

THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN AUTHORS TO THE DISCOVERY OF PEOPLE OF FEMALE SEX IN GERMAN-SPEAKING LITERATURE SINCE 1945

INGEBORG DREWITZ

Berlin

I

The prolific contribution that women authors have made in German-speaking countries since the Second World War and the lively debate on the question of the role of women in society in the last 10 years have given new life to the traditional question of whether women's writing is different because women are women or because the processes of socialization to which they are subjected are different. The assertion that women write differently from men is finding more and more support. And increasingly we hear Virginia Woolf quoted who, against a considerable amount of misunderstanding, declared that if two qualitatively equivalent texts were placed side by side, one could tell which was written by a woman and which by a man. The fact that the self-confidence and self-awareness of women have in the meantime and without doubt increased, however, also poses further questions: for example, whether it might not be more or less preferred constellations of plot, emotional commitment or the method of structuring a text that permit the distinctiveness of feminine experience to be detected; whether, for instance, the classical symmetrical structure of the drama is still used when women deal with this form of literature; whether in a poem by a woman we can detect an unusual way of experiencing things or at least a way of experiencing things that is different from that which might be expected; whether, in prose, bonds between women are treated more elaborately

than in the traditional novel or in a love story written by a man; or whether the subject matter involves relationships between mother and daughter, between daughter and mother, between sister and sister, friendship between women, erotic fascination of women for women or the strain imposed upon women caught up between motherhood and career. On examining relevant works by German women writers, we find that there is a clear emphasis on the mother-daughter and the daughter-mother relationship which, in the traditional novel (with the notable exception of Fontane's *Mathilde Möhring*) was almost always only a side-issue of the plot. Of decisive importance for the subject matter are narrative techniques that depart from mere description, techniques that incorporate confessions in both dialogue and monologue form, i.e. narrative techniques that are not preferred solely by women. It would appear important to me to underline this in order to ensure that Friedrich Schlegel's prejudice is not perpetuated when he recommended that women use the epistolary form in literature. (And we know that due to the late emancipation of women in an already well-developed bourgeois society, it was not even a prejudice at that time.) It is noteworthy that the mother/daughter problem failed to appear in literature produced by women in the first post-war decade. This was certainly not because the return of women to their families after the stress of the war years and the post-war years had obscured the problem, but rather because the pressure of war and refugee experiences as well as the horror at the genocide which had taken place laid the emphasis on private and intimate experiences. A young generation without youth was tentatively testing itself in the partnership between man and woman, a situation which was new to it. Amongst women, Ingeborg Bachmann was the first able to shape feminine eroticism, whether she measured the unbridgeable gulf between woman and man in her play for radio, "Der gute Gott von Manhattan," or whether she very cautiously, but with a nervous sensitivity transmuted into language, displayed the challenging love of a young lesbian and in the end, the inevitability of the meeting of two women, Mara and Charlotte, in her story "Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha":

She was free. Nothing seemed impossible. Why shouldn't she start to live with a person of her own nature? But now Mara had knelt down beside her, was beginning to talk, was talking and talking insistently. My beloved, you mustn't think—I'm sorry—I

don't know what's got into me—be nice to me—I'm insane, insane for you—

I want to—I think—I could . . .

Charlotte thought: I don't understand what she's talking about. In such hours men's language had always given something which she could hold on to. I can't listen to Mara, I can't stand her words without muscles, these superfluous little words.

Listen Mara, if you want to know the truth. We must try to talk, really to talk to each other. Try. (But she doesn't want to know the truth, and then there's the problem of how to put this truth about us both. The words don't exist yet.) I can't comprehend what you're saying. You're too vague. I can't imagine how you think. Something different must be going around in your head.

My poor head. You must take pity on him, you must stroke him, tell him what he should think.

Charlotte started obediently to stroke Mara's head. Then she stopped. She had heard it before, not the words but the intonation. She herself had often talked on and on like this, particularly when she had first met Franz, and in front of Milan too she had fallen into this intonation, had gathered her voice into frills; he had had to listen to this sing-song completely lacking in understanding, she had babbled away at him with lips screwed up, the weaker to the stronger, her the helpless, the uncomprehending, him the comprehending. She had used the same weaknesses as Mara was now using towards her, and then suddenly had held the man in her arms, extorted tenderness when he wanted to think of something else just as she was now being blackmailed by Mara, was being forced to stroke her, to be nice to her, to be wise.

But this time she had insight. It wouldn't work with her. Or would it? Perhaps it was of no use at all that she recognized and saw through the girl—because she was suddenly reminded of herself and saw it all. Only, suddenly she felt much older all at once, because this creature in front of her was playing the child, was making herself small to make Charlotte bigger for her own ends. Once more she ran her hand tentatively through Mara's hair, would have liked to have promised her something. Something sweet, flowers, a nightie or a necklace. Simply to keep her quiet. So that she, Charlotte, could at last get up and think of

something else, so that this little burdensome animal should be shooed away. She thought of Franz and she wondered if he too had been molested by her and would have liked to have shooed her away, this little animal, to get peace and quiet.

Charlotte stood up because she noticed that the curtains were not drawn. Although she would have preferred the windows to have been lit up, open for others to see in. She no longer had anything to be afraid of. What should start to be important now was what she thought and meant, what should no longer be important was what others had urged her to think, how others had allowed her to live.

If she were to begin life with Mara. . . . Then she would enjoy her work more for example. Although she had always liked working, her work lacked the curse, the compulsion, the absolute necessity. And she needed someone around her, beside her, under her, for whom she not only worked but for whom she was the access to the world, for whom she could set the pace, decide the value of a matter, choose a position.¹

The fear of this contact, the changing of roles enacted suggest an acquaintance with the twofold nature of woman that conceals the flight of so many of Ingeborg Bachmann's feminine figures into a superiority consumed by anguish, that creates a new estrangement between man and woman or, to be perhaps more precise, reveals this estrangement between man and woman for the first time. She dealt with and was familiar with the so intangible ego of woman. This is discernible in the relationship between Elisabeth and her father Matrei in the story "Drei Wege zum See" (in *Simultan* [Munich: Piper, 1972]), in which Elisabeth almost finds a feeling of security in an approach through aloof distance, in a rejection of adulthood, but also exhibits, at least for moments, an ability to show patience, a motherliness (albeit one directed towards her old father) similar to Charlotte's in her relationship with Mara.

II

For woman as a twofold nature (not only in the splitting of roles

into girl/woman/mother and person with career), intelligence remains the deciding motive for the self-discovery of women, this being the very factor that applies in the images which mothers create of their daughters and daughters of their mothers.

In the forefront here are two texts by Marie Luise Kaschnitz taken from *Orte*, i.e. almost at the end of her life, because they anticipate a break with the stability of harmony between man and woman that Marie Luise Kaschnitz's work expresses so convincingly, a break which was only later to be tried out by the younger generation—the estrangement between mother and daughter and daughter and mother:

And I'm supposed to be a good mother, bringing up children well. I am not. A playmate-teacher my husband called me once and that was true, I wasn't bored when I played with the children, I didn't go down to their level, I was in their middle, one of them. The biggest sin I committed towards my child was the love I felt for my husband—the one-ness of togetherness. That's why I always maintain that a bad marriage is better for children, particularly for only children. Then they know who to stick to. The conspiracy of an invariably united couple on the other hand makes the child small and helpless, makes it consumed with jealousy. You always stick together, my four-year old daughter once said, and turned away, stamped her foot. And we probably laughed at this as well. When I think of the loneliness of that child, I feel ill.

Only after thirty years have I discovered that it was a witch sitting at her bedside every night. The child didn't dare to cry and didn't say anything the next day—only after thirty years. And when I think how I forced her at the age of five to take back a toy soldier she had taken from one of the neighbour's sons, to go all the way there on her own, to ring the bell, to confess her guilt (guilt!). Or how it was when she was thirteen and I took her to school in the country (because we were homeless) and then got back into the horse-drawn cart—which had been so difficult to get hold of—and heard the tap tap tap of her plimsolls on the asphalt of Nieder-Erlenbach and the imploring voice—take me with you. And I went on talking for the best, nothing but stupidity, and drove away, drove away.²

And the second example:

In this thirty year old film, my mother suddenly appeared in the picture walking straight towards me. I was surprised at how beautiful she was and how frail. I thought immediately that she must have already taken hold. Because after the death of my father she started to get fat, plump in the face and red. The film stemmed from 1940, wartime. The time of the West Wall; trips to the Upper Rhine and to the border area had become difficult. That summer I definitely wasn't at home and I had no idea of the onset of my mother's illness. The loving smile was not intended for me, but now it applies to me, I play the film back, four or five times. My nephews as little boys with a chess board or with a fishing rod, my eldest sister as a young woman, everything nice and cheerful, but all I want is to see the same few feet of film. They are directed at me, me alone. My mother, who is walking towards me, smiling, looking at *me*. The eight lindens in the year appear and reappear in the picture, the foliage is black and unbelievably dense, no comparison with today. I don't want to show this film, which was given to me, to my brother. It hurts him to see how these two hundred year old trees are slowly dying. I must have another look at how my mother smiles at me, so full of love, not meant for me. (Kaschnitz, *Orte*, p. 137)

Two examples of women not reaching one another, not being able to interact for a period of over thirty years, a state of missing one another, but still knowing about one another exactly, without being able to turn this knowledge into feeling. Two examples of a feeling of almost failure, the triviality of guilt, one in the presence of the other, the inner chill arising from shame.

We observe a tenderness of perception which the young reject with severity of feeling, as if they were not equal to being known by their mother, as if the affection behind the estrangement were painful:

She began to run when she had covered half of the distance. The shadow of old mother Glaufügel behind the wrought iron glass door gave her a choking feeling in her throat, a tightening in her hands: shortly she would be stretching her arms out to her mother, enfolding her in her arms. Her mother stooped down once more before opening the door. Whatever is she doing there,

is she still picking fluff from the floor, piece by piece with her fingers even though her children have long since left home? Why is she wiping her children's thumbprints from the door handles? In the fraction of a moment before they see each other again, while her mother is placing her hand on the door handle, wiping it with her wet finger, Glauf­lügel begged for a delay. Her mother opened the door. Glauf­lügel stooped down to her—a face as if the skin had been stripped off, transparent and broken into splinters.

A new mirror on the wall reached up to the ceiling, the hawthorn in the front garden had grown, lilac climbing on the roof; nothing had changed. Glauf­lügel didn't relate everything, nothing disquieting, she followed her mother's questions and answers, devoted her attention to her. Only once when old mother Glauf­lügel asked her to say a "proper sentence in Italian" and Glauf­lügel met her wish—words without sense, without context—and the old woman looked at her silently, did she feel the need to relate everything, completely comprehending the privation of her mother in a single moment. . . .

She found it unpleasant that she should cling to her mother, couldn't get away from her, allowed herself to be led everywhere, didn't go anywhere alone—and she didn't do anything to stop this. The Marums are standing at the garden fence said old mother Glauf­lügel, they've been waiting a long time for you, they're peeping through the boxwood hedge. It was the same old thing. She crept up to the first floor under the roof; a crate of books which Ronnen had brought had still not been unpacked, she ran her hand over it. Everything was all too much for her, the customs in this house, unchangeable, she hit the wall with her arm. The old woman below beside the hawthorn, she was fishing little animals and leaves out of the fountain. Glauf­lügel shrank at the thought of the next few days. She thought of leaving but rejected the thought immediately. Seeing the old woman had affected her too much. Your mother talks about you so much, old Glauf­lügel had written to her, she says, if Johanna were here . . . your mother is not ill, but she no longer goes down to the river on her own. When you come to Germany go and see her.³

Here, in Birgit Pausch's description of Johanna Glauf­lügel's visit home after her divorce and a long stay in Italy (in *Die Ver-*

weigerungen der Johanna Glaufügel), a social bond is almost totally destroyed. These simple people, who have made their daughter's education possible and who were proud of what by conventional standards was a good marriage to a doctor, find it difficult to comprehend the divorce of their daughter and her beginning a new career in Italy; they are unable to hide their disappointment completely. The daughter, however, still cannot manage to accept the thwarted hopes of her parents and to counteract this with her emancipatory right to freedom; on the contrary, she is almost ashamed of it, remains caught up in girlish spite which makes her appear pitiless even though she knows better.

A similar experience is captured by Ursula Krechel in her poem "Meine Mutter" which (written after the death of her mother) confesses the breakdown of the generation gap, the cave-in of the walls of time, and which suddenly experiences the twinship, the agreement between woman and woman only to lose it again:

Ten days after her death she was suddenly there again in a dream. As if someone had called I was drawn to the window of the flat which we used to have. In the street there were four characters waving out of an old dented VW while one of them sounded the horn. The way friends in Berlin used to look about five years ago. Then there was a woman waving from the back seat: my mother. I see her first half hidden behind her new friends. Then I see nothing but her, as big as in the cinema, then her lean white arm on which, even in close-up, there is not a single hair to see. . . . I race down the polished staircase. At the front door I hear a giggle: Mummy, I call, but the next sentence fails to come. My mother is sitting jammed between two laughing boys. She hadn't been so happy for a long time. Are you coming with us? she asks. But there's no room in the car, I say, and look embarrassed through her silk blouse—she never wore anything like this when she was alive—and see her young girl's pointed breasts and I think I must call father. Then the motor revs up, the ramshackle door is slammed from the inside. At the front door I could have hit myself. I hadn't even noticed the number of the car.⁴

Another common theme is twinship and agreement also on the occasion of the daughter's first menstruation but nevertheless long

ago disrupted, de-ritualised, no longer a common experience shared by women. Angelika Mechtel, in *Wir sind arm, wir sind reich*, describes the strain between security and disrupted communication between daughter and mother:

I noticed that something was wrong with me when I was climbing the stairs. Mummy had been expecting it daily. I had been longing for it as if it meant a new life.

Floodlight which penetrates all darkness, cocoon which bursts like a ripe seed in a pod. Tear away the webs, I thought, you'll recognize outlines where everything used to be vague for you, set foot on new shores from which, in the past, you had been debarred, you will be accepted as one of them.

I imagined initiation rites. The world would suddenly change, doors would be opened, I would be one of them sharing all secrets.

I saw that it was blood and hid it until evening. Mother discovered it when I was getting into the bath. I watched the surprise and the shyness which she suddenly felt. She took my underclothes and soaked them in cold soap suds.

That's not possible, I heard her say, then she took me out of the warm water. You shouldn't bathe now, it's not good for you.

She called daddy and I heard him coming out of the living room across the hall. Mummy stopped him outside of the bathroom.

She's had her first period, I heard her say.

Well, I'll be damned, answered daddy, at her age? I heard his quiet laughter and his steps recede.

Mummy wrapped me in a towel just as she did with Marcella every day, she dried me as if I were her youngest. The feeling of excitement almost reaching bursting point had subsided. Under her hands my body was warm, I felt secure.

I hope you're not frightened? Mummy said.

I'm a woman now, I said. Disappointment rose like a lump in my throat when she laughed just as quietly as daddy before: you've still got time.

I counted the years ahead of me, an unimaginable long time. Of course, mummy said, you won't be able to do gymnastics on the carpet-beating bar in the yard any longer. That wouldn't be

proper. She gave me instructions in hygiene, just as she had taught me to disinfect a graze. The next afternoon I spent on my own in the flat, imagined how the others would be doing gymnastics on the carpet-beating bar in the yard. I wanted to tie the boy next door to the stake, sat on the floor in the hall, listened to my body, wanted to hear the flow of blood and be a woman.⁵

To get to know one another through the generation barrier almost always requires extrapolation of the separating line and may freeze into cold fury as in Helga Novak's novel *Die Eisheiligen* where, however, there is a combination of an adoptive relationship and other social preconditions. No satisfactory mother-daughter relationship can arise amidst brutal tenderness and corporal punishment, petty bourgeois desires for self-assertion and the unredeemed life of the mother, where attempted suicide on the part of the child and finally denunciation of the adolescent in order to be taken into a Boarding School run by the State Youth Organization of the GDR are the only answers to the problem of escaping from existential rape by the (adoptive) mother:

One Sunday morning at eight my door burst open and Kaltesophie stood beside my bed. Pooh!, what's stinking here, what've you got there on your head?

Lice.

Where did you catch them?

At the World Festival.

Some of them get palmed off with a kid and you get lice.

Seems as if there's something for everyone.

What do you want here?

We got your letter and we were pleased to hear anything at all from you. We wanted to go to the police and report you missing. You're living in style.

Is that all?

No, I came to collect my suitcase.

Your suitcase? And how do you think I'm going to carry my stuff?

That's your business, you're on your own. We've decided to let you go—wherever you want. But you won't get one penny from us, even if you come crawling.

I didn't expect money and I didn't ask for any.

And what about the suitcase.

Wait a moment, I'll empty it first.
 Don't come near me with your louse-infested skull.
 She stood at the door and watched me pack the rest of my stuff
 into the cupboard, then I threw the suitcase at her stomach.⁶

We encounter yet another, different situation when Karin Struck (*Die Mutter* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975]), with almost arrogant compassion, retells the life of her mother beyond the social barrier of her education and a boastingly exuberant reflection; but nevertheless on one occasion when the two women (the daughter is herself already a mother) are crouching in the bushes urinating, a wave of tender warmth arises, atmospherically prepared by the joint trip of the young couple with the parents to their old homeland, Polish Pomerania, where the parents, as if transmuted, are suddenly young again. Here speechlessness for an animally shared minute loses its divisive force.

On the other hand, a situation of being locked up in a predestined role within society can cause such a division that it is impossible for a mother-daughter relationship to arise. Elisabeth Plessen describes a family situation of this nature in *Mitteilung an den Adel*, which involves her coming-to-terms with her father on the occasion of his death:

C. A. stands on the steps outside the front door, beside him Olympia, beside her, the manager, beside him, his wife, beside her Johannes, Augusta, Johanna, the children in striped socks and patent-leather shoes. The guests are standing behind them in the door. The last cart of sheaves to be brought in harvested draws up in front of the house, drawn by two horses. On top of the sheaves there are two farmworker women sitting, each with a large and a small harvest wreath in her lap. The cart is followed by a train of farmworkers with their wives. Many of them have brought their children. A crowd of a hundred. The cart comes to a stop. The two women climb down and take up their position in front of C. A. with hayforks on which two harvest wreaths are stuck. They look at him with embarrassment. The first recites her poem and then the second. Sometimes they fail to find the rhymes, turn red and lower their eyes which were staring before straight ahead at the wall of the house. They help each other out. Then it is over, they can move again. C. A. is presented with the

great harvest wreaths with their multi-colour ribbons dangling down and they step back. C. A. voices thanks, says “we” and “us” and “our,” says thank you to “all loyal friends” who have every year “helped” to bring in the harvest safe and sound despite the trials and tribulations of the weather and other difficulties. He offers thanks to God “in his name and in the name of his wife and children,” then he thanks them. Out of emotion there is a catch in his voice and the atmosphere. The end of his part.⁷

A picture which by itself suffices to make understandable the sensitivities and perversions of unexpressed feelings and to explain why the daughter who had come to attend her father’s funeral turns around shortly before her parents’ estate. The estrangement between generations, between the parents and their daughter, between the widowed mother and the daughter, can no longer be bridged by the pre-determined ceremony of a socially appropriate funeral. The extent to which daughters are made to suffer because of the role in which their mothers are caught up can also be felt in Ruth Rehmann’s novel *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, her extremely successful attempt to come to terms on the basis of her father’s life with the lack of moral commitment of so many protestant clergymen in the Nazi era, their tendency to look the other way. The mother, the clergyman’s wife in the role of the servant, the unobtrusive helper, invariably without any claims of her own, is incapable of saying “my,” but at the same time she is a person who not only looks after her husband and children, but also helps to look after people of the parish: she is shy, insecure, but uncomplaining—almost cheerful but not quite cheerful, never totally relaxed. This is an impressive description:

The parents are very rarely seen together during the day. The mother’s centre is the nursery, a wicker chair on the platform beside the window, a sewing table and a sewing machine. Here all the strings of the household meet. Did she like being a housewife? Later in the three-roomed flat in which she was alone after he died she left the dishes unwashed on fine days, sat out on the balcony, read, watched the tomatoes ripening. “My tomatoes” she said, “my afternoons on my balcony.” In the parsonage at Auel she had never called anything “mine.” The room which in fact ought to have been her room with her desk and

her books which she had brought into the marriage (Storm, Raabe, Gottfried Keller, Fritz Reuter, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer) was changed over the years to become a reception room.

She didn't worry about having her own room, it was said in the family.

His centre is the study. And this is the only room in which he knows his way around.

The precision with which he knew in his head the souls entrusted to him was equivalent to the vagueness of his idea of the house in which he lived.

Whenever the children want some fun they ask questions to catch him out: How many rooms are there in the attic? Which direction do the windows face? Then they let him guess; where is the shed in the cellar used for storing the garden tools, on the left, on the right or straight ahead?

"Leave him alone," says mother, "How do you expect him to know that?" He pretends that he is sure: Of course he knows, after all, he lives here. But they never get a precise answer. As they had already known in advance: He hasn't the foggiest idea.

In fact he only uses things which are not in the study on fleeting occasions. He never plays head of the household. The tidiness and order which primarily serves his work, his peace and quiet and his well-being, he fails to notice. He never finds fault, praises where praise is expected, but without understanding. The arrangement of his things in the cupboards and drawers is for him a closed book. It is useless to expect him to look for a tie or a pair of underpants.

He has never understood the system.

He never goes into the attic. And of all the cellars, he only knows those with the wine shelves. No matter how often he goes down, he never remembers that the first door on the right leads to the hen house and the second to the central heating. He doesn't know how the heating system works. If he had to operate it, the family would have to sit in the cold all the time. For the life of him he could never relieve mother of any work, although he offers repeatedly. Well meant; but never mind, she says.

The children watch him from the winter garden when he—spurred on by grand designs—goes about digging to turn up the

potato patch. He attacks the work like a madman, stabs his spade deep into the ground and hurls shovel-fulls of earth behind him. But soon his movements become more hesitant, his digging becomes flatter. At ever shorter intervals he stops, wipes away the sweat, looks at what he's completed and compares it with what he's still got to do while in his mind, without noticing it, he reduces the amount he plans to do. Tomorrow is another day.

He doesn't know what the children know: tomorrow he won't have any time. And the day after tomorrow something else will crop up. Before he thinks of it again, mother will have done it. When the potatoes are there, he'll say: "Look how well they've turned out. It was me who turned over the patch." From time to time mother has a break-down. Flat out, with hardly a trace of her beneath the bed clothes she lies in the right-hand marriage bed and wants peace and quiet, nothing but peace and quiet. With closed eyes she drifts down the river of sleep, for days, while the household keeps going without her; but the orderly system behind everything, the pattern of life together, falls to pieces. Although nobody disturbs him, father cannot work. Puffing smoke he runs up and down the study, empties his pipe finally and then with a guilty conscience he looks in on her "Are you asleep?"

When she slowly opens her eyes, he has so much advice which has occurred to him on his rounds of the parish: medicines, doctors, lay practitioners and diets. . . .

There is a touch of impatience in his voice, a furtive dig: Now do something. Now pull yourself together.

He is never ill, at the most, trouble with his teeth or voice—diarrhoea from getting worked up. And the whole family is allowed to share his toothache. His cough is an orgy of moaning and groaning. It worries him that she is so quiet. It disturbs her that he is worried.

She climbs back into the harness much too early. While the family gives a sigh of relief, the anxious intermezzo of her absence recedes. Mother is back. We can forget her.⁸

Gabriele Wohmann represents her mother in a similar way when she writes about her parents' home (also a clergyman's household) until, in *Ausflug mit der Mutter*, she first sees her as a widow, until she

discovers the woman whom she had hitherto always only perceived in the bustle of the family—in the shadow of her father:

And what is beautiful: mother enjoys it when she can once again lay the table for three persons, or for two persons, or for five. Beautiful: when she forgets to show me in the garden where and how she buried my brother's dead quail and when I remind her of this. That makes her happy. She has ordered 30 pansies and I cannot understand how one can arrive at the idea, how it is possible to think of PANSIES, PLANTS, SOWING SEEDS, things to do with the garden. Beautiful: when I can talk to her about such incomprehensible worries about the garden; and more: when I can listen to her and when I DON'T remind her of her real worries. A proof of trust like your tolerating my presence at the cemetery: your midday nap while I am in the same room or in the room next door. How can one sleep when there is someone close to one who is awake! Really beautiful: I place myself in the background, I can almost forget myself as the person who I am and conceive of myself as someone who you consider me to be: I let you show me your kitchen herbs, tell me about a neighbour's sore throat, I tell you how right you are, yes, the magnolia blossom really smells of lemon; patiently I go through the signature marks in the book on porcelain and everything as if I were concerned. But most beautiful of all: when I allow you to be adult: give you the chance and cause to criticize me. There! I walk around like an unwashed monster. I run around in rags, the hem of my coat is hanging down, the lining in the sleeves is torn, ladders are running everywhere. In the presence of your horrified superiority I am happy: now I can be proud of you. Her voice is full of self-confidence. She knows exactly how to treat me at this moment.

The grown-up children have plans for the evening which mother hasn't inquired about. The children will probably have told her about it, she thinks. She knows that she is a bit absent-minded and tends to forget things. The children mention this to her; this is gentle criticism for her own good and that's the way she takes it, but she can't really concentrate very well. She simply does not listen with the same attention as father used to do.

It has nothing whatsoever to do with indifference. However, now she's taken a good piece of advice from the children and

adopted one of father's habits: writing down plans and dates concerning the children in her diary.

Her daughter as always has told her too hurriedly and with too much emphasis what they are doing this evening. Emphasizing, repeating, hammering home lack of guilt: her mother will have considered it all unnecessary. All one needs to say to her is whether one has time for her or one has no time for her. Additional elaboration only affects her in so far as it adds to the story. She doesn't need the proof. She never doubts what the children say. It would never occur to her to entertain the suspicion that the children might want to go behind her back; in fact she would never entertain suspicion at all. Within the hard core of the family this would be impossible for her. Everything which might have to do with a guilty conscience is foreign to her. Her daughter has a guilty conscience when her conscience is not good enough in every direction of thought and feeling. To feel in a less radical manner is slovenly and impermissible. If only her daughter could LIVE in such a radical way.⁹

Here we see the double motherliness—that of the aging mother toward her daughter and that of the daughter toward the mother. And we see also the pretense of one toward the other, the knowledge of the rules of the game, the narrow line between love and irony, kindness and being “nice,” the precise perception of one's own half-sincerity; an ability which is evident time and time again in women's writings: the fact that they include themselves without vanity in the certain knowledge that between woman and woman there can be no cheating, that the arts of seduction which women have developed in their jealous efforts to attract the attention of men are not needed; a knowledge of failure which women cannot hide from each other because they know the weaknesses of sons and men so that they possess a final triumph, a trust in their own patience even if they do not say “I,” do not think in terms of “my.” Sacrificial maternity is also evident in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, unlike the works of Karin Struck or Birgit Pausch, where there is no social barrier even though there is adequate occasion for it:

What Nelly doesn't want to have to keep imagining and thus prefers not even to listen to right from the beginning—that is what

is frequently told. The important things—are forgotten. Completely forgotten.

A round table with a white table cloth. That was in the Fröhlich's house on Küstriner Strasse. That was in the backroom behind the shop where we all three had to sleep and eat, and along the wall were stacked bags of flour and sugar. The white cloth was cheap oil cloth, obviously. But it is impossible that you should be able to remember that.

The picture is silent, clearly very old as can be seen from the faint original colours, particularly from that strong, warm golden yellow cast by the suspended lamp (my God, the old oil-cloth bag) on the white table. So it is evening. The picture tends to get vague towards the edges, a factor which only increases its authenticity. It also lacks completeness. The cup, into which her mother is pouring and out of which a warm sweet liquid flows down Nelly's throat, remains invisible. (Coffee substitute, nothing else. And you drank out of the light blue cup with the handle, an enamel pitcher to be precise. No - you *cannot* know). Her mother to the right of her in a white shop coat. Not laughing: radiant. Of her father, only thick fingers, frozen red, strangely shortened by his grey woolen mittens with their fingers cut off. Poor fingers, with which the child, in spite of all the joy which lies over the scene, in spite of all the radiance which emanates from it, feels heartstirring compassion. This unusual mixture: joy and compassion will anchor the picture in the child's memory.

Her father's red fingers are counting banknotes on the white table. Her mother's hand strokes her father's jacket sleeve. The sparkle on the faces implies: We have done it. It's not a matter of luck; not now and not later.

The meaning behind the silent scene is trivial: Father, Bruno Jordan, has been counting his first week's takings ("returns") on the table from the new shop on Sonnenplatz. By way of a trial—some people had called us daring—Jordan had opened a new business on Sonnenplatz beside the modest but secure shop in the Fröhlich's house. In the middle of the economic crisis—or let's say towards the end of it—we had taken our destiny into our own hands. We had built up a living for ourselves. Against all well-meaning advice and all common sense we had rented this GEWOBA shop on the corner of Sonnenplatz. And the money on the table only means that the new customers had placed trust in

our courage and hard work. This means that soon we shall be moving into a proper 1½ room flat and will be able to offer the daughter of the family (who fortunately will forget the backroom completely) a room of her own, as is only proper. Reason for radiance and joy. Who wouldn't give a fortune for a happy childhood?¹⁰

How much of the pride of the petty bourgeoisie is present here! But are we not making things too easy for ourselves with our terminology if we play down the very abilities that women in the narrowness of the petty bourgeoisie exhibit in a much more matter of fact manner than men: the abilities required to survive, to survive privation and misery? It is thus not perhaps the fact that the situation of women pursuing a career has admittedly depleted their emotional capital but hardly altered it and (in so far as is reflected in literature) not even changed the position of women in society. Irmtraud Morgner, in *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*, shows us this with humour and with compassionate curiosity:

In the seventy-second year of the twentieth century there lived a woman graduate at Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin. She worked in an Institute of Nutrition. Her husband, Rudolf, had the same profession and was also employed there. The woman was called Valeska.

Since as a result of the extreme shortage of housing there was little prospect of their getting a flat together, Valeska had not resisted marriage on principle. Rather, as on other occasions, she trusted in some natural course of things, through which hesitation can sometimes sort things out of its own accord like mail on her desk. Filled with such optimism, Valeska and Rudolf managed to enjoy two years of honeymoon-like bliss. And she was by no means afraid of the end of this ideal state, because she relied on Rudolf's lack of interest in all non-scientific activities.

Rudolf pursued his research, in the conviction that he was the greatest scientist in his field. All his acquaintances overlooked this eccentricity. No one would have overlooked it in Valeska. Megalomania was indeed totally foreign to her nature. She considered herself to be a member of a team, who was

replaceable at any time, who herself was surprised everytime she finished a job successfully. After successfully defending a sensational thesis based on a series of experiments with Wistar rats, Valeska encountered on her way home something that turned out to be a face. Oddly enough it was her own.

At home Rudolf received her with roses and told her that in eight weeks they would be able to move into a new flat. In secret he had been busy. And he wanted to surprise Valeska. And he had succeeded. But in a manner different from what he had intended. A turbulent evening with lots of love-making. Rudolf celebrated all good news in a natural way. Valeska was adaptable. She even cried louder than usual. Because in fact she was unable to enjoy love-making.

Rudolf's flat sounded of the sea. In the morning, in the evening, and, best of all, at night when the traffic subsided. The habit-forming noise was generated by a fountain in front of the house. Four water spouts, which projected out of a blueish green-tiled basin. The tiles simulated the waters of the Adriatic, at least cleanliness. In the summer, Valeska's son could not pass by without paddling in it. On hot days, apart from children, young and elderly people also went for a paddle. Middle-aged people, who were no longer able in an unconcerned manner to rely on charm and were not yet able in an unconcerned manner to rely on indifference, refrained from the pleasure. Valeska refrained.

Could Valeska's second marriage have been her expressed wish? After all, she had lived wonderfully relaxed along with her son since her divorce had officially permitted her to bear all the worries of life alone. Valeska suffered from an extreme aversion to practical regulations and pieces of advice when they were offered by people who were not practically active. She strictly refused to acknowledge their competence. Preferably by remaining silent. For which reason Rudolf considered her hate of patriarchal states to be only slight, not doing any damage to the beauty of her appearance. Rudolf had rented a flat in a house known as the "Stossburg," situated at the junction of Friedrichstrasse. The strange face, which had appeared to Valeska on her way home, had followed her there. And she was unable to shake

it off, no matter how hard she tried. And it was totally out of place in a shared flat.

Because Rudolf was used to housewives.¹¹

The conclusion of Irmtraud Morgner's long narrative about the emancipation of women, which she develops with a clever and witty mixture of fairy tale and truth, is that nothing much has changed—yet. The fact that it is not enough just to run away from men in order to find intimacy among women, to cope with twice the amount of work—career and work in the family—is not lost on those women who try to do both jobs. In Maxie Wander's report, based on conversations with women with various professions in the GDR, *Guten Morgen du Schöne* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1976), we immediately notice the instinctive contact with reality on the part of those women who do not forget the number of strings with which they are tied down by men whom they have to leave: by children, the home, the wish to make things a little cosier, friendlier and more cheerful; by the natural desire not to be outstripped in their career. They represent a twofold stress, but also a twofold ability for observation. In my own novels I have tried to show both, and also to see the divisions between the generations and their experience and to draw conclusions, because it is women in particular who are able to recognize these factors. This is because their ability for patience is even more intact than that of men, because they are not, unlike their partners, bound to specific functions (cf. Ingeborg Drewitz: *Gestern war heute—hundert Jahre Gegenwart* and *Wer verteidigt Katrin Lambert?* [Düsseldorf: Classen, 1974/1978]).

The fact that Elfriede Jelinek, Erica Pedretti, and also Jutta Schutting deal with the young child and life with children and are not afraid to capture the daydreams and fears of children reveals feminine, maternal empathy, reveals areas of feminine creativity that have always been open to women and that must not be obscured, that cannot be obscured by professional success without loss (cf. Elfriede Jelinek, *Michael* [Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1972]; Jutta Schutting, *Am Morgen vor der Reise* [Salzburg and Vienna: Residenz, 1978]; Erica Pedretti, *Veränderung oder die Zertrümmerung von dem Kind Karl und anderen Personen* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977]).

Should this give us courage? Courage and confidence in woman's ability, beyond her claim to equality of opportunity (because in spite

of having been laid down by law it is still only a claim), to introduce into society these talents—talents long subdued and albeit not publicly developed but nevertheless talents, to interpret the causal relationships of developments, not only rationally but also emotionally, and to reorder the values of highly industrialized societies? It is important to realize that women writers have refined the traditional image of the woman; that the “great beloved” and the “ecstatic partner in love” do not occupy such a significant place as supposed by men, in spite of subtle love scenes, uncommonly open descriptions of women’s sexual experience; that women are consciously emerging with great curiosity from the situation of being an object, and listening to their own bodies, exploring, but without narcissism; that they are much more sober in their judgements and that their bodies know desire and rejection—a fact that makes them unsuitable for consideration as an object; that they are discovering superiority and are at the same time underprivileged, because the discovery of women, mother and daughter helps them to recognize themselves. This is probably the reason why women writers, no matter how committed they may be, do not join in the feminist war cry but instead reject the patriarchal family in favour of generation gaps and breaks, revealing barriers of language and experience in order perhaps to subvert them.

No mention at all has been made in this article of the command of all the techniques of writing that the prose of the twentieth century offers, the playfulness which keeps form and language constantly in vibration. No traditional narrative in the imperative—and if this form is then employed, for example by Irmtraud Morgner, for the purpose of demonstration, or by Birgit Pausch, to contrast levels of experience, or by Ingeborg Bachmann to make the depths beneath the flow of narrative, then its force appears all the more appalling.

Still, we are not confronting a new prose of the sort that was attempted by Gertrude Stein, but which remained an experiment in language. The reason is evidently that the pressure of experience as yet unredeemed would appear too strong, since women writers have finally been able to disperse the clichés about the women that literature has continued to generate. We have, therefore, not a feminist war cry, but a contribution to the discovery of people of the female sex.

NOTES

1. Ingeborg Bachmann, "Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha," in *Das dreissigste Jahr* (Munich: Piper, 1981), pp. 15 ff.
2. Marie Luise Kaschnitz, *Orte* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1973), p. 94.
3. Birgit Pausch, *Die Verweigerungen der Johanna Glaufügel: Erzählungen* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1977), pp. 56 ff.
4. Ursula Krechel, "Meine Mutter," from *Nach Mainz: Gedichte* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1977), p. 5.
5. Angelika Mechtel, *Wir sind arm, wir sind reich* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1977), p. 91.
6. Helga Novak, *Die Eiseiligen* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1979), pp. 352-53.
7. Elizabeth Plessen, *Mitteilung an den Adel* (Zurich and Cologne: Benziger, 1976), p. 95.
8. Ruth Rehmann, *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* (Munich: Hanser, 1979), pp. 108 ff.
9. Gabriele Wohmann, *Ausflug mit der Mutter* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1976), pp. 38 ff.
10. Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1976), pp. 50 ff.
11. Irmtraud Morgner, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1974), pp. 647 ff.