

**LITTLE MISS TYPIST: THE REPRESENTATION OF
WHITE-COLLAR WOMEN IN WEIMAR GERMANY**

MARY MACFARLANE

PHD

THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND RELATED
LITERATURE**

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Abstract

This thesis takes the figure of the typist as the starting point for an exploration of the intersections of gender, modernity, technology and class in the Weimar Republic, drawing together the unique German discourse of *Angestelltenliteratur*, which developed out of a class-based sociology analysis, and feminist examinations of the New Woman. I argue that, although ultimately conservative, popular culture may offer lower-middle class women more opportunities for liberation and resistance than explicitly socially-critical discourses produced by elite men. In Chapter One I summarise the sociological understanding of the white-collar workers, and show that gender begins to operate as the discourse moves into mainstream media. I argue that Kracauer uses white-collar female characters in his socially-critical journalism to represent the white-collar class as feminised and passive, in contrast to an authentically masculine and virile working-class. In Chapters Two and Three, I explore the representation of the typist in three popular romance novels and six films (early romantic comedies). I trace the origins of the secretary/boss romance, which draws the apparently liberated working woman back into the framework of bourgeois marriage. In the films, I find that the dramatic conventions of disguise and mistaken identity are used to equate a secretary's role with a wife's, and therefore part of women's 'natural' function. Despite this conservatism, I show both films and novels are fascinated with the New Woman's freedoms. In Chapter Four, I read four novels which explicitly reject the 'marriage' ending, and show how they draw on the conventions established in the earlier works. I end with Irmgard Keun's Weimar novels, arguing that they achieve the critical relationship to modernity and mass culture that Kracauer was striving for, without patronising or condescending to the white-collar women they represent.

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Crème Mouson advert

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Without my family and my friends in York, London, Dublin, Berlin and elsewhere the past four years would hardly have been bearable, never mind the rich and rewarding time it has been. Thanks are due in particular to my parents, Neil and Megan Macfarlane, who have supported me

both financially and emotionally, and have never once doubted that I was doing exactly what I should be doing. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to Deb Taylor and Helen Finch, my best friend and my partner respectively, because I cannot thank you two enough for the support and love you have given me.

Declaration

I declare that no part of this thesis has been submitted for examination at this or any other university; that it is entirely my own work with all quotations and references fully cited; that no part of it has been published elsewhere (although I presented a paper based on Chapter Three at the Real Things conference at the University of York in July 2007); and that I am happy for the University library to loan or copy this thesis on request, subject to the usual conditions.

Mary Macfarlane, September 2007

Crème Mouson Image



Das Gesicht unserer Zeit!

Schneller, schneller — heult es durch die Strahlen, schrillt es durch die Fernsprecher, knattern die Schreibmaschinen, schneller, schneller jazzt und trommelt es durch die Nacht, stöhnen es die morgendlich überfüllten Straßenbahnen. 100% Leistungssteigerung, Rekorde, laufendes Band — das sind die Zeichen unserer Zeit.

Wer kann da noch mitmachen, ohne frühzeitig zu altern, ohne daß Erschlafung und Abspannung sich gar bald in seine Gesichtszüge eingraben! Gift fand sein Gegengift: Gegen abgesspannte, erschlafte Haut wurde Creme Mouson geschaffen, jahrelang wurde daran gearbeitet, bis der Grad von Vollkommenheit erreicht wurde, der Creme Mouson heute vor allen anderen Hautpflegemitteln auszeichnet. Millionen Frauen wissen um die Unfehlbarkeit der Creme Mouson.

CREME MOUSON

Crème Mouson advert

Berlin Illustrirt Zeitung (10th November 1929), p. 2024
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Introduction

Crème Mouson

In November 1929, an advertisement for a moisturiser called *Crème Mouson* appeared in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. ‘Das Gesicht unserer Zeit!’ it proclaims, and the copy - written in a modern sans-serif font, whilst the editorial content still appeared in the older black-letter font - is sharp and fragmented, with the repeated word ‘faster’ invoking the speed and pressure of contemporary life:

Schneller, schneller – heult es durch die Straßen, schrillt es durch die Fernsprecher, knattern die Schreibmaschinen, schneller, schneller jazzt und trommelt es durch die Nacht, stöhnen es die morgendlich überfüllten Straßenbahnen. 100% Leistungssteigerung, Rekorde, laufendes Band – das sind die Zeichen unserer Zeit.¹

Framing and illustrating this text is a montage composed of various images of modern metropolitan life: a policeman, a motor car, a tram and Art Deco skyscrapers; telegraph poles, a telephone and a clock; a black jazz musician with a banjo; an aeroplane, an airship and a pilot with goggles; a reinforced steel structure and cogs. But this is not all, for the advertisement must sell face cream:

Wer kann noch mitmachen, ohne frühzeitig zu altern, ohne daß Erschlaffung und Abspannung sich gar bald in seine Gesichtszüge eingraben! Gift fand sein Gegengift: Gegen abgespannte, erschlafte Haut wurde Crème Mouson geschaffen, jahrelang wurde daran gearbeitet, bis der Grad von Vollkommenheit erreicht wurde, der Crème Mouson heute vor allen anderen Hautpflegemitteln auszeichnet. Millionen Frauen wissen um die Unfehlbarkeit der Crème Mouson.²

¹ Crème Mouson advert (*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 10 November 1929), p. 2024. ‘Faster, faster – howling through the streets, shrieking through the loudspeaker, clattering on the typewriter, faster, faster jazzing and drumming through the night, the groaning of the over-full trams in the morning. One hundred percent increase in production rate, records, conveyor belt – these are the signs of our time.’

² Crème Mouson advert (1929), p. 2024. ‘Who can be a part of this without aging prematurely, without the sleeplessness and exhaustion etching themselves on your features! Poison has found its antidote: Crème Mouson was made for exhausted, worn-out skin, and then refined for years until we achieved the degree of perfection which marks out Crème Mouson from all other skincare products. Millions of women know of the reliability of Crème Mouson.’

And so, four women feature in the montage, as well. In the very centre are two young women out in public, fashionably dressed in hats and coats. A third looks at her watch and smiles confidentially into a telephone receiver, apparently arranging a date. The fourth taps at a typewriter. In front of her is a sleek desk lamp, and behind her we can just see the torso of an elegant masculine figure, who is presumably her boss. All four women have short hair: they are modern, elegant and chic, encountering the city and the office on their own terms, and perfectly at home in a world their mothers would not recognise. Of the two young women who appear to be in the street, one glances out at the viewer with an alert, self-possessed, and slightly flirtatious smile. But, if this charming and elegant lady is the modern woman with whom potential consumers are supposed to identify, what does she know of the masculine world of cogs, steel pylons, conveyor belts and 100% increases in productivity?

On the one hand, new technology and a rapidly changing commercial culture; on the other hand, women and glamour. The image that unites these two strands is the typist.

Outside Germany: typing and women

Nearly a century and a half after the invention of the typewriter, it is overwhelmingly associated with women, and indeed, has been since the earliest decades of its use. Yet, as Margery W. Davies and others have argued, the typewriter was not inevitably a woman's technology.³ Writing machines had been built before, but Christopher Sholes's 1867 typewriter, mass-produced by Remington, hit the market at a particularly fortuitous moment. Small, family-owned businesses were growing into corporations, and local markets were expanding across national and international borders. As the amount of clerical work increased, companies looked for a cheaper way of producing documents than the traditional male clerks and their elegant longhand. At the same time, many feminist organisations seized on the typewriter, hoping that it would provide middle-class women with an alternative employment to that of governess, and set up typing schools. George Gissing's novel *The Odd Women* (1893) revolves around such a

³ For more detailed labour histories of the numbers of women entering white-collar work in the UK and USA, see Gregory Anderson, *The White-Blouse Revolution* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988); Margery W. Davies, *Women's Place is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers 1870 – 1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982) and Lisa M. Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

school.⁴ For its heroines, ‘feminism is the theory and typing the practice’, as Christopher Keep comments.⁵ Thus, it was the combination of structural changes, technological innovation and grassroots political action that brought women into the office in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Once there, however, the same structural changes limited their role, something which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter One.

Both Christopher Keep and Morag Shiach have written on the way typing is represented in American and British fiction, focussing particularly on the perception of typing as a utopian feminist activity and the material conditions under which typists worked, as portrayed in a range of contemporary texts. As Shiach writes, ‘[t]he question of whether this increased entry into the public sphere of the office represented, or was experienced as, emancipation is significantly more complex’. Examining a range of texts produced in the last decades of the nineteenth century, including Gissing’s *The Odd Women* and Grant Allen’s *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897),⁶ Shiach finds ‘[u]ncertainty about the typewriter as a technology of emancipation’.⁷ By the time she reaches the 1920s, and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, the typist has become a ‘figure of alienated modern femininity’. Shiach ends with the beach scene in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, where Leopold Bloom watches typist Gertie MacDowell and masturbates. She concludes that ‘[a]s a typist, the woman worker becomes available, visible, sexualised [...] her entry into the public sphere offers different sorts of opportunities’.⁸

⁴ George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, ed. with introd. by Patricia Ingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000). [Orig. 1893].

⁵ Christopher Keep, ‘The Cultural Work of the Typewriter Girl’, *Victorian Studies*, 40 (1997). p. 409.

⁶ Grant Allen, *The Type-Writer Girl* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1897). Published under the feminised *non-de-plum* Olive Pratt Rayner.

⁷ Morag Shiach, ‘Modernity, labour and the typewriter’, in Hugh Stevens and Caroline Howlett (eds), *Modernist Sexualities* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 122.

⁸ Shiach (2000), pp. 124 and 126.

Keep, like Shiach, is interested in the sexualisation of the typist, and the way in which, in moving into the public sphere and becoming visible, the typist moves into the territory of the male gaze. Although *The Odd Women* has suffragists as its central characters and a liberal political bent, Keep argues that the authorial consciousness sides with (male) Everard Barfoot, and frequently shows the feminist radical Rhoda through his eyes, which ‘scrutinize[-]’ her for signs of femininity or heterosexuality and eventually ‘impose’ them. Despite her stated antipathy to the institution of marriage, Rhoda ‘succumbs to the pressure exerted by Everhard’s gaze’ and falls in love with him.⁹ Thus, Gissing – and Grant Allen, whom Keep also discusses – configure the typewriter girl as ‘the object of scopophilic desire’. Keep, however, makes a stronger distinction between the experiences of real typists and representation than Morag Shiach:

These novels do not so much document or mirror the life of the woman typist as produce her as the site of erotic attraction for the men who might otherwise be threatened by this sudden invasion of the spheres of masculine privilege.¹⁰

Keep reads the representation of the typist as gendered spectacle, not as a reflection of real typists’ lived experience, but as an ideological move on the part of a conservative, masculine establishment, containing the newly mobile woman within the established gender hierarchy by reminding her that she is, first and foremost, the object of someone else’s erotic gaze. Yet this does not altogether negate the emancipatory potential of the women’s move into offices: the figure of the typewriter girl was also one that women could adopt and re-write according to their own ends.

Of these two examinations of the representation of typists, my work is closest to Keep’s: I am not concerned with the gap between the representation and the experiences of real typists, or the question of whether women’s entry into the office was (or was experienced as) a step towards women’s emancipation. Rather, I read the texts in which typists are represented as a cultural response to the emergence of the female office worker, situated geographically, politically and

⁹ Keep (1997), p. 414.

¹⁰ Keep (1997), p. 413.

generically, marketed to particular audiences and serving particular class and gender ideologies. First, however, let us situate the Weimar typist in her historical and local circumstances.

The Typist in the Weimar Republic

Weimar women were propelled into the office not only by the structural changes in the economy, which applied across the developed regions of North America and Western Europe, but also by the calamity of the First World War and the ensuing hyperinflation, which impoverished daughters of bourgeois families who would otherwise have lived on private incomes and pensions. After the 1919 revolution, German women also had the vote, and had begun, in Katharina von Ankum's phrase, 'to expect a hitherto unimaginable mobility and independence'.¹¹ This study is the first to analyse the representation of the typist across the popular film and fiction of the Weimar Republic, showing how the typist figures in academic, popular and oppositional literature as the embodiment of a nexus of anxieties about gender, class, rationalisation and technology.

Scholarly examination of the short-haired, short-skirted New Woman in late Weimar Germany has, however, long recognised the typist as a superlative example of the type. In her 1986 study of the 'rationalised' and sexually-reformed New Woman, Atina Grossmann sites her explicitly in 'office and factory, bedroom and kitchen, just as surely as in café, cabaret and film'.¹² In the context of the Weimar Republic, 'rationalisation' signified more than just the mechanisation of industrial and commercial practices: often synonymous with *Neue Sachlichkeit* ("New Objectivity") or Americanisation, it stood for the modernisation of private attitudes and lifestyles as well. The New Woman was not only modernised in her working practices, but also in her clothing, her leisure pursuits, and – perhaps most alarmingly for a conservative, male-dominated establishment - her stance on sexual, romantic and procreative matters. Young working women

¹¹ Katharina von Ankum, 'Introduction' to Katharina von Ankum (ed), *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (London: University of California Press, 1997).

¹² Atina Grossmann, 'Girllkultur or Thoroughly Rationalised Female: A New Woman in Weimar Germany?', in Judith Friedlander, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Alice Kessler-Harris and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (eds), *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 64.

were at the forefront of rationalisation, Grossmann argues, 'in mechanized offices with typewriters, filing cabinets, and switchboards', as well as on Taylorised factory assembly lines and behind the counters of the new chain-stores. And again, we see the typist cited as a prime specimen of the type:

If some particularly worried about the romantic and sexual fantasies of typists and salesgirls (sitting too long could be overly stimulating, like horseback riding!), others worried about the eroticisation (literally *Erotisierung*) of the factory atmosphere in much the same terms.¹³

According to Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, white-collar work was 'the fastest growing area of female employment, though it had the lowest absolute number of women'.¹⁴ Perhaps it was the sector's rapid growth that made white-collar women disproportionately visible: what cannot be disputed is that they were. In 1932, Siegfried Kracauer observed, '[t]o the extent that working women have appeared at all in popular film, they have usually, until very recently, been cheerful young private secretaries or typists who take dictation for the fun of it and do a little typing'.¹⁵ Outnumbered by shopgirls and especially by female assembly-line workers in the real post-WWI economy, typists predominated in the image-economy represented in mass culture. Vicki Baum was drawing on a cultural trend when she made the carefree flapper girl of *Menschen im Hotel* a typist.¹⁶ As advertisers, novelists and film producers realised that the image of the liberated, independent metropolitan woman would sell, the typewriter became nearly as potent a symbol of modern femininity as the *Bubikopf* hairstyle, and images of typists proliferated in the developing mass media.

¹³ Grossmann (1986), p. 67.

¹⁴ Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, 'Beyond *Kinder, Kueche, Kirche*: Weimer Women in Politics and Work', in Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann and Marion Kaplan (eds), *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), p. 51.

¹⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Working Women', in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (eds), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 238. Orig. 'Mädchen im Beruf' *Der Querschnitt* 12:4 (April 1932).

¹⁶ Vicki Baum, *Menschen im Hotel* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1929).

Academic work on this phenomenon includes an article published in 2000 by Angelika Führich, who discussed typist protagonists in two films, examining ‘the ways in which [the New Woman] is imagined and negotiated as a spectacle in terms of gender, technology, work and consumption’, and arguing that the films’ ‘conventional conclusions’ are ‘an expression of male anxieties about the economic crisis and their fears of the competition from working women’.¹⁷ Similarly, recent scholarship on Irmgard Keun, one of the authors discussed in this thesis, has drawn attention to her heroines *as* typists, reflecting a new interest in the typist as a figure of modernity. Katharina von Ankum describes how ‘the gender-specialised profession of office-worker/employee replaced that of servant girl as a typically female occupation in the 1920s [...] [T]he female office employee was perceived as the typical working woman of the masses’.¹⁸ Barbara Kosta ascribes a similar contemporary relevance to the office girl:

Contraposed to the image of the femme fatale and the femme enfant of the silver screen, the clerical worker graced the streets of the metropolis. These stylized young women, who took their cue from the flickering images of movie stars and glamour, performed in offices as secretaries, stenographers, typists, and salesgirls. Predominantly between ages of 18 and 25, this generation stood at the vortex of social change. Irmgard Keun’s first novel [...] contributed to the numerous representations of the modern woman in her portrayal of Gilgi, a young stenographer and typist who belonged to the class of female white-collar workers that rapidly emerged during the 1920s.¹⁹

The typist heroine, as we will see, allowed authors and film-makers to represent (and eroticise) the new mixed-sex office, as well as to exploit the mechanical iconography of the rationalised age. Indeed, there was no contradiction perceived between the erotic and rational: rather, the juxtaposition of female bodies (or body parts) and mechanical elements formed a new, contemporary language of eroticism. Siegfried Kracauer’s observation that ‘the hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls’ is well-known: Führich adds a typist-flavoured variation when she describes a revue which explored ‘urban culture, encompassing work, leisure and consumption’ and included ‘a scene depicting typists in modern offices’:

¹⁷ Angelika Führich, ‘Woman and Typewriter: Gender, Technology and Work in Late Weimar Film’, *Women in German Yearbook*, 16 (2000), pp.152 and 162.

¹⁸ Katharina von Ankum, ‘Gendered Urban Spaces in Irmgard Keun’s *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen*’ in von Ankum, *WITM* (1997), p. 163.

¹⁹ Barbara Kosta, ‘Unruly Daughters and Modernity: Irmgard Keun’s *Gilgi-eine von uns*’, *The German Quarterly*, 68:3 (1995), pp. 271-2.

Significantly, their collective portrait was entitled “Schreibmaschinenbild” [...] The chorus girls—uniformly dressed in dark skirts and white blouses—are placed in rows on the keys of a giant typewriter, their faces covered by key tops.

Fifty-three dancing girls are arranged to form the standard QWERTY keyboard. This “typewriter image”, says Führich, ‘illustrates the conflation of woman with machine, and machine with objectification, consumerism and modernity’.²⁰ In a third example, a film entitled *Es leuchten die Sterne* (1938) – which to the best of my knowledge has not yet received academic attention – a typist dreams of becoming a big revue star. The wall of the office lifts, curtain-like, to reveal a stage, complete with syncopated chorus girls in military-inspired costumes dancing on human-sized typewriter keys. At the end of the musical number, the camera returns not to the dreaming girl, but to the Mercedes-brand typewriter.

There is, then, no need to contradict Vibeke Rützou Petersen’s comment that ‘[t]he typist or stenographer was the most visible emblem of the independent woman in the Weimar years’.²¹ Quoting from Lynda J. King’s study of Vicki Baum’s collaboration with the House of Ullstein, Petersen indicates why this might have been the case:

Herman Ullstein of Ullstein Press once suggested that Vicki Baum write a novel “with a hard-working girl as its central character ... someone like his secretary.” Here a stenographer is metonymously made to stand for the “working girl,” and it appears, therefore, that this conflation of the working-class woman with the female clerical worker signifies the lowest position on the class ladder that Ullstein ever considered suitable for its literature.²²

Despite the fact that her pay was frequently lower, the typist retained an aura of middle-class respectability denied to the factory girl. Office work had an intellectual element, and was also thought to be cleaner than office work: it was thus suitable not only for literate girls of the working classes, but also those of the middle-class. As we will see, the perception of cleanliness

²⁰ Führich (2000), p. 157.

²¹ Vibeke Ruetzou Petersen, *Women and Modernity in Weimar Germany: Reality and Representation in Popular Fiction* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Book, 2001), p. 84.

²² Petersen (2001), p. 77.

was not necessarily an accurate one. Office girls wore protective sleeves and sometimes aprons, and, as Hans Speier recounts, at least one company had to purchase a special cleaning agent in order for its employees to wash at the end of the day, as ordinary soap wouldn't shift the ink from the machines. Despite this, office-work continued to attract the daughters of the bourgeoisie, deprived of suitable mates by the trenches of the First World War and impoverished by the ensuing hyperinflation.

***Angestellten* discourse**

The contested class status of the typist will be a major theme in this work. Although similar structural and technological developments could be found across Western Europe and North America, the German response to them was unique. Traditionally, German literary criticism has classified several of the works discussed in this thesis (Braune's *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*, Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* and Keun's *Gilgi: eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*) by the class, rather than the gender, of their protagonists. More than anywhere else in the industrialised West, Germany struggled to classify its new and growing sector of white-collar workers, or *Angestellten*, eventually creating a new legal category in order to provide them with health and pension insurance.²³ Economically insecure, yet possessed of a bourgeois class-consciousness, scrimping on their rents and other necessities in order to spend their tiny disposable incomes on mass entertainment and other fashionable pursuits, the white-collar workers baffled a generation of sociologists and cultural critics schooled in Marxist thought. If the traditional terms of analysis divided society into an independent bourgeoisie and a dependent proletariat, and posited a deep and abiding antagonism between the two, how did social theory accommodate a social group with some traits in common with one side, and some traits in common with the other? The best-known of these works outside Germany are Hans Speier's *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler*, which implicates the employee class in the Nazi Party's success, and Siegfried Kracauer's *Die Angestellten: aus dem neuesten Deutschland*, a collection of articles written for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.²⁴ As we will see in

²³ See Chapter One.

²⁴ Hans Speier, *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), and Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Angestellten* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp-Verlag, 1971). [Originally

Chapter One, both of these books reflect a sociological tendency which was current during the Weimar Republic itself: Kracauer's book was first published in 1930, whilst Speier originally completed his in 1932 but was unable to publish it under the Nazi regime.

In Kracauer's view, as we will see, white-collar workers consume affirmative mass culture uncritically, giving their wages back to the dominant culture industries in return for a dazzling commercial experience which blinds them to their actual condition. Female office-workers outnumber male office-workers in his columns. They are populated with 'kleine[-] Tippmädel', or little miss typists, girls with their heads full of popular music, film heroes and glamorous bars. (Indeed, the image on the cover of my Suhrkamp Taschenbuch edition of *Die Angestellten* is a female-coded typewriter, rather than any non-gendered image of the office.) These typists are the sisters of the Little Shopgirls who make up the imaginary audience in 'Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino'. There too, young, white-collar women are figured as the primary consumers of mass culture. Each column finishes with an affirmation of the film's intended effect on its audience, which is characterised as 'the little shopgirls', a soubriquet which entirely erases their individual perceptions and reactions.²⁵ Despite his occasional delicious swipes at the more powerful members of society ('In reality it may not often happen that a scullery maid marries the owner of a Rolls Royce. But doesn't every Rolls Royce owner dream that scullery maids dream of rising to his level?'),²⁶ Kracauer repeatedly casts female employees as the uncritical mass. As I argue in Chapter One, this serves to feminise both mass culture and the mass itself: where Kracauer seeks to write about class, he does so in terms of

published as *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*. (Frankfurt-am-Main: Societäts-Verlag, 1930.) Published in English as *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. by Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1998.) When the Nazi party took over, Speier had completed a book on the subject of the employees. It was due to be published in 1933, but by the time it came to press, it was not possible to release a book with obvious Marxist leanings. At this stage, Speier had left Germany and was living in New York. The book remained unpublished until the late 1970s, when there was a resurgence of interest in German *Angestelltensoziologie*, led by Jürgen Kocka. Kocka persuaded Speier to revise and publish his work, and it eventually appeared in 1977 under the title *Die Angestellten vor dem Nationalsozialismus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der deutschen Sozialstruktur 1918-1933* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977). In the eighties, Speier translated his own work into English, and it was published in 1986 with the title *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler*.

²⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies' in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. by Thomas Y. Levin (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). See Chapter One.

²⁶ Kracauer, *TMO* (1995) p. 292.

gender, just as (I show) where romance novels and films seek to delineate acceptable narratives of femininity, they do so in terms of class. But this feminisation of the mass also has links to the grand narrative of the Weimar Republic articulated in Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, wherein a crisis of male subjectivity culminates in Germany's descent into fascism.²⁷ The little miss typists and shopgirls in Kracauer's work, therefore, are not represented honestly – I should even go so far as to say not represented ethically – but are a projection of an elite male's concerns about the politics of violence which another male elite is disseminating. An analysis of the popular novels and films in which the typist figure appears, from a perspective which is alert to the nuances of gender and cultural elitism, is long overdue.

Popular culture and Women

In the introduction to her study of the New Woman in Weimar-era novels, Kerstin Barndt claims that, although discussion of the New Woman was restricted to metropolitan bohemia and modernist or feminist publications before the First World War, she exploded into popular consciousness – and therefore popular culture – in the 1920s: 'Hier werden die Bilder der "Neuen Frau" in Filmen und Romanen, Schlagertexten und Fotoreportagen, auf der Bühne und auf Reklametafeln multipliziert.'²⁸ The New Woman, continues Barndt, became a 'Massenphänomen'.²⁹ I make, therefore, no apology for the fact that the majority of texts discussed in this work are from the popular culture side of the high / low culture split: further, I submit that subjecting popular texts to sophisticated analysis is a critical part of the project to re-

²⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, ed. by Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). [Orig. 1947].

²⁸ Kerstin Barndt, *Sentiment und Sachlichkeit: Der Roman der Neuen Frau in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2003), p. 10. 'Here, the pictures of the New Woman are multiplied films and novels, popsongs and photo-reportage, on the stage and billboards.'

²⁹ Barndt (2003), p. 16.

address the traditional focus on masculine experiences and accounts of modernity. Since the publication of Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity*, literary critics have faced the challenge to imagine an analysis of modernity in which 'feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity'.³⁰ In my view, this re-imagining of modernity cannot take place without subjecting popular or mass culture texts to the scrutiny traditionally reserved for high culture texts. This is, firstly, because many women had no option but to engage primarily with popular culture texts, being excluded from engagement with the canon of high art by a lack of education, leisure, or the material resources to access it; and, secondly, because popular or mass culture was frequently gendered as feminine, as we have seen.

Furthermore, the perceived boundary between popular culture and high literary culture has become increasingly porous. In his influential essay 'Mass culture as Woman', Andreas Huyssen argued that: 'the repudiation of *Trivialliteratur* has always been one of the constitutive features of a modernist aesthetic intent on distancing itself and its products from the trivialities and banalities of everyday life [...] Mass culture has always been the hidden subtext of the modernist project'.³¹ Maria DiBattista adds that 'high moderns [...] nevertheless regarded low cultural phenomena and entertainments unique to their times – the popular press, cinema, music hall, and the "art" of advertising – as an inalienable part of modern life, hence unavoidable subject matter whose forms as well as content might be assimilated or reworked, playfully imitated or seriously criticised, in their own art'.³² Eliot and Joyce, after all, both have typists in their works – Lawrence Rainey discusses the parallels between Eliot's typist and those that appear in contemporary realistic and melodramatic fiction in 'Eliot Among the Typists: writing *The Waste Land*' – and the experiences of the lowly clerk were given literary expression by none other than

³⁰ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 10.

³¹ Andreas Huyssen, *After the great divide : modernism, mass culture, postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP 1986), p. 47.

³² Maria DiBattista, 'Introduction' to Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid (eds) *High and Low Moderns: literature and culture 1889 – 1939* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 5.

Franz Kafka.³³ Similarly, Irmgard Keun, whom I discuss in Chapter Four, employs many of the experimental techniques and formal self-consciousness associated with the high literary modernists, but her portrayals of the modern young woman depend on references to popular fiction, advertising, films and even fashion for their vitality.³⁴

My approach to popular culture, then, draws on the insights of cultural studies and recent work in German studies: as Petersen has written, 'popular culture is a forum where debates about subjectivity, gender, sexuality, social conditions, and nationhood were, in the early twentieth century, discussed with as much fervor as they were in what was traditionally known as high culture'.³⁵ Whilst almost all of the popular fiction texts and films discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this work return the typist to the bourgeois home through the traditional device of romance, marriage, the particular terms in which they do so, and the objects they place in the path of the romantic resolution tell us a great deal about the concerns of contemporary audiences. In the semiotics of popular culture in the nineteen twenties, a typist is a woman embracing the new freedoms and technologies available to her: will these new phenomena lead her to happiness or prove a distraction from her true womanly fulfilment?

I am also choosing to read fiction and film together. Although I make a point of distinguishing between the different generic traditions to which romance novels and films belong, I assume that they occupy a similar position *vis-à-vis* the trends and concerns of the culture which produced them. In this, I draw on the example of Richard W. McCormick's recent book, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature and "New Objectivity"*:

Just as German literature ought no longer to be studied as the crucial aesthetic and philosophical expression of a national culture [...] neither will the cinema be studied as high art or as a formal

³³ Lawrence Rainey, 'Eliot Among the Typists: Writing *The Waste Land*', *Modernism/Modernity* 12:1 (April 2005), pp. 27-84.

³⁴ See Leo A. Lensing, 'Cinema, Society and Literature in Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*', *Germanic Review* 9:4 (1985), pp. 129-134. My discussion of Keun also draws on Laura Sopcak, *The Appropriation and Critique of the Romance Novel, Film and Fashion in Irmgard Keun's Weimar Prose: Humor, Intertextuality and Popular Discourse* (Unpublished dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999).

³⁵ Petersen (2001), p. 5.

system that transcends political, economic and cultural determinations at regional, national and international levels. This, too, is why I find it productive to juxtapose literary texts and film texts against a common historical context: not to read them solely against exclusive aesthetic traditions, or as transparent reflections of some more crucial social reality, but rather to see them as related but distinct articulations of overlapping and often contradictory cultural discourses.³⁶

McCormick goes on to quote Anton Kaes's comments on the continuing utility of Kracauer's analysis of Weimar-period film:

Although we rejected Kracauer's claims about "the" Germans, we were convinced by his basic premise that films must not be separated from their political, social and cultural habitat. We learned that films signify something not *in abstracto*, but concretely at a certain moment in time, at a certain place and for a certain audience.³⁷

My reading of film, therefore, is influenced by Kracauer – particularly his insight that films 'smuggle in a respectable way of thinking', for my analysis of film is guided by the drive to identify the specific way of thinking that this particular time and place deems respectable – but with a constant awareness of Kracauer's blindness to gender. Patrice Petro first raised this issue in *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Kracauer's film criticism, Petro shows, assumed a male subject and therefore elided any possibility of female-subject identification. In her view, a female-identified genre like melodrama:

compels us to acknowledge a more complex notion of "emancipation," [...] the appeal of the film melodrama derived from its attempt to speak to the promises and failures of sexual and economic liberation in Weimar, and thus to the fundamental contradictions in women's lives.³⁸

The films which I discuss are not melodramas but romantic comedies, but I draw on Petro's analysis to show that they still contain emancipatory elements for a female-identified spectator. I read the genre novels and novellas in Chapter Two similarly, as neither wholly reactionary nor wholly emancipatory: a complex interaction of impulses, with moments of liberation resolved

³⁶ Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature and 'New Objectivity'* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 11.

³⁷ McCormick (2001), p. 11.

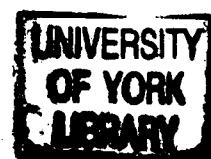
³⁸ Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 218-9.

but not wholly vanquished by the drive to absorb the working woman back into the bourgeois space of family and marriage.

Thesis statement

Thus, this account draws as much on traditional German accounts of the *Angestellten*, which have their roots in Marxist sociological analysis, as it does on current scholarship about women's experience of modernity. I argue that the frenzy of representation which surrounded the typist in the Weimar Republic must be read not only as the product of increasing anxiety about middle-class women's new visibility in the city streets and the office, but also of increasing anxiety about the middle-class as a whole. Long before *From Caligari to Hitler*, his seminal reading of the crisis of German masculinity in Weimar film, Kracauer's *Die Angestellten* expresses his concern about the white-collar classes in terms of a fear of the feminising effects of mass (or 'distraction') culture, a fear which is reflected in some of the popular films and novels of the period. Conversely, the popular representation of women's new relationship with technology must be discussed as much in terms of class as gender, not only because it is important not to neglect the material realities of working women's lives, but also because representations of gender-acceptable goals and behaviour are always class-specific. Even within the relatively unsophisticated genre romance novels and films discussed in this thesis, the New Woman is represented as occupying a fraught and uncertain class position which is only resolved by her ascension to an idealised, specifically bourgeois state of heterosexual marriage. To qualify as a happy ending, the match must not only guarantee financial security and social status, but the lovers' pursuit of these necessities must be concealed, for the myth of the disinterested love-match must be maintained. As we will see, those texts that operate within specific genres draw on all the generic conventions at their convenience to bind the typist, a potentially liberated figure of middle-class womanhood, back within the boundaries of marriage and the family. In doing so, they create a new set of expectations and clichés which other texts respond to or react against.

Chapter One provides a history of *Angestellten* sociology in Germany. Although the economic and technological changes that led to the expansion of the clerking or white-collar sector – and



women's entry into the office – were taking place elsewhere in the industrialised West, a specific sociological discourse arose in Germany to explain and interpret this phenomenon. As well as establishing the class characteristics of the *Angestellten* class as a background to the novels and films discussed later on, this chapter looks at the discourse of *Angestelltensoziologie* as it moves from academic analysis into the mainstream by examining texts by Emil Lederer, an article published by Hans Speier (whose post-war book, *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler*, is an influential study of the new middle-class's political affiliations towards the end of the Weimar period) and Kracauer's *Die Angestellten*. I show that, as the discussion moves away from academic sociology into journalism, gender becomes increasingly important. Kracauer in particular uses various rhetorical strategies to position himself as superior to those he is discussing, and uses colonial, class and gender hierarchies to legitimise this position. Furthermore, his differing reactions to the male and female employees he represents betray an unconscious anxiety about the feminisation of the white-collar class that filters into wider debates about Weimar modernity.

In Chapter Two, I turn to the representation of the typist in romance novels.³⁹ The purpose of this chapter is to establish some of the genre conventions for the romantic novel which takes modernity as its setting, the major one of which is the final marriage to the boss. Despite an interest in the environment and conditions of the modern working woman, the novels effectively seal her back into a conservative worldview by marrying her to the boss, neutralising the potentially threatening archetype of the independent woman and the sexualised office space. However, I show how, even within this relatively formulaic and predictable fiction, the representation of the city, technology and the sexualisation of the office environment are all foregrounded. The first novel represents the masculine world of business and new technology as a series of threats to the heroine, which are only resolved by her marriage to the hero. Marriage implies an acceptance of protection and a movement out of the public sphere. The second novel begins with a movement from rural childhood home to metropolitan independence, a trope that

³⁹ The three novels discussed in detail (*Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt* by Adolf Sommerfeld (Berlin and Lichtenfelde: Continent Edition, 1932); Fedor von Zobeltitz, *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit* (Berlin: Im Verlag Ullstein, 1930) and Grete Rothberg, *Seine kleine Sekretärin* (Halle: Fünf-Türme-Verlag, 1934)) all date from the early 1930s, as do the films discussed in the third chapter. This represents the material I was able to access during my research in Berlin and Leipzig.

will recur in both the films and the novels discussed in the final chapter. Once in the city, the novel pays close attention to modern urban phenomena, and, I argue, dramatises many of Kracauer's concerns about the ambivalent class position of the white-collar worker and the gender confusions which surround the metropolitan 'distraction' culture. The third was published in 1934, and is a radical and almost nonsensical re-imagining of the typist novel in the context of Nazi ideology. It too begins with the heroine leaving her provincial home and coming to the city, but it quickly moves back out of the city and to a German aristocrat's castle, the more authentic locus of a new German identity.

In Chapter Three, I turn to films. With their extra visual material, the interplay of images of modernity and liberation and the restoration of bourgeois norms becomes increasingly sophisticated. Moving on from the fiction chapter, I concentrate on the use of traditional comedy conventions, particularly mistaken identity and substitution plots, in the development of the secretary / boss romance. Much of the humour of the mistaken identity plot centres around the substitution of someone of higher social status for someone of lower status, and reinforces the point made in the previous chapter: secretaries and wives are, in at least one film, literally interchangeable. I discuss four of these films in detail, concentrating on the films' debts to realism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (or New Objectivity) film aesthetics, which dictated simplicity and an absence of ornamentation, their depictions of technology and work, the gender and class hierarchies they establish, and the degree of agency they allow their heroines. In a postscript to the chapter, I look at a film produced during the Nazi period: here, the image of the liberated New Woman as secretary is turned on its head, as the secretary / boss romance becomes an analogy for how the German people should love their Führer.

The final chapter looks at four novels which I have chosen to term 'oppositional texts': those that position themselves as a new perspective in opposition to the mass cultural texts discussed in the earlier chapters. The most obvious and consistent aspect of this oppositional stance is that none of the novels ends with an engagement or a wedding. The degree of sophistication they bring to popular representations of New Women in general and of typists in particular varies, but all four deliberately use some genre conventions and expectations in order to subvert or challenge others. The intermediate class status of the typist is nicely demonstrated in the first

two novels, Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* and Rudolf Braune's *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*, which represent the typist from quite explicitly class-based political positions, one from the national-conservative perspective of the established middle-class, and one from the socialist perspective of the working class.⁴⁰ Both of these novels attempt to illustrate the problems faced by the new white-collar classes, but both suffer from their inability to think outside their relatively simplistic political schema. Christa Anita Brück's novel is semi-autobiographical, and, whilst it refutes the image of the glamorous secretary who inevitably marries her boss, it lacks a critical perspective which might provide a more nuanced analysis of the white-collar woman's situation, or suggest ways to alleviate it. Rudolf Braune, in contrast, presents worker solidarity and socialist revolution as a cure-all. Like Kracauer, he is far more interested in class than gender and his representation of white-collar women is a superficial account which is less interested in the particularities of women's experience than in their ability to stand in for a class caught between the two masculine cultures of exploitative, bourgeois capitalists and honest, politically-committed proletarians.

The final part of this chapter turns to two novels by Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi: eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*.⁴¹ My discussion of these two novels and the critical work surrounding them brings together the various strands discussed throughout the thesis. I am a shameless partisan of Keun's work, which is sufficiently sophisticated to combine critical positions on gender, class and sexuality with humour and empathy for the protagonists. Keun's novels are characterised by a perfect command of tone, which enables her to depict her white-collar characters as realistically limited in their understanding and education, but capable of insightful and critical reflections on society. *Gilgi* and *Doris* represent two archetypes of the white-collar woman, the rational Girl and the distracted and intoxicated film fan, yet both are presented as full agents, with unique and perceptive responses to the various cultural forces which seek to limit their movement. Drawing on Lorna Sopcak's work, I show that Keun pays close attention to the way that fashion, film and other much-derided aspects of women's popular culture provide

⁴⁰ Christa Anita Brück, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* (Berlin: Sieben Stäbe Verlag, 1930) and Rudolf Braune, *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat: Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin* (München: Verlag München, 1975).

⁴¹ Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi – eine von uns* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2002) [orig. 1930] and *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2005) [orig. 1932].

her protagonists with means of self-fashioning and education without falling into a simplistic, affirmative model. Furthermore (influenced by McCormick's comments on Keun), I argue that Keun's critics have not always recognised this, and have therefore replicated Kracauer's condescending attitude to lower-middle-class women.

Thus, the typist becomes a figure through which the contested histories of both the New Woman and the white-collar classes can be examined together. To her contemporaries, she was a signifier of both modernity in general and a specifically feminine modernity, bridging the gap between the masculine world of business and rationalisation and the feminine world of glamour and visibility. For us, she is the bearer of a great deal of information about the so-called crisis of male identity and attendant 'feminisation' of the masses and mass culture. Through this study, I also hope to show that popular culture may provide a more fertile source of moments of resistance and liberation than the work of social critics like Kracauer, who unconsciously reproduce gender hierarchies in their work.

Chapter One

The Salaried Mass: Literary sociology and sociological literature

Introduction

By taking the typist as a central figure, this thesis foregrounds gender and the history of representing women in the city. German literary criticism, however, has preferred to classify novels such as Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* and Irmgard Keun's *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen* not by their protagonists' gender, but by their class identity. Both books have been read and analysed as *Angestelltenroman*, or 'salaried employee novels',¹ a term which draws on a sociological discourse peculiar to Germany. This discourse began in 1912 when Emil Lederer published *Die Privatangestellten in der Modernen Wirtschaftsentwicklung*, one of the first sociological texts to respond to the emergence and rapid growth of a salaried employee sector in the German economy.² It appeared one year after the legislation that created a social insurance scheme for salaried employees separate from that of workers, and considered the employees' class position and their role in a political and economic environment that relied heavily on Marxist terms. Lederer posed a simple question: if the traditional terms of analysis divided society into an independent bourgeoisie and a dependent proletariat, and posited a deep and abiding antagonism between the two, how did social theory accommodate a populous (and growing) group in society that had some traits in common with one side, and some traits in common with the other?

¹ In his 1998 translation of Kracauer's book, Quintin Hoare chose *The Salaried Masses* for a title, and translated *Angestellte* in the text as "employees", though others have used "clerks", "salaried employees" or "white-collar workers". Throughout this work, I will use "employees", though I will also frequently use the word *Angestellte* untranslated. As I hope will become clear, there is no direct English equivalent for the German socio-economic category, and I hope that the use of the German term will encourage the reader to keep that lack in mind.

² Emil Lederer, *Die Privatangestellten in der Modernen Wirtschaftsentwicklung* (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1912). The title translates as 'The Private Employee in the Modern Economy'.

In the dozen or so years between the end of World War One and the rise of Hitler, the proportion of German men and women classed as *Angestellten* continued to grow, and so did both the sociological literature analysing them and the literary fiction representing them. Emil Lederer returned to the subject of the *Angestellten* in collaboration with his student Jakob Marschak;³ Carl Dreyfuss⁴ and Hans Speier⁵ also contributed to the debate. Most famously, Siegfried Kracauer combined the sociological tradition with the Frankfurt School's dialectical materialism in a series of articles published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Feuilleton, later collected into a book under the title *Die Angestellten: aus dem neuesten Deutschland*.⁶ From very early on, the sociological analysis and the literary representations were intertwined: in 1930, Kracauer published a review of Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* (*The Fates behind the Typewriters*) under the title 'Ein Angestelltenroman', and two years later, Josef Witsch published *Berufs- und Lebensschicksale weiblicher Angestellter in der Schönen Literatur* (*The Life and Work of Female Employees in Literature*), which analysed fictional employees in the social and cultural context of the period.⁷ *Angestelltenliteratur* – literature about or featuring the experience of white-collar workers – continues to function as a critical category in German literary analysis. In 1974, Werner Deich published *Der Angestellte im Roman: zur Sozialgeschichte des Handlungsgehilfen um 1900* (*The Employee in Novels: a social history of clerks around 1900*), which considered the representation of office workers and commercial assistants around the turn of the century.⁸ More recently, Christa Jordan analysed ten Weimar

³ Emil Lederer and Jakob Marschak, *The New Middle-Class*, trans. by S. Ellison for the Dept. of Sociology at Columbia University, 1937. [Orig. 'Der Neue Mittelstand' in *Grundriss der Sozialökonomik*, IX Abteilung, I. Teil. Tübingen, 1926.]

⁴ Carl Dreyfuss, *Beruf und Ideologie der Angestellten* (Munich and Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker and Humboldt, 1933).

⁵ Hans Speier, *Die Angestellten vor dem Nationalsozialismus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der deutschen Sozialstruktur 1918-1933* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977).

⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Angestellten* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp-Verlag, 1971).

⁷ Josef Witsch, *Berufs- und Lebensschicksale weiblicher Angestellter in der Schönen Literatur* (Cologne: Verlag der Forschungsinstitut für Sozialwissenschaften, 1932).

⁸ Werner Deich, *Der Angestellte im Roman: zur Sozialgeschichte des Handlungsgehilfen um 1900* (Cologne und Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagbuchhandlung KG, 1974).

novels featuring *Angestellten*, focussing in particular on how close the experiences represented in narrative prose were to those described in contemporary sociological surveys,⁹ and Deborah Smail investigated the depiction of Berlin as a physical environment in three novels from the same period, and their relationship to *Neue Sachlichkeit*.¹⁰ At least two universities have run seminar courses on *Angestelltenliteratur*,¹¹ both including Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi: Eine von uns* or *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen*, Hans Fallada's *Kleiner Mann – Was Nun?*, Erich Kästner's *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* and Martin Kessel's *Herrn Brechers Fiasko*.

In this chapter, I do not address specific novels, but first analyse the sociological discourses which surrounded the *Angestellten* from the pre-World War One period to the early thirties, and the gendering of the *Angestellten* as this discourse moved into the public sphere. The first of the texts discussed in this chapter is by Emil Lederer, an academic sociologist who was one of the first to analyse the position of the employees according to their ideological identifications and economic position. For Lederer (who published his monograph in 1911, shortly after the definition of *Angestellte* was written into the German legal code of the first time), the employees are a disruption in an otherwise recognisable and predictable narrative of historical development, for they fit neither into the Marxist category of workers nor that of entrepreneurs. In the 1920s, Lederer and his student Jakob Marschak returned to the same topic and added some new observations. The second text is an article published by Hans Speier, some forty years before his major sociological study *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler*. This article appeared in the *Magazin der Wirtschaft*, a highbrow but non-specialist magazine which was intended to fulfil the same role in Germany as *The Economist* did in Britain. The last is the best known work of the three, Kracauer's *Die Angestellten: aus dem neuesten Deutschland*, a series

⁹ Christa Jordan, *Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berauschung: Die Angestellten in der Erzählprosa am Ende der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 1988).

¹⁰ Deborah Smail, *White-collar Workers, Mass Culture and Neue Sachlichkeit in Weimar Berlin: A Reading of Hans Fallada's Kleiner Mann - Was nun?, Erich Kästner's Fabian and Irmgard Keun's Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (Berne: Peter Lan, 1999).

¹¹ 'Die Angestellten in der Literatur der Weimarer Republik' Heinrich Heine Universität, Düsseldorf, and 'Angestelltenromane der Weimarer Republik' Universität-Wuppertal, both winter semester 2002/2003.

of columns which, far from being written for a specialist academic audience, were published in one of the most popular broadsheet papers of the period.

This survey of these three main texts is intended to sketch out the territory inhabited by the employees, and to explore some of the concerns which will be foregrounded in the films and novels discussed in later chapters. Yet it is also intended to show how a discourse that began in the rarefied arena of academic sociology moved into the public consciousness, and the way it metamorphosed according to the demands of the audience and the position of the authors. Although Kracauer's text is frequently referred to as sociology, I show that it is overwhelmingly concerned with literariness and its own literary status, to the extent that it is better considered as literary prose with a sociological slant, than as a sociological text. Cultural production in various forms and genres comes to dominate Kracauer's perception of the group, and this is reflected in the way that he draws on various genres and registers to represent them. Furthermore, I argue that, as we move progressively further from Lederer's dry, scrupulous academic prose and towards a freer, more literary style, gender, gender hierarchies and anxieties come into play. For Lederer, the *Angestellten* are simply economic units, differentiated by income and status but rarely by gender: for Speier, they are roughly sketched but are nonetheless figures with male or female faces, and for Kracauer, they are fully realised characters and caricatures. Though Kracauer rarely acknowledges the role that gender plays in his work, it animates his representation of the employees he meets and is crucial to his development of his own narrative persona, as we will see in his account of meeting a 'little miss typist' on a train. Furthermore, anxiety about gender and gender roles informs his Marxist critique of the employees' encounters with modernity, for at the heart of his concern about the 'distraction culture' which is sold to the employees is the fear that the men are being feminised, which is reflected in his disproportionate focus on female employees and the comparisons he makes between the employees and an "authentic" working class culture.

We begin, however, with a short history of the *Angestellten* group.

Social change and the rise of the employee

German studies of the *Angestellten* in the first half of the twentieth century usually looked back to the middle of the previous century, which was viewed as a period of relative stability before profound socio-economic and demographic change. In the last decades of the 1800s, an employee was typically a young man of good class, working as a clerk in a small, privately owned enterprise. He stood directly under the owner alongside one or two others in the firm's hierarchy, or at two or three removes at the most. His relationship with the owner was therefore personal: he might be a nephew or a potential son-in-law, but even if he was not a relation by blood or marriage, the employer might take a fatherly interest in his progress. To dine with the family or receive board and lodging in lieu of part of his wage was quite standard. The hours were long and the pay low, but the employee received instruction and was exposed to every aspect of the business:

Commercial assistants at that time were responsible for a variety of operations that depended upon skills in writing and arithmetic. They had to maintain correspondence and records and, especially in smaller businesses, to ship goods and engage in some sales work. There was some division of labor in larger firms – one man might be trained as a bookkeeper, for instance – but often an assistant worked his way up a clerking ladder, from messenger boy to copyist or salesman and then to a more responsible job that might involve specialized tasks.¹²

Clerking was not a career, but the first step on the path to independence. The young man might rise to become a partner in the firm, stand to inherit it (through marriage or in his own right), or leave to start up on his own. He undoubtedly had reasonable grounds to expect that he would not remain a clerk until death or retirement. The position had a social valuation commensurate with this projected future: the merchant's assistant belonged to the merchant class. He could be considered a member of this class because his economic dependence was regarded as a stepping stone on the way to economic independence.¹³

Following unification in the late nineteenth century, Germany entered a period of rapid modernisation. The liberal capitalism of small, independent establishments metamorphosed into

¹² Carole Elizabeth Adams, *Women clerks in Wilhelmine Germany: Issues of class and gender*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 6.

¹³ Speier, *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler* (1986), p. 11.

the monopoly capitalism of modern corporations, and the structure of the labour force changed with it. These developments necessitated the division of labour, and vast numbers of administrative staff were required as German industry was bureaucratized: bookkeepers, secretaries, foremen, personnel managers, correspondents, commercial assistants, floor managers and more. As the sector grew, its nature changed. The division of labour meant that employees were now only competent in a narrowly defined area of business expertise – unlike the clerks of yesteryear who had gained experience in a wide range of commercial skills – and the introduction of new technologies meant that work became increasingly mechanical. Both economic change and technological innovation facilitated the expansion of the employee sector, as the new corporations seized on new-fangled office paraphernalia like typewriters, adding machines and stenography machines. Demand grew for personnel who could operate them, and technical schools and evening classes rushed to meet it. For the first time in its history, there were women working in the commercial office, usually as clerks and typists.

The opportunities for advancement in these new jobs were extremely limited. For men, too, the traditional ideal of the clerk working towards an independent future began to look more and more remote: the likelihood of promotion or partnership diminished and lifelong dependence on one's employer looked inescapable. The relationship with the employer was different in corporations with many hundreds or even many thousands of workers. Where he had previously been a familiar (if patriarchal) figure, to whose position the ambitious and competent clerk might reasonably aspire, he was now distant, almost mythical. The nineteenth century clerk had lived in reasonable expectation of eventually reaching his employer's position, but the status of capitalist owner was beyond the wildest dreams of the overwhelming majority. As the prospects of the typical employee diminished, so did its cultural and social valuation, and the employee's membership of the bourgeois or merchant class was no longer a given.

In Germany, uniquely, there were calls for the state to intercede on behalf of the employees from a relatively early stage. In 1891, the economist Georg Adler published a treatise on the social position of commercial employees, declaring the necessity of state intervention. He may have already been drawing on a body of literature produced by the commercial employees' organisations, which demanded protection for their members. The welfare of the employee class

constituted 'eine soziale Frage in ähnlichem Grade wie für den Arbeiterstand.'¹⁴ Adler recommended a comprehensive system of state insurance 'analog der Arbeitergesetzgebung,'¹⁵ including old age and invalid pensions. As the comparison suggests, legislation providing protection for the working classes had already been passed. Reference to this existing legislation played a major role in the debates surrounding the creation of a social insurance scheme for employees. The basic issue was whether to extend the health and pension insurance originally created for the workers, or to create a separate insurance policy.¹⁶

Between 1903, when the *Angestelltenversicherungsgesetz* (Employee Insurance Law, or AVG) was first debated by Parliament, and 1911, when it was finally passed, an enormous number of publications on the *Angestellten* question were published. The vast majority of these were produced by the many employees' organisations, which had diverse ideological stands and memberships. One of the largest and most influential conservative organisations was the *Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfen-Verband* (German Nationalist Commercial Assistants' Alliance, or DHV), which argued fiercely against the workers' unions' recommendation that the existing workers' legislation be extended to cover employees.¹⁷ This question was never purely pragmatic, but contested according to various ideological positions. The most important concern for the overwhelming majority of white-collar workers was that their 'service function' be recognized. They wanted an independent pension-insurance policy that would not only lighten their burdens as members of the labour force, but also testify to their superiority over manual workers.¹⁸

¹⁴ Werner Mangold, 'Angestelltingeschichte und Angestelltensoziologie in Deutschland, England und Frankreich. Über den Zusammenhang von sozialpolitischer und sozialwissenschaftlicher Themefindung und Problemstrukturierung' in Jürgen Kocka (ed), *Angestellten in europäischen Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1981), p. 14. '... a social question of a similar magnitude to that of the workers.'

¹⁵ Mangold (1981), p. 14. '... analogous to the workers' legislation.'

¹⁶ Speier, *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler* (1986), p. 66.

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the various *Angestellte* organisations and their various political and ideological affiliations, see Adams (1988).

¹⁸ Speier, *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler* (1986), p. 66.

In 1911, the special position of the German employees was cemented unanimously, and employees were defined in law as a higher social stratum than the proletariat. It is the *Angestellten's* sense of superiority over the workers, which remained long after the salaries of the majority had sunk to poverty levels, that fascinated sociologists such as Lederer, Speier and Kracauer. The anxieties produced by this fraught and ambigulous class identity also made their way into the films and novels discussed in later chapters of this thesis.

One year after the passing of this law, Emil Lederer published the first comprehensive academic study of the group.

Emil Lederer: *Die Privatangestellten in der Modernen Wirtschaftsentwicklung*

Ein Stehkragen-Proletariat

Lederer's interest in the *Angestellten* stems from the fact that they appear to be basically incompatible with the materialist conception of history formulated by Marx, which dominated the nascent field of sociology. For Germany's sociologists, Marx's analyses of economic development functioned as a kind of map to the future. The orthodox Marxist scheme set out in the opening chapter of *Die Privatangestellten in der Modernen Wirtschaftsentwicklung* argues that historical development is driven by the conflict between two economic interest groups, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. As the economic interest groups grow and alter, new institutions and media form, in which the class struggle can be both expressed and contained. The predicted phenomena – the concentration of wealth, a shrinking entrepreneur sector and a growing proletariat – were all evident in contemporary German political economy. But what was also evident, which could not be accounted for in traditional Marxism, was a growing sector of the population whose parentage, composition, incomes and social and economic function meant that they could be classified as neither bourgeois nor proletarian. The political and social importance of this stratum was increasing, but their role in the materialist historical narrative had not been theorised. They were an unknown quantity, a startling creation of the modern era, whose presence could not be accounted for by recourse to traditional Marxist doctrine. They were

claimed as both a new middle class and a “Stehkragen-Proletariat”¹⁹ by classes that sought to bolster their own position, but they resisted definitive categorisation. Lederer’s analysis of the social and economic function of this group, was intended to go some way towards filling in what has previously been a blind spot for academic sociologists. Through the application of rigorous sociological methods, it was hoped that their position could be explained, and – more importantly – their future allegiances predicted. This erratic and potentially volatile group must be absorbed into either the proletarian or the bourgeois sectors of society and identified as either radical or statist, in order that the conventional Marxist narrative be restored.

Lederer’s first problem was to find some way of defining the various groups that fall under the rather vague heading of *Angestellten*. They could be endlessly differentiated, and the difference between a commercial assistant in a rural grocer’s and a commercial assistant in a huge bank was as great as that between the *Lumpenproletariat* and educated, highly qualified organised labour. A clerk in a small trade or commercial enterprise in a rural area might have had more in common with a clerk as he existed in the middle ages than he did with the specialised, metropolitan commercial employee in a colossal modern industrial concern. With such diversity, it was impossible to classify the *Angestellten* by their technical function (the nature of their work) or their social position alone. Any authoritative definition, Lederer argued, must take both into account:

Dem Wesen des Angestellten (im Gegensatz zum Arbeiter) kommt man wohl am nächsten, wenn man, von den zwei Hauptgruppen (der kommerziellen und technischen Angestelltenschaft) ausgeht und als Kriterium eines Privatangestellten (neben der unselbständige Berufstätigkeit) bezeichnet, daß seine Tätigkeit entweder: rein manuell, wie die des Arbeiters, aber dabei einen speziellen Charakter erhält durch eine geistige Leistung, oder aber keine geistige, dann aber auch nicht rein manuell (bloß für die Produktion).²⁰

¹⁹ Lederer (1912), p. 22. ‘stand-up [or starched] collar proletariat’ – a more idiomatic translation would be ‘white-collar proletariat’.

²⁰ Lederer (1912), p. 25. ‘Next we come to the character of the *Angestellte* (in contrast to that of the worker), if we take the two main groups (commercial and technical *Angestellte*) and, as a criterion of an *Angestellte*, set down that their function must be either: purely manual, like that of the workers, but with a simultaneous intellectual element, or if there is no intellectual achievement, then it cannot be purely manual (purely for production).’

This somewhat tortured attempt to come up with a watertight distinction between workers and employees shows how ill-defined the line was. Lederer considered this adequate, though, as far as technical function goes: it included the purely intellectual capability of the highest stratum of employees, but not the purely manual labour of the workers. This distinction between manual and intellectual work was of enormous ideological importance to the employees, and claims of superiority over the working classes frequently made reference to it.

So much for the technical function: Lederer moves on to the social position, which, he suggested, was more useful in identifying an *Angestellten* group, as it tended to be more consistent than technical function:

Die beiden Gruppen empfangen ihre soziale Charakterisierung, die für sie ausschlaggebend wird, nicht von ihrer technischen oder wirtschaftlichen Funktion, sondern hauptsächlich von ihrer Stellung zu den ausschlaggebenden Klassen der Unternehmer und Arbeiterschaft.²¹

This in-between position, Lederer continues, is the definitive characteristic of employeehood, and determines the consciousness of the *Angestellten* as well as how the rest of society perceives them. This characteristic, which is defined negatively as neither one thing nor the other, is more important than any positive definition of their technical function. Even as it is claimed by both classes, this in-between group is growing and achieving its own status as a class at the same time. Lederer emphasises that this is a complication of enormous importance for Marxist social theory. Industrial concerns are not structured as Marx envisioned, and where there are diverse social strata, there are diverse dependent relationships to the entrepreneurs that must be theorised individually. Without a clear understanding of the employees' political and economic role, historical materialism will be fundamentally flawed.

Although the number of *Angestellten* grew from around 4% of the population to around 6% between the 1882 census and the 1907 census, this increase was not evenly spread across the three main areas of agriculture, industry and commerce. Unlike in the USA and UK, where the greatest increase was in the commercial sectors, the most staggering rise in Germany was in

²¹ Lederer (1912), p. 25. 'The social character is decisive for both groups, and is not defined by their technical or economic function, but from their position between the two crucial classes of entrepreneurs and workers.'

industry, which saw the number of *Angestellten* rise nearly six-fold over the given time period. The six-fold increase in employees in industrial concerns over twenty-five years, Lederer argues, is the visible evidence of a deep-rooted change in the technical formation and composition of German firms:

Diese stürmische Vermehrung des kaufmännischen Personals in industriellen Betrieben ist die direkte Konsequenz der technisch höheren Organisationsform. Die immer weiterschreitende Rationalisierung der Betriebe, die Einführung der amerikanischen Kalkulationsmethoden in die Fabriken, die rechnerische Erfassung und Auswertung eines jeden Produktionsstadiums macht die Einstellung eines ungleich größeren kaufmännischen Personals – zu erheblichem Teil kaufmännischen Personals von geringerer Qualifikation – notwendig.²²

The American forms of rationalisation mentioned here involved breaking down the production process into its most basic elements, then examining each stage of the production line mathematically and calculating the most efficient movements required to complete the task. Fordism was perhaps too new to have made much impact on German industry (the first Model T appeared in 1908), but Taylorism and other precursors were certainly influential in the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth. Corporate structures and scientific management techniques also had their origins in American business, and many modern innovations were considered to have an “American” flavour. As we will see in later chapters, American business methods entered popular consciousness on a mass scale after World War I, closely linked to American entertainment culture and American funding (in the form of the 1924 Dawes plan, a injection of cash which helped to revive the German economy after the catastrophic hyper-inflation), and formed the cultural phenomenon known as “Americanismus”, or Americanism. For a short period in the twenties, Americanisation was used almost interchangeably with “modernisation”, positively or negatively according to the political stance of the speaker, and implied a direct link between imported business techniques and imported entertainment and cultural forms. At this earlier stage, however, references to American

²² Lederer (1912), p. 33. ‘The dramatic increase in commercial personnel in industrial firms is the direct consequence of technically advanced forms of organisation. The ever progressing rationalisation of companies, the introduction of American methods of calculation, the mathematical examination and evaluation of every stage of production necessitates the appointment of a disproportionate number of commercial personnel – for the most part, commercial personnel with only very basic qualifications.’

business methods refer only to business practices, and do not carry the associations of full-scale cultural shift which they will later assume.

The systematisation of industry required a multitude of low-paid, ill-qualified clerks to process and monitor the thousands of calculations being made in the name of rationalisation. Trained in a narrow area of business and capable only of fulfilling their very basic functions, these clerks were entirely a creation of the modern industrial corporation. It was not the increase in numbers per se which augmented the employees' political and cultural weight, but relative growth and the character of the work undertaken, which were both factors in whether or not the *Angestellten* developed some sort of cohesive group identity. Geographical features also played a part: the employees were overwhelmingly concentrated in Germany's major cities, and so had a disproportionate impact on the popular consciousness, as the vast majority of cultural production originated in the metropolis.

Thus, Lederer established that there was a group identity nascent among the employees, perhaps even a class identity, albeit one that was still indistinct at the time of writing. Critically, from the point of view of Marxist theory, it showed no definitive orientation on the question of material interests. Dependent on capital, the *Angestellten* were welcomed by students of Marxist theory as an appendix to the worker class or as evidence of the differentiation of the proletariat that was theorised by Marx's followers. On the other hand, they were claimed by the middle classes and the 'staatserhaltenden'²³ political parties as conservative, in the belief that the employees' interests lay alongside those of the establishment. To one side, they were 'Lohnarbeiter' – salaried workers, with the emphasis on workers – and to the other side, a 'neue Mittelstand', or new middle class. Courted as potential political allies by both sides, the class position of the *Angestellten* required thorough and independent analysis. Putting forward the case for regarding them as an extension of the worker class, one side cited their sinking salaries. According to definitions that looked strictly at their income, the overwhelming majority of employees had experienced or were experiencing 'eine Proletarisierung': they were being

²³ Lederer (1912), p. 50. 'statist', i.e. those parties that seek to protect the state in its current form and resist revolution.

rendered proletarian.²⁴ At the same time, they retained a connection with the bourgeoisie, and – particularly for those working in the commercial sector – there was still the possibility of ascent into the independent classes.

This contradiction raises the question of what constitutes class identity: is it living standards, or a background of interests and their relationship to public life? Myriad factors determine the class identity of the workers, Lederer claimed. Desperate poverty and an insecure existence were the preconditions for a proletariat class identity, but not the whole story: their monotonous and limited work and their perception that they contribute vastly more to society than they receive are also implicated. Whilst many of these characteristics might have been found in the *Angestellten*, to a greater or lesser degree, they do not exist in the same intensity or combination. Likewise, the employees could not be described as truly bourgeois. They had similar goals and values, but their political and economic interests were so far apart as to be hostile to one another:

Im Gegenteil, die Interessen sind durchaus diametral: es ist der Interessengegensatz Produzent – Konsument, der vielleicht zeitweise durch analoge politische Interessen gegenüber anderen Klassen überbrückt werden kann, aber prinzipiell so groß ist, daß der Antagonismus immer wieder ganz deutlich hervorbricht.²⁵

At its most basic level, this antagonism exists because, as producers, the bourgeoisie requires a market for its wares. As consumers, the *Angestellten* demand that the state ensure a basic living standard. The state does not have the funds to satisfy both the middle-class's need for high prices and the employees' need for basic goods to be available to all.

Yet, even though their dependency would appear to place them in the same relationship to capital as the working class, the *Angestellten* were sharply distinguished from the working classes because their political aims were ultimately conservative:

²⁴ Lederer (1912), p. 63. The noun 'Proletarisierung' and its cognate verb 'proleterisieren' – 'proletarianisation' and 'to proletarianise' respectively – are common in discussions of the *Angestellte*.

²⁵ Lederer (1912), p. 52. 'In fact, their interests are diametrically opposed: it's the Producer—Consumer opposition of interests, which can be temporarily overcome by an appeal to shared political interests in opposition another class, but which are always so large that the antagonism breaks through again and again.'

Diese Grundtendenz kann man am besten als »konservativ« bezeichnen [...] die Maßnahme [...] haben alle den Zweck, ökonomisch eine »mittelständische«, »gesicherte« Lebenshaltung zu garantieren [...] Ganz in Gegenteil die der Arbeiterschaft: [...] Die Sozialpolitik der Angestellten erstrebt Sicherheit: Sie ist eine Reaktionserscheinung auf die zerstörenden Wirkungen der Industriesystems hinsichtlich der Angestelltenschaft.²⁶

The specific goals of the employees – an improved standard of living, through a minimum wage, pension insurance, protection against future technological improvement – all have this conservative character. In contrast, the politics favoured by the workers are revolutionary, and regard all of these improvements as merely cosmetic. Claimed by everyone from the most conservative parties to the most radical, the *Angestellten* had points of similarity and points of contention with all.

The Twenties

In 1926, Lederer returned to the subject of the *Angestellten* and published 'Die neue Mittelstand' with his assistant Jakob Marschak. In this new article, Lederer and Marschak noted the conflicting socio-economic theories that attempted to account for the new middle class's role in the national political economy. Firstly, there was the theory that the employees could act as a "buffer" or "social mediator" between the two main classes by absorbing the lowest levels of the middle classes and the upper levels of the working classes. Through careful management of their position and aspirations, the *Angestellten* could act as a useful tool for an establishment that wished to safeguard its position and neutralise the ever-present threat of revolution. A second theory stated that class conflict could not be avoided and that the so-called new middle class were simply a new "white-collar proletariat" (*Stehkragenproletariat*) who would eventually merge with the traditional proletariat – a position that socialist novelist Rudolf Braune embraced, as we will see. Finally, there were those who argued that the new middle class either already constituted or would eventually constitute an entirely separate class, whose interests and aspirations must be considered in isolation from those of the established classes.

²⁶ Lederer (1912), p. 56-57. 'The basic tendency can best be described as "conservative" [...] all the strands have the aim of guaranteeing a "middle-class" "secure" lifestyle. In contrast to the workers [...] the social politics of the *Angestellte* strive for security: they're a reaction to the disruptive effects of the industrial system on the employee class.'

The article expanded on the 1912 book in two significant ways. The first notable difference is quite obviously chronological. Fourteen years and one World War after Lederer's book, the proportion of the *Angestellten* in the labour market was now even larger. The war, the revolution and hyperinflation all served to accelerate the processes identified in 1912. A huge amount of administrative work was involved in the shift from a civil society to a society at war, big business continued to expand and the trend towards bureaucratisation continued apace. Conscription meant that much of the clerical labour involved in ensuring supplies reached the front line had to be performed by those new to such work, particularly women. Though the proportion of female workers in the workforce dropped after the war, many other changes in the economic structure could not be reversed. Hyperinflation was another powerful driver (and forces the heroine of Christa Anita Brück's 1930 novel, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine*, into work): as private incomes shrivelled, the previously independent middle classes were forced to enter the labour market:

As a result, those who had been reduced to dependence turned now to the socially kindred occupations of the salaried employees, although these, too, showed a steady deterioration of their economic status and an approximation to (if not an actual drop below) the living standards of the wage-earners.²⁷

In spite of the expansion of the clerking and sales sectors in the modern economy, demand for employee labour did not keep up with supply. Unemployment became a real fear for those working or seeking work in the *Angestellten* sector, and the wages of those who were in work dropped further. All of these changes and new insecurities are reflected in the *Angestelltenroman* of the period.

Lederer and Marschak saw the *Angestellten* as the natural allies of the proletariat, unlike those who expected the group to protect the state and usher in an era of unprecedented social harmony. Direct comparisons are made between the labour movement and the newly founded employees' movement. Lederer and Marschak conclude that "the term "new middle class" ... was not very

²⁷ Lederer and Marschak (1926), p. 9.

appropriate before the war; after 1918 it became still less felicitous.”²⁸ Although the pre-war *Angestellten* adhered to bourgeois values and sought middle-class security, their dependence on capital meant that, if they were to take a role in the class conflict, they were economically determined to join with the working classes. Yet the group was still ideologically fractured, and the perception that the *Angestellte* is fundamentally different from the *Arbeiter* persisted. Lederer and Marschak also note that the children of the bourgeoisie whose incomes vanished during hyperinflation turn to the ‘socially kindred occupations of the salaried employee’ because ‘consideration of class and tradition turned the young generation away from possible transference to manual occupations.’²⁹ Fiscally, they might have been living at the same level as those who had been employees before the war, but their sense of themselves as middle-class and their commitment to establishment values had not evaporated. The *Angestellten* class in the second half of the 1920s therefore bore many resemblances to their pre-war forebears, but with another recent wave of imported middle-class ideology, yet more onerous economic pressures, and a slightly higher tendency towards the agitation techniques and political goals which had traditionally been the preserve of the workers. This, then, is the political economic context in which all the novels and films discussed in this work were produced.

Hans Speier: ‘Die Angestellten’

‘Ein Gespenst droht den Angestellten’

In the latter half of the twenties, critical examinations of the *Angestellten* moved out of the narrow world of academia, and began to appear in more popular forums. With this move, the type of analysis changed. Professional social scientists, who were writing for other trained sociologists and economists, dealt in statistics and quantifiable data wherever possible. With no expectation of rigorous scrutiny by their peers, the authors of popular accounts of *Angestellten* were free to include anecdotes, observations and character sketches of their subjects. In 1930, the same year that Kracauer’s columns were published as a book, Hans Speier wrote:

²⁸ Lederer and Marschak (1926), p. 44.

²⁹ Lederer and Marschak (1926), p. 9.

Aber die erwähnten Arbeiten messen gewissermaßen nur den sozialen Raum aus, in dem die Angestellten leben. Kracauer gibt mehr: die Luft, die in ihm weht.³⁰

Speier's article, which is also entitled 'Die Angestellten,' is pitched somewhere between the dry scrupulousness of Lederer's academic writing and the playful populism of Kracauer. It was published in the *Magazin der Wirtschaft*, which was founded in 1925 as a sort of highbrow but non-specialist journal, taking a closer look at political and economic issues that the daily newspapers could only cover cursorily:

Es ist offenbar, daß ein **zusammenfassendes** wirtschaftliches Kompendium, das zugleich **praktisch-aktuell** und **wissenschaftliches fundiert** die Ereignisse und Probleme verzeichnet und behandelt, in breiten Kreisen tatsächlich vermißt worden ist. [Speier's emphasis.]³¹

This statement of purpose is taken from the introduction to the first issue of the magazine, which makes explicit reference to the role of the UK *Economist* alongside papers such as the *Times*, *Morning Post* and *Manchester Guardian*. The readership was educated and interested in current affairs, but was not expected to have any specialised academic knowledge: statistical data were certainly included, but subordinated to engaging and informative text. The magazine aspired to be a forum in which ideas and theories could be tested and explored.

Speier is enthusiastic about Kracauer's work, with particular praise for the way he includes his own observations about the *Angestellten*, cites realistic conversations and makes good use of other sources. The employee organisations ought to commend this work, but instead, in a colloquial phrase, they 'schreien Zeier und Mordio'.³² Much of this reaction, Speier contends, springs from the political conservatism of the majority of the employee organisations. The only

³⁰ Hans Speier, 'Die Angestellten', *Magazin der Wirtschaft*, VI (1930), p. 602. 'But the above-mentioned works [Lederer and Marshak, 1926, and the publications of the *Angestellten* associations] gauge only the social space in which the employees live. Kracauer gives more: the air that moves in them.'

³¹ 'Zur Einführung', *Magazin der Wirtschaft* 1 (12 February 1925), p. 1 'It is apparent that the lack of a **comprehensive** economic compendium, which records and examines events and problems in a manner that is both **topical** and **scientific**, is felt in many circles.'

³² Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 602. 'scream blue murder.'

group to welcome this work and engage with it positively is the Afa-Bund, a confederation of the left-leaning organisations.

Speier moves on to his own assessment of the *Angestellten*'s situation, providing statistics to show that the number of employees has increased dramatically, and that the increase of female employees in particular has been disproportionate. Unlike Lederer, his discussion of the reasons behind this change conjures an image of the employee in their working environment. One of the reasons for the growth in *Angestellten* in proportion to the rest of the workforce is that they are marginally more resistant to rationalisation than those in industry:

Man kann nicht am laufenden Bande verkaufen, oder – wie es an dieser Stelle kürzlich formuliert wurde: “Wenn sich aber der Verkäufer einem schwierigen Kunden gegenüber sieht, vergißt er nur zu schnell, daß es sich um eine berufliche Aufgabe handelt, deren Bewältigung von ihm verlangt wird. Er reagiert mit all der Intensität, mit der er im Privatleben auf ähnliche Widerstände reagieren würde.”³³

This quotation does something that Lederer never attempted: it shows the *Angestellte* as an individual with an emotional response to a situation in their working life. For Lederer, the employee was an economic unit with a class identity (however uncertain) and certain political tendencies. Speier does not record conversations in his work, as Kracauer does, nor describe the work, leisure or attitudes of actual employees. However, his writing still has a much more less abstract feeling than Lederer's. A discussion of the attempts to standardise and rationalise the functions of the commercial employee or salesperson concludes:

Das extreme Beispiel ist das Einheitspreisgeschäft; aber bereits der Verkauf von Markenartikel erfordert nur noch eine verschwindend geringe Warenkenntnis. Man lernt die Höflichkeit um jeden Preis, den “Dienst am Kunden”, und kann die alte “Lehre” fast entbehren.³⁴

³³ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 603. 'Things can't be sold on a conveyor belt, or – as it is neatly formulated here: “However, if the salesman confronts a difficult customer, he forgets only too quickly that this is a professional task which he must accomplish. He reacts as intensely as he would to similar resistance in his private life.”' The quotation comes from a *Verkäuferschulung im Einzelhandel*, a training manual for personnel in the retail industry.

³⁴ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 603. 'The extreme example is the One Price Store, but even the sale of branded goods requires only minimal (and shrinking) knowledge of the wares. At all cost, one learns politeness - “customer service” - and can more or less dispense with the old lore.'

The reference to the One Price store, the physical environment of the shop assistant, the “branded goods” that they handle each day and the social interactions with the customers are only mentioned in passing, and barely described at all, yet they evoke a physical and social landscape which is absent in Lederer’s work. These individuals are roughly sketched, yet the journalistic tone of the *Magazin der Wirtschaft* at least allows them to exist.

Speier’s article is not illustrated, but the text does make use of visual descriptions, and even refers to the developing culture of photojournalism:

Die leeren Arbeitsäle, in denen Maschinen Parade stehen und die Arbeiter fehlen, sind ein beliebtes Sujet der illustrierten Zeitungen geworden. Die Räume, in denen hinter den Additions- und Multiplikationsmaschine, den Loch-, Tabellier- und Sortiermaschinen, den Schreibmaschinen, Registraturen und Kontrollapparaten, den Brieffalz-, Briefschließ- und Frankaturmaschinen die Bataillone der Angestellte sitzen, blieben bisher weniger beachtet.³⁵

The human element is behind a colossal variety of office machinery, not only physically, but syntactically too – subordinate to it, the text implies. Some of the equipment requires a “geistig” or intellectual capacity on the part of their operators – such as the adding machines or the typewriters – but others perform purely repetitive tasks, such as folding letters and sealing and franking the envelopes. The office is just as mechanised as the factory, yet it still languishes in un-photographed obscurity. The illustrated papers to which Speier refers were fascinated by contemporary modernity, and frequently published images taken from ordinary metropolitan life. One photograph, published in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* on 13 July 1930, shows four men in business suits in front of a colossal wall of paper, stacked in dozens of rolls each five feet in diameter, with the caption: ‘Die Papier-Rollen für den Druck einer einzigen Nummer der “Berliner Illustrierten Zeitung”’.³⁶ Another shows a cheerful telephone exchange girl whizzing

³⁵ Speier, ‘Die Angestellten’ (1930), p. 604. ‘The empty workroom, where the machinery stands still and there are no workers to be found, has become a favourite subject in the illustrated papers. The rooms in which battalions of employees sit behind addition and multiplication machines, hole-punching, tabulating and sorting machines, typewriters, filing and checking systems, and letter-folding, envelope-sticking and franking machines, remain so far unwatched.’

³⁶ *BIZ* (Ullstein, 13 July 1930), p. 1268. ‘The paper rolls to print a single issue of the “Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung”’.

up and down a bank of connections on roller skates.³⁷ A photo essay shows one of the Berlin tenements and depicts the residents in their rented rooms, eating, working, chatting and doing their chores.³⁸ In recommending that the photographers turn their cameras towards the *Angestellten* with their myriad office technologies, Speier is validating the scene as an exemplar of modernity, and worthy of this kind of public documentary attention. As we will see in the third chapter, the musical comedies of the late 1920s and early '30s took this recommendation to heart.

Speier's secondary concern is the gap between the public perception of office work, as promoted in the illustrated papers, and its reality. A recent series of images of *Angestellten* was published under the heading 'Schönheit im Beruf':

Einer Welt, die das Lächeln bevorzugt und normt, beliebt es, die scharfen Züge des Lebenskampfes zu retouchieren. In jenem Blatt verlautete nichts davon, daß eine Großbank zum Ersatz der untauglichen Seife ein Putzmittel anschaffen mußte, damit die Angestellten in den großen Maschinensälen Gesicht und Hände vom Arbeitsschmutz säubern können.³⁹

Speier dispels the commonly held belief that factory work is dirty and office work clean. The higher status assigned to office work depends in part on this perceived dichotomy. Would the sons and daughters of the impoverished bourgeoisie who flock to clerking rather than manual occupations be so keen to join the employee classes, if it was widely known that ordinary soap couldn't shift the grime of the new, mechanised office?

Both Kracauer and Speier quote Lederer's contention that modern-day slavery is found not in the factory but in the office.⁴⁰ Speier does not endorse this proposition, but he does accept that

³⁷ *BIZ* (Ullstein, 31 March 1929), p. 558.

³⁸ 'Querschnitt durch ein Haus,' *BIZ* (Ullstein, 24 January 1932), pp. 61-63.

³⁹ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 604. 'A world which privileges and normalises smiles prefers to retouch the sharper corners of life's struggles. It is not announced in any of those papers that a large commercial bank had to purchase a cleaning agent as a replacement for its ineffectual soap, in order for the employees to clean their blackened hands and faces after a day's work in the huge machinery halls.'

⁴⁰ A. Thomas, E. Lederer and O. Suhr, *Angestellte und Arbeiter: Drei Vorträge* (Afa-Bund, 1928). Quoted by both Kracauer and Speier in the works discussed here.

mechanisation and standardisation have led incontrovertibly to the *Angestellten's* functions becoming more numerous and more specialised, and that this has been accompanied by an erosion of the intellectual content of the work. Alongside the skilled workers come more and more who are semi-skilled or unskilled. The latest theories of management suggest, in fact, that the most efficient employees are those who operate without any sort of intellectual engagement with their work:

Die Erfahrung lehrt, und direkte Aussagen bestätigen, daß die Stenotypistin am schnellsten und sichersten arbeitet, wenn sie dem geistigen Gehalt des Stenogramms keine Aufmerksamkeit zollt, sondern nur auf die Worte achtet.⁴¹

This sage insight is the work of 'der amerikanische Psychologe Elliot D. Smith': again, we see the influence of American corporate management techniques.⁴² The ideal employee, in this view, is as automatic and dehumanised as the machine he or she operates, without any intrusive emotions or understanding. The distance between 'Kopfarbeit' and 'Handarbeit' – mental and manual work, another of those distinctions on which the higher status of employee work rested – shrivels away. The rationalisation of office work is fundamentally changing the employee's relationship to the employer, Speier claims:

Das stolze Bewußtsein: "Ich bin der Firma unentbehrlich" wird von der glatten Regel "Mann isst Mann" zertrümmert, und als Gespenst droht den Angestellten der frühzeitige **Berufstod**. [Speier's emphasis.]⁴³

The new orthodoxy dictates that expensive employees can and should be replaced by cheaper ones: the older and more experienced by the young, men by girls. The plight of older employees that this opportunistic ageism caused was a major problem in the Weimar Republic – and 'older'

⁴¹ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 604. 'The experience teaches, and first-hand accounts attest to this, that the stenotypist works fastest and most accurately when she pays no attention to the intellectual content of her stenogram, but attends solely to the words.'

⁴² For more information about the literary debates sparked by the publication of Ford's autobiography, see David Vickrey 'Henry Ford in the literary crossfire of the Weimar Republic', *Papers in Romance* 2:1 (July 1980), pp. 59-65.

⁴³ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 604. 'The proud awareness of "I am indispensable to the firm" is smashed by the bald decree "dog eats dog", and the spectre of a premature **professional death** threatens the employees.'

might mean anyone over the age of twenty-six. Speier quotes Kracauer's *Die Angestellten*, in which a thirty-two year old *Angestellte* describes the future as 'trostlos und aussichtslos.' This hopeless soul, married with two children, considers a 'baldigen Tod' the best that he can hope for.⁴⁴ Charged with causing this misery, the employers responded that they were not the ones who set pay scales that reward long-term employees. The threat of unemployment became a major issue for the *Angestellten* in the latter half of the twenties, and although unemployment was a bigger problem amongst the working classes quantitatively, Speier argues that the specific character of unemployment in the employee classes was worse. Where the workers' unemployment rates followed business cycles closely, the employment figures for the *Angestellten* showed a steady downwards trend that bore no relation to wider economic activity.

Speier's conclusion starts with a bold statement:

Das Denken der Angestellten befindet sich mit den sozialen und ökonomischen Tatsachen nicht in Deckung.⁴⁵

The salaries of a substantial percentage of the *Angestellte* have dropped below those of the skilled proletariat. Large parts of the group have undergone economic proletarianisation, although not an ideological proletarianisation. This contradicts Lederer's 1926 assertion that the post-war employee organisations' enthusiasm for the platforms and tactics that were associated with the trade unions in the pre-war period represents a significant shift in consciousness. Speier finds that:

Die Proletisierung wird nicht nur gefürchtet, sondern verabscheut. So entsteht das sozialpsychologisch höchst interessante Verhalten, die Proletarisierung nicht zu erkennen oder sie gar zu leugnen, während sie um sich greift.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 604. 'bleak and futile', 'an early death'. The relentless preference for youth in employee culture has been seen as one of the factors behind the development of sport culture and the beauty industry in the 1920s. Kracauer discusses this in more detail.

⁴⁵ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 606. 'The *Angestellte*'s thinking isn't congruent with the social and economic reality.'

⁴⁶ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 606. 'Proletarianisation is not just feared, rather, it is abhorred. Thus a highly interesting social-psychological attitude arises, which refuses to recognise proletarianisation or even denies it, even as they are gripped by it.'

Considered next to Lederer's bloodless, irreproachably objective prose, Speier's article is almost poetic in its evocation of the dilemmas faced by the *Angestellte*, and focusses much more on the threats and difficulties that the individual white-collar worker faced in their life. Unemployment is a *Gespens* or spectre, and the execrated proletarianisation slides its fingers around them even as they fix their gaze resolutely on the bourgeoisie's ideals. Vulgar-Marxist ideologies fail to enthrall the *Angestellten*, and bourgeois-liberalism no longer strikes a chord. The *Angestellten's* lack of a coherent political consciousness means that they are fertile ground for ideologues of all kinds:

Bei den Angestellten ist Freiland für Weltanschauung aller Art. Sie gedeihen in dieser bunten Massenschicht nebeneinander.⁴⁷

The apparently upbeat images of blooming flowers and open country cannot be taken at face value. The heterogeneity of the employees' political ideals is the result of their being, per Kracauer's diagnosis, 'spiritually homeless'.⁴⁸ They will vote right across the spectrum, from the far right to the far left. Speier argues that this political diversity has its benefits for the parliamentary system, for the employees can never exercise as powerful an influence as the more united workers. Yet this lack of a clear political identity also meant that *Angestellten* were easy prey for men with big ideas. The anti-Semitic DHV (*Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfe Verband*⁴⁹) was one of the most powerful employees' organisations, and many of these impoverished and hopeless citizens would vote for the National Socialist party in the near future.

⁴⁷ Speier, 'Die Angestellten' (1930), p. 606. 'The land of the Angestellte is open country for all sorts of worldviews. They blossom in this mass stratum side by side.'

⁴⁸ Kracauer, *The Salaried Mass* (1998), p. 88. All quotations are taken from Quintin Hoare's translation, *The Salaried Mass: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*. In the original: 'geistig obdachlos'. Kracauer, *Die Angestellten* (1971), p. 91.

⁴⁹ This translation is taken from Adams (1988).

Siegfried Kracauer: *The Salaried Mass*

Aus dem neuesten Deutschland

In a column for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* which did not get included in the collected edition *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*, Kracauer reviewed Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine*, which shows the brutally hard life of a female secretary. The protagonist was raised in a middle-class family but is forced out to work after her father – an officer – is killed in World War One and the pension that he left to her is swallowed up by the hyperinflation. She faces daily insecurities and frustrations in her work, encounters sexually predatory bosses, and records the fates of various colleagues: an unmarried woman who becomes pregnant, an invalid who struggles desperately to work despite her pitiful health. Kracauer is less interested in the exact nature of her trials, however, than the fact that such a book has been written and published at all. The *Angestellten*, Kracauer claims, 'beginnen literaturfähig zu werden.'⁵⁰ Their collective fate demands expression, and representation duly follows.

Speier's article in the *Magazin der Wirtschaft* and Kracauer's essays for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* provide the bridge between the sociological analysis of Lederer and the literary representation of Christa Anita Brück and others. Metaphor, the detailed depiction of environment and references to popular cultural formats such as photojournalism all have a place in Speier's work, alongside orthodox sociological method. The guidelines of the publication for which he is writing – intellectually rigorous but non-specialist analysis of current affairs – allow for a much more expressive and creative style than Lederer's.

Kracauer, to whom we now turn, is engaged on the same project: to bring an awareness of the social reality and potential problem of the *Angestellten* sector out of the confined world of academic sociology and into the wider public consciousness. Much of his work is in sympathy with Lederer and Speier: he examines the employees' increasingly insecure social and economic position, and, like Lederer and Speier, considers them to be in a state of false consciousness,

⁵⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Ein Angestelltenroman'. First published in *Frankfurter Zeitung Literaturblatt*, 6th July 1930. Accessed at http://www.angestellten.de/rez_brueck01.html on 10th November 2003. 'The employees are becoming worthy of literature.'

continuing to identify with bourgeois values long after their standard of living has dropped far below that of the genuine middle-classes. Kracauer extends the field of his enquiry by analysing the ways in which the capitalist system, in the form of corporate structures, sport culture and the entertainment industry, conspires to keep the employees in this state of false consciousness and prevent their perceiving the true facts of their position.

Writing for one of the largest broadsheet newspapers in Germany, Kracauer moves even farther than Speier from traditional sociological writing, and uses a wide range of literary techniques and references. He differs decisively from both Lederer or Speier, however, in that he is self-consciously literary: the 'mosaic' that he is creating is artful, and as beautiful as it is informative. Each chapter was originally a column, concentrating on a single aspect of the *Angestellten* experience, and composed of anecdote, quotation, observation, ideological musing, and acute political commentary, unified by the consistently ironic narrative voice. As we will see, he borrows from fairy tales, Gothic Romanticism, high literary culture, documentary footage and ethnography, both to illuminate his analysis of the *Angestellten* but also to situate it within the wider field of representation and cultural production surrounding them. These references to narrative and literary forms and works turn up all the way through the work. In the first column, he describes the method behind his work:

A hundred reports from a factory do not add up to the reality of the factory, but remain for all eternity a hundred views of the factory. Reality is a construct. Certainly life must be observed for it to appear. Yet it is by no means contained in the more or less random observational results of reportage: rather, it is to be found solely in the mosaic that is assembled from single observations on the basis of comprehension of their meaning.⁵¹

Kracauer, of course, is the observer with sufficient understanding to comprehend myriad experiences and construct the mosaic.

⁵¹ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 32. 'Hundert Berichte aus einer Fabrik lassen sich nicht zur Wirklichkeit der Fabrik addieren, sondern bleiben bis in alle Ewigkeit hundert Fabrikansichten. die Wirklichkeit ist eine Konstruktion. Gewiß muß das Leben beobachtet werden, damit sie erstehe. Keineswegs jedoch ist sie in der mehr oder minder zufälligen Beobachtungsfolge der Reportage enthalten, vielmehr steckt sie einzig und allein in dem Mosaik, das aus den einzelnen Beobachtungen auf Grund der Erkenntnis ihres Gehalts zusammengestiftet wird.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 16.

Sometimes the intrusions of cultural forms into the text are subtle: where Speier reminded the reader of photojournalism, by suggesting that the photographers turn their cameras to the technologised office, Kracauer plays with the conventions of an even more modern form, the documentary film. At the beginning of the column entitled 'Short break for ventilation' ('Kurze Lüftungspause'), Kracauer is shown around the offices of a modern, rationalised factory, where a wealth of flashing lights tell the director precisely what operations are taking place, and where. Unlike the majority of Kracauer's experiences or tales, the entire tour is described in the present tense, and all contained in one long single paragraph, apart from a short conversation between Kracauer and the office manager towards the end. The effect of this prose style is fluidity and immediacy, as if it were a single camera shot following a production process from beginning to end. In another column, Kracauer describes how the services of an aptitude-testing agency turned out to benefit an unfortunately afflicted job candidate:

[A] boss sent the aptitude-tester two girls, one with rickets and the other as pretty as a picture. The boss would have preferred, of course, to hire the pretty one but, as so often with girls, it was the one with rickets who was the jewel. The aptitude tester, in the guise of a latter-day Paris, picked not the Aphrodite but the Athene (no Hera was present among the employees). He scored a triumph when the boss, after a certain time, engaged the rickety goddess in his private office.⁵²

'As so often with girls' corresponds to 'wie oft in den Märchen' in the German, which would be better translated as 'as is often the case in fairy tales'. Kracauer therefore not only sets up the anecdote as a traditional oral narrative of reversal of fortune, he draws attention to the fact that he is doing it.

At other times, there are more direct addresses to the essays' intertexts and their effect on the everyday lives and perceptions of the white-collar workers:

⁵² Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 37. 'Ein Chef schickt dem Eignungsprüfer zwei Mädchen zu, ein rachitisches und ein bildhübches. Der Chef möchte natürlich lieber die Hübsche engagieren, doch wie oft in den Märchen is gerade die Rachitische das Juwel. Als moderner Paris kürt der Eignungsprüfer nicht die Aphrodite, sonder die Athene. (Eine Hera ist unter Angestellten nicht zu finden.) Er erlebt den Triumph, daß der Chef die rachitische Göttin nach einiger Zeit in sein Privatbüro übernimmt.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 22.

If literature usually imitates reality, here it precedes reality. The works of Franz Kafka give a definitive portrait of the labyrinthine human big firm – as awesome as the pasteboard models of intricate robber-baron castle made for children – and the inaccessibility of the supreme authority.⁵³

The context is the labour court hearing of an ‘impoverished bourgeois’, who was fired because of a two-day unexplained absence, having taken to drink after being humiliated and tormented by a sadistic deputy manager, his office superior. One of the directors of the firm expressed his surprise at the case, and although he was personally unacquainted with either the manager or the plaintiff, could not understand why the poor man had not appealed directly to the head office. Yet the director of the firm is, to the lower castes of workers, so distant and unapproachable, that this possibility was out of the question. This state of affairs had been described some fifteen years earlier by Kafka (and is also noted by Lederer), and Kracauer notes that ‘the very language’ of the petit bourgeois complainant ‘seems borrowed from Kafka’.⁵⁴ In another section, Kracauer describes watching two men ‘metamorphose’ (‘verwandeln’) from ‘repressed office workers’ into ‘real elemental forces’ during a night out in a cheap bar: the verb refers the reader to Kafka’s short story ‘The Metamorphosis’ (‘Die Verwandlung’), which deals specifically with the cultural disjunctions and cognitive dissonances of life as the new commercial industries.

Kracauer’s depiction of the *Angestellten*, then, is far from the objective, social-scientific ideal, but is constantly inflected not only by his ideological stance, but also by the journalist’s imperatives to be witty, or to garner sympathy for his subject. The project is therefore primarily literary, with a sociological edge, rather than well-written, literate sociology, like Speier’s article in the *Magazin der Wirtschaft*. To this end, we do not ask whether Kracauer quotes his sources verbatim, nor how Käthe’s letters to her poor ‘dull and narrow-minded’ correspondent came into Kracauer’s possession: we are distracted from doing so by the perfectly poised narrative persona that Kracauer adopts. Kracauer the narrator expresses amusement, elegant surprise and

⁵³ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 48. ‘Wird sonst nach der Wirklichkeit gedichtet, so geht hier die Dichtung der Wirklichkeit voran. In den Werken Franz Kafkas ist der verworrene menschliche Großbetrieb, dessen Entsetzlichkeit an die für Kinder hergerichteten Pappmodelle vertrackter Raubritterburgen erinnert, ist die Unerreichbarkeit der höchsten Instanz ein für allemal dargestellt.’ Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 36.

⁵⁴ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 48. ‘Die Klage des verarmten Kleinbürgers, die bis in die Sprache hinein Kafka entlehnt scheint’. Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 36.

occasionally even delight when confronted by the simplicity of some naïve shop-girl or a new and ingenious technique on the part of the employers:

One little miss typist, working in an enterprise far too big for her, tells me boldly to my face that neither she nor her colleagues are exactly wedded to the clatter of machines.⁵⁵

We conceive of the narrator of this anecdote as a rather pompous personage, holding the somewhat bizarre belief that the typists adore the racket of their machines, and that expressing displeasure at any aspect of their work requires a degree of courage or boldness. The author deliberately portrays himself as a person of limited understanding, but as readers we are sure that the 'real' Kracauer suffered no such delusions.

In introducing this element of characterisation and the development of a distinct narrative persona, however, Kracauer loses the objectivity of the sociological approach. The Kracauerian narrator and the 'little miss typist' face each other in a social relationship, which is structured by the same systemic hierarchies as any other encounter. The typist described is infantilised, in her soubriquet "little miss", the description of the firm as "far too big for her", and in the suggestion that she is "bold" to tell a visiting journalist that she does not like the machinery noise. The narrator, an avatar of Kracauer, is male and middle-class, and so doubly distanced from the typist in the social hierarchy. The overwhelming majority of references to the *Angestellten* are similarly structured, with Kracauer drawing on the hierarchies of colonial ethnography, gender, academic privilege and class to lend authority to his depiction of the white collar workers.

To some extent, of course, these harsh judgments of employees of both genders are inevitable: Kracauer's complaint with the capitalist system's treatment of the *Angestellten* is that they are poorly educated and lacking in imagination and understanding. They cannot be otherwise, herded into 'pleasure barracks'⁵⁶ by ideological forces with a vested interest in ensuring that

⁵⁵ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 46. 'Ein kleines Tippmädel, das in einem für sie viel zu großen Betrieb arbeitet, schleudert mir dreist ins Gesicht, daß weder sie noch ihre Kolleginnen ein Interesse an mechanischen Geklapper hätten.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 34.

⁵⁶ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 91. 'Pläsierkasernen'. Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 95.

they do not pause to develop any imagination or understanding. The depiction is so dismissive, however, that it is clear that there is no intention on the part of the author that this work should shock the employees from their stupor and bring them to full consciousness. It is simply not addressed to them. Instead, the intended audience are Kracauer's peers: those who, like him, regard the employees with wonder and mystery from an exalted and privileged position. His model for this style of writing is ethnography, and there are several arch references to anthropological practice, the most obvious being subtitle to the original German edition, '*aus dem neuesten Deutschland*' and the title of the first column, 'Unknown Territory' ('Unbekanntes Gebiet'), which hints at the geographical or spatial aspect usually present in ethnographic writing. Two passages in the first chapter develop this allusion:

Hundreds of thousands of salaried employees throng the streets of Berlin daily, yet their life is more unknown than that of the primitive tribes at whose habits those same employees marvel at in films.⁵⁷

Those are a few facts. They roughly outline the territory into which this little expedition – perhaps more of an adventure than any film trip to Africa – is to journey. For as it seeks out employees, it leads at the same time to the heart of the modern big city.⁵⁸

Kracauer styles himself as an ethnographer, reporting on a cultural phenomenon hidden in plain sight. He places himself wherever the breed is to be found: in offices and stores, in training academies, on trains or trams, or the streets of the big cities, in nightclubs and cafés. He enquires into their reading habits and their consumption patterns, their pleasures and their anxieties, the injustices they suffer and their means of redress, the discourses, institutions and technologies that govern their lives, and their organisations and the attachments that they form – and reports his findings to the readers of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. This inverted triangle relationship – with the author and his audience of peers hierarchically superior to the subject matter – is explicit in the titles of the last two columns in the book: 'Seen from above' ('Von

⁵⁷ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 29. 'Hunderttausende von Angestellten bevölkern täglich die Straße Berlins, und doch ist ihr Leben unbekannter als das der primitiven Völkerstämme, deren Sitten die Angestellten in den Filmen bewundern.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 11.

⁵⁸ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 32. 'Das sind ein paar Tatsachen. Sie umreißen notdürftig das Gebiet, in das diese kleine Expedition gehen soll, die vielleicht abenteuerlicher als eine Filmreise nach Afrika ist. Denn indem sie die Angestellte aufsucht, führt sie zugleich ins Innere der modernen Großstadt.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 15.

oben gesehen') and 'Dear Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!' ('Liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen!') There can be no doubt that this is a text written *about* a certain group for a third-party audience. When Kracauer describes the life of the *Angestellte* as 'unknown territory', it is clear that he is writing from a particular cultural position for whom "known" means rationally and scientifically examined and set down for an academically educated audience. The life of an *Angestellte*, after all, is perfectly well known to the private employee whom he encounters on a train on her way back from a wedding.

Gender is a similarly hierarchising principle, and, carefully manipulated, bolsters the Kracauerian narrator's authority to represent his subject. Kracauer depicts rather more female *Angestellten* than male ones, but there is no explicit feminist angle to his work: rather, I suggest, he makes women representative of the *Angestellten* class because his concern for their future is partially motivated by a fear that they are being feminised by the insecurity and false consciousness of their existence. Despite his claimed sympathy for the group, he is surprisingly harsh on the women he depicts. Many unemployed single women, he claims, bear full responsibility for their predicament:

However, their own foolishness is often to blame for the girls' misfortune. Since they can manage quite tolerably on a salary augmented by office bonuses, they shrink from any marriage in which they would do worse materially. If they are subsequently made redundant, they get neither a new job nor a husband.⁵⁹

A few of the women in the text earn Kracauer's sympathy or respect: Käthe, the correspondent of the 'dull and narrow-minded' 21-year-old employee (who stamps and files every communiqué 'according to methods worthy of the filing department of a large-scale enterprise,') is described as 'enlightened, luminous and idealistic'.⁶⁰ The majority, however, are vapid, childlike and

⁵⁹ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 54. 'An dem Unglück der Mädchen trägt allerdings oft ihre eigene Torheit die Schuld. Da sie mit einem durch die Bürozulage vermehrten Gehalt ganz erträglich wirtschaften können, scheuen sie vor einer Ehe zurück, in der sie sich materiell verschlechtern. Werden sie dann später freigesetzt, so kriegen sie weder eine neue Stelle noch einen Mann.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 46.

⁶⁰ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), pp. 71-72. The employee is 'dumpf und beschränkt'. 'Diese Privatkorrespondenz wird von ihm nach Methoden geführt, die der Registerabteilung eines Großbetriebes würdig wären.' Käthe is 'aufgeklärt, scheinhell und ideal'. Kracauer, *DA* (1971), pp. 69-70.

frequently sexually loose, like the private employee Kracauer meets on a train, who dallies with her boss in spite of her engagement, and who will not believe that it is possible to reach Spain without crossing the sea. Another, Cricket, chirrup along unconsciously with the latest musical hits, one of popular culture's stupefied slaves.

Kracauer finds rather more pathos in the situation of emasculated men who are unable to feed their families than that of women, who are likely to be single. As white-collar women are infantilised, so white-collar men are feminised. In the account of a case where one man is seeking redress after having been forced out of his job by a bullying deputy manager, the narrator snipes, 'These insults must have stung terribly, for they were all numbered and recorded for all eternity' – implicitly accusing the plaintiff, like Käthe's correspondent, of a rather effeminate attention to petty detail.⁶¹ Throughout the text, as we shall see, there is a tension between representing men as feminised for comic effect – which also enables the authoritative narrative voice to retain its double-privilege of class and gender - and a genuine (although not overtly acknowledged) alarm that employee culture not only emasculates men by taking away their ability to support their families, but actually feminises them, too:

In order to increase the man's friendliness, the job centre incidentally requires him to apply with shaven cheeks and in his best suit. [...] For fear of being withdrawn from use as obsolete, ladies and gentlemen dye their hair, while forty-year-olds take up sports to keep slim. [emphasis in original]⁶²

With personality treated as a commodity in the new commercial sector and the development of age-related discrimination, concern for one's appearance is now a gender-neutral phenomenon. And Herr Wagner presses his own trousers, to keep up the appearance of affluence.

The emasculation of the male *Angestellte* is seen most clearly in the description of an evening spent with two older employees:

⁶¹ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 47. 'Die Beleidigungen müssen höllisch gebrannt haben, denn sie sind alle für die Ewigkeit gezählt und registriert.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 35.

⁶² Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), pp. 38-39. 'Um die Freundlichkeit des Mannes zu steigern, fordert das Arbeitsamt übrigens, daß er sich mit rasierten Wangen und in seinem besten Anzug bewerbe. [...] Aus Angst, als Altware aus dem Gebrauch zurückgezogen zu werden, färben sich Damen und Herren die Haare, und Vierziger treiben Sport, um sich schlank zu erhalten.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 24.

[W]e attended a ball for widows in the neighbourhood of Elsässerstraße, the real Zille milieu, with brass band music, casual workers, cheap widows and whores. Beer was drunk and the men metamorphosed before my eyes. They were no longer repressed office employees, but real elemental forces breaking out of their cages and enjoying themselves in quite reckless ways. They told crude stories, dug up comic anecdotes, prowled about the room, brooded into their glasses, then went wild again [...] [W]hat was particularly noteworthy about the encounter was that the accountant seemed like an old crony of the dancing master, like a thoroughly non-bourgeois character who had never seen the inside of an office at all. Why did he never make his way up to higher positions? Perhaps the indifference of a vagabond nature prevented his ascent [...] There are a great many fantastical E. T. A. Hoffmann figures among the employees of advanced years. They have got stuck somewhere, performing unremittingly banal functions that are anything but uncanny. Yet it is as though these men were shrouded in an aura of horror. It emanates from the decaying powers that have found no outlet within the existing order.⁶³

This passage is one of the few in the book where *Angestellten* break out of the shallow, limited confines of the *Angestelltenkultur*, and are seen as authentic, vital – and fully masculine – beings. With its atmosphere of raw sexual energy and the contrast between the ‘repressed office employees’ and ‘real elemental forces’, this scene is perhaps the most explicit about the depredations that employee culture has, in Kracauer’s opinion, wrought on male sexuality. The more usual social activities enjoyed by employees are described in a later column, ‘Shelter for the homeless’ (‘Asyl für Obdachlose’). A young woman tells Kracauer that when she and her friends go out to glamorous nightspots, they avoid serious conversations because they “‘only distract and divert you from surroundings that you’d like to enjoy’”. Kracauer comments wryly that ‘[i]f distracting effects are ascribed to serious talk, distraction must be a deadly serious

⁶³ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), pp. 69-70. ‘Wir besuchten [...] einen Witwenball in der Gegend der Elsässer Straße, das echte Zille-Miljö, mit Blechmusik, Gelegenheitsarbeiten, billigen Witwen und Dirnen. Es wurde Bier getrunken, und die Leute verwandelten sich vor meinen Augen. Das waren nicht mehr gedrückte Büroangestellte, sondern richtige Elementargewalten, die aus dem Gehege brachen und sich auf ziemlich unbekümmerte Weise vergnügten. Sie erzählten eindeutige Geschichten, kramten Schwänke aus, strichen im Saal umher, sinnierten in ihre Gläser hinein und tobten dann wieder. [...] Besonders merkwürdig an der Zusammenkunft war aber dies: daß der Bilanzbuchhalter als ein alter Spießgeselle des Tanzmeisters wirkte, als eine durchaus unbürgerliche Existenz, die niemals Büroräume lange von ihnen gesehen hat. Warum ist er nicht zu höheren Position emporgedrungen? Vielleicht hat die Uninteressiertheit der Vagabundennatur seinen Anstieg verhindert [...] Es gibt eine Menge phantastischer E. T. A. Hoffman-Figuren unter den Angestellten vorgerückteren Alters. Irgendwo sind sie steckengeblieben und erfüllen seitdem ununterbrochen banale Funktionen, die alles andere eher als unheimlich sind. Dennoch ist es, als seien diese Menschen in eine Aura des Grauens gehüllt. Sie strömt von den verwesten Kräften aus, die innerhalb der bestehenden Ordnung keinen Ausweg gefunden haben.’ Kracauer, *DA* (1971), pp. 67-68.

matter'.⁶⁴ In the huge, glittering nightclubs frequented by the *Angestellten*, their personalities and political consciousnesses are overwhelmed and stifled by their environment. The widows' ball, by contrast, has no such mesmerising effect. The physical space is secondary to the men themselves, who dominate their surroundings physically as well as psychically. That they are 'elemental forces' suggests the strength of their personalities, and the references to 'cages' and 'prowling' characterises them as big cats, with powerful, tensed bodies that threaten to explode into violent motion at any time. The scene is ribald, with sexual commerce visible and acknowledged, rather than concealed behind polite phrases and a veneer of conventional respectability as it is in the aspirant bourgeois environments of the fashionable, feminised cafés.

This is urban proletarian culture, where the atmosphere is created and determined by the patrons themselves, not purchased in the price of a drink as in the corporate pleasure palaces. These men, with their 'decayed powers', their suppressed and wasted life force, are seen by Kracauer as grotesques, not because of the meanness of their minds, but because of the frustration of their native abilities and habits. Unlike the shop-girls avoiding serious conversation in one of the glittering modern cafés, these men once had a potential that has been squandered and denied by the system. It is not the lack of promotion that signifies this failure, but the way that their sexual energy, physical power and narrative capacity have been dissipated. In the cultural contexts of the urban proletariat culture or rural peasant culture, both of which value physical potency and personal charisma, these men would not appear as failed and frustrated grotesques, for their native masculine attributes would have been appreciated. With the direct reference to Hoffmann, as well as linguistic borrowings from the Gothic tradition ('phantastischer', 'eine Aura des Grauens', 'unheimlich'), Kracauer links the proletarian to two potent strains of what he believes to be authentic culture: the high culture of German Romanticism, and the low culture of folk narrative and oral tradition that Romanticism sought out. The passage contrasts this failure and the futility of their 'unremittingly banal functions' with the vigour of the proletarian culture, which is validated by being linked with both folk traditions and high national culture, both of which were regarded as authentic culture by Kracauer's contemporaries in the Frankfurt School.

⁶⁴ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), pp. 88-89. "'Ernste Unterhaltung [...] zerstreuen nur und lenken von der Umwelt ab, die man genießen möchte." Wenn einen ernsten Gespräch zerstreuende Wirkungen beigemessen werden, ist es mit der Zerstreung unerbittlicher Ernst.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 92.

Kracauer's reference to the Gothic tradition therefore textualises the hierarchical class relations identified by Lederer – the *Angestellten* as neither true proletariat nor true bourgeoisie – by leaving them stranded between the high literary tradition of German Romanticism and the low literary tradition of oral folk tales. Once again, the superficial *Angestellten* existence is caught between stronger and more defined institutions, both above and below.

These games with form and genre are not only a way of drawing attention to the text's own status as literary, then, but part of the project of elucidating a relationship between the *Angestelltenkultur* and hierarchised forms of cultural production. The first column begins with this relationship:

'But surely you can find all that in novels', one private employee replied, when I asked her to tell me something about her life in the office.⁶⁵

On the contrary, the narrator responds, you cannot find it all in novels. Instead, Kracauer mines various other textual sources: sociological research, trade union publications, petitions lodged with the labour councils, company newspapers, private correspondence, the Berlin evening newspapers, booklets containing the secret to keeping one's youth and beauty – even the sign held up by an unemployed salesman standing opposite the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. Kracauer finds a mass of cultural production surrounding the *Angestellten*, some produced about them, some produced for them, and some produced by them. Yet he is dismissive of the nature of the exchange between these products and the employees themselves:

Salaried employees today live in masses, whose existence – especially in Berlin and the other big cities – increasingly assumes a standard character [...] All these compulsions have unquestionably led to the emergence of certain standard types of salesgirl, draper's assistant, shorthand typist and so on, which are portrayed and at the same time cultivated in magazines and cinemas.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 28. "Das steht doch schon alles in den Romanen", erwiderte eine Privatangestellte, als ich sie bat, mir aus ihrem Büroleben zu erzählen.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 10.

⁶⁶ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 68. 'Die Angestellten leben heute in Massen, deren Dasein, in Berlin und den übrigen großen Städten vor allem, mehr und mehr ein einheitliches Gepräge annimmt ... All diese Zwangsläufigkeiten haben unstreitig zur Heraufkunft gewisser Normaltypen von Verkäuferinnen, Konfektionären, Stenotypistinnen usw. geführt, die in den Magazinen und den Kinos dargestellt und zugleich gezüchtet werden. Sie sind ins Allgemeinbewußtsein eingetreten, das sich nach ihnen ein Gesamtbild von der neuen Angestelltenschicht formt. Die Frage ist, ob das Bild die Wirklichkeit entscheidend trifft.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 65.

Kracauer claims that this flurry of production surrounding the *Angestellten* is not merely a matter of representation, but that it also has some influence over the reality of the *Angestellten*. Under the onslaught of this cultural fascination, he argues, the employees themselves are retreating into stock types, just as if they were, in fact, shallowly-drawn fictional characters.

I wish to end this discussion of Kracauer by turning to the essay series 'Die kleinen Ladenmädchen geht ins Kino' ('The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies'⁶⁷), which appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1927, three years before *Die Angestellten*, but which adopts a very similarly gendered position. Each of the eight essays discusses a film, none of which are named. All have relatively simple plots, and Kracauer's analysis finds that each appears to challenge social convention or educate its viewers – by showing the misery of the proletariat, for example, or a war or a love affair – but ultimately reinforces the status quo. Each essay ends by affirming the effect that this film has on its imagined audience, the 'little shopgirls': 'The little shopgirls gain unexpected insights into the misery of mankind and the goodness from above.' 'It is hard for the little shopgirls to resist the appeal of the marches and the uniforms.' 'The little shopgirls want so badly to get engaged on the Riviera.' 'The little shopgirls were worried; now they can breathe easy again.'⁶⁸ Like Cricket with her popular tunes, the little shopgirls depicted by Kracauer neither distinguish between nor distance themselves from the products of the culture industry, but are completely within its power, subject to every manipulation. The stereotype of the white-collar woman as ideal passive consumer is thus one that recurs in Kracauer's work, and I will refer back to it throughout this thesis. As well as noting Kracauer's characterisation of the white-collar woman as mass culture consumer, however, I also want to stress the wider implications: both mass culture and the *Angestellten* class which are assumed to be its primary audience are gendered as feminine. The association of mass culture with femininity is not a new observation, nor is it unique to Kracauer's work or even German culture. It has been noted at least as early as 1986, when Andreas Huyssen published the essay 'Mass Culture as Woman' in

⁶⁷ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament* (1995), pp. 291-304.

⁶⁸ Kracauer, *TMO* (1995), pp. 295, 298, 299, 304.

*After the great divide : modernism, mass culture, postmodernism.*⁶⁹ The particular depiction of the *Angestellten* class and their fashions, leisure activities and mass cultural products as feminine is a feature of this unique German discourse, however, and remains close to the surface in this account. As we will see, it appears not only in the texts discussed in this chapter but also in some of the novels and films discussed in the rest of this work. Kracauer's projected anxiety about the apparent feminisation of the masses is also linked to another grand narrative of the period, which reads the history of the Weimar Republic as a crisis of masculine identity. Moreover, I suggest that the social critiques offered by Kracauer and other leftwing critics – such as Rudolf Braune, whose novel is discussed in the final chapter – would have been of limited relevance to white-collar women because of their tendency to subsume particular female experience into a dominant narrative of 'feminisation' which had little to do with women themselves. My analysis of mass cultural products such as romance novels and films, then, is partly motivated by the assumption that these texts may have contained *more* potential for liberation or resistance for their female audience than those texts which were explicitly critical of the system, simply because they placed the New Woman and her worklife, dreams and aspirations at the centre.

Conclusion

German literary criticism, then, has tended to categorise novels featuring white-collar women along with those featuring white-collar men, privileging class status over gender. This is the result of a sociological tradition which was fascinated by the tension between an economically proletarian existence and a bourgeois ideological identification, and which gradually moved out of the realms of academic sociology and into the public sphere. For Lederer, scientific objectivity means a minimum of literary content, and he aims for a writing style without figurative language or metaphor, which attempts to do nothing more than to describe the group as accurately as possible. He prefers to take statistical material as his data, particularly census results and surveys carried out by unions. Kracauer's work, on the other hand, presumes a complex relationship between text, audience, ideology and the real. He is not only happy to treat

⁶⁹ Huyssen (1986), pp. 44-62.

literary and other cultural material in his research, but also writes in a self-consciously different style: a form of journalism which acknowledges the influences of orthodox academic social sciences such as sociology and anthropology, but which also draws heavily on both the new understanding of cultural production emanating from the Frankfurt School and various rhetorical strategies. This is not only because his work is appearing in the more public, less specialised forum of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, but also because the the social context of his work is different. By the late 1920s, new forms of media and mass communication were evolving, and representations of the *Angestellten* themselves were flourishing. Kracauer's analysis reads the overwhelming majority of these media as part of the 'distraction culture' that surrounded the white-collar workers, which prevented them from achieving consciousness. In his representations of this mystification and glamour, he depends on a gender schema which represents the educated, established middle-classes and the working classes as masculine and in possession of authentic high and folk cultures respectively, and the *Angestellten* as enthralled by a feminised mass culture. His disproportionate attention to female white-collar workers stems not from an interest in female experience, but from a rhetorical strategy which places his narrative persona in a position of superiority over his subject, and depends on systemic hierarchies of class, gender and occasionally race. Ironically, Kracauer's characterful depictions of the individuals subsumed under the 'Angestellten' label and himself walking amongst them serve to intensify rather than dissipate the powerful hierarchies in which they are caught.

Chapter Two

Girl meets Boss: Popular Romantic Fiction

Introduction

Long before white-collar men and women became (in Kracauer's phrase) 'literaturfähig', typists and office girls were making an appearance in popular romantic fiction, one of the new mass-produced media forms that technological innovation and modern methods of distribution had brought into being. According to Lynda B. King, the book trade began to industrialise during the nineteenth century, as developments in printing and paper production allowed vast numbers of cheap books to be printed. By the end of the nineteenth century, according to Lydia B. King, mass circulation had become a reality.¹ In the 1920s, the popular fiction market exploded once again, with major publishing houses like Ullstein leading the boom. The Ullstein innovation, King writes, was to commission new books, whilst the other publishers of cheap books were reprinting older books whose authors no longer required a fee:

Although Ullstein could not pay out as large a percentage to their authors as was usual, their plan was based on the technique of volume sales common in the 1980s: they would sell so many books that the final amount the authors earned would be more than they would have realised from a higher percentage of royalties calculated on a lower sales figure.²

Various other new imprints sprang up, producing books on the same, rationalised principle, and many of them – such as *Goldene-Frauen-Romane* by Eden, *Münchmeyers Frauen-Roman*, *Paynes Frauen-Romane* and others – were overtly aimed at women. Some of these imprints are extraordinarily standardised: the *Frauen von Heute* (Women of Today) series, which includes such titles as *Ein Prachtmädel*, *Die Privatsekretärin des Detektivs* and *Frau Fendrichs Privatsekretärin*, are all precisely 64 pages long. By no means all of the titles in these series were stories about secretaries, but the new white-collar worker was a popular subject. By

¹ Lynda B. King. *Bestsellers by Design: Vicki Baum and the House of Ullstein* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988).

² King (1988), p. 59.

selecting those that do have typists or secretaries as their protagonists, I aim to narrow down the field to those which thematise or respond to modernity and women's new role within it.

All of the novels discussed in this chapter and the films discussed in the next are effectively romances: that is, they all end with a wedding, or with an engagement and a wedding presumed to take place shortly after the last page or final credits. In all three of the popular romance novels that I look at in detail, the final marriage is between the secretary protagonist and her boss or her boss's son, and this is also true for many of the typist films. That the new household will be financially secure is also a constant factor. Struggling young typists marry rich men and embark upon lives of luxury: few embrace indolence, however, but carry the cheerful energy, diligence and agreeableness that brought them career success into the home. Struggling young men, meanwhile, get well-deserved promotions or sell the patents for their new inventions. This happens whether they are marrying poor young secretaries or rich heiresses, for the prevailing moral ethos dictates that no self-respecting man can be financially dependent on his wife. Yet, even though the protagonists are all struggling financially at the beginning of the novels, the marriages are never explicitly economically motivated: Inge, the heroine of *Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt*, maintains an implausible level of innocence about money even after she has become engaged to the heir of a large commercial company, as we will see.

For a significant number of novelists and film producers, then, women's new role in the office was first and foremost an opportunity for a new kind of romance, and the typist / boss romance quickly became a cliché. This reframing of the professional relationship between secretary and boss as a romantic encounter, I argue, was one of the ways in which a conservative popular culture sought to neutralise the potentially liberated figure of the white-collar woman. Although the reality was that secretaries and typists were poorly paid and had few prospects for career advancement, the small degree of personal freedom and financial independence they had was a new phenomenon for middle-class women. The typist thus became one of the most visible manifestations of the *Neue Frau*, the modern woman whose fashionably short skirts and bobbed hair were read as the external signs of a rationalised approach to life. The New Woman was involved in sport and *Körperkultur*, dealt confidently with men and romantic liaisons, organised her private life with the same ruthlessly objective efficiency that held sway in the business

world, and was closely allied with Americanism and *Neue Sachlichkeit*. She was visible in the office, in the department store, and in the streets, moving through the city and using public transport without any need for a chaperone. Simply in representing women employed in the office, all the texts discussed here operate to some degree within the discourse of the New Woman, and thematise her independence and modernity.

Many representations of the New Woman also ascribe to her a degree of sexual emancipation that would have been unthinkable a generation earlier, sometimes approvingly, and sometimes disapprovingly. As we saw in the Introduction, Atina Grossmann describes commentators who 'worried about the romantic and sexual fantasies of typists and salesgirls'.³ We will see in the final chapter that extra-marital sexual intercourse is a significant event in Rudolf Braune's *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat* and Irmgard Keun's novels. Vicki Baum's typist flapper Flämmchen (of *Menschen im Hotel*) is also sexually emancipated, and Franz Krey's *Maria und der Paragraph* features a stenotypist who has an abortion (the Paragraph in question being §218, which criminalised abortion until it was repealed in the 1970s.)⁴ The romance novels and films examined here, however, adhere to traditional standards of sexual morality. The protagonist's virginity on marriage is assumed, and it is not severely threatened.

Thus, these novels write the new figure of the typist into a set of previously established genre conventions: sexual abstinence until financially secure bourgeois marriage, sanctioned by love. The mixed-sex office is new, but the roles played by men and women within it are reassuringly familiar. Bridenthal and Koonz identified the conservative function of these stories in their 1984 study of women's labour: 'Filled with Cinderella fantasies encouraged by the media, they dreamed of marrying the boss rather than uniting against his exploitation of their labor and sex.'⁵ The plots cannot be wholly fantastic, however: consider this insight from Janice Radway's study of women who read romances:

³ Grossmann (1986), p. 67.

⁴ Vicki Baum, *Menschen im Hotel* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1929) and Franz Krey, *Maria und der Paragraph* (Berlin: Verlag Neuer Kurs, 1972). [Orig. 1929.]

⁵ Bridenthal and Koonz (1984), p. 51.

Romances purport to be open-ended stories about different heroines who undergo different experiences. They manage such a suggestion by using the conventions of a realistic novel, which always pretends to be telling an as-yet-uncompleted story of a singular individual. Despite this realistic illusion, however, each romance is, in fact, a mythic account of how women *must* achieve fulfilment in patriarchal society. This is true precisely because the central events in each romance are structurally the same.⁶

The texts rely, therefore, on a combination of idealised romantic match and recognisable, realistic-portrayed urban environment. Through the juxtaposition of modern setting and mythic structure, the novels establish a continuity of gender hierarchy, transforming secretaries into wives: the mixed-sex office may be new, but the dynamics between the central characters are utterly familiar, with women subservient to men. As we will see in Chapter Three, the comparison of wife and secretary is taken even further in the films, which exploit the dramatic conventions of mistaken identity to suggest that the secretary and the wife are practically interchangeable.

The first two novels discussed here are Weimar novels, and the structures they have in common are a typist heroine, a paternal boss (who expresses a sexual or romantic interest in the protagonist) and his son, who loves the protagonist but is not free to act whilst his father controls the family business, but who ultimately marries the protagonist. Both showcase the modern city, and the modern typing girl who makes her home there. Despite these similarities, they display quite different conceptions of the city. The first, *Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt*, imagines the modern city through its topography and its new infrastructure: not only is the heroine Inge identified in the title by the commercial district in which she works, but the text gives sufficiently detailed accounts of her and other characters' movements around Berlin, by car, on foot and on tram, that they can easily be plotted on a map. The fascination with the new material environment goes right down to the technology of the office building in which she works, and the technology used in the office, for when one of her suitors conceives a murderous plot against her, he succeeds in turning both her typewriter and the building's elevator into weapons. Inge may move independently in the public spaces of the new metropolis, but they pose a threat to her

⁶ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 17.

until she moves into the protection of her husband. In the second book, *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, the emphasis is on personal relationships and Dagmar's negotiation of the modern social context, in particular her encounters with her boss and his family, and the careless and potentially exploitative manner in which the rich treat the poor under the guise of democratic friendship. The new entertainment culture also features heavily, with a vast pleasure palace including cinema screens, restaurants and a dance-floor playing a substantial role in the novel. I read both of these novels with an awareness of gender. In *Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt*, the masculine world of business technology and the public spaces of the city threaten Inge unless she is under the protection of her lover Wolfram. *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, in contrast, replicates Kracauer's gender dynamics by associating the 'pleasure palace' with women and feminised men.

These two novels have been selected because they are told predominantly from the point of view of the young white-collar worker, and showcase aspects of urban living that were also a source of fascination to the period's film-makers, journalists and artists. Many other novels featuring typists show a similar interest in modernity and the New Woman, albeit to a lesser extent: in *Die Tippgräfin*, an Italian princess learns to type so that she can help her suitor, the dissolute Graf von Hagen, write his great work. Discovering that he is in debt, Mariella steals her aunt and guardian's jewels, sells them, and replaces them with paste. The theft is discovered and the ensuing court case is an enormous scandal. Graf von Hagen commits suicide, and Mariella's only friends are her school-mate Lore and her friend Renate, a freelance photographer, who takes her to live at her house after she is released on bail. Renate, rather than the 'typing countess', is the novel's New Woman: she is financially independent, lives alone, drives her own car and insists that Mariella puts her typing to good use during her recuperation. This example of feminine industry gives Mariella new hope and inspires her to carry on living, but ultimately, she does not follow Renate's example. Instead, she realises that she loves her family lawyer (who is absent during the court case as he is in Africa rescuing Mariella's father from a pygmy tribe who had imprisoned him twenty years earlier and made him their king) and marries him.⁷

⁷ Klothilde von Stegmann, *Die Tippgräfin* (Berlin: Fünf-Türme Verlag, 1927).

At the other end of the scale is the heroine of *Sekretärin Vera* by Grete von Urbanitzky, which is less a novel and more a professional woman's manifesto organised around a plot.⁸ After a stint as a department store model, Vera takes a job as a secretary to an English writer called May Hardy, and leaves her mother and sister to travel to London. To her amazement, Vera finds herself in a circle of professional women: one of May Hardy's former secretaries is now a successful independent author in her own right. Typing, in this novel, leads to much more than a marriage to the boss, and England is a land of opportunity and plenty. The novel does not stop there, however. Miss Hardy sends Vera to New York to organise a publicity tour for her new novel. In the promised land, Vera finds not just artistic, independent women, but a whole club full of professional women, who seem to exist in a parallel universe of their own: the skyscraper in which their club has its residences was built by Anne Morgan, sister of Pierpont Morgan. Miss Hardy's publisher introduces her to the club, the America Women's Association, who are sworn to avoid working with men and employ one another as far as possible. Inspired by their example, Vera returns to Germany to take up a post that one of them has created for her, as head of a new German photo-library. Just as the library is established, and Vera is, at nineteen, at the start of an exciting new career, she meets Paul Rameder, a wealthy young man with egalitarian attitudes, and the novel finishes with an engagement. The novel certainly foregrounds working women, but it does so in such an unreal way that it is difficult to map it on to any wider phenomenon of women working. Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about it, however, is the way the 'romantic' ending is tacked on, as if the only way that a novel could possibly end is with the heroine's marriage.

Radway also warns, however, that 'although ideology is extraordinarily pervasive and continually determines social life, it does not preclude the possibility of firm though limited resistance.'⁹ Although moments of resistance and agency will become more important in the next chapter, I do not want to represent any of the novels published in the Weimar era as wholly negative and reactionary. By taking typists as heroines, all these authors indicate some interest in the modern, liberated woman, and provide a model with which young, female readers can

⁸ Grete von Urbanitzky, *Sekretärin Vera* (Hannover: Adolf-Sponholtz-Verlag, 1930).

⁹ Radway (1984), p. 17.

identify. An attempt to address the challenges that working women might face is also a frequent feature: both Vera and Dagmar have to negotiate the problem of unwanted sexual attention at work, and it is clear that Inge (*Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt*) has a set of strategies for dealing with men who pester her on the street. Inge is also very decisive in her response to Anuschat's sexual aggression.

The last book discussed here, however, is hardly interested in the city or its heroine's first discovery of love. *Seine kleine Sekretärin* is a meretricious novel from 1934, and carries its National Socialist credentials rather close to the surface. Like *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, the novel begins with the heroine moving from the country to Berlin to find work as a typist, a classic narrative of modernity. Shortly after she has begun working on the fringes of the film industry, however, the novel takes a sharp right turn and moves to an aristocrat's castle in deepest rural Germany. It ends with a marriage and the aristocrat announcing exultantly that they will have 'blonde, schöne Kinder'¹⁰. The similarities between this novel and *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, I argue, show the extent to which the typist novel had developed recognisable generic conventions, which are being deliberately re-written to suit a fascist agenda.

Adolf Sommerfeld, *Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt : Lebensroman einer Stenotypistin*

Rationalism and Romance

The typist protagonist of *Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt* moves in a new, modern world, where technology is both a source of excitingly novel opportunities and experiences, and a series of threats and dangers. The book begins with the funeral of Herr Berger, a low-level civil servant. His daughter Inge is a typist and lives alone with her mother in a small Berlin flat. Inge and her mother typify the *Angestellten* class described by the sociologists: although poor, they have a bourgeois consciousness, and seek to maintain a distinction between themselves and the working classes. Inge's poverty, however, is not the focus of the novel, nor the means by which a

¹⁰ Grete Rothberg, *Seine kleine Sekretärin* (Halle: Fünf-Türme-Verlag, 1934), p. 199.

structural analysis of the problems faced by white-collar workers can be carried out. It is instead part of the wish-fulfilment function of the romance plot, and her middle-class status ensures (as it does for the heroines of the romance films in the next chapter) that she is able to move comfortably and confidently in a much wealthier social world.

Like the typist heroines of the many of the novels and films discussed here, she is extremely good at her job. In a discussion of typists in two Weimar films, Angelika Führich stresses the importance of hard work in representations of the typist:

As successful and industrious young working women, they mediate female professional and private success and invite the female audience to identify with their ascent up the office ladder. With their exemplary, flawless, and virtuous performance at work, both characters serve as role models for their female office colleagues – no less in the film itself than in the cinema audience.¹¹

The successful conclusion of the romance plot in these films is therefore a reward for the protagonist's professional dedication, and this is no less true in romance novels. With three years' experience, Inge has risen from the general secretarial ranks to a well-paid and responsible position as a private secretary to the head of the company. She is practical and objective: a daughter of the modern age. She is a 'Großstadtmädchen', or metropolitan girl, and 'erkannte sich schon vor der Konfirmation die Heuchelei der männlichen Kompliment'.¹² Yet, the text tells us, this rationality doesn't mean that Inge doesn't also have secret romantic longings:

Im solchen schlaflosen Nächten sah sie sich selbst, als die Heldin der Dramen und Filme, die fühlte sich umwoben von herrlichen Musik und hinaufgetragen in höhere Sphären, beglückt von Sonnenschein, Menschengüte und Liebe. Und die Menschengüte kam von anderen Wesen, denen sie bisher nie begegnet war, so rein und licht und edel, wie Blumen in den Gefilden eines Märchenlandes.
Und auch die Liebe kam...

¹¹ Führich (2000), p. 154.

¹² Sommerfeld (1932), p. 30. '... was aware of the deceitful nature of men's compliments even before her Confirmation.'

Inge Berger, die fleißige, pflichttreue und kluge Angestellte einer großkaufmännischen Firma, die vorzügliche Stenotypistin und Rechnerin, das selbstbewußte, aber mißtrauisch und menschenscheue Mädchen, sehnte sich nach Liebesglück.¹³

The text sets up an opposition between the modern rationality and romanticism: the implication is that there is something incongruous about a practical working girl with secret romantic longings. Inge's fantasies are closely based on a stereotyped romantic dream sold by popular culture: so closely do her dreams follow filmic devices, they even come with a soundtrack. The novel does not depend on an ironic gap between Inge's romanticised ideals and her actual experiences, however, nor do her secret dreams lead her to behave in ways that hinder or advance the romance plot. Rather, this paragraph serves to establish a bond between Inge and the reader of the romantic novel, who, one assumes, also idealises and longs for true love. It asserts Inge's normality and likeness to the romantically-minded reader, despite her credentials as a modern, rational girl.

Despite her romantic longings, Inge behaves with impeccable objectivity throughout the novel. It is the men who are impulsive, imprudent and (in the case of one of her suitors) violent in the name of love. Shortly after the funeral with which the novel opens, a young typewriter mechanic named Anuschat approaches Inge, and tells her that before his death, her father affianced her to him. Inge refuses this engagement, saying that her father would not have arranged such a match without her knowledge and consent. Anuschat continues to try and persuade her, however, becoming more and more threatening and unstable as the novel continues.

On the same day, Inge's romantic life blossoms further when she receives a proposal from the director of the firm, Erich. Seconds later, she receives another from his son and second-in-command, Wolfram. Inge returns the younger man's love, but cannot see a way of accepting

¹³ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 32. 'In such sleepless nights she saw herself as the heroine of dramas and films, felt wonderful music weave around her and herself lifted to higher spheres blessed with sunshine, human benevolence and love. And the human benevolence came from other beings, whom she had never encountered before, so pure and light and noble, like flowers in the meadows of a fairy-tale land.

And Love came too ...

Inge Berger, the hardworking, conscientious and clever employee of a great commercial firm, an outstanding stenotypist and bookkeeper, a self-confident, somewhat mistrustful and reserved girl, longed for true love.'

him that will not hurt his father, who has been very kind to her. She resigns her position and moves to Frankfurt-am-Main. Wolfram persuades his father to open a Frankfurt branch of the company, moves there to run it, and employs Inge as his secretary. They are found out when Erich receives a letter from Wolfram addressed in Inge's hand and comes to get them. He is now disgusted with Inge, believing her to be a person of low moral standards who moved to Frankfurt deliberately to entrap his son. The couple return to Berlin, still in disgrace with Erich, but secretly engaged. Inge finds work at a new office.

The City as 'Mordmaschine'

The romance plot is thus established: Inge and Wolfram seek a way to be together, whilst Anuschat and Wolfram's father provide various threats to their happiness. Anuschat continues to pester Inge, and to dissuade him, she tells him about her engagement to Wolfram. He begins a violent campaign against her, turning the modern office technology which surrounds her into a series of weapons. He comes to her office in his professional role as a typewriter mechanic and immediately after he has 'repaired' her typewriter, it explodes:

Aber kaum hatte sie die ersten Satze geschrieben, als die Maschine mit lautem Krach auseinanderfiel und der Wagen mit der Gummiwalze ihr ins Gesicht flog.¹⁴

Inge is covered in blood, though fortunately the wound is small. Anuschat is fired from the typewriter workshop, but this only gives him more time to obsess about Inge. He resolves to build a 'Mordmaschine':

Der stellungslose Werkmeister, der sich seit seinem Lehrjahren mit der Bau und der Konstruktion von Maschinen beschäftigt hatte, kam sich jetzt vor wie ein Erfinder, dem die Ausgabe gestellt war, eine Mordmaschine zu konstruieren. Und diese grübelnde Beschäftigung schmeichelte nicht nur seiner Eitelkeit, sondern erhöhte vor allem den Reiz seines verbrecherischen Vorhabens. Aber wie bei allen Erfinden zahlreichen Theorien noch immer nicht zu einer einzigen praktischen Verwertung führen, so erging es erst recht dem Werkmeister Anuschat, der kein Erfindentalent besaß. Zwar balgten sich in seinem krankhaften Gehirn die tollsten Pläne miteinander, aber aus

¹⁴ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 120. 'But she had barely written the first sentence when the machine fell apart with a loud bang, and the carriage with the rubber roller hit her in the face.'

diesem Chaos verworrener Phantasterei wurde kein greifbares Projekt, keine Mordmaschine, ja nicht einmal ein tödlich wirkendes Zauberwort geboren.¹⁵

Like Inge with her dreams of true love, Anuschat casts himself in a cinematic role: he is no longer an unemployed worker, but a crazed genius, a Caligari or a Frankenstein, and this self-image fuels his enthusiasm for the project. Technology, science, magic and chaos are all mixed up, an established rhetorical trick for depicting modernity as mysterious and threatening. In the end, though, Anuschat fails to invent his “murder machine”, and instead adapts a familiar piece of urban infrastructure to his purposes. He watches Inge and ascertains that she leaves work at five o’clock sharp, whilst the rest of the office stays until five-thirty. One Monday afternoon, he puts his plan into action:

An der Normaluhr auf dem Spittelmarkt stellte er seine Taschenuhr, ging um viertel fünf die Treppe des Geschäftshauses bis zum letzten Stockwerke hinauf, vergewisserte sich, daß die Arbeitsräume verschlossen waren, durchschnitt das schützende Drahtnetz des Fahrstuhlschachtes und wartete bis fünf Minuten vor fünf Uhr. Dann schwang er sich verwegen und mit eigener Lebensgefahr auf die Achse des Rades und durchfeilte das den Fahrstuhl tragender Teil mit einem ganz besonders scharfen Instrument bis auf den geringen Durchmesser von einigen Millimetern. Er rechnete damit, daß das Teil nach dem Anlaufen sofort reißen und der Fahrstuhl in die Tiefen laufen würde.

Zwei Minuten vor fünf Uhr schlich Anuschat sich die Treppe hinunter, und trieb sich in Erwartung der kommenden Dinge auf der Straße umher.

Punktlich um fünf Uhr verließ Inge das Bureau, öffnete den Fahrstuhl, drückte auf den Knopf und – in demselben Augenblick stürzte der Fahrstuhl etwa einen Meter herunter, um dann festgekeilt stehen zu bleiben.¹⁶

¹⁵ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 128. ‘The unemployed foreman, who had been constructing machines since his apprenticeship, now saw himself as an inventor with the task of building a murder machine. And this occupation flattered not only his vanity, but also increased the allure of his criminal plans. But Anuschat, who had no talent for invention, fared no better than the inventors of hundreds of theories which were never put into practice. The most wonderful plans scrambled for attention in his morbid mind, but no tangible project came out of this chaos, no murder machine, not even a lethal magic word.’

¹⁶ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 131. ‘He set his pocket watch according to the main clock on the Spittelmarkt, went up the stairs to the very top floor of the building at quarter to five, made sure that the workrooms were still locked, cut through the protective wire netting around the lift cabin, and waited until five to five. Then, daringly and almost lethally, he vaulted onto the axis of the wheel, and filed through the weight-bearing part with a very sharp instrument until only a few millimetres remained. He calculated that this would rip through as soon as the lift started, and it would plunge down. Two minutes before five, Anuschat went down the stairs, and hurried across the road to wait for what was about to happen. On the dot of five, Inge left the office, opened the lift, pressed the button, and – in the same moment, the lift plummeted one metre, then stopped dead.’

The description of Anuschat's attempt on Inge's life makes use not only of technology in the physical sense, by turning an ordinary feature of the modern office building into a deadly weapon, but also technological precision. Leaving work at precisely five o'clock every day under the sight of the big clock – a reminder of the nineteenth-century rationalisation of time – Inge is machine-like herself, part of the regular, efficient mechanism of the modern city, and it is the repetition of this event that gives Anuschat his opportunity. With his technician's training, Anuschat is able to insert a destructive element into this routine just as he inserted the explosive into the workings of Inge's typewriter. Fortunately, the text continues, the lift had been checked and serviced only two days earlier, and the safety mechanism functioned perfectly. Inge has a nasty shock, but is unhurt. As it becomes clear that something exciting has happened, a crowd of commercial employees gathers around the entrance to the building. At first, the mass provides cover for Anuschat, for who can find a criminal in a crowd of hundreds? Then:

Mit der Schnelligkeit eines elektrischen Funkens verbreitete sich das Gerücht auf der Straße, der Attentäter sei erkannt und flüchtig.¹⁷

Anuschat loses his head and tries to fight his way out of the crowd, intending to leap over the side of the bridge and into the river Spree, and there to swim for his life. But many anonymous hands take hold of him, and he is handed over to the police, questioned, and placed in an asylum.

Although Anuschat will return, Inge's next encounter with new machinery is benevolent – perhaps because she is under Wolfram's protection. Hearing of Inge's problems with Anuschat, he decides that he must marry her at once, and proposes to drive up to Berlin in his new car to see her. Inge is overjoyed not only at the prospect of seeing Wolfram again, but also of her first ride in a motorcar:

.. sie sprang wie ein Kind in der Stube herum. Ein Automobile war schon von jeher ihr Schwarm. Wenn sie die reichen Leute, nachlässig an die Rückwand der prächtigen Wagen gelehnt, auf Gummireifen durch die asphaltierten Straßen Berlins rasen sah, kam ihr eine Umwandlung von

¹⁷ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 137. 'With the speed of an electric current, the rumour went through the street that the assassin was known and on the run.'

Neid, und sie sehnte sich, nur ein einziges Mal in einem Auto fahren zu dürfen, sei es auch nur auf kurze Zeit.¹⁸

Inge's wish to go in a motorcar is expressed in very visual terms: not only the car itself, but the new asphalt streets of the city.¹⁹ The text goes into great detail about the route they take through the city:

In raschem Lauf durchfuhr des Auto die Leipziger Straße bis zum Potsdamer Platz, schwenkte dann die Bellevuestraße ab, durchraste den Tiergarten, Kurfürstendamm und Kantstraße bis zum Stadion im Grunewald, wo in dem eleganten Restaurant das Wiedersehen noch mit leidlichen Genüssen gefeiert werden sollte.²⁰

We turn now to the city's streets, and how they are used to constitute the public spaces of the city in physical, sociological and commercial terms, for Sommerfeld takes great care to map his heroine's journeys around Berlin. As in many high modernist texts, the individual's travels around the real city is used to express something about metropolitan experience. Earlier on, we have seen Inge walking down Danzigerstraße and Schönhauser Allee to the Senefelderplatz U-bahn station, with all the other metropolitan workers:

Der Bahnstiege was angefüllt mit Menschen der verschiedensten Art, Angestellter beiderlei Geschlechts, die auf schnellsten Wege zu ihrer Beschäftigungstätte gelangen wollten.²¹

¹⁸ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 144. 'she jumped around the office like a child. She had always been passionate about cars. When she saw the rich people leaning careless on the back of the splendid cars, cruising on rubber tyres through the asphalt streets of Berlin, a sense of envy came over her, and she desperately wished she might go in a car just once, even if only for a short time.'

¹⁹ The way Inge refers to the car and its occupants, however, simultaneously draws attention to and conceals the wish-fulfilment nature of the text. Inge refers to the "rich people" who own and drive cars as if they were impregnably separated from her: and for many of those who read the narrative contemporaneously, they probably are. Yet she is now engaged to the heir of a large commercial firm. It is rather implausible if this has had no effect on her expectation of realising her fantasy of driving in a motor-car. The logic of idealised romantic love – the subtextual logic that says that a romance heroine is not worthy of a rich husband if she appears more interested in his wealth than in love - is thus taken to an extreme. Although we are aware that the match between Inge and Wolfram will be a wealthy one, Inge does not appear to have even noticed that her fiancé is wealthy.

²⁰ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 151. 'The car drove quickly along Leipziger Straße to Potsdamer Platz, swerved away from Bellevue Straße, dashed through the Tiergarten, Kurfürstendamm and Kantstraße to the Grunewald Stadium, where, in an elegant restaurant, the reunion would be celebrated with sweet delights.'

²¹ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 21. 'The platform was filled to overflowing with various sorts of people, employees of both sexes, who wanted to reach their places of employment by the quickest means possible.'

The text draws attention to the change which has taken place since the First World War, and the public visibility of the new patterns of employment. In the old city, the overwhelming majority of the workers heading into the commercial districts were male, and a much greater proportion of the population would have been engaged in some kind of manual work. In the modern city that Sommerfeld represents, white-collar employees dominate and there are vast numbers of women among them, travelling by the newest, quickest means possible. Further down the line (which is the current day U2), the employees are further taxonomised, each stop given character by the businesses that congregate in that area of the city. At Alexanderplatz, commercial employees and warehouse workers get out; at Klosterstraße, the legal clerks. In this way, the commuters identify each other's work by their relationship to a particular area of the city.²² The city, meanwhile, is made real by the atmospheres that these populations and professions bring to its different districts.

Similarly, the underground features in Anuschat's final assassination attempt. Having been released from the asylum and failed to find Inge, he follows Wolfram instead, who is on his way home to try and make amends to his ill father. Anuschat pursues him on the line out towards Thielplatz, in the southwest suburbs of Berlin. Wolfram gets out at the unidentified D_____ (presumably Dahlem). Once again, Anuschat makes use of the mass to hide himself. Despite the fact that Wolfram has seen Anuschat before and knows him to be a threat to both Inge and himself, Anuschat is able to get close enough to Wolfram at the ticket office to overhear his destination. The underground chase scene is played for maximum tension: Anuschat nearly misses the train that Wolfram has got on to, but, just as the guard calls for the crowd to stand back, leaps forward, opens the door and presses himself into the packed carriage. As in the scene in the lift control box, Anuschat's assassination attempt is told with reference to his daredevil stunts, and there is, again, the sense of time ticking by. This time, it is the passage of the stations rather than the precise time until Inge's departure from work that creates the suspense:

²² Sommerfeld (1932), p. 24. 'So each passenger knew from the outset not only where their neighbour got out, but had also known what each one did for their job, since their first encounter.'

Dieses mit höchsten Lebensgefahr verbundene Hineinspringen in einen zur Abfahrt bereiten Wagen der Untergrundbahn bewies hinreichend, in welchem Erregungszustand sich der wahnwitzige junge Mensch befand. Von dem raschen Lauf außer Atem, stand er schnaufend an die Wagentür gepreßt und starrte zum Fenster hinaus [...]

Die vielen Stationen bis zum Thielplatz dünkten ihn eine Ewigkeit, obwohl die Fahrt kaum länger als eine halbe Stunde dauerte. Vom Bahnhof Wittenbergplatz flaute der Verkehr erheblich ab, so daß er mehr Bewegungs freiheit bekam und mit Eifer und Unruhe bei jeder Haltestelle die Namenschilder prüfen konnte.²³

Like the passage describing the rigged elevator, this is immensely visual, almost cinematic. Anuschat with his face pressed against the door and the compression and expansion of time as perpetrator and victim move closer to their destination would be extraordinarily easy to translate to film. Anuschat's pursuit of Wolfram, like his pursuits of Inge, is given in very specific detail, so that the city is not only the location of his acts, but also plays a part in them. Its mechanics and machinery suggest and enable his attempts to harm the couple, and its crowds hide, delay and seek him. At the end of the novel – after Wolfram has survived Anuschat's bullet and persuaded his father to forgive him and allow him to marry Inge – the city's infrastructure also finishes Anuschat off. He waits outside the church where the marriage is being celebrated, plotting a final assault on the happy couple:

In demselben Augenblick brauste ein Straßenbahnwagen heran und über Anuschat hinweg. Ein allgemeiner Schrei des Entsetzens, aber Anuschat konnte nur noch als Leiche geborgen werden.²⁴

Inge and Wolfram, the narrator notes, pass by the accident in their bridal carriage, but remain oblivious of Anuschat's demise. The book ends with an assurance that Inge and Wolfram will be very happy together, and never forget how they came to meet:

²³ Sommerfeld (1932), pp. 199-200. 'This potentially lethal jump into a train on the point of departing shows what pitch of feeling the insane young man had reached. Out of breath from the impetuous leap, he stood and gasped, pressed against the carriage door and stared out of the window [...]
The stations to Thielplatz seemed to last forever, even though the journey was barely longer than a half hour. After Wittenbergplatz the crowds abated somewhat, so that he had more freedom to move, and he could check the name at each station, impatient and zealous.'

²⁴ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 220. 'In the same moment a tram roared up and right over Anuschat. A general cry of horror – but now only Anuschat's corpse could be retrieved.'

Auf dem Tisch ihres Boudoirs, als sinnige Überraschung des aufmerksamen Schwiegervaters stand eine kleine Schreibmaschine in einem prachtvollen Lederkoffer und an der Wand in einem vergoldeten Rahmen hing eine Radierung von Künstlerhand, den Spittelmarkt darstellend, mit dem immer wogenden Geschäftsbetrieb der Großstadt.²⁵

This novel, perhaps more than any of the others discussed in this chapter, makes a feature of the city, its new commercial culture and the new technologies that the city inhabitants encounter. Inge's office environment and its tools (her stenogramm pad and sharpened pencils) are described several times, and her typewriter, the firm's elevator and the city's modern transport systems are all given prominent roles in the action. Inge's romantic fantasies take place in 'ein Märchenland' of idealised pastoral landscapes, but, despite its melodramatic elements, her courtship is quite definitely situated in the urban environment. Despite Inge's confidence in the city and at work, her awareness of the 'Heucherlei der männlichen Kompliment' and her aptitude for office work, the masculine world of business and technology is a source of threats unless she is in Wolfram's protection. Her typewriter, her work routine and the modern office building with its lift all make her vulnerable to Anuschat, and it is only once she is safely married to Wolfram that the threat is truly neutralised. Office technology is a source of opportunity and social mobility, but only in the protection of a husband is one truly safe.

Fedor von Zobeltitz, *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*

Social strata

In *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, the focus is less on the city's technology and infrastructure, and more on its entertainments and social distinctions. Dagmar, the typist protagonist, becomes friends with her boss's daughter and son. Much of the first part of the novel focusses on the way that the wealthy Schmitzes and the poorer working girl negotiate the class divisions between them, and how these are expressed. Not only the men of the family but also the women treat Dagmar's sexuality as though it were placed at their disposal: whilst the father and grandfather harass her, daughter Ellinor and her mother engineer a flirtation between Dagmar and the son. Ellinor and Dagmar become close friends, but their different class statuses mean that Ellinor is in

²⁵ Sommerfeld (1932), p. 222. 'As a surprise from the attentive father-in-law, a little typewriter in a exquisite leather case stood on a table in their bedroom, and, hung on the wall, was a gold-framed etching of the Spittelmarkt, with the ever-growing commercial activity of the metropolis.'

danger of exploiting Dagmar's position even when she believes she is acting in her friend's best interests. In a secondary plot, Dagmar's (male) cousin takes a job in a colossal pleasure palace called the Paradies, which enables the novel to portray the new, commercialised Berlin nightlife. The novel is surprisingly close to Kracauer's view of the *Angestelltenkultur* in its characterisation of the Paradies as an overwhelmingly feminised space.

As von Ankum comments in the introduction to *Women in the Metropolis*, 'the classic "arrival in the city" scene [was] frequently employed in fictional and filmic texts of the 1920s that establish urban space as a place of great expectation for women'.²⁶ Accordingly, *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit* begins with nineteen-year-old Dagmar's dramatic escape from rural tradition to urban modernity. She lives in a half-ruined castle with her indifferent grandmother and her older cousin Ilse, in an unidentified German province. The owner of the castle is her cousin Erwin, who inherits it on his father's death and returns to Germany from the USA. He falls in love with Ilse and they plot to run away together. Dagmar is asked to aid their elopement by helping Ilse out of the castle in the dead of night, to where Erwin will be waiting in a car. Instead, Dagmar locks Ilse in the castle, leaps out of her bedroom window and persuades Erwin that it is only fair that he take her instead: unlike Ilse, she is under the age of majority and has no other opportunity for escape. At thirty one, Ilse can simply tell her grandmother that she is leaving and do it. Erwin, who is not the most constant beau a woman could wish for, acquiesces. He and Dagmar leave for Berlin.

Dagmar, like Inge, sees herself as a modern, rational girl, and we find the same perceived distinction between rationality and romanticism. Having arrived in Berlin, she writes to her grandmother, explaining that she knows that most of the dangers that attend young women come from Love, but she has no intention of falling in love, so there is no need to worry about her:

‘ Ich will nicht abstreiten, daß es für jedes junge Mädchen auf dem Wege zur Selbstständigkeit Gefahren gibt. Aber die fürchte ich nicht. Ich weiß ja, woher die meisten dieser Gefahren kommen: aus Dummheiten des Herzens. Ach Gott, Grossi, mein Herz ist mehr ein Kühlraum als ein Wärmeapparat. Und wenn wirklich mal einer da sein sollte, ich meine ein männliches Geschöpf Gottes, einer, der mir gefällt, so kannst Du Dich schön darauf verlassen, daß ich die

²⁶ von Ankum (1997), p 1.

Atmosphäre meines Herzens verständlich regulieren werde. Vorläufig habe ich besseres zu tun, als an Liebe, Verlobung und Hochzeit zu denken.²⁷

Instead, further adopting the language of rationalised New Womanhood, she is in Berlin to stand on her own two feet. She finds a job almost immediately, and boasts to Erwin that she is so good she types 'auf jeder Maschine wie ein geborenes Tipphuhn.'²⁸ The metaphor, and the ensuing conversation with Erwin, emphasise the fact that typing has become a wholly feminine occupation – to the detriment of men like himself, Erwin believes:

Wo? Du hast mehr Glück als ich und bist auch nicht gescheiter. Aber ihr Weiberchen drängt die Männerwelt ja immer weiter auf die Schattenseite. Überall schmuggelt ihr euch da zwischen. Seit Erfindung der Schreibmaschine gibt es bloß noch Sekretärinnen, männlich Sekretäre werden gar nicht mehr gesucht. Ihr grinst niedlich, zeigt eure hübschen Beinchen und klappert mit den Augen. Das ist eure anschaulich Stärke.²⁹

Dagmar is unruffled by this outburst, merely remarking that she hasn't even seen her new boss yet, so how could she have shown off her legs?

Despite Dagmar's easy dismissal of the subject, however, the novel shows her carefully negotiating the threats posed by the sexually charged atmosphere of the office. Unusually, it takes a great interest not only in her but also in Erwin's ambiguous class position and sexual status, for in this novel it is not only the female character who can trade on her youth and sex appeal. Erwin is a trained architect, but unable to find work in his chosen profession, and eventually takes a job as at the 'Paradies', one of the city's new pleasure palaces. The *Paradies* seeks elegant young men to take female customers onto the dance floor: with his semi-

²⁷ von Zobeltitz (1930), pp. 64-5. 'I won't deny that there are dangers for every young girl on the road to independence. But I am not afraid of them. I well know where most of the dangers lie: in the heart's stupidity. Heavens, Grandmother, my heart is more of a refrigerator than a heating apparatus! And if there really should be someone, God's ideal figure of a man, I mean, someone whom I really like, you can still depend on it that I can regulate the temperature of my heart. I've got better things to think about than love, engagement and weddings.'

²⁸ von Zobeltitz (1930), pp. 88-9. '... on every machine like a born typing hen!'

²⁹ von Zobeltitz (1930), pp. 89-80. 'Where? You have more luck than me, and aren't any smarter, either. But you females threaten the male world more and more. You sneak in everywhere. Since the typewriter was invented, there are only female secretaries: nobody's looking for male secretaries any more. You smile, show off your legs and flutter your eyelashes – that's your strength!'

aristocratic background and American upbringing, Erwin has all the right clothes ('Frack, Smoking, Cut, Sakko, alles war da und tadellos und bedurfte noch des Aufbügelns') and knows all the right dances ('alle "mondänen Tänze" kamen ja aus Amerika, in seiner Chicagoer Bummelzeit hatte er sie gründlich gelernt.')³⁰ He becomes part of the new entertainment industry, dancing every teatime with the wives of businessmen, elderly society ladies, and office girls like Dagmar who have stepped in for a cocktail on their way home. No male customers are mentioned.

Dagmar, meanwhile, is befriended by her boss's family, the Schmitzes. Unlike in *Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt*, in which Inge appeared to be entirely oblivious of the disparity between her economic status and Wolfram's, *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit* focusses on the inequality of this friendship, and the family's tendency to exploit Dagmar's vulnerable position, both sexually and socially. Despite Dagmar's assurances to Erwin that there is no hint of a sexual undertone in her relationship with her boss the Kommerzienrat, she is clearly aware of the danger she is in when she is invited to dinner by him in the middle of her dictation. After this disconcerting invitation, an even more undesirable visitation occurs. An elderly man, the Kommerzienrat's father, appears in her office to tell her that she's very beautiful and stroke her hair. After he has left, Dagmar sits astounded at the thought that both the Kommerzienrat and the old 'Eierkopf' ('egghead') want to take her out for a meal:

So waren die Männer. Mit der Einladung zum Souper fing es an. Das war der Angelhaken. Natürlich soupierte man in einem sehr vornehmen Restaurant, da gab es wahrscheinlich hübsche kleine Zimmer, in denen man ungestörter saß als in dem großen Allerweltssaal. Und dann fragte der Kavalier, was man am liebsten esse. Dagmar überlegte, was sie bestellen würde. Austern, Hummer und Kaviar waren für sie nur undeutliche Begriffe. Das konnte man alles kennenlernen, hintereinanderweg, und dazu schlürfte man Champagner. Selbstverständlich Champagner. Die Stimmung konnte sodann auf der Höhe sein, und die Gefahr beginnen. Vielleicht mit der Bitte um einen Kuß. Dazu mußte der Kellner draußen sein. Aber sie würde sich einen Mokka bestellen, dann mußte er wieder hereinkommen. Immerhin, es war nur eine Verzögerung – Dagmar schnitt ein Gesicht. Sich von dem dicken Kommerzienrat küssen zu lassen – oder gar von dem alten Eierkopf – nicht um die Welt!

³⁰ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 95. 'Dinner jacket, smoking jacket, cutaway, blazer, everything was there and spotless, hardly even needing an iron', 'all "trendy dances" came from America, and he had learned them all during his days hanging out in Chicago.'

Danke schön, meine Herren! – Das Souper wurde abserviert – sie saß wieder voll geschäftlich Selbstbesinnung an ihrem Schreibtisch und griff in die Tasten der Maschine...³¹

Evidently the pattern is familiar to Dagmar – already a stereotype, perhaps. She has been offered the opportunity to bargain her youth and beauty for a taste of the high life, but the trade is illegitimate and must be hidden away, and the gains not worth the expense. This accords with the view of extra-marital sexual relationships shown in all of the texts discussed in this chapter. At the end of the passage, the fantasy is banished with the return to the real, material existence of the typewriter.

The friendship between Dagmar and the women in the Kommerzienrat's family is depicted as fraught with nearly equivalent danger, however, and they are also complicit in Dagmar's sexualisation. The novel moves straight from this scene to the Kommerzienrat at home with his father the Generaldirektor, his wife Frau Rosemarie, and his daughter Ellinor. They are planning a party, and the Generaldirektor says that he is looking forward to seeing the pretty girls. Ellinor tells him that most of her friends are still away on their summer trips, and so she doesn't know whether there will be any pretty girls there. Frau Rosemarie suggests inviting the new secretary, 'ein allerliebstes Geschöpfchen': the Generaldirektor enthusiastically endorses this suggestion, and the Kommerzienrat assents, because Dagmar is 'aus gutem Haus' and 'benimmt sich tadellos.'³² Each of the family members present projects their own plans onto Dagmar: Ellinor asks whether she is good fun; her father answers that she has merry eyes; his father adds that she has wonderful cherry-red lips. Frau Rosemarie laughs and tells the elder man to cool down. But this is not because she wishes to protect Dagmar from the men's sexual objectification: rather,

³¹ von Zobeltitz (1930), pp. 113-4. 'But that was how men were. It started with an invitation to dinner. That was the bait. Naturally, dinner took place at a fancy restaurant, where there were perhaps pretty little room, where you could be cosier than in the big public room. And then your cavalier asked what you'd like to eat. Dagmar thought about what she would order. Oysters, lobster and caviar were meaningless terms to her. But you could get to know them, one after another, and of course you'd drink champagne with them. Obviously champagne. The mood would reach its peak, and then the danger began. Perhaps with a request for a little kiss. The waiter would have to be outside. But she would order a coffee, then he'd have to come back in again. But that was only a delaying tactic – Dagmar pulled a face. To let herself be kissed by the fat Kommerzienrat – or even by the old egghead – not for the world!

Thank you very much, gentlemen! The dinner was called off – she sat at her desk, once more aware of her professional surroundings and placed her fingers on the keys of her typewriter...'

³² von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 115. 'a darling little thing', 'from a good home' and 'behaves herself flawlessly'.

her plans for Dagmar are to introduce her to the eldest son, Konrad, who could do with a bit of livening up:

‘Möchte versuchen, Konrad für die kleine Römer zu interessieren. Er versimpelt ja ganz in seiner Arbeitswut. So ein netter Flirt möbelt ihn vielleicht ein bißchen auf.’
‘Reizend, Mama,’ rief Ellinor, ‘ich helf’ dir dabei. Wir sperren beide versehentlich im Pavillon ein.’³³

The men object to this plan, but Frau Rosemarie remains resolute:

Doch da rebellierte Frau Rosemarie. ‘Erlaubt, meine Herren,’ sagte sie, ‘ich bin niemals unpassend. Ich bin Mutter und denke fraulich. Konrad ist völlig gesellschaftsfremd geworden. Alles, was Gesellschaft heißt, ist langweilig für ihn – die Herren sind Strohköpfe, Gecken, Marionetten, die Damen geschminkte Puppen. Nun tritt ihm bei uns ein außerhalb unseres Kreises stehendes Mädchen entgegen – vielleicht gefällt ihm grade das und reißt ihn heraus. Ich erhoffe eine günstige Wirkung davon für Konrad – und dein Römerchen, Georg, wird, denke ich mir, auch nichts dagegen haben. Ihr erster Flirt wird es ja wohl nicht sein – und der letzte nicht bleiben.’³⁴

The Kommerzienrat warns against the plan, lest a real affection develop – but Ellinor and her mother ridicule this fear. In her own, feminine way, Frau Rosemarie feels herself just as entitled to define and marshall Dagmar’s sexuality as the men do. The ambiguous class position which is repeatedly associated with all the white-collar workers renders her open to this: with her ‘good home’ and ‘flawless deportment’, she is sufficiently well-bred to be invited to a society event and regarded as a potential flirtation for the son of the house, but sufficiently socially inferior that she will never gain access to their most intimate circles. So confident of the social barriers is Frau Rosemarie that she does not even regard this last as a danger.

³³ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 116. “‘I’d like to try to get Konrad to show an interest in the little Römer. Everything is about work, with him. A nice little flirtation might be just the thing.”
“‘Charming, Mama,” cried Ellinor. “I’ll help you. We’ll lock them into the pavillion on purpose!””

³⁴ von Zobeltitz (1930), pp. 116-7. “That made Frau Rosemarie rebellious. “Excuse me, gentlemen,” she said, “I am never inappropriate. I am a mother and I think like a woman. Konrad has become completely hostile to society. Anything to do with society is boring to him – the men are blockheads, coxcombs and marionettes, the women painted dolls. Now he’s going to meet a girl from right outside our circle – perhaps he’ll like it, and it’ll bring him out a bit. I anticipate a good effect on Konrad – and I don’t think your little Römerchen, Georg, will have anything against it either. It certainly won’t be her first flirtation – nor the last.””

In the face of this patronage, Dagmar asserts her autonomy and self-respect in a series of small but important encounters. She is puzzled and somewhat alarmed by the invitation to the party ('War es Sitte, daß man eine Angestellte, die Sekretärin des Chefs, zu einem Fest im Haus lud?'³⁵), and concludes that she cannot accept it, as it would blur the boundaries of her position too uncomfortably. When the Kommerzienrat asks her why she is declining the invitation, she says that she has no suitable outfit for the occasion. He offers to buy her one as a present: she declines. He offers to raise her salary so that she can afford one: she again declines, this time passionately, with scarlet cheeks, and insists that she cannot accept a raise simply to buy an evening dress. The Kommerzienrat apologizes, and, as in the passage where Dagmar is asked to dinner, the text emphasises Dagmar's fingers 'flott' on the keyboard. She is once again a part of the mechanical function of the office.³⁶

As we will see in several of the films discussed in the next chapter, the acquisition of a suitable dress is a recurring trope. In the end, Ellinor comes to the rescue, offering Dagmar a choice from her wide collection of old dresses. Dagmar, assured by Ellinor that she never wears it, eventually accepts a yellow dress with gold threads and a pair of champagne-coloured stockings, and promises to buy herself a pair of matching patent-leather yellow shoes. This is the beginning of a friendship between Dagmar and Ellinor, but one which continues to be strained by their different class positions. They call each other Elli and Dagmar, but when Ellinor tries to step up the intimacy between them by offering Dagmar the 'Du' – i.e. suggesting that they should use the informal "you" with each other – Dagmar's self-defence mechanisms step in and she declines. Ellinor realises how vulnerable Dagmar's position is, and how much she stands to lose if anything were to go wrong in her genuine but carelessly-offered friendship. She suddenly sees the potential danger of her mother's matchmaking plans:

³⁵ von Zombeltitz (1930), p. 119. 'Was it usual, to invite an employee, the secretary of the chief executive, to a private party at the house?'

³⁶ von Zombeltitz (1930), p. 121. 'nimble'.

Nun fiel Ellinor ein, was ihre Mutter mit ihr in bezug auf Konrad für Wünsche gehabt hatte. Aber sie war anderen Sinnes geworden. Dagmar war doch zu schade für ein so leichtfertiges Spiel.³⁷

Despite Dagmar's care, however, something does develop between her and Konrad. He shows her around the firm's factory (which is producing that most modern and glamorous of materials, artificial silk), and Dagmar asks whether there is any chance of him finding a position for her cousin, Erwin. On hearing that Erwin works as a dancer, Ellinor begs Konrad to take her and Dagmar to Paradies, the pleasure palace where Erwin is working. Again, Erwin's class status is worthy of comment: Ellinor reacts to the fact that his surname is "von Diesburg" by remarking that he is "auch noch adlig". Dagmar responds, "In den Beinen hat er den Adel abgelegt."³⁸ Konrad eventually agrees to the outing.

The Paradies

The Paradies is an archetypal 'pleasure palace' of the kind described by Kracauer and considered one of the defining features of Weimar modernity. It contains an almost exhaustive range of leisure facilities:

Das 'Paradies' war einer der neuen Vergnügungspaläste, die eine waghalsige Unternehmungslust in Zeichen des Wiederaufbaus auf den wenigen noch freien Plätzen im Westen der Stadt aus der Erde zauberte. Im Hintergrund lag der Rundbau eines kleinen, sehr eleganten Kinos "für Kammerspiele", mit einer grüngoldenen Kuppel wie bei eine Moschee, und zu ihm führte ein breiter Durchgang des Vorderhauses über einen Vorplatz mit gärtnerischen Anlagen, der im Sommer in den Restaurationsbetrieb einbezogen werden konnte. Dies ganze Vorderhaus, nicht übel mit seiner schlicht vornehmen Fassade und dem Bacchantenfries über der Fensterreihe des Erdgeschosses, umfaßte die Räume des "Paradieses". Im Parterre lagen die Bier-, im ersten Geschoß die vornehmen Weinstuben, im zweiten Stockwerk Teeräume, Bar, kleiner und großer Tanzsaal, und von hier aus führte auch noch eine Treppe mit holzgeschnitztem Geländer höher zu einer Anzahl traulich eingerichteter Kabinette für Privatgesellschaften und Pärchen, die in geschäftlichen Angelegenheiten mit sich allein zu bleiben wünschen. Der dritte Stock endlich enthielt Ateliers und die Garderoben für die Artisten.³⁹

³⁷ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 169. 'Ellinor suddenly thought of her mother's wish for [Dagmar] in relation to Konrad. But she had quite changed her mind. Dagmar was worth too much for such a frivolous game.'

³⁸ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 174. "Also noble" "He's keeping his nobility in his legs for now!"

³⁹ von Zobeltitz (1930), pp. 99-100. 'The "Paradise" was one of the new pleasure palaces, which were conjured up out of the ground by a new commercial spirit on the quickly vanishing areas of free land in the west of the city. To the back was the rotunda of a small, very elegant cinema 'for chamber performances', with a green-gold dome like a mosque, and, leading to it, a wide way through from the front of the building and over a small square set out with

Magic, exoticism, glitz and glamour are all evoked in the description of this erection.⁴⁰ Without ever leaving the building, one can move from afternoon tea to dinner to evening drinks: we learn later that there is also a restaurant, where Konrad, Ellinor and Dagmar dine. Pleasure is available for purchase no matter what the time of day, season or degree of privacy desired. Yet, even whilst it marvels at the elegance of the cinema and the sheer variety of facilities, the passage also suggests the simulacra nature of the Paradies. Despite the 'schlicht' façade – which adheres, one assumes, to the elegant minimalism of *Neue Sachlichkeit* aesthetic – the décor is an astonishing mix of influences, from orientalist ('wie bei eine Moschee') to classical ('Bacchantenfries') to traditional northern European ('holzgeschitzt'). The square has no permanent gardens, but potted plants that can be moved around at different times of the year. The Paradies is a triumph of what Janet Ward calls 'the surface worship so symptomatic of the Weimar Republic',⁴¹ the culture of façades and aesthetic appeal which gratifies and overwhelms the senses, but, according to critics, offers no 'authentic' experience which might enrich the minds or lives of the patrons.

In the Paradies, furthermore, all the old class hierarchies and identities are confused. Earning their living as dancers alongside Erwin are more impoverished men from good homes: a pair of former officers, an estranged landowner, a doctor of philology with foxtrot-legs ('Foxtrotbeinen'), and the Baron Kalinin, who first introduces Erwin to the job and who welcomes him as 'Mitglied unsrer kleinen Gruppe Niedergebrochener, doch nicht

plants, which could serve as a restaurant in summer. This whole front part – with its attractive, minimalist façade and the Bacchanalian frieze over the ground floor windows – encased the rooms of the 'Paradies'. On the ground floor were the beer rooms; on the first floor were outstanding wine bars; the second floor had tearooms, another bar, and small and large dance salons; and from there another flight of stairs with carved wooden bannisters lead up to a number of cosy cabinets for private parties and couples, who wished to enjoy one another's company alone. Finally, the third floor had the ateliers and the artists' dressing rooms.'

⁴⁰ Exoticism is also a feature of its variety acts, we discover later, when Konrad, Ellinor and Dagmar watched a beautiful Indian snake-charmer. The snake-charmer remains nameless because nobody can understand her name, but this is not important because her act is 'voll der tausendjährigen Poesie des Orients' (p. 194) – the snake charmer is presumably exploiting the same fascination with exoticism described by Nancy Nenno in 'Feminity, the Primitive and Modern Urban Space: Josephine Baker in Berlin' in Katherina von Ankum (ed), *WITM* (1997), pp. 145-61.

⁴¹ Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 34.

Niedergeworfener'.⁴² Its clientele is mixed: glamour is priced within the range of not only the very wealthy, but also office girls like Dagmar herself:

Beim Nachmittagstee herrschte, wie man es vorausgesetzt hatte, ein gutbürgerlicher Einschlag vor. Es bildete sich sogar ein gewisses Stammpublikum heraus, Erwin sah oft dieselben Gesichter in bestimmtem Damengruppen und in Kreise junger Mädchen, und da in diesen Stunden die Herren spärlich gesät waren, so fanden die angestellten Tänzer selten ein Ruhepause. Um Nachmittag tanzte man bei Tee und Gebäck zu zwei Mark fünfzig mit Damen, die oft schon über die Grenze der Jugend hinaus waren, und mit Mädelen, die aus dem Büro kamen und sich noch ein Stündchen austoben wollten. Am Abend dagegen quirlte zwischen den Sektkühlen ein trubelndes Gewühl durch den Saal, Damen der Gesellschaft mit ihren Begleitern und Damen mit Herren von jener Distinktion, für die sich morgen schon der Staatsanwalt interessieren konnte – und alles schien beherrscht zu sein von einem wütenden Drange nach ausgelassenem Erleben und einem Durchrütteln der Nerven bei hämmernder, kreischender Musik.⁴³

The fictional Paradies resembles the restaurants owned by the historical Kempinski, which 'was claimed to have initiated the "Sozialisierung des Luxus", in that both the famous and the general public could be found in his restaurants [...] Food could be bought as half portions, giving less rich customers the chance to enjoy the surroundings in return for modest financial outlay.'⁴⁴ Despite the democratic mixing of the classes, class has by no means ceased to function as an identifying characteristic in the Paradies: as we have seen, dancers like Erwin are cashing in on their pedigree as much as their nimble feet, and the day's various populations are identified as much by their social status and spending power as they are by their age and sex. The office girls who stop in on their way home are purchasing, at the cheapest time of the day, something of the glamour of the society ladies, and the society ladies' evening is enhanced by the presence of those dubious sorts in whom the state prosecutor might take an interest. Consciousness of class

⁴² von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 99. 'A member of our little group of down-but-not-outs'.

⁴³ von Zobeltitz (1930), pp. 99-100. 'At afternoon tea, as one had planned, an unpretentious bourgeois clientele predominated. A regular crowd even developed: Erwin often saw the same faces in groups of women and circles of girls, and, since men were few and far between during these hours, the employed dancers hardly ever had a moment's rest. In the afternoon, one danced alongside tea and cake for two marks fifty, with women who were frequently well past the first bloom of youth, and girls who had just come out of the office and fancied a quick hour to let their hair down. In the evening, a turbulent melee twirled through the salon between the champagne coolers, ladies of society with their escorts and men and women with reputations that might interest the state prosecutor in the morning – and everything seemed to be governed by a mad drive for fun and a nerve-rattling, pounding, shrieking music.'

⁴⁴ Smail (1999), p. 35.

difference, likewise, is present in all of Dagmar and Konrad's interactions during their meal at the Paradies,

Aber es war keine Umwerbung – nein, das konnte man nicht behaupten, viel eher klang durch die ganze Art seines Sichgebens etwas Machtgütiges mit, eine gewisse noble Leutseligkeit, das Bemühen, die kleine Sekretärin, die Freundin seiner Schwester, doch auch als Dame zu nehmen, die seinen Kreisen nahestand.⁴⁵

Benevolent nobility and a certain paternalism characterise Konrad's attitude to Dagmar – despite the fact that his family, manufacturers of artificial silk, are presumably relatively recent entrants to the higher social echelons. Ellinor, slightly drunk, raises the Sie/Du question again, asserting 'angrily' ('wütend'⁴⁶) that she has offered Dagmar sisterhood, and that regardless of Dagmar's preferences, she is going to call her Du: a sort of forced egalitarianism that Ellinor imposes on Dagmar by dint of her superior social status. This time, Dagmar accepts the Du.

The ballroom in the evening has great chandeliers and 'schwimmenden Wölkchen des Zigarettenrauchs.'⁴⁷ Tobacco smoke signifies: the Schmitz family are characterised by their smoking material, and Deborah Smail notes that cigarettes are one of the trademarks of the fashionable, aspirant middle-classes (the *Angestellten*), whilst the established middle-classes smoke cigars and the working classes loose tobacco. The Kommerzienrat and his cigar correspond to this order, whilst only the women of the Schmitz family smoke cigarettes. The cigarette smoke floating above the ballroom, therefore, indicates a certain association with femininity – and the Paradies, with its tea and cakes, kitschy interiors and elegant male dancers, is certainly designed to appeal to female tastes. As we saw above, the clientele are described as 'bestimmtem Damengruppen und [...] Kreise junger Mädchen [...] Damen [...] Mädchen, die aus dem Büro kamen [...] Damen der Gesellschaft mit ihren Begleitern und Damen mit Herren von jener Distinktion, für die sich morgen schon der Staatsanwalt interessieren konnte' – it is the

⁴⁵ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 191. 'But it wasn't a courtship – no, no-one could think that, rather something gracious sounded throughout his whole mode of interaction, a certain noble geniality, the effort to treat the little secretary, his sister's friend, as a lady who belonged in his own circle.'

⁴⁶ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 192. 'angry'.

⁴⁷ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 193. 'swimming clouds of cigarette smoke'.

women who are noted here, whilst the men appear only as escorts, as Konrad escorts the two women to oblige Ellinor's wish. The Paradies is a women's space, and the men who enter it are, to a certain extent, feminised. Kracauer's fear that the new commercial culture and the glamour of the distraction industry has a emasculating effect appears to be borne out by Zobeltitz.

After the evening in the Paradies – during which Konrad has offered Erwin a job as a designer, and the mysterious Dutch Baron Rosseboom has asked Dagmar to help him find a new cook and offered Erwin a job as a private secretary – Konrad takes Dagmar home. On the steps of her building, he warns her away from Baron Rosseboom, and asks her to promise that she will trust him and come to him for advice before making any rash decisions. She consents for as long as such an understanding is possible, reminding him that she is still his father's employee, and that his father may not like her friendship with Ellinor, and be even less enamoured of anything that might approach an understanding between her and his son. Konrad interrupts her, exclaiming, “Sie urteilen falsch—Herrgott, liebes Kind, liebes Mädelchen, meine liebe kleine Dagmar...”⁴⁸ Dagmar, terrified and embarrassed by this outburst, dismisses him abruptly, goes into the building and shuts the door. Her caution proves to be justified, but too late. Two days later, when she goes into the office, she finds that the Kommerzienrat, unusually, has arrived before her. A painful and embarrassing interview takes place – with Dagmar sitting at her typewriter, emphasising the function she ought to have in the office – in which the Kommerzienrat informs her that there can be no love match between her and his son. Dagmar protests that there *is* no love match between them, but is thwarted by a patrician raised hand and a request for silence. The interview ends with Dagmar resigning her position and asking the Kommerzienrat to pass on her best wishes to Ellinor, which he is glad to do. They part on good terms: Dagmar thanks the Kommerzienrat for believing that she hasn't encouraged Konrad, and the Kommerzienrat reflects that this is by far the best solution, and relishes the salutary lesson it will provide for both Konrad and the family matchmakers.

The novel neatly illuminates the imbalance of power and the relative severity of the consequences experienced by each actor in the little drama. The Kommerzienrat is delighted

⁴⁸ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 202. 'You mistake me – my God, darling child, darling little girl, my darling little Dagmar...'

with himself, for the whole episode has demonstrated his superior knowledge of business and human nature, and exposed the flawed thinking and myopia of his wife and daughter. Frau Rosemarie is equable, for Konrad will no doubt recover soon, and that all-important first romance is out of the way. Ellinor is furious, demanding that Dagmar be recalled instantly and the marriage be allowed to proceed. Her outrage is genuine, but motivated more by her appreciation of the romance of the situation than concern for Dagmar: her cold-hearted parents point out that she has brought about this situation by pushing Dagmar and Konrad together without any serious consideration of the difficulties of such a match, but she does not and will not accept that her own actions might have been motivated by anything but altruism. Between the Kommerzienrat's cynicism, Frau Rosemarie's complacency, the Generaldirektor's lechery, Ellinor's idealistic romanticism and Konrad's clumsy proposal by proxy, the novel has provided a variety of ways in which the rich and privileged might hurt the poorer and more vulnerable.

As the heroine of a romantic novel which will conclude with a socially advantageous marriage, however, she does not assign any blame to the class hierarchy of which she is the victim. Instead, she returns to her flat and, as she reflects on her experiences, it occurs to her that there is a little tenderness in her heart towards Konrad, and that his only mistake was to speak to his father before he spoke to her. But she can no longer be friends with anyone in the family, and moves out of her lodgings, leaving no forwarding address. The novel takes a rather peculiar turn at this point: several days later she contacts Erwin, and they both arrange to join Baron Rosseboom's staff and travel around Europe with him. They spend several months in Paris and Corsica, before the Baron vanishes in mysterious circumstances, and is unmasked as a major forger. Erwin and Dagmar, believing that they may be suspected by the Corsican police to be party to the Baron's criminal activities, flee to Paris, where they meet Konrad, from whom Dagmar has earlier received a letter with 'einem Unterton zärtlicher Führerschaft'.⁴⁹ Konrad wishes to accompany Dagmar back to Germany: since Dagmar left, the Kommerzienrat has died, Ellinor has married, Frau Rosemarie has retired to the south for her health, and Konrad is now free to make his own choices. He offers Dagmar his protection and a position as lady of the house:

⁴⁹ von Zobeltitz (1930), p. 282. 'an undertone of tender leadership'.

Und in diesem Augenblick, nach allen jagenden schrecklichen Geschehnisse der letzten Tage, stieg ein sanftes tröstendes Gefühl in ihr auf: daß sie nie im Leben einen besseren Schutz und einen festeren Halt finden könne als bei diesem Getreuen, dessen Liebe auch in der Ferne um sie gewesen war.⁵⁰

Dagmar's equanimity fits in with the rest of the novel, which makes remarkably little of its romance plot. Konrad, to begin with, appears to be little more than an aspect of Dagmar's relationship with the Schmitz family, then later an inconvenience in her working life. The most positive descriptions of him focus on his good manners, slight air of paternalism and offers of protection. Is the moral suggested here that, actually, Dagmar's leap from the castle bedroom into 'Freiheit' and modernity is a failure, and that what she really needs is protection from such a man?

If so, the novel still makes much of its modern, urban setting. The depiction of the Paradies evokes the Berlin 'pleasure palaces' which many commentators remarked on, with its variety of spaces and attempts to cater for every taste in entertainment under one roof. With its façades, its commercialism, and its shamelessly pick'n'mix attitude to architectural styles, the Paradies seems to encompass everything about the *Angestellten* culture that Dagmar has joined. The fashionable, superficial values which obtain here are coded as female, but, presumably, the private rooms on the second floor discreetly facilitate as much of the sexual exploitation that Dagmar fears from the Kommerzienrat and Generaldirektor as they do true love. The glamorous, the rich and the insecure all socialise here, but the class boundaries appear to be rigidly maintained, as they are in Dagmar's friendships with the Schmitz family, until the Kommerzienrat conveniently dies off-stage. The novel's romance plot and attempt to reconcile the representation of an urban girl's life with a mystery plot is patchy and unconvincing, but the characters' complex attitudes to their own and each other's class status work surprisingly well.

⁵⁰ von Zobeltitz, pp. 305-6. 'And in that moment, after all the awful events of the past few days, a clean, trusting feeling rose up inside her: that she never in her life could find a better protection and a safer home than this faithful man, whose love surrounded her even from afar.'

Rothberg, Grete, *Seine kleine Sekretärin*

Moving to the city

Like *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, *Seine kleine Sekretärin* begins with the heroine's movement from the countryside to Berlin, shows her discovering the Berlin nightlife, and features several aristocrats and a castle. Beyond that, however, it goes in a very different direction. The novel was published four years later than *Dagmar...*, after Hitler's accession, and it is impossible not to see a connection between the new political mood in Germany and *Seine kleine Sekretärin's* excessively anti-modern stance.

The novel begins almost as a fairy tale. It is Christmas Eve, and Käthe lives in a small town with her aunt and uncle. Her uncle drinks heavily, and her aunt works as a cleaner to support the family. Käthe is a trained typist, but unemployed. Stung by her uncle's criticism that she is too useless even to help her aunt clean, she decides to look for work in the big city, packs a suitcase and sets out ten minutes later. As she has very little money, she walks as far as she can – all on Christmas Day – until she eventually decides that she is now close enough to Berlin to afford the trainfare. The narrator provides a rather pessimistic assessment of her chances in the big city:

Und so fuhr sie nach Berlin. Fuhr voller Hoffnungen und voll von grenzenlosem Vertrauen in die große, unbekannte Stadt, die ihr Arbeit und Brot schenken würde. Und sie hatte keine Ahnung, daß es dort schon viele Tausende von Menschen gab, die auch schon lange auf Arbeit warteten und auch hungerten.⁵¹

Käthe spends the journey listening to two men talking about horses and business, and conceives a fancy for one of them, who exchanges a few words with her on disembarking in Berlin. On the platform, she meets Mama Kulick, a kindly soul who waits for lost-looking girls to arrive on trains from the provinces, in order to offer them rooms in her lodging house. Käthe accepts, and is installed at Mama Kulick's, where she meets Olga, another girl who has come to Berlin to seek her fortune. Unlike the modest Käthe, however, Olga isn't satisfied with her seventy marks a month:

⁵¹ Rothberg (1934), p. 15. 'And so she travelled to Berlin. Travelled full of hope and full of boundless trust in the big, unknown city, which would present her with work and bread like a gift. And she had no idea that there were already many thousands of people there, who also waited for work and also starved.'

“Ich bin nach Berlin gekommen auf die Versprechungen eines Lumpenkerls hin. Ich hab mich doch schon als Filmdiva gesehen! Und was ist geworden? Ach – wär ich doch daheim geblieben! [...] [D]er Traum von großen Sagen, einem eigenen Auto, Geschenken und Männern, die mir zu Fuß liegen, ist längst ausgeträumt. Ich blieb also vorläufig Komparsin. Und wenn es mal wieder besser wird im alten schönen Deutschland, dann werde ich mir irgendeinen anderen Beruf suchen.”⁵²

Käthe’s hopes of finding a job are quickly dashed. Olga, however, offers to take her to the film-sets, so that she too can make some money as an extra. Käthe at first protests that she’s too shy, but Olga reminds her that she has little choice: real life doesn’t work the way it does in novels:

‘Immer steht so etwas bloß in Romanen. Unsereiner findet es nie. Da hat wieder solche reicher Mann ein armes kleines Mädchel auf sein Schloß genommen, hat es geheiratet!’⁵³

Käthe, a good, honourable girl, just wants to earn her own money honestly: there’s no happiness to be found in men and riches. She pities Olga, who has become cynical and no longer believes in true happiness.

Olga persuades Käthe to join her on the film set as an extra, where she earns 120 marks in her first week. The star of the film, the beautiful Berani, also invites Olga and Käthe to dinner, and presents them with two evening gowns that she no longer wears (as in *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, we see the acquisition of a dress from an unusual source). Berani’s generosity is not disinterested, however, for she is plotting to seduce Arndt von Berken, the man Käthe met on the train. Arndt, however, favours her rival, Mila Kranz. Berani asks Käthe and Olga to sit on either side of Mila, in the hope that she will look old and tired next to the two fresh-faced teenagers. They attend the dinner party and mix with the film stars, aristocrats and other beautiful people. Käthe, despite her shyness and humility, is one of the prettiest girls at the party. Arndt von Berken’s first impression, however, is not good:

⁵² Rothberg (1934), p. 26. “I came to Berlin on a promise from some silly lad. I saw myself as a film diva! But what happened? Oh, if only I’d stayed at home! [...] I’ve stopped dreaming of big promises, my own car, presents and men lying at my feet. So I’ve stayed a film extra for now. And when things get better in lovely old Germany, then I’ll look for another job.”

⁵³ Rothberg (1934), p. 33. “It always happens so simply in novels. Not for the likes of us, though. There, another rich man takes a poor little girl to his castle and marries her!”

Ein Mädchenschicksal, das vollzog wie tausend andere auch! Daheim durchgebrannt! Zum Film!
Keinen anderen Gedanken mehr als den: ich will zum Film.⁵⁴

On talking to Käthe, however, Arndt is impressed by her simple purity. He, Käthe, Olga and another young man leave the party together and go to a late-night café. It is Käthe's first experience of the famous, glittering Berlin nightlife.

... and back to the country

The scene appears to be set: according to the conventions of the Weimar romance novel, Käthe will break into films and ascend into the city's glamorous elite, charming everyone with her naturalness and unaffected rural values. Instead, however, the plot takes a sharp right turn and goes off in a completely different direction. Neither Berlin's nightlife nor its film-industry holds any attraction for this heroine:

“Dieses Nachtleben gefällt mir ganz gewiß nicht. Ich bin viel lieber in Frau Kulicks kleinem bescheidenem Heim.”

“Kamen Sie nach Berlin, um Filmschauspielerin zu werden?”

“Nein! Nein! Ich habe – meine Tante hatte mich in unserer kleinen Heimatstadt in einem großen Büro kaufmännisch ausbilden lassen. Ich habe auch die Handelsschule besucht. Ich kann Stenographie und Schreibmaschine. Auch Buchführung. Und ich war längere Zeit arbeitslos. Meine Tante aber lebt auch in armseligen Verhältnissen und geht waschen und scheuern zu fremden Menschen. Ich konnte ihr nicht noch zur Last sein. Sie muß ja schon seit Jahren den Onkel mit ernähren. Da bin ich gegangen. Ich habe es aber meine Tante gesagt, und sie war einverstanden. Sie gab mir noch Geld. Und ich hoffte, in Berlin in einem großen Büro oder auch in irgendeinem kleinen Arbeit zu finden. So – ich fuhr damals – gerade nach Berlin.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Rothberg (1934), p. 104. ‘A typical girl's dream, just like thousands of others! Leave home! To Film! No other thought except: I want to be in films.’

⁵⁵ Rothberg (1934), p. 117. “I don't like this nightlife at all. I'd so much rather be in Frau Kulick's modest little home!”

“Did you come to Berlin to be a film star?”

“No! No! I – my aunt got me commercial training at a big office. I also went to secretarial college. I can type and write stenography. Book-keeping, as well. And I was unemployed for a long time. My aunt struggled financially, however, and took in laundry and cleaned for other people. I couldn't be a burden to her. She's already been supporting my uncle for years. That's why I left. I told my aunt, and she agreed. She gave me money. And I hoped to find a big office, or a some sort of little job somewhere. So – that's why I left – and came straight to Berlin.”

The story becomes increasingly conservative from this moment on. Arndt is so charmed by this tale of niecely duty that he is tempted to offer Käthe a job more suited to her talents and preference for a quiet life: his private secretary, back in the ancestral castle in Bodenstein:

Verantwortung war es immerhin. Die kleine war schön, das war nicht zu leugnen, und vielleicht machte sie doch eine ganz gute Karriere? Wie konnte denn das Leute wissen? Wenn man sie heraus in Bodenstein, in die ländliche Stille eines Gutes als Sekretärin verpflanzte, - wer weiß, ob das kleine Mädel die ganze Wolltat nicht dann später verwünscht und sich zurück sehnte in die schillende, bunte Welt, die sie nun einmal kennengelernt hatte, wenn ihr auch das Schlimmste bisher erspart geblieben war.⁵⁶

Käthe is barely even acknowledged as human in this passage, as he contemplates whether she will thrive if 'transplanted' to the country soil of the family estate. Furthermore, the name of this estate, Bodenstein, recalls the 'Blut and Boden' rhetoric of the Nazi era, the emphasis on 'blood and soil' as the loci of national identity.

The 'schillende, bunte Welt' quickly loses out. Arndt offers her the job and Käthe immediately accepts, exclaiming that she adores trees and flowers and all the simplicity and innocence of rural life. Shortly afterwards, she is on a train to Bodenstein, and quickly installed as the estate secretary. She also realises that she loves Arndt, and is unwittingly the centre of controversy. Arndt's sister Brigitte is furious: she does not approve of her brother bringing beautiful young girls down from the city to work as secretaries, and worries about what their social circle will make of the new arrangement. Another class battle rages: will Käthe be expected to eat at the table with the family? With whom will she associate? Most importantly, *does* Arndt intend to marry her? Käthe, in the midst of this conflict, is entirely passive. She eats alone in her room, performs her secretarial duties with a speed and efficiency unknown to the denizens of the castle – Mittrasch, her predecessor, is summarily fired for being neither as highly qualified nor as pretty as Käthe – goes for long walks in the countryside, and is blissfully happy simply to see and work with Arndt every day. She is perfectly satisfied and hopes for nothing more. (As we

⁵⁶ Rothberg (1934), p. 119. 'It was a responsibility, certainly. The little one was pretty, you couldn't deny it, and perhaps she'd have a wonderful career? How could people know? If she were transplanted out to Bodenstein, out to the rural setting of an landed estate as a secretary – who knew whether the little girl wouldn't regret the whole thing later, and wish herself back in the sparkling, colourful world, which she'd only just got to know, even if she had been spared the worst so far.'

will see, Käthe's silent, selfless and disinterested adoration mirrors to that of Inkenn, the secretary in *Der Herrscher*, an acknowledged Nazi propaganda film.)

Käthe's meekness compares favourably with the pushiness of Arndt's old sweetheart, Nora, who returns to the district hoping to renew their acquaintance and take up her place as the new mistress of Bodenstein. Arndt is horrified by her flirtatious hints that she is available: he remembered her as a shy, submissive girl, and does not think the change is for the better. He snubs her openly, and is infuriated when she begins to cry. His rudeness, however, works a strange charm on Nora: she observes Arndt's mastery of his horse as they both ride hard and fast across the estate, and imagines what it would be like if he were also her master.

Käthe's passivity wins, however. When she is out walking in the estate one day, and stops by a lake, her dislodged predecessor Mittrasch sees her opportunity and pushes her in. Käthe can swim, but doesn't: the knowledge that someone could hate her sufficiently to try and kill her is so distressing that it seems that she ought to drown, and she allows the water to close over her head. Fortunately, Arndt happens to be coming past, and so he rescues her. The thought of losing her brings matters to a head, and he asks her to marry him. There is some concern that Tante Adelheid, the head of the family, will not allow the marriage to take place, but she gives her blessing immediately. Not one of the women who has tried to set controls on Arndt has succeeded, after all: the filmstars Bersani and Mila Kranz, his sister Brigitte, the hapless Nora – all those who have sought to place restrictions on him have failed, and it is only the absolutely docile Käthe who has managed to secure the prize. The novel validates masculine action and feminine acquiescence as the desirable natural order, and Tante Adelheid is no exception. Brigitte grudgingly admits that it is better than Arndt marries a secretary than not at all, and Arndt enthuses:

‘Daran hab’ ich gedacht, Brigitte! Und Käthe ist so schön und blond und zart. Es ist gut, wenn sie mir Kinder schenkt. Blonde, schöne Kinder! Die letzten Berkens waren alle dunkel! Vielleicht sogar ein bißchen häßlich – nicht wahr?’⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Rothberg (1934), p. 199. “That’s exactly what I thought, Brigitte! And Käthe is so pretty and blonde and tender. It will be good if she bears me children. Pretty blonde children! The recent Berkens were all dark! Perhaps even a little bit ugly – don’t you think?”

It would appear that the old world order of aristocratic exclusivity has given way to a new doctrine of Aryan beauty and racial improvement.

Seine kleine Sekretärin is a horrendous mix of cliché and clunky dialogue, saturated with the rhetoric of the developing Nazi consciousness. At the same time, it combines a startling number of narrative forms, and more or less succeeds in unifying them. Like Nazism itself, the novel includes elements of modernity, folk culture and feudalism, transformed into something entirely new and radical. Käthe's story is both a fairy-tale (one Christmas Eve, a poor orphan girl called Käthe leaves the small town where she was born, and grows up to marry a baron) and a modern secretary romance (a typist moves from the countryside to the city and ends up marrying her boss). It is clearly working with the conventions established in the Weimar novels, with its brief glimpse of the ultra-modern, glamorous world of the metropolitan film industry, but reverts quickly to an apparently much older and more traditional world of nobility and landed estates. Yet Arndt acts like an autonomous, bourgeois agent, with little sense of a dynastic responsibility, and the romance plot itself replaces a feudal understanding of exclusively aristocratic marriage and reproduction with one in which egalitarianism and racial-consciousness play a much greater role. In terms of class, the Nazi image of the nation is a superficially meritocratic one, even whilst it defines and excludes the racial other.

Conclusion

The three novels discussed in detail in this chapter are only a tiny sample of the popular fiction starring typists which was published during the Weimar era, but they begin to show the variety of styles, themes and political concerns which could be hung upon this modern, female figure. The first two novels foreground the single, white-collar woman's new presence in the streets, dancehalls, trams, and office buildings of the city, inscribing her movements and pleasures in its spaces and her participation in its rhythms. *Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt* both celebrates the protagonist's relationship with technology that brought her and her city into being, and inscribes it as a threat. In the second, we find not only a pre-occupation with class difference, but also hear faint echoes of Kracauer's gender anxiety in the depictions of the feminised spaces of the

pleasure palaces, appearing in popular fiction even as his elegant prose was being submitted to the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. *Seine kleine Sekretärin*, in contrast, re-writes the Weimar typist novel according to the new national-socialist ideology. Despite the diversity of these three novelists' approaches, however, certain plot conventions are becoming evident – the movement to the city, the love affair with the boss, the acquisition of a evening dress - as are certain pre-occupations, like class status and sexual harassment. Both the plot conventions and the fascination with the city and modernity carry over into the films of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Girls on Film: Cinema and Genre

Introduction

A war-time ban on imports from enemy countries served German film production well: by the time American films returned to German cinemas in 1921, the native industry had gained sufficient momentum to resist their onslaught, and maintained its dominant share of the domestic market until after the Second World War. During the early and mid-twenties, Expressionism was the most influential aesthetic, and directors like F. W. Murnau and Fritz Lang created films that continue to be watched, studied and acclaimed today, ensuring that the Weimar Republic features in any history of film. These cinematic classics, however, are hardly representative of the majority of films coming out of the Weimar studios. As with its American counterpart, the German film industry quickly established its primary goal as entertainment, and set about making profitable and entertaining films as quickly and cheaply as possible. The films in this study fall overwhelmingly into this latter category: they were not made with high artistic ideals in mind, but with the basic financial considerations of outlay and profit.

Despite their commercial origins, however, these films repay close study. All have been chosen because they have a typist as a main character, either as protagonist or, if the protagonist is male, as the chief love interest. All are effectively fairy tales, with the protagonists' problems are solved in the final act with a wedding, solvency guaranteed, except *Der Herrscher* (1937), which I discuss in a postscript. Within the framework of this basic narrative structure, all of these films are fascinated by the processes and relationships of modernity and metropolitan experience and integrate technology, commercial culture, nightlife and new forms of travel into their storylines. They share all this in common with the novels discussed in the previous chapter, but are distinguished from the novels by their use of dramatic conventions. As *Lustspiele* (light comedy), the films make a much greater use of humour than the romance novels of the previous chapter, and much of the comedy in each film revolves around a case of disguise or mistaken identity.

In the first film discussed, *Ein Mann mit Herz* (1932), a wealthy banker's daughter takes a shine to a lower-level manager, and takes a job as a typist in order to spend more time with him. Alongside the conventional romance plot, the film integrates some ridiculous comic elements – characters taking on elaborate disguises and some mis-direction – and a sort of documentary-style realism alongside its romance plot, attempting to represent serious questions like sexual harassment and unemployment. The film also takes an aesthetic interest in the city, the street and the office environment, using montages, split screen effects and one long tracking shot showing a woman walking down the street to portray the new metropolitan freedoms and phenomena. The second film, *Ein Bißchen Liebe für Dich* (1932), is based on a play about an American who visits a Viennese colleague, and who is tricked into thinking that his colleague's secretary is his wife, and vice versa. As well as satirising the Viennese characters' ideas of America, the American character's idea of Vienna and the very idea of cinematic verisimilitude, much of the comedy in this film plays on the perceived equivalence of wives' and secretaries' roles. At the same time, it maintains a sharp insistence that the bourgeois wife's role is superior. In the third section, I compare the representation of technology in *Keine Angst vor Liebe* (1933), in which a workaholic boss must learn to relax and appreciate commercialised leisure time before he is regarded as a suitable husband, and *Liebe muß verstanden sein* (1933). This latter film involves a typist being substituted for a mechanical doll. A comparison between *Liebe muß verstanden sein* and the other films shows the extent to which typists in the other films are represented as agents, even within the context of a genre where a wedding is a necessary ending. Finally, in a postscript to this chapter, I look at one film which is decidedly not a comedy. *Der Herrscher* was produced after Hitler's power grab and was recognised by the Nazi *Propagandaministerium*. It depends, however, on the generic secretary / boss romance plot established during the Weimar and pre-Hitler periods.

My analysis is informed by Kracauer, who not only laid the foundations for almost all later discussions of Weimar film with *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film*, but also placed a great importance on film in his contemporary discussions of the

'distraction culture' consumed by the urban masses.¹ Broadly following the Frankfurt School's understanding of popular culture, Kracauer regarded film as upholding and reinforcing the social and economic structures of the day by preventing its consumers from apprehending their true, miserable circumstances. This was particularly true of popular film, the category into which the *Lustspiele* discussed in the main part of this chapter fall:

Indeed, the films made for the lower classes are even more bourgeois than those aimed at the finer audiences, precisely because they hint at subversive possibilities without exploring them. Instead, they smuggle in a respectable way of thinking.²

As we will see, there is certainly plenty in these films to confirm Kracauer's analysis. The 'happy endings' raise many of the typist protagonists out of their lower-middle-class situations and guarantee them a place in secure bourgeois households, rendering a systemic improvement in living and working conditions superfluous:

[the Zille films] combine the comfortable with the useful by depicting the proletarian environment as horrible and simultaneously rescuing one person from this hell. The film lords work in mysterious ways. Even telephone girls, shopgirls and executive secretaries can hope, without having to call upon their professional unions.³

One film, *Keine Angst Vor Liebe*, exemplifies many of the arguments put forward in *Die Angestellten* by showing a character who invests too much time in his work and must learn to balance it with the 'human' aspects of life, shown here to be synonymous with style, glamour and commodified leisure. Brief moments of resistance might be found in these films, but they are quickly subsumed into the dominant ideologies of capital.

Patrice Petro, however, has demonstrated the extent to which Kracauer's account of Weimar film – and much of the work which followed it – depends on the assumption of a male spectator

¹ In this I include not only those columns collected in *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*, discussed in Chapter One, but also those published elsewhere, such as 'The Little Shopgirls Go To The Movies' in *The Mass Ornament* (1995).

² Kracauer, 'The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies', *TMO* (1995), p. 291.

³ 'Film 1928' in Kracauer, *TMO* (1995), p. 309-10.

and subject. She argues that 'analyses of crisis in Weimar almost always return to questions about male subjectivity: unresolved Oedipal conflicts serve to symbolise the political and economic situation of Germany in the 1920s, and narrative is said to enact the drama of male passivity and symbolic defeat which supposedly organizes both the history of Weimar and its cinema.'⁴ Even films which, according to contemporary audience statistics, were overwhelmingly watched and enjoyed by women, and which have female protagonists who are named in the title, are analysed from a perspective which assumes an identification with the male characters. A female-identified genre of film like melodrama, Petro continues:

compels us to acknowledge a more complex notion of "emancipation," [...] [T]he appeal of the film melodrama derived from its attempt to speak to the promises and failures of sexual and economic liberation in Weimar, and thus to the fundamental contradictions in women's lives.⁵

As we saw in Chapter One, something similar applies in Kracauer's analysis of distraction culture, which is motivated by an anxiety about its feminising effects. The women in his accounts of modernity are more notable for what they tell us about male subjectivity than about their own. Even as he inscribes the 'little shopgirls' as a film audience in the title of one of his best-known essays, he caricatures their pliability at the hands of the capitalist machine and denies them any sophisticated response to the depiction of their newly gained freedoms and agency on the cinema screen. Whilst I concur with Kracauer's assertion that popular culture ultimately validates the dominant cultural norms, then, I argue that the 'subversive possibilities' should not be dismissed too quickly. The pleasure of these films for their lower-middle class, female audience is not just in their wish-fulfilment happy endings, but also in those slippages and moments of resistance which linger even after the bourgeois heterosexual values have been confirmed and the final credits have rolled. The task of this survey is to consider the ways in which these films stage women's encounters with modernity, beginning from the assumption that the pleasures they offer inhere in the way they simultaneously celebrate and undermine female agency.

⁴ Petro (1989), p. xviii.

⁵ Petro (1989), pp. 218-9.

Each of these films features an ultra-modern figure, the female white-collar worker, and the tensions surrounding middle-class women's entry into the workplace are foregrounded. The primary analytic categories in my study, therefore, are gender and class. As mentioned above, the *Lustspiele* typically end with a wedding (or at least an engagement, with the wedding assumed to take place shortly after the final reel). The boss / secretary romance is certainly well represented. Further, many of the films contrive to make some kind of comparison between a boss / secretary relationship and a husband/wife relationship. One version of this implies that the role of secretary and role of wife are interchangeable: literally so, where the narrative depends on the comedic devices of role-play and mistaken identity. Two convenient truisms are united in this formula: firstly, that the wife is subordinate to the husband, just as the secretary is subordinate to her boss; secondly, that the role of secretary or typist is ideally suited to women, as an extension of their "natural" nurturing, caring and supporting role.⁶

In some films, class status is an impediment to the romance plot, or prevents the heroine from attaining her true desire in some other way. Sometimes it is the class-consciousness of an angry father or a disapproving family that delays the resolution, but at other times it is the internalised class-consciousness of the protagonists themselves that convinces them that a happy ending is beyond their grasp. In films with a mistaken identity plot, much of the humour depends on poorer women being substituted for rich women, or powerful men being mistaken for powerless ones. In an extreme example, *April April* (1935), the three exemplars of class are a prince, a *nouveau riche* manufacturing family (Herr Lampe, Frau Lampe and their daughter Myra) and their everywoman secretary, who is 'unmarked' in class terms and therefore middle-class. Bourgeois values are rewarded, whilst *arriviste* behaviour is punished. The plot begins when one of the Lampe family's social circle plays a trick on them: the Lampes receive a telephone call saying that the Prince would like to arrange a visit to their factory for the following day. They regard this honour as vindication of their arrival in Society, and speculate that he will fall in love with their tasteless and spoilt daughter, Myra. In the middle of their preparations, the trickster's colleague Leisegang arrives to break the news that the Prince is *not* coming and that it

⁶ A film produced in 1939 proves a surprising exception, focussing on the conflict caused by a married woman's desire to continue working. Despite its production date, *Frau am Steuer* (Ufa, 1939) allows for a spirited defence of a woman's right to work and an indictment of sexual harassment and double standards in the workplace.

is all a joke. Afraid of losing face, the Lampes hastily agree to Leisegang's suggestion that a friend of his, Müller, play the role of the Prince. Meanwhile, the real Prince has read in the newspaper that he is supposed to be visiting Lampe's noodle factory, and decides that he might as well honour the appointment. However, the Prince walks to the factory and is wearing an ordinary tweed jacket: the impostor Müller wears evening dress and arrives in a big car. After a mistaken identity plot which centres on the Lampe family's inability to recognise true royalty when confronted by a commoner with posh clothes and a disdainful air, the sensible, down-to-earth Prince falls for the sensible, down-to-earth secretary. That she fell for him before she discovered his true identity proves that she is worthy of the honour. Finally, Leisegang declares his love for Myra Lampe and proposes to her. Myra realises that love is all that truly matters and renounces her interest in marrying royalty, thereby demonstrating her fitness to ascend into the secure bourgeois lifestyle offered by Leisegang. In both couples, it is the heroines' insistence on the primacy of love and mutual sexual attraction and their rejection of an explicitly class-interested match that renders them worthy of their upwardly-mobile marriages. Private, middle-class values are upheld.

As in the romance novels discussed in Chapter Two, the unmarked category in almost all of these films is essentially middle-class. Our typist heroine may be poor, and may struggle to pay the rent on her cramped rooms, but she is always neatly and tastefully dressed. If she can acquire a fancy frock – and, as in *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit* and *Seine kleine Sekretärin*, the Cinderella-like acquisition of such a frock is a plot point in several of the films – she has the manners and confidence to mingle freely in the most exclusive ballroom. She has neither too much respect for her social betters, which might lead to snobbishness or an embarrassing display of deference, nor too little, which would suggest a lack of humility and hubristic sense of her own importance. Rather, she meets them all as cheerfully and politely as she would her social equals. Her good sense and natural taste compare favourably with the silliness, vanity and vulgarity of the rich women whom she encounters, yet she is an infinitely better secretary than girls of the lower classes, bright and cheerful with excellent organisational skills. She never allows her (entirely commendable) personal ambition to conflict with her loyalty to her employer. Her boss would be lost without her, and she will make someone a wonderful wife.

These paragons of secretarial virtues are the protagonists (or, at least, the female romantic lead if the main protagonist is male). Alongside them, in supporting roles, are lesser women, who fulfil a variety of narrative functions. Some of them are foils for the heroine, whose virtues shine all the brighter when set alongside a vain, superficial, lazy or simply shy counterpart. Some are crucial to the narrative mechanics: competitors for the attentions of the male romantic lead obstruct the resolution of the romance plot, whilst facilitators hasten the happy end, perhaps by helping to clear up a misunderstanding between the hero and heroine.

Others are comic relief, with their own B-plot romance storylines and suitably absurd or unlikely objects for their sexual longings. To illustrate how the primacy of the leading lady is asserted, let us turn to an example. In *Keine Angst vor Liebe*, Liane Haid plays Käte, a hard-working and ambitious secretary who sets about entirely re-organising the piano shop owned by Höfert, her indolent playboy boss. She lodges with Trude (Jessie Vihrog), a disaffected and lazy secretary to a slave-driver lawyer named Hornemann. Trude works only because she has to earn her living, and is driven to distraction by Hornemann's long hours and unreasonable demands. One day, both girls run out of patience, and each tells her boss precisely what she thinks of him. Comparing notes that evening, they decide to swap places for a day. The men value their secretaries' opinions more highly than the women have realised, and have mended their ways overnight: the workaholic Hornemann sends Käte home after an hour, whilst playboy Höfert keeps Trude busy until late in the evening. But this interruption to the daily routine is all it takes to bring both boss and secretary couples to a realisation: they are in love! Over the next two days, the final obstacles are resolved, and two proposals are made and accepted.

Despite the parallel plots, however, the primacy of the hard-working secretary is clearly signalled. Liane Haid as Käte is the romantic lead, and Jessie Vihrog as Trude is a comic actress: her courtship plot makes few concessions to idealism or glamour. Trude's beau, Hörnemann, is no conventional romantic hero, being middle-aged and overweight where Käte's Höfert is young, slim and glamorous. When the secretaries are absent for a day – the pretext for the swap is illness – Höfert sends flowers, whilst Hornemann (to Trude's delight) sends a bag full of medicines. Most importantly, Trude's joyful acceptance of Hornemann does not signal the end of the film: indeed, it is at their engagement party that the final misunderstanding of

Käte's romance plot occurs, when Höfert arrives unexpectedly and sees her joyfully dancing with her best friend's new fiancé. It is only with the resolution of this last twist and a second consummation, the kiss between Käte and Höfert, that the film ends. As Angelika Führich notes, hard work and a sunny disposition are rewarded with a more satisfactory romantic storyline and a more enviable match than Trude's attitude of grudging acquiescence and comic petulance.⁷

It is by now clear how conventional the plots and plot dynamics of these films tend to be. Moreover, it is evident that the conventions, such as the reliance on mistaken identity plots and substitutions, are specifically those of European comedy. Once established as a narrative form, film was quickly recognised as a dramatic form, and the tropes and archetypes of traditional comedy were pressed into use. John Mackenzie's comments on social comedy also have some relevance:

A strange combination of continuity and discontinuity characterizes the dozen plays I have discussed. The story we have been following exemplifies the generic continuity within the context of social and political discontinuity [...] Long-established features of international comedy – central comic figures, contrived comic situations, happy endings – are recognizable in all the works. This formal conservatism is remarkable. Was generic continuity a *necessary* counterweight to social change, a standard point of reference in an unstable world?⁸

Mackenzie is discussing bourgeois and avant-garde drama in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: following Kracauer, we might expect a mass form like film to be even more conservative. In the case of these films, I argue that formal conservatism is not simply a means of sweetening the pill of revolutionary material, as it might be in the case of a socialist dramatist like Bertolt Brecht. By positioning an ultra-modern figure, the single, independent female office-worker, in the context of traditional narrative forms, and by manufacturing and then reinforcing the myth of the boss / secretary romance, a conservative culture industry seeks to neutralise a potentially liberated female archetype and to absorb her back into the traditional heterosexual

⁷ Führich (2000), p. 154. See quotation in Chapter Two, p. 74.

⁸ John R. P. McKenzie, *Social Comedy in Austria and Germany 1890-1933* (Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt/M, New York, Paris and Vienna: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 209 – 12.

context of marriage and the family. In the guise of comic role-reversals and mistaken identity plots, we are reassured that the secretary's role is really *just* like a wife's. Popular culture is never wholly regressive, however, and we will see how these films also celebrate the typist and the modern, showing women who are ambitious, capable and confident of their place in the streets, offices and spaces of the modern metropolis.

***Ein Mann mit Herz* (1932)**

The tension between the banal exigencies of a romance plot and an aspiration to a more sophisticated engagement with the modern world are particularly clear in a film from 1932, *Ein Mann mit Herz*. Within the framework of a relatively formulaic storyline – a bank owner's rich daughter, Clara, poses as a typist in order to get closer to a young bank clerk, Paul, whom she eventually marries – the film opens up spaces in which it can explore gender politics and sexual economies, foreground modern technological and urban phenomena, or comment self-reflexively on its own status as fiction. One could argue that the film follows the model described by Kracauer at the beginning of this chapter: subversive possibilities are hinted at, but then closed down, and mainstream conservative values are upheld. Despite this, there is an appealing earnestness about it, as if the makers were eager to pack in as many references to social concerns and realities as the romance plot could reasonably carry.

The film opens with the type of documentary footage more usually associated with Ruttmann's *Berlin: Sinfonie einer Großstadt* (1927) or Siodmak's *Menschen am Sonntag* (1930). There are shots of the traffic on Alexanderplatz; delivery vans doing their rounds; newspapers being printed, bundled and distributed; open air markets; goods trains, passenger trains and S-bahns (Berlin's electric overground transit system) whistling in and out of recognisable Berlin stations; factory machinery and chimneys pumping out smoke and mass crowds of workers surging through their gates. From the beginning, the film signals its interest in the conditions and lived experience of the metropolis. The trains and crowds of the opening montage recur when Paul and Clara first meet. He is passing the station on his way to Herr Monty's house, and she has just arrived back in Berlin after a stay in England. Swept up in a sudden crowd of people when a train comes in, Clara and Paul are carried down the stairs and end up pressed against one

another. When the crowd has passed, she thanks him for trying to protect her and says goodbye. The camera cuts to a street scene. Paul checks his appearance in a shop window, straightens his tie, and catches up with Clara. The camera tracks along the street on Clara with Paul just behind her. She stops to admire the goods displayed in a shop window; the camera stops too, with Paul at a perpendicular window, raising his hat towards her. After this long (and complicated) tracking shot, there is a brief shot of Clara taken from the inside of the shop: she notices him, but pretends to ignore him. Outside, the tracking shot continues as Clara resumes her walk. In the foreground of the shop is a *Litfaßsäule*, one of the tall round pillars covered with advertising space which developed alongside commodity culture and became a common sight in German cities from the late nineteenth century. The *Litfaßsäule* and the wall behind are bedecked with the same repeated poster: a sort of Warholian effect *avant la lettre*. Clara hides behind the *Litfaßsäule* to see whether Paul is still following her: finding that he isn't, she doubles back, and he, delighted to discover that she had noticed his absence, steps out of a doorway. Smiling and laughing, they make one another's acquaintance and walk together.

This short scene only lasts a few minutes, but it demonstrates the kind of self-reflexive interest in the features and fixtures of modern life that appears over and over again in the cultural products of the Weimar Republic. Commodity culture and commercial premises are the context and setting for Paul and Clara's commodified romance. Despite the fact that the film takes place in a nominally "real" setting – unlike, for example, *April April* with its free-floating prince and subplot about a search for longlife pasta suitable for an expedition to Africa – it is unusually explicit about its own escapist nature. Immediately after the opening montage, we see two scruffily dressed workers outside a tall cast iron gate. They gloomily discuss the world economic crisis and their subsequent experiences of unemployment. "Not like them," one concludes in disgust, nodding through the gates. The camera leaves the two disgruntled workers and cuts to what they are watching: two men, Paul and his friend and housemate Rochus, relaxing by a swimming pool. The anonymous workers do not return to close the film, but their presence contributes to an alienation effect. It introduces a certain kind of meta-awareness into the text, framing the romance storyline as an illusory and escapist fiction produced for a society where hardship and poverty are widespread, and not to be taken as a representative depiction of that society.

We soon discover that Paul and Rochus's apparently luxurious lifestyle is only a game of make-believe, however: they have permission to live in one room of the mansion until the owners return at the end of the summer. Other examples of make-believe, performance and role-playing abound. At their first meeting, Clara walks with Paul to her father's (his boss's) house. Worried that she will embarrass him, he manages to give her the slip at the gate but she confounds him by somehow getting into the house anyway and teasing him whilst he waits to see Herr Monty. She seats herself at the piano in the hall and sings the film's only song, jumping up between each verse to run around the piano as Paul chases her. Stifled by his fear that Monty will hear them, he silently pantomimes anger. The sequence combines music and slapstick, and underlines the fact that this is a performance, a piece of art, at the expense of realism.

As in the pretence at the centre of the romance plot – where Clara takes on the role of an ordinary secretary in order to get to know Paul better – many of the role-plays involve a character adopting (or helping others to adopt) a different social status. Paul and Clara's next meeting is at the mansion, where Paul attempts to maintain the illusion that he is wealthy. Rochus, dressed impeccably as a butler, admits Clara. She and Paul sit down at a table in the garden to enjoy coffee and cakes. Rochus, meanwhile, dons a long false beard and patched clothes to appear as the aged gardener. Clara, who is aware of Paul's true status at the bank, is not taken in for a minute, but pretends to be convinced by Paul's attempts to impress her. Thus, the scene manages to both acknowledge the absurdity of its fiction and yet maintain a superficially cohesive realism. Another date begins with a tight shot of Paul and Clara snuggled together in the back seat of what we take to be a car. Smiling happily, Clara tells Paul how perfect everything is. The camera moves back and we see that they are actually sitting on the back seat of a bus: in the next scene, we discover that the bus is a free one organised by an estate agent responsible for a new development outside the city. Moreover, every young couple on it is posing as husband and wife interested in purchasing a house on the development in order to get a free ride into the countryside, and the poor estate agent sees her entire market evaporate as they give her and her showhouses the slip in favour of a romantic walk in the woods.

Visually, the film conforms to the predominant aesthetic language of late nineteen twenties and early thirties *Lustspiele*, that of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. For a viewer raised on the elaborate and expensive scenery of the Hollywood musicals, the sets seem rather Spartan. *Ein Mann mit Herz*, however, makes it clear that the plain walls, square corners and sparse furniture of the modernist offices and apartments were not merely a side effect of the financial pressures under which the German studios laboured, but a prestigious and fashionable assertion of style. When Clara takes her secretarial job at the bank her father owns, in order to get closer to Paul, her father insists that if she is going to work, she must be completely independent and can no longer live at home. One of the other secretaries in the office mentions that there is an empty room in her boarding house, and the camera cuts from the office to the boarding house. Where the office had clean, bright, light spaces, the interior of the old-fashioned boarding house has low ceilings, dark wood panelling and heavy patterned wallpaper. Likewise, the clean lines and high contrasts of Clara's elegant black and white outfits, designed for maximum impact on monochromatic film, are particularly striking next to the fussy checked fabric of the stout landlady's dress. Simplicity and minimalism are overtly associated with the young, the beautiful and the aspirational: ornamentation and "fuss" belong to an older, less modern generation.

As in *Keine Angst vor Liebe*, the romantic lead is not the film's only typist: *Ein Mann mit Herz* has a whole taxonomy of them. The first shot of Paul's office (before Clara has been introduced) shows four desks set out in a rough square. Three young women, Paul's subordinates, enter the room. Chattering cheerfully, each hangs up her coat, and takes her seat behind her desk, opening and closing her desk drawer as she prepares herself for work. The camera pauses on each of the drawers, the contents of which serve as shorthand for their female types: Fräulein Schmidt, who is short-haired and butch and wears a man's shirt and tie, has filled hers with sport magazines. Blonde and beautiful Fräulein Keller has a hairbrush and a powder compact in her drawer, which she promptly takes out to ensure that she is looking her best when Paul arrives. The third desk belongs to shy Fräulein John, whose drawer is absolutely orderly and contains only pens and stationery, neatly aligned. There is a second montage just after Fräulein Keller, Fräulein Schmidt, and Fräulein John arrive in the office, signifying the beginning of the working day. Fascinatingly for my purposes, this one is explicitly concerned with the new commercial culture of the large firms. The screen splits into nine in a

“kaleidoscopic” effect and shows nine identical versions of the actions being repeated all over the bank, and in banks and firms all over Germany: dust covers are taken off machines; ledgers are opened; anonymous fingers attack adding machines or type furiously; the bank safe swings open. Money is being made.

Of the three secretaries who are categorised by their desk drawers, two are crucial to the main romance plot. It is Fräulein John who tells Clara about the spare room in her boarding house, and Paul and his friend Rochus help her move in. Seen outside work, with her hair down and a soft dress on, Fräulein John is revealed as another beauty, and a B-romance develops between her and Rochus. Not only do the two couples conveniently double-date, but Fräulein John and Rochus facilitate Clara and Paul’s reconciliation when Paul believes (erroneously) that she has another lover. Fräulein Keller, meanwhile, is jealous of Clara. She hides part of a translation that Clara has completed for Herr Sieber, who is senior to Paul, and her treacherous behaviour results in Clara being fired. Only Fräulein Schmidt is peripheral to the main storyline, having no part in either obstructing or facilitating Clara and Paul’s romance. She has a minor comic role: with her short hair, straight-forward manner and fierce loyalty to the “good” axis of Clara, Paul and Fräulein John, she is the antithesis of Fräulein Keller, and provides several cutting retorts to Keller’s attempts to flirt with Paul. She could easily have been missed out of the film, however, with barely any alteration to the storyline. Nor is there any plot-related justification for her masculine appearance and attitudes, which follow the contemporary conventions of a recognisable psychosexual type, the Lesbian. (At one point, she also dances with Fräulein Keller, in the masculine role.) It appears that her presence, like the commercial culture montage that signifies the start of the working day, is due entirely to the film’s determination to integrate realist or journalistic elements into the romance plot.

One of these elements which the film attempts to address seriously is the flipside of the office as a mixed sex environment and site of erotic potential: sexual harassment. Attempting to address sexual harassment or sexual bullying is by no means unusual, as a comparison with *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit* will show. Overwhelmingly, it is presented as a very real and unpleasant danger for the working woman, even in a film like *Ein Mann mit Herz* which has a generally lighthearted tone. It is not, however, treated as a systemic problem, let alone one that might be

perpetuated by films and books which consistently portray the secretary as an erotic subject seeking to achieve higher status through a conjugal relationship with a superior. In *Ein Mann mit Herz*, the sexual harasser, Sieber, is an odious man, disliked by his colleagues and his superior, and the film's narrative logic sees that he is punished. The punishment is mild, however, and his other victim, the treacherous Fräulein Keller, barely gets off more lightly: it is implied that, as she has used her sexual charms to get ahead in the office, she deserves everything she gets when it goes wrong. It is also made quite explicit that the head of the bank sees no reason to penalise Sieber. When Clara goes to her father to complain about the way Sieber has treated her, Monty reminds her that she chose to be independent, and that she can't come running to him every time there's a slight problem. With a dimpled smile, Clara reluctantly accepts the justice of this judgment, and resolves to find some way of dealing with it herself. Sexual harassment is therefore portrayed as a failing, but an entirely individual failing, and an inevitable hazard for the female office worker which must be overcome through strength of character. Through Fräulein Keller, the film tries to come to a more sophisticated understanding of sexual harassment, and elicits some sympathy for her by showing the invidiousness of her position – damned if she does, damned if she doesn't – but, as we shall see, the romance plot calls, and the question is dropped quite suddenly.

The incident of sexual harassment which sends Clara to her father is cleverly shot, and, despite the subtlety of Sieber's actions, genuinely menacing. Clara is called into Sieber's office for a new assignment. As he tells her what he wants her to do, the camera stays on her face and upper body, with an empty background. The shot is quite clearly hers. With the camera static, the much taller Sieber moves into the shot from the right, causing her to fall back to the left. The violation is clear: by entering her frame, he has aggressively entered her personal space, and she is visibly alarmed. She moves back towards the left – the office door – and the shot stays with her, as do the audience's sympathies and identification. The shot cuts to her hand grasping the door handle, and Sieber's larger hand is immediately placed over hers, restraining her and effectively blocking her exit. The movements are tiny, but the air of menace is unmistakable. More than anything he says, it is the visual cues, the way that Sieber and Clara's relative sizes and his subtle but unmistakable assertion of physical dominance over her are foregrounded by the camera work, that communicate the threat he poses to her.

At this point, Paul in the outside office looks up to see the door handle moving. Suspecting that Clara is in trouble, he jumps up and opens it, and Clara is saved. Herr Sieber calls Fräulein Keller instead, and it is strongly implied that she has proved more pliable than Clara in the past, and is willing to accept the mutually beneficial (but distinctly hierarchical) arrangement that Sieber has suggested to Clara. However, the film – perhaps inadvertently – has posed a question that it fails to answer satisfactorily. Annoyed by her rejection, Sieber seizes on any minor infraction Clara commits, delighted to have legitimate reasons to attack her. At the second offence, he is able to dismiss her with impunity. By this time, Clara and Paul's romance is firmly established, and we know that she does not need the money, so her dismissal is no great tragedy in the internal world of the film. Yet, by the film's own logic, Clara's rejection of Sieber has cost her the job, despite Monty's cheerful assurances that Clara will simply have to find her own solution to the problem of sexual harassment and the film's moral condemnation of Fräulein Keller for submitting to Sieber's pressure and using her sexuality to progress. At the end of the film, the film's moral judgment is pronounced: Clara's true identity is revealed and Sieber and Keller discover that they have been persecuting the boss's daughter. Sieber looks merely uncomfortable, but Keller bursts into tears and runs out of the room. Clara follows her and there is a brief scene in which the two are reconciled. As Keller sobs and tells Clara that she can't imagine what it's like for an ordinary woman trying to make her way in the world, without a rich father, the audience's sympathy is evoked. For a brief moment, it seems as though the enduring problem of sexual bullying is going to be taken seriously. But the pull of the romance narrative wins out: after a minute spent comforting Keller, a butler enters to tell Clara that Paul has arrived, and she doesn't hang around. Perhaps, after all, the scene is only there to emphasise Clara's virtue and moral fitness as a romantic heroine: her magnanimity extends even to her defeated enemies.

***Ein bißchen Liebe für Dich* (1932)**

Americanism

The last break between Paul and Clara, before they are finally reconciled and their relationship is publicly confirmed, occurs because Paul believes she has another lover. Clara's nosy landlady has told him about the telephone conversations she has with "Teddy", which Paul assumes to be nickname for Theodore Monty. Clara is actually saying "Daddy", an imported affectation which is incomprehensible to the old-fashioned, monolingual Fräulein with her dark wood-panelled rooms and dowdy checked dress. Clara's modish English name for her father is as much a symbol of modernity as her simple, elegant dresses and the office's light, open spaces.

The association between modernity and Anglophone American culture is foregrounded in the next film, *Ein bißchen Liebe für Dich*. The phenomenon of "Amerikanismus", or Americanism, in Germany has been well documented (and briefly discussed in Chapter One.) The sheer scale of Germany's defeat at the hands of the allies led to a general consensus on the need for economic and political reform: the need for modernisation was a given, but the exact forms it should take were the subject of much discussion. America, with its technologically advanced and rationalised industries and economic success, figured in many of these discussions as the archetype of the modern. Alongside these economic debates, Americanised (and therefore modern) forms of entertainment – such as jazz, nightclubs and, of course, cinema itself – became increasingly popular. In some cases, an American origin might be more or less incidental to a phenomenon's success, but in others, "Americanness" was foregrounded as *the* key recommendation or gimmick. For many commentators, "American" was synonymous with "modern", whether used as a term of approbation or disapprobation.⁹

Even contemporary commentators, however, were aware that what passed for "American" in Germany did so at a vast remove from America itself:

What is it then with Americanism? [...] Certainly it has nothing or little to do with the American, whom we, after all, know less than any other national type. As a literary type, the American is

⁹ Kaes *et al* have a section on Americanism which shows a variety of positions on the Americanism debate in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (1994).

much less familiar to us than that of the European or the Oriental. The French citizen, the English Lord, the Russian peasant, the Eastern sage—they have become palpable realities to us though their literatures [...] But we have other things: trusts, highrises, traffic officers, film, technical wonders, jazz bands, boxing, magazines, and management. Is that America? Perhaps. Since I have never been there, I can make no judgement.¹⁰

This mediated knowledge of America, omnipresent, intrinsically desirable but existing at a significant remove from the country and its people, is at the heart of *Ein bißchen Liebe für Dich*. Contrasted to it, and motivating most of the changes of location in the film, is an American character's similar fixation on an "authentic" Viennese culture, which he also knows through Hollywood representations. Much of the film's humour comes from the juxtaposition of the real Vienna with the American character's expectations of "Vienna". But, as in *Ein Mann mit Herz*, the film plays with the idea of the "real", constantly undermining what it has previously suggested is realistic, and mocking the suggestion that anything that is seen on screen can be trusted.

The film features a Viennese couple, Paul and Clary Baumann, who entertain an American visitor, Mr Brown. Mr Brown is the king of the US automobile industry, and Paul Baumann has invited him to dine with him and his wife at their apartment, hoping to enter into an unspecified business deal with him. Shortly before the American guest is due to arrive for dinner, Paul argues with his wife Clary, and she storms out. As she has not returned by the time Mr Brown arrives, Paul's secretary, Anni Weber, puts on one of Clary's evening dresses and introduces herself as his wife. Anni is one of the several secretary protagonists who pass as bourgeois housewives with great ease once they have found the right frock: her only awkward moment comes when she is asked to choose champagne from a list. Despite that small slip, her good manners and charm enchant Mr Brown, and he declares that he must find himself a wife whilst in Vienna. Clary, the real wife, returns, expecting to be introduced to Mr Brown, and is shocked when Franzi the maid tells her, 'Wir haben schon ein andere gnädige Frau!'¹¹ To Herr

¹⁰ Rudolf Kayser in the *Vossischer Zeitung*, 1925. Reprinted in Anton Kaes *et al* (1994), p. 395.

¹¹ *Ein bißchen Liebe für dich* (Dir. Max Neufeld. Germany, 1932).

Franzi: 'We already have another lady of the house!' As in *Ein Mann mit Herz*, the formulation that Franzi uses, "gnädige Frau", is repeated throughout the film in order to emphasise the huge difference in social status between Baumann's wife and his secretary.

Baumann's horror, the real *gnädige Frau* comes out in another evening dress, introducing herself as the unmarried secretary, Anni Weber, and proceeds to flirt outrageously with the American guest. Mr Brown enthusiastically transfers his affections to this apparently legitimate object, and, at the end of the evening, proposes to Baumann that he take the secretary back to America. Panicked, Baumann tells Brown that he cannot cope without his secretary, and offers him his "wife" instead. Eventually, the truth comes out, the Baumanns kiss and make up, and Brown – again without hesitation – proposes to Anni, who delightedly accepts. This analysis is threefold: firstly, I examine the way the film foregrounds Mr Brown's Americanness and the encounter between two cultures and languages. As in *Ein Mann mit Herz*, the perceptual gap between the characters' ideas of traditional Vienna and American modernity are used to undermine the idea that anything seen on the screen can be taken at face value. Later, I look at the roleplay and substitutions contained within the plot and the statements the play makes about the respective roles of secretary and wife. Lastly, I compare the film with the play on which it was based, *Geschäft mit Amerika* ('*Business with America*'): the changes which were made are instructive for what they say about the different audiences of film and theatre, and also show how the requirements of genre distort representation.

The film opens with Mr Brown in a train carriage, asking how far it is to Vienna in German with a marked American accent, and then cuts (with a crescendo in the musical accompaniment) to a paper set of a fantasy theatrical Vienna. Girls in dirndls dance and strew flowers around the feet of cheerful boys with mugs of beer. When the overture has finished playing, the dirndls, beer and flowers are replaced with a car showroom scene: another clean, airy and brightly-lit modern workplace with a shiny luxury automobile in the foreground, with nothing to identify it as specifically Viennese or Austrian. Brown's Americanness, and these two images of Vienna – traditional, cosy and timelessly local on the one hand, and modern, elegant and universal on the other – are established and remain throughout the film.

The film is in German, but there is plenty of humour centring on the linguistic possibilities of English and German. Paul coaches Franzi the maid on how to greet the American visitor:

‘Öffnet die Tür mit, *How do you do.*’ “‘Du’ soll ich gleich sagen?’ she asks in astonishment.¹² As well as his strong American accent, Mr Brown makes numerous small grammatical errors, some of which are typical of a native English speaker attempting German:

Exchange between Mr Brown and Herr Baumann on the phone:

Mr Brown: “Ich kann gut Deutsch verstanden!”

Paul: “Wovon sprechen Sie?”

Mr Brown: “Von Hotel Bristol in Wien!”¹³

The audience isn’t required to speak anything other than German to enjoy the film, but certain minor jokes are enhanced by a basic knowledge of English, suggesting a certain level of bilingualism amongst the target audience for this film. In addition to the exploitation of the characters’ different linguistic backgrounds, however, the film pokes fun at the Austrian characters’ perceptions of America and the American’s perception of Vienna. For both, the referent is cinema: to Paul’s amazement, Clary has ordered colossal amounts of wine for the meal, because she believes that someone from the land of Prohibition like Herr Brown will be delighted to be able to drink. Her idea of America, he tells her, is based in films and utterly unrealistic. Mr Brown, likewise, motivates much of the movement of the film by declaring his desire to see the ‘real’ Vienna, ‘Ich will eine echte richtige Heurige ... wie es ich in Hollywood gesehen habe!’¹⁴ In the film’s paradigm, ‘Vienna’ has the same status as a quasi-real, quasi-mythological site, one known to the American Brown through filmic representation, as America has for the Austrian Baumanns. If Brown is typical, then Viennese music, Viennese nightlife and even the Viennese family enjoy a surprising level of brand recognition in the United States. After singing ‘So tanzt man nur in Wien mit ein Wienerin’ (‘Only in Vienna with a Viennese woman can one dance like this’), Brown exclaims:

¹² Paul: ‘Open the door with *How do you do.*’

Maid (Franzi): ‘I should say “Du” [informal/familiar “you”] straight away?’

¹³ Brown: ‘I can understood German well!’

Paul: ‘What are you talking about?’ (literally: From where do you speak?)

Brown: ‘From the Hotel Bristol in Vienna!’ (ie. his location.)

¹⁴ Brown: ‘I want to see a real original Viennese tavern [...] just like I’ve seen in Hollywood!’

'Ich bin so glücklich das ich endlich habe gesehen, wie es ist das gemütliche Leben in einer Wiener Familie!'¹⁵

The film overtly mocks the idea that films represent anything resembling reality: the "cosy family life" that Brown is admiring is anything but, with the housewife needling her annoyed husband still further by talking about her imaginary lover, whilst he cuddles up to his secretary in a pretence of conjugal bliss. Even Bibi the dog is deceived by the silver screen: when Clary storms out of the house, she ends up at the cinema, which is showing a film about dog shows. But the celluloid dogs upset Bibi, who cries so much that Clary is asked to leave.

In the original play, the action stays in the apartment, but the film takes advantage of its greater mobility to both subvert and reinforce the cinematic chocolate-box Vienna that Brown is seeking. On Brown's declaration that he wants to see Vienna, the film cuts to show Brown, Clary, Paul and Anni arriving at a modern nightclub, with a danceband and Black jazz dancers. To the three Viennese characters, there is nothing more excitingly modern or more desirable than this American-style entertainment – a sentiment which was presumably shared by the film's European audiences, for the action stops for a four-minute performance of *Ein bißchen Liebe für Dich* by the nightclub singer, complete with skimpily-dressed dancing girls. The American visitor, however, is seeking the exotic, and exclaims, 'Das ist nicht Wien – das ist New York! Das kenn' ich!'¹⁶ Despite Brown's expressed disappointment, the two couples stay for a few cocktails. As far as the plot goes, this allows Brown and Clary to get closer, and Anni and Paul become more and more frustrated as her dream of marriage to a wealthy American and his plan of a business deal look increasingly unlikely: the audience, meanwhile, is able to enjoy the spectacle of the glitteringly modern nightclub.

As Brown and Clary dance, and Paul and Anni argue about whether this can possibly fall under the terms of her secretarial contract (she taking the opportunity to negotiate better terms), the two couples get separated. Brown and Clary drive to an old part of town to look for Brown's

¹⁵ Brown: 'I'm so happy to have finally seen a Viennese family's cosy way of life!' The grammatical errors are deliberate: Brown's German is fluent, but not perfect.

¹⁶ Brown: 'That isn't Vienna – that's New York! I know that already!'

“real” Vienna. They find a pub with loud “heurige” music playing, and he is delighted. Inside, however, the pub is deserted except for an aproned bartender slowly sweeping the floor. The camera pans to a loudspeaker, the music stops, and a voice announces, ‘Die Übertragung des original Wiener Heurigen aus Berlin ist beendet!’¹⁷ Brown laughs, and seems to accept the impossibility of finding the ‘authentic’ Vienna he is acquainted with from the screen. However, they ask the bartender if he can recommend a real Heurige bar, and in the next scene, he and Clary are dancing in their eveningwear with Viennese workers, in as authentic a bar as anyone could wish for. In this way, the film constantly undermines its own knowing take on cinematic verisimilitude. It asserts at one moment that there is no authentic Vienna nightlife and that the naïve character who seeks it is doomed to be frustrated – and then, just when we have taken the point, shows him finding it after all. Similarly, the film mocks the idea that the Baumanns are a happy, loving couple, and then shows that they are: Baumann is almost inconsolable when he believes that Clary is lost, and their reconciliation scene in the bathroom at the end of the film is rather touching. In a different way, the film plays the same game as *Ein Mann mit Herz*, flattering its audience that they are too clever to mistake celluloid for reality, whilst simultaneously allowing them to enjoy a fantastic, idealised world.

Family

Despite the lack of children in the film, the nuclear family is an almost constant presence. Reproduction is always the unspoken object of a romance plot, but in *Ein bißchen Liebe für Dich*, it is actually spoken. The family is invoked in a series of substitutions throughout the film and play. Although Clary is childless, her maternal instincts are diverted to Bibi the dog, whom she pets, carries around and calls ‘Süsses’, ‘Liebsten’ and ‘Bibilein’. This substitution is played for laughs: the exaggerated affections which Clary lavishes on her ersatz child are a grotesque parody of maternity, suggesting the lengths to which a childless woman will go to find an object for her natural desires. Brown articulates the meaninglessness of a childless marriage, at the same time unambiguously comparing the office and the family:

Brown: “Haben Sie kleine Babys?”

¹⁷ Loudspeaker: ‘The transmission of the original Vienna Heurige band from Berlin has now finished.’

Anni: "Nein, leider nicht."

Brown: "Ein Ehe ohne Kinder is wie ein Fabrik ohne Reingewinn! Der Betrieb hat gar kein Zweck!"¹⁸

This comparison is the central theme of the text: through it, the potentially dangerous territory of the mixed-sex office is rendered safe. The new commercial environment is, explicitly, just another form of the entirely recognisable middle-class nuclear family, hierarchically arranged with the male at the head and a female helper in a subordinate role: the perfect reproductive union whether the issue be profit or children. At the same time as the film casts secretarial work as an extension of the woman's natural role as a wife, however, it carefully avoids implying that a secretary is *equal* to a wife. To be treated as a secretary when one is in fact a wife is a humiliation:

Brown [to Anni, who he believes is Baumann's wife]: 'Wenn Sie eine Schwester hätten, würde ich sie auf die Stelle heiraten [...] Ihr Mann muß sehr glücklich sein.'

Anni: 'Ich bin doch nur seine Sekretärin.'

Brown: 'Oh – er vernachlässigt Sie?'

Anni nods.

Brown: 'Das ist nicht schön von ihm!'¹⁹

Next to the spoilt and canine-obsessed Clary, Anni is a model of good sense and rationality. Yet whilst the success of the film requires that the audience identify with Anni, it also depends on them sharing the basic assumption articulated by all the characters: that the change of status from secretary to *gnädige Frau*, pampered bourgeois housewife, is an elevation entirely to be desired. Anni and Brown's engagement at the end of the film must be read as a successful and triumphant outcome for both, but most particularly for Anni.

¹⁸ Brown: 'Do you have any little babies?'

Anni: 'No, unfortunately not.'

Brown: 'A marriage without children is like a factory without profit! The enterprise has absolutely no point!'

¹⁹ Brown: 'If you had a sister, I would marry her on the spot [...] Your husband must be a very happy man.'

Anni: 'Why, I am nothing but a secretary to him.'

Brown: 'Oh – he neglects you?'

Anni nods.

Brown: 'That isn't nice of him at all!'

Finding a coherent value system within the film is not easy, for many of the moral or social values which the film attempts to promote are subverted or downright contradicted by the necessities of the genre. Brown, for example, admires Anni's practicality and the knowledge of business that she has learnt in the work place, and comments on how admirably such a woman would suit him as a wife. Believing her to be married, however, he is equally happy to woo the vacuous Clary. Is it fair, then, to attribute Anni's ultimate accession to the role of wife of a fabulously wealthy American to the qualities which she does not share with Clary? Broadly speaking, I think it is: Paul and Clary's marriage, with its squabbles and silliness, his anxious buffoonery and her cossetted superficiality, compares unfavourably with the cheerful and humour-filled union we predict for Brown and Anni. Anni, we assume, will not transform herself in a whining, childlike wife, but remain alert, practical and informed. Her objective (or *sachlich*) approach to life and her familiarity with the world of affairs will enhance her marriage and enable her to support her husband all the better. Brown, the rational, modern American, and Anni, the rational, modern Viennese woman, will inaugurate a new and better form of marriage.

Adaptation

As was the case with *Ein Mann mit Herz* and *Keine Angst vor Liebe*, the primacy of the leading man and leading lady is unmistakable, despite the existence of a second heterosexual pairing. The film publicity features high-gloss, soft-focus glamour shots of Magda Schneider, who plays Anni, with Georg Alexander (Mr Brown) and Hermann Thimig (Paul Baumann) given more or less equal second billing, as Hermann Thimig was a fairly well-known comic actor, and Lee Parry (Clary) last of the four.²⁰ This is not the case in the play on which the screenplay was based, where Paul Frohner (Paul Baumann's original) and Clary come first in the cast list, and are indeed much bigger roles than I. Th. Hanyman (Brown) and Alma (Anni). This is no coincidence, and is indicative of the art of adaptation. Whilst the basic plot is the same (although the action never moves out of the Frohmans' apartment, as it does in the film), the play has a very different focus, with Clary and Paul's squabbles and their desperate attempts to conceal the discord from their guest taking up a much greater portion of the action. Essentially,

²⁰ Magda Schneider was in fact a typist before she got into films: her obituary in the *Berliner Zeitung* (2.8.1996) read 'Stenotypistin sollte sie, Sangerin wollte sie werden'.

the same plot is framed in very different ways by the demands of the genre and the way it will be marketed to a particular audience. The film is publicised through reference to its stars, promising (and delivering) beautiful people, glamorous locations, cheerful musical numbers and an aspirational romance narrative. The play seeks a wealthier and more bourgeois audience, and, whilst still a comedy, has a slightly more satirical skew. It is certainly nowhere near the Socialist theatre or overtly political cabaret being produced in the same period, but the theatre audience is more conscious of its own sophistication than the film audience, and demands a marginally more cynical treatment of the institution of middle-class marriage and its hypocrisies.

Thus, the play makes more of the difference between the comfortable lives of the Frohmans, and the difficulties faced by the single working girl. Alma, the Anni character, decries the lot of the typist, under the guise of chastising her husband for his insensitivity to his employees,

Alma [Anni]: Als Mann ist er ja sehr nett, aber als Chef möchte ich ihn nicht haben [...] Vom Urlaub will er immer etwas abzwacken [sic], von der Weihnachtsgratifikation, und wenn eine sich einmal eine Ueberstunder [sic] aufschreibt, is er ausser sich ...

Hanymann [Brown]: Sie scheinen ja ein sehr gutes Herz für Ihre Angestellten zu haben.

Alma: Habe ich auch, Gott sei Dank! So ein kleines Büromädel will auch einmal etwas vom Leben haben. Jeden Tag dasselbe: Stadtbahn, Büro, billiges Menü, wieder Büro und Stadtbahn. Am Sonntag eine Landpartie oder ins Kino. Bis sie alt und verblüht ist. Dann heiratet sie einen Kollegen, der auch nichts hat. Das hat sie vom Leben [...] An der Schreibmaschine ist noch kein Büromädel glücklich geworden. Aber nach Büroschluss, wenn sie nur ein Mädel ist, da kann ihr plötzlich das Glück begegnen...²¹

In the film, this exchange is both shorter and more humorous: Anni focuses not on her hard life, but on the excellent job she performs, telling Brown that her 'husband' has an 'ausgezeichnete Sekretärin', and effectively forcing Paul to praise her work in front of the guest: the social reality of the typist is elided in favour of an arch and flirtatious game. The play also evinces a much

²¹ Paul Frank and Ludwig Hirschfeld, *Geschäft mit Amerika* (Vienna: Georg Marton Verlag, 1930), p. 50.

Alma [Anni]: As a husband he is certainly very nice, but I wouldn't like to have him as a boss [...] He always pinches a little bit back from your holiday entitlement or your Christmas bonus, and if anyone tries to claim overtime, he's beside himself...

Hanyman [Brown]: You certainly seem to have a lot of feeling for the employees.

Alma: Yes I do, thank God! Even a little office girl wants something out of life. Every day the same: the S-bahn, the office, a cheap lunch, then the office and the tram again. On Sunday a trip to the countryside or the cinema. Until she's old and withered. Then she marries a colleague who's got no more than she has. That's what she gets from life ... No office girl has yet been happy at her typewriter. But after closing time, when she's only a girl, then happiness can suddenly strike...'

less rose-tinted view of the romance between the secretary character and the American businessman: for Alma, it is more or less a career move. She upbraids Paul Frohmann for the way that his wife's participation in the deception – flirting with Hanyman to revenge herself on Paul – might ruin Alma's chances of marrying Hanyman, perhaps her only opportunity to better herself:

Paul: Was kann Sie als Sekretärin – ?

Alma: (von innen herausbrechend, immer stärker) Aber was, Sekretärin. Glauben Sie, ich spiele nur aus blosser Dienstfeier mit? Um von Ihnen eine Remuneration zu bekommen, die bestimmt sehr schäbig sein wird? [...] Hier geht's für mich um mehr. Um die grosse Chance, die man nur einmal im Leben hat [...] Und darauf soll ich wegen Ihrer Frau verzichten? Fällt mir nicht ein.

Paul: Sie lieben den Amerikaner?

Alma: Lieben? Das kommt später [...] Vorläufig gefällt er mir und ich bin ihm sympathisch. Das ist schon ein ganz schöner Anfang.

Paul: Sie glauben wirklich, dass Sie dieses grosse Glück –

Alma: Auch mit einem Achtenklassenlos kann man den Haupttreffer machen. Unsereins hat ja nie mehr als ein Achtenklassenlos [...] Und das soll ich knapp vor der Ziehung wegwerfen? Um bis 60 Jahre ein Bürofräulein zu sein? Nein! Das ist nicht mein Traum. Dort drin ist mein Traum; der Amerikaner, der sich momentan noch einbildet, dass er Ihre Frau liebt. Und Sie glauben, dass ich mir von Ihrer Frau den Haupttreffer wegnehmen lasse, wo wie ihn gar nicht braucht? Verehrter Herr Chef, da kennen Sie mich sehr schlecht. Nicht nur meinen Nacken, auch meinen Kopf!²²

According to the stage directions, Alma's energy is infectious, and inspires Paul to go and prove that he isn't just in charge in the office, but also in the home: 'Zeigen Sie doch einmal, dass Sie nicht nur der Chef sind, sondern auch der Herr im Hause!'²³ Alma is the indignant voice of the poor and downtrodden, seeing yet another opportunity being casually denied her by the

²² Frank and Hirschfeld (1930), p. 80.

Paul: 'But as a secretary, what can you – ?'

Alma: (in a sudden burst, increasingly loudly) 'Oh yes, a secretary. Do you think I'm playing along out of simple professional loyalty? To get a payrise from you, which will no doubt be tiny? [...] It's about more than that, for me. It's about the big chance, which only comes once in a lifetime [...] And I should give it up on behalf of your wife? I can't do it.'

Paul: 'You love the American?'

Alma: 'Love? That comes later [...] For now, he seems nice and I like him. That's a perfectly good beginning.

Paul: You really think you'd have the good luck to –'

Alma: 'Even if you've been dealt a rotten hand, you can still win the game. People like me only have a rotten position after all. And I should throw that away, before the game is up, when it's in my grasp? To be an office girl until I'm sixty? No! That's not my dream! My dream is out there: the American, who currently imagines that he's in love with your wife. And you think I'm going to let your wife take my big chance away from me, when she doesn't even need him? You may be my boss, sir, but you don't know me very well. Not only my neck, but also my head!'

²³ Frank and Hirschfeld (1930), p. 81. 'Go and prove for once that you're not just the manager, but also the master of the house!'

thoughtlessness of the rich. This righteous anger is more or less absent from the film, where the general impression is that Anni, whilst not rich, is doing perfectly well. When it comes to cinema, glamour trumps realism, and in the absence of an oral account of her economic circumstances, visuality becomes the most eloquent testimony. Political and social concerns are edited out by a medium which requires that a heroine appear with flawless make-up, perfect hair and an elegant and fashionable frock. *Ein Mann mit Herz* paid some lipservice to the real economic position of secretaries by having a secretly rich female lead to satisfy the demands of glamour and supporting characters who expressed the real insecurity of the office girl's life; the exigencies of plot in *Ein bißchen Liebe für Dich* do not allow the contradictions to be explored, so the social aspect is dropped. The film does feature a conversation between Paul and Anni wherein she negotiates a payrise and reduced overtime in recompense for her continued co-operation, but it takes place during the nightclub scene and is played in a flirtatious manner, two ways of undermining any possible serious intent.

Human as Machine

In two films, technology and the anxieties surrounding increasing mechanisation are foregrounded. In *Keine Angst vor Liebe* – the plot of which I summarised on page 96 – the lawyer Hornemann must learn to balance work with leisure and recognise and respect both his own humanity and that of his secretary and love-interest, Trude Schader, before he can be accepted as a husband. As we will see, what the film offers as 'leisure/humanity' in opposition to 'work/machinism' bears a close relationship to that which Kracauer calls 'distraction': fashion, glamour and nightlife. A note of misogyny creeps in to *Liebe muß verstanden sein*, in which the secretary heroine is closely identified with a mechanical woman invented by her love interest. The film not only allows the female heroine less agency than the other films discussed in this chapter, but also, by aligning the typist heroine with the mechanical woman, and hinting at the sexual possibilities of the pliant female automaton, constructs an ideal technologised woman, ideally suited for domination. Comparison with this film, I argue, serves to highlight the powerful images of female emancipation and agency contained within the other films discussed in this chapter, despite the conservative class and gender hierarchies preserved in the final reels.

Keine Angst vor Liebe (1933)

After a wealth of aggravation from her boss Hornemann, secretary Trude furiously slams down her stenography pad and confronts him. She explicitly compares him to a machine, much to the consternation of Hornemann, who is rather dense when it comes to personal relationships:

Hornemann: Fräulein Schader, schreiben Sie weiter.

Trude: Nein! Schluß!

Hornemann: Was fällt Ihnen denn ein? Ich bin noch lange nicht fertig!

Trude: Aber ich! Feierabend!

Hornemann: Was soll das denn heißen? Die Büroschlüß ist von mir festgesetzt. Schreiben Sie auf der Stelle weiter, Fräulein Schrader!

Trude: Nein, ich habe es satt, ich bin keine Maschine!

Hornemann: Sie sind keine -

Trude: Nein, nein, nein! Aber sie sind eine Maschine und zwar ein miserabel geölte und schlecht geputzte Maschine!

Hornemann: Erlauben Sie mal, ich bin schlecht geputzt?

Trude: Sehen Sie in den Spiegel, aber Sie haben eben Ihren alten Bürokrum im Kopf, Tag und Nacht! Sommer und Winter! Sie merken ja gar nicht, was um Sie herum vorgeht! Was haben Sie da an?

Hornemann: Cattewai!

Trude: Ich werde Ihnen gleich zeigen, wie ein Cattewai aussieht. Da [*shows him a picture from a magazine she has in her pocket*] – so sieht ein eleganter Mann aus!

Hornemann: Ja, ich weiß nicht, ich bin mir lieber!

Trude: So könnten Sie auch aussehen, wenn Sie einem Mädél gefallen wollen! Aber Sie sind eine schlecht geputzte Maschine!²⁴

²⁴ *Keine Angst vor Liebe* (Dir. Hans Steinhoff. Germany, 1933).

Hornemann: 'Keep writing, Miss Schrader.'

Trude: 'No! Closing time!'

Hornemann: 'What are you talking about? I am nowhere near ready yet!'

Trude: 'But I am! Time to go home!'

Hornemann: 'What on earth does this mean? It's up to me when the office closes. Start writing again this instant, Miss Schrader!'

Trude: 'No, I've had enough. I'm not a machine!'

Hornemann: 'You're not a -'

Trude: 'No, no, no! But you're a machine, and a badly lubricated, badly washed machine at that!'

Hornemann: 'I beg your pardon – I'm badly dressed?' [This puns on the double meaning of 'putzen': to wash or clean, but also to dress oneself up.]

Trude: 'Look in the mirror, but you have your stupid old office rubbish on your mind day and night! Summer and winter! You have no idea what's going on around you! What do you call that thing you're wearing?'

Hornemann: 'A cutaway!'

Trude: 'I'll show you what a cutaway looks like – [*shows him a picture from a magazine she has in her pocket*] There! That's what an elegant man looks like!'

Hornemann: Well, I don't know – I think I prefer myself –'

Trude: 'You could look like that too, if you wanted to make yourself look nice for a girl! But you're just a badly washed machine!'

As I discussed earlier, Trude and Hornemann are the B-pairing in the film, the supporting romantic plot which provides much of the comedy. In this scene, the camera plays up their physical differences: Jessie Vihrog is tiny, but spitting furious, and although the actor playing Hornemann is significantly taller and wider than she is, his authority crumbles under her onslaught. The scene is an updating of an old dramatic situation – the shrewish wife and the hen-pecked husband – except that here it is the professional as much as the heterosexual hierarchy which Trude’s wrath turns topsy-turvy.

Given the extremes of Hornemann’s obsession with work, however, few could disagree that she has right on her side. In an earlier scene, Trude and Käte go to Trocadero’s nightclub together. Hornemann telephones their landlady looking for Trude, and, on being told that she has gone out for the evening, arrives at Trocadero’s. At first, Trude is delighted to see him, and – in the first intimation that he is going to be her romantic interest – greets him using a diminutive version of his name:

Hornemann! Das ist aber vernünftig, daß Sie sich von der blöden Arbeit freigemacht haben! Na, Hörnchen, heute tanzen wir mal, was?²⁵

Hornemann, unfortunately, finds a free table and promptly demands that Trude take dictation for him. He refuses to stop until the small hours of the morning, when a policeman tells him that the nightclub has to close according to the terms of its licence. For Trude, this workaholicism is inhuman. As well as comparing Hornemann to a machine in the dialogue above, in an earlier speech when she first arrives home from work, she aligns him with the hated typewriter:

Hier ist’s schön, hier ist kein Hornemann, keine Schreibmaschine, niemand schreit: Fräulein Schrader zum Diktat, schreiben Sie!²⁶

²⁵ Trude: ‘Hornemann! But it’s so sensible, that you’ve freed yourself from the stupid work for once! So, Hörnchen, we’re going to have a dance today, aren’t we?’

²⁶ Trude: ‘It’s nice here – there’s no Hornemann here, no typewriter, nobody shouting: Miss Schrader, come and take dictation! Write!’

Machines and drudgery are closely identified, and Hornemann, who forces her to be a drudge, is a machine. In denying her (and himself) an evening of fun at the nightclub, endlessly postponing the end of the working day and dressing badly – rather than recognising Trude as a woman and dressing to impress – Hornemann is denying both his and Trude’s humanity. When Trude claims to be ill and sends Käte to do her day’s work, in the aftermath of telling him that he is a ‘badly lubricated, badly washed machine’, however, Hornemann sends a suitcase full of medicines to her lodgings. Despite the absurdity of the romantic gesture (again, Trude and Hornemann’s courtship plot cannot be conventional, for they must not rival Käte and Höfert as the leading partnership), Trude is delighted. Hornemann has finally recognised her as a human being rather than as an extension of the mechanical typewriter, subject to physical weariness and ill health, and capable of appreciating an expression of sympathy. Thus, what Trude demands Hornemann recognise as “humanity” is both the artificial, social representation of the body, interpreted by fashion, but also the frailties of the physical body under the onslaught of the machinic discourses of work, such as Taylorism and Fordism, which proliferated in the 1920s.

Despite its superficial emphasis on rejecting the workplace and the all-consuming drive towards increased productivity, Hornemann’s story arc validates a consumer ideology that Kracauer identifies and critiques in *The Salaried Masses*. In order to become a suitable match for Trude, Hornemann must cease to work like a machine and learn to live a full and human life. What the film codes as non-work or ‘human’, however, could equally be called ‘leisure’. Hornemann first breaches the conventions of leisure when he makes Trude take dictation in a nightclub, a violation of a leisure space that is comic in its absurdity. Later, after Trude has accused him of being a machine, he demonstrates his change of heart by donning a beautifully tailored new suit. Within the film’s order, these are signs of his education: a move away from a single-minded obsession with work towards a new holistic understanding of life, which is rewarded by marriage to Trude. It isn’t hard, however, to map these values onto Kracauer’s “distraction”, or *Zerstreuung*:

‘Why do people spend so much time in bars?’ asks one employee I know. ‘Probably because things are so miserable at home and they want to get a bit of glamour.’ [...] And society consciously – or even more, no doubt, unconsciously – sees to it that this demand for cultural needs does not lead to reflection on the roots of real culture, hence to criticism of the conditions underpinning its own power. Society does not stop the urge to live amid glamour and distraction, but encourages it

wherever and however it can. [...] Society too is dependent on diversions. Since it sets the tone, it finds it all the easier to maintain employees in the belief that a life of distraction is at the same time a higher one.²⁷

Glamour, elegance and the public assertion of wealth and style are sold to the 'spiritually homeless' white-collar classes as a substitute for actual, vital culture. For Kracauer, this narrative where education consists of the recognition of glamour would undoubtedly bolster the assertion that 'almost all the [film-]industry's products serve to legitimize the existing order, by concealing both its abuses and its foundations.'²⁸

***Liebe muß verstanden sein* (1933)**

A similar fascination with the potential confusion between machine and human is evinced in *Liebe muss verstanden sein*. In this film, however, the identification is specifically between woman and machine, and woman *as* machine. Margit, who is first seen behind her typewriter, follows her boss to a hotel and finds herself in the middle of a scientist's demonstration of his new project, a mechanical woman. By coincidence, the mannequin resembles her: this, of course, is crucial to the plot, as she has to impersonate it during a demonstration to the scientist's financial backers because his jealous fiancée has stolen the mannequin's 'heart'.

Liebe muß verstanden sein is undoubtedly one of the more preposterous films, drawing more on the traditions of farce than bourgeois comedy. People are found in each other's beds and there is an extended chase scene through the hotel corridors that makes a complete mockery of any kind of spatial continuity. The film opens on a smiling Black woman with an 'African' scene behind her who takes a bite of a banana: the camera opens out to reveal that she is at a typewriter in a modern office and that the 'African' scene is a poster bearing the legend, 'Bruno C. Plaumann,

²⁷ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 88-9. "Warum die Leute soviel in Lokale gehen?" meint ein mir bekannter Angestellter, "doch wohl deshalb, weil es zu Hause so elend ist und sie am Glanz teilhaben wollen." [...] Bewußt oder wahrscheinlich mehr noch unbewußt sorgt nun die Gesellschaft dafür, daß diese Nachfrage nach Kulturbedürfnissen nicht nur Besinnung auf die Wurzeln echter Kultur und damit zur Kritik an den Zuständen führe, durch die sie mächtig ist [...] Auch sie ist auf Ablenkungen angewiesen.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 92.

²⁸ Kracauer, *TSM* (1998), p. 94. '... das nahezu sämtliche von der Industrie gelieferten Erzeugnisse das Bestehende rechtfertigen, indem sie seine Auswüchse sowohl sowohl wie seine Fundament dem Blick entziehen.' Kracauer, *DA* (1971), p. 99.

Import & Export' In a single shot, the camera pans around to the right to show a similar poster with an 'Oriental' landscape, in front of which sits a cheerful Chinese woman who is also typing; right again to a blonde whose poster depicts the Statue of Liberty; a brunette with a 'Mediterranean' scene; and finally comes to rest on Margit the German heroine, and a poster with no particular geographical identity. Of these women, only Margit has a speaking role, and the others never reappear after this first scene: it is a purely visual joke. This opening scene nonetheless foreshadows the role that women's bodies will take in the film's economy. The typists' racially marked bodies speak of the firm's success, showing both how wide a market it commands (global), and how it draws the exotic-traditional into the modern technologised and commercialised economy. Likewise, Margit's body, being so closely identified with the mannequin's, becomes a symbol of the dominance of male-ordered technological culture.

The opening scenes, before Margit gets to the hotel where the scientific demonstration is to take place, establish the tenor of the film. Whilst it has much in common with the films discussed earlier – such as the interest in streetlife and the new commercial culture of international trade and spectacular street-level display – there are also certain major differences. To the extent that any character in a relatively formulaic genre comedy can be said to be an agent, Clara of *Ein Mann mit Herz*, Anni of *Ein Bißchen Liebe für dich*, and Käte and Trude of *Keine Angst vor Liebe* were agents: much of the action of the films was motivated by the female characters' determination to realise their professional or romantic ambitions. Clara takes a job as a secretary in order to pursue Paul; Anni decides to help her boss by pretending to be his wife and later seeks to marry Mr Brown and go to America; Käte persuades Höfert to give her a job at the piano shop and sets about making it successful, and Trude resists her boss Hornemann's work obsession and inspires him to change. In *Liebe muß verstanden sein*, in contrast, Margit reacts rather than acts. The plot is driven by her childlike eagerness to make up for things that have gone wrong, which breeds new misfortune, rather than by any actual decisions or desires on her part. The endlessly complicated plot of *Liebe muß verstanden sein*, with one caper after another, leaves even less room for characterisation than *April April*. Yet the differences in style and generic tradition between these two films and the three more sophisticated ones serve to show how versatile and ubiquitous the common elements were.

Following the opening shot described above, Margit is called into the boss's office, where Herr Plaumann asks her to take 3000RM and deposit it before the bank closes. On the way, she is distracted by a window display. An argument begins when another woman accuses Margit of making eyes at her husband. A crowd quickly gathers, and – in a scene which proves typical of the film's rather unpleasant gender politics – the good wives all begin to attack Margit, being by nature jealous of a young, attractive women, whilst their benevolent, paternal but rather ineffectual husbands defend her. Eventually, Margit is able to carry on, but it is too late, for the bank has closed. Turning to go back to the office, Margit is caught in a sudden breeze, and the banknotes fly out of her hands. There is a quick streetscene montage: we see notes stuck to rolling car tyres, disappearing down drains, and weaving in and out of the legs of smartly attired pedestrians. Margit, horrified at her failure, goes back to the office to confess. Finding that Herr Plaumann has already left, she goes to his house, where she is told that he is already on his way to a hotel in Dresden. She gets on a train and arrives at the hotel, where the greater part of the action takes place.

This begins a series of calamities, the solution of each generating the next difficulty to be overcome. Finding that she has beaten Herr Plaumann to the hotel, Margit tiptoes up to an empty room, and falls asleep on the bed. Sometime later, Herr Lambach the inventor arrives in the room. He climbs into bed, waking up Margit who jumps in horror. Inexplicably, Bobby the photographer is at the foot of the bed, and he promptly takes a photo and taunts Herr Lambach with the prospect of his fiancée seeing it. After Bobby has left the room, Herr Lambach blames Margit, and Margit promises to get the negative back. The attempt to get the photo back involves Margit pretending to be a chambermaid, whereupon Frau Plaumann (Margit's boss's wife) gives her an evening dress to mend. Margit wears this dress down to the hotel ball and steals the photo back from Bobby whilst they are dancing. She is apprehended by a policeman, who takes Bobby's pocketbook and her handbag from her before she manages to run away. She then bumps into Herr Plaumann, and begins to explain that she came to the hotel to find him because she was unable to deposit the 3000RM before the bank closed. Herr Plaumann asks her to give the money back to him, and she realises that what is left of it is in the bag that has just been confiscated by the policeman. The camera cuts to the 'policeman' having handcuffs snapped onto his wrists: actually, he is a thief who has been impersonating a policeman. Margit,

unaware of this, is in danger of being arrested herself, because she cannot produce Her Plaumann's 3000RM. Whilst he is on the phone to the police, she escapes through the corresponding door into the room next to his ... which proves to be Frau Plaumann's, and Frau Plaumann recognises her evening dress and would like it back. Margit hands it over, and Frau Plaumann changes and goes downstairs to the ball. Whereupon she is arrested, because a woman wearing that very dress has just lifted Bobby's pocketbook.

And so on. Each "solution" breeds a catalogue of new disasters, and Margit jumps from one crisis to another, perpetually in and out of various frying pans and fires. Eventually, Margit and Herr Lambach form an alliance (his fiancée, Ellen, has ended the engagement on the evidence of Bobby's photos and taken with Bobby) and he tells her that everyone has come to the hotel to decide whether or not to invest in his new invention, a mechanical woman named "Lilli". The grand demonstration is nearly ruined, however, when Bobby steals Lilli's "heart" to please Ellen. Margit, discovering the plot to sabotage Lambach, quickly dresses herself in Lilli's clothes and pretends to be the mannequin, dancing up and down in an imitation of mechanical movement. Ellen realises that what they have just seen is not really Lilli, but by the time she has convinced the financial backers that they haven't really seen a fully-functioning mechanical doll, Lambach and Margit have replaced Lilli's heart and the second demonstration is authentic. The film ends, in accordance with the genre conventions, with Lambach and Margit set to live happily ever after.

There is a strain of misogyny in *Liebe muss verstanden sein*, both in the representation of female characters and female bodies and in the underlying plot mechanics. Whereas many of the other films depict friendships or camaraderie between women, all the female speaking roles in *Liebe...*, except Margit, are shrewish, spoilt or conniving: Ellen and Frau Plaumann are the sisters of the jealous wives who attack Margit on the street on her way to the bank. Margit, as I have already suggested, is granted much less agency than the protagonists of other films: the catastrophe-ridden nature of the plot means that she is always seen reacting, and never acting. Much is also made of the mannequin's apparent femaleness, and its sexual possibilities are hinted at.²⁹

²⁹ The trope of the mechanical woman, of course, has literary and high-modernist cinema antecedents in Hoffmann's *Der Sandman* and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.

Lambach's servant appears to have sexual designs on Lilli, taking the doll out onto the balcony of the hotel, serving tea and holding a one-sided conversation with it in a fantasy of courtship. Lilli, Lambach tells Margit, is sure to be a huge success, because 'everyone needs a woman who will do as she's told!' The men's evident delight in Lilli's compliance is made all the more disturbing by the emphasis laid on a close identification between Margit and the mannequin. From our first view of Lilli, there is an obvious physical resemblance, which is what enables Margit to play the role of the doll in front of Lambach's investors. She is also aligned with Lilli through Lambach: following the departure of Ellen, Margit and Lilli stand in similar relation to Lambach as "his" women, and the comparison is strengthened by several characters. Although Margit ceases to see Lilli as a rival once she is aware that it is only a mannequin, Lambach's servant continues to see an equivalence between the two, treating Margit with suspicion, and telling Lambach that *he* prefers Lilli. Lastly, there is Bobby bestowing Lilli's "heart" to Ellen as an engagement present: the ostensible reason for the gift, of course, is to sabotage Lambach's hopes of securing financial backers, but offering someone else's heart as a romantic token can hardly be seen as symbolically void. The action only makes sense if Lilli and Margit, who has replaced Ellen in Lambach's affections, are closely aligned, and Lilli's mechanical heart can stand for Margit's real one.

In a film that takes such care to establish a strong connection between the typist and her typewriter in the opening scene, with the camera pausing so that woman and machine are perfectly framed in ergonomic harmony, there is another level to this identification. Where the other films in this chapter celebrated the typist for her independence, glamour and modernity, *Liebe muss verstanden sein* seems to rejoice in her submission. Specifically, Margit the typist is identified with the ideal figure of the pliant female automaton: this original image of her as a typist, a woman defined by her relationship with technology and frequently treated as an automatic extension of the machine, informs her character throughout the film. This is, of course, true of many of the other films featuring typists, but it is only in *Liebe muss verstanden sein* that the identification of woman with technology is linked so closely to woman *as* technology, and that technology and the technological woman, furthermore, are so obedient and eminently suited to domination.

Conclusion: Genre and Tradition

All of these films operate firmly within the boundaries of their genre, lighthearted musical comedy. Within the genre, the more sophisticated films, such as *Ein Mann mit Herz* and *Ein bißchen Liebe für Dich*, find room to comment on questions of realism and their own status as visual fiction. Not all of the *Lustspiele* featuring typists and secretaries are as well-crafted, engaging and self-aware as these two, but even the more superficial, such as *April April* and *Liebe muß verstanden sein*, show a desire to showcase modernity or modern technological phenomena. Few of the other heroines beloved of the Weimar light entertainment industry, such as actresses, dancers and heiresses, provided the same opportunities to portray the new world of commerce, technology, and leisure time through the medium of traditional heterosexual romance, or to engage with the ambivalent status of the new white-collar women. Thus appeared a body of films which, I argue, are numerous enough to be treated as a sub-genre, bound by certain themes, concerns and plot conventions which audiences came to expect and which directors and scriptwriters both conformed to and deviated from. The model film of this subgenre would have a young, pretty woman as either protagonist or the protagonist's love interest, and she will be sweet, fresh and cheerful and work as a typist. She will probably not have much money, but – when she somehow acquires an evening dress – her manners and conversation are refined enough to carry her successfully through an evening in the most splendid restaurant, nightclub or ball. The camera will linger lovingly on the details of this establishment, and the action may pause for a performance by a jazz singer or dancer, just as it lingers on some piece of office technology, a street-scene with traffic and trams, a factory production line or a shop-window. Someone in the film will at some stage mistake someone else's identity, and the character will fail to correct them, although the audience will be in on the deception. There will be at least one song, and the sets and costumes will be simple and modern, quite probably designed with one eye on the unadorned architectural style of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Through her superior knowledge of the business or human nature, or simply her passion for a particular brand of stockings, the secretary may very well save her company from a disastrous deal. She wouldn't dream of marrying purely for money, and certainly wouldn't knowingly make a play for the boss (or another suitably superior man, if the boss is already married) but she

will marry him anyway, and he will be of an appropriate age and level of attractiveness. Long before the romance plot is concluded, however, she may well be compared to, disguised as or mistaken for a wife. There may well be another couple in the film, either as comic relief or to facilitate or obstruct the A-romance. The audience will not be in any doubt, however, as to which couple's consummation will end the film.

Almost all of these conditions are fulfilled in the irrepressibly cheerful film *Die Privatsekretärin* (1930), a film which both Kracauer and more recently Angelika Fuerich have discussed as an iconic example of the *Bürofilm*.³⁰ It begins with Susie arriving in Vienna on a train: entering the modern city by modern means. She finds herself a room in an all-female boarding house, where she sings about how happy she is and makes friends with all the other women living here. The next day, she befriends the security guard at a bank, who helps her to get a job in the typing pool. At first the women all type rapidly and individually, but as Susie sits down to work, a rhythm is gradually picked out, and coheres into a short musical number based on the sounds of the typists typing and the other office machinery in the bank. Susie, however, falls behind with her work and is told by the autocratic office manager that she must stay late to finish it. The bank manager, Paul, finds her alone in the typing pool and insists that she must finish working and come with him for dinner, and that he will straighten things out with the office manager. Susie, believing him to be another poor clerk, accepts, and she, Paul and Hasel (the security guard) have a marvellous evening together at a *Heuriger* where Hasel's band is playing. The next day at work, Susie finds out that Paul is actually the bank manager. Unhappy that he has tricked her, she resigns. Hasel cheers her up and convinces her that Paul did not mean to be underhand, and she and Paul arrange to meet at his flat that evening. Back at the women's boarding house, each resident contributes something to the penniless Susie's outfit: one her dress, another a beaded wrap, a third elbow-length gloves, a fourth an evening bag, a fifth shoes,

³⁰ Fühlich (2000). This film is an example of the late 1920s practice of shooting the same film, on the same set and with largely the same cast, in more than one language, to enable sound films to benefit from the international markets developed during the silent era. The English version, *Sunshine Susie*, is held at the British Film Institute and features the same actors (Renate Müller and Hermann Thimig) as Susie and Paul, but a British actor playing Hasel the security guard. The English-speaking Hasel also has an extended slapstick dance scene, in the style of the English music hall tradition, which is missing from the German version. Kracauer also comments in *From Caligari to Hitler* that it 'emphasized luck rather than capability as the true source of brilliant careers', a response to such dire economic times that even the most talented were not guaranteed work: 'Luck as the vehicle of success: the Germans must have been on the verge of hopelessness to accept a notion so utterly alien to their traditions.'

and so on. All dressed up, she arrives at Paul's gloriously modern and glamorous flat. He proposes to make her his mistress: she declines and walks out, furious and heartbroken, and prepares to leave Vienna. At the last minute, he arrives to tell her that he was only testing her by offering to make her his mistress, and the fact that she turned him down proves that she really loves him. (Neither Paul nor the film seems to have noticed that, if one were marrying for mercenary reasons, being a rich man's wife is a rather more secure position than being his mistress.) They embrace, and live happily ever after.

Die Privatsekretärin is – as all the films discussed in this chapter are – an intricate mix of the ancient and modern. As a feature film, it is immediately modern, the result of a technology only two or three decades old, and an even younger infrastructure and industry. As we have seen, these films also foreground the modern quite unambiguously, with technology, modern commercial culture, new modes of travel and metropolitan experience all integrated into their storylines. As per John McKenzie's investigation of the social comedy of the period, discontinuity is cushioned by 'generic continuity'. Certain elements, such as the 'happy ending' marriage of the primary couple, the guarantee that the marriage is financially solvent, the reliance on mistaken identity plots and substitutions, are old staples of European comedy. This somewhat contradictory combination of formal conservatism alongside celebration of the modern argues an ambivalent cultural attitude to the new emancipated *Fräulein*: on the one hand, a fascination with her perceived glamour and independence, whilst on the other, a desire to draw her back into the traditional heterosexual economy of marriage and the family.

Postscript: The Secretary in Nazi-era film

***Der Herrscher* (1937)**

In this final section, I discuss a film featuring a typist romance which was made after Hitler's rise to power. Veit Harlan's *Der Herrscher* (1937) is a propaganda film by the director who went on to make *Jud Süß* (1940), perhaps the most famous anti-Semitic feature produced during the Third Reich. *Der Herrscher*, I argue, shows the extent to which the boss / secretary romance had become a cliché: for Veit Harlan, the power differential between the two becomes not only a

metaphor for how a subservient, passive Germany should love her Führer, but also an emblem of a new classless society, in which the traditional bourgeois elite has no place.

Der Herrscher ('The Leader') was shown with an address from Walter Funk, State Secretary in the *Propagandaministerium*, and recognised as 'Staatspolitisch und künstlerisch besonders wertvoll' under the *Predikat* system. Predicates carried tax breaks and also ensured preferential treatment in cinemas: thus, the German film industry was motivated to support the ruling party as much by the carrot as the stick. Prior to 1934, Julian Petley reports, predicates were awarded to films that were 'instructional, popularly improving, culturally valuable or artistic'.³¹ In 1934, however:

the system became more overtly politicised. Predicates available during all or part of the 1933-1945 period were: especially valuable, politically valuable, politically especially valuable, politically and artistically especially valuable, valuable for youth, nationally valuable, film of the nation, and commendable. The highest distinction (politically and artistically especially valuable) meant that the film was entirely exempt from entertainment tax, while the film of the nation and valuable for youth predicates carried no actual tax relief but greatly enhanced a film's status and made it more likely to be selected for showing in schools and Nazi youth organisations.³²

Der Herrscher qualified on both political and artistic grounds, and director Veit Harlan was awarded the 1937 Staatsfilmpreis. It stars Marianne Hoppe and Emil Jannings, who had won the first Academy Award for Best Actor for his performance in *Die Blaue Engel* () and was one of the Weimar era's best-known actors. Jannings plays Matthias Clausen, the visionary leader of the title who retains control of his industrial empire despite the treacherous machinations of his adult children. The film dramatises the *Führerprinzip*, the Fascist doctrine that certain great men are born to lead and should be allowed to do so without hindrance or interference. Clausen is a nationalist and a man of the people, but his jealous, self-interested children conspire to have him declared legally incompetent and removed from his position as the head of the business he has built up because he has married his stenotypist.

³¹ Julian Petley, 'Film Policy in the Third Reich' in Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (eds), *The German Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), p. 177.

³² Petley (2002), p. 177.

The film begins with the first Frau Clausen's funeral, which causes Clausen to realise his own mortality, and determine to create a legacy which will stand for all time. His baffled friend points to the enormous industrial complex which Clausen has created: surely that will stand as his legacy? But Clausen wants more: anyone can build and sell machines, he says, but to create the raw material out of nothing but human ingenuity, now *that* would be a legacy. Returning to the boardroom after an absence, Clausen is furious to find that the unimaginative directors of the company have reduced the company's emphasis on research and development. He announces his vision to the directors, emphasising the nationalistic and social qualities of his dream:

'Mir scheint, Sie haben nicht begriffen, was auf dem Spiele steht! Gerade bei dem Experiment, das Sie unterbrochen haben! Wenn es gelingt, ist die deutsche Wirtschaft unabhängig von der Einfuhr eines der wichtigsten Rohstoffe! [...] Wir sind dazu da, für Millionen – und Abermillionen Arbeit und Brot zu schaffen. Wir sind dazu da, für die Volksgemeinschaft zu arbeiten, der Volksgemeinschaft zu dienen! Das muß das Ziel eines jeden Wirtschaftsführers sein, der sich seiner Verantwortung bewußt ist. Dieser mein Wille ist das oberste Gesetz für mein Werk! Dem hat sich alles andere zu fügen! Ohne Widerspruch! Auch wenn ich damit den ganzen Betrieb in den Abgrund steuere!'³³

Clausen already expresses himself in fascist terms, describing himself as a servant of the *Volksgemeinschaft* but recognising no higher authority than his own will. The directors, however, fail to be moved by Clausen's passion for feeding the masses and ensuring the health of the German economy: their imaginations stretch no further than their own bonuses, and they grumble at the thought of changing the company when they are collecting quite nice salaries for a minimum of work. Only the new stenotypist, Inken Peters (Hoppe), appreciates Clausen: the camera cuts from Clausen standing at the head of the boardroom table to a soft-focus shot of Inken sitting in the corner with her stenograph pad and pencil. When Clausen invokes the *Volksgemeinschaft*, she looks up at him with rapt eyes.

³³ *Der Herrscher* (Dir. Veit Harlan, Germany, 1937).

Clausen: 'It seems to me that you haven't understood what's on the table! Particularly in the experiment that you have cancelled! When it succeeds, the German economy will no longer be dependent on the import of one of the most important raw ingredients! [...] We are here to provide work and bread for millions and millions. We are here to work for the people, to serve the people! That must be the aim of every industrial leader who is conscious of his responsibility. This will of mine is the highest law of my factory. Everything else is subordinate to it, without exception! Even if I drive the whole firm into the ground!'

After the meeting, Clausen collapses. He recovers to attend the celebrations for the firm's 40th anniversary. An aerial shot shows thousands of workers amassed in the factory forecourt. In the film's only overt reference to Nazi imagery, the masses greet Clausen with Nazi salutes and wave banners which display tools resembling the hammer and sickle arranged in such a way that they almost make a swastika, as well as slogans like 'Ein Führer, ein Vorbild' and 'Ein Mann der Tat, nicht der Worte'. This scene establishes Clausen's popular support, simultaneously identifying him with Nazism and co-opting the symbols of the Communists, fascism's sworn enemies, to suggest an appeal which encompasses the entire political spectrum. Clausen's position in the workplace is thus established. The board of directors work against him because they are only interested in personal gain and do not share his vision of working for the whole German economy, but the workers, the mass, love and laud him. Clausen is presented with a model of a pre-industrial factory, a blacksmith's forge with wooden buildings and a cartwheel and a grassy yard in front of it.

The narrative then moves into the private sphere, where the same class relation obtains. At a private garden party after the public celebration, Inken is insulted first by one of Clausen's sons-in-law, who tries to persuade her to go for a drive with him, and then by a daughter-in-law, who compliments her on her dress and then snidely asks whether she paid for it herself. Inside, Clausen is talking to his old friend Erhardt. Clausen's mentally unstable daughter Bettina keeps dreaming of Clausen with his dead wife: it isn't just childish fantasy, Clausen explains, but an attempt to bind him to the past, and to his old life. But Clausen feels as if he lives in a new, young world, for a wonder has come to him: he has fallen in love with Inken, his secretary. Erhardt congratulates him, and the two drink a toast. When Clausen's children become aware of the relationship, however, their immediate concern is their inheritance. The men fear for the future of the factory, and the women worry about their mother's jewellery.

This private drama is the central conflict of the film. Clausen and Inken marry, but his children refuse to accept Inken and openly snub her. Whilst the couple are on their honeymoon in Italy, the children conspire to have their father declared insane and legally incompetent. Control of the factory is handed over to the board, with one of the sons-in-law at the head. When Clausen returns and discovers the treachery, he is furious. As he waits upstairs for the van which will

take him to the mental institution, the lawyer handling the case persuades Inken that it will be better for Clausen if she goes away quietly, for the children would then rescind the *Entmundigung* (power of attorney). She sends her ring back to Clausen in his sick-room, where he lies apparently unresponsive. But the ring revives him, and, at the sound of the factory sirens, he leaves his bed. There is a long shot of him walking through the factory he has built up, and then he arrives in his office, where he tells the servant that he has a letter from a judge declaring that he is in full control of his mental faculties. He asks for someone to be sent in to take dictation, and it is Inken. The film ends with Clausen dictating his will to Inken: the factory is no longer to go to his children, but will become the property of the state, under the direction of a researcher or a foreman from the factory floor.

This family drama, however, mirrors the conflicts and allegiances of Clausen's professional life, seen in the first few scenes, and functions as an analogy for Hitler's relationship with the German state. Inken, like the workers who celebrated the firm's fortieth anniversary, recognises Clausen's vision and loves him selflessly and obediently, whilst Clausen's children, like the board of directors, oppose him from selfish, grasping and illegitimate motives. Shortly after Clausen tells his friend Erhardt that he loves Inken, we see Inken telling her mother that she loves Clausen, too. Frau Peters is tending and cutting flowers, which Inken holds dreamily in a small bouquet as she speaks: the film thus establishes a link between the modern typist and the country maiden, just as the model forge presented to Clausen linked his industrial complex to traditional production. Goebbels, in a speech quoted by Julian Petley, described the modern age as 'an era of technology', and argued that 'the danger unquestionably arises that modern technology will make men soulless. National Socialism never rejected or struggled against technology. Rather, one of its main tasks was to consciously affirm it, to fill it inwardly with soul, to discipline it and to place it in the service of our people and their cultural level.'³⁴ Both Inken and her flowers, and the workers with their model forge, stress the 'soul' of technology by affirming the continuity between the modern technological worker and nostalgia-infused, pre-modern figures.

³⁴ Petley (2002), p 177.

Inken's love is not only selfless, but passive. Her mother asks whether Clausen plans to marry her, and Inken responds that she doesn't care as long as she can be near him: 'Es ist schön. Ich bin glücklich.' Like Käthe in the other Nazi-influenced text discussed here, *Seine kleine Sekretärin*, she places no conditions on her love, and makes no demands on him. In this reading, Inken is the personification of Germany, which must love its Führer equally whole-heartedly and equally passively, and trust to his judgment. Her love is rewarded for its purity by Clausen's proposal of marriage. As in Germany, however, there are those who would seek to thwart the union. The film makes artful use of the class parameters established in earlier secretary/boss romances to denounce Hitler's opponents as a self-interested bourgeois elite. Clausen's children and children-in-law include a socialite, one of the board of directors (whom we have already seen dismissed as unimaginative and greedy), an academic, and a rather effete playboy, and they object to their father's marriage both because it offends their sense of class and because it threatens their inheritance. Thus, the film characterises opposition to Hitler as the treacherous machinations of those selfish few who fear the loss of their own privileged position, whilst representing his overwhelming popularity amongst the less privileged masses. The disparity in class status which, as we have seen, was one of the central features of the secretary romances of the Weimar period, becomes an analogy for the accession of the fascist regime.

Chapter Four

Little Ms Typist: Political and Literary Responses to Popular Culture

Introduction

To finish, we return to where we began: the uniquely German discourse of the *Angestellten*, which takes the apparently unreconcilable combination of economically insecurity and bourgeois class identity as its defining trait. All four novels discussed in this final chapter have been classified as *Angestelltenliteratur* by German critics, and the first, Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine*, occasioned Kracauer's 1930 declaration that '[d]ie Angestellten beginnen literatur-fähig zu werden'.¹ Along with other well-known *Angestellten* novels, such as Hans Fallada's *Kleiner Mann – was nun?* and Erich Kästner's *Fabian*, all four were also declared 'Asphaltliteratur' and banned by the Nazis.² All four, too, respond in some way to the popular representation of female white-collar workers, seeking to correct a partial or skewed impression, or to offer another dimension. As we will see, however, the political positions they adopt, the aspects of the popular image they address and the literary sophistication they bring to the task vary considerably.

More noticeably, perhaps, none of these texts ends with a wedding or engagement. All four depict some kind of sexualised relationship between a female typist and a male superior, but in each text it is problematised and presented as disempowering for the woman. For Frau Brückner, the protagonist of Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine*, a sexually-predatory boss is one of the many trials that make the secretary's life a hard one; in Rudolf

¹ Kracauer, 'Ein Angestelltenroman' (1930).

² 'Asphaltliteratur' is a peculiar classification, but one which was used against many contemporary novels which sought to represent modern, especially metropolitan experience. Lorna Sopcak quotes the definition of 'Asphaltliteratur': '[Literatur] deren Kennzeichen eine geistreiche, bewegliche Intellektualität ist, die mit virtuoser Technik vorgetragen sein kann, aber in ihrer Standpunktlosigkeit ohne Bindungen an die Werte ist, auf denen das völkische, sittliche und religiöse Gemeinschaftsleben beruht, die auch um solche Werte und Bindung nicht ringt, sich vielmehr in ihrer freischwebenden Intellektualität gefällt und so zur Verneinung aller Bindungen und Werte führt (Literatur des intellektuellen Nihilismus).' Sopcak (1999), p. 4.

Braune's *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*, a sexual relationship between a typist and an executive triggers the first white-collar industrial action. In Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi: eine von uns*, Gilgi enlists the help of her friend Olga to deal with an amorous boss, and in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Doris's gauche attempt to use her sexuality to her advantage precipitates her dismissal from the office and her fall into the demi-monde. These texts all show an awareness of the sexualisation of the relationship between secretary and boss, then, and must be read not only in the context of the *Angestellten* debates, but also in the context of the generic conventions and expectations established by the films and fiction discussed in the previous two chapters. Each of these novels reacts in some way against the dominant popular discourse which surrounded the typist in the later years of the Weimar Republic, using some of the tropes associated with the films and pulp novels whilst seeking to undermine both the glamorous image of the single, independent girl, and the romanticised ideal of the economically-aspirant marriage.

For Christa Anita Brück, this meant countering the image of the typist as a glamorous, independent New Woman and depicting her instead as poor, desperate, insecure and unhappy, moving cheerlessly from one ill-paid and miserable position to another. *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* promised to expose 'die Welt der abertausend Frauen, die Tag für Tag hinter der Schreibmaschine ihre Pflicht erfüllen, unterdrückt, beiseitegeschoben, vielfach mißbraucht und gedemütigt.'³ The very title – *The Fates Behind the Typewriters* – suggests something hidden, and also hints at the novel's portrayal of the typist's lot. In contrast to the majority of romance novels and films discussed so far in this dissertation, the heroine of *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* is thoroughly disempowered, at the mercy of her sex and class. Where romance novels glamorised the life of the single white-collar girl, providing her with a chic wardrobe, nightlife and an enviable match, Brück's novel (which has often been read as autobiographical) adopted a form of realism, and its protagonist experiences many of the real threats and insecurities that the sociologists of the *Angestellte* described. Brück's heroine, Brückner, is the victim of unremitting drudgery, poverty and a humiliating episode of sexual exploitation.

³ 'the world of untold thousands of women, who do their duty behind the typewriter day after day, oppressed, brushed aside, repeatedly ill-used and humiliated.' From the book jacket blurb of Christa Anita Brück. *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*. Berlin: Sieben-Stäbe-Verlag (1930), viewable at http://www.angestellten.de/materialien/ma_brueck.html. 19th April 2007.

For Rudolf Braune, the second novelist discussed here, it meant showing the sordid lengths to which the typing girls go to afford their glamorous clothes and lifestyles. Erna Halbe, the new girl who has just arrived from the provinces, is shocked to discover that many of her sophisticated, metropolitan colleagues think nothing of maintaining relationships with rich older men in order to obtain stylish new clothes and visits to expensive nightspots. When one of them falls pregnant and is fired, Erna steps up to lead the rest of the young, exploited women in a strike. In contrast to *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine*, where sexual attraction only enters the narrative as unwelcome lechery, Braune distinguishes between a commercial glamour, to which the girls aspire and for which they enter exploitative sexual relationships, and an egalitarian, comradely heterosexuality which furthers the cause of solidarity and the strike.

Braune's explicitly socialist novel ends with the strike broken, but with the promise that Erna has begun a struggle 'der kein Ende hat'.⁴ Brück, a national-conservative, offered no such faith in political action. Her heroine tells Max, a young proletarian colleague who is fond of quoting socialist arguments, that the what differentiates people is not found in money, but 'liegt am Charakter'.⁵ Kracauer commented on the novel's 'ausgesprochene Individualismus', and indeed, Brückner identifies strongly with the established middle-classes.⁶ The two texts thus approach the typist from opposite ends of the political spectrum and claim her for opposing classes, demonstrating once again the typist's unique versatility as a model of modernity.

I end this dissertation with a discussion of Irmgard Keun's two novels, *Gilgi: eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. These two novels are, I contend, more sophisticated than any of the others discussed here, and present the ambivalences, tensions and contradictions of the lower middle-class woman in late Weimar Germany without flattening them into any generic or

⁴ Braune (1960), p. 225.

⁵ Brück (1930), p. 96.

⁶ Kracauer, 'Ein Angestelltenroman' (1930). 'In one place, the protagonist tells a younger colleague who is complaining about the boss: "It's all about character. Even amongst ourselves, there are those who are good for nothing..." This pronounced individualism does not disturb any part of the social structures that determine the *Angestellte's* fates.'

political schema. In one way or another, these two novels make reference to almost all that has gone before. They are written in full consciousness of the problems and insecurities faced by the new middle-classes, the questions of gender and sexuality with which the women of the late twenties and early thirties grappled, the possibilities of identification and liberation offered by popular culture (as well as its limitations), and even the degree of condescension with which they are regarded by a predominantly male-identified Establishment. According to Richard McCormick, Keun was consciously responding to the stereotype of the enthralled and distracted young white-collar worker, of which Kracauer's condescending portrayal of the 'little shopgirls' is the best-known.⁷ Her two protagonists can be read as two archetypes of young, female employees, one with absolute faith in the rationalised, systematised world, and the other entirely in thrall to images of glamorous femininity and confident that her sexual attractiveness will bring economic security. Yet rather than depicting her protagonists as limited by their easy acceptance of these mass-produced identities, she portrays them discovering the limitations of these mythologies, and offers a critique of the social hypocrisies and hierarchies that produced them in the typist-girls' own voices. The omniscient narrator of *Gilgi: eine von uns* occasionally satirises the supporting characters but treats Gilgi herself sympathetically, whilst *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* is written in the first-person. In both, it is the perfectly balanced tone which succeeds in communicating the characters' mistakes and misconceptions without suggesting that either the author or reader is superior to them. Those critics and readers who have not recognised this, I argue, miss the subtlety of Keun's work and reproduce Kracauer's condescending attitude to the lower-middle-class woman.

In the first section of this final chapter, then, I discuss *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* and *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*, both for their political backgrounds and limitations, and also in the context of traditional *Angestelltenliteratur*, which has failed to address the specific questions of gender with sufficient sophistication. In the second section, I turn to *Gilgi: eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, and argue that my exploration of the representation of the typist in the Weimar Republic adds an extra dimension to the critical work surrounding these two texts.

⁷ McCormick (2001), p. 130.

Christa Anita Brück, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine*

‘ausgesprochene Individualismus’

In the 1930s, Christa Anita Brück claimed that *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* was autobiographical. Lydia Marhoff suggests that this was in response to pressure to prove her national loyalties in the face of increasing political pressure and censorship, but it is not wholly implausible, and there is undoubtedly an autobiographical element to the novel.⁸ Like her heroine Fräulein Brückner, Brück had worked as a typist, and author and protagonist share a background in the established middle-class, as well as their closely-related surnames. The book is written in the first-person, with events narrated exclusively from the perspective of Brückner. Kracauer remarked that the book was ‘unzweifelhaft aus dem Bedürfnis entstanden, die eigenen bitteren Erfahrungen auf eine anständige Art loszuwerden’, but added that:

Aber wenn irgendwo so ist hier (nicht minder wie seinerzeit bei den Kriegsromanen) die autobiographische Form am Platz. Sie verbürgt die Wirklichkeitsnähe, durch die allein solche Frontberichte gerechtfertigt werden, und überdies ist in der individuellen Not die allgemeine beschlossen.⁹

As we saw in the first chapter, Kracauer is fond of representing the daily lives of the *Angestellten* as a foreign, unmapped land: here, his preferred metaphor is war, as he likens Brück’s novel to ‘Frontberichte’.¹⁰ Existence is indeed a battle for Fräulein Brückner. Without family or friends, she is forced to work for her living, always on the edge of poverty and humiliation. Over the course of the novel, she works for six different employers, and encounters a different form of exploitation or unhappiness at each. Few of the problems are insurmountable in themselves, but the dire economic circumstances of the period accentuate Fräulein Brückner’s

⁸ Lydia Marhoff, *Zwischen Abwehr und Anpassung: Strategien der Realitätsverarbeitung in den Texten nichtfaschistischer junger Autorinnen von 1930-1945* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2002).

⁹ Kracauer, ‘Ein Angestelltenroman’ (1930). ‘...stems from the need to purge oneself of bitter experience in a respectable way.’ ‘But if the autobiographical form has its place anywhere, it is here (no less than it has in war novels.) It vouches for its fidelity to the real, the only criterion on which such front-line dispatches can be justified, and besides, individual misery leads to general misery.’

¹⁰ Kracauer, ‘Ein Angestelltenroman’ (1930).

powerlessness: there is sufficient unemployment that even as a highly capable secretary with two foreign languages, she is acutely aware that she is dependent on this position and this employer. The novel carefully reflects the economic histories of the protagonist's real-life equivalents: as the child of an old officer family, Fräulein Brückner would have received a private income for life if she had been born a generation earlier, but the annuity her father left her has been swallowed up in the hyperinflation of the early 1920s. This close attention to reality is also the novel's weakness, however, for it has no critical distance from that which it portrays and is saturated with the politics, prejudices and assumptions of Fräulein Brückner – and therefore, one presumes, of Brück herself.

Following both Kracauer's treatment of the novel as documentary despatches from the front line, and the tradition of *Angestelltenliteraturkritik*, Christa Jordan reads the novel for its similarity to contemporary sociology and class politics. She identifies Brück's political goal with those of the rightwing DHV (*Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfen-Verband*, see Chapter One), which argued that employees' and employers' interests need not be in conflict and sought a stable accommodation between the two. Indeed, as we will see, when she is not fending off the advances of lecherous bosses or being tricked out of her agreed wages, Brückner identifies with her employers far more than she does with her colleagues and equals. Her dreadful experiences are a cry for sympathy and understanding, but in no way constitute a demand for change. As Jordan puts it, 'Brück übt Moralkritik, nie Systemkritik.'¹¹ The 'distraction culture' of nightclubs, popular music and movies which is plays such a significant role in other depictions of office girls is also almost entirely absent in this novel. Brückner spends some time working for a film distribution company, but where another heroine might have made the most of this distant association with the glamour of the silver screen, Brückner adopts an attitude of patrician disdain. There is no glamour, sociability or distraction in the novel, just a relentless focus on Brückner's unhappy hours in the office and her relationships with her colleagues.

Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine begins with a sort of *memento mori*. Fräulein Brückner is only twenty-two, and in her first post at the Dudenmeyer firm. Her colleague Urschl, who is

¹¹ Jordan (1988), p. 125. 'Brück practices moral criticism, not criticism of the system.'

neering the end of her career, is ill and broken down, but cannot afford to retire, nor even to take the vacation that might restore her health. She exhorts her younger colleague ‘Heiraten, Fräulein Brückner, heiraten heiraten! [...] Denken Sie an mich, heiraten um jeden Preis!’¹² Marriage is here a purely economic arrangement, the only means of escaping an even worse fate. Despite this, romance never appears to be an option for Fräulein Brückner: shaken by this vision of her future, she applies herself to the matter of increasing her hundred mark salary. Her first attempt is foiled through simple sexism. Hearing that her mediocre manager is about to be promoted, she applies for his job, but finds that her gender is a great handicap: Herr Dudenmeyer laughs at her – “Was reden Sie da für Unsinn?”¹³ – and Herr Pehlke, the son of a mere waiter, gets the job. Here, we see how Brückner’s class expectations colour her reaction to events. Brückner resents Herr Pehlke’s appointment not only because she has been discriminated against on grounds of gender, but also because she is better-bred than he is. Brückner the author validates her protagonist’s sense of class superiority: Herr Pehlke cannot give dictation at all, and the stenotypists are constantly blamed for his mistakes.

Frustrated by this, Brückner hands in her notice, and takes a new job at Piepenbrock & Eckerlein, a venerable commercial establishment with a much stricter ethos. She finds, however, that she is no happier here than she had been at Dudenmeyer: at Piepenbrock & Eckerlein’s, she concludes, tradition counts for too much. Her next job is gained through a chance encounter on the street with a man who knew her family, and her class expectations once again come into play. Herr Lichter, the manager of a film distribution company, tells her that he is looking for two hardworking stenotypists, to start at 150 marks, with the opportunity to progress to a Disponentin position in the real film industry at 500 marks. Brückner objects that she doesn’t like the film industry, and he, pretending to agree, finds another way to seduce her:

‘Mir auch nicht, mir ganz und gar nicht. Fräulein Brückner, machen wir uns doch nichts vor. Wie habe ich mich umstellen müssen! Oberleutnant gewesen im Felde, Adjutant beim Stabe, E. K. I und II. Ihr Vater war ja wohl auch Offizier?’

¹² Brück (1930), p.20 and 22. ‘Marry, Fräulein Brückner, marry, marry!’ ‘Think of me, and marry whatever the cost!’

¹³ Brück (1930), p. 26. “‘What nonsense are you talking?’”

Mir schießt das Blut in Gesicht. Infam hat er das gesagt. Mein Vater war Oberst und Regimentskommander. Lichte kann allenfalls gegen Ende des Krieges Leutnant geworden sein, wenn nicht auch das gelogen ist. Ich schwanke in dem Entschluß, wenigstens für die kritische Zeit bis zur Klärung der Wirtschaftslage einen Versuch bei ihm zu wagen.¹⁴

As well as the high salary, responsibility and opportunity to climb the career ladder, Lichte appeals to Brückner's pride and class consciousness. He represents himself as, like her, a member of the formerly privileged classes having to make his way in the unfamiliar, populist new world. She accepts the offer of a job, partly because of the dreadful state of the economy, but the solidarity he appears to offer is quickly betrayed. He will not give her a contract, and the 150 mark salary never materialises:

‘Holla, holla, langsam, langsam! So sehr mir Ihre Geschäftstüchtigkeit gefällt, Fräulein Brückner, ich bin schließlich kein Kintoppbesitzer, dem Sie das Fell über die Ohren ziehen sollen. Wenn Sie einige Zeit hier sind und sich gut bewährt haben, können wir auch mal über ein Gehalt von hundertfünfzig Mark sprechen. Aber vereinbart, das wollen wir zunächst festhalten, vereinbart sind hundertzwanzig Mark. In der heutigen geldarmen Zeit ist das ein schöner Verdienst. Sehen Sie sich mal um, wer in Ihrem Alter, noch dazu als Anfängerin in einer Branche, soviel Geld verdient.’¹⁵

Thus begins a battle of wills between Brückner and Lichte: to prove his point, he writes to Ufa asking what they would pay a 23-year-old Disponentin, but then refuses to let Brückner see the letter and claims they recommend 80-100 marks. Brückner finds the letter in his office and tells him she's read it, and he claims that she's seen the old, pre-war one. He interviews potential replacements for her position where she can hear him, and – using both her class and her gender against her – tells her that all this arguing is not becoming:

¹⁴ Brück (1930), p. 53. “‘Nor do I, nor do I. Fräulein Brückner, let's not fool ourselves. How I've had to adapt! Lieutenant in the field, then Adjutant, E. K I and II. Your father was an officer too, of course?’ Blood shot to my face. What an infamous thing to say! My father was Group Captain and Regiment Commander. Lichte could undoubtedly have been lieutenant by the end of the war, if that wasn't a lie. I dithered about whether to brave it with him, if only for this critical time until the economic situation improved.’

¹⁵ Brück (1930), p. 60. “‘Hey, hey, slow down, slow down! As much as I like your dilligence, Fräulein Brückner, I'm not some cinema proprietor that you can take for a ride. When you've been here a while and proved yourself, we can talk about a 150 mark salary. But we agreed 120 marks, that's what we agreed. In these difficult times, that's an excellent salary. Have a look and see where there's someone of your age, an absolute beginner in the industry, who earns so much.’”

Die Art, die Sie jetzt herauskehren, steht Ihnen ganz und gar nicht. Früher waren Sie wirklich eine sehr angenehme junge Dame. Schade. Verleugnen Sie nicht zu schnell Ihre gute Erziehung. Die Zeiten kommen wieder, in denen man Wert auf Kinderstube legt.¹⁶

Lichte's skilful manipulation of Brückner is beautifully portrayed. Having denied her a contract, he strips her of every bargaining tool or form of power she might have, and then twists the qualities that persuaded her to take the job – their shared class background and family history – to denigrate her further. Brückner becomes an archetypal *Angestellte*, then, trapped by a combination of poverty, the depression, and her own bourgeois consciousness.

In this novel, however, author and protagonist are so closely identified that it is hard to say whether Brück herself is aware of the irony. As we have seen, the narrative validates Brückner's class-conscious fury when the son of a waiter is promoted above the daughter of an officer by informing us that the new manager is incompetent, and Brückner continues to identify with a conservative politics. She works with Max and Martha, two impressionable children of the proletariat who are quite prepared to work hard and honourably to get on – Martha attends evening classes in stenography and typing, and Brückner declares herself 'zuweilen erstaunt, wieviel diese beiden leisten'¹⁷ – but whose good intentions are betrayed by the harshness of the society they live in and Lichte's own personal deficiencies. Brückner, Martha and Max all work for little money under unbearable pressure, caused by Lichte's meanness. His motto is 'Spare im Büro wo immer du kannst, desto mehr hast du für deinen Privatgebrauch',¹⁸ and he refuses to pay for separate storage for the highly flammable film, despite an incident in which a stray spark from a cigarette starts a small fire. Max, Martha and Brückner discuss the economics of their situation:

¹⁶ Brück (1930), p. 62. "The way you are carrying on really doesn't suit you. Really, you used to be such a pleasant young lady. It's a shame. Please don't renounce your good upbringing too quickly. The times when people set store by what they learned in the nursery are coming back."

¹⁷ Brück (1930), p. 62. 'sometimes astounded by how much they achieve'.

¹⁸ Brück (1930), p. 77. 'Save in the office wherever you can: all the more for spending on yourself!'

‘Doch die Reichen, das sind eben die, die die Macht haben und uns wegen dieser Macht quälen. Die meisten sitzen ja im Auto und haben ein eigenes Haus. Aber das kommt immer erst, wenn sie genug Arme gefunden haben, die für sie arbeiten und sich von ihnen schinden lassen.’¹⁹

Max here articulates a crude Socialist understanding of the economic order, which he backs up by the example of their own place of employment. There can be no denying that the lazy Lichte’s wealth depends on his exploitation and reckless endangerment of his workforce, but Brückner’s politics, like Christa Anita Brück’s, are far from radical. Lichte, she argues, is the exception, not the rule,

‘Die meisten Kaufleute, Fabrikbesitzer, Großindustriellen, die Leute, die im Auto fahren und ein eigenes Haus haben, sagen wir mal ruhig in diesem Fall “die Reichen”, müssen noch viel mehr arbeiten als Sie und ich und die Martha und der Walter. Nicht jeder verdient sein Geld so leicht wie Herr Lichte [...] Sie trotzdem nicht denken, daß es am Geld liegt. Es liegt am Charakter.’²⁰

Despite the appalling example of their own employer, she tries to instill in Max and Martha a sense of respect for the wealthy, on the grounds that the majority have earned their position and its rewards. Lichte ought to be seen as the exception in an otherwise well-ordered system. Brückner demands sympathy for her plight, but makes no calls for social change.

After four years at Lichte’s, Brückner applies for her fourth position, at another film distribution firm owned by a man named Murawski. The pay is good, two hundred marks plus commission – but lying over the entire office is a greasy atmosphere of unwanted erotic attention. Murawski makes sexual demands on all of his female employees, but pays substantially above the market rate, so that none of them can afford to leave. No-one will say what is wrong in the office, but it poisons every conversation between the women who work there. The other secretaries are pale and drawn, and whisper to each other when Brückner comes into the room. The depiction of Murawski’s intimidation is intelligently done. Although his overtures to Brückner are

¹⁹ Brück (1930), p. 94 “But the rich are those who have the power and who use it to torture the likes of us. Most of them sit there in their cars and have their own house. But that only happens because they’ve found enough poor people who’ll work for them, who’ll get flayed by them.”

²⁰ Brück (1930), pp. 95-96. “Most commercial people, factory owners, industrialists, the people who drive around in cars and have their own houses – we’ll call them “the rich” for the sake of ease – have to work much harder than you, me, Martha and Walter [the other errand boy]. Not everyone earns their money as easily as Herr Lichte [...] so you shouldn’t think that it’s about money. It’s about character.”

sometimes clichéd (like the Kommerzienrat in *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, he pressures her to have lunch with him) they are often less conventional and the more disquieting for it, as when he comes up close to Brückner and breathes deeply, as if smelling a perfume: 'Ich benutze nie ein Parfum. Wonach soll ich riechen?'²¹ Brückner asks the reader, perplexed. On another occasion, Brückner admires a lamp in his office and he immediately tries to make a gift of it. Kracauer's comments about the power of autobiographical writing may have some relevance here.

Brück is at pains to show that Murawski's coercion is not based on any great physical strength. On the contrary, he is depicted as relatively weak, with small eyes, gold teeth, jowls and a wheedling voice. Following an incident with one secretary, who immediately quits, he is seen with a bandage on his face from eye to chin. But, the other secretaries whisper darkly, she will be back, because she has no qualifications and nobody pays as much as Murawski, where blonde hair and beauty are worth more than certificates. His power rests entirely in the secretaries' economic need. Brückner, too, thinks of quitting, but knows that it will be almost impossible to meet her rent on the seventy or eighty marks that another position would pay:

Auf dem Arbeitsamt sagt man mir: um Gottes willen eine gutbezahlte Stellung nicht aufgeben. Perfekte Stenotypistinnen bieten sich an für sechzig und siebenzig Mark, ein Gehalt, das allenfalls als Wirtschaftsbeihilfe für den elterlichen Haushalt genügen mag.²²

In Murawski's worldview, the women working for him constitute his private harem, and he reacts jealously to the prospect of them paying attention to other men outside work.

This constant atmosphere of sexual harassment causes the secretaries not only individual misery, but poisons the relations between them. Brückner, however, believes that her class status and her 'purity' will shield her. Early on in her appointment, she invokes her bourgeois credentials in an attempt to assert her untouchability:

²¹ Brück (1930), p. 158. 'I never use perfume. What could I smell of?'

²² Brück (1930), p. 186. 'At the employment office they say, for God's sake, don't give up a well-paid job. Perfect secretaries are looking for work at sixty or seventy marks, a salary that's just about enough to supplement a parental household.'

‘Ich stamme aus einer alten Offiziersfamilie. Ein Unglück entriß mir beide Eltern zu gleicher Zeit. Die Inflation verschlang den Rest unseres Vermögens. Ich hatte nichts gelernt und mußte dem ersten besten Erwerb nachgehen, um überhaupt leben zu können. [...] Es gibt keine Arbeit, die ich scheuen darf um meiner Armut willen. Aber meine Frauenehre is unverkauflich. Ich will lieber hungern, als sie mit in die Wagschale zu werfen.’²³

Brückner’s attempt to invoke the protection of the bourgeoisie fails, however: as the other women in the office, so Brückner. Moreover, it alienates her from her colleagues. Murawski eventually invites Brückner to join him in a car-trip to Danzig, and she refuses. After he has gone, she realises that far from feeling solidarity with her, all the other secretaries are furious: they are all waiting for her to submit to Murawski’s pressure in order to lighten the loads on themselves. What she sees as protection of her honour condemns her colleagues to greater sexual exploitation. Not only that, but her resistance implicitly judges their submission,

‘Kann es denn das geben’, frage ich, ein Kribbeln in den blutleeren Lippen, ‘daß Frauen, Frauen untereinander sich verbieten wollen, ihre Ehre vor so einem Mann zu verteidigen?’
‘Warum soll es Ihnen besser gehen als uns?’²⁴

So corrupting is Murawski’s influence that the secretaries can only imagine solidarity in misery.

Exhausted not only by Murawski’s assaults but also by the atmosphere with her female colleagues, Brückner manages to save enough to leave the job and travel to Berlin. Finding few opportunities to work, she travels down to Saxony, where, after several months of unemployment, she eventually gets a trial at a bread factory run by a Herr Heinz Wagner, the first good man she has encountered. The job is basic, but she is delighted to be working again:

²³ Brück (1930), p. 156. “‘Herr Murawski, I have heard about you. There are things that I should make clear before I begin. I come from an old military family. My parents were both killed in an accident. Our means were swallowed up in the inflation. I wasn’t trained for anything and had to take the first job I could, simply in order to live. People who live on the edge of the destitution are unprotected in certain ways. That is why I am saying this. In order to stay out of penury, I will carry boxes of films to the station or mop the stairs, if that’s what you want me to do. There’s no work that I can afford to turn down. But my honour as a woman is not for sale. I shall starve rather than throw that away.’”

²⁴ Brück (1930), p. 192. “‘Has is come to this,’ I asked, a prickle on my blood-drained lips, ‘that women, women themselves want to condemn someone for defending her honour against a man like that?’
“‘Why should it be better for you than the rest of us?’”

Nach viermonatiger Arbeitslosigkeit wieder hinter der Schreibmaschine! [...] Ich ziehe das Wachstumverdeck zurück und die Schreibmaschine blickt mich an.²⁵

Rarely for this novel, the passage invests the experience of sitting behind a typewriter with a certain joy and affection. Brückner identifies herself with the role, and personifies the typewriter as her partner in work. Delighted to be reunited after her unemployment, her fingers itch and she fails to hear the voices of her actual human colleagues. When she eventually raises her head, Herr Wagner shows her around the factory and reminds her that there is a world outside commercial letters. This workplace, finally, is ideal in almost every respect. In fact, the only shadows here are the psychological scars which remain from her days with Lichte and Murawski.

Despite the saintliness of Heinz Wagner, however, the job itself is dull. Brückner is employed as a copy-typist, at the very bottom of the secretarial hierarchy, and complains that '[j]edes siebzehnjährige Mädchen, das die Fortbildungsschule besucht hat, macht das genau so gut wie ich, vielleicht sogar besser'.²⁶ When she points out to one of the higher-up confidential secretaries that she has mis-addressed something, it is assumed that she is after their jobs. This incident, Brückner feels, might be the key to the lack of unionisation amongst white-collar workers:

Liegt hier die Ursache, daß die große Masse der Angestellten keinerlei Zusammenhalt hat? ... Sehr schön die Theorie von der Gleichheit aller Menschenkinder. Aber wer will sie verwirklicht sehen?²⁷

This ideal workplace seems to exist in order to demonstrate that even under the regime of a man like Heinz Wagner, far away from the malicious influence of a Murawski, the employees depicted by Brück are quite incapable of developing a sense of common feeling or camaraderie.

²⁵ Brück (1930), pp. 227-9. 'After four months of unemployment – to be back behind a typewriter again! ... I pulled the cover off and the machine gazed back at me.'

²⁶ Brück (1930), p. 238. 'any seventeen year old girl who'd finished her training could do it as well as I, and perhaps even better'.

²⁷ Brück (1930), pp. 245-6. 'Is this the reason why the overwhelming mass of employees have no solidarity? How nice is the theory of everyone being equal. But who really wants to see it become reality?'

The fact that this petty interest in hierarchy is associated with another secretary, rather than with the owner of the factory, is another irony of which Brückner is apparently unaware. Like the women at Murawski's or the confidential secretary with the mis-addressed envelope, Brückner thinks primarily of herself, and only of solidarity when she finds it lacking in others. In her conversation with Max and Martha, she defended the position of the rich as entirely justified in the face of their hardwork: similarly, she draws an invisible wall around Heinz Wagner – who, after all, administers the hierarchical system – which protects him from criticism, and blames her peers instead. The system which encourages the employees to adopt an individualistic attitude and compete with one another, thereby preventing them from organising, is naturalised and rendered invisible by a rhetorical strategy.

There is one more place of employment after this, where Brückner's cross is an inefficient secretary, whose jealous fear that Brückner will be preferred by their bosses leads her to sabotage Brückner's work. Eventually, Brückner is forced out in a humiliating fashion. Returning from a short illness, she discovers that another stenotypist has been hired in her place, straight out of typing school and costing only two-thirds of Brückner's salary. The calamity predicted at the beginning of the novel by the sickly Urschl (and many real-life employees' organisations) has come to pass: Brückner is too old and too expensive, and her employers prefer the young and cheap.

The novel ends, rather surprisingly, with Fräulein Brückner spending six weeks in the countryside. Despite the misery of the past three hundred and fifty pages and the fact that the economic situation does not appear to have improved, this sojourn in her ancestral land, spent communing with nature, restores her. Spring is coming, and '[e]in Geruch von Erde, von Frische, von unbändiger Kraft und Fruchtbarkeit durchdringt bis ins innerste Mark'.²⁸ These weeks bring even Fräulein Brückner herself 'zur Reife'.²⁹ This fertility imagery doesn't seem to lead anywhere, for there is no suggestion of what Brückner intends to produce: there is still no

²⁸ Brück (1930), p. 362. 'A smell of earth, of freshness, of unbounded strength and fertility pierced to the innermost place.'

²⁹ Brück (1930), p. 357. 'to ripeness'.

hint of a romantic interest, nor does she decide to embark on, say, a semi-autobiographical novel which exposes the true misery of the modern stenotypist. Brückner accuses her final boss, Dr Maßmann, of fomenting revolution through his cavalier attitude to his employees' well-being, and reiterates her belief in 'Gemeinsamkeit', a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between employer and employee. Yet, in the end, Brück offers nothing more than the apparently miraculous therapeutic powers of her character's 'Heimaterde' as a solution to the problems of modernity.

Rudolf Braune, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat

At the other end of the political spectrum is Rudolf Braune, a socialist activist. *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat* is closer to the genre romances discussed in Chapter Two than *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine*, and also has much clearer distinctions between author, narrative persona and protagonist, and a more structured plot with a carefully developed ideological schema. At first glance, it appears to be a more conventional tale of a modern girl typist in the big city, but it develops into something else entirely. Erna Halbe, the protagonist, begins the novel as a young typist with her first job in the metropolis – the 'Orga Privat' of the title is the machine she is assigned to, the oldest one in the typing pool – but soon finds herself leading a strike, as Berlin's *Angestellten* discover industrial solidarity. The strike fails, but it is the beginning of something much bigger. Erna and her little band of typists have awakened a new communal spirit amongst the white-collar workers: 'Was sie tat, wird nicht vergessen, es wächst und wächst'.³⁰ In other words, *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat* is just as fantastic as the romantic novels of Chapter Two, albeit in a very different way.

Glamour and Organisation

In keeping with the conventions, the novel begins with Erna's arrival in Anhalter Bahnhof, Berlin, in the spring of 1928. Behind her lie the provinces, where her father works in a mine to support a family of thirteen. With a qualification in typing and stenography, and four years'

³⁰ Braune (1960), p. 226. 'What she did would not be forgotten: it grew and grew.'

experience in a local lawyer's office, Erna has found a position in the metropolis. Her first task is to find herself some lodgings, and the text details her movements around the city – Leipzigerstraße, Spittelmarkt, Alexanderplatz – where she finds small, gloomy rooms for half as much again as she can afford, and encounters some of the city's unhappier residents. One advertised room turns out to be a mattress on the floor in the corner of a room in which a couple and their young twins and new baby live. Despite the woman's evident desperation, her newly unemployed husband reacts angrily to the suggestion that they might need a lodger, and Erna retreats in horror, promising to visit the exhausted young mother if she can.

Outside the flat, juxtaposed with this tableau of misery, is an advertisement for shampoo:

'Sei schön durch Elida.' Das Mädchen hat goldblondes Haar, rosige Wangen, glänzende Augen, einem duftenden Mund. So muß man hier aussehen, nicht wahr? Geld braucht man dazu, Geld braucht man überall. Ich muß Geld verdienen. Natürlich, ich werde mich bald verbessern und mehr verdienen, viel, viel mehr...³¹

In the city, Erna discovers a culture of female visibility, where women's ornamented bodies are present not only in advertising, but also in the flesh:

Vor ihr geht ein junges Mädchen, in ihrem Alter ungefähr, einen blauen Hut mit gelbem Band schief über dem Kopf gezogen, in einem leichten, enganliegenden blauen Seidenkleid, das so kurz ist, daß Erna die Kniekehlen sehen kann. Die Beine des Mädchens sind sehr schmal, ihre Füße setzt sie nicht gerade auf, sondern ein bißchen schlenkernd, das Mädchen läuft leicht und heiter dahin, ohne sich umzublicken oder zur Seite zu sehen, ohne die Männer zu beachten, die sich nach ihr umdrehen. Es macht spaß, diesem schicken, eleganten Mädchen zu folgen, die so selbstbewußt aussieht, daß Erna sie beneidet. Wird nicht teuer sein, so ein Kleid, überlegt sie.³²

³¹ Braune (1960), p. 16. "Be beautiful with Elida." The girl has gold-blond hair, rosy cheeks, shining eyes and a fragrant mouth. That's how you have to look here, isn't it? You need money for that; you need money full stop. I need to earn money. Of course, I'll get on quickly and earn more, much, much more...'

³² Braune (1960), pp. 26-7. 'In front of her walks a young girl, about the same age as her, a blue hat with a yellow ribbon cocked on her head, in a light, close-fitting blue silk dress, that is so short that Erna can see the hollows of her knees. The girl's legs are very slim, and she doesn't set her feet down quite straight, but swings slightly; the girl walks easily and blithely, without looking around her or to the side, without noticing the men who turn to watch her. It's fun, following this chic, elegant girl, who looks so self-possessed that Erna envies her. A dress like that wouldn't be so expensive, she thinks.'

In this passage, Erna sees first the clothes, then the body, and then the woman's way of carrying herself, and her studied indifference to the male eyes watching her. Erna too enjoys watching her, identifies with her, envies her, and has, by the end, begun to work out how she can transform herself into her – and her first concern is financial. The carefully-constructed and maintained female glamour of the city is expensive. This glamour, and women's attraction to it even in the face of poverty, becomes hugely important in the novel, and motivates much of the action. Almost all of Erna's colleagues are in thrall to it, despite the fact that it is way beyond their typist's salaries. To provincial Erna's shock, they take lovers and court admiration from richer, older men in order to afford treats and indulgences. When Trude becomes pregnant by Lortzing, a manager in the firm, and is fired because she is no longer sufficiently productive, the typists are horrified by this manifestly unfair treatment and go on strike. Thus, in Braune's novel, the popular image of the secretary as glamorous sexual commodity leads directly to revolutionary politics.

Glamour is firmly associated with the metropolis in *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*. Arriving at work on her first day, Erna walks straight into a medical emergency (Trude has fainted) and is the only one who knows how to deal with it. As soon as the danger has passed, however, Erna and the typists note one another's physical appearance, and both find a stark contrast between the city girls and countrified Erna:

Sie sehen sich die Neue genau an, ihre Kleidung, ihre Haltung, Gesicht, Beine und Frisur. Erna hat noch ihren dürrtigen Mantel an, darunter eine einfache Arbeitsbluse und den dunkelblauen Rock; unter der Baskenmütze wuschelt sich ihr verwaschenes rotes Haar hervor.³³

Heimlich beobachtet Erna die gebobbtten, ondulierten, gedrehten, gelockten, glatt gekämmten und auf unterschiedliche Art frisierten Bubiköpfe. Alle Mädchen tragen schon helle und luftige Kleider, die Vorahnung des Sommers erblüht zuerst in diesen Mädchenherzen. Erna findet dagegen ihre Werktagsbluse etwas dürrtig.³⁴

³³ Braune (1960), p. 46. 'They look at the new girl: her clothes, her bearing, face, legs and hairstyle. Erna is still wearing the skimpy coat, underneath it a simple work blouse and the dark blue skirt; underneath her straw-hat her pale red hair frizzes out.'

³⁴ Braune (1960), p. 54. 'Erna surreptitiously observes the pageboy cuts, which are bobbed, waved, twisted, curled, flat-combed and styled every other way possible. All the girls wear light, airy dresses, the first breath of summer bloomed earliest in these girlish hearts. Erna, in contrast, finds her work blouse rather stifling.'

So much does Erna desire to be part of this beautiful vision that she sits up all night after her first day at work working over her best Sunday dress, for she 'will nicht verschwinden, eine kleine Unbekannte, ein armes Mädel aus der Provinz'; she must have 'ein schönes, modernes Kleid, das Sie im Büro und auf der Straße tragen kann.'³⁵ For the modern girl in the modern city, to be frumpy is to disappear, and visibility not only in the office but also the street is imperative. In re-making the dress, Erna is already distinguishing herself from the old-fashioned, non-metropolitan principles which she brought with her to the city: 'Was würde Mutter dazu sagen, wenn sie wußte, daß ihre Tochter das feine, das einzige Sonntagskleid schon werktags anzieht!'³⁶ That the old dress was not simply a best dress but a Sunday dress suggests that there is something almost profane about Erna's new outfit. In the city, glamour trumps religion.

Compared to her colleagues, however, Erna retains enough of her provincial morality to seem positively staid. Most of the other typists take the necessity of a rich boyfriend, or "Kavalier", for granted. At lunchtime, in the nearby canteen, a young woman who has just lost her job bursts into tears. Her friends ask whether she has a boyfriend who can help: on being told that he is also unemployed, someone suggests that she needs to find another boyfriend. Back in the workroom, one of the married typists asks rather cattily whether Erna isn't finding her old-fashioned work blouse too warm. Another girl, Martha, defends her:

'Eva, du sitzt schon so fest in deiner Ehe drin, daß du gar nicht mehr weißt, wie sich ein selbstständiges Mädchen durchschlagen muß. Weißt du, was eine neue Bluse kostet?'
'Gott, wenn ihr kein Geld habt, müßt ihr euch eben einen Kavalier nehmen. Tut doch nicht so.'³⁷

In some of the women, this arrangement is portrayed as hedonistic and incontinent. Lieselotte Kries juggles three men: shortly after she has described her husband as 'ein guter lieber Kerl [...]

³⁵ Braune (1960), p. 87. 'She doesn't want to disappear, a little unknown, a poor little girl from the provinces... She must have a pretty modern dress, that she can wear in the office and in the street.'

³⁶ Braune (1960), p. 88. 'What would Mother say, if she knew that her daughter was wearing the good Sunday dress for work!'

³⁷ Braune (1960), p. 71. "'Eva, you sit there so perfectly married that you don't even know what it's like for an independent girl. Do you know how much a new blouse costs?'"
'"God, if you don't have any money, get a boyfriend! Don't carry on so."'

[der] gibt mir auch genügend Geld', Erna accidentally discovers her sitting on Herr Lortzing's knee.³⁸ Later, at Lieselotte's house, Erna finds out that she is also having a secret affair with a third man, Wolf Tümmeler, who (Lieselotte claims) is the only man she *truly* loves. Women like the older private secretary Erika and Erna's confidante Lotte, however, regard these secondary relationships with richer men as a practicality, apparently without compromising their integrity. When they meet by chance at a smart bar, Erika tells Erna about the man she is waiting for, a mining engineer who has been working in Soviet Russia for over a year. (As we will see further on, younger men and 'real' relationships are overwhelmingly associated with working-class occupations and politics.) In the meantime, she goes out for drives with the manager Herr Siodmak, and her cool self-possession in his presence later aids the strike enormously. Lotte asks Erna on her first day how she intends to live in Berlin on a hundred and twenty marks, and the question resonates through the novel: 'die Frage ist unangenehm und die Antwort darauf viel zu einfach.'³⁹ Lotte, too, admits that her relationship with her boyfriend is partly economically motivated: "Natürlich muß er bezahlen, wenn wir irgendwohin gehen, aber das ist doch selbstverständlich..."⁴⁰ Amongst the women, only the divorcée Martha Hummel departs from this orthodoxy, decrying the luxurious lifestyles the typists prostitute themselves to obtain:

"Jetzt werdet ihr wohl gleich wieder erzählen, ihr müßt verhungern, wenn ihr eure Kavaliere nicht habt! Ich weiß ganz genau, daß wir einen Dreck verdienen [...] Aber ebenso schlimm ist die Protzerei, die bei einigen von euch nicht mehr zum Aushalten ist. [...] Theater, Autofahrten, Wein und ähnlicher blöder Quatsch, das ist immer das gleiche Lied. Jeden Tag erzählt ihr lange Geschichte, und Montag morgens ist es ganz besonders schlimm. Nur gut, daß der größte Teil Schwindel ist. Habt ihr gestern gehört, wie die kleine Annemie großschnäuzig von den Kaviarschnitten erzählte, he? [...] Erna sieht das schon ganz richtig. Und wenn ein Mädchen nicht sehr gerissen oder sehr oberflächlich ist, bleibt sie im Schlamassel hängen."⁴¹

³⁸ Braune (1960), p. 67. "A good, darling lad ... [who] gives me enough money".

³⁹ Braune (1960), p. 80. 'The question is unpleasant and the answer to it far too simple.'

⁴⁰ Braune (1960), p. 98. 'Obviously he has to pay when we go anywhere, but that goes without saying.'

⁴¹ Braune (1960), p. 99. "And now you're going to explain all over again that you'd starve if you didn't have your cavaliers! I know perfectly well that we earn a pittance [...] But this swank is just as bad, it's got unbearable with some of you. [...] Theatre, car rides, wine and other such nonsense, it's always the same song. You lot show off every day, and Monday mornings are particularly bad. Fine, most of it lies anyway. Did you hear yesterday, that little Annemie going on about caviar, eh? [...] Erna's got it right. And if a girl isn't very smart or is a bit superficial, she's going to get caught up in the whole dog's dinner."

This search for glamour in the face of poverty and insecurity has, of course, a certain sociological realism to it: nearly all the contemporary accounts of *Angestelltenkultur* make reference to it. Within this context, Trude's affair with Lortzing, her pregnancy and her eventual death seems almost an inevitability. In another telling, the story might be a morality tale, but in Braun's she is a victim of the system, if a rather witless one. Similarly, an even younger colleague, seventeen-year-old Grete Theier, tells Erna about her rich older boyfriend – 'Er ist ein bißchen über vierzig, aber das schadet nichts' – and his offer to pay for a flat: she is fed up of living with her parents, because her mother does her washing so badly, and all her pretty lace underwear has been practically ruined.⁴² Grete Theier has a 'Puppengesicht', with 'runden, nichtssagenden Porzellanaugen'. All her features speak of childishness and innocence, and we suspect that she may well be the next Trude.⁴³ Women like Erika Tümmeler and Lotte may have the self-assurance and maturity to handle these relationships of convenience, but they are (literally) fatal for their younger or less self-aware colleagues.

Mimicking a sophisticated, mercenary nonchalance, Trude tells the typists that she has broken with Lortzing because he wasn't spending enough on her. Lotte suspects that there is something else behind this story, but Erna is the first to work out that she is pregnant, and promises to find a doctor who will perform an abortion. Trude is almost immediately fired, however, then taken ill and rushed to hospital. Her illness becomes the catalyst for the typists' industrial action. Suspecting that her affair with Lortzing is a factor in her dismissal, and quite possibly also in her illness, the typists discuss industrial action, first idly, and then more seriously. The turning point comes when Erika, the twenty-six-year-old private secretary who earns 400 marks a month, tells them that she is going to join them. The women in the typing pool have traditionally regarded Erika with suspicion, believing her to be stuck-up and remote, and her sudden display of solidarity impresses them. This is perhaps the only instance of hierarchical distinction amongst the typists in *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*, and, in contrast to *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine*, it swiftly turns into something which facilitates solidarity, rather than thwarting it.

⁴² Braune (1960), p. 150. "“He's a bit over forty, but that doesn't hurt.”"

⁴³ Braune (1960), p. 151. 'doll's face' with 'round, expressionless eyes'.

Unlike in almost any other film or novel discussed here, competition between the employees is negligible. Despite their personal differences, the women in the workroom and their peers in the employees' canteen have a sense of camaraderie and solidarity that converts quickly into industrial organisation. Where *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* focused on the various factors that bred ill-feeling amongst the secretaries and militated against their developing friendships, never mind political solidarity, the atmosphere in the workroom in *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat* is cheerful and sociable:

Ein dünnes, unscheinbares Mädchen beginnt zu flöten. [...] Sie kann viele Schlager, es klingt angenehm, man kann besser dabei schreiben, und das flötende Mädchen ist sicher stolz darauf, denn sie schielt ab und zu durch das Zimmer, ob auch alle hinhören. Sie kann zufrieden sein, allen macht es Spaß. [...] Nach einer Weile hört Friedel auf, sie wird müde. Von Tisch zu Tisch geht eine fliegende Unterhaltung, mal erzählt die eine etwas, mal die andere. Sie unterhalten sich von Männern und vom Tanzen, von Kinos und von Kleidern, aber die Schreibmaschinen stocken keinen Augenblick.⁴⁴

The typists also arrange an outing together for their Sunday off, to which Erna is immediately invited. In the local canteen, which serves a cheap lunch to young employees from several local firms, a similar sense of good cheer abounds. Despite their poverty, the employees find great satisfaction with the world and with each other:

Da treffen sich nun die jungen Leute aus den Geschäften und Büros, die um den Alexanderplatz herum liegen. Jungens, die weit von ihrer Arbeitsstelle entfernt wohnen und mittags nicht nach Hause gehen wollen; Mädchen, die allein in Untermiete wohnen und denen das Kochen zu teuer kommt. Sie können nicht viel für Essen ausgeben, sie bekommen ja einen Dreck für die acht und neun und noch mehr Stunden, die sie im Büro sitzen. Aber alle sind lustig, nun, nicht immer, aber sie haben helle, klare Gesichter und finden sich in ihrem kleinen Leben zurecht. Dieser kleine Mittagstisch ist eine Geschichte für sich. Neue Worte, neue Helden und viele neue Sorgen sind aufgetaucht, man schreibt 1928, man muß sich kameradschaftlich helfen und manchmal nur, weil es nicht anders geht.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Braune (1960), p. 55. 'A slight, unobtrusive girl begins to whistle [...] She knows lots of popular songs, it sounds cheerful, you can work better with it, and the whistling girl is certainly proud, as she squints around the office to see whether everyone's listening. She can be pleased, it makes everyone happy [...] After a while Friedel stops, she's tired. From desk to desk rises a little conversation, someone tells someone else something, someone tells another. They chat about men and dancing, films and clothes, but the typewriters don't halt for a minute.'

⁴⁵ Braune (1960), p. 57. 'That's where they meet, the young people from the offices and shops around Alexanderplatz. Boys who live a long way from their workplaces and don't want to go home. Girls who live in sublets and for whom cooking is too expensive. They can't afford much for food, they get a pittance for the eight or

Despite his other political concerns, it appears that Braune is entirely indifferent to the effects that the ideology of youth is having on the older members of the *Angestellte* class: his novel is a hymn to the optimism, beauty and innocence of the young. The scene represents an idealised heterosexual exchange. Having drawn attention to the fact that this is a mixed-sex environment with ‘Jungens’ and ‘Mädchen’, gender identities are dropped, for both sexes have ‘helle, klare Gesichter’ and take similarly innocent delight in one another’s company and conversation. For once, there is no reference to the women’s clothing or hair: in this place, it doesn’t matter how chic someone’s blouse is, nor how carefully their hair has been curled. The employees’ youth, equality and their mutual support of each other are stressed, in contrast to the tawdry, exploitative relationships between penniless young women like Grete Theier and their older, richer boyfriends. The boys in the lunch canteen are in fact extremely unimpressed by the girls’ insistence on wealthy partners who can provide them with luxury: ‘Det sagt ihr alle so leicht [...] So viele einigermaßen bejüterte Männer wohnen ja jarnich in Berlin, um allen netten stellungslosen Mädels auszuhalten.’⁴⁶ Note here the transcription of the Berlin accent, which is never used for any of the women’s speech. In the novel’s schema, older, richer men are linked to heady, commercialised glamour and distraction culture, whilst younger, poorer men are all grounded in an authentic, working-class, socialist culture, and the egalitarian relationships which exist between young workers of the same age are closely linked to revolutionary politics.

Erna’s own relationship follows the *kameradschaftlich* model, and her lover, Fritz Drehkopf, provides a further level of support for the strike. Fritz is first identified by his ‘Monteurjacke’, which marks him out as a worker. They meet first when Erna is looking for a room, and two weeks later, she goes back to the street where she first met him and manages to find his lodgings. Fritz, like the employees in the canteen, is described repeatedly as a ‘Junge’ rather than a man,

nine or even more hours that they sit in the office. But they are all cheerful now, not always, but they have bright, clear faces and are pretty happy with their lives. This little lunch is a story for them. New words, new heroes and many new worries are exchanged, it’s 1928, you have to help each other like comrades, sometimes just because it doesn’t work otherwise.’

⁴⁶ Braune (1960), p. 62. “‘You lot all say that so casually ... But there are not even enough rich men living in Berlin to look after every nice unemployed girl!’”

and his and Erna's conversation is ungendered and non-hierarchical. As in the description of the 'helle, klare Gesichter' in the canteen, their sexes and individual voices are elided by the syntax:

Sie muß sich seine neue Wohnung ansehen, und dann sprechen sie noch ein wenig zusammen, was so junge Menschen eben zusammen sprechen, vom Kino und von der Arbeit und von der Stadt und von der Liebe. Das heißt, von der Liebe sprechen sie nicht viel. Warum sollen sie auch darüber sprechen? Es gibt etwas viel Schöneres, als darüber zu sprechen.⁴⁷

The omniscient narrator adopts a tone which naturalises the interaction between the two: they discuss what young people always discuss, and the reader, of course, will understand what is meant by that. Erna knows immediately that Fritz is 'ein netter, ehrlicher Kerl' and stays the night with him. A member of the proletariat and an active communist, he becomes her mentor when the typists' strike begins, advising her on which organisations will support their cause and how to rally the women when their enthusiasm starts to flag. The link between revolutionary politics and the simple, natural relationship between 'boys' and 'girls', as innocent as those between children, is made and reinforced.

By focusing on industrial action amongst white-collar workers, and by taking a typist as a heroine, the novel marries materialist politics and sex. The commodified feminine glamour of the typist films is replaced with the gender-neutral 'helle, klare Gesichte' of the canteen, and the socially aspirant boss-secretary marriages of those films is exposed as a form of prostitution. Where the harsh capitalist world is characterised by consumerism and exploitative, unfulfilling sexual relationships between poor young woman and rich older men, revolutionary politics go hand-in-hand with joyful camaraderie and egalitarian relationships between innocent, cheerful boys and girls, each facilitating the other.

These two novels, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* and *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*, resist the stock narratives and romantic ideologies found in the popular fiction and films discussed in earlier chapters, but both are limited by their own ideological constraints. A year after its publication, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine* had become shorthand for another typist

⁴⁷ Braune (1960), p. 135. She must see the new flat, and then they talk for a bit, about the things that young people always talk about, films and work and the city and love. That is to say, they don't say much about love. Why should they talk about love? There are so many nicer things to do than talk about it.'

cliché: Irmgard Keun's character Gilgi dismisses the attentions of a lecherous superior with the words, "“Bloß keine große Beleidigungstragödie à la *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine!*”"⁴⁸ Brück represents the typist as the miserable victim of a never-ending series of oppressions and offers nothing more than a retreat from the modern office environment, back to *Heimaterde*, as a restorative. Whilst a 'Frontbericht' might have had some function for critics like Kracauer, in search of the 'unknown territory' of the new middle-class, Gilgi's remark reminds us how much less effective it must have been for a reader who sought figures with whom she could identify, and strategies for understanding or resisting the system in which she lived. For that reader, Brückner's trials offer no more insight than the escapist fantasies that end with marriage to the boss – and considerably less entertainment.

Braune, on the other hand, subordinates gender to class politics. Christa Jordan notes that Braune appears to treat a 'typisches "Frauenthema"' by making a botched abortion the central event that triggers the strike.⁴⁹ In my reading, however, the femaleness of his protagonist and her colleagues functions more like the femaleness of Kracauer's typists and little shopgirls. Their choice between acquisitive affairs with wealthy older men or comradely relationships with worker-identified "Jungs" is closer to an analogy for the choice that the *Angestellten* class must make between the conservative, state-supporting politics of the established middle-classes and the revolutionary politics of the proletariat, than a true engagement with the experiences and choices faced by female office workers. In the terms provided by Rita Felski, 'feminine phenomena' are *not* of central importance in Braune's text: rather, femininity is a vehicle for a ideological argument which leaves the traditional gender hierarchy in place.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi – eine von uns* (2002), p. 101. "“It's not some great tragedy like in *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschine!*”"

⁴⁹ Jordan (1988), p. 223.

⁵⁰ Felski (1995), p. 10.

Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi: eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*

In Irmgard Keun's novels, in contrast, female experience is central. Like Christa Anita Brück, Keun had worked as a typist herself, but her novels are far more sophisticated transformations of her experience than Brück's. Her playful tone allows her to maintain a much greater distance from her protagonists, and she exposes their illusions and prejudices – and their realisation of these illusions and prejudices – with a gentle humour that neither belittles nor satirises them. Both *Gilgi* and Doris (the protagonist of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*) are creatures of their social contexts, constituting themselves in the terms provided by hegemonic discourses mediated through popular culture, as well as the class and gender identities passed on by their parents. *Gilgi* is the fully rationalised Girl, who steps smartly out of bed every morning to perform her exercises before work, and studies English, French and Spanish after. She is twenty-one when the novel begins, and manages everything according to a system, up to and including her name – which is *Gilgi* until she is twenty-five, at which point she will start using her full name, Gisela. She also manages her somewhat predatory boss, who is distracted from his pursuit of *Gilgi* by an apparently chance (but really pre-arranged) encounter with her best friend, Olga. Doris embodies an alternative type. She is dazzled by mass media images of women and believes that she has a great future ahead of her as a *Glanz*, a glamorous star. The two novels chart their protagonists' gradual discoveries that the value systems and self-images to which they have been clinging are inadequate, and are simultaneously critical of the late-Weimar society in which the two women find themselves.

Gilgi, with her ordered morning routine, is closely identified with rational modernity at the beginning of the novel. Like many of the typists discussed in this text, she is so efficient at her job as to become one with her machine:

Sie schreibt schnell, sauber und fehlerfrei. Ihre braunen, kleinen Hände mit den braven, kurznäglig getippten Zeigefingern gehören zu den Maschine, und die Maschine gehört zu ihnen.⁵¹

⁵¹ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002). p. 16. 'She wrote quickly, cleanly and accurately. Her brown, small hands with the neat, short-nailed fingertips belonged to the machine, and the machine belonged to them.'

She has her 'gut geölten Arbeitsmethode' – the reference to oil evokes the close relationship between rationalised working methods and mechanisation – and her 'harten Zeiteinteilung' and her 'prachtvoll funktionierenden System.'⁵² This rationalism extends beyond the office and into her management of her private life, and there are many references to 'System' throughout the novel. Her income and outgoings are neatly noted down in a notebook that she carries with her: 'Einnahmen – Ausgaben. Ordnung muß sein [...] Olga hat nie eine Ahnung, wofür ihr Geld draufgegangen ist. Sie hat kein System und kein Einteilungsvermögen.'⁵³ Like the heroine of *Dagmar springt in die Freiheit*, Gilgi dismisses the idea that romantic love might disturb her efficient plans to get ahead. Kissing her friend Olga's brother the evening before is described quite coolly as 'nett':

Netter Junge. Wie war noch sein Vorname? Weiß sie nicht. Geküßt hat er sie gestern abend im Auto. Heute reist er wieder ab. Schade? Ach wo. Aber nett war es gestern mit ihm. Lange hatte sie nicht mehr geküßt. Es gefällt einem so selten einer. Die Jahre der Wahllosigkeit zwischen siebzehn und neunzehn sind vorbei. Der Junge was nett. Der Kuß was nett. Nicht mehr. Er brennt nicht nach. Gut so.⁵⁴

'Nett' appears later, too, when she is asked by her lover, Martin, whether she has been in love:

Letzten Endes stellen doch alle Männer die gleichen dämlichen Fragen. "Natürlich ist man verliebt – hier und da – das nimmt man nicht weiter ernst, gibt Wichtigeres. Männer! Was das schon ist." Und sie zitiert Olga: "Liebe ist nett und vergnüglich, aber man darf sie nicht ernst nehmen."⁵⁵

⁵² Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 121. 'well-oiled methods', 'her strict time-management', 'practical, functioning system'.

⁵³ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 55. 'Incomings – Outgoings. There must be order. [...] Olga has no idea where her money goes. She has no system and no way of telling.'

⁵⁴ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), pp. 7-8. 'Nice boy. What as his first name? She didn't know. He had kissed her yesterday evening in the car. He was leaving today. A shame? Well, you know. But it was nice with him yesterday. She hadn't been kissed for ages. You so rarely met someone you liked. The wanton years between seventeen and nineteen were over. The boy was nice. The kiss was nice. That was all. He didn't inspire any lasting passion, and that was good.'

⁵⁵ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 93. 'In the end, all men asked the same silly question. "Of course I've been in love – here and there – you don't take it seriously, there're more important things. Men! That's all there is to it." And she quoted Olga: "Love is nice and pleasurable, but you can't take it seriously."'

Nor does she allow a less idealised form of sexual expression to disconcert her: recognising a certain tone in her boss's voice which means that he is in love with her, Gilgi considers the matter quite calmly. It is something of an inconvenience, because she does not want to start an affair, but nor does she want to endanger her position, because he is generally a good boss and pays overtime. Eventually, she agrees to dinner at a hotel, and arranges for her blonde friend Olga to turn up at the same restaurant later in the evening, apparently by chance. Olga, safely employed elsewhere, is happy to flirt with Herr Reuter until he suddenly remembers that he has always preferred blondes (Gilgi is a brunette) and that dating one's employees never works out well. For Gilgi, love is nice, harassment is inconvenient, and men and boys respond quite predictably to external stimuli. Both theirs and one's own passions can be managed quite easily, and need not interfere with that which is 'ernst'.

Her background is the Cologne petit-bourgeoisie, and her family is gently satirised at the beginning of the novel for its adherence to convention:

Trautes Heim – Glück allein. Die Familie ist beisammen. Vater, Mutter und Tochter. Sie trinken Kaffee. Hausmischung: ein Viertel Bohnen, ein Viertel Zichorie, ein Viertel Gerste, ein Viertel Karlsbader Kaffeegewürz. Das Getränk sieht braun aus, ist heiß, schmeckt scheußlich und wird widerstandlos getrunken. Von Herrn Kron wegen der Nieren und wegen der Sparsamkeit, von Frau Kron wegen des Herzens und wegen der Sparsamkeit, von Gilgi aus Resignation. Außerdem ist bei allen dreien der Widerstand durch Gewohnheit gebrochen.

Alle drei essen Brötchen mit guter Butter. Herr Kron (Karnevalsartikel en gros) ißt als einziger ein Ei. Dieses Ei ist mehr als Nahrung. Es ist Symbol. Eine Konzession an die männliche Überlegenheit. Ein Monarchenattribut, eine Art Reichsapfel.⁵⁶

Discipline, order and the recognition of the patriarch in middle-class homes like the Krons' is closely linked to the maintenance of order in the State – and the narrator refers to a right-wing, nationalist ideal of the State, closely identified with the pre-war Empire. Gilgi herself no longer

⁵⁶ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), pp. 9-10. 'True home – true happiness. The family is together. Father, mother and daughter. They drink coffee. House mixture: one quarter beans, one quarter chicory, one quarter barley, one quarter Karlsbad coffee spice. The drink looks brown, is hot, tastes revolting and is drunk without resistance. By Herr Kron because of his kidneys and because of thrift, by Frau Kron because of her heart and because of thrift, and by Gilgi out of resignation. Apart from that, familiarity has worn down the resistance of all three. All three eat bread buns with good butter. Herr Kron (wholesaler of carnival merchandise) alone eats an egg. This egg is more than nourishment. It is a symbol. A concession to masculine superiority. An attribute of the monarchy, a sort of imperial jewel.'

resists this state of affairs, and has not yet begun to rebel. For the moment, the comfortable home and its familiar imperfections suit her very well.

These short extracts are enough to show how important the narrative voice is to the novel's success. Frequently dispensing with verbs, it presents the characters' thoughts, actions and perceptions in the present tense, unmediated by explanations of who is thinking what. Fragments of pop songs, business slogans, newspaper headlines and advertisements all feature. David Midgeley notes that in *Gilgi*, Keun adopted 'a narrative tone which blended perfectly with the heroine's states of mind; it could mark Gilgi's disdain for sentiment with tersely dismissive phrases, it could capture the warmth and expansiveness of her erotic awakening, and it could deftly note her fleeting thoughts and impulses at moments of tension and confusion.'⁵⁷ Whilst Gilgi's point of view predominates, the narrative also dips in and out of other characters' thoughts, including those pomposities and clichés that they might prefer to leave unarticulated: the result is the light satire of Herr Kron's egg as 'Konzession an die männliche Überlegenheit', and Herr Reuter's recollection of the excellent maxim 'mit Angestellten keine Liebschaften anfangen und so weiter'. Keun's sympathies lie with her female characters, and it is men in positions of authority who suffer the most from having their absurdities and pretensions laid bare. The satire is gentle and humourful rather than biting or angry, however, and as such, also extends to Gilgi herself, and her unquestioning belief in the power of systematisation, work and ambition.

Fashion

Gilgi's ordered world is rocked first by her parents' revelation that she is adopted, and second by falling in love with Martin, a careless, irresponsible bohemian who is some twenty years older than her. These two events precipitate a journey through the class structures of Weimar Germany that challenge Gilgi's confident understanding of herself and the society she lives in. In particular, she comes to regard her creed of self-sufficiency and hard work as inadequate.

⁵⁷ David Midgeley, *Writing Weimar: Critical Realism in German Literature 1918-1933* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 215.

The news that she is adopted is broken on her twenty-first birthday by her mother, who also tells her that her real mother is a poor woman by the name of Fräulein Täschler. A few days later, Gilgi goes to visit Fräulein Täschler in her run-down rooms on Thieboldsgasse. This brings Gilgi into contact with Weimar's underclass, first Fräulein Täschler herself, and then a prostitute in a nearby bar where Gilgi goes to recover. As Lorna Sopcak shows, the encounter between the different classes is rendered legible not only through their surroundings (Fräulein Täschler's lodgings are dirty and smell of fish and old washing) but also through their appearance, and in particular through their adherence to – or departure from – the culturally defined standards of fashionable beauty.⁵⁸ Gilgi's impression of Täschler is that she 'has no face':

Sie ist mager und vertrocknet, und ein Gesicht hat sie gar nicht, das hat sie verloren. Sie hat eine Bademütze, eine helle Bademütze auf dem Kopf, graugelbe Haarsträhnen hängen drunter vor. [...] Man kann doch nicht aufgucken, man kann doch keine ansehen, die kein Gesicht hat!⁵⁹

The bathing cap is Fräulein Täschler's idiosyncratic means of curing her headache, and it and the words 'kein Gesicht' recur again and again as Gilgi looks in horror on the woman she believes to be her mother. She invites Fräulein Täschler to dinner, and, as Täschler busies herself getting ready to go out, the narrative adopts Gilgi's inner monologue to comment, 'Sinnlose Verschönerungsversuche.'⁶⁰ It is clear that Gilgi's fear and disgust stems from her identification with Täschler, a fear of being related to her, being like her, having been like her, or becoming like her,

So ein Gesicht zu bekommen! Warum hast du dir das gefallen lassen? Mann kann dich nicht gern haben mit dem Gesicht, man kann noch so sehr wollen, es ist unmöglich. Heulen könnte man, schreien, lachen, heulen – na, und mein Vater! Wie wird der erst aussehen? Und Gilgi fühlt, wie ihr Gesicht weißer wird und ihre Augen tief in die Höhlen kriechen.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Sopcak (1999). Much of the following discussion of fashion is indebted to her analysis.

⁵⁹ Keun, *Gilgi*, (2002), p. 41. 'She is thin and dried-up, and she doesn't have any face at all, she's lost it. She has a bathing cap on her head, with greyish-yellow strands of hair hanging down. You can't look at, you can't see someone who doesn't have a face!'

⁶⁰ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 43. 'Senseless attempt to beautify herself!'

⁶¹ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 44. 'To get such a face! Why haven't you done something about it? You couldn't like someone with a face like that, you could want as much as you like, it's impossible. You could cry, scream, laugh, cry

Gilgi discovers that Täschler is not her mother: she was born to the unmarried daughter of a rich family, who paid Fräulein Taschler to take the baby and keep the matter quiet. After she has bade Täschler goodbye, Gilgi goes to a pub to find her friend Pit, and sees a prostitute, Lenchen, who is described in the same terms as Täschler,

Die Nutte hat ein Korallenkettchen um den Hals, ihre Strickjacke ist an den Ellbogen sauber gestopft – ob sie das selber getan hat? – sie hat die breiten, schmutzigen Fingernägel dick mit Nagellack beschmiert, sie hat kein Gesicht, so wenig wie Fräulein Täschler ein Gesicht hatte.⁶²

Gilgi notices Lenchen's worn-out clothes, and the unkempt fingernails (in contrast to Gilgi's own neatly manicured nails, mentioned when she waits to meet her lover Martin (p. 81)), which signal the social gulf between the two of them. Gilgi, we see, adheres quite consciously to a slew of fashion 'rules', such as not wearing make-up during the day, which serve to maintain a distinction between women like herself and women like Lenchen, or the two prostitutes she sees on her way up to Täeschler's flat who, Gilgi thinks, could be taken for 'Telefonbeamtinnen' if only they weren't wearing make-up. Here in the pub, however, the carefully maintained distinction feels less certain, and she repeats meritocratic maxims in order to reassure herself – 'Jeder ist da, wo er hingehört. Wenn einer so'n Dreckpamps aus seinem Leben macht, ist's seine eigne Schuld'⁶³ – but her new consciousness of how close she came to growing up in the same slums haunts her:

Gilgi hat das dunkle Empfinden, daß ein Mädchen, das seine Strickjacke sauber stopft, nicht Straßendirne zu sein hat. Die Nutte zuckt die Achseln [...] Darauf weiß Gilgi keine Antwort. Nur nicht die Nase so hoch tragen, nur nicht immer denken, es wäre so ganz und gar eignes Verdienst, wenn man was besseres ist. Wenn die Krons sie nun nicht adoptiert hätten, wenn sie von der

– and oh, my father! What will he look like? And Gilgi feels as if her face was getting whiter and her eyes are sinking back into her head.'

⁶² Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 56. 'The whore has a coral necklace around her neck, her cardigan is neatly mended at the elbows – has she done that herself? – she has wide, dirty fingernails thickly smeared with nail varnish, she has no face, so little face as Fräulein Täschler had.'

⁶³ Keun, *Gilgi*, (2002), p. 56. 'Everyone is where he belongs. If someone's made such a pig's ear of their life, it's their own fault'.

Täschler aufgezogen worden wäre, hinten in der Thieboldsgasse, wenn sie – man lieber gar nicht dran denken ---⁶⁴

Faced by this image of her alternative self, Gilgi tries to repress it. As Sopcak points out, the three women are also linked by their ability to sew – Täschler is a seamstress, Lenchen mends her own clothes, and Gilgi makes her own evening gowns and imagines herself owning ‘ein kleines Modeatelier’ in Paris or Berlin⁶⁵ - but ‘[t]he reality of Lenchen’s and Fräulein Täschler’s lives demonstrates to Gilgi that this skill does not guarantee the success which Gilgi assumed was within her grasp when she dreamt of a fashion atelier in Paris.’⁶⁶

Fashion is, therefore, the language through which class difference is articulated and maintained. In the other texts by leftwing authors discussed here, fashion is dismissed as either trivial or dangerous, a trick played on foolish young men and women by superior economic forces. Keun takes fashion seriously, however, and rather than functioning as a distraction from her economic situation, fashion is the sign system through which Gilgi apprehends both her own class privilege and the arbitrary nature of class. Keun’s narrative strategy makes it clear that Gilgi’s careful attention to her appearance is a means of distancing herself from those other less respectable, less fortunate women – repressing alternate selves, one might say – but she doesn’t just show the reader this, she shows Gilgi herself realising it. The difference this makes to the dignity and autonomy that Keun allows her character, and by extension to those readers who identify with the young white-collar woman, is immense.

‘Betriebsstörung’

Similarly, Gilgi learns the limitations of her *Neue Sachlichkeit* faith in rationalism and hard work through her relationship with Martin. At the beginning of the novel, she considers an afternoon

⁶⁴ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 57. ‘Gilgi had a dim feeling that a girl who darned her cardigan neatly didn’t have to be on the streets. The prostitute shrugged her shoulders [...] To that, Gilgi had no answer. Except not to hold her nose so high, except not always to think that you’d earned it yourself if you were better. If the Krons hadn’t adopted her, if she’d been brought up by Täschler, back there in the Thieboldsgasse, if she – better not to think about it ---’

⁶⁵ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 22.

⁶⁶ Sopcak (1999), p. 158.

spent drinking coffee and gossiping with her mother's friends 'sinnlos verschwendete Zeit', and there is nothing, the narrator informs us, 'was Gilgi mehr gegen Natur und Gewissen geht'.⁶⁷ Gilgi's cousins Gerdachen and Irenchen, who come to stay during the Cologne carnival, do not work, and Gilgi has nothing but disdain for their idle, unemployed ways:

Hin und wieder wirft sie haßerfülltes Blicke auf die beiden Schläferinnen: man sieht zumpliges, strohgelbes Haar, pappige Gesichter, ein bißchen fettglänzig um die Nasen herum. Faules Pack! Aufreizend zum Klassenhaß. Leute, die nicht arbeiten und so idiotisch, albern, verschlafen durch die Tage trotten, kann Gilgi nicht leiden.⁶⁸

For the first third of the novel, Gilgi identifies herself wholly with her work ethic, her efficiency and her plans to get ahead. This is what is 'ernst', the 'Wichtigeres' to which love must be subordinated, she tells Martin on their first evening alone together. According to Gilgi, modern, systemic rationalism and romantic love belong in quite separate, even atagonistic, categories – a point of view with which we are, by now, quite familiar. Gilgi's passion for Martin entirely overturns this neat hierarchy. He is, almost literally, a spanner in the works:

Der Martin is eine Betriebsstörung. Und das schlimmste: diese Störung ist ihr lieber als der ganze Betrieb.⁶⁹

The text puns on 'Betrieb', or business: Martin is literally a hindrance or an interference to business, the smooth operation of an enterprise, but he is more dear to her than 'der ganze Betrieb', the whole business, which suddenly signifies Gilgi's ordered, systemised life and her ambition in its entirety. Suddenly, spending the day at work and then two hours at her private part-time job feels like an enormous imposition on her time. Martin complains that it is cold in bed after Gilgi has got up to go to work. Not long afterwards, Gilgi hears a rumour that she is about to be laid off, and feels only relief that she can now give up her job without having to take

⁶⁷ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 13. 'Senselessly wasted time', 'nothing more contrary to Gilgi's nature and conscience'.

⁶⁸ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 64. 'Now and then she throws hate-filled glances at the two sleeping women: you see fluffy, straw-yellow hair, pappy faces, abit shiny around the nose with oil. Lazy bunch! An incitement to class hatred. Gilgi can't stand people who don't work and stumble sleepily through the day so stupidly and idiotically.'

⁶⁹ Keun, *Gilgi*, (2002), p. 106. 'Martin is a hindrance to business. And the worst of it is: this hindrance is more precious to her than the whole business.'

responsibility for the decision. Yet where the romance novels and films treat the ascendance of heterosexual love and eclipse of professional concerns as a sign of the heroine's maturity, for Gilgi, the all-absorbing love-affair is not self-realisation, but self-destruction. Cossetted and spoiled and adored, Gilgi feels her body becoming foreign, and does not recognise herself:

Sie hebt ihre Hände – langsam – meine Händ sind mir untreu geworden, waren mir einmal vertraut – und jetzt? Weiche, müde Haut, spitzgefeilte Nägel, glänzend von rosigem Lack. Vier zärtliche, verliebte Luxusfinger an jeder Hand – daneben die Zeigefinger mit den hartgetippten Kuppen – gewöhnliche, robuste Arbeitsinstrumente – man darf sie nicht auch glänzend machen, darf ihnen das nicht antun. Acht vornehme, elegante Finger, zwei ordinäre – ihr häßlichen, stumpfnägligen, von allen meinen zehn Fingern seid ihr beiden mir immer noch die liebsten.

'Martin, meine zwei Zeigefinger sind alles, was du mir von mir gelassen hast.'⁷⁰

Like Gerdachen and Irenchen, with their pappy faces and thick legs, Gilgi's new idleness is inscribed on her body. The unfamiliar 'Luxusfinger' are soft, their boundaries blurring like Gilgi's own identity, less certain than the hard edges of her typewriter-calloused little fingers.⁷¹ The callouses on her fingers take on a new significance as the locus of the more authentic, working self. As in the previous section, it is through the discourse of fashion and beauty that Gilgi makes sense of this.

Two further events convince Gilgi that she must leave Martin. First, she is pregnant and knows that their careless, debt-ridden lifestyle will quickly become unbearable if they bring a child into it. Second, she meets a former colleague, Hans, who is now living in miserable poverty with his pregnant wife and two children. Learning that he will go to prison if he cannot repay a debt by a certain date, Gilgi goes to find her rich biological mother, who gives her a handful of rings to

⁷⁰ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 135. 'She lifts her hands – slowly – my hands have become unfaithful to me, they used to be familiar – and now? Soft, relaxed skin, nails filed to points, shiny with pink nail varnish. Four tender, loved luxury-fingers on either hand – and then the little fingers with their hard callouses – ordinary, robust work tools – you didn't dare make them shiny too, you couldn't do it to them. Eight beautiful elegant fingers, and two ordinary – you ugly, stumpy-nailed ones, of all my ten fingers, you two are my favourites. "Martin, my two little fingers are all that you've left me of myself."

⁷¹ In the film based on the novel, this loss of identity had a visual marker: when Gilgi first kisses Martin, the camera closes in on the characters' faces. Instead of following the usual cinematic convention of staying sharply focussed, signifying the primacy of the kiss as narrative resolution or climax, the camera goes blurry and a little unsteady. The film departs significantly from the novel, however, in having Martin drive after Gilgi's train to Berlin, determined to take on his responsibilities as a husband and father. Unmarried motherhood might just about make it into a novel, but cinema was not ready for such a thing.

sell, telling her bitterly that the rings are gifts from her husband, who buys her jewellery every time he is unfaithful. Back in the apartment, however, Gilgi gets drunk with Martin and is persuaded that it will not matter if she takes the rings around to Hans a day later than planned. When she gets there the next day, Hans and Hertha have killed themselves and their two children.

Keun refuses the narrative conventions that treat romantic love as the pinnacle of women's self-realisation. Gilgi's love-affair with Martin is decisive, but as a means to self-realisation, rather than an end. Through their relationship, Gilgi learns of her own capacity for erotic passion, and that she must temper it if she is not to lose herself in self-indulgence, luxury and idleness. Yet nor does she go back to the certainties and self-confidence with which she began. '[I]ch muß arbeiten und Ordnung haben,' she tells her friend Pit,⁷² but her encounters with the various class strata of Weimar society – the humiliating desperation of Täschler, the loveless wealth of her biological mother, the hopeless misery of Hans and Hertha, and the glamorous but empty hedonism of her relationship with Martin – have opened her eyes to the experiences and realities of others, and she has lost her self-absorption and gained a new empathy. The novel ends with pregnant, unmarried Gilgi, still desperately in love with Martin, taking a train to Berlin where she will live with Olga, bring up her child and work. Some aspects of the popular image of the *Neue Frau* are retained in this final image of Gilgi, then: she will work, she will have order, she will determine her own sexual behaviour, and she has turned away from her great romantic passion. But her individualist politics and her belief in her own absolute power to choose and determine her own life are gone. She has learned that her control over the world, the degree of systematisation that she can enforce, is strictly limited.

Sex

In *Gilgi – eine von uns*, Gilgi's subjectivity and the process of self-discovery and education that she undergoes are foregrounded by a narrative style which never speaks over her head, or offers interpretations or valuations of her actions. The omniscient narrator often characterises her as

⁷² Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 256. 'I must work and have order.'

‘die kleine Dame Gilgi’, and there are ironic asides about the other characters’ motives and pomposities (such as Herr Kron’s breakfast egg, the symbol of masculine superiority, or the comment that Gerdachen and Irenchen are ‘zwar nicht so schön, wie Tante Hetty sie findet, aber auch nicht ganz so häßlich und verblüht, wie Frau Kron bei sich feststellt’⁷³) which appear to originate from the narrator rather than being insights of Gilgi’s. But, despite the narrator’s willingness to contradict or poke fun at other characters, Gilgi is treated with remarkable gentleness. Her prejudices and follies are not remarked on until she herself realises them herself. The narrative strategy, which combines this slightly ironic yet affectionate distance from the protagonist and the free indirect style which presents Gilgi’s unmediated reactions to events, is the novel’s chief pleasure, and successfully communicates the simple certainties of Gilgi’s life in the early parts of the novel, her confusion on discovering that she is adopted, the heat of her passion for Martin, and her grief, misery and anguish in the wake of Hans’s and Hertha’s suicide. Through it, Keun achieves a sophisticated critique of contemporary late Weimar society and the rationalist, *sachlich* values that Gilgi holds dear, without ever patronising or belittling her heroine.

As Lawrence Rainey says, the ‘preeminence of tone over plot would become even more pronounced in Keun’s second novel, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*’.⁷⁴ This novel is episodic, and consequently difficult to summarise. Doris, a typist in a law firm, loses her job when she presses her breasts against her boss’s back in order to distract him from the misplaced commas in the letter that she has typed and he is proof-reading. He believes this to be the result of her attraction to him, and proposes an affair. Doris blurts out that she thinks he is repulsive, and promptly loses her job. She manages to get a small part in a play, thinking that it is the beginning of a career as an actress, but soon loses it, steals a fur coat, and has to flee to Berlin. Here, she expects to make a career in films, but instead enters a series of relationships, sometimes surviving on the very edges of destitution, and sometimes the mistress of wealthy men. Towards the end of the novel, she finds herself living with Ernst in a satisfying simulation

⁷³ Keun, *Gilgi*, (2002), p. 63. ‘actually not as pretty as Aunt Hetty finds them, nor quite as ugly and overblown as Frau Kron tells herself’.

⁷⁴ Lawrence Rainey, ‘Fables of Modernity’ (2004), p. 337.

of bourgeois marriage. Ernst is still in love with his wife, though, and Doris cannot bear to see him unhappy. She engineers their reunion, rendering herself superfluous. The novel ends with her sitting in the waiting room at Zoo station, trying to decide what to do next.

Das kunstseidene Mädchen is ostensibly Doris's journal – although she doesn't want to think of it as such because 'das ist lächerlich für ein Mädchen von achtzehn und auch sonst auf der Höhe'⁷⁵ – and is told in the first person throughout. Again, Keun succeeds in creating an ironic distance between protagonist and the reader, from which much of the humour stems, whilst simultaneously treating her character with affection and empathy. We see from the beginning that Doris is not particularly well-educated (part of the attraction of writing a private journal is that she doesn't have to fuss about where the commas go), and in thrall to cinematic and commercial notions of 'glamour' and visibility. She describes herself as looking like film actress Colleen Moore, wishes that her lover Hubert were able to see her with the moon shining on her dark hair, does not pull her nightgown over her shoulder even though it is chilly because she likes the way it looks, and describes her dream of becoming a *Glanz*.⁷⁶ Like Gilgi, Doris is a recognisable *Angestellten* 'type': a stereotype, even. Yet Keun invests her heroine with wit and humanity, and she is at least as acute a critic of social hypocrisy – especially gender-related hypocrisy – as Kracauer's bumbling anthropologist persona.

This has not always been evident to readers, however. Critical responses to *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* tend to fall into one of two groups. The first group notes Doris's investment in popular cultural forms, and Keun's understanding of the manifold shortcomings of popular culture as a means of self-fashioning, and emphasises the distance between the two. As Kerstin Barndt argues, this way of reading 'konstatiert eine kritische Distanz zwischen Keuns Romanen und der Massenkultur der Angestellten' and elides the fact that Keun's novels are 'selbst Teil

⁷⁵ Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (2004), p. 8. 'that's laughable for a girl of eighteen, especially one who's on the up'.

⁷⁶ The word *Glanz* is more or less untranslatable: it is literally 'lustre' or 'shine', but is not commonly used to describe people. Kathie von Ankum uses 'star' in her translation of the novel, which has a very similar sense of aspiration, but Doris's use of the word *Glanz* doesn't necessarily evoke fame, but the aura of beauty, wealth and desirability which surrounds famous women.

eine neuen Massen- bzw. Populärkultur'.⁷⁷ In order to admit Keun to the canon of literary modernism, Barndt continues, the fact that her work both engages with and *is* popular mass culture must be suppressed. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* is therefore read, in McCormick's phrase, as 'a detailed critique of the type of working woman caught up in consumerist and cinematic fantasies that Kracauer ridiculed so famously'.⁷⁸ The second group, in which I count myself, believes that this approach misses much of the subtlety of Keun's work, and repeats Kracauer's error of assuming that the white-collar woman is incapable of turning irony back on her critics.

An excellent example is the response to Doris's fantasy of meeting Albert Einstein:

Und ich denke immer, wenn ich sein [Einsteins] Bild sehe mit den vergnügten Augen und den Staubwedelhaaren, wenn ich ihn im Kaffee sehen würde und hätte gerade den Mantel mit Fuchs an und todschick von vorn bis hinten, dann würde er mir auch vielleicht erzählen, er wäre beim Film und hätte unerhörte Beziehungen. Und ich würde ihm ganz kühl hinwerfen: H₂O ist Wasser – das habe ich gelernt von Hubert und würde ihn damit in größtes Erstaunen versetzen.⁷⁹

To Leo Lensing, this passage demonstrates the extent to which Doris, a Little Shopgirl type, has passively absorbed the fantasies created and marketed by the film industry, particularly *Der blaue Engel* (1930). McCormick notes that Lensing 'seems to look at Doris with almost complete condescension'.⁸⁰ In Lensing's reading, Doris hopes to emulate Lola Lola by seducing Albert Einstein, an absent-minded professor in the same mould as the hopeless Professor Unrat. Lensing finds humour in the fact that Doris's 'limited perspective' treats Einstein as 'easy sexual prey', and 'ignores his political activism, especially his involvement in the international peace movement'. Being a politically-active professor of physics, though, is not necessarily

⁷⁷ Barndt (2003), p. 19 'postulates a critical distance between Keun's novels and the mass culture of the white-collar workers' and elides the fact that Keun's novels are 'themselves part of the new mass or popular culture'.

⁷⁸ McCormick (2001), p. 130.

⁷⁹ Keun, *DkM* (2004), pp. 19-20. 'And I always think when I see his photo with the cheerful eyes and his hair standing on end, if I met him in a café and had the coat with the foxfur and was totally gorgeous from head to toe, then perhaps he too would tell me that he was in film and had great connections.'

⁸⁰ McCormick (2001), p. 130.

incompatible with an interest in attractive young women.⁸¹ As McCormick points out, Lensing willfully overlooks the humour of Doris's cynical take on men.⁸² One smart foxfur coat, and even famous physicists try to chat you up with corny lines about careers in film. Doris's belief that Einstein will be astounded by her knowledge that H₂O is water is also part of the comedy, of course, and this is undoubtedly at her expense. To focus only on Doris's ignorance and ignore her shrewd appraisal of the heterosexual male psyche is to miss the sophistication of Keun's work, however. The joke is not only on Doris.

The degree of agency and insight that Keun grants her character is downplayed by critics in other ways, too. Deborah Smail, in a comparative study of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Hans Fallada's *Kleine Mann-was nun?* and Erich Kästner's *Fabian*, focuses on the fact that Doris (like Cornelia in *Fabian*) exchanges sex for material goods and economic security. According to Smail, this means that she 'relinquishes the possibility of establishing any relationship with a man which is not based on exploitation':⁸³

Both Cornelia and Doris display sexual availability as a method for achieving economic stability and social climbing. But once they use their sexuality in this way, their public lives become intimately bound up with their private lives making love relationships, or any kind of relationship in which some form of solidarity can be established [...], impossible. Their bodies become instrumental in both private and public – emotional responses, sexual acts and market forces all become inextricably bound together with the boundary between public and private obliterated.⁸⁴

This reading condemns Doris for her sexual activity, and assigns an essentialist value to sex. According to this logic, sex (or a 'display [of] sexual availability') can never be exchanged for material gain without permanently altering one's ability to relate to others, unlike any other physical activity. It also treats the public/private distinction as real and natural, and the collision of emotional responses, sexual acts and market forces as the *consequence* of Doris's deviant

⁸¹ Lensing (1985), p. 130.

⁸² McCormick (2001), p. 130.

⁸³ Smail (1999), p. 75.

⁸⁴ Smail (1999), p. 76.

sexual activity, thereby validating those social discourses which name her sexual activity deviant. Smail does not address the criticisms of bourgeois sexual morality that Doris articulates:

“Wenn ein Mann heiratet, will er eine unberührte Frau, und ich hoffe, meine kleine Doris ...” und sprach so gesalbt, als wenn er eine ganze Dose Niveacreme aufgeleckt hätte: “Mein gutes Kind, ich hoffe, daß ein anständiges Mädchen aus dir wird, und als Mann rate ich dir, dich keinem Mann hinzugeben, bevor du verheiratet bist mit ihm...”

[...] Und das mir! – von einem, den ich nahezu dreihundertmal in Unterhosen gesehen habe und noch weniger an – mit einer Sommersprosse auf dem Bauch und Haare an den X-Beinen! Und hätte mir sagen können als guter Freund, daß er eine will mit Geld und darum mich nicht. Aber triefen vor Rührung über seine Fabelhaftigkeit, weil er mich nicht zu arm, sondern nicht anständig genug findet, weil ich mit ihm ... also bei so was kann ich nicht mit, da setzt mein Verstand aus und es überkommt mich.⁸⁵

Wenn eine junge Frau mit Geld einen alten Mann heiratet wegen Geld und nichts sonst und schläft mit ihm stundenlang und guckt fromm, dann ist sie eine deutsche Mutter von Kindern und eine anständige Frau. Wenn eine junge Frau ohne Geld mit einem schläft ohne Geld, weil er glatte Haut hat und ihr gefällt, dann ist sie eine Hure und ein Schwein.⁸⁶

Doris’s sexual morality is very straightforward: she despises hypocrisy and cant, and demands honesty in her sexual encounters from both herself and her partners. As she says at one point, ‘Man muß wissen wofür. Um Geld oder aus Liebe.’⁸⁷ Doris is aware that the public/private distinction is itself a product of material existence: the ability to keep emotional, sexual and market acts “separate” is dependent on a minimum level of financial security. Sex and money were therefore ‘inextricably bound together’ long before Doris treated sex as a saleable

⁸⁵ Keun, *DkM* (2004), pp. 21-22. “When a man marries, he wants his wife to be untouched, and I hope, my little Doris...” and he spoke so smoothly, it was as if he’d licked up a whole tin of Nivea cream: “My dear child, I hope that you’ll become a decent girl, and as a man I advise you not to give yourself to any man before you’re married to him...”

[...] And that to me! – from someone I’d seen about three hundred times in his underwear, and even less – with his freckly stomach and the hair on his knock-kneed legs! And he could have said to me, as a good friend, that he wanted someone with money and that wasn’t me. But dripping with emotion about his own wonderfulness, not because I’m too poor, but because I’m not upright enough for him, because he and I had ... I just can’t put up with that, I just lost my head and it overcame me.’

⁸⁶ Keun, *DkM* (2004), p. 85. ‘When a young woman with money marries an old man for money and nothing else, and has sex with him for hours and hours and looks pious, then she’s a German mother of children and an upright woman. When a young woman without money sleeps with a man without money, because he has smooth skin and she likes him, then she’s a whore and a pig.’

⁸⁷ Keun, *DkM* (2004), p. 63. ‘You have to know why you’re doing it. For money or for love.’

commodity. Her inability to establish and maintain a lasting and secure romantic relationship is not a function of having had sex for goods or shelter, but of society's inability to cater for a woman who perceives the various sexual double-standards at play and refuses them, but does not have enough money to insulate herself against the backlash. In adopting critical positions which do not pay sufficiently close attention to Doris's shrewdness, then, and representing her as a victim of sexual exploitation or passive dupe of popular culture, both Lensing and Smail miss the sophistication of Keun's work.

Popular Culture

In Doris, then, Keun created a second white-collar woman through whose experiences, observations, and insights she could communicate a sophisticated and critical understanding of contemporary Weimar society. Both novels depend on a perfect command of tone, creating believable young, female voices whose education and perspective is limited, but who are nonetheless able to articulate a critical view of social conventions and mores, and who become increasingly self-aware during the course of the novels. One aspect of this is the way both of the typist heroines draw on the language of popular culture and other supposedly ephemeral phenomena to make sense of their world: we have already seen that fashion is the means through which Gilgi recognises the arbitrary nature of class, and that the cult of the beautiful female body is a seduction she learns to resist. Popular songs and film are also important to the protagonists. Both Gilgi and Doris have relationships with educated men from higher social classes than themselves (Gilgi with Martin, and Doris with Ernst), and, as Lorna Sopcak shows, the women's popular songs are juxtaposed with their bourgeois lovers' preferred art forms. After going to the opera with Martin, Gilgi muses on the subjective nature of art:

Literatur, Musik, Malerei – ist so eine Sache mit der Kunst. Was dem einen sein Hubermann – bleibt dem andern sein Dajos Bela, was dem einen sein Rembrandt ist – ist dem andern sein Abeking. Was will man da machen? It's a long way to Tipperary – it's a long way to... there...⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Keun, *Gilgi* (2002), p. 145.

Rembrandt is set against Abeking (a contemporary cartoonist, according to Sopcak), as *It's a long way to Tipperary* is set against the opera that Gilgi has just seen.⁸⁹ Similarly, Doris responds to Ernst's mention of Schubert by singing her favourite song, *Das ist die Liebe der Matrosen*, which recurs throughout the novel:

Und: "Meine Frau konnte singen so ganz hoch und hell."

Sing ich --- das ist die Liebe der Matrosen – wunderbarstes Lied, was man hat.

"Schubert", sagt er. Wieso? "Gesungen hat sie, wie Schubert komponiert hat." Das ist die Liebe der Matrosen – ist vielleicht ein Dreck, so'n Lied, was? Was heißt Schubert, was besagt er? Das ist die Lie – aus dem Leben gegriffen ist das – wie meine Mutter bei richtigen Kinostücken sagt.⁹⁰

Both Gilgi and Doris question, rather than accept, the high/low culture hierarchy, and Doris (as Sopcak notes) has her own aesthetic criterion. In fact, their response turns one of the important paradigms of the high/low cultural divide on its head. Gilgi and Doris do not experience popular culture as an undifferentiated mass which seeks to fascinate and obliterate the individual self, nor high culture as a source of critical insight. When it is mediated through their lovers, high art appears as a threat, for the only response permitted is recognition of its superiority. Both women refuse to acquiesce to this demand, and the popular songs that they sing to themselves are a form of resistance. The attempt to draw a hard distinction between mass distraction culture and Keun's novels that Barndt described, then, is doomed to failure: Keun's texts explicitly resist such a distinction.

⁸⁹ Sopcak (1999), p. 94. Sopcak believes that 'Hubermann' is a reference to a well-known violinist, Bronislaw Hubermann (1882-1947), but is unfortunately unable to identify Dajos Bela.

⁹⁰ Keun, *DkM* (2004), p. 171. 'And: "My wife could sing so high and clear."

I sing --- That's the Sailors' Love --- the most wonderful song there is.

"Schubert," he says. What? "She sang the way Schubert wrote." That's the Sailors' Love – perhaps it's trash, a song like that, eh? What's Schubert, what does he say? That's the Sail – to capture life, that's it, that's what my mother said of really good films.'

Conclusion

I end this dissertation with a discussion of Keun's work because these two Weimar novels are written in full awareness of many of the themes and dynamics which motivate my work. Firstly, female subjectivity is at the centre of these novels and represented for its own sake, rather than being pressed into the service of a greater ideology or political system. Kracauer's 'little miss typists' and 'little shopgirls' and Braune's typists, in contrast, are meant to stand in for an entire class and these writers have a strictly limited interest in a specifically female experience of modernity. Secondly, Keun's novels do not prioritise class over gender or vice versa, but foreground the interdependence of both systems. Doris, who would have understood and forgiven if her first love had broken up with her because he needed to marry a rich woman, is aware from the beginning of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* that her experience of sex and love is conditioned by material wealth. Gilgi, too, comes to understand this through the course of her relationship with Martin and her discovery of her own origins. Similarly, I have shown that class, like gender, is at the very heart of the popular romance novels and films, for the heterosexual romantic love they idealise always guarantees bourgeois economic security and is usually portrayed as an ascent in social status for the female party. Thirdly, Keun recognises the limitations of popular culture and its reliance on aspirational mythologies, but does not discount its potential to provide the audience with moments of emancipation or resistance. Gilgi and Doris both draw on fashion, film and popular music in their self-fashioning, and these prove valuable and meaningful languages through which they achieve greater understanding, empathy and self-determination. Many of the popular romances and film that I have discussed here contain similar latent possibilities, celebrating the New Woman's new freedoms even as they draw her back into a traditional heterosexual matrix. Fourthly, as in all the texts discussed here, modernity and modern phenomena figure as sources of endless fascination, reconstructing human life and providing endless new opportunities for myth-making and myth-destroying.

In taking the figure of the typist as the starting point for this discussion, I have brought together the traditions of *Angestelltenkritik* and more recent scholarship on women's experience of

modernity, and argued that class and gender cannot be separated.¹ Through the juxtaposition of sociology-based left-wing critique, popular fiction, romantic comedy, ‘oppositional’ fiction and Keun’s novels, I have shown the limitations of leftwing, politically critical material and explored the potential of popular or ‘distraction’ culture. For young women who are not members of educated elites, I suggest, popular culture may well have offered (and perhaps continues to offer) many more opportunities for a positive self-recognition and validation than those texts which claim to resist or illuminate dominant discourses. In understanding class as decisive and prioritising it over gender, Kracauer reproduces deeply-rooted hierarchical structures which equate masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity, whilst Braune portrays women whose gender particularity is subordinate to a larger political schema. Christa Anita Brück rejects the ‘glamorous’ version of office work portrayed in the popular culture, but does not maintain any critical distance from her protagonist, and so her novel does not rise above the status of ‘Frontberichte’.

Popular romance novels and films, on the other hand, combine traditional genre conventions with new situations and liberties. As we have seen, they employ a variety of strategies to draw the working woman back into the home: both of the Weimar novels discussed in Chapter Two show their heroine retreating gratefully from public life, Inge after her typewriter and the office building itself have been turned into weapons against her, and Dagmar after the ‘Freiheit’ into which she jumped has become wearying. Before these endings, however, both novels show their heroines navigating the city, their boss’s sexual interest, their own fraught class status and their romantic lives – in short, experiencing an independence that their mothers never had. The films, similarly, remain true to a worldview which validates bourgeois marriage and motherhood as the highest status a woman can achieve and creatively exploit the dramatic convention of mistaken identity to re-cast the role of secretary as the same (but not equal) to that of wife. At the same time, they celebrate the working woman’s independence. Even if working in an office and operating a typewriter is not really as glamorous as the films suggest, the ability to move around

¹ The occasional appearances of racially Othered characters (in *Liebe muß verstanden sein*, *April April*, *Die Tippgräfin*, and others) also demonstrates that other traditionally under-represented narratives might be waiting to be recovered, and there is almost certainly scope to explore the significance of the ‘expedition to Africa’ in Weimar-era popular culture.

the city freely, to decide that one is going to spend an evening at a nightclub, and to negotiate one's own marriage are freedoms worth celebrating.

From Kracauer's little miss typists to the film and romance heroines to the passive, adoring secretaries of the two Nazi texts, my exploration of the figure of the typist draws together modernity, gender, rationalisation, technology, class and popular culture. The Weimar Republic was fascinated with its own modernity, and, I have shown, women and women's texts were by no means excluded from this fascination. Even if they were rather rose-tinted versions, white-collar women both appeared in and consumed media which reflected and revealed their particular experiences of modernity. The typewriter was as much a symbol of modernity and the *Neue Frau* as bobs, short skirts and jazz.

Filmography

April April. Dir. Detlef Sierck. Germany, 1935.

Arm wie ein Kirchenmaus. Dir. Richard Oswald. Germany, 1931.

Asphalt. Dir. Joe May. Germany, 1929.

Berlin – Sinfonie einer Großstadt. Dir. Walter Ruttmann. Germany, 1927.

Ein bißchen Liebe für dich. Dir. Max Neufeld. Germany, 1932.

Die blaue Engel. Dir. Josef von Sternberg. Germany, 1930.

Eine von uns. Dir. Johannes Meyer. Germany, 1932.

Es leuchten die Sterne. Dir. Hans H. Zerlett. Germany, 1938.

Frau am Steuer. Dir. Paul Martin. Germany, 1939.

Der Herrscher. Dir. Veit Harlan. Germany, 1937.

Keine Angst vor Liebe. Dir. Hans Steinhoff. Germany, 1933.

Liebe muß verstanden sein. Dir. Hans Steinhoff. Germany, 1933.

Mädchen in Uniform. Dir. Leontine Sagan. Germany, 1931.

Ein Mann mit Herz. Dir. Géza von Bolváry. Germany, 1932.

Menschen am Sonntag. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Germany, 1930.

Metropolis. Dir. Fritz Lang. Germany, 1927.

Die Privatsekretärin. Dir. Wilhelm Thiele. Germany, 1931.

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