
The nature of women and relations between the sexes, Michael Salewski notes, was a popular topic in the salons of eighteenth-century Europe (102). And it remains a popular topic today. Salewski has written a popular book with copious footnotes to scholarly literature that stands in this centuries-old tradition. Although this book cites literatures on women, gender, sexuality, it is in fact an impressionistic essay. Die Revolution der Frauen offers a history of how we live today, which he argues is fundamentally shaped by the emergence of new ideas of women. The transformation of women's status underpins, he argues, the wider transformation of Western, or European, or (by the last chapter) German society—and it is the latter, not women's status per se, that is his subject.

A book like this—big, ambitious, extensively illustrated—is a labor of love. A historian takes on such a project when he believes he has tapped into a deeper truth that cannot be brought to light in more detailed monographic studies. For Salewski, this deeper truth is that in the late nineteenth century (and in a very few cases earlier) images of female power (Weiberherrschaft) emerged that were new because they were positive or at least agnostic in their valuation of that counterfactual scenario, and that we live in that era today. While images of female power and female rule are very old, before this cultural moment they had been depicted negatively. The fin de siècle is the harbinger of our own era: after interruptions due to the remasculinizing world wars, we now live under Weiberherrschaft. That is, values traditionally associated with women are prized, while those traditionally associated with men are rejected or are not even seen as salient (15). Women, now that they are no longer consigned to male tutelage, now appear as capable, dependable, and even powerful people. Moreover, this deeper truth was mediated importantly by pornographic images that recast both femininity and masculinity. Images of women, sex, and power in high culture have been in dialogue with images of women, sex, and power in pornography; the two belong together like "Berg und Tai" (14). The first chapter draws upon myths of powerful women, such as Lilith, Phyllis, and Omphale, to introduce particularly the theme of their sexual power and danger. Chapter Two opens the book's real chronology with the Middle Ages and early modern period. There, Salewski notes that the notoriety of queens and other exceptional individual women did not affect the everyday lives of the vast majority of
women. He stresses that in any case his goal is not to recapture women's lives, but rather those elusive attitudes or values that have rendered the Middle Ages a "weiblich" era (71). Sexuality is established in this chapter as the privileged lens for power, for "... das Sexuelle schlug bis in die kleinsten Kleinigkeiten durch-und damit ein schwer zu bemessender Eintfluss der Frauen weit jenseits des bloss Sexuellen" (87). The medieval and early modern eras offer scenarios of "verkehrte Welten" in which women wield sexual power, but those scenarios remain just that—representations of the opposite of what the world was or should be. The third chapter takes up the era of the French Revolution, opening with yet another iconic figure from the gallery of female power: Charlotte Corday. Salewski discusses Olympe de Gouge and Mary Wollstonecraft of course, but it is de Sade who receives the most attention, for "Ohne de Sade hätte es keine weibliche Revolution gegeben ... " (121). De Sade occupies this key niche because he represented, in for example the story of the innocent, ordinary Justine, "einen immer wüsten Missbrauch des weiblichen Wesens, des Weibes an sich, des Prinzips des Weiblichen" (124). Salewski emphasizes connections between high-cultural, or philosophical, ruminations about the possible effects of female power and pornographic representations of that power, as in the work of Heinrich Füssli. Kleist's character Penthesilea, Bizet's Carmen, and Lola Montez are [End Page 308] further milestones, as the circulation of their images displayed female sexual power. It is in Chapter Four, on the twenty or so years before 1914, that Salewski's story really gets underway. His examples here include Bachofen's discussion of matriarchy, Ibsen's A Doll's House, and Ignaz Semmelweis's medical innovations that saved many women's lives in child-birth, ending, he claims, the virtual presumption that men would marry a second or even third time in their lives. Chapter Five concerns, finally, the fin de siècle feminine revolution itself, and this chapter foregrounds the interaction between philosophy and pornography. Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner, Félicien Rops and Leopold Sacher-Masoch are linked in a discussion of philosophizing as gynephobia and pornography as the representation of female power, that, as Salewski hints with regard to Sacher-Masoch, need not be gynephobic at all (238). Here too is his brief discussion of the nineteenth-century German women's movement and Otto Weininger as antifeminist. The feminine revolution is halted by World War I, the interwar period, and World War II, all the subject of Chapter 6. Here Salewski gives special attention to Mathilde Vaerting, professor and feminist, because she wrote at length about the "Autoritätsverlust des Mannes" (299)—which of course nineteenth-century feminists did not do. The final, seventh chapter takes up the postwar period in West Germany, emphasizing the dislocations of gender relations in the immediate postwar period and new consumption habits (men reading Brigitte as well as Playboy; mail-order catalogs that blurred the boundary between male and female purchasers, Beate Uhse's products that combined birth control with sexual pleasure, and Playboy). Kinsey and de Beauvoir—who, like Salewski, preferred to discuss women in terms of images and types—receive special mention. The chapter moves through the 1960s and 1970s, giving more attention to the importance of extended peacetime, Alfred Kinsey and to Barbie dolls than to the usual suspects of the student, feminist, and Green movements. The current moment, he argues, is characterized by a popular culture rife with images of powerful, capable women, from politicians to elite athletes to movie superheroines. Will readers love Salewski's labor of love? That depends on what they are looking for. It is a fun tour through mostly well-known thinkers and artists who are sometimes put into new relationships with each other. (Sometimes it is a bit of a slog through some mediocre summaries to which Salewski cannot be all that attached, just to get through the years.) Salewski's essayistic style, very brief summaries,
and sometimes cryptic assertions incite the reader to contradiction, and that could also be part of the fun.

I am too much a feminist, and was too often incited to contradict him, to say that I found the book compelling. I appreciated his effort to put feminism in a larger cultural context—a vital task (159, 161, 186). However, I did not appreciate his asides intended to put feminists in their place. His allergy to radicals is such that he cannot bring himself to credit them with much of anything at all; repeatedly we are told that the important transformations took place before they ever arrived on the scene, and that social movements were mere effects, while images had causal, shaping impact (e.g. 189). I also found valuable his sustained effort to focus not on emancipation—a highly ambivalent thing—but rather on the transformation of gender relations (e.g. 154). He and I can agree that gender relations have changed a lot. But I would hardly call what we have today any form of Weiberherrschaft at all. Rather than men becoming women, I would argue that we see women becoming men—working days that are just as long, for example—and yet still remaining women—still getting paid less for that work, and still doing almost all the housework. Just because men are tired of hearing about that does not mean that much in the housework and child care department—or the domestic violence department—has changed. My preference for sociological data over images derived from Hollywood films is showing, I'm afraid. Salewski explains his focus on myth and its connection to fictional and real women by saying that myth, after all, shaped how men thought about women, for men did not really have any idea of "wie es ia der grauen weiblichen [End Page 309] Welt wirklich zuging" (48). I would counter that they seem to have known that well—and why wouldn't they? Most men have lived with women, after all. And because they have known it, they have tried to make sure they would never be stuck in that gray world of drudgery and doldrums.

This is a book based on visual and literary images, and they are fascinating. But their interpretation is by no means exhausted by Salewski's discussions of course (and I am sure he wouldn't argue that they were). While much of his pornography argument is valuable, one is struck after reading through dozens of his brief examples that the logic seems foreshortened: de Sade or Fuessli, for example, can be interpreted as harbingers of the feminine revolution whether they are representing men's abuse of women or whether they are representing women subjugating men (144). At his level, that argument does make sense—but we must stay at that very general level. Playboy magazine, another key text for Salewski's argument, is interesting because it has set aside questions of rights in favor of presenting "einen neuen Kosmos, dessen Regeln neu ausgehandelt werden mussten" (363)—exactly the phenomenon that Salewski seeks to highlight I would simply leave out the feminine side and say that Playboy has confronted its readers with a new cosmos of masculinities—an argument that the very feminist and socialist Barbara Ehrenreich made some years ago in her book The Hearts of Men. For some reason, Salewski apparently did not want to write a book about masculinities—but that is exactly what he has done.

I was struck by how images by men were taken as the key "texts" for a feminine revolution, but whatever women said or thought came in a distant second. Since Salewski makes clear that he is not seeking to recapture women's experiences or actual status (formidably complex questions), and that is, at his level of argument, fine. However, it seems to have led him into two other all-too-typically, all-too-historically male analytical approaches that connect his book directly to its
sources, such as books by Eduard Fuchs--this is spite of Salewski's clear intention of being unconventional and non-ideological (18). Those are, first, to identify woman as primarily a sexual being, and second, to identify improvements in the status of women, or even equality, with women's domination over men. Why set aside the rich feminist literature which has taken those obsessive and paranoid assumptions apart, some of which Salewski footnotes, and build a book so uncritically around them?