

Ideology, Family Policy, Production,
and (Re)Education: Literary Treatment
of Abortion in the GDR of the Early 1980s

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I

When in 1993 the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe overruled the German parliament's compromise abortion law, not only did the ruling promote intense discussion, it also outraged women, especially those in the former German Democratic Republic. For two decades East German women not only had had the freedom to choose to have an abortion up to the twelfth week of pregnancy, but the procedure was performed free of charge at state-run hospitals. Moreover, the German Democratic Republic had eliminated the most compelling reason for obtaining an abortion by providing everyone a job and an adequate social support system for those women who truly wanted children. The economic collapse in the former GDR cost many women their jobs and their social support system, and hence diminished their ability to raise a family. As Sandra Smith, reporter for *The European*, notes, the ruling has had a profound effect on women in the former GDR. About Eva Müller, an unemployed pregnant East German woman, she explains: "She believes she cannot afford to have a child. Before unification her decision would have been respected and financed by the socialist state. Today the imposition of strict criteria on the right to an abortion has challenged her right to make her own decision" (10). Even though the socialist state in subtle ways had discouraged abortions by promoting a large-family policy, women in the former GDR nevertheless anticipated that following unification, access to an abortion might be further humanized and less restricted, but never did they imagine that their existing abortion law would be so extensively

modified as it was under the 1993 decision. As Elizabeth Clements points out: "for seventeen years of the history in the GDR's history, a woman's right to have an abortion was unquestioned, now abortion is an illegal act in the new *Bundesländer*" (47).

This most recent ruling by the German Constitutional Court no doubt meant a circumscription of the right to choose. However, closer examination of official policies regarding abortion in the former GDR shows that East German women's rights to choose had been under attack ever since the establishment of the German Democratic Republic. The lack of support by East German authorities for a woman's right to control her body is most persuasively argued by Katharina von Ankum in her article "Political Bodies: Women and Re/Production in the GDR." Her detailed account shows GDR government policies on abortion between 1947 and 1971 to be an integral part of its effort to increase economic production rather than advance policies toward emancipating women *per se*. She concludes: "In 1971, the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) government finally had to acknowledge the failure of its concurrent productive and reproductive exploitation of women. The decision to legalize the termination of a pregnancy during the first three month was thus primarily the result of a governmental balancing act attempting to control women's productive and reproductive behavior" (137). However, despite a supposed admission of a failed policy the SED continued to pursue this decidedly anti-abortion campaign shortly after the passage of the liberal abortion law in 1972. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, government policies promoted large families while actively discouraging abortions. Von Ankum adds: "Over the following two decades, the existence of liberal abortion legislation on the one hand and continuous ideological pressure towards motherhood on the other hand created conflicts for many GDR women that found expression in literary texts long before they could be publicly discussed" (137).

As yet another response to the most recent decline in population, the SED continued to pursue in the early eighties many of the same tactics of the 1950s and 1960s which were based upon social policies that had been formulated during the Weimar Period. During the 1920s, the Left proposed policies intended to decriminalize abortion by calling for an outright abolition of Paragraph 218 of the civil legal code. However, in the face of opposition from the bourgeois parties, women legislators and communists were able to make the punitive aspects of the abortion law less severe but still

had to support an overall family policy that promoted population growth. Cornelia Osborne in her study *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany* points out that the anti-feminist, repressive, and decidedly pronatalist approach to population control during the First World War was replaced after the War ended. She states: "The old regime's crude imperialist attempt to 'enforce reproduction' had been discredited; the Left advocated instead a system of material support for mothers, in conjunction with judicious use of birth control which would allow women to control their sexuality rationally. But it was found that the old-style interventionism had not disappeared but had adjusted according to social-and racial-hygiene criteria. Similarly, the dispensation of material welfare benefits was often accompanied by pedagogical strategies through which official norms of reproductive behavior were subtly imposed upon women" (203).

In the 1980s in the face of dramatic reductions in births, the party, for ideological reasons, never seriously considered abolishing or reforming the 1972 abortion law. Instead, it launched yet another campaign very reminiscent of past efforts. Financial incentives and educational materials promoting the larger family and discouraging the use of abortions were the central themes. The strategy effectively undermined the right to choose and in a subtle manner attempted to force women back into their traditional reproductive roles.

While throughout the seventies the birthrate in the German Democratic Republic had steadily grown, despite the liberal abortion law, these increases resulted largely from generous social programs initiated between 1972 and 1976. They provided women with children with career and financial incentives such as shorter work hours, pregnancy leaves, interest-free credit, and other concrete assistance during the pregnancy. When this baby boom came to a rather sudden halt in 1982, with nearly 11,000 fewer births than in 1980, party officials and policy makers were alarmed. Furthermore, between 1980 and 1982 abortions had also climbed from 92,103 to 96,414. The greatest increase occurred for women between 30 and 35, i.e., the group of women who had most likely given birth to one or two children previously (DDR Jahrbuch 378). In order to reverse this trend and maintain a viable population growth pattern, the party propagated a family policy that advocated "the three-child family."

Based upon surveys, GDR social planners were aware of the difficulty of persuading young people to have larger families. The

direct economic incentives offered in the 1970s no longer were as attractive to a generation removed from the post-World War II hardships. Their concerns centered on issues related to comfort and lifestyle. In 1980, only 10 percent of those questioned planned to have more than one child. The reasons most frequently given were small living quarters, difficulty of juggling a career and housework, concern for having to give up one's employment due to the lack of child care facilities, and impending personal restrictions and costs associated with child rearing. In spite of these formidable obstacles, family planners expressed confidence that this desire for small families could be reversed with improved living conditions and active educational programs at all levels. In schools, worker collectives, and the mass media, "the three-child family" was touted as the model GDR family unit, and easily accessible abortions ran counter to these goals.

The policy of promoting larger families while keeping women in the work force and continuing to support the right to an abortion presented the state with the difficult task of devising effective social and economic policies that addressed the concerns of a better educated and wealthier population. By 1984, however, the economic policies were already in place (Helwig 116). Developing an information campaign that would not confuse the public was less easily accomplished. This effort to encourage larger families was even more difficult in view of the fact that 60 percent of all abortions were performed on women who had already given birth to one or more children. Moreover, the party for ideological reasons could not permit any serious discussions that might lead to reform in the existing abortion law.

Many of the elements of the campaign for the three-child family can be found in Wolfgang Engelmann's dissertation (1979). His study deals with means by which to entice young couples to have large families. He makes the case that the "three-child family" must be actively promoted by the media to assure success in increasing the birth rate: "An additional extraordinary possibility of influencing public opinion results from the work of mass communication means such as the press, radio and television. It is certainly not a matter of chance, whether the cover page of a large magazine depicts a family taking a spring walk with two or three children! Here the responsible editors very urgently must be reminded of the large part of responsibility they have for how intensively the social recognition for the socialist three-child-family ideals take a foot hold" (qtd. in Helwig 116).

Since an immediate and positive effect of the 1972 abortion law was a drastic reduction in deaths of women caused by complications during births and botched illegal abortions (400 hundred in 1955 to 30 in 1982), it is understandable that for practical as well as ideological reasons the 1972 law legalizing abortion could not be modified or abolished. Women could not easily be forced back into their more traditional reproductive roles. Instead, the SED government designed a strategy to accomplish a similar goal. To encourage large families it passed ambitious support programs accompanied by a vigorous propaganda campaign that enlisted a number of writers.

II

The novel *Meine ungeborenen Kinder* (1982) by Charlotte Worgitzky helps to illuminate this pedagogical strategy. The depictions of the main character's six abortions are intended to serve as an historical appraisal of the progress women have made regarding ready access to abortions in last two decades in the GDR. As part of this campaign to encourage writers and editors to produce novels, short stories, plays, and essays concerning the family, Worgitzky's novel, although not an explicit endorsement of the official three-child-family policy, examines the social, political, and economic environment by focusing upon past horrors endured by women and at the same time initiating a discussion on the present state and future prospects of GDR women.

Worgitzky's novel shows how far women have come in their struggle for equality while pointing out that much still needs to be done. For her, childbirth must not be accepted unquestionably as an act of nature. Worgitzky argues that much as humankind has attempted to manipulate nature in other areas to improve the quality of life, women should be able modify the process of reproduction and have children only if they are truly wanted. Legal and free access to abortion is viewed as a fundamental right in freeing women economically, psychologically, and socially. As Martha Trubec, the main character, puts it: "What is nature anyway? In a dictionary it's stated: '—everything, which forms itself according to its own drives and laws, without foreign additives.' Thus only that which has not been touched or changed by human beings. That hardly exists on earth any longer. For example, everything you do in your job aims to explore laws, so that one can in a changing manner

intervene in them. The bread we eat is nature changed by human beings; the houses in which we live, much as the microprocessors and rockets with multi-explosive heads, were created out of nature's building blocks" (314). In *Meine ungeborenen Kinder*, the reader witnesses a public debate of this controversial issue as the actresses and actors, as well as the audience, representing a wide range of opinions and coming from all segments of society, discuss the depiction of abortion in Friedrich Wolf's drama *Cyankali*. The graphic testimony, historical perspectives, and factual information extend the debate beyond the main character's individual plight and expose the public's prejudices related to abortion. The novel frames the public debate, serves as a vehicle for conveying information for educational purposes, forces the reader to confront stark reality, identifies shortcomings, and finally attempts to arrive at resolutions to re-establish public harmony by providing a positive horizon: a process common to many novels written in the GDR, a closed society.

The history of abortion and the accompanying indignities suffered by women take up a large portion of *Meine ungeborenen Kinder*. Of greater importance, however, is the establishment of a connection between the past and the present. Worgitzky accomplishes this task by portraying the inner workings of producing a local theater production of Friedrich Wolf's drama *Cyankali* (1929). Furthermore, Friedrich Wolf's drama provides the bridge to the Weimar Period where the struggle had begun that eventually culminated in the 1972 abortion law. However, this law is by no means to be viewed as the end of that struggle. Significant progress had been made under real existing socialism. However, a complete remedy to the problems Friedrich Wolf posed in his drama will only be achieved with the establishment of a truly socialist society. Only with the elimination of all remnants of capitalism would attitudes change sufficiently where abortion need no longer be a woman's choice to achieve emancipation. The drama is therefore more than a historical artifact. It provides Worgitzky the opportunity to propose a positive view of the future.

In order to contribute to the "three-child family" information campaign, literary works needed to point to a future where economic and social conditions would be such that abortions needed to be performed only in medical emergencies. Because it was a legal and fundamental right of every woman in the GDR, the socialist positive horizon had to include abortion, even though its actual

use would eventually be reduced to a minimum. *Cyankali* depicts the desperate economic plight of women during the Depression and defends the use of abortion as a viable means of preventing the birth of a child who faces the likelihood of starving. The drama is also a stinging indictment of Paragraph 218, which prescribed severe punishment for women who had an abortion and for doctors who performed the procedure. Paragraph 218 of the German Federal law, first passed in 1871, states: "A pregnant woman, who prematurely aborts her fruits or kills it in her womb, will be punished with a prison term of up to five years . . ." (30). It is also important to note that Friedrich Wolf, who could not support abortions on moral grounds, nevertheless found it more humane for a mother to abort her child than bring it into a world where it was bound to starve to death. His moral objection to abortion was set aside in light of the severe economic conditions in the 1920s, and what he found especially abhorrent was the criminalization of abortion.

The central issue in *Meine ungeborenen Kinder* is to examine the extent of progress women have made since Wolf wrote *Cyankali* in 1929. Worgitzky chooses Friedrich Wolf's drama as a point of departure not in order to debate the right of a women to have an abortion but rather to examine the social and economic environment in the GDR. She concludes that real existing socialism had not yet progressed to a point where abortions had become unnecessary, and even though the economic survival of every individual in the GDR was now guaranteed, social circumstances and the division of labor still disadvantaged women.

In 1946, in his forward to the stage edition of *Cyankali*, Wolf arrived at a similar conclusion. He refused to relegate his drama to the position of a mere historical document, even though the economic situation had changed since its debut in 1929. Wolf felt the devastating aftermath of the war was less than conducive to human reproduction: "As much as our emaciated people are in need of healthy procreation, we are not served well with sickly, undernourished, children susceptible to tuberculosis." Wolf goes on to point out that the drama's main purpose is to help in eliminating the " 'social depravity' for mother and child . . . then and only then will—what no constitutional paragraph can force to occur—the number of newborns exceed the number of deaths," and only then "will 'Cyankali' be able to step back into the twilight of a purely historical piece" (Wolf 273).

In 1982, Worgitzky was not ready to concede, as Wolf had done in 1946, that conditions for women were such that emancipation had been achieved. The desperate economic conditions and the draconian laws regarding abortions as depicted in *Cyankali* no longer existed, but other more subtle forms of oppression persisted. Worgitzky shows the audience in graphic detail how the horrors associated with illegal abortions continued long after the war. To be sure, the legalization of abortion in 1972 represented progress, but most women who chose to have an abortion continued to be subjected to many other indignities.

Wolf's drama serves as the novel's historical point of departure and launches a discussion not only of abortion but of the contemporary role of women in the former German Democratic Republic. The main character, Martha Trubec, gives a personal account of the six abortions she had performed in the last two decades. Each time, under a cloak of secrecy and with the fear of arrest, she proceeds first to use home remedies to attempt to abort her pregnancy. After such attempts (always unsuccessful), she relies on a network of friends and colleagues who assist her in finding someone to perform the procedure. The lack of information about abortion plus the unqualified and unscrupulous practitioners who perform abortions placed women like her in potentially life-threatening situations.

In Martha's case there never existed any doubt about her choice of an abortion. Her primary reason for not wanting a child was the fear of jeopardizing her career as an actress. Her sexual activity is guided by her feelings toward a man at a given moment without concern for consequences. Contraceptives or other methods of pregnancy prevention distract from her sexual pleasure and therefore are not used. Moral implications and concerns for the unborn fetus are relegated to secondary importance. A woman's choice to have an abortion, for whatever reason, is not questioned. Five of her abortions were in fact carried out illegally, but never are they described as criminal acts. In spite of the illegality and the enormous hardships to which she is subjected, she asserts her right to have an abortion. Readers are not invited to make a value judgment about the character's behavior. Instead, they are witness to a cruel system that threatens women with severe punishment and permits them to endure their pain and suffering in isolation.

Furthermore, prevailing contemporary attitudes among men, the medical profession, and the public at large continue to make

abortion an ordeal for women. Martha Trubec remembers March 9, 1972 well: “—one day after the International Day for Women—the paper reports in sober terms, that what can be the greatest accomplishment for a woman, ought no longer be misused for her enslavement, i.e. emancipation.” And she concludes with the qualifier: “An emancipation, which by no means is complete, but one to which I can refer at any time” (299).

Legalized abortion in the GDR meant that women no longer had to live in fear of arrest or risk injury or death for choosing to terminate a pregnancy. However, as significant as this newly granted freedom was, it by no means liberated women from the culturally determined taboos and myths associated with abortion. Large segments of the medical profession still perceived women who requested abortions as morally depraved. Accordingly, women in the GDR continued to be subjected to indignities similar to those women had endured in the days of back-alley abortions. To underscore this point, Martha points out: “Even today most women having an abortion must overcome a great deal, whether they reject the child or not. All men should be made aware of this; most of them do not have to be concerned about the consequences of the sexual act, because their lovers either take the pill or they will ‘get rid’ of the ‘accident’ ” (302). Then she continues by questioning the behavior of the medical profession: “I know of women who actually fear to go to the doctor, because he will question her ‘irresponsible behavior’ or attempt to talk her into continuing her pregnancy. And when they by good fortune have succeeded in passing this first step, comes the fear of the hospital, because they have heard or experienced themselves, that they will be treated in an unfriendly manner. This occurs when the personnel is of the opinion, that women who come to them for this purpose are irresponsible and immoral” (302-03).

No longer was the lack of sufficient economic support a reason for aborting a child, but other social pressures, such as maintaining an acceptable quality of life by excelling in a creative career, still placed enormous psychological burdens on women when confronted with having to make a choice for or against an abortion. The issue then is not to maintain life at all cost, “but instead do everything possible, so that every human being can live with dignity”(303). This also included the life of the woman.

In *Meine ungeborenen Kinder*, Emilia, the young actress who portrays the main character, Hete, in *Cyankali*, contemplates abort-

ing her own child. She has difficulty dealing with the consequences of her decision. Emilia is confronted with uncertainties and fears that are personally as devastating as the lack of economic resources which during the Depression persuaded Hete to seek an abortion. The prospect of no work and little income certainly was not a concern for anyone living in the GDR in the 1980s, which should have made the choice for having children much easier. But Emilia is torn between her career and having the child. She also must deal with her husband's attitudes. She fears that after her abortion he may no longer consider her attractive. She loves him and is certain that he will leave her, thereby leaving her to face these problems alone without any community support. The isolation she feels resembles closely that experienced by Martha each time she had an illegal abortion, as well as what Hete felt in Wolf's drama.

Emilia opts for the abortion but, unlike Martha, suffers enormous pangs of conscience, and feelings of guilt nearly overwhelm her. Whereas Martha returns to the television studio the same day she has her sixth and last abortion, Emilia is devastated by the prospect of never again being able to bear children as a result of having had the abortion and is uncertain about the survival of her marriage. To the end Martha remains a staunch defender of the right to choose. She summarizes her six abortions as follows: "According to Catholic norms I am a six time murderer, according to the state a five time law breaker. However I, who usually has a bad conscience fairly easily, in this case refuse to have one" (315). Martha's abortions are carried out in such a calculated manner that she avoids both legal and moral entrapment. Her mechanical and clinical descriptions of her abortions are contrasted by the complexities portrayed in Wolf's drama and by the emotional turmoil Emilia and her generation experience in opting for an abortion. The structure of the novel disallows Martha's point of view to dominate. Her uncompromising defense is mediated by the inclusion of emotionally charged scenes from *Cyankali* and the younger generation's commitment to reproduction *and* the right to choose. Martha's morally and emotionally uncomplicated and uncompromising defense of abortion as a means of birth control gives way to a redefinition of abortion as a means of family planning. Emilia's greatest fear of not being able to have children in the future is alleviated by assurances to the contrary. Unlike Martha, all the younger women, including her own daughter-in-law, express a strong desire to have

children. As an endorsement of childbirth the novel ends with Martha relishing her new role as a grandmother.

Wolf's drama is more than a historical reminder of the horrendous treatment of women who refused to bring children into a world where they had little or no chance of survival. The inclusion in the novel of the discussions concerning the production of the play *Cyankali* elevates the debate about abortion beyond the linear description of one woman's description, and the historical perspective demonstrates that the progress made in the intervening 40 years indeed had been significant. Even though the emancipation of women is by no means complete, the novel ends on a "positive" note, i.e. with the birth of a child. Worgitzky leaves open to question whether or not the gains women have made can be sustained under present day economic and career assumptions. Martha concludes: "In this respect men have it easier, as long as they are not required to be available when the child needs them. And this is not going to change in a satisfactory manner for women, as long as we live in a world, in which human beings are measured by grades and money according to measurable accomplishments" (309). In effect, Worgitzky claims that all remnants of capitalism need to be eliminated before women can take total control of their bodies without consideration of economic consequences or social taboos. These ideas closely echo Lenin's thoughts concerning the emancipation of women: "True emancipation of the woman, true communism will only then begin, where and when the mass struggle (under the leadership of the proletariat which stands at the rudder of the state) begins against this petty work of housework, or more correctly, begins its massive restructuring of the socialist grand economy" (*Temperamente* 10).

Meine ungeborenen Kinder is an energetic defense of the right to choose. However, much as did Wolf, Worgitzky defends the right to an abortion as necessary because the existing social and economic conditions are not yet conducive to afford women the same level of freedom enjoyed by men. Martha, in contemplating her granddaughter's future, speculates on how many generations will pass before all social issues regarding a woman's right to choose are indeed resolved: "This now is my grandchild, she thought, the next generation. Philine, a girl. What will the earth look like, when out of this child of feminine gender a woman has become? Will she want to have children? Be able to have them? Or will she once again be forced to have children" (322). The joyous tribute to the

birth of her grandchild is a preview. Thus, Worgitzky follows Wolf's lead by declaring the right to an abortion still necessary. However, as socialism evolves, as can be witnessed by the changing attitudes of the younger generation in the GDR, the use of abortion as a means to control reproduction will diminish because the birth of a child will become a truly communal experience.

Meine ungeborenen Kinder is written in the tradition of the *Entwicklungsroman*. However, instead of witnessing the development of any one character, the concept of abortion evolves from a means of rescue of the unborn child from economic deprivation (Wolf's drama), moves on to a way for women to achieve personal freedom with little regard for the unborn (Martha's depictions), and then to planned childbirth (Emilia's decision to have the abortion), to a final stage of endorsement for childbirth (Martha's grandchild, Philine).

A widely discussed novel published in the GDR in 1982 was Christoph Hein's *Der fremde Freund*, and in West Germany published under the title of *Drachenblut* (1983). The novel examines the life of a GDR woman who by choice disconnects herself from society. Her social environment consists of pro-forma routines and self-indulging rituals that are void of genuine social interactions. The main character is a clear antithesis to the traditional socialist hero. Her actions and behavior are intended to shock and repulse the reader. The manner in which she discusses her two abortions is a case in point. The shock effect is heightened by the lead-in to the matter-of-fact description of her two abortions. The affectionate description of developing photographs in her darkroom as a birthing experience and as an ultimate act of creation is contrasted with her total lack of feelings toward having aborted two fetuses. She says:

I like that particular second in the darkroom when on the white paper in the developer the picture slowly emerges. That is for me a moment of creation, of procreation. The transition from a white nothing to an indefinite something is fluid and surprising in their ever changing structures. The slow emergence of an image. Germination which I influence and guide, and can abort. Creation. Life creating chemistry, in which I play a role. Different than with my children, my unborn children. I never had the feeling that I played a part. Maybe later much later it would have happened that something moved within me. Two abortions was the result. (86)

Following this grotesque comparison she gives the reasons for the two abortions. Matter-of-factly, she points out that the first child had come too early in her life when she had other plans. The second was aborted because she could not continue the relationship with Hinnen, her partner. This decision was based upon her instinctual feeling that the two of them were not meant for one another.

Although this description is not a direct indictment of abortion, it arouses pity and makes the reader question the validity of her reasons for having the abortions. This point is reiterated most forcefully toward the end of the novel when she has to assess the state of her existence. There are only two events in her life that give her a sense of being. One is the memory of her childhood relationship with Katharina and the other is her wish to someday have or adopt a child. She realizes too late that dedicating oneself to another human being is the only real source of happiness. She confesses that "the occasional wish for a child will reappear again and again." She continues and explains: "What causes this is most likely the yearning to unequivocally dedicate oneself to another human being. My lost capability, to unequivocally love someone else. It is the yearning for Katherina, for childhood love, for friendship, of which only children are capable. I really miss Katherina now" (171-72). Similarly to her other failed relationships, the two abortions are used to further disconnect herself from the rest of society. The reader is reminded at the end of the novel that childhood memories may be comforting, but they cannot be sustained over a life time. Only procreation contributes to our own humanity and to society. The main character knows that having missed the opportunity to give birth to a child condemns her to a life within her protective cover of dragon's blood devoid of genuine human contact. She exclaims: "I will die of yearning for Katharina in my inviolable shell" (172) because she can never have Katharina back and her child bearing years have passed.

The main character in *Drachenblut* chooses abortion as yet another means to achieve her goal of total isolation. As the reader witnesses this degeneration and pseudo-construct of happiness on the part of the character, the alternative of childbirth as a means of maintaining a connection to humanity emerges. Thus, even more forcefully than Worgitzky in *Meine ungeborenen Kinder*, Christoph Hein gives a glimpse of a positive horizon by endorsing childbirth as a regenerative force while seeing abortion as self-indulgent and destructive.

III

Meine Ungeborenen Kinder reports on the status of women in the GDR and concludes that abortions continue for the time being to be a necessary option for women to attain a viable economic, social, and political position in society. The novel concludes with a view toward the future by depicting the next generation opting for childbirth and against abortion. In *Drachenblut*, women are free to choose abortions to meet their immediate social, psychological or economic goals, but abortion is clearly rejected as a means of achieving the long-term social and psychological well-being of the individual and society. Whereas these two novels moderate between free choice and obligation to the larger social needs, a number of shorter literary pieces written in the same year are a direct attack on the use of abortion. In 1982 these works appeared in the journal *Temperamente: Blätter für junge Literatur*, which published prose, poetry, interviews, and commentary directed at young people. The journal is an attempt to make literature relevant. Its provocative and colorful covers stood out on newsstands and were intended to appeal to a youthful audience. Prose and poetry contributions presented young people with an array of contemporary issues and frequently appropriate socialist solutions.

In the lead essay, in *Temperamente*, "Familien und Ehen" (1982), Irene Runge echoes many of the same themes related to the inequities of women found in *Meine ungeborenen Kinder*. However, Runge's emphasis is not on abortion but rather on the promotion of the family. Her essay and the accompanying short stories in this edition of *Temperamente* are distinctly less affirmative with regard to abortion. These works, directed at young people, are decidedly anti-abortion and less concerned with defining the ideological parameters within which the right to choose contributes to the emancipation of women. The pedagogical strategy is to laud the large family as the means for women to achieve social and economic emancipation rather than dwell on a woman's individual right to make decisions about her body. In promoting the family, the state wanted to maintain a significant role in the education and socialization of children while simultaneously dissuading women from isolating themselves in their homes. Women needed to reproduce but at the same time remain fully active in the workforce.

Irene Runge's essay begins by providing young people insights into the function of the family in a socialist society. The essay starts out with elementary concepts about family life and then examines

the existing inequities between men and women. She concludes that these stem from the career roles men and women are assigned. She takes her lead from Lenin, who wrote: "The woman remains now as then a house slave in spite of all the laws of emancipation, because she is being crushed, suffocated, numbed, oppressed by the petty chores of housework, which ties her to the kitchen and the nursery, and her creativity is being squandered through barbaric unproductive, petty, unnerving, numbing, oppressive work" (qtd. in *Temperamente* 9). The main task confronting socialist societies such as the GDR was to prevent this isolation. Women quickly lose their personal identity if separated from the work place and become increasingly dependent upon their husbands and children for contact with the larger society. She adds: "To accommodate the wish for children and the career of the woman is still a problem today, whose social solution in the form of creches and public nurseries, ready-made baby food and throw-away diapers does not only have a material side" (*Temperamente* 9). In spite of these conveniences women will wither in their isolation if ways are not found to integrate them fully into the workforce. Runge argues that the family cannot exist outside of or parallel to society, and it is a societal problem when "the nearly 87 percent of working women in the GDR still do 80 percent of all needed housework" (*Temperamente* 10). She ends her essay much the same way as Worgitzky had ended her novel: she points out that the family is part of a continuum and a network of social contacts in which the individual thrives.

Irene Runge's essay on the affirmation of the family is also a practical guide on how to make a marriage work—clearly an effort to combat the rising divorce rate. A major cause for the breakup of marriages, according to Runge, was that women were still assigned gender-specific roles and ended up doing double work, while men participated only marginally in the marriage. Runge gives the following advice in an almost sermon-like manner:

to be a partner means to participate, to allow to take part and to be able to take part. If taking part is reduced solely to an obligation and under everyday pressures the special nature of the participation is ground away, then it is appropriate to fear for the survival of the partnership. (*Temperamente* 10)

Her comments are directed toward young people who have minimal understanding about the complexities of maintaining a viable

relationship. Although most young people in the GDR continue to endorse the concept of marriage, many sociologists question whether they are equipped or willing to deal with the many necessary adjustments. Runge admits that some will not find success in marriage, but most will: "Life has boundaries, that also result from people living together. Some fail, others accommodate, many would not want to live any other way" (*Temperamente* 11).

In the same edition of *Temperamente*, Runge's essay is followed by a short story by Maja-Michaela Wiens entitled "Traumgrenzen." The dehumanizing experience of obtaining an abortion is the central theme. From the moment Nina Rothe is rolled into surgery, she is subjected to a series of humiliating experiences that resemble a bad dream. Nurses, doctors, and fellow patients, as well as Thomas her boyfriend, exhibit little understanding of the trauma she has had to endure. The nurse makes no effort to comfort Nina. When Nina becomes sick to her stomach and expects sympathy, the nurse replies with the trite phrase: "Sure, now you feel bad, but while you were doing it you didn't feel bad" (*Temperamente* 17). The procedure is performed in the basement of the hospital in filthy surroundings, with little regard for privacy and in a manner reminiscent of an assembly line. The nurse refuses to change her blood-soiled bed with a remark used more appropriately for cattle: "We're not changing this until this evening, now you will make a mess of it again anyway" (*Temperamente* 18), and the anaesthetist gives Nina her shot while addressing the next patient.

The vulgarity of the experience is heightened further by the conversation of the six other women who are either recuperating after an abortion or are waiting to go to the operating room. The casual and profane manner in which they speak about their experiences shows the level of deprivation of values:

Carmen, the seventeen year old one, who had been here twice before, is telling men stories again. She belongs to those who already have 'it' behind them. On the floor there are always those who have 'it' in front of them and the others for whom 'it' is already past. To have 'it' in front of you creates connections. Fear makes the women appear quieter than they normally are. They rarely speak about the abortion, even more rarely about the reasons. Most of them have a bad conscience. They keep the abortion secret as they kept the pregnancy secret. When everything is over, the women most often find their way back into life. They cannot forget. (21)

Profanity may have been a release of tension, but it also underscored the lack of seriousness on part of these young women in deciding for an abortion. Carmen laughs at the doctor's suggestion that she should take the pill regularly and in her vulgar way adds: "For that I am too sloppy, she says. And when I constantly have to think about that little pill, I don't have much fun fucking" (*Temperamente* 21). In contrast, Christine, another patient, experiences agony and despair over losing a child she really wanted. The lack of support and the crude behavior of the other women only add to her sorrow.

"Traumgrenzen" presents a frightening picture of the total isolation women face when seeking an abortion. The hospital staff is outright hostile. The physical surroundings are unpleasant. The procedure is carried out in the most mechanical way. The loss of contact with other human beings makes the price paid for having an abortion indeed very high. This is made most apparent in the final scene of the story. Thomas, Nina's boyfriend, can only offer platitudes as he picks her up from the hospital. This final verbal exchange shows the depth of Nina's isolation: "Well, Nina how was it, make it through alright? Thomas asks, because he does not know what else to say. Ya, Ya, says Nina. What else is he supposed to say, she thinks. She gets up and throws her bathrobe around her. Come, let's get out of here" (*Temperamente* 21-22).

In *Meine ungeborenen Kinder* the criticism of the medical profession is intended to affect reform. In "Traumgrenzen," the description of this dehumanizing experience might very well discourage young women from exercising their right to seek an abortion. By implication, the majority of women seeking an abortion did so for reasons that were less than appropriate. Clearly the author intended to make the point that irresponsible sexual behavior ought not be resolved by access to an "easy" abortion.

"Glücksspender," by Monika Helmecke, tells the story of Karla M., who is pregnant and sitting at her desk at home looking through a set of file cards. She is reflecting on the last eleven years of her life. She and her husband had an understanding that they would have no more than two children, even though at that time they were contemplating having a third. They decided against the idea because: "Otherwise we won't have much of each other. Also for the children it is better, one has more time for them. The question of the living accommodations played a role. And anyway. They agreed" (*Temperamente* 29). In spite of these reasons, her husband finally

agrees to support her decision to have the third child because he remembers his personal joy of being a part of his wife's pregnancy. However, in the end she insists that they hold to their agreement. This might very well have been the end of the story. However, this is where it takes a somewhat unusual turn.

Karla's girlfriend comes to visit. She proceeds to tell Karla that her marriage is in trouble because of her inability to bear children. Near a nervous breakdown, she is convinced that she will never be a mother because to adopt a child would take three years and then it would have to be an older child, which would be unacceptable to her. Karla is so deeply affected by the desperate state of her best friend that she comes up with a plan which her husband enthusiastically endorses: "And thus it came about that she [Karla] had given birth again. She gave it to her girlfriend immediately after her hospital stay" (*Temperamente* 30). By word of mouth, others come to her. "In the course of the past eleven years nineteen women had come to her, however only nine wishes could be fulfilled" (*Temperamente* 31). One such child is placed with the police major who investigates her on suspicion of dealing in "Menschenhandel." Instead of arresting her for the crime of selling children, the major gives Karla the nickname "Glücksspender," i.e. bearer of good fortune.

Karla's good deeds are rewarded in that she maintains contact with all the children who affectionately call her "Tante Karla." Her greatest joy, though, is looking through her file cards where the successes of each of the children are dutifully recorded. Each of the children she bore also held together a marriage that was otherwise sure to fail. "Glücksspender" ends much like a fairytale where everyone lives happily ever after. Even Karla's wish to have her own third child may come true: "Certainly—weren't the girls grown up? And isn't a boy something different? She had to speak about this to her husband without delay" (*Temperamente* 32). Helmecke's story does not attempt to strike a balance between having a child or having an abortion. She clearly opts for carrying the child to full term even if that means giving it up for adoption. It is noteworthy that none of the recipients of Karla's babies suffer from the alienation Nina or Martha Turbec experienced during their ordeal of having an abortion. Instead they became part of a large happy family.

The final piece in the *Temperamente* series is entitled "Gespräche mit dem Ungeborenen," by Gabriele Keyßelt. In the form of a diary, a mother speaks to her unborn child in two week intervals on a variety of topics. In the course of the nine months her

initial anxieties about bringing a child into a world filled with uncertainties yield to expressions of joy and anticipation. Her decision to carry the baby to full term comes on October 8, 1981, the day the American President gives the order for the construction of the neutron bomb. Uncertainty about her choice is alleviated by the realization that the state provides her with adequate financial assistance and excellent prenatal care. With the support of her husband, eight-year-old daughter, and the pregnancy counselors, as well as the encouragement of the "Gemüsefrau" and the taxi driver, her fears gradually subside. Toward the end of her pregnancy she is sufficiently confident to be able to reject calmly the indictment of a young man who accuses her of being irresponsible for bringing a child into a world destined for destruction:

At the beginning of the year I would have used those same words myself, actually only to avoid responsibility. Because I should have know even at that time, that especially children are our great responsibility. Children need peace, love, attention, humanity—with these they force us to help change the condition of the world, to not turn over decisions to the passing of time. Because life has been given birth, there shall be no atomic death. (27-28)

Although the right to decide in favor of an abortion is left solely to the mother, Keyßelt leaves no doubt that such a choice would clearly be irresponsible. Neither financial or career sacrifices nor the threat of nuclear war are sufficient reasons for aborting a child. She argues that only with the birth of a child do we genuinely strive to make the world a better place. "Gespräch mit dem Ungeborenen" sends a message that is in its emphasis opposite the one offered in *Meine ungeborenen Kinder*. In the latter, readers are provided with an abundance of information, so that they can formulate opinions about abortion and more importantly about the overall progress women have made in their struggle for emancipation; the former is a direct appeal to young people to not let the present sorry state of the world deter them from having children.

Meine Ungeborenen Kinder and *Drachenblut* are directed at adults and provide a positive horizon where women should be able to continue to assume their traditional reproductive roles with the full support of the larger society. Young people are the targeted audience in the prose pieces of the *Temperamente* edition and the

message is clearly anti-abortion and pro-family. Worgitzky treats the subject of abortion with a degree of objectivity, gives the discussion a historical perspective, and does not blatantly impose her value judgments. She allows the debate to evolve slowly in favor of childbirth without sacrificing the right to choose. She maintains that women must unequivocally retain the right to choose while weaving a complex debate which at the end persuades the reader of the great joy children can bring to the community. In *Drachenblut* the main character's way out of her utter deprivation and isolation could have been achieved by giving birth to a child and thereby reconnecting with the community. In contrast, the prose pieces appearing in *Temperamente* convey a more direct message. Abortion is not seen as a form of liberation for women, but rather as an invitation to pain and sorrow. The true joy is found in the preparation for childbirth and the accompanying anticipation of the arrival of the newborn. Giving birth is a significant social contribution, whereby parents commit to improve the social order on behalf of their children. Accordingly, the establishment of a family enhances the social environment, while those having abortions detract from that effort by promoting isolation and alienation.

As noted before, the campaign to promote the family was enhanced in 1984 by extensive social programs. If the subsequent decline in abortions is an indicator, then the effort to curb the use of abortions as a means of birth control succeeded. By 1989 the number of legal abortions had declined to 72,000 from a high of 96,000 in 1982. No doubt the reasons for this reduction most certainly included factors other than an effective public relations campaign or generous social programs, but it can be argued that the literary debate about abortion and the promotion of the family in the media, as well as the financial and social assistance, were effective tools in deterring or at least curbing the use of abortion. It is another way of saying that GDR family policy did not ever promote women's independence and emancipation, but instead reinforced the traditional productive and reproductive roles of women. As Katerina von Ankum points out, at the time of the collapse of the SED regime women were just beginning to discuss the consequences of such policies on their lives, and this "may have been the reason why East German women's movement failed to insist immediately on access to free and legal abortions" (Ankum 138).

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