



2006-03-22

# Irgendwo muss man doch einmal hingehoeren': Irmgard Keun as Heiress to the Flaneur."

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“IRGENDWO MUSS MAN DOCH EINMAL HINGEHOEREN”

IRMGARD KEUN AS HEIRESS TO THE FLANEUR

by

Matthew D. Embley

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts in German Literature

Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages

Brigham Young University

April 2006

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis by Matthew D. Embley in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographic style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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## ABSTRACT

“IRGENDWO MUSS MAN DOCH EINMAL HINGEHOEREN”

IRMGARD KEUN AS HEIRESS TO THE FLANEUR

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Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages

Masters of Arts in German Literature

Flanerie is the art of taking a walk, leisurely observing the movements and spaces of the city. By writing about cityscapes, urban realms, and the condition of society, flaneurs are able to describe the uniqueness of the metropolis and give life to the modern city—creating a photograph of an urban setting. In the early nineteenth century, and even today, flaneur literature has been ultimately dominated by men who have documented their cultural and aesthetic interactions with the city. During these times, unwritten rules have often excluded the female from participating in parts of the urban society. Today, these unwritten rules are still apparent as many park signs warn us to stay out of secluded areas after dark—implying the possibility of danger for women, but not necessarily for men. The controversy over the existence of the flaneuse or female flaneur has been the corner stone of many recent debates as a large body of scholarship has claimed that women have had no part in the art of flanerie. The questions still

remain: was it possible for women to promenade in the streets of a male-dominated society and is it possible that female flaneur literature even exists?

My answer to these questions is yes. Although the public sphere was dominated by the male figure as they confined women to the private realm of the home, there were notable women who proved to be exceptions to these rules. Recently, scholars have uncovered an array of female authors that have written in the art of flanerie. Irmgard Keun was one of the prominent exceptions who wrote many texts that are potentially important as cultural and historical documents of the time period in which she lived.

In this thesis, I will investigate Keun's first two novels, *Gilg—eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, as well as a few of her lesser known feuilletons that have scarcely been observed or considered as essential links to the rare works of the female flaneur. I will first discuss the problems of the flaneuse—being subjected to gender-stratified societies, being seen as a prostitute, and being confined to the private realm of the home. I will then argue several aspects of Keun's novels and feuilletons that are necessary to understand the practices of the modern flaneur and, more importantly, to liberate the controversial figure of the flaneuse.

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## Introduction

*Ich bin in Berlin. Seit ein paar Tagen. Mit einer Nachtfahrt und noch neunzig Mark übrig. Damit muss ich leben, bis sich mir Geldquellen bieten. Ich habe Maßloses erlebt, Berlin senkte sich auf mich wie eine Steppdecke mit feurigen Blumen. Der Westen ist vornehm mit hochprozentigem Licht—wie fabelhafte Steine ganz teuer und mit so gestempelter Einfassung. Wir haben hier ganz übermäßige Lichtreklame. Um mich war ein Gefunkel. Und ich mit dem Feh. (Keun, 39)*

After announcing her arrival in Berlin, Doris searches to find a way to describe her initial experience with the metropolis, but is only capable of using fragments, images, and metaphors. She is unable to speak cohesively or expound on her observation. But why is this the case? Why does she struggle to fully develop this description? For Doris, the main protagonist in Irmgard Keun's (1905-1982) 1932 novel, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, the metropolis and its urban landscape are immeasurable and beyond normal dimensions. To comprehend the pace and rhythm of the city, Doris turns to these fragments and metaphors to deal with comprehending so much in just a short time.

It is through these short, fragmented glimpses that she tries to keep up with the movement of the city and find herself among the crowds that she encounters. Doris continues:

Und schicke Männer wie Mädchenhändler, ohne dass sie gerade mit Mädchen handeln, was es ja nicht mehr gibt—aber sie sehen danach aus, weil sie tun würden, wenn was bei rauskäme. Sehr viel glänzende schwarze Haare und Nachtaugen so tief im Kopf. Aufregend. Auf dem Kurfürstendamm sind viele Frauen. Die gehen nur. Sie haben gleiche Gesichter und viel Maulwurfpelz—also nicht ganz erste Klasse—aber doch schick—so mit hochmütigen Beinen und viel Hauch um sich. Es



gibt eine Untergrundbahn, die ist wie ein beleuchteter Sarg auf Schienen—unter der Erde und muffig, und man wird gequetscht. Damit fahre ich. Es ist sehr interessant und geht schnell (39).

As Doris enters the metropolis of Berlin, she is bombarded with multiple stimuli—lights, advertisements, men and women, and exciting and curious innovations—and she tries to depict these spectacles and describe the feelings that arise within her as quickly as she experiences them. As she observes the expanse of the metropolis and the fleeting images of modernity, Doris tries to capture them in words. She needs to describe as quickly as she observes, from moment to moment and from glimpse to glimpse.

Not only is Keun using Doris to describe the streets and the city, but she is also using the city itself as an aesthetic medium for her literature. As Doris is driven by the spectacles of the streets and fleeting images of the modern metropolis, she tries to capture its kaleidoscopic images and put them into words. What Doris is doing with this description and throughout her experience in Berlin is exactly what Charles Baudelaire describes as the pursuit of the flaneur.<sup>1</sup> He says:

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flaneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using mainly Baudelaire's definition of the flaneur. For further discussion of the definition of the flaneur, see Neumeyer, Harald. *Der Flaneur*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999, Köhn, Eckhardt. *Straßenrausch: Flanerie und Kleine Form. Versuch zur Literaturgeschichte des Flaneurs von 1830-1933*. Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1989, Tester, Kieth. *The Flaneur*. New York: Routledge, 1994, Benjamin, Walter. "Das dämonische Berlin" in *Nachträge. Gesammelte Schriften VII Teil I*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992, and "Die Wiederkehr des Flaneurs" in *Gesammelte Schriften III*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981, and Gleber, Anke. *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999.

the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. (9)

Immediately after stepping off of the train, Doris becomes a passionate spectator and desires to be in the movement and rhythm of the metropolis. Although she was away from home, she was still at home in the midst of the crowd and the landscape of the city. For her, the joy of being at the center of the city brought about extreme pleasure, but was also difficult for her to define. However, how is this possible for a female author, such as Keun, to use a female character in the multitude who describes *her* pleasure in *his* element? For if *his* passion and *his* profession are to be in the midst of the metropolis, where does Keun, as a woman, fit into the male-dominated literary genre of flanerie? Or does she even belong at all?

Since the beginning of its inception as a literary genre, flanerie has been overwhelmingly dominated by men who have documented their cultural and aesthetic interactions with the streets, the crowds, and the images of the city. During this time, the boundaries of flanerie have been defined by traditional rules that have excluded the female author from participating in this part of urban society. Today, some of these traditional rules are still apparent, as many park signs continue to warn us to stay out of secluded areas after dark—habitually implying the possibility of danger for women (possible rape, molestation, mugging, etc.), but not necessarily for men. Like the “understood” rule of staying out of the park at night, historically, women faced similar

implicit rules that demanded that they stay off of the streets and out of the public sphere. These unspoken rules also kept them from publication opportunities and from participating in literary circles—as many of them were excluded from the universities and were seen and marked as insufficiently educated for writing literature.

However, in this thesis, I will investigate many of Irmgard Keun's interaction with urban space in several of her works, including her first two, best-selling novels, *Gilgi—eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, as well as many of her lesser-known feuilletons (1939-1945). In chapter one, I will outline the way that early twentieth-century European traditional norms of gender-segregation hindered the interaction of women with the city: constantly being subjected to gender-stratified societies, being seen as a prostitute, and being confined to the private realm of the home. Women hardly had a chance to participate in the experience and representation of the city. I will then show how Keun was able to overcome these traditional rules of gendered societies to begin her career as a female flaneur.<sup>2</sup> In chapter two, I will illustrate how several aspects of Keun's first two novels establish her as a prominent author and allow her to transcend the boundaries of the male-dominated flaner. And finally, in chapter three, I will finish my discussion of Keun's career as an author and show how she used the feuilleton to further her experiences as a female flaneur. Keun's texts, I will argue, provide documented evidence of this one female author's liberation from the confines of societal rule, proving the possibility of the female urban observer—for *her* element and *her* passion were also to be one with the flesh of the crowd and the metropolis.

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<sup>2</sup> Although there has been some recent scholarly debate about the proper term with which to describe and differentiate the urban female author from her male counterpart—that is, whether to use the term “female flaneur” or “flaneuse,”—in this thesis, I will use the two terms interchangeably. See Parsons, Deborah L. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

## Chapter One

### “Männer dürfen und Frauen dürfen nicht”<sup>3</sup>:

#### Revealing the Secrets behind the Private Woman in the Public Sphere.

In *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, which first appeared in 1932, the character Doris expresses sentiments that seem to reflect the discontent that Irmgard Keun felt about the opposition that she encountered in the public sphere of the city and reveals the traditional, societal gender divisions that have plagued the freedom of women’s movement and choices throughout history. Doris alludes to these traditional gender divisions when she states, “...Und Grundsätze: Männer dürfen und Frauen dürfen nicht” (46). This statement appears in the novel at a time when she has become angry at society and the labels that they have constantly applied to her. Throughout the novel, Doris continually wonders why men have been allowed to enjoy the freedom of the streets without being subjected to undeserved prejudice, while she has constantly been stereotyped as a female loiterer or a prostitute. All that Doris wanted to do was belong to the city of Berlin and its inhabitants and feel that she could participate in the activities of the metropolis (42). However, because of her gender, she often felt weak (24) and unhappy (47) in her pursuits in the public sphere.

Similar to the frustration shown in her previous statement about her displeasure with society, Doris echoes these feelings when she says, “Ich bin das alles so satt... Es muss doch noch anderes geben auf der Welt” (78). At a time when she is struggling to find her place in the metropolis of Berlin, Doris exclaims that she has dealt with enough

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<sup>3</sup> Keun, Irmgard. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. München: Claassen Verlag, 1992. Original publication : Berlin: Universitas, 1932. 46.

discrimination and prejudice, and wishes that there were something else in the city for her. What Doris portrays is a society where women have been marginalized and excluded from the public sphere and restricted in their movements and activities. In the novel, some of the following questions also arise: What was it that created these gender divisions within the context of the urban realm? Why were the men allowed to participate in the life of the city and the public sphere, while the women were not? What has excluded the woman from the public sphere of society and placed her in the private realm of household and motherhood? And was there ever a woman who was able to break out of these gender ideologies? In this chapter, I will explore the answers to these questions from a historical perspective and discuss some of the specific ways that women were excluded from the urban realm and from the possibility of being a flaneuse. And, using Keun as an example, I will show the way that women have been able to defy the gender ideologies and discover the city as an urban text.

Since the beginning of the rise of industrialization and the advent of a newly defined division of public and private spheres, women have been repeatedly stereotyped and labeled as second-class citizens in relation to their male counterparts. In writing about the early part of the nineteenth century and the rise of the cosmopolitan city, Helen Taylor discusses some of the factors that helped cause this separation of spheres. In her essay, *Walking through New Orleans: Kate Chopin and the Female Flaneur*, she writes, “It is commonplace that nineteenth-century industrialization and commerce produced concomitant divisions of social life into a public (or masculine) and a private (feminine) sphere... Men had the freedom of the streets...” (99). With the emergence of the industrialized nation and the burgeoning modern metropolis, gendered separation of

social spheres began. Due to the large numbers of people who were moving to the cities in search of jobs, gender-stratified societies increased in strength as many of the men left the home to work, while most of the women stayed at home to take care of the children (Martin 70). This separation of spheres excluded women from the community and over time forced them to be “outsiders... viewing society from its margins” (Martin 70)—ultimately keeping many of the women off of the streets and complicating any possibility for the development of the female flaneur. Because of the historical division of genders and the general exclusion of women from the public sphere, scholars continue to disagree about whether or not a female urban experience was actually possible. If women were excluded from the public sphere of the male-dominated society, is it possible that the flaneuse, as an author, even exists from the nineteenth and early twentieth century?

Despite the collection of urban literature written by some female authors, the controversy over the existence of the flaneuse has been the cornerstone of many recent academic debates. Although people have been able to locate a considerable number of texts written by female flaneurs, a large body of scholars has continued to claim that women were never able to participate or exist in the urban realm of the metropolis. Scholars such as Janet Wolff, Elizabeth Wilson, Priscilla Ferguson, and Keith Tester conclude that it was virtually impossible for women to observe the movements of the city, which ultimately eliminated their opportunity to promenade in the streets, develop their skills in the art of flanerie, and publish urban texts. Ferguson argues that women “compromise the detachment that distinguishes the true flaneur” and that “no woman is able to attain the aesthetic distance so crucial to the flaneur’s superiority... [The woman] is unfit for flanerie because she desires the objects spread before her and acts upon that

desire” (27), unlike the flaneur who “is in society as he is in the city, suspended from social obligation, disengaged, dispassionate” (26). She further claims that women cannot “reproduce the physical distance of the bird’s-eye views and panoramas in which contemporaries so often indulge” (31). Wilson goes as far as to suggest that the “prostitute is the nineteenth-century female flaneur: as a woman of the streets, her visibility could not ruin her reputation” (Taylor 22-23). Thus, scholars have argued that women have been incapable of creating texts in the art of flanerrie because they remain attached to city through their desire to shop<sup>4</sup> and stand in a disruptive manner to the city through their sexuality.

However, what they do not take into consideration is that the female flaneur was not on the streets to shop, but rather to observe the movements of the city and gather the spectacles of the urban realm—collecting the visual and not the material. As a long-time advocate for the existence of the flaneuse, Anke Gleber believes it is necessary to discuss and refute some of the arguments that other scholars use to try to prove that the female flaneur cannot exist. In her essay, *Women on the Screens and Streets of Modernity: In Search of the Female Flaneur*, Gleber writes, “The female flaneur has been an absent figure in the public sphere of modernity, in its media and texts, and in its literatures and cities” (172). Because, according to many scholars, she was an invisible figure in the

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<sup>4</sup> In refuting the idea that the department store and shopping enabled the development of the female flaneur, Priscilla Ferguson writes, “When flanerrie moves into the private realm of the department store, feminization alters this urban practice almost beyond recognition and jeopardizes, when it does not altogether obliterate, the identification of flaneur artist... In other words, women shop, and today as in the early nineteenth century when the arcades first make shopping a new, exciting and specifically urban practice and pleasure, shopping is invariably considered a female pursuit. Indeed, for these texts of flanerrie, shopping seems to be the strongest social marker of female activity... She is unfit for flanerrie because she desires the objects spread before her and acts upon that desire. The flaneur, on the other hand, desires the city as a whole, not a particular part of it.” Ferguson Priscilla. “The flaneur on and off the streets of Paris” in Keith Tester. *The Flaneur*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 23 and 27.

metropolis “we do not and can not expect to encounter a flaneuse in the street” (Gleber 172). Although Gleber acknowledges that the flaneuse was, indeed, an often-absent figure from the streets of the city, the theory of her invisibility does not prove that the female flaneur was non-existent—it merely states a hypothesis about her improbability. Although the stratified societies of the metropolis were traditionally dominated by the male figure, who marginalized and excluded the female city-dweller from the urban realm, the woman might have seemed invisible, but she was never completely fictional.

Even though the appearance of women on the streets was exceptional, as Heike Beutel calls them, “was ganz Besonderes” (81), and although the public sphere was dominated by the men, there existed notable women who proved to be exceptions to these norms. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, advances in education, entry into professions, increased employment opportunities, better wages, and the right to vote all worked together to allow an increased number of women access to the traditionally male-dominated sphere of the city (Iskin 351).<sup>5</sup> Recently, scholars have uncovered an array of female authors who were able to emerge from the shadowy outskirts of the metropolis—“stepping out of the conceptual and physical segregation of the gendered territories of ‘private’ and ‘public’” (Iskin 351)—and who were able to develop the keen sense of observation essential for producing texts in the style of flanerie.

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<sup>5</sup> “The Weimar Constitution granted women the vote (19. January 1919) and slowly they attempted to enter into the previously male spheres of politics and medicine...and into academia. By 1932 women students formed a fifth of the student population, but constituted a mere 1 per cent of the university teachers. The most dramatic change was the rise of female employees overall, which shaped a completely new culture.” Schmidt-Ott. 119.



In her own letters in 1935, Keun specifically addresses the problem of the woman in the city. Her personal writings show that she was deeply interested in the gender ideologies that affected the way a woman approached the city. In the first letter, she wishes for the liberty of the male subject, writing “wäre ich ein Mann doch wenigstens nur!” (Oberembt 113). Her desire to become a male is not a literal tran-gender longing, but a realization of her own limitations in the urban landscape. In the second letter, written just a few months later, she notes, “Ach Kleines, warum bin ich kein Mann! Männer können ruhig Glatzen kriegen, Männer dürfen bummeln, Männer können sich an jedem Baum stellen – die Vorzüge sind unendlich” (Kreis 128). Contained within these letters is Keun’s personal lamentation that she had not been provided with the same spatial freedoms as her male counterparts. According to these passages from her personal writings, Keun’s desire was to roam the streets unmolested and meander through the metropolis as her male contemporaries. If she were only a man, she would not only be allowed access to the public realm of the metropolis, but she would also have the right to walk on the streets and promenade at her own leisure. She would also be able to rest herself in the midst of the city, set up house, and watch the river of life flow past her in its kaleidoscopic splendor and intrigue. Thus, if Keun and other women have been considered to be absent from the images and texts of the metropolis, it is because they were often removed from the public sphere of the city and sent back to their designated private realm (Gleber 175).

Although society’s traditional rules have historically worked as a veil to cover the women who roam the streets of the city, there were a few notable women whose “desire for [their] freedom of movement...can be read in [the] texts of the nineteenth century”

(Gleber 175). Ruth Iskin's article, *The Pan-European Flaneuse in Fin-de-Siecle Posters: Advertising Modern Women in the City*, is a pivotal work in the scholarship about flanerier that argues for the visible existence of the modern woman, as being in and about the streets of the late nineteenth-century. With this article, Iskin shows how a selection of European posters and advertisements work together to prove that "the flaneuse was quite visible in the visual culture of the 1890s" (333). She further writes that "*Fin-de-siecle* posters, which were an innovative mode of large-scale full color advertising, played an important role in portraying middle- and upper-class women and occasionally working women as flaneuses." As she continues, although late-nineteenth century women were constantly faced with many challenges in the modern metropolis, these "posters which portrayed women in the city contributed to affirming women's presence there" (333-334). Similar to Gleber's reading of Walther Ruttmann's 1927 production of the film *Berlin, Symphonie einer Grossstadt*, these posters provide visual evidence of the visibility of women in the modern city. Like the film, they also reaffirm and strengthen Gleber's argument that it is time to reconsider women's authorship in relation to the female subject as a flaneur (189). As Iskin asserts, women were able to become part of the metropolis, and the feminine stroller or flaneuse—emerging "both in historical practices and literary representations" (Iskin 334)—was not entirely invisible in nineteenth and twentieth-century discourses.

Another industrial innovation that led to the increased number of women on the streets of the metropolis was the consumer-driven department store. Indeed, the department store allowed women the opportunity to become socially appropriate and further practice the art of flanerier. In direct contrast to critics such as Ferguson, Lisa

Tierston writes, to continue their “urban promenade unmolested...circulating freely.... [T]he very scale of the place, the sense of open space seemed to make the store a city in itself” (119-120). The department store complexes provided added freedom of the streets and increased opportunity for women to explore the metropolis’ “new city.” Echoing the writings of Tierston, Gleber discusses her own opinions on how the department store made it possible for women to walk the streets of the city on her own. She argues that the department store became an outlet through which the twentieth-century woman found spatial freedom of the streets:

The female flaneur was not possible until a woman could wander the city on her own, a freedom linked to the privilege of shopping alone... It was not until the closing decades of the century that the department store became a safe haven for the unchaperoned women... The great stores may have been the flaneur’s last coup, but they were the flaneuse’s first (174).

The department stores of the nineteenth century created a new city within the existing metropolis that reshaped gender divisions and allowed women an option through which they could cross over the boundaries of the male-dominated society and begin to wander the city on their own—allowing them opportunity to become the idle strollers that the genre of flanerrie requires.

Although there are many scholars who still oppose, and even refute, the idea that shopping engendered flanerrie, and even though shopping, alone, does not constitute, nor is it equivalent to, the art of promenading in the city and observing its images, the rise of the department store did provide a greater possibility for the flaneuse. It is my contention

that there are many weaknesses in Ferguson's argument about the non-existence of the female flaneur. Although she may be making a stereotypical statement about the large mass of women shoppers, she does not make place for the rare women who were exceptions to the rules, who did in fact step out of the private sphere and into what was perceived to be a masculine role. These women did indeed observe the city as a flaneur. Although Ferguson argues that "shopping is invariably considered a female pursuit" (23), what matters is what is, and not what is perceived to be. Increased association with the urban culture of the metropolis, through the ability to shop, further enlarged the evolving connection that many women were beginning to feel with the expanding modern city. In discussing the advancement and spread of female flanerier through the development of the department store, Iskin writes that historical "representations of women in the European city along with modern women's increasing active participation in the city, burgeoning mobility, and practices of walking, looking, and enjoying a variety of urban pleasures" provide evidence with which we may conclude that "feminine flanerier became integral to urban modernity by the late nineteenth century" (Iskin 351). This active involvement in the social mobility of the city brought along with it greater possibilities and opportunities for active participation in the circles of flanerier of the time. By providing even more reasons and occasions for women to be on the streets, the growing economics-driven metropolis gave the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century female flaneur another chance to venture out onto the streets, establish her skills of observation, and rise in the art of flanerier.

However, one of the main problems that faced women who entered the streets of the city unaccompanied by a man was that they were considered to be sexually

promiscuous or available—women on the streets were labeled as prostitutes and whores. In discussing this particular problem that the women on the streets were facing, von Ankum writes, “the unmarried woman or the woman who appeared alone in public was immediately labeled with a reputation for being sexually available” (166). Thus, in her efforts to observe and wander the boulevards of the city on her own, the female flaneur, like Keun,<sup>6</sup> had her century-long role of prostitution continue to threaten her pursuit of emancipation:

Während in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts allein dem Mann die öffentliche Sphäre zugeordnet war, blieb das Wirken zumindest der sozial bessergestellten Frau auf private und gesellschaftliche Innenräume beschränkt. Jahrhundertlang waren Prostituierte die einzigen Frauen gewesen, die im öffentlichen Raum ihrer Arbeit nachgingen. Das Prostituiertenviertel ist der weiße Fleck auf dem Stadtplan des männlichen Flaneurs, für den Flanieren zum Orgasmusersatz wird (370-371).

Although increased numbers of women were finally beginning to be visible on the streets of the metropolis, the voyeuristic, male-dominated society confined them, once again, into a separate realm, this time different than the home—the realm of prostitution, continuing the tradition in which women were labeled as second-class citizens.

These societal advances, such as the expansion of the working woman, the invention of the department store complex, and increased leisure time, allowed and encouraged Keun and other women to actively promenade in the streets of the metropolis,

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<sup>6</sup> In a letter written to Arnold Strauss in 1936, Keun alludes to the fact that people may see her as a prostitute or sexually active woman. She writes, “Deine Mutter sieht in mir einen kalten Vamp.” Gabrielle. 162.

even though they might continue to be labeled as sexually active prostitutes. Keun discusses her desire to be out of the home as she writes, “I have to go to the pub every day in order to write. I can’t just sit around the whole day at home—I always need a change of atmosphere and I have to be able to see and observe things. If I really had to lead the life of a housewife I’d soon get dull and miserable” (quoted in Martin 74). With the desire to end her misery and leave her strict role of housewife, Keun ventured out of the home and into the public realm. After she was finally able to find her way out of her confinement in the private sphere, Keun was then able to promenade in the streets of the metropolis and was able to fulfill her desire to participate in the experiences of the city. Thus, Keun was able to use the industrial innovations of the twentieth century to begin her career as an author and to challenge the male-dominated, public sphere with her visibility and existence as a modern flaneuse.

By the early 1930s, Irmgard Keun became one of these women who was able to step out of her gendered confinement and enter the world of literature and flanerie. During her career as an author, she became a prominent exception<sup>7</sup> to society’s rules, eventually writing many texts that have become important cultural and historical documents that give us insight into the concepts of “New Objectivity” and the rise of the “New Women” during the era of the Weimar Republic. In her biography of Keun, Ritta Jo Horsley discusses many of the important cultural and historical aspects of Keun’s texts. She writes:

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<sup>7</sup> In a letter written to Arnold Strauss, one of Irmgard Keun’s long-time friends and lovers, Strauss’s father writes, “Man möchte von Irmgard Keun immer mehr lesen. Ihre hohe Begabung ist unzweifelhaft...” quoted in Kreis, Gabrielle and Marjory Strauss. *Ich lebe in einem wilden Wirbel: Briefe an Arnold Strauss, 1933 bis 1947*. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1988. 60. With this statement, he is not only expressing his own opinion about Keun's growing popularity, but is also implying that other people felt the same way.

Keun's...narratives present a fascinating chronicle of German society from the late Weimar Republic to the postwar era, interweaving ironic insights into the psychology of the middle and lower-middle classes with vivid depictions of the social milieu.... Keun's portrayal of women is tantalizingly contradictory; from the liberated New Woman of her first two novels to the subordinated wives and lovers and stereotypically nasty shrews who predominate in her later works, her female figures appear to represent a barometer of women's changing fortunes and images over the course of recent German history (234-235).

Through Keun's works, we can gain significant and detailed insight into twentieth-century Germany, its social milieus, its economics, and its gendered atmospheres.

Keun's works have also become important urban texts that give us a glimpse into German history, teach us about the conditions of society, describe for us the uniqueness of the metropolis, and allow us to become, with her, passionate spectators of the developing modern city of the 1930s. Thus, it is through her texts that Keun is able to create a "photograph of [the] urban setting" in which she lived (Kosta 271).

Within Keun's own works, we can find further examples of instances, perhaps based on the author's personal experiences,<sup>8</sup> where women are being pushed to the edges of the societies in which they live. Both of her first novels, *Gilgi—eine von uns* and *Das*

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<sup>8</sup> In an interview, Martina Keun talked about the unique life that her mother lived and how many of her mother's personal stories are reflected within the pages of her novels. She says, "Sie war nicht der Mensch, der seine Autobiographie schreibt. Wenn man ihre Bücher genau liest, dann findet man eigentlich genug Autobiographisches" Beutel, Heike and Anna Barbara Hagin. *Irmgard Keun: Zeitzeugen, Bilder und Dokumente erzählen*. Köln: Hermann Josef Verlag, 1995. 72. In her biography of Keun, Häntzschel strengthens Martina Keun's statement that her mother's novels reflect autobiographical experience. She writes, "Man liest Irmgard Keun's Texte, sieht ihre Mädchen und Frauen Figuren autobiographisch und findet die so rekonstruierte Autorin eben dort, in ihren Texten und Figuren, wieder bestätigt." Häntzschel, Hiltrud. *Irmgard Keun*. Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2001. 41

*kunstseindene Mädchen*, which are “keyed to the particular conditions of the late Weimar Germany,” seem to epitomize both Keun’s own and the “New Woman’s” desire for “self-sufficiency” and “sexual emancipation” (Horsley 235). Both novels not only specifically address the New Woman in an urban context and support New Objectivity and women’s emancipation, but also show the constant struggles that women—in this case Gilgi and Doris—face, which interfere with their determination and with their courage to step out into the public sphere of the city. Through Gilgi, Keun portrays a woman who struggles to find personal existence and purpose in her efforts to cross the boundaries of social mobility. As she attempts to take hold of her own life and shift the parameters of her own feminine existence, Gilgi consistently confronts turmoil because of her own “rootlessness, dispossession, and displacement” (Kosta 274). Gilgi struggles to find her place in the modern age of remarkable freedoms and her struggle for independence; she is unable to fully escape her traditional gender role and establish her individual existence as a complete, or visible, part of the cityscape.

In the novel *Gilgi—eine von uns*, Keun not only depicts a woman’s struggle for independence and purpose, but she also uses her novels to illustrate multiple images that represent this problem of prostitution or women who are considered to be as sexually active in Weimar. By the time Gilgi has turned 20, at the beginning of the book, she is determined to change her destiny by entering the economic world of the modern metropolis, finding a job as a stenographer and typist, and buying her own private apartment that nobody else knows about or has access to. Through her self-proclaimed emancipation, Gilgi begins to earn wages and to enjoy economic independence that allows her to distinguish herself from earlier generations of women. However, although



she has won a few of the battles along the way, her continual fight for independence is constantly hindered by her gender and her perceived sexuality.

One of the most apparent battles that Gilgi is constantly faced with can be seen in her relationship with her boss, Herr Reuter. Even though he is married, he consistently sees Gilgi as a sex object and regularly acts inappropriately towards her at work—often implying that she will be fired from her job if she does not meet him at a hotel and give in to his will (17-19). At this point in her career, Gilgi quickly realizes that she is caught in a seemingly impossible situation. On the one hand, if she wants to keep her job by giving in to the desires of her boss, she will be forced to give up her position as an emancipated woman who is no longer in subjection to the desires of her male counterparts; however, on the other hand, if she says no and stands firm in her convictions, she could be fired and thus lose her claim on independence and economic freedom. Although Gilgi has been able to merge into the public realm of the metropolis, she continues to struggle with her femininity and the assumption that she is sexually promiscuous.

A year after her first success as an author, Keun contributed another sensational literary achievement that portrays a woman's experience in the modern metropolis: *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. In discussing Keun's ability to describe the culture of the Weimar era, Hiltrud Häntzschel writes, "Keuns Roman wird immer wieder genannt als Prototyp des modernen Zeitromans der Neuen Sachlichkeit" (30). In the novel, the protagonist Doris must continually confront the difficulties which arise from societal gender divisions. As Doris says, "Aber ich hatte eine Wut wegen meiner Schwäche, denn wie komme ich damit durch die Welt wie ich will?" (24). Doris is unable to live her life the way that she wants to and is incapable of enjoying the freedom of the streets

because of her femininity—she, too, has been excluded from the male-dominated public sphere of the “Big-City.”

Furthermore, in Keun’s second novel, we can see another vivid image of prostitution that epitomizes the situation to which Doris has become accustomed, but with which she continues to struggle. After she has become more acquainted with the big city, Doris begins to experience the “real” metropolitan life of Berlin. She observes that “...überall abends stehen Huren—am Alex so viele, so viele—auf dem Kurfürstendam und Joachimsthaler und am Friedrichbahnhof und überall” (85). At this moment, as far as she can tell, all of the women who are on the streets of the metropolis really are sexually active participants. Even though Doris has been able to find her way into the city of Berlin and to begin her individual emancipation process, she has not been able to fully enjoy the freedom of being able to promenade in the streets, alone and unmolested:

Immer ging ich weiter, die Huren stehen an den Ecken und machen ihren Sport, und in mir war eine Maschinenart, die genau ihr Gehen und Stehenbleiben machte. Und dann sprach mich einer an, das war so ein Besserer, ich sagte, “Ich bin nicht ‘mein Kind’ für Sie, ich bin eine Dame” (85)

Because unaccompanied women were seen as prostitutes, Doris was also immediately affected by this label. She often found it difficult to experience the streets in the way that she wanted—free from gendered stereotypes, free from historical traditions, and free to walk the streets and observe the rhythms of the metropolis.

However, although Keun’s novels often depict an image in which the woman is constantly subjected to gender-stratified societies, I have argued that Keun’s characters

call for a re-evaluation of the theory that the flaneuse was an impossible figure in the modern metropolis. As we have seen, both of her protagonists, Gilgi and Doris, are figures that have not only been able to establish themselves as independent and emancipated women of the Weimar Era, but they have also been able to show their ability to systematically collect and describe the images of modernity and its effect on the modern metropolis. Although these women are often seen by the other characters in the novels as images of the sexual landscape, I have shown that their existence is more significant than mere spectacles of the streets. They are integral figures in the metropolis that have recorded their interactions with the urban landscape.

In the following chapter, I will further discuss the significance of and evidence for these novels as urban texts and I will show in greater detail and through deeper analysis Keun's individual ability as a flaneuse to read and represent the urban landscape and simulate the urban experience in her literature. What we shall see is that Keun's own experiences establish her as a flaneuse, and that the observations of her characters further substantiate this fact. I will also show how she paves the way for subsequent female flaneurs and enhances the traditional genre of flanerie by conveying unique feminine characteristics to the city through her characters' descriptions that depict the movements and montage of Berlin—as they *become* Berlin.

## Chapter Two

**“Gut kann ich kurze Sachen nie Schreiben. Ich kann nur Romane:”<sup>9</sup>**

### **Re-investigating and Restoring Keun’s Weimar Novels as Models of Flanerie.**

By the spring of 1921, Irmgard Keun had turned sixteen years old and had finally reached the end of her school career. However, although her formal education had come to an end, her *Berufslaufbahn* had just begun (Hantzschel 16-17). At this pivotal moment in her life, Keun would finally have the opportunity to leave behind her childhood home and experience the modern metropolis. In 1935, in an application for admission into the *Reichsschrifttumskammer*, Keun briefly describes this critical and adventurous time in her life as well as some of the career options that were offered to her. In her description of her adolescence, Keun illustrates some of her education and experience in the business world, and her desire to become an actress. She writes:

Nach Abschluß des zehnten Schuljahres kam ich von Ostern bis Weihnachten in das Pensionat von General Kannegießer in Bad Grund im Harz, um Haushalts- und Gartenarbeit zu lernen.... Als ich wieder bei meinen Eltern in Köln war, besuchte ich dort die Berlitz-School und nahm Privatunterricht in Stenographie und Schreibmaschine. Nachdem ich kurze Zeit im Betriebe meines Vaters tätig war, nahm ich eine Stellung als Stenotypistin in der damaligen Firma Westdeutsche Gardinen Akt. Ges., Köln, Schwerthof an, wo ich ein halbes Jahr arbeitete, um dann auf

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<sup>9</sup> In a letter written to Arnold Strauss, Irmgard Keun writes: “Gut kann ich kurze Sachen nie schreiben, weil ich mich da nicht ausbreiten kann und alles richtig entwickeln. Ich kann nur Romane und hab’ auch nur daran Freude.” Gabrielle. 55.

eigenen Wunsch mit einem guten Zeugnis entlassen zu werden. Es war nämlich schon lange mein Wunsch gewesen, zur Bühne zu gehen, und mein Vater gab mir endlich die Erlaubnis, die Kölner Schauspielschule zu besuchen (Häntzschel 17).

After temporarily experiencing the early twentieth-century business world as a stenographer and the new-found freedoms of the working woman, Keun was finally granted permission by her father to follow her lifelong dream of becoming a “Glanz” and seeing herself in pictures (posters and theater ads).<sup>10</sup> By the mid-1920s, Keun had finally found her way into the public sphere of the city, onto the stage, and into the public theater of life.

However, although she had been able to experience and use many aspects of the world of business of the twentieth century to step out of the confines of a traditional view of womanhood and begin her career as an actress, Keun found minimal success in the theater. She therefore decided to start anew and focus her efforts on writing: “Im folgenden Jahr (1930) war ich engagementlos und kehrte nach Köln zu meinen Eltern zurück. Das Leben und die Arbeit am Theater machten mir keine Freude mehr. Ich fing an zu schreiben...” (Häntzschel 20). At this point, it appears that Keun no longer wanted to be on the stage; she no longer wanted to portray characters—she wanted to create them. She no longer desired to display her characters in person, but with pen. However, where did she learn to write? What types of texts did she create? How did she use her previous knowledge and experiences with the theater and the city to further her career as

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<sup>10</sup> In the opening pages of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Keun’s own desires seem to be reflected in Doris’s assertion to live her life as a *Glanz* through her character Doris. She writes, “...ich sehe mich in Bildern” and “Ich will eine werden. Ich will so ein Glanz werden, der oben ist.” Keun, Irmgard. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. München: Claassen Verlag, 1992. 4 and 26. Original publication: Berlin: Universitas, 1932.

an author? In this chapter, I will explore the answers to these questions and show how Keun enlisted in the tradition of flanerier and used her novels to allow her readers an opportunity to view through her images early twentieth-century Berlin. I will also present several aspects of these Weimar texts that illustrate her use of the novel that, I argue, establish her as a prominent author and prove her existence a modern-day female flaneur.

In the initial stages of her authorship, Keun sent some of her preliminary work to her friend Rudolf Presber, who had been *Chefredakteur* of the magazine entitled “Über Land und Meer” since 1909 (Häntzschel 21). Through his encouragement as a fellow author and editor, Keun became more confident in her abilities as a writer and decided to devote more of her free time to writing. In discussing Keun’s decision to change careers, Häntzschel suggests that even though she had to leave her childhood dream of becoming an actress behind her, Keun’s “Stil ist von der Bühne gar nicht so weit entfernt” (20). Much as she had worked to create the personality of the character she was portraying on the stage, Keun was able to discover, create, and give words to the characters in her texts, thus making her literary figures come alive. Because of her particular interest in observing and writing about the city and its streets, within a short while, Keun found the profession through which she would actually be able to become a “star” as she had always dreamed.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of 1931, less than a year after Keun made her life-changing decision to become a writer, she thought of her father’s suggestion that she should take

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<sup>11</sup> “Und [Keun] hat ihr eigentliches Metier entdeckt: Menschen beobachten, sich mit Klugheit, Witz und Gefühl in ihr Innenleben hineinphantasieren, ihre Sehnsüchte, Eitelkeiten, Schwächen mit Sympathie bloßlegen.” Häntzschel. 20.

every opportunity to participate in *Lektüre* and *Literaturunterrichten* in order to learn more about becoming an author. In January of that same year, Keun decided to attend a presentation by Alfred Döblin, who was making a stop in Cologne during a lecture tour about his new book *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Häntzschel 20). After the seminar, Keun approached Döblin, who invited her to join him for dinner. Shortly thereafter, “die beiden verschwanden ganz schnell in den Kölner ‘Schwerthof’” (Serke 164). When Döblin proposed that Keun show him the city, she suggested that they should avoid the common paths: “Man soll sich nicht in eine Stadt hineindrängeln. Man soll immer über eine Brücke gehen und langsam in die Stadt schauen” (Serke 165). As Keun led Döblin through the streets of Cologne, he took notice of her ability to understand and explain the urban images that they encountered.

At the end of their sojourn, after having spent just a short amount of time with her, Döblin—due to his own experience as an observer—had already come to the conclusion that Keun was a fine observer and describer of the city. As he left her that evening, he told her that “Wenn Sie nur halb so gut schreiben, wie Sie sprechen, erzählen und beobachten, dann werden Sie die beste Schriftstellerin, die Deutschland je gehabt hat” (Serke 166). Thus, by the end of their conversation, this prominent author left the young Keun with encouragement to continue writing and with a prophecy that she had the ability to become a magnificent author. In my opinion, this statement implies that Keun would one day be able to successfully transcend the borders of male-dominated flanerie and establish a platform from which the flaneuse could ascend. As Keun continued to visit and receive letters from Döblin, she also continued to hear his echoing statement: “Schreiben Sie ein Buch!” (Serke 166). Thus, during this initial year of

interaction with this well-established flaneur, and through his constant encouragement and mentoring, Keun was able to develop her own skills and aptitude in the art of flanerie and ended up writing *Gilgi—eine von uns*.

What Döblin was able to teach Keun and accomplish in his own career as an author, especially with his book *Berlin Alexanderplatz*—making the modern metropolis the central theme and hero of the novel—is what countless other flaneurs have tried to achieve.<sup>12</sup> In discussing the rise of the city as a central theme in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature, Eckhardt Köhn writes, “Die Großstadt selbst entwickelt sich zu einem der zentralen Themen in der Selbstverständigung des Bürgertums. Für die Literatur wird auf diese Weise die Gegenstandswelt der Großstadt erstmals zu Stoff, der nach einer eigenständigen Darstellung verlangt” (8). As the metropolis grew, so did the flaneur’s fascination and desire to write about and explain this modern-day phenomenon. As Klotz writes, for the flaneur, the novel and its form became the perfect tool through which he (and I add she) could describe the effects of modernity:

[Die Form] begünstigt breite Einschnitte, Sprünge, Wiederholungen, lose Verknüpfungen.... Wo sie den steten Fortgang lockert, fördert sie Verbindungen, die gleichsam querlaufen zur linearen Begebenheitsfolge. Der Roman...halt sich vornehmlich an drei Darbietungsweisen, die er von Fall zu Fall in unterschiedlichen Mischungsverhältnis einsetzt: Bericht,

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<sup>12</sup> In writing about Döblin’s novel, Karl Riha writes, “Sehr viel schlüssiger hat man für Alfred Döblins *Berlin. Alexanderplatz* nachgewiesen, dass hier wirklich die Großstadt sich erzählt, Berlin zum eigentlichem Helden des Romans avanciert.” Riha, Karl. *Die Beschreibung der ‚Grossen Stadt‘: zur Entstehung des Grossstadtmotives in der deutschen Literatur (ca. 1750-ca. 1850)*. Berlin: Verlag Gehlen, 1970. 29. Similarly, in an essay written about flanerie and the novel, Volker Klotz writes, “*Berlin Alexanderplatz* ist der erste und bis heutige einzige belangvolle Roman in deutscher Sprache, der vorbehaltlos die zeitgenössische Großstadt zu seiner Sache macht.” Klotz, Volker. *Die Erzählte Stadt*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1969. 372.



Beschreibung und Dialog.... Mit diesem Mittel wird erzählt.... Der Spielraum seiner Tätigkeit liegt zwischen den extremen Tätigkeiten des Dramatikers, der hinterm Gegenstand verschwindend diesen selber den Sinnen der Zuschauer aussetzt, und des Lyrikers, der...den Gegenstand als Affizienz den Gedanken, Visionen, Stimmungen seines Ichs unterwirft. Anders als jener ist der Erzähler immer anwesend.... [Er hat] unbegrenzte Beweglichkeit (Klotz 18).

Through the novel's form, the author could maintain his (or her) position as an omniscient narrator who could act as a guide for the metropolis and relate the city's events and images. Thus, for Keun, this literary form provided the perfect medium through which she could record her observations, describe the modern metropolis, and create a dialogue with the city and its images.

Keun's Weimar novels serve to portray the urban realm, the modern city, and the individual struggles that she experienced, and refute the argument that the female flaneur was a fictional figure in the modern twentieth-century metropolis. The title of Keun's first novel, *Gilgi—eine von uns*, seems to reflect many of Keun's personal feelings as she tried to establish her "home" in the public sphere of the metropolis and on the streets of the city: One of us? One of whom? These questions have been continually included in much of the scholarship that has been written about this novel. Scholars have consistently looked at this text as a representation of depression-era Germany and of the modern urban culture (Horsely 235). However, although conclusive arguments have shown that *Gilgi* should be considered as a pivotal figure within the realms of these representations, I argue that through her vivid depictions of the social milieu, Keun also

paints pictures of the urban society, verifies her visibility on the streets, and confirms her ability to mirror the spectacles of the streets and capture the fleeting images of modernity.

By October of 1931, *Gilgi—eine von uns* had appeared on the presses of Berlin's *Universitas Verlag* (Häntzschel 22) and would soon be seen as a text that reflected a woman's "courage to step out, to face the threat of assault or being taken as a prostitute, in short, to endure the risk of being transformed in to an object" (Gleber 176). From the novel's opening lines, we can see Gilgi as a figure who had been able to emerge from the home and escape from the expectant roles of housewife and motherhood: "Sie hält es fast in der Hand, ihr kleines Leben, das Mädchen Gilgi. Gilgi nennt sie sich, Gisela heißt sie"(5). As she assumes the power to give herself her own nickname, she also empowers herself to set her own standards, make her own rules, and set her own course—"sie ist...stolz auf ihre bescheidene Tapferkeit und Selbstüberwindung" (6). In referring to her family and home life, Gilgi says, "Man wohnt ja nicht hier, schläft nur in diesem weißen Jungfrauenbett" (7). With this statement, Gilgi illustrates the social situation in which she finds herself and reflects on the division that separates a woman in the public sphere and a woman in the private sphere. Although she has been able to find a job, rent her own apartment, and create a new life as an independent woman, it is still difficult for her to completely break away from her gendered-role and become totally emancipated—as seen through her need to go back home each night and sleep in her virgin bed.

Although it remains to be a continually struggle for her to maintain her power and freedom on the streets, the fact is that Gilgi is in the public sphere and has become a part of the metropolis. As Gilgi leaves her home and makes her way to work, she has been able to establish herself as a part of the city—as a worker and woman on the

streets—and has also been able to develop a keen ability to describe the social milieu.

While Gilgi sits in the streetcar, she begins to observe, describe, and explain many of the faces and images that she sees around her. As she says:

Müde Gesichter, verdrossene Gesichter. Alle sehen einander ähnlich.  
Gleichheit des Tagelaufs und der Empfindungen hat ihnen den  
Serienstempel aufgedrückt. Jemand zugestiegen—sonst noch jemand  
ohne Fahrschein? [...] Kleine Blasse mit den hübschen Beinen, lägst du  
jetzt nicht lieber im Bett und schiefst dich aus? Braunes Mädchen mit  
den Wandervogelschuhen, scheint ein schöner Tag heute zu werden....  
Sonst noch jemand ohne Fahrschein—sonst noch jemand ohne  
Fahrschein? (13-14).

In this scene, Gilgi illustrates the modern metropolis and the figures with whom she interacts. These tired and crabby faces of mass production, these women of fashion, and these people of anonymity and deceit are just a few of the many characters that make up the framework of the metropolis. They are all metropolitan façades that disclose and reflect the histories, the socioeconomic institutions, and the conditions of society that are represented in this urban text. In the tired faces, we see the effects of industrialization and the monotony of work; in the women, we see the growth of consumerism and fashion; and in the people of anonymity and deceit, we see the inner-city life of the poorer sections of society as well as the crime and economic instability that ravaged and plagued many of Germany's citizens during their early twentieth-century

*Wirtschaftskrise*.<sup>13</sup> Finally, during this interior monologue, we occasionally hear the interrupting voice of the driver without any grammatical separation from Gilgi's own thoughts—showing how she has become intertwined with the figures in the city.

As Gilgi continues her ride to work, we notice another unique characteristic of the growing, modern metropolis: the rapid pace at which Gilgi lives her life in the public realm. As Gilgi observes:

Ein Tag gleicht dem andern. Man fährt. Fährt und fährt. Achtstundentag, Schreibmaschine, Stenogrammblock, Gehaltskürzung, Ultimo—immer dasselbe, immer dasselbe. Gestern, heute, morgen—und in zehn Jahren... Tag für Tag. Wird etwas kommen, was das Gleichmaß der Tage unterbricht? Was? Wird was kommen? Nein.... Aber man fährt ja noch. Ja, man fährt (14).

In this description, Keun shows us how the rhythms of life, the demands of employment, and the speed and monotony of the day that work together to form the urban phenomenon that Simmel describes as the blasé attitude. Simmel writes, “A life in [the metropolis] makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all” (329). We are also overwhelmed with short, fragmented sentences that portray the accelerated pace at which she lives her life in the city. Through her description and form and sentence structure, we are able to experience with her the rhythm and flow of life in the metropolis.

Day for day, Gilgi sees the monotony of city life and often wonders if anything will ever change its regularity. As she continues her ride, she finally admits that

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<sup>13</sup> For a brief explanation of the main events that led up to Germany's economic depression, see: Häntzschel. 23.

modernity's timekeeping and promptness have permanently changed the urban landscape and that the only thing left for her is to ride along—"...man fährt ja noch...man fährt." In discussing Keun's ability to mimic the intensification and pulse of the metropolis, Kosta explains, "Both Gilgi's tempo and time schedules, punctuated by Keun's rapid scene changes, fragmented writing, and abrupt sentences, replicate the pulse of the city..." (272). In order to keep pace with the city, Gilgi must conform to the "mandates of mass culture" and modernity (272). Thus, the text is able to imitate the attitudes, movements, and rapidness of the city, and further demonstrates how the modern metropolis dictates the actions and personalities of its inhabitants and shapes its unique topography.

In Gilgi, the most definitive examples of the art of flanerier are the representations of the city as seen through the eyes of Martin Bruck. Martin is a former author who has traveled the world and is now visiting Cologne. When Martin's long-time friend Olga finds out that he has returned from Russia, she convinces Gilgi that she should come with her to meet him. As the three of them sit for several hours in *Schwerthof* (73), Gilgi begins to realize not only how funny and entertaining Martin is, but also how well he can narrate the things that he has seen and experienced: "Erzählen kann er" (75). As she spends more time with Martin and as their relationship becomes more intimate, Gilgi notices some of the differences in her own ability to see and observe. As the text states, "Gilgis Phantasie war immer ein artiges Kind: darfst ein bißchen auf der Straße spielen, aber nicht um die Ecke gehen. Jetzt läuft das artige Kind mal etwas weiter. Martin erzählt, und Gilgi sieht" (77).

Although Gilgi had already developed the ability to observe and describe the images and sights of the city, Martin helps her broaden her horizon as he increases her knowledge of the city and expands her capacity to see beyond her “childhood” street corner and into the heart of metropolis. In many ways, Martin is a literary representation of Keun’s friend and mentor, Alfred Döblin. Martin is the one who has experienced the world, who has learned the value of being able to see. He is the one who has learned to “set up house” (Baudelaire 10) in the midst of the metropolis, who teaches Gilgi how to observe the urban topography and fleeting images of modernity.

In this novel, we find the ironic, even contradictory fact that Martin’s observations actually are recorded “from the perspective of a female flaneur and author” (Gleber 194). Both Martin and Gilgi appear in the text as flaneurs. As we walk with Martin through the streets of Cologne, we are able to observe and experience the social spheres of the city, the café nightlife of its inhabitants, and the city’s underlying desires for growth and greatness. For example:

Planlos streift Martin Bruck durch die Straßen. Mistiges Wetter, klebriges naß. Guckt man nach oben: wolkiges, schmuddliges Grau—guckt man nach unten: schwärzliches feuchtglitschiges Pflaster. Mißvergnügt blinzeln die Lichtreklamen auf dem Hohenzollernring durch den Nebel. Urbans Gaststätten—Café Wien. Jazzschlager spülen in kleinen Wellen bis zu den fröstelnden Portiers an den Eingängen. Drinnen langweilen sich vereinzelt Provinzler auf rotem Plüsch. Kellner erzählen auf den kleinsten Antipp hin von schlechtem Geschäftsgang, ein Ehepaar verläßt bewußt demonstrativ das Lokal, weil Kaffee nur in Kännchen gegeben

wird. Tafel-Geschäftsführer sind bereits so tief gesunken, daß sie ihre für Pelzmäntelgäste reservierte Liebenswürdigkeit erster Klasse bereits an einfache Tuchgäste verzappeln. Nur ein hübscher kleiner Zigarettenboy repräsentiert unbeirrbar hochmütig und standesbewußt die Kurfürstendamm-Ambition der Kölner Ringstraße (96).

Because Martin has become so experienced and has developed such a keen sense of observation, he is able to see and make connections about the images of Cologne that an untrained observer might not. He sees the differences in the representations of class: from the jazz singer on the streets, to the freezing, middle-class doorman, and finally to the *Provinzler*, who are able to enjoy the cozy atmosphere “auf rotem Plüsch.” He also sees the couple who has become disgusted and has decided to leave because of the way their coffee was served; and that the manager has accidentally mistaken a couple of poorer guests for rich and elegant *Pelzmäntelgäste*. And we see Cologne’s ambition to become like the great metropolis of Berlin. At the end of this description about Cologne, Martin finalizes his impressions by saying, “Man kann vergessen, daß man in Köln ist, in Deutschland” (98). Through Martin, we see that the effects of modernity and the metropolis are not just a localized phenomenon, but that, although the experience of the city is unique to the city, it is not exclusive to any one individual city.

Throughout the novel, Gilgi and Martin’s descriptions not only portray the city, but they also allow the reader to experience early twentieth-century urban landscape and flow of life. During this and subsequent scenes in the novel both Martin and Gilgi represent and mirror the social milieu. Häntzschel writes, “*Gilgi—eine von uns* war ‘wie eine Bombe eingeschlagen,’ das Buch hat den Nerv der Zeit getroffen” (31). Because of

the way the text observes the city, mirrors its images and sights, and depicts the conditions of contemporary society, the novel became an instant best-seller as a “Prototyp des modernen Zeitromans...” (Häntzschel 30). Thus *Gilgi—eine von uns* gives us a concrete representation of the modern metropolis in early-twentieth century Germany. Today, this novel stands as a type of documentary, filled with images and illustrations that give us a glimpse into the life of the Weimar era and the rise of the female flaneur.

Another, and even more conclusive, example of the way Keun’s texts help to define the presence of the modern flaneuse in twentieth-century Germany is *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. This second novel magnifies and exemplifies Keun’s accomplishments in her first novel. As Gleber writes, “Both the novel and [Doris] focus on the big city that encircles ever larger metropolitan spaces, gradually articulating the conditions for the female flaneur’s increasingly assured monologue of perception” (195). The title of this book, and its implied association with an artificial fabric, reflects the society in which Keun lived and many of the struggles that she faced in trying to establish herself as an author. Although many scholars may in fact interpret the title to mean that the flaneuse herself was in fact “artificial,” I believe that this book is a concrete example of how a novel can represent a city, its images, and its significance.

Similar to the life that Gilgi lived, we find our new protagonist struggling to find her own existence and freedom. In the beginning of this second book, Doris reports of her own life as she discusses her impressions about some of the men who she has met: “Und sie haben gar keine Ahnung, wie man sie mehr durchschaut als sie selber” (7). Although she is specifically talking about men, this quote also represents the life that



Doris led. Throughout this novel, Doris continually struggles to find her significance in life and her place in the city. She often suffers the sense of being invisible in the public realm and having her intentions and existence on the streets misconstrued and sexually interpreted. In Doris, we again have a female character who feels invisible as she challenges the gender-stratified society in which she lives, which has continually hindered her attempts to establish herself as a woman in the public sphere of the city. Later in the novel, Doris sadly notes, “Aber das ist es ja eben, ich habe ja keine Meinesgleichen, ich gehöre nirgends hin” (128). Doris felt unsatisfied and out of place in the private sphere to which she had been confined; but, as she ventured out onto the streets of the city, she found that she was alone, as a woman, in the male-dominated society. Although she did not like being confined to the home, she was unable to completely enjoy the freedom of the streets because of her gender—she felt that she did not belong in either realm.

Although the title of Keun’s novel suggests that the flaneuse might have been in fact “artificial,” there are many examples in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* that prove the existence of this exceptional modern female flaneur. In this novel, Doris desires to leave her small-town in Cologne and discover new opportunities in the metropolis of Berlin. The story consists of Doris’ experiences and thoughts as she struggles to find herself and her individual meaning in the *Großstadt*. Throughout the text, Doris not only discusses her often grim situation, but she also focuses her observations on the city itself and portrays many aspects of the art of flanerie. The first example appears in the opening paragraphs of the novel where Doris expresses her desire to write about her life and her encounters in the city as if they were a film:

Und ich denke, dass es gut ist, wenn ich alles beschreibe, weil ich ein ungewöhnlicher Mensch bin. Ich denke nicht an Tagebuch—das ist lächerlich für ein Mädchen von achtzehn und auch sonst auf der Höhe. Aber ich will schreiben wie Film, denn so ist mein Leben und wird noch mehr so sein.... Und wenn ich später lese, ist alles wie Kino—ich sehe mich in Bildern (4).

As this passage indicates, Doris is not only aware of herself as a unique and unusual character, but also desires to observe and describe everything that she sees in bright lights and pictures. In order to truly illustrate life as she sees it, she avoids the lackluster form of a simple diary, choosing instead to portray her life in action and in lights—like a film.<sup>14</sup>

The style of writing through which Doris illustrates her life does much to create the film-like sense in the novel. In many instances, she chooses to write without the use of commas: “Und es wird mir eine Wohltat sein, mal für mich ohne Kommas zu schreiben und richtiges Deutsch—nicht alles so unnatürlich wie im Büro” (4). This absence of commas suggests that Doris’ life flows without interruptions or pauses—it is a continual cycle of action and drama. The style, grammar, and filmic perspective in the novel allow the reader to watch the river of life flow by and to see the urban façade in one giant panoramic view. In discussing the similarities between film and flanerie, Gleber writes:

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<sup>14</sup> In discussing some of the similarities between flanerie and film, Gleber writes, “Flanerie precedes the technology of the filmic apparatus even as its intensity of vision is related intrinsically to a filmic perspective: both perspectives revel in a writing of light, in the movements of the streets.” Gleber. 199.

The flaneur registers the details of the street with the fleeting curiosity of a gaze that scans the crowds, scrutinizes tiny details, tracks the façades of the street, and understands the landscape of public viewing as a form of reading along an ultimately filmic perspective, a cinemorphic view that mobilizes the spectator's eyes and prefigures many of the camera's moves (39).

Because Keun *understands* the style of flanerie and the unique landscape of the city, she is able to use her writing style and novels to put her characters on the stage of life and urban experiences in lights. Through the style of writing, the text becomes a “camera-eye” for its readers as it “records the city visually” and not just in a written document (Lensing 131). Doris reveals her personal observations and experiences of the metropolis to her viewers (not her readers) as she walks the streets of Berlin. Because the novel is structured like a film—using rapid scene changes, fragmented sentences, and free-flowing grammatical structures—the written images of the urban realm become film-like photographs and pictures of the unique metropolis of Berlin.

Another example of Doris' experiences in the city as they unfold the uniqueness of the metropolis, is her revelation of the “incomprehensible rhythms” of city life (Lensing 131). As Doris notes: “Mein Leben rast wie ein Sechstagerrennen” (33)—being in the streets of Berlin has forced her to increase the velocity at which she had previously lived her life. Doris also describes the rapidity of life in Berlin as she says, “Berlin verursacht mir Müdigkeit.... So was gibt es nur in Berlin” (52-53). Berlin has caused her to become tired because of the pace at which she is living her life in the city. Doris has become a part of the accelerated pace of the metropolis by moving from the secluded

realm of the home and the slow-paced life of Cologne, by entering the public sphere of the city, and by increasing the speed at which she is forced to think and act in order to keep up with her urban experiences.

An example of Doris' interactions with the fast-paced life of Berlin is revealed by her adventure during a taxi ride. As we ride with Doris in the backseat of a taxi, we watch as Doris becomes so preoccupied and involved with the escalation of events that are occurring around her that her anticipation and excitement supercede her concern for anything else:

Und [ich] bin heute allein Taxi gefahren wie reiche Leute—so  
zurückgelehnt und den Blick meines Auges zum Fenster raus—immer an  
Ecken Zigarrengeschäfte—und Kinos—der Kongress tanzt—Lillian  
Harvey, die ist blond—Brotläden—und Nummern von Häusern mit Licht  
und ohne—und Scheinen—gelbe Straßenbahnen glitten an mir vorbei, die  
Leute drin wussten, ich bin ein Glanz—ich sitze ganz hinten im Polster  
und gucke nicht, wie das hopst auf der Uhr—ich verbiete meinen Ohren,  
den Knack zu hören—blaue Lichter, rote Lichter, viele Millionen  
Lichter—Schaufenster—Kleider—aber keine Modelle—andere Autos  
fahren manchmal schneller—Bettladen—ein grünes Bett, das kein Bett ist,  
sondern moderner, dreht sich ringsum immer wieder—in einem großen  
Glas wirbeln Federn—Leute gehen zu Fuß—das moderne Bett dreht  
sich—dreht sich (76)

Because this scene is narrated in short, fragmented descriptions, the reader is enabled to read the descriptions of Berlin and to experience, as a viewer, the liveliness, rapidity, and

motions of the city. As the pace of the action accelerates, so does the rate at which the reader reads and observes the city. Through her observations of the streets of the metropolis from inside the taxi, Doris reflects on “the intensification of emotional life [of the city] due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli” (Simmel 325). Because she focuses her observations on the accelerated pace and intensified life in the city, Doris can correctly record the movements and interactions of Berlin at the same pace at which they happen.

A third example of the flaneuse occurs when Doris describes the city of Berlin to her blind friend, Herr Brenner. During a large section of the novel, Doris becomes the seeing eyes of a blind war veteran. Throughout these pages, Herr Brenner, the blind man, continues to ask Doris, “Was hast du gesehen.... Was siehst du noch, was siehst du noch?” (60-61). According to Gleber, “In his fervent wish to see, Brenner calls on the female protagonist to provide him with eyes...” (197). As Doris explains to him what she sees, her experiences are being recorded as visual images for this man who has lost his own ability to see. In the same way that a flaneur is able to carefully observe and documents the movements and spaces of the city, Doris illustrates the images and conditions of society in the metropolis to Herr Brenner—she creates an urban photograph for him, as well as for the readers who view the city with him through Doris’ descriptions. Doris says, “Ich sammle Sehen für ihn. Ich gucke mir alle Straßen an und Lokale und Leute und Laternen. Und dann merke ich mir mein Sehen und bringe es ihm mit” (57). Doris’ ability to read the streets and the fact that she has been able to freely promenade in the streets becomes clear as she asserts, “Ich bringe ihm Berlin, das in meinem Schoß liegt” (59). Berlin sits in her lap because she has spent a great deal of

time on the streets, has become familiar with the movements of the city, and has been accepted as a citizen of the city.<sup>15</sup> Doris' description of Berlin sitting in her lap also emphasizes the deep, comfortable, intimate relationship that she has with the metropolis—it demonstrates the fact that she has moved beyond the traditional flaneur-city relationship to a mother-child relationship. She has created a type of relationship with Berlin that only a woman can know, feel, and express.

Gleber discusses the impact that a woman, like Keun, can have on a metropolis, like Berlin, as she examines Doris' experiences in the city. She writes, “[Doris’] arrival in the city opens the female flaneur’s eyes to the sensations of modernity, reshaping the novel into a text that explicitly records a woman’s experience with the metropolis....” (197). Doris’ “vivid depictions of the social milieu” of Berlin are clearly the experiences of the metropolis as seen through the eyes of this authentic female flaneur (Horsely, 234). Keun further describes her individual ability to write about the city when she explains how Doris is able to use the city of Berlin as her text. Upon entering the big city, Doris is unfamiliar with the foundational framework and movements of Berlin, but has the ability to write about and describe the city because she has already had previous experiences where she has been able to systematically record the interactions and activities of the city of Cologne.

The encounters that Doris had as a youth have left a physical and mental impression with her that keeps her connected with the city. In an imaginary letter, written by her thoughts to her mother, we read Doris’ memories that show her intimate

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<sup>15</sup> After having discussed some of her initial experiences in Berlin, Doris writes, “Das war mein Ankommen in Berlin. Und ich gehörte gleich zu den Berlinern so mitten rein—das machte mir eine Freude. Und die Politischen senkten staatsmännisch und voll Wohlwollen die Köpfe, und so wurde ich von ihnen mitbegrüßt.” Keun. 42.

connections with the city that have remained with her from her youth and are still engraven on her childhood streets. Doris says:

Liebe Mutter, meine Gedanken schreiben Grüße an dich.... Ich hatte bekannte Straßen bei euch mit Steinen, die Guten Tag sagten zu meinen Füßen, wenn sie drauf traten. Und es war die Laterne mit einem Sprung in der Scheibe und Gekratze am Pfahl.... Das habe ich gekritzelt vor acht Jahren von der Schule nach Haus und steht immer noch da (49).

Because of her earlier experiences with life in Cologne, Doris has already been able to develop the skills of observation and evaluation that are essential in the art of flanerie. Thus, Doris shows how she has been able to develop the techniques of the flaneur and how she has learned to identify with the conditions of society and the urban realm—strengthening her ability to record the movements and actions of the metropolis. She also shows how she has been able to develop a sincere and pleasant relationship with the streets of the city—a subtle relationship that a traditional male flaneur might just pass over or view in a way that expresses the more rough and harsh conditions of the streets of the city.

Because Doris has had previous experiences with the art of flanerie, as seen through her description of Cologne, she is able to use her texts to prove her existence as a female flaneur. The most important and explicit illustrations of this literary genre in this novel are Doris' own personal experiences with the city of Berlin. As Doris describes her initial, first-hand experiences in the metropolis:

Ich bin in Berlin. Seit ein paar Tagen. Mit einer Nachtfahrt und noch neunzig Mark übrig.... Ich habe Maßloses erlebt. Berlin senkte sich auf

mich wie eine Steppdecke mit feurigen Blumen. Der Westen ist vornehm mit hochprozentigem Licht—wie fabelhafte Steine ganz teuer und mit so gestempelter Einfassung (39).

Doris' recorded experiences, as she enters the city, reflect her own feminine and "fiery" personality. As she enters the metropolis, Berlin welcomes, comforts, and surrounds her person with a blanket full of flowers and invites her to fulfill her fantasies—living in the "lights" of the city. She also describes the scene as being fabulous and expensive with hallmark borders. These unique qualities of the city can only be brought out and described by the flaneuse and her feminine knowledge—making the existence and value of the female flaneur a necessity and not just a simple myth or footnote.

Even on her first few nights, Doris is able to feel as if she already belongs in the metropolis and that she immediately belongs to Berlin. From her vantage point on top of the omnibus, Doris is able to observe the city from a bird's-eye view and examine the city from a different perspective:

Es gibt auch Omnibusse—sehr hoch—wie Aussichtstürme, die rennen. Damit fahre ich manchmal. Zu Hause waren auch viele Straßen, aber die waren wie verwandt zusammen. Hier sind noch viel mehr Straßen und so viele, dass sie sich gegenseitig nicht kennen. Es ist eine fabelhafte Stadt.... Und gegenüber ist eine Gedächtniskirche, da kann aber niemand rein wegen der Autos drum rum, aber sie hat eine Bedeutung...sie hält den Verkehr auf (39-40).



This outlook, combined with her ability to scrutinize the streets of the metropolis allows her to make different connections about the city that she would not be aware of if she remained at ground-level. Although there is a big difference between the number of images and spectacles that exist in Cologne and in Berlin, Doris is able to adjust to this intensification more easily because of her prior experiences with city life and her prior practice in the art of flanerie. Doris also says, “Das kann ja keiner verstehen, der’s nicht erlebt hat” (83). The only way to know what the city is like—what ultimately makes flanerie possible—is by experiencing it for oneself. It is significant to note that Doris has been able to *understand* the city, its movements and its spectacles. She has lived the experience of a flaneur as has become aware of the conditions of society and the types of people that the metropolis produces. Thus, through Doris’ descriptions of her activities and life in the city, the reader, who is viewing these images and spectacles along with her, can experience and *understand* the city as well.

As a final thought, Doris discusses some of the feelings and spectacles that she has been able to experience in the metropolis because of her ability to observe and watch the excitement and bustle of the city. For Doris, the city is not just a city; the city is a phantasmagoric mirage of images, commotions, impressions, and activities. Doris portrays this sensational panorama as she writes,

Wie schön war es, wenn man über die Straße ging—Worte und Gesten Vorübergehender einfing, einen Sonnenstrahl auf einem Geranientopf—ach, alle die tausend Dinge, die auf der Straße so vor sich gehen, die wurden einem dann im Kopf zu Musik, die sich

dem ganzen Körper mitteilte—die einen bewegte und die man ausdrücken wollte (112).

As Doris goes through the river of life, her entire being, not just her eyes, becomes intimate with the motions and images of the metropolis. The “music” of the streets causes her entire body to move and ultimately increases her desire to sing with. Through her interactions with the city, Doris is not only able to participate in the life of the city, but is more importantly able to become a significant and essential part of Berlin. Doris exclaims, “Mein Leben ist Berlin, und *ich bin Berlin*” (54, emphasis added). With these words, Doris recognizes that she is not just in the city, but that she is a representation of the city. This feeling of being an essential part of the city is fundamental in being able to explain the movements of the city. The flaneur is best able to describe the city when they are not only able to observe the interactions within the urban realm, but also when they become a link to the urban rhythms and feelings between the reader and the metropolis—a link that Doris becomes with her descriptions of Berlin in this novel.

Through Doris’ unique words and descriptions, we can see that Berlin is much more than just a place where works and lives—it is a reflection of the emotions, attitudes, and opinions of each of its city-dwellers. The metropolis is a representation of the masses where all members are as much in the city as they are a part of the city. This idea of being in the city as well as being a part of the city is illustrated in Doris’ words as she continues to describe Berlin and the type of relationships that she would like to find with the city. She explains, “Aber es ist mir ein Frühling, Berlin ist mir ein Ostern, das auf Weihnachten fällt, wo alles voll schillerndem Betrieb ist. Ich sehe die Männer und

denke, das sind so viele, und es wird doch für mich einer sein, der atmet das ganze Berlin aus sich heraus und auf mich ein” (56).

For Doris, not only is Berlin a fantastical fairy tale with dazzling images and endless bustle; but it is also a personality to which she belongs, and which simultaneously belongs to her. Doris not only wants to be in the city, but she also wants to be the city—to be able to breathe it in and out. After having “concluded [her] breathless monologue of perception” for Herr Brenner (Gleber 202), Doris echoes these sentiments as she says, “Er soll mir nicht danken—er soll nur *mein* Berlin schön finden” (70, emphasis added).<sup>16</sup> Doris wants Herr Brenner to be able to experience the city that she experiences, that she knows, and that she is.

As an exception to the societal rules of gender stratification and the male-dominated urban realms, Keun is able to establish her characters as prominent examples of female flaneurs. Although it was difficult for her to find her place in the society in which she lived, Keun helped set the stage for the importance of the existence of flaneuse literature as influential and meaningful cultural and historical documents. When asked about why she is always spending her time writing things down, Doris replies, “Ich mache eine Aufzeichnung von meinen Erfahrungen” (102)<sup>17</sup> It is these experiences of the modern woman in the metropolises of Weimar Germany that Keun is gathering and recording for us in her novels.

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<sup>16</sup> Doris’ response to Herr Brenner’s comments at the end of their expedition: “Die Stadt ist nicht gut, und die Stadt ist nicht froh, und die Stadt ist krank,” sagte er—‘du bist aber gut und ich danke dir.’” Keun. 70.

<sup>17</sup> Doris also says, “Ich schreibe, weil meine Hand was tun will und mein Heft mit den weißen Seiten und Linien ein Bereitsein hat, meine Gedanken und mein Müdes aufzunehmen und ein Bett zu sein, in dem meine Buchstaben dann liegen, wodurch wenigstens etwas von mir ein Bett hat.” Keun. 84.

Through the eyes of her protagonists Gilgi and Doris, Keun reveals many of the unique aspects of the urban realm and divulges the importance of female flanerier as she systematically records the movements and interactions of Berlin that create the foundation of this metropolis—ultimately, unveiling and liberating the existence of this once-invisible flaneuse. Gleber writes, “Keun’s characters speak of “a female view of modernity whose final destination is the pursuit of a woman’s own way of walking and seeing, of a kind of surrealism of the street...” (207). As scholarly groups continue to raise questions about the controversial figure of the flaneuse, the evidence and certainty remain that the importance of these works, *Gilgi—eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, are essential links to the genre of flanerier and to proving the existence of the modern, female flaneur: “Ich bin in Berlin...und ich *bin* Berlin” (Keun 39 and 54, emphasis added).

## Chapter Three

### Windows of Curiosity and Streets of Desire:

#### Reading the City, Writing the Feuilleton, Pursuing the Flaneur.

As has been established in the first chapter, throughout her life, Irmgard Keun was the exception to many rules and the fulfiller of her own dreams. She often ventured out of the home and onto the streets to escape the confines of her own home: “Ich kann nun mal nicht den ganzen Tag zu Haus sitzen – ich brauche immer wieder mal eine veränderte Atmosphäre und so nebenbei was sehen und beobachten. Wenn ich so ganz und gar des Leben einer Hausfrau führen müßte, würde ich bald matt und kläglich werden” (Kreis 134). This statement resounded throughout Keun’s own life and the lives of the characters in her novels and stories. What they really needed and desired was to roam the ever-changing atmospheres of the city and to be in the mix of the metropolis. For them, walking the streets and observing the movements and spaces of the city was not just a hobby; but also a way of life—the city was a dreamscape of the magical and the mysterious in which they were enticed in their pursuits of desire and distraction (Gilloch 103). Just like her female protagonist Doris in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Keun believed that “Irgendwo muss man doch einmal hingehören” (16). Because it was on the streets of the metropolis that Keun would eventually find her way of life and her “home,” living the life of the flaneur is where she knew that she belonged.

However, although *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* found immediate success—not only in Germany, but also in many other European countries<sup>18</sup>—due to the rise of Hitler and the Nazi regime, Keun was blacklisted and eventually banned from publication and her career as a novelist was suddenly derailed. In her biography about Keun, Häntzschel discusses the troublesome and difficult situation that the young Keun found herself in during the rise of the fascist regime. She explains that by the spring of 1933, both of the titles for Keun’s first two novels could be found on the Nazi blacklist—a list that had been created for the “‘Säuberung der Volksbüchereien’ und zur Orientierung des Buchhandels” (48). Häntzschel further writes, that because of the Nazi *Zensurpolitik*, “*Gilgi* gilt nun als ‘Asphaltliteratur mit antideutscher Tendenz’ und enthalte ‘häßliche Angriffe gegen die bürgerliche Moral und das Deutschtum;’” while *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* “wird...beschlagnahmt und am 13. Oktober vernichtet” (48). By 1934, just a few years after her successful publications, the selling of Keun’s books was forbidden in all bookstores and even the libraries were no longer allowed to carry them on their shelves. Not only were Keun’s first two novels removed from all bookshelves, but also the ongoing work and possible publication of her next novel, *Der hungrige Ernährer*, was suppressed and eventually stopped. Thus, almost as quickly as Keun had risen to the top of the best-seller list and to international prominence, so abruptly was her fall back into the asphalt and her voice was silenced in Germany.

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<sup>18</sup> Häntzschel writes that “[Keuns] Romane repräsentieren...den europäischen ‘Zeitgeist,’ die Großstadtkultur der ‘Neuen Sachlichkeit’ und finden erhebliches Interesse.” She further explains that by the end of 1933, translations of *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* were found in France, London, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Budapest, Bucharest, Hungary, Russia, Denmark, and Holland. Häntzschel. 46-47.

Not only did the Nazis halt the further production of Keun's novels, they also eventually forced her into exile from 1936 until 1940. However, even though her continued efforts to produce other novels while living in exile might have resulted in her premature death, she did not easily give up. Even in exile, Keun was determined to remain steadfast in her efforts to further her career and continue publishing. However, because the publishing companies were forced to stop doing business with her, it became consistently more difficult for this emerging author to produce any subsequent novels. As a result, Keun was required to find a different option through which she could continue publishing—not only to further her career, but also to earn money to survive, before and during exile: “In verzweifelt hektischer Aktivität produziert Irmgard Keun zum Geldverdienen kleine Geschichten und bietet sie den Zeitungsredaktionen an” (Häntzschel 53).

Early on in her career as an author, through her friendships with Alfred Döblin and Rudolf Presber, Keun became acquainted with the literary genre of the feuilleton, its use in the daily newspapers, and the opportunity that it provided to make money. Although she had not consistently worked with any newspaper company or published any short prose or articles—and although she had little faith that she actually could—Keun turned to the newspaper and the feuilleton as an outlet for her literary works and her observations about society and the modern metropolis. In this chapter, I will first discuss the purpose of the feuilleton and its usefulness to the modern flaneur; then I will continue my discussion of Keun's career as an author and show how she uses the rise of the press, the newspaper, and the feuilleton to continue producing texts about the city and to strengthen her development and eminence as an author.

The cultural and artistic sections of the newspapers known as the *feuilleton* section were often reserved for critiques of literature, art, theater, music, and film, but they were also used for serial novels, poems, short stories, and the basic entertainment of the general public (Enderle 67, 73-79). These texts, called *feuilletons*, were written to amuse their readers and act as a type of guide book or short sketch—articles that were produced to mirror every-day events, to discuss the images and panorama of the metropolis, and to invite their readers to take a glimpse of the culture and its urban representations. In discussing the evolution of this type of journalistic literature, Eckhardt Köhn writes:

Literatur und Presse übernehmen es, dem Publikum jene Vorgänge darzubieten, die es zuvor selbst in Augenschein nehmen konnte. Das Fremdwerden der großstädtischen Lebenswelt und die für den einzelnen nicht mehr auszumachende Bedeutung der Phänomene weist den auf das räumlich-soziale Gebilde der Großstadt bezogenen Texten die Aufgabe zu, die Leser in einfachen Nachrichten über neue und unbekanntere Ereignisse oder Objekte zu informieren und deren Bedeutung zu erklären (9).

This new genre, also described by Köhn as *die kleine Form*, combined both literature and journalism to give the city-dweller an opportunity to witness the events of the city as often and as quickly as they happened. As the speed of life increased, so did the need for a guide that could help focus and lead the individual through the ever-changing atmospheres, events, and rhythms that the metropolis put on display. This guide also included pieces of prose about every-day events, wanderings, encounters, opinions, discussions, or sneering commentary (Kernmayer 13). Because of its growing



popularity, the feuilleton soon became a central part of the newspaper and often acted as a type of commentary or footnote about society and its culture (Bailey 156).<sup>19</sup> These articles were “the most versatile guide[s] to the huge and ever-changing inventory of the industrial city. By the end of the nineteenth century, most city people read newspapers and, often enough, only newspapers” (Fritzsche 15)—there was simply far less place, nor time, left for books or booksellers in the rapidly growing cities of the twentieth century. Thus, it was through the newspaper that Keun could continue to reach her widespread audience outside of Germany while in exile.

With the feuilleton, the flaneur could capture the fleeting images of the metropolis by creating a short sketches that worked as “mirror[s] that reflected the city in fragments” (Fritzsche 103). Because the art of flanerier literally functions as “a journalistic form of labor that involves the work of inquiry, the gathering of information, and the collection of contemporary impressions” (Gleber 46), the flaneur is already equipped with many of the journalistic attributes that are necessary when writing for the newspaper. The headlines, the bold print, the short, concise descriptions that are contained within this medium were exactly what the flaneur needed to succeed in his or her efforts. Because the newspaper was a daily interaction with society and the activities of the city, it was through this medium that the flaneur could literally “seize the day.” The rapidity with which the newspaper changed matched the speed to which the actions and images of the city

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<sup>19</sup>Bailey also writes, “Inevitably the rise of the newspaper and the attendant developments in reading habits and readership influenced writers and what they wrote. A prose writer could reach his widest audience through the columns of the newspaper... The feuilleton generally appeared at the bottom of the first page of a newspaper; it was thus an indispensable part of the newspaper, and at the same time incidental by nature, appearing as the Viennese said “unter dem Strich,” under the line which ruled off the part of the page devoted to news and leaders. Its place of publication gave it the air of commentary or footnote, as well as implying that the feuilleton was to be a rather light-hearted and entertaining contrast to the serious news.” Bailey, L.H. “Ferdinand Kürnberger, Friedrich Schlegel and the Feuilleton in Gründerzeit Vienna” in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. 156.

changed. The newspaper reflected the city in its form as well as with its substance. After Keun became more acquainted with this form of entertainment, she was able to use these short, literary compositions to continue the tradition of flânerie that she had previously, and frequently, used in *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, in creating historical photographs of the cities and societies in which she lived.

Throughout her years of Nazi persecution and exile, Keun used this form of short prose to further her career as an author, while still producing portraits of the societies<sup>20</sup> in which she lived. It was through this medium that Keun was able to continue living in the throng of the city, even though she had been forced to move from her German homeland and the cities that she knew intimately. Although she had now turned away from exclusive use of the novel, she was also able to use this literary medium to not only capture the movements and spaces of the city, the fleeting images of the urban setting, and conditions of society within the metropolis; but also to create a snapshot or looking glass through which the individual could read the physiognomy of the streets and texts of the city. Behind every door, in every window, and around every corner, Keun saw an opportunity to explore the labyrinth of the streets and alleyways and to discover the mysteries, secrets, and undisclosed histories that the city offers and reveals. Keun used her keen sense of observation to encounter a life that the untrained eye or the regular city-dweller was unable to discover or feel and the feuilleton was the perfect tool through which she could chronicle and publicize her observations and portraits of the metropolis.

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<sup>20</sup> Keun, in the feuilletons that I use in this thesis, never specified which particular cities or societies she was writing about. For me and my purpose in writing this thesis, it is not important to know which cities she was writing about, but rather that she was writing about the urban realm and placing her characters in the mix of the city.

Thus, Keun could use this genre as a medium to reveal and reflect her message about her encounters on the streets and with the characters of the city.<sup>21</sup>

In 1932, in her first published feuilleton entitled *System des Männerfangs*, Keun identifies the societal practice of the flaneur who goes “botanizing on the asphalt,”—a term for which Walter Benjamin labeled the actions of the flaneur (36)—categorizing the perceptions of people according to their individual worth and status. As Keun goes botanizing on the asphalt, she is able to describe sketches of different individuals’ histories and lifestyles by observing their faces, actions, and appearances. Keun observes and compartmentalizes different individuals by the roles that they play in the city, ultimately transforming them into objects of desire that are being put on display. With this feuilleton, Keun builds a framework that acts as a grid or table upon which she categorizes the men of the metropolis according to their employment—“*Den Mann als Mann seines Berufs*”—in order to teach women how they should think, act, and portray themselves in order to “capture” their perfect man.

With this feuilleton, Keun is taking on a traditionally male oriented job and form and manipulating it for a woman’s purpose. She also develops this snapshot as a parody of the conditions of society that reflect the paradox of femininity in which women are constantly being categorized or labeled as housewife or whore—never able to break free from what society dictates.<sup>22</sup> Throughout this unique lesson on love, Keun not only gives

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<sup>21</sup> In discussing the usefulness of the feuilleton for the flaneur, Bermann writes, “the only rightful focus for an artist in any given form or genre was the nature and limits of that genre: the medium is the message.” Bermann. “Baudelaire: Modernism in the Streets” in Benjamin R. Barber and Michael J. Gargas (Eds.). *The Artist and Political Vision*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1982. 30.

<sup>22</sup> In discussing the Modern Woman at the turn of the twentieth century, Von Ankum argues, “Die größere Bewegungsfreiheit der bürgerlichen Frau einerseits und der zahlenmäßige Anstieg der Prostitution unter Frauen der niederen Schichten andererseits stießen in der modernen Großstadt auf eine Weise aufeinander,

some general rules about the process of finding a man, but also explains that a woman needs to customize her own actions accordingly, in order to make herself appealing to her particular man and to properly feed his vanity:

Allgemeine Regeln: der Eitelkeit des Mannes Futter geben. Sein Selbstgefühl stärken, ihn stolz sein lassen auf sich. Ihn verstehen, wenn er verstanden sein will, und im richtigen Moment stoppen – mit dem Verstehen. Ein Mann wünscht nicht bis in die letzten abgründigen Tiefen seines einmaligen Innenlebens begriffen zu werden von einer Frau – er könnte sonst merken, daß es nicht so unerhört einmalig ist, und das würde er sehr übel nehmen... Ihm immer Gelegenheit zum triumphierenden Rivalentum geben. Und nicht sein – sondern reflektieren. Spiegelbild seines jeweiligen Wunsches (259).

With these “general rules of love” and the skills of a flaneur, Keun shows her ability to analyze the façades of the metropolis, read the lives and faces of people, and act as an authority figure who describes the urban landscape and educates the city dweller. In this particular description, Keun chooses the man as her subject to explore and scrutinize, while she instructs women how to act, when to stay silent, and how to reflect a man’s desires with a mirror of his vanity.

In the feuilleton, Keun proceeds to divide and sub-divide men into their artistic (actor, painter, musician, author, etc.) and business (doctor, lawyer, engineer, salesman, and city official) vocations, thus co-opting the “male gaze” and creating a type of literary

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die es zunehmend schwieriger machte, die von der bürgerlichen Moral etablierte Polarisierung der Frau in Hure oder Ehefrau und Mutter aufrechtzuerhalten.” Von Ankum. 372.

museum in which the men of the metropolis are on display. In her description on how to “capture” a musician, she writes, “Man täusche kein Gehör vor, wenn man keins hat – er kommt dahinter. Unmusikalische Frauen suchen sich besser andere Objekte als gerade Musiker. Man kann sich von Schriftstellern und Malern belehren lassen – Gehör läßt sich nicht beibringen“ (260). In order to please and acquire this particular “object”—that is, a musician—a woman needs to become the “mirror image of his desire” and develop the necessary talents that would allow her to feed his vanity by fulfilling this given role.

Keun creates this museum (or compartmentalized setting) in similitude of the department store and the arcade that succeeded it “for the fantastical display of exotic objects, a display case for artifacts...” (Gilloch 129). Through her descriptions and categorizations, Keun, the female flaneur, acts as the curator for the museum and chooses how to display these “exotic objects” and “artifacts” so that they can be properly seen and studied. Through their professional progress and vanity, these men are being stripped of their individuality and are being put on display as items of desire and pleasure—to be looked at, discovered, and obtained. Thus, Keun uses her skills as a flaneur and the literary medium of the feuilleton to create a looking glass, or display case, through which the city-dweller can explore, experience, and learn about these objects, or artifacts, of the modern metropolis.

However, as Keun continues, she not only describes men as exotic objects and artifacts, but she also shows how women allow themselves to be encased and put on display by the men. As women try to become the mirror images of man’s wish and play the roles of the object of man’s desire—they too become spectacles of desire and pleasure. As Keun continues to describe the specific rules that pertain to the individual

vocations, she also explains the different roles that the women are forced to fulfill when they are trying to capture a particular man. Along with the example of the musician: the actor, the object of his desire “muß von einer Frau geliebt werden wie ein Mann eine schöne Frau liebt. Sein Beruf ist feminine” (260); for the painter, the woman “sei sein Modell” (260); for the doctor, “man sei möglichst nicht seine Patienten... [und] sich ja nicht mit medizinischen Fachausdrücken lächerlich machen” (261); and finally for the city official “man sei in dem Stadium, wo man so eben gerade noch gerettet werden kann” because “Beamte retten sehr gern” (261).

Through these descriptions, Keun explains the often contradictory or irreconcilable implications that come with wanting to have a man while maintaining one’s independence. As women pursue their desires and give up their individual identities, as required by these particular vocations, they allow themselves to be stripped of their own uniqueness and become seduced, through their own vanity, into becoming nothing more than what the men have become—objects on display for the men to look at, choose from, and obtain. As a final rule to her recipe on how to capture a man, Keun writes, “Dieses Rezept ist unvollkommen und versagt vollständig, wenn die letzte individuelle Behandlung fehlt. Es gibt nur eine Regel, die unter allen Umständen zu befolgen ist: selbst nicht verliebt sein, denn dann macht man sicher alles falsch” (261). She declares that when the women allow themselves to fall in love that they allow themselves to become seduced and reduced to mere objects of desire.

This early observation is underscored later in a letter written to Arnold Strauss, where Keun notes, “Man hat eine Frau wie ein Auto – eine Mercedes-Frau oder eine Rolls-Royce-Frau. Nichts aus selbständiger Neigung, alles aus Eitelkeit” (Kreis 64).

According to her, people do not fall in love because of the feelings of affection and fondness, but rather through the powers of vanity and seduction, such that people are turned into objects that are to be desired, won, and displayed for all to see and admire. Thus, through her keen observations of society, Keun is able to create a particular snapshot in which she describes the modern woman as being unable to free herself completely from the male gaze; the woman is forced to remain an object of desire even though, in this specific moment, she is the one who is doing the looking.

Through this feuilleton and her skills as a flaneur, Keun also displays how the enticements of the metropolis seduce the curiosity or interest of the city-dweller through the fantastical elements of commodities and fashion. In his book, *Myth and Metropolis*, Graeme Gilloch discusses the commodities of modernity and their effects on the inhabitants of the metropolis. He writes:

The intoxication of modernity is itself part of the mythic character of the metropolis, and finds its embodiment in the unchanging parade of commodities and fashions, in repetition and compulsions.... In the modern metropolis, the eroticized object is perpetually on display in the department store window.... Its shadowy recesses are caches for the fantasies of the bourgeois citizens (172).

What Keun is showing us is how an endless array of attractions on display in a modern department store windows works to arouse the curiosity of the city-dweller, while the activity of the eye becomes a form of intoxication as it searches these darkened corridors and observes the commodities and objects that are on display.

These erotic elements become the driving forces that also arouse the curiosity of the flaneur into fulfilling his or her desires to walk the streets of the city. The allure of

the spectacle of the city is what drives the flaneur (and the feuilletonist) to continually go out and experience life in the metropolis: “In miniature, the world assumed a panoramic aspect that heightened both the *Schaureize* (visual allure) of the object and the *Schaulust* (visual curiosity) of the viewer” (Fritzsche 137). Although the flaneur is driven by his or her desire to observe, rather than by the objects themselves, knowing that there was going to be a different display each day heightened the senses and breached the curiosity of these portrayers of modernity, which drew them onto the streets of the city. Thus, the allure of the object and the curiosity of the viewer work side by side to drive the flaneur into the city and amongst the crowds where he or she is able to observe and create literary artwork.

In her 1935 feuilleton, *Ich bin feige*, Keun explores some of these erotic elements of shopping<sup>23</sup> to explain the effects of modernity and to show how the commodities and fashions seduce an individual into creating new identities, doing things that he or she would not normally do, and ultimately becoming a part of the display and the commodity. *Ich bin feige* is a feuilleton about a woman who has been invited to visit her “elegante Freundin Evangeline” (547). Because her friend is elegant, and because she desires to fill the proper role (of being elegant herself), this woman decides to go shopping and to buy herself a new hat that would be fitting for the occasion. Through her shopping, she is hoping to find the right identity that will properly portray the life that she will be experiencing. Rachel Bowlby describes this act of identity transformation as she writes, “In the shop, a buyer can put on different identities in public, according to how she presents herself, or what she buys.... Here, the guest can act out parts... [and become

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<sup>23</sup> As discussed in chapter one, although shopping did not constitute flanerier in itself, it did give women, and in this case Keun’s character, an added opportunity to venture onto the streets and into the flow of life.



a]... temporary person of no fixed abode or self” (110). Bowlby also goes on to explain that “in the first part of the [twentieth] century, the putting on and off of identities was a mark of the ironic freedom of the exceptional man or (occasional woman): dandy, artist, millionaire” (116).

This desire to “act out parts” and put on different identities is what Keun describes as the central theme that drives this woman to go onto the streets and is what ultimately drives her to purchase the objects that are on display, even though she says she cannot afford them. As her protagonist journeys into the department store, a saleswoman shows her a hat that she describes as being “das Neueste” (547). Even though this is not the particular kind of hat that the woman was looking for, or that she even likes, because it is the latest fashion, she decides to try it on. As she models the hat, the saleswoman tells her how wonderful she looks and that this particular hat makes her look like “die Prinzessin Marina.” The woman also notices how suddenly “die Leute im Laden jauchzen vor Freude” and how much love, affection, and interest they have for her now that she is wearing the hat. Although she does not want to initially buy the hat or fulfill the role of the Princess Marina—not only because she personally thinks that the hat is ugly, but also because she cannot afford it—she gives into the seduction of the fashion and desires of the crowd, not only to buy the hat, but also to put on this new identity.

As she continues her journey through the streets, this woman is captivated by the window display of a particular *Herrenmodegeschäft* and is enticed to enter the store to buy a tie for her brother. She says, “Und die mysteriöse Flasche mit den bunten Bonbons oder Mottenkugeln ist durch ein Paar prächtige plakinblonde Schweinsleder-Handschuhe ersetzt. In dies Geschäft gehe ich, da mir die schöne und ernste Krawatte gefällt” (548).

This magnificent window display piques her curiosity, which draws her inside. As she enters the store, she describes her experience as a fulfillment of her fantasy:

Ein Thronerbe empfängt mich. Mit der wahrhaft prinzlich geschwungenen linken Braue deutet er ein Lächeln an... Ich habe das Gefühl, einen Hofknicks machen zu müssen... Recht nettes Krawattchen zu Mark 6,50! Ich sollte jetzt gehen. Stolz und überlegen sollte ich jetzt dieses samtige Fürstentum verlassen... Der Prinzliche legt mir eine Auswahl Krawatten zu acht Mark vor. Sie sind schön, aber sie gefallen mir nicht. Ich getraue mich auch nicht, sie anzufassen... Während ich an der Kasse zahle, träume ich davon, daß zumindest gleich sieben Geschäftsführer, Aussichstrate und Thronerben herbeiströmen werden, um mir das Geleit bis zur Türe zu geben mit "Bitte sehr" und Danke sehr" und tausend eleganten Rumpfbeugen bis zur Erde... Nur für ein paar Sekunden wird er wieder thronerbenhaft: als ich die Türklinke in der Hand halte, entläßt er mich von der dritten Leiterprosse aus mit einem gnädigen und gar nicht mal unfreundlichen Neigen des Hauptes (548).

As she enters the store, her brief fantasy is strong enough to take control of her mind and body and for a moment she becomes a noble in a wonderful principality. Through the new identity that this store has given her, the shopping woman is able to experience a life that she was previously only able to dream or fantasize about. Not only is the shopper drawn into the store because of its attractive window display, but eventually she is also overcome by her fantasy and is driven to buy the tie—"die teuerste Krawatte meines Lebens." Although this purchase would end up being of no use to her,

as she thought it was too expensive to give to her brother as a present, this hapless shopper's willpower is overwhelmed by the array of attractions on display in the department store.

Although she leaves the store and journeys back onto the streets, the new identity that she has "purchased" remains with her and she becomes an exotic object that is now on display: "Als ich draußen am Ladenfenster vorbeigehe, sehe ich wie ich die Leute drinnen die Nasen an der Scheibe plattquetschen. Irgend etwas auf der Straße scheint ihre heftigste Heiterkeit zu erregen. Komisch, denn außer mir ist keiner auf der Straße" (548). In buying these new fashionable items and thus a new identity, this woman has become part of the commodity that was being shown in the department store window and which is now being displayed through her. Thus, she has given into the enticements of the metropolis, through the seduction of her fantasies, the commodities of the fashion, and the gaze of the crowd, and has become an object on the streets, reflected in the windows, that is displayed for all to see and enjoy. However, although it may seem that she has lost all sense of her identity by becoming an object on display, she still maintains control of her vision and is able to further observe the people on the streets and the image of herself that she sees reflected in the window. Even though she was drawn onto the streets to go shopping, and even though she has become an object of desire—two arguments that have continually refuted the possibility of the existence of the flaneuse—I argue that Keun's protagonist is still able to exercise her abilities as an observer of the masses. Thus, she has been able to show that she can still observe the movements of the city and actions of its dwellers, while being observed herself.

Through her descriptions, this character gives us an historical glimpse into the emerging modern metropolis and the growing consumerism of the early twentieth century. As industrialization continued and technology increased, so did the landscape of the metropolis broaden. Not only was modernity constantly changing the sites of the city, destroying much of what was already there, but it also was creating new ways of life for its inhabitants. With every new boulevard, street, sidewalk, or even department store, the metropolis offered a new opportunity for the flaneur to meander along these new paths and observe the movements and activities of the city dwellers. Each one of these new landscapes worked as a type of *Schauplatz* where the flaneur could explore and discover its new features. As Fritzsche explains:

A carnival atmosphere prevailed each Saturday afternoon, on payday, when families shopped together along the crowded stalls of the markets: 'today, provision are heaped two or three times higher than normal.' Cafés and taverns were busier still: 'Almost everywhere, you notice the joy that tomorrow is a holiday, that hard work will be interrupted by a day of rest' (118-119).

In other words, these places within the city, filled with countless crowds and parading people, created by growing trade and commerce, acted as stages for observation. Just like the woman in *Ich bin feige*, who becomes part of the spectacle, these crowds became exhibits of entertainment. Thus, along its marketplaces and at its street corners, the city invited Keun, as a female flaneur, to witness its carnival-like type atmosphere and document its kaleidoscope of fleeting images and array of theatrical scenes.

In one of her last feuilletons, written in 1937 while in exile, entitled *Die Sonnengasse*, Keun describes how the metropolis offers the perfect atmosphere in which the mysteries of the unknown have the power to spark the curiosity of the flaneur and how the structures of the city aid in the process of flanerier by enabling acts of voyeurism. Through the following description of a particular alleyway, Keun details the unique features of the metropolis that awaken the senses of interest and snooping. She writes:

Der einzig Sonnige an der Sonnengasse ist ihr Name. Ganz klein und verkumpelt liegt sie im dunklen Viertel einer Menschen Großstadt. Für ihre Bewohner ist sie Anfang und Ende der Welt. Wenn ein Kind nicht gut tut, so sagen die Eltern “vor der janzen Sonnengasse kann man sich für dich schamme.” Eng stehen die Häuserchen sich gegenüber, und die alterschwachen Gebiet neigen nach einander zu, als wollten ihren Bewohnern leichter machen, einander in die Fenster zu gucken. Denn hehre Pracht eines jeden Sonnengässlers ist dem anderen zu wissen, alles und jedes und vor allem das Ungehörige. Neugier ist ein moralischer Besen, mit dem kehrt man die Straße sauber (Keun, *Sonnengasse*).

In this feuilleton, she describes how darkness reigns, which piques curiosity and demands a closer look; how houses in a highly populated metropolis stand so close together as if to invite and make it easier for people to look out their own windows and into their neighbors'; and how a small “city within a city,” such as this alleyway makes it impossible not to have anybody's business become everybody's business. Because the individual can see onto the alleyway from above and into the different apartment windows, as if the people inside the windows are on display at a shopping center, but

cannot hear what is going on, he or she is overcome by the temptation to continue snooping and observing until he or she can figure out what is going on and make that which is unknown or not understood into reality.

In this complex paradigm of a smaller world created within the matrix of the metropolis, Keun portrays the city as a virtual paradox. A paradox that on one hand “exists as a festival of visibility, a delight to the all-eyes gawker. [On the other hand] ... as darkness descends, it unfolds its mysteries and visual understanding becomes elusive” (Gunning 54). In this alleyway in the corner of a big city where darkness reigns, the visual understanding eludes the sight of the *Sonnengässler*, who could be seen as an all-eyes gawker or type of flaneur, and entices his or her curiosity to rediscover the objects that were once visible and on display. This platform allows the ordinary all-eyes gawker to see through the eyes of a flaneur and collect the images of the streets and observes the details of the city to properly examine the physiognomy of the streets and alleyways that bring life and character to the metropolis. As the mysteries and secrets of the metropolis become more elusive through the pervading shadows, flaneurs become enticed and excited through our own curiosity about acts of snooping and discovery.

Another way that the unique features of the metropolis allow the citizens of the city to practice voyeurism is through its invitation to make everybody’s business anybody’s business. The platform from which the flaneur or gawker can view the activities of the alley allows him or her to read the streets of the city with a celestial eye: “His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god” (de Certeau 92). The

structure of the metropolis, with its high rises and towering buildings, creates an elevation from one of these inhabitants of the *Sonnengasse* able to read the city and its movements like a map or atlas. This elevation allows one to be distanced from the chaos that is below and can allow for a better understanding of what the makeup of the city entails. This bird's eye view of the metropolis enables the onlooker to see the entirety of the actions of its inhabitants. It also creates the perfect angle from which one can use his or her "solar eye" (an eye that sees everything from above and knows what is going on below) to take part in and observe the ever-changing atmospheres and dreamscapes of the magical and mysteriousness of the alleyway: "Die halbe Sonnengasse ist anwesend" (Keun, *Sonnengasse*). Thus, the close proximity of the apartment complexes forms a platform that encourages the citizens to see through the eyes of a flaneur to take advantage of the (elevated) situation from which he or she resides, where it becomes easier to properly look at the displays in the windows and on the streets.

However, although the solar eye can capture the visual festival of the city's images, the objects on display remain partially unknown and unobtainable because the windows and the closed doors act as filters and the entire truth of what one is seeing seems to remain elusive. It is as if one were watching a television show, trying to discover what was being said without being able to listen to the sound. In this type of situation, the seduction of curiosity becomes even stronger because "someone who sees without hearing is much more uneasy than someone who hears without seeing" (Benjamin 37-38). The uneasiness becomes unsettling and the desire to hear *das Ungehörige* overpowers the flaneur and forces him or her to continue pursuing the magical and mysterious: "Und vor allen Türen stehen Menschen, aus allen Fenstern

sehen Köpfe heraus” (Keun, page number unknown). Thus, the objects on display and the endless attractions of this alleyway create an allure that further heightens the curiosity of the flaneur beyond initial observations through his or her desires to understand and capture the unobtainable fleeting images of the metropolis: for “Neugier ist ein moralischer Besen, mit dem will man die Straße sauber kehren” (Keun, *Sonnengasse*).

Through this description of a particular alleyway, Keun explains not only how the city enables the practice of flanerie, but also how it encourages it. She, like many other flaneurs, was able to “be away from home and yet feel oneself everywhere at home, to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world” (Baudelaire 9). The structure of the metropolis allowed the flaneur to make his or her “home” wherever he or she went in the city. The billboards and newspapers became reading material; the buildings, houses, and pillars became walls; the streets, the markets, and the *Fußgängerzone* became the floors. Keun might have been labeled as a nomad, a fugitive, or even a wanderer; but was always able to feel at home in the multitudes of the people, activities, and images that she confronted every day. Her center of the world was within the city where she could explore its features and the people who lived there with her. It was here that she could explore the realms of the New Woman, and be in the mix of the metropolis.

Throughout the past decades, Keun’s feuilletons have been largely ignored, labeled by scholars as unimportant literature that was only written to produce money and help her survive during times of persecution and turmoil. Even Keun, the author, labels her own short stories as *Scheiße* and *Quatsch*: “...momentan thematisch nicht genehm. Irgendeine neckische Scheiße ist leichter loszuwerden” and again, “Aber lernen kann



man schließlich auch den größten Quatsch” (Häntzschel 53). In June of 1934, in a letter to Arnold Strauss, Keun further discussed her own personal dissatisfaction in having to write short prose pieces. She writes, “Ich mach’ mir letzten Endes verflucht wenig draus, kleine Sachen zu schreiben. Ich fange nun mal erst an, meine Menschen erst von der 40. Seite an zu lieben. Und erst ab der 100. Seite kann ich mich richtig mit ihnen verständigen und an ihrem fremden Leben restlos teilnehmen” (Kreis 73).

However, although Keun apparently only wrote these feuilletons and other short stories to earn money and survive, these literary snapshots of society and of the modern *Großstadtkultur* have become important historical documents that give us glimpses into mid-twentieth-century Germany and the effects of modernity. Keun’s feuilletons, as well as her novels, have become important manuscripts that represent the life of a German female flaneur who successfully transcended the restricting borders of male-dominated flanerierie. Just as her one-time mentor, Alfred Döblin had once predicted, Keun was able to become one of the great female German authors of the twentieth century. What Döblin knew in 1930, is what we are now beginning to realize: that Irmgard Keun was a woman of the streets who was able to witness and observe the movements and fleeting images of the city and who did eventually find her home in the crowds and ever-changing atmospheres of the metropolis.

## Conclusion

### The Flaneuse Irmgard Keun and Suggestions for Further Research

Although women had become more visible in the streets of the metropolis before the rise of National Socialism, this short-lived emancipation of the private women in the public sphere became only a small relic in German history. Gleber suggests that the “absence of female flanerier results not from any individual lack or incapacity, but from the crucial blind spot of society that exposes the limits and conventions imposed on women’s lives” (177). Because of the restrictions placed on her during the rule of National Socialism,<sup>24</sup> Keun was not able to continue recording all of her experiences in the metropolis of Berlin and to fully develop her individual art of flanerier. These societal restrictions prohibited her access to the streets of the city and kept her from being able to promenade, freely and unmolested.

Although she was able to re-establish her career as an author after the end of World War II and the fall of the Nazi regime, Keun continued to struggle to find her place in the German society that she left many years earlier. After having tried to publish feuilletons, while in exile, for survival and to continue her career, Keun desperately struggled to enter the post-war literary circles of Germany; but she was never able to regain her early prominence as a best-selling author: “She thought that her literary career was over...” (Beutel 78). Even though Keun was able to briefly establish her foundation

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<sup>24</sup> Barbara Kosta writes, “The modern woman’s alleged departure from origins and her break with tradition...was answered by the National Socialist’s insistent return to origins, which resulted in a conflation of female identity and motherhood as women’s sole purpose.” Kosta. 282.

as an author before Hitler's installment as chancellor, shortly after the Nazi publication policies were enforced, her books were banned—even burned—and her groundwork as a flaneuse was nearly destroyed. Even though she continued to publish novels and short pieces of prose until the early 1980s, Keun was never again able to lay claim on the title of being a best-selling author.

However, although she had suffered different types of persecution throughout her life and career as an author, Keun was able to use the genre of flanerie to systematically record and document her interactions with the city in her novels and in her feuilletons. Near the end of her life, Keun began to work on an autobiographical novel, which she titled *Kein Anschluß unter diesem Nummer* (Unger 257). Although Keun never finished this last sketch of her life, the title that she chose for it personifies the career that she had experienced and the life that she had lived. For Keun, it was in the art of flanerie that she was able to find her “connection” to the streets of modernity where she could set up her own house in the multitudes of the metropolis—what Irmgard Keun believed, she accomplished. Although Keun often felt like a “dislocated book” that was full of “contradictions,” her writings prove that she did in fact find her place in the public sphere of society and that she remained consistent to the traditions of the flaneur, or purveyor of modernity. Not only are Keun's texts witnesses of her generation (1905-1982), but they are also windows of time through which we can travel back to view the images of the twentieth-century, modern metropolis and the urban experience.

Although Keun's works had drifted into the shadows of near forgottenness (only to have been recently rediscovered, since the time of her death in 1982), and although only a handful of scholars have taken the time to examine her works as important

historical and cultural documents of early and mid-twentieth-century Germany, many of her other writings still need to be looked at and included with the exceptional works of the flaneuse. Keun lived from writing—“vom Schreiben von Romanen, Erzählungen und Briefen,” (Kreis 107)—and who wrote about what she observed and thought at every second of the day—“...wenn ich einen Bleistift in der Hand habe, kann ich einfach nur das schreiben, was mich in der Sekunde des Schreibens angeht” (Kreis 17). Because she lived from writing and because of her constant yearning to observe and write, Keun was able to capture many of the fleeting images of modernity and the growing metropolis. Thus, through her obsession to observe and write about the images of the city, Keun has been able to transmit, through her texts, photographs of the urban setting in which she lived—becoming a passionate painter of modern life.

What her texts have shown us is that she did understand the city and the workings of the flaneur. They also prove how valuable her works and observation are because she expanded on the traditional definition of flanerie and made clear many of the differences between her views and a man’s views. Her efforts and work are significant because she saw beyond what the traditional flaneur did and brought in perspectives of women’s feelings and problems. Through her descriptions, Keun shows us many of the personal and intimate relationships that a person can have with a city (even a mother-child relationship), how decorative and extravagant the scenes of the metropolis can be (with flowers and hallmark borders), and how she was able to maintain her individual, distinct vision even though she was being observed and compartmentalized (on display in the shopping center windows).

Although scholars continue to debate the factual possibility for the existence of a female flaneur, by the end of her career as an author, Keun had shown that she was able to become a prominent novelist who excelled in her pursuits of flanerie. Not only have I tried to show, with this work, that there is in fact evidence for the existence of the flaneuse, but I have also tried to open the door for further studies into the writings of other female authors who have also been able to systematically record their interactions with the activities and images of the city. Although Keun had been marginalized from the city, as well as from many literary circles, her continued efforts to write in the art of flanerie have proven the existence of the female flaneur and have provided further opportunities for women to excel in their own urban literature.

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## Appendix

## A Collection of Keun's Feuilletons used in this Thesis

### System des Männerfangs

I. Allgemeine Regeln: der Eitelkeit des Mannes Futter geben. Sein Selbstgefühl stärken, ihn stolz sein lassen auf sich. Ihn verstehen, wenn er verstanden sein will, und im richtigen Moment stoppen – mit dem Verstehen. Ein Mann wünscht nicht bis in die letzten abgründigen Tiefen seines einmaligen Innenlebens begriffen zu werden von einer Frau – er könnte sonst merken, daß es nicht so unerhört einmalig ist, und das würde er sehr übel nehmen. Also ihm immer noch den letzten, sanft melancholischen Seufzer des Unverstandenseins lassen, erschüttert von der eigenen Machtlosigkeit dasitzen – er wird sie verzeihen und einem über die eigene Unvollkommenheit liebevoll hinweghelfen. Jeder Mann legt Wert darauf, ein im Grunde “einsamer Mensch” zu sein. Man respektiere das. Ihn sentimental sein lassen. Männer brauchen das – und können es nur bei einer Frau sein. Zynische Männer sind am sentimentalsten (Zynismus als Stacheldraht um ein zu weiches Herz) – man muß ihn taktvoll ahnen lassen, daß man, trotz verhüllender Geistesschärfe, von dem kostbaren weichen Herzen Kenntnis genommen hat. Unbedingt und immer über dasselbe mit ihm lachen – sonst ists Essig mit der erstrebten Gemeinsamkeit. Sich politisch aufklären lassen. Sehr dumm sein, aber sehr intelligent fragen. Zu seinen jeweiligen Freunden und Bekannten entzückend sein – Lob von andern macht die eigenen Aktien um hundert Prozent steigen. Möglichst zu dreien oder vierein ausgehen – zusammensitzen – lieb und nett sein – und im richtigen Moment sehr graziös zur Telefonzelle entschweben, um den Bekannten Gelegenheit zu ein paar anerkennenden Worten zu geben. Sich mit einem Nimbus von Verehrern – “die einem aber sehr gleichgültig sind” – umgeben. Man ist nicht so. Man macht sich nichts draus. Man legt

ihm die Skalpe der Eroberten zu Füßen – er wird stolz sein – auf sich, auf die Frau, auf sich und überhaupt. Ihm immer Gelegenheit zum triumphierenden Rivalentum geben. Und nicht sein – sondern reflektieren. Spiegelbild seines jeweiligen Wunsches. Ihm zuhören. Und dann –

II. Den Mann behandeln als Mann seines Berufes. Vor allem: Interesse für seinen Beruf

#### A. KÜNSTLERISCHE BERUFE

a) *Schauspieler*. Einen Schauspieler lieben ist fast pervers. Man kommt nicht auf seine Kosten – d. h. die spezifische Eitelkeit der Frau kommt nicht auf ihre Kosten. Ein Schauspieler muß von einer Frau geliebt werden wie ein Mann eine schöne Frau liebt. Sein Beruf ist feminin. Ein Schauspieler ist oft großenwahnsinnig aus Unsicherheit – wie eine schöne Frau (beider Erfolge sind zeitgebunden und gehen vorüber). Man muß in seiner Gegenwart Werner Krauß ablehnen – er wird widersprechen – trotzdem ablehnen. Bassermann ablehnen, Ernst Duetsch ungemein ablehnen, Moissi ablehnen (wenns nicht zufällig Moissi selber ist) – alle ablehnen. Kollegen neidisch finden, Kritiker lachhaft und unmöglich. Ihm bedingungslos glauben, daß er nie Kritiken liest. Ihm Rollen abhören und bei tragischen Ausbrüchen weinen. Und ihn bewundern. Und wenn möglich gut kochen. Den Intendanten (Direktor) in jedem Fall gemein finden. Schauspieler kokettieren gern mit Bürgerlichkeit, wenn sie Bohemiens sind – man lasse sie. Sind sie bürgerlich, wünschen sie der Boheme verfallen zu sein. Man lasse sie. Man lasse sie am besten überhaupt.

b) *Maler*. Man sei sein Modell – ganz gleich ob schön ob häßlich, man bringe ihm bei, daß ein Künstler seines Ranges mit jedem menschlichen Lebewesen etwas anzufangen weiß – ja, daß es durch ihn erst Existenzberechtigung bekommt. Nach der

Sitzung ist man ermattet und der Maler angeregt – der wahrhaft günstige Zustand. Unter keinen Umständen jemals Eroberungswillen zeigen, sonst weckt man die Opposition des Mannes. (Gehört eigentlich unter “Allgemeine Regeln.”)

c) *Musiker*. Man täusche kein Gehör vor, wenn man keins hat – er kommt dahinter. Unmusikalische Frauen suchen sich besser andere Objekte als gerade Musiker. Man kann sich von Schriftstellern und Malern belehren lassen – Gehör läßt sich nicht beibringen. Sonst: Bei gemeinsamen Konzertbesuchen lehne man ab, was er ablehnt, finde schön, was er schön findet – und um nichts falsch zu machen, lehne man den Kopf zurück und schließe die Augen – was, je nachdem, äußerstes Gelangweiltsein oder höchstes Entzücken ausdrücken kann.

d) *Schriftsteller*. Man lasse sich vorlesen. Man schlafe nicht ein. Man sei zu erschüttert, um zu sprechen, denn es gibt keine Worte, die genügen. Man kritisiere mit einer Ehrfurcht, als wenn man den Faust verbesserte. Man finde alles sehr neu und einmalig. Man biete sich an, ihm das Manuskript abzuschreiben – man sei immer wieder dankbar und erschüttert von den herrlichen Gedanken und Worten – bei jeder neuen Schreibmaschinenseite glaube man an eine Auflage mehr. Man hat unbedingt die Chance, nach Beendigung des Manuskriptes zur Muse aufzusteigen.

e) *Verleger*. Man schreibe wenn möglich, erfolgreiche Bücher. Die Sympathie eines Verlegers wächst mit der steigenden Auflage. Je weniger Vorschuß man braucht, um so angenehmer macht man sich.

f) *Redakteure*. Wenn sie selber schreiben, sind sie zu behandeln wie Schriftsteller. Man bemitleide sie, daß sie so können wie sie wollen (kein Redakteur kann wie er will).

Man bringe ihnen die Beiträge möglichst kurz vor Redaktionsschluß, um die Gelegenheit des gemeinsamen Fortgehens zu schaffen.

## B. BÜRGERLICHE BERUFE

a) *Aerzte*. Ein wesentlicher Vorteil, gut gewachsen zu sein. Ansonsten: Aerzte sind Kummer gewöhnt. Man sei möglichst nicht seine Patienten. In dieser Beziehung hat ein Arzt seine Grundsätze – warum es sich und ihm unnütz erschweren? Ferner: Sauerbruch ablehnen, Bier ablehnen, Freud ironisieren (bei Psycho-Analytikern: Alfred Adler beschimpfen). Koch, Semmelweiß, Billroth anerkennen. (Weil die ja tot sind.) Sich ja nicht mit medizinischen Fachausdrücken lächerlich machen. Ihn aber bedauern, daß er auf eine praktische Ausübung seines Berufes angewiesen ist, wo er doch von Kopf bis Fuß für rein wissenschaftliche Arbeit prädestiniert ist.

b) *Rechtsanwälte*. Sind als verhinderte Literaten zu behandeln. Man lasse sich ihre Dramen und Romane vorlesen. Strafanwälte beglückwünsche man ununterbrochen zu ihren herrlichen Plädoyers. Zivilanwälte beglückwünsche man zu ihrer meist unveröffentlichen (aber ganz gewiß vorhandenen) schriftstellerischen Produktion.

c) *Ingenieure*. Man lasse sich jeden Mechanismus, vom Fahrrad angefangen, genau erklären. Es wirkt sehr nett, wenn man hilf- und fassungslos staunend vor seinen komplizierten Berechnungen steht. Frauliche Unwissenheit wirkt bei einem Ingenieur stets kleidsam. Jedoch empfiehlt sich die Vertrautheit mit dem Auto.

d) *Kaufleute*. Kaufleute wollten eigentlich “was andres werden,” Kaufleute sind zuweilen gern lyrisch und haben ihren Beruf verfehlt. Was nicht hindert, daß sie an ihrem Beruf hängen wie die Kletten. Man bewundere ihr Auto und bemerke nicht, wenn es geliehen ist. Man habe einen ehemaligen General als Vater oder einen, der sein



Millionenvermögen in der Inflation verloren hat. Man möchte gern seine Mutter kennen lernen und ist “überhaupt nicht modern” – man wählt deutsche Volkspartei. Sicher ist sicher. Kaufleute sind meistens konservativ. Man kann unbesorgt seine Angestellte sein – er hat nicht die Hemmungen eines Arztes bei seiner Patientin. Allein mit ihm zusammen Überstunden machen, bietet sogar äußerst günstige Chancen.

e) *Beamte*. Beamte haben vielfach Grundsätze und eine etwas festgefrorene Moral. Man richte sich nicht danach. Im Gegenteil. Beamte sind im allgemeinen keine schwierigen Fälle. Man lebe sich nicht etwa in ihren Beruf und ihre Anschauungen hinein – man sei der augenfälligste Kontrast ihres Durchschnittsdaseins. Man tue alles, was sie ablehnen – es zieht. Beamte sind sinnliche Naturen und auch poetisch – aber doch noch mehr sinnlich. Mit dem Lippenstift in der Hand ist man noch kein Vamp. Aber mit blaugeschminkten Augenlidern, bißchen mondäner Aufmachung, gut sitzenden Tramastrümpfen und leicht gewagten Gesten kann man sich auch heute noch einem Beamten gegenüber den Hauch anziehender Verderbtheit geben. Man sei in dem Stadium, wo man so eben grade noch gerettet werden kann. Beamte retten sehr gern. C. NABOBS. (Gibt es noch welche?) Geld hat einem gleichgültig zu sein, der Nabob auch – “man will ihn garnicht” –. Nabobs sind mißtrauisch. Ein gutes Rezept: man tue, als halte man ihn für einen Hochstapler und armen Schlucker – und was man an ihm bewundert, sind seine rein männlichen Reize und Vorzüge. Im ersten Stadium der Bekanntschaft weise man jedes Geschenk zurück.

III. Dieses Rezept ist unvollkommen und versagt vollständig, wenn die letzte individuelle Behandlung fehlt. Es gibt nur eine Regel, die unter allen Umständen zu befolgen ist: selbst *nicht* verliebt sein, denn dann macht man sicher *alles* falsch.

## **Ich bin feige**

Heute abend treffe ich meine elegante Freundin Evangeline, und darum muß ich mir einen Hut kaufen. Meinen letzten Hut habe ich nämlich vor ein paar Tagen verloren. Ich besitze immer nur einen Hut, und den verliere ich von Zeit zu Zeit, weil ich ihn statt auf dem Kopf stets in der Hand trage. Das hängt mit meiner Feigheit zusammen, die ich seit Jahr und Tag gänzlich erfolglos bekämpfe.

Ich komme einfach nicht dazu, mir einen Hut auszusuchen, der mir auch nur einigermaßen steht. Die Verkäuferin stülpt mir irgendeinen Kochdeckel auf und sagt streng: "Das ist das Neuste." Sie zieht mir das Ding ins Gesicht, als wollte sie Blindekuh mit mir spielen – ich ziehe es wieder aus dem Gesicht raus. Sie zieht her, ich ziehe hin –, und dann bitte ich sie schüchtern um etwas weniger Neues. Sie klatscht mir einen Scherzartikel aufs linke Ohr und schreit: "Entzückend." Ja, gewiß, ich finde das auch. Aber was soll ich denn aufsetzen, wenn nicht Karneval ist? Ich möchte zu einem braunen Mantel einen sportlichen braunen Filzhut. Doch es ist einfach unmöglich, daß ich mich mit diesem Wunsch durchsetze. Dann habe ich auf einmal ein gelbes samtiges Gebilde mit neckischen Federchen dran auf, es ist mir etwas zu eng, und mein eines Auge ist ganz verdeckt. Die Verkäuferin kreischt vor Wonne, die Inhaberin und das Fräulein von der Kasse stürzen herbei und kreischen auch, und so was hinreißend Schönes wie mich mit diesem Hut hätten sie überhaupt noch nicht gesehen. Wie die Prinzessin Marina sähe ich aus. Ich will gar nicht aussehen wie die Prinzessin Marina. Ich sehe auch gar nicht so aus, ich sehe aus, als wollte ich gleich in einem Vorstadtvariete mit dressierten Hunden auftreten. Insofern, aber auch nur insofern, hat der Hut etwas Sportliches. Doch die Leute im Laden jauchzen vor Freude. Man merkt, mit wieviel Liebe und Zärtlichkeit sie an dem

Hut hängen. Wenn ich nicht wäre, würden sie sich wahrscheinlich überhaupt nicht davon trennen. Zwar hat er zu allem andern auch noch die gemeinste aller gelben Farben, allein ich wage nicht, den Hut abzusetzen. Er ist sehr teuer. Als ich draußen am Ladenfenster vorbeigehe, sehe ich, wie ich die Leute drinnen die Nasen an der Scheibe plattquetschen. Irgend etwas auf der Straße scheint ihre heftigste Heiterkeit zu erregen. Komisch, denn außer mir ist keiner auf der Straße. Im Schutze des nächsten Hausflurs reiße ich mir die Kopfbedeckung ab und rupfe die lächerlichen Federchen aus. Schwermütig klemme ich mir das Stückchen gelben Stoff unter den Arm. Kein Mensch, der mir begegnet, wird mir anmerken, daß ich eine Frau bin, die sich soeben einen neuen Hut gekauft hat.

So, und nun will ich meinem Bruder eine Krawatte zum Geburtstag kaufen. Seinen Geschmack kenne ich und weiß, was er will und braucht. Ich pendle also in der Stadt herum und guck' mir die Schaufenster der Herrenmodegeschäfte an. Je feiner so ein Geschäft ist, um so weniger liegt im Schaufenster drin. In den allerfeinsten Schaufenstern liegt nur ein Spazierstock aus irgendeinem atembeklemmend edlen Holz auf dunkelrotem Samt. An dem Spazierstock lehnt, als wär' sie soeben ohnmächtig geworden, eine Flasche mit irgendeinem geheimnißvollen und aufregend kostbaren Inhalt: ur-ur-ur-alt Lavendel oder ur-ur-alt Whisky, was weiß ich. Und im Hintergrund schmachtet, auf ein Kissen gebettet, noch eine Flasche mit zartbunten Bonbons drin. Vielleicht sind es auch besonders vornehme gefärbte Mottenkugeln. Dieses Geschäft ist unter, bin aber immer noch von Höhenluft umwittert, als ich ein tiefer, weniger hochwertig gelegenes Schaufenster in Augenangriff nehme. Auch hier ein Spazierstock auf sanftigem Samt, diesmal auf blauem. Aber der edelholzige Spazierstock teilt hier bereits seine Einsamkeit mit einem edel und weich fließenden Seidenhemd, dem eine schöne und ernste Krawatte

als Nebenfluß wellig zuwallt. Und die mysteriöse Flasche mit den bunten Bonbons oder Mottenkugeln ist durch ein Paar prächtige plakinblonde Schweinsleder-Handschuhe ersetzt. In dies Geschäft gehe ich, da mir die schöne und ernste Krawatte gefällt. Vielleicht haben die Leute in dem Geschäft auch fröhliche Krawatten von gleichem erlesenen Geschmack. Leute in dem Geschäft sind keine Leute. Ein Thronerbe empfängt mich. Mit der wahrhaft prinzlich geschwungenen linken Braue deutet er ein Lächeln an, nachsichtig und diskret. Ich habe das Gefühl, einen Hofknicks machen zu müssen. "Wie bitte? Krawatte? Oh, wir haben schon ein recht nettes Krawattchen zu Mark 6,50," sagt der Thronerbe. Er hat wunderbar gewelltes Haar und melancholische Mundwinkel. Recht nettes Krawattchen zu Mark 6,50! Ich sollte jetzt gehen. Stolz und überlegen sollte ich jetzt dieses samtige Fürstentum verlassen. Ich entsinne mich, Schaufenster gesehen zu haben, schöne Schaufenster, da waren erstklassige Krawatten ausgestellt zu Mark 4, –. Bedeutende Krawatten. Ein zu schönsten Hoffnungen berechtigender Filmstatist mit eigenem Ehrgeiz und fremden Vermögen würde solche Krawatten zu Mark 4, – kaufen, um damit von Erfolg zu Erfolg zu flattern. Und ein bereits fertiger Filmstar, der ausgeflattert hat und nun adlerhaft auf den Höhen des Ruhmes horstet, der wird natürlich zeigen, daß er so was ganz Großartiges an Krawatte nicht mehr nötig hat und in stiller, selbstverständlicher Vornehmheit eine Krawatte zu – sagen wir – zu Mark 3,25 wählen. Sanft und mit leicht angewelktem Augenausdruck fragt mich der Thronerbe, was ich anzulegen gedächte. Gott, Mark 3,25 gedachte ich anzulegen, aber – ich sage "Och," weil damit ja nichts gesagt ist.

Der Prinzliche legt mir eine Auswahl Krawatten zu acht Mark vor. Sie sind schön, aber sie gefallen mir nicht. Ich getraue mich auch nicht, sie anzufassen. Ich halte die

Hände auf dem Rücken verschränkt und wühle mit den Augen schüchtern in der stolzen Seidenpracht herum. Da kommt ein Mann von draußen herein. Ein energisch blickender Mann mit stacheligen, roten Haaren und roten Ballonbacken. Den Thronerben nennt er herablassend "junger Mann" – und: "Bißchen dalli-dalli bitte – hamse Pomade an den Füßen, oder was ist los?" Er will eine Krawatte. Und während ich, vollkommen sinnesverwirrt, eine Krawatte zu 8 Mark anfasse und damit auch schon gekauft habe, sagt der Erdverhaftete: "Was sagen Se? Mark 6,50 die Krawatte? Hauen Sie ab. Für was halten Sie mich? Ich bin ein anständiger Mensch, ein kleiner, solider Privatmann." Ich aber habe die teuerste Krawatte meines Lebens gekauft, und was ich mit ihr anfangen soll, weiß ich nicht. Meinem Bruder kann ich sie nicht schenken – der müßte sich nämlich erst einen passenden Anzug dazu machen lassen müssen. Während ich an der Kasse zahle, träume ich davon, daß nun zumindest gleich sieben Geschäftsführer, Ausschüßräte und Thronerben herbeiströmen werden, um mir das Geleit bis zur Türe zu geben mit "Bitte sehr" und "Danke sehr" und tausend eleganten Rumpfbeugen bis zur Erbe. Nichts dergleichen geschieht. Ein apathisches Mädchen stopft mir kühl und gleichmütig mein kostbares Päckchen in die Hand, während der schöne, zarte Thronerbe Leitern 'rauf und Leitern 'runter läuft, um dem rauhen, energischen Mann immer mehr Krawatten zu Mark 1,75 darzubieten. Einen ganz abgedankten, demütigen Eindruck macht der Prinzliche, und einen Augenausdruck hat er, als kniete seine Seele. Nur für ein paar Sekunden wird er wieder thronerbenhaft: als ich die Türklinke in der Hand halte, entläßt er mich von der dritten Leitersprosse aus mit einem gnädigen und gar nicht mal unfreundlichen Neigen des Hauptes.

Ich bin wütend auf mich, ich ekle mich an, und ich gönne es mir von Herzen, daß ich jetzt zum Friseur muß. Mein Haar muß gewachsen werden. Nicht mehr und nicht weniger will ich vom Friseur. Eine wehmütige Männererscheinung mit Knopfnase und schlängeligen Fingern bedient mich, das heißt, er bedient mich gar nicht, sondern zwirbelt erst mal eine Haarsträhne von mir zwischen seinen schlängeligen Fingern herum und sieht dabei mitleidig aus. "Gnädige Frau wünschen sicher vorher eine Ölmassage." Ich wünsche keine Ölmassage, aber – Gott, ich bin ja schon so grenzenlos dankbar, wenn ich so ein Friseurgeschäft ohne bordeauxrot gefärbte Haare verlasse. "Vielleicht könnten wir in der Zeit die Augenbrauen?" – "Ach bitte – danke – nein." – Ich möchte weinen. Man legt mir eine Zeitschrift vor, da sind hübsche, etwas krampfzig lächelnde Mädchen drin abgebildet mit witzigen kleinen Locken und geometrisch strengen Wellen. Der Schlangenfingrige nennt das Frisur – und welche Frisur ich wollte? Gar keine. "Ach, sehen Sie, ich trage mein Haar schon seit Jahren so – einfach einen Scheitel auf der Seite, und um übrigen fällt das Haar, wie's eben fällt." Der Schlangenfingrige ruft nach Herrn Gellwange. Das ist der Chef. Herr Gellwange kommt, reibt auch eine Haarsträhne von mir zwischen den Fingern und sieht traurig und besorgt aus. Der Schlangenfingrige klatscht: "Die gnädige Frau wünschten keine moderne Lockenfrisur." Ich sehe, daß Herr Gellwange sich körperlich vor mir ekelt und daß es ihm schwerfällt, sich nichts dergleichen anmerken zu lassen. Er kann es auch einfach nicht verantworten, mich ohne ein paar kleine Wasserwellen gehen zu lassen. Natürlich werde ich nicht ohne ein paar kleine Wasserwellen gehen. Stundenlang langweile ich mich unter einer metallenen Haube, die heiße Lüfte ausströmt. In der Kajüte nebenan sitzt ein Dame, die Herrn Gellwange gewachsen ist. Nein, sie will heute keine Henna-Packung und auch kein

Haarwasser. “Und wissen Sie schon, Herr Gellwange, daß die Frau Poll sich den Fuß verstaucht hat? Wie? Ja, Sie haben recht – ja, tat mir sooo leid – ‘türlich ist der Mann schuld. Als meine Freundin ihn letzthin auf der Straße sah, sagte sie direkt – Wie? Nein, macht keinen guren Eindruck. Wie? Ach so. Hahahaha.” Ich werde von dem Schlangenfingrigen nicht mehr bedient. Ein armes, hilfloses Kind, ein halbwüchtiger Knabe darf an mir das schöne Wort “Früh übt sich, was ein Meister werden will” zur unschönen Tat werden lassen. Als er fertig ist, sagt der Schlangenfingrige: “Ganz reizend, das Köpfchen.” Schamerfüllt und duftumwölkt entfliehe ich wieder in den nächsten Hausflur. So viel hat sich die Lorelei in vielen Jahren nicht zusammengekämmt wie ich in drei Minuten, um meine “moderne Lockenfrisur” wieder zu zerstören.

Als ich Evangeline im Weinrestaurant Dreimand treffe, sehe ich immer noch etwas komisch aus. Außerdem rieche ich wie ein Versuchslaboratorium für Blumendüfte der Neuzeit. Evangeline hat ihren Hund bei sich, ein launisches, verzogenes Tier, das neben ihr auf einem Stuhl lagert. Evangline läßt ihm Knochen bringen, sie selbst trinkt nur eine Tasse Kaffee. Sie müßte für ein neues Abendkleid sparen. Der Kellner legt die Menukarte vor mich hin. Ich habe gar keinen Appetit, und sparen muß ich weiß Gott auch. Aus Angst vor dem Kellner will ich wenigstens eine Kleinigkeit essen. Als ich bescheiden murmle: “Nur eine Kleinigkeit,” sieht der Kellner mich mit einem Blick an, als hätte er mich ertappt. Nur seinetwegen trinke ich im Laufe des Abends noch zwei Glas Wein und zwei Tassen Kaffee und kann doch nicht erreichen, auch nur halbwegs so anständig behandelt zu werden wie Evangelines struppiger Köter. Am Nebentisch sitzt einer jener wunderbaren Männer, die mit ruhiger Bestimmtheit ein Glas Bier zurückgehen lassen: “Nehmen Sie das mal mit und lassen Sie besser einschenken.”

Ich bin sehr traurig und klage Evangeline mein Leid. Die sagt, es wäre die allerhöchste Zeit, mich etwas zu erziehen. Morgen soll ich mit ihr in das schönste Delikateßwarengeschäft der Stadt gehen, nichts als eine Muskatnuß verlangen und dem Verkäufer sagen: “Ach, bitte, schicken Sie sie mir im Laufe des Nachmittags zu.” Ich zittre jetzt schon vor Angst vor dem Verkäufer. Aber ich habe auch viel zuviel Angst vor Evangeline, um mich dieser Erziehungsmaßnahme zu entziehen. Und wenn ich morgen nicht feige bin – so bin ich’s doch wieder nur aus Feigheit nicht.



## Die Sonnengasse

Der einzig Sonnige an der Sonnengasse ist ihr Name. Ganz klein und verkrumpelt liegt sie im dunklen Viertel einer Menschen Großstadt. Für ihre Bewohner ist sie Anfang und Ende der Welt. Wenn ein Kind nicht gut tut, so sagen die Eltern "vor der ganzen Sonnengasse kann man sich für dich schämen." Eng stehen die Häuserchen sich gegenüber, und die altersschwachen Giebel neigen nach einander zu, als wollten sie es ihren Bewohnern leichter machen, einander in die Fenster zu gucken. Denn hehre Pracht eines jeden Sonnengässlers ist dem anderen zu wissen, alles und jedes und vor allem das Ungehörige. Neugier ist ein moralischer Besen, mit dem kehrt man die Straße sauber.

Augenblicklich ist sich die ganze Sonnengasse einig in der Entrüstung über der Isabella Schommers, die rosarunzelige Bäckerwitwe. Sie ist eine saubere appetitliche Frau von über vierzig. Der Schneider Susewind hatte ernste Absichten mit ihr, ein ehrbarer Witmann, der wohl zu ihr passte. Aber was tut die Schommers? Sie fängt sich den Pitter an "Dä jecke Windhund," sagen die ehrbaren Männer – "dat mannstolle Schommers," die ehrbaren Frauen. Und die alten und jungen Mädchen können den Pitter um alles in der Welt nicht bedenken. Denn Pitter ist der begehrteste, lustigste Mann der Sonnengasse. Er ist fünfundzwanzig Jahre alt und schön wie der gut gelockte Gottfried von Bouillon, der bei dem gefährlichen Schmitzens Palais überm verstauben plöschsofa liegt. Er ist gutmütig und liebenswürdig und sogar seine uralter Grossmutter sagt: "Dä Pitter, dä Jung, dä is wie ene Engel."

Diesen Engel also hat Schommers Bell eingefangen. Und zwar in des Engels Mittagspause. Pitter arbeitet in einer Fabrik. Das Liebste vom Tag sind ihm seine zwei Stunden mittäglicher Freizeit mit dem einschliesslichen Mittagessen. Er isst

leidenschaftlich gern. “Dä Jung, dä is nie satt zu kriege,” klagte eines Tages seine Grossmutter beim Brötcheneinholen. Darüber hatte Schommers Bell, die gerade selbst bediente, nachgedacht und war zu einem guten vernünftigen Plan gekommen. Als der Pitter am nächsten Tag zur Arbeit ging, lag Schommers Bell im Fenster, umwölkt vom süssen Dufte frischer Backwaren und herrlichen Bohnenkaffees. Als sie den Pitter sah, tat sie ungemein erstaunt. “Ah, der Herr Pitter! Wo jeht Ihr dann hin? Uech sieht man ja jarnit mehr!” “Ich gonn arbeide,” meinte der Pitter, und: “Dunnerlitsch nochmal, dat riecht aber jod hier!” “Ae-ja,” sagte dat Bell, “so’n jod Tässche echte Bunnekafee, dat hätt et in sich. Kutt doch enen erin, Herr Pitter, und trinkt en Tässche mit.” Pitter trank drei Tassen Kaffee, dazu drei Likörchen und ass ein grosses Stück Apfelkuchen und vier Röggelchen mit gutter Butter. All das musste er in zwanzig Minuten schaffen. Nur sein starkes Pflichtbewusstsein trieb ihn von der gastlichen Stätte. “Nehmt Üch doch morgen jet mehr Zeit un kutt jet früher,” lächelte dat rosige Bell.

So kam es denn, dass der Pitter in den nächsten Tagen eine fette halbe Stunde beim Bell sass. Dann kam die Zeit, wo er eine kräftige Stunde bei ihr sass. Und eines Tages hielt dat Bell es für angebracht, den armen Jungen aufzuforden, sich neben sie auf’s Sofa zu setzen. “Pitter, he sitzt Ihr weicher, tut Üch nit jensere, wo Ihr dä jasse Tach so hart arbeide müsst.” Pitter war alles andere als eine aggressive Natur, und darum war dat Bell schliesslich gezwungen, sich selbst Pitters Arm um die eigene kräftige Taille zu legen. Pitter nahm auch dies hin und verstieg sich sogar zu einem selbständigen Ausdruck seines Gefühls: “Aach, leev Frau Schommers. Ihr seid so weich wie en Kissen.”

Das Leben könnte ein Paradies sein, wenn die Mitmenschen nicht wären. Da kommt der Installateur Pütz zum Bell in den Laden und erklärt ihr, giftig wie ein

gereizter Kettehund, er ginge von nun an seine Brötchen bei der Verkaufstell von der Brotfabrik holen, da wären sie viel besser, und dat Bell hätt ja wohl bald in der eignen Familie mehr Absatz, als es herstellen könnt. Dat blutjunge Annemie vom Schuster Dotz lacht dazu schrill und unschön. Und gestern hat der Lehrjung mit einem hämischen Blick auf's Bell zum Gesellen gesagt: "Alter schützt vor Torheit nicht." Es stichelt von allen Ecken und Enden.

So hockt dat Bell denn eines Nachmittags in der dämmerig plüschenen Traulichkeit ihrer kleinen Wohnstube auf dem Sofa und betrachtet träneneden Auges die leicht eingedrückte Sitzfläche neben sich. Pitter ist vor einer guten Stunde gegangen. Ob dat Bell kein Ahnung hätt, wat dat Dotzens Annemie gegen ihn haben könnt, hat er gefragt. Eben wär sie auf der Strasse an ihm vorbei gegangen und hätt nit gegrüsst. Sondern ganz wütich den Kopf abgewandt. Dat Bell hat über das freche launische Put nur die Achseln gezucht. Als dann der Pitter, nach dem vierten Likörchen und so richtig verträumt, sagte: dem Annemie sein Haar tät in der Sonn leuchten wie Jold, da knipete dat Bell des Licht an und streckte seinen Kopf gerad unter die elektrische Birn. Aber abgesehen davon, dass ein Glühbirn kein Sonn ist – so wie dem Annemie sein Haar leuchtet dem Bell seins nicht mehr. Bells Selbstsicherheit ist grundlegend erschüttert. Ach, sie durchlebte die letzten Wochen in geradezu sträflicher Seligkeit, und vermessen: ist's, als Sterblicher das Paradies zu wollen. Sie merkt gar nicht, wie von aussen her das Fenster aufgestossen wird, bis eine harte Stimme ruft": "Tach, leev Bell, ich wollt doch mal nach dir sehn, wie jeht et dir denn?" Am Fenster steht dat gefährliche Schmitene Plünn. "Bell, do hass doch nit etwa jeweint?" Von jeher hat dat Bell eine Abneigung gegen dat Plünn gehabt. Nun aber scheint's, dass ein guter Geist dat Plünn gerad jetzt in

dieser Stunde schweres Zweifel schickte. “Ich komm mit dir, Plünn, wenn’s dir recht ist, und – und dann legste mir mal die Karten, ja?” “Ja, komm nur mit, Bell, ich bin doch deine Freundin, und ich helf dir hätzlich jern.”

Dat gefährliche Schmitzens Plünn ist eine ehrsame Jungfrau, in Belle Alter und verdient sich als Inhaberin eines Reibkuchenbüdchens redlich seinen Lebensunterhalt. Im übrigen ist es eine künstlerisch veranlagte Natur mit Innenleben. Hinter seinem Reibkuchenbüdchen hat es einen taschentuchgrossen Garten mit einer Laube. In dieser Laube stehen drei Marmorfiguren, Glück, Liebe, Hoffnung. Für jahrelang gesparte neunzig Mark hat dat Plünn die Figuren auf einer Auktion ersanden und in die Laube gestellt, damit kein Regen dran kommt. Und nun hat es vor lauter Glück, Liebe, Hoffnung selbst kaum noch Platz in seiner Laube. Jeden Abend hängt dann Plünn eine kleine gelbe Laterne an den Arm der Hoffnung und murmelt vor sich hin: “Irgend wat will man doch von Leben haben.” Und wenn sie so dasteht mit knochig gefalteten Händen, gelbgesichtig und lang und schwarz, dann rufen die Kinder aus den nachbarlichen Fenstern: “süch ens die Hex!” und auch den Erwachsenen ist unheimlich zu Mut. Denn dat Plünn weiss mit der Zukunftt Bescheid. Und manch einem hat sie schon die Wahrheit und allerhand drüber hinaus gesagt.

Still und gedrückt hockt dat Bell in Plünns kleiner Küche. Dat Plünn aber tischt Reibkuchen auf, dazu einen guten Steinhäger. “Nää, leev Bell, wat ene Freud! So jemötlich ham wir lang nit mehr zusamme jesesse. Tja, leev Bell, Jlük haben is leicht, aber Jlük halte, is arg schwer. So – jetzt woll’n wir erstmal die Karten befragen.” Oeliger Dampf durchzieht die kleine Küche, auf dünnfädigen Beinen tastet sich eine Spinne die bröcklige Kalkwand herab. Tausend Reibkuchen tanzen vor Bells Augen –

“wat liegt in de Karte, Plünn?” “Nit jod, Bell, jarnit jod, hier die Kreuzzehn, ach du lever Jott – trink man noch ene Steinhäger, Bell. Ae-Ja, die Jüngsten sinn wir ja nit mehr. Nix für Unjut, Bell, do biss ja schön wie enen Mutterjottesbildche.” Kurz und gut, die Karten liegen schlecht, Bells jungem Glück drohen heillose Gefahren, der Herzkönig liegt bei einer andern – es ist allerhöchste Zeit, was zu unternehmen.

Aus ihrem alten faltigen Wollrock fördert die Plünn ein kleines gelbes Fläschen zu Tage. Ob dat Bell schon mal was von Liebestränken gehört hätte? Nun, dieser Liebestrank wäre Plünns teuerster Schatz, zusammengebraut aus edlen geheimnisvollen Kostbarkeiten. Zu keinem Menschen dürfe dat Bell ein Wort davon sprechen. Sieben Tage lang müsse sie dem Pitter ein halb Teelöffelche voll in die Kaffeetasse geben. Und nach sieben Tagen wär er ihr verfallen auf Gedeih und Verderb. In diesen sieben Tagen aber dürfe sie dem Pitter keinen Alkohol geben und nichts zu essen, das schwäche die Wirkung ab. Sie selbst solle ja nichts davon probieren, weil sie die bereits Entflammte, dann in einem Zustand von Liebesraserei geriete, der sie gefährliche Unvorsichtigkeiten begehen liesse. Was? Ob der Liebestrank nicht etwa giftig wär? Da muss dat Plünn aber doch mal herzlich lachen! Nun, man sage ja, dass Liebe Gift wär, und in dem Sinne wäre der Trank allerdings Gift. Uebrigens – wenn der Pitter beim Trinken das Gesicht verziehen würd, dann wär das ein Zeichen, dass er besonders empfänglich für den Trank wäre!

Pitter scheint überaus empfänglich für Liebestränke. Er verzieht sein Gesicht beim Kaffeetrinken, sagt aber nichts Sein enttäuschter Blick schweift über die ungewohnt leere Kaffeetafel. Dem Bell zieht sich das Herz zusammen. “Ich wollt heut nix esse, leeve Pitter, mir – mir is et nit jod im Magen.” Am zweiten Tag geht Pitter zwanzig Minuten

früher als sonst. Am dritten Tag sagt er: “Leev Bell, ich find de Kaffee, dä hätt ene leichte Beijeschmack.” Am vierten Tag meint er voll sichtlichen Unbehagens dat Bell wär jar nit mehr so lustig wie sonst, und dass sie ihn immer so eijenartig anstarre, dat hing wohl mit ihrer Magenverstimmung zusammen. Am fünften Tag hat er nur zehn Minuten Zeit und erkündigt sich schüchtern, wann dat Bell denn wieder gesund wär. Und am sechsten Tag – am sechsten Tag bleibt er einfach fort.

Dat Bell ist verzweifelt. Wie soll der Trank weiter wirken, wenn der Pitter nicht kommt? Sieben Tage sind vorgeschrieben. Dat Plünn muss helfen, dat Plünn, die einzige gute Freundin.

In ihrem Reibkuchenbüdchen ist dat Plünn nicht, in der Küche ist es auch nicht. Dat Bell stürzt in den winzigen Garten. Grautröpflich fisselt Regen vom Himmel. Am Gartenende glimmt eine kleine Lampe, sie hängt an der zärtlich einladenden Hand der Liebe. Dat Bell steht vor der Laube mit den drei Marmorfiguren – wird selbst marmorbleich und erstarrt zu einer vierten Figur. In der Laube sitzen, auf das äusserste zusammengequetscht, zwischen Glück, Liebe, Hoffnung dat Plünn und der Pitter. Vor der Laube steht im Regensriesel ein rostiger kleiner Tisch mit Reibkuchen, belegten Brötchen und Schnapsgläsern. In der lehmigen Trübe des kleinen Gartens, zwischen koboldhässlichen feuchten Kohlstrünken blüht zum Händefalten schön eine letzte einsame widrote Georgine. “Wenn de gehst, Pitter, kannst dir die Blum anstecke,” hat dat Plünn vor fünf Minuten gesagt – vor fünf Minuten...

Dem Pitter war seit Tagen nicht mehr gut im Magen gewesen, und dat Bell war immer so komisch. Er wollte doch lieber warten, bis et wieder gesund war und zu gemeinsamen Tafelfreuden aufgelegt. Als er solches denkend am Schmitzens

Reibkuchenbüdchen vorbei kam, rief ihn das Plünn an. Sie wär man nur so'n ärm schwach Fraumensch und könnt's nicht allein – nämlich die eine Figur in ihrer Laube was mehr nach links rücken. Der höfliche Pitter marschierte denn auch gleich in die Laube und befasste sich dort mit der Hoffnung. Dann kam dat Plünn mit einem Tablett, das es auf ein rostiges Tischchen stellte, quetschte den Pitter in die Laube und sich daneben – und sie wär ihm doch so dankbar, und so'n bescheidenen Imbiss dürfe er doch nicht verschmähen. “Dat is aber der letzte Steinhäger, Fräulein Schmitz, ich muss jetzt jehn.” “Na, noch einen leeve Pitter,” flehte schmelzend dat Plünn und umklammerte mit ihrer Knochenhand Pitters Schulter. So sah die beiden dat Bell.

Langsam sickert Verstehen in Bells erstarrtes Hirn. Sie wirft das rostige Tischchen beiseite und zerrt das Plünn aus Glück, Liebe, Hoffnung und Pitter hervor, “Do jämmerliche Ohrwurm, do aal verdrüschte Bunnestang, do fiese Hex – maach, dat ich dir ding schwatz Strähne usroppe.” “Beruhicht Uech doch, leev Frau Schommers.” Der zutiefst verschücherte Pitter versucht blümchenhaft zart den Streit zu schlichten. Das aber hat gerade noch gefehlt, dass der sich jetzt leibhaftig in Erinnerung bringt. Laut heult dat Bell auf: “do Hex – dä Pitter wolltste mir abjage – dafür musst ich ihm jede Tach von dem jiftige Zueg gewwe –” Pitter machte grenzenlos erstaunte Augen. Er hatte gute Ohren, doch der Weg vom Trommelfell bis zum Hirn ist bei ihm weit. Das Wort Gift gelangt in sein Hirn und rüttelt ihn im innersten auf. Vor zehn Jahren hat er Bücher gelesen aus Laumanns Aenn sein Leihbibliothek: “Das Gift der Venus.” “Das Gift in der seidenen Steppdecke” – das Gift! Immer waren Frauen Schuld, und die ganze letzte Zeit war ihm so schlecht und... Pitter wirft schreiend die Arme hoch: “Ich bin verjiftet!” Er rast fort. Ein Apothek muss er finden, zum Doktor muss er, falls überhaupt noch Rettung

möglich ist.

“Pitter!” schreien Bell und Plünn gleichzeitig auf und stürzen hinter ihm her. Aber sie sehen nur noch, wie er im Laufschrift um eine Ecke biegt. Und vor allen Türen stehen Menschen, aus allen Fenstern sehen Köpfe heraus. Wie vom Gottseibeius verfolgt, flieht dat Bell seinem Bäckerladen zu.

Mit rot geschwellenen Augen bedient dat Bell am Spätnachmittag im Laden, der vor Kunden nur so wimmelt. Wie ein Lauffeuer hat sie die Nachricht verbreitet: Schommers Bell hat den Pitter vergiftet. Dat Nettsche von der Devotionalienhandlung hat schon eine Sammlung vorgeschlagen, um en Extra-Mess für die arm Seel lesen zu lassen. Und den Milchmann sein Veronika hat gesehn, wie sein Gesicht grün wurde – “Leever Jott, wat ene schauerliche Anblick.” Allmählich gibt’s kaum einen Menschen mehr in der Sonnenjasse, der den quallvoll verstorbenen Pitter nicht bereits aufgebahrt erblickt hätte. “Hach wat nit all so in der Blüte der Jugend dahinjerafft wird.” “Ja, un jestern erst hat er mir noch jesagt, in einem Monat tät er sich für sein Ersparthes en Fahrrad kaufe.” “Wem fällt dat Jeld denn nun zu?” In der Eckwirtschaft “Zum Halven Hahn” sitzt der Installateur Pütz und trinkt sich Mut an, denn er hat es übernommen Pitters Grossmutter das beizubringen. Und dat Märzenichs Toni weiss sogar, dat der Kaplan Vowinckel jerad noch zurecht jekomme wär,” für die letzte Oelung zu geben.

Und nun sind sie alle im Laden von Schommers Bell und warten darauf, dass et verhaftet wird. Erst wenn et wirklich verhaftet wird, hat man die Gewissheit, dat et en richtichjehend Mörderin ist. Noch begnügt man sich mit hämischen blicken, gehässigen Flüstern und tränensatten Seufzern. In jeder Kehle aber steckt abschlussbereit der Schrei: Mörderin. Dat Bell fühlt dunkel Ungutes um sich herum und spürt den Hass um sich wie



tausend spitze Nadeln auf der Haut, doch ist sie unfähig, die ganze Ungeheuerlichkeit, die man ihr vorwirft, auch nur zu ahnen.

“Wat soll et sein, Herr?” fragt sie und wundert sich müde, dass plötzlich um sie herum alles so kirchenstill geworden ist. Vor ihr steht ein Schutzmann. “Sind Sie Frau Isabella Schommers?” Ehe dat Bell auch nur ja nicken kann, wird mit mächtigem Schwung die Ladentür aufgerissen. “Platz hier,” schreit eine kräftige Stimme, und ein wohl beliebter mittelgrosser Mann mit rotem Struwelhaar steuert der Theke zu. “Jestatten Sie, Herr Wachtmeister – August Susewind, Schneidermeister. Dürft ich Sie zum Telefonapparat bitten, Herr Wachtmeister, es handelt sich sicher um dat höchst lächerliche Jerücht über den angeblichen Ermordeten – hier ist die Telefonnummer von der Fabrik, wo er angestellt ist. Ich selbst hab soeben noch mit dem Toten gesprochen.” Der Schupo lächelt August Susewind wohlwollend an wie einen Betrunkenen. “Lasst et Uech weiter schmecke, jode Mann – ich bin hier im Dienst un han kein Zick för en lang Verzällche. Also Frau Schommers, ich komm nämlich wegen der Hundesteuer, die Ihr seit einem Jahr nit mehr –” “Aber mein Mucki ist doch seit anderthalb Jahr tot,” schlucht et Bell, dem zu frischem Kummer nun der Erinnerung altes Leid hinzufügt wird.

Kein Kunde ist mehr im Laden ausser dem Schneider Susewind. “Leev Frau Schommers,” sagt er, “haben Sie endlich den leichtfertigen Menschen von dannen jejagt? Unter uns jesagt, wat kann ein so unintelligenter junger Mann einem jeistvollen Weibe wie Sie bieten? Leev Frau Schommers, dürft ich Sie einladen für heut abend zum Tanzfest im “Halven Hahn?” “Ach, Herr Suswind, ich muss mich vor der Menschheit verstecke un en alte Frau wie ich jehört doch nit mehr auf ene Tanzboden.” Dann wirft der Schneider Susewind seine weisse breite Hand in die Luft: “Versündijen Sie sich nit,

Frau Schommers. Ein leckere Person wie Sie! En Staatsfraumensch wie Sie! Sie sind einem redlichen Mann nur Freud jeschaffen, un in der Stund komm ich Sie holen.”

Viel Rumor ist in der Wirtschaft “Zom Haven Hahn.” Die halbe Sonnengasse ist anwesend.

“Kleine Möwe flieg nach Helgoland,” spielt die Musik. “...ich bin einsam und verlassen – und ich sehne mich nach einem Kuss...” Dat Bell seufzt und Susewind drückt ihr die Hand. “Wat dürft ich Üch noch bestalle? Wie wär’s mit nem Anisetteche oder mit nem Jläsche Südwein? Dat Bell macht dankbare Augen. Mag dat Herz auch noch weh tun – gut tut’s einem ja doch, wenn man so umsorgt wird.

Die Glocken von Marin im Capitol schlagen Zehn. Die Tür knarrt auf, und dat Dotzens Annemie rauscht herein. Sie trägt ihr Staatsgewand aus rosa Kunstseide. Stolz und energisch strebt sie dem Tisch der Eltern zu. Hinter ihr geht bleich und schön, umflort vom Reiz dunkler Geheimnisse, der Pitter. “Es lebe die Leich,” ruft der Susewind, “en alljemeines Hoch op dä Pitter – Pitter, ich dacht Ihr wärt längst begraben?” Einen Anlass zum Lachen lässt man in der Sonnenjasse nit vorbeigehn und einen zum Trinken erst recht nicht. “Zum Wohl, zum Wohl – es lebe die Leich!”

Um Mitternacht haben alle einen kräftigen Schnaps, und dat glückselige Annemie halt sogar en Red: “Frau Schommers, ich wünsch Euch alles Gute. Ihr braucht enen starke Mann – und dat is der Susewind. Un dä Pitter, dä braucht en starke Frau – und dat bin ich. Heut mittag lief mir dä Pitter wie’n Wahnsinniger enegen: er wäre verjiftet, er müsst zum Doktor. Da bin ich denn mit ihm jejangen. So, Pitter, und nu ston op, jeh bei die Frau Schommers un sag, dat du ihr nit mehr bös bist, dat sie dir Rhizinusöl gegewe hat.” “Ein Hoch auf den Rhizinus-Pitter,” ruft Susewind. Pitter und Bell büssen ihren

ganzen dämonischen Reiz ein, doch der Menschheit kommen sie wieder menschlich nahe. Alle stossen miteinander an auf alle und alles, und da ist kein einziger unter den Sonnengässlern, der um Bell je gezweifelt hätt. Federleicht und munter wie Schneeflocken sind die Herzen der Sonnengässler – zum Bösen bereit, zum Guten entschlossen. Das Dunkle zieht sie an, und das Helle ist ihnen lieb. Durch Leid laufen sie gern mal ein halb Stunde weit entgegen, um sich dann am Hals der Freud auszuweinen. Schmerzenstränen und Glückstränen fliessen geschwisterlich in den gleichen Becher, aus dem der man der Freud zutrinkt – der Freud am Gestern, der Freud am Morgen, und vor allem der Freud am Jetzt. “Susewind solln wir einen Skat kloppe?” jauchzt der verkrünkelt Schuster Dotz, denn seine Frau ist mit dem Pitter beschäftigt und merkt gar nicht, dass ihr Mann sich heimlich eine neue Lager Bier und Wacholden bestellt hat. “Leeven Dotz, wenn ich wat Jutes im Arm hab – brauch ich kein schlechte Karte in der Hand,” meint Susewind und streicht über Bells Schulter. Zum dreissigsten Mal spielt die Musik: Annemarie – schenk mir den Abschiedskuss, weil ich jetzt scheiden muss.” “Dat Annemie wird mir noch janz jeck werden,” meint die Frau Dotz. Da aber geht Susewind zum Klavier und spielt eigenhändig einen uralten vergilbten Schlager: Oh Isabella, du bist mein Ideal. Er spielt mit Schmalz und Herzenstakt, mit Leidenschaft und mit Gefühl – und Alt und Jung singt mit.

Dat Schommers Plünn aber hockt einsam und fröstelnd in seiner morschen regenfeuchten Laube. In ihrem Scham hält dat Plünn ihr gelbes Laternechen. Vor einer Stund hat sie dat Laternechen vom Arm der Liebe genommen und kann sich immer noch nicht entschliessen, es wieder in den Arm der Hoffnung zu hängen.