EXHAUSTING WORK:
THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN’S EMANCIPATION AND AUTONOMY
IN THE LITERATURE OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an analysis of portrayals of women’s emancipation and autonomy in the literature of the Weimar Republic. I begin by describing the political, social, and economic changes taking place in Germany during the early years of Weimar. Germany’s first democracy affected every aspect of life, particularly for women, who were granted such rights as the right to vote and equal pay for equal work. These rapid advancements combined with a strong economy and an increasing interest in popular culture, such as movies and sports, made possible the media creation of the New Woman. I discuss first what made this woman “new” and then the reasons why she was never a reality for most German women.

I then turn my attention to one of Weimar’s most famous playwrights, Ernst Toller. I analyze two of his major works—the Expressionist drama Masse Mensch and his later drama Hoppla, wir leben!—in terms of their portrayal of gender, both of traditional masculinity and femininity and of newer attitudes brought out in the period of the Neue Sachlichkeit. I also discuss the transition from Expressionism to the Neue Sachlichkeit in a more general sense.

Next I look at another successful writer of the period, Irmgard Keun. Keun seized on the image of the New Woman and used it as the backdrop for her first two novels, Gilgi—eine von uns and Das kunstseidene Mädchen. While very different characters, Gilgi and Doris (from Das kunstseidene Mädchen) both embody to some extent the idea of the New Woman. Keun shows us, however, that this new image of women as emancipated and independent was not necessarily an authentic one. I conclude with a discussion of the possibilities and realities of women’s emancipation and autonomy, both in these works and in general.
“To continue her wish for independence requires an effort in which she takes pride, but which exhausts her.”

-- Simone de Beauvoir
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INTRODUCTION

Even though the women’s movement in Germany developed and was most active under the monarchy, it was not until the constitution of the Weimar Republic was drafted in 1918 that significant legal and political gains were actually made for women. The revolutionary constitution secured the right for women to vote and hold office, guaranteed extensive civil liberties and social welfare, and promised protection of the family and decent work and housing for all Germans.

However, because of Germany’s defeat in World War I and the subsequent demands of the Versailles Treaty, along with the US stock market crash in 1929, the republic spent several years in desperate economic conditions, plagued with runaway inflation and massive unemployment. This meant that most women were struggling just to survive and feed themselves and/or their children and could not fully enjoy or exercise their newly-gained rights. (Some rights and guarantees, such as the guarantee of equal pay for equal work, withered away within the first few years of the republic anyway.) Nevertheless, the media latched onto the new opportunities available to women during the Weimar Republic and created the icon of the “New Woman.” The New Woman was economically, socially, and sexually emancipated, and reveled in and celebrated her independence. She lived in a big city, had a rollicking social life, “voted, used contraception, obtained illegal abortions, and earned wages”—a nice image, but unfortunately not one that was financially feasible to most women of the time (Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan 11). Despite the fact that the New Woman icon suggested degrees of emancipation and autonomy that most women did not enjoy, she soon became a pop culture phenomenon. Her face graced countless magazine covers, her seductiveness dazzled in film, and authors who wrote novels detailing her escapades and experiences became celebrities overnight. It is to this literary world that I would like to give special attention.
This thesis will present historically conscious close readings of four works by two authors of the period: Ernst Toller’s dramas *Masse Mensch* and *Hoppla, wir leben!* and Irmgard Keun’s novels *Gilgi—eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. I will situate the female characters from these works within a socio-historic context, against the backdrop of the New Woman.

Toller is known as a highly successful dramatist committed to social revolution, but little research focuses on issues of gender and power in his work. This is curious, given the important role that women play in his texts. For example, in *Masse Mensch*, a play about violent revolutionary struggle, it is a woman (literally “The Woman”) who advocates peaceful resistance instead of bloody rebellion. She is seen as the heroine in the end, the only one who fought the drive to succumb to rage and was thus able to see the humane solution to the social problems faced by “the masses” in the story. Toller’s *Hoppla, wir leben!* presents us with another heroine. This story deals with Eva Berg, a woman who has had a long career as a political activist and organizer. Having taken part in a failed revolution, she is now able to channel her political passion into constructive forms of resistance, a feat which her former lover, Karl, has not managed to accomplish. Throughout the drama she remains calm and self-assured, even as her compatriots are falling apart at the seams.

Irmgard Keun, on the other hand, was seen to embody the New Woman idea herself. She established and maintained a commanding presence in a traditionally male occupation, and the mere fact that she was able to become such a successful author as a woman during this time was sensational to some. The women in her works are striving toward the emancipation and autonomy embodied by the New Woman icon—though often unsuccessfully—reflecting the social reality of the time that the New Woman was practically a myth. Her main characters in novels such as *Gilgi—eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* are self-confident, independent, ambitious young women who demand good lives for themselves and are determined to get them. The only thing missing is the economic autonomy to do so, and their
struggle to achieve that autonomy reveals more fundamental conceptual problems of 

independence and interdependence that became acute during the Weimar years.

I have found the extant scholarship on these two authors and these four works to be of 

varying breadth and depth. Much literature exists on Ernst Toller as a person, as well on as his 

role in Expressionism and the political implications of his dramas. Given the prominence of 

Toller as a playwright during the Weimar Republic, however, it is odd that scholarship dealing 

with the concept of gender in his works is so limited. It seems that this would be a bigger topic 

discussion, given that Toller creates such strong female characters like The Woman from 

*Masse Mensch* and Eva Berg from *Hoppla, wir leben!* and the fact that some scholars consider 

Expressionism (of which *Masse Mensch* is a part) an inherently misogynistic movement. 

Furthermore, the language Toller uses is often pregnant with notions of gender, such as The 

Woman’s seemingly simple statement that “letzter Weg ist ohne Mutter.” Eva Berg is a classic 

New Woman, and Toller paints her femininity in a much different way than The Woman’s or 

Mutter Meller’s (another female character from *Hoppla*). In this thesis I will explore concepts of 

gender in his works, particularly in the representation of the traditional versus the “new” woman.

The scholarship relating to Irmgard Keun and her works is not lacking. Problematic, 

however, is the fact that a large proportion of the literature on Keun was written by just a few 

scholars. It is a tendency of these authors to view Gilgi (from *Gilgi—eine von uns*) and Doris 

(from *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*) as progressive characters or even role models, in Gilgi’s 

case. This is often too rosy an outlook. The texts themselves do not put forth these women as 

the epitome of emancipation and autonomy and, in fact, generally emphasize their failures 

instead of their successes. The simple fact that the main characters of these works are female 

does not automatically make them role models for women or even progressive examples of 

femininity. Portrayals of traditional as opposed to progressive femininity are common in the 

novels, suggesting that the line between tradition and emancipation is not as clear-cut as we 

may think. I hope to show in this thesis the complicated relationship between “old” ideas and
the “New” Woman and illustrate how, if at all, the main female characters achieve and experience emancipation and autonomy.
On November 9, 1918, when Social Democrat Philipp Scheidemann stepped out onto a balcony of the Reichstag and proclaimed Germany a republic, a new era in history was born. World War I ended with an armistice on November 11, after two million Germans and ten million people in all had been killed. Though no battles had been fought on German soil, that was soon to change.

Towards the end of the war, morale in the German military was very low. While Germans on the home front were being told constantly that the war was going in their favor, the soldiers knew better. On October 28, sailors in Wilhemshaven mutinied, sparking a series of uprisings and beginning a revolution in Germany. When the revolution reached Berlin on November 9, the same day that Scheidemann made his famous proclamation, Spartacist leader Karl Liebknecht made a proclamation of his own. From a balcony of the Berlin City Palace, only two hours after Scheidemann’s statement from the balcony of the Reichstag, Liebknecht declared the formation of Germany as a free socialist republic. This would push Germany into what historian Hagen Schulze referred to as no less than “civil war” (Schulze 135).

The following days pitted two revolutionary forces against each other: the “black-red-gold revolution” comprised of Social Democrats, center, and left-liberal parties against the “red revolution,” a collection of left-revolutionary groups, including the Spartacist League headed by Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg (Schulze 135). The “red revolution” was quickly put down by the three-party alliance, and it is into this atmosphere of in-fighting and bloodshed that the Weimar Republic was born.

The new republic faced criticism almost from the very beginning, largely due to the government leaders’ signing of the Versailles Treaty, commonly referred to in Germany as “the
shameful diktat of Versailles” (Peukert 42). Territorial concessions dictated in the treaty meant that Germany would lose ten percent of its prewar population, fifteen percent of its arable land, most of its colonies, foreign investments, fleet, and railroad stock. Furthermore, the German army was to be restricted to only 100,000 men, and the Allies were given rights of inspection and disarmament control within the country. Perhaps most devastating to the average German citizen was the seemingly unbearable burden of reparations.

Needless to say, unrest was widespread at the beginning of the Weimar Republic. The “stab in the back” legend, which claimed that the war was lost on the home front rather than in the trenches due to subversion by Jews, Communists, Social Democrats, and even to an extent by women, grew and spread throughout the country. The Weimar government was also seen as having stabbed Germany in the back by signing the hated Treaty of Versailles (though they essentially had no choice in the matter), and distaste for the new democracy grew, with some rightist elements even calling democracy “un-German” (Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan 7). Despite these economic and political tensions, one group of Germans did benefit greatly, or at least it seemed so at first, from the formation of the Republic.

WOMEN AND POLITICS

The Weimar constitution, hailed as “one of the most democratic in the world” (Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan 5), granted numerous new rights to women. The constitution stated that “women and men have basically the same rights and duties” and resolved to end all discrimination against women in the civil service (Bridenthal and Koonz 35). Women were to receive equal pay for equal work, the right to hold office, and the right to vote. The women’s movement in Germany had been clamoring for such rights since the late years of the monarchy, so these gains were met with jubilation and optimism by many women. In the republic’s first elections in January 1919, nearly eighty percent of all eligible women voted—a percentage higher than that of male voters. Nearly ten percent of the National Assembly delegates were
women, and women began to join political parties in record numbers. For example, female membership in the SPD (Social Democratic Party) rose from 66,000 in 1918 to 207,000 in 1920. Women had obviously been waiting a long time for reforms such as these, and they eagerly exercised their new rights.

WOMEN AND ECONOMICS

The economic position of women was also in flux because of WWI. During the war women had moved into men’s jobs in industry and manufacturing. This was seen as a temporary move, however, and guidelines were being put in place by the war ministry as early as 1917 that were designed to ease the transition from a female back to a male workforce. Women were seen as unnecessary competition now that the war was over and the men were back and in desperate need of work. So relinquish their wartime jobs they did, but that did not mean that women disappeared from the workforce.

The proportion of women in the workforce did not so much rise as simply shift from industry to light-manufacturing and white-collar work in offices. It is true that there were more women in the workforce, but it must be remembered that after the war there were more women in the population in general. Furthermore, the rise in the number of women workers was proportional to the rise in the number of male workers. Of the 1.5 million new jobs that were created in Germany between 1925 and 1933, 77% went to men. Figures like these show that women were not really invading the labor market and stealing men’s jobs, though it may have seemed that way because, as Bridenthal and Koonz state, women’s presence in the workforce “had never really been accepted in the first place” (Bridenthal and Koonz 45).

Though women undoubtedly appreciated the new rights afforded them by the Weimar constitution, optimism for women’s legal and economic equality soon proved unfounded. While women may have enjoyed their new jobs in increasingly female sectors, their occupation in such jobs was seen as a temporary phenomenon: it was expected that their numbers would decline
as women got back to their “real jobs” of replacing the lost population. Women generally only worked until they married, and sometimes there was even legislation forcing them to quit their jobs if they had a husband. Doppelverdiener (double-earners), or women who worked even though they were married to an employed man, were looked upon with scorn in a time of economic crisis and rising unemployment. Youth was a main asset for working women: companies advertised for twenty-five-year-olds, and a clerk or salesgirl was considered obsolete at age thirty. This meant that a women’s job was almost always dead-end; if they did not get married at some point and leave their jobs of their own accord, they would probably be pushed out anyway and replaced by someone younger.

Though women and men were supposedly now equal under law, judicial decisions still went in men’s favor in terms of family law and property rights. Wages, job security, and working conditions continued to be more favorable for men than for women, and equal pay for equal work promises were retracted starting in 1920. While women voted in great numbers in the 1919 election, their involvement in politics declined steadily after that, and many women even began voting for parties that had long opposed women’s rights, such as the Catholic Center Party and the Nationalist Party. When inflation and depression hit Germany, women’s employment and equal rights under law moved swiftly to the back burner.

Soon after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany found itself unable to pay its war reparations. When it defaulted on its debts in 1923, France occupied the Ruhr region (which, along with the Rhineland, it actually hoped to split off from the rest of Germany), in order to force payment. Desperate, the Weimar government resorted to printing money. This led to runaway inflation: by November of the same year one American dollar was worth 4.3 trillion marks. Germany was floundering, unemployment was skyrocketing, and “women’s issues” were of very little concern anymore. Assistance finally came in the form of the United States’ Dawes Plan (1924) and Young Plan (1929), which together set out a reasonable long-term repayment schedule and offered economic assistance. The currency stabilized, and the
economy even grew despite the twelve percent unemployment rate. Disaster struck again, however, in October 1929 when the US stock market crashed. The US called in the loans contracted under the Dawes Plan, investments shrunk, the international market for German-produced exports decreased markedly, and unemployment once again spiraled out of control such that by 1932 twenty percent of Germans were unemployed.

These harsh realities meant that women could not exercise—or sometimes did not experience at all—their supposedly newfound “emancipation” and “autonomy.” Most women had no time to devote anymore to women’s rallies or political campaigns. Most women could not concern themselves with the fashion of the “roaring 20s” or the blooming cosmetics industry because they were struggling just to survive and feed their families. Nevertheless, the media seized on and exaggerated what little gains women had made and introduced the icon of the New Woman, a figure that would gain much fame and infamy during the period of the Weimar Republic.

THE NEW WOMAN

While it is true that during this time period more women than usual did move from the countryside to the city to find work, the fact remains that, as Bridenthal and Koonz point out in their chapter Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche, “However appealing city lights may have been to the young women who left the country…it was economic pressure that forced their departure” (Bridenthal, Grossmann, Kaplan 46). Nevertheless, the icon of the New Woman emerged in magazines, film, and literature as a street-smart young woman, living in the city of her own accord, working to support only herself and leading a fantastically glamorous life. She was “the embodiment of the sexually liberated, economically independent, self-reliant female” (von Ankum 4) who also “voted, used contraception, [and] obtained illegal abortions” (Bridenthal, Grossmann, Kaplan 11).
The New Woman was largely a media creation, however, and did not represent an attainable reality for most women. Not even young, economically independent women who did live and work in the cities could afford such a fabulous lifestyle as that of the New Woman. Regardless of this fact, the New Woman, with her androgyny of dress, hairstyle, and even posture, soon became a pop culture phenomenon.

She was not just a German creation, but rather a world-wide fantasy figure. French author and sex reformist Victor Margueritte’s *La Garçonne (The Bachelor Girl)* (1922), for example, tells the story of Monique, a young woman who rejects marriage and instead sets out on a “bachelor life, complete with career, lots of wild partying, and affairs with glamorous partners of both genders” (Allen 139). English author Christopher Isherwood’s semi-autobiographical novella *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), which decades later would inspire the musical *Cabaret*, is set in Berlin in the early 1930s and introduces us to the character of Sally Bowles, a singer in a local cabaret. She embodies the icon of the New Woman, leading an independent and exciting life filled with drinking, smoking, parties, travel, rich suitors, abortions, and an array of sexual forays.

These socially, economically, and sexually emancipated women, though they were more myth than reality, began to concern many people, from the bourgeois women’s movement to the rising fascist elements. A popular perception was that the family was in crisis, not only because of the war, but also because of the changing status of women (Allen 138). In the midst of all their lavish revelry, these “New Women” seemed to have forgotten their primary responsibilities of becoming wives and mothers and raising healthy German children. Men and women alike shared the fear that “along with the disappearance of long hair and restrictions to home and hearth, femininity itself was on the wane” (Frame 16). The medical community began to speak of “intersexed” females, that is, women who because of appearance or behavior were “inadequate” or “deficient” and were thus not well-suited for marriage (Frame 18). A few noteworthy characteristics of an “intersexed” woman were a reflective nature, judgement less
subject to emotional influence, self-reliance, and independent opinions (Frame 20). The New Woman came to be seen as immoral and degenerate, a detriment to gender relations, the family, and the nation as a whole. Pop culture outlets—when not holding her up as a progressive ideal—portrayed her as “a seductive man-hater.” “I’m a vamp, I’m a vamp, I’m a fierce wild beast...Upon the blood of men I feed, I like them fried and fricasseed” sang the performers in Berlin cabarets (Allen 139). Even the character Monique in La Garçonne was not portrayed as enviable. Her sexual escapades eventually lead her to have an abortion, which renders her sterile and thus incomplete: “If no child was to be given to her, what was there left?” (Margueritte, trans. Burnaby, in Allen 139). She remains depressed and childless until she gives up her “misguided independence” (Allen 139) and marries a nice man, which then magically restores her fertility.

Yet with all this negative attention, people—especially women—remained fascinated with this daring and alluring New Woman, as is evident by the wild success of female authors such as Irmgard Keun and Vickie Baum whose novels placed New Women at their cores. I would now like to dive into the worlds of Toller and Keun and explore the ways these authors depict, analyze, praise, and criticize Weimar’s New Woman in their writings.
CHAPTER TWO

MASSE MENSCH (1921)

ERNST TOLLER

“Toller has been called the best representative of his generation—a generation destined to enter the First World War, converted by its horrors to pacifism or revolt, disillusioned by the revolution of 1918 and its aftermath, and finally exiled, imprisoned, or killed by the Nazi government.”

(Spalek, “Need for a New Estimate” 581)

Ernst Toller was born into a Jewish family on December 1, 1893 in Samotschin, present-day Poland. Having always felt himself a bit of an outsider as a Jew, he was determined to assert himself as a German. When the First World War began, a young and fiercely patriotic Toller volunteered for military service, even requesting duty at the front lines. This experience proved life changing: the human suffering and loss he experienced at the front soured his sense of patriotism and turned him into what he would call a “revolutionary pacifist.” Upon returning from the war, Toller began attending leftist conferences and founding political groups, such as the Kulturpolitischer Bund der deutschen Jugend. He eventually found himself in Berlin where he met Kurt Eisner, the leader of the Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (USPD). Toller began working with Eisner to organize strikes and demonstrations. This activity quickly got him arrested, but he was released soon thereafter.

The November 1918 revolution was a turning point for many activists of this generation, and Toller was no exception. In Bavaria, the movement succeeded in ousting the monarchy and declaring a Soviet Republic, and Toller was elected to several high positions in the new revolutionary government. Following Eisner’s assassination in February of 1919, Toller was named the leader of the USPD. Even though he voiced opposition to the declaration of the first Räterepublik (April 7, 1919), Toller nevertheless found himself the head of that government until
it was overthrown a week later by the Communists. When this second Räterepublik was overthrown a few weeks after that, he went into hiding until June when he was discovered and arrested. This time the charges of high treason stuck, and Toller ended up serving five years in prison.

EXPRESSIONISM

It was during this time in prison that he wrote the first of the dramas I will discuss, Masse Mensch. The humiliating end of WWI, the disillusionment in the aftermath of the November 1918 revolution, and the tumultuous beginnings of the Weimar Republic fueled the fire of an artistic movement that had begun around the turn of the century: Expressionism. The Expressionists’ “rebellion against stable forms and common sense reflected the longing for renewal, the discontent with actuality, and the uncertainty about means that marked Germany in general” (Gay 105). They hoped to rescue the world from itself by employing “unprecedented intensity of feeling [and] unheard-of purity of conviction” in their often apocalyptic- and utopian-themed art (Gay 109). Drama of this period was marked by speech that “rose to declamation and, often, sheer yelling, as far removed from ordinary manner as possible. Characters were endowed with universality by being deprived of names and individual characteristics, and called simply ‘the man,’ ‘the young girl,’ […]” etc. (Gay 110).

Expressionist playwrights such as Toller often focused on the need for a “new man” in these dark and changing times. Dramatic heroes would be “converted through suffering and living” and would be “purified and give birth to a higher species” (Gay 113). This search for a “new man” allowed for what Douglas Kellner refers to as “wildly unrestrained individualism” in some Expressionist writings, but artists such as Toller focused less on liberating the individual and more on the sacrifice of the individual for the good of all humankind. Toller articulated “the ethical-activist project of redeeming humanity from the suffering and evils of the past through creating a new humanity and new society” (Kellner 174).
There were significant flaws in the Expressionist vision, however. The “new men” described in dramas were nearly always just that—men. Men were seen as the personification of the Expressionist ideal, while women only played supporting roles, if that. Given their second-class depictions, it is not surprising that women often became the unpitied victims of violence, rape, and murder. According to Kellner, “this sexism is deeply rooted in the expressionist belief that only superior men can produce a renewal of humanity and that women are inherently inferior” (191). Considering this attitude it is especially significant that the hero of Toller’s otherwise textbook-Expressionist drama *Masse Mensch* is, in fact, a woman. Toller, as we shall see, portrayed women fairly and even flatteringly in his dramas and certainly did not share in this sexist “expressionist belief.”
Sonja Irene L., eine Frau

Sonja Irene L. (interestingly the only named character in the drama), or “The Woman” as Toller most often calls her, belongs to the ranks of Weimar’s New Women not because she has a pageboy haircut or because she likes American movies, but because of her independence of thought and the power she wields over her own life. When the first “picture” (the first act—Expressionist writers often invented new terms of their own) opens we see The Woman speaking with a group of agitated workers with whom she is organizing a rally. Her husband, who works for the government, enters the meeting and immediately announces that he is not there to help—quite the opposite, in fact: “Um kurz zu sein, ich setze Riegel vor dein Wirken” (Toller, Masse Mensch 9). He voices his opposition to her revolutionary intentions and even claims that her anti-government actions are grounds for divorce.

Thus the backdrop of a traditional patriarchal society is set. Though The Woman ultimately refuses to be intimidated by her husband’s threats and announces that the following day at the rally she intends to rip “die Maske von der Mörderfratze” of the state to which he has sworn his solemn oath, she is not entirely the portrait of a radically new woman—there are still very traditionally feminine things about her (Toller, Masse Mensch 12). For instance, in the quarrel with her husband, she seems often to be at a loss for words and is hesitant in her speech, while he seems more sure of his argument. She emphasizes the negative emotional effect the argument is having on her: “Wie du mir wehe tust mit jedem Wort,” whereas he is unmoved. She obviously does not like fighting with him, and in the middle of the argument she says, “Mann…du…lass mich… Nun halt ich deinen Kopf… Nun küß ich deine Augen… Du… Sprich nicht weiter…” (Toller, Masse Mensch 10). These words draw up images of a mother, holding her child’s head and kissing his face in order to calm him. After several more codependent and passive statements such as “Sieh, ich werde welkes Blatt ohne dich” (Toller, Masse Mensch 11) and “Ich glaube, ich werde schwach sein ohne dich,” she finally takes a firm
stand against him, casting aside her sentimentality and instead focusing her energy on the justification of her political cause: “Dein Staat führt Krieg, dein Staat verrät das Volk! Dein Staat ausbeutet, drückt, bedrückt, entrechtet Volk” (Toller, Masse Mensch 12). In this personal rebelliousness, she shows that she is on her way to emancipation, though she is not there yet.

Weltrevolution. Gebärerin des neuen Schwingens.

As mentioned, at this point in the drama The Woman still possesses many traditionally feminine qualities, such as a mothering tendency and overly-emotional reactions. There is another feminine entity in Masse Mensch that is equally as important as The Woman: the mass. Interestingly, both “mass” and “revolution” are feminine nouns in the German language (die Masse, die Revolution), and Toller codes the mass in traditionally feminine terms. A mass is an unthinking, emotional, irrational, unstructured force of nature—not unlike a traditional woman. Both she and the mass have a tendency to either produce or destroy with no moderate middle ground. And, like a woman, though a mass may seem unruly, it is ultimately an object to be controlled and manipulated. Consider how easily the mass is swayed during the rally. First The Woman speaks: “Ich rufe Streik! Hört ihr: Ich rufe Streik!” (Toller, Masse Mensch 22), and the mass answers, Wir rufen Streik! Wir rufen Streik!” (Toller, Masse Mensch 23). Then The Nameless One takes the stage and says, “Ich rufe mehr als Streik! Ich rufe: Krieg! […] Gewalt! Gewalt!” to which the mass answers, “Waffen!” (Toller, Masse Mensch 24). The Nameless One then says, “Masse ist Schicksal,” and the mass repeats, “Ist Schicksal…..” The Nameless One: “Masse ist Kraft!” The mass: “Ist Kraft,” and so on (Toller, Masse Mensch 25). At the end of this scene The Woman is also swayed; she finally gives in to the demands of The Nameless One, suggesting that all things feminine can be controlled and molded according to a (masculine) master’s will.

A revolution, like a mass, is understood as an emotional, out-of-control, feminine force. This makes the quote at the beginning of the Reclam edition of Masse Mensch very interesting:
“Weltrevolution. / Gebärerin des neuen Schwingens. / Gebärerin der neuen Völkerkreise. / Rot leuchtet das Jahrhundert / Blutige Schuldfanale. / Die Erde kreuzigt sich.” Here the revolution is directly compared to a woman, specifically a mother: “Bearer of the new wave.” Through feminine forces like the mass and the revolution certain things are born, such as this “new wave” and a “new circle of men.” But these forces also destroy—homes, cities, countries, and people. There is no constructive middle ground—we will find that this is true both for the mass in *Masse Mensch* as well as for The Woman herself.

**DIE FRAU:** Gefühl zwängt mich in Dunkel, doch mein Gewissen schreit mir: Nein!

Though this is a revolutionary drama, Toller paints a fairly traditional picture of the feminine and the masculine. This juxtaposition comes to the forefront in the third picture. The Woman is seen speaking at a rally, trying to unite the workers around her cause: a strike. “Ein Ausweg bleibt uns Schwachen, uns Hassern der Kanonen. Der Streik! kein Handschlag mehr. Streik unser Tat!” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 22). This short speech identifies two important positions of The Woman. First, she emphasizes the weakness of the people, not only in this excerpt (“uns Schwachen”) but later in her speech as well: “Masse ist schwach” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 25). Secondly, the action she advocates—a strike—is basically inaction. The masses do not have to take any new action, they just have to cease their current action, working. She is clearly a pacifist, saying later that she does not want anyone to kill anyone else, and a strike is a typical non-violent, pacifist “action.”

Compare her speech to that of The Nameless One, a male agitator at the rally: “Ich rufe mehr als Streik! Ich rufe: Krieg! Ich rufe: Revolution! Der Feind dort oben hört auf schöne Reden nicht. Macht gegen Macht! Gewalt...Gewalt!” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 24). He does not admit weakness as The Woman does. He instead speaks of the strength and power of the people, saying later, “Masse ist Führer! Masse ist Kraft!” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 25). One could draw the typical correlations here between power and masculinity versus passivity and
femininity. In fact, pacifism was considered a “‘feminine’ [aspect] of the left” (Meskimmon 96). His emphasis on power and force (“Gewalt...Gewalt!”) is a traditionally masculine characteristic, while The Woman’s passivity and admission to weakness is traditionally feminine.

And, in traditional fashion, the feminine cedes to the masculine: The Woman eventually (though briefly) admits that The Nameless One is right in calling for more than a strike. But more is going on here than just a woman bowing to the will of a man. She says, “Gefühl zwängt mich in Dunkel, doch mein Gewissen schreit mir: Nein!” (Toller, Masse Mensch 25), thus mentioning two opposing forces within her: her feelings and her conscience. Considering that the conscience plays the part of the superego, which issues commands and admonitions to the ego (the self), the two sides represented here are the emotional and the rational. Her “Gefühl” tells her to join The Nameless One, though she admits in the same breath that this is a mistake (her feelings “push her into darkness” and out of the light of reason). Her conscience, on the other hand “screams: No!” If we follow the traditional line of thought that women are emotional while men are rational, this statement of hers represents a struggle within a struggle: a struggle between feminine and masculine characteristics within the woman herself, in addition to the struggle between femininity and masculinity personified in The Woman and The Nameless One. She follows her feelings—her “feminine side”—but realizes almost immediately that this is the wrong choice and tries in vain for the remaining duration of the play to atone for her mistake. The message thus seems to be that following her “masculine side” and not succumbing to “female emotionality” would have saved her life, but she made the wrong decision.

Besides a struggle between femininity and masculinity, her statement could also describe the opposition between two different ways of thinking: the declining Expressionist tendencies and the rising neue Sachlichkeit. The Woman sides with her feelings and emotions—with Expressionism—but it actually turns out that following her rational, sober, sachlich side would have saved her life in the end. The Woman and Toller seem to be signaling—probably more unconsciously than consciously—Expressionism’s declining
relevance; it was not the correct choice in this situation. Rational thought is, in this one instance at least, given more credence than one might expect in such a typically Expressionist play.

**DIE FRAU: Letzter Weg ist ohne Mutter.**

Toller again characterizes the masculine and the feminine in a traditional manner in Picture Seven. Here we find The Woman imprisoned for her role in the failed revolution. She is facing execution and is talking to herself alone in her cell: “Letzter Weg ist ohne Mutter. Letzter Weg ist Einsamkeit,” she says (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 47). One is truly alone when one is without a mother—a mother makes a person her safest and most complete. The mother in this case rescues her child from unbearable loneliness; she is a savior, a supernatural force of redemption. Immediately after delivering this line, The Nameless One comes to rescue The Woman from prison—her savior, supposedly. She does not view him as such, however, for she learns that in order to escape they would have to kill a guard. Again, she is a sworn pacifist, now more than ever since she has seen horrific violence firsthand. The thought of killing another person so that she might be freed is unacceptable to her. The Nameless One is no savior; he brings violence wherever he goes. She tells him: “Du bist nicht Befreiung, du bist nicht Erlösung. Doch weiß ich, wer du bist. ‘Schlägst nieder!’ Immer schlägst du nieder! Dein Vater der hieß: Krieg. Du bist sein Bastard” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 48). Thus war is a father where salvation is a mother. The juxtaposition of mother/savior and father/war is another clear example of traditional ideas of gender playing out in *Masse Mensch.*

Another significant exchange in Picture Seven is between The Woman and her husband. He, too, comes to visit her, in fact, before The Nameless One. He announces, “Ich bringe frohe Kunde dir, nicht weiter dürfen Gossen ihren Sud auf deinen...meinen Namen willkürlich entleeren” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 45). He states immediately his concern that his name has been sullied by this whole affair, and he wants to put an end to it. He also informs her that it is not yet certain that she will be executed and that he knows she is innocent. Instead of being
grateful for this “good news,” she says to him: “Ich seh dich jetzt so…klar… Und bist doch schuldig… Mann, du…Schuldiger am Mord!” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 45). She continues, “Ahnst du…wer letzte Schuld trägt? … Komm gib mir deine Hand, Geliebter meines Blutes. Ich hab mich überwunden... mich und dich” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 46). This is a pregnant statement. She says that she has overcome herself: she has identified and corrected flaws in her character that were hindering her in some way, such as the personal insecurity that made her cede to The Nameless One. She is now a better version of her old self—she has become the “New Man.” Now unwavering in her belief in pacifism, she says to The Nameless One, “Höre: kein Mensch darf Menschen töten um einer Sache willen. Unheilig jede Sache, dies verlangt. Wer Menschenblut um seinetwillen fordert, ist Moloch: Gott war Moloch. Staat war Moloch. Masse war Moloch” (Toller, *Masse Mensch* 50). She is no longer susceptible to his influence and sends him away instead of accepting his help, which comes with a human price that she is not willing to pay.

She has also overcome—or developed beyond, one could say—her position as a wife, telling her husband that she has overcome him as well. She has finally liberated herself from him and no longer cares what he says or thinks. She is not worried about soiling his good name. She is no longer concerned with his oaths to the government and his opposition to her every political move. In short, she is just over it.

This is the moment where she becomes not only a New Man, having been, as Gay says, “converted through suffering and living” into a “higher species” of human, but also a New Woman (though without the life of leisure trappings), having severed herself from an unnecessary, controlling authority figure and realized her new identity as an independent, self-reliant woman (113).
ERSTE GEFANGENE: Schwester, warum tun wir das?

In the struggle between traditionally coded masculinity and femininity, the triumphant force seems to be the feminine. Because The Woman is executed by the state, she becomes a martyr for her followers. Her pacifistic beliefs are held up as those which would have prevented the tragedy and human loss of the bloody revolution. She should have been followed, for she was the true savior of the masses. On the other hand, the male characters in the play, namely The Nameless One and the husband, only cause conflict and death. The Woman disregards them both in the end, realizing that she has her own values and that she does not need the influences of these men.

One could even say that Toller portrays the women in this play as higher beings, not only because of the savior-like qualities of The Woman, but also because her message of non-violence and human community is ultimately received and put into practice by two other women. (It is worth noting that these are the only women in the play.) After The Woman is taken to the gallows, two other female prisoners in her cell begin to squabble over the food and clothing she has left behind. Upon hearing the shots of the firing squad which signal The Woman's death, they immediately stop. “Schwester, warum tun wir das?” they cry as they realize that fighting amongst themselves will only lead to more misery, while cooperation will lead to a more humane world (Toller, Masse Mensch 52). This is the legacy of The Woman (and of the New Man), and she seems to know that it will be a lasting one, telling The Nameless One, “Ich lebe ewig” (Toller Masse Mensch 50). It is the women—never the men—who are able to learn from her example and internalize this enlightened way of thinking.

Another idea is highlighted in Masse Mensch besides the idea of transcendent femininity. Remember that when faced with the struggle between Gefühl and Gewissen, The Woman chose to follow her feelings. Choosing the emotional over the rational, while a traditionally feminine thing to do, in the end leads to her demise, for she was arrested and executed for her complicity in The Nameless One’s plans. I likened this earlier to a signal that
Expressionism—here represented by her purely emotional reaction—is losing relevance. A more rational, deliberate response to The Nameless One would have saved not only her life but possibly the lives of hundreds of others. In that she is ultimately killed, one could read her death as the death of Expressionism as well. The next generation of social reformers—the two women in the cell, perhaps—must learn not to let emotions cloud judgement and to think soberly about a situation before acting. In short, they must possess more characteristics of the calmer *neue Sachlichkeit*.

The Woman’s portrayal as nearly a Christ-like figure is problematic, however. As mentioned, she is the one who achieves enlightenment in the end, and she is able to pass her knowledge on to her followers (the two women prisoners). Nevertheless, she is killed. She has essentially been shown to be too good for this world; she is the holder of supreme knowledge, executed by those who do not share or even understand her opinions. She and the truths she now embodies are irreconcilable with the society in which she lives. Obviously, this is not a woman to emulate, at least not exactly, for she cannot exist in the real world. Eva Berg, the main female character of *Hoppla, wir leben!*, is a response to this problem. While just as passionate as The Woman, Eva is able to find a way to function productively in a society that does not always share her views. Let us now turn our attention to her story.
CHAPTER THREE

HOPPLA, WIR LEBEN! (1927)

We will now look at another of Toller’s characters, Eva Berg. Eva undergoes a transformation over a period of eight years, eventually becoming a prime example of a New Woman—employed, single, independent, and sexually liberated. Her former lover Karl Thomas, however, has not undergone such a transformation, and a clash of world views occurs when he is released from prison and visits Eva. In this chapter I will examine the character of Eva Berg, particularly the ways in which she embodies the New Woman. I will also consider other female characters in the drama and the ways their femininity is constructed. Additionally, I will briefly discuss an emerging literary trend, neue Sachlichkeit, and how it relates to the concept of the New Woman.

EVA BERG

KARL THOMAS: Lass sie doch. Sie ist so jung.

Eva Berg’s story in Toller’s Hoppla, wir leben! begins in a prison cell in 1919. She and four of her comrades have been arrested for their roles in a failed revolutionary uprising. The group has already been awaiting execution for ten days, and Eva, only seventeen years old at the time, struggles to maintain her composure as her older comrades speak of preparing for death. Even the presumably more experienced revolutionaries in the bunch are beginning to lose their minds. One man, Albert Kroll, vocalizes his anxiety: “Verdammte Quälerei! Warum kommen sie nicht! Ich hab mal gelesen, Katzen quälen Mäuse so lange, weil die so gut riechen in Todesangst…bei uns muss es andere Finessen geben. Warum kommen sie nicht? Warum kommen die Hunde nicht?” (Toller, Hoppla 17). When the guards finally do come, it is not to execute the prisoners, but rather to announce that their sentences have been commuted to more jail time (but Wilhelm Kilman, who has apparently struck a deal somewhere, is allowed to
go free). The thought of further imprisonment sends one of the other prisoners, Karl Thomas, over the edge, and he is carried away laughing like a madman. Though Karl is kept in a mental hospital for eight years, the others are released not long after their sentences are commuted.

The Eva Berg we meet in this first short scene is very different from the Eva Berg of eight years later. Young Eva may be politically committed, but her consciousness as an independently strong woman—as a New Woman—has not yet developed. The audience gets the impression that Karl Thomas, Eva’s then-boyfriend, is her main support while in prison and probably in general. She cries often and needs nearly constant defense and comfort from him in order to stay calm. He is the end-all be-all for young Eva, as is evident in her comments such as “Karl, ich küss dich tot” (Toller, *Hoppla* 14) and “Ob sie uns zusammen begraben, wenn wir sie drum bitten?” (Toller, *Hoppla* 17).

EVA BERG: Keiner gehört dem andern.

Eight years later, when Karl Thomas is finally released from the institution, he meets a very different Eva Berg from the one he used to know. Eva has successfully made the transformation from scared teenager to New Woman, *Bubikopf* and all. Act two, scene one is the first time we see Eva and Karl together since Karl’s release. When the curtain rises Eva is just getting out of bed to go to work, and Karl is still lounging. While she is getting ready to leave he comments on her new hairstyle: “Bubikopf nennt Ihr die Frisur?....Die Frisur kleidet dich, da du ein Gesicht hast. Frauen ohne Gesicht müssen sich in Acht nehmen. Die Frisur macht nackt. Wie viele vertragen Nacktheit?” (Toller, *Hoppla* 49). He goes on to say that he never noticed before how few people have faces.

The androgynous *Bubikopf* (pageboy) hairstyle, characteristic of the New Woman, was seen by some to signal the decline of femininity, for girls who look like boys can’t be real women. In fact, if a woman did not have the traditional “rounded physique” and other physical indicators (such as long hair) of a “real,” “complete” woman, there was a perceived danger that
she was “intersexual”—that is, “inadequate” or “deficient” in her sexual differentiation from men (Frame 18). Characteristics of an “intersexed” woman included a reflective nature, judgement unclouded by emotions, self-reliance, and independent opinions. Types of women who were “not infrequently intersexual” were “emancipated women, suffragettes, female academics, woman politicians, leaders of the women’s movement, woman artists, [and] woman drivers” (Frame 20). These “intersexual” women would supposedly not make good wives and mothers, as they were thought to be “prone to irregularities in their sex drive, frigidity, physical complications or psychoses associated with giving birth, or even infertility, and […] generally unstable psyches” (Frame 19). They were, therefore, merely a dangerous tax on society.

Because of all that this hairstyle symbolized—in short, an independent young woman with her own money and “questionable” morals who was more focused on career than family—it made its wearers highly visible. A woman couldn’t hide herself with a Bubikopf. She was exposed for all the world to see (and judge), and not only her face, but her occupations, her politics, her relationships, her free time activities, and every move she made in the public sphere. For this reason, says Karl, women without faces—that is, without strength of character and self-confidence—should not attempt to wear a Bubikopf. The hairstyle itself is too loud a statement to be worn by just anyone. The lamentable fact that most people don’t have faces (they are merely “Fleischklumpen,” according to Karl) is his way of remarking that not everyone is as independent and driven as Eva. The use of the term of “Fleischklumpen” even conjures up images of zombies moving unthinkingly through their daily routines. Not everyone can grit their teeth, to paraphrase Eva, and become successful in the modern world (especially not Karl). Eva, however, is one of the few who can.

Karl Thomas’ statement that she is one of the few women who have faces could also reflect the fact that he is still in love with her. His desire for her makes her face visible to him, where others are not. Karl Thomas assumes that they will once again be lovers, since they were before they were imprisoned. He has not moved on; unfortunately for him, Eva has. This
is one example of Karl’s personal stagnation, made clear in this scene. He seems generally unable to deal with the new reality surrounding him, and, realizing but not yet admitting this, he repeatedly asks Eva to run away with him. “Eva, komm mit mir,” he says, “Wir reisen nach Greichenland. Nach Indien. Nach Afrika. Es müssen irgendwo noch Menschen leben, kindliche, die sind, nur sind…. Die nichts von Politik wissen, die leben, nicht immer kämpfen müssen” (Toller, *Hoppla* 50). She, however, is the pragmatic one who knows this is no solution: “Glaubst du, du könntest über südlicher Sonne, über Palmen, Elefanten, farbigen Gewändern das wirkliche Leben der Menschen vergessen? Das Paradies, dass du dir träumst, existiert nicht.”

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Karl is unable to deal with the nature of his new relationship with Eva. Eight years ago they were lovers, and he does not understand why they cannot simply pick up where they left off. He seems confused when Eva tells him that he needs to find another place to live. She explains that she needs to be able to be alone, to which he replies, “Gehörst du nicht mir?” Eva points out the ridiculousness of the term he chooses: “Gehören? Das Wort ist gestorben. Keiner gehört dem andern.” He then admits that the term “gehören” is the wrong one and restates the question: “Bin ich nicht dein Geliebter?” They have slept together, and he assumes that that is binding in some way. Eva explains, however, “Ein Blick, den ich mit fremdem Menschen tausche auf verwehter Straße, kann tiefer mich an ihn binden, als irgendeine Liebesnacht. Die braucht nichts zu sein als sehr schönes Spiel” (Toller, *Hoppla* 51). And when Karl asks her what she would do if a pregnancy resulted from their night together, she replies coolly that she would have an abortion.

This exchange is significant in that it shows not only how much Eva has changed—remember that eight years ago she wanted to be buried with Karl—but also how society has changed and how Karl has failed to adapt to either. Eva’s speech about what constitutes a binding experience is very much in the spirit of the New Woman. She does not consider sex as important as she perhaps once did or as other, more conservative, members of society now do;
to her it’s “just sex.” Furthermore, she does not see the sense in keeping a child she is not prepared to raise. She explains that she wouldn’t keep the child, “weil es mich nicht notwendig dünkt” (Toller, Hoppla 52). This sexually-liberated attitude is as classic a characteristic of the New Woman as the Bubikopf.¹ A relaxed attitude toward sex was growing in popularity among young women of the Weimar Republic, much to the chagrin of the older generation.

Karl Thomas eventually asks Eva, “Welches Erlebnis hat dich verhärtet in diesen Jahren?” (Toller, Hoppla 52). His description of her as “hardened” instead of “realistic” or “independent” betrays a typical attitude toward the New Woman. A “hardened” woman—one with a thick skin who is not as easily swayed by emotions—was seen as not sufficiently different from a man and therefore androgynous or, as previously mentioned, “intersexual.” Because Eva is capable of dealing with the real world without becoming overwhelmed by it, she is seen as less than a real woman. “Real” women were those with soft bodies and soft voices, but Eva, as Karl has just pointed out, is hard.

Eva goes on to explain that it is time and experience itself that have changed her: “Seit acht Jahren arbeite ich, wie früher nur Männer arbeiteten. Seit acht Jahren entscheide ich über jede Stunde meines Lebens. Darum bin ich wie ich bin” (Toller, Hoppla 53). In fact, she says that work essentially saved her life: “Oft, wenn ich in einem dieser hässlichen möblierten Zimmer sass, habe ich mich aufs Bett geworfen…hab geheult, wie zerbrochen…hab gedacht, ich kann nicht mehr weiterleben…Dann kam die Arbeit. Die Partei brauchte mich. Ich habe die Zähne zusammengebissen…” (Toller, Hoppla 53). She has worked hard and achieved the autonomy that made the New Woman icon so alluring.

Eva, unlike Karl, has coped well with the changes of the last eight years, both social and political, and has no illusions about the world that now faces her. Regarding the revolution of

¹ We shall see also that neither main character from Irmgard Keun’s highly successful novels Gilgi—eine von uns or Das kunstseidene Mädchen put much stock in physical relationships either. Gilgi says of one of her boyfriends (whose name she has forgotten), “Der Junge war nett. Der Kuss war nett. Nicht mehr” (Gilgi 8), and Doris from Das kunstseidene Mädchen is often paid, whether with gifts or with actual money, for sex.
eight years ago, she tells Karl: "Diese Revolution war eine Episode. Sie ging vorüber" (Toller, *Hoppla* 52). As Ossar puts it, she has "drawn the necessary conclusions" in regard to the failed revolution and "altered [her] tactics to fit the post-revolutionary circumstances" (142). She realizes that revolution is no longer practical and that the best current avenue to alter society is to work legally, inside the system. She now works as a political organizer and belongs to the "Vorstand des Verbandes weiblicher Angestellter," which is chock full of New Woman like Eva (Toller, *Hoppla* 28). She has put the past behind her and adapted well to the present.


OTHER FEMALE CHARACTERS

Eva is not the only female character in *Hoppla, wir leben!,* unlike The Woman in *Masse Mensch.* There are several different women in the drama and just as many different ways of portraying them. They are workers, activists, mothers, and, in the case of Kilman's daughter Lotte, possibly even lesbians. Take for example the scene in which the workers are voting. An old woman wishing to cast her vote is accosted by three ballot distributors who represent three different political parties and who approach her femininity from three different angles.

The first ballot distributor says to her, "Hier, junge Frau, hinter eins müssen Sie ein Kreuz machen. Da wählen Sie den richtigen Präsidenten. Der Kriegsminister wird für Ruhe und Ordnung sorgen und für die Frauen" (Toller, *Hoppla* 60). He hopes to appeal to her vanity, calling her "young woman" when her actual description in this scene is "old woman." He tries to achieve her support by saying that the minister of war will "care for the women." What this actually means is unclear, and the ballot distributor does not bother to explain. The actual specifics are unimportant, however, because a *junge Frau* does not understand politics anyway (this is his perception). The old woman is a woman, therefore she must care at least somewhat
about women, so that is the issue that will sway her to his side. It is barely even a political
decision.

The second ballot distributor says to her, “Na, Mutterchen, immer das Kreuz hinter zwei
setzen. Wollen Sie, dass die Kohlen billiger werden und das Brot?” (Toller, Hoppla 61). This
man appeals to her housewife and mother side, emphasizing the high cost of household items
and food. Since she is older, she probably has a family, hence she knows how expensive
raising children can be. She should, therefore, vote for a candidate who will lower the prices of
everyday goods, thus making it easier on mothers like herself.

The third ballot distributor takes a different approach: “Als klassenbewusste Proletarierin
wählen Sie Nummer drei. Klare Entscheidung, Genossin” (Toller, Hoppla 61). He appeals to
her political side. (This will most likely be useless, however, since earlier in the scene she
explains that she is only voting to avoid being punished by the state for not voting.)
Nevertheless, the identity of Genossin—a politically active woman—is very different from that of
a politically naïve young woman or an experienced older mother. These three definitions of
femininity can be applied to the other female characters as well.

FRAU MELLER: Na, iss jetzt, Jung. Ich muss in die Küche zurück.

Frau Meller is a Mütterchen. She is also a Genossin since she was a political prisoner
in the first scene along with Eva and the others, but her motherliness is a more defining
characteristic, evident already in her appellation, “Mutter Meller.” Although she and Eva are
similar in many ways in terms of politics and experience, they are treated very differently by the
men in the drama because of the different models of femininity they are perceived to embody.
A scene where this is especially clear is Act four, Scene three where Karl has just been arrested
for the murder of Minister Kilman and his friends are being questioned. The examining
magistrate asks Mutter Meller fairly standard questions: how did she know Karl, is it true that
she helped get him a job, did she ever hear him say that he wanted to kill Kilman, etc. The man is more or less respectful, the process goes smoothly, and she is soon released.

When Eva is questioned, however, the investigating magistrate does not ask a simple question such as “How do you know Karl?” as he did with Mutter Meller. He asks Eva, “Standen Sie zu ihm in strafbaren Beziehungen?” She calls the question ridiculous, to which he responds, “Ich will wissen, ob Sie in geschlechtlichen Beziehungen zu dem Beschuldigten standen?” (Toller, Hoppla 105). A question such as this reveals that he sees Eva not as a Genossin and certainly not as a Mütterchen, but as a less-respectable junge Frau. One could even say that he was trying to humiliate Eva on the basis of her sexuality since he equates a “geschlechtliche Beziehung” with a “strafbare Beziehung.” With these questions he basically expresses his disapproval of her lifestyle as a junge Frau—as a New Woman; in his opinion, her type of femininity is a crime. Furthermore, when she refuses to answer, the magistrate threatens to “expose” her “devious” behavior to her family, namely to her father: “Sie stammen aus anständiger Familie…Ihr Vater würde…”. In the spirit of the bürgerliche Trauerspiel (the bourgeois tragedy), the investigating magistrate seems to be saying that her honor has been damaged and that her father in particular would want to know of his daughter’s impurity.

It is merely Eva’s lifestyle as a New Woman that is threatening to the investigating magistrate. The fact that she is a political activist and organizer does not bother him; Mutter Meller was too, after all, and he did not seem intimidated by her. Mutter Meller, however, is seen as harmless because of her sexual status: namely, that she is asexual due to the fact that she is older and maternal. Her days of being sexual are over; now she is a mother.

Eva, on the other hand, is young and unmarried. She is no one’s mother, which means that she is still sexual, but she is also no one’s wife, which means that any sexuality she does have is immoral in the eyes of Christian society. This is why it is so important that the

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2 There may actually be something illegal about the nature of their sexual relationship. Since they are not trying to conceive, their act may be considered sodomy and, therefore, deemed illegal, as it was in some American states until as recently as 2003 (sodomylaws.org).
investigating magistrate know if she has a sexual relationship with Karl—because if she does, it means that she is morally corrupt and therefore capable of crimes herself. She may even be his accomplice. The investigating magistrate conveys the common fear that promiscuous women would lead to an increase in crime and corruption and to a disintegration of the social fabric in general. Even other women—the bourgeois women’s movement in general—“joined in bemoaning the supposed sexual laxity of the times, urging closer supervision of morality” (Bridenthal, Grossmann, Kaplan 11). New Women such as Eva represented a “moral crisis” and were seen as a symbol of degeneracy, so naturally the investigating magistrate is wary of her. But besides signalling “moral corruption,” Eva’s sexuality and status as a single working woman is objectionable to the magistrate for another important reason.

Having lost nearly an entire generation of men in the First World War, Germany now faced a population imbalance and, to make matters worse, a falling birthrate. There was a panicked sense that if women didn’t start having more children—replacing the lost population—as soon as possible, Germany as a nation would shrivel. For this reason (as well as moral ones), Paragraph 218, which outlawed abortions, remained in place, as well as Paragraph 184, which outlawed the advertisement of contraceptives. Any woman who became pregnant was thus encouraged—even forced—by the state to bear the child, thus doing her part to help end the population crisis. As Pit says in Keun’s Gilgi—eine von uns: “Heirate und krieg Kinder. Jedem Embryo sein Paragraph 218. Der Staat will Kinder [...]” (35). Therefore, even though it was becoming more acceptable for young women to work outside the home, this employment was seen as temporary, and women were expected to quit their jobs after a few years, marry, and begin families. In the eyes of the investigating magistrate, Eva has exceeded her allowed period of independence. She has now been working for eight years, she is twenty-five years old, and she should be settling down and fulfilling her civil duty as a woman instead of galavanting around with numerous men. Katharina von Ankum explains this notion further: “Rather than indulging in promiscuity and careerism [it was agreed that] women should strive to
maintain their internal balance and use their maternal instinct in the interest of the future of humankind” (“Motherhood” 173). Mutter Meller, as her name suggests, has already done her reproductive duty, so she does not draw the magistrate’s scorn. As a representative of the government, he is irked by Eva’s seeming lack of regard for her country, and he can hardly conceal his contempt.

Eva’s entire “threatening” persona is a symbol of how times have changed. Where women were formerly seen as beings ruled by emotion, she shows no emotional ties even to those with whom she is intimate. Where a woman’s job used to be that of wife and mother, Eva has worked in politics for eight years. She is practical, level-headed, and modern, and in that, she is a good example of the newest artistic trend in the Weimar Republic: *Neue Sachlichkeit.*

**NEUE SACHLICHKEIT**

_EVA BERG: Warum mystische Worte für menschliche Dinge?_

Throughout the play, Karl has difficulty coping with the realities of modern life. He is stuck in the world he left eight years ago—in the world of *Masse Mensch*. The failed revolution in which he took part could be seen as the same failed revolution in *Masse Mensch*; his story picks up where that story ends. However, Karl is not able to make as smooth a transition into the future as Eva or any of the other former prisoners because he has spent the last few years imprisoned and outside of society. It is as if he is a time traveler from the year 1919, having just arrived in 1927 and marvelling at the changes he sees. He not only brought the mindset of 1919 with him to the future; he also bears the marks of the literary movement, Expressionism.

Consider this speech that he makes to Eva in Act two, Scene one, in which he also openly admits that he cannot relate to present times: “Wenn ich dumme Worte jetzt sage, falsche Worte, hör nicht drauf, hör auf das Unsagbare, an dem auch du nicht zweifelst. Ich brauche dich. Ich habe dich gefunden in Tagen, da wir den Herzschlag des Lebens hörten, weil der Herzschlag des Todes pochte, laut und unaufhaltsam. Ich finde mich nicht zurecht in dieser
Zeit. Hilf mir, hilf mir! Die Flamme, die glühte, ist verlöscht" (Toller, Hoppla 52). These are the desperate cries of a man stuck in a time warp.

His expressionist outlook is even noticeable to others, and it is clear that he simply does not gel with these modern times. In a later section of Act two, Scene one, Karl Thomas has a conversation with the landlady’s two children, Fritz and Grete. He speaks emotionally about the horrors he witnessed as a soldier in the first World War:


“Der arme Mensch,” says the girl, to which Karl replies, “Ja, Mädchen, der arme Mensch! Nicht: der Feind. Der Mensch” (Toller, Hoppla 56). He then tells of the hardships he and his comrades faced in the revolution:

FRITZ: Wart ihr viele?
KARL THOMAS: Nein, das Volk begriff nicht, warum wir kämpfen, sah nicht, dass wir für sein Leben uns erhoben.
FRITZ: Auf der anderen Seite, waren da viele?
KARL THOMAS: Sehr viele. Waffen hatten sie und Geld und bezahlte Soldaten.

Tragic, heart-wrenching accounts such as these coupled with a “new man”-style epiphany that all people, regardless of nation, are part of the same human family would be right at home in an Expressionist drama, but in this new day and age Karl’s pathos registers as excessive. The children put a quick end to his sentimental reminiscing:

FRITZ: Und ihr wart so dumm zu glauben, ihr könntet siegen?
GRETE: Ja, da wart ihr recht dumm.
KARL THOMAS (starrt sie an): Was sagt ihr?
FRITZ: Dumm wart ihr.
GRETE: Sehr dumm.
While children are often prone to exaggeration and over-reaction—expressionist tendencies, one could say—these children speak frankly and without illusion. Their sharp words stun Karl and affect him deeply; this was not the awed reception he expected. Their words are cold and practical in the face of his emotional war stories, and thus are a prime example of the artistic trend that replaced Expressionism: *neue Sachlichkeit*.

The constant deluge of emotion that was Expressionism eventually became simply draining, and by 1923 a more level-headed, matter-of-fact style of art was establishing itself in response. Indicative of the *neue Sachlichkeit*, or “new sobriety,” was “a cool assessment of modern society, sometimes merely registering the development of modern technologies, at others fiercely critical of social mores and their glittering adepts” (Lamb, Phelan 71). The time for revolutionary experimentation, in politics as well as in art, was over, and with *neue Sachlichkeit* came a slower pace, a cooler approach, a commitment to practical and realizable goals, and often a more cynical voice.

Eva is another character who reflects the mood of *neue Sachlichkeit*. For example, after she explains to Karl her attitude regarding how a revolutionary should live—namely that being a revolutionary does not mean that one must be an ascetic, as he apparently thinks—he hesitantly asks her, “Was ist dir...heilig?” She responds bluntly, “Warum mystische Worte für menschliche Dinge?” (Toller, *Hoppla* 51). Her matter-of-factness seems cold in comparison to Karl’s dramatics, but she merely reflects the change in perspective that has taken place in Weimar over the past eight years.

As we have seen in both of his works, for whatever trials she endures, the lead female character ends up glorified in the end. The Woman is elevated to nearly saintly status in *Masse Mensch*; Eva proves to be one of the strong individuals who were able to adapt to modernity, even as those around her fall victim to it. One could say that Toller’s women are on an upward trajectory: in the beginning they seem codependent and unsure of themselves, but in the end
they prove to be autonomous, emancipated individuals who achieve their set specific goals. I
would now like to turn my attention to the works of Irmgard Keun, whose characters begin at this
high point and thus, unfortunately, have nowhere to go but down.
IRMGARD KEUN

“For the first time in the Weimar Republic women were writing novels about women for women.”

(J.M. Ritchie; “Irmgard Keun’s Weimar Girls” 66)

Irmgard Keun was born into an upper-middle class family in Berlin, probably in February 1905—there is some uncertainty about her actual birthdate because Keun lied about her age and said she was born in 1910. Growing up in Berlin and coming of age in the early years of the Weimar Republic affected her immensely. No one was better qualified to write about young, working city girls than a young, working city girl herself. In 1931 when her first novel, Gilgi—eine von uns, was published, Keun was in her mid-twenties and living in Köln. The novel became a huge success and was even made into a movie, and Keun was now living a fantastic New-Woman’s life, the kind of her characters’ dreams. Her second novel, Das kunstseidene Mädchen, appeared just a year later, further cementing Keun’s place among the most famous writers of the Republic—wild success for a woman writer of the time.
Perceived Autonomy:

Sie hält es fest in der Hand, ihr kleines Leben, das Mädchen Gilgi.

This first line of the novel alerts the reader immediately to the fact that the main character Gilgi Kron is an independent and capable young woman. She is in control of her own life, the reader learns right from the start, and she can presumably handle anything that happens to her. Alice Rühle-Gerstel describes her type: a “woman who is not frustrated by occasional failures or temporary defeats,” one who “will not stray from the path that she has found to be correct and necessary” (qtd. in Ankum, “Motherhood” 171). Like Eva from Hoppla, she loves to work: “Arbeit. Ein hartes Wort. Gilgi liebt es um seiner Härte willen” (Keun, Gilgi 13). Besides work, her life is also focused on self-improvement. She takes language classes and rents her own small room where she can study in peace, all to try to make herself more marketable in the work force. “Wenn man drei fremde Sprachen perfekt kann,” she says, “ist man gegen Stellungslosigkeit wohl so ziemlich gesichert” (Keun, Gilgi 22). She is not yet sure what she wants to pursue as a career, but she certainly knows what she does not want to do: get married or become an actress or a beauty queen. She knows the type of person she wants to become and has a practical plan for how to get there: “Ich will arbeiten, will weiter, will selbständig und unabhängig sein—ich muss das alles Schritt für Schritt erreichen. Jetzt lern’ ich meine Sprachen—ich spar’ Geld—vielleicht werd’ ich in ein paar Jahren eine eigene Wohnung haben, und vielleicht bring’ ich’s mal zu einem eigenen Geschäft. ...Was ich aus mir machen kann, will ich machen” (Keun, Gilgi 70-71).

Gilgi, only twenty years old at the novel’s outset, is an exceptional young woman, which is particularly clear in comparison to her two cousins. “Gerdachen” and “Irenchen” are both older than Gilgi but are both significantly less mature, as signified by the diminutive –chen endings on their names. Neither of them works. Soon they will both marry, hopes their mother,
Tante Hetty, and then they won’t need jobs anyway. Tante Hetty is a woman who does not appreciate the “neue Zeit”—that is, the new society in which women can work and be independent, as Gilgi does and is, and does not necessarily need to be married to survive.

“Tante Hetty ist nicht für die neue Zeit, nur was ihr dran gefällt, pflückt sie sich raus: zum Beispiel, Gerdachen ist sechsundzwanzig und Irenchen dreißig Jahre, und das wäre früher alt gewesen für’n Mädchen, ist’s jetzt aber nicht mehr” (Keun, Gilgi 62). This passage regarding Tante Hetty highlights two different reactions to the modernity of Weimar as specifically related to the lives of women. Now a woman who is in her late twenties and still unmarried is no longer seen as “too old” to find a man, where years prior this was the case. This is good news for Tante Hetty because it means that her daughters still have a chance to wed and will not necessarily end up spinsters. Even though she is old-fashioned in that she insists her daughters be married and supported by a man (unlike Gilgi, who only wishes to support herself and shuns the thought of marriage), she chooses to acknowledge and embrace this new social reality because it is favorable to her children. Another new reality, however, that women such as Gerdachen and Irenchen are now more able to work and earn their own money, does not sit as well with Tante Hetty, so she chooses to ignore it. She clearly believes the best career—at least for her own daughters—is to be someone’s wife, and for this reason she will not fully integrate herself and her children into modern times.

Managing Romance:

*Du musst mir einen Mann abnehmen.*

Gilgi, far from wanting to be someone’s wife, tries her best to avoid serious relationships with men. In one scene, she enlists her close friend Olga, who is blonde and beautiful, to help her out of an awkward dating situation with her boss, whose advances Gilgi does not welcome. As Gilgi sits at a table with her drunk and swooning boss Herr Reuter, Olga “just so happens” to appear in the same restaurant, and Gilgi calls her over to introduce her. Gilgi then goes to the
restroom for a while and comes back to find, just as planned, that Herr Reuter has taken an interest in Olga—remembering suddenly that blonde is actually his type—and no longer wishes to pursue Gilgi. This humorous scene is important for several reasons. First, it illustrates a common reality for working women in Weimar: sexual harassment in the workplace. Gilgi is constantly subject to her boss’ advances. He tries to stroke her hands and touch her knees, once even saying, “Ich fühle mich so allein, könntest du mir nicht ein wenig gut sein, Kind?” (Keun, *Gilgi* 19). Gilgi recognizes the precariousness of her situation. “Sie hat keine Lust, mit Herrn Reuter ein Verhältnis anzufangen, und sie hat keine Lust, sich ihre Stellung bei ihm zu vermutken, sie eventuell zu verlieren” (Keun, *Gilgi* 17). She realizes that she may jeopardize her job by declining his advances. Seen another way, this is Gilgi’s chance to achieve professional success. She has the perfect opportunity here to become romantically involved with her boss, and the fantasy of marrying the boss—a “surrogate for the lack of opportunities for professional advancement,” writes Ankum (“Motherhood” 180)—was common among working women. A woman’s “professional commitment” was seen as temporary since most only worked until they got married, but this is not Gilgi’s plan, as she demonstrates in this scene by skillfully pawning off Herr Reuter on Olga. This maneuvering is actually evidence of Gilgi’s “business savvy and professionalism” (Ankum, “Motherhood” 181).

This scene also shows the way that Gilgi and Olga are able to manipulate and, to an extent, disregard men. “Gilgi ist ein erfahreneres Mädchen,” writes Keun. “Sie kennt Männer” (Keun, *Gilgi* 17). She knows, for example, that when a boss like hers speaks with an unsteady voice that he is in love, and if he is in love, he wants something and will be angered if he does not get it. Olga, too, is an “erfahreneres Mädchen” and has learned to use her beauty and elegance to whatever ends she desires, in this case, to “get rid of a man” for Gilgi. One has the sense that this is not the first time the two women have teamed up like this, suggesting a “Solidarität unter Frauen,” of which Olga speaks later in the novel. Here the women pool their strengths and work together to ensure the comfort and safety of Gilgi. Beyond being simply
friends, they are each other’s protectors. What they need rescuing from—in this case, as surely in many others—is men (though this particular man is not so much threatening as he is simply annoying). At this point in the novel, however, Gilgi does not fully recognize the necessity of cooperation. She is very individualistic and wants to succeed only through her own doings, expecting others to do the same. It is not until later, after talking with Hans and Hertha, that she realizes the value of community support.

Another point clearly illustrated in this scene is that neither Gilgi nor Olga is interested in forging lasting relationships with men at this point in her lives, echoing Eva Berg’s description of sex as a “schönes Spiel” but nothing serious. Early in the novel, Gilgi even states that “sentimentality and romanticism […] only impede her progress and personal growth” (Kosta 272). These women appreciate the aesthetic pleasure of romance without the emotional involvement, viewing men and romance more as leisure activities. Ankum describes Gilgi as having a “playful attitude toward sexuality” (“Motherhood” 184). For example, at the beginning of the novel, Gilgi admits that she can’t even remember the first name of a boy she kissed just the night before. “Der Junge war nett. Der Kuss war nett. Nicht mehr,” she says (Keun, Gilgi 8). Consider also the scene in which Martin brings Gilgi to his apartment for the first time. She is not overcome with emotion and anticipation, nor does she seem nervous at all. She states coolly, “Sie können sich das sparen, Sie brauchen mir nicht zu erzählen, dass Sie mich hergebracht haben, um mir ein interessantes Buch zu zeigen” (Keun, Gilgi 94). She is not shy or coy—what might be considered “ladylike” behavior in the traditional sense—when it comes to men and sex; she is forward and quite blunt. She knows exactly what she is doing in his place, so why should they try to disguise their motives? However, she is momentarily concerned that things are moving too fast, but she then thinks to herself, “Schnell? Wenn man fünf lange, lange Tage darauf gewartet hat?” (Keun, Gilgi 95).

Gilgi’s uninvolved, matter-of-fact, sachlich attitude demonstrates a reorientation of thought in regard to sex. Though not legally allowed to be advertised, birth control was
available to young women at this time, and though not legal at all, abortions were still available as well. Access to these services meant that women no longer had as much reason to worry that their sexual conduct would result in pregnancy. Furthermore, these products and services signified a shift in society’s definition of the purpose of sex. The sole purpose was no longer reproduction. In fact, conception could now be specifically avoided, meaning that sex could just be, as Eva would say, for fun. Sex could be just another pleasure, like drinking alcohol or going to the movies, that was assumed to be readily available. Instead of viewing this as liberating, however, these advancements in science and attitude were considered in conservative sectors of society to lend themselves to sexual promiscuity and even to prostitution. Popular culture of the time, however, embraced the “sex-as-fun-and-games” concept. The main characters of novels such as Victor Margueritte’s *La Garçonne* (*The Bachelor Girl*) and English author Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* lead lives full of glamorous parties and numerous, uninvolved sexual affairs. Eva Berg also takes a sober outlook toward sexual relationships with men in *Hoppla, wir leben!*, and prostitution is treated as valid employment in Keun’s other novel, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. Whether this disinterest in commitment and increase in promiscuity was a widespread reality or not, it was a popular portrayal of the New Woman icon.

**Constructions of Self:**

**Die Dame ohne Unterleib**

On the morning of her twenty-first birthday, Gilgi learns that she is adopted. As Barbara Kosta points out, Gilgi, like the modern woman, is “‘illegitimate,’ which means born outside of any traditionally sanctioned space and not compliant with the notions of family that Freud was plotting at the time” (274). Frau Kron gives her the name of her biological mother, and in the identity crisis that ensues, Gilgi sets out to find her. She discovers that the woman is a dressmaker living alone in a small, filthy apartment. Gilgi is disgusted with the woman’s home and with the woman in general: “Warum wohnst du hier, warum lebst du hier? Totschlagen
sollte man dich, wenn du zufrieden bist!” (Keun, *Gilgi* 42) she thinks to herself, “Warum bist du so geworden! Wer ist schuld, wer?” (Keun, *Gilgi* 48). One striking image in this scene, besides the greasy woman herself, is “die Dame ohne Unterleib” (Keun, *Gilgi* 40). The first thing Gilgi notices upon entering the apartment is the woman’s mannequin used to size clothing. This mannequin is just a torso—its “body” stops at the hips and it has no legs, hence “die Dame ohne Unterleib.” “So leben wir, so leben wir, so leben wir alle Tage,” remarks Gilgi to herself (Keun, *Gilgi* 40).

Though Gilgi does not dwell on this mannequin, it is significant for many reasons. The Dame has been dismembered—she has no lower half—and, though Gilgi does not specifically mention this, these models do not usually have heads either. Thus this Dame is missing both her sex organs and her brain; she has no sexuality, and she does not think. According to Lynne Frame in her essay “Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne?,” emotionality and passivity were two of the most important characteristics that “defined the age-old concept of ideal femininity” (16), i.e., the female “essence.” *Die Dame ohne Unterleib* embodies this perfectly because of her missing head and genitals. Because she lacks a brain and cannot think at all, let alone independently, she has no choice but to be passive, and she must always and only act on her emotions, since she does have a heart. In fact her truncated body consists almost entirely of breasts, heart, and womb, so she has all the parts she needs in order to fulfill her traditional mothering and nurturing duties, but none to be an independent and sexually liberated woman. Furthermore, her missing genitals mean that she is asexual and therefore not promiscuous, immoral, or impure. She is perfect wife and mother material. As the era of the Republic drew to a close, increasing numbers of people were longing for the “good old days” when women were more like the Dame and wanted husbands and families and less like the New Woman who wanted independence and career. Women like the Dame were good German women, it was thought, who remembered their biological “obligation” to propagate the German race, thus strengthening Germany as a nation, unlike the New Women who seemed to be eroding the fabric of society
and thus weakening the German nation as a whole (Frame 14). As we also saw in the case of Eva Berg, New Women were frowned upon from both a moral and a patriotic standpoint.

*Die Dame ohne Unterleib* is also an interesting symbol because she represents the increasing trend to segment and objectify women’s bodies in the media, arts, and society in general. New media of all kinds—radio, magazines, advertisements, and especially film—sprouted and flourished in the Weimar Republic, and soon women’s faces and bodies were everywhere. In the introduction to *Women in the Metropolis*, Katharina von Ankum writes, “The images of advertising, the mass media, and the shop windows confronted women with their own visually fragmented bodies”—fragmented bodies such as the *Dame’s* (Ankum 10). For example, usually only a woman’s head and shoulders were used to advertise makeup in women’s magazines. Susan Buck-Morss states that “just as the much-admired mannequin has detachable parts, so fashion encourages the fetishistic fragmentation of the living body” (qtd. in Meskimmon 59). Thus only a woman’s legs were used to sell stockings, only feet to sell shoes, only heads to sell hats, etc. Meskimmon even goes so far as to say that the repeated use of fragmented, fetishized parts of women, not only in shop windows and magazines but also in writing and visual art of the time, “acted as a form of disavowal for the male subject faced with external threats of emasculation in the face of empowered female consumers and the capitalist system itself” (61). She quotes Huysen: “[…] it is male vision which puts together and disassembles woman’s body, thus denying woman her identity and making her into an object of projection and manipulation” (61). This suggests that men viewed complete women as threatening and actually preferred their more managable dismembered parts to the intimidating whole.

Women’s body parts were even studied separately, as if they had a life of their own. For example, in 1929 the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* featured a piece on leg posture. It was thought that the way one held one’s legs when sitting betrayed certain personal characteristics; thus, if a man understood a woman’s leg posture, he could better determine her character, specifically
her “marriageability quotient” (Frame 15). “The person...who grows up in the milieu of high metropolitan culture keeps a tight rein on her or his bodily gestures and controls the expression of her or his movements as well as her or his facial gestures; she or he ‘wears a theatrical mask.’... Only the legs have thus far escaped this already unconscious restraining compulsion,” stated the magazine (qtd. in Frame 14). A caption to a picture accompanying the article reads, “The practice of crossing the legs below the knee indicates quarrelsomeness, but ready appeaseability, hot temperament and volatility.... Legs held in a rigorously parallel position speak for particular suitability for marriage, adaptability, inner restraint” (qtd. in Frame 15).

Making bodies readable piece-by-piece in this fashion meant making those bodies controllable piece by piece. Once one could control the pieces of a woman, controlling the whole followed naturally. The parts even seemed to be gaining more importance than the whole itself.

Women’s bodies were dismembered in art as well. Hannah Höch, famous for her photomontages, often used women’s body parts in her work. She cut photographs from magazines, newspapers, advertising brochures, and anything else with illustrations and recombined them in “new, often unsettling ways” (Makela 108). Famous pieces such as Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser or Das schöne Mädchen attempted to show the relationship between women and technology—sometimes inspiring, sometimes overwhelming. Other pieces sought to question the media image of the New Woman as successful, autonomous, and overwhelmingly happy, instead carrying the message that “Weimar’s modern woman may indeed now have a career, be sporty and physically fit, and even display her legs, but ultimately she is still controlled by a male, technological world that disregards her achievements” (Makela 116). Höch’s montage Da-Dandy, which featured five fragmented women with mixed-and-matched body parts, sought to expose sexism within the Dadaist movement of which she was a part: the (male) Dadaist artist “may theoretically support women’s emancipation but in fact objectifies women as much as any other contemporary male” (Makela 120). Artist Hans Richter also used images of fragmented women’s bodies to criticize the vacuousness of many popular
films of the day, juxtaposing close-up pictures of famous movie stars with photographs of mannequins’ heads “arranged in disturbing disarray, in order to convey the lifeless superficiality of such images” (Lensing 130).

The trend of segmenting and dismembering the female form parallels the industrial spread of Taylorism and the cultural fascination with this new process. Taylorism, as defined by Meskimmon, is a “form of technological rationalisation such as the assembly-line and time and motion studies” which was “so commonly deployed in Weimar industry” (58). This rationalization was not only deployed in booming Weimar industry, but also in public entertainment forms, “which now sought to mimic the rationalised factory for its socially-fragmented mass audience” (Meskimmon 58). Hence, for example, interchangeable parts on the assembly line translated to segmented bodies and mannequins with detachable parts in media and advertising. Time and motion studies were carried out on housewives to ensure that they were completing their chores in the most rational and productive manner possible.

Discourse on the rationalization of sexuality became widespread in Weimar; relationships were studied as closely as factory efficiency. Meskimmon states that around four hundred marital and sexual advice centers operated in Germany during this time (125). Sexual fulfillment was now a matter that deserved sober and scientific attention, and one way to study sex and bodies more efficiently was to study the parts separately, as we saw with *Die Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* article on leg position. Thus the industrialization and rationalization of Weimar partially inspired the segmentation of women’s bodies, unrelated as that may seem, reflecting a societal need to meet the potential chaos of modernity with ever more pervasive systems of organization. We have now seen that the *Dame ohne Unterleib*, while non-living, incomplete, and mentioned almost in passing, actually signifies a complex field of struggle on which competing efforts to define women in Weimar Germany played themselves out.
Das, was ich im Spiegel seh’, hat ein andrer aus mir gemacht, ich kann nicht stolz darauf sein.

As the novel progresses, Gilgi’s and Martin’s relationship becomes more serious, and she eventually moves into his apartment. Martin is significantly older and more traditional than Gilgi, and though he realizes that he does not have much money, he still tells her that he does not want her to work: “Du solltest nicht mehr ins Büro gehen [...] Was ich an Geld hab’, ist für einen zu wenig, da kann’s doch auch für zwei zu wenig sein, was meinst du—sollen wir nicht zusammen von meinem Geld leben?” (Keun, Gilgi 125). While she does not actually quit her job, she is nevertheless relieved when she is laid off because “jetzt ist’s nicht meine Schuld [...] Gott sei Dank” (Keun, Gilgi 140). She no longer wants to work, but she does not want to quit either, so she is elated to be let go because she feels like the decision was out of her hands. This type of thinking—not wanting to work, being happy to find herself in a situation out of her control—is uncharacteristic of Gilgi but becomes more common in the course of the text. As time passes, she becomes more and more emotionally dependent and focused on Martin. In addition to no longer working, she has also given up her language studies and visiting her own apartment. Where she used to be self-reliant—“[…] sie braucht niemanden, kommt allein durch” (Keun, Gilgi 93)—she now dreads being alone: "Und dass man nicht mehr allein sein kann! Richtig krankhafte Angst hat man vor Alleinsein“ (Keun, Gilgi 150). Olga even notices a decline in her physical health due to these painful changes and her somewhat self-imposed lack of independence: “[Du sollst] nicht dein Leben auf ihn aufbauen, nicht alles auf eine Karte setzen. Wie müde du aussiehst! Du brauchst deine Arbeit und deine Selbständigkeit [...]” (Keun, Gilgi 147). These upsetting changes in her life make Gilgi feel like a Frankenstein monster that someone else has made out of her old self. “Ich gehöre mir ja nicht mehr. Das, was ich im Spiegel seh’, hat ein andrer aus mir gemacht, ich kann nicht stolz darauf sein [...] Mein Körper ist mir fremd,” she says (Keun, Gilgi 135). She has come a long way from “holding her life in her hand” as stated in the first line of the novel and has become a woman who has
strayed “from the path that she has found to be correct and necessary” (qtd. in Ankum, “Motherhood” 171). Her relationship with Martin is transforming her into an entirely new person.

Martin—who, significantly, calls her “Gilgichen,” a diminutive reminiscent of her two immature cousins—seems oblivious to the pain Gilgi experiences as a result of becoming another person. He rather likes the new Gilgi that he helped create. She is prettier, more docile, less driven, more attentive—more like a traditional woman and less like a New Woman. He even admits that he likes his women to be unsure of themselves so that they are thus presumably more reliant on him: “[…] ich hab’s so gern, wenn Frauen unsicher sind” (Keun, Gilgi 95). He has taken certain aspects of her and molded them into what he wants, and as a result he does not know how to love her as a complete, real, flawed person instead of as a fantasy creation. Gilgi notices the conditionality of his love: “Was ich am wenigsten bin, gefällt [ihm] am besten an mir […] und alles, was mir am liebsten ist auf der Welt, ist ihm nichts wert” (Keun, Gilgi 137).

To better express his affection for Gilgi, Martin fragments her body into smaller, more manageable parts and worships them separately. For example, because Gilgi does not like Martin to look at her face when she is crying (she asks him to give her the face powder and the mirror so that she can freshen up), he likes to look at her legs instead. Gilgi at one point mentions that she is jealous of her own legs because Martin seems to love them so much and derive such joy from them. She wishes he loved her as much as he loves her legs. She says, “Sind doch keine selbständigen Lebewesen, sind doch ein Teil von ihr, der tut gerade, als wär’s anders” (Keun, Gilgi 129). She knows that her legs are just one part of her, but Martin seems not to realize this; he prefers the parts to the whole.

A little later, when Gilgi looks at herself in the mirror, she realizes that much of her body has been warped by Martin’s view of her and is now unrecognizable to her as her own: her powdered face, red lips, dark eyes, and painted fingernails, for example. The only parts of her body that remain unchanged and reflect the “old Gilgi” are her pointer fingers. They are uglier
than her other “Luxusfinger;” her fingertips are calloused and her nails are stubby. These two fingers are so different from the others because they are not for looks—they are “gewöhnliche, robuste Arbeitsinstrumente” (Keun, Gilgi 135). They are her typing fingers, the only remnants of her former life in which she was confident, self-reliant, and working. In this way, Gilgi segments her own body as a way of removing herself from the alien life she now leads as a strange person who she does not even recognize in the mirror. She clings to her typing fingers as a way of preserving her lost identity; they are the only authentic parts of her now. “Martin,” she thinks to herself, “meine zwei Zeigefinger sind alles, was du mir von mir gelassen hast” (Keun, Gilgi 135).

In the midst of all this, Gilgi also finds out that she is pregnant. Consistent with the New Woman attitude, she demands an abortion from her gynecologist. Though her tone becomes ever more forceful, she “ist wie immer, wenn vor schwierige und unabänderliche Tatsachen gestellt, ganz eingehüllt in eiskalte Sachlichkeit.” She snaps at the doctor: “Lassen Sie diesen molligen Großpapa-Ton—ich will kein Kind.” “Das beste ist, Sie heiraten,” he replies, and refuses to perform the abortion (Keun, Gilgi 175). Gilgi then delivers a speech outlining the basic views of the pro-choice movement of the time: “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...” (Keun, Gilgi 176). She emphasizes the fact that a woman should be allowed an abortion if for no other reason than she simply does not want the child, regardless if she can care for it or not. This is an important scene for Gilgi in terms of her identity as a New Woman. Even the outfit she chooses to wear to the gynecologist reflects recent changes in gender identity: she wears a tie. This gender-bending choice of clothing, combined with her pithy speech in support of abortion,
speaks to her modernity and *sachlich* attitude, especially when compared to the doctor’s traditional outlook that she should get married and have the child.

Meskimmon states that the struggle for abortion rights was “the single most significant public political action undertaken by women during the Weimar Republic” (106). Paragraph 218, amended in 1926, was the major piece of anti-abortion legislation in the Weimar Republic. It mandated prison sentences for women who received abortions as well as for those who aided them. The law was “selectively and arbitrarily enforced” and “decreed what leftists and sexual reformers termed a Gebärzwang, the tyranny of involuntary childbearing, for those women with neither the means to purchase expensive contraceptives nor the connections to doctors who might have encouraged their use” (Grossmann 68). Thus Paragraph 218 became a major point of contention in German society. Many women—most of them married and mothers already—considered abortion necessary to their own and their families’ survival, as evidenced by Grossmann’s estimate that “on the average, every German woman underwent an abortion at least twice in her lifetime” (70). Meskimmon writes that despite the law, “political parties and men in the medical and scientific communities” tended to agree that abortion was acceptable, but only as a last option “when motherhood was not physically or economically endurable” (106). She states that by the 1920s, only Catholic groups, right-wing extremists, and former Wilhelminian “pro-natalists” were still arguing that abortion was never excusable for any reason. Neo-Malthusian views emphasizing the quality of the population over the quantity—social eugenics—became one reason to support abortion and even sterilization, especially in the case of “unfit” mothers (as Meskimmon points out, the “unfit” were “those whose racial origins were deemed undesirable”) (107). Thus the issue was not so much a woman’s right to choose but rather a concern for the health of the population, or even, as Ankum suggests, an attempt to “channel female sexuality into forms where it could best be functionalized” (“Motherhood” 172). As Grossmann explains,
At stake was women’s ideological role in legitimizing or threatening the social system and the moral and actual authority of the state and its laws, by their willingness and ability to reproduce the next generation, as well as their material function in preserving and reproducing the family—a position that becomes particularly critical in a time of political instability and economic crisis (69).

It was critical in the eyes of the state both that the moral integrity of the family remain intact and that women reproduce the lost population as a matter of national security. Therefore, any measure that might hinder conception or birth was frowned upon or made illegal.

Since anti-abortionists “commonly exaggerated the link between abortion and the perception of frivolous, promiscuous sexual activity among young urban women,” a New Woman such as Gilgi would not have been a good poster child for the pro-choice movement. Instead, the figure of the mother was more commonly used in abortion rights campaigns, for an image of a poor, struggling mother was better able to convey the life-and-death aspect of abortion, as well as to “assert the moral and intellectual fitness of women choosing abortion” (Meskimmon 109). A young, single woman in need of an abortion would have suggested to some that she was merely a careless, highly-sexualized degenerate in search of a quick fix—not a sympathetic figure. Activists meant to convey that women in need of abortion were not “stupid or promiscuous,” but rather that “the information and assistance they needed in order to make informed choices were being withheld” (Meskimmon 110). Abortion was no reason for shame; it should be a viable option for women who would not be able to raise a child. Though using the image of the mother was a traditional strategy, it was effective. Dramas about the abortion issue were even written (by abortion doctors), such as Friedrich Wolf’s *Cyankali* (1929), which focused on a suffering mother and her desperate need for an abortion. The mother in this drama emphasizes the fact that women are ill-informed when it comes to their own health: “We working women know much too little of those things that we should know about. Every day they hit us. And then no one will help us” (qtd. in Grossmann 68). Considering that abortion was
such a heated topic at the time, it is no wonder that Keun would choose to include this situation in her novels. In Gilgi’s case, she is ultimately told to come back to the doctor in three weeks, at which time if she still wants an abortion, something can be worked out.

A Downward Spiral:

_Hertha—eine müde blonde Frau mit schweren, langsamen Bewegungen._

One day when Gilgi is home alone, a door-to-door salesman comes to the apartment. It turns out that this salesman is Hans, an old friend of Gilgi’s, and she invites him in. He tells her about his life now: he is married to Hertha, whom Gilgi also knows, and they have two children. Times have been rough for Hans and his wife, however. He explains that they both used to have well-paying jobs, but things began to change when Hertha became pregnant: “Die Hertha war doch Sekretärin bei Brandt & Co., verdiente recht gut [...] Und Hertha wollt’ ihre Stelle behalten die nächsten zwei Jahre, bis ich genug verdiente für uns beide. Aber dann kam das erste Kind” (Keun, _Gilgi_ 191). The child was unfortunately born around the time of the stock market crash in 1929 and the subsequent collapse of the economy. Not long after the birth of the child, Hans lost his job, and the couple had to give up their apartment. Hans found another job but was once again let go. Then came the second child. His family is now destitute, barely able to live off his wages. “Das—wird—nie mehr—besser, Gilgi—ich fühl’, dass das nie mehr besser wird,” he tells her (Keun, _Gilgi_ 193).

Hans’ story is a common one for 1931 Weimar. The mid-twenties in Germany were considered a time of prosperity and stability, the time in which both Hans and Hertha had good jobs. Following the US stock market crash in October 1929, however, when the US called in its loans, this period abruptly ended, and the German economy once again plummeted. Unemployment spiraled out of control such that by 1932 twenty percent of the population was out of work. Times were hard for everyone but especially for poor families like Hans’. He says of his children: “Wenn ich über die Straße geh’—und seh’ so dicke rotbäckige Kinder und denk’
dann an meine—so blass und elend—da oben in der muffigen Kammer” (Keun, *Gilgi* 193).

Hertha’s story is also typical. She was employed and “verdiente recht gut.” She wanted to keep working for two more years—but then she became pregnant. It was expected that once a woman got married or became pregnant, her days as a wage-earner were over, and motherhood was her new job. Another issue was simply that a pregnant woman would eventually need time off for maternity, and most jobs filled by young women carried no legal guarantee that their job would be reserved for them. The women were easily replaced and simply let go. This is exactly what happened to Hertha, who now must stay at home with the two small children.

Hertha’s is another example of the differing fates of Weimar women. There were women like Gilgi—young, employed, independent—and then there were women like Hertha—prematurely aged, poor, and bound to the home. Hertha is the opposite of a New Woman; she is a ruined woman. When Gilgi goes to visit her, Hertha sits with her youngest child on her lap and says, “Ich hab’ die Kinder so gehasst, wie ich sie getragen habe” (Keun, *Gilgi* 204), and later, of Hans, “Wie habe ich ihn gehasst, als ich merkte, dass das zweite Kind kam” (Keun, *Gilgi* 205). What’s worse, she is now pregnant with her third child. She is a perfect example of the suffering, struggling mother whose life and the life of her family would benefit greatly from access to birth control and abortion. Hans and Hertha simply can’t support themselves; the economy is too depressed, work pays too little, and children are too expensive. Hertha, like Gilgi, also seems to believe that it is immoral and absurd to bring a child into the world if one cannot support and does not want it. But she, unlike Gilgi, is unaware of her options; as Meskimmon notes, “The information and assistance [she needs] in order to make informed choices [is] being withheld” (110). Thus she sees no other way of living. Her bitterness about motherhood translates into a bitterness toward her husband and a bitterness toward the world in general. She says, “Ich würde auch für den Hans alles tun, ich würde sterben für ihn—aber ob ich ihn noch liebe—das weiß ich nicht. Ich glaube, ich bin zu müde geworden, um einen Mann
zu lieben" (Keun, *Gilgi* 207). She tells Gilgi how she is disgusted with her own body and hates to be touched, let alone to have sex. Her attitude toward sex is obviously very different from Gilgi’s. Whereas Gilgi has redefined sexuality on her own terms and rejected traditional ideas on the matter, such as the belief that sex equals love, Hertha’s sexuality has simply been obliterated. She no longer even wants a sexual identity; she would prefer to be asexual, even in her husband’s eyes. She says that she sometimes thinks of giving Hans money so that he can go to the nearest prostitute instead of trying to sleep with her. Here is a woman so battered by hard times that she does not even enjoy the romantic company of her own husband. She considers it too late for her to have a good life, but she has advice for Gilgi, “Hör’ Gilgi, ich sag’ dir eins—noch ist’s Zeit für dich—und wenn’s dir jetzt noch so gut geht: schaff’ dir Selbständigkeit 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... ” (Keun, *Gilgi* 209). She tells Gilgi basically to put herself first. If she is able to become economically independent, that is, not having to rely on a man for income, then she will be free to love whomever she wants. Hertha, on the other hand, is trapped. Even though she is no longer in love with Hans, she has no choice but to stay with him. Leaving him would have disastrous consequences, for she could not survive without his income and would have little chance as a mother in a depressed economy of getting a good job for herself. In Hertha’s eyes, economic autonomy is the key to all other freedoms. She describes herself as “helpless” and “defenseless,” meaning that should something happen to Hans, she and her children would be lost without his income. She hopes that Gilgi can achieve some modicum of financial independence before she meets a man and settles down, for only then will she have the freedom to act in her own self-interest instead of always being a slave to money. Whether such freedom is ever possible, no matter how high the income, does not seem to cross Hertha’s mind. She only dreams that if she had been able to support herself that her life may have turned out differently.
Her words affect Gilgi deeply. On her way home she realizes that having a child with Martin would ruin her as well: “Ich mit einem Kind! Und Martin! Es wird uns so gehn, wie es dem Hans und der Hertha geht—oh mein Gott” (Keun, *Gilgi* 211). Hertha’s situation makes her realize something else too: “Und man muss helfen—ich hab' mal gedacht, es genügte, sich allein durchzubringen und sich selbst nicht helfen zu lassen. Ich wollte mich freikaufen, indem ich mir selbst nicht helfen ließ—aber jetzt weiß ich, dass man helfen muss—und wenn von einem selbst überhaupt nichts mehr übrig bleibt.” Here Gilgi is finally developing a sense of interdependence. True independence may not be possible, it seems, but there is no shame in needing people, as she once thought. She is overcome with an urge to help others and even considers giving the money that she has saved for her own abortion to Hertha “damit sie das Kind nicht zu kriegen braucht” (Keun, *Gilgi* 210). So when Hans comes to her a few days later desperately asking for twelve hundred Marks, she immediately agrees to help him. He has falsified sales orders so that he does not lose his job, but now he needs the money to pay for those fake sales or he will go to prison, they will lose the apartment, and who knows what will become of Hertha and the children. Gilgi says confidently, “Sprich nicht mehr, Hans, geh’ nach Hause—bis heute abend bringe ich dir das Geld” (Keun, *Gilgi* 215). She has seven hundred Marks herself, and she has an idea of where to get the other five hundred.

**Die Magazindame**

When Gilgi found out from Frau Kron that she was adopted, she sought out her birth mother. She first went to Fräulein Täschler, the seamstress who owned the *Dame ohne Unterleib*. This woman tells her that she is not Gilgi’s birth mother either; a wealthy woman named Magdalene Greif is her birth mother. The story goes that Frau Greif, born Kreils, became pregnant at a young age. Her mother was convinced that having a child out of wedlock would ruin her daughter’s future (meaning that no man would want to marry her if she already had a child), so the mother paid Fräulein Täschler, who was their seamstress, ten thousand
Marks to take the child and raise it as her own. Within two weeks Täschler came into contact with the Krons, for whom she sometimes worked. Their first child had just been stillborn, and Frau Kron was unable to have any more children, though the couple desperately wanted them. The Krons then offered to adopt Täschler’s baby, not knowing that it was not really hers and that she had been paid to raise it. Fräulein Täschler jumped at the chance to unload the child and keep the money, and that is how Gilgi ended up the daughter of the Krons. On her twenty-first birthday, as mentioned, Frau Kron told Gilgi she was adopted and that she was actually the daughter of Täschler. Gilgi then sought out Täschler, who told her this story and that she is actually the daughter of Frau Greif. Gilgi went to visit Frau Greif once after learning her identity, but she was out of town. Now seems like a good time to try her again.

Gilgi goes to Frau Greif’s house and is let in by the help. Soon she meets the “elegante Dame” who is her real mother: “Typ: Titelheldin einer mittelmäßigen Magazinnovelle. Ganz gute Figur—bisschen unentschlossen in der Linie—halb kühl fesches Americangirl, halb mager getanzte ältere Gigolo-Mäzenin. Um eine Nuance zu teuer gekleidet” (Keun, Gilgi 228). She represents yet another type of Weimar woman: the “rich society lady” (Ritchie 73). Gilgi thinks to herself that this “Magazindame” is “kühl, selbstbewusst und überlegen in der Haltung. Sicher spielt sie Bridge und kann seperate Cocktails mixen und weiß, in welchen Monaten man Austern isst, und verachtet Leute furchtbar, die nicht wissen, wann in Monte tote Saison ist...” (Keun, Gilgi 229). This type of lifestyle is completely foreign to Gilgi, and she experiences a kind of culture shock in this meeting with her mother. The woman lives in a huge home with her husband and servants. She does not have a job and probably never has had one because she has never needed to. Gilgi faces poverty and need in some form on a daily basis, whether in the form of Martin and his mounting debts or Hans and his destitute family. This woman is Gilgi’s opposite. She lives in the proverbial “big house on the hill,” a member of the wealthy upper class. Gilgi, understandably, has trouble relating to her or even grasping that this is actually her birth mother. She refers to the woman as a “fremde Dame” (Keun, Gilgi 229).
“Dame” (lady) speaks to the air of nobility about her, but more important is the description of her as “fremd” (strange or alien). The feeling of distance between the women, the result of stark class distinctions, translates into linguistic distinctions as well. Gilgi tells her, “Ich würde nie Du zu Ihnen sagen können” (Keun, *Gilgi* 230), and later: “Versuchen Sie nicht, mich Du zu nennen—das wäre so beschämend und peinlich, denn Sie können jetzt noch gar kein Du für mich fühlen…” (Keun, *Gilgi* 232). Gilgi does not feel comfortable using the informal “you” with the *Magazindame*, even though children and parents typically do. Gilgi relates to this woman first as a stranger and lastly, if at all, as her mother. Thus the formal, more distanced form of “you” is more fitting to her. Furthermore, Gilgi does not want her mother to use informal terms with her either. She maintains that there is no way the *Dame* could feel close enough to her to use “du,” thus doing so would be “embarrassing.” It is clear that Gilgi is not at all at home in the *Dame*’s world, and because of their class distinctions, the two will never be able to have a meaningful relationship.

That understood, Gilgi states bluntly why she has come: “Ich will fünfhundert Mark von Ihnen haben, und ich will Ihnen sagen, dass Sie meine Mutter sind” (Keun, *Gilgi* 231). The *Magazindame* is understandably shocked. Gilgi, however, does not want her to feel obligated now to act like a mother. A further manifestation of the distance she feels, Gilgi requests that the *Magazindame* not even touch her, and she says that she will never visit her again because she would only be a disturbance. And, as we have seen, fostering a relationship would be pointless since the two women lead such irreconcilably different lives. Despite Gilgi’s apparent coldness, her mother does offer her the money in the form of several expensive rings. Gilgi is grateful but asks, “Haben Sie die Ringe nicht lieb—ich meine, gab Sie Ihnen nicht jemand, den Sie lieb haben?” Her mother replies in an empty voice, “Von meinem Mann habe ich sie—jedesmal wenn er mich betrogen hat, schenkt er mir ein Schmuckstück...” (Keun, *Gilgi* 236). At the end of the conversation, the *Dame* faints, but Gilgi, feeling so little connection to this strange
woman that she can barely muster concern, simply leaves. So ends her meeting with her real
mother and her momentary brush with wealth.

A New Chance for Fulfillment:

_Ein letztes, kleines Lächeln, das halb gelingt._

After getting the rings from her mother, Gilgi hurries to get them to Hans—but stops by
Martin’s apartment first. He is curious as to where she has been and does not want her to go
out again: “Ich will, dass du hier bleibst, Gilgi—hörst du, ich will” (Keun, _Gilgi_ 243). It does not
take long before she once again folds to his wishes, even going so far as to say, “Ich bleibe
hier—ich liebe dich—es geht mich nichts an, wenn der Hans ins Gefängnis kommt, ich hasse
ihn, Martin, weil du durch ihn traurig geworden bist” (Keun, _Gilgi_ 244). This is just another
example of how much Gilgi has changed since we first met her. She is proud of herself for
actually getting the money for Hans and wants to fulfill her promise to him, but as soon as
Martin comes into the picture she becomes a weak thing with no drive of her own; she cares
only for him. The next day when she finally goes to Hans’ apartment to give him the rings, she
meets a man in the hallway who says to her, “Wollen Sie zu denen da? Die sind tot. […] Tot.
Alle vier. Gas” (Keun, _Gilgi_ 247).

This is another wake-up call for Gilgi. “Die sind tot,” she thinks, “Was ist das? – die sind
tot, weil ich gestern nicht gekommen bin—das muss ich ganz zu Ende denken—das bleibt mir
nicht erspart—da muss ich weiter denken […] Die sind hier gestorben, während ich mit Martin…
” (Keun, _Gilgi_ 248). In her mind, these deaths are her fault, a direct result of her codependent
relationship with Martin. She seems to realize for the first time how much of herself she has lost
because of her relationship with him. She is not who she used to be, but she would like to
become her again. “Von vorne anfangen, Gilgi!” she tells herself, “Und ich weiß, was ich tun
muss—das Schwerste. Aber ich lebe, und Martin lebt, und das Kind lebt…ich will leben—und
ich bin froh, dass ich lebe” (Keun, _Gilgi_ 250). Her decision to leave Martin is a _sachlich_, level-
headed one, made without “theater.” “There is no ‘Strindberg-Drama’ in her final decision,” writes J.M. Ritchie. She writes him a note saying that she would only be a burden for him “the way she is now” (meaning pregnant, though he does not know about the baby). She packs her things and heads to her friend Pit’s apartment. She needs his help: she wants him to make sure that she gets on a train to Berlin tonight. It is his job to make her go through with this plan. Here is a moment where Gilgi must rely on another for assistance, a concept previously foreign to her. She realizes that she cannot take this seemingly most independent of steps—to move to another city alone—on her own. She needs a friend to physically force her onto a train if need be. Far from being the young woman who wanted to accomplish everything without relying on anyone, Gilgi now realizes that she, too, needs the help of others. No one can make it alone, and in this instance, complete independence is shown to be an illusion.

She explains to Pit that she is pregnant and that she actually would like to have the baby. “Ist auch eine große Verantwortung,” she tells him, “und das ist gut” (Keun, Gilgi 255). “Aber du wirst Schwierigkeiten haben, Gilgi!” he warns her, to which she replies, “Gott sei Dank, Pit! Ich sehne mich krank danach, endlich mal wieder Schwierigkeiten zu überwinden” (Keun, Gilgi 257). She now seems to be back to her old, pre-Martin self. She is once again the ambitious young woman who loves the word work, “um seiner Härte willen” (Keun, Gilgi 13). She has also regained her self-esteem and her faith in herself, telling Pit, “Ich kann ja alles mögliche […] ich bin wirklich tüchtig.” She plans to live with Olga, who also recently moved to Berlin, and asserts, “Olga wird mir helfen” (Keun, Gilgi 258). Here is yet another example of “Solidarität unter Frauen.” Gilgi will be a single mother—“the most visible affront to notions of family and dominant culture” (Kosta 282)—living with her girlfriend and working in Berlin. Through her experiences with Olga, Hertha, and her own mother, Gilgi has realized “the commonality of women’s experience” (Ankum 183).

This is not such a positive situation as it would seem, however. According to Ankum, “Single motherhood is presented as a challenging and rewarding path towards a progressive
femininity,” “rather than a deserved punishment for a woman’s loose morals, for which she has to redeem herself” (“Motherhood” 179). It is true that Gilgi’s pregnancy is part of the reason that she decides to leave Martin, which Ankum would agree was a necessary step toward regaining her sense of self. Having a child with Martin would be ruinous, for monetary reasons alone. However, it seems an overstatement to claim that her pregnancy is a “rewarding path towards a progressive femininity.” Though she claims to want the child, Gilgi hardly seems excited about it; at best she is ambivalent, at one point saying in the same thought both that she should go to the doctor today (for the abortion) and that she would like to have a child. Would Gilgi not be just as progressive—if not more so—if she had decided to have an abortion? Is that not a “visible affront to notions of family and dominant culture,” as Kosta says? Becoming a mother seems like a fairly traditional thing to do for a young woman as modern as Gilgi. Yes, she will be raising it alone, which she realizes will be challenging. However, she is more excited about the challenges and hardships themselves than about the baby that will bring them. She sees motherhood as just something to do. It is merely a big responsibility that will keep her busy and take up a lot of her time, just as an office job would. It seems that at this point Gilgi is not certain what motherhood entails, so she views it like any other job she has had. This attitude, while undeniably sachlich, does not seem to lead down “the path toward progressive femininity,” as Ankum claims.

Gilgi does have second thoughts upon arriving at the train station, but Pit does his duty and makes sure that she gets on the train. As it is pulling away, she wonders to herself, “Flucht vor der Wirklichkeit? Flucht in bessere Wirklichkeit?” She looks back at Pit, running along the train waving goodbye, “und müht sich für ihn um ein letztes, kleines Lächeln, das halb gelingt” (Keun, Gilgi 262). The reader, as Gilgi herself, is unsure of her future. Ankum states that Gilgi’s “ultimate decision to leave Martin […] rests on her still unshaken belief in the possibility of an independent female existence in a patriarchal society” (“Motherhood” 182). It is erroneous to say that her belief is unshaken; she realizes that she has not been the most independent
woman, often feeling powerless in the face of this fact. Recall her perception that she no longer belonged to herself because Martin had molded her into the woman he wanted. Also significant is her belief that it was at least partially her dependency on Martin that cost Hans’ family their lives. She seems to have been noticeably shaken, which is the most prominent reason for her move to Berlin. She hopes to escape the quagmire that her life has become and start anew in a different city. One can only hope that her newly-regained self-confidence is not delusional and that she really is mentally strong enough to undertake this huge life change, for the outlook, as her “only half-successful smile” indicates, is not necessarily promising.
We now turn our attention to another of Keun’s characters, Doris, from her second novel, Das kunstseidene Mädchen. Doris is a young woman of eighteen who decides to pursue a glamorous autonomous life in Berlin but is disillusioned by the reality she encounters in the metropolis. Her fate is still in question at the end of the novel, leaving the reader to consider whether her misguided stab at independence could have ended any other way. In this chapter I will explore Doris as a character—her hopes, her motivation, her experiences—in an effort to trace the course of this New Woman from big dreams to big disappointment. While sharing common themes, hers is a very different story from Gilgi’s, and I hope to illuminate those differences and their consequences.

A Cinematic Existence:

Und wenn ich später lese, ist alles wie Kino—ich sehe mich in Bildern.

Compared to Gilgi, Doris is a different kind of New Woman. Whereas Gilgi was independent and hard-working, Doris relies on others—mostly men—to give her what she wants. She is a very cunning young woman, but it cannot be said that she is self-reliant as Gilgi was, nor is she as analytical. Gilgi was a planner: she had clear goals and clear steps along the path to the achievement of those goals. Doris is more intuitive and less deliberate. She does not think in critical terms, but rather just seems to know the ways of the world and how to get by accordingly. For instance, in her dealings with men, she simply knows that to get what she wants from them, she must act a certain way, essentially recreating her identity on a situational basis. She does not realize the sociological or psychological reasons for this code of interaction, nor does she think critically about the epistemological issues it brings up, such as a
lack of authenticity; she just knows what works. This is not to say that she is not intelligent; she
is just analytically deficient.

One of the first things the reader learns about Doris is that she is obsessed with film and
film stars, writing early in her journal that she wants her entries to read like a movie script
because her life is like a movie. Leo A. Lensing refers to her as “a woman obviously
conditioned by the films she has seen” (129). In fact, she often has trouble separating reality
from the fictional worlds of film and advertising. For example, early in the novel she meets a
man named Armin, a name which was also used in an advertisement for laxatives. Her first
thought is that he looks like the actor Conrad Veidt. Upon learning his name, however, she has
difficulty separating him from the advertisement, and whenever she sees him she thinks to
herself, “Armin, hast du heute morgen auch Laxin genommen?” (Keun, Das kunstseidene
Mädchen 15). In another scene she directly refers to a woman on the street as “ein blondes
Kino,” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 102) revealing “the dehumanizing dimension of Doris’
preoccupation with the image of the glamorous blonde movie star” (Lensing 131). The medium
of film made great leaps forward during the Weimar Republic, with many popular films coming
from America. Doris is one of the many who became enthralled with the cinema; Lensing even
says that for her it has become “a common surrogate for dreams and introspection” (129).

Doris thinks that she personally looks like the actress Colleen Moore, a flapper girl from
the silent films of the 1920s. This is an interesting comparison since, according to Annette
Keck, Colleen Moore was not particularly beautiful. Moore herself said that her fame began with
a haircut—a pageboy—which was enough to become beautiful, rich, and famous. Keck states
that Moore’s success demonstrates that a girl no longer had to be beautiful to be desired. “Any
plain Jane could become a flapper” (Keck 221). Doris’ main goal in life is to become something
glamorous, so it is noteworthy that here she compares herself to a “plain Jane.” Doris realizes,
however, that becoming a Glanz, as she calls it, has less to do with looks and more to do with
attitude. She laments the fact that she isn’t blonde, for example, but instead focuses on the fact that she is young, fashionable, and very self-confident.

Her focus on the fictional world of movie plots and characters could be a reason why Doris does not have much concrete vision for her own life. She speaks of having ambition, but what these ambitions are is never clearly stated. Her main goal in life, which she does state early and frequently, is to become a Glanz, best translated as a “glamor girl.” But literally, Glanz means “sheen” or perhaps “sparkle”—it is immaterial. She aspires to be something inanimate. This is the dehumanizing dimension of which Lensing speaks. All Doris knows is that there are people, movie stars most publicly, who live fabulously wealthy and glamorous lives. Her greatest ambition is to become this immaterial Glanz so that she too may live fabulously, free from the physical realities of need, such as food, shelter, and companionship. Becoming an immaterial quality may seem like a fantasy, but to Doris, who perhaps realizes the difficulties of achieving material success in the modern world, it is her most serious—though nebulous—of goals.

One important factor that Doris recognizes as vital to becoming a Glanz is the proper clothing. She says proudly, “Ich bin jetzt komplett in Garderobe—eine große Hauptsache für ein Mädchen, das weiter will und Ehrgeiz hat” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 11). (Here is just one instance where she speaks of her ambition but leaves it undefined.) Whenever she thinks of something material that she needs—a new watch, for example—she can usually use her “feminine art of seduction” to get a man to buy it for her (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 165). In one case, this strategy first entails acting sweet and innocent with her date, then dropping hints, such as “Jetzt weiß ich schon wieder nicht, wie spät es ist—meine Uhr ist schon so lange kaputt” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 13). She then acts surprised the next evening when the man presents her with a new gold watch. She describes how to act when a man is talking, if one hopes to use him for personal gain later: “Ich sage da schon gar nichts mehr ein für allemal und tu, als glaube ich alles. Wenn man Glück bei Männern haben will,
muss man sich für dumm halten lassen” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 71). Though playing dumb seems to run counter to the goals of the women’s movement, to which Doris claims to be attuned, she seems unbothered by this fact. She does not analyze the reasons why women must demean themselves in front of men in order to gain attention, affection, or gifts. She simply knows that this is the way a woman must behave if she seeks to find favor with a man, and she accepts this fact at face value. She takes a very *sachlich* view of this situation, considering her acting not tragic in any sense, but just another of her life skills. One could say that she even finds this strategy empowering. She knows she is acting; the man is actually the unsuspecting fool. Thus, from one perspective, she is in control of the situation and holds all the power over the man. Of course, there is always the opposite perspective that she is doing a disservice to herself by portraying herself as less intelligent than she actually is. Some would call it a shame that a woman would have to “stoop” to get the attention of a man. These perspectives don’t really matter to Doris, however, who simply does not think in these terms. Some women, like Gilgi, work and save to get ahead; Doris merely has a different technique.

This method is by no means foolproof, however. In one scene, Doris’ strategy of using her feminine charms to get what she wants is actually too effective. She is at work, typing a letter, but she desperately wants to leave. She does not know where to place the commas in the letter, so she places none. As her boss is reading over her work, Doris gives him a look “wie Marlene Dietrich so mit Klappaugen-Marke: husch ins Bett” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 23) and then uses her body to further distract him so that he will ignore her typing mistakes: “Und [er] malt immer mehr Kommas und streicht und verbessert, und will auf einmal bei einem Brief sagen: der muss nochmal geschrieben werden. Aber bei ‘nochmal’ gebe ich mit meinem Busen einen Druck gegen seine Schulter, und wie er aufguckt, zittre ich noch für alle Fälle wild mit den Nasenflügeln…” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 24). This sexual harassment on Doris’ part does not turn her boss into putty as she had hoped. Instead, he
grabs her and tries to take her over to the sofa, saying, “Kind, verstell dich doch nicht, ich weiß
doch seit lange, wie es mit dir steht und wie dein Blut nach mir drängt” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene
Mädchen* 24). She breaks free by kicking him in the shins and then tells him that she is sick of
him and is quitting. She was lucky this time, but this situation could easily have ended in battery
or rape. This is just the first instance where Keun shows “the illusory nature” of Doris’ strategy.
Doris seems blind to the fact that she must perform this act—feigning attraction—to get what
she wants because “the patriarchal economic structures have remained intact” (Ankum,
“Gendered Urban Spaces” 169). I will discuss this further when Doris comes to this realization.

Pragmatic Sexuality:

*Und dabei gibt es Millionen Gründe für ein Mädchen, bei einem Mann zu schlafen.*

*Und ist alles nicht so wichtig.*

Though both are considered New Women, Doris and Gilgi are very different characters.
Gilgi, as we have learned, loves to work, lives to better herself, and cannot stand people (such
as Doris) who are focused on material possessions and who don’t want to work. For Gilgi, a girl
“das weiter will und Ehrgeiz hat” needs much more than a complete wardrobe. In terms of men,
Gilgi is (at least in the beginning) straightforward in her relationships, whereas Doris is
underhanded and manipulative. One point on which the two women share common views is
sex. Gilgi, like Eva Berg, took a very *sachlich*, playful attitude toward sex. Doris agrees that
there are “Millionen Gründe” besides love for a woman to sleep with a man, and Doris seems to
be even more matter-of-fact in this regard than Gilgi or Eva. For instance, she relates a story in
which she decided to sleep with someone simply because she was tired and did not want to
walk all the way home. She also admits that sometimes she sleeps with men for money or for
the gifts they will give her. As previously mentioned, this system of trading sex for gifts does not
seem wrong to Doris, even though she is essentially using her body as a commodity for trade.
This is not such an outlandish idea as it may seem, however. As discussed in regard to Gilgi, it
was a trend in popular culture of the time to reduce women’s bodies to their individual parts—faces, legs, torsos, etc.—to better sell a product or even to better study women’s behavior. Women were used so often in advertising that the bodies themselves could be considered a kind of commodity to be bought and sold in the form of modeling work. Doris seems to have internalized this new view of the female body and uses it to her advantage, considering her body a resource. It is a tool that belongs to her, so she uses it to get what she wants.

Though she may at times act ignorant, Doris is increasingly aware of what is going on around her. She realizes that her lifestyle of parties and indiscriminate sex is frowned upon by bourgeois society: she is not fulfilling her duty as a German woman to have children, and she is contributing to moral decay. Doris, however, recognizes the contradictions and hypocrisy in this bourgeois morality: “Wenn eine junge Frau mit Geld einen alten Mann heiratet wegen Geld und nichts sonst und schläft mit ihm stundenlang 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“ (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 85).

She also recognizes that women are not asexual, as much of society of the time would like to portray them. A major goal of the Sex Reform and abortion rights movements was to separate sexuality from procreation, thus emphasizing the fact that women enjoy sex for reasons other than because it can lead to children. Women are not just sexual objects of men, but rather they are active sexual subjects with their own sexual wants and needs. In fact, according to Doris, women are just as sexual as men: “Tilli sagt: Männer sind nichts als sinnlich und wollen nur das. Aber ich sage: Tilli, Frauen sind auch manchmal sinnlich und wollen auch manchmal nur das” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 99). Doris’ “image of herself as a modern, emancipated woman prompts her to lay claim to the same sexual freedoms that have always been granted men” (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 173). Doris is able to use her sexuality to her advantage because she is in control of it (though, as we saw
in the instance with her boss, she is not always in control of the outcome). In one instance, for example, she uses seven safety pins to attach her bra to her shirt in order to rein in her sex drive and reinforce to herself that she should not sleep with her date that night. “Ich war mächtig blau,” she says, “wie achtzig nackte Wilde—aber die rostigen Sicherheitsnadeln vergass ich nicht” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 12).

One of the most intimate relationships Doris maintains over the course of the novel is not with a man but with a stolen fur coat. “Es sah nach Trost aus und Allerheiligen und nach hoher Sicherheit wie im Himmel,” she says of the coat (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 61). She tries it on and immediately feels a “trauriges Gewissen, als wenn eine Mutter ihr Kind nicht will, weil es häßlich ist” toward her own, now seemingly shabby, coat. She decides immediately to take the coat, telling herself she will bring it back, but knowing that she never will. She speaks more romantically about the coat than about any other person or thing in the novel: “Und der Pelz war für meine Haut wie ein Magnet, und sie liebte ihn, und was man liebt, gibt man nicht mehr her, wenn man es mal hat” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 62). She speaks of the coat as if it were her lover: “Der ist wie ein seltener Mann, der mich schön macht durch Liebe.” The coat, which “confers the aura of fabulous wealth and film stardom” (Lensing 131), makes her feel “hochelegant,” and she realizes that it is a critical piece of clothing for her if she is to become a Glanz. “Der Mantel will mich, und ich will ihn, wir haben uns,” she says, and leaves for Berlin shortly thereafter (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 64). In Berlin, however, the coat implies more that just wealth and fame.

The Streets of the Metropolis:

Auf dem Kurfürstendamm sind viele Frauen. Die gehen nur.

In the metropolis of Berlin, Doris’ coat is not just a beautiful fur, it is a “second skin” that Doris creates for herself, from which she draws her identity as an aspiring Glanz ( Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 162). It also, however, causes her to be mistaken for a prostitute.
As Ankum states, “The unmarried working woman or the woman who appeared alone in public was immediately labeled with a reputation for being sexually available” (“Gendered Urban Spaces” 166). Meskimmon elaborates: “All women in public suffered the lewd stares and approaches of men who assumed them to be available merely because they were outside the domestic sphere” (29). Men could walk around the city “unmolested and without purpose,” but a woman who did the same was perceived as a streetwalker (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 168). Therefore, a woman generally stayed off the streets unless in the company of a male, who would legitimize her presence in the public sphere. The fact that Doris dares to walk outside alone, combined with her extravagant fur coat leads men to assume she is something she is not: “Und gestern war ich mit einem Mann, was mich ansprach und für was hielt, was ich doch nicht bin” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 144). The coat has become “a costly but impenetrable shell that heightens her exchange value and also makes her outwardly recognizable as a commodity” (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 162). In fact, writes Meskimmon, “the sheer commodification of ‘woman’ was [Berlin’s] most noted feature” (28).

The spread of prostitution was an issue of growing importance during this period. The majority of women who became prostitutes—usually out of economic need—came from the ranks of servant girls, waitresses, sales clerks, and seasonal workers, many of whom had moved from rural areas to the city in search of employment. “Prostitution,” writes Ankum, “was thus a concrete result of forced industrialization and urbanization” (“Gendered Urban Spaces” 165). She continues, “The trade in young women was understood as an unavoidable side effect of modernity, resulting from ‘the general market quality of the modern man of culture,’ embodied in its most extreme form by woman” (“Gendered Urban Spaces” 171). Furthermore, distinctions between prostitutes and “other women” were increasingly difficult to draw, especially considering women like Doris who, while not making a career of it, still occasionally slept with men for monetary gain, especially in times of financial crisis. The commodification of sex and
women was ubiquitous. Even Doris begins to think of women as objects, comparing one man’s estranged wife to a piece of furniture that can be easily replaced.

Though the selling of one’s body was considered degrading by much of bourgeois society, it was often the only chance women had to make money independently. If a woman was employed as an office worker, she was at the mercy of her (usually male) boss, and she had virtually no chance of promotion, a situation which Gilgi also faced. Though she may have earned her own money, she was still controlled by men, who held all the economic power. If she became a prostitute, however, she would be essentially running her own business; she would be her own boss. In a world where economic opportunities for women are simply not present, it is easy to see why so many women would turn to prostitution as a career.

One of these women in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* is Hulla. Hulla lives in the same building as Doris, and when Doris first meets her, she has been beaten half to death by Rannowsky, a local pimp. She turned him in to the police, and he is now serving a jail sentence, all the while writing her threatening letters and demanding that she take care of his pet fish. When Hulla speaks to Doris, Doris is unsure what to make of her and her situation: “Es war mir doch eine furchtbar fremde Unterwelt […] Aus Angst war ich freundlich” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 121). Compared to Hulla, Doris feels like a *Glanz*; she feels superior to this woman who sells herself. The next time Hulla is mentioned in the novel, she is already dead. Hulla had gone to a doctor, who told her that her face would never completely heal from Rannowsky’s beating. This damage to her body is also damage to her business. She tells Doris how she was with a man from whom she wanted three Marks, but he would only give her two and a half because of her disfigured face. This permanent decrease in her market value infuriates Hulla, who promptly returns home and exacts her revenge on Rannowsky’s favorite goldfish. She then runs down the stairs with the dead fish, screaming for Doris, having realized that Rannowsky will probably kill her when he learns his fish is dead. The two women cry together and comfort each other: “Etwas ist sehr streng mit uns, dass es macht, dass passiert,
was wir gelogen haben zu wollen und gar nicht wollen. Wir haben geweint um das Tier. Wir haben eine Zigarette geraucht und wieder geweint um das Tier“ (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 129-130).

This scene is an important one for Doris. Her commiseration with Hulla, the sharing of cigarettes and the sharing of misery, places the women on the same level. Doris cries with and for Hulla as if she herself were in trouble. Needless to say, they are not crying about only the fish. They are crying about the fish in the sense that when Rannowsky learns what has happened to it, he will probably want to kill Hulla. But an issue more important than the fish is that this fear and dread are simply two aspects of daily life for Hulla, due to the inherent danger in her profession, and to an extent for Doris as well, who often does not know where her next meal will come from. The two women, though perhaps without realizing it, are sharing in this moment their sense of desperation. They are crying over what has become of their own lives—Hulla a battered prostitute and Doris not much better, relying on gifts from men to survive. Doris no longer feels superior to Hulla as she once had, and there is a sense of solidarity between them. Their differences are no longer as important as their common experiences as struggling women in the metropolis. Doris sees Hulla as her equal and even as a better person than most. “Kein Mensch darf Schlechtes über die Hulla sagen,” Doris will say later (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 136).

Earlier in the novel Doris experiences a sense of solidarity with her mother as well. She writes in her diary: “Liebe Mutter, du hast ein schönes Gesicht gehabt […] du bist arm gewesen, wie ich arm bin, du hast mit Männern geschlafen, weil du sie mochtest, oder weil du Geld brauchtest—das tue ich auch. Wenn man mich schimpft, schimpft man dich“ (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 86). This solidarity is different from the solidarity of the organized women’s movement, for example, in that Doris does not recognize it in explicit terms. Even though she claims to be interested in the women’s movement, one gets the impression that she actually doesn’t know much about it. She perhaps thinks that being a woman, especially a
young, modern woman, automatically makes her part of the movement. It is doubtful that Doris thinks about “the movement” or this “solidarity” as having political implications; she merely recognizes that there are other women, such as her mother and Hulla, with whom she has common experiences. The solidarity she feels is more personalized. When she makes a connection with her mother or with Hulla, she doesn’t necessarily see it as a connection to all other women. Her actions to help or relate to specific women are localized; it is not as if she is fighting for all women all over the country, as the organized movement was attempting. This is another example of Doris intuitively knowing that she is part of a community without actually thinking about it in critical terms.

Unfortunately, Doris and Hulla are right to be despondent and afraid. Doris leaves Hulla briefly to get some Cognac. Upon returning she finds that Rannowsky is back and that Hulla has jumped out the window to her death rather than face his wrath. Doris thinks about her often after her death, at one point writing, “Ich wünsche ihr wirklich einen Himmel, in dem das Gute in ihren Augen Verwendung findet. Und wenn sie ein Engel ist, dann soll sie Flügel haben ohne Leukoplast geklebt” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 136). It is interesting that in the face of this difficult situation Doris speaks in such traditional terms, though there is little else traditional about her life. Evoking traditional Christian imagery such as heaven and angels, as well as harkening back to themes of the sentimental novel and the bourgeois tragedy, such as “the good in people’s eyes,” is a strange move for the otherwise very modern and sachlich Doris. This could imply that Doris is not really as modern as she seems to be. When the reality of modernity becomes overwhelming, such as when Hulla is, for all intents and purposes, killed by her pimp, the New-Woman-ness of Doris melts away and the traditionalist in her comes through. A tradition is, by definition, a long-standing practice, and Doris sometimes finds comfort in more well-established, seemingly safer ways of thinking and acting. We shall see later that in the face of another very difficult situation, she again falls back on tradition, this time even more uncharacteristically.
fallback positions:

Es ist nämlich so schwer draußen.

Doris moves from her middle-sized hometown to Berlin literally overnight, her one goal being to become a Glanz. She dreams of starring in films and becoming rich and famous. Over and over, however, these “expectations aroused by cinematic images prove to be inappropriate and misleading” (Lensing 130). For example, Doris does audition for films and theater, but she finds quickly that “das bietet wenig Aussicht” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 78). She thinks to herself, “Also ich könnte noch Film versuchen. Dann kann ich mich ins Film-Kaffee setzen von morgens bis abends, jahrelang. Eines Tages entdecken sie mich für Statisterie zu machen als verhungerte Leiche. Dreckbande” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 132). Now realizing the improbability of being discovered as an actress, she allows herself to be discovered by men.

She becomes somewhat of an escort, meeting various men in bars and restaurants for drinks or dinner or possibly more. It is through these men that she acquires clothing, food, and money. Having failed in her own attempts to find employment, she comes to the conclusion that “social betterment”—or even survival—“can only be achieved through connection to a man.” She makes a living out of being “the lover, the mistress, who is showered by the man who keeps her with transitory fashionable objects” (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 177). Some days she is only able to eat because a man invites her to a restaurant and pays for her. On another specific occasion she is angered by a man who keeps buying her drinks when what she really needs is dinner.

These relationships provide her with little else besides some money and gifts, however. For example, after getting caught up in a political protest on the street, she for the first time feels “der Wunsch nach politischer Aufklärung” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 73). This seems that it could be a crucial juncture for her—she actually feels the need to think analytically about something. She seeks counsel almost immediately. She is having coffee with one of her
random men and asks him for information: “Ich fragte den dunkelblauen Verheirateten, warum die Staatsmännischen gekommen sind? Darauf erzählte er mir: seine Frau wäre fünf Jahre älter als er. Ich fragte ihn, warum man nach Frieden schreit, wo doch Frieden ist oder wenigstens kein Krieg. Antwortet er mir: ich hätte Augen wie Brombeeren” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 73). It seems that her strategy of playing dumb to attract men has caused this man not to take her questions seriously. Furthermore, his unhelpful responses to her inquiries suggest his true perception of her. He views her purpose as that of physical entertainment and not intellectual stimulation—in short, he is not with her to talk politics. That a young woman such as Doris is automatically assumed to be a sex object illustrates the tendency of the “bourgeois man” to view a woman who lacks “the moral protection and financial security of a family or husband” as hardly different from a prostitute (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 173). What is perhaps even worse is that Doris’ attempt to gain critical insight into the world around her fails, and the burning desire for knowledge proves fleeting, as she never broaches the subject again.

In only her second diary entry since arriving in Berlin, she admits how unhappy and exhausted she is already: “Ich bin in einem Kaffee—da ist Geigenmusik, die weht weinerliche Wolken in mein Gehirn—etwas weint in mir—ich habe eine Lust, mein Gesicht in meine Hände zu tauchen, damit es nicht so traurig ist. Es muss sich soviel Mühe geben, weil ich ein Glanz werden will. Es strengt sich ungeheuer an—und überall sitzen Frauen, von denen die Gesichter sich anstrengen” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 81). This passage also points to the common experience of women. Doris, on the verge of weeping in public, looks around to see numerous other women whose faces also look like they are under immense emotional strain. These women are all finding out, in the words of Ernst’s wife Hanne, who has shared the feelings and experiences of women like Doris, that “es ist nämlich so schwer draußen” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 213). For now, however, Doris tries to see the good in her situation, pathetic as it already is, saying that it is good that she is unhappy “denn wenn man
glücklich ist, kommt man nicht weiter” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 81). She intends to use her unhappiness as motivation, though it is still unclear what she hopes to accomplish (probably even to Doris herself).

Motivation and unfocused ambition mean nothing, however, if one is struggling merely to survive. “Wir haben gar kein Geld, Tilli und ich,” Doris says of her and her roommate, “Wir liegen im Bett wegen Hunger.” Despite this destitution, Doris keeps her vague goal in mind: “Ein Glanz will ich werden” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 89). After a falling out with Tilli, she leaves her apartment and becomes homeless. She begins living with the men who pick her up. For a short while she lives with a man named Lippi Wiesel, for example, whom she admits she does not really like. She stays there simply so she has a roof over her head and so she isn’t alone. She reaches her breaking point on Christmas Eve when a slovenly drunk man calls himself her Christmas present. She packs her things into her one suitcase, grabs her fur coat, and leaves. That night she sleeps on a bench, “das kann ja keiner verstehn, der’s nicht erlebt hat” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 139). This visceral experience has effectively shattered her fantasy of a cinematization of existence.

She is now completely homeless and spends a lot of her time in the waiting room of the zoo train station. She captures her hopelessness in her journal entries: “Ich schreibe, weil meine Hand was tun will und mein Heft mit den weißen Seiten und Linien ein Bereitsein hat, meine Gedanken und mein Müdes aufzunehmen und ein Bett zu sein, in dem meine Buchstaben dann liegen, wodurch wenigstens etwas vor mir ein Bett hat” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 143). Her hand, which she segments from the rest of her body (a theme in *Gilgi* as well), seems to be the only part of her with any life left in it. Men on the street continually mistake her for a prostitute, and she begins to wonder if there really is any difference now, even looking in her mirror to see if she looks like a whore. She continues going on dates with men, and sometimes she gets to sleep in a bed. More often, however, she is on her own, and at one particularly low point she sleeps in a parked taxi for a few hours. When she sleeps
she dreams that she is eating. In midst of this wretched existence there are two glimmers of hope, two instances where she seems to have a chance for stability, purpose, and peace. The first of these is Herr Brenner.

Herr Brenner is a married man who was blinded in the war. He lives downstairs from Doris (where she lived with Tilli), and when Frau Brenner is away, Doris likes to visit him. Providing him with company gives her something meaningful to do, especially considering that his only other companionship is his smothering, abusive wife. Doris “collects sights” for him, meaning that she describes to him in vivid detail everything she has seen in the city that day. This is an especially exciting occupation for Doris, since she finally gets to do something cinematic—she is the director of a film about Berlin, created especially for Brenner. She finally gets to explain the world from her perspective, as a film director does. He is reliant on her picture of the city; all his impressions of Berlin come from her. This task gives Doris purpose and direction: “Und da lebe ich in Berlin für mich erstens und dann für den Brenner” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 99). Through her descriptions they share one reality, and even though this particular reality may only exist in the minds of Doris and Brenner, this shared experience draws them ever closer to each other.

Their meetings become more frequent and more intimate, though not sexual. Doris derives great pleasure from sitting on the kitchen table in front of him, her feet on his knees, his hands on her feet, and telling him all about her day. “[Ich] liebe manchmal seine Hände um meine Füße. Wann hatte denn wohl jemals bei mir ein Mann Hände, die genau gewusst haben, wenn es mir nicht passte, dass sie sich bewegten?” she says of him (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 100). This passage illustrates their corporal synchronization, which, though Doris has had many physical relationships, she has never experienced before. Never has a man known when and how to touch her exactly the way she wants to be touched, and that Brenner possesses this knowledge is exhilarating to her. When this man gives Doris a present—a
necklace of pearls—she is moved to tears. She begins to feel that “das größte Geschenk ist von einem Mann, gut sein dürfen zu ihm” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 112).

Another reason that this relationship is so fulfilling for Doris is that for once she is with a man who cannot appreciate her for her beauty or her body, but only for the other parts of her that are often ignored. Since he cannot see her, she is free from objectification and the scrutiny of the “male gaze.” The reader realizes the extent to which Doris “is alienated from herself and has internalized the male gaze” when Brenner asks her to describe what she looks like (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 177). Doris says that she wants to look at herself from the outside and not simply repeat what men have told her about her body. But when she steps outside herself to take a sober look, she becomes a man in her mind: “Und denke mir: Doris ist jetzt ein enormer Mann mit einer Klugheit und sieht auf Doris und sagt so wie ein medizinischer Arzt: ‘Also liebes Kind, Sie haben eine sehr schöne Figur, aber ein bisschen spillrig, das ist gerade modern [...]’” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 97). The experience of being constantly objectified and defined as a person by men (such as often being defined as a prostitute) has affected her in such a way that even in relation to her own body she struggles to find a female—or even a personal—perspective. Brenner’s definition of her is different from that of any other previous man, surely a factor which allows them to have as intimate a relationship as they do. Sadly for the both of them, Brenner’s wife eventually decides that she can no longer take care of Brenner and puts him in a home. Doris’ one experience of honest, unadulterated, authentic intimacy has come to a disappointing end.

The second man who provides a more permanent home and occupation for Doris is Ernst. Ernst picks Doris up at a New Year’s Eve party and takes her home with him. She assumes he wants to sleep with her—and she wants ten Marks for it. She looks at herself in the mirror and is disgusted. She had once said that “nackt und allein vorm Spiegel findet sich jedes Mädchen schön” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 98), but now, in a brutal, explicit expression of the total transformation of her body into a commodity, she says, “Wenn ich noch
länger in’ Spiegel seh, geh ich im Preis runter” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 158). She is starting to think of herself in terms of market value, as Hulla once did. She has started to think of herself as a prostitute. Therefore, she is understandably puzzled when he presents her with a separate bed.

Ernst is not looking for sex, only company. His wife has left him, and he says he is afraid to come home to an empty house. Doris does not understand his despair, however: “Hat da ’ne Wohnung mit Korkteppich, drei Zimmer mit Bad, einen Gummibaum und ein Diwan so breit mit seidiger Decke und so feine stahlene Zahnarztlampen—hat er alles, und heult in seinem Bauch über ’ne ausgerückte Frau. Gibt doch so viele” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 157). At this point in her life—homeless, starving (she says she weighs a mere 97 pounds)—the home and furnishings seem more important to Doris than any woman, who, being that she thinks of women’s bodies as commodities, she considers replaceable. There is a surplus of women wandering around Berlin, and he could have his pick of any one of them. This is essentially what Ernst has done—chosen one of the many homeless women in Berlin, namely Doris—and he now intends to use her as a replacement for his wife. She accepts his strange offer but continues to be puzzled as to why he does not want to sleep with her: “Ob ich so hässlich bin, dass er mich nicht will?” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 163). She has lost her confidence and become embittered. But being Ernst’s surrogate wife gives her purpose again.

Doris takes care of things around the house while Ernst is at work. She does the grocery shopping, makes the beds, cleans up the apartment, and cooks dinner—everything a wife does. Her new role legitimizes her presence on the street—she must run errands—and she is immensely proud of this fact. She can once again scoff at men who think she is a prostitute because now she feels more certain that she is not one. In one instance, after leaving a lively conversation with the grocer, who even calls her “gnädige Frau,” she is accosted by a man but is able to dismiss him immediately: “Sie irren sich ganz enorm in mir,’ sag ich. Kein
Wort mehr. Mit einer fürstlichen Handbewegung schneid ich alles weitere ab” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 175). Here again we see Doris fall back on traditional gender roles when her life becomes too gritty and real. She never aspired to be a wife, but as she has been traumatized by the modernity of the metropolis, a domestic life now seems like an idyllic alternative.

Problems first arise in this arrangement when Ernst one day announces that they are going to send Doris’ fur coat back to its rightful owner and then find her a job. These plans are unacceptable to her. She tries to explain, “Lieber Herr Ernst, ich will nicht arbeiten, ich will nicht—bitte, ich will die Gardinen waschen und die Teppiche klopfen, ich will unsre Schuhe putzen und den Fußboden und kochen [...] Ich will alles tun, aber arbeiten will ich nicht“ (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 183-184). In the words of Ankum, “Doris refuses to be enlisted in the alienating labor process of modern society that does not even offer her the economic independence necessary to indemnify herself for the monotony of everyday life through participation in the culture of distraction“ (“Gendered Urban Spaces” 175). Doris is more comfortable with subjugation as a housewife than with alienation in a job outside the house. Though one could argue that she is already fairly alienated from herself, being that she has become the very opposite of what she intended to be, her subjugation at least affords her a stable existence, one in which she enjoys respect and pride, not to mention food and shelter, and she is therefore not willing to give it up. Unlike Eva Berg, who was able to successfully make the leap from young rebel to mature activist, Doris unable or simply unwilling to make the leap from housewife back to worker. She sums up her opinion on the matter in simple terms: “Feh, du bleibst” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 186).

The newly-won freedoms of New Women like Doris ultimately mean little in the face of ever-present patriarchal economic structures, as Doris gradually learns. A woman has no freedom at all if not economic freedom. Doris finds that she can only get so far by batting her
eyelashes and playing dumb around men; this strategy, by which she once swore, now seems like a ridiculous game. In living with Ernst and becoming his pseudo-wife, Doris admits defeat and retreats from the streets of the metropolis and the “unstable existence of the New Woman” into the safe haven of a bourgeois home life. She has given up the struggle for emancipation and undertaken “the futile attempt to fit into a traditional, male-defined woman’s life pattern” (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 179). Ernst’s suggestion that she sell her coat and get a job is an insult to her experience. First of all, she already has a job: taking care of the home and Ernst. Ernst’s suggestion insinuates that housework is not real work, doing a disservice to women everywhere who work in the home, Doris now included. Secondly, having realized the limitations of her professional mobility as a female and knowing that she will probably never make enough money to even support herself, she is not willing to once again subordinate herself to a male boss and endure the discrimination and sexual harassment that comes with employment. She would rather stay a housewife where at least she has respect, a home, and a sense of security.

Her fur coat is the last thing she has left that reminds her that she once had dreams, ambitions, and confidence. It inspired her from the beginning, and she feels attached to the coat as if it were a person: “Es geht um den Feh. Den habe ich gestohlen. Aber jetzt liebe ich ihn—und so genau wie der Ernst seine Frau liebt. Da hat mein Feh so weiche Haare, da hat er mit mir Ereignisse erlebt und sehr Schwieriges manchmal, und da haben wir auch so kleine Gemeinsamkeiten und alles“ (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 195). Her coat is what is left of the Doris who still dreamed of becoming a Glanz, and at this point she is not quite willing to give that up. Though this is her only lasting relationship, however, the above quote illustrates that she still cannot thoroughly describe it. She speaks in vague terms, underscoring once again her inability or at least her disinclination to analyze her situations and feelings.

Despite the security he provides, she leaves Ernst after he calls her by his wife’s name during sex. On her own once more, Doris heads for the waiting room in the zoo train station.
“Vielleicht nehme ich mir das Leben,” she writes, “Aber ich glaube nicht. Ich bin ja auch viel zu müde für Selbstmord und mag ja auch gar nichts mit mir tun mehr” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 208). Her life seemingly in ruins, she weighs her options, the only two of which seem to be to either try to get back in touch with a man, Karl, who once offered to let her stay with him or to officially become a prostitute. Work is still out of the question: “Wenn [Karl] mich nicht will—arbeiten tu ich nicht, dann geh ich lieber auf die Tauentzien [a focal point of prostitution in central Berlin] und werde ein Glanz” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 218). Her efforts to live a modern existence in a big city proved disastrous, yet her attempt to live a traditional life ended badly as well. She has not yet discovered a successful way to live, suggesting that perhaps success is not an option. Her last thoughts bring into question “the possibility of female self-realization in the rationally and functionally determined society of modernity” (Ankum, “Gendered Urban Spaces” 180)—if there is even hope that a New Woman can make it in the modern world of Weimar: “Aber ich kann ja dann auch eine Hulla werden—und wenn ich ein Glanz werde, dann bin ich vielleicht noch schlechter als eine Hulla, die ja gut war. Auf den Glanz kommt es nämlich vielleicht gar nicht so furchtbar an” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 219). Doris has here the beginnings of an analytical thought: it seems that one cannot become autonomous in today’s society, just as one cannot physically become a Glanz.
Though these four works come from two very different authors—different motivations, different political outlooks, different sexes—there are significant similarities between the four main characters and their situations. The themes most important to my studies are that of emancipation and autonomy: how, if at all, do these women achieve and experience emancipation and independence? Toller’s two characters, The Woman and Eva Berg, trace the upward trajectory of the New Woman—the journey to the top. At the beginnings of their stories they are less than autonomous. The Woman, for example, exhibits many traditionally feminine characteristics, particularly in relation to her controlling husband. By the end of the drama, however, she is able to break from her traditional role as a wife, sever herself from the men who would hold her back, and declare herself an independent person (unfortunately only shortly before her death). She is not cut from the cloth of the pop-culture New Woman icon, which has yet to emerge, but she can be seen as a proto-New Woman. Her development is one that many women have to go through: from yielding to and following men to asserting herself and standing on her own. Eva Berg is far from autonomous at the beginning of her story as well. We at first meet a young, frightened, dependent woman who relies heavily on Karl, her boyfriend, in order to cope with the harsh realities of imprisonment. Eight years later, she has transformed herself into a New Woman who lives to work and is politically active and sexually liberated. As with The Woman, it is the struggle for enlightenment and emancipation itself that molds Eva into a New Woman, and the reader is able to see the steps along the way, or at least, in Eva’s case, the before and after pictures.

Keun’s characters, on the other hand, start in a position of strength and independence—at least in their own minds—and trace the descent into disillusionment and disappointment. In her view, Gilgi is near the top of her game when the novel opens, already living the life of a New
Woman to a large extent. She is independent, employed, and constantly seeking to better herself, both personally and professionally. Gilgi has great plans for her life and knows exactly what she needs to do to achieve her goals. Unfortunately, starting from this high point, she can only go down. We witness with Gilgi the breakdown of the New Woman persona as one particular man gains more and more importance in her life. We see her abandon her self-improvement efforts and limit herself to a life of unemployment and boredom. By the end of her story, Gilgi does start to get her life back on track, leaving behind the relationship that was keeping her from her original ambitions and setting out to start a new life in a different city as a single mother. One gets the feeling, however, that the damage has been done, and Gilgi must now re-transform herself. Contrary to what Ankum writes, Gilgi’s belief in “the possibility of an independent female existence” has been deeply shaken (“Motherhood” 182). Whereas at the beginning of the novel she felt that she could accomplish anything with hard work and dedication, she learns over time that this is not the case. She learns through Hans and Hertha’s example that even good people who work hard sometimes do not make it. Success is not guaranteed merely because one is dedicated; there are many social hindrances that Gilgi never considered. Furthermore, she has seen that she is not a tower of strength as she once thought; in fact, she can be quite vulnerable at times. When she lets this vulnerability get out of control, she can become a strange, ugly person. This troubling and discouraging knowledge in mind, she must now start over from square one, as The Woman and Eva did, and endure the long struggle for emancipation and autonomy all over again.

One could also say, however, that Gilgi was never very autonomous to begin with. She is independent in that she does enjoy a significant amount of social freedom—her own job, her own studies, her own small apartment—and she is an independent thinker with her own plan for her life. However, she still lives with her parents at the beginning of the novel. As discussed in regard to Das kunstseidene Mädchen, economic emancipation is the key to all other forms of emancipation. Even though Gilgi has her own income and even rents a room of her own, she is
not fully economically independent at the novel’s onset. When she does eventually move out of her parents’ house, she moves in with Martin and is thus still not completely independent. This raises the question of the very nature of independence in modern society. It would seem that one can never be truly independent. Gilgi depends first on her parents, later on Martin, then on Pit, then finally on Olga to help her establish herself in Berlin. As Gilgi learns throughout the course of the novel, people generally have no choice but to rely on each other; complete independence is simply not possible in today’s world.

Doris starts at the top in her mind as well. She has big dreams but, unlike Gilgi, no clear plan as to how to achieve them. Nevertheless, she is headstrong and independent and moves to Berlin to pursue her life as a liberated woman. Unfortunately, however, the images in movies and the media icon of the New Woman are not all they’re cracked up to be. By the end of the novel she finds herself homeless with seemingly only two options—find another man to take her in or become a prostitute—neither of which is especially appealing. Like Gilgi, she is faced with a life that she never expected to have as an “independent” New Woman, and her disillusionment at the end of the novel asks the reader to consider if an emancipated, autonomous existence is even attainable. For Doris, at least, the answer seems to be no.

Thus the outcomes of Toller’s characters seem to be more encouraging, while the outcomes for Keun’s are more pessimistic. These two trends represent two conflicting points of view during the Weimar Republic. On the one hand, women had gained significant political and economic rights under the Weimar constitution, such as the right to vote and the right to equal pay for equal work. Young women were increasingly more visible in the workplace, and some of them were able to achieve the economic means necessary to be able to live independently. Eva Berg, for example, was one of these women who benefited from the political and economic changes of the time and who was able to create—through years of hard work—an independent New Woman life for herself. After all, the New Woman icon didn’t spring from nothing. It was based on a new type of real woman who did live in a big city, was interested in popular culture,
did have a social life, voted, and earned their own wages. These authors maintain that New
Women “were more than a bohemian minority or an artistic convention. They existed in office
and factory, bedroom and kitchen, just as surely as—and more significantly than—in café and
cabaret” (11).

The New Woman image obscured the fact that many women were never able to achieve
the economic freedom required in order to live such an autonomous lifestyle. Germany in the
late 1920s and early 1930s was in the middle of a great depression, unemployment rates were
extremely high, money was increasingly scarce, and many people were struggling simply to
survive. In addition, women were faced with the “forced rationalization of [their] existence, as
well as unchanged discrimination against the female workforce” (Ankum, “Gendered Urban
Spaces” 179). As Doris finds out, conditions such as these made it nearly impossible for the
majority of women to enjoy the new social, economic, and sexual freedoms that they
supposedly now had. For most women, the New Woman icon was just a myth, an unrealizable
fantasy figure.

Considering this, one could say that Keun is not pessimistic, but merely authentic.
Realizing that many women—or men, for that matter—would never be able to live an
emancipated, autonomous life, she chose to write realistic, though depressing, endings to these
two novels, ones in which the heroine does not necessarily succeed. Compare this to an author
such as Vicki Baum, whose character Helene Willfüer ends up becoming a successful chemist,
discovering a youth serum, and marrying her former professor, who is not bothered by the fact
that she already has an illegitimate child that she has successfully raised alone. Happy endings
like these make for an entertaining read, but they don’t paint a very true picture of a typical
woman’s life in the late days of the Weimar Republic.

Keun’s outlook was not completely negative, however. She does provide us with
characters who take a modern view of women in the workplace and the meaning of sex, for
example. The image of Gilgi, in particular, typing away at work or studying her languages at
night reinforces the idea of the New Woman. There were women who were career-driven and sought to support themselves. Keun’s works also undermine the New Woman icon, however, showing her faults and failures just as often as her qualities and successes. Doris is a character who we see fail far more often than she succeeds, suggesting that maintaining the life of the New Woman icon is impossible. This double-sided, realistic portrayal of struggling young women made her books more authentic to women readers, who probably experienced many of the hardships of Keun’s characters.

I would stop short of saying that *Masse Mensch* and *Hoppla, wir leben!* were meant to be encouraging works. In *Masse Mensch* The Woman is executed; in *Hoppla* the lead male character Karl Thomas, unable to cope with the modern world, kills himself. While these are not necessarily happy endings, the women in these dramas are highlighted as examples of hope. The Woman, through trial and tragedy, is able to gain enlightenment in the end; Eva Berg consistently demonstrates her strength under fire and her ability to push forward instead of lingering on the past. Being that death and redemption were themes of Expressionist works, it is not surprising that *Masse Mensch* ends in death. With *Hoppla*, on the other hand, Toller uses death to signal that he has moved past Expressionism. Putting these ideas to rest, however, entailed abandoning the idea of literature as an inspirational catalyst. The *Neue Sachlichkeit* was not about unrealistic, uplifting endings for inspiration’s sake. It was about sober realism and accepting that not all stories end happily, as Karl Thomas’ certainly did not. This may have been a tough admission for Toller to make as a political writer and activist, but it was a necessary step toward embracing the future and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Despite these differences in basic perspective, Toller’s and Keun’s characters have much in common. The Woman and Gilgi, for example, both find themselves in constricting, oppressive relationships. The Woman’s husband constantly tries to control her actions, even forbidding her to participate in the political rally. When she is arrested, he is more worried that
his name is being dragged through the mud than about the fact that his wife is in prison. He does not share her political views and does all he can to hinder her progress throughout the drama. In the end, she tells him that even though she loves him, she has “overcome him,” meaning that she no longer needs his support and no longer seeks his approval. She has an awakening, sadly just before her death, that she must not compromise her beliefs in the face of adversity or for the sake of diffusing a tense situation. She has also severed herself from the influence of The Nameless One, summoning the personal strength to stand up to him in the end. She has freed herself from the men who would hinder her progress, both as an activist and as a humanist.

Gilgi, similarly, becomes very dependent on Martin and his image of her. At first the relationship seems under her control, but we quickly see that his influence over her is great. Gilgi, who loves to work, now finds herself with a man who wants her to stay home. She ceases her studies, becomes unemployed, and begins to concern herself more with outward appearances than with internal personal betterment. Her dreams of being self-reliant and independent fall by the wayside as she becomes more and more involved with Martin. She realizes after speaking with Hertha that the road she is travelling leads to perpetual poverty and not to personal fulfillment as she ever envisioned it. The death of Hans’ family is the catalyst that finally pushes her to leave her oppressive relationship with Martin, though she, too, admits that she still loves him. She strikes out on her own again, and the reader sincerely hopes that she succeeds in her new life. She at least has some chance of becoming the woman she wants to be—financially stable, supported by friends, and hopefully somewhat satisfied—which she did not have while she was with Martin.

Gilgi is also similar to Eva Berg in that both women have a strong work ethic. Gilgi follows a rigorous self-improvement regime geared toward making her a more marketable worker. Eva has worked for eight years “where only men used to work.” Her job as a labor organizer actually entails fighting for other women and their jobs. Such discipline and
dedication must have been necessary during the Weimar Republic in order for a woman to earn enough money to live autonomously. Work is at the center of Eva’s and Gilgi’s identities. It is when Gilgi ceases to work that she feels the least like herself. Eva would be lost without her work, telling Karl that before she was employed she was severely depressed and even thought she could not live any longer. Work saved her life. This theme, while not really touched on in *Masse Mensch* and not especially pertinent to Doris, who prefers not to work if possible, is central to the stories of Eva and Gilgi.

Gilgi and Doris are similar in that they both find out that they are *kunstseidene*. The only reference to *Kunstseide* (artificial silk) in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* is when Doris says, speaking of her “rules” for dating, “Man sollte nie Kunstseide tragen mit einem Mann, die zerknautscht dann so schnell, und wie sieht man aus dann nach sieben reellen Küssen und Gegenküssen?” (Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* 109). She concludes that pure silk is better for dates because it does not wrinkle as easily. Both Gilgi and Doris have learned through experience that they—and people in general—wrinkle easily. That is, in the face of hardship, everyone falters. Both women felt invincible in the beginning, as if they were strong enough to handle anything. When stressed, however, both women tended to turn to traditional models of femininity. Gilgi falls back on a man; Doris falls back on several men, including one for whom she performs wifely duties. They stumble as New Women; they wrinkle.

Another similarity between three of the characters, The Woman excepted, is a new attitude toward sex. As previously mentioned, a more objective, sober attitude toward sex was a characteristic of the New Woman, and one that Eva Berg, Gilgi, and Doris all share. These women tend not to attach deep meaning to sexual encounters. Gilgi considers romantic relationships a hindrance to her personal growth, and Eva even compares sex to a game. They are liberated by the loss of romantic fixation, a concept which others around them, such as Karl Thomas, find puzzling.
This *sachlich* attitude toward sex is just one part of a more general *sachlich* outlook on life. These women are calm, practical, and not prone to displays of great emotion. Eva, for instance, does not speak of the revolution of which she was a part and because of which she spent time in prison in flowering, emotional terms as Karl does. She calls it an “episode” that is now over. It is in the past, and it is time to move on, which she does. Gilgi, too, reacts coolly even to the news that she is pregnant and that the doctor will not perform an abortion. She calmly explains her opinion that having a child one cannot support and does not want is the immoral act, not the abortion, and she does so without becoming emotional as one might expect in such an unnerving situation.

Doris is perhaps the most undisturbed by the superficial ways of the world. She realizes that in order to achieve certain things (such as gifts from a man), one must act a certain way (such as innocent and naïve), even if it is contrary to one’s true character. This raises a larger issue of whether there even is such a thing as a true inner character for Doris. Her life is a series of acts, and she deals with most people around her on a strictly superficial basis. Men certainly do not get to see the “real” her, and seeing as how her goals and aspirations are so heavily influenced by movies and popular culture, it is questionable whether even the reader gets to see the “real” Doris. Is there a “real” Doris? Her sense of self is so wrapped up in others’ views of her—recall that she sees herself through a man’s eyes—as well as the fictitious “reality” she gleans from the media and advertising—the “reality” that has convinced her that it is possible for an ordinary girl to become glamorous and famous through charm and cunning—and one could argue that there is not much genuine about her. Instead of bemoaning this fact and lamenting the superficiality of her world, she merely accepts it as true and conducts herself accordingly. It is not a matter of great concern to her.

A question central to the broader discussion is simply, what does emancipation look like? Perhaps it looks like *The Woman’s enlightenment* or Eva Berg’s political work. It could
mean freeing oneself from a suffocating relationship, as Gilgi did, or, as in Doris’ case, simply
letting go of one’s false hopes and unrealistic dreams. Is anyone ever fully emancipated?
Keun’s women learned that financial independence is the key to all other independence. To an
extent this is true, for one must have a stable economic existence before any other freedoms,
such as the ability to engage in leisure activities, for example, can be enjoyed. Does this mean,
however, that simply having one’s own money makes one emancipated? Because a person
can acquire the material things they want, does that make them free? Consider one of Doris’
Pelzjackett und Hüte und feinste Zervelatwurst—ist es ein Traum? Gewaltig bin ich. Ich bin so
voll Aufregung” (Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 122). Acquiring these articles of clothing
makes her feel “powerful,” as if going shopping were the most liberating experience one can
have. Doris equates spending power with emancipation. I am reminded in this instance of the
popular TV show Sex in the City which featured four “emancipated” single women. These
women do earn their own money—and frequently spend it on $400 pairs of shoes. It is at least
partially the ability to spend money like this that makes these women feel independent and
powerful. They are not bound by economic restraints and thus have a feeling that they could do
anything they wanted. But is this all there is to emancipation?

In three of these stories (Eva’s, Gilgi’s, and Doris’) there is a specific sexual component
to emancipation. To be liberated means to have a sober outlook on sex and relationships, not
attaching unnecessary importance to either. Again, I am reminded of Sex and the City. In the
pilot episode, Carrie, the main character, decides to try having sex “like a man.” This entails
promptly leaving afterward and not giving it another thought—a very sachlich attitude that
confuses her male partners. But I am also reminded of another character, Samantha, who has
had hundreds of partners and views sex as a sport. Is she more emancipated than Carrie or
Doris or Eva simply because she is more detached? It would seem that one has to disengage
oneself from others in order to achieve this kind of emancipation—not any more appealing than chasing material wealth.

Perhaps the conclusion we should draw from these texts is that emancipation, along with complete independence, is a actually myth. No one in the modern world can exist without the assistance of others—someone else makes our clothes, grows our food, and builds our houses. Furthermore, living in a society, no one will ever be completely emancipated, for everyone is restricted by rules and laws and thus cannot always conduct oneself in the manner they choose. Perhaps the best definition of emancipation is “equally constrained.” Until recently, both in Germany and in the United States, there were more laws on the books constricting women’s rights than men’s. For example, up until the 1960s the German Bürgliches Gesetzbuch stated that a husband had the right to dictate what type of career his wife would have (as The Woman’s husband tried to do). Now men and women are supposedly equal under the law, meaning that the degree to which we can act as we wish is equally restricted. Though this is a somewhat depressing definition of emancipation and independence, it may be the best we can hope for in a democratic society.

In this thesis we have seen how the works of these two authors shed light on gender relations of the Weimar Republic. We have seen characters that demonstrate the lifestyle of the New Woman and show the changes in gender that were possible during the time. We have also seen, however, that “possible” is the key word: emancipation and autonomy for women, while seemingly granted by the new Weimar constitution and social and political gains of the time, were not usually realities many women could enjoy. What the literature of the time did succeed in was highlighting the ideals, drawing attention to the realities, and hopefully impressing upon readers that there is still much work to be done, even today, in order for women to be able to fully enjoy their freedoms and independence.


