, but with Prothoe’s pronouncement “Entseelt ist sie” (1421).<sup>20</sup> With the ambiguous use of “nicht,” Prothoe also casts doubt on this alignment: “Ward er entwaffnet — nicht?” (1617). What is not doubted is that Penthesilea is “entseelt,” that she has lost her soul, that she is dead.

By the final scene, Penthesilea’s perpetual death is expressed in the image of the vampire. The murder of Achilles has created of her the undead: “O die lebend’ge Leich’,” laments the First Amazon (2717). Instead of the cannibalism typically read into the death of Achilles, even by Kleist himself,<sup>21</sup> I would like to suggest an alternate reading that exposes the vampirism practiced by both the Amazon

state and Penthesilea. The Amazon state functions as a parasite and, as such, needs victims on which to feed periodically. These victims are the men whom the warrior women dominate in battle every year and then take as their lovers to the "Rosenfest." Indeed, the legacy of Tanais's state is one of constant war, for if the war with the Greeks came to an end, the foundation of the state upon martial (not marital) relations with Greek men would fall, as would the customs which constitute Amazon culture.

Incidentally, the term "Vampir" was used as a political metaphor as early as 1733. Johann Christoph Harenberg speaks of the "lebendigen Vampirs in allen Ständen," warning that the reader should beware, "denn sie ziehen Guht, Muht und Bluht, entweder mit offenbahrer Gewalt, oder unter dem Schein des Rechten an sich" (cited in Hock 1900: 56). In fact, in the eighteenth century, the term most often served as a metaphor (Hock 1900: 55–56). Yet the literal image of the vampire as a supernatural being would not have been foreign to Kleist's audience. Goethe's ballad "Die Braut von Korinth" (1794) tells the story of a young woman who, although dead and buried, returns to spend the night with her lover in order to "saugen seines Herzens Blut" (Goethe 1977: 268–73).

The emphasis on the bite into Achilles' breast and the image of his blood, as opposed to the consumption of his flesh, encourage the reading of vampirism. We read: "Er, in dem Purpur seines Bluts sich wälzend, . . . / Den Zahn schlägt sie in seine weiße Brust, . . . als ich erschien, / Troff Blut von Mund und Händen ihr herab" (2662, 2670–74). The final metaphor of sexual frenzy completes the image of Penthesilea as vampire.<sup>22</sup> A literal reading would see a destructive female sexuality—i.e., a lustful Amazon destroys Achilles' body in an orgiastic frenzy. But if we look upon the text with a metaphorical gaze, what emerges is Penthesilea's performance of her rejection of the parasitic state. Her rejection of the state is symbolized by the "death" of her bow, which represents her political power. The narration of its death concludes with the words "Und stirbt, / Wie er der Tanais geboren ward" (2771–72). The explicit remembrance of the bow's connection to the birth of the Amazon state implies the death of that state as the bow "dies."<sup>23</sup>

As if it were not shocking enough that she is constructed as a vampire, Penthesilea ultimately radicalizes her own death. While she has hitherto been described by others as dead or dying and was

herself passive in these textual “deaths,” Penthesilea now takes her destiny into her own hands. It has often been noted that Penthesilea distances herself from the Amazon state: “Ich sage vom Gesetz der Frauen mich los, / Und folge diesem Jüngling hier” (3012). But what is not so often noted is that this statement is only part of her response to the high priestess’s question, “So folgst du uns?” (3002). Her immediate response is an emphatic “Euch nicht! — —” She does not so much follow Achilles into death as she does *not* follow the Amazons back to their capital city.

This reading explains the exclusive preoccupation of her dying speech not with a “Liebestod” but with the formation of the metaphorical dagger with which she will kill herself. The very form of her dying words gives insight into her subjectivity. If earlier she engaged in a mediated process of identity formation, the death of Achilles forces her to identify as an absolute self. Consider the preponderance of first person verbs in her “suicide by speech act” (Rigby 1992: 321):

Denn jetzt steig ich in meinen Busen nieder,  
Gleich einem Schacht, und grabe, kalt wie Erz,  
Mir ein vernichtendes Gefühl hervor,  
Dies Erz, dies läutr’ ich in der Glut des Jammers  
Hart mir zu Stahl; tränk es mit Gift sodann,  
Heißätzendem, der Reue, durch und durch;  
Trag es der Hoffnung ewgem Amboß zu,  
Und schärf und spitz es mir zu einem Dolch;  
Und diesem Dolch jetzt reich ich meine Brust:  
So! So! So! So! Und wieder!—Nun ists gut (3025–34).

Despite the apparent agency in this suicide, it is not a celebration of self. Rather, the powerful images of refining, whetting, and forging a “vernichtendes Gefühl” from raw ore ironize the historical use of this language to denote the founding of a state.<sup>24</sup> Her suicide declares the death that this state bears within it—namely, the stasis caused by the rigid adherence to a male image of women and the repression and functionalization of sexuality. Penthesilea’s words reveal a cynical vision in which regret, typically a nostalgic revisioning of what might have been, is labeled poisonous. The warrior thus turns her back on the past, and with her rejection of “Hoffnung,” also renounces faith in the future. In so doing, she is perpetually trapped

in the present. Having closed herself off from history and from the future, she is slated for paralysis. Hence the text gazes perpetually at her death, long before her actual suicide.

In conclusion, I would suggest that Penthesilea's intense identification with the first queen and thus with the catalyzing experience of mass rape, profoundly affects her experience of sexual desire. Both desire and sexuality are characterized for her by postponement and fear because for the Amazons, historically, sex *is* rape. The women warriors objectify the men they conquer in a manner similar to the objectification of the Scythian women by their mass rape. While Penthesilea puts an end to the state through her suicide, the resulting void is not necessarily a negative prognosis for the female state, as it has traditionally been read. Instead, her purifying act of self-sacrifice becomes legible as a slate wiped clean of the influence of the male-oriented self-image. Whereas the negation of an external self-definition was necessary as Tanais's first step, Penthesilea breaks the mirror that had dictated her self-image. Her "Freitod" echoes Tanais's purifying self-sacrifice and so creates the possibility for a new state.

## NOTES

A version of this article appeared in *Beiträge zur Kleistforschung* 11 (1997): 44–59 under the title "The Eye of the Beholder: Female Subjectivity in Kleist's *Penthesilea*." The present version has been modified.

1. "Der Mann, dess' Auge diesen Staat erschaut, / Der soll das Auge auf ewig schließen" (1963–64).
2. "Gerad als sie, im festlichsten Moment, / Die Altarstuf erstieg. . . . Ließ eine Stimme also sich vernehmen" (1976).
3. It is of no consequence whether the voice belongs to a man or a woman since in either case the words spoken by the voice play upon the imperative to acknowledge the male image of women.
4. Helga Gallas (1990: 214) identifies Penthesilea's admiration of Achilles' flat, male breast.
5. Steele and Aronson argue that for the person to feel the threat, he or she need not believe the stereotype. Following their arguments, it is not necessarily the case that the queen acts due to an internalized self-image, but



that she feels the need to respond to that external self-image as it is represented by the voice.

6. Although surgery was practiced as a treatment for breast cancer as early as 1700 B.C., it has historically been a controversial corrective (Hippocrates and Galen, for example, both cautioned against its use). This discussion is not meant to claim that Kleist, or other members of the general public, would have been intimately familiar with the details of surgical history, but rather to point out that cancer was a well-recognized, if little understood disease and that its treatments, including removal of the breast, were equally well known.
7. According to Sontag (1978: 81), in the early modern period, diseases considered fatal were not to be treated; they were to be "attacked." Here, the medical as well as the metaphorical understandings of cancer apply.
8. Sontag opposes the cancerous "non-self" to the tubercular "sick self." Using a metaphor not coincidentally tubercular, Kleist himself likens his completion of the text to a bodily expulsion, which subverts the contemporaneous metaphors of pregnancy and birth for thought and writing in general. In an 1807 letter to Wieland he writes, "Ich habe eine Tragödie . . . von der Brust heruntergehustet; und fühle mich wieder ganz frei!" (Kleist 1977: 330).
9. "Beneficial violence must be carefully distinguished from harmful violence. . . . Ritual is nothing more than the regular exercise of 'good' violence" (Girard 1977: 37).
10. See the references to Achilles' wound (503; stage direction in 560, 565), as opposed to his own indifferent assessment of it, "Nun ja" (504).
11. Gallas has suggested that it was the mutilation of the Amazon body which so horrified Goethe: "Für Goethe war der schöne auch der harmonische Mensch, harmonisch im Sinne von Unteilbarkeit, Ganzheit und Vollkommenheit" (1990: 213).
12. "Frei . . . sind / Die Frau'n . . . / Und dem Geschlecht der Männer nicht mehr dienstbar" (1954–56). Kate Rigby notes that the relationship between the sexes among the Scythians must have been "far from ideal" (1992: 327).
13. "Sei ganz ruhig. / Sie [die lieblichen Gefühle] retteten in diese Linke sich" (2014–15).
14. And 1603: "Er soll den Fuß auf meinen Nacken setzen!"
15. As Angress notes (1982: 106), Achilles' statement that he wishes to do to Penthesilea what he did to Hector can express three things: the sadism in his cruelty to Prothoe, the desecration he sees in the sex act, and the sexual nature of his treatment of Hector.
16. Zizek (1991: 14–15) borrows the notion of reality as a "grey and formless mist" from Robert Heinlein's story "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag."

17. Bal illuminates the violent death of "the concubine" in the book of Judges. Her death is "narratively ambiguous"—i.e., she dies "several times, or rather, she never stops dying" (1988: 3). It is this sense of the heroine dying multiple deaths, or dying always the same death, that I would like to explore here.
18. The iconography of Saint Agatha places almost exclusive emphasis on the torture of her breasts (Schechter and Swan (1962: 694; Lewison 1950: 419), which documents the belief that women's power lies in their breasts and thus can be destroyed. I am indebted to Julia L. Epstein (1986: 165–66, n. 32) for the references to Schechter/Swan and Lewison.
19. Although I appreciate Gallas's succinct formulation, "Sie will ihn nicht haben, sie will sein wie er" (1990: 215), which rightly draws attention to Penthesilea's problem of identity, I believe the desire for identification with the Greek hero is inseparable from the sexual desire for him.
20. Note the simultaneity, written into the play with the stage direction "zugleich," of the two lines "Entwaffnet nennt er sich," spoken by the Second Amazon (whose wording "nennt er sich" also distances her from his claim) and "Entseelt ist sie," spoken by Prothoe (1421).
21. In a letter of 1807 to Marie von Kleist, he writes "Sie hat ihn wirklich aufgegessen, den Achill, vor Liebe" (1977: 326).
22. Angress (1982: 111) has called attention to the sexual nature of the slaying of Achilles.
23. After the death of Tanais, her bow also "died" (2000–2001), signaling through its death the birth of the new nation.
24. See, for instance, Schiller's poem "Das Lied von der Glocke" (1800), in which the casting of a town bell serves as an allegory for national unification. For a discussion of the poem's gendered perception of the French Revolution, see Karen J. Kenkel (1995: 66–71).

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## IMPERFECT MYTHS: GENDER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATION IN HEINRICH VON KLEIST'S *DIE HERMANNSSCHLACHT*

Jennifer M. Kapczynski

Heinrich von Kleist's 1808 play *Die Hermannsschlacht* has had what one might call a "checkered past."<sup>1</sup> Despite Kleist's wish to have his work brought to the stage immediately, political conditions prevented it from being performed in his time. The first productions were not staged until the 1860s and achieved only modest success, although mid-nineteenth-century German nationalists had praised the drama for its patriotism.<sup>2</sup> The heyday of the *Hermannsschlacht* reception came during the period of National Socialism: in the 1933–34 theater season alone, it was performed 146 times.<sup>3</sup> After World War II, the play was generally dismissed as hate propaganda, largely as a result of this later popularity under the Nazis. For similar reasons, many critics also treated the work as an aberration, denying it a place within Kleist's oeuvre. It was not until the 1980s that interest in the play was again revived. In 1982, Klaus Peyman directed a production at the Bochum Kleist Festival which received great critical acclaim. At the same time, literary scholars began to look more closely at the play and reexamine some of the assumptions which had so long marked its reception.<sup>4</sup>

One of the scholars responsible for the resurgence in interest in the play is Jeffrey L. Sammons. In his article, "Rethinking Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*," he argues that Kleist creates the character of Hermann in his own image, as an "intellectual and artist."<sup>5</sup> Noting the regularity with which Hermann "stages" events within the play, Sammons offers an extremely useful insight: *Die Hermannsschlacht* is a play about *writing*—about the writing of history and the creation of national myth. The play does not simply reenact Hermann's overthrow of the Romans in 9 A.D.; Kleist's Hermann becomes the author

of the German foundation myth. He never fights the actual battle but rather orchestrates it, just as he directs the events which lead to the beginning of the German uprising. As Sammons argues, this emphasis on the importance of the author suggests a special place for that other writer, Kleist, who hoped to play a significant role in the founding of a united Germany. In addition, however, the emphasis on authoring foregrounds the construction of history: as the play unfolds, we behold the making of an historical event.

*Die Hermannsschlacht* is also a play about the act of viewing and the intersection of language and image. It shows a concern which permeates all of Kleist's writing: the question of whether one may ever know the truth of one's perceptions. Kleist's drama foregrounds the production of the visual. It is not simply that imagery plays an important role in the drama, but also that Kleist exposes the manner in which images are made and how they are defined through language. I should expand upon my earlier statement and say that *Die Hermannsschlacht* is also about making history and national myth visible. This is most poignant at the moment when the audience witnesses the construction of a body as the symbol of the nation, when the character of Hally becomes Germania. Hally is dead, but Hermann is the "puppeteer" who guides her in her new role. This framing of Germania as female draws on the tradition which represents the nation as a woman. At the same time, it resurrects those very ties by giving metaphoric Germania an actual form. Germania, the mythical female representative of Germany, is *made* a woman. The connection between gender and the state is enacted, at the same time as this scene also reaffirms their long-standing tie.

Some recent scholarship has focused on the significance of gender in the play. One fine example is Barbara Kennedy's article, "For the Good of the Nation: Woman's Body as Battlefield in Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht*."<sup>6</sup> Kennedy looks at the figures of Thusnelda and Hally, articulating the manner in which both characters fall victim to Hermann's political machine. As a result, doubt is cast on the character of the play's hero and, by association, on his cause. Kennedy concludes that Kleist offers a proto-feminist critique of militant nationalism. It is at this point that my reading departs from Kennedy's, for I find little to recommend the view of Kleist as a feminist writer. As I hope to prove, a reexamination of the language in the Hally scene suggests a rather different interpretation of Kleist's project.

Taking as my starting point the insights offered by both Sammons and Kennedy, I would like to suggest that Kleist's use of the gendered body must be viewed in conjunction with his emphasis on writing and the visual. Antoine de Baecque has written along similar lines about the use of metaphors of the body during the French Revolution. Discussing corporeal metaphors for the nation, de Baecque argues that "The body is not only a metaphor for the world, it is also a spectacle given for us *to see* . . . [a] visual pedagogy":<sup>7</sup>

[The Republic] organizes the inspection of its own wounds through a very controlled, expressive ritual. . . . The murdered body [of the revolutionary, now under attack] is never handed over in innocence to the gaze of the political spectator: by means of concentrating on its wounds, presented as those of the great body of the Republican state, it captures the violence of brutal, anarchic populist repression.<sup>8</sup>

The ritual described here recalls the ceremony surrounding Hally's dismemberment. Hally, too, fulfills a pedagogical function, achieved through the display of her wounds. One must ask what lessons she proffers.

It is in the fourth act that Hally is discovered, killed, and dismembered. It comes at a dramatic high point, when the various tribes are readying for battle and the defeat of the Romans is imminent. As the scene opens, a body is discovered in Cheruska, Hermann's village. The unconscious victim is brought forward by two Cheruskan soldiers and covered over with a large veil. The person is eventually identified as Hally, the daughter of the local weapon-smith, Teuthold. Her attackers are identified as Roman soldiers. When Teuthold hears of his daughter's fate, he elicits the help of his two nephews to kill the girl, thereby delivering her from the (presumed) shame of the victim. Shortly thereafter, Hermann arrives on the scene. He is apprised of the situation and quickly divines a way to use the event for the national cause. He determines that the body of the victim must be cut up into fifteen pieces, one for each tribe of Germany, and sent out among the tribes. Her limbs provide the final impetus to revolution.

The dismemberment of Hally's body has several consequences. The rallying cry proves effective, and the German tribes are successful in defeating Varus's legions. The dissected woman comes to rep-

resent violated Germany: like the nation, she has been defeated, fragmented, and dispersed. As the nation is then united through collective battle and victory, Hally's body, too, is brought together. The convergence of the tribes literally rejoins her body within the national body; the formerly scattered remains now rest within the territory of Germany.

Through dispersal, Hally's body takes on a pedagogical function, providing a visual illustration of Germany's subjugation.<sup>9</sup> Hermann acknowledges this when he outlines the plan for her dissection:

We, the tribes of Germany, number fifteen;  
 Into fifteen pieces, with the keen edge of the sword  
 Divide her body, and with fifteen messengers dispatch it  
 To the fifteen tribes of Germany.  
 I will grant you fifteen horses.  
 Exacting revenge for you, it will  
 Call forth even the inanimate elements:  
 The stormwind, whistling through the woods,  
 Will cry revolt! And the sea,  
 Beating the ribs of the land, shall cry freedom!<sup>10</sup>

The reiteration of "fifteen" emphasizes the connection between the dismemberment of her body and Germany. As Hermann envisions it, her body will "call forth even the inanimate elements": her corpse is to enact a resurrection, raising even the dead. This is also suggested by the wind's cry of "revolt!" which indicates a political uprising but also connotes a physical "rising up." The landscape is described in physiognomic terms, and Hally's body seems to give it life. Her death is conflated with the vivification of the nation, and as the nation is resurrected, she too is brought to life in mythical form as Germania. Antoine de Baecque has described this phenomenon as follows:

The "body" is truly a pivotal word: it can deal with the political, social, and cultural organization of the *ancien régime* while telling itself anew, and fashioning a narrative of its own origins, of its "coming into the world." At the end of the eighteenth century, the metaphor of the body tells the condition of one political system, its death, and then the birth of another.<sup>11</sup>

Hermann predicates Germany's rebirth on Hally's death. She is the condition of its possibility, representing the death of the old power structure which de Baecque describes.

There are numerous passages in which Hally's body is identified with the passing regime and with the emerging nation. Thus she stands for the Germany of both the past and the future. A short while after the scene of Hally's discovery, Hermann makes reference to the body of Germania. Outlining to Thusnelda his plan for the destruction of the Roman forces, he declares:

The entire brood, which has infiltrated the body of  
Germania  
Like a horde of insects  
Must die by the sword of revenge.<sup>12</sup>

The "horde of insects" of the Romans has infiltrated the body of Germania, and Hermann suggests that a crude surgery is necessary to effect the removal of the parasites. The passage invokes images of pregnancy as well as decay. Supporting such a reading are the play's numerous descriptions of the Romans as *aufgepflanzt*, implanted or transplanted. Their artificial "insertion" into the body of Germania implies rape, impregnation, and infestation.<sup>13</sup> Germania, like Hally, appears as a violated corpse.

In a sense, Hally has become a relic.<sup>14</sup> It is through her division that Hally can come to represent divided Germany, and it is through her dispersal that she connects each of the tribes to the others. Her limbs become synecdochial, each part standing in for the whole—for both her body and the nation. As a relic, however, Hally does not invoke so much religious sentiment as national sentiment. Each part of her body provides the visible reminder that Germany is not unified. This division also invokes an originary myth: Germany is represented by a part of a body that once was whole, implying that Germany too was once organic and complete. It also suggests that the entity represented here may become whole again. As the tribes and then Hally's body are brought together, a kind of healing is achieved. Hally is pieced back together through Germany, and her original wounds are metaphorically "sutured." She is erased in the process, but through unification she is reconstituted as Germania.



The conflation of Hally and the nation is reiterated once the battle is won. A tribe leader tells Hermann of the reaction to receiving a piece of Hally's body:

Hally, the virgin, the violated one,  
Whom you, the terrible image of the fatherland,  
Sent to all the tribes  
Devoured the patience of our peoples.  
You see Germany armed, burning  
To punish the misdeed done to her.<sup>15</sup>

The text suggests that Hermann is the terrible image of the fatherland, but Hally has also become that dreadful symbol, devouring the patience of the populace; she has become Germania, glowering, newly armed, to avenge her own violation. While Hally herself has fallen victim to the battle for independence, she comes to life again as allegory. Hally's erasure is not insignificant, for she must be supplanted by the new image of a revolutionary and triumphant Germania. As I argued above, her death comes to stand in for the death of the old regime. In order to also signify the nation's rebirth, she must return in a new form, as a terrible image.

Although the casting of Hally as the dreadful symbol of Germany seems a rather straightforward affair, Kleist's frequent use of obfuscating language and convoluted sentence structure undermines that construction. In the end, Kleist reveals precisely that the myth is *made*. The moment of Hally's entrance bears closer scrutiny.

Close examination of the language of this scene reveals that Hally's identity is by no means clear. As it opens, the villagers gather around to see the injured person being led forward by the Cheruskan soldiers. They speculate about the fate and identity of the victim. They refer to the figure as "a person" ("ein Mensch"), "the unfortunate" ("die Unglücksel'ge"), "a miserable creature, shame-ridden" ("ein elendes, schmachbedecktes Wesen"), "the figure, trampled, soiled, beaten at the breast and brow" ("der fußzertretenen, kotgewälzten, / An Brust und Haupt zertrümmerten Gestalt").<sup>16</sup> The figure is neither identified nor ascribed a clear gender. The nouns attributed to the person are alternately masculine (ein Mensch), feminine (die Unglücksel'ge, die Gestalt), and neuter (ein Wesen). In the stage directions the character is described as simply "the person" or "the corpse." Hally is absent from the list of characters at the

play's beginning. The uncertainty of the identity and gender of the figure is also highlighted when voices in the crowd pose the question: "Who is it? A man? A woman?"<sup>17</sup> In response, the Cheruskan warrior leading the person orders them not to ask and shrouds the body in a large cloth. Just at the moment when she would be revealed, she is veiled and remains so for the rest of the scene.

It is tempting to say that only women represent violated Germany, but this must be amended. I would suggest that it is not only biological women who may become viable victims, but also those bodies *constructed* as female. As I stated in my introduction, the audience here witnesses the making of Germania, but also the creation of Germany as a woman. This has important implications for the understanding of the passage, as well as the broader issue of gender within the creation of the nation. As the figure is led forward, we are uncertain of the identity of both perpetrators and victim. Kleist stages, thematizes this uncertainty, and grants us insight into the constitution of identity. The figure is determined to be Hally, but the circumstances of this identification seem faulty at best. We are left unsure, as Kleist once wrote, "whether that which we call truth truly *is* truth, or whether it only appears so."<sup>18</sup>

Despite the confusion, a voice in the crowd identifies the father as Teuthold. When Teuthold steps forward, however, he is unable to recognize his child. The guards insist upon keeping the body shrouded; when asked if he can identify the body, Teuthold protests, "No! How could I? Such mystery!"<sup>19</sup> Permitted to see just her feet, however, Teuthold acknowledges the figure before him as his beloved daughter Hally. After having recognized her, he kills her.

The ambiguity of the language in the scene raises several questions. Is the person in fact a woman? Is it Hally? What is one to make of Teuthold's rather bizarre recognition of his daughter? And why must the figure be veiled?

After a closer look, it seems this figure is neither clearly female nor clearly Hally. The audience does not so much see a woman as it sees a figure being constructed as female on rather scant evidence. For it is precisely the creation of meaning that is enacted in this scene: the unidentifiable figure is "recognized" as a member of the local community. The figure is interpreted, *created* as a female victim whose identity may prove a point of coalescence, for both the local populace and the insurgents at large.

It is suggestive that Teuthold identifies the figure by her feet. Looking for a clue to her identity, he examines that part of her body which is known to leave a trace—i.e., a footprint. Kleist seems to suggest that these feet—and the body to which they belong—are lacking a signifier. It is precisely the act of signification which this scene represents, after all. And thus the audience is left wondering whether Teuthold's interpretation is reliable. The dubious nature of his recognition of Hally implies that the connection between the body and identity is unstable. One can now see how Hally is able to effectively "shed" her initial identity and assume mythological proportions. It may also, however, point toward an instability in the identity of that other body, the national body of Germania.

The deliberate veiling of Hally's body also points toward the instability of her image. It is unclear why she would need to be veiled if she were Hally. It is important to consider what might be gained from obscuring her figure, in relation to both this narrative and Kleist's larger concern with the knowability of truth. While it may be tempting to suggest that the sensitivity of the issue of rape prevents the display of the figure, that would seem too limited an answer. Kleist certainly does not hesitate to include other very violent and disturbing scenes in this and other of his texts.

The gesture is a tease. At the moment in which Hally is supposed to be identified, she is obscured. It seems the quintessential enactment of Kleist's query about the truth. Is she Hally, or does she simply seem to be? The lowering of the veil proves quite revealing.

At the moment of her veiling, Hally begins to take on symbolic form. Covered over, her body becomes elusive. While there are traces present—her feet—the veiling only alludes to, does not show her whole body underneath. Kleist exposes the machinations of myth-making. He presents this obfuscating gesture as central to the creation of Germania's embodiment; the Cheruskans refuse to lift the veil.

The veiling and dismemberment allow Hally to become the "grauses Sinnbild" (horrible symbol) of Germania. The shroud covers over her immediately recognizable features, so on a certain level one could say she loses her local identity. The villagers and family members who once knew her can only fleetingly distinguish her. The invocation of her name refers not so much to her presence as to her

absence. Quite like Germania, she becomes an entity whose wholeness is desired but is still lacking.

The theme of veiling is taken up in two other contemporary texts: Schiller's poem, "The Mystery at Sais" ("Das Geheimnis zu Sais"), and Novalis's fragment, "The Young Scholars at Sais" ("Die Lehrlinge zu Sais"). Both texts use the veil as the metaphor for that which separates man from truth. Kleist may or may not be responding to these texts, but their use of the metaphor is certainly suggestive for the interpretation of the Hally scene as a scene about the ambivalence of truth. It is well known that Kleist was consumed with the question of whether the perception of truth was possible. It is my belief that this concern has a great deal to do with *Die Hermannsschlacht*.

Above I cited the famous line that Kleist penned in a letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge on 22 March 1801, at the time of his so-called "Kant crisis." I will quote at greater length from that letter now, in the hope that it may offer insight into the issues of veiling and truth:

If all men had green glasses instead of eyes, they would have to judge that the objects which they viewed through the glasses *were* green—and never could they determine whether their eyes showed them the objects as they were, or whether the eyes perhaps did something to the objects characteristic not of the objects, but of the eyes. We cannot determine whether that which we call truth truly *is* truth, or whether it only appears so. If the latter is true, then the truth which we gather ceases to exist after death—and every effort to acquire property which will also follow us into the grave is useless.<sup>20</sup>

This passage indicates that Kleist saw the world as a construction—the very notion at the center of the Hally scene. Might not the veil be compared to the green glasses, obscuring the perceived object so that it is unclear whether one sees Hally or the veil? Kleist concludes that the collection of truth in life cannot outlast us in death, an image which resonates with Hally's veiling. The collected traces of her body are covered over, so that those traces may be shed for new ones. She is divested of and then reinvested with meaning. How then, is one to read *Die Hermannsschlacht*? Is it a play about the constructedness of historical narrative and images, or is a piece of

pro-revolutionary propaganda? I would like to suggest that it is both of these things.

There is little doubt that Kleist wrote his play in order to argue in favor of an uprising against Napoleon. In a letter written shortly after finishing the drama, he explained:

This play is not written from the distant perspective as that other one which is now coming to the stage. And when that day has truly come, the dawn of which you are summoning forth, then I shall write nothing but works which pertain to their time.<sup>21</sup>

And in a letter to Heinrich Joseph von Collin:

I would particularly regret if the dissemination of [*Die Hermannsschlacht*] were somehow neglected through some oversight, insofar as this work, more than any other, was intended for the moment, and I should almost wish to withdraw it entirely if, as is easily possible, circumstances should not permit for it to be performed at this time.<sup>22</sup>

Kleist intended his play to serve the needs of the day—in this instance the “dawning” of the united Germany—and he stresses the parallels between the historical events of Hermann’s time and the contemporary situation of Germany under France. There is no suggestion in these lines that he desires to question the very possibility of nationhood.

I would argue that Kleist’s skepticism about language, however, ultimately undermines the very means by which he makes his attempt at propaganda. The play is rife with moments which question the stability of language and the knowability of truth. This is particularly true in the Hally scene, as I have illustrated. The result is an imperfect myth, one that never itself attains the wholeness so desired for the nation. Kleist’s destabilization of the relationship between the signifier and the signified makes it quite difficult to see Germany as anything more than a mythical construction itself.

This leaves an important question unanswered: What is the position for women within the Germany envisioned by Kleist? Despite all of the vacillations of the language of the play, the fact remains that the text constructs the nation over the body of woman. We may consider the text to be more or less successful at creating a myth of German wholeness, but in either case these central issues

are still worked out over a woman's corpse. Kleist's two seemingly incommensurate projects share this basis: the formation of the nation is enacted through a female body, while for his critique of language, woman serves as the cipher for lack, for the elusive truth behind the veil. Thus although Kleist seems to suggest that gender is constructed, I think that is an unlikely reading. It is more plausible that in writing the play, he was concerned generally with the construction of images and their determination in language. Kleist never overtly questions the possibility of another sort of body filling the role of Germania.

Barbara Kennedy has tried to offer a more redemptive reading of the play. She argues that

[the drama] aims to demonstrate . . . the manner in which imagery of victimization and actual mutilation serves to position the woman's body as the chief casualty of nationalist fervor in the unified male nation-state.<sup>23</sup>

While I concur that the woman's body is the chief casualty in the creation of the unified male nation-state, I am reluctant to go so far as to say that Kleist is offering, as Kennedy asserts, "a potentially feminist commentary on the male practice of nation-building through military conquest."<sup>24</sup> While one can certainly deduce this from the play, it is not clear to me that Kleist had any interest in critiquing the phenomenon of female victimization. The positions Kleist offers women are only supporting roles: either at the sidelines or in the exalted heights of the nation's pantheon, but never as political actors in their own right. In the end, Hally is never really brought back to life. She herself has been swallowed by the mythical Germania, utterly coopted for the project of national unification.

#### NOTES

1. As William C. Reeve has noted, "Written with a scarcely concealed political goal in mind and conceived of with typical Kleistian enthusiasm and total commitment, *Die Hermannsschlacht* has been accorded a warm or cool reception almost entirely in relation to the German political situation" (*Kleist*

on Stage, 1804–1987 [Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993], p. 141).

2. According to Reeve (pp. 142–43), it was first staged in 1860 at the Stadttheater in Breslau and first received some critical acclaim with an 1861 production at the Dresden Hoftheater.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
4. See, for example: Jeffrey Sammons, "Rethinking Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*," *Heinrich von Kleist Studies* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), pp. 33–40; Lawrence Ryan, "Die 'vaterländische Umkehr' in der *Hermannsschlacht*," *Kleists Dramen: Neue Interpretationen* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1981); Norbert Miller, "Verstörende Bilder in Kleists *Hermannsschlacht*," *Kleist-Jahrbuch* 1984: 77–97; Peter Michelsen, "'Wehe, mein Vaterland, Dir': Heinrich von Kleists *Die Hermannsschlacht*," *Kleist-Jahrbuch* 1987: 115–36.
5. Sammons, p. 33.
6. Barbara H. Kennedy, "For the Good of the Nation: Woman's Body as Battlefield in Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht*," *Seminar* 30, 1 (February 1994): 17–31. See also Raimar Zons, "Von der 'Not der Welt' zur absoluten Feindschaft: Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*," *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 109, 2 (1990): 175–99. Zons (p. 188) expands the scope of his discussion of gender, making the interesting argument that the other Germanic tribal leaders are also effectively "feminized" by Hermann, inasmuch as they are reduced to being his pawns.
7. Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770–1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 10 and 281 (my emphasis).
8. *Ibid.*, 11.
9. I am indebted to Antoine de Baecque for the notion of a "visual pedagogy" of the body. See de Baecque, p. 281.
10. "Wir zählen funfzehn Stämme der Germaner;/In funfzehn Stücke, mit des Schwertes Schärfe, / Teil ihren Leib, und schick mit funfzehn Boten, / Ich will dir funfzehn Pferde dazu geben, / den funfzehn Stämmen ihn Germaniens zu. / Der wird in Deutschland, dir zur Rache, / Bis auf die toten Elemente werben: / Der Sturmwind wird, die Waldungen durchsausend, / Empörung! rufen, und die See, / Des Landes Ribben schlagend, Freiheit! brüllen" (Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 1, ed. Helmut Sembdner [Munich: dtv Klassik, 1987], p. 591). All translations of Kleist are my own.
11. De Baecque, p. 4.
12. "Die ganze Brut, die in den Leib Germaniens/Sich eingefilzt, wie ein Insektenschwarm, / Muß durch das Schwert der Rache jetzo sterben" (Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, p. 593).
13. "Pierce the neck of the Roman army, transplanted in the fields of Germany" ("So durch den Nacken hin des Römerheeres jagen, / daß in den Feldern

Deutschlands aufgepflanzt"; *ibid.*, p. 540). Also: "Only too clearly did he make known his intention to implant the eagle in the land of Cheruska" ("Nur allzuklar ließ er die Absicht sehn, / Den Adler auch im Land Cheruska's aufzupflanzen"; *ibid.*, p. 541).

14. For a discussion of the function of the relic, see de Baecque, particularly ch. 8.
15. "Hally, die Jungfrau, die geschändete, / Die du, des Vaterlandes graues Sinnbild, / Zerstückt in alle Stämme hast geschickt, / Hat unsrer Völker Langmut aufgezehrt. / In Waffen siehst du ganz Germanien lodern, / Den Greul zu strafen, der sich ihr verübt" (*ibid.*, p. 625).
16. *Ibid.*, 586.
17. "Wer ists? Ein Mann? Ein Weib?" (*ibid.*, p. 587).
18. "Ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint" (*ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 634).
19. "Nein! Wie vermocht ich das? Solch ein Geheimnis!" (*ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 588).
20. "Wenn alle Menschen statt der Augen grüne Gläser hätten, so würden sie urteilen müssen, die Gegenstände, welche sie dadurch erblicken, *sind* grün—und nie würden sie entscheiden können, ob ihr Auge ihnen die Dinge zeigt, wie sie sind, oder ob es nicht etwas zu ihnen hintut, was nicht ihnen, sondern dem Auge gehört. Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es nur so scheint. Ist das letzte, so *ist* die Wahrheit, die wir sammeln, nach dem Tode nicht mehr—und alles Bestreben, ein Eigentum zu erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ist vergeblich" (*ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 634).
21. "Dies Drama auf keinem so entfernten Standpunkt gedichtet ist, als ein früheres, das jetzt daselbst auf die Bühne kommt. Und wenn der Tag uns nur völlig erscheint, von welchem Sie uns die Morgenröte heraufführen, so will ich lauter Werke schreiben, die in die Mitte der Zeit hineinfallen" (in a letter to the Freiherr von Stein, 1 January 1809; in *ibid.*, p. 821). In the same letter he praises his friend Adam Müller for "the great, heartfelt and enthusiastic interest which he takes in the rebirth of the fatherland and the utter dedication of his spirit to the newspapers which speak of it" ("Der große, innige und begeisterte Anteil, den er an die Wiedergeburt des Vaterlandes nimmt, und die gänzliche Versenkung seines Geistes in die Zeitungsblätter, die davon handeln.")
22. "Er würde mir, besonders um der letzteren willen (d.h., Die Hermannsschlacht), leid tun, wenn die Überlieferung derselben, durch irdend ein Versehen, vernachlässigt worden wäre, indem dies Stück mehr, als irgend ein anderes, für den Augenblick berechnet war, und ich fast wünschen muß, es ganz und gar wieder zurückzunehmen, wenn die Verhältnisse, wie leicht möglich ist, nicht gestatten sollten, es im Laufe dieser Zeit aufzuführen" (*ibid.*, pp. 821–22).
23. Kennedy, pp. 17–18.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 29.



**BETTINA AND LOUISE: GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS  
IN BETTINA BRENTANO-VON ARNIM'S  
*CLEMENS BRENTANOS FRÜHLINGSKRANZ***

**Elisabeth Krimmer**

**GENDER AND WARFARE**

Compared with other women authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholarship on Bettina Brentano-von Arnim's life (1785–1859) and works is fairly extensive. It comprises biographies and discussions of her politics, her concept of gender, her poetics, and her relationships with famous contemporaries such as Goethe and Schleiermacher. This paper, while indebted to all its predecessors, aims to add to this body of work by highlighting and analyzing a configuration in Brentano-von Arnim's writing which, so far, has not received scholarly attention—namely, the intersection of gender, warfare, and transvestism.

In speaking about warfare, I am referring to two different kinds of violence and war and, consequently, to two different types of conquering women. Both types are represented in Bettina Brentano-von Arnim's novel *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz* (1844). The first type, the French aristocrat Louise de Gachet, is a warrior woman in the traditional sense. She participates in military endeavors in the wake of the French Revolution. The other, Bettine, the author's fictional alter ego,<sup>1</sup> is a warrior of an entirely different kind. Bettine wages a war on gender. Her fight is directed against the violence that the traditional gender hierarchy inflicts upon women.

The fascination of Brentano-von Arnim's *Frühlingskranz* lies in the subtlety with which she shows how one conquering woman influences the other. Brentano-von Arnim demonstrates how the encounter with the French Amazon functions as a catalyst that transforms Bettine's understanding of gender and ultimately helps

her break free from the constraints of the traditional gender hierarchy. That de Gachet is able to effect such a powerful change is due to her own twofold violation of gender norms. For not only did de Gachet engage in the masculine activities of warfare and science, but she also donned male attire, thus adding to a manly lifestyle the appearance of a man.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in contrasting Bettine's perception of the cross-dressed aristocrat with that of her brother, Brentano-von Arnim draws attention to a different kind of battlefield. While de Gachet's battles are fought in the Vendée, Bettine's combat is conducted at the home front. And where de Gachet attempts to conquer France, Bettine intends to conquer a world.

### **CLEMENS BRENTANOS FRÜHLINGSKRANZ**

Bettina Brentano-von Arnim's third epistolary novel, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, published in 1844, was based on her correspondence with her brother Clemens from 1801 to 1803.<sup>3</sup> However, one must not imagine that Brentano-von Arnim intended to provide her readers with an authentic account of her experiences.<sup>4</sup> As with all of Brentano-von Arnim's epistolary novels, it is impossible to decide where facts end and where fiction begins. This predicament led to a sizable body of research that attempted to sift the chaff from the wheat (see Oehlke 1905).<sup>5</sup> Only recently have scholars begun to understand Brentano-von Arnim's mythologization of her life as a deliberate technique which attempted to break down the hierarchy between author and text, subject and object, self and other (Frederiksen and Shafi 1986: 54; Liebertz-Grün 1989: 18ff.; Simpson 1995: 247). The following interpretation is indebted to these later works in that its aim is not to reconstruct the author's life from her fiction but to analyze Brentano-von Arnim's conceptualization of gender as it was developed in the encounter with the Amazon.

It is important to keep in mind that Brentano-von Arnim's epistolary novels span two different time periods. They must be seen in reference to both her youth—i.e., the time during which the original correspondence on which the novels are based was written—as well as her mature years, during which the novels themselves were conceived and published. Even though the extent of her revisions cannot

always be determined, as the manuscripts are not always extant, it is certain that Brentano-von Arnim changed the original letters considerably in order to make them more conducive to her purpose (see Weißenborn 1987: 154, 228; Burwick 1986: 63). For rather than cherishing memories of the past, Brentano-von Arnim meant to influence the political situation of the present (Mander 1982: 132; Ockenfuß 1992: 40).

In the case of the *Frühlingskranz*, Brentano-von Arnim's wish to support a liberal agenda led to the choice of Egbert Bauer as publisher, which ultimately caused the prohibition of the *Frühlingskranz*. It is against this political background that one must interpret the old Brentano-von Arnim's description of her feelings toward the stifling restrictions that she experienced as an adolescent girl, as well as her gradual rejection of them. And it is in view of this background that one can claim that the political change that Brentano-von Arnim wanted to effect with *Frühlingskranz* is the redefinition of traditional gender roles.

It is not accidental that the means to convey her message is the portrayal of the French Amazon Louise de Gachet. De Gachet has a tremendous impact on the fictional heroine Bettine due to the fact that in her person three momentous motifs melt into one: the chaos of war, the freedom of travel, and the category-defying power of the transvestite.

#### EXILE FROM REALITY

It is impossible to give a plot summary of the *Frühlingskranz*. The essence of the novel consists of fleeting moments, bits of everyday life, impressions of the world, and thoughts about the people that Bettine encounters. Its unifying thread is a passionate endeavor to grow up female and free—against the resistance of philistine conventions and even against the resistance of a loving brother.

At the beginning of the novel, the young Bettine is already an orphan. In this respect, the biography of the fictional heroine mirrors that of her author. After the death of her mother, Bettina Brentano spent four years at the Ursulinen convent in Fritzlar near Kassel.<sup>6</sup> When her father died in 1797, she went to live with her grandmother,

Sophie La Roche (1730–1807), in Offenbach. Even though life with the famous author of *Das Fräulein von Sternheim* (1771) must have provided considerable intellectual stimulation for the young girl, Brentano-von Arnim depicts a heroine who experiences deprivation brought about by a gender-specific socialization. From the outset, Bettine questions gender stereotypes and offers resistance to what she calls the “very special police . . . that persecutes young girls” (“ganz eigne Polizei . . . womit man die jungen Mädchen verfolgt”; Arnim 1959: 102). In one of her first letters to Clemens, she expresses her discontent with the advice that education traditionally has in store for girls:

Yes, I would have to talk about my astonishment about everything that I see and hear in the world! About the advice which those people give me who want to bring me up to be an agreeable and lovely girl. But what other people call well-mannered and educated, I do not find that agreeable at all but rather horrific.<sup>7</sup>

Bettine’s dissatisfaction with the destiny prescribed for women is founded on her desire to change the world, to be active, to travel, to live free and heroically. Brentano-von Arnim had already given expression to these desires in her epistolary novel *Die Günderröde* (1840), based on her correspondence from 1804 to 1806 with her friend and fellow writer Karoline von Günderröde. In this novel the protagonist’s melancholy springs from a thirst for life which cannot find expression.<sup>8</sup> The life of an adolescent girl is compared to a river made of bricks (“ein backsteinerne Fluß”), where the oarsmen attempt in vain to stir up waves. In the *Frühlingskranz* as well, the young Bettine’s frustration is caused by the fact that the world which surrounds her cannot provide an outlet for her energy, her strength, and her courage:

To be and to become are two different things, I know it very well, and to become is to feel strength for the real life and to apply it and not just dream of becoming a hero. And this is what often makes me afraid of myself, that I have chosen for myself such a splendid role in the land of fantasy, which I play without danger, but which does not touch reality.—What can I do to be delivered from this exile from reality?<sup>9</sup>

That in the *Frühlingskranz* the possibility to overcome this painful “exile from reality” opens up in the form of a cross-dresser comes as no surprise. For already in *Die GÜnderode* the wish to lead a different life was entangled with the wish for a different body. Only an existence as a man or boy could provide Bettine with the means to escape from her unheroic world: “If I should make out your character,” GÜnderode writes to Bettine, “I would prophesy that, if you were a boy, you would become a hero.”<sup>10</sup> In *Die GÜnderode* Brentano-von Arnim designs male roles for herself and her friend again and again. She describes GÜnderode as dominant master and herself as goblin (Arnim 1994: 70). She is the student, her friend the preceptor. Due to a “male” mind, GÜnderode thinks masculine thoughts:

And flames will soar, inspired by the law of your breath, from your soul and ignite in the hearts of youthful generations, who, thinking themselves boyish manly, will never guess that the youth’s breath which lights their breast never came from the mind of man.<sup>11</sup>

In the *Frühlingskranz* the dreamed-for possibility of changing one’s gender becomes tangible when Louise de Gachet enters center stage.

### THE SUPERWOMAN

In the novel, Louise de Gachet’s visit is announced by Bettine’s brother Clemens. Even though Sophie von La Roche housed many French emigrants, de Gachet appears to have stood out among the stream of visitors. De Gachet, who is said to be the model for Goethe’s *Natürliche Tochter*, had been a military leader of the royalist resistance in the Vendée. She was also a physicist and had come to Germany to pursue her studies. While Brentano-von Arnim’s fictional account stresses the excitement caused by the arrival of the French Amazon in the small German town of Offenbach, in historical reality de Gachet was by no means the only woman to participate in the revolutionary wars.

From the beginning, French women had been actively involved in the revolution (Levy et al., eds. 1980; Petersen 1987). They had been the main instigators of riots linked to the subsistence crises. The

women's march to Versailles led to the King's and the Assembly's transfer back to Paris. From 1789 on women had volunteered to serve with the National Guard. Some of them tried to legalize this situation. On 6 March 1791 Pauline Léon, the future president of the radical Women's Club of Revolutionary Republicans, addressed a petition to the Legislative Assembly demanding that women be granted the right to bear arms. Her request was denied. On 31 July 1792 her plea was taken up again by 304 women from the Hôtel de Ville section. Women's claim for the right to become soldiers also found expression in Théroigne de Méricourt's plan to form a legion of Amazons. While these activists demanded legislative equality, other women had donned male attire and joined the revolutionary army directly.<sup>12</sup> Some of them were praised highly, and a few even received pensions from the state after their retirement. Among the most famous of these Amazons are Thérèse Figueur (called Sans-Gêne); Félicité and Théophile de Fernig, who served in their father's regiment, and Angélique Marie Joséphe Brulon, who received the Cross of the Legion of Honor for her courage in battle (Gilbert 1932: 1–91; Wheelwright 1989). Even though male revolutionaries sought to eliminate the presence of women from the armed forces in the wake of the general backlash of 1793, which also led to the ban on women's clubs, the history of the above-mentioned heroines proves that the attempt was not entirely successful.<sup>13</sup> Many women remained in the army even after 1793.

Among the events which were well known for the strong participation of women, the uprising in the Vendée of 1790–91 is often singled out.<sup>14</sup> Michelet in his study on women and the revolution goes so far as to hold women accountable for the very existence of this revolt (see Grubitzsch et al., eds. 1985: 151). The important role of women in the Vendée may also have influenced two German women writers in their choice of this subject for a novel. Both Therese Huber in *Die Familie Seldorf* (1795–96) and Caroline de la Motte Fouqué in *Das Heldenmädchen aus der Vendée* (1816) describe the feats of a cross-dressed heroine involved in the uprising in the Vendée.<sup>15</sup> But while these novels are fictional accounts, Bettina Brentano-von Arnim is the first to describe an actual meeting with a Vendée heroine. This encounter with the French cross-dresser and warrior woman deeply influenced Bettine's definition of her own gender

identity, which she developed in reaction (and contrast) to her brother's perception of the Amazon.

In the beginning Clemens's perspective dominates. Clemens, who had met de Gachet on a journey to Mainz, starts his epistolary introduction of the woman from the Vendée with an enthusiastic eulogy. De Gachet performs miracles, Clemens tells us. Not only is she intrepid, like a woman from the Nibelungs ("ein Weib aus den Nibelungen")—riding on wild horses—and knowledgeable in science, but she is also exceptionally beautiful. Clemens's second letter on the subject is equally ardent. In fact, his hymns of praise for the celebrated Amazon rather surpass the ones expressed in his first letter:

You don't know how happy I am that I can tell you this through the most lovely woman who due to her destiny surpasses the ordinary circle of men, but even more due to her independence, due to her firm earnest will, with which she fought against this destiny and suffered heroically, walking calmly and alone amongst the terrors of the bloody regime. She often rode on wild horses through the Vendée in order to meet with the great heroes there whom she often preceded on nightly dangerous walks; quite a few of these poor peasants (Chouans) she saved by risking her own life, but her whole family was devoured by the guillotine.<sup>16</sup>

Clemens, as Brentano-von Arnim portrays him, is sexually attracted to de Gachet's Valkyrian qualities. He displays a masochistic desire for a woman involved in the horrors of war. He celebrates her as an invulnerable goddess who—calmly strolling among the terrors of blood and destruction—saves ordinary mortals from distress. In his description, de Gachet is transformed into a superwoman, an almost Nietzschean *Übermensch*. But his admiration is contingent on de Gachet's relegation to a mystical realm—i.e., on her removal from everyday societal and familial contexts. By isolating her from the realm of normality (the "gewöhnlichen Kreis"), Clemens makes a miraculous being out of de Gachet. It is obvious that his recommendation of de Gachet as a model for his sister would be unthinkable had the former not been safely located in this surreal-mythical realm. It is therefore no surprise that Clemens has second thoughts about his glowing report when he realizes that the Valkyrie is about

to be a guest in his own sweet home. In his third letter to Bettine, Clemens qualifies his former recommendation:

Also, you should love her like the most ingenious person, but only her mind and heart, but the scars which her experience and destiny inflicted upon her, the manly wildness of her being and intellect, you should overlook, and in general not give yourself up to her, remain mine and God's.<sup>17</sup>

Suddenly, Clemens's admiration for the heroic independence of the extraordinary individual comes into conflict with his ideas on what he considers "true" femininity. He remembers his self-imposed obligation to educate his sister to be a proper woman, which, in his view, is incommensurably different from being a proper man ("ein vortreffliches Weib etwas ganz anderes ist als ein braver Mann"; Arnim 1959: 158). His solution to this dilemma consists in the admonition to love everything human about de Gachet and to overlook all that is manly and wild. But as all of de Gachet's admirable qualities are coded as masculine, Clemens must ultimately withdraw his recommendation completely. He is tormented by sleeplessness until he finally writes his fourth letter:

And again about this de Gachet, but God knows, it chases me out of my bed again. . . . I regret it very much and it was too hasty that I gave her my letter to you.<sup>18</sup>

We do not know to what extent Brentano-von Arnim changed her brother's original letters. But it seems likely that even for a romantic outsider like Clemens Brentano, there was an abyss between his fascination with the exotic Amazon on her wild horse and his demands on his sister, whom he entrusts with the knitting of his stockings (see Arnim 1959: 113) and whom he advises to stay away from dangerous Amazons. The fact that Clemens must be seen in the context of early romanticism only complicates the matter.

Women in men's clothing and men in women's clothing are a common motif in the literature of German romanticism. Naturally the phenomenon of gender-bending fascinated a generation that considered the transgression of polarities—be it art and life, philosophy and poetry, nature and culture—the core of its program of "progressive Universalpoesie." Transvestites figure prominently in many works by male and female romanticists. In Joseph von Eichendorff's



*Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts* (1826) the painter Guido proves to be a young lady, while the Taugenichts himself is thought to be a cross-dressed woman. In Achim von Arnim's *Isabella von Ägypten: Kaiser Karl des Fünften erste Jugendliebe* (1812) the mandrake hides his identity under women's clothing, while the female protagonist, Bella, disguises herself as boy later on. In Dorothea Schlegel's *Florentin* (1801) Juliane cross-dresses for an outing. In Clemens Brentano's *Godwi oder das Steinerner Bild der Mutter* (1801) the reader meets an Amazon on horseback. Cross-dressed characters also appear in Eichendorff's *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (1815), *Dichter und ihre Gesellen* (1834); in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Artushof* (1817); and in Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798).

The prominent role of cross-dressed characters in these texts speaks of their involvement in a debate on the essence of gender. The figure of the transvestite, whose bodily sex does not match his/her displayed gender identity, is especially apt to foreground questions on the "nature" of femininity and masculinity. Cross-dressers provided an important argument in the debate on gender that dates from the end of the eighteenth century. It is centered around the implementation of a concept of gendered character (*Geschlechtscharakter*) which attempts to define a woman's emotional and intellectual properties as directly linked to her physiology (Becker-Cantarino 1980; Honegger 1996; Laqueur 1990). That even in the 1840s this model of *Geschlechtscharakter* was still contested can be seen in the work of Bettina Brentano-von Arnim.

The romanticist fascination with gender-benders is also inter-related with the fact that androgyny emerged as an ideal of human wholeness in the works of romantic writers and philosophers such as Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, Novalis, Franz von Baader, and Georg Friedrich Creuzer (Friedrichsmeyer 1983). However, feminist scholarship has pointed out that the perfection that was to be brought about by heterosexual love was one-dimensional. It was man's progression toward an androgynous ideal that these writers had in mind. The union of man and woman, far from perfecting her, rather provided the masculine partner with the tool by which this ideal of wholeness was to be achieved (Becker-Cantarino 1979; Weigel 1988; MacLeod 1998).

Luckily, Bettine did not fall for this ideology, nor was she inclined to follow her brother's advice to stay away from Amazons.

Despite all of Clemens's warnings, Bettine experiences the arrival of the superwoman as an event that turns her little world upside down:

From one day to the next the world here in Offenbach has turned in a somersault. . . . Behold, there came rushing in a storm a cabriolet like a darted arrow to our doorstep, down jumps the driver, a youthfully strong, beautiful man-youth with jingling spurs; two riders, who accompanied him, enter with him; I was, I don't know how, not why, seized by fright, so that I forgot to talk, and didn't think to call my grandmother, who was in the garden. The duke asked who it was; I intimated to the stranger that he was blind, and said: "C'est un jeune cavalier, Monseigneur, avec deux messieurs." "Au contraire c'est une femme," said the youth and came closer.<sup>19</sup>

De Gachet's arrival is like a whirlwind that takes Bettine away from her familiar environment (e.g., she forgets to call her grandmother). However, she overcomes her initial shock and speechlessness and feels exhilarating joy: "I have to shout out of joy about an indefinite something. What can it be?" ("Ich muß jauchzen vor Vergnügen über ein unbestimmtes Etwas. Was mag es sein"; Arnim 1959: 50–51). Unlike her brother, Bettine is not attracted by de Gachet's violence but by her ability to defy dichotomous categories. She is fascinated by the "Mannjüngling," a mixture of man and boy before she realizes that de Gachet is really a combination of man and woman, a "Mannweib." Even after de Gachet's explanation that she is "une femme," Bettine continues to call her "Jüngling." She, too, is erotically attracted to de Gachet's appearance, as well as enraptured by the promise of freedom and heroic action that the Frenchwoman symbolizes for her. But just as de Gachet's nature is mixed, so are Bettine's feelings. She wants to travel with the Amazon, who invites her to come along. Bettine need only mount her horse and leave her narrow little world behind. But her longing is marred by her anxiety to be overpowered by an older, more experienced personality, and she declines de Gachet's invitation to travel with her. To her, de Gachet is a devil of a woman, but so is she. Thus she knows that she has to stay away from de Gachet if she wants to be independent. Even though her close relationship to her brother, which also betrays an erotic component, may have played a part in her decision (Bettine declares her loyalty to him and promises not to surrender to the

stranger [“sich nicht hingeben”; Arnim 1959: 52]), her refusal to join the Amazon is not driven by anxiety but by the wish to stay true to herself. She lives according to her insight that to be oneself is to be a hero (*ibid.*, p. 87). Even though she regrets the missed opportunity and comments on de Gachet’s departure with “It’s over with flowers” (*ibid.*, p. 60), she knows that it is not yet time for her to leave. And even though she distances herself from the Amazon, the encounter changes her relationship with Clemens. Encouraged by de Gachet’s example, Bettine refuses to adopt her brother’s ideal of a “proper” woman. She receives all of Clemens’s often bestowed misogynist statements with silence or with rejection. She starts to dissolve the rigid dichotomies that he imposes on her. She tells him that his ideas are illusions which are bouncing up and down in his texts like grasshoppers:

The most leathery grasshopper is the one where you absolutely want to point out the big difference between an excellent woman and a good man. May these two meet each other on some lucky star, only this one thing I ask of you, that you do not inform me of it; and once and for all I want to be excluded completely from this sanctuary!—And secondly—your warning against all male company! The G nderode tells me she does not know any male company but mine. I, too, dear Clemens, do not know any male company but the hop-poles which the milkmaid bought for me for the coming spring, they are the most coarse amongst my acquaintance. . . . The *nice ingrata*, who even though she is your university friend, and who, after you had paid the graduation meal for her, ran off with your best clothes, has a beard and perhaps wants to be taken for a man; but she looks into the mirror and sings *nice bella*, and who has any doubts that she is a *nice*.<sup>20</sup>

Bettine’s playful irony unmasks Clemens’s gender ideology. She invents a scale of masculinity on which she herself figures prominently, right along with the hop-pole and higher than Clemens’s university friend, the “nice ingrata.” According to this scale, masculinity is a quality that can be detached from the male body. Masculinity and femininity are not derivatives of a prior physical state but the consequence of a person’s behavior. This definition of gender is astonishingly close to what Judith Butler calls gender performance when she asks:

Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established? Does being female constitute a “natural fact” or a cultural performance, or is “naturalness” constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex? (1990: viii).

In Butler’s theory, as well as in Brentano-von Arnim’s text, gender identities become free-floating entities.<sup>21</sup> It has been noted that in her letters to her family and friends, Brentano-von Arnim often chose to use pronouns that do not match the gender of the person to whom she is referring or writing (Waldstein 1988: 70). This phenomenon is also visible in the *Frühlingskranz*. Her grandmother’s friend Ebel, whom Bettine calls a “naturforschender Mistfinke,” is endowed with the female name “Empusa.” Bettine judges that he is no longer a man but has to pass as female (“Er wird auch nicht mehr maskuliniert, sondern muß weiblich passieren”; Arnim 1959: 138). Bettine herself declares that from now on Jeanne d’Arc will be her model and proves her newly gained masculinity by preventing the execution of an androgynous chicken, the “Männewei” (*Mannweibchen*). But Bettine’s, and, one might add, Bettina Brentano-von Arnim’s, new concept of gender identities leads to more daring actions than saving a chicken.

In Brentano-von Arnim’s epistolary novel *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (1835), the author’s fictional alter ego Bettine plans a journey in male attire. And again, a war offered an excuse for her gender-transgression. Bettine’s fictional account is based on an actual journey. In 1807 Bettina Brentano, her sister Lulu, and her sister’s husband Jordis were on their way to Weimar.<sup>22</sup> Both women wore men’s clothing, Bettina a yellow vest, gray pants, a brown jacket, and a black cap. The disguise was meant to protect them against the French occupational army. However, in Brentano-von Arnim’s novel, Bettine’s enthusiasm about her pants exceeds such pragmatic considerations:

A pair of pants? Yes—Cheer—now come different times—and a jacket too, and an overcoat. Tomorrow everything will be tried; it will fit, for I have ordered everything comfortable and wide, and then I will jump into a chaise and travel night and day express through all armies between enemy and friend; all fortresses will open before me. . . . Just think, Weimar always seemed so far

away, as though it were in a different part of the world, and now it's right in front of my doorstep.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, Bettine's new trousers are more than just another garment. They function as symbols of strength and endow their wearer with magical power (see Ockenfuß 1992: 75). They open up new worlds and enable Bettine to brave all enemies. Once again, Oscar Wilde's statement that the influence of the costume penetrates to the soul of the wearer is proven.

By appropriating male clothing, Bettine appropriates qualities that are commonly attributed to men. Thus Brentano-von Arnim demonstrates that power does not emanate from the body. Her power comes from pants, but it may take a war to show it. It seems that gender identities are easily accepted as natural entities in times of peace. But the turmoil of a war destabilizes many presumed certainties and unmasks the cultural constructedness of gender itself. It is therefore no surprise that Brentano-von Arnim's actual cross-dressing, as well as her fantasies about it, are often linked to wartime experiences. In *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde*, Bettine argues in a similar way that it is only the lack of pants that keeps her from fighting for Tyrolese independence: "Oh, if only I had a jacket, pants, and a hat, I would run to the straight-nosed, straight-hearted Tyrolese right away" ("Ach, hätt ich ein Wämslein, Hosen und Hut, ich lief hinüber zu den gradnasigen, gradherzigen Tirolern"; Arnim 1984: 280).

### MIND AND FLESH

In recent publications much attention has been given to Bettina Brentano-von Arnim as political activist: her concern for the poor, especially during the cholera epidemic of 1831; her defense of the Göttinger Sieben and of Tschsch, the former mayor of Storkow who attempted to assassinate the king in 1844; her support for the Tyrolese, Hungarian, and Polish struggles for independence; her opposition to capital punishment and her advocacy of prison reform (French 1995; Frühwald 1985; Waldstein 1988; Wyss 1935: 5–15; Meyer-Hepner 1960).<sup>24</sup> Hahn (1959: 20) even went so far as to suggest that no political event escaped her notice. But in spite of such an

abundance of active engagement in the affairs of her time, one lacuna is often noted—namely, Brentano-von Arnim's "distance from any of the initial stirrings of feminist activity" (Goodman 1995: 116; see Dischner 1977). However, as Goodman points out, the absence of direct comments on the emancipation of women cannot be equated with silence on gender issues. If Brentano-von Arnim's epistolary novels about the past are indeed interventions in the political situation of the present, the *Frühlingskranz* must be seen as expressing her concern with the restrictive gender roles of the 1840s. And just as the transvestites in her work break down dichotomistic categories, so does her style of writing, in which fact and fiction intermingle inseparably. It is well known that Brentano-von Arnim used only segments of the original letters. She combined passages from several letters into one and even changed the recipient (see Oehlke 1905: 181ff.; Ockenfuß 1992: 29). In short, she fictionalized her authentic material consciously (Kuhn 1990: 14) and thereby undermined a clear distinction of life from art. While the figure of the transvestite draws attention to the split between sign and referent by virtue of his/her clothing, her writing achieves a similar effect by describing the same event several times, with each portrayal differing from the other. But if Brentano-von Arnim disassociates sign and referent, body and character, on one level, she reconnects them on another. Where the assumption of a male exterior brings about male comportment and power, appearance and reality become newly interwoven.

Such melting of polarities into oneness forms the center of Brentano-von Arnim's *Schwebereligion*, (floating religion), in which spirit and flesh are but two sides of one coin. All things sensual and natural are symbols of the spirit, and all matter is to become spiritual again. Art itself is the sensual revelation and expression of the spirit of the poetess. And this spirit of truth that finds its body in the artist is gradually to become incorporated in the future world:

The future must cross over into that which the spirit has already for so long founded in poetry; for what would the poet be if he did not clear the way for the spirit of truth, which has long become flesh and blood in him, and now through him becomes the sensual body of the future.<sup>25</sup>

Thus Brentano-von Arnim's Amazons do not only appropriate men's clothing. Rather, in the character of Bettine, de Gachet's physi-

cal combativeness is transformed into spiritual resistance against the restrictions of traditionally defined gender roles. In turn, the spirit of resistance that the book expresses is meant to become flesh again. With the *Frühlingskranz*, Bettina Brentano-von Arnim hoped to encourage her female contemporaries of the 1840s to become the Amazons of the future and appropriate a world that was rightfully theirs.

#### NOTES

1. I will use Bettina Brentano-von Arnim when referring to the writer, and Bettine when referring to the fictional character that Brentano-von Arnim created. It is apparent that this differentiation cannot always be made clearly for a writer who consciously obscured the border between fact and fiction.
2. For information on cross-dressing in history and literature, see Garber (1992), Dekker and van de Pol (1989), and Bullough and Bullough (1993).
3. Only very few of the actual letters have come down to us (see Bäumer 1986: 25). Brentano-von Arnim's brother Clemens died in 1842, two years before the publication of the novel.
4. Schultz (1989: 324) claims that even while writing her letters, Brentano-von Arnim had already planned to edit her correspondence as a book.
5. Some scholars found great fault with this technique. Heinrich Düntzer, for example, called Brentano-von Arnim's epistolary novels unscrupulous forgeries (see Hahn 1959: 21).
6. Fritzlar was taken by the French under General Hoche in 1797. Bettina Brentano then spent some time with her half-brother Franz in Frankfurt before she moved to her grandmother's. For biographical information on Bettina Brentano-von Arnim, see Hirsch (1987); Hans von Arnim (1963); Hetmann (1984); Milch (1968); and Drewitz (1969).
7. "Ja, ich müßte Dir von meiner Verwundung sprechen über alles, was ich sehe und höre in der Welt! Über die Lehren, die jene Leute mir geben, die mich zu einem angenehmen und liebenswürdigen Mädchen erziehen wollen. Das kommt mir aber gar nicht angenehm, sondern sehr horribel vor, was andre Leute wohlgezogen oder gebildet nennen" (Arnim 1959: 21).
8. "Melancholie allein aus dieser Quelle des Lebensdrangs fließt, der sich nirgends ergießen kann" (Arnim 1994: 249).
9. "Sein und Werden ist zweierlei, das sag ich mir auch, und Werden ist für das wirkliche Leben Kraft fühlen und diese anwenden, und nicht bloß zum Helden träumen. Und dies ist, was mich oft vor mir erschreckt, daß ich im

Lande der Phantasie mir eine große rolle auserwählt habe, die ich zwar ohne Gefahr spiele, die aber nicht die Wirklichkeit berührt.—Wie mache ich's, daß ich aus dieser Verbannung des Wirklichen erlöst werde?" (Arnim 1959: 91–92). See also her letter to Savigny from October 1804: "Daß ich traurig bin, kannst du Dir wohl leicht erklären. So viel Lebenskraft und Mut zu haben und keine Mittel, ihn anzuwenden. Wie mag es einem großen Krieger zu Mute sein, dem das Herz glühet zu großen Unternehmungen und Taten, und der in der Gefangenschaft ist, mit Ketten beladen, an keine Rettung denken darf. Mir überwältigt diese immerwährende rastlose Begierde nach Wirken oft die Seele und bin doch nur ein einfältig Mädchen, deren Bestimmung ganz anders ist" (cited in Schormann 1993: 107).

10. "Sollt ich Deinen Charakter zusammenfassen, so würd ich Dir prophezeien, wenn Du ein Knabe wärst, Du werdest ein Held werden" (Arnim 1994: 501).
11. "Und so werden Flammen aufsteigen, bewegt vom Gesetz Deines Hauchs, aus Deiner Seele und zünden im Herzen jugendlicher Geschlechter, die, knabenhaft männlich sich deuchtend, nimmer es ahnen, daß der Jünglingshauch, der ihre Brust erglüht, niemals erstieg aus Männergeist" (Arnim 1994: 381).
12. Another example for cross-dressed women during the revolution are the red-pantalooned Revolutionary Republicans, who helped to chase away Girondin deputies from the Convention in May 1793.
13. The official reason for this measure was the report of J. F. Delacroix, a deputy of the revolutionary government, who stated that the deplorable state of affairs in the army was caused by the presence of women (Opitz 1989).
14. The Vendée insurrection lasted from March 1793 to May 1795, when the Vendée was obliged to recognize the Republic (for more information, see Yalom 1993: 191–209).
15. One of the interesting differences between these two works is that Sara Seldorf, Huber's heroine, fights on the republican side, while Elisabeth Rochefoucault, Fouqué's protagonist, is supporting the royalist cause.
16. "Du weißt nicht, wie glücklich ich bin, daß ich Dir dies durch die liebenswürdigste Frau sagen kann, die durch ihr Geschick schon über den gewöhnlichen Kreis der Menschen hinausragt, noch mehr aber durch ihre Selbständigkeit, durch den festen ernsten Willen, mit dem sie dies Geschick bekämpfte und heldenmäßig ertrug, indem sie ruhig und allein zwischen den Schrecken der Blutgerichte hindurchwandelte. . . . Durch die Vendée ist sie oft auf wilden Pferden geritten, um mit den großen Helden dort sich zu treffen, denen sie oft auf nächtlichen gefahrvollen Wegen voraneilte, manchen jener armen Landleute (Chouans) hat sie gerettet mit Gefahr ihres Lebens, ihre ganze Familie aber hat die Guillotine gefressen" (Arnim 1959: 47).
17. "Auch sollst Du sie lieben wie den geistreichen Menschen, doch nur ihren Geist und Herz, die Narben aber, die ihr Erfahrung und Geschick geschla-



- gen, das männliche Wilde ihres Seins und Verstandes sollst Du übersehen, überhaupt Dich ihr nicht hingeben; mein bleiben und Gott (Arnim 1959: 48).
18. "Und immer noch von dieser de Gachet, aber Gott weiß, es jagt mich wieder aus dem Bette heraus... Ich bereue es sehr, und es ist eine Übereilung, daß ich ihr den Brief an Dich gab" (Arnim 1959: 48–49).
  19. "Von einem Tag zum andern hat die Welt hier in Offenbach einen Purzelbaum geschlagen. . . . Siehe, da kam im Sturm dahergebraust ein Kabriolet wie ein abgeschosener Pfeil vor die Haustür, herabspringt der Wagenlenker, ein jugendlich voller schöner Mannjüngling mit klirrenden Sporen, zwei Reiter, die ihn begleiten, treten mit ihm ein, ich war, ich weiß nicht wie, nicht warum, von Schrecken durchgriffen, daß ich vergaß zu reden, und besann mich nicht, die Großmama zu rufen, die im Garten war. Der Herzog fragte, wer da sei, ich deutete den Fremden an, er sei blind, und sagte: "C'est un jeune cavalier, Monseigneur, avec deux messieurs." "Au contraire c'est une femme, sagte der Jüngling und näherte sich" (Arnim 1959: 50).
  20. "Die allerledernste Heuschrecke ist mir die, wo Du mich mit Gewalt willst auf den großen Unterschied hinweisen zwischen einem vortrefflichen Weib und einen braven Manne. Mögen sich diese zwei beiden zusammenfinden auf irgendeinem glücklichen Stern, nur das einzige bitte ich mir aus, daß Du es mir nicht zu wissen tust; und ein für allemal will ich von diesem Heiligtum gänzlich ausgeschlossen sein!—Und zweitens—Deine Warnung vor aller männlichen Gesellschaft! Die Günderde sagt zu mir, sie kenne keine männliche Gesellschaft, außer die meine. Ich, lieber Clemens, kenne auch keinen männlichen Umgang, als den mit den Hopfenstecken, die mir die Milchfrau besorgt hat für den kommenden Frühling, sie sind die derbsten unter meine Bekannten. . . . Die nice ingrata, die obschon sie Dein Universitätsfreund ist, und nachdem Du ihr den Doktorschmaus bezahlt hattest, mit Deinen besten Kleidern durchging, hat zwar einen Bart und möchte vielleicht auch für einen Mann gehalten sein; aber sie sieht in den Spiegel und singt nice bella, und wer zweifelt, daß sie eine Nice ist" (Arnim 1959: 159).
  21. Brentano-von Arnim's concept of gender cannot be described as role reversal, nor can it be characterized as androgyny (see Waldstein 1988: 71). Rather, there is no predictable connection between body and gender (see Goodman 1995: 129).
  22. The journey led them from Kassel to Berlin. They stopped in Weimar on their way back. That the "gender police" was still active can be seen in a letter that Bettina received from her half-brother Franz in April 1807 as reaction to her journey: "Du weißt, wie ich das Herumschwärmen von Mägden in der Welt hasse, welches in den Augen aller vernünftigen Menschen für unanständig gehalten wird" (cited in Bäumer 1986: 50). That Bettina herself had wished for this journey for a long time can be gathered from a letter by Goethe's mother, the Frau Rat: "Da hat den doch die kleine Brentano ihren Willen gehabt, und Goethe gesehen—ich glaube im gegen gesetzten fall wäre sie Toll geworden—denn so was ist mir noch nicht

vorgekommen—sie wolte als Knabe sich verkleiden, zu Fuß nach Weimar laufen“ (Goethe 1996: 552).

23. “Ein Paar Hosen?—Ja!—Vivat!—jetzt kommen andre Zeiten angerückt— und auch eine Weste und ein Überrock dazu. Morgen wird alles anprobiert, es wird schon sitzen, denn ich hab’ mir alles bequem und weit bestellt, und dann werf’ ich mich in eine Chaise und reise Tag und Nacht Kurier durch die ganzen Armeen zwischen Feind und Freund durch; alle Festungen tun sich vor mir auf... Denk’ Sie doch, Weimar schien mir immer so entfernt, als wenn es in einem andern Weltteil läg’, und nun ist’s vor der Tür“ (Arnim 1984: 32).
24. That Brentano-von Arnim’s engagement was taken seriously by the authorities can be gathered from the fact that secret reports on her political activities were filed in 1843 and 1847 (Waldstein 1988: 61).
25. “Die Zukunft muß übertreten in das, was der Geist so lange schon in der Dichtung vorausbegründete; denn was wär der Dichter, wenn er nicht dem Geist der Wahrheit den Weg bahnte, der längst in ihm Fleisch und Blut geworden, nun auch zum sinnlichen Leib der Zukunft werde durch ihn“ (cited in Betz 1982: 68).

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## DIVERGENT INTERPRETATIONS OF WOMEN'S AGENCY AND LUTHER'S POLITICAL AGENDA

David O. Neville

### LUTHER, FLORENTINA, AND *GEZWUNGEN DIENST*

During the German Reformation, religious pamphlets fragmented the population along religious battle lines. Through coarse characterizations, simplified arguments, and hostile rhetoric, the orthodox and radical reformers alike fought protracted battles against the Catholic hegemony and against each other. In these battles of words and sometimes of deeds, the pamphlet became a forum of debate and a mechanism of persuasion, a medium that allowed for ideas to clash and new social imperatives to be expressed. Luther's pamphlet *Eyn Geschicht wie Got eyner Erbarn Kloster Jungfrawen ausgeholffen hat* (An Account of How God Helped a Noble Nun Escape) is an example of such Reformation era social discourse. Couching the escaped nun Florentina's autobiographical testimony within the framework of his exegesis, Luther bolsters in this manner his argument that the practice of cloistering (what he terms *gezwungen dienst*, or "forced service") should be abolished. The nun's stirring account of her abuse and torture appeals to the readers on their most basic, emotional level; Luther's theological interpretation, in turn, shapes and directs the resulting impassioned public response. Superficially, the pamphlet speaks powerfully against *gezwungen dienst* and appears to express the intentions of the two contributors, Florentina and Luther, in a unified and unanimous manner. Closer examination, however, exposes fractures in this apparently whole text, cracks which ultimately reveal that Florentina and Luther interpreted women's agency differently.

The piecemeal format of the text, the conflicting intentions of the contributing authors, and the varied styles of writing incorpo-

rated under one title make the pamphlet a literary unicum.<sup>1</sup> The pamphlet's main section, lengthily entitled "Unterricht der erbar[n] und tugentsamen Jungfrawen Florentina von obern weymar, wie sie aus dem kloster durch Gottis hulff komen ist" (The Noble and Virtuous Maiden Florentina of Upper Weimar's Report, How She Escaped from the Cloister with God's Help), recounts Florentina's actions and experiences while she was cloistered in the New Helfta convent (formerly located near the present-day city of Lutherstadt Eisleben). The section is divided into two segments. Florentina casts the first, smaller segment as an apology in which she states the two-fold purpose of her writing. First, her account aims at vindicating her past actions while she was cloistered at the New Helfta convent. Second, it responds to the slander that the convent's abbess, Florentina's aunt Katherina von Watzdorf, publicly circulated regarding Florentina subsequent to her escape—slander which is unfortunately today not extant. The second segment, simply entitled "Anfank" (The Beginning), is a chronology of Florentina's life from when her parents delivered her to the convent up to the time that she escaped. It relates how she was forced into the convent at the age of six, explains how she was compelled to remain there, and charts Florentina's growing dislike of cloistered life. The second segment further summarizes the abuses she suffered at the New Helfta convent and, in so doing, seems to justify her flight.

Adding to Florentina's text, Luther erects a commentative framework around her apology and chronology. This framework, however, does not support or expand her account but rather seeks to center it within a larger theological and political context. Luther prefaces the pamphlet with an open letter to the counts of Mansfeld in which he differentiates between those who do not pay heed to God's commandments and miracles and those who recognize and obey them. Using this lesson as an introduction, he then presents Florentina's account, labeling it a "miracle" that only the devoutly religious can appreciate and understand. In the conclusion to his introduction, Luther transforms Florentina's miracle into a general religious and political imperative, demanding that all monks and nuns be freed from their *gezwungen dienst*, or at least not coerced into such "unnatural" service. In addition to his preface, Luther's framework includes a brief, moralizing conclusion on the evils of

cloistering, as well as marginalia attached directly to the text of Florentina's account.

I submit that Florentina's account, largely overlooked in past research,<sup>2</sup> and Luther's comments are germane to our theme of conquering women since they illuminate how the life of an ordinary woman affected and was affected by contemporary sociopolitical issues; they depict how Florentina emerged as both "conqueror" and "conquered" in the battle for her agency and honor. As we shall see, her account champions an emerging culture whose apparent emphasis on individual agency allows Florentina to establish herself as an independent *subject*. Yet while championing this culture, Florentina's account is coopted by a dominant male voice of this emerging culture, ultimately becoming *subjected* to the machinations of Luther's political agenda. An analysis of the pamphlet's ambiguity will contribute to our knowledge of women in the German Reformation in a twofold manner.<sup>3</sup> First, a juxtaposition of Luther's and Florentina's writing allows for an unusual opportunity to reveal how a woman experienced aspects of the German Reformation—specifically how she viewed the practice of cloistering—differently from a male perspective. Second, with a focus primarily on Florentina's account and experience, inroads can be made toward correcting what feminist scholars have previously critiqued as the exploration of women's experiences from a predominantly male vantage point.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, an exploration of the pamphlet promises to uncover a site where different writing styles, opinions, and intentions clashed and the new cultural expectations of women in the German Reformation were synthesized.

### UNJUST SUFFERING AND AN IMPASSIONED ENTREATY

Why Florentina wrote publicly on the religious issue of cloistering can be understood and explained within a framework of the period's apocalyptic fervor. As Merry Wiesner illustrates, the Pauline admonition that women remain silent on religious matters was suspended due to what many felt to be the gravity of the situation.<sup>5</sup> When the hegemony of the Catholic Church began to fragment into Protestantism and radical sects, women of the middle and



upper classes took positions on contemporary issues through the medium of the printed word. Written during the initial years of the German Reformation, Florentina's text manifests a flavor of this new-found public candor and urgency. Although the Protestant Reformation initially allowed for a large number of women to express their views via this medium, as the Reformation became more established, "most women expressed their religious convictions in a domestic, rather than public setting."<sup>6</sup>

How Florentina ended up in the New Helfta convent as a six-year-old child is best understood if we first briefly examine the socioreligious culture surrounding her account. Throughout Europe in the medieval period, and into the early modern period as well, convents provided a convenient means for families of greater and lesser nobility to save money (among other things) and thus prevent the fragmentation of their power. Since it was customary that the family of a woman pay a substantial dowry to her future husband, families that had an inordinately large number of female children ran the risk of losing all of their wealth and property to other families and winning none or very little in return through women who married into their families. Although this was probably the case with Florentina, it should not be assumed that she was callously sent far away to live in isolation from her family. Instead, a patronage system emerged between the nobility and convents generally located close to the families' ancestral lands. Noble families often had several female family members, as well as members from the extended family, cloistered in the same convent. Through various textual clues in Florentina's account, we can safely assume that this was also the case with her family.

Although typical in the ways outlined above, what is unusual for *Eyn Geschicht wie Got eyner Erbarn Kloster Jungfrawen ausgeholffen hat* is that a woman's autobiographical account is framed within a predominantly male dialogue between Luther and the counts of Mansfeld. Moreover, the writing style and the tone of each contributor accentuate the peculiarity of the text. Whereas Florentina appeals to the emotions of the reader with personal stories of her victimization at the hands of *gezwungen dienst*, Luther interprets her account within a theological framework that is meant to appeal to the intellect. In this context, then, her account appears less a personal narrative

with the aim of self-exculpation than an exemplum to strengthen Luther's polemic.

The first segment of Florentina's text is remarkable on two accounts. First, instead of abstracting the issue of cloistering by reducing it to a purely theological exercise, the manner in which she addresses the reader reveals an obvious personal involvement with the issue. This personal involvement becomes most evident in Florentina's introductory remarks, where she addresses herself to "allen frummen Christen und liebhabern des Evangelij Gottis" (all devout Christians and lovers of God's gospel), appealing to them: "dise meyne untrricht und entschuldigung mit Christlichen hertzen zu vernemen" (to receive with Christian hearts this, my account and apology).<sup>7</sup> Such an approach enlists the audience as sympathizers of Florentina's cause; it allows her to explain and exculpate herself on a religious and emotional level. Not surprisingly, Florentina's rhetorical stance resembles examples mentioned in modern studies on women's psychology and moral development. Quoting Carol Gilligan's work,<sup>8</sup> Merry Wiesner notes that when placed in morally ambiguous situations, "women justify their solutions and the actions they take with a value system based on responsibility in relationships and care, rather than a value system based on rights and rules."<sup>9</sup> Although Wiesner recognizes the dangers inherent in applying twentieth-century psychological theory to earlier periods, she nevertheless feels that there are striking parallels between Gilligan's study of women's psychology and Renaissance women, parallels which extend to our discussion of Florentina. Seeing herself as a member of a religious family that transcends established social boundaries, Florentina appeals to all devout Christians, whose faith in God is the common thread binding them. By bringing her situation to the attention of Christians, she hopes to find moral justification and support in a network of like-minded individuals. In addition to seeking justification and support, her approach also overturns the established religious hierarchies by seeking mediation through the "priesthood of all believers," or lay people of the church. This type of behavior, according to Wiesner, is typical for women during the Reformation:

The Renaissance women also based their appeals on their responsibility to others, to people who were actually related to them or to people they cared about. They saw themselves first as part of

a network of relationships which included family, relatives, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances, rather than as members of a hierarchical system such as a guild. They, too, rarely argued that they had a “right” to do something because of precedent or regulations, but that the circumstances surrounding their cases might even warrant a break with the rules from the past.<sup>10</sup>

Second, Florentina introduces and develops the theme of unjust suffering as the *modus movendi* of her apology. Instead of relying upon theological reasoning to exculpate herself, Florentina enhances the persuasiveness of her defense through her personal accounts of unjust mental and physical abuse at the New Helfta convent. In so doing, Florentina makes victimizing *gezwungen dienst* the focus of her text; it becomes her apology’s most compelling and persistent theme. On one hand, she admits that it is her position to suffer the just reproofs of this life: “Denn wie wol ich schmach und schande zu leyden schuldig byn” (Then however much I am responsible to suffer humiliation and dishonor); on the other hand, the unreasonable allegations of Katherina von Watzdorf, as well as Florentina’s personal experiences in the convent, are unjust and therefore intolerable:

So byn ich doch auch widerumb schuldig, die selbige, weyl sie unrecht ist, nicht zu billichen oder durch stil schweygen bestetigen, und mich frembder sunden teylhafftig machen.

(I am nevertheless on the other hand responsible not to approve or affirm the same through silence, thereby making myself a participant in another’s sins, since it is unjust).<sup>11</sup>

By introducing these two themes—unjust suffering and an appeal to the audience on a personal level—at the beginning of her text, Florentina lays a strong foundation for the remainder of her account.

After having spent eight years in the convent, or at about the time she was fourteen years old, Florentina discovered that cloistered life clashed with both her temperament and what she termed her “nature,” or what we can assume is a euphemism for her sexual urges: “aller meyner geschicklickeyt und natur entkegen” (against all of my ability and nature).<sup>12</sup> Seeking support among her friends and relatives, she turned to one of her aunts from Upper Weimar, confiding in her concerning this problem.<sup>13</sup> This aunt, however, betrayed her trust and immediately made Florentina’s dilemma known to the

abbess of the New Helfta convent. In response, the abbess stated that it would be impossible for Florentina to change her status by exiting the convent since she had already taken her final vows and no power on earth or heaven would be able to free her from her religious obligations. The conclusive and unyielding nature of the response must certainly have shocked Florentina, who, according to the rules of the convent, should have had an opportunity to deliberate whether or not she wished to become a nun. As Florentina explains in her account, this opportunity should have been made available at every reading of the regulations during her probationary year but was never explicitly granted her.

Instead, Florentina explains that her consecration was performed when she was still a child, before she could properly understand the obligations and responsibilities of cloistered life. When she inquired of the abbess why she had not waited to consecrate her, the abbess responded that she was considered to be old enough at the time the ceremony was performed. According to Florentina's account, the probationary year was granted not so that the novices could decide whether or not to become nuns, but rather to only allow them a space of time in which they could become familiar with the rules of the convent, as well as be tested by the consecrated nuns. As Florentina further relates, the pressure she felt from her peers prevented her from formally complaining against the abbess's response and her forced consecration. Likewise, she felt that any knowledge she did have concerning the convent rules and Holy Scripture would have been no match for the formidable learning of the abbess and consecrated nuns. It is for this reason that in her account Florentina relies so heavily on the theme of her unjust suffering at the New Helfta convent and less on any theological defense.

Having no opportunity to choose otherwise, Florentina assumed her religious vocation against her will and under duress. As in the apology which prefaces her chronology, Florentina once again turns to the collective audience of Christians, urging them to be the judges of her situation:

Also hab ich yn widerwillen meyner angenommen geystlickeyt gestanden. Was fur beschwerung myr teglich yn meynem gewissen dar von erwachsen, geb ich eynem iglichen fromen Christen und liebhaber Evangelicher warheyt zuermessen.

(And so I remained in my assumed religious order against my will. What sorts of burdens arose in my conscience daily because of this I submit to every single devout Christian and lover of Protestant truth for evaluation.)<sup>14</sup>

This impassioned entreaty highlights the desperation of her situation and justifies in advance the radical action she took. Finding no support among her relatives and cloistered nuns at New Helfta, Florentina reached far outside the convent walls, looking to Martin Luther for solace and emotional support. This radical step of writing to the Protestant reformer, however, added physical torture and abuse to the emotional trauma suffered by Florentina up to this time.

Having discovered that Florentina had written Luther, the abbess prescribed a course of punishment spanning a period of more than four weeks and consisting of three stages. The first stage was primarily physical. Removed from the society of her fellow nuns, Florentina was isolated for four weeks in an unheated cell:

In dem gefengknis ich iiii wochen gesessen on alle barmhertzickeyt, yn grosser kelden (wie man weyß vor und nach allen heylygen gewest) ynn keyne stuben kommen.

(I sat without any mercy for four weeks in prison, in extreme cold [as anyone knows it was before and after All Saints Day], coming into no room.)<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this isolation, Florentina was forced to sign an affidavit containing a confession of the many "sins" she had committed during the last three years at the New Helfta convent.

The second stage consisted of both physical and mental punishments designed to humiliate Florentina before the other nuns, as well as to break her spirit. Although still remaining for the majority of time in a locked cell, she was now required to be present during the canonical hours in order to kneel before the choir. To heighten her humiliation while kneeling before the choir, other nuns stepped over her when entering and leaving the choir stall. Florentina does not specify in her account how long this stage of her punishment lasted.

The third stage seems to have foregone physical punishment since no further mention is made of her solitary incarceration. Instead, her punishment consisted primarily of actions designed to

shame and belittle Florentina before the other nuns. Although now allowed to participate with the others in the choir stall, she was still required to prostrate herself on the ground as the other nuns stepped over her while entering and leaving. Furthermore, Florentina was not allowed to eat meals with the other nuns, a punishment whose stigma of separation was underscored by the straw crown she was required to wear as the other nuns ate. As with the second stage of her punishment, we do not know the duration of the third stage.

Upon completion of her course of punishment, Florentina was once again able to exercise the regular duties of a nun at the New Helfta convent, but under special rules of probation: five fellow nuns would watch over her and be responsible for her spiritual welfare. Furthermore, she was forced to swear that she would never again attempt to leave the religious order. In addition to the five nuns responsible for her spiritual welfare, a sixth nun, intent on rehabilitating the prodigal daughter, accompanied her twenty-four hours a day. Although Florentina had suffered the prescribed punishment, the abbess informed her that the shame of her actions would besmear her name for the remainder of her life. Florentina may have remained cloistered as a nun at New Helfta, but her previous actions nevertheless separated her from the other nuns; she became a pariah within a closed society.

Considering the physical and emotional suffering that Florentina experienced after she transgressed the rules of the convent, her continued disobedience testifies powerfully to her determination, as well as her desire to leave. Despite the precautions that the abbess took to ensure that Florentina would never again violate the oaths she made under duress, it seems that, against all odds, Florentina once again wrote someone, this time her cousin Kaspar von Watzdorf, whom she describes as a lover of Protestant truth. The abbess, however, having discovered this attempt, responded with torture and abuse that eclipsed even Florentina's previous punishment. So extreme was the censure meted out by the abbess that even Florentina shies away from relating it to pious Christians:

Wie schmechlich, schemlich, lesterlich und hönisch ich da vor yhr und andern ausgericht, ist nicht fur frummen leuten zu reden odder zu schreyben.

(Religious people should not speak or write about how foully, shamefully, disgracefully, and scornfully I was punished by her and others.)<sup>16</sup>

She was flogged and beaten by the abbess and four other nuns until they were exhausted from their efforts, and then she was placed in iron shackles. Although Florentina was released after a day and night of being confined in this manner, she nevertheless had to remain in an unheated cell until she was released to celebrate Christmas. Never again would Florentina be able to join the society of other nuns; she was to remain locked in her cell during the day, without exchanging words with anyone, as a prisoner under house arrest for the remainder of her life:

uber tag yn der cellen verschlossen, mit niemand keyn wort reden, keynen tritt gehen. . . : yn solche gefengnis sollt ich mich meyn lebenslang geben.

(locked during the day in a cell, to speak not a word with anyone, to take not a step: in such a prison I was supposed to spend my life).<sup>17</sup>

Due to the good fortune that one evening her cell was improperly locked, Florentina was finally able to put an end to her torture by escaping.

#### DIVERGENT INTERPRETATIONS OF WOMEN'S AGENCY

Perhaps most surprising in our examination of the pamphlet is that despite the persuasive depictions of torture and *gezwungen dienst*, Florentina does not assume a vindictive tone in her apology or chronology. She does not interpret her ordeal at the New Helfta convent as irrefutable testimony that all women should leave the cloistered life, but instead her report is published only to preserve her honor by exculpating herself from the slander of the convent's abbess:

Und werde also durch ihr unwahrhaftig, ungegrunt, unbillich aufflegen zu rettunge meynere ehre diese schrift aus gehen zu lassen verursacht.

(And I am given cause to publish this pamphlet for the preservation of my honor because of her untruthful, unfounded, and unfair publications).<sup>18</sup>

Although it would be a tremendously rewarding investigation to explore concepts of female honor during this period, how these concepts were constructed, and why Florentina went to such tremendous lengths to defend her honor, such an investigation is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, what holds the most promise for uncovering divergent interpretations of women's agency during this period is to explore the marked incongruity between Florentina's writing and actions, as well as to compare the results of this exploration to Luther's text.

On the one side of this incongruity, Florentina's apology and chronology, even though they paint a grim picture of her suffering at the New Helfta convent, seem almost conciliatory with—even forgiving of—those who abused her in the past. Although possibly only a rhetorical device, Florentina's wish that the abbess be enlightened by the comments which she wrote in the pamphlet ("Der almechtige Gott verleyhe yhr erleuchtung und gnaden" [May the Almighty God grant her inspiration and mercy])<sup>19</sup> betrays a profound sense of Christian *caritas* for the person responsible for her suffering. Also remarkable in Florentina's writing is its tone of propriety. Although she has named the abbess as the person directly responsible for her suffering and subsequent defamation, she refuses to name and accuse the other nuns connected with the abbess, even the four who brutally flogged her. Again, the reason for her remaining silent on this issue is a profound sense of Christian *caritas*:

Weyl myrs aber meyn Christus verbeut, will ich aus des selbigen gebot zu forderst ynne halten und des namens hyrynnen auch Christlicher liebe verschonen.

(But because my Christ forbids me it, I will cease for reason of the same commandment at the outset, and for the sake of Christian love spare the names of those in this account.)<sup>20</sup>

As Florentina's rhetoric reveals, she focuses her censure, tempered with Christian *caritas*, solely against those guilty of her suffering while she was cloistered, as well as against those responsible for slandering her good name subsequent to her escape. Yet surprisingly she



leaves those only marginally involved in her suffering, as well as the entire practice of cloistering, unnamed, unchallenged, and uncriticized in her account. Although such a critique may be implicitly present in her wish that the light of Protestant truth might drive away the shadows of Catholic error, that Florentina remained relatively silent on the issue of cloistering, an issue that other women felt was of great import, is remarkable.

On the other side of this incongruity, Florentina's leaving the New Helfta convent clearly expresses a dissatisfaction with the cloistered life not present in her written text and implies that any woman should leave a convent if she so desires. Her incongruous actions and rhetoric, then, illustrate the only choice available to most women during the Reformation: a life confined by the walls of a convent or an uncertain existence on the other side. Since she neither decries the practice of cloistering nor explicitly states which side of the wall women should choose, Florentina through her example asserts that women should be individually responsible for this decision. Her account underscores the individual agency which allows her to make such a choice and establishes Florentina as an independent subject.

Luther's contributions to the pamphlet, however, emphasize a different interpretation of her story. Unlike Florentina, who relies primarily on emotionally charged accounts of unjust suffering to exculpate herself, Luther approaches her account from an analytical vantage point. His writing reveals an intellectual and theological involvement with the issue, an approach that does not aim to exculpate Florentina individually, but rather seeks to destroy the practice of cloistering women.

In his introduction to Florentina's account, Luther establishes a dichotomy between the Mansfeld counts' political power and God's sovereign power, a dichotomy for which Florentina's account will play a significant role. Luther interprets Florentina's escape from the New Helfta convent to be an exceptional token of God's will and explains it to the counts as a *mene tekel* of His divine displeasure regarding the practice of cloistering. By emphasizing the connection between Florentina's "miracle" and the place of its occurrence, Luther is thus able to reveal to the counts the emergence of the divine in matters of temporal governance. Since Florentina's story took place within the boundaries of their territory, Luther reasons that it is a special sign from God prepared especially for the counts. He

admonishes the counts not to ignore such a miracle but instead advises them that they should willingly receive the message it brings. In this way, Luther hopes that the counts will cease governing in a manner they alone see fit and will instead conform their actions to what he interprets as God's will:

Und weyl er so bestendiglich anhellt und anklopfft, auch williglich auff thun und nicht wie ander ungleubigen seyne zeychen und wunder ynn den wind schlahen.

(And since He stops and knocks so constantly, open up also willingly and do not do like the other unbelievers who throw His signs and miracles to the wind.)<sup>21</sup>

Luther, however, momentarily suspends his further interpretation of this divine will in order to expound on the dichotomy between spiritual and temporal, between believer and unbeliever. In this way, as we shall see, he lays a stronger foundation for his interpretation of Florentina's escape as a miracle and ultimately strengthens for the counts his argument for the abolition of cloistering in their lands.

Luther defines unbelievers as those who do not heed God's commandments but instead maintain that His commandments are what they conveniently wish them to be. Refusing to recognize themselves as subjects of divine jurisprudence, they instead languish under mortal hubris by presuming to judge the efficacy and pertinence of divinely established laws. The unbelievers interpret God's miracles in a similar manner. They do not believe in divine miracles per se but rather insist that it is their right to declare for themselves what should be labeled miraculous:

Was Gott fur wunder thett, das waren keyne wunder bey yhnen. Was sie aber fur wunder angaben und stympten, das solten wunder seyn.

(What miracles God would perform, they did not consider miraculous. What they indicated and declared miraculous, those things should be a miracle.)<sup>22</sup>

By delineating between believers and unbelievers in this manner, Luther establishes a moral compass, one that can navigate the waters of pride and apathy by clearly establishing for the counts standards of right and wrong, of faith and unbelief. Only after establishing these

standards does Luther introduce Florentina's account in depth. Describing her account as miraculous, and also one likely to be ignored by the unbelievers, Luther cleverly presents Florentina's account in a manner which makes it difficult for the counts to ignore. Not wishing themselves to be labeled as unbelievers, they are compelled by Luther's rhetoric to interpret her account as a manifestation of God's will concerning the practice of cloistering, with her escape assuming the form of a divinely guided miracle.

Returning once again to the topic of Florentina's account, Luther argues against the practice of cloistering since it is essentially forced service to God rather than service motivated by an individual's love of God. This violation of human agency—and not, as one might expect, the suppression of the sacrament of marriage through the practice of cloistering—forms the foundation for Luther's argumentation.<sup>23</sup>

By boldly advising the counts that it is not part of their office to drive people to God against their will but instead that their only responsibility is to preserve temporal peace, Luther intimates that their political policy of *cuius regio, cuius religio* is fundamentally unfair since the religious desires of the counts, who are in a position of authority, override those of the individual. Luther suggests in a manner similar to Florentina that all nuns and monks should be allowed to decide on the individual level whether or not they wish to continue cloistered life:

Und daneben E.G. demütiglich bitten, weyl Gott selbs solchs fordert und anhebt, das E.G., die solcher gefangenen viel ynn yhren landen haben, wollten doch zum wenigsten von treyben und anhalten ablassen (ob sie ja nicht wollten helffen los machen), sondern lassen hie eynem iglichen seyn gewissen antwortten und weren nicht, ob yemand wölle aus dem kloster gehen odder bleyben, auff das E.G. Gott nicht versuchen.

(And furthermore to humbly beseech Your Lordships, since God Himself presents and demands it, that Your Lordships, who have many such prisoners in Their lands, would at least cease from coercion and obstruction [if They indeed do not wish to help free them]; but instead let each and every one now be answerable to his conscience, and do not offer resistance if someone wishes to

depart the cloister or remain, so that Your Lordships do not tempt God.)<sup>24</sup>

However, the intent of Luther's text could not be more fundamentally different from that of Florentina. Using her account as a means to exculpate herself and assert her right of agency, Florentina writes to be heard and justified among an audience of Christian believers, as well as to lend weight to the will of the individual subject. Luther, however, writes not to excuse Florentina's actions as those of an individual, but rather to attack the practice of cloistering. Her account simply provides a convenient staging area for his attack. Although Luther may appear to arouse much public sympathy for the plight of nuns through Florentina's account, his use of Florentina's text as symbolic for all nuns undercuts the individuality of her personal experience. He states that her account is by no means a singular occurrence but is also representative of other nuns' experiences:

Denn nicht alleyn aus diser Florentina geschicht, sondern auch aus vieler andern zeugnis man wol sihet, wilch eyn teufflich ding die nonnerey und muncherey ist.

(Then not only in Florentina's account, but also in many other testimonies, can one clearly see what a devilish thing the cloistered condition of nuns and monks is.)<sup>25</sup>

Thus Luther places the practice of cloistering under public scrutiny and scorn while simultaneously banishing Florentina to the shadows. Florentina's marginalization occurs likewise in the pamphlet's conclusion. Here Luther does not directly return to Florentina's account but instead concentrates on the general moral lesson derived from her exposé of the New Helfta convent:

Sihe lieber mensch, wilch gifftig, böse, bitter, falsch, lughafftig volck die nonnen sind, wo sie am aller heyligsten und die zarten breutte Christi sind.

(Behold, dear friend, what a poisonous, evil, bitter, false, and deceitful bunch the nuns are, while they are the holiest and the tender brides of Christ).<sup>26</sup>

By emphasizing what Florentina shares with other nuns and downplaying her personal agenda, Luther is able to issue what

seems to be a sweeping imperative calling for the abolition of cloistered life. Although Luther echoes Florentina's suggestion ("sondern lassen hie eynem iglichen seyn gewissen antwortten" [but instead let each and every one now be answerable to his conscience]),<sup>27</sup> his thinly veiled agenda of absolute abolition is most keenly felt in his concluding remarks. He denounces those who force or retain people against their will and urges them to be set free:

We euch ymmer und ewiglich, herrn und fursten, eldern und freunden, die yhr ewre kinder, freunde, odder nehisten yn solch mord grüben leybs un seelen stosset odder drynnen bleyben lasset, So yhrs wol bessern kund.

(Woe unto you forever and ever, lords and counts, parents and friends, who throw your children, friends, or kin into such murderous pits of both body and soul, or who let them remain in there, when you could rectify it.)<sup>28</sup>

This apparent ambiguity, however, places Luther's position in this pamphlet on the issue of cloistering, and ultimately on women's agency, in question. In some passages, such as the one just quoted, Luther takes a dogmatic stance, calling for the end of cloistering; in others passages, he assumes a less radical voice, seemingly leaving this choice up to the individual. In either case, he does not express his interpretation of women's agency as conclusively as Florentina does and more often than not seems just to ignore it. Whether at this juncture in time such an ambiguous position was more palatable for the Mansfeld counts or because Luther himself had not precisely formulated how his agenda would be carried out and was unsure of its impact on social structures remains to be examined. Perhaps by blunting his rhetoric, Luther was anticipating and trying to avoid the unpleasant consequences of a populace excited by the incendiary pamphlet; nevertheless, during the Bauernkrieg (Farmer's War) of 1525, local peasants raided and ransacked the New Helfta convent. Yet regardless of how or for what reason he took such a position on this issue, it is clear that Florentina's account was less a personal manifestation of individuality to Luther and more a subject to his grand narrative. As such a subject, her account loses much of its efficacy as a text establishing the agency of a woman.

### LUTHER'S POLITICAL AGENDA

Despite how Florentina's account lent strength to Luther's argument, due to her lowly social stature it may appear as if Luther were making the proverbial mountain out of a molehill by bringing her story to the attention of the Mansfeld counts. Even Florentina seems aware of her insignificance, describing herself in her account in a most unpretentious fashion. Relying on allusions that underscore her weakness and unimportance, she first compares herself to an abandoned orphan

Er wurde yhe noch eyn zeyt ersehen, yn der er mir yhm alleyne verlassen weysen wurde trost der erlösung geben.

(He would still always reserve a time in which He would give me, an orphan abandoned solely to Him, the comfort of salvation.)

and then to a famished and languishing sheep:

Sind auch myr als eynem verschmachtetem hungrigem schaff, das lange der weyde gedarbet, die schriffte der rechten hirten.

(The scriptures of the right shepherd are to me as to a languishing, hungry sheep that for a long time has been in want of the meadow.)<sup>29</sup>

Through these self-descriptions, it becomes apparent that Florentina saw herself as a humble player in a human drama, an actress of a common role that was performed many times throughout German-speaking lands. The story of her escape is not much different from that of other nuns and, in its similarity to their accounts, hardly noteworthy.

Although Florentina's experience was precisely the example that Luther needed for his argument, his interest in Florentina's account, considering that there were so many to choose from, provokes the simple question: Why was it of such interest to Luther? Woven into the fabric of his introduction are hints revealing a possible answer to this question. Immediately noticeable is Luther's interest in the connection between Florentina's miracle and the place of its occurrence, between religion and local politics. As we shall see, Luther

utilizes this connection in the hope of influencing the Mansfeld counts to abolish the practice of cloistering.

Although the five Mansfeld counts addressed by Luther in his introduction were related, they could not have been more religiously or politically divided. Of the five, Albrecht VII (†1560) and Gebhard VII (†1558) professed to be Protestants with strong leanings toward Luther's teachings.<sup>30</sup> It is probable that Luther was aware of their religious predisposition at the time the pamphlet was published and was relying heavily upon their political support and influence to bring their cousins into the Protestant camp. Two other counts addressed by Luther—the brothers Ernst II (†1532) and Günter IV (†1526)—apparently did not distinguish themselves much in religious affairs. The remaining count, Hoyer VI (†1540), remained his entire life a devout Catholic and secret advisor to the Holy Roman Emperor, Karl V.

Luther found Florentina's experiences at the New Helfta convent fortuitous in two ways. First, since her experiences occurred within the territory that the Mansfeld counts governed, it gave him an uncommon opportunity to confront them directly concerning the practice of cloistering:

Es hat mich, gnedigen herrn, dis geschicht, ynn E.G. landen von Gott beweyset, vermöcht, an E.G. disen brieff zu schreyben.

(This account, merciful Lords, manifested by God in Your Lordships' lands, has enabled me to write Your Lordships this letter.)<sup>31</sup>

This emergence of the divine remains an omnipresent motif in Luther's introduction, one upon which he relies heavily in order to lend justification to his actions, as well as behind which he is able to hide his political agenda. In the course of his introduction, Luther returns repeatedly to his interpretation of Florentina's escape as a manifestation of divine will, intimating that for this reason the counts should be all the more receptive to the message that he will present them, even taking it to heart:

Weyl aber dis ynn E.G. landen Got zeyget, sollen E.G. das selb als ein sondere vermanung Gottis zu hertzen nemen.

(But because God has shown this in Your Lordships' lands, Your Lordships should take it to heart as an especial warning from God.)<sup>32</sup>

Second, not only did Florentina's "miracle" occur within the boundaries of their duchy, but also within the walls of a convent which the counts were responsible to protect, as well as where members of the Mansfeld noble family had been cloistered.<sup>33</sup> Ludwig Niemann notes that Anna (†1495) and Elisabeth (†1495), both members of the Mansfeld Vorderortische line and sisters to Hoyer VI, Ernst II, and Günter III, had been nuns at Eisleben, the same convent from which Florentina would later make her escape.<sup>34</sup> That this convent is the one identified by Luther and Florentina as the New Helfta convent is affirmed by Paul Bietsch:

In den Urkunden aus dem Anfang des 16. Jahrhundert heißt es öfter "reformirtes Jungfrauenkloster Neu-Helfta" ("Neuen Helfte, neuen Helft, Nauen Helfta, Nawe Helft"), "vor" oder "zu" Eisleben, manchmal auch "Kloster zu Eisleben" oder "Kloster Eisleben."

(In documents from the beginning of the 16th century, it is more frequently called "reformed cloister for maidens at Neu-Helfta" ("Neuen Helfte, neuen Helft, Nauen Helfta, Nawe Helft"), "before" or "at" Eisleben, sometimes also "cloister at Eisleben" or "cloister Eisleben.")<sup>35</sup>

It is most likely that the counts of Mansfeld had frequent dealings with the convent and even maintained a special patronage system with it. Furthermore, even though Anna and Elisabeth had died twenty-nine years before the publication of Luther's pamphlet, other members of the Mansfeld family were probably still cloistered there, although these are not mentioned in any extant document.

Seen in this light, Luther's interest in Florentina's account, considering that there were so many to choose from, seems transparent. By bringing Florentina's suffering to the attention of the Mansfeld counts, especially to the counts yet ambivalent toward the Protestant cause or devoutly Catholic, Luther attempts to force them to religious and political action by touching their hearts and inciting their sense of responsibility. Yet were it not for Florentina and her account, it is doubtful whether Luther could be so bold with his rhetoric or so presumptuous with his claims. After all, the inclusion of Florentina's account softens his approach by adding human interest to Luther's advice; he seems genuinely concerned for the spiritual



and physical welfare of the women cloistered at the New Helfta convent. It gives him an excuse to write the counts. By combining his religious and political agenda with Florentina's personal narrative, Luther is able to advise the counts in matters regarding the practice of cloistering and yet still appear deferential. Should we not say, then, that Florentina emerges as the pamphlet's conclusive *victrix*, its definitive conquering woman? For had it not been for Florentina or her account, none of this probably would have been a possibility for Luther.

#### NOTES

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1. Although a grabbag of diverse styles and purposes, the numerous extant copies of the pamphlet attest to its immense popularity and wide distribution in German-speaking lands. See *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15 (Weimar: Herman Böhlau Nachfolger, 1899), pp. 81–82, where these copies are listed. Copy A (with variant copies listed as A<sup>a</sup>, A<sup>b</sup>, and A<sup>x</sup>) was published by Lucas Cranach and Christian Döring in Wittenberg; Copy B was published by Melchior Kamminger, or possibly Phillip Ulhard d. Ä(lder) in Augsburg; Copy C was most likely published by Matthes Maler in Erfurt; Copy D was possibly published by Josbt Guknecht in Nürnberg. According to the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, the two remaining variants, copies E and F, cannot be traced to a certain publisher or place of publication. The frontispiece of copy F, however, varies from the other pamphlets in that it is more highly decorated with a picture. The other pamphlets simply have the title within a xylographic border whose few illustrations are thematically irrelevant to the text. Counted all together, there is a total of eight extant variations of the pamphlet, attesting to a wide variety of editions and places of publication. Some were published geographically close to the center of the Protestant movement in Wittenberg, whereas others appeared in the more remote cities of Nürnberg and Augsburg. For copies of these pamphlets in microfiche format, see also Hans-Joachim Köhler, *Flugschriften des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts* (1978), fch. 139, grid 384; fch. 1018, grid 2571; fch. 1063, grid 2683; fch. 1085, grid 2749; fch. 1329, grid 3476.

2. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), vol. 8, p. 101; Mary Jeremy Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), p. 5; Helmut Lehmann et al., eds., *Luther's Works: American Edition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), vol. 43, pp. 83–84; Steven Ozment, "Pamphlet Literature of the German Reformation," in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), p. 93; and *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 19–20.
3. See Mary Beth Rose, ed., *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), p. xv, who asserts that a lost history of women's experiences in the Reformation should be reconstructed through an examination of ordinary and obscure women, as well as the investigation of texts written by women themselves.
4. This critique is most pronounced in feminist scholars' evaluations of the new historicism as a means of uncovering the female experience in history. See especially Judith Lowder Newton, "History as Usual? Feminism and the 'New Historicism,'" in *The New Historicism*, ed. Aram Veveser (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), and "Family Fortunes: 'New History' and 'New Historicism,'" *Radical History Review* 43 (1989).
5. Merry E. Wiesner, *Woman and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 186–89.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
7. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15, p. 89.
8. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
9. Merry E. Wiesner, "Women's Defense of Their Public Role," in Rose, ed., p. 10.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15, p. 89.
12. *Ibid.*
13. The *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (pp. 89ff.) identifies this nun as Katherina von Oberweimar, who was in charge of all the novice nuns, including probably Florentina. A manuscript from the Staatsarchiv Magdeburg dated 14 May 1516 recognizes a Katerina von Uberweymar as the *novicarium meisterin*. See Max Krühne, *Urkundenbuch der Klöster der Grafschaft Mansfeld* (Halle: Otto Hendel, 1888), p. 243.
14. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15, p. 90.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
30. Niemann identifies these counts as Albrecht VII and Gebhard VII, whereas Hempel identifies them as Albrecht IV and Gebhard VI. See Ludwig Ferdinand Niemann, *Geschichte der Grafen von Mansfeld* (Aschersleben: Druck und Verlag von C. Lorleberg, 1834), and Erich Hempel, *Die Stellung der Grafen von Mansfeld zum Reich und zum Landesfürsten (bis zur Sequestration)* (Halle a. d. S: Gebauer-Schetschke Druckerei und Verlag m. b. H., 1917).
31. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15, p. 86.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
33. Regarding the Mansfeld counts' responsibility toward the convent at New Helfta, see Max Krühne: "es zu vertreten und zu schützen, hatten sich die Mansfelder Grafen, dann die Edlen v. Hakeborn, verpflichtet. Im 15. Jahrhundert erscheint die Vogtei im Mansfelder Besitz" (*Urkundenbuch der Klöster der Grafschaft Mansfeld* [Halle: Otto Hendel, 1888], p. xvii).
34. See Niemann, pp. 138–39.
35. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15, p. 79.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Hilary Collier Sy-Quia is a doctoral candidate in the Department of German at the University of California at Berkeley, where she is writing her dissertation on Christa Wolf's literary output since 1990, with an emphasis on her 1996 daring rewriting of the Medea myth. She chaired the Fifth Annual Interdisciplinary German Studies Graduate Student Conference at Berkeley, out of which this present volume of essays emerged.

Susanne Baackmann is Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. She has published a book on the discourse and choreography of love as reflected in contemporary women's writing (*Erklär mir Liebe: Weibliche Schreibweisen in der Gegenwarts-literatur*, 1995). Currently she is working on a book-length study tracing the intersections of history, memory, and gender in recent German literature and culture.



Jennifer V. Evans is a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Her dissertation focuses on postwar Berlin in an attempt to understand how competing notions of sexual delinquency differentially shaped the political landscape of national belonging for the men and women of the emerging two Germanies.

Jennifer M. Kapczynski is a doctoral candidate at the University of California at Berkeley, where she is writing a dissertation on the figure of the returning soldier after World War II. Her research interests include the relationship among gender, the nation, and nationalism. In the fall of 1999 she chaired the Eighth Annual Interdisciplinary German Studies Graduate Student Conference at Berkeley, addressing "The German Soldier."

Kristin Kopp is a doctoral candidate in the Department of German at the University of California at Berkeley, where she is currently writing her dissertation investigating the cultural ramifications of the German colonization of East European territories.

Elisabeth Krimmer received her Ph.D. in German Literature and Culture from the University of Massachusetts and now teaches at the University of Missouri.

Janice Monger received her Bachelor of Arts in Art History from Whitman College in 1997. She currently works at Davidson Galleries in Seattle, where she maintains here interest in early twentieth-century German art. She and Andrea Wuerth were awarded the Louis B. Perry Fellowship for faculty-student collaboration from Whitman College in 1996 to conduct research in Germany for their paper.

David O. Neville is a Ph.D. candidate in German Language and Literature at Washington University in St. Louis. His interests are the medieval and early modern periods, as well as medieval Latin literature. Recently he was awarded a DAAD annual grant to study at the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich, where he will work on his dissertation, which explores themes of sin and purity in Mechthild von Magdeburg's "Das fließende Licht der Gottheit."

Ellen Rees is Assistant Professor of Scandinavian Studies and Women's Studies at Arizona State University. She received her Ph.D. in Scandinavian Languages and Literatures from the University of Washington in 1995. Her primary research interests are experimental prose fiction and constructs of gender identity in literary modernism.

Renée M. Schell received her Magister in German Literature from the University of Bonn. She completed her Ph.D. in German Studies at Stanford University and now teaches at San Jose State University. Her research interests include the figure of the woman warrior from the Amazons to Xena, Weimar cinema, and notions of masculinity.

Andrea Wuerth received her Ph.D. in political science from Johns Hopkins University in 1995. She has taught at Johns Hopkins and at Whitman College and has been a visiting scholar at the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California and UCLA's Center for the Study of Women. She is the author of numerous articles on abortion politics in post-Wall Germany.