

Preface

The papers collected here were presented at a conference on the topic of *Women and the 'Wende'*, which was organised by Women in German Studies (WIGS) and held at the University of Nottingham on 9-11 September 1993. WIGS was founded in 1988 to further the work of women teaching German in higher education and to encourage development of the academic syllabus to include issues of interest specifically to women as well as the study of literary and other cultural productions by women. Given the momentous changes leading up to and following on from the unification of the two Germanies the theme of *Women and the 'Wende'* was the inevitable choice for the first international WIGS conference with participants from Germany, Eire and the United States as well as from Britain. The success of the conference was due in large measure to the generous support of the Goethe-Institut, Manchester. Financial assistance from the Goethe-Institut enabled us to invite speakers from Germany, and from the start Dr Gerhard Murjahn offered encouragement and practical help in putting the programme together. We would like here to express our warmest thanks to Dr Murjahn and to Marcia Rhodes of the Goethe-Institut Manchester for all their assistance. Our thanks are also due to committee members of WIGS, to colleagues in the Department of German and in the Institute of German, Swiss and Austrian Affairs at the University of Nottingham, and to Mrs Dagmar Allwood for secretarial assistance.

This volume explores the effects of German unification on women's lives and the responses of women to the political, economic, social and cultural changes following in the wake of unification, as well as looking at how the political changes have been portrayed in the media and in literary texts. Two highpoints of the conference were literary readings by the poet, Barbara Köhler, and by the novelist and essayist, Helga Königsdorf. They have the opening and the closing word in this volume. Barbara Köhler's opening contribution comes in two parts: her witty and disconcerting poetic reflection on grammar and gender points the way to the gendering of discourses of power as a leading theme in this volume; her prose montage of memories and images denies the reductive simplicities of the ideologues of left and right and points to the leading theme of how to evaluate the *Wende* and the forty years history of the state it brought to an end.

A first sequence of papers pursues political, economic and legal aspects of this theme. Sabine Bergmann-Pohl was the last President of the Volkskammer and acting Head of State of the GDR at the time of unification and became *parlamentarische*

Staatssekretärin in the Ministry of Health of united Germany. As its title indicates, her paper initiates the key topic of the conference, namely how to evaluate women's position in the GDR, for the answer to that question will in turn affect judgements of what has happened since unification. Forty years of separate development meant that women's lives in the two Germanies followed different patterns. Female participation in the labour force in the GDR was the highest in the developed world and was supported by an extensive network of child-care provision; in West Germany female participation in paid labour was much lower and child-care provision poorer. Since unification women in the new *Länder* have been disproportionately hit by unemployment, by the disappearance of facilities as factories close and by the loss of rights entailed in the adoption of West German practice. The single most thorny constitutional problem since unification has been the abortion law and it seems unlikely that the latest ruling of the Constitutional Court is the end of the matter. On the other hand, the ostensibly emancipatory state policies of the GDR have been subject to much criticism as enabling women's participation in the labour force but doing little to change underlying gender relations or alleviate the double burden women bear of waged and domestic labour. The heated debate over how to evaluate policies for women in the former GDR is of continuing interest in the context of developing European policy. The papers by Barbara Einhorn, Rachel Alsop and Elizabeth Clements pursue these themes: Barbara Einhorn sets the changes in women's employment in the new *Länder* in the larger context of what has been happening in Europe since the end of the cold war; Rachel Alsop explores a regional example of how unification has affected women's position, and Elizabeth Clements charts the continuing battle over abortion legislation.

The next sequence of essays turns to responses to unification, both practical and psychological. Following Julia Teschner's account of the post-*Wende* fate of the official voice of women's interests in the GDR, Hanna Behrend's paper gives a fascinating account of the great range of independent activities which the employment crisis has elicited. Higher education has been a particularly fraught field as the institution purveying Marxist-Leninist doctrine to the educated elite and now subject to a controversial process of scrutiny by which women in the middle and lower echelons of the academic hierarchy have been disproportionately affected; Hanna Behrend surveys the growing sector of autonomous academic projects which has emerged in response to these developments. Kerstin Mey explores the different history of the art market in the West as against state support but also state control of the arts in the East and the marginalisation of women under both systems. Her paper raises a key area of debate, the difference between grass-roots feminism in the West and state-led emancipation in the East. This emerges as a leading theme in the sequence of essays exploring how women's sense of identity as citizens and as women has been affected by the *Wende*. Here Irene Dölling sets an illuminating theoretical context for the material gathered through individual interviews in the papers by Dinah Dodds and Chris Weedon.

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The next set of papers explores how the press and other media have responded to the political changes and contributed to changing or reinforcing cultural constructions of gendered identity. Andrea Rinke looks at the crucial medium of television in a survey which contrasts the sexist culture prevailing in most popular programmes with the few women's magazine programmes which offer a more differentiated view. Martha Wörsching examines the role of the magazine *Für Dich* in constructing the feminine mode of the *allseitig entwickelte sozialistische Persönlichkeit* (a personage who reappears in Astrid Herhoffer's essay) and the brief radical turn during the *Wende* which was quickly crushed by market forces, as Margaret Stone's piece on *EMMA* also brings out. Jean Conacher's analysis of Helga Königsdorf's journalistic work exposes a massive sea-change in the position of intellectuals who, she argues, have lost the key role they played in the GDR and been marginalised by the arrival of a Western media culture. Ingrid Sharp probes the lower depth of that (un-)culture in examining the sexist terms in which unification has been gendered.

Finally comes a sequence of essays surveying the literary scene. J. H. Reid's paper brings out how gender symbolism, deployed scurrilously in the press, is turned to critical effect in Volker Braun's literary works which figure the GDR and the FRG in gendered terms, while Anna Kuhn's paper uncovers a sexist subtext, fully in tune with the more vulgarly overt tones set in the popular press, in the journalistic attacks on Christa Wolf; just as the political culture of the GDR and its policies for women have come under attack, so too has the intellectual and literary culture in an atmosphere poisoned by revelations concerning collaboration with the state security service. Writers generally and specifically women writers had a high profile in the GDR: Eva Kaufmann surveys contrasting contributions of women writers from differing political positions to the post-*Wende* debate in a paper which strikes a more optimistic note than Jean Conacher's sense of the marginalisation of the literary voice. Georgina Paul's paper adds an important dimension to the controversy on how to evaluate gains and losses for women arising from the *Wende* in her paper exploring gender politics in East and West and literary representations of lesbianism in GDR literature. The papers by Astrid Herhoffer and Ricarda Schmidt both assess, with interestingly differing accentuation, the work of Monika Maron, who has been one of the sharpest critics of the GDR *qua* phallocentric body politic. Finally there comes Helga Königsdorf's meditation on the traumatic anxieties which the political upheaval of the *Wende* has brought in its wake and on the ambiguities in the saying of 'we' and 'I' which the claims of writers to speak for others entail. Her subtle reflection, part confession of failings, part elegy for lost hopes, part step towards an unknown future is the last word in our volume: 'Nur aus der Selbstachtung entsteht der Mut zur Angst und zur gemeinsamen Überwindung von Angst. Der Mut zu leisen Tönen, die stolz sind, ohne es sein zu wollen.'