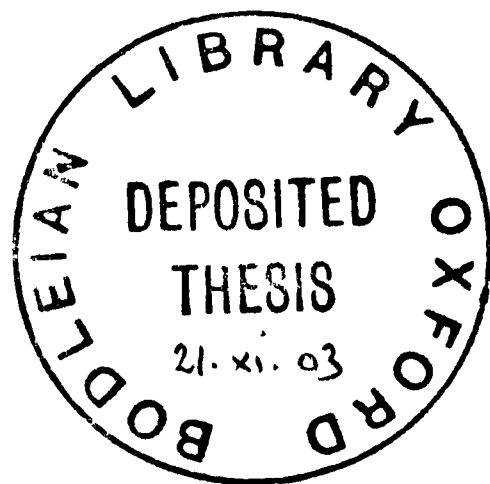


The Diligent Dilettante:

Women Writers in Germany 1770-1820



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Short abstract

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The thesis sets out to explain the presence of women writers in the book market of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In order to do so, it examines the position of women writers in Germany – in the context both of their discursive and of their social reality. The thesis investigates the ideological and material background for women's writing, by exploring the areas of gender ideology, contemporary concepts of authorship, women's reading, and the literary market. The final chapter examines women's freedom of expression in different public circumstances. The thesis argues that women's position in the business of culture in general and literature in particular is not as unpromising as has often been claimed. By investigating less well-known texts on gender roles, such as eighteenth-century journal articles, it is possible to show that the rhetoric of prohibitions, for example regarding women's reading and writing, was by no means uniform, but fragmentary and frequently contradictory. Women's own responses to the conditions under which they were working are highlighted throughout the thesis, and examined on the basis of a range of texts, including unpublished correspondence. The examination of non-literary factors, such as the expansion of the literary market and the emergence of a newly diverse reading public, enables the identification of causes other than gender as determining women's position as writers during this period. In the course of this study, numerous neglected texts are considered, which broaden our understanding of this period of literature. The creative and successful use which women writers made of the opportunities they were afforded is emphasised throughout, thereby making an important contribution to the study of women writers.

The Diligent Dilettante: Women Writers in Germany 1770-1820

Long abstract

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In recent years, much work has been done to rescue the texts of women writers from obscurity. Writers like Therese Huber and Caroline Auguste Fischer have been rediscovered and reprinted. Scholars in the English- and German-speaking world have received their works, conferences to discuss their writing have been organised, and a new canon of women authors who were contemporaries of Goethe is beginning to emerge. But the discovery of these authors and their texts has also necessitated an examination of why they were forgotten in the first place. As an explanation of their historical exclusion women's disadvantaged and restricted position on all levels of society – legal, educational and ideological – has been diagnosed. But the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of a narrative of victimhood: it is now not at all evident how women ever managed to enter the literary market in the first place, given their unenviable social and economic position. This thesis aims to explain that presence, and to highlight the opportunities which women authors were able to exploit in eighteenth-century Germany.

Chapter One investigates eighteenth-century ideologies of gender as the rhetorical background in which women writers wrote and lived. Well-known texts by writers such as Joachim Heinrich Campe, Ernst Brandes, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Friedrich Schiller are examined as representatives of a school of thought which constructed

women's gender identity ('Geschlechtscharakter') as essentially different from that of men. Women's alleged differences in character were based on the differences in their bodies, and reflected their unique role in society as mothers, wives and housekeepers ('Bestimmung'). The polarisation of gender difference, so frequently cited as a primary cause for women's exclusion from creative writing, is seen as fundamental to the discussions of appropriate gender roles quoted in later chapters. But this polarisation was not unchallenged: Jakob Mauvillon and Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel are seen as vociferous opponents of the Humboldtian idea that gender identities were rooted in nature, arguing instead that they were the direct consequence of women's social and historical condition. Women also criticised the place accorded to them in the writings of their male counterparts, and amended it in their own writing: Susanne von Bandemer is presented as an example. The discussion of the rhetoric of 'Geschlechtscharakter' and 'Bestimmung' concludes with the verdict that the discourse was not monolithic, but rather multi-faceted, and often confused. The ambiguity of the debate is interpreted as a sign that women's status was not cast in stone, but still being negotiated, and in need of justification. The fact that this fierce debate took place at all, and was being engaged in by so many male writers and thinkers of the age, is indeed proof of the fact that women were already, and irrevocably, part of the literary and social life of Germany.

In Chapter Two, the debate surrounding women's social role and putative sexual character is related to the discussion of female authorship. Women's writing was widely regarded in the eighteenth century as a problematic and undesirable development, and discussions of female authorship in journals and didactic treatises such as Campe's

Väterlicher Rath (1789) were often accompanied by dire warnings of the threat which writing posed to their health and to their souls. More sophisticated aesthetic concepts of authorship, propagated by Goethe and Schiller, excluded women from high artistic achievement *a priori*. But elsewhere, there is much evidence of a genuine fascination by, and interest in, the phenomenon of women writers. Four contemporary compilations of women writers are analysed with regard to their attitude to the emergence of women writers as a definite feature of the book market. Although they did to some extent reflect a negative stance towards female authorship (especially Samuel Baur's dictionary of women writers), their very existence also acknowledged that women authors could no longer be ignored. Carl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel's work, *Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1823-5), took women writers most seriously, and defended the legitimacy of their writing most explicitly. Examples of women's own reflections on female authorship, drawn from private letters as well as published writings, illustrate a distinct self-confidence in asserting their status as writers.

Chapter Three explores how women's actual freedom to read was affected by a panic-stricken discourse about the dangers of women's reading. Women's experiences of reading varied depending on their family's attitude, income and even religious outlook. But nearly all surviving statements about women's reading indicate its importance in their lives, and the pleasure they derived from it. Although earlier studies overstated the extent to which the eighteenth century witnessed a reading revolution and democratisation of reading, there is no reason to assume that vituperative attacks on women's reading succeeded in controlling the phenomenon: on the contrary. The example of Elisa von der

Recke shows how even the most hostile husband and family could not succeed in curbing her interest in literature, or diminish its importance in her life. Instead, their vitriolic attacks on her reading only strengthened her affection for her favourite authors, and deepened her sense of identification with fictional heroines. This intensity of reading can be interpreted both as a contributing factor of her own authorship, and as an illustration of the role which literature could play in the lives of women readers. The extent to which reading could become the focal point of entire households, especially among the well-to-do aristocracy, is vividly demonstrated in the case of Luise Stolberg. In her family, reading assumed greater importance than any other activity, thereby proving right the worst fears of her male contemporaries. This eager readership of women, who read whenever they had an opportunity, clearly provided an ideal receptive audience for women writers.

Based on this observation of female readership, the position of women authors in the German book market is examined in Chapter Four. Economic and structural changes in the publishing industry are examined with regard to their effect on women authors. The emergence of a varied, less specialist readership looking to books for entertainment, and demanding a constantly renewed supply of reading matter is interpreted as a favourable condition in which women sought publication. Women's quest for publication is traced in their correspondence with two of the main publishers of the age: Georg Joachim Göschen and Friedrich Nicolai. This correspondence, of which scarcely any has yet been studied, and much of it by neglected and forgotten writers, provides ample evidence of women's confident and assertive interaction with these publishers. These letters also explain how

women were able to exploit the opportunities which the market represented through their own proactive behaviour. The business letters written by women are also a welcome extension of the traditional image of the nature of women's letter-writing during this period.

The fifth, and final, chapter of the thesis takes further the examination of the opportunities that existed for women, by exploring a range of their texts in which they engaged with questions of gender. The *Teutscher Merkur* is studied as an example of a mainstream literary journal, in which women's expression might be thought to be limited to the expression of socially acceptable norms. However, conformity to gender stereotypes is not evident in the texts examined, and women are instead found to be forceful on the subject of the status of their own sex. Women's responses to male ideas of female education are scrutinized in the second section, which argues that women clearly did feel entitled to speak in public on such controversial matters, and did not leave the ideas propounded by men like Campe unchallenged. The final section studies three examples of women using publication in order to respond to their critics, and to regain control over their disparaged public reputations. Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld, Elise Bürger and Wilhelmine von Lichtenau all turn to publication for different, personal reasons. But they, like the female contributors to the *Teutscher Merkur* and Campe's opponents, share a complete disregard for the division between the public and the private sphere so often interpreted as a key feature of women's position by scholars. Publicity, it becomes clear, did more than pose a threat to women writers: it also afforded them opportunities.

Our understanding of the position of women writers during this period is enhanced in several important ways through this study. The thesis employs a range of texts to illustrate its findings, many of which are not well-known. Journal articles in particular are seen as a space in which questions of gender were considered and discussed, though ultimately they were not uniformly resolved. Other sources, such as unpublished archival material, are clearly valuable in revealing women's strategies in seeking publication. They show women as active in pursuing their own destinies, not passive in accepting their fate. The employment of extra-literary material such as book market statistics shows that women's gender is only one factor amongst many influencing women's position in the literary market. The use of such empirical material is a safeguard against those interpretations which tend to see the prohibitive discourse of the era as a description of historical reality. In fact, they were an attempt to lock the stable door after the horse had bolted: women were an ineluctable presence on the literary market. In using such evidence this thesis aims to retrieve the historical reality of women writers, highlighting the opportunities they took, and the pitfalls they avoided, rather than the exclusion they suffered.

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Abbreviations

Libraries and archives

FDH:	Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Frankfurter Goethe-Museum, Großer Hirschgraben 23-25, 60311 Frankfurt am Main
GSA:	Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Hans-Wahl-Straße 4, 99425 Weimar
SAH:	Stadtarchiv, Am Bokemahle 14-16, 30171 Hannover
DBSM:	Deutsches Buch- und Schriftmuseum, Deutscher Platz 1, 04103 Leipzig
TSUK:	Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung, Universität zu Köln, Schloß Wahn, Burgallee 2, 51127 Köln
SLUB:	Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Zellescher Weg 18, 01069 Dresden
SBB-PK	Staatsbibliothek Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 10102 Berlin

Introduction

This thesis aims to revisit the real historical identities of women writers in the period 1770-1820. The women concerned wrote books on education, collections of essays and poems, travelogues, dramas, novels and autobiographies. Some of these women were well-connected in literary circles, others appear to have been on the fringes of Germany's literary public. Their domestic circumstances varied: some were mothers of ten, some were spinsters, some married and divorced several times. The contemporary book market as whole is reflected in their writings, both in the variety of genres represented and in the variable quality of their writing. But aesthetic considerations are not the focus of this thesis. Instead, the thesis asks how, practically, women writers gained access to the literary market, how they traversed the pitfalls of gender ideology and how they legitimized their writing and life choices. In doing so, the thesis highlights the room for manoeuvre open to women, rather than investigating how women writers were disenfranchized by eighteenth-century social, legal and literary norms.

This re-examination of the position of women authors in German society is necessary because their lives have become obscured by two levels of discourse: the eighteenth-century discussions, mainly of gender and related subjects (such as women's reading and writing), and the modern discourse of feminist scholarship on women writers. With regard to the former, the thesis seeks, firstly, to point out the *rhetorical* (rather than historical-actual) nature of these discussions, and secondly, to broaden our knowledge of eighteenth-century discourse by considering a wider range of texts, including many minor

and neglected ones (especially journal articles). With regard to the latter, the thesis attempts to break free from misleading dogmas about eighteenth-century women writers, which have become commonplace in their study. In this thesis, women writers are regarded from the outset as intrinsically linked to the cultural literary life of Germany during the Enlightenment, rather than as distinct from it. This represents a change of perspective in feminist scholarship, which has previously, to a large extent, focused on women's exclusion from the public (including the literary) sphere. Whilst women's exclusion is not denied in this thesis, it is not the whole story. A linear, monocausal narrative of repression cannot express the complexity of women's position in German literary life. In contrast to the well-known assertion that women writers were 'outsiders' in literary culture, this thesis explores the opportunities which existed for them during this period.¹

The starting point for the thesis is the simple fact of women's definite *presence* in German literary life between 1770 and 1820. Women wrote some of the best-selling titles on the market, from Sophie von la Roche's *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771) at the beginning of the expansion of the literary market, to its peak in Karoline von Wobeser's *Elisa oder das Weib wie es sein sollte* (1795). The latter had gone into four editions by 1799. Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century dictionaries of women writers indicate contemporary awareness of the development. Samuel Baur listed 78 women writers in 1790; Carl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel included several hundred women writers in *Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1823-

¹ Quoted from Barbara Becker-Cantarino, "'Outsiders': Women in German Literary Culture of Absolutism", *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 2 (1984).

5).² Susanne Kord's recent study of women writers and anonymity concludes that more than 3,900 women authors published in the German-speaking countries in the 1700s and 1800s.³ Her previous analysis of women dramatists lists 315 authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who wrote over 2,000 dramas between them.⁴ More specific figures for the period around 1800 are difficult to obtain. Few bibliographies of women's literature of this period exist. One of them is Helga Gallas and Anita Runge's bibliography of women's published novels and stories between 1771 and 1810, which highlights trends, even if it does not represent the total numbers of publications by women.⁵ Even though it does not include dramas, autobiographies, poetry collections or publications in journals, it still lists 110 female authors who published fiction in book form during those forty years. Altogether they published an impressive 396 books, of which twenty-four are partially revised second editions under a new title. While sixty-two women only published one book each (though they may have published more in journals and magazines), many women managed to sustain a career. Some women published more than a dozen books: Johanna Isabella Eleonore von Wallenrodt published eighteen, and Therese Huber fifteen. Several more published between seven and twelve books, but the undeniable giants (in quantity at least) of women's writing were Benedikte Naubert, who published no fewer than fifty-nine books, and Sophie von La Roche, author of thirty-

² Samuel Baur, *Deutschlands Schriftstellerinnen von Samuel Baur*, ed. Uta Sadji, Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik vol. 194 (Stuttgart: Heinz Akademischer Verlag, 1990). Carl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel, *Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1823-1825).

³ See Susanne Kord, *Sich einen Namen machen. Anonymität und weibliche Autorschaft 1700-1900*, Ergebnisse der Frauenforschung vol. 41 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), p. 13.

⁴ See Susanne Kord, *Ein Blick hinter die Kulissen. Deutschsprachige Dramatikerinnen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Ergebnisse der Frauenforschung vol. 27 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992).

⁵ The statistical analysis of the bibliography, apart from the graphs, is by Gallas and Runge, and appears in Helga Gallas and Anita Runge, *Romane und Erzählungen deutscher Schriftstellerinnen um 1800: eine Bibliographie mit Standortnachweisen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993), pp. 11-13.

five.⁶ Such an astonishing presence of women writers on all levels of literary life, and in all genres, cannot be explained by such metaphors as women writers existing ‘in the shadow of Olympus’, or entering the literary market ‘durch die Hintertür.’⁷

This presence has to be reiterated, given feminist scholars’ concentration on women’s educational, social and legal disadvantages. An examination of eighteenth-century gender discourse, always cited as a primary cause of women’s social and literary exclusion, follows in Chapter One. It shows that the eighteenth-century discussion of the role of the sexes was by no means uniform and monolithic, but rather fragmented and contradictory. The discussion is furthermore interpreted not as a description of women’s actual marginalization, but as an attempt to re-impose discursive control on a social development which had already got out of hand. It is also clear from this examination that modern scholarship has often wrongly equated discourse with social reality, thereby overestimating its influence.

Chapter Two examines the intersection of gender discourses and concepts of authorship. Male writers and reviewers have been regarded by feminist scholarship as exerting a kind of ‘gender censorship’ through the construction of models of authorship, excluding women *a priori*.⁸ But these restrictions were undermined by a continuing ambiguity in the debate about women writers, and by the increasing numbers of women

⁶ Benedikte Naubert published at least one novel a year between 1785 and 1795, in one year she even published four novels. See Jeannine Blackwell and Susanne Zantop, eds., *Bitter Healing: German Women Writers from 1700 to 1830. An Anthology*, European Women Writers (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 203.

⁷ See Katherine Goodman and Edith Josefine Waldstein, *In the shadow of Olympus: German women writers around 1800* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), and Kord, *Ein Blick*, p. 226.

⁸ Quoted from Barbara Becker-Cantarino, “‘Gender Censorship’: On Literary Production in German Romanticism”, *Women in German Yearbook* 11 (1995).

who entered the literary market despite these prohibitions – not infrequently with the help of precisely those men keen to keep them out. Consequently, several texts demonstrate that women writers often had a healthy, unimpeded sense of the validity of their writing activity.

Chapter Three examines women's reading during this period. Simple descriptive patterns of the phenomenon are rejected in favour of a more complex understanding of women's reading. Old reading modes continued to coexist with new reading habits, and women's individual freedom to read depended not just on their social class, but also on their personal circumstances, which frequently changed during their lifetime. But a strong association between women and reading is discernible, which laid the foundation for a reading public to which women writers could appeal.

This reading public, and the literary market as a whole, is the subject of Chapter Four. Changes in the book trade are examined with regard to the implications for women writers. The market situation as a whole is interpreted as favourable to women writers at this time of expansion and diversification, as shown by the fact that the rise in the numbers of women writers is parallel to the rise in the number of authors overall. Women's apparent ability to seize these opportunities is explained by an examination of their correspondence with publishers. This reveals their at times dogged pursuit of publication. The letters also demonstrate the deliberate use women made of normative gender discourse: women's putative gender characteristics appear not to be internalized, but deployed for strategic purposes.

Finally, the thesis questions the view that femininity and the public sphere were inimical. Textual examples from three different areas reveal the freedom with which women engaged in contemporary debates, especially about gender issues, but also about wider topics such as education. Despite certain traits being condemned as ‘unfeminine’, the writers in the last chapter are eager to disagree with men, keen to express their point of view in public, and determined to be in charge of their public image. These women authors do not conform to the admonition to be pliable, humble and self-deprecating: instead they are keen to assert their personal perspective and to affirm their identity on their own terms. Publicity is found not to be an adverse condition for these women, but essential to achieving their purpose.

The oxymoron in the title of this thesis, *The Diligent Dilettante*, is intended to reflect the absurdities of a position in which prohibitive discourse is taken to represent reality. If we consider women writers largely in the light of those who oppose them, we do not actually correct their historical exclusion. In fact, we exacerbate its effects. These real historical women have been excluded from their own historical reality, with all its confusions and idiosyncrasies, and denied their own agency by being labelled victims of their age. Schiller uses the term ‘dilettante’ to push women writers from the centre of literary life into its margins. Literary historians have been too quick to follow Schiller’s lead. In fact, examining the situation as Schiller himself knew it, we see that women writers, by their diligence, by their professionalism – in fact, by means of a character as

far from dilettantism as possible – entered every area of literary life, and often on their own terms.

Chapter 1: 'Weiber=Apologeten' and 'Mode-Misogyne':¹ Ideologies of Gender

'Ich kenne nichts Trivialeres, als die Vorstellungen unserer meisten Aufklärer, auch Dichter, über die Frauen.'²

Introduction

In her discussion of the position of women writers around 1770, Ulrike Prokop identified in the ideology of the era 'das Modell einer systematischen Beeinträchtigung, ja der Subjektzerstörung [der Frau]'.³ The social structures of patriarchy, she suggests, led to a traumatization of the women born around 1750, which is expressed in a high level of psychological disorders amongst them.⁴ This leads her to the conclusion that women's writing was thwarted from the outset, by an ideological context denying women freedom of expression and a creative imagination. Women who failed to write are cited in support of this conclusion: Charlotte von Kalb (1761-1843), who struggled her entire life to write her only novel – she began it aged twenty-five, and finished it one year before her death, when she was eighty years old; Caroline von Wolzogen (1763-1847), whose play *Der leukadische Fels* always remained a fragment; and others, for instance Rahel Varnhagen, who never progressed from writing letters into more highly regarded literary genres.

The view that women writers were oppressed by contemporary gender ideology is not confined to Prokop but is, in fact, widely shared amongst modern feminist scholars. It

¹ Terms employed in 'Etwas über die heutige Mode-Misogynie. Ein Dialog', *Hannoversches Magazin* 69 (1788).

² Charlotte von Kalb, *Briefe von Charlotte von Kalb an Jean Paul und dessen Gattin*, ed. Paul Nerrlich (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1882), p. 64.

³ Ulrike Prokop, 'Die Einsamkeit der Imagination. Geschlechterkonflikt und literarische Produktion um 1770', in *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen. Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Munich: Beck, 1988), p. 338.

⁴ Prokop, 'Einsamkeit der Imagination', p. 328.

is easy to see how the consensus has been built. The delineation of gender identity has long been recognized as a feature of the period.⁵ There is a large body of eighteenth-century texts which debate gender roles and define sexual characteristics. Although some are by now well known, I shall begin this study by revisiting them. I do so for two reasons. Firstly, the subject of this thesis is the debates about women's reading, writing and publishing. These debates cannot be understood except in the context of the wider debates about gender in general. Secondly, a thorough review of the dominant discourse leads to questions about its dominance. A simple statement about the prevailing gender ideology ignores the fact that this is only one side of the argument. How accurate is the impression of a single monolithic discourse created in many studies of the period?

‘Ueber die Bestimmung des weiblichen Geschlechts’⁶

Evidence for a restrictive and oppressive gender ideology can be found in the discussion of women's role in society and purpose in life. It concentrated on definitions of the ‘Bestimmung des Weibes’.⁷ Women's ‘Bestimmung’, or destiny, was frequently defined in conservative ways both in pragmatic texts (for example by Campe and

⁵ See Silvia Bovenschen, *Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit. Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979). Barbara Duden, ‘Das schöne Eigentum. Zur Herausbildung des bürgerlichen Frauenbildes an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert’, *Kursbuch* 47, (1977). Karin Hausen, ‘Family and Roledivision: The polarisation of sexual stereotypes in the nineteenth century - an aspect of the dissociation of work and family life’, in *The German Family*, ed. Richard J. Evans and W.R. Lee (London: Croon Helm, 1981). Volker Hoffmann, ‘Elisa und Robert oder das Weib und der Mann, wie sie sein sollten. Anmerkungen zur Geschlechtscharakteristik der Goethezeit’, in *Klassik und Moderne. Die Weimarer Klassik als historisches Ereignis und Herausforderung im kulturgeschichtlichen Prozeß*, ed. Karl Richter and Jörg Schönert (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1983).

⁶ Karl Rose, *Väterliche Winke an junge Frauenzimmer über ihre Bestimmung als Mädchen, Gattinnen, Hausfrauen und Mütter; allen edlen Töchtern Deutschlands gewidmet* (Hannover: in der Ritscherschen Buchhandlung, 1802), p. 26.

⁷ For examples of this debate, see Andrea van Dülmen, ed., *Frauenleben im 18. Jahrhundert*, Die Bibliothek des 18. Jahrhunderts (Munich: Beck, 1992), pp. 35-49.

Wieland) and literary publications (for example by Goethe). This rhetoric designated certain attributes as taboo for women, and specified others as highly desirable.

Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter. Ein Gegenstück zum Theophron. Der erwachsenen weiblichen Jugend gewidmet* (1789) is such a text. He went into considerable detail in defining women's 'Bestimmung'; it was the *raison d'être* for his book.⁸ His explicit aim is to make women's 'Bestimmung', which he characterizes at one point as living 'in einer, zwar durch äußere Zeichen der Hochachtung verlarvten, aber nicht desto weniger sehr wahren, vielleicht gar etwas drückenden Abhängigkeit', easier and less burdensome for them by teaching them how to live with it gracefully.⁹ That way, it will become a mere 'Scheinübel' (p. 32). But first, he must acquaint them with their duties. He lays down a double 'Bestimmung' for women, a general one which is inherent in their role as human beings, and a specific one which is generated by their sex:

du bist ein Mensch – also bestimmt zu Allem, was der allgemeine Beruf der Menschheit mit sich führt. Du bist ein Frauenzimmer – also bestimmt und berufen

⁸ Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter. Ein Gegenstück zum Theophron. Der erwachsenen weiblichen Jugend gewidmet*, 7th ed. (Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandlung, 1809). Originally published in 1789, the book was a sequel to Campe's *Theophron, oder der erfahrene Ratgeber für die unerfahrene Jugend* (1783), and by far the most popular book on pedagogy of the period. By 1832 there were nine editions, five pirate editions and four reprints. 8,700 copies were bought in the first decade, and it was translated into several languages including Dutch (1791), French (1803), Russian (1804), Polish (1805) and Danish (1805). The subscription registers reveal that the book was bought in particularly large numbers by women: at this time, women on average represented about 5% of subscription list buyers, but for the *Väterlicher Rath* that figure went up to 38.5%. Even though the book is expressly aimed at middle class women, the subscription register contains a surprisingly large number of aristocratic purchasers. It is clear that the book had a wide appeal, and was taken up voluntarily by women at least as much as it was used for didactic purposes by men. See Pia Schmid, 'Ein Klassiker der Mädchenerziehungstheorie: Joachim Heinrich Campes Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter (1789)', in *Visionäre Lebensklugheit. Joachim Heinrich Campe in seiner Zeit (1746-1818)*, Ausstellungskataloge der Herzog August Bibliothek (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), pp. 205-207.

⁹ Campe, *Väterlicher Rath*, pp. 30-31. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, unless cited elsewhere. See also Schmid, 'Klassiker', p. 209.

zu allem, was das Weib dem Manne, der menschlichen und der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft sein soll (pp. 6-7).

In keeping with Enlightenment ideas, man's general purpose is defined as follows:

‘Beglückung seiner selbst und Anderer durch eine zweckmässige Ausbildung und Anwendung aller seiner Kräfte und Fähigkeiten in demjenigen Kreise, in welchem und für welchen die Vorsehung ihn geboren werden ließ’ (p. 8). But in fact the universal-sounding ‘human purpose’ is anything but universal: it is specific to one's class and status, which appear to be immovable, because they are provided by destiny. Bearing this in mind, he notes twice, and each time with character spacing for added emphasis, that one's talents and skills ought to be developed and applied, but only ‘in beständiger Hinsicht auf den von der Vorhersehung und der menschlichen Gesellschaft ihm angewiesenen Wirkkreise’ (pp. 8-9, emphasis original). For the same reason, in the prologue of the first edition he dedicates his book to women of a particular class, ‘vornehmlich [...] junge Frauenzimmer der glücklichen Mittelklasse’ (p. VII). He acknowledges that theoretically everyone has the right to develop all their faculties to their maximum potential, whether king or pauper. But at the same time, because a pauper is not able to apply kingly skills in his everyday life, it makes no sense to waste one's energies on learning what will prove useless in practice. Practical learning needs are determined by the duties and responsibilities which one's class (or gender) brings with it.

Campe, who addresses his daughter in the second person throughout, then explains woman's general ‘Bestimmung’. It is her duty to develop ‘alle deine

menschlichen Anlagen und Kräfte, die körperlichen wie die geistigen, die sittlichen wie die erkennenden'. But he instantly limits this very wide-ranging definition:

aber wohl verstanden! Immer in Bezug auf deinen bestimmten Beruf als Weib, und nur an Gegenständen [...], welche innerhalb der Grenzen dieses deines weiblichen Berufs liegen, auf jede dir mögliche Weise, sorgfältig und emsig zu entwickeln, zu üben, zu stärken und zu veredeln (p. 13).

Women's human rights, which Campe – in keeping with Enlightenment natural law discourse – had to admit women possessed, are curtailed, or even invalidated, by their gender. He anticipated that this would meet with opposition among women:

Allein ich merke den Einwurf, der dir, mein Kind, wie vielleicht manchem andern Frauenzimmer, beim Lesen dieser Blätter, hier auf den Lippen schweben wird. Wie? werdet ihr sagen, sind wir denn nicht eben so gut Menschen, wie du und deine Geschlechtsverwandten? (p. 71)

Und doch haben wir Andern [...] auch in dieser Rücksicht so viel vor euch voraus! (p. 73)

This very frank description of women's unenviable position is typical, the *Väterlicher Rath* is unique in its realistic and sympathetic attitude to the inglorious aspects of women's lives, which Campe does not attempt to conceal from them.

Das Erste und Nöthigste, was ich dir [...] hier zu melden habe, ist: daß das Geschlecht, zu dem du gehörst, nach unserer jetzigen Weltverfassung, in einem abhängigen und auf geistige sowohl als körperliche Schwächung abzielenden Zustande lebt, und, so lange jene Weltverfassung die nämliche bleibt, nothwendig leben muß. Das ist freilich keine angenehme, aber eine nöthige Nachricht, die ich [...] dir nicht verheelen durfte. (pp. 24-25)

He describes the hierarchy between the sexes as: 'Er die Eiche, sie der Efeu...ein niedriges Gesträuch, das von jedem Vorübergehenden zertreten wird' (pp. 27-28).

Despite this, he has no doubt that the only valid option for women is marriage, 'die Ehe ist ja das einzige, euch noch übrig gelassene Mittel, einen bestimmten Standort,

Wirkkreis, Schutz, Ansehn und einen höhern Grad von Freiheit und Selbstständigkeit zu

erhalten' (p. 41). But even this marriage process contains indignities which women have to suffer; they have to wait, 'gleich einer Waare, die nicht ausboten werden darf, [...] bis sich jemand findet' who will marry them (p. 37).

In response, he elevates women's role to the level of a profession: 'o vernimm deinen ehrwürdigen Beruf mit dankbarer Freude über die große Würde desselben! – um beglückende Gattinnen, bildende Mütter und weise Vorsteherinnen des innern Hauswesens zu werden' (p. 19).¹⁰ Aware that so far, the destiny of being a wife, mother and housewife does not sound like a great honour, he explains wherein the grandeur of the task lies:

Fasse diese hohe und würdige Bestimmung deines Geschlechts doch ja recht fest ins Auge, mein Kind; und siehe, wie das Wohl der ganzen menschlichen Gesellschaft [...] davon abhängt, wie gut oder wie schlecht ihr dazu vorbereitet werdet. Denn nicht bloß das häusliche Familienglück, sondern auch [...] das öffentliche Wohl des Staats, steht größtenteils in eurer Hand, hängt größtenteils, um nicht zu sagen ganz, von der Art und Weise ab, wie das weibliche Geschlecht seine natürliche und bürgerliche Bestimmung erfüllt (p. 20).¹¹

In Campe, the personal really is the political: the family replicates the state on a miniature scale, and the well-being of the state depends on the well-being of the family: 'Wie die Quelle, so der Bach, also wie das Weib, so der Bürger, der vom Weib geboren wird [...] wie das häusliche Familienglück, so das öffentliche Staatswohlergehn' (pp. 20-21). So although he confines women's role to a particular sphere, and acknowledges the

¹⁰ Campe's text has to be seen in the context of a socio-structural shift towards professionalization which increasingly defined people not by their social class but their profession. Enlightenment pedagogy played an important part in constructing identities for the middle classes based on their professional activity, and not their class status. Men's professions were defined in antithesis to women's 'Beruf', which was a replica of their 'Bestimmung'. See Christine Mayer, 'Bildungsentwürfe und die Konstruktion der Geschlechterverhältnisse zu Beginn der Moderne', in *Das Geschlecht der Bildung - Die Bildung der Geschlechter*, ed. Britta L. Behm, Gesa Heinrichs, and Holger Tiedemann (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1999), pp. 2-3.

¹¹ Pia Schmid considers Campe's need to explain the contradictions which existed between universal human rights and women's actual social condition 'noticeable'. See Schmid, 'Klassiker', p. 209.

unattractiveness of their situation, he offers them their contribution to the state as compensation, which leads to the paradoxical definition of women as an ‘allgewaltiges, obgleich schwaches Geschlecht’ (p. 23). He wrote the book precisely because women had such responsibilities as mothers of citizens: he aimed to ensure the well-being of the home in order to secure the welfare of the state. ‘Bestimmung’, in Campe’s work, is rooted not in religion, but in social custom and nature, and provided the foundations for a binary model of gender difference.¹²

The same notions were echoed by Christoph Martin Wieland, in his prologue to the *Allgemeine Damenbibliothek* (1786). Women’s right to learning is determined by their role as women:

Also nicht die Fähigkeiten, sondern bloß die angeborne Bestimmung des weiblichen Geschlechts, und der eigene Wirkungskreis, welchen die Natur ihren Gaben und Tugenden angewiesen, geben uns den wahren Gesichtspunkt an, aus welchem das Recht der Damen an wissenschaftliche Bildung genau zu bestimmen ist.¹³

Wieland expresses very clearly how women’s specific purpose as women overruled their general purpose as human beings: it is not their talents that determine their training, but their ‘natural’ role as women. In *Ueber den Historischen Kalender für Damen für das Jahr 1791 von Friedrich Schiller*, Wieland defines women’s role, like Campe, as that of ‘Gehilffinnen unsers Lebens, [...] Mütter und Erzieherinnen unsrer Kinder, [unsere] Freundinnen, Rathgeberinnen und Gesellschafterinnen’, who make an invaluable contribution to society: ‘das Geschlecht, dessen liebenswürdige Eigenschaften und

¹² ‘Natur und [die] menschliche [...] Gesellschaft’, see Campe, *Väterlicher Rath*, p. 68.

¹³ Christoph Martin Wieland, ‘Vorrede. [Zu: Allgemeine Damenbibliothek]’, in *Von der Freiheit der Literatur. Kritische Schriften und Publizistik*, ed. Wolfgang Albrecht (Frankfurt am Main, Leipzig: Insel, 1997), p. 667.

Tugenden [...] zum gemeinen Wohlstande der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft gleich wesentlich und unentbehrlich sind'. Again, he encourages women to develop their minds and increase their learning, but like Campe, with the proviso 'so weit, als es der Umfang und die Grenzen ihrer allgemeinen und besonderen Bestimmung zulassen.'¹⁴

Literary texts mirrored such conceptions, for example, Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* (1797), in which Dorothea defines the role and duties of a good woman. Rather than share a heavy burden with her lover, she insists on carrying it alone, and tells him that this is good preparation for life as a woman:

Und der Herr, der künftig befiehlt, er soll mir nicht dienen.
 Seht mich nicht so ernst an, als wäre mein Schicksal bedenklich!
 Dienen lerne bei Zeiten das Weib nach ihrer Bestimmung;
 Denn durch Dienen allein gelangt sie endlich zum Herrschen,
 Zu der verdienten Gewalt, die ihr doch im Hause gehöret.
 Dienet die Schwester dem Bruder doch früh, sie dienet den Eltern,
 Und ihr Leben ist immer ein ewiges Gehen und Kommen,
 Oder ein Heben und Tragen, Bereiten und Schaffen für andre.
 Wohl ihr, wenn sie sich gewöhnt, daß kein Weg ihr zu sauer
 Wird, und die Stunden der Nacht ihr sind wie die Stunden des Tages,
 Daß sie niemals die Arbeit zu klein und die Nadel zu fein dünkt,
 Daß sie sich ganz vergißt und leben mag nur in andern!
 Denn als Mutter, fürwahr, bedarf sie der Tugenden alle,
 Wenn der Säugling die Krankende weckt und die Nahrung begehret
 Von der Schwachen, und so zu Schmerzen Sorgen sich häufen.¹⁵

The image of womanhood that is here presented is one of a life of servitude, hardship and self-sacrifice. But the text appeals to women not to be disheartened by this, because acceptance of their true destiny ultimately creates the conditions which allow women to

¹⁴ Christoph Martin Wieland, 'Ueber den Historischen Kalender für Damen für das Jahr 1791', in *Wieland's Werke. 35. Theil. Kleinere Schriften zur Culturgeschichte* (Berlin: Gustav Hempel, 1879), p. 240.

¹⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Hermann und Dorothea', in *Goethes Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz, Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden (Munich: Beck, 1994), pp. 494-495. *Hermann und Dorothea* is an example of a genuinely populist text: first published in Vieweg's *Taschenbuch* for the year 1798, Goethe received the record honorarium of 1,000 Reichstaler for it. See Rolf Engelsing, 'Wieviel verdienten die Klassiker?', *Neue Rundschau* 87 (1976), p. 128.

rule in the household. However, even this spatially limited rule is curtailed because it is made very clear that the husband is the ‘Herr, der [...] befiehlt.’

These texts defined women’s role and purpose as existing for other people: mainly men, but also their parents. This idea was originally propounded by Rousseau, who determined that women are destined ‘[den Männern] zu gefallen und nützlich zu sein, sich bei ihnen beliebt zu machen, sie zu trösten, ihnen das Leben angenehm zu machen und zu versüßen.’¹⁶ Campe phrased it thus: ‘Das Weib ist dazu bestimmt, dem Manne zu gefallen.’¹⁷ Christian August Fischer’s populist didactic treatise *Über den Umgang der Weiber mit Männern* (1800) was similarly explicit. Women were designed to entertain men and keep them company: ‘Als die Gottheit die Einsamkeit des Erstgeschaffnen versüßen wollte, gab sie ihm ein Weib zur Gesellschaft’.¹⁸ A few pages further on, this is made even less ambiguous: ‘Das Weib ist zur Gefährtin des Mannes bestimmt. Alle ihre Talente, alle ihre Tugenden sind auf dieses Verhältniß berechnet’ (p. 15). Woman therefore has no reason for being, other than to entertain and aid man. Ernst Brandes considered all other interpretations futile: ‘Umsonst sträubt man sich, die Wahrheit zu erkennen, daß das Weib um des Mannes willen da sey.’¹⁹

¹⁶ See Susan L. Cocalis, ‘Der Vormund will Vormund sein: Zur Problematik der weiblichen Unmündigkeit im 18. Jahrhundert’, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* 10 (1980), pp. 43-44.

¹⁷ Campe, *Väterlicher Rath*, p. 341.

¹⁸ Christian August Fischer, ‘Über den Umgang der Weiber mit Männern’, in *Elisa oder das Weib wie es sein sollte*, ed. Lydia Schieth, *Frühe Frauenliteratur in Deutschland*, No. 8 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1990), p. 10.

¹⁹ [Ernst Brandes], *Ueber die Weiber* (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1787), p. 83.

‘Geschlechtscharakter’: crystallizing definitions of gender

The notions inherent in the debate about ‘Bestimmungs’ were defined further by the term ‘Geschlechtscharakter’. It was used to describe the mental characteristics which purportedly coincided with the physiological distinction between the sexes. Statements about ‘Geschlechtscharakter’ conveyed the quintessential nature of men and women.²⁰ Sparked off by the quest for a German bourgeois identity, and inspired by the writings of Rousseau, the debate became more deterministic by emphasizing biological, rather than social factors; but the meaning of the term itself remained in flux for some time. It is possible to identify a progression in the debate, exemplified by a move away from social, to inherent biological, factors. Some writers, like Campe and Brandes, occupy a transitional, contradictory position; but by the 1790s, gender was increasingly conceived of in binary, monolithic terms. Socially conservative authors like Fichte and Humboldt represent the philosophical attempt to define sexual difference once and for all, which Schiller’s literary *œuvre* popularized. The bourgeois gender model gradually combined biology, social destiny and the inner nature of the sexes, reflecting the trend towards an essentialist anthropology. This progression has been often interpreted by feminist critics as an indication that women’s position as writers became more difficult towards the turn of the century.

Rousseau began the codification of the two sexes by attributing diametrically opposite, mutually complementary sexual characteristics to them. After that, not even theoretical equality was possible between man and woman, despite the egalitarian-

²⁰ Hausen, ‘Polarisation’, p. 51.

sounding ‘in allem, was nicht das Geschlechtliche berührt, [gleich] die Frau dem Mann’. It is rendered irrelevant because – in women – the sexual determines everything: ‘der Mann ist nur in gewissen Momenten Mann’, ‘die Frau aber ist Frau ihr ganzes Leben lang. Alles erinnert sie unaufhörlich an ihr Geschlecht’. Gender based on biological functions is inescapable. This, he claims, is the ‘ureigene Bestimmung der Frau’.²¹ The link between women’s biology and their position in society is very direct: women’s task as child bearers requires that they adopt a physically undemanding, largely sedentary lifestyle in the home, which effectively precludes them from participating in the public sphere. The idea that sex defined the nature of woman was powerfully propounded by Fichte later in the period.

Joachim Heinrich Campe

Campe’s work exemplifies the gradual shift towards an essentialist definition of gender. His pedagogical works are based on the idea that women are assigned a particular role in society which they must learn to fulfil if they are to be happy themselves and if they are to create happiness in their families. He implies thereby that women’s behaviour is not necessarily intrinsic, but culturally determined and occasioned by the ‘Weltverfassung’ (p. 24). He himself emphasized the particularity of his project by announcing that he wrote for one specific class only, and did not presume to make pronouncements for *all* women. His emphasis on both society *and* nature as influencing factors in the construction of gender roles indicates the transitional nature of this period. However, the qualities required by women to equip them for their unenviable position in

²¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile oder über die Erziehung*, translated by Josef Esterhues, 3rd ed. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1963), pp. 417-419. Originally published in 1762.

society (he never discusses changing society in order to make women's position less unenviable) are universal:

Reinigkeit des Herzens und der Gesinnung, aufgeklärte Gottesfurcht, Schamhaftigkeit und Keuschheit, Bescheidenheit, Freundlichkeit und unerschöpfliche Herzensgüte, Besonnenheit, Ordnungsliebe, Haushaltungsgeist, Eingezogenheit, Anhänglichkeit an Mann, Kind und Haus, ein gänzlich, freies und freudiges Verzichtthun auf die zerstreuen und berausenden Vergnügungen des herrschenden üppigen Lebens, und endlich ein liebevolles Hingeben ihres eigenen Willens in den Willen des Mannes, woraus denn nach und nach ein gänzlich süßes Zusammenschmelzen ihrer eigenen Wesenheit (Existenz) mit der seinigen entsteht.²²

Echoing Goethe's Dorothea, this amounts to nothing less than a programme of resignation and subjection which demands great self-control and self-denial, for which he believes women are equipped by their equally universal innate qualities of 'Nachgiebigkeit, [and] Sanftmuth' (p. 339).

Whilst Campe postulates education as a formative influence, like Rousseau he also subscribes to the emerging notion of the physiological character of gender, which is evident in his argument that women's sickly constitution did not equip them for physically demanding tasks (amongst which he included scholarship).²³ In *Väterlicher Rath* he argued that the human sciences were able to give women most useful insights into the 'ungünstigsten Verhältnisse des Weibes zur menschlichen Gesellschaft' (p. 24), since the study of anthropology would make women realize their limited capabilities. Anthropology was able to demonstrate to women that men had more muscles, stronger nerves, a coarser skeleton, more courage and had in general, 'auch die unverkennbaren Anlagen zu einem größern, weitblickenden und mehr umfassenden Verstande' (p. 26).

²² Campe, *Väterlicher Rath*, pp. 187-188.

²³ Schmid, 'Klassiker', p. 209.

However, his argument is not based on ideas of moral physiology throughout. He does not rely on anthropological features alone to ensure women's proper status; instead, he consistently asserts that women must be persuaded by his arguments and cultivate, however hard it may be, the qualities he identifies as essential:

Sei endlich, diesem allen zufolge fest überzeugt, daß Geduld, Sanftmuth, Nachgiebigkeit und Selbstverläugnung die allerunentbehrlichsten Tugenden deines Geschlechts sind, ohne welche ein weibliches Geschöpf, das seine natürliche Bestimmung erreichen [...] will, unmöglich glücklich und zufrieden leben kann. (pp. 31-32)

The pressure to cultivate these qualities stems from the current 'Weltverfassung':

Du fühlst vielleicht Kräfte des Geistes und einen Trieb zu gemeinnütziger Wirksamkeit in dir, die dich fähig und begierig machen, einen größern Wirkkreis auszufüllen, an den öffentlichen Geschäften des Staats Antheil zu nehmen, dich durch große ruhmwürdige Handlungen auszuzeichnen; aber die bürgerliche Verfassung hat dir die Gelegenheit dazu abgeschnitten, hat jeden Standort, auf dem sich etwas Großes und Rühmliches verrichten läßt, fast ohne Ausnahme, mit Männern besetzt, und ein demüthigendes Zurück! scheucht dich, sobald du es dennoch wagen wolltest, dich einem solchen Standorte zu nähern, fort, und verweist dich wieder in den kleinen Kreis deiner, zwar an sich sehr wichtigen, aber von allen Seiten beschränkten und wenig bemerkbaren häuslichen Wirksamkeit. (p. 35)

Campe is clearly a hybrid thinker in these transitional times, whose belief in an innate 'Geschlechtscharakter' is infused with contradictory ideas about a class-specific, not universal, 'Bestimmung', and about women's perfectability through education.

Ernst Brandes

Ernst Brandes, author of *Ueber die Weiber* (1787), is another writer whose position was fraught with inconsistencies.²⁴ His text was intended as 'ein ausführliches Räsonnement über des weiblichen Geschlechts Bestimmung und Fähigkeiten', which he

²⁴ [Brandes], *Ueber die Weiber*. All further references to this treatise are given after the quotation in the text. A later, much expanded version of *Ueber die Weiber* is Ernst Brandes, *Betrachtungen über das weibliche Geschlecht und dessen Ausbildung in dem geselligen Leben*, 3 vols. (Hannover: Buchhandlung der Gebrüder Hahn, 1802).

deemed lacking in the contemporary debate. He betrays his belief in social, rather than biological forces, by emphasizing throughout that women have been led astray by a false culture which has inflated their sense of self-importance, leading them to believe that they are the centre of the universe. 'Andere [...] haben [...] zu hoch gespannte Ideen von den Vorzügen ihres Geschlechts [...] Bey diesen liegt der Fehler, gelinde gesagt, in unrichtigen Vorstellungen der Verhältnisse der Welt' (pp. 17-18). Even young girls were becoming 'übermüthige Beherrscherinnen der Welt' (p. 8).²⁵ In fact their true position was the reverse: 'Das Weib ist nicht gemacht, sich selbst zu regieren. [Der Männer] Bestimmung ist dagegen zu herrschen' (p. 295). He blamed French habits, too much social interaction and perpetual amusements for spoiling the characters of German girls. In marriage, he lamented, women expected from their husbands the 'Attentionen eines Liebhabers', and had 'übertriebene Prätentionen', which led to selfish behaviour on their part: 'Verheyrathet dauret [sic] gewöhnlich die Idee der Superiorität ihres Geschlechts bey den Weibern der großen Welt fort' (p. 12).²⁶ Women's impudence went further; he accused widows of cold-hearted selfishness:

Selbst in den so gennanten guten Ehen fühlt sich die Frau, nachdem der Schmerz über den Tod ihres Mannes vorbei ist, glücklicher ohne ihn. Ihr Herz fühlt keine Bedürfnisse. Sie kann daher ganz der [sic] Independenz genießen, zu der sie sich bestimmt glaubt. Vergnügt nimmt sie Sitz und Stimme in der Wittwenrepublik, und ihre Sklaven sind nun ihre Domestiken. (p. 22)

²⁵ Ernst Brandes was Therese Heyne-Forster-Huber's uncle, and well-aware of her intellectual pursuits. Either he is guilty of hypocrisy here, in that he exempts his own family from these remonstrations, or he is in fact complaining about young girls precisely like his niece. See Elke Kleinau and Claudia Opitz, eds., *Geschichte der Mädchen- und Frauenbildung. Band 1: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1996), p. 525, footnote 527.

²⁶ Brandes would have been familiar with the attentions required of a lover, as he had had an affair with Lotte Kestner (Werther's Lotte) three years prior to the publication of *Ueber die Weiber*. See Eckhardt Meyer-Krentler, 'Die Leiden der jungen Wertherin. Weibliche Sozialisation durch Literatur im späten 18. Jahrhundert', in *Zwischen Aufklärung und Restauration. Sozialer Wandel in der deutschen Literatur (1700-1848). Festschrift für Wolfgang Martens zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Wolfgang Frühwald and Alberto Martino (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989), p. 247.

Women's characters are here primarily the result of misguided social habits which can be altered, rather than of physiology, and women must be reminded that they are not destined to enjoy independence, but are rather bound for a life of service within the family.

Wilhelm von Humboldt

A decade later, biological forces were being increasingly used to characterize the sexes, and to explain their differing roles in society. Particularly influential was the gender model of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who conceived of the sexes as binary opposites, each with their own set of characteristics. The title of his essay 'Ueber den Geschlechtsunterschied und dessen Einfluß auf die organische Natur', published in Schiller's *Die Horen* in 1795, is programmatic: sexual difference determines the organic nature of the sexes. In fact, Humboldt sees sexual difference as the essence of nature itself:

Die Natur wäre ohne [den Geschlechtsunterschied] nicht Natur, ihr Räderwerk stände still, und sowohl der Zug, welcher alle Wesen verbindet, als der Kampf, welcher jedes einzelne nöthigt, sich mit seiner, ihm eigenthümlichen Energie zu waffnen, hörte auf, wenn an die Stelle dieses Unterschieds eine langweilige und erschlaffende Gleichheit träte.²⁷

Sexual difference is therefore not just limited to the purposes of reproduction, but all-pervasive. It is logical from this that the sexual act itself is the foundation for Humboldt's definition of the characteristics pertaining to each sex, since it illustrates sexual difference 'in seiner völligen Allgemeinheit'. Analysis of the sexual act reveals such an 'eigenthümliche Ungleichheit verschiedener Kräfte, daß sie nur verbunden ein Ganzes

²⁷ Wilhelm von Humboldt, 'Über den Geschlechtsunterschied und dessen Einfluß auf die organische Natur', *Die Horen. Eine Monatsschrift herausgegeben von Schiller* 2 (1795), p. 99. Further references to this article are given after the quotation in the text.

ausmachen, und ein gegenseitiges Bedürfniß, dieß Ganze durch Wechselwirkung in der That herzustellen' (p. 100). The link between the physiological and the moral is established, in that the physical part expresses with unmistakable clarity the related moral qualities. He is able to deduce from the sexual act that one sex is 'mehr thätig', the other 'mehr leidend'; one sex is 'zeugend', the other is 'empfangend' (p. 106). 'Was von der erstern belebt wird, nennen wir männlich, was die letztere beseelt, weiblich. Alles Männliche zeigt mehr Selbstthätigkeit, alles Weibliche mehr leidende Empfänglichkeit' (p. 111). Christian August Fischer's text exemplifies how this idea became a commonplace: 'Seine Stärke macht ihn unternehmend, ihre Schwäche flößt ihr Sanfttheit ein. Er ist geschaffen, sie zu beschützen, sie ist gebohren, ihm zu gefallen. Seine Begierden herrschen, die ihrigen schmeicheln; er ist der angreifende, sie der anlockende Theil.'²⁸

Humboldt explicitly moves away from the declarations which referred to mankind as one, and sees it instead as divided into two different 'ungleichartige' sexes (p. 106). Nonetheless, he attempts to square his definitions with the Enlightenment requirement that all human beings be equal by insisting that the two parts, though diametrically opposed, are equally valuable because they are interdependent. This leads to constant reiteration and restatement and some logical contortions: 'Der überströmenden Fülle [masculinity] mußte daher ein Bedürfnis [femininity] gegenüberstehn; aber da die Natur in ihrem Gebiet eben so wenig Armuth als Selbstgenügsamkeit gestattet, so ist das Bedürfniß wieder mit Reichthum verknüpft' (p. 120). Likening artistic creation to biological procreation, he deduces from this overflowing quality of the male that creative

²⁸ Fischer, 'Umgang der Weiber', p. 14.

energy and genius are primarily associated with the male and not the female – a conception which would stubbornly impede women's opportunities as writers. Other qualities such as mental abilities are similarly conceived as opposites: women possess a 'reizende Anmuth' and 'liebliche Fülle' which moves their senses and feeds their very visual imagination, whereas men are occupied primarily by concepts, the 'Vermögen der Begriffe' (pp. 121-122). In fact, women lack reason to such an extent that they seem unable to share in Kant's Enlightenment project of leaving behind 'selbstverschuldete Unmündigkeit',²⁹ which is now defined as a purely male enterprise: 'Alles Männliche ... ist mehr aufklärend', whilst emotion is now decidedly female territory, because 'alles Weibliche [ist] mehr rührend. Das eine gewährt mehr Licht, das andere mehr Wärme' (p. 122). At pains to point out that no sex is superior to the other, he stresses their complementarity again: '[...] nur die Verbindung der Eigenthümlichkeiten beyder Geschlechter bringt das Vollendete hervor' (p. 122). This theoretical emphasis on mutual dependence is also pivotal in Fischer's treatise: 'Was ist der Mann ohne Umgang mit Weibern? Was ist das Weib ohne Umgang mit Männern? Sie werden nie zu ihrer [...] Vollkommenheit gelangen', but, unlike Humboldt, Fischer makes no pretence of equality: 'Auf ihm ruht der Segen der Bevölkerung, ihre Rolle ist untergeordnet.'³⁰ In contrast to earlier, more ambiguous writers such as Campe, Humboldt's essay crystallized sexual difference, and assigned quite rigid gender characteristics: activity, energy, strength, willpower, independence and courage belonged to men; passivity, weakness, subjection, modesty, dependence and kindness belonged to women. In the 1790s, recourse to 'nature' and biological functions allowed men to justify women's inferior social position anew, a

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? (1784)', in *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*, ed. Ehrhard Bahr (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1974).

³⁰ Fischer, 'Umgang der Weiber', pp. 14-15.

fact not concealed by the rhetoric of mutual dependence and equal value of the two sexes, because moral equality did not translate into equality of rights.

Reflections in literature

Literary texts popularized gender models such as Humboldt's.³¹ For example, Schiller's famous poem *Das Lied von der Glocke* (1799) describes the sexes as antithetical, and as belonging to opposite spheres: 'Der Mann muß hinaus / Ins feindliche Leben', 'Und drinnen waltet / Die züchtige Hausfrau / Und herrschet weise / Im häuslichen Kreise'. Man occupies the public, woman the private sphere. Their tasks are also opposites: man's tasks are rough, strenuous and require daring: 'Muß wirken und streben / [...] Erlisten, erraffen, / Muß wetten und wagen / Das Glück zu erjagen'. Woman is also busy ('ruhet nimmer'), but with gentler tasks, which are characteristically described in sensuous terms:

Und füllet mit Schätzen die duftenden Laden,
Und dreht um die schnurrende Spindel den Faden,
Und sammelt im reinlich geglätteten Schrein
Die schimmernde Wolle, den schneeigten Lein.

Man has to face the harsh aspects of life ('Erlisten, erraffen'), whereas woman occupies a sphere in which she is able to fulfil the satisfying task of adding the aesthetic icing to the cake: 'Und füget zum Guten den Glanz und den Schimmer'.³²

³¹ See for example chapter 5, 'Die Herausbildung von Geschlechtscharakteren als soziales Orientierungsmuster', pp. 140-154, in Horst Hartmann and Regina Hartmann, *Populäre Romane und Dramen im 18. Jahrhundert. Zur Entstehung einer massenwirksamen Literatur* (Obertshausen: Context, 1991).

³² Friedrich Schiller, 'Das Lied von der Glocke', in *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1800*, ed. Friedrich Schiller (Tübingen: J.G. Cotta, 1800). In addition to the idealized woman, *Das Lied von der Glocke* also contains images of demonized, unnatural women, for instance of women who have joined political activism on the streets and become 'Hyänen' by leaving their natural sphere.

In Schiller's earlier poem, *Würde der Frauen* (1795), the same characterization is developed: Women add beauty to life ('flechten und weben / Himmlische Rosen ins irdische Leben'); they are queens of the realm of emotion ('Nähren [...] wachsam das ewige Feuer / Schöner Gefühle mit heiliger Hand'). Men's powers are altogether more uncontrollable ('Ewig aus der Wahrheit Schranken / Schweift des Mannes wilde Kraft, / Unstet treiben die Gedanken / Auf dem Meer die Leidenschaft'). They are striving and restless, and not easily satisfied, always chasing after their ambitious vision ('Gierig greift er in die Ferne, / Nimmer wird sein Herz gestillt, / Rastlos durch entlegne Sterne / Jagt er seines Traumes Bild'). The adjectives used to describe each sex are typical: women are 'bescheiden', 'treu', 'fromm', 'zufrieden', 'liebend', 'fühlend', 'zärtlich', and 'sanft'. This reflects Humboldt's definition of 'Geschlechtscharakter', and reveals their wide appeal. The adjectives used to characterize men are equally predictable: 'wild', 'unstet', 'gierig', 'rastlos', 'feindlich', 'zermalmend', 'streng', 'stolz', 'roh', and 'hart'.³³ The most striking formal feature of the poem is the alternation of stanzas in dactylic and trochaic metre, depicting the male and female sphere in turn. The polarization of gender characteristics is precisely echoed in the poem's formal structure.

The *Musen-Almanach* of 1796 also contained a poem entitled *Mathilde*. It features an unhappy young woman's lament which begins with 'Was quält mit tiefen Schmerzen / die Seel' ohn' Unterlass?' We soon learn that the source of her suffering is her marriage: 'Ich lernte früh entsagen, [...] Seit ich den Schwur geschworen, / Der am Altar mich

³³ Friedrich Schiller, 'Würde der Frauen', in *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1796*, ed. Friedrich Schiller (Neustrelitz: Hofbuchhändler Michaelis, 1796). This poem was published as a song with a melody by J.F. Reichardt which represents the gender dichotomy musically: whilst the stanzas about women were to be sung with 'Würde und Anmuth', the stanzas about men should be sung 'stark und mit Nachdruck'.

band, / Gieng all mein Glück verloren'. Despite this heartbreaking account of her unhappy marriage, she remains aware of her duties: '[ich] kenne meine Pflicht [und] meine Treue bestand.' Occasionally, doubt about the value of her sacrifice enters her heart ('giebt mir Thränen / Er engt mir meine Brust') and she questions her husband's rights: 'Was ihm das Recht erworben, / Verdankt er's dem Geschick? / Bin ich der Welt gestorben / Zu seiner Tage Glück?' Yet she stays convinced of the virtue of her sacrifice:

Dem ich mein Wort gegeben,
Des Eigenthum ich bin,
Dem bring ich auch mein Leben,
Und mich zum Opfer hin.

The poem ends with a resigned affirmation of her imprisoning family situation: 'Gott segne Mann und Kind!'³⁴

In poems such as these, an ideology of subjection and resignation was made palatable to women.³⁵ How successful this ideology became can be seen in many articles, published in various journals, which set out to explain its basic principles to women. The *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* for instance ran a series of articles entitled 'Der große Kritiker über die Weiber'.³⁶ They offered their readers an easy-to-read digest of Kant's view of women, spread out over three issues. These articles were explicitly intended to augment the reading of other treatises such as Hippel's *Ueber die Ehe* (first published in 1774). The success of this gender model is also obvious in Wilhelmine Karoline Wobeser's best-selling novel *Elisa oder das Weib, wie es sein sollte*

³⁴ F.L. Meyer, 'Mathilde', in *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1796*, ed. Friedrich Schiller (Neustrelitz: Hofbuchhändler Michaelis, 1796).

³⁵ See Peter Kuhlbrodt, 'Die französische Revolution und die Frauenrechte in Deutschland', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 5 (1990), p. 419.

³⁶ 'Der große Kritiker über die Weiber', *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* 2, no. 7 (1806). 'Der große Kritiker über die Weiber (Fortsetzung)', *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* 2, no. 8 (1806). 'Der große Kritiker über die Weiber. Beschluß', *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* 2, no. 10 (1806).

(1795). This novel took the glamour of female resignation and self-denial to new extremes, and was published in its fourth edition by 1799.³⁷ Its unprecedented success indicates that the idealization of the suffering, virtuous woman was not merely a male construct, forced upon women, but one that women adopted. Importantly though, the novel recommends the self-sacrificing behaviour of its heroine as a conscious *social* strategy for women, and does not see it in terms of innate female characteristics.³⁸

Johann Gottlieb Fichte

Johann Gottlieb Fichte commented on the proliferation of texts which engaged in the debate surrounding gender roles:

Dieser Hang [zur Unzufriedenheit] ist von Schriftstellern schon benutzt worden; die einen haben ihn begünstigt (Ueber die bürgerl. Verbeßerung der Weiber, z.B.), die andern niedergedrückt, getadelt, persiflirt. An einer gründlichen Untersuchung fehlt es. Ich glaube, es wäre darüber (...) ein höchstinteressantes Buch zu schreiben.³⁹

A year later, he published *Grundriß des Familienrechts*, in which he worked with concepts of gender very reminiscent of Humboldt.⁴⁰ Like Humboldt, he also saw the need to explain how the sexes could be equal, despite the obvious differences between them which appear to suggest hierarchy. The answer he arrives at is essentially moral, focussing on the moral qualities inherent in the two sexes. He argues throughout that, although these moral qualities are inherent, it is possible 'daß [...] das Weib entweder unter ihre Natur herabsinken, oder durch Freiheit sich über sie erheben könne', and that

³⁷ Wilhelmine Karoline von Wobeser, *Elisa oder das Weib wie es sein sollte*, ed. Lydia Schieth, *Frühe Frauenliteratur in Deutschland* vol. 8 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1990).

³⁸ Claudia Honegger, *Die Ordnung der Geschlechter. Die Wissenschaften vom Menschen und das Weib 1750-1850* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus, 1992), pp. 36-38.

³⁹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 'Brief vom 27. April 1795 an Johann Friedrich Cotta', in *Briefwechsel 1793-1795*, ed. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Jacob, *J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Stuttgart - Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1970), p. 295.

⁴⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 'Grundriß des Familienrechts', in *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1960). All page references to this work appear in the text.

these natural instincts are dependent on the right conditions to develop (p. 301). But nonetheless, for Fichte, as for Rousseau, Humboldt and Fischer, the most important determining force in the lives of humans was physical: sex.⁴¹ Consequently, he also grounded his theory of the characteristics of the two sexes on their role in the sexual act, believing it to be paradigmatic: the unchangeable factor of sexuality became the source for women's subjugation. Again, Fischer echoes these views on a populist level by extolling the virtues of nature's system, and emphasizing the universal quality of the phenomenon of sexual characteristics: 'O Natur! dein System ist in allen Theilen vollkommen! Ueberall, wo sich zwey Geschlechter finden, wird der Geist ihres Umgangs derselbe seyn; überall wird der männliche Theil durch Stärke herrschen, aber der weibliche durch Sanftheit siegen.'⁴²

Based on the (by now) familiar assumptions that the sexes are mutually dependent, but diametrically opposite, and that men are active and women passive ('leidend'), Fichte begins his explication of their characteristics by asserting that both sexes are rational creatures, since that is the defining characteristic of human beings. Reason demands activity, since passivity for its own sake contradicts reason and utterly cancels it out. 'Der Charakter der Vernunft ist absolute Selbstthätigkeit: bloßes Leiden um des Leidens willen widerspricht der Vernunft [...]' (p. 300). The definition of women as the passive, retiring, receiving sex is therefore problematic, because it undermines his claim that the two sexes are morally equal. He solves the problem by endowing women with the virtue of modesty, which men do not possess.

⁴¹ See for example Fischer, 'Umgang der Weiber', p. 14.: '[...] ihr Betragen wird einzig aus ihrem Geschlechte fließen.'

⁴² Fischer, 'Umgang der Weiber', p. 14.

Daß ich das ganze Verhältnis bildlich bezeichne: das zweite Geschlecht steht der Natureinrichtung nach um eine Stufe tiefer, als das erste [...] Nun aber sollen beide, als moralische Wesen, gleich sein. Dies war nur dadurch möglich, daß im zweiten Geschlecht eine ganz neue, dem ersten völlig ermangelnde Stufe eingeschoben würde. [...] Aus diesem Naturgesetze entsteht die weibliche Schamhaftigkeit. (pp. 302-303)

Modesty demands that women should not disgrace themselves by wanting sexual satisfaction. Admitting to their sexual desire would debase them and offend their modesty.⁴³ Female sexual desire, incapable of fulfilling itself, therefore takes the form of *actively* wishing only to fulfil the male, not itself. 'Im Weibe erhielt der Geschlechtstrieb eine moralische Gestalt, weil er in seiner natürlichen die Moralität derselben ganz aufgegeben hätte' (p. 304). Modesty remains unoffended, because the sexual urge has found an altruistic outlet, and men and women are morally equal because women possess modesty instead of men's sexuality. The stages of his argument are as follows: Fichte interprets the woman's sexual activity as an act of 'giving herself up'. Appealing to woman's dignity and her sense of honour, he argues that she must actively want to direct her actions at satisfying the man, not herself. This sacrifice has to be voluntary. If it is not, then the woman cannot respect herself any longer.⁴⁴ He calls this sacrifice 'Liebe', which is 'die Gestalt, unter welcher der Geschlechtstrieb im Weibe sich zeigt.' Love, 'der edelste aller Naturtriebe', is central to femininity because it is peculiar to women. Men only have the sexual urge (p. 304). Women's desire for love does not crave physical satisfaction, but 'Befriedigung des Herzens' (p. 305). That way women's actions during the sexual act are not entirely passive, because they aim to satisfy their own urge for love during intercourse.

⁴³ Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 315-316.

⁴⁴ Hull, *Sexuality*, p. 317.

Fichte's argument demonstrates how the high-minded idealism which underpinned his characterization of the sexes in moral terms resulted in an unchanged patriarchal reality for women, as his comments on marriage reveal:

In dem Begriff der Ehe liegt die unbegrenzteste Unterwerfung der Frau unter den Willen des Mannes; nicht aus einem juridischen, sondern aus einem moralischen Grunde. Sie muß sich unterwerfen um ihrer eignen Ehre willen. (p. 320)

He counters the impression of oppression which this concept no doubt evokes in the reader by insisting that marriage has to be entered into freely, which means that women are not really oppressed, because they submit to it voluntarily, and out of a sense of honour. The submission, however voluntary, is total, 'Sie hat aufgehört, das Leben eines Individuums zu führen' (p. 307), and it manifests itself in a very real social, legal and political sense:

Die Frau gehört nicht sich selbst an, sondern dem Manne [...] Der Mann tritt ganz an ihre Stelle; sie ist durch ihre Verheiratung für den Staat ganz vernichtet, zufolge ihres eigenen notwendigen Willens, den der Staat garantiert hat. (pp. 320-321)

It is easy to see why feminist scholarship has regarded this discourse as being of paramount importance in determining the position of women, in particular, of women writers. Their argument that the female self was oppressed in a fundamental way is strengthened by an examination of the scientific texts written at this time.

Scientific Discourse

Writers like Humboldt and Fichte were able to derive further legitimacy for their gender model from the physical sciences. Medical discourse, anatomy and the development of relatively new disciplines like psychology and anthropology combined in the late eighteenth century into a powerful psycho-physiological determinism, which continued to be influential well into the nineteenth century. Concern for psychology and

anthropology became extremely common, and was shared, among others, by Kant. His interest in anthropology is documented by the lectures he gave in the winter semester of 1790/1 on the topic of 'Menschenkunde oder Philosophische Anthropologie', published in 1831, and *Die Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, published in 1798. The *sciences de l'homme* of the eighteenth century, 'das große Zeitalter der Klassifizierung',⁴⁵ all shared one feature: the attempt to categorize humanity into two basic universal stereotypes, male and female.

In medicine, it is noticeable that in the eighteenth century, when the essence of the sexes was being distilled in philosophy and literature, physicians were no longer experts in women's diseases but in women as such, the condition of womanhood.⁴⁶ Definitions of pathology in women became bound up with ideas of women's social destiny and their natural sphere. Hysteria, the vapours, and other women's diseases were interpreted not as the result of sick organs, but rather as a sign that the woman in question did not respect nature's wishes and led an unnatural life, thereby disturbing her physiology. A healthy woman was a woman who followed her natural destiny and became a good mother, wife and housekeeper, and guardian of virtue.⁴⁷ Scholarship, and reading on the other hand, were unnatural, and carried dire health warnings. As the boundaries between disciplines were not so clearly defined, medical practitioners were entitled to espouse views on the moral and mental characteristics of women, as well as their bodies. In fact, these sciences

⁴⁵ Londa Schiebinger, 'Die Anatomie der Differenz. 'Rasse' und 'Geschlecht' in der Wissenschaft', in *Frauen in der Aufklärung. "... ihr werten Frauenzimmer, auf!"*, ed. Iris Bubenik-Bauer and Ute Schalz-Laurenze (Frankfurt am Main: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 1995), p. 157.

⁴⁶ See Anna Richards, 'Passivity or Protest?: Women, Illness and Wasting in German Novels by Women' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1999), esp. pp. 16-37.

⁴⁷ Evelyne Berriot-Salvadore, 'The Discourse of Medicine and Science', in *A History of Women in the West. III. Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 388.

appealed precisely because they enabled men (and women) to establish a full view of humanity and its components, the two sexes.

Historically, many scientific notions about the human body were taken up with enthusiasm, even if they were entirely misguided, such as Galen's conception of the two sexes,⁴⁸ because they accorded well with the values of society at large; whilst others, such as the discovery that women were not entirely passive in the act of conception and contributed an ovum, struggled to find acceptance because they challenged perceived notions of gender. This particular discovery upset the notion that man's superiority was proven by the fact that it was his semen that caused conception to occur. Man's legitimate power in the family and society, at least partly based on this notion, was threatened if through the active virtue of her seed, woman participated in reproduction, because then woman could be regarded at least as equal, if not superior to man. The question arose, 'how could a doctrine that threatened to undermine all the prejudices about the imperfection, debility, and the incompleteness of woman be tolerated?' So medical treatises continued to be written which warned against a theory that gave women 'almost all the honour of generation', despite the evidence in its favour.⁴⁹ Medicine had always evolved in accordance with society's preoccupations and prejudices, but in the late eighteenth century, developments in anatomy gave it an edge it had previously lacked.

The publication of Jakob Fidelis Ackermann's *Ueber die körperliche Verschiedenheit des Mannes vom Weibe außer den Geschlechtstheilen* (1788) founded the

⁴⁸ For an explanation of Galenic anatomy, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 25-28.

⁴⁹ Berriot-Salvadore, 'Medicine and Science', pp. 365-366.

trend of comparative anatomy in Germany. Ackermann's goal was to determine all anatomical differences between the sexes except the purely sexual. He studied all aspects of the human body; its skin, skeleton, skull and muscle tissue, and concluded from all of this, 'daß der weibliche Körper in jedem seiner Elemente vom männlichen Körper abweiche.'⁵⁰ Sexual difference was no longer a superficial phenomenon affecting the sexual organs, but an organizing principle of the human body. As a result, human sexuality was radically reconstituted in the eighteenth century, and, as ever, reconstitution was more radical for women than for men.

For thousands of years it had been a commonplace that women had the same genitals as men [...] except [women's] are inside the body and not outside it [...] By 1800 this view [...] had come under devastating attack. Writers of all sorts were determined to base what they insisted were fundamental differences between male and female sexuality, and thus between man and woman, on discoverable biological distinctions.⁵¹

Medicine and anatomy provided the physiological element which combined with the new science of psychology, or 'Erfahrungsseelenkunde' to produce an increasingly deterministic definition of gender. The discipline of 'Erfahrungsseelenkunde' is chiefly associated with the work of Carl Friedrich Pockels. Disregarding the formative influence of individual experience and circumstance, Pockels believed that it was possible to come to general conclusions about the categories within humanity by observing merely 'das eingeschränktste häusliche Leben', because 'der forschende Umgang mit einem einzigen Kinde, mit einem einzigen Weibe' would yield 'die reichhaltigsten Aufschlüsse über den

⁵⁰ Honegger, *Ordnung*, p. 172.

⁵¹ Thomas Laqueur, 'Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology', in *The Making of the Modern Body. Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Thomas Laqueur and Catherine Gallagher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 2.

menschlichen Charakter'.⁵² Pockels published his observations on the two sexes in an enormous tract entitled *Versuch einer Charakteristik des weiblichen Geschlechts* between 1797 and 1802. This five-volume work was followed a few years later by the four-volume treatise: *Der Mann. Ein anthropologisches Gemälde* (1805-8).⁵³ His work is a classic example of the endeavour to divine universally applicable principles in the arrangement of the sexes.

The publications which resulted from this combination of anatomical, anthropological and psychological science were psycho-physiological, or moral-biological throughout. An example of this is Pierre Roussel's immensely successful treatise, originally published in 1775, entitled *Système Physique et Moral de la Femme, ou Tableau Philosophique de la Constitution, de l'État organique du tempérament, des Mœurs et des Fonctions propres au Sexe* (*Physical and Moral System of Woman, or Philosophical Portrait of the Constitution, Organic State, Temperament, Morals and Functions Peculiar to the Sex*).⁵⁴ He conceived of femininity as an essential nature defined by organic functions, 'la femme n'est pas femme seulement par un endroit, mais encore par toutes les faces par lesquelles elle peut être envisagée' (woman is not only

⁵² Carl Friedrich Pockels, *Neue Beyträge zur Bereicherung der Menschenkunde überhaupt und der Erfahrungsseelenlehre insbesondere. Ein Buch für Gelehrte und Ungelehrte* (Hamburg: Hoffmann, 1798), pp. VII-VIII.

⁵³ Carl Friedrich Pockels, *Versuch einer Charakteristik des weiblichen Geschlechts. Ein Sittengemählde des Menschen, des Zeitalters und des geselligen Lebens*, 5 vols. (Hannover: Christian Ritscher, 1797-1802). Carl Friedrich Pockels, *Der Mann. Ein anthropologisches Charaktergemählde seines Geschlechts. Ein Gegenstück zu der Charakteristik des weiblichen Geschlechts*, 4 vols. (Hannover: Ritschersche Buchhandlung, 1805-8).

⁵⁴ On Roussel, see Claudia Honegger, 'Die französische Anthropologie der Revolutionszeit und die Neubestimmung der Geschlechter', in *Sklavin oder Bürgerin? Französische Revolution und neue Weiblichkeit 1760-1830*, ed. Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff (Frankfurt am Main: Jonas, 1989), pp. 300-302.

woman in one place but in every aspect under which she can be envisaged).⁵⁵ Woman's 'Bestimmung' is revealed by her body: she is fragile, soft and smaller than the man, which indicates that she is destined to be a mother, and that her life is meant to be sedentary and orderly.

In Germany, Johann Heinrich Ferdinand Autenrieth published *Bemerkungen über die Verschiedenheit beyder Geschlechter und ihrer Zeugungsorgane, als Beytrag zu einer Theorie der Anatomie* (1807). His detailed anatomical comparison of the two sexes is explicitly aimed not just at contributing to anatomical theory, but also at developing a gender-specific social theory. In this treatise, an oppositional theory of the physical nature of the two sexes leads seamlessly to binary psychology and sociology:

Zeigt sich das Hirn-und Rückenmark als entgegengesetzte Polarität für das vereinigte Muskelsystem, dieses als Sitz der Energie, jenes als Sitz der Sensibilität; so erklärt sich die Reizbarkeit des Weibes, ihr feines Empfindungsvermögen, ihr Scharfsinn ohne Fähigkeit, Eindrücke so lange fest zu halten, als zur Consequenz im Handeln, zum höhern Abstraktionsvermögen nöthig ist. Denn in einem weichern Organ löscht leicht ein neuer Eindruck den alten aus. So lebt das Weib mehr in der Gegenwart, als der Mann; es ist empfänglicher für die leisen Eindrücke, welche sein Wirkungskreis [...] mit sich bringen.⁵⁶

What emerged from these ideas was a model of difference and biological divergence which Laqueur suggests was the result not of increased scientific knowledge, but rather of 'new ways of representing and indeed constituting social realities.'⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Pierre Roussel, *Système Physique et Moral de la Femme, ou Tableau Philosophique de la Constitution, de l'État organique du tempérament, des Mœurs et des Fonctions propres au Sexe*, translated into German by Christian Friedrich Michaelis in 1786. (Paris: 1803), p. 2.

⁵⁶ Johann Heinrich Ferdinand Autenrieth, 'Bemerkungen über die Verschiedenheit beyder Geschlechter und ihrer Zeugungsorgane, als Beytrag zu einer Theorie der Anatomie', *Archiv für die Physiologie* 7, no. 1 (1807), p. 25.

⁵⁷ Laqueur, 'Politics of Biology', p. 4.

Political agendas, not scientific advances, determined the way in which anatomy was interpreted; and around 1800 the facts of biology were used to justify cultural and political differences between the sexes: 'The new biology, with its search for fundamental differences between the sexes and between their desires, emerged at precisely the time when the foundations of the old social order were irremediably shaken'.⁵⁸ The search for a biology which justified a political *status quo* which excluded women (and all non-white, non-European men) from participation in civil society has justly been called 'political anatomy' (Foucault). It gave women a 'weibliche Sonderanthropologie', and defined them as weaker than the male, but also as 'zart, rein, leidenschaftslos, eine Bastion der moralischen und spirituellen Tugend'.⁵⁹ The blending of scientific verification with philosophical discourse, social practice and popular prejudice was intended to keep women more firmly in their place than reference to their social class ever could.⁶⁰

Between 1770 and 1820, definitions of femininity perceptibly changed. In 1789, Campe could still write:

bei allen gebildeten Völkerschaften [wurden] die ganze *Erziehungs- und Lebensart* der beiden Geschlechter dergestalt eingerichtet, daß das Weib schwach, klein, zart, empfindlich, furchtsam, kleingeistig – der Mann hingegen stark, fest, kühn, ausdauernd, groß, hehr und kraftvoll an Leib und Seele würde.⁶¹

Over the next few years, this view changed. Woman was no longer interpreted as the result of social conditions (which would be alterable), but was regarded instead as the victim of her physiology. This became especially pronounced in the nineteenth century.

⁵⁸ Laqueur, 'Politics of Biology', p. 16.

⁵⁹ Schiebinger, 'Anatomie', p. 168.

⁶⁰ Hausen, 'Polarisation', p. 58.

⁶¹ Campe, *Väterlicher Rath*, p. 26, emphasis is mine.

Medical practitioners paid an extraordinary degree of attention to the relationship between the ovaries and the nature of woman. So natural was the assumption of a synecdochic relationship between the quintessentially female organ (the ovaries) and the nature of womanhood itself, that in 1844, the French physician Achille Chereau wrote: ‘Propter solum ovarium mulier est id quod est’ (It is only because of the ovary that woman is what she is), notwithstanding the fact that it would be another forty years before the importance of the organ in a woman’s life was established.⁶² Once the essential character of the sexes had been defined, and been linked to anatomy, it could be used as a regulative means. Consequently, bilateral ovariectomy (the removal of healthy ovaries) became an instant success cure after its first appearance in the 1870s, and was used to cure all manner of ‘female pathologies’, including hysteria.⁶³

Feminist scholars have often told this narrative.⁶⁴ Progressively more restrictive definitions of ‘proper’ femininity are seen as proof of the fact that women writers, in an unenviable position to begin with, were increasingly unable to counter this powerful discourse. But to construct this linear narrative means to overlook a whole body of texts which do not fit this story.

⁶² Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 175. Translation by Thomas Laqueur.

⁶³ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 176.

⁶⁴ Recently, there have been important amendments to it. See Irmtraud Götz von Olenhusen, ‘Das Ende männlicher Zeugungsmythen im Zeitalter der Aufklärung: Wissenschafts- und Geschlechtergeschichte des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts’, in *Ordnung, Politik und Geselligkeit der Geschlechter im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrike Weckel, et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998).

‘Sind wir bloß um der Männer willen da?’⁶⁵ – Alternative voices

The positions outlined above did not go unchallenged. This era, characterized by historians as the ‘Sattelzeit’, ‘an epoch, like a saddle, straddling old and new’, is typified by ‘the simultaneous co-existence of several heterogeneous trends’.⁶⁶ The debate on women’s nature and role in society is no exception. In addition to the essentially conservative outlook, there were more liberal interpretations of women’s role, some of which are less well known, which illustrate the variety of definitions of femininity. I would argue that these are more than mere exceptions: they indicate that fundamentally, gender roles were not stable, but the subject of continual discussion.⁶⁷ To interpret all discourse on the female sex as a ‘systematische[...] Beeinträchtigung, ja [...] Subjektzerstörung’ seems therefore to be misguided.

Women themselves did not passively receive these ideas, but reflected on the implications of the gender model proposed by the likes of Humboldt and Fichte. In 1799, Charlotte von Kalb graphically expressed how this ideology looked to a woman:

Das Testament der Männer an die Töchter lautet ungefähr so: Ihr habt kein Recht [an]s Leben, keine Liebe giebt’s für euch, ihr werdet verachtet oder genossen. Ihr müßt lieben und einen einzigen beglücken, aber ihr dürft weder Verstand noch Willen haben; keinen Wunsch, keine Freude oder Teilnahme dürft ihr bezeigen, nicht euer Verlangen allein, auch das unsere wird euch in der Erinnerung als Schuld angerechnet.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Amalia Holst, ‘Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höhern Geistesbildung (1802)’, in *Die Frau ist frei geboren: Texte zur Frauenemanzipation. Band I: 1789-1870*, ed. Hannelore Schröder (Munich: Beck, 1979), p. 163.

⁶⁶ Nicholas Saul, ‘Aesthetic humanism (1790-1830)’, in *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, ed. Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 204.

⁶⁷ Christa Kersting, *Die Genese der Pädagogik im 18. Jahrhundert. Campes “Allgemeine Revision” im Kontext der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1992), p. 373.

⁶⁸ Kalb, *Briefe*, p. 65.

Men also perceived that for women, the elevation of their position in texts such as Campe's *Väterlicher Rath* did not equal liberation, as this perceptive comment from 1778 indicates:

[...] das Frauenzimmer [ist] der Abgott der Männer, den sie bloß anbeten und verehren [...]. Diese Art von Verehrung, welche man ihrem Geschlechte und ihren Reizen erweist, ist ein bloßer Schein, und die Frauenzimmer fallen in der That dadurch in eine Art Erniedrigung [...]. Durch ihre Schwachheit sind ihre Anbeter ihre Tyrannen geworden, und sie sind wirklich ihre Slavinnen, indem sie Königinnen der Welt heißen.⁶⁹

In a less radical tone, Susanne von Bandemer (1751-1828) also responded to contemporary ideas on gender. She went beyond simply reflecting on their implications, and suggested an alternative perspective. Her strategy was to try to subtly extend the role of women as defined by men, whilst not contradicting them outright. In an essay entitled *Zufällige Gedanken über die Bestimmung des Weibes, und einige Vorschläge dieselbe zu fördern* (1787) she expands women's duties to include their responsibilities as citizens of the world.⁷⁰ From this she concludes that their minds ought to receive a broader education than that envisaged by many of their male contemporaries. In an interesting reversal, she argues that scholarly knowledge educates the *heart*, rather than just the mind, thereby making it an acceptable feminine pursuit (p. 147). Far from being an enemy to femininity, 'die Wissenschaften [können] die angenehmsten Gefährten des Lebens seyn,

⁶⁹ Johann Georg Krünitz, *Oeconomische (Oekonomisch-technologische) Encyclopädie, oder allgemeines System der Staats- Stadt- Haus- und Land-Wirthschaft, aus dem Fr. übers. und mit Anmerkungen und Zusätzen vermehrt von J.G. Krünitz [continued by others]* (Berlin: 1773-1858), vol. 814, p. 810. See also Duden, 'Bürgerliches Frauenbild', p. 126 for a discussion of the repressive effect of the elevation of women.

⁷⁰ The essay was originally published in Susanne von Bandemer, *Poetische und Prosaische Versuche* (Berlin: 1787). I quote from the later edition: Susanne von Bandemer, *Gedichte und prosaische Kleinigkeiten*, new ed. (Neustrelitz: Ferdinand Albanus, 1811), p. 147. All further page references appear in the text. The essay is also reprinted as Susanne von Bandemer, 'Zufällige Gedanken über die Bestimmung des Weibes und einige Vorschläge, dieselbe zu fördern', in *Ob die Weiber Menschen sind. Geschlechterdebatten um 1800*, ed. Sigrid Lange (Leipzig: Reclam Leipzig, 1992).

und auf jede unsere Pflichten einen glücklichen Einfluss haben' (p. 159). Bandemer also reinstates women's own happiness as a criterion in defining women's role: women cannot simply exist for men, their own happiness is important if they are to fulfill any of their duties properly (p. 150).

For women, fulfilling their duties and conforming to the ideal of womanhood, propagated for instance in the writings of Humboldt, involved embracing an ideal of renunciation and resignation. This was most explicitly demonstrated in Wobeser's *Elisa oder das Weib wie es sein sollte*. But not all men welcomed this ideal. Wilhelm Traugott Krug (1770-1842) referred to the novel as 'mehr gerühmt[...] als rühmenswertig[...] in his *Philosophie der Ehe* (1800). He enthusiastically welcomed a critique of the novel, published as *Elisa, kein Weib, wie es seyn sollte*: 'Diese Kritik ist dem Verfasser so aus der Seele geschrieben, dass er sie [...] fast unbedingt unterschreiben möchte.'⁷¹ Throughout the book he argues that any attempt to return women to an earlier, more primitive, state of subjection to their husbands is unacceptable in 1800. He sees women as more equal to their husbands (they are now 'Ehegenossinnen', rather than 'Beyschläferinnen', and 'Gehülffinnen', rather than 'Dienerinnen'), and regards this as a positive development.⁷²

An article published in the *Hannoverisches Magazin* in 1788 also noted the increased anti-woman sentiment, and bemoaned this trend. 'Etwas über die heutige Mode-Misogynie' is composed as a dialogue between a defender and a critic of the

⁷¹ See [Wilhelm Traugott Krug], *Philosophie der Ehe. Ein Beytrag zur Philosophie des Lebens für beyde Geschlechter* (Leipzig: Roch und Comp, 1800), footnote pp. XIII-XV.

⁷² [Krug], *Philosophie der Ehe*, p. 123.

female sex.⁷³ The defender of women describes the position of his opponent as unreasonable and dishonest:

So stimmst auch du den sonst fast allgemeinen Lieblingston unsrer ehelosen männlichen Gesellschaften an: bittren Spott und muthwilligen Tadel über das ganze weibliche Geschlecht auszugießen, alle seine Schwächen zu vergrößern und seine Fehler im nachtheiligsten Lichte darzustellen [...] und dadurch seinen Werth und seine Würde so tief als möglich herabzusezzen? (p. 1090)

The critic of women rejects these accusations, claiming that his point of view is informed not by prejudice, but by a knowledge of humanity ('Menschenkenntniß') and the study of the female sex. The ills of the age are reflected in the shortcomings of women:

'Leichtsinn, Luxus, Sucht überall zu glänzen und zu gefallen, unbegrenzte Eitelkeit, Koketterie, [und] Modehang' are now the defining characteristics of women (p. 1092).

The misogynist is given shorter speeches throughout the piece, and his opponent, who is also allowed to have the last word with a closing speech, effectively demolishes his point of view. He argues throughout that women's faults are the result of their current status in society, and would be remedied if they were granted the same advantages as men. He also points out that men must be to blame for women's faults, since they are ultimately in charge of women's destinies. The idea that all women can be accused of these faults is also rejected by him, who maintains that women are as diverse a group as men.⁷⁴

Wieland's discussion of Schiller's *Kalender für Damen* (1791) also indicates that there was no monolithic agreement on what femininity was. He devotes a large part of the

⁷³ 'Etwas über die heutige Mode-Misogynie. Ein Dialog', *Hannoverisches Magazin* 69 (1788). All further references appear in the text.

⁷⁴ A lively discussion of women's role also took place in the *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen*. See 'Beantwortung der Frage: Dürfen Weiber gelehrte Kenntnisse haben? oder: Sind Weiblichkeit und wissenschaftliche Geistesbildung zu vereinigen? Ein Versuch', *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* 1, no. 4 (1805). 'Ueber die Bildung der Frauen für Wissenschaften und Künste', *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* 1, no. 22 (1805).

text to defining *German*, as opposed to *French* women, of whose habits and characteristics he thoroughly disapproves. French fashions – social as well as in dress – were contaminating German girls, whose innate sense of virtue and decency was being corrupted by French frivolity. Appealing to their sense of patriotism, he argues that French habits do not suit the German ‘[...] Klima, [...] Lebensweise, [...] Verfassung [or] Nationalcharakter’. He regards frivolity as quintessentially French, and proclaims that: ‘ein frivoles deutsches Mädchen [...] ist unstreitig das fade, platt, widerlichste [...] das ungenießbarste Ding auf der Erde’.⁷⁵ The piece was written in a spirit of national self-confidence and assertiveness in opposition to French cultural hegemony. Wieland is only interested in enhancing women’s learning insofar as it is part of a general endeavour to overtake French culture. Nonetheless, Wieland’s text emphasizes that, far from being monolithic and essentialist, definitions of femininity and women’s role were in flux at this time. It exemplifies inherent contradictions: it was possible to be progressive (advocating improved facilities for women’s education), whilst being socially conservative (insisting that women’s learning remain within the sphere laid down for them).

The work of two further writers indicates that the progression of gender views was by no means linear, but fiercely contested throughout the period: Jakob Mauvillon (1743-1794) and Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel (1741-1796). Mauvillon’s book, *Mann und Weib nach ihren gegenseitigen Verhältnissen geschildert*, published anonymously in 1791, explicitly set out to provide a critique of writers such as Rousseau and Ernst Brandes.⁷⁶ He accused Rousseau of spreading ‘moralischen Unfug’, whilst Brandes’s *Ueber die*

⁷⁵ Wieland, ‘Historischer Kalender’, p. 239.

⁷⁶ [Jakob Mauvillon], *Mann und Weib nach ihren gegenseitigen Verhältnissen geschildert. Ein Gegenstück zu der Schrift: Ueber die Weiber* (Leipzig: Dykische Buchhandlung, 1791).

Weiber prompted him to write his book: 'Ein Buch, das [...] die falschsten Begriffe über dieses wichtige Verhältniß [zwischen Mann und Weib] verbreitet, hat endlich bey mir diesen Vorsatz [das Buch zu schreiben] so lebhaft gemacht' (p. 1). He is concerned that Brandes's book will have a negative effect on relations between men and women:

Sollten aber auch nur hundert Männer dadurch bestimmt werden, ihren Weibern despotisch zu begegnen, zu denken und zu sagen: Ich bin der Herr; nach diesem Grundsatz zu handeln, und sie dadurch unglücklicher zu machen: so würde ich das für eine traurige Wirkung desselben halten. (p. 9)

For his own book, he hopes to move at least ten men to be kinder, nobler, and more pleasant to their wives. He identifies two main schools of thought on women: 'Nach der einen findet sich nicht nur in Rücksicht auf ihre körperlichen Beschaffenheiten [...] sondern auch in den Eigenschaften ihres Geistes ein auffallender und ursprünglicher Unterschied zum Vortheile des männlichen.' The other school of thought, to which he belongs, regards these mental and physical differences as 'blos ein Werk der Erziehung.' (p. 13) Women's character, he argues, is directly influenced by their position in society, especially their legal status: 'der sittliche Zustand der Weiber [gründet] sich allemal ursprünglich auf den gesetzmäßigen' (p. 133). But above all, Mauvillon rejects the notion that it is possible to make general pronouncements on the nature of women at all, since there are so many differences between them, which invalidate generalizations:

Es giebt ungefähr dreißig Millionen Menschen in allen den verschiedenen Ländern, die man mit dem gemeinschaftlichen Namen Deutschland belegt. Davon sind etwa funfzehn [sic] Millionen weiblichen Geschlechts. Man siehet daraus, daß ein Buch über die Weiber mit dem Zusatz: in Deutschland, schon ein sehr weites Feld umfaßt. Wie viel unermeßlicher wird es nicht, wenn dieser Zusatz gar nicht einmal da steht! [...] Nun [...] komme ich auf den Punkt, wo unter ihnen gar zu viel Verschiedenheiten eintreten, als daß sich ihre Verhältnisse so allgemein abhandeln liessen. (pp. 151-152)

The differences between women include their ‘Stand und Vermögen’ (p. 152), and ‘Religion, Klima, Nahrungsmittel, Regierungsform, Zustand der Wissenschaften, örtliche Verhältnisse, Umgang mit Fremden’ (p. 154).

Like Mauvillon’s text, Theodor Gottlieb Hippiel’s work shows very effectively that definitions of ‘Geschlechtscharakter’, and women’s ‘Bestimmung’, were by no means uncontested. His work *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (1792) aimed at nothing less than large-scale social reform.⁷⁷ The book, which postulates egalitarian and emancipatory principles, followed the publication in 1781 of Wilhelm Dohm’s *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*. It is another explicit response to Ernst Brandes’s *Ueber die Weiber*.⁷⁸ Hippiel shared the commonplace conception of women as ‘das der Natur weit treuer gebliebene [...] Geschlecht’ (p. 441), which made them agents for social improvement: ‘In allen Gesellschaften, woran Weiber theilnehmen, verbreitet sich Anstand’. But he came to very different, more radical conclusions about the implications of the power of female morality: ‘und sollte dies nicht auch der Fall beim Staate seyn, in dessen Geschäfte ein andres Licht und Leben kommen würde, wenn Weiber den Zutritt hätten, in ihnen ihr Licht leuchten zu lassen und ihnen einen anderen

⁷⁷ [Theodor Gottlieb von Hippiel], *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (Frankfurt und Leipzig, 1794). Originally published in Berlin, 1792. Further references to Hippiel’s treatise will appear after the quotation in the text. For a review of the reception of Hippiel’s treatise, see Kuhlbrodt, ‘Frauenrechte’. See also Juliane Jacobi, ‘Der Polizeidirektor als feministischer Jakobiner. Theodor Gottlieb von Hippiel and seine Schrift “Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber”, Berlin 1792’, in *Sklavin oder Bürgerin? Französische Revolution und neue Weiblichkeit 1760-1830*, ed. Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff (Frankfurt am Main: Jonas, 1989). William Rasch, ‘Mensch, Bürger, Weib: Gender and the Limitations of Late 18th-Century Neohumanist Discourse’, *The German Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1993). Lesley Sharpe, ‘Theodor Gottlieb von Hippiel: Argumentative Strategies in the Debate on the Rights of Women’, in *Shifting the Boundaries. Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1995). Gisela Shaw, ‘Theodor Gottlieb von Hippiel (1741-1796) als Wegbereiter der Frauenbewegung in Deutschland: “Lachender Philosoph” oder “Prophet”?’’, *German Life and Letters* 54, no. 4 (2001).

⁷⁸ In chapter five Hippiel introduces a fictitious opponent who contradicts the author and who is addressed as ‘lieber Einwänder’, or ‘mein Feind’. These interruptions are frequently quotations from *Ueber die Weiber*.

Schwung beizulegen?’ (pp. 27-28) Precisely because he believed in ‘Geschlechtscharakter’ and held that women had innate qualities such as cleanliness, gentleness, patience, greater emotionality and more humanity, he wished to see these attributes applied for the greater good of the state, not hidden away in the home.

At present, he argued, women’s inferior position precluded their positive contribution to society. Rather than attempting to combat the ills of modern society by creating the intimate atmosphere of harmonious domesticity within the family home, he wished to see women improve the public sphere by entering it.

Lagen die Verhinderungen einer moralischen Verbesserung des menschlichen Geschlechts [...] nicht vorzüglich darin, daß man das schöne Geschlecht in seinen Ruinen ließ und diesen Tempel bloß aus unserm Geschlecht errichten wollte? [...] Ist es nicht unverzeihlich, die Hälfte der menschlichen Kräfte ungekannt, ungeschätzt und ungebraucht schlummern zu lassen? (p. 130)

He had little faith in male efficiency and competence (pp. 216-220), and insisted that women’s contribution would bring ‘dem Staate tausendfältige Früchte’ (p. 214). His uniqueness as contributor to the debate about women’s ‘Bestimmung’ and ‘Geschlechtscharakter’ consists of the fact that, although he shares the basic premise of gender differences, he is of the firm opinion that women should be fully emancipated, gain full rights of citizenship, and obtain appointments as judges, professors and civil servants. Society and the state would, in his words, ‘unendlich gewinnen’ (p. 256).

Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber upheld the revolutionary postulate ‘Alle Menschen haben gleiche Rechte – Alle [...] Männer und Weiber sollten frei und Bürger seyn’ (p. 209), thereby challenging all notions of the psycho-physiological character of the sexes. Diversity of opinion continued to exist. Hippel, who

believed man (and nature) to be too complex to be deciphered easily, was profoundly sceptical of both anatomy and psychology which together alleged that the characteristics of the sexes were universal and ascertainable through observation: 'Der Mensch ist ein Hieroglyph der ganzen Natur, wer es zu erklären und aufzulösen versteht, hat den Schlüssel zur Natur. Den Menschen ganz zu verstehen, dazu gehört mehr, als wir diesseits des Grabes vermögen.'⁷⁹

He did not believe that the physiological indicated anything about the moral and the psychological, or the intellectual, and ridiculed this sort of argument for being naïve. Anatomists' conclusions could not impress him; it was the spirit of a person that mattered, not their size or body: 'ist nicht die Größe überhaupt etwas sehr Relatives?' (p. 42), from which he deduced, 'so ist die Unfähigkeit des Weibes zu Staatsgeschäften, Künsten und Wissenschaften ein Vorwand, allein kein Einwand' (p. 376). He went on to name many men who were indisputably great, yet small of stature, like Alexander the Great and Friedrich II. The generalizing conclusions of comparative anatomy invite his mockery, and he questions the constant assertion that women are weak, 'Wie hätte die Natur ihr größtes Werk, die Fortpflanzung des menschlichen Geschlechtes, absichtlich mit solchen Uebeln [the weaknesses of woman] in Verbindung bringen [können]?' (p. 50). His points are given great emphasis by constant reiteration: 'Darf ich es noch einmal wiederholen, daß der Vorzug der physischen Größe und Stärke des Mannes in Hinsicht des Weibes sich auf keine moralische Ueberlegenheit unseres Geschlechtes bezieht?' (pp. 374-375)

⁷⁹ From Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, *Lebensläufe nach aufsteigender Linie*, 3 vols. (Berlin: 1778-1781). Quoted in Honegger, *Ordnung*, p. 72.

With regard to psychology, Hippel asserts that man's claims to have deciphered human nature were both premature and presumptuous:

Noch hat es den Psychologen nicht gelingen wollen, in dem Gebiete der Geister weit genug vorzudringen, um bestimmen zu können, ob es unter ihnen einen wesentlichen Unterschied gebe; wenigstens gab es keinen Geister-Linné, der sie klassifizierte (pp. 53-54)

[...] wenn nur wir es nicht wagen, unter den menschlichen Seelen Rangordnungen zu bestimmen, die nicht mehr und nicht weniger Realität haben, als Träume und ihre Deutungen. Giebt es denn etwa auch Geschlechtsunterschiede unter den Seelen? giebt es Seelen, die ausschließlich bestimmt sind, weibliche Körper zu bewohnen – ? und wer ist der kühne Argonaut, der dieses unbekannte Meer beschifft hat? (p. 56)

He mistrusted the attempt to base socio-cultural hierarchies on scientific discoveries, because he could not see the sciences of man solving all problems of humanity, including sexual difference:

Wie lange ist es, daß wir in diesem Fach Erfahrungen anstellen? Welche Methoden wenden wir an? Waren diese so wohl gewählt, daß sich nach ihnen richtige Resultate erwarten ließen? Haben wir wirklich bereits einen solchen Vorrath von Erfahrungen, daß wir ein System wagen können, nach welchem für eine ganze Hälfte des menschlichen Geschlechtes eine so nachtheilige Unterscheidungslinie sicher gezogen werden kann? (p. 57)

References to the authority of 'Nature' are not just misguided, but deliberately misleading, he argued: 'Die Menschen schieben gern Alles auf Andere; und wenn sie keinen finden, der seinen Rücken zu dieser Belastung darbietet, so muß die Natur sich diese Denunciation gefallen lassen' (p. 430). Unfortunately 'nature' was a concept which allowed everyone to find in it what he was looking for (p. 54). Hippel also employs it for his own purposes, reinterpreting nature's intent:

Die Natur scheint bei der Bildung der beiden Menschengeschlechter nicht beabsichtigt zu haben, weder einen merklichen Unterschied unter ihnen festzustellen, noch eins auf die Kosten des andern zu begünstigen. (p. 35)

Hippel insists throughout the treatise on the social and cultural reasons for women's so-called inferiority:

Wie ist es aber möglich, daß Weiber diesem Berufe genügen können, wenn jene Anlagen und Fähigkeiten so wenig entwickelt werden! Man vernachlässigt sie nicht bloß; man unterdrückt sie absichtlich. (p. 235)

He considers social factors more important than biological ones, and bases his argument on experience: 'Was für einen Einfluß Erziehung, Klima und andere äußere Umstände auf Menschen (Männer nicht ausgeschlossen) behaupten, lehrt die Erfahrung.' (p. 441) The same experience leads him to question the commonplace assumption that the lack of notable women means that the sex must be incapable of producing them. 'Lag es an den Weibern oder an der ihnen verweigerten Gelegenheit, wenn sie [...] zurückblieben?' (p. 264) Men have been one of the factors directly responsible for denying women opportunities to succeed, because men have misused their mastery over women:

Können wir, die wir uns so unrühmlich zu Herren des weiblichen Geschlechtes aufgeworfen haben, es leugnen, daß wir diese Herrschaft von jeher nur sehr schlecht verstanden? und in dieser Wissenschaft [...] bis jetzt nicht weiter gekommen sind? können wir es vor unserm Gewissen verhehlen, daß wir die Urheber und Veranlasser aller weiblichen Fehler sind, und daß das meiste Gute, welches wir an uns haben, auf die Rechnung des andern Geschlechtes gehört? (p. 439)

He further undermined the psycho-physiological mode of arguing by giving countless examples of women who were exceptions to the Humboldtian model of 'Geschlechtscharakter'. His references are historical and contemporary, international and 'interdisciplinary', and range, amongst others, from Catherine the Great (p. 28, pp. 64-67), Elizabeth I and Maria Theresia (p. 64), Joan of Arc (p. 68), the women of Sparta (p. 246), and references to contemporary women like Mme de Genlis, Mme de Sevigné and

Mme de La Roche (p. 263). He exposes male arguments about the natural superiority of their sex as self-serving ('Alles wodurch Menschen sich auszeichnen können, ist dem Frauenzimmer genommen [...] damit nur unser Geschlecht sicher bliebe, nie von ihm zu einem Zweikampfe gefordert zu werden', p. 186). They have ensured that in this system men possess: 'Stärke der Seele, Muth, Ueberlegenheit des Verstandes, ein größeres Maaß von Urtheilskraft, Festigkeit des Willens, eine größere Stärke des Gefühls und andere dergleichen Seelenvorzüge der Menschen'. It is at women's expense that men have acquired this right of the first-born (pp. 58-59). Above all, Hippel doubts men's claim to possess more rationality than women, on which many of their social privileges are based. In fact, he believes Eve to be the original Enlightenment thinker, who donated reason to Adam (if she had not insisted on tasting the fruits of the tree of knowledge, man would never have been freed from the 'paradiesischen Joche des Instinkts'). So great is our debt to her that he suggests: 'Eva sollte die Vernunft, ihr zum Andenken, heißen.' (p. 33)

If Hippel's opponents were as dominant as scholars imply, then surely his work would have been ignored. Actually, it caused concern. Ernst Brandes tried to discredit it by arguing that *Die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* lacked 'gänzlich de[n] Geist einer eignen wahren Beobachtung'.⁸⁰ Carl Friedrich Pockels' anxious response acknowledged that the debate was by no means concluded. He was concerned about the influence which writers like Hippel were having:

Auch wünschte ich, daß diejenigen unter unsern Schriftstellern, welche jetzt als Sachwalter der Weiberwelt auftreten, Maaß und Ziel in ihren Deductionen halten möchten. Sie sind es, die eigentlich unsern Töchtern die Köpfe verrücken.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Brandes, *Betrachtungen*, vol. 1, p. XXXII.

⁸¹ Pockels, *Versuch einer Charakteristik*. Here quoted from volume two, pp. 342-343.

The problem was that they wrote

gegen die Natur und gegen die Ordnung der Dinge; [sie] verkennen den Unterschied der Geschlechter, und ihre Bestimmung, und würden die Welt verkehren, wenn es ihnen gelänge, ihre hohe Meinung von den Weibern, als eine öffentliche und allgemein anerkannte Meinung einzuführen [...]

whereas he strove to support the natural order. The dangers inherent in any attempt to destabilize the *status quo* were great:

Hier ists doch wahrlich um nichts Geringes zu thun, sondern um alle häusliche Glückseligkeit, die für Gelehrte, Philosophen und Männer in öffentlichen Ämtern eben so noch die einzig wahre Glückseligkeit auf Gottes Erdboden ist, wie für jeden andern vernünftigen Mann, er sey, wer er wolle.

His anxiety was based on the notion that men had to carry the heavy burden of responsibility in life, and deserved the respite of a tranquil home,

Oder sollen die Männer, welche ihr Leben im Denken hinbringen, und dadurch so schon auf tausend sinnliche Freudengenüsse Verzicht thun müssen, auch nicht einmahl häuslich glücklich seyn, und von der Erde also gar nichts haben?

Pockels's panic is revealing: what is at stake in these debates is the comfort of his home, which appears to be vulnerable and threatened by any suggestion that women might feasibly be more than mothers, wives and housekeepers.

Das 'Aufstreben der Weiber'⁸² – A crisis of the sexes?

The writings of Fichte, Humboldt and Schiller offer examples of a gender model which was deceptively neat. But despite being widely received and their influence in setting the tone of the debate for many years, these texts were nonetheless merely attempts to rein in a situation which had already got 'out of control': women were already present in many areas of society; at every book fair, more women writers were listed in

⁸² Fichte, 'Briefwechsel', p. 295.

publishers' catalogues. Such texts therefore reflect the increased *presence* of women, not their increased *absence*.

In contrast to Ulrike Prokop's observation quoted earlier, which identified a systematic exclusion of women from society, eighteenth-century commentators diagnosed a very different malaise. Johann Gottlieb Fichte described it in 1795 as follows: 'Ein gewißes Aufstreben der Weiber, eine Unzufriedenheit derselben mit ihrer politischen Lage gehört unter die Eigenschaften unsers Zeitalters.'⁸³ Women's changing role in society occasioned a fear of what Honegger has called the 'Unordnung der Geschlechter'.⁸⁴ Fichte and his contemporaries could point to several trends to support their view: women were indeed increasingly prominent in the public sphere. Best-selling writers like Sophie von La Roche (1730-1807) and Wilhelmine Karoline von Wobeser (1769-1807); women of learning like Dorothea Schlözer (1770-1825) and Julie Bondeli (1731-1778); female pamphleteers like Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) as well as the rioting women of Paris; they all raised questions concerning the status of women in the social hierarchy. Women's perceived dissatisfaction with their traditional role, and their activities in new roles, such as writers and editors, had an especially unsettling effect on society. Women could point to Enlightenment concepts of the freedom of the individual and the equality of man and question their status in society. This posed a challenge: How to respond to the postulates of the Enlightenment whilst securing social stability, both at home and in the state as

⁸³ Fichte, 'Briefwechsel', p. 295.

⁸⁴ Honegger, *Ordnung*, p. 46.

whole?⁸⁵ The publication of hundreds of texts, such as the ones discussed above, which debated appropriate roles for the sexes, is testimony to the unease caused by the perceived loosening of social structures in the late eighteenth century. Authors of didactic and ideological texts responded to developments that they felt were threatening the social order. By defining normative behaviour, they attempted to stem the tide of these changes.

The reactive nature of these texts is exemplified by Ernst Brandes's work. He used *Ueber die Weiber* to rail against the artificially high status of women in society, and sought to amend this situation by reminding women of their 'natural' duties and responsibilities.⁸⁶ He believed that gender relations were at present in an unhealthy imbalance (affording women far too much prominence), which he wished to see redressed:

Sie, die von der Natur nicht bestimmt dazu sind, die erste Rolle zu spielen, stehen bey Uns in der Gesellschaft nicht auf ihrer rechten Stelle. Von der Natur war ihnen eine andere untergeordnete Bestimmung angewiesen. (p. 23)

Brandes established a clear connection between women's entry into bourgeois life and social disorder: 'Welche Verderbnisse folgten nicht, als die Frauen in das bürgerliche gesellige Leben traten.'⁸⁷

Consequently, 'natural' gender roles had to be redefined and re-established for both men and women. Although late eighteenth-century discourse about 'natural' gender characteristics focused primarily on women, there was also a perceptible effort to define

⁸⁵ See Marion W. Gray, 'Men as Citizens and Women as Wives. The Enlightenment Codification of Law and the Establishment of Separate Spheres', in *Reich oder Nation? Mitteleuropa 1780-1815*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt and Andreas Kunz, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte (Mainz: von Zabern, 1998), pp. 279-283.

⁸⁶ [Brandes], *Ueber die Weiber*, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁷ [Brandes], *Ueber die Weiber*, pp. 24-25.

masculinity. So much so, that it has been argued that the end of the eighteenth century saw a masculinist movement which aimed at the reduction of women's influence in state and society.⁸⁸ It propounded the notion that the higher respect for women rose, the lower the level of national culture sank. Indicating the instability of male bourgeois identity, this discourse can be interpreted as an attempt to define German bourgeois masculinity as the antithesis of court, and thereby also of French, culture. The pre-eminence of women in the cultural and social life of the country was associated with aristocratic court life and alien French culture. Developing an independent sense of bourgeois German identity meant defining oneself in contrast to a culture which was perceived as effeminate and frivolous. If the bourgeois self was going to be male, women had to be returned to the home, and a discourse had to be developed to make sure they remained there. So women were defined in antithesis to men, in order to grant men the stronger role, active in the public sphere. Recourse to the Classical Greeks was often part of this discourse, because they were regarded as models of 'true' masculinity. Affording women their rightful status in society was interpreted as the hallmark of all civilized cultures, and German men were keen to be seen to be treating women better than barbarian peoples had done. As part of Germany's eighteenth-century quest to increase, and develop, its national culture, ending the extreme oppression of women was hailed as part of the nation's path to progress.⁸⁹

At the same time, there was a widespread feeling that this must not go too far: an exaggerated elevation of women's status was as harmful as their undignified oppression.

⁸⁸ Honegger, *Ordnung*, pp. 52-53.

⁸⁹ See for example Wieland, 'Vorrede'.

Eben das, worauf Wir cultivirten Völker so stolz sind, es als den Gipfel der Cultur ansehen, daß die Weiber in die Gesellschaft gezogen werden, darinn den Ton angeben, hat den Verfall der Sitten bewirkt, und die Weiber von ihrem wahren Standpunkt abgeführt.⁹⁰

Classical Rome was a much-cited example of a state which had granted women too elevated a status, which contributed to its fall.⁹¹ Too much cultural integration alienated women from their natural self and brought about the evils of laziness, empty learnedness and the desire among women to dominate social gatherings. Many male commentators shared the view that too much mixed society was the source for such unnatural imbalance in gender relations. It was believed to lead to the emasculation of men and to give women ideas above their station. Consequently, this period also saw the founding of unprecedented numbers of male circles and societies, as well as all-male secret societies.⁹²

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thoughts on this, as on so many other issues, proved to be hugely influential and set the tone of this debate. He yearned nostalgically for the days when a woman was honoured because she was silent and unnoticeable; in his day, he lamented, it was the woman 'die am meisten Aufsehen erregt, von der man am meisten redet, die man am häufigsten in Gesellschaften sieht, bei der man am häufigsten diniert, die am gebieterischsten den Ton angibt, die die Talente, die Verdienste und Tugenden bestimmt, sie verkündet und ihnen ihren Rang und Platz zuweist', who was feted the

⁹⁰ [Brandes], *Ueber die Weiber*, pp. 22-23. Emphasis in the original is in bold.

⁹¹ For example, volume one of Brandes's *Betrachtungen* contains an examination of the 'Zustand der Weiber in Athen, Rom und unter den alten deutschen Völkern'.

⁹² The classic study of the clubs and associations of the Enlightenment and their function is Richard van Dülmen, *Die Gesellschaft der Aufklärer: Zur bürgerlichen Emanzipation und aufklärerischen Kultur in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1986).

most.⁹³ In a short article published in the *Deutsches Museum* in 1780, H.F. Dietz also reflected on the contrary situation which women's new status as opinion-makers created:

Wir [...] machen die Urtheile der Weiber zum Maaßstabe der unsrigen: wir buhlen ängstlicher um ihren Beifall, als um ihren Blick, und, um diesen Beifall uns selbst schätzbarer zu machen, sind wir bemüht, sie in allen Arten von Kenntnissen zu unterrichten, ohne zu überlegen, daß nur die Temperatur eines Mannes, eines eigentlichen Mannes, geschickt sei, die Widersprüche in menschlichen Begriffen zu vereinigen.⁹⁴

Diez could not see the positive effects which this elevation of women was supposed to have: according to him, the benefits remained 'sehr zweideutig.' His text is also a response to current social mores, in which 'unsre Damen [...] aus Zeitungen sprechen, [...] ihren Young und Klopstock lesen, [...] moralisieren und [interessiert am] Schicksal der Amerikaner [sind].'⁹⁵

The plethora of texts which defined appropriate gender roles must therefore be read as a *post hoc* attempt to curb a trend which had already occurred. This served a double purpose: to preserve the status quo, whilst harnessing women's power as redeemers of men, and of society as a whole. Based on a fixed definition of the sexes' natural characteristics, arguments such as Fichte's are essentially moral; their ultimate purpose is the moral perfection of society. Its agent is woman, who acts from an inferred natural moral sense. Throughout the period, women were made liable for the moral perfection of society.⁹⁶ We have already seen that Campe believed women to be

⁹³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Brief an Herrn d'Alembert über seinen Artikel "Genf" im siebten Band der Enzyklopädie', in *Schriften*, edited by Henning Ritter. Munich; Vienna: Hanser, 1978, p. 382. Originally published in 1758.

⁹⁴ H.F. Diez, 'Ueber Frauenzimmer. Ein Fragment', *Deutsches Museum* 4 (1780), p. 349.

⁹⁵ Diez, 'Ueber Frauenzimmer', p. 350.

⁹⁶ Women continued to be used for pictorial representations of virtue, see for example twelve prints by Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki from the year 1789, in which women represent positive human qualities, such as happiness, unity, charity, love, kindness and moderation. Jens-Heiner Bauer, ed., *Daniel Nikolaus*

responsible for the well being of individuals (their families) as well as the state. Fichte expresses the absolute necessity for woman to be defined as he does, if the moral perfection of society is to be achieved: 'Wie kann man das Menschengeschlecht von Natur aus zur Tugend führen? Ich antworte: lediglich dadurch, daß das natürliche Verhältnis zwischen beiden Geschlechtern hergestellt werde.'⁹⁷ Any demands for changes in women's status can be countered with women's responsibility for morality, which is dependent on their acceptance of their role. How do women guarantee morality? Fichte argues that a man is honour-bound to treat his wife well, because he is aware that the woman has given herself completely to him: 'Der Mann ist durch den natürlichen Trieb der Großmut genötigt, edel und ehrwürdig zu sein, weil das Schicksal eines freien Wesens, das in vollem Zutrauen sich ihm hingab, davon abhängt.' Women on the other hand are encouraged by their modesty to fulfil their moral duties, even though Fichte admits that experience has proved that both men and women are capable of losing the virtues of generosity and modesty respectively, and becoming immoral.

The hope that women's innate morality would bring about a new, better world was based on their (implicitly assumed) close relationship with nature, whereas men were thought to be corrupted by their absorption into society, culture and the world of politics. Women acted as preservers of this link with nature, allowing men access to it to restore their faulty relationship with nature. Behaviour manuals were expressly dedicated to creating women who would be able to help make men moral beings, thereby revealing a wide-spread fear about the dangers of alienation and fragmentation within modern

Chodowiecki. *Das druckgraphische Werk. Die Sammlung Wilhelm Burggraf zu Dohna-Schlobitten* (Hannover: Verlag Galerie J.H. Bauer, 1982).

⁹⁷ Fichte, 'Grundriß'. All quotations here from p. 309.

society.⁹⁸ The creation of a domestic sphere which was to provide shelter from the hostile world necessitated that women be characterized as a-sexual.⁹⁹ Fichte exemplifies this:

‘Im unverdorbenen Weibe äußert sich kein Geschlechtstrieb, und wohnt kein Geschlechtstrieb, sondern nur Liebe; und diese Liebe ist der Naturtrieb eines Weibes, einen Mann zu befriedigen.’¹⁰⁰ The creation of a desexualized notion of femininity led to much emphasis being placed on women’s practical abilities as housewives, and on their moral integrity as wives and companions. In a parallel development, sentimental and idealized images of women were becoming widespread in literary, visual and journalistic depictions, as Helga Brandes’s study of images of women in the press illustrates. Here, definitions of femininity were directly linked to ideological goals. The purpose of idealized images of women was expressed very candidly in the counter-revolutionary

Revolutions-Almanach:

Es thut dem Herzen wohl, es erhöht den Glauben an Seelenadel und Tugend, wenn man in Zeiten der größten Verworfenheit, der unmenschlichsten Barbarey und der Verleugnung allen Gefühls auf der einen Seite, der gänzlichsten Erschlaffung und der kriechendsten Kleinmuth auf der andern, wenn man auf solche Züge stößt, die das gesunkene Menschengeschlecht wieder emporheben.¹⁰¹

Women’s supposed ‘naturalness’ meant that they were stylized as representatives of organic wholeness, unity and cosmic harmony, which made them the focal point of male longing for a lost world. The modern world threatened men with alienation and specialization in the workplace, rationalization of the state and pressure to succeed in

⁹⁸ See Ulrike Döcker, *Die Ordnung der bürgerlichen Welt. Verhaltensideale und soziale Praktiken im 19. Jahrhundert*, Historische Studien, vol. 13 (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus, 1994), pp. 31-32.

⁹⁹ Döcker, *Bürgerliche Ordnung*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁰ Fichte, ‘Grundriß’, p. 305.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Helga Brandes, “‘Ueber die Revolutionssucht der deutschen Weiber.’ Frauenbilder in der deutschen Publizistik um 1800”, in “*Der Menschheit Hälfte blieb noch ohne Recht.*” *Frauen und die Französische Revolution*, ed. Helga Brandes (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 1991), p. 161.

career terms. Male identity was increasingly separated from personal relationships, and, in becoming characterized by a whole network of abstract and functional responsibilities, fragmented: men now faced the roles of citizen, employee, father and sole provider. Consequently, it became all the more important that women counteracted this by remaining firmly tied to the home and the family. It was commonly argued that men were useful to the state, but less happy than women. By contrast, women were not useful to the state, but happier.¹⁰² It was therefore incumbent upon women to help men find happiness: men expected women to cultivate the qualities they lacked, and provide the conditions which would allow them to find harmony at home at least.¹⁰³ This idea of the domestic and public spheres as complementary opposites is expressed in many literary texts, such as in the two Schiller poems quoted earlier. Women act as an antidote to the poison of the modern world by neutralizing the negative experiences which men encounter in the hostile outside world. The ending of Schiller's *Würde der Frauen* sums this up: 'Aus der bezaubernden Einfalt der Züge / Leuchtet der Menschheit Vollendung und Wiege [...]'.¹⁰⁴

However, being invested with this power proved a double-edged sword for women: because they were granted supreme responsibility for the well-being of their family, the state and the world, they were also responsible for all evils in the world. Woman was 'Urquell aller Sittlichkeit' as well as the fount of all 'Unsittlichkeit', guardians of 'alles menschlichen Wohlergehns', but also the cause of 'alles menschlichen

¹⁰² For this reason, it was crucial to develop the idealizing myth of women's activity not as work at all, but as *love*. See Duden, 'Bürgerliches Frauenbild'.

¹⁰³ Döcker, *Bürgerliche Ordnung*, pp. 232-233. See also Schmid, 'Klassiker', pp. 211-213.

¹⁰⁴ Schiller, 'Würde der Frauen'.

Elends’.¹⁰⁵ This potential for women to ‘go wrong’ clearly had to be controlled, and many of the texts defining women’s role *ad nauseam* attempted to do just that.

Conclusion

The assumption made by Ulrike Prokop and other scholars, whereby ideological texts are regarded as descriptive of social reality, rather than as rhetorical speech acts, must be revised. They are, in fact, often a *reaction* to pre-existing social conditions, not their cause. Whilst it is possible to identify a line of argument that progressed from deducing women’s character from their social duties to deducing it from their essential mental and physiological characteristics, this was not an uncontested line of reasoning. In many different texts, from major treatises to minor journal articles, definitions of gender were examined, discussed and dismissed. Pia Schmid argues that progressive writers such as Mauvillon and Hippel cannot simply be dismissed as proponents of a ‘verschrobenes Minderheitenprogramm [...] sonst wären sie nicht so vielfältig thematisiert worden, sonst wären [so viele] [...] Warnungen nicht nötig gewesen.’¹⁰⁶ The ideological context in which women writers operated must therefore not be characterized as simply oppressive. Contradictions, inconsistencies and ambiguities continued throughout the period, despite vituperative attempts to silence incongruent voices. The areas and character traits designated as taboo for women were contested, redefined and subtly extended by a variety of authors, thereby leaving lacunae in which women authors might validate their writing.

¹⁰⁵ Campe, *Väterlicher Rath*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ Pia Schmid, “‘... das Rad der Kleider-Moden mauerfest und täglich neue überraschende Phänomene’. Frauen und Französische Revolution im *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 1789 bis 1795’, in *Französische Revolution und deutsche Öffentlichkeit: Wandlungen in Presse und Alltagskultur am Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Holger Böning (Munich: Saur, 1992), p. 427.

Chapter 2: 'Über die Begierde der Weiber, Schriftstellerei zu treiben'.¹ Authorship and Gender

Wie das gesellschaftliche Leben nun einmahl ist, müssen die Weiber Romane lesen, davon bin ich überzeugt, was auch [...] darüber – in den Wind gepredigt wird. [...] Da es nun hauptsächlich das weibliche Geschlecht ist, welches Romane liest und lesen muß, so dünkt es mich für die Sittlichkeit günstig, wenn es, wie in Brittannien, weibliche Federn sind, die ein so unentbehrliches Product verarbeiten, und ich wünschte, daß auch in Deutschland Frauen von Stande, Erziehung und gutem Ton ihre Talente so anwenden möchten.²

Introduction

The previous chapter described the development of essentialist definitions of femininity during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. From these definitions of feminine 'Bestimmung' and 'Geschlechtscharakter', women who wrote were not excluded. In fact, women authors were subject to special scrutiny, since writing was perceived as antithetical to femininity. Making public their thoughts, presuming that these thoughts were worth hearing, and earning an independent income; all these aspects of women's authorship worried contemporaries. This chapter therefore examines the discourse pertaining to the phenomenon of women writers, as promulgated by men and women. It asks three questions. First, how were definitions of femininity used in the criticism of women authors? Second, to what extent was the discourse internally consistent? Third, to what extent was it challenged? The intellectual context in which women wrote influenced both their self-image, and their professional practices.³ So it is crucial to establish precisely how this context operated. Could women define themselves

¹ Fichte, 'Grundriß', p. 348.

² [Emilie von Berlepsch], *Caledonia. Von der Verfasserin der Sommerstunden. Eine malerische Schilderung der Hochgebirge in Schottland*, 4 vols. Vol. 4 (Hamburg: Hoffmann, 1802-4), p. 32.

³ See Christa Bürger, "'Dilettantism der Weiber'", in *Leben Schreiben. Die Klassik, die Romantik und der Ort der Frauen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990), p. 19.

as authors without losing respectability? How could female authorship become legitimate – through inconsistencies in the case against it, laxity in application of an oppressive discourse, or active encouragement?

During the eighteenth century, concepts of gender difference were transformed. But so were concepts of authorship, creativity and genius.⁴ Earlier generations of writers saw their work as deriving in some way from God, epitome of the creative spirit. But for authors of the late eighteenth century, this spirit was relocated to original genius in the autonomous self. Or, it should be said, the autonomous *male* self. Autonomy was beyond a woman's range, given her social and familial responsibilities; she was debarred from original genius. It was difficult even to imagine women as authors, a difficulty reflected in language: 'die Karschin', 'die Günderröde', 'Bettine' and 'Rahel' as opposed to 'Goethe', 'Schiller' and 'Novalis', already indicates that authorship is 'keine neutrale Instanz. Ihr ist ein Geschlecht eingeschrieben – ein Autor ist männlich.'⁵ Far from being able to use a single surname to mark their work, the unified *œuvre* deriving from a unified self, female authorship is always broken: it is either made invisible under the cloak of anonymity, infantilized by the use of the first name, or scattered under several different names. Esther Gad (1770-1827) is a good example of this. Born Esther Gad, her first married name was Bernard. Later she converted to Christianity and was baptised Lucie, and, in her second marriage, gained the name Domeier. She published under all of these

⁴ Ina Schabert and Barbara Schaff, eds., *Autorschaft: Genus und Genie in der Zeit um 1800, Geschlechterdifferenz & Literatur*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1994), p. 10.

⁵ Barbara Hahn, *Unter falschem Namen. Von der schwierigen Autorschaft der Frauen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 7.

names, in various combinations.⁶ Other examples are better known, such as Caroline Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, Therese Heyne-Forster-Huber, and Brendel Mendelssohn-Veit, who became Dorothea Schlegel. The naming of women authors for the purposes of literary criticism and canonization has remained a problem to this day, and indicates the tension that exists between the cultural gender of women and the social construct of authorship. So although the general concept of authorship changed, ‘der Zugang zur Schriftstellerinnen-Existenz ist auch im Zeichen neu konstituierter genialer (nicht professionell-gelehrter) Autorschaft problematisch.’⁷

To characterize women’s position as authors, feminist critics have developed the notion of gender censorship. Barbara Becker-Cantarino defines it thus: ‘When terming women “outsiders” in the German literary culture of Absolutism, I mean their status as human beings different and separate from men; I mean the deep and essential separation into the “other sex”’.⁸ Based on this gender construct, she argues, authors, editors, publishers, critics and (male) readers functioned as ‘arbiters of aesthetics and of what constitutes “good” or “publishable” literature’, which in effect means that individuals or groups ‘influence, if not control and censor’, literary production.⁹ The discourse on sexual difference outlined in chapter one served as the background to a discriminatory discourse on authorship, making possible the ‘surveillance of [women’s] literary production and reception’.¹⁰ How, then, did this censorship operate?

⁶ Hahn, *Unter falschem Namen*, pp. 36-46.

⁷ Ursula Geitner, ‘Soviel wie nichts? Weiblicher Lebenslauf, weibliche Autorschaft um 1800’, in *Lebensläufe um 1800*, ed. Jürgen Fohrmann (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), p. 37.

⁸ Becker-Cantarino, ‘Outsiders’, p. 149.

⁹ Becker-Cantarino, ‘Gender Censorship’, p. 81.

¹⁰ Becker-Cantarino, ‘Gender Censorship’, p. 85.

The polemic surrounding women's writing

Many texts from the late eighteenth century deal explicitly with the question of female authorship. Goethe's and Schiller's deliberations about 'dilettantism' in literature are the most famous. It is interesting to note that many of the men who wrote treatises on the status and nature of woman also made pronouncements on the question of female authorship, which underlines how challenging the emergence of women writers was to eighteenth-century constructs of femininity. Joachim Heinrich Campe devoted nearly forty pages of his *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter* (1789) to the problem.¹¹ He argues that women who become used to deriving happiness from reading or writing will never want to return to cleaning or looking after children. And even if they do feel duty-bound to return, such women will have lost their natural aptitude for domestic chores (p. 68). In this way, ambitions to become a writer are bound to undermine the fulfilment of women's natural 'Bestimmung'. The publications of a learned wife, he argues, will not compensate her husband for badly cooked food, an untidy house, wastefulness in housekeeping and the neglect of his clothes. Campe is able to disguise his prohibition against female authorship as genuine concern for the women in question. It is well known, he claims, that writing destroys women's health. Their constitution will be weakened and their nerves damaged. Ultimately a woman author is bound to lose 'ihre[...] ganze[...] irdische[...] Glückseligkeit' (p. 70). Yes, he concedes, men might also suffer ill health as a result of writing – but men have stronger constitutions than women. So, although there are many sad cases of weak physical specimens among learned men, veritable 'Märtyrer der Gelehrsamkeit und der Schriftstellerey', they are still stronger than women, and better

¹¹ All page references to Campe's treatise appear in the text.

able to withstand the ravages of learning and writing (pp. 72-73). Using the language of disease, Campe outlines the terrible consequences of the 'Geistesseuche', the 'Begierde, seinen Namen durch schriftliche Erzeugnisse des Geistes zu verherrlichen' (pp. 76-77). This desire to write is not driven by noble motives, according to Campe, but by a dislike of useful professional activity, a tendency to sloth, greed for fame and vanity. Literature produced in this way deliberately sets out to damage its readers, by confusing and overexciting the imagination, and threatening morality (p. 81). Campe considers the expansion of the literary market during the last four decades of the eighteenth century to be an unhealthy and worrying excess, which is driven by the 'Schriftstellersucht' (p. 89). All aspects of women's assigned role in society are threatened by literary practice: happiness is destroyed in domestic life, the upbringing of the children is disrupted and the marriage is destabilized. The consequences are dire:

Erschlaffung, wo nicht gar gänzliche Auflösung der heiligen Familienbände zwischen Mann und Weib, zwischen Eltern und Kindern, Verwilderung des Herzens durch genährte Eitelkeit und Ruhmbegierde; häufiger Anlaß zu mißvergnügten Stunden, Tagen und Wochen bei den oft schmerzhaften öffentlichen Urtheilen. (p. 89)

Worst of all is:

eine fast unvermeidliche milzsüchtige Gemüthsverfassung, mit ihrem ganzen schwarzen Gefolge von Unzufriedenheit, griesgrammender Laune, Empfindlichkeit, Schwermuth, Aengstlichkeit, Beklemmung, halbem oder ganzen Wahnsinne! (p. 90)

And yet the 'Leseöbel' admire women authors! The quill that once promised moral and intellectual enlightenment has become a tool for sycophancy, vanity, laziness and excess. Philanthropists and lovers of the Fatherland are made so angry, they want to stamp on it! (p. 92). Campe claims that his observations are based on fact, not prejudice, and can easily be verified by anyone who cares to look at the households run by 'lesesüchtige,

schreibselige und dichterische Weiber' (p. 93). In such households, the woman can be found either at her writing desk or surrounded by admirers. She will suffer bad nerves and bad moods, as well as boredom with her household duties. Campe asserts that the woman's long-suffering husband will die prematurely, or he will seek distraction outside the home, becoming crippled in body and mind, leaving his children to hear inappropriate tales from the staff. Economically, the household will be damaged too: it will go into serious debt and become disreputable, 'bis endlich der Kummer über Schuldenlast, über mißgerathene Kinder und öffentliche Schande das Maß der Leiden für den unglücklichen Gatten voll macht, und ihn mit Schmerzen in die Grube senkt.' (pp. 93-94) Women writers are therefore responsible not only for their own ill health, but also for their husbands' premature demise. Campe's arguments seem extreme. But his treatise was not alone in stating the case against women writers so starkly.¹²

On a similarly populist level is Schiller's poem *Die berühmte Frau* (1788). It takes the form of a letter from Ninon de Lenclos's husband, representative of all husbands of female literati, to another husband. Lenclos's husband has been told of the infidelity of his friend's wife, but finds himself unable to sympathize. 'Freund, höre fremde Leiden an, / und lerne *Deine* leichter tragen.'¹³ He asserts that the fate of a man married to a female writer is so undesirable that he considers his cuckolded friend a 'beneidenswerter Mann'. Sharing a wife with a lover might be bad, he argues, but sharing a wife 'mit dem ganzen menschlichen Geschlechte' is infinitely worse. Female authorship has clear

¹² A similar scene of domestic chaos and topsy-turvy gender relations is conjured up by Adolph Freiherr Knigge, *Über den Umgang mit Menschen*, ed. Karl-Heinz Göttert (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), pp. 206-207.

¹³ All quotations here from Friedrich Schiller, 'Die berühmte Frau. Epistel eines Ehemanns an einen andern', in *Schiller. Werke und Briefe*, ed. Georg Kurscheidt (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992).

overtones of prostitution, as his wife is offered at every market stall ('wird [...] in allen Buden feil geboten'), and is examined and judged by all the world. Her publisher takes the role of her pimp, offering her for sale: 'Ein Leipziger [...] bietet Gegenden dem Publikum zum Kauf, / Wovon ich billig doch *allein* nur sprechen sollte.' It is not just the wife's honour which is ruined by this spectacle, but her husband's too. *He* is defined by *her* activity, a reversal of the traditional gender hierarchy: 'Mich kennt man nur als *Ninons* Mann. [...] *Mich* merkt kein Aug', und alle Blicke winken / Auf meine stolze Hälfte nur.' He considers this more humiliating than being the subject of gossip as the cuckolded husband.

He then goes on to describe the reality of his domestic life with the famous woman. All correspondence is addressed to her, not him, and when she wakes up she is interested only in her reviews. But her real duty ought to be to her husband, who laments: 'Mir / Nicht einen Blick!' In an earlier poem, Schiller had drawn a picture of the ideal wife. Crucially, she needed to see her husband as the focal point of her life:

Glücklich macht die Gattin nur,
Die für dich nur lebet
Und mit herzlicher Natur
Liebend an dir klebet;
Die, um deiner wert zu sein,
Für die Welt erblindet
Und in deinem Arm allein
Ihren Himmel findet.¹⁴

In *Die berühmte Frau*, Schiller also alludes to the neglect of children, which like Campe, he portrayed as an inevitable aspect of female authorship: 'Laut hört man es aus der Kinderstube weinen.' Later in the poem, her children are described as 'sieben Waisen'.

¹⁴ Quoted in Philipp Simon, 'Schillers "Berühmte Frau"', *Euphorion* 17 (1910), p. 288. Simon traces the sources of Schiller's poem to a number of articles in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* of 1786, which contain images and ideas used in Schiller's poem.

In addition, literary women were bound to neglect their appearance ('doch halbe Blicke nur beglücken ihren Spiegel'). Their vanity focuses instead on their literary talent.

Furthermore, the attentions his wife receives from her many visitors insult her husband's honour, taking liberties even a lover would be denied:

Hier darf ihr [...]
 Der dümmste *Fat*, der ärmste Wicht,
 Wie sehr er sie bewund're, sagen;
 Und darfs vor meinem Angesicht!
 Ich steh' dabei, und, will ich artig heißen,
 Muß ich ihn bitten, mitzuspeisen.

As Campe had predicted, women's authorship also costs money. Visitors are entertained at the husband's expense. But his self-esteem suffers as much as his pocket: an audience will think that, compared to his brilliant wife, he is a 'Pavian'. The literary wife also needs to travel to all the fashionable spa towns, because she, like other famous people, wants 'Zur Schau sich geben und zu Markte tragen'. The public and commercial aspects of authorship are depicted in no uncertain terms as unseemly, as they are similar to the practices of prostitution. Thomas Nolden has shown that the processes of inspiration and creative writing have always been associated with entering an affective state of mind which in its intensity and irrationality is associated with sexual activity. A woman's personal honour was therefore endangered by taking up the pen, let alone by publication. So women writers were obliged to justify their activities.¹⁵

¹⁵ Thomas Nolden, "An eine junge Dichterin" Der poetologische Diskurs über die Schriftstellerin des 18. Jahrhunderts', *Lessing Yearbook* XXIV (1992), p. 105.

Schiller concludes his poem with a series of especially repellent images, emphasizing the incongruity of being female and an author at the same time, thereby condemning female authorship once and for all as unnatural:

Ein *starker* Geist in einem *zarten* Leib,
 Ein Zwitter zwischen Mann und Weib,
 Gleich ungeschickt zum Herrschen und zum Lieben.
 Ein Kind mit eines Riesen Waffen,
 Ein Mittelding von Weisen und von Affen!¹⁶

By writing, women are attempting – unsuccessfully – to imitate the male sex (‘Um kümmerlich dem *stärkern* nachzukriechen’), whilst destroying their femininity: ‘Dem *schöneren* Geschlecht entfloh’n’. Schiller’s imagery and use of emphasis is by no means subtle, but stark in its effect. His point is clear: women who leave their ordained sphere lose their ‘Geschlechtscharakter’ and threaten the welfare of their family.¹⁷ Ultimately, society is undermined, since the family is the central unit of the state.

But how widespread were the attitudes expressed by Schiller and Campe? Frank Schubert’s study of the status of women in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* concluded that the intellectually active woman was the second most discussed woman-related topic in the journal, and was met with an ‘ausnahmslos ablehnende Haltung’.¹⁸ Here too, the supposed ‘unnaturalness’ of women authors received the most criticism. Not only would writing make women dissatisfied with their natural situation, but also male sycophants would inflame women’s vanity and ruin whatever qualities their writing might have had. Women who wrote travelogues were compared in one article as being similar to ‘Kinder

¹⁶ This characterization of Ninon de Lenclos as a ‘Mannweib’ draws on Rousseau’s *Emile*. See Simon, ‘Schillers “Berühmte Frau”’, pp. 294-295.

¹⁷ Lesley Sharpe, ‘Über den Zusammenhang der tierischen Natur der Frau mit ihrer geistigen. Zur Anthropologie der Frau um 1800’, in *Anthropologie und Literatur um 1800*, ed. Jürgen Barkhoff and Eda Sagarra, Publications of the Institute of Germanic Studies (Munich: iudicum, 1992), pp. 217-218.

¹⁸ Frank Schubert, *Die Stellung der Frau im Spiegel der Berlinischen Monatsschrift*, Abhandlungen zur Philosophie, Psychologie und Pädagogik, vol. 150 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1980), p. 130.

und Unmündige', 'Unwissende und Unstudirte, Menschen ohne Kopf und Sinn und Kenntniß und Beobachtungsgeist.'¹⁹ Women writers were generally considered as a homogenous group, and individuals mentioned only once, if at all. The one exception to this was Elisa von der Recke, mentioned no fewer than twelve times, but only because she was considered a supporter of the journal's Enlightenment agenda with her attacks on Cagliostro. Her poetry was ignored. Anna Luise Karsch also received a positive notice, but it was for her patriotic spirit, not her poetry. Women writers associated with the literature of *Empfindsamkeit* were either attacked (Philippine Gatterer) or ignored (Sophie von La Roche).²⁰

Other journals besides the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* reflected on the rise of women writers. A brief article in Christian Schubart's *Vaterlandschronik* (1788-9) addresses the issue of women writers as a Europe-wide problem: 'In Portugal ist der erste Dichterkopf – ein Weib [...] in England sind Weiber im Besitze des Romanschreibens [...] und in Deutschland? – gibt's derzeit 50 Schriftstellerinnen; und darunter 20 Dichterinnen.'²¹ Schubart is concerned about the effects of this trend ('Was soll das alles werden?'). He posits polemically that King Solomon would be unlikely to replace his ideal of a woman with a woman who can 'Verse machen, Romanen schreiben, philosophieren, freigeisten'. Like Schiller and Campe, he suspects that 'die Kinderstube, Küche und Keller, Haus und Hof, Garten und Feld vernachlässiget wird!!'

¹⁹ 'Ueber die vielen Reisebeschreibungen in unsern Tagen', in *Die Berlinische Monatsschrift* 4 (1784), p. 319. Quoted in Schubert, *Stellung der Frau*, p. 130.

²⁰ Schubert, *Stellung der Frau*, p. 132, p. 133.

²¹ Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, 'Gelehrte Weiber', in *Schubarts Werke in einem Band*, ed. Ursula Wertheim and Hans Böhm (Weimar: Volkverlag, 1959).

Journals specifically aimed at women also propagated the view that literary ambitions were, for a woman, a ‘Verkehrtheit’. For women, writing necessitated a ‘widernatürliches Leben am Schreibtische’, stealing away their rosy cheeks and their life’s prime.²² Marital happiness would suffer, their husbands would seek ‘fremde[...] Reize[...]’ elsewhere, and their children would be neglected. An article published in the *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* describes a visit to the house of a female author. The visitor describes experiencing a sense of respect for the author’s learning, but also ‘etwas Widerwärtiges, das ich dir nicht weiter beschreiben kann’ (p. 49). The woman makes herself appear unattractive by losing her temper – ‘auf eine so ungraziöse Weise’ – about a negative review of her work. Since it was a woman’s duty to create a pleasant atmosphere in the home, the prospect of a family supper in which the female author exhibited a sour temper appalls the visitor (‘es überläuft mich eiskalt bei dem Gedanken’, p. 50). The fictional visitor is unambiguous about his objections to female authorship: it is unnatural. For, as he says, ‘Ich tadle nichts, worauf die Natur von selber hindeutet’ (p. 51).

These examples provide clear evidence of the way in which concepts of a ‘natural’ femininity were used in polemical attacks on female authorship. But so far, most of the arguments brought forward against women authors have been socio-cultural and practical in origin. Female authors simply offended the eighteenth-century sense of propriety, and it was feared that writing would distract women from the tasks they ought to be doing, thereby wreaking havoc in the home and family. Most of these articles did

²² ‘Weiblicher Genius. Ein Fragment’, *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* 1, no. 6 (1805), p. 48. The piece was signed with a female pseudonym, ‘Minna’. All further references to this article appear in the text.

not offer more profoundly argued objections to female authorship. But there was a more sophisticated opposition, too.

Goethe, Schiller, and the problem of 'dilettantism'

In the 1790s, Goethe and Schiller began to develop aesthetic objections to female authorship. In doing so, they also drew heavily on contemporary concepts of gender.

The wave of polemics on the character of the sexes coincides, most remarkably in the 1790s, with the wave of classicist theorizations about literary practice, and not surprisingly, many of the aesthetic writings are gender coded. The character polarities attributed to the genders are mapped onto the definitions of art vs. non-art, appropriate vs. inappropriate literary consumption, and professional poets vs. dilettantes.²³

Goethe and Schiller derived their categories from an aesthetic tradition struggling to cope with the unprecedented expansion of the literary market since the early 1770s. This expansion had disrupted the homogeneity characteristic of the literary market up until the middle of the eighteenth century. It thereby necessitated an examination of aesthetic theories on the nature of authorship and good literature.²⁴ From the beginning, these aesthetic theories were gender coded. Johann Georg Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (1771-4) formalized contemporary literary developments into two opposing categories: high and low art were characterized respectively as strong/weak, active/passive, hard/soft. The gender code is unmistakable, and prefigures Humboldt's model of 'Geschlechtscharakter' by twenty years. Later texts, such as Johann Christoph Friedrich Bährends's *Ueber den Werth der Empfindsamkeit besonders in Rücksicht auf*

²³ Linda Dietrick, 'Women Writers and the Authorization of Literary Practice', in *Unwrapping Goethe's Weimar: essays in cultural studies and local knowledge*, ed. Susanne Kord Burkhard Henke, Simon Richter, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics and Culture (New York and Suffolk: Camden House, 2000), p. 216.

²⁴ Karin A. Wurst, 'Negotiations of Containment. Elise Bürger's *Adelheit*, *Gräfin von Theck* and the "Trivial" Tradition', in *Thalia's Daughters: German women dramatists from the eighteenth century to the present*, ed. Susan L. Cocalis and Ferrel Rose (Tübingen: Francke, 1996), p. 35.

die Romane (1786) and Johann Gottfried Hocke's *Vertraute Briefe über die jetzige abentheuerliche Lesesucht und über den Einfluss derselben auf die Verminderung des häuslichen und öffentlichen Glücks* (1794), developed this dichotomy further.²⁵ And it was perpetuated by Goethe and Schiller, especially in their outline of a plan for a treatise on what they called 'dilettantism' (1799). This was meant to provide criteria for determining the value inherent in literature, defining classicist practice in terms of what it was not – namely unprofessional, unauthorized production. They developed a hierarchy of the dilettante versus the 'Künstler'. The true artist was characterized by his exercise of art according to principles of science ('Ausübung der Kunst nach Wissenschaft'). His stance was objective, not subjective ('Annahme einer objektiven Kunst'). He was capable of progression and development ('Schulgerechte Folge und Steigerung'). For him, writing was not a hobby, but rather 'Profeßion und Beruf'. As a result, he was part of a literary movement ('Anschließung an eine Kunst und Künstlerwelt').²⁶ Real art was timeless, but dilettantism was ephemeral.

By definition, women could not be included amongst the real artists. Women did not have the prerequisite formal education and training, nor could they be part of a 'Künstlerwelt'. Few women would have the luxury of pursuing art professionally. And conclusively, women's putative 'Geschlechtscharakter' obviously prevented them from adopting an objective perspective. As they were supposedly closer to their 'Gefühl' and less capable of reason, they were condemned to being trapped in their own emotionality and subjectivity. Many male writers argued that women lacked the analytical skills to

²⁵ See Wurst, 'Negotiations of Containment', pp. 35-36.

²⁶ Friedrich Schiller, 'Über den Dilettantismus', in *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe Bd. 21*, ed. Benno von Wiese and Helmut Koopmann (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1963), p. 60.

move beyond their personal experience towards an abstract, objective, autonomous literature. So Goethe and Schiller excluded women's authorship 'on an *a priori* basis'.²⁷ Ironically, many women writers fell in with Goethe's assertion that 'der Dilettant [...] treibt alles als ein Spiel, als Zeitvertreib, hat meist noch einen Nebenzweck'.²⁸ In forewords and correspondence, they made their writing appear a harmless hobby which did not interfere with their real business as mothers, wives and housewives. The pressure to contribute to their family's income also meant that women were usually writing with the demands and interests of the literary public in mind. And in doing so, they were forfeiting their claim to true art. A work's reception by actual, historical consumers as well as the response of the producers to that specific market devalued its artistic credibility.²⁹

Linguistically, eighteenth-century gender constructs and Goethe and Schiller's concept of dilettantism are closely related. Terms used to describe dilettantism echo the discourse surrounding gender: the dilettante represents 'das Paßive', the artist the active, and the dilettante wants to reproduce what s/he has experienced, 'erlittne[...] Wirkungen'.³⁰ This is a direct replica of Humboldt's description of the female as passive and 'leidend'. Women, in his scheme, were characterized as incapable of creating anything themselves. Their role was to receive and to react; just like the dilettante in

²⁷ Susan L. Cocalis, 'Acts of Omission. The Classical Dramas of Caroline von Wolzogen and Charlotte von Stein', in *Thalia's Daughters. German Women Dramatists from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Susan L. Cocalis and Ferrel Rose (Tübingen: Francke, 1996), p. 77.

²⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Über den Dilettantismus', in *Sämtliche Werke Bd. 18. Ästhetische Schriften 1771-1805*, ed. Friedmar Apel (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1998), p. 747.

²⁹ Dietrick, 'Authorization of Literary Practice', p. 218.

³⁰ Schiller, 'Über den Dilettantismus', p. 61.

Goethe's and Schiller's definition.³¹ Similarly, contemporary gender models suggested that women were essentially constant, incapable of development or change. Just so, the main feature of dilettante writers, according to Goethe, was their 'Inkorrigibilität.'³² In this way, dilettantism 'is assigned a female positionality within the hierarchy [of high and low art], which devalues or trivializes it.'³³ During the 1790s, constructions of gender and the discourse of classical art evolved in tandem, and

both these ideals of art and femininity were constructed to meet the needs of men. [...] By associating dilettantism with innate gender roles, it becomes possible to view it as an analogous innate phenomenon and to assign it to a gender on an *a priori* basis.³⁴

It seems obvious that Goethe and Schiller saw a connection between dilettantism and the presence of women on the literary scene.³⁵ The two issues are often discussed side by side. The subject is first broached in a letter from Schiller to Goethe in June 1797, and then expanded in their correspondence and the schemata developed in 1799. Goethe himself expressed their increased anxiety about dilettantism:

Denn wie Künstler, Unternehmer, Verkäufer und Käufer und Liebhaber jeder Kunst im Dilettantism ertrunken sind, das sehe ich jetzt erst mit Schrecken, da wir die Sache so sehr durchgedacht und dem Kinde einen Namen gegeben haben.³⁶

Earlier letters had still expressed pleasure at some texts by women writers: 'Dieser Tage hat die Imhoff mir die 2 letzten Gesänge ihres Gedichts geschickt, die mir sehr große Freude gemacht haben. Es ist überaus zart und rein entwickelt'.³⁷ Some women writers

³¹ Bürger, 'Dilettantism', p. 28.

³² Goethe to Schiller, 22 June 1799. Siegfried Seidel, ed., *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*, 3 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1984), vol. 2, p. 228.

³³ Wurst, 'Negotiations of Containment', p. 36.

³⁴ Cocalis, 'Acts of Omission', p. 78, p. 80.

³⁵ Bürger, 'Dilettantism', p. 21.

³⁶ Goethe to Schiller, 22 June 1799. Seidel, ed., *Briefwechsel*, vol. 2, p. 228.

³⁷ Schiller to Goethe, 19 March 1799. Seidel, ed., *Briefwechsel*, vol. 2, p. 208.

were even deemed capable of development and improvement: '[Die Mereau] fängt [...] an, sich von Fehlern frei zu machen, die ich an ihr für ganz unheilbar hielt.'³⁸ But increased disillusionment with the literary public and its lack of appreciation of high art ('Das einzige Verhältnis gegen das Publikum, das einen nicht reuen kann, ist der Krieg') led to a sharper focus on those elements which were contaminating the literary market: dilettantes.³⁹ After this, Goethe and Schiller were unable to continue to see women writers as a harmless phenomenon. They were now seen as partly responsible for the problems of literature. So by May, Schiller was writing:

Ich begreife wohl, daß Ihnen das Gedicht unserer Dilettantin [Amalie von Imhoff] immer weniger Freude machen mag, je näher Sie es betrachten. Denn auch darin zeigt sich der Dilettantismus besonders, daß er, weil er aus einem falschen Prinzip ausgeht, nichts hervorbringen kann, das nicht im ganzen falsch ist, also auch keine wesentliche Hilfe zuläßt.⁴⁰

Thus, Goethe and Schiller completed an entirely circular argument.⁴¹ Inferior writing is essentially feminine; women must be essentially feminine; therefore women must be inferior writers. Their aesthetic criteria (e.g. Schiller's concept of the sublime and the naïve) were already given in gendered terms. And their notions of gender were informed by aesthetics. Goethe and Schiller were able to conclude that although women might be able to achieve a certain technical competence ('eine gewisse Schreibgeschicklichkeit'),

³⁸ Schiller to Goethe, 30 June 1797. Seidel, ed., *Briefwechsel*, vol. 1, p. 359.

³⁹ Schiller to Goethe, 25 June 1799. Seidel, ed., *Briefwechsel*, vol. 2, p. 230.

⁴⁰ Schiller to Goethe, 31 May 1799. Seidel, ed., *Briefwechsel*, vol. 2, pp. 214-215.

⁴¹ See Barbara Becker-Cantarino, 'Goethe as a Critic of Literary Women', in *Goethe as a Critic of Literature*, ed. Karl J. Fink and Max L. Baumer (Lanham; New York: London: University Press of America, 1984), p. 163. Judith Purver, "'Zufrieden mit stillerem Ruhme'? Reflections on the Place of Women Writers in the Literary Spectrum of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth Centuries', *Publications of the English Goethe Society* LXIV (1993-5), p. 80.

dilettantes nevertheless remained an objectionable ‘Gezücht’, not of any literary, but merely ‘naturhistorisch’ interest.⁴²

Circular though it may be, this argument practically affected the reception of women’s work. Goethe’s 1806 review of Friederike Helene Unger’s novels *Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele, von ihr selbst geschrieben*, and *Melanie, das Findelkind*, and Karoline Paulus’s novel *Wilhelm Dumont* was the practical application both of his gendered aesthetics, and of contemporary gender ideology. By asserting that the novels entertained the reader ‘auf eine angenehme Weise’, Goethe signalled from the outset that these were trivial, dilettante entertainments.⁴³ But the novels were aimed at a female readership, and two, at least, had been written by women (Goethe thought the *Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele* had been written by a man). This meant he had to assess the moral suitability of the novels, both for female readers and female writers. An aesthetic critique was unnecessary. In principle, these books were incapable of being ‘ganz ästhetisch’. Goethe set out to examine their ‘sittliche Wirkung’ instead.⁴⁴ Morally, he concluded, the novels could not be recommended. Measured against contemporary standards for female behaviour and character, they fell short of his expectations, and could only be used as an example to women of how not to be.

Wir tadeln daher unsere Amazone gar sehr, daß sie auf ihrer Reise nach der Schweiz den Arm gerüstet aufhebt und gewaltig ausholt, um einem wackern Eidgenossen im Vorbeigehen eins zu versetzen. [...] So haben wir denn auch nicht ohne Kopfschütteln bemerken können, daß die anmutigen und liebevollen

⁴² See Schiller to Goethe, 30 June 1797, and Goethe to Schiller, 22 June 1799. Seidel, ed., *Briefwechsel*, vol. 1, p. 359 and vol. 352, p. 229.

⁴³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, ‘Rezension von “Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele, von ihr selbst geschrieben”, “Melanie, das Findelkind”, und “Wilhelm Dumont”’, in *Berliner Ausgabe. Kunsttheoretische Schriften und Uebersetzungen. Schriften zur Literatur I* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1970), p. 410.

⁴⁴ Goethe, ‘Rezension’, p. 415.

Naturen, die in dem Roman unserer Freundin Eleutherie [Karoline Paulus] ihr Spiel treiben, sich als Anti-Naturphilosophen ankündigen und bei dieser Gelegenheit immer außerordentlich verdrießlich werden. [...] sollte man mit so viel Liebenswürdigkeit, Gefühl und Lebenslust an Philosophie überhaupt, geschweige denn an Naturphilosophie denken?

The novels were judged only with regard to gender ideology, and the extent to which the sexes were appropriately represented.⁴⁵ Anything unfeminine was condemned ('wie wenig dergleichen Äußerungen einer weiblichen Feder geziemen'). Goethe's general advice to women writers was therefore to have their novels read by male mentors prior to publication, so that they might be able to expunge 'alle Unweiblichkeiten'. Women's writing occupied an entirely separate sphere of literature. 'The "pen" is divided, as is society, in [sic] the male and the female.'⁴⁶ Women writers should remain under male tutelage and therefore, gender censorship; not so that they might learn to attain the characteristics of a true 'Künstler', but rather that they might learn how to comply with their natural 'Geschlechtscharakter'.

The limitations of 'gender censorship'

These definitions are precise: but in practice, such precision could not be maintained. At the same time as developing a model of literary production which excluded women, Goethe and Schiller nonetheless acted as mentors for several women of their acquaintance (e.g. Caroline von Wolzogen and Amalie von Imhoff).⁴⁷ They also devoted much time and energy to editing their manuscripts and finding publishing outlets,

⁴⁵ See for example Goethe, 'Rezension', pp. 416-417. Quotation from pp. 419-420.

⁴⁶ Becker-Cantarino, 'Goethe as a Critic', p. 168.

⁴⁷ In their own journals, Goethe and Schiller published Sophie von La Roche, Sophie Mereau, Friederike Brun, Caroline von Wolzogen, Amalie von Imhoff, Louise Brachmann and Elisa von der Recke. See Helga Brandes, 'Der Frauenroman und die literarisch-publizistische Öffentlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Untersuchungen zum Roman von Frauen um 1800*, ed. Helga Gallas; Magdalene Heuser, *Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte* 55 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990).

either by publishing them in their own journals or by finding publishers for them.⁴⁸ This discrepancy between theory and practice is evident elsewhere. Despite the overwhelmingly condemnatory attitude of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* to women writers, it nonetheless published fourteen contributions by women writers. These included poems by Susanne von Bandemer, and essays by other women, of which only a third dealt with topics specific to the female sex.⁴⁹ Some of these contributions to the *Monatsschrift*, especially Elisa von der Recke's attacks on 'Schwärmerei', attracted a great deal of public interest and attention. Frank Schubert asserts that these contributions reveal their authors' 'selbstbewußte Haltung', indicating 'mit welcher Sicherheit sich die Frau im 18. Jahrhundert zu äußern gewohnt war', even in an otherwise conservative journal like the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*.⁵⁰ It is possible to argue that the theoretical objections against female authorship coexisted with, and were undermined by, practical concessions. The discourse condemning female authorship was not applied with complete consistency, and was destabilized further by active encouragement for women writers.

Women writers were clearly a phenomenon that could not be ignored. The discourse of anxiety and prohibition concerning female authors does not document absence or marginalization. It demonstrates the very opposite, women's presence on the literary market. There would have been no need to draw the boundaries of legitimate authorship so clearly, if they had already been well established in the minds of late

⁴⁸ Cocalis, 'Acts of Omission', p. 79.

⁴⁹ All contributions to the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* by women authors are listed in Schubert, *Stellung der Frau*, pp. 215-223.

⁵⁰ Schubert, *Stellung der Frau*, pp. 133-134.

eighteenth-century Germans. This point is emphasized by Linda Dietrick, who stresses the extent to which these texts were rhetorical, rather than descriptive. As rhetoric, they point towards ‘an exercise in symbolic power in a specific, historical social context’.

‘While there are no simple explanations for this public exercise of linguistic authority, it was clearly a reaction to a perceived threat.’⁵¹ Rather than indicating a static condition, discourse is part of a process, a contest over the distribution of linguistic authority. The discourse which gains linguistic authority aims to set the terms of reference that are recognized within a social group as legitimate. The symbolic power which this discourse then wields is essentially invisible because it is based upon a value system that all participants have come to see as legitimate or natural. By defining the nature of real art versus its mechanical imitation, mere pseudo-art, Goethe and Schiller were attempting to create one such value system, which was to be recognized as natural. To this end, its grounding in ‘natural’ gender characteristics presented a strategic advantage. Yet the power of the notion of dilettantism must not be over-emphasized. The article which Schiller and Goethe intended to write was, after all, never finished, and never published.⁵² Its influence on their contemporaries was therefore limited. Other authors who considered the question of women writers, such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, remained profoundly ambiguous about their existence.

Fichte discussed the question of female authorship in the conclusion to his *Grundriß des Familienrechts* (1796). He considered ‘die Begierde der Weiber, Schriftstellerei zu treiben’ to be a growing trend, which was potentially dangerous.

⁵¹ Dietrick draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s work for her article. See Dietrick, ‘Authorization of Literary Practice’, pp. 213-215.

⁵² Becker-Cantarino, ‘Goethe as a Critic’, p. 163.

Judging women's literary activity within the context of natural law, Fichte 'sternly restricts women's writing to certain types of text, to useful, moral, popular literature, excluding their "products", as he calls their texts, from the realm of art.'⁵³ Becker-Cantarino is right to suggest that Fichte was no more able than Goethe to conceive of a woman writing a book with aesthetic merit. And yet he too is unable to condemn their writing absolutely. He argues that women are better suited to write for their own sex than men 'weil sie ihr Geschlecht besser kennen, als es je ein Mann kennen wird'.⁵⁴ Having outlined the specific quality of women's minds and moral character in his treatise, he was now unable to deny them the right to authorship totally. Women's writing must be in keeping with their general moral purpose in life, which is to be useful to others ('Ich habe [...] vorausgesetzt, daß das Weib lediglich um zu nützen [...], für ihr Geschlecht [...] schreibe'). But it would be simplistic to regard this a plain prohibition. In fact, it opened up several genres to women: pedagogy, didactic novels, sentimental poetry, children's literature, letter-writing manuals, household manuals and cookbooks (which were often lucrative and went into several editions). And indeed women did enter these genres in large numbers. For many women they represented a means of gaining an independent income and semi-professional activity.⁵⁵ Whilst Fichte clearly found female authorship an uncomfortable reality, and sought to contain it within certain limits, he had nonetheless endowed women with positive qualities. So although it is possible to see Fichte's comment, as Becker-Cantarino does, as a male attempt to control female writing, it is not a simple silencing, or mere censorship. Rather, it represents a compromise validating

⁵³ Becker-Cantarino, 'Gender Censorship', p. 82.

⁵⁴ Fichte, 'Grundriß', p. 348.

⁵⁵ These include, among others, J.I.E. von Wallenrodt, T. Huber, F.H. Unger, C.A. Fischer and B. Naubert.

some forms of female authorship; even suggesting, in some genres, that female authorship might be superior.

Carl Friedrich Pockels, whose writings on the subject of the nature of the sexes were discussed earlier, also discussed female authorship. The idea so troubled him that an entire chapter was devoted to it, entitled ‘Weiblicher Geschmack in der prosaischen Schriftstellerey und in den Künsten’, in a treatise which was supposed to deal with the character of the *male* sex (*Der Mann. Ein anthropologisches Charactergemählde seines Geschlechts. Ein Gegenstück zu der Charakteristik des weiblichen Geschlechts*, 4 vols, 1805-8). Part two of the third volume of *Der Mann* is wholly taken up with a discussion of female genius, introduced by a general evaluation of its ‘passive’ nature. Like others before him, Pockels also draws on general conceptions of the female ‘Geschlechtscharakter’ and women’s social responsibilities. He attempts to deduce differences between men’s and women’s minds from the general principle that man is the stronger, woman the weaker sex. From there it is possible to argue that despite their intrinsic equality as human beings, sexual difference is nonetheless evident in a ‘gewisse[r] Unterschied in der Denkgeistigkeit’ too, which predestined men to pursue writing, and excluded women. But this, Pockels himself admits, is mere ‘Räsonnement’ that writing is unsuitable for women, not proof.⁵⁶ Instead, he resorts to the by now familiar arguments about literary activity ruining a family’s happiness and the woman’s own welfare. So, although unable to prove scientifically that the female sex is not

⁵⁶ Carl Friedrich Pockels, *Der Mann. Ein anthropologisches Charactergemählde seines Geschlechts. Ein Gegenstück zu der Charakteristik des weiblichen Geschlechts* vol. 3 (Hannover: Ritschersche Buchhandlung, 1806), pp. VI-VII. All other references to this book appear in the text.

compatible with literary pursuits, Pockels did insist on the undesirability of female authorship by means of a socio-cultural argument. This, he feels, is justification enough:

Es wäre also ein so verdammliches Unrecht nicht, wenn man der schönen Welt, durch die Hinweisung auf den Mangel ihres Genies, - das Schriftstellerhandwerk, - das hier wirklich nur ein Handwerk ist, - ein wenig zu verleiden suchte. (p. IX)

The ambiguity of his argument is striking. He says very clearly that as long as women fulfil their feminine duties, there is nothing wrong in principle with female authorship ('Er [the author] gönnt [...] allen wackern Frauen ihr Schriftstellern und Versmachen recht gern', p. IX). But half a paragraph later, as though he had suddenly realized the liberating potential of that concession, he withdraws it:

Allein bey diesen Voraussetzungen des andern Geschlechts treten so viele Bedenklichkeiten hervor, daß man aus Vorsicht die ganze Erlaubniß zu dem leidigen Schriftstellerwesen des schönen Geschlechts wieder zurücknehmen möchte. (p. X)

Despite Pockels's careful attempt to argue scientifically and logically, he is unable to do so when it comes to the emotive subject of the 'Schriftstellerwesen des schönen Geschlechts', as this outburst shows: 'Sollte es denn wirklich Zeiten und Stunden geben, worin unsern Frauen wirklich nichts Besseres und Edleres zu treiben übrig bliebe, als – Bücher zu schreiben?' (p. XI) The emphatic repetition of 'wirklich' indicates his incredulity at such a thought. He is suspicious too of the lascivious connotations of female authorship ('dieses wollüstige Herumtappen in der Bücherwelt', p. XII). But like Fichte, he finds himself faced with the inescapable fact of women's established authorship. And like Fichte, he has endowed women with certain qualities, which he is now unable to withdraw. Whilst in theory opposed to the idea of women writers, in

practice he appraises their work and deals with it on a more specific basis. And so he admits:

Ueber das weibliche Talent, - Romane zu schreiben, herrscht nur eine Stimme. Die Schriftstellerinnen haben uns hier und da wirklich lesenswerthe Sachen gegeben, - sie können uns angenehm unterhalten, in einzelnen Stellen sogar hinreißen und bezaubern. (p. 379)

His objections are to do with the limitations that female propriety and delicacy place on women in describing certain aspects of life, which robs their novels of realism:

Hierzu kommt [...] bey ihren Zeichnungen des wirklichen Menschen der Umstand, daß die Frauen, aus einer Art von Schüchternheit und Delicatesse, sich selten in den Geist und die Weise des Mannes hineinstudiren, uns daher fast allemal in einem zu grellen und schwarzen, oder in einem zu gefälligen Gemählde aufstellen. (Pockels's emphasis, p. 380)

The nature of the female sex, which he had defined elsewhere as being preoccupied with and especially suited to the cultivation of love, could have a positive effect on their novels:

Eben darum giebt es auch in der That wenige ganz frostige und kalte weibliche Romane, [...] weil irgendwo der Liebe ein Herz aufgeschlossen, - eine Aussöhnung der Uneinigen gestiftet, eine Hochzeit gefeyert, eine unglückliche Liebe am Ende zu einer freudigen Entwicklung gebracht, ein kaltes Gemüth in Feuer und Flammen gesetzt wird.

Similarly, women's putative sense of morality and decency resulted in their novels being innocent, which meant they could be recommended more generally: 'Offenbar haben die Weiber mehr moralischen Geschmack und mehr moralisches Gefühl, als der Mann' (p. 381). That way, women's 'Geschlechtscharakter' gave them an advantage over male authors:

Alle unsere edleren Romandichterinnen heiligen in ihren Schriften die Würde der Sittsamkeit; - immer schildern sie die Liebe in ihrer Unschuldsgestalt; sie wissen sie eigentlich auch nicht anders zu schildern. (p. 385)

So, although women's literary achievements lacked all originality, and were devoid of any genuine poetic value (p. 386), women had to be credited with certain qualities which ensured their unique contribution to the eighteenth-century literary sphere, especially novels:

Wir legen daher zunächst dem schönen Geschlechte ein ästhetisches Auge bey, das Liebliche und Regelmäßige der Formen und Gestalten schnell und richtig zu beurtheilen, und seinen Sinn danach zu gewöhnen. (p. 389)⁵⁷

The discourse of gender difference clearly infused eighteenth-century notions of authorship, but prohibitions were not always applied in practice (as in Goethe and Schiller's editorial practice). Moreover, the discourse itself is riven with ambiguities and contradictions (as in Pockels's work), thereby failing to condemn female authorship outright. Sometimes there is even positive encouragement of female authorship. A note in Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's writings suggests that some men appreciated the unique contribution that a woman's perspective could make to literature:

Unstreitig ist die männliche Schönheit noch nicht genug von den Händen gezeichnet worden, die sie allein zeichnen könnten, von weiblichen. Mir ist es allemal angenehm, wenn ich von einer neuen Dichterin höre. Wenn sie sich nur nicht nach den Gedichten der Männer bildeten, was könnte nicht da entdeckt werden.⁵⁸

Whilst not everyone was able to countenance the idea of women developing their own independent literary aesthetic as Lichtenberg was, many contemporaries did hold views on female authorship which were by no means unambiguously negative.

⁵⁷ The same views were expressed in an earlier work of his. See volume one of Pockels, *Versuch einer Charakteristik*, pp. 305-310.

⁵⁸ Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Aphorismen*, ed. Friedrich Sengle (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1977), pp. 111-112.

It is often asserted that, whilst the eighteenth century was able to contain such contradictory phenomena, they ceased to be permissible in the nineteenth. For instance, Susanne Kord argues:

Der Gegensatz 'Frau' und 'Autorin' im 18. Jahrhundert ist eine Gratwanderung, die zeitgenössischer Literatur zufolge von einigen Auserwählten mit viel Feingefühl bewältigt werden konnte; der Gegensatz 'Hausfrau' und 'Autorin' im 19. repräsentiert einen unüberbrückbaren Abgrund.⁵⁹

However, this is an oversimplification. I would argue that the contradictions and ambiguities which were so apparent in the eighteenth century continued to exist well into the nineteenth. A review published in the *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode* in 1819, often held to be the most conservative period of the post-revolutionary era, shows how female authorship could be appraised positively for its unique qualities.⁶⁰ The reviewer began his piece by addressing those very same reservations against female authorship.

Halb in Scherz, halb in Ernst hat man den Frauen neuester Zeit vorgeworfen, daß sie häufig die Feder ergriffen, ja ein Romanenfach, mehr als die Männer schrieben. Warum, wenn es ihnen ihre Verhältnisse sonst gestatten, sollten sie es auch nicht?

By addressing the objections against women writers in this way, the reviewer shows how this debate was not, as Kord has alleged, concluded in favour of condemning female authorship. In fact, it was still a live issue. Not only could the reviewer see no valid objection in principle to female authors, he also asserted that women possessed definite skills and attributes which made their writing valid and their contributions welcome:

⁵⁹ Kord, *Namen*, p. 94.

⁶⁰ See 'Literatur - Deutsche Literatur [Rezension]', *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus, Mode* March (1819). The reviewer discussed four novels, *Frauenliebe*, *Frauenwürde*, *Maria und Wallpurgis* and *Rosalba*, by Caroline von Fouqué, Caroline Pichler, Caroline von Woltmann and Benedikte Naubert respectively.

Gute Beobachtungsgabe, Auffassen gewisser unscheinbarer, und doch für bessere Charakteristik so wichtige Züge, klares Eindringen in des Herzen Tiefen, zumal des eignen Geschlechts, sind Vorzüge, die nicht leicht Jemand den Frauen streitig machen wird. Kommt dazu nun ein gebildeter Geist, das Talent der Darstellung, und gewisse großartige Gesinnungen und Aussichten, so sind sie recht dazu ausgestattet, Romane zu schreiben [...].

Women's novels often reached a standard of excellence which made them equal to the products of the male pen. They also had the further advantage of offering moral guidance to female readers.

[So] wäre denn doch auch zu beachten, daß Frauen moralische Zwecke mit ihren Erzählungen weit häufiger, als die Männer es thun, verbinden, und auf eine faßlich heitere Weise, manche nützliche, jüngere Personen ihres Geschlechts heilsame, Lehre darin verweben.⁶¹

Nor is it true to say that women's texts were necessarily assumed to be occupying a literary stratum below that of high art, in what Christa Bürger has termed the 'mittlere Sphäre'.⁶² Instead, the reviewer assures his readers from the outset that he will not be offering them anything mediocre ('Der Name der geehrten Verfasserinnen bürgt schon, daß nichts Flaches, Mittelmäßiges zu erwarten sey'). That women's writing was only ever assessed with regard to the author's sex, and not to the text's content, is also not borne out by this review. The reviewer specifically states that he will be addressing the *ideas* inherent in the novels he is reviewing ('so wollen wir denn versuchen mit [...] den Ideen, die ihren Büchern zu Grunde liegen [sic], die Lesewelt bekannt zu machen').⁶³ This suggests that it was not female authorship per se, but rather the extent to which individual women writers were seen to conform to the norms prescribed to the female sex (despite their activity as writers) that determined the response of their contemporaries.

⁶¹ '[Rezension]', *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus, Mode* March (1819), pp. 158-159.

⁶² Bürger, 'Dilettantism', p. 31.

⁶³ '[Rezension]', *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus, Mode* March (1819), p. 159.

Balancing genius and gender: Dictionaries of women writers

Dictionaries of women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries express this aspect of the male response to female authorship very clearly.⁶⁴ They exemplify the male desire to contain and control women's writing, whilst being faced with the *fait accompli* of female authorship, the presence of women writers on the literary market. At the same time, they also indicate the extent to which women writers were regarded as a phenomenon which was here to stay, and which was of great interest to their contemporaries.

'Verzeichniß einiger jetztlebenden Deutschen Schriftstellerinnen und ihrer Schriften' (1788)

The earliest compilation of eighteenth century women writers to be discussed here appeared in the *Journal von und für Deutschland* in 1788. In the 'Verzeichniß einiger jetztlebenden Deutschen Schriftstellerinnen und ihrer Schriften', the anonymous contributor lists 54 female writers and their works, in addition to five anonymous writers.⁶⁵ The subject was of such interest to the readers of the journal that there appeared no fewer than six further articles with additions and corrections between 1788 and 1790.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Five such dictionaries were published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: in 1715, 1790, 1823-5, 1893 and 1898. Of these, the last two were written by women. Dorothea Behnke, "Daß dem weiblichen Geschlechte an Tapfferkeit, Klugheit, Gelehrsamkeit und anderen Haupttugenden, gar nichts fehle." *Lexika zu Schriftstellerinnen aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum. Bestandsaufnahme und Analyse* (Osnabrück: Zeller Verlag, 1999), p. 9.

⁶⁵ 'Verzeichniß einiger jetztlebenden Deutschen Schriftstellerinnen und ihrer Schriften', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 5, no. 2 (1788). In the *Index deutschsprachiger Zeitschriften, 1750-1815*, compiled by the Göttinger Akademie der Wissenschaften, the author is deciphered as C.H. Schmid. However, later additions to the 'Verzeichniß' were written by another, unidentified author.

⁶⁶ 'Berichtigungen des Verzeichnisses jetztlebender Deutscher Schriftstellerinnen', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 5, no. 8 (1788). 'Beytrag zum Verzeichniß der jetztlebenden Deutschen Schriftstellerinnen', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 6, no. 3 (1789). 'Erinnerungen und Zusätze zu dem Verzeichnisse einiger jetztlebenden Deutschen Schriftstellerinnen und ihrer Schriften im Journal von und für Deutschland 1788.II S.133-42 und zu den Berichtigungen VIII S. 109-10', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 7, no. 5 (1790). 'Neuer Beytrag zum Verzeichniß der jetztlebenden Deutschen Schriftstellerinnen', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 6, no. 11 (1789). 'Noch ein Nachtrag zu den Verzeichnissen von Deutschen

The *Verzeichniß* takes the form of a writers' dictionary, listing the women's names, pseudonyms, dates of birth and death where known, and the titles of their works. The definition of a 'Schriftstellerin' goes beyond authors of *belles lettres*, and includes writers of scientific works, translations, domestic manuals and letters. The entries on individual women are usually devoid of judgment and comment, but in 1789, the author added a brief rationale for the *Verzeichniß*, in which he argued that the specific circumstances under which women pursue authorship necessitated a separate dictionary for them.

Mir scheint übrigens eine Litteratur der Deutschen Schriftstellerinnen um desto nöthiger, je weniger genau und vollständig insgemein die männlichen Litteratoren und Recensenten in diesem Fache zu seyn pflegen, je mehr die weibliche Bescheidenheit sich verborgen zu halten sucht, und je mehr es hier (bey der geringen Muße, die die meisten Frauen zur Autorschaft haben) darauf ankommt, auch die Verfasserinnen einzelner kleiner Aufsätze nicht zu übersehen.⁶⁷

Far from condemning female authorship in principle, this author felt that women's achievements ought to receive more recognition, as their natural modesty tended to obscure the extent of their literary accomplishments. In fact, he deliberately sought to encourage women writers by acknowledging and making public their work. It is indicative of the large numbers of women on the literary market that, despite the fairly extensive list of women writers compiled in this sequence of additions to the original *Verzeichniß*, the author felt that a careful reading of journals and almanacs would increase the *Verzeichniß* considerably.

Schriftstellerinnen', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 7, no. 9 (1790). 'Sechster Beytrag zum Verzeichniß der jetztlebenden Deutschen Schriftstellerinnen', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 7, no. 9 (1790).

⁶⁷ 'Neuer Beytrag', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 6, no. 11 (1789), p. 467.

**‘Deutschlands Schriftstellerinnen. Eine charakteristische Skize’
(1790)**

Only two years later, a separate dictionary appeared in book form, published anonymously by its author, Samuel Baur. Although his book, *Deutschlands Schriftstellerinnen. Eine charakteristische Skize* (1790), was to a large extent based on the *Verzeichniß*, his motives for compiling the dictionary were very different from those of the earlier author.⁶⁸ Baur freely admits that he is no admirer of women writers, and that he is writing the book only because he thinks that it is a potentially lucrative gap in the market.

Daß doch die Modeschriftsteller sich so manchen guten Bissen vor'm Munde wegschnappen lassen [...] noch [ist] keiner auf den Gedanken gekommen, Deutschlands gelehrte Damen dem Publikum vorzustellen.⁶⁹

Baur publicly acknowledged his opposition to women writers in a previous publication:

Da wir der Frauenzimmerschriftstellerei – wir können's nicht läugnen – ziemlich abhold sind, aus Gründen, die mehrere Gelehrte schon vor uns in ein deutliches Licht gesetzt haben, so wollten wir lieber diese Namen aus unserer Gallerie [der Erziehungsschriftsteller] ganz weglassen [...]. Wir kennen von den 50-60 schreibenden Damen Deutschlands wenige, denen wir ihre Schriftstellerei Dank wüßten, und wir denken, die Recensenten sollten den schreibenden Damen nicht so gar viele Scharrfüße machen, und alle Fehler nachsehen. Zu große Nachsicht schadet, und ein Frauenzimmer, das Bücher schreibt, legt seine Weiblichkeit ab, wird Gelehrter, und muß als solcher beurtheilt werden, wenn nicht besondere Umstände eintreten.⁷⁰

This means that a fundamental contradiction is built into *Deutschlands*

Schriftstellerinnen: although he is making women writers more prominent by publishing his dictionary, and although he is benefiting financially from their popularity, he is

⁶⁸ Nearly all the women listed in Baur's publication had appeared in the *Verzeichniß* two years earlier. It is obvious that he merely copied large parts of it, as the number of mistakes which he simply repeated, indicates. He did not incorporate the additions and corrections published in later editions of the *Verzeichniß*. See Uta Sadji, 'Einleitung', in *Deutschlands Schriftstellerinnen von Samuel Baur (1790)*, Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik (Stuttgart: Heinz Akademischer Verlag, 1990), pp. 11-13.

⁶⁹ Samuel Baur in his preface to Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*. Unpaginated.

⁷⁰ Samuel Baur in the preface to [Samuel Baur], *Charakteristik der Erziehungsschriftsteller Deutschlands. Ein Handbuch für Erzieher* (Leipzig: Johann Benjamin Georg Fleischer, 1790), pp. VIII-IX.

nonetheless unable to detect any merit in their work. In one entry, he declares freely that praising this woman's work, though necessary in the context of his dictionary as a concession to his readers, was a distasteful task to him ('wir versichern, daß es uns sehr sauer geworden').⁷¹ Such a cynical publication serves to illustrate the dichotomy between a widespread, instinctively negative attitude to women writers, and the inescapable fact of their established presence on the literary market.

Unlike the compiler of the *Verzeichniß*, Samuel Baur does not list the female authors and their works without commentary, but rather uses the bio-bibliographical entries to make general points about female authorship. Nearly all seventy-eight entries on the women in his dictionary are copied from a small number of sources previously published elsewhere, with only a few additions. It is these additions, the only original text, which reveal Baur's personal attitudes.⁷² His comments on the work of many women writers are usually disparaging. A woman writer could afford to be 'kein großes Licht', as her work was only of minor importance anyway.⁷³ Without giving any examples to justify his judgment, he frequently deems a work inferior: 'Schlecht wollen wir die Arbeiten dieser Dichterin [...] eben nicht nennen, aber schwerlich werden sie sich jemals sehr über das mittelmäßige erheben.'⁷⁴ Mediocrity and lack of originality are his most frequent charges:

⁷¹ On Sophie von La Roche. Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 77. A review of Baur's work, which appeared in the *Journal von und für Deutschland*, was surprised by this comment: 'dieser Artikel enthält am Schlusse einen Seitenblick, den wir nicht verstehen.' See 'Noch ein Nachtrag', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 7, no. 9 (1790), p. 231.

⁷² Sadji, 'Einleitung', p. 11.

⁷³ On Henriette von Runckel. Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 83.

⁷⁴ On Karoline von Grünier. Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 36.

Eine sehr mittelmäßige Dichterin, deren Gedichte ganz gewiß kein Aufsehen machen oder gemacht haben. Sie [...] enthalten lauter alltägliche Gedanken, empfehlen sich durchaus mit nichts Neuem; sind matt und kriechend [...].⁷⁵

When he does comment favourably, he damns with faint praise. One woman is extolled not for the quality of her work, but for 'der gute Wille der Verfasserin'.⁷⁶ Frequently, he appreciates moral sentiments in a woman's work, omitting to mention any literary merits. He considered any woman who could write more than an 'unorthographischen Liebesbrief' worthy of admiration, and so he appears genuinely surprised when he encounters a rare example of female intellect: 'daß der Geist eines Frauenzimmers seltener Anstrengung fähig sey [...] beweiset diese Dame.'⁷⁷ In another instance, he recommends a book as a worthwhile read, if one has absolutely nothing better to do: 'Diese Frau hat einige Schriften geliefert, die für die Leser, welche aus lieber Langeweile lesen, eine ganz gute Speise sind.'⁷⁸

Femininity is constantly seen as incompatible with authorship. Some subjects, for example, are 'für ein Frauenzimmer zu tragisch und zu unmoralisch'.⁷⁹ And because femininity itself was a quality to be judged, the critic must deal with a woman's heart as well as her writing. Although Baur had considered Madam Hänel's poems 'matt und kriechend', he assessed her 'Herz und Gefühl' as 'untadelhaft'.⁸⁰ But despite this, Baur's publication, though ostensibly a hostile reaction to the phenomenon of women writers, nonetheless bears testimony to the range of women's literary activities.

⁷⁵ On Madam Hänel. Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, pp. 37-38.

⁷⁶ On Charlotte Henriette Hezelin. Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 40.

⁷⁷ On Charlotte Sophie Gräfin von Bentinck. Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 11, p. 15.

⁷⁸ On Amalie Henriette Sophie Froriep. Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 32.

⁷⁹ On Caroline Lucius-Schlegel. Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 86.

⁸⁰ Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 38.

Baur bemerkt nicht, daß gerade sein Lexikon beste Beweise für absolute Selbständigkeit und Ebenbürtigkeit der schreibenden Frau liefert: Zahlreich sind die als Wissenschaftlerinnen, Erzieherinnen und Übersetzerinnen Tätigen sowie die Frauen, die als direkte Mitarbeiterinnen ihres Mannes berühmt werden, Mitglieder von Akademien und überregionalen, sogar ausländischen, Gesellschaften und Dichterinnen, denen von den Großen ihrer Zeit freundschaftliche Gunst und Förderung gewährt [werden].⁸¹

And Baur concedes that some women authors have certain accomplishments, even compared to their male counterparts: 'Wir haben schon einmal bemerkt, daß gut geschriebene Frauenzimmerbriefe Reize und Schönheiten haben, die Männer nur höchst selten den ihrigen zu geben vermögen.'⁸² Baur published several books in the same format later on, so we can deduce that his dictionary enjoyed relative success, thereby demonstrating the popular interest in women writers.⁸³

'Deutschlands Dichterinnen' (1803)

The issue was raised again in 1803, by Christoph Martin Wieland, in an article published in the *Neuer Teutscher Merkur*.⁸⁴ In 'Deutschland's Dichterinnen', Wieland stated that although Germany's philosophical women writers had still not achieved the prominence and excellence of foreign women philosophers, German women poets of the recent past 'können sich [...] sowohl ihrer Zahl als Vortrefflichkeit nach, mit denen aller auswärtigen Nationen vollkommen messen.'⁸⁵ For Wieland, the presence of women writers was an indicator of the level of culture and civilization in a state. It was important and desirable therefore, that Germany encouraged its female authors. Wieland's own role

⁸¹ Uta Sadji, "'Ein Frauenzimmer, das Bücher schreibt, legt seine Weiblichkeit ab, wird Gelehrter'"? Deutsche Autorinnen des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts und ihr Publikum', in *Begegnung mit dem Fremden. Grenzen-Traditionen-Vergleiche. Proceedings of the Internationaler Germanisten-Kongreß in Tokyo* (Munich: iudicum, 1991), pp. 227-228.

⁸² On Frau Forkelin. Baur, *Baur's Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 26.

⁸³ See 'Samuel Baur: Deutschlands Schriftstellerinnen. Eine charakteristische Skizze (Ulm: Stettin, 1790)', in Behnke, *Schriftstellerinnen Lexika*, pp. 25-35.

⁸⁴ Christoph Martin Wieland, 'Deutschland's Dichterinnen', *Neuer Teutscher Merkur*, (1803).

⁸⁵ Wieland, 'Dichterinnen', p. 259.

in fostering the talent of Sophie von La Roche is, of course, well-documented.

‘Deutschland’s Dichterinnen’ gives a brief survey of German women writers from the Middle Ages to the mid-eighteenth century. The article contains two interesting comments. First, Wieland felt that it would be appropriate, and beneficial to the readership, if a *female* historian undertook the task of writing a history of German women writers. Second, he lamented the lack of biographies of women writers. Biographies would give great insights into the ‘Kunst’ as well as into the ‘Psychologie’ of female authorship.⁸⁶ This indicates quite clearly the extent to which women writers were a legitimate topic of discussion, and of general interest to the reading public. Indeed, to some, women writers were a matter of national pride and distinction.

‘Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts’ (1823-5) and its reception

Whether or not female authorship was desirable or appropriate was a question that remained unresolved in the eighteenth century. Baur’s dictionary did not succeed in setting the tone for the debate, as later publications indicate. Carl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel published the next dictionary of women writers: *Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1823-5). The most ambitious and complete listing of women writers of the period around 1800, it caused intense debate. Tensions between femininity and authorship were examined yet again. Schindel’s work ran to over a thousand pages, and noted several hundred women authors.⁸⁷ Although he focused on writers living or only recently deceased, he intended to make a general contribution to the ‘weibliche Cultur unserer Zeiten’. As in the *Verzeichniß*, his definition

⁸⁶ Wieland, ‘Dichterinnen’, p. 259, p. 274.

⁸⁷ See ‘Carl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel: Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts (1823-5)’, in Behnke, *Schriftstellerinnen Lexika*, pp. 36-45.

of authorship was broad. He included not only writers of household manuals and cookery books, but also female composers. His entries, like Baur's, combine critical commentary with factual information about the writers' biographies and bibliographies. But Schindel's approach was very different, as is evident from his disparaging response to Baur's work.

Diese Schrift enthält nur wenig biographische Notizen und mehr Beurtheilungen, meistens sehr oberflächlich, unbillig und absprechend. – Erst später wurde es mir bekannt. – Der Verfasser hat sich nicht genannt, weil er sich vielleicht scheute, seine Urtheile zu vertheidigen.⁸⁸

Schindel's more positive attitude to female authorship was criticized in several reviews, in particular by Jakob Grimm. In a review published in the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, Grimm set out 'welchen [Eindruck] das ganze auf ihn gemacht hat'.⁸⁹ Since women have not contributed to the disciplines of theology, jurisprudence and medicine, because these are considered unfeminine, Grimm is unable to see the justification for women contributing to other genres, such as poems, novels and travelogues. After all, 'warum schiene die poesie etwas anderes, als ein amt und geschäft der männer? Die ganze geschichte lehrt es uns so.' Any act of speaking out ('lautwerden'), regardless of the context, is inappropriate for women, as it destroys their modesty and dignity. Women's modesty prevents them from ever attaining 'wahre dichtkunst', as propriety forbids them from discussing a love affair, or a kiss, in public (p. 172). Although Grimm does acknowledge that specific skills and talents (e.g. 'unnachahmliche[...] natürlichkeit') can be deduced from women's 'Geschlechtscharakter', these should only be made public

⁸⁸ Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. 2, p. XVI.

⁸⁹ Jakob Grimm, 'Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts von Carl Wilhelm August von Schindel', in *Kleinere Schriften von Jacob Grimm. Band 4: Recensionen und Vermischte Aufsätze* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1869), p. 172. All further page references appear in the text. Capitalization has not been adapted to modern usage.

after women writers' deaths. Grimm's argument is not based on anthropological or medical ideas about women's lack of creative ability, but is situated instead in a social discourse of gender-encoded behaviour. Accordingly, he sees the tremendous growth in the number of women writers as a 'niederschlagende progression.' It is evidence only of the spread of the writing disease, 'so hat die sucht zu reimen, zu declamieren eine die andere genährt.' (p. 172) Although Schindel's dictionary lists more than 300 female authors Grimm believes that not one of them has made a contribution to German literature:

Wenn sich nun in dem haufen von büchern und gedichten, aus diesen weiblichen händen hervorgegangen, kein einziges wirklich originales, kein mit dem genius lebendiger poesie gestempeltes vorfindet, wenn, gesetzt dasz alle ungedruckt geblieben wären, unsere literatur das nemliche ansehen, welches sie hat, haben, der gang unserer dichtkunst um kein haarbreit verrückt worden sein würde, was soll man daraus schlieszen? (pp. 172-173).

Disagreeing with Wieland, Grimm does not believe that the achievements of women authors confer prestige upon their nation. For him, it is to Germany's credit that there is no German Madame de Staël. Moreover, Grimm professes to be shocked at the number of 'unglücklicher, gestörter und geschiedener ehen, welche die vorliegenden lebensgeschichten deutscher dichterinnen ergeben' (p. 173). This is a consequence of women leaving their natural sphere: 'die frau, welche einmal aus dem kreise natürlicher bestimmung weicht, geräth mit sich selbst in zwiespalt, sie kann nicht mehr leisten und ertragen, was ihr gebührt.' Editors of books like Schindel's therefore have a moral responsibility not to encourage more women to take up the pen, 'indem sie den schleier der anonymität lüften, manches gute mädchen [...] zu neuen eitelen versuchen reizen'.

In response to these criticisms, Schindel prefaced the third volume of the dictionary with an essay, *Ueber die Schriftstellerei der Frauen und ihren Beruf dazu* (1825), in which he defended the validity of his work. This essay is one of the earliest works making the link between the social condition of women, the poetological discourses of the time and women's writing.⁹⁰ He argues that a work like his is necessary simply because no other work exists which lists all current women writers. Wieland's essay in particular, which asserted that there were around twenty female authors in 1803, cannot be correct, as 'jeder Meßkatalog vielleicht 8-10 neuaufliebende Musenfreundinnen zeigt'.⁹¹ This remarkable presence of women writers surely deserves to be examined, because it raises two questions: 'wie ist diese Erscheinung zu erklären, und verdient sie Lob oder Tadel?'. He summarizes the reactions to women authors as follows:

Einige tadeln fast jede Schriftstellerei der Frauen, als ihrem eigenthümlichen Berufe fremd, und sprechen ihr alles Verdienst ab, da sie nur, von Eitelkeit geleitet, glänzen wollen, und darüber die Pflichten der Haushaltung und Kinderzucht vernachlässigen und unglückliche Ehen befördern. [...]

Es fehlt aber auch nicht an Stimmen, welche diese Erscheinung als einen Beleg der fortschreitenden Cultur unseres Zeitalters und einer glücklichen Generation preisen, und sich der schmeichelnden Lobeserhebungen der schriftstellerenden Frauen im allgemeinen ermüden. (pp. VI-VII)

Schindel considers both responses extreme. The more appropriate response would be a consideration of the question 'ob das Weib einen eigenthümlichen Beruf habe, der mit dem der Schriftstellerei nicht zu vereinigen sey?' (p. VIII)

⁹⁰ Wurst, 'Negotiations of Containment', p. 37.

⁹¹ Carl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel, 'Ueber die Schriftstellerei der Frauen und ihren Beruf dazu', in *Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Die Schriftsteller- und Gelehrtenlexika des 17., 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts. (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1825), p. VI. All further page references to this essay appear in the text.

Like Campe, Schindel argues that all women are primarily destined to be mothers, wives and housewives. This is an important, valuable, and indeed honourable calling, which women can be proud to fulfil. But, unlike Campe, Schindel does not believe that women who wrote would inevitably neglect their domestic duties. He is able to quote several examples to support his case: Philippine Gatterer and Elise Sommer, both of whom successfully brought up ten children and maintained an orderly household despite their writing. Moreover, he declares, not all women are destined to become wives and mothers. It would be unjust not to let them write. Furthermore, writing can enliven a dull existence of domestic chores and worries. Schindel also counters Grimm's argument that women's writing made for an unhappy marriage. The reverse could be the case: unhappy marriages could drive women to seek solace in writing. Again, Schindel can offer examples of women who remained exemplary wives throughout their literary careers. Furthermore, he defends women's writing against Grimm's view that, in literary terms, it is simply too inferior to consider. It is not innate lack of ability that produces poor writing, but women's disadvantaged social condition, their lack of a proper education and training. He mentions several Enlightenment treatises in support of his argument:

Wolstonecraft, über die Rechte des Weibes; Amalie Holst, über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höheren Geistesbildung, und den berühmten Philosophen v. Hippel, über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber. (p. XVI)

And historical examples (Catherine II, Empress of Russia, Louise Gottsched) have proved the true potential of women. The female sex has, Schindel believes, certain aesthetic proclivities, for instance a better feeling for what is aesthetically and morally beautiful, and deeper religious sentiment (p. XIX). There are also genres to which women are naturally suited. The novel requires powers of observation and knowledge of the domestic situation. In this genre, women are even able to write *better* than men. Women

are able to avoid ‘das Frostige und Langweilige männlicher Schriftsteller’; and where male authors are tempted ‘durch ihre Darstellungen mit allen reizenden Farben der Sinnlichkeit oft die Unschuld [zu] vergiften’, women are able to instruct positively through their virtue (p. XXII). Finally, although Grimm might have been right to allege that some texts by women were written for reasons of vanity, and would not be missed if they had not been written, the same can also be said of male authors. Schindel’s praise for women writers in this essay simultaneously limits women to certain genres. Nevertheless, it represents an authorization to write.

Schindel was not the sole defender of his book. Two ‘Briefe über das Werk “die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, von Karl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel”’ appeared in the *Literarisches Conversations-Blatt*, entitled *Auguste an Marien*, and *Marie an Augusten*.⁹² Both letters were unreservedly positive, applauding the accuracy and thoroughness of Schindel’s research. Such virtues guaranteed the work ‘einen dauernden Werth für den Literaturforscher.’⁹³ In the first letter, the reviewer anticipates the criticisms Schindel would face from the ‘Widersacher der Schriftstellerinnen’.⁹⁴ Like Schindel, the reviewer rejects the claim that women *cannot* write, or are simply ‘nicht [zum Schreiben] geboren’. S/he acknowledges the socio-cultural circumstances obstructing women’s literary activities: ‘die Erziehung, die Sitte entfernt die Frauen von Feder und Katheder, nicht die Eigenthümlichkeit ihres

⁹² ‘Briefe über das eben erschienene Werk: Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, von Karl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel. *Auguste an Marien*’, *Literarisches Conversations-Blatt* 296 (1822). ‘Briefe über das Werk “die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, von Karl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel.” *Marie an Augusten*’, *Literarisches Conversations-Blatt* 67 (1823).

⁹³ ‘*Auguste an Marien*’, p. 1183.

⁹⁴ ‘*Auguste an Marien*’, p. 1184.

Geistes'. Here too, a list of outstanding members of the female sex is used to exemplify the potential for female excellence. Naturally, not every woman is destined for greatness, but then, 'Genius kehrt auch bei den Männern nur selten ein.' The author then tackles the claim that women *should* not write:

Haben denn alle Frauen Gattinnen- und Mutterpflichten zu erfüllen? – wie manche blieb unvermählt, wie manche ward früh Wittwe: andre sahen ihre Kinder früh versorgt, oder fanden Mittel, die Pflichten ihres Berufes zu erfüllen und doch Zeit zu ihren schriftstellerischen Arbeiten zu erübrigen.⁹⁵

More than that, writing can provide welcome relief and comfort from women's worries.

For all these reasons, women's suitability for writing should be judged on an individual basis, not rejected outright. The letter then discredits all critics of female authorship: 'Es sind gerade nicht die Edelsten, auch gerade nicht die Klügsten, die bisher gegen schriftstellernde Frauen geredet haben'. To conclude, the author cites the Bible as an encouragement for women to write: they should follow 'dem Gebot des Herrn, der ihren Kräften freie Uebung befiehlt.'⁹⁶ The second letter, *Marie an Augusten*, deals more specifically with Schindel's critics. The author systematically reverses the accusations commonly made against women writers, and alleges in turn that they are based on prejudice ('vorgefaßten Meinungen'), rather than on empirical fact and sound reasoning.⁹⁷

It is clear from this brief survey that Schindel's publication stimulated an intense public debate about female authorship. Whilst it did trigger some condemnation, it also met with some approval. Kord's claim that, by the nineteenth century, authorship was universally rejected as inappropriate for women, must be modified in the light of this. In

⁹⁵ 'Auguste an Marien', p. 1184.

⁹⁶ 'Auguste an Marien', p. 1184.

⁹⁷ 'Marie an Augusten', p. 268.

various ways, dictionaries of women writers did attempt to control and influence women's writing. But they were not consistent, reflecting instead a broad range of opinion continuing into the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The aesthetic, social and cultural discourses surrounding female authorship were manifestly not unified, but contained contradictions which persisted well into the 1820s, a time commonly held to be dominated by a resurgent conservatism. It is possible to recognize several currents, rather than a monolithic norm, without denying the power of an ideology that found its most influential proponent in Rousseau.⁹⁸ At the same time, theoretical positions opposing female authorship frequently co-existed with a practice permitting literary and learned activity by women. Adolph Freiherr von Knigge, for example, said he experienced shivers of revulsion when he encountered learned, women writers:

Ich muß gestehn, daß mich immer eine Art von Fieberfrost befällt, wenn man mich in Gesellschaft einer Dame gegenüber oder an die Seite setzt, die große Ansprüche auf Schöngeisterey oder gar auf Gelehrsamkeit macht. [...] Was hilft es ihnen, mit Männern in Fächern wetteifern zu wollen, denen sie nicht gewachsen sind, wozu ihnen mehrernteils die ersten Grundbegriffe, welche den Knaben schon von Kindheit eingebläuet werden, fehlen?⁹⁹

And yet he had a daughter who herself published on several occasions. In the *Verzeichniß* of 1789, Philippine Knigge is listed as having published a song in the *Magazin für Frauenzimmer*.¹⁰⁰ At the time of publication, 1785, she was only 10 years old. In 1789, she published her first book. It was not just her sex and her age which made this an unusual publication, but also her topic: *Versuch einer Logic für Frauenzimmer*.¹⁰¹ The preface shows that her father had helped and encouraged her in the publication of this

⁹⁸ Todd Kontje, 'Gender-Bending in the Biedermeier', *Women in German Yearbook* 12 (1996), p. 53.

⁹⁹ Knigge, *Umgang mit Menschen*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁰ 'Beytrag zum Verzeichniß', *Journal von und für Deutschland* 6, no. 3 (1789), p. 303.

¹⁰¹ Philippine von Knigge, *Versuch einer Logic für Frauenzimmer* (Hannover: Christian Ritscher, 1789).

work. Although she acknowledged the inappropriateness of authorship as a pursuit for women, she was not deterred.¹⁰²

Es hat gewiß nicht die Eitelkeit, als Schriftstellerinn glänzen zu wollen, Antheil an Herausgabe dieses kleinen Werks. Ich weiß wohl, daß Wenige meines Geschlechts [einen] wahren Beruf haben können, eine gelehrte Laufbahn zu betreten, und daß am wenigsten ein Mädchen von funfzehn [sic] Jahren sich sollte einfallen lassen, ein philosophisches Buch zu schreiben.¹⁰³

Knigge claims that the work was largely the result of her father's tuition, but it is nonetheless published under her name, not his; and she admits to finding writing and the discipline of logic an 'unbeschreibliches Vergnügen'. She also defends logic as a useful discipline for women. Explanations of the structure of her work reveal an extensive education, and a thorough training in the classical languages: she prefers to employ Latin terms where the German equivalent is inadequate. Moreover, she would not let it be thought that she had relied on other sources. She concludes the preface by stating the precise extent to which the work is her own:

allein ich habe es lieber wagen wollen, nach meiner eigenen Weise zu übersetzen, als aus anderen teutschen Handbüchern der Logic etwas abzuschreiben; Auch hat mein Vater, nicht zugeben wollen, daß ich dergleichen Lehrbücher vor Herausgabe dieses kleinen Werks, lesen sollte.¹⁰⁴

Philippine Knigge was not the only daughter who did not live according to her father's publicly acknowledged model of the sexes. Johann Heinrich Campe's colleague, Johann Bernhard Basedow, who together with Campe had developed a gender-based theory of education, in practice turned his own daughter into a *Wunderkind* who was able to read and write at the age of four, and able to speak Greek and Latin at the age of six.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Nor did her writing lose her the respect of her contemporaries. In 1802, Karl Rose dedicated his book of advice for girls to her, as a sign of his 'Hochachtung und Ergebenheit'. Rose, *Väterliche Winke an junge Frauenzimmer*, unpaginated dedication.

¹⁰³ Knigge, *Versuch*, pp. V-VI.

¹⁰⁴ Knigge, *Versuch*, pp. IX-X.

¹⁰⁵ Honegger, *Ordnung*, p. 70.

‘Sprecht, hab ich Dichterfähigkeit?’¹⁰⁶ – Validating women’s authorship

However, it is undeniable that the prohibitive discourse surrounding female authorship did affect women writers in their practice, as has been shown on numerous occasions. Susanne Kord’s study of anonymity and female authorship concluded that female identity forced women to choose between femininity and authorship. This creates a tension in their texts. The author wants to assert her female identity, and yet feels simultaneously forced to hide it: the contradiction between the ‘Versuch, bekannt zu werden und gleichzeitig unbekannt zu bleiben.’¹⁰⁷ Such a contradiction typically entails strategies of disguise: anonymity, cryptonymity, the refusal to publish, or ostentatious compliance with gender roles. So women not only attempted to make their own biographies comply with traditional notions of femininity, but also feminized the process of writing itself, for example, by referring to their texts as children.¹⁰⁸

A female author usually justified her authorship of a book in the preface. Here, the impropriety of women writing was often acknowledged; but, it would be claimed, this particular woman is writing with the encouragement of a male mentor, or publisher.¹⁰⁹ It might also be declared that the work was published without the author’s knowledge and against her will. Occasionally the author of an original work might pretend to be no more than a translator or editor. Straitened financial circumstances are also called upon to

¹⁰⁶ Philippine Gatterer, ‘An Leser und Leserinnen’, in *Gedichte von Philippine Gatterer* (Göttingen: Johann Christian Dieterich, 1778), p. 290.

¹⁰⁷ Kord, *Namen*, p. 93, p. 115.

¹⁰⁸ Kord, *Namen*, p. 117.

¹⁰⁹ Helmina von Chézy said she tried to meet her publisher’s demands: ‘Es war nothwendig, daß ich viel schrieb, [...] weil Bertuch mir mehr als Einmal in seinen Briefen sagte: hätten sie doch tausend Hände zum Schreiben!’ Wilhelmine von Chézy, ‘Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben, bis 1811’, in *Aurikeln. Eine Blumengabe von deutschen Händen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1818), p. 160.

justify literary activity.¹¹⁰ Women characterize their work as an exception, an irregularity – it will not happen again. Or they argue that this is their first and only publication. In some cases, women assert that whilst authorship in general is unseemly for their sex, this does not apply to their particular genre (educational treatise, didactic novel etc.). Frequently, a work of fiction is passed off as a true story, thereby limiting its claim to originality. Another possible strategy in justifying authorship was to anticipate any negative criticism: ‘Diese Arbeit hat weder Plan, noch Zeichnung, weder Styl, noch poetischen, oder sonst irgend einen andern Werth’.¹¹¹ Criticism could also be nullified by dedicating work to (mostly female) patrons, whose high social standing would grant the work relative immunity.¹¹² In order to avoid being castigated for the neglect of their traditional responsibilities, women writers always state that their true calling has not been compromised by their writing. And nearly all women address a female audience in their prefaces. So, it has been argued, in response to the contradictory and often negative discourse surrounding female authorship, women writers tended to retreat, demonstrating their modesty in endless apologies.¹¹³

But such a retreat was not universal. Unfortunately, only a few examples can be mentioned here. In the 1770s, Maria Anna Sagar (1727-1805) published two novels, *Die*

¹¹⁰ Chézy explained: ‘Meine Verhältnisse machten noch immer Arbeiten nothwendig, welche ich selbst im Wochenbett nicht versäumte.’ Chézy, ‘Erinnerungen’, p. 155.

¹¹¹ [Elisa Friedrike von Langeland], *Memoires der Frau v. Lan. geboren v. Burg. Von ihr selbst geschrieben*, 2 vols. (Kopenhagen: Gerhard Bonnier, 1813). The preface is unpaginated.

¹¹² On prefaces, see Kord, *Namen*, pp. 102-105.

¹¹³ Magdalene Heuser, “‘Ich wollte dieß und das von meinem Buche sagen, und gerieth in ein Vernünfteln”. Poetologische Reflexionen in den Romanvorreden’, in *Untersuchungen zum Roman von Frauen um 1800*, ed. Helga Gallas and Magdalene Heuser, *Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990), pp. 55-58. Here quoted from p. 85. For a recent critique and revision of earlier studies of prefaces, see Anne Fleig, *Handlungs-Spiel-Räume. Dramen von Autorinnen im Theater des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts*, *Epistemata. Reihe Literaturwissenschaft* vol. 270 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), pp. 62-85.

verwechselten Töchter; eine wahrhafte Geschichte, in Briefen entworfen von einem Frauenzimmer (1771) and *Karolinens Tagebuch ohne ausserordentliche Handlung oder gerade so viel als gar keine* (1774).¹¹⁴ The preface to her first novel acts as an antidote to the modesty described above. Sagar explicitly rejects the tendency of female prefaces to apologize for the publication of their work. She defies her critics and unequivocally rebuffs their right to judge her work:

Ich mag mich noch weniger des sonst so gewöhnlichen, und in den meisten Vorreden so treflich benutzten Vorwandes bedienen: die Herausgabe seines Werkes niemals ihren wahren Beweggrund – der Schreibsucht, dem Ehrgeiz nach Autorschaft, und so weiter – sondern allemal dem Andringen seiner Freunde, oder dem Bitten des Verlegers, auf den Hals zu werfen. Ich würde durch dergleichen Entschuldigungen mein Geschlecht zu sehr herabsetzen [...]

Schon den bloßen Gedanken kann ich ohne Beleidigung der weiblichen Eitelkeit nicht ertragen: eine Vorrede zu schreiben, die voller kriechenden Empfehlungen an die Herren Kunstrichter, gerichtet seyn sollte, um ihren, für mein Geschlecht so wenig bedeutenden Beyfall, zu erbetteln. ... O das sollen sie von mir ja nicht erwarten!¹¹⁵

In the preface to her second novel, Sagar confounds her readers' expectations further. She taunts them for having picked up a book with a title as unpromising as *Tagebuch ohne ausserordentliche Handlung oder gerade so viel als gar keine* ('Wie [...], Sie haben das Titelblatt gelesen, und wollen doch in dem Buche noch weiter umblättern?').¹¹⁶ She is aware of pejorative attitudes to women writers, but she does not counter them with protestations of modesty. Instead, she gives an ironic twist to the well-known rhetoric

¹¹⁴ For a discussion of Sagar's work, see Claire Baldwin, *The Emergence of the Modern German Novel: Christoph Martin Wieland, Sophie von La Roche, and Maria Anna Sagar*, Studies in German literature, linguistics, and culture (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002). Helga Meise, 'Das Werk von Maria Anna Sagar - Konstitutionsbedingungen und Probleme des Romans von Frauen im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Untersuchungen zum Roman von Frauen um 1800*, ed. Helga Gallas and Magdalene Heuser, Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990).

¹¹⁵ [Maria Anna Sagar], *Die verwechselten Töchter, eine wahrhafte Geschichte, in Briefen entworfen von einem Frauenzimmer* (Prag: 1771), pp. 2-4.

¹¹⁶ [Maria Anna Sagar], *Karolinens Tagebuch, ohne ausserordentliche Handlungen oder gerade so viel als gar keine. Geschrieben von M.A.S.* (Prag: Wolfgang Gerle, 1774). The preface is unpaginated. All further references to this novel appear in the text.

against women authors: ‘Was können Sie sich von einem böhmischen Frauenzimmer versprechen; wie kann die nur auf den Gedanken verfallen ein Buch zu schreiben.’ She ends the preface with a warning that all male efforts to curtail women’s reading and writing are bound to fail, just as in her case, ‘denn je mehr man mich von etwas abhält, desto neugieriger bin ich darauf. Aber nur still! Das bleibt unter uns Frauenzimmern im Vertrauen gesagt.’ The confidential tone she adopts with her dear ‘Leserinnen’ belittles the loud pomposity of her opponents, making these patriarchs foaming at the mouth appear ridiculous.

Writing, and writing by women, is a theme throughout the novel. Its female heroine, Karoline, decides to write regular letters to her sister, defending her decision by saying that writing is no less productive than any other female pursuit.

Nur werfe mir nicht vor, daß ich so viel Papier und Zeit verderbe: denn es dünkt mir doch, daß ich besser daran thue, als wenn ich die leeren Stunden vor dem Spiegel zubrächte, um zu forschen, welcher Blick, oder welche Stellung mir besser lassen? (pp. 6-7)

When, symbolically, she swaps her pen for a needle, she pricks herself and draws blood. This convinces her – in a direct reversal of contemporary gender ideology – that needlework is not for her: ‘als ich nun mein liebes Blut sahe, warf ich die Nadel weg, aber freylich zu spät, hätte ich sie lieber gar nicht in die Hand genommen. Warum mußte ich damit tändeln, da [...] das Nähen mein Beruf nicht ist.’ (p. 54) There is no hint of modesty in Karoline’s attitude to her own writing (‘ich [bin] selbst in meine eigene Plauderey verliebt’), and she makes no effort to avoid charges of ‘Schriftstellersucht der Weiber’ (‘Heute, glaube ich, [habe] ich meiner Schreibsucht ziemlich Genüge getan [...]’, p. 53). Karoline includes herself in the community of writers (‘uns Schriftstellern’, p.

164), and is unashamed about her work, telling her brother he may print it only on condition that it be reviewed by all the critics (p. 198). She is not shy of male judgment, but welcomes it. Later in the novel, Karoline wants to go beyond writing letters and copying stories, and lays claim to creative writing, too: '[...] ich gefalle mir selbst. Wenn ich so fortfahre, so kann ich mit der Zeit nicht allein abschreiben, sondern auch selbst Romanen erfinden.' (p. 256) She is defiant when her relatives want her to give up writing: 'meinethalben mögt ihr anstellen, was ihr wollt, nichts soll mich vom Schreiben mehr abschrecken.' (p. 278) In this novel, Karoline's writing, and that of Sagar herself, are validated by the women themselves, and not by any external encouragement. Sagar's own persona in the prefaces, and the character of her protagonist, are powerful alternative voices to the discourse of female modesty so prevalent elsewhere.

Philippine Engelhard, née Gatterer (1756-1831), provides another example of a woman unashamedly claiming authorship. She published three collections of poetry between 1778 and 1787. Although her poems cannot be considered subversive, and she certainly received a very gendered reception from critics and readers alike, she nonetheless asked to be recognized as an author.¹¹⁷ Later, she combined her writing career with being a mother of ten, thereby experiencing the tension between her social responsibilities as a woman and the 'male' activity of writing very acutely. But she concluded her first poetry collection with the following appeal to her readers:

Ihr, die Ihr Schönheit kennt und Fehler,
Helft meiner Unerfahrenheit.

¹¹⁷ On Philippine Gatterer-Engelhard's reception, see Ruth P. Dawson, 'Im Reifrock den Parnas bestiegen. Die Rezeption von Dichterinnen im 18. Jahrhundert (am Beispiel von Philippine Gatterer-Engelhard)', in *Kontroversen, alte und neue. Akten des VII. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses*, ed. Inge Stephan and Carl Pietzcker (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986).

Und Euer Urtheil! Grosse Lehrer!
Sprecht, hab ich Dichterfähigkeit?¹¹⁸

Her appeal to more experienced mentors to judge her ability is entirely in keeping with the traditional model of femininity. But she is also asking to be properly considered as a poet, a 'Dichter'.¹¹⁹ She also endeavours to construct an authorization for her writing, a justification to publish more in the future:

Konnt' es zuweilen mir gelingen,
In eines Traurigen Gesicht
Ein heitres Lächeln zu erzwingen;
So wird mir, mehr zu singen, Pflicht.

That same year, Sophie von La Roche (whose writing career was famously directed and controlled by a male mentor, Wieland) revealed to Julie Bondeli (1731-1778) in a letter how she perceived herself. She was a wife and mother, and complained of her many tasks: 'die Kinder, das große Haus, die Pflichten der Repräsentation, die wohl keiner Kanzlersgattin erspart bleiben [...] Ich bräuchte Nerven wie Ankertaue, um all das auszuhalten.' And yet, despite all this, she did not conceive of herself as a wife and mother first and foremost: 'daß [...] ich [...] inmitten von familiären Pflichten und höfischer Etikette, von Gewohnheiten und Ritualen vor allem eine femme de lettres bin.'¹²⁰ Later in the same letter, she once more refers to herself as a 'Frau der Feder'. Interestingly, she seems only to have felt at ease making this confession in correspondence with another exceptional woman, known for her own intelligence and

¹¹⁸ Gatterer, 'An Leser und Leserinnen', p. 290.

¹¹⁹ Emilie von Berlepsch also stated her claim to authorship plainly, in 'Antwort auf eine Warnung vor den Gefahren der Schriftstellerei', printed in Emilie von Berlepsch, *Sommerstunden* (Zurich: Orell, Gessner, Füssli und Compagnie, 1794), pp. 3-14.

¹²⁰ Sophie von La Roche, letter to Julie Bondeli, August 1778, reprinted in Renate Feyl, 'Das mühselige Amt der Poeterey. Sophie la Roche an Julie Bondeli', *Querelles. Jahrbuch für Frauenforschung* 3 (1998). Quotations on p. 313 and p. 314.

learning.¹²¹ Nevertheless, it does indicate the extent to which was possible to maintain a sense of self which did not conform to the gender identities propagated in public discourse, precisely because this public discourse was not itself uniform and monolithic.

Elsewhere, there is evidence of women writers deliberately positioning themselves in a female literary tradition.¹²² Susanne von Bandemer (1751-1828) published a new edition of her collection of verse in 1811, which included a number of poems written either to, or about, other women authors. They were addressed to Friederike Helen Unger, Anna Louisa Karsch and Sophie von La Roche among others. All these poems recognize the other woman as a fellow woman writer, and refer to their writing in a complimentary fashion. To see this implied comradeship in itself as evidence of confident female authorship might seem implausible, but the defence of female literary practice is made more explicit elsewhere in the volume. Bandemer responds to a poem originally published in the *Göttinger Musenalmanach* in 1797 (reprinted in Bandemer's collection) entitled 'An die Schriftstellerinnen'.¹²³ The poem suggested that women, 'zur Liebe nur geboren', should not lose sleep writing verse at night. The author recommended instead that women remain content with their victories in love, since a moment's pleasure is worth more than 'aller Ruhm der Nachwelt'. Only Apollo's sons were destined for authorship, women were advised: 'Begeistert – aber schreibet nicht!' Bandemer's reply,

¹²¹ By contrast, Sophie Mereau replied with biting sarcasm directly to Clemens Brentano in response to his criticism of her literary activity: 'Was Sie mir über die weiblichen Schriftsteller, und ins besondere, über meine geringen Versuche, sagen, hat mich recht ergriffen [...]. Gewiß [hat] nur die außerordentliche Großmut der Männer diesen [sic] Unfug so lange gelassen zusehen können.' Dagmar von Gersdorff, ed., *"Lebe der Liebe und liebe das Leben": Der Briefwechsel von Clemens Brentano und Sophie Mereau* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1981), p. 116.

¹²² See also Ruth P. Dawson, 'Reconstructing Women's Literary Relationships: Sophie Albrecht and Female Friendship', in *In the Shadow of Olympus. German Women Writers Around 1800*, ed. Katherine R. Goodman and Edith Waldstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

¹²³ See Susanne von Bandemer, *Gedichte*, new ed. (Neustrelitz: Ferdinand Albanus, 1811), pp. 185-186.

entitled: 'Parodie. Antwort an die Schriftsteller', constitutes a general response to men opposing female authorship and learning.¹²⁴ She argues that men have always benefited from women's learning: intellectual accomplishments mean that women are better company in more circumstances than simply in the bedroom. Apollo's sons are not challenged by women's poetic and intellectual pursuits, and so she demands: 'lasst den sogenannten Schönen, / Die Wissensfreyheit ungekränkt.' Beauty and youth do not last, and an old woman who cannot make interesting conversation is repellent to men. Female authorship is explicitly endorsed in this poem and tacitly confirmed by her poetical references to other women writers.

In a further example of private correspondence between women authors, the letters exchanged between Therese Huber (1764-1829) and Karoline von Woltmann (1782-1847) give an intriguing insight into the self-presentation of two writers whose writing careers lasted until the 1820s.¹²⁵ Throughout their correspondence, there are few allusions to the fact that they were women. No references to the (dis)advantages of their sex in the publishing industry are made, nor do they mention the reaction of the public to their work *as women*.¹²⁶ Instead, the women discuss the everyday issues which they encountered in their activities as editors and authors, unrelated to their sex. They exchange views on books they were reading, including classical texts, histories, almanacs,

¹²⁴ Bandemer, *Gedichte*, pp. 187-188.

¹²⁵ Brigitte Leuschner, ed., *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Therese Huber (1764-1829) und Karoline von Woltmann (1782-1847). Ein Diskurs über Schreiben und Leben* (Marburg: Tectum, 1999).

¹²⁶ Sigrun Schmid has also noted the frankness with which women writers referred to their writing in correspondence with female colleagues. Sigrun Schmid, *Der "selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit" entkommen: Perspektiven bürgerlicher Frauenliteratur; dargestellt an Romanbeispielen Sophie von La Roches, Therese Hubers, Friederike Helene Ungers, Caroline Auguste Fischers, Johanna Schopenhauers und Sophie Bernhardis*, *Epistemata* vol. 257 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), pp. 293-294. See also Dawson, 'Women's Literary Relationships'.

and contemporary German literature. On one occasion, gender is mentioned specifically. Therese Huber criticizes Woltmann's work for being too learned and masculine, but her criticism is not aimed at the fact that it was inappropriate for a woman to be learned, but rather that it would exclude less educated readers.¹²⁷ In general, their letters reveal them to be self-confident in their work and their abilities, knowledgeable about their trade and occasionally mocking about the literary market. They freely discuss 'unfeminine' topics such as philosophy, history and scholarship. Rather than turn to male mentors for advice and support, as Goethe had suggested women writers ought to do, these women turned to each other to discuss their professional lives. There is no evidence here of the alleged tendency among women writers to become a living embodiment of the discourse in their behaviour, in order to make the fact of their writing appear acceptable. In this private exchange, the signals of gendered discourse relating to authorship are not evident, and yet in their published output, both women were careful to comply with the expectations of their readership.

Conclusion

How can the pervasive rhetoric about femininity and authorship, with which women writers often colluded, be explained? Uta Sadji suggests that in some cases, it was not a lack of self-confidence but a pragmatic understanding of how the cultural and literary marketplace functioned which induced women to comply ostentatiously with the constraints placed upon them.¹²⁸ In the light of the texts examined here, this seems a likely suggestion for some women writers at least. In general, the discourses of sexual

¹²⁷ See letter no. 10 in Leuschner, ed., *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Therese Huber und Karoline von Woltmann*, pp. 38-41.

¹²⁸ Sadji, 'Autorinnen', p. 228.

difference and authorship were simply too internally inconsistent to outlaw female authorship completely. So although women authors were particularly vulnerable to criticism, because authorship was defined in such a way that it ruled out femininity, the inconsistency of contemporary discourse enabled women to authorize their own writing practice. By using a variety of sources, from private correspondence to opinion-shaping commentary in journals, it is possible to see beyond the texts most frequently cited: prohibitions from male literary giants like Goethe and Schiller and self-censorship by women themselves, in the performative rhetoric of their prefaces. Consideration of a broader range of sources allows a more subtle interpretation of the constraints and opportunities which existed for women writers, both in practice and in contemporary discourse. 'Gender censorship' was not a monolithic force, barring all women from authorship, but a careful balance of authorization and denial. Female authorship was possible, due to loopholes inherent in the case against it, laxity in the practical application of the prohibitive discourse, and some instances of active encouragement. These possibilities continued to exist until long after the onset of post-revolutionary reaction.

Chapter 3 ‘...sollte ich gar nicht lesen, dann könnte ich ...von Sinnen kommen’:¹ Women and Reading

Bücher lesen, ausser Bibel und Gesangbuch, wäre Todsünde, Müßiggang für ein Mädchen. Wie oft wurde mir meine Liebe zum lesen nicht verbittert, manchmal die Bücher verschlossen, und ich an den Spinnrocken verwiesen. Da [...] legte ich mein Buch aufs linke Knie, und spann mit der rechten Hand.²

Introduction

Literacy has two sides. In the eighteenth century, German women struggled to claim legitimacy as writers, a struggle that took place against implacable ideologues. In chapter one, we encountered those who maintained, for social or scientific reasons, that the natures of the two sexes were diametrically opposed. In chapter two, we met with those who concluded from this that women were unsuited to literature. The implacability of these opponents of a new phenomenon – the female author – can be partly explained by their opposition to the phenomenon with which they were already familiar – the female reader. For as literacy rates rose overall in the eighteenth century, it became obvious that legitimacy as a writer came, at least partly, from the mass of readers. If German women were to be prevented from writing, then their reading must also be curtailed, or strictly censored. For literacy, having begun as a means of women’s instruction and education, might continue as a means of women’s self-expression, ending finally as the means of women’s utter independence.

¹ Paul Rachel, ed., *Elisa von der Recke. Aufzeichnungen und Briefe aus ihren Jugendtagen* (Leipzig: Dietrich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1900), p. 255.

² Friderika Baldinger, ‘Versuch über meine Verstandeserziehung’, in *“Ich wünschte so gar gelehrt zu werden.” Drei Autobiographien von Frauen des 18. Jahrhunderts. Texte und Erläuterungen*, ed. Magdalene Heuser; Ortrun Niethammer; Marion Roitzheim-Eisfeld; Petra Wulbusch (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1994), p. 17. Originally published as Friderika Baldinger, *Lebensbeschreibung von Friderika Baldinger von ihre selbst verfaßt. Herausgegeben und mit einer Vorrede begleitet von Sophie, Wittwe von la Roche* (Offenbach: Ulrich Weiß und Carl Ludwig Brede, 1791).

Unease about female authorship in the period was mirrored by unease about women readers. Contemporary commentators observed with concern the number of women who read often and widely. They called for limits on how women read and what they read. But the continual expansion of the literary market suggests that their attempts were unsuccessful. Were their concerns simply ignored? Or was a discourse of selective prohibition too incoherent to be effective? The history of women's reading is inextricably linked with women's authorship around 1800, and needs to be examined. Who belonged to the reading classes? Were women able to choose their own reading matter? If so, what were their preferences? How did they read? We have seen that women writers were aware of their readership, and consciously wrote for women. But at what point did the passive consumption of literature lead to the active production of literature?

To answer these questions, this chapter examines the eighteenth-century discourse relating to reading in general, and women's reading in particular. It then investigates whether the claims made by critics of the so-called *Lesewut* phenomenon corresponded to reality. The Stolberg household will provide an example of the role that reading could potentially play domestically. Finally, the chapter looks at the autobiographical writings of Elisa von der Recke, revealing the status of reading in her life. It also documents how, in her case, prohibitive discourse was translated into proscriptive action.

Reading in the Enlightenment

Reading had been an integral part of the German Enlightenment project from the beginning. The German *Aufklärung* propounded the belief that genuine social improvement could only result from a progressive change in individual awareness. This, rather than violent social upheaval, would change people's essential nature. The written word was the medium through which this collective self-enlightenment would take place. Cultivating the power of reason, in order to participate in this project, constituted a moral obligation: 'Unser ganzes Leben soll ein Streben seyn, uns mündig zu machen. Alle unsere Kräfte sollen selbsthätig, und unser Charakter soll selbstständig werden.'³ So to read became an essential duty in man's quest to fulfil his destiny: 'Was giebt es nun für ein zweckmäßigeres Mittel, unsern Geist auszubilden, als das Bücherlesen?' It was potentially nothing less than 'eine Bildungsanstalt zur Erweckung unserer Anlagen und zur Vervollkommnung unserer Kräfte'.⁴ For reading to be carried out correctly, the reader had to engage actively with the text, rather than accept the written word without question. (Enlightenment ambition assumed that people could use their powers of reasoning competently and autonomously.⁵) The ideal reading process was therefore described as a dialogue between the author and the reader. Passive reading was detrimental to *Aufklärung*. Novalis phrased it thus: 'Der wahre Leser muß der erweiterte Autor sein.'⁶

³ Johann Adam Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen. Nebst Bemerkungen über Schriften und Schriftsteller* (Jena: Hempelsche Buchhandlung, 1799), p. IV.

⁴ Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen*, p. IV, p. VII.

⁵ John A. McCarthy, 'The Art of Reading and the Goals of the German Enlightenment', *Lessing Yearbook* 16 (1984), p. 80.

⁶ From an unpublished fragment. Carl Seelig, ed., *Novalis. Gesammelte Werke* (Herrliberg; Zurich: Bühl, 1945), vol. 2, p. 44.

The eighteenth century offers many examples of attempts to popularize knowledge and advance right judgment, from the proliferation of moral weeklies to dictionaries and encyclopaedias. All these indicate that ‘the goal of enlightenment and the chief means of achieving it [...] appear to be one and the same. The reading act is equated to a “Denkübung” which has the effect of making one perfect.’⁷ But such definitions seemed exclusively intellectual. In the wake of the movement of *Empfindsamkeit*, a more balanced understanding of literacy emerged. Reading ought to educate the heart as well as the mind. Goethe gave definitive expression to this: ‘Es gibt dreierlei Art Leser: Eine, die ohne Urteil genießt, eine dritte, die ohne zu geniessen urteilt, die mittlere, die geniessend urteilt und urteilend genießt; diese reproduziert eigentlich ein Kunstwerk aufs neue.’⁸ And if good reading involves both heart and mind, then understanding must be emotional, as well as intellectual. Wieland’s essay *Wie man liest* (1781) shows how writers attempted to promote good reading practice. Good reading requires understanding and refinement, without prejudice or free will. But Wieland claims that there are innumerable potential obstacles to a text being read in this way.

Das Unglück, obenhin, unverständlich, ohne Geschmack, ohne Gefühl, mit Vorurteilen, oder gar mit Schalksaugen und bösem Willen gelesen zu werden – oder, wie die meisten Leser, die nur zum Zeitvertreib in ein Buch gucken – oder zur Unzeit, wenn der Leser übel geschlafen, übel verdaut, oder unglücklich gespielt, oder sonst Mangel an Lebensgeistern hat – oder gelesen zu werden, wenn gerade dieses Buch, diese Art von Lectüre unter allen möglichen sich am wenigsten für ihn schickt, und seine Sinnesart, Stimmung, Laune, mit des Autors seiner den vollkommenen Contrast macht – das Unglück, so gelesen zu werden, ist [...] keines von den geringsten. [...] Unter hundert Lesern kann man sicher rechnen von achtzig so [schlecht] gelesen zu werden. [...] Mit den Autoren ist

⁷ McCarthy, ‘Art of Reading’, p. 83.

⁸ Goethe, letter to J.F. Rochlitz (13 June 1819). Ernst Beutler, ed., *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, 24 vols. (Zurich: Artemis, 1948-1963), vol. 21, p. 337.

kein Mitleid zu haben – und den Lesern ist nicht zu helfen. Aber gleichwohl wäre zu wünschen, daß die Leute besser lesen lernten.⁹

Bad reading habits frustrated eighteenth-century commentators. Everyone has a chance of enlightenment: why waste it? Adam Bergk is typical in warning of the dangers of bad reading habits (these include an early demise), and in condemning those who indulged in them: ‘Die Folgen einer solchen geschmack- und gedankenlosen Lektüre sind also unsinnige Verschwendung, unüberwindliche Scheu vor jeder Anstrengung, grenzenloser Hang zum Luxus, Unterdrückung der Stimme des Gewissens, Lebensüberdruß, und ein früher Tod.’ The majority of readers are ‘die große Menge derjenigen, die bloß vegetiren, essen, trinken und sterben.’¹⁰ Spurred on by such assessments, Enlightenment critics in large numbers set about forcefully educating readers in the proper art of reading.

Along with the lower orders, it was women who were considered most prone to these bad reading habits.¹¹ But just how extensive was female literacy in the eighteenth century; how and what did women read? Thirty years ago, research into the history of reading proclaimed that the period witnessed nothing less than a full-scale ‘Leserevolution’. The reading population became more widespread, including for the first time women, children, and the lower orders. Scholars characterized this as a ‘democratization of reading.’¹² This first wave of research was, however, hampered by methodological errors, which more recent scholarship has highlighted. Chief of these a misplaced emphasis on ‘literacy’. This term covers a wide spectrum of reading and

⁹ Christoph Martin Wieland, ‘Wie man liest; eine Anekdote’, in *Christoph Martin Wieland, Werke III* (Munich: Hanser, 1967). Originally published in *Der Teutscher Merkur* (January 1781), pp. 70-74.

¹⁰ Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen*, p. 412, p. 415.

¹¹ McCarthy, ‘Art of Reading’, p. 87.

¹² See for example Rolf Engelsing, *Analphabetentum und Lektüre* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1973), pp. 53-68.

writing ability.¹³ Schooling provides no measure of literacy: many pupils left school able only to read, not to write. In some cases the ability was lost within a few years of leaving school. Nor does the ability to sign one's name indicate proficiency at reading, or indeed at writing anything other than one's name. Moreover, the ability to read, and even the possession of books, does not necessarily suggest actual reading practice, let alone a regular reading habit. Even if the data was reliable, there was a lack of comparative evidence across different regions.¹⁴ Literacy varied greatly amongst the German states. Earlier assertions that literacy in the Protestant North was greater than in the Catholic South do not stand up to scrutiny, as Siegert points out:

Sicher ist jedoch schon jetzt, daß wegen der starken territorialen Zersplitterung mit unterschiedlichen Konfessionen, unterschiedlicher Förderung des Schulwesens und unterschiedlicher Wirtschaftsstruktur kein einfaches lineares West-Ost oder Nord-Süd Gefälle zu erwarten ist. (Schließlich liegt Sachsen im Osten und Baden im Süden).

Most statistics are therefore flawed: '*Durchschnittszahlen für große Flächen mit solchen Differenzen sind schlicht nicht sinnvoll.*'¹⁵

However, although the 'Leserevolution' was undoubtedly patchy across Germany, and did not take place on the scale previously suggested, the increase was nonetheless significant. Even if the literary public of the early 1700s constituted less than two percent of the general population, an increase of a further two percent by the end of the century

¹³ Erich Schön, 'Publikum und Roman im 18. Jahrhundert', in "*Öffentlichkeit*" im 18. Jahrhundert, ed. Hans-Wolf Jäger, Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert Supplementa (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1997), p. 299.

¹⁴ Ulrike Weckel, *Zwischen Häuslichkeit und Öffentlichkeit. Die ersten deutschen Frauenzeitschriften im späten 18. Jahrhundert und ihr Publikum*, Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur vol. 61 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), p. 311.

¹⁵ Reinhart Siegert, 'Zur Alphabetisierung in den deutschen Regionen am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts. Methodische Überlegungen und inhaltliche Bausteine aus Quellenmaterial der Volksaufklärung', in *Alphabetisierung und Literalisierung in Deutschland in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Hans Erich Bödeker and Ernst Hinrichs, Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), pp. 284-285. p. 294. Quotations from p. 302 and p. 306.

represents a one hundred percent increase.¹⁶ And although the absolute number may have remained small, the composition of the literary public had changed considerably.¹⁷ This is why the development caused such comment and concern among eighteenth-century Germans. Erich Schön has tried to quantify the readership of novels in the late eighteenth century. Although he acknowledges that ‘Eine seriöse “Berechnung” der tatsächlichen Größe des Romanpublikums ist nicht möglich’, there are a few useful indicators.¹⁸ The total number of novels published between 1750 and 1800 was 5,008. Per novel, it is reasonable to assume an average print run of about 700 copies. But the number of printed copies does not indicate the number of readers, since the presence of lending libraries and reading societies multiplied the total number of readers. Each copy of a book is likely to have been read by between 5 and 10 readers. Schön estimates therefore that between one and ten percent of the population were regular readers by the end of the eighteenth century. But not all of these would have been regular novel readers, so the number of people who read novels on a habitual basis is even lower. Schön suggests that a maximum of 120,000 people (one percent of the population) read at least one literary text per annum in the late eighteenth century.

These statistics are perhaps of limited value; but there are other factors which show that reading *was* transformed during this period. There was a move away from the intensive reading of a small number of (largely devotional) texts towards the extensive reading of a large number of (predominantly secular) texts. But extensive reading was expensive. In an age of high book prices and general inflation in the cost of living,

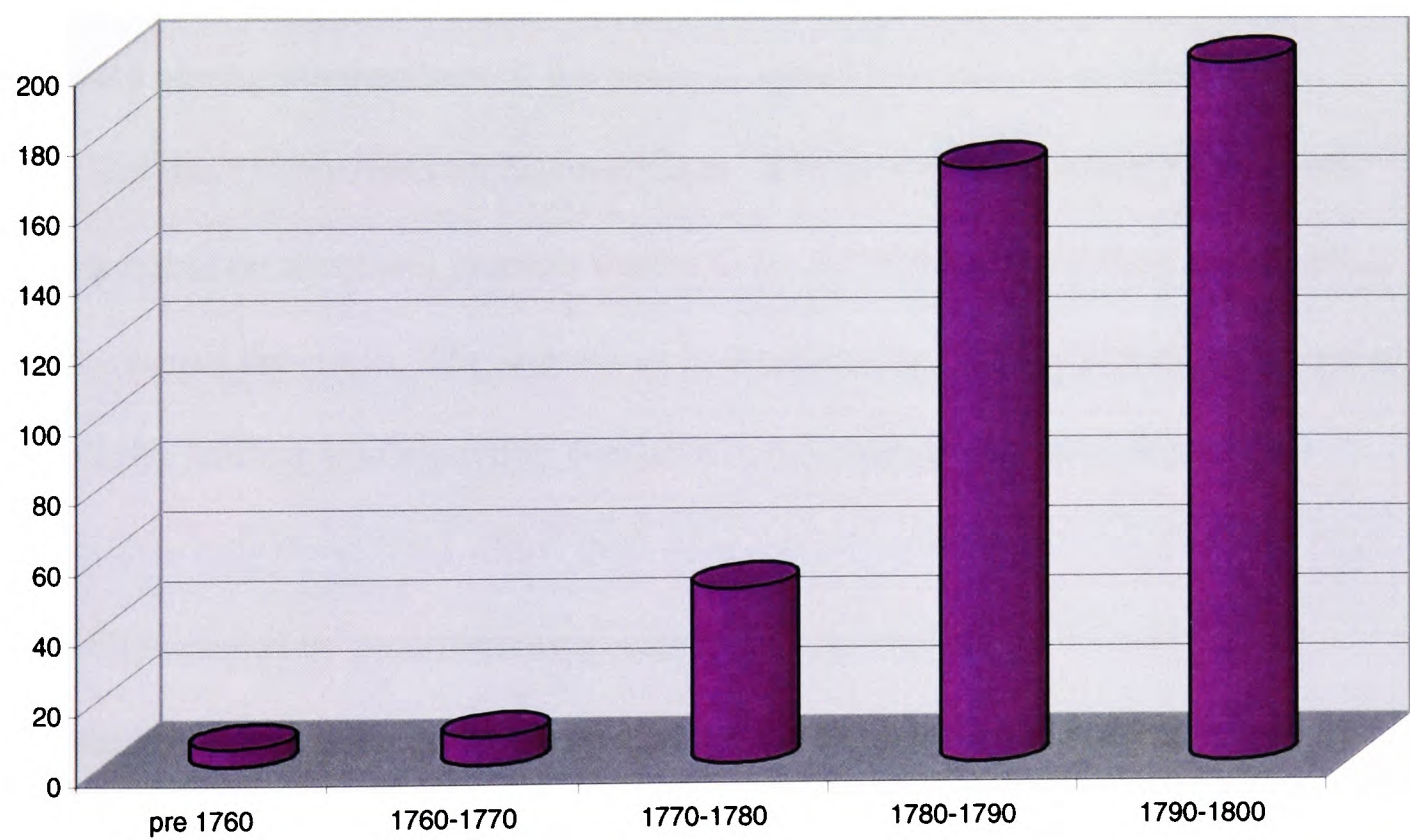
¹⁶ Weckel, *Häuslichkeit*, p. 314.

¹⁷ Schön, ‘Publikum und Roman’, p. 309.

¹⁸ Schön, ‘Publikum und Roman’, pp. 299-301.

purchasing books and possessing them for individual, personal use was, for many, an unaffordable luxury.¹⁹ Without public lending libraries, the only way to satisfy the increasing demand for reading matter became communal ownership of books, through reading societies and circles. The founding of such *Lesegesellschaften* is, therefore, a reliable indicator of the new habits of reading. In the second half of the eighteenth century, more than five hundred such societies existed in Germany.²⁰ Every town, however small, had its own, even if that had fewer than a dozen members.²¹ The proliferation of *Lesegesellschaften* after 1780 is noticeable:

Fig. 1: Establishment of New Reading Societies, 1750-1800



¹⁹ Weckel, *Häuslichkeit*, p. 310, and Marlies Stützel-Prüsener, ‘Die deutschen Lesegesellschaften im Zeitalter der Aufklärung’, in *Lesegesellschaften und bürgerliche Emanzipation. Ein europäischer Vergleich*, ed. Otto Dann (Munich: Beck, 1981), p. 72.

²⁰ Stützel-Prüsener, ‘Die deutschen Lesegesellschaften’, p. 71. Figure 1 is based on Stützel-Prüsener’s statistics on p. 74.

²¹ Otto Dann, ‘Die deutsche Aufklärungsgesellschaft und ihre Lektüre - Bibliotheken in den Lesegesellschaften des 18. Jahrhunderts’, in *Buch und Sammler. Private und öffentliche Bibliotheken im 18. Jahrhundert*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Literatur und Kunst des 18. Jahrhunderts (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1979), p. 189.

This increase does not necessarily indicate a corresponding growth in the actual number of readers. It illustrates a change in reading habits: isolated reading was to some extent replaced by communal, public reading. Henriette Herz explained this, when she wrote: 'In meiner Jugendzeit wurde viel mehr gemeinschaftlich gelesen als jetzt. Theils kaufte man damals noch weniger schönwissenschaftliche Bücher [...], theils bezweckte man, sich über das Gelesene gegenseitig zu verständigen.'²²

Different stages in the development of reading societies illustrate changing public needs. The earliest reading societies, founded from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, subscribed mainly to journals and newspapers, but also books. These were then handed round among the members of the circle at agreed intervals, in an established sequence. But this system had two disadvantages. It relied on all members to hand over the reading matter on time; and journals tended to be out of date by the time they reached the last member of the circle. The successors to these circles, 'Lesebibliotheken', avoided such pitfalls by making reading matter available to members at specified times. This way, they chose only those texts which they were actually interested in reading, and there were no delays caused by procrastinating readers. Further developments created the 'Lesekabinett', a reading society not only equipped with its own stock of books and journals, but also blessed with a communal room, in some cases even a house. Thus reading could become a means of social communication. 'In den Lesekabinetten wurde

²² Henriette Herz, *Henriette Herz. Ihr Leben und ihre Erinnerungen*, ed. J. Fürst (Berlin: Wilhelm Herz, 1850), p. 98.

ein Schritt über das Lesen hinaus getan, indem der Leser sich in eine Gruppe Gleichgesinnter, in eine “Öffentlichkeit” in kleinem Rahmen begab.’²³

So reading societies made reading a more affordable activity, but they also provided a social forum in which to discuss reading matter. The role of reading in aiding group formation and bourgeois self-definition therefore cannot be underestimated.²⁴ A voluntary association, defined by reading, could potentially overcome class boundaries.²⁵ But although the statutes of reading societies served to level differences between their members, they also defined the distinction between members and non-members. As such they were an essential part of the development of a self-conscious literary public, and provided the social foundation of the late Enlightenment.²⁶ Reading societies were not necessarily a phenomenon of social advancement. They existed partly, through networking and fraternization, to consolidate social status within the literate bourgeoisie.²⁷ We cannot assume therefore that the data gathered from reading societies simply represents eighteenth-century reading habits. But it does represent one particular aspect of the reading revolution.

Who then, were the members of these reading societies? According to Stützel-Prüsener’s research, they were members of the new professional class: civil servants, lawyers, doctors, pastors, officers, professors, scholars, and occasionally schoolmasters

²³ Definitions of the different types of reading societies from Stützel-Prüsener, ‘Die deutschen Lesegesellschaften’, pp. 72-73. Quotation here on p. 73.

²⁴ Weckel, *Häuslichkeit*, p. 310.

²⁵ Dann, ‘Aufklärungsbibliotheken’, p. 191.

²⁶ See Dann, ‘Aufklärungsbibliotheken’, p. 189.

²⁷ Otto Dann, ‘Lesegesellschaften im 18. Jahrhundert. Ein Forschungsbericht’, *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 2 (1989), p. 50.

and their families.²⁸ But it is simplistic to see reading societies as the domain of the new middle class. As stated above, aristocrats formed a large sub-group among the members.²⁹ Membership also naturally reflected the makeup of the local community. A ducal capital meant more civil servants, garrison towns more officers, university towns more professors, and so on. But in each case, reading societies were selective. Membership fees of between two and eight *Reichstaler* per annum ensured a certain degree of class homogeneity.³⁰ Moreover, Stützel-Prüsener found not a single 'Lesekabinett' originally founded for, and by, men which allowed students and women to become members (although women were allowed to join reading circles). We might conclude from this that, although women were allowed to read, it was considered unnecessary or indeed improper for them to discuss their reading in mixed society. But there were ways round this apparent exclusion. A woman might well read what her husband or father borrowed or subscribed to, as is acknowledged in several sources. Wieland often made a distinction in the *Teutscher Merkur* between his subscribers, whom he always addressed as men, and his readers, whom he expected to include women.³¹ But only after 1800 were women regularly allowed to join reading societies.³² By this time the socialising had perhaps become more important than the reading. Henriette Herz recalled earlier Berlin reading associations, all of which were characterized by their mix of reading and sociability, which admitted both sexes ('Aber Frauen waren [...] nicht

²⁸ Stützel-Prüsener, 'Die deutschen Lesegesellschaften', pp. 76-79.

²⁹ See Dann, 'Lesegesellschaften', p. 49.

³⁰ Alberto Martino and Marlies Stützel-Prüsener, 'Publikumsschichten, literarische und Lesegesellschaften, Leihbibliotheken', in *Deutsche Literatur. Eine Sozialgeschichte. Bd.4. Zwischen Absolutismus und Aufklärung: Rationalismus, Empfindsamkeit, Sturm und Drang (1740-1786)*, ed. Horst Glaser (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1986), p. 45.

³¹ Ruth P. Dawson, "'Der Weihrauch, den uns die Männer streuen': Wieland and the Women Writers in the *Teutscher Merkur*", in *Christoph Martin Wieland. Nordamerikanische Forschungsbeiträge zur 250. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages 1983*, ed. Hanjörg Schnelle (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984), p. 226.

³² Stützel-Prüsener, 'Die deutschen Lesegesellschaften', p. 79.

ausgeschlossen, ja sie waren thätige und gern gesehene Mitwirkende.’)³³ Such reading societies, often without statutes and membership fees, could be more liberal in their admission of women. Henriette Herz attended two of them:

Eine der frühesten Lesegesellschaften deren ich mich erinnere, war die, welche sich wöchentlich im Hause meiner, ein Jahr früher als ich verheiratheten Freundin Dorothea Veit, der Tochter Mendelssohns, später Friedrich Schlegels Gattin, versammelte. Zu ihr gehörten außer dieser Freundin und mir unter Andern mein Mann, Moritz, David Friedländer und eine zweite Tochter Mendelssohns. Gewöhnlich wurde Dramatisches gelesen. [...] Etwas später, etwa um das Jahr 1785, bildete sich eine Lesegesellschaft, an welcher die ausgezeichnetesten Männer Berlins von den verschiedensten Fächern und Altern Theil nahmen. Ich will unter ihnen nur Engel, [...] Ramler, Moritz, Teller, Zöllner, Dohm, den Juristen Klein und meinen Mann nennen. Auch die weiblichen Mitglieder ihrer Familien gehörten ihnen an.³⁴

These were gatherings of a group of progressives partly linked by marriage, religion, cultural and educational outlook, who included women as members of the family. More than mere reading clubs, they were social gatherings, at which men and women ‘tanzten’, and ‘spielten [...] allerlei gesellige Spiele im Freien’.³⁵ The presence of women was therefore actually an advantage.

But some reading societies specifically addressed the needs of women. Helga Brandes has located several ladies’ reading societies which were founded in the 1780s and 1790s, in Aurich, Greiz, Leipzig, Speyer and Rügen. Unisex societies were founded in Dresden, Kassel, Stralsund, Hadersleben and Meiningen.³⁶ For Brandes these societies show how established women’s social and educational development (‘Bildung’) had

³³ Herz, *Leben und Erinnerungen*, p. 103.

³⁴ Herz, *Leben und Erinnerungen*, pp. 100-101.

³⁵ Herz, *Leben und Erinnerungen*, p. 101.

³⁶ Helga Brandes, ‘Die “literarische Damengesellschaft” in Oldenburg zur Zeit der Französischen Revolution’, in *Französische Revolution und deutsche Öffentlichkeit: Wandlungen in Presse und Alltagskultur am Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Holger Böning, Deutsche Presseforschung (Munich: Saur, 1992), p. 439.

become by the end of the eighteenth century. They are also a sign of women's economic power as readers.³⁷ Nevertheless, they were not equivalent to the male-only societies. Male societies existed for the dissemination of information and general knowledge, combined with opportunities for networking and professional development. 'Literarische Damen-Gesellschaften' ran on different principles. Though nominally founded on the same doctrine of equality among members, in practice they seem to have been dominated by men. It cannot be concluded that women's reading societies challenged the gender hierarchy: surviving documentation shows all major decisions being made by men.³⁸ Accordingly, the reading matter available was selected for didactic purposes. Independence of mind and greater general knowledge were not encouraged; though as a concession to women's less scholarly mentality, this didactic reading matter was combined with more entertaining literature; a category usually almost entirely absent from the shelves of male reading societies.³⁹

Brandes' primary source is the ladies' reading society of Oldenburg, which existed between 1797 and 1804. She found that male members used it to regale the female sex with their own work. No such evidence exists of women reading their own letters or poems. Men also 'trugen vor, bestimmten die Sujets, besorgten die Literatúrauswahl, führten meist das Protokoll.'⁴⁰ So although it was called a reading society for ladies, the ladies in question functioned primarily as students, taught by men.

³⁷ Brandes, 'Damengesellschaft', p. 440.

³⁸ Brandes, 'Damengesellschaft', p. 443.

³⁹ See Dann, 'Aufklärungsbibliotheken', pp. 194-199. Martino and Stützel-Prüsener, 'Publikumsschichten, literarische und Lesegesellschaften, Leihbibliotheken', pp. 47-48.

⁴⁰ Helga Brandes, 'Die Entstehung eines weiblichen Leseublikums im 18. Jahrhundert. Von den Frauenzimmerbibliotheken zu den literarischen Damengesellschaften', in *Lesen und Schreiben im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert: Studien zu ihrer Bewertung in Deutschland, England und Frankreich*, ed. Paul Goetsch (Tübingen: Narr, 1994), p. 131.

Brandes concludes that societies run for women could serve ‘als Ort poetischer, literarischer Selbstdarstellung und Profilierung der Herren.’⁴¹ The society’s reading selection appears deliberately to have propagated Rousseau’s gender ideology: the paradigm of the ‘schöne Seele’ was a selection criterion for texts. The society therefore chose not to read Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Rechte der Frau*, preferring instead Thomas Gibborne’s reactionary response, *Pflichten der Frau*. And only those contemporary philosophical texts which explicitly defined gender relations were chosen: Fichte’s *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre*, or Kant’s *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*.⁴² The dual purpose of the society, to educate and entertain women, but also to serve as an ‘Instrument psychosozialer und soziokultureller Disziplinierung’ is all too evident.⁴³

In light of the earlier discussion of the aims of reading in the Enlightenment, this restrictive practice may initially seem surprising. After all, moral weeklies like Gottsched’s *Die Vernünftigen Tadelrinnen* (1725-6) had sought to improve women’s education by encouraging reading, and to some extent writing.⁴⁴ Reading recommendations for women, in so-called ‘Frauenzimmerbibliotheken’, were often ambitious during this period.⁴⁵ However, during the period of *Empfindsamkeit*, women’s reading lost some of that educational and emancipatory focus. It was intended instead to entertain women, and to enhance their natural femininity. This shift could be seen in the

⁴¹ Brandes, ‘Damengesellschaft’, pp. 443-444. Quotation on p. 444.

⁴² Brandes, ‘Entstehung’, pp. 131-132.

⁴³ Brandes, ‘Damengesellschaft’, p. 446.

⁴⁴ Brandes, ‘Entstehung’, pp. 125-127.

⁴⁵ See Wolfgang Martens, ‘Leserezepte fürs Frauenzimmer. Die Frauenzimmerbibliotheken der deutschen Moralischen Wochenschriften’, *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 15 (1975).

emerging popularity of smaller book formats, such as the dainty duodecimo. *Belles lettres* superseded encyclopedias and dictionaries as recommended reading; women's hearts must be schooled, not their minds.⁴⁶ So, by 1800, we come to the restrictive syllabus of the Oldenburg ladies' reading society. Brandes sees this move away from idealism (the *Vernünftigen Tadlerinnen* had even envisaged an Amazonian state, with women in universities and public office)⁴⁷ as a reaction to the real historical phenomenon of women's reading. Although actively encouraging when women's reading was irregular and rare, men's attitude quickly changed when such encouragement proved successful. Women's enthusiasm for reading seemed to be getting out of control: the reading society was the perfect means of reining it in.

Defining women's reading experience

But was women's enthusiasm for reading really out of control by the late eighteenth century? The total increase in readers, though significant, did not amount to a revolution, as we have seen. What was revolutionary was the growth both in diversity and in volume of reading matter itself. It is reasonable to assume therefore that individuals read more than their counterparts a century earlier. This applies to women as much as men. Women's journals from the last quarter of the eighteenth century were aimed at practised readers, familiar with literary forms, possessing general knowledge, and with enough time and money to extend their knowledge and their libraries. These factors show that women, too, had become more ambitious readers.⁴⁸ But it remains difficult to

⁴⁶ Brandes, 'Entstehung', p. 127.

⁴⁷ Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Die Vernünftigen Tadlerinnen*, 3rd ed. vol. 1 (Hamburg: Conrad König, 1748), pp. 51-53.

⁴⁸ Weckel, *Häuslichkeit*, p. 313.

generalize about women's reading habits, given the selective nature of the evidence. Letters, diaries and autobiographies give us insights; but as merely randomly surviving samples, they cannot be said to be representative. The polemic surrounding women's reading cannot be taken at face value either, as it inevitably sought to exaggerate the extent of women's reading. Similarly, claims that only women read novels may well obscure the fact that men, although they too indulged in the reading of novels, would rather not be seen to be doing so. Book production and book possession alone do not tell us anything about the quality of women's reading, or what those texts meant to them. And subscription lists including women's names may indicate growing purchasing power, rather than altered reading habits. Other sources, such as pictorial representations of women readers, cannot be regarded as a true reflection of historical reality either, as the portrayal of readers in books and journals often had an overtly didactic function, to praise or condemn certain reading habits.⁴⁹

Given the inconclusive nature of this evidence, it is all the more surprising that several studies have made general pronouncements about women's reading. Rolf Engelsing, for example, declared that women primarily read novels, but extrapolated his conclusion from research only on Bremen. In this period, a town's distinctive character has a decisive influence on the availability of books there: so can such a conclusion really be justified?⁵⁰ Erich Schön likewise claims that novels were read almost exclusively by women ('Von 1750 bis 1800 erschienen in Deutschland über 5000 Romane. Gelesen

⁴⁹ Fritz Nies, 'Suchtmittel oder Befreiungsakt? Wertungen von Lektüre in der bildenden Kunst des 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Lesen und Schreiben im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Studien zu ihrer Bewertung in Deutschland, England und Frankreich*, ed. Paul Goetsch (Tübingen: Narr, 1994), pp. 151-153.

⁵⁰ Friderika Baldinger bemoaned the lack of books in a merchant town: 'Woher nun die Bücher, die mich klug machen sollten? denn in einer Handelsstadt gabs keine.' Baldinger, 'Versuch', p. 16.

wurden sie von Frauen.').⁵¹ As Ulrike Weckel points out, 'woher er das so genau weiß, bleibt weitgehend sein Geheimnis.'⁵² Her scepticism is supported by contemporary sources, which often state the very opposite, claiming: 'Aber nicht allein Frauen lieben eine solche geschmacklose Kost, sondern es giebt auch Männer, die elende Romane lesen [...].'⁵³ With these obstacles in mind, I do not intend to make final pronouncements on the nature and extent of women's reading during this period; I shall be satisfied to outline common themes and aspects.

Whatever the actual figure, the number of women whose reading was regular enough to be called a habit was substantial. It was sufficient to create a trade in books and journals specifically for women. This in turn attracted more women to reading, legitimizing the practice, and giving 'women readers' a group identity. But this development is ambiguous. The market was regulated as soon as it was opened up. By becoming an explicit group of consumers, women became vulnerable to censorship or control.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, women's letters, diaries and autobiographical writings show how the development was welcomed. Women enjoyed their reading, and strove hard to incorporate it into their everyday lives.⁵⁵

Wie aber soll ich das Entzücken bezeichnen, das unsre der Poesie so offenen
Gemüter ergriff, als wir in das uns bisher noch ganz verschlossene Heiligtum

⁵¹ Erich Schön, 'Weibliches Lesen: Romanleserinnen im späten 18. Jahrhundert', in *Untersuchungen zum Roman von Frauen um 1800*, ed. Helga Gallas; Magdalene Heuser, *Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte* 55 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990), p. 21.

⁵² Weckel, *Häuslichkeit*, p. 316.

⁵³ Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen*, p. 413.

⁵⁴ Weckel, *Häuslichkeit*, p. 451.

⁵⁵ Ursula A.J. Becher, 'Lektürepräferenzen und Lesepraktiken von Frauen im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Lesekulturen im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans Erich Bödeker, *Aufklärung* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1991), p. 28.

unserer Literatur eingeführt wurden und die Meisterwerke Schillers und Goethes wie Träume aus schönen Wolken an uns vorübergingen!⁵⁶

[...] doch war's, als wenn ich Herzpochen bekäme, wenn meine Augen auf ein Buch fielen, welches ich noch nicht zuende gelesen, oder erst erhalten, und noch gar nicht gelesen hatte. Zuweilen ward alles weggeworfen, und die Lectüre vorgenommen.⁵⁷

Women were clearly influenced by contemporary literary developments, and endeavoured to read those texts which were currently the subject of literary discussions.

Die Teilnahme am Diskurs [...] ist entscheidend für die Leküreauswahl der Leserinnen zwischen 1770 und 1800. Alte und junge Leserinnen lesen mehr oder minder dieselben Bücher, die in diesen Jahren diskutiert und in der bildungsbürgerlichen Diskussion geschätzt werden. [...] Da die Leserinnen an einem Diskurs teilnehmen, ergibt sich ein Kernbestand an Literatur, der allen bekannt ist.⁵⁸

This 'Kernbestand', mentioned again and again in women's letters and diaries includes Lessing, Klopstock, Wieland, Herder, Lavater, Goethe and Schiller. Klopstock's *Messias* (1749) was mentioned most frequently. It was not read casually, but keenly and intensely: 'dieser Versepos erhält für die Leserinnen den Rang eines religiösen Buches.'⁵⁹ Naturally, no two women had identical preferences or inclinations. Some, for example Julie Bondeli and Caroline Flachsland, read French authors (Voltaire, Racine, Corneille), whilst others preferred English novelists ('bestand nun vom neunten Jahre an ungefähr meine Hauptbeschäftigung im Lesen der damals häufig werdenden Übersetzungen englischer

⁵⁶ Sophie von Schwerin, quoted in Helga Meise, 'Bildungslast und Bildungslust in Autobiographien von Frauen um 1800', in *Geschichte der Mädchen- und Frauenbildung. Band 1: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Aufklärung*, ed. Elke Kleinau; Claudia Opitz (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1996), p. 462.

⁵⁷ Isabella von Wallenrodt, quoted in Dülmen, ed., *Frauenleben*, pp. 260-261.

⁵⁸ Becher, 'Lektürepräferenzen', p. 32.

⁵⁹ Ursula A.J. Becher, 'Religiöse Erfahrung und weibliches Lesen - Zu einigen Beispielen des 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Le livre religieux et ses pratiques: études sur l'histoire du livre religieux en Allemagne et en France à l'époque moderne [Der Umgang mit dem religiösen Buch]*, ed. Hans Erich Bödeker, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 322-323.

Romane’).⁶⁰ Henriette Herz read so voraciously that her parents sent her to a sewing school for correction.⁶¹ She also claims that by the time of her engagement to Markus Herz, at the age of thirteen, she had ‘schon fast die ganze Viewegsche Leihbibliothek zweimal durchgelesen’.⁶² Nearly all women appear to have read Rousseau at some point in their lives. The attractiveness of his works was undoubtedly enhanced by their status as ‘forbidden fruit’. In an incident recalled in the memoirs of Luise Wiedemann, née Michaelis, young Luise is caught reading *La Nouvelle Heloise*:

Der gute alte General Malortie hatte auch viel liebevolles gegen mich. Ich weiß noch daß er mich fragte Kind was lasen sie? Er hatte mich in meinen Zimmer sehen können. Ich sagte ihn die Wahrheit: La nouvelle Eloise. Kind haben Sie die Vorrede gelesen? Legen Sie das Buch weg, daß ist nicht für ein junges Mädchen. Nehmen Sie Campens Rath an seine Tochter. Nun das war auch nichts, ich verlangte mehr [...],⁶³

The desirability of texts was directly proportionate to their scandalousness, as an earlier recollection documents:

Damals waren die Räuber von Schiller eben herraus [sic] u. ich weiß, es hieß Caroline habe Fieber beim lesen bekommen. Die Mutter war über diese Lectüre sehr aufgebracht. Eben so durfte man später kaum die Götter Griechenlands als unchristlich u.s.w. lesen. Desto eifriger [wurden sie] verschlungen u. auswendig gelernt, wie so manches andere Gedicht. Meine Schwester Lotte machte sich alles mit abschreiben zu eigen.⁶⁴

The titles mentioned in these excerpts recur time and again in the women’s memoirs. For example, Therese Huber listed (scornfully – she did not share in the worship) a number of ‘Modegötzen’: ‘Nie ward ich einem Modegötzen untertan, nicht dem Werther, nicht

⁶⁰ Therese Huber quoted in Meise, ‘Bildungslast’, p. 465.

⁶¹ Meise, ‘Bildungslast’, p. 465.

⁶² Herz, *Leben und Erinnerungen*, p. 99.

⁶³ Luise Wiedemann, *Erinnerungen von Luise Wiedemann, geb. Michaelis, der Schwester Carolinens*, ed. Julius Steinberger (Göttingen: Verein Göttinger Bücherfreunde, 1929), p. 70.

⁶⁴ Wiedemann, *Erinnerungen*, p. 62.

Siegwart, nicht Götz von Berlichingen, nicht Roubeau, nicht den Räubern – ich sah die Menschen thörigt drum werden, las es, fand die Nachtheilige Seite und blieb unbethört.’⁶⁵

Women’s reading was partly dependent on their male relatives. Goethe’s correspondence with his sister, during his time as a student, shows how male relatives functioned as mentors to their female relatives.

Du bist eine Närrin mit deinem Grandison. [...] Aber mercke dirs, du sollst keine Romanen mehr lesen, als die ich erlaube. [...] Ich will jetzo von [...] deiner jetzigen Unterhaltung im Lesen [reden]. Du bist über die Kinderjahre, du must also nicht nur zum Vergnügen, sondern zur Besserung deines Verstandes, und deines Willens lesen. [...] Allein ich muß dich auch lesen lernen. [...] Nimm ein Stück nach dem andern, in der Reihe, ließ es aufmerksam durch, und wenn es dir auch nicht gefällt, ließ es doch. Du must dir Gewalt anthun. Ich sag es noch einmahl: wenn du haben willst daß ich für dich sorgen soll; so must du mir folgen, und nicht nur Vergnügen beym Lesen suchen. Wenn du es gelesen hast; so mach das Buch zu, und stelle Betrachtungen darüber an. [...] Manchmahl werde ich Stücke aussuchen [...] Dieses ist besser und dir nützlicher als wenn du 20 Romanen gelesen hättest. Diese verbiete ich dir hiermit völlig, den einzigen Grandison ausgenommen [...]⁶⁶

Whether Cornelia Goethe appreciated these draconian guidelines is not known. But not all brothers acted prohibitively. Some positively encouraged their sisters, as in the autobiographies of Caroline Rudolphi, Margarethe Milow and Caroline Herschel,⁶⁷ and

⁶⁵ Therese Huber an Karl August Böttiger, 1816. Quoted in Andrea Hahn and Bernhard Fischer, “Alles ... von mir!” *Therese Huber (1764-1820). Schriftstellerin und Redakteurin*, Marbacher Magazin vol. 65 (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1993), p. 11.

⁶⁶ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, ‘An Cornelia Goethe, 6 December 1765’, in *Goethes Briefe. Hamburger Ausgabe. Briefe der Jahre 1764-1786*, ed. Karl Robert Mandelkow (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1962), p. 18, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁷ See Caroline Herschel, *Caroline Herschel’s Memoiren und Briefwechsel (1750-1848)*, ed. Frau John Herschel, trans. A. Scheibe (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1877). Margarethe Elisabeth Milow, *Ich will aber nicht murren*, ed. Rita Bake and Birgit Kiupel (Hamburg: Dölling & Galitz, 1987). Caroline Christiane Louise Rudolphi, *Schriftlicher Nachlaß, mit dem Portrait der Verfasserin. Zum Besten der in Heidelberg errichteten Kleinkinderanstalt* (Heidelberg: Mohr, 1835).

became the person ‘der den Tag in mein dunkles Hirn bringen würde’.⁶⁸ But even here, the sisters’ access to books is secondary:

Mein Bruder und [her brother’s friend] [...] wenn sie so ein neues Buch unsrer ersten Dichter, die damals erst heraus kamen, miteinander lasen, das war ein Fest [...] da wünschte ich mir oft, auch Jüngling zu sein, um mit ihnen lesen zu können, denn wir mußten warten, bis sie’s gehabt, und vieles ging uns gar vorbei, wozu wir keine Zeit hatten [...]⁶⁹

Reading matter could also come from outside the family. Luise Wiedemann recalls that she and her female friends and family gained access to the holdings of Göttingen’s university library through a friend’s suitor, who was employed there. ‘Besonders erhielt man viel von Prof. Meyer der bei der Bib[liothek] angestellt ward, der Meyer der Verehrer der Huber damals Forster war, Therese Heyne.’⁷⁰

But the access provided by sympathetic males was always limited. For Friderika Baldinger, her husband opened up a whole new world of books: ‘Ich habe in seiner Gesellschaft sehr viel gelesen, und aus seinen Gesprächen den Auszug von mehr denn ein Tausend Büchern genossen.’⁷¹ Still, she had only been truly in charge of her own time when she lived on her own with her mother: ‘Ich lebte nun ganz einsam mit meiner guten Mutter, und lebte nun für meine Neigung, als ich noch niemals gelebt hatte. Ich durfte lesen so viel ich wollte.’⁷²

⁶⁸ Baldinger, ‘Versuch’, p. 17. Schindel’s biographical sketches also provide many examples of brothers sharing their own education and reading with their sisters. See for example Esther Gad’s biography in Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. 1, p. 103.

⁶⁹ Milow, *Ich will aber nicht murren*, p. 25.

⁷⁰ Wiedemann, *Erinnerungen*, p. 70.

⁷¹ Baldinger, ‘Versuch’, p. 22.

⁷² Baldinger, ‘Versuch’, p. 21.

Indeed, time was the central issue for women who wanted to read. Often they had to resort to reading very early in the morning, before the family had risen, and before they attended to domestic chores.⁷³ ‘Eigentliche Freistunden gab es wenig: Morgens vor sieben, so viel sich eine vom Schlaf abbrechen wollte’, recollected Ernestine Voß.⁷⁴ Caroline Herschel’s experience was similar: ‘Wir erübrigten nur einige Stunden, indem wir bei Tagesanbruch zusammenkamen, denn um sieben Uhr, wenn die Familie aufstand, mußte ich wieder bei meinen gewöhnlichen Tagesgeschäften sein.’⁷⁵ Isabella von Wallenrodt read late into the night: ‘besonders aber wendete ich die Nacht dazu an, wenn alles im ruhigen Schläfe lag, ich las dann oft bis an den Morgen’.⁷⁶ Luise Wiedemann was in the same boat: ‘die gütige Nachtlampe hat mir oft geleuchtet dazu’.⁷⁷ Other women found that only childbed provided them with the time to read.

Sechs Wochenbetten haben zum Wachsthum meiner Kenntnisse nicht wenig beigetragen; denn ich habe mehrentsils in denen nächsten Augenblicken wieder gelesen, wo ich aus den Händen der Wehmutter kam. Und diese sechs Wochen, wo ich ungestört lesen konnte, waren mehrentsils Erholung für meine Seele [...]⁷⁸

In some cases, a husband’s illness was a blessing in disguise: he might ask his wife to read to him. As dutiful wives, many women could only read at times like this – when reading became a duty. A letter from Albertine von Grün illustrates that women’s reading generally had to fit in with more mundane duties. ‘Lachen muß ich manchmal, was es für ein wunderlicher Mischmasch in meiner Sphäre ist, von meiner Malerei zum Schnitzendörren, von Büchern zum Schwartenmagen=Machen und so mehr’.⁷⁹

⁷³ Becher, ‘Lektürepräferenzen’, p. 37.

⁷⁴ Ernestine Voß quoted in Meise, ‘Bildungslast’, p. 459.

⁷⁵ Herschel, *Caroline Herschel’s Memoiren*, p. 27.

⁷⁶ Isabella von Wallenrodt, quoted in Dülmen, ed., *Frauenleben*, p. 261.

⁷⁷ Wiedemann, *Erinnerungen*, p. 14.

⁷⁸ Baldinger, ‘Versuch’, p. 22.

⁷⁹ Albertine von Grün quoted in Dülmen, ed., *Frauenleben*, p. 265.

If women's education had been limited, reading became their only means of broadening their intellectual horizons. Therese Huber confessed to her friend Luise Mejer that she was reading a learned book: 'Ich lese jetzt Arnolds Kirchen und Kezer Historie ein Foliant von 1695 oder so ungefehr. Es ist interessant, aber zum enragiren geschrieben.' She had to keep her reading it a secret, as it would have made her unappealing to potential husbands:

Wie würden viele junge Herrn vor mir zurück prallen wenn sie mich bei so einen
Buche sähn; ich will wetten man merkt mir meine art lecture in zehn
Unterredungen nicht an, ich nehm mich wohl in acht mirs merken zu laßen.⁸⁰

Friderika Baldinger's autobiography describes a similar autodidactic struggle. While still a child, she attempted to read her uncle's journals before he had a chance to read them himself ('ich kriegte oft eins auf die Finger, wenn ich unter seinen Armen weg, zuerst nach dem Göttingischen Gelehrten Anzeigen griff').⁸¹ But being thwarted by gender and circumstance, she is forced to conclude her autobiography with a pessimistic assessment of her learning: 'Als Frau bin ich erträglich geworden, wie klein würde ich doch als Mann seyn!'⁸² Where reading became an alternative for the education denied to a woman ('so willst du wenigstens klug werden, dachte ich, und dies wird man aus Büchern, du willst brav lesen'), it was more than mere entertainment or escapism.⁸³ It was her only means of winning intellectual self-esteem and gaining access to a literary public.

There is much evidence to suggest that women's reading had by and large become extensive by the late eighteenth century, and left behind the intensive reading of a small

⁸⁰ Therese Huber, née Heyne quoted in Hahn and Fischer, "*Alles ... von mir!*", p. 12.

⁸¹ Baldinger, 'Versuch', p. 16.

⁸² Baldinger, 'Versuch', p. 24.

⁸³ Baldinger, 'Versuch', p. 16.

number of devotional texts, as had been the case in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. However, certain aspects of intensive reading continued to be practised during this period, such as learning off by heart, copying of excerpts and the recital of favourite texts.

Am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts haben manche Leserinnen einen derart vertrauten Umgang mit verschiedenartigen Büchern erlangt, daß die Frage nach der 'Leserevolution' zu dieser Zeit neu zu stellen ist. Sie ist nicht allein als Wende vom intensiven zum extensiven Lesen zu deuten. Es gibt eine vertiefte Intensität der Lektüre, die sich das Gelesene anverwandelt, sich dergestalt aneignet, daß es in eine Lebenswelt hineinwirkt und Teil von ihr wird.⁸⁴

So to suggest a simple paradigm shift would be a mistake. The reception of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, for instance, illustrates the way in which a literary text could be read so intensively that it created a powerful myth in its readers' minds. 'Ein Name wird zum Inbegriff neuer Weiblichkeit, fordert und findet umgehende, unbedingte Nachfolge, macht die Realität als banal bewußt und wird, so steht zu hoffen, von ihr befreien.'⁸⁵ Albertine von Grün also explained how her practice of textual close readings could sustain her 'Tage lang bei meinem Nähen, Stricken oder sonstigen Arbeiten.'⁸⁶ Nor is it correct to say that, in an age of secularization, the intensive study of devotional texts ceased altogether. Caroline Rudolphi's mother, for example, forced her to read 'täglich eine bestimmte Aufgabe in der durch und durch bekannten Bibel und Abends mehrere Stunden in andern Andachtsbüchern'.⁸⁷ Baldinger was also exposed to intensive and regular Bible reading:

Bei [meiner Mutter] wurde immer viel in der Bibel gelesen, und gebetet. Dies war mein Amt, weil ich mich auszeichnete, und mit Empfindung las. Meiner Mutter Bruder [...] tat nichts als beten. Wir musten täglich eine gesezte Zahl

⁸⁴ Becher, 'Lektürepräferenzen', p. 38, p. 40. Quotation on p. 40.

⁸⁵ Meyer-Krentler, 'Die Leiden der jungen Wertherin', p. 225.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Dülmen, ed., *Frauenleben*, p. 265.

⁸⁷ Meise, 'Bildungslast', p. 461.

Capitel aus der Bibel lesen, und dafür kriegte jedes von jedem Capitel einen Pfennig. Die Mägde und meine Schwester schliefen gemeiniglich schon bei dem dritten Capitel fest, ich aber durch den Beifall des Vetters und durch die vielen Pfennige aufgemuntert, las so lange, bis mich der Vetter selbst schweigen hiess [...]⁸⁸

A similar diversity is evident in women's reading spaces (inside the house and outside), and contexts (on their own, in family groups, or in friendship groups). Books were read together and alone, quietly and aloud (plays in particular lent themselves to communal reading, 'mit vertheilten Rollen').⁸⁹

The debate surrounding reading

As these examples have shown, reading was indeed an essential part of many women's lives. There had been a reading revolution for women of a certain socio-economic class, both in reading matter and reading habits, although it was limited, and did not yet amount to a true democratization of reading.⁹⁰ It is also clear that there is no 'typical' female reader: women as readers were relative to their individual context. The limitations in women's freedom to read seem obvious to the modern literary historian. But many contemporary commentators considered even these limited changes decisive. The issues for them were unambiguous: women's reading was sufficiently widespread and habitual to constitute a threat to the fabric of society. So we must now turn to contemporary views of women's reading: why did such a piecemeal and diverse phenomenon cause such anxiety?

⁸⁸ Baldinger, 'Versuch', p. 17.

⁸⁹ Becher, 'Lektürepräferenzen', p. 41. See also Becher, 'Religiöse Erfahrung und weibliches Lesen', pp. 320-321. Quotation from Herz, *Leben und Erinnerungen*, p. 105.

⁹⁰ Pictorial representations of women readers also document these changes. See Fritz Nies, *Bahn und Bett und Blütenduft. Eine Reise durch die Welt der Leserbilder* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991), pp. 49-61.

It has been suggested that this anxiety stemmed from the loss of literacy as a male preserve. As men lost the monopoly on the written word, the exclusivity of their status as writers, reviewers and readers was threatened. Men were no longer the sole legitimate source of judgment on cultural matters: 'man [hat] dem andern Geschlechte ein Richteramt in Sachen der Philosophie, der Erziehung, des Geschmacks, der Litteratur eingeräumt'.⁹¹ So men's reaction to the emergence of women keen to discuss literature signifies confusion and anger at the topsy-turvy state of gender relations:

Ihr Haschen nach gelehrten Floskeln und Anekdoten, ihre Betriebsamkeit und ihre Affectation, die Gespräche nur immer auf Dichter, und Philosophen, und Romanschreiber und ihre Geistesproducte hinzuleiten, ihr gnädiges oder stolzes Herabblicken auf Leute, die keine Gelehrte sind [...] ihre Prätensionen [...] ihr lächerliches Drehen und Wenden, um bewundert zu werden, ihre gelehrte Impertinenz, mit welcher sie uns oft ihre Meinungen aufdringen wollen, ihr gezwungener Witz und die Gewalt, die sie sich anthun, um paradox zu seyn [...] empören uns gegen sie, und zerreißen oft die letzten Faden der Geduld, die wir bisher mit ihren literarischen Schwächen gehabt haben.⁹²

Men's own literary work seemed to be devalued by the fact that it was now read by a socially more inclusive group of readers. The problem was two-fold: not only did the involvement of women in literary life raise them above their natural status in society, but the books which they read further confirmed this warped notion, 'daß die Weiber der Mittelpunkt, wo nicht der einzige Punkt, sind, um den sich alles in der Welt drehet'.⁹³

Ernst Brandes explained the link between books and the problem with women:

Romane, Gedichte, Schauspiele, fast die einzigen Bücher, wodurch der Geist der Weiber seine Ausbildung erhält, bringen diesen Gedanken immer mehr zur Reife. Mit wenigen Ausnahmen, die nicht gelesen werden, sieht das Mädchen in diesen Büchern alles um sein Geschlecht, alles um Liebe geschehen.⁹⁴

⁹¹ [Brandes], *Ueber die Weiber*, p. 10.

⁹² Pockels, *Versuch einer Charakteristik*, vol. 1, pp. 303-304.

⁹³ [Brandes], *Ueber die Weiber*, p. 6. Emphasis in the original is in bold.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

The polemic against women's reading indicates a concern that women's reading was blurring the traditional lines dividing the sexes. Consequently, these lines had to be re-emphasized. 'Das Leseublikum war in Bewegung geraten, und folglich mußten Plätze jetzt neu bestimmt und verteilt werden.'⁹⁵

But this anxiety was not simply based on male prejudice. Women's reading could not, and should not, be prevented. It had to be controlled. Reading was not in itself considered harmful ('Lecture [ist] das vorzüglichste Bildungsmittel für dich'), but it needed to be practised selectively ('das Lesen bedarf großer Auswahl und einer vernünftigen Leitung und Anwendung, wenn es nicht mehr schaden als nützen').⁹⁶ The inherent dialectic in reading – it had the potential to perfect and ennoble individuals, but also to lead them astray – was at the root of the ambiguous attitude to reading women. 'It proved that the very mechanisms that disseminated progress also disseminated destruction.'⁹⁷ It was therefore necessary to issue guidance to readers, especially women, on how to avoid these perils, whilst not throwing the baby out with the bathwater:

By and large, these commentators recognize that reading is a necessary skill and a powerful tool, but only with the proper reading material and the proper mode of reading, which can only be insured through close supervision of [...] reading habits; unsupervised, uncontrolled reading leads all too easily to destructive vices such as the much-feared "compulsive" reading (*Lesewut* or *Lesesucht*). [...] It is expressly not reading per se that is discouraged, only an improper choice of reading material.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Weckel, *Häuslichkeit*, pp. 310-315, p. 452. Quotation on p. 311.

⁹⁶ Johann Genersich, *Ueber die Bestimmung des weiblichen Geschlechts und einige wichtige Verhältnisse des gesellschaftlichen Lebens. In Briefen. Nebst einer lyrischen Anthologie, einigen Idyllen und Gleichnissen für die Lektüre in Erholungsstunden* (Pesth: Hartleben, 1819), p. 23.

⁹⁷ Hull, *Sexuality*, p. 269.

⁹⁸ Arnim Polster, 'On the Use and Abuse of Reading: Karl Philipp Moritz and the Dialectic of Pedagogy in Late-Enlightenment', in *Impure Reason. Dialectic of Enlightenment in Germany*, ed. W. Daniel Wilson and Robert C. Holub (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), pp. 466-467.

Seen in the light of women's *actual* reading experiences, it is hard to understand the often shrill tone of the anti-reading polemic. However, that polemic must be understood in the context of more general concerns about the possible negative effects of the Enlightenment project.

Eighteenth-century Germans were convinced 'that theirs was an age of increased sexual desire.'⁹⁹ Several trends led them to this conclusion, chief amongst which were 'the dual association of cultural refinement with sexual knowledge, leisure, and thus with excess on the one hand, and with the sexual stimulants of wealth, exotic food and drink, and luxurious clothing and social amusements [...] on the other'.¹⁰⁰ Whilst these ills had previously been confined to the nobility, they were now threatening a much larger part of the population. The seductions to vice were not simply material, but also educational: anyone literate could read sexually explicit texts nourishing 'wollüstige Begierden'.¹⁰¹ Increased sociability between the sexes, plus a culture of gallantry and sensibility, threatened to legitimize licentiousness.¹⁰² Several phenomena of the late eighteenth century, including the anti-masturbation campaign and the 'Lesewut' debate, are the product of fears unleashed by Germany's 'own, peculiar social circumstances'.¹⁰³ Crusaders against the apparent problem of licentiousness considered numerous achievements of the modern era to be responsible for the decline in sexual continence: 'in the last two generations, or, since that time when refined opulence, lasciviousness,

⁹⁹ Hull, *Sexuality*, p. 231.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Johann Georg Heinzmann, 'Vom Bücherlesen, und der Romanen insbesondere', in *Die Feyerstunden der Grazien* (Bern: Hallersche Buchhandlung, 1784), p. 92.

¹⁰² Ernst Brandes saw mixed social gatherings as a particular scourge of modern society: 'Welche Verderbnisse folgten nicht, als die Frauen in das bürgerliche gesellige Leben traten.' [Brandes], *Ueber die Weiber*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰³ Hull, *Sexuality*, p. 261.

weakness, [and] effemininity [...] has overwhelmed mankind and discipline and order have been lost', lamented Dr. Bernhard Christoph Faust in 1791.¹⁰⁴ The physical foundations for increased sexual activity were thought to be in place (amongst these were heated rooms, soft clothing, rich foods), and when they were combined with 'the mental and social stimuli on which [sexual deviancy, such as masturbation] thrived: books, plays, poems, paintings, social gatherings, and civilized habits', there seemed to be no protection for the populace. Reading and women were perceived as dangerously sexual by male commentators, and a combination of the two seemed positively perilous.¹⁰⁵ Women whose sexual appetite had been aroused at an early age would not be suited for their role in a bourgeois marriage ('[ohne] Damm gegen den Geschlechtstrieb, [so] daß die Männer, die solche Weibchen heyrathen, Hörnerträger werden'), and young men who learnt to indulge in the fantasy world of novels would not be able to fulfil their duty as fathers and providers for their families.¹⁰⁶ It was therefore not mere prudery that lay behind the fears of anti-reading campaigners, but a genuine concern that the happiness of marriage was threatened by these developments. And, as marriage was 'the original social institution', it followed that reading also threatened society itself.¹⁰⁷ Ironically, the Enlightenment reforms which set out to improve civilized society were now thought to be undermining it.

¹⁰⁴ Bernhard Christoph Faust, *Wie der Geschlechtstrieb der Menschen in Ordnung zu bringen und wie die Menschen besser und glücklicher zu machen* (Braunschweig: 1791), p. 1. Translated by Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality*, p. 263.

¹⁰⁵ Stephan K. Schindler, 'Die verbotene Lust am Text: Romanlektüre und weibliche Autoerotik', in *Eingebildete Körper. Phantasierte Sexualität in der Goethezeit* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2001), pp. 180-181.

¹⁰⁶ Johann Georg Heinzmann, quoted in Helmut Kreuzer, 'Gefährliche Lesesucht. Bemerkungen zu politischer Lektürekritik im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert', in *Leser und Lesen im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Rainer Gruenter, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Literatur und Kunst des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 1 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), p. 65.

¹⁰⁷ Hull, *Sexuality*, p. 265.

The solution to this problem was not to give up on the ambitions of the Enlightenment altogether, but to control and supervise its effects. The key would be moderation. In order to enjoy the benefits of the modern age safely, people had to avoid all exaggeration, curtailing the imaginative excesses stimulated by fiction. But this required the use of reason. Therefore, those with the weakest powers of reason were most vulnerable to the Enlightenment's negative effects. That included the young, 'the impoverished, [...] countryfolk, or [...] other groups of questionable rationality' – and women.¹⁰⁸ These people needed particularly close supervision, and were not to be left on their own: the 'twin perils of privacy and solipsistic, egoistic individualism' were the environment in which vices thrived.¹⁰⁹ Male anxiety about women's reading is undoubtedly the result of this wider fear of what the Enlightenment project had unleashed. It therefore comes as no surprise that the debate on reading rehearsed the same dangers again and again, and suggested the same solutions.

Typical is Johann Georg Heinzmann's advice to young women published in *Die Feyerstunden der Grazien* (1780). He warns against the invisibility of vice in books: 'Es giebt viele Bücher, die zwar angenehm geschrieben sind, aber deren Lesung höchst verderblich ist'. Young people are especially vulnerable, for they do not possess any principles which could protect them 'vor Verführung'.¹¹⁰ His definition of harmful texts

¹⁰⁸ Hull, *Sexuality*, p. 266.

¹⁰⁹ Hull, *Sexuality*, p. 275.

¹¹⁰ Heinzmann, 'Vom Bücherlesen', pp. 90-91. All references to this essay appear in the text. For a critique of Heinzmann's essay, see Gerhard Sauder, 'Gefahren empfindsamer Vollkommenheit für Leserinnen und die Furcht vor Romanen in einer Damenbibliothek. Erläuterungen zu Johann Georg Heinzmann, *Vom Lesen der Romanen und Einleitung und Entwurf zu einer Damenbibliothek* aus: J.G.H., *Die Feyerstunden der*

is extensive, including all books describing love stories between ‘verliebten Gecken beyderlei Geschlechts’. Good books on the other hand have the intention of making their readers ‘vernünftiger, arbeitsamer, wohlwollender und zufriedener’ (p. 91). Heinzmann employs two main strands of metaphor throughout the piece. The first is the language of seduction: enjoyable books are tempting sirens. The second is the language of health: bad books poison the readers’ souls (p. 92, p. 93). But he also aims to illustrate the socially corrosive effect of this kind of reading: ‘Du, mein Sohn, siehst es nicht mehr als dein vornehmstes Geschäft an, etwas nützliches zu lernen, und [...] den Beyfall deines Vaters zu erwerben’ (pp. 93-94). The daughter too is less eager to fulfil her duties. Both children have been reluctant to accept their more mundane destiny since they stepped into the fictitious world of heroes and heroines. Deluded by ‘chimärische und einfältige Träume’, they are unable ‘dem Staate und dem menschlichen Geschlechte nützliche Dienste zu leisten’ (p. 95). Children therefore ought to follow their parents’ advice, and avoid the reading of such dangerous texts.

The idea that novels were particularly likely to overheat the imagination, whilst weakening the conscious mind, was ubiquitous (‘die deine Einbildungskraft mit glühenden Farben erhitzen, aber auf deinen Willen nachtheilig wirken, deinen Verstand irre leiten’).¹¹¹ A journal article published in 1786 argued that the imagination cancelled out reason and judgment (‘ihre Einbildungskraft bekommt einen Schwung, mit dem sie über die Vernunft wegfliegt’). A girl, once poisoned thus, ‘ist fürs eigentliche

Grazien. Ein Lesebuch, Bern 1780’, in *Leser und Lesen im 18. Jahrhundert*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Literatur und Kunst des 18. Jahrhunderts (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977).

¹¹¹ Genersich, *Ueber die Bestimmung des weiblichen Geschlechts*, p. 25. See also Fritz Nies’s observations in Nies, ‘Suchtmittel oder Befreiungsakt?’, p. 159.

Menschenleben [...] doch verdorben.’ In both young boys and young girls, the reading of novels would therefore excite their sexual instinct prematurely (‘jene allzuzeitige[] Aufregung gewisser natürlicher Triebe’), and lead to untimely liaisons with members of the opposite sex (‘jene[...] oft das ganze künftige Lebensglück vergiftende[...] frühe Verbindungen mit Personen des anderen Geschlechts’).¹¹² According to these authors, the perils of reading were extreme. Carl Friedrich Pockels even wrote: ‘Die Zeit wird es uns lehren, daß noch nie irgend eine Mode so vielen Schaden für die menschliche Gesellschaft gehabt hat, als die allgemein gewordene Lectüre unter dem andern Geschlecht.’¹¹³ Novels, he argued, could never contribute to true Enlightenment (‘solch elende Romanlectüre wird nie die wahre Aufklärung des Geistes hervorzubringen im Stande seyn’, p. 62). His anxiety is focused on lewd texts:

Ich habe nicht selten auf den Toiletten der Damen Bücher angetroffen, die mir gar nicht hieher zu gehören schienen, und die ein ehrbares Frauenzimmer ohnmöglich ohne Erröthen lesen konnte, — und doch waren grade dergleichen Schriften am meisten zerlesen. (p. 64)

He does not explain, however, how he himself came to be in several ladies’ boudoirs. But the danger from women’s reading of novels is so great, he suggests, that it will soon be necessary to ban it in prenuptial agreements, and to employ censors to regulate it (‘bald wird es nöthig seyn, daß ein Mann [...] sich [...] im Ehecontract alle Romanlectüre seines künftigen Weibes verbittet, und daß Censoren angestellt werden, welche auf das Lesen der Frauenzimmer ein wachsames Auge haben’, p. 67).

¹¹² ‘Meine Gedanken übers Romanlesen’, *Neue Bunzlauische Monatsschrift zum Nutzen und Vergnügen* 1 (1786), p. 13.

¹¹³ Carl Friedrich Pockels, ‘Ueber Frauenzimmerlectüre’, in *Fragmente zur Kenntniß und Belehrung des menschlichen Herzens* (Hannover: Schmidtsche Buchhandlung, 1788), p. 61. All further page references to this essay appear in the text.

More moderate articles also warned against the dangers of reading. The author of an article from the *Bunzlauische Monatsschrift* of 1785 was reconciled to the fact that reading had become ‘eine häufigere und allgemeinere Beschäftigung, als ehemals.’¹¹⁴ Whilst some might wish to see reading confined to the class of ‘Gelehrten’, since reading more than anything else contributed to the ‘Verderben unsers Zeitalters’, there were also people who would recommend reading without any reservations. Those people consider reading ‘ein entscheidendes Merkmal der sich immer mehr ausbreitenden Aufklärung’. The author himself suggested a middle way. It would be foolish to ignore the recent increase in learning and sensibility. More books, and a larger reading public including women and the lower classes, were generally ‘gut und lobenswert’ (p. 265). However, the changes were not all for the better:

Neben den vielen guten Büchern, derer sich unser Zeitalter zu erfreuen hat, ist auch mit so vielen verführerischen Schriften überhäuft, die die Religion wenigstens herabwürdigen, die Sitten verderben und Gleichgültigkeit gegen Tugend und Laster beibringen. (pp. 265-266)

Reading in moderation was the only way to read beneficially. ‘Man muß daher nicht allzuviel, nicht alles durch einander lesen.’ (p. 271) Otherwise, duties were neglected, and working hours frittered away, leading to economic hardship and suffering families. This applied to ‘der Kaufmann, Künstler, Handwerker [und] Landwirth’, but especially to women:

Wenn ein Frauenzimmer nun alle ihre Zeit auf Lektüre verwendet, darüber ihre eigentliche Bestimmung aus den Augen setzt, [...] alle Verbindlichkeiten, die sie als Gattin, Mutter und Vorsteherin eines Hauswesens zu erfüllen hat, vernachlässiget, sie nur so obenhin und höchst eilfertig besorget, um nur bald wieder zu ihren lieben Büchern zu kommen: wer wird das alles billigen wollen?

¹¹⁴ ‘Etwas übers Bücherlesen’, *Neue Bunzlauische Monatsschrift zum Nutzen und Vergnügen* 9 (1785), p. 262. All further page references to this article appear in the text.

wer nicht lieber wünschen, daß für alle diese Personen gar kein Buch in der Welt seyn möchte? (p. 267)

Reading was harmful not only when it consumed too much time, but also when it was practised for the wrong reasons, such as vanity and boredom. But the harm is not inevitable: the author would still recommend reading to his readers, provided they were prepared to heed his warnings. This general article on reading is concluded with two and a half pages of advice specifically for women and girls, including the suggestion not to read until all domestic duties were performed, not to read learned books, and not to show off their knowledge in conversation ('Suchen Sie nie mit Ihrer Leküre zu glänzen, reden Sie nicht viel davon, daß sie lesen', p. 270). And women, more than men, had to be judicious in their choice of reading. Books to be avoided at all cost were those which would excite the imagination, because they were 'schlüpfrig geschrieben'.

The author of 'Sind unsere Lese-Gesellschaften der Litteratur zuträglich oder hinderlich?' published in the *Hannoverisches Magazin* in 1782 also observed that the benefits of reading were ambiguous. He notes that the reading of fashionable books was becoming ever more common, and that the readership now included members of the lower classes ('Kutscher und Vorreyter') and the female sex ('Garderobenmädchen'). He also observes that these readers were seeking 'feinere Nahrung', like Goethe's *Werther*. Although this ought 'zu [der] Verfeinerung der Sitten beitragen, den Witz bilden und nützliche Kenntniß vermehren', it did not seem to be doing so.¹¹⁵ Instead, women were prone to 'Empfindelei', even in the lower orders, and no improvement in manners could be observed. This was owing to the poor quality of books ordered by reading societies,

¹¹⁵ 'Sind unsere Lese-Gesellschaften der Litteratur zuträglich oder hinderlich?', *Hannoverisches Magazin* 37 (1782), p. 582.

which were often chosen for their popular appeal. But reading societies should not be banned; what was needed was better selection of material. Books of quality, ‘die bei dem Vergnügen auch Nutzen gewähren’, are far less damaging than poor translations of bad novels. Readers should also avoid the very latest publications, choosing instead texts that have stood the test of time. In general, all reading should be done slowly and carefully (‘Lieber wenig Gutes aufmerksam gelesen, als vieles ohne Wahl mit eindruckloser Flüchtigkeit’). If these recommendations are not followed, the author feels certain that ‘die Lesegesellschaften der Litteratur, im Ganzen genommen, mehr schädlich als vortheilhaft [sind].’¹¹⁶

Karl Rose’s *Väterliche Winke an junge Frauenzimmer* elaborated on the specific dangers for young women inherent in reading. He alleges that women are particularly drawn towards precisely those books warned against in the article in the *Hannoverisches Magazin*: ‘Schriften, die den Leidenschaften schmeicheln und das Herz bezaubern.’¹¹⁷ These texts hide ‘ihr verborgenes Gift’ behind their enjoyable façade. Chief culprit is of course the novel, of which many are so bad as to be a ‘Seuche unserer Literatur’: ‘mehr schlüpfrig als schändlich’ (pp. 206-207). He considered both French and English novels to be potentially dangerous, and the German canon (Wieland, Nicolai and Goethe), though not as bad as the others, was certainly unsuitable for women. It was written ‘für den reifen, männlichen Verstand’. The only commendable novels are those that instruct the reader in morality (‘Sittenlehre’, p. 209). Rose then suggests a list of titles in all genres, which women could read without coming to any harm. If done correctly, reading

¹¹⁶ ‘Lese-Gesellschaften’, *Hannoverisches Magazin* 37 (1782), pp. 587-590.

¹¹⁷ Rose, *Väterliche Winke an junge Frauenzimmer*, p. 205. All further references to this text appear in the text.

could be a positive influence on women, and poetry was especially suited to making ‘den Witz lebhafter, die Gedanken erhabener, und [...] das Herz zärtlicher’ (p. 213). But here too a woman would benefit from the advice of a male friend. Rose gives a long list of suitable poets, but he is more circumspect about recommending journals to women. Traditionally, women have read journals ‘ohne Auswahl mit vieler Begierde’ (p. 215), attracted by their novelty and changing content. But many journals are of poor quality, without the merits of Addison’s, Steele’s or Pope’s writing. The key to a good journal is its ability to be ‘eben so lehrreich als unterhaltend’ (pp. 216-218). Rose also recommends that women read books aimed at the young (p. 219), and the writings of Sophie von La Roche, because she combined a love for the muses with her domestic life (p. 221). But overall, advice books for girls remained cautious: ‘Vor dem vielen Lesen muß ich dich ernstlich warnen, meine Tochter!’¹¹⁸

Christian Friedrich Gottlob Kühne was generally more positive about women’s reading (‘sie wollen und müssen lesen’), arguing that it was in the interest of culture, and indeed of men, for women to read.¹¹⁹ Reading ‘gehört nicht nur zum guten Ton, sondern wir Männer würden uns sehr schlecht befinden, wenn unsere Weiber ihren Geist nicht durch Lektüre bildeten.’ The days where middle class women could remain mere ‘oekonomische Hausmütter’ were over (pp. 78-9). Uniquely, Kühne makes the case that precisely because women had to do household chores, they ought to be allowed to read,

¹¹⁸ Jakob Glatz, *Rosaliens Vermächtnis an ihre Tochter Amanda; oder Worte einer guten Mutter an den Geist und das Herz ihrer Tochter. Ein Bildungsbuch für Deutschlands Töchter* (Wien: in der Haas’schen Buchhandlung, 1816), pp. 63-64, p. 65.

¹¹⁹ [Christian Friedrich Gottlob Kühne], *Worte der Freundschaft und Liebe an alle deutschen Mädchen die gern froh und glücklich werden wollen von X.Y.Z. dem Verf. Karl Biedermann’s. Seitenstück zu Elise und zu Ewald’s Kunst ein gutes Mädchen und eine glückliche Gattin zu werden* (Leipzig: G.G. Graffé, 1804), p. 219. All further references appear in the text.

because 'diese Arbeiten sind an sich so geistlos, daß es nicht zu verwundern ist, wenn sie dabei die höchste Langeweile empfinden' (p. 219). He also gave more specific guidelines, recommending a wide range of works. His list ran to two pages of poetry, three pages of suggested plays, and no fewer than nine pages of novels, including novels by women (Susanne von Bandemer, Caroline von Wolzogen, Sophie von La Roche). But he too advised caution. Anything more than one or two hours of reading per day was excessive, although exceptions could be made on Sundays and holidays (p. 88, p. 220). The same amount of time 'zum Lesen einer nützlichen Schrift, die unsere Kenntnisse erweitert, und unser Herz bilden [sic]' was considered necessary by Johanna Katharina Morgenstern in her advice to young women. This period had to be devoted to useful and educational literature, and ought to take place early in the morning, to ensure that enough time remained 'zur Wirthschaft und andern weiblichen Beschäftigungen.'¹²⁰

Emilie von Berlepsch opposed her contemporaries, arguing for the importance of novel reading for women. Despite being at once 'ausschweifend geliebt' and 'übertrieben verdammt', the novel could be not just useful but in fact 'unentbehrlich', if it was dealt with correctly ('mit äusserster Behutsamkeit und richtiger Menschenkenntniss'). Its very popularity meant that it could reach large numbers of people, teaching them ideals of beauty and concepts of a more refined morality, as well as 'Grossheit des Herzens'.¹²¹

But von Berlepsch was a lone voice.

¹²⁰ Johanna Katharina Morgenstern, *Lehren und Erfahrungen für junge Frauenzimmer. Von der Verfasserin des Unterrichts für ein junges Frauenzimmer, das Küche und Haushaltung selbst besorgen will* (Hannover: Gebrüder Hahn. 1807), pp. 88-89.

¹²¹ Berlepsch, *Sommerstunden*, p. 225.

In conclusion, we can say that the debate over women's reading was caused not just by fear of the new, or by anxiety at the threat to a male preserve. It had its origins in a central issue for the whole Enlightenment project: how far can Enlightenment safely go?

Luise Mejer and Countess Luise Stolberg, 'ein wahres Ungeheuer in weiblicher Gestalt'¹²²

We have seen that the polemic against women's reading greatly exaggerated the extent of the problem. Especially among the middle classes, where women were directly involved with the running of the household, women would rarely have had the time or resources to read to their heart's content, as their contemporaries feared.¹²³ Nevertheless, amongst the aristocracy, women did sometimes have the time and resources to read – to an extent that seemed to substantiate the worst fears of their contemporaries. One such example which set eighteenth-century tongues wagging is the Stolberg family.

In the autumn of 1783, Luise Mejer joined the aristocratic Stolberg household on the family estate in Tremsbüttel in Holstein. She was to be a companion for Countess Luise Stolberg, renowned for her intellect and reading mania. Her correspondence with Heinrich Christian Boie, over several months, provides a fascinating account of her stay. Luise Mejer soon realized that the central occupation of all members of the household was reading ('Man stopft hier die Menschen mit Lektüre, wie man Gänse mit Nudeln

¹²² Luise Mejer and Heinrich Christian Boie, "*Ich war wohl klug, daß ich dich fand.*" *Heinrich Christian Boies Briefwechsel mit Luise Mejer 1777-85*, ed. Ilse Schreiber (Munich: Biederstein, 1961), p. 314.

¹²³ Women's household responsibilities are well documented, see for instance Sigrid Damm, *Christiane und Goethe: eine Recherche* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1998). Dülmen, ed., *Frauenleben*, pp. 103-120. Dagmar von Gersdorff, *Goethes Mutter: eine Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2001).

stopft'), and that she was to be no exception: 'Lesen und Schreiben wechseln bis abends spät miteinander ab, daß ich wahrlich an nichts denke als an das, was ich gelesen, aus Furcht, es zu vergessen.'¹²⁴ Her appointment to the Stolberg household was intended as a favour. She had previously been living in poverty as a spinster in Celle, and the Countess wanted to rescue her. But Luise Mejer quickly found the reading regime less enjoyable than her life in Celle:

das [...], was ich jetzt [...] tue, das heißt von Morgens bis halb elf Abends lesen und schreiben. [...] Mein Geist hat [in Celle] nicht die Nahrung wie hier, aber wozu im Treibhause blühen, da ich noch nie aufhörte zu wirken und zu wachsen ohne Blühen? (p. 277).

Before long, the insistence on a highly regimented daily routine angered Luise ('Hier im Hause herrscht eine despotische Regierung wie in Rußland', p. 278) and made her resentful: 'Bitterkeit und Verachtung für alles, was Genie ist, tobten heute in meiner Seele [...]' (p. 287). The Tremsbüttel routine was clearly oppressive:

Nun will ich dir unsern Tageslauf erzählen. Um zehn Uhr wird gefrühstückt. Dann liest Stolberg ein Kapitel aus der Bibel und einen Gesang aus Klopstocks Liedern vor. Jeder geht nach seinem Zimmer. Ich lese dann in dem 'Spectator', der 'Physiognomik' und noch einigen Büchern, die mir die Gräfin gegeben hat. Sie kommt zu mir herunter, indes Lotte übersetzt, und ich lese ihr den 'Pontius Pilatus' von Lavater eine Stunde lang vor. Indessen sie ihre lateinische Stunde hat, schreibe ich ab für sie oder lese für mich, bis angerichtet ist. Nach Tisch und Kaffee liest Fritz aus den 'Leseläufen', dann kommt Lotte zu mir herunter und ich lese mit ihr den Milton eine Stunde. Dann gehen wir wieder hinauf und ich lese dem Grafen und der Gräfin aus dem Plutarch vor, bis es Teezeit ist um neun abends. Nach dem Tee liest Stolberg ein Kapitel in der Bibel und einen Gesang aus dem Klopstock vor, damit Gute Nacht. (p. 275)

The Countess even designed a ten-year plan for Luise's reading ('Die Gräfin hat mir auf zehn Jahre Bücher zum Lesen ausgesucht', p. 285). But Luise, who for most of her adult

¹²⁴ Mejer and Boie, "*Ich war wohl klug*", p. 272, p. 277. All further references to Luise Mejer's letters appear in the text.

life had been in poor health, was finding the programme physically draining: 'Das entsetzliche Vorlesen greift meine Brust an' (p. 308).

Countess Luise emerges most strikingly as the driving force in the household. It was *her* desire to read which determined the daily routine of everyone else. This gave rise to many discussions about the appropriateness of her conduct for a woman. 'Nichts interessiert sie als Platon, Buffon etc. Sie liest den ganzen Tag mit Extrapost', writes Luise. Other family members want Luise Mejer to curb the Countess's excessive reading ('Gustchen will, ich soll sie zurückbringen von dem verwünschten Lesen ohne Genuß'), but she is unable to do so: 'sie ist so ganz darin verwebt' (p. 310). Naturally, the Countess's reading habits made her suspect in the eyes of her contemporaries. But this was exacerbated by her dislike of children (she told Luise: 'Kinder zu lieben ist eine unerhörte Schwäche und verrät eine unedle Neigung'), which extended even to the children in her own household ('Daß der kleine Ernst der Gräfin so unbeschreiblich zuwider ist, macht Agnes jeden Tag unglücklich.'). For both correspondents, this undermined the Countess's femininity ('Boie, Boie, wie komme ich zu einem solchen weiblichen Geschöpf!', p. 302). Luise Mejer, although she found the Countess admirable in some ways, also lost patience with her, and cursed her intellect: 'Himmel und Erde bewahre jedes weibliche Geschöpf vor mehr als gewöhnlichem Verstand.' (p. 287). The Countess took pride in having rescued Luise Mejer from unworthy feminine tasks, and elevated her to a life of study. She presumed that Luise was content with her life in Tremsbüttel, 'denn wer den ganzen Tag nicht schreibt und liest, ist nach ihrer Idee schrecklich unglücklich' (p. 295). But the way the Countess pursued her literary interests

could hardly be supposed to inspire love for reading and learning ('Die Art, wie hier studiert wird, ist für Genies, nicht für andere Menschen, Nutzen habe ich nicht daran, denn so alle Stunde etwas anderes macht mich verwirrt.' (p. 302); 'Ich bin so überhäuft mit Lesen, daß ich gar nicht denken kann.' (p. 307)). In fact, the Countess of Stolberg fits exactly the stereotype propounded by opponents of women's reading. Not only does she reject motherhood: her household is badly organized and the family frequently leave the dinner-table hungry ('Arme Agnes! sie geht oft hungrig vom Tisch mitsamt ihrem Mann. Das ist *auch* noch so ein Artikel, der Körper kann von geistiger Nahrung nicht leben', p. 294). Luise Mejer's experience of this regime, which she seems to have survived remarkably well, nonetheless led her to conclude: 'Die Gräfin ist ein wahres Ungeheuer in weiblicher Gestalt.' (p. 314)

Contemporaries acknowledged the Tremsbüttel household as untypical, as an oddity. Nonetheless, it does illustrate the extremes to which reading could be taken in an affluent household.¹²⁵ For the Countess of Stolberg, life could be entirely devoted to reading. But the price she paid for her reading habits was a questioning of her femininity by her contemporaries. Other women tried hard to maintain the compatibility of their reading with respectable femininity.

¹²⁵ The sheer volume of books consumed by the Countess indicates that disposable income was a necessary precondition of her reading habit. 'Die Gräfin hat heute ihre Rechnung beschlossen: sie hat in diesem Jahre fünfundsiebzig Bände durchgelesen ohne die Journale', p. 272.

‘Ich will recht viel lesen’ – Reading in the Life of Elisa von der Recke (1754-1833)

Elisa von der Recke, née von Medem’s life provides a more typical case study of women’s reading in this period: although she had a similar appetite for reading, her book consumption was constrained by the demands of her gender and her family. Long before she became well-known as one of Germany’s leading literary figures, books and reading were an integral part of Elisa von der Recke’s life.¹²⁶ The history of that life, especially during the brief period of her marriage, exemplifies both the new status reading had in many enlightenment households, and the opposition to women’s reading evident in the *Lesewut*-debate. This history is documented in several autobiographical writings: letters, diaries, a formal epistolary autobiography and a memoir.¹²⁷ Of these, the epistolary autobiography is of most interest to scholars, recording as it does the circumstances of Recke’s life as a young married woman.¹²⁸

In Elisa von der Recke’s marriage, between the years 1771 and 1778, her personal habits were scrutinized and questioned by her husband and the rest of her own family, especially her habits of reading. Written in 1793, but unpublished until 1900, Recke’s

¹²⁶ Among her publications were Elisa von der Recke, *Nachricht von des berühmten Cagliostro Aufenthalte in Mitau im Jahre 1779 und dessen dortigen magischen Operationen* (Berlin; Stettin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1787). Elisa von der Recke, *Etwas über des Herrn Hofpredigers Johann August Stark Vertheidigungsschrift nebst einigen andern nöthigen Erläuterungen* (Berlin; Stettin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1788). Elisa von der Recke, *Familien-Scenen oder Entwicklungen auf dem Maskenballe (1794)* (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer, 1826). I.L. Schwartz, ed., *Elisens und Sophiens Gedichte* (Berlin: Friedrich Vierweg, 1790).

¹²⁷ These have been published in several editions. Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*. Christine Träger, *Elisa von der Recke. Tagebücher und Selbstzeugnisse* (Munich: Beck, 1984). Johannes Werner, *Mein Journal. Elisens neu aufgefundenen Tagebücher aus den Jahren 1791 und 1793/5* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1927).

¹²⁸ On the transmission of the manuscripts, see Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, pp. III-IX. See also Ortrun Niethammer, *Autobiographien von Frauen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen; Basel: Francke, 2000), pp. 204-206.

autobiography details the struggle. The text consists of 105 letters, ostensibly written during marriage, which Recke claims to have selected for publication from a larger collection of 1,388 letters. Although the letters are contemporaneous to her marriage, there can be little doubt that Recke subsequently edited them in 1793.¹²⁹ They are all written by Recke herself, and addressed to a small number of friends and family. The majority of letters are addressed to her sister's governess, Sophie von Stolz ('Stolzchen'). Although the letters are rich in observations about the circumstances of Recke's life as the wife of a Courland landowner, the text has so far only interested scholars as an example of female autobiographical practice pre-1800.¹³⁰ Its relevance as social history and as a study in the history of women's reading has been overlooked.

Reading had been of great symbolic importance in Recke's life from an early age. Following her mother's death when she was four years old, she was sent to live with her grandmother, Constanzia Ursula von Korff, née von der Wahlen (1698-1790). Her grandmother, domineering and old-fashioned, insisted that she be brought up to be a wife first and foremost, and placed more importance on maintaining Recke's complexion than

¹²⁹ See Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 205.

¹³⁰ Katherine R. Goodman, 'Poetry and Truth: Elisa von der Recke's Sentimental Autobiography', in *Interpreting Women's Lives: feminist theory and personal narratives*, ed. Joy Webster Barbre (Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press, 1989). Helga Meise, "'I owed my diary the truth of my views": Femininity and Autobiography after 1784', in *Impure reason: dialectic of enlightenment in Germany*, ed. W. Daniel Wilson; Robert C. Holub (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993). Katharina Topf-Medeiros, 'Selbstdarstellung und narrative Autorität in den Briefautobiographien Elisa von der Reckes und Elisabeth Stägemanns', in *Geschriebenes Leben. Autobiographik von Frauen*, ed. Michaela Holdenried (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1995). Christine Träger, 'Vorwort', in *Elisa von der Recke. Tagebücher und Selbstzeugnisse*, ed. Christine Träger (Munich: Beck, 1984). Karin A. Wurst, "'Begreifst du aber / wie viel andächtig schwärmen leichter als / Gut handeln ist?' Elisabeth (Elisa) Charlotte Konstantia von der Recke (1754-1833)", *Lessing Yearbook* 25 (1993).

on developing her mind.¹³¹ Recke was constantly admonished ‘meine schöne weiße Haut und meinen feinen Wuchs zu schonen; das hieß, mich so vor Luft zu bewahren, daß ich selbst vor kein offenes Fenster treten durfte, und mich so fest einzuschnüren, daß mir die Luft verging.’¹³² With regard to women’s reading, her grandmother maintained: ‘Weiber werden durch lesen zum Narren, die Bücher sind nur für Männer gemacht!’¹³³ The oppressive atmosphere of her grandmother’s house meant that Recke deliberately eschewed learning in order not to be teased by her relatives. They maintained that she was so weak in the head that any kind of learning would send her over the edge, and make her completely stupid. ‘Ich fürchtete also herzlich diesen Augenblick und faßte den stillen Vorsatz, nichts zu lernen, um nicht, wie die anderen sagten, dwatsch [töricht] zu werden.’¹³⁴

All this changed when her father, Johann Friedrich von Medem (1722-1785) remarried, and sent for her to return to his home, when she was eleven years old. In a scene of remarkable symbolism, she describes her mental as well as physical liberation through the new educational regime under her educated and well-read stepmother, Agnesa von Medem, née Brucken (1718-1784). In order to guard her skin against sun damage, Recke’s grandmother had insisted that she be so wrapped in protective veils and hats that she was unable to walk unassisted:

so wurde ich [...] vom stärksten Diener [...] die Treppe hinuntergetragen, weil mein Gesicht, in vielfache Florkappen und eine Kalesche gehüllt, so verdeckt

¹³¹ On Recke’s stay with her grandmother, see Recke’s memoir of her youth, written in 1795, *Selbstbiographie Elisas von der Recke*, printed in Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, pp. 1-154, and Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, pp. 181-204.

¹³² Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, p. 37.

¹³³ Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, p. 212.

¹³⁴ Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, p. 36.

war, daß ich nichts sehen, also keinen Schritt ungeführt thun konnte. So nur war ich bis dahin der freien Luft zugeführt worden.¹³⁵

Recke had never seen any countryside except through her veils. Driving away from her grandmother's estate, Recke is permitted by her stepmother to shed her veils and to look out of the carriage windows. 'Mir ging ein neuer Himmel auf; freudig sah ich nun zum Fenster hinaus [...] und zum ersten Male in meinem Leben sah ich mit unverhülltem Angesichte [mein Vaterland]. Ich konnte mich der Freudenthränen nicht enthalten.'¹³⁶ In the years following her return to her father's house, Recke acquired sophisticated reading habits. Reading and literature played an important role in her father's house, as Recke and her siblings often produced dramatic performances, and read together as a sociable activity. Her stepmother's attitude to women's reading and education remained an annoyance to Recke's grandmother,¹³⁷ but Recke herself came to love her stepmother very much.

When Recke was seventeen years old, all this changed again.¹³⁸ Under parental pressure, she entered an arranged marriage with Baron Georg Magnus von der Recke (1739-1795). Although she was not attracted to him – she claimed he made 'immer einen höchst unangenehmen Eindruck auf mich' – she consented to the match in order to forge a financially advantageous alliance with the von der Recke family.¹³⁹ In effect, she was sold, 'für die Neuenburgischen Güter'.¹⁴⁰ As a result of the mismatch between herself and

¹³⁵ Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, pp. 58-59.

¹³⁶ Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, pp. 59-60.

¹³⁷ 'In jeder Stunde mußte ich es hören, daß Mama eine Närrin aus mir gemacht hat [...]' Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, p. 251.

¹³⁸ Her autobiographical writings are contradictory about her date of birth, stating variously that she was either fifteen or seventeen at the time of her marriage. I follow Niethammer's assessment. See Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 176, footnote 186; p. 181, footnote 190.

¹³⁹ Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, p. 128.

¹⁴⁰ Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, p. 227.

her husband in terms of age, temperament, outlook and expectation, she tried to withdraw from her domestic situation and find solace in reading.¹⁴¹ But her husband expected her to attend to the domestic duties of a landowner's wife, and to give up her interest in reading and writing in favour of housework. Consequently, her reading habit became the focal point of many conflicts. As Elisa von der Recke was so young at the time of her marriage, both her grandmother and her parents still played a great part in her life. Recke found herself under attack from all sides. The marriage eventually became unsustainable, and the couple separated in 1776. In 1777, the couple's only child, Friedrike (1774-1777), died, and they finally divorced in 1781. After her divorce, Recke travelled extensively in Europe, visiting spa towns, courts and famous contemporaries, such as Catherine the Great, Goethe, Hippel, Hamann, Kant, Lavater, Gleim, Wieland, Herder, Klopstock, Campe, Mendelssohn and Nicolai, before finally settling in Dresden, where she died.

Throughout Recke's epistolary autobiography, she emphasizes her feeling of imprisonment in the marital home, and by extension, in the marriage itself. Baron von der Recke's ancestral home was a fortified medieval moated manor house, which seemed like a 'wüstes Schloß' to Recke, who had been brought up in the relative comfort of a baroque palace.¹⁴² She describes arriving at the house for the first time, and experiencing a sense of foreboding when the carriage drove through the dark and narrow entrance with the portcullis rattling above (p. 243). Recke's sense of the house as a prison continues throughout the text: 'Neuenburg ist ein großes, fürchterliches Schloß! es hat sehr dicke – dicke Mauern, acht Personen können in einem Fenster sitzen.' (p. 177) In keeping with

¹⁴¹ About her relationship with her husband, see also Topf-Medeiros, 'Selbstdarstellung', pp. 142-143.

¹⁴² Rachel, ed., *Aufzeichnungen und Briefe*, p. 193. All further references to this text appear above.

the house, her husband appeared to her to be uncouth and brutal, a characteristic which is illustrated by an incident in the text, in which he set his hunting dogs onto her cat, and encouraged them to tear her cat to pieces before her own eyes. Perhaps understandably, the episode horrified the refined and sensitive seventeen-year old. Her husband's response to her distress was unrepentant: 'Wenn Sie so über den Tod einer Katze weinen, wie werden Sie sich denn anstellen, wenn Sie einmal Kinder haben und diese sterben?' (p. 180). Recke's social isolation is evident throughout the text, and actively encouraged by her husband, who wanted her to give up her friends and family in order to devote herself to him alone:

heute sagte er wieder, es taugte nichts, wenn verheirathete Weiber Freundinnen hätten; diese müßten nur ihren Mann und das Hauswesen lieben, und Gott sagte selbst in der Schrift: Du sollst Vater und Mutter verlassen und an deinem Manne hangen [sic], und dein Mann soll dein Herr sein. (p. 183)

In direct response to her feelings of alienation and loneliness, Recke turned to reading as an escape:

Ich will recht viel lesen, um meinen Verstand und mein Herz zu bilden, dann wird mir auch, wenn übles Wetter ist und ich nicht herumspazieren kann, die Zeit in diesem großen, wüsten Schlosse nicht so lang, und mir wird vielleicht dann auch nicht so ängstlich sein. (p. 194)

When her brother, Friedrich von Medem (1758-1778), came to visit her, reading also functioned as a means of escaping the reality of her life: 'Mit ihm scheint dies öde Schloß mir gar nicht wüste. Er liest mir bald etwas aus den Nachtgedanken vor, bald übersetzt er mir etwas aus seinem Liebling Horaz.' (p. 235) When her grandmother was adamant that she restricted her reading, in order that she devote herself entirely to her husband, she tried to submit to her grandmother's rules, but insisted on a small amount of reading as a defence against what she calls 'losing her mind' in the castle.

Und lesen will ich nie, wenn mein Mann nur eine müßige Stunde hat, weil ich es so für meine Pflicht halte, ihm [...] durch meinen Umgang die Zeit zu verkürzen. Aber sollte ich gar nicht lesen, dann könnte ich in meiner Lage in diesem wüsten Schlosse von Sinnen kommen. Ich würde [sic] also nur gerade so viel lesen, um durch Ausbildung meiner Seele das Leben, es sei auch, wie es sei, ruhig und mit Würde tragen zu lernen. (p. 255)

Throughout the text, she insists that reading allowed her to endure her unhappy marriage and her oppressive family relationships. 'Ich versprach, ihrem Rathe so viel möglich [sic] nachzukommen, nur könne ich nicht versprechen, daß ich nicht lesen würde, weil dies meine einzige Zerstreuung in diesen wüsten Mauern sei.' (p. 258)

Reading provided food both for her soul and for her mind, and it enabled her to overcome her social isolation, as she discussed individual books with correspondents. She wrote: 'mit meiner guten Doris Lieven spreche ich über alles, was ich lese. Wenn wir uns unsere Gedanken über Cronegks Gedichte mittheilen, so wird uns beiden so wohl.' (p. 202) Intensive, repetitive reading of her favourite authors was one way in which Recke maintained friendships and cemented her social bonds, thereby bridging physical distance:

wenn ich unsern Young, unsern Cronegk lese, dann ist mir immer so, als läse ich mit Ihnen, und wenn Sie auch nicht da sind, so denke ich mit Ihnen fort – das heißt, ich denke, Sie lesen unsre Lieblingsschriftsteller und fühlen, wie ich, und unsre beiden Seelen werden wie zwei Saiten, die auf dem Klaviere gleich gestimmt sind, einen Ton angeben. (p. 209)

Whenever possible, Recke read in the company of her friends, thereby heightening the sense of friendship: 'Fritzchen, Dortchen und ich blieben so lange in meiner Bücherkammer, und wir lasen einander einige Gedichte vor, die Dortchen und ich gemacht haben.' (p. 298) The extent to which reading played a part in her life is illustrated by her description of a typical day during her favourite brother's stay:

Steht die Sonne schon hoch über uns, dann lesen wir entweder Cronegks Einsamkeiten, Klopstocks Oden oder Kleistes Frühling. Auch Zacharias Tageszeiten haben wir jetzt zu lesen angefangen. Aber oft vertiefen wir uns so im Gespräch über das, was wir lesen, daß wir nicht aus der Stelle kommen und den schnellen Flug der Zeit gar nicht bemerken. Ehe wir uns dessen versehen, steht die Mittagssonne über unserm Haupte [...] (p. 235)

Her reading matter is typical of the 1770s: *belles lettres* written primarily by German, French and English writers (Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, Wieland, Lavater, Klopstock, Sterne, Young and Cronegk). Similarly, her reading manner is both extensive and intensive at the same time: characteristic of this time of changing reading habits.

Her husband was all too aware that he did not share her reading proclivities.

Recke quotes him in one of her letters as saying: 'Sehn Sie, Fräulein Lisette! mein hübsches Weibchen möchte mich so gern zum Silpfen [i.e. Sylphen] machen, aber ich Erdenkloß werde nimmermehr Geist allein.' (p. 246) The Baron seems to have been uncomfortable with the fact that his young wife was more cultured than himself, and he suspected this to be at the root of her disdain for him. 'Sie haben die Romanensprache recht gut studiert, und ich Buschklepper muß Ihrem fein gebildeten Herzen wohl sehr plump vorkommen.' (p. 185) He is not proud of his refined wife (whom he disparagingly considers a 'Mode-und Tanzpuppe'), and fears that she will become a 'gelehrte Närrin' like her stepmother (p. 184). Elsewhere, he refers to her as a 'Larve', and a 'feines Zierchen', emphasizing her sophistication as superficial, in contrast to women who were good housekeepers (p. 279). Baron von der Recke considers his wife's reading a fashionable and thus affected habit, and alleges that she merely seeks to be admired for her learning out of vanity: 'Hat sich Ihr Stolz heute an alle dem Weihrauch, der Ihnen gestreut wurde, sättigen können, oder hungert Sie noch nach mehrerem Lobe?' (p. 206)

Although we hear these conversations only from one side, it is remarkable how clearly the *Lesewut*-debate finds an echo here. Baron von der Recke feared that reading was making his wife too high-minded, and that he would not be able to meet her exalted expectations. Consequently, he poured scorn on all mannerisms which he felt derived from her reading. A key target for his attack was her bookish vocabulary, and the way she expressed herself ('die Romanensprache', p. 185). Soon after Elisa had moved into the marital home, he first reproached her: 'Das ist eine wahre empfindsame Theatersprache, mit der ich verschont zu bleiben wünsche.' He regarded her learned stepmother as the source of this affected language, and he hoped that Elisa would distance herself from this model of femininity: 'ich wünschte zu meinem Glücke, daß Sie Verstand genug hätten, um die Thorheiten dieser superklugen Frau einzusehen.' (p. 178) The Baron attempted to dissociate his wife from what he considered this unnatural, performative language, and to train her in domestic skills. Like many of his contemporaries, he feared that his wife's reading stood in the way of her being a good housekeeper. 'Recke fragte mich, ob ich nicht mit ihm zum Viehstall gehen und das Vieh dort überzählen wolle, dies wäre besser, als mich unter einen schattigen Baum zu setzen und da Wielands Sympathien zu lesen.' (p. 184) But Elisa von der Recke did not take the interest in household management which her husband wished to see, and continued to seek solace in reading instead – thereby partly confirming contemporary prejudices against women's reading. Her husband went on reproaching her for her unsuitability as a wife:

Ich [...] wurde [...] bitter angefahren, hörte Spöttereien über meinen Hang zum Lesen, und da ging es wieder über Mama her, daß sie mich zur gezierten Närrin, nicht aber zur Wirthin erzogen habe. [...] ein kurländischer Edelmann brauche eine gute Wirthin, nicht aber eine Bücherfreundin zur Frau. (p. 200)

Recke tried to counter by arguing that reading was not in conflict with her position as a wife, but in fact allowed her to become a better companion for her husband. 'Doch müsse er es mir auch zu gute halten, wenn ich einige Stunden des Tages zur Ausbildung meiner Seele verwende, weil ich selbst dadurch geschickter würde, eine gute Gattin und Hausfrau zu werden.' (p. 200) At this point, it becomes clear that Baron von der Recke's vitriolic attacks against his wife's reading were not in fact the result of genuine worries about the state of the kitchen or the linen cupboard, but derived from his fear of losing his status as head of the family. His wife's reading threatened his dominant position in the household: 'er aber sagte, er wünsche, daß ich nur nicht so viel Verstand aus den Büchern holte, daß ich Versuche machte, Herr im Hause zu werden, denn dies könne üble Folgen haben [...]' (p. 200).

Her grandmother's side of the family shared Baron von der Recke's opposition to Recke's reading habit. Her grandmother in particular believed that the loss of a social life and solitary pleasures like reading were a sacrifice every married woman had to make. Consequently, she intervened when Recke's relationship with her husband deteriorated, and imposed a set of rules designed to force Recke to devote herself exclusively to her husband. The prohibitions focused on curtailing family visits, correspondence and reading. In a letter to her parents, Recke explained the new regime:

[...] das schwere Gebot meiner Großmutter, daß ich Sie [...] nur alle 4 Monate besuchen soll, drückt mich ganz darnieder. Meine Großmutter glaubt, daß ich meinem Manne diesen Beweis der Liebe schuldig bin [...] Meine Freundschaft und Korrespondenz mit meiner lieben, liebsten Lisette soll ich auch aufgeben, weil eine verheirathete Frau nur in ihrem Manne ihr ganzes Glück finden müsse. Meinen Hang zu lesen soll ich bloß in Liebe zur Wirthschaft verwandeln [...] (p. 255)

Recke's grandmother was certain that Recke's problems in her marriage derived from 'diesen Teufelsbüchern' (p. 316) and 'hieß mich eine durch Bücher verrückt gewordene Närrin [...]' (p. 349). If only Recke could focus more on her 'vortrefflicher Mann' and less on her 'verfluchten Bücher', marital differences would soon be a thing of the past (p. 316). Books were also blamed on Recke's failure to conceive a child in the first three years of her marriage: 'Der Onkel setzte hämisch hinzu, ich würde gewiß schon zwei Kinder haben, wenn ich meinen Mann nur halb so, als meine Bücher, meine Freundinnen und meine superkluge Stiefmutter lieben würde.' (p. 257) Her grandmother argued that Recke's reading had jeopardized her married life, made herself an object of ridicule ('sich durch Gelehrsamkeit zum Spektakel [ge]macht') and become the bane of her husband's life ('die Plage eines so guten Mannes', p. 252). In addition, she considered that Recke's reading was endangering the salvation of her soul after she found Moses Mendelssohn's *Phädon, eine Beweisschrift für die Unsterblichkeit der Seele und das Dasein Gottes* (1767) among Recke's books. The argument that reading endangered women's health was also made ('daß ich meine Gesundheit durch das Nachtlesen und –schreiben so geschwächt habe', p. 314). But underlying her grandmother's opposition to the specific case of Recke's reading was her belief that reading in general was unsuited to women.

[...] das sind deine Bücher? und du schämst dich deiner Albernheit nicht? Hast du die Bücher nur zur Parade, dann bist du eine Närrin, und liest du sie gar, so bist du ganz verrückt! Wo kann ein Weiberkopf so viele Bücher fassen? (p. 252)

Recke's grandmother, as she appears in the autobiography through the prism of Recke's recollection and editing, perfectly embodies the school of thought which saw reading on a wider scale in society not as a positive symptom of enlightenment, but as a threat to personal happiness and the social order.

Her grandmother's and her husband's concerns about women's reading, and those of their contemporaries, were to some extent borne out by Elisa von der Recke's behaviour. As suggested by opponents of the *Lesewut*-phenomenon, she was not interested in being a model housewife, nor was she brought up to fulfil that role. At the same time, it was also true that she did have unrealistically high expectations of her husband, because she compared him (unfavourably) to male heroes in novels, or to male writers. For example, after reading Sophie von La Roche's *Die Geschichte des Fräulein von Sternheim*, she compared herself to Sophie Sternheim ('O! die Sternheim war viel besser, viel liebenswürdiger und viel unglücklicher als ich.'). She was inspired to become more like the fictional heroine: 'Ihre Tugenden will ich nachzuahmen suchen'. But then she remembered her husband, and realized that she would never be able to emulate her role model, as she was tied to such an oaf: 'aber so glücklich, als die Sternheim am Ende wurde, kann ich doch nie werden! denn ach – zum Seym[o]ur hat Recke gar keine Anlage!' (p. 229) Men in general did not measure up well to their fictional counterparts: 'Keiner von allen hat Youngs und Cronegks Geist, keiner hat Agat[h]ons Schwung der Seele [...]' (p. 212) But it is her husband's dissimilarity to her literary heroes which poses the biggest problem: 'wie glücklich könnte ich hier leben, wenn Recke anders wäre, wenn er Cronegks Seele hätte!' (p. 235)

And yet, despite the vehement opposition to Recke's reading habits, which eventually made her ill, and caused a breakdown ('meine Nerven sind von mannigfaltigem Kummer angegriffen', p. 261), Recke's experience of literature and

reading was not as straightforward as this would suggest. After moving back into her father's house aged eleven, she did grow up in a household in which literature was regarded highly, and in her stepmother she had a female role model who encouraged her to become a learned, well-read woman. Even when she lived with the uncouth Baron von der Recke, she was by no means as deprived as it seems. She possessed her own private space, her 'Bücherkammer', into which she could retreat with her friends (p. 298). In her writing room she kept a 'Bücherschrank' which housed her impressive collection of over four hundred books (p. 252). And despite her husband's foul behaviour on many occasions, there are two instances mentioned in the letters in which he actually bought books for her. On each occasion, he spent a substantial sum of money on her: 'Heute [...] machte [er] mir ein Geschenk mit Büchern. Ich habe die Rechnung gesehen, die Bücher kosten über 50 Thlr.' (p. 263) Earlier, he had already spent ninety talers on books: 'Mein Mann hat mir für 90 Thlr. schöne Bücher geschenkt, auch hat er mir sogar einige Aufsätze aus dem englischen Zuschauer vorgelesen.' (p. 227) Although the Baron is generally characterized in the text as antithetical to her, there are glimpses of him which indicate that perhaps he was not as removed from a culture of books and reading as she suggests elsewhere.

Conclusion

Elisa von der Recke's life is paradigmatic of the changes in women's reading in the second half of the eighteenth century. Books and reading were clearly an integral part of many well-to-do aristocratic and middle-class women's lives. Recke benefited from much greater access to reading matter, and enjoyed reading a greater number of books than her female counterparts half a century earlier. Books were an accepted item of

household expenditure in households that could afford the expense, whilst reading became a recognized female activity. At the same time, people shared their reading experiences, and reading became a sociable pursuit. Books became a vital element in friendships and social networks. Reading also encouraged women to make the transition to their own writing. But whilst these changes do indicate a watershed in the history of women's reading, the limits of this 'reading revolution' are also clearly evident. They are the same limits placed on women throughout the culture of the time. Women's reading did not enjoy a uniformly high status. Fears and concerns, based on the idea that reading was inimical to femininity, are expressed in numerous books and articles. And despite the desire to read, physical access to books (and friends) was often regulated and curtailed. The much-discussed 'revolution' in women's reading did take place; but the revolution was more to do with reading, than with women.

Chapter 4: Creativity and Capital: Women Writers and the Literary Market

Introduction

Women's writing from the past comes down to us through many filters. Some of these, such as canon formation, have been studied in some depth. By contrast, the economic and social context in which women produced their work is often neglected. Yet publication is, necessarily, the beginning of any work's journey to the future; and economic and structural factors significantly affect the process of publication. Without publication no eighteenth-century female writer could become established; and only through the success of some could others be encouraged to take up the pen, creating a female literary tradition. Certainly, ideological factors such as notions of femininity and propriety played a significant part in the literary world. But, as Silvia Bovenschen points out, 'Außer den psychischen und den kulturpolitischen Zensuren gibt es freilich noch andere Selektionsmechanismen, die man als literaturinstitutionelle Zugangsschranken bezeichnen könnte'.¹ So how far did other, more practical factors, affect women's entry into the business of literature?

The book trade functions as a cultural mediator in all literary developments and traditions: 'die Möglichkeit, daß Werke des Geistes erscheinen, bewirkt allein der deutsche Buchhandel'.² At the end of the eighteenth century, like all other areas of society, the book trade underwent a series of changes. In one of the most notable of

¹ Bovenschen, *Imaginierte Weiblichkeit*, p. 219.

² Friedrich Christoph Perthes, *Der deutsche Buchhandel als Bedingung des Daseins einer deutschen Literatur. Schriften* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), pp. 6-7.

these, women entered the literary profession in significant numbers for the first time. The reasons for this are yet to be studied in any depth: women writers have frequently been examined as individuals, and not as a distinct socio-economic group. Yet, the size of this group makes an investigation of women writers' role and place necessary.

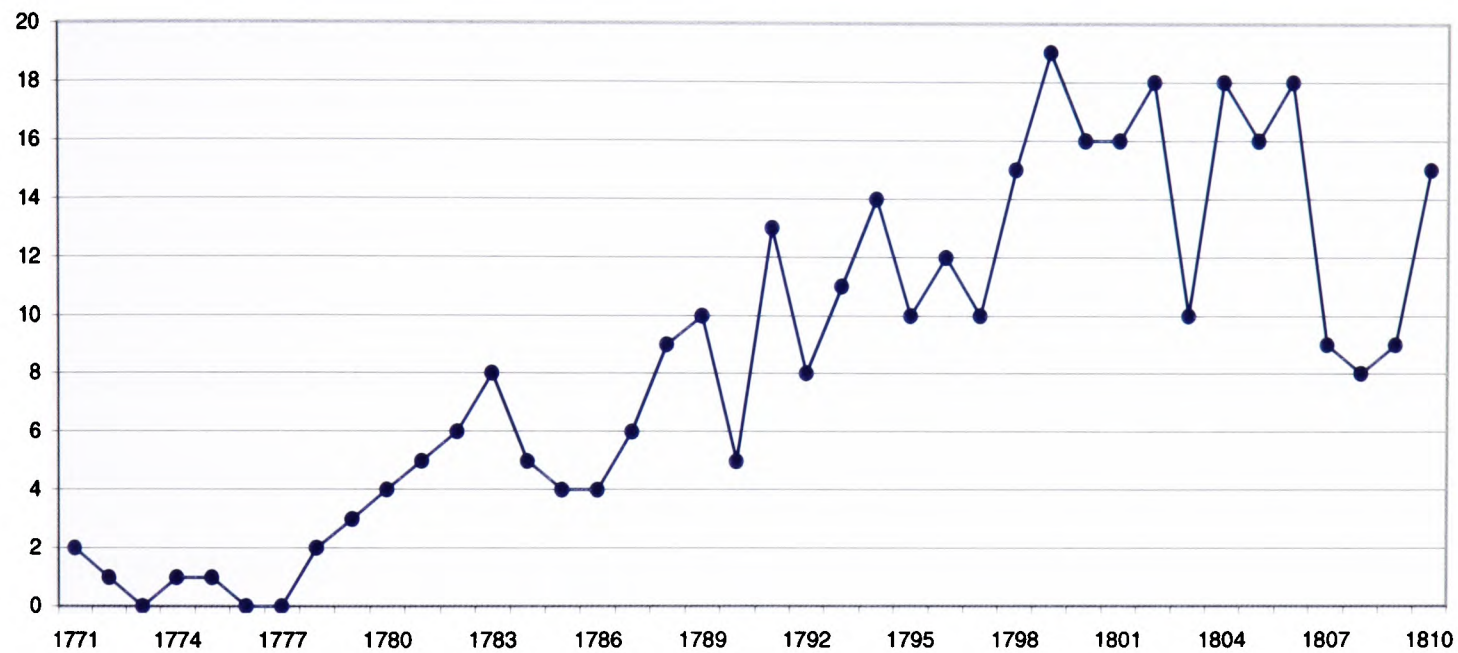
Previous explanations of this phenomenon, such as Jirku's statement that 'In Deutschland hatten Frauen im 18. Jahrhundert keinerlei Recht oder Möglichkeit, unabhängig von männlicher Unterstützung zu veröffentlichen', are unconvincing.³ Individual biographies alone cannot explain the increased presence of women in the market either. Personal publication strategies – adopting a husband's name (as in the case of Dorothea Schlegel), or relying on established male literati for help (as in the case of Sophie von La Roche's first novel, *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771)) – cannot explain the general phenomenon. In particular, they only tell us about women in contact with established male writers. An explanation must instead be sought in the contemporary economic and historical context. It will be the contention of this chapter that changes in supply and demand in the book trade created the conditions necessary for women's emergence as authors. These changes will be discussed first; before then examining the question of how women entered the literary market despite their relative economic, educational, social and legal disadvantages.

That women entered the literary market in large numbers, and in some cases sustained their careers for a long period of time, has already been established (see

³ Brigitte E. Jirku, "Wollen Sie mit Nichts...ihre Zeit zersplittern?" *Ich-Erzählerin und Erzählstruktur in von Frauen verfaßten Romanen des 18. Jahrhunderts*, *Forschungen zur Literatur-und Kulturgeschichte* vol. 39 (Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Bern; New York; Paris; Wien: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 139.

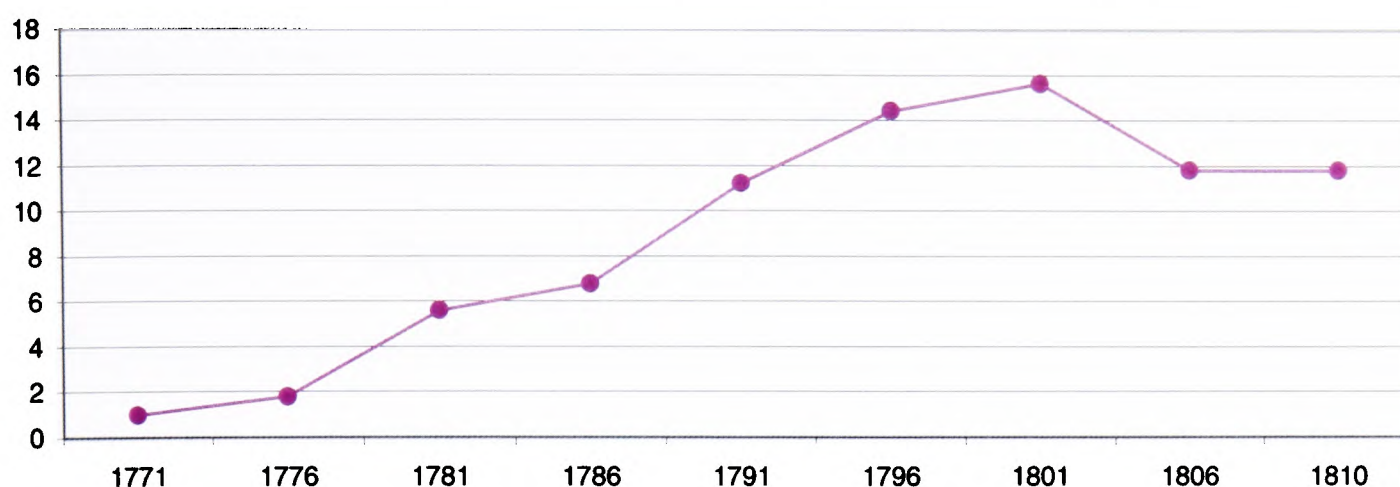
introduction). Charted over time, women’s prose contribution to the literary market alone appears as follows (see figure 2):⁴

Fig. 2: Novels and Stories by German Women Writers 1771-1810



The increase after 1780 (about ten years after the publication of the first novels by Anna Maria Sagar and Sophie von La Roche) is noticeable, but annual fluctuations seem to be drastic. A better overview is gained when we look at five-year averages instead:

⁴ Figures 2 and 3 are based on Gallas and Runge, *Romane und Erzählungen*. However, second editions, reprints and the publication of later volumes were excluded for the sake of simplicity. The graphs therefore indicate the publication of (first volumes of) first editions only.

Fig. 3: Novels and Stories by Women (Five-Years Averages)

The gradual, and consistent, increase in publications by women is unmistakable (the fall after 1805 was largely the result of the chaos caused by the Napoleonic wars, and is in line with novel production as a whole). But how did this phenomenon come about? What were the factors that enabled women to gain a place in the literary market? Karin Tebben's assessment that all women writers had to rely on 'die Gunst [...] [der] Männer [...], die als Verleger, Mentoren und Berater den Weg in die Öffentlichkeit ebneten', is unconvincing as an explanation of such high figures.⁵ Instead, the answer lies partly in the history of the German book trade, and partly in women's own active pursuit of publication.

⁵ Karin Tebben, 'Soziokulturelle Bedingungen weiblicher Schriftkultur im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Einleitung', in *Beruf: Schriftstellerin. Schreibende Frauen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), p. 28.

‘Vielschreiberei’ and ‘Verlagsmanufakturisten’: The book trade in the eighteenth century

Ich übersende Ew. Hochedgelgeb. hier ein Manuskript vor dessen Stärcke Sie erschrecken werden, aber ich habe ein sehr günstiges Vorurtheil dafür und dencke dazu ein wenig Recht zu haben.⁶

Changes in book production

The story of the book trade in the eighteenth century is one of expansion and diversification. The number of books produced rose drastically during the course of the century. In total, the book market is estimated to have expanded by 350% between 1740 and 1800.⁷ The rate of increase was steep. Whilst 265 more new titles were produced in 1763 than in 1721, 2,832 more new titles appeared in 1805 than in 1763.⁸ Book fair catalogues, though not reliable indicators of total production, can be used in this context to indicate developments in the market.⁹ They record the publication of 750 new titles in the year 1740, with an increase to around 5,000 new titles annually in the 1780s and 1790s. Parallel to this growth in production was the rise in the use of German, and a corresponding decrease in the use of Latin as the language of publishing (see figure 4). In 1740, 27.7% of all publications were in Latin. By 1770 this was down to 14.3%. In 1800, a mere 3.97% of books published in Germany were written in Latin.¹⁰

⁶ J.I.E. von Wallenrodt, letter to Friedrich Nicolai (7 Mai 1788). Printed in Johanna Isabella Eleonore von Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt in Briefen an einen Freund: ein Beitrag zur Seelenkunde und Weltkenntniss*, ed. Anita Runge, 2 vols., Frühe Frauenliteratur in Deutschland vol. 12 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1992), vol. 2, p. 725.

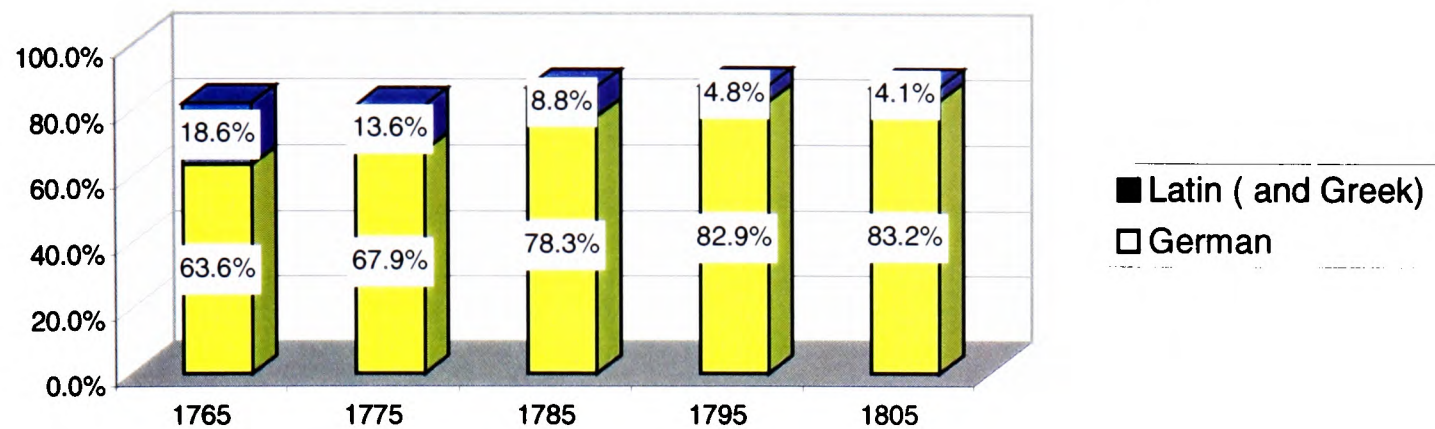
⁷ This rate of growth easily outpaced population growth in the same period. See Saul, ‘Humanism’, p. 208.

⁸ All statistics here cited from Reinhard Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 1991), pp. 122-123.

⁹ The unreliability of the catalogues is revealed very clearly in the case of the Leipzig publisher Georg Joachim Göschen: only 53% of the titles published by him were actually printed in book fair catalogues. And 8% of those titles listed were in fact published elsewhere later. See Stephan Füssel, *Georg Joachim Göschen. Ein Verleger der Spätaufklärung und der deutschen Klassik. Band 2. Verlagsbibliographie Göschen 1785-1838* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), pp. IX-XIII. On the problem of using book fair catalogues, also see Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 121.

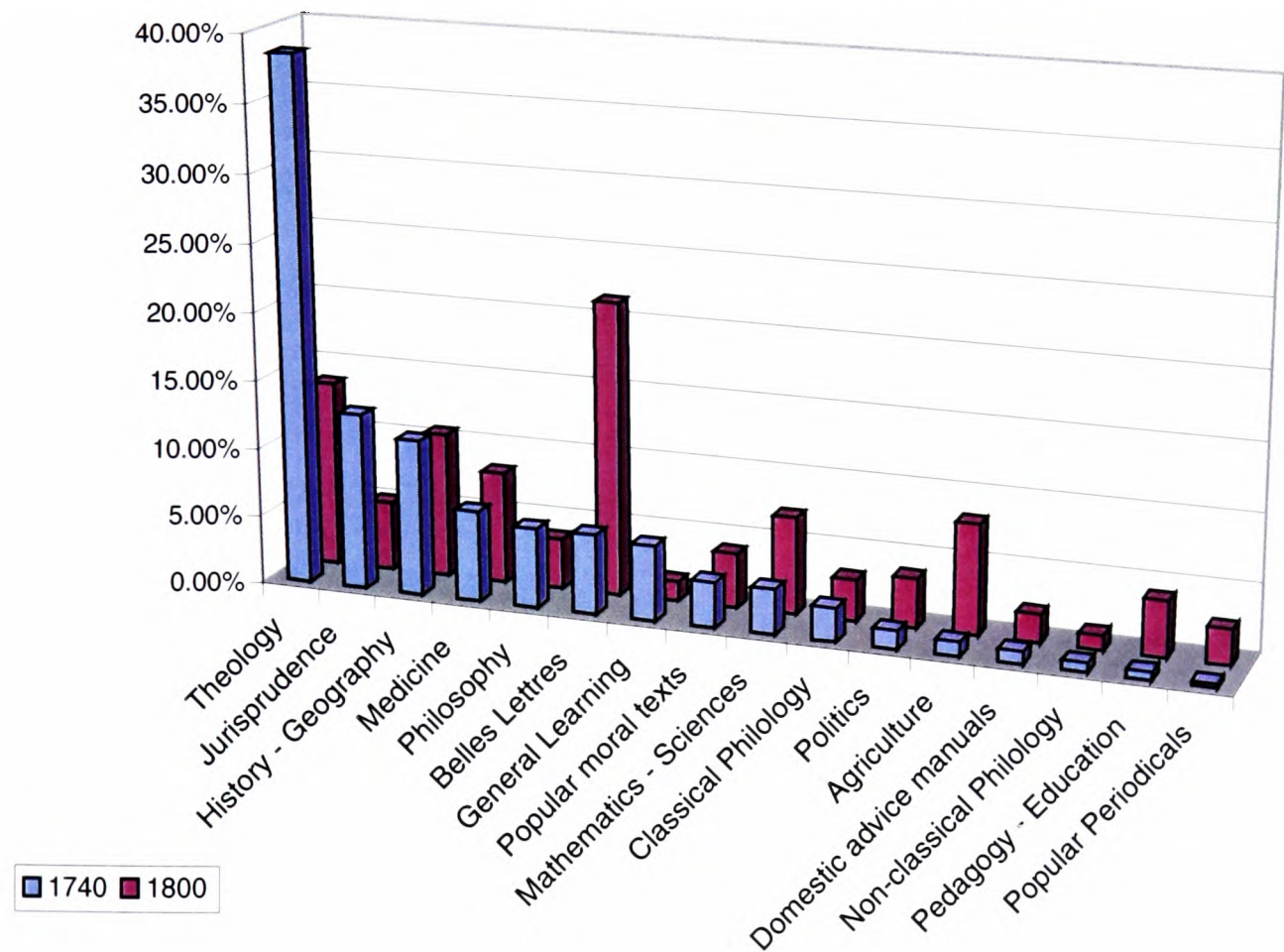
¹⁰ See Albert Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public 1740-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 164.

Fig. 4: The Growth of German as a Literary Language



However, the profound change in the book market went further. The type of books produced altered as dramatically as the quantity of books (see figure 5).¹¹

Fig. 5: Changes in German Book Production 1740-1800



¹¹ Statistics for figures 4 and 5 from Helmuth Kiesel and Paul Münch, *Gesellschaft und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert: Voraussetzungen und Entstehung des literarischen Markts in Deutschland* (Munich: Beck, 1977), p. 196 and pp. 201-202 respectively.

Subjects like medicine and jurisprudence maintained their market share throughout the century. But theology, previously dominant, declined significantly, especially between 1770 and 1780. In 1770, 25% of books published were theological in content. By 1800, this had fallen by nearly half to 13.5%. There were, of course, regional variations in these developments, and religious texts were still produced in greater quantities in the Southern German states. But the trend towards a more secular literary market remained. As theology declined, relatively new disciplines managed to increase their market share. Geography, pedagogy, political treatises, popular philosophy and natural sciences all approximately doubled their market share from around 2% in 1740 to around 4-5% in 1800. The literary public was thus consuming not only more secular, but also more diversified reading matter. *Belles lettres*, or what was called *schöne Literatur*, increased its popularity most noticeably. In 1740, it had occupied no more than 6% of the market, which increased to an impressive 16.5% by 1770, thereby placing it in second place behind theology. By 1800, it had overtaken theology and now took first place with no less than 21.45%. Women's contribution to this growth in *belles lettres* has often been noted.¹²

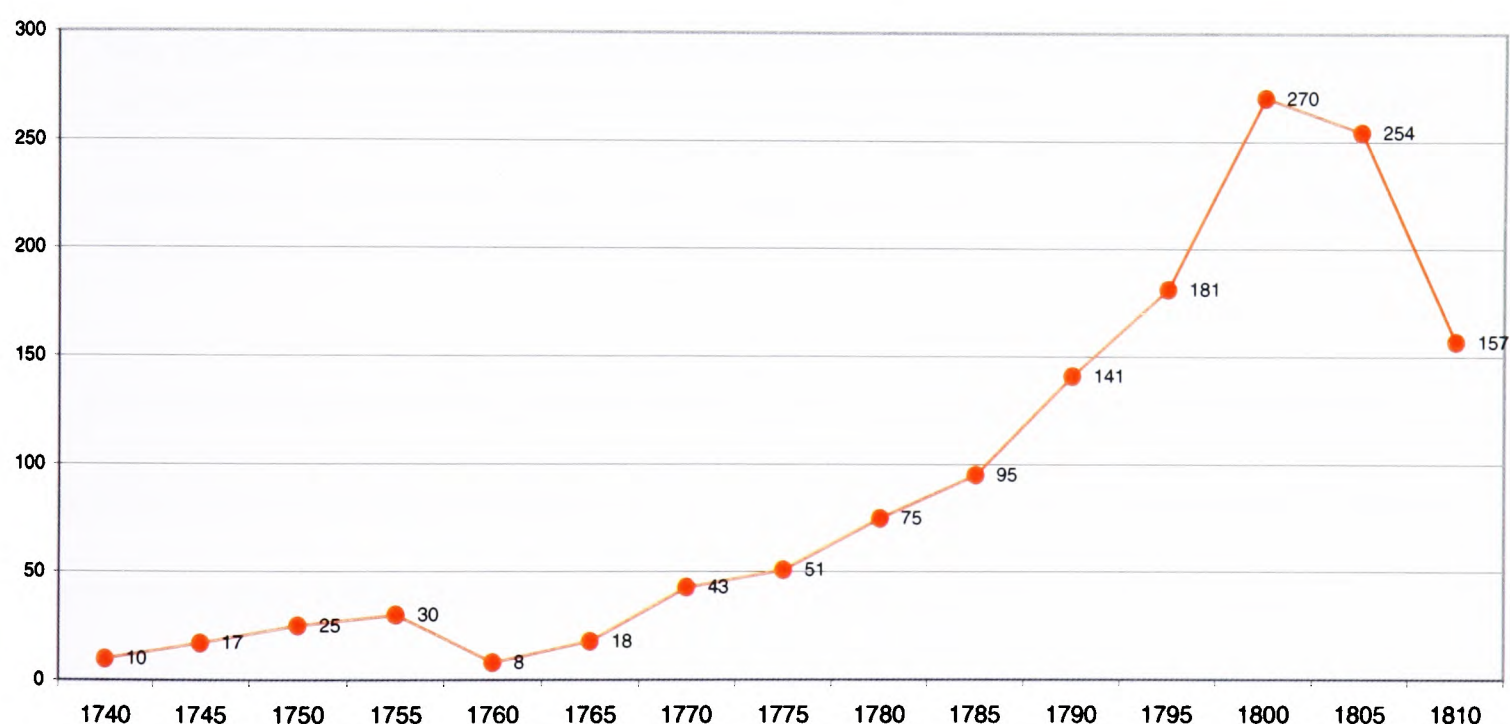
A similar change in emphasis had taken place in the genres preferred by the reading public. The novel, which occupied an insignificant 2.6% of the market in 1740, at a time when it had yet to establish its validity as a genre, had become the most popular genre of them all by 1800, with 11.7% of the market (see figure 6).¹³ The Easter fair

¹² See Barbara Becker-Cantarino, 'Leben als Text - Briefe als Ausdrucks- und Verständigungsmittel in der Briefkultur und Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Frauen-Literatur-Geschichte*, ed. Hiltrud Gnüg and Renate Möhrmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), p. 141.

¹³ Statistics for figure 6 from Ward, *Book production*, p. 167.

catalogues of 1800 recorded the publication of 300 new novels, 64 new dramas, and 34 volumes of poetry. Figure 6 reveals an increase in the overall production of novels similar to that demonstrated in figures 2 and 3, showing that women's writing was in step with the market as a whole. Ever since Silvia Bovenschen's much acclaimed study, it has been accepted that '[...] die "offene Form" [...] dieser Gattungen (Roman, Briefroman) ebenso wie der Umstand, daß sie ihre Sujets in Bereichen fanden, die der Erlebniswelt der Frauen nahestanden, die Partizipation der Frau an der Literatur bedeutsam erhöhten.'¹⁴

Fig. 6: Novel Production in Germany 1740-1800



The significance of these shifts is evident: the literary market was no longer the preserve of classically educated scholars well versed in Latin, writing predominantly theological books. Instead, the statistics '[...] verweisen auf einen literaturhistorischen Vorgang größter Tragweite – auf die Entstehung einer deutschen Nationalliteratur für ein

¹⁴ Bovenschen, *Imaginierte Weiblichkeit*, p. 216. See also Anita Runge, *Literarische Praxis von Frauen um 1800. Briefroman, Autobiographie, Märchen*, Germanistische Texte und Studien vol. 55 (Hildesheim; Zurich; New York: Olms-Weidmann, 1997), p. 22.

anonymes, verbürgerlichendes Lesepublikum.’¹⁵ The revolution in the literary market was accompanied by the emergence of a new geographical focus for book production. The reading public received most of its reading matter from North Germany, and from Saxony and Prussia. 10% of publishers who took part in the book fairs were from Leipzig itself. The cities which had pioneered the printing process three hundred years earlier (Augsburg, Mainz, and Nürnberg) had been left behind by the new centres for publishing, predominantly university cities and princely capitals. This concentration in publishing activity itself represented an opportunity for aspiring women writers:

There was of course no metropolis like London or Paris in Germany, but there was a good deal of literary piecemeal available particularly in Leipzig, which is probably the reason why there was one published writer to every 170 inhabitants of the city in 1790. In the two largest German cities, Berlin and Vienna, in contrast, the ratios were 1:675 and 1:800, respectively. In Germany as a whole the ratio has been estimated at 1:4000.¹⁶

The transformation of the literary market did not go unnoticed. An example of contemporary interest in these changes can be found in a *Deutsches Museum* article from 1780, which contains a detailed comparative examination of book fair catalogues.

Man kann sicher annehmen, jährlich kommen über 2500 neue Bücher auf die Messe. Vor 160 Jahren war [...] die Anzahl aller neuer Bücher etwa gegen 1000. Also wäre seit anderthalb Jahrhunderten des Schreibens dritthalbmal so viel geworden? [...] Der Meßkatalogus vor 160 Jahren war 5 Bogen stark, gegenwärtig ist er über 17 Bogen.[...] Gegen das vorige Jahrhundert sind heutigestages Naturgeschichte, Ökonomie, Physik, Erziehungswesen, die Menge Journale und alle Bücher zur angenehmen Lektüre, imgleichen die Menge

¹⁵ Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 123.

¹⁶ Pamela E. Selwyn, *Everyday life in the German book trade. Friedrich Nicolai as bookseller and publisher in the Age of Enlightenment 1750-1810*, The Penn State Series in the history of the book (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 313. Leipzig was by far the most important publishing centre in Germany; one sixth of all new titles published 1780-1782 were produced in Leipzig. See Hazel Rosenstrauch, ‘Leipzig als ‘Zentralplatz’ des deutschen Buchhandels’, *Wolfenbütteler Studien zur deutschen Aufklärung. Zentren der Aufklärung III. Leipzig: Aufklärung und Bürgerlichkeit* 17 (1990), p. 109.

Bücher von mechanischen Künsten, der Kriegswissenschaft, mit der Literaturgeschichte, fast ebenso viele Fächer der Gelehrsamkeit, welche man vor 160 Jahren kaum dem Namen nach kannte. [...] Im Jahre 1619 waren [...] unter jeden 7 Büchern [...] immer 5 lateinisch und nur 2 deutsch geschrieben. [...] heutigestages werden unter 25 Büchern noch keine 2 lateinisch geschrieben. [...] Das Theologisieren in Deutschland wird langsam weniger. [...] Nächst den theologischen Büchern sind heutigestages diejenigen, welche zur angenehmen Lektüre gehören, als Romanen, Komödien, Bücher zur Frauenzimmerlektüre, der größte Teil [...].¹⁷

The author of the article was quick to point out that this alteration in the book market clearly indicated a profound change in the nature of the reading public, and a structural change in literary consumers:

Noch vor 160 [Jahren] waren diejenigen, welche Bücher kauften, bloß Gelehrte: heutigestages ist nicht leicht ein Frauenzimmer von einiger Erziehung, das nicht läse; der lesende Teil befindet sich jetzt unter allen Ständen, in Städten und auf dem Lande, sogar die Musketiere in großen Städten lassen sich aus der Leihbibliothek Bücher auf die Hauptwache holen.

All these developments, especially the altered constituency of the reading public, favoured women's entry into the market. The decline in theology, and in the use of Latin, combined with the rise of the novel meant that women had a legitimate inspiration for their writing: their own domestic, social and personal experiences.¹⁸ A liberalized market meant that prejudice and conservative ideology became secondary.¹⁹ Women's educational status mattered less than their ability to please the reading public. And that

¹⁷ 'Einige Bemerkungen, welche sich über den deutschen Meßkatalogus machen lassen', in *Deutsches Museum*, edited by Christian Heinrich Boie (Leipzig, 1780). Reprinted in Ernst Fischer, *Der Buchmarkt der Goethezeit. Eine Dokumentation*, Texte zum literarischen Leben um 1800 vol. 15 (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1986), pp. 81-92.

¹⁸ See Eva Kammler, *Zwischen Professionalisierung und Dilettantismus. Romane und ihre Autorinnen um 1800* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992), p. 9. For observations on the same phenomenon in England, see Cheryl Turner, *Living by the pen: women writers in the eighteenth century* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 14-15.

¹⁹ Anne Fleig has found that in the theatre, the growing demand for new plays in the 1760s and 1770s encouraged women writers in exactly the same way as their male colleagues to produce greater numbers of new dramas. Fleig, *Handlungs-Spiel-Räume*, p. 8, 24-30.

public increasingly included members of their own sex, which legitimized their writing further.

Economic changes

However, besides these cultural developments, there were economic and structural changes. From the 1760s onwards, profound alterations in the way in which books were bought, sold and marketed took place. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, the book trade had operated on the basis of exchange (*Tauschhandel*). Everyone involved with the book trade was paid in books, not cash. This was the logical response to the multiplicity of individual German states' currencies and constantly changing exchange rates.²⁰ The advantages were obvious:

Erwerb und Herstellung eines Werks oder Werkchens mit möglichst geringen Kosten oder auf Kredit; Eintausch fremden Verlages, womöglich bessern, als der eigene war; Zahlung aus dem Absatzgewinn, an den Changekollegen überhaupt nie eine Geldzahlung, der Autor mit Freixemplaren, der Drucker womöglich ebenfalls mit Büchern befriedigt.²¹

However, disadvantages became clearer as the century wore on. Differences in taste and production between North and South became more discernible. The North, particularly Saxony, was the main source of Enlightenment thought and writing: its products were popular and fashionable. But these had to be exchanged with more traditional, often religious books produced in the South, sale of which could hardly be guaranteed. The vaults of Northern booksellers were filled with unwanted products from the South, making an exchange system unviable.²² And there were other discrepancies. Censorship

²⁰ Michael Bülow, *Buchmarkt und Autoreneigentum. Die Entstehung des Urhebergedankens im 18. Jahrhundert*, Buchwissenschaftliche Beiträge aus dem deutschen Bucharchiv München vol. 30 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990), p. 8.

²¹ Johann Goldfriedrich, quoted in Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 124.

²² Ernst Fischer, 'Der Buchmarkt der Goethezeit. Zu den ökonomischen Grundlagen einer literarischen Epoche', in *Der Buchmarkt der Goethezeit*, ed. Fischer, p. 412.

in Saxony, where most books were published, was more liberal than in many other German states, even after the French Revolution.²³ Moreover, the Saxon government provided subsidies for publishers, strengthening their hegemony. All deliveries of books to and from Leipzig were toll-free. Moreover, the multitude of printers in the Leipzig area increased competition and lowered prices.²⁴

Although reforms were necessary, they changed the dynamic of the literary market forever, forcing the book trade to enter 'ein dem buchhändlerischen Wesen völlig fremdes kaufmännisches Zeitalter'.²⁵ Following the intervention of the Leipzig bookseller Philipp Erasmus Reich (who was in charge of the Weidmannsche Buchhandlung), trade was from now on conducted on a cash-only basis (*Nettohandel*). The consequences were profound:

Damit war der endgültige Übergang von der Tausch- zur Geldwirtschaft im deutschen Buchhandel eingeleitet, begann die Anonymität des buchhändlerischen Warenverkehrs, setzte die Trennung von Verlag und Sortiment ein und entstand erst eigentlich das kapitalistische Konkurrenzdenken in diesem Berufsstand.²⁶

Leipzig booksellers were now able to calculate their profit margins accurately. This in turn enabled them to pay authors more generously, making a freelance existence as a writer a more realistic and attractive prospect. And books too were made more attractive, with decorative features such as engravings.²⁷ Leipzig booksellers used their virtual monopoly following these reforms to increase the price of books dramatically. This

²³ See Fischer, 'Buchmarkt der Goethezeit', p. 427 and Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, pp. 151-154.

²⁴ See Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, pp. 124-125.

²⁵ Johann Goldfriedrich, quoted in Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 123.

²⁶ Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 126.

²⁷ For example, Reich's edition of Johann Caspar Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* contained no fewer than 343 engravings.

allowed them to recoup their investment after selling only a relatively small number of copies, turning all further sales into profit. So publishers were able not only to produce more books, but also to risk production of a wider variety of books.

The impact of these changes, and the stimulus for the production of literature, cannot be overestimated.

Für einen Nettohändler, der seine Novitäten rasch und bar verkaufen wollte, war ein attraktives Programm viel wichtiger als für einen Tauschhändler. Reich tat deshalb alles, um [...] seinen Verlag beim Lesepublikum begehrt zu machen. Seine Firma importierte und übersetzte mehr englische und italienische Bücher als alle anderen. Um sich die beliebten Übersetzungen aus dem Englischen zu sichern, beschäftigte er Informanten in London. Vor allem aber bemühte er sich, bedeutende und zugkräftige Autoren [...] mittels hoher Festhonorare [an seinen Verlag zu binden] – der bekannteste von ihnen war Christoph Martin Wieland.²⁸

Publishers' desire to regain their cash-investment quickly undoubtedly encouraged the production of literary texts aimed at immediate entertainment and short-term pleasure. The proliferation of such publications from the 1770s onwards created publishing opportunities for both men and women.

In order to feed this increased demand for books from a more inclusive reading public, more people took up the pen. A new type of author emerged, independent and freelance.²⁹ Previously, writers had belonged to the socio-economic group known as 'ständische Dichter', representing a transitional phase between court poets of the Baroque period and independent writers of the modern era. Germany's lack of a central cultural capital prevented the professionalization of authors on the scale seen in England and

²⁸ Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 130.

²⁹ On the social, cultural and economic causes of this development, see Hans Jürgen Haferkorn, 'Der freie Schriftsteller. Eine literatursoziologische Studie über seine Entstehung und Lage in Deutschland', *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 5 (1964).

France.³⁰ Without patronage, but also without sufficient income from literature, German writers had to support themselves with stipendiary posts as academics or civil servants. However, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, writing was increasingly feasible as a source of income. Estimates suggest that in 1766, there were approximately 3,000 writers in Germany. By 1806, this had risen to around 11,000, of whom about a quarter were full-time.³¹ Although this generation of writers is often described as ‘free’, they were free only from patronage, and not from market forces and the influence of publishers. Nevertheless, this trend towards independence was especially important for women writers, and not just because it made writing properly remunerative.³² Lacking contacts in the literary world, women were unable to ‘network’ in the same way as men. An anonymous book market with anonymous producers writing for an anonymous public suited women much better.

But the increase in payments to authors also attracted contemporary criticism.

Would it not inflate production and reduce quality even further?

Es würde aber diese Leselust allein das Vielschreiben nicht bewirken können, wenn nicht die in den jetzigen Zeiten über alles Verhältnis erhöhten Preise der neuen Bücher die Verleger in Stand setzten, für eine jede Brochüre, die man in vorigen Zeiten auch ohne Honorarium nicht in Verlag genommen hätte, ein ansehnliches Honorarium zu bezahlen. [...] Dieses aber ist für die große Zunft gewinnsüchtiger oder bedürftiger Gelehrten ein unwiderstehlicher Reiz, die

³⁰ See Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, pp. 155-156.

³¹ Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 160.

³² On the payment for literary work, see Engelsing, ‘Wieviel verdienen die Klassiker?’; Harald Steiner, *Das Autorenhonorar - seine Entwicklungsgeschichte vom 17. bis 19. Jahrhundert*. Buchwissenschaftliche Beiträge aus dem Deutschen Bucharchiv München vol. 59 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998) and Walter Krieg, *Materialien zu einer Entwicklungsgeschichte der Bücher-Preise und des Autoren-Honorars vom 15. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert; nebst einem Anhang: Kleine Notizen zur Auflagengeschichte der Bücher im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Wien: Stubenrauch, 1953).

edleren Beweggründe der Autorschaft zu vergessen und nach jedem unbedeutenden wohl gar erdichteten Anlaß zum Schreiben zu haschen.³³

But for middle-class and aristocratic women, the fact that writing paid made it one of the few ways in which they could contribute to their family's income. In some cases, it meant they could sustain the family single-handedly.³⁴

Contemporary reactions to this situation, the so-called 'Vielschreiberei', were largely negative. Christoph Martin Wieland expressed the fears of many when he wrote:

Jedermann schreibt Bücher, Bärtige und Unbärtige, Gelehrte und Ungelehrte, Meister, Gesellen und Lehrjungen; wer sonst nichts in der Welt kann und seinem Leibe keinen Rat weiß, schreibt ein Buch.³⁵

Most commonly, commentators bemoaned the writers' lack of formal qualifications, and consequently, the lack of quality of the finished product.

Unter Zwanzigen, welche die Unverschämtheit haben, mit Prose oder Versen vor dem Publikum zu erscheinen, sind kaum Drei, die nicht vonnöten hätten, noch in eine Trivialschule zu gehen; unter Zwanzigen kaum Fünfe, die eine Seite Deutsch ohne Sprachschnitzer schreiben können. Niemand macht sich eine Schande daraus, unrecht zu deklinieren und zu konjugieren; von richtiger Konstruktion, von Proprietät und Bestimmtheit des Ausdrucks, von allem, was zum Stil gehört, wenn er wenigstens nur nicht ungekämmt und ungewaschen sein soll, ist [...] gar nicht die Rede mehr.

³³ 'Ueber die Ursachen der jetzigen Vielschreiberei in Deutschland', in *Journal von und für Deutschland* (1790). Quoted in Fischer, *Buchmarkt der Goethezeit*, p. 101. See also 'Über Deutschlands Litteratur und Buchhandel. Allen Gelehrten und Buchhändlern ans Herz gelegt' (1800) in the same volume, pp. 241-243.

³⁴ For example, J.I.E. von Wallenrodt was forced to write to support her family, after her husband's death had left her with an inadequate pension. Anita Runge points out that both the content and the structure of her autobiography reflect her need to earn money. Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt*, p. 698. Marianne Ehrmann pursued her literary career together with her husband, and their joint writing income was the family's sole financial support. Helga Stipa Madland, *Marianne Ehrmann. Reason and emotion in her life and works*, Women in German Literature vol. 1 (New York; Washington; Boston: Peter Lang, 1998).

³⁵ Christoph Martin Wieland, *Allgemeine Vorerinnerung des Herausgebers des Merkurs zu den Anzeigen neuer Bücher* (1784). Quoted in Evi Rietzschel, ed., *Gelehrsamkeit ein Handwerk? Bücherschreiben ein Gewerbe? Dokumente zum Verhältnis von Schriftsteller und Verleger im 18. Jahrhundert in Deutschland* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1982), pp. 101-102.

The book trade itself was also concerned. At the Easter book fair in 1788, the Southern booksellers published the so-called *Nürnberger Schlußnahme*, in which they accused the Northern publishers of excessively inflating book production. By their own greed, they had turned the public into an unpredictable colossus, always ready to devour something new. They were aware of, and concerned about, the correlation between book market practices and the public's taste. Their proclamation reveals their anxiety about excess and lack of quality control in the mechanisms of book production.

Sie sind weder gelehrte noch spekulative Kaufleute. Ohne Rücksicht auf wahren, inneren Werth für das Publikum kaufen sie Romane, Gedichtgens, Journale, Reisebeschreibungen etc. von Gelehrten, Halbgelehrten und Studenten, drucken 500 Exemplare, taxiren wegen der kleinen Auflage einen hohen Preiß, dann lassen sie durch alle Journale und Zeitungen posaunen, und machen mit Geschrey auch das schlechte Zeug durch ganz Deutschland bekannt. – Das Publikum, das immer neues haben will, das alte seyn läßt, bestürmet die Buchhändler, will die neuen Wunder sehen. [...] ³⁶

So publishers themselves were not sanguine about these changes ('Mit Schrecken sehen wir die fürchterlichen Ballen bedruckten Papiers ankommen [...] Aber was sollen wir thun? [Es] ist nun einmal kurrente Ware, wenn auch jedem vernünftigen Menschen davor ekelt.')

³⁷ This did not stop writers, during the 1780s and 1790s, blaming publishers for these developments, claiming that they approached literary production as a form of manufacturing: 'Sie betreiben ihre Geschäfte so mechanisch, so handwerksmäßig, als jeder andere Tuch-oder Strumpffabrikant.'³⁸ Immanuel Kant's text *Ueber die Buchmacherei*, addressed to the Berlin publisher Friedrich Nicolai, exemplifies these complaints:

³⁶ Quoted in Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 137.

³⁷ Publisher's letter written during the Easter book fair in Leipzig, 1784. Quoted in Paul Raabe, 'Aufklärung durch Bücher. Der Anteil des Buchhandels an der kulturellen Entfaltung in Deutschland 1764-1790', in *Aufklärung in Deutschland*, ed. Paul Raabe (Bonn: Hohwacht, 1979), p. 95.

³⁸ 'Schreiben an einen Freund über die Ursachen der jetzigen Vielschreiberey in Deutschland', in *Journal von und für Deutschland* (1789). Reprinted in Fischer, 'Buchmarkt der Goethezeit', p. 97.

Ein erfahrener Kenner der Buchmacherei wird als Verleger nicht erst darauf warten, daß ihm von schreibseligen, allezeit fertigen Schriftstellern ihre eigene Ware zum Verkauf angeboten wird; er sinnt sich als Direktor einer Fabrik die Materie sowohl als die Façon aus, welche mutmaßlich – es sei durch ihre Neugier oder auch Skurrilität des Witzes, damit das lesende Publikum etwas zum Angaffen und zum Belachen bekomme – die größte Nachfrage oder allenfalls auch nur die schnellste Abnahme haben wird.³⁹

Johann Georg Heinzmann made the same criticism of publishers:

Seitdem die Buchhändler Bücher bestellen, anordnen, Pläne vorschreiben, und das edelste Geschäft, Menschen zu lehren, zu bessern und zu erfreuen, zu dem allerniedrigsten Geschäfte herabgewürdigt haben, seitdem ist die deutsche Literatur zur Profession und Puscherei herabgesunken; und nichts ist bald mehr verächtlicher als das Autorenmetier.⁴⁰

At this crossroads in the history of the book trade, two opposing views of commerce collided: that of the capitalist entrepreneur, thriving on competition, and that of the protectionist, idealizing solidarity between members of the same professional 'guild'. But while controversy raged within the publishing community, conditions for those hitherto excluded from it improved.

As Wittmann points out, the late eighteenth century witnessed a tremendous surge in the founding of publishing firms, all looking to make a quick profit.⁴¹ But if they wanted to survive in this cut-throat market, they had to be able to attend the book fairs in Leipzig with new titles, known as *Novitäten*, as this article from 1789 pointed out:

Ein Buchhändler, der ohne oder mit wenig Novitäten die Leipziger Messe besucht, spielt dort eine traurige Rolle. Hat er nicht guten, vortrefflichen alten Verlag [...] so kann er beynahe gar keine Geschäfte machen. Denn kommt er z.B. zu einem Buchhändler in sein Gewölbe, und dieser fragt nach dem Titel seiner Novitäten, jener aber antwortet: er habe keine, so mag er's haben, wenn man ihn mit den Augen von Kopf bis auf die Füße mißt [...] und ihn mit dem

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Ueber die Buchmacherei* (1798), quoted in Rietzschel, ed., *Gelehrsamkeit*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Helmut Hiller, *Zur Sozialgeschichte von Buch und Buchhandel*, Bonner Beiträge zur Bibliotheks- und Bücherkunde vol. 13 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1966), pp. 17-18.

⁴¹ See Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, pp. 142-143.

höhnischen Complimente: Wenn sie keine Bücher haben, so kann ich auch keine Geschäfte mit ihnen machen, entläßt. Novitäten muß er also haben [...] sie kommen nun her, woher sie wollen, sie seyen gut oder schlecht.⁴²

Pressure to produce new books on an annual basis was therefore intense for publishers, frequently leading them to encourage 'jemanden zum Schreiben [...], der in seinem Leben nicht daran gedacht hätte'.⁴³ Though this pressure may have resulted in excessive book production and a drop in quality, not everyone deplored it. For some writers, including women, it constituted an unprecedented opportunity.⁴⁴ In 1797, Johanna Isabella Eleonore von Wallenrodt defended, not entirely without self-interest, the right of authors to write for money: it was only just that authors enjoy the fruits of their labour ('große Schriftsteller schreiben nicht umsonst').⁴⁵ She even went further, defending literature which, though less accomplished, might appeal to a larger numbers of readers. Such a book is

in hundert, wohl in mehrern hundert Händen; indessen ein Werk vom größten Werth kaum Käufer hat. Das ist immer gut für Euch, ihr Bücherfabrikanten, vom zweiten, dritten Rang, und wenn ihr nur nichts schreibt, was euer Publikum zu Unsinn oder Unthaten verleitet, so wünsch' ich, daß es nie anders werden möge.

That bad literature sold well, whereas good books did not, was accepted by other contemporaries, including the bookseller Friedrich Nicolai himself. In a letter to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing he writes:

⁴² 'Schreiben an einen Freund', pp. 95-96.

⁴³ 'Schreiben an einen Freund', p. 97.

⁴⁴ Cheryl Turner has found this to be the case in the context of the English book market. Here too, an expanding secular culture which had percolated through society was both a stimulus for and a reflection of changes in the book market. These changes made relations between booksellers and authors more commercial, and aimed at satisfying popular demand for literature as a leisure activity. The emergence of easily accessible forms of financial support, i.e. payment by publishers, was a crucial prerequisite for women to access the market. A growing reading public delimited only by its literacy and its propensity to consume, also supported the development of genres (e.g. the novel) which did not require a (classically) educated writer. The impersonal forces of the market as an alternative route into literary life (as opposed to the more intimate relationship with a patron) enabled women to offer their wares to the public just like everyone else. '[...] a niche had appeared within the literature market for these particular products of the female pen which was easily identifiable and potentially lucrative': between 1696 and 1796, 446 works of fiction by women writers were published in England. Turner, *Living by the pen*. Quotation p. 95.

⁴⁵ Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt*, p. 606.

Freilich habe ich es Ihnen, wie Sie wissen, schon oft eingeprägt, daß die Buchhändler von den gelehrten und vernünftigen Büchern gar nicht reich werden [...] sondern von dummem Zeuge [...]. Inzwischen [habe] ich [...] das besondere Glück [...], daß in meinem Verlage viele schlechte Bücher, die gut abgehen, befindlich sind [...]⁴⁶

But this did not undermine the central point of Wallenrodt's argument: since the readership was heterogeneous, why should the books be any different?

Jedermann will nach seiner Art unterhalten sein, alle können nicht Kanten lesen, so daß er verstünde, was er läse. Wielands, Göthens und andrer großen Männer Werke sind eben auch nicht eines jeden Waare, denn alle Welt hat doch nicht einerlei Geschmack und Fassungskraft. Die, bei denen beides nicht aufs meisterhafte gebildet ist, wollen auch was von ihrem Schlage haben.

She concludes by defending the right of authors like herself to carry on producing their (much reviled) type of literature.

Wenn es also auf mich ankäme, so hätten die Subalternen unter den Schriftstellern volle Erlaubnis, in ihren Arbeiten fortzufahren, wie sehr auch die hohen Chefs darüber spötteln mögen.⁴⁷

For Wallenrodt, the literary market had created a demand for ephemeral literature, and women were just as entitled to fulfil the demand as anyone else.⁴⁸

The case of Hoffmann and Campe

But how important were women writers to publishers? What place did women's publications have in the portfolio of an average publishing house around 1800? Bibliographies listing publishers' outputs might tell us. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of publishers from this period, no comprehensive bibliographies exist. Even now they would be difficult and time-consuming to compile. If contemporaries did compile them, they would then be stored in a publisher's archive, at the mercy of fire, war

⁴⁶ Friedrich Nicolai, letter to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (14 June 1768). Reprinted in Rietzschel, ed., *Gelehrsamkeit*, p. 94.

⁴⁷ Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt*, pp. 608-609.

⁴⁸ For a bibliography of Wallenrodt's works, see the list compiled by Anita Runge in Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt*, pp. 721-723.

and commercial failure. The history of Hamburg publisher Hoffmann and Campe illustrates this well. When the firm's bicentenary in 1981 led to the publication of a comprehensive *Verlagsbibliographie*, it had to be compiled without an extant publisher's archive. The great fire in Hamburg in 1842 had destroyed much of it. The remnants were divided up and sold in 1917. During the economic upheaval of the 1920s the company suffered greatly, and by the time of the Second World War, it was impossible to keep an archive, let alone to reassemble the old one.⁴⁹ Such cases have made it difficult to view women's writing in its contemporary context of publication, and to compare publishers' publication practices. However, with Hoffmann and Campe's reconstructed bibliography (see figure 7), it is possible to establish what kind of texts, and how many, women published, and to compare this with the market as a whole.

⁴⁹ See introduction in Bernd Steinbrink, ed., *Hoffmann und Campe Bibliographie 1781-1981* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983). He describes the errors commonly made in the compilation of such bibliographies, and explains the painstaking nature of the work. This goes some way to explaining why so few publishers' bibliographies exist.

Fig. 7: Women Writers Published by Hoffmann and Campe, 1781-1820⁵⁰

1781-1790

1. Beaumont, Marie de, *Briefe des Markis von Roselle*. Translated from French by Marianne Deurer (1784)
2. Bellamy, Georgia Anne, *Merkwürdiges Leben der Georgia Anne Bellamy, vormahliger (!) Schauspielerin auf der Bühne zu Coventgarden. Von ihr selbst verfasst*. Translated from English (1787)
3. [Peacock, Lucy], *Die Abentheuer der sechs Prinzessinne von Babylon, und ihre Belohnung im Tempel der Tugend. Ein Neujahrsgeschenk für junge Frauenzimmer adlichen und bürgerlichen Standes*. Translated from English by Albrecht Wittenberg (1787)
4. Brandes, Minna, *Musikalischer Nachlaß*. Edited by Friedrich Hönicke (1789)

1791-1800

5. [Baudissin, Caroline Adelheid Cornelia Gräfin von (née Gräfin v. Schimmelmänn)], *Die Dorfgesellschaft, ein unterrichtendes Lesebuch fürs Volk* (1791)
6. Smith, Charlotte, *Desmond, Eine Geschichte in Briefen*. Translated from English by Dorothea Margarethe Liebeskind (1793)
7. [Goldstein, Augusta Freiin von (née v. Wallenrodt; gesch. von Fölsch)], *Weihnachtskörbchen für die Jugend. Von einer Dame* (1794)
8. Genlis, Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, Comtesse de, later Marquise de Sillery, *Précis de la conduite de Madame de Genlis, depuis la Révolution, suivi d'une letter à Mr. De charters & de Réflexions sur la critique* (1796)
9. Wollstonecraft-Godwin, Mary, *Briefe geschrieben während eines kurzen Aufenthalts in Schweden, Norwegen und Dänemark von Maria Wolstonecraft*. Translated from English (1796)
10. Smith, Charlotte, *Schiffbruchszenen vom Theater des jetzigen Seekrieges, geschildert von Charlotte Smith*. Translated from English by Christoph Wilhelm Lohmann (1797)
11. [anonymous], *Die sich selbst lehrende Köchin, oder praktische Anweisungen, wie ein junges Frauenzimmer ohne mündlichen Unterricht die Küche und Haushaltung selbst besorgen kann. Nebst einer Sammlung von Krankenspeisen und einer Anweisung zum Transchieren. Verfasst und herausgegeben von einigen Hausmüttern* (1800) 2nd, rev. ed. 3rd edition 1803

1801-1810

12. [Berlepsch, Emilie von (née von Oppel)], *Caledonia. Von der Verfasserin der Sommerstunden. Eine malerische Schilderung der Hochgebirge in Schottland* (1802)
13. Domeier, Esther (née Gad, married Bernard), *Briefe während meines Aufenthalts in England und Portugal an einen Freund* (1802), 2nd ed. 1808
14. [Westphalen, Engel Christine (geb. v. Axen)], *Charlotte Corday. Tragödie in fünf Acten mit Chören* (1804), 2nd ed. 1805
15. [Ahlefeld, Charlotte Sophie Louise Wilhelmine von], *Therese. Roman in Briefen* (1806)
16. [Westphalen, Engel Christine (née v. Axen)], *Petrarca; ein dramatisches Gedicht in fünf Akten von der Verfasserin der Charlotte Corday* (1806)
17. [Westphalen, Engel Christine (née v. Axen)], *Gedichte* (1809)
18. [Unger, Friederike Helene], *Horace von St. Ange und Adelaide Hennig, oder Der junge Franzose und das deutsche Mädchen. Wenn man will, ein Roman. Herausgegeben von der Verfasserin Julchen Grünthals* (1810)

1811-1820

19. [anonymous], *Weihnachtsgeschenk für Liebhaberinnen der Stickkunst* (1811)
20. [Westphalen, Engel Christine (née v. Axen)], *Gesänge der Zeit von Christine Westphalen* (1815)
21. [Wesselhoeft, Elisabeth], *Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem öffentlichen und Privat-Leben der verewigten Charlotte Auguste, Prinzessin von Wales und Sachsen-Coburg. Zum Theil nack Aneckdoten und Charackterzügen dargestellt. Nach dem Englischen, mit einem Bildniß* (1817)

⁵⁰ Compiled from Steinbrink, ed., *Hoffmann und Campe*.

This list gives substance to our general impression that women's writing was, on the whole, limited to certain genres. Here, we find several didactic publications: an educational reading book for country people (by a countess), a cookbook for young women, and a book of embroidery. Many were marketed as suitable New Year or Christmas gifts for young women. But there are also belletristic books: several novels and travelogues, two dramas and a collection of poetry. In total, Hoffmann and Campe published twenty-one books written by women between 1781 and 1820.

The list also shows the success that publishers had with women writers. Three features in particular should be noted. First, the number of publications by women are revealingly at odds with the market as a whole: During the 1780s and 1790s, women's publications gradually increased (four and six titles respectively), in line with the market's expansion at large. But the first decade of the nineteenth century was the busiest, with eight titles by women being published. This is not in line with the book market as a whole, which slumped during this decade. From this it is reasonable to suggest that Hoffman and Campe had found publishing women to be particularly remunerative. Secondly, the list includes translations. There are six German translations of works by foreign women. At least two, and maybe four, of the translators were female. We know of Marianne Deurer and Dorothea Margarethe Liebeskind; two others remained anonymous. All the translations were published before 1800, and after that, Hoffmann and Campe's women writers were exclusively German. This suggests that German demand for women's writings before 1800 exceeded supply, leaving the publisher to resort to works from abroad. At least two of the English authors chosen for translation

were commercially successful: in Cheryl Turner's bibliography, six fiction titles by Lucy Peacock are listed, and Charlotte Smith published as many as ten novels at annual, sometimes less than annual intervals. Hoffmann and Campe clearly considered that their popularity in England would cross over to Germany. Thirdly, several women were published more than once; Engel Christine Westphalen for example published four books with Hoffmann. These multiple publications indicate a relationship between author and publisher which begins profitably and continues amicably. Three books (numbers 11, 13 and 14 on the list) were reprinted in later editions. Number 14, Engel Christine Westphalen's play about Charlotte Corday, was reprinted only one year after the first edition. It must have been a commercial success, because she used it to market her next publication in 1806. Unfortunately, with this bare bibliography, we cannot know how these women established and maintained their contacts with Hoffmann and Campe. But other archives can help us here: archives in which the correspondence of women with their publishers has survived.

Negotiating with publishers

Was will der Buchhändler der Dichterin, der reiche Mann der armen Frau, für den Bogen dieser [Arbeit] geben? Bald erbitt ich mir Antwort auf diese Frage.⁵¹

That changes in the market opened up the book trade for women is now clear. The capitalist impetus of the newly reformed publishing industry was able to override popular prejudice and ideological objections against women authors to a surprising extent. Women writers' entry into the literary market was parallel to the same

⁵¹ Philippine Engelhard, letter to Friedrich Nicolai, 19 December 1803, Nicolai Nachlaß, SBB - PK, Berlin.

phenomenon among male writers. But what is less clear is how women took advantage of that opening. How could women negotiate with publishers when they were unable to be their own legal representative, and when business dealings were outside their assigned sphere?⁵² Like their male counterparts, they had to *write* to publishers. But that possibility seems to be ruled out by eighteenth-century ideologues and present-day scholars alike.

Women's business letters?

Women's affinity with correspondence has often been noted in recent scholarship.⁵³ During the eighteenth-century, letters were often the only means of communication for women, as opportunities to travel were limited.⁵⁴ The formation of a bourgeois public itself was characterized by communication and exchange, both literary and social. Therefore, for women fortunate enough to participate in the literary culture of their time, letters have been thought to function as

Vehikel vor allem für intellektuellen Austausch und zur Pflege geistiger Bildung – unter weitgehender Zurückstellung persönlicher intimer Gefühlsregungen –, oder vorrangig als Mittel leidenschaftlichen Ausdrucks eben dieser Regungen oder zumindest empfindsam-freundschaftlicher Emotionen.⁵⁵

Because the lives of bourgeois and upper-class women were largely confined to the domestic sphere, Becker-Cantarino assumes that women's letters are 'unpolitisch und persönlich, Briefe, in denen der familiäre Bereich und Lebenskreis der Frauen sich

⁵² On women's legal status, see Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit. Frau und Literatur (1500-1800)* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987), p. 59. Gray, 'Codification of Law'.

⁵³ An recent anthology of women writers included five women for their letter-writing, including Louise Adelgunde Gottsched, Caroline Schlegel-Schelling and Rahel Varnhagen. See Blackwell and Zantop, eds., *Bitter Healing*.

⁵⁴ Becker-Cantarino, 'Leben als Text (1999)', p. 131.

⁵⁵ Reinhard M.G. Nickisch, 'Briefkultur: Entwicklung und sozialgeschichtliche Bedeutung des Frauenbriefs im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen. Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Munich: Beck, 1988), p. 402.

gespiegelt hat [...] Gelehrsamkeit, Geschäft oder Politik spielten nur ausnahmsweise eine Rolle'.⁵⁶

Women's participation in correspondence received validation from Christian Fürchtegott Gellert's *Briefe, nebst einer praktischen Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmacke in Briefen* (1751). This contained model letters by women, praising their natural, effortless style.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, there were clear prohibitions. Women's letters should deal with appropriately sentimental subjects, such as friendship. Good letters would be intuitive, subjective and domestic, in line with women's putative 'Geschlechtscharakter' – and idea upheld until after 1800: 'Einem männlichen Autor verzeiht man noch weit eher eine gewisse Pedanterey; aber bey einem weiblichen Autor bringt der geringste Anstrich davon eine Art von Widerwillen hervor.'⁵⁸ If addressed to men, women's letters had to be polite, deferential and flattering. Letter-writing manuals advised women to ask male correspondents questions, allowing them to display his knowledge.⁵⁹ From these prohibitions, we can see that it would not have been thought appropriate for women to write letters of business.

Academics continue to link women's letters with the private domestic sphere, despite the new questions raised by feminist scholarship. Letters have been brought out

⁵⁶ Becker-Cantarino, 'Leben als Text (1999)', p. 133.

⁵⁷ See for example Lorely French, *German women as letter writers, 1750-1850* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), p. 48. Jirku, *Ich-Erzählerin und Erzählstruktur*, p. 94.

⁵⁸ Ernst Brandes, 'Betrachtungen über das weibliche Geschlecht und dessen Ausbildung in dem geselligen Leben', in Angelika Ebrecht, Regina Nörtemann, and Herta Schwarz, *Brieftheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts: Texte, Kommentare, Essays* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990), p. 190.

⁵⁹ See Melanie Archangeli, 'Negotiating the Public Sphere through Private Correspondence: A Woman's Letters of Liberty in Eighteenth-Century Germany', *German Life and Letters* 53, no. 4 (2000), p. 441, p. 437.

of relative obscurity and reclaimed as literary products by scholars such as Lorely French. But the letters she selects, which deal with ‘being single, having childless marriages, forming strong female friendships, working on communal literary projects, divorcing, remarrying [and] having extramarital love relationships [...]’, inadvertently reinforce the idea that women’s correspondence is invariably personal.⁶⁰

Yet, as French points out, our knowledge of women’s letter-writing activity is limited. Letters from women were very often not preserved, frequently being destroyed by the correspondents during their lifetime. Goethe burned letters from several women (including his mother and sister) before his journeys to Switzerland in 1779 and Italy in 1797. Letters that have survived have often been edited and reprinted in line with the prevailing gender-discourse (for example, by restricting their content to sentimental subjects). Collections of letters were unlikely to include the work of women writers, unless they were famous or part of a famous circle.⁶¹ Given these facts about women’s letters generally, it may be understood how women’s business letters, considered improper by contemporaries, have escaped the notice of scholars.

The theorists who tried to prohibit women from writing business letters could not have been successful. How else did women writers contact their publishers? How did they ever leave the confines of their drawing rooms and kitchens, especially if they had no brother or husband to act on their behalf? Letters that show women moving into commerce, the archetypal realm of the bourgeois patriarch, do survive, it is just that they

⁶⁰ Quoted from French, *German women as letter writers*, p. 25.

⁶¹ French gives numerous examples of selective editing of women’s letters, see especially pp. 29-35. The Goethe incident is mentioned on p. 33. See also Nickisch, ‘Briefkultur’, pp. 391-392.

are rarely studied; an oversight which here will be addressed.⁶² This study will shed light, not only on women writer's letters per se, but also on their strategies in the literary market.

If women wanted to sell their work, they had to make contact with publishers and become sensitive to the market they sought to exploit. That they were successful in doing so, and that the conditions were favourable to their entry, has now been recognized. But how did they go about establishing and maintaining their business relationships? Finding a publisher presented at least two problems: whom to approach, and how to go about it. Often the best way to proceed was to identify a company whose publishing profile suited what the author had to offer. More commercial publishers offered more money; more highbrow publishers offered more kudos. In any case, the choice of publisher was crucial: as mediator between author and public, between the literary manuscript and the finished article, he was the linchpin of literary careers. Gallas and Runge have established that the 110 authors in their bibliography used no fewer than 177 different publishers during their writing careers.⁶³ Most publishers only printed one title by a woman, few published more than four. However, three publishers were represented more frequently: Weygand (42 titles), Gräff (26) and Unger (19).⁶⁴ They specialized in *belles lettres*,

⁶² Only a few female authors have inspired research into their dealings with publishers, none of them in this period. Later examples include Elisabeth Blakert, Jochen Grywatsch, and Stefan Thürmer, 'Aschendorff, Velhagen oder Cotta? Von den ersten Ueberlegungen der Droste zur Wahl eines geeigneten Verlegers bis zum Erscheinen ihrer Gedichtausgabe von 1844', in *Droste-Jahrbuch 3 (1991-1996)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997). Gabriele Schneider, 'Aus der Werkstatt einer Berufsschriftstellerin. Unbekannte Briefe Fanny Lewalds an den Verleger Wilhelm Herz aus den Jahren 1876 und 1877', in *Forum Vormärz Forschung Jahrbuch 1996: Autorinnen des Vormärz*, ed. Detlev Kopp and Helga Brandes (1996).

⁶³ Gallas and Runge, *Romane und Erzählungen*, pp. 11-13.

⁶⁴ Weygand published the majority of Benedikte Naubert's works during the 1780s and 1790s. Her productivity accounts for the high number of titles from his publishing house. See Anita Runge, 'Leben' -

thereby attracting a relatively higher proportion of women authors. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of texts were published in North Germany: 162 were published in Leipzig, 61 in Berlin, 13 in Hamburg and, by contrast, only 21 in Vienna. In this too, women's literary production reflects the market's overall features.

Securing the sources

There is little evidence to show how women interacted with their publishers in this period. The archives of most publishing houses with a history dating back to the late eighteenth century were destroyed during the Second World War. For this survey, I made enquiries to nearly a dozen publishers, including Hoffmann and Campe (Hamburg), Herder Verlag (Freiburg), Gebrüder Bornträger (Stuttgart), and Aschendorff Verlag (Münster). All of them have lost their archives. However, over 4,000 letters of Georg Joachim Göschen's correspondence do survive (though not in a single archive), including his correspondence with some women authors.⁶⁵ Of these, not all have survived wars and fires unscathed. The letters in the Göschen collection in the DBSM in Leipzig are all damaged either by fire or by the water that extinguished the fire. This impairs their readability considerably. But Göschen's correspondence is especially revealing, not simply because it has survived. Göschen received letters from a wide range of women (twenty in total), concerned primarily with their writing and the business of publication. By contrast, a publisher like Johann Friedrich Cotta corresponded with only ten women, usually in a personal, not professional tone, about publication of their husbands' or

'Werk' - Profession: Zum Umgang mit biographischen Dokumenten bei Schriftstellerinnen', *Querelles. Jahrbuch für Frauenforschung* 6 (2001), p. 73.

⁶⁵ See Stephan Füssel, *Georg Joachim Göschen. Ein Verleger der Spätaufklärung und der deutschen Klassik. Band 3. Repertorium der Verlagskorrespondenz Göschen (1783-1828)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996).

fathers' work.⁶⁶ Of course, we only have the letters *to* Göschen. There are some letters still extant to three of his female authors, but none of them deal with publication.⁶⁷ But what Göschen wrote can be surmised from the remarkable letters that have survived.

Another source of information is the Nicolai Nachlaß in Berlin, although this too has been ravaged by war. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Nicolai papers were well preserved. Since 1862, parts of Nicolai's papers had been in the care of such Prussian state institutions as the Königliche Bibliothek. By 1913, they filled a total of 284 bound volumes. After World War Two, only ninety survived.⁶⁸ Despite this relative miracle, the remaining papers are a much under-used resource. The correspondence has not been catalogued, and is only accessible by means of a hand-written list of correspondents (without full names, dates or places). It reveals that Nicolai wrote to, in total, over 90 women. Most of these were not writers, but friends and acquaintances, or simply women who petitioned Nicolai for advice. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to examine all the letters here: only a representative sample will be considered.

These letters afford remarkable insights into the reality of women's literary life, showing how women interacted with publishers and exploited the opportunities the

⁶⁶ See Helmuth Mojem, ed., *Der Verleger Johann Friedrich Cotta (1764-1832). Repertorium seiner Briefe* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1997).

⁶⁷ A few of Göschen's letters to Elisa von der Recke (they were friends for many years), to Charlotte Schiller about her husband's work, and to Johanna Elisabeth Klopstock about her father's work have survived.

⁶⁸ See 'Vorwort' in Peter Jörg Becker, ed., *Friedrich Nicolai: Leben und Werk; Ausstellung zum 250. Geburtstag, 7. Dezember 1983- 4. Februar 1984, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983).

literary market presented.⁶⁹ They reveal how women's success in the literary market was at least partly due to simple business acumen and an 'unfeminine' ambition to publish. Moreover, they highlight a surprising discrepancy between eighteenth-century discourse and praxis: they show the gender-discourse of the period being decisively subverted. In these letters, by acting on their own behalf, women broke down the barrier between their prescribed domestic seclusion, and the public world of affairs.

Georg Joachim Göschen and Friedrich Nicolai

Göschen's importance as a publisher would have been obvious to aspiring women writers. As well as putting the works of Iffland, Thümmel, and Klopstock into print, he was also the publisher of Goethe's collected works, and a large number of prestigious journals, including Schiller's *Thalia*, Wieland's *Neuer Merkur*, the *Pandora*, and the *Journal von Deutschen Frauen für Deutsche Frauen*. He also possessed the common touch, publishing 36 popular journals, almanacs and calendars. These provided a stable income for his other publishing ventures and made him a household name.⁷⁰ During forty-four years in charge of his firm, he published 912 book titles (1,137 volumes), and employed 317 authors, the majority of whom were professional theologians, philologists, lawyers, doctors and practitioners of the natural sciences. His productions ranged from especially desirable collectors' items to *Taschenbücher*, he reformed typography and employed the best illustrators of the age, such as Chodowiecki, Ramberg and Penzel.⁷¹ He was particularly interesting to women novelists or poets because his publishing house

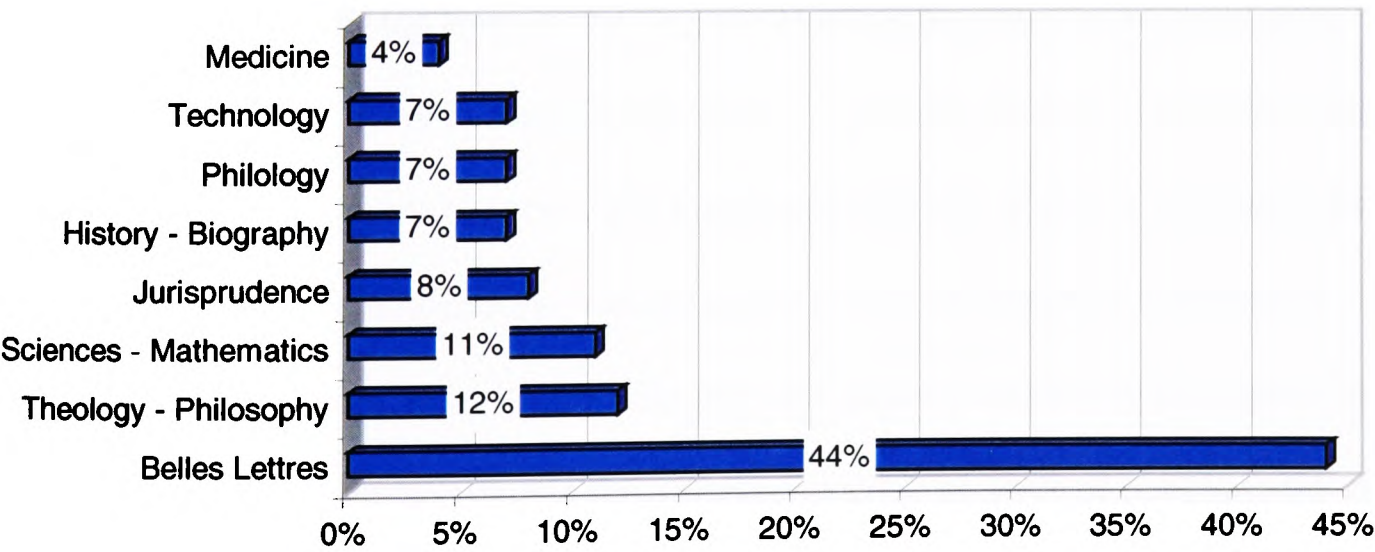
⁶⁹ Some of this material has been published in Helen Fronius, 'Der reiche Mann und die arme Frau: German Women Writers and the Eighteenth-Century Literary Market-Place', *German Life and Letters* 56, no. 1 (2003).

⁷⁰ For all statistics, see Füssel, *Verlagsbibliographie*, pp. XI-XIII.

⁷¹ See Stephan Füssel, *Georg Joachim Göschen. Ein Verleger der Spätaufklärung und der deutschen Klassik. Band 1. Studien zur Verlagsgeschichte und zur Verlegertypologie der Goethezeit* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), p. 6, p. 17.

produced a higher than average number of belletristic books. 44% of the titles in his production were belletristic, at a time when the book market average was 25% (see figure 8). Nonetheless, Füssel’s directory of authors only includes a dozen female authors. They are Karoline Luise Brachmann (1777-1822), Karoline Freifrau de la Motte Fouqué (1773-1831), the French author Johanna Gallien (died 1830), Betty Gleim (1781-1827), ‘Herminia’, an anonymous woman writer, Meta Klopstock (1728-1758), Emilie Friedrike Sophie Lohmann (1774-1830), Christiane Benedicte Naubert (1756-1819), Karoline von Rudolphi (1754-1811), Amalia Emma Sophia Schoppe (1791-1858), the English author Charlotte Smith (1754-1831) and Therese Emilie Henriette aus dem Winkel (1784-1867). There was also one woman who translated from French, Cora von Mosch. Some women included in this list were not authors of whole books, but contributed to journals.⁷²

Fig. 8: Göschen's Book Production



⁷² See Füssel, *Verlagsbibliographie*, pp. 209-219.

Friedrich Nicolai was also one of the best-known publishers of the eighteenth century. A prolific writer, self-taught critic, successful publisher and well-known bookseller, he, more than anyone else, was aware of developments in the literary market. A staunch supporter of the Enlightenment, he cultivated friendships with Moses Mendelssohn and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and considered books to be crucial for the German people:

Wir Deutschen sind Buchmenschen. Eine schreibende Nation. Alle Empfindungen gehen uns verloren oder werden nur mangelhaft ausgedrückt, die nicht können gelesen werden.⁷³

Under his guidance, the firm founded by his father became one of the three most important publishers in Berlin during the second half of the eighteenth century. It is largely due to his influence that Berlin became the second-largest centre of publishing in Germany by 1800.⁷⁴ The publishing enterprise that to this day is almost synonymous with Nicolai's publishing career is the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* (ADB), which he founded. It ran for forty years, and was edited and published for thirty years by Nicolai himself. Conceived along the lines of the English *Monthly Review*, it was the biggest journal enterprise in Germany to date. Its brief was to provide reviews of all new German publications, and although ultimately it was unsuccessful in this aim (it is estimated that about half of all German publications from this period were included), it nonetheless reviewed about 80,000 new titles in 256 volumes, and made them known throughout the German-speaking world.⁷⁵ To achieve this impressive goal, an army of collaborators and

⁷³ Friedrich Nicolai, quoted from Leopold Friedrich Günther Göckingk, *Friedrich Nicolais Leben und literarischer Nachlaß*, ed. Bernhard Fabian and Marie-Luise Spiekermann, Friedrich Nicolai. Gesammelte Werke. Ergänzungsbande vol. 1 (Hildesheim; Zurich; New York: Georg Olms, 1999), p. 128.

⁷⁴ Paul Raabe, 'Der Verleger Friedrich Nicolai. Ein preussischer Buchhändler der Aufklärung', in *Friedrich Nicolai 1733-1811. Essays zum 250. Geburtstag*, ed. Bernhard Fabian (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983), pp. 60-61.

⁷⁵ Becker, ed., *Friedrich Nicolai: Leben und Werk*, p. 36.

reviewers was needed, and Nicolai's registers name over 400 contributors.⁷⁶ They reviewed books from a wide range of disciplines, including theology, philosophy, law, *belles lettres*, medicine, history, geography and technology. The ADB allowed Nicolai to take on more risky publishing projects, as it provided him with a dependable income – during the late 1770s, 2,500 copies of the ADB were printed and sold, making his name known throughout Germany. However, this was by no means his only publishing project (see figure 9). The *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* was just one title amongst 422 new titles published by Nicolai (543 including new editions).⁷⁷ Statistical analysis of his publications also reveals the importance of *belles lettres* among his publishing output: a massive 77 new titles, or 167 volumes (of which 148 were new titles, and 19 new editions) of Nicolai's publishing business belonged to the genres of novels, poetry and drama, making it the most important aspect of his work as a publisher.⁷⁸ Unusually for a publisher, Nicolai was his own most prolific author, publishing more than 30 works in a whole range of different disciplines.⁷⁹ This in itself was enough to make his business well known far beyond Berlin itself, and is a fact often alluded to in women's letters to him.

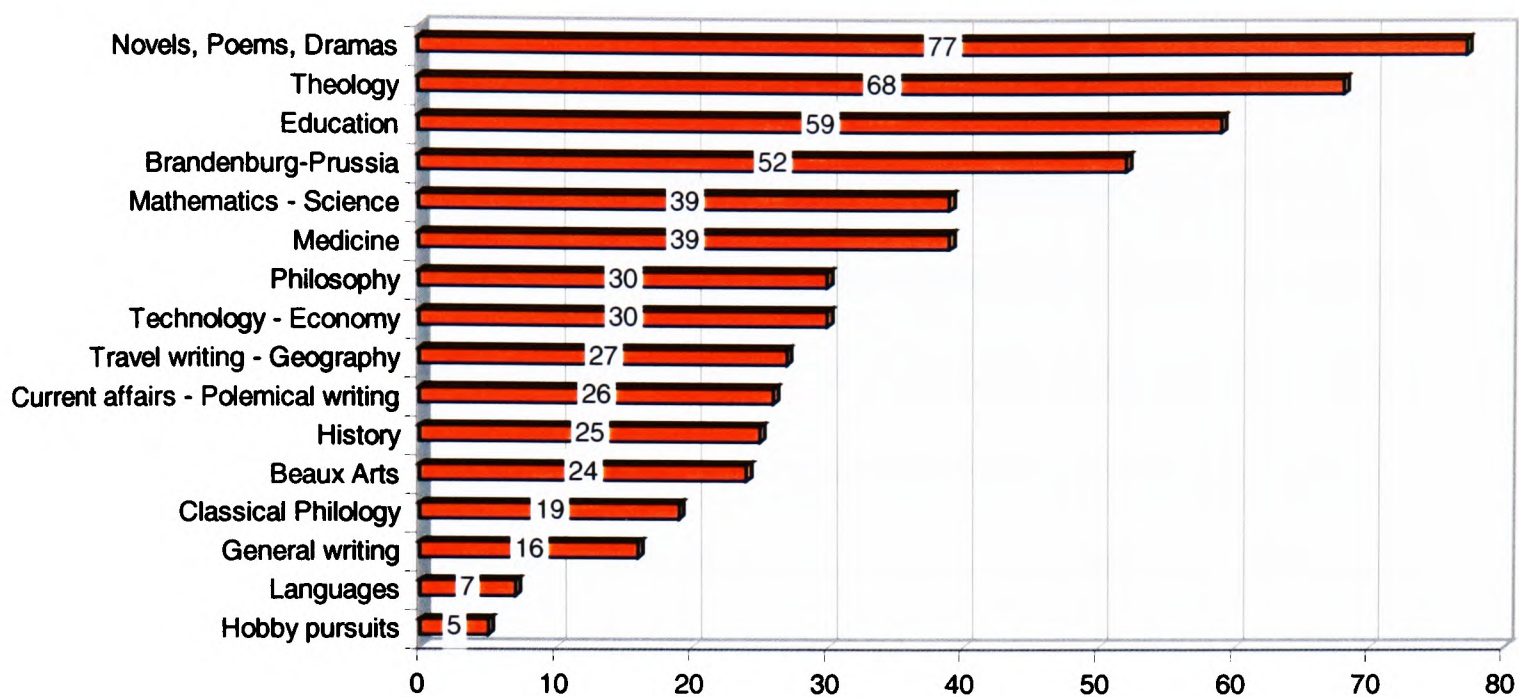
⁷⁶ Raabe, 'Der Verleger Friedrich Nicolai', p. 64.

⁷⁷ Raabe, 'Der Verleger Friedrich Nicolai', p. 69. However, the number of volumes published by Nicolai indicates the importance of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*: of the total 1,117 volumes published between 1759 and 1811, the ADB contributed a massive 256 volumes, around 20%.

⁷⁸ See statistics in Raabe, 'Der Verleger Friedrich Nicolai', pp. 70-73.

⁷⁹ See Becker, ed., *Friedrich Nicolai: Leben und Werk*, pp. 55-56.

Fig. 9: Nicolai's Publishing Production in Number of Titles



The letters we will examine here cover the period 1778-1810, with one exception from 1817. From the perspective of contemporary gender-discourse, the most surprising aspect of the letters to Göschen and Nicolai is their tone. In contrast to women writers' prefaces, with their contrived protestations of modesty,⁸⁰ the letters received by Göschen and Nicolai were written in a confident, self-assured manner. Few of these women seem even to have met the famous publishers: yet they offered no apology for their social presumption or their lack of a formal education.

Friedrich Nicolai's list was very much an expression of his own personality: 'Friedrich Nicolais Verlagsprogramm [...] wurde von persönlichen Interessen und Leidenschaften, von sittlichen und religiösen Überzeugungen, von aufklärerischen und

⁸⁰ See above, chapter 2.

preußischen Gesinnungen geprägt und bestimmt.’⁸¹ In the case of Elisa von der Recke, this opened up publication opportunities for a woman. A long-standing friend of the family, she shared Nicolai’s distrust of charlatans and religious hypocrites, and he published several of her texts exposing such people, most notably her revelations against the infamous Cagliostro.⁸² It is possible that the same Enlightenment views which made him publish those tracts led him to turn down the other aspect of her work – her poetry, which was written in the style of *Empfindsamkeit*. In a letter from 1794, he wrote ‘Der guten R. Gedichte kann ich nicht drucken’, and explained that he already had ‘mehr [Gedichte] als mir nützlich ist.’ For Niethammer, this clearly expresses his ‘Ablehnung des bewußt empfindsamen Teils der Produktion Elisa von der Reckes zugunsten ihrer aufklärerischen Schriften.’⁸³

But Nicolai combined his Enlightenment ideals with good business sense. This afforded another woman the opportunity to publish her writing. In 1791, Nicolai anonymously published Wilhelmine Wahl’s novel *Emiliens Reise nach Paris, oder die Macht der Verführung; von einem Frauenzimmer*. She subsequently wrote several novels, though none of them were published by Nicolai, despite her attempt to secure him as the publisher for her next project (*Minnas Feyerstunden. Deutschlands Töchtern gewidmet*, later published in Leipzig by Gräff in 1792).⁸⁴ Nicolai’s willingness to publish novels which did not necessarily have his private approval, indicates the extent to which

⁸¹ Raabe, ‘Der Verleger Friedrich Nicolai’, p. 84.

⁸² Evidence of Nicolai and von der Recke’s joint crusade against religious mysticism are Recke’s *Nachricht* and *Etwas über des Herrn Hofpredigers Vertheidigungsschrift*.

⁸³ See Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 85. She also argues that Nicolai rejected several offers to publish women’s autobiographical texts for the same reason. See pp. 89-92.

⁸⁴ See Wilhelmine Wahl, née Singer, letter to Friedrich Nicolai, 6 January 1791, Nicolai Nachlaß, SBB-PK, Berlin. She also wrote *Adolphine, von der Verfasserin der Emiliens Reise nach Paris* (Leipzig, 1794).

they must have been commercially successful. These works were clearly not designed to contribute to the quality of the German literary canon, but were rather meant to satisfy the demand for entertainment and pleasurable reading material from the public, thereby providing a tempting market for women writers to exploit.⁸⁵

Julie von Kamecke

One woman seeking to take advantage of this opportunity was Julie von Kamecke (dates unknown), who wrote to Nicolai on 16 March 1791. Julie von Kamecke was a ‘Stiftsfräulein’ in the Lutheran convent of Heiligengrabe in the district of Potsdam, and does not appear to have had a literary career (she is not included in any writers’ dictionary or literary history). Nicolai would have been an obvious publisher for her to approach, since his business was close by. Her letter addresses Nicolai with a familiar polite phrase (‘Wohlgebohrner Herr, Besonders Hochzuehrender Herr’).⁸⁶ But it is not concerned with social niceties, but rather with business, as soon becomes apparent when it transpires that Kamecke is offering him a ‘kleine[s] Englische[s] Werk’, presumably hoping to capitalize on recent increases in the demand for foreign language publications other than Latin.⁸⁷ The daring of the letter is enhanced by the fact that it was unsolicited (‘Ich nehme mir die Freiheit’). Her very first sentence opens with the question of whether or not he was willing to do business with her, and under what conditions: ‘laße daher gehorsamst die Frage an Sie ergehen, unter welchen Bedingungen Sie [...] diese Unternehmung mit mir eingehen würden.’ Although she seeks to flatter him by alluding to his renown as a publisher, her interest in his fame is not star-struck but mercenary: his reputation will

⁸⁵ Raabe, ‘Der Verleger Friedrich Nicolai’, p. 77.

⁸⁶ Julie von Kamecke, letter to Friedrich Nicolai, 16 March 1791, Nicolai Nachlaß, SBB - PK, Berlin.

⁸⁷ See Kiesel and Münch, *Gesellschaft und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert*, pp. 196-197.

serve her book well. 'Der große Ruf von Ew. Wohlgebohren wird Empfehlung für das Buch seyn'. She explains the rationale for her book in some detail by referring to the lack of similar publications on the book market:

Da die Beschaffung Englischer Original-Dichter, daran an die hunderte bey Verfertigung des Werks genutzt worden, äußerst kostbar, und in unserem Lande noch keine Sammlung ähnlicher Art erschienen, so darf ich beynah glauben, daß Liebhabern Englischer Dichtkunst, diese Erscheinung nicht ganz unwillkommen seyn wird.

It is her same awareness of the reading public which makes her concerned that her sex will count against her. This is not because she is worried about being seen to be an author, but rather because she feels that her sex will make the readers (and Nicolai) assume that she is not well-educated enough to carry out the task. She dispels this notion by praising her qualifications:

Sehr wahrscheinlich werden mir, als einem Frauenzimmer, Ew. Wohlgebohren, nicht Sach-Kenntniß genug zutraun, diese Unternehmung gehörig zu leisten; hierauf sey es mir aber erlaubt, Ihnen das Geständniß abzulegen, daß ich unter Anleitung meiner seligen Mutter [...] nicht allein Gelegenheit gehabt habe, diese Sprache gründlich zu erlernen, sondern ich habe auch viele mir von ihr hinterlaßne Manuskripte hierin nutzen können.

She then ends the letter with the request that he declare his intentions 'in Absicht des ganzen Manuskripts' for her proposed book, which would have been a substantial project ('das Werk [besteht] aus beynahe vierhundert ähnliche[n] Seiten, als die beygefügt sind').

This letter is especially striking when we consider that this was not the first time Julie von Kamecke approached Friedrich Nicolai. Thirteen years earlier, in 1778, she had written to him as someone who was not 'persönlich gekandt' by him, for the purpose of borrowing one hundred Thaler, under the following conditions:

auf [zwei] Monathe, nemlich bis Martini [...] gegen ausgestellter Pfandschrift zu leihen, da ich sie Ihnen als dann [illegible word] von den mir zukommenden Stifts-Einnahmen mit dem innigsten Danke wieder erstatten werde.⁸⁸

The reasons for her request were private:

Meine Mutter wünscht daß ich in einigen Tagen zu ihr reise, und dies ist die Ursache, warum ich einige außerordentliche Ausgaben zu bestreiten mich genöthigt sehe.

Nicolai's response is not known, nor do we know whether there was any correspondence between Kamecke and Nicolai between 1778 and 1791. It is however, interesting to note that Julie von Kamecke does not refer to this earlier contact in 1791. She clearly wanted him to consider the book project on merit alone. At the same time, this letter suggests that monetary considerations may have been at the root of her pursuit of publication.

Despite her apparent lack of success with Nicolai, Julie von Kamecke persevered. Two months later, on 10 May 1791, we find her writing again, this time to Georg Joachim Göschen, with whom she appears to have had no previous connection or acquaintance.⁸⁹ This letter is very similar to the one she sent to Nicolai, suggesting that she could have written many more similar letters to other publishers. The purpose of the letter is stated again outright in the first sentence, 'in wie fern Sie [...] die Bedingungen dieses Unternehmens mit mir einzugehen gedächten?' Without the weight of a previous publication to add substance to her negotiations, she attaches a sample of her manuscript and states confidently that these sheets 'liefern einen Beweis meines Vorhabens'. Her letter, which offers no explanation or even excuse for its existence, is much shorter than the one she sent to Nicolai two months earlier. It is also brusquer than her letter to

⁸⁸ Julie von Kamecke, letter to Friedrich Nicolai, 3 September 1778, Nicolai Nachlaß, SBB- PK, Berlin.

⁸⁹ Julie von Kamecke, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 10 May 1791, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 8, Kamecke, 1, DBSM, Leipzig.

Nicolai. This time, she does not elaborate on the usefulness of her collection, but proceeds instead immediately to offer her vision of the final product, which is to be about one hundred pages long, and produced in the fashionable book size of the era: '[ich] wünschte, daß solches in einem kleinen Octav Format erschiene'. It is significant that in this letter, unlike in her letter to Nicolai in March, Kamecke does not allude to her sex, and does not justify her qualifications for taking on the job of producing it. Although her letter is not without flattery, 'Mannigfaltige Empfehlungen, haben es veranlaßt, mich an Ew. Wohlgebohren in dieser Sache zu wenden', it does not exhibit the kind of apologetic modesty supposedly characteristic of women's public discourse with men. In fact, the courteous phrases of modesty are contradicted by the actual content of the letter. For example, the last sentence is preceded by the pleading phrase 'Nur würde ich mir gehormsamst [...] ausbitten', and yet concludes with a series of demands which her letter to Nicolai lacked: she wants to remain anonymous, she requires a positive answer quickly, and she demands the return of her manuscript with his response. The short letter ends with a common polite phrase ('Ew. Wohlgebohrene gehorsamste Dienerin'), but no further appeals to his generosity, vanity or indeed masculinity. This letter is unmistakably more curt and business-like than the earlier letter to Nicolai – Kamecke had clearly decided to make her demands clear from the outset.

Susanne von Bandemer

The tone of Julie von Kamecke's letter is no exception in the surviving correspondence, as other letters written to Göschen illustrate. The women writers who approached him were Betty Gleim (1781-1827), Therese aus dem Winkel (1779-1867), Susanne von Bandemer (1751-1828), Elise Sommer (1767 - ?), and Caroline Schlegel

(1739-1833). One of them, Susanne von Bandemer, a 35-year old niece of Benjamin Franklin, wrote to Göschen about the publication of a collection of poems in November 1794. Although Bandemer was acquainted with Christoph Martin Wieland, Johann Gottfried Herder, Anna Louisa Karsch and Clemens Brentano, she chose not to approach Göschen via another author, but to write to him directly herself.⁹⁰

Her letter – a response to a letter from Göschen which is now lost – is honest, jovial and agreeable: she appears entirely uninhibited by the publisher's reputation. She discusses her difficulties in raising capital for the publication of her work, for which she has already collected subscribers. Her tone is also decisive and business-like: 'Allein nach der reifsten Überlegung will ich nichts mehr als das: 500 Ex. drucken lassen, damit finde ich meine Subscribenten ab; und ich [decke] vermuthlich die Hälfte der Kosten.' She informs Göschen frankly of her financial affairs, and muses on the possibility of seeing her work published through some local printers. But she is unsatisfied with their work, which produces 'sehr häßliche und sehr wenig correcte Auflagen'.⁹¹ Convinced of the value of her poems, she offers Göschen the opportunity to publish them himself: 'Oder nehmen Sie das ganze Werk als ein eigenes Verlags=buch an'. She assures him that the initial outlay would be no risk, her subscribers are all people of quality: 'meine Sammler sind Leute von Credit'. Impatient to see the matter resolved, she urges Göschen 'Jetzt überlegen Sie, guter edler Mann! alles wohl. Machen Sie mir nur einigermaßen einen

⁹⁰ For more information on Susanne von Bandemer, see also Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, pp. 29-31 and Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. I, pp. 34-35, which includes a bibliography. Her works include: *Klara von Bourg, eine wahre Geschichte aus dem letzten Zehntel des abscheidenden Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a.M., 1798); *Knapp Edmund oder die Wiedervergeltung. Ein Schauspiel* (Frankfurt a.M., 1800); *Neue vermischte Gedichte* (Berlin, 1802); and *Poetische und prosaische Versuche* (Berlin, 1802).

⁹¹ Susanne von Bandemer, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 16 November 1794, 16622, FDH, Frankfurt am Main.

annehmlichen Vorschlag, so ist die Sache beendet'. She makes her business advance in a forthright manner and professional tone. But at the same time Susanne von Bandemer maintains her independence as an author by entertaining an alternative plan of publication, if Göschen was not interested in her project, which indeed appears to have been the case.

Susanne von Bandemer's contacts in the literary world were widespread, and she cultivated them by means of correspondence. She was not shy to solicit the help of others, and wrote repeatedly to Karl Wilhelm Ramler, for example. During the process of publishing her essays and poems in 1792 (she was ill and unable to attend to the publication herself), she enlisted his support in placing announcements on her behalf in Berlin's journals, and requested his help in ensuring that the printing quality of her book was high.⁹² It was obviously important to her to retain some control over the quality of the publication, as her letter shows:

Wenn die Bücher in Leipzig gedruckt werden, so wünschte ich sehr, daß man für diejenigen Exemplare welche die Subscribenten empfangen sollen, vorzüglich gutes Papier auswählen möchte. Die Buchfarben und den Druck wünschte ich von der nehmlichen Größe und Form, wie der Druck des Catula; und da ich nicht weiß, ob in Leipzig ein so guter Schriftstecher ist, als unser Herr Geik [...] in Berlin, so würde es mir sehr lieb seyn, wenn dieser Künstler die [...] Schrift mit aller Genauigkeit stechen, und das Original [...] von mir zurück lieferte.⁹³

Her purpose in ensuring a pleasing exterior of the book is to hide eventual shortcomings in the writing. This is designed to bolster its chances of success in the book market, which shows her awareness of the commercial aspect of literary production.

⁹² See Susanne von Bandemer, letter to Karl Wilhelm Ramler, 4 August 1792, Nachlaß Ramler, K.W.: 75/1, GSA, Weimar. Susanne von Bandemer, letter to Karl Wilhelm Ramler, 29 August 1793, Nachlaß Ramler, K.W.: 75/2, GSA, Weimar.

⁹³ Bandemer, letter to Ramler, 29 August 1793, Nachlaß Ramler, K.W.: 75/2, GSA, Weimar.

Interestingly, she uses the language of motherhood to describe her book, and casts Ramler as the guardian of her publication.⁹⁴

Denn die schriftstellerischen Kinder eines Weibes, haben sehr natürlich schon aus diesem Grunde auf eine Art von sorgfältigerer Toilette Anspruch zu machen, um bey ihrem Eintritt in die Welt durch eine gefällige Außenseite dasjenige zu gewinnen, was auf einer anderen Seite mangelhaft seyn könnte. Haben Sie also die großmütige Güte, mein Verehrungswürdigster! als ein liebevoller Vormund dieser weiblichen Schöpfung, für die Vermehrung ihrer äußeren Reize Sorge zu tragen, damit ihre kleine Unmündigen, mit einem zierlichen Beystand, und in einem Putz, a la derniere goût, sich vortheilhaft darstellen können.'

Bandemer continued to negotiate on her own behalf and to foster contacts in the literary world. In 1809, for example, she used a letter to Friedrich Nicolai, in which she ostensibly wanted to thank him for publishing a defence of Ramler (who had been 'spitefully' attacked), to suggest a number of possible publications, including the offer to bring out some letters from well-known literary figures, such as Anna Louisa Karsch, which she had in her possession.⁹⁵

Caroline Schlegel

Women often entered the literary world as translators.⁹⁶ Translation suited the female educational background, as bourgeois notions of women's education included the learning of modern languages like French, English or Italian. Translation also seemed apposite in the context of popular ideas about the limits of women's creativity, as it did not involve the writing of original work. In May 1795, Göschen received a letter from

⁹⁴ Niethammer points out the frequent use of the metaphors of birth and motherhood in women's reflections on their own writing. According to her, it potentially affected their reception: 'Zudem erschließt sich durch den häufig gewählten Begründungszusammenhang, daß Autorschaft bzw. Publizieren einer Geburt ähneln, ein weiterer geschlechtsspezifischer Kontext [...] der bei männlichen Verlegern auf Vorbehalte oder, in der Durchsetzung von Weiblichkeitsmustern, auf Unterstützung trifft.' Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 86.

⁹⁵ Susanne von Bandemer, letter to Friedrich Nicolai, 15 October 1809, Nicolai Nachlaß, SBB - PK, Berlin.

⁹⁶ See for example Sophie Mereau's long list of published translations. Sophie Mereau, "*Ein Glück, das keine Wirklichkeit umspannt*." *Gedichte und Erzählungen*, ed. Katherina von Hammerstein (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), pp. 299-300.

Caroline Schlegel, née Lucius, offering him a translation for publication.⁹⁷ She had become famous in the 1760s through her model correspondence with the father of the German school of letter writing, Christian Fürchtegott Gellert.⁹⁸ The daughter of a Saxon civil servant, she represents the Enlightenment class of educated citizens who constituted the literary public. She and her siblings ‘zeigten schon in früher Jugend sehr viel Fähigkeiten.’ Reading had been the key to her education: ‘so lasen sie gemeinschaftlich ziemlich alle erscheinenden Schriften, die zur Veredelung des Herzens und Ausbildung des Verstandes beitrugen’.⁹⁹ Thanks to their well-chosen tutors, the Lucius siblings learned several languages. Caroline excelled especially in French, English and Italian, which proved useful to her publishing activity. Furthermore, her freedom to devote herself to reading, correspondence and study did not disappear with marriage, as for so many women. She married late, aged 35, having rejected previous offers of marriage, and remained childless, thereby continuing to be free from the duties and perils of motherhood (unlike her sister, who died in childbirth a mere ten months after her wedding).

⁹⁷ For more information on Caroline Schlegel, see Baur, *Baurs Schriftstellerinnen*, pp. 86-87, and Schindel’s interesting, detailed biography. Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. 2, pp. 248-259. Her works include *Düval und Charmille, ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel* (Leipzig, 1778), as well as several translations from the English and the French into German. *Düval and Charmille* is reprinted in *Frauen und Drama im achtzehnten Jahrhundert 1770-1800*, ed. Karin A. Wurst (Cologne; Vienna: Böhlau, 1991).

⁹⁸ Published as *Briefwechsel Christian Fürchtegott Gellert’s mit Demoiselle Lucius. Nebst einem Anhang ... Sämmtlich aus den bisher meist ungedruckten Originalen herausgegeben von Friedrich Adolf Ebert*. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1823) See also Regina Nörtemann, ‘Die “Begeisterung eines Poeten” in den Briefen eines Frauenzimmers. Zur Korrespondenz der Caroline Christiane Lucius mit Christian Fürchtegott Gellert’, in *Die Frau im Dialog. Studien zu Theorie und Geschichte des Briefes*, ed. Anita Runge and Lieselotte Steinbrügge (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991).

⁹⁹ Biographical information from Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. 2, pp. 248-259. Quotes here from p. 250. Schindel mentions in a footnote on p. 253 that he was closely acquainted with Caroline Schlegel, and had in fact planned to publish the new edition of her correspondence with Gellert, which was ultimately published by Friedrich Adolf Ebert.

She was fifty-six years old when she wrote to Göschen, after some initial contact had been established through a mutual acquaintance. The letter offers him the first part of a translation (the text in question remains unknown). Again, her letter contains no apologetic remarks about the fact that she is a woman taking time out from her duties as a wife to write. On the contrary, she mentions having written the translation three years ago during the ‘schönste Jahreszeit’ when she should have been recuperating from a prolonged illness.¹⁰⁰ Her curt letter contains no allusions to the popular prejudice against women’s literary activity, or to her husband (whose approval was presumably needed). Perhaps the much-admired correspondence that she initiated with Gellert thirty years earlier had given her the confidence to write so easily to Göschen. Schlegel does not even try to point to any utilitarian motives for her translation work (for instance, straitened financial circumstances). She says she is undertaking the work entirely for her own benefit, as a pleasant change from her other – presumably domestic – obligations (‘dergl. Arbeit [ist mir] angenehme Unterhaltung und Abwechslung von anderen Geschäften’).¹⁰¹ Schlegel does not beg forgiveness for her presumption in wanting an audience for her work, and is self-confident in her ability to negotiate business-deals. Moreover, she argues that a task which has produced no results invariably leads to a sense of regret ‘das natürliche Misvergnügen welches mit jeder vergeblichen Unternehmung verbunden ist’, which is why she is prepared to accept all the conditions Göschen wishes to suggest, just so that she can see the manuscript published.

¹⁰⁰ Caroline Schlegel, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 3 May 1795, Autographensammlung Culemann Nr.: 2005, SAH, Hannover.

¹⁰¹ This echoes Esther Gad’s sentiment in a letter to Jean Paul (26 November 1800): writing was useful because it occupied her ‘auf eine angestrenzte Art’, and protected her ‘von allen den grübelnden Gedanken’. Barbara Hahn, “‘Geliebtester Schriftsteller’: Esther Gads Korrespondenz mit Jean Paul”, *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 25 (1990), p. 38.

Ich würde also mit diesem ersten fertigen Bande jedem Herrn Verleger, der sich damit befassen wollte, recht gern ein Geschenk machen und wegen der Übrigen die noch zu übersetzen sind, leichte Bedingungen eingehen.

But it does not appear that Göschen published her work.

Therese aus dem Winkel

So far, the letters I have analysed do not conform to eighteenth-century gender ideology. But there are other letters which deliberately employ that ideology. Some women who wrote to Göschen played on the gender-specific rhetoric of modesty, simultaneously subverting it. An example is Therese aus dem Winkel, and her attempt to forge business links with Göschen appears to have been more successful.¹⁰² Another privileged young woman from Saxony, she was carefully educated by her mother and soon showed an interest in the arts. As well as being an excellent harpist, she was also, it seems, a talented oil-painter, especially skilled in the art of copying Italian masters. Her stance on gender roles was reputed to be entirely traditional, as Schindel's dictionary shows. He quotes her views on women's creativity and ability as original artists as follows:

es sey am zweckmäßigsten für Frauen, nicht nach Originalität zu streben, sondern mit liebender Treue, kindlicher Demuth und Biagsamkeit des Sinnes, sich den hohen alten Meistern anzuschmiegen [...] als durch eigene Erfindungen nach eitlem Ruhme zu streben.¹⁰³

It certainly is true that she used pseudonyms ('Comala' and 'Theorosa'), but that does not mean that she was altogether modest in her attempts to see her work published, or shy of earning money with her skills, as we shall see.

¹⁰² For more information on Therese aus dem Winkel, see Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. 2, pp. 431-435.

¹⁰³ Quotation from Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, p. 432.

Her first letter to Göschen was written on 3 June 1805, when she was twenty-six years old. The timing of the letter is significant here. Taking at face value the views she espoused on women's originality and women's inferiority in relation to men regarding creative endeavours, commentators like Schindel, and later the editors of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, take it for granted that aus dem Winkel's attempts to turn her talents into money (through painting as well as writing), could only have been the direct result of her family's loss of fortune in 1806. Her three surviving letters to Göschen tell a different story. Therese aus dem Winkel was taking active steps towards co-operation with Göschen and publication *before* her family lost its fortune.

In fact, the earliest publication attributable to Therese aus dem Winkel occurs in the *Journal für deutsche Frauen*, in April 1805.¹⁰⁴ It is an essay about an Italian Renaissance painting which had recently been brought to Dresden, aus dem Winkel's home town. Although it is a descriptive piece, which aims to make the readers more familiar with the masterpiece 'durch ausführliche Schilderung', it also contains knowledgeable references to histories of art, written in Italian, in which her readers could find out more. So not only did Therese aus dem Winkel begin contributing to journals independently of her family's loss of fortune, but she also continued, actively and indomitably, to seek outlets for her writing, as her letters to Göschen show.

Even though the first letter mentions an essay which Göschen had rejected as unsuitable for publication, aus dem Winkel was not discouraged. On the contrary, she

¹⁰⁴ [Therese Emilie Henriette aus dem Winkel], 'Einige Worte über ein allegorisches altitalienisches Gemälde', *Journal von deutschen Frauen für deutsche Frauen* 1, no. 4 (1805).

agrees instantly that the essay was in fact ‘gar nicht passend’.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, she insists that she regards the rejection of her essay not, as one might expect, as a set-back, but in fact as proof of Göschen’s true friendship, because he revealed its faults to her. So, undeterred, she attaches another unsolicited piece of writing to her letter. This time it is a poem from a female friend.¹⁰⁶ In keeping with notions of femininity, she hastens to assure Göschen that she personally would never send him a poem, because she is not familiar with the rules of the genre (‘so glühend warm ich für die Poesie fühle, so fremd sind mir doch ihre Regeln.’). Nonetheless, she is not frightened to suggest in which journal it should be included (she chooses again the *Journal für die Frauen* edited by Wieland, Schiller, Rochlitz and Seume), nor does she shy away from advertising the poem by calling the author ‘genialischer und kühner als ich’, or of recommending it further by informing Göschen that Hofrath Böttiger enjoyed the poem so much that *he* suggested she should send it to him.

Aus dem Winkel’s description of her ‘geistvolle Freundin’, the author, evokes contemporary gender stereotypes by describing her in terms of female modesty combined with a natural poetic gift, unspoilt by tuition: ‘sie dichtete viel, schon von früher Jugend an, obgleich ganz ohne Anleitung, aus inneren [sic] Drang dazu, doch entschloss sie sich nie, ihre Arbeiten irgend jemand mitzuthemen.’ Now that the poem is entering the public sphere, her friend is expecting corrections to be made by the editors, who function as male mentors in a hierarchical pupil-teacher relationship. But this is undercut moments

¹⁰⁵ Therese Emilie Henriette aus dem Winkel, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 3 June 1805, Autograph Au 12967, TSUK, Köln.

¹⁰⁶ The poem’s author can no longer be identified; it is not impossible that it was penned by aus dem Winkel herself.

later. Despite the protestations of personal and professional modesty (expressed by the author's desire to remain anonymous, even to Göschen, and the invitation to improve her poem), aus dem Winkel explains that her friend will probably reject the corrections if they are too drastic:

Sie möchte da ihre begangenen Sünden gern erst kennen lernen; denn sie will sich das Gewand ihres Geistes wohl von einem geübten Meister zuschneiden lassen, aber doch die Freiheit haben, dann zu probieren ob es ihr passt, ehe sie öffentlich darin erscheint. Sie denkt so originell, dass ich vermuthe, wenn die für fehlerhaft erkannten Stellen, solche sind, in denen ihre Individualität sich aussprach, so wird sie lieber das Ganze unterdrücken, als diese verlöschen lassen; überhaupt: lieber das Gold ihrer Gedanken zu einer freilich nicht ganz tadelosen Medaille selbst ausarbeiten, als es mit einem vortrefflichen, aber allgemeinen Stempel zur Kurrentmünze prägen lassen.

This writer does not welcome the tuition of male advisers unconditionally, nor does she reject originality in favour of imitating (male) masters, as Schindel had suggested aus dem Winkel believed women ought to do. Instead, we find here an assertion of artistic integrity and authorial privilege on a woman's part, supported by Therese aus dem Winkel.¹⁰⁷ Aus dem Winkel goes on to state confidently that she can personally promise Göschen 'so manchen witzigen und humoristischen Beitrag von diesem launigen, durch viele Lektüre sehr gebildeten Mädchen.'

Her next letter to Göschen employs a similar strategy. It emerges that Göschen had returned and rejected the poem she sent him with her last missive. As in her last letter, she does not admit to disappointment, but writes instead that she concurs precisely with his judgement in rejecting it. Undeterred by this second rejection, she suggests yet

¹⁰⁷ A similar example of a women author sending a manuscript to a male editor, and, whilst asking for his corrections, making it plain in the same letter that she is not prepared to countenance major changes, can be found in J.I.E. von Wallenrodt's correspondence with Nicolai. See the reprint and commentary in Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt*, pp. 725-727 and 707-708.

another project, similar to the one which had already been successful earlier in the year: the writing of ‘einige Briefe über Kunstwerke der hiesigen Bildergalerie’, that is, in Dresden, for inclusion in one of his journals.¹⁰⁸ This potentially presumptuous-sounding suggestion is prefaced by the assurance that her desire to write these letters really does not arise ‘aus der Sucht, die Feder führen zu wollen’. However, this rings somewhat hollow when we consider that this is at least the third time in as many letters that she attempts to submit material for his journals.¹⁰⁹ She strengthens her position by adding that the large number of visitors to the gallery in Dresden every year surely warrants such a project. Her plan is to write ‘neue, unterhaltende und nützliche Ansichten und Ideen [über die Galerie]’. She is cautious not to seem too learned, and writes: ‘nicht ihren artistischen Werth zu bestimmen würde ich streben, sondern Sinn, Karakter und Ausdruck zu entwickeln’. The female rhetoric of modesty and lack of presumption is evident here, but it is belied by the active suggestions for a professional relationship with Göschen and the very existence of the letter. Her strategy of employing a ‘Mischung aus Unterwürfigkeit und Dreistigkeit’ paid off, and her next letter from November that same year saw the inclusion of more of her contributions to the *Journal für deutsche Frauen*.¹¹⁰ Her persistence may also have contributed to the duration of her co-operation with Göschen, as a decade later she was still writing for the journals *Die Harfe* (1815-19), and *Hesperiden* (1816).

¹⁰⁸ Therese Emilie Henriette aus dem Winkel, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 25 August 1805, Autograph Au 12967, TSUK, Köln.

¹⁰⁹ Contributions to journals were often very lucrative, on average even slightly more lucrative than books. See Steiner, *Das Autorenhonorar*, pp. 289-334.

¹¹⁰ A description used by Anita Runge about Wallenrodt's letters to Friedrich Nicolai. Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt*, p. 707.

The last letter of hers to Göschen to survive is especially interesting, because in it she openly admits that her letters to him, and the language used in them, have been strategic and deceptive:

schrieb ich erst, dass ich wenig von dem was das Wissenschaftliche der Kunst betrifft dabei erwähnen wollte, so war dies wohl eine kleine List, um mir eher Eingang in ein Journal für Frauenzimmer zu verschaffen, und dem Vorwurf, kunstgelehrt scheinen zu wollen, zu entgehen.¹¹¹

This letter, like the previous ones, is ingratiatingly self-deprecating about herself (she asks him not to create a mental picture of her, because he would certainly be disappointed if he met her in reality), and about her work ('dies ist eine so schwere Aufgabe, dass ich für die Ausführung zittere!'). Yet she is sufficiently self-assured to say that the first essay to be published will be sent soon, and she indicates that she has yet more ideas for contributions to the journal. Again, her actions belie the sentiments expressed verbally. Her motives for working for Göschen, be they financial need or the desire to be a writer, are not really important here.¹¹² What is important is that aus dem Winkel did not act out the beliefs about appropriate tasks for women which she was said to have held, and which the public by and large shared with her. Moreover, at the time of her first contact with Göschen, she had no urgent financial need to pursue him, and she was evidently not dispirited by a series of rejections. It seems that women like Therese aus dem Winkel were just as capable as men of doggedly pursuing their interests with publishers.

¹¹¹ Therese Emilie Henriette aus dem Winkel, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 11 November 1805, Mscr.Dresd.t.87, SLUB, Dresden.

¹¹² Publication in a journal often became the stepping stone for the publication of books. For publishers, journals presented a useful means of establishing contact with potential authors. See Füssel, *Verlagsgeschichte*, p. 17.

Elise Sommer

The discrepancy between aus dem Winkel's public image of demure femininity and the nature of her correspondence with Göschen occurs also in the case of Elise Sommer, who wrote two letters to Göschen.¹¹³ Sommer was the mother of ten children, so although her domestic duties might be supposed to be heavy, she does not apologize for her poetry at any point, nor indeed for writing to Göschen in the first place. There is no insistence that her poems are mere trifles, or that she would welcome Göschen's criticism. Instead, she informs him in straightforward terms that her essays have 'den Beifall der Kenner'.¹¹⁴ Having already published her collection once, she now needs to print a second edition due to an unexpected demand for it: 'meine Gedichte [sind] in unseren prosaischen Zeiten in 4 Wochen alle vergriffen'. Unwilling to see her fans remain 'unbefriedigt', she asks Göschen to consider printing a second edition. Although he did not, he seems to have recommended someone else who would, as her next letter thanks him for establishing this connection. However, her business with Göschen has not come to an end, for she too wishes to benefit from his position as the publisher of journals:

Möchten angelegte Aufsätze den Beifall der Herausgeber des Journals für Frauen von Frauen geschrieben, finden, ihren Schriften verdanke ich manchen süßen Genuß für Kopf und Herz, und ihr Beifall würde mir sehr theuer sein.¹¹⁵

In fact, she hopes to become a regular contributor to the journal:

In dem Fall, daß die [...] Herausgeber meine kleine Arbeiten mit ihrem Beifall crönen sollten, biethe ich Ew. Wohlgebohren zu jedem Heft einen Beitrag an. Es würde mich freuen wenn ich so glücklich wäre, den Besseren meines

¹¹³ Elise Sommer was the author of *Poetische Versuche* (Marburg, 1806) and *Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M., 1813). She was also a prolific contributor of poems to journals like Wieland's *Neuer Teutscher Merkur*, and to the *Morgenblatt*.

¹¹⁴ Elise Sommer, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 10 March 1806, Autograph Au 10121, TSUK, Köln.

¹¹⁵ Elise Sommer, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 10 April 1806, Autograph Au 10129, TSUK, Köln.

Geschlechts Gefallen abzu gewinnen, und meinem Herzen würde das Bewußtsein mit an der Veredelung desselben arbeiten zu helfen, eine sehr beglückende Empfindung verursachen.

This bears out Helga Brandes's assertion that journals were especially important for women trying to break into the literary market.¹¹⁶ Elise Sommer proves herself to be an effective negotiator on her own behalf, and her letters appear to be primarily written in her capacity as a writer looking for publishing outlets, rather than as a woman. She also carried on making contacts in the literary world. In 1810, she wrote to Wieland, enclosing a poem she had written about him.¹¹⁷

However, this is in sharp contrast to the public image she created. In the prologue to her collection of poems from 1806, she claims that she is offering her poems to her readers with 'Schüchternheit', and asks the public to be lenient with her.¹¹⁸ Exposing her work to the reading public is risky, 'wie vieles ich wage, indem ich meine dichterischen Versuche dem öffentlichen Urtheil preis gebe', especially since they are mere attempts, not meant for publication: 'Ich nenne sie Versuche, und mehr sollen sie nicht seyn, auch wurden sie nicht in der Absicht niedergeschrieben, um einst öffentlich bekannt gemacht zu werden.' Her reasons for publishing her work despite these worries were firstly, her situation, and secondly, the encouragement of her friends (Wenn ich [...] hernach beschloß [zu veröffentlichen], so bestimmt mich hierzu theils meine Lage, theils auch das – vielleicht nicht vorurtheilsfreie – Urtheil meiner Freunde.') Her poems, she claims, are the result of her tragic life, which left her no choice but to seek solace in poetry:

¹¹⁶ Brandes, 'Frauenroman', p. 45.

¹¹⁷ Elise Sommer, letter to Christoph Martin Wieland, 16 August 1810, Wieland Nachlaß: 93/137, GSA, Weimar.

¹¹⁸ See 'Vorrede' in Elise Sommer, *Poetische Versuche* (Marburg: 1806).

Meine Gedichte wurden mehrentheils niedergeweint, und in Verhältnissen erzeugt, die die freie Bewegung des Geistes fesseln und jeden Aufflug der Fantasie niederdrücken, und lähmen. Nichts blieb mir übrig das Dunkel zu mildern, das meinen Lichtkreis umzog, nichts, was meinem Herzen Trost und meiner Seele Aufheiterung gab, als der Versuch: meine Gefühle in den Rhythmus elegischer Ergießungen zu bringen.

Her announcement of a forthcoming new collection in the *Neuer Teutscher Merkur* in 1810 emphasizes further that her talent is not tutored, but natural, and that she considered herself an amateur: 'Meine Lieder [verdanken] bloß der Empfindung und dem Gefühl ihr Daseyn', because she is 'mit der höhern Kunst der Poesie unbekannt. [...] So weiß ich keinen schönern Namen, als den, einer Dichterin der Natur'.¹¹⁹

Sommer continued in this vein, preceding her collection of 1813 by an autobiographical essay, in which she explained the tragic circumstances of her life, and how she came to publish poetry. Although this collection is now entitled more confidently (*Gedichte*, rather than *Poetische Versuche*), this preface evokes the same stereotypes as the 1806 foreword.¹²⁰ Sommer describes the sorrowful circumstances of her writing:

In jenen Tagen [the time of her first marriage] [...] wo ich oft mit vor Schwäche zitternden Händen bis in die späte Nacht mich mit dem Abschreiben [...] beschäftigen, und mit Schlaf und Ermattung kämpfen mußte, wozu nicht selten die fürchterlichste Migräne hinzukam – in jenen Tagen war es, wo ich [...] meine Gefühle auf dem Papier ausströmte. Unwillkürlich, und ohne im mindesten an Poesie zu denken [...] wurden diese Klagen Reime, Reime, die oft in dem Moment vernichtet wurden, wo sie geschaffen waren.¹²¹

Schindel repeated her protestations almost word for word, thereby cementing her public image of the reluctant poet and over-worked mother struggling against an unkind fate:

¹¹⁹ Elise Sommer, 'Anzeige', *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* 3, no. 9 (1810), p. 78.

¹²⁰ See 'Vorrede' in Elise Sommer, *Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Herrmannsche Buchhandlung, 1813), pp. VII-XVI.

¹²¹ Sommer, *Gedichte*, p. XI.

In jenen Tagen der Mühseligkeit, wo Elise oft mit Schlaf und Ermattung unter der ihrem Geist und Herzen so wenig angemessenen Beschäftigung seufzte, und wo sie neben bangen Sorgen mit der fürchterlichen Migräne kämpfte, strömten ihre Empfindungen des Kammers, die sie stets in sich verschloß, aufs Papier über, und unwillkürlich und ohne im mindesten an Poesie zu denken, wurden diese Klagen Reime, die sie oft in dem Moment, wo sie sie geschaffen, wieder vernichtete.¹²²

This representation of women's writing as artless is entirely in keeping with popular ideas about women authors, and was clearly created by Sommer herself. She thus laid the foundations for her own entry into literary history chiefly as a tragic mother with a poetic gift, rather than as a writer adept at creating her own career opportunities. Her preface, and Schindel's dictionary, claimed that she was so uncomfortable with her poetic output that she destroyed the poems immediately afterwards, but this stands in complete contrast to her letters to Göschen. These letters, written in order to further her own career as an author, show a much more unpoetically self-assertive woman, actively striving to create opportunities for herself. There are other precedents for this situation, too. Benedikte Naubert, despite being Germany's most prolific woman writer, is another author who successfully maintained the public persona of a mother and wife, living in seclusion and attending to her domestic duties. Like Sommer, she partially wrote her own entry in Schindel's dictionary, creating this image. This led to the paradoxical situation whereby her biography, as printed in the dictionary, stands in complete contrast to her extensive list of works, which was evidently not the result of a few idle hours.¹²³

It is clear that women did not always conform to their putative *Geschlechtscharakter* in their correspondence. When they did, it was often for strategic

¹²² Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. 2, p. 323.

¹²³ Runge, 'Leben' - 'Werk' - Profession', p. 75.

reasons, not an expression of reality, as Therese aus dem Winkel acknowledged in her letter to Göschen.¹²⁴ Within the private medium of letters, the ideologies of the time could be subverted, creating public opportunities for women's work. The sheer quantity of such letters shows that the phenomenon was widespread.¹²⁵ These women became their own agents and publicists, despite possessing excellent literary contacts in some cases. In the context of women's specific social and economic status in society, their pro-active, confident approach to publication goes some way towards explaining their presence on the literary market.

Authorizing Literary Practice and Legitimizing Financial Demands

Jeder der ein Werk der Phantasie [...] geschrieben hat, wird Ihnen sagen können, daß keine Arbeit [...] so viel Aufwand, als gerade eine solche, von eigentlicher Lebenskraft erfordert. Wir handeln also, mein theurer verehrter Freund! um ein Stück von meinem Leben und ich bitte Sie noch ein mal [...] [den Preis] etwas höher anzusetzen.'¹²⁶

But how did these authors gain such confidence? Why, at a time when opposition to their involvement actually increased, did women feel entitled not just to write, but to see their work in print? The answer to this lies partly in the economics of the literary

¹²⁴ Cheryl Turner interprets the use of pseudonyms like 'Mrs Teachwell' as 'an understanding of market manipulation, rather than a need for protection.' Turner, *Living by the pen*, p. 95. Anne Fleig's analysis of women's prefaces also regards protestations of modesty as a deliberate marketing strategy. Fleig, *Handlungs-Spiel-Räume*, p. 80.

¹²⁵ Letters sent to other publishers also indicate that Göschen and Nicolai were not alone in conducting such correspondence. See Caroline Fouqué's letters to Cotta in Herbert Schiller, ed., *Briefe an Cotta. Das Zeitalter der Restauration 1815-1832* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1927), pp. 353-355. Also Johanna Schopenhauer's letters to various publishers, Schmid, *Selbstverschuldete Unmündigkeit*, pp. 291-294. Marianne Ehrmann wrote similar letters, see Madland, *Marianne Ehrmann*, pp. 209-211. Sophie Mereau also negotiated ('selbstbewußt und kenntnisreich') with her publishers on her own behalf. Sophie Mereau, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung. Amanda und Eduard. Romane*, ed. Katherina von Hammerstein (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), p. 298.

¹²⁶ Caroline Auguste Fischer, letter to Johann Georg Zimmer, [no date] II 1557-58, FDH, Frankfurt am Main.

market. Once the book market was liberalized, market forces dictated publishing practice at least as much as social customs and contemporary gender ideology. Not only had women entered the market in large numbers, thereby legitimizing each other's presence, but they had a large female readership, which in turn supported their writing.¹²⁷ Factors such as the growth in literacy during the eighteenth century, improvements in women's education as well as the fashionability of reading as an activity (indicated by the large-scale foundation of reading societies) had led to an unprecedented growth in the number of female consumers of literature.¹²⁸ As shown above, women's favoured genres, written in the language they spoke, had become the most popular on the market as a whole. This economic basis of consumption granted women an unprecedented licence to become producers of literature themselves. It is primarily as such that they approached Göschen and Nicolai, which would explain why their letters were relatively free from the hallmarks of gendered discourse. Their sex mattered only insofar as they were now especially able to write for a growing niche market. Reinhard Wittmann's statement 'Denn zugleich mit dem Strukturwandel des Buchmarktes begann die Emanzipation des literarischen Autors, der sein neues Selbstbewußtsein [...] an den Bedingungen des anonymen Warenverkehrs zu bewähren hatte' can be applied equally to women.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Linda Dietrick explains how Charlotte von Stein and Charlotte von Schiller tried to legitimize their own writing, despite their awareness of the aesthetic standards which Goethe and Schiller were attempting to set, and despite their awareness of gender characterizations. See Dietrick, 'Authorization of Literary Practice', pp. 223-227.

¹²⁸ See for instance Brandes, 'Entstehung'. Schön, 'Weibliches Lesen'.

¹²⁹ See Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 150.

A good example of this is the correspondence of Betty Gleim (1781-1827) with Göschen. It consists of 18 letters,¹³⁰ spanning the years 1808-1817 and dealing with the publication of three of her books in Göschen's publishing house.¹³¹ Betty Gleim was not a literary author, but a highly respected author of pedagogical books and educational treatises, as well as the founder of a higher education establishment for girls in Bremen.¹³² A relatively new discipline, pedagogy had managed to double its market share between 1770 and 1800 (see figure 4),¹³³ so Gleim was working in an increasingly popular area. Her publishing success is all the more remarkable, since her work *Erziehung und Bildung des weiblichen Geschlechts* (1810) is socially radical in advocating higher education for girls, and careers beyond simply being a wife and mother.¹³⁴

Gleim's letters are, again, business-like and professional, and scrupulously correct in both grammar and orthography. Again, they contain practically no personal information, and no rhetoric of modesty. Gleim is even sparser in her use of polite

¹³⁰ These letters have been catalogued as 18 documents by the archive in Leipzig, but they appear to me to be only 16 separate letters. This is all the correspondence pertaining to Betty Gleim which survives, as Bremen's archives do not possess Betty Gleim's collected papers.

¹³¹ Betty Gleim, *Lesebuch für Kinder zur Übung in der Deklamation. 1. Theil. Für Kinder von 6-10 Jahren* (Leipzig: Georg Joachim Göschen, 1809). Reprinted under the title *Kindermoral in Beispielen. Für Kinder von 6 bis 10 Jahren* (Leipzig: Georg Joachim Göschen, 1809). Betty Gleim, *Lesebuch für Kinder zur Übung in der Deklamation. Zweiter Theil* (Leipzig: Georg Joachim Göschen, 1810). Betty Gleim, *Erziehung und Unterricht des weiblichen Geschlechts. Ein Buch für Eltern und Erzieher von Betty Gleim* (Leipzig: Georg Joachim Göschen, 1810).

¹³² Schindel reviewed her work favourably in volumes 2 and 3 of Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*. For a bibliography of her works and a discussion of her educational work, see Hannelore Cyrus, "Hab ich zu Kühnes gewagt?" Die Bremerin im Zeitalter der Aufklärung. Ein historischer Bilderbogen', in *Frauen in der Aufklärung. "... ihr werten Frauenzimmer, auf!" Ein Lesefestival*, ed. Iris Bubenik-Bauer and Ute Schalz-Laurenze (Frankfurt am Main: Helmer, 1995). See also Martina Käthner and Elke Kleinau, 'Höhere Töcherschulen um 1800', in *Geschichte der Mädchen- und Frauenbildung*, ed. Elke Kleinau and Claudia Opitz (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Campus, 1996).

¹³³ Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, p. 122.

¹³⁴ See Elke Kleinau and Christine Mayer, *Erziehung und Bildung des weiblichen Geschlechts. Eine kommentierte Quellensammlung zur Bildungs- und Berufsbildungsgeschichte von Mädchen und Frauen*, 2 vols. (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1996), vol. 1, pp. 70-84. Rasch, 'Mensch, Bürger, Weib', pp. 28-31. Josefine Zimmermann, 'Betty Gleim (1781-1827) und ihre Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Mädchenbildung' (unpublished thesis, University of Cologne, 1926).

phrases than the other women, frequently beginning a letter with a terse ‘An Göschen’, and ending with an informal ‘B. Gleim’.¹³⁵ Her correspondence is characterized by a rather dogged pursuit of her own agenda, and full of demands: about the duration of the printing process, the inclusion of new text into the final version, the alteration of already printed text, the number of complementary copies she wishes to have sent, the spelling mistakes which she desires to have corrected, the paper she wants him to use, and the amount of money she wishes to be paid, as well as, finally, a new edition of her books. This pushiness came to the fore during the disruptions caused by the Napoleonic wars. Göschen’s production plummeted to fewer than ten titles per year between 1808-1810. He was therefore having problems publishing Gleim’s books by the due date, and so, for a while, avoided responding to her letters.¹³⁶ This did not deter Gleim, who wrote:

Schon wieder sind die Wochen verstrichen, und ich habe immer noch keine Antwort von Ihnen. Wahrlich, dies könnte mich recht traurig machen, wenn ich nicht glaubte, daß ein Brief von Ihnen müßte verlorengegangen sein, oder daß andere mir unbekannte Umstände obwalteten, die Sie am Schreiben gänzlich verhinderten.¹³⁷

In response, Göschen seems to have complained again of war-related difficulties. Her next reply uses this cunningly against him:

Sie schreiben mir: “Kommt der Friede zu Stande, so soll Ihr Buch zur Ostermesse erscheinen.” Wir haben jetzt Friede – und – ich freue mich! Sie verlegen nun meine Ideen; nicht wahr? Es wäre wahrlich auch gar zu hart, wenn

¹³⁵ See for example Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 23 November 1809, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 12, DBSM, Leipzig, and Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 8 December [1809], Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 13, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹³⁶ See Füßel, *Verlagsbibliographie*, p. XI.

¹³⁷ Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, [September 1809], Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 10, DBSM, Leipzig. Most of her letters contain amendments to her manuscripts, which she desires to have incorporated into the final print. They are invariably sent very late, which she acknowledges perfunctorily, before adding that the alterations surely cannot be too difficult to add.

meine so lang genährte Hoffnung auf Sie gänzlich hätte getäuscht werden sollen.¹³⁸

Another time she writes, equally disingenuously: 'Es fängt nachgerade an, mich zu ängstigen, daß ich auf [illegible word] meinen zweiten an Sie erlassenen Brief noch immer keine Antwort habe. Sie sind doch nicht krank?'¹³⁹ One suspects that even if he had been ill, this would have made no difference to her, since the letter goes on to make yet more demands. Earlier, she had sent him a recipe for a solution to bathe in, which she thought would help cure his rheumatism, thereby ensuring that he would now be able to devote himself to her books.¹⁴⁰ Gleim often anticipates a positive answer from Göschen, thereby limiting his room for manoeuvre from the outset: 'Erfreuen Sie mich bald mit einem Briefchen und mit der Versicherung, daß mein Buch bald erscheinen soll.'¹⁴¹ On other occasions, she anticipates his irritation, negating it: 'Erschrecken und zürnen Sie [nicht], mein werther Freund, daß schon wieder ein Brief von mir da ist. [...] die Mühe, die ich Ihnen diesmal verursache, ist wenigstens nicht groß.'¹⁴² Betty Gleim is always confident of success for her work, and trusts it will find plenty of buyers: 'Sie sollen sehen, daß dies Buch so ganz schlechten Absatz nicht haben wird: Bremen ist ganz so arm noch nicht, es wird immer noch viel verdient; ich habe hier viele Bekanntschaften.'¹⁴³ Gleim's confidence in her work stems from her contact with the

¹³⁸ Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 20 October 1809, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 11, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹³⁹ Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, sent before her departure to Bad Pyrmont 1809, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 14, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹⁴⁰ Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 14 April 1809, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 7, DBSM, Leipzig. She referred to this recipe in later letters, trusting that it would have solved his problems. Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, undated [after 14 April 1809] Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 8, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹⁴¹ Gleim, letter to Göschen, [September 1809]. Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 10, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹⁴² Gleim, letter to Göschen, 23 November 1809, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 12, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹⁴³ Gleim, letter to Göschen, 20 October 1809, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 11, DBSM, Leipzig. Gleim's educational establishment was very successful during these years (in 1812, eighty pupils attended

readership, and the awareness that she commanded an interested public. In only her second letter, before she has fully agreed the terms of her contract with Göschen, she announces that she has already received advance orders for 250 copies of her book, from eight primary schools in Bremen.¹⁴⁴ This readership provided her with a bargaining lever in her correspondence with Göschen.

A letter written by another female pedagogue, Caroline Rudolphi, author of *Gemälde weiblicher Erziehung* (1807), confirms that women authors used their readership to assert the legitimacy of their writing against the aesthetic criteria and gender norms of their age. Rudolphi wrote to Göschen in 1806, asking for her new book on women's education to be published by him (he had already published a collection of poems by her).¹⁴⁵ Her justification for asking for its publication is this:

Der Grund, warum ich so eile, liegt in den dringenden Bitten einiger junger Mütter, die gerade jetzt das höchste Bedürfnis haben, etwas über diesen wichtigen Gegenstand zu lesen, worin sie praktische Anleitung finden. [...] Für jetzt ist mirs bloß darum zu thun, den [...] jungen Müttern, deren Familienwohl mir so sehr angelegen ist, recht bald ein Buch in die Hände zu geben, das Ihnen ihre erste Erziehungsaufgabe leicht und heiter lösen hilft...¹⁴⁶

References to the public's approval giving women the courage to publish are frequent in the authors presented here. Elise Sommer announces her poetry collection by referring to her surprise and pleasure at finding 'die zahlreichen Namen meiner

the school), providing Gleim with a ready public prepared to buy her books. See Zimmermann, 'Betty Gleim', p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 24 September 1808. Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 2, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹⁴⁵ Rudolphi's *Neue Sammlung von Gedichten* was published by Georg Joachim Göschen in 1796.

¹⁴⁶ Caroline Christiane Luise Rudolphi, letter to Göschen (22 April 1806). Quoted in Johann Goldfriedrich, ed., *Aus den Briefen der Göschensammlung des Börsenvereins der deutschen Buchhändler zu Leipzig* (Leipzig: 1918), p. 12.

Subscribenten', and alludes to the fact that 'mehrere hundert geforderte Exemplare konnten nicht abgeliefert werden, weil sich die Auflage vergriffen hatte.'¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Susanne von Bandemer claims that it is 'Der gütige Beyfall und die Aufmunterung meiner [...] Gönner' which gave her the courage to announce a new collection of poems and essays.¹⁴⁸ Caroline Auguste Fischer used her publishing success to bargain for increased payment for her next novel. Her previous novels had been printed in large numbers ('Gräff und Kühn hatten gewiß zwey tausend Exemplare gedruckt') and sold so well that a second edition became necessary ('[sie] machten, wie Sie wissen, beyde eine zweyte Auflage'). She therefore felt encouraged ('dieses gibt mir Muth') to ask for more money, which her publisher could pay in the knowledge that he would recoup his outlay.¹⁴⁹ Wallenrodt, as has already been noted, also robustly defended literature that, although perhaps not of the highest aesthetic quality, nonetheless served a purpose and pleased many:

Ich würde bei dem eignen Bekenntniß der Unvollkommenheit meiner Schriften das Publikum um Verzeihung bitten, sie bekannt gemacht zu haben, wenn ich nicht wüßte, daß sie dennoch von vielen mit Vergnügen wären gelesen worden.¹⁵⁰

Interestingly, her correspondence changed over time: the despairing and pleading tone of her letters to Nicolai during her time in Berlin vanished after she successfully published a series of books in Leipzig. Her increase in confidence is furthermore revealed by her publication of an overtly political treatise on the dangers of the French Revolution in 1794.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Elise Sommer, 'Anzeige', *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* 3, no. 9 (1810), p. 77.

¹⁴⁸ Susanne von Bandemer, 'Ankündigung', *Der Teutsche Merkur* 1 (1792).

¹⁴⁹ Fischer, letter to Zimmer, [no date] II 1557-58, FDH, Frankfurt am Main.

¹⁵⁰ Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt*, p. 650.

¹⁵¹ See Wallenrodt, *Das Leben der Frau von Wallenrodt*, pp. 711-712. Elke Ramm, 'Schreiben aus "Brodnoth". Johanna Isabella Eleonore von Wallenrodt (1740-1819)', in *Beruf: Schriftstellerin*.

The belief that her work was both important and popular gave Betty Gleim the self-confidence to remain steadfast during a dispute with Göschen over the number of books she had allegedly ordered from him. After Göschen had agreed to publish the first part of her *Lesebuch* for school children in 1808, Gleim had ordered 260 copies of the book, for sale and distribution in eight of Bremen's primary schools.¹⁵² When Göschen had printed the second part in 1810, he decided to consider her original order for 260 copies of part *one* as an order which applied to part *two* as well. Without access to Göschen's own business papers and his side of the correspondence, it is difficult to know whether this was a genuine mistake on his part, or whether he decided to try his luck. Betty Gleim's response makes plain her confusion and anger about this incident, but she is not intimidated:

Es waltet ein Mißverständniß zwischen uns ob, daß ich eilends zu heben suchen muß. Als ich vergangenes Jahr die 260 Ex. des ersten Theils meines Lesebuchs bestellte, bezog ich diese bloß auf den ersten Theil, hätt ich ahnen können, daß ich damit gleich an die folgenden Theile gebunden gewesen wäre, ich hätte überall die Bestellung nicht machen dürfen.¹⁵³

She rejects his attempt to force her to take the 260 copies by referring to what she knows to be normal business practice: 'allein ich glaube dies um so weniger, da ich weiß, daß, wenn die Theile eines Werks nicht auf einmal, sondern nacheinander erscheinen, man jeden Theil [...] besonders kaufen kann.' She concludes her discussion of the matter by appealing to his sympathy:

Schreibende Frauen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, ed. Karin Tebben (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), pp. 94-95.

¹⁵² See Gleim, letter to Göschen, 2 February 1810, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 15, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹⁵³ Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 2 February 1810, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 15, DBSM, Leipzig.

Wenn die 260 Ex. des zweiten Theils wirklich abgegangen sind, so sehe ich mich in großer Verlegenheit, denn was damit anfangen? Der erste Theil ist in lauter Elementarschulen eingeführt, die den zweiten Theil gar nicht zu gebrauchen im Stande sind, und mit den anderen Schulen stehe ich nicht in Verbindung. Vom ersten Theil noch 60 Ex. und außerdem 60 Ex. vom zweiten außer den 260? mein Gott was soll ich damit machen?

This incident illustrates Turner's assertion that there is no indication that publishers treated women any differently from men, '[...] there is no reason to assume that women were exempted from "hard-headed" or deceitful business practices.'¹⁵⁴

In Betty Gleim's case, she was clearly more than able to look after her own interests. The self-assurance she gained from her public is highlighted in Gleim's negotiation of a fee for her work. She wrote:

Sie haben gewünscht, dass ich bestimmt angeben möchte, wieviel Honorar ich verlange. Ich bin daher so frey Ihnen anzuzeigen, daß ich jeden Bogen beyliegenden Manuskripts nicht gern unter 10 rt in Golde weggebe.¹⁵⁵

Just in case Göschen had his doubts about whether her book was worth that much, she adds:

Ich bin überzeugt, daß diese Forderung nicht unbillig ist, und daß mir sie leicht ein Buchhändler bewilligen wird, indem dies Buch gleich in 5 hiesige Schulen und gewiß in noch mehr eingeführt, auch hier außerdem recht guten Abgang finden wird.

She strengthens her case by appealing to Göschen's business sense, adding

Will man dasselbe als Unterhaltungsbuch für Kinder, zu Weihnachts = Neujahrs = und Geburtstags = Geschenken in die Welt schicken, so dünkt mir, bleibt nicht das geringste Risiko übrig.

This is not just a keen business sense, however. She is convinced of the merit of her book: 'Dazu kommt endlich, daß diese Schrift nach einem ganz neuen Plane entworfen

¹⁵⁴ Turner, *Living by the pen*, p. 97.

¹⁵⁵ Betty Gleim, letter to Georg Joachim Göschen, 22 July 1808, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 1, DBSM, Leipzig.

ist, und wirklich eine Lücke in der pädagogischen Literatur ausfüllt.' On top of that fee, which Göschen granted her, she asked for 25 free copies for herself, a common request at the time. When she suggested her next book project to him, she did not wait for him to ask what her conditions were; she just announced them straightaway.

Ich wünsche diese Schrift auf gleiches Papier, mit denselben Lettern und in gleichem Format wie das Buch der Demoiselle Caroline Rudolphi, Gemälde weiblicher Erziehung, gedruckt, und verlange alsdann für den so gedruckten Bogen 10 Rt in Golde, und außerdem 25 Frey-Exemplare. Ueberlegen Sie nun einmal diese Vorschläge, verehrter Freund, und machen Sie, daß wir recht bald einen Contract dieses Buchs wegen, abschließen können.¹⁵⁶

Her fee of 10 Reichstaler in gold was good, even slightly above average. The most commonly paid honorarium per printed sheet was 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ rt – 8 $\frac{1}{3}$ rt (Reichstaler). Successful authors commanded an average of 10-11 $\frac{1}{3}$ rt, occasionally more.¹⁵⁷ It is estimated that one Thaler bought '15 Pfund Fleisch extra Qualität, oder 25 Pfund Brot, zwei Pfund Tabak aus Porto Rico [...] oder zwei Bouteillen Champagner [...] oder ein Paar Schuhe', so the fee for *Erziehung und Unterricht des weiblichen Geschlechts* would have allowed Betty Gleim to buy 3,150 pounds of meat, or 420 bottles of champagne.¹⁵⁸ And she was not the only woman to be paid well for her work. Caroline Auguste Fischer, for example, rejected the offer of 11 fl [Gulden, worth about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a Reichstaler] per sheet from Johann Georg Zimmer, and explained that: '[Dies Honorar ist] weit unter denjenigen (...), für welche ich bis jetzt gearbeitet habe.' She demanded at least 15 fl (around 11 rt). The manuscript letter contains a note in the margin from Zimmer in which

¹⁵⁶ Gleim, letter to Göschen, 14 April 1809, Gö-Slg Gruppe A, Kasten 5, Gleim, 7, DBSM, Leipzig.

¹⁵⁷ See Steiner, *Das Autorenhonorar*, p. 138. These statistics do not include exceptional fees paid to a small number of exceptional authors, like Goethe. These figures are based on majority fees, though there were of course differences between publishing houses; Cotta for instance was especially generous. See Steiner, *Das Autorenhonorar*, pp. 130-136.

¹⁵⁸ See Krieg, *Materialien*, p. 104.

he calculated that, if her novel ran to twenty sheets, he would have to pay her a total sum of 300 fl.¹⁵⁹ Caroline von Wolzogen managed to get paid twice for *Agnes von Lilien* (1798): its publication in Schiller's journal *Die Horen* earned her 135 rt, whilst its publication in book form earned her another 500 rt.¹⁶⁰ Sophie Mereau was paid 10 rt per sheet in 1805 for *Bunte Reihe kleiner Schriften*, and twice as much for her *Gedichte* (1800-2). Her commercially most successful work appears to have been her novel *Amanda und Eduard* (1803), for which she earned 22 rt 16 gr (Groschen).¹⁶¹ It does not appear that male writers were better paid than women. For example, Clemens Brentano received only 9 fl per sheet for volume one of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. The fees paid to these women, all above average and in line with fees for male authors, would suggest that women authors did indeed command influence as producers of literature for which there was a market, and that they were aware of their power.

Conclusion

Silvia Bovenschen refers to letters as women's 'Entrée-Billet' into literature, by which she means that letters taught women how to write.¹⁶² Publishers' correspondence with female authors indicates that letters were in another, more practical sense, 'entry tickets'. Ortrun Niethammer's statement

¹⁵⁹ Fischer, letter to Zimmer, [no date] II 1557-58, FDH, Frankfurt am Main.

¹⁶⁰ Brandes, 'Frauenroman', p. 46.

¹⁶¹ Other examples include Johanna Schopenhauer, who received 10 rt per sheet for *Ausflucht an den Rhein und dessen nächste Umgebung* (1818) from Brockhaus, and Marianne Ehrmann, who received up to 22 fl for her work on Cotta's journal *Amaliens Erholungsstunden* (1790-92). All examples from Steiner, *Das Autorenhonorar*, p. 142, p. 297. See also Sophie von La Roche's earnings as documented in Gudrun Loster-Schneider, "'Ich aber nähre mich wieder mit einigen phantastischen Briefen.'" Zur Problematik der schriftstellerischen Profession. Sophie von La Roche (1730-1807)', in *Beruf: Schriftstellerin. Schreibende Frauen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Karin Tebben (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), pp. 65-66.

¹⁶² Bovenschen, *Imaginierte Weiblichkeit*, p. 212.

Indem Frauen zur Publikation *drängen*, werden gleichzeitig ihr Wille zur Präsenz und der Versuch der Teilhabe an der gesellschaftlichen Ordnung deutlich¹⁶³

is especially pertinent, as women do indeed seem to have ‘pressed’ for their publication.

These letters are of great importance, simply because they help restore the real historical identity of women writers in this period. Knowledge of the contemporary gender discourse, along with basic historical assumptions about the status of women, has resulted in what has been called ‘pessimistic criticism’ – analysis that begins, and ends, with how women were prevented from writing. But if we take as a starting point women’s actual activity, rather than the possible obstacles to women’s activity, we can provide a balance to that pessimism. Indeed, the examination here of women’s correspondence with publishers, should lead to ‘optimistic criticism’.¹⁶⁴ The results of the investigation necessitate a revision of the simple assertion that women could only publish with the help of male friends and mentors.

Seen in the context of the book market, women’s business letters explain why female authors were present in the market in such large numbers, whilst at the same time revising our knowledge of the nature of women’s letters. But at the same time, they provide us with glimpses of women who wanted to become authors, but did not succeed in securing publication. The number of women wishing to become participants in literary

¹⁶³ Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 86. The emphasis is mine.

¹⁶⁴ The distinction between ‘pessimistic’ and ‘optimistic’ criticism was first made by Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres, “‘That girl is an entirely different character!’ Yes, but is she a feminist?’: Observations on Sophie von la Roche’s *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*”, in *German women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: a social and literary history*, ed. Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 137-138.

activity was even larger than the already impressive number of women who did publish successfully.

Whilst generalizations about women's (literary) history tend to reinforce unhistoric notions of women as a monolithic group, it is possible to generalize about opportunities which existed for women authors around 1800, and which some of them, though certainly not all, evidently managed to seize. It would be disingenuous to pretend at this point that all women authors wrote self-assured business letters to publishers. A few did compose letters which were meant to inspire pity and sympathy in the (male) publisher for the female writer suffering from an adverse fate.¹⁶⁵ But the prospects for women writers, especially with regard to the receptivity of the market, were better than they had been in any period previously. These socio-economic developments help to explain the remarkable incursion women made into the literary market place in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

¹⁶⁵ See for instance the nine letters from Philippine Engelhard, née Gatterer, to Friedrich Nicolai (1799-1805). Nicolai Nachlaß, SBB – PK, Berlin.

Chapter 5: Femininity and the Public Sphere

Die Frau [...] hat ihre eigene zuweilen nicht unwichtige Rolle im gesellschaftlichen Leben zu behaupten.¹

Introduction

German women's writing at the turn of the eighteenth century must be re-evaluated. My previous chapters have shown how modern scholarship often fails to appreciate the complexity of its subject. Too often, the dogmas of the period are taken as descriptive, not proscriptive. Thus an authority is imputed to prohibitions on women's literary activity that, in the light of the evidence, they do not deserve.

That conclusion may be so far correct. Yet it requires an examination of women's written expression to confirm it. Certainly, women left their proscribed confinement by writing: but was that the end of their transgression? Scholars have often assumed so, emphasizing the general exclusion of women from public life. Karin Tebben argues that authorship was in itself a great threat to a woman's social respectability, and Susanne Kord deems female authorship a double risk: financial and personal.² Both scholars assume that this explains the frequently conformist nature of women's writing, and the disguised nature of subversive elements – where they exist at all. Barbara Becker-Cantarino even goes so far as to characterize the entire period of the reformation to the romantic era as 'eine Phase der Gesichts- und Geschichtslosigkeit für Frauen' because of

¹ Emilie von Berlepsch, 'Ueber einige zum Glück der Ehe nothwendige Eigenschaften und Grundsätze', *Neuer Teutscher Merkur* May (1791), pp. 100-101.

² Kord, *Ein Blick*, p. 226. Tebben, 'Soziokulturelle Bedingungen weiblicher Schriftkultur', p. 25.

their lack of participation in public discourse and public life.³ Under threat, at risk, oppressed: is this an accurate description of women writers' predicament?

This chapter investigates three areas from which we might assume women were excluded, and in which we might assume they were constrained by gender-ideology. I will examine, firstly, women's writings on gender from the *Teutscher Merkur* (TM); and secondly, women's published responses to Campe's *Väterlicher Rath*. In the third section, I will consider examples of women who, though it was taboo, wrote about their private lives. They used publication as a means of reclaiming their public image and reputation. All three sections question this hypothesis that the public sphere was an innately hostile space for women. They show in fact, that women saw publication not as a risk, but as an opportunity.

Journals – The Case of the *Teutscher Merkur*

In this period, if women wanted to publish their work without any threat to their social or financial standing, contributing to a journal seemed ideal. Journals allowed the publication of minor pieces that might not warrant stand-alone publication. They gave women access to a broader readership than individual works might command. Contributors, both male and female, could remain anonymous. Thus journals enabled women to participate in the debates of their day, Elisa von der Recke's articles in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* being a good example of such participation. The role of women's journals and female editors has been studied elsewhere and will not be the focus

³ Barbara Becker-Cantarino. *Schriftstellerinnen der Romantik. Epoche - Werk - Wirkung* (Munich: Beck, 2000), p. 27.

of this discussion.⁴ Instead, I will highlight the possibilities offered to women by literary journals such as Wieland's *Teutscher Merkur* (after 1790 known as the *Neuer Teutscher Merkur*), aimed at a general, predominantly male readership.

The publication of Thomas Starnes' *Repertorium* brought women's contributions to the *Teutscher Merkur* to light; but since Ruth Dawson's article of 1984, these have received scant attention. During the lifespan of the journal, the work of thirty-one women writers was published. The majority of these contributions were poetry (twenty in all, with one contribution sometimes consisting of several poems). Only thirteen were prose texts. (Two women, Friederike Brun and Emilie von Berlepsch, published both poetry and prose in the *TM*).⁵ More than half of these women had published, or were about to publish, books in their own right. For them, the *TM* represented an opportunity to widen their readership, or to introduce themselves to the literary public before publishing a separate collection.⁶ Women's work was published throughout the existence of the journal, from the first volume to the last. In the last year of the journal's life, no fewer than fifteen contributions from women were published, for the first time, making up a significant proportion of the whole.⁷ This appears to contradict the widespread notion that, after a brief heyday in the late eighteenth century, there was progressively less space for women on the literary market after 1800.⁸ However, entire years went by without contributions from women: women's presence in the journal was still not overwhelming.⁹

⁴ Most recently in Weckel, *Häuslichkeit*.

⁵ Statistics compiled using Starnes' *Repertorium*.

⁶ Dawson, 'Women Writers in the *Teutscher Merkur*', p. 229.

⁷ Dawson, 'Women Writers in the *Teutscher Merkur*', p. 230.

⁸ Kord, *Namen*, p. 94.

⁹ Dawson, 'Women Writers in the *Teutscher Merkur*', p. 230.

Despite this, noteworthy texts did find their way into the journal. Two of these are remarkable partly because they constitute a response to texts written by men in earlier issues: women, by no means well-known authors, not only submitted contributions to the *TM*, but aimed at publicly contradicting men. In the first exchange, in 1782, a woman identified as Johanna Susanna Bohl wrote *Winde und Männer. Antwort eines Frauenzimmers auf Dr. Sheridans Wolken und Weiber*, in response to Johann Gottlieb Kreutzfeld's translation of a poem by Sheridan, entitled: *Wolken und Weiber oder A New Simile for the Ladies, nach Dr. Sheridan*.¹⁰ Both poems are humorous in tone, but they very openly address the vexed question of gender relations. Bohl's poem is significant in that it sets out to redefine, from a female perspective, the gender relationship as previously characterized by a male author.

In *Wolken und Weiber*, the male poet is searching for a simile which will describe women 'in allen Punkten'.¹¹ Deciding on the image of a cloud, he proceeds to enumerate the ways in which women and clouds are alike. Both are unsteady and changeable, both in their attire and their moods. Sometimes the slightest breeze can sway them; at other times, they stubbornly oppose the strongest winds. Like clouds, women can be light and cheerful or dark and threatening. They produce thunder and lightning – with their tongues – to make even 'der bravste Kerl' cower as he would before a thunderstorm. And tears are to women as rain is to the clouds – a natural by-product of their existence. In contrast

¹⁰ Johanna Susanna Bohl, née Eberhardt (1738-1806), was the wife of the mayor of Lobeda, near Jena. Johann Gottlieb Kreutzfeld (1745-1784) was a philosopher, librarian and professor of poetry at the university of Königsberg.

¹¹ All references are to [Johann Gottlieb Kreutzfeld], 'Wolken und Weiber oder A New Simile for the Ladies, nach Dr. Sheridan', *Der Teutsche Merkur* May (1782).

perhaps to these telling comparisons, Kreutzfeld contends that women's ideas lack substance and are, like clouds, built on air.

The comparisons become less playful when Kreutzfeld refers to the widely held belief that clouds brought with them 'Pest und Gift', the equivalent of women's gossip: 'ein guter Name, sagt man auch, / Sterb' oft von einem Weiber-Hauch.' Also he contends that, analogous to clouds, women always obscure the horizons of men's vision. 'Ich seh, tritt sie mir vors Gesicht, / Dann keinen Himmel ausser - - Ihr.' The poem's attitude to women is curious: it attempts humour in describing women's supposed character, but many of the characteristics mentioned are surely serious character-faults. It is no surprise, therefore, that Johanna Susanna Bohl felt stung into writing a reply.

Her poem is a quick and direct riposte, as the subtitle indicates – *Antwort eines Frauenzimmers auf Dr. Sheridans Wolken und Weiber*. It does not dispute the relationship between the sexes as outlined in *Wolken und Weiber*, but rather challenges the interpretation of women's motives. The poem begins in a mock-polite tone: 'Wir danken ganz höflich für die Ehre / Dem Herren, der uns in die Sphäre / Des schön gestirnten Himmels versezt'.¹² She too has searched for a simile to describe men, and has found the wind. 'Denn nichts unterm Monde schmiegt sich so an / Das wolkichte Weib, als der windichte Mann.' Her poem ridicules the idea of womanhood propagated by Rousseau – that women's existence is only meaningful in relation to men.

Die Wolke bekommt erst vom Winde das Leben,
Muß nach Befehl sich bald senken bald heben,

¹² All references are to [Johanna Susanna Bohl], 'Winde und Männer. Antwort eines Frauenzimmers auf Dr. Sheridans Wolken und Weiber', *Der Teutsche Merkur* July (1782).

Muß immer sich lassen treiben und jagen,
 Nach ihres gestrengen Herrn Behagen,
 Und dient ihm vielmahls nur zum Spiel,
 Darf nicht gehn wenn und wohin sie will.
 Denn öfters jagt nur zum Zeitvertreib
 Der Windichte Mann das wolkichte Weib.

As this second stanza shows, women's dependence on men makes them changeable, for they are then easily exploited for men's amusement. Bohl then redefines the characteristics of clouds, in antithesis to Kreutzfeld's poem: far from wreaking havoc, clouds lessen the destructive force of the sun, and 'seegen durch Einfluß das Feld und das Thal.' When the winds are pleasant and mild, clouds are gentle too. Unfortunately, winds are frequently anything other than pleasant, and resemble 'ein wütender Orcan' instead. Men's temper and anger (often triggered by minor occurrences) are unleashed on women, 'So müssens die armen Wolken entgelten. / Da gehts an ein Brausen, ein Toben und Schelten.' Whatever chaos might be caused by a black cloud, it is only 'zusammengetriebene Noth / Der Winde'. Were clouds unencumbered by the wind, she posits, they would not cause a disturbance to anyone. Clouds are helpless against the power of the wind, which in turn is described in threatening tones: it is 'schreckend', 'furchtbar', 'gestreng' and 'ungestüm'. She rejects the idea that women's gossiping destroys reputations, and suggests instead that 'alle Seuchen und Plagen [werden] / Von Winden durch die Welten getragen.' Men's destructive potential – inherent in their ability to corrupt innocent girls – is also hinted at: 'Sanftlockend bei Tage und Tödtend bey Nacht, / Verderbt er was sie lange gepflegt und bewacht.' Bohl also rejects the notion that general statements can be made about women as though they did not exhibit any individual traits, 'Drum kann auch der Schluß nicht wahr und gemein / Auf alle Wolken zu machen seyn.' She ends the poem with a question:

Doch Eine Frage sey mir erlaubt,
 Und die man nicht überflüßig glaubt.
 Was wär denn ein solcher Gast [Mann] wohl werth,
 Der Kraft und Vermögen uns aufgezehrt?
 [...]
 Bey dem man viel schmerzliche Nächte durchwacht,
 Und Der Wirth und Wohnung noch lächerlich macht,
 Ja was von dem allen das bitterste ist,
 Den beissenden Spott noch mit Schmeicheln beschließt?

Bohl gives the answer to the question herself, sounding a defiant note on which the poem ends:

So wahr ich eine Wolke bin
 Ich gäb nicht ein Tröpfchen Regen um ihn!

Bohl's reply ensures that, appropriately, the last word on the subject of women belonged to a woman, not a man.

Of course, this is only one example of a woman contradicting the male perspective in public. But there are others. In 1793, a woman wrote a poem on waltzing, in response to a male-authored poem published earlier in the *Teutscher Merkur*. In *Das Walzen*, believed to have been the work of Friedrich von Köpken, the author rejected the fashionable waltz on two grounds: firstly, it was un-German, and secondly, immodest.¹³ The dance is described as involving 'dieses wilde Schwingen / Wo sich Mann und Mädchen dicht umschlingen', which contrasts with the traditional German virtues of 'Grazie und Anmuth'.¹⁴ Waltzing is not worthy of the noble German people who are 'gewöhnnt an Edelthaten, / Groß im Kriege'. German women, once gentle and virtuous, are singled out as being especially depraved. Köpken sees worrying sexual overtones in the waltz:

¹³ Friedrich von Köpken (1737-1811) was a poet and civil servant in Magdeburg.

¹⁴ All references are to [Friedrich von Köpken], 'Das Walzen', *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* February (1793).

Wie? Sie beben nicht mit scheuem Blick
 Vor der Wilden Walzer dichten Reihen,
 Die des Tanzes Grazie entweihen,
 Vor den wüsten Orgyen zurück!

The blame for this deplorable state of affairs lies with women. For Köpken, women are responsible for the moral health of the nation. The author ends the poem by appealing to the German people to return to their old ways, 'Dann erst, wenn bey sanften Reihentänzen, / Euch die Grazien mit Rosen kränzen, / Dann erst ist Terpsichore versöhnt!'

Henriette Ernestine Christiane von Gilden anonymously published a poem in response to Köpken three months later, refuting his allegations of immorality. In *An den Verfasser des Gedichts: das Walzen. (Im 2ten Stücke des Teutschen Merkurs 1793, wie auch an Herrn Menschenschreck im Bürgerschen Musen-Allmanach dieses Jahres)*, she argues that the dance is not un-German, and an innocent pleasure. It was Köpken's judgement that was flawed: 'Schiefes Urtheil [trifft] unsere reinsten Thaten'.¹⁵ His judgement is discredited, not the dancers: 'Doch, wen schändet solch ein Blick?' He is a 'Freudenstöhler', who cannot appreciate true beauty – he lacks an 'offnes Aug' und reine Güte'. She insinuates that Köpken must be mixing with the wrong crowd, if immodesty is all he can see in the dance ('Wenn in deinen Kreisen/ Man sich tummelt nach Bachanten-Weisen'). 'Grazie and Anmuth', the two qualities he had found lacking in the waltz, are in fact the ideal of its execution. He is clearly unable to appreciate the beauty and nobility of the 'seelenvolles Schweben' of waltzing, 'Und so höhnt er kühn, das was er nie verstand.' To condemn the dance because of the dancers would be as illogical as

¹⁵ All references are to [Henriette Ernestine Christiane von Gilden], 'An den Verfasser des Gedichts: das Walzen. (Im 2ten Stücke des Teutschen Merkurs 1793, wie auch an Herrn Menschenschreck im Bürgerschen Musen-Allmanach dieses Jahres. S. 159)', *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* May (1793).

condemning fine wine on account of the existence of drunkards. Gilden accuses Köpken of seeing 'die Schale statt dem Kerne'. This is the cause of his misguided criticism.

Her spirited defence of the waltz is interesting for several reasons. It shows that women did participate in general public debates about contemporary phenomena such as waltzing. Also, Gilden rejected the more specific charge of immodesty and immorality levelled against the female sex in Köpken's poem. Although this exchange did not ostensibly deal with gender relations, Gilden was spurred into speaking up for her sex and rejecting the criticisms Köpken made of women in particular. However, Gilden's male contemporaries do not seem particularly to have welcomed her intervention. Unlike Köpken's poem, Gilden's appeared accompanied by a number of disparaging footnotes by Wieland, in which he contradicts her and points out the poem's technical deficiencies. The metre is scrutinized ('die zwey fehlenden Sylben'). A quotation from Voltaire, intended to end the poem with a bang, is dismissed ('Ich bitte um Erlaubniß hinzuzusetzen, daß Voltaire vielleicht auch hier [...] Unrecht haben könnte.').¹⁶ The editor explicitly conspires with Köpken to undermine the credibility of Gilden's argument because waltzing is 'auch mir verhaßt'. Women could enter into public debates, it seems, but not without a censorious chaperone. But we should not forget the strength of Gilden's desire to write the poem and have it published in a mainstream journal. Despite the trivial nature and humorous tone of these contributions by Gilden and Bohl, they address crucial aspects of the relations between the sexes, and the status of women in particular.

¹⁶ See footnotes on pages 95, 96 and 97, signed 'W.'.

Few substantial prose articles by women were published in the *Teutscher Merkur*. An exception is Emilie von Berlepsch's anonymous piece entitled: *Ueber einige zum Glück der Ehe nothwendige Eigenschaften und Grundsätze*.¹⁷ Published in two parts in the issues of May and June 1791, it is also accompanied by footnotes from the editor. In this case, however, the editor endorses the piece. It has been abandoned in a desk drawer for over ten years, he says, and is only now being published as a result of his intervention.¹⁸ The essay is formally composed as a letter of advice from a woman to her soon-to-be-married younger sister. What is surprising about the essay is the way that, amongst the highly conventional mundane advice, Berlepsch makes an outspoken attack on traditional gender relations.¹⁹ That the attack was somewhat hidden within an otherwise conventional article, is perhaps explained by the mainstream masculine nature of the *Teutsche Merkur*.

Universal ideals of femininity might be noble, Berlepsch concedes early on, but they bring with them many problems. Gentleness ('Sanftmuth') in particular, so inextricably linked with femininity since Rousseau, is desirable in a woman, but real women do not conform to such universal ideals. It is therefore unavoidable ('da sich die Gesetze der Natur nicht umstoßen lassen', p. 68) that those women who are naturally of a more fiery temper, will offend men's sensibilities. The problem here lies not with the women themselves, but with the ideals to which they have to conform. Furthermore, these

¹⁷ Emilie von Berlepsch (1755-1830). She began to publish in 1785; her first book was published in 1787, the year of her divorce.

¹⁸ See editor's footnote, page 63. Berlepsch, 'Glück der Ehe'. All further references to this essay appear in the text.

¹⁹ See Ruth P. Dawson, *The Contested Quill. Literature by Women in Germany, 1770-1800* (Newark; London: University of Delaware Press, 2002), pp. 258-263 for a discussion of the incongruities of Berlepsch's position.

ideals are misused for the purposes of oppressing and controlling women. Whilst gentleness is a good and noble idea, she criticizes 'den Mißbrauch des Ausdrucks sanft'. More specifically, she opposes the prejudice 'welches den Weibern weder eignen Willen, noch Muth ihn auszudrücken, gestatten möchte.' (p. 69) Berlepsch's critique of the status of women in late eighteenth-century Germany was not anti-establishment in purpose. She wanted to ensure happier, better and therefore lasting marriages. Her own experience of divorce in 1787, when she was thirty-two years old, undoubtedly influenced her. Like Johanna Susanna Bohl, she argues that women are in an undignified position, whereby they are worth nothing in themselves, and depend on men for everything. 'Natur und Gesellschaft, Vorurtheil und Nothwendigkeit, haben unsern Zustand so eingeschränkt, daß wir wenig durch uns selbst sind und seyn können.' (p. 75) The lack of equality between partners results all too easily in a despotic relationship: 'Seelenherrschaft [...] muß in wilde Anarchie ausarten, sobald sie einen despotischen Anschein gewinnt, und bloß auf das Recht des Stärkeren sich gründen will.' (p. 76) Men's rule over women might be less destructive if men were better equipped to be in charge, but, Berlepsch insists, this is not the case:

Woraus besteht die größere Anzahl derjenigen, die sich anmaßen, Ehemänner und Hausväter zu werden? Theils sind es rohe, ungebildete Jünglinge, die nie Gelegenheit hatten das weibliche Herz zu studieren, oder, was noch schlimmer ist, nur aus seichten Romanen und Spottschriften, nur im Umgang mit der verworfensten Klasse der Weiber einige Kenntnisse davon erwerben [...] (p. 77)

Such men are not capable of properly treating women who are frequently handed to them at a tender and immature age ('ein zartes junges Geschöpf, das aus der Kinderstube in ihre Arme geworfen wird', p. 78). Men do not possess the wisdom necessary to lead others ('Sie sollen Führer seyn? Ach die Blinden, die selbst eines Führers bedürfen!', p. 78). Many women also married civil servants, men who spent their lives 'in trocknen

Amtsgeschäften', where they had no opportunity to develop their 'Menschenkenntniß' or 'Biegsamkeit des Geistes'. They are equally unsuited to be husbands in charge of young women (p. 79). Add to that all those men who were prevented by worries and concerns from devoting sufficient attention to their wives, and the number of husbands 'von denen eine schonende und großmüthige Behandlung sich erwarten läßt', was not great (p. 80).

All-male society also created an atmosphere which precluded harmonious gender relations. In male company, even the least bearded youth learnt to repeat 'Spöttereyen, freche Scherze und hämische Anspielungen'. Indeed, male society is so entirely based on communal disdain for the female sex that she wonders what else men would talk about: 'Würde nicht der Strom ihrer Unterredung versiegen, wenn nicht ein Stückchen aus der weiblichen Charakteristik Stoff zu lautem Gelächter hergeben müßte?' (p. 81) But, she contends, male derision of the whole female sex is only supported by individual and exceptional instances. These are the instances which lie behind Ernst Brandes' arguments in *Ueber die Weiber* – a text specifically cited by Berlepsch as poisoning relations between the sexes (p. 83). Unlike many of her contemporaries, Berlepsch calls these unfounded prejudices against women by their proper name: misogyny. And so she maintains, 'Die nachtheiligen Folgen dieses misogynischen Tons auf Gesellschaft und Sitten überhaupt sind wohl nicht zu bezweifeln [...] doch ihr Einfluß auf das Glück der Ehe [...] wird vielleicht von vielen verkannt.' (p. 83) The misogynist stories, jokes and anecdotes which fill men's heads naturally affect their behaviour towards women (p. 86).²⁰ Attitudes towards women which may have been acceptable in an earlier age were no longer appropriate in the late eighteenth century, a time of 'allgemeine Verfeinerung

²⁰ See also Dawson, *The Contested Quill*, pp. 261-262.

und Ausbildung aller Ideen und Gefühle'. Men could no longer ignore women's needs, as these conditions had given women 'höhere Bedürfnisse des Geistes und des Herzens' (p. 86).

Berlepsch could see only one solution to these problems in gender relations, more like prevention than cure. Women's status must be altered; they must gain more '*Selbstständigkeit*' (p. 89, emphasis in the original). Berlepsch then elaborates what this self-reliance might mean for women:

Wir müssen, wir müssen allein stehen lernen! Wir müssen unsere Denkart, unsern Charakter in unsern eignen Augen so ehrwürdig machen, daß uns das Urtheil andrer in unserem geprüften und gerechten Urtheil über uns selber nicht irre machen kann. (p. 90)

The strength of Berlepsch's feeling and the sense of the urgency felt by her is expressed in the repetition of 'müssen'. There was no reason why German women should not be able to maintain their 'innere, geistige Existenz selbstständig und eigenthümlich' (p. 91). Many of women's faults, such as their gossiping, would naturally be remedied if women were less restricted. '*Selbstständigkeit*' would act as shield both against men's flattery ('der Weihrauch, den uns die Männer streuen'), and men's criticism (p. 92). Berlepsch explicitly describes the late eighteenth century as one of change, in which the old order was replaced by a new one, thereby necessitating a renegotiation of gender relations.

Die Frau ist nicht mehr bloß Haushälterin des Mannes und Gebährerin seiner Kinder; sie ist auch Erzieherin, ist Theilhaberin seiner oft sehr verwickelten Verhältnisse, und hat ihre eigene zuweilen nicht unwichtige Rolle im gesellschaftlichen Leben zu behaupten. (pp. 100-1)

The new role for women was, however, left tantalisingly indistinct. The remainder of the essay considers conventional questions of married life, and may well be part of the older essay written ten years earlier, whilst the section discussed here could have been written

shortly before publication, under the influence of the French Revolution and the proclamation of human rights. But in her discussion of the duties of a housewife in part two, she also insists on the dignity of women's familial role, and argues that housewives are unjustly forgotten, given the difficult nature of their task: 'diese Frau wird von der Welt übersehen, lebt unbekannt und stirbt vergessen!'²¹ Berlepsch does not propose the alteration of the material circumstances of women's lives. But she does suggest that they may be able to establish an independent realm within themselves in which their sense of self is inviolable. This was a radical suggestion to make, and all the more radical for having been made in the unlikely context of Wieland's *Neuer Teutscher Merkur*.

Contradicting Campe – The Examples of Esther Gad and Amalia Holst

The debate on the status of women in German society inevitably included the question of their education. As we have seen in chapter one, education provided the opportunity to put theoretical observations about women into practice. Joachim Heinrich Campe's ideas on women's education, in the best-selling *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter* (1789) can be summarized briefly. Whilst Campe essentially accepted Rousseau's model of bi-polar, complementary sexes, he disagreed with Rousseau's emphasis on the sexual nature of gender relations, and replaced it instead with a domesticated model of separate spheres.²² His purpose was to make women 'beglückende Gattinnen, bildende Mütter und weise Vorsteherinnen des inneren Hauswesens'. All

²¹ Emilie von Berlepsch, 'Fortsetzung: Ueber einige zum Glück der Ehe nothwendige Eigenschaften und Grundsätze', *Neuer Teutscher Merkur* June (1791), p. 116.

²² See Heide von Felden, 'Geschlechterkonstruktion und Bildungsvorstellungen aus Männer- und Frauensicht im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Das Geschlecht der Bildung - Die Bildung der Geschlechter*, ed. Britta L. Behm, Gesa Heinrichs, and Holger Tiedemann (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1999), pp. 37-38.

learning unrelated to these functions was deemed extraneous, and, in some cases, even dangerous.²³ Campe's reputation ensured that his views would be influential. But they did not go unchallenged. Women not only reflected on his pronouncements in private correspondence; they also criticized them in public.

Esther Gad

Esther Gad (1770-1827), author of *Einige Aeufferungen über Hrn. Kampe's Behauptungen, die weibliche Gelehrsamkeit betreffend* (1798), was born in Breslau. Her Jewish parents were well-to-do and she received a thorough education.²⁴ She married twice, divorcing her first husband (also Jewish), with whom she had had two children, in 1796. Her writings are topical, politically acute: her first publication, in 1791, concerned the emancipation of the Jews.²⁵ Having moved to Berlin, she converted to Christianity in 1801, married Wilhelm Friedrich Domeier and changed her first name to Lucie. This second, apparently happy marriage took her to Lisbon, Malta and finally London. Here she lived until her death, with only a brief visit to Germany in 1822. She counted Jean Paul, Ludwig Tieck, Henriette Herz and Rahel Varnhagen (with whom she corresponded for over thirty years) among her acquaintances.²⁶ Her writings include travel journals, stories, essays and poems. Schindel applauded her for combining the traditional feminine virtue of a 'warmes inniges Gefühl [...] für alles moralisch Schöne und Große' with a

²³ Campe, *Väterlicher Rath*, p. 16.

²⁴ Esther Gad's dates are uncertain, and conflicting information is given in secondary literature. I have given the dates as I have found them in Renate Heuer, ed., *Lexikon deutsch-jüdischer Autoren*, Archiv Bibliographia Judaica, vol. 5 (Munich; New Providence; London; Paris: Saur, 1997), pp. 487-489. This also contains a selected list of works.

²⁵ Ingrid Lohmann, 'Esther Gad (ca. 1767-1833)', in *Erziehung und Bildung des weiblichen Geschlechts. Eine kommentierte Quellensammlung zur Bildungs- und Berufsbildungsgeschichte von Mädchen und Frauen*, ed. Elke Kleinau and Christine Mayer (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1996), p. 54.

²⁶ Her correspondence with Jean Paul is reprinted in Hahn, 'Geliebtester Schriftsteller'.

‘scharfsinniger, philosophischer Geist.’²⁷ Esther Gad’s unconventional life gave her an unusual perspective on gender relations, but her response to Campe has rarely been the focus of scholarly interest.²⁸ Its reprinting in 1996 will hopefully make it known to a larger body of scholars: as a woman’s response to one of the period’s major texts defining the female sphere, it is strikingly outspoken.

Originally published in Christian Daniel Voß’s *Der Kosmopolit*, Gad’s response takes the form of a letter to a friend.²⁹ But its epistolary disguise is transparent. The letter is in fact a point-by-point refutation of Campe’s main tenets. Gad argues for a much larger sphere of activity for women. The essay’s first footnote points out that Gad’s response is being published a whole nine years later than Campe’s *Väterlicher Rath*, by which time Mary Wollstonecraft had already published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Gad claims that her response had been written at the time of reading Campe, but had been left in a desk for several years.³⁰ Since then, Wollstonecraft’s ‘berühmtes Werk’ on the subject has been published, but Gad still regards her essay as valid. She doubts that Mary Wollstonecraft fully exhausted the topic, ‘sonst hätte ich meinen Aufsatz nicht drucken lassen.’ (p. 56) Moreover, the importance of the subject matter justifies the publication of her text:

Das Recht des halben Menschengeschlechts ist der höchste Gegenstand der Moral, der von allen Seiten betrachtet werden muß, um es endlich von der

²⁷ Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. 1, p. 104.

²⁸ Sigrid Lange, *Ob die Weiber Menschen sind. Geschlechterdebatten um 1800* (Leipzig: Reclam Leipzig, 1992).

²⁹ Esther Gad, ‘Einige Aeufferungen über Hrn. Kampe’s Behauptungen, die weibliche Gelehrsamkeit betreffend’, in *Erziehung und Bildung des weiblichen Geschlechts. Eine kommentierte Quellensammlung zur Bildungs- und Berufsbildungsgeschichte von Mädchen und Frauen*, ed. Elke Kleinau and Christine Mayer (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1996).

³⁰ Gad, ‘Einige Aeufferungen’, pp. 56-57. All further references to this essay appear in the text.

rechten zu werden, und dazu trägt nichts so zweckmäßig bei, als die mannigfaltige Darstellung desselben durch verschiedene Individuen. (p. 56)

So from the beginning, Gad has established her position. Fighting on the same front as Mary Wollstonecraft, she regards women's education as an issue of women's rights. Her polemic is established in her title, which refers to Campe's ideas as claims, mere 'Behauptungen'. They are not, as Campe would have his readers believe, self-evident truths founded on the laws of nature and the customs of society, but rather subjective statements which can be disproved. She gives the customary assurance that it was not unfeminine presumption ('Anmassung', p. 57) which caused her to write the essay. However, her defence against the accusation of presumption is unusual. Only a high degree of learning gives one a sense of humility, she says. Ignorance, on the other hand 'ist stolz, gnügsam mit sich selbst zufrieden'. So, whilst claiming that she is not presumptuous in seeking publication for her thoughts, she also indicates that she considers herself a 'gebildete unterrichtete [Frau]'. Many women have not had the opportunity to find out that they know nothing, and this is 'die Schuld der Männer' (p. 57). To change this situation, she asserts her right to speak on behalf of her sex, not just of herself ('Ich spreche also wahrlich nicht für mich, sondern für mein Geschlecht.')

Campe admonishes his daughter not under any circumstances to become learned, or a writer. Taking particular exception to this, Gad paraphrases Campe's main arguments and contradicts them in turn. Campe assumes that women smitten with the delights of learning would not want to return to tedious household chores. This threatens the collapse of the bourgeois family structure. But Gad does not consider Campe's statements as wise

observations of social reality. They are preconceived notions, which cannot be proved *a posteriori*. In contrast to his claim that ‘Kenntnisse und Gelehrsamkeit diejenige so despotisch beherrschten, die sich ihnen widmen’, she argues that there is daily proof that this is not a proven cause and effect. Men would be in thrall to the same despotic love of learning, and the state (‘wo Gelehrte oft das Ruder führen’) would collapse if this were true:

[es] wäre also zu fürchten, daß ein Gelehrter und Schriftsteller, welcher ein Amt hat, es schlecht verwalten müste, denn wenigen werden unwillkührliche Brodgeschäfte nach freiwilligen Geistesübungen schmekken. (p. 58)

As this was patently not true, there was no reason to suspect that it would be true of women:

wenn nun der Schritt vom Schreibepult, in die Gerichtsstube, auf die Kanzel und zum Krankenbette, täglich von Männern gethan wird; warum sollte das Weib ihre gelehrten Beschäftigungen nicht eben so willig verlassen, wenn ihre Gegenwart bei den Kindern, in der Küche, oder sonst wo im Hauswesen erfordert wird? (p. 57)

Campe’s association of learning with bad mothering was not credible anyway, as being a good mother was not related to being learned or otherwise, but to being a decent person (‘so muß das rechtschaffene Weib, die gute Mutter handeln, sie mag gelehrt, oder ungelehrt sein.’ p. 58)

Like Emilie von Berlepsch, Esther Gad objects to male generalizing about women. ‘Jedes Geschrei, welches man gegen eine ganze Gattung wegen einzelner Individuen erhebt, scheint mir höchst ungerecht.’ (p. 61) The objection applies to both sexes: individual examples of deviant men cannot be used to chastise all men.

Ich will aber hoffen, daß es [...] nicht so viele solcher Frauen giebt; nicht mehr, als es Männer geben mag, die in der Bücherwelt so sehr herum irren, daß sie die

wirkliche darüber vergessen, und die ihre geistige [sic] Bedürfnisse so unmässig befriedigen, daß ihre armen Familien zuweilen, der dringendsten körperlichen, entbehren müssen. (p. 58)

To make 'Ausnahmen zur Regel' would mean abstracting an unjust conclusion: it is therefore not justified to make 'Gelehrsamkeit' and 'Hausmütterliche Tugenden' mutually exclusive. Esther Gad's own observation of social reality has in fact taught her that the most cultivated women are often the best mothers, owing to their depth of understanding. As a result, experience convinces her of the harmlessness of women's learning. By using assumptions as though they were *a posteriori* observations, Campe has abused his influential position:

Unverantwortlich ist es daher, wenn ein Mann von Herrn Campe's entschiedenen Verdiensten, Meinungen *a priori*, öffentlich hinwirft, die durch die anerkannte Autorität eines solchen Mannes, zu Gesezen gestempelt werden. (p. 59)

Gad then confronts Campe's argument that lack of physical strength makes women unsuited to mental exertion. She begins by observing that physical strength is no guarantee of mental strength. But the main thrust of her argument derives from women's role in society. Precisely because women are weaker, and face a greater multitude of possible worries, they require the comfort and distraction which learning can provide.

Und mit welchem Rechte will man die Hälfte des Menschengeschlechts von dem bewährten Troste in Leiden, ausschließen? Die Hälfte, die des Trostes am öftersten bedarf? (p. 59)

Women require this comfort, being more prone to illness, financially dependent, and generally without allies: 'wer ist durch physische, moralische und politische Gesezze mehr für die Einsamkeit bestimmt, als das Weib?' Women's natural and social circumstances require them to find a shield which makes them strong and patient in the endurance of

their manifold woes. Like Emilie von Berlepsch, Esther Gad also sees a need for women to create an inner sanctum ('eine Welt in uns') which is inviolable ('die *keine* Erschütterung umstürzen kann', p. 60). Learning, which she defines as 'die Erwerbung guter, nützlicher Kenntnisse', is the shield she recommends. Men's present position, whereby they admit that women are the weakest, whilst denying them all possible means of strengthening themselves, is extraordinarily inconsistent, if not positively malicious (p. 60). Not only is learning no threat to the duties of women: it is actually advantageous for their performance.

Again like von Berlepsch, Gad contends that supposedly typical flaws in the female character would disappear if women's circumstances changed ('Man wirft uns mit Recht und Unrecht unzählige kleinliche Empfindungen vor, und doch erlaubt man uns nichts Großes'). For example, women's vanity results from the emphasis placed on women's looks: 'ist es wohl ein Wunder, wenn sie sich ausschließend [...] mit Ausschmückung der Schaale beschäftigen, da man sie fast zu überreden sucht, daß sie keinen Kern haben?' (p. 60).

Also, Gad pours scorn on the general fear of women's learning. Campe advises his daughter to keep her learning to herself in order not to be despised by men and women alike. He may well call that trait feminine modesty, but to Gad, it is glorified stupidity ('Blödigkeit', p. 61). It is unlikely that all women would want to pursue learning on an advanced level: the occasional instance of a learned woman can hardly constitute a threat – even if she encourages some others. Yet female education is so universally despised

that women who exhibit every other fault of their sex, but are not learned, feel themselves to be virtuous. Similarly, calling a woman learned immediately cancels out whatever other positive qualities she might have (p. 62). But compared to other character flaws, learning is a minor blemish on a woman's character: 'Wohl dem Manne, dessen Frau keine andern Abwege einschlägt, als diese.' (p. 63) Gad concludes that the dangers of women's learning are vastly exaggerated, 'da doch in keinem Falle zu vermuthen ist, daß eine Frau durch ihr Beispiel ihr ganzes Geschlecht, zu Gelehrten oder zu Schriftstellerinnen machen wird' (p. 62).

So Esther Gad, a divorced Jewish mother, bids to become 'eine zweite Wolstonecraft',³¹ responding in print to Joachim Heinrich Campe's definition of femininity. The public nature of this response was integral to Gad's purpose: she wished to make her case to all those who had read Campe's book, and to undermine his credibility in the public eye. Private correspondence, often considered a quintessentially female realm, would not have served her objective. She chose to enter the public sphere, and use it for her own purposes. In this case, the often-cited boundary between the public and the private sphere does not stand up to scrutiny.

Amalia Holst

Esther Gad's opposition to Campe was echoed by Amalia Holst (1758-1829).³² In 1791, she anonymously published a critical appraisal of recent pedagogical trends and

³¹ Schindel, *Schriftstellerinnen*, vol. 1, p. 104.

³² Amalia Holst, née Johanne Pauline Amalie Justi, was the daughter of the famous cameralist and Prussian civil servant Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justi. See Elke Kleinau, 'Holst, Amalia, geb. von Justi', in *Demokratische Wege. Deutsche Lebensläufe aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Manfred Asendorf and Rolf von Bockel (Stuttgart; Weimar: Metzler, 1997).

methodologies, entitled *Bemerkungen über die Fehler unserer modernen Erziehung von einer praktischen Erzieherin*.³³ This represents the first critique of the philanthropist movement (to which Campe belonged) published by a woman.³⁴ This early work concentrated on child development, and the appropriateness of educational methods, in general. But nine years later she reflected on Campe's specific proposals for girls and women, in the better-known *Ueber die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höhern Geistesbildung* (1802).³⁵ Holst's work grew out of a personal involvement with education. The foreword to her study of 1791 refers to her as a 'praktische Erzieherin'. In 1792, she married the theologian Johann Ludolf Holst, with whom she ran an educational establishment in Hamburg. In time, she became more involved with women's education specifically. In 1802, she established a boarding school for girls in Hamburg, aspects of which are reflected in her second publication. Details of her biography are uncertain, but she appears to have separated from her husband, running girls' schools with the help of her daughters in various towns. Her educational model will not detain us here: what is interesting is her outspoken critique of Campe's pedagogical approach.

Holst's work of 1791 contains an anonymous preface by an editor whom we now know to be Johann Gottwerth Müller. He immediately establishes his own objectivity with regard to the book: he has read it 'mit unpartheyscher Aufmerksamkeit... Pädagogik ist nicht mein Fach; ich bin neutral'.³⁶ He is clearly conscious of the antagonistic quality

³³ [Amalia Holst], *Bemerkungen über die Fehler unserer modernen Erziehung von einer praktischen Erzieherin*. Herausgegeben vom Verfasser des Siegfried von Lindenberg [Johann Gottwerth Müller] (Leipzig: Carl Friedrich Schneider, 1791).

³⁴ Kleinau and Mayer, *Erziehung und Bildung*, vol. 1, p. 72.

³⁵ Amalia Holst, *Ueber die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höhern Geistesbildung* (Berlin: Heinrich Frölich, 1802).

³⁶ Editor's foreword, unpaginated. Emphasis in the original.

of the work, and feels he must apologize in advance, emphasizing his own personal respect for Campe:

[ich] besorge ganz nicht, weder den Herrn R. Campe, der bey mir in dem Kredit eines Wahrheit liebenden, auf Untrüglichkeiten keinen Anspruch machenden Philosophen steht, noch irgend einen redlichen Pädagogen zu beleidigen, indem ich ein Aktenstück zum Druck befördre, welches mir wichtig scheint [...]

He justifies the publication of the work in several ways: firstly, he recognized in the author 'die Tochter eines berühmten Gelehrten', which made him inclined to publish the book. Secondly, the subject matter is one of such importance 'daß man schlechterdings nichts Erhebliches [...] unterdrücken muß'. Thirdly, Holst's practical experience as an educationalist validates her opinions: 'Es sind Resultate, nicht einzelner, sondern vielfältiger Erfahrungen, worauf sich die Verfasserin stützt'. Like Esther Gad, he emphasizes the empirical nature of pedagogy: it is a subject 'wo Erfahrungen entscheidender sind als Spekulationen'. Still maintaining his own neutrality, he argues that no one had anything to lose by the publication of her work:

Hat sie Recht: so ist dem Publikum ihr Dank schuldig, daß sie ihre Beobachtungen und Zweifel freymüthig mittheilte. Hat sie Unrecht: so gewinnen die Erbauer und Pfleger des neueren Erziehungssystems desto mehr Festigkeit für dasselbe, wenn sie dieses Unrecht evident darthun. In beiden Fällen verdient sie gehöret zu werden, und dieses um so viel mehr, da sie als praktische Erzieherinn allerdings zu einer Stimme befugt ist.

Nevertheless, he defends Holst against a number of possible criticisms. Anticipating the argument that pedagogy was not a woman's proper occupation, he writes: 'Erziehung der Jugend ist die Bestimmung, die sie selbst sich gewählt hat.' Against the charge that women's thoughts, if they must have them, ought not to be published, he argues: 'Sie glaubt mit Recht, es gehöre mit zu ihrem Berufe, dasjenige öffentlich anzuzeigen, was ihr [...] nach Maßgabe eigener Erfahrungen theils mißlich, theils geradezu schädlich schien.'

This is the crux of the matter: despite these reasoned, superficially humble justifications, both Holst and her editor were well aware of the work's explosive nature. Holst's criticism was aimed at specific people, notably Campe. Although the editor might claim that the work was not intended to cause offence, the nature of Holst's argument practically ensured that it would. The attack on Campe and his collaborators was explicit and indeed part of a larger project: the editor explains that it will be followed by an exposition of Holst's own pedagogical model. It appears that this second part remained unpublished, although her next work *Ueber die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höhern Geistesbildung* partly fulfilled its function.

In the text following Müller's preface, Holst consistently refers to Campe's work, openly contradicting him: 'Je weniger ich aber beynahe allem, was Herr Campe in dieser schönen Abhandlung vorträgt, meinen Beyfall versagen kann, um desto mehr muß ich beklagen, daß er in der Anwendung ganz wider seine eignen Regeln widerfährt' (p. 38). Campe's claims that children should not be taught too much, too early, or all at once, is 'befremdend', when one considers the 'zahlreiche Menge von Lesebüchern, die Herr Campe für die Jugend geschrieben hat, und durch Uebersetzungen aus andern Sprachen noch vermehrt', since they contain 'Sittenlehre, Religion, Staatskunde, Psychologie, Kritik, Schöne Wissenschaften u.s.w.' (p. 38, 39). She also accuses Campe of not understanding children's mental development: 'Herr Campe selbst aber scheint die Sphäre des für Kinder verständlichen weiter auszudehnen, als ihre dermalige Fassungskraft reicht.' (p. 65) She continues in a faintly mocking tone: 'Einem Manne von Herrn Campens Einsicht dürfen wir die Unmöglichkeit nicht erst zeigen, einem Kinde

von so zartem Alter Begriffe der Art verständlich zu machen.’ (pp. 65-66) Joining in the general concern about masturbation, she argues that an overheated imagination, fuelled by too much reading, is to blame for this problem.³⁷ Campe’s writings are culpable here too: ‘Herrn Campens [...] Lesebücher für Kinder haben bey ihren unverkennbaren Verdiensten das Nachtheilige, daß sie sämmtlich, mehr oder weniger, auf die Einbildungskraft der Kinder wirken.’ (p. 86) And not only is Campe partly responsible: he is also surprisingly complacent. ‘Dieser Gelehrte scheint den erwähnten Schaden nicht zu beherzigen [...]’ (p. 87). Throughout the *Bemerkungen*, Amalia Holst bases her arguments against Campe on her observations of the cognitive development of children. At no point does she differentiate between the sexes. This emphasis on a common humanity before gender identity is also at the root of her next book, in which she insists that women are to be educated first and foremost as human beings, and only then as women.

Holst’s second book was not published anonymously. Though ostensibly of a broader conception, dealing as it does with women’s ‘Bestimmung’ in general, Holst nevertheless returns to her dispute with Campe and his followers. In *Väterlicher Rath*, Campe repeatedly maintains that women’s education ought to be geared solely towards fulfilling their duties as women. Amalia Holst considered this principle to be unjust, unhealthy and a product of prejudice. Male educationalists were biased against women; and in her introduction, she declares her intention to challenge their texts, contradicting both premisses and conclusions:

³⁷ See Hull, *Sexuality*, pp. 258-280.

Es schien mir ein Bedürfniß der Zeit, daß diese wichtige Materie, über welche fast Männer allein bereits so viel geschrieben haben, auch einmal von der andern, von der weiblichen, Partei zur Sprache käme. Männer, wenn sie unser Geschlecht beurtheilen, sind immer parteiisch für das ihrige, und lassen dem unsrigen selten die gehörige Gerechtigkeit wiederfahren. [...] nur ein Weib also kann die individuelle Lage des Weibes in allen ihren Zweigen und Abstufungen gehörig beurtheilen.³⁸

She was aware that she herself was not unbiased: 'So viel es mir möglich war, ließ ich den Männern volle Gerechtigkeit wiederfahren; aber mein Geist empörte sich auch gegen die Ungerechtigkeiten mehrerer Männer.' But she had observed the increase in texts expounding the nature of women's 'Bestimmung', and noted the way in which the concept was used to limit women's sphere of influence:

Seit kurzem ward so viel über die weibliche Bestimmung geschrieben. Männer wagten es, unserm Geiste die Linie vorzuziehen, über welche im Felde des Wissens er nicht hinüber schreiten dürfe; es stehe, wännen sie, eine höhere Ausbildung unseres Verstandes mit unseren individuellen Pflichten im Widerspruch. (p. 1)³⁹

Someone must speak out. She does not relish the position of a 'Revolutionspredigerin' (p. 6). But while other women are silent, it is up to her to ask important questions in public:

im Namen unsers ganzen Geschlechts fodre ich die Männer auf, uns die Rechte zu beweisen, deren sie sich anmaßen, die eine ganze Hälfte des Menschengeschlechts zurückzusetzen, ihnen die Quelle der Wissenschaften zu untersagen [...] (p. 3)

Her stance was moderate: she combined a recognition of women's position in the world ('[das Weib] in seinem dreifachen Beruf') with a belief in women's higher education: 'sie

³⁸ Holst, *Ueber die Bestimmung des Weibes*, pp. IX-X. All further page references appear in the text.

³⁹ This striking visual image of drawing a line before women's minds, over which they must not step, is memorably echoed in the work of Caroline Auguste Fischer, sixteen years later. 'Man erzählt von den Hühnern, daß, wenn man ihnen einen Strich mit Kreide vor den Schnabel zieht, sie beständig darauf hinstarren, und sich einbilden, nicht weiter kommen zu können. Ob dasselbe von den Hähnen gilt, weiß ich nicht; daß man sich aber, statt dieses Kreidestrichs, des Wortes Weiblichkeit gegen die Weiber mit demselben Erfolg bedient habe, ist keinem Zweifel unterworfen.' Caroline Auguste Fischer, 'Justine', in *Kleine Erzählungen und romantische Skizzen*, ed. Anita Runge, *Frühe Frauenliteratur in Deutschland* (Hildesheim; Zurich; New York: Olms, 1988), pp. 293-294.

sei [...] auf das innigste überzeugt, daß die Erfüllung dieser Berufspflichten, in ihrem ganzen, höchsten Umfange [...] durch die höhere Ausbildung [...] recht eigentlich [...] gewürdigt und vollendet wurde.’ (pp. 1-2)

No apologies accompany this second publication. Holst knew she seemed like a revolutionary, and that critics would find her book improper and impudent.⁴⁰ However, this did not stifle her self-expression, or her opposition to those men who sought to impose constraints on women’s lives. Publication was the only way that her voice would gain weight and importance in public discourse. Both Esther Gad and Amalia Holst refused to perform contemporary gender discourse as prescribed by male pedagogues. As the power of discourse relies on performative repetition to ensure its hegemony, their public refusal reveals the permeability of discourse and social constructs such as women’s education.

‘Nun wird’s mir zu toll gemacht’: Reclaiming Women’s Reputation⁴¹

So far, we have seen women taking up the pen publically to respond to issues of the day, contradicting male intellectuals and expressing the female point of view. These are spirited acts, but the women were able to argue either that their contributions were intended to be humorous (as in the case of Johanna Susanna Bohl), or that they served the greater common good (as in the case of Amalia Holst). A woman speaking out in public purely on her own behalf was a more complicated matter. According to everyone from

⁴⁰ It was indeed reviewed unsympathetically, for instance in the *Kaiserlich-privilegirten Hamburgischen Neuen Zeitung*. See Kleinau, ‘Holst, Amalia, geb. von Justi’, p. 285.

⁴¹ Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld to Friedrich Nicolai, 8 August 1793. Reprinted in Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 155.

Rousseau to Schiller and Campe, women were not supposed to please themselves. Their actions ought to serve others: children, husbands, parents. There are, however, examples of women who do not fit this mould. Despite the prohibitions placed on women's actions, some women did play a part in public life. This left them open to criticism; criticism which some women bravely confronted. In doing so, they went further than most other women writers in challenging received notions of femininity; and what they wrote inaugurated a new genre for women's writing – the unapologetic apologia – to which we will now turn.

'Ihr Ton [war] bisweilen [...] am unrechten Ort feyerlich': Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld⁴²

Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld (1745-1815) was well-known in theatrical circles for her dramatic performances. She took up writing in order to tell her life-story, and set the record straight on a number of issues. Discussing her autobiography is complicated, as the status of the text is ambiguous. Two hand-written versions exist (written in 1782 and 1793) which differ notably in their depiction of several stages of her life.⁴³ Excerpts of the autobiography appeared posthumously, but none of these texts is entirely identical with either hand-written version.⁴⁴ However, a letter she wrote to Friedrich Nicolai in 1793, offering him the (second) manuscript of her lifestory, survives; and provides us at least with an account of her motives.⁴⁵ She begins by saying that, although she has withdrawn from public life (she retired from the stage in 1785), she has not been allowed to enjoy

⁴² Heinrich August Ottokar Reichard on Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld. Quoted in Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 158, footnote 157.

⁴³ Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, pp. 162-168.

⁴⁴ Niethammer lists all five publications from 1828-1988 in Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, pp. 149-150, footnote 140. She discusses their departures from the original on pp. 147-153.

⁴⁵ The original can be found in the Nicolai Nachlaß (SBB – PK). It is reprinted in Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, pp. 154-157.

her well-earned 'stille Ruhe'. Without revealing what has unsettled her, she continues: 'so konnte man [mir] auch [...] nicht diesen kleinen sich erbetenen Wunsch [to live in peace] gönnen. – Daß ist hart!'⁴⁶ Nicolai is addressed in a confidential manner. She calls him her friend, and thanks him for his loyalty to her. Then, finally, she reveals what has prompted her to write her memoirs: an entry in Heinrich August Ottokar Reichard's *Theater-Kalender* disparaged her professional reputation.⁴⁷ It disparaged her acting skills, whilst applauding her chief rivals, other actresses from the same acting company. Such an unfair attack is too much for her to bear, especially as the same criticisms have been repeated in successive editions. The reviewer fails to take into account the 'Veranlassung' for the situation he describes. She therefore feels entitled to correct the impression he has created, for 'das Recht ist ganz auf meiner Seite.' (p. 154)

Her attitude to her reviewer is one of extraordinary self-confidence and assertiveness. He may well have thought that he was dealing with a mere 'Comödiantin von gewöhnlichem Schlage', but 'da hatt sich der Mann – der nun für mich zum Männlein geworden gewaltig geirrt.' Not only does she reject his criticisms outright, she also impugns his masculinity by referring to him as a 'Männlein'. Throughout the letter, liberal use of underlining adds force to her sentiments. Stung by the published verdict on her acting career, she wrote her autobiography, which grew from a 'Büchlein' into a proper 'Buch' (p. 154). She does not doubt her suitability to write such a book. In fact, only one person has the right qualifications: 'Nur eine Frau wie ich mit dem Muth, mit der Entschlossenheit in allen ihren Handlungen, mit dem Bewußtseyn, konnte so ein

⁴⁶ See p. 154. All further references to this letter occur in the text. Underlined words correspond to the original.

⁴⁷ For a reprint of the offending entry, see Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 158, footnote 157.

Werk schreiben.' (pp. 154-155) Although she is loath to reveal intimate details of her life, it is unavoidable, because 'man macht es mir zu arg.' Her patience is clearly exhausted:

aber nun? nun noch? noch? nun wird mir's zu toll gemacht. Nun hilft nichts mehr, meine so lange lange Geduld hat ihr Ende erreicht. Nun stelle ich mich öffentlich der Welt dar, und sage: daß war ich, daß bin ich noch (p. 155)

Hiding in the privacy of her retirement is no option for Schulze-Kummerfeld, she has to address her critics in public. If she had still been on the stage, she could have proved the critics wrong by her acting; having retired, she has to write instead.⁴⁸ The purpose of her memoirs is not to express regret for mistakes she may have made: she presents herself to the world with pride. Her unapologetic mood extends not just to her life, but also to the book itself. She refers to her book as her child, declaring that she is not ashamed of it: 'des meinigen Schäume ich mich nicht.' It is unlike any other she has come across, and full of life: 'Es weint, es lacht, es ist launisch, es ist Satyrisch; sagt bittere Wahrheiten'. She is aware of the stir it will cause ('Lärm wird es machen, daß sehe ich zum Voraus', p. 155), but this does not weaken her determination, because she still has much left to say: 'ich bin auf alles gefaßt, denn ausgeschrieben habe ich mich noch nicht' (pp. 155-156). She likens her book to a military campaign, and, like a military strategist, she has preserved her most damning evidence for future use. 'jetzt bin ich noch höflich [...] aber kommen sie mir von neuem A LA REICHERD [her unflattering reviewer] heimtückisch dann reiße ich vollends die Maske herunter.' (p. 156) As a woman, it takes courage 'einen gelehrten Herrn auch Gedruckt zu sagen daß er Unrecht gehabt', because it exposes her to further attacks on her person. But she has been humiliated ('erniedrigt'), and is therefore forced, 'die Feder zu meiner Rechtfertigung [zu] ergreifen'.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See the foreword to her 1793 autobiography, reprinted in Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 164.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

This is not the conventional modesty expected of women writers in this period – expected by both their contemporaries and by modern feminist scholars. Schulze-Kummerfeld wishes to validate her own life as she experienced it, wresting the power of judgment out of the hands of her critics. In doing so, she asserts her own identity and affirms her own achievements ('Was ich bin, was ich kann lehrte ich mich selbst', p. 156). She expresses her desire to have her memoirs published as soon as possible with great urgency, because much depends on it ('Ehre ist im Spiel'), and is confident that she will find public favour: '[ich] weiß daß Sie, und manche wackere Deutschen sagen werden nachdem sie mich gelesen: gäbe es doch viele solche Weiber in der Welt wie die ist' (p. 157).⁵⁰ This is an exceptionally lucid explanation of one woman's decision to 'go public', and serves as a model for the 'unapologetic apologia'.

'Ich habe meine Zunge wacker auf ihre Kosten spielen lassen': Elise Bürger⁵¹

Like Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld, Elise Bürger, née Marie Christiane Elisabeth Hahn (1769-1833) had been in the public eye from a young age. Her relationship with the public, which continued for most of her adult life, was somewhat ambiguous. She needed the public's approval to earn her living as an actress and writer; but she resented their subsequent judgments, both personal and professional. Likewise, the public reviled her for her fame, but were fascinated by her. For over a decade after her scandalous marriage to Gottfried August Bürger, she was the subject of gossip and intense public

⁵⁰ A note in the margin of her letter, written in Nicolai's hand, indicates that he rejected the manuscript. See Niethammer, *Autobiographien*, p. 157.

⁵¹ Ernst Schulze (1789-1817) on Elise Bürger. Quoted in Traudel Weber-Reich, 'Elise Bürger, geborene Hahn', in *'Des Kennenlernens werth'. Bedeutende Frauen Göttingens*, ed. Traudel Weber-Reich (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1993), p. 97.

interest. Then, in 1801, an anonymous thirty-two page pamphlet was published against her, entitled *Schicksale einer theatralischen Abentheurerin bei der Hannöverschen Bühne*.⁵² It was this that prompted her to compose a defence of her actions, *Ueber meinen Aufenthalt in Hannover gegen den ungenannten Verfasser der Schicksale einer theatralischen Abentheurerin*.⁵³ Although her marriage to Bürger was not the main topic of the attack on her, it remained central to her public image throughout her life, and will therefore have to be outlined briefly.

Elise Hahn's relationship with the literary public, and with Bürger, began in 1789. She was twenty years old when a poem of hers, entitled 'An den Dichter Bürger. Nach einem scherzhaften Gespräch nach Lesung seiner Gedichte', was published anonymously in *Der Beobachter*. The poem, in praise of Bürger's poetic gift, introduced the character of a Swabian girl ('Schwabenmädchen'), who was purportedly in love with Bürger after reading his poetry. The 'Schwabenmädchen' recommended herself to Bürger as a bride with a description of herself and her personal circumstances, and concluded with an indirect marriage proposal to the poet: 'Drum kömmt Dir 'mal das Freien ein, / So laß's ein Schwabenmädchen seyn, / Und wähle immer mich!' Although the poem's tone was deliberately equivocal, swaying between humour and seriousness, its publication was widely interpreted as a brazen act. The author's anonymity seemed to be inviting discovery, as the poem contained factual information about the 'Schwabenmädchen', including her age and where she lived. By coincidence, the editor's wife, the writer Marianne Ehrmann, was seeking subscribers to one of her own publications at the time of

⁵² *Schicksale einer theatralischen Abentheurerin bei der Hannöverschen Bühne* (1801).

⁵³ Elise Bürger, *Ueber meinen Aufenthalt in Hannover gegen den ungenannten Verfasser der Schicksale einer theatralischen Abentheurerin von Elise Bürger* (Altona: 1801).

the publication of Elise Hahn's poem. She sent a copy of the *Beobachter* to Gottfried August Bürger, accompanied by a request for help with finding subscribers.⁵⁴ Bürger, despite being twice widowed and twice the age of the 'Schwabenmädchen', was flattered. He initiated a correspondence with Marianne Ehrmann which led to the discovery of Elise Hahn as the poem's author.⁵⁵ After corresponding with Elise Hahn directly himself, Bürger went to see her in Stuttgart, and proposed to her. On his second visit the couple were married.

From the beginning, the Bürgers' relationship involved other members of the public. Bürger had sent copies of the anonymous poem to all his friends and acquaintances, and corresponded with them about the progress of the affair.⁵⁶ The public nature of her proposal was part of its attractiveness: 'daß sie öffentlich in einem gedruckten Gedichte vor allem Volke gesagt: Ich liebe dich! Und förmlich um mich angehalten hat.'⁵⁷ And the same 'publicness' invited comments and advice from others. A friend of Bürger's, Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Meyer, even wrote a humorous poem, *Die Warnung. An Bürger*, warning Bürger that this bold young woman was surely up to no good: 'Es will das Jungferlein aus Schwaben / Den ersten Gatten bald begraben, / Darum

⁵⁴ The whole affair from the point of view of the Ehrmanns is published in Theophil Friedrich Ehrmann, *Briefe von Gottfried August Bürger an Marianne Ehrmann. Ein merkwürdiger Beitrag zur Geschichte der letzten Lebensjahre des Dichters. Mit einer historischen Einleitung herausgegeben von Theophil Friedrich Ehrmann.* (Weimar: Industrie-Comptoir, 1802).

⁵⁵ The sequence of events which led from the publication of the poem to the wedding of Elise Hahn and Gottfried August Bürger is described in Ulrike Weckel, 'Bürgerliche Raffinesse. Zur wohlinszenierten Eheanbahnung von Elise Hahn und Gottfried August Bürger', in *Ordnung, Politik und Geselligkeit der Geschlechter im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrike Weckel, et al., *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert Supplementa* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998).

⁵⁶ Weckel, 'Bürgerliche Raffinesse', p. 152.

⁵⁷ G.A. Bürger, letter to F.L.W. Meyer (14 March 1790). Adolf Strodtmann, *Briefe von und an Gottfried August Bürger. Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte seiner Zeit. Aus dem Nachlasse Bürger's und anderen, meist handschriftlichen Quellen* vol. 4 (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel, 1874), p. 31.

erwählt sie dich.’⁵⁸ But Bürger felt so confident of his choice that he published *Die Warnung* and a poem of his in response, in the *Musen Almanach* of 1791, thereby keeping the entire literary public up-to-date with his private life. Humorous or otherwise, this public participation in the relationship between Elise and Gottfried August proved unhelpful. Rumours about them began to spread soon after their arrival in Göttingen, in particular about Elise Bürger’s unsuitable nature as wife, mother and housekeeper.⁵⁹ After a series of scandalous events, involving alleged affairs and elaborate entertaining on Elise’s part, the couple were divorced before their second wedding anniversary. The court deemed Elise the sole guilty party on account of adultery.⁶⁰ She was also banned from remarrying, and had to forfeit the dowry she had brought into the relationship.⁶¹

Twenty-three years old, with no money and no prospect of marrying again, Elise Bürger was forced to make her own way. From a very limited range of options, she chose to enter the acting profession, and supplemented her income with her writing (she published a novel, plays, poems and calendars for ladies).⁶² But her choice kept her in the public eye, and she could not shake off the public perception that she was unsteady, immoral and unwholesome. Luise Wiedemann, Caroline Michaelis’s sister, wrote in her memoirs: ‘Ich habe sie [die Bürger] nie wieder gesprochen [after she left Göttingen] u. sie in Kiel vermieden, als unwürdig.’⁶³ Elise Bürger’s eighteen-month relationship with Bürger had an unpleasant coda when he died two years after their divorce, only forty-six

⁵⁸ Reprinted in Strodttmann, *Bürgers Briefe*, pp. 52-53.

⁵⁹ Weber-Reich, ‘Elise Bürger, geborene Hahn’, pp. 91-95.

⁶⁰ The legal documents concerning the divorce are reprinted in Strodttmann, *Bürgers Briefe*, pp. 194-204.

⁶¹ See Weckel, ‘Bürgerliche Raffinesse’, p. 144.

⁶² For a bibliography of her works, see Weber-Reich, ‘Elise Bürger, geborene Hahn’, pp. 101-102.

⁶³ Wiedemann, *Erinnerungen*, p. 28.

years old. In the public's mind, the reason for his untimely demise was obvious: Elise, his unfaithful wife, who had shamelessly offered herself to him – in public! – and then, in less than two years, had brought him to financial and personal ruin, whilst cuckolding him in his own town. Grief had hastened him to the grave. Elise Bürger refrained from offering her side of the story regarding her marriage with Bürger, preferring instead to concentrate on her professional life. It was when her professional conduct was questioned on account of her private morality, that she spoke out.

The anonymous attack on her begins with a declaration that acting should combine 'Schönheit und Moralität'. In order for this to happen, the actors must possess noble minds and pure souls (p. 4). The acting company which had been performing at Hanover for over three years is praised for its ability to achieve these sublime and noble aims. The text even names those who are true 'Zierden unserer Bühne' (p. 7). Ludowike Gehlhaar is the ideal actress. She has no wish for fame for herself, merely the desire to do the theatre and the audience justice. She is not proud: she is a servant of art.

All this is in contrast to Elise Bürger. She is described as being full of 'unersättliche Eitelkeit', and suffers from her 'nie befriedigter Stolz', which leads her to indulge in 'die furchtbarste, hämischste Intrigue' (pp. 9-10). Her performances do not serve art, but only herself, and her 'ungeheuer[e] Selbstsucht, ihre[...] nie gezähmte[...] Begierde, zu glänzen und sich geltend zu machen.' (p. 10) Her acting lacks all natural skill, and smacks instead of the most repulsive 'Uebertreibung, die der wahren Kunst so fremd ist, daß sie mit ihr im geradesten Widerspruche liegt' (p. 16). The author claims

that Bürger has never actually received any accolades for her acting, something only impudence ('Frechheit', p. 13) enabled her to ignore. But the author is not content simply to focus his attack on her acting skills. He makes it more general: 'Aber der Grund, warum das Publikum sie verabscheuen muß, ist nicht bloß ästhetisch, er ist triftiger, dringender: er ist die Moralität selbst.' (p. 16) The same impudence that keeps her on the stage, can also be seen in Elise Bürger's decision to return to Lower Saxony, a region where everyone knows her shame: 'Sie wagt es, den Boden wieder zu betreten, den ihre Verbrechen besudelt haben.' (p. 14)

The reason for this more general attack becomes obvious when the author holds the poetic marriage proposal – published twelve years earlier – against her as an example of her unladylike behaviour. The author then discusses her marriage to Bürger, casting her in the mould of the man-eating woman, who exploited the weakness of a great man for her own sordid ends, thereby causing his death: 'Sie und ihre Laster verabscheut man, als den Grund [für das Schicksal ihres unglücklichen Mannes]' (p. 12). Her appearance on the stage is not interpreted as an economic necessity, but as a vain search for 'Glanz, Ruhm und Libertinage' (pp. 11-12).

Throughout the pamphlet, the flaws in Elise Bürger's stagecraft are linked to an alleged sexual incontinence and deviancy. Elise's acting is deemed to be full of 'Indecenz' and 'Wollust'. Her 'zügellose Denkart, die völlig unsittliche Tendenz ihres Thuns und Lassens, die entschiedene Verachtung aller äußern Ehrbarkeit' is evident in her dress also (p. 18). She represents 'Koketterie und Buhlerei. – Buhlerei! – ' (p. 19).

The immodesty evident in Bürger's dress and behaviour are destructive to the acting ensemble as a whole, through her 'gränzenlose[r] Rollenwuth' and her 'rasende[r] Egoismus' (p. 21).

Towards the end of the pamphlet, the author changes his tone and addresses Elise Bürger directly: 'Sie besitzt ein Dämon, der in der Welt schon erschreckliches Unheil angerichtet hat.' Among these demons of which she is possessed is the 'Schriftstellerteufel'.

Ach leider scheint er sich so unablässig an Sie gekettet zu haben, daß keine irdische Macht Sie ihm entreissen wird. Dem Teufel rechnen Sie es zu wenn ihre Schauspiele kompeliert und fade, Ihre Romane voll Unsinn und widersprechende Verwirrung, Ihre Gelegenheitsstücke voll der auffallendsten Inkonsequenzen sind. (pp. 21-22)

The author suggests that she write 'das Sprichwort: "Viel Geschrey und wenig Wolle!" über die Thür ihrer Zimmer', as a warning against her pride and ambition (p. 28). The pamphlet then ends by taunting her ('Nun drohen Sie mit Druckschriften. Schreiben Sie nur, schreiben Sie nur!'), and by threatening to continue this assault on her reputation and her career: 'wir haben auch noch Federn, Pressen und Gefühl für Recht.' (p. 32) Elise Bürger picked up the gauntlet.

Her response assures the reader, just as Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld assured Nicolai, that she was reluctant to answer her critics. However, since her silence did not discourage her tormentors ('aber leider! scheint mein Stillschweigen sie aufzumuntern'), she saw no other option but to publish 'eine schlichte, aber durch Beweise belegte

Erzählung meines Aufenthalts an der Bühne in Hannover'.⁶⁴ She had been subject to insults and injuries for years ('Beleidigungen und zum Theil öffentliche Mishandlungen von Menschen, die ich nie wissentlich gekränkt [hatte]', p. 3) 'Öffentlich' is the key term here: since she has been attacked in public, she has to justify herself before the public too, and is unable to dismiss the allegations simply in private. A printed denial is her only option, if she is to regain control of her reputation. For her, going public is not the problem, but the solution. The text is thus paradigmatic proof of the permeability of the divide between the public and the private. And Elise Bürger's rejection of her public detractors is defiant:

Anonyme Beleidigungen sind keine Beleidigungen! Den treffen sie nicht, den noch Redliche achten. Pasquille werden auf die edelsten Menschen von Schurken gemacht, verachtet – und vergessen. Bewußtseyn schützt vor dem inneren Richterstuhl am besten und sichersten. (p. 3)

Although she claims here that her inner judgment matters more than the judgment of the world, it is clear that she found her hecklers difficult to ignore. And so she responded to their challenge, despite arguing that their actions damage themselves more than they damage her. Her detractors have written about her partly 'aus Sucht, ihren Witz spielen zu lassen, oder aus gemeineren Ursachen, mich in ein nachtheiliges Licht zu stellen.' She has little faith in the reading public, whom she imagines as 'voreilig richtende, oder leichtgläubige, oder schadenfrohe Leser'. For the benefit of her own self-esteem, she needs to defend herself before them ('so bin ich es mir schuldig', p. 4). However, she is unwilling to be drawn on the issue of her personal life and her marriage to Bürger, and wants to respond to professional slurs only.

⁶⁴ Bürger, *Ueber meinen Aufenthalt*, p. 4. All further references appear in the text. All emphases are original.

Ohne frühere Fehler zu entschuldigen, die seit zehen Jahren und vielleicht auf immer meine Lebensruhe vergifteten und deren Veranlassung ich an einem andern Orte darstellen werde, glaube ich hier blos von den Ursachen sprechen zu müssen, welche mich bestimmten, das Theater im Jahre 1796 zu betreten. (pp. 4-5)

Ueber meinen Aufenthalt in Hannover contains two sections: in part one (pp. 3-32), Elise Bürger addresses the criticisms made of her. Part two (pp. 33-49) contains nine separate documents supporting her claims, mainly letters and poems in praise of her performances. In part one, she argues that she entered the theatre out of 'Hang und Convenienz': not out of desperation. In fact, she had always been interested in the theatre, and would probably have joined it earlier, if her bourgeois circumstances had not prevented her from doing so ('meine eingeschränkte Beziehung und die bürgerlichen Verhältnisse, in denen ich aufwuchs', p. 5). Naturally keen to show how successful she was as an actress, she lists a number of facts: she was invited to join the stage, and so did not even have to apply to join; she was offered a good part (Lady Milford in Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*); and she was well-paid (fifteen Reichstaler a week). Her acting stints in Altona and Bremen were met with approval by the critics and the public alike, and the scandal in Hanover was not the result of her lack of acting talent, but the result of an intrigue directed against her. A Mr and Mrs Reinhard, who were also members of the acting ensemble at Hanover, were allegedly jealous of her success in securing good roles (played by Mrs Reinhard until Elise Bürger's arrival), and sought to undermine her status in a bid to oust her. Innocent details were thus used against her in their campaign. She argues that her decision to join the household of Mr and Mrs Ernst, with whom she had struck up a friendship while in Hanover, was used to insinuate an immoral relationship between her and the couple, a notion which she dismisses forcefully:

Menschen, die ein freundliches Verhältnis nicht bey andern zu dulden vermögen, weil sie es selbst nicht durch Ausdauer und gegenseitige Aufopferungen zu erhalten wissen, streuten zahllose Gerüchte aus, um dieses Verhältnis zu stören. (pp. 18-19).

She is able to strengthen her case through the attached documents in part two of her defence. The first text is in fact a letter written by the hapless author of *Schicksale einer theatralischen Abentheurerin bei der Hannöverschen Bühne*, in which he admits that the allegations made in his pamphlet were untrue and libellous. The letter is witnessed by a 'Canzley- und Hofgerichts-Procurator'. Other documents are poems written by admirers of her art, and letters from two princes, thanking her for the occasional poems and prologues she had written on the occasion of royal birthdays. These poems, which ought to have been performed on stage, were suppressed by her theatre company, revealing the prejudice she endured ('ich werde nun auch als Schriftstellerin unterdrückt', pp. 20-21).⁶⁵ Eager to show how unfair the allegations made against her are, and to use all the available evidence, she is eventually enticed into revealing something about her private life, and more importantly, about her relationship to the Bürger family.

Daß ich in Hannover sogar von Verwandten meines verstorbenen Gatten, in deren Herzen das Andenken seiner litterarischen Verdienste noch eben so wie in dem meinigen lebt, mit Freundlichkeit empfangen worden, mag einen Beweis geben, daß, wer die Familienverhältnisse genau kannte, meinen Fehler zwar nicht entschuldigen, aber wohl verzeihen konnte. (p. 25)

Her self-defence ends on the same note of defiance on which it began: 'Die schlechtesten Früchte sind es nicht, / Woran die Wespen nagen!' (p. 31)

⁶⁵ Bürger's plays were in fact comparatively successful. *Adelheit, Gräfinn von Teck* (1799) was her first play and performed successfully within a year. By 1812, it had appeared in four reprints and been translated into Dutch. See Wurst, 'Negotiations of Containment'.

Elise Bürger's protest, however spirited, was bound to be fruitless, as her very existence as a freelance actress was a provocation to the prevailing discourse of separate spheres and women's *Geschlechtscharakter*. Recent research into eighteenth-century theatre and actresses in particular has established time and time again that actresses were a 'Herd der Beunruhigung', 'prädestiniert, prinzipielle Diskussionen über Charakter und Bestimmung von Weiblichkeit auf sich zu ziehen.'⁶⁶ The actress in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century clashed with contemporary definitions of femininity in several fundamental ways. Firstly, she reversed the desirable distinction between domestic and public life. Secondly, she disproved the comfortable assumption that women needed a male guardian to look after them. Thirdly, the public display an actress made of herself (and her body) was considered a breach of women's natural femininity and modesty. It is here that the assumption of lewdness and immorality is made. A woman who was shameless enough to appear on stage before the eyes of all the world was likely also to be sexually promiscuous. She is therefore almost invariably referred to as a 'Buhlerin' and a 'Kokette' in an attempt to regulate her behaviour. Fourthly, the unsteady travelling lifestyle and fluctuating income of an actress were considered a key factor in such socially corrosive developments as child abandonment, broken homes and divorce. Again, women's putative gender identity (e.g. an innate motherliness) appeared threatened. In Elise Bürger's case, her decision to leave her son Agathon in care with another family in Göttingen was seen as evidence of her warped, unnatural character.

⁶⁶ Ursula Geitner, 'Vom Trieb, eine öffentliche Person zu sein. Weiblichkeit und Öffentlichkeit um 1800', in "*Öffentlichkeit*" im 18. Jahrhundert, ed. Hans-Wolf Jäger, Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert Supplementa (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1997), p. 78. The same observation has been made by biographers of other eighteenth-century actresses, such as Marianne Ehrmann. See Madland, *Marianne Ehrmann*.

In addition to the unpalatable aspects mentioned above was the fact that actresses had to *act*. This was by no means a simple matter. Eighteenth-century discourse had allocated women an innate innocence and inability to deceive. A woman who earned her living by subverting this paradigm was an unnatural abomination. 'Es ist evident: Die Schauspielerin ist alles andere als jenes natürliche, mit sich selbst auf einfache Weise identische Wesen, als das die bürgerliche Frau konzipiert wurde.'⁶⁷ The conclusion from this is clear: a woman who aspires to be an actress must be driven by a grotesque and exaggerated self-love and desire for attention, which makes her disregard the danger which acting poses to her true identity. By extension, she poses a danger to the whole idea of *Geschlechtscharakter*, as she points up the constructed nature of gender discourse itself, functioning as an 'öffentlich agierendes Dementi natürlicher Weiblichkeit'.⁶⁸ The appearance of an actress in the public domain is therefore an opportunity to re-establish the boundaries. Elise Bürger, scandalous not just for her acting, but her general flouting of bourgeois values, was bound to receive more than her fair share of condemnation. In fact, her relationship with Bürger continues to be a topic for critical debate until this very day, usually to Elise Bürger's disadvantage.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Geitner, 'Weiblichkeit und Öffentlichkeit', p. 86.

⁶⁸ Geitner, 'Weiblichkeit und Öffentlichkeit', p. 88.

⁶⁹ See Ludwig Christoph Althof, *Einige Nachrichten zu den vornehmsten Lebensumständen Gottfried August Bürger's, nebst einem Beitrage zur Charakteristik desselben* (Göttingen: Johann Christian Dieterich, 1798). Heinrich Döring, *G.A. Bürger's Leben. Nach zuverlässigen Quellen bearbeitet* (Berlin: Christiani, 1826). Friedrich W. Ebeling, *Gottfried August Bürger und Elise Hahn. Eine Ehe-, Kunst- und Literaturleben*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: 1871). Ehrmann, *Briefe von Gottfried August Bürger an Marianne Ehrmann*. Heinrich Pröhle, *Gottfried August Bürger. Sein Leben und seine Dichtungen* (Leipzig: Mayer, 1856). [Karl Reinhard], *Gottfried August Bürger's Ehestands-Geschichte. Geschichte der dritten Ehe Gottfried August Bürger's. Eine Sammlung von Acten-Stücken*. (Berlin & Leipzig: 1812). Helmut Scherer, *Lange schon in manchem Sturm und Drange. Gottfried August Bürger. Der Dichter des Münchhausen. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Scherer, 1995). Her reception is also discussed in Weber-Reich, 'Elise Bürger, geborene Hahn'. Unfortunately, not all attempts to clear her name have been successful. In an uninformed piece, Dagmar von Hoff wrongly maintains that it was G.A. Bürger himself who published the scandalous *Ehestandsgeschichte*, despite its publication date 18 years after his death. Dagmar von Hoff, 'Zwischen Einfluß und Befreiung. Das weibliche Drama um 1800 am Beispiel der Dramatikerin und Schauspielerin

Her brief marriage and its aftermath overshadowed all of Elise Bürger's writing. Even though she never attempted to write another formal apologia, the texts she subsequently published seemed nevertheless to function as a self-defence. In 1804, she published a collection of texts under the title *Mein Taschenbuch den Freundlichen meines Geschlechts geweiht*.⁷⁰ Some of these were her own work, but some were written by others and addressed to her. One was a poem entitled *An Elisa bei ihrer Abreise von ...* It is a sympathetic description of her departure from the stage of Hanover. The problem, according to the poem, was not her poor theatrical performance or her 'Libertinage', but the envy of her fellow cast members:

Warum entfliehst Du dem Schlangengezische
Des Neides, der deinen Lorbeer nicht rauben,
Dein Verdienst nicht verdunkeln, unser Herz
Nicht bestechen ... [kann]?

The poem suggests that her sex made it difficult for her to ignore her critics; men would simply have destroyed 'die Natter', whereas she is forced to flee shyly ('Entfliehst Du schüchtern unserm Musenhain'). She is highly praised for her intelligence ('Du! die den / Zauber des Weibes mit der Geisteskraft des / Mannes verband'), and acknowledged for her acting prowess ('der Künste Bildnerin'). The inclusion of this poem in the volume served as independent proof that the allegations made against her, and the slanderous comments made about her art in particular, were unfounded and libellous. The prefaces to the volume continue this self-defence. The book is introduced by the editor, and by Elise Bürger herself. The editor describes her in sympathetic tones as a woman with a difficult

Elise Bürger (1769-1833)', in "*Der Menschheit Hälfte blieb noch ohne Recht*". *Frauen und die Französische Revolution*, ed. Helga Brandes (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 1991).

⁷⁰ Elise Bürger, *Mein Taschenbuch den Freundlichen meines Geschlechts gewidmet von Elisa Bürger, geb. Hahn* (Pirna: Carl August Friese, 1804).

lot in life: '[Ein] Frauenzimmer [...], die unter mühevollen Anstrengungen des Lebens, beschränkt von tausend unangenehmen Verhältnissen, dennoch ihre Zeit weise auskaufte, und zum Vergnügen anderer anwandte.'⁷¹ Elise Bürger herself also refers to her having to endure undeserved insults ('unverschuldete[...] Beleidigungen!'). She blames people's misconceptions about her and her atypical fate for these attacks: 'Die Menschen [...] sind selten klug aus mir gewesen, und der Zufall hat mir so seltsame Streiche gespielt, daß ich einigemal an mir selbst irre geworden wäre'.⁷² Publication gave her an opportunity to address these misconceptions, and to prove her critics wrong.

A similar pattern is evident in a poem entitled: *Traum meines Lebens*, which was printed in her poetry collection of 1812.⁷³ In the poem, Bürger aligns herself with types of bird – respectively, a dove, a peacock, and a swallow. These peaceful, harmless birds are persecuted by others, larger and more ferocious – owls, vultures, and magpies. She dismisses allegations of vanity by insisting that she, originally a dove, was forced against her will, by fate, to become the much-reviled peacock ('da entriß mich in Riesengestalt / Das Schicksal der lachenden grünenden Au, / Verwandelt in einen buntschimmernden Pfau.'). And despite her elevation to fame and stardom, she was still a dove at heart ('doch lebt in dem Pfau / Allein nur die Sanftheit der Taube der Au'). Her public appearances as an actress and writer, which so riled her critics, were, she suggests, the result of her circumstances (i.e. her inability to live the life of a bourgeois woman owing to her being prohibited to marry again), and did not change the essence of her self. She

⁷¹ Editor's preface to Bürger, *Mein Taschenbuch*, p. IX.

⁷² Bürger's preface to Bürger, *Mein Taschenbuch*, p. VI.

⁷³ Elise Bürger, *Gedichte. Als erster Band ihrer Gedichte, Reise-Blätter, Kunst- und Lebens-Ansichten* (Hamburg: Conrad Müller, 1812).

describes her present condition as an itinerant performer and writer as the life of a swallow, of which she is not ashamed and which does not cause her any unhappiness:

So ward ich zum Wandern als Schwalbe bestimmt,
 Mir blieb eine Gabe die niemand mir nimmt,
 Sie ist mir viel lieber als Federn vom Pfau
 [...]
 Ich singe mit Freuden im sonnigen Schein,
 Ich singe Land aus und singe Land ein,
 [...]
 Ich singe dem Frühling zu Ehren manch' Lied,
 Ich singe der Freundschaft mit treuem Gemüth,
 [...]
 Und freue mich sehr eine Schwalbe zu seyn.⁷⁴

Having been the subject of public speculation and gossip for most of her adult life, yet depending on public favour for her livelihood, Elise Bürger really had no choice but to defend herself doggedly in public. She could not, and did not, shy away from publicity. In her case, the ambiguous relationship between women and the public sphere is all too obvious: her public appearances did lead to her being reviled and mistrusted, which would seem to support the notion that femininity and publicity were antithetical. But at the same time, she persisted in her public life, thereby challenging and complicating women's relationship with the public. Women could exist in the public sphere, without rehearsing apologies, disclaimers, and words of self-deprecation. But as Elise Bürger's example shows, it was an uphill struggle.

⁷⁴ A year later, she did indeed publish another collection of 'Lieder'. Elise Bürger, *Lieder am Rhein gedichtet und Teutschlands Befreiern gewidmet* (1813).

‘Sie war zur Mätresse geboren und erzogen’: Wilhelmine von Lichtenau⁷⁵

Wilhelmine von Lichtenau, née Encke (1752-1820), daughter of a Prussian court musician, was the student, mistress and lifelong friend of Friedrich Wilhelm II (1744-1797). Her personal circumstances also brought her into the limelight, where she found herself subject to severe criticism from her contemporaries.⁷⁶ Like Elise Bürger, she responded to this disparagement in writing, by publishing the two-volume *Apologie der Gräfin Lichtenau gegen die Beschuldigungen mehrerer Schriftsteller. Von ihr selbst entworfen. Nebst einer Auswahl von Briefen an sie*, when she was fifty-five years old.⁷⁷ A much more substantial work than Elise Bürger’s slim volume, Wilhelmine von Lichtenau’s self-defence nonetheless has a similar structure: volume one contains her narrative of what really happened in her life, and volume two a great number of letters written to her (two-thirds of them in French), which were intended to prove her upstanding character and moral rectitude.

Wilhelmine von Lichtenau had been vilified as an ambitious, morally-depraved and avaricious schemer because of her relationship with the Crown-Prince, later the King, of Prussia. His various failings, both personal and in government, were blamed on her influence on him. Only hours after Friedrich Wilhelm’s death in 1797, Lichtenau was arrested for crimes against the state, stripped of her wealth and condemned to house arrest. The special commission assigned to investigate the accusations against her was

⁷⁵ Friedrich von Coelln (1766-1820) on Wilhelmine von Lichtenau. Quoted in Artur Schurig, *Das galante Preußen gegen das Ende des XVIII. Jahrhunderts*, Sammlung kulturgeschichtlicher Publikationen vol. 1 (Berlin; Leipzig: Verlagsgesellschaft Berlin, 1910), p. 10.

⁷⁶ See Carl Atzenbeck, *Die deutsche Pompadour. Leben und Briefe der Gräfin von Lichtenau*. (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925).

⁷⁷ I would like to thank Melanie Archangeli for bringing this text to my attention.

eventually unable to prove any wrongdoing, but the damage to her reputation was complete, and she was vilified in many books and pamphlets.⁷⁸ This was also the reason why, eleven years after Friedrich Wilhelm's death, she still felt it necessary to defend her reputation. A typical example of the literature against her is the *Biographische Skizze der Madame Ritz jetzigen Gräfinn von Lichtenau*.⁷⁹ The title itself is already disparaging, as it calls Wilhelmine von Lichtenau by her married name, Ritz, and ignores her subsequent elevation to the rank of a Duchess. (Other texts refer to her even more colloquially, calling her simply 'Minna Enke', thereby denying her any rank or status.)⁸⁰ In the preface, the author claims that he is interested in the driving force behind great political events. One of these forces is the allure of women, brought to bear on ruling men ('der allmächtige Zauber weiblicher Reizungen'). The motivation behind the biographical sketch of the Duchess of Lichtenau is established right from the beginning. The author is keen to corroborate the veracity of his narrative, and to portray himself as an insider at court:

Die Heldin [...] handelte lange [...] unter unsern Augen; und theilte uns mündlich und schriftlich manchen Stoff zu diesen Blättern mit. Keine Leidenschaft vor der wir zu erröthen haben, sondern Liebe zu unbedingter Publicität, die Friedrich der Einzige schützte, führte unsere Feder.⁸¹

The suspicion that Wilhelmine von Lichtenau exerted political influence – so wholly inappropriate for a member of the female sex – underlies the author's resentment against her, and is further strengthened by the fact that she has been elevated above her rightful

⁷⁸ Many of these are partially reprinted in Schurig, *Das galante Preußen*. See especially the bibliography on pp. 3-7.

⁷⁹ *Biographische Skizze der Madame Ritz jetzigen Gräfinn von Lichtenau* (Paris [Leipzig]: [Rein], 1798). This work is traditionally ascribed to Susanne von Bandemer (it is preceded by a motto from Bandemer's *Poetische und Prosaische Versuche* (Berlin, 1787)), but this is rejected in Gallas and Runge, *Romane und Erzählungen*, pp. 31-32.

⁸⁰ See for example August Wilhelm Baranius, reprinted in Schurig, *Das galante Preußen*, p. 32.

⁸¹ Preface to *Biographische Skizze der Madame Ritz jetzigen Gräfinn von Lichtenau* (Paris [Leipzig]: [Rein], 1798), unpaginated. All further references to the main body of the book appear in the text.

station: 'die aus dem niedrigsten Stande, allmählich bis zu den Stufen des Thrones herauf stieg'. A beautiful mistress at an extravagant court conjured up comparisons with the French court, by 1797 the embodiment of debauchery and intrigue: '[sie spielte] die Rolle einer Pompadour'. The king himself is depicted as benevolent, but weak; a weakness which his mistress was all too ready to exploit ('[sie] mißbrauchte die Gewalt, die ihr der Zauber erotischer Leidenschaft über einen König verschafte', p. 11). Wilhelmine von Lichtenau is here cast in the classic role of Eve, leading Adam (in this case, 'dem menschlichsten aller Prinzen', p. 47) astray, an idea which persists throughout this text, and several others about her.

Despite the claims to authenticity, the text soon reveals itself as scandalous and libellous, intent on ruining Lichtenau's reputation. Her mother is described as a 'hogartischen Karrikatur', both to look at and in her personal qualities (p. 15), and both mother and father are accused of having prostituted their two daughters for financial gain (pp. 16-18). The family is denigrated further with an allegation of incestuous relations between the father and his two daughters (p. 19), and the highlighting of their poverty: Wilhelmine von Lichtenau was apparently 'barfüßig und zerlumpt' as a teenager, and unable to afford soap for washing (p. 22). Her sister is accused of running a brothel ('Tempel der Freude', p. 23), which is allegedly where the Crown Prince and Lichtenau met. Lichtenau's dissolute, depraved, low-life origins were bound to have an effect on her character, and so it proves:

Die Beyspiele, die sie von Kindheit an sah, waren ebenso gefährlich für die Unschuld ihrer Sitten, als für den Kopf einer jungen Person, welche bey einem sehr lebhaften Temperamente einen entschiedenen Hang zu dem äussersten Leichtsinne hatte. Sie war wild und aufbrausend, und ihre knechtische Erziehung,

streute bey ihr den Samen zur Verstellung und Heucheley aus, den sie in der Folge auf alle Art zu kultivieren Gelegenheit hatte. (p. 32)

Like Elise Bürger, Wilhelmine von Lichtenau is described in terms contrary to the feminine ideal: she is not gentle, but wild and possesses a bad temper, and she is guilty of that most unfeminine quality: pretence. Throughout the text, she is depicted in sexual terms ('Venus', 'Rundungen', 'Busen', pp. 42-43), thereby heightening the impression of immorality and sexual licentiousness.

Wilhelmine war unermüdet, die Kunst des Ovidius [...], mit glücklicher Geschmeidigkeit auszuüben; und bald besaß sie darinn eine Vollkommenheit, die alle Vorstellungen weit übertraff. (p. 60)

A journey to Paris taken by Lichtenau is also interpreted in sexual terms: it was here that she was apparently transformed into 'eine vollkommene Französische Courtesane' (p. 87). The power which she was thus able to exert over the 'gute[r] und zärtliche[r] Prinz' (p. 93) allowed her to gain preferment for her friends and family, all of whom were utterly unsuited to their jobs (p. 100). To complete the impression of corruption, Lichtenau's lifestyle is described as excessively luxurious ('Der prächtige Bau ihres Schloßes zu Charlottenburg, wurde mit einem Luxus ausgeführt, mit dem man nichts vergleichen kann', p. 129). As a result, she is the enemy 'eines jeden redlich denkenden Weltbürgers' (pp. 160-161).

Other texts portrayed her in a similar light. In 1807, Friedrich von Coelln's anonymously published *Vertraute Briefe über die inneren Verhältnisse am Preußischen Hofe seit dem Tode Friedrichs II* went so far as to suggest that Wilhelmine von Lichtenau acted as a kind of trainer for Friedrich Wilhelm's mistresses, thereby strengthening her hold over him:

Nun wurde sie die Kupplerin des Königs und unterrichtete die Schlachtopfer seiner Wollust, wie sie sich mit dem König zu benehmen hätten. Sie aber hatte des Königs Reizbarkeit so genau studiert, daß die alte Freundin, wenn er sich durch häufigen Wechsel abgestumpft hatte, noch Reizmittel in Rückhalt hatte, [...] [so] daß er immer wieder zu ihr zurückkam. [...] Sie war zur Mätresse geboren und erzogen.⁸²

In 1798, a book entitled *Die preußischen Staaten vor und seit dem 16. November 1797* contained a description of the Duchess, which considered her qualities and characteristics. Although the anonymous author was unable to justify his suspicions against her, he concluded paradoxically: 'Ueber ihr Verbrechen vermag ich nicht zu entscheiden, aber soviel ist gewiß, sie war eine Verbrecherin und ihr ist kein Unrecht geschehen.'⁸³ In several books, she is accused of having poisoned one of Friedrich Wilhelm's other mistresses, and of having used narcotics to ensure a continuous influence over the King.⁸⁴

These texts were clearly highly provocative, and damaging to the Duchess, and it is with a note of weariness and defiance that she begins her response:

Meine Geduld ist erschöpft; ich kann nicht länger schweigen! Hart war mein Schicksal, das mich einst, ohne mein Zuthun, und selbst gegen meinen Wunsch, auf einen Platz stellte, um den mich Tausende unverdient beneideten – und mich dann [...] von der Höhe des Hofes in die Tiefe einer dreyjährigen Gefangenschaft herabstürzte. Ich ertrug dieses Schicksal. [...] Ohne alle weitere Celebrität, ohne allen Einfluß als den in meinem eigenen Hause, hätte ich nun billig von Schriftstellern, die mich einst so wüthend anfielen, verschont werden, und von ihnen eben so ungepriesen, als ungelästert bleiben sollen.⁸⁵

Like Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld, the Duchess argues that she would not have taken up the pen to defend her reputation had she been allowed to withdraw gracefully from public life. But since her retirement had been made impossible by the continuing attacks of

⁸² Friedrich von Coelln, reprinted in Schurig, *Das galante Preußen*, pp. 9-10.

⁸³ Anonymous, reprinted in Schurig, *Das galante Preußen*, p. 14.

⁸⁴ See for example August Wilhelm Baranius, reprinted in Schurig, *Das galante Preußen*, pp. 31-38.

⁸⁵ Wilhelmine von Lichtenau, *Apologie der Gräfin Lichtenau gegen die Beschuldigungen mehrerer Schriftsteller. Von ihr selbst entworfen. Nebst einer Auswahl von Briefen an sie*, 2 vols. (Leipzig & Gera: Wilhelm Heinsius, 1808), p. 1. All further references to volume one of this apologia appear in the text.

writers who 'wetteifern mit einander um die Meisterschaft im Beschimpfen eines – Weibes' (p. 2), she was now forced to take a stand. Contemporaries, especially other women, had interpreted her continuing silence in the face of the allegations made against her as proof of her guilt. 'Einsam und ohne Stütze bleibt mir also nichts übrig, als in den Stand der Natur zu treten, und mich selbst zu vertheidigen. Gedrückt, aber nicht unterdrückt [...]' (p. 5) In the course of her self-defence, she addresses allegations and rumours about her one after another, naming their origins (it is noticeable that she has read most of the texts written about her), and denying them where false. Where the allegations are correct, but in her opinion not indefensible, she stands up for her past behaviour, and asks those pure at heart to throw the first stone:

Gern erlaube ich einem Jeden und einer Jeden, die ganz rein sind, und in gleichen Umständen der Versuchung widerstanden hätten, auf mich den Stein zu werfen; denn ich bekenne mich sehr gern, noch in diesem Augenblicke als Mitglied einer unvollkommenen und mangelhaften Welt. (p. 15)

Many of the allegations refuted by her were so bizarre and untrue, that her prosaic denials sound almost sarcastic. For instance, it had been alleged by several writers that her family, including her mother, lived in excessive wealth as a result of her intrigues in court, to which she replied:

Meine Mutter hat nie, nie ein Haus oder irgend ein Vermögen besessen, sondern genoß blos, seit meiner Bekanntschaft mit dem Kronprinzen, eine Pension von 600 Rthlr, die nicht selten ins Stocken gerieth, und mit dem Tode des Königs gänzlich aufhörte. Seit dieser Zeit habe ich sie mit jährlichen 400 Rthlr. unterstützt, wovon sie – man kann denken, wie brilliant? – lebt. (pp. 43-44)

Her tone is exasperated, hurt, outraged, dignified, rhetorical and sarcastic in turn, and throughout her defence, she appears as a woman fully aware of how she is viewed by the public. For instance, she comments on her elevation to the ranks of nobility with particular lucidity:

Hält mich denn wirklich jemand für gar so einfältig, nicht zu wissen, nicht zu ahnden, was diese Standeserhöhung auf mich für nachtheilige Wirkung haben mußte? Gesetzt, mein Verstand hätte dahin nicht gereicht, so hatte ich doch Freunde, [...] die mir mit ihrem Lichte zu Hülfe kamen. (p. 121)

Someone of her status, she argues, is not able to ignore her critics and her public reputation: 'Wer so angegriffen wird, wie ich, und dazu schweigen kann, der muß entweder weit höher, oder weit tiefer stehen als ich!' (p. 284). As a woman, she is particularly vulnerable to allegations of immorality, and therefore has no choice but to respond publicly to these allegations. 'Die [...] ehrenrührigen [Urtheile] thun mir den wesentlichsten Schaden; keine öffentliche Macht schützt mich dagegen [...]. Was blieb mir da übrig, als die Feder zu ergreifen, und sie zu meiner Vertheidigung zu führen?'

Wilhelmine von Lichtenau knew perfectly well how vulnerable she was made by her position as mistress of the King of Prussia. Having entered the public consciousness, she was bound to come under scrutiny once her royal protection had expired. Not only would she then have to face the wrath of the state, but also the myriad of writers for whom she was a legitimate target onto which they could project their criticism of the state. She assessed the situation, and having found that she could not expect any reprieve from another quarter, she decided to answer her critics herself. She concluded her apologia with a reflection on this process of self-defence, and an affirmation of her legitimacy in writing her defence:

Meine Apologie ist vollendet [...] Ehe ich aber diese Schrift dem Drucke übergebe, überblicke ich sie noch einmal von Anfang bis zu Ende, und lege mir, wie vor dem Richterstuhle der Gottheit, die Fragen vor: Hast du recht daran gethan, sie zu schreiben? Bist du bei deiner Vertheidigung ohne ungebührliche und leidenschaftliche Hitze verfahren? Hat auch sonst Klugheit und Vorsichtigkeit deine Feder geleitet? – Auf alle drei Fragen weiß ich mir, nach meinem besten Bewußtseyn, nicht anders als mit einem freien und offenen Ja zu antworten. (p. 284)

Lichtenau was not ashamed of having acted in an unfeminine way (answering back her male critics, entering the public sphere in order to pursue a personal matter, acting openly on her own behalf). In her case, only a public repudiation could have served her purpose. But at the same time, she hoped 'daß keiner [meiner Leser] je in den Fall kommen möge, eine solche Apologie wie die meinige schreiben zu müssen.'

Conclusion

For the women discussed in this chapter, publicity represented an opportunity, rather than just a threat. For different reasons, they all required the 'publicness' of the printed word to achieve their purpose.⁸⁶ Henriette Ernestine Christiane von Gilden and Johanna Susanna Bohl both wrote spirited replies to poems written by men which presumed to judge women, and to represent them negatively in public. Equally publicly, both women answered back, and tipped the balance in favour of their own sex. Emilie von Berlepsch was concerned about the social and behavioural patterns which were developing in eighteenth-century gender relations, and tried to represent the female perspective to her contemporaries in her essay in the *Teutscher Merkur*. Esther Gad and Amalia Holst both disagreed with the pre-conditions for the education of the female sex established in public by male pedagogues like Joachim Heinrich Campe. If they wished to exert any influence over the education accessible to women, they had to publish their critique of Campe and his colleagues, and publicize their own educational counter-model. Karoline Schulze-Kummerfeld, Elise Bürger and Wilhelmine von Lichtenau had become public personae, and in due course been attacked on a personal, and a professional level.

⁸⁶ Sophie Bernhardi also required positive publicity through publication, to mend her 'gesellschaftliche[...] Integrität.' Protection of her reputation is secured 'gerade erst durch das öffentliche Auftreten.' Schmid, *Selbstverschuldete Unmündigkeit*, p. 300.

For them, speaking out against their critics was the only means available to them to regain control of their reputation. These examples question the assumption often made in feminist scholarship that the public sphere was alien territory for women, which they were both reluctant to enter and unlikely to enter without peril to themselves. These examples reveal instead that the relationship between women and the public sphere was more complicated and multi-faceted than this paradigm would suggest.

Studies of the ‘inhibiting forces that discouraged [...] women from publishing almost anything at all’ are invaluable in explaining the puzzling reluctance of women like Meta Klopstock and Rahel Varnhagen to publish.⁸⁷ But it is important to recognize that there were instances in which women positively wanted to publish. Moreover, for those women who sought to set the record straight about their own lives, it was imperative that they published under their own name, in order to be able to clear it. Susanne Kord’s observation that ‘Ein Pseudonym war für viele Autorinnen mehr als nur ein falscher Name, der dazu diente, die Identität der Autorin zu verhüllen: es war vor allem ein Schutzmantel für den guten Ruf’, clearly does not apply in cases either where a woman’s reputation was already severely damaged, or where a woman used her good reputation to bestow legitimacy on her writing (e.g. Amalia Holst, known for her girls’ schools).⁸⁸ The potentially dangerous consequences of writing for an eighteenth-century woman are well-established:

Solange die gesellschaftliche Konvention die Frau in Küche und Schlafzimmer verbannte, begab sich eine Schriftstellerin auf soziales Glatteis und setzte sich der öffentlichen Kritik aus: Kritik nicht etwa an der Qualität des Geschriebenen,

⁸⁷ Dawson, *The Contested Quill*, p. 90.

⁸⁸ Kord, *Ein Blick*, p. 16.

sondern allein an der Tatsache, daß sie schrieb – Kritik an ihrer sogenannten ‘Weiblichkeit’.⁸⁹

Yet these dangers were not always enough to silence women who wanted to contribute to public debates. All of the women discussed in this chapter felt justified in their decision to take up the pen: either because their writing in some way served the greater good of the female sex (Bohl, Gilden, Berlepsch, Gad and Holst), or because they felt that their public humiliation rationalized their presumptuousness in writing on their own behalf (Bürger, Schulze-Kummerfeld, Lichtenau). It is possible to conclude from this that the social and discursive pressures brought to bear on women did not affect them in a uniform way: the very existence of these texts, which do not go out of their way to demonstrate the feminine virtues of modesty, obedience and humility, lays bare the fragility of these prohibitions.

The women discussed in this chapter differ in several respects: some of them pursued publication professionally; others remained uninvolved in the literary market. Not all of them were personally acquainted with well-known male writers. But all these women share one characteristic: their desire not just to speak out on matters which they felt strongly about, but also their common refusal to be cowed by the prescriptions made for their sex. They were willing to contradict male writers and pedagogues in full view of the literary public, and prepared to defend their own reputation. They were clearly aware of the discursive conditions in which they published their texts, but not intimidated by them. These texts therefore provide important counter-examples to the numerous texts by

⁸⁹ Kord, *Ein Blick*, p. 17.

women writers which bear out, and in many cases perpetuated, eighteenth-century gender ideology.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to retrieve the historical reality of women writers in the period 1770-1820. Of necessity, therefore, it examined contemporary ideology to which they were expected to conform, whilst contrasting that ideology with their actual experience. This examination revealed that women's writing was less restricted than the ideology has led us to expect. And that access to the literary market was far less dependent on gender than scholars had assumed. Women's position in the business of literature was in fact determined rather by other factors: the increase in readers, and the emergence of a literary market diverse enough to include both the demanding aesthetic of Weimar Classicism and the popular entertainments of romantic fiction. This study therefore concludes that, in spite of all the well-documented disadvantages women faced through their lack of education and of financial and legal independence, there was no general exclusion of women from the sphere of literature and culture, but rather a complex involvement on several levels – as readers, writers, public figures, teachers, actresses, translators and correspondents.

This change in perspective – effectively acknowledging women's agency, as well as their oppression – is part of a wider trend in recent research.¹ Interest in women's writing of this period began primarily as an attempt to unearth little-known texts. Scholars were subsequently under pressure to explain the recondite nature of these texts. This pressure was partly self-imposed. Feminist scholars wanted to avoid an obvious

¹ This trend is surveyed in Anne Fleig, 'Vom Ausschluß zur Aneignung. Neue Positionen in der Geschlechterforschung zur Aufklärung', *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert* 26, no. 1 (2002), pp. 79-89.

conclusion: that women's work in this period was just not as good as men's. Such a conclusion involves the patently ridiculous idea that women writers enjoyed equal opportunities with men. Scholars therefore undertook the task of setting out in full women's disadvantages in the period. However, their achievement in doing so led them to overestimate the influence of these disadvantages. Exclusion, oppression, prejudice and subversion became watchwords essential for the evaluation of women's writing. But the women writers themselves had no such retrospective clarity. In the main, they did not write with a literary canon in mind, nor were they dissuaded from writing by their social, legal and cultural status. The latest research, to which this thesis is intended to be a contribution, attempts to present a more complex historical picture of women's writing. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is historians, rather than literary scholars, who have led the way.

An example of this change in perspective is Anne-Charlott Trepp's *Sanfte Männlichkeit und selbständige Weiblichkeit. Frauen und Männer im Hamburger Bürgertum zwischen 1770 und 1840* (1996). Trepp uses a large body of archival material, much of which had not been studied before, to investigate the polarization of gender relations in Hamburg's bourgeois class. Her conclusion is simple:

Die Jahrzehnte zwischen 1770 und 1840 waren keine Zeit der Trennung, sondern der spürbaren *Annäherung* von Frauen und Männern im Hamburger Bürgertum. Die Vorstellung von der Polarisierung und Auseinanderentwicklung der Geschlechter erweist sich – wenn überhaupt – als eine Rückprojektion der Verhältnisse des späteren 19. Jahrhunderts.²

² Anne-Charlott Trepp, *Sanfte Männlichkeit und selbständige Weiblichkeit. Frauen und Männer im Hamburger Bürgertum zwischen 1770 und 1840* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 399.

The structural conditions that would have separated the male and female spheres did not exist. And there was no real attempt among Hamburg's bourgeoisie to create this polarization. Instead, all households prided themselves on their involvement with society at large. Scholars have often overlooked private social events, which involved mixed gatherings; yet they were an integral part of bourgeois society. So an empirical study of personal papers, family documents and correspondence shows that a revision of the simplistic concept of separate spheres is necessary. Scholars are, once again, too ready to equate ideology with actuality.³

Anne Fleig's work has also successfully revised unhistorical, and often unexamined, notions of women's writing in this period. She based her study *Handlungs-Spiel-Räume. Dramen von Autorinnen im Theater des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts* (1999) on all available plays by women from between 1770 and 1800. The exploration of new texts enabled her to identify certain assumptions about the position of women dramatists in this period as 'Fiktion der literarhistorischen Überlieferung'.⁴ Among these 'fictions' is the idea that women did not write many plays because of the inhibiting effect of the supreme aesthetic status accorded to drama. Fleig shows that this fiction derives more from modern scholarship than contemporary reality. The majority of eighteenth-century plays, both by women and men, were far from inhibited by high aesthetic standards, and more diverse than scholarship allows.⁵ The assumption that women's plays were more likely to be published anonymously, and less likely to be performed than

³ See also Claudia Opitz and Ulrike Weckel, 'Einleitung', in *Ordnung, Politik und Geselligkeit der Geschlechter im 18. Jahrhundert*, edited by Ulrike Weckel, Claudia Opitz, Olivia Hochstrasser and Brigitte Tolkemitt. Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998, pp. 12-14.

⁴ Fleig, *Handlungs-Spiel-Räume*, p. 281.

⁵ Fleig, *Handlungs-Spiel-Räume*, pp. 1-4.

men's plays, has also been proved wrong by Fleig. At least half of all plays written by women were performed, which compares favourably to performance ratings of work by male dramatists. Women's drama production rose parallel to men's drama production, in response to a general increase in the demand for new plays.⁶ The ever-present analysis of gender-discourse, concludes Fleig, has misled scholars.

These new approaches allow for both theoretical and practical exclusion, but refuse to accept such exclusion as final. As a result, some paradoxically positive effects of exclusion can be noted. It is possible to argue, for example, that the insistence on women's 'Bestimmung', whilst relegating women authors to didactic genres, simultaneously designated women as experts in the education of the female sex. This allowed women to achieve the publication of a plethora of advice books and didactic novels.⁷ Rebekka Habermas has suggested the use of the term 'Aneignung' to express women's relationship women to the normative discourse of their age and to convey their active involvement.⁸ This is in contrast to earlier positions which have characterized women merely as passive recipients, excluding all possibilities of reciprocity.

The women discussed in this thesis were certainly not neutral recipients of a role handed down to them by men. Instead, they challenged male ideas on women's education (Gad and Holst), asserted the validity of writing literature for entertainment (Wallenrodt), rejected the criticism of male reviewers (Sagar), criticized the contemporary practice of

⁶ Fleig, *Handlungs-Spiel-Räume*, p. 280.

⁷ Opitz and Weckel, 'Einleitung', p. 10.

⁸ Rebekka Habermas, *Frauen und Männer des Bürgertums (1750-1850). Eine Familiengeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), p. 9.

marriage (Berlepsch), created reading spaces for themselves (Stolberg and Recke), defended their reputation (Bürger and Lichtenau), and openly used the language of feminine modesty in a calculated and strategic way (aus dem Winkel). And none of them was inhibited in their pursuit of publication, which most of them negotiated independently, without the help of male relatives or mentors. Much writing about women in this period rehearses a narrative that Rebekka Habermas has called the 'Einbahnstraße des Leides'.⁹ But this thesis tells a different story: not of suffering so much as triumph through adversity; not of passively received monologues but of active conversation between the sexes. There is no evidence here of psychic damage inflicted on women by an overwhelmingly patriarchal society. From the textual evidence presented in this thesis they appear to have dealt with their situation in a pragmatic and robust manner.

The direction scholarship must take is clear. Without prejudice, scholars must return to primary sources. Plenty remains to be rediscovered. The Nicolai Nachlaß in Berlin, for example, holds the letters of over 90 women correspondents, many of which have not been studied. And yet they are the most direct evidence we have of how women approached male publishers, pursued publication and exploited the contemporary book market. As scholars, we purport to serve our subjects. Yet without revisiting primary sources, we serve only an earlier generation of scholars. This thesis attempts to retrieve the real historical identity of women; not to seek reasons for their comparative obscurity, but to overcome it. To understand women's literary life in this period, so different from our own, we should do more than catalogue their relative disadvantages, or compare their writing and reading with that of Goethe or Schiller. We need to re-imagine their reality: to

⁹ Ibid, p. 19.

see Ernestine Voß, with the fire just lit and her family still asleep, opening her book to read in the light of dawn, or Philippine Engelhard writing at night when her ten children are finally asleep; to feel the relief of Elise von der Recke, escaping from her loutish husband to her four hundred books; to hear Maria Anna Sagar's cool mockery of the presumption that she should be sewing, not writing; to imagine Therese aus dem Winkel folding another poem from her pile to send to Georg Joachim Göschen; or Betty Gleim writing to the same man with advice on how to cure his supposed rheumatism; we need to realize the courage it took for both Elise Bürger and Wilhemine von Lichtenau to set about compiling dossiers of favourable reflections on their personal honour. Without reference to this wide spectrum of evidence, women's work will be misrepresented. Only with the picture of literary activity renewed in this way, restored from a portrait of marginalized dilettantism, to a crowd-scene of restless, diligent activity, can women writers of the period be remembered as they deserve.

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