

# Making Women's History Public in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Role of Biography in the Women's Periodical Press

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## Introduction

**THE** German tradition of lifewriting in the nineteenth century produced two main categories of biography—the political biography that postulated that great men make history, and the intellectual biography that concentrated on the lives of (male) scientists and artists. On the whole, biographies, which were published by the mainstream publishing houses, ignored women as subject matter. As a rich source for investigating the lives of nineteenth-century German women, the women's bourgeois periodical press presents new possibilities for the study of nineteenth-century biography.

The selected periodicals for this study are *Neue Bahnen* (New Paths, 1866–1919), edited by Louise Otto (1819–1895) and *Die Frau* (The Woman, 1893–1943), edited by Helene Lange (1848–1930). In

these journals, Otto and Lange wrote and published historical and literary biographies as well as numerous critical reviews of selected lifewriting. Given that feminist women's periodicals did not begin to appear in Germany until the middle of the nineteenth century, Otto recognized early on the power of biography to introduce her readers to exemplary women who could serve as role models. Lange, at the close of the century, attempted to chronicle connections between the past and present and between the life and work of particular women.

Any study of biography in its present form has to wrestle with questions of the genre's identity—whether it is literature or history, art or scholarship, the extent to which it emphasizes art or life, and finally, the degree to which it is a subjective or an objective literary form. Otto and Lange never confront these questions. In the biographies that Otto and Lange published in their periodicals, the editors' own biases, as women publishing for other women, remain at the forefront, and are indeed often stated explicitly. Neither the biographers nor the editors make excuses for the writers' strong sense of identification with their subjects because they sought to document the lives of women in their search for inspiration and role models. Thus, the biographers' personal involvement in the retelling of lives of their subjects is always apparent to the reader. By blurring the autobiographical and the biographical, they are able to establish a relationship between the reader and subject.

Overall, these biographers exhibit no guise of objectivity, nor was such a guise necessary in the context of the women's periodical press in late nineteenth-century Germany. Readers expected that the content of a given newspaper or magazine be timely and deliberate as well as consistent with the prescribed program of the periodical. Such "newspaper literature" written by women has been disregarded by literary scholars for two reasons. The first is that these texts have been classified as trivial or tendentious, their role reduced to that of entertainment, and therefore not considered worthy of serious scholarly investigation (Belgum 1998; Klingenstein 1997). In this study, however, I investigate texts' implicit and explicit political-ideological reference as separate from their aesthetic merit, and I focus on the collective and constructive cultural purpose of these so-called "lesser" texts.

Consequently, I do not attempt a definition of a "good biography" to measure my chosen texts against. In his work on American

biography and culture of the nineteenth century, Scott Casper (1999) emphasizes that one must ask how, as a form of popular literature, biography sought to shape readers' conceptions of themselves and their world, rather than ask if the text is "good" by modern standards (11). This approach challenges the genre's conventions of accuracy, accountability, validity, and worthiness of subject. Writing about women's lives further complicates it. Given that, in nineteenth-century Germany, women's lives were supposed to be restricted to the private sphere, how does a biographer appraise the accomplishments of a woman's life? Women had to overcome extraordinary obstacles to achieve even moderate public success, so often their accomplishments cannot hope to put the female subject on par with male achievers like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Louis Pasteur. The biographer's task was made somewhat easier for Otto and Lange and the biographers whose work they published, in that the biographies appeared in periodicals targeted at progressive-thinking women who sought out pioneering models of female behavior. Those readers were not looking for the female equals of Goethe or Pasteur since they knew such women were rare; rather, they were interested in finding out how women who had achieved some measure of success had done so, given the social forces they had to fight against.

A second presumption regarding newspaper literature has been that it was not sufficiently radical or emancipatory to warrant scholarly consideration by engaged feminists. In her discussion on "radicality" in *Respectability and Deviance: Nineteenth-Century German Women Writers and the Ambiguity of Representation* (1998), Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres described the struggle early feminist scholars had in rediscovering German women writers and their writing. She argued that feminist scholars were searching for "rebels, for signs of deviation, resistance, and subversion [...] We preferred those writers whose disagreement with their times, however expressed, could give us some sign of gender awareness, autonomy, and individuality" (78). If not explicitly "radical" or "feminist" by twentieth-century (and now twenty-first century) standards, many works and writers were considered not "emancipatory" and even now continue to be neglected. As a result, there has been a lack of investigation into, and consequently, a failure to understand, the importance of German women's biographical writing from the nineteenth century. Research during the last twenty years on nineteenth-century German women's

writing has focused primarily on prose fiction in the mainstream press (Catling 2000; Boetcher Joeres 1998; Diethe 1998). Similarly, scholars have utilized the women's press to develop a picture of the early German women's movement, its members, and its politics (DiFino 1990; Boetcher Joeres 1983; Geiger and Weigel 1981; Gerhard et al. 1979; Evans 1976). Until recently, critics accorded little attention to letter exchanges, female workers' diaries and autobiographies, and other less conventional venues of authorship.

My particular interest in studying these texts lies in what they reveal about nineteenth-century German culture. For example, what messages predominate? Are they feminist ones? Didactic, or perhaps, nationalistic ones? In German studies as well as the study of German biographies, the inclusion of neglected individuals, or women as a group, challenges accepted narratives of a particular time and suggests an alternative interpretation. Also, a case study such as this can link up with other case studies to form a picture of larger historical and cultural patterns that demonstrate how women, as agents of history, acted differently from men.

### **Development of the Women's Periodical Press in Germany**

The history of serialized publications intended for a female readership in Germany has been traced as far back as the Reformation. These early efforts were written by men and intended for women's entertainment. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, moral weeklies played a major role in educating the German middle class. The women's periodical press of the nineteenth century has its roots in these weeklies and literary journals of the German Enlightenment. Like its English predecessors, the German moral weekly's task was to spread literature and learning into German-speaking territories by reaching a supra-regional audience on a regular basis (Mattenklott and Scherpe 1974, 74). As the name implies, the moral weekly's function was moral edification and instruction on worthwhile virtues and loathsome vices. Morality lessons appeared in a variety of literary forms, including poetry, aphorisms, short stories, and biography dealing with a variety of topics. Natural history, economics, geography, and history were also covered extensively (Martens 432). Literary journals intended for the general reading public began to appear in the 1740s and 1750s. Editors of both moral weeklies and

literary journals introduced their readers to women of exemplary accomplishment as role models, particularly through biography.

The revolutions of 1848 changed the course of development of the women's press in Germany. The democratic movement demanded the establishment of a representative federal government, a constitution ratified by the people, freedom of the press, freedom to assemble, a solution to the problems of social welfare, and the political and social equality of all citizens. This last demand attracted politically conscious women. They were soon disillusioned, however, by the revolutionaries' refusal to consider the rights of female citizens a part of their demands. Also disappointed by the male-dominated democratic press's exclusion of women, they began to publish their own periodicals in which their demands for political equality were prominently displayed (Gerhard, Hannover-Drück and Schmitter 1979, 24).

The resulting connection between the women's periodical press and the growing women's movement in the nineteenth century was a vital one. As the century progressed, the women's periodical press afforded women an opportunity to communicate and identify with each other, becoming an indispensable part of the women's movement's strategies to reform women's gender role and status in society. In the manner of the eighteenth-century moral weeklies and literary journals, the editors of these new periodicals continued to include original literature and literary criticism as major features.

Lifewriting not only remained an essential genre in the literary selections; it became more common in the women's periodical press as the century progressed. Louise Otto's first serial, the short-lived *Die Frauen-Zeitung* (The Women's Magazine) (1848–1852) did not feature biography as a distinct genre, but rather, serialized fiction and poetry dominated its literary selections. In fact, the first two years' issues do not feature biography at all, and the few biographical sketches in the second two years of publication highlight activists such as the Frenchwoman Jeanne Deroin (Weller 1851) and the Russian-German author Elisabeth Kulman (N.L. 1851).

In her second periodical, *Neue Bahnen*, Otto made the editorial decision in 1868 to replace serialized fiction with biography. In the first issue of 1868, the editors cite financial considerations as the reason for this; serialized fiction took up too many pages that the editors could not afford to produce. Nevertheless, the editors

understood that *Neue Bahnen* addressed an important “life question” (meaning women’s position in society) that was still in the “fermentation process” and acknowledged the importance of literature in that process. Otto recognized biography as the most effective genre to enhance the fermentation (Otto and Schmidt 1868). As a result, every issue of *Neue Bahnen* after that contained at least one biographical text, the overwhelming majority of them featuring women.

Helene Lange, like Louise Otto, very much appreciated the role that biography played in the women’s press; in fact, each volume between *Die Frau*’s inception in 1893 and 1919 contains, on average, nine biographical essays. Though Lange was less apt to limit the subjects of these essays to women than Otto, she certainly understood how women’s lives were undervalued. A review of Eleonore von Bojanowski’s 1905 biography of the Grand Duchess of Saxony-Weimar articulated the value of women’s biography to the magazine’s readership:

That which struggles, which probes, which strives to exit the darkness for the light is suited [...] to our modern female sex. We attempt to express humanity in our own way. Therefore every biography of prominent women is meaningful, regardless of whether they fulfilled their strengths or if they were inhibited and oppressed in their development and effectiveness. (Bredow 1905)<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, this passage conflicts with the main principle of nineteenth-century theory on male biography: that the “life of a nonentity or a mediocrity, however skillfully contrived” was generally not regarded as worthy of biographical immortalization (Marcus 1994, 60).

Since women as subjects routinely were left out of the annals of the talented, it was left to women authors to present biographies of all notable women, regardless of their achievements. Within current literary studies, the best-known biography of women writers from the nineteenth century is Sophie Pataky’s 1898 *Lexikon deutscher Frauen der Feder* (A Lexicon of German Women of the Pen). This two-volume work collects in one text short bio-bibliographical sketches of nineteenth-century women authors beginning in 1840. Pataky defined “author” to include writers of cookbooks, handbooks, and other advice literature. This book appeared seventy-five years after the lesser-

known *Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (German Female Writers of the Nineteenth Century) by Carl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel. Published in 1823, this work includes women writers native to Austria as well as those not native to the German states but who had lived there for an extended period of time. In 1893, five years before Pataky's book was published, a volume similar to von Schindel's devoted to Austrian women writers appeared, titled *Biographien der österreichischen Dichterinnen und Schriftstellerinnen: ein Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur in Österreich* (*Biographies of Austrian Women Poets and Authors: A Contribution to the German Literature of Austria*) and written by Marianne Nigg.

### **Louise Otto's *Neue Bahnen*: A Magazine for Women, by Women**

After 1853, the political and legal situation in Germany made Otto's work as a journalist very difficult. With the eventual failure of revolutionary efforts in mid-nineteenth-century Germany and the subsequent repressive measures imposed upon the press and organized political groups, women's newspapers were short-lived. More moderate in tone than some of the authors and editors of other contemporary women's newspapers, though true to the democratic ideal of promoting equality for women, Louise Otto managed to publish her *Frauen-Zeitung* continuously for four years (1848–1852), the first two years in Saxon Meißen. In 1850, Saxony passed a law banning women from the position of editor that became known as "Lex Otto," because it was so clearly directed at stifling Otto's *Frauen-Zeitung*. Prevented from continuing her work in Saxon Meißen, Otto moved her periodical to Gera in Thuringia, where she published it successfully for another two years.

After authorities ultimately shut down *Frauen-Zeitung* in Thuringia as well, Otto turned to writing cultural-historical novels. This keen interest in history led to her publishing the two-volume *Aus der alten Zeit. Historische Erzählungen* (From Old Times. Historical Stories) in 1860 and 1861 and the six-volume *Privatgeschichten der Weltgeschichte* (Private Stories of World History) between 1868 and 1872. Otto's pursuits in the historical novel are echoed in 69 biographical sketches of historical women in *Neue Bahnen*. In fact,

many of the biographies that appeared in the magazine were reprints from Otto's earlier work.

The expansion of biography in these magazines contributed to the didactic goals of the feminist press by resurrecting forgotten women and presenting them as noble examples. This biographical turn also included portrayals of admirable contemporary women in order to suggest the possibilities open to women. In this way, accounts of individual lives provided a window not only onto the past, but also into possibilities for the contemporary day.

Otto's 1868 portrait of Charitas Pirckheimer, the sister of the Nuremberg humanist Willibald Pirckheimer, exemplifies the "forgotten woman" biography. Charitas was born in 1466 into a family that valued the monastic humanist tradition. Her life story is that of an exceptional woman who was given the opportunity to reach her full potential. She entered the Saint Claire convent in Nuremberg in 1500, became a nun two years later, and within two more years rose to the office of abbess. Pirckheimer's personal letters and her brother's writings reveal that she corresponded with such leading figures of her time as Hieronymus Emser, Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melancthon, and Albrecht Dürer, among others. The Lutheran Reformation in Nuremberg in the early 1500s attempted to bring religious institutions under civic control and to secularize the convents. Charitas' personal and political resistance to these efforts persuaded the Nuremberg Council to allow all the convents in the Nuremberg territory to remain, though novices could no longer be admitted. Otto's biography of Charitas recounts these details and concludes, "Still, we must wonder at her convincing loyalty, her courage and also the force of one woman who did not allow herself to be turned away from what she had sworn to uphold, to protect as a religious person" (Otto 1868, 90). Otto obviously admired Pirckheimer's intelligence and tenacity and considered her worthy of emulation.

While the life story of Charitas Pirckheimer exemplifies a long-established tradition of historical biography, and while *Neue Bahnen* featured other women writers such as George Sand, Luise Büchner, and Eugenie John, many "first women" also received treatment. I define "first women" as pioneering women who made headway into the male-dominated professional world. For example, in 1885 Otto printed a biography of Sophie Kowalewski, who was in 1884 the first woman to become an ordinarius professor of science at the university



in Stockholm. In addition, she rose in the academic ranks to chair of the department of mathematics (T.L.M. 1885). This profile would have been particularly striking to *Neue Bahnen* readers since in 1885, women in the German states were not allowed to attend university lectures, and a German academic degree would remain unattainable to women until after the turn of the twentieth century. Other first women profiled include the first female doctors in Sweden and Switzerland, the first woman to achieve a master's degree in Finland, the first German woman promoted to director of a museum, and the first female London broker, whose trades were placed by a man.

Two women married to famous men were profiled in biographical sketches in *Neue Bahnen*, but the biographer specified that each was presented for her own achievements, not for those of her husband. The biographer in both these cases was Anna Kempe, a frequent contributor to the magazine. Kempe's account of Louise Adelgunde Gottsched, wife of the Enlightenment philosopher Johann Christoph Gottsched, positions her subject as a major figure in Germany's Enlightenment endeavor (1882a). The female Gottsched translated key works of the English Enlightenment, the French Rationalists, and her husband's works. She also produced a number of original works, *Die Pietisterey im Fischbein-Rocke* (Pietism in Petticoats) in 1736 and *The Mésalliance* in 1743. Her adaptation of Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant's 1731 play *La femme docteur* (The Lady Scholar) made her the first female playwright in Germany since the Middle Ages. In her biographical article, Kempe states that Gottsched respected his wife not because of her beauty, appearance, or money (all of which she possessed), but for her intellect and virtue, her wisdom and understanding—all suitable female qualities. Throughout the article Kempe grants Louise Gottsched the same esteem her husband enjoyed, calling them a "scholarly pair" (1882a, 97–101).

Kempe also wrote on Ernestine Caroline Reiske, the wife of Dr. Johann Jacob Reiske (1716–1774), a researcher of classical philology and Arabic. Throughout her husband's career, Ernestine was his research assistant, more closely involved in his work than his students were. After Reiske's unexpected death, Ernestine continued her husband's research, completed his manuscripts, and published them under both of their names. Interestingly, Ernestine accomplished for her husband what he could not during his own life—the publication of his autobiography (Kempe 1882b). In the years following Reiske's

death, Ernestine edited the notes to his memoir and in 1783 published *D. Johann Jacob Reiskens von ihm selbst aufgestzte Lebensbeschreibung* (D. Johann Jacob Reiske's Biography as Set Down in His Own Hand).

From the examples above, it is clear that as both writer and editor, Otto chose women whose lives illustrated admirable behavior of one kind or another. The function of these biographical sketches was similar to that of the fictional characters in the novels and short stories that occupied many pages of the bourgeois women's press. Recognizing the convention of the women's press's offering to women literature in addition to journalistic essays, Otto and her colleagues endeavored to tie entertainment to instruction. In the *Frauen-Zeitung*, stories frequently wove historical events, dates, and locales into the narrative action. *Neue Bahnen's* abandoning prose fiction after its second year in favor of biography does not mean it forewent entertaining its readers; rather, it means that such entertainment was put in service of the journal's feminist goals.

This shift from fictional to biographical narratives meant a shift from imagined lives to real lives, from invented private behaviors to observed public ones. The biographical sketches showed readers what was in fact possible outside the home, and not just on a theoretical level. Whereas earlier fictional characters had conveyed models of behavior for the ideal democrat or wife, the real-life women portrayed in *Neue Bahnen* were achieving practical, attainable goals within the working world. With this maneuver, readers of the women's press progressed from the hypothetical daughter of democracy fighting at the barricades (Otto 1850) to the concrete Charitas Pirckheimer or Sophie Kowalewski. Additionally, the editors chose women with whom they personally identified and with whom they thought their readers could identify. In *Neue Bahnen's* inaugural issue, Otto and her co-editor Jenny Heynrichs elaborated on the periodical's mission: "We offer our readers not just articles [on the women's movement]. We offer them entertainment and instruction in all areas in which women have a special interest: prose, poetry, biography, the natural sciences, reports and notes on all events significant to today's world of woman [...] (Otto and Heynrichs 1866). This statement of purpose helped the editors introduce the concept of mentors and models who were instructive on exemplary ways of being a woman, something unavailable to Louise Otto and her contemporaries in the years before.

## Helene Lange's *Die Frau*: A Monthly for the Whole Woman

As the nineteenth century progressed, the biographical sketches in the women's press conveyed an increasing sense of female history. The women's movement had been established for almost thirty years when Helene Lange began publishing *Die Frau* in 1893, which gave her and her successors a sense of tradition and empowerment. Lange, therefore, featured not just "first women" who had been pioneers in their chosen field, but also "first women" of the German women's movement, such as Louise Otto, Fanny Lewald, Auguste Schmidt, and Lina Morgenstern, to name only a few, whom Gertrud Bäumer (1911) referred to as "the first generation of the women's movement" (490).

*Die Frau's* biographical sketches fully situate their subjects within their social and historical contexts. Most often, those contexts concerned the relation of the subjects to the women's movement. Biography, like the fiction it displaced in the women's periodical press, helped mediate the relationship between the subjects' individual identity and the collective identity of the German women about whom, for whom, and by whom the magazines were produced. Within the framework of *Die Frau*, that collective identity and the passage of time (and the benefit of hindsight) often resulted in a reassessment of certain women within the women's movement or a renewed interest in their accomplishments. Two women who were repositioned within German feminist memory in this way were Charitas Pirckheimer and Louise Aston.

Margarete Rothbarth, writing for *Die Frau* in 1918, presented a more historically detailed and objective narrative about Charitas Pirckheimer than had Louise Otto's article fifty years earlier. Charitas's biography no longer presented a remarkable woman with an unusual education in extraordinary times. Rothbarth, like Otto, narrates the details of Charitas's life but her account also places Charitas within a tradition of women's history: "This Nuremberg patrician's daughter and abbess of Saint Claire took on a particularly distinctive position in the history of women of this time" (Rothbarth 1918, 163). The biographer further positions Charitas within a Nuremberg milieu depicted as the center of German Humanism: "Through her brother [Willibald] whose house was the center of humanist Nuremberg, [Charitas] came into contact with the majority of the leaders of this movement" (Rothbarth 1918, 165). She was not

considered a woman on the outside fortunate to correspond with the humanists, as Otto had portrayed her, but rather as one of the major players herself in German Humanism. Rothbarth includes analyses of Charitas' own humanist writings, which Otto had ignored, and a discussion of the impact her writing had on events taking place in Nuremberg. Charitas's humanist, scholarly studies had equipped her with the knowledge and skills to express herself effectively, which made her extremely attractive to *Die Frau's* editors and readers.

Ultimately, Rothbarth's assessment of Pirckheimer's achievements is largely consistent with Otto's: "That which creates her enchantment for us today is her directness, her steadfastness, and not least of all her intelligence. It is not without reason then that her spirit would be conjured up within the framework of a magazine that serves the women's movement, even if some might be surprised by it" (Rothbarth 1918, 168). In the pages of *Die Frau*, Charitas is transformed from *Neue Bahnen's* noble example of womanhood to an active personality in one of the most important intellectual movements in German culture.

Similarly, Helene Nathan's 1914 treatment of the early author and activist Louise Aston reflects a startling change in the women's movement's evaluation of this early feminist. Whereas Louise Otto in 1849 had categorically rejected both Aston and her writing in the pages of her earlier *Frauen-Zeitung* (Otto 1849), Nathan characterized Aston's life story as a "document for the roots of the women's movement" (1914, 651). Otto had based her rejection on Aston's public persona—her trousers, cigars, and "free love" relationships—while Nathan recognized Aston's contributions to the women's movement as an author, a political activist, and a democrat. The forty-three years that had passed since Aston's death in 1871 afforded Nathan the detachment to consider the value of Aston's once "shocking" activities.

Similar to Rothbarth's treatment of Charitas, Nathan establishes the sociohistorical context in which Aston lived, treating her not as an aberration from the nascent women's movement, but rather as an active participant in the literary movement *Junges Deutschland* (Young Germany), a small group of authors inclined toward liberal values who wrote between 1830 and 1850. Today they are considered the beginning of the progressive literary tradition in Germany. According to Rothbarth, Aston's protests "against unjustified force

and against hypocrisy” (Nathan 1914, 655) reflect the same protests that contemporary male intellectuals such as Karl Gutzkow, Heinrich Laube, and Theodor Mundt had voiced against marriages of convenience and the church’s influence on love and marriage. Aston’s fatal flaw, according to Nathan, is her rejection of the assumption of the supposed “innate differences” between men and women, and her acceptance of the Saint Simonians’ understanding of the “emancipation of the flesh.” According to Nathan, Aston’s rejection of the duality of sexual difference and Otto’s own exaggerated “ideas of freedom” had negated any influence Aston might have had within the early women’s movement (1914, 653).

Though Nathan is sympathetic to the opposition that Louise Otto and many of Aston’s contemporaries directed against Aston, she nevertheless claims a place of honor for Aston at the birth of the German women’s movement. Notably, not only the value of Aston’s feminist writings, but also her personal strength of character influence Nathan’s assessment:

That an appearance such as hers at that time was more likely to hurt the women’s movement than be useful to it is clear [...] Louise Aston’s weaknesses will appear in a much gentler light to her successors and later examiners who have to bear an irritating dose of desire for emancipation [...] She stood next to so many competent and morally strong figures, if not virtuous, than certainly courageous, decent and full of life in the cradle of the women’s movement. (1914, 655)

Nathan is convinced that later critics and revisionists will assess Aston differently from her contemporaries. And indeed, a number of recent works on the early German women’s movement and nineteenth-century women writers include Aston.

Furthermore, the behaviors Otto labeled “dangerous” Nathan found to be “eccentric,” and she emphasized Aston as an exemplary model of womanhood. She gave favorable treatment to Aston’s literary works, praising her poetry, especially the 1846 collection *Wilde Rosen* (Wild Roses) as “a unique anthem to life, joy, and happiness that resonates with a cheerful fanfare for this life. An impetuous affirmation of life runs through these lively songs” (Nathan 1914, 655). Nathan also praised her 1849 novel *Revolution und Counterrevolution* (Revolution and Counterrevolution) for its

portrayal of the events of 1848. This novel, told from the perspective of a politically engaged woman, offers a counterbalance to the history of the revolutions as told by men (Nathan 1914, 655).

*Die Frau* produced a far more positive portrayal of Louise Aston for its readers than either *Die Frauen-Zeitung* or *Neue Bahnen* had. Nathan's biographical reevaluation of Aston's significance to the women's movement indicates the maturing movement's ability to look beyond Aston's trousers and cigar smoking in order to concentrate on her struggle for personal emancipation and on the meaning of that individual struggle for succeeding generations.

While Louise Otto would not be rediscovered by feminist scholars until the 1980s, in 1919 she was for all practical purposes overlooked by historians, literary and otherwise. In the March 1919 issue of *Die Frau*, Lange wrote a tribute in memory of Otto's hundredth birthday. It opens thus: "Louise Otto is quite distant to today's sex, much further than women like Karoline von Humboldt, Charlotte Schiller, Frau von Stein, and Karoline Schlegel whose births were much earlier. One could say that every trace is gone of her poetry, her multiple, often three to four volume novels, her books" (169). Though Lange attributes Otto's disappearance from the literary memory to her remoteness in time as well as to a "literary refinement" that the modern reader expects, Lange's biographical sketch is not concerned with the literary merit of Otto's work. It is interesting to consider that the women with whom Lange compares Otto had all been related in some way to prominent men of belles-lettres. Perhaps this is why these women's names remained in the literary pantheon of Germany, but if so, it is an issue Lange chooses not to address, or perhaps even to consider. Lange is more concerned with Otto's role as the organizer of the first German women's movement and wanted Otto's legacy to remain in the consciousness of *Die Frau's* readers. Lange reminds her readers that others such as Otto had come before them and helped to secure the rights women now enjoyed: "And therefore we remember her today with warm thanks and have the sole wish that those German women who wish to exercise their new rights, do so in the spirit in which [Louise Otto] strove for them: with a feminine sense for power in public life" (Lange 1919, 170).

All in all, Lange's tribute on Otto's one-hundredth birthday seeks to rescue from oblivion a woman worthy of respect and to anchor her in the historical and literary consciousness of Germany's women. This

endeavor is inextricably tied to Lange's efforts in educational reform, which emphasized access for girls and women to the same education and cultivation (*Bildung*) as boys and men. Lange pleaded for equal educational content for boys and girls that stressed intellectual development and an equal share in the culture of the age.

Among the female authors whose literary biographies appeared in *Die Frau* were Fanny Lewald, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Ida Boyed, Bertha von Suttner, Ricarda Huch, Frieda von Bülow, Clara Viebig, Helene Böhlau, and Lou Andreas-Salomé. All of these women were praised for their accurate portrayals of society and their realistic female characters. Of particular interest to Lange were those authors whose unconventional lives enabled them to portray in literature the social changes confronting turn-of-the-century Germany. Their breaking away from conventional social patterns earned them a place in the pages of *Die Frau*; behind the struggles and convictions expressed in their fiction lay the author's own experience.

The biography of Fanny Lewald (1811–1889) in particular deserves a closer look as an example of the literary biography featured in the women's periodical press at the turn of the twentieth century. Lewald was the subject of two articles in *Die Frau*: the first, by Felix Poppenberg, appeared in 1900 after Ludwig Geiger posthumously published her autobiographical *Gefühltes und Gedachtes* (Emotions and Feelings), written between 1838 and 1888, while the second, by Gertrud Bäumer, appeared in 1911 on the occasion of Lewald's hundredth birthday. These articles suggest that Lewald had suffered much the same oblivion as Louise Otto. For example: "To today's generation, the name Fanny Lewald does not sound foreign to the ear, but remains foreign to the heart. We no longer know her novels" (Poppenberg 1900, 477). Eleven years later, Bäumer's sentiments were similar: "We have the least amount of objectivity and inner connection with the generation which went immediately before us" (Bäumer 1911, 487). Both articles discuss Lewald's major publications at length; at the same time, they strive to reaffirm Lewald's place within the women's movement. This assessment is based on the ways that her personal convictions appear in her prose fiction and political essays alike.

Lewald had been born in 1811 to Jewish parents in East Prussian Königsberg. After finishing her schooling at thirteen, Lewald remained in her parents' home until she was thirty-two. Baptized in

1828, she ultimately concluded that established religion was nothing but hypocrisy. Lewald's first two novels, *Clementine* and *Jenny*, appeared anonymously (at her father's insistence) in 1843 while she was still living at home. After a marriage proposal from a theology student, a later (unrequited) relationship with her cousin Heinrich Simon, and her subsequent refusal to marry the suitor of her father's choice, Lewald moved in 1845 to Berlin, where she became part of that city's extensive intellectual life. In Berlin's salons she met Henriette Herz, Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, Bettina von Arnim, Bertold Auerbach, Luise Mühlbach, and Theodor Mundt. During a trip to Italy in 1845, Lewald met and fell in love with the scholar and writer Adolf Stahr, whom she married ten years later after he divorced his wife.

Poppenberg and Bäumer admired Lewald for her independence, for knowing what she wanted, and for taking responsibility for her own happiness and success—all characteristics notably lacking in most women of her generation. Poppenberg found Lewald's "view on life practical, concrete, deep-rooted, and without theorizing" (1900, 478), and he approved of her straightforwardness. Bäumer too praised Lewald's outlook on life: "[T]here is something impressive in this complete control of one's life" (1911, 488). Furthermore, Lewald had possessed the dignity and confidence that allowed her to be self-reliant and not to acquiesce to the "female existence" as prescribed by social convention (Bäumer 1911, 488).

The self-reliant Lewald published a number of novels, novellas, essays, and works of travel literature, which gave her financial independence. Bäumer considered Lewald's 1863 *Osterbriefe für die Frauen* (Easter Letters for Women) and her 1870 collection of essays *Für und wider die Frauen* (For and Against Women) the best writing of her generation on women's rights. She described these feminist writings as "practical and to the point, factual and irreproachable, gutsy and yet measured" (Bäumer 1911, 490). In these works Lewald had argued for women's right to education and to a profession, which would release them from financial subordination to men—fathers and husbands alike. At the same time, she had demanded that women take control of their own lives by not wasting their time on what she called "unfruitful, crippling, destructive feelings" (Bäumer 1911, 488).

Openly critical of social conventions in her writing, Lewald lived according to her convictions. She spent ten years in an open



relationship with Adolf Stahr, even moving to an apartment in Oldenburg in order to be near him and his family. (Some sources state that Stahr's wife helped her find the apartment.) In her autobiographical *Gefühltes und Gedachtes*, Lewald states, "If Stahr's divorce had not been able to take place, I would have acted with the same freedom to be his and to remain with him, as if ten priests and given their okay and amen" (Poppenberg 1900, 482). Whether or not she would indeed have remained in the relationship outside of marriage is impossible to say, but the very fact that she was willing to commit such conviction to paper is noteworthy. The characters in Lewald's early novels likewise struggle with such issues as marriage of convenience (in *Clementine* 1843), anti-semitism, "conversions of convenience," so-called mixed marriages (*Jenny* 1843), and social opprobrium for divorce in her 1845 *Eine Lebensfrage* (A Vital Matter).

Both Poppenberg and Bäumer recommend Lewald's realistic treatment of these topics to *Die Frau's* readers. Poppenberg cites Lewald's vision of women's future in Germany, which she had put to paper in 1876: "The arguments against the free right of self-determination for women are so dumb and crude, that one will find them at a later date to be unbelievable; and with neither family life nor the human race dying out because of it" (1900, 483). Such words were certainly progressive in 1876 when Lewald penned them, and in 1900 when *Die Frau* cited them, German women were still fighting the battle for self-determination. As Germany worked toward ratifying its first constitution in 1896, which came into effect in 1900, women's issues such as the control of property and child custody were hotly debated. The new constitution did not grant women the right to vote, the right to a university education, the right to control property or other financial assets, or the right to determine a child's upbringing and education. As does Helene Nathan in her assessment of Louise Aston, Bäumer firmly claims a place for Lewald in that continuing battle:

She remains in the history of the women's movement as the person the movement needed at that particular time: a woman adverse to all sentimentality, who wanted to fashion quietly and energetically a solid foundation for the development of women. On this foundation an exceptional and rich life would be assured, one of intellectual and social independence under one's own control. (Bäumer 1911, 491)

Bäumer believed Lewald's successful personal liberation lent authenticity and depth to her fictional and nonfiction texts (Bäumer 491). Her admiring tribute is an early effort to fashion Lewald a place in the succession of significant women figures in Germany's historical and literary consciousness.

### **Literary-Critical Discourse**

Though none of the editors I have discussed here was trained as a literary scholar, literary-critical discourse occupies a large portion of each volume. All three periodicals offer extensive feature articles treating historical, ideological, and theoretical discussions of literature and culture. Each also includes a book review section, though the range and length of them vary. In the reviews, the editors in effect define a body of literature for women by evaluating the books' usefulness and their relevance to the periodical's female readership. Complementing the biographical essays, the book review sections of these periodicals cover biography extensively.

*Neue Bahnen's* anonymous 1878 review of *Die Frauen des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts. Culturgeschichtliche Zeit und Lebensbilder Band I* (Women of the Eighteenth Century. The Cultural-Historical Time and Its Portraits Volume I) (written by H. Scheube in 1876) reveals a multilayered interest in historical women. This collection of individual biographies pluckily declares the eighteenth century "the century of the woman" and shows the parallel influence of women in France and Germany as "the leading principle," "the ruling spirit," and "the dominant voice" of the century. It illustrates how these "goddesses of destiny" dominated the era. The volume begins with an overview of women at Louis XIV's court, such as Elisabeth Charlotte von Kurpfalz (the Duchess of Orleans), Queen Sophie Charlotte of Prussia, and concludes with Queen Sophie Dorothee of Prussia and the Margravine Friederike Sophie Wilhelmine of Bayreuth. The unidentified reviewer praised the male author for his objectivity and impartiality, which allowed the facts to speak for themselves. The reviewer's final recommendation was that the book is "particularly worth reading, as well as instructive, interesting, and entertaining" (Anon. 1878, 96). As an early assessment of the importance of eighteenth-century women in Germany and France, this volume can be added to those works dedicated to making women's history public.

Over one hundred years later, we can now see that such a volume was an early step in the historical work of relating women who have been historical agents to the larger picture of historical change.

Though Scheube's volume restricted its biographical sketches to women of noble birth, we again see exemplary women held up as representative of female capabilities. As members of eighteenth-century nobility, these women distinguished themselves as shapers of history. The volume's subtitle, *Von Ludwig XIV. bis auf Friedrich den Großen* (From Louis XIV to Frederick the Great), suggests this secondary historical goal but also hints at an inherent contradiction in the book. The author chose two great men of history as bookends to the life stories of women told in its pages. This suggests that had the author used the names of two female contemporaries of Louis XIV and Frederick the Great, potential readers may not have recognized them. Therefore, the author had to refer to male history in order to bring female history to light. Such a move allowed him to add women's history to the already known history of men, and in doing so, challenge the many tomes about great men as makers of history.

## Conclusion

The many biographical sketches written in *Neue Bahnen* and *Die Frau* were early efforts to fashion a place for their subjects in a succession of significant women figures in Germany's historical and literary consciousness. Both Otto and Lange aspired to expand the genre of biography beyond the study of great men. The presence of these biographies in the women's periodical press permitted their readers to understand themselves and their identity as they fashioned a new culture. Through its ability to mediate the experience of individual women and the collective expression of the women's movement, biography was particularly helpful to the women's press. This mediation resulted in an integration of private and public elements in the discursive representation of life, an integration that German women themselves were struggling for at that time in their lives. Considered collectively, these biographies set in motion a history of women that has transformed the possibilities of women's present and future. Further investigations into these biographies may help to change the historical narrative of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany. Such a reevaluation could bring women from the

margins into the mainstream of history, as the volume *Die Frauen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* attempted to do in 1878.

## Note

1. All translations from the German are my own.

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