

Anke Finger and Julie Shoults, Editors. *Women in German Expressionism: Gender / Sexuality / Activism*. U of Michigan P, 2023. vii + 364 pp.

Literary and art historians covering German Expressionism have consistently prioritized the output of male writers and artists, resulting in a flawed and incomplete understanding of the movement. This edited volume by Anke Finger and Julie Shoults aims to put a dent in the consequently skewed nature of scholarship on a movement that researchers claim ushered in the Modern era in calling for a *Neuer Mensch* (new human). Not only have the more than three hundred women who produced works of Expressionist art and literature been—with the striking exception of Else Lasker-Schüler—ignored and neglected both by anthologies documenting the movement and by scholarly studies, but critical approaches, such as gender theory, intersectionality, ethnicity, social identity, and feminism, that could counteract the patriarchal tendencies of research on Expressionism have also been absent. In the book by Finger and Shoults, we find a corrective to this state of affairs.

As the editors report, the prioritization of male contributors to the Expressionist movement finally underwent revision with the publication of anthologies of female Expressionist writers by Hartmut Vollmer, who edited “*In roten Schuhen tanzt die Sonne sich zu Tod*”: *Lyrik expressionistischer Dichterinnen* (‘In red shoes the sun dances itself to death: verse of Expressionist female poets’) in 1993, and *Die Rote Perücke: Prosa expressionistischer Dichterinnen* (‘The red wig: prose by female Expressionist poets’) in 1996. Finger and Shoults cite these anthologies as what may be regarded as windows that finally revealed to modern readers and scholars the existence of women writers and artists in a period that has historically been characterized as dominated by men.

This volume seeks to rectify the unbalanced attention paid to male creators of Expressionism who perpetuated the nineteenth-century bourgeois claim that women must be relegated to the roles of either stay-at-home mothers lacking individual agency, or prostitutes serving as agents of social depravity. The contributors offer analyses that present the women of the Expressionist period as political activists, asserting their autonomy and right to self-determination, and exploring their sexuality beyond the confines of traditional male discourse dominated by Sigmund Freud and Otto Weininger. These women challenge the gender binary, present maternalism as revolutionary discourse, and assert the potential of women to rival men in attaining the Expressionist ideal of becoming a *Neuer Mensch*.

The volume is divided into four major sections addressing the place of women writers and artists within Expressionism, gender aspects and the female body, the framing of women beyond the roles of mothers and prostitutes assigned to them by male Expressionists, and activism in the social realm. Fourteen articles

by fourteen different contributors make for a book that is just as deep as it is wide-ranging in its exploration. The artists and writers covered include Elsa Asenijeff, Gabriele Münter, Claire Goll, Lu Märten, Vally Wieselthier, Emmy Hennings, and Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, among others. The articles do justice to the intersections of visual art and literature, politics and theory, and also to the seminal roles played by female Expressionist creators, such as Claire Goll and Elsa Asenijeff, known previously primarily for their presumably subordinate connections to male creators as their wives and partners.

Women in German Expressionism is a welcome contribution to the scholarship on a cultural period that remains shrouded in misconceptions engendered by the surprisingly patriarchal approach to documenting its output and establishing the reasons for its importance. The authors embrace recent theoretical approaches in a manner that allows them to correct the impression that Expressionism was by and large the achievement of male authors and artists who strove to pave the way for a “new man” informed by the male attribute of “*Geist*” (intellect), when in fact it was simultaneously the accomplishment of women striving to infuse contemporary culture with the nurturing necessary to achieve justice and civil rights.

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