

1995

Jeanette Clausen and Sara Friedrichsmeyer, eds.: Women in German 9. Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture

Christina Guenther
Bowling Green State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/gdr>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Guenther, Christina (1995) "Jeanette Clausen and Sara Friedrichsmeyer, eds.: Women in German 9. Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 22: Iss. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v22i1.1162>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in GDR Bulletin by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

laments the pollution of trees and streams, expresses a disdain for the automobile because only the stroller can really penetrate a landscape, pronounces the Bible the greatest poetic work of world literature, and tells us that the task of the human race lies in becoming and not just in being. The most exciting event of Cibulka's stay in Dornburg is a gigantic traffic jam occasioned by the breakdown of a T-32 tank on Main Street.

In the last of the journals, *Wegscheide* (1988), the poet writes about his stay in a little cottage in the middle of the *Thüringer Wald* which he rented from March to December upon retirement from his position as head of the district library in Gotha. The motto of the journal, a quotation from Dostoevsky asserting that it is hard to believe that anybody can walk past a tree and not be happy, becomes flesh and blood as Cibulka proceeds to depict in minute fashion the effects of the changing seasons on nature. The journal owes its title to Cibulka's insistence that technology will destroy humankind unless there is a spiritual regeneration and to this end he even enlists the services of Meister Eckhart, who was born near Gotha. The laments about pesticides and herbicides are much louder than in the previous diary, and concerns about the environment and nuclear destruction come to be shared by a cabinet-member named Robert, who is the only neighbor with whom the poet associates. The intellectual climax of the journal is a detailed description by Robert of the destructive force of a nuclear bomb; it comes across as artificial, as a lecture by a professor or a lengthy quotation from a treatise. The spiritual climax is a moving poem in prose to the lowly sparrow, an attestation of Cibulka's reverence for life, one of the qualities that can compensate for the boring stretches of his journals. Another is a deep religiosity, epitomized in the poet's own version of St. Anselm's ontological argument: "Dass der Mensch das Zeitlose denken kann, ist das nicht schon ein Zeichen dafür, dass es das Zeitlose gibt?" (261)

RALPH LEY
Rutgers University

Clausen, Jeanette and Sara Friedrichsmeyer, eds.
Women in German 9: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. ISBN 0-8032-9754-8

The ninth *Women in German Yearbook* represents a rich contribution to an often neglected area of German Cultural Studies, namely German Women's Studies. The *Yearbook's* fifteen articles investigate social, political, historical, and literary texts

spanning the middle ages to the present. The articles are arranged in chronological order according to topic, and a helpful abstract precedes each article. Despite the wide range of topics and feminist approaches, all authors engage in a feminism that strives toward meaningful social change. The juxtaposition of essays reveals an, according to the editors, unanticipated recurrence of concerns and issues. The authors of the articles problematize the politics of identity in literature and culture as it relates to gender difference, class, race and nationality.

In the first article, A. Allen provides an overview of the development of Women's Studies in West Germany and the US during its early phase between 1966 and 1982. Although Women's Studies in both countries share a similar theoretical basis, Allen uncovers the different roots, i.e. cultural and political contexts, the divergent social composition of Women's Studies advocates in each country and their intellectual paradigms. This comparison offers us a reevaluation of strategies to transform knowledge, the utopian goal toward which both Women's Studies in Germany and the US continue to work. The article serves as a thoughtful introduction to the *Yearbook*. The rest of the volume is loosely organized into three sections. The first articles provide interpretations of literary and cultural texts from the middle ages to the 19th century, the middle section is devoted to GDR Studies, and the last section deals with issues of colonialism and race.

The two articles on medieval texts of the first segment investigate modes of discourse. S. Morrison engages in gynocriticism as she questions the pejorative classification of 15th century German adaptations of *chansons de geste* by Elisabeth von Nassau and Eleonore von Österreich as *Trivilliteratur*. Bearing in mind the work and the producer of the work, she analyzes the construction of identity through discourse. In the second contribution to medieval studies, C. Griebhaber-Weninger also investigates gender-specific differences in discourse and modes of interaction in Harsdörffer's 17th century *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* and demonstrates how current gender-specific modes of interaction may be traced back to a long tradition of female education.

The 19th century is the focus of the next two articles. F. Pickar contributes a feminist close-reading of Droste-Hülshoff's canonical text, *Die Judenbuche*, revealing Droste's sensitivity to the plight of women as well as a gender-bias or, in her words, misogyny in traditional literary criticism.

Pickar demonstrates this bias in an interpretation of Margarethe, a character that is marginalized by both the “judgmental” narrator and, hence, by literary critics. In the second article dealing with a 19th century topic, K. Belgum underscores the importance of the 19th century popular family magazine, *Die Gartenlaube*. Belgum analyzes both the topics and self-reflexive discourse, and the appeal and impact of the printed “messages” that established ideals of national, class, and familial gendered identity among its middle-class readership.

The middle four articles are devoted to socio-political and literary developments in the former GDR. K. Sieg rediscovers four plays (Petra Zehlen’s 1951 comedy *Dramaturgie und Liebe*, Regina Halstedt’s musical, *Wer ist hier von gestern? oder Hausfrau gesucht*, Berta Waterstradt’s 1958 drama *Ehesache Lorenz*, and Rosel Willer’s 1963 *Gelegenheit macht Liebe*) analyzing the discrepancies between *Sein* and *Bewußtsein* as these women dramatists come to grips with the issue of gender equality in the GDR. She interprets how each female dramatist negotiates contradictory messages regarding women’s identity and roles in the socialist state during the *Aufbauzeit*. This discussion is complemented by K. von Ankum’s analysis of the contradictory development in GDR abortion legislation. Von Ankum concludes that the 1972 law legalizing abortion demonstrated control of the SED over women’s bodies and not a move toward women’s equality.

F. Eigler and K. Eysel offer feminist revaluations of GDR literature. Eigler explores the works by writer Elke Erb and performance artist Gabriele Kachold, both, in her estimation, marginalized artists of the alternative cultural movement of the Prenzlauer Berg. Analyzing the content, context and form, an aspect neglected in literary criticism of engaged GDR literature, Eigler discovers innovations on the linguistic and stylistic level that reflect in both artists’ works an awareness of gender and power relations. Eysel focuses on the politics of nationalism in Wolf’s *Kassandra* and argues persuasively that Wolf reveals the connections between GDR nationalist and imperialist and colonialist discourses in her adaptation of the patriarchal myth of antiquity and offers instead an alternative vision of identity that is transnational in character.

The final articles address the urgent issue of racism, calling our attention to its various forms. P. Waschescio begins this sequence with an introduction to (West) German essayist, poet, and dramatist Gisela von Wysocki. Waschescio

recognizes in von Wysocki’s first drama *Abendlandleben* (1987) a deconstruction of masculinist Enlightenment discourse with its binary thinking and its complicity in the process of colonialism. The following article offers the first lengthy interpretation of Ruth Klüger’s *weiter leben* (1992). According to D. Lorenz, this childhood memoir represents a feminist challenge to a much needed Jewish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. S. Lennox introduces two contributions by participants of the 1992 Women in German Conference on “Racism in Germany.” With her personal coming-of-age narrative, Afro-German activist Ika Hügel identifies the links between national identity, nationalism, and racism. She thereby offers to Germans and North Americans activist strategies against racism. Identifying herself as a white “Christian” woman in Germany, Dagmar Schultz reflects on the different racisms in Germany and examines public policy that allows for racism and anti-Semitism in particular. She ends her article with a call to the women’s movement in both Germany and the United States to clarify the connection(s) between sexism, racism, anti-Semitism and classism.

The *Yearbook* ends with the editors’ thoughtful discussion of the problems of new historicism for feminists. The broad spectrum of topics, feminist approaches and information on women’s history, contemporary culture, and politics make this *Yearbook* a valuable and necessary resource for Germanists.

CHRISTINA GUENTHER
Bowling Green State University

Faber, Elmar und Carsten Wurm, Hg. “Das letzte Wort hat der Minister.” Autoren- und Verlegerbriefe 1960-1969. Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag (Nr. 8010), 1994. 424 S.

Dieses Buch stellt den dritten Band einer wohl noch nicht abgeschlossenen Reihe dar, die den Briefwechsel zwischen Autoren und Vertretern des Aufbau-Verlags dokumentiert. Die ersten beiden Bände erschienen unter den Titeln “Allein mit Lebensmittelkarten ist es nicht auszuhalten . . .” (Nr. 1) und “. . . und leiser Jubel zöge ein” (Nr. 100); sie decken die Zeit von 1945-1949 bzw. 1950-1959 ab. In der Fortführung sind sowohl die Namen von bekannten DDR-Schriftstellern (etwa Brigitte Reimann, Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf oder Erwin Strittmatter) als auch relativ unbekannteren (z.B.