

*Little Detours: The Letters and Plays of Luise Gottsched (1713–1762)*. By SUSANNE KORD. (Studies in German Literature, Linguistics and Culture) Columbia, SC: Camden House. 2000. xiv + 222 pp. £40.

Unlike the majority of women writers of the eighteenth century in Germany, Luise Adelgunde Victorie Gottsched has never been completely ignored by literary historians. This is largely because of her marriage to her more famous husband and her association with his literary programme. Yet, while never leaving her out of the picture altogether, critics nevertheless tended to present her as an imperfect, even rather incompetent precursor of the greater male writers who were still to come that century.

In her preface, Susanne Kord makes clear what she is trying (and not trying) to do in this monograph. She does not aim to write a general, comprehensive survey of her subject's life and works but rather to raise new questions about Luise Gottsched, questions central to an investigation of the conditions and possibilities of expression open to a woman writer of her day. Kord challenges the established view that Gottsched, known as the most erudite woman of her day in Germany, saw her task as being unquestioning subservience to her husband's scholarly and polemical enterprises. She sees the image of Gottsched that has been passed down to us as one constructed by the two major influences in her life: these were not only her husband Johann Christoph, who wrote his wife's biography immediately after her death, but also the close friend of her last ten years, Dorothea von Runckel, who edited her letters. Johann Christoph presents her always as 'die geschickte Freundin', he the mentor, she the derivative, unoriginal recipient of his instruction. Runckel, who subjected her friend's letters to very extensive editing, is concerned to present us with the paragon of virtue, whose letters can at the same time be turned into exemplars of letter-writing. Both views, Kord argues, must be subjected to critical scrutiny, not in an attempt to discover the long-hidden truth, but so that the reader is aware of the complex interplay of editor, text, expectations, hierarchies of value and so forth that determine the transmission of a woman writer's life and achievement.

Two areas of vital scholarly work have helped Kord to her critical reappraisal. She draws on Magdalene Heuser's pioneering work in uncovering the extent of Runckel's editorial interventions in Gottsched's letters. This leads her to challenge accepted notions of textual authenticity and originality and to show how Runckel saw herself as legitimately adapting Gottsched's correspondence for literary purposes. She also suggests how discrepancies between the editorial voice and the content of the letters may allow glimpses of a more critical Gottsched than the tireless, self-sacrificing helper. The other scholarly work is that done by Kord herself into the work of women dramatists of the eighteenth century. This allows her to set Gottsched in the context of women's dramatic writing invisible to earlier critics and to draw comparisons in the treatment of certain themes, for example, the happy ending and female hypochondria.

The reader who expects from this book detailed readings of individual texts will be disappointed. Among the dramas only *Panthea*, which Kord sees as questioning the ideological assumptions of tragedy, is treated at length (Kord takes seriously Gottsched's own regard for her only tragedy, in spite of critical rejection and subsequent marginalization of it in treatments of Gottsched). With regard to her comedies, I found Kord's discussion of her avoidance of certain conventions thought-provoking, though her glimpses of criticism of woman's lot did not always convince me. One of the most fascinating sections of the monograph is the analysis of Gottsched's correspondence with Runckel as an attempt, among other things, to

establish a correspondence between women as a form of literary expression. Susanne Kord's study opens up questions more than it provides answers to them, but in doing so, and in setting a framework for new investigation, it is an invaluable contribution to the critical appraisal of women writers of this period.

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