

Unseen Critics: Women and Literary Reviews from Enlightenment to Modernity

(Unsichtbare Literaturkritikerinnen von der Aufklärung zur Moderne)

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The history of literary criticism is overwhelmingly dominated by men. Taking Germany as a case study, it becomes evident that numerous authoritative works on the history of German *Literaturkritik* omit female critics entirely or, at best, reference women as marginal figures and/or exceptions; on the rare occasion that female critics are referenced, their inclusion is almost always limited to the 20th and 21st century. Such omissions foster the erroneous narrative that women simply did not engage in the writing and publication of reviews.

The focus of this dissertation is to challenge the narrative that the literary critic of the 18th, 19th and 20th century was predominantly male and thus, to offer a new perspective on the history of literary reviewing. Through archival research (inter alia), this study highlights that there were a substantial amount of women from Enlightenment to Modernity, who wrote reviews and other forms of critique, yet whose names and works have been systematically erased from the history of literary criticism. Importantly, the objective is not to lapse into binary oppositions or to construct a separate tradition of “female literary criticism” as a counterpoint to established male canons. Rather, the focus of this study is to confront the invisibility of women and to challenge the strategies that have perpetuated their exclusion. Throughout, methods and theories based in gender and queer studies will inform the analyses.

Geographically, the focus of this work lies both on British and German critics. While in the British context, recent scholarship has begun to recover several of the overlooked female voices, in Germany the illusion persists that the history of literary criticism is the exclusive domain of men, and new studies continue to reinforce this misconception by neglecting the presence and influence of female critics. Through a comparative approach, I aim to gain a greater comprehension of the mechanisms of invisibility in force in the field of literary criticism.