

**Laudatio for Ina Schabert**, September 3, 2021 Symposium Zürich (Ina Habermann)

I thank Isabel for organizing this wonderful event, and for asking me to speak. She did so, I believe, because I was a member of the famous Graduiertenkolleg *Geschlechterdifferenz & Literatur* at the University of Munich in the 1990s. Ina Schabert was instrumental for this as one of “die das Kolleg tragenden HochschullehrerInnen”, as they were charmingly called. The Kolleg was an interphilological enterprise, based on the idea that literature is more capable of representing and exploring gender than any other discourse. Being part of this Grako was an amazing and formative experience. We engaged in plain living and high theory and were able to develop our PhDs or Post-doc projects in a stimulating and privileged, if sometimes fiercely competitive atmosphere. There were also elements of family pathology – the first generation of graduates filled the role of the eldest child, trailblazing and fighting the parents, in this case ‘die das Kolleg tragenden HochschullehrerInnen’, every step of the way over intellectual independence and the choice of topics. It was then impressed upon us, the second generation, that we were settling down in a well-feathered nest, and of course we in turn thought that the third generation of this exceptionally successful Kolleg had licence to be completely maverick in their choice of topics and themes. But like most families, we had a sense of belonging that transcended petty quarrels. [Note on success in terms of former members’ university careers, see list below.] When I found initially that I shared my first name with my new supervisor, I took that as a good omen, and so it was, because in Ina Schabert I met the person who would become my touchstone for academic achievement and integrity. I realize more clearly now than I did then how much work, time and effort went into setting up and running this graduate college and launching us on our careers in an academic world that could no longer ignore issues of gender. Ina Schabert crucially helped to make this happen, and for this privilege, we owe her a great dept of gratitude. I thought I would divide my speech into three acts, each revolving round a set of paradoxes that modulate into harmony in Ina’s world.

Act One: Pragmatism and Vision, or, in Virginia Woolf’s words, ‘granite’ and ‘rainbow’

Ina, you have always felt enthusiastic about literature, and the place of gender in literary history, so enthusiastic and visionary that studying these fields became a single-minded pursuit for which personal sacrifices would be made. But there was nothing Quixotic about it – you knew that in order to change things, you would have to take responsibility and get involved in university politics, even become Vice-president – to achieve the influence and the power to make things happen. Perhaps not so much ‘fighting the system from within’, but diverting its

waters to feed our mills. And you knew that in order to do innovative and critical work we needed a room of our own and five hundred a year. Or whatever it takes to pay for a room in Munich. You knew that the “lamp in the spine does not light on beef and prunes.” (V. Woolf, ARO, 19) You would criticize wealthy ladies who, you said, draped their old bodies with expensive furs instead of paying for a student grant. So you offered great support, of the ideal and material kind, but that support had to be earned, and I know that many Grako members were slightly in awe of you. Good wasn’t good enough, and I remember how once you said to me in an office hour “When I read your work I want to be surprised”, only to add, with a dark sidelong glance: “pleasantly, of course”. Ok, I thought. To do list: Item 1 – surprise pleasantly. Yet if there was pressure, invariably, there was pragmatic help, sound advice and loyalty. Once when I whinged about what seemed to be the entirely preposterous task of finishing a doctoral thesis, you just said, again with one of those glances: “elephants are eaten by the spoonful”. But behind these scant words I felt such belief and determination that the longer view, the vision opened up before me, and I went back to my daily dish of elephant wonderfully consoled. Surely, for many of us it was a great incentive to see someone always working to the highest standard, and to insist on the special power of literature to explore and recreate lived experience past and present. As you explain in the preface to the *Englische Literaturgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, specialist literary historians are called to give readers an impression “von dem literarischen Leben, das sich vor, mit, zwischen ihren Autoren und Autorinnen abspielt.” (xi) Diving into that richness, and coming up with nugget after nugget, is your life’s work.

#### Act Two: A Sense of Duty and the Lightness of Touch

Many of us know how difficult it is to excel equally at all the duties of a professor – inspired teaching and supervision, tons of marking, administration, acquiring third-party funding, excellent research and publication. You were doing it all – there is the monumental two-volume history of literary gender relations, all those years of commitment to the study of Shakespeare, editing the *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch* (before passing the baton to Sabine), and putting together the classic *Shakespeare-Handbuch*. The way you dealt with this one is entirely characteristic, I think. You didn’t believe that the handbook format still made sense after so many years, but because the publisher threatened to reprint the old version in response to consistently high demand, you agreed to revise it, and you did so thoroughly. You brought in and trusted young scholars and weren’t afraid to snub old colleagues who weren’t prepared, or able truly to revisit their work. This speaks of a sense of duty – to literature, to the academy, to students and colleagues. A sense of duty that emerges most strongly in the commitment to the female writers

of the past, whose stories and works must be revived to complete the picture. I know nobody else who, like you, has read and studied the entire older canon as well as all the recovered work by women, as well as all the theory and much world literature, and put all this masterfully into dialogue. This commitment to dialogue was also highlighted in the book for Ina Schabert, *Bi-Textualität. Inszenierungen des Paares*, edited by Annegret Heitmann, Sigrid Nieberle, Barbara Schaff and Sabine Schülting 20 years ago, and it surfaces already in the book *In Quest of the Other Person. Fiction as Biography*, about the multiple ways in which life and literature become entangled. Speaking about dialogue, I must also bow in passing to your first dialogue partner, Thilo, who is the good man behind an excellent woman. Having mentioned Ina's strong sense of duty, I should add that there is nothing hysterically and masochistically Victorian about it. Still less does it imply that you lack *sprezzatura*. Your work has a lightness of touch, a playfulness, like works of art that feel as if they had always been there and just needed to be plucked from the tree of knowledge ripe and ready. There is a key passage in the Festschrift, at the end of Hadumod Bussmann's lovely contribution "Millennium Hall 2000. Femmage à Ina Schabert", that riffs on this dutiful play, or playful duty. After doing femmage to the 'Lady Abbess' Ina Schabert, Bussmann adds a post scriptum: "Die in diesem Band versammelten Autorinnen und Autoren, gestützt durch eine grosse Fan-Gemeinde quer durch die Generationen, wünschen sich, dass *Genus* und *Genuss* in einem luzide ausgewogenen Pas de deux die *Honorary Gentlewoman* auch fürderhin begleiten mögen – auf dass alle Gender-Inspirierten die literarhistorischen Gender-Schneisen recht bald bis in die Gegenwart verfolgen können!" So: good on you, Lady Abbess. But no resting on your laurels – get out the second volume! Bring us up to date! In the way only you can do. And so you did, of course, with the happy result that ensues when duty and pleasure collide. But of that wasn't the end of the story. Back in 1997, you had begun the Preface of your literary history with the following words: "Das Buch eröffnet einen neuen Blick auf die englische Literatur von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts. Zum ersten Mal wird eine Literaturgeschichte als Geschichte der Geschlechterbeziehungen geschrieben – ein Unternehmen, das sich auch für andere Nationalliteraturen als lohnende Alternative erweisen dürfte." And indeed, after revolutionizing English literary history, and while a number of your male colleagues, as you remarked with *almost* inaudible spite, were "actively preparing their retirement", you turned your attention to French literature, still in a deplorably unenlightened state with regard to gender, giving in at this point to your lifelong love of things French. When people asked you on the occasion of your retirement whether you did not feel horribly sad and afraid of emptiness, you gave them the glance and said "Ich bin jetzt ein freier Mensch". You did not need the prop of office to

carry a bloated ego. If the rest is history, it is the continuously evolving history of the Feminist European Enlightenment, as traced in the conference in the last few days including today and the volume of essays edited by Isabel.

### Act Three: Self-Respect and Pleasure

One reason why some of us bluestockings of the Graduiertenkolleg were in awe of Ina Schabert was that it was impossible to wrong-foot her and she was always so poised and elegant. To a certain extent, this was a deliberate reaction to the university as an institution. Once you said: “The shabbier this place becomes, the more carefully I dress” – an outward expression, I think, of self-respect and a confidence in the necessity, and the significance of professing literature at university level. In our current situation, when it often seems as if we needed only scientists, particularly virologists and engineers committed to reducing our Co2 footprint, this is a quality we need. It is no longer just a case of amplifying the voices of women, or other marginalized people, though this remains important, but as the humanities are going through one of their many crises, we need to take a stand as Ina has always done and convince people of the importance of our field.

Yet, more relevantly on this special day, Ina’s poise and elegance is a personal quality that seems to have charmed and tantalized colleagues and friends from an early stage. Manfred Pfister told me once that back in the days when they were all assistants of Wolfgang Clemen, they used to go on hiking tours, and as they were clambering up the hill, they would glance furtively at Ina, in the hope that some beads of sweat might be seen to form on her smooth brow. Needless to say, it was a vain hope, since Ina is not a bookworm out of her element beyond the library. She is a great gardener and cook, and a charming, elegant woman. This, by the way, was also encouraging to budding female academics 20 years ago. And I remember you as the perfect hostess. I can still see that same Manfred Pfister at the Schabert’s house when we were celebrating the publication of the new Shakespeare-Handbuch, you playfully wearing an outfit that matched the red-and-white cover of the book. There he was, Manfred Pfister, talking animatedly, flashing impish green eyes and scattering the ashes from his pipe everywhere, and you managed to remove these volcanic eruptions discretely and laughingly, with a few touches of your small hands, just before they hit the white carpet, without for a moment disturbing the warm, funny, festive atmosphere. And when the party was at its best, you would light your cigarillo. This event lives on in my memory as a golden day when body and mind were equally entertained, in the double sense of amusement and sustenance, as in some moments conjured up in the final scene of a Shakespeare comedy or a novel. I quote, and no prizes for spotting the

quote. ;-)) “Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after. This would remain.” (V. Woolf, *TtL* 97)

I am not sure that this speech of praise has all the right and proper ingredients – perhaps there should have been more anecdotes, usually calculated to make the honoured eminent patriarch more human, flatteringly pretending to speak truth to power. And showing how witty we are. But I think the Queen of English literary history needs no court jester – Ina, you know who you are and what you’ve done, and your works, and the academic success of your ‘daughters’ speak more eloquently than I can do. Still, I am sure we all have a few anecdotes up our sleeve that deserve to be told. I have one involving a shoe fetishist that I will gladly divulge later over a glass of wine, and equally gladly, thanking Ina from the bottom of my heart, I will make room for this beautiful line-up of substantial talks – let’s get down to business, ladies! Just one more word to Ina: May you long continue to surprise us – pleasantly, of course.

Former members of Grako *Geschlechterdifferenz & Literatur* working at universities

Heike Paul – University of Erlangen  
Claudia Öhlschläger – University of Paderborn  
Sabine Schülting – University of Berlin  
Britta Herrmann – University of Münster  
Herrad Heselhaus – Tsukuba University Japan  
Barbara Schaff – University of Göttingen  
Kati Röttger – University of Amsterdam  
Ruth Nestvold – author  
Ralph Poole – university of Salzburg  
Katharina Waldner – University of Erfurt  
Virginia Richter – University of Berne  
Janett Reinstädler – Universität des Saarlandes  
Annette Keck – University of Munich  
Sigrid Nieberle – University of Dortmund  
Elena Carrera – Queen Mary University of London  
Alexandra Tischel – University of Stuttgart  
Birgit Wiens – Heisenberg Scholar, University of Munich  
Janine Schulze – University of Leipzig  
Julika Funk – Konstanz  
Michael Ott – Konstanz  
Elfi Bettinger – pretty much everywhere, recently in Frankfurt  
Ina Habermann – University of Basel