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Elizabeth Boa and Janet Wharton, eds.: Women and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections of the German Reunification Process

Katharina von Ankum
Cornell University

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BOOK REVIEWS

Boa, Elizabeth and Janet Wharton, eds. *Women and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections of the German Unification Process*. German Monitor 31. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. 264 pp.

The essays collected in *Women and the Wende* are the published proceedings of the Women in German Studies conference held in Nottingham, England, in 1993. Bringing together scholars from a variety of disciplines—political science, sociology, literary criticism, art, media studies—and several countries—primarily Great Britain, but also (East) Germany and the United States—the collection documents a bygone stage in academic research on women in the GDR. Reading these contributions five years after unification, i.e. two years after they were presented in the context of the conference, I am uncomfortably reminded of the debates taking place in the US around the same time, when angry expressions of solidarity lamenting East German women's fates as losers of unification blocked much scholarly analysis.

The contributions address a number of issues central to women's lives such as access to abortion, gender-stratification of the labor market, and discrimination in the political and cultural sphere. However, the volume's focus on the immediate post-*Wende* years frequently curtails the critical and analytical dimension of the debates. *Women and the Wende* largely continues the tradition of "reporting from behind the iron curtain" that marked so much GDR research undertaken prior to 1989. The necessary historicization of the GDR and its political and cultural discourses is far less a concern to most contributors than is the continuation of a utopian bent of feminist GDR research rooted in an essentialist notion of femininity. This outlook creates such unlikely allies as Sabine Bergmann-Pohl, CDU, who presents her plea for a societal reevaluation of women's nurturing roles as a political answer to disproportionately high female unemployment, and Georgina Paul, who would rather see lesbians quietly living a societal alternative than noisily clamoring for social equality.

Only a few contributors analyze representational gendered discourses that make the collection worth reading even five years after the *Wende*. Martha Wörsching's analysis of the GDR women's journal *Für Dich* vividly illustrates the propagandistic

function of femininity in the GDR. Ingrid Sharp's discussion of the sexualized discourse of unification exposes the patriarchal continuum between both systems. Anna Kuhn's documentation of the Christa Wolf debate reveals the connections between the discreditation of a feminine/female aesthetics and the moral outrage over a woman writer's personal politics. Making the academic discourse on GDR women itself the subject of her analysis, Irene Dölling identifies a dangerous tendency among (East German) feminist scholars to limit their own critical perspective by GDR nostalgia and hide behind an undifferentiated "Subjekt Frau," internalizing the status of "victim of the unification process." This self-critical perspective on the profession that puts into question many of the other contributions is, however, safely buried in the middle of the collection. Instead, it is the powerful yet nostalgic literary reflections by Barbara Köhler and Helga Königsdorf that set the tone for the volume, making it a historical document rather than a point of departure for future feminist research on the GDR.

KATHARINA VON ANKUM
Cornell University

Böthig, Peter and Klaus Michael, eds. *Machtspiele. Literatur und Staatssicherheit*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1993.

By now this collection has become more or less a companion volume to *Der deutsch-deutsche Literaturstreit* edited by Karl Deiritz and Hannes Krauss in 1991. It contents certainly add credence to the claim put forth by contributing author Gabriele Dietze that "die Wiedervereinigung uns in eine neue Denunziationskultur stürzt" (29), a dubious distinction fueled mercilessly by the feuilletonist one-upmanship of the conquering West. By exposing the IM activities of two GDR writers, Sascha Anderson and Reiner Schedlinski, it has become possible to discredit the entire avant-garde movement of the 1980s. Therefore, using the logic of the *Literaturstreit*, if Christa Wolf is tainted, then nothing of literary value could have ever been produced in the GDR by her nor by anyone else; and likewise, it follows, à la Frank Schirrmacher, that Anderson's activities "zerstört den letzten Glauben an eine genuine, intakte DDR-Kunst" (305).

Peter Böthig and Klaus Michael have put together a collection of over 40 essays which includes a