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Catherine Dollard, *The Surplus Woman. Unmarried in Imperial Germany, 1871–1918* (2009), 272 (Berghahn Books, New York, \$95.00).

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Like the woman worker, the unmarried woman in the nineteenth century confounded expectations about middle-class womanhood. For anti-feminists, images of the unmarried woman, especially that of the ‘old spinster’ (*alte Jungfer*), were yet another way to mock and thereby discipline women. For feminists, the unmarried woman was a wonderfully useful way to compel the public to contemplate new norms for middle-class womanhood. They referred to a demographic ‘surplus of women’ (*Frauenüberschuss*) to argue for social change: if a considerable number of women would never be able to marry, then new life options must be opened for them. Diverse feminists made the surplus of women into a point of departure for their arguments – for education (Helene Lange), paid and unpaid social work (Alice Salomon), for new sexual ethics (Helene Stöcker, Ruth Bré) or for the unworkability of capitalism (Lily Braun, Clara Zetkin). Dollard has taken an issue that is pervasive in the sources, and therefore known to historians of German women, but only in a shallow way, and she has done the innovative thing of putting it at the centre of her analysis. The idea of a surplus of women in Germany was common to essentially all feminists and also to people in realms of social thought [End Page 533] beyond feminism, such as sexology. It did not unite them, for they each built it into their own divergent analyses, but it was common to all of them.

Dollard's other achievement is to demonstrate that, interestingly enough, this surplus of women did not exist. That is, while contemporaries were convinced that it was a genuine demographic phenomenon and argued on that basis, Dollard's own analysis – using both contemporary statistics and more recent regional demographic studies by historians – shows that the surplus did not exist on the scale that was believed at the time. Even Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, a feminist who was trained as a statistician and researched this topic, greatly inflated her figures for the supposed surplus. The fictitious nature of the surplus makes it all the more interesting as a cultural artefact. (And to be clear, while the subtitle would lead one to believe that this is a history of being single, this book is purely a history of that cultural artefact.) Dollard is surely correct in analysing the myth of the surplus as an expression of anxiety about industrialization and modernity.

The book reads in a somewhat static fashion, I think, because of how the evidence proceeds, and perhaps because of how it must proceed. Because feminists, sexologists and other social scientists simply took the surplus of women as given, they did not explore it in their writings, and we cannot see their thinking evolving in tandem with it. Dollard must meanwhile explain the significance of their respective work to the reader. Her capsule accounts are well done, but it is hard to break new ground in the limited space she has for each. In other words, knowing the deeper history of the idea of a surplus of women does not really change our understanding of the work of each of these thinkers and activists. Perhaps in an effort to find a common analytical thread among them, Dollard briefly criticizes the feminists for participating in the negative discourse of the idle and/or frustrated spinster (112, 126, 148, 159, 168). Yet since they were all using the idea of the surplus to argue for social change, it follows that they would not affirm the status quo. The high value they placed on work, for example, seems to predetermine their negative comments on single middle-class women's idleness. As Dollard is herself demonstrating, if the belief in the surplus of women – together with its negative images – did not exist, these feminists would have had to invent it. And obviously they did!

Chapter eight on Gnauck-Kühne stands apart because the reader can observe this religious activist and feminist thinking through, and changing her mind about, the meaning of being unmarried. She does not just refer to the female surplus as a jumping-off point for an argument. Chapter three, which uses statistics to demolish the myth of the surplus of women, also stands apart. The substantial conclusion also covers new ground. Here Dollard juxtaposes the strong cultural presence of the female surplus at a time when there was no significant demographic imbalance with the opposite situation after the First World War broke out. From then on, the demographic imbalance was very real, but the cultural presence of the surplus of women disappeared, or at least changed beyond recognition. All of the book is well researched and carefully written, and it provides a sound introduction to important feminist thinkers and to anti-feminist thought. For readers already familiar with the history of German feminism, these chapters are the ones to be sure not to miss.