ABSTRACT

FRANZISKA GRÄFIN ZU REVENTLOW, BOHEMIAN MUNICH, AND THE CHALLENGES OF REINVENTION IN IMPERIAL GERMANY

by Scott Sulzener

Through the lens of Bohemian Munich, this thesis explores the incongruities of identity formation in Imperial Germany. Using the life and writings of the Prussian ex-countess Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow, this work considers Reventlow’s ambiguous social, political, and sexual identities as emblematic of the contradictions of a modernizing turn-of-the-century Wilhelmine Germany society. In turn, Reventlow’s life complicates the perception of German bohemian communities as a direct contrast to the dominant bourgeois society (Bürgertum) surrounding them. Reventlow’s opinions on gender equality, sex, and maternity were as often sympathetic as antagonistic to mainstream German feminist opinion, illustrating both the diversity of response to the changes of a modernizing society as well as the inadequacy of broad political labels—whether “conservative” or “liberal”—for late-Wilhelmine intellectual groups. In Reventlow’s relation to both bohemianism and feminism, then, this thesis finds a microcosm of the social, political, and sexual pressures dividing Wilhelmine Germany.
FRANZISKA GRÄFIN ZU REVENTLOW, BOHEMIAN MUNICH, AND THE CHALLENGES OF REINVENTION IN IMPERIAL GERMANY

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INTRODUCTION

The death of Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow provided a life punctuated by contradiction its final inconsistency. Barely surviving the trauma of intestinal surgery, Reventlow passed away from heart failure in the early morning of July 26, 1918 in Locarno, Switzerland. Less than four months later, the German Kaiser abdicated, setting in motion events that culminated in the foundation of a Republic and the dissolution of the German Empire. Both Reventlow and the Deutsches Reich had come into the world forty-seven years earlier; and, if their subsequent trajectories seemed to ensure estrangement, chronology, in the end, proved unifying.

Fittingly, Germany’s immediate post-war changes would have been nearly unfathomable to both Reventlow and the country of her birth. Nowhere was this upheaval more pronounced than in Munich; for years a key Catholic and conservative bastion, in 1918 the city was witness to a failed socialist experiment modeled after recently successful Bolshevik methods. Thirty years prior, Reventlow adopted a very different, imperial iteration of Munich as home. And, from the northern district of Schwabing—the beating heart of Munich’s bohemian community—Reventlow had surveyed a city and lifestyle which, by most appearances, stood in opposition to her own.

Indeed, even a cursory skim of Reventlow’s life reveals a set of values removed from those of the society in which she grew up. Libertine, outcast from Prussian aristocracy, domestic Einwanderin from Protestant north to Catholic south during a time in which the tides of influence flowed in reverse, literary contributor to periodicals antagonistic to the government and purveyor of destabilizing social and sexual ideals: the details of Reventlow’s life and work frequently speak to a figure every bit the agitator her detractors claimed her to be. In some respects, Reventlow appears as less a mirror onto the typical Schwabing bohemian than its apotheosis. As scholars have long noted, Reventlow was the “embodiment (“Verkörperung”) of Schwabing and of its bohemians”—an “incarnation of the ‘erotic Movement,’ [and] of the ‘erotic rebellion.’”1

Likewise, the values implicit in Imperial Germany’s ascendancy bear scant resemblance to those held by Reventlow—a woman re-ennobled as “the queen of the bohemians” in a recent study.2

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1 Richard Faber, Franziska zu Reventlow und die Schwabinger Gegenkultur, trans. personal (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1993), 2. The full German of the relevant passage reads: „Reventlow war, wie generell die Verkörperung Schwabings und seiner Boheme, die ‚Inkarnation der ‚erotischen Bewegung,’ der ‚erotischen Rebellion.’“
2 Ibid., 1. „...die Königin der Boheme...“
An expanding industrial and political power—replete with aggressive international posturing—the German Empire, nonetheless, waged an internal war against dissension while still in its infancy. Bismarck’s Kulturkampf sought to delimit the potential political influence of Catholic factions within a state dominated by its foremost military power. The paranoia of Prussia’s governing conglomeration of landed Protestant nobility and royalty nearly negated the fact that this northern region was itself a functional multi-ethnic and religious society. Notwithstanding domestic issues, Germany grew in both territorial and commercial strength. The vigor with which English writers conjured up the potential horrors that German cruisers off the Kentish coast and German soldiers in Piccadilly Circus might inflict bespeaks the breadth of international suspicion of German hostility. Germany’s exponential industrial growth only confirmed these misgivings: by the start of the July Crisis of 1914 that preceded the outbreak of war, Germany was producing more iron than the aggregate sum of its three foremost future combatants—save the United States. This prodigious growth encouraged the cultivation of a system of values—whether industriousness and thrift, or the ready acceptance of one’s social station and traditional gender norms—many deemed associative with the country’s continued expansion on all fronts.

It seems appropriate, then, that Chicago birthed Thorstein Veblen’s 1899 conception of “conspicuous consumption,” while Max Weber’s treatise on the unintended fiscal benefits of a rational Protestantism followed, half a decade later, from Germany. Less known, however, are Veblen’s musings—spurred on by the start of the First World War—on the principal “traits” of the German people since the advent of their empire in 1871. Comparing the “divergent lines” of English and German modernity, Veblen concluded that German “liberty is [the] freedom to give orders and freely to follow orders,” whereas English-speaking peoples retain a deep abhorrence for such subservience. To the foreign observer, then—informed and casual alike—Germany had positioned itself as a competitive, ambitious, disciplined, conservative, and ideologically rigid nation of the first rank.

Nonetheless, these simplified descriptions of both Reventlow and Germany belie the fact that the boundaries separating one from the other were often more shifting, alive, and porous than

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3 Examples of this thriving genre include William Le Quex’s 1893 work The Great War in England in 1897, during which German artillery destroy buildings and shops from Regent Street to Oxford Circus as “over the roads lay men of London, poor and rich, weltering in their blood, their lower limbs shattered or blown completely away.”

4 Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 68.

commonly allowed for. Years after the ultimate break—both social and financial—with her patrician family, Reventlow still struggled to reconcile herself to the starker realities of a bohemian existence. Similarly, German bohemia’s struggles to differentiate themselves from Wilhelmine society were examples of both a rupture and reluctant continuity. This departure, however, was likely especially difficult for Reventlow—a “spoiled” child growing up in the full expectation that adolescence could only give way to a personal “house and yard, carriage, servants, and so on.” Even during periods of dire financial instability, Reventlow remained convinced that her current situation was only a “temporary, painful phase.” Tellingly, she was known to compare her bohemian life to someone who has missed a train and must “wait in some small, shabby station.” Although some unfortunate fusion of chance and circumstance had deposited her at this spot, one should not “therefore simply identify themselves with it [the station].” 6 Likewise, only years after meeting the members of Munich’s Kosmiker—a group of intellectualizing bohemians that provided Reventlow such intellectual stimulus that she privately bemoaned the “loud cripples, lame and blind people with whom I [previously] kept company”—Reventlow attacked the pretensions of the group’s principal members. 7 In many ways, contradiction remained Reventlow’s consistent impulse. As shown in her tumultuous relationships, this ex-countess’ search for a type of nobility—of minds rather than pedigree—within which she could belong often resulted in disaffection with those with whom she had previously found common cause.

The actual vicissitudes of the Empire’s development—in which Germany careened between censorship and strident social reform, political repression and progressive legislation, and patriarchy and tolerance—mirror the ambiguity with which Reventlow viewed both her privileged past as well as her role within Germany’s burgeoning women’s movement. Less than a decade after various pieces of legislation had been cobbled together to create Germany’s pioneering healthcare at the end of the 1880s, successive governments sought additional legislative means of “limit[ing] free


expression in the spheres of politics … academia … and the arts.” Furthermore, one response to the tepid successes of German feminism was the formation of the League to Combat the Emancipation of Women ("Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation"), colloquially known as the Anti-League, two years before the outbreak of war. On second glance, then, those facets of Reventlow’s life that register as distinctive—her social background, political allegiances, and attitudes on sex and gender—transform into simple, individual manifestations of Germany’s larger idiosyncratic stance toward a fin-de-siècle ‘modernity’ that appeared to threaten conventional social stability. And, again, it is in Munich—and specifically through the unique window that Reventlow’s writings and life offer into the temperature of the city in the decades before the outbreak of war—that the ambiguities of the responses to these pressures appear most marked.

While, admittedly, a term such as “modernity”—in trying to hold so many disparate developments within itself with minimal friction—may be fraught with problematic imprecision it is, nonetheless, useful for this very attempt, as the trends it describes are numerous and connected. Whether the growing presence of women in educational settings, the revolt of avant-gardists against conventional arts, increasing urbanization, or the backlash against liberalism, a perception of social, cultural, demographic, and political upheaval characterized this modernity. Many historians (such as Peter Gay, Peter Jelavich, and Modris Eksteins, among others), aware of this confluence of developments, have found “modernity” (or variations thereof) an adequate umbrella term to encompass many of the challenges Germany faced at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, there are significant divisions within the contents to address: the particular nature of late-nineteenth-century German industrialization, and its attendant urbanization and repurposing of the workforce, constitute a “modernization” that, while clearly distinguishable from a experimental and iconoclastic cultural “modernism”—itself prompted by the social demands of “modernization”—nevertheless share traits and stimuli that allow them both to be easily subsumed into the larger rubric of “modernity,” which, in turn, may also include tangential political developments ranging from women’s emancipation to the gradual disintegration of certain segments of the political spectrum.

Furthermore, studies of both Reventlow and her bohemian acquaintances reveal the inadequacy of assigning broad political and social classifications of “liberal” or “conservative,” of “radical” or “reactionary” to turn-of-the-century German groups. Recognition of the fluidity of

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Wilhelmine labels is itself, in turn, an acknowledgment of the diverse fecundity of Wilhelmine intellectual life, in which some modes of thought were destined for a long shelf life, reverberating throughout German political and social spheres for decades to come, while others withered on their ideological vine, destined for an obscurity as complete as the stimuli that first engendered them.

In this sense, both Veblen’s ruminations on Imperial Germany and the overemphasis on Reventlow’s “radicalism” muddle an understanding of their subjects by painting them with too-broad strokes. The complexities of Reventlow’s work and life bear the imprint of her diverse social background, political sympathies, and sexual views; and, it was this very confluence of factors that characterized Reventlow’s Munich and Germany itself in the decades before the First World War; both presented themselves in opposition to the environment actually shaping them, neglecting the debt their contumaciousness, prejudices, pleasures, and ambitions owed to this very society. Through this lens, then, Reventlow becomes less an outspoken anomaly in the conservative Bavarian capital than a microcosmic iteration of larger contradictory currents running through the country. And, likewise, this perspective allows Schwabing to comfortably assume its role as a geographic concentration of the very social, political, and sexual issues dividing fin-de-siècle Wilhelmine Germany.

Reventlow’s Munich

The Munich of Reventlow’s arrival in the early 1890s was a city undergoing its own rapid transformation. As the capital of Bavaria—one of three kingdoms (along with Saxony and Württemberg) subsumed into that of the Prussian—Munich entered this new assembly of German states with an existent prestige forged over generations as a dominant actor within the Holy Roman Empire and the German-speaking world. In recognition of this, Berlin granted several privileges to its erstwhile enemy: Bavaria maintained its own diplomatic court in the capital as representatives of the Wittelsbachs (Bavaria’s ruling family); and, Bavarian military units survived Unification intact rather than being swallowed wholesale by the gargantuan Prussian military apparatus.

Nonetheless, traces of regional antagonisms remained, influencing the divergent directions taken by Prussia and Bavaria during the Empire’s period of rapid industrial growth (Gründerzeit) in the latter half of the nineteenth century. After ceding much of its political importance to Berlin—where the Prussian bureaucracy was centralizing the responsibilities of the state, imbuing them with a Prussian tenor—Munich sought a means of reestablishing its national and international
significance. The solution was cultural: the loss of political prestige left a vacuum that Munich filled by emphasizing its artistic tradition and achievement. Indeed, the Franco-Prussian War barely ended before Munich “spent part of their share of the French war indemnity on art-related projects.”\(^9\) As the Bavarian education minister declared, there was further recognition that after Unification—and in response to the ascendance of the Prussian state—a “large part of the future role of the individual states would lie in the cultivation of art and science.”\(^10\)

Tellingly, Berlin never seems to have entered into Reventlow’s mind as a possible site to pursue her own dreams of art and independence. By the time of her southern flight, Munich had successfully rebrand itself as a hub of pioneering cultural activity. Although the city’s preeminence could not long withstand Berlin’s own rapidly expanding cultural reputation, at the time that Reventlow relocated—as Stefan Zweig reiterates in his autobiographical look at Central Europe’s fin-de-siècle—the “leadership in artistic and cultural matters had not yet fallen” to the new Empire’s capital. For those with serious creative ambitions, Munich was still “considered the real center of art.”\(^11\) Furthermore, the capital city that serves as the best point of comparison for Munich was not Berlin, but Vienna, which exercised an under-appreciated influence on its Bavarian counterpart. The Austrian metropole’s often overlooked hold on Bavarians depended on more than simple geographic proximity;\(^12\) by the first decade of the new century, both cities had to deal with the complications of adapting an institutionalized Catholicism to the challenges of a liberalizing political sphere in the midst of broad cultural and intellectual ferment.

Nonetheless, many scholars impulsively reach for Berlin as the clearest comparative match for Munich in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Many of Reventlow’s contemporaries, however, found the German capital lacking. As Reventlow’s acquaintance Leonhard Frank, the writer, noted, “in Berlin life does not appear to be as warm and familiarly comfortable as in Munich, that city of painting.”\(^13\) Additionally attractive to the libertine within Reventlow was the reputation Munich had earned as a burgeoning center of sexual license. As Reventlow’s friend Oscar Schmitz admitted, “it was not rare for Berliners to go the ‘way of all flesh’”—albeit inconspicuously, in

\(^10\) Ibid., 102.
\(^12\) Berlin, as the crow flies, sits more than 150 kilometers farther away from Munich than does Vienna.
nightspots. Turn-of-the-century Schwabing, however, was in the midst of a “Dionysian” awakening, during which the city’s accumulated passions—which “generations of salt-of-the-earth Münchners [now] enjoying bourgeois respectability had repressed”—were released.  

Indeed, there were practical reasons, as well, for the city’s cultural efflorescence: while Berlin justified its lofty stature through military prowess, industrialization, and political primacy, Munich’s prominence had as much to do with an implicit opposition to these attributes as it did to standing upon its own, not insubstantial, merits. Munich owed a measure of its vitality, then, to simply not being Berlin, especially in a judicial sense. The “institutional diversity” of the Empire allowed the two cities to maintain separate legal procedures and Munich happened to have a law requiring charges of obscenity to be tried by jury, a protection against judicial arbitrariness and manipulation lacking in Berlin. Consequently, artists, journalists, and authors might exercise a much broader degree of freedom in Munich than would have been possible elsewhere. Combined with a strong and extant cultural reputation, this relative autonomy—however chimerical—ensured that Munich remained the reflexive destination for Germany’s artistically, socially, and politically disaffected at the turn of the century. And, once this mottled group of seekers arrived in the city, it was most often Schwabing that absorbed the brunt of them.

A more divisive legacy of Munich’s legally facilitated cultural boon was the social baggage new migrants carried into an already-suspicious city. Attracted by its perceived liberality, an influx of outsiders flooded the city, duly playing their part in the cultural revitalization of the city while simultaneously stirring the native mistrust of Bavaria’s Catholic and rural contingents. By the outbreak of the First World War, many Bavarians had come to consider Schwabing’s residents ineluctably foreign. A November 1914 editorial applauds the damage the conflict caused in Schwabing, as the war had “scattered to the winds” its licentious citizens. This, however, was still not enough for the editorialist—for him the “literary and artistic Bohemianism signified by the word Schwabing must be eliminated forever,” as “German discipline is more important than anything else!”

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14 Faber, Franziska zu Reventlow, 14. “Während sie in Berlin nicht selten in den Nachtlokalen den Weg allen Fleisches gingen, gerieten sie in München in das Schwabinger Dionysiertum, und dort verpufften sie die Leidenschaften, die seit Jahrhunderten an der Scholle haftende Generationen in bürgerlicher Wohlständigkeit zurückgedrängt hatten.”
16 Ibid., 104.
Literary Biography

Considering the pragmatism with which Reventlow regarded her pen, it is hardly a coincidence that the start of Reventlow’s literary career coincided with the onset of her financial troubles. After one-of-her-many forced adolescent exiles into the countryside, Reventlow began writing short essays for various periodicals in and around her hometown. Contemporaries noted that these initial journalistic forays were more workmanlike than ambitious—Reventlow, in ones words, “writes as the unemployed shovel snow in the winter, because she has learned no other way in which to earn money.”\footnote{Angermann, „Franzika Gräfin zu Reventlow,” 223-224. „Man muß es ihr glauben, daß sie schreibt, wie die Arbeitslosen im Winter Schnee schaufeln, weil sie nichts anderes gelernt hat, um Geld zu verdienen.“} Her literary assignments remained irregular, as, in her youth, Reventlow considered painting her primary artistic focus; it was only upon her disenchantment with the canvas that she turned fully to her pen.

Over time, Reventlow’s journalistic pieces began to appear in increasingly noteworthy publications in Munich, such as Michael Georg Conrad’s Symbolist “The Society” (Die Gesellschaft), and Germany’s leading satirical outlet, Simplicissimus. Similarly, her subject matter widened with her visibility, although her opinion pieces retained an experiential grounding in her own life. In this way, several of the clearest presentations of her thought on sex, politics, gender, and feminism draw heavily upon Reventlow’s own life, with self-referential asides that are veiled (or not) according to the sensitivity of the issue at hand. Additionally—and providing an essential supplement to her income—Reventlow, nearly constantly, was working on translations from French, eventually completing more than fifty in her life.

“Serious” artistic aspirations revealed themselves more gradually, only becoming a conscious objective with her integration into the Kosmiker. Encouraged by the entreaties of the group—especially those of Ludwig Klages—to pursue substantial literary achievement, Reventlow completed Ellen Olestjerne in 1900. This roman à clef depicted her tumultuous childhood, the domestic ruptures that were the result, and the initial stages of her flight to Munich. Reventlow’s rendering of the chaos and creativity of bohemian Schwabing at the turn of the century, Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen: oder Begebenheiten aus einem merkwürdigen Stadtteil (“The Records of Mr. Lady or, Episodes from an Odd City District”), followed in 1913. In the half decade that remained to her, Reventlow would publish a novel detailing her persistent problems with money,
Der Geldkomplex ("The Money Complex"), as well as a string of stories, sketches for German feuilletons, and shorter essays.

Reventlow’s posthumous literary reputation, however, rested largely on her Schwabing novel—especially so, as the work consciously dovetailed with that non-artistic guarantor of renown: her dissolute bohemian life in Schwabing. The dismissive manner in which she depicted the Kosmiker and their theories soon earned her the enmity of the group’s members; indeed, Klages refused to read the book for the rest of his life.18 Not only had Schwabing’s bohemians felt themselves personally attacked, but a once-integral member of their own circle had initiated the assault. Upon its publication, a critic rightly described Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen as a “book of condemnation”—a satire in which that satirized is not Munich proper’s beer-swilling, ignorant citizens, but Schwabing’s “bureaucracies of anarchism.”19

Many of these negative assessments are, nevertheless, tinged with a begrudging nostalgia. In many ways, Reventlow’s very divisiveness—the caustic, winking manner in which she paints Schwabing’s bohemians—bespeaks the vanished vitality of fin-de-siècle Munich. Indeed, as Karl Wolfskehl—the central Kosmiker counterweight to Klages—conceded three decades after its publication, Reventlow’s book, if only for its “atmosphere and air of the epoch,” remained the “best source” for understanding Schwabing at the turn of the century.20 Reventlow’s novel, in effect, became the “swan song of Schwabing’s bustling geniuses,” unaware of their increasing irrelevancy even as they bemoaned Reventlow’s rendition of them.21 And, as this thesis aims to show, it was precisely this combination—the aloof, cryptic Kosmiker erudition Reventlow chronicles, as well as the cold, mockingly perfidious manner in which she did it—that illustrates the larger contradictions of urban life in Imperial Germany.

**Historiography**

This study draws upon the work and ideas, in equal measure, of several significant scholars. Carl Schorske’s seminal study of the intersections of politics and culture in Vienna remains a touchstone for any examination of the undercurrents guiding German-language intellectual discourse at the turn of the century. The significance for this study is partially due to Schorske’s deft treatment of a similar subject; his work is, at its heart, an extended meditation on the shifting nature of a single city during a tumultuous period wrapped in the guise of an impressionistic, cultural historical essay collection. Similarities to Munich’s turn-of-the-century intellectual life abound: as Schorske shows, novel conceptions of the duties of the individual to society influenced the political direction of Vienna as much as was the case in the Bavarian capital.

The *Kosmiker* mirrored Viennese modernists in their reconceptualization of the relationship of the modern citizen to history, whether on a small (personal) or large (social) scale. In this way, the fact of historical change “not only forces upon the individual a search for a new identity but also imposes upon whole social groups the task of revising or replacing defunct belief systems.” This hostile impulse towards contemporary social norms impelled the modern woman—wholly aware that existing traditions were inherited and thus inherently tarnished by their historical heritage—to reimagine the role of the past in contemporary society. As a result, those traditions that had been historically “victorious” could be abandoned, while once-discarded customs might be reevaluated, in the process acquiring an attraction roughly equivalent to their current irrelevancy. From these urges sprang the iconoclastic dissonances of the Second Vienna School of Schönberg, Berg, and Webern, who dismissed their musical forebears and the neo-classicism of Munich’s *Kosmiker*, who sought to emulate a contrived Dionysian antiquity in the face of what they saw as the Enlightenment’s Apollonian, or coldly rational, legacy. Schorske finds paradoxical coherence between these seemingly unconnected strands by considering them distinct manifestations of the larger futility with which post-Nietzschean thinkers searched for widespread cultural or intellectual unity. Thus, in the face of the era’s “‘death-dance of principles,’” any search for “sweeping but heuristically indispensable categories [such] as ‘the Enlightenment’ seemed doomed to founder on the heterogeneity of the cultural substance it was supposed to cover.”

Reventlow’s captious portrayal of Schwabing reveals Wilhelmine Germany’s own “cultural substance” as a similarly heterogeneous and intricate concoction of motives, aims, and methods.

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And, while the temptation exists to superimpose an organizational nomenclature of “instability” over these disparate lines of thought—finding structure in its very non-existence—the actual, on-the-ground effects of this discord reveal this ‘unity’ as little more than a contrivance. In this way, even seemingly imperceptible discrepancies had the ability to shatter relationships that had once appeared essential: in 1904 the Kosmiker split in two following a dispute over the legacy of a Semitic Ursubstanz (“primeval substance”); and, by 1910, Reventlow had permanently, bitterly left a city once synonymous with her name. Not a decade after her death, a contemporary noted those contradictions sprinkled throughout Reventlow’s life: she had lived in “cold rooms with mortgaged furniture” as comfortably as in “luxurious hotels as a ‘grande dame,’” she had known “men who loved her and men who paid her;” indeed, she was both a “queen and a beggar,” and the difference depended simply on the panoptical perspective the observer adopted.23 This study is also indebted to Mary Louise Roberts’ work on the emergent category of the “New Woman” in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which provides a practical lens through which to assess Reventlow’s relation to Germany’s feminists. As with Schorske, Roberts’ Disruptive Acts positions the New Woman within an amorphous intellectual climate: descriptions of the age veer back and forth between a “belle époque,” fixated on pleasure and its acquisition, to one of endemic “moral crisis.” For Roberts, the New Woman connects these notions, as the unconventionality of their lifestyle signaled neither the blind pursuit of personal delight nor a steady moral descent, but instead a performance that played off the fears and expectations of both. As with Robert’s French New Women, the difficulty of assigning Reventlow a place within extant feminine categories fostered the vagueness with which her contemporaries often judged her. As an unrepentant, public symbol of female sexual freedom, many read her actions as small rebellions against the pieties of her adolescence or against the affected sterility of the Bürgerlichkeit (“bourgeois way of life”) surrounding her.

Nonetheless, Reventlow clearly worked within the parameters of the liberal thought of her time; the “ideal of individual self-fulfillment” served as an adequate rationalization for an otherwise apparent sensationalism. By this formulation, Reventlow’s contempt for feminists focusing on

mainly domestic matters—those whose agenda was concerned with the duties of the housewife just as much as with her sexual emancipation—was justifiable, as they openly contradicted and undermined their own aims: in limiting the “choice and self-development” of women who wished to upend the negation of their sexuality as well as of their social subjugation, these feminists implicitly affirmed the very same, as this domestic suppression was often concomitant to, and dependent upon, the continuation of traditionally repressive social mores regarding feminine sexual expression.24

Finally, Peter Jelavich’s *Munich and Theatrical Modernism* has established a reliable roadmap for any study tracing the intersecting changes within Munich’s cultural, political, and social spheres in the years bookending the First World War. In a practical sense, Jelavich’s thorough dissection of the work and disposition of many of Reventlow’s acquaintances adds depth to this study’s consideration of the context of her life in Schwabing. As Jelavich admits, the “game” of cultural production playing out in Munich at this time was full of “diverse cultural pieces” tenuously navigating “a political, social, and commercial terrain that was constantly shifting.” Reventlow’s own background and ideological stances, then, only contributed to already cacophonous amalgam of “tensions, uncertainties, and frustrations” within the city’s bohemian community. Significantly, Jelavich latches upon an argumentative thread that both unites Munich’s disparate actors while simultaneously acknowledging the larger, inescapable discrepancies influencing these groups—in effect, Jelavich finds shades of unity within the larger commotion of the period.25

For Jelavich, this organization is dependent upon the factors that made Munich’s iteration of modernism unique: the “decline of liberalism and the growth of political Catholicism; the prevalence of a classical tradition in the arts; the increasing commercialization of cultural production and diffusion; and the persistence of traditional forms of popular culture.” While each of these formulations exerted an influence on the direction of Reventlow’s life and art, the steady decline of liberal ideologies (relative to the gains made by their competitors on the extremes, whether a nationalistic conservatism or an internationalist socialism) and the prevalence (or, revitalization) of a classical tradition most usefully complement the aims of this study. Both of these categories become useful metrics for understanding the increasing stature of the *Kosmiker* and their theories, as well as the attendant backlash, as exemplified by Reventlow’s *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen*.

There are no translations of Reventlow’s work, nor large English-language studies of her life. This work, then, benefits from several key German sources. *Über Franziska zu Reventlow: Rezensionen, Porträts, Aufsätze, Nachrufe aus mehr als 100 Jahren*—a 2007 compilation of texts, edited by Johanna Seegers, that range from contemporary reviews and obituaries to posthumous assessments—clarifies Reventlow’s place within a German cultural sphere shifting with the reverberations of the twentieth century. The volume’s own existence highlights an implicit conclusion that a perusal of its pages generates: broader recognition of Reventlow as a significant figure proceeds in waves, one of which has crested with the publication of the book itself, intended as a companion piece to the recently released *Sämtliche Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe* (“Collected Works, Journals, and Letters”). Attention to the publication dates of the pieces within *Über Franziska* reveal these periods of resurgent interest: the twenty years bookending her death in 1918, the early years of the 1970s, and the middle of the 1990s. These dates align with periods of upheaval—whether the apex of the West German student movement surrounding the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke, or the reunification of the country in 1990—during which Germans may have felt the urge to revisit and reconsider figures from eras of similar social uncertainty.

While Brigitta Kubitschek’s *Franziska zu Reventlow: Leben und Werk* is, likewise, a compendium of Reventlow information, her work is a biography, rather than a collection of sources. Kubitschek’s book—combined with Gunna Wendt’s *Franziska zu Reventlow: die anmutige Rebellin*, written in 1998 and 2008, respectively—exemplifies German-speaking audiences growing attraction to the particulars of Reventlow’s tumultuous life. Understandably, both works focus on these sensational details at the expense of seeking their broader context. The epigraph—the Marianne Faithfull lyric, “I drink and I take drugs, I love sex and I move around a lot,”—to Wendt’s engaging, brisk, and novelistic rendering of Reventlow’s life typifies her angle. Kubitschek’s study, however—as a consequence of its copious documentation of the careers and backgrounds of various Reventlow relatives, hangers-on, friends, and lovers—partially expands beyond only material explicitly related to its subject.

Richard Faber’s 1993 work *Franziska zu Reventlow und die Schwabinger Gegenkultur* (“Franziska zu Reventlow and Schwabing’s Counterculture”), however, realizes this ambition. In this dense study, Reventlow’s life—whether her anti-Prussianism, “sexual anarchy,” or artistic

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aspirations—serves as a garden from which Faber, pursuing the distinct tones and fixations of German bohemia, can pick at will. In its expansiveness, then, Faber’s work is illuminating; Reventlow becomes that very symbol of Wilhelmine bohemia’s capacity to serve as a “counter” to Germany’s prevailing culture. In this context, however, Reventlow’s struggle for sexual freedom assumes exaggerated importance; and, as a result, Faber gives less attention to the ways in which Reventlow actually fit into a German feminist movement increasingly making room for women arguing for the importance of their sexual fulfillment, as well as (although less often), the rights of the country’s unmarried women to the comforts of motherhood.

On scales both large and small, Richard J. Evans’s The Feminist Movement in Germany: 1894-1933 and Catherine L. Dollard’s The Surplus Woman: Unmarried in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918 investigate the reach and agenda of Germany’s feminists. Evans’s work deftly navigates between Imperial Germany’s more moderate, broad-based feminist organizations and the gradual development of radical doctrine within these groups in the early twentieth century. Evans argues that the trajectory of the feminist movement was similar to those of other Wilhelmine groups struggling against historic oppression, namely youth and workers. Furthermore, Evans claims that, like the extreme wings of the country’s socialist parties, cooperation with moderates increasingly insistent upon conformity and deference to the state eventually diluted German feminism’s radical factions. Similarly, in the years after the First World War explicitly politicized right-wing groups appropriated many Kosmiker ideas. Dollard’s work, on the other hand, deals with a single, specific, albeit especially acute, anxiety within Imperial society: the perception of an irreconcilable surplus of women who, subsequently, would be unable to marry and must find a manner of productively acclimating to, and becoming a part of, society as alleinstehende Frauen (“women standing alone”). As Dollard writes, this “notion of a surplus of unmarried woman was a central pillar of debates surrounding the changing nature of society throughout the Kaiserreich.” 27 While Dollard’s thesis proves this surplus was illusory, her work, nonetheless, reveals the degree to which Reventlow, as a voluntary single mother in a country divided by the Frauenfrage (“question of women’s rights”), came to figure so prominently in discussions regarding the era’s supposed moral rot. 28

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28 In actuality, as Dollard notes, the female surplus only became a reality in the lean years following the devastations of the First World War, which, ironically, had so changed the political context of the country that any light the extensive pre-war debate had shed was rendered irrelevant.
Methodology and Organization

Reventlow’s experiences reveal a society struggling with the changes and pressures of modernity. Centrally important, then, are the sources through which this study accesses these experiences: the published stories and novels, journal entries, and letters of Reventlow constitute the bulk of material used here, although related, contemporary primary material provides necessary texture. This accumulated material presents both the creative and daily life of an Imperial German artist; they provide a space to explore the relationship between the German bohemian and society—between the world created and the world inhabited. For their insight into her own life and circumstances, Reventlow’s novels of Schwabing and adolescence each pull their own weight as a representation of her personal history. Nonetheless, Reventlow’s story also serves as a lens into the larger complexities of turn-of-the-century Munich. As with Reventlow, the city responded paradoxically to the demands modernity placed upon it, sometimes looking back to discarded traditions, sometimes embracing aspects of change, and sometime actively opposing the same.

This study is also attentive to the differences between pieces Reventlow wrote for material gain and those never meant for an audience; circumspection is often necessary regarding the specific perspective and tone she favors in a piece. Furthermore, while Reventlow’s prose style is largely sincere and straightforward, hers is a deceptive earnestness; her stance on a subject often pivots relative to her present disposition towards it. The chronological order in which she produced material on Munich, then, is important. For example, two conflicting portraits of fin-de-siècle Schwabing emerge depending on the source given primacy. An insatiable need for freedom—and a ready willingness to sacrifice anything necessary to attain it—comprise the emotional core of Ellen Olestjerne. The experiences are Reventlow’s; Ellen’s words are a literary shell for Reventlow’s own recollections. In this way, Ellen’s idealistic vision of the artistic and personal liberty available in Munich—seen in conjunction with the fact that Reventlow penned the work during a period of singular contentment in the city—meant that her portrayal of Schwabing glistened with a romantic sheen. Over a dozen years separate the composition of Ellen Olestjerne from Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen and, naturally, the image of Schwabing Reventlow presents shifts with her age. Furthermore, by 1913, time had blurred some of the edges on even Reventlow’s more impressionable memories. Understandably, exact details of raucous parties, tenuous acquaintances, and esoteric theories had grown so murky during work on the novel that she sought the help of
friends to shore up information. Nonetheless, both of these works bookend distinctive periods of Reventlow’s intellectual thought and—tempered by additional material—comprehensively cover the polarities of her opinions on the role of the bohemian within German society. If her writings sometimes tend towards contradiction, it is only in keeping with her city, attempting to make its own sense of the volatile assortment of backgrounds, allegiances, and impulses indicative of the age.

German-speaking Europe during the two decades before the First World War constitutes, roughly, the geographic and chronological scope of this thesis. Although the trends it illuminates (countercultures, feminism, and so on) have relevance in other parts of Europe and the Americas at the turn of the century, the applicability of the work’s argument regarding these processes is primarily German. This study is largely one of cultural history, as it intends to assess a society based upon its representation through conscious artistic products. In some ways, however, it strays from cultural history norms, as the creative discourse it examines is mainly confined to the thoughts of an individual—there is minimal emphasis placed on widening this dialogue to encompass countervailing ideas. An expansion along these lines—while broadening an understanding of the actual implications of Reventlow’s thoughts on other bohemians and feminists—would push the primary concerns of this study too far out of view. Furthermore, it is the argument of this study that the multiplicity of Reventlow’s personality and actions are, indeed, characteristic of larger Wilhelmine society. In this sense, Reventlow—in straddling the lines between radical reform and reactionary conservatism—complicates the picture of both the Imperial German bohemian and the feminist. The study’s organization mirrors this argument, as each chapter oscillates between two areas of inquiry: that of Reventlow’s personal experiences and the trends these illuminate.

The first chapter focuses on the role of social background and status within Schwabing. Reventlow’s fraught relationship with her aristocratic family form the central narrative thread, while her writings—especially Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen—reveal the ambivalence many bohemians felt toward wealth and status, even as the implications of their own thoughts made such a stance appear unlikely. Exemplary of this is Reventlow herself, severed from her privileged family, but nevertheless more willing to identify with this class than the one she unwittingly found herself a part of. To parallel Reventlow’s reevaluation of the past in light of her place in a changing society, this chapter explores the importance Munich placed on promoting a distinct regional and artistic identity.

against the backdrop of a new multi-state, Prussian-dominated German Empire.30 Considered in conjunction, these complementary narratives illustrate the chapter’s argument: in the face of a “modernism” upsetting familiar social and political equilibriums, Imperial German actors—whether individuals, groups, or institutions—responded by reconsidering their own histories, a process yielding varied results and one often as confused and erratic as it was spontaneous. As a result, both Reventlow and fin-de-siècle urban Germany related to modernity partially through the prism of a misunderstood past, creating, in the process, a synthesis that was simultaneously traditional and novel. This theme, then, adheres the first chapter—the only one of which not explicitly addressing feminism and issues of gender—to the remainder of the study, as an indistinct fusion of past and present colored both Reventlow’s relationship to feminism, as well as that of other Germans to their modernizing society.

The second chapter—in exploring Reventlow’s thoughts on several overtly politicized aspects of the struggle for women’s equality—demonstrates the insufficiency of assigning comprehensive political labels to many Imperial German groups. Furthermore, this chapter is the first to look at depth into Reventlow’s connections to Germany’s feminists—a relationship that epitomizes the argument of this study by revealing the myriad forces influencing Reventlow’s complex response to the increasing demands for gender equality. Reventlow maintained that modern women preoccupied with equality were instead leveling natural sexual boundaries and, in the process, diminishing the position of females within society. As they would never equal or surpass masculine artistic, professional, or academic accomplishments, women should instead focus on cultivating their innate maternal and erotic natures. The chapter reveals the influence of the Kosmiker on Reventlow’s perception of the role of women in society and, subsequently, charts the further impact of their views throughout German society. Importantly, Reventlow’s antipathy towards the major aims of many German feminists contrasts with Reventlow’s otherwise “progressive” feminist views, in which she implores women to embrace their sexual impulses with nary the mention of marriage.

30 Indeed, the contentious nature of regional centers like Munich to Berlin remains relevant even into the 21st Century. In a 2011 public forum in Berlin addressing the outsized cultural significance of that capital, former German Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien (“Secretary of Culture and Media”) Michael Naumann referred, albeit teasingly, to the fact that, even though Munich does marginally compete with Berlin by boasting “an incredibly expensive and lively cultural scene,” the relation is incidental, as the “Bavarians never considered themselves to be fully-fledged Germans anyway—and they aren’t.” As an added ribbing, he gave his endorsement to any future Bavarian petitions to join Austria, although “of course the Viennese would refuse that.” From: BBC: : The Forum, 24/09/2011,” accessed October 10, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00k6rr3.
Pivoting off of this conclusion, the final chapter more thoroughly examines those issues that most often defined Reventlow as radical in the eyes of her contemporaries: her relationship to sex, marriage, and motherhood. The chapter argues that her ‘radical’ reputation was based upon an overemphasis on several aspects of her personality and thought regarding sexuality which, consequently, disguised the ways in which her behavior often conformed to both progressive and conservative opinion of her time. Indeed, as is shown, many of Reventlow’s more “inflammatory” actions had precedents in both Wilhelmine Germany as well as the France of Mary Louise Roberts’ *Disruptive Acts*. Likewise, Reventlow’s public persona often overshadowed those numerous traditional views that she held, many of them vestigial holdovers from childhood. Nonetheless, the image of Reventlow as *fin-de-siècle* Germany’s sexual libertine *par excellence* is not entirely unfounded. This chapter, however, seeks to nuance, rather than upend, that persistent picture of Reventlow as the singular *provocateur* while simultaneously placing her within a turn-of-the-century German feminism that has more than enough theoretical space to contain her.

The significance of this study, then, arises partially out of the perspective it adopts: Reventlow and Schwabing’s bohemian intellectuals serve as a novel vantage point from which to regard the struggles of a nation coping with a changing world and social climate. This slice of German society—frequently derided, by contemporaries and scholarship alike, for the *unorthodoxy* of their lives—helps to affirm larger social historical trends affecting divergent areas. This study argues that differences between Wilhelmine *Bürgertum* and bohemia were as real as they were cosmetic, in that both were distinctive—albeit similarly confused and impromptu—adaptations to the uniform challenges modernization presented to all strata of society. Reventlow herself provides much of the originality for this study. The biography of one individual—a figure whose life and writings affirm the plasticity of Wilhelmine thought, and whose ideological stances were often as spontaneous as they were fixed, equally responsive in turn to the remnants of her upbringing and that inescapable desire for self-reliance and autonomy—allows for access to a wider swath of Imperial social milieus than most other figures of her era. Moreover, it is often among actions perceived as antithetical to an environment that the most salient characteristics of this society reside. The significance of this study, therefore, also comes from the novel perspective on countercultures it adopts. In this way, Schwabing’s relation to turn-of-the-century Germany is emblematic of the roles which countercultures have assumed in diverse cultures, environments, and eras. As with Reventlow, many figures that appear to be subversive, fringe elements of a society are actually the
vanguard of larger communal, political, or moral change, experimenting with potentially expansive styles of living in a laboratory, itself simply a gathering of existing forces.
Like many of Munich’s transplants, Reventlow eventually came to consider the city a "Wahlheimat" ("adopted home"). Even a decade after her arrival, during a trip abroad, Reventlow wrote that she was unable to "rid herself of homesickness for Munich." Regardless of this attachment to "my promised land," the climate of Reventlow’s Schwabing surroundings remained—in relation to those values forged during her privileged adolescence—a secondary influence. Although her subsequent life distanced Reventlow from her family in quite tangible ways, her writing and thought betray the class consciousness, arrogance, and impenetrable self-regard her upbringing provided. Likewise, as Munich wrestled with the reverberations of this aforementioned “new age” upsetting traditional social structures—hereafter referred to as “modernism”—both the city’s bohemians and Bürgertum (“bourgeois middle classes”) reacted based on ingrained conceptions of the proper social order and hierarchy.

As the term “modernism” itself entails various, mutually-contentious definitions—relating to potentially diverse areas of social development—this study pivots upon Peter Jelavich’s definition of the term. Jelavich ties “modernism” to its Bavarian context, isolating prominent factors, chief among which, for this chapter, is the “decline of liberalism.” Most significant, however, are the social, rather than political, implications of this trend—for, while this decline clearly manifested itself in the ballot-box, the change is similarly evident in the mindset of the city’s populace, whether bohemian or bourgeois, conservative or socialist. This late-nineteenth century rise in illiberal and reactionary ideology affected the trajectories of both Reventlow and Munich: the response of each to this facet of “modernism” was a perpetual renegotiation of their past(s). For Munich, this necessitated reimagining both the city’s place within the political hierarchy of the German-speaking world, as well as the internal configuration of a city with a recently strong liberal presence in both politics and the arts. For Reventlow, this entailed reconfiguring the residue of her noble, Prussian background into a Schwabing scene that increasingly tended towards extremes, whether political or theoretical. If, however, these were tasks at which her city succeeded—managing, in the coming decades, to form the German

32 Faber, Franziska zu Reventlow, 15. “… mein gelobtes Land …“
vanguard of both communistic and fascistic experimentation—Reventlow did not. For this disinherited, north German sexual libertine, friend to anarchists and artists, class remained the consistent metric by which Reventlow assessed the rapidly changing world around her. As Ludwig Klages, her initiator into the *Kosmiker* and eventual lover, believed, Reventlow had “remained in her attitude always a countess, but had become a worldly woman full of superior, mocking gestures and, in a way, more aristocratic than ever before.” Reventlow’s biography sheds additional light on the stubborn persistence of her aristocratic impulse and *Standesbewu\ßtsein* (“pride of rank”).

**Life ‘on the Gray Beach, on the Gray Sea’**

Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow was born on the 18\textsuperscript{th} of May, 1871 to Ludwig Christian Detlev and Emilie Julia Anna Luise zu Reventlow—count and countess, respectively. Her father had been active in one of pre-Unification Germany’s defining events, the revolutions of 1848, fighting against Denmark to ensure the German character of the province of Schleswig-Holstein. The Danes soon captured and imprisoned him. His ideals symbolized two strains of thought stoked by the revolution: that of a democratic liberalism indebted to the Enlightenment, and that of a fervent nationalism. Throughout her life Reventlow would reject the nationalism of her father while maintaining a general adherence to nominally liberal notions of freedom of choice. The unification of Germany through Prussian arms and diplomacy in 1871, the year of Reventlow’s birth, privileged nationalism at the expense of liberalism. Upon defeating Denmark in 1864 and incorporating Schleswig-Holstein into the *Kaiserreich*, Prussia rewarded Ludwig for his earlier nationalistic struggles with the post of *Landrat* [district administrator] for the area surrounding his family’s historic seat in Husum.\textsuperscript{33} Ludwig Reventlow, too, had pragmatically forfeited his earlier liberalist tendencies for the attendant benefits of a conservative nationalism.

It was here, in the family castle, that Reventlow spent her formative years.\textsuperscript{34} The opening lines of Theodor Storm’s “The City”—describing a city lying “on the gray beach, on the gray sea”—convey the misty vista of Reventlow’s birthplace.\textsuperscript{35} The Reventlow family—close to Storm, a writer of international standing as well as a fellow northerner—duly exercised a wide

\textsuperscript{33} Kubitschek, *Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow*, 41, 35.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 577. Unless otherwise noted, most of the details for this short biographical introduction come from Kubitschek’s work.
cultural and social reach. As the fifth of six children, Reventlow felt “lost” within a group including an older sister (Agnes) and three older brothers (Theodor, Ludwig, and Ernst). The youngest of the group (Karl) received his preliminary education with Reventlow and became, not incidentally, the sibling to whom she felt the closest attachment.\(^3\) Long after Karl began his formal schooling, Reventlow continued to be educated at home by various governesses until fifteen, at which point she attended a private school in Thüringen for the daughters of protestant aristocrats. In addition to a disposition to French, Reventlow’s early schooling revealed her distaste for authority. By sixteen, she had left school, returned north and been placed under the care of her parents. Here she remained for two years, intermittent trips to relatives in the countryside being her sole diversion.

During these years of early adolescence, clear differences emerged between Reventlow and her siblings. Agnes, her only sister, was to spend the last fifty-four years of her life in a Protestant convent for noble women after caring for both her parents until their deaths.\(^3\) An early letter shows Agnes’s mounting spiritual concern for her sister. Prefacing her message with joy at simply being in contact, Agnes turns to a dispute between Reventlow and the family, reiterating that an “injustice” was done not only “against your parents … but against yourself and against God.”\(^3\) The event she referred to occurred in Lübeck, which the family had moved to in the fall of 1889, upon the comfortable retirement of their father. This coastal, Hanseatic city and its cosmopolitan environment was to play a pivotal role in the intellectual and social development of the young countess.

Reventlow began to spend her free time in the *Ibsenklub* (“Ibsen Club”) with other young *Lübecker* s. While this secret reading group routinely discussed authors such as Nietzsche, Zola, and Tolstoy, the primary focus—as their moniker makes clear—was the work of the Norwegian modernist. Both the friends and ideas Reventlow cultivated in the *Ibsenklub* remained with her; and, importantly, it was here that she met her first love, Emanuel Fehling. Letters to Fehling—at


\(^{37}\) Many north German convents were originally Catholic institutions which, following the Reformation, retained many of their traditional characteristics. Nonetheless, the authorities made several notable changes in accommodation with the new faith, such as allowing the inhabitants to seek outside marriages, upon which they were free to leave.


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once deliriously amorous and clear-headed—constitute the bulk of Reventlow’s published early correspondence. Reventlow revisits this early relationship in an episode in *Ellen Olestjerne*, in which her infatuated heroine rapturously relates to her lover her first “big step” towards independence. As she tells Fehling, she had recently given her father an ultimatum: he could either allow her to take her teacher certification exam or, barring his permission, “she would refuse to return to the house at all.”³⁹ For Reventlow, this intransigence was warranted, as she was finally able to “see that life that lay ahead” of her, namely freedom from family and convention in which she could pursue art and love in equally unencumbered measure. Nonetheless, there were still “barriers” that “should and must fall.” Invariably, it was her father constructing the highest of these and, should she be unable to overcome them, she felt that she may “perish inside.” These youthful desires, additionally, had a clear geographic focus: Munich. The city offered an opportunity to paint, write, and live without recourse to the superficial strictures of a corrupted society. As she bids Fehling to imagine, just “think how divine it can be, if we would both be in Munich—you studying and I painting and us loving each other as two people never before have.”⁴⁰

Before Reventlow was to make it to Munich, however, scandal ensued in Lübeck upon the discovery of her clandestine membership in the *Ibsenklub*. A second expulsion promptly followed, this time to a rural parish—a decidedly less-comfortable exile than the family castle. Her parents placed her under the care of a guardian with the assumption that the countryside and menial labor were curatives for budding insubordination. Plans for escape began almost immediately. It was during this period that Agnes—long the intermediary between Reventlow and her increasingly bemused parents—wrote to apprise her of the situation at home. Agnes, hoping her sister may seek forgiveness, lays out several paths a repentant Reventlow might follow, while acknowledging the unlikelihood of either: “speaking of it, Mama says that you should have learned cooking and ironing. Indeed, you’d rather do that than sew and, if you do it

with an appropriate eagerness, Mama will let you paint also sometime soon. I want to do what I can for you, but it’s a bit terrible as I’m now out of favor.”

Agnes’ attempted mediation failed and, in the early hours of April 1, 1893, Reventlow stole away from her minder, eventually making her way to friends living outside of Hamburg. From here, the sisters’ lives appear to diverge even more sharply—Agnes soon to arrive at her convent, Franziska at Munich. However, these disparate paths—Agnes preoccupied with her chores, worship, and chastity and Franziska with her morphine, paganism, and promiscuity—did not lessen the familial bond between the two.

As Reventlow noted in a letter, her respect for Agnes remained—she believed her to be “actually quite smart and educated,” although these qualities were “overgrown by [the] mannered chimeras” of behavior Agnes felt obliged to adopt. Reventlow’s anger at her sister for affecting an intellectual passivity was not simply a complaint against the nature of feminine aristocratic life; instead, it registered an individual disgust with Agnes’ decision to abide by these restrictions. Reventlow focused much of her outright class antipathy on those below the nobility: recalling a stop at a provincial German railroad station, Reventlow—a regular, and haughty, international traveler—bemoaned the fact that “one doesn’t need to travel to Greece to find sleazy hotels, pushy people, breathing sofas and creepy beds.” The target of her “disgust” was Germany’s own “feeble, hunchbacked, [and] withered petty bourgeoisie [Kleinbürgertum].” The scene reminded her of those holidays when one “sees so many crooked, hideous faces that only creep out of their damp basements once.”

Reventlow’s nostalgia for the order of her childhood is understandable in light of these darker ruminations on the slovenly mien of the masses. While on vacation in 1907, Reventlow

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41 Ibid., 113. „’Mama spricht davon, daß Du Kochen und Plätten lernen solltest. Du machst es ja auch lieber als Nähen, u. wenn Du das mit dem dazugehörigen Eifer thust, wird Mama ja Dich auch mal eher bei dem Malen lassen. Ich will dafür thun, was ich kann, aber es ist grausam wenig, da ich jetzt sehr außer Gnade bin.’”

42 Franziska Reventlow was, actually, also destined for the convent life that Agnes so compliantly accepted. So great was the practical appeal of the life for unmarried aristocratic women as an assurance of future material sufficiency following the death of a primary male provider that their father had registered both of them at Preetz within months of their respective births.

43 Ibid., 120-121. „Zum Schluß dieses Briefes faßt Franziska zusammen: „Agnes ist eigentlich recht klug und gebildet, aber es ist alles von manirierten Hirngespinsten überwuchert.”

44 Faber, Franziska zu Reventlow, 201. „In der Bahnhofrestauration abgestiegen. Man braucht nicht nach Griechenland zu fahren, um schmierige Hotels, zudringliche Leute, atmende Sofas und unheimliche Betten zu finden. Ich war ganz deprimiert vor Degout ... Es scheinen die typischen Sommerfrischen des schiefgetretenen, lahren, buckligen, verkümmerten Kleinbürgertums zu sein ... Pfui Teufel. Es ist, wie man manchmal an Festtagen so viele schief abscheuliche Gesichter sieht, die nur dann einmal aus ihren feuchten Kellern hervorkriechen.”
notes that a recent letter from Agnes felt “like home,” in turn making her “so wistful.”

In remaining beholden to the social preoccupations of her upbringing, Reventlow had consequently estranged herself from both the aristocratic and bohemian communities of Imperial Germany—one of which she had left, and the other, one she instinctively felt herself superior to. Reventlow’s larger contrarian, independent temperament left her unable to ever fully express “solidarity” or “engagement” with a single group, for she “cannot recognize her own fortune as part of a larger one, can see no causes, [and] can neither hope for nor attempt to change.”

**Echoes of the North**

In April 1892—a year before escape from her rural confinement and while still in Lübeck—Reventlow received a certificate qualifying her to teach in girls’ schools throughout Germany (“Zeugnis der Befähigung für den Unterricht am mittleren und höheren Mädchenschulen”). As with her brother Ernst, who eventually entered the bourgeois-dominated Navy, Franziska’s desire to teach placed her within a profession suffused with the country’s middle classes. The pull of education for the middle class was partially attributable to the standing, research, and reputation of German universities and public education. The need for additional teachers created a vacuum that was often filled by the children of town-dwelling small businessmen and the members of the state’s extensive bureaucratic system [Beamter]. For example, the brother of Reventlow’s pubescent paramour Emanuel Fehling grew up to become an historian and professor at the University of Heidelberg. Teaching, then, was an avenue for social mobility, open to ambitious members of Germany’s lower- and middle-classes.

For Reventlow, teaching meant something quite different; her certificate was a vehicle for liberation from the confines of her fortunate life. By the end of the nineteenth century, teaching—mainly to female pupils—had become a means of assuring independence for many of Wilhelmine Germany’s women. In this way, the visibility of female instructors rose in accordance with the demands of this increasingly educated populace for broader access to the

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45 Kubitschek, *Franziska zu Reventlow*, 121. „Sie vermerkt in ihrem Tagebuch am 18. Januar 1907: „Einen langen Brief von Agnes, das ist so heimlich und macht mich so sehnsüchtig.“

skills available at university (a theme explored more extensively in the next chapter). The numbers bear out this fact: women steadily accumulated positions reliant upon their own mounting access to knowledge. In 1896, Prussia had nearly 15,000 full-time female instructors and a third of them worked in “private and state higher girls’ schools.”47 This familiarity with both women in education and the attendant struggle for academic equality, however, did not endear Reventlow to feminist arguments. As stated, Reventlow simply desired a freedom presently impossible as a young countess subject to a patriarch’s traditional opinions on the role of noble women in society.

By running away, however, Reventlow had opted for the more immediate path to independence. Once in Hamburg, Reventlow quickly took up with a lawyer a decade her senior named Walter Lübke before abruptly leaving for Munich, always the destination. There, Reventlow took up painting lessons—that first artistic love—and began her initial, tentative excursions into Munich’s bohemian scene, spending the requisite amount of time in the cafés and bars of Schwabing. Lübke, from Hamburg, financed all of this. At this point, Reventlow, recently disinherited by her father, was wretchedly poor.

As usual, Reventlow’s brazenness—also on display in her confident entrance into the social and cultural world of bohemian Schwabing—was the cause of this ultimate rupture. Reventlow, twenty-two years old, had written her father to voice those concerns she had earlier shared with Fehling, and made it clear that she was prepared to renounce the spoils due her birth in order to forge her own path “in each way, financially and all else.”48 Her father took her up on this offer and Reventlow, her back turned on privilege, found herself in Munich with little money and a need to secure more. Aware that she had already ceded too much to tiptoe into the life she desired, Reventlow quickly contacted Michael Georg Conrad, editor of the influential Munich literary journal Die Gesellschaft. Reventlow may have been aware of Conrad’s connections with the Naturalist artistic movement in the city, which took subverting the “nature of middle-class marriage and sexual morality” as one of its primary aims. These were familiar themes for Reventlow, as they came from Henrik Ibsen, a literary idol for Conrad as well—he thought the

47 Ibid., 120.
48 Kubitschek, Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow, 507. „Es liegt durchaus kein Grund vor, der mich wünschen läßt Adelby zu verlassen, außer dem, daß ich wünsche mich selbständig zu machen und zwar in jeder Weise, pekuniär und auch sonst.“
Norwegian playwright the “great caller-to-arms in the battle against artistic dissoluteness and the moral degeneration of the stage.”

Although written on December 30, 1893, Conrad must have received Reventlow’s missive shortly after the New Year—a fitting time for fresh starts. Her letter was, ostensibly, a plea for publication; it reads, however, as a declaration of artistic purpose. To Reventlow, the aim of art was expression, and painting appeared the ideal vehicle to achieve this. Her letter, though, tracks the evolution of these thoughts, as Reventlow realizes that there are “so many things which … [she] would like to create artistically and which are not yet expressible through painting.” Undeterred, she turned to writing, that most effective conduit for conveying the “need to cry out over what one has suffered from life and from people.” In less than two decades, this urge to universalize personal pain resulted in Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen, which, fittingly for Reventlow, was a satire of the very place within which she had once found refuge.

Before this, however, Reventlow practiced this personalizing aesthetic by analyzing her still ambiguous relationship with her father. As she related years later in a somber piece for that otherwise irreverent Munich staple, Simplicissimus, her father’s death in the summer of 1894 had devastating effects upon her. The article—titled simply “Vater,” and opening with the equally stark “my father died suddenly”—concerns her unexpected grief at this passing, and the attempts by much of the family to deny Reventlow—just established in Munich—the right to mourn.

After receiving a note from a sympathetic brother that their father had taken ill, Reventlow returned north only to be confronted by a pastor, delegated by her mother to confront Reventlow. The message he carried was harsh: she should leave, as she “had no business here anymore.”

Even with this, she could not bring herself to go. After contemplating suicide, she resigned herself to sneaking a glimpse into a window of the house where she had grown up and was now

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49 Jelavich, Munich and Theatrical Modernism, 4.
50 Kubitschek, Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow, 274. “Aber schreiben muß ich doch. Es gibt so vieles, was man gerne künstlerisch gestalten möchte und es wenigstens noch nicht in der Malerei ausdrücken kann. Da drängt es mich mächtig dazu, es zu schreiben [...] und dann kommt einem, wenigstens mir, auch oft das Bedürfnis, das, was man vom Leben und von den Menschen gelitten hat, hinauszuschreien...”
51 Franziska zu Reventlow, „Vater,“ Simplicissimus 1. Jg., Nr. 5, trans. personal (1896): 6, f. „Mein Vater starb plötzlich.“
52 Ibid., 6. „Geh wieder fort, du hast hier nichts mehr zu suchen.‘ Meine Mutter hatte recht ... Ich hatte mich ja von ihnen losgelöst, und nun gehörte ich nicht mehr zu ihnen.“
unwelcome. All she could make out, looking through this glass, dimly, was her family, “sitting beside a lamplight around the tea table.”

Following this, she made her way back to Munich.

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Despite her connection to the city, many Bavarians continued to judge Reventlow—in many ways as shunned by her erstwhile Prussian community as she was dismissive of them—suspiciously. Germany’s traditional regional antagonisms colored these assessments of Reventlow. In a review of one of her works, the author noted that Reventlow was shaped by a “flight from Prussian-Protestant narrowness and the severity of an aristocratic family home.”

The writer Oskar Panizza, even, contended that Reventlow’s Prussian education had made a permanent mark on her and was still tangible in her mindset. As a result, this “Venus from Schleswig-Holstein” still believed in the lies of her classically minded schooling, in which Greek and Latin were privileged over more practical disciplines. A contemporary obituary by Franz Angermann noted the regularity with which she had to answer for her aristocratic background, while drawing attention to the general ambiguity with which she personally regarded her past.

Indeed, her once-ostentatious wealth often discredited her in the eyes of contemporaries. As a letter from Agnes to an absent Reventlow described, their new house in Lübeck included attic space to paint, as well as a “very large and very pretty” parlor “with a Chaise lounge.” The living room, in addition, contained a “soft Turkish carpet and similar tablecloth” with an “enchantingly pretty” balcony. Nonetheless, Angermann claims that only a “malicious person (Böstier) would be able to speak of carelessness here and, in this way, misjudge the deeper

53 Ibid., 6. „An der Südseite standen die Fenster offen. Die Vorhänge waren nicht herabgelassen. Da saßen sie beim Lampenlicht um den Teetisch.“
56 Kubitschek, Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow, 113. „Um den Trennungsschmerz der Schwester von Husum wissend, versucht sie – wie auch der Vater –, ihr das neue Zuhause schmackhaft zu machen: ‘Deine Stube ist sehr groß und sehr hübsch, mit einem Chaise-longue’ ... Offensichtlich hätte Franziska die Bodenzimmer gern für sich zum Malen gehabt... ‘In der Wohnstube haben wir eine weichen türkischen Teppich u. eben solche Tischdecke. Die Wohnstube mit dem Ausbau u. einem wilden Balkon sind so bezaubernd hübsch.’“
necessity of this relationship [to money].”\

Whereas others saw financial flippancy on Reventlow’s part, Angermann instead emphasized the unavoidability of her actions, as determined by both her environment and family. Reventlow, to Angermann, was never intentionally conceited, simply a happily indifferent spirit to whom the “appearance of a bailiff is absolutely nothing more than an annoying migraine or a thundershower that ruins a picnic.” As Angermann imagines Reventlow stating, one should “ideally ignore these … unavoidable irritations of life.”

Nonetheless, the German states’ turbulent history assured that unification would not only re-open old antagonisms within Munich and Bavaria, but deepen those only partially concealed. Even for those accepting of unification, there was a sense that “Hanoverians, Hessians, or Bavarians could get along well as Germans … but not as Prussians.” These old rivalries and hatreds came to the foreground most clearly during times of deprivation and conflict. As the First World War trudged through its third year, Munich suffered from a lack of foodstuffs including, most importantly, the hops necessary to produce the beer a traditionally thirsty city required. During the ensuing riots, Münchner derided the police sent in to disperse them as “Prussian lackeys,” exclaiming that “even the French wouldn’t treat us like this.” Rioters were additionally mistrustful of supposed preferential treatment for Prussian regiments, claiming that Junker Generals treated Bavarian soldiers “as cannon fodder.” The roots of this distrust were deep and, although most visible during upheaval, they remained a chronic concern of the city’s citizens, even during the peaceful years that Reventlow spent in Schwabing. And, as she would chronicle, it was the presence of perceived outsiders—whether Jew, anarchist, or emancipated woman—that fed these paranoid flames.

These regional prejudices mirrored those that the editors of Simplicissimus played off of, frequently mocking the Prussian “values” of “discipline, authority, and obedience.” These strict

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57 Angermann, „Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow,“ 222. “…nur ein Böstie könnte hier von ‘leichtsinnig’ sprechen und damit die innere Notwendigkeit dieses Verhältnisses verkennen…”
58 Ibid., 222. “Das Erscheinen eines Gerichtsvollziehers ist ihr durchaus nichts anderes als eine lästige Migräne oder ein Gewitterregen, der eine Landpartie verdirbt, diese kleineren oder größeren, unvermeidlichen Schikanen des Lebens muß man möglichst ignorieren, jedenfalls kennt sie darin keine prinzipellen Unterschiede.”
60 David Clay Large, Where Ghosts Walked: Munich’s Road to the Third Reich (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997), 63.
61 Ibid., 64.
attitudes stood in opposition to a “relaxed, tolerant, and vital Bavarian culture.”\(^{62}\) Albert Langen, a local publisher, had founded *Simplicissimus* in 1896 and would go on to publish the works of many of the city’s important modernists and dissidents, including Reventlow. *Simplicissimus*’s agenda was both simple and broad: to point out the foibles—via vehement ridicule, if necessary—of Wilhelmine German society. Although this aim made the magazine’s focus national in scope—as mentioned, Prussian militarism was a favorite topic—the peculiarities of Munich itself were often a target of the paper’s mockery. For example, special concern was given to caricaturing Munich’s sauced “burghers” warming seats in the city’s famous *Bierhäuser*.\(^{63}\) *Simplicissimus*’s association with Munich was so strong that once the paper threatened to become a bestseller outside of its Bavarian heartland, the editors suffered a momentary crisis of conscience. Considering the possibilities of marketing in the north—Reventlow’s ancestral seat and that favorite target of the paper—a leading writer for the magazine reiterated that “‘we should never lose our South German character … it’s our biggest asset.’”\(^{64}\)

As a contributor, Reventlow’s own writings seem to imitate the paper’s identity crisis. As works such as “*Vater*” show, Reventlow and *Simplicissimus* constantly shifted between a parody of, and deference to, the social divisions of Imperial Germany. In this fashion, *Simplicissimus*—no matter its Bavarian baiting—also reflected the society and culture of its city of birth. The methods by which *Simplicissimus*’s contributors, editors, and cartoonists attacked the norms of German society often “embrac[ed] some of that [same] society’s most aggressive ideals.”\(^{65}\) In many ways, the paper’s attack on the Hohenzollerns and Prussian army—exemplified by the most famous case, in which contributors Thomas Theodor Heine and Frank Wedekind received prison sentences for mocking the pageantry of a state visit to Palestine—revealed not a disagreement with the aggressive principles of the state but with the way in which this power was exercised.

The major concern of *Simplicissimus*’s writers was not that Germany had adopted a truculent international stance but, rather, that the country “could realize its potential only if it

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\(^{63}\) Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, 12.

\(^{64}\) Allen, *Satire and Society*, 45.

\(^{65}\) Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, 12.
rooted out remnants of feudalism in favor of promotion by merit.”  

Therefore, the connective thread between *Simplicissimus*’s anti-Prussian tenor and Munich’s egalitarianism—in contrast to Berlin, as being a “count … in Munich [often] meant absolutely nothing socially”—was actually a nationalism that, in the current construction of the state, could not help but bind Bavarians to Prussia, regardless of any larger hesitations.  

Furthermore, the magazine’s very success helped to accomplish the same. The reputation, output, and allure of the likes of Heine, Wedekind, Ludwig Thomas, and Reventlow—all contributors—made Schwabing an “epicenter of the new Reich,” in turn drawing ever more to the city.  

Upon her arrival, then, Munich had earned its nickname as a *Stadt der Fremden*, or “city of foreigners.” Schwabing, furthermore, was an already vibrant fusion of the Empire’s many social ingredients—full of artistic and intellectual polymaths, and complexly contradictory. It was here that the anarchist Erich Mühsam eventually made a name for himself as a cabaret performer; it was here that the Russian Wassily Kandinsky—after turning down a professorship in St. Petersburg—came to explore the possibilities of a non-objective abstract form of art; Otto Gross—noted Austrian psychoanalyst and son of a magistrate—came here to both philander and philosophize. And, of course, it was here that Reventlow—the once rich, aristocratic Prussian countess, with a brother drifting towards the radical right and a sister destined for the convent—came to paint, write, and reinvent herself.  

It was into this volatile mixture—of flourishing artistic modernism and entrenched aesthetic traditionalism; of divisive free thinkers and solid Catholic theology; and of determined social radicals and embittered conservative reaction—that the young Reventlow had placed herself. And, it was this mixture that allowed Reventlow to proclaim, with full conviction, that “Schwabing was not a place, but a condition.” Later in life, Mühsam himself noted the bizarre conglomeration of elements comprising turn-of-the-century Schwabing. Happening to know a rich Baltic noble in need of a wife (to satisfy an impatient father and access the remainder of his inheritance) as well as a penurious woman of respectably noble stock, Mühsam acted as intermediary between the Baron Alexander von Rechenberg-Linten and Reventlow, so this

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66 Ibid., 15.  
67 Faber, *Franziska zu Reventlow*, 9-10. “‘Ein Graf, der beim Leibregiment Oberleutnant oder so was war, das bedeutete gesellschaftlich in München gar nichts.”  
69 Faber, *Franziska zu Reventlow*, 10.  
70 Seegers, *Über Franziska zu Reventlow*, 250. „Schwabing ist kein Ort, sondern ein Zustand.“
“genteel, brave countess would finally be able to emerge out of her awful financial troubles and dependencies.” Likely laughing to himself, Mühsam noted the novelty of this arrangement: “imagine: the Jewish anarchist as marriage matchmaker between counts and barons, [it] has something very comic to it.”

That, however, was to come. Reventlow’s initial phase in Munich came to an abrupt end early in 1894 upon finding out that she had become pregnant by a Polish painter. To secure support, Reventlow returned to Hamburg and married the unassuming and unaware Walter Lübke. Several months later, Reventlow suffered quietly through a miscarriage, alone in her room. With the immediate need for support gone, Reventlow tired of her position as middle-class wife. Following a full confession regarding her frequent betrayals, Lübke initiated divorce proceedings and, by 1896, Reventlow was back in Munich for good. Things moved fast. Within two years she was a mother and had met Ludwig Klages, the bohemian intellectual who expanded her circle beyond artists. She was soon an integral member of the Kosmiker, and it was the following half decade of these relationships that played the central role in her work detailing Reventlow’s bohemian life in Schwabing.

**Class and Bohemia in Reventlow’s Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen**

The rhythm of Reventlow’s life during these years in Schwabing—filled with cafés, costume parties, and readings, and all set to the peculiar background hum of Kosmiker pontification—influenced her conception of the ideal bohemia for years to come. She had bestowed the sobriquet Wahnmoching upon the enclave—an untranslatable play on words whose meaning hinged upon the prefix “wahn-,” which contributed a note of “delirium” or “delusion” to the place. The term became a ubiquitous and colloquial byword for both the district and the bohemian attitude of its occupants. It is the Reventlow of this period that writers recall when thinking of the supreme Schwabing bohemian. Indeed, as an obituary in August 1918 stated, the two seemed nearly interchangeable; the Wahnmoching spirit was simply an extension of

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Reventlow, for “the whole world stayed for her Schwabing” whether she “sat in a beach chair or rocked in a hammock.”

*Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* represents Reventlow’s most cogent depiction of this world and the social foundations buttressing it. The novel revolves around Herr Dame (Mr. Lady)—whose hermaphroditic name was Reventlow’s wink at *Kosmiker* obsessions with classical mythology, many of whose gods exhibited these same sexual ambiguities. Herr Dame—a northerner lacking in little save for “qualities,” “initiatives,” and the desire to “prepare himself for any career”—relocates to Munich to pursue his sole interest: bohemians. Reventlow has set Dame up as a passive recipient of the Schwabing experience. This allows the author to distance herself from any single, central figure and instead cast her gaze across the Schwabing scene as a whole. As a contemporary critic noted, in a play on the title of the book, these “events from a strange neighborhood are not quite completely Reventlow.” Therefore, Dame’s ultimately fatal accident is simply Reventlow’s “appropriate way of managing [Dame] in the futureless and indifferent world of literature, after he has fulfilled his role as a witness and chronicler … of *Wahnmoching’s* bohemians.”

By making an outsider the lens through which readers enter *das geheime Deutschland* (“secret Germany”), Reventlow lends her narrative a naïve sincerity while simultaneously allowing herself to comment on the allure that bohemia held for those German *Mittelständler* otherwise only facilely interested in the deeper ideological battles at play behind the carousing and licentiousness.

Importantly, Herr Dame explicitly outlines his relationship to the bohemian scenes he recorded and his role within them. He begins by disparaging; he feels he has, over several

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73 Helmut Kreuzer, *Die Boheme: Analyse und Dokumentation der intellektuellen Subkultur vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, trans. personal (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971), 97. „... ein junger Mann mit reichem Stiefvater ... ist jedoch außerstande, sich ‚auf irgendeinen Beruf vorzubereiten,’ ein ‚bestimmtes Studium zu ergreifen‘; er hat, auf seine freilich bescheidene Art ein ‚Mann ohne Eigenschaften‘, ‚nicht viel eigene Initiative‘ und wenig ‚fixierte Interessen‘, wohl aber ein lebhaftes Interesse für die Boheme, das offenbar in seiner ‚Biographie‘ angelegt ist.“

74 Angermann, „Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow,“ 224. „Gehrke fühlt es selbst: ‚Diese Begebenheiten aus einem merkwürdigen Stadtteil sind doch nicht so ganz Reventlow.‘“

75 Kreuzer, *Die Boheme*, 97. „Herr Dame ist insofern Fatalist, als er sich zu seiner ‚Biographie‘ a priori ‚verurteilt‘ weiß und sie nur noch passiv erlebt ... Doch auch der Leser weiß bereits, daß die Autorin ein Eisenbahnglück mit tödlichem Ausgang über ihn verhängt hat. Der Zufall ist die angemessene Art, den Zukunfts- und Interessenlosen aus der Romanwelt zu schaffen, nachdem er seiner Rolle als Zuschauer und Chronist denkwürdiger Episoden ... aus der Geschichte der ‚Wahnmochinger‘ (Schwabinger) Boheme genügt hat.“
entries, allowed himself to adopt a tone too “emotional and romantic.” His goal, as he states clearly, was “only to be a chronicler in these pages, and it does not behove a chronicler to place his own sensations too strongly in the foreground.” Reventlow intends this as a declaration of her authorial intentions, for, however closely her life resembles the vivacious one detailed, her larger aim is to let the story tell itself. It was likely this “ironic, self-deprecating distance from the object” of her inquiry that infuriated those she profiled within the work. Nonetheless, the connections between her aims with Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen and those stated in her letter to Conrad, written decades before, are clear. Her cathartic rendering of Schwabing’s bohemian scene allowed her “to cry out over what one has suffered from life and from people.” As Helmut Kreuzer has noted, Reventlow aimed to portray the “activities of the whole ‘great’ circle (des ganzen ‘enormen’ Kreises)—their parties, their jargon, their ideas, and their ideologies.” Therefore, while Reventlow attaches minimal importance to Dame’s internal life, she imagines a significant future for the product of his thoughts. Her hope is that “someone”—whom she “imagines as something like a thoughtful scholar or serious researcher”—may happen upon these pages in the future and use them as a vehicle to reconstitute what she knows by this time must be long past: that very Wahnmoching spirit.

Despite Reventlow’s growing disagreements with the Kosmiker, the two implicitly understood those unwahnmochingisch elements of fin-de-siècle Munich. A recurrent theme in Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen is the slow infiltration of bourgeois elements into Schwabing, attracted by the lax social and sexual restrictions but ambivalent about the intellectual and artistic currents coursing through the district. Both members of the Kosmiker and the women in the novel—who unapologetically sleep with several of them, albeit with a constant smirk and wink in the direction of more enlightened friends—derisively referred to these characters as Zinnsoldaten (“tin soldiers”). For example, Dame notes at the beginning of one particularly

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76 Ibid., 97. “…mit ironischer, selbstironischer Distanz vom Gegenstand, dessen humoristische Verfremdung durch das Initiationsmotiv erreicht wird…“
78 Franziska zu Reventlow, „Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen: oder Begebenheiten aus einem merkwürdigen Stadtteil,” in Sämtliche Werke in fünf Bänden, ed. Michael Schardt, trans. personal (Oldenburg, Germany: Igel Verlag Literatur, 2004), 63-64. „Ich will in diesen Blättern nur Chronist sein … Sollten sie etwa in späteren Tagen oder Jahren in jemandes Hände geraten, der mit Staunen Kenntnis davon nimmt, was Wahnmoching war und bedeute, was hier lebte, gelebt wurde und gelebt werden sollte, so wird dieser Jemand – ich stelle ihn mir etwa als versonnenen Gelehrten oder ernsten Forscher vor – vielleicht mäßiges Interesse an meiner Person nehmen und nur so nebenbei in stiller Anerkennung den Hut ziehen, wenn er erfährt, daß es bloß ein junger Mann aus Berlin war, welcher Dame hieß und sich verurteilt fühlte, das Wichtigste über diesen bemerkenswerten Stadtteil aufzuzeichnen.”
raucous party that Maria—one of two feminine stand-ins for Reventlow—arrived with a guest that does not quite fit in: “poor Georg,” Maria’s “law intern” date, immediately felt “very uncomfortable,” as he misunderstood the theme of the party and arrived as Pierrot, the recognizable stock character of Italian Commedia dell’Arte. One of Reventlow’s housemates cheers Georg up by mentioning that he could easily pass for a “fool in a Shakespearean drama,” although the comment was meant mockingly. Reventlow’s easy fun at the intern’s expense reinforces her earlier distaste for Germany’s petty-bourgeois, revealing the social anxieties still underpinning her worldview.

Nonetheless, Zinnsoldaten are essential elements of Reventlow’s depiction of Schwabing, as they provide a constant foil to the pretentious erudition of the Kosmiker and their circle. Indeed, it is precisely the voice of the Zinnsoldat that Reventlow adopts to tell her story. It was the modest question of a Zinnsoldat that prompted one of Reventlow’s non-Kosmiker intellectual friends to pessimistically answer that the eventuality of Wahnmoehing prefiguring the emergence of a Dionysian age was slim. After the philosopher concludes his metaphor with an allusion to the wild dancing and animal sacrifices that this reinvigorating age would usher in, the archetypal Zinnsoldat can only reply, “Pfui Teufel!” (“Disgusting!”). In this instance, the apparently artless distaste of the Zinnsoldat mirrors the measured incredulity Reventlow herself wanted the novel to intimate. These ignorant bourgeois were not always useless.

The larger question, however, remains: how indicative of her environment and contemporaries were Reventlow’s experiences and writings? As with Reventlow, Schwabing’s bohemians clearly defined themselves, at least in part, negatively; namely a coherent sense of bohemia came as a result of larger opposition to, or divergence from, bourgeois Wilhelmine society. This contrarianism was true, as well, of the Viennese “modernists” of Schorske’s work. Both groups, then, shared a central antagonism: it was not only the generic paternalism, but that rationalized, practical “value system of classical liberalism-in-ascendancy within which they had

79 Ibid., 73. “Der arme Georg, Marias Rechtspraktikant, der durch die Eckhäusler eingeladen war, hatte den Charakter des Festes entschieden nicht begriffen, er war als Pierrot gekommen, und es war ihm dann sehr unbehaglich. Willy, dem er sein Leid klagte, sagte, er müsse eben versuchen, sich wie der Narr in einem Shakespearschen Drama aufzufassen. Er empfand wohl die Bosheit nicht, die darin lag, und fühlte sich getröstet.”
80 Ibid., 79.
been reared” that their critiques targeted.\textsuperscript{81} In this way, an imagined Dionysian classical past appealed to Schwabing’s social theorists, as it presented an ideal “vehicle for freeing the emotions and liberating the body.”\textsuperscript{82} Significantly for Schorske’s thesis, the traction of this violent disassociation with “history” depended on the very insularity of Vienna, in which the city’s “highly compacted political and social development” created a “shared social experience” against which the populace reacted, even if their responses differed. Likewise, a sense of the “cohesiveness of the whole élite” characterized Reventlow’s Munich.\textsuperscript{83}

An incestuous cast of characters—whether poets, philosophers, dramatists, painters, or revolutionaries—roamed Schwabing’s northern streets. As in Vienna—where “intellectuals … mingled with a business and professional elite proud of its general education and artistic culture”—Munich’s hubs—such as the Café Luitpold and, as one artist colloquially described it, the “University of Café Stephanie”—assembled people from assorted sectors of society, as long as they shared an interest in any of the activities commonly associated with Schwabing’s bohemians, be they cutting-edge art, philosophy, or guiltless carousing.\textsuperscript{84} And, in the middle of it all, was Reventlow. There was seemingly “no party to which she would not bring a humor, an exuberance, a final abandonment; no café where she would not be dancing on the tables and driving the collected literati, waiters, and artists crazy; no society that would have been able to exist without her charm, [and] no theory from which her figure (Erscheinung) had not been of importance [in its construction].”\textsuperscript{85}

While Reventlow was a personal thread connecting the eclectic assortment of avant-gardists, socialists, criminals, workers, poor, writers, and musicians living in Schwabing, opposition to the norms of Wilhelmine society was often the group’s reflexive “ideological” impulse. And, Reventlow’s own life often seemed to reiterate these social animosities. During one trip, Reventlow and her young son (Rolf) traveled next to “three old women, hideous north Germans.” As Reventlow lay him down to sleep, one of the women directed a question to the

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\textsuperscript{81} Schorscke, Fin-de-siecle Vienna, xxvi.  
\textsuperscript{82} Jelavich, Munich, 8.  
\textsuperscript{83} Schorske, Fin-de-siecle Vienna, xxvi.  
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., xxvii.  
\textsuperscript{85} Hildegard Felisch, „Franziska Reventlow,“ in Über Franziska zu Reventlow: Rezensionen, Porträts, Aufsätze, Nachrufe aus mehr als 100 Jahren, ed. Johanna Seegers, trans. personal (Oldenburg, Germany: Igel Verlag Wissenschaft, 2007), 206. „Kein Fest, auf dem sie nicht die Laune brächte, den Überschwang, das letzte Selbstvergessen; kein Café, wo sie nicht auf Tischen herumgetanzt wäre und sämtliche Literaten, Kellner und Künstler zur Raserei gebracht hätte; keine Gesellschaft, die ohne ihren Charme hätte bestehen können, keine Theorie, bei der nicht ihre Erscheinung von Wichtigkeit gewesen wäre. “
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child: “tell me, my boy, do you pray often?” Reventlow’s entry makes clear her pride at her son’s response: a quick “no,” said “with open eyes.”

Reventlow’s hostility, however, was directed at this reminder of the stifling piety of some northerners, rather than at any class in itself. Indeed, trace remains of Reventlow’s past life continually resurface in her writings. In this way, many of Schwabing bohemia’s signature events appear as little more than aristocratic appropriations of a sort of lower-class viscerality and spectacle assumed to be absent from higher social stations. As Jelavich has noted, many Fasching (Carnival) festivities “embodied a visual and gestural vitality that had disappeared from the ‘overly’ literary paintings and plays of the educated elite.” Reventlow’s famous costume parties, then, were related to these spontaneous, traditional proletarian celebrations in that the bohemians aimed to convey a “‘carnivalesque’ spirit that opposed social, political, and cultural hierarchies, and that dismissed the ‘civilized’ bifurcation of mind and body.” As with other aspects of her life, Reventlow’s bohemian existence was just as much a calculated negotiation between the assumed superiorities of the class of her birth and those advantageous aspects of an otherwise disdained lower class, nonetheless ripe for the pilfering.

87 Jelavich, Munich and Theatrical Modernism, 9.
CHAPTER TWO: REVENTLOW AND THE POLITICS OF WOMEN’S EMANCIPATION

Fifteen years after Franziska zu Reventlow’s 1918 death, her friend Franz Hessel sat down and tossed off a poem. Hessel’s verse described a state of affairs that Reventlow would not have recognized, although rendered through a political lens that she would have:

My sweetheart’s no Aryan
But still a lovely little mouse
And if Herr Hitler would see her
Then he’d come out of his little house.

And if Herr Göring would see her
Then he would make to gobble her up
And dance with her, topless
And with lace below.

And only that Everyman, the pea-brained lout
would spout: What are exceptions, but cases that prove the rule.88

Hessel was one of Reventlow’s most intimate acquaintances. An early-summer diary entry from 1903 conveys the warmth of their interactions: “In the afternoon, Franz Hessel plays with Bubi [Rolf, her son] while I sleep. Then it rains. Franz reads stories aloud to Bubi.”89 The two, however, shared more than confidences; Hessel’s poem—about the power of feminine beauty to make even the most ardent National Socialist betray his principles—serves as a posthumous précis on an aspect of Reventlow’s political thought: her belief that essential feminine traits stem

from an inherent, erotic nature. While, on the surface, this contention holds minimal political import, during Reventlow’s life—a time in which the ranks of German feminists swelled and women campaigned, amidst dogged opposition, for equal opportunities under the law and in the work force and higher education—the Frauenfrage (“Question of Women’s Rights”) was one of Imperial Germany’s most salient and politicized areas of discourse.

Reventlow’s writings on this key issue reveal her indebtedness to the beliefs of her intellectual mentors: Schwabing’s Kosmiker (“Cosmics”) were a group of diverse, eclectic personalities who nonetheless shared a mutual fascination with the possibilities of refashioning the myths, ideas, and lifestyles of antiquity for the modern age. As with Reventlow, the central Kosmiker members converged on Schwabing from disparate origins. Alfred Schuler, originally from the Palatinate, moved to Munich with his mother, who bankrolled his lifestyle and studies until her death in 1913. Ludwig Klages, born in Hanover, studied chemistry and physics in Leipzig, and moved to Munich in 1893 to defy his parents. He subsequently earned his doctorate in the city, began work in a field he labeled “characterology,” and lectured at his own “Psycho-diagnostic Seminar,” abandoning chemistry along the way—again, disappointing his parents. Karl Wolfskehl, a Hessian banker’s son and one-time student in Berlin, claimed that “my attitude toward Judaism, my commitment to the Jewish idea, to the Jewish reality is as old as myself.” Indeed, even during Wolfskehl’s harmonious years with the Kosmiker he was simultaneously active in Zionist groups within the city. And, Stefan George—the Rhineland poet and aesthete who retained enough personal renown to form the core of his own circle of disciples—described by Reventlow as possessing an “almost eerie … odd, learned head with dead eyes,” wrote symbolist poetry exalting in the vitality, freedom, and passion of classical antiquity.

As Peter Jelavich has shown, a rejection of liberalism—defined by the “secularization of education, restricted parliamentary power, [and] a franchise limited to educated and propertied men”—is central to Munich’s iteration of “modernism.” And, it was the intellectual and cultural equivalents of these liberal political sentiments that served as the straw men against which the

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90 Raymond Furnes, Zarathustra’s Children: A Study of a Lost Generation of German Writers (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 70, 101, 107. While other sources have contributed to these short biographical anecdotes, Furnes constitutes the majority of the above-mentioned details.


Kosmiker reacted. Therefore, the Kosmiker’s Dionysian revolt represented an assault against the propriety and rationalism of the city’s middle classes just as much as Frank Wedekind’s foregrounded, adolescent sexuality and anarcho-cabaretist Erich Mühsam’s political radicalism. As Jelavich notes, by the turn of the century, “Bavarian liberalism was on its deathbed” after this multi-faceted assault on the bourgeois Weltanschauung; and, it was in this period of relaxed and cowed political and social liberalism that the Kosmiker’s prescriptions gained traction.

Jelavich’s examination of the persistence of a classical tradition in Munich supplements any look at the impact of Kosmiker theories—especially in their relation to Reventlow’s thoughts on the question of women’s emancipation—by illuminating those intellectual trends that, firstly, influenced their formulation. The desire to look back to a pagan past—as a corrective for a sense of “moral decay” just as pervasive in Munich as in Roberts’ fin-de-siècle France—parallels the more general decline of liberal values. The Kosmiker drew upon a dichotomy in Greek mythology, as outlined by earlier German theorists. While the aforementioned “Apollonian” model—favoring a clinical rationalism “used to refine and temper the mind”—characterized Bavaria’s bourgeois thinkers, a “Dionysian” system—in which sensuality and femininity served as a weapon against a sanitized and stultifying culture—remained attractive to many of Schwabing’s intellectuals. The navel-gazing neo-classicism of the Kosmiker and their ilk, however, ill-fitted the traits of the pre-war city and ultimately proved a cumbersome catch-all for the myriad manifestations of “modernity” in Munich; by the end of the First World War, many Schwabingers had begun to understand that the ultimate bequest of the “cultures of classical Greece … [was] an ambiguous heritage.”

During her time in Schwabing, however, Reventlow was indelibly drawn to both Kosmiker members and their ideology. Indeed, Reventlow was, at first, all things to the group: inspiration, contributing member, and lover to both Klages and Wolfskehl, as well as the sole feminine voice, although her views did not vary significantly because of it. Klages—increasingly infatuated with Reventlow in the years following her permanent departure from Munich in 1910—even envisioned Reventlow as a symbol of ideal Nordic womanhood. Reventlow, for her part, “enjoyed the erotic and intellectual liaison” with Wolfskehl as deeply as she did her

93 Jelavich, Munich and Theatrical Modernism, 6.
94 Ibid., 184.
95 Ibid., 8.
96 Ibid., 7.
involvement with Klages. Her intimacy with Kosmiker thought is apparent in her leaden response to the rising demands of feminists for equality. As a matriarchal, pagan past—in which society prized women, dually, for their intrinsic maternal and sexual instincts—remained the steady preoccupation of Kosmiker theorists, Reventlow was unable to address the many layers of the turn-of-the-century Frauenfrage without appealing to idealized conceptions of an ancient feminine essence. Likewise, Hessel’s poem echoes this strain of thought in his inference that femininity and eroticism can soften the shuttered strivings of men (“then he would come out of his house”) for power. Indeed, Kosmiker thinkers wrote of the primacy of “matriarchal state[s] of wholeness” over the present “violent world of thrusting masculinity.”

As the Frauenfrage shows, the standard against which Reventlow appraised her age was a distant, mythologized human past. Reventlow, like many of Schwabing’s bohemian intellectuals, confronted the novel problems of a modernizing, urban Germany—in which traditional social and political structures were in flux—armed only with the terminology of an inadequate and imagined antiquity. The manifold consequences of this tendency were discernible following the outbreak of the First World War, as Reventlow, the Kosmiker, and broad swathes of once-vital artistic and intellectual communities in Schwabing found themselves increasingly eclipsed, or unwittingly co-opted. While Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen, written in 1913, prefigures Schwabing’s irrelevancy, the obscurity into which both Wolfskehl and Schuler fell upon their deaths (in 1948 and 1923, respectively) made it manifest. The degradations of war threw avant-garde groups, such as Zurich’s Dadaists—who criticized the absurdities of the present without retreating from them—into the spotlight at the expense of Munich’s artists. And, many Kosmiker theories—such as the group’s “philosophical“ anti-Semitism, soon to be subsumed by its biological cousin—were, often inelegantly, absorbed into larger structures more than willing to politicize what had once been but academic obscurantism. Early Nazi party registers, up until the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, included a disproportionately “high percentage of artists from Schwabing,” exemplifying this appropriation.

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98 Furnes, Zarathustra’s Children, 90.
Women’s Emancipation and the Work Place

Reventlow’s most concise expression of her opinions on the German feminist movement (Frauenbewegung) appears in “Viragines oder Hetären,” an 1899 article written for a Swiss periodical. In short, Reventlow’s argument is that women should remain “untroubled by the strain of a career and find their satisfaction in eroticism and motherhood.”100 Before expounding on this thesis, however, Reventlow takes the temperature of the room: regarding “that question [the Frauenfrage] of what befits women,” Reventlow proclaims that “the views have likely never drifted so far apart as in our days, where, at the same time, [the struggle between] Emancipation and Erotic Modernity leave us with persistent repercussions.”101 Indeed, Reventlow’s original title, “what befits women”—only later changed by an editor—betrays the stridently proscriptive tone she adopts throughout.102 Within the article, Reventlow attacks reform-minded German feminists—whom she labels “Viragines,” or “mannish, impudent women”—who Reventlow sees as incorrectly emphasizing an agenda of occupational and mental equality. Importantly, feminists are both the bête-noire and addressee of the article, leaving men—sympathetic or not to her cause—on the sideline.

To begin her argument, Reventlow discusses what she sees as the actual meaning behind feminist rhetoric. For Reventlow, this “army of agitated and agitating women, who, in place of their cooking spoon and sewing needle, have taken up the sword of speech and incitement, want to liberate the whole world in spite of themselves and their sisters.”103 Reventlow’s answer: “Liberation? From whom and to what end?” Reventlow notes that these Bewegungsweiber (or, “movement women,” as Reventlow derisively labeled them) usually respond with two answers: the first one—to liberate women “from the slavery of men, under whom women have languished for centuries”—she mocks; the second—to liberate women “from social and gender slavery”—

100 Carol Diethe, Nietzsche’s Women: Beyond the Whip (New York: de Gruyter, 1996), 127. The corresponding idea, that Reventlow’s unconventional idea of femininity was intricately connected to the means by which she imagined an ideal Wahnmoching, or bohemian existence, is explored more thoroughly in the chapter three.
102 Ibid., 256.
103 Ibid., 211. “ … dieses Heer von bewegten und bewegenden Frauen, die statt Kochlöffel und Nähnadel das Schwert der Rede und Agitation ergriffen haben, und der ganzen Welt zum Trotz sich selbst und ihre Mitschwestern ‘befreien’ wollen.”
she does not. Reventlow can think of no “reasonable and humane person”—man or woman—who opposes improving the living conditions and health of lower-class women, as well as that of their children. As she admits, for those women who must work, the “energy and self-denial” they daily practice is “commendable, but a pleasing picture it is not.” These “Viragines,” however, “would be highly indignant if one expected them to confine themselves to this” first purpose. Instead, the main thrust of their actions—which women’s education and professional advancement promote—are directed towards the “liberation of the educated, wealthy woman, the struggle for equal rights and equality among genders.”

Regardless of Reventlow’s hostility, this was a ‘struggle’ that many German feminists, in the decade before the First World War, considered themselves to be losing. Germany, having universal manhood suffrage for its Lower House of Parliament written into its constitution, nonetheless long lacked the robust debate around the female vote that characterized so many other industrialized, Protestant countries. Indeed, only three years before Reventlow’s article, a motion presented by socialists within the Reichstag—that Lower House, directly under, and subordinate to, the Bundesrat—to introduce qualified female voting in state parliamentary elections was “virtually ignored.” Furthermore, German women were subject to broad restrictions on their rights to join political groups or even express political sentiments in public in many of Germany’s most-populous states—an anachronistic constraint held over from ruling class anxieties following the revolutions of 1848, in which bitterness eventually spilt over into mobilization. After 1900, Germany put a new Civil Code, the Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, into effect. This law book—which remained in place for nearly half a century—subordinated women’s rights to property, children, divorce, and work to, in succession, their parents, guardians, and husbands. Only rarely did the law correspond to the legal advancements women slowly accumulated in other countries. As Richard Evans noted, the Code “represented a

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106 Ibid., 212. “Aber die ‘kämpfenden Frauen’ würden sehr empört sein, wenn man ihnen zumuten wollte, sich darauf zu beschränken. Die Hauptkraft der reddenen, schreibenden, und agitierenden Bewegung konzentriert sich auf die Befreiung der gebildeten, gutschützten Frau, auf den Kampf um die Gleichberechtigung und Gleichstellung der Geschlechter.”

combination of the social conservatism of the Evangelical Church and the anachronistic and authoritarian familial ideals of the Prussian aristocracy.”

Regardless of the conditions placed on women, from the latter half of the nineteenth century, an increasing number began to seek independent incomes outside the home. While elementary teaching remained a popular and accepted avenue for working women, by the mid-1890’s there were also more than 13,000 female office workers in the Germany, a sign of the growing potential for daughters of the nation’s middle classes to find clerical, pink- and white-collar jobs. Still, this constituted a marginal percentage of the total German female workforce; in 1895, agricultural work accounted for 53.5% of female occupation. Blue-collar work steadily lost ground to women in the service industries, however, as these registered a jump from 7.7% to more than 20% in the thirty years before the First World War. By 1914, this group was only slightly smaller than the number of women associated with urban, factory work.

Possibly recognizing these trends and distributions, Reventlow’s article addresses women in urban, bourgeois environments and industrial settings, as well as those more traditional, agricultural areas of female labor. Reventlow was not the only woman, however, to devote attention to these segments of the working population. Taking a divergent stance from Reventlow’s, Clara Zetkin—the socialist leader—remarked, in 1889, that gender equality should exist in the workplace; women needed no special provisions and “no other protection than that which work in general proposes against capital.” In this international fight, there was no essential, gendered difference between those on the front lines of the struggle. Many bourgeois proponents of professional equality, as well, seconded Zetkin; “social justice [and] individual freedom” demanded that biological differences play no part in creating preferences or hindrances amongst the genders in any section of the labor market.

Reventlow disagreed. One needs only to “watch these hard-working women of the lower classes, who additionally bring a child into the world each year, to realize that the female body is

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108 Ibid., 15.
110 Ibid., 334.
not up to the task, that it gradually goes out of shape and perishes.”\textsuperscript{113} This observation—far from a call to reform—was instead a spur for women to recognize their proper social role, which is one of comfort given and received, maternally and sexually. Nonetheless, Reventlow’s Kosmiker-inspired insistence on the physical degradation that work in the masculine professions entails neglected the reality of the current situation. The cycle of “pregnancy, abortion, and childbirth” in both bourgeois and working-class woman—for whom “nine pregnancies per marriage was no rare occurrence”—contributed just as much to the declining health of women as did any insistence on maintaining a masculine work ethic or reaching for occupational equality.\textsuperscript{114} Even so, by 1900 German women, regardless of their profession or lack thereof, could expect to live, on average, three years longer than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{115} Reventlow’s actual concern, as is shown, is that the potential cosmetic deterioration of working women might detract from their ability to enjoy and dispense the courtesanal comfort she prioritizes.

The embodiment of these dually maternal and sexual women was represented by the “Hetären” of the article’s title. For Reventlow, these “courtesans” were the most important part of her solution to the Frauenfrage: the proliferation of hetäristic ideology would ensure that women were indeed liberated, but without sacrificing their intrinsic feminine qualities. As Reventlow notes, the “courtesans of antiquity were free, highly educated, and respected women that no one felt offended by if they gave away their love and bodies to whom they wanted and as often as they wanted, while simultaneously taking part in the intellectual life of men.”\textsuperscript{116} The problem with Germany’s modern “Viragines” was that, in prioritizing inclusion into majority-masculine spheres, they appeared willing to forego those parts that made them uniquely women. Reventlow’s ideology was, in this way, a curious form of female exceptionalism in which she reinforced contemporary masculine conceptions of gender and social roles, albeit by resorting to primordial precedent. Furthermore, by emphasizing the equivalent significance of women’s role as mother and temptress—rather than arguing, as some feminists did, that sexual freedom was an antidote aimed directly at the constrictions of marital child-rearing—Reventlow’s ideal was

\textsuperscript{113} Reventlow, “Sonstiges,” 213. “Man braucht ja nur einmal diese schwerarbeitenden Frauen der unteren Stände anzuschauen, die außerdem noch jedes Jahr ein Kind zur Welt bringen, um einzusehen, daß der weibliche Körper dem nicht gewachsen ist, daß er dabei aus der Form und allmählich zu Grunde geht.”

\textsuperscript{114} Frevert, \textit{Women in Germany History}, 91.


\textsuperscript{116} Reventlow, “Sonstiges,” 218. “Die Hetären des Altertums waren freie, hochgebildete und geachtete Frauen, denen niemand übel nahm, wenn sie ihre Liebe und ihren Körper verschenkten an wen sie wollten und so oft sie wollten und die gleichzeitig am geistigen Leben der Männer mit teilnahmen.”
particularly distinctive in Wilhelmine feminist discourse. In claiming both strands of the traditional “mother or courtesan” rhetoric as essential in her formulation of feminine nature, Reventlow’s ideal was just as radical, albeit arrived at by paradoxical dint of her reiteration of anti-feminist constructions that had historically been viewed as innately opposing categorizations.

In this way, Reventlow moved beyond the freedom of women to exercise instinctual, (exclusively) heterosexual urges, and also emphasized the importance of motherhood.¹¹⁷ As she notes in another essay on gender difference, Reventlow finds truth in Nietzsche’s dictum that “everything about woman is a riddle and everything about woman has only one solution: pregnancy.”¹¹⁸ Betraying Kosmiker loyalties, Reventlow argues that “women who have loved and lived a lot” make the best mothers. As evidence, she cites the fact that “in Japan, girls are even considered the most suitable spouses if they have spent a certain number of years in the tea houses.” To drive the point home to what Reventlow can only imagine is a shocked, bourgeois, and potentially titillated audience, Reventlow familiarizes her metaphor by noting that tea houses “mean about approximately the same as a Berlin pub with female hostesses.”¹¹⁹

Reventlow’s life, it seems, exemplified her observation: often describing her life before her son’s birth as a time in which she “could not live,” Reventlow forever after marked his birthdate as the “date of [the beginning of] my life [and] the night in which the mouse [her son] beheld the light of the world.”¹²⁰

As noted, much of Reventlow’s argumentation was a reprocessing of Kosmiker thought, although the members of the group were themselves in a constant process of re-formulating the thought of their great, coalescing source, Swiss anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen and his 1861 study, *Die Mutterrecht*, known alternatively as “Matriarchy” or “Mother Right.” Reventlow, in *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen*, comments on the ubiquitous presence of Bachofen

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¹¹⁷ This is a subject which is developed more thoroughly in the third chapter of this study, but, as a central part of her argument within “Viragines oder Hetären,” requires mention in this context.
¹¹⁸ Ibid., 203-204. This article “Das Männerphantom der Frau” was also published in the *Zürcher Diskussionen*, but in the year 1898. Nietzsche’s quote reads: “Alles am Weibe ist ein Rätsel und alles am Weibe hat nur eine Lösung: Schwangerschaft.”
¹¹⁹ Ibid., 209. “Man kann oft genug beobachten, daß gerade Frauen, die viel geliebt und gelebt haben, die besten Mütter warden. In Japan gelten die Mädchen sogar für die geeignetsten Ehefrauen, wenn sie eine bestimmte Anzahl von Jahren in den Teehäusern zugebracht haben, und die Teehäuser bedeuten etwa dasselbe, wie eine Berliner Kneipe mit Damenbedienung.”
within Schwabing circles. During an informal philosophical discussion at the Seasons Bar, Dr. Sendt gives his listeners an overview of the group’s important concepts. In turn, he mentions the Swiss scholar. Turning to Maria (one of two female stand-ins for Reventlow), Sendt explains that Bachofen is a “famous scholar, dear lady, and if you want to permanently settle in our neighborhood, you must read him.”¹²¹ These were instructions most Kosmiker took to heart; Klages reputedly “steeped himself in the book for five weeks on end, inaccessible to his Schwabing colleagues.”¹²²

If the book’s methodology was not clear, its aim was: Bachofen intended to “restore the picture of a cultural [matriarchal] stage which was overlaid or totally destroyed by later developments.” It was the victory of the Judeo-Christian worldview—one that raised patriarchy over maternal sensuality, reason over passion—that ended this stage of paganism in which society prized the feminine qualities of “fruitfulness and nourishment” (in both the maternal and sexual senses). Bachofen classified an early stage of this development as “hetaerist-aphroditic,” in which female sexual promiscuity was assumed, and “sex [was] motivated by lust, with no understanding of the relationship of intercourse to conception.”¹²³ Reventlow develops these ideas in “Viragines oder Hetären.” By steadfastly refusing to consider what contemporary feminists actually mean by “liberation”—or what value might exist in women gaining an equal footing in professional life—Reventlow consistently misrepresents any urge towards sexual leveling as a denial of the ancient, natural essence of women.

Helene Lange—one of Germany’s most vocal feminists—anticipated exactly this critique in her defense of professional gender equality. Lange notes, with seeming frustration, that when “women make an attempt at participating in male privileges in order to acquire the knowledge made necessary for competition … they are ever and again reminded of their ‘natural calling.’” Lange, and Reventlow too, on this count, also noted that men in the professional world are able to freely “engage in amorous liaisons at will,” while women have no means by which to learn to understand themselves, either sexually or professionally. Lange’s proposal, however, differed from that of Reventlow. Whereas Reventlow saw this as a sign that women should remain out of the workforce, Lange’s suggestion was that “middle-class men needed to expand their

¹²¹ Reventlow, „Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen,“ 46. “Nach Bachofen – das ist ein bekannter Gelehrter, lieber Dame, und wenn Sie sich dauernd in unserem Stadtteil niederlassen wollen, müssen Sie ihn lesen …”
¹²² Furnes, Zarathustra’s Children, 101.
understanding of the female *Bestimmung* (purpose) and open professional and educational avenues for women.”  

In her article, however, Reventlow identifies feminists such as Lange as exactly the force in the modern world denying the rebirth of a matriarchal age. In *Kosmiker* nomenclature, Apollo represents these cold, rational, patriarchal forces, while Dionysius symbolizes the countervailing, anarchic hedonism, sensuality, and natural states of society’s various matriarchal pasts. Over the centuries of “progression from inchoate, chthonic, female-based wisdom to the pellucid radiance of paternity,” Apollo beat down society’s vestigial Dionysian elements. And, these are exactly the elements Reventlow prioritizes in “Viragines oder Hetären,” longing for their eventual victory over the sexless proscriptions of German feminists. Indeed, Reventlow remains uncertain if she can even consider these “Viragines” women. Drawing on an aside of Charles Darwin’s—who noted in *On the Origin of Species* that “English sheep farmers breed out the [useless] sexually intermediate forms” of their herd—Reventlow claims that feminists are themselves part of this middle evolutionary stage. These women, who “want to do away with men, are likely for the most part only hermaphroditic spirits that the healthy erotic spirit of the new paganism—whose victory we anticipate in the next century—will soon clear away.” For those, like Reventlow, attracted to the enticements of this hetaerist-Dionysian period, only through bringing the “buried, but still existent pagan bedrock to the surface—ideally through a ‘Dionysian frenzy’”—could this age return in the modern world. The bacchanalian reverie, costume parties, and general, stylized eccentricity of fin-de-siècle Schwabing were *Kosmiker* contributions towards this renaissance.

The *Kosmiker*, then, each in their idiosyncratic way, used *Die Mutterrecht* as the seed from which their own ideas grew. In the end, many of their thoughts were simply vague

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125 Furnes, *Zarathustra’s Children*, 103.
127 Wendt, *Franziska zu Reventlow*, 180. “Sie sollten den verschütteten, aber immer noch vorhandenen heidnischen Grund an die Oberfläche bringen – idealerweise in ‘dionysischer Raserie.’” Although, as Reventlow notes late in life, her son had recently begun reading about the subconscious („Unterbewußtsein“), Freudian theory had little traction on early *Kosmiker* thought, save for the only tangential influence Freud’s student Otto Groß had might have had during his dissolute time spent in Schwabing before the war.
refractions of Bachofen, filtered through this group of writers also profoundly affected by Germany’s modernizing present. This backwards-looking exultation of a Dionysian age engendered, naturally, its corollary: contempt for modernity, the scientific method, Americanization, and the strict confines into which society shepherded appropriate sexual behavior. As Klages saw it, a commercial spirit and “vicious utilitarianism ha[d] drained the soul of its vital energies,” for “progress was synonymous with decadence and civilization with desolation, a ‘life in death’ ruled over by a despotic, ghostly reason.” Further symptomatic of this “vicious utilitarianism” was the speed and enthusiasm with which many women clambered into the work force, voicing along the way their belief in the need for equality.

To address this aspect of modernity, Reventlow analyzes a number of occupations partially opened up to women while, simultaneously, keeping a running tally of the ways in which females in these fields fall short of their male counterparts. Reventlow addresses her opponents by recalling their foundational stance: most “extreme movement women have made the claim that woman can do everything that man can [and] has only been defrauded of the possibility of physical and mental feats of strength by centuries of oppression and custom.” Again returning to the pre-historic past, Reventlow argues that this cannot be so, as men reap the benefits of their “original power,” a “sexual attack” that necessitated greater physical strength. As Reventlow notes, then, while women are readily able to perform grueling domestic work such as chopping wood and carrying water, they are no match for men in more physically demanding areas. As she ends, sharply, “any exceptions, as is known, do not overturn the rule.”

The situation is similar, Reventlow continues, for positions that demand little to no physical labor on the part of women. Speaking of doctors, Reventlow sets up a serviceable straw man with the supposed feminist complaint that many women suffer and go uncared for rather than submit themselves to the gaze of the male physician. Reventlow—drawing on her thoughts on the natural state of women—notes that feminists should instead focus on ridding themselves of this “false sense of shame, behind which only stupidity and lasciviousness hide.” Indeed, the “normal, perceptive woman” would certainly feel far more shame in front of a female doctor. Continuing in this sardonic tone, Reventlow claims that, were women to be tried in front of a
group of “straight-laced fellow women, countless sinners amongst them would be driven to suicide or perjury.” Reventlow moves on to repudiate the possibility of individual “female genius” (Weibgenie). Whenever someone matching this description might actually appear—as in the case of Sonja Kowalewska, granted a doctorate from the University of Berlin decades before formal female enrollment was allowed—Reventlow notes that they are usually a “phenomenon,” something that occurs only once a century, whereas masculine genius is common to all eras.

Significantly, this was an opinion that Reventlow did not even share with men, often even of a conservative bent. As a male politician noted in the Reichstag before the implementation of the Civil Code, “women are now quite different from what they used to be.” While the past featured individually outstanding examples of feminine intelligence, women have “since then … conquered almost all fields of human activity … [and] shown themselves everywhere to be of equal ambition and equal worth to men.” Again, Reventlow disagreed. Assuring the reader that Kowalewska concurred, Reventlow claims that even these women suffered for their “talent and science” and “yearned for a completely different purpose in life.” As Reventlow assumed, the “Hetären” held the key to that newer, more fulfilling purpose. As men are created for action—for work—and, therefore, are able to “come into their own” by simply having a career, women, on the other hand, are made for “ease, pleasure, and beauty.” Women are able to intuitively feel it in their nature that they were not made for the “hard things of the world.” Reventlow’s ideal future is one in which women—who “love men, build up their children and take part in all the pleasurable things of the world and, for this, give all of our power and bodies to men and our children”—will, in recognition, be given a life “externally designed to be as light as possible.” That this change be quick in coming, however, is imperative. Reventlow


134 Ibid., 217. “Er kann leichter zu seinem Recht als Mann und als Mensch kommen wie die Frau zu ihrem Recht. Sie ist nicht zur Arbeit, nicht für die schweren Dinge der Welt geschaffen, sondern zur Leichtigkeit, zur Freude, zur Schönheit … Sie leidet darunter, weil sie fühlt, dass es gegen ihre Natur ist. Wenn wir die kurze Zeit des Lebens damit ausfüllen, Männer zu lieben, Kinder zu bauen und an allen leichten erfreulichen Dingen der Welt
describes the alternative—a world where women are made to “lift heavy loads” or carry around as much mental baggage “as any highly learned man.” In this “feminist” world, women have “nothing of their own life” and the “gifts of nature, which nature has placed within in them, wither unenjoyed.” For Reventlow, this state—which would become “ever more boring and genderless”—was one she was currently living in.

*Women’s Emancipation and Education*

An additional sign of this decline, in Reventlow’s eyes, was the increasingly vocal demand of feminists for the equal rights of female students in Germany’s universities. The universal renown for Germany’s post-secondary university system had little to do with women’s higher education. Although women periodically—from the late-eighteenth century on, and including the aforementioned Sonja Kowalewska—had received advanced degrees, Germany did not formally admit women into universities as full-time students until 1900. American universities had been allowing women to enroll for half a century, and even the French for only a decade less. Even these few degrees were usually medical, viewed as the more natural outlet for feminine intellectual advancement, which, if it must be pursued, was the “discipline for which the motherly qualities of women were [most] ideally suited.” Still, the more-common sentiment was one voiced by a University of Heidelberg lecturer in 1871, the year of Reventlow’s birth—any “‘attendance of ladies at academic lectures … [was] an unsavory and disturbing phenomenon.’”

Reventlow, then, published her article during the zenith of the debate surrounding the question of female education.

Regardless of her protestations against it, education was an area with which this daughter of privilege was quite familiar. The gritty realism of the authors Reventlow read during her time in the *Ibsenklub* in Lübek—including Theodor Storm, Emile Zola, and Leo Tolstoy in addition to Henrik Ibsen, that iconoclastic, fiery Norwegian playwright—had a large hand in broadening Reventlow’s awareness of the world outside her own gilded adolescence. Furthermore, in
teilzunehmen, so haben wir genug getan, und dafür, dass wir unsre Kraft und unsren Körper den Männern und Kindern geben, verdienen wir, dass man unsre Kraft und unsren Körper den Männern und Kindern geben, verdienen wir, dass man uns das Leben äusserlich so leicht gestaltet wie nur möglich.”


137 Frevert, *Women in German History*, 121.
addition to introducing Reventlow to like-minded young people, the club was a place where modern ideas could be discussed minus the propriety demanded outside of their circle. As she writes in her semi-autobiographical novel *Ellen Olestjerne*, the *Ibsenklub* was notorious among concerned adults as a place “where young girls could speak with young men over immoral things and read Ibsen together.” Reventlow, then, in the *Ibsenklub*, practiced that exact mixture of studiousness, companionship, and socializing that she later loudly claimed female students would be unable to manage. In “Viragines oder Hetären” Reventlow claims that, while the male student is still “capable of enjoying life, loving, and performing the functions of a man,” the female student is not—instead she “does not drink, does not love, she lives only in her work and for her work, [and] does not count anymore as a woman.” Reventlow continues along this *Kosmiker*-inspired line by claiming that female university studies are additionally pointless for having to be, necessarily, suspended once girls finally come into their own as women and have children. Perhaps the most telling difference, then, between Reventlow’s experiences and those she derides, is the fact that it was in the *Ibsenklub* that Reventlow met her first love, Emanuel Fehling, and first formulated her plan to leave her family and make her way to the bohemian center of German life, Schwabing. As opposed to the university-educated feminists—who would be unable to mirror the male student’s disposition—Reventlow viewed her auto-didactical education as, mainly, a feminine, hetärist experience, in which education and academic learning were but supplemental pleasures to the possibilities of erotic stimulation.

Nonetheless, German feminists countered that “female matriculation was a financial necessity for future teachers, a basic human right … [and] a necessary consequence of improved secondary education.” Most strikingly, as well, feminists were just as willing as Reventlow to argue that the maternal instinct of women had a say in her educational destiny. As Lange put it, this was a further justification for educational equality, as the “creative intellectual capacities stemming from the maternal nature” of women would have broad social benefits. In this way, the “spiritual female productivity is just as necessary to the world as the purely mental male

139 Reventlow, „Sonstiges,“ 214. „Der Mann ist neben seinem Studium oder Beruf noch imstande zu genießen, zu lieben, seine Funktion als Mann auszuüben. Das kann die Frau nicht … und daneben eine Studentin, die Studentin trink nicht, liebt nicht, sie lebt nur in ihrer Arbeit und für ihre Arbeit, als Weib zählt sie nicht mehr mit.“
productivity. And therefore this spiritual productivity is the true educational goal for the woman.”¹⁴¹ For all of the concern these debates evoked on both sides, however, many often overlooked the fact that the “number of women who passed through the universities [from the turn of the century until the First World War] continued to be tiny.”¹⁴² As the ferocity of the debate regarding the expansion of female suffrage likewise reveals, Reventlow’s hyperbolic response regarding education only illustrates the charge these issues possessed for a society unmoored by a modernization disrupting once-entrenched social roles.

Still, this antipathy towards female education had its clear antecedents in Kosmiker thought, as this expansion of educational opportunity was seen as a sign of the steady march of Apollonian patriarchy around them. As Schuler theorized, the post-Roman world was slowly suffocating under the life-denying dictates of an expanding and pervasive Church which negated the possibility for “life [lived] radiant and suffused with erotic energy.”¹⁴³ This is what Reventlow had in mind when she berated feminists—the byproduct of this modernizing, rational world—as the “decided enemy of all erotic culture, for they would like to masculinize women.” For Reventlow, the ultimate aim of the Feminist was twofold: through “high school and university studies” she might remove that last little bit of gender from the country’s daughters while simultaneously “training men up as ascetics,” who, now familiar with women in once exclusively male areas, would learn to disregard them as sexual objects.¹⁴⁴ German feminists whose main aim was education, however, would have disagreed. As the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (Federation of German Women’s Associations) saw it, without a proper post-secondary education feminists were fighting “with a wooden sword,” as the “‘higher girls’ schools, with their accumulation of superficial knowledge, are not suitable to prepare girls for serious work in any area.”¹⁴⁵ In this way, Germany’s feminists had found a way to unite their main concerns in a coherent manner, acknowledging both the potential pitfalls ahead of them, as well as the best means of avoiding them. Whereas Reventlow’s unity—between her concerns for sexual freedom and maternal guidance—were, in principle, “timeless”

¹⁴¹ Dollard, The Surplus Woman, 127.
¹⁴³ Furnes, Zarathustra’s Children, 78.
¹⁴⁵ Dollard, The Surplus Woman, 120.
in their evocation of the benefits of a matriarchal past, her feminist opponents unity was intricately tied to the dictates and issues of their shared, modern, \textit{fin-de-siècle} Germany. With “Viragines oder Hetären,” then, Reventlow had directed an impassioned and incendiary polemic right at the heart of a movement that—in their tactical sophistication and awareness of the workings of modern German society—could not have been less impressed. Still, for all of her animosity, Reventlow’s opposition to the women’s movement was largely conditional and contradictory. As her son Rolf, years later, concurred, for his mother the “women’s movement … was too dogmatic. But, fundamentally, she belonged to it.”\footnote{Faber, \textit{Franziska zu Reventlow}, 37. “Dennoch gilt schon für diese Aufsätze, was ihr Sohn rückblickend festgehalten hat: ‘Die Frauenbewegung … war ihr zu dogmatisch. Aber im Grunde genommen gehörte sie dazu.”}

\textit{The Repercussions of the Past}

Both Reventlow and the \textit{Kosmiker} suffered for their preoccupation with weighing contemporary issues by the scales of the past. Schwabing’s \textit{Kosmiker}, who persistently denied any overlap between their philosophy and politics at large, expressed surprise when their seemingly apolitical observations were politicized and molded to fit forms they had not foreseen. Although Schuler predicted shortly before his death that the “‘nationalist tumor’” that seemed to be enveloping his city was “‘the drunken torch of death lighting the masses the way to the slaughterhouse,’” the space between the state and \textit{Kosmiker} thought was never quite as wide as imagined.\footnote{Furnes, \textit{Zarathustra’s Children}, 93.} Following Bachofen, much \textit{Kosmiker} writing focused on imparting several key lessons: to “defy danger, to seek out adventure, and to serve beauty [as] these virtues betoken the fullness of a nation’s youth.”\footnote{Bachofen, \textit{Myth, Religion, and Mother Right}, 84.} Foregrounding these qualities brought \textit{Kosmiker} art and writing into the purview of the post-war right-leaning conservatives, some of whom increasingly adopted an ideology of militant modernism which sought to impart similar values to Germans, albeit with a different tone. Indeed, Klages’s conception of the artist strikes an especially martial tone; as the “embodiment of vital, often monstrous forces,” the artist must “resemble the man of action, the general, the hero.”\footnote{Furnes, \textit{Zarathustra’s Children}, 100.} It was, therefore, especially strange to those nationalists that recognized their spiritual forebears that Stefan George would refuse Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels’s invitation to join the Writer’s Academy in 1933 and that Schuler would reject his
earlier use of the swastika (a character with deep symbolic truth for him) upon learning that Hitler found similar meaning within it.\textsuperscript{150}

Years before these larger reverberations, however, the Kosmiker—riven by these same racial implications in their thought—almost ensured their own irrelevancy by splitting apart from within. Schuler considered Judaism a malicious doctrine, as it emphasized patriarchy and was irredeemably legalistic. Klages went a step further, however, by seeing Christianity as not only Judaism’s ancestor, but the “most sublime and cunning continuation” of the faith, in which an “insidious morality triumph[s] over life.”\textsuperscript{151} These were not solitary sentiments shared among only the esoteric segments of Schwabing; Oskar Panizza seconded Klages’s connections, claiming that both “Catholicism and Judaism … were marked by ‘something weak, formless, soft … and evasive.’”\textsuperscript{152} Within Reventlow’s attempts in \textit{Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen} to display the pretensions of the Kosmiker—the narrator at one time recalls that all “these things” he has learned should “actually be treated as a secret” to keep their vocabulary vague—the racial connotations of their work become apparent.\textsuperscript{153} Dr. Sendt stutteringly expounds upon the \textit{unwahnmochingisch} nature of Semitic “original stock [\textit{Urs substanz}].” As all peoples carry traces of their origin, Jews are stained with their Semitic \textit{Urs substanz}, which, as Dr. Sendt argues, is “hostile and destructive to life … [and] the opposite of cosmic.” Therefore, while “Aryans represent the constructive, cosmic principle, the Semites [represent] the corrosive” aspect of life.\textsuperscript{154}

By these subtle formulations, then, Judaism—while also residing within the blood—was transmutable; as Reventlow notes in \textit{Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen}, Schuler considered Martin Luther a Jew. Although, as Sendt sarcastically notes, generally held for a German, Luther “turned against the pagan remnants in Catholicism, denied them and brought about their disintegration,” effectively mimicking a process that a Judaized-Christianity had done with a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 96.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 107.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Large, \textit{Where Ghosts Walked}, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Reventlow, “Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen,” 49. “… der Philosoph sagte mir, daß alle diese Dinge in Wahnmoching eigentlich als Geheimnis behandelt warden. Deshalb wende man wohl auch die vielen merkwürdigen Ausdrücke an, die eben nicht jeder versteht.”
\item \textsuperscript{154} Reventlow, \textit{Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen}, trans. personal, 47-49. “Molochitisch bedeutet daher in gutem Wahnmochinger Jargon alles Lebensfeindliche, Lebenvernichtende—kurz und gut, das Gegenteil von kosmisch ... die Arier repräsentierendes aufbauende, kosmische Prinzip, die Semiten dagegen das zersetzende, negativ-molochitische.”
\end{itemize}
more powerful paganism a thousand years before.\(^{155}\) These eventual turns in *Kosmiker* thought made Klages and Schuler less willing to tolerate Wolfskehl’s apparent duplicity—in which he acted as both the matriarchal-minded cosmic, as well as the stanch Zionist. Nascent *Kosmiker* anti-Semitism, then, derived from their larger concern, the vitality of the matriarchal past. Only in relation to these older societies was Judaism seen as the exemplar of patriarchy and, therefore, detrimental to attempts to reconstruct a Dionysian paganism. In many ways, then, even strict adherence to *Kosmiker* thought—as Reventlow’s writings show—did not necessitate anti-Semitism. As with Wolfskehl, modern Jews could temper their faith’s inherent legalism with appropriate doses of matriarchal nostalgia.

None of this mattered to Klages and Schuler. By stressing the stultifying sway of monotheistic religions—especially Judaism, exercising its ostensibly pernicious patriarchal influence over contemporary European civilization through its progeny, Christianity—these two had grown increasingly intolerant of Wolfskehl, the enemy in their midst. These mounting internal tensions led to the *Großer Schwabingerkrach* (“Great Schwabing Spat”) of 1904, in which the group split along religious lines, with Reventlow backing Wolfskehl. This began Reventlow’s disenchantment with Schwabing, to be complete by 1910, when she left the city permanently. As she later wrote to a friend from Munich visiting her in Rome, “it is progress when one can’t stand it [the city] any longer.”\(^{156}\) During the Spat, however, Klages—described by Reventlow as a “sinister, devastating, and divine” presence—and Schuler symbolically defected from the group and, in having a soldier deliver their note of resignation to Wolfskehl, effectively shredded the group along its theoretical threads.\(^{157}\) Indeed, the fervor of Schuler’s aversion to Wolfskehl was so pronounced during the most intense period of dispute that Reventlow, when “alone and nervous,” perceived phantom footsteps and pictured “Schuler with a dagger behind the door.”\(^{158}\)

Reventlow’s reliance on the *Kosmiker* in the articulation of her objections to professional and educational reform seems particularly telling considering the distance she later put between


\(^{158}\) Ibid., 283. “Wenn ich abends allein und nervös bin, meine ich Schritte zu hören und Adam oder Schluer mit einem Dolch hinter der Tür.”
herself and the group with *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen*, her measured Philippic against the dangers of intellectual grandiosity. However, in many ways, the *Schwabingerkrach* was less a prelude to Reventlow’s intellectual disillusionment than a recognition of personal animosities. Prior to this, Reventlow had only passively “enjoyed the exhilaration of the parties and the high of being accepted, loved, and adored” by the group.\(^{159}\) The vehemence with which the anti-Semites in the group split from Wolfskehl, however, convinced Reventlow not that their theories had been ill founded, but that she had been blind to the spiteful pretension of Klages and Schuler from the start. It was only in the weeks before the split that she realized the precarious position she had placed herself in—“between the parties of hate and kindness,” as she wrote to Hessel.\(^{160}\) Regardless of the breakup, Reventlow remained devoted to Wolfskehl’s version of *Kosmiker* ideology. While Reventlow rejected the burgeoning anti-Semitism of some *Kosmiker*, she did not reject the group’s methodology wholesale.

Ironically, this latent *Kosmiker* anti-Semitism—made manifest in the *Schwabingerkrach*—and disdain for feminists came together in one of the least likely of places, Reventlow’s own family. Ernst—her older brother, who was once described as so “strange, that relationships with him are not possible”—gradually gained notoriety for his conservative views.\(^{161}\) A career naval officer who, like many of his contemporaries, drifted into the arms of the political right after the war, Ernst was already active in the German Nationalist Party (“*Deutschvölkischen Partei*”), a group with a clear “anti-Semitic character,” by 1914. Within a decade this party—now concerned with opposing the Weimar constitution, and the influence of Germans Jews within the country—would be absorbed into the ranks of the expanding National Socialist party. In this way, Ernst and the political movements he supported and endorsed were essential components of the NSDAP’s “expansion of power (“Machtentfaltung””) during the Weimar era.\(^{162}\)

\(^{159}\) Rehmann, “Franziska zu Reventlow und Lou Andreas Salome,” 277. „Damals formuliert sie nicht, sie erlebt nur, genießt den Rausch der Feste und das Hochgefühl, angenommen, geliebt, verehrt zu sein.“


\(^{161}\) Kubitschek, *Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow*, trans. personal, 99. “Mama geht es erträglich; von Ernst weiß ich nichts; er ist so albern wie komisch, daß Beziehungen zu ihm nicht möglich sind.“

\(^{162}\) Ibid., 110. „...die im März 1914 zur ‚Deutschvölkischen Partei‘ wurde—eine Partei mit nationalistischem und antisemitischem Charakter ... und ging später in der NSDAP auf. In ihrem Kampf gegen die Weimarer Republik und ihre Verfassung, durch ihre radikale Haltung in der Judenbekämpfung und in ihrem Bekenntnis zur antiparlamentarischen Diktatur trug sie wesentlich zur Machtentfaltung des Nationalsozialismus bei.“

57
Furthermore, in 1912 Ernst joined the forthrightly named *Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation* (“League to Combat the Emancipation of Women”), known colloquially as the Anti-League. The degree to which Ernst’s views were influenced by his sister’s is unclear; what is not, however, is Ernst’s belief in the aims of the Anti-League—combating middle-class sexual equality. Potential freedom “endanger[ed] Germany’s military potential by discouraging marriage,” Ernst zu Reventlow insisted. Franziska zu Reventlow had spent parts of “Viragines oder Hetären” herself arguing that German feminists—desiring to desexualize women and force men to brothels for satisfaction—threatened healthy, monogamous child-rearing environments. While their justifications differed—and, with one arguing from a militaristic stance while the other proceeded to the point from her sensualist foundation, these possibly remaining irreconcilable—Ernst and Franziska zu Reventlow, themselves estranged, nonetheless found shaky, yet common ground to stand upon in their rejection of the aims of the modern German feminist agenda. As Ernst argued during the Anti-League’s first congress, if women were to have a prominent position within the new Germany it must be that of the “‘Spartan and old German kind, who stood behind their men in battle and fired them on to kill as many enemies as possible.’”

Here, then, were classical sentiments that Reventlow might, with qualifications, be able to get behind.

**Conclusion**

During a time in which the stresses of modernization created a ubiquitous sense of social upheaval, the demands of women for domestic, professional, and educational equality formed a uniform foil against which all could respond. For turn-of-the-century Germany, then, one’s opinion on the *Frauenfrage* seems the perfect barometer of broader political disposition. However—as with her thoughts on class and sexuality in Wilhelmine society (examined in Chapters One and Three)—Franziska zu Reventlow’s response to this question illustrates the difficulty of retrospectively assigning pat markers to *fin-de-siècle* German groups. Rolf Reventlow’s assessment of his mother’s politics illustrates this theme: to him, his mother “believed that she was already emancipated enough, without the vote.”

164 Faber, *Franziska zu Reventlow*, 36. “Erst recht hatte sie mit der Frauenstimmrechtsbewegung ‘nichts zu tun, sie glaubte, daß sie auch ohne Stimmrecht emanzipiert genug sei.’”

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it refuses tidy confinement into clearly delineated groupings. Reventlow’s writings on feminism reveal this: with scant effort and selective editing, one can affix most available political labels to her thought. Just as her embrace of a woman’s right to sexual pleasure appears “liberal,” her insistence that tradition and biology dictated that male domination in the occupational and educational spheres remain entrenched was as “conservative” a thought as that of her brother, Ernst. As “radical” as her proposition that “Hetären” might make the best mothers, Reventlow’s claim that even the supposedly rare “feminine genius” (“Weibgenie”) resents their intelligence seemed a clear, “reactionary” statement aimed at even the meekest proponents of equality between the genders.

The significance of Reventlow’s example, however, stems from how commonplace her political ambiguities were. As noted, while many of Weimar’s fascists openly declared their debt to the work of George and his ilk, the Kosmiker just as often bemoaned these associations. Although lumped together for the sake of convenience, bohemians offered no consistent, uniform response to the political fissures of the age. Avant-garde artists “divid[ed] themselves into a quiescent, apolitical, and aesthetically introverted group on the one hand, and an increasingly politicized and activist faction on the other.” As Peter Jelavich argues, the forces of modernism overwhelmed Munich’s traditional political culture, hollowing out its center and forcing Schwabingers to drift to the extremes of the left and right.”

Erich Mühsam—anarchist, provocateur, and cabaret performer—in his response to the beginning of the First World War, himself epitomizes the fluidity of these political definitions. For years, his circle of anarchists took on both Munich’s ‘moderate’ socialists and conservative orthodoxy. As war approached during the July Crisis of 1914, Mühsam was gradually caught up in the fervor, despite his pacifist credentials. He was aware of the contradiction. On the fourth of August, he wrote with amazement that he, the “anti-militarist, the enemy of the nationalist phrase, the anti-patriot, the hating critic of the arms race,” was still “somehow moved by the general frenzy, inflamed by an angry passion,[and] not against some ‘enemies,’ but suffused with a red-hot desire to save ‘us’ from them!” Furthermore, some Schwabingers declared their bellicose passions with fewer

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165 Jelavich, Munich and Theatrical Modernism, 7.
caveats than Mühsam. Both Franz Marc and August Macke—members of Munich’s modernist art collective, *Der Blaue Reiter* ("The Blue Rider")—were cut down on the front lines, proud of serving their country.

Mühsam’s struggles to reconcile his political convictions and inchoate sense of indebtedness to the country of his birth mirrored those of the largest political party in Germany. The *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (or SPD) represented a broad swath of German leftist thought—from the revolutionary-minded throng around Karl Liebknecht to August Bebel’s gradualists, seeking change through parliamentary action. The factions in the Reichstag put aside the subtleties of their convictions, however, to pass the armaments bills necessary for war. The Kaiser reciprocated the SPD’s tractability immediately after, declaiming to the Reichstag that “I no longer recognize any parties, I know only Germans.”

However fleeting this *Burgfrieden* (or truce between parties), its existence bespeaks the complex political negotiations necessary by all during this tumultuous and rapidly changing age.

Attempts, then, to glimpse traces of Germany’s political trajectory within turn-of-the-century philosophical formulations founder on these very contradictions, as well as on the unique contextual pressures each responded to. In many ways, Reventlow—ever the embodiment of these contradictions—recognized this. Ending *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen*, Reventlow states her aim: her work may help future historians and researchers “note with wonder what Wahnmoching was and meant, what existed here, [and] what was alive.”

In other words, Reventlow intended her work to testify to the climate of her own time, rather than prefigure that of another.

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168 Reventlow, "Herrn Dames," 63-64. “Meine Selbstkritik macht bei nochmaligen Durchlesen die Wahrnehmung, daß ich hier wohl nahe daran war, in eine romantisch pathetischen Ton zu verfallen, und sie warnt mich davor. Ich will in diesen Blättern nur Chronist sein, und dem Chronisten ziemt es nicht, mit seinen eigenen Empfindungen zu stark in den Vordergrund zu treten. Sollten sie etwa in späteren Tagen oder Jahren in jemandes Hände geraten, der mit Staunen Kenntnis davon nimmt, was Wahnmoching war und bedeutete, was hier lebte, gelebt wurde und gelebt werden sollte, so wird dieser jemand – ich stelle ihn mir etwa als versonnenen Gelehrten oder ernsten Forscher vor – vielleicht mäßiges Interesse an meiner Person nehmen und nur so nebenbei in stiller Anerkennung den Hut ziehen, wenn er erfährt, daß es bloß ein junger Mann aus Berlin war, welcher Dame hieß und sich verurteilt fühlte, das Wichtigste über diesen bemerkenswerten Stadtteil aufzuzeichnen.”
CHAPTER THREE: SEX, MARRIAGE, AND MOTHERHOOD IN REVENTLOW’S BOHEMIA

Naturally, the discourse surrounding Germany’s Frauenfrage encompassed more than just the rights of women to work and attend university. Any debate touching on females and sex—such as the relationship of modern women to marriage, maternity, and eroticism—engendered equally incendiary rhetoric from both feminists and their opponents. As with education and the professions, however, extrapolating outward from a group or individual’s views on sexuality proved an imprecise indicator of broader political sentiment, as the archives of Munich’s Simplicissimus attest. Wilhelmine Germany’s premier satirical periodical, Simplicissimus’s stated “enemies”—stupidity, misanthropy, prudery, and sanctimony—impelled the paper to regular attack on myriad institutions of import to conservatives, such as the Catholic and Lutheran churches, the army, and the educational system.

The ambitions of Germany’s feminists, however, were also frequent targets of the magazine’s mockery. An 1898 caricature, titled “The Feminist,” reveals a man and woman, both well-dressed and comfortable—he, absent-mindedly rolling his cigarette while she leans back, head in hand—discussing marriage. Wondering why she has not yet married, the man sarcastically notes that she “would surely make a splendid housewife.” Indignant, the woman rejects this characterization and replies that “woman has but still higher duties than becoming a spouse and mother.” Besides, she adds, “no one has yet asked me to do so.” This inability to see the concerns of women extending beyond the traditional familial unit—a decidedly conservative position—contrasted with the “liberal” tone the magazine adopted regarding fin-de-siècle Germany’s changing sexual mores. Two years before, in only its seventh issue, Simplicissimus defended efforts at sexual liberation: the editors wrote that “it is not immoral to proclaim to an emasculated generation the eternal, holy right to true passion.”

Sharing the page with this incipient call for sexual reform was one of the first published works of a stubborn, eager, and opinionated recent transplant to Munich, Franziska zu Reventlow.

171 Allen, Satire and Society, 143.
It was not only her byline that was close to the argument put forth by *Simplicissimus*’s editors. As noted, Reventlow was soon to sound her own alarm at this “ascetic” wave building among an “emasculated generation” of young men. In many ways, the proper role and expression of sexuality in contemporary German society was, for Reventlow, the most pressing facet of the whole *Frauenfrage*. To Reventlow, the true “women’s movement” was one that conceived of women as “liberated sexual beings” and, accordingly, taught that the rights to “complete sexual freedom” and the “free disposal of one’s body” were those worth a fight.\(^{172}\) Indeed, to some, Reventlow’s notorious reputation overshadowed the rest of her character; as a writer at *Simplicissimus* crudely put it, he “could never perceive anything of a sex appeal in Fanny Reventlow,” on account of the countless men she had bedded “without opposition.”\(^{173}\)

Reventlow’s appeal for contemporary scholars—aware of familial spats regarding her promiscuity, her occasional prostitution (“*Gelegenheitsprostitution*”), as well as her inclinations toward polyamory, group sex, and anonymous sex—often hinges just as much upon these salacious biographical details.

The distractions of her lasciviousness, however, obscured areas of commonality between Reventlow and a segment of Imperial Germany’s feminists. Reventlow’s anxieties about patriarchal imbalances within contemporary marital structures echoed a common sentiment of feminine thinkers. Reventlow’s desire for a child of her own—without feeling the need to include the father in its upbringing—only placed her at the forefront of a movement that came to acknowledge the benefits maternity might offer to Germany’s numerous single women. And, even moderate feminist theoreticians began to extol sexuality (practiced within socially-sanctioned parameters) as a “positive and creative aspect of human nature.”\(^{174}\) Nonetheless, Reventlow never seamlessly matched up with any one area of the women’s movement in Germany. For these reasons, Reventlow’s pronouncements on sex, marriage, and motherhood—careening between the “left” and “right,” sometimes a fringe thinker and sometimes in line with

\(^{172}\) Reventlow, “Sonstiges,” 218. „Vielleicht entsteht noch einmal eine Frauenbewegung in diesem Sinn, die das Weib als Geschlechtswesen befreit, es fordern lehrt, was es zu fordern berechtigt ist, volle geschlechtliche Freiheit, das ist, freie Verfügung über seinen Körper."


contemporary positions on the Frauenfrage—illustrate the defining characteristics of her time, rather than those of her convictions.

As noted, Mary Louise Roberts has described the turn of the century as an era of both “spectacular delight” and perceived social crisis. Disparate as these two judgments were, they pivoted upon shared points, the “New Woman” and her role in society being one. For many, Reventlow—as sexually-liberated woman and content single mother—was a destabilizing force, one of those very “symptoms indicative of apocalyptic anxiety” prevalent throughout Europe and Germany at the start of the twentieth century.\(^\text{175}\) In this sense, when understood in relation to her Gallic cousins—the French New Women of Roberts’ *Disruptive Acts*, themselves regarded with a vague confusion by fellow Frenchwomen—Reventlow’s actions assume a new import. In Roberts’ formulation, Reventlow’s sexual aggressiveness and promiscuity were theatrical acts of “subversion rather than mere diversion.”\(^\text{176}\) Roberts notes that it is beside the point whether these performances were conscious or not, for, conditioned by the environment within which they were enacted, each reveals something fundamental about their society, regardless of intentions. Reventlow performs this awareness through what Roberts’ terms “disruptive acts,” or those extraordinary actions which reconceptualized the “ideology of womanhood” by skewering its traditional, polarized manifestations, whether mother or whore.

This chapter, then, recognizes the similarities between the French New Woman and Reventlow and “reads” her actions accordingly. As with the French New Woman—just as likely to be “interested in beauty and seduction as … the arguments for equality”—the intentional ambiguity of Reventlow’s choices made her a contentious symbol of progression within fin-de-siècle European feminist circles.\(^\text{177}\) Reventlow, as well, desired above all to be “beautiful and loved.” And, for this reason, she “held herself apart from anything that smelled like [mainstream] women’s liberation or emancipation.” To be too closely associated with these movement women would diminish Reventlow’s sexual appeal, for “men don’t like that, and she lived off of men, and through men.”\(^\text{178}\) Hers was a feminism that bade women remember one central aspect of their sexual power, the power of passivity, the power to be seduced.

\(^{175}\) Dollard, *The Surplus Woman*, 5.
\(^{177}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{178}\) Rehmann, “Franziska zu Reventlow,” 279. „Franziska will schön sein und gefallen ... Trotz aufrührerischer Gedanken in ’Ellen Olesjterne’ hält sie sich ängstlich fern von allem, was nach Frauenrecht und Emanzipation..."
Furthermore, Reventlow—ever the staunch “individualist”—abhorred signing on to anything that might have infringed upon her freedom to express herself, or censured her for the attempt. Indeed, this individualism contributed to Reventlow’s eventual disenchantment with Schwabing, as she struggled to “identify with the we-cult (‘Wir-Kult’) of a Kosmiker hive-mind.”\textsuperscript{179} As Roberts notes, then, “resistance in women’s lives … [is] a diverse language in which feminism is simply one, albeit very important, dialect.”\textsuperscript{180} For many French women, an alternative “resistance” to the perceived prudishness of many Bewegungsweiber—still allowing them to register discontentment with their place in society—was an abnormality of behavior operating upon the “originally aristocratic notion that individuality was a creative process, not undertaken once and for all but performed daily, selectively.”\textsuperscript{181}

For Schwabing’s bohemian countess, this “aristocratic notion” came naturally—Reventlow had only recently bemoaned her familiarity with the “ridiculous formality” of the “aristocratic clan.” As noted, Reventlow never fully rid herself of these aristocratic accoutrements, retaining her peculiar “‘Junker-like (‘junkerlich’)’ attitude, her ‘Junker-like’ bearing” until the end. As her son, Rolf, estimated years later, his mother always carried the “residue of aristocratic arrogance.”\textsuperscript{182} In this light, Reventlow’s actions—whether her decision to have and raise her son alone, her forays into prostitution, or her unrepentant sexual openness—are a personalized theatricality in which some were conscious “strategies, [whilst] others were unintentional, performed on instinct simply because they felt ‘right.’”\textsuperscript{183} Reventlow, then, increasingly mirrors the society from which she sprang, for Germany’s own turn-of-the-century “disruptive acts”—often similarly unconscious and inscrutable—took place in the midst of changes that, to those Germans in the middle of them, often appeared as nauseatingly iconoclastic as they did unrelenting.


\textsuperscript{180} Roberts, Disruptive Acts, 9.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{182} Faber, Franziska zu Reventlow, 199-200. “Ein Rest von aristokratischen Hochmut’ ist bei Reventlow im Spiel geblieben, wie ihr Sohn rückschauend bemerkt … sie hat ihre ‘junkerliche’ Einstellung, ihr ‘junkerliches’ Gehabe tatsächlich nie aufgegeben.”

\textsuperscript{183} Roberts, Disruptive Acts, 145.
Adventures of a Modern Hetäre

From adolescence, Reventlow struggled to reconcile her outsized sexuality with her place in society. As one of her late semi-autobiographical novels relates, by the age of fourteen Reventlow already understood the troubles an expected sexual fidelity would cause her. At a ball in her parent’s palatial residence, the young Reventlow’s card remained full through the night and, by the end, she was hard pressed to decide upon a favorite. Before her were two “brunettes and a blonde,” of which “the two brunettes appealed somewhat more to me, although I also loved the blonde.” Contemplating their modern attire, Reventlow meditates on the ineluctable allure of the men; as she admits, “I don’t know exactly why the collar made such a large impression on me.” Anticipating her eventual disapproval of the institution of marriage, Reventlow writes that she “still remembers so well how I thought back then: that you would always only be able to marry but one man. And if you, however, loved three right now—what then?”

For Reventlow, even from this early age, marriage was mainly a body for legitimizing intimacy between men and women, and the larger domestic concerns regarding partnership, child rearing, and household economics that would figure so prominently in feminist debates were, for Reventlow, but incidental byproducts of marriage’s primary social objective. The next thirty-three years of Reventlow’s life did little to alter these attitudes. Over this span, she nonetheless married twice: once, to an unsuspecting lawyer as a means of providing social cover for an unexpected pregnancy that he had had no hand in; and, later to an insouciant Italian nobleman as a means of procuring an income.

As the ballroom episode—in which her dancing partners are never named or revisited—illustrates, anonymity played a large role in Reventlow’s sexual model. Commenting on her proclivities, a contemporary noted that the “actual ideal of the countess is the ‘ever-unknown gentlemen,’ forever remaining unknown.” Everything else is an “irritant, naturally tempting her to mockery.” As Ludwig Klages—her Kosmiker colleague and long-term lover—confirmed, Reventlow’s passions cooled over time, and, during those “long long intervals between revelries,

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she would not tolerate the slightest tenderness from men,” recoiling “if her lover tenderly strokes her hand, [and] hating if her hair is stroked.” For Klages, this was “above all else, torturous.” For Reventlow, however, it was natural. As she relates in her diary, she “can not not not live with people,” who act as if they have nothing better to do than miss her. 186 In many ways, then, her adult response to the dilemma of sacrificing potential, multiple erotic possibilities by giving into the social expectations of marital monogamy was the same as her frivolous teenage one: the “question has given me quite a headache.”

Additionally, Reventlow’s experiences in the Ibsenklub proved a formative influence on her future thinking on eroticism. Notwithstanding the practical sexual experience gained in Lübeck, her readings of Ibsen contributed to an understanding of the central sexual issues of the day. As Peter Jelavich has shown, Ibsen’s works—in “dramatizing the personal tragedies brought about by the ‘healthy’ functioning of ‘normal’” marriages—found a wide audience in Imperial Germany. Reventlow, then, took to heart Ibsen’s call “upon the public to engage in self-emancipation by challenging and rethinking accepted values and social roles.” 187 As Reventlow wrote to Emanuel Fehling—a fellow Ibsenklub member and one of her first love interests—upon reading Ibsen a “new world of truth and freedom opened up.” Ibsen had managed to clearly relate that which Reventlow had only “unclearly felt.” From this day, she told Fehling, she would like to “live and work for these ideas.” 188 Furthermore, what most appealed to her in Ibsen was his “beautiful, noble view” on the emancipated women and the constraints of marriage. 189 And, by stealing away from her parent’s watch to Munich, Reventlow had begun her self-emancipation, ending up in a city that, as Klages claimed, would “decide the fate of the next generation.” 190

Even more so, Reventlow’s relationship with Klages demonstrates Reventlow’s disregard for monogamy. Before their liaison fizzled—puzzling Klages, as noted—it had been the most

187 Jelavich, Munich and Theatrical Modernism, 24.
188 Wendt, Franziska zu Reventlow, 57. “Ihr sei, schrieb Franziska zu Reventlow an Emanuel Fehling am 22. April 1890, seit sie Ibsen kennengelernt habe, ‘eine neue Welt aufgegangen von Wahrheit und Freiheit; ich möchte ins Leben hinaus und für diese Ideen leben und wirken … Ich verdane Ibsen viel, seine Ideen und seine Menschen sind begeisternd und man hat so das Gefühl, als ob er einem klar sagt, was man unklar gefühlt hat.”
189 Faber, Franziska zu Reventlow, 34. “Im selben Brief an Fehling heißt es nämlich: ‘Was ich bei Ibsen besonders liebe, ist seine schöne, edle Auffassung des Weibes und der Ehe.’”
190 Ibid., 14. “… für Klages – ‘das Schicksal der nächsten Generationen entscheiden wird.”
significant of Reventlow’s life. Her juvenile infatuation with Fehling had foundered upon their rather divergent moral senses—Reventlow, in their correspondence, often defended the open physicality of her passion, as Fehling had taken to claiming that “sexual intercourse before marriage is a problem of lack of self control, and should be regarded as any other passion.” Reventlow countered that she agreed that sexual desire was a passion, but if it should be treated with the same restraint shown other potentially dangerous temptations, why was it healthy to give into this particular one “after marriage” and not others?¹⁹¹ For Reventlow, divisions such as these between lovers were intractable. In Klages, however, she found a kindred spirit. Soon after meeting, Reventlow wrote him that her “acquaintanceship with you is something rare—what one only finds every so often in life.”¹⁹²

Nevertheless, during this whole time, Reventlow was also an occasional prostitute. While never exclusively paying her way by selling sex, Reventlow—regularly in financial straits during her early in years in Munich, following her disinheritation—rarely passed up opportunities to collect money from men who would willingly part with it. And, when the coffers were especially empty, she would spend some evenings in the “salon of Frau X.” Here Reventlow luxuriated in glamorous clothes (that circumstances, however, had forced her to rent) and prayed she would not run into anyone she knew. As Reventlow told herself, this time in Frau X’s salon was part of “another life,” for “no one knows who I am.”¹⁹³ Although necessity often forced Reventlow to these ends, she still fretted over the impression this method of earning money might have on Rolf. In her diary—after stating that she had just brought home 200 marks of “extra income” collected from a “foreigner”—Reventlow practices explaining herself to her son: while you might “resent” me when you realize, you might think twice and “resent me [more] if I let us starve.” As she adds, “my only crime is that I’m not rich.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ibid., 153. “… wie sie Klages schreibt, ‘daß die Bekanntschaft mit Ihnen etwas von dem Seltenen ist was man nur hier und da im Leben findet.’”
¹⁹⁴ Faber, Franziska zu Reventlow, 115. “‘Aber daß er mir etwas übelnehmen sollte, wenn er groß wird und einen Einblick in die Abgründe tut, durch die seine Mutter gelegentlich wandelt – er möchte mir’s eher übelnehmen, wenn ich ihn und mich verhungern ließe, und wenn ich mich mit Uebersetzen totschine. Mein einziges Verbrechen ist, daß ich nicht reich bin.’
Similarly, Reventlow had earlier contemplated the consequences of coming clean to Walter Lübke—her first husband—about her full sexual history. Likewise, she imagines his “horror” at finding out her means of coming into necessary money, as “no man would understand me, if I told him everything. He would see me as the scum of the earth.” Nonetheless, as with her imaginary confession to Rolf, Reventlow provides internal justification: “thousands of women lead similar lives, and most of them certainly out of necessity.” As for any effects these forays into prostitution may have had on her, Reventlow quickly dismisses the notion: “I don’t feel touched by it at all.”

Indeed, Reventlow had earlier used the persistence of the institution of prostitution to question the morality of another long-standing one, marriage. To Reventlow, with its artificial expectations of monogamy, marriage had itself created prostitution. Christianized, masculine morals had attempted to simultaneously destroy the sexual instinct in women while also exploiting it through the forced monogamy of marriage and the forced polygamy of prostitution. To Reventlow, then, the feminine sexual impulse is “required as a duty in marriage, scorned outside of it, or brought to a degree of gratification in the most undesirable ways, such as allowed for by our presently state-sanctioned prostitution.” For Reventlow, the question of sexual freedom is just as much about morality as it is for conservatives, albeit her formulation is different: she rhetorically asks whether it is “pleasant” to think of parent’s making their “blossoming girls” into de-sexualized, “dead ghosts” of their former selves by stifling their sexual instincts; whether it is “moral” to “send your sons to the brothel.” Reventlow assumes the answer will be clear: it is better to “let the two of them rejoice in the beauty of their lives together.”


196 Reventlow, “Sonstiges,” 218. “Das Christentum hat statt dessen die Einehe und – die Prostitution geschaffen … In einem Teil der Frauen sucht man von Jugend auf durch die christlich moralische Erziehung das Geschlechtsempfinden abzutöten, oder man verweist sie auf die Ehe mit der Behauptung, daß die Frau überhaupt monogam veranlagt sei. Gleichzeitig richtet man die Prostitution ein, zwingt also den anderen Teil der Frauen, poligam zu sein, damit den Männern geholfen werde, für die wiederum die Ehe unausreichend ist … In der Ehe wird er zur Pflicht gestempelt, außerhalb derselben verpönt, oder seine Befriedigung in möglichst unsthetischen Formen, wie unsere heutige staatliche konzessionierte Prostitution, gebracht … Was ist denn ästhetischer und im wahren Sinne moralischer: wenn ihr euere blühenden Mädchen zu abgestorbenen Gespenstern macht und euere Söhne ins Bordell schickt, oder wenn ihr sie miteinander in der Schönheit ihres Lebens freuen laßt.”

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Reventlow’s relationship with Klages coincided with those years in Schwabing, bookending the turn of the century, when Reventlow’s life most resembled that *Kosmiker* attempt at the reinvigoration of a pagan past through pleasure, revelry, and intoxication (“*Rausch*”). A representative *Kosmiker* event—chronicled in *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen*—was the so-called *Antikenfest* (or, “Antiquity Party”) of February 1903. During the *Antikenfest*, Reventlow’s “claim for happiness (*Glücksanspruch*)”—in which she could experience “existence as a party, existence as a dance”—appeared to become a reality.\(^\text{197}\) As she later recalled, this gathering left on her “memory a colorful mixture of separate images and impressions that I would surely like to retain before they fade.”\(^\text{198}\) Indeed, that carnival year of 1903, with its “erotic Libertinism, its wild masquerades, [and] its ecstatic happiness, came very close to her [Reventlow’s] ideal of life.” In this construction, Reventlow’s model bohemianism is simply an extension of her own predominant concern: the autonomy of the individual, especially regarding the pursuit of their own sexual freedom. Schwabing’s bohemian potential rested on the freedoms it promised the individual; similarly, any larger societal ‘progress’ for Germany’s women would simply be the inevitable result of a process originally emanating outwards from the individual.

On that chilly February night, Reventlow—together with friends clad in floor-length white togas topped with garlands, and walking with the aid of staffs—braved the brisk air and headed north on Leopoldstraße. Karl Wolfskehl’s apartment, their destination, was already full of comparably dressed Schwabingers, preparing for the classical-themed party. Reventlow’s novel documents the festivities. It begins with a procession, replete with faux pomp and little circumstance. Various figures—a mish-mash of “Renaissance [characters], ancient Teutons, or Orientals”—solemnly make their way into the living room. Following closely behind are “boys with wine cups,” weaving in and out of this incoherent convoy.\(^\text{199}\) Members of the *Kosmiker* quickly adapted their demeanors to the implications of their costumes, although, as Reventlow notes, this change required little actual adjustment. Stefan George—otherwise referred to as *der

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\(^{197}\) Wendt, *Franziska zu Reventlow*, 209. „Der Fasching mit seiner erotischen Libertinage, seinen wilden Maskeraden, seinem rauschhaften Glück kam ihren Lebensideal sehr nahe. Das Dasein als Fest, als Tanz – im Februar 1903 schien dieser Glücksanspruch wirklich zu werden.“

\(^{198}\) Reventlow, “*Herrn Dames,*” 74. “Ich sehe in der Erinnerung ein buntes Gemisch von einzelnen Bildern und Eindrücken, die ich wohl festhalten möchte, ehe sie sich verwischen.“

\(^{199}\) Ibid., 73. “Das Fest begann mit einem feierlichen Umzug … und die in Schwarz gehüllte Matrone, daneben und dazwischen bekränzte Knaben mit Weinbechern … Denn viele waren auch anders kostümiert – Renaissance, alte Germanen oder orientalisch.“
Meister and commonly trailed by “one of his adorers”—naturally assumed the role of Caesar. Alfred Schuler played a Roman matron with the ease and commitment that might be expected from someone who sometimes “believ[ed] himself to be the reincarnation of a Roman legionary.” As Reventlow notes, he was “completely in his true world,” during the party. Wolfskehl seemed to straddle the porous borders between fantasy and reality more comfortably than others. Presiding over the festivities in his toga, intermittently supporting himself on a golden staff, Wolfskehl entertained a group of women with verse for “probably half an hour.” As onlookers reluctantly admitted, Wolfskehl’s performance was actually “quite an accomplishment.” Klages, however, brooded. Dressed as an Indian monk, this difficult mystic—increasingly preoccupied by his evolving thoughts on the pernicious infiltration of Semitic Rassensubstanzen (“racial substances”) into the “constructive,” “true life” of ancient Aryan societies—only “self-consciously observed the amusement of the others.” He may as well have been looking in Wolfskehl’s direction. Klages had grown jealous of Reventlow’s numerous liaisons—an impulse towards loyalty was one that “did not exist naturally” for Reventlow—especially one with a Jewish man like Wolfskehl. Indeed, Klages’s threats towards Reventlow became so pronounced that she took to carrying a revolver around with her as potential security. This offense was especially painful for a man who imagined Reventlow, child of the North Sea, the unique embodiment of a racialized “Nordic beauty.” Klages’s idealization of Reventlow survived even this erotic intransigence, however, as well as her half-veiled mockery of him in Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen—in which Reventlow likened


Reventlow, Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen, 48. „Man wandte nun in unserem Stadtteil mit Vorliebe diesen Gegensatz auf die Rassensubstanzen an und gelangte zu dem Resultat: die Arier repräsentieren das aufbauende, kosmische Prinzip, die Semiten dagegen das zerstörende, negativ-molochoistische.”

Wendt, Franziska zu Reventlow, 204. “Wolfskehl, der in der wilden Ekstase ganz in seinem Element war, ging als Bacchus, Klages, der – gehemmt – das Amüsement der anderen nur beobachtete, als indischer Mönch...”


Faber, Franziska zu Reventlow, 6. “Als Gehilfe von Klages attackiert Hentschel nicht nur Roderich Huch, sondern zeitwillig auch die Gräfin und Wolfskehl. Wie dieser fühlt sich Reventlow bedroht und sichert sich mit einem Revolver.”
Klages to an “angry god,” who “presides over Wahnmoching, but always from afar, always shrouded in mist.”

Even after her death, the sole picture hung over Klages’s writing desk was Reventlow, lying on the beach, face coyly turned away the camera, but her nude body facing it.

Nonetheless, as Reventlow’s representation of the Antikenfest reveals, her conception of the model bohemian femininity resembled her conception of a model general femininity, which she had laid out next to her criticism of Germany’s Bewegungweiber. As explained in the prior chapter, this belief was that women should focus on a life in which they “were untroubled by the strain of a career and found their satisfaction in eroticism and motherhood.” Encapsulated within this ideal were both Reventlow’s independent streak (the eroticism) and the seeds of a broader harmony with other German feminists (the motherhood). Far from a coincidence then, Reventlow’s ideal feminism also happened to match up with those periods of her life in which she was at her happiest. A diary entry from June 1901 reveals Reventlow’s joy with only her son and lover around, unencumbered by other demands. With Klages, Reventlow takes a trip to Murnau, where, by day, the three row under the intense heat and, by night, walk along the boardwalk, where beautiful women and costumes delight Rolf. During a party, Reventlow dances and swings around with a female painter, who cannot help but tell her that “you are wonderful, Countess … [and] what a mouth you have. And I have never even seen you before.”

Here, then, resided the essence of woman: to be appreciated as a sensuous creature, as well as a doting mother.

At Home among Children and Feminists

As shown, from an early age Reventlow cultivated the ability to separate the physical comforts of sex from the demands made by emotional love. It was the rare occasion when she realized the difficulties this imposed on those who felt differently. As she asks herself, at age 25,
after her marriage to Lübke fails upon the weight of her unfaithfulness, “why are love and eroticism so completely separated in me?” Furthermore, Reventlow had distinguished early on between the duties of maternity and matrimony. In a letter to Fehling—written while still a teenager—she finds it difficult to believe that the “purpose of marriage is to reproduce.” While acknowledging the good it may do her to “submit to the law of nature,” the thought is abominable, as it does not conform to any “moral feeling.” For Reventlow, sexual and maternal desires were independent, and the birth of her son Rolf, in 1897, exemplified this.

Reventlow had been pregnant before. As mentioned, the father, a Polish painter she met during her first stint in Munich, remained out of the picture, and Reventlow had retreated to Hamburg and the arms of Lübke. The subsequent miscarriage devastated her. It was June 14, 1895; her father had died exactly a year before. Reventlow commemorated that painful anniversary in her journal by noting the barriers it had retrospectively thrown up between distinct periods of her life: “two years ago, the day of my father’s death; one year ago, that of my child; and, in between, my whole former life has died.” The similar despair Reventlow felt seven years later—after giving birth to twins, one stillborn and the other, “my little Sybille,” to die within days—ironically demonstrate the joy motherhood gave to Reventlow. As his new sister clung to life, Rolf had kneeled next to her, fighting sleep, cooing “stay alive, little Sybille, stay alive.” Her wish, to have “two little girls,” had been “over-abundantly fulfilled” and “now, robbed, nothing remained in empty hands that had once held so much.” As Reventlow wrote, the life she had imagined for her family—“if they would have lived and now lay on breast, my Bubi [Rolf] nearby and all of us so blissful”—now “haunts me like a constant vision.” In her grief, Reventlow turned to Rolf, for “thank god that I have him and he is so close to my heart.”

There is little mention of the twin’s father in Reventlow’s depiction of her grief. As with Rolf—born between these periods of maternal sorrow—Reventlow claimed that the boy’s father “does not belong to my fate.” Echoing her teenage recognition that marriage and motherhood need not be inextricably linked, an additional parent was not what Reventlow desired; she

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212 Reventlow, „Tagebücher,“ 43. „Warum gehn Liebe und Erotik für mich so ganz auseinander?“
213 Reventlow, Briefe, 146. „Aber in dem einen Punkt kann ich doch nicht mit Dir übereinstimmen – alles andere, was Du sagst, befriedigt mich sehr –, daß es Pflicht und Zweck der Ehe sei, die Menschheit fortzupflanzen, mit dem Gedanken kann ich mich nicht befreunden. Man kann ja sagen: es ist so und man muß sich dem Naturgesetz unterwerfen, aber ich muß sagen, ich finde nicht, daß es das sittliche Gefühl zufriedenstellt.“
214 Reventlow, „Tagebücher,“ 37. „Vor 2 Jahren Todestag meines Vaters, vor einem der meines Kindes, und dazwischen ist mein ganzes früheres Leben gestorben.“
215 Ibid., 307-310. “
wanted a child. As she happily anticipated in her journal in early 1897, noting what her recent sickness, including blurred vision and a “strange nausea,” implied, there was “now no more doubt.” She was soon to have her wish: “A child. A child. My god.”

Rolf completed her life in a way that was incomprehensible to many at the time. Although her diaries repeatedly note the joy Reventlow took in her son, it is also clear that he acted as a guard against loneliness. Indeed, the maternal bond between the two offers a kind of love that could not be reciprocated in Reventlow’s sexual relationships. As she notes when Rolf was not yet four, the “happiness, that I find in him is richer than that which any would be able to give me.”

Regardless of the maternal intimacy of the pair, she retained the secret of Rolf’s birth father so tightly that even her son never knew for certain. As Rolf notes in his memoirs, he had waited patiently “until Mother herself spoke, or not … [and] so, I never learned who my father was.”

Reventlow’s enthusiasm for sex and motherhood, if extreme, were hardly uncommon in fin-de-siècle German feminist circles, as the examples of Helene Stöcker and Ruth Bré reveal. Even those more moderate strains sounded by the country’s early feminists—who often saw “sex as a necessary evil” and expected that a “virtuous woman kept her lust under control”—held shades of a later sexual emancipation. For these bourgeois reformists—as with the Kosmiker proposals Reventlow evinced—the true feminine ideal was not to be part of the “‘great cultural systems,’” but to shepherd “‘purely masculine creations’” to their perfection through “motherly values and ideas.”

Furthermore, Reventlow’s views on motherhood—namely the delight she received from her son—positioned her far closer to some Bewegungweiber than may be assumed. From the beginning, Reventlow insisted on being a single mother—as shown, she argued that conveying commitment, dedication, and love to a child required no father. Reventlow’s opinion, while not explicitly approved by many feminist groups, was nonetheless safeguarded by the same, as they commonly called for a “stop to be put to the social, economic, and legal victimization of single

217 Reventlow, „Tagebücher,“ 45.
218 Ibid., 135.
220 Frevert, Women in German History, 134.
221 Ibid., 127.
mothers.” In other ways, Reventlow’s decision to have and raise Rolf alone received clear, if oblique, endorsement by leading feminists. As Stöcker—that vocal campaigner for equality—remarked in 1908, motherhood “’should no longer be forced on women by threats of imprisonment, but consciously and responsibility chosen.” Relatedly, German feminists had also begun to defend the choice of women to remain single, or, as with Reventlow, pursue their interests alone. Catherine Dollard, in her work *The Surplus Woman*, slyly illustrates this point with a feminist fairy tale from the *Kaiserreich*. The story describes a nightingale, content to make music in her solitude, who nonetheless marries and redirects those energies into making a home—these efforts come at the expense of music, her “natural calling.” As Dollard notes, the “very particular nature of an unmarried woman’s loneliness” was perceived as having the “potential to infuse society with beauty and generosity.”

The point, however, was that marriage, even when acknowledged by some feminists as a requisite, still smothered inherent creative impulses and potential in women, as it required them to subordinate these desires to their husbands, as well as to the task of running an efficient household.

Other feminists, however, advocated even more explicitly for the validity of the single life and the value of motherhood, two seemingly opposed notions for nineteenth-century women. Ruth Bré, a lesser known Imperial German activist, seized upon these ideas, becoming an advocate of the idea that “only single motherhood could relieve the stigma and loneliness” attached to single women. While Reventlow’s desire for children arose out of more than an amorphous fear of solitude, it is nonetheless clear that, following her divorce from Lübke, once again alone in Munich, and occasionally selling herself to provide for basic needs, Reventlow felt the pressure of her situation. The beginning of 1897 saw Reventlow despairing that she “sometimes would like to know nothing and simply lay around.” Her previous months had been so trying that she would rather “put everything down into a grave, myself included.” Nine months later, she gave birth to Rolf, who made the “world wonderful again for me, with the Gods and temples and the blue sky once again overhead.” Her son’s birth, in effect, reinvigorated Reventlow’s belief in the potential of a beautiful, liberating paganism.

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222 Ibid., 135.
In 1904, Bré went a step further than many of her even progressive colleagues and founded the League for the Protection of Motherhood and Sexual Reform (*Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform*). This organization, which Stöcker later assumed control of, worked for the protection of unmarried mothers and the betterment of their conditions. Bré herself was influenced by the growing literature on matriarchy and combined this with a strident socialist bent to argue for the “establishment of state-supported [rural] enclaves for single mothers and their children,” which would operate according to Social Darwinist principles; and—much like *Simplicissimus’s* or Bismarck’s adoption of progressive means to ensure conservative ends—the “improvement of the state of the nation” was Bré’s goal and only “healthy” mothers would be allowed to take part.

Balancing between notions like state care for unwed mothers as well as eugenic discrimination was not only indicative of other feminists, but of Reventlow, and Wilhelmine thought as a whole. Also, like Reventlow, Bré’s reformist agenda arose from her personal history: as she wrote in 1903, her “yearning for a child comes from such depths, from the depth of my unhappy, foregone life that it can only be understood by those who have struggled and renounced like I have.” Indeed, as with Reventlow, Bré understood the “female essence as innately sexual and maternal.” This conjunction of motherhood and sexuality by both Bré and Reventlow was dangerous to even radical feminists, as it remained something quite different from the desire to fulfill the sexual impulse outside of marriage that women like Stöcker advocated. Like Reventlow, Bré was largely castigated and shunned to the periphery of feminist discourse because of this; only a few years after founding the League for the Protection of Mothers, Bré was forced out by its new administrators, Stöcker among them.

Nonetheless, Stöcker did much to increase the visibility of an issue like women’s sexual satisfaction in the feminist movement. She succeeded in shifting the platform of the League towards a position acknowledging the importance of sexual love, compatibility, and pleasure. As formulated in the League’s founding document, “sexual activity was a ‘natural and self-evident right,’” only condemnable when its motives were dishonorable. As this formulation condemned much of Reventlow’s more aggressive sexual energies—she once noted in her diary, curious at

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her own lack of concern following the absence of a particularly beloved amour, that “even la grande passion doesn’t make me monogamous”—the views regarding sex between her and other, even radical, feminists never did completely align. 229 Ideological replication, however, would be a tall offering to ask from any of the era’s personalities, let alone one as individualistic as Reventlow. Nonetheless, the League found common cause with Reventlow in their rejection of marriage as the only proper outlet for feminine sexual expression; indeed, a marriage—if entered into “without love”—was as immoral as any “promiscuity or mere hedonism.” The League’s metric for understanding “honorable” sexual relationships echoed the pronouncement of one of the group’s founders, who noted that moral sexual relationships were those that remained the “expression of spiritual communion and true love.” 230

Stöcker and Bré, while clearly among the most radical of turn-of-the-century German feminists, were, nonetheless, a central part of the broader women’s program and no less influential than conservative voices in the movement. In effect, as Richard Evans has argued, Germany’s feminists were, at their “most radical point, more advanced than any other feminist movement.” 231 Indeed, in the clearest echo of Reventlow’s fundamental philosophical groundings for her thoughts, Stöcker herself claims that the ““strongest expression of the love of life, sexuality, can no longer be considered sinful in the new age.”’’ This sentiment echoes Reventlow’s own that sexuality is one of the central “beauties of life.” Regardless, this “new age” was one familiar to Reventlow. Her variety of “disruptive acts”—simultaneously demonstrating her similarity to a growing circle of radical German feminists and her willingness to go beyond borders even they had advised—bespeaks the larger confusions of this age.

In this way, Reventlow—as an advocate for both radical female sexual freedom and the traditional comforts of motherhood—stands as a clear, if not singular, testament to her age. As with Bré and Stocker, there was ample ideological room within Imperial German feminist circles to fit a voice like Reventlow’s comfortably. She, however, would not have wanted that invitation. All three of these women, though, equally resist a pat categorization of their views, full of contradictions that seem glaring to the modern eye. Stöcker and Bré’s flirtations with evolution, eugenics, and communal health control had “downsides that later in the century would

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229 Reventlow, “Tagebücher,” 118. “Selbst la grande passion mach mich nicht monogam.”
230 Evans, The Feminist Movement, 125.
231 Ibid., 139.
be incorporated into the family politics of National Socialism.232 Similarly, their pioneering work paved the way for much of the twentieth century’s subsequent liberation movements. As with her position on Wilhelmine Germany’s social picture and her assessment of the political angles of the Frauenfrage, Reventlow’s own sex life (and her views on the same) indicates the corrosion of certainties specific to the fin de siècle of Reventlow’s time, much more than they presage the disasters of another.

232 Dollard, The Surplus Woman, 147.
CONCLUSION

Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow symbolizes the contradictions of her age. Reventlow occupied a liminal space during a tumultuous period in which middle classes wielded increasing socio-economic power and women clamored to have their educational and sexual choices legitimized while, nonetheless, many had begun to reject the basic premises of liberalism altogether. Cut off from, but still identifying with her aristocratic pedigree, Reventlow adopted diverse social tropes at will—a pragmatic and reflexive adaptation mirroring both Munich (simultaneously transitioning from a political to cultural leader) and the Zinnsoldaten of Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen. More tangibly, Reventlow’s complex relationship with the German women’s movement—in which not only the agenda and direction, but the appeal of the movement, were objects of debate—also complicates the image of the radical Wilhelmine feminist. Reventlow, educated author and translator, denied the aspirations of women aspiring to the same. She instead emphasized, citing an historicized natural state, the central importance of maternity to female identity, even while rejecting what she saw as the enforced-monogamy of marriage.

For these reasons, Reventlow’s place within Imperial German feminism remains singular. Stressing gender equality—but in choice of sexual partners rather than educational opportunity—and underlining gender difference—based, however, on the sexual and maternal preeminence of women in antiquity rather than on traditional patriarchal marital hierarchies—Reventlow presaged the central divisions of the twentieth century’s later discourse on emancipation, albeit from her distinctive perspective. In Germany, fin-de-siècle mainstream feminism focused on establishing cultural, social, and legal building blocks from which female equality of opportunity could be established, while simultaneously reiterating to a wary public their commitment to traditional female religious, maternal, and domestic duties.

Reventlow’s import stems from her dual subversion and confirmation of this German feminism; in her embrace of irrevocable feminine sexualized difference Reventlow also reinforced attendant gender conventions, in turn creating new social dynamics. In Reventlow’s formulation, the “Hetären” and moderate feminist might not make such improbable bedfellows. Although her conclusions may have been unique, Reventlow’s impulse to blend the old and new, the conventional and novel, was not. Both Munich’s Kosmiker and Reventlow’s brother Ernst,
among others, struggled to distance themselves from the perceived threats of a domineering social order and, in so doing, unwittingly perpetuated certain characteristics of that very paradigm.

In many ways, then, Reventlow’s tensions with feminism underscore the larger tensions within late-Wilhelmine Germany. While it is clear that there was no uniform response to the pressures of a modernizing society, this acknowledged heterogeneity of response has been broadly shunted off onto groups (bourgeoisie, socialists, Junkers, etc.) with a perceived consistency of outlook. Reventlow’s experiences, however, within both bohemian Schwabing and German feminism (seemingly homogenous blocs of dissent) reveal these varied groups as miniature fields of contention, in which the same issues dividing Wilhelmine Germany played themselves out in small scale.
Bibliography


