

Kowalik, Jill Anne. *Theology and Dehumanization: Trauma, Grief, and Pathological Mourning in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century German Thought and Literature*. Ed. Gail K. Hart, Ursula Mahlendorf, Thomas P. Saine and Hans Medick. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009. 186 pp. ISBN: 978-3-631-59092-8 hardcover, \$57.95

Reviewed for Women in German by Imke Brust

With her research on trauma, grief, and pathological mourning in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany, Jill Kowalik aimed to fill a gap in German studies and sought to establish a link between *Empfindsamkeit* and trauma studies. At the same time, her research was probably also very personally motivated, because, as Ursula Mahlendorf mentions in the preface, Jill Kowalik struggled with breast cancer the entire fourteen years she spent researching and writing this book. In this respect, Kowalik's research on grief may have been her personal way of mourning, of dealing with the trauma of her illness, i.e., developing a narrative for the event. Unfortunately, as a result of her illness, Kowalik was unable to complete her book, and therefore the final version remains unfinished. However, her research provides valuable insights and represents a source of inspiration for the readers, who are challenged to complete Kowalik's work by linking her insights on grief to dehumanization in modern times. As Kowalik outlined in her introduction, the final and missing chapter was to illuminate "the impact of early modern forms of grief on the development of modern pathologies" (22). This is the legacy Kowalik leaves to her fellow scholars. Simultaneously, Kowalik's interdisciplinary research project that sought to combine an anthropological and historical approach with psychoanalytic and literary analysis, is also pointing German studies in a more inter- and cross-disciplinary direction.

Kowalik based her study of grief in the German-speaking countries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries primarily on empirical analysis of a substantial corpus of *Leichenpredigten* "(about 2,000 documents)" (36), which, as Kowalik argues, provided "models for grieving" (38) and expressed and dealt with the trauma of the Thirty Years' War (25, 91-94). In addition to studying the content and genre of *Leichenpredigten*, Kowalik had also planned to develop a "statistical analysis along period, gender, age, and class lines" (12) to provide insights about the different life expectancies of men and women at the time.

In the second chapter, Kowalik attempts to develop a historical narrative of grief, of dealing with loss, which spans from ancient to early Christian contexts, from Homer to Luther. As Kowalik demonstrates, Martin Luther's inconsistent double legacy on grief, which allowed for "Augustinian sorrow, the acknowledgment of human vulnerability", but "also emphasized guilt, shame, and remorse as proper reactions to bereavement" (71), set the stage for the dichotomy of empathy and punishment in later Protestant thought, i.e., the development of worldly versus godly grief. According to Kowalik, the primary reason for the need to turn worldly grief into godly grief, which meant repressing emotional reactions to loss (worldly grief) by channeling them into shame and guilt (godly grief), was the dangerous relationship between sorrow and rage (86-87). One ancient story, which is missing from this chapter and would have strengthened Kowalik's planned argument concerning modern dehumanization, is Sophocles' story of *Antigone*, where the precise opposite happens, and the repression of worldly grief, empathy, leads only to more violence rather than achieving reconciliation and dealing with trauma.

The third chapter focuses on the Thirty Years' War and its long-term psychological impact on the German-speaking countries, an area of research that, as Kowalik points out, had previously been neglected (90). Accordingly, this chapter contains numerous examples of *Leichenpredigten* with explicit references to the Thirty Years' War. Kowalik notes in particular the repetitive and formulaic nature of the texts (94), while she also argues that the discourse on rage in these texts

serves as an indicator of the extent of trauma (96). Moreover, Kowalik provides an overview of the main themes that these sermons addressed, ranging from biographical information to warnings against pagan/worldly forms of grief (97-111).

The following five, significantly shorter chapters devoted to literary analysis are journal and conference papers that Kowalik produced during her last four years. The editors selected these pieces because they found them best suited to support Kowalik's overall argument (10). All of these chapters point Kowalik's work in a more feminist direction and imply a connection between trauma, dehumanization, and patriarchy. Chapter Four discusses Freudian paradigms and German literary criticism and speaks against "limiting the literary-critical enterprise to the investigation of patriarchal conflict" (117). Since Kowalik addresses the "supposed master myth of capitalism, the Oedipus complex" (115) in this chapter, any follow-up research would benefit from including the aforementioned story of Oedipus' daughter, *Antigone*. Chapter Five establishes the connection between pietistic grief and *Empfindsamkeit* by looking at Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. In this chapter, Kowalik is particularly concerned with representing the "crucial psychohistorical dimension" (122) of Goethe's critique and applies the dichotomy of worldly versus godly grief to her analysis of *Werther*. In Chapter Six, Kowalik combines Nietzsche's observations on *Auschweifung des Gefühls* with Freud's observation on repression and explores "the narrative representation of this phenomenon in Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser*" (141). With Chapter Seven, Kowalik returns to Goethe and discusses his portrayal of 'pathological' aspects of feminine identity formation in *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* by analyzing the development of the three female characters - the beautiful soul, Natalie, and Therese - from childhood to adulthood. In the final chapter, Kowalik engages with yet another text by Goethe, *Wahlverwandschaften*, and again explores issues of trauma and memory by focusing on the three female characters Mignon, Natalie, and Otilie. Trauma, as Kowalik argues, can only be overcome if the traumatized individuals manage to develop a narrative for the event (168-169). Thus, in her analysis of Otilie, Kowalik stresses that Walter Benjamin's focus on Otilie's silence needs to be complemented by the "failure of others to listen" (174).

Any reader interested in comprehending Kowalik's argument in its entirety will feel challenged to read beyond *Theology and Dehumanization*. Above all, Kowalik's study offers the opportunity to extend the discussion of the issues she has identified to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany, in order to connect them to the dehumanization processes that led to the tragedy of the Holocaust. It might be helpful to consider the works of the social scientists Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, in particular Weber's *Die protestantische Ethik und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus* and his study on *The Sociology of Religion* for such future research, as well as Hannah Arendt's thoughts on empathy.

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