

NEGOTIATING THE PUBLIC SPHERE THROUGH PRIVATE  
CORRESPONDENCE:  
A WOMAN'S LETTERS OF LIBERTY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

The pivotal role played by letters in eighteenth-century German literary, cultural and everyday life has long been recognised. In contrast to earlier times, many of the letters written in the eighteenth century were composed by women, and their correspondence provides modern scholars with a rich source of information about the process of communication in the intimate, private and public spheres. The limited correspondence of Charlotte von Hezel, the first woman in Germany to edit a periodical under her own name, is of particular interest because it offers one of the few examples of a woman corresponding with men for professional, not personal reasons. In addition, Hezel, not her male correspondents, represents the voice of authority within the area of activity being discussed: the publication of her magazine. Hezel's self-assurance is remarkable for a German woman of the time, and her letters demonstrate a liberating process of communication that allowed individuals hindered by gender, educational background or social status to debate contemporary issues and exchange services as they negotiated their entry into the public sphere.

Charlotte von Hezel, née Schwabe (1755–1817), was not afraid to let her voice be heard in a public forum. Despite her youth, her inexperience as a writer, and her sex, Hezel edited a literary-cultural journal, *Das Wochenblatt für's schöne Geschlecht*, in 1779.<sup>2</sup> Hezel, the first woman in Germany to edit a periodical under her own name, was a spirited advocate of the belief that the Enlightenment principles of reason and independent judgment were valid not only for men, but for women as well. Access to books was a necessity for women who wanted to incorporate these principles into their lives, and ten years later, in 1789, Hezel was the first person to try to establish a reading society in Germany exclusively for women.<sup>3</sup> A less visible but equally significant aspect of the process by which Hezel negotiated the world of public discourse is her limited correspondence with Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811), the influential Berlin publisher,

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Claudia Hein and Robert Liebler for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> *Das Wochenblatt für's schöne Geschlecht*, ed. Charlotte von Hezel, Erfurt 1779, reprint, afterword by Hans Henning, Hanau 1967. Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Hezel was assisted by the publisher Justus Friedrich Krieger of Giessen. After Krieger committed suicide in 1790, Hezel was unable to realise her ambitious plan. See Christine Haug, 'Das Verlagunternehmen Krieger 1725–1825: Die Bedeutung des Buchhändlers, Verlegers und Leihbibliothekars Johann Christian Konrad Krieger für die Entstehung einer Lesekultur in Hessen um 1800', *AGB*, 49 (1998), 1–170, esp. pp. 64, 70–4.

and Georg Wilhelm Zapf (1747–1810), a member of the patriciate and a self-educated scholar of local renown in Augsburg.

An examination of Hezel's letters contributes to ongoing discussions of the ways in which the epistolary form exposes the myriad connections between gender, social history, literary culture and the process of communication in the emerging public sphere. For example, the content and narrative strategies of Hezel's correspondence reveal various components of her individual and group identities, including gender, social status and intellect. Hezel's disdain for contemporary discourses that sought to limit the role of women in society, their reading habits and friendship between the sexes can also be detected. In this essay, however, Hezel's letters are not presented as an example of 'women's' letters that existed in a world separate from the one in which men also wrote letters. Zapf's letters to Hezel are not known to exist, but two letters written to Zapf by Hezel's husband, Johann Wilhelm Friedrich von Hezel (1754–1824), are included in the discussion. These letters, written in conjunction with the publication of *Das Wochenblatt* and a work by Hezel's husband, are a rare example of letters written by a man not on behalf of a woman, but with the goal of benefiting from a professional relationship already established by her.

The pivotal role played by letters in eighteenth-century German literary and cultural life has long been recognised:<sup>4</sup>

Eine Geschichte des Briefs und eine Geschichte der Brieftheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts im deutschsprachigen Raum ist Teil einer Geschichte der Entstehung bürgerlicher Öffentlichkeit und Intimsphäre und der deutschen Nationalliteratur. In beiden Zusammenhängen kommt dem Brief eine bedeutende, wenn nicht auch konstitutive Rolle zu.<sup>5</sup>

A great many of the letters written in the eighteenth century were composed by educated burgher women,<sup>6</sup> thanks in large part to the efforts of Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715–69), author of perhaps the most influential guide to German letter writing in the eighteenth century, *Briefe, nebst einer praktischen Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmacke in Briefen*. As Lorely French explains:

In short, because this handbook contained what Gellert considered model letters by women, it gave them an unprecedented legitimacy to write and offered an influential model for their writing and the presentation of that

<sup>4</sup> For a bibliography of literature related to the eighteenth-century epistolary tradition, including primary works, theoretical essays, edited collections, etc., see Lorely French, *German Women as Letter Writers, 1750–1850*, Cranbury, NJ 1996, pp. 293–316. Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>5</sup> Regina Nörtemann, 'Brieftheoretische Konzepte im 18. Jahrhundert und ihre Genese', *Brieftheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts: Texte, Kommentare, Essays*, ed. Angelika Ebrecht, Regina Nörtemann, and Herta Schwarz, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 211–24 (here p. 212). Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>6</sup> Reinhard Nickisch, 'Briefkultur: Entwicklung und sozialgeschichtliche Bedeutung des Frauenbriefs im 18. Jahrhundert', *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler, Munich 1988, I, pp. 389–409 (here I, p. 390).

writing to the public. From the 1750s . . . to 1850 . . . women took confidence in the epistolary form as a primary means of literary and political self-expression. The period's large number of unpublished and published epistolary writings also contributed immensely to women's growing public image as writers. (pp. 48–9)

Barbara Becker-Cantarino suggests that the increased importance of the letter as a form of writing led to a 'feminisation' of literature in the second half of the century as so many women began to reflect upon and record their experiences in letters.<sup>7</sup> However, until recently, most of the women's letters examined by scholars initially attracted attention because these individuals corresponded with famous men known to them personally – a lover, husband, son, guardian, or mentor – and the letters are valued because of the light they shed upon the lives and careers of these male addressees. In addition, many women's letters have been heavily edited or presented out of context to illustrate better the themes emphasised by the editors of the collections (French, pp. 29–47), and these topics are often limited to the intimate circle of home, family and friends.<sup>8</sup> Hezel's letters clearly differ from such traditional presentations.

Six of Charlotte von Hezel's letters are known to be extant. Written in connection with the publication of *Das Wochenblatt*, the letters are highly unusual for several reasons. There are relatively few instances of non-standard grammatical and orthographic usage, and this fact alone makes the letters noteworthy since Hezel was a woman. Few women were literate in eighteenth-century Germany,<sup>9</sup> and among women who could write, competence varied dramatically (Becker-Cantarino, p. 90). Stylistically, Hezel's

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Becker-Cantarino, 'Leben als Text: Briefe im 18. Jahrhundert', *Frauen Literatur Geschichte. Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Hiltrud Gntig and Renate Möhrmann, Stuttgart 1985, pp. 83–103 (here p. 85). Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of more controversial topics in women's letters, see for example Becker-Cantarino; Barbara Hahn, 'Antworten Sie mir!': *Rahel Levin Varnhagens Briefwechsel*, Stroemfeld 1990; Magdalene Heuser, "Das beständige Angedencken vertritt die Stelle der Gegenwart", *Frauen und Freundschaften in Briefen der Frühaufklärung und Empfindsamkeit*, *Frauenfreundschaft-Männerfreundschaft: Literarische Diskurse im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wolfgang Mauser and Barbara Becker-Cantarino, Tübingen 1991, pp. 141–66 (further references will appear in the text); James Trainer (ed.), *Bei aller brüderlichen Liebe. The Letters of Sophie Tieck to her Brother Friedrich*, Berlin 1991; and various essays in *In the Shadow of Olympus*, ed. Katherine Goodman and Edith Waldstein, Albany, NY 1992, including those by Ruth Dawson, 'Reconstructing Women's Literary Relationships: Sophie Albrecht and Female Friendship', pp. 173–88; Sara Friedrichsmeyer, 'Caroline Schlegel-Schelling: "A Good Woman, and No Heroine"', pp. 115–36; Edith Waldstein, 'Goethe and Beyond: Bettine von Arnim's Correspondence with a Child and Günderoode', pp. 95–114; and Liliane Weissberg, 'Turns of Emancipation: On Rahel Varnhagen's Letters', pp. 53–70.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolph Schenda estimates that literacy in central Europe in 1770 was about 15 per cent. See *Volk ohne Buch, Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe 1770–1910*, Frankfurt a.M. 1970, p. 444. Helmut Kiesel and Paul Münch identify most German readers as members of the upper or educated 'Bürgertum'. See *Gesellschaft und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert: Voraussetzungen und Entstehung des literarischen Markts in Deutschland*, Munich 1977, p. 166. No figures that I know of are available about literacy among women, but one would imagine that this figure would be lower than the average since no formal educational system existed for women.

letters are also atypical, for they are unemotional, businesslike and often satirical, free of the 'sentimentality, naiveté and simplicity' that was widely praised in the letters of German women, especially in the second half of the century (French, p. 56). With only a few exceptions, Hezel also avoids using French expressions.

Perhaps most significant, Hezel's correspondence provides us with one of the few examples of letters written by a woman for professional, not personal, reasons: Hezel wrote her letters to two men whom she did not know to request their expertise in promoting her magazine. It was not unheard of at the time for a woman to correspond with a man whom she had not met (French, pp. 53–5), but these letters were usually motivated by the desire to practise the art of writing letters, an approved activity for women. Furthermore, the male usually assumed the role of teacher.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Hezel was the leading actress in her letters while Nicolai and Zapf were supporting players, for instead of relying on these men to help her as they saw fit, Hezel suggested specific ways they could aid her efforts. In addition, Hezel used her correspondence as a means to negotiate her intellectual freedom in the literary public sphere, a site where women were not particularly welcome.

By writing to Nicolai and Zapf, Hezel could contribute to the success of *Das Wochenblatt* if the men would agree to help her with marketing and distribution. Even if they did not, Hezel's magazine would be advertised and her opinions would enter the public forum should her correspondence be published, a distinct possibility recognised by contemporary writers and modern scholars. For example, Dorothee Henriette von Runckel (1724–1800), editor of Louise Gottsched's correspondence and author of an epistolary handbook published in 1777, lamented the fact that Germans, ever mindful of the censors, avoided discussing politics in letters that could appear in print.<sup>11</sup> More recently, Nörtemann observes that, given the increased popularity of publishing correspondence in the eighteenth century, letter-writers began to remark that they would try to write as if there were no possibility that their words might eventually be published (p. 220).

Hezel sold *Das Wochenblatt* by subscription, which is why she wrote to

<sup>10</sup> The teacher/student paradigm was considered standard for male/female interactions, as evidenced by the hundreds of books, periodicals, and essays written by male authors for the betterment of their female readers. Letters were no exception, as noted by Magdalene Heuser in her examination of correspondence between men and women: 'Sie entsprechen einem Lehrer-Schüler-Verhältnis, wie zum Beispiel die Briefe des Dresdner Bibliothekars Karl Wilhelm Daßdorf an verschiedene Adressatinnen zeigen. Daßdorf versteht sich in erster Linie als Erzieher, der "die Aufklärung und Bildung junger um mich aufblühender Weltbürger" bei seinen Korrespondentinnen im Sinne der Ausbildung und Festigung traditioneller weiblicher Tugendideale betreibt' (p. 163).

<sup>11</sup> See the foreword to Runckel's *Sammlung freundschaftlicher Originalbriefe, zur Bildung des Geschmacks für Frauenzimmer*, Dresden 1777, reprinted in *Brieftheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts: Texte, Kommentare, Essays*, ed. Angelika Ebrecht, Regina Nörtemann, and Herta Schwarz, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 137–8.

Georg Wilhelm Zapf for the first time on 1 February 1779.<sup>12</sup> Zapf was reputed to be a successful collector of subscriptions, so Hezel's husband suggested that she ask Zapf for his help. Four subsequent letters to Zapf (10 April, 5 June, 7 August, and 26 September 1779) continue to address matters pertaining to collecting subscriptions and distributing the periodical, but Hezel also responds to various questions posed by Zapf regarding the title and content of *Das Wochenblatt*. Hezel's single letter to Nicolai (27 July 1779), accompanied by a complimentary copy of several issues of the magazine, is a request to have *Das Wochenblatt* reviewed in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* – a request that Nicolai appears to have ignored.<sup>13</sup> The first letter to Zapf by Hezel's husband (5 June 1779) expresses Johann von Hezel's hope that Zapf, given his success in finding readers for *Das Wochenblatt*, will also collect subscriptions for one of his works. The second letter (5 January 1780) discusses the distribution of *Das Wochenblatt* in Augsburg and the continued collecting of subscriptions.<sup>14</sup> Normally these matters were dealt with by Charlotte von Hezel, not her husband, but Johann von Hezel explained that he was writing for his wife since she was visiting the Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia of Weimar (1739–1807) for a few days.

Charlotte von Hezel was the only daughter of Johann Wilhelm Schwabe, a Lutheran minister and assistant superintendent of schools in Ilmenau.<sup>15</sup> Hezel's mother, Dorothea Crusius, a talented occasional poet, was born in Giessen into a family of renowned theologians. Education was highly valued in the Schwabe household: each of Hezel's three brothers earned a university degree and practised a profession (minister, lawyer, and doctor). Hezel's self-schooling was guided primarily by her middle brother, Heinrich Elias Schwabe (1750–1831), a lawyer employed by the duchies of Sachsen-Hildburghausen and Weimar. In 1778 Hezel married Johann Wilhelm Friedrich von Hezel, a private tutor and orientalist scholar; beginning in 1785 he taught for several years at the University of Giessen before settling permanently in 1801 at the University of Dorpat (now the University of Tartu in Estonia). A little less than one year after

<sup>12</sup> All of Charlotte von Hezel's letters to Zapf are located in the Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, Augsburg. I would like to thank the librarians in Augsburg for their assistance, as well as Jutta Weber of the Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, who informed me of the location of Hezel's letters. See Charlotte von Hezel, letters to Georg Wilhelm Zapf, Zapf Briefwechsel, Vol. IX, 2<sup>c</sup> Cod Aug 419 #137(138), #139(140), #141(142), #143(144), #145(146), Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, Augsburg. Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Charlotte von Hezel, letter to Friedrich Nicolai, 27 July 1779, Nachlaß Nicolai, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin. Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>14</sup> Johann Wilhelm Friedrich von Hezel, letters to Georg Wilhelm Zapf, Zapf Briefwechsel, Vol. IX, 2<sup>c</sup> Cod Aug 419 #135(136), 420 #130(131), Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, Augsburg. Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>15</sup> Biographical information for Hezel and her family was found in Uta Koch and Angelika Koller (eds), *Deutsches Biographisches Archiv*, microfilm collection, New York 1986, indexed in Uta Koch, Hans Koch, and Angelika Koller, *Deutscher Biographischer Index*, New York 1986.

she married, Charlotte von Hezel began to publish *Das Wochenblatt für's schöne Geschlecht*.

Despite the many societal constraints faced by women authors, Hezel's self-confidence as an editor and as a woman is clearly evident in her letters to Zapf and Nicolai. She almost always refers to *Das Wochenblatt* using the possessive 'mine' and, as noted earlier, she appears to be convinced that the success of the periodical depends on her management of the enterprise, rather than the goodwill of male sponsors, for she gives both Zapf and Nicolai instructions as to how her requests should be carried out. For example, in Hezel's first letter to Zapf (#137[138]) she indicates the specific audience in the Augsburg area that she is trying to reach – 'die vorzüglichsten Familien' – for these are the only readers with the interest and the financial resources to purchase a non-essential journal about art, literature and music. She also reminds Zapf that he cannot appeal just to female readers; he must also influence the men who may make the purchasing decision ('Leserinnen und Käufer'). Finally, recognising the importance of personal relationships in literary endeavours, she asks Zapf to lend his personal recommendation ('ihre gütige Empfehlung') to the magazine.

In Hezel's letter to Nicolai, she suggests that Nicolai should judge her magazine according to its purpose, as stated by Hezel, if he decides to publish an advertisement or a review of *Das Wochenblatt*.

Sollten Sie von meinem Wochenblatt in Ihrem Journal eine Anzeige machen, so hoffe ich, daß Sie den rechten Gesichtspunkt, aus welchem ich zu beurtheilen bin, nicht verkennen machen. Nichts Neues wollte ich vorbringen, sondern nur manches von anderen schon gesagte. Nütliches bald mit veränderten, bald mit unveränderten Worten wiederholen um – Liebhaber der in meinem Wochenblatt vorkommenden Materien nicht bloß Frauenzimmer zu unterhalten.

Thus, Hezel emphasises the value of her endeavour as a source of information and entertainment, an effective combination employed by many eighteenth-century editors. Hezel's statement that she will present the reader with no new information is a formulaic statement also used by male editors. Reprinting material from other sources was quite common in periodicals, and Hezel borrowed liberally from contemporary reference works which, as she stated in a letter to her readers in *Das Wochenblatt* (p. 16), she believed were available to only a few women. The phrase also conveys the image of an unassuming editor free from scholarly or belletristic ambitions; this in turn implies that the reprinted essays and original contributions should be exempt from criticism based upon standards the editor is not attempting to meet. Despite her disclaimer, however, Hezel did in fact offer a substantial amount of new information in the form of



literary reviews written by her and essays on women's health written by her brother, Ernst Schwabe (1752–1824).<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to the auto/biographical nature of so many women's letters examined by scholars to date, Hezel's letters include little personal information. When Hezel does reveal details of her family background and domestic life, she usually does so at the end of the correspondence, often as a postscript, perhaps indicating the slowly growing separation of the public and professional spheres from the intimate sphere. In addition, Hezel generally does not volunteer this information. She responds to questions posed by Zapf, and she answers precisely with little elaboration. For example, curious about Hezel's family background, Zapf asks if Hezel is from Leipzig<sup>17</sup> and how she acquired her education. Hezel replies in a postscript (#141[142]) that she is not from Leipzig, and explains that her father is the assistant superintendent of schools in Ilmenau. She does not go into detail about her family history, although she notes that she is descended 'aus dem Stamme Levi', i.e. a long line of individuals who have served the church.<sup>18</sup> She attributes 'mein bißchen Wissens' to the efforts of her middle brother, 'einem Schüler Riedels'.<sup>19</sup> Hezel asks no questions of Zapf, although posing questions that allowed the male to display his knowledge and experience was a strategy recommended to and employed by women conversing with men in the eighteenth century.

The style and tone of Hezel's letters are determined by her purpose in writing. When the goal is to communicate information pertinent to the management of *Das Wochenblatt*, Hezel writes clearly, concisely and politely without being obsequious. In her letter to Nicolai, one of the foremost

<sup>16</sup> For an evaluation of the literary essays see Melanie Archangeli, 'Charlotte von Hezel and *Das Wochenblatt für's schöne Geschlecht*: An Eighteenth-Century Challenge to Gender and Genre', *WGY*, 14 (1998), 71–89. For a discussion of the health column, see Archangeli, 'Das *Wochenblatt für's schöne Geschlecht*: A Sociohistorical and Literary Analysis of an Eighteenth-Century Periodical for Women', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan 1995, pp. 99–101, 138–41, 215–17, 232–5.

<sup>17</sup> Zapf may have wondered if Charlotte von Hezel, née Schwabe, was related to the well-known Johann Joachim Schwabe (1714–84), university librarian and later professor of philosophy at the University of Leipzig. Schwabe was a staunch supporter of Johann Christoph Gottsched's theories of language and literature. See *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, 2nd ed., New York 1986. Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>18</sup> Hezel may have written that she was of the 'tribe of Levi' because of the influence of her husband, an orientalist scholar. At one time 'Levites' referred to one of the twelve tribes descended from Levi, one of the sons of Jacob. Some modern scholars doubt the existence of such a tribe and believe that the term 'Levite' designated a priestly functionary, and only when the function became hereditary did the concept of the tribe develop. In the Middle Ages, the term *levitae* (servants, ministers) began to be used for deacons, a rank in the Christian ministry immediately below priest and bishop. In the Protestant church 'deacon' applied to the holders of an office in the ministry, and in the Lutheran church specifically, 'deacon' is applied to assistant parochial ministers. See 'Levites' and 'Deacon', *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., New York 1974. As already noted, Hezel's father was a Lutheran minister whose professional title was listed in contemporary lexica variously as 'Frühprediger', 'Diaconus', etc.

<sup>19</sup> Hezel is probably referring to Friedrich Justus Riedel (1742–85), a pastor's son who studied at Jena, Leipzig, and Halle, and later became a professor of philosophy for a short time at the University of Erfurt (1768–72) and then Vienna (see *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*).

publishers and thinkers of the Enlightenment, there are no flattering phrases, not even in the opening or closing of the letter. These formalities are, in fact, more restrained than usual for the time. She asks Nicolai to do no more than would be expected of a publisher who routinely introduces new publications. In her first letter to Zapf, on the other hand (#137[138]), Hezel communicates a greater degree of respect and admiration than she does in the letter to Nicolai. She may feel this approach is justified since she is requesting a personal favour from a stranger as opposed to asking a businessman, Nicolai, for a service. The final line of the Zapf letter probably indicates a concession to the fact that Hezel is a woman. Because she is female, her request of Zapf might be deemed inappropriate, so she writes, 'Pardonnieren Sie mir meine Dreistigkeit, welche sich auf die, mir gemachte Schilderung Ihres edlen Charakters gründet'.<sup>20</sup> Hezel's husband makes no such apology when he sends a similar letter to Zapf (#135[136]) asking Zapf to collect subscribers for Johann Hezel's edition of the Bible since Zapf has been so successful finding readers for *Das Wochenblatt*.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Johann von Hezel is almost curt as he writes, 'Ich verbitte dabey alle Weitläufigkeiten und wenn Eur. Wohl. bis gegen Michael. nun Subskribenten Liste haben: so bitte ich selbige gelegentlich, wenn Sie etwa an meine Frau schreiben, beyzulegen'. His politeness returns in the next sentence, however, as he assures Zapf that he would be glad to collect subscriptions for him in return. Overall, in an age riddled with hierarchical relationships determined by gender, social status and education, the tone of Charlotte von Hezel's letters indicates that she considers herself an equal of the men to whom she writes, despite the fact that she is female, her father is a lower church official in a provincial town, and she lacks a university education.

Beginning with her second letter to Zapf (#139[140]), Hezel often refers to their relationship as one of friendship, and Zapf does not contradict her. Although the concept of friendship was a key component of burgher consciousness and social life in the eighteenth century,<sup>22</sup> this status was unusual for a married woman corresponding with a married man. Despite the fact that it had become typical for a woman to request the friendship of the man to whom she was writing rather than his protec-

<sup>20</sup> At the end of the seventeenth century a statement like Hezel's was considered good form at the beginning of a letter requesting assistance. For example, a model letter in *Curiöse Gedancken Von Deutschen Briefen* (1691) included the following sentence as part of the 'initial compliment': 'Monsieur, Dessen sonderbare Güte hat mir gleichsam den Weg eröffnet, daß ich bey meiner jetzigen Auffwartung keiner übermäßigen Kühnheit kan beschuldiget werden.' See Reinhard Nickisch, *Die Stilprinzipien in den deutschen Briefstellern des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts. Mit einer Bibliographie zur Briefschreibelehre (1474–1800)*, Göttingen 1969, p. 107, cited in Nörtemann, p. 216. In 1779 such a phrase was no longer standard, yet Hezel, the woman, continued to use it while her husband did not.

<sup>21</sup> Johann von Hezel's major work in progress in 1779 was a multi-volume edition of the Bible with detailed explanatory comments for the uneducated reader.

<sup>22</sup> See for example the collection of essays in Wolfgang Mauser and Barbara Becker-Cantarino (eds), *Frauenfreundschaft-Männerfreundschaft*.



tion, as had previously been the case (Nörtemann, p. 216), the request appears to have been formulaic. Men were generally warned against classifying a relationship with a woman as friendship, since it was probably nothing but camouflage for nascent love that could unleash its destructive power even more uncontrollably under the guise of friendship.<sup>23</sup> This societal prejudice may well have prompted Hezel to assure Zapf that her husband sanctioned his wife's friendship with Zapf, for Hezel writes, 'Mein Mann, welcher sich Ihnen gehorsamst empfehlen, und versichern läßt, daß er nicht jaloux sei wenn Sie mir Ihre Freundschaft versichern, welche von so guter Art und so thätig ist ...'. In her next letter to Zapf (#141 [142]) Hezel remarks that she views Zapf's offer to contribute some articles to *Das Wochenblatt* as a sign of his friendship, and she reconfirms their mutual friendship in the final sentence and closing. Apparently the friendship did not outlast the lifespan of *Das Wochenblatt*, but the sentiment was sincere to the extent that publishing by subscription was in part an attempt to maintain a personal relationship between author and public in the face of the increasing commercialisation of the publishing process.

Johann von Hezel's enlightened thinking regarding his wife's correspondence with Zapf may well reflect the nature of the relationship between Hezel and her husband. Charlotte von Hezel was 24 when she married, probably about the average age for a woman's first marriage.<sup>24</sup> Johann von Hezel was 25, several years younger than the average age for upper, middle-class men when they first married.<sup>25</sup> The closeness in age of the Hezels, a difference of just six months, was atypical for the time, when the average age difference between husband and wife was ten to fifteen years (Frevert, p. 59). Because of this parity, it seems likely that the Hezels shared more interests than did couples where the husband was much older than the wife. Moreover, their relationship may have approached that of partners rather than the student/teacher model that was common in many marriages where the opinion of the older and wiser male was considered superior to that of the younger and less experienced female. In any case, Johann von Hezel seemed more comfortable with the fact that his wife was involved in such an ambitious and public literary project than did other men in similar situations.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps a man like Johann von Hezel, who published prolifically in his field yet was never

<sup>23</sup> Eckhardt Meyer-Krentler, 'Freundschaft im 18. Jahrhundert. Zur Einführung in die Forschungsdiskussion', in *Frauenfreundschaft-Männerfreundschaft*, pp. 1–22 (here p. 19).

<sup>24</sup> Ruth Dawson, 'The Search for Women's Experience of Pregnancy and Birth: Eighteenth-Century Accounts', *Anthropology and the German Enlightenment*, ed. Katherine M. Faull, Cranbury, NJ 1995, pp. 101–25 (here p. 107, note 17).

<sup>25</sup> Ute Frevert, *Women in German History*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans, from *Frauen-Geschichte zwischen bürgerlicher Verbesserung und neuer Weiblichkeit*, Frankfurt a.M. 1986, p. 39. Further references will appear in the text.

<sup>26</sup> In the correspondence of Clemens Brentano, for example, French finds substantial evidence that 'Brentano found it easy to discuss women's creativity from a distance, but concerning his own lover, wife, or sister, he had difficulties accepting the idea that a woman could display public ambition' (p. 70).

considered part of the academic elite, identified with his wife's efforts to challenge the literary and intellectual power-brokers who sought to exclude women from participating openly in literary life. The same may also have explained Zapf's support of Hezel, for Zapf was considered an outsider by the supra-regional academic and literary establishment. For these men, women like Charlotte von Hezel may have appeared not as competitors but as allies in the struggle to gain social acceptance as intellectual equals.

Hezel's writing style changes significantly when she replies to a pointed philosophical issue raised by Zapf. In her second letter to Zapf (#139[140]) Hezel responds to Zapf's inquiry as to how women came to be called 'das schöne Geschlecht'. Hezel's reply refers to a debate that began in the Renaissance about whether women were human,<sup>27</sup> and she relates the story in a genre that was used in particular variations to convey either a moral lesson or reveal unpleasant social truths: the fairy tale.

Die mir vorgelegte Frage: Warum wir armen Evens=Töchter<sup>28</sup> das schöne Geschlecht heissen? Da es doch, nach Ihrer eigenen Überzeugung, oft recht garstige Geschlechter darunter giebt. Diese Frage will ich Ihnen zur Zufriedenheit aller meiner Millionenzähligen Schwestern kürzlich beantworten. Es war 'emal 'ne Zeit, da man stritt, ob's Weibsvolk auch Menschen wären? – Viel' – g'waltig viel' schrieten: Nein! Der Streit war g'fährlich. Keiner wollt' entscheiden. 'n Namen wollten's doch haben. Das Mannesvolk nannt's währends Streit *das schöne Geschlecht*. Das nun Riedel<sup>29</sup> den Streit entschied – drollig gnug entschied b'hielten's d'n Titel *schön Geschlecht* zur Rekompens, das man 'nen d'n Titel Mensch versagen wollt. Wenn nun 'n garstig Weibsbild *schön Geschlecht* genannt wird: Sollen nicht d's Antlitz b'schauen sondern an jen'n Streit gedenken, wie Noah beim Regenbogen an d' Sündfluth.

In contrast to the generally standard orthography and syntax found in her letters, Hezel's fairy tale is characterised by contractions for ironic effect, and even a bit of dialogue, a sharp contrast to the scholarly rhetoric used by many of the men who contributed to the debate. In addition, although Hezel usually wrote her letters in a neutral tone void of excessive emotion, her fair-sex narrative displays several vivid expressions chosen to parody

<sup>27</sup> 'Ob die Weiber Menschen seyn oder nicht' was a question that received considerable attention throughout Europe from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. For a brief summary of the debate see Elisabeth Gössman, *Ob die Weiber Menschen seyn, oder nicht?* Munich 1988, pp. 7–32.

<sup>28</sup> An earlier meaning of the word 'Evenstochter' was 'ein eitles, leichtsinniges Mädchen'. See Jakob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig 1862. The letter in which Zapf posed his question does not appear to be extant, so it is unclear whether 'Evenstochter' was used in Zapf's formulation or supplied by Hezel in her response. Hezel's use of the word to describe herself and other women accentuates the ironic tone that characterised her response to Zapf, because she made it clear throughout *Das Wochenblatt* that she considered her female readers to be intelligent and reasonable.

<sup>29</sup> See note 19, above.

the storm and stress of the debate ('stritt', 'g'waltig viel', 'schrieen', 'g'fährlich').<sup>30</sup>

By using this exaggerated style Hezel creates a caricature of the 'moral' lesson often illustrated by the fairy tale and transforms it into a satirical tale of social criticism resembling the type of fairy tale later articulated by Christoph Martin Wieland in *Dschinnistan oder auserlesene Feen = und Geister = Märchen*:

Einige gute Köpfe fanden, daß man über die Grenzen der Damen d'Aulnoy und Mûrat hinausgehen, und auch Märchen für eine Klasse von Leuten schreiben könne, welche schwehler zu unterhalten sind als Kinder, oder Personen, die in gewissen Stunden sich gerne zu Kindern machen lassen. Man fand, daß Witz und Laune, ja sogar Philosophie und selbst Philosophie von der esoterischsten Art, mit dieser popularen, von aller Prätension so weit entfernten Dichtart sehr wohl vertrage; und daß sie eine sehr gute Art sey, gewisse Wahrheiten, die sich nicht gerne ohne Schleyer zeigen, in die Gesellschaft einzuführen: oder solche, die in einem ernsthaften Gewande etwas abschreckendes haben, gefällig und beliebt zu machen.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the form chosen by Hezel serves to communicate several of her attitudes toward the specific debate as well as the more general issue of the role of women in society, even though these attitudes might offend her male reader. First, she expresses what she sees as the absurdity of the issue, i.e. that such a question should be a topic of debate in the first place, and that it should be taken so seriously by the participants. Second, she reveals her awareness that despite the inappropriateness of the dispute, recognising its true purpose – the conscious subjugation of women by men for their own advantage – can indeed be dangerous. Thus, she seeks to conceal her knowledge at the same time that she reveals it by disclosing it in a fairy tale. Third, Hezel points out that the original meaning of symbols can be lost or repressed, i.e. refitted with a more attractive costume, if that meaning causes discomfort to those in charge. For example, although the rainbow is considered a manifestation of nature's beauty and a symbol of the hope inspired by God's covenant with Noah, it should also remind its viewers of the evil of the world that was washed away by the flood. In the same manner, the expression 'the fair sex' should not simply invoke the image of a lovely woman, but also call to mind the evil of a debate in which men sought to deny women their humanity and compensate for their loss by calling them beautiful, in which case the title of Hezel's magazine becomes an artful reminder of male duplicity.

In her answer to Zapf's question, Hezel challenges him in three subtle

<sup>30</sup> Hezel's affection for parody and satire is evident not only in her correspondence, but also in *Das Wochenblatt*. Hezel's style was probably unfamiliar to and possibly uncomfortable for female readers accustomed to the sentimental and solicitous tone typical of moral weeklies and women's magazines.

<sup>31</sup> Cited by Manfred Grätz, *Das Märchen in der deutschen Aufklärung*, Stuttgart 1988, p. 85.

ways. First, she invites him to write down his thoughts on the matter, adding that she may print his essay in *Das Wochenblatt*: 'So viel wären's die Worte, mein bester Herr Hofrath. Philosophiren weiter darüber und schreiben Sie mir Ihre weiteren Gedanken davon. Es kann einmal etwas für mein Wochenblatt unter dem Titel: "Verm. Aufsätze" wiederkommen'. This invitation could be interpreted as a form of flattery, since Hezel appears to provide Zapf with an opportunity to display his intellectual ability. However, the decision to publish the essay would rest with Hezel, thus providing one of those rare moments in the eighteenth century when a German woman had the power to silence a male voice in the public forum.

Hezel's second challenge is more subtle. Is her invitation sincere? Even though she has ended her story, a colloquial expression remains in the next sentence, 'so viel wären's die Worte', which seems to imply that nothing more remains to be said. In addition, Hezel continues to toy with Zapf and clearly makes no promises that she will print the hypothetical essay as she writes, 'es kann einmal'. Finally, it is likely that Hezel uses the word 'philosophiren' ironically, for how could one philosophise about a belief (that women are not human) that was clearly unjust in Hezel's mind and in the minds of those she deemed reasonable people.

The third challenge is the least obvious. In telling her story, Hezel asserts that the argument about women's humanity was settled by Riedel, but she does not say which Riedel, nor does she elaborate on his remarks. Although she might know enough about Zapf to assume that he knows which Riedel participated in the debate, she cannot assume that Zapf is familiar with Riedel's comments; if he were, he would not have asked the question in the first place. By alluding to a highly publicised debate without providing the details, she implies that such knowledge is shared among a particular learned community, and those who lack the knowledge must either acquire it or remain silent. This was the exact situation faced by so many women who lacked a classical education but wanted to participate in intellectual pursuits.

Hezel's reply to Zapf clearly indicates her sense of identity with other women ('meine Millionenzähligen Schwestern') and her indignation at the restrictions placed upon women, yet she does not wish to establish a separate sphere for women, nor does she want to promote certain interests typically defined as feminine, such as domestic pursuits and fashion. For example, despite her desire to provide women with information that might not otherwise be accessible to them, Hezel, as noted earlier, informs Nicolai that her intention is not to entertain women alone, but to appeal to all readers, men and women, interested in the topics presented in *Das Wochenblatt*. This sentiment is consistent with thoughts expressed in a later letter to Zapf (#135[136]). Hezel explains that she will not report on the latest fashions from France because of the cost involved in including the necessary etchings, but all things considered, she is just as glad; otherwise she would have reproached herself ('müßte ich mich doch verwerfen')

for filling her magazine with 'Eitelkeiten'. Nor does she include any essays that praise women's ability to carry out domestic chores, or that warn women not to spend too much time reading for fear they will neglect their domestic responsibilities, standard fare in most women's periodicals. Hezel mentions to Zapf (#141[142]) that editing *Das Wochenblatt* does in fact require her to renounce her domestic duties ('... daß ich allen meinen häuslichen Geschäften entsagen muß'), but she does not apologise for the situation. Unlike most of her contemporaries, Hezel believed that men and women shared many interests unrelated to running the household, among them such intellectual pursuits as art, music, literature and history.

Hezel's wit, first observed in her fairy-tale narrative of the second letter, reappears in her fourth letter to Zapf (#145[146]). Apparently Zapf has not yet persuaded anyone to subscribe to Johann von Hezel's Bible, and Hezel cannot resist repeating a comment made by her husband: 'Mein Mann läßt sich Ihnen gehorsamst empfehlen, und er glaubt, daß es in Augsburg mehr schöne Geister, als gute Christen geben müßte, weil sich noch keine Subskribenten auf seine Bibel gefunden hätten.' Hezel's comment may also reflect her pride in the fact that Zapf quickly found several subscribers for *Das Wochenblatt*. Although hundreds of readers eventually subscribed to Johann von Hezel's publication, in Augsburg at least, Charlotte von Hezel's work was in greater demand, and if Zapf's correspondence were eventually published, others would become aware of that fact.

Hezel's fifth and final letter to Zapf (#143[144]) reveals a dilemma that will ultimately contribute to the end of *Das Wochenblatt*: difficulties with the postal system. Apparently Zapf notified Hezel that the copies for Augsburg did not arrive. Hezel apologises for the mix-up, but she explains that the fault lies with the post office in Nuremberg. Hezel paid the postage and mailed the issues in a timely manner, but the officials at the imperial post office of Nuremberg refused to send them to Augsburg for reasons stated in an announcement printed for the readers in Augsburg and Ansbach in the forty-fourth issue of *Das Wochenblatt* (pp. 346–9), which Hezel encloses with her correspondence to Zapf. In a letter to Hezel reprinted in the announcement, the postal officials at Nuremberg claim that they have the exclusive right to distribute newspapers and periodicals to Augsburg and Ansbach. Moreover, this right entitles them to payment from Hezel. In her vehement and public response to these influential officials, Hezel refuses to acquiesce in their demands and promises that she will find another way to distribute her magazine. Hezel entreats her readers not to be angry with her, Zapf, or another collector also affected by the Nuremberg restrictions, a Professor Faber of Ansbach, because of the inconvenience. Instead, they should lay the blame exclusively on the Nuremberg post office. In her letter to Zapf, Hezel tells him that she can no longer send his issues on a monthly basis, but she guarantees that the subscribers in Augsburg will receive every issue for the entire year. However, Zapf will have to pick up the copies at the Leipzig book fair in Janu-

ary. In closing, Hezel tells Zapf that she will not use her personal seal on the letter, and she will have her husband's manservant address the letter: she does not want to arouse suspicion at the Nuremberg post office since she has enclosed four copies of the current issue of *Das Wochenblatt*.

A final brief note to Zapf concerning *Das Wochenblatt* was written by Hezel's husband on 5 January 1780 (#130[131]). Johann von Hezel informs Zapf that he has enclosed a final copy of *Das Wochenblatt*, but multiple copies will have to be picked up in Leipzig. Furthermore, future subscriptions should be sent not to Hezel, but to the bookseller who printed *Das Wochenblatt*, Georg Adam Keyser in Erfurt. However, as would soon become apparent, the issue of *Das Wochenblatt* that appeared on 31 December 1779 was the last. Hezel had indicated in a brief address to her readers on the wrapping of the fifty-third issue that the problems she encountered in the distribution of her periodical had robbed her of her enthusiasm for the project (between pp. 416 and 417). Still, the possibility existed that she would continue to edit the journal in the coming year on a quarterly rather than a weekly basis. After all, she had more than enough readers and material to continue. Nevertheless, the fact that Hezel, formerly so particular about attending to every detail related to the production of 'her' paper, left it up to her husband to conclude her business with Zapf in January also foreshadows the end of *Das Wochenblatt*. It appears that Hezel never published again, although she did not fade entirely from the public eye given her efforts to establish a reading society for women in Giessen in 1789 (see note 2, above). In addition, readers of *Das Wochenblatt* familiar with Hezel's style may have discerned her helping hand in some of her husband's publications, since it was acknowledged in a biographical essay on one of Hezel's brothers, Friedrich Wilhelm Schwabe (see Koch and Koller, note 15, above), that Hezel served as her husband's secretary ('amanuensis'). Furthermore, now that Charlotte von Hezel has begun to receive increased recognition for her accomplishments, scholars may be more likely to take note of her name should they come across it in connection with other projects. Perhaps we will learn still more about this forceful and enterprising young editor, whose public self-assurance in word and deed can only be described as extraordinary given the current body of knowledge about German women in the eighteenth century.

As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, Hezel's letters provide a valuable bridge between an author, his text and the complex socio-historical processes by which a German literary work was conceived, produced, and distributed near the end of the eighteenth century. In addition, the letters demonstrate a liberating process of communication that made it possible for individuals hindered by gender, educational background or social status to debate contemporary issues and exchange services as they negotiated their entry into the public sphere. The import of the letters for German studies does not end here, however. Despite substantial progress, there is a significant lack of empirical information about the many



ways in which German women, especially those not affiliated with famous male literary figures, helped define the eighteenth century. As shown in this essay, the content, form and context of women's letters can provide a record of the letter-writer's activities as well as insights into her perception of self, daily life and personal and professional relationships during an age of conscious cultural change in the German-speaking territories. Thus, they provide evidence of actions and discourses, many of which were later edited from the historical script, that shaped contemporary values, economic structures and social networks affecting the public and private lives of men and women. In addition to providing new information about the dynamics at work among the full cast of characters staging the German Enlightenment, it is hoped that this presentation of Hezel's letters will encourage others to seek out and present similar archival materials by women. Like Hezel, many of these individuals probably appeared in significant cameo roles, but as yet, their talents and contributions to eighteenth-century life remain undiscovered.