Preface

This volume originated in an experiment. In March 1992 scholars from five European and North American countries met in St. Louis, Missouri, to explore the possibilities of gender as a category of analysis for study of early modern German literature and culture. In the hope of creating a broader base for gender studies in early modern German literature and of putting gender studies closer to the center of the discipline, we not only invited scholars who were actively involved in feminist criticism, gender studies, or women's studies, but also quite simply scholars with expertise in early modern German culture and minds open to new approaches.

Although American academics often use gender in everyday parlance interchangeably with women—so that "gender studies" and "women's studies" often seem indistinguishable—we did not seek to focus on women alone or in isolation. Rather we proposed to investigate the relational structures or processes inherent in the idea of sexual difference, to explore social and cultural patterns and institutions, and to scrutinize junctures between systems of gender and other structures and processes in early modern German texts. While these essays focus on gender, our refocusing was not intended to exclude or discard other categories of analysis like "class" or "convention" but rather to complement or illuminate more established approaches. We understood gender—as distinct from sex—to refer to historical, social and cultural constructs and we therefore used the word gender programmatically to distance ourselves from the essentialist arguments about sex of another era.

We hope that this volume will enrich the scholarship of German literature of the Early Modern period with the insights of contemporary theories of gender and, more broadly, that it will contribute to a general discussion concerning the production and distribution of meaning in a given culture at a specific historical moment. While readers will find many common threads and similarities of ap-
proach, they will also note in the essays differences of opinion and differences of approach, even differences in the understanding of our central category, gender. It was by no means our intention to enforce unison but rather to advance a discussion that promises to continue into the next century, to offer models that could be pondered, emulated, and disputed.

The four divisions of the volume comprise a somewhat arbitrary grouping by affinity. The four essays in section I constitute an extended introduction to the problematic and politics of gender in early modern studies — Sigrid Weigel’s essay, which opens the volume, offers a German perspective on some of the central concerns underlying our North-American-based symposium. The four essays in section II explore the discourses of marriage and love in the early modern period and accompanying questions of domination and hierarchy. In section III four essays refocus on women and gender: women as citizens and rulers in the German empire, women as readers, women in literary texts as co-conspirators in the very systems of power that sacrifice them, and women as the implied recipients of asymmetrical moral lessons. Finally, in Section IV, beginning with the twelfth century and concluding in the nineteenth century, five essays analyze the construction of masculinity and femininity and its function in specific texts, genres, and disciplines.

This undertaking did not want for forbears. The initial concept for the Eleventh St. Louis Symposium was particularly indebted to *Rewriting the Renaissance*, the conference and consequent collection of essays, edited by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers and introduced by Catherine R. Stimpson, and to the lucid discussions of gender as a category of analysis by the American historian Joan Scott.1 Unlike the latter, the former is cited in this volume only in our introduction. Nevertheless, it can truly be called the inspiration for our symposium. We would like to thank Washington University, and the Goethe Institute, especially

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