

PREFACE

Considering the state of the world, as we write this preface in August of 1990, this issue of *Feminist Studies* ought to have several articles on the Middle East, perhaps comparing the position of women in Iraq (bad) with their position in Saudi Arabia (worse), and an article on the gendered nature of American militarism. But given the vagaries of scholarly journal publishing, none of the excellent contributions in volume 16, number 3, comes close to these subjects—for which we apologize.

As negotiations over German reunification draw to a close, however, we are in the fortuitous position of having three pieces, two articles and one short story, connected through their subject, the fate of women in Germany between 1920 and 1945, along with a recent—but nonetheless historical—document from feminists in East Germany. Mary Nolan, in "'Housework Made Easy': The Taylorized Housewife in Weimar Germany's Rationalized Economy," examines the consequences when what Americans in the 1920s called home economics was exported to Germany. Weimar Germany, crushed by war, inflation, and social turmoil, could not support the American consumerist vision of households crammed with wonderful labor-saving electrical appliances: irons, toasters, vacuum cleaners. In Germany, instead, many constituencies, including such unlikely bedfellows as the Social Democratic party, the Home Economics Group of a major industrial employers' organization, and a number of women's groups, promoted household "rationalization" primarily as a way of redefining working-class women and housewives. Only very secondarily was the movement an effort to make housework easier and more efficient for women. What in the United States was a series of techniques for selling new mass-produced consumer goods was in Germany quite simply a method of social control.

Marion A. Kaplan's "Jewish Women in Nazi Germany: Daily Life, Daily Struggles, 1933-1939" captures the specifically gendered dimensions of growing Nazi persecution and violence against the entire Jewish community in the years before the outbreak of World War II. Although Nazi genocide, once in place, was aimed at women, men, and children (indeed Jewish children were the earliest targets in Poland), practically and psychologically, the earlier stages of persecution had different meanings for women and for men. In many respects, as Kaplan's finely grained portrait of

Jewish life in Germany in the 1930s demonstrates, women had a more vivid sense of the ostracism and the danger for their people than did their husbands, as they saw their children ridiculed and eventually expelled from their schools, their friends and neighbors shunning them. In a community where men were heavily involved in business, the professions, and government service (until 1933), women had less to lose from emigration than men and it was very often wives who saw that emigration was the best hope for survival. The enormity of the carnage for which the Nazis were responsible has kept hidden the quieter horrors of German racial policy after 1932, horrors vividly presented in Kaplan's essay.

The next piece in this German "quartet" is "Drops of Honey," Irene Eber's story that evokes the lives of those Jewish women who survived, as girls, the years of war and death camps. Adina and her friend, Sara, escaped the troops, left Europe, settled in Israel, found work, married, had children. But despite their determination to use the gift of life they had miraculously been given, both women lived with the sense that they belonged to a world which most people did not want to know about; the happy round of shabbat celebrations, talk of children and grandchildren, is a strange and forbidden place to Sara and Adina. "We cannot rid ourselves of the stench of death, so why try," says Adina. "We remind people not only of dying, we remind them also of something no one wants to think about: forgetting," maintains Sara.

"The Lila Manifesto" which we publish here with an introduction by Lisa DiCaprio has, since the time we received it, changed from a contemporary to a historical document. The political conditions which produced this document—intended as a position paper for a new democratic socialist East German state—no longer exist. Today the women who formed this first feminist organization in Eastern Europe have become a vital part of the political scene in a unified Germany.

Other contributions range from Dickens to American waitresses in the 1930s, to Los Angeles public schools in the Progressive Era, to British aristocrats and their gardens. Dorothy Sue Cobble uses the successful organizing of waitresses in the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union to explore the importance of craft unionism for women. Her findings about the value of separate female locals both for attracting women members and for successful negotiations, picks up a theme in historical scholar-

ship about women and union organizing and calls new attention to the importance of the structures into which women are organized. Despite the legendary hostility of the American Federation of Labor to women, craft unionism offered waitresses a tradition of local control and an emphasis on pride in their trade and loyalty to their coworkers which enhanced their ability to act effectively.

The waitresses that Cobble studied may have experienced a public education system similar to that described by Victoria Bissell Brown, and it was not emancipatory. In Los Angeles, the "fear of feminization" biased educators to cater to boys. Policy-makers held low expectations for the vocational futures of girls and agonized over the needs of boys, marking public education as asymmetrical even in its periods of early and enthusiastic growth.

Our art essay, Susan Groag Bell's "Women Create Gardens in Male Landscapes: A Revisionist Approach to Eighteenth-Century English Garden History," on the beautiful flower gardens of eighteenth-century British aristocratic women, is a fine example of an arena of female activity, inventiveness, and achievement which, downgraded by eighteenth-century contemporaries, has continued to be ignored by historians. Landowning men, in the course of the seventeenth century, began to use landscape gardening as a way of reflecting their power, pedigree, and position, and great landscape architects like Capability Brown and Charles Bridgeman carved out magnificent careers creating the rustic-looking dells and sweeping vistas which made English landscape gardening one of the great contributions to Western culture. Meanwhile, however, the ladies, "grafted" onto male lines through marriage and with no real permanent interest in their lands, but also following an ancient aristocratic tradition of female medicinal and decorative gardening, sought out the more ephemeral pleasures of flower gardening. Bell's article reminds us that the earlier excitement of discovering new women's worlds is still with us.

Finally, in "Historicisms New and Old: 'Charles Dickens' Meets Marxism, Feminism, and West Coast Foucault" we have a work of literary criticism which should be of interest both to literary specialists and to nonspecialists. Judith Newton's article is both a critical look at one of the newer trends in literary studies, the new historicism, and an effort to consolidate the assumptions and findings of feminist literary critics. She focuses on readings of Dickens's

Bleak House, a much-loved and complex novel quite sturdy enough to support the heavy scaffolding scholars of all kinds have constructed on it. With Newton's guidance, we contrast the parts of the book brought into relief by the Foucault-influenced new historicist nonfeminist critics with those – the book's many women characters and complex of family issues – whose meanings are explicated by the group of feminist critics whose wisdom Newton has gathered and expanded upon. "In our feminist reading," says Newton, "it is not Chancery alone, Dickens's representation of power organized in a male public sphere, but his representation of the rebellious energies of women that also drives on the narrative's development."

Sara Evans and Ellen Ross,
for the editors