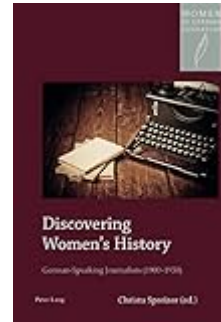




**Christa Spreizer, ed.** *Discovering Women's History: German-Speaking Journalists (1900-1950)*. Women in German Literature Series. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014. 416 pp. \$89.95 (paper), ISBN 978-3-0343-0747-5.



**Reviewed by** Maria González Gorosarri

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## Uncovering Written Memories

Because of the increase in women's literacy and the end of imperial censorship, German newspapers attained an especially high circulation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Women gained positions as journalists as well, since no formal education or training was required. But they also found considerable resistance from their male workmates. Christa Spreizer has edited a collection of essays on fourteen German-speaking female journalists from the first half of the twentieth century. The essays consider journalism in the broadest of senses, that is, not only published news reports but also fiction in periodicals and newspapers.

Each essay highlights main features of the journalists' respective works: Grete Meisel-Hess (1879-1922) openly dealt with the issue of sexual liberation; Elsa Asenijeff (1867-1941) searched for the Nietzschean superwoman; Eliza Ichenhauser (1869-1932) pleaded for "the collective force of women at all levels of civil society" (p. 80); Margarete Susman (1872-1966) wrote political news reports; Doris Wittner (1880-1937) "incorporated a feminist inclusionary agenda" into the news (p. 129);

Annemarie Schwarzenbach (1908-1942) worked as a foreign correspondent; Erika Mann (1905-1969) successfully distanced her articles from her father's legacy; Vicki Baum (1888-1960) and Gina Kaus (1893-1985) became best-selling authors; Alice Rühl-Gerstel (1894-1943) targeted the everyday life of female workers; Maria Leitner (1892-1942) became a posthumous muse for GDR propaganda; Gabriele Tergit (1894-1982) documented life in Berlin, described vividly in her articles; Gabriele Reuter (1859-1941) worked as a book reviewer of German literature for the *New York Times*; and Ursula von Kardoff (1911-1988) published her diaries about the Nazi era and found considerable resonance in the West.

Female journalists were not to deal with politics, such that many of them wrote solely in the Feuilleton sections. Of course, men addressed similar topics, but the entrance of women into the public sphere lent a different perspective to familiar issues. Even though sexual violence had been a recurrent topic in the male press and in fiction, women journalists highlighted the traumas faced by survivors, as for instance, in Leitner's work.

Women also made political statements within newspaper sections labeled "Society and Life." Whereas Meisel-Hess stood up for "reproduction outside (i.e., before) marriage," Hle-Gerstel sought "realistic portrayals" of love in terms of "marriage, parenting or even contraception" for female workers (pp. 24, 234). Similarly, topics like fashion, traditionally considered trivial, achieved a political relevance when the ideal of the New Woman was criticized because it did "not necessarily lead to emancipation," as Baum stated (p. 222).

Journalism at the beginning of twentieth-century Germany became a means of women's self-expression. As witnesses of their times, their own lives gained public relevance, and they also helped other women become engaged politically. That was the case for Wittner, who moved from liberal Judaism to Zionism after 1933, and Mann, who rejected pacifism in order to support the armed response against the Spanish Fascist coup d'état in 1936. With analogous transitions in mind, Susman explained that "she had lived several lives" (p. 119).

Unfortunately, works by Leitner and Kardoff were used politically to further Cold War objectives. Leitner's books, *Hotel Amerika* (1930) and *Eine Frau reist durch die*

*Welt* (1932), describe the living conditions of impoverished workers in the United States but were published in the German Democratic Republic, whereas Kardoff's wartime diaries and postwar correspondence were first published in 1962. Kardoff's *Berliner Aufzeichnungen* became a best-seller book and was translated into English as *Diary of a Nightmare* (1965). One author not included in *Discovering Women's History* is the journalist Marta Hillers (1911-2001). Hillers published her wartime diaries in English in 1954, but she was accused of Fascist propaganda because her diaries documented the huge number of rapes committed against German women. A German edition was only printed in 2003, after her death, under the name of "Anonyma" (as she had requested), subsequently becoming a best seller and film.

Lastly, Mann's autobiographical text, "I, of All People," is printed for the first time in its original English version. *Discovering Women's History* might have included a selection of short texts from all the authors so that readers could judge their work directly. Nonetheless, German-speaking journalists from the first half of the twentieth century have won back a visibility they greatly deserve.

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