

THE PEDAGOGY OF POP: IMPLICIT CODES OF CONDUCT  
IN THE WEIMAR NOVELS OF VICKI BAUM AND IRMGARD KEUN

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## Introduction

In his book *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte: Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen*,<sup>1</sup> Helmut Lethen argues that during the Weimar Republic—a time of social unrest when the overarching political and social structures regulating behavior were no longer supported—“das desorientierte Subjekt bedurfte der ‘äußeren Stimme’, die sagte, wo es langging.”<sup>2</sup> Lethen argues that the residents of the newly-established Weimar Republic, no longer able to look towards a stable government for a sense of moral and social stability in their lives, abandoned faith in their own conscience and instead looked outside of themselves for examples of how they should live. By looking to literature, the residents of the Weimar Republic could find a plethora of codes of conduct: explicit codes of conduct providing concrete rules, typologies that helped to define the self through the identification and (implied) moral categorization of others, and even literary figures that provided examples of behavior that could be used as models for survival. The strict observance to a set of external rules, Lethen argues, promised a sense of relief from self-reflected moral responsibility, in turn offering a sense of stability in an otherwise volatile and uncertain time.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Don Reneau as *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*. All quotations citing Lethen’s *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte* will be designated by “VdK” followed by the page number, and the English translation, *Cool Conduct*, will be designated by “CC.”

<sup>2</sup> VdK 64; “the disoriented subject was clearly in need of an external voice to tell it where to go and what to do” (CC 42).

Lethen argues that this call for a modern figure who rejects his inner-directed moral compass in favor of externally-oriented codes of conduct explains the renewed interest by many writers of the Weimar Republic in the works of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Jesuit Balthasar Gracián. In his analysis of the literature of the Weimar Republic, Lethen sees Gracián’s externally-directed pre-bourgeois figure combining with the cold armoring of the psyche as advocated by the Weimar anthropologist Helmuth Plessner, among others, to create the figure of the *kalte persona*. By adopting attitudes of coldness and rejecting demands for authenticity and inwardness, the mask of the *kalte persona* offers the individual protection from the uncertainties of modern society by transforming him into a mobile, psychologically armored subject whose actions are unhampered by the restrictive nature of the conscience.

In 1911, the German sociologist Georg Simmel wrote that “im großen und ganzen bleibt also das Haus die große Kulturleistung der Frauen,”<sup>3</sup> arguing that women are the time-honored guardians of bourgeois morality whose true place is in the home, not the public sphere. As Inka Mülder-Bach argues, “die Pointe von Simmels Theorie der Weiblichkeit besteht darin, daß das Weibliche in der modernen Kultur keinen Ort haben kann.”<sup>4</sup> Society, however, changed dramatically during the years of the Weimar Republic. As a result of modernization, the introduction of new technology—specifically adding machines and typewriters—reduced many aspects of office work to the level of simple mechanical tasks, tasks that could be easily performed by low-paid,

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<sup>3</sup> Simmel, “Weibliche Kultur” 307; “the home remains the supreme cultural achievement of women” (“Female Culture” 97).

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis in original; Mülder-Bach, “Weibliche Kultur” 125 – 126; “the point of Simmel’s theory of femininity consists of the fact that women *can* not have any place in modern culture.”

semi-skilled female labor. A new class of white-collar workers or *Angestellten*, many of whom were women, emerged as the result of the creation of numerous low-skill clerical jobs. In addition to working, these young “New Women”—portrayed in films, illustrated newspapers, and advertisements as athletic, sexually emancipated, lacking sentimentality, economically independent, and resistant to traditional conceptions of femininity and motherhood<sup>5</sup>—openly challenged traditional notions of femininity.

In his analysis of literature from the Weimar Republic, Lethen perpetuates Simmel’s notion that women, many of whom were just beginning to exercise their new-found freedoms, were less capable than men of successfully negotiating the dangers of society associated with the public sphere. Unlike the *kalte persona*, who uses attitudes of cold calculation to consciously adopt a series of masks for protection, Lethen relegates women to the passive role of the Radar Type. Like the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, too, looks outside of the self for the behavioral guides; however, the Radar Type, instead of consciously manipulating its behavior, merely scans the horizon, passively absorbing and adopting, or rather imitating, the latest trends.

It is true that many men and women were actively influenced by the images portrayed in popular culture. In the 1920s, Berlin—after New York—was considered “die Zirkulationsmetropole der westlichen Welt,”<sup>6</sup> and images of glamour, strength, and a carefree, independent lifestyle for women were utilized by both the advertising and film industries, creating an elusive role-model that many women in the Weimar Republic strove to imitate. By presenting glamour as an achievable goal for the average

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<sup>5</sup> McCormick 2, 4; Petro 109; von Ankum, “Material” 160.

<sup>6</sup> Anselm 253; “the circulation metropolis of the western world.”

woman, the advertising industry successfully encouraged many women to “transfer a part of their screen dream to everyday life.”<sup>7</sup> As a result, numerous women, low paid as they were, reordered their spending and consumption priorities, spending money that might earlier have been saved in preparation for marriage on body and health care products, fashion, entertainment, and tobacco.<sup>8</sup> These idealized images of successful New Women were not limited to the screen, but were also created and perpetuated—and I would also argue critiqued—by the increased number of illustrated newspapers, magazines, and paperback novels specifically targeting this new class of white-collar working women.<sup>9</sup>

The presence of the New Woman was at the center of numerous popular and political debates regarding the “proper” role of women in the Weimar Republic. One of the many fears associated with the increased presence of women in the workplace was that “modernization had incorporated women into public life and wage labor too quickly, with the result that women had become ‘masculinized’ or alienated from their bodies and resistant to childbearing.”<sup>10</sup> There were concerns that the presence of New Women was having a detrimental effect on German civilization as a whole: “Was the modern woman too selfish, too physically degenerated by the luxuries of civilization, or too exhausted from the rigors of wage labor to reproduce?”<sup>11</sup> The declining birthrate, which dropped from 27 births per thousand in 1914 to only 11.5 births per 1000 in

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<sup>7</sup> von Ankum, “Material Girls” 5.

<sup>8</sup> Grossmann, “Girlikultur” 69.

<sup>9</sup> *Die Dame, Frauenwelt, Die Genossin, Der Weg der Frau, Blatt der Hausfrau, Frau und Gegenwart*, and *Uhu*, to name only a few.

<sup>10</sup> Petro 109.

<sup>11</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming* 4 – 5.

1922, was seen as evidence of the moral degeneration of German women. In addition, moral standards among these working women appeared to decline rapidly, as anti-abortion advocates estimated that half of all women in 1914 had at least one abortion, and by 1930, the estimated number of abortions exceeded live births.<sup>12</sup> As I will show in this dissertation, the public debates on these issues were not limited to the upper echelons of society, but rather both the moral and social consequences of the New Woman were widely discussed throughout all of Weimar society, and the representation of these controversial issues in the popular novels of Vicki Baum and Irmgard Keun allowed a wide range of women not only to educate themselves about these controversial issues but also to add their own voices to the public debates.

Lynda J. King writes that even though middle-class women could often read and write, “they resembled the readers of the lower economic classes in that they were not allowed a level of education that would prepare them for intellectually demanding literature. As a result, many became consumers of popular literature.”<sup>13</sup> Yet as the Weimar psychologist Alice Rühle-Gerstel shows, many readers of popular literature viewed the act of reading itself as an educational activity, one that was not limited to those with university educations who were able to comprehend the complex nuances of canonical literature. In the following quotation, Rühle-Gerstel reflects on her experiences teaching an evening class dealing with the reading of love stories to 35 young women and housewives in Weimar Germany:

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis 210 – 211; Grossman addresses the unreliability of these estimates in “Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign against Paragraph 218.”

<sup>13</sup> King, *Best-Sellers* 22.

Aber sehr stark das Bedürfnis, aus dem Buch Hilfe fürs tägliche Frauenleben, Rat in persönlichen Fragen zu gewinnen. Die Frauen wollen im Roman das finden, was es derzeit nur in populärwissenschaftlichen oder sogenannten “lebenskundlichen” Büchern gibt, Antwort auf Fragen, wie: Heiraten oder nicht heiraten, Kinder in die Welt setzen oder sie verhüten, treu sein, Treue verlangen, Treue erhoffen können, Mann und Kindern gerecht werden und doch das Einkommen durch Arbeit vermehren...<sup>14</sup>

Kerstin Barndt argues that the *Zeitromane*, *Feuilletons*, and sociological essays of the Weimar Republic all actively engaged with the problems and figures of contemporary society.<sup>15</sup> Yet in his analysis of popular culture, the Weimar sociologist and cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer writes that:

Nahezu sämtliche von der Industrie gelieferten Erzeugnisse [Filme, die illustrierten Zeitungen und die Mehrzahl der Magazine] das Bestehende rechtfertigen, indem sie seine Auswüchse sowohl wie seine Fundamente dem Blick entziehen; daß auch sie die Menge durch den Similiglanz der gesellschaftlichen Scheinhöhen betäuben. Hypnotiseure schläfern so mit Hilfe glitzernder Gegenstände ihre Medien ein.<sup>16</sup>

Popular culture, Kracauer argues, negates the possibility of active social change, in turn lulling its audience into a sense of apathy through promises of the illusion of glamour, success, and higher social standing. Interestingly, as Inka Mülder-Bach notes, Kracauer’s critiques were intended for an educated, social elite, and his writings would

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<sup>14</sup> Rühle-Gerstel, “Liebesgeschichten” 9; “But the need to find help for a woman’s everyday life, advice in personal matters, is very strong. The women want to find in a novel that which is at the moment only available in the popular scientific or so-called self-help books; answers to questions like: to marry or not to marry, bringing children into the world or preventing pregnancy; faithfulness in love, demanding faithfulness, whether one can hope for faithfulness; being fair to husband and children and still increasing one’s income through work” (qtd. in Frame 22).

<sup>15</sup> Barndt, *Sentiment* 13.

<sup>16</sup> Kracauer, “Asyl” 99; “almost all the industry’s products [films, illustrated newspapers, and the majority of popular magazines] serve to legitimate the existing order, by concealing both its abuses and its foundations. They, too, drug the populace with the pseudo-glamour of counterfeit social heights, just as hypnotists use glittering objects to put their subjects to sleep” (“Shelter” 94).

not have been accessible to the vast majority of working women in the Weimar Republic who lacked a college education.<sup>17</sup>

Popular novels—such as those written by Vicki Baum and Irmgard Keun that portray the trials and tribulations of Weimar Germany’s New Women—have never been seen as high literature, at best being relegated to the realm of *Unterhaltungsliteratur* or “light fiction,” occupying a realm above *Kitsch* but lacking the subtle nuances of “Literature.” Yet far from avoiding contemporary social reality, both Baum and Keun actively engage with many of the highly discussed, contemporary controversies analyzed by Kracauer, including the financial struggles of the white-collar working class, the illusion of glamour and success created and perpetuated by popular culture, the role of external appearance in employment, and the question of whether women should work outside the home or marry and raise a family, to name only a few. In addition, these novels also address heavily debated contemporary controversies not analyzed by Kracauer, such as the causes and potential implications of often forced sexual relations, syphilis, unplanned pregnancies, and abortion.

Writing in the style of the New Objectivity, Baum and Keun did not create pure fiction, but rather incorporated their contemporary reality into their fictional stories. Although the characters and story lines these authors created were fictitious, it is the skillful combination of factual detail, multiple viewpoints of contemporary controversial topics, and complex emotions that give their readers insight into the raging debates on the changing roles of women in the Weimar Republic that may otherwise have been inaccessible to them.

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<sup>17</sup> Mülder-Bach, “Auf der Suche” 129.

In this dissertation, I will argue that the Weimar novels of Vicki Baum and Irmgard Keun, traditionally relegated by scholars to the realm of *Unterhaltungsliteratur*, can and should be read as implicit *Verhaltenslehren*, or codes of conduct, for women readers who did not have the privilege of university education. Lethen, following Kracauer's example, limits his analysis to works of canonical literature, which would have been inaccessible to many women in the Weimar Republic. By analyzing Vicki Baum's novels *stud. chem. Helene Willfüter* and *Menschen im Hotel*,<sup>18</sup> which were serialized in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* [sic] before being published in paperback form, and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns*—which was first published in book form, then later serialized in the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts*<sup>19</sup>—and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, which appeared less than nine months before Keun's writings were banned by the Nazi regime in 1933, I argue that the phenomenon of using literature as a source of education is not limited to those with substantial educations who are able to comprehend the complex texts of the established literary canon. Rather, the candid representation of controversial women's issues in Vicki Baum's and Irmgard Keun's novels provided a well-informed social critique to the women that comprised their reading audience.

Taking advantage of the melodramatic nature of serialized novels, Baum and Keun created “a scenario into which a woman could project a bit of herself and reflect

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<sup>18</sup> *stud. chem. Helene Willfüter*, originally written in 1925 – 1926, appeared in serialized form from October 1928 – January 1929. *Menschen im Hotel* was serialized from March – June 1929.

<sup>19</sup> Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* was published in book form in October 1931 and serialized in *Vorwärts* from 24 August – 25 October 1932.

on the alternatives to and within her real-life situations.”<sup>20</sup> Both authors used their women protagonists to convey not only factual information regarding varying viewpoints on controversial issues, but also to critique society through their portrayal of the complex emotions related to these issues. Because of the combination of these melodramatic elements and attention to factual detail in these texts, they were able not only to attract and hold the attention of their women readers, but more importantly to provide them with enough background to form their own positions on these issues. In turn, the public discussions of both Baum’s and Keun’s novels provided their women readers with a forum in which they could voice their own views and join the public debate regarding the changing role of women in the Weimar Republic.

In Chapter One, I will introduce the figures of the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature, which Lethen argues emerge in the literature of the Weimar Republic and illustrate the desire for masking as a form of protection from the perceived dangers of society. I will then apply Lethen’s characterization of these figure to three male protagonists from Baum’s serialized novel *Menschen im Hotel* in order to show that the presence of these figures are not limited to the realm of canonical literature from which Lethen draws his examples. The three protagonists in Baum’s novel provide three very different examples of how modern individuals could have survived in the Weimar Republic by adopting various masks. However, none of the figures Lethen portrays in his analysis—neither the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, nor the Creature—appear to be completely desirable options for anything more than a minimalist survival. In addition, Lethen argues that the *kalte persona* is a purely

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<sup>20</sup> Frame 22.

masculine phenomenon, relegating women to the more passive roles of the Radar Type and the Creature. In Chapter Two, I argue against the gender bias of Lethen's analysis by showing how the women protagonists of Baum's and Keun's novels actively adopt the characteristics of the *kalte persona* that Lethen attributes only to men. I will also show how these women skillfully manipulate the various masks of the *kalte persona* and end by suggesting several specifically feminine masks that create a distinctive counterpoint to Lethen's male-dominated figure.

Lethen argues that the literature of the Weimar Republic acted as codes of conduct by providing examples of behavior and survival to their readers. While none of Baum's or Keun's novels were written as explicit codes of conduct, in Chapter Three I argue that these novels nevertheless had an *implicitly* pedagogical function. Far from avoiding the controversies of contemporary reality and providing merely a means of pleasurable "escape" from one's dreary life—a characteristic that Kracauer attributes to popular literature—I argue that the candid representation of controversial women's issues in Baum's and Keun's novels provided a well-informed social critique to many non-university educated working- and middle-class women. Instead of using these novels as an instrument to advance a certain ideological viewpoint, both authors provided not only multiple perspectives on common arguments, but also conveyed the complex emotional issues that surround these issues. In addition, both Baum and Keun provide factual ancillary information, such as the potential consequences—both from a legal and a health standpoint—of obtaining an illegal abortion or even options for prenatal medical care. This useful information educated women about some of the

risks, moral considerations, and options available to them should they find themselves in a similar situation.

The most pedagogically beneficial aspect of these novels, I argue, is that instead of telling their readers what to believe, both Baum and Keun give their readers the opportunity to formulate their own views on these complex issues. The public discussion of these novels, I argue, provided women with the opportunity not only to discuss the novels themselves, but also to discuss the controversial issues raised. In Chapter Four, I analyze the critical and popular reception of Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* to illustrate how these novels fostered a great deal of debate in the press about many contemporary controversies. My analysis, though dealing only with those reactions that appeared in print, provides insight into how the public discussion of popular novels allowed women to add their own often suppressed voices to the raging debates about the changing roles of women in the Weimar Republic. It is precisely this combination of providing multiple models of behavior, providing factual information on contemporary controversial issues from multiple viewpoints, showing the potential consequences of controversial decisions, and encouraging readers not only to formulate their own positions, but also to participate actively in contemporary debates that I argue elevate the Weimar novels of Vicki Baum and Irmgard Keun from the realm of *Unterhaltungsliteratur* to that of implicit codes of conduct.

## Chapter One

### **The Masks of the Metropolis: The *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature in Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel***

Alfred Döblin called Weimar Germany “eine Republik ohne Gebrauchsanweisung.”<sup>21</sup> Rocked by civil war, political instability, hyperinflation, and the woes of a society coming to terms with the horrors of World War I, the citizens of the Weimar Republic found that the trusted patterns of orientation, which regulated not only lawful but also social and moral order, were no longer valid. The sudden loss of the legitimacy of social institutions resulting from the collapse of the Wilhelmine Empire not only resulted in the removal of overarching, exterior voices which regulated behavior but also caused many to question the validity of their own interior sense of moral judgment.

In his book *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte: Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen*, Helmut Lethen argues that in such times of social and political turmoil, people look to exterior codes of conduct that will replace their own discredited internal moral compass:

In Augenblicken sozialer Desorganisation, in denen die Gehäuse der Tradition zerfallen und Moral and Überzeugungskraft einbüßt, werden Verhaltenslehren gebraucht, die Eigenes und Fremdes, Innen und Außen unterscheiden helfen. Sie ermöglichen, Vertrauenszonen von Gebieten des Mißtrauens abzugrenzen und Identität zu bestimmen.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Döblin qtd. in VdK 64; “a republic without an instruction manual” (CC 42).

<sup>22</sup> Lethen, “Einleitung I” (VdK 7); “In moments of social disorganization in which the framework of tradition collapses and morality and the power of persuasion are lost, codes of conduct are needed that help to distinguish between oneself and otherness, between the internal and the external. They enable one to distinguish zones of trust from territories of mistrust and to ascertain identity.”

During this time of instability, “das desorientierte Subjekt bedurfte der ‘äußeren Stimme’, die sagte, wo es langging”<sup>23</sup> and numerous typologies materialized in the Weimar Republic in an attempt to reestablish an “external voice.” Lethen argues that the rampant “classification mania” occurring during these turbulent years was in fact an attempt to reinforce the social boundaries that were no longer clearly defined. In order to fully demarcate the border between “self” and “other,” everything from body type to handwriting to race were not only identified, but also categorized in order to assess moral character.

“Distinguo ergo sum,”<sup>24</sup> Lethen writes, became the motto of the Weimar Republic. New technological advances including photography, film, and mass-printing were used to produce and spread these typologies among wide audiences, in effect turning the body into “something that can be read”:

[Die Typologie] entlastet die Orientierung von Ambivalenzen und erspart vorprädikative Erfahrung; sie erleichtert das Urteil, klärt Fronten und beschleunigt den Akt der Entscheidung. Damit bildet die Typologie eine ideale Rahmenbedingung für den Dezisionismus.<sup>25</sup>

The importance of these typologies lies in the fact that they share an emphasis on visible phenomena, on processes, and on behavioral patterns. Typologies, by their very nature, embody a resistance to introspective psychology. By categorizing and attributing moral judgements to people based on observable, exterior characteristics, typologies act as an external rather than an internal source of social and moral

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<sup>23</sup> Vdk 64; “the disoriented subject was clearly in need of an external voice to tell it where to go and what to do” (CC 42).

<sup>24</sup> “I distinguish, therefore I am.”

<sup>25</sup> VdK 194; “Typologies bypass the stress of *prepredicative* experience, stripping the other’s orientation of ambivalence; they make judgments easier to form, clarify lines of opposition, and accelerate the decision-making process. Typologies thus provide the ideal framing conditions for decisionism” (CC 154).

judgment. Stressing the “ununterbrochene Anwesenheit der Kontrolle des Blicks der anderen,”<sup>26</sup> Lethen finds throughout the literature of the Weimar Republic the desire for an impenetrable shielding “gegen äußere Gefahr, gegen innere Zersetzung und die täglichen Beschämungen.”<sup>27</sup> By focusing on the observable characteristics of the modern figure, these typologies acted not merely as hermeneutic guides, but also as a form of *Verhaltenslehren*: codes of conduct that were designed to visually identify the “other” as well as to provide a paradigm that in turn helped to define and regulate individual behavior.

In the 1920s, the trusted patterns of orientation of Wilhelmine society were no longer valid. Weimar Germany was rocked by civil war and inflation, and the populace was struggling to come to terms with the horrors experienced during the First World War. During this time of immense instability, the residents of the Weimar Republic were no longer able to look towards the government for the moral and social stability in their lives. As a result, Lethen argues that the residents of the newly-established Weimar Republic looked not only to typologies, but to the plethora of codes of conduct that appeared in every realm of society for models of how they should live their lives. In his analysis of the writings of numerous authors from the Weimar Republic, Lethen notes increasing skepticism and anti-democratic tendencies. “Wenn immer das Politische sich nicht aus substantiellen Werten herleitet, sich die Handlung am Effekt orientiert und Prinzipien zu Funktionswerten werden, man also im ‘Bodenlosen’

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<sup>26</sup> VdK 37; “uninterrupted presence of the supervisory gaze of the other” (CC 18).

<sup>27</sup> Vdk 203; “against external danger or against internal decomposition and daily shaming” (CC 161).

operiert, kommt es auf stabile Verhaltenslehren an.”<sup>28</sup> During this time, numerous codes of conduct appeared, which served as “schriftliches Gehäuse externer Direktiven, Handel und Wandel der Einzelnen anzuleiten.”<sup>29</sup> In addition to platforms from various political parties, explicit conduct guides and handbooks appeared addressing everything from architecture to sexuality. The strict observance to a set of external rules, Lethen argues, promised a sense of relief from self-reflected responsibility, offering a sense of stability in an otherwise volatile and uncertain time.

Through his examination of codes of conduct from the Weimar Republic, Lethen argues that is not merely *explicit* codes of conduct that provided behavioral guides to the residents of the Weimar Republic, but that the literature of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* created three main allegorical figures that showed drastically different ways of reacting to the dangers of society: the *kalte persona*,<sup>30</sup> the Radar Type, and the Creature. Lethen sees the first two character types as proffering “symbolische Zaubermittel, die entworfen werden, um dem Menschen einen angstfreien Zugang zum Prozeß der Modernisierung zu erschließen und einen Freiheitsspielraum zu konstruieren.”<sup>31</sup> The Creature, on the other hand, symbolizes “die aus der Figur der

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<sup>28</sup> VdK 146; “When politics cannot be derived from substantive values, when all that orients action is effect and principles become nothing more than functional values—when there is no ‘ground’ beneath a man’s feet—stability comes to depend on explicit codes of conduct” (CC 112).

<sup>29</sup> VdK 36; “written receptacles for external directives to guide individual behavior” (CC 17).

<sup>30</sup> Don Reneau’s English translation of “kalte persona” to “cool persona” does not fully convey the original meaning of Lethen, which is one of *coldness*, not *coolness*. Reneau’s translation of Lethen’s title from *Verhaltenlehren der Kälte* [emphasis mine] to *Cool Conduct* [emphasis mine] once again does not convey Lethen’s original meaning. For this reason, I will use Lethen’s original term of *kalte persona* throughout my analysis.

<sup>31</sup> VdK 43; “symbolic sleights-of-hand designed to free people of the anxieties induced by the process of modernization, to open up for them areas of free movement” (CC 25).

kalten persona entfernte Angst,”<sup>32</sup> presented either in the form of a scarred individual with the tattered remains of cold armoring such as the war cripple, or the individual—usually represented as a member of the proletarian masses—who has never been able to successfully develop a protective mask. As a result, the Creature often physically and emotionally embodies the suffering caused by the ills of society, fully exposing the fragile inner being the armoring of the *kalte persona* was supposed to protect.

After introducing each of Lethen’s three figures, I will analyze their portrayal in Vicki Baum’s 1929 serialized novel *Menschen im Hotel*. My analysis will illustrate that the appearance of the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature were not limited to the canonical literature on which Lethen focuses in his analysis. My decision to use *Menschen im Hotel* in particular is because out of the four texts I will be analyzing in this dissertation—Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and *Menschen im Hotel* and Irmgard Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*—*Menschen im Hotel* has received the least amount of scholarly attention, specifically with regard to its literary content. As Linda J. King has shown, Baum’s works were generally regarded by her contemporary critics as works of minor literature until the 1929 publication of *Menschen im Hotel*, at which point the focus of criticism turned predominantly from the content of Baum’s works themselves to the issue of Baum’s commercialism. Baum was accused by many critics of “doing anything necessary to sell her products by catering to the general public.”<sup>33</sup> This view that her writings are merely commercialized popular fiction and therefore unworthy of scholarly attention has persisted even until today.

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<sup>32</sup> VdK 43; “the anxiety [that] falls away from the figure of the cool persona” (CC 25).

<sup>33</sup> King, *Best-Sellers* 112.

In this chapter, I will analyze how Baron von Gaigern, the provincial assistant bookkeeper Otto Kringelein, and the physically and emotionally scarred Dr. Otternschlag correspond to Lethen's character types of the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature respectively. Putting aside the argument of Baum's status as a writer of *Trivallliteratur*, in my analysis I advocate a scholarly rereading of Baum's texts, arguing that the literary types analyzed by Lethen are not limited to canonical texts but are also clearly portrayed in Baum's novel. The high prices of books—in some instances costing as much as 60 pounds of beef<sup>34</sup>— and the lack of access to anything more than basic education prevented many members of the lower- and middle-classes from accessing higher literature. Despite the high rise in overall literacy rates, less than 1% of the population had received a university education. Baum's readers, for example, had basic reading skills, but “could not have been expected to understand the complex texts of good literature.”<sup>35</sup> By applying Lethen's categories to Baum's serialized novel, I will argue that non-canonical literature portrayed the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature in a manner more easily accessible to those working- and middle-class women readers who did not have the privilege of a university education. More importantly, as I will show in this dissertation, by portraying different representations of psychological armoring through popular literature, Baum's novel illustrated the potential complications and negative effects resulting from the adoption masks of coldness as a survival technique.

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<sup>34</sup> King, *Best-Sellers* 23.

<sup>35</sup> King, *Best-Sellers* 21.

In order to demonstrate that what Lethen finds in canonical literature can also be found in popular novels, I, like Lethen, am specifically focusing on the phenomena of the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature as they are represented by male characters. In the next chapter, I will broaden my analysis to the women protagonists from Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and *Menschen im Hotel* as well as Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* in order to critique Lethen's gender bias in his analysis of the literary representation of these three types. By showing how women characters actively experiment with attitudes of coldness and masking as survival techniques, I challenge Lethen's view that the attributes of the *kalte persona* can only be successfully adopted by men.

In *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte*, Lethen argues that numerous codes of conduct written during the Weimar Republic contain both a desire for masking and concealment as well as a desire for distance caused by an innate distrust of the human warmth offered by society. Yet at the same time, especially in the metropolis, social interaction is a necessary prerequisite for physical survival. Lethen illustrates the complexities of this paradoxical conundrum through Schopenhauer's parable of the freezing porcupines:

On a cold winter's day an assortment of porcupines needs to set an adequate distance among its members. Being too close, they risk mutual injury from their quills; being too far apart, they are bound to die of exposure. The porcupines, as Schopenhauer writes, are torn between closeness and distance until they settle on a moderate temperature at which they can tolerate their situation.<sup>36</sup>

Being wary of the dangers of communitarianism, Lethen argues, the people of the Weimar Republic, like these porcupines, needed to actively create an adequate amount

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<sup>36</sup> Lethen, "Preface to the American Edition" (CC ix).

of distance from others in order to ensure their individual protection and survival: close enough to be able to interact and survive, but with enough distance to ensure individual protection. For Lethen, attitudes of psychological coldness aided individuals in maintaining this delicate balance.

Lethen writes that after the loss of the authoritarian system such as the dissolution of the Wilhelmine Empire, people experience the immediate confrontation with modernity as a freezing shock. In an attempt to counteract this shock, there is an overwhelming desire for the warmth offered by the sense of community. Lethen sees Helmuth Plessner's 1924 anthropological treatise *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft: Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* as a paradigmatic code of conduct that confronts this shock by advocating the cool and distanced behavior of the *kalte persona*. Yet at a time when "the ideal of a glowing community displaces the coldness of industrialized civil society,"<sup>37</sup> Plessner stresses the dark side of communitarian ideology, arguing that "the German ideology of community obscures violence and hatred inside a community; it overlooks the necessity of, and the right for, spheres of mistrust."<sup>38</sup> In his study, traditionally negative characteristics such as "Anonymität, Aufenthaltslosigkeit, Zerstreuung und Seinsentlastung,"<sup>39</sup> far from being negative aspects of society, are in fact justified as positive methods of survival. Rejecting the communitarian demands for authenticity and inwardness, Plessner advocates the use of symbolic masks of coldness and distance as "armoring," which offers the individual protection from modern society.

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<sup>37</sup> Lethen, "Preface to the American Edition" (CC ix).

<sup>38</sup> Lethen, "Preface of the American Edition" (CC x).

<sup>39</sup> Lethen, "Einleitung I" (VdK 8); "anonymity, homelessness, dispersion, and dismissal of the self."

For Plessner, man is by nature artificial. “Er wird in einer ‘exzentrischen’ Position zu seiner Umwelt geboren und bedarf der Künstlichkeit einer zweiten Natur, des kulturellen Kontextes, den er um sich webt, um überhaupt leben zu können.”<sup>40</sup> In order to survive, Plessner argues, individuals must surrender fully to the artificial nature of society. By perpetuating the artificial nature of society, individuals define themselves through interaction with others, yet always appear in roles, never in raw form:

Um die Reibungsfläche mit den anderen zu verkleinern, muß der einzelne ein funktionierendes Gleichgewicht zwischen Vertrauens- und Mißtrauenssphären schaffen. Bei diesem Unternehmen entlasten ihn “Zeremoniell” und “Prestige”, “Diplomatie” und “Takt”, die für den Ausgleich von “Distanz und Nähe”, “Objektivität und Familiarität” sorgen.<sup>41</sup>

Plessner asserts that all social interaction presupposes an artificial means used to regulate the distance between people. This artificial means takes the form of a mask, which not only regulates distance but also offers protection in situations threatening shame.

This fear of shame, Plessner argues, is one of the most important and fundamentally stabilizing factors of primitive societies. Only armoring can guarantee dignity, and Plessner “[begrüßt] aber in der ‘Maskerade’ des Lebenselixier der Existenz in der Öffentlichkeit.”<sup>42</sup> By masking themselves, individuals inhibit what Plessner calls the “Neigung zum Entblößen” as well as outwardly producing the effects of an

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<sup>40</sup> VdK 80; “He is born into the world in an eccentric position and requires the artificiality of a second nature, which is available in the surrounding cultural context, in order to be able to live at all” (CC 56).

<sup>41</sup> VdK 79 – 80; “In the process, people must create a functioning balance for themselves between spheres of trust and mistrust, relying on instrumentalities of ritual ceremony, prestige, diplomacy, and tact, all of which work to regulate proportions of distance and closeness, objectivity and familiarity” (CC 55).

<sup>42</sup> VdK 85; “welcomes the masquerade as the essence of life in the public sphere” (CC 60).

“offizielle Physiognomie.”<sup>43</sup> This masking of the public individual “verbirgt eine prekäre Substanz, die nicht schutzlos der Öffentlichkeit ausgeliefert werden darf.”<sup>44</sup> Only by using this masking, Lethen surmises from Plessner, “kann der Mensch seine Freiheit im Reich der Künstlichkeit beweisen.”<sup>45</sup> One can, therefore, objectify oneself by means of a mask “hinter der er bis zu einem gewissen Grade unsichtbar wird, ohne jedoch völlig als Person zu verschwinden.”<sup>46</sup>

Lethen argues that the call for armoring advocated by Plessner is in fact not a call to create a completely new type of person, a new figure who is able to successfully negotiate the onslaught of modernity in a way never encountered before. Rather, this “armoring” calls for the return to a pre-bourgeois figure, one who relies not on an internal moral compass, but rather on exterior sources of rules governing distance as a guide for survival: one who substitutes introspection with codes of conduct. The paradigm for this externally oriented means of survival is a mid-seventeenth-century code of conduct written by the Spanish Jesuit, Balthasar Gracián.

Morality, Gracián argues, is not an inner quality that can be used to guide a person’s behavior. “In Gracián’s kalter persona fand man die Gestalt eines mobilen Subjekts ohne seelische Tiefengliederung, dessen Bewegungsraum weder durch Interventionen der Moral noch durch die Stimme des Gewissens eingeschränkt wird.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Plessner 85, qtd. in VdK 89; “tendency towards self-exposure”; “official physiognomy” (CC 63).

<sup>44</sup> VdK 89; “shelters a precarious inner substance that must not be delivered up defenseless in the public sphere” (CC 63).

<sup>45</sup> VdK 90; “The mask alone displays man’s freedom in the realm of artificiality” (CC 63).

<sup>46</sup> Plessner 82, qtd. in VdK 89; “behind which he, to a certain extent, becomes invisible without that causing him to disappear completely as a person” (CC 63).

<sup>47</sup> VdK 66; “In Gracián’s cool persona observers recognized the figure of a mobile subject, without psychological depth, with a radius of action unhampered by moral intervention or the voice of the conscience” (CC 44).

His subject consciously rejects this internal moral regulator, i.e. the conscience, because conscience “ihren Bewegungsspielraum ein[engt].”<sup>48</sup> Instead, as Krauss shows, Gracián’s subject requires an external voice for orientation. “Inmitten allgemeiner Bedrohtheit...‘reduziert sich die ganze Moral auf taktische Regeln.’”<sup>49</sup> This rediscovery of Gracián and a call for a return to a pre-bourgeois rational type, Lethen argues, can be found in the writings of multiple anthropologists and writers during the Weimar Republic, and it is these texts which comprise the core of Lethen’s analysis.<sup>50</sup>

It is specifically the return to this type of pre-bourgeois being that Plessner advocates: one without an inner moral compass who instead relies on external rules and regulations for guidance. “In einer Welt ohne Sekurität orientiert sich der vorbürgerliche Rationalitätstyp an Verhaltensregeln, die ihn Nähe und Distanz taxieren lehren.”<sup>51</sup> Yet this return to a pre-bourgeois rational type, “der—ohne Schuldgefühl—sein Verhalten von Außen regulieren läßt”<sup>52</sup> was not something totally foreign to the residents of the Weimar Republic. Society already contained a modern-day example of pre-bourgeois “armored” individuals successfully negotiating the dangers of society without the use of an inner moral compass: the military. “Die Ikone des soldatischen Profils mit Stahlhelm, stechendem Blick und energischem Kinn wird im neusachlichen

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<sup>48</sup> VdK 58; “restricts freedom of movement” (CC 37).

<sup>49</sup> Krauss 75, qtd. in VdK 54; “If threats rain down from all sides... ‘the whole of morality comes down to tactile rules’” (CC 34).

<sup>50</sup> In addition to Plessner and Krauss, Lethen analyzes the influence of Gracián on the writings of Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Marieluise Fleißer, Sigmund Freud, Ernst Jünger, Erich Kästner, Siegfried Kracauer, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Carl Schmitt and Walter Serner, among others.

<sup>51</sup> VdK 129; “In a world lacking in security, [Gracián’s] prebourgeois rational type finds orientation in a set of behavioral rules that teach him to gauge degrees of intimacy and distance” (CC 96).

<sup>52</sup> VdK 20; “a person who was able to adapt personal behavior to external influences with no feelings of guilt” (CC 5).

Jahrzehnt verehrt und prägt die Bilder des mobilen Typus, der nicht unterliegen will.”<sup>53</sup>

It was precisely this image of the soldier that provided a model for civilians to deal with the social, financial, and political instabilities of the Weimar Republic.

In addition to the necessary armoring of the psyche, the military has need of people who are specialized in quick adaptation to extremely rapidly changing situations. Lethen argues that the discipline in the army by its very nature demands hibernation of the ego, which should vouch for coherence, balance, and continuity. Since these no longer have free reign, it leads to the possibility of quick transformation:

In [der Armee] war der Zwang zur inneren Regulation des Gewissens entfallen, die äußeren Stimmen des Befehls hatten regiert, Beobachtungsfähigkeit und Reaktionsschnelligkeit waren die Kardinaltugenden gewesen. Der rasche persona-Wechsel von der Affektkontrolle zum Blackout, von der Etikette zum sadistischen Rausch hatte an der Front auf der Tagesordnung gestanden.<sup>54</sup>

Functioning mechanically like clockwork throughout the centuries, the military in effect froze historical change, bringing Gracián’s pre-bourgeois *kalte persona* to the forefront of the twentieth century. The military embodied the qualities of the *kalte persona* by consisting of individuals who exemplified morality through discipline of emotions, alertness, and *Ausklammerung*, the “ability to bracket considerations of morality.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> VdK 169; “The new objectivity decade elevates the image of the soldier to the status of an icon: the army helmet crowning the soldier’s strong profile, penetrating gaze, and forceful chin. It fosters images of the mobile type who refuses to succumb” (CC 132).

<sup>54</sup> VdK 169; “In the army, the need for an internal regulation of the conscience falls away; the external voice of orders takes over. The cardinal virtues are the ability to discharge a duty and react quickly. The rapid change of persona, from affective control to blackout, from etiquette to aggressive frenzy, is the order of the day at the front” (CC 132).

<sup>55</sup> VdK 168; CC 131.

Lethen argues that the horrors of World War I demonstrated that “die Bürgerschaft der Innen-Lenkung per Dekret annihiliert werden konnte.”<sup>56</sup> The majority of the postwar resistance to the “soul” or “bourgeois psyche,” Lethen argues, was in fact a reaction to the failure of the inner moral compass of humanity. Rejecting the functionality of inner-guided morality, Plessner advocated the “Subjekt im Panzer” as a means of survival not merely for the military, but for all citizens of the Weimar Republic.

In order to further explore the intricacies of the mask of the *kalte persona*, I now turn my analysis to Vicki Baum’s 1929 serialized novel *Menschen im Hotel*.<sup>57</sup> The character of Baron Felix Amadei Benvenuto Freiherr von Gaigern at first glance does not appear to embody the qualities of *kalte persona* as described by Plessner or Gracián:

Es roch nach Lavendel und guter Zigarette. Knapp hinter dem Geruch kam ein Mensch durch die Halle, der so beschaffen war, daß sich viele nach ihm umsahen. Die Klub- und Korbstühle in seinem Fahrwasser belebten sich. Der Mensch lächelte auch, ohne erkennbaren Grund, nur einfach aus Vergnügen an sich selber, so schien es. Er war außergewöhnlich gut angezogen, er federte beim Gehen wie ein Katzentier oder ein Tenniscrack. Er trug zum Smoking keinen Abendmantel, sondern einen dunkelblauen Trenchcoat, was unpassend war, aber der ganzen Gestalt etwas liebenswürdig Saloppes gab. Er klappte den Pagen 24 auf den Wasserscheitel, streckte, ohne hinzusehen, einen Arm über den Tisch des Portiers und empfing eine Handvoll Briefe, die er einfach in die Tasche stopfte, der er zugleich seine gesteppten Wildlederhandschuhe entnahm. Dem Empfangschef nickte er zu wie einem Kameraden. Er setzte seinen dunklen, weichen Hut auf, nahm ein Zigarettenetui heraus und steckte eine Zigarette zwischen die Lippen, ohne sie anzuzünden. Gleich darauf nahm er den Hut wieder ab, um beiseite tretend zwei Damen die Drehtür freizugeben.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> VdK 237; “inner-direction could be done away with by fiat” (CC 189).

<sup>57</sup> All references to *Menschen im Hotel* will be cited as M; the English translation, *Grand Hotel*, will be cited as GH.

<sup>58</sup> M 9; “There was a smell of lavender and expensive cigarettes, immediately followed by a man whose appearance was so striking that many heads were turned to look at him. He was unusually tall and

Yet after describing this “ganz anständiger Mensch” and a few of the polite things Baron Gaigern does—“[er] hilft mit Briefmarken aus, gibt Ratschläge für Fernflüge, nimmt alte Damen in seinem Auto mit, macht den vierten beim Bridge und kennt sich in den Weinbeständen des Hotels aus”<sup>59</sup>—Baum notes “aber auch ein Baron Gaigern wohnt hinter Doppeltüren, auch er hat seine Geheimnisse und Hintergründigkeiten— — —.”<sup>60</sup>

Baron Gaigern is a confidence man, a high-class hotel thief, who follows the Russian prima ballerina Grusinskaja from city to city in an attempt to steal an ancient string of pearls worth more than 500,000 Marks. The confidence man is one embodiment of the *kalte persona* as defined by Lethen. One of the many codes of conduct that appeared during the Weimar Republic was Walter Serner’s *Letzte Lockerung: Eine Handbrevier für Hochstapler und solche, die es werden wollen*, which appeared in 1920. As can be seen in the following example Serner, like Plessner, advocates the use of masking: “Wo immer du auch seist, sage dir dieses: ‘ALLES WAS UM MICH HERUM VORGEHT, KANN AUCH GESPIELT SEIN.’ Dann wirst du

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extremely well dressed and his step was as elastic as a cat’s or a tennis champion’s. He wore a dark blue trench coat over his dinner jacket and this was scarcely correct perhaps, but it gave an attractively negligent air to his appearance. He patted page boy No. 24 on his sleek head, stretched out his arm with out looking over the porter’s table for a handful of letters, which he put straight into his pocket, taking out at the same time a pair of buckskin gloves. With a friendly nod to the head reception clerk, he put on his dark felt hat, took out his cigarette case and put a cigarette between his lips. The next moment he removed his hat and stood aside to allow two ladies to pass before him through the revolving door” (GH 5).

<sup>59</sup> M 94: “he was always ready to oblige with a postage stamp, to give advice about long-distance flights, to take an old lady out in his car, or to make a fourth at bridge, and he was well informed as to the resources of the hotel cellar” (GH 87).

<sup>60</sup> M 94; “quite a good fellow;” “But even a Baron Gaigern sleeps behind double doors and even he, too, has his secrets and hidden motives...” (GH 87).

gesund bleiben und es dir wohl ergehen auf Erden.”<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note that in his manifesto, Serner advocates the use of masking not merely for basic survival, but for personal and monetary gain as well.

As Lethen writes, the essence of the confidence man is a life of perpetual armoring. “Das Leben des Hochstaplers ist die Als-ob-Existenz par excellence, in der der Erfolg von der virtuoson Anwendung des Verhaltenskodexes einer fremden Klasse abhängt.”<sup>62</sup> In the case of the confidence man, the core self can never be revealed; in contrast, numerous masks are necessary because they allow the confidence man to adapt to any situation. The goal of this constant adaptation is to leave behind the impression of authenticity, something that is questioned relatively early in Baum’s novel. After watching Gaigern interact with hotel guests and staff, the following conversation occurs between two of the hotel clerks:

Der kleine Georgi nickte zur Drehtür hin und sagte: “Der ist gut. Der kann so bleiben.” Der Portier zuckte die Schultern des Menschenkenners. “Ob der gut ist, das ist noch die Frage. Der hat so was—ich weiß nicht. Der ist mir zu flott. Wie der Auftritt und die großen Trinkgelder—das hat so was von Kintopp. Wer reist denn heutzutage mit so einem Aufwand—wenn’s nicht ein Hochstapler ist? Wenn ich Pilzheim wäre, ich täte die Augen aufmachen.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Serner qtd. in VdK 150, emphasis in original; “Whoever you may be, say this to yourself: ALL THAT TRANSPIRES AROUND ME CAN ALSO BE FEIGNED. Then you will remain healthy and things will go well for you on earth (maxim no. 422)” (CC 115).

<sup>62</sup> VdK 150; “The con man’s life is the ‘as-if’ existence par excellence, in which success depends on the virtuoso application of the behavioral codex of an alien class” (CC 115).

<sup>63</sup> Pilzheim is the in-house detective employed by the hotel; M 10; “Little Georgi jerked his head towards the revolving door and said: ‘He’s alright. Nothing wrong with him.’ The hall porter shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who knows his fellowmen. ‘Whether he’s alright remains to be seen. He’s a bit—I don’t know. He’s too much of the fine fellow for me. The side he puts on and the tips he gives. It seems a bit queer to me. And whoever travels nowadays to throw his money about, unless he’s a swindler? If I were the Pilzheim I’d keep my eyes open’” (GH 6).

This conversation brings to light an important point raised by Lethen in his analysis of the confidence man as *kalte persona*: assimilation requires uninterrupted “training.” In addition to leaving behind the impression of authenticity by wearing the appropriate clothing, confidence men must also master appropriate facial expressions, gestures, and other aspects of external behavior. In order to sustain the aura of the type of person they are imitating, one must assiduously practice in order to uphold the image of the desired mask. From this conversation, it does not appear as if Gaigern’s external appearance fully supports the image of the wealthy baron he is attempting to portray, which Baum uses to foreshadow the Baron’s eventual downfall.

Lethen also argues that the *kalte persona* rarely exists without a military shadow. This too proves to be the case for Gaigern. Formerly an officer, Gaigern’s confidence man *kalte persona* can be read as a continuation of the cold conduct demanded in the army. Even as a thief, he does not work for himself, but rather takes orders from a band of criminals who “finance” him while he carries out his various swindles. In an interesting parallel, Gaigern’s plans appear to be more similar to covert military operations than petty crimes. After staking out Grusinskaja’s room and knowing that she will be dancing at the theater and not returning until at least 2:00 am, Gaigern decides to sneak into her room to steal the precious pearls. There are multiple ways he could have done this: he could have easily knocked out Grusinskaja’s attendant and stolen the pearls from her; he could have overpowered one of the maids as they entered her room; he could have picked the lock. Yet none of those choices offer him the same level of danger and excitement he experienced during the war. Yearning for

that sense of danger, he deliberately puts himself into perilous situations. Instead of entering the room through the hallway, Gaigern scales the façade of the hotel, entering Grusinskaja's room through the open door of her private balcony.

As if following the rules for survival dictated in Bertolt Brecht's *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner*, Gaigern is very careful to cover his tracks. Despite his intense desire for a cigarette to calm his nerves during this ordeal, he does not dare to light one, because the lingering smell of the cigarette would betray his presence in the room. During his precarious journey, he cuts open his finger. This, too, he attempts to conceal the best way he can in the situation. "Liegend streifte er den rechten Handschuh ab und began den Schnitt am Zeigefinger auszusaugen, er konnte keine blutenden Pfoten zu seiner Arbeit brauchen."<sup>64</sup> He even wears wool socks over his shoes, careful not to leave any visual trace of his footprints.

He successfully finds the pearls, but is not able to escape to the safety of his own room before he is surprised by Grusinskaja, who suffered a breakdown and fled to the safety of her hotel room. At first, Grusinskaja does not even know that Gaigern is in the room, and he only makes his presence known in an attempt to prevent her from committing suicide. Concealing the fact that he was attempting to steal her pearls, he demonstrates the quick adaptation to rapidly changing situations and exhibits the bracketing of emotion required of the *kalte persona* in the military. Once again, he quickly considers all of his options: "Er hätte die Grusinskaja totschiagen, er hätte sie

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<sup>64</sup> M 103; "He pulled the glove off his right hand and sucked the cut on his forefinger. A bleeding paw would never do for the job he is on" (GH 95 – 96).

durch Drohungen stillmachen können.”<sup>65</sup> Understanding that if he were to reveal himself as a thief to Grusinskaja his cover in the metropolis of Berlin would be blown, Gaigern instead adopts the mask of an enamored admirer. “Es war der Instinkt seiner lebenswürdigen Natur, der ihn statt Gewalt und Mord eine Verbeugung machen ließ, ohne Überlegung, aber in guter Haltung.”<sup>66</sup> As a result, Gaigern slowly begins to take pity on her, and he transforms the mask of admiration to one of love for her, a ruse which the affection-starved Grusinskaja readily accepts without much consideration of the consequences.

In his conversation with Grusinskaja, Gaigern illustrates how the former soldier turned *kalte persona* yearns for the chaos and uncertainty of the war. “Im Krieg war es gut. Im Krieg spürte ich mich zu Hause. Es hätte meinerwegen noch viel dreckiger hergehen können. Wenn es wieder einmal Krieg gibt, wird wieder alles gut mit mir.”<sup>67</sup> It is at this point that Gaigern begins to show his true nature, which he is hiding under his mask. His conversation with Grusinskaja reveals that his current mask of affection is nothing more than a series of masks he has adopted throughout his life:

“Ich bin zügellos,” fuhr er fort, ins Dunkle zu sprechen; “ich bin ganz ohne Charakter und unaussprechlich neugierig. Ich kann mich nicht einordnen und bin zu nichts zu brauchen. Ich habe zu Hause gelernt, zu reiten und den Herrn zu spielen. Im Kloster beten und lügen. Im Krieg schießen und Deckung suchen. Mehr kann ich nicht. Ich bin ein Zigeuner, ein Außenseiter, ein Abenteurer— [...] Ich bin ein Spieler,

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<sup>65</sup> M 127; “He might have made a wild dash for the hotel façade. He might have struck Grusinskaya dead or silenced her with threats” (GH 120).

<sup>66</sup> M 127; “It was the prompting of his good nature that chose a bow, an unpremeditated but courteous bow, instead of murder and violence” (GH 120).

<sup>67</sup> M 142; “The war was fine. I felt at home in it. For all I cared it might have been a lot worse than it was. If there could only be another war I should be alright” (GH 133).

und es kommt mir nicht darauf an, zu betrügen. Gestohlen habe ich auch schon. Eigentlich gehöre ich eingesperrt.”<sup>68</sup>

Gaigern describes his entire life as being nothing more than a series of masking and deception. However, based on this description it is not clear whether or not Gaigern’s portrayal to Grusinskaja as a perpetual outsider is in fact reality, or merely another clever deception. According to this portrayal of this and many other masks throughout his life, Gaigern uses money he cons from elderly women or swindles from card games and fixed horse races merely to continue the impression of being a wealthy Baron long enough for him to locate and begin swindling his next victim.

This endless cycle, however, is interrupted through this encounter with Grusinskaja. Initially, Gaigern only feigns love for Grusinskaja out of a sense of pity for her, but over the course of the novel, this pity does change into true emotion. It is not clear if Gaigern develops feelings for Grusinskaja as a love interest or as a mother figure, as both scenarios are hinted at in the text, but after this interaction with her in her hotel room, Gaigern becomes plagued by guilt from his inner moral compass, the exact same compass that the *kalte persona* was supposed to replace. Throughout his life, Gaigern put on a mask giving the illusion of warmth, but he could never allow the warmth to become genuine, lest it prevent him from carrying out his true plans. The moment Gaigern does allow his emotions to influence his actions, his *kalte persona*

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<sup>68</sup> M 147; “‘I am uncontrolled,’ he went on into the darkness. ‘I am quite without character and unspeakably inquisitive. I can’t live an orderly life and I am good for nothing. At home I learned to ride and play the gentleman. At school to say my prayers and lie. In the war to shoot and take cover. And beyond that I can do nothing, I am a gipsy, and outsider, an adventurer. [...] I am a gambler who is not above cheating. I have stolen too before now. Properly speaking, I ought to be in prison’” (GH 137 – 138). In American English, Gaigern would refer to himself as a “gypsy” and not a “gipsy.” Although the text I am using is the 1931 American edition published in New York by Doubleday, Doran & Co., the translation by Basil Creighton does incorporate a mixture of British- and American-English spellings, such as the example above.

mask begins to crack. While Grusinskaja is sleeping, Gaigern returns the pearls, deciding instead to find another mark in order to swindle the money he so desperately needs.

Once again illustrating the quick transformation required of the *kalte persona* in the military, Gaigern stumbles upon his next potential victim:

Gleich danach hatte er sich—gebadet, trainiert und mit Lavendelessig eingerieben—auf den Herrn aus der Provinz von Nr. 70 gestürzt, bei dem vielleicht auf diese oder jene Weise die paar tausend Mark locker zu machen waren, deren er zunächst bedurfte.<sup>69</sup>

Gaigern decides to take advantage of a naïve bookkeeper from the provincial town of Fredersdorf, Otto Kringelein, who after being diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer has cashed in his life savings and his life insurance policy to live his last few weeks in splendor in Berlin.

At first, Gaigern plans to befriend Kringelein and borrow the money from him, with the intention of disappearing immediately afterwards and never paying it back. Once again, however, compassion prevents Gaigern from carrying out his initial plan. He does not want Kringelein to be hurt knowing that a “friend” stole his hard-earned money, so instead he devises a way to more anonymously acquire it. After bringing Kringelein to a casino and deliberately intoxicating him with champagne, Gaigern gambles away the small amount of money he has left but watches as Kringelein has a bout of beginner’s luck and wins a great deal of money, more than enough for Gaigern to pay off his debts and buy a train ticket to join Grusinskaja in Vienna.

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<sup>69</sup> M 187 – 188; “Immediately after than, when he had had his bath, done his excercises and rubbed himself over with toilet vinegar, he had run into the provincian gentleman of No. 70, from whom in one way or another he hoped to raise the few thousand marks of which he now stood in immediate need” (GH 177).

At the casino, Kringelein becomes faint and thinks he is dying. This scenario provides the perfect opportunity for Gaigern to steal Kringelein's money unnoticed. However, this event causes Gaigern to flash back to the horrors he experienced in the trenches during World War I:

Weil die Lampe blau war, sah auch [Kringeleins] Gesicht blau aus, mit einem runden, großen, schwarzen Mund, daraus es stöhnte. Gaigern kannte diese Schmerzensmaske vom Krieg her, von den Schwerverwundeten her. Er stützte schnell einen Arm unter Kringeleins Kopf und preßte stark und brüderlich gegen dessen bebende Schultern.<sup>70</sup>

While transporting Kringelein back to his hotel room with the assistance of Dr. Otternschlag, another guest of the hotel whom I will take as the subject of my analysis of Lethen's categorization of the Creature, Gaigern secretly steals Kringelein's wallet. After a brief examination, Otternschlag concludes that Kringelein is in fact not dying, but rather only suffering the aftermath of drinking too much cold champagne. Later, when Kringelein discovers he does not have his money, Gaigern once again attempts to cover his tracks. "‘Vielleicht haben die Mädchen in der Alhambra sie ihm geklaut’, antwortete er. Es war die Antwort, die er von langer Hand vorbereitet hatte."<sup>71</sup> When Kringelein begins crying like a child for his lost money, Gaigern tries his best to block out his cries as he once again considers his options:

Es war Kraft in ihm, aber nicht genug Kraft. Er hätte die beiden kranken Männer niederschlagen und davongehen können. Er hätte sie wegstoßen und mit seinem Raub über die Hotelfassade flüchten können. Er hätte mit

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<sup>70</sup> M 249; "The lamp was blue and it made Kringelein's face blue, with a great round black mouth from which groans issued. Gaigern knew this mask of pain from severely wounded cases in the war. He quickly put an arm under Kringelein's head and, like a good comrade, supported his heaving shoulders" (GH 235 – 236).

<sup>71</sup> M 262; "‘Perhaps the girls at Alhambra took it off him,’ he answered. It was the answer he had long had ready" (GH 249).

einem Scherzwort das Zimmer verlassen, zur Bahn rasen und verschwinden können.<sup>72</sup>

While he is considering his options, Gaigern's *kalte persona* mask cracks once again, and Gaigern's internal moral compass begins to more strongly influence his actions:

aber plötzlich überkam ihn das unsinnige und heftige Mitleid, das er gestern mit der Grusinskaja gefühlt hatte, auch für diesen Kringelein da hinten am Bettrand. Mitleid auch für Otternschlag, der ihn mit dem verwüsteten Gesicht des Krieges anstarrte, und ein ganz fernes unwissendes Mitleid mit sich selbst—und dieses Mitleid warf ihn um.<sup>73</sup>

Overcome by pity, Gaigern's inner directed moral compass takes control and he "finds" the money that he himself had stolen from Kringelein. For the second time, Gaigern's *kalte persona* mask is unable to override his sense of compassion. Baum hints that this change in Gaigern, allowing his compassion to control his emotions, is the beginning of his downfall. "In dieser Sekunde entschied sich sein Schicksal. Der Bruch, der durch sein Wesen ging, nahm ihm die Sicherheit."<sup>74</sup> Once more, Gaigern must quickly adopt a new plan to be able to find the money he needs. Gaigern, in a last effort, attempts to steal the money from Kringelein's employer, Generaldirector Preysing. After discovering Gaigern in his room attempting to steal his pocketbook, Preysing attacks Gaigern in a fit of anger and kills him.

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<sup>72</sup> M 263; "There was strength in him, but not enough strength. He might have felled the two sick men to the ground and gone off. He might have pushed them aside and made his escape with his booty over the façade of the hotel. He might have left the room with a few jesting words, made a dash for the railway station and disappeared" (GH 249).

<sup>73</sup> M 263; "But suddenly he was overcome by the unreasoning and irresistible pity that he had felt for Grusinskaya the day before; and he now felt it for Kringelein sitting there on the edge of the bed. He felt pity too for Otternschlag, for the war-wasted face fixed on his own, and pity, remote and unconscious for himself, and this was his undoing" (GH 250).

<sup>74</sup> M 263; "Gaigern hesitated for one second and in this one second his fate was decided. A rift opened in his being and his assurance was gone" (GH 249).

Because he allowed the internal moral compass disengaged by the *kalte persona* to come back into play and influence his actions, Gaigern's mask could no longer protect him, and he paid the ultimate price for this mistake. In retrospect, some characters acknowledged seeing glimpses of Gaigern's true self behind his *kalte persona* mask. "Kringelein erinnerte sich der unklaren Sache mit der Brieftasche in der gestrigen Nacht. Er hat Geld gebraucht, dachte er. Vielleicht ist er den ganzen Tag herumgejagt nach Geld. Er hat gelacht und den Kavalier markiert, aber vielleicht war er ein armer Hund."<sup>75</sup> Unable to separate himself from his own compassion, Gaigern's *kalte persona* mask was no longer strong enough to protect him.

Perhaps only the *kalte persona* as advocated by Plessner and Gracián and portrayed here in Brecht's *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner* is ever truly able to negotiate society with his mask intact: "suche Distanz, betrachte Unterkünfte als Provisorien, trenne dich von der Kohorte, zerschneide die Familienbande, meide übertriebene Individualisierung, ziehe den Hut tief in die Stirn, und entferne dich von allen Wärmequellen."<sup>76</sup> Yet if the true goal of the *kalte persona* is to leave behind the *impression* of authenticity as Serner claims, Gaigern was able to accomplish just that: "Niemand findet sich, kein einziger Mensch in Grand Hôtel, der Schlechtes über ihn auszusagen wüßte."<sup>77</sup> In this instance at least, Gaigern's mask of the wealthy, care-free

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<sup>75</sup> M 299; "Kringelein recalled the obscure affair over his own pocketbook the night before. He was in need of money, he reflected. Perhaps he had been in anxious search of money all day. He laughed and played the fine gentleman, but perhaps he was only a poor devil after all" (GH 283).

<sup>76</sup> Brecht, qtd. in VdK 171; "seek distance; regard shelter as provisional; separate yourself from your cohort; cut family ties; avoid exaggerated individuation; pull your hat low on your brow; retreat from all sources of warmth" ("Ten Poems," qtd. in CC 133).

<sup>77</sup> M 321; "Not a single person in the Grand Hôtel had anything to say against him" (GH 303).

baron will be remembered, while his true inner self—the confidence man and high-class hotel thief lurking behind the mask—will quickly be forgotten.

The second type Lethen analyzes is what the anthropologist David Riesman calls the “Radar Type.” Lethen describes the Radar Type as engaging in “rastloser Informationssammlung und ‘Fun-Morality.’ Er verhält sich sentimental zu den Mitmenschen und zynisch zu den Institutionen.”<sup>78</sup> As with the *kalte persona*, the focus of attention for the Radar Type moves away from the discredited inner regulator of morality, instead looking outside of itself for public codes of conduct as a source of direction. The most obvious difference between the *kalte persona* and the Radar Type is the conception of agency. Unlike the *kalte persona*, who consciously and actively follows a set of external rules in order deliberately create a sense of distance, the Radar Type has no single handbook or set of rules to guide them. Rather, like a radar, they scan society, looking for the latest trends and fashion for guidance on how to live their lives. The Radar Type passively, and indiscriminately, imitates models of how to dress, how to behave, and most importantly, how to fill their free time. Lethen’s interpretation of the Radar Type parallels Kracauer’s critique of the white-collar masses, or *Angestellten*, in the Weimar Republic. “In Kracauer’s view, white-collar workers consume affirmative mass culture uncritically, giving their wages back to the dominant culture industries in return for a dazzling commercial experience which blinds them to their actual condition.”<sup>79</sup> For the Radar Type, “Vergnügen und Konsum, Nebenschauplätze der vergangenen Epoche, werden zur Hauptbühne. Die

<sup>78</sup> VdK 236; “tireless information-gathering, in a cult of nonchalance and ‘fun morality.’ The Radar Type relates cynically to institutions but sentimentally to fellow beings” (CC 188).

<sup>79</sup> Macfarlane 17.

Verbraucherhaltung ist die dominante Reaktionsform.”<sup>80</sup> In contrast to the bourgeois ideals of thriftiness and saving money, the Radar Type becomes a voracious consumer, spending money on frivolities of entertainment and in-the-moment enjoyment.

Lethen calls the Radar Type a character, “der nach seinem Genre und einem technischen Medium sucht.”<sup>81</sup> The Radar Type, Lethen explains, “bahnt sich seinen Weg durch trivialere Genres, die zum Markt geöffnet sind: Kabarett, Kriminalromane, Magazin-Geschichten und Revuen.”<sup>82</sup> Presumably for this reason, apart from briefly citing a few examples—the women protagonists from Irmgard Keun’s novels *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, as well as some minor (and in Lethen’s analysis, nameless) women characters from Erich Kästner’s 1931 novel *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten*—Lethen does not provide any literary examples or textual analysis as he does for both the *kalte persona* and his third type, the Creature. My analysis here of Baum’s *Menschen in Hotel*, drawn from the “magazine novels” Lethen mentions, will help illustrate both how Lethen’s “Radar Type” appears in the literature of the Weimar Republic as well as provides an implicit critique of the emphasis on consumerism and those who live their lives attempting to achieve the elusive happiness blatantly advertised by popular culture.

Otto Kringelein, a 47 year old bookkeeper from the provincial town of Fredersdorf, undergoes a transformation throughout the novel that helps to illustrate the extreme differences between the traditional bourgeois type and the new consumerist-

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<sup>80</sup> VdK 238; “enjoyment and consumption, the sideshows of the passing epoch, take over center stage. A consumerist attitude becomes the dominant reaction form” (CC 189).

<sup>81</sup> VdK 241; “a character still in search of a genre and an appropriate technical medium” (CC 192).

<sup>82</sup> VdK 241; “forges its ways through more trivial genres, which are open to the market: cabarets, crime novels, magazine stories, and revues” (CC 192).

oriented Radar Type. Kringelein spent his entire life scrimping and saving any way he could—cutting the firewood into kindling (otherwise it would cost eight cents a bundle to have it done, which averages to about two cents per day), sitting in the cheapest seats closest to the screen at the cinema, and even wearing second-hand clothes from his father that are several sizes too big for him—all in an attempt to save money.

After being diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer, Kringelein took his life savings and the inheritance from his father, cashed in his life insurance policy and raced to the metropolis of Berlin with what he sees as a princely sum of 8540 Marks, which is almost three years' salary in Fredersdorf, in order to live out his last few remaining weeks in the glamorous lifestyle he denied himself all his life. “Er kenne wenig vom Leben, aber nun möchte er es kennenlernen, er möchte das wirkliche große Leben kennenlernen, eigens dazu sei er hier.”<sup>83</sup> At first, the thought of having so much money to spend is almost too much for him to handle, and the overwhelmingly consumerist attitude epitomized by Berlin appears completely foreign to him. “In Berlin sind die Schaufenster auch nachts beleuchtet und die Fülle der Welt liegt darin zu Haufen gestapelt. ‘Das alles kann ich mir kaufen’, ist ein fieberhafter und berauschend neuer Gedanke für einen Kringelein.”<sup>84</sup> Despite his grand plans to live life to the fullest, once he arrives in the metropolis Kringelein feels out of place and is not sure how he should act or what he should do.

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<sup>83</sup> M 50; “He knew little of life, but now he wanted to get to know it. He wanted to know life as it really was. That was why he was here” (GH 44).

<sup>84</sup> M 47; “In Berlin, the show windows are lighted up at night, and the riches of the world are displayed there. I can buy what I like, is a novel idea for a man like Kringelein” (GH 41).

At first demonstrating characteristics of the *kalte persona*, Kringelein, like Gaigern, consciously adopts a mask in order to disguise his true provincial self, which he views as out of touch with the metropolitan lifestyle of Berlin. However, these attempts to conceal his background make him feel even more out of place. “Er kam mit den eleganten Sätzen, die er zurechtgelegt hatte, nicht aus. Seit er im Grand Hôtel wohnte, bewegte er sich wie in einem fremden Land. Er sprach die deutschen Worte wie eine fremde Sprache, die er aus Büchern und Journalen gelernt hatte.”<sup>85</sup> In order to protect himself from the shame of being labeled an outsider, Kringelein slowly, and unconsciously, transforms into a Radar Type and begins to scan his environment, searching for examples of how he needs to adapt himself to blend in to his new surroundings. By imitating those whom he assumes are successful people, Kringelein tries to appear, at least externally, as someone he is not. However, unlike Gaigern, Kringelein is never fully able to successfully portray the image that he belongs to the upper-class, cosmopolitan lifestyle epitomized by the other guests at the Grand Hôtel.

Kringelein’s radar reception becomes clear as Baum describes his first impressions of the hotel:

Er sah: die Marmorsäulen mit den Gipsornamenten, den illuminierten Springbrunnen, die Klubstühle. Er sah Herren in Fräcken, Herren in Smokings, elegante, weltläufige Herren. Damen mit nackten Armen, mit Glitzerkleidern, mit Schmuck, Pelz, ausnehmend schöne und kunstvolle Damen. Er hörte entfernte Musik. Er roch Kaffee, Zigaretten, Parfüme, Spargelduft vom Speisesaal und Blumen, die an einem Tisch zum Verkauf aus Vasen strotzten. Er spürte den dicken, roten Teppich unter seinen gewichsten Stiefeln, und dieser Teppich machte ihm zunächst den stärksten Eindruck. Kringelein schliff vorsichtig mit der Sohle über

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<sup>85</sup> M 52; “The polished phrases he had prepared found no utterance. Since he had come to the Grand Hotel he felt that he was in a foreign land. He spoke his native tongue like a foreign language that he had learnt from books and newspapers” (GH 46).

diesen Teppich und blinzelte. Es war sehr hell in der Halle, angenehm gelblich hell, dazu brannten hellrote, beschirmte Lämpchen an den Wänden, dazu strahlten grüne Fontänen in das venezianische Becken. Ein Kellner flitzte vorbei, trug ein silbernes Tablett, darauf standen breite, flache Gläser, in jedem Glas war nur ein bißchen goldbrauner Kognak, in dem Kognak schwamm Eis—aber warum wurden im besten Hotel Berlins die Gläser nicht vollgefüllt—?<sup>86</sup>

This last sentence in particular illustrates Kringelein's ignorance of upper-class conventions. Yet despite the fact that Kringelein's first-hand experiences with the big city are limited, he does not see himself as a complete novice. "Man lebt ja heutzutage auch in der Provinz nicht außerhalb der Welt. Man liest die Zeitung. Man geht ins Kino. Man sieht alles in den illustrierten Blättern."<sup>87</sup> Typical for the Radar Type, aspects of popular culture have already helped to inform his perceptions and expectations of urban modernity, yet as he states with some disappointment, the representations he knows from the illustrated press do not always accurately portray reality. "In Wirklichkeit sieht doch alles anders aus, als man sich's vorstellt."<sup>88</sup>

As Kringelein slowly transforms his traditional, thrifty, hardworking bourgeois values into the overwhelmingly consumerist attitudes associated with the Radar Type, he constantly asks not only himself, but multiple characters throughout the novel "Was

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<sup>86</sup> M 17 – 18; "He saw the marble pillars with stucco ornament, the illuminated fountain, the easy chairs. He saw men in dress coats and dinner jackets, smart cosmopolitan men. Women with bare arms, in wonderful clothes, with jewelry and furs, beautiful, well-dressed women. He heard music in the distance. He smelt coffee, cigarettes, scent, whiffs of asparagus from the dining room and the flowers that were displayed for sale on the flower stall. He felt the thick red carpet beneath his black leather boots and this perhaps impressed him most of all. Kringelein slid the sole of his boot gingerly over its pile and blinked. The lounge was brilliantly illuminated and the light was delightfully golden; also there were bright red-shaded lights against the walls and the jets of the fountain in the Venetian basin shone green. A waiter flitted by carrying a silver tray on which were wide shallow glasses with a little dark-gold cognac in each, and in the cognac ice was floating; but why in Berlin's best hotel were the glasses not filled to the brim?" (GH 12 – 13).

<sup>87</sup> M 48; "Nowadays even in the provinces one is not out of the world. There are the newspapers. There are the cinemas. There are the pictures in the illustrated papers" (GH 42).

<sup>88</sup> M 48; "It is not at all as one imagined it" (GH 42).

ist das Leben?” Not knowing how to proceed, the Radar Type Kringelein scans his surroundings for a model who will show him how to live. At first, Kringelein’s radar apparatus is fixed upon his employer, Generaldirektor Preysing of the Saxonia Baumwoll A.-G. Viewing Preysing as the epitome of success and a life lived to the fullest, Kringelein follows the example of his employer not only in his choice to come to Berlin, but also specifically in his choice of the hotel in which he decides to live once he arrives. “Kennen Sie Herrn Generaldirektor Preysing? Der wohnt doch auch immer bei Ihnen, wenn er nach Berlin kommt, nicht wahr? Nun sehen Sie. Ich will auch hier wohnen.”<sup>89</sup> Up until this point, Kringelein does not feel he has lived himself, but once he does decide to actively live out his own dreams, he merely imitates the behavioral example of the successful people closest to him.

When discussing travel with Dr. Otternschlag, it becomes clear that while Otternschlag has visited many countries in many different capacities—as a tourist, as a military doctor, and even as a prisoner of war—this is the first time Kringelein has ever left Fredersdorf. Despite his desire to travel, Kringelein has only vague plans for where he would like to go and instead focuses his attention not on his own desires, but rather once again recounts the adventures of Preysing. “‘Ich beabsichtige auch zu reisen’, sagte Kringelein. ‘Unser Generaldirektor Preysing zum Beispiel reist jedes Jahr. Erst vor kurzem war er in Sankt Moritz. Vorige Ostern war er mit seiner ganzen Familie in

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<sup>89</sup> M 15; “Do you know Herr Generaldirektor Preysing? He always stops here when he comes to Berlin. Well, I want to stop here, too” (GH 10).

Capri. So etwas denke ich mir wundervoll—”<sup>90</sup> Once again, it is not clear whether Kringelein wishes to travel for his own pleasure, or wishes to experience travel only because that is what he perceives wealthier and more successful people enjoy.

All of Kringelein’s initial attempts at living revolve not his own desires, but rather are merely acts of imitation. For example, once again following the example of Preysing—“Wenn unser Generaldirektor Gesellschaft gibt, läßt es Kaviar aus Dresden kommen, pfundweise”<sup>91</sup>—Kringelein orders expensive foods in order to experience what he has been denied his entire life. The long-desired food, however, proves not to be nearly as fulfilling as he had hoped:

Neun Mark beispielweise kostet eine Portion Kaviar. Kaviar ist eine Enttäuschung, findet Kringelein. Schmeckt wie Herring und kostet neun Mark. [...] Burgunder war ein dicker saurer Wein, der in einer Art von Kinderwagen lag, wie ein Baby. Reiche Leute hatten einen komischen Geschmack, wie es schien.<sup>92</sup>

In the end, Kringelein’s emulation of Preysing’s life proves as unfulfilling as the caviar and the wine. Once again, he asks anyone who will listen to him what he needs to do in order to more fully experience the pleasures of society:

“Wo ist das wirkliche Leben? Ich habe es noch nicht erwischt. Ich war im Kasino, ich sitze hier mitten im teuersten Hotel, aber es ist noch immer nicht richtig. Ich habe immer den Verdacht, das richtige, das wirkliche, das eigentliche Leben spielt sich ganz woanders ab, das sieht

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<sup>90</sup> M 26 – 27; “‘It is my intention to travel, too,’ said Kringelein. ‘The head of our firm, Preysing, for example, goes abroad every year. A short time ago he was at St. Moritz. Last Easter he took his whole family to Capri. That sort of thing must be wonderful’” (GH 21).

<sup>91</sup> M 188; “When our general director entertains people he has caviare sent by the pound from Dresden” (GH 178).

<sup>92</sup> M 46; “Caviare, for example, cost nine marks. Caviare was a delusion, Kringelein decided. It tasted like herring and cost nine marks. [...] Burgundy was a heavy, sour wine that lay in a kind of cradle, like a baby. The rich had odd tastes, it seemed” (GH 40).

ganz anders aus. Wenn man nicht dazugehört, dann ist es gar nicht so leicht, hineinzukommen, verstehen Sie?“<sup>93</sup>

Kringelein has observed Preysing for many years, yet he always merely followed his example from a distance, as he is in no social position to be able to interact with his employer on more informal terms. Kringelein now believes that mere passive imitation is not the answer, but rather that he needs a mentor, someone who has experienced life in the metropolis firsthand and is willing to personally show Kringelein how to live his life. As a result of this decision, Kringelein’s radar device changes its focus from Generaldirektor Preysing to Dr. Otternschlag.

Otternschlag takes pity on Kringelein and agrees to show him his personal conception of “life” in the metropolis. They begin with the standard tourist fare: a tour of Berlin, museums, a trip to Potsdam, and a visit to the observation deck of the radio tower high above Berlin. The evening finishes with a trip to the ballet to see Grusinskaja dance. The “living” that Dr. Otternschlag organizes for Kringelein conforms to the traditional bourgeois conceptions of culture and *Bildung*. However, Otternschlag’s example is still not completely fulfilling for Kringelein, and he poses his question once again, this time to Baron Gaigern: “Gut, Kaviar und Sekt und dieser ganze Klimbim ist nicht das Leben, können Herr Baron sagen. Aber was ist das Leben?“<sup>94</sup> Gaigern replies with an attitude towards life that is substantially different from the traditional conceptions of *Bildung* offered by Otternschlag and Preysing.

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<sup>93</sup> M 50 – 51; “Where is real life? I have not come on it yet. I have been to a casino, and here I am sitting in the most expensive hotel, but all the time I know it isn’t the real thing. All the time I have a suspicion that real, genuine, actual life is going on somewhere else and is something quite different. When you don’t belong to it it’s not at all so easy to get into it, if you see what I mean?” (GH 44 – 45).

<sup>94</sup> M 188 – 189; “Well, caviare, champagne, and all the rest of it are not life, you may say. But what is life, Herr Baron?” (GH 178).

“Was haben Sie gestern gemacht, zum Beispiel? Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Potsdam, abends Theater? [...] Aber mit dem Leben hat das alles nichts zu tun.”<sup>95</sup> Gaigern directly asks Kringelein his impressions of the cultural events he experienced, although he already knows the answer. “Was hat Ihnen am besten gefallen? Welches Bild? Wie? Nichts gemerkt—natürlich.”<sup>96</sup> In contrast to the previous people whom Kringelein has imitated, the focus of Gaigern’s approach to life is one of living in the moment, focusing on consumption and entertainment.

The first element of “living” on which Gaigern focuses is that of external appearance—in this case, clothing—with the assumption that new clothes will not only make Kringelein look better, but feel better as well. “Mit solcher Krawatte werden Sie das Leben nie einholen, in Ihrem Anzug kann man sich nicht glücklich fühlen.”<sup>97</sup> At first, Kringelein is reluctant to follow Gaigern’s example, believing he should not be wasting his money on things he will not be able to enjoy for long due to his terminal illness. Gaigern responds by reminding Kringelein to focus on the present and not worry about what the future may hold:

“Nicht rechnen, Herr Kringelein. Man verrechnet sich. Sie sollen nicht alte Kleider lange Zeit tragen. Sie sollen im richtigen Augenblick in der richtigen Verfassung sein. Ich bin so ein Augenblickmensch—und mir geht es gut dabei. Kommen Sie, stecken Sie ein paar tausend Mark zu sich, und dann wollen wir sehen, ob das Leben nicht eine Sache ist, die Spaß macht.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> M 189; “What did you do yesterday for example? Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Potsdam, and at night the theater. [...] But all that has nothing to do with life” (GH 178).

<sup>96</sup> M 189; “Well, and what pleased you the most? Which picture? You don’t know? Of course not” (GH 178).

<sup>97</sup> M 190; “With a tie like yours you’ll never get even with life, and you’ll never feel happy in a suit like that” (GH 179).

<sup>98</sup> M 191; “Don’t reckon things up, Herr Kringelein. One’s apt to reckon all wrong. You should not go on wearing old clothes. You should meet each moment as the moment requires. I am a man of the

It is interesting to note that this concept of consumption applies very differently to these two men: for Gaigern, up-to-date clothing is a necessary component of his *kalte persona* mask of the confidence man, in turn keeping up his appearance as a wealthy baron, while for Kringelein, new clothing fulfills his desire to adapt to standards of superficial conformity. Kringelein's new-found consumption does indeed make him feel like a different person. Just by changing his clothes, people treat Kringelein with more respect, holding doors open for him, bowing, and addressing him "Wünsche guten Morgen, Herr Generaldirektor,"<sup>99</sup> a far cry from his true status as a bookkeeper for a producer of mop rags in a small provincial town.

In addition to new clothes, Gaigern advocates adventure as the key to "living-in-the-moment". Some of the adventures Kringelein experiences with Gaigern are riding in a car traveling 118 km per hour—a life changing experience for Kringelein, as he notes "in Fredersdorf gab es viele, die waren noch nie Auto gefahren"<sup>100</sup>—and taking a tour of Berlin in an airplane. Later that evening, he attends a boxing match and is once again transformed from someone who "fürchtet sich schon wieder, denn Blut und Kampf und Roheit kann er nicht sehen"<sup>101</sup> into someone who becomes subsumed into the mass of the spectacle-oriented audience:

Kringelein wird eingeschmolzen. Kringelein ist nicht mehr allein, er wohnt nicht mehr in sich wie in einem gebrechlichen Gehäuse. Kringelein ist einer von vierzehntausend, er ist ein grünes, verzerrtes Gesicht von den unzählbaren Gesichtern der Halle, sein Schrei gehört zu

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moment in this sense, and I'm all the better for it. Come along now, and put a few thousand marks in your pocket and then we'll see whether there isn't some fun in life" (GH 180).

<sup>99</sup> M 203; "I wish you a good-morning, Herr Generaldirektor" (GH 191).

<sup>100</sup> M 198; "There were many people in Fredersdorf who had never been in a motor car" (GH 186).

<sup>101</sup> M 236; "He was afraid this time, too: for he could not endure the sight of blood and fighting and barbarity" (GH 223).

dem großen Schrei, der aus allen zugleich herausstößt. Er atmet, wenn die anderen atmen, und er preßt einhaltend die Luft in sich zusammen, wenn die ganze Halle mit den Boxern keucht.<sup>102</sup>

In this quotation in particular, the inherent dangers in the Radar Type's consumerist and mimicking attitudes become apparent. In stark contrast to the *kalte persona* who incorporates "eine Mobilmachung gegen eine feindliche Macht oder [ein] Einrücken in ein Kollektiv,"<sup>103</sup> Lethen argues that the unquestioning desire for conformity characteristic of the Radar Type foreshadows the impending rise of fascism in Germany.

Following the boxing match, Kringelein experiences for the first time high-stakes gambling. Contrary to his instinct to risk a maximum of 10 Marks, Kringelein follows Gaigern's suggestion—in this instance, not his example, as Gaigern is broke and has only 24 Marks with which to gamble—and first changes over 500 Marks, then later another 500 Marks. His beginner's luck pays off, and Kringelein wins a total of 3,400 Marks before the night is through, an amount equivalent to an entire year's salary in Fredersdorf. With every passing day in Berlin, Kringelein slowly loses his bourgeois morality and slowly incorporates more of the consumerist attitude associated with the Radar Type. "In einer Welt, wo man vormittags tausend Mark ausgibt und abends dreitausend gewinnt, irrt der Buchhalter Kringelein aus Fredersdorf labyrinthisch

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<sup>102</sup> M 240; "Kringelein melted like wax. Kringelein was cooped up no longer in his dilapidated body. Kringelein was one among fourteen thousand, one green distorted face among countless others, and his voice was indistinguishable in the one great roar that issued from every throat at once. He drew his breath when every breath was drawn, and he held it back when the whole hall gasped in sympathy with the boxers" (GH 227).

<sup>103</sup> VdK 236; "sense of mobilization against a hostile power or integration into a collective" (CC 188).

herum, wie in einem Zauberwald ohne Licht und Weg.”<sup>104</sup> To him, money is no longer something that must be earned through hard work and carefully guarded: it can be easily acquired and even more easily given away. He gives one page-boy a fifty pfennig tip for opening the door for him and another page-boy a crumpled 100 Mark bill. Baum writes, “Er hat die Orientierung verloren. Er weiß nicht mehr, was Geld ist.”<sup>105</sup> I argue that Kringelein has not *lost* his orientation, but rather replaced the inner-seeking moral orientation associated with traditional bourgeois values by embracing the exterior-seeking orientation of the Radar Type: observing those whom he believes are successful and happy people and imitating them in an attempt to answer his eternal question of what life truly is.

For Lethen, the third and final mask epitomized by the New Objectivity literature of the Weimar Republic, the Creature, represents the opposite end of the spectrum from the *kalte persona*. Whereas the armoring of the *kalte persona* presents a mask of self-confidence, “die Kreatur [hat] ihren Auftritt, wenn die künstlichen Mittel der persona in Scherben zerschlagen sind.”<sup>106</sup> The Creature is a raw bundle of nerves, purely reactive in nature and forced to sublimate its instinctual drives through brute force:

In Kunst, Literatur und Film taucht die Kreatur als letzte Station einer Lebensgeschichte auf: als Soldat, der seine Panzerung verliert; als wehrloser Arbeiter, von der Freikorpsoldateska an die Wand geführt; als Schikanierter in den Labyrinthen der Verwaltung; als Portier des

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<sup>104</sup> M 246; “In a world where in the morning you spent a thousand marks and won three thousand at night, Kringelein the Fredersdorf bookkeeper wandered as though in a labyrinth, an enchanted forest where no path, no light directed his steps” (GH 232 – 233).

<sup>105</sup> M 246; “He had quite lost his senses. He no longer knew what money was” (GH 232).

<sup>106</sup> VdK 256; “The creature makes its appearance only once the artificial devices of the persona crumble into pieces” (CC 206).

Grandhotels, der als Toilettenwart endet; und “natürlich”—weil, wie wir in Plessners Anthropologie sahen, aus der Arena der Künstlichkeit ausgeschlossen—als Frau, die den Gashahn aufdreht, die sich als Prostituierte durchschlägt, ihr Kind ermordet...<sup>107</sup>

Lethen stresses that the Creature is not merely the modern subject without the protection of any kind of mask. On the contrary, the guise of the Creature itself is a mask: one that offers protection by regulating closeness and distance. “Ihre Physiognomie reflektiert die soziale Situation, verstellt Blöße, überwindet Scham, zeugt von der Abwehr der Todesangst oder dem Anspruch, dämonisch zu sein, d.h. als Schreckfigur sich zwischen die Belagerer zu mischen.”<sup>108</sup> In this way, Lethen argues, the mask of the Creature, too, can be instructive, but only as a grotesque.

As with his analysis of the *kalte persona*, the examples Lethen uses to illustrate the Creature are drawn from the established canon of Weimar literature. He analyzes the works of Siegfried Kracauer, Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Zweig, and makes references to authors such as Alfred Döblin and Robert Musil, to name only a few. However, the character of Dr. Otternschlag in Vicki Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel* is a paradigmatic example of the Creature in the form of the war cripple as analyzed by Lethen. Otternschlag, like the *kalte persona* Gaigern, has a military past. He worked as a doctor during the war, an experience he refers to cynically as “die große Schweinerei.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> VdK 255 – 256; “In art, literature, and film, the creature shows up as the final station in a life story: as the soldier who has lost his armoring; as a defenseless worker put up against the wall by Freikorps rabble; as a pitiful soul at the mercy of the bureaucracy; as an ex-porter in the Grand Hotel who ends up in charge of the toilets; and ‘naturally’—barred, as we saw in Plessner’s anthropology, from the sphere of artificiality—as the woman who turns on the gas, who endures life as a prostitute, who murders her child” (CC 204 – 205).

<sup>108</sup> VdK 244; “Its physiognomy reflects a social situation, shields nakedness, overcomes shame, evidences a defensive reaction to mortal fear or an ambition to be demonic, striking a ferocious pose among the besiegers” (CC 195).

<sup>109</sup> M 50; “the whole rotten business” (GH 43).

Although Otternschlag is described as a man “dessen Beine wie ohne Gelenke waren,”<sup>110</sup> he is not otherwise physically crippled like the one-armed army veterans who operate the Grand Hôtel’s elevator. Observing Otternschlag from the side, he appears to be the epitome of classical beauty, with “einem jesuitenhaft verfeinerten und zugespitzten Profil, das mit einem außerordentlich schöngebauten Ohr unter dünngrauen Schläfenhaar abschloß.”<sup>111</sup> Otternschlag is, however, described as both physically and psychologically scarred, crippled emotionally as a direct result of his experiences in war. Describing the incident in his own words, we get a feel for Otternschlag’s personality. “Granate in die Visage, Diphtheriebazillen in der Wunde herumgeschleppt bis 1920. Isoliert gelegen zwei Jahre. Na. Genug. Punkt dahinter.”<sup>112</sup> As Baum describes it, the other side of Otternschlag’s face “war nicht vorhanden.”<sup>113</sup> His face embodies the physical scarring of the war cripple, consisting only of “einen schiefen, ineinandergeflickten und zusammengelappten Wirrwarr, in dem zwischen Nähten und Narben ein Glasauge blickte. Souvernir aus Flandern, pflegte Doktor Otternschlag dieses sein Gesicht zu nennen, wenn er mit sich sprach...”<sup>114</sup> This facial

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<sup>110</sup> M 7; Creighton translates this phrase simply by writing that Otternschlag has “stiff legs” (GH 3), but a more direct translation would be that Otternschlag’s legs were so stiff that it appeared “as if they didn’t have joints.”

<sup>111</sup> M 7; “the sharp and aesthetic profile of a Jesuit was completed by an unusually well-shaped ear beneath the sparse gray hair on his temples” (GH 3).

<sup>112</sup> M 50; “Shell in the face. Diphtheria germs messing around in the wound till 1920. Two years isolation hospital. There, that’s enough. Full stop” (GH 44).

<sup>113</sup> M 7; “was not there” (GH 3).

<sup>114</sup> M 7; “a confused medley of seams and scars, crossing and overlapping, and among them was set a glass eye. ‘A souvenir from Flanders,’ Dr. Otternschlag was accustomed to call it when talking to himself” (GH 3).

scarring combined with his “Skelettschultern im schmalen Smoking”<sup>115</sup> creates the image of the physical shell of a once great man.

Lethen writes that the war cripple “repräsentiert einerseits noch Restbestände des Kältepanzers der soldatischen persona, andererseits die verletzte organische Substanz der Kreatur, die der Panzer verbergen sollte.”<sup>116</sup> It is interesting to note that on multiple occasions Baum refers to Otternschlag’s hands as being metallic or otherwise metaphorically encased in a sort of armor:

Die dünnen, gelbgerauchten Hände hingen ihm zwischen den gespreizten Knien hinab und waren so schwer, als ob sie in bleiernen Handschuhen steckten.<sup>117</sup>

[Er] legte seine dünnen Finger auf die Tischplatte zwischen sich und Kringelein, wie zehn kalte, schwere Stangen aus Metall.<sup>118</sup>

Die bleiernen, angerauchten Fingerspitzen hingen ihm hinunter, und mit dem blinden Auge starrte er die Scheuerfrau an, die ungehörigerweise am hellen Tag die Halle des Grand Hôtel mit feuchten Sägespänen zu fegen began.<sup>119</sup>

The remnants of Otternschlag’s *kalte persona* armoring combine with his physically scarred physique to epitomize his “injured organic substance,” which comes through most clearly in Baum’s descriptions of Otternschlag’s physical deformity. Building on the theme that Otternschlag is merely the shell of a man, there are numerous references

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<sup>115</sup> M 54; interestingly, the English translation does not convey the comparison of Dr. Otternschlag to a walking skeleton, citing namely that his “dinner jacket was stretched tightly over his shoulder blades” (GH 48).

<sup>116</sup> VdK 246; “has what remains of the cool armoring of the soldierly persona and embodies the Creature’s injured organic substance, which the armor was supposed to protect” (CC 196).

<sup>117</sup> M 11; “His thin tobacco-stained hands hung down between his parted knees as though they were encased in lead” (GH 6).

<sup>118</sup> M 47; “[He] laid his skeleton fingers on the table between himself and Kringelein, like ten cold, heavy metal bars” (GH 41 – 42).

<sup>119</sup> M 192; “His leaden cigarette-stained fingers hung down, and he stared with his blind eye at the charwoman who, contrary to all orders, was beginning in broad daylight to sweep out the lounge with moist sawdust” (GH 181).

to Otternschlag staring at people through his glass eye. Otternschlag pessimistically comments on the world by saying, “wenn man die Welt durch ein Glasauge anschaut, da siehtse ganz merkwürdig aus, kann ich Ihnen versichern.”<sup>120</sup> Precisely this act of staring, intentionally or unintentionally, is another contributing factor physically creating distance between Otternschlag and all other people.

Otternschlag’s physical deformity is not the only factor that creates distance. Due to his experiences in the war, he is also psychologically merely a shell of the man he used to be. Already in the first few pages of the novel, Baum associates Otternschlag with an overwhelming attitude of pessimism:

Die Welt war eine bröckliche Angelegenheit, nicht zu fassen, nicht zu halten. Man fiel von Leere zu Leere. Man trug einen Sack voll Finsternis in sich herum. Dieser Doktor Otternschlag wohnt in der tiefsten Einsamkeit, obwohl die Erde voll ist von seinesgleichen...<sup>121</sup>

This last sentence in particular illustrates the peculiar case of the Creature. “Immer schuf er eine Entfernung zwischen sich und den anderen, aber das wußte er nicht.”<sup>122</sup>

Despite his sometimes overwhelming desire for human contact, the Creature’s attitude and mask prohibit the possibility of any such interaction.

Baum notes that Otternschlag has lived at the Grand Hôtel for a few months every year for the last ten years, and all he does is sit in the lobby from morning until

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<sup>120</sup> M 260; based on the context of this quotation, where Otternschlag is comparing his pessimistic view of life to Gaigern’s optimistic view despite their shared experiences in the war, I think the English translation of “merkwürdig” does not convey the true meaning of Otternschlag’s words, which I interpret as being “odd” or “strange” as opposed to potentially positive connotations associated with “remarkable”: “But when you look at the world through a glass eye, it has a remarkable appearance, I can assure you” (GH 246).

<sup>121</sup> M 12; “The world was a crumbling affair, not to be grasped or held. You fell from vacancy to vacancy. You carried around a sack of darkness inside you. Dr. Otternschlag lived in the most utter loneliness—although the earth is full of people like him...” (GH 8).

<sup>122</sup> M 12; “He always set a distance between himself and others, though he was not aware of it” (GH 7).

late at night, staring at people through his glass eye. One of the rare interactions he has with other people is when he asks the porter, multiple times every day, if he has received any letters, telegrams, or if anyone has asked for him. The answer is always the same: “Diesmal leider nichts, Herr Doktor.”<sup>123</sup> The porters behind the counter take pity on Otternschlag, but they never make their pity known to him when they are interacting with him. “Noch nie ist ein Brief gekommen, und kein Hund hat nach ihm gefragt.”<sup>124</sup> This sense of rejection fills Otternschlag with an overwhelming sense of abandonment. “Alles war so tot. Die Stunde war tot. Die Halle war tot. Die Leute waren fortgegangen zu ihren Geschäften, ihren Vergnügen, ihren Lastern und hatten ihn allein hier sitzen lassen.”<sup>125</sup> His own actions and demeanor perpetuate distance between him and anyone who tries to interact with him. For example, when people offer Otternschlag their hands in a gesture of friendship, he refuses to shake their hands, “denn seine eigene war kalt und feucht, und das hemmte ihn.”<sup>126</sup> When he orders cigarettes and newspapers from the page-boys, he also avoids any kind of human contact. “Otternschlag bezahlte, er legte Geld auf die kleine Tischplatte, nicht in die Hand des Pagen.”<sup>127</sup> Unlike the *kalte persona* who deliberately seeks distance from human warmth, the Creature both intentionally, as in his avoidance of shaking hands, and unintentionally, because of his physically and emotionally scarred persona, causes distance when it appears it desires the exact opposite.

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<sup>123</sup> M 7; “Not today, Herr Doktor” (GH 4).

<sup>124</sup> M 8; “Not a letter has he ever had and not even a dog has ever asked for him” (GH 4).

<sup>125</sup> M 11; “Everything was so dead. The lounge was dead. Everyone had gone out to his business or pleasures or vices, and had left him there to sit alone” (GH 7).

<sup>126</sup> M 212; “for his own was cold and moist and that embarrassed him” (GH 200).

<sup>127</sup> M 12; “When he paid, he put the money on the plate, not into the boy’s hand” (GH 7).

Another remnant of the *kalte persona*'s attitude inherent in the figure of the Creature is the urge to always remain mobile, a desire which comes through most clearly in Bertolt Brecht's *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner*:

Reden Sie nichts von Gefahr!  
 In einem Tank kommen Sie nicht durch ein Kanalgitter:  
 Sie müssen schon aussteigen.  
 Ihren Teekocher lassen Sie am besten liegen  
 Sie müssen sehen, daß Sie selber durchkommen.

Geld müssen Sie haben  
 Ich frage Sie nicht, wo Sie es hernehmen  
 Aber ohne Geld brauchen Sie gar nicht abzufahren.  
 Und hier können Sie nicht bleiben, Mann.<sup>128</sup>

Baum portrays this desire for instant mobility through references to Otternschlag's attitude to his residence in the Grand Hôtel. "Meine Koffer sind gepackt. Meine Koffer sind immer gepackt."<sup>129</sup> This sentiment is repeated by Otternschlag several times throughout the novel. Despite the incomplete armoring of the *kalte persona*, which no longer offers any protection to Otternschlag, he retains the *kalte persona*'s determination of being able to pick up and leave at a moment's notice. "In Bereitschaft sein—das ist es natürlich, wie Shakespeare so hübsch sagt. Bereit zur Abreise—in jeder Minute bereit, verstehense?"<sup>130</sup> I will return to the significance of Otternschlag's packed suitcase in more detail shortly.

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<sup>128</sup> Brecht, *Lesebuch*, qtd.in VdK 141; "Don't talk about danger! / You can't drive a tank through a manhole: / You'll have to get out. / Better abandon your primus [German original: tea kettle] / You've got to see that you yourself come through. / Of course you need money / I'm not asking where you get it from / But unless you've got money you needn't bother to go. / And you can't stay here, man" ("Ten Poems" 138 ff., qtd. in CC 108).

<sup>129</sup> M 17; "My boxes are packed. They're always packed" (GH12).

<sup>130</sup> M 255; "To be prepared—that's the thing, as Shakespeare so finely puts it. Ready to move on, ready at any moment, don't you see?" (GH 242).

As I stated earlier, both Gaigern and Otternschlag were greatly affected by their experiences in war. Not only were both soldiers during World War I, but in an interesting turn of events, Otternschlag and Gaigern had previous contact with each other prior to their random meeting at the Grand Hôtel in Berlin:

Otternschlag streckte seine Hand aus und zeigte mit seinem schweren, gelbgerauchten Zeigefinger in Gaigern's zurückweichendes Gesicht. "Hier habe ich Ihnen einmal einen hübschen Granatsplitter herausgeholt. Die nette Naht, die Ihnen so interessant steht, habe ich genäht—Sie erinnern sich nicht?—in Fromelles? Ihresgleichen vergißt alles. Unsereiner muß sich alles merken, kann nichts loswerden, nichts."<sup>131</sup>

This incidental reunion not only reiterates the Creature's inability to heal from a traumatic past, but also allows me to explore the similarities and difference between the Creature and the *kalte persona* in more detail.

Gaigern differs from Otternschlag mainly in his outlook on life. Despite being wounded in the war—granted, to a much lesser extent than Otternschlag—Gaigern appreciates life after the war, even though he acknowledges it was difficult to adjust to civilian life:

"Mit dem Zurückkommen ist es nicht einfach gewesen. [...] Man ist unbändig geworden und hat keinen Platz. Was soll unsereiner mit sich anfangen? Reichswehr? Drill? Bei Wahlraufereien eingreifen? Danke. Flieger, Pilot? Ich habe es versucht. Täglich zweimal nach dem Fahrplan loszuckeln, Berlin—Köln—Berlin. Forschungsreisender, Expedition, das alles ist so abgekocht und ohne Gefahr. Sehen Sie, das ist es: Das Leben müßte ein bißchen gefährlicher sein, dann ware es gut. Aber man nimmt's, wie's kommt."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> M 257; "Otternschlag extended his arm and pointed with his heavy, tobacco-stained forefinger at Gaigern's face. Gaigern drew back. 'I once took a nice shall splinter out of your face just there. That charming night you found so interesting [as can be seen here, the translator mistook "Naht" for "Nacht": Otternschlag here is referring to Gaigern's scar, not the time of day the surgery took place]; I stitched it up for you—you don't remember—at Fromelles? Your sort forgets everything. It's another story for me. I forget nothing'" (GH 244).

<sup>132</sup> M 259; "It wasn't very easy coming back. [...] We've become intractable and there's no place for us. What can any of us start to do with himself? Reichswehr? Drill? Electioneering scrimmages? Thanks!

In order to perpetuate the thrill caused by the sense of imminent danger of battle, Gaigern chooses to retain the mask of *kalte persona*, more specifically, that of the confidence man, and deliberately puts himself in risky and life-threatening situations, like that of scaling the façade of the Grand Hôtel to steal Grusinskaja's pearls, as I analyzed earlier.

In stark contrast, Otternschlag, who is both physically and psychologically scarred from the horrors of the war, cannot understand how anyone who experienced war can return to anything resembling a normal life:

“So. Großartig finden Sie es [das Leben]? Sie waren doch auch im Krieg. Und dann sind Sie heimgekommen, und dann finden Sie das Leben großartig? Ja, Mensch, wie existiert ihr denn alle? Habt ihr denn alle vergessen? Gut, gut, wir wollen nicht davon sprechen, wie es draußen war, wir wissen es ja alle. Aber wie denn? Wie könnt ihr denn zurückkommen von dort und noch sagen: das Leben gefällt mir? Wo ist es denn, euer Leben? Ich habe es gesucht, ich habe es nicht gefunden.”<sup>133</sup>

Several times in the novel, Otternschlag comments—to himself, or to anyone else who will listen—that he is not sure he even survived the war at all. “Manchmal denke ich mir: Ich bin schon tot, eine Granate hat mir den Kopf weggerissen und ich sitze als Leiche verschüttet die ganze Zeit im Unterstand von Rouge-Croix.”<sup>134</sup> Otternschlag cannot escape from the horrors of the war even in his dreams. During his morphine-

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Flying? I've tried it. Toddling off twice daily according to timetable, Berlin—Cologne—Berlin. And as for voyages of discovery, that's all so stale and without danger. That's what it is, you see. Life ought to be a little more dangerous, and then it would be alright. But you have to take it as it comes" (GH 246).

<sup>133</sup> M 259; “Indeed? You find it [life] splendid? And yet you were in the war. And then you find life splendid? And what, man, have you done about it all? Have you forgotten it all? There—we won't talk of what it was like out there. We all know that well enough. But how can you come back after that, and still say you're pleased with life? Where do you find it—this life of yours? I have looked for life, but I can't find it" (GH 246).

<sup>134</sup> M 259; “I often think to myself: I'm dead already. A shell has torn my head from my shoulders, and I'm sitting as a corpse all the time buried in that dug-out at Rouge Croix" (GH 246).

induced sleep, Otternschlag often dreams of the joys of human contact: he dreams of a dream town, a dream house, a dream wife, and a dream child. However, exactly that which he desires most quickly turns into a nightmare. He realizes his dream child cannot be his because it was conceived and born while he was in captivity, and the child screams in horror every time it sees Otternschlag's "zerschossenes Gesicht."<sup>135</sup> The nightmare spirals until he "herunterstürzt durch einen brennenden Himmel voll platzender Granaten bis in sein Hotelbett."<sup>136</sup> After waking from this recurrent nightmare, the only thing that can calm his nerves and help him return to his restless sleep is another injection of morphine.

Lethen describes the Creature as "das der Gnade bedürftige Wesen in einer Zeit, die keine Gnadeninstanzen kennt, da sein Schöpfer unwiderruflich in weite Ferne gerückt ist und bürgerliche Institutionen es nicht auffangen können."<sup>137</sup> Since society shows no mercy towards Otternschlag, he is prepared to take a stand and provide mercy to himself. He declares that once life becomes too overwhelming for him, he has already made up his mind how he will cope:

"Ich bin ein Selbstmörder, verstehense. Gewöhnlich sieht man Selbstmörder erst nachher, wennse schon am Gasschlauch gneckelt oder losgeknallt haben. Ich, wie ich hier sitze, bin also ein Selbstmörder vorher, mit einem Wort. Ich bin ein lebender Selbstmörder, eine Rarität, werden Sie zugeben. Eines Tages nehme ich aus dieser Schachtel zehn Ampullen, rein damit in die Vene—und dann bin ich ein toter Selbstmörder. Ich spaziere raus aus der Drehtür, bildlich gesprochen, und Sie können drin sitzen bleiben in der Halle und warten."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> M 319; "mangled face" (GH 302).

<sup>136</sup> M 319; "crashes down through a burning sky of bursting shells and arrives on his bed in the hotel" (GH 302).

<sup>137</sup> VdK 256; "a being in need of mercy in a time that knows no source for it, since the creator has retreated to an impossible distance and bourgeois institutions cannot make up for the loss" (CC 205).

<sup>138</sup> M 258; "I am a suicide, you must understand. As a rule, you only see suicides after the event—when they have already turned on the gas or pulled the trigger. I, as I sit here, am a living suicide—a rarity,

Ironically, the only thing that keeps Otternschlag living in what he refers to as “eine miserable Sorte von Dasein”<sup>139</sup> is the knowledge that once everything becomes too much for him to handle, he has the ultimate control over ending his own life. “Deshalb lobe ich mir meinen kleinen Koffer. Eigentlich kann man das, was einem hier auf der Welt zugemutet wird, doch nur aushalten, wenn man weiß, daß man in jeden Augenblick Schluß machen kann, wie?”<sup>140</sup> It is precisely for this reason that Otternschlag keeps his bags packed: not so that he can leave the hotel on a moment’s notice in order to survive, but rather so he can take his doctor’s bag, fill his syringe with a lethal dose of morphine, and commit suicide.

At the end of the novel, after waking up from his recurrent nightmare once again, Otternschlag decides that he has finally had enough. “‘Es ist genug’, sagt er zu sich selbst. ‘Ich habe die Nase voll. Wie lange noch? Wozu noch? Nein, wir wollen einmal fertig werden.’”<sup>141</sup> He takes out his doctor’s satchel, fills a syringe with more than enough morphine to kill himself, but for some unknown reason, at the last moment he cannot go through with it. “Er drückt die Spritze aus, ohne sie zu benutzen, läßt ihren kostbaren, erschlichenen, erschwindelten Inhalt einfach in die Luft rinnen bis auf einen letzten, kleinen, ungefährlichen Rest, den er seinem hungrigen Organismus

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you will agree. One of these days I shall take ten of these ampoules out of this box and inject them into my veins—and then I shall be a living suicide no longer. I shall march out through the revolving door, figuratively speaking; and you can sit in the lounge and wait” (GH 245).

<sup>139</sup> M 257; “miserable sort of existence” (GH 243).

<sup>140</sup> M 257; “That’s why I value my little trunk so highly. You cannot really put up with all the pain that being on this earth entails unless you know that at any moment you can make an end of it” (GH 243).

<sup>141</sup> M 319 – 320; “‘It’s enough,’ he said to himself. ‘That’s done it. How long have I to put up with it? And what’s the use? No, we’ll make an end of it’” (GH 302).

vergönnt.”<sup>142</sup> The novel ends with Otternschlag, “ein versteinerte Statue der Einsamkeit und des Ausgestorbenseins,”<sup>143</sup> sitting alone in the lobby to the hotel, watching through his glass eye as life continues without taking any notice of him. “Die gelben Hände aus blei hängen ihm herunter, und mit dem Glasauge starrt er auf die Straße hinaus, die voll ist von einer Sonne, die er nicht sehen kann.”<sup>144</sup> Unable to fully live after experiencing the horrors of war first-hand, Otternschlag’s fragile inner being, which was supposed to be protected by the armoring of the *kalte persona*, becomes painfully clear. The tattered remnants of the *kalte persona*’s armoring remain on this shell of a man, who sits alone in the hotel lobby, shielding himself from the outside world through the mask of the Creature.

In *Verhaltenlehren der Kälte*, Helmut Lethen argues that during times of extreme social, financial, and political turbulence such as the Weimar Republic, “die äußere Stimme, der Mann sich unterwerfen will, [fällt aus] und die innere Kontrollinstanz [ist] in Miskredit geraten.”<sup>145</sup> As a result, “die Horizonte der Orientierung [stürzen] ein und der Bewegungsraum des Menschen [steht] unter extreme agonaler Spannung.”<sup>146</sup> In order to help individuals cope not only with the overwhelming uncertainties of society but also to compensate for the loss of their discredited sense of personal inner-directed morality, numerous anthropologists and

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<sup>142</sup> M 320; “He emptied the syringe without using it, squirting all its precious and surreptitiously acquired contents into the air with the exception of a few harmless drops with which he appeased the cravings of his nerves” (GH 302).

<sup>143</sup> M 325; “a stone image of Loneliness and Death” (GH 309).

<sup>144</sup> M 325; “His yellow hands hang down like lead, and with his glass eye he stares out into the street which is full of sunshine that he cannot see...” (GH 309).

<sup>145</sup> VdK 36; “the external voices to which individuals have attended are no longer clearly audible and the interior seat of judgment is no longer credited” (CC 12).

<sup>146</sup> VdK 64; “social ties fail and extreme agonistic tension fills the space in which individuals interact” (CC 42).

writers of the Weimar Republic advocated a return to a pre-bourgeois rational type: one who rejects the inner moral compass of the conscience and looks outwardly for codes of conduct to regulate individual behavior.

Codes of conduct abounded during the Weimar Republic, appearing in numerous forms from typologies to manifestoes. These *Verhaltenslehren* helped to regulate social and moral order, compensating for the sudden loss of the legitimacy of social institutions resulting from the collapse of the Wilhelmine Empire. Distinguishing morality from depravity by assigning moral judgments to observable physical traits and behaviors, these codes helped create and stabilize the sometimes questionable boundaries between the “self” and the “other.”

In his analysis of the literature of the Weimar Republic, Lethen sees the discrediting of the conscience and the urgent need for external codes of conduct—advocated by 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Jesuit, Balthasar Gracián—and the need for cold armoring of the psyche as a form of protection—advocated by 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologist Helmuth Plessner—merging together to form three artificial types that model how individuals may confront the uncertainties of modernity while at the same time offering a sense of protection. The *kalte persona* not only discards the inner moral compass in favor of external codes of conduct, but also adopts a series of masks to create distance and distance oneself from the dangers of community. Exhibiting an overwhelming consumerist attitude, the Radar Type also looks outside of the self for guidance, but instead of creating distance from society, the Radar Type registers the winds of fashion and others’ consumptive behavior as a guide for living one’s own life.

The Creature, for Lethen, represents the other side of modern consciousness: either still exhibiting remnants of the *kalte persona*'s armoring or unable to successfully adopt any sort of protective armoring, the Creature exposes the fragile yet wounded inner being that the armor was supposed to protect. The Creature, therefore, guarantees protection from the dangers of society by preventing the individual from ever being welcomed as a member of society.

This chapter focused on the phenomena of the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature as they are portrayed by Baum's male protagonists in order to argue against Lethen's exclusion of non-canonical literature. By demonstrating that the presence of Lethen's three artificial types can be discerned in Vicki Baum's serialized novel *Menschen im Hotel*, I have shown that literary representations of the pre-bourgeois and externally-directed *kalte persona*, the consumerist and pleasure-seeking Radar Type, and the physically and emotionally scarred Creature were not merely limited to established canonical texts. In contrast to the canonical literature Lethen analyzes, which has a very limited audience, I argue that non-canonical and popular literature, such as Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*, has the potential both to present these models of survival in a manner much more accessible to a great number of citizens in the Weimar Republic who did not have the privilege of a university education.

Just as Lethen argues that the Creature can only be instructive as a grotesque, I argue that the representation of all three types—the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature—show Baum's readers the potential benefits and disadvantages associated with these types, regardless of the gender of the character who represents them. In the

portrayals above, none of these types appear to be truly successful or even desirable. As I will examine in the next chapter, the women protagonists not only in Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*, but also in her *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and in Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi—eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* all actively adopt the mask of the *kalte persona*, challenging Lethen's argument that the *kalte persona* is a purely masculine phenomenon that precludes women from successfully adopting the characteristics of the *kalte persona* as a survival technique. I will argue specifically not only that the women characters in these novels *are* able to successfully adopt the characteristics of the *kalte persona* as confidence-trickster as illustrated by Baron von Gaigern, but more importantly, that these women protagonists actively transform these characteristics into the persona of a confidence-*woman*, thereby providing a literary example of how women are able to both adopt and adapt masks of cold calculation into specifically feminine modes of survival.

## Chapter Two

### “Wat biste so kalt—”: The New Woman as *kalte persona*

As I showed in the previous chapter, Lethen argues that the men of the Weimar Republic surrendered to the artificial nature of society and adopted a series of masks as a means of protection, in turn ensuring protection by creating adequate distance from other members of society. These masks, especially the mask of the *kalte persona*, were often fluid by necessity, allowing individuals to adapt quickly to various situations in an attempt to protect their fragile inner-selves from shame. Lethen writes, “Erst die neusachlichen Schriftstellerinnen zeigen uns dann Frauen, die sich ihrerseits eine exzentrische Lebensführung aneignen, um zu überleben.”<sup>147</sup> Yet in his analysis, he fails to adequately explore the possibility of a woman *kalte persona*, instead relegating women to the more passive roles of the Radar Type and the Creature.

In this chapter, I argue that Lethen’s gender bias regarding the mask of the *kalte persona* as a purely male phenomenon merely perpetuates traditional gender roles, as can be seen in his analysis of the writings of Gracián, Plessner, Krauss, and others. Helene in Vicki Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Flämmchen in Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel*, Gilgi in Irmgard Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns*, and Doris in Keun’s *Das*

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<sup>147</sup> VdK 101; the following quotation from Reneau’s translation does not correctly capture the true meaning of Lethen’s words: “It remains for the women writers of the new objectivity to show us female characters who themselves, for the sake of their own survival, tend toward eccentricity” (CC 74), whereas the meaning of Lethen’s original is that the women writers of the Weimar Republic were *the first* to show these female characters.

*kunstseidene Mädchen* are four different representations of the phenomenon of the New Woman in Weimar Germany. These women not only participate in the traditionally male-dominated realm of the world outside the home but also actively challenge traditional notions of gender roles in the Weimar Republic. In my reading of these novels, I argue that all of these women protagonists deliberately and, to a certain degree, successfully adopt and adapt the characteristics of the *kalte persona* for their own survival.

In *Sentiment und Sachlichkeit: Der Roman der Neuen Frau in der Weimarer Republik*, Kerstin Barndt argues against reading Vicki Baum's and Irmgard Keun's novels through the lens of Lethen's masculine-dominated categories of *kalte persona*, Radar Type, and Creature. By attempting to force the phenomenon of the New Woman into explicitly male categories, she argues, scholars ignore the importance of the necessary revision of the implicitly "masculine" identity of New Objectivity.<sup>148</sup> I counter Barndt's theory by arguing that I am not attempting to show how women can be viewed through male categories, but rather to show that women authors created women protagonists who, as I will show, not only adopted, but deliberately modified the masking qualities of the *kalte persona*. By doing so, these women protagonists portrayed specifically feminine attitudes of coldness that both protected women and allowed them to negotiate the adequate amount of distance necessary to navigate the male-dominated patriarchal society of Weimar Germany. Although not always adopting masks of coldness, I argue that these women are *kalte personae* in that they consciously adopt and adapt the principles of the *kalte persona*, sometimes even by

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<sup>148</sup> Barndt, *Sentiment* 3.

using masks of warmth, and by doing so, these women protagonists transform themselves into “Subjekte im Panzer,”<sup>149</sup> providing a model of how women, like men, can protect themselves from shame.

In this chapter, after introducing and arguing against Lethen’s gender-biased analysis of the *kalte persona*, I apply Lethen’s model of the *kalte persona* to several women protagonists from Baum’s and Keun’s novels. My analysis will illustrate how the successful use of the mask of the *kalte persona* can be seen in the literary portrayals not only of powerful, educated men, but that such use can also be seen in representations of individuals from all levels of society, regardless of gender, educational background, or social status. I argue against the gendered disparity of Lethen’s argument and show how these novels offer concrete examples of women who actively and successfully manipulate attitudes of coldness in order to survive. In addition, by adopting the masking such as that advocated by Plessner and demonstrating the conscious rejection of an inner-moral compass as advocated by Gracián, I argue that these women protagonists also become models of *con-women*, putting on masks of warmth in order to take advantage of men for their personal gain.

Just as men adopted masks in order to distance themselves from the warmth of society, I will introduce Joan Riviere’s concept of “womanliness as masquerade” and argue that this masquerade acts as a specifically female adaptation of the masking advocated by the *kalte persona*, one that protects women by both manipulating men for personal gain and creating the adequate amount of cold distance necessary to protect women in a society where the majority of power remains in the hands of these men. I

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<sup>149</sup> VdK 168; “armored subjects” (CC 131).

argue that women, like men, both successfully adopted and benefited from the use of protective masks, and that Baum's and Keun's novels provided implicit *Verhaltenslehren* to their women readers by providing examples not only of how women from different class, social, and educational backgrounds are able to use cold calculation to and survive and prosper in Weimar society, but also how these women protagonists critique the use of coldness as a necessary or desired option for survival.

In his 1911 essay "Weibliche Kultur," the sociologist Georg Simmel argues that objective culture is inherently male. "Männer haben die Kunst und die Industrie, die Wissenschaft und den Handel, den Staat und die Religion geschaffen."<sup>150</sup> Simmel illustrates that traditionally "unzulängliche Leistungen der verschiedensten Gebiete 'feminin' deklassiert und hervorragende weibliche Leistungen als 'ganz männlich' gerühmt werden."<sup>151</sup> He envisions the public and the private spheres as two contrasting poles, concluding that the private realm of the home is inherently female, while the public sphere outside the home is by nature much more suited to the male:

Arbeitsteilung aber ist, wie die ganze Geschichte der Arbeit zeigt, offenbar dem männlichen Wesen unvergleichlich viel adäquater als dem Weiblichen. Noch heute, wo gerade sie dem Haushalt eine große Anzahl differenter Aufgaben, die früher in seiner Einheit erfüllt wurden, entzogen hat, ist die Tätigkeit der Hausfrau eine mannigfaltigere, weniger spezialistisch festgelegte, als irgendein männlicher Beruf.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Simmel, "Weibliche Kultur" 270; "It is men who have created art and industry, science and commerce, the state and religion" ("Female Culture" 67).

<sup>151</sup> Simmel, "Weibliche Kultur" 270; "deficient performances in the most diverse areas are degraded as 'feminine' while outstanding performances of women are celebrated as 'thoroughly manly'" ("Female Culture" 67).

<sup>152</sup> Simmel, "Weibliche Kultur" 273; "The division of labor is incomparably more congruent with the male nature than with the female. Even today, when it is precisely the division of labor that has removed from the household a large number of differentiated tasks that were formerly carried out within its unity, the activity of the housewife is more diversified and less specialized than any male occupation" ("Female Culture" 70).

Despite what may seem like an overtly negative view of femininity, as Mülder-Bach notes, Simmel does acknowledge that women play an important role in society. “Ihre Kulturmission wird die Frau nur erfüllen können, wenn sie etwas leistet, was der Mann nicht leisten kann, wenn es ihr gelingt, einen ‘neuen’, spezifisch weiblichen ‘Weltteil der Kultur’ zu schaffen.”<sup>153</sup> Simmel argues that the only adequate space where women could successfully fulfill this *Kulturmission* was the private domestic sphere of the home, where women were expected to assume the idealized role of loving mothers and wives. Therefore, it was the role of the women to ensure that the home was a desirable place for the men, a welcome escape from the perceived dangers and temptations of the male-dominated world outside of the home.

Lethen argues that despite their desire for coldness as a form of protection from the perceived dangers of society, “die Kältelehrer der Distanz kannten einen unermeßlichen Bedarf an Wärmequellen, die jedoch—Plessners Grenz-Schrift hatte es demonstriert—aus der Arena des Kampfes selbst ausgeschlossen bleiben.”<sup>154</sup> This source of warmth “excluded from the arena of struggle itself” came from women in the safety of one’s home. In the following quotation, Lethen shows how Plessner bars women from the “sphere of artificiality” in his *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, in turn relegating them to the private sphere:

Im “Gnadengeschenk” ihrer Liebe ist das Sich-los-Lassen ausnahmsweise zugelassen. [...] Aus der Sphäre der Künstlichkeit

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<sup>153</sup> Mülder-Bach, “Weibliche Kultur” 134; “Women will only be able to fulfill their cultural mission when they accomplish something that allows them to create a ‘new,’ specifically feminine ‘continent of culture.’”

<sup>154</sup> VdK 182; “The advocates of cool distance also experienced an immense need for sources of warmth, which, however—as Plessner’s *Grenzen* demonstrated—they excluded from the arena of struggle itself” (CC 143).

verbannt, verbürgen die Frauen, wie schon im 18. Jahrhundert, die erste Natur, weil sie im “zweiten Vaterland” der symbolischen Ordnung ihre Identität nicht realisieren können.<sup>155</sup>

As can be seen in this example, Plessner’s own attitudes towards women perpetuated the traditional views of the roles of women. As with Simmel, Plessner argues that whereas men needed to consciously mask themselves in order to survive outside the home, because of the nurturing environment provided by women, men were able to take comfort in the warmth of human companionship that they shunned outside the home.

Following this thought, women, therefore, regularly interacted with unmasked men. Even as women became increasingly visible in the traditionally male-dominated urban environment outside the home, in the eyes of many men they remained sources of warmth and protection from the coldness of society. There are numerous examples in Vicki Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Irmgard Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* where men shed their masks in the presence of women and expose their weakness. The types of comfort that men seek from Baum’s and Keun’s women protagonists can be separated into three main categories: first, sexual companionship in substitution for unhappy or unfulfilling marital relationships; second, solace from substitute “mothers” who offer compassion and understanding for men on the brink of psychological and emotional collapse; and third, monetary assistance asked by men who are not able to financially support themselves and their families. In all of the following situations, Baum and Keun’s

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<sup>155</sup> VdK 94; “By the ‘merciful gift’ of [the woman’s] love, a man can, exceptionally, let himself go. [...] Banned from the world of artificiality, as in the eighteenth century, woman is still the preserver of first nature, because she is incapable of realizing an identity in the ‘second fatherland’ of the symbolic order” (CC 67).

women protagonists, as well as their readers, are able to see not only the masks these men use for protection, but also the weak men hiding behind these masks.

As more women entered the white collar workforce as typists and secretaries, the social dynamic in the traditionally male-dominated office changed as well. Women were often subject to sexual advances from their male co-workers and employers, a widely discussed phenomenon that was both portrayed and critiqued in the popular culture of the time. In the following examples, the male employers of both Gilgi and Flämmchen, the latter from Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*, shed their masks of power and control and expose themselves as weak to their women employees.

Gilgi's employer confides to Gilgi that "seine Ehe ist ganz und gar nicht gut, sein Leben ist verpfuscht, man ist ein alter Trottel, festgefahren in einem Krämerberuf."<sup>156</sup> Far from being the strong, professional man he appears to be in the office, he exposes his true weakness to Gilgi, hoping that she will feel pity for him and validate his waning self-esteem by engaging in sexual intercourse with him. "Seine Hand verirrt sich auf Gilgis Knie und wird von Gilgi sanft entfernt. 'Ich fühle mich so allein, könntest du mir nicht ein wenig gut sein, Kind?'"<sup>157</sup> A similar sexually charged conversation occurs between Flämmchen and her employer: Preysing "trat hinter sie und nahm vorsichtig ihre Ellbogen, die sie an den Körper preßte, in seine beiden Hände. 'Wird man freundlich zu mir sein?' fragte er leise."<sup>158</sup> Both these men, drained by the

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<sup>156</sup> Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* will be designated by "G" followed by the page number. The novel was never translated into English, so all the translations of *Gilgi* will be my own.

<sup>157</sup> G 19; "His hand strays to Gilgi's knee, and is gently removed by Gilgi. "I feel so alone, couldn't you be a little bit good to me, child?"

<sup>158</sup> M 235; "[Preysing] went behind her and carefully took hold of her elbows. They were lightly pressed to her sides. 'Will you be kind to me?' he asked softly" (GH 222).

pressures of work and family, shed their masks of unwavering power, confess their weaknesses, and attempt to regain a sense of power and self-worth by coercing their women employees to engage in sexual intercourse with them. It must be noted here, however, that although these men shed their masks, they do not relinquish their power over their women employees. As I will explore later in this chapter, both of these women must carefully choose their verbal and physical responses or they may risk losing their jobs.

The second group of men, driven almost to the brink of despair by the pressures of society, do not merely reveal glimpses of themselves, but rather fully lose their protective masks altogether and fully expose the true weakness of their inner beings in the presence of women. In *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Ernst, a middle-aged man bitterly crushed when his wife left him to pursue a career in show business, breaks down in Doris' presence. "Da weint er—es ist ein Ausbruch wie bei dem Trapper—ich befasse sein Haar und mache: nana."<sup>159</sup> Doris, who was desperately trying to get Ernst to fall in love with her, has indeed adopted the role of "wife," but more in the form of a comforter and not, as she had hoped, as a sexual partner or love interest.

In *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Helene's academic adviser, Professor Ambrosius, also completely loses his composure in the presence of his young student after his wife leaves him. Although only implied in Doris' situation, Baum makes it explicitly clear that Helene, who is young enough to be Ambrosius' daughter, adopts the consoling role of a substitute mother:

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<sup>159</sup> *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* will be cited as "KM," and the English translation, *The Artificial Silk Girl* will be cited as "ASG." KM 135; "Then he starts to cry—it's an outburst like that Trapper's. I touch his hair and say: Dear, dear" (ASG 183).

Er ließ sich fallen. Er nahm seine Hände aus der Verklammerung, löste sich von den Gepäcknetzen, von der nächtigen Fensterscheibe los und ließ sich einfach zu Helene hinfallen, wie zu einer Mutter. Da nahm sie ihn in die Arme, ganz fest, ganz stark, ganz frauenhaft. Er bettete den Kopf auf ihre Schulter, er weinte noch immer, aber nun wurde es eine flutende Wohltat. [...] Dann war es vorbei, zerlief in Beschämung und Peinlichkeit.<sup>160</sup>

Doris and Helene, both who are young enough to be the daughters of the men in question, end up providing protection during a temporary emotional escape, assuming the nurturing role of mothers to these men who feel completely overcome by the pressures of the world.

As the result of high unemployment, several male characters in Baum's and Keun's novels find themselves unable to financially support themselves and their families, thereby failing to fulfill one of the primary responsibilities of men in patriarchal society. Hubert, Doris' ex-boyfriend in Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, seeks her out after his wife left him. However, as Doris quickly learns, this is not because of lingering romantic feelings but rather because he is in dire financial straits, and goes to Doris seeking financial help. Although, unlike the previous examples, this does not expose his emotions per se, this is perhaps the hardest mask for a man to shed, as he is admitting his failure to be able to financially support himself. In addition, Hans, an old friend of Gilgi's, is no longer able to financially support his family and risks being thrown into debtor's prison. Both of these men approach not their own

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<sup>160</sup> All quotations from *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* will be abbreviated "HW," and the English translation, titled simply *Helene*, will be designated with "H." HW 139; "He let himself go. He freed his hands from the trammels, abandoned the luggage nets and the dismal window, and sank on Helene's breasts as he might have sunk on his mother's. Then with a very womanly gesture she took him into her arms, holding him very close, very tight. He laid his head on her shoulder, and though he was still weeping his tears were now a beneficent flood. [...] Then it was over, dissolved in humiliation and distress" (H 170 – 171).

wives, but rather another woman looking not only for the possibility of financial assistance, but more importantly for the opportunity to expose their weaknesses and shame at not being able to provide financially for the survival of themselves and their families, two qualities they must hide from the rest of the world. “Tränen laufen übers unverdeckte Gesicht, und er schämt sich nicht—wenn man mal soweit ist, schämt man sich nicht mehr.”<sup>161</sup> As Keun writes, this is truly the epitome of exposure for these men, and breaking down is all they can do, for they have nothing more to lose. These men must hide their true emotions in order to be able to survive in society, but in the presence of women, who are traditionally viewed by men as providing warmth and comfort, they are able to expose their true emotions.

Building on this view of women as caregivers to “unmasked men,” it is interesting to note that because women are traditionally the ones who are allowed to see the true nature of men free from the protective masks they wear in society, these women are often able to see behind the guise of the *kalte persona* even when the men are attempting to use these masks for protection or manipulation:

Gilgi ist ein erfahrendes Mädchen. Sie kennt Männer und die jeweiligen Wünsche und Nichtwünsche, die sich hinter dem Ton ihrer Stimme, ihren Blicken und Bewegungen verbergen. Wenn ein Mann und Chef wie Herr Reuter mit unsicherer Stimme spricht, ist er verliebt, und wenn er verliebt ist, will er was. Früher oder später. Bekommt er nicht, was er will, ist er erstaunt, gekränkt und ärgerlich.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> G 193; “Tears run down his unconcealed face, and he is not ashamed—when someone has been pushed so far, they are not ashamed any more.”

<sup>162</sup> G 17; “Gilgi is an experienced girl. She knows men and the respective things they may or may not desire that lurk behind the tone of their voices, their looks and their gestures. When a man and boss like Herr Reuter speaks with an unconfident voice, he is falling in love, and when he is falling in love, he wants something. Sooner or later. If he doesn’t get what he wants, he is shocked, mortified, and infuriated.”

Gilgi is not the only character in these texts who has the ability to see behind the deceptive masks of men. Flämmchen illustrates that just as men adopt the mask of the con-man in order to impress women, women are able to see clearly through the deception, as can be seen in the following interaction between Flämmchen and the con-man Baron von Gaigern: “‘Wir haben doch in Baden-Baden zusammen getanzt?’ ‘Nö. Ich war gar nie in Baden-Baden’, sagte Flämmchen und besah sehr genau den jungen Menschen. [...] ‘Mir dürfen Sie mit diesem alten Schwindel nicht kommen’, sagte sie trocken.”<sup>163</sup> Even Doris, perhaps the least formally educated of the four women protagonists, knows very well of the deceptive masks men put on when dealing with women. “Es ist ein Krankheit von jedem, daß sie jedem Mädchen erzählen, sie wären Generaldirektor von Film oder hätten wenigstens unerhörte Beziehungen. Ich frage mich nur, ob es noch Mädchen gibt, die darauf reinfallen?”<sup>164</sup> Because of the social role mandating that they provide warmth to men and thus being privy to the weaknesses hiding behind the masks, women, perhaps better than men, understand that appearance does not necessarily indicate reality. As Doris writes in her journal, “Und ich weiß, daß Leute, die ‘immer die Wahrheit sagen müssen’, immer lügen.”<sup>165</sup> In this rather pessimistic view of society, Doris affirms Plessner’s belief that individuals in public always appear in “roles,” and never in raw form.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> M 85; “‘Didn’t I dance with you at Baden-Baden?’ ‘Impossible. I’ve never been to Baden-Baden,’ said Flämmchen, and took a good look at him. [...] ‘You don’t get over me with that old story,’ she said dryly” (GH 78).

<sup>164</sup> KM 9; “It’s a male sickness to tell every girl that they are the top executive of a film studio or at least that they have great connections. All I’m asking myself is if there are still any girls left who fall for that” (ASG 10).

<sup>165</sup> KM 47; “And I know for a fact that those who ‘always have to tell the truth’ are definitely lying” (ASG 63).

<sup>166</sup> VdK 79 – 80; CC 55 – 56.

Living, working, and interacting with men in the public sphere, Helene, Flämmchen, Gilgi and Doris all understand that in order to survive in the world they, too, must actively adopt some form of deception or masking. Yet in his analysis of the literature of the Weimar Republic, Lethen argues that the adoption of the *kalte persona*'s mask as a form of protection from the warmth of society is purely a male phenomenon. He reiterates Plessner's maxim, putting specific emphasis on the gender component inherent in the phrase: "Der *Mann* sei von Natur aus künstlich."<sup>167</sup> This, he argues, is because the 17<sup>th</sup> century pre-bourgeois figure on which the *kalte persona* was based was solely a male phenomenon. "Gracián's 'persona' ist ein Trennungskünstler (männlichen Geschlechts)."<sup>168</sup> Simmel argues woman's innate nature prevent them from successfully adopting deceptive masks as a form of protection. "[Die Frau] 'strebt nach Sitte', die die Bewegung des Mannes oft hindert; dem Wesen der Frau aber liegt sie an wie eine Haut."<sup>169</sup> Mülder-Bach argues that in Simmel's opinion, "es kann keine weibliche Kultur geben, denn die Frau ist, gerade in ihrer unentfremdeten Existenz, ein Fremdling in der Moderne, sie ist das geschichtslose, reflexionslose, weltlose Wesen."<sup>170</sup> Because the construct of the *kalte persona* was created centuries ago by men *for men*, Lethen argues, the world of Gracián was a purely male world and the

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<sup>167</sup> VdK 94; in the German original, Lethen puts emphasis on the implied gender by italicizing the word *Mann*, as seen above. In the English translation, this emphasis is not evident and merely reiterates Plessner's maxim as it is quoted elsewhere by Lethen: "man is by nature artificial" (CC 67).

<sup>168</sup> VdK 58; Reneau does not explicitly make the gender distinction of Gracián's persona, emphasized above by Lethen in the German original, translating it simply as: "Gracián's persona is a master in the art of distinction" (CC 37).

<sup>169</sup> Simmel, "Geschlechter-Problem" 96; "[Woman] 'aspires to morality,' which is often an obstacle to the mobility of the male. However, it fits the nature of the woman like her skin" ("Problem of the Sexes" 126).

<sup>170</sup> Mülder-Bach, "'Weibliche Kultur'" 136; "there cannot be any female culture because the woman is, precisely in her unestranged existence, a foreigner in modernism; she is the faceless figure, without a reflection, and without a world of her own."

gender polarization initiated by Gracián and perpetuated by Simmel, Plessner, Jünger, and others effectively silences the female voice in their historical analyses.

Lethen writes, “Wenn die Neue Sachlichkeit als ‘sozial-psychologische Ausgleichsfunktion einer um ihre Identität gebrachten Männergeneration’ dient, dann scheint es undenkbar, daß eine Frau, mit Graciáns *Handorakel* ausgerüstet, als Subjekt im Panzer erscheint.”<sup>171</sup> Unthinkable, perhaps, but as Lethen shows, this situation is not unheard of. In an attempt to confront this gender bias of the of the *kalte persona*, Lethen analyzes Marieluise Fleißer’s *Die Mehlreisende Frieda Geier* as one example of the *kalte persona* as woman. Dressed in a leather jacket or men’s overcoat, this mobile woman protagonist, whom Lethen describes as a combination of a sensuous woman and an ascetic with short hair, is seen as threat to her local community, not only economically because she is perceived as undermining the economic existence of the salesmen in the town, but more importantly because she is seen as draining the vitality of her sport-star boyfriend. Andreas Huyssen writes that “femininity, imagined as it is from the male perspective, poses a threat to the male world of high technology, efficiency, and instrumental rationality.”<sup>172</sup> Because this woman is seen as a threat to male power, Frieda is “gezwungen zu verschwinden, damit der Geliebte, sportlich und geschäftlich, seine Krise überwinden kann.”<sup>173</sup> Lethen argues that because Frieda had entered the masculine working realm and in turn “mit der Verringerung seiner

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<sup>171</sup> VdK 181; in this quotation, Lethen cites Baureithel 140; “If the new objectivity served the ‘function of social and compensation for a generation of men who had lost their identity,’ the appearance of a women armed with Gracián’s *Art of Worldly Wisdom* seems inconceivable” (CC 141 – 142).

<sup>172</sup> Huyssen 72.

<sup>173</sup> VdK 182; “forced to disappear so that her lover can overcome his crisis, in both his athletics and his business” (CC 142).

Beweglichkeit bedrohte,”<sup>174</sup> she needed to be “taken care of” in order to restore and preserve the traditional gender hierarchy.

Although Marieluise Fleißer’s *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier* challenges the idea that it is inconceivable for a woman to appear as an armored subject, Lethen concludes that the *kalte persona* in a female form is still not a viable option. He argues that women’s literature stimulated “beträchtlichen Haß” by problematizing the traditional image of woman perpetuated by the male of New Objectivity.<sup>175</sup> From his analysis, Lethen concludes:

In Gestalt der Frau wird die kalte persona als “Hexe” gejagt, wenn sie nicht als Prostituierte instrumentalisiert werden kann. Marieluise Fleißers Roman ist ein Medium, das die selbstzerstörerischen Aspekte der Leitmotive der Neuen Sachlichkeit erschließt. Die pathetischen Motive des Inkognito-Lebens, der Erweiterung der Mobilität durchs Anonymwerden des Individuums, des Überlebens in der kleinsten Größe—verwoben in Heeresmentalität oder Dandy-Haltung—waren auf die Frau nicht ohne Angstlust zu übertragen. In den Handbrevieren—den höfischen wie den neusachlichen—war sie ein Objekt, das nach allen Regeln der Kunst traktiert werden mußte.<sup>176</sup>

In his analysis, Lethen perpetuates the traditional gender polarization by arguing that Frieda was in fact a failed attempt to apply the male concept of the *kalte persona* to a woman, and based on this analysis, Lethen relegates women to the role of passive spectators of modernity.

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<sup>174</sup> VdK 182; “threatened to restrict man’s mobility” (CC 143).

<sup>175</sup> VdK 102; “considerable animosity” (CC 74).

<sup>176</sup> VdK 182; “If the cool persona in the figure of a woman cannot be instrumentalized as a prostitute, she is hunted as a ‘witch’.... The transfer of themes of winning mobility through anonymity, incognito, or minimalist survival—woven through a soldier’s mentality or a dandy’s attitude—to a woman evokes a (thrilling) note of *Angst*. In the handbooks—whether composed from the perspective of court society or the new objectivity—woman was an object, to be (mis)treated according to all the rules of the art” (CC 142 – 143).

Instead of conceding the possibility that women might be able to adopt actively the masks of the *kalte persona* as a form of protection, Lethen relegates women to the roles of the “Radar Type”—characters who merely passively imitate life as opposed to actually living it—or to the roles of prostitutes and destitute mothers whose only escape from their desolate lives is to gas themselves and their children, situations clearly illustrative of the role of the “Creature.” In his analysis, Lethen does not comment on the writings of Vicki Baum but does briefly mention both of Irmgard Keun’s Weimar novels:

Die Heldinnen von Irmgard Keuns Romanen *Gilgi, Eine von uns* (1930) [sic]<sup>177</sup> und *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932) benutzen die Mimikry an die Außenlenkungen als Waffe. Es sind Menschen, die sich permanent im Spiegel der Fremdwahrnehmung definieren, Nähe und Distanz auf ihren Bewegungsspielraum hin taxieren, Wahrnehmungsformen der Massenmedien auf sich beziehen, Moden als Orientierungsmarken benutzen—Simultanspielerinnen ohne Fortune.<sup>178</sup>

By doing this, Lethen merely perpetuates the traditional male dichotomy illustrated in the writings of Gracián, Plessner, and Krauss, which argue that women were merely meant to give men an escape from the “real world,” not to be active participants in it.

My analyses of *Gilgi* in Irmgard Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns*, Helene in Vicki Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Doris in Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, and Flämmchen in Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel* all challenge Lethen’s gender-biased analysis of the *kalte persona*. All these protagonists are representations of liberated

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<sup>177</sup> *Gilgi* was first published in October 1931, not 1930.

<sup>178</sup> VdK 242; “The heroines of Irmgard Keun’s novels *Gilgi, eine von uns* (1930) [sic] and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932) use other-direction’s mimicry as a weapon. These are people who constantly define themselves in the mirror of others’ perception, who assess closeness and distance in terms of their own latitude for movement and use fashion as signposts and markers—chess players without fortune” (CC 193).

New Women who not only actively participate in the traditionally male-dominated realm of the world outside the home but also challenge traditional notions of gender roles in the Weimar Republic. In the following examples, I will show how all of these women protagonists consciously and successfully adopt and adapt characteristics of the *kalte persona*, achieving the protection promised by the *kalte persona*.

In her 1931 novel *Gilgi, eine von uns*, Irmgard Keun describes various people Gilgi encounters on her way to work:

Braves Fräulein aus guter Familie, nicht wahr, Sie würden die bunte Halskette nicht umbinden, wenn Sie nicht wünschten, daß einer kommt, der findet, daß sie Ihnen hübsch steht? Kleiner Rotkopf, hättest du die zwanzig Mark für die Dauerwellen ausgegeben, wenn du nicht von Schönheitskonkurrenz und Filmengagement träumtest? Auch Greta Garbo ist einmal Verkäuferin gewesen.<sup>179</sup>

These female figures all appear to correspond to what Lethen terms the Radar Type. In contrast to the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type embodies an unquestioning desire for conformity and consumption. Instead of relying on an inner-moral compass, “die Aufmerksamkeit wendet sich von den diskreditierten inneren Regulatoren auf öffentliche Verhaltensregeln.”<sup>180</sup> In this instance, the “public rules of conduct” refer to the latest fashion trends and mannerisms, phrases, and perceived morality as illustrated on the silver screen. Following the latest trends, Lethen argues, these people wait for something that will rescue them from their misery, providing them with their own cinema-inspired “happy ending.”

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<sup>179</sup> G 14 – 15; “Well-behaved young woman from a good family, you wouldn’t wear that colorful necklace if you didn’t hope that someone would come and think that it looks good on you, would you? Little redhead, would you have paid twenty marks for your perm if you weren’t dreaming of beauty competitions and a film contract? Even Greta Garbo was once a salesgirl.”

<sup>180</sup> VdK 238; “attention turns from the discredited inner regulators to public rules of conduct” (CC 189).

The presence of the Radar Type in this passage is undeniable. “Wird etwas kommen, was das Gleichmaß der Tage unterbricht? Was? Der Douglas Fairbanks, der Lotteriegewinn, das Filmengagement, die märchenhafte Beförderung, der Sterntalerregen vom Himmel? Wird das kommen?”<sup>181</sup> As Kracauer stated, these individuals appear to use popular culture as an escape from reality, hoping for the unrealistic dreams they see on the silver screen to come true so they can leave their dreary realities behind. As Bridenthal and Koonz argue, this distraction inadvertently caused many negative effects. “Filled with Cinderella fantasies encouraged by the media, they dreamed of marrying the boss rather than uniting against his exploitation under their labor and sex.”<sup>182</sup> Shortly after their introduction, however, it quickly becomes clear that Gilgi actively distances herself from these “Radar Types”:

Die Trostlosen da im Wagen—nein, sie hat mit ihnen nichts gemein, die gehört nicht zu ihnen, will nicht zu ihnen gehören. Sie sind grau und müde und stumpf. Und wenn sie nicht stumpf sind, warten sie auf ein Wunder. Gilgi ist nicht stumpf und glaubt an kein Wunder. Sie glaubt nur an das, was sie schafft und erwirbt. Sie ist nicht zufrieden, aber sie ist froh. Sie verdient Geld.<sup>183</sup>

In contrast to being someone “die sich permanent im Spiegel der Fremdwahrnehmung [definiert]”<sup>184</sup> as Lethen suggests, Gilgi actively promotes the image of a hard-working individual who adopts a mask of cold professionalism as opposed to casual enjoyment.

When commenting on Gilgi’s work ethic, Keun notes “Sie ist öfters zu früh da und nie

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<sup>181</sup> G 15; “Will anything come along that will break the daily monotony? What? Douglas Fairbanks, winning the lottery, a film contract, a fairy tale rescue, money falling from heaven? Will that come?”

<sup>182</sup> Bridenthal & Koonz 317.

<sup>183</sup> G 15; “The desolate people there in the streetcar—no, she doesn’t have anything in common with them, she doesn’t belong to them, does not want to belong to them. They are grey and tired and lethargic. And when they aren’t lethargic, they are waiting for a miracle. Gilgi is not lethargic and is not waiting for a miracle. She only believes in what she achieves herself. She is not satisfied, but she is happy. She earns money.”

<sup>184</sup> VdK 242; “constantly defining [herself] in the mirror of others’ perception” (CC 193).

eine Minute zu spät”<sup>185</sup> and mentions multiple times that her work is “sauber und tadellos getippt.”<sup>186</sup> In addition to her professional work ethic, Gilgi deliberately adopts an attitude of coldness towards her coworkers, actively separating herself both physically and emotionally from these Radar Types who flirt and gossip.

Gilgi also actively maintains an attitude of coldness in order to create and maintain a sense of distance from members of the opposite sex. For example, when she enters her boss’ private office with letters for him to sign, he invites her to sit down. Instead of making herself comfortable, “Gilgi geht an dem guten, ledernen Kundensessel vorbei, nimmt ein paar Hefte und Blätter von dem einfachen Rohrstuhl und setzt sich.”<sup>187</sup> In stark contrast to many representations of working women in film, popular literature, and even the numerous observations written by sociologists such as Siegfried Kracauer that I will examine in more depth in the next chapter, instead of flirting or attempting to look pretty to catch the boss’s attention, “neugierlos sieht sie vor sich hin und hat ihr ruhiges, abgeschlossenes Berufsgesicht.”<sup>188</sup> In this situation, Gilgi is consciously using the coldness attributed to the *kalte persona* to deliberately create a sense of professional distance between herself and her employer.

This professional coldness, however, is not enough to dissuade her boss’ sexual interest in Gilgi. After several attempts to ignore and deflect his sexual advances, she realizes she must spend some time with her boss outside of work, or otherwise she may

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<sup>185</sup> G 65; “She regularly comes to work early and is never a minute late.”

<sup>186</sup> G 130; “neatly typed and without any errors.”

<sup>187</sup> G 17; “Gilgi walks past the nice leather chair reserved for customers, takes a few files and papers from the simple cane chair and sits down.”

<sup>188</sup> G 17; “without any sense of curiosity Gilgi looks straight ahead and wears her quiet, professional business face.”

risk losing her job. “Sie hat keine Lust, mit Herrn Reuter ein Verhältnis anzufangen, und sie hat keine Lust, sich ihre Stellung bei ihm zu vermurksen, sie eventuell zu verlieren.”<sup>189</sup> Like a skilled negotiator, she coolly talks him out of meeting for lunch and instead agrees to meet him at 2:00 pm after work. Despite his numerous attempts to crack her cold mask—he even asks her “Machen Sie immer so ein böses Gesicht?”<sup>190</sup>—she answers his questions succinctly only with “ja” or “nein.” Instead of offering the slightest hint of polite protest when Herr Reuter admits that he is old enough to be her father, “Gilgi lächelt nur unschuldsvoll.”<sup>191</sup> In fact, Gilgi refuses to exchange any illusion of warmth with Herr Reuter: she refuses to drink alcohol in the afternoon, she gently removes his hand when he puts it on her knee, and even pays for her own meal so she does not owe him anything. Despite her coldness, “Gilgis kleine Brüste zeichnen sich deutlich unter dem taubenblauen Samtkleid ab und überzeuegen Herrn Reuter, daß Gilgi ‘die’ Frau ist, die ihn versteht. Er sagt es und glaubt, was er sagt.”<sup>192</sup>

In a calculated move à la Franz Biberkopf and Reinhold from Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Gilgi and her friend Olga arrange to have Olga “steal” Herr Reuter’s attention and desire away from Gilgi on their date. At the right moment, Olga comes dressed for the theatre in her expensive, new fur coat, “von dem erst die dritte

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<sup>189</sup> G 17 – 18; “She doesn’t have any desire to start a relationship with Herr Reuter, and she doesn’t have any desire to mess up her employment with him or to eventually lose her position.”

<sup>190</sup> G 17; “Does your face always look so mean?”

<sup>191</sup> G 19; “Gilgi only smiles innocently.”

<sup>192</sup> G 22; “The outline of Gilgi’s small breasts stands out clearly under the pigeon blue velvet dress and convinces Herr Reuter that Gilgi is ‘the’ woman that understands him. He says this and believes what he is saying.”

Rate bezahlt ist,”<sup>193</sup> and Herr Reuter, although he would rather not, out of politeness invites Olga to join them at their table.

His mood changes significantly, however, as he notices the attitudes of the men around him. “Er merkt, daß andere Männer ihn beneiden, als Olga sich an seinen Tisch setzt.”<sup>194</sup> Gilgi and Olga’s plan works perfectly, and after a while, Gilgi is as good as forgotten:

Herr Reuter erinnert sich, daß eigentlich “blond” sein Typ ist. Er wird geistreich. Olga sieht ihn bewundernd an, und Herr Reuter ist überzeugt, sich sein Leben lang unterschätzt zu haben. [...] Durch cremefarbene Spitzen schimmert Olgas frische, rosige Blondinenhaut und überzeugt Herrn Reuter, daß Olga “die” Frau ist, die ihn versteht.<sup>195</sup>

Skillfully managing her mask of cold professionalism, instead of leaving her employer with a sense of rejection Gilgi “verabschiedet sich von Herrn Reuter und hinterläßt in ihm das angenehme Gefühl, ‘um seiner selbst willen’ geliebt zu werden.”<sup>196</sup> Following the guidelines of the *kalte persona* as advocated by Plessner, it appears as if Gilgi has successfully found the appropriate balance between the poles of coldness necessary for personal protection and the minimal amount of warmth necessary in order to succeed in society.

The distance Gilgi advocates is not limited to her relationships at work, but also applies to her relationships with men outside of work, in turn presenting more scenarios which Keun uses to critique the New Woman images perpetuated by popular culture.

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<sup>193</sup> G 23; “of which only the third payment has been made.”

<sup>194</sup> G 24; “He notices that other men envy him as Olga seats herself at his table.”

<sup>195</sup> G 24; “Herr Reuter remembers that his type is actually ‘blond.’ He becomes full of wit. Olga looks at him with admiration, and Herr Reuter is convinced that he has been underestimated his entire life. [...] Like a cream colored mountain top Olga’s fresh, rosy blond skin shines and convinces Herr Reuter that Olga is ‘the’ woman who understands him.”

<sup>196</sup> G 20; “takes her leave from Herr Reuter and leaves him with the pleasant feeling of being loved ‘for being himself.’”

Many images of working women portrayed smart, fashionable women who saw work merely as a means of supporting a consumerist lifestyle until they were able to find suitable (i.e., successful) husbands. In contrast, Gilgi focuses on her career and does not intend to work merely as long as she remains single, and based on her portrayal at the beginning of the novel, it does not appear as if Gilgi would ever voluntarily give up her professional career should she fall in love. In fact, it appears as if Gilgi sees any potential romantic or sexual relationship with a man as a hindrance to her career aspirations.<sup>197</sup>

The following interactions between Gilgi and her admirers at *Karneval* clearly illustrate how Gilgi uses the coldness associated with the *kalte persona* to protect herself from men. “Gilgi sitzt neben Herrn Becker. Er zwickt sie in den Schenkel, sie tritt ihn mittelkräftig gegen’s Schienbein: ‘Finger weg.’ — ‘Ist doch Karneval!’ — ‘Kein Grund, mir Ihre Albernheiten gefallen zu lassen.’ — ‘Sag’ du, sag’ du—zu mir...’ — ‘Trauriges Gewächs.’”<sup>198</sup> Later that evening, Gilgi must once again adopt an attitude of coldness to separate herself from men. “‘Laß mich dein’ Rosenmund küssen.’ ‘Wenn dir dran liegt, kannst du mein’ Lippenstift mal jeliehn haben—’ ‘Dein’ Mund will ich— [...] Wat biste so kalt—is doch Karneval...’”<sup>199</sup> When coldness itself

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<sup>197</sup> Gilgi does, indeed, fall in love, and she ends up leaving her career, a choice which Keun strongly critiques. I will analyze this situation in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>198</sup> G 88; “Gilgi sits next to Herr Becker. He pinches her thigh, she kicks him firmly in the shin: ‘Keep your hands to yourself.’ — ‘But it’s Mardi Gras!’ — ‘That’s no reason to involve me in all your foolishness.’ — [this next section, ‘Sag’ du, sag’ du zu mir...’ cannot be translated into English, but Herr Becker is asking Gilgi to use the informal as opposed to the formal address when speaking with him] — ‘You are a pathetic idiot.’”

<sup>199</sup> G 89; “‘Let me kiss your rosy mouth.’ ‘If it’s all the same to you, I’ll lend you my lipstick—’ ‘I want your lips— [...] Why are you so cold—after all, it’s Mardi Gras....’”

is not enough to dissuade those men pursuing her, Gilgi switches to outright deception in order to free herself from another man who is interested in her:

Ein wüst tätowierter Jüngling packt Gilgi um die Taille: “Komm, tanz’ mit mir.” “Nee, hab’ keine Lust.” — “Warum willstest nich—is doch Karneval...” Ist doch Karneval, ist doch Karneval, Himmelkreuzdonnerwetter nochmal. Gilgi streift die tätowierte Hand ab. Steuert dem Familientisch zu und läßt sich von Herrn Kron die Garderobenummer geben: “Will nur mein Puderdöschen aus der Manteltasche holen.” Ein paar Minuten später steht sie auf der Straße.<sup>200</sup>

These examples have shown how Gilgi, in contrast to the depiction of the Radar Type which Lethen assigns to her, maintains a mask of professionalism, and does not live her life seeking only enjoyment and passively mimicking the latest fashionable trends. Gilgi sees both men and romantic relationships as a hindrance to her professional career goals and actively adopts attitudes of coldness to create distance from anyone who prevents her from reaching those goals.

Gilgi’s use of masks, however, is not limited to interactions with members of the opposite sex. Plessner welcomes the masquerade as the essence of life in the public sphere, and throughout the novel much like a *confidence-woman*, one of the main manifestations of the *kalte persona* that Lethen attributes only to men, Gilgi adopts various masks in order to gain people’s confidence and obtain what she wants. Yet in contrast to the *confidence-man* as described by Lethen, Gilgi uses this technique of deception to acquire not money, but rather information.

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<sup>200</sup> G 90 – 91; “A tattooed young man grabs Gilgi’s bottom: ‘Come on, dance with me.’ ‘No, I don’t want to.’ — ‘Why don’t you want to—but it’s Mardi Gras...’ But it’s Mardi Gras, but it’s Mardi Gras, for heaven’s sake! Gilgi pushes the tattooed hand aside. She steers herself to her family’s table and gets the coat check number from Herr Kron: ‘I just want to grab my compact out of my coat pocket.’ A few minutes later, she is standing on the street.”

When she goes to find her birth mother, Gilgi adopts the pretense of someone who wants an outfit made, since the woman she believes is her birth mother is a seamstress. Like a con-woman, Gilgi uses alcohol and casual conversation to extract the necessary information from the woman she assumes is her unsuspecting mother. “Fräulein Täschler, wollense in der Wirtschaft an der Ecke nicht mit mir zu Abend essen? Wir unterhalten uns so gut, und ich hab’ noch nicht Lust, nach Haus zu gehn.”<sup>201</sup>

The mask of the con-woman seeking information is another facet of the *kalte persona*’s armoring that offers protection by shielding one’s true identity and intentions. Yet this mask is significantly different than the mask of professional coldness illustrated earlier in the novel, and Gilgi is not as experienced with this mask of deception. Supporting my prior argument that because of the social expectations associated with the gender roles society prescribes for them, women are more skilled than men at seeing the truth lurking behind masks, Fräulein Täschler is able to see through Gilgi’s ruse. “Jetzt muß [Fräulein Täschler] sich aber doch wundern. Da steckt was dahinter, da stimmt was nicht!”<sup>202</sup> Fräulein Täschler’s suspicions are soon confirmed. “‘Ich dacht’, Sie hätten ein Kind, ich kenn’ da ein Mädchen, die wurd’ adoptiert von ‘ner Familie—wie heißt sie noch gleich? Kron—ist jetzt einundzwanzig Jahre alt...’ [...] ‘Sie sind das Kind!’ schreit die Täschler hellstichtig und sinkt auf den Stuhl zurück.”<sup>203</sup> Once Gilgi’s mask has been breached, she learns that Fräulein Täschler is in fact not her biological

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<sup>201</sup> G 43; “Fräulein Täschler, would you like to go to the pub on the corner and have some dinner with me? We are having such a good conversation and I really don’t want to go home.”

<sup>202</sup> G 43; “Now Fräulein Täschler begins to suspect something. There’s something else going on here, something is not right!”

<sup>203</sup> G 47; “I thought you had a child, I know a girl who was adopted by a family—what was their name? Kron—she’s twenty one now...’ [...] ‘You’re the child! Fräulein Täschler screams, suddenly seeing things clearly as she sinks back down onto the stool.”

mother, but rather that Fräulein Täschler was given 10,000 marks by the wealthy parents of an unmarried, pregnant girl who were looking to preserve their daughter's honor in return for Fräulein Täschler pretending the infant Gilgi was her own.

After having discovered the truth about her own past, Gilgi must once again use deception in order to see her true biological mother. Gilgi adopts yet another mask and pretends to be the fiancée of her biological mother's younger lover in order to confront her mother face-to-face. Before she even sees her mother for the first time, based merely on the opulence of the home in which she lives and the whispered conversations she hears between her mother and her mother's significantly younger lover, Gilgi immediately develops an attitude of intense coldness towards her biological mother. "Ich mag sie nicht—stellt Gilgi kalt und endgültig fest."<sup>204</sup> Almost immediately after meeting her mother, Gilgi drops her ruse of being the lover's fiancée and tells her mother who she really is.

In order to protect herself from the immense feelings of confusion, anger, and hatred she now has for the woman who abandoned her 21 years ago, Gilgi quickly adopts an almost overwhelming attitude of coldness. "Ich würde nie Du zu Ihnen sagen können... [...] Sie sind mir fremd, und ich mag Sie nicht leiden—ich finde es kümmerlich, daß Sie mich so spöttisch und ein bißchen verachtungsvoll ansehen, nur weil Sie jetzt gerade besser angezogen sind—."<sup>205</sup> In addition to preventing any future feigned friendliness, Gilgi purposely rejects any affection from her mother. "Die Frau

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<sup>204</sup> G 228; "I don't like her—Gilgi decides coldly and definitively."

<sup>205</sup> G 230; "I would never be able to say 'du' [the informal address] to you... [...] You are a stranger to me, and I don't want to hurt you—I think you are weak because you look at me so derisively and with a bit of contempt just because you are better dressed than I am—."

faß plötzlich nach Gilgis Hand—Gilgi zieht sie hastig zurück—‘fassen Sie mich nicht an—ich bitte Sie—es ist besser für Sie, wenn Sie mich nicht erst anfassen.’”<sup>206</sup> As can be seen in these examples, the protection offered by coldness and the bracketing off of emotions advocated by the *kalte persona* is not limited to men, and not limited merely to the working environment. Gilgi—sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully—uses the masking qualities of the *kalte persona* to create distance between herself and others, in turn both protecting herself in times of potential emotional turmoil and proactively preventing potentially harmful consequences that may prevent her from achieving her personal and professional goals.

Richard W. McCormick argues that in the eyes of bourgeois men who traditionally held positions of power in society, women came to represent both the threat of losing male autonomy and the fears of subsequent symbolic castration anxiety. As a result, in Weimar culture there was an increased public fascination not only with the instability of traditional, male-dominated gender roles but also repeated attempts to control them.<sup>207</sup> If women adopting relatively unskilled yet traditionally male jobs in the white-collar workplace were considered a significant threat by the established patriarchal society, women who studied—especially those who studied in predominantly male professions such as the hard sciences—were viewed as an even bigger threat.

Vicki Baum’s protagonist Helene Willfüer in her novel *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* faces discrimination from multiple fronts, not only as a woman working

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<sup>206</sup> G 235; “The woman suddenly reached out for Gilgi’s hand—Gilgi quickly pulls it away—‘do not touch me—please—it is better for you if you never touch me.’”

<sup>207</sup> McCormick 58.

outside the home, but more importantly as a college-educated woman entering the male-dominated realm of the hard sciences. She experiences varying levels of hostility not only from her fellow students but also an ambivalent attitude from her adviser, Prof. Ambrosius, who makes his professional opinion very clear: “Ich bin ja im ganzem kein großer Freund von studierenden Frauen.”<sup>208</sup> In her professional life, Helene must adopt the cold, professional mask of the scientist—factual, direct, and unemotional—in order to survive. Helene’s mask hides her weaknesses, insecurities, and emotions, following the maxims of “cool conduct” as illustrated by Lethen.

The melodramatic characteristics of Baum’s novel give her readers a glimpse not only of the *kalte persona* mask Helene must adopt, but also of the complex emotions and desires Helene is shielding. The following quotation gives an interesting look at the true woman behind Helene’s austere, scientific exterior:

“Sie sind ja überhaupt ein so vernünftiger Mensch.” “Jawohl, Herr Professor,” sagte Helene und schaute [Prof. Ambrosius] an. Seine Hand lag vor ihr auf dem Büchertisch neben der alten Bibel. ‘Ich bin verrückt’, dachte sie, ‘ich bin ja verrückt. Ich möchte, daß du mich küßt. Ich möchte, daß du mich in deine Arme nimmst, jetzt gleich, hier, und daß ich schwach werde vor Glück, und daß du mich küßt ohne Ende—’ “Und nachher? Was stellen Sie sich nachher vor?”<sup>209</sup>

In addition to her professional struggles as a working woman, Helene must struggle

<sup>208</sup> HW 44; “I’m no great friend of women students” (H 54).

<sup>209</sup> HW 43; The German edition of *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* is currently out of print. Interestingly, all references to the romantic inner-monologue of this and other scenes have been cut out of later editions of Baum’s book. I quote here from page 30 of the 1968 version published by the Wilhelm Heyne Verlag in Munich: “‘Sie sind ja überhaupt ein so vernünftiger Mensch.’ ‘Jawohl, Herr Professor,’ sagte Helene und schaute [Prof. Ambrosius] an. ‘Und nachher? Was stellen Sie sich nachher vor?’” It is for this reason that I am using the original editions of Baum’s texts in order to more fully understand how the original versions of the texts affected the women who read them. “‘You’re such a reasonable person, anyway.’ ‘Yes, professor,’ said Helene, gazing at him. His hand lay on the table before her, beside the old Bible. ‘I’m crazy,’ she thought. ‘I’m simply crazy. I want you to kiss me. I want you to take me in your arms—now—this minute—until I go weak with joy. I want you to go on kissing me forever.’ ‘And afterwards?’ asked Ambrosius, knocking the ash from his cigar. ‘What do you plan to do afterwards?’” (H 53 – 54).

with and deliberately conceal the romantic desire she harbors towards her adviser. Not only is this novel the portrayal of a working woman, but it includes the romantic elements of forbidden desire for an older, married man.

Just as with Gilgi, even outside of the professional sphere Helene must hide her emotions and adopt an attitude of coolness in an attempt to protect herself and achieve her academic and professional goals. But unlike Gilgi, who deals with sexual advances from her employer, Helene must deal with sexual pressures from someone for whom she cares very much. Helene adopts a cold demeanor in an attempt to dissuade her boyfriend, Rainer, from pressuring her into having sex with him. When the subject comes up, Helene tries to distract Rainer by changing the topic. “Schau nur, das Wasser ist ganz rot, wenn es von den Rudern tropft.”<sup>210</sup> When he pressures her further, she tries once again to dissuade him by showing him her weakness, admitting “Ich habe Angst.”<sup>211</sup> Even this does not stop him, and Helene eventually gives in to his pleading, but she does not do so passionately. Instead, she adopts an attitude of coldness to protect herself from doing what she feels forced to do. “Helene zog die Ruder ein. [...] ‘Ich lasse es treiben—’ sagte Helene schlafwandlerisch und legte die gefalteten Hände in ihren Schoß....”<sup>212</sup> For Gilgi, the choice to have sex with her married employer is more morally clear-cut. But for Helene, the choice is much more ambiguous. Helene feels torn: by giving in, she risks becoming pregnant and jeopardizing her studies and future

<sup>210</sup> HW 76; “Just look. The water’s all red where it drips from the oars” (H 94).

<sup>211</sup> HW 77; “I’m afraid.... Oh, I’m afraid” (H 96).

<sup>212</sup> HW 79; “Helene drew in the oars. [...] ‘I’ll let it drift,’ said Helene, like a sleepwalker, and laid her folded hands in her lap...” (H 97).

career, but by refusing to have sex with Rainer, she risks losing him.

Rainer, who is chronically depressed and being forced to take over the position of a small-town doctor from his terminally ill father, later convinces Helene to enter into a joint suicide pact with him. At the last moment, however, Helene decides she wants to live, and Rainer commits suicide alone. As the last person to see Rainer alive, Helene is arrested and interrogated about Rainer's death. Once again, Helene adopts a protective mask of coldness during her interrogation. "Aber nein doch, Rainer hatte es ja selbst getan, er selbst hatte sich die tödliche Morphiuminjektion verabreicht, gab Helene mit schmalen, verhaltenen Lippen an. Sie weinte nicht, machte keine Szene, sie war nicht hysterisch."<sup>213</sup> The attitude of coldness Helene adopts not only towards the investigators but also her cold, impersonal demeanor when she identifies Rainer's body in the morgue makes numerous people mistakenly believe that Helene is a cold-blooded killer:

"Eine hartgesottene Person," sagte der Staatsanwalt zum Untersuchungsrichter, als sie die Treppen hinabgingen. "Ich habe die abgebrühtesten Kerle schlappmachen sehen, wenn sie der Leiche gegenübergestellt wurden, um sie anzuerkennen. Aber die da ist ganz verstockt."<sup>214</sup>

Because of her overwhelming attitude of coldness even in the face of death and the threat of a lengthy prison sentence, it is not clear to the *Untersuchungsrichter* whether Helene is a cold-blooded killer "oder ganz unschuldig."<sup>215</sup> It is only after a series of

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<sup>213</sup> HW 155; "But not at all. Rainer had done it himself—Rainer had administered the fatal dose of morphine himself, Helene declared, her lips set in a thin, controlled line. She didn't cry; she made no scenes; she was not hysterical" (H 189).

<sup>214</sup> HW 166; "'A callous creature,' commented the prosecutor to the magistrate, as they went downstairs together. 'I've seen the most case-hardened criminals wilt on being brought face to face with the corpse for identification. But this one's completely impervious'" (H 203).

<sup>215</sup> HW 166; "or completely innocent" (H 203).

witnesses come forward producing letters from both Helene and Rainer that prove that Rainer and Helene had planned to commit suicide together that Helene is cleared of the charges and released from prison.

A professional mask of coldness also helps Helene to earn respect in her field and even helps her to successfully negotiate her future in the male-dominated world of chemistry. Several years after her imprisonment, Helene is offered the opportunity to work for a large chemical manufacturer to mass produce Vitalin, a miraculous drug that reverses the ageing process that she was instrumental in creating. Having spent all of her adult life in the predominantly masculine realm of the laboratory, Helene does not have any problems representing her achievements and negotiating with the men in the boardroom of the largest chemical manufacturer in Germany. Once again, Helene adopts a mask of austerity to bolster her strength and hide her weaknesses:

Wenn eine Erregung in ihr vorgehen mochte und höchst begreiflich war, so gelangte doch nichts an die Oberfläche. Frau Doktor Willfüer saß mit den führenden Männern des größten deutschen Chemiewerkes zu einer grundlegenden Besprechung und machte einen so kühlen und unbeteiligten Eindruck, als wenn sie nie etwas anderes gewohnt gewesen wäre.<sup>216</sup>

When the members of the board stress that Helene must be able to change from performing research science to industrial production, Helene, echoing the necessity of the *kalte persona* to be able to rapidly change in order to survive in an ever-changing world, replies, “‘Ich krieche gerne in eine neue Haut. Es macht mir nicht viel Schwierigkeiten. Ich habe es schon öfters getan,’ sagte Helene zufrieden, und ein wenig

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<sup>216</sup> HW 227; “If there was any inward excitement, as might well have been the case, none of it appeared on the surface. Frau Doktor Willfüer was taking part in an extremely important conference of the directors of the largest chemical concern in Germany, and presenting as cool and collected an appearance as if she’d never been used to anything else” (H 273 – 274).

Wärme strahlte von ihr in die allgemeine Sachlichkeit.”<sup>217</sup> Interestingly, one of the men replies, “Darin sind Frauen wohl talentierter und beweglicher.”<sup>218</sup> Helene proves to be a skilled negotiator, not only securing her desired salary, but also the management of the production department, a portion of the profits, and a personal lab with two women lab technicians. After the negotiations, Helene notices that she is dizzy, but “sie zwang es hinunter.”<sup>219</sup> Following Serner’s guideline—“Wenn es dir schlecht geht, bemühe dich, es zu verbergen”<sup>220</sup>—Helene lives up to the call of the *kalte persona* by hiding any external sign of weakness. Baum here clearly shows that Helene, too, is well-skilled at striking the appropriate balance between coldness and warmth necessary for survival, providing another example of a working woman who is able to manipulate the cold masking of the *kalte persona* to her own personal and professional advantage.

It is not merely highly skilled and educated women such as Helene and Gilgi who are able to manipulate and adopt the masks of the *kalte persona* in order to survive. On the initial examination of Doris, the protagonist in Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, one may conclude, as does Lethen, that Doris is a prototypical Radar Type. Doris does equate success with the appearance of being a *Glanz*, and her existence appears to focus on achieving the glamour she associates with success, or at least attaining the appearance of someone who has. Many of her thoughts revolve around the

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<sup>217</sup> HW 232; “I enjoy crawling into a new skin. I don’t find it particularly difficult. I’ve done it often before,” said Helene cheerfully, and a little of her warmth spread through the room’s impersonal atmosphere” (H 279).

<sup>218</sup> HW 232; “Women are probably more talented and flexible in such matters” (H 279).

<sup>219</sup> The English translation acknowledges that Helene was dizzy, but does not refer to her consciously suppressing her weakness, stating only “she grew conscious of the fact that she was dizzy” (H 283). The full context for the original German quotation is “Als sie auf Botstiber zutreten wollte, merkte sie, daß sie schwindlig war. Sie zwang es hinunter” (H 236).

<sup>220</sup> Serner 69, qtd. in VdK 53; “When you’re not doing well, make an effort to conceal it” (qtd. in CC 33).

latest fashion trends, perfumes, dinner and dancing. Yet as this analysis will show, Doris, while striving to achieve her goal of living the glamour she desires, actively adopts and exploits strategies and traits that Lethen attributes to the *kalte persona*.

In her book *Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung: Die Angestellten in der Erzählprosa am Ende der Weimarer Republik*, Christa Jordan argues that, in contrast to the women who worked mainly as laborers prior to World War I, the abundance of semi-skilled jobs as white-collar office workers during the Weimar Republic gave women new possibilities. “So standen ihnen jetzt auch Angestelltenberufe offen, die die Illusion aufrecht erhielten, sozial nicht völlig deklassiert zu werden und ins Proletariat abzusinken.”<sup>221</sup> Building on this observation, I argue that Doris, the daughter of working-class parents, consciously adopts the mask of the bourgeois *Angestellte*, or white-collar worker, in order to deliberately conceal and distance herself from her working-class roots.

It must be noted that the masks Doris adopts are not masks of coldness such as those advocated by Brecht in his *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner*. Like Gilgi, Doris adopts a series of *kalte persona* masks that mirror the figure of the confidence-woman. “Und dann spreche ich fast ohne Dialekt, was viel ausmacht und mir eine Note gibt, besonders da mein Vater und meine Mutter ein Dialekt sprechen, das mir geradezu beschämend ist.”<sup>222</sup> Believing that a working-class background is incongruent to the star status she hopes to achieve, Doris actively adopts mask to hide not only her

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<sup>221</sup> Jordan 24; “Now, even white-collar jobs were open to them, jobs that supported the illusion of not being fully subjugated to a lower class or of descending into the proletariat.”

<sup>222</sup> KM 4; “Plus I speak almost without dialect, which makes a difference, and gives me a special touch, particularly since my father and mother speak with a dialect that I find nothing short of embarrassing” (ASG 2).

psychological and emotional weaknesses, but also her class background, in turn protecting her from shame.

Barndt argues that Keun uses film and “Schlagerkultur” as a lens through which Doris can more sharply examine her own life.<sup>223</sup> Doris is presented to Keun’s readers through the perspective of Doris herself in the form of a journal, which Doris sees more as a “film script”: “Ich denke nicht an Tagebuch—das ist lächerlich für ein Mädchen von achtzehn und auch sonst auf der Höhe. Aber ich will schreiben wie Film, denn so ist mein Leben und wird noch mehr so sein.”<sup>224</sup> Despite this lack of an “objective” narrator’s view of Doris, Keun’s readers are able to see not only the various masks that Doris attempts to portray but also the true individual taking shelter behind the mask.

As a lesser-educated woman working as a secretary during a time of high unemployment and high competition for low-skilled jobs, Doris acknowledges early on in the novel that education and at least the appearance of living an upper class lifestyle are key to success. Her lack of education and perceived inferior social status became painfully clear to Doris when her boyfriend, who had just completed his doctorate in physics, left her to marry someone “aus seinen Kreisen und Tochter von einem Professor.”<sup>225</sup> As a result, Doris attempts not only to conceal her emotions, but more importantly to hide her working-class background and financial troubles from view. “Und man wird schlecht behandelt und ganz billig, wenn man sich anmerken läßt, daß

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<sup>223</sup> “Schlagerkultur” is an area of popular culture that is dominated by popular songs; Barndt, *Sentiment* 168.

<sup>224</sup> KM 4; “I don’t mean a diary—that’s ridiculous for a trendy girl like me. But I want to write like a movie, because my life is like that and it’s going to become even more so” (ASG 3).

<sup>225</sup> KM 11; “a woman of his standing, the daughter of a professor” (ASG 13).

es einem schlecht geht.”<sup>226</sup> For this reason, like Gaigern who adopts the mask of the wealthy and care-free baron, Doris perpetuates a mask that she is better educated and of a higher social standing than she actually is in an attempt to protect herself from being used and treated poorly. In order to perpetuate this image of glamour, she steals a fur coat from the cloak room of a theatre and flees with it to Berlin to begin her life anew.

Doris’ status as a thief, and the fact that she is forced to live under a pseudonym, prevents her—unlike Helene, Gilgi, and Flämmchen—from working to support herself. The police are searching for Doris and watching her friends and family, so she cannot remain in contact with her family and cannot allow any of her possessions to be sent to her. As a result, Doris must adopt a *kalte persona* lifestyle in order to survive, following many of the cold dictates of the *kalte persona* as advocated by Brecht: “suche Distanz, betrachte Unterkünfte als Provisorien, trenne dich von der Kohorte, zerschneide die Familienbande, meide übertriebene Individualisierung, ziehe den Hut tief in die Stirn, und entferne dich von allen Wärmequellen.”<sup>227</sup> Yet unlike Gilgi and Helene who see romantic relationships and hindrances to professional development and intentionally adopt the mask of the *kalte persona* to create distance from men, Doris actively uses her femininity to manipulate the men in her life for her own financial gain. Much like Baron von Gaigern in Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel*, Doris repeatedly attempts to adopt the mask of the *Gebildete* that, while protecting her true inner-self, projects a

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<sup>226</sup> KM 57; “And people treat you badly and they’re cheap, if they notice that you’re not doing well” (ASG 77).

<sup>227</sup> VdK 171; “seek distance; regard shelter as provisional; separate yourself from your cohort; cut family ties; avoid exaggerated individuation; pull your hat low on your brow; retreat from all sources of warmth” (CC 133).

superficial illusion of warmth that attracts men long enough for her to con them out of food, money, and shelter.

As Lethen states, “in manchen Zug seines Verhaltens gleicht der Hochstapler dem Autodidakten, wie ihn die Soziologe beschreibt: er besitzt von Haus aus kaum kulturelles Kapital, lernt an Vorbildern und ist voller Angst, entdeckt zu werden.”<sup>228</sup> This is especially true of Doris. She obviously does not belong to the educated classes, but she attempts to portray this mask by imitating the style and actions she associates with glamour and success. Lethen writes that the primary goal of the mask of the con-man is to leave behind the impression of authenticity. Doris attempts to do this to cover up her lack of education. “Ich habe weiße Seidenschuhe von Pinet zu vierzig Mark und kann olala—c’est ça, daß jeder denkt, ich spreche perfekt Französisch.”<sup>229</sup> As expected from Lethen’s description of the Radar Type, Doris does use men to fill up her leisure time, but she adopts characteristics of the *kalte persona* by consciously selecting her victims, actively changing her mask depending on the situation, and manipulating those men whom she perceives will provide her with the greatest benefit. “Ich gehe nachher in eine Jockeybar mit einem Mädchenhändlerartigen, an dem mir sonst nicht liegt. Aber ich komme dadurch in Milieu, das mir Aussichten bietet.”<sup>230</sup> As can be seen in this quotation, after moving to Berlin Doris relies on the men she dates not only for food

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<sup>228</sup> Vdk 151; “the confidence man resembles the autodidact as described in sociology: he possesses little cultural capital of his own, learns from models, and is filled with anxiety over being discovered” (CC 116).

<sup>229</sup> KM 81; “I have white silken gloves by Pinet at 40 marks and I can say *olala—c’est ça* in a way that makes everyone think I speak perfect French” (ASG 110).

<sup>230</sup> KM 43; “Later on, I’ll be going to a jockey bar with a white-slave trader type that I don’t care about otherwise. But this way, I’ll get introduced to the kind of environment that will open up some opportunities for me” (ASG 57).

and immediate survival, but also for information that will allow her to perpetuate her deceptive lifestyle.

Lethen writes “[der Hochstaplers] Verhalten wird nicht durch Assimilation an eine ranghöhere Gesellschaftslage der Aristokratie erleichtert. Die Disziplinierung der Affekte bedarf unausgesetzten ‘Trainings.’”<sup>231</sup> As if following Lethen’s instructions, Doris perpetually treats her exposure to more cultured people literally as a form of education. She regularly listens in on other people’s conversations because “man kann nie wissen, ob man nicht lernt dabei.”<sup>232</sup> The fact that Doris actively listens in on other’s conversations yet is wary to talk much herself echoes a warning in Brecht’s *Lesebuch*, which advises its reader to be wary that just as you are listening in on other’s conversations, you too, at all times, may be overheard: “Was immer du sagst, sag es nicht zweimal / Findest du deinen Gedanken bei einem anderen: verleugne ihn. / Wer seine Unterschrift nicht gegeben hat, wer kein Bild hinterließ / Wer nicht dabei war, wer nichts gesagt hat / Wie soll der zu fassen sein?”<sup>233</sup> By observing and imitating those around her, Doris actively uses the mask of the *Gebildete* to sustain the illusion that she is more educated and glamorous than she actually is. She believes that this mask acts as a protective force that shields her lack of education:

Und daran merke ich, er hält mich wirklich für eine Unschuldige und bessere Familie. Ich spreche ja doch auch wenig und gebildet. “Ich bin müde”, sage ich—welche Gebildete sagt dieses anders? “Danke”, sag

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<sup>231</sup> VdK 153; “assimilation into the aristocracy’s higher social standing does not facilitate [the con-man’s] behavior. The disciplining of the affects requires uninterrupted ‘training’” (CC 117 – 118).

<sup>232</sup> KM 6; “You never know what you might learn from it” (ASG 5).

<sup>233</sup> Brecht, qtd. in VdK 172; “Whatever you say, don’t say it twice. / If you find your ideas in someone else, disown them. / The man who hasn’t signed anything, who has left no picture / Who said nothing: / How can they catch him?” (qtd. in CC 134).

ich, “bitte”, sag ich—welche Gebildete macht einen Unterschied von mir in diesen Worten? Und so denkt er mich zu etwas Kolossalem.<sup>234</sup>

Doris’ choice of polite silence may have the desired effect, and it may be true that in some situations, Doris is able to trick others into believing that she is in fact better educated and of a higher social standing than she is in actuality. However, Keun exposes the absurdity of Doris’ illusion of education in the following anecdote where Doris fantasizes about impressing Einstein with her knowledge of science:

Und ich denke immer, wenn ich [Einsteins] Bild sehe mit den vergnügten Augen und den Staubwedelhaaren, wenn ich ihn im Kaffee sehen würde und hätte gerade den Mantel mit Fuchs an und todschick von vorn bis hinten, dann würde er mir auch vielleicht erzählen, er wäre beim Film und hätte enerhörte Beziehungen. Und ich würde ihm ganz kühl hinwerfen: H<sub>2</sub>O ist Wasser—das habe ich gelernt von Hubert, und würde ihn damit in größtes Erstaunen versetzen.<sup>235</sup>

Based on the examples above, perhaps it is good that Doris does choose polite silence in the company of others as opposed to expressing her true thoughts as they come out in her diary.

Lethen relegates women to the role of the Radar Type by asserting that they are only interested in superficial pleasures. “Vergnügen und Konsum, Nebenschauplätze der vergangenen Epoche, werden zur Hauptsache. Die Verbraucherverhaltung ist die dominante Reaktionsform; der neue Typus entwickelt sie auch gegenüber der

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<sup>234</sup> KM 106; “And that tells me he really considers me innocent and coming from a good family. I do speak very little and in an educated manner. ‘I’m tired,’ I say—and what education would let you say that any differently? ‘Thank you,’ I say, ‘please,’ I say—what education would make a difference when saying those words? And so he makes me into something incredible” (ASG 144).

<sup>235</sup> KM 11; “And every time I see a picture of [Einstein], with his cheerful eyes and his mobhead, I’m thinking if I ran into him in a café, wearing my coat with the fox collar and elegant from head to toe, perhaps he too would tell me that he was in the film industry and had incredible connections. And I would simply tell him: H<sub>2</sub>O is water—that’s what I learned from Hubert, and he would be stunned” (ASG 13).

Politik.”<sup>236</sup> Doris’ situation, however, shows that it may not be a lack of *interest*, but rather a lack of education that prevents her and other women from actively engaging in politics. “Denn Zeitungen sind mir so langweilig, und ich verstehe sie nicht richtig. Ich brauche jemand, der mich aufklärt.”<sup>237</sup> In fact, at several points in the novel, Doris asks for clarification on political issues, but instead becomes the object of persistent sexual advances:

Ich fragte ihn, warum man nach Frieden schreit, wo doch Frieden ist oder wenigstens kein Krieg. Antwortet er mir, ich hätte Augen wie Brombeeren. Hoffentlich meint er reife. [...] Ich machte noch einen Versuch und fragte, ob Franzosen und Juden dasselben wären und warum sie Rassen sind und von den Nationalen nicht gemocht werden wegen dem Blut—und ob es ein Risiko wäre von mir, davon zu sprechen—und wo unter Umständen die politische Ermordung einsetzt. Erzählt er mir, daß er seine Mutter vergangene Weihnachten einen Teppich geschenkt hat und furchtbar gutmütig ist, und er hat seiner Frau gesagt, daß es eine Gemeinheit wäre, ihm vorzuwerfen, daß er sich den Regenschirm gekauft hat aus Halbseide, statt den großen Sessel neu beziehen zu lassen, wodurch sie sich schämt, ihre Damen, worunter eine Professor ist, zum Kaffee einzuladen—<sup>238</sup>

Instead of expressing a lack of interest in politics as attributed to the Radar Type by Lethen, Doris instead adopts what Lethen attributes as a characteristic of the *kalte*

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<sup>236</sup> VdK 238; “Enjoyment and consumption, the sideshows of the passing epoch, take over center stage. A consumerist attitude becomes the dominant reaction form; the new type develops it also in opposition to politics” (CC 189).

<sup>237</sup> KM 46; “Because I find newspapers boring and I don’t really understand them. I needed someone who would explain things to me” (ASG 61).

<sup>238</sup> KM 46 – 47; “I asked why people were shouting for peace, since we have peace or at least no war. Him: ‘You have eyes like boysenberries.’ I hope he means ripe ones. [...] I made one more attempt, asking him if Frenchmen and Jews were one and the same thing, and why they were called a race and how come the nationalists didn’t like them because of their blood—and whether it was risky to talk about that since this could be the beginning of my political assassination. So he tells me that he gave his mother a carpet for Christmas and that he’s terribly good-natured, and that he was telling his wife that it was unfair of her to criticize him for having bought himself a new silk umbrella instead of having the big easy chair reupholstered—which makes her too embarrassed to invite her lady friends over, one of whom is a professor—” (ASG 62 – 63).

*persona* by maintaining a “Haltung der Indifferenz”<sup>239</sup> towards politics when it is functional.

Prevented by her lack of formal education, instead of trying to understand or actively participate in politics, Doris avoids the topic, afraid that her ignorance will expose her true self. Once again, without an objective narrator, we cannot tell if Doris’ cons are as successful as she thinks they are. However, the fact that Doris is not passively, but rather actively imitating those of higher social standing both for her own protection and survival brings this attitude out of the realm of the Radar Type into the realm of the *kalte persona*.

In an interesting comparison, both Helene and Gilgi, who are much more formally educated than Doris, do the exact opposite: instead of trying to support the illusion of being *more* educated, they attempt to present themselves as *less* educated, adopting what Joan Riviere terms “womanliness as masquerade” in an attempt to protect themselves by hiding what may be perceived as potentially threatening, masculine characteristics. Riviere argues that much like homosexual men who exaggerate heterosexual characteristics as a “defense” against their homosexuality, “women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men.”<sup>240</sup> One aspect of this “mask” perpetuates the assumption that women are by nature less educated than men, and therefore some

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<sup>239</sup> VdK 236; “attitude of indifference” (CC 188).

<sup>240</sup> Riviere 303.

educated women “put on the semblance of a rather uneducated, foolish and bewildered woman”<sup>241</sup> in order to protect themselves from shame or retribution.

This mask of the *lack* of education does not prevent women from achieving their goals, but rather proves just the opposite. Riviere illustrates this phenomenon through the case of one woman, who, despite her manipulative mask of naïveté, succeeds “in the end always making her point.”<sup>242</sup> Having educated, able women act in this manner as a form of defense actively creates a means of dissipating the perceived hostility and their own anxiety caused by their education and ability.

This mask of the lack of education as an attempt to deal with the anxiety of dealing with potentially hostile father-figures can be clearly seen in Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*. After succumbing to the pressure and having intercourse with her boyfriend, Helene becomes pregnant, but she believes that having a child is not compatible with her future as a working woman and especially as a scientist. After several failed attempts to cause a miscarriage, Helene searches for a doctor who will perform an abortion for her. Her search brings her in contact with corrupt and law-abiding doctors, drop-out medical students, and retired midwives, a journey I will explore in more detail in the next chapter. What is most interesting, however, is that during each of these encounters, Helene adopts the mask of a lesser-educated woman to shield herself from her own sense of shame, which, Lethen has shown, is the goal of the mask of the *kalte persona*.

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<sup>241</sup> Riviere 308.

<sup>242</sup> Riviere 308.

As a college-educated woman, Helene is afraid not only that the doctors would not be willing to help her, but also that they would rebuke her because she, as an educated woman, should have known better and easily could have prevented her pregnancy. During her visits to the various medical “professionals,” Helene adopts the mask of a timid clerk, using the pseudonym “Fräulein Schmidt.” One doctor suggests she marry the father of her child. This is, of course, a possibility for Helene, but one that is not conducive to her life as a student, so she quickly dismisses the idea. “Den Firilei heiraten—absurder Gedanke.”<sup>243</sup> In order to deflect admonishment from not considering the possibility, Helene claims that the father of her child is already married.

It is interesting to note that Helene does not only adopt this defensive mechanism of naïveté as masquerade when the doctor is a male, but more importantly when she deliberately seeks out a woman doctor, thinking a woman would be more sympathetic to her circumstances. In this instance, Helene is not so much afraid of being rebuked as a *woman* in a man’s world, but rather of being an *educated* woman who has put herself in such a compromising position. After she is unable to reason with a doctor who believes she is an uneducated clerk, Helene discards her mask and explains her true situation: that she is a student who has neither the time nor the finances to properly take care of a child. Yet this explanation, too, does not stir the sympathy of the doctor. Helene determines that neither her true self nor the masks of others she adopts are sufficient to help her in her situation. She realizes that she must face the world alone, adopting a mask of coldness in order to be able to survive.

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<sup>243</sup> “Firilei” is Helene’s nickname for her boyfriend, Rainer; HW 114; “Marry Firilei—preposterous idea!” (H 141).

In addition to educated women adopting the masks of lesser-educated women as a form of protection, Riviere also analyzes educated women who actively use flirtation as a tactic to distract men, whom they perceive as being in power, from noticing and being threatened by the women's masculine attributes. Riviere cites the following example of a highly successful woman "engaged in work of a propagandist nature, which consisted principally in speaking and writing":<sup>244</sup>

In spite of her unquestionable success and ability, both intellectual and practical, and her capacity for managing an audience and dealing with discussions, etc., she would be excited and apprehensive all night after, with misgivings whether she had done anything inappropriate, and obsessed by a need for reassurance.<sup>245</sup>

This woman sought two types of reassurance from perceived father-figures: "first, direct reassurance of the nature of compliments about her performance; secondly, and more important, indirect reassurance of the nature of sexual attentions from these men."<sup>246</sup>

Riviere concluded that the woman "was attempting to obtain sexual advances from the particular type of men by means of flirting and coquetting with them in a more or less veiled manner,"<sup>247</sup> and that this form of flirtation with men in power was in fact "an unconscious attempt to ward off the anxiety which would ensue on account of the reprisals she anticipated from the father-figures after her intellectual performance."<sup>248</sup>

This use of "womanliness as masquerade" as described by Riviere by its very nature tends to put women into a subordinate role in relationship to men. However, the parallel between womanliness as masquerade and Lethen's description of the *kalte*

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<sup>244</sup> Riviere 304.

<sup>245</sup> Riviere 304.

<sup>246</sup> Riviere 305.

<sup>247</sup> Riviere 305.

<sup>248</sup> Riviere 305.

*persona* are striking. Riviere concludes that “womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it.”<sup>249</sup> I argue that womanliness as masquerade, when combined the characteristics of the *kalte persona* as identified by Lethen, can also be used as an active form of defense by providing a situation in which women transform themselves into “Hochstaplerinnen,” into confidence-women, a mask which allows women to not only protect themselves but also to adapt the qualities of the *kalte persona* into a specifically feminine form, allowing women to actively manipulate and take advantage of men.

Baum’s and Keun’s novels include numerous instances where women actively use flirtation in an attempt to manipulate men to their will. When Gilgi finds out she is pregnant, she asks the doctor whether or not he would be willing to perform an abortion, knowing that although it is illegal, many doctors would perform the procedure for a fee. The doctor, however, does not react as Gilgi expected. “‘Wofür halten Sie mich!’ Der kleine Arzt ist halb echt, halb unecht entrüstet.”<sup>250</sup> This quotation shows once again that Gilgi is able to see behind the feeble mask adopted by the doctor. After recognizing the doctor’s feigned mask of shock, Gilgi thinks to herself, “Ach Herrgott nochmal—willst du Theater, du vermickelter Idiot! Gut, machen wir eben Theater.”<sup>251</sup> Gilgi adopts both characteristics of the masquerade of womanliness as described by Riviere. By adopting the mask of a lesser educated woman, Gilgi uses flirtation not as a means to protect herself from shame, but rather as a tactic to deliberately manipulate the

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<sup>249</sup> Riviere 306.

<sup>250</sup> G 176; “‘What do you take me for!’ The small doctor is half genuine, half indignant.”

<sup>251</sup> G 176; “Oh for God’s sake—do you want to play, you stupid idiot! Good, let’s play.”

doctor. Much like Baron von Gaigern in Baum's *Menschen im Hotel* who uses his suave mask of the *kalte persona* to con his victims out of money, Gilgi actively uses her feminine appeal in an attempt to bend the doctor to her will:

Gilgi stiert schmerzverloren vor sich hin, packt nach sekundenlangem Stieren die Hand des Arztes—dumpfes Röcheln wäre jetzt angebracht und vorschriftsmäßig — na, vielleicht genügt auch: “Helfen Sie mir, Herr Doktor! Ich habe solches Vertrauen zu Ihnen (hört jeder Arzt gern) ich weiß nicht, was—ich meine—also ich—”<sup>252</sup>

In this instance, Gilgi cannot bring herself to continue this masquerade. “Quatsch, das ist mir zu dumm, ich kann das nicht. Man muß doch vernünftig mit so einem Mann reden können.”<sup>253</sup> Gilgi sheds her mask and attempts to reason with the doctor as an educated woman, a conversation that quickly turns in to a thirty-minute heated debate regarding the morality of allowing a child to be born, knowing that the parents cannot financially care for it, a critique that I will analyze in more detail in the next chapter.

While the mask of the *kalte persona* performs the social role of a protective shield that protects people in everyday life, it is interesting to note that Ernst Jünger attributes the mask of the *kalte persona* to both men and women, yet the mask itself takes on very different representations of “armoring” depending on the gender of the person who puts on the mask. Citing Jünger, Lethen writes that the mask of the *kalte persona* “[erweckt] bei Männern einen metalischen, bei Frauen einen kosmetischen Eindruck.”<sup>254</sup> Unlike men, who adopt symbolic rather than literal armor as a form of

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<sup>252</sup> G 176; “Gilgi stares ahead blankly as if lost in her pain, and after several seconds of staring grabs the hand of the doctor—muffled moaning would need to be added here—well, maybe that’s enough: ‘Help me, Doctor! I have such confidence in you (every doctor likes to hear that) I don’t know what—ich mean—well I—.’”

<sup>253</sup> G 176; “Nonsense, this is so stupid, I can’t do this. You have to be able to reason with a person like this.”

<sup>254</sup> Jünger 171; “evokes for men, a metallic, for women, a cosmetic impression.”

protection, women can literally put on a new face before entering potentially hostile situations.

When womanliness is used as a form of protective masquerade, cosmetics form an integral part of the con-woman's *kalte persona* armoring. When Doris adopts the mask of the *Gebildete*, she uses cosmetics to appear as if she is of higher social standing and wealthier than she really is. "Vater unser, mach mir noch mit einem Wunder eine feine Bildung—das übrige kann ich ja selbst machen mit Schminke."<sup>255</sup> Once again, the mask alone will never be enough to raise to her a higher social and economic class, but it does contribute to the illusion she wishes to portray. Cosmetics not only help Doris to portray the *image* of a successful, educated *Glanz*, but also—like the cold armoring attributed to men—give her an added layer of protection from the outside world. "Ich möchte mich etwas pudern, dann habe ich mehr Mut. Ich kann mir ruhig die Lippen schminken, das Rot bleibt garantiert doch drauf bis morgen früh. Bis ich's abwasche."<sup>256</sup> In addition to shielding her vulnerable inner self and preventing it from being revealed, cosmetics, like armor, give Doris the added courage necessary to confront the world.

Doris is perhaps the best example of a woman who actively uses womanliness as masquerade as a deliberately manipulative defense tactic. In contrast to the Radar Type who sees money merely as a means for entertainment, once again much like Baron von Gaigern in Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*, Doris uses the masquerade of womanhood in a

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<sup>255</sup> KM 131; "Heavenly Father, perform a miracle and give me an education—I can do the rest with make-up" (ASG 177).

<sup>256</sup> KM 114; "I would love to powder my face, that would give me more courage. I guess it's okay to put on lipstick. The color is going to stay on until tomorrow morning, until I wash it off" (ASG 155).

calculated effort to obtain the food, shelter, and money she needs in order to survive. She deliberately dates older, fat men, knowing that they will shower her with gifts, anxious to have others see what a beautiful woman they are dating. Instead of seeing these men as serious romantic possibilities, Doris uses them merely to build her wardrobe, allowing them to perpetuate her ambition to become a *Glanz*.

Despite her obvious manipulation of these men, Doris attempts to perpetuate a mask of being not only beautiful, but also the mask of an upstanding, moral woman. When one of her suitors tries to persuade her into having intercourse with him, Doris sharply rebukes him:

“Mein Herr, was denken Sie sich eigentlich von mir? Ich muß doch sehr bitten. Wofür halten Sie mich in etwa?” Und ich habe ihm mächtig imponiert. Erst war er natürlich wütend, aber dann sagte er mir als edel empfindender Mensch: das gefällt ihm—ein Mädchen, das sich auch im Schwips so fest in der Hand hat. Und er achtete meine hohe Moral. Ich sagte nur ganz schlicht: “Das ist meine Natur, Herr Grönland.”<sup>257</sup>

Keun’s readers know that it is not Doris’ morality that stops her from being intimate with her suitor; rather, it is because she is embarrassed by the fact that she is in such dire financial need that her shirt and bra are held together with seven rusty safety pins.

One particularly humorous example of Doris using her womanliness as a con is when she melodramatically says that she does not know what time it is because her watch is broken. “Jetzt weiß ich schon wieder nicht, wie spät es ist—meine Uhr ist

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<sup>257</sup> KM 6 – 7; “‘But Sir, what are you thinking of me? I’m shocked. Who do you think I am?’ And he was really impressed. Of course he was mad at first, but then, being a man of noble sentiment, he said that he liked a girl who was in control of herself even when she was soused. And he respected my lofty morals. I merely said: ‘It’s my nature, Herr Grönland’” (ASG 6 – 7).

schon so lange kaput.“<sup>258</sup> Instead of receiving some money to repair her broken watch, which is in fact what Doris is expecting, she receives a beautiful gold watch:

Aber am nächsten Abend in Rix Diele kam er mit einer kleinen Goldenen. Ich staunte furchtbar: “Wie konnten Sie denn nur wissen, daß ich gerade eine Uhr brauche???”—aber Sie beleidigen mich zutiefst—ich kann sie doch nicht annehmen!” Er wurde ganz blaß, entschuldigte sich und tat die Uhr fort. Ich zitterte schon und dachte: jetzt bist du zu weit gegangen, Doris! Dann sagte ich so mit schwimmender Stimme, so ‘n bißchen tränenfeucht: “Herr Grönland, ich kann es nicht übers Herz bringen, Sie zu kränken—binden Sie sie mir bitte an!”<sup>259</sup>

Doris takes deliberate advantage of this situation, but never allows herself to lose her control in the relationship. When one of her boyfriends wants to marry her, she declines, “weil ich doch auf die Dauer zu schade bin für kleine Dicke, die noch dazu Käsemann heißen.”<sup>260</sup> When another of her boyfriends wants to marry her, she does not say yes, but instead she stays with him long enough to get enough money from him to allow her to have a coat with fur trim made before breaking up with him. “Und nach dem Fuchs habe ich Schluß gemacht. Aber ich bin jetzt komplett in Garderobe—eine große Hauptsache für ein Mädchen, das weiter will und Ehrgeiz hat.”<sup>261</sup> Especially in this last example, the true essence of the confidence women becomes apparent: Doris has abandoned her inner-moral compass because, as Lethen argues, the conscience “engt ihren Bewegungsspielraum ein.”<sup>262</sup> Instead, Doris adopts a series of masks that

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<sup>258</sup> KM 7; “I still don’t know what time it is—since my watch has been broken for so long” (ASG 7).

<sup>259</sup> KM 7; “But the following night he arrived at the Rix Bar with a small golden one. I acted so surprised: ‘How on earth did you know that I needed a watch? But you’re insulting me, I couldn’t possibly....’ So he turned all white and apologized and put the watch away. And I was trembling and thinking: ‘Now you went too far, Doris! So I said, with tears in my voice: ‘Herr Grönland, I can’t bear to hurt you—please put it on for me’” (ASG 7).

<sup>260</sup> KM 5; “I’m too good for the short and stocky type, particularly if they’re called Käsemann” (ASG 5).

<sup>261</sup> KM 5; “But now my outfit is complete, which is the most important thing for a girl who wants to get ahead and has ambition” (ASG 5).

<sup>262</sup> VdK 58; “restricts freedom of movement” (CC 37).

prevent her own sense of morality from interfering with the choices she makes for her own personal gain.

Once Doris has the beginnings of an elegant wardrobe, it becomes easier and easier for her to use her mask of the *Gebildete* to deceive men:

Da war ich zuerst auf dem Kurfürstendamm, da stand ich vor einem Schuhgeschäft, da sah ich so süße Schuhe, da kniff mich eine Idee—ich tat Sicherheit von ganz großer Dame in mich, wozu mir der Feh half—und riß mir einen Absatz vom Schuh und hinkte in das Geschäft. Und legte den Absatz dem schwarzen Rayon in die Hände. Sagte er zu mir: “Gnädige Frau.” Sag ich: “So ein Unglück, wo ich tanzen wollte und hab nicht mehr Zeit für nach Haus und nicht genug Geld bei mir.” Ging ich aus dem Laden mit Eidechsenkappen und abends mit dem schwarzen Rayon in ein Kabarett.<sup>263</sup>

Doris continues her deception with the shoe salesman for the entire evening, adopting the guise that she is a model for a famous artist. “Wir haben uns furchtbar angelogen und uns aus Gefälligkeit gegenseitig alles geglaubt.”<sup>264</sup> Once again, this shows that not only is Doris deceiving the salesman, but the salesman is deliberately attempting to deceive Doris. However, as a woman who is used to seeing behind men’s masks, as I argued earlier, Doris easily sees through his deception, but politely pretends she believes him.

Some women, such as Flämmchen in *Menschen im Hotel*, combine the flirtatious aspects of the mask of womanliness as masquerade with their professional

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<sup>263</sup> KM 49 – 50; “It all started on *Kurfürstendamm*. I was standing in front of a shoe store, where I saw such adorable shoes, when I had an idea. I went in with the assertiveness of a grand lady—helped by my fur coat—and tore off one of my heels and started to limp into the shop. And I handed my broken heel to the salesman. And he calls me ‘Madam.’ I say: ‘What a pity. I wanted to go dancing and I don’t have time to go home and don’t have enough money on me.’ Needless to say, I left the store with the lizard toes and that night I went to a cabaret with the salesman” (ASG 66 – 67).

<sup>264</sup> KM 50; “We both lied to each other tremendously and believed each other just to be nice” (ASG 67).

lives. Flämmchen is a beautiful young woman and, as can be gathered from her first appearance at the Grand Hotel, is used to being noticed for her beauty:

Auch in der Halle wurde Flämmchen angestarrt. Sie war ein Prachtexemplar von Weibsperson, darüber schien kein Zweifel möglich.... Flämmchen, völlig unberührt von den Blicken ringsherum (mein Gott, wie war sie das gewöhnt), puderte sich ohne viel Aufmerksamkeit die Nase, holte, mitten in der Halle stehend, mit einer burschikosen Bewegung ein kleines Zigarettentui aus ihrer Manteltasche und begann zu rauchen.<sup>265</sup>

Given the high unemployment rates and the fierce competition for lesser-skilled, white-collar jobs, Flämmchen actively uses her physical beauty as a bargaining chip for securing employment. In this way, Flämmchen differs from her step-sister, who, although not beautiful, has a permanent position:

Unähnlichere Schwestern konnte es auf der ganzen Welt nicht geben. Preysing erinnerte sich an Flamm eins<sup>266</sup> ungefähr als einer vertrauenswürdigen Person mit mißfarbenem Haar, einem Schreibärmel am rechten, einer Schutzmanschette aus Papier am linken Arm und mit saurer Miene unerwünschte Besucher im Vorzimmer von Doktor Zinnowitz zurück-haltend. Flamm zwo hingegen, Flämmchen, hatte nicht das geringste von dieser Gediegenheit. Sie saß in einen Klubstuhl hingelehnt, als wenn sie hier zu Hause wäre, sie wippte mit Schuhen aus blitzblauem Leder, sie sah aus, als ob sie sich köstlich amüsieren wollte, und war im ganzen höchstens zwanzig Jahre alt.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> M 84; “In the lounge Flämmchen once more attracted all eyes. She was a magnificent example of the female form—of that there seemed no doubt.... Flämmchen, entirely unmoved by the looks that were fixed upon her from all sides (she was used enough to them, heaven knows!), carelessly powdered her nose, and then, without moving from where she stood, took a cigarette case from the pocket of her coat and with a free-and-easy air and began to smoke” (GH 77 – 78).

<sup>266</sup> It is interesting to note here that these two sisters are both referred to as numbers, not by their first names. “Flamm eins,” also known as “Frau Flamm,” is Flämmchen’s older step-sister; Flämmchen [literally “little Flamm”] is also known as “Flamm zwo” when compared with her sister.

<sup>267</sup> M 82; “Two sisters less alike could scarcely be imagined. Preysing had a vague recollection of Flamm the First as a most reliable person with colorless hair, a detachable sleeve on her right arm, and a paper cuff on her left who, with an uncompromising air, barred the way to undesired callers in Dr. Zinnowitz’s outer office. Flamm the Second, Flämmchen, on the other hand, had not a trace of the stolid demeanor. She was leaning back in an armchair as though she was quite at home in such surroundings; she swung one foot in a neat shoe of light blue leather, and looked as if she was out to have a jolly good job. She was, as her whole appearance testified, at the utmost twenty years old” (GH 75 – 76).

From this quotation, it becomes clear that while Flamm *eins* has adopted a mask of coldness and professionalism, Flamm *zwo*, known as Flämmchen, uses womanliness as masquerade in order to be noticed.

Baum writes that Flämmchen's older sister has been employed by the firm for over 20 years and is indispensable to the success of the company. Flämmchen, on the other hand, is significantly younger and works only occasionally when additional help is needed in the office, and she is in the process of searching for a permanent position. Baum insinuates that Flämmchen's physical appearance does play an important role in making her culturally appropriate for her professional situation:

Sie trug ein blaues, dünnes Seidenkleidchen, eine billige Kette aus geschliffenem Glas und ein flott zurechtgekniffenes Hütchen aus einem Serienverkauf zu einer Mark neunzig. Sie sah bezaubernd aus mit diesen Requisiten einer karrierebeflissenen Eleganz.<sup>268</sup>

Not only must Flämmchen be physically beautiful, her beauty must coincide with professional standards of beauty in the working world. Flämmchen's means of obtaining and sustaining employment using her beauty as a bargaining tool echoes Kracauer's comments regarding the fact that for many employers, the physical beauty of their female *Angestellten* was as least as important as their professional qualifications.

Based on the physical descriptions of Flämmchen, one may conclude that she is a Radar Type. Even her gestures seem to be direct imitations of what she sees in films. “‘Die Herren kennen sich?’ fragte sie mit einer vornehm leichten Handbewegung, die

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<sup>268</sup> M 225 – 226; “She wore a thin blue silk dress, a cheap necklace of cut glass, and a neat little close-fitting hat bought at a sale for one mark ninety. She looked enchanting in this finery of a girl with her own way to make in the world” (GH 213).

sie einem Filmstar abgeguckt hatte.”<sup>269</sup> I argue that this, however, does not relegate her to the category of the Radar Type because she actively adopts masks and attitudes of coldness in order to take advantage of the men whom she attracts.

Despite her stunning physical appearance, it becomes clear that Flämmchen, like her sister, also adopts a mask of cold professionalism when she is working. “‘Doktor Zinnowitz schickt mich wegen der Abschriften. Ich bin das Flämmchen, das er Ihnen versprochen hat, soll ich sagen’, äußerte sie ohne Feierlichkeiten.”<sup>270</sup> Once Preysing and Flämmchen go to a private room and Flämmchen begins setting up to take down Preysing’s correspondence, she fluctuates between her mask of cold professionalism and her masquerade of womanliness. Flämmchen repeatedly brings Preysing’s attention to her physical characteristics, and knowing she has enticed him, then transitions to work:

Flämmchen betrachtete ihre Hände, streifte auch ihren Ärmel ein wenig hoch und sah ihre braune Haut ernsthaft an. “Das kommt noch vom Schnee. Ich war Skifahren in Vorarlberg. Ein Bekannter von mir hat mich mitgenommen. Fein. Sie hätten mich sehen sollen, wie ich zurückgekommen bin. Also, kann’s losgehen?”<sup>271</sup>

Once she knows she has his attention, Flämmchen uses her physical beauty as a bargaining chip to negotiate future employment with him. She retains Preysing’s interest by telling him that she has worked, nude, as an advertising model, and while

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<sup>269</sup> M 229; “‘Do you know each other?’ she asked with an elegant wave of the hand which she had picked up from a film star” (GH 216 – 217).

<sup>270</sup> M 82 – 83; “‘Dr. Zinnowitz sent me to make the copies. I am Flämmchen, whom he said he would send along, I ought to explain,’ she said without ceremony” (GH 76).

<sup>271</sup> M 88; “Flämmchen inspected her hands and then she drew her sleeve up a little way and looked earnestly at her brown skin. ‘That’s the snow. I went skiing in Vorarlberg. A friend of mine took me with him. It was glorious. You should have seen me when I got back. Shall we make a start, then?’” (GH 81).

casually mentioning that her ultimate goal is to work in film, she asserts that her current career goals are drastically different:

“Nee—am liebsten wäre es mir, wenn mich jetzt im Frühjahr wieder jemand als Sekretärin auf Reisen mitnehmen würde. Voriges Jahr war ich mit einem Herrn in Florenz, er hat für ein Buch gearbeitet, ein Professor. Reizender Mensch war das. Ach was—es wird dieses Jahr wieder etwas kommen”, sagte sie und rückte die Maschine zurecht.<sup>272</sup>

In this manner, Flämmchen consciously manipulates the masquerade of womanliness not only to secure employment, but also to retain it, hinting at the possibility of securing additional employment in the future.

Flämmchen is not the only woman who adopts a mask of womanliness and uses flirtation in order to advance in her career. Gilgi is hired out of a large pool of well-qualified women to take dictation from a former officer who is writing his memoirs, but she does not believe she was hired only because of her professional skills and the fact that she has her own portable typewriter. Instead, it is because she “so ein bißchen verheißungsvoll mit den Augen gekullert hat. So niedliche Von-unten-nach-oben-Blicke wirken bei Männern über fünfzig fast immer.”<sup>273</sup> Gilgi has a very interesting view regarding the importance of proper balance between flirtation and professionalism:

Ferner ist’s gut, an Beschützerinstinkte zu appellieren, im richtigen Augenblick solides Selbstbewußtsein durch kleidsame Hilflosigkeit zu ersetzen. Man muß das alles verstehen. Gilgi versteht es. Auf die Arbeitgeber ist man nun mal angewiesen, und ganz ohne Mätzchen ist

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<sup>272</sup> M 87; “‘No, the best thing would be if someone would take me traveling as his secretary this spring. Last year I went with a gentleman to Florence. He was working at a book—a professor—charming man he was. Oh, well, something else will turn up this year too,’ she said, and put the machine in order” (GH 81).

<sup>273</sup> G 82 – 83; “flirted with her eyes in such a promising way. Such ‘look down – look up’ glances almost always work with men over fifty.”

ihnen nicht beizukommen. Können allein entscheidet nicht, Mätzchen allein entscheiden nicht—beides zusammen entscheidet meistens.<sup>274</sup>

Gilgi's actions, despite the fact that this will supplement her regular income during the day, prevent other women, including one woman who has been unemployed for over five months, from obtaining the position. As Gilgi notes, "Sie muß sehen, wie sie weiter kommt—jeder für sich—, wo käme man hin, wenn man allen weichlichen Mitleidsregungen nachgeben wollte?"<sup>275</sup> As I will explore in Chapter Four, not only Gilgi's flirtation in order to secure employment but also her conscious lack of pity for this other woman's situation are directly linked to Plessner's call for the conscious distancing from the warmth of community. Through this portrayal of Gilgi's lack of solidarity, Keun not only represents how women can use attitudes of coldness for survival, but also offers a biting critique of Gilgi's rabid egoism.

It is a very fine line, however, between casual flirtation and going too far and giving the wrong signals. The following example of Doris shows what may happen when the appropriate balance is not maintained. Doris, who is employed but less skilled than Gilgi, consciously attempts to use her sexuality in order to distract her employer in the hopes that he will not fire her for her inability to type correctly. She herself admits that her typing is not as professional as it should be. "Natürlich weit und breit kein Komma in den Briefen, was aber ein System von mir ist: denn lieber gar keine Kommas

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<sup>274</sup> G 83; "Furthermore, it is good to appeal to your protective instincts, to replace solid self-confidence with the appropriate amount of helplessness at the right moment. You have to understand everything. Gilgi understands. You're authorized by your employer, and you won't be able to get by without some sort of gimmick. Ability alone doesn't decide anything, the gimmick alone doesn't decide anything—both together are usually what makes the decision in the end."

<sup>275</sup> G 83 – 84; "She needs to see to it that she gets through—every woman for herself—where would you be if you gave in to every sad story?"

als falsche, weil welche reinstricheln unauffälliger geht als falsche fortmachen.”<sup>276</sup> In order to keep her job, Doris attempts use her sexuality to distract her employer from her lacking skills. “Also—ich lege [dem Chef] die Briefe vor, und bei jedem Komma, was fehlt, schmeiß ich ihm einen sinnlichen Blick.”<sup>277</sup> This type of harmless, sexual flirtation was most likely an imitation of similar behaviors seen by many women at the movies, where, as von Ankum states, “the fantasy of marrying the boss is a welcome escape from the difficulty of everyday life.”<sup>278</sup> Doris attempts to imitate the successful and flirtatious women she sees at the movies in the following humorous situation:

Und er sieht meine Briefe durch und macht Kommas mit Tinte—ich denke, was bleibt dir übrig! und lehne mich aus Versehen leicht an ihn. Und malt immer mehr Kommas und streicht und verbessert, und will auf einmal bei einem Brief sagen: der muß noch mal geschrieben werden. Aber bei “noch mal” gebe ich mit meinem Busen einen Druck gegen seine Schulter, und wie er aufguckt, zittre ich noch für alle Fälle wild mit den Nasenflügeln...und mache ein Nasenflügelbeben wie ein belgisches Riesenkaninchen beim Kohlfressen.<sup>279</sup>

Unlike in the movies, however, Doris’ strategy does not turn out as she had anticipated. Doris’ flirtation backfires, driving her boss into a passionate frenzy. He attempts to embrace her, saying that he has been aware for a long time of her hidden desire for him. Unlike Gilgi—who skillfully transfers her employer’s affection on to another woman,

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<sup>276</sup> KM 13 – 14; “Of course there were no commas in sight, which is one of my strategies: because I figure, it’s better to have no commas at all than commas in the wrong places, since it’s easier to pencil them in than have to erase them” (ASG 16).

<sup>277</sup> KM 4; “So I put the letters in front of him, and for every missing comma, I give him this sensual look” (ASG 4).

<sup>278</sup> Von Ankum, “Gendered” 171.

<sup>279</sup> KM 14; “And he’s going over my letters, marking them with commas in ink—and I’m thinking to myself, What can you do? and casually brush up against him, as if by accident. And he keeps putting in more and more commas, and crosses out words and corrects, and he’s about to tell me that one of the letters has to be written again. But as he says ‘again’ I press my breast against his shoulder, and when he looks up I madly flare my nostrils...flaring my nostrils like one of those giant Belgian rabbits when they eat cabbage” (ASG 16 – 17).

reminding him that instead of the brunette Gilgi, “daß eigentlich ‘blond’ sein Typ ist”<sup>280</sup>—Doris physically pushes her employer away, thus rejecting his sexual advances and clarifying her true feelings for him. “Wie kann ein Studierter wie Sie so schafsdämlich sein und glauben, ein junges hübsches Mädchen wäre wild auf ihn. Haben Sie noch nie in den Spiegel gesehen?”<sup>281</sup> As a result, Doris loses not only her flirtatious mask, but also her temper. This remark ends up costing Doris her job, leaving her in dire financial straits.

In stark contrast to Doris’ rather comical situation, Flämmchen gives an example of how to protect oneself from the potentially serious consequences of sexual propositions by male employers. Flämmchen’s flirtation during her previous encounters with Preysing has indeed piqued his interest, and he gives Flämmchen a “business” proposition. In order to negotiate, Flämmchen first puts on her *kalte persona* armoring à la Jünger. “Flämmchen klappte ihr Puderdöschen zu und fragte: ‘Also, um was handelt es sich?’”<sup>282</sup> Preysing tells Flämmchen that he must go on a business trip to England and offers her a position as a personal secretary and travel companion:

“Es handelt sich darum,” sagte er, “daß ich nach England fahren muß und eine Sekretärin mitnehmen möchte. Erstens wegen der Korrespondenz, aber dann auch, weil ich unterwegs etwas Ansprache haben möchte. Ich bin sehr nervös’ (er sagte es mit einer unbewußten Spekulation auf ihr Mitgefühl) ‘und brauche auf der Reise jemanden, der

<sup>280</sup> G 28; “that ‘blond’ is actually his type.”

<sup>281</sup> KM 15; “How can a highly educated man like yourself be so dumb to think that a pretty young girl like myself would be crazy about him? Have you ever looked at yourself in the mirror?” (ASG 18).

<sup>282</sup> M 233; “Flämmchen snapped her powder box and asked: ‘Well, what is it about?’” (GH 220).

sich um mich kümmert. Ich weiß nicht, ob Sie mich verstehen? Ich biete Ihnen eine Vertrauensstellung, bei der es—bei der Sie—bei der—”<sup>283</sup>

On the surface, Preysing refers to necessity of having someone to take down his business correspondence, but it quickly becomes obvious that he has more than just business on his mind. “Wenn meine Unternehmung dort gut geht, dann mache ich vielleicht nachher noch vierzehn Tage Ferien, wir können in London bleiben oder nach Paris fahren—.”<sup>284</sup> It is clear that this business trip blurs the line between professional employment as a secretary and prostitution. Macfarlane notes that this blurring of the boundaries between a professional relationship and a romantic encounter “was one of the ways in which a conservative popular culture sought to neutralize the potentially liberated figure of the white-collar woman.”<sup>285</sup> Flämmchen, too, is well aware of Preysing’s true intentions, but, having not held a steady position for over a year, Flämmchen is willing do whatever she needs in order to obtain a sense of financial security.

Worried that Preysing may change his mind, Flämmchen hides her true feelings about this proposal and instead adopts a mask of optimism to convince Preysing that not only the trip, but taking her with him as his personal secretary would be a good idea. “Gut, gehen wird die Sache dort schon; ich weiß ja bißchen Bescheid aus den Briefen’,

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<sup>283</sup> M 234; “I have to go to England and I want to take a secretary with me. In the first place for my correspondence, but also for the sake of a little company. I am very nervous, very nervous (he said this by way of an unconscious bid for her sympathy) and need someone on the journey who will take care of me. I don’t know if you understand me. I offer you a confidential post in which it—in which you—in which—”

<sup>284</sup> M 234; “If the business I have there goes off well I would possibly take a fortnight’s holiday afterwards. We could stay in London or go to Paris” (GH 221).

<sup>285</sup> Macfarlane 63.

sagte Flämmchen mit Bestimmtheit. Optimismus war das Element, in dem sie lebte.”<sup>286</sup>

Unlike Doris, who expresses her true feelings about her employer, by hiding her true emotions Flämmchen ensures not only her own salary, but also the possibility of getting more money and fringe benefits.

However, Baum also gives her audience a glimpse of the true emotions Flämmchen is hiding behind this mask of optimism. When Preysing asks her about her salary expectations for the job, she takes many things into account:

Sie hatte eine umfangreiche Bilanz zu machen. Der Verzicht auf das angefangene Abenteuer mit dem hübschen Baron stand darin, Preysings schwerfällige fünfzig Jahre, sein Fett, seine Kurzatmigkeit. Kleine Schulden da und dort. Bedarf an neuer Wäsche, hübsche Schuhe—die blauen gingen nicht mehr lang. Das kleine Kapital, das notwendig war, um eine Karriere zu beginnen, beim Film, bei der Revue, irgendwo. Flämmchen überschlug sauber und ohne Sentimentalität die Chancen des Geschäftes, das ihr geboten wurde. “Tausend Mark”, sagte sie, es kam ihr reichlich vor: sie machte keinerlei Illusionen über die Summen, die heutzutage schönen Frauen zu Füßen gelegt wurden. “Vielleicht noch eine Kleinigkeit zum Anziehen für die Reise—” setzte sie ein wenig schüchterner hinzu, als es sonst ihre Art war. “Sie wollen doch, daß ich gut aussehe—”<sup>287</sup>

It must be noted that the financial needs Flämmchen takes into account for this job are not merely for entertainment, but are work-related necessities, linked not only to paying off her debts but providing her with a financial base that will aid her in her future career

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<sup>286</sup> M 234; “‘It will go off all right, I’m sure. I could tell that from the letters,’ said Flämmchen with assurance. Optimism was the element she lived in” (GH 221).

<sup>287</sup> M 234 – 235; “She had to draw up a comprehensive balance sheet. The renunciation of the incipient affair with the handsome Baron figured on it, also Preysing’s ponderous fifty years, his fat, and his heavy breathing. Then there were one or two little bills, requirements in the way of new underclothing, pretty shoes—the blue ones were nearly done. The small capital that would be necessary to launch her on a career in the films, in revue, or elsewhere. Flämmchen made a clear and unsentimental survey of the chances the job offered her. ‘A thousand marks,’ she said. It sounded a princely amount, and she was under no illusion as to the sums that were nowadays laid at the feet of pretty girls. ‘Perhaps a little extra for clothes to travel in,’ she added, a little more timidly than was usual with her. ‘You want me to look my best, naturally’” (GH 221 – 222).

goals. This negotiation for 1000 marks must be put into perspective. The following quotation gives insight into how just how much money she is asking for. “Sie kannte ihren Preis. Zwanzig Mark für eine Aktaufnahme. Hundert Mark für einen Monat Büroarbeit. Fünfzehn Pfennig für eine Seite Schreibarbeit mit Durchschlag. Ein Pelzmäntelchen zu zweihundertvierzig Mark für eine Woche Hingabe.”<sup>288</sup> By asking for such a great sum of money, she is, indeed, not merely negotiating the price for her work, but rather, knowing Preysing’s true intentions, quoting how much she believes *she* is worth. “Du lieber Gott, woher hätte sie die Hochschätzung für ihre eigene Person nehmen sollen?”<sup>289</sup> It is interesting to note how skillfully Flämmchen manipulates Preysing’s own ego during her negotiation. In addition to the stated salary, she includes new clothes for the trip, implying not that *she* needs them, but rather that bringing along an attractive secretary wearing the latest fashions would reflect well on *Preysing* himself. His own (perceived) success would be reflected not only in his choice not only of a beautiful and skilled secretary, but also in a secretary who is well-paid enough to be able to afford new and fashionable clothes.

It is obvious that Flämmchen has reservations about Preysing’s proposition, as can be seen by her taking his physical attributes into account when calculating her salary. Instead of accepting what would make her happy, in this instance, future interactions with the Baron, she settles for what she needs. “Man kann nicht alles haben, dachte sie. Tausend Mark. Neue Kleider. Und London ist auch nicht zu

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<sup>288</sup> M 303; “She knew her price. Twenty marks for a photograph in the nude. A hundred and forty marks for a month’s office work. Twopence per page for typing with carbon copy. A fur coat at two hundred and forty marks for a week as somebody’s mistress” (GH 287).

<sup>289</sup> M 303; “She had no reason, then, to set a high value on herself” (GH 287).

verachten.”<sup>290</sup> In fact, it appears as if Flämmchen is going to compromise herself merely out of necessity for money:

Sie war ein wenig nervös und ungeduldig. Sie hatte ihrerseits den besten Willen, den ungeschriebenen Vertrag in allen Punkten zu erfüllen. Schließlich konnte ein anständiger Mensch nicht tausend Mark und eine Reise nach England und ein neues Jackenkleid nebst diversem anderen hinnehmen und nichts dafür bieten.<sup>291</sup>

In order to protect herself psychologically from this “implied expectation,” Flämmchen once again adopts an attitude of coldness. This becomes clear when Preysing expresses his disappointment after seeing her naked for the first time, saying he expected her to be more flirtatious, more like the nude photographs he saw of her in a magazine advertisement. “Flämmchen begriff die verhohlene Enttäuschung über ihre kühle Intaktheit und die Hemmungen in Preysings schwerem, entwöhntem Bürgerblut—aber sie konnte nicht helfen. Ich bin, wie ich bin, dachte sie.”<sup>292</sup> When Preysing explicitly states his true intentions to Flämmchen, she consciously adopts an attitude of coldness:

Preysing, in dem eine heiße, leidenschaftliche und dankbare Welle hochkam und ihn ganz überschwemmte, trat hinter sie und nahm vorsichtig ihre Ellbogen, die sie an den Körper preßte, in seine beiden Hände. “Wird man freundlich zu mir sein?” fragte er leise. Und ebenso leise, den Blick auf den himbeerroten Läufer gerichtet, antwortete Flämmchen: “Wenn man mich nicht drängt—”<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> M 235; “Once can’t have everything, she thought. A thousand marks. New clothes. London, too was not to be despised” (GH 222).

<sup>291</sup> M 279 – 280; “She was a little nervous and impatient. On her side there was nothing but willingness to carry out the unwritten agreement in every particular. After all, a self-respecting person could not take a thousand marks and a journey to England and a new costume and much else besides, and give nothing in return” (GH 265).

<sup>292</sup> M 280; “Flämmchen understood. She was aware of the hidden disappointment over her cool unapproachability and of the repressions in Preysing’s sluggish blood, the stagnation of his conventional nature, but she could do nothing to help him. I am as I am, she thought” (GH 266).

<sup>293</sup> M 235; “Preysing felt a hot impassioned wave of gratitude rise and overwhelm him. He went behind her and carefully took hold of her elbows. They were pressed lightly to her sides. ‘Will you be kind to me?’ he asked softly. And as softly with her eyes cast down to the raspberry-colored carpet, Flämmchen answered: ‘If it’s not forced on me—’” (GH 222 – 223).

Flämmchen, like Gilgi with her biological mother, perpetuates her protective attitude of cold distancing by refusing to use the informal address, even after Preysing uses it with her and he requests that she use it with him:

“Aber willst du mir denn nicht Du sagen? Bitte?” Flämmchen schüttelte nachdrücklich den Kopf. “O nein”, sagte sie. “Nein—warum denn nicht?” “Das—eben so. Das kann ich nicht. Das tue ich nicht. Sie sind mir ja fremd, wie soll ich Ihnen denn Du sagen? Ich bin sonst—ich mache Ihnen sonst gern jede Freude, die Sie wollen. Aber mit Du geht es eben nicht.”<sup>294</sup>

Flämmchen’s attitude towards men in general must be taken into account at this point. Much like Doris, Flämmchen uses men to obtain financial security in order to advance her dreams of becoming a film star. Yet in stark contrast to Keun’s portrayal of Doris as someone who is both shunning love but desperately seeking affirmation of external beauty as a validation of her inner worth, Baum portrays Flämmchen not as a hopeless romantic, but rather as a woman who uses her physical beauty merely to extract money from men as a means of survival. “Man machte Bekanntschaften, wie man eine Zigarette anzündete. Man tat ein paar Züge, gerade so viele wie schmeckten, dann trat man den kleinen Funken aus.”<sup>295</sup> In fact, Flämmchen goes so far as to confess “Die große Liebe? Das gibt es doch gar nicht.”<sup>296</sup>

Riviere writes that “[womanliness] was used far more as a device for avoiding anxiety than as a primary mode of sexual enjoyment.”<sup>297</sup> Just as Flämmchen does not

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<sup>294</sup> M 281; “‘But won’t you say ‘darling’ to me? Please, do!’ Flämmchen shook her head emphatically. ‘Oh no,’ she said. ‘No? But why not?’ ‘Just no. I can’t do it. I can’t really. You are a stranger to me, so how can I call you ‘darling’? In every other way—in every other way, I’ll do whatever you like. But to call you ‘darling’ is impossible’” (GH 266).

<sup>295</sup> M 86; “You picked up an acquaintance as you lit a cigarette. You took a few puffs just as you felt inclined and then you trod it out” (GH 79).

<sup>296</sup> M 228; “Real love? There isn’t such a thing” (GH 216).

<sup>297</sup> Riviere 213.

always flirt out of sexual desire, she uses her masquerade of womanliness not to protect herself from perceived reparations as a result of possessing masculine traits, but rather as a means of avoiding anxiety caused by financial necessity. It is obvious from this example that adopting womanliness as masquerade, while offering some sort of protection, will not always guarantee the “happy ending” epitomized in popular culture, especially in film. Once she has negotiated her price and is forced to honor her unwritten contract, Flämmchen has no choice but to adopt a different mask of coldness to protect herself both emotionally and psychologically from the consequences of her negotiations.

On the surface, Helene in Vicki Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Flämmchen in Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel*, Gilgi in Irmgard Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns*, and Doris in Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* may not appear to fit into Lethen’s paradigm of the *kalte persona*. In fact, based on their gender, Lethen relegates them to the passive categories of the Radar Type. Each of these women represents merely a small portion of the great diversity of the new class of white-collar working women in the Weimar Republic, yet despite their different class, social, and educational backgrounds, all of these women, to varying levels of success, adopt attitudes of coldness and masking associated with the *kalte persona* in order to survive.

Building on the traditional view perpetuated by Simmel and Plessner that women provide a welcoming environment in the home where men could shed their masks of coldness, I have shown how the women portrayed in these novels are not only able to see behind the deceptive masks of men, but these same women are able to adopt

similar masks of cold calculation themselves. Consciously playing off the traditional conception of women as providers of warmth and comfort to men, the New Women protagonists in these novels actively use the conscious masking of the *kalte persona* to adopt a variety of masks in order to manipulate men. These masks appear in drastically different forms and take the guise of cold professionalism; of the illusion of warmth emitted by con-men, or in the case of Baum's and Keun's protagonists, in the form of con-women; or even in the form of womanliness as masquerade, which actively uses the deceptive illusion of warmth and flirtation in an attempt to manipulate men for personal or financial gain.

Although these novels by Baum and Keun are not and have never have been included in the category of "high literature," which has typically been the repository for pedagogical texts, I argue that these novels inherently offered their readers an implicit code of conduct. In contrast to the stark black and white categories constructed by Lethen's analysis of explicit codes of conduct—either you are following the maxims of a code of conduct or you are not—the implicit codes of conduct presented by the novels analyzed in this chapter do not easily fall into clear-cut categories. The decisions and consequences these protagonists face are not all black or white, positive or negative, moral or immoral. Unlike the difficult style of many of the writers and philosophers Lethen quotes in his work, the elements of melodrama—defined by Patrice Petro as the "synthesis of the sensational and the everyday"<sup>298</sup> and including what one reader identified as "Spannungen, Abenteuer, Verwicklungen,...das *happy end* mit der lang

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<sup>298</sup> Petro 34.

verzögerten Ehe”<sup>299</sup>—bring both the principles and the model of the *kalte persona* as woman to a wide range of lesser-educated readers. These novels portray both the wide range of masks women adopt as well as give insight into the moral, emotional, and psychological struggles of the women who use these mask as a form of protection.

Baum’s and Keun’s novels, unlike many of the texts analyzed by Lethen, were not written as explicit codes of conduct with strict sets of rules to be followed in order to ensure both physical and psychological protection and were not intended to show women how to behave in particular situations. By portraying different ways of reacting to real-life situations, however, they do show how four very different women are able to consciously adopt masks to survive in a male-dominated world in addition to the potential positive and negative consequences of their *kalte persona* masks. As a result, these novels both represent the contemporary debates surrounding the necessity of coldness as a survival technique in a form that is much easier for lesser-educated readers to understand while at the same time providing a critical perspective of contemporary attitudes of coldness, an attribute that would be more expected from “high” as opposed to “popular” literature.

In *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte*, Lethen quotes Balthazar Gracián, who justifies the use of masks for protection by writing, “Schein zivilisiert!”<sup>300</sup> However, it is Doris in Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* who candidly questions the validity of appearance and the possibility of achieving the desired outcome. “Ob man wohl ein

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<sup>299</sup> Arna.

<sup>300</sup> Gracián, qtd. in VdK ;“Appearance civilizes” (CC 45).

Glanz werden kann, wenn man es nicht von Geburt ist?”<sup>301</sup> Throughout the novel, Doris actively attempts to portray the mask of a *Gebildete*, yet she understands that her own lack of education makes it unlikely that she will ever achieve the level of sophistication she strives to imitate. Despite brief periods of living the life of a *Glanz*, the masquerade of womanhood Doris adopts in fact relegates her to a lower social standing, that of the kept woman. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the cold professionalism of Helene combined with her personal dedication and work ethic is enough to raise Helene to the top echelons of her scientific field.

Yet as I will show in the next two chapters, these novels also contain a critique of the attitudes of coldness portrayed in these novels. Coldness in itself may be beneficial as a survival technique in certain situations, but at the same time, the lack of morality desired by the *kalte persona* often has negative repercussions both on the individual and on society. The examples of Helene, Flämmchen, Gilgi, and Doris together teach an insightful lesson: success will not come from the use of a mask alone, but the cold calculation associated with the *kalte persona*, when used appropriately and skillfully, can help women to achieve their dreams, albeit for those who are able and willing to master, at least temporarily, the necessary *Ausklammerung*, the “ability to bracket considerations of morality.”<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> KM 30; “I’m wondering if you can become glamorous if you weren’t born that way” (ASG 39).

<sup>302</sup> VdK 168; CC 131.

### Chapter Three

#### “Man kann nie wissen, ob man nicht lernt dabei”: Popular Novels as Social Critique

In his analysis of canonical literature, Lethen argues that the texts he selected acted as codes of conduct for their readers. Although the Weimar novels of Vicki Baum and Irmgard Keun were not written as *Verhaltenslehren*, a quick investigation of these novels give a wealth of advice and rules for survival, a small selection of which I will include here:

Ausnahmen gelten nicht. [...] Tagesplan einhalten. Nicht abweichen vom System. Nicht schlapp machen. In der kleinsten Kleinigkeit nicht.<sup>303</sup>

Schminken gibt's nicht am Vormittag, Rouge und Lippenstift bleiben für den Abend reserviert.<sup>304</sup>

Wenn man drei fremde Sprachen perfekt kann, ist man gegen Stellungslosigkeit wohl so ziemlich gesichert.<sup>305</sup>

Die Stunde Lachen heut' abend um elf muß man sich erst verdienen.<sup>306</sup>

Leute, die “immer die Wahrheit sagen müssen”, immer lügen.<sup>307</sup>

Man muß immer seinen Koffer gepackt haben...<sup>308</sup>

Wer Geld hat, hat Beziehungen und braucht nicht zu zahlen.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> G 6; “Exceptions cannot be allowed. [...] Stick to your daily schedule. Don't stray from your plan. Don't become weak. Not in the slightest.”

<sup>304</sup> G 6; “Don't wear makeup in the morning, rouge and lipstick are reserved for the evening.”

<sup>305</sup> G 21; “If you can speak three languages perfectly, you are as good as guaranteed protection against unemployment.”

<sup>306</sup> G 20; “The hours of merriment at eleven tonight need to be earned first.”

<sup>307</sup> KM 47; “Those who ‘always have to tell the truth’ are definitely lying” (ASG 63).

<sup>308</sup> M 52; “The main thing is—have your bags ready packed” (GH 46).

Man wird schlecht behandelt und ganz billig, wenn man sich anmerken läßt, daß es einem schlecht geht.<sup>310</sup>

Wenn einer so'n Dreckpamps aus seinem Leben macht, ist's seine eingene Schuld.<sup>311</sup>

As can be seen in these examples, the “rules” in these novels range from the practical to the more cynical and critical. In addition to these explicit rules, there are numerous examples where both Baum and Keun use the style of *Neue Sachlichkeit* to include typically mundane, everyday activities that nevertheless act as examples for their readers. For example, the readers accompany both Helene and Gilgi as they perform their morning exercise and morning routines (“man will doch nicht dick werden”<sup>312</sup>), and Baum even describes Preysing as an example of what “Männer seiner Kaste zwischen acht und zehn im Grand Hôtel treiben.”<sup>313</sup> Keun includes multiple references to Gilgi’s work ethic: “Sie ist die erste. Zehn Minuten zu früh ist sie gekommen. Oh, sie ist öfters zu früh da und nie eine Minute zu spat.”<sup>314</sup> Thriftiness is also shown to be a virtue, as can be seen by Helene’s careful budgeting of her money, being sure to take out money for anticipated expenses, and Gilgi using her skills as a seamstress to make new clothes for herself by reusing the fabric from old clothes that are out of style.

Despite these pedagogical elements, Siegfried Kracauer argues that film, illustrated newspapers, and the majority of popular magazines “rechtfertigen, indem sie

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<sup>309</sup> KM 28; “If you have money you have connections, and then you don’t have to pay” (ASG 36).

<sup>310</sup> KM 57; “people treat you badly and they’re cheap, if they notice that you’re not doing well” (ASG 77).

<sup>311</sup> G 56; “When you make such a mess out of your life, it’s your own fault.”

<sup>312</sup> G 12; “you don’t want to become fat.”

<sup>313</sup> M 59; “men of his class are about between eight and ten in the Grand Hotel” (GH 53).

<sup>314</sup> G 65; “She is the first. She came 10 minutes early. Oh, she regularly comes to work early and is never a minute late.”

seine Auswüchse sowohl wie seine Fundamente dem Blick entziehen; daß auch sie die Menge durch den Similglanz der gesellschaftlichen Scheinhöhen betäuben. Hypnotiseure schläfern somit Hilfe glitzernder Gegenstände ihre Medien ein.”<sup>315</sup> Popular culture, he argues, by its very nature negates the possibility of active social change, in turn lulling its audience into a sense of apathy through promises of the illusion of glamour, success, and higher social standing.

In his article “Über Erfolgsbücher und ihr Publikum,” Kracauer writes:

Der Mittelstand und überhaupt die verarmten Massen verlangen statt des Abstandes [Geschmack und Bildung] Herz, das kostenfrei ist. Das *Gefühl* ist alles, wenn alles andere fehlt. Es vermenschlicht die Tragik, ohne sie aufzuheben, und nebelt die Kritik ein, die der Konservierung überalteter Gehalte gefährlich werden könnte.<sup>316</sup>

It must be noted, however, that when Kracauer here refers to bestsellers, he is not commenting on the immensely popular novels of Vicki Baum and Irmgard Keun, but rather on bestsellers from the realm of the literary canon, including the novels of Richard Voß, Stefan Zweig, Erich Marie Remarque, Frank Thieß, and even Jack London.<sup>317</sup> Kracauer had an even lower opinion of non-canonical popular novels and serialized paperback novels such as those written by Irmgard Keun and Vicki Baum.

“[Die Kolportage] birgt bedeutende Gehalte in verzerrter Form und antwortet auf

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<sup>315</sup> Kracauer, “Asyl” 99; “serve to legitimate the existing order, by concealing both its abuses and its foundations. They, too, drug the populace with the pseudo-glamour of counterfeit social heights, just as hypnotists use glittering objects to put their subjects to sleep” (“Shelter” 94).

<sup>316</sup> Kracauer, “Erfolgsbücher” 72; “Rather than expensive reserve [taste, culture, and education], the middle class and the impoverished masses in general demand heart, which costs nothing. It humanizes tragedy without abolishing it and obscures any criticism that might threaten the preservation of outdated contents” (“Bestsellers” 96).

<sup>317</sup> Kracauer, “Erfolgsbücher” 64; “Bestsellers” 89.

Neigungen, die so wenig wandelbar sind wie ihr Kompositionsschema.”<sup>318</sup> By following the same standard patterns and giving the audience exactly what they want and expect, Kracauer believed that the overarching goal of making money prevented non-canonical popular novels from incorporating any positive social message.

I argue that although Baum’s and Keun’s novels were not and should not be considered *explicit* codes of conduct, they are in fact what I term *implicit* codes of conduct. Far from avoiding social critique and merely providing a sense of distraction as Kracauer claims, both Baum and Keun openly address contemporary social controversies that were widely discussed throughout the Weimar Republic. Taking advantage of the melodramatic nature of popular novels—including “tropes of female victimization, highly expressive language, and sudden shifts of fate that confront characters with impossible decisions between love and work, life and death”<sup>319</sup>—both Baum and Keun use their characters to convey not only factual information regarding varying viewpoints on controversial issues, but also to critique society through their portrayal of the complex emotions and underlying causes and effects surrounding these issues. It is a combination of melodramatic elements and attention to factual detail in Baum’s and Keun’s texts that were able not only to attract and hold the attention of their women readers, but more importantly provided them with enough background to begin forming their own positions on these issues. In turn, as I will show in the next chapter, the public discussions of Baum’s and Keun’s novels provided their women readers with

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<sup>318</sup> Kracauer, “Erfolgsbücher” 65; “[Dime novels] convey significant contents in distorted form and respond to tendencies that are as unchanging as their compositional structure” (“Bestsellers” 90).

<sup>319</sup> Barndt, “Aesthetics” 71.

a forum in which they could voice their own views on these controversial issues and join the public debate regarding the changing role of women in the Weimar Republic.

All aspects of popular culture during the Weimar Republic—including film, illustrated newspapers, popular magazines, magazines, and even serialized novels—actively engaged with the national debates regarding the changing role of women in the Weimar Republic. As Petersen points out, “popular culture is a forum where debates about subjectivity, gender, social conditions, and nationhood were, in the early twentieth century, discussed with as much fervor as they were in what was traditionally known as high culture.”<sup>320</sup> Walter Hofmann argued in *Die Lektüre der Frau* that men and women have different reading tendencies: men prefer educational materials, whereas women prefer “erzählende Literatur,” especially biographical novels, which allow women to associate with the characters.<sup>321</sup> This opinion was also voiced by Ricarda Huch in response to an essay contest specifically asking young women what kinds of literature they like to read. “Viele äußern sich den Wunsch, Lebensgeschichten von Frauen zu lesen, die schwer zu kämpfen haben und schließlich aus allen Nöten als Ueberwinder hervorgehen.”<sup>322</sup> Because only 6% of the total female working population in the Weimar Republic had a college education,<sup>323</sup> the fine social critique and explicitly pedagogical aspects of traditional canonical literature were not accessible to the vast majority of women. “Daneben stellt sie die Suche nach

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<sup>320</sup> Petersen 5.

<sup>321</sup> Barndt 57.

<sup>322</sup> Huch 1; “Many express the desire to read life stories of women who must fight to survive and emerge victorious from their difficulties.”

<sup>323</sup> For statistical information regarding working women in the Weimar Republic see Beuys 451 – 471 and Bridenthal & Koonz, “Beyond *Kinder, Kirche, Küche*.”

‘nützlichen, belehrenden’ Büchern, die nicht mit ‘aufgehobenem Zeigefinger’ belehren, sondern nüchtern über ‘die soziale Frage und die politischen Parteien’ informieren.”<sup>324</sup>

As can be seen in all of these quotations, many non-college-educated women perpetuated the belief in the pedagogical properties of reading and applied that notion to the act of reading itself, including the reading of popular novels.

Janice Radway’s 1984 study of the women readers of Harlequin romance novels in the early 1980s shows that this belief in the educational benefit of reading has perpetuated even until today. Many of the women Radway observed believe that “knowledge is not only the prerogative of the rich who can afford expensive educations, but it can be purchased by anyone in the form of a paperback book.”<sup>325</sup> Radway was careful to point out that the women readers of romance novels in her study did read mainly for “enjoyment and to escape their daily problems,”<sup>326</sup> which appears to confirm Kracauer’s views regarding popular culture as a form of escapism. Interestingly, the women in Radway’s study claimed not to read romances to learn about relationships, “but, rather, because they acquired factual information about geography, culture, and history from these books.”<sup>327</sup> In order to provide a suitable escape from the troubles of daily life, these women believed these novels should not be too much like “real-life;” however, in order to be educational, the readers asserted that the details of the novels needed to be researched and historically accurate.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Barndt, *Sentiment* 61; inner quotations from Huch; “Next came the search for ‘useful, educational’ books that don’t teach with a ‘raised finger’ but rather nurturingly inform about ‘the social question and the political parties.’”

<sup>325</sup> Radway, *Reading* 108.

<sup>326</sup> Radway, “Interpretive” 474.

<sup>327</sup> Radway, “Interpretive” 474.

<sup>328</sup> Radway, *Reading* 109.

This conception that the act of reading itself was a form of education, and education was the key to an increase in social status, echoes similar attitudes towards popular literature during the Weimar Republic. Writing in the style of the New Objectivity, Baum and Keun did not intend to create pure fiction, but rather to integrate fictional stories into their contemporary reality. Baum's publisher, Ullstein, created numerous marketing campaigns stressing the fact that Baum thoroughly researched the backgrounds of her novels much like an undercover journalist in order to ensure that all the details in her novels were as accurate as possible. Before writing *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Baum spent months observing and interacting with women students at the University of Heidelberg, discussing chemical processes with scientists, and even went so far as to study chemistry at a Berlin university. In preparation for her novel *Menschen im Hotel*, Baum worked as a private secretary and even undercover as a maid in several Berlin hotels.<sup>329</sup>

As a result, Ullstein advertised that Baum's serialized novels were not merely well-written stories, but also educational texts that had the potential to broaden the discussion of controversial contemporary issues:

Vicki Baum schrieb dieses Buch [*stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*] um das Problem der Mädchen-Mutterschaft, obwohl sie wußte, daß Angriffe nicht ausbleiben würden—schrieb es in der Erkenntnis, daß eine lebendige Gestalt der Dichtung vieles klären kann, was Tausende heute unbegriffen in sich tragen und brennende Frage ist.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> King, *Best-Sellers* 88; Krell 223 – 224.

<sup>330</sup> “Ein neuer Roman”; “Vicki Baum wrote this book [*stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*] about the problem of unwed motherhood even though she knew that it would not avoid attacks—wrote it in with the knowledge that a living figure in literature can clarify a lot about the burning questions that thousands secretly carry with them.”

In another publication, Ullstein argues that Baum's novels stands out from other works of popular fiction precisely because it does not advance a single social or political viewpoint, but rather provides merely the facts, in turn forcing every reader to formulate their own opinions of these controversial issues.<sup>331</sup> As the following examples will show, although the characters and story lines created by both Baum and Keun were fictitious, it is the authors' skillful combination of factual detail, multiple viewpoints on contemporary controversial topics, and complex emotions that gives Baum's and Keun's readers insight into the raging debates on the changing roles of women in the Weimar Republic that may otherwise have been inaccessible to them.

The sexual freedom enjoyed by many New Women during the Weimar Republic was regarded as a dangerous and radical break from traditional standards of morality. Despite the mores of bourgeois society, relations between often married men and younger New Women were widespread, and both their presence and their implications were heavily discussed throughout Weimar society. Although both Helene and Gilgi also engaged in premarital sexual intercourse within the confines of monogamous relationships, Keun's Doris in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and Baum's Flämmchen in *Menschen im Hotel* appear to epitomize the negative stereotype of the sexually promiscuous New Woman. Doris' adventures throughout the novel consist of a long list of brief relationships with often married men. During one of Doris' many brief relationships, in exchange for her company she receives an apartment, money, food, and even a position as nanny to her lover's children. Yet as Keun's Doris so eloquently

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<sup>331</sup> "Eine Dichterin."

points out, this form of sexual emancipation was also subject to a long-established patriarchal double-standard:

Wenn eine junge Frau mit Geld einen alten Mann heiratet wegen Geld und nichts sonst und schläft mit ihm und guckt fromm, dann ist sie eine deutsche Mutter von Kindern und eine anständige Frau. Wenn eine junge Frau ohne Geld mit einem schläft ohne Geld, weil er glatte Haut hat und ihr gefällt, dann ist sie eine Hure und ein Schwein.<sup>332</sup>

Doris' astute observation is made after her lover realizes she has slept with his best friend. Upon hearing this, the married man fires Doris and throws her out onto the street, stating, "Sie sind eine Dirne, machen Sie sich fort von meinen reinen Kindern."<sup>333</sup> The double-standard here is clear: regardless of the infidelity of men, women are expected to remain faithful to their spouses, or, in this case, to their married lovers. The man, who is cheating on his wife, feigns moral outrage against Doris for being sexually promiscuous, yet his own infidelities remain hidden, as the infidelity brought to light is between Doris and his friend. In the end, Doris' ex-lover suffers no consequences from his actions, whereas Doris is labeled a prostitute after having committed the very same act with her accuser.

The presence of extra-marital affairs in the workplace between married employers and their New Women employees were also heavily discussed during the Weimar Republic. In his collection of essays analyzing the white-collar "salaried masses," Kracauer quotes the following candid conversation he had with a young, pretty "New Woman":

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<sup>332</sup> KM 54; "If a young woman from money marries an old man because of money and nothing else and makes loves to him for hours and has this pious look on her face, she's called a German mother and a decent woman. If a young woman without money sleeps with a man with no money because he has smooth skin and she likes him, she's a whore and a bitch" (ASG 73).

<sup>333</sup> KM 55; "You are a whore, get away from my pure children" (ASG 75).

“Wir gehen immer abends aus. Manchmal nimmt er mich schon nachmittags ins Café mit, dann kommen wir nicht mehr zurück. Sehen Sie meine Schuhe an, ich vertanze alle paar Monate die Schuhe.” [...] “Werden Sie Ihren Chef einmal heiraten?” “Wo denken Sie hin. Mich lockt der Reichtum nicht. Ich bleibe meinem Bräutigam treu.” “Weiß Ihr Bräutigam...” “Ich werde doch nicht so dumm sein. Was ich mit meinem Chef habe, geht niemanden etwas an.”<sup>334</sup>

Kracauer portrays this woman as consciously—and successfully—balancing her personal life and the unwritten sexual expectations of her career, using her femininity as a commodity in exchange for entertainment and enjoyment.

Far from being a romantic affair, the circumstances as illustrated by this young working woman put an interesting twist on the widespread romantic trope of the office romance as perpetuated by popular culture, including films, illustrated newspapers, and popular novels, many of which were full of stories of happy endings: young, beautiful women falling in love with their bosses, followed by idealized images of these women being rescued from unhappy economic situations. In her analysis of romance novels and romantic comedy films from the Weimar Era, Macfarlane argues that popular culture portrayed “the masculine world of business and new technology as a series of threats to the heroine, which are only resolved by her marriage to the hero. Marriage implies an acceptance of protection and a movement out of the public sphere.”<sup>335</sup> Interestingly, Kracauer does not analyze or critique this phenomenon in any detail, but rather uses this example to illustrate what he believes is the attitude of the large number

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<sup>334</sup> Kracauer, “Unbekanntes Gebiet” 10; “[My boss and I] go out every evening. Sometimes he takes me to the café in the afternoon too, and then we don’t go back again. Do you see my shoes? I wear my shoes out every few months, dancing.” [...] “Will you be marrying your boss one day?” “Whatever gave you that idea? Wealth doesn’t attract me. I’m sticking to my fiancé.” “Does your fiancé know...” “I’m not such a fool. What I’ve got going with my boss is no one else’s business” (“Unknown Territory” 28).

<sup>335</sup> Macfarlane 23.

of white collar working women who, following the dictates of popular culture, merely yearn for distraction.

Far from perpetuating the idealized workplace romance as epitomized in both film and the illustrated press, both Keun and Baum openly challenge the glamorous images of the New Woman who successfully combines romance and an independent career. In the previous chapter, I analyzed examples of work-related sexual harassment in both Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. In the passage analyzing the sexual advances Gilgi receives from her employer, Keun not only critiques the manipulative sexist situations in which employers, especially *married* men, put their female employees, but also provides insight into the reality of the working environment for many New Women. The substitution of the women in the passage above also illustrates that women were often treated as commodities, not as people, yet in this instance, the women appear to remain in control. Not only are these men not remaining true to their marriage vows in accordance with bourgeois standards of morality, but they also are not driven by love or emotion, but rather only by superficial surface attraction.

In both of these novels, Keun's critique is clear: "Popular images of the New Woman who combines romance and an independent career successfully, and of the poor office worker who finds fame as a star or happiness with a wealthy man are shown to be illusory fairy tales."<sup>336</sup> While contributing to the overarching critique of the professional dangers associated with being a young working woman in the traditional male-dominated sphere of the office, both of these examples were merely very short

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<sup>336</sup> Horsley 311.

vignettes. In Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*, the work-related seduction of Flämmchen plays a much larger role in the advancement of the plot and gives Baum the opportunity to critique more closely both the causes and implications of such openly discussed relationships.

I argue that Vicki Baum, instead of perpetuating this idealized notion of the office romance, openly critiqued this stereotypical fantasy by showing the often too common reality resulting from sexual relations between female office staff and their male employers. Baum shows that in many cases, the sexual freedom associated with the liberated New Woman was merely an illusion, as men actively manipulated women for their own sexual pleasure and, ultimately, remained in control.

As I explored in the last chapter, at first glance, Flämmchen in Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*, like the woman in Kracauer's example above, appears to use her physical beauty consciously merely to secure a lifestyle of carefree enjoyment. On the outside, she is the epitome of the fashionable New Woman: a sexually emancipated, economically independent and fashionable young woman who has both the physical beauty and the fashion sense associated with the ideals of success as dictated by popular culture. By fluctuating between a mask of cold professionalism and flirtation, Flämmchen, like the woman described in Kracauer's example above, actively uses her physical beauty to attract and manipulate her employer, General Director Preysing. Baum's readers recognize not only that Flämmchen has attained the required standards of physical beauty necessary for success, as so often portrayed in popular culture, but

also that she uses the correct amount of flirtatiousness necessary to make her stand out from the numerous other working girls who may be competing for her position.

From these passages, it appears as if Flämmchen is in control. Her manipulation of Preysing is a success, and as a result she is offered a position as a personal secretary and traveling companion during an upcoming business trip to England. However, the extra-marital affair between Flämmchen, the young, beautiful office worker, and Preysing, a fat, married man in his 50s, more closely resembles a form of white-collar prostitution.

Although this relationship may seem unrealistic, Baum uses this situation to critique the reality that too often, women felt obligated to accept sexual propositions from their employers not because of physical or emotional attraction, as was often associated with the liberated sexuality of the New Woman, but rather out of financial desperation. Despite her exterior beauty which may suggest otherwise, Flämmchen, like so many of Baum's readers, does not live a happy, carefree consumerist lifestyle. Baum uses Flämmchen not only to critique a society where human value is placed on exterior beauty, but also to explore the complex emotions shared by those who must adopt a certain standard of beauty in order to financially survive.

In his 1929 essay "Auslese," Kracauer argued that a "morally pink complexion," i.e. youth, was often viewed by employers as an unwritten prerequisite for successful employment. Kracauer here quotes the Social Democratic Bundestag member Dr. Julius Moses:

"Bei den riesigen Angebot von Arbeitskräften ergibt sich zwangsläufig eine gewisse physische 'Auslese'. Auffallende körperliche Mängel,

mögen sie auch die Arbeitsfähigkeit nicht im geringsten beeinträchtigen, machen den betreffenden sozial Schwachen vorzeitig zum unfreiwilligen Arbeitsinvaliden.”<sup>337</sup>

As a result, the image of glamour perpetuated by popular culture in fact became a prerequisite for economic survival, forcing white-collar employees to adopt a certain standard of physical beauty, in addition to their professional skills, in order to remain viable employees:

Die Angestellten müssen mittun, ob sie wollen oder nicht. Der Andrang zu den vielen Schönheitssalons entspringt auch Existenzsorgen, der Gebrauch kosmetischer Erzeugnisse ist nicht immer ein Luxus. Aus Angst, als Altware aus dem Gebrauch zurückgezogen zu werden, färben sich Damen *und* Herren die Haare, und Vierziger treiben Sport, um sich schlank zu erhalten.<sup>338</sup>

Kracauer concludes that the image of glamour perpetuated by popular culture, which began merely a means of distraction for those who wished to appear wealthier or of a higher social status, became in effect a prerequisite for economic survival.

Flämmchen’s situation echoes the unfortunate reality that, when employment was concerned, a woman’s physical appearance was at least as important as her professional skills.<sup>339</sup> Just as a minimum amount of beauty was often viewed as a prerequisite for employment, Baum uses Flämmchen’s voice to continue her critique of this chauvinistic practice by showing how those who are considered too beautiful are also often discriminated against:

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<sup>337</sup> Dr. Julius Moses, qtd. in Kracauer, “Auslese” 23; “With the huge supply of labour a certain physical ‘selection’ inevitably occurs. Conspicuous bodily imperfections, though they may not in the least impair fitness for work, prematurely force socially vulnerable people out of work and into invalidity” (“Selection” 38).

<sup>338</sup> Kracauer, “Auslese” 25; Employees must join in, whether they want to or not. The rush to the numerous beauty salons springs partly from existential concerns, and the use of cosmetic products is not always a luxury. For fear of being withdrawn from use as obsolete, ladies *and* gentlemen dye their hair, while forty-year-olds take up sports to keep slim (“Selection” 39).

<sup>339</sup> von Ankum, “Gendered” 165.

“Ohne Stellung bin ich schon über ein Jahr, da muß ich doch etwas anfangen. Für’s Büro bin ich zu hübsch, heißt es, überall hat es noch Klamauk gegeben deshalb, die großen Firmen nehmen nicht gern Mädchen, die zu gut aussehen—ist ja auch richtig. [...] Ich komme auch noch durch, ich komme auch noch durch. Nur alt werden darf ich nicht, ich bin ja schon neunzehn, da muß man zusehen, daß es vorwärts geht.”<sup>340</sup>

With the prevalence of both sexual harassment in the workplace and inter-office romances, many men saw women as distractions to productivity in the traditionally male-dominated white-collar workplace. The more beautiful a female employee is, the more she may have been viewed as a visual distraction to her male coworkers. In addition, those women who were more physically attractive also sometimes received special attention or treatment from their employers, potentially fostering a sense of jealousy and unrest among the other women in the office. Flämmchen, who Baum describes as being very beautiful, provides a literary representation of many women who must carefully balance this line between being not beautiful enough to stand out and sustain employment and those who are viewed too beautiful, therefore becoming a potential physical distraction in the workplace. Flämmchen is different from many women in that her own abundance of physical beauty prevents her from being hired, but like so many working women, Flämmchen is caught in a vicious financial *Teufelskreis*: in order to secure employment, she must not only be skilled but also be physically

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<sup>340</sup> M 300; “I haven’t had a job now for over a year, and something had to be done. I’m too pretty for a business post. It’s always the same story. The big firms don’t like to have girls who are too good-looking, and they are quite right. [...] However, I shall pull through somehow. Only I mustn’t get old. I’m nineteen already and it’s time to see about getting on” (GH 283 – 284); it should be noted that in the original German, Flämmchen repeats the phrase “Ich komme auch noch durch,” which the English translator chose to replace by adding the word “I shall pull through *somehow*” [italics mine].

attractive; yet in order to perpetuate her glamorous appearance, she needs money, which she must obtain either from working or from her male admirers.

Flämmchen's attitude toward money appears to separate her from the "Little Shop Girls" in Kracauer's analysis who waste their money by escaping from reality, albeit temporarily, into the fantasy land of film. Yet Baum shows that despite the gender implications inherent in the title, the social critique from Kracauer's "Die kleinen Lademädchen gehen ins Kino" clearly also can apply to men:

Das Leben ist eine Erfindung der Bemittelten, denen die Unbemittelten nach bestem Unvermögen nacheifern. Da die Aufrechterhaltung der Gesellschaft im Interesse der besitzenden Kreise liegt, müssen sich das Nachdenken über sie verbieten. Mit Hilfe ihres Geldes gelingt es ihnen, die Existenz, für die sie tagsüber schufteten, während ihrer freien Zeit zu vergessen.<sup>341</sup>

Baum echoes Kracauer's critique of consumerism in *Menschen im Hotel* not only through Flämmchen, but also through the character of Otto Kringelein. After being diagnosed with a terminal illness, Kringelein, an assistant bookkeeper from the provincial town of Fredersdorf, cashed in his life savings and moved to Berlin to spend his life savings in attempt to live life to the fullest—a life of enjoyment he had seen in films and in the newspapers reporting on the vibrant and thriving metropolis. Slowly, Kringelein transforms from a penny-pinching clerk to at least the outward appearance of a wealthy man, and it astounds him how rapidly people's attitudes towards him have changed based merely on his external appearance. The man who could not get anyone

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<sup>341</sup> Kracauer, "Ladenmädchen" 285; "Life is an invention of the haves, which the have-nots try to imitate to the best of their ability. Since it is in the interest of the propertied classes to maintain society as it is, they must prevent others from thinking about that society. With the help of their money, [the little shopgirls] are able in their free time to forget the existence for which they slave during the day" ("Little Shopgirls" 296).

to pay any attention to him at the Grand Hotel when he was wearing his second-hand clothes is now treated with the utmost respect once he is wearing an expensive, custom-made suit—even being addressed as “Herr Generaldirektor” by the page boys who hold open the door for him.

In the following quotation, Baum makes her critique of the culture of consumerism very clear through the voice of a man with whom many of her readers can personally identify. “Zu Hause ist alles dreckig. Erst mit dem Geld fängt man an, ein sauberer Mensch zu werden. Nicht einmal der Luft ist in Ordnung, wenn man kein Geld hat, man darf nicht lüften, weil die teure Wärme hinauszieht.”<sup>342</sup> Flämmchen adds to this critique by stating:

“der kleine Spiegel ist zerbrochen...und man kann keinen neuen kaufen. Schlafen muß man auf der Chaiselongue hinter einer spanischen Wand. Immer riecht es nach Gas. Mit dem Zimmerherrn gibt es immer Krach. Das Essen werfen sie einem vor, das man nicht bezahlen kann, weil man keine Stellung hat.”<sup>343</sup>

Many consumers of popular culture on the lower ends of the financial spectrum believe that money will create happiness, and they can readily identify with the financial woes of both Kringelein and Flämmchen. Yet as the characters of Grusinskaya in Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel* and to some extent Doris in Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* show, money does not necessarily guarantee happiness. The popular culture of the Weimar Republic perpetuated the notion that the illusive combination of exterior beauty

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<sup>342</sup> M 301; “At home everything is always filthy. Even the very air goes wrong when you haven’t got money. You can’t open the window because the warm air costs money. You can’t have a bath because hot water means coals. Your razor blades are old and scrape your chin” (GH 284 – 285).

<sup>343</sup> M 285; “Your hand mirror is broken...and you can’t afford a new one. You have to sleep on the sofa behind a screen. There’s a perpetual smell of gas. The lodger makes his daily row. The very food you eat and can’t pay for because you are out of a job is cast in your teeth” (GH 284 – 285).

*and* money are key to achieving success and happiness. Yet as both Baum's and Keun's novels show, those who have one but not the other, and even those who are lucky enough to have both, may not always be as happy as they appear on the surface.

As shown in the analysis of Flämmchen above, it was an unfortunate but common occurrence that many New Women of the Weimar era were forced into sexual relationships out of financial necessity. In order to maintain a certain standard of beauty, women used income from their jobs, but also sometimes were forced to resort to immoral acts in order to secure more money. As was shown in my analysis of Kracauer above, "the sex appeal exuded by a stenographer or sales clerk was considered at least as important as her professional qualifications."<sup>344</sup> Instead of perpetuating the stereotype of the office romance, both Keun's and Baum's novels show that although *women* were breaking traditional roles of femininity by pursuing employment outside of the home, the traditional *male* attitudes towards women as sexual objects did not change nearly as easily. Christiane Schönfeld argues that this, too, perpetuated the patriarchal double standard: once again, men were able to cheat on their wives without any social repercussions, while women were either labeled as prostitutes or driven from their jobs merely as a result of rejecting (or sometimes after accepting) their employers' sexual advances.<sup>345</sup> Far too often, the "liberated sexuality" of New Women loosened social mores regarding sexual activity, yet many women were forced to engage in sexual activity not out of romantic attachment, but rather out of financial necessity.

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<sup>344</sup> von Ankum, "Gendered" 165.

<sup>345</sup> Schönfeld 22.

Baum further contributes to this debate on the “liberated” sexuality of the New Women by illustrating that it is not only in the workplace, but also in the private sphere where women were forced to subjugate themselves to male desire. In her novel *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Helene’s boyfriend, Rainer, not only expects but subtly demands that Helene have sex with him. “Du mußt mir gehören. Ich sage dir das jetzt ganz ernst und still. [...] Du mußt mir gehören. Auch du bist nicht der Mensch, der etwas Halbes leben darf. Du mußt dich ganz geben, Hele, wenn du mich lieb hast—oder gar nicht—.”<sup>346</sup> Helene’s reaction is not one of immediate agreement, but rather of careful contemplation, including an emotional examination of how she truly feels:

Muß ich? denkt Helene Willfüer.... Muß ich wirklich? Ja, es ist wohl so. Wahrscheinlich muß es sein. [...] Aber bin ich selbst bereit? [...] Ich möchte dich ganz still in den Armen halten, mein Firilei, und sonst nichts. [...] Und so wird es wohl geschehen müssen—heute—oder bald—<sup>347</sup>

As I showed in the last chapter, Helene actively adopted an attitude of coldness in order to dissuade Rainer from forcing her into sexual relations. She understands, however, that one way or another, Rainer’s sexual demands must be met. She becomes a reluctant participant, choosing to offer herself to him in order to protect him from a worse fate: by agreeing to engage in sexual intercourse, Helene not only saves her

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<sup>346</sup> HW 78; “You’ve got to belong to me. I’m saying this to you now very soberly and quietly. [...] You’ve got to belong to me. You’re not the kind of person, either, who can deal in half measures. You must give yourself completely, Helene, if you love me—or not at all” (H 96 – 97).

<sup>347</sup> HW 78-79; “‘Must I?’ thought Helene Willfüer.... Must I really? Yes, I suppose I must. I suppose it’s got to be.... But am I ready myself? [...] I’d like to hold you very quietly in my arms, my Firilei, and nothing more. [...] And I suppose it will have to happen—today—or soon—” (H 97).

relationship with Rainer, but also prevents him from inevitably seeking sexual satisfaction elsewhere.

Helene's choice is informed not only by her understanding of her boyfriend's sexual needs, but also by the potentially negative consequences if these needs are not met. One of Helene's friends, Marx, is engaged to Friedel, a young woman of bourgeois standing with strict notions of proper conduct, which causes her fiancé a great deal of frustration. "Ich habe doch die Friedel lieb—davon läßt sich gar nicht sprechen. Da bin ich nun verlobt—da vertraut man mir das Mädél an, da läuft man neben ihr her tagaus, tagein und darf sie nicht anrühren."<sup>348</sup> As a result of this sexual frustration, Marx has intercourse with a waitress at a local bar and contracts syphilis.

Baum uses this situation to directly criticize the not only the bourgeois institution of premarital celibacy at a time when many bourgeois activists were condemning the sexual freedoms of the New Woman, but also the frigidity of many married women, causing their husbands to stray, as is the case for Gilgi's employer, Doris' lovers, and Preysing. In her analysis of typologies published during the Weimar Republic addressing various "types" and the perceived moral qualities associated with these women, Lynne Frame argues that Friedel represents many of the negative characteristics associated with the "Gretchen" type. Due to her traditional upbringing and strict moral standards, Friedel "embodies the traditional woman who can only be the stumbling block under the wheel of history and progress," in turn arguing that the

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<sup>348</sup> HW 94; "I love Friedel—I don't have to tell you that. Here I am, engaged—they trust you with the girl—you run round with her day after day and don't dare touch her. That's simply torture—you can't imagine what it is like" (H 118).

Friedels of the world represented as great a public health hazard as the prostitutes themselves.<sup>349</sup>

Interestingly, Baum does not critique the man for the contraction of syphilis; instead, she critiques the bourgeois morality that prevents young couples from consummating their love before marriage and the frigidity of married women, both of which potentially compel men to seek sexual satisfaction elsewhere. By critiquing this romantic fantasy, and showing the emotional turmoil of the women who feel forced to subjugate themselves to male sexual desire, Baum shows that the consequences of sexual promiscuity, especially among bourgeois men, were issues that were much more complicated than their overly simplistic and light-hearted presentation in popular culture often implied.

Regardless of being coerced into sexual intercourse or else engaging in it of her own free will, the possibility of becoming pregnant was a very common reality for many women in Weimar Germany. In a time of inadequate sexual education, a lack of contraceptives, and the constitutional prohibition of abortion, the topic of unwanted pregnancy was heavily debated during the 1920s and 1930s. As Kosta points out, despite the liberalized awareness of the body and female sexuality throughout the 1920s, sexual knowledge and the use of contraceptives lagged far behind sexual practice. As a result, she argues, the increasing presence of single-mothers in the metropolis presented the most visible affront to bourgeois notions of family and dominant culture.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Frame 25.

<sup>350</sup> Kosta 282.

In her novels, Irmgard Keun illustrated the unfortunate reality of how unexpected, and often unwanted, children were sometimes viewed by their parents as more of a burden than a blessing. In Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Doris does not become pregnant, nor does her text directly address the controversial topic of abortion in any detail. Yet after one of her friends has a baby, the father "sprach Worte ohne Freude: was das Kind sollte und daß sie sowieso nicht wüßten, wohin und woher, und besser wär's nicht da."<sup>351</sup> This sentiment of the financial difficulties caused by raising unwanted children is also echoed in the story of Hans and Hertha, a working-class family in Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns*. Because of their dire financial situation, Hertha confesses to Gilgi her true feelings towards her children. "Ich hab' die Kinder so gehaßt, wie ich sie getragen habe—[...]—manchmal glaub' ich, daß alle Liebe jetzt diesen Haß nicht mehr gutmachen kann."<sup>352</sup> Now pregnant with her third child, Hertha can only see the family's already precarious financial situation getting worse. Gilgi sympathizes with Hertha's plight, urging her not to have the child. Hertha's response is cool, yet realistic: "Muß ich ja wohl schon, Gilgi—oder glaubst du, ich könnt' damit dort zur Ortskrankenkasse laufen?"<sup>353</sup> Because of the illegality of abortion, Hertha is forced to carry the child to term despite the ever-worsening poverty in which she and her family already live.

Some characters in Keun's novels openly express the commonly held belief that the outlawing of abortion through Paragraph 218 of the Weimar constitution actively

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<sup>351</sup> KM 48; "he was saying things like: what were they going to do with a child, that already they didn't know what to do, and it would be better if the child had never been born" (ASG 64).

<sup>352</sup> G 204; "I hated the children so much when I was pregnant with them—[...]—sometimes I think that all the love in the world won't be able to make amends for all this hate."

<sup>353</sup> G 210; "I have to, Gilgi—or do you think I can just run to the neighborhood hospital?"

contributed to the rising poverty rates among the lower classes. One such viewpoint is expressed by Gilgi's socialist friend, Pit. "Wenn du anständig sein willst, liebe Eltern, Vaterland und Hunde! Heirate und krieg Kinder. Jedem Embryo sein Paragraph 218. Der Staat will Kinder, laufen noch nicht Arbeitslose genug auf der Erde rum."<sup>354</sup> The phrase "der Staat will Kinder" is a reference to the falling birth rates during the Weimar Republic, which dropped from 27 births per thousand in 1914 to only 11.5 births per 1000 in 1922.<sup>355</sup> Many critics of the New Woman's liberated sexuality cited these statistics, in addition to the attitude of resisting marriage common among New Women and increase in the number of illegal abortions performed,<sup>356</sup> as proof of the degeneracy of the New Woman's liberated sexuality, in turn prompting the question "Was the modern woman too selfish, too physically degenerated by the luxuries of civilization, or too exhausted from the rigors of wage labor to reproduce?"<sup>357</sup> The topic of abortion has never had clear-cut moral implications, and the novels of Baum and Keun do not provide simplistic moral or ethical judgments about it.

My analysis here will focus on the unexpected pregnancies of two New Women protagonists: Baum's Helene and Keun's Gilgi. I will show that the decision to procure an abortion or carry a child to term for these two protagonists was not a flippant decision based on the degeneracy caused by luxury. Barndt argues that Keun's inclusion of this topic was not to argue for or against the moral implications of

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<sup>354</sup> G 30; "If you want to be respectable, love your parents, your country, and dogs! Marry and have children. Every embryo has its own Paragraph 218. The state wants children, as if not enough unemployed are running around on this planet."

<sup>355</sup> Lewis 210 – 211.

<sup>356</sup> Anti-abortion advocates during the Weimar Republic estimated that half of all women in 1914 had at least one abortion, and by 1930, the estimated number of abortions exceeded live births.

<sup>357</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex* 4 – 5.

Paragraph 218, but rather merely another example of the melodramatic topos of life versus death.<sup>358</sup> While I agree that Keun does not state a specific view for or against this issue, I argue that both of these novels actively contributed to the public debates on this controversial issue by contributing factual, political, and emotional aspects to this already heated discussion.

As I explored in the last chapter, even before Gilgi becomes pregnant, her personal story is one of both scandal and intrigue. Born to a wealthy—though unmarried—young mother, passed on to the proletarian seamstress Fräulein Täschler, then adopted by the petit-bourgeois Krons, the story of Gilgi’s own past not only offers a stark critique of the moral corruption of those who have money and are able to shirk off the responsibility of raising a child by using their vast wealth to cover up their moral indiscretions, but also an implicit critique of the quality of life based merely on class differences. Being raised by her adoptive bourgeois parents, Gilgi realizes that her bourgeois upbringing helped turn her into the person she currently is: a hard-working, independent woman. As Gilgi notes, she, Fräulein Täschler, and the prostitute Lenchen all know how to sew. However, as Sopcak points out, her dreams to one day become a fashion designer may only be a possibility because of the bourgeois upbringing she received from the Krons.<sup>359</sup> “Wenn die Krons sie nun nicht adoptiert hätten, wenn sie von der Täschler aufgezogen worden wäre, hinten in der Thieboldsgasse, wenn sie—man lieber gar nicht dran denken— — —”<sup>360</sup> Gilgi, after her experiences with Fräulein

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<sup>358</sup> Barndt, *Sentiment* 80.

<sup>359</sup> Sopcak 158.

<sup>360</sup> G 57; “If the Kron’s hadn’t adopted her, if she had been raised by Täschler, back there in the Thieboldsgasse, if she—rather not think about it— — —.”

Täschler, comes to the conclusion that had she not been adopted by the Krons, she very well could have ended up as a prostitute.

After learning the truth of her own birth and that she is pregnant herself, Gilgi feels torn. Her biological mother, whose family was very wealthy, could have easily paid for a safe, though illegal, abortion. Instead her biological mother chose to carry Gilgi to term and secretly give her away, albeit to an unmarried, proletarian seamstress. While Gilgi doesn't agree in principle with anti-abortion legislation, she does understand the very real possibility that she may owe her own life to it: "und der Paragraph 218—gewiß hätte der schon längst abgeschafft werden müssen, obwohl sie ihm vielleicht das Leben verdankt—"<sup>361</sup>

When Gilgi visits a doctor who confirms that she is pregnant, the only advice that she receives is, "Das beste ist, Sie heiraten."<sup>362</sup> In her response to this overly-simplistic solution to her complex problem, Gilgi attempts to explain both her personal views and the reason behind her views:

"Würde mir absolute nichts ausmachen, fünf gesunde, uneheliche Kinder in die Welt zu setzen, wenn ich für sie sorgen könnte. Aber das kann ich nicht. Ich hab' kein Geld, mein Freund hat kein Geld—ich meine, es kostet weniger, wenn man die Angelegenheit rechtzeitig beseitigt."<sup>363</sup>

In this quotation, it is important to note that Keun neither condemns nor condones unwed mothers. The issue for Gilgi is not a moral one, or even one of shame. Rather, it comes down specifically to a question of finances. When Gilgi discovers she is

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<sup>361</sup> G 58; "and paragraph 218—should have been abolished long ago, even though she probably owes her own life to it—."

<sup>362</sup> G 175; "It would be best if you got married."

<sup>363</sup> G 175; "It wouldn't make any difference to me to bring five healthy out-of-wedlock children into the world if I could care for them. But I can't do that. I have no money, my boyfriend has no money—I mean, it costs less if you eliminate the problem right away."

pregnant, not only is she living with her bohemian boyfriend who does not work, but she herself has been laid off from her position, and the two of them live off of the money they can borrow and the little amount of unemployment compensation Gilgi receives from the state.

When the doctor refuses, though only “halb echt, halb unecht entrüstet,”<sup>364</sup> Gilgi more forcibly expresses her views against Paragraph 218 of the Weimar constitution, which outlawed abortion:

Und Gilgi spricht ganz still und ruhig: “Hören Sie, Herr Doktor, es ist doch das Unmoralischste und Unhygienischste und Absurdeste, eine Frau ein Kind zur Welt bringen zu lassen, das sie nicht ernähren kann. Es ist darüber hinaus überhaupt das Unmoralischste und Absurdeste, eine Frau ein Kind kriegen zu lassen, wenn sie es nicht haben will...”<sup>365</sup>

The argument Keun presents here was especially common among abortion activists fighting for the rights of the lower-classes, who, like Gilgi’s friends Hans and Hertha, frequently lacked both the necessary sexual education to prevent pregnancy and the financial means to support ever-increasing family sizes. After seeing the squalid conditions in which Fräulein Täschler lives and in which Gilgi herself could have been raised had she not been adopted by the Krons, Gilgi believes it is more ethical to terminate the pregnancy that face the very real possibility of raising the child in extreme poverty.

Following a half-hour heated discussion with the doctor, he finally succumbs to Gilgi’s viewpoint. “Also dann kommen Sie in drei Wochen mal wieder, kleines

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<sup>364</sup> G 176; “half genuine, half indignant.”

<sup>365</sup> G 176; “And Gilgi speaks very calmly and quietly: ‘Listen, Doctor, it is the most unmoral and most unhygienic and most absurd idea to force a woman to bear a child that she cannot feed. Furthermore, it is immoral and absurd to force a woman to carry a child, when she doesn’t want it...’”

Fräulein, es passiert ja häufig, daß so eine Sache von selber in Ordnung geht—na, und—in solchem Falle könnte man dann eventuell nachhelfen.”<sup>366</sup> This interaction between Gilgi and her doctor illustrates the reality that many medical professionals, despite their initial protests, were in fact sympathetic to the plights of these young women and disagreed, at least in principle, with the prohibition of abortion in the Weimar constitution. Gilgi does not return to the doctor for the abortion, and Keun does not make Gilgi’s motivations clear in this respect. Yet by combining Gilgi’s own history and personal experiences, as well as the first-hand accounts of the suffering of Hans and Hertha described above who, in the eyes of Gilgi, truly would have truly benefited from having an abortion, Keun is able to portray both the common arguments for and against the outlawing of abortion and provide some insight into the complexities of the issues surrounding the controversy of abortion during the Weimar Republic.

Baum, too, contributed to the contemporary debates by putting a personal face on this highly controversial issue. Traditionally, the problems associated with illegal abortions were considered by many as a proletarian issue. “Since the emergence of the industrial working class, the middle-class standpoint on the proletarian woman’s sexuality was clear: she could or would not restrain it, she was immodest, and she was not a virgin.”<sup>367</sup> It should come as no surprise, then, that in *Helene* the first encounter with abortion, or rather the devastating consequences of one, should involve a working-class woman:

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<sup>366</sup> G 176; “Well, come back in three weeks, Miss, it often happens that these things take care of themselves—well, and—if not in such a case one can help it along.”

<sup>367</sup> Petersen 73.

Aber die kranke Arbeiterfrau, welche auf dunkle Weise versucht hat, ihre sechste Schwangerschaft zu unterbrechen, und die ganz müde und zufrieden und ausgeblutet daliegt, die möchte noch lieber sterben. Sie hat es ausdrücklich und mit letzter Kraft der Schwester versichert, und es ist beinahe eine Grausamkeit, daß ein Assistenarzt versuchen will, eine Bluttransfusion an ihr auszuführen.<sup>368</sup>

Baum's description here provides a biting critique of the quality of life for this proletarian woman. The woman is not only suffering because of a failed abortion attempt, but because of the conditions of poverty in her life. By stressing that this is a working woman who already has five children, and even after the abortion would rather choose death than the chance to return to health and her family, Baum gives insight into the desperation of this woman and many others who find themselves in similar situations. By introducing her critique of abortion in this way, Baum stresses that it is not solely the legality or illegality of abortion that needs to be addressed, but rather the underlying social and economic conditions that drive people to such acts of desperation.

Helene's experiences as she attempts to deal with her own unexpected pregnancy incorporate multiple contemporary political and moral arguments both for and against abortion, and the fact that Helene is an educated, bourgeois woman brings the discussion out of the realm of the elitist bourgeois view that abortions are the result of the perceived lack of morals and rampant promiscuity among the lower classes. Throughout her portrayal of Helene's experiences, Baum provides an objective, journalistic view of the day-to-day reality for many unmarried pregnant women. Helene's story gives insight into some of the potentially negative consequences of

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<sup>368</sup> HW 23; "But this sick workingwoman, who has tried by illicit means to intercept her sixth pregnancy, and who lies here now, exhausted and content and drained of blood—she would prefer death. With her last ounce of strength she has specifically assured the nurse of the fact, and it seems very like cruelty to attempt the blood transfusion which the assistant physician is planning" (H 27).

outlawing abortions, including the dangerous conditions for those women who lack the finances for “professional,” though illegal, medical treatment. In addition to this factual information, it is the melodramatic aspects of Helene’s experiences that shed light on the emotional turmoil many women suffered while attempting to make this decision.

Baum clearly illustrates that for Helene, this unexpected pregnancy is not merely a matter of inconvenience. The following quotation illustrates how Helene attempts to come to terms with the complex emotions, fears, and potential consequences she faces as an unwed mother and, more importantly, as a woman student who needs to take care of a child:

...aber man bekommt kein Kind, wenn man Chemie studiert und seinen Doktor baut. Es ist in einer unvorstellbaren Weise ausgeschlossen, daß in Fräulein Willfüers Sphäre ein Kind geboren würde. Grotteske Idee, etwa einen Kinderwagen in die Bude zu stellen, in welcher zwei Dissertationen ihrer Vollendung warten. Unmöglich von jeder Seite, materiell und menschlich, vom Standpunkt der Kolleginnen aus wie vom eigenen, vom Standpunkt der Arbeit, der Kaste der Umwelt, der Leistung und Führung, die von der Studentin verlangt wird.<sup>369</sup>

After showing the futility of trying to cause a miscarriage by cooking “medicine” and even doing painful bellyflops at a public beach, it quickly becomes obvious both to Helene and to her readers that there is no simple solution to such a serious problem. Helene visits a series of doctors, midwives, and unsavory medical “professionals” in an attempt to secure an abortion. Helene’s journey illustrates not only the emotional struggles of women who find themselves in this position, but more importantly educates

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<sup>369</sup> HW 107; “But one doesn’t have a child when one’s studying chemistry and working for a doctorate. Absolutely unthinkable that a child should be born into Fräulein Willfüer’s circle! Grottesque idea! Set up a baby carriage, perhaps, in a room where two dissertations are awaiting completion! Impossible from every point of view, material and human: from the angle of her fellow students as well as from her own; from the angle of work, of caste, of society, of the performance and conduct expected of a woman student” (H 133).

Baum's audience about the horrifying and often unsanitary conditions women seeking illegal abortions often subjected themselves to out of desperation.

Helene's first experience is an initial examination by "Doktor" Rauner, an alcoholic, medical student drop-out. In the following quotation, we can clearly see how Baum uses melodrama both to keep her readers' attention and to illustrate the horrible and unsanitary conditions in which many women obtained abortions:

Schweigen wir von dem Verlauf der Konsultation. Schweigen wir von dem Ekel, der tödlichen Beschämung, von den zynischen und flotten Redensarten des Heilkundigen, von seiner Aufforderung, sich zu entkleiden, sich's bequem zu machen, sich hinzulegen, auf einen Diwan, dessen überwurf von speckigem Rot die bebende und gewürgte Helene Willfür an endlose Züge von Frauen gemahnte, die sich hier entblößt, und hingestreckt hatten. Schweigen wir von all diesem und berichten wir nur, daß Fräulein Willfür unverrichteter Dinge entflo, weil Herr Rauner es sich beikommen ließ, sie über alles Widerwärtige hinaus noch mit Zudringlichkeiten, mit Zärtlichkeiten unanständiger Sorte zu überfallen. Ja, sie entflo, sie raffte sich zusammen, stürzte davon, atmete auf, als käme sie direct aus der Hölle; aber fortan wird Herr Rauner bis an ihr Lebensende durch Angstträume geistern und mit knotigen Fingern und schwimmenden Augen sich ihren entblößten Gliedern nähern.<sup>370</sup>

In this passage, Baum cleverly writes about Helene's frightening experience without giving too many details. Instead, she gives only the bare outline of Helene's experience and allows her readers to fill in as many of the details as they themselves choose. By doing so, Baum does not turn the audience away by giving too gruesome a description,

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<sup>370</sup> HW 108 – 109; "Let us pass quickly over the consultation; over the loathing, the mortal shame; over the practitioner's glib, cynical phrases; over his fumbling hands, his breath, his invitation to Fräulein Willfür to undress, to make herself comfortable, to lie down on a couch whose greasy red cover suggested to the trembling, choking Helene an endless procession of women who had undressed and laid themselves down here. Let us pass over all this and merely report that Fräulein Willfür fled, having accomplished nothing; fled because, in addition to all the other ambitions, Herr Rauner took it into his head to press her with importunities and caresses of the most offensive nature. Yes, she fled—she scrambled into her clothes and rushed out; and when she had closed the door behind her, she heaved a long breath, as if she had come direct from hell. But from now to the end of her life, Herr Rauner would haunt her in nightmares, approaching her bared body with knotted fingers and bleary eyes" (H 135).

but at the same time points out not only the often unsanitary conditions, but also the humiliation and fear experienced by women who find themselves in similar situations.

After fleeing, Helene visits a physician “von großer Humanität, von dem man ‘alles haben könne.’”<sup>371</sup> His clinic is clean, professional, and immediately puts Helene at ease. The doctor himself never outright states that he will perform an abortion, but rather deals with the issue in a loosely veiled manner. “Die Unregelmäßigkeiten, über die Sie klagen, haben andere Gründe. Ich würde Ihnen einen kleinen operativen Eingriff vorschlagen, und dann ist alles wieder in Ordnung. Sie können einfach für ein paar Tage in meine Klinik, fünf bis sechs Tage, eine Kleinigkeit—.”<sup>372</sup> However, as Helene soon learns, all of this comes with a price:

Tausend Mark. Tausend Mark also, und dann ist alles in Ordnung. Ganz einfach. Eine Kleinigkeit. Kleiner operativer Eingriff. Tausend Mark. Tausend Mark scheint für Professor Riemenschneider nicht viel zu sein. Für Fräulein Willfür hingegen ist es ungefähr alles, was sie besitzt. Es ist die Grundlage ihres Daseins, ihres Studiums, ihrer gesamten Existenz. Tausend Mark.<sup>373</sup>

Once again, the discussion of true freedom for women in the Weimar Republic seems to revolve around money. For Helene who pays an honorarium of 30 Marks for this initial examination, which is more than she pays in a full month for rent, the 1000 Marks for this “minor operation” is simply not a possibility, even after the doctor kindly offers to

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<sup>371</sup> HW 109; “most humane physician, from whom one ‘could get anything.’” (H 137).

<sup>372</sup> HW 110: “The irregularities you complain of have other causes. I’d advise a minor operation, which will make everything all right. You’d simply spend a few days in my clinic—five or six days—a trifle” (H 137).

<sup>373</sup> HW 110: “A thousand marks. A thousand marks, then, and everything would be all right. Quite simple. A trifle. A minor operation. A thousand marks. A thousand marks didn’t seem much to Dr. Riemenschneider. To Fräulein Willfür, on the other hand, it meant practically everything she owned. It was the foundation of her existence, of her work, of her whole life. A thousand marks” (H 138). In an interesting parallel, this is also the same amount that Flämmchen in Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel* bargains for in exchange for several weeks as a traveling secretary and mistress, as I examined above.

wave his personal fee. In this passage, Baum critiques a society in which those with money can have anything they want, including safe, albeit illegal, abortions, while those who truly need this procedure, namely those who would otherwise be forced to raise these children in abject poverty, are left with no other option but to bring the pregnancy to term or to have the procedure performed illegally in often unsanitary conditions similar to those described above.

Helene attempts to find some middle ground by visiting women doctors in the hopes that one of them may be willing to perform an abortion for her. Over the course of these visits, both Helene and Baum's readers are exposed to multiple political and social viewpoints illustrating the complexity of issues surrounding Paragraph 218. Some of the arguments she encounters are blatantly oppositional:

“Ich halte es für unmoralisch—verstehen Sie mich recht—ich halte es für unmoralisch, sich einer Verantwortung auf diese Weise zu entziehen. Man darf sich's nicht bequem machen, das ist meine Meinung. Die Härten des Lebens sind es, an denen man wächst und stark wird. Ich bin eine Frau wie Sie auch, ich weiß, was ich sage.”<sup>374</sup>

Other medical professionals are more sympathetic:

“Denken Sie, daß es in Ihnen ein Mensch wächst, der vielleicht einmal Ihr ganzes Glück sein wird. Vielleicht ein Genie, ein Dichter, ein Entdecker, etwas Großes. Die Möglichkeit, die in Ihnen wächst, darf nicht zerstört werden. Sie sollen nicht fürchten, Sie sollen hoffen.”<sup>375</sup>

Helene also encounters several other medical personnel who are sympathetic, citing the financial and emotional struggles of numerous examples of women who have six or

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<sup>374</sup> HW 115 – 116; “I consider it immoral—don't misunderstand me—I consider it immoral to shirk a responsibility in that fashion. One has no right to take the easy way out—that's my opinion. It's the rigors of life that make for growth and strength. I'm a woman like yourself—I know what I am talking about” (H 143).

<sup>375</sup> HW 117: “Remember there's a human being growing inside of you who may one day mean your whole happiness. A genius, perhaps—a poet, an explorer—something great. The possibility that's growing within you mustn't be destroyed. You mustn't be afraid, you must *hope*” (H 144 – 145).

seven children and are unable to feed them, but these doctors are unwilling to break the law to assert their personal convictions:

Man hatte zu schwer um seine Existenz zu kämpfen, man durfte sie nicht durch gesetzwidrige Handlungen gefährden und untergraben. Es war schon so, daß Hilfe in diesen Dingen hauptsächlich bei Pfüschern und dunklen Heilkundigen zu erhoffen war. Blödsinniges Gesetz, blödsinnige Zustände.<sup>376</sup>

Through dialogues with these women, Baum's readers learn not only common arguments for and against Paragraph 218, but also the wide range of opinions ranging from those who are willing to break the law for a fee and those who, while opposed in principle, feel obliged to uphold what they believe is a unjust law despite their acknowledgement of the very real, and very dangerous, alternatives.

As a consequence of the restrictions of Paragraph 218, Helene, like so many other women, is warned repeatedly not to visit "minderwertigen Kräften"<sup>377</sup> in an attempt to obtain an illegal abortion. These numerous repetitions, however, do not have the same pedagogical impact on Baum's readers as realistic, personal experiences filtered through Helene's eyes. Despite these numerous warnings and her previous experience with "Doktor" Rauner, Helene employs the services of Frau Friedrichs, a retired midwife. Once again, Baum incorporates elements of melodramatic sensationalism in order to both increase the audience's emotional involvement and to illustrate the true nature of illegal abortions resulting from the restrictions caused by Paragraph 218. Once again, in order not to drive her audience away by these gruesome

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<sup>376</sup> HW 118; "One had to struggle too hard for existence, one couldn't endanger and undermine it with illicit practices. Conditions were such now that, generally speaking, you couldn't hope for help in these matters except from obscure practitioners and quacks. Idiotic law, idiotic conditions" (H 146 – 147).

<sup>377</sup> HW 112; "inferior hands" (H 139).

details, Baum chooses to portray the potential consequences of abortions not as they are experienced by Helene herself, but rather through Helene's observations of another woman.

In stark contrast to Dr. Riemenschneider's sterilized, gleaming white office, "Das Schlimmste sind die Wände in diesem Zimmer. Sie lassen alles durch, Gerüche, Menschendunst, Stimmen."<sup>378</sup> It is one of these voices in particular that causes Helene to reconsider the consequences of her actions:

"Was ist denn da los?" fragt Helene und deutet mit dem Kinn gegen die stöhnende Wand. [Frau Friedrichs:] "Da? Los? Ach nichts. Das Gewöhnliche eben." "Bekommt da jemand ein Kind?" fragt Helene Willfür, sie ist sich selbst ganz fremd geworden, wie sie da, wie herverschlagen von einem Sturm, vor dem rot-grünen Wandschoner sitzt. Frau Friedrichs läßt die Frage offen. "Die hat's nicht leicht," sagt sie nur. "Bei Ihnen wird es ganz anders gehen. Sie sind jung und gesund." Schlappt ab auf Pantoffeln. Türen. Flüstern. Stöhnen, Stöhnen, ein so weiches, kraftloses, winselndes Stöhnen, daß es Helene wurde, als sähe sie das wegrinnende, immer rinnende Blut. Es strömte über die Dielen, es life über den Flur, es floß unter der Schwelle herein.—<sup>379</sup>

Although Helene is not outright confronted with her own death, the possibility of dying or suffering horribly as a result of this procedure—a dangerous possibility that echoes the cries of the proletarian women suffering after a failed abortion attempt described at the beginning of the novel—becomes evident in this passage not only to Helene but also to Baum's audience.

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<sup>378</sup> HW 120; "The worst thing about this room was the walls. Everything seeped through them: smells, human odors, voices" (H 148 – 149).

<sup>379</sup> HW 121; "'What's the matter there?' asked Helene, lifting her chin towards the groaning wall. 'There? The matter? Oh, nothing. Just the usual thing.' 'Is someone having a child?' asked Helene. Sitting in front of that red-green hanging, she seemed an utter stranger to herself, like a ship storm-driven from its course. Frau Friedrichs left the question open, saying merely: 'She's not having an easy time of it. It'll be different with you. You're younger and strong.' Her slippered feet shuffled away. Doors. Whispers. Moaning. Moaning. Such low, weak, whimpering moans that Helene began to feel as if she could see the blood gushing out, blood pouring and pouring. It streamed over the floor, it ran across the corridor, it flowed under the door into the room..." (H 149 – 150).

As Baum implies here, the negative consequences of illegally obtained abortions were often quite gruesome. According to Professor Bumm, a famous Weimar gynecologist, out of every one hundred women who had illegal abortions performed, fifty were admitted to the hospital with a high fever. Out of those fifty, thirty six became seriously ill and four died.<sup>380</sup> Although dramatic, Barbara Beuys argues that Prof. Bumm's statistics cited above were also not an accurate representation of reality because not all women who were suffering after receiving illegal abortions would have sought medical treatment. In 1924 alone, 5,296 women were charged with violating Paragraph 218. Three years later, the yearly total had risen to 5,313.<sup>381</sup> Faced with the very real possibility of incarceration as a result of their actions, many women would rather have risked their lives than seek medical care.

Attempting to escape from the terrible sounds and smells, Helene leaves to pick up her stored luggage. When she returns, however, she is turned away by the police, who have arrived to arrest Frau Friedrichs for performing illegal abortions. Throughout her ordeal, numerous medical professionals told Helene that they refuse to perform abortions because they do not want to be prosecuted for breaking the law. But now, Helene experiences first-hand the all-too-common possibility of facing prosecution for her actions, bringing the reality of the consequences of her decision to light.

The pedagogical aspects of Baum's novel as Helene comes to terms with her unexpected pregnancy are not limited merely to the topic of abortion. Baum's novel also gives accurate information for those women who choose to carry the pregnancy to

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<sup>380</sup> Beuys 455.

<sup>381</sup> Beuys 455.

term. Throughout the novel *Helene*, and Baum's readers, are given valuable information regarding the rights and options for both married and unmarried pregnant women:

“Da gehen Sie nachher, wenn es so weit ist, in ein Wöchnerinnenheim. Sie haben keine Kosten, man berät Sie auch nachher mit dem Kind. Wir haben es Gott sei Dank durchgesetzt in den letzten Jahren, daß die uneheliche Mutter ihr soziales Recht erhält. Sie wissen, daß es Ihnen auch gestattet ist, den Frauentitel anzunehmen? Also nur den Kopf nicht verlieren. Soll ich Ihnen erzählen, wieviel uneheliche Kinder, laut statistic, jedes Jahr geboren werden? Und alle kommen durch, glauben Sie mir. Das ist keine solche Tragödie, wie Sie zu glauben scheinen.”<sup>382</sup>

After learning this, Helene's situation, at least with regard to safe medical care, does not seem as hopeless as she had feared. However, since she has limited finances, she must rely on the services of the state and subject herself to numerous examinations by medical students before, during, and after the birth in order to ensure a safe and affordable delivery. In the following quotation taken from a letter Helene writes to a friend, Baum once again focuses on Helene's complex emotions to both to retain her audience's attention and to personalize the crisis facing women in similar situations:

Wissen Sie die Bedingungen, unter denen ein mitteloser, unverheirateter Mensch ein Kind bekommen darf? Diese Bedingungen bestehen aus einer großen Wohltat und einer großen Härte. Man darf sechs Wochen vor der Geburt in die Klinik eintreten und darf bis sechs Wochen nach der Geburt dort bei seinem Kind bleiben. Das ist sehr schön. Aber man muß in diesen Wochen als Studienmaterial dienen, man muß den Studenten zur Verfügung stehen, man besitzt nicht einmal die Stunde der Geburt für sich allein, und das ist, wenn auch notwendig, eine große, unerträgliche Grausamkeit. Ich jedenfalls war zu Boden geschlagen, als

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<sup>382</sup> HW 115; “When the time comes, you'll enter a lying-in hospital. There'll be no charge, and they'll advise you as to the care of the child later on, too. Thank God, we've managed these last years to see that the unmarried mother gets her social rights. You know you're allowed to call yourself 'Frau' too? So—just don't lose your head. Shall I tell you how many illegitimate children are born every year, by statistical count? And they all manage somehow, believe me. It's no such tragedy as you seem to think” (H 142).

sich diese Perspektive vor mir auftat, und ich will Ihnen nicht erzählen, in welchen Abgründen der Verzweiflung ich eine Zeitlang gehaust habe.<sup>383</sup>

The social and emotional implications of what lower-income women unmarried women must offer in exchange for safe and legal treatment are clearly critiqued in Helene's rhetorical question: "War es leichter, sich hinzulegen und den Studenten zu dienen, nicht anders als ein Meerschweinchen oder eine Experimentiermaus?"<sup>384</sup> This, coming from a college-educated scientist who performs experiments on animals further illustrates the degradation Helene feels at this prospect.

In the end, Helene chooses not to go through with an abortion, a decision which provides Baum with the opportunity to further explore the trials and tribulations experienced by unwed mothers in Weimar society. Throughout the novel, however, Baum never makes clear her own personal views on whether Paragraph 218 is good or bad, moral or immoral. Rather, through her examination of the conditions in which abortions are performed—ranging from absolute squalor to sterile operating rooms available to those willing and able to pay the price—she stresses the fact that the ongoing debate of the consequences of the restrictions of Paragraph 218 and the underlying causes that drive women to consider abortions should not be limited the realm of the educated, ruling elite, but should actively include all women, regardless of

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<sup>383</sup> HW 189 – 190; "Do you know the conditions under which a penniless, unmarried woman may bear a child? They're conditions that combine a very human feature with a very harsh one. You may enter the hospital six weeks before the birth of the child and stay there with it for six weeks after. But during that time you've got to serve as material for study—you've got to be at the disposal of the students—you don't even have the hour of birth to yourself. And that—though necessary, perhaps—is unbearably cruel. I, at any rate, was completely unnerved by the prospect, and don't want to tell you into what depths of despair I was plunged for a while" (H 230).

<sup>384</sup> HW 191; "Was it easier to place myself at the disposal of the students—nothing more nor less than a guinea-pig or an experimental mouse?" (H 231).

social standing or educational background. By presenting both the factual information and complex emotions associated with this issue through melodrama, Baum was able to bring controversial, contemporary debates to a wide range of women who otherwise may have remained ignorant of the complexities of these issues.

During their attempts to procure abortions, both Helene and Gilgi are told that the best solution is for them to get married. Both women immediately dismiss this as a possibility. When Helene is confronted with the option of marrying Rainer after discovering she is pregnant, she quickly rebuffs the idea, thinking “Den Firilei heiraten—absurder Gedanke.”<sup>385</sup> The same is true for Gilgi. “Ich werde ihn nicht heiraten—das weiß ich.”<sup>386</sup> All four of the women protagonists in these novels appear to desire a sense of independence here expressed by Gilgi: “Es macht mir Freude, aus eigener Kraft weiterzukommen.”<sup>387</sup> This is especially true of the hard-working, self-sufficient Gilgi and Helene. Even the more carefree Flämmchen and Doris, who view men as providers of entertainment and enjoyment, see themselves in control of their own destiny. Both Flämmchen and Doris view men not as potential life-partners, but merely as stepping-stones for financial survival and social advancement and are willing to manipulate men frequently in an attempt to achieve their personal and professional goals.

Both Baum’s and Keun’s novels directly confront and contribute to the debate surrounding the permanence of the New Woman’s “liberation” and the “true role” of women in Weimar society. In his writings, Kracauer elaborates on a widespread belief

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<sup>385</sup> HW 114; “Marry Firilei—preposterous idea!” (HW114).

<sup>386</sup> G 109; “I won’t marry him—that I know.”

<sup>387</sup> G 70; “It makes me happy to get ahead by my own hard work.”

that the financial and sexual independence of the New Woman was never meant to be a permanent status, but rather a temporary one, merely lasting long enough to support a single woman until she was married and adopted the traditional female role within the household. In his collection of essays *Die Angestellten*, he shows that as the youth and beauty of these New Women faded, so did their desirability and ability to retain their jobs. Kracauer cites a newspaper ad that clearly demonstrates the relationship between age and employment desirability. “In der Annonce wünscht nämlich ein Herrenkonfektionsgeschäft einen *älteren Verkäufer von 25 bis 26 Jahren*.”<sup>388</sup> This may not seem very old, but Kracauer cites several additional examples of unemployed workers ranging in age from 32 to 51 years of age who are considered “too old” to keep their positions, many of whom saw suicide as the only possible solution to their problems.<sup>389</sup>

This is specifically a phenomenon of the white-collar world: unlike stenotypists and salesgirls, women working in industry or agriculture were not viewed as obsolete once their external beauty began to fade.<sup>390</sup> The fact that women had far less opportunity to advance when compared to men further supports this assumption of the temporality of women’s employment. Bridenthal and Koonz have argued that the hierarchical structure of Weimar businesses further perpetuated this belief. Men, while

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<sup>388</sup> Kracauer “Ach, wie bald...” 44, italics mine; “For in the advertisement a menswear store wants an *older salesman of twenty-five or twenty six*” (“Alas” 53).

<sup>389</sup> Kracauer, “Ach, wie bald...” 49 – 50; “Alas” 57.

<sup>390</sup> Bridenthal & Koonz 316.

constituting only 75% of the white-collar workforce, held 95% of all the top positions, and the larger the establishment, the less likely a woman held a managerial position.<sup>391</sup>

Von Ankum has argued that the tough competition in the job market, some of which was driven by age and beauty, as well as the limitations placed on female advancement due to patriarchal prejudice caused many women to begin fantasizing about returning to traditional roles of femininity.<sup>392</sup> Shortly after the publication of Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Alice Rühle-Gerstel commented on this overwhelming sense of disillusionment:

Heute ist unter den jungen Mädchen und Frauen eine starke Tendenz zur Ehe, zur Mütterlichkeit, ja zur Küche zu bemerken, ein Überdruß an der als so nichtig erlebten 'Freiheit,' eine Leere der Gegenwart, die nur Wenige als Provisorium erleben, nur Wenige mit Zukunft zu füllen vermögen. [...] Bubikopf und Kurzkleider haben den Rückzug angetreten, die Wirtschaftsnot hat Bürostuhl und Katheder weggeräumt und die Schalter vor der Frau geschlossen, und die Ideologie der neuen Weiblichkeit hängt in einem derzeit luftleeren Raum, schal wie ein vorgestriger Luftballon.<sup>393</sup>

Kracauer attributes some of the blame to the New Women themselves, who do not see the warning signs and as a result shun their calling to adopt the traditional feminine role:

“Da sie mit einem durch die Bürozulage vermehrten Gehalt ganz erträglich wirtschaften können, scheuen sie vor einer Ehe zurück, in der

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<sup>391</sup> Bridenthal & Koonz 316 – 317.

<sup>392</sup> von Ankum, “Motherhood” 171.

<sup>393</sup> Rühle-Gerstel, “Zurück” 5 – 6; “Today among many young girls and women one notices a strong trend towards marriage, motherhood, even towards cooking; a weariness caused by the ‘freedom’ that is never achieved, a contemporary emptiness that is only a temporary problem for a few, a future that very few are ever able to fill. [...] The page-boy haircut and short skirts are going away, the economic crisis cleared away the office chair and the lectern and has closed the door on women, and the ideology of the new femininity is hanging in a vacuum, flat like a deflated balloon.”

sie sich materiell verschlechterten. Werden sie dann später freigesetzt, so kriegen sie weder eine neue Stellung noch einen Mann.”<sup>394</sup>

Von Ankum further argues that the desire for young women office workers in addition to the relatively low pay of the *Angestellten* were further expressions of the employers’—and employees’—conviction that their professional commitment would be temporary and that their ultimate career goals would be marriage and motherhood.<sup>395</sup>

Based on the numerous instances of infidelity and lack of marital bliss, it should come as no surprise that all four of these women protagonists appear skeptical of the possibility of marriage as a means for achieving happiness. Doris describes the relationship between her parents in very negative terms, writing that they stay together not out of love for one another, but rather out of a sense of resignation:

Leider hat sie meinen Vater geheiratet, was ich für einen Fehler halte, denn er ist ein vollkommen ungebildeter Mensch und faul wie eine jahrelange Leiche und brüllt nur manchmal von wegen männliches Organ zeigen—man kennt das. [...] Und fragte nur mal meine Mutter, warum sie als Klassefrau diesen Popel genommen hat, und sagte sie nur, statt mir eine zu langen: irgendwo muß man doch einmal hingehören.<sup>396</sup>

In Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Ambrosius treats his wife as if she were his property. “‘Du gehörst mir—jetzt gehörst du mir—’ ‘Ich mag dich nicht!’ schrie sie

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<sup>394</sup> Kracauer, “Ach, wie bald...” 46; “Their own foolishness is often to blame for the girls’ misfortune. Since they can manage quite tolerably on a salary augmented by office bonuses, they shirk from any marriage in which they would do worse materially. If they are subsequently made redundant, they get neither a new job nor a husband” (“Alas” 54).

<sup>395</sup> von Ankum, “Motherhood” 180.

<sup>396</sup> KM 16 – 17; “Unfortunately, she married my father, which was a mistake, I think, because he’s completely uneducated and as lazy as a dead body and only shouts every once in a while to show off his big mouth—we all know about that sort of thing. [...] And I’ve been asking my mother why she as a high-class woman settled for this loser, and instead of slapping me she just said: ‘You have to belong somewhere after a while’” (ASG 20).

aus sich heraus. ‘Du bist mir zuwider! Geh! Geh! Geh!’<sup>397</sup> In this instance, the relegation of women to the status of sexual objects contributes to the demise of their marriage. In the “office romance” portrayed in *Menschen im Hotel*, the married businessman Preysing’s fascination with Flämmchen slowly progresses to obsession, prompting him to shave his moustache in an attempt to look younger, to offer Flämmchen a job, and ultimately to have sex with her in a manner much more resembling rape than any type of affection. The provincial Kringelein, too, is not free from an unhappy marriage, as the constant nagging and penny-pinching on the part of his wife Anna drives him not only to cash in his life insurance and move to Berlin, but also drives him into the arms of the young Flämmchen (at least in this instance, with no sexual favors insinuated or desired). Gilgi’s biological mother, a wealthy matron with a significantly younger (and also engaged) lover, is not only cheating on her husband, but is aware that he is cheating on her as well because her husband gives her expensive jewelry every time he cheats on her, and Keun continues the trope of marital infidelity through Doris’ numerous sexual relationships with married men.

Interestingly, despite the numerous references to unhappy and unsatisfying marriages in their novels, all four of these women protagonists—Helene, Flämmchen, Gilgi, and Doris—either temporarily relinquish their emancipated ideals and pursue romantic relationships or attempt to combine their professional aspirations with more traditional roles of “wife” and “mother.” Unexpected pregnancy transforms Gilgi and Helene from single, independent New Women into what von Ankum calls “New

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<sup>397</sup> “‘You belong to me—you belong to me now—you’re mine—you belong to me—’ ‘I don’t like you!’ she screamed with all her might. ‘I loathe you! Get away! Get away! Get away!’” (HW 53).

Mothers,” forcing them to confront the possibility of rearing a child with their career aspirations. Both Doris and Flämmchen temporarily give up their dreams of achieving glamour and experiment with traditional roles of femininity in an attempt to find the happiness that their New Woman status had promised them but had failed to deliver.

Perhaps the most drastic, and unrealistic, shift from working woman to housewife comes in the story of Baum’s Helene Willfüer. After completing her doctorate in chemistry, Helene achieves victory in the very male-dominated, traditionalist environment of the hard sciences. Her achievement culminates in the offer of a job at the *Süddeutsche Chemiewerk AG* as the director of manufacturing for a wonder drug, Vitalin, to which she co-owns the patent. In short Helene, through her hard work and dedication to her career, has beaten all of the odds and become a role model for New Women everywhere.

It must be noted, however, that she has achieved all of her professional goals in addition to becoming a loving and doting single-mother, which further questions the possibility of achieving such goals in real life. Lynda J. King points out that this story of success in the 1920s was not impossible, but rather highly improbable.<sup>398</sup> Petersen argues that Helene does offer her readers a view of an emancipated life for women, but this can only become a reality “if—and that is a substantial if—they have at their disposal staunch determination and purpose, intelligence, education, and, not to be forgotten, male connections.”<sup>399</sup> Vicki Baum herself was another example of a highly successful “New Woman” who was able to balance her professional career in addition

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<sup>398</sup> King, *Best-Sellers* 157.

<sup>399</sup> Petersen 18.

to raising her two young children. Ullstein promoted this image of a successful “New Woman” and “New Mother” in their advertisements for *Helene*, where they portray the successful woman author taking time out to play with her children.<sup>400</sup> The advertisement, however, fails to mention that Baum was happily married at the time, and her husband also took an active role in the rearing of the children.

Yet despite all of Helene’s professional achievements, Baum insinuates there is still something lacking in Helene’s life. At the end of the story, after many years Helene is reunited with Prof. Ambrosius, her former mentor, a man to whom, consequently, she has shared a long-repressed romantic bond. Ambrosius, himself the mere shell of man following a failed suicide attempt after his wife left him years before, makes Helene an offer to which she does not know how to respond:

“Helene, hör mich an. Ich lasse dich nicht wieder von mir. Du mußt mit mir gehen. *Du mußt alles lassen und bei mir bleiben.*” [...] “Ich weiß nicht,” sagte sie schwach. “Ich werde das nicht können. Ich bin gewöhnt, selbständig zu sein. Ich muß selbständig arbeiten. Ich taue nicht zur Assistentin, glaube ich—” [...] “Du dummes Mädel,” sagte er dicht an ihrem Mund. “Ich meine nicht die Chemie. Ich meine das Leben. Willst du leben mit mir?”<sup>401</sup>

Here, Helene is confronted not only with the possibility of giving up her own sense of independence, but also of fully assuming the traditional female role and entering into what von Ankum calls the “perfect relationship” of “protected daughter, supportive wife, and caring mother.”<sup>402</sup> Ambrosius implies that he expects her to give up her own

<sup>400</sup> “Vicki Baum”; see also King, *Best-Sellers* 123.

<sup>401</sup> HW 260, italics mine; “‘Helene, listen to me. I won’t let you go again. You’ve got to come with me. *You’ve got to drop everything and stay with me.*’ [...] ‘I don’t know,’ she said weakly. ‘I shouldn’t be able to do it. I’m used to being independent. I’ve got to work independently. I don’t think I’m cut out to be an assistant.’ [...] ‘You silly girl,’ he said. ‘I don’t mean chemistry. I mean life. Will you live with me?’” (H 311 – 312).

<sup>402</sup> von Ankum, “Motherhood” 179.

career and ambitions in order to take care of him. Helene's initial response is similar to that of all four of the women protagonists that I examine, namely, that they are wary to willingly give up their own hard-earned sense of independence. But in the end, Helene replies with the final words of the novel: "Es ist ein Experiment. Ich will es versuchen."<sup>403</sup> By accepting his offer, Helene not only loses her status as a single mother, but also her own sense of independence. As she states, she will approach this relationship as an "experiment" to determine whether or not giving up her professional career in substitution for a complete traditional family—mother, father, and child—is the next logical and fulfilling role for the New Women of the Weimar Republic to adopt.

In Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*, Flämmchen, after having prostituted herself to her employer Preysing out of financial necessity, receives a similar proposition from Kringelein. The terminally ill man, who is also old enough to be her father, offers her the chance to leave her career aspirations behind and adopt the traditional role of loving wife. "Wirst du—du wirst doch bei mir bleiben? Du sollst es gut haben bei mir. Ich will nichts, als daß es dir gut geht..."<sup>404</sup> In this instance, Flämmchen's role may actually be more the role of loving mother and caretaker, as, for perhaps the first time, this New Woman is not asked for sexual favors in return. Flämmchen, like Helene, agrees to give up her liberated lifestyle of the New Woman in order to take care of Kringelein. "Er ging bis an das Bett heran, und dort kniete er plötzlich nieder. Er legte seinen Kopf in die Hände und murmelte etwas, das Flämmchen nicht verstand. 'Ja.

<sup>403</sup> HW 260; "It's an experiment. I'll try it" (H 312).

<sup>404</sup> M 304; "Will you stay with me? You will, won't you? You shall have a good time with me. I only want to give you a good time" (GH 288).

Aber ja,' sagte sie dazu. 'Gerne. Ja.'"<sup>405</sup> In contrast to Helene, who will give up her career in chemistry when she marries Ambrosius, Flämmchen must give up her career only temporarily, as Kringelein is terminally ill and does not have very long to live. Yet Flämmchen, too, is willing to experiment with traditional roles because it is obvious that her current employment situation is providing her neither with the amount of happiness she desires nor the financial capital necessary for her to achieve her future goals.

Interestingly, with both of these relationships, Baum leaves everything open, choosing to end the story with the possibility of a happy end. Baum stated repeatedly that she gave her audience what they wanted, and, in these novels, what her public wanted was a romantic—though I argue unconventional and unbelievable—happy ending for the women involved. By doing this, Baum subjugated herself to the trope of the romance novel. In her study of the readers of Harlequin romance novels, Janice Radway argues that “romances provide a utopian vision in which female individuality and a sense of self are shown to be compatible with nurturance and care for another.”<sup>406</sup> Because Baum does not show how these pseudo-marriages progress, her readers merely assume that the couples involved live happy, fulfilling, and “complete” lives together.

These long-awaited “romantic” resolutions bring an end to the melodramatic pattern of emotional crisis running throughout both of Baum’s novels. Barndt identifies the perpetual struggle between life and death and the obligatory resolution through the

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<sup>405</sup> M 306; “At the door he suddenly turned back and, going to the bed, knelt down. He put his face in his hands and murmured something Flämmchen did not catch. ‘Yes, yes, of course,’ she said. ‘Yes, gladly’” (GH 289).

<sup>406</sup> Radway, *Reading* 55.

romantic “happy-end” as the hallmarks of melodrama, arguing that it is these elements that separate popular literature, such as Baum’s novels, from “high literature.”<sup>407</sup> In addition, by providing the audience with the happy ending and romantic conclusion it desires, Barndt argues, traditional melodramas overwhelmingly support the status quo.<sup>408</sup> As I will argue in the next chapter, the obligatory happy endings to Baum’s novels do not depreciate from the pedagogical impact these novels had on their readers.

In both of Keun’s novels, however, these traditional feminine roles are not nearly as idealized as they are at the end of Baum’s works. In contrast to Baum, who ends both of her novels at the beginning of the relationship, Keun traces the development of marriage-like relationships from their inception to their dissolution. In *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Doris’ attempt at fulfilling the traditional feminine role comes at a point where she, like Flämmchen, is driven to financial desperation. During one of her periods of homelessness when she uses the waiting room at a train station for shelter, an acquaintance, Karl, offers Doris the chance to live with him in his garden colony, in effect taking over the role of traditional role of housewife. The role, however, comes with a bit of a rural twist, as in addition to cleaning, Doris’ responsibilities would also include milking the goat—a far cry from the image of glamour she associated with the metropolis of Berlin.

Doris rejects Karl’s offer, and instead she agrees to go home with a man and intends to charge him ten Marks for her “services.” However, like Kringlein, this man,

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<sup>407</sup> Barndt, *Sentiment* 117.

<sup>408</sup> Barndt, “Aesthetics” 81; It must be noted, however, that Barndt argues in *Sentiment* that the novels of Keun do not fit in to the same category as Baum. Keun, she asserts, actively uses elements of melodrama in both of her Weimar novels to specifically challenge the status quo.

Ernst, gives her a place to stay and food to eat with no expectations for sexual favors in return, going so far as to make the couch into a place for her to sleep. When Doris asks him why he allows her to stay, he replies simply, “weil ich Angst habe, nach Hause zu kommen, und keiner ist da und atmet—bleiben Sie doch bitte noch hier.”<sup>409</sup> When Doris implies that she could offer him some sort of “payment” for his generosity, he replies, “Wenn Sie Lust haben, Fräulein Doris, dann können Sie morgen ja mal die Betten machen und ein bißchen Ordnung in der Wohnung.”<sup>410</sup> Unaccustomed to men not responding to and taking advantage of her physical charms, Doris imitates the role of the “perfect” housewife—cooking, cleaning, even walking Ernst home from work—in a desperate attempt to make him fall in love with her.

Ernst, however, is too consumed with longing for his absent wife, who left him to pursue her dreams of being a *Glanz*, to notice Doris as a sexual being. The longer Doris stays with Ernst, the more the differences between Ernst’s bourgeois and Doris’ working-class background constantly remind Doris that her lack of education will never allow the two to be compatible. Doris’ rendition of “Das ist die Liebe der Matrosen” will never be able to replace Ernst’s memories about how his wife used to sing: “Gesungen hat sie, wie Schubert komponiert hat.”<sup>411</sup> It appears as if no amount of imitation will ever be enough to replace her lack of culture, a question that is raised

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<sup>409</sup> KM 103; “Because I am afraid to come home and there’s nobody there who breathes—please stay” (ASG 141).

<sup>410</sup> KM 104; “Well, if you like, Miss Doris, you can make the beds and straighten up a bit tomorrow” (ASG 142).

<sup>411</sup> KM 110; “She used to sing like Schubert composed” (ASG 149).

both directly and indirectly throughout the novel. “Ob man wohl ein Glanz werden kann, wenn man es nicht von Geburt ist?”<sup>412</sup>

Throughout her stay with Ernst, the urge to attain the status of a *Glanz* has consumed Doris. She realizes that she will never be more than substitution for the love of his life. Chasing glamour by manipulating men has not provided her with happiness, and neither has adopting the traditional role of housewife without any sense of love or affection. Doris leaves Ernst and her pseudo-domesticity behind, understanding that adopting the role of housewife will never guarantee love, and may never make her feel complete. This pseudo-romantic relationship with Ernst is only one of many encounters Doris has with men, and not a very substantial part of the novel, yet through this relationship, Keun challenges not only the illusory happiness promised by the independent status of the New Woman but also the intense lack of satisfaction when formerly independent women give up their carefree lives in order to assume the traditional role of wife and mother.

In *Gilgi, eine von uns* Keun shows in much greater detail how a relationship can, and often is, the destruction of the independence and free will associated with Weimar Germany’s New Women. Gilgi, too, falls in love with a man significantly older than she who embodies the antithesis to Gilgi’s strong, independent work ethic: Martin, a bohemian “Weltreisender und Habenichts,”<sup>413</sup> who lives off of money he is able to borrow from his family and friends. Over the course of the novel, Keun traces the psychological and emotional changes as Gilgi slowly transforms from an independent,

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<sup>412</sup> KM 30; “I’m wondering if you can become glamorous if you weren’t born that way” (ASG 39).

<sup>413</sup> G 75; “world traveler without a penny to his name.”

hard-working, goal-driven young woman to what resembles more of a stagnant, bourgeois housewife.

Keun uses this relationship to question not only the sustained viability of the New Woman's independent nature, but also to explore the inner struggles faced by many new women who must give up their independent lifestyle to adopt traditional female gender roles. Keun uses the voice and experiences of Gilgi to put a personal face on this issue, showing the radical transformation in Gilgi from one end of the spectrum to the other: from the super-regulated, no-nonsense career girl to the hopeless romantic. Herr Höhne, a bookkeeper in Gilgi's office, comments candidly on the fate of numerous women employees he has seen over the years: "Tritt ein Mann in Erscheinung, taugt die Frau nichts mehr im Beruf."<sup>414</sup> This viewpoint seems to correspond with those expressed by Kracauer and Rühle-Gerstel above. Gilgi's transformation is neither quick nor easy. As Gilgi herself comments in the novel on her difficulties continuing with her own professional aspirations and her romantic feelings for Martin. "Der Martin ist eine Betriebsstörung. Und das schlimmste: diese Störung ist ihr lieber als der ganze Betrieb zusammen."<sup>415</sup> Keun uses Gilgi and Martin's relationship to challenge the fairy-tale happiness associated with bourgeois marriage often idealized in popular culture, most often in film and the illustrated press.

This determined, self-sufficient New Woman moves in with Martin and slowly begins to assume the traditional role of bourgeois wife. "Und Gilgi wird energisch. Kündigt zuerst einmal [die Putzfrau] Frau Boß. Das bißchen Geschirrabwaschen und

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<sup>414</sup> G 130; "When a man enters the picture, the woman no longer appears at work."

<sup>415</sup> G 106; "Martin is a disruption from her work. And the worst part: this disruption is more dear to her than all the work combined."

Zimmerausfegen kann sie allein machen. Jetzt wird sie dem Martin mal zeigen, wie tüchtig und leistungsfähig sie ist.”<sup>416</sup> Here, we can see that not only is Gilgi attempting to bring her work ethic into the private sphere, but also that she is doing so not for her own benefit or sense of self-worth, but rather to show Martin what a good housewife she is, in turn potentially strengthening his romantic feelings towards her.

The more energy Gilgi puts into her domestic duties, the more she transfers her own feelings of self-worth on to Martin’s perception of her. It comes to a point where Gilgi, whose entire existence used to revolve around her sense of independence, begins to loathe her career ambitions because she sees these as taking time away from Martin. Due to the financial crisis, Gilgi, who was once an indispensable member of her office, is laid off from her job because she “für niemanden zu sorgen [hätte].”<sup>417</sup> Instead of being upset at losing this last vestige of her independence as would be expected, Gilgi in fact sees this as an act of liberation, as she can now spend more time creating an idealized, happy household for Martin. “Gott sei Dank, Gott sei Dank—jetzt ist’s nicht meine Schuld, ich kann nichts dafür. —Gott sei Dank, ich brauch’ nicht mehr hierher.”<sup>418</sup> Von Ankum argues that at this point, Gilgi loses not only her employment, but also her sense of self, which for such a long time has been derived from her ability to function independently in the working world.<sup>419</sup> At this point, Gilgi has appeared to go from one end of the spectrum to the other: from the completely independent, hard-

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<sup>416</sup> G 126; “And Gilgi becomes full of energy. First she fires [the cleaning woman] Frau Boß. Cleaning a few dishes and sweeping out the room she can do herself. Now she will show Martin how hard-working and productive she is.”

<sup>417</sup> G 140; “does not have anyone to care for.”

<sup>418</sup> G 140; “Thank God, thank God—now it’s not my fault, there’s nothing I can do. —Thank God I don’t need to come here any more.”

<sup>419</sup> von Ankum, “Motherhood” 182.

working New Woman to a codependent shell of her former self who places all her hopes and dreams on the love she receives (or hopes to receive) from her boyfriend.

At the beginning of the novel when Gilgi finds out that she is adopted, she accepts this news with a sense of relief. “Das freut sie, denn sie hat nie Wert darauf gelegt, zur bürgerlichen Gesellschaft zu gehören.”<sup>420</sup> The life she describes with her parents is that of the prototypical, petit-bourgeois Wilhelmine-era conception of family centered around the patriarch of the family, her father. “[Gilgi, ihr Vater und ihre Mutter] essen Brötchen mit guter Butter. Herr Kron (Karnevalsartikel en gros) ißt als einziger ein Ei. Diese Ei ist mehr als Nahrung. Es ist Symbol. Eine Konzession an die männliche Überlegenheit. Ein Monarchattribut, eine Art Reichsapfel.”<sup>421</sup> Even before she met Martin, Gilgi does not seem very interested in dating at all, much less settling down in the role of a bourgeois housewife:

Und nur weil sie jetzt im Augenblick gar nichts anderes zu tun hat, denkt sie an Olgas Bruder. Netter Junge. Wie war noch sein Vorname? Weiß sie nicht. Geküßt hat er sie gestern abend im Auto. Heute reist er wieder ab. Schade? Ach wo. Aber nett war es gestern mit ihm. Lange hatte sie nicht mehr geküßt. Es gefällt eimen so selten einer. Die Jahre der Wahllosigkeit zwischen siebzehn und neunzehn sind vorbei. Der Junge war nett. Der Kuß war nett. Nicht mehr. Er brennt nicht nach. Gut so.<sup>422</sup>

Her attitude towards the men she meets at Karneval, as I examined in the last chapter, futher emphasizes Gilgi’s lack of interest in pursuing a relationship. However, after

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<sup>420</sup> G 26; “That makes her happy, because she was never interested in belonging to bourgeois society.”

<sup>421</sup> G 10; “[Gilgi, her father and her mother] eat rolls with good butter. Herr Kron is the only one who eats an egg. This egg is more than nourishment. It is a symbol. A concession to the masculine preeminence. A tribute to the monarch, a type of orb.”

<sup>422</sup> G 7 – 8; “And only because at this moment she doesn’t have anything else to do, she thinks about Olga’s brother. Nice boy. What was his name? She doesn’t know. He kissed her last night in the car. Today he is going away. Too bad? Doesn’t matter. But it was nice with him last night. It’s been a long time since she kissed anyone. It’s so seldom that you meet someone that you like. The years of randomness between seventeen and nineteen are past. The boy was nice. The kiss was nice. There’s no flame still burning. It’s better that way.”

meeting and falling in long with Martin, Gilgi has moved from one end of the scale to the other, and now she appears to have fully adopted a pseudo-married lifestyle she has resisted all of her life. The longer Gilgi stays with Martin, the more domesticated she becomes, and the more of her own liberated New Woman identity she loses.

Interestingly, Gilgi continues to struggle with her own loss of independence, as she, like Doris, links more and more of her own self-worth to other's romantic perception of her. In the following excerpt, Keun clearly illustrates the often contradictory feelings experienced by many women struggling to find their niche in both the working and home sectors:

Alles ist gut, dachte man, als man zu Martin zog. Nichts ist gut. Vielleicht will man zu viel. Man will sein ganzes bisheriges Leben behalten, mit seiner Freude am Weiterkommen, seiner gut geölten Arbeitsmethode, mit seiner harten Zeiteinteilung, seinem prachtvoll funktionierenden System. Und man will noch ein anderes Leben dazu, ein Leben mit Martin, ein weiches, zerflossenes, bedenkenloses Leben. Und das erste Leben will man nicht, das zweite kann man nicht aufgeben.<sup>423</sup>

Gilgi thinks, "ich gehöre jetzt mir ja nicht mehr. Das, was ich im Spiegel seh', hat ein anderer aus mir gemacht, ich kann nicht stolz darauf sein."<sup>424</sup> Others, too, notice Gilgi's loss of independence and warn her not to change in order to obtain others' approval. Olga, Gilgi's best friend, is clearly not comfortable with the extreme and sudden changes she sees in Gilgi. "Nicht dein Leben auf ihn aufbauen. [...] Du brauchst deine

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<sup>423</sup> G 121; "Everything is good, you thought, when you moved in with Martin. Nothing is good. Maybe you want too much. You want to keep your entire previous existence with its joy of advancement, its well-oiled work methods, with its strictly regimented time tables, its grandly functioning system. And you want a different life in addition to that, a life with Martin, a tender, loving, carefree life. And you don't want the first life, and you can't give up the second."

<sup>424</sup> G 134; "I don't belong to myself any more. I can't be proud of what I see in the mirror. What I see there someone else has made out of me."

Arbeit und deine Selbstständigkeit, du...“<sup>425</sup> This advice is echoed later by Hertha, the wife of an old friend of Gilgi. Hertha gave up her own independence in an attempt to become a wife and mother and gives Gilgi this important piece of advice:

“Hör’ Gilgi, ich sag’ dir eins—noch ist’s Zeit für dich—und wenn’s dir jetzt noch so gut geht: schaff’ dir Selbstständigkeit und Unabhängigkeit—dann kannst du einen Mann lieben und dir die Liebe erhalten. Sorg’ rechtzeitig, daß du nie eines Tages so hilflos und wehrlos dastehst wie ich...“<sup>426</sup>

Here, Keun’s readers can clearly see the difference between “love” and “obsession.” Hertha argues that only by retaining her independence will Gilgi truly be able to love Martin. If she gives up everything she has worked so hard for in an attempt to be with him, she will no longer have control over her own life and may end up regretting her decision. Despite these repeated warnings, Gilgi appears to slide from the realm of love and affection to the realm of dangerous obsession. “Lieber möchte ich tot sein, als aufhören, Martin zu lieben.”<sup>427</sup> Gilgi’s sense of happiness and self-worth are now being controlled not by Gilgi herself, but rather by Gilgi’s perception of Martin’s feelings for her. In these passages, Keun clearly critiques not only the dangers of the loss in independence through marriage, but more importantly the dangers of seeking fulfillment and happiness outside of oneself.

One horrific act, however, causes Gilgi to reevaluate her position. Driven to despair by the inability to pay their debts and take care of their young children, Gilgi’s working-class friends, Hans and his pregnant wife Hertha, kill themselves and their two

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<sup>425</sup> G 147; “Don’t build your entire life on him. [...] You need your work and your independence....”

<sup>426</sup> G 209; “Listen, Gilgi, I’ll tell you one thing—it’s not too late for you—and because things are going so well for you now: create some autonomy and independence—then you can love a man and get some back. Make sure right away that one day you won’t stand here as helpless and defenseless as I am.

<sup>427</sup> G 211; “I’d rather be dead than stop loving Martin.”

small children by turning on the gas in their apartment. Gilgi could possibly have prevented this tragedy: she promised Hans she would find money to pay off his debts and is in fact on the way to bring him some expensive rings when Martin, in a fit of jealousy, prevents her from leaving. When Gilgi goes the next day to deliver the rings to Hans, she discovers that Hans and Hertha had killed not only themselves, but their children by turning on the gas. Barndt argues that these deaths, although tragic, are also a call for social change, because the deaths “could have been prevented by the law and a more progressively organized society” that addressed both the causes and the consequences of extreme poverty.<sup>428</sup>

In addition to being an implicit call for social change, Hans and Hertha’s suicide causes Gilgi to reevaluate her own life. On the surface, she realizes Martin’s bohemian lifestyle and her own new-found lack of career ambition may very well foreshadow a bleak financial future such as that suffered by Hans and Hertha, affecting not only herself and Martin, but also the future of their unborn child. Hans and Hertha’s deaths, caused as a result of Martin’s jealousy and controlling attitude combined with Gilgi’s own obsession with pleasing him, makes Gilgi realize how much of herself she has sacrificed in order to gain the affection of someone else. More importantly, her own personal changes are having a direct effect not only on herself, but also on those around her. She realizes that she must find some middle ground between the two extremes portrayed, as her current obsessive relationship makes any other goal—professional or ethical—impossible to achieve. She decides that she must leave Martin and create a new future for herself in order for both of them to be able to fully live:

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<sup>428</sup> Barndt, “Aesthetics” 72.

“...ich müßt’ fort von ihm—um meinetwillen und um seinetwillen. Ich kann nicht arbeiten, Pit—mit ihm zusammen. [...] Und ich würd’ immer nervöser und angstvoller und immer, immer kraftloser und wär’ nur noch auf ihn angewiesen... ach, Pit—aus meiner schönen Leben soll nicht so ’n Strindberg-Drama werden...”<sup>429</sup>

Gilgi leaves a note for Martin and boards a train for Berlin, where her friend Olga can give her a place to stay and help her find a job. She has decided to keep her child, but would prefer to raise it as an independent single-mother as opposed to losing her own sense of self by giving in to the harsh reality she sees as the restrictive bourgeois family model.

The representation of marriage, motherhood, and the bourgeois ideals of family in Baum’s and Keun’s novels are drastically different. In Baum’s texts, both Helene and Flämmchen voluntarily choose to give up their independence and succumb to the traditional bourgeois feminine roles assigned to them in an attempt to find the completeness and happiness promised by the illusory images of the New Woman but were not able to deliver. In fact, the traditional role of wife and mother appears to be one aspect of their lives that had been missing and could never be fully compatible with the by the New Woman lifestyle. Baum strongly implies that the role of New Woman was, as Kracauer suggests, just a temporary phase, and true fulfillment and happiness could only be achieved once a women has adopted the role of mother and caregiver. Especially in *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Baum implies that true happiness can only be achieved by a return to the traditional feminine roles. The successful Helene agrees to leave her life-long work behind and act as loving wife, mother, and caregiver by starting

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<sup>429</sup> G 256; “...I need to get away from him—for my sake and his sake. I can’t work, Pit—together with him. [...] And I’m getting more and more nervous and weaker and weaker and my whole life revolves around him...oh Pit—my life shouldn’t become a Stindberg drama....”

a new life with her former mentor. The plausibility that a successful woman would give up everything she had worked for years to achieve in order to take care of a handicapped old man seems absurd, as if a “happy end” were more important than continuing the social commentary that had been running throughout the text.

Keun, on the other hand, appears more skeptical of the illusion of happiness portrayed in the bourgeois family model. Petersen argues that because Baum incorporated the values of her publisher in the texts she wrote, “the values expounded in them would be expected to match those of the targeted middle-class readership.”<sup>430</sup> Keun, on the other hand, was an independent writer and therefore had “less assurance of economic success but more artistic leeway.”<sup>431</sup> Neither Gilgi nor Doris achieves true happiness in the traditional role of housewife. Rather, the pseudo-marital relationships they engage in seem to more closely resemble codependent relationships, where their own self worth is directly related to their perceived value from their partners. Gilgi, realizing that she has given up too much of herself to be with Martin, chooses to leave him and moves to Berlin even though she is pregnant with his child. Gilgi has accepted her status as a new mother, but instead of desiring a return to a bourgeois family life, she decides to take a “challenging and rewarding path towards a progressive femininity” by moving to Berlin and adopting the role of independent, single-mother.<sup>432</sup> Realizing that Ernst does not and never will love her and disillusioned by the role of bourgeois housewife, Doris leaves him and waits at the train station to look for her friend Karl and

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<sup>430</sup> Petersen 30.

<sup>431</sup> Petersen 30; I would caution against such a reading of Baum because I believe that this attitude towards her works as being merely financially driven does not take into account both the social critique and the pedagogical impact that her works had on her readers during the Weimar Republic.

<sup>432</sup> von Ankum, “Motherhood” 179.

join him, albeit in a platonic as opposed to romantic relationship, in the garden colony on the outskirts of Berlin, unsure of what her future will hold.

Interestingly, Keun's works do not give her readers a conclusive answer, as both novels are left with undetermined conclusions. With Baum, the proposed answer is clear: return to the traditional bourgeois family roles, and even the most independent of New Women can become "complete." It is not clear if this was really Baum's opinion or rather if this was mainly a marketing ploy used to sell the books, providing a "happy ending" as required by the genre of Baum's medium. As I will show in the next chapter, the ending proved to be problematic among some of her readers, and while some ignored the ending altogether, others argued that it did not contract the overall social message of the novel. However, Keun does not suggest such a black-and-white answer and does not propose any definite solutions for the incompleteness felt by many white-collar working women. Happiness, Keun implies, does not come from living alone as an independent New Woman, yet it also does not come from adopting traditional bourgeois family roles. The question for Keun, therefore, is not "What path do women need to follow in order to achieve happiness and fulfillment?" but rather "Is true happiness and fulfillment a viable option for women in Weimar Germany?"

As I have shown here, Vicki Baum's novels *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and *Menschen im Hotel* and Irmgard Keun's novels *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* provided much more than a sense of escapism from the harsh realities of daily life in the Weimar Republic. Instead, each of these authors actively combined fictional story lines with contemporary controversies that were heavily

debated during the Weimar Republic. Some of the topics critiqued by Baum and Keun include a sharp critique of consumerism and the illusive promises of happiness through glamour; marital infidelity; the consequences of liberated sexuality, including syphilis and unexpected pregnancy; the complex reality of the issues surrounding to outlawing abortion; and the perceived fulfillment offered to New Women in the forms of motherhood and marriage.

In addition to these critiques, both Baum and Keun educated their audience by providing factual information on a wide variety of topics, including options for affordable healthcare for unwed mothers and the judicial and health-related implications associated with attempting to obtain an illegal abortion. Far from avoiding contemporary social reality as Kracauer claims and instead of merely perpetuating the illusion of the New Women created by the popular culture, Baum and Keun actively used the techniques of popular culture, including melodrama, to create realistic characters through which they could present the emotional difficulties of many women in a fictional setting. As a result, both Baum and Keun were able to not only educate their women readers about the factual background and common arguments connected with these controversial issues, but also to shed light on the emotional consequences stemming from the various causes of and solutions to these contemporary issues.

Barndt argues that the setbacks that happen to Helene—and I would add Flämmchen, Gilgi, and Doris as well—are not failures, but rather tests which these protagonists must endure in order to preserve their *Lebenswille*.<sup>433</sup> Employing the skillful manipulation of melodrama, Vicki Baum and Irmgard Keun presented multiple

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<sup>433</sup> Barndt, *Sentiment* 101; “will to live.”

viewpoints of many controversial and emotional issues facing women in the Weimar Republic to a wide audience in a non-judgmental way, in turn providing their readers with an implicit education: by providing them with not only the necessary background, but also encouraging their women readers to formulate their own positions on these issues, which, as I will analyze in the next chapter, allowed these women to add their often suppressed voices to the raging debates surrounding the New Woman in the Weimar Republic.

## Chapter Four

### “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?": The Pedagogy of Popular Discussion

In the August 15, 1929, issue of *Frau und Gegenwart vereinigt mit Neue Frauenkleidung und Frauenkultur*, the editors printed the following introduction to a review of Vicki Baum's novel *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*: “Unseren Leserinnen wird es willkommen sein, daß hier einmal eine kluge und literar-historisch fein gebildete Frau den aufsehenerregenden Roman einer umfassenden *ästhetischen, künstlerischen* Kritik unterzieht.”<sup>434</sup> Dr. Hilde Walter begins her review by justifying her reason for specifically critiquing the literary aspects of Baum's novel:

Vicki Baums “stud. chem. Helene Willfüer” [entfacht] Debatten, Proteste, Entgegnungen der Verfasserin—kurz einen Aufruhr. Doch immer steht das Was, nicht das Wie im Vordergrund, die “Probleme” werden diskutiert, nicht die Art, wie sie behandelt werden.<sup>435</sup>

It is implicit from both the editors' introduction and Walter's opening lines that both felt as if this “uproar” over Baum's novel—instigated by those readers who were not necessarily *klug* or *literarisch fein gebildet*—was somehow missing the point, that the true value of Baum's novel would be determined by its literary quality or lack thereof, not by the popular discussion of the social issues portrayed in the text.

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<sup>434</sup> Qtd. in Walter 656; italics in original; “Our readers will welcome the fact that here a clever and well-educated literary woman will provide here a comprehensive *aesthetic, artistic* critique of this sensational [here, meant in a negative connotation] novel.”

<sup>435</sup> Walter 656; “Vicki Baum's ‘stud. chem. Helene Willfüer’ is arousing debates, protests, responses to the author—in short, quite a commotion. But everything focuses on the ‘what’ and not the ‘how,’ the ‘problems’ are being discussed, not the manner in which they are being addressed.”

In her analysis of the phenomenon of Vicki Baum's success, Lynda J. King argues that Baum's novels were often unjustifiably dismissed as being of sub-standard quality both because of the emotionally-charged melodramatic style in which she wrote and her choice of publisher, Ullstein, which was associated with promoting very popular literature but whose primary goal was to make money. "Scholarly theory about the nature of 'Trivialliteratur'...asserts that the use of clichés and other such techniques simply reinforces the audience's preestablished view of society so that they need not invest creative thought in the literary experience."<sup>436</sup> This view of *Trivialliteratur* as providing nothing more than a sense of distraction and entertainment, as I have mentioned previously in my analysis of Kracauer, continues to this day, and as King shows, many contemporary scholars have dismissed Baum's works precisely because of this traditional label applied to her works.

Walter's quotation above shows that much of the discussion surrounding Baum's novel was in fact not initiated by critics, but rather by Baum's readers. Participants in these discussions, which focused specifically on the overarching social issues raised in Baum's novel included a wide range of readers from multiple social classes and political affiliations. A similar phenomenon also applies to Irmgard Keun's novel *Gilgi, eine von uns*, which was heavily discussed throughout Germany when it first appeared, and which prompted another round of intense debates when it was

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<sup>436</sup> King, "Image" 384.

serialized in the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* from 24 August to 25 October 1932.<sup>437</sup>

As in both of these novels, the New Woman portrayed in the popular culture of the time was most often portrayed as an *Angestellte*. This new white-collar working phenomenon blurred class distinctions, as its members were made up of women from both the working- and middle-classes. Petersen argues that the New Woman takes on a “utopian status, that, rather than revolutionizing German society, offers a liberal solution:” because of its classless nature, the phenomenon of the New Woman represents a traditional view of womanhood in general, which despite promiscuity can be brought “back to the fold” through marriage.<sup>438</sup> She continues by arguing that

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<sup>437</sup> Despite the large amount of public discussion surrounding Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns*, Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel* and Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* received primarily critical/literary reception with relatively little popular reception appearing in the press. Lynda J. King, whose research focuses on Baum’s literary success as a result of Ullstein’s marketing practices, argues that although *Helene* was a bestseller and regarded by many critics as a work of minor literature, in turn distinguishing it from the *Trivilliteratur* traditionally associated with her publisher, her next novel, *Menschen im Hotel*, was immediately criticized as being nothing more than a calculated combination of proven elements designed to create a bestseller. *Menschen im Hotel* not only became an immediate bestseller, but also spawned an extremely successful theatrical version and a Hollywood film adaptation that won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1932. In the printed reception of *Menschen*, the pedagogical impact of *Menschen im Hotel* I explore elsewhere in this dissertation was drowned out by the phenomenal popular success of the novel and especially by reports of the star-studded cast assembled for the film including, among others, Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo. Keun’s second book, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, was published in June 1932. Although there were a few critical reviews published in June, the majority appeared in July and August 1932. However, the release of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and its initial reception were overshadowed by the raging debates in the press about Keun’s first novel, *Gilgi, eine von uns*, which was spurned not only by the serialization of the novel in the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* but also by the advertising campaign for the German film adaptation of *Gilgi* during the months leading up to the film’s release in October 1932. The popular discussion of *Gilgi* in the press continued until March 1933, when Keun’s writings were banned by the Nazi regime. For these reasons, I will focus my analysis in this chapter on Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns* to illustrate how non-canonical literature can, and in the case of these novels did, have a pedagogical impact on their readers.

<sup>438</sup> Petersen 89.

because many working-class women were not *Angestellten*, they probably would not see much of their everyday lives represented by prototypical New Woman protagonists.<sup>439</sup>

In this chapter, I challenge Petersen's interpretation by arguing that Baum's and Keun's New Women protagonists address a wide range of contemporary controversies that are not limited to the everyday work-related experiences of white-collar workers. Instead of focusing solely on the literary analyses of Vicki Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns*, I put a greater emphasis specifically on the opinions of the ordinary readers whose reactions were published in multiple newspapers and journals during the Weimar Republic. The views published do not promote one unified interpretation of the text, but rather present many diverging viewpoints from multiple classes, political ideologies, and educational levels. As my analysis will show, the published reactions to these novels stemmed from all backgrounds, all education levels, and all political affiliations, ranging from unemployed typists selling flowers on the streets to medical doctors. Voices that praised these novels were printed along side those that denounced them, and while some outright rejected the novels as unrealistic and not representative of the young working women of their generation, others focused not on the faults of the novels, but rather on what those readers saw as the potentially transformative message implicit in both of the texts.

By focusing specifically on the voices of Baum's and Keun's contemporary readers who addressed the social issues inherent in these novels and not on the opinions of the literary critics whose critiques focused mainly on the perceived literary value of

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<sup>439</sup> Petersen 88.

these works, I will show how the Weimar press provided women with a forum, albeit a mediated forum, where they could not only express their own views, but also learn from the multitude of opinions generated by these texts and more fully participate in the debates regarding the changing role of women in the Weimar Republic. As Petersen points out, while it may be impossible to gauge the impact of popular fiction on its readers, “the great frequency with which the themes of marriage, sexuality, and reproductive issues occurred in the popular works of the time bears witness to the urgency of the questions that accompanied them.”<sup>440</sup> My analysis here of the reactions in the press gives insight into both the complexity of these issues as well as the potentially pedagogical impact of the discussions created by these texts.

Although Baum’s and Keun’s books were immensely popular throughout Germany, it is beyond the scope of the current chapter to analyze every review written of Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns* throughout the entire German-speaking world. I will focus here primarily on the reception of Baum’s novels in Berlin, where it originally appeared in serialized form in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, as well as in several journals where both Baum’s and Keun’s novels were discussed that included a wide readership outside of Berlin to show how the discussion of these texts encouraged a wide section of the populace to enter into the debates and actively discuss the social and moral issues presented.

From the beginning, Vicki Baum’s publisher, Ullstein, advertised Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* as an up-to-date novel, one that consciously confronted contemporary controversies. According to the following quotation from the book’s

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<sup>440</sup> Petersen 40.

advertising, *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* was meant to provide a means of education by addressing contemporary issues:

Vicki Baum schrieb dieses Buch um das Problem der Mädchen-Mutterschaft, obwohl sie wußte, daß Angriffe nicht ausbleiben würden—schrieb es in der Erkenntnis, daß eine lebendige Gestalt in der Dichtung vieles klären kann, was Tausende heute unbegriffen in sich tragen und brennende Frage ist.<sup>441</sup>

Baum created a New Woman protagonist who was determined not only to survive, but also to prosper, relying solely on hard work and perseverance. The advertisement continues, “Sie schrieb in der ‘Helene Willfüer’ ein Buch von der Tapferkeit eines jungen Menschen, der das Leben ‘trotzdem’ liebt, trotz aller Schwere, die schwächere Gefährten in den Tod flüchten läßt.”<sup>442</sup> This last section, as Barndt points out, refers both to the melodramatic trope of life versus death, but also to many contemporaries during the Weimar Republic who committed suicide out of financial desperation.<sup>443</sup> In *Helene*, when the protagonist discovers she is pregnant, she enters into a suicide pact with her lover, Rainer, but at the last minute chooses life for herself and her unborn child despite the increased difficulties she knew she would have to face in the future:

Der Glaube an die Kraft des Willens, an die Kraft der Güte, an das Leben selber machen das Buch so schön und wichtig für alle Menschen: für die jungen, die sich wehren müssen, und die älteren, denen es gut tut zu wissen, wie es um das zukünftige Geschlecht steht.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> “Ein neuer Roman”; “Vicki Baum wrote this book about the problem of unwed motherhood even though she knew that it would not avoid attacks—wrote it in with the knowledge that a living figure in literature can clarify a lot about the burning questions that thousands secretly carry with them.”

<sup>442</sup> “Ein neuer Roman”; “In ‘Helene Willfüer’ she wrote a book on the courage of a young person who loves life ‘despite it all,’ despite all difficulties that would drive weaker travelers to the grave.”

<sup>443</sup> See Barndt’s “Aesthetics” as well as chapter two of *Sentiment und Sachlichkeit*.

<sup>444</sup> “Ein neuer Roman”; “The belief in the strength of the will, on the strength of goodness, on life itself make this book so beautiful and so important for all people: for the youth, who must struggle, and the elder generation, who need to know how things are for the future generation.”

It is specifically this outlook towards a better future, the advertisement argues, that embodies the positive impact of the novel. The advertisement concludes by stating, “‘Helene Willfüer’ ist ein Werk, das jeden Leser zur Stellungnahme zwingt.”<sup>445</sup>

In his article “Popular Narrative and Commercial Television,” John Fiske argues that “real-seemingness,” which I argue corresponds to the tenets of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, “is functional and relevant: its diegetic world is insufficient until the reader applies it to her or his everyday world.”<sup>446</sup> Although Fiske here refers specifically to television, it is precisely this notion that Baum’s novel—and I would add Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns*—combines fictional stories with elements of contemporary reality such that it forces each of its readers to come to their own position on these controversial issues, in turn providing the pedagogical impact of these novels.

One of the earliest affirmations of the pedagogical impact of Baum’s novel came in the form of a letter written to Baum by Dr. Hagen, a *Stadtmedizinalrat* from Frankfurt am Main:

Ich bin Ihnen dankbar, daß Sie zwei Millionen Menschen dieses Schicksal zum Nachdenken gegeben haben. Ich glaube, Sie recht zu verstehen, daß die sexuellen Schwierigkeiten, aus denen Konflikt und Tragik dieses Schicksals entstehen, Ihnen nicht die Hauptsache waren. Wir sind Ihnen dankbar, daß Sie einem so ausgedehnten Leserkreis einmal sagen, daß ein Mensch, der anständig, gerade und aufrecht belieben will, dies unter allen Umständen auch kann.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> “Ein neuer Roman”; “‘Helene Willfüer’ is a work, that forces every reader to respond.”

<sup>446</sup> Fiske 140.

<sup>447</sup> Hagen qtd. in “Vicki Baums neuer Roman”; “I am thankful, that you gave two million people the opportunity to think about this fate. I believe, if I understand you correctly, that the sexual difficulties caused by this turn of events was not the main point. We are thankful, that you tell such an extensive readership that a person who wants to remain upstanding and just can do this under all circumstances.”

Here, Hagen refers not only to the explicitly pedagogical aspects of Keun's novel specifically with regard to Helene's unexpected pregnancy and attempts at attaining an abortion, but more importantly to the role model that Helene provides for modern women. Helene regularly endures not only financial hardship, but also social and professional discrimination due to her status as an unwed mother. She nevertheless manages not only to scrape by, but more importantly to survive comfortably, in the process restructuring her life and achieving her dreams, thereby presenting a model of perseverance and dedication for women everywhere.

In her review of *Helene*, Anselma Heine argues that Helene is not a typical or traditional student, nor is she meant to portray one. Instead, "Diese Helene ist ein junges Mädchen des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts."<sup>448</sup> By being not only a student but also a chemist and a mother, Helene shows how modern women are able to successfully balance both traditionally masculine and feminine roles. Heine stresses that Helene's determination provides a powerful and effective role-model for contemporary women. "Helene selber, auf der von Anfang an allerlei Trübes lastet, überwindet mit ihrem kraftvollen und zuversichtlichen 'Trotzdem' alles Schwere, gestaltet es zu Erkenntnissen, ja zu Freuden."<sup>449</sup> As in the letter from Hagen above, Heine praises Helene's positive example, which shows that although life is full of distractions and setbacks, dedication, hard-work, and optimism can lead not only to survival, but also to success:

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<sup>448</sup> Heine; "This Helene is a young woman of the twentieth century."

<sup>449</sup> Heine; "Helene herself, burdened from the very beginning by everything dull and difficult, nevertheless overcomes all difficulties strongly and confidently, changing these into educational experiences, even into happiness."

Im Studium schreitet Helene ständig und sicher voran, auf “geraden Wegen”, wie sie es sich vorgenommen hat. Im Menschlichen gerät sie auf beglückende und verhängnisvolle Nebenwege. Zuletzt endlich, nach tapfer bekämpftem Elend, belohnt sich ihr geduldiges Aufwärtsgehen. Dem Verdienst gestellt sich das Gelingen, der Erfolg, das Glück. Die Viel-geprüfte erreicht in Wissenschaft und Leben, wonach sie verlangte.<sup>450</sup>

Heine concludes her review by ascertaining that Baum’s novel is not only a shining example of success through determination, but more importantly, an affirmation of life itself: “Dieses laute ‘Ja’ zum Leben ist es, das diesen Roman (soeben im Verlag Ullstein erschienen) zu einem der tröstlichsten unserer Zeit macht.”<sup>451</sup> Here once again, the review highlights not merely the literary value of Baum’s novel, but more importantly the positive social impact that a story of survival can have on its readers.

It must be noted that both these reviews by Hagen and Heine were printed in newspapers that were owned by the Ullstein publishing company, the same company that serialized *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* in the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* and marketed Baum’s novel in book form. In these instances, the views presented may not be fully representative of an impartial public sphere. The following reviews of *Helene*, as well as all of the reviews of *Gilgi*, provide a more accurate picture of debates surrounding these texts without including the potentially skewed manipulation by the publisher.

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<sup>450</sup> Heine; “In her studies, Helene constantly pushes on with determination, on a ‘straight path.’ With regard to humanity, she takes uplifting and fate-filled detours. Finally, after bravely battling suffering, her patient forward striving pays off. Her rewards are success and happiness. The well-tested Helene reaches her goals in science and life, exactly what she wanted.”

<sup>451</sup> Heine; “This loud ‘yes’ to life is precisely what makes this novel (which also has been published by Ullstein) one of the most comforting of our time.”

Alfred Arna provides a critical review of *Helene* in which he argues that although it is not high literature, Baum's novel nevertheless has many redeeming characteristics. One positive aspect of the novel, Arna argues, is that in a time plagued with many different representations of the flirtatious and pleasure-seeking "Girl," Baum's *Helene* offers insight into the life of a hardworking woman. He acknowledges that Baum's novel is an *Unterhaltungsroman*, a work of "light fiction," and therefore caters to certain melodramatic expectations of the audience, including "Spannungen, Abenteuer, Verwicklungen, ...das *happy end* mit der lang verzögerten Ehe."<sup>452</sup> This, however, does not detract from the novel's positive social message:

Aber, und dies ist entscheidend, es sind nur pikante Gewürze, es sind Hemmungen auf dem Wege dieses Mädchens, Hemmungen, an denen sich die Energie, der Arbeitswille um so starker entfalten. Vicky [sic] Baum gibt ein Charakterbild im Konversationsstil, und das schadet nichts.<sup>453</sup>

In order to speed up the plot, Arna argues, Baum does not dwell on psychological details or a deep examination of her soul required of works of higher literature. Yet Baum still successfully provides highlights into Helene's psyche in the popular style of objectivity. By doing so, Baum is not only implicitly providing her readers with the seeds of culture, but introducing them to contemporary societal problems in a style that is more accessible to readers of *Unterhaltungsromane*. Helene, Arna concludes, is an easily accessible literary representation of the modern woman, one who defines herself by her career, not by love or her rank in society.

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<sup>452</sup> Arna; "suspense, adventure, complexity, ...the happy end [in English in the original] with the long delayed marriage."

<sup>453</sup> Arna; "But, and this is decisive, they are only spicy flavorings, only inhibitions on the journey of this girl, inhibitions that develop her sense of energy, her morale. Vicky [sic] Baum give a picture of a character in a conversational style, and that doesn't harm anything."

For Gabriele Reuter, the importance of Baum's novel is not that Helene survives, but rather that Baum's readers see her weaknesses. Reuter argues that Helene is an accurate representation of modern society, "das Mädchen unserer Tage. Das tüchtige, lebensvolle, studierende Mädchen, in dem sich der ewige Kreislauf weiblichen Leidens und weibliche Sroge [sic] vollendet."<sup>454</sup> Like Heine, Reuter praises Baum's objective writing style, citing her effective combination of "sachlicher Erzählungskraft und einer ernsten ganz unsentimentalen Herzensteilnahme an dem prachtvollen weiblichen Geschöpf, der Helene."<sup>455</sup> Helene, Reuter argues, is a contemporary hero because Baum's reader knows she is weak, but she is nevertheless able to survive despite it all. "Helene ist eben keine Heroine alten Stils, sondern ein volles, rundes, lebendiges Menschenkind, und gerade dies ist das Schöne an dem Buch."<sup>456</sup> This provides a positive role-model for many other working women who are struggling in their everyday lives.

The one aspect of the book which Reuter believes detracts from the positive social impact of the novel is the ending, where Helene agrees to give up her career to take care of her disabled former adviser, Ambrosius. "Ich weiß—ich weiß—die unsterbliche Hingebungs-fähigkeit auch im stärksten Frauengeist soll bewiesen werden—und das ist eine kleine Schwäche in dem starken Buch."<sup>457</sup> Reuter concludes that this ending, while in effect resolving the suppressed romantic tension implied at

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<sup>454</sup> Reuter; "the girl of our day. The capable, school girl full of life, in whom the circle of life of feminine suffering and feminine concerns comes to fruition."

<sup>455</sup> Reuter; "objective narrative style and a seriously unsentimental interest in the heart together in the grand female figure, Helene."

<sup>456</sup> Reuter; "Helene is no traditional heroine, but rather a full, all around, living child of humanity, and precisely this is what is beautiful about this book."

<sup>457</sup> Reuter; "I know—I know—the undying capacity for devotion even in the most independent woman is supposed to be proven—and that is a small weakness in this otherwise strong book."

numerous points in this novel and providing the necessary “happy end” required of the melodramatic genre, cannot detract from the positive social message pronounced throughout the novel.

The criticism above focused primarily on the literary aspects of Baum’s novel while at the same time mentioning the positive social implications of the contemporary controversies and personal struggles Baum portrayed. Ullstein perpetuated this notion of the novel promoting a positive social message by including the following letter from a student in their advertising campaign for the novel:

“Sie fühlen, um was wir ringen, um was wir kämpfen...” schrieb eine Kölner Studentin an Vicki Baum zu ihrem Roman “stud. chem. Helene Willfüer”. Dankte der Dichterin für diese Geschichte eines jungen Mädchens unserer Zeit, das anders als in der “guten alten Zeit”, selbst für sich sorgen muß, volle Freiheit hat—aber auch volle Verantwortung trägt. Lesen Sie diesen Roman, der vom üblichen abweicht!<sup>458</sup>

Yet Baum’s novel also attracted negative criticism. In another advertisement, Ullstein updated their advertising for Baum’s *Helene* in the following manner: “Dieser mutige Roman, der jeden zur Stellungnahme zwingt, hat einen Sturm entfacht, wird von den einen mit höchster Begeisterung gelobt, von anderen entschieden abgelehnt.”<sup>459</sup> In the following section, I will move away from the critical to the popular reception of Baum’s novel, focusing on those who attacked Baum’s representation of social issues. By doing

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<sup>458</sup> “Sie fühlen”; in addition to appearing in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, this same quotation appeared in similar advertisements in the *Vossische Zeitung* on 17 Februar 1929 and 3 März 1929; “‘You feel what we struggle with, what we are fighting for...’ wrote a female student from Cologne to Vicki Baum in response to her ‘stud. chem. Helene Willfüer’. She thanked the author for this story of a young woman of our time, who unlike in the ‘good old days’ has to fend for herself, has full freedom—but also full responsibility. Read this novel that diverges from what is expected!”

<sup>459</sup> “Eine Dichterin”; “This brave novel, that forces every reader to respond, caused an uproar, is praised by some with the highest enthusiasm, while others resolutely dismiss it.”

so, I will examine multiple arguments both for and against Baum's novel and show how these multiple viewpoints encouraged women to join in the public debate of this novel.

In the quotation above, Ullstein used the words of a woman student to praise Vicki Baum's novel *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*. It is interesting to note, however, that many women students reacted negatively to Baum's representation of Helene. Shortly after *Helene* was published in book form, the journal *Die Studentin* published the following: "Wir bringen in folgenden zwei Kritiken an dem Studentinnenroman der 'Berliner Illustrierten' und fordern unsere Leserinnen auf, an der Aussprache darüber teilzunehmen. Anmerkung der Schriftleitung."<sup>460</sup> In this brief passage, we can clearly see that despite its status as being an *Unterhaltungsroman* and a serialized novel from the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, the discussion of the novel itself and the issues it raised was highly encouraged even outside of the realm of the Ullstein press.

In her response to *Helene*, Hanna Hecht argues that the sufferings Helene faces are not representative of the student population. Unexpected pregnancy, she argues, is not merely a student issue, but rather a societal issue. "Bis dahin kein Studentinnenproblem, jede Näherin, jede Fabrikarbeiterin könnte denselben Entschluß fassen, und an diesem Punkt reiht sich Helene Willfüer ein in die Reihe der alleinstehenden Mütter von gestern, von heute, von morgen."<sup>461</sup> Hecht argues that Helene's struggle to achieve self-sufficiency is a common occurrence among many lower-class women who,

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<sup>460</sup> "Anmerkung" 57; "Below we present two critiques of the *Berliner Illustrierten*'s student novel and request our readers to join the discussion. The editorial staff."

<sup>461</sup> Hecht 58; "Up until now, this is not a problem of women students. Every seamstress, every woman factory worker could come to the same conclusion, and in this manner Helene Willfüer adds herself to the long line of single mothers of yesterday, of today, of tomorrow."

unfortunately, are not valorized like Helene for being able to overcome their personal struggles.

Hecht acknowledges that Baum does illustrate the very real difficulties for many unwed mothers, but questions why Baum chose the role of a student for a protagonist, as her novel does not adequately address the issues that specifically relate to students. She ends her essay with a critique of *Helene* that will also be echoed in the popular reception of Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns*: "So handelt und lebt Helene Willfürer, das Mädchen von heute, die Studentin, nein nicht *die* Studentin, sondern eine Studentin."<sup>462</sup> Helene's story—while providing insight into several social issues common among the lower classes such as poverty, unexpected pregnancy, and abortion—is just one of many. Her story, Hecht concludes, should not be used to generalize about women, and certainly does not adequately represent the struggles and personal and professional achievements of women students in particular.

Gabriele Humbert, too, questions why Baum chose a student to represent the struggles of the modern woman. She argues that the premise of Baum's novel had great promise, but in the end it failed to accurately represent the problems and concerns of students:

Nach Thema und Anlage hätte der Roman wahrhaftig ein erschütterndes Lebensbild einer Studentin abgehen können; doch ist er an mehreren Stellen so rettungslos verzeichnet, daß es nicht wunder nehmen kann, wenn der Anerkennung, die ihm von der einen Seite gezollt wird, ebenso heftige Ablehnung auf der anderen entgegensteht.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Hecht 58, italics in original; "In this manner Helene Willfürer acts and lives, the girl of today, the woman student, no, not *the* woman student, rather a woman student."

<sup>463</sup> Humbert 58; "Because of the theme and the composition this could have been a stirring life story of a woman student; but it written in such an unsalvageable manner in so many places that it is no wonder that that the praises it receives from one side are countered with such repudiation on the other."

Humbert argues that while the milieu of the novel is relatively accurate, the story lines mix elements of Kitsch with literature, often giving in to overly melodramatic romantic tendencies, such as Helene's long-awaited union with Ambrosius that, Humbert argues, ruins the novel. *Helene* could have been "ein erschütterndes Lebensbild einer Studentin,"<sup>464</sup> but instead Baum gave into sensationalism and her novel, therefore, provides an inaccurate representation of the true lives of students.

Despite the request of the editors of *Die Studentin* for their readers to continue debating Baum's representation of students, no additional reactions directly addressing Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* were published in the journal. However, the social issues raised by Baum continued to be addressed in a more indirect manner. The following issue of *Die Studentin* included articles on "Beruf und Ehe,"<sup>465</sup> "Die wirtschaftliche Lage der deutschen Studentin,"<sup>466</sup> and "Die rechtliche Stellung des unehelichen Kindes,"<sup>467</sup> all three of which played an important role in Baum's novel.

The journal *Germania* also contributed to the discussion of Baum's novel by questioning the representational accuracy of the lives and ordeals of women students. One student, Lucie Becher, worried that many of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung's* two million readers would make rash generalizations and believe that Helene's attitudes and situations were typical of all women students, "als ob Helene Willfüer *der* charakteristische Studentinentyp der Gegenwart, als ob ihr Milieu *das*

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<sup>464</sup> Humbert 58; "a stirring life story of a woman student"

<sup>465</sup> Dittmer-Könemann "Beruf und Ehe"; "Career and Marriage."

<sup>466</sup> Schönborn; "The Financial Status of the Woman Student."

<sup>467</sup> Dittmer-Könemann "Rechtsfragen"; "The Legal Condition of the Child Born Out of Wedlock."

charakteristische Studenten- und Studentinnenmilieu an der heutigen Universität ist.”<sup>468</sup>

Becher’s critique gives in in-depth analysis of Baum’s novel from the perspective of a student, challenging the implied assumptions that exhaustive studying causes women students to become hard and cold, in turn fossilizing their innate feminine nature so that:

dann als notwendige Reaktion irgendein Frühlingswind und die Möglichkeit ständigen Verkehrs mit den Studenten die erotische Seite ihres Wesens so urplötzlich und so stark wecken müsse, daß ihre ganze Lebensbahn dadurch in einen Augenblick, ihr fast unbewußt, über den Haufen geworfen wird.<sup>469</sup>

Becher argues that, contrary to the relationships portrayed in *Helene*, flirtatious and erotic relationships between students are far from the norm. By presenting such a false view of women students, Baum’s novel contributes to the degradation of working women everywhere, but especially within higher education. “Und das in einer Zeit, die sowieso an einer Unterbewertung aller geistigen Arbeit der Frau leidet!”<sup>470</sup> Far from the melodramatic representations of Baum’s *Helene*, Becher argues that all students, regardless of gender, work together as equals, and calls for all students to unite and show that they lead a difficult, but clean and hard-working life. “Wir wissen, daß viele Studenten und Studentinnen ein hartes und sauberes Leben der Pflicht und Entbehrung führen in den Jahren, in denen früher die Haustöchter in die Gesellschaft eingeführt

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<sup>468</sup> Becher, italics in original; “as if *Helene* is *the* characteristic student of modern times, as if her milieu is *the* characteristic milieu of students at a modern university.”

<sup>469</sup> Becher; “then as a necessary reaction a simple spring wind and the possibility of permanent sex with male students wakens the erotic side of their being so suddenly and so strongly that the entire plan they have constructed for their lives, unbeknownst to them, in the blink of an eye is thrown out the window.”

<sup>470</sup> Becher; “And this in a time when already any intellectual achievements by women are undervalued!”

wurden.”<sup>471</sup> Becher concludes her review by writing—as a representative of all the students whom Helene does not adequately represent—“Im Namen all dieser protestiere ich gegen ‘Stud. chem. Helene Willfür.’”<sup>472</sup>

Ullstein believed that when it came to marketing, any publicity was good publicity. They did not mind that various companies used Helene for their own purposes, some going so far as to use her fame to sell cigarettes:

stud. chem. Helene Willfür hat für die nikotinarmer Fabrik “Hektor” eine neue Schlankheitszigarette “Ford” erfunden, die garantiert über 1 Proz. Karlsbadersalz und echtes Marienbader Klima enthält. Unter Aufsicht der vereinigten Chemiker A. und B. Piep ist die beabsichtigte Wirkung innerhalb 24 Stunden zweimal eingetreten.<sup>473</sup>

For this reason, the company welcomed all reviews of the novel, be they positive or negative, arguing that the later added the allure of the book being controversial to the mix. One of the many advertisements Ullstein used to promote *stud. chem. Helene Willfür* directly mentioned the negative reviews of the novel. “Einige Stimmen des Widerspruchs, die sich zu Anfang erhoben, konnten den Weg dieses offenen, mutigen Buches nicht hemmen. Lesen Sie selber diesen Roman um das Problem der Mädchenmutterschaft!”<sup>474</sup>

With relatively few exceptions, women wrote both the literary and popular reviews of Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfür*. In their advertising, Ullstein portrayed

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<sup>471</sup> Becher; “We know that many men and women students lead a hard and clean life of responsibility and deprivation in the years which earlier the stay-at-home daughters would first be introduced to society.”

<sup>472</sup> Becher; “In the name of all of these I protest against ‘Stud. chem. Helene Willfür.’”

<sup>473</sup> “*stud. chem. Helene Willfür* Cigarette Advertisement”; see also King, *Best-Sellers* 125; “stud. chem. Helene Willfür invented a new slimming cigarette ‘Ford’ for the low-nicotine factory ‘Hektor,’ which is guaranteed to contain over 1% Karlsbad salt and authentic Marienbad climate. Under the inspection of the united chemists A. and B. Piep, the desired effects were observed twice within 24 hours.”

<sup>474</sup> “Vier Monate”; “A few voices of opposition that appeared at the beginning were not able to slow down the success of this open, brave book. Read yourself this novel about the problem of unwed motherhood!”

Baum's novel as educational, and many of the reviews stressed the positive social functions of the novel. Despite its moments of melodramatic sensationalism and the unrealistic romantic conclusion, reviewers agreed that the novel gave both accurate representations of contemporary controversies as well as a positive role-model of dedication, perseverance, and survival.

As can be seen above, many reviewers praised *Helene*, focusing specifically on Baum's portrayal of general social issues. However, in many of the negative reviews, this book was seen as potentially corrupting the minds of the lower classes that read Baum's novels by perpetuating misleading stereotypes, especially of women students. In general, the focus of the negative criticism centered on whether or not Helene was an accurate representation of women students, even though Baum never claimed that Helene was meant to be or should be read as a prototype for modern women students.

A similar discussion of the question of the accuracy of representation surrounded the reception of Irmgard Keun's novel *Gilgi, eine von uns*. As the title implies, "eine von uns" can have multiple interpretations: is Gilgi meant to be one representative, merely one of the countless stories of the white collar masses, here putting the emphasis on the "eine" of "eine von uns?" Or is she meant to represent the trials and tribulations of the modern woman, with specific emphasis on "uns"? The following analysis of the reception of *Gilgi* will illustrate how the public discussion of Keun's novel brought women from all classes together to discuss not only the representation of the New Woman in Keun's novel, but also to discuss the social and moral implications of the controversies portrayed through Gilgi's story.

When Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* was first published, it received mixed although primarily good reviews. The initial reception, as with Baum, focused primarily on the literary accomplishments of the novel itself. From a primarily literary standpoint, it was seen as unconventional:

Episoden werden breit ausgesponnen, Hauptszenen (von der Konzeption aus gesehen) werden nur angedeutet, und der Schluß ist kein Schluß, sonder nur ein zeitlicher Einschnitt im Leben der Hauptfigur. Irmgard Keun beherrscht ihre Kunstmittel noch nicht, aber sie beweist eine ungewöhnliche Begabung.<sup>475</sup>

Despite this seeming lack of structure, many critics praised the novel for providing realistic insight into the complexities of the New Woman. Max Herrmann praised *Gilgi* for giving a uniquely woman's view, as opposed to a man's, on the phenomenon of the New Woman in Weimar Germany.<sup>476</sup> Peter Medelsohn focused on the stark reality Keun used to portray the problems faced by the New Woman, claiming that Keun's novel was a document of the modern times "im besten und unverfälschtesten Sinn des Wortes. Sein Atem ist der Atem des heutigen Tages."<sup>477</sup> The *Salzburger Wacht* newspaper wrote that for the first time, the public was given an accurate, as opposed to an idealized, view of the modern woman. "Das moderne Mädchen—allzu schnell eine Papierfigur geworden—wird hier zum erstenmal so geschildert, wie es wirklich ist."<sup>478</sup> Hanns Johst also argued that *Gilgi* is a positive example for the modern young women of the Weimar Republic. "Sie sieht Schmutz und Verderb, aber sie übersieht noch

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<sup>475</sup> Palitzsch; "Episodes were loosely woven together, the main scenes (from a organizational standpoint) were only hinted at, and the conclusion was no conclusion, but rather a timely break in the life of the protagonist. Irmgard Keun has not yet mastered her art, but she does demonstrate an exceptional talent."

<sup>476</sup> Herrmann.

<sup>477</sup> Mendelsohn; "in the best and most unadulterated meaning of the word. Its breath is the breath of life."

<sup>478</sup> Rev. of *Gilgi, eine von uns* in *Salzburger Wacht*; "The modern girl—all too often being represented by a paper figure—is represented here, for the first time, exactly how she is."

mehr. Sie läßt ihr Auge nicht ertrinken in dieser trüben Flut, sie schaut weiter....”<sup>479</sup>

Hermann Mostar, on the other hand, expressed a more negative view and was skeptical that *Gilgi* is a transformational role-model for women: “Am Ende wird das Bürgermädchen von heute denselben Dingen durcheinandergewirbelt wie das Bürgermädchen von gestern.”<sup>480</sup>

After the initial critical reception appeared, more and more women began to review and praise Keun’s novel, giving a women’s viewpoint on the novel. Kadidja Wedekind wrote that *Gilgi, eine von uns* is:

Ein Buch, das interessieren muß, weil es sich mit einem der brennendsten Zeitprobleme beschäftigt: mit dem Konflikt der modernen Frau, die zwischen die Arbeit und die große Liebe ihres Lebens gestellt ist. Ein Buch, das interessieren muß, weil es ein Zeitdokument ist: ein Dokument jener sachlich verstörten und kärglich bizarren Zeit, in der man lebt.<sup>481</sup>

*Gilgi*, Wedekind argued, is an important work because it not only documents, but also actively engages with contemporary controversies. Charlotte R. supports this argument, but adds that Keun masterfully draws her audience into her protagonists struggle. “Dies alles ist in einer nüchternen, unromantischen, deswegen aber besonders wirksame Form erzählt. Man glaubt, Gilgis Kampf um ihre Selbstständigkeit und Selbstachtung mitzuerleben.”<sup>482</sup> More than being merely a story read for entertainment, the text is

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<sup>479</sup> Johst 622; “She sees filth and deterioration, but she overlooks even more. She does not allow her eyes to drown in this dingy flood, she looks ahead....”

<sup>480</sup> Mostar; “In the end, the bourgeois girl of today spins through the same problems as the bourgeois girl of yesterday.”

<sup>481</sup> Wedekind 74; “A book that must interest, because it deals with one of the most burning questions of our time: with the conflict of the modern woman, who is positioned between work and the great love of her life. A book that must interest, because it is a document of our times: a document of the very objectively unsettling and scantily bizarre time in which we live.”

<sup>482</sup> Charlotte R. 15; “All of this is told in a clinical, unromantic, and therefore especially effective manner. You believe that you are experiencing *Gilgi*’s struggle for her independence and self-respect first-hand.”

pedagogical because it “bietet einen guten Einblick in den Lebenskampf der jungen bürgerlichen Generation von heute.”<sup>483</sup> This last review echoes the discussion of Baum’s *Helene*, in that Gilgi was providing an example of survival for modern women in a style that was both contemporary and comprehensible to a wide range of women throughout the Weimar Republic.

Numerous women added their voices with a specific focus not on the literary form or the perceived literary value of her novel, but rather concentrating on the social issues raised. Anna Beckman argues that not only Gilgi, but Keun herself is a positive representative for the young women of her generation because she created an independent protagonist who critiques the desire for traditional values. Gilgi, Beckman argues, would have succeeded in life had she not given everything up for love. The only thing that saves Gilgi is the realization “daß eine Frau sich nicht völlig an den Mann verlieren darf.”<sup>484</sup> It is a combination of Gilgi’s own sense of independence and sense of dedication to her unborn child that moves her forward, and Gilgi provides an innovative, positive role-model for women because she does not need to subjugate herself to a man in order to succeed. Even though Keun’s ending is deliberately left open, Beckmann believes the message to the readers is clear: Gilgi’s future in Berlin will be a long and difficult struggle, but in the end, she will triumph.

The public discussion of *Gilgi* increased dramatically when the novel was serialized in the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* from 24 August to 25 October 1932. Near the end of the serialization, the editors of the newspaper announced the

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<sup>483</sup> Charlotte R. 15; “offers a good impression of the struggle to survive experienced by today’s young middle-class generation.”

<sup>484</sup> Beckmann 31; “that a woman should not be allowed to fully lose herself because of a man.”

topic for an essay contest whose focus centered on the real-life stories of “Gilgis,” the hardworking women who made up the newspaper’s audience:

Verlangt wird kleine literarische Beiträge, Niederschriften und knappe Skizzen, deren Thema frei gewählt werden kann. Szene aus Leben und Beruf, und auch Erlebnisse außerhalb des Arbeitsabenteuerlichen oder die Not der Zeit kennzeichnendes Lebensschicksal hinter sich zu haben—das gilt besonders für die zahlreichen Opfer der Wirtschaftskrise—, so ist auch dessen Beschreibung willkommen.<sup>485</sup>

In order to elicit responses for this *Preisausschreiben*, the newspaper encouraged its readers to actively contribute their voices to the debate surrounding the following questions:

*Ist Gilgi eine von uns?* Gilgi, das Mädchen, das entdeckt, daß sie die Tochter einer sehr verwöhnten und kaltherzigen Dame ist und daß nur durch eine sehr abenteuerliche Schiebung Kleinbürger ihre Pflegeeltern geworden sind? Ist dieses Mädchen Gilgi eine von uns, das Arbeit und Zukunft wegwirft, um mit einem Manne zusammenzuleben, der seine Sache letzten Endes nur auf sich gestellt hat? Ist sie eine von uns, wenn sie zurückfindet in die Armee der Werktätigen, als sie sich Mutter fühlt und ahnt, daß sie ihre Pflichten als Mutter an der Seite des von ihr geliebten Mannes nicht erfüllen können wird? [...] Die Abonnenten des “Vorwärts” sollen das entscheiden. Sie sollen es in aktiver Mitarbeit entscheiden.<sup>486</sup>

The editors of *Vorwärts* received hundreds of reactions to Gilgi over the course of its serialization and afterwards, and over 200 written literary sketches in responses to the

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<sup>485</sup> “Preisausschreiben des ‘Vorwärts’”; “We would like to ask for short literary articles, transcripts, and short outlines about any topic of your choosing. Scenes from life and work, and also experiences outside of work adventures or stories of prior difficulties—this is especially true for the numerous victims of the financial crisis—all of these descriptions are also welcome.”

<sup>486</sup> “Eine von uns?”, italics in original; “*Is Gilgi one of us?* Gilgi, the girl who discovers that she is the daughter of a very spoiled and cold-hearted lady and that she is only belongs to the petit-bourgeoisie as the result of an adventure that landed her with her adopted parents? Is this girl Gilgi one of us, who throws away her career and her future to live together with a man, who only thinks of himself? Is she one of us when she finds her path back to the army of the employed, when she discovers she is pregnant and thinks she will not be able to fulfill her responsibilities as mother at the side of her beloved boyfriend? [...] The subscribers of ‘Vorwärts’ will decide. They will decide through direct participation in the discussion.”

*Preisausschreiben* alone. This was viewed by the editorial staff as a success because it furthered the goal explicitly stated by the newspaper in their justification for serializing the novel: “So wird der Roman einer jungen Autorin, deren soziale Blickrichtung noch nicht ganz sicher ist, zum Erzieher: er fordert zur Kritik heraus, er veranlaßt, ein Problem, das uns alle angeht, zu durchdenken, und wirkt so schöpferisch.”<sup>487</sup>

In order to encourage more women to take part in the essay competition, the editors regularly printed readers’ reactions both to Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns* and reactions for or against the newspaper’s decision to serialize the novel. The vast majority of the responses fell along the following lines:

Aus ihren Arbeiten geht hervor, daß *Gilgi* zwar eine aus dem Millionenheer der Angestellten ist, aber keineswegs einen Durchschnittstyp der Angestellten unserer Tage darstellt, wenn auch so manche Angestellte, ehe sie sich kämpferisch gefunden hat, in müden Stunden von ähnlichen Schicksalen träumen mag wie dem Schicksal *Gilgis*.<sup>488</sup>

As I will discuss shortly, the continued discussion of *Gilgi, eine von uns* was not limited to the readers of *Vorwärts*. In fact, the debates prompted by *Vorwärts* sparked a renewed interest in the novel that spread to numerous other newspapers and journals. Because the responses to the *Preisausschreiben* itself are literary and anecdotal in nature, I will not be analyzing the winning selections published by *Vorwärts* in this chapter. I will, however, be analyzing the letters, editorials, and reactions sent in by the readers and published in *Vorwärts* leading up to the *Preisausschreiben* as well as the

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<sup>487</sup> “Eine von uns?”; “Thus the novel of a young woman author, whose social viewpoint is not quite solidified, becomes an educational text: it demands criticism, it demands that we all think about a problem that concerns each and every one of us, and it does so so constructively.”

<sup>488</sup> “Die Entscheidung der Preisrichter”; “From her work it becomes clear that *Gilgi* is merely one out of the million-strong army of white-collar workers, but in no way a representative of the white-collar workers of today, even when so many white-collar workers have had to fight through tired hours of similar fates and dreams such as those associated with *Gilgi*.”

reactions to the increased interest in *Gilgi* by other newspapers and journals caused by the serialization of *Gilgi* in *Vorwärts* because I believe that these contributions best illustrate how the public discussion of this novel brought the voices of multiple women to the forefront of the debate regarding the changing roles of women in the Weimar Republic.

Not all of the readers agreed with the decision of *Vorwärts* to serialize Keun's novel. Frau Emma Langhans wrote, "Ich und viele andere Genossinnen verstehen einfach nicht, wie der 'Vorwärts' einen derartigen, literarisch und in jeder Beziehung wertlosen Roman aufnehmen konnte. [...] Der Roman ist eine Beleidigung des wirklich arbeitenden Mädchens."<sup>489</sup> While not immediately responding to Langhans and elaborating on their decision, the editorial staff chose to leave the question open until after the conclusion of the *Preisausschreiben*, which I will analyze in more detail below. Other readers praised the selection of the text. For example, A.D.<sup>490</sup> praised *Vorwärts* for choosing a novel that broadened the discussion of women's issues:

Als Sozialistin finde ich es geradezu von ganz hochpolitischer Bedeutung, welche Anregungen uns ein Frauenroman geben kann... Ich beglück-wünsche den "Vorwärts" zu diesem Roman und hoffe, daß derartige Diskussionen die Triebkraft für neue Wege der Frauenbewegung sein werden.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Langhans, qtd. in "Diskussion um Gilgi"; "I and many other women comrades simply do not understand, how 'Vorwärts' could contain a piece of literature like this, which is in every aspect worthless. [...] The novel is an affront to the real working women."

<sup>490</sup> All reactions to Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* printed in *Vorwärts* designated by initials only are women unless explicitly stated otherwise.

<sup>491</sup> A.D., qtd. in "Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?"; "As a socialist woman, I find it of very relevant political importance to see what excitation a woman's novel can give us...I congratulate 'Vorwärts' because of this novel and hope that these kinds of discussions will be the driving force behind new paths for the women's movement."

In this way, A.D. saw not only positive discussions stemming from Keun's text, but also the possibility for an increased interest in women's issues. R.C. argued that Keun's novel was a good choice because it provided ample opportunity for women to formulate their own opinions on the controversial issues of the time:

...und doch ist es gut, daß der "Vorwärts" auch mal einen bürgerlichen Roman gebracht hat. Es ist gut, daß wir aufgefordert werden, in einer Diskussion dazu Stellung zu nehmen. Es gibt zu viele (auch in unseren Reihen), die Bücher gedankenlos schön finden, weil ein bißchen an ihr Sentiment gerüttelt wurde, weil etwas von Liebe darin steht.<sup>492</sup>

In this passage, R.C. notes that the novel is not only entertaining, but also educational. She hopes that this novel will not only educate women about the social issues presented, but also encourage them to be critical readers. By doing so, literature, even a *bürgerlicher Roman* has the potential to inspire increased political and social action.

The vast majority of responses published, however, focused on the question of whether or not Gilgi was, in fact, "eine von uns." However, the definition of what "eine von uns" means varied greatly. Some of the submissions focused on Gilgi as a New Woman, some on Gilgi as a representative of the *Angestellten*, while others focused on Gilgi as a socialist. Those who answered in the affirmative, that Gilgi *did* represent them, were by far in the minority. In fact, *Vorwärts* printed only two responses from readers who explicitly stated that they thought Gilgi's story accurately portrayed the essence of the socialist movement. "Dieser Roman zeigt ja im Grunde nichts anderes als den Kampf der *sozialistischen* Welt gegen die *bürgerliche*, und da dieser Kampf

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<sup>492</sup> R.C., qtd, in "Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?"; "...and it is good that 'Vorwärts' used a middle-class novel. It is good, that we are called to take part in a discussion about it. There are too many (even in our own ranks) that find novels good without any further thought because it makes them feel sentimental, because there is something about love in it."

noch lange nicht ausgekämpft ist, kann Gilgi sehr gut als eine von uns bezeichnet werden.”<sup>493</sup> Gilgi’s struggle to reconcile her work ethic and career obligations (attributed to the socialist world) and her romantic personal life (attributed to the bourgeois world), B.H.C. argues, should be read not as the story of an individual, but rather as a representation of the ongoing class struggle.

The second affirmation of Gilgi’s accurate representation of contemporary society was not nearly as positive as the views expressed by B.H.C. Margarete Hartig does argue that Gilgi represents many working women, but her portrayal is an accurate representation of both the positive and negative aspects of society:

O ja, Gilgi *ist eine von den Hunderttausenden* der Stenotypistinnen und weiblichen Handelsangestellten! Sie ist Ueberdurchschnitt in ihrer hellstichtigen Zielstrebigkeit, mit der sie erkennt, daß man im Erwerbsleben nur durch straffe Diszipliniertheit und Tüchtigkeit weiterkommt im Gegensatz zu vielen dumpfer Dahinlebenden, die nach dem bekannten Filmmärchen “wie heirate ich meinen Chef” auf ein Wunder hoffen.<sup>494</sup>

Hartig believes Gilgi’s extraordinary work ethic, like that of so many hard-working women, is caused not by a sense of pride in their work and a desire for advancement, but rather by the recognition that the images of success proffered by popular culture are merely illusions. As Gilgi’s story shows, strenuous work and self-determination will not always guarantee, but will most likely be able to provide these hard-working women with the financial means to survive.

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<sup>493</sup> B.H.C., qtd. in “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?”, italics in original; “This novel in reality shows nothing more than the struggle of the *Socialist* world against the *bourgeois* world, and because that this struggle is still far from being over, Gilgi can very well be one of us.”

<sup>494</sup> Hartig, italics in original; “Oh yes, Gilgi *is one of the hundred thousand* of stenotypists and salesgirls! She is above average in her determination, with which she acknowledges that you only get ahead with strong discipline and efficiency, in contrast to the many dull people who hope for a miracle like the well-known film fairy tale ending ‘how do I marry my boss.’”

Despite her dedication to work and continuing education by learning foreign languages in an attempt to make herself more marketable, Gilgi also accurately represents many of the negative aspects of society:

Aber sonst ist sie eine der ihren in vielen Gemeinsamkeiten: in der mangelhaften Berufsausbildung, mit der man nur Hilfskraft bleibt, in ihrem Streben, nicht nur durch Arbeitsleistung, sondern auch durch kluge Koketterie vorwärts zu kommen, in ihrer Sehnsucht nach Glanz und schönen Kleidern, in ihrer Illusionslosigkeit Männern gegenüber, mit denen man allzu oft unromantische Erfahrungen macht, in ihrem kühlen Sachlichkeitspanzer, den sie zur Schau trägt.<sup>495</sup>

Hartig notes that women's "Sehnsucht nach Glanz und schönen Kleidern" is not merely a casual reaction to contemporary trends, but often a prerequisite for continued employment. "Man braucht es aber auch *zur eigenen Selbstbestätigung*, denn durch Kleider kann man vor sich selbst und seiner Umgebung avancieren oder—deklasiert werden."<sup>496</sup> This critique of the importance of external appearance closely parallels Kracauer's observations that I analyzed in the last chapter.

Hartig continues by arguing that Gilgi is an accurate representation of the negative aspects of the "Frauengeneration von heute" precisely because she is completely politically indifferent and does not understand the importance of solidarity, both with her family—as can be seen by the casual way she releases herself from any sense of obligation or affection towards her adopted parents—as well as with her co-workers and other fellow women. In addition, Gilgi represents the sad reality of so

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<sup>495</sup> Hartig; "At the same time she has many things in common with them: in the insufficient education that relegates her to only being an assistant, in her striving to get ahead not only through hard work, but also by using flirtation, in her desire for glamour and beautiful clothes, in her lack of illusion with regard to men, with whom she often has unromantic encounters in her cool objective armor, which she only wears for show."

<sup>496</sup> Hartig, italics in original; "You need it also *for your own self-affirmation*, because based on your clothes you can advance from your current environment—or be pushed down even farther."

many women who willingly abandon their former lives and career goals all in the hopes of winning the love of a man. While many respondents argued that Gilgi did not represent their positive aspects, Hartig has shown how many of the negative characteristics of Gilgi critiqued elsewhere in fact do have their roots in the reality of everyday life for many women.

The vast majority of readers whose responses were published in *Vorwärts*, however, did not agree that Gilgi adequately represented them. E.M. wrote that Gilgi's attitudes and actions proved that she was not a socialist, but acquiesced that many of the struggles she encountered brought to light many of the very real social problems socialist women face. "In dem zwischen Willen und Gefühl sprunghaft pendelnden, noch nicht festgewurzelten Charakter Gilgis finden wir eine Kombination vieler jugendlicher Frauencharactere und Gestalten unserer heutigen Zeit wieder."<sup>497</sup> E.M. argues that Gilgi appears to be an unrealistic conglomeration of societal problems, and although many women may be able to identify with certain aspects of Gilgi's life, it is highly unlikely that any woman could ever fully identify with Gilgi. This view is also shared by Dr. Else Möbus, who wrote, "So scheint es mir, daß der Roman 'Gilgi' einen *Einzelfall aus der Wirklichkeit* wiedergibt, der selbstverständlich nicht für alle, aber für eine bestimmte Schicht jugendlicher Menschen typisch ist."<sup>498</sup> Dr. Möbus continues by

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<sup>497</sup> E.M., qtd. in "Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?"; "In the still unrooted character of Gilgi, which swings between her own will and her feelings, we find a combination of many young women characters and figures of our contemporary time."

<sup>498</sup> Möbus, italics in original; "It seems to me that the novel 'Gilgi' depicts a *single depiction of reality* that is of course not typical for everyone, but may be typical for a certain group of young people."

arguing, “Ich glaube, daß man den Roman nicht von literarischen Gesichtspunkten aus, sondern als Zeitdokument betrachten muß.”<sup>499</sup>

A.St. brings up an interesting argument when she writes that when Gilgi decides to carry her child to term as a single mother, she makes a conscious decision to face the very real possibility of a life of hardship and suffering:

Sie läßt ihr Kind zur Welt kommen und dann überläßt sie es möglicherweise der Pein. Hoffen wir um des Kindes willen, daß alles gut geht. Diesen Typ Frau sehen unsere jungen, vernünftigen Genossen als besonders mutig an und uns Frauen, die wir gern wenigstens ein Kind haben möchten, ehe wir zu alt dazu sind, als feige! Gewiß, wir sind alle groß geworden, aber fragt uns nur nicht wie. Wir Frauen, von denen Gilgi keine ist, können die Stempelstelle ertragen, schlechtes Leben und auch Kälte im Winter, aber wir ertragen es nicht, unser Kind in ebensolchen Verhältnissen zu wissen.<sup>500</sup>

In this critique of *Gilgi*, A.St. also implicitly critiques the social and moral consequences resulting from the outlawing of abortion by paragraph 218 of the Weimar constitution. Gilgi, like so many other unwed and even married mothers who do not have the financial means necessary to support a child, faces the very real possibility of raising the child in abject poverty, even though Keun’s ending leaves the future uncertain. Gilgi, A.St. argues, cannot and should not be “eine von uns” because unwed motherhood is not a status that future generations of women should strive to achieve.

Several readers responded that Gilgi’s lack of solidarity and desire to make the world a better place prevented her from adequately representing them. Hanna Hertz

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<sup>499</sup> Möbus; “I think that we should not judge this novel from a literary standpoint, but rather regard it as a document of our times.”

<sup>500</sup> A.St., qtd. in “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?”; “She allows her child to be born into the world which probably leads to much suffering. We hope for the sake of the child that everything will be alright. Our young, sensible woman comrades see this type of woman as especially brave and see us women, who would like to have a child before we are too old, as cowards. Certainly, we all grew up, but don’t ask us how. We women, and Gilgi is not one of us, can bear the punches, bad life and even the coldness of winter, but we cannot bear it when a child is knowingly brought into such conditions.”

argues that despite all the experiences Gilgi has gone through, she fails to see the larger issues at stake. “Trotz der schönen Worte ahnt Gilgi nichts von den ernsten und großen Problemen, die unsere Zeit erschüttern, selbst die Probleme ihrer engeren Berufsangehörigen bleiben ihr fremd, weil sie in Wirklichkeit *immer nur sich selbst* sieht und nichts als sich selbst.”<sup>501</sup> Especially when Gilgi is hired for a supplementary freelance position after work—in part because she has her own typewriter, but also because she resorted to flirting during her interview—her attitude towards the other women who were not hired but, based on their appearance, needed the job more desperately than Gilgi epitomizes this lack of solidarity. “Die Begegnung mit der älteren Angestellten, die sich vergeblich nach Arbeit umtut und selbst die Hoffnungslosigkeit ihrer Bemühungen erkennt, ruft zwar ihr Mitleid wach, aber sie findet sich innerlich damit ab, weil sie ja doch nichts ändern kann.”<sup>502</sup>

In Hertz’s view, it is precisely this sense of resignation and individualistic symbolic fight for survival that separates Gilgi from the socialist cause. “Um den sozialen Kampf braucht sich Gilgi ja nicht zu kümmern, denn sie selbst will aufsteigen, mögen die anderen sehen, wo sie bleiben.”<sup>503</sup> It is not only Gilgi’s sense of apathy but also her own lack of focus towards her own personal goals that makes her an inadequate role-model. Once love comes into the picture, Hertz argues, Gilgi transforms from an

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<sup>501</sup> Hertz, italics in original; “Despite the nice words, Gilgi does not know anything about the serious and large problems that grip our world, even the problems of those who work most closely with her remain foreign to her, because in reality she *only sees herself* and thinks of nothing but herself.”

<sup>502</sup> Hertz; “The encounter with the older white-collar worker, who is hopelessly looking for work and whose efforts acknowledge her hopelessness raises some compassion in Gilgi, but she ignores it because she can’t do anything to change it.”

<sup>503</sup> Hertz; “Gilgi does not need to care about the Socialist struggle because she wants to advance on her own, and others can stay where they are.”

independent, confident, forward-looking woman into a backwards-looking character from yesteryear:

Beruf und Zukunft sind plötzlich Nebensache geworden, verschwinden im Nebel romantischer Gefühle, und das sachliche Büromädel Gilgi kann ebenso schwänzen und glücklich-unglücklich lieben wie das Bürgermädchen in den Unterhaltungsroman von gestern.<sup>504</sup>

It is precisely Gilgi's lack of solidary, dedication, and social action, Hertz argues, that precludes her from ever representing "eine von uns." On the contrary, "Für uns ist Gilgi *keine von uns*, keine von den Millionen, die tapfer kämpfen für den Aufstieg ihrer Klasse und für den Aufbau einer neuen Gesellschaft."<sup>505</sup>

Moving from social to class issues, Elle Rensky argues that Gilgi is "vielmehr *eine von wenigen*"<sup>506</sup> mainly due to her financial success. Not many typists could afford all the things Gilgi owns in addition to having the luxury of a private, one-room apartment and, as Rensky points out, many young working women did not even have a private room at home. It is precisely this that precludes Gilgi from being an accurate representation of working women. "Wer außerdem noch über derartige Toiletten wie Gilgi verfügt, wem Puder und Schminke und alle die Kleinigkeiten so wichtige Angelegenheiten sind, der ist wirklich nicht zu denen von uns zu rechnen."<sup>507</sup>

Two representatives of the *Zentralverband der Angestellten*,<sup>508</sup> Hans Gottfurcht and Gertrud Ellert, supports this view by claiming that Gilgi will "nie und nimmer"<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Hertz; "Career and future have suddenly become irrelevant, disappearing in the fog of romantic feelings, and the businesslike office girl can suddenly skip work and love happily-unhappily like a bourgeois girl in the kitschy novels of yesterday."

<sup>505</sup> Hertz, italics in original; "For us, Gilgi is *not one of us*, not one of the millions who courageously fight for the advancement of their class and the creation of a new society."

<sup>506</sup> Rensky, italics in original; "much more *one of a very few*."

<sup>507</sup> Rensky; "In addition, whoever can afford all the cosmetics like Gilgi, whoever thinks blush and makeup and all these other small things are so important cannot be counted among our ranks."

<sup>508</sup> Central Committee of White-Collar Workers

adequately represent *Angestellten* or the social realities of facing working women in Weimar society. In order for Gilgi to be “eine von uns,” they argue, “muß der *soziale Tatbestand* des Romans mindestens in seinen alltäglichen Zügen der Wirklichkeit entsprechen.”<sup>510</sup> According to their calculations, it is not possible for a typist who earns 150 Marks per month to save 1200 Marks in only four years, especially given Gilgi’s spending on makeup, perfume, and elegantly embroidered pajamas. In addition, the fact that Gilgi uses her unemployment money for powder and lipstick “ist vollends ein Hohn auf die Not der Zeit.”<sup>511</sup>

Gilgi’s attitude towards money is clearly “*rein bürgerlich-individualistisch bestimmt*,”<sup>512</sup> and her financial success as portrayed in the novel is far from a true representation of what working women could accomplish. In addition, the publicity shots from the filmed version of the novel embedded into the serialized novel further had a negative impact on the *Zentralverband*’s perception of the novel. “Die in diesen Bildern gezeigte Gilgi entspricht vielleicht einem Wunschbild, wie es Magazine, Wahre Geschichten und schlechte Filme der großen Masse aufzudrängen suchen.”<sup>513</sup> It is precisely this fairy-tale image of love, happiness, and success that the *Zentralverband der Angestellten* fought against, but in their opinion, *Gilgi*, instead of challenging these notions, merely perpetuates them.

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<sup>509</sup> “never ever”

<sup>510</sup> Gottfurcht & Ellert, italics in original; “the *social facts* of the novel must at least be consistent with everyday reality.”

<sup>511</sup> Gottfurcht & Ellert, italics in original; “is completely a mockery of the destitution of the times.”

<sup>512</sup> Gottfurcht & Ellert, italics in original; “*purely bourgeois-individually* determined.”

<sup>513</sup> Gottfurcht & Ellert; “The Gilgi that is portrayed in these images are perhaps consistent with an ideal image, as magazines, true stories and bad films attempt to impose upon the great masses.”

The renewal of the discussion surrounding *Gilgi* was not limited to *Vorwärts*. Several other newspapers and journals responded not only to the resurgence of interest in the text, but also specifically to the reactions to the novel published in the Social Democratic newspaper. Bernard Brentano's reaction in *Die Linkskurve* in some instances paralleled those voiced by members of *Vorwärts'* own readership. Brentano argues that it is impossible to generalize about everyone from the view of only one person. "Das Leben ist bunt und es gibt eben so viele verschiedene Menschen, wie es Menschen gibt."<sup>514</sup> Pushing this argument further, he sees *Gilgi* not merely as a misrepresentation, but also as a potential danger to society. After being published, Keun's novel was extremely successful, not only reprinted in *Vorwärts* but also turned into a feature film. Because of the amount of publicity surrounding *Gilgi*, Brentano argues that too many people are taking the story's message at face value. The book, he argues, became a success because it perpetuated the dream of so many young white-collar workers: "Der Wunschtraum vieler Angestellter, frei, selbständig, selbstbewußt sein zu dürfen, wird hier literarisch befriedigt."<sup>515</sup> In addition, the film version ends not with *Gilgi* leaving on a train to Berlin to begin a new life, but rather by Martin "rescuing" her from the train and bringing her home in a Mercedes, which many critics argued ruined the social message of the original novel by giving in to the public demand for a stereotypical romantic "happy end."

Reiterating the issue of *Gilgi's* lack of solidarity mentioned above, Brentano argues that *Gilgi* cannot and should not be considered a role-model for women because

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<sup>514</sup> Brentano 27; "Life is colorful and there are as many different kinds of people as there are people."

<sup>515</sup> Brentano 27; "The desire of many white-collar workers to be free, independent, self-assured is here assuaged in literary form."

of her innate selfishness. “[Gilgi] muß sehen, wie sie weiter kommt—jeder für sich—wo käme man hin, wenn man allen weichlichen Mitleidsredungen nachgeben wollte?”<sup>516</sup> In addition to citing Gilgi’s manipulation of her friend Olga to distract her enamored employer and using flirtation to secure supplementary work, Brentano views Gilgi’s attitude towards her working-class friend, Hans, as epitomizing her selfishness. Even though Gilgi has the money Hans desperately needs to pay off his debts, Gilgi succumbs to Martin’s bourgeois jealousy, inadvertently causing the death not only of Hans, but of his entire family.

Brentano critiques not only Gilgi’s continued indifference to the suffering around her, but also argues that Keun does not give an accurate representation of that suffering. Gilgi’s suffering, he argues, does not adequately represent the suffering of the real people. In fact, some of the suffering not included in the main story line is actually caused by Gilgi herself. “Man kann einen Menschen zeigen, der sich mit spitzen Ellenbogen durch die Massen drängt, aber man kann dabei nicht die Leute auslassen, die die Stöße empfangen und diejenigen, die sich wehren.”<sup>517</sup> By doing so, Keun is giving her audience a skewed view of reality by not accurately representing the suffering of the lower classes.

Gilgi’s typical bourgeois reaction to anything that becomes cumbersome, Brentano argues, is to abandon it as opposed to working to make it better. This can clearly be seen in her actions towards her friends, her parents, and even her boyfriend.

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<sup>516</sup> Brentano 28; “[Gilgi] needs to see to it that she gets through—every woman for herself—where would you be if you gave in to every sad story?”

<sup>517</sup> Brentano 28; “You can show a person who forces himself through the crown with sharpened elbows, but you cannot leave out the people who receive the blows and those who defend themselves.”

“Das ist eine besondere Methode, die Widerstände der Gesellschaft dadurch aufzulösen, daß man sie nicht vorkommen läßt.”<sup>518</sup> The story of Gilgi ends up perpetuating the cycle of escapism through entertainment: popular culture creates unrealistic dreams, which are turned into novels, which are filmed, which then perpetuate these stereotypes to a wider audience. Echoing Kracauer’s critique of mass-culture, Brentano argues that this form of escapism becomes like a narcotic that, especially in Gilgi’s case, doesn’t necessarily harm the work ethic, but destroys both the desire and the ability to resist.

Elizabeth Fließ’s critique in *Die Frau* also appears to parallel those of many of the respondents published in *Vorwärts*, while at the same time building on the opinions expressed by Brentano. Fließ argues that “das Mädchen von heute” herself does not exist in reality, but rather the notion itself is merely a construct of popular culture. “Und hier liegt auch die Gefahr für die jungen Menschen, die heute Bücher wie die von Irmgard Keun als eine Art Rauschmittel zu sich nehmen.”<sup>519</sup> By looking to these figures in literature as role-models of how to lead their lives, Fließ fears that too many working women will, like Gilgi, adopt feelings of apathy instead of actively fighting for social change. She argues that people should not look to literature for examples of goodness in society, but rather work to ensure that society itself is a good and healthy place for the youth to live.

In her review in *Der Weg der Frau*, Ingeborg Franke also challenges the view that Gilgi is a positive role-model for women, but in this case, she argues that

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<sup>518</sup> Brentano 28; “This is a special method of releasing herself from the opposition of society that gets in her way.”

<sup>519</sup> Fließ 177; “And here, too, is the danger for the young people of today who read novels like the one by Irmgard Keun as a form of intoxicant.”

employment as a typist earning 85 – 105 Marks a month is not a desirable goal for women because by doing so, they are setting their goals too low. Franke argues that those who praise this novel have never lived the life of a typist, otherwise they wouldn't so heartily embrace it. She continues her argument by writing that it is unethical to proffer the illusion that those who work hard will be able to succeed. Her argument also echoes the views of the *Zentralverband der Angestellten* mentioned above, specifically by mentioning that Gilgi's finances, and the fact that she was able to put 1200 marks in savings, are highly unrealistic for a typist.

Franke also critiques Keun's novel by arguing that by portraying the romantic trials of Gilgi, Keun fails to provide any realistic social critique:

Die wirklichen Gilgis haben ganz andere Sorgen als die Beschäftigung mit der großen Liebe. Auch ihnen mangelt es an Arbeit und Brot. Und die erkämpft man nicht durch Strebertum, sondern durch solidarischen Kampf aller Gilgis gegen die heute bestehenden wirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse. Weil das Buch jedoch nicht diesen, sondern einen falschen und gefährlichen Weg weist, müssen wir es ablehnen und bekämpfen.<sup>520</sup>

Keun ends Gilgi's story at the train station, Franke argues, precisely because she is not willing to show the true reality that Gilgi will face as an unwed mother in the metropolis of Berlin. She ends her critique with a call to arms: "Gilgis der Wirklichkeit—wehrt euch!"<sup>521</sup>

This call to arms assumes that there are, in fact, "Gilgis der Wirklichkeit." Brentano, whom I cited above, ended his analysis with the following question: "Was

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<sup>520</sup> Franke 6; "The real Gilgis have very different worries than preoccupation with great love. Even they don't have enough bread and work. And you can't fight those with determination, but rather with the solidarity of all Gilgis in the fight against today's financial situation. Because this book does not follow this, but rather shows a false and dangerous path, we must oppose it and fight against it."

<sup>521</sup> Franke 6; "Gilgis of reality—defend yourselves!"

würde sonst mit [Gilgi] geschehen—wenn etwa die Blasse aus der Straßenbahn [the one who did not get the evening typist position as a result of Gilgi’s flirtation] zu reden anfinge? Wir aber fordern sie auf, zu schreiben, denn sie ist eine von uns.”<sup>522</sup> Multiple people responded that Gilgi was not “eine von uns” and instead offered examples of whom they felt truly represented white-collar working women. In her overview of the arguments against *Gilgi* printed in *Vorwärts*, Marianne Gundermann argues that her journal, *Der Weg der Frau*, gives voice to the countless women whose voices are suppressed by newspapers like *Vorwärts* that claim to represent them. “Hier kommt neben der Verkäuferin die Telephonistin, neben der Büroangestellten die Erwerbslose zu Wort.”<sup>523</sup>

Because she does not believe Gilgi is an accurate representative of the times, Gundermann introduces Elisabeth Weißmann, a nineteen year-old typist who must share a bedroom with her parents, as a more accurate representation of typists. Instead of Gilgi’s lucrative salary of 150 Marks per month, at the most Elisabeth earned only 75. When her company declared bankruptcy, Elisabeth lost her job and despite her skills, she was forced to take the only job she could find: selling flowers on the street. Quoting Weißmann directly, “Man hat für eine 19jährige Stenotypisten keine Arbeit mehr. Ich bin eine von den Millionen, ‘überflüssigen’ Menschen.”<sup>524</sup> Compared to

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<sup>522</sup> Brentano 28; “What would have happened with Gilgi—if the pale woman on the streetcar [the one who did not get the evening position as a result of Gilgi’s flirtation] began to speak? We employ her to write, because she is one of us.”

<sup>523</sup> Gundermann 7; “Here, the salesgirl, the telephone operator, the office worker and the unemployed woman can all share their opinions.”

<sup>524</sup> Weißmann, qtd. in Gundermann 7; “There is no work for a 19 year old stenotypist any more.”

Elisabeth, Gilgi's life is pure fantasy. "Das ist das Leben einer Stenotypistin in Wirklichkeit."<sup>525</sup>

As promised, in the next issue of *Der Weg der Frau* the editors published a response by another "Gilgi der Wirklichkeit." Herta Büchle writes, "Ich selbst war bis vor kurzem auch eine 'Gilgi'. Aber es ist mir nicht gelungen, so eine 'glänzende Position', wie sie die Film-Gilgi hatte, zu erringen."<sup>526</sup> She, like many of her white collar colleagues, had to feed not only themselves, but their unemployed husbands on a meager salary of 110 marks, far below the representative wage suggested by Gilgi. Instead of the idealized place to work as suggested by *Gilgi*, Büchle compares her position as a typist to an "Arbeitstier," noting, among other problems, that older, experienced women would regularly be replaced by 17 year-old apprentices, once again echoing the age discrimination analyzed by Kracauer. Büchle acknowledges the sad reality that there are many women and men "die sich an solchem Roman und Filmkitsch ergötzen."<sup>527</sup> Despite this, there are many working men and women who have known for a long time "daß nur ein festes Zusammenhalten der Kolleginnen untereinander uns vor Ausbeutung und Lohnraub schützen kann."<sup>528</sup> It is the members of this latter group, she argues that are the ones who truly represent society.

I believe that those who best understood the underlying purpose of republishing *Gilgi, eine von uns* in *Vorwärts* were those who read the text not with an "us versus

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<sup>525</sup> Gundermann 7; "That is the real life of a stenotypist."

<sup>526</sup> Büchle 13; "Until recently, I was also a 'Gilgi.' But I was never able to achieve such a 'glamorous position' like that the film-Gilgi portrays."

<sup>527</sup> Büchle 13; "who amuse themselves with such novels and film kitsch."

<sup>528</sup> Büchle 13; "only a strong bond among the women workers can protect us from exploitation and cut wages."

them” mentality, but rather as an opportunity to reach out and bridge differences. While many respondents argued that Gilgi’s representation in the novel did not represent them or their values, they believed that her experiences throughout the novel and its open ending represented the very realistic possibility that Gilgi, and those women in the Weimar Republic who associate with her, may in the future become advocates for the Socialist cause. By advancing such a viewpoint, many people in real life who have some of the qualities and attitudes represented by Gilgi should not be seen as “lost causes,” but rather as potentially future supporters of the socialist cause. It is in these responses that we see the greatest pedagogical impact that these books might have on its readers.

L.G.O. is the first to denounce the “us versus them” mentality present in so many of the responses published in *Vorwärts*. “Darf ein Mensch sich Sozialist nennen, wenn er einen Mitmenschen ablehnt, nur weil ihm dessen Lebensweise nicht gefällt?”<sup>529</sup> By doing so, she argues, the socialist movement risks losing many potential supporters. Although Gilgi does not initially align herself with socialist principles of solidarity and compassion for those who are suffering, G.R. believes that Gilgi’s confrontation with Hans and Herta’s suicide makes her realize that her attempts at achieving happiness by assuming traditional bourgeois gender roles are not truly an option for her. Instead, she chooses to leave her bourgeois life behind and find a new path in life. “Allein will sie ein neues Leben nicht beginnen, und sie findet die Kraft zu einer *unehelichen Mutterschaft*. Hat sie nicht in diesem Augenblick das bürgerliche Milieu verlassen, um

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<sup>529</sup> L.G.O., qtd. in “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?”; “Can someone call themselves a Socialist when he disapproves of his fellow human being, only because he doesn’t like the way he lives?”

zu kämpfen für sich und das Kind? Und könnte sie da nicht eine von uns sein?“<sup>530</sup> This response stresses the growth Gilgi experiences within the novel, and uses this growth to speculate on the enlightenment that Gilgi may some day achieve after the story’s open ending. W.K., one of the few men whose views were published in *Vorwärts* on this issue, wrote that Gilgi becomes “eine von uns” at the point the train leaves the station for Berlin, because at that moment “beginnt für Gilgi der Weg, der sie unfehlbar zu uns führen wird.”<sup>531</sup>

Others argued that the true goal of socialism was not to perpetuate enmity and strife, but rather to fight against “lebensfeindliche Probleme, aber nicht Menschen: Millionen verwirrter Menschen laufen und hetzen durch das Chaos unserer Tage und suchen Wahrheit—und ein bißchen Glück.”<sup>532</sup> B.I. stresses that socialism is “eine Weltanschauung,”<sup>533</sup> whereas the party is an organization whose goal it is to achieve that view. In contrast to those who argue that Gilgi is not and never will be a socialist, she replies, “Darum ist es Pflicht, wenn wir Gilgi sehen, sie aufzuklären, denn sie ringt um Erkenntnis, und da dürfen wir niemanden zurückstoßen. *Alle, alle arbeitenden Menschen gehören zu uns und alle werden gebraucht zum Kampf um die Freiheit.*”<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> G.R., qtd. in “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?”, italics in original; “She wants to begin her life again alone, and she finds the strength through *unwed motherhood*. In this moment, hasn’t she left the bourgeois milieu in order to fight for herself and her child? Then couldn’t she be one of us?”

<sup>531</sup> W.K., qtd. in “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?”; “the journey begins for Gilgi that will undoubtedly lead her to us.”

<sup>532</sup> B.I., qtd. in “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?”; “hostile problems, but not people: millions of confused people hustle and bustle through the chaos of everyday life and are searching truth—and a bit of happiness.”

<sup>533</sup> “a world-view”

<sup>534</sup> B.I., qtd. in “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?”, italics in original; “That is why it is our responsibility, when we see a Gilgi, to enlighten her, because she is struggling for awareness and we should not be allowed to rebuff anyone. *All, all working people belong to us and all will be needed in the fight for freedom.*”

In her essay entitled “Was lehrt Gilgi? Weniger Verachtung, mehr menschliches Verständnis!” Susi Bork argues that the discussion about Gilgi is neither a discussion about the abilities of the author nor about the “hero” of the novel. She concedes that Gilgi does not embody socialist ideals, but instead of reacting to the novel with a battle cry against women like Gilgi, Bork reacts to it by realizing the need to reach out to these women. “Es geht um die Frage, wie wir Sozialistinnen erreichen können, Frauen wie Gilgi zu uns heranzuziehen, sie für den Kampf um den Sieg unserer Idee zu begeistern.”<sup>535</sup> The issue for Bork does not revolve around whether or not Gilgi can or should represent women merely because she was not raised a socialist. The true unifying factor for Bork is the novel’s exposure of the sufferings of society and its awakening of a fervent desire to address the causes of that suffering.

The bourgeoisie, Bork continues, does not understand the problems of the proletariat until they, like Gilgi, experience suffering themselves or hear the truth from a proletarian perspective. Precisely because the proletarians fail to effectively to bring the truth of their lives to the attention of the upper classes, many in the bourgeoisie adopt an attitude of apathy and fail to recognize the suffering of the lower classes. “Sie gehören zu denen, die, solange sie gut leben können, nicht gern von der Not anderer hören, sie werden zum Sozialismus geführt, erst wenn eigene Verelendung sie schreckt.”<sup>536</sup> Another danger that Bork identifies is that although many who consider themselves petit-bourgeois like Gilgi are only one or two generations away from being

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<sup>535</sup> Bork; “What is at stake is the question of how we can reach women Socialists, how we can bring together women like Gilgi and inspire them to join the fight for the victory of our ideas.”

<sup>536</sup> Bork; “They belong to those who, as long as they can live comfortably, do not like to hear about the suffering of others. They are led to Socialism only when they become frightened by their own impoverishment.”

proletarian themselves, because of their perceived higher social status they ignore their own proletarian roots. Like Gilgi, these girls have no sense of class history and more easily give into regressive bourgeois ideals in an attempt to perpetuate their status as members of the bourgeoisie. “Für sie ist die *Liebe* noch das Wesentlichste, obgleich sie unterbewußt fühlen, daß sie sich dadurch dem Mann unterordnen.”<sup>537</sup> Just as bourgeois women often feel subservient to men, proletarians were attracted to socialism because they were subservient to their employers. It is for this reason in particular that it is important for all women to join the socialist movement in order to start fighting for the rights of women everywhere.

The one socialist character in the novel, Pit, treated Gilgi poorly because he had preconceived notions of her based merely on her external appearance, including her fashionable make-up and fur coat. H.W., another man whose reaction was printed in *Vorwärts*, argued that those who claim to be socialists should not immediately dismiss Gilgi, or any other person, merely because they use their money for entertainment or frivolous things. “Denn auch ich habe mir während meiner zwölfjährigen Tätigkeit die Erfüllung solcher Wünsche von meinem verdienten Gelde möglich gemacht und bin *trotzdem mit ganzem Herzen bei unserer Bewegung.*”<sup>538</sup> Bork points out that instead of judging Gilgi, Pit should have taken the initiative and attempted to convince her of the positive aspects of socialism.

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<sup>537</sup> Bork, italics in original; “For them, *love* is the most essential, although they unconsciously feel that as a result they become subordinate to the man.”

<sup>538</sup> H.W., qtd. in “Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?”, italics in original; “During my twelve year membership even I have used my hard earned money to fulfilled such wishes, and *nevertheless I am wholeheartedly with our movement.*”

Too often, Bork argues, the proletariat chooses to ignore that fact that numerous people from the bourgeoisie also have fought and are continuing to fight for the socialist cause. “Wir sehen ringsum nicht in unseren Mitmenschen den ‘Mitarbeiter’, den Genossen, dem wir frei und herzlich entgegenkommen sollten, weil er Gemeinschaft sucht wie wir, ganz gleich, ob er mit oder ohne Kragen uns entgegenkommt.”<sup>539</sup> Instead of perpetuating enmity, true socialists should see all people as potential allies who are willing to work toward a better future for all people.

The goal of the leaders of the socialist movement is to foster the development of free people and protect everyone from suffering. “Freiheit, Gleichheit und *Brüderlichkeit* sollten aufräumen mit Verlogenheit, Mißgunst und veralteten *Vorurteilen!* Und doch stecken in uns selbst noch so viele unseren Mitmenschen gegenüber, deren einer heute gerade ‘Gilgi’ heißt.”<sup>540</sup> Bork is convinced that Gilgi is one of them, she and thousands and millions more:

Jeder Mensch, der ringt nach Klarheit, wie Gilgi es auch tat, der sucht nach einem Ausweg, der das innere Bedürfnis hat sich hinzugeben, zu helfen, *der gehört zu uns!* Wir müssen ihm entgegengehen, soweit wir können, wir müssen ihn gewinnen für uns, dann wird er mitbauen helfen an unserer gerechteren sozialistischen Gesellschaftsordnung, die kommen wird!<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Bork; “We look around and don’t see in our fellow men a ‘colleague,’ the comrade that we should accommodate, because he, just like us, is seeking a sense of community, regardless of whether or not he is wearing a collar when we encounter him.”

<sup>540</sup> Bork, italics in original; “Freedom, equality, and *brotherhood* should replace dishonesty, distrust, and outdated *prejudice!* And still so many of us treat our fellow men in this way just because today they are called ‘Gilgi.’”

<sup>541</sup> Bork, italics in original; “Every person who is striving for clarity like Gilgi, who is looking for a way out, who has the inner need to devote themselves to something, to help, *they belong to us!* We must approach them as much as we can, we must win them for our side, then they will be able to help us build our just Socialist social order that will one day come!”

She ends her essay by quoting August Bebel's conclusion to "Die Frau und der Sozialismus": "**Dem Sozialismus gehört die Zukunft, das heißt in erster Linie dem Arbeiter und der Frau.**"<sup>542</sup>

In this analysis of the critical and popular reception of Vicki Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns*, I have provided an overview of the viewpoints raised by the public debates of these two texts. By presenting controversial social issues in a format more accessible to all levels of society regardless of education level, Baum and Keun provided these women with a means to be able not only to discuss these texts, but to develop and redevelop their own opinions on these contemporary issues.

Some of the critiques appearing in these newspapers and journals were topical, focusing on whether or not Helene and Gilgi adequately represented the working women of the Weimar Republic. Others focused on the positive aspects of portraying strong women who survive in the face of adversity, while others focused on negative aspects, such as the perceived inaccurate representation of social problems or promoting a "fairy tale" image of success that some felt was unachievable, while others felt women should be striving towards higher goals.

E.Th., one of the women whose commentary on Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* was published in the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts*, perhaps best expresses my own sentiment regarding the impact of the public discussion of these two novels:

Wäre sonst eine derartige Diskussion zustandgekommen? Hätte man sonst in den Bürostunden, in Familien- und Freundschaftskreisen über

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<sup>542</sup> Bork, bold in original; "**Socialism belongs to the future, that means first and foremost to the worker and the woman.**"

alle in 'Gilgi' angedeuteten Probleme sich mit derartiger Begeisterung in den Haaren gelegen? Und wenn jemand über Dinge *zum Nachdenken angeregt* wird, soll das nichts bedeuten?<sup>543</sup>

By participating in the discussions and debates surrounding both Vicki Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Irmgard Keuns's *Gilgi, eine von uns*, women were able to create and express their views regarding the representations of New Women in popular culture, the changing role of women in contemporary society, and even what role the women of the Weimar Republic should adopt in order to construct a more positive future for society.

By taking part in these debates, these women exposed themselves to multiple viewpoints and, as can be seen by the inter-connectedness of viewpoints above, to incorporate or refute varying viewpoints in order to clarify their own personal views. Combining entertainment and implicit education through social critique, both Baum and Keun were able to introduce controversial social issues in a more easily accessible manner, in turn broadening the discussion of women's issues to multitudes of women who may not have previously felt as if they had a voice to be heard.

The editorial staff of *Vorwärts* noted that the multitude of responses received, a portion of which I analyzed here, belong to the "erschütterndsten Dokumentationen unserer Zeit."<sup>544</sup> The ensuing discussion encouraged women to look beyond the story line to create their own implicit interpretation of the novels. As a few of the women at the end of the chapter pointed out, the most productive pedagogical impact of these

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<sup>543</sup> E.Th., qtd. in "Kunst / Kitsch / Leben?"; "Would such a discussion of this have ever happened? Would all of these problems implied by 'Gilgi' have been discussed in the office, among family and friends with such fervor? And when someone gets *so worked up that they have to think about something*, shouldn't that mean something?"

<sup>544</sup> "Die Entscheidung der Preisrichter"; "most shocking documentations of our time."

novels was not the answer to the question “Do Helene and Gilgi accurately represent us?” but rather “How do these novels teach us, either through positive or negative examples, to achieve not only our personal goals, but also to work together for a more equal society?”

As can be seen by the wide array of opinions of these novels that appeared in print, the portrayal of contemporary controversies in Vicki Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Irmgard Keun’s *Gilgi, eine von uns* both encouraged and more importantly enabled women from all backgrounds—from medical doctors to students to unemployed clerical workers—to discuss not only the novels themselves, but more importantly the social and moral implications of these issues. The debates and views illustrated in this chapter represent merely those voices that appeared in print and give insight into the wide range of issues brought to light by the discussion of these novels. These varied opinions help to illustrate that many women from all walks of life found the critical impulses inherent in these texts despite the emotional, sensational, and melodramatic elements that have relegated these novels to the status of *Unterhaltungsromane*. In turn, these women used these popular novels as pedagogical aids, which allowed them to educate themselves about contemporary controversies. The resulting public discussion of these texts provided as many answers to this question as the number of women who answered it, and their voices were an essential and welcome addition to the already raging debates on the changing roles of women in the Weimar Republic.

## Conclusion

Contrary to Siegfried Kracauer's view of popular literature as avoiding the controversies of contemporary reality and providing merely a means of pleasurable "escape" from one's dreary life, Vicki Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and *Menschen im Hotel*, and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* all actively contributed to the raging debates on the changing role of women in the Weimar Republic. These novels actively challenged both traditional representations of women as well as idealized images of the "New Woman" that were created and perpetuated by popular culture, while at the same time offering a pleasurable reading experience. In addition, analysis of the public discussions of the controversial issues represented in Baum's and Keun's novels offers unique insight into complex multiplicity of viewpoints expressed by the often-muted voices of the everyday women who comprised Baum's and Keun's readers.

Over the last few decades, numerous scholars have argued that Keun's literary works should be regarded as a higher level of literature than the category of *Unterhaltungsliteratur* to which they have traditionally belonged. Scholarly attention to Baum, however, has tended to focus more on the phenomenon of her success and the successful marketing of her image by her publisher, Ullstein. While I do not disagree that Keun's novels are of a higher literary quality than Baum's—which often sacrifice

quality in exchange for providing, among other melodramatic tendencies, romantic resolution and the obligatory “happy end” her readers expect—I argue that these melodramatic tendencies should not overshadow the implicit pedagogical aspects and social critique present in Baum’s novels.

In contrast to the explicit codes of conduct taken from the realm of canonical literature analyzed by Helmuth Lethen in *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte*, I argue that Baum’s and Keun’s novels act as *implicit* codes of conduct for many of their lesser-educated readers: instead of providing a set of rules to follow, through the portrayal of trials and tribulations of their women protagonists, Baum and Keun both explore and critique the positive and negative consequences surrounding various attitudes, decisions, and controversial issues. By arguing against the canonical bias in Lethen’s analysis, I have shown how the character types of the *kalte persona*, the Radar Type, and the Creature that Lethen identifies do indeed appear in popular fiction. As a result, the portrayal of these character types were accessible to a much wider audience than those who had a level of education that allowed them to access the high literature of the established literary canon.

As I argued in the first chapter, the quality of life portrayed by the male figures in Baum’s *Menschen im Hotel*—either the constant deception of the *kalte persona*, the constant distraction of the Radar Type, or constant suffering of the Creature—do not appear to be viable or desirable paradigms to follow. Focusing my analysis on the women protagonists of Baum’s and Keun’s novels, I show how these woman protagonists are not only able to successfully adopt the principles of masking advocated

by the *kalte persona* that Lethen attributes solely to men, but more importantly I explore how Baum's and Keun's women protagonists provided representations of women who were able transform those masks into a specifically feminine form of protection. Instead of portraying the act of masking merely as a possibility for survival, both Baum and Keun use their portrayal of women protagonists who adopt attitudes of coldness and masquerade for survival to criticize not only the social implications of using deception as a survival technique, but more importantly to critique the overarching social conditions that encourage, and in some instances force, the residents of the Weimar Republic to adopt such masks.

Baum and Keun each portray two very different conscious attempts of using masking for survival. Both Helene and Gilgi adopt masks of coldness, whereas Flämmchen and Doris attempt to use womanliness as masquerade, emphasizing a mask of warmth in order to con men out of food, shelter, and employment. Over the course of these novels, each of these protagonists, in their own way, comes to the conclusion that "the value systems and self-images that they have been clinging to are inadequate,"<sup>545</sup> thus questioning the use of masks as a viable option for survival and prosperity.

Helene becomes a dedicated single mother and accomplished scientist, yet when offered the opportunity to marry her former adviser, she agrees, adding "Es ist ein Experiment. Ich will es versuchen."<sup>546</sup> Although this ending resolves the romantic tension throughout the novel and provides Baum's readers with their obligatory "happy

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<sup>545</sup> Macfarlane 159.

<sup>546</sup> HW 260; "It's an experiment. I'll try it" (H 312).

end,” it is not clear whether or not this “experiment” will actually be able to provide whatever it is Helene feels she is missing. Gilgi’s own outlook on life changes from one extreme to the other, and she freely abandons her hyper-regimented hard-working lifestyle in order to dedicate her entire existence to her bohemian boyfriend, Martin. During this latter phase, Gilgi’s eyes are opened to the suffering of the poor all around: the financial worries, the illness, the decrepit living conditions, and even the ultimate destruction of life manifested in the suicide of her friends Hans and Hertha. She realizes that neither of the two extremes she has chosen—neither the complete individuality with an emphasis on professional goals nor the complete romantic dedication to another person—will provide her with the happiness she desires. As a result, Gilgi experiments with a third path: leaving both of her previous lives behind and boarding a train for Berlin, Gilgi seeks a middle way and envisions a future where she will successfully be able to maintain both her sense of independence as well as establishing a social connection with her child.

In many cases, Doris, like a grotesque, provides an amusing example of how not to behave, but also provides insight into what can happen when deception goes too far, as is illustrated when she loses her job after flirting too strongly with her employer and then violently rejecting his advances. Doris’ repeated attempts to take advantage of men—both those that are successful and those such as this example that are not—shed light on the fact that Doris herself is the one being taken advantage of. This is also true of Flämmchen who, out of financial desperation, chooses to prostitute herself to her employer in order to secure and retain employment. This situation is a sharp critique

not only of the infidelity of men, but also of poverty, the illusory fantasy of social advancement through hard work, and most importantly, the critique of a patriarchal hierarchy that bestows and revokes employment based not on skill, but rather on age and on physical beauty.

Throughout the Weimar Republic, and despite male fears of loss of autonomy, men remained the “hidden power”:

Zunächst schienen beide Geschlechter entmächtigt angesichts der herrschenden Macht der Tatsachen, doch ihre gesellschaftlichen Rolle bleibt grundsätzlich verschieden. Die Frauen fetischisieren den Luxuskonsum als Symbol gesellschaftlicher Teilhabe, während die Männer sich darin gefallen, diesen Luxus bereitzustellen.<sup>547</sup>

Despite their new-found, but limited, financial freedom, women’s sexual freedom, in reality, could be nothing more than the illusion of freedom as long as economic and social power continued to be concentrated in the hands of men. Once again, neither the outcome of Doris nor of Flämmchen are portrayed as positive possibilities for women, but rather as a critique of the moral situations that allow these types of relationships to happen and, more importantly, the social situations that force women to accept these immoral propositions out of financial necessity.

As I have shown, the pedagogical tendencies of these novels are not limited to the literary portrayal of examples of women’s behavior. Rather, the pedagogical impact of these novels is strengthened by the inclusion of factual information of contemporary social problems within the storylines themselves. Baum’s and Keun’s novels educated their readers about numerous contemporary controversial issues such as sexual

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<sup>547</sup> Anselm 271-2; “Initially, both genders appear to be disempowered in view of the prevailing power of the facts, but their societal roles remain fundamentally different. The women fetishize luxury goods as symbols of social participation, while the men are happy to provide these luxury goods.”

harassment, unplanned pregnancy, and abortion, to name only a few. Instead of using these novels as a platform to advance a specific moral or political viewpoint, the authors portrayed multiple opinions from various perspectives which allowed women to develop their own opinions on these controversial issues. In the last chapter, I have analyzed the public debate surrounding these novels that appeared in print to shed light on one forum where the public discussion of these novels provoked heated debates, most of which focused not on the perceived value of these novels as literary texts, but rather focusing on the controversial social issues portrayed in the texts themselves.

Siegfried Kracauer argues, “Hundert Berichte aus einer Fabrik lassen sich nicht zur Wirklichkeit der Fabrik addieren, sondern bleiben bis in alle Ewigkeit hundert Fabrikansichten.”<sup>548</sup> The literary representations of these women protagonists, as well as the voices of the women analyzed in chapter four who participated in the public discussion surrounding these novels, should be read as merely representatives of the complex network of issues surrounding the phenomenon of the New Woman in the Weimar Republic. Kracauer begins his study of white-collar workers in Germany with the following quotation: “‘Das steht doch schon alles in den Romanen’, erwiderte eine Privatangestellte, als ich sie bat, mir aus ihrem Büroleben zu erzählen.”<sup>549</sup> Kracauer quickly refutes this claim by stating, “Es steht nicht alles in den Romanen, wie die Privatangestellte meint.”<sup>550</sup> While I agree that we cannot “find it all” in the popular

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<sup>548</sup> Kracauer, “Unbekanntes” 16; “A hundred reports from a factory do not add up to the reality of the factory, but remain for all eternity a hundred views of the factory” (“Unknown Territory” 32).

<sup>549</sup> Kracauer, “Unbekanntes” 10; “‘But you can already find all that in novels,’ one private employee replied, when I asked her to tell me something about her life in the office” (“Unknown” 28).

<sup>550</sup> Kracauer, “Unbekanntes” 10 – 11; “You cannot, as the secretary thinks, find it all in novels” (“Unknown” 28).

novels of Vicki Baum and Irmgard Keun, my analysis has shown that scholars cannot afford to ignore or underestimate the pedagogical impact both of popular culture itself and the resulting discussion of social issues encouraged by the public discussion of popular literature.

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