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GENDER/SEXUALITY/ACTIVISM

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## Women in German Expressionism

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# Women in German Expressionism

*Gender, Sexuality, Activism*

ANKE FINGER AND JULIE SHOULTS, EDITORS

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# Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
Introduction: Flipping the Prostitute: German Expressionism Reexamined after One Hundred Years (Anke Finger and Julie Shoults)	I
Chapter 1 Intimate Strangers: Women in German Expressionism (Barbara D. Wright)	25
<b>Situating Female Authors and Artists in the Expressionist Movement</b>	
Chapter 2 Elsa Asenijeff and German Expressionism (Curtis Swope)	61
Chapter 3 Between Bohemian Brotherhood and the New Man: On Gender and Writing in F. Gräfin zu Reventlow's <i>Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen</i> (1913) (Carola Daffner)	81
Chapter 4 "Wenn man eine Frau ist": Female Protagonists as Social Revolutionaries (Corinne Painter)	101
Chapter 5 On Their Own: Reconsidering Marianne Werefkin and Gabriele Münter (Katy Klaasmeyer)	116
<b>Gender and the Body</b>	
Chapter 6 Somaesthetics, Gender, and the Body as Media in Claire Goll's Racialized Expressionism (Anke Finger)	137

Chapter 7	
Gender, Sexuality, and the Makeup of Feminine Beauty: Viennese Expressionist Ceramics and the Wieselthier <i>Frauenkopf</i> (Megan Brandow-Faller)	158
Chapter 8	
The <i>Ecstasies</i> of Mela Hartwig-Spira: Between Laughter and Terror (Aleksandra Kudryashova)	185
<b>Sexuality: Beyond Mothers and Prostitutes</b>	
Chapter 9	
Resituating Lu Märten’s Manifesto of Matriarchal Socialism in Expressionist Debates (Douglas Brent McBride)	211
Chapter 10	
Emmy Hennings: The Human Being as Woman (Nicole Shea)	232
Chapter 11	
Writing the Inner Strife: Emmy Hennings’s <i>Das Brandmal:     Ein Tagebuch</i> (1920) (Mirjam Berg)	250
<b>Social Issues and Activism</b>	
Chapter 12	
“‘The Time Is Coming’”: Women Writers in the Expressionist Journal <i>Die Aktion</i> (1911–1932) (Catherine Smale)	269
Chapter 13	
Expressionism and “Female Insanity”: The Lives and Works of Else Blankenhorn (1873–1920) and Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler (1899–1940) (Daniela Müller)	293
Chapter 14	
Empathy for Outsiders in Women’s Expressionist Literature (Julie Shoults)	319
<i>Contributors</i>	343
<i>Index</i>	349

Digital materials related to this title can be found on the Fulcrum platform via the following citable URL <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12298135>

## Illustrations

- Figure 5.1. Marianne von Werefkin, *Sonnenaufgang (Sunrise)*, n.d.,  
tempera on paper on cardboard. 124
- Figure 5.2. Gabriele Münter, *Lower Main Street, Murnau*, 1910. 126
- Figure 5.3. Alexej Jawlensky, *Black Tree—Bordighera*, 1914. 128
- Figure 7.1. Vally Wieselthier, *Head with Flower*, polychromed glazed  
red earthenware, 1928. 167
- Figure 7.2. Gudrun Baudisch, *Heads*, earthenware, ca. 1929. 171
- Figure 7.3. Vally Wieselthier, *Sitting Figure with Flower Pots*, 1928.  
Red earthenware, white slip, blue, green and orange glaze. 174
- Figure 7.4. Vally Wieselthier, *Flora*, 1928. Red earthenware,  
white slip, colored glazes. 176
- Figure 7.5. Gudrun Baudisch, *Kneeling Girl*, 1927–29.  
Red earthenware, white slip, colored glazes. 177
- Figure 13.1. Else Blankenhorn, *Ohne Titel (Roter Reiter) [Untitled  
(Red Rider)]*. 300
- Figure 13.2. Else Blankenhorn, *I. Milliarde Thaler (Geldschein)  
[One Billion Thalers (Banknote)]*. 302
- Figure 13.3. Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, *Die Nachtwandlerin  
[The Sleepwalker]*. 305
- Figure 13.4. Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, *Lissy*. 307
- Figure 13.5. Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, *Selbstporträt (erste Zeichnung  
[der Serie Friedrichsberger Köpfe) [Self-Portrait (first drawing  
in the Friedrichsberg Heads series)]*. 311





## INTRODUCTION

### Flipping the Prostitute

#### *German Expressionism Reexamined after One Hundred Years*

Anke Finger and Julie Shoults

In 2005, in her seminal essay “Intimate Strangers: Women in German Expressionism,” Barbara D. Wright remarks on the paltry state of research available on women writers in the German Expressionist era by launching an overdue call for action: “Given the meager amount of work that has been devoted to the recovery of women Expressionists, the scholarship of German Expressionism clearly lacks the texts necessary for a thorough comparison of male and female writers” (290). More significantly, she demands a reexamination of “our fundamental understanding of Expressionism,” beyond a mere “recovery” of forgotten women authors, a reexamination that would take to task the Expressionists’ plea for a reinvention of humanity, the *Neue Mensch* (New Human), by applying the complex catalog of feminist and gender theory and scholarship to the outpouring of literary works that emerged from the entire movement. At the beginning of the 2020s, such scholarship still remains to be accomplished. For reasons discussed below, not only have the majority of the over three hundred women associated with Expressionist publications such as *Der Sturm* (The storm) or *Die Aktion* (The action) not been recovered by posterity, but the historiography and literary analysis of German Expressionism have largely been left untouched by gender theory, intersectionality, and numerous other women’s studies and feminist scholarship approaches. Befittingly, Wright’s essay, published within an epistemologically and internationally solid context of

women's studies scholarship and feminist literary history, is itself categorized as "interdisciplinary" in the book section within which it was placed, not under "gender" or "women's writing."

What happened to Wright's call to action? These last decades have seen tremendous upheaval, innovation, and growth in the study of modernism as a practice that not only invites us to commemorate countless centennials—if we assume German modernism to begin with the 1890s and last through 1933, the traditional period frame—but also helps us to place ourselves within certain trajectories, contradictions, and historical *déjà vus*. Professional organizations, such as the Modernist Studies Association,<sup>1</sup> dedicate themselves to reviving and enriching the study of a period representative of worldwide artistic, social, technical, and political changes that has resulted in entirely novel approaches to this complex and fascinating time period in our immediate past. Not so for the study of German Expressionism, especially literary Expressionism. It seems that, in the over one hundred years since its beginnings around 1911 with the secessions, German Expressionism, as an object of scholarly inquiry, has attracted attention from interdisciplinary approaches, but not from gender studies. Irritating and curious as that may be, given the multiplicity of methods and approaches applied to the almost feverish research in modernism, two very simple facts underscore what we observe in this subfield: books and articles published on German Expressionist literature are written by men and about male authors and artists. Thomas Anz, one of the most prominent scholars in this field, maintains in the second edition of his pivotal introduction to the *Literatur des Expressionismus* (Literature of Expressionism), published in 2010, that "the literary youth movement of Expressionism was a men's movement" (34), one that constructed itself as "manhood of the highest potency" (35),<sup>2</sup> devoid of the "femininity" inherent to impressionism and naturalism. He concedes that the Expressionists themselves employed such gender stereotyping for their own purposes. He also readily admits that while "the category of gender and the strong domination of male authors should not be overlooked, their appropriate evaluation, which has yet to be accomplished in greater detail, demands considerable capabilities for differentiation and competencies in gender theory" (36).<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, Anz leaves the gender question at that, and the entire volume engages German Expressionist literature with just a smidgen of references to women authors in its midst.

Other introductory volumes present the same or similar contents. The 1957 collection of Expressionist prose *Ahnung und Aufbruch* (Foreboding and awakening), edited by Karl Otten, includes fifty-six texts, fifty-four by male authors and one each by Claire Studer-Goll (1890–1977) and Else Lasker-

Schüler (1869–1945). Fritz Martini’s Reclam collection, *Prosa des Expressionismus* (Prose of Expressionism), from 1972, includes no women authors at all. Silvio Vietta and Hans-Georg Kemper, in their 1975 volume on literary *Expressionismus*, mention five women one time each, with only Lasker-Schüler referred to five times. The sixth edition, published in 1997, remained unchanged and lacking any inclusion of additional women writers or gender theory, despite more than two decades of gender studies research in the interim. The 1976 *Begriffsbestimmung des Literarischen Expressionismus* (Definition of literary Expressionism), published in a highly regarded series, collects articles by male scholars about male writers, with one article about Georg Kaiser by Annalisa Viviani. Augustinus P. Dierick’s *German Expressionist Prose: Theory and Practice*, published in 1987, peripherally mentions four women, Käthe Brod-nitz, Ricarda Huch, Lasker-Schüler, and Annette Kolb. Volume 7 of *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* (Hanser’s social history of German literature), edited by York-Gothart Mix and published in 2000, focuses on naturalism, fin de siècle, and Expressionism, with all chapters on Expressionism written by male scholars and no mention of gender or women’s literary history, although a review of the volume generously points out that women authors and artists are at least mentioned by name.<sup>4</sup> Finally, Ralf Georg Bogner’s *Einführung in die Literatur des Expressionismus* (Introduction to the literature of Expressionism), published in its second edition in 2009, dedicates one page to the construction of gender by a few male authors, listing the oft-cited image of the prostitute, women as mothers and/or erotic objects, and the female sex drive as viewed by the other sex. He concludes this short section by highlighting the dearth of women’s perspectives, given the “numerically small presence of women authors within the Expressionist movement” (68), taking his cue from Hartmut Vollmer’s work.<sup>5</sup> According to Bogner, only Emmy Hennings (1885–1948), Goll, and Lasker-Schüler gained some “semblance of recognition” by getting published and adding their voices to the plethora of topics established by male authors. It is particularly unfortunate, in the case of Bogner, that the historiography of literary Expressionism, one hundred years after the movement’s emergence, perpetuates the myth of women writers as absent by misquoting those actively engaged in rewriting that same history.

Hartmut Vollmer, in the introduction to his 1996 groundbreaking anthology *Die Rote Perücke: Prosa expressionistischer Dichterinnen* (The red wig: Prose by female Expressionists) that includes thirty women authors, does not bemoan or legitimize the lack of women’s voices; in fact, he calls attention to the “incomprehensible and deplorable” notion of “absence” of Expressionist women authors, given that they were both numerous and vociferous (9).<sup>6</sup>

Rather, with this second anthology following his first on women Expressionist lyrics,<sup>7</sup> Vollmer hopes that his anthology on women's prose will finally "prove that future discussions of Expressionism will not be able to ignore the women authors of this movement" (17).<sup>8</sup> By misquoting Vollmer, Bogner quite directly does just that. The artificially maintained belief that women writers were absent within the Expressionist movement or, at the very least, without voice and without access to publication, demands not only their texts' recovery, as required by Barbara Wright, but a thorough reinvestigation of the traditional tropes and topics established by the scholarship of literary and artistic Expressionism. These include illness, the city, the New Human, insanity, utopia, war, ugliness, literary aesthetics, genres, emotion, sexuality and the body, and more—topics that call for the integration of perspectives and literary aestheticization by women authors. These are topics, moreover, that necessitate analysis from perspectives and approaches informed by gender theory, by intersectionality, by notions and perspectives of difference, and by viewpoints and methodological and interdisciplinary approaches that push the boundaries of how German Expressionism has been defined. For however "male" the Expressionist movement constructed itself to appear at the time, it is incumbent upon the scholars of and experts on this movement to question and challenge previous readings of Expressionist texts, artworks, and projects such that we can understand them with the sophistication and understanding of twenty-first-century readers. This is the goal of this volume, and the editors and authors hope that future anthologies and introductions of German Expressionism will productively avoid excluding gender theory and viewpoints of difference. No twenty-first-century discussion of German Expressionism can expect to produce serious research without acknowledging that gender marks this movement—perhaps more than others. No twenty-first-century scholarship can ignore the approximately 310 women who participated in and represented German Expressionism, as documented in Paul Raabe's *Index Expressionismus* from 1972 and meticulously listed by Barbara Wright in her handwritten notes. The fact that, over one hundred years later, literary scholarship is just now facing these questions and challenges by, finally, adding the movement's women authors and artists to the entire oeuvre, is astounding and exhilarating at the same time.

### **Women in German Expressionism**

Although female figures are prevalent in the works of male Expressionists, particularly in the roles of the New Woman, mother, and prostitute, their pos-

sibilities for self-expression and self-sufficiency are decidedly limited in these works. This collection, for the first time, explores women's self-conceptions and representations of women's and gender roles in society in their own Expressionist works. Oskar Kokoschka's depiction of a brutal "battle of the sexes" in his 1907 play *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (*Murderer, Hope of Women*) introduced a motif that was taken up by many Expressionists. How did women interpret this "battle" and depict gender relations? How did women approach themes commonly considered to be characteristic of the Expressionist movement, and did they address other themes or aesthetics and styles not currently represented in the canon? How do the language and imagery employed by female Expressionists compare to that of their male counterparts? Is the historical and sociopolitical context reflected differently in the writings of authors outside of the male, white, and privileged gaze? In what ways do intersections of ethnicity, class, and gender play a role? How do mental health, social status, immigrant status, identity, regional affiliation, and notions of difference inform these texts? Finally, do current perceptions and receptions of German Expressionism shift once we take into more thorough consideration the works of woman artists and authors and the above perspectives on and experiences of difference?

This collection seeks to broaden the theorization, scholarship, and reception of German Expressionism by—much belatedly—including works by women, and by shifting or redefining firmly established concepts and topics carrying only the imprint of male authors and artists to this day. While there is renewed interest in women artists of the period,<sup>9</sup> women authors remain largely unknown, unpublished, and unexamined. This presents a significant and alarming gap in the research and reception of German Expressionism, as the archives are full of uncovered materials. However, very few have challenged this staid reception. As a result, works by male artists and authors continue to characterize the canon a century after the Expressionist decade of 1910–1920.<sup>10</sup> Here, the contributors present and analyze primarily new voices, integrate them into the canon productively by challenging parameters that have remained too tight, unforgiving, and exclusive, and thereby change the reception of and future scholarship on German Expressionism in the twenty-first century.

Interest in German Expressionism remains strong a century after the movement flourished, and we remind our readers of more work that needs to be accomplished by reprinting Barbara Wright's essay from the 2005 collection to open our volume. Her essay appeared in *A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism* (Camden House) alongside just two contributions that mention a few well-known women writers such as Lasker-Schüler and Goll. Wright identifies three major facets in the research on women and

Expressionism, including the portrayal of women and the recovery of their works (287). She notes that “the bulk of scholarly work on women in Expressionism has confined itself to the first category, that is, the portrayal of female figures in Expressionist works largely by men” (288).<sup>11</sup> Wright further notes that the work of recovery is lagging when it comes to women’s contributions to the movement, yet there has been promising progress in this area in recent decades. For instance, several key texts by Emmy Hennings, including *Gefängnis* (Prison) and *Das Brandmal* (The stigma), appeared in new editions in 2016 and 2017 thanks to the efforts of Nicola Behrmann and Christa Baumberger, and an English translation of Mela Hartwig’s *Bin ich ein überflüssiger Mensch?* was published as *Am I a Redundant Human Being?* in 2010. Also, alongside his volumes of poetry and prose, which are both now in their second editions, Hartmut Vollmer edited a collection of poems and short stories by Henriette Hardenberg, *Südlisches Herz* (Southern heart, 1994). And Hartwig Suhrbier republished two volumes of literary sketches by female Expressionist El Hor / El Ha in 1991, *Die Schaukel* (The swing), originally published in 1913, and *Schatten* (Shadows) from 1920. The next step, according to Wright, is for scholars to work productively with these texts at a theoretical level and to compare them to other works in order to understand the movement more deeply and to potentially redefine prior readings of Expressionism (287).

Since Barbara Wright’s important work, several women Expressionists have garnered attention in recent scholarly projects: Cristanne Miller includes Lasker-Schüler in her examination of literary works in *Cultures of Modernism: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, & Else Lasker-Schüler* (2005), Caroline Rupprecht discusses texts by Henriette Hardenberg in *Subject to Delusions: Narcissism, Modernism, Gender* (2006), and Marsha Meskimmon focuses solely on German women in the visual arts in *We Weren’t Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (1999). More recently, Nicola Behrmann’s *Geburt der Avantgarde: Emmy Hennings* (The birth of the avant-garde, 2018), which accompanies her volumes of Hennings’s work previously mentioned, examines the impact Hennings had on various movements in the early 1900s with her innovative literature. Although the introduction and conclusion of Frank Krause’s *Expressionism and Gender / Expressionismus und Geschlecht* (2010) reference works by women, the essays included in the collection focus overwhelmingly on works by male Expressionists. Lorella Bosco and Anke Gilleir’s volume *Schmerz. Lust. Künstlerinnen und Autorinnen der deutschen Avantgarde* (Pain. Desire. Female artists and authors of the German avant-garde, 2015) includes essays on women’s contributions to a variety of artistic movements, not just Expressionism, and many focus on well-recognized

women, including Lasker-Schüler, Hannah Höch, and Käthe Kollwitz. The journal *Expressionismus*, established in 2015, published an issue devoted to *Expressionistinnen* (female Expressionists) in 2016. While this issue includes valuable contributions to the field, there is very little overlap with the authors and artists to be addressed in our volume, and gender theory remains un(der) developed. *Women in German Expressionism: Gender, Sexuality, Activism* seeks to fill a gap still in existence one hundred years after the Expressionist movement by moving beyond initial biographical recoveries, such as Britta Jürgs's 1992 collection of portraits of Expressionist women artists and writers, *Wie eine Nilbraut, die man in die Wellen wirft* (Like a bride of the Nile one throws into the waves). It is time to focus on the output of women Expressionists to, finally, represent and showcase *all* of the Expressionist oeuvre and make it available to analysis and research about the movement as a whole. How much of this work lies ahead of us and beyond this volume becomes apparent when considering the colossal interart project that German Expressionism ultimately represents: in this volume, we address primarily women authors and literary Expressionism, with a focus on Expressionist art history interlaced to discuss sexuality, gender, and activism. Significantly, in-depth research on women, gender, intersectionality, ethnicity, and identity in Expressionist film, drama, architecture, and dance, to name a few other areas and disciplines, is still to be accomplished if we seek a thorough reinvestigation of German Expressionism in the twenty-first century.

### **Rewriting the Expressionist Movement**

In the first part of the volume, "Situating Female Authors and Artists in the Expressionist Movement," we address the need to look at the origins of Expressionism and reconsider the dates of its beginnings. While there are ample pamphlets and manifestos that speak to the meaning of Expressionism, collected, for example, in a 1990 edition by Thomas Anz and Michael Stark, we emphasize more generally the elements at the core of Expressionist work: the focus on raw emotionality and its translation into forms and media whose affordances allow for a new aesthetics in writing, in colors, in shapes, on the stage, and in many more art forms. For the women writers, 1911 and the first usages of the term as representing French art (in exhibition catalogs and elsewhere) does not speak to the slow emergence of the "New Woman" well before 1910/1911, nor does it specify changes in the aesthetics of literary style that overlapped with naturalism or Jugendstil. Curtis Swope, in "Elsa Asenijeff and



German Expressionism,” for example, showcases Asenijeff (1867–1941), who was a generation older than the group of writers around whom the canonical account of German Expressionism has been fashioned. The thematic concerns of her poetry and prose ranged from the role of art in society to the horrors of patriarchal marriage. Her formal choices overcame the empty, gestural quality of Jugendstil and symbolist poetry and, as early as the late 1890s, heralded the social urgency of the Expressionist movement. Despite the numerous rich literary essays in which she outlined her idiosyncratic feminism and despite the fact that her poems were published alongside those of Walter Hasenclever and Kurt Pinthus, her writings have never received sustained scholarly treatment. In his contribution, Swope traces Asenijeff’s development as a feminist theorist and poet with particular attention to how her unique brand of feminism affected her literary work in its formal dimensions. He also places Asenijeff’s writings in relation to the emergence of full-blown Expressionism in literature around 1910 and to the artistic currents, such as symbolism and decadence, that paved the way for that emergence. In Swope’s analysis, Asenijeff’s take on gender polarity seemingly flips the prior “norm,” depicting men as automatons while women have boundless potential for individuality, and men are destructive toward women, particularly through the psychological violence they inflict. He further notes that women, by Asenijeff’s account, have greater capacity for humanity—a thought that echoes throughout our volume, such as in Julie Shoults’s exploration of literary empathy. Finally, Swope posits that we should reread the movement in terms of gender, noting that such an approach might illuminate that the concept of gender is behind other dichotomies that are essential to Expressionism. His call here epitomizes the goal of this volume, drawing on the importance of reading with a gendered lens and raising important questions about who is considered an Expressionist and why.

Another important trailblazer of this generation was Franziska zu Reventlow (1871–1918). Carola Daffner, in “Between Bohemian Brotherhood and the New Man: On Gender and Writing in F. Gräfin zu Reventlow’s *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* (1913),” casts her as a change agent, emphasizing that the uncertain, liminal state of “betwixt and between,” as labeled by cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, is often regarded as undesired. Turner, however, stresses that the lack of attachment to a space or a system offers a “realm of pure possibility” as it encourages reflections on existing social norms and alternative models. Germany’s bohemian circles around 1900 as well as Expressionist groups after 1910 celebrated their positions at the margins for this very reason. Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the *Umwertung aller Werte* (transvaluation of all values), participants in both groups radically

criticized contemporary Western civilization and questioned patriarchal Christian values. Unsurprisingly, the Expressionist movement not only grew out of Bohemian circles but also found its first followers among *la Bohème*. At the same time, many Expressionists passionately rejected *la Bohème*'s "Apollonian" mentality, its lack of leadership vision, and its attachment to a Romantic ancestry. A few select women, such as Lasker-Schüler and Hennings, are well known for their active participation in both scenes. Daffner argues that Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow's later work is another important, yet often neglected example, showcasing both points of contact as well as points of tension between *la Bohème* and early German Expressionism. While considered a staple of Schwabing's bohemians and never officially affiliated with the Expressionists, Reventlow uses the epistolary form in her roman à clef *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* (1913) to negotiate her own limited role as a writer in between the two male-dominated movements. Mirroring the writer's own difficulties in her quest for sexual and creative self-determination in the midst of the "Bohème-Bruderschaft," the novel's catastrophic ending can and should be read as a warning to messianic Expressionism and its own euphoric visions of a "New Man." Furthermore, Daffner notes the importance of the androgynous protagonist in this work, a concept that is gaining increasing attention in scholarship on literary Expressionism.<sup>12</sup>

In "'Wenn man eine Frau ist': Female Protagonists as Social Revolutionaries," Corinne Painter picks up Barbara Wright's observation that "key documents of Expressionism repeatedly present woman as a means to the New Man's end, namely his development as an artist and/or social revolutionary" (292). Painter examines the gender "battle" depicted in the works of German Jewish writer Clementine Krämer (1873–1942), who, although largely forgotten today, was a prolific writer and campaigner in the women's movement. Her short stories were published in local and national papers and intellectual and literary magazines such as *Jugend* (Youth). This chapter takes up two stories from 1913 and 1916, analyzing how Krämer's protagonists challenge the virgin/whore dichotomy, how the protagonists use men for their own means, and how Krämer challenges the traditional literary representations of women. Discussing Krämer's status as an outsider—she was a Jewish writer in Catholic Bavaria—Painter asserts that she presented a challenge to the dominant narratives in Expressionist writing and to projections of ethnic identity. Painter also shows how Krämer used hyperbole and irony, among other techniques, and appropriated themes from Expressionism and the Grimms' fairy tales to challenge the role and perceptions of women in the public sphere, including how men could be used by women for economic and social stability.

The final contribution in this part concerns a discussion of two important women artists, “On Their Own: Reconsidering Marianne Werefkin and Gabriele Münter,” by Katy Klaasmeyer. She explains that in the visual arts, the term “Expressionism” does not constitute a cohesive movement or style; rather it describes in a broader sense of art that was united by a rejection of impressionism and the search for an inner, essential reality behind the external world of appearances. As such, groups commonly classified as Expressionist, *Die Brücke* in Dresden/Berlin and the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* (NKV, later *Der Blaue Reiter*) in Munich, differed in their philosophical and stylistic approaches. Two women artists, Marianne Werefkin (1860–1938) and Gabriele Münter (1877–1962), were both active in Munich; however, they have been defined in most academic sources principally by their relationships (with Alexej Jawlensky and Wassily Kandinsky, respectively). In her chapter, Klaasmeyer “reconsiders the careers of these two women, primarily by placing their romantic relationships in an ancillary role—which is the treatment their artist partners received.” Although she discusses each woman’s relationships with fellow artists, she simultaneously critiques the ways in which these relationships have overshadowed the women’s careers and work. Furthermore, she observes that women’s influence on male artists has not necessarily been acknowledged, since it is often assumed that the women (as pupils) learned from the men, even though these women also had things to share and to teach. Through her analysis, Klaasmeyer draws attention to both women’s agency and their self-doubt at times. Importantly, Klaasmeyer focuses on the differences between Werefkin and Münter, rather than trying to fit them in the same “box” of female artists. By delineating their individual approaches in content (themes, subject matter), formal concerns (preferred media, color palette), and meaning (philosophical underpinnings), she allows for nuanced exploration of their work and illustrates how examining women’s artworks and the female gaze can inform our understanding of Expressionism as a whole.

### **Gender and the Body**

Given the tradition of men writing about men in German Expressionism, one might assume that perhaps masculinity studies, a substantial subfield in gender studies today, would have filtered into the analysis of Expressionist texts, artworks, drama, film, poetry and architecture. That, too, is not the case. Masculinity studies, as an approach in gender studies that seeks to “deconstruct static binaries on gender studies between victims and oppressors, difference and

dominance, and hegemonic (or socially validated) and alternative masculinities [that] examine[s] parallelisms, interdependencies, and asymmetries between men and women” do not figure in studies on German Expressionism (Gardiner 2). An Expressionist of the first hour, Kurt Hiller, for example, was a gay rights activist and inherited Magnus Hirschfeld’s position at the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. But his writing and activism, starting in 1909, on behalf of Expressionism have yet to be analyzed under these parameters. In fact, a 2019 article on gay rights activism in Germany reports that “Kurt Hiller is the least remembered of the leading early homosexual activists” (Marhoefer 96). Similarly, texts such as Alfred Döblin’s famous short story “Die Ermordung einer Butterblume” (“The Murder of a Buttercup”) from 1910 urgently call for an analysis based on gender, given—in the case of Döblin—the “battle” between the desperately hapless civil servant and the feminized buttercup whose ontology as a flower counteracts the protagonist’s obsession with control over (mother) nature. However, the overwhelmingly conservative and negative image of women in Expressionist writing has not been theorized from the perspective of gender studies, nor have women authors, as contemporary writers or literary scholars, been allowed in to adjust the same image in its entirety, beyond focusing on individual and few-and-far-between contributions.

Making gender, together with difference, ethnicity, intersectionality, and identity, the center of analysis for German Expressionism allows us to approach artworks and texts in more nuanced ways, engaging solidly established theoretical and sociohistorical approaches that enhance and update our understanding of the material under investigation. We can move beyond the masculine, “New Man” viewpoint so firmly associated with German Expressionism and examine alternative, critical, and divergent interpretations of the changing world at the time. This approach has only just begun within scholarship on Expressionism, and while gender theory has inspired initial analyses of women Expressionist authors, it also urges a reanalysis of the ascription or avowal of masculinity, gender performance, and gender fluidity in German Expressionism in conjunction with intersectionality and positions of difference. If we think about gender theory today, the focus on fluidity rather than dichotomies, flexibility rather than rigidity in conceptions and understandings of gender and sexuality, allows for richer and more inclusive readings of texts and artworks that deserve a new and more informed investigation of the variety of lifeworlds and viewpoints lived and expressed at the time.

In “Somaesthetics, Gender, and the Body as Media in Claire Goll’s Racialized Expressionism,” for example, Anke Finger discusses gender identity and ethnicity from the perspective of an aesthesis of the body in that a

woman's own body serves as a medium for performing or expressing precisely those identities listed above. Following an introduction to the larger body of work by women writers, especially the display or integration of sensory perception, this chapter focuses on Claire Goll's *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa* (The Negro Jupiter abducts Europe, 1926) to argue for gender and social-justice oriented perspectives on race, somaesthetics, and the body as media. The emphasis lies in an intersensory and interarts approach to the avant-gardes and their media, supported by research on intersectionality. Importantly, the focus on sensory experience also opens up a renewed discussion about race and ethnicity, questioning markers of "whiteness" and "blackness," class and socioeconomics that complicate the discourses of difference in the 1920s. Goll's text, as Finger points out, foregrounds sensory perception and bodily experience, questions the assignment of color to complicated sets of identity and social and political context, and engages with everyday practices of blatant racism. Her focus, contrary to previous scholarship on Goll's text, is on the interracial couple that embodies the colonial conflict between Europe and Africa and highlights the discourses of difference, between ethnicities, cultures, and genders, by using Expressionist aesthetics, in this case Goll's acerbic and biting criticism of white supremacy, in distinct and subtle ways.

Megan Brandow-Faller, in "Gender, Sexuality, and the Makeup of Feminine Beauty: Viennese Expressionist Ceramics and the Wieselthier *Frauenkopf*," discusses Viennese Expressionist ceramics that exploded onto the postwar art scene, laying claim to the same expressive immediacy as the easel canvas. Informed by the primitivizing currents first present at the 1908/9 *Kunstschau* (art shows), Expressionist ceramics emerged out of the collaborative, experimental atmosphere of the Wiener Werkstätte Artist Workshops, an experimental design space predominated by female art students during the war. The work of Vally Wieselthier (1895–1945), head of the Wiener Werkstätte Department of Ceramics, and students such as Gudrun Baudisch defined what critics perceived as the movement's feminine aesthetic: roughly modeled, unevenly glazed, and brightly painted ceramic vessels and figural sculptures with surface ornamentation revealing an excitement about process and spontaneity.

Brandow-Faller describes in great detail Wieselthier's trademark ceramic heads (*Frauenköpfe*), notable for their formal asymmetries and surface imperfections, with faces painted so as to appear deliberately "made up," in a subversively childlike fashion calling attention to the artifice of visible cosmetics and attendant sexual roles. The Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* figured the vermilion lipstick, bold eye shadow, mascara, and rouged cheeks of the 1920s New Woman: a sexualized but masklike mode of face painting

asserting female autonomy and sexual liberation. Antidecorative critics—including many of the same individuals supporting male Expressionist painters—dismissed women’s innovative use of applied arts media like ceramics, using tropes of decadence, seduction, and frivolity to neutralize the ceramics as decorative trifles that, although flirting with the expression of significant artistic ideas, were incapable of conveying significant content. However, it is Brandow-Faller’s argument that the Wieselthier *Frauenkopf*, far from being mere decoration, subversively reclaimed pejorative stereotypes linking women’s art making with her sexual drives to decorate and “make up” herself. Just as in the contribution by Klaasmeyer, Brandow-Faller calls attention to Wieselthier’s artwork being judged by different standards and devalued because she sought recognition as a woman artist.

Gender and sexuality play a significant role in “The *Ecstasies* of Mela Hartwig-Spira: Between Laughter and Terror,” Aleksandra Kudryashova’s contribution to this volume and part. The name of the Austrian actress, writer, poet, and painter Mela Hartwig (1893–1967) is largely forgotten today, and her works are absent from university curricula and discussions of female authors in interwar Austria. Very few scholarly publications exist to this day, and those that are extant focus far too narrowly on Hartwig’s explicit and implicit engagement with psychoanalysis. However, Kudryashova demonstrates that a closer study of her work reveals a socially critical author sharply attuned to recent experiments in literature and the visual arts whose language, themes, and imagery evoke the pallet of Expressionist paintings and the language of post-war Expressionist poets.

Examining Hartwig’s first collection of novellas *Ekstasen* (Ecstasies), printed in 1928, Kudryashova notes that it agitated critics and shocked, provoked, and aroused excitement at the same time. The four dynamic female figures featured rebel against their fathers and lovers, against a society that deformed their bodies, suppressed their desires and fantasies, and denied them their right to self-determination—only to be ultimately defeated, condemned, convicted, or burned at a stake. Kudryashova examines Hartwig’s visual vocabulary, stating that the language is intense, vivid and violent, erotic and fervent, ecstatic as the title suggests, at times taking on almost grotesque, distorted features. The primary colors featured are red (“wine,” “flesh and blood”) and black (“darkness” and “nightmares”). These nightmares actually appear as living creatures who haunt their female victims and exert violence against women. The women respond with both screams and laughter—reactions to the ways in which they experience the world and the limitations placed on them by society and patriarchal culture.

Kudryashova explores Hartwig's representation of women who deviate from prescribed roles and even defy our expectations as critics (they are neither mothers nor prostitutes nor able to find a place in the "modern" world, and they remain alone in their agony). Her analysis focuses on Hartwig's language of excess and extremes, specifically her descriptions of the female body as highly dynamic and fluid, an unstable and eruptive entity prone to exaltation, violence, and self-destruction in its struggle for liberation and self-determination. Ultimately, Kudryashova argues, Hartwig dissects the bodies of her protagonists with surgical precision to reveal forces and voices modernity sought to pathologize, conceal, and restrain.

### **Sexuality: Beyond Mothers and Prostitutes**

Female sexuality was largely dominated by male discourse at the turn of the century, and the impact of Otto Weininger's controversial *Geschlecht und Charakter* (*Sex and Character*, 1903) on the context cannot be understated. The contributions of medical researchers such as Albert Moll, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Iwan Bloch to the growing field of sexology, and of Sigmund Freud to psychology, are also well documented and still feature in the discourse today. While at the time these new fields served to reshape conceptions of human sexuality in many ways, they also proved limiting for women. As Kirsten Leng observes, "For many male sexologists, women were precisely objects to be studied, managed, and contained" (3). Yet women were certainly contributing to these important discussions of sexuality and desire—through literary texts, scientific research, artwork, women's rights advocacy, political engagement—yet their voices have never received the same attention or been assigned the same authority as those of their male counterparts.<sup>13</sup> Leng's *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science: Women Sexologists in Germany, 1900–1933* (2018) addresses this gap by bringing female voices to the forefront—women as "self-determining agents capable of producing knowledge about their own sexual realities" (3). The contributions to our volume in this section also examine women's thoughts and feelings on sexuality and sexual desire via their Expressionist writings, problematizing the mother/whore dichotomy that so often has been tied to Expressionism. While recent scholarship, such as Jill Suzanne Smith's *Berlin Coquette* (2013), have added to the canon that challenged and rewrote stereotypical and static projections of the prostitute, women's writings offer much more nuanced perspectives on such central themes as motherhood, prostitution, sexual expression, and sexual health. They also chal-

lenge essentialist notions of womanhood and consider the impact of socialization on women's roles and desires.

Douglas Brent McBride, in "Resituating Lu Märten's Manifesto of Patriarchal Socialism in Expressionist Debates" calls attention to a lost manifesto of crucial importance to the "image" of the mother in German Expressionism. When Märten's manifesto "Die Geburt der Mütter" (The birth of mothers) appeared in the December 11, 1918, edition of *Die Freiheit* (Freedom), the socialist activist's call for the institutionalization of motherhood as a public office seemed part and parcel of the Soviet rhetoric of the revolution of sailors, soldiers, and workers that had toppled the German monarchy and precipitated the end of the First World War barely one month earlier. In reality, its publication in the Berlin organ of the Independent Social-Democratic Party was a timely reprint of what had been the culminating statement on maternalism as a revolutionary discourse in the pages of three competing organs of movement Expressionism: *Der Sturm* (Berlin, 1910–1932), *Die Aktion* (Berlin, 1911–1932), and *Die weißen Blätter* (Leipzig/Zurich/Bern/Berlin, 1913–1920). By resituating Märten's manifesto within its original context, McBride aims to recover an overlooked thread woven through the otherwise misogynist fabric of Expressionist discourse on feminism, naturalized sexual characteristics, and the institution of the bourgeois family that began with the publication of Oskar Kokoschka's one-act drama *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* in *Der Sturm* in July 1910.

While Lu Märten's manifesto presents a call for activism, Nicole Shea, in "Emmy Hennings: The Human Being as Woman," uncovers the internal turmoil of a woman caught between the images of mother, prostitute, and intellectual. Shea explains that Expressionism's rendition of the internal condition, an often-nightmarish reaction to a bourgeois urban existence, has traditionally been investigated or celebrated from a male-dominated perspective, often via the figure of the prostitute. As woman, as *Weib*, as sex, as troubling desire, the prostitute emerges as the male anxiety regarding the female's technological coming-into-being, but always within the realm of patriarchal construction, evidenced by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's paintings as well as his claim to know what it is to be a prostitute due to his service in the war. Shea, then, focuses on Emmy Hennings's works, specifically *Gefängnis* (Prison, 1919), to contradict perceived gender binaries, thereby highlighting a path from "Weib" to "Mensch" via both a psychoanalytic and historical materialistic approach.

In concert with the Futurists, Hennings celebrates the potentially liberatory quality of the automobile, but her arrest—possibly for prostitution—reveals the patriarchal subsumption of technology, whereby female selfhood, and even her humanity are negated. Shea writes that Hennings's poetic response



bifurcates the concept of self: while she finds common humanity in a fellow prisoner, her representation of her life becomes fragmented and contradictory, her autobiography—characterized by unreliability and gaps—echoing the Expressionist urban anxiety. However, instead of a *Weib* appropriated by a patriarchal system—artistic, political, or legal—to underscore male uncertainty and cultural anxiety, Hennings compels the inner reality of the prostitute, a series of half-formed impulses, as a response. And it is only when women communicate with other women, not with men, that they become human (*Mensch*) in Hennings's work, as women understand each other in ways that men cannot.

Hennings is also the subject of the next chapter—echoing the increased attention to her work in recent years—with an article “Writing the Inner Strife: Emmy Hennings's *Das Brandmal: Ein Tagebuch* (1920)” by Mirjam Berg. This article focuses on her second prose text, the diary novel *Das Brandmal: Ein Tagebuch* (*The stigma: A diary, 1920*). Existing criticism largely frames this work in the context of Hennings's biography, since there seem to be many similarities between her personal experiences and those of her diary-writing protagonist Dagny. Like Hennings, Dagny is a cabaret actress who works as a prostitute to make a living. It comes perhaps as a surprise, then, that the text is concerned with charting the intensification of its protagonist's faith in God over the course of the work. Her religious convictions lead to an inner strife, which is at the center of her diaristic writing. Even though it is relevant to keep the author's biography in mind, the focus of the analysis is on the text itself. Berg argues that Hennings conceives of a peculiar female self-conception by intertwining such seemingly remote subjects as religion, new media technology, and the most popular female figure in expressionistic work, the prostitute. In *Das Brandmal*, a female voice gives shape to themes predominantly discussed in literature by male authors. Hennings crafts a unique style by combining the narrative mode of religious confession with the modern aesthetics of photography and film, thereby articulating her own artistic persona in the literary culture of her time.

### **Social Issues and Activism**

Just as Lu Märten was an activist in socialist circles, Claire Goll was an avid protester of the First World War. In her “Die Stunde der Frauen” (*The hour of the women*) from 1917 she asks provocatively: “We who have never been allowed to play a role on the world's stage! When will we finally no longer be the chorus that

laments, but rather individual actors in life? How long will we allow ourselves to be suppressed by the vain and brutal mimes of power? Where is *our* revolution?" (11).<sup>14</sup> Helene Stöcker, another activist affiliated with German Expressionism, was among those calling for a "New Ethic" and advocated successfully—with Magnus Hirschfeld—for the inclusion of homosexual women in politics, for the necessity of peace, and for reproductive and sexual rights for women. Political and social activism runs like a red vein through a number of Expressionist women's writings, and this volume can only touch on a few aspects of this vast topic that includes political activism as well as social engagement.

Catherine Smale, in "'The Time Is Coming': Women Writers in the Expressionist Journal *Die Aktion* (1911–1932)," addresses this red vein by examining one of the most important Expressionist journals. The journal *Die Aktion*, published in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, was one of the leading forums for literary Expressionism in Germany. In its first issue, the editor Franz Pfemfert explicitly connects the political and cultural aims of the journal, highlighting its left-wing stance while also declaring his intention to engage in Kulturkampf (culture war) and challenge the staid artistic and literary culture of the Wilhelmine era. Scholarship on the journal has, to date, tended to focus either on its socialist politics and opposition to the First World War or on the work of the male Expressionist writers and artists who published in it.

However, little attention has been paid to the significant number of women who had their work published in the journal, such as Claire Goll, Margarete Kubicka, Henriette Hardenberg, Angela Hubermann, Emmy Hennings, Mia Morgenroth and others. Smale's chapter focuses on literary and essayistic texts by female authors whose work was published in *Die Aktion*, showing how the literary and political scope of the journal is broader than has previously been acknowledged. Smale argues that these female writers introduce a specifically gendered dimension to their understanding of the relationship between their poetic writing and political activism. Their work often questions existing patriarchal norms, appealing to women to find their individual voices and speak out against their exclusion from the public sphere, while their protest against convention is reflected formally in their aesthetic experimentation and break with artistic and literary tradition. Overall, Smale shows how the Kulturkampf identified by Pfemfert poses a challenge, not only to the political and literary culture of the period, but also to the rigid social structures that constrained women and assigned them to fixed gender roles. And she recognizes women as active, critical participants who helped to shape the direction of the Expressionist movement.

Likewise, in "Expressionism and 'Female Insanity': The Lives and Works of Else Blankenhorn (1873–1920) and Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler (1899–1940)"

by Daniela Müller, we find calls for activism to end the voicelessness of marginalized women, especially those deemed “insane.” Müller examines the role of female Expressionists, their impact on the idea of insanity within Expressionism, and their influence on the artwork of some of their male counterparts. Whether depicted as subject or as the author himself, the “madman” is an important figure in German Expressionism at the beginning of the twentieth century. Art both about and from asylum inpatients is mostly associated with names of male artists like Alfred Kubin, Conrad Felixmüller, Otto Dix, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, while Expressionist “madwomen” are neglected. Müller notes that the amount of artwork by female inpatients shows a similar trend: among more than 4500 artworks collected by the Heidelberg psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn up to 1922, only 80 of 450 “artist inpatients” were women.

There were two outstanding female Expressionists who had a crucial influence on the artwork of artists like Schlemmer, Kirchner, and Dix: Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler and Else Blankenhorn. Unknown to each other, their lives and creativity show affinities: both followed an artistic path until they were diagnosed with schizophrenia, which led to their internment in different sanatoriums in Germany. There, Blankenhorn developed her extensive oeuvre consisting of numerous watercolors, expressive drawings, as well as poems and compositions, and Lohse-Wächtler created her famous Friedrichsberger heads, which made her one of only a few artists depicting interned mental patients during her own hospitalization. While Blankenhorn became famous during her lifetime within a small Expressionist circle and is now a prominent artist in the Prinzhorn Collection, Lohse-Wächtler’s work only gained attention in the 1990s after it was discovered that she was murdered in the Nazi “euthanasia” program. Müller discusses the unique artistic signature of both women and their broad spectrum of art in their interaction with male artists in the context of insanity and Expressionism.

The woman as outsider, as part of an unheard choir not even present as background lament, as a part of a quieted mass rather than an individual, is discussed by Julie Shoultz in “Empathy for Outsiders in Women’s Expressionist Literature.” The figure of the “outsider” is prominent in Expressionist literature and may take on a variety of embodiments, including the disabled war veteran, the criminal, and the prostitute. While these figures are often portrayed via stark, matter-of-fact imagery, other depictions exist in which authors develop such characters beyond surface-level sketches. Yet these social outsiders are generally employed metaphorically, not meant as social commentary calling for change. Shoultz explores the figure of the outsider in a variety of Expressionist literature by women, including Martina Wied, Trude Bernhard,

and El Hor / El Ha, through the lens of literary empathy studies, and illustrates ways in which the poetry and prose of these female Expressionists conveys a sense of empathy toward social outsiders. This notion of women displaying greater empathy and understanding for marginalized figures appears in several other contributions to the volume, including those by Swope, Berg, Smale, and Müller, and culminates here in a deeper discussion of empathy itself.

Shoultz demonstrates how writers ask us to consider the humanity of these individuals living on the margins of society, whether it is a disabled war veteran with no home to return to or a prostitute expressing a desire for emotional closeness, not just physical contact. Some figures challenge their institutionalization, prompting readers to reconsider the necessity of locking such individuals away, which only isolates them from society and condemns them to lives of loneliness, further marking their outsider status. These Expressionist texts serve a purpose beyond their literary value. Rather than merely depict the plight of the social outsider, these female authors encourage readers to empathize with them as fellow human beings by illuminating the humanity of these social outcasts. They instill a powerful emotional element through their use of language and imagery, and although they do not provide specific commentary regarding how to resolve perceived social injustices, their texts are an important step in raising awareness of social issues and recognizing the need for change.

## **Conclusion**

When we begin this introduction with a heading and invitation to “flip the prostitute,” we have in mind a number of scholarly endeavors to be undertaken. “Flipping” an existing state of knowledge or set of approaches, in this case the representational figure of the prostitute in German Expressionism, requires careful analysis of the same pockets of knowledge and set of approaches in order to determine what, precisely, invites or demands flipping, turning over, or bringing in from a previously defined “outside.” What has been “outside” the scholarly work on German Expressionism, especially literary Expressionism, is both a considerable corpus of gender theory, of studies on intersectionality, ethnicity, social status, difference, and identity, and a considerable corpus of texts authored by women. If we wish to redraw the lines or territories of what exactly falls within German Expressionism as a movement, we should at the very least begin to perforate the boundaries that, for over one hundred years, have defined the field as “by men and about men.” This calls for a substantial number of questions. Who qualifies as “Expressionist”? How and why? Which

criteria need redefining, updating, or eliminating: should we redraw the time period? Reconsider Expressionist aesthetics? Investigate stylistics from a twenty-first-century position? Reprioritize themes, such as illness, the New Human, the city, gender “battles,” mental health, generational upheaval? Uncover the machinations and hegemony of publication venues? Reconsider participation in certain circles? Will the need arise for a new set of criteria, aspects so far ignored or hidden, that come into the limelight with closer or first attention to topics or aesthetics introduced by women authors affiliated with or part of the Expressionist movement? Will flipping the prostitute necessitate her acknowledgment and recognition as a self-assured woman in command of her own sexuality and identity, performing a complex gender fluidity, as represented in Emmy Hennings’s writings? If we are flipping the current criteria established by and for male authors who have drawn and fossilized a conventional image of the contemporary prostitute—or woman—are such categories still valid? When is the exalted figure of the prostitute in German Expressionism going to be replaced by a much more complex human being, befitting the gendered, ethnic, social, sexual, regional, political spaces of everyday life at the time and indicative of a woman’s view that was ostracized from literary scholarship for so long? German literary Expressionism, with scholars engaging in a practice of questioning established approaches and knowledge bases, may find itself under investigation by a whole set of new inquiries, given the addition of new contemporary or scholarly voices and their integration, juxtaposition, or opposition of texts written by male authors and scholars.

Flipping the scholarly endeavor thereby puts us into a definitional and innovational conundrum. Many of the authors and artists represented in this volume may not fit neatly into the categories established over the last one hundred years within Expressionist scholarship. Does that not make them Expressionist, then, do they fall outside of the movement because they defy neat categorization? Or, by including them in the discourse, by including gender, difference, intersectionality, ethnicity, regional affiliation, political position, social status, and identity in the parameters, do we redefine the German Expressionist movement and interdisciplinary enterprise such that it itself needs redrawing, expanding, and updating? Does the scholarship collected in this volume reinforce German Expressionist parameters, or do they push boundaries that needed readjusting for quite some time? With these questions in mind, we suggest revising the analysis and the reception of German Expressionism to degrees that broaden and deepen the scholarly field of German Expressionism such that it—finally—includes the many voices and works that have stood aside as a silenced choir, referring to Claire Goll’s critique, robbed of their

legitimate roles on the Expressionist stage. German Expressionism, one hundred years later, may yet emerge as a movement that we have to comprehend and appreciate as a much more complex mosaic of conversations expressing difference, only one of which relates to the “battle” between the sexes.

## NOTES

1. The Modernist Studies Association (MSA) was established in 1998, recognizing the need to expand the modernist canon and to provide a forum for new and dynamic approaches in the field. Furthermore, the journal *Feminist Modernist Studies* was initiated in 2018, drawing attention to the need for such a venue of exploration and to the significance of distinctly feminist approaches to modernism in its many locations, genres, and manifestations.

2. “Dass die literarische Jugendbewegung des Expressionismus eine **Männerbewegung** war” (34); Anz cites Paul Hatvani’s 1917 gender-biased “Versuch über den Expressionismus” (Thoughts about Expressionism) and concludes: “Expressionismus ist in dieser Selbstbeschreibung Männlichkeit in höchster Potenz” (35). All translations by the authors.

3. “In einer Soziologie dieser Subkultur und in der Rekonstruktion ihrer Selbsteinschätzung dar die Kategorie des Geschlechts und die starke Dominanz männlicher Autoren nicht übersehen werden, doch fordert deren angemessene Bewertung, die bislang noch nicht eingehender geleistet wurde, erhebliches Differenzierungsvermögen und gendertheoretische Kompetenzen.”

4. See Christine Kanz, “Familie und Geschlechterrollen als Leitthemen der literarischen Moderne,” [www.literaturkritik.de](http://www.literaturkritik.de), no. 1 (2001), accessed September 11, 2022.

5. “Diesen fiktionalen Weiblichkeitsbildern korrespondiert im Übrigen die geringe tatsächliche Präsenz von Autorinnen innerhalb der expressionistischen Bewegung.”

6. “Wiederum signifikant ist es hier, daß bei der Explikation dieser Kategorisierung [expressionistischer Prosa] und der Zuweisung expressionistischer Autoren und Werke Dichterinnen vollkommen unberücksichtigt bleiben. Diese ‘Abwesenheit’ erscheint um so unverständlicher und beklagenswerter, inventarisiert man die keineswegs raren weiblichen Prosatexte des Expressionismus.”

7. Vollmer’s *In roten Schuhen tanzt die Sonne sich zu Tod: Lyrik expressionistischer Dichterinnen* (In red shoes the sun dances itself to death: Lyric by female Expressionists) first appeared in 1993. Both of Vollmer’s volumes have been published in second editions, in 2010 (*Die rote Perücke*) and 2014 (*In roten Schuhen*).

8. “So macht die vorliegende Anthologie nicht nur auf wenig bekannte oder zu Unrecht vergessene expressionistische Autorinnen und Werke wieder aufmerksam, sie beweist zugleich, daß eine künftige Betrachtung des Expressionismus an den Dichterinnen dieser Bewegung nicht mehr vorbeisehen kann.”

9. Female artists have been gaining exhibition space, yet there is still much room for improvement when it comes to recognizing women’s contributions. For instance, a 2014 exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Expressionism in Germany and France: From Van Gogh to Kandinsky*, featured work by three influential women,

Paula Modersohn-Becker, Gabriele Münter, and Marianne Werefkin, among over forty artists featured (see “Female Voices of Expressionism,” September 14, 2014, <https://unframed.lacma.org/female-voices-expressionism>). Expressionist influences were also on display in a 2019 exhibition at Berlin’s Verborgenes Museum (Hidden museum) entitled *Women Artists in Dialogue* (see <https://www.dasverborgenemuseum.de/exhibits/exhibit/women-artists-in-dialogue-en>, accessed September 11, 2022). See also *Marianne Werefkin and the Women Artists in Her Circle*, edited by Tanja Malycheva and Isabel Wünsche, which explores not only Werefkin’s oeuvre but also the productive exchanges and influences among female artists and authors engaged in her various networks.

10. Despite the pithy moniker of calling it a “decade,” Expressionism is usually divided into several phases: early Expressionism, from 1910/11 to 1914; 1914 through 1918; and then Weimar Republic and late Expressionism, which lasts well into the 1930s. The two main journals, *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm*, for example, were issued 1911–1932 and 1910–1932, respectively. The famous *Expressionismusdebatte*, launched by the critique of Marxist literary scholar Georg Lukács, lasted from 1933 to 1938. Expanding the time frame beyond the stereotypical “Expressionist decade” is pivotal to acknowledging women’s contributions to the movement, as many of their works were published in these later years.

11. For example, while Christiane Schönfeld has aptly written on the depiction of prostitutes in German Expressionism, her focus is largely on works by men; see, for instance, her essays “Streetwalking the Metropolis: Prostitutes in Expressionism” and “Under Construction: Gender and the Representation of Prostitutes in Expressionism.” Yet she has also examined a female author’s take on prostitution in “Confessional Narrative / Fragmented Identity: Emmy Hennings’s *Das Brandmal. Ein Tagebuch*.”

12. See, for instance, Johanna Meixner’s *Androgynie in der Prosa Else Lasker-Schülers* (Androgyny in Else Lasker-Schüler’s prose, 2020).

13. For a discussion of sexual difference in German Expressionism in particular, see, for instance, Julie Shoults’s “Radical Depictions of Female Sadomasochism in El Hor / El Ha’s Literary Sketches,” in which she analyzes this female author’s contributions to the discourse on women’s sexual desires through her Expressionist literature.

14. “Wir Talentlosen, wir kleinen Statistinnen, die wir nie mitspielen durften auf der Bühne der Welt! Wann werden wir endlich nicht mehr Chor sein, der klagt, sondern einzeln auftreten im Leben? . . . Wo bleibt **unsere** Revolution?”

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## CHAPTER I

# Intimate Strangers

## *Women in German Expressionism*

Barbara D. Wright

Women in German Expressionism have been the intimate strangers of the movement in more senses than one.<sup>1</sup> As literary artists and participants in that avant-garde explosion of creativity and innovation at the beginning of the twentieth century, they remained largely unacknowledged by male leaders of the movement, their works and perspectives for the most part invisible, both to the movement and to the wider public. Later, when literary critics and academics rediscovered Expressionism in the 1950s and 1960s, following decades of eclipse and then violent suppression, it was male exponents of the movement who were reprinted, providing the foundation for scholarly work and the canonical examples of Expressionist literature that have since shaped our definitions and understandings of the movement. The manifestos and other documents of Expressionism selected for reprinting have compounded the problem.<sup>2</sup> Even feminist literary scholarship, which began to thrive in the 1970s and 1980s, has mostly overlooked the women of German Expressionism.

The topic of women and Expressionism has several separate but related facets. Traditionally in feminist research on women in literature, there has been first the question of how women are portrayed. The emphasis in such analysis is primarily but not exclusively on the canonical male authors of a movement and their treatment of women characters or women's issues. Second, there is "recovery": the task of discovering the works of women authors, researching their biographies, and reconstructing their bibliographies. In particular, the scholarship of recovery focuses on determining the extent to which women authors participated in or influenced the literary movements they are associated with, and identifying the ways in which their writings resemble or differ from those of male authors, whose works in reality set the standards. Finally,

on the conceptual or theoretical level, the key question becomes: What do comparisons of the writings of male and female authors tell us about a particular literary movement, and how does the inclusion of works by women force us to significantly redefine, for example, such concepts as period, style, genre, aesthetic intent, characteristic themes and issues, or even “greatness”?

The bulk of scholarly work on women in Expressionism has confined itself to the first category, that is, the portrayal of female figures in Expressionist works largely by men. Christiane Schönfeld’s research, for example, focuses on the figure of the prostitute in Expressionist literature, while that of Jean Wotschke analyzes the prostitute’s obligatory complement in Expressionist thinking, the mother. My own previous work has concentrated on nonfiction discussions that appeared in Expressionist “little magazines” on the nature and appropriate role of women, and on the transformation of the Expressionist *Weib* (woman) into the New Woman of the twenties in dramas by erstwhile Expressionists Ernst Toller and Carl Zuckmayer. Maria Tatar’s groundbreaking study *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (1995) focuses on the extreme violence toward women portrayed in Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as well as in the visual art of Otto Dix and George Grosz. All three of these creative artists are popularly associated with the Weimar Republic, but each of them has roots in Expressionism and produced significant early works in the period from the First World War through the early twenties. Tatar argues that mutilation of the female body becomes a strategy used by male artists to manage social, political, and sexual anxieties. Similarly, art historian Beth Irwin Lewis refuses to view the portrayal of violated and dismembered women victims of sexual murder merely in aesthetic terms as experiments in imagery or composition, as other art historians traditionally have done. Instead, she insists on addressing misogyny directly, connecting it to the deep-seated anxiety about the role of women that male artists and intellectuals, despite their understanding of themselves as an enlightened avant-garde, shared with conservative and mainstream bourgeois contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> An outstanding essay by German art historian Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, “Frauenbilder Oskar Kokoschkas” (Oskar Kokoschka’s Images of Women), published in 1987, makes numerous connections among Kokoschka’s bloody visual images of women, his equally bloody Expressionist dramas, and his obsession with the battle between the sexes. But Hoffmann-Curtius’s essay has not inspired parallel efforts in literary scholarship.

The scholarship of recovery, that is, of finding and publishing the works of women authors, has lagged behind, and because of this the opportunities to compare portrayals of women by male and female writers—for differences in

perspective, for differing aesthetic sensibilities, for alternative visions of the Expressionist utopia—have necessarily lagged, as well. One happy exception to the rule is the work of Hartmut Vollmer, editor of a volume of poetry by Henriette Hardenberg (1991), an anthology of lyric poetry by thirty-nine Expressionist women poets (1993), and another anthology of Expressionist women's prose (1996).<sup>4</sup> In the foreword to his 1993 collection, "*In roten Schuhen tanzt die Sonne sich zu Tod*": *Lyrik expressionistischer Dichterinnen* ("In Red Shoes the Sun Dances Itself to Death": The Poetry of Female Expressionist Poets), Vollmer observes that Expressionism today is one of the most frequently and most thoroughly researched movements in German-language literature (15). Yet despite all the effort that has gone into the reprinting and interpretation of Expressionist literature, much remains to be done. Most notably, in Vollmer's view, there has been scarcely any attempt to collect and publish the works of *women* Expressionists; lacking that foundation, scholarly investigation into the light those works might shed on the movement as a whole has been inhibited.

Vollmer suggests that this lacuna may be the result of an impression that women writers of the movement were rare and anomalous phenomena (as, for example, Else Lasker-Schüler is often represented), or that they were merely the coffeehouse companions and lovers of male Expressionists. The neglect of women writers may well also be the result of the aggressively masculinist stance of the movement, a stance expressed not only in poetry, drama, and prose but also, and perhaps even more strongly, in the theoretical and social-critical writings of the movement (see Wright 1987). Since the inception of feminist literary scholarship in the 1970s, it has been primarily women in German Studies who have labored to recover the female presence in German literary history, and Expressionism has given the impression of being particularly barren and unwelcoming terrain for such endeavors. Thus for example Gisela Brinker-Gabler's acclaimed two-volume collection of essays, *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen* (German Literature by Women), contains several essays on women at the turn of the century and others on women writers of the Weimar period and beyond, but makes no mention of women Expressionists. Vollmer's publication of the collected works of poet Henriette Hardenberg in 1988 served to add her name to the short list of relatively well-known authors, such as Else Lasker-Schüler, Claire Goll, and Emmy Hennings,<sup>5</sup> who are readily associated with Expressionism. But at the same time, Hardenberg was received as an exception that proved the rule. In her review of the book, a critic from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Beatrice Eichmann-Leutenegger, writes that with this publication, Expressionism—"so arm an Vertreterinnen" (so poor in female repre-

sentatives) has finally gained “eine neue eigenwillige Nuance,” “eine neue, eine weibliche Dimension” (a new original nuance . . . a new female dimension; quoted in Vollmer 15).<sup>6</sup>

Yet Paul Raabe’s *Index Expressionismus* (Index of Expressionism), that extraordinary compilation of bibliographic information on the little magazines of the movement, lists the names of over *three hundred* women contributors. Many of them are represented by only a handful of entries; others such as Berta Lask, Mechtilde Lichnowsky, Ruth Schaumann, and Martina Wied pursued successful writing careers long after the end of the movement and are not identified primarily as Expressionists. Still others expressed their artistic creativity in a variety of media beyond poetry, working as dancers, singers, actresses, or artists and thus elude neat categorization. Like a number of their male counterparts, some also were politically active on behalf of the revolutionary workers’ movement (Vollmer 16). The editors of the two most influential Expressionist magazines, *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm*, were both assisted by talented women, yet today we have no detailed picture of the influence that Alexandra Pfemfert or Nell Walden exerted on the movement.<sup>7</sup> Obviously, raw material for extensive scholarship on women’s contributions to literary Expressionism is present, but the research itself remains to be done.

Given the meager amount of work that has been devoted to the recovery of women Expressionists, the scholarship of German Expressionism clearly lacks the texts necessary for a thorough comparison of male and female writers. Even more clearly, we lack the basis for the third and potentially most far-reaching facet of literary scholarship noted above, namely the task of reexamining our fundamental understanding of Expressionism in light of new information provided by research into women authors. This essay will suggest the dimensions of the challenge and provide a concrete example of what we might learn from a comparison of literature by male and female Expressionists. In the following section, the backgrounds for Expressionist thinking about women and portrayal of women will be sketched. A pivotal question, for a movement dedicated to the renewal of *die Menschheit* (humankind), is the extent to which men and women writers regard women as *Menschen* (human beings), as full participants in and contributors to the human community. This is contested ground, and the sources that Expressionists draw on—politically progressive neo-Kantianism, but also the thinking of Johann Jakob Bachofen, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Otto Weininger—are ambiguous in their assessments, leaving the door open to divergent interpretations by male and female writers.

In the third section of this essay, discussion will turn to a comparison of the poetry of male and female Expressionists as it appears in Kurt Pinthus’s

*Menschheitsdämmerung* (Dawn of Humanity) and Vollmer's *In roten Schuhen tanzt die Sonne sich zu Tod*, a comparison made possible by the publication in 1993 of Vollmer's anthology. The comparison only begins to tap into the possibilities for this kind of exercise, focusing as it does on fairly superficial characteristics of the poetry. Even so, the discrepancy between male and female Expressionists' views of women is striking and anticipates the gender conflicts of the 1920s between the New Woman and the "lost generation" of men. The "New Man" of Expressionism projects a vision of a "New Woman"—*das Weib* (the female)—who differs significantly from what women wish for themselves. These projections continue into the twenties, when a liberated, independent New Woman does emerge as a social and literary phenomenon, a woman who shares some but by no means all of the characteristics of the New Man's female ideal.

The concluding section of this essay will argue, finally, that in terms of portrayals of women and women's perspectives, the results of even this superficial comparison are suggestive and should inspire more extensive efforts: first in the recovery of women's work particularly in drama and prose, where social conflicts are likely to be more vividly portrayed than in lyric poetry; and second in the reexamination of our assumptions about German Expressionism as a literary and artistic movement. Many if not all Expressionists saw themselves not only as artistic revolutionaries but also as shapers of politics and social policy—and, indeed, of a utopian new reality—which raises the central question of the extent to which the views of male and female Expressionists are congruent or divergent, particularly in gender-related areas.

With a few notable exceptions, male Expressionists, despite their artistic innovativeness and infatuation with modernism, remain caught in traditional, stereotypical categories of binary thinking about the nature of masculinity and femininity, and this in turn colors both their representations of male and female figures and their views on social and political structures. Women Expressionists do not see themselves confined in those traditional categories; they blur boundaries and suggest tantalizing alternatives. By exploiting the vast potential for feminist scholarship on literary Expressionism, we can move those women's voices to the center of the conversation and help to keep Expressionism, its legacy and its lessons, a vital part of intellectual discourse.<sup>8</sup>

To achieve this, we must go back to the sources that shaped the Expressionist representation of women. German Expressionism shares in a modernist mission to strip off surface phenomena and distill things down to their abstract core elements, to express not outer appearance but inmost being. In doing so, paradoxically, it draws on a long cultural tradition for its understanding of

women and their nature, purpose, and role in human society. Because of this fundamental tension between modernity and tradition, Expressionism runs the risk of arriving not only at new and essential truths but also at hoary stereotypes, of not only blurring traditional boundaries but also of setting them back into place in a new guise.

Expressionist literature is strongly influenced by a range of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century philosophical currents. Foremost among them is neo-Kantianism, which shapes notions of the Expressionist “New Man” and by implication sets him apart from traditional men and women alike. Neo-Kantianism anticipates the Expressionist insistence that human *Geist* (spirit/intellect) and *Wille* (will) can transform empirical reality and social relations in ethically desirable ways. Expressionists, who view themselves not only as artistic but also to a large extent as social and political revolutionaries, take this position to an idealist extreme, however, scorning the controlling effects of feedback from empirical reality. The authors of Expressionist political manifestos and essays on social or political reform argue that if human consciousness—or *Geist*—confines itself to the highest and purest levels of reason and will, then the ensuing changes will necessarily be supremely ethical and desirable. But true, powerful *Geist* is possessed by only an elite few; it is embodied in *der neue Mensch* (The New Man; Wright 1987, 584–87).

The New Man of Expressionism is a contradictory and ambivalent creature, revolutionary yet caught up in a series of traditional dichotomies. He rejects “civilization” while embracing “culture” and thus becomes part of a long-standing and rather conservatively colored debate over Germany’s cultural status vis-à-vis other major European powers such as Britain and France. He rejects *Gesellschaft* (society) while embracing a *Gemeinschaft des Geistes* (spiritual-intellectual community), providing a variation on Ferdinand Tönnies’s analysis of modernity and joining the national nostalgia for lost community, yet he is irresistibly drawn to the iconic site of the *Gesellschaft*, to the modern metropolis, with all its freedom as well as ugliness, alienation, and human misery. He bitterly rejects the dominance of the bourgeois father while celebrating his own masculinity and power. He opposes religious orthodoxy and the authoritarianism of the state while embracing elitism and an aesthetic dogmatism. Not least of all, the extreme dualism that Expressionists derive from neo-Kantianism leads to a starkly binary—and very traditional—construction of the relationship between man and woman. Although Expressionists otherwise reject positivism and the empiricism of modern scientific research, they accept a form of biological determinism at least with regard to women, who become the receptacle for the physical and sexual qualities that

the New Man rejects as determinative in himself. The foundation of the Kantian ethical system is the imperative to treat the individual not as means but as his or her own end. However, its claims to a higher ethic notwithstanding, key documents of Expressionism repeatedly present woman as a means to the New Man's end, namely his development as an artist and/or social revolutionary.

Both in their understanding of women's nature and in their views of the German women's movement of the day, Expressionists thus stake out a basically traditional position; their innovation lies in reversing the values they attach to those quintessential female roles, mother and lover/prostitute, as set forth most clearly in the theoretical literature. Whereas the New Man is the bearer of *Geist* and *Wille*, women (with few exceptions, for instance Ernst Toller's female protagonists) are the embodiment of earth, nature, physicality, and carnality. In other words, women represent precisely the forces that the New Man must conquer if he is to create a new reality. While the New Man is in search of the essential, the core of truth and being, women specialize in illusion. Man is dynamic, conscious, fully human, charged with *Geist* and *Wille*; woman is static, unchanging, and unchangeable. The two forms of creation—female procreation, male creation—are in competition, but the male artist as creator trumps the woman as mother. In positioning themselves within the aesthetic context of their day, male Expressionists thus provide a highly gendered definition of their movement. They repeatedly assert the manliness, activism, and focus on essence or *das Wesen* that characterize Expressionism, in opposition to the alleged passivity and ornamental superficiality of art nouveau or impressionism. The aggressive *Schrei* (scream) of the Expressionist protagonist confronts the effeminate sentimentality of philistines.<sup>9</sup> In sum, the task of imposing Expressionist *Geist* on raw matter is a titanic and ongoing struggle, a relationship of eternal opposition that finds a ready metaphor in the struggle of men to exercise control over women (Wright 1987, 594–95).

The dualism that flows from neo-Kantianism reveals something about the Expressionist New Man, but woman remains elusive, a negation, not man, not *Geist*. To complete the Expressionist image of woman, other philosophical sources come into play. If the Expressionist construct of the New Man is largely inspired by neo-Kantianism, the understanding of woman is conditioned by other philosophical sources that include Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Otto Weininger (1880–1903). These influences further support a view of woman that is dualistic, built on traditional binary oppositions between male and female, and biologically determined. In this “eternal” view of woman, she is characterized largely through her carnality, sexuality, reproduction, and asso-



ciation with natural forces, in contrast to the New Man, who is identified through the force of his *Geist* and *Wille* and may engage in sexuality but never succumbs to the merely carnal.

Admittedly, Expressionist acceptance of these ideas is not complete or consistent. Opposition to bourgeois subjugation of women (a companion phenomenon to the oppression of the son by the father), to the bourgeois double standard of sexual morality, to bourgeois rigidity and intolerance—these positions also characterize German Expressionism. In their writings on society, male Expressionists support abortion, contraception, divorce, and sexual fulfillment for women. One finds as well male criticism of women who as mothers support the patriarchal leaders of Germany, push their sons into battle (Wotschke), and espouse an unthinking nationalism. One finds a fascination with the prostitute as the physical manifestation of something authentic and primitive that contemporary society has lost; her attractiveness functions as a threat to bourgeois society, and as an outcast she represents something wild and untamed in the artificial urban space (Schönfeld 1996, 1997). One finds further Ernst Toller's courageous female protagonists and, in the little magazines of the movement, male champions of the women's movement such as Franz Pfemfert, Erich Mühsam, and Alfred Kerr (Wright 1987, 591–94). But ultimately, more conventional convictions outweigh the progressive aspects in mainstream Expressionist thinking about women.

One of the most important influences on perceptions of women and notions of gender relations in Wilhelminian Germany was Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–87), the Swiss professor of Roman law, scholar of Greco-Roman antiquity, and historian of culture. Bachofen's most significant work is *Das Mutterrecht* (Matriarchal Law, 1861); he achieved his greatest impact posthumously, however, in the 1910s and again in the 1920s, when *Mutterrecht und Urreligion* (Matriarchal Law and Primal Religion), a selection of his writings, was edited and published by Rudolf Marx in 1926. Bachofen was rediscovered, as Joseph Campbell points out, not by historians or anthropologists, who had come to reject his theories, but by a circle of creative artists and literary people in the group around the poet Stefan George (Bachofen xxv).<sup>10</sup>

Bachofen postulated two orders of matriarchal law: first the hetaeristaphroditic, which he associated with a primitive, nomadic existence based on hunting and gathering; and the later matrimonial-demetrician form, associated with early agriculture. In the first or "tellurian" stage, motherhood exists without marriage, without agriculture, and with nothing resembling a state; then in the "lunar" stage conjugal motherhood and legitimate birth appear within settled communities; in the "solar" period, finally, there emerges the patriarchal law or

privilege of the conjugal father, a division of labor, and individual ownership. Bachofen reflects a Hegelian belief in progress and evolution as he traces an ascent from the crudely sensuous—that is, tellurian matriarchy—to spiritually pure and elevated Apollonian patriarchy. Social and cultural progress requires the male to triumph over matriarchy, but Bachofen also acknowledges the generative power of the female, the civilizing influence of marriage, and the importance of nurturing and protective qualities of the mother as precursors of justice and civil rights.

Bachofen's theories anticipate much of German Expressionism's view of women and of gender relations, which are centered upon an acknowledgment of the female's awesome power and, at the same time, the male's need to triumph over her. His theories foreshadow Expressionism's fascination with the hetaera or prostitute and the compulsion to overcome her and the physical world, the world of sex, lust, and matter, if the New Man is to fulfill his cultural mission. In this context the Expressionist response to women and the "woman question" appears as a kind of telescoping and replaying of 5,000 years of male/female relations, as described by Bachofen, into a few short years of artistic and literary ferment, characterized by a defiant return to the hetaera and sexual promiscuity, a celebration of the mother—in her primordial, not her bourgeois role—and a reduction of women to these two basic roles, accompanied by awe at the power of sexual desire and of mother love, but also by violent reassertion of male dominance, this time in a "new world" of *Geist* and *Wille* over mundane political or economic reality.<sup>11</sup>

In the view of legal historian Roy Garré, Bachofen's work can be viewed as a contribution to conservative thinking of the time. But Bachofen also sees cultural history as progress to ever higher levels of development. It is in this sense, in his *Origins of the Family*, that Friedrich Engels uses Bachofen's work on maternal rights in early human societies for revolutionary purposes. Expressionism, too, attracts adherents who subsequently move to the political right as well as left. Bachofen advocates a return to ancient simplicity and spiritual health that seems almost to prefigure Expressionist painters' search for simplicity and renewal, a search they enact in their outings to the beach or lakeside in paintings of naked figures frolicking in natural landscapes. Most importantly, however, Bachofen's thinking gives a radically new perspective on the sexual and marital relations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. By presenting these relations as historically determined and variable rather than divinely ordained and immutable, Bachofen's work invites an interrogation of Wilhelminian mores, the double standard, and alternative sexual relations.

Friedrich Nietzsche became a frequent guest in the Bachofen home upon his arrival in Basel in 1869 as a newly appointed professor of classical philology. Like Bachofen, Nietzsche saw history as a dialectical progression. In his view, the key conflict lay between the forces of disease, weakness, and life-resentment versus manly courage and affirmation of life. Bachofen had written that the physical aspect of human existence, enacted in maternity, is the only thing man shares with the animals; the paternal-spiritual principle belongs to him alone. Nietzsche subsequently often equates women with animals, describes male/female relations almost exclusively in terms of a struggle for dominance, and regards the fulfillment of masculine potential as requiring liberation from the pull of women, along with the pull of conventional piety and the community, or in his phrase "the herd." In his writings Nietzsche, like many later Expressionists, emphasizes the central importance to exercise will, and the importance of myth, embodied in poetry, as a means to capture the deepest truths of human existence.

Nietzsche's writings are rife with mocking references to women not only as animals but also as dangerous playthings, born slaves, purveyors of illusion, religious fanatics, and representatives of a realm of darkness against which he contrasts the masculine world of daylight and rationality. Like Bachofen, Nietzsche sees two roles for women: either as mother bearing robust offspring or the hetaera of Greek antiquity.<sup>12</sup> But in contrast to Bachofen, Nietzsche values both roles negatively: the mother becomes identified with the hated bourgeoisie and Christianity, while the hetaera is ambiguous. She presents both the weakness of male sexual desire and the opportunity for agon, for reassertion of male dominance against all the seductiveness of the feminine. Woman, who is identified with the life force and viewed positively by Bachofen as a creator of culture and thus a worthy partner/antagonist of man, becomes for Nietzsche the quintessential herd animal, the simultaneously fearsome and unworthy antagonist. This is a core component of Nietzsche's transvaluation of values.

Several similarities with dominant Expressionist views of women emerge here, along with differences. Like Nietzsche, Expressionists are fascinated by the feminine and acknowledge the feminine, whether for good or ill, as a source of enormous power. They feel the need to assert themselves in relation to this power, toward which they, like Nietzsche, feel great ambivalence: both attraction and repulsion. Raised in a household of, as he saw it, repressively pious women, Nietzsche blames women for much of what he hates in German bourgeois society; Expressionists reject the institution of the bourgeois family but direct their overt anger at the father, generally viewing the mother as at best a helpmate and at times even as a fellow victim of the father. For Nietzsche, the

attack on women is merely part of a larger attack on all things sacred or canonical, including God, absolute truth, conventional morality, German nationalism, democracy, and a host of other values. Nietzsche's "herd animal," the individual who has no higher ambitions and seeks above all security and the comfort of conformity, sounds much like the bourgeois philistine Expressionists love to pillory. Like Nietzsche before them, the Expressionists are deeply dissatisfied with modern European culture, decry the positivist privileging of science, empiricism, and theory over art or myth, the reduction of the human being to a biological creature, and the loss of a higher, truer calling in life. Like Bachofen before him, Nietzsche calls contemporary sexual mores and gender relations into question, arguing that the prevailing situation inhibits cultural progress. For Nietzsche and even more for mainstream Expressionism, the relationship with women is a primary locus for the inevitable conflict and struggle for dominance that characterize the (male) human life of higher purpose and the evolution of culture to a higher level. Nietzsche's extremes of femininity (*das Weib*, the female) and masculinity (*der Übermensch*, superman) reappear in Expressionism as *das Weib* and *der Mensch*. Expressionism's contribution lies in the aesthetic novelty of its formulation of these views.

Otto Weininger, the son of an assimilated middle-class Jewish family, was born in Vienna in 1880 and took his own life there in 1903, only months after completing his doctoral dissertation, which was revised and published the same year under the title *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Sex and Character). The dissertation perplexed and alienated his advisors; his suicide, however, sensationalized the work, which subsequently was discussed at length in bourgeois as well as avant-garde and Expressionist publications and had gone through twenty-eight editions by the end of the 1920s (Heckmann 114). He received a letter of thanks from August Strindberg for solving the "problem of the sexes," was later described by Adolf Hitler as "the only honorable Jew" he'd ever known (Anderson 433), and Ursula Heckmann argues persuasively that he was a major influence on the poet Georg Trakl. It seems reasonable to assume that Weininger influenced other Expressionists beyond Trakl, and that his ideas were an integral part of the cultural context, well known during the period from about 1910 to 1930 even to those who had never actually read *Geschlecht und Charakter*. Though Weininger's ideas appear outrageous today, in his own day he fascinated "so feine Geister wie Karl Kraus, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hermann Broch, Heimito von Doderer e tutti quanti" (such fine minds as . . . ; quoted in Anderson 433). Others attracted to his work include Ludwig von Ficker, editor of the influential *Brenner*, Adolf Loos, Arnold Schönberg, and Alban Berg (Heckmann 121). Carl Dallago pronounced Weininger's work "das tiefste phi-

losophische Werk . . . das je über das Weib geschrieben wurde" (the most profound philosophical work . . . ever written about the female; Heckmann 132).

Born like the majority of Expressionists, in the decade of the 1880s, Weininger believes the turmoil of his age is rooted in the relationship between the sexes. Like the Expressionists in search of artistic or literary basics, he seeks philosophical fundamentals and finds them in a theory of the sexes that is strongly essentialist and dualistic. He posits two absolute or ideal types, Male and Female, ascribing spiritual and ethical qualities to maleness while arguing that femaleness is entirely dominated by the sex drive and thus incapable of intellectual activity, morality, or creative endeavor. If sexuality is the whole reason for woman's being and the erotic power of women seduces and thereby degrades men, it follows that man is locked in an eternal struggle with sexuality and therefore with woman. To remain true to his higher calling, man must defend himself, and the inevitable result is emphatic assertion of male claims to dominance and patriarchal relations. Whether the seductress is a hetaera or a (potential) mother is secondary; both are exponents of the W principle, Woman.

By extending Nietzsche's thinking and linking motherhood with sexuality in this way, Weininger undermines the tradition that reveres the mother while reviling the sexually active woman; instead of polar opposites, Weininger sees no fundamental difference: "Die Eignung und der Hang zum Dirnentum ebenso wie die Anlage zur Mutterschaft' (ist) in jeder Frau 'organisch, von der Geburt an vorhanden. . . . Es gibt sicherlich kein Weib ohne alle Dirneninstinkte,' ebenso wie sich keine Frau finden lasse, die 'aller mütterlichen Regnungen bar wäre'" (The aptitude and inclination to prostitution, like the disposition to motherhood [is] organically present within each woman from birth on. . . . There is most certainly no woman entirely without whoring instincts, just as no woman can be found who entirely lacks all maternal impulses; quoted in Heckmann 76). Indeed, in a reversal of conventional moral judgment that anticipates Expressionism, Weininger seems to ascribe a higher moral position to the prostitute, who is at least honest about the basis of her existence; the mother, conversely, may be more reprehensible precisely because she produces new life and thus perpetuates the cycle of reproduction, death, and decay (Heckmann 90–91). Like Nietzsche, Weininger argues that while man embodies intellect, consciousness, and soul, woman is soulless matter; furthermore, as "Sklavin des Sexuellen im Manne" (slave to the sexual in man; quoted in Heckmann 95) she is dependent on man even for her sexual power.

Weininger's work is a response to the gender anxiety of his day in the wake of women's demands for access to education, work, and civil rights. Like

the Expressionists, Weininger is dismayed by changes in conventional social roles; his solution is to transcend gender tensions by eradicating sexual difference and postulating a “utopia” based on pure masculinity in which relations between the sexes have been replaced by the dominance of his ethical ideal M, an isolated and absolute male who, like Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, has fore-sworn sexuality and procreation. Like many others—August Strindberg, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, Frank Wedekind, and Alfred Döblin spring to mind—he fears female sexuality and aims to annihilate it philosophically, if not with a knife.

Weininger shares many convictions with mainstream Expressionism. However, differences also emerge between Weininger’s thought and the theoretical positions of Expressionism. Weininger wishes to overcome sexual difference by eradicating sexuality, but this position is too extreme for the Expressionists, who propose instead a kind of quarantine of the sexual within women, who will live exclusively in and through their sexuality so that men may be freed from it—but visit only occasionally. Whereas Weininger sees the possibility of women overcoming their own W traits by renouncing their sexuality, this alternative is notable by its absence from Expressionist writings, theoretical or literary. Weininger’s views on the impurity of sex put him in the orbit of the German moral purity movement (Anderson 443), whereas Expressionists, in a spirit of bohemian license, embrace sexual freedom. However, male Expressionists approach sexuality with ambivalence: it is not simply pleasure; rather it represents a struggle that must be played out repeatedly in order to reassert dominance and male identity. Weininger’s arguments ultimately lead to a position Expressionists do not share. For him, emancipation is emancipation *from* femaleness for *both* sexes, whereas for Expressionists, emancipation follows distinct gender lines: emancipation for women is emancipation *to* complete identification with their female sexual functions, so that man is free to become an exponent of pure *Geist* (Wright 1987). On balance, Weininger’s remedy for the cultural malaise of his era is not identical with the Expressionist solution, but it is clearly a not-so-distant cousin. While Heckmann argues that the close relationship between Georg Trakl’s poetry and Weininger’s thought makes Trakl more an exponent of Viennese aestheticism than of Expressionism (14–15), the argument can just as easily be turned around. That is, the presence of Weininger’s influence can be taken as a characteristic not merely of Trakl but of Expressionism more generally, especially when comparing the lyric poetry of men and women Expressionists and their differing idioms.

In turning from a discussion of philosophical sources to Expressionist works themselves, it makes sense to ask whether gender-related aspects of the

legacy receive different interpretations from male and female authors. But comparisons are difficult, since little of the work of women Expressionists has been collected and published. A pioneering exception is Hartmut Vollmer's 1992 volume of women's Expressionist poetry *In roten Schuhen tanzt die Sonne sich zu Tod*, which lends itself to comparison with Kurt Pinthus's *Menschheitsdämmerung*, the ultimately canonical collection of Expressionist poetry that appeared in 1919, sold briskly, and had reached a circulation of twenty thousand by the time of its 1922 reprinting (Pinthus 33).

As "die beste" (the best), "die repräsentativste" (the most representative), and "die klassische Anthologie des Expressionismus" (the classical anthology of Expressionism; Pinthus 7) *Menschheitsdämmerung* provides a useful comparison to Vollmer's anthology.<sup>13</sup> *Menschheitsdämmerung* includes 276 poems by twenty-three authors. Of these authors, only one, Else Lasker-Schüler, is a woman, and of the 276 poems, fifteen are by her. Pinthus points out in the original introduction that while some may object that two poets, Lasker-Schüler and Theodor Däubler (both born in 1876), do not belong to the young Expressionist generation (with birthdays clustering around 1885), he has included them because they embody core qualities of Expressionism: Lasker-Schüler "läßt als erste den Menschen ganz Herz sein—und dehnt dennoch das Herz bis zu den Sternen" (*MHD* 25, is the first to allow humans to be all heart—to expand nonetheless the heart up to the stars, *DoH* 30). In other words, although Lasker-Schüler has been included, the "typical" Expressionists are all men.

*Menschheitsdämmerung* is not organized around particular authors or readily recognized themes. Instead, Pinthus creates four "horizontal" categories: "Sturz und Schrei" (Crash and Cry), "Erweckung des Herzens" (Awakening of the Heart), "Aufruf und Empörung" (Call to Action and Revolt), and "Liebe den Menschen" (Love for Human Beings). Within these divisions, which function like the movements of an orchestral composition, the poems express motifs that intertwine in what Pinthus describes as a dynamic symphony. This poetic symphony is designed to express an inner action, one that moves from outrage in *fortissimo* through the *andante* of doubt and despair and the *furioso* of rebellion, finally resolving with the *moderato* of the awakening heart, the *maestoso* of a loving humanity (*MHD* 22–23; *DoH* 28). In the introduction of 1919, Pinthus emphasizes the Expressionist project to create a new, more noble, more humane human being. He declares famously, "Alle Gedichte dieses Buches entquellen der Klage um die Menschheit, der Sehnsucht nach der Menschheit. Der Mensch schlechthin, nicht seine privaten Angelegenheiten und Gefühle, sondern die Menschheit, das ist das eigentlich unendliche

Thema" (MHD 25; All the poems in this book spring from the lament over humanity, the desire for humanity. Simply the human, not [his] private affairs and feelings, but rather humanity, that is actually the infinite theme, DoH 30). Out of the new human being is to emerge a new world (MHD 27; DoH 32), one with kindness, justice, comradeship, and love for all (MHD 28; DoH 33), made possible through the "Macht des menschlichen Geistes, der Idee" (MHD 30; power of the human spirit, the idea, DoH 35). It is in this context that Lasker-Schüler's poetry of the "heart" sounds its note. Pinthus and other Expressionists reject the scientific rationality of the fathers, but they embrace the new "idea." They scorn the sentimentality of the bourgeoisie but adopt a heroic emotionalism of their own, one that transcends the individual to include all humanity. The goal is a synthesis, an "unisono der Herzen und Gehirne" (MHD 22; harmony of hearts and minds, DoH 28).

Pinthus's use of the metaphor "Humanitätsmelodie" (MHD 14; melody of humanity, DoH 18) for his collection is qualified, however, by the dominant Expressionist practice of distinguishing between *Mensch*—or "human being"—and *Weib* (woman). Pinthus never defines what he means exactly by *Menschheit* (humanity), but it is not difficult to infer that he and the poets of the collection assume a community of men. In the closing passage of the 1919 introduction, Pinthus begins his coda-like charge to younger readers with the words: "Ihr Jünglinge aber, die Ihr in freier Menschheit heranwachsen werdet . . ." (MHD 31; you young men, however, who will grow up in a freer humanity, DoH 37),<sup>14</sup> and there is frequent use of the words *Bruder* (brother) and *Brüderlichkeit* (fraternity) both in the introduction and in the numerous poems that express anguish, hope, rebellion, or a sense of solidarity.

The invocations of *Menschheit* scattered throughout the collection reach a crescendo in the sections "Aufruf und Empörung" and "Liebe den Menschen." As a transition from the section "Erweckung des Herzens," Franz Werfel's "Ich bin ja noch ein Kind" (MHD 208–9; I am still a child, DoH 233–35) lists the suffering of humans and beasts alike but asserts the existence of God coursing through all creation and proclaims "Wir sind" (We are). In this poem women figure as *Hure* (whore), *Weib* (female), *Mutter* (mother), and *Mädchen* (girl) as well as, curiously enough, *Kaiserin* (queen, female Kaiser). As the section "Aufruf und Empörung" opens, the famous Hasenclever poem "Der politische Dichter" (MHD 213–16; The Political Poet, DoH 237–40) depicts the titanic struggle of the poet, the "Freiheitskämpfer" (freedom fighter) against the "Herrscher" (ruler); of the "Jünglinge" (young men) against the fathers. Women in the role of passive and violated victims form the backdrop for this struggle: "Zerstampfte Frauen hinter Läden weinen" (trampled women



cry behind shutters) while “auf weiße Mädchen fällt das nackte Vieh” (the naked beasts fall upon white-faced girls) with obvious sexual implications. Similarly, Karl Otten addresses “die Menschheit,” invoking a “Blutorkan” (bloody hurricane) of eroticized suffering and including women as “Sirenen” (sirens), “Gebärdende” (birthers), and “Zeugende” (reproducers) before inciting workers to rebel against the inhuman treatment accorded them and “their” women and children (227–30). Paul Zech’s “Neue Bergpredigt” (New Sermon on the Mount, 230–33) appeals to fallen women, “Töchter der Magdalena” (daughters of Mary Magdalen, 230), and to “Mütter fruchtbar ohne Sinn” (mothers senselessly fertile, 231), as well as to men.

Johannes R. Becher’s “Mensch stehe auf” (*MHD* 253–58; Human Being Rise, *DoH* 276–80) exhorts a male audience, with passing references to “Babels Hure und Verfall” (Babylon’s whore and ruin) on the one hand, and to “schwängere Eselinnen” (pregnant donkeys) on the other, that may at last find rest when the revolution succeeds. Similarly, Alfred Wolfenstein’s “Guter Kampf” (*MHD* 259–62; The Good Fight, *DoH* 281–84) will be waged, among other ends, for the sake of the “Mädchen in des Prinzipals Kabinett, an seinen Schoß gefesselt wie ein Brett” (girl tied like a board / To the boss’s lap in his private room), for the sake of tired mothers and “der Liebe Frau” (261; lady of love, 284). More eroticized revolutionary violence appears in Becher’s “Eroica” (*MHD* 265–67; *DoH* 288–91) where “Jäh aus Riesen-Phallus schoß Lava-Samen kataraktisch in mein Blut” (*MHD* 265; Abruptly out of a gigantic phallus lava-seeds shot like a cataract into my blood, *DoH* 289), and where he as visionary poet-revolutionary becomes the “Visionenschwangerer Stier” (*MHD* 266; bull pregnant with visions, *DoH* 289). Ludwig Rubiner’s “Der Mensch” (*MHD* 273–74; The Human Being, *DoH* 297–98) is characterized by “das Denken” (*MHD* 273; thinking, *DoH* 297) in entirely male terms. The poems in the final section praise *Brüderlichkeit* (fraternity) and *Freundschaft* (friendship), again with women and girls, mothers and prostitutes providing the backdrop and adoring audience for male rescue. In contrast, Else Lasker-Schüler’s vision of “Mein Volk” (*MHD* 269; My People, *DoH* 293) is completely gender-neutral (269).

In the anthology the most frequent term for women is the derogatory *Weib* (female), followed by *Mädchen* (girl), with the more standard *Frau* running a distant third. References to *Huren* (whores) and *Mütter* (mothers) also occur frequently, and the most frequent female activities are *Gebären* (birthing), suffering, and lamenting. In the majority of poems in which women figure at all, they appear as scenery, part of the stage setting for the poem’s message, listed in long enumerations of phenomena that characterize the metropolis, war, or

rebellion.<sup>15</sup> Thus, for example, Wilhelm Klemm describes “Meine Zeit” (*MHD* 40; My Age, *DoH* 62–63) as consisting of “Gesang und Riesenstädte, Traumlawinen, / Verblaßte Länder, Pole ohne Ruhm, / Die sündigen Weiber, Not und Heldentum, / Gespensterbrauen, Sturm auf Eisenschienen” (Song and giant cities, dream-avalanches, / Faded lands, poles without glory, / The sinful women, perils and heroism, / Spectral brewings, storm on iron rails);<sup>16</sup> and in “Der Dichter und der Krieg” (The Poet and the War) Albert Ehrenstein sighs, “Müde bin ich der trostlosen Furten, / des Überschreitens der Gewässer, Mädchen und Straßen” (*MHD* 88; I am weary of the bleak fords, / Of the crossing of streams, girls, and streets, *DoH* 111).<sup>17</sup> Violence perpetrated against women, too, is a matter-of-fact part of this backdrop. Thus, Johannes R. Becher’s poem “Berlin” (*MHD* 43–45; *DoH* 66–68) mentions not only bright lights, noise, and speeding trains but also the fact that “Auf Winkeltreppe ward ein Mädchen wüst zerstoßen” (44; On back stairs a girl was stabbed brutally, 67) while elsewhere loiter “Huren mit den ausgefransten Fressen” (44; whores with frayed mugs, 67). In Jakob van Hoddiss’s poem “Der Todesengel” (*MHD* 103–4; Angel of Death, *DoH* 126–27) a *Mädchen* suffers sacrificial death in the midst of exotic and bloody ceremonies that celebrate the union of the Angel of Death with the unresisting bride. If women are not treated cavalierly, they threaten *Geist*, and as Walter Hasenclever argues in his poem “Kehr Mir Zurück, Mein Geist” (*MHD* 130; Come Back to Me, My Reason, *DoH* 152) the connection to *Geist* requires protection at all costs: “Wenn je dich ein Genuß verzehrt, den tote! Verkauf dein Weib, du wirst es überstehn” (Kill what brings you pleasure before it can consume you! / Sell your woman, you will get over it). Similarly, in “D-Zug” (*MHD* 130–31; Express Train, *DoH* 152–53) Gottfried Benn underscores the insignificance of women with the comment: “Eine Frau ist etwas für eine Nacht” (*MHD* 130; A woman is something for one night, *DoH* 153).

Such casual brutality is not entirely typical, however, and it does not preclude some exceptions. Ernst Stadler, for example, paints a sympathetic picture of poor shopgirls pouring into the streets to meet their lovers at closing time (*MHD* 47–48; Closing Time, *DoH* 71), and Paul Zech describes the miserable plight of “Sortiermädchen” (*MHD* 55–56; Sorting Girls, *DoH* 78–79). Walter Hasenclever has an uncharacteristically tender poem “Auf den Tod einer Frau” (*MHD* 318; On the Death of a Woman, *DoH* 344), and Georg Heym’s haunting “Ophelia” (*MHD* 107–8; *DoH* 130–31) describes a woman’s body drifting downstream, past urban and rural landscapes, exhibiting in death a peacefulness that contrasts with the noise and the bustle of the city. But Ophelia is a classic victim of male jealousy and violence, and the implication may be that

the man who killed her has done her a favor. Ivan Goll's magnificent poem "Noemi" (*MHD* 270–73; *DoH* 293–97) presents the biblical figure, abstracted from her story in the book of Ruth, as daughter of the Jewish people but beyond that as an ur-ancestor of all humanity and a symbol of rebirth out of catastrophe. Franz Werfel's "Hekuba" (*MHD* 1354; *DoH* 157–58) as "elendste der Mütter" (most wretched of all mothers) shares a bond with "Mütter" (mothers) and "junge Weiber" (young women) through the ages. However, relatively few poems in the collection make a female figure the focus of the poem rather than a prop. The reader encounters the first such poem, which is by Else Lasker-Schüler ("Meine Mutter," *MHD* 103; My Mother, *DoH* 126), a full one hundred pages into the collection.<sup>18</sup>

Most remarkable, perhaps, is Johannes R. Becher's painful tribute to the assassinated Rosa Luxemburg. A Polish-Jewish expatriate who studied in Basel before settling in Germany, Luxemburg was one of the most highly educated women in Europe, a prolific writer on national economy and Marxist theory and a leading activist in the German Socialist movement. She never married or had children, but fellow activist Leo Jogiches and she were lovers for many years. She and Karl Liebknecht were assassinated in January 1919. Becher's tribute (*MHD* 285–87; Hymn to Rosa Luxemburg, *DoH* 308–10) addresses Luxemburg in ecstatic but grotesquely incommensurate terms: "Du Heilige! O Weib!—" (285; You holy one! O woman! 308) using such imagery as "dein Kuß" (your kiss), "milde Milch" (mild milk), and "reine jungfrauweiße Taube Glaubens-Saft" (pure virgin-white / Dove faith-sap). In addition to the Christian imagery of Marian virginity and the poet's vision of her violated body being taken "vom Kreuz" (287; from the cross, 310) the poem invokes pagan symbolism of feminine mystery ("sibyllinische Mütter" 286; sibylline mothers, 309) and fertility ("Acker-Furche bergend sichere Saat," 286; field-furrow sheltering safe seed, 309) and offers a bizarre example of the manner by which the complexity of a real woman's existence is tied to the Procrustean bed of Expressionist abstractions about women.

Compared to theoretical essays in the journals of the movement (Wright 1987), in the poetry of *Menschheitsdämmerung* hostility toward women is muted, but the treatment of women is still characterized by familiar assumptions and clichés. Though expression has mutated into more modern, more starkly abstract, and therefore seemingly new forms, the underlying assumptions remain deeply traditional with regard to women's purposes, roles, and limitations. When Expressionism rebels against such inventions of modernity as science, technology, statistics, trade, and industry (*MHD* 26; *DoH* 31), feminism, to most Expressionists, is just another item on that list, one of the many

manifestations of a society that has lost its grounding in eternal verities such as the *Wesen* (essence) of male and female.<sup>19</sup> Kurt Pinthus describes Expressionism's drive toward abstraction as a quest for "nicht das Individuelle, sondern das allen Menschen Gemeinsame . . . das Einende, nicht die Wirklichkeit, sondern der Geist" (*MHD* 28; not the individual, but rather for what is common to all humanity . . . the unifying, not the reality, but rather the spirit, *DoH* 33). But in seeking such all-encompassing, abstract universals, Expressionism runs the risk of ignoring the very distinctions and nuances out of which genuine alternatives might evolve. The mere fact that male Expressionists often view the prostitute with sympathy and celebrate her defiance of bourgeois sexual mores, her suffering, and her supposedly authentic sexual instincts (see Schönfeld) does not vitiate the argument that the majority of male Expressionists view women mainly in terms of sexual function (Wright 1987).

Pinthus's *Menschheitsdämmerung* enjoys singular status as the publication that presented Expressionism in literature to a wider audience and in effect defined the Expressionist canon just as the movement began to wane. With his own anthology of poetry by women authors, *In roten Schuhen tanzt die Sonne sich zu Tod*, Hartmut Vollmer has done yeoman's service by creating a kind of companion piece to Pinthus's collection. Vollmer's volume, the first of its kind, includes the work of thirty-nine women poets who wrote and published in the Expressionist style. In the introduction, he argues that the large number of authors represented may surprise readers. Most of these poets are entirely forgotten today, the most basic information about their lives seemingly impossible to reconstruct. Nevertheless, the biographical sketches and bibliographies at the end of the volume provide a significant amount of information and can serve as points of departure for further research. The poems—more than 150 of them—are arranged in five sections reminiscent of *Menschheitsdämmerung*: "Der Mensch ist tot" (Man is dead); "Ich bin das Gelächter der schlaflosen Stadt" (I am the laughter of the sleepless city); "Ich lebe meinen Traum in ewigen Zeiten" (I live my dream in eternal times); "Die Dunkelheit frißt mich mit Raubtierzähnen" (The darkness devours me with predator's teeth) and "Ich sehe dein Herz sternchen" (I see your heart star). In each, familiar Expressionist themes intertwine: war, the modern metropolis, dreams, pain, love, and hope for a better world.

As Vollmer points out in the introduction, it was difficult in any case for women writers to establish themselves in the literary market of the early twentieth century, and the Expressionist milieu did not make things any easier. In the day-to-day dramas enacted in artists' cafés, talented women such as Else Lasker-Schüler, Emmy Hennings, and Claire Goll played supporting roles. The

biographies of Vollmer's contributors reveal many close ties to male writers of the movement. Thus Else Lasker-Schüler, for example, had relationships with Herwarth Walden, Gottfried Benn, Georg Trakl, Peter Baum, Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele, and others. Henriette Hardenberg was close to Richard Oehring, Alfred Wolfenstein, and Johannes R. Becher. Emmy Hennings was paired at various times with Becher, Ferdinand Hardekopf, and Hugo Ball. Claire and Ivan Goll are one of the movement's best-known couples, and Herwarth Walden married Nell Walden after divorcing Else Lasker-Schüler. Vollmer reports numerous dedications of works by one partner to another, suggesting that the relationships provided much poetic inspiration. Nevertheless, their literary templates for women "als angebetete und verwunschene Projektionen der Sehnsucht und Verzweiflung, als Muse, Dämonin, Geliebte, Gefährtin, Schwester, Mutter, Heilige und Dirne" (as exalted and execrated projections of desire and despair, as muse, demon, lover, companion, sister, mother, saint, and whore, 17) seem more compelling for male Expressionists than their experience with real women colleagues.

Women writers share many of their male colleagues' artistic and political goals. They do not shrink from engagement; they call for an end to bourgeois hypocrisy and the sexual double standard; they are equally committed to a new humanity or *Menschheit*; they too long for love and life, and they share the horror at the death and destruction brought on by the First World War; they condemn the war, and do not see women as blameless. But mixed in with these common themes is also the call for equality and an end to the limitations that society and culture impose on women. Claire Goll is particularly passionate in linking the oppression of women to the horrors of war and showing how women's emancipation and full participation in public life is the world's best hope for an end to the violence of war:

Der schmachvolle Zusammenbruch der von Männern geführten Völker müßte uns endlich lehren, die Welt unter einem andern Gesichtswinkel als dem männlichen zu sehen. . . . Wir . . . die wir nie mitspielen durften auf der Bühne der Welt! Wann werden wir endlich nicht mehr Chor sein, der klagt, sondern einzeln auftreten im Leben? Wie lange wollen wir uns noch zurückdrängen lassen von den eiteln, brutalen Mimen der Gewalt? Wo bleibt *unsere* Revolution? (quoted in Vollmer 21)<sup>20</sup>

[The ignominious collapse of societies led by men should teach us at last to see the world from another point of view than the masculine one. . . .

We who have never been allowed to play a role on the world's stage!  
When will we finally no longer be the chorus that laments, but rather  
individual actors in life? How long will we allow ourselves to be sup-  
pressed by the vain and brutal mimes of power? Where is *our*  
revolution?]

Vollmer argues that the typically Expressionist devices used by male and female poets make it difficult to recognize sex-specific characteristics in this writing. He warns that it is problematic to regard the preference of the women poets for particular themes, motifs, or metaphors as typically feminine, since they can all be found in the works of men as well. A poem from the collection that makes this point emphatically is Erna Kröner's "Der Zug" (The Train, 64), which captures the jarring experience of modern transportation using images of the fragmented body in an ironic and darkly humorous fashion, reminding the reader simultaneously of Jakob van Hoddis's "Weltende" (*MHD* 39; End of the World, *DoH* 61) and Ernst Stadler's "Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht" (*MHD* 179; Ride across the Cologne Rhine Bridge at Night, *DoH* 202-3):

Meine Beine rollen sich geschwind am Rücken hinauf,  
Bis ich hupp, hupp wie ein Ventilator mich um meine  
Ohrmuschel drehe.  
Gott sei Dank! Endlich rennt das Licht hinunter auf den  
Schienen.  
Meine Hüften trennen sich erlöst von den Rippen  
Und meine Augen hängen sich an eine starke Telegraphenstange.  
Da trabt ein alter Mann vorbei.  
Über die Schulter zieht ihm der lila Strick  
Ein höhnisch grinsendes Maul in die Jacke.

[My legs roll rapidly up my back  
Till I turn like a fan hop, hop around my ear conch.  
Thank God! Finally the light runs after me on the tracks.  
My hips separate themselves with relief from my ribs.  
And my eyes hang onto a strong telegraph pole.  
There goes an old man trotting by.  
A purple cord over his shoulder pulls  
A disdainfully grinning face into his jacket.]

What is truly striking in turning from *Menschheitsdämmerung* to *In roten Schuhen* is the shift to a female *perspective* that Vollmer notes in his introduction but does not explain more fully. If we look more closely at the poems and specify more precisely how these differences in perspective are manifested, it leads to novel observations about women Expressionists' views on *Menschheit*, the roles women can play as members of the human race, and their experience of *Geist* (intellect, spirit), or transcendence. In short, the female perspective expands and enriches our notion of the extent and limits of Expressionism.

This shift in perspective appears most dramatically in the treatment of stock female characters such as the *Dirne*, or prostitute. In *Menschheitsdämmerung* the prostitute tends to function primarily as a requisite part of the cityscape, perhaps sinful, demonic, and threatening, or diseased and repulsive, but in any case merely one element in long enumerations; in the women's poems the prostitute appears far less frequently and then the portrayal is less formulaic and more personalized and empathetic. In Paula Ludwig's "Die Buhlerin" (Lover), for example, the first-person lyrical voice identifies with the primitive power of animals: "In meinen Füßen hat sich die Schlange verbissen / . . . das Herz zwitschernder Vögel / Ich atme im Stöhnen des Tiers" (the snake has sunk its teeth into my feet / . . . the heart of twittering birds / I breathe with the groaning of a beast) and then universalizes her experience to include not just *Menschheit* but all beings: "Es gibt kein Wesen, das sich mir verschlüsse / . . . Und ich verströme in allen" (There is no being that is closed to me / . . . and I stream into all, 75). On a related note, in Martina Wied's "Die Dirne" (The Whore) the prostitute serves not as passive backdrop but as active and powerful agent, the made-up face merely a mask behind which lurks a sinuous panther on the prowl for prey. Or the prostitute may be portrayed with sympathy. Emmy Hennings's "Nach dem Cabaret" (After the Cabaret, 59) notes a series of human figures in the early morning hours: children, peasants on their way to market, churchgoers, then devotes the culminating lines of the poem to a prostitute who "irrt noch umher, übernächtig und kalt" (still wanders about, unkempt and cold). In Trude Bernhard's "Klage einer Dirne" (Lament of a Whore, 73), the first-person lyrical voice of the prostitute speaks poignantly of her pain: "Hat mir schon einmal einer über die Stirne gestrichen, ohne mir wehe zu tun? . . . Meine Küsse fallen blutend, von der Sichel des Abschieds gemäht" (Has anyone ever stroked my brow without hurting me? . . . My kisses fall bleeding, cut down by the scythe of parting). In Emmy Hennings's "Apachenlied" (Apache Song) the first-person narrator, "eine von den Oftgeküßten" (one of those often kissed) expresses despair, fear, and resignation while hinting enigmatically at the threat of violence: "Ich flüchtend grauer,

wehender Fetzen! / . . . Und Géry soll das Messer wetzen" (I, fleeing, a gray, fluttering tatter! / . . . And Géry is said to whet his knife, 77). Nowhere in the collection is violence against women eroticized.

In contrast to *Menschheitsdämmerung*, here the word *Weib* appears two or three times. Berta Lask's poem "Das Weib" (The Woman, 179) uses the word in the sense not of a real human being or even of a philosophical category called Woman but as a powerful mythic figure—and one with a soul. The poem opens with the line "Alle hundert Jahr wach' ich auf aus dem Lebensschlaf" (Every hundred years I awake out of my dormant existence), echoing the opening line of Georg Heym's "Der Krieg" (The War). The mythic "Weib" stumbles forth, blinded and with bound feet, a child in her womb, into a world of blossoms and sunshine, blood and horror, before posing a question: "Wer hört meiner Seele schlafschweres Aufschreien? / Wird das Kind einst hellere Sonnen und Sterne schauen?" (Who hears the sleep-heavy cry of my soul? / Will my child ever see brighter suns and stars?). The Expressionist *Schrei* in anguish at the present and in the longing for a utopian future issues here from the *Weib*, who, according to much (male) Expressionist theory, constitutes precisely the obstacle to that future.

When painted *Weiber* appear, they are paired with equally repugnant male counterparts: "blöde Kerle" (stupid jerks), as for example in Franziska Stoecklin's "De Profundis" (63), or most strikingly, in Lili von Braunbehren's "Stadtnacht" (City Night, 72). There, a male customer reduced to a grotesquely "torkelnde, widrige Wampe" (reeling, repellent beer belly) waddles into "des Teufels Residenz" (the devil's domicile). While men at the bar disappear in a cloud of "Schnapsgeist" (alcoholic vapors), a prostitute slides over to solicit a potential john with "verzückter Fratze" (ecstatic grimace) only to discover that he is the devil: "der Mann mit dem Pferdefuß" (the man with the cloven hoof). In a more prosaic café setting, complete with *Dirnen* (whores) as well as "Bürgerfrauen" (middle-class women) and an effeminate "Garçonne," Sylvia von Harden's description of a male-female interaction is less dramatic but equally telling: "Lu greift zagend nach einem Kavalier. / Streckt sich in ihn. / Er zerfällt pathetisch / In sich" (Lou reaches hesitantly for a cavalier. / Leans into him. / He collapses pathetically / Into himself, 76). In short, from the female perspective, the unsavory prostitute is still less repugnant than her male partners. These are not heroes struggling in a metaphysical agon.

The treatment of the mother figure also differs radically. Male Expressionists tend to portray both the birthing mother and the bereaved mother mourning her child one-dimensionally as figures of suffering, and most often as part of the background rather than the focus of the poem. Vollmer's collec-



tion includes poems that also function this way, but many go beyond those limits. Marie Pukl's "Mütterlichkeit" (Motherliness, 130), for example, never uses the word "Mutter" (mother) at all; instead *Mütterlichkeit* becomes synonymous with the abstract principle of dynamic *Werden* (becoming), the bridge between metaphysical heights and the physical earth with its herds of grazing animals, its "saft geböschten Tiefen" (soft hilly depths). Similarly, Henriette Hardenberg writes a "Requiem" for her mother in which she calls upon birds and blossoms to cover her in "Liebeserde" (love-earth), a neologism that spans the gap between "love," a lofty sentiment frequently invoked by Expressionists, and the earth. Else Lasker-Schüler's tender tribute, the second of her poems in *Menschheitsdämmerung*, accomplishes a similar bridging of heaven and earth when the poet refers to her mother as "Der große Engel, der neben mir ging" (*MHD* 103; The great angel who walked beside me, *DoH* 126). These poems with their tenderness toward the mother provide an interesting contrast to the male Expressionists' much ballyhooed anger toward the father; in this collection of women's poems, at least, anger at the father is simply absent. Equally noteworthy is the series of poems by Lola Landau describing pregnancy, birth, and contemplation of the child. In "Geburt" (Birth, 178) she portrays the "martyrdom" of labor in highly Expressionistic imagery. The delivery reaches its climax in the moment when "da bricht ein Schrei als Fackel aus meinem Munde / Und legt Brand an die festliche Stunde" (then like a torch a cry breaks out of my mouth / And sets fire to the festive hour), soon joined by the "flackernde Schrei meines Kindes" (flickering cry of my child) and closes with an experience of divinity: "und ich höre, wie Gott mir leibhaftig entgegenlacht" (and I hear how god incarnate laughs with me). Here, the purifying flame of divinity replaces the flesh and filth more typically associated with birth, and the once metaphorical and metaphysical *Schrei* now signals as well real birth and physical, indeed obstetric, labor.

Another important component of the female perspective is the perception of inequality in power relations between men and women. Berta Lask, for example (40–41), takes herself and women to task for suppressing their "Weibes Wissen / Aus Scheu vor der Mahnmacht" (Women's knowledge / Out of timidity before male power, 40). In a poem entitled "Die Fahne" (The Flag), Erna Kröner melds images of the modern city and allusions to patriotism with violent collapse: "Gewimmer, Gestöhn und krachende Knochen. / Die Kraft hat das Recht / Und schüttelt die blutigen Locken, / An der sich die Schwachheit zerschneidet" (Whimpering, groaning, and cracking of bones. / Might makes right / And shakes its bloody locks, / on which weakness is cut to ribbons, 60). Yet at the same time, women also possess power and passion. Elisabeth Meinhard's

poem “Mädchen” (Girl, 134) uses the image of a hooded falcon—more conventionally used in medieval poetry to describe the freedom, skill, and courage of the knight—to convey the confinement and frustration of girls who long for the day when a “Sturmwind” (stormy wind) will shatter their chains and “ein Blitz aus der Menschheit” (a bolt of lightning from humankind) will tear them into “des Alls lebendiges Mark” (the living marrow of the universe).

These poets implicitly reject the male Expressionist juxtaposition of male *Mensch* to female *Weib* and the notion of male monopoly on *Geist*. Instead, in countless examples, the women include themselves in the circle of *Menschen*. This means sharing in the guilt for what has occurred (see Franziska Stoecklin, “O wie haben wir Menschen die Erde entstellt”; O How We Humans Have Disfigured the Earth, 39) and the suffering that has ensued (see Henriette Hardenberg’s “Abend im Kriege”; Evening in Wartime, 38), as well as helping to build a new world. In “Der Mensch ist tot” (The Human Being Is Dead) Claire Goll describes how “we” with “our” hands and “our” hearts will create that better world (44). Charlotte Wohlmuth, in a poem that could have been written by Ludwig Rubiner, writes of “Wir Utopisten” (We Utopians, 53) in whom the fire glows, who envision “Ziele” (goals) and “Wirken” (works) that will carry one and all “In die ersten Menschlichkeiten!” (Into primal humanity). And Berta Lask has a vision of “erwachende Frauen” (awakening women, 55) at last finding their voice, a voice of divine inspiration: “Mund des Herzens, / Verklebt und verwachsen, / Laßt herein / Gottes Sturm!” (Heart’s mouth, / Stuck shut and misshapen, / Let in God’s storm!). Negative variations exist as well. Margarete Kubicka begins her poem “Die Mutter” with a pietà-like image but then indicts this mother who kept her distance from “Geist” (intellect/spirit) cursing her “die nichts verstand” (who understood nothing) for failing both her son and other women (45). Other poems simply criticize male *Geist*. In “Kriegsausbruch” (Outbreak of War, 31–33), Lulu Lazard accuses “Kadaver Wissenschaft” (dead academic knowledge), “hohle Kunst” (hollow artistry), and “Tat” (action) of leading to war. Trude Bernhard cynically dismisses fevered *Hirn* (brain), *Wille* (will), and self-professed activism: “Zerlumpt entfällt der Tag kraftlosem Hirn . . . / Nachts werden Willen heiß wie Schöpfer wach / Und stumpfen hin an kleinverstreuten Lüsten, / Dann wird die Hand, die handeln wollte, schwach . . .” (A ragged day falls from a feeble brain . . . / By night wills awaken hot as creators / And grow dull in trivial enjoyments, / Then the hand that wished to act gets weak, “Leben” 91). From this female perspective, the dawn of a new humanity or *Menschheitsdämmerung* seems almost to require as a precondition the dissipation of male privilege, its fading into a sort of long overdue Twilight of the Men or *Männerdämmerung*.

The women poets do not subordinate female creation through birth to male creation through art, positing instead equality and reciprocity. Thus Lola Landau's poem "Wiedergeburt" (Rebirth, 206) presents a dynamic and mutual process of creation and recreation: "Mein Schöpfer warst du" (You were my creator) she acknowledges, but now "Dein Eingang bin ich . . . / Dein Ausgang, aus dem du entstürzt, Kind mit gespültem Gesicht" (I am your entrance . . . / Your exit, from which you descended, child with fresh-rinsed face). In the final strophe of the poem, in an interesting contrast to the male tendency to identify women with primitive being, Landau presents woman as the very agent through whom one is "carried"—note the double entendre—from the most primitive levels of being to the promise of full humanity:

So wächst du ins Unherz zurück, in Pflanze und Schleim.  
 Ich trage dich zärtlich als Alge und Fisch durch die endlosen Wehn,  
 Bis du gekrümmt in mir hockst, ein Mensch mit lächelnden Zehn,  
 Wie der Weise sinnend gebückt, du umschaueter Keim.

[Thus you grow back into primal heart, into plant and mud.  
 I carry you tenderly as algae and fish through endless labor pains,  
 Until you crouch coiled within me, a human with smiling toes,  
 As a wise man bent pondering, you awesome seed.]

In a juxtaposed poem on the opposite page (207), Paula Ludwig reverses the conventional associations (that is, female equals earth equals death, male equals Apollonian fire equals spiritual life) as she identifies the touch of a lover with deathly paralysis. She writes, "Ich muß durch die Erde gehen / Und ihre Gluten einlassen in mein Herz, / Daß ich nicht werde wie der Tod, / Wenn du mich anrührst" (I must go through the earth / And let her fires into my heart, / That I may not become like death, / When you touch me). As an earth mother or an earth lover, the speaker draws chthonic strength, like Antaeus, from touching the earth, not her lover, in order to ward off the predations of the male.

The language of women Expressionists is innovative, bold, and often grotesque as the language of the (male) *Menschheitsdämmerung*. However, in contrast to the male practice of seeing the city as "the Whore of Babylon," personified in the prostitutes who populate the scene, women Expressionists see the city primarily in terms of death, loneliness, and pain. Thus, for example, Martina Wied's poem "Das Gespenst der großen Stadt" (The Ghost of the Metropolis, 71) notes the requisite prostitutes, but features the dominant image of a "nackten Schädel übereist von Schorf" (a naked skull iced over with scab)

atop a swaying, ghostly figure that stalks through stinking city streets. In Else Lasker-Schüler's "Weltende" (End of the World, a poem which incidentally does not appear in *Menschheitsdämmerung*, though the theme is well-represented, particularly by the epoch-making van Hoddiss poem that opens the collection), the end of the world appears not in terms of violence or physical destruction but through an image of lovers seeking emotional comfort from the heavy shadows of death: "Komm, wir wollen uns näher verbergen . . . / Das Leben liegt in aller Herzen / Wie in Särgen. / Du! Wir wollen uns tiefer küssen— / Es pocht eine Sehnsucht an die Welt, / An der wir sterben müssen" (Come, let us hide closer to one another . . . / Life lies in all hearts / As in coffins. / You! Let us kiss more deeply— / Yearning pounds upon the world, / And we must die of it, 29).

Even a cursory comparison of *Menschheitsdämmerung* and *In roten Schuhen* has suggested some key differences between male and female Expressionists, particularly in their treatment of female figures and gendered topics. Arguably, the work of these women poets is more successful than that of their male colleagues in achieving a synthesis of *Herz* and *Gehirn* (see Pinthus 22) and envisioning a truly new *Mensch*. Though they write about many of the same stock problems or themes, the women's poetry shows more variability and less predictability. In contrast to the stark yet conventional dualisms of male poets, the women's treatment of similar subject matter is more nuanced, demonstrating its innovativeness through genuine reinterpretation of received categories and a synthesis of seemingly irreconcilable dichotomies. To some extent the women Expressionist poets embrace the same traditional roles with an unfamiliar passion, strength, and significance in the struggle for the utopian new world of Expressionist longing.

In contrast, one can say that *Menschheitsdämmerung* is not so much hostile to women as simply oblivious to them, apart from a limited number of categories of human experience with which women are readily and stereotypically identified. Through the comparison with *In roten Schuhen* it becomes more obvious how, on a fundamental level, old male-female divisions of cultural labor remain intact in the Expressionist avant-garde, and women remain largely marginalized in the work of male poets. Would the same be true in other Expressionist genres? At the conclusion of his introduction to *In roten Schuhen* Vollmer calls for additional research, particularly on the large body of fiction by women Expressionists. He has since published his own collection of women's short stories, *Die rote Perücke: Prosa expressionistischer Dichterinnen* (The Red Wig: Prose of Expressionist Women Writers, 1996). Together with little-known single-authored collections such

as Claire Goll's *Die Frauen erwachen* (Women Awake, 1918), Vollmer's short stories could be compared, for example, with Fritz Martini's *Prosa des Expressionismus* (Prose of Expressionism, 1970) or Karl Otten's collections, particularly *Ego und Eros: Meistererzählungen des Expressionismus* (Ego and Eros: Masterpieces of Expressionist Narrative, 1963).<sup>21</sup> There is, to my knowledge, no collection of women's dramas that could be compared with, say, Horst Denkler's *Einakter und kleine Dramen des Expressionismus* (One-Act Plays and Short Dramas of Expressionism, 1968), though dramatic works by women may similarly await discovery. Vollmer's collection also raises questions about period, challenging literary scholarship to rethink its tendency to consider the prewar years from 1910 to 1914 as the peak of the movement's creativity and brilliance and the standard against which later Expressionist works are judged, often negatively. As Vollmer notes, the women poets do not reach the height of their output until somewhat later, after the war, after male politicians have failed catastrophically.

Among male Expressionists, a progressive minority always championed equal rights and a role in public life for women. The very first issue of Franz Pfemfert's *Die Aktion* (Action, 1911) includes an essay by Hedwig Dohm criticizing the conventional sexual morality expected of women and calling for a reform of the relationship between the sexes, along with eradication of the notion that women are intellectually inferior to men. Subsequent issues of *Die Aktion* contain numerous essays in which the feminist philosopher Grete Meisel-Hess argues for women's sexual emancipation—though her critique of Nietzsche's views on women, her rebuttal of Otto Weininger, and her calls for a "new man" to share in child-rearing and domestic chores with the new, emancipated woman do not appear.<sup>22</sup> Eight years later, in her volume of "lyrical" essays titled *Das Ergebnis* (The Outcome, 1919), Nadja Strasser writes that for too long women have been regarded as "dolls," treated like dolls. No struggle, she asserts, is "größer und bedeutungsvoller als der Kampf der Frau um Geist" (greater and more significant than the fight of women for intellectual recognition; quoted in Vollmer 19). An investigation into women Expressionists' relationship to the German women's movement of the day might reveal that more progressive views dominate among Expressionist women, thus shifting the movement's philosophical center of gravity on the woman question. Given scholarship that has attempted to analyze Expressionism's relationship to the avant-garde, modernity, or postmodernity, it is worth asking how those arguments might be modified if the potentially even more destabilizing perspectives of women Expressionists were included.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the contention surrounding male and female Expressionists' views of women, and their humanity,

capacities, and real or potential roles, anticipates the even greater divide that will open in the twenties, as the New Woman—in theory at least, economically independent, politically empowered, and sexually emancipated—encounters the “lost generation” of young men (Wright 1994).<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

1. This essay was originally published in *A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism* (2005). We thank Barbara D. Wright, Neil H. Donahue, and Camden House for their permission to reprint it in this volume.

2. See, for example, the collections by Otto Best or Thomas Anz and Michael Stark.

3. See also Sherwin Simmons’s discussion of “Ornament, Gender, and Interiority in Viennese Expressionism.” Simmons traces the development of Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka from the ornamental aesthetic associated with the Wiener Werkstätte to Expressionist depth and interiority. Documenting the association of women artists with ornamental superficiality, Simmons argues that in their anxiety over gender roles, “male expressionist artists struggled to separate themselves from the growing presence of women in the Viennese art world” (271).

4. Thomas Anz is aware of Vollmer’s work on women Expressionists and refers to it in his *Literatur des Expressionismus* (34) while making the point that an analysis of Expressionism from the perspective of gender is yet to be done. Indeed, the Swiss press published the second edition of Raabe’s *Expressionismus: Der Kampf um eine literarische Bewegung* in 1987. Inexplicably, however, despite both Vollmer’s and Arche Verlag’s scholarly credentials, Vollmer’s publications are not listed in the MLA bibliography.

5. A glance at the number of references to these three writers in the MLA bibliography provides an interesting indicator of the problem. References to Lasker-Schüler spike at 144, then fall off rapidly with 25 for Goll and 2 for Hennings. Grete Meisel-Hess, a theorist and novelist who appeared regularly in the pages of *Die Aktion*, gets 1.

6. Richard Brinkmann found nothing on the subject of women Expressionists to report in his first survey, *Expressionismus. Forschungs-Probleme 1952–1960*; nor does he in his second review of the literature (1980) foresee potential for future scholarship in the area of women Expressionists, despite the emerging significance at the time of women’s studies and feminist scholarship. The impression of a movement lacking women’s representatives is also perpetuated by introductions to German literary history designed for upper-level high school and college students. See, for example, the Metzler *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte* or Thomas Anz’s contribution, “Expressionismus,” in *Moderne Literatur in Grundbegriffen*. The discussions in Nürnberger’s *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* (Bayrischer Schulbuch-Verlag) or Knapp’s *Literatur des deutschen Expressionismus (Beck’sche Elementarbücher)* include only Lasker-Schüler. The same applies to the ambitious 1990 volume of *Der Deutschunterricht* devoted to Expressionism.

7. We do, however, have a volume dedicated to another well-known couple, Ivan

and Claire Goll. In the introduction to their volume, editors Eric Robertson and Robert Villain discuss the lack of critical interest in both authors' works and factors that contributed to it, including exile, bilingualism, and the difficulty of fitting either writer into any neat category. On a related note, Bernhardt Blumenthal laments that Claire Goll has been regarded by literary critics primarily as translator and editor of her husband's works but neglected as a prose author in her own right.

8. I am not the first to draw attention to the basically conventional view of women held by most male Expressionists. However, Wolfgang Paulsen, the author of *Expressionismus und Aktivismus*, and I draw different conclusions from the same observation. Writing a generation ago, Paulsen observed that Expressionists "elevated the prostitute to a pedestal" (6), intending to shock the bourgeoisie. But "the social intent revealed itself as utterly trite. . . . We would hardly call these 'loose women' emancipated: they remained totally subservient to the men in their lives. . . . Indeed, the question of women's emancipation never arises anywhere in Expressionism. . . . Man remains the center of its universe, and a self-centered universe it is! Women are but supporting characters, sentimentalized, glorified, but at times also brutalized. In no way did German Expressionist writers even attempt to change the traditional role of women in German society." Paulsen goes on to argue that male Expressionists' conservatism was fully shared by the women in their circles, with the single exception of Else Lasker-Schüler (6–8). I appreciate the candor of Paulsen's remarks but take exception on two counts: first, one *can* find discussion of the women's movement, admittedly not in traditional literary texts but certainly in the movement's numerous sociopolitical essays, manifestos, and reviews; and second, it is rash to conclude on the basis of a few examples that women Expressionists as a whole were conservative in their views, when so little is known about those women and their work to begin with.

9. For an interesting discussion of the Expressionist appropriation of subjectivity and hysteria, traditionally viewed as feminine characteristics, see Richard Murphy's "The Poetics of Hysteria: Expressionist Drama and the Melodramatic Imagination."

10. See the new biography on George by Norton.

11. In his book *Primitive Renaissance* (2001), David Pan makes a persuasive case for Expressionism as a primitive critique of modernity. Though he does not touch on women or gender issues directly, he does include "mythic violence" and the inevitability of conflict between humans and nature as essential elements of primitivism, thus implying the necessity of struggle between men and women, if woman is viewed not as human subject but as part of the object world of nature.

12. See Peter Burgard's collection of essays, *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, for a systematic review of the topic along with pertinent current theoretical meditations.

13. Kurt Pinthus, ed., *Menschheitsdämmerung: Symphonie jüngster Dichtung* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1920; Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1959, 1976, 1993). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from this anthology are designated by the abbreviation *MHD* and page number, and English translations are taken (though modified by the present author in some cases) from *Menschheitsdämmerung / Dawn of Humanity: A Document of Expressionism*, trans. Joanna M. Ratych, Ralph Ley, Robert C. Conrad (Camden House, 1994) and designated by the abbreviation *DoH* and page number.

14. Though perhaps intended to some degree as a more general, inclusive form of address to a whole generation, as indicated by the translation "young people," the word

Pinthus uses (*Jüngling*) refers specifically only to young men and is, to that same extent, specifically exclusive of women.

15. As an additional illustration of this argument, see, for example, Kasimir Edschmid's definition of Expressionism, quoted in Anz's "Expressionismus" essay: "Nun gibt es nicht mehr die Kette der Tatsachen: Fabriken, Häuser, Krankheit, Huren, Geschrei und Hunger. Nun gibt es die Vision davon. Die Tatsachen haben Bedeutung nur soweit als durch die hindurchgreifende Hand des Künstlers nach dem greift, was hinter ihnen steht" (144).

16. See Neil H. Donahue's reading of this poem in the introduction to this volume [*Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism*].

17. On a related note, in his article "Grossstadt in der Malerei des Expressionismus am Beispiel E. L. Kirchner's," Franz Matsche juxtaposes a cast of erotically ambiguous, siren-like women to the male bon vivants who populate Kirchner's cityscapes.

18. Jürgen Froehlich's *Liebe im Expressionismus* offers a wide-ranging and detailed analysis of poems published by male Expressionists between 1910 and 1914 in *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm*. Froehlich contends that the poems bridge familiar dualisms and shatter stereotypes and the fragility of such syntheses.

19. For an informative discussion of the ideological ebb and flow of the German women's movement and its relationship to Expressionism, see Marion Adams's "Der Expressionismus und die Krise der deutschen Frauenbewegung."

20. See Margaret Littler's "Madness, Misogyny and the Feminine in Aesthetic Modernism: Unica Zürn and Claire Goll" in which the author examines the tension between Goll's political activism as a young woman and anti-feminist statements in her later biography, *Ich verzeihe keinem* (1976).

21. It could be fruitful, for example, to take Richard Sheppard's analytical approach to short stories by Döblin, Heym, and Jung and use it comparatively on fiction by female as well as male authors.

22. Meisel-Hess's four novels, referred to only fleetingly by Ellinor Melander in her article on Meisel-Hess's philosophy, could provide additional insight into the relationship of women writers to the Expressionist movement.

23. Richard Murphy, for example, examines Expressionist "defamiliarization techniques" aimed at the "dismantling of the real" (1999, 260); however, he does not address the Expressionist reinforcement of traditional notions of what women "really" are. Aldo Venturelli positions Expressionism at the border between modernism and postmodernism and argues that the Expressionist mission "einer umfassenden Emanzipation" fails for lack of an ability to turn ideas into political action and to reconcile art and society, intellectual elites, and mass culture, or public life and the private sphere. Yet these are the very areas in which the women of Expressionism may have suggested alternatives. In his discussion of Berlin, Thomas Anz distinguishes between "zivilisatorische Moderne" and "ästhetische Moderne"; using Anz's distinction as an analytical tool, research on women in Expressionist literature and women authors could offer new insights into women's position as a point of contact—and friction—between these two. Similarly, Walter Erhart describes the New Man as an "artificial product of artistic autonomy" (308) on the boundary between modernism and postmodernism, unable to integrate the "sublime" and life; attention to *das Weib* and women's writings could modify his diagnosis.



24. The New Woman of the twenties is another topic that cries out for attention from the scholars of German Studies. The overwhelming majority of publications to date deal with examples from British and American literature. Notable exceptions include Katharina von Ankum's edited volume *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*. U of California P, 1997.

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# Situating Female Authors and Artists in the Expressionist Movement



## CHAPTER 2

# Elsa Asenijeff and German Expressionism

Curtis Swope

This essay argues that Elsa Asenijeff's (1867–1941) prose and poetry relate to Expressionism in three ways. The first is that she at times ran in Expressionist circles, welcoming Kurt Pinthus and Walter Hasenclever to her salon in Leipzig, and getting to know Expressionist painters via her partner, the important symbolist painter Max Klinger. The second way is that her work, particularly in its mysticism and in its exploration of what she saw as the close connection between male-dominated societies and violence, anticipated the grotesque linguistic intensity and far-reaching revolutionary impulses of the Expressionists—and therefore qualifies as “proto-Expressionist” in the same way that the work of Frank Wedekind and Edvard Munch do in much of the scholarship on Expressionism. The third way is more conceptual: that Asenijeff's idiosyncratic feminism, which relied on a strict distinction between male and female essence, reveals how gender polarity might be much more central to Expressionism than previously thought. The essay is structured in four main sections. The first lays out the biography and career of this author largely unfamiliar to readers in the English-speaking world and places that career in relation to key scholarship on the roots of Expressionism. The second section explores Asenijeff's mysticism, while the third traces her representations of patriarchal violence. The final section sets forth the idea that the role of gender binaries in Asenijeff's work can help recentralize the role of gender in Expressionism and briefly suggests avenues for further research.

### **Asenijeff: Biography and Career**

Asenijeff was born Elsa Maria Packeny in 1867 in Vienna and began frequent travel in central and eastern Europe starting with her 1890 marriage to Bulgar-

ian diplomat Ivan Nestoroff. Before and after an 1892 trip to Leipzig and an 1893 trip to Paris, she spent extensive time in Nestoroff's native Sofia. She returned for much of the years 1895 and 1896 to Leipzig, where she audited classes at the university and where her eccentric dress and manner made her a controversial and sought-after person. Her first publication was the 1896 volume of short stories, *Ist das die Liebe? Kleine Psychologische Erzählungen* (Is this love? Small psychological stories) with the Wilhelm Friedrich Verlag in Leipzig. In 1897, she moved to Leipzig and in 1898, her sixteen-year relationship with the painter and sculptor Max Klinger began. The next five years were to be very productive ones: Asenijeff published a theoretical tract, *Aufbruch der Weiber und das dritte Geschlecht* (The Women's Revolt and the Third Sex, 1898) and four extended prose sketches, *Sehnsucht* (Longing, 1898), *Unschuld: Ein modernes Mädchenbuch* (Innocence: A book of modern girls, 1901), *Tagebuchblätter einer Emanzipierten* (Diary of an emancipated woman, 1902), and *Kuss der Maja: Traumfugen über das Leben* (Kiss of the Maya: Dream fugues on life, 1903). These were followed by a novella in 1905, *Die Schwestern* (The sisters), and by a collection of prose sketches, *Epithalamia* (1907), based on stories from Greek and Roman mythology and illustrated by Klinger. Then came a five-year lull in publications during which Asenijeff devoted considerable time to the women's voting rights movement and remained a fixture in salons in Leipzig and Paris. Pinthus and Hasenclever were introduced to her in Leipzig in 1909; her poetry appeared in a volume with theirs, *Neuer Leipziger Parnass* (New Leipzig Parnassus) in 1912. The next year saw the publication of a poetry volume, *Die neue Scheherazade: Ein Roman in Gefühlen* (The new Scheherazade: A novel in feelings); the year after that came another volume of poetry, *Hohelied an den Ungenannten* (Song of songs to the unnamed one). In that same year, 1914, she published a film scenario in Kurt Pinthus's *Kinobuch* (Cinema book), which included work by Hasenclever and Else Lasker-Schüler. She published nothing until the final publication of her lifetime, *Aufschrei—Freie Rhythmen* (Scream—free rhythms, 1922). She wrote numerous, in many cases antifascist, poems between then and her death in 1941—none of which were published until a selection of her published and unpublished poems appeared in 2010 (*Ist das die Liebe?* 243–50).

Much that is fascinating and tragic about Asenijeff's life has been left out of this biographical sketch. This is because my essay will focus on Asenijeff's published work, particularly her early work. Previous scholarship on her life and writings has not had the luxury of such literary-historical complacency—and for good reason. Asenijeff's provocative public presence and literary voice, though bringing her fame in bohemian circles in the first

decade of the twentieth century, was never really accepted (Spreitzer, *Texturen* 70–71). Challenges she faced in the patriarchal world of her time ranged from the legendary (her holding a dagger to Frank Wedekind’s throat in response to unwanted sexual advances) to the artistically catty (repeated charges that the extreme pathos of her works was kitschy) to the politically dire (public censure of her poetry by nationalists at the opening celebration of the mammoth *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* [Monument to the Battle of the Nations] in Leipzig in 1913) to the personally disastrous (her being declared insane and being forced into an asylum in 1922 in response to her complaints against heirs of Max Klinger who cut her out of the painter’s inheritance after his death in 1920) (Spreitzer, “Im Glanze” 167–74; *Ist das die Liebe?* 243–50). I must urge all readers of this essay to read in detail about these and other events from Asenijeff’s life in the relevant scholarship.

But the fact remains that Asenijeff’s work, though analyzed by scholars in Germany and Austria in terms of its unusual brand of feminism and thus “recovered” in the sense that Barbara Wright uses that term, has not been adequately placed in relation to the literary context of its time—neither, again to use Wright’s terminology, within the male-dominated canon nor with an eye toward revising the terms of that canon (Wright 287–89; Spreitzer, “Im Glanze” and *Texturen*). Brigitte Spreitzer briefly suggests the affinity of Asenijeff’s late work with Expressionism in an article that treats Asenijeff’s early texts as part of 1890s Vienna modernism. But Asenijeff’s name appears only once in Paul Raabe’s enormous reference work on Expressionism; she appears not as a separate entry, but rather as a note under the entry on Pinthus because her poems appeared alongside his in the 1912 volume mentioned above (Spreitzer, “Im Glanze” 186–87; Raabe 378). Asenijeff made a strong impression on Pinthus and Hasenclever, who saw in her uncompromising nonconformism and anti-conventional pathos a model for new lyrical forms (Schuhmann 15–19). In addition, Asenijeff’s final published work, *Aufschrei*, can be read as a response to her exclusion from Pinthus’s *Menschheitsdämmerung* (*Dawn of Humanity*, 1920); this exclusion was probably the result of Asenijeff’s separation from Klinger in 1914 and its repercussions for her status in the emerging, patriarchal Expressionist canon.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Asenijeff is implicated in the genesis of Expressionism in the visual arts, which is conventionally dated to the founding of the *Brücke* group in Dresden in 1905. What initially united the figures who formed *Die Brücke*, including Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Fritz Bleyl, and Erich Heckel, was that all were students of Fritz Schumacher, then a leading modern architect who arrived in Dresden in 1902 after having spent the previous eight years in



Leipzig, where he was friends with Asenijeff and Klinger and where he wrote some of his most innovative theoretical tracts criticizing the empty stylistic gestures of Jugendstil architecture and its codification as a cultural trend. Schumacher was highly supportive of the radical young artists despite his status as an “establishment” figure at the school of fine arts. Given that Schumacher devotes nearly as much attention in his later autobiography to Asenijeff as he does to Klinger, the influence of her particular brand of activism and rebellion in the intra-Saxon constellation of Leipzig and Dresden must also be seen as part of the Expressionist ferment in the visual arts (Schumacher 176–80).

While the art historical scholarship has focused on the ways that Klinger’s themes of sexual fetishism, isolation, violence, and anxiety influenced artists like Kirchner and Heckel, a similar investigation of how the themes of Asenijeff’s writings anticipate Expressionist prose has not been undertaken. A historiographical problem arises here, though: there is no scholarly consensus as to the relationship between the various literary movements and trends of the turn of the century to the canonical literature of the Expressionist decade. Jost Hermand makes a stark distinction between the fundamentally suburban “artist colony” ethos of fin de siècle *Stilkunst* and the gritty, urban context of cafés and cabarets from which Expressionism emerged (Hermand, “Bild” 61–64).<sup>2</sup> Rhys W. Williams and Neil Donahue take a far more measured approach. For them, themes that anticipate Expressionist ones are present in neo-Romantic, Viennese modern, and Jugendstil literature, but become “intensified” (a word that appears often in the scholarship on Expressionism) in the time around 1910 (Donahue 3–6; Williams 89–91). In this constellation, there are canonical works of the 1890s that are viewed, cited, and re-cited as “proto-Expressionist,” as “anticipating” Expressionism. Such works include Frank Wedekind’s *Frühlingserwachen* (*Spring Awakening*, 1891) in theater, Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* in the visual arts, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s “Brief an Lord Chandos” (Letter to Lord Chandos) in prose literature (Donahue 5, 7, 13). For Donahue and Williams, Wedekind’s penchant for extreme gestures qualifies him; Hofmannsthal’s interest in the limits of language does so for him; in Munch’s case, it is the use of innovative techniques to express existential anxiety.

Yet these three elements are present in much of Asenijeff’s work and are found in decadent and fin de siècle literature often enough to merit fresh inquiry into the relationship between Expressionism and its predecessors. Asenijeff’s critiques of patriarchal institutions, including the nuclear family and university science departments, are delivered at points in her work with the grotesque intensity characteristic of Expressionism. Her mysticism, most

closely influenced by the writings of Rudolf Steiner, who went on to become an Expressionist designer, tends in her texts to be implicated in a hoped-for broader renewal of all of humanity, typical of Expressionist rhetoric. It is also related to her preoccupation with the inarticulability of the self in language in her *Aufbruch der Weiber und das dritte Geschlecht*, a text that predates Hofmannsthal's "Letter to Lord Chandos" by five years. While it might be easy to write off Asenijeff's version of *Sprachproblematik* simply as neo-Romantic rather than Expressionist, it is instructive to look to recent architectural-historical scholarship. Architectural historian Barbara Miller Lane, in her work on the period in question, has shown the continuities between the national Romantic architecture of the 1890s and the Expressionist architecture of the 1910s (Lane 15–16, 252–59). In the realm of literary history, Sokel and others have long claimed a relationship between early nineteenth-century Romanticism and Expressionism, but have been keen to differentiate Expressionist writers from the neo-Romantics of the turn of the century (Sokel, *The Writer* 8–9, 24, 42). An analysis of Asenijeff's work can help recenter the attention of scholars of Expressionism on the importance of the neo-Romantic or Jugendstil work prior to 1910 as a thematic and occasional formal precursor to Expressionist cultural production.<sup>3</sup>

### Asenijeff's Proto-Expressionist Mysticism

A proto-Expressionist mysticism is present already in Asenijeff's 1897 set of prose sketches, *Sehnsucht*. In the sketch, "—und die Seele flüstert mit sich" (and the soul whispers with itself), Asenijeff touches on the motif of ice or crystal as a symbol of the artist's role, not in a Jugendstil turning away from the world, but rather an ethereal Expressionist longing for humanity. Like most of the sketches in *Sehnsucht*, "—und die Seele flüstert mit sich" traces the feelings of the speaker for a longed-for lover in an energetic language that turns increasingly visual. In this case, the lover has "flaming hair," and his influence is both "sacrilizing and annihilating."<sup>4</sup> But the lover's heart is more than just individual:

His heart, though, must be broad like the world, and in the core of this heart, all of humanity must lie. His radiant thinking should glaze the most distant infinities; glacier-cold, though, is his lonely pride. I seek only him, the distant much-beloved and if I could find him, I would put my fist before my mouth to choke my exultation. (Asenijeff, *Sehnsucht* 13)<sup>5</sup>

This “heart” that is “broad like the world” and which contains humanity symbolizes the kind of longing for a unified social world that runs through Expressionist poetry most obviously from Werfel and his pleas for a close comity of art and humanity but also to Ernst Toller, who converts it into an overtly politicized humanism in his poem “An alle Gefangenen” (To all prisoners) of 1919. The contrasting images of the “glacier-cold” pride and the crystalline “glazing” conjure the work of poet and novelist Paul Scheerbarth, another member of the proto-Expressionist canon, whose reverence for the serenity of glass architecture prepared the way for the emotional understandings of space and material characteristic of Expressionism (Williams 91). Wolfgang Pehnt, the foremost scholar of Expressionist architecture, similarly sees the crystal or ice palace as a characteristic trope of German experimental design in the 1910s—one that symbolizes just the kind of longed-for unity of the artistic and social that Asenijeff’s reference to “glacial” chill is part of (Pehnt 7–22).

Asenijeff’s *Unschuld* of 1901, which consists of short prose pieces, each of which follows a different female “type” from the innocent ingenue to the world-weary, unwed, working-class mother, similarly expresses the longing to lead a whole, nonlinguistic existence unified with all of humanity. This is particularly the case in the segment about an unconventional young woman named Lora with no desire to marry who seeks to endow everyday activities such as cooking with the profound metaphysical meanings of works of art. Her commitment to the spiritualization of the everyday and the emancipation of the self takes a toll, however, on her face, which betrays her unconventionality as an Expressionist portrait might. She

does not have a classical face. Her dark brown curly hair leaves the young, already furrowed brow and the powerfully convex humps over the eyebrows visible. But they cap hollowed temples that bear witness to their bearer’s lack of desire to eat. The nose is broadly formed at the top and disappears fleshless and narrow into a pair of always-vibrating nasal wings. (141)<sup>6</sup>

The approach to reality here and the willingness to highlight the value of the grotesque in the context of a broader affirmation of humanist-spiritualist unconventionality anticipate Expressionism. The prematurely wrinkled forehead, hollowed temples, and fleshless nose attest to a feverish modernity seeking the best outlets it can find within the constraining confines of the bourgeois household. The path from facial expressions to the behaviors and emotions of

the character along with the darker aspects of the description itself bear comparison to the *Nackte Tänzerinnen* (Nude dancers) of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's 1909 woodcut of that title or his *Passagiere in der Straßenbahn* (Streetcar passengers) of a 1908 lithograph.

The supernatural, particularly as perceived by men in women, is another mystical aspect of Asenijeff's work that connects it to Expressionism—in this case with even greater intensity of imagery. The narrator of Asenijeff's *Tagebuchblätter einer Emanzipierten*, a work that traces the trials and tribulations of university life for a young woman in Leipzig, meets an eccentric young woman about whom she later hears stories from a male friend. The woman dominates her husband, humiliating him in public—a theme that, as Roy Pascal has pointed out, shows remarkable similarity from naturalism to the turn of the century and into Expressionism (Pascal 235–43); she inspires men to fight duels. Even more chilling is her command of hypnosis: “She had hypnotized [a man] for so long that she was cold and that only fuming blood could make her warm again—totally warm—there, in the soul, where it is eternally cold, until the poor devil took it seriously and shot himself” (Asenijeff, *Tagebuchblätter* 31).<sup>7</sup> Telepathic mind control, often sexually charged, was to become a staple of Expressionist cinema from *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1919) to *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (*Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*, 1922). This kind of control is in turn represented using intense and grotesque Expressionist imagery, such as that of blood giving off smoke.

A gentler fascination with the supernatural is on display when Asenijeff's narrator elaborates on her claim that she can see human thoughts and feelings radiating from bodies as something visible. She recognizes that such visions must rest in physiology, in the nervous system's “thousand magnetic streams of feeling, wanting, desiring” (38).<sup>8</sup> However, she “divine[s] thoughts before they are said,” perceives the “secret liquids” behind people's feelings, and “see[s] the people's radiations in the shifting fluorescence of their perceptions” (37–38).<sup>9</sup> Asenijeff here perches on the precipice that divides a fully materialist view of the world from the spiritualist worldview of the fin de siècle aesthetes. Her willingness to respect both “Geist” and “Mechanik,” per the title of Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (General Electricity Company, AEG) boss Walter Rathenau's 1912 book, *Zur Mechanik des Geistes* (The mechanics of the soul), accords not only with the aims of later Expressionists who sought to bring the soul of art into contact with real life in order to revolutionize it, but also with leading designers such as her friend, Fritz Schumacher, who was a founding member of the Deutscher Werkbund

(German Association of Craftsmen) (Schwartz 48–49). A connection that is both philosophical and architectural on this score is to the Theosophist guru and designer Rudolf Steiner, who, like Asenijeff and the Expressionists, sought a merger of the scientific and spiritual and who, like them, took Goethe's *Faust* as a major influence (Sokel, *The Writer* 19). Steiner's most widely read work, *Die Mystik im Aufgange des neuzeitlichen Geisteslebens* (*Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age*, 1901) appeared the year before Asenijeff's diaries and contained numerous references to Steiner's own ability to see people's thoughts and feelings as a visual residue radiating from their bodies. Such forms of mystical connection, for which Steiner sought a scientific basis, are precisely the kinds of impulses that undergird the more mystical aspects of the Expressionist rhetoric of the "New Man."

Asenijeff's fascination with the metaphysical qualities of color also connects her work to Expressionism. In the story "Der Schwur" (The oath) a young woman who cheated on a previous husband who subsequently died now has a new, young, innocent lover who has fallen in love with his image of the woman's moral purity. She ultimately decides to put his lover to the test of reality as she confesses to him, quite forthrightly, her many previous lover affairs. He is shocked and demands a loyalty pledge from her, one that Asenijeff's narrator roundly condemns as cruel. She does, however, concede to make an oath, and the lovers enjoy a brief and intense period of passion. During this period, Asenijeff's main character comes to the conclusion that connections between human beings cannot be forged in terms of unified subjectivities. The spirit instead contains a spectrum of colors each of which coincides, in an ambiguous, nonlinguistic way, with a deep communicative potential. For Asenijeff's main character, the spirit is a "spectrum that consists of many colors and innumerable nuances. It seems to ask the speaker: do you want green, red, yellow?" (Asenijeff, "Der Schwur" 94).<sup>10</sup> Kandinsky, a key figure in the proto-Expressionist canon, comes to similar insights about color in his *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (*Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1910). The painter sees colors as bearers of the content of inner life capable of communicating "immediately to the soul" (Kandinsky 24).<sup>11</sup> Kandinsky does not use the metaphor of the spectrum, but rather that of the piano: "The colors are the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul" (25). The notion of a multifaceted soul with different "vibrations" that can be touched in response to different colors is one that resonates very closely with Asenijeff's own spiritualism—a spiritualism that, as a consequence, should, like Kandinsky's, be seen in connection to the origins of Expressionism.

## Patriarchy and Violence

Asenijeff's representations of the violence that patriarchal structures inflict on women, but also sometimes on men, are another aspect of her work that connects it to Expressionism. In the story "Liebe: Eine Erzählung aus Bulgarien (Love: A story from Bulgaria)," from her debut story collection of 1896, Asenijeff depicts a main character trapped in a marriage to an abusive petit bourgeois brute who is a cowardly servant of the authoritarian regime under which they live. She falls in love with a friend of his who is a revolutionary freedom fighter. She is particularly taken by his description of his time in prison, during which he hears the tortures of other political prisoners and is himself tortured. His incarceration is most emotionally difficult at night as sounds take on uncanny dimensions: "Heavy steps went up and down, doors were ripped open and slammed shut, and then, macabre, shrill calls of pain sounded, piercing, irrepressible, until they became weaker and weaker. Each of the prisoners there heard those calls with a shudder, saw in a vision the blood-streamed face, the hacked-up body of the martyred one and trembled along with it and longed for these blood-curdling cries for help to stop. Then it was silent" (Asenijeff, "Liebe" 17–18).<sup>12</sup> The vision of the imprisoned man of principle trapped in a hell of physical tortures for a crime he did not commit is a situation reminiscent of the uncanny torture-chambers of Expressionist cinema; in Asenijeff's story, the Expressionist vision of the chained fighter takes on a unique aspect as his suffering reverberates in and awakens the "soul" of a woman who is herself "imprisoned" in her marriage. Asenijeff not only prefigures the trope of liberatory struggle against politically enshrined patriarchy, but does so in a way that highlights forms of oppression specific to women.

In the story "Sie" (She) from the same collection, a young woman uses the opportunity to pursue a university education as a way to escape the strictures of the traditional family and find room for spiritual solitude. But the main character's busybody aunt visits her at a crucial point in her studies and, with her incessant knitting, disturbs the main character's contemplation:

She wanted sacred silence, like the reverent quietude of all beings at the approach of a storm; but the knitting needles on the old auntie's socks clinked together—clingdilandang, clingdilandang, clingdilandang, and raving with fury, in the middle of the fever dream of thinking, of wanting to give intellectual birth, her spirit searched for relief. Her ideas struggled with her wrath over the disturbance; she still held onto them, that illusive structure, built more ethereally than spiderwebs; but the next minute's struggle

would destroy it already. Clingdilandang, clingdilandang! The old auntie sits there, dignified and stupid, and beats her knitting together. Her idiotic, pedestrian face radiates an easy conscience, but she is a blackguard more spiteful than any. Because she disturbs, she kills the blossoming of this young talent, she murders the beauty of these yet unborn thoughts. (Asenijeff, "Sie" 37)<sup>13</sup>

The anger that Asenijeff's figure expresses is not the precious and ethereal lament of a fin de siècle male intellectual who feels distanced from society in abstract terms; what we have is rather a young woman who truly has never been left alone by family and friends to pursue independent desires and thoughts. After weeks of pure pleasure pursuing such desires and thoughts, her freedom is stripped from her by her aunt's visit. If the character Michael Fischer in Alfred Döblin's short story "Die Ermordung einer Butterblume" ("The Murder of a Buttercup," 1905) committed an act of violence for an enigmatic set of social reasons having to do with a decaying society and its oppressive norms, Asenijeff's young woman feels murder in her heart for very concrete reasons, as her own thoughts are murdered at the hands of the watchdog of gender conformism. Again, it is crucial to Asenijeff's proto-Expressionism that the "beauty" and "blossoming" are not symbolic. They are real social processes of self-realization, the constriction of which the story dramatizes.

More deeply Expressionist still is the end of Asenijeff's ironically titled sketch from *Unschuld*, "Was Mädchen nicht wissen sollen" (What girls should not know). The story is about the bourgeois girl Helene, who begins to help care for a working-class girl in a tenement building—the girl's fiancé has left her after being told she is to have a child. An old woman in the building becomes the girl's "priestess of pain" as she goes into a three-day labor that ultimately kills her; the old woman makes clear that society's scorn for and abandonment of this pregnant woman is the true cause of her death. Helene is outraged, again, not because of an enigmatic self-repression, but rather with a genuine pathos of destruction and renewal. On her way home after the girl's death, Helene passes a butcher shop advertising a pig-slaughtering festival. She conjures for herself an image:

She saw the meat, oozing blood and still smoking, from which the characteristic sickly-stale odor rose up. Here a leg, there the head, skinned, still with the eyes in it. It was still living a few hours ago. The blood pulsed joyfully in it that now, having spilled out, sticks to the flesh. Even this was given life under torture. Then: "How can mothers nourish them-

selves on things that have been killed?" For women, everything born must be sacred. Men may glorify killing, but we want to celebrate life, honor and protect all that has been born. (165)<sup>14</sup>

Extreme reverence for the natural process of birth as an authentic expression of humanity was a crucial part of Asenijeff's feminism. That reverence is converted here into a plea for a humanism that puts birth on a secular-religious pedestal as a means for staving off a culture of death that is, for Asenijeff, distinctly male. Here already we have a stinging critique of the "glorification of death" that will underpin the Futurist attitude toward the outbreak of World War I and the fascist, patriarchal ideologies that crystallized in the war's wake.

Asenijeff, while more anxious about the negative effects of urban environments on the individual soul than Expressionists ten years later, nevertheless at moments anticipates the raw fascination with the violence of urban newness. In her *Tagebuchblätter einer Emanzipierten* of 1898, her passages on the intensity of the modern city at times leave behind the high-flown, subordinating sentences that Sokel sees Expressionist prose as working to surpass. For instance, Asenijeff follows an impressionistic passage about how "the odor of soot" has a stimulating effect on the nerves with short prayer-like injunction: "With nostrils wide we breathe in courage—Soot! Soot!" (Asenijeff, *Tagebuchblätter* 8).<sup>15</sup> A similar connection between industry and vitality is made two paragraphs later as the main character muses that any potential God watching over human activity must certainly find nothing more beautiful than the railroad, than "this powerful lindworm with glowing red eyes and whose gigantic limbs glide, blowing and roaring through the night under the quaking of the earth" (9).<sup>16</sup> Likewise: "The slender minarets of the [factory] smokestacks climb into the air and at the top, a joyful cloud of smoke proclaims that the holy sacrificial fire of labor is burning, held ablaze by thousands of people" (9–10).<sup>17</sup> Such quasi-religious depictions of the new industrial society as perpetuating potentially community-sustaining rituals of work clearly form a part of Asenijeff's proto-Expressionist mysticism. She thus anticipates the Expressionist architectural trope of the *Stadtkrone*, beloved by Scheerbarth and other Expressionist architects such as Erich Mendelsohn and graphic artists such as Lyonel Feininger, who sought, in a utopian way, to show how mass labor as symbolized by massive architecture could help foster new forms of community in a highly alienated age (Pehnt 7–22). For Asenijeff, though, the train with its "roaring" sounds, its ability to make the earth "quake," and its glowing red eyes is an image that conveys the fundamental violence of industrial modernity in a way akin to Georg Heym's canonical poem "Der Gott der Stadt" (The god of



the city) of 1910. Likewise, though the “smoke” from the factories is “joyful,” the fire that produces that smoke is also “sacrificial”—on some level a top-down act of violence against those producing it.

The *Tagebuchblätter einer Emanzipierten* are at their most forceful in the specific accounts of the connection between violence, science, and the objectification of women. Her narrator laments that when teenage girls wish for “work,” “solitude,” and “peace,” they are stalked instead by the “cold calculation” of a society that requires them to think in terms of being outwardly pleasing to men. Her main character declares that the moments “when [she] stood most beautiful, most transfigured before men” were precisely those in which she was reduced to a “mere means of expression” for the norms of society (20).<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Asenijeff, through her main character, comes to view society as a kind of reform school for the shaping of women’s characters according to the needs of men.<sup>19</sup> For Asenijeff, men are like mechanical automatons incapable of individual self-realization. They gladly subordinate themselves to a positivistic science that is fundamentally destructive. Women, by contrast, contain deep reserves of silence that give them a capacity for individuality and that require a different type of “science” to begin to understand. Thus, her narrator says: “[Man-civilization] kills us, it makes of us only an instrument for men” (26).<sup>20</sup> She then describes the chill she always felt as a teenager when watching the gardener pruning shrubs “with his truly masculine rabidness for mutilation” (27).<sup>21</sup> He worked obsessively to give “the little trees forms opposed to their nature” as he cut “all the limbs that shot longingly forth in favor of one that shot to unnatural heights” (27–28).<sup>22</sup> Asenijeff keenly captures here, in a vegetal image that combines the plant-oriented aspect of Jugendstil prose and the more Expressionist notion of unnatural cutting or pruning, the way, for her, a banal, civilizatory, male will to power, not just bourgeois domesticity as later Expressionists understood it, deforms the inner life of women (Hermand, “Undinenzauber” 147–51).

Asenijeff thus implicitly develops in the *Tagebuchblätter einer Emanzipierten* a negative counterpart to the “New Man” who makes a productive fusion of spirit and science. For her, the greatest risk is that this New Man, far from redeeming authentic experience, will turn the emotions and spirit of science into an objectifying, ritualistic cult of destruction. This figure appears in Asenijeff not merely as a cause for oversensitive flight from reality, but as a quite clear-headed diagnosis of the cult of institutions and positivism in the late nineteenth century. For Asenijeff, scientists who study the human body are on the one hand cold dehumanizers: “[The doctor] hacks around on the human body and saws human bones as though they were wood” (Asenijeff, *Tagebuchblätter*

34).<sup>23</sup> On the other, their clinicality turns dialectically to frenzy as the dissection of corpses perpetuates the modus operandi of ancient sacrificial religions that use violence to reinforce doctrine. Asenijeff's main figure acknowledges that not all doctors are sadists, but asserts that there must be sadists among Leipzig's medical students: "One is certainly among them whose eyes flash with lust when a patient gives a shriek" (36).<sup>24</sup> She even listens to a clinician at the university calmly tell her how he recorded the screams of patients in order to study the tones of their cries of pain: "He has phonographs set up in front of patients bellowing in pain in order to study the species and rhythm of the tortured cries. What leering ecstasy tore apart his whole being as he told me this with lust-choked words" (36).<sup>25</sup> The bloodlust that, for Asenijeff, fueled the more violent aspects of the ancient religions of Assyria and Mesoamerica lives on in the religion of science that, like older spiritualities, dehumanizes and instrumentalizes its objects. For Asenijeff, the scientific attitude has its dialectical analogue in an uncanny, ritualistic sadism that was to play an important role in spatial conceptions of the evil genius, from Caligari to Mabuse, that recur in Expressionist cinema and are rooted in the Faustian tradition.

### **The Fundamental Dichotomy of Expressionism?**

In her *Aufbruch der Weiber und das dritte Geschlecht* and the *Tagebuchblätter einer Emanzipierten*, the poles of "male" and "female" are driven to extremes: women contain unknowable reserves of silence that defy patriarchal epistemologies and make women, unlike men, capable of becoming actualized individuals; men, by contrast, are faceless, violent automatons with sex drives that they mistake for authentic expressions of self, but which in fact are mechanical operations that cut them off from the true individuality and self-realization that women have access to. What later Expressionists see as the travails of modern culture, Asenijeff sees here as the product of male culture born of a scientific impulse to know that is ultimately violent and insipid. What later Expressionists view as a potential source of resistance to that world, the silence of the inarticulable and the resistance to classification and convention, Asenijeff sees as female (Donahue 13). That the gender dichotomy is a foundational one for Asenijeff and that her thematic concerns are proto-Expressionist indicate that it might be fruitful to ask to what extent Asenijeff's work can ultimately be a starting point for scholars who want to recentralize gender in Expressionism. It has been usual to see gender as one concern among others in the Expressionist movement; it certainly has taken a back seat for most scholars to the revolu-

tionary political impulses that are seen as characteristic of the movement starting at the end of World War I. But given the centrality of gender to Asenijeff's thinking and its status as a driver of her push toward more Expressionist treatment of contemporary themes, it might also be that gender is really the foundational dichotomy of Expressionism and that the whole movement needs to be reread in terms of it. Many of the "extremes" that characterize Expressionism are themselves, as a result of being the legacy of German idealism as Walter Sokel has pointed out, dichotomous: worker versus artist; crystal versus cave; violence versus harmony; representation versus abstraction (Sokel, *The Writer* 64; Kracauer 218). Asenijeff's gender theories could spur a new field of research in which gendered thinking is found to undergird and lurk behind and beneath other kinds of dichotomies that Expressionists were interested in.

The polarity of genders is thus not peripheral to her proto-Expressionism but rather central to it. In her *Aufbruch der Weiber und das dritte Geschlecht* of 1898 she writes of the male-dominated system as she sees it in terms that later male Expressionists would use to characterize "the world" more generally and speculates about alternative forms of science in what might be read as a design for a "female" Expressionism. For Asenijeff, men are "spiritually castrated. . . work-beings" who are characterized by "raw force"—all words that later Expressionists would use to tar the bourgeoisie and lambaste its restrictive and destructive adherence to norms (Asenijeff, *Aufbruch* 36).<sup>26</sup> The "longing for fraternity" is something Asenijeff sees as characteristic of men because men do not have the capacity for nonlinguistic knowledge or immediate self-actualization that women have (36).<sup>27</sup> To read Werfel through Asenijeff: the speaker of his "An den Leser" (To the reader) wants to be closer to humanity precisely because, for Asenijeff, men are distant from humanity. Women, on the other hand, once they free themselves of social expectations, "surge in the un-depths of proto-being . . . thereby, the externality of a brotherly human relationship becomes dispensable for women" (36).<sup>28</sup> Women recognize inherently the incompleteness of human relationships, particularly, for Asenijeff, of marriage. As a result of this sensitivity, women's lives are ones of an intense but mysteriously salutary pain: "[Women's] pain will thus be concentrated, they will have to carry its whole unsplintered torture; remaining conscious that every external relationship (love or friendship) distances them from becoming conscious of contiguity with total being" (40).<sup>29</sup> It is as though Asenijeff has anticipated the "O, Mensch" rhetoric of male Expressionists fifteen years later and delivered an advance critique of it by showing how women's special sensitivities make this particular male sort of solidarity, which for her is actually a pendant to the male will to violence, redundant.

Women, by contrast, contain “a sublime peace” that speaks more forcefully than the “surface” of men, who insist on making intense gestures with the hands and face (111).<sup>30</sup> Darwin’s doctrine of natural selection is for Asenijeff one of patriarchal violence par excellence; she proposes instead an *Erziehungsdiktatur* (educational dictatorship) of women who, in an extremely conservative-sounding way, will revolutionize society not via violence but via a firm grip over the terms of education and upbringing—not in the conventional sense of marriage, which Asenijeff sees as the pinnacle of patriarchy, but in the sense of women’s special form of the transmission of knowledge as a revolutionary counterpoint to the violent dogma of conventional science (96). Against the intensification of the despiritualizing, male culture, the “red dawn of the lice,” as Asenijeff calls it in an Expressionist-sounding phrase, she holds up another extremely conservative-seeming basis for a new society: reverence for childbirth (108).<sup>31</sup> As a physiological and symbolic process, childbirth for Asenijeff contains the totality of existence and is rendered here in some of Asenijeff’s most stylistically concentrated prose:

[Childbirth] is nothing less than awestruck bliss, with nerve convulsions, ever more forceful, as the last convulsions of air—with gyrating tortures, of which the woman dies each time only to awaken to new pain, once more savoring it through and through. And when, then, in the final protogyrations, in the final, dreadful spasm that mercilessly rips her apart—the division occurred—in which the best of her blood entered into existence—there sounds in her a joy, a cosmic feeling that diffuses itself beyond into the infinities of infinity. (88)<sup>32</sup>

For Asenijeff, childbirth combines violence and creation in a way totally unreachable to men and one that establishes interconnections to humanity across space and time that transcend those that would animate Toller’s poetry toward the end of World War I. Even as the body is torn apart, a higher form of pleasure is achieved—a happiness whose “cosmic” quality has a physiological basis. The orgasmic childbirth described here has few literary precedents—perhaps the “male” childbirth of the monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Kitty’s birthing scene in Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, which also makes a claim to the unknowable and transcendent aspects of the birthing experience, though not in the kind of language Asenijeff uses. It is a decidedly Expressionist childbirth scene from the idealist branch of the movement—the positive antipode to the negative of Wendla’s rape and abortion in Wedekind’s *Frühlingsserwachen*.<sup>33</sup>

This deep dichotomy, between the spiritualist longing for higher experience and wholeness and the distillation and intensification of a crisis-ridden reality, is characteristic of Expressionism. In Asenijeff's work, it has its basis not in discourses of spirituality but rather in concepts of gender. Is it possible that other characteristically Expressionist tropes in the work of other authors might have gendered thinking behind them? Georg Heym's "God of the City" might be reread as a symbol of the specifically patriarchal aspects of urban expansion in the industrial age. Döblin's flower-destroying bourgeois can be understood as one of Asenijeff's "pruning" males, keen to destroy forms of growth that would defy patriarchal control. Particularly fruitful might be examinations of various forms of modernity that are given gender dimensions in Expressionist works. Is the exploitation of labor in industry portrayed as a fundamentally "feminizing" process for the workers in Kaiser's *Gas I* (1918)? Is the modernity of civilization, order, and bureaucracy in his *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts (From Morn to Midnight, 1912/1917?)* portrayed as a product of patriarchy or as a "feminizing" influence on a potential authentic male culture? Asenijeff's work certainly cannot answer such questions. But if we view it as proto-Expressionist, it can help redirect our attention to the possibility that gender is at issue in Expressionism beyond the typical tropes of the femme fatale and the vicissitudes of male desire.

## NOTES

1. Though Klinger tended to be associated with the various Secession groups in Munich, Vienna, and Berlin, he was a great supporter of the Expressionists and was greatly admired by them. Marsha Morton's recent book outlines the now substantial historiography that shows how Klinger, whose best-known works are his prints from the 1880s, such as his darkly fetishistic *Glove* cycle, were crucial for Expressionist artists (Morton 10–11).

2. Asenijeff was a decidedly urban writer for whom long walks through Leipzig and the cultural contacts of the city were crucial. She did share an affinity with Peter Altenberg, a Viennese modernist, for the genre of the short prose sketch. The similarity was even noted in an early review of her work (Lessing 395). Altenberg himself, though, defies easy categorization, influential as he was for the canonical Austrian Expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka. He was even a chief defender of Kokoschka's when the latter's work came under critical attack around 1910 (Selz 167–68).

3. There are a number of now classic studies that in fact treat the 1880–1918 period as thematically unified (Trommler, "Einleitung" 7–13; Pascal vii–ix). Trommler also sees significant continuity between turn-of-the-century writers who view science and art as irreconcilable and Expressionist critics of bourgeois culture (Trommler, "Sachlichkeit" 467–69).

4. “Flammend[es] Haar”; “segnend und vernichtend.” All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

5. “Sein Herz aber müsste weit sein wie die Welt und in dieses Herzens Grund müsste die ganze Menschheit liegen. Sein strahlendes Denken stollte noch die fernsten Unendlichkeiten übergänzen; doch gletscherkalt sei sein einsamer Stolz. Ich such’ nur ihn, den fernen Vielgeliebten und wenn ich ihn fände, wollt’ ich die Faust vor den Mund thun, damit mein Jauchzen erstickt.”

6. “Hat kein klassisches Gesicht. Ihre dunkelbraunen lockigen Haare lassen die junge, schon durchfurchte Stirne und die mächtig hervorgebogenen Hügel über den Brauen frei. Doch bedecken sie eingefallene Schläfen, die vom dem Mangel an Eblust der Trägerin Zeugnis geben. Die Nase ist oben breit angelegt und verläuft fleischlos und schmal in ein paar stets vibrierende Nasenflügel.”

7. “Sie hatte [einen Mann] so lange hypnotisiert, dass sie friere und wie nur rauchendes Blut ihr warm machen könnte—ganz warm—da drinnen in der Seele, wo es ewig friert, bis der arme Teufel es ernst nahm und sich erschoss.”

8. “Tausend magnetische Ströme des Fühlens, Wollens, Begehrens.”

9. “Er[rät] Gedanken ehe Sie gesagt sind”; “geheimen Fluida”; “s[ieht] die Ausstrahlungen der Menschen in dem wechselnden Schillern ihrer Empfindungen.”

10. “[Ein] Spektrum, welches aus vielen Farben und unzähligen Nuancen besteht. Sie scheint den Sprechenden zu fragen: Willst du grün, rot, gelb?”

11. Kandinsky plays a central role in the historiography on Expressionism as evidence of the importance to the movement Expressionism of transcending language (Donahue 11–12, 20; Schürer 244–47).

12. “Schwere Schritte gingen auf und ab, die Thüren wurden aufgerissen und zugeschlagen und dann tönten schaudervolle, gelbe Wehrufe herauf, schrill, unbändig, bis sie immer schwächer wurden. Jeder der Mitgefangenen hörte sie mit Beben, sah in einer Vision das blutüberströmte Gesicht, den zerfleischten Körper des Gemarterten und zitterte mit und sehnte sich, dass diese markerschütternden Hilferufe aufhören. Da war es still.”

13. “Heilige Ruhe wollte sie; so wie das ehrfurchtsvolle Schweigen aller Wesen beim Herannahen des Gewitters; aber da schlug die Stricknadeln vom Strumpfe ihrer Mume aneinander—Klingdiligang, Klingdiligang, Klingdiligang, und rasend vor Wut, mitten in der Fieberhallucination des Denkens, des geistigen Gebärenwollen, suchte Ihr Geist nach einer Erlösung. Ihre Ideen kämpften mit dem Zorne über die Störung; noch hielt sie jene fest, jenes Scheingebäude, flüchtiger als Spinnngewebe gebaut; aber der Kampf der nächsten Minute schon wird es zerreißen. Klingkilidang, Klingkilidang! Dort sitzt die alte Muhme würdevoll und dumm, und kleppert ihre Strickerei zusammen. Ihr blödes Alltagsgesicht strahlt gutes Gewissen aus, dennoch ist sie eine Lumpin, ärger als irgend eine. Denn sie stört, sie tötet das Blühen dieses jungen Talentes, sie mordet die Schönheit dieser noch ungeborenen Gedanken.”

14. “Sie sah das bluttriefende, noch rauchende Fleisch, aus dem der ihm eigentümlich fad-üble Geruch stieg. Da ein Bein, dort der Kopf, enthäutet, noch mit den Augen darin. Das hatte noch vor wenigen Stunden gelebt. Darin pulsierte fröhlich das Blut, welches nun zerronnen am Fleisch klebte. Auch das ist unter Qual dem Leben gegeben worden, dachte sie. Dann: ‘Wie können Mütter sich von Getötetem nähren? Frauen

muss alles Geborene heilig sein. Der Mann mag das Töten verherrlichen, wir aber wollen das Leben feiern und alles Geborene ehren und schützen.”

15. “Russgeruch”; “Mit weiten Nüstern atmen wir uns Mut ein—Russ! Russ!”

16. “Diesen mächtigen, rotglühäugigen Lindwurm, dessen gigantische Glieder unter dem Erzittern der Erde pustend und brausend durch die Nacht gleiten.”

17. “Die schlanken Minarets der [Fabrik-]Schornsteine steigen in die Luft und oben verkündet eine fröhliche Rauchwolke, das das heilige Opferfeuer der Arbeit brennt, lohend gehalten von vielen tausenden Menschen.”

18. “Wenn [sie] am schönsten, am verklärtesten vor den Männern stand”; “reines Ausdrucksmittel.”

19. The metaphor of the educational institution was important, of course, for Asenijeff’s would-be nemesis, Wedekind, whose *Frühlingserwachen* and *Minehaha* both represent the disciplinary structures of institutions that determine subjectivity.

20. “[Die Manneszivilisation] tötet uns, sie macht aus uns nur ein Mittel für den Mann.”

21. “Mit seiner echt männlichen Verstümmelungswut”

22. “Den Bäumchen ihrer Natur entgegengesetzte Formen”; “alle austreibenden Äste abhaut, die sehnsüchtig heraustreiben, auf Kosten eines einzigen, der unnatürlich in die Höhe schießt.”

23. “[Der Arzt] fleischert am Menschenleib herum, sägt Menschenknochen als wären sie Holz.”

24. “Einer ist sicher darunter dessen Augen in Wollust funkeln wenn ein Patient aufkreischt.”

25. “Er liesse die vor Schmerz brüllenden Patienten Phonographen aufstellen, um Art und Rhythmus des Qualschreies zu studieren. Welche grinsende Wollust trieb sein ganzes Wesen auseinander, als er dies mit luststockendem Wort erzählte.”

26. “Seelisch kastrierte . . . Arbeitsmenschen”; “roher Gewalt.”

27. “Sehnen nach Brüderlichkeit.”

28. “Wog[en] in Untiefen des Urseins . . . die Äusserlichkeit eines menschlichen Brüderlichkeitsverhältnis wird der Frau dadurch entbehrllich.”

29. “[Das] Schmerz [der Frau] wird also konzentriert sein, sie wird seine ganze unzersplitterte Qual tragen müssen; sich bewusst bleibend, dass jedes äußerliche Verhältnis (Liebe oder Freundschaft) sie von dem Bewusstwerden des Zusammenhanges mit dem Allsein entfernen wird.”

30. “Eine erhabene Ruhe”; “surface.”

31. “Morgenrot der Läuse.”

32. “Es ist ein geradezu schauergroßes Glück, mit Nervenerschütterungen, gewaltiger, als die letzten Konvulsionen der Luft—mit kreisenden Qualen, an denen das Weib jedes mal stirbt, um dann zu neuem Weh noch einmal es durchkostend zu erwachen. Und wenn dann in letztem Urkreisen, im letzten fürchterlichen Krampf, der schonungslos ihren armen Leib zerreißt—die Teilung geschah—in dem das Beste ihres Blutes ins Dasein tritt—da tönt ein Glück in ihr, es durchwirbelt sie ein kosmisches Gefühl, das sich ausbreitet noch über der Unendlichkeit Unendlichkeiten.”

33. We noted above that Asenijeff was not insensitive to pregnancies that occurred in difficult financial and social situations.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Between Bohemian Brotherhood and the New Man

#### *On Gender and Writing in F. Gräfin zu Reventlow's Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen (1913)*

Carola Daffner

The liminal state of “betwixt and between” is often regarded as an undesired temporary state of uncertainty. Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, however, stresses that a lack of attachment to a space or a system offers a “real or pure possibility” as it encourages reflections on both existing social norms and alternative models (“Betwixt and Between” 105). Germany’s bohemian circles around 1900 as well as Expressionist groups after 1910 celebrated their positions at the margins for this very reason. Inspired by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and his call for a reevaluation of all values, participants in either group (social outsiders, cultural misfits, and artists) radically criticized contemporary Western civilization and questioned patriarchal Christian values. With the rise of the women’s movement in the nineteenth century, women also began to question their social, economic, and political situation. In Munich, women’s rights activists such as Anita Augspurg, Sophia Goudstikker, and Ika Freudenberg actively boycotted their assigned roles as wives and mothers, while Carry Brachvogel, Helene Böhlau, and Gabriele Reuter confronted norms of gender and sexuality in their writings (see Richardsen 300).

A few select women, such as Else Lasker-Schüler, Claire Goll, and Henriette Hardenberg, are well known for their active participation in both scenes. Many more have remained unacknowledged by male artists as well as by the wider public. In recent years, the topic of women and Expressionism has received increasing attention, with scholarship slowly moving away from the traditional approach of analyzing canonical male authors and their por-

trayal of women characters or women's issues. Instead, a new "scholarship of recovery" (Wright 287) has focused on reconstructing the extent to which women either participated in or influenced the different modernist movements in the early twentieth century. Hartmut Vollmer's volume of women's poetry "*In roten Schuhen tanzt die Sonne sich zu Tod*": *Lyrik expressionistischer Dichterinnen* (In red shoes the sun dances itself to death: The poetry of female Expressionist poets, Arche, 1993) is an early example, often cited as a direct response to the classic anthology of (predominantly male) Expressionist poetry *Menschheitsdämmerung* (*Dawn of Humanity*, E. Rowohlt, 1919), published by the German writer Kurt Pinthus. Giving voice to numerous unknown women contributors, Vollmer brought to light not only similarities to male authors from the same period but also differences in perspectives, characteristic themes, or stylistic choices.

While considered a staple of Schwabing's *Bohème* and never officially affiliated with the Expressionists, Countess Franziska zu Reventlow, I argue, is an important, yet often neglected, example, showcasing both points of contact as well as points of tension between *la Bohème* and early German Expressionism in her later works. Reventlow's novel *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen oder Begebenheiten aus einem merkwürdigen Stadtteil* (Mr. Madame's notes or, notes from a strange city district),<sup>1</sup> first published in 1913, provides an intimate view into Munich's artist quarter of Schwabing around the turn of the century. Written in the form of a collection of notes, the novel is also known for its play with traditional genres and conventions. In her study on female dandies around 1900, for example, Isabelle Stauffer concludes that Reventlow uses irony to destabilize gender identity (1ff.). In addition, Anke Finger challenges the often-repeated classification of Reventlow's narrative as a roman à clef on the margins of modernism. Instead, as Finger stresses, works by women that steered away from male-dominated stylistics and aesthetic experiments needed to have their own category within literary modernisms (323). Building upon Stauffer's and Finger's assessments, my investigation traces the novel's particular position as a retrospective narrative, negotiating genre and gender expectations "betwixt and between" the different male-dominated modernist movements in the early twentieth century.

The first part of my study provides a brief overview of Reventlow's involvement in the avant-garde movements of her time and analyzes Herr Dame (Mr. Madame) as a character who finds himself drawn to ideas and concepts that were practiced in bohemian as well as Expressionist groups. Dame's rejection of dominant norms and values, as represented by the figure of the father, and his frustration with the established literary canon give insight into

the allure of vibrant artistic and intellectual subcultures for the culturally restless in the early twentieth century. The second section explores the model of a “new community,” as celebrated in both bohemian and Expressionist circles. The continued liminal position of Reventlow’s protagonist, however, mirrors the writer’s own difficulties in her fight against bourgeois hypocrisy and her quest for absolute sexual freedom “betwixt and between” Schwabing’s “brotherhood.” In the third section, I discuss how Reventlow’s androgynous protagonist challenges popular juxtapositions of male *Mensch* (human being) and *Geist* (spirit, intellect) to female *Weib* (woman) and *Körper* (body) in the two male-dominated circles. The novel’s catastrophic ending can and should be read as a warning to messianic Expressionism and its own euphoric visions of a “New Man.”

### **Between Canon and New Man**

Popularized by ethnologist Arnold van Gennep, the concept of liminality is often used to describe the transitory stage between an individual’s separation from a previous social status and his or her acquisition of a new social status (237). Turner expanded van Gennep’s understanding of liminality by defining it as a “condition of being either permanently and by ascription set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system, or being situationally or temporarily set apart, or voluntarily setting oneself apart from the behavior of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system” (“Passages, Margins, and Poverty” 233). Reventlow’s story is told from the perspective of a liminal character, Herr Dame, who is in a transitional period between two life stages and temporarily removes himself from society’s demands, values, and institutionalized roles. The notes begin with Herr Dame arriving in the fictional urban district of Wahnmoching (a reference to Munich’s bohemian quarter of Schwabing) upon the recommendation of his stepfather.

Around 1900, Munich’s district of Schwabing became a space of deviance and rebellion for social outsiders and cultural misfits. Schwabing’s bohemians met in the Café Luitpold, worked for the German publisher Albert Langen and his satirical journal *Simplicissimus*, or learned how to paint in the studios of bohemian socialite Anton Ažbe. This vibrant antibourgeois subculture, hidden under Munich’s largely conservative Catholic surface, was an exclusive world with its own laws and practices. It provided the necessary space for several, oftentimes interlinked intellectual circles, in which artists and thinkers came together to discuss and to perform alternative sociocultural

models (see Kreuzer 170f.). The most famous of these circles, the Stefan-George-Kreis, had its roots in the controversial neo-pagan Cosmic Circle, which was active from the year 1899 to 1903/4, when arguments inside the group led to its downfall. Known as the *Kosmiker* (cosmics), the circle's main members consisted of the mystic Alfred Schuler, the philosopher Ludwig Klages, the writer Karl Wolfskehl, and the poet Stefan George, all of whom rejected the empire's main tenets of capitalism, the dominant Judeo-Christian tradition, and society's trust in progress and rationality. Under the spiritual leadership of Schuler, the *Kosmiker* called for a new world order and celebrated a pseudoreligious ancient value system, which they saw realized in the ancient Greek and Roman world and confirmed in the works of Swiss historian Johann Jakob Bachofen and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

Famous for her scandalous and unconventional lifestyle, Reventlow became one of Munich's most important figures. She willingly left behind her restrictive aristocratic life and its hierarchical structures in Prussia in lieu of a life in poverty in Schwabing. Today, Reventlow is known as the "Cosmic Countess," the main muse for the Cosmic Circle, and as an incarnation of the "erotic rebellion" around 1900 (see Fritz 30). Despite her unconventional lifestyle, Reventlow disagreed with many initiatives of the contemporary women's movement and her involvement with the *Kosmiker* still draws criticism. In a recent study, for example, Ingvild Richardsen compares Reventlow's notoriety to Carry Brachvogel, a fellow writer and passionate participant in Munich's women's rights movement. Richardsen argues that—while Brachvogel's important work as a feminist activist is virtually unknown today—Reventlow became famous because of her aristocratic background, her scandals, and her role as an oversexualized projection screen for men (321). However, even though Reventlow did not participate in the movement's fight for equal access to education and the professions, her unorthodox approach to women's rights deserves attention for its radical rejection of dominant sexual politics around 1900 and beyond. In her 1899 essay "Viragines oder Hetären?" (Viragoes or hetaerae?, 193–202), for example, she strongly advocated for the liberation of women as sexual beings, outside of the constraints of bourgeois marriage and with free control over their bodies. Reventlow also saw her absolute rejection of anything bourgeois confirmed in the tenets of Schwabing's neo-pagan Cosmic Circle. Here she was hoping to realize her own vision of "free, highly educated women, who offended no one when they gave their love and their body to whomever they desired, as often as they wanted, and at the same time participated in the intellectual life of the men."<sup>2</sup>

Framed by an anonymous chorus, Reventlow's novel presents a kaleido-

scopic view into the bohemian world of Schwabing around 1900 and reveals many of the Cosmic Circle's escapades, secrets, and arguments. The notes also capture the general feeling of outsiderhood and cultural malaise, which many young bohemian and Expressionist writers attributed to their disappointment with and struggle against bourgeois complacency. The reader quickly learns that Herr Dame, despite coming from a well-educated, upper-class family in Berlin, had voluntarily left his socially predetermined path of going to the university, hoping instead to find new forms of authentic experiences and expressions, in an act of defiance of the role society has in store for him. However, not everyone approves of his decision. For the old *Hofrat* (councillor), a stock character in the novel who, as his title implies, is deeply rooted in the dominant social system of the Wilhelmine Empire, Herr Dame's semipermanent position outside of society is not only risky but also dangerous, as it could make him get involved with the wrong crowd and lead to his permanent social downfall: "The old councillor seemed to find it a bit worrisome that I was not planning to study at the university and that I seemed to have so few fixed interests—I should be careful not to get into bad company."<sup>3</sup>

Herr Dame's notes suggest that his general feeling of melancholy and suffering is caused by the powerful presence of the stepfather, who appears both as a major influence and as an archetypal figure of social power. Strongly encouraged by his stepfather, Herr Dame intends to use his voluntary break for collecting ideas for a novel, which he records in a notebook. Despite the stepfather's repeated admonishments, however, Dame has problems finding suitable material as well as developing his own style (57). In addition, a conflict arises when Dame rebels against the stepfather's recommendation to use the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as a role model for his writing, responding instead with frustration and anger: "My stepfather has always encouraged me to do this as well—he liked to point out during such occasions that Goethe always kept a diary, and expressed the view that Goethe was and always had remained the best role model for every young German."<sup>4</sup> For Dame, the constant references to Goethe not only demonstrate a certain arrogance and laziness of the older generation but also hinder any true possibility to create something extraordinary: "No one helps us to live but is content with pointing to the big role models and hopes that something exceptional will become of us. How should these references help me?"<sup>5</sup> Instead of imitating canonical figures, Dame desires to break free from conventions in both experiences and writing.

In many ways, Herr Dame mirrors the position of many male writers in the early twentieth century. The destabilized position of the artist around 1900 led to a destabilization of the dominant cultural canon (see Pendorf 433ff.).

Reventlow was familiar or even friends with writers such as Theodor Fontane, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Thomas Mann, all of whom wrote about the demise of social norms but also about possible alternatives during this perceived cultural crisis. While capturing the essence of bohemian outsiderhood, for example, Reventlow's archetypal conflict of father versus son hints at one such alternative idea, namely the concept of the New Man. In the early twentieth century, the idea of the New Man became a formula for different hopes, desires, and dreams, combining a variety of ideas and constellations (see Anz 45–46). While not new, the concept was reintroduced and celebrated by the German symbolist poet Stefan George<sup>6</sup> and later played a central role in the Expressionist project. For a wide range of thinkers, writers, politicians, and revolutionaries, the New Man represented a complete reconfiguration of both the human body and mind. Optimally functioning, spiritually awakened, and physically liberated, the New Man could even appear in artificial form, for example as the strong and dynamic “machine man” of the Italian Futurists. The concept of the New Woman, in turn, became an extremely influential concept for women's rights and feminist groups in the late nineteenth century. In the plays of Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen, for example, the New Woman often appeared as an *emancipated* or *liberated woman* who defied traditional roles and limits imposed by society.

The Expressionist movement not only grew out of bohemian circles but also found its first followers, such as the writers Else Lasker-Schüler, Erich Mühsam, and Leonhard Frank, among *la Bohème* (Kreuzer 55).<sup>7</sup> Just like bohemian subculture, the Expressionist subculture was a relatively closed and exclusive subculture with its own social rituals and performances, and its own magazines, publishers, circles, clubs, and cafés. Despite the movement's heterogeneity, the various circles bonded in the common opposition against any kind of bourgeois culture, traditions, or lifestyles (see Anderson 17). For the *Kosmiker* as well as for the Expressionists, the New Man became an often-repeated and highly contradictory formula, celebrating manliness and activism while foreshadowing a spiritual, cultural, and social rebirth. Symbolic of the protagonist's general struggle against patriarchal authority and bourgeois norms, Expressionist plays by Franz Werfel (*Nicht der Mörder, der Ermordete ist schuldig*; It's not the murderer, it's the murdered who is guilty, 1920) and Walter Hasenclever (*Der Sohn*, The son, 1914) used images of the father-son conflict in order to unfold visions of a new humanity (see Stoehr 75). In Reventlow's work, it is the stepfather becomes synonymous with the dominant values and norms of bourgeois society (*Bildungsbürgertum*) and the “old” social system, whereas Herr Dame, the son, defies the father's absolute author-

ity and introduces thereby the modernist rebellion against the existing culture and exploration of alternatives.

Revolutionary yet caught in traditional dichotomies, Herr Dame initially appears as a character who anticipates bohemian as well as Expressionist notions of the New Man: he rejects the dominance of the bourgeois father, society, and the state while embracing a modern urban lifestyle and a spiritual-intellectual community. It is important to note, however, that, unlike in plays by Werfel or Hasenclever, the defiance in Reventlow's work is not an open one but one that remains confined to the pages of the notebook and to the margins of *Wahnmoching*. For all we know, the father never hears or reads the notes, and Dame's resistance ultimately remains unknown to future generations. Overlooked and invisible, the character's unacknowledged struggle to find his own voice reflects the fate of many writers who found themselves ignored "betwixt and between" the existing canon and the various avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century. Female artists who tried to find their own language and style without, as Finger writes, embracing feminism or openly attacking conventional styles (323) faced similar issues of not being seen, heard, or read. The following section takes a closer look at Dame's continued position as a liminal character and his futile attempts to become an equal participant in *Wahnmoching*'s male-dominated subculture.

### **Between Bohemian Brotherhood and a Secret Germany**

The longing for a community (*Gemeinschaft*, in opposition to society or *Gesellschaft*) was a crucial concept for the bohemians around 1900 and for the early Expressionists about ten years later. This longing coincided with "a highly messianic strain in the art and literature" (Anderson 9) of the early twentieth century, built around the striving toward a social and inner regeneration. In Reventlow's novel, the idea of community reappears throughout the story, for example in the form of an anonymous chorus that introduces, accompanies, and judges Dame's notes. In accordance with the frequent use of the group chorus in Expressionist plays, Reventlow's chorus represents the voice of the collective as a whole, repeatedly referring to itself simply as "wir" (we), raving about "our plural" and evoking the great simplification and enrichment of life that comes with it: "How poor, how isolated, how pretentious and embarrassingly underlined does the narrating or experiencing 'I' stand there—how rich and strong instead does the 'We.'"<sup>8</sup> For Herr Dame, *Wahnmoching*, too, initially appears as a model of community and as the perfect refuge for indi-



viduals without a stable foundation of self, who, like himself, temporarily opted out of the dominant social structure and its traditional values. He describes the district as a “spiritual movement, a standard, a direction, a protest, a new cult or, moreover, an attempt to gain new religious possibilities from ancient cultures,”<sup>9</sup> and finds himself immediately attracted to the exciting promise of a new art, culture, and liberated lifestyle. Wahnmoching’s most popular movement, as the reader soon learns, is a thinly disguised version of Schwabing’s Cosmic Circle, consisting of Delius (Schuler), Hallwig (Klages), Professor Hofmann (Wolfskehl), and the Meister (master; George).

The idea of a messianic voice that would signify the twilight of humanity (*Menschheitsdämmerung*) is, in many respects, a unique phenomenon of modernist movements in the early twentieth century. More than any other single thinker or writer, Friedrich Nietzsche was not only life-changing for many bohemians around the turn of the century but also heavily influenced the young Expressionists. Typical topics, such as the will to power, vitalism, the overman, and the general search for a cultural redemption, led many Expressionist writers to appropriate Nietzschean and especially Zarathustrian rhetoric in their works (see Anderson 27). Inspired by Nietzsche’s works, Stefan George and his circle proclaimed the New Man and envisioned that, under the guidance of the male poet (*poeta vates*) and foreshadowed by an elite group of youth referred to as *Sonnenknaben* (Lads of the Sun), a new secret Germany would arise from under Germany’s surface (see Norton 293). In Reventlow’s Wahnmoching, Nietzsche, too, is as a main inspiration and anything destructive to life considered hostile (41). Here the concept of the *Sonnenknabe* appears in the figure of Konstantin, also referred to as “Zauberlehrling” (sorcerer’s apprentice, 34), who is free to do anything he wants.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of a redemption in the here and now is part of a long literary and philosophical tradition, going all the way back to the German writer Friedrich Schiller (see Anderson 18). Reventlow’s narrative alludes to this tradition by returning to the difficult question of how to approach the literary canon in the context of a general longing for a cultural rebirth. A few weeks after his move to Wahnmoching, for example, Herr Dame is allowed to stand near Delius, who joins him and other guests in looking at portraits of several poets and historical personalities, among them Friedrich Schiller, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Martin Luther, and a painting of the Meister himself. After seeing the portraits, Delius gives an elaborate speech about his vision for a new form of society, ruled by a hierarchical spiritual aristocracy and the intellectual, artistic elite, before disappearing with several chosen disciples in the coveted third room.

Delius's speech appears as a direct response to Dame's general dissatisfaction with society's blind reliance on the authority of great icons and canonical role models, as exemplified by Schiller and Goethe. Dame, however, perceives Delius as someone who, instead of merely imitating the canon, places himself in a privileged position at its forefront: "I feel more and more that this here is about big ideas and deep life knowledge. There are undoubtedly some unusually intelligent persons among these people, and they want to shape life in a whole new and more beautiful way,"<sup>11</sup> Inspired by the prophetic tone in Nietzsche's influential *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–1891), the assumed leadership role of Delius within the canon creates the illusion of a rebirth of society and culture, guided by a male messiah.<sup>12</sup> This active reinterpretation and revision of the male-dominated literary canon continues during another costume ball. Here again, references to the German classical tradition, and in particular a performance of scenes from Goethe's *Faust*, create notions of a distinctly modified and updated cultural identity, shared exclusively with the rest of the guests. During the fest, several parades take place inside the apartments, in which the *Kosmiker*—dressed up as a variety of historical and mythological figures, ranging from a Roman mother and an Indian Dionysus to Julius Caesar—walk through several rooms while chanting lyrics from Goethe's *Faust* (67–69). Typical of German Expressionist dance, the parade culminates in an ecstatic, uninhibited, and provocative performance, accompanied by (sacred) chants and the sounds of a gong. The collective bond, again triggered by the canonical text and magnified by the shared ecstatic experience of the dance, increases Herr Dame's hope to become an equal member in the exclusive community.

Despite his longing for a community of like-minded individuals, however, Dame quickly realizes that he remains confined to the ambiguous position of "betwixt and between." His first encounter with Wahnmoching's unique world takes place in a coffee shop, where he has trouble following the conversation. Confused about the unfamiliar references, exclusive jargon ("Mirobuk," 16) and Wahnmoching's surprisingly hierarchical system with a master on top, Dame reacts by feeling excluded and embarrassed: "This young man and the lady had such a confusing way of expressing themselves in a dark and mysterious manner, and they also acted as if they were talking about completely real things so that I had become somewhat insecure."<sup>13</sup> The awareness of not belonging continues during future visits to the café, which not only limits him to a liminal position at the next table (17) but also leads to a temporary regression to a childlike state: "I cannot always ask and ask like a four-year-old child."<sup>14</sup> In an attempt to counteract his feeling insecure,

marginalized, and confused, Dame expresses an urgent desire to belong to the circle: “But it entices me, I cannot escape any of it anymore—I guess I am condemned to it.”<sup>15</sup>

Dame’s intense impressions of being excluded, invisible, and an almost existential outsider, and, at the same time, his strong desire to become integrated into this imagined community of equals echo central themes of alienation and loneliness in German Expressionism. From the beginning, these feelings are also connected to what Dame perceives to be his own lack of masculinity. The latter feeling starkly opposes the celebration of masculinity in bohemian and Expressionist circles and makes Dame feel reduced to the role of an ignorant child. His unhappiness continues during his first invitation to a *jour fixé* at the apartment of Professor Hofmann—a fictitious name for the German Jewish writer Karl Wolfskehl, the circle’s main financial sponsor. Wolfskehl’s apartment in the Leopoldstrasse 87 not only became the *Kosmiker*’s main meeting point but also an arena for social games, a microcosmic prototype of a new cultural capital and known as a “kind of anti-Berlin” (Norton 293). Here the circle hosted its infamously lavish carnival parties and costume balls with which the *Kosmiker* sought to revive an ancient mystic world by frequently dressing up as different mythical and historical figures.<sup>16</sup>

Dame’s first time entering the crowded apartment denotes a temporary change in his marginal position within the subculture, implying a symbolic transition and suggesting hope that an integration into Wahnmoching would follow next. Simulating a rite of passage, his crossing of the threshold triggers a temporary silence in the room: “When we entered, everything was quiet for a few minutes.”<sup>17</sup> In these first seconds, Herr Dame briefly changes from an invisible liminal character to the object of the gaze. The rare moment of visibility, however, does not last long: Dame quickly realizes that every new guest receives the same attention (“I later noticed that it was like this every time someone new arrived,” 24)<sup>18</sup> and, again, feels excluded from the conversation: “I had hardly said ten words the entire evening and not understood most of what was said, in addition to having committed a serious faux pas, as Gerhard told me afterward, by mentioning to the Frau Professor that I would be eager to get to know the Meister.”<sup>19</sup> Despite being invited to the gathering, Herr Dame is not allowed to be part of the inner circle, which is spatially separated from the rest of the guests: “He [the Meister] tends to remain in the third room and only whoever is found worthy will be introduced to him.”<sup>20</sup> As before, Dame’s exaggerated feelings of being unworthy, invisible, anxious, and without individuality are closely linked to the tormented emotions typical of German Expressionism. Implied here again is also a lack of masculinity, as Herr

Dame is forced to remain in a passive and inactive position. Dame leaves deeply unhappy and confused, as he remains at the margins, both spatially as well as linguistically.

Shortly thereafter, Herr Dame attends a second fest, this time a carnival party, during which he crosses another spatial and symbolic threshold when he is invited to sit at Hofmann's table. Reventlow's description evokes a carnivalesque place and thereby once more the hope that the space would allow social hierarchies, cultural conventions, and dominant values be overturned by normally suppressed voices. Indeed, Dame detects in the unimaginable chaos of people, costumes, music, and noise several breaches of social conventions: "I thought everyone would behave appropriately and solemnly and I was perplexed to see that the professor was dressed as the devil and danced around in wild jumps."<sup>21</sup> Despite the ecstatic and expressive celebration of raw power, vitality, and sexuality, Dame realizes that, even in this carnivalesque atmosphere, free expression for everyone, without fear of judgment, is not possible. He again feels lost during the conversation and is not allowed to see the Meister, who spends the evening hiding behind a mask. Evoking a sense of secrecy and superiority, the Meister's mask becomes a symbol for Dame's own blindness, inferiority, and powerlessness. In addition, several young men form a circle around the Meister (31), further blocking Dame's view and rendering him less masculine by exclusion. Once more, he is reminded of being unworthy and prohibited from participating in these secret meetings: "Everywhere are mysterious communities. You hear talk of satanic masses, orgies, magic, and paganism as if they were everyday things, then there is dancing and tea drinking, but even at tea there are secrets and closed doors."<sup>22</sup> Despite his advances, Herr Dame remains in his passive peripheral position, caught between inclusion and exclusion.

Continuously subjected to discrimination based on gender expectations, Herr Dame's experience reflects the general experience of female writers in the different avant-garde groups. Always invited yet also always excluded, the protagonist's liminal position specifically highlights the supporting role many talented women, from Else Lasker-Schüler to Claire Goll, were forced to play (see Vollmer 16). His reactions, ranging from feeling embarrassed and unworthy to insecure and confused, also give insight into how difficult it was for women writers of the time to establish themselves in the literary market. Even though unconventional women such as Reventlow were hoping to fulfill their dreams of overturning social hierarchies and cultural conventions in the modernist movements, they often found themselves deeply disappointed in and ultimately restricted by modernist ideas of a cultural rebirth. The third section

of this study discusses Reventlow's novel in the context of one of the main ideas in bohemian and Expressionist circles, namely that a cultural renewal depended on the violent reassertion of male dominance over effeminate culture. By choosing an androgynous protagonist, Reventlow particularly responds to visions of the New Woman (*das Weib*, the female), which often differed significantly from what women wished for themselves.

### **Between New Man and New Woman**

A crucial question for a movement dedicated to the renewal of humankind is the extent to which this renewal applies to both sexes. Unsurprisingly, the imaginings of a "new community" in both bohemian and Expressionist circles were based on the highly gendered tension between modernity and tradition. The views of women and gender relations in both movements were particularly influenced by the works of the Swiss anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen. Bachofen's publication *Das Mutterrecht* (Mother right, 1861) was first rediscovered by the *Kosmiker* and later celebrated by the Expressionists as an essential source for visions of a cultural renewal. In this work, Bachofen argued that a sensuous and earth-derived "tellurian" matriarchy had preceded "Apollonian" patriarchy. Just as patriarchy had conquered matriarchy before, social and cultural progress would again require men's triumph over women in the current age (see Norton 297).

When German-speaking thinkers started to reconstruct nonnormative sexualities in the nineteenth century, they consistently placed them outside of the centers of power in the German and Austrian empires. Instead, discussions of homosexuality or explorations of gender identity often appeared projected onto various peripheral traditions and/or locales, from Switzerland and Italy to Greece and Palestine (see Tobin x). Bachofen's theories of a tellurian matriarchy and Nietzsche's call for a liberation from "the herd" deeply influenced Reventlow's own fascination with the hetaera of Greek antiquity and inspired her to radically reject sexual politics in the Wilhelmine Empire. Alongside works of other influential writers such as Magnus Hirschfeld, Lou Andreas-Salomé, and Thomas Mann, Reventlow's novel instead advocates for modern categories of sexuality and genderqueer subcultures, anticipating herein global discussions around sexual desires and forms of gender identity throughout the twentieth century. The inferior role of women in *Wahnmoching*, for example, resurfaces several times throughout the notes, mirroring Reventlow's own difficulties in her quest for absolute sexual freedom and creative self-determination:

Delius, we learn, tends not to acknowledge women (64), and sexual intercourse with a woman can result in punishment (82ff.). The notes further include several moments of gender ambiguity, which undermine the idea that the projected cultural mission would be based on the symbolic as well as the real domination of women. Particularly the androgyny of Herr Dame challenges the often-repeated dualisms of male *Mensch* (human being) and *Geist* (spirit, intellect) versus female *Weib* (woman) and *Körper* (body) in the two male-dominated movements. As a stark contrast to traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity, Reventlow's protagonist appears neither fully male nor fully female, attracted to both women and men, and symbolically assigned characteristics of both sexes through his name, Herr Dame.

For Anke Finger, the friendship between the androgynous Herr Dame and the two female characters, Maria and Susanna, reflects Reventlow's own multifaceted self and gender flexibility, eliminates notions of a duality between masculinity and femininity, and mocks the *Kosmiker's* romanticized view of the woman as wife and mother (327). Reventlow's play with gender expectations and the variety of women's identities also foreshadows major themes in the works of female Expressionist poets who celebrated female sexual activity and used androgynous perspectives to emphasize that conventional gender roles had failed to create community.<sup>23</sup> While Else Lasker-Schüler's character of Yusuf, Prince of Thebes, might be the best-known performance of gender and difference, Bess Brenck-Kalischer undermined the traditional gender dichotomy in her Expressionist narrative *Die Knäbin: Aus einem Brief* (The boygirl: From a letter) by using an androgynous narrator who switches between male and female perspectives (55–62).

In Reventlow's novel, Dame feels particularly drawn to the two female characters, Maria and Susanna (50), since, as he believes, they would understand his particular position as a liminal and gender-ambiguous character and the difficulties that come with it.<sup>24</sup> The gender triangle (Dame—Maria—Susanna) is also reflected in Reventlow's combination of different writing styles and genres, traditionally ascribed to both men (essays) and women (novels). With the juxtaposition of male and female genres, as Finger highlights, Reventlow exposes the restrictive nature of the various male-dominated genres in modernism for not adequately capturing the complexity of women's concepts of self (323). *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* continues to blur male and female principles on the content-level. During one of the parties in Hofmann's apartment, Maria and Susanna dress up as hermaphrodites (62), and Konstantin, the circle's *Sonnenknabe*, temporarily appears as a beautiful female: "I . . . slowly put my arm around her—it is Konstantin—he turns around and looks at

me like a beautiful girl.”<sup>25</sup> Despite dressing up as a flute player himself, Herr Dame confesses: “I remained Herr Dame during the fest as well.”<sup>26</sup> Even if he tried, as Reventlow’s sentences suggest, Herr Dame is unable to mold himself into just one or the other, the *Weib* of a tellurian matriarchy or the male *Mensch* who will bring forth a new culture, but remains genderqueer. Unable to fully identify as one or the other, as woman or as man, Reventlow’s character of Herr Dame expands the general sense of nonbelonging in the Expressionist worldview to the question of gender identity. Instead of a desired liberation from social norms that is limited to the New Man, Dame’s self-understanding also describes a position which does not align with heterosexual nor homosexual norms but rather fluctuates between different sexual desires.

For Dame, the inability to deny his own unique individuality and gender-ambiguous complexity remains an issue through the entire story as the character repeatedly expresses his own unhappiness. To visualize the protagonist’s suffering, Reventlow’s novel touches upon a new style of conveying ideas through general truths and representative types that was introduced by her friend the playwright Frank Wedekind (1864–1918), and later continued by the Expressionists. In accordance with the Expressionist focus on stock characters, negative exaggerations, and apocalyptic threats, Dame frequently refers to himself as condemned (“verurteilt,” 13) or as “a condemned one” (“ein Verurteilter,” 19), stuck in a role that he would have no choice but to live out: “The ‘condemned one’ would probably be a type . . . like ‘the Profligate,’ ‘the Don Juan,’ ‘the Adventurer,’ and so on.”<sup>27</sup> The feeling of being stuck in an unwanted, invisible, and inferior type makes Herr Dame feel self-conscious (9), insecure (9), without initiative (12), insignificant (47), tired (52), and, ultimately, unable to write. Throughout his diary entries, Dame again and again refers to his difficulties writing (31, 48, 65), his hesitation in picking a style (31), and his problems with being able to concentrate (65, 80).

Despite his continued inability to write, glimpses of a new feminine style of writing appear out of the blue in the notes in the unexpected shift to a female perspective. Susanna, one of the two female characters in the narrative, not only reads Dame’s notes but also writes herself into and straight across the notes: “Here several pages are torn out, and instead there is a number of almost illegible pieces of paper with pencil notes. Then, written across the pages follows an entry by a woman’s hand: I found this notebook—your diary, it seems—open on the table and was so indiscreet as to read in it a little bit.”<sup>28</sup> Herr Dame initially reacts to Susanna’s handwriting with frustration, yet this frustration goes deeper than merely being annoyed by her indiscretion. Anticipating Hélène Cixous’s seminal concept of *écriture féminine*, Susanna’s sen-

tences reveal exactly the sort of carefree and uniquely feminine writing experience, neither bound by any rules or lines nor afraid to be discovered and read and, most of all, not intimidated by previous male writers, that Herr Dame had longed for in vain during his discussions with his stepfather and his participation in the Cosmic Circle. However, the shift to the confident female perspective remains brief: Dame's continued invisibility confirms Reventlow's own disillusionment with the modernist movements, as new and unorthodox styles are ultimately neither encouraged nor allowed in Wahnmoching.

Herr Dame remains an outsider in the circle and is never allowed into the coveted third room. In addition, he slowly loses his liminal freedom to move back and forth between the different spaces: the hierarchical nature of the circle and the strict assignment of roles do not allow for any other voices or perspectives. The promise of an exclusive community further turns into disappointment when the radical anti-Semitic nature of Delius's theories causes several disagreements among the core members and ultimately leads to Maria's banishment (97). Moreover, many of the circle's followers are increasingly worried that talking about the circle's many secrets with outsiders would not only lead to physical punishment but even death (61). Popular visions of the New Man as a harbinger of a cultural and spiritual rebirth are also exposed as illusory when the *Sonnenknabe* Konstantin, after a night with a female dancer, is mocked, violently threatened (82), and finally expelled from the circle (89). As the arguments continue, and one member after the other disappears, Herr Dame, too, decides to leave. The diary abruptly ends with the protagonist still in transition to a new space, "betwixt and between," without a promised resolution or stable reintegration in sight. The anonymous chorus finds Dame completely voiceless, "schweigsam und verstört" (silent and distraught, 10), and convinced that his novel will never be written (100). Foreshadowing the apocalyptic narrative style of Expressionism, Dame dies in a train crash during his attempt to escape predetermined expectations once again.

## Conclusion

Reventlow's novel *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* has often been dismissed as an entertaining, yet aesthetically undemanding, roman à clef. A closer reading of the novel, however, reveals that Reventlow's protagonist, the genderqueer character of Herr Dame, challenges the stereotypical understanding of Expressionism as a movement solely committed to binary gender identities. In their longing for a cultural rebirth, Munich's bohemians around the turn of the cen-



tury and Germany's Expressionists sought to overcome existing social norms. Yet despite their radical rejection of patriarchal tendencies and their enthusiastic celebration of matriarchal creation myths, many bohemians and Expressionists remained deeply traditional in their views of women's roles and purposes. The underlying assumption that women were procreators instead of creators made it difficult for women writers to break out of their supporting roles and to establish themselves as main voices within the various literary movements.

Showing great concern about questions of identity, equality, and liberation from social limitations, the story of Herr Dame traces Reventlow's own ongoing search for sexual freedom and absolute creative self-determination during a perceived social decline and a general longing for a cultural rebirth. Instead of reaffirming traditional views of the male *Mensch* and the female *Weib* as polar opposites, Reventlow's protagonist continues to fluctuate between feelings of masculinity and femininity throughout the novel. Reventlow hereby brings awareness to discussions around different forms of gender identity and nonnormative sexualities that remain as relevant today as they were one hundred years ago. *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen*, in other words, not only confirms the general sense of an almost existential outsiderhood and loss of individuality that many Expressionists felt but also expands the struggle with social and cultural norms to issues of gender and sexuality.

Reflecting the writer's own disillusionment with Germany's modernist movements, *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* exposes Wahnmoching, despite its promise of a "community of equals," as ultimately conservative and oppressive. Referencing the male individual's striving for greater knowledge, as played out in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* and in the Wilhelm Meister novels (*Turmgesellschaft*), Wahnmoching's secret society, too, sets traditional gender stereotypes back into place in a new guise: Herr Dame continuously attempts to find his own voice through writing, yet his continued powerlessness, based on traditional gender expectations, prevents a true coming-of-age-process within the circle's elitist and male-dominated power structures. Reventlow, too, became more and more worried about Schwabing's increasingly euphoric calls for a New Man and the growing enthusiasm for an apocalyptic rebellion, which, one year after the publication of *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen*, would lead many Expressionists to enlist in the armed forces in the First World War. Due to financial reasons but also in search of a new community of equals, Reventlow decided to leave Munich in 1910 for Ascona in Switzerland.

## NOTES

1. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.
2. "Freie, hochgebildete und geachtete Frauen, denen niemand es übelnahm, wenn sie ihre Liebe und ihren Körper verschenkten an wen sie wollten und so oft sie wollten und die gleichzeitig am geistigen Leben der Männer teilnahmen" ("Viragines oder Hetären?," 200); translated in Tobin 181.
3. "Der alte Hofrat schien es etwas bedenklich zu finden, daß ich kein bestimmtes Studium ergreifen will und so wenig fixierte Interessen habe—ich solle mich vorsehen, nicht in schlechte Gesellschaft zu geraten" (The old councilor seemed to find it a bit worrisome that I was not planning to study at the university and that I seemed to have so few fixed interests—I should be careful not to get into bad company, Reventlow 12).
4. "Auch dazu hat ja mein Stiefvater mich von jeher ermuntert—er wies bei solchen Gelegenheiten gerne darauf hin, daß Goethe stets Tagebücher geführt habe, und äußerte die Ansicht, Goethe sei und bleibe doch immer das beste Vorbild für jeden jungen Deutschen" (Reventlow 57).
5. "Man hilft uns nicht zu leben, sondern begnügt sich damit, uns auf große Vorbilder hinzuweisen und dann zu hoffen, dass etwas Außerordentliches aus uns wird. Was sollen mir derartige Hinweise?" (Reventlow 47–48).
6. "Nur bei wenigen (und das sind natürlich die Auserlesenen) hat sich eine oder die andere Substanz in überwiegendem Maße erhalten" (Only a few [and those are of course the chosen ones] still have a predominant amount of one or the other substance, Reventlow 23).
7. Despite their roots in the bohemian circles, many Expressionists passionately rejected *la Bohème's* "Apollonian" mentality and its perceived lack of leadership vision. They also considered the approach to antibourgeois sentiments among bohemian circles too playful (Anz 30).
8. "Wie armselig, wie vereinzelt, wie präntiös und peinlich unterstrichen steht das erzählende oder erlebende 'Ich' da—wie reich und stark dagegen das 'Wir'" (Reventlow 9).
9. "Wahnmoching ist eine geistige Bewegung, ein Niveau, eine Richtung, ein Protest, ein neuer Kult oder vielmehr der Versuch, aus uralten Kulturen wieder neue religiöse Möglichkeiten zu gewinnen" (Reventlow 24).
10. "Wo ist denn der Sonnenbengel? Schon untergegangen am frühen Morgen?" ("Where the heck is the sun brat? Already went down in the early morning?" Reventlow 51).
11. "Ich habe mehr und mehr das Gefühl, daß es sich hier um große Ideen und tiefe Lebenserkenntnis handelt. Es sind unter diesen Menschen zweifellos einige ungewöhnliche Intelligenzen, und sie wollen das Leben auf eine ganz neue und schönere Art gestalten" (Reventlow 47).
12. "So war in den achtziger Jahren des vorigen Jahrhunderts große heidnische Blutleuchte. Delius fand seine Weltanschauung—Nietzsche schrieb den Zarathustra—in der damaligen Jugend gärte es" (In the eighties of the last century was the big heathen blood light. Delius found his worldview—Nietzsche wrote the Zarathustra—something was brewing among the youth of that time, Reventlow 40).

13. “Jener junge Mann und die Dame hatten eine so verwirrende Art, sich dunkel und geheimnisvoll auszudrücken und dabei, als ob von ganz realen Dingen die Rede sei, daß ich selbst etwas unsicher geworden war” (Reventlow 16).

14. “[I]ch kann doch nicht immer fragen und fragen wie ein vierjähriges Kind” (Reventlow 19).

15. “Aber es lockt mich, ich kann dem allen nicht mehr entfliehen—ich bin wohl dazu verurteilt” (Reventlow 19).

16. Schuler attempted to revive the ancient world by arranging several costume balls in the early 1900s in which participants dressed “as Dionysos, Euridice, and Orpheus; and as Bacchantes, Phrygians and Thracians” (Norton 298).

17. “Als wir eintraten, schwieg alles ein paar Minuten lang” (Reventlow 24).

18. “Ich merkte später, daß es jedesmal so war, wenn jemand Neues kam” (Reventlow 24).

19. “Ich hatte den ganzen Abend kaum zehn Worte gesagt und das meiste, was sie sprachen, nicht verstanden, zudem, wie Gerhard mir nachher sagte, einen schweren Fauxpas begangen, indem ich der Frau Professor sagte: ich sei sehr begierig, den Meister kennenzulernen” (Reventlow 25–26).

20. “Er pflege sich im dritten Zimmer aufzuhalten, und nur, wer würdig befunden sei, würde ihm vorgestellt” (Reventlow 26).

21. “Ich dachte, man würde sich gemessen und weihevoll benehmen und es machte mich stutzig, daß der Professor als Teufel verkleidet war und in wilden Sprüngen tanzte” (Reventlow 31).

22. “Überall sind mysteriöse Gemeinschaften, man hört Satansmesse, Orgien, Magie und Heidentum sprechen wie von ganz alltäglichen Dingen, dann wird wieder getanzt und Tee getrunken, aber selbst beim Tee gibt es Geheimnisse und verschlossene Türen” (Reventlow 33).

23. See, for example, descriptions of ecstatic sexual lust in El Hor’s “Die Närrin” or in the poetry of Henny Stock and Else Lasker-Schüler (see Krause 16–17).

24. “Sie [Maria] dachte noch über meinen Namen nach, und wir sprachen darüber. Ich sagte, daß ich Chamotte beneide—wie fröhlich und selbstverständlich kann einer durch die Welt gehen, wenn er so gerufen wird; er tut sich leicht mit seiner Biographie” (She [Maria] was still thinking about my name and we talked about it. I said that I envied Chamotte—how cheerfully and naturally someone can go through the world when he is called this way; his biography will come easily to him, Reventlow 30).

25. “Ich denke, sie ist es, die vor mir steht, und lege sanft den Arm um sie—es ist Konstantin—er dreht sich um und schaut mich an wie ein schönes Mädchen” (Reventlow 69).

26. “Und ich blieb auch bei dem Fest Herr Dame” (Reventlow 66).

27. “Der ‘Verurteilte’ sei wohl ein Typus . . . wie ‘der Verschwender,’ ‘der Don Juan,’ ‘der Abenteurer’ und so weiter” (Reventlow 13).

28. “Hier sind mehrere Seiten herausgerissen, und statt dessen findet sich eine Anzahl fast unleserlicher Zettel mit Bleistiftnotizen. Dann folgt quer über die Seiten hineingeschrieben ein Eintrag von Frauenhand:—ich habe dieses Heft—Ihr Tagebuch, wie es scheint, offen auf dem Tisch gefunden und war so indiskret, etwas darin zu lesen” (Reventlow 26).

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## CHAPTER 4

### “Wenn man eine Frau ist”

#### *Female Protagonists as Social Revolutionaries*

Corinne Painter

“Your writing is just not what I’m actually looking for,” the editor said. “Write me something wild, something mad, something crazy” (768).<sup>1</sup> These words, taken from “Die Grotteske” (The grotesque), published in 1916 by German Jewish author Clementine Krämer, and spoken by a male editor to the female protagonist, refer to debates about women’s creativity, autonomy, and rights in the workplace. The difficulties women faced in the public sphere were a theme that Krämer returned to repeatedly throughout her life. She wrote over one hundred short stories and at least a third deal with this topic.<sup>2</sup> In her Expressionist work, Krämer’s female protagonists inverted societal norms and used the men around them for economic and social stability. As a result, the female protagonists seized power from men and became social revolutionaries.

The canon of German Expressionism and Expressionist writers remains dominated by male writers. Within this field, the gender divide is stark and the male protagonists use women to further their own development as social revolutionaries, often replicating the gender divide in contemporary society (Wright 292). However, within women’s writing, we can see women’s subjectivity centered and how female protagonists were able to use men to become social revolutionaries. In order to understand how women could become social revolutionaries, we need an understanding of what a social revolution is and how these kinds of revolutions occur. In its most basic form, a social revolution is a transformation of society brought about through class upheaval by self-conscious actors (Skocpol 4–8). Social revolutions bring previously excluded and/or oppressed groups to power (Goldstone 36). The history of revolutions teaches us that maintaining this change is difficult, and frequently revolutions result in a society that is very different from that which the revolutionaries

imagined. Krämer's work did not tend to examine the outcomes; rather she was focused on the revolutionary potential of her female protagonists and how these protagonists could begin the process of seizing power. This chapter therefore analyzes how Krämer understood this moment of revolution and how her female protagonists were able to become revolutionaries.

Clementine Krämer (1873–1942) was a German Jewish writer, poet, and campaigner in the women's movement. Her writings covered the majority of her life, but she was especially active between 1900 and 1929, with a particularly productive period during the First World War. Many of her stories featured in the local and national press and in both Jewish and non-Jewish publications. She used a variety of different styles in her work and combined different literary elements to critique her world and to imagine alternative solutions to the problems she perceived. This chapter will take a cultural studies approach, using Krämer's writings as "texts" to gain a fuller understanding of German society and relations between different social groups at a time of great social change. This approach also challenges the construction of a canon, as this replicates preexisting power dynamics and creates a division between the "superior" texts within the canon and "inferior" texts outside it. Changing the focus of the canon to previously excluded or ignored writers renders this power dynamic visible, and a more complete understanding of Expressionism can be developed.<sup>3</sup> Cultural studies is inherently interdisciplinary and, in this chapter, concepts from literary analysis and gender studies will be used to analyze Krämer's work. For Krämer, as a member of a group which experienced discrimination, this approach illuminates how German Jewish women confronted the boundaries of their world, how they understood their position and how they reflected on the difficulties they faced. The definitions of Expressionism and the themes associated with the movement are numerous, so to ensure a focused analysis, the discussion here will be limited to Krämer's approach to the "gender battle" and the ways in which female protagonists use men. Her protagonists confront the boundaries of the world, and in so doing they start the process to revolutionize the social order.

This essay will focus on two of Krämer's stories, "Wenn man eine Frau ist" (When you are a woman) and "Die Grotteske," both of which fit comfortably inside the main period of German Expressionist writing and incorporate many stylistic aspects of Expressionism. They also coincide with the origins of the First World War and the sweeping changes it brought. In public discourse, a patriotic wave was portrayed as sweeping across Germany, removing differences of religion or region. Of course, anti-Semitism remained, and, as the war dragged on, Jews were often accused of shirking their responsibilities or even

undermining Germany from within. As many men were away fighting and women took on new roles in larger numbers, questions were raised about women's rights in the public sphere (Kaplan 225–26). Krämer, whose name did not identify her as Jewish and who often published in non-Jewish publications, was in the position of what literary theorist Trinh T. Minh-Ha calls the “inappropriate Other,” someone who was both on the outside looking in and simultaneously on the inside looking out (74). The boundary crossing found in Krämer's work is common in female Expressionist writing (Wright 291). Her characters are frequently alienated from their environment and those around them, adopting different identities and, in the terms of gender theorist Judith Butler, performing gender to adapt to the different challenges they faced (Butler 192). Krämer was able to critically consider society from the position of insider and outsider, and her stories demonstrate her critical position, while also reflecting the Expressionist themes of alienation and isolation, allowing her characters to critique society.

By including women's writing in the canon, we can undertake the valuable work of highlighting the creative output of those who have been suffering under the injustice of being ignored, and we can complicate the traditional understanding of Expressionism. We can add detail to the idea of the “social revolution” and gain a nuanced understanding of what this term means to women, in particular women belonging to a minority group. This chapter, and the Expressionist writing introduced, challenge the notion of women serving as a means to a male artist's or male revolutionary's development and examine how women can become revolutionaries and even use men for their own ends. The goals of the social revolution become more nuanced, and the potential consequences of upending the status quo become apparent. When new voices are added to the canon of German Expressionism, our understanding of the literary and cultural scene in Germany during this period becomes more complicated and we gain new insights into German society from the perspectives of insiders and outsiders and begin to blur these demarcations.

An overview of Krämer's life demonstrates how she transgressed social boundaries and campaigned for a better world, themes that also emerged in her writing. Clementine Krämer (née Cahnmann) was born in a small village in Baden in 1873 into a Liberal Jewish family. In 1891, she married a banker, Max, and moved to Munich. In Munich, the Krämers associated with many key figures on the literary scene. They lived in Schwabing, a bohemian area, home to many artists and writers, and creative types were a prominent fixture at many of their social gatherings. Clementine Krämer became involved with the League of Jewish Women, a national charitable organization, which organized



welfare within the Jewish community, provided education and training, and aimed to increase religious engagement for middle-class women and girls.<sup>4</sup> By 1911, Krämer was the leader of the Munich branch of this organization. As a result, she had a keen eye for social problems, a desire for social change, and an imaginative approach to problem-solving. Krämer wrote many articles for the League of Jewish Women, highlighting the important role women could undertake in education, religious ceremonies, and social work. More conservative leaders in the Jewish community, who often wanted women to play a limited role in public religious life, found this work to be a threat to the social order. The social commentaries Krämer created in her articles were also a key theme in her literary works, in which she often focused on class divisions and relationships between men and women and challenged the expectation of women's inferiority. Through her personal connections on the literary scene and her familiarity with publishing in Germany, she was keenly aware of trends and changes in literary styles, many of which she blended in her work.<sup>5</sup>

As a German Jewish woman, her opportunities for self-expression were, in many ways, restricted. Jews had been legally emancipated across Germany in 1871, meaning that the rights of citizenship had been extended to German Jewish men on the same terms as non-Jewish German men. However, this had not ended anti-Semitism and violence toward Jews; discrimination and discriminatory language continued to be widespread. Furthermore, German women, both Jewish and not, continued to grapple with restrictions placed upon them. While the first decade of the twentieth century opened university education to women and the job market began to expand, women continued to face discrimination in both fields. There were also concerns about the role women should play in the public sphere. For German Jewish middle-class women like Krämer, there were questions about the types of roles they should play, while at the same time they faced discrimination on the basis of their religious or cultural affiliation with Judaism and their gender.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in women like Krämer carefully negotiating public spaces and using their voices with caution to challenge the status quo. As a creative writer, she used her stories as a way to negotiate this space, imagine alternative realities, and create new solutions. The complex nature of her identity and the context in which she was writing must be borne in mind in order to appreciate the complexity of her stories.

Judaism was also undergoing a period of change. Religious affiliation and synagogue attendance was in decline, as increasing numbers of young people, in particular young men, converted out of the religion. This raised questions about what it meant to be Jewish and how the religion was going to continue in

light of these struggles.<sup>7</sup> Reform Judaism, from which Liberal Judaism grew, was practiced by the largest number of German Jews, but there was a sizable Orthodox minority that was supplemented by new arrivals from eastern Europe who came to Germany seeking employment and escape from anti-Semitic discrimination and pogroms in the East. These new arrivals confronted German Jews with what it meant to be Jewish. Some saw them as an example of an authentic form of Judaism, lost to modern German Jews; others saw them as a retrogression to a past they would rather forget (Kauders 242). By confronting this group, who were perceived as “Other,” German Jews were forced into a confrontation with themselves and their own sense of self; how did German Jews relate to eastern European Jews as members of a religious community, and how did they understand themselves as Germans? As the cultural theorist Stuart Hall reminds us, as “identities depend on what they are *not*, they implicitly affirm the importance of what is outside them—which often returns to trouble and unsettle them from the inside” (377).

Krämer worked with Jewish women from eastern Europe through her social work because, as it was close to the border with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Munich was a destination for many migrants. She led a group of German Jewish women in organizing language and cultural classes for young women and girls who had recently arrived from the East and helped them find employment in the city. In 1913, she wrote articles about this work to publicize herself and her group and to encourage other women to follow suit in their cities. Her approach to these women and girls focused on highlighting the differences between herself, the bourgeois German, and these poorer, non-German women. When she strayed toward finding common ground, she was quick to reiterate that these women were the recipients of her aid and she was teaching them, never that there was anything she could learn from them.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite this approach, she called for understanding about the plight of poor women who found themselves either trafficked or left with no alternative but prostitution as a way to support themselves. Her desire to help young women can be found reimagined in her stories, as she highlighted the plight of women isolated in the public space. She reflected on the ease with which women could find themselves vulnerable and questions assumptions about how “respectable” women should behave. In this way, she reimagined the virgin/whore dichotomy and challenged male writers’ representations of the gender battle.

As well as being confronted with questions about Germanness, German Jews were also experiencing questions about their class. Legal emancipation in 1871 brought with it new education and employment opportunities for Jews, and restrictions on owning property had also been lifted. While discrimination

remained, Jews were finally able to enter the ranks of the middle classes, and many rapidly became part of a property-owning bourgeoisie. This unsettled many established members of the bourgeoisie who felt their position was called into question by what they saw as *nouveaux riches*. This new class saw *Bildung* as the entrance ticket to middle-class society.<sup>9</sup> Unlike “civilization” as practiced in France and Britain, which was about affecting the intellectual status of others, *Bildung* was an internal process of acculturation; it was about knowing the right cultural texts, owning the right cultural products (Wright 292). It is closely linked to what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu later defined as cultural capital; members of a society demonstrate their cultural capital through owning cultural goods, using the “right” language, and having the “right” education.<sup>10</sup> However, paradoxically, the dedication of many Jewish Germans to *Bildung* led to a perception of an overreliance on it, and so it became a mark of Jewishness. *Bildung* was especially important for women; they were expected to provide a shelter for their men from the stresses of modernity through culture (Kaplan 16). The canon of German writers, from Goethe to the Grimms, was important for *Bildung*. Krämer’s confident familiarity with the German canon and her ability to manipulate these writers’ works within her own creative output reflects her *Bildung* and therefore her credentials as a bourgeois German woman and a German writer.

Krämer also demonstrated her commitment to *Bildung* through founding a girls’ school in 1926 in the rural spa town of Wolfratshausen. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the women’s movement, and German society more broadly, were concerned with the negative effect of German urban life and its corrupting influence on the morals of Germany’s youth, in particular German girls. This had close connections with the *Kindergarten* movement, which, as well as providing early years’ education, was also about connecting future generations with nature and rural life. These concerns continued into the twentieth century as German cities continued to expand and pollution seemed out of control.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the supposed corrupting influence of the city, many Jews were concerned about the increasing rates of conversion, with many leaving the religion and many others choosing to practice cultural Judaism and shun the synagogue.<sup>12</sup> This attempted to address all of these problems: it removed girls from the corrupting, polluting urban environment, it had a rigorous curriculum to enable the girls to find suitable employment and run middle-class homes, and it included religious instruction to encourage the girls to keep their faith and practice their religion. Krämer, as the leader of the Munich branch, was a key figure in setting up this school. In establishing this school, she was instructing the next generation about the value and nature of *Bildung*

to ensure that it persisted. As will be discussed, her writing served an educational purpose, showing the next generation of young women how they could revolutionize the social order, and also demonstrated Krämer’s credentials as a German writer.

“Wenn man eine Frau ist” is the story of an unnamed female protagonist who narrates her experience of traveling alone and finding a way to upend the gender imbalance and show how the social order can be revolutionized. She is forced to spend the night in a small rural town as her next train does not depart until the following day. Her path leads her through what she believes in bright daylight will be a small park: “But on this evening, in the unfamiliar darkness, it was a forest” (168).<sup>13</sup> In a manner common to many Expressionist narrators, her internal terror has transformed her perception of her external reality, and she repeats the words “dark,” “darkness,” and “blackness” throughout her journey: “In the meantime it had grown very dark. And the way went through a black wood” (168).<sup>14</sup> As she travels through the forest she encounters many men who heckle her with sexual innuendos, which she finds embarrassing and threatening: “Now and then there were words that brought the blood rushing to my face” (168).<sup>15</sup> The darkness of the forest has become a physical manifestation of her terror, and it offers protection to those who threaten her.

She eventually reaches a hotel where she hopes to find a room for the night. At the hotel, the headwaiter tries to turn her away, stating that they do not have a room at such a late hour and for such a guest,<sup>16</sup> casting aspersions on her respectability. In order to gain access to the safety that the hotel represents, she needs to manipulate this man into helping her. She does this by appropriating the manners and mode of speech of the “German Empress”: “Then I would tell him [the proprietor] who he was and who I am—and I emphasized it as if I was at least the German Empress” (169).<sup>17</sup> The headwaiter sets off to find the proprietor “like a scalded cat,”<sup>18</sup> and she is then granted a room through which she is able to access the safety of the hotel (169). By appropriating the manners of a higher, or indeed the highest, class, she is reminding this man of the social contract. According to the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1788), in order for a society to function, individuals must set aside their own desires and act in the best interests of the group (Froese 587). Here this means that this man must set aside his sexual desires and offer this woman the protection that she, as a bourgeois woman, should be afforded by society; she has performed gender here to invoke a demand for safety. She has not used this man to aid her on her journey to escape the threats of sexual violence she has encountered thus far, and so has upended the previous social order of the woods and the hotel; she has become powerful.

The female protagonist of “Die Grotteske” does use a man in her pursuit of being an artist. She is a writer, tasked by her editor with writing a grotesque. She agrees to try but states that she is hungry. The editor gives her money, and it is unclear if this is an advance for the story, a loan, or a gift. She uses this money to have a three-course meal in a restaurant, where she takes out a pen and notepad and begins to draft her grotesque. By writing in public, she is performing the role of a writer, and she uses the editor’s money to enable this performance. At this early stage in the story, we can see the editor’s request for a grotesque as a motivation for her to become a better writer, or at least the kind of writer the editor is willing to publish. She has used him and his money to help her on this journey. The protagonist does create a grotesque—a short piece filled with confused, violent, animalistic imagery: “The thoughts howled loudly and flowed and shoved one another in the monstrous cauldron. There they crouched beside one another and bit each other’s tails” (769).<sup>19</sup> However, she refuses to send it to the editor. After an encounter with a young girl and a blackbird, she writes a note to him stating that she cannot see the world as a crazy place that lends itself to a grotesque, and she apologizes that he wasted his money. She has chosen not to take the step on her journey as a writer that he demanded and has decided to forge her own path instead. She could be breaking out of the confines of the mold to which he wants to restrict her and her writing. However, as this is the end of the story, it is unclear whether this is the end of her journey as a writer; if she will not write what he has asked, will he continue to publish her other stories? Nonetheless, she makes no offer to return the money that he gave her; it and he have served their purpose of offering sustenance. She has taken his money and also declared the right to make creative decisions over her career. His power from the beginning of the story has thereby been removed.

These protagonists are outside the virgin/whore dichotomy because of their unclear social status; moreover, they are the complicated protagonists of their own stories and engender the reader’s sympathies. The lone woman of “Wenn man eine Frau ist” is assumed to be, by the men she encounters, if not an actual sex worker, then a woman of loose morals whom it is appropriate to proposition.<sup>20</sup> The very fact that she is alone and seemingly without direction undermines her respectability. It is never explained to the reader who she is or where she is going. The reader is expected to accept that she is not a prostitute and is unaccustomed to the rough behavior of the men around her, but there is little evidence proffered to support this interpretation. In this way, Krämer has offered a protagonist/narrator of questionable class and moral background. If we accept, as the protagonist insists, that her actions do

not warrant the behavior she encounters, then we have to accept a blurring of the distinction in the virgin/whore dichotomy. Furthermore, as she narrates her story, the protagonist demands sympathy for her plight. As she waits for the proprietor to grant her request for a room, she describes her panic in detail: “I admit, as I stood there my heart was pounding. If the proprietor were to send me away! Another half hour back to the train station through the dark forest alone with my heavy bag!” (169).<sup>21</sup> As is common in Expressionist writing, we are privy to the protagonist’s rich inner life as she narrates her thoughts with an intensity and detail that is not present in her descriptions of her external reality. Her use of parataxis, by removing extraneous details, gives an air of authenticity. The reader is not just listening to a marginalized woman; the reader has become her.

The protagonist of “Die Grotteske” seems to occupy this gray area as well. Like a prostitute, she is offered, and accepts, money for a task she has not yet performed, and the conversation she has with the editor is laden with sexual subtext. He refers to her as “my dear,”<sup>22</sup> and the reader is told that she is recently divorced. The editor also dismisses her previous work as only about babies and failing marriages. He clumsily asks her if she is a specialist in adultery before trying to excuse his blushes by stating, “Sorry, as a writer of course . . . I mean, please don’t misunderstand, right?” (768).<sup>23</sup> As a divorced woman with a job in the publishing world, she is operating outside the boundary of the traditional “virgin,” and yet she is not depicted as a morally loose woman; she blushes at the editor’s suggestion about adultery. Krämer has once again created an ambiguous character, challenging traditional expectations of women.

Krämer’s narration adds to this sympathetic portrayal of her protagonist. Unlike the first-person narration in “Wenn man eine Frau ist,” “Die Grotteske” has an omniscient third-person narrator. In this story, Krämer uses free indirect speech to place the protagonist’s thoughts at the center of the narrative.<sup>24</sup> This style of narration blurs the boundary between the narrator’s opinions on events and the protagonist’s own thoughts, placing the narrator, and thereby the reader, into the experiential field of the protagonist. This allows the reader to understand the protagonist’s motivations and identify with her and, by omitting markers such as “she thought,” enable her perceptions to form the reality of the world. Free indirect speech predates Expressionism and was also used by later authors such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, but the effect in Krämer’s work shares similarities with other Expressionist writers, as the protagonist’s inner thoughts blend with the depiction of events. By making characters of uncertain “respectability” sympathetic and using the narration to place marginalized characters at the center, Krämer undermines the privileging of male

voices and provides a female perspective on the gender battle within the traditional canon of Expressionism.

The propensity of Krämer's protagonists to invert preexisting power structures and transgress boundaries also places them in the role of the "inappropriate other." Once they have seized power for themselves, they are on the inside looking out. Krämer also used these stories to demonstrate her *Bildung*, to show how she as a Jewish German could be on the inside of German culture. Just as she has reworked Expressionist themes to demonstrate her credentials as a writer, she also repurposed elements of the Grimms' fairy tales to demonstrate her mastery over the German literary canon. In both of these stories, the unnamed protagonists, depicted as decidedly ordinary and not endowed with any unique abilities, must undertake a quest. The title of "Wenn man eine Frau ist" also contributes to this as the indefinite pronoun and article suggest that the experiences relayed are universal, and the unnamed protagonist becomes an "everyman." The protagonist in "Wenn man eine Frau ist" is seeking the crown, or at least that is the name of the hotel to which she walks. She also journeys through a dark and dangerous forest and like so many Grimms' creations, she is affected by this journey, but the forest remains unchanged. Similarly, the protagonist in "Die Grotteske" encounters elements of the Grimms' stories. She orders macarons in the restaurant, a sweet confection suitable for any witch and, like the evil stepmother in Snow White, she offers an apple to a child, an act that leads to the denouement. As with many Grimms' protagonists, she is also helped on her quest by a creature on the margins of civilisation, in this case a blackbird.<sup>25</sup> By creating unnamed characters, Krämer universalized her work; the problems her protagonists face are not bound by geography or time, and the social revolution they offer is for all readers to consider. By moving beyond Expressionist themes and using ideas that would have been familiar to her readers from their childhood, her call for a social revolution became more compelling.

Moreover, there is a long tradition in Germany of female writers using fairy tales to foment a social revolution. In the Vormärz era (1815–1848), bourgeois and aristocratic women met in the salons of Berlin to write and share fairy tales. This was a way for them to question the roles society ascribed them and imagine new possibilities, something that Krämer's own work also did.<sup>26</sup> However, the Grimms' work was also appropriated by the nascent nationalist movement in the late nineteenth century to create a canon of "German" folklore. Nationalist rhetoric, which was often combined with anti-Semitism, was increasing in volume during the First World War. Krämer's careful appropriation of themes from the Grimms' work was a demonstration of her German identity, but she was also cautious and chose not to replicate the fairy tales in

full. By using elements from the Grimms’ stories, she took ideas that would have been familiar to her audience and manipulated these ideas to create unfamiliar encounters and outcomes. This created a space for her to imagine radical social change, social changes that would not have been possible in her own reality. She chose not to create an exact copy of a fairy tale, reflecting a hesitancy about the genre due to its appropriation by anti-Semites. So much of the Grimms’ work was about constructing an idea of Germanness, and Krämer, through her adaptation of this idea, was constructing a Germanness that could include her. Just as her female protagonists seized power, Krämer seized the power of being an insider in a German nation. Krämer’s ability to manipulate and mold these Grimms’ stories for her own work also demonstrate the depth of her *Bildung* and thereby her Germanness, undermining the simplistic boundary of insider/outsider.

Krämer’s stories were a way for her to imagine a new social order and demonstrate its possibilities to the readers. Her female protagonists upend the preexisting power dynamics and seize this power for themselves. For example, in “Die Grotteske,” the protagonist decides to define what kind of a writer, and therefore what kind of a person, she is. As a result of her actions, the editor, who seemed so powerful at the start, is rendered powerless. Moreover, Krämer’s protagonists use their gender to subvert expectations and reveal new sources of female power. The protagonist in “Wenn man eine Frau ist” revolutionizes the rules about to whom the social contract applies. As both protagonists are ambiguous in their “respectability,” they face unsettled social norms about who deserves respect and security. Through their actions, they also affect perceptions about the gender battle and who has a right to exist unmolested in public space. They are conscious revolutionary subjects who are aware that, as women, they are lower in the hierarchy than the men who wield economic injustice and the threat of sexual violence as weapons.

Krämer’s characters manipulate the boundaries between insider and outsider, highlighting the instability of these categories and indicating the possibility of new ways of understanding society. Her style of narration via free indirect speech, whereby the inner voice of the narrator affects the external, further blurs the lines between the internal world of the protagonists and their external environment. Her use of parataxis adds to the ambiguous atmosphere in these stories as the reader must find the connections between events and ideas themselves. Krämer crossed the boundaries of insider and outsider herself, and she was able to critically reflect on German society. As a German Jewish woman, finding a platform where she could be heard and repelling anti-Semitic attitudes were commonplace difficulties for Krämer. Her stories indi-



cate some of the problems that she faced and allow her the space to reflect on alternative possibilities and demonstrate the potential for a social revolution. She did not concern herself with the outcome of the social revolution her characters created; we do not know if the changes they created lasted. Her focus was the moment of revolutionary disruption, when the protagonists used the tools at their disposal and were victorious over those more powerful who oppressed them.

These stories were also a way for Krämer to demonstrate her Germanness, that is, her place in the German middle class, through *Bildung*. In particular, in these stories we see her thorough understanding of the Grimms' stories and how by manipulating their style, she developed a Germanness that included her. Her social work also provided her with an opportunity to establish her Germanness in the real world and to share achievement with other Jewish women and girls, especially through her work in education. Through her work and the work of women like her, German Jewish women made considerable gains in her lifetime. From access to higher education, to the world of work, to entering politics, large numbers of women took to public spaces in a multitude of ways. In this way she contributed to a revolution of the social order.

By expanding the canon to include her work, we are able to open a dialogue about how women, in particular women from a minority group, saw women's roles in the public sphere. Women did not have to be passive objects in stories about male protagonists' development; instead, they could be complex subjects who were able to subvert gender and class norms in their own journeys. When we include Krämer's work within the canon of German Expressionism, the canon becomes richer. Expressionist writers explored tensions they felt within German society, and by adding women from minority groups, we make more diverse the types of tensions and the responses represented. Through her work, a more complicated understanding of Expressionism and German society during this turbulent era can be gained.

## NOTES

1. "Ihre Sachen sind nicht das, was ich eigentlich suche. . . . Schreiben Sie mir doch mal was Wildes, Tollwütiges, Verrücktes." All translations from German into English are my own unless otherwise stated.
2. For full analysis of Krämer's life and works see Painter, *Writing Lives*.
3. The development of cultural studies and the canon is explored in Chris Weedon's "Cultural Studies."

4. The history of Jewish women’s social work and the important role women played in the development of the Jewish middle class can be found in Marion Kaplan’s *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*.

5. A brief biography of Krämer’s life can be found in “The Life of Clementine Krämer” (1989), an essay written by her nephew, sociologist Werner Cahnman.

6. See Kaplan’s “Double Barriers, Double Burdens: Women’s Employment” in *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*.

7. As Kaplan writes, there were concerns that many Jews were only “men and women on the streets and Jews at home” (11).

8. Krämer described her experiences in an article for the Jewish women’s movement: “Unterricht” (Lessons, 1914).

9. Today, *Bildung* is often translated as “education” but in the late nineteenth century, *Bildung* was a form of acculturation, long practiced by the German middle classes to demonstrate their credentials.

10. For more about how less-established members of a society acquire and demonstrate their cultural capital see Bhugra, Watson, and Ventriglio.

11. Historian Ann Taylor Allen discusses the relationship between the countryside and the Kindergarten movement in *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany*, 79–95.

12. Krämer’s article “Zur Eröffnung der Haushaltungsschule des J.F.B. in Wolfratshausen” (On the opening of the League of Jewish Women’s school for home economics, 1926) sets out the school’s aims.

13. “Aber diesen Abend in der fremden Dunkelheit war es ein Wald.”

14. “Auch ist inzwischen ganz dunkel geworden. Und zudem geht es durch einen finstern Wald.”

15. “Mitunter aber sind es auch Worte die mir das Blut ins Gesicht treiben.”

16. “Für solchene Gäst.”

17. “Dann werde ich ihm mal erzählen, wer er sei und wer ich wäre—und ich betone das so, als wäre ich—mindestens die deutsche Kaiserin.”

18. “Wie eine Katze, die Prügel bekommen hat.”

19. “Laut heulten die Gedanken und fließen und drängten sich in dem ungeheuren Kessel, da sie beieinander hockten und sich in die Schwänze bissen.”

20. It was common in this period for women who were alone and deemed to have no fixed abode to be arrested for prostitution (Schönfeld 9).

21. “Ich gestehe, daß mein Herz, wie ich so wartend dastehe, ganz laut klopft. Wenn mich nun der Wirt wegschickt! Nochmal eine halbe Stunde allein durch den finstern Wald bis zum Bahnhof mit dem schweren Täschchen!”

22. “Meine Liebe” (768).

23. “Pardon-natürlich-Sie verstehen-schriftstellerisch natürlich-das ist nicht mißzuverstehen, nicht wahr?” (768).

24. See Oltean; Pascal.

25. For more fairy tale motifs see Zipes.

26. The history of women rewriting and writing fairy tales can be found in Jarvis.

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## CHAPTER 5

### On Their Own

#### *Reconsidering Marianne Werefkin and Gabriele Münter*

Katy Klaasmeyer

Those “who wish to be creative . . . must first blast and destroy accepted values.”<sup>1</sup> These words of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche provided a beacon for the artistic revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century, when many modern artists felt themselves to be destroyers of conventions surrounding them, and at the same time heralds of new and unknown values. Extending beyond a simple rejection of bourgeois materialism, they looked forward to a time of apocalypse, when a new order would be created out of the total destruction of the old (West 59–60). Adopting Nietzsche’s conception of the creative artist as someone endowed with superior strength, many Expressionist theorists believed in the power of art to transform society and bring about this new age (Frenzel 77). And yet, fundamental to their concepts of the nature of art and creativity, this powerful artist was, by necessity, male.

Two female artists, Marianne Werefkin (1860–1938) and Gabriele Münter (1877–1962), were both active within the sphere of German Expressionism; however, during their own lifetimes and in most subsequent academic sources, they are defined principally by their relationships with their male artist partners. This essay reconsiders the careers of these two women, primarily by placing their romantic relationships in an ancillary role—which is the treatment their artist partners have received. In order to achieve this, factors such as content, formal concerns, and meaning as they developed throughout their oeuvres will be explored. The application of feminist revisionist theories concerning the impact of their female bodies and its associative realities on the development of their artistic expressions is my primary goal; however, I also seek to reexamine

each according to her own appropriate framework. For Werefkin this means an analysis of her evolving theories regarding notions of gender and how this is expressed pictorially, whereas for Münter a more formalist approach is fitting.

In order to establish a context for their lives and production, a brief digression is necessary into the two principal movements labeled Expressionist—*Die Brücke* (The Bridge) in Dresden and *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) in Munich—specifically seen through the lens of their interpretation of the female form. By analyzing various facets of this context, this essay will paint a vivid picture of the numerous oppositions these women faced—some quite literal and others more hidden, such as the underlying assumptions and expectations of society in general, as well as of those active within the avant-garde. These two women took quite a different approach in facing these issues, and these differences can be seen in their paintings. Revisiting their distinctive lives and careers with a feminist lens will offer a much fuller picture of this time period, both in our analysis of Werefkin and Münter, as well as of the more widely celebrated artistic movements.

The female nude was a principal motif of *Die Brücke*, the group founded in 1905 by four architecture students. There is a certain irony that the female form, in many ways a cornerstone of traditional academic art, would be so central to a group who wanted to break away from established ideas.<sup>2</sup> Yet they were able to counteract traditional figure studies in part by seeking to emulate what they felt were the “unrefined techniques” of non-Western tribal art, such as simplification of form, sharp angularities, and a severely flattened picture plane.<sup>3</sup> In their rendition of the female form, untrained models—more specifically, young girls entering adolescence and puberty—were favored, as they were believed to be free from artificial and traditional conventions. For example, in works such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s *Marzella* (1910, Stockholm, Moderna Museet), a nude young girl is depicted sitting with crossed legs, with folded arms placed upon her lap, while her face, tilted upward, directly engages the viewer. This is just one of many artworks wherein Kirchner represented the view of the male artist looking down on the recumbent female, equating artistic vision with male sexual power (Simmons, “A Suggestiveness” 543–44). Indeed, in describing his fascination with *Marzella*, Kirchner extolled the charm of her immature form over an older woman’s body: “There is a greater charm in such a virginal female, allusions that can drive one insane” (Simmons, “Kirchner’s Brücke Poster” 168). For *Die Brücke*, numerous renditions of naked and socially unencumbered adolescent girls were integral to their Nietzschean ambitions for cultural renewal, symbolized by the hope invested in the new generation of unfettered youth (Price 108).

Studies of the female form are rare within the second group, *Der Blaue Reiter*.<sup>4</sup> This is only one of many differences. Whereas *Die Brücke* members eruptively produced their passionate work from the depths of primal emotion, *Der Blaue Reiter* artists imbued their works with a certain spiritual quality absent from the other group. *Die Brücke* followers did not talk, they created; their works are like an outcry (Röthel). The members of *Der Blaue Reiter*, however, started from the intellect, they analyzed, philosophized; their works are like a meditation. Further, the nucleus of active members of *Die Brücke* was specifically German and male, while the makeup of the Munich-based association was cosmopolitan and open to the membership of women practitioners (Behr, *Expressionism* 31–32). Did this mean a greater sense of equality and artistic freedom for Gabriele Münter and Marianne Werefkin?

Despite the unusual inclusion of women in this group, the avant-garde was not immune to the patriarchal attitude of the period in adopting the gendered stereotypes of culture versus nature. In their search for the spiritual in art, notions of gender infiltrated both *Der Blaue Reiter* ideology and iconography. One of its founding members, Franz Marc (1880–1916), formulated complex theories that invested color with psychological and gendered attributes; for instance, blue was associated with the spiritual, intellectual, male principle, while yellow was linked with earthy, emotional, female qualities. In works such as *Die Gelbe Kuh* (*The Yellow Cow*, 1911, New York, Guggenheim Museum), Marc sought to express male and female principles through both color and form. This painting depicts a frolicking yellow cow, whose gentle curves are contrasted with the angular blue mountain peaks in the distance. The feminine is expressed not only through Marc's choice of yellow, but also by the cow, perhaps an allusion to Nietzsche's association of women with animals and other natural phenomenon. These ideas were in alignment with several other Expressionist theorists, who write of women, like dumb animals, lacking in human consciousness—in stark contrast to the intense consciousness and heroic will of man (Wright 589). This equation of women with animals, the spiritual, and the primitive gave a distinct tenor to the artistic production of *Der Blaue Reiter* (West 70–72). In Marc's estimation, only animals were innocent and pure enough to express the spiritual principle underlying the material world; he wrote, "Animals with their virginal sense of life awakened all that was good in me."<sup>5</sup> The belief in art as an engagement with the pure and virginal was expressed by another of *Der Blaue Reiter*'s founding members, Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944). In negotiating abstraction, he used control over the female body as a metaphor for his encounter with the canvas. He writes of the action of the brush as the conquest of virginal territory and describes the "cre-

ative” and the “good” as the “fertilizing white stream.”<sup>6</sup> Within this gender-specific rhetoric, the victory of “spirit” over female “matter” was viewed in utopian terms, as the source of the Expressionist artist’s higher masculinity.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, for all we celebrate the revolutionary ideology of the avant-garde, they are still bound, perhaps unavoidably, within societal conventions of their time. Revisiting these patriarchal ideologies using a feminist framework may be a first step in reevaluating the celebrity of these figures and their place within the art historical dialogue. The refusal of the art academies to allow women to enroll in them was the legal and pedagogical manifestation of the widespread belief around 1900 that women lacked the capacity for significant artistic productivity (Heller 44). Having been excluded both from the academies and from state exhibitions, women artists in Germany received their training and exposure of their works within specially formed associations (*Künstlerinnen-Verein*), known for their unsystematic quality of formal education and limited facilities (Behr, *Women Expressionists* 5–6). In their exclusion from established institutions, aspiring female artists were primary candidates for the avant-garde, yet the predominant belief about the nature of creativity at this time was that “woman” and “artist” were mutually exclusively terms (Felski 432). It is within this context, a complex and sometimes contradictory framework of revolution and limitation, that Marianne Werefkin and Gabriele Münter pursued their artistic careers.

For Gabriele Münter, the decision to train seriously as an artist was a difficult one, reached only after the death of her mother and a two-year trip to visit relatives in the United States. With the exception of one visit to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, her time in America lacked artistic stimulation. She filled that space with her own images, impromptu sketches dependent upon her own artistic talent, memory, and childhood instruction in drawing. This early instruction emphasized imitation and accuracy by using simple outlines to define form. The lessons of simplification, significance of line, and flattened patterning are the fundamentals of her later art, with its radical reductivity and accented outline (Heller 38).

Having been denied the option of enrolling within the official art academy, upon her return to Germany Münter had few alternatives outside private lessons or ladies’ academies. After finding this training inadequate, in 1902 she enrolled in classes at the recently founded school of the Phalanx artist’s society, an organization characterized by greater freedom generally and a more progressive aesthetic stylistically (Heller 50–52).<sup>8</sup> Although her initial interest appears to have been sculpture, her training (and indeed, many aspects of her life) would change upon enrolling in the required life drawing course taught by



Kandinsky. Much has been written in recent accounts of Münter's career that testify to Kandinsky's early recognition of her talents, and his defense of her artistic style, as if his endorsement were necessary in order to validate her creative output. Yet it is important to acknowledge that he consistently spoke of her work in terms of the feminine, as if its merits were chiefly supplemental, acting as an enhancement to his own art (Obler 75, 95–97). This confinement of Münter into the category of the “feminine” is a chief violation to her category as an “artist.”

Münter's progress as a painter was interrupted as Kandinsky pressed her for a romantic relationship even though he was still married to his first wife. Remarkably, a long-term consequence of this interruption is the marginalization of Münter's artistic career; at worst it is characterized as nothing more than a devoted pupil clinging to her master, while at best it is described in terms of a romantic companionship between unequal individuals.<sup>9</sup> From 1904 until 1908, they spent most of their time outside Germany in travel and study, first in Tunisia, then Italy and France, finally settling in Murnau. This constant travel may have served as a tentative solution to their problematic personal situation, or it may have been the privilege and freedom of a woman of independent financial means. Regardless, during this time greater sophistication emerged in Münter's compositions, in terms of clarity of expression and philosophical development. Her years of formal training with Kandinsky came to a close at this point;<sup>10</sup> her development as a mature artist was to begin in 1908, when an important collaboration developed with Alexej Jawlensky (1864–1941) and Marianne Werefkin.

The time spent together in 1908 was significant for Werefkin as well, as she had just returned to painting after a ten-year self-imposed hiatus. However, a study of Münter and Werefkin is a study in contrasts. While some of their life circumstances are similar—both were financially independent and free to pursue their artistic ambitions after the death of their parents, and both were involved in turbulent relationships with male artists—the similarities end there. While Münter chose to avoid any debates about art theory, this is perhaps Werefkin's greatest strength.

Shortly after her arrival in Munich in 1896, Werefkin surrounded herself with large numbers of artists, writers, and intellectuals in the salon she founded, known as the “Brotherhood of St. Luke” (Diethel 120).<sup>11</sup> Among the guests who attended these events was Gustav Pauli, at the time director of the Kunsthalle Bremen, who characterized Werefkin as “the center, the transmitter, as it were, of waves of force that one could almost physically sense” (Lanfermann 23). In addition to regularly leading the theoretical discussions, Werefkin also orga-

nized international travels for the purpose of artistic enrichment that she supplemented with her own theoretical material (Geiger 11). Indeed, Werefkin was a commanding personality full of intellectual charisma, a precise theorist thoroughly occupied with the trends of the French and Russian avant-garde; and yet, among *Der Blaue Reiter* artists, Kandinsky is typically celebrated as the undisputed leader and visionary theorist with his 1912 publication *Über das Geistige in der Kunst (On the Spiritual in Art)*. Historians are now recognizing that it was most likely Werefkin who introduced Kandinsky to various aesthetic theories, including Russian Symbolist thought (Weiler 68, 70–73).<sup>12</sup> In fact, Werefkin’s partially published theoretical excerpts, *Lettres à un inconnu*, published as *Briefe an einen Unbekannten* (Letters to a stranger, 1901–1905), predated Kandinsky’s publication by several years. Numerous similarities can be found in their writings. For example, both Werefkin and Kandinsky reveal a thorough knowledge of French, German, and Russian aesthetics, and both proclaim their dedication to a form of spiritual abstraction. In seeking abstraction, the notion of boundlessness, the desire to transcend physical and spatial containment, had its correlative in their differing emphases on denying the body.<sup>13</sup>

It was her possession of a female body and its philosophical correlations that Werefkin held as the greatest limitation in realizing her artistic aspirations. By holding this belief she was aligning herself with predominant Expressionist theories claiming men were the sole possessors of “Geist”—the source of all ethics, culture, and personal development (Wright 589). She wrote, “I am a woman. I lack every ability for creation. I can understand everything and cannot create. . . . I don’t have the words to express my ideal. I am looking for the person, the man, who can give this ideal form.”<sup>14</sup> These statements may be difficult to understand from our twenty-first-century perspective, but they seem even more nonsensical considering that they were written by an artist known as the “Russian Rembrandt” in her early career due to her capabilities as a portraitist (King 50). From our modern perspective it is easy to characterize her self-doubts as absurd, and yet we must strive to understand her hesitation within a male-dominated art environment, as well as acknowledge the still male-dominated art historical lens that evaluates her career.

Werefkin’s formal artistic training began at age fourteen, as she was the daughter of an aristocratic artist mother who encouraged her talent (Lanfermann 22). Her family background was privileged, and she enjoyed many advantages, such as schooling in French and travel abroad. Additionally, as a woman in Russia, she had access to academic art training; as such, in 1883 Werefkin studied for one year at the Moscow School of Painting with Illarion

Prianishnikov, a founding member of the Peredvizhnikis, or Wanderers, a group of Russian artists who often took up the hardships faced by the peasantry as their subject (King 50–51). Three years later Werefkin would begin a prolonged period of study with celebrated Realist painter Ilya Repin, who also was active within the Wanderers. In Repin's best-known work, *Barge Haulers on the Volga* (1870–1873, St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum), many of the group's philosophical preoccupations can be seen, such as an honest depiction of a real-life situation, a meticulous rendering of people as individuals (and not simply types), as well as a focus upon inner life over external appearance (“Russia! Art and Society”). The philosophical and stylistic influence of Repin is apparent in Werefkin's early portraiture. The location of many of these works is unknown, but the portrait of her mother, *Elizabet von Werefkin* (1886, private collection) is a demonstrative example, displaying a sensitive rendering of her subject in subdued, earthy tones. Set within a plain background and shown from a traditional three-quarter view, the expressiveness of the older woman's face is emphasized. Werefkin deftly balances an intricate depiction of surface details and texture, while drawing the viewer into her subject's inner world. Although aspects of her formal style will drastically change later in life, many concerns will remain consistent, such as her deep interest in humanity and human concerns, as well as her masterful skill in rendering internal states of reality.

It was through her studies with Repin that Werefkin became acquainted in 1891 with Jawlensky, who was to become her companion for over two decades. The two shared mutual artistic interests and worked together, spending summers at Werefkin's family estate in Lithuania (at that time a part of Russia).<sup>15</sup> Five years later her father died, which, provided that she stay a single woman, allowed her an inheritance of a government pension and the means to live independently. That same year, she and Jawlensky moved to Munich; this relocation set into motion the mature stages of their careers.

As previously discussed, upon her arrival in Munich, Werefkin established her salon, the intellectual and social center of the avant-garde. This also marked the beginning of her extended hiatus from painting, which was entirely self-imposed. Despite her years of formal training and sophisticated theoretical understanding, she found herself lacking. She was still beholden by the gender norms of artistry of her time and, for this reason, for ten years she lived through Jawlensky, nourishing his talent, advocating for his career, supporting him financially, and hoping to see all of her ideals realized through him. Yet their relationship was deeply flawed and marked by betrayal when Jawlensky fathered a child with Werefkin's seventeen-year-old housemaid. Indeed, her

commitment to this relationship, so often cited as her great contribution to modernism, was in fact a catalyst for greater self-determination and independence. She wrote:

Because I did not trust myself, I have become a harlot, a kitchen maid, a nurse and governess, all in service of a talent to the great art. . . . I am an energetic being, intelligent and artistic, I have a creative soul, and I have fallen into idleness. . . . What have I done to myself?<sup>16</sup>

This period of self-doubt and artistic inactivity was resolved only when she released her beliefs about the gendered nature of creativity. Rather than seeing sets of binary forces in a struggle for dominance (e.g., male versus female), Werefkin chose instead to integrate differing aspects of each, creating a multi-dimensional sense of self. She marks the resolution to this crisis by writing, “I am not male, I am not female, I am who I am.”<sup>17</sup>

With this bold proclamation Werefkin presents the critical lens through which we can explore her creative output. Moving beyond the male-dominated rhetoric of her lifetime, and beyond even the feminist framework that celebrates her power and influence as a woman, Werefkin instead confronts head-on the universality of the human experience in her painting, exploring such themes as loss, isolation, friendship, and hope. In this she is more closely aligned with the Symbolists, who celebrated a painter’s ability to convey a subjective viewpoint of universal experiences through form and color. Significantly, the Symbolists were obsessed with the feminine principle as either virginal or corrupting, and her admiration of their theories added another layer of obstruction to the realization of her artistic ambitions and practices. With the assertion of her unique identity, Werefkin moves beyond these obstacles, into a wholly new, unexplored realm of creativity.

This strong sense of individualism is present in her subject matter as well; even during the years of collaboration with Münter and Kandinsky, her frequent portrayal of humanity, most often peasantry, was unique. Nearly all of her paintings contain at least one person, more commonly groups or clusters of similar figures, without any distinguishing personal characteristics. In this manner she unites the figures to some common expressive purpose, and more firmly embeds them within their environment. An example like *Sonnenaufgang* (*Sunrise*, n.d., Ascona, Fondazione Marianne Werefkin) is typical; a brilliant sunrise peeks around the jagged mountaintops, illuminating a scene wherein seven men, dwarfed by the landscape, have their backs bent in labor. They are hauling a boat out of the water, moving away from the sunrise and



Figure 5.1. Marianne von Werefkin, *Sonnenaufgang (Sunrise)*, n.d., tempera on paper on cardboard. Fondazione Marianne Werefkin, Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna di Ascona.

toward the viewer. The horizon line curls upward and inward, the trees bend impossibly, and the mountaintops curve like the rim of a bowl; the overall composition twists and turns, directing the viewer's eye upward to the kaleidoscopic sun, with rays of light bursting outward like the petals of a blooming flower. Yet the men face downward and away, oblivious to the radiant beauty just behind them. Although all of the men are painted in a nearly identical fashion, in blues and purples like the landscape surrounding them, there is an overwhelming sense of isolation. With no distinguishing features or faces, this is an image of mankind, laboring together, yet ultimately alone.

The psychological expressiveness of this painting is especially poignant when compared with Repin's depiction of this same scene, in the previously mentioned *Barge Haulers on the Volga*. Where Repin took great pains to highlight the individuality of each man, complete with personalized depictions of anguish and toil, Werefkin instead has subsumed their individuality into a

scene of a common humanity, transforming the landscape into an expression of their inner realities. Although predominantly filled with deep blues, purples, and black, the overall mood in Werefkin's painting is not bleak. Indeed, it is as if Werefkin invites us to view the profound joy and beauty of life, if we would but raise our eyes and pay attention. In Werefkin's paintings, each formal aspect of the composition is carefully chosen, no longer for its optical fidelity, but rather for its potential of psychological and spiritual expressiveness.

By contrast, Münter's landscapes are an exercise in reduction, in distilling the essence of physical reality to its most essential component parts. Indeed, during this time of collaboration in 1908, her main artistic strengths—simplification and significance of line—came into their own. Her style developed under the influence of Jawlensky, who advocated the practice and aesthetic theory of the French *avant-garde*, specifically the “wild and free” handling of color typical to the Fauves, and the *cloisonnisme* technique developed by Paul Gauguin—the reduction of visual elements to a few colored planes enclosed by strong outlines. Another major stylistic influence was the folk tradition of *hinterglasmalerei*, or “reverse-glass painting,” which Münter enthusiastically practiced while in Murnau (Obler 36).<sup>18</sup> Traditionally created as votive paintings for working-class patrons by untrained artists, the apparent simplicity of style and purity of expression appealed to Münter, Kandinsky, and Jawlensky, all of whom experimented with this format. She later said it was the “carefree simplification of forms and the strong colors with dark contours” of this painting tradition that allowed her to access her own style (qtd. in Obler 36).

An examination of a typical landscape from this time period reveals Münter's dominant formal characteristics. *Lower Main Street, Murnau* (1910, Los Angeles, Norton Simon Museum) shows a series of three buildings aligned along a bright blue path that curves upward and to the right. Three slender trees, topped with triangular yellow boughs, are balanced by three bright yellow, elongated, rectangular shapes prominently placed in the foreground within the wide blue path. A wedge-shaped area of light green grass on the far right is located beneath a larger wedge-shaped purple mountain. Multiple areas of the textured cardboard painting surface are exposed, nearly evenly scattered throughout the picture plane. Thick, black outlines dominate the image, even though vibrant yellows, greens, reds, and blues fill in the shapes. Indeed, a close inspection reveals that the outlines must have been sketched in first, as the areas of color overlap the outline, and never vice versa. This black outline is uniformly applied, with an equal thickness and intensity of color throughout the picture plane. This adds to the overall impression of this painting being



**Figure 5.2.** Gabriele Münter, *Lower Main Street, Murnau, 1910*. Norton Simon Museum, Gift of Mr. David Gensberg.

executed as a rapid sketch, with the artist not bothering to conceal the steps of its creation. Although very lightly applied, the brushstrokes are visible, revealing the motions of the artist's hand. Significantly, the quality of brushstroke is distinct between the black outlines and the fills of color. Whereas the outlines are applied almost exclusively as rigid horizontal, vertical, or diagonal lines, the flat expanses of color show a looser, flowing motion of the brush. Even

within a geometric shape, such as the yellow areas in the foreground, the paint is applied in a swirling, rounded motion. The light blue sky reveals the quickness of Münter's paint application, with swaths of the uniform color moving up, down, zigzag, or twisting around and inside the surface area, as if the urgency to fill in the space took precedence over a measured attempt to depict the external world. This immediacy of execution is visible in every aspect of this painting: its roughed-in outlines, extreme simplification in rendering shape and depth, and restrictive color palette. Further, repetition dominates the overall composition, from the rhythmic placement of the houses, to the recurrence of basic geometric shapes, to the similarities in the color blending. A formalist reading of Münter's creative output rightly emphasizes the aspects that seemed to interest her most. Further, it liberates her art from the common assessment of her failing to achieve the transcendence of her romantic partner.

A comparison with a Jawlensky landscape from generally the same period is revealing. His painting, *Black Tree—Bordighera* (1914, Los Angeles, Norton Simon Museum), also depicts trees and houses in a flattened, simplified pictorial manner reminiscent of Gauguin's *cloisonnisme* technique, however, several aspects are distinct. First, small portions of the initial outline are still visible, yet this outline was predominantly curvilinear, tracing the rounded, organic forms of the vegetation. The outlines were also created in the same color as the objects; for this reason, the appearance of the outline seems like an oversight, rather than an intentional design component as with Münter. Further, Jawlensky forms his composition with consistently short brushstrokes, often applied with a uniform thickness, saturation, and in a dominant direction. In this manner Jawlensky not only creates volume and texture, but imbues the natural world with a vibrant, living force reminiscent of Van Gogh. Finally, the variations in color intensity are striking, created by adding white or black pigment in order to showcase the full tonal value of each hue. By contrast, Münter only uses white or black paint in clearly defined areas, with no variance in tone in the blended color areas.

Traditional scholarship evaluates these formal traits in terms of skill, sophistication, intelligence, and innovation, with Münter falling short. Indeed, Jawlensky is celebrated for his "innate talents, chiefly for color, with a yearning for transcendence" (Schjeldahl 72), whereas Münter is blamed for perpetuating the stereotype of the female artist as a dilettante, by creating works in a "deliberately archaizing style" that are "calculated to appear childlike" (West 72). And yet, when evaluating Jawlensky's painting, comparisons to other established artists are inevitable, whereas Münter's style is entirely her own. In an era that valued the individual artist's unique creativity





**Figure 5.3.** Alexej Jawlensky, *Black Tree—Bordighera*, 1914. Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four Galka Scheyer Collection.

as a powerful force to abolish decaying conventions, the merits of Münter's oeuvre were grossly underestimated.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, it is my contention that Münter was neither seeking to emulate her male counterparts' methods, nor to present a self-abasing simplicity of style. Rather, Münter's artwork was an exploration, deeply personal and ever-changing, of her potential as an artist and her ability to distill and depict the essential nature of her experiences. Her dominant subjects were still-life arrangements of domestic objects, views of the rural Bavarian countryside, as well as portraits of her close companions. This selection reveals an artist whose concern lies in immediate

experience, perception, and her place within a community. Münter may not have confronted the philosophical preoccupations of her time, yet it does not necessarily follow that her work is devoid of intellect.

The 1908 collaboration was to have important repercussions beyond Münter and Werefkin, however, as it was the catalyst for the organization of the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (New Artists' Association Munich), a short-lived avant-garde exhibiting society that is notable primarily for its status as the forerunner to *Der Blaue Reiter*. Typical to their respective roles within the group, the theoretical framework of this artist's collective was developed in Werefkin's salon, while Münter maintained her more passive role by simply transcribing the founding document (Lanfermann 23 and Heller 70). Just two years after its founding, the organization was dissolved due to philosophical and stylistic differences among the members (Fäthke 50–51). Surprisingly, the unity between Münter, Kandinsky, Werefkin, and Jawlensky was fractured. Although aligned in theoretical principles, when Münter and Kandinsky left the group in 1911, Werefkin and Jawlensky remained for another year, most likely due to an unwillingness to sever financial resources for their work (Friedel and Helmut 58).

Further disruptions came in the following years with the outbreak of World War I and the dissolution of their romantic partnerships. In July 1914, Marianne Werefkin, as a Russian citizen and hence now a member of an enemy power, had only three days to leave Germany (Hoberg 71).<sup>20</sup> She and Jawlensky, together with her housemaid and Jawlensky's son, fled to Switzerland, where Werefkin and Jawlensky finally separated. Having lost almost her entire wealth as a result of the Russian Revolution, she decided to stay in Ascona, Switzerland, and spent the rest of her life in an artist's colony there. Unsurprisingly, she would continue her unrelenting advancement of avant-garde practices and theory, forming the artist's organization *Der Große Bär* (The Great Bear) in 1924, with her as its sole female member.

Kandinsky's status as a Russian citizen similarly compelled that couple to make a swift escape to Switzerland in early August, where they remained together for four months. Having entrusted Münter with the care of hundreds of his paintings still in their home in Germany, Kandinsky left for Moscow. Münter journeyed to Stockholm and waited for Kandinsky, who had offered renewed promises of marriage and a swift reunion later that summer. Münter would remain in Scandinavia for nearly four years before returning to Germany, having presumed that Kandinsky was either dead or lost in the chaos of war and revolution. In 1921, however, Münter would discover through an intermediary that Kandinsky was in fact alive and well, and remarried to another woman. Kandinsky soon

demanded the return of his property, sparking a legal dispute that would last five years. In the final resolution, Münter retained the rights for several hundred paintings, which she donated to public art institutions. Happily, after years of personal crisis, Münter would return to her Murnau home in 1931, settling with a new partner, the art historian Johannes Eichner.

In the decades after the war, both women would maintain continuity stylistically with their important developments of 1908: Werefkin expressing the dark, mysterious depths of color and Münter reducing and simplifying natural forms. Each one, in her own way, would imbue her works with a profound melancholy, a heightened sense of isolation and reflection. Recent scholarship is just beginning to uncover the richness and depth of their lives and work, subjects certainly worth reconsideration. Truly, for the past century critical assessment of these women has been consistent in its use of terms for the activities of children, with Werefkin's salon dismissed as "tea parties," simply the amusing pastime of a wealthy, eccentric woman, and Münter's talent classified as "naïve," nothing more than a mimicry of Kandinsky's style with none of the brilliance (Campbell-Johnston 14–15).<sup>21</sup> Yet the accomplishments of these women are remarkable—they challenged gender bias in their training, content, and style, and abolished self-doubt in their development as artists. Perhaps more so than their male partners, these women followed the battle cry of Nietzsche to destroy accepted values, and were heralds of the future.

## NOTES

1. As translated by Chilvers 84.

2. The naked female body's allure became the group's focus in most of its promotional material from 1905 to 1906. See Simmons, "Kirchner's Brücke Poster" 155–73.

3. Nolde 102. He writes it was the "absolute originality, the intense and often grotesque expression of power and life in very simple forms" that appealed to them.

4. Kandinsky's paintings from 1909 to 1914 are an exception to this generality. See Washon Long 50–60, wherein she discusses Kandinsky's responsiveness to contemporary Dionysian beliefs in sexual love as a means of achieving spiritual transcendence, using the motif of an entwined couple to evoke a Nietzschean utopia.

5. Marc 49–51. In a letter dated 12 April 1915, Marc wrote, "Der unfrome Mensch, der mich umgab, (vor allem der männliche) erregte meine wahren Gefühle nicht, während das unberührte Lebensgefühl des Tieres alles Gute in mir erklingen ließ." All translations from German into English are my own unless otherwise stated.

6. Kandinsky 74–100. The phrase reads as follows, "Das ist das Positive, das Schaffende. Das ist das Gute. Der weiße befruchtende Strahl."

7. Behr, *Expressionism* 42. The statement about Kandinsky's control over the female body is also taken from this source.

8. All information about Münter's early artistic training, including its interruption by Kandinsky's urging for a relationship, is taken from this source. Heller's publication was produced concurrently with a 1997 solo exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Museum featuring Münter, whom the museum's director described as a "somewhat neglected artist." Significantly, this remains the only publication to thoroughly investigate her life and early work.

9. Campbell-Johnston 14–15. Ostensibly written to celebrate the individual achievements of Münter on occasion of a 2005 London exhibition, the headline of this article characterizes Münter chiefly as "Kandinsky's mistress," and concludes that "she was not the pioneer, but the pupil."

10. Even after the dissolution of her formal training with Kandinsky, he clearly viewed himself as continuing his role as teacher and mentor, often mixing this perception with his role as Münter's lover and companion. If she questioned aspects of his teachings and theories, he would immediately translate this into an accusation and would claim that she was personally disloyal and unfaithful. Often Münter gave in. She avoided close relationships with other artists, especially men, and seldom overtly questioned Kandinsky's ideas. See Heller 155.

11. Werefkin's salon was formed along the lines of a club of that name that had been founded by Russian painters in Vienna in 1809, who sought to cultivate art and ethics simultaneously. According to Werefkin, although the relaunched group did not adhere to the values of its predecessors, she saw their efforts as a valuable first step in creating the art of the future.

12. Weiler clarifies that not only was Werefkin the energetic center of the intellectual discussions within her salon, but also that Kandinsky often did not contribute to the group discussions, while Jawlensky and Münter were passive listeners. Further, the idea to found the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (NKVM) originated in Werefkin's salon; she hoped that Jawlensky would lead the new organization, yet he did not consider himself to be up to the task, and so by default the leadership fell to Kandinsky.

13. Behr, "Veiling Venus" 128. All details correlating the philosophical theories of Werefkin and Kandinsky are taken from this source.

14. "Ich bin Frau, bin bar jeder Schöpfung. Ich kann verstehen und kann nichts schaffen. . . . Mir fehlen die Worte, um meine Ideal auszudrücken. Ich suche den Menschen, den Mann, der diesem Ideal Gestalt geben würde" (Berger 190).

15. Kochman, online. The statement about her income due to her father's death is also taken from this source. See Kochman's note 46 for a detailed account of Jawlensky's affair with Werefkin's housemaid, including Werefkin's attempts to control the situation.

16. "Ich habe mir selbst nicht vertraut. . . . Ich bin zur Hure geworden und zur Küchenmagd, zur Krankenpflegerin und zur Gouvernante, nur um der großen Kunst zu dienen, einem Talent. . . . Ich bin ein energisches Wesen, intelligent und Künstlerin, ich habe eine schöpferische Seele, und ich bin der Trägheit verfallen, dem Nichtstun. . . . Was habe ich aus mir gemacht?" (Weiler 23–24).

17. "Ich bin nicht Mann, ich bin nicht Frau, ich bin ich" (Weiler 50). This is the conclusive statement to a portion of writing wherein she acknowledges the complexity of her sense of self, listing traits she possesses that are often reduced to the basic labels

of “masculine” or “feminine,” and as inherently contradictory. Her statement exposes the limitations of such a value system, as well as rejects its supremacy over her identity.

18. See Obler 35–51 for a thorough discussion of Münter’s practice of this art form.

19. Perhaps the one exception to this trend is a critical review following the NKVM’s first exhibition. As quoted in Obler 82, one critic lauded Münter over Kandinsky for her lack of ostentation, arguing that her simplicity brings her closer to genius, in that she was able to transcend her French and German artistic models.

20. All details concerning the whereabouts of Werefkin and Münter after the war are taken from this source. See especially Friedel 10–20 for a detailed account of the legal dispute between Kandinsky and Münter occurring after 1914. In Friedel’s estimation, the legal proceedings were imbued with the bitterness of Münter as a scorned woman, who was only satisfied with Kandinsky’s written acknowledgment of “Mrs. Gabriele Münter-Kandinsky” in the final settlement.

21. Campbell-Johnston states that Münter is “far more famous” than Werefkin, “who was more accomplished at applying intellect to tea-party conversation than paint to a canvas.”

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# Gender and the Body





## CHAPTER 6

# Somaesthetics, Gender, and the Body as Media in Claire Goll's Racialized Expressionism

Anke Finger

German Expressionism, a multiart avant-garde movement that started in 1905 with the *Brücke* group in Dresden and lasted well into the 1920s, is among the most thoroughly documented artistic waves of the early twentieth century. Unsurprisingly, scholarship on Expressionist film, painting, prose, drama, and poetry has been prolific and very thorough, leaving a plethora of material that is, to some, already covered with a fine dust: the majority of Expressionist works have long entered the canon of European and Western art traditions, with many examples dominantly featuring in art or literary history classes, on prominent stages, and in national and international museums. Only recently have scholars added a new angle that, somehow, got lost in time or in the archives: the amount of materials produced by women, especially produced by women authors. Some of these texts are available—again—thanks to important anthologies edited by Hartmut Vollmer, for example, and new scholarship is underway, such as the edited volume by Frank Krause titled *Expressionism and Gender*, published in 2010. However, as Thomas Anz remarked in *Literatur des Expressionismus* (Literature of Expressionism, 2010), and Krause echoes in the introduction to his collection, studies of Expressionism that apply gender theory in differentiated and competent fashion remain curiously absent. Instead, binaries and bifurcations of reading core aspects of gender construction continue on, as if the desperately virile psychosocial atmosphere around 1910, when the Expressionist search for the “New Man” sought to wipe away the generally observed feminization of art and culture, has left its potent mark well into the twenty-first century.

Parallel to this recovery, so far removed from the emerging discourse on women in German Expressionism as documented in and by this volume, has

blossomed a vibrant, interdisciplinary, and even urgent discourse on European colonialism and postcolonialism that coincides with German Expressionism in the notion of “primitivism.” It is widely known that Black art and cultures fascinated many of the Expressionist writers and artists, with Carl Einstein composing one of the first authoritative, albeit controversial, studies on African sculptures and art in 1915. The notion of the “primitive,” however, has been little challenged in recent decades, despite strong scrutiny of many modernists’ sometimes naive, sometimes misplaced empathies with Black cultures in their midst, apart from those depictions of Black protagonists and an “Other” that are outright racist or discriminatory. Similar critique applies to the exploration of sensory experience that employs somatic and somaesthetic work beyond such notions as “pleasure” or “pain.” According to philosopher Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics can be provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning.” The body becomes a medium of and for knowledge as it experiences and explores, tests and shapes reality “to correct the actual functional performance of our senses by an improved direction of one’s body” (302). Accordingly, the intersection of sensory experience and Black aesthetics in the focus on African cultures feeds into well-established topics in the Expressionist canon, such as vitalism, the New Man, and a compromised engagement with colonialist discourses that are well presented in studies such as Jan Gerstner’s *“Die absolute Negerei”: Kolonialdiskurse und Rassismus in der Avantgarde* (“The total negroism”: Colonial discourses and racism in the avant-garde, 2007).<sup>1</sup> What about a deeper exploration of the somaesthetics underlying the avant-garde’s engagement with the senses? How are they mediated? How are they contextualized? How are they racialized?

### **Somaesthetics and the Senses in the Avant-Gardes**

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), for example, represents an avant-gardist who played with food and the accompanying senses in *Tender Buttons*—yet she does not engage in the intense somatic work that Expressionism so very much embodies. Stein “documents” her experiences with everyday food items by sending them through the medium of language in a way all her own—she calls it “studies in description” (30)—thereby creating a panopticon of linguistic haptics that turns the objects, in this case the food, into small poetic universes. The text “Roastbeef” approaches meat not with taste or scent, but with “feel-

ing,” setting the stage for a bodily encounter not limited to the need for nourishment. In fact, her roast beef starts with its origin, the cow, and proceeds to the cutting, the division, the surface, the shine, the red and the white, the tenderness. She philosophizes about and serenades the meat:

in kind cuts and thick and thin spaces, in kind ham and different colors, the length of leaning a strong thing outside not to make a sound but to suggest a crust, the principal taste is when there is a whole chance to be reasonable. . . . Lovely snipe and tender turn, excellent vapor and slender butter, all the splinter and the trunk, all the poisonous darkening drunk, all the joy in weak success, all the joyful tenderness, all the section and the tea, all the stouter symmetry. (30–31)

The end of the meat-cutting-preparing-eating process presents itself with “This is a result.” Stein was clearly fond of her meat, and she continues to describe mutton, sausages, chicken, and veal. Her “descriptions” or documentations mark a process of looking for meaning in foods and their significance for modern life, and her tasting and smelling the food corresponds to a new assessment of language: a rolling over the tongue of both words and cuisine. As Michel Delville points out in his reading of *Tender Buttons*, “The ‘real’ point of *Tender Buttons* is not the description of the objects themselves but the changing complexities and mutabilities which constantly interfere with the act of naming” (40–41). He terms Stein’s approach a democratization of the senses in that taste and smell, in contrast to sight, enable an approach to food that emphasized its ephemerality, its processed-ness—only by making the language move with and around it can we adequately perceive and experience food with our senses of taste and smell. I would go further: with the medium of language Stein moves beyond the boundaries of habit and symbol—she can rearrange everyday life without sticking to convention, as demonstrated in this excerpt from “Breakfast”: “Coffee all coffee and a sample of soup these are the choice of a baker. A white cup means a wedding. A wet cup means a vacation. A strong cup means an especial regulation. . . . Price a price is not in language, it is not custom, it is not in praise” (33). Stein’s democratization ends, however, at the level of onomatopoeia, at sensing language like music, at rhythm and play. While she does break through conventions of composition and storytelling with the help of the senses, she remains at the surface of more daring democratic endeavors that involve the body in quite different ways.

Claire Goll (1890–1977), in contrast, is an Expressionist writer whose texts display prominently those gender “anxieties” underlying everyday sen-

sory experiences that are also marked by a keen sense for democratization, which she pursued with antiracist activism. Goll's texts correspond to the many passages one can cite from contemporary authors such as Marie Holzer, Hermynia Zur Mühlen, Lola Landau, Mechtild Lichnowsky, Elisabeth Joest, and of course Else Lasker-Schüler: the body and bodily experiences as screens that reflect or project interior emotions and sensory impulses. Elisabeth Janstein's short story "Die Telephonistin" (The operator, 1920), for example, paints the physicality of the protagonist's everyday life in inescapable detail: the operator waking up to the rattling sound of the alarm clock, facing "unüberwindliche Schrecken, wie Waschen mit kaltem Wasser, Kämmen und grelles Licht" (25) (insurmountable terrors such as washing herself with cold water, combing her hair and garish light),<sup>2</sup> forced to pass through and endure the foul, turpentine scent in the cloakroom when at work, and anticipating with dread the metal ring of the apparatus that will painfully squeeze her head all day long. Habitual movements, her body's memory work, make her aware of her heavy hands, her body resisting these robotic repetitions while it perceives acutely the stresses of heat and cold, loud and calm, and dark and light surrounding and pounding it. In short, the work of an operator is depicted as sheer somatic work, as the body in revolt or at least in revulsion, and as if the nameless protagonist existed merely via her extroceptive and introceptive senses, embattled and defenseless. The Expressionist style, with its frequent anthropomorphizing of physical objects, its radically reductionist "Wortkunsttheorie" (word-art-theory: "Baum blüht Blüte" / tree blooms flower), parataxis and neologisms, indeed "digs into the sense of the object," using language that lays bare the rawness of the operator at work.

While in this chapter I will speak to the themes at the core of this volume, gender and sexuality, and, in particular, to racialization, I also propose to turn scholarship on Expressionism on its head by revaluating what Expressionism stands for, namely the "aktive Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit" (Anz 7) (the active construction of reality) through the arts. This active construction of reality points beyond the expression of the interior life, of depicting emotional landscapes in text, in images, in music, or in theater; this active construction points, rather, to the searing gaps in social justice, to the brutal absence of democracy or equality, to a reality that has to be changed and shaped anew rather than merely endured or indeed suffered. As Kasimir Edschmid, a pivotal promoter of Expressionism also referenced by Anz, emphasized in 1918, "Die Realität muß von uns geschaffen werden. Der Sinn des Gegenstandes muß erwählt sein" (46) (Reality has to be created by us. The sense of the object has to be dug out). Importantly, according to Edschmid,

This is how the Expressionist artist's entire scope becomes vision. He does not see, he looks. He does not describe, he experiences. He does not render, he designs. He does not take, he searches. Now there is no longer just the chain of facts: factories, houses, illness, whores, clamor, and hunger. Now there is a vision of them. The facts have meaning only insofar as the artist's hand, grasping through them, seizes what hides behind. (46)<sup>3</sup>

This very haptic approach to creative work, to depicting the world by expressing what is experienced and found truth-worthy within, points to deeply sensuous work—it demands that we apply findings from sensory studies to uncover a renewed understanding of Expressionism itself: the somatic work at the center of Expressionist sense making. This is work to be accomplished prior to creating a new reality.

### **Goll's Expressionist Retelling of *Othello***

Gender aspects merge with racial stereotyping, somatic ascriptions, and the deconstruction of contemporary European attractions to the "primitive" in Goll's *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa* (The Negro Jupiter abducts Europe, 1926).<sup>\*</sup> The novel's story is a short one: the aristocratic Black government official Jupiter Djilbuti (his name evoking the capital city of Djibouti), his country's high-ranking representative in France, courts white and very young Alma Valery, who is from a Swedish-French family, and marries her. They soon discover themselves engulfed in racially infused conflict, both their own and within their society. Alma has an affair with a white Swedish friend, Olaf, and Jupiter, jealous, stabs her to death. This "union between two continents" (61) is marked by a reading of bodily encounters that is filled with ambiguity, essentialism, projections, and unease. Each page in the novel plays with the coloring of the protagonists' skin, reflecting intercultural and interracial encounters in which both the protagonists desperately try to overcome the exteriority of difference so ingrained in their sensory perceptions. Chapter 1 describes Jupiter's and Alma's meeting as a mutual attraction of the Other. Jupiter is well aware of the titillating exoticism he represents, including the racist projections of his sensory experiences: "O, er kannte sie, die Neugier der weißen Frauen!" (10) (Oh, how well he knew white women's curiosity!). Alma tosses away her restraint, overcomes her embarrassment, and concludes: "Übrigens war es ganz pikant, einmal mit so einem Neger zu tanzen" (11) (It happened to be quite salacious to dance with a Negro like

him). By chapter 7—the couple is now married—Jupiter plays Alma’s body as if it were a rare instrument. A “debutante of the senses,” as he calls her, he seeks to teach her the art of the body: “Es war ein kostbares Spiel für ihn. . . . Er konnte fast mit mathematischer Genauigkeit durch diese oder jene Berührung die Höhe und Intensität eines Tones oder Seufzers vorausberechnen und lächelte entzückt, wenn er aus dieser rosa Kehle rosa herausfiel” (61) (It was a precious game to him. . . . He was able to calculate with almost mathematic precision the pitch and intensity of a sound or sigh generated by this or that touch and smiled with delight when it fell so pinkly from this pink throat). Jupiter himself, in contrast, holds his senses in check: “Er verstand, kunstgerecht zu atmen, so langsam zu essen, dass zwei Bissen in seinem Mund dem Wert eines Menus seiner weißen Tischgenossen gleichkamen, dass er einen Ton noch hören konnte, wenn ein Europäer schon längst wieder taub für dessen Schwingungen war” (61) (He knew how to breathe artfully, to eat so slowly that two bites in his mouth were equal to the value of an entire multicourse meal enjoyed by his white dinner partners; he could hear a sound when a European had long become deaf to its vibrations).

As an aesthetic endeavor, Expressionism, I argue, should be revisited as a full body contact with the outside world, a contact in which the senses and sensory perception serve as the media of production for a reality that is raw, open, and extremely vulnerable. As socioanthropological approaches to sensory studies have shown, sensory experiences are socially and culturally inflected, and, I argue furthermore, it is women authors in German Expressionism who sought to push the boundaries on sensory perception and somaesthetics (Vannini et al. 15). The larger goal is to investigate a turning point in media and cultural history by reinvestigating the traditional avant-gardes (Futurism, Dadaism, Expressionism, surrealism) on the basis of the “ordinary” or the “everyday.” Drawing from the scholarship of Mădălina Diaconu, Yuriko Saito, Caroline Jones, Cecilia Novero, David Howes, Constance Claassen, and others, the purpose is to uncover an everyday aesthetic within avant-garde movements—in this case Expressionism—and to expose and examine those senses, those modes and media of perception, that, in a long aesthetic and philosophical tradition, have been marginalized and often racialized: the senses of taste, touch, and smell. This is particularly pressing in view of current discourses on race, colonial historiography, and post- and anticolonial scholarship, and media inscriptions of intersectionality. Questions of everyday aesthetics in modernism are invariably intertwined with the cultural habits or ruptures of sensory perception, including perceptions that are both experienced and ascribed. As art historian Caroline Jones put it,

The hierarchies placing sight at the top of our sensory aristocracy are anxious *narratives*, not neuronal imperatives. Perhaps we privilege sight because it's one of the more recent acquisitions in our sensory toolkit? Freud reflected both classical and modern prejudice when he decided that homo erectus founded his [*sic*] civilization on sight, celebrating the triumph of an erect, far-seeing body over those quadrupeds bound to smell for their orientation. (11)<sup>4</sup>

These anxious narratives are born or perhaps reborn at the onset of a multidimensional and multidirectional expansion of daily life—the velocity of technological inventions; the vestiges of war; the total artworks of the avant-gardes, radio, film; and the industrialization of cooking, to name a few—and we should acknowledge parallel or counternarratives that include the other senses to widen our understanding of the everyday in specific historical and cultural contexts. This widening and deepening of the soma's sensory landscape and abilities also includes discourses of racialization and ethnic projections that further seek to hierarchize bodies and their interaction with everyday constructions of reality.

For avant-garde movements such as Expressionism, the media or art products being generated, therefore, do not torpedo traditional art forms in the interest of being at the forefront and producing something outrageously original and confrontational—the traditional view. Rather, they reflect a new approach to, a new understanding and interpretation of, everyday environments artists experienced almost too closely all around them. Accordingly, avant-garde media and art products present the means with which to process a new everyday: a technologically enhanced, economically driven, socially complex, and challenging urbanity that consisted not just of unseen or unheard-of spectacles, but very much also of unknown haptic, gustatory, and olfactory realities. The latter realities had rarely been explored, consistent with the habitual downgrading of the senses of smell, taste, and touch that frequently played into a racialized denigration of nonwhite populations beyond the confines of a presumably “civilized” Europe.

### **Activism and Sensory Perception**

For Claire Goll, translator of two books by René Maran (the first Black author to win the prestigious Prix Goncourt, in 1921), a “firebrand radical” in her support of Black art and culture, according to Werner Sollors (44), colonialist and



racist realities needed capturing in her Expressionist novel *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa*. In her autobiography, *Ich verzeihe keinem* (I forgive no one, 1976), she recounts a scene she witnessed in Paris:

I was always particularly open-minded about race issues because I identified with all who were degraded and abused. At the Paris flea market I noticed with horror a booth with the inscription “Down with Blacks.” A Black athlete sat on a bed; you were supposed to hit his heart so that he would fall over: sex and an invitation to murder as a symbolic association of ideas. (175)<sup>5</sup>

In her novel, the scene is rewritten by staging the two main protagonists, Alma Valery, the white Swedish-French wife, and Jupiter Djilbuti, the Black prince and French colonial minister, in the midst of a Paris street fair. Even before they approach the booth that advertises “Negro Down,” Jupiter, despite his high rank, already feels reduced to a marionette, as he is bombarded by spiteful comments from the occasional passer-by, but he refuses to tip over and surrender to the brutal offenses. The words flung at him appear like balls that seek to kill in a steadfastness and relentlessness that is matched by the actual use of balls that are thrown at the two Black men, so as to knock them off the board they sit on so they drop into the water basin underneath them—the booth Claire Goll sets up in the novel, a “game of massacre” according to the narrator:

The play with balls was really merely a euphemism. Because one could, for humanitarian reasons, unfortunately not satisfy the audience’s hidden desire to personally stone the two Blacks with the balls, one was forced to hit them circuitously. Every hit was a symbol that needed to serve as a deflector for the lynching passion of many a white man. (122)<sup>6</sup>

For Jupiter, watching his wife participate with glee in this massacre, the “game” becomes a cruel turning point in their marriage: “She was throwing at Jupiter. And she struck him right in the heart. He, too, began to hate her. Only that he hated her out of love. She, however, hated him out of hate” (122) (Sie warf nach Jupiter. Und sie traf ihn mitten ins Herz. Auch er begann sie zu hassen. Nur haßte er sie aus Liebe. Sie aber haßte ihn aus Haß).

As the title of Goll’s novel indicates, her text plays with culture clashes between white Europeans and Black Africans, referencing the famous myth of the Greek god Jupiter’s bull claiming Europa (see also Djufack, 2014); between

stereotypes of supposed “civilization” and “wilderness,” or the colonizing and the colonized; and between the sexes, as the subtitle to one edition of her book signals: *A Battle of Love between Two Worlds*.<sup>7</sup> Strictly speaking, the story builds on a retelling of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, as remarked above, including the handkerchief, but with a modernist twist whereby the high-ranking and rich Black official Djilbuti marries the white lower-middle-class Valery whose mother (the father is dead) much welcomes the materially advantageous union and overlooks its interracial character: “Bei dieser von Durchschnittssorgen ausgelagten Frau war die ausschlaggebende Farbe das Rosa seines Scheckbuches” (33) (For this woman, drained by average sorrows, the decisive color was the pink of his checkbook). His wife, Alma, actually is unfaithful because she refuses to be kept indoors, a modern Garçonne who prefers to roam the streets. Shakespeare’s Iago, in turn, is merely implied by the many inviting delicacies modern life has to offer, including chatty girlfriends, entertainment, travel, and shopping. In Goll’s text, the husband murders Alma out of raging jealousy, just as Othello does. In Goll’s version, however, he also murders her out of self-preservation: “Sie sollte ihn nicht mehr durch ihren Anblick schwächen!” (142) (Her sight will not weaken him anymore!). He is desperate to stem the broader brutal, traumatizing, murdering social racism she has come to embody.

For Goll’s text “digs out the sense of the object,” to employ Edschmid’s phrase, from a variety of perspectives. This variety comprises, one, the fascination, perhaps obsession, of many Expressionists with Black art and cultures (Goll and her husband were fans of Carl Einstein’s and collectors themselves and, later, in exile, friends with African American writers such as Richard Wright); two, an understanding of “primitivism” that, though hardly nuanced, sensed the colonialists’ and Europeans’ denial of their own beastly cruelties, making them the animals to which they degraded others; and, three, the plethora of racist commercials, advertising, and media that underscored the economics of colonialism: Black lives and bodies as a voiceless screen upon which to project and perform colonial rule and the supremacy of whiteness. Together, these perspectives were born from a radical politicization Werner Sollors locates between the socialism of the time “and Goll’s enthusiasm for revolution, pacifism, and the Negro” (44).

In the following, then, I read Goll’s text not only as a battle between Black and white, as it has been primarily interpreted (e.g., McGowan 1997; Dietrich 2004; Steidl 2013), but first and foremost as a bitter and accusing satire of outside and inside, of ascription by others of the Black “Other” by whites and the ambivalence of agency and avowal whereby the masks each protagonist wears become the media she or he has to negotiate: between body/skin and

perception, between identity formation and bursting forms and formats. Goll's grasping "the sense of the object"—racism—is mediated by an Expressionist aesthetic that utilizes the language of vitalism taken ad absurdum by colonialist inscriptions on both Black and white bodies robbed of their sensory and emotional humanity.

### **Somaesthetics as Medium: "Performance"**

The short and silent engagement of Alma Valery and Jupiter Djilbuti abruptly ends upon their wedding day when both enter from a virginal state of bliss (each for different reasons) into a blazing heat of public hell:

The sun shone as bright as possible and turned the car into a vitrine for the people. They thrust and pushed in front of the entrance of No. 110 Boulevard Exelmans as if surrounding the showcase in a wax museum. . . . The photographers of *Excelsior*, *Vogue*, and *Femina* were already waiting with silver, gigantic light tulips to offer their readers the joke of this wedding, held onto with magnesium, tomorrow morning. Paris so much likes to amuse itself at others' expense; nowhere else in the world does one exploit stylistically a scandal, a society event, or a "fait divers" with so much grace, epic talent, and finesse. (41–42)<sup>8</sup>

The beginning of their union also promises its demise: as soon as the stage has been set for the couple, a public wedding, they are turned into puppets, potential wax figures, dead upon arrival, as the spectacle of their nuptials erases all individuality that makes them human. They are Black and white, man and woman, masks and tokens that are to perform a well-worn script with the added titillation of "miscegenation."

Not incidentally, Countee Cullen, a famous Harlem Renaissance poet, during his travels in France met Goll in Paris and reported in *The Crisis* (1929) that "Madame Claire Goll . . . is largely and sincerely interested in the Negro." However, her book, according to Cullen's ironic review, repeats "outworn shibboleths: I have no personal brief for intermarriage, but I do await eagerly the advent of that pioneer who will . . . forget his formula and write one such story in which the ending will be happy and probable. It is my belief that such marriages when they prove unhappy, have color no more than others as the cause of their disintegration" (567). Cullen's point is well taken: Goll, indeed, has little interest in depicting real-life characters, complete with complicated inte-

riors, emotions, and interpersonal relationships—certainly an aesthetic oft-used by Expressionist authors. As Steidl (2013) has shown, Alma and Jupiter are constructs of color, with black and white dominating, but including yellow, blue, and red, that paint Expressionist masks onto the realities in which they operate—but they are predominantly the reflections of white European society that seeks to revel in what it projects. According to Steidl, the text holds 588 mentions of color, and with few exceptions they are static (black and white as noncolors, and blue, red, and yellow as the primary, RYB color model). There is no mixing or graying implied: invariably, the two protagonists see “black” (when Alma faints); “yellow” (blond; when Alma visits Jupiter in his office); “blue” (Jupiter looking into Alma’s eyes); and “red” (Jupiter, upon learning of Alma meeting Olaf, her lover and his competitor). Nuances escape both the projections from the outside as well as the couple’s projections onto each other: they perform for each other, with each other, on a semiotic stage that they would not even begin to ably decode, given that the script for their own agency has yet to be written into a colonialist Eurocentric discourse.

Hidden beneath the static blocks of color lies a sensory interdependency we can begin to approach with an analysis of the soma.<sup>9</sup> It is here that tropes really help the Expressionists mask character and create types—devoid of feeling and sensing altogether, stuck in a kind of paralysis produced by overstimulation in the cities and the complexity of ethnic and gender realities all around. Jupiter, viewed as Black, not as red as he views himself, becomes increasingly weakened and ill the longer he is exposed to the unceasing comparison with whiteness. As literary scholar El-Shaddai Deva emphasizes, “Die voyeuristische Lust der europäischen Nachbarn drückt auf die Haut Jupiters . . . denn [ihre] überwachenden Augen [bleiben] da, um ihn zu erkranken” (109) (The voyeurist lust of the European neighbors presses upon Jupiter’s skin . . . because their surveilling eyes remain present to make him sick). Alma’s whiteness makes him dizzy, and he soon refuses to wear lighter clothing because “Ja, sie taten ihm weh, die weißen Kleider” (119) (Yes, they hurt him, the white clothes). As he turns into a lifeless victim of her constant psychological torture, emaciated as Alma is serving him fish he cannot eat because it is his family’s revered animal, she turns into the marionette, “fühllos und hell wie Wachs” (119) (emotionless and light as wax), just as their wedding already presaged.<sup>10</sup> Jupiter protects his heart with his hand from her waxen rays “wie seine Verfahren beim Anblick der Europäer in Tropenkleidung . . . , weil sie der grelle Stoff mehr blendete als die Strahlen der Sonne” (119) (Like his ancestors facing the Europeans dressed in tropical garb . . . because the shrill fabric blinded them more than the rays of the sun). The more Alma subscribes to the dictates

of European racism (flinging the five letters of N\* at him just like the balls that kill Blacks symbolically at the booth), the more she becomes a lifeless puppet, waxen, fake, a mere mouthpiece of white constructions of Blacks and a mere copy of herself; the more Jupiter seeks to employ his ample capacities for sensory perception, the more he engulfs himself in precisely the stereotypes of sensory hierarchies by emphasizing his olfactory, gustatory, and haptic abilities. Toward the end of the novel, he has turned into wax himself, shaped by Alma's cruel manipulations and stabs—and, by extension, the popularized colonialist positions—dependent on her superficial whims and wants and devoid of life support outside of the racialized prison in which society has shackled them. Wax figurines or death by stoning or the knife—it is a choice that voids any somatic experience.

### **Gender as Medium: “Primitivism”**

Over the years, at least two scholars have called for the application of gender theory to *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa*. Most recently, El-Shaddai Deva noted that “it would be interesting to pursue how the author stages the connection between sexual and ethnic-racial alterity; and how she uses the staging of an intercultural, that is, interracial encounter as a paraphrase to comment on feminist movements in the Weimar Republic” (138).<sup>11</sup> Moray McGowan, in 1997, wondered, “To what extent does it [the novel] represent an *écriture féminine* which consciously piles up the clichés of a dispossessed language in order to deconstruct them?” (217). All three concerns should be pursued, I concur, but they also require not only consideration of the sociohistorical context of the Weimar Republic, and, perhaps more importantly, Paris, at the time, but also the context of the discourse on “primitivism” within German Expressionism and colonialism. German scholar Stephan Dietrich, for example, correctly observes that while we cannot dismiss the appropriation of popularized racializing discourse Goll utilizes to an alienating degree in her Expressionist text that appears to be pedagogical, we also have to acknowledge that, given both Claire and Ivan Goll's “Begeisterung für afrikanische Kunst” (enthusiasm for African art), “ihre Bemühungen, sie in Europa zugänglich zu machen” (their efforts to make it accessible across Europe), and desire “Texte zu übersetzen, Anthologien herauszugeben, etc.” (to translate texts and edit anthologies, etc.), it is “[kaum] vorzustellen, dass hier eine Diskreditierung des exotischen Primitiven ernsthaft intendiert ist” (217) (hard to imagine that [the novel] seriously intended a discrediting of the exotic primitive). But what of the resulting

“ambivalente Schweben” (ambivalent limbo) Dietrich ascribes to the text? Is intention really what’s at the core of the matter?

As literary scholar David Pan reminds us, the idea of modern primitivism originates with Friedrich Nietzsche, and, according to Pan, “The expressionists are amongst his most ardent disciples” (18). Importantly, he emphasizes that, for Carl Einstein, primitive art “is also an attempt to redefine the link between the individual and the outside world,” and he is interested in the “extent to which everyday life is experienced in every culture as a corollary to aesthetic experience” (19–20). Famously, this becomes the curriculum of the avant-gardes who make the aesthetic translation of everyday life their very own program. While Claire Goll would likely subscribe to Einstein’s notion of primitivism, her text engages the discourses of women’s liberation and the Expressionists’ interest in and fascination with non-Western cultures by employing a language of distance. For how do you inscribe gender performance into wax figurines and colonialist projections? How do you ascribe agency to protagonists whose shared life is already in decline at their wedding?

If we focus exclusively on Alma Valery, leaving behind the masking of the protagonists with color and colonialist codes, we meet an eighteen-year-old girl in a boy’s body, red-cheeked and thus forever touched by the heat of summer, a veritable embodiment of nature. She is fresh, vibrant, unmarked, and, importantly, virginal in a plethora of ways. Already on the first page, though, she yearns to “[übermalen] die echte rote Schminke auf meinen Wangen mit weißer Ölfarbe” (7) (mask her real red makeup on my cheeks with white oil paint). What we perceive of her is primarily a sensory image presented by Jupiter, who is blinded by her blondness, lost in the blue eyes he compares to a garden of like-colored flowers. He experiences her hair as “Blitze” (flashes) and her clothing as “Feuerwerk” (fireworks) or food. Her body, at first, appears to him in animal form (“meine Schneetaube” / my snow-white dove). Even her scent is “weiß . . . wie Jasmin” (44) (white as jasmine), and he eventually only talks to her “[um] des hellen Namens mit den zwei offenen A [willen]” (47) (because of her light name, with its two open A’s). If she speaks at all, she responds to his narratives of himself and his home—delivered in verbal avalanches one would refer to today as “mansplaining.” When he asks her to undress and perform for him as “meine kleine weiße Negerin” (54) (my little white Negress), she collapses and “fing kläglich zu weinen an, ein Weinen, das gar nicht zu dem Negerkostüm paßte. Ein kleines Mädchen, das seine Mutter verloren hat” (55) (starts to cry pitifully, a weeping that does not at all match the Negro costume. A little girl who has lost her mother). Promptly, the empathetic Jupiter fetches her clothes

and carries her to the sofa, only to dress his little doll-like girl “wie ein . . . Mannequin aus Wax” (55) (like a mannequin made out of wax). And she readily serves as a marionette without a life of her own.

Over time, Alma, emancipated by their initially impassioned lovemaking that follows Jupiter’s recipe entirely, feels grown up and discovers that her husband, in fact, makes her interesting by association and as a participant in society: “Wirklich, sie kam sich sehr interessant vor. Augenblicklich waren die Neger modern. Ihre Musik, ihre Skulptur, ihre Tänze beschäftigten vorübergehend die oberflächlichen Zehntausend der Gesellschaft” (66) (Really, she thought herself very interesting. At the current moment, Negroes were modern. Their music, their sculpture, their dances temporarily occupied the superficial upper crust of society). She becomes Jupiter’s “kleines weißes Schoßhündchen” (67) (little white lap dog); he calls her “meine Häuptlingin aus Alabaster” (67) (my alabaster woman chief). For four weeks, they stay away from the public eye. But once unleashed, Alma revels in the full regalia of the status she has now gained, complete with Jupiter’s money to furnish her commercial desires. “Sie konnte endlich ihrer Passion des Einkaufens huldigen, der alle Frauen wie eine Massenpsychose verfallen sind” (86) (Finally, she could pay homage to her passion for shopping that all women are addicted to as if in mass psychosis). In chapter 11, Goll stylizes Alma into a shallow consumerist who is taking full advantage of modern buy-and-return logistics, seeking to be part of the “scene” by attending theater events and being turned into a marionette by Jupiter—only for them both to be mocked by high society. Soon she is known as the “blonde Negerin” (95) (blond woman Negro), a label she deplores, and she attacks Jupiter by creating a racist hierarchy of minorities whereby he is “feige, feige wie ein Jude” (92) (cowardly, cowardly like a Jew). The tides turn: “Von heute ab war er nicht mehr ihr Herr, sondern ihr Neger” (93) (From now on he was not her master anymore, but her Negro).

Goll, in her distanced, satirical, even searing voice, refuses to show empathy, even sympathy, or feeling for Alma, her protagonist. Essentially, Alma represents Europe, and Europe fashions a sense of superiority to, neglect of, and exploitation of all nonwhite cultures that defy any personalization or humanity. If anything, Alma is gendered by losing her virginity to Jupiter (who cherishes it for three days, contrary to his own culture’s practices) as she turns from a girl to a woman and enjoys sex; her agency as a female in Paris society, however, is marked by Jupiter: she will show him that she is “Emanzipiert!” (54) (emancipated), but she collapses wearing the loincloth she is unable to fill with meaning. Just like Jupiter, Alma fulfills a role, playing the waxen, mask-equipped figure in the drama of her own demise.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Body as Medium: “The African”**

Jupiter’s body, in contrast to Alma’s white alabaster blaze, is written with a nuanced understanding of browns, reds, and blacks. In a rare passage of identity positioning and avowal, Jupiter tries to explain to Alma the complex heritage he proudly calls his own:

“Peuhl” . . . means “red man,” because we are a mixture of whites and blacks, a mixture of Egyptian, Assyrian, Semitic, Moorish, Syrian, Arab, and Berber bloods. It is said we descended from the Atlas Mountains, from where we were expelled by Muslims, or we come from Egypt, with our square shoulders. Other researchers place our origins near the Red Sea, hence the Semitic aspect. We ourselves insist that we come from the Sudan. But this cannot possibly be of interest to you! You don’t see any difference! Europeans can distinguish two Blacks no more than two sparrows. (11)<sup>13</sup>

In trying to move the European perception beyond the colonialist gaze limited to perceiving Black and white bodies, training it to see and sense cultural heritage beyond the ethnographic and anthropometric taxonomies that filtered so conveniently into contemporary racist stereotypes leading to eugenics, Goll chronicles perceptions of the exterior that have been sustained to this day.<sup>14</sup> Rather than engaging with the actual ancestry of her future husband, Alma is much more interested in being wooed by lies that match her own imaginations of “Africa,” fantasies that have been stirred by colonialist fairy tales.<sup>15</sup> The landscape of Jupiter’s body, with its physical inscriptions of his ancestors visible and multifaceted, does not attract her nearly as much as the geography of the lands he inhabited—trappings Jupiter understands fully and ably exploits for his own purposes: “Exotische Ländernamen entzünden europäische Mädchenhirne!” (24) (The names of exotic countries inflame the brains of European girls!). The picture he paints of his geographic origins, a mythical Africa, presents itself in the most multisensory, multicolored fable he can conjure up to douse Alma with fantasies that far exceed her expectations: “Alma hing an seinem Mund wie ein Kind, dem man ein buntes Märchen erzählt” (25) (Alma hung on his lips like a child that is told a colorful fairy tale). Ultimately, Jupiter achieves his goal: “Alma ist verliebt; Ob in sich oder in ihn, das kann sie nicht so recht unterscheiden” (26–27) (Alma is in love. But she cannot quite distinguish whether it is with herself or with him).

Neither “Africa,” as a geographical place and a space of fantasy, nor Jupi-



ter, as a human body and surface for projections, can emerge from the static images Europe, represented by Alma, has cast them into. Jupiter's body remains Black, and even though he refuses to be seen in public among his own people in order to prevent being seen as merging into a Black mass, he cannot escape this fate. No matter how he sees himself, his internal and external qualities and differentiations are erased by the color of his skin, "read" as Black, not as red, by his white European contemporaries. The same reductive projection, the same one-dimensionality, is the "fate" of "Africa" as a continent. Were Jupiter to enumerate its countries and cultures, it would overwhelm Alma and her contemporaries not just as fact, but as an invitation to imagine a world beyond the one that has been created for her and given the parameters within which she can make choices. Jupiter's body—ultimately an object of hatred that helps her deflect her own self-hatred—offers, at first, an adventure, an exploration into exotic lands, a taste of the "Other" as new and as an escape from Alma's dreary, predictable, lower-middle-class existence. Taking a step into the vast unknown such as the African continent would mean disavowal of her own heritage, encountering realities she could not possibly fathom; it would mean losing herself. She would much rather stick with the fairy tale and dismiss the Black body as an undesirable, tainting disruption.

In an essay titled "The Color Fetish," published in 2017, Toni Morrison wrote,

Of constant fascination for me are the ways in which literature employs skin color to reveal character or drive narrative. . . . There are so many opportunities to reveal race in literature—whether one is conscious of it or not. But writing non-colorist literature about black people is a task I have found both liberating and hard. (41, 51)

Claire Goll, as a white, Jewish author, a socialist, and a pacifist active in the women's movement, employs skin color not to reveal character or drive narrative, but to do the precise opposite. Her characters remain static and underdeveloped, mere shells, stiff waxen figures, precisely because of the color dictate, not despite it. The oft-cited ambivalence of her voice actually is far from infirm: with biting sarcasm, the narrator comments on the futility of Alma's and Jupiter's feeble attempts to overcome the color roles within which they are cast by a white supremacist society. Herbert Uerlings calls it "Goll's gnadenlos-unerbittliche . . . Textperspektive" (35), her merciless-relentless text perspective that highlights the "fetish dance" Alma and Jupiter are caught in, whether as a "farce or as a tragedy." But because of their "Folie à deux spiegel-

bildlicher Verkennungen” (36) (folie à deux of mirroring misjudgments), according to Uerlings, they fail to explore and recognize the other beyond the casting they are expected to endure.

In that sense, Goll ably and pointedly turns the Expressionists’ fetishization of color, of “primitivism,” of vitalism, of the New Man ad absurdum: black and white are not colors, at least there are no pure black and white colors—black and white come in hues with other colors mixed in. To “dig out the sense of the object,” Goll, in her racialization of common Expressionist tropes, has exposed the absurdity and cruelty of racism in conjunction with the greed of European consumerism that continues at the expense of colonized territories and bodies—with Jupiter as the increasingly anemic Black body who either submits to degradation or kills in desperation. It is an Expressionist reality, filtered through gender, sexuality, and activism, of which Claire Goll was only too acutely aware.

I would like to expressly thank Julie Shoults, Katharina von Hammerstein, and all members of my 2021 graduate seminar on modernism for their careful and astute reading of this chapter and for their immensely helpful comments and suggestions.

I retain the original title of the novel and citations including the term N\* from within for historical accuracy only.

## NOTES

1. Relatedly, “decolonial aesthetics,” an important aspect of postcolonial studies research established by Adolfo Alban Achinte and Walter D’Mignolo, among many others, provides another angle with which to approach these discourses central to a reinvestigation of German Expressionism. See [https://monoskop.org/Decolonial\\_aesthetics](https://monoskop.org/Decolonial_aesthetics)

2. All German original quotations and passages translated by Anke Finger.

3. “So wird der ganze Raum des expressionistischen Künstlers Vision. Er sieht nicht, er schaut. Er schildert nicht, er erlebt. Er gibt nicht wieder, er gestaltet. Er nimmt nicht, er sucht. Nun gibt es nicht mehr die Kette der Tatsachen: Fabriken, Häuser, Krankheit, Huren, Geschrei und Hunger. Nun gibt es die Vision davon. Die Tatsachen haben Bedeutung nur insoweit, als durch sie hindurchgreifend die Hand des Künstlers nach dem greift, was hinter ihnen steht.”

4. Jones continues, revealing the sexual angst implied in the denigration of all senses except sight: “But of course ‘erectus’ has his problems, finding himself suddenly vulnerable in that the upright posture, with formerly protected body parts now bonelessly flapping into view. Protection and concealment of the more fragile body parts—as an underside became frontal—demanded clothing and *Kultur*, even as our libidos lingered on furtive memories of smells, lubricated four-legged interactions, and mutually vulnerable touch.”

5. “Für Rassenprobleme war ich stets besonders aufgeschlossen, da ich mich mit allen Erniedrigten und Beleidigten identifizierte. Auf dem Pariser Flohmarkt hatte ich

mit Schrecken einen Stand mit der Inschrift 'Nieder mit den Schwarzen' gesehen. Auf einem Bett saß ein schwarzer Athlet, dessen Herz man treffen mußte, damit er umfiel: Sex und Aufruf zum Mord als symbolische Gedankenverbindung."

6. "Das Ballspiel war eigentlich nur eine Umschreibung. Da man dem Publikum in seinen versteckten Gelüsten, die zwei Schwarzen selbst mit den Bällen zu steinigen, leider aus humanen Gründen nicht entgegenkommen durfte, war man gezwungen, sie auf Umwegen zu bewerfen. Jeder Wurf war ein Symbol, das der Lynchpassion manches Weißen als Ableiter dienen mußte."

7. Rita Mielke, in her postscript to both the Argon (1987) and dtv (1996) editions of Goll's novel, reports on the three first editions from 1926: one in the Rhein Verlag in Basel (with Walter Lohmeyer), two by the Ullstein Verlag in Berlin in their brand-new Die Gelben Ullstein-Bücher series. While the first Ullstein edition depicts the photo of a Black man suspiciously racialized also as a Jew (the image appears warped to artificially elongate the profile, especially the nose and chin), the second edition, with the subtitle *Ein Liebeskampf zwischen zwei Welten* supposedly features a photo from the 1930 film *Der Greifer* (The groper) with Hans Albers, a thriller. This must have been a later edition. The Rhein-Verlag edition does not display any imagery.

8. "Die Sonne schien so hell sie konnte und machte aus dem Auto eine Vitrine für das ganze Volk. Das stieß und drängte sich vor dem Eingang Nummer 110 des Boulevard Exelmans wie um den Schaukasten eines Wachsfigurenkabinetts. . . . Die Photographen von 'Excelsior', 'Vogue' und 'Femina' warteten schon mit silbernen riesigen Lichttulpn darauf, ihren Lesern morgen früh den mit Magnesium festgehaltenen Witz dieser Hochzeit bieten zu können. Paris amüsiert sich ja so gern auf die Kosten der andern; nirgends in der Welt wird mit soviel Grazie, epischem Talent und Feinheit ein Skandal, ein gesellschaftliches Ereignis oder ein fait divers stilistisch ausgebeutet."

9. Not incidentally, it was the first Black philosopher and scholar in Germany, Anton Wilhelm Amo (c. 1700–c. 1750), whose 1734 dissertation, "On the Impassivity of the Human Mind," argues against Descartes that the senses belong to the body as the mind cannot sense by itself. As Dwight Lewis has shown, "For Descartes, the mind and body, which are distinct substances, interact and commingle at the pineal gland, producing the passions of the soul. Amo responds with a 'No.' For Amo, ontologically distinct substances are necessarily distinct. Consequently, sensing necessarily belongs to the body because without a body, one cannot sense. There is *impassivity* between the mind and sensation because the mind is immaterial and sensations necessarily need to occur upon something passive and material (the body), which means sensations could only ever be *cognized through* and occur *on* the body" ("Anton Wilhelm Amo," n.p.). See also Lewis, "Anton Wilhelm Amo's Philosophy." For contemporary discussions related to Amo's argument, see Taylor and Gordon.

10. The wax figure in conjunction with a mannequin—as a modernist expression of the doll—is an Expressionist trope in need of further scrutiny. Sophie van Leer, another female Expressionist author to be inquired into, for example, published a striking short story in the May issue of *Der Sturm* in 2016, "Die Puppe": "Der Stein ritzt die große Spiegelscheibe. Glasstreifen zersplittert das Pflaster. Der Knabe steht vor der Blondgelockten. Ihre Augen weiten in Warten. Hände und Arme breiten in Sehnsucht. Er bettet sie in Schmuck und Blumen. Kerzen beten um ihr Gesicht. Und er küßt die toten Glieder. Seine Schläfen schmiegen ihre Stirn. Er wühlt die starren Füße und deckt den warmen Leib über sie. Und sein Leben strömt in sie. Zitternde Adernstrahlen pflanzt er

in ihre Lenden. Geboren regen sich die Füße. Und er senkt sein Herz in das weiße Wachs und kleine Brüste knospen. Zag klopf das Blut und zuckt und klimmt in ihren Nacken und flutet in die Wangen und scheucht die Stirnenblässe. Ueber die bleichen Lippen wächst der erste Atem. Weit warden die Augen und blicken. Und ihre Haut blüht und duftet, daß er in die Kniee sinkt und weint in ihren Schoß. Sein Blut wächst in Strömen, er türmt die Hände um ihren Hals und kümmert ihre Schultern. Rauschend umhüllen sie seine trunkenen, taumelnden Worte. Und sein Blut rollt. Und sie schreitet durch die Gänge seiner Adern und ihre Fingern plätschern in dem Brunnen, der seinen Gliedern entquillt und ihr blondes Haar betaut. Und ihre Arme ranken um sein Haupt und hängen Trauerweiden um sein sterbes Angesicht" (22). As literary scholar Jan Christian Metzler points out, a number of motifs find their expression in this gender-token of the female wax mannequin, including the female vampire, Pygmalion, the femme fatale, and the creation of a model female, albeit demanding the death of her "author-artist," a possible revenge for the sexual usurpation posing as an awakening.

11. "Es wäre interessant, den Fragen nachzugehen, wie die Autorin den Zusammenhang zwischen sexueller und ethnisch-rassischer Alterität inszeniert; und inwiefern die Inszenierung einer interkulturellen bzw. interrassischen Begegnung als Paraphrase benutzt, um Stellung zu nehmen gegenüber den feministischen Bewegungen der Weimarer Republik."

12. A theme whose context I will have to leave unexplored merely for reasons of space is that of motherhood, parenthood, motherland, and the projection of (conquered) "dependents", that is, children and colonies. By chapter 15, Alma and Jupiter have a daughter, Marianne. When pregnant, Alma loathes looking at dark colors; she obsessively frequents the Louvre to look at white statues, in superstitious hope that looking at anything white and light will brighten the skin of her child. Once born, Alma teaches Marianne (Mimi) to fear the color black, including her father, and the baby eventually refuses to be held by him. Jupiter, in turn, considers her "eine Kostbarkeit des Orients" (130) (a treasure of the Orient), which he seeks to possess over time. While the biting comment of the narrator concludes that "sein Kind nur eine tragischere Wiederholung des Falles Alma darstellte" (130) (his child presented merely a more tragic recurrence of Alma's case), the parable of mother, father, and child demands a more thorough reading on the background of colonial power dynamics and the gendered projections ascribed to the colonizer versus the colonized.

13. "Peuhl . . . heißt 'Roter Mann,' denn wir sind eine Mischung aus Weißen und Schwarzen. Eine Verschmelzung ägyptischen, assyrischen, semitischen, maurischen, syrischen, Araber- und Berberblutes. Man sagt, wir seien vom Atlas heruntergekommen, von wo uns die Muselmanen vertrieben hatten, oder auch wir stammen aus Ägypten, mit unsern viereckigen Schultern. Andere Forscher verlegen unsere Herkunft ans Rote Meer, daher der semitische Einschlag. Wir selbst behaupten, vom Sudan zu sein. Aber das kann Sie wahrhaftig nicht interessieren! Sie sehen doch keinen Unterschied! Europäer halten ebensowenig zwei Schwarze wie zwei Spatzen auseinander."

14. Scholars in Black German studies have contributed substantially to diversifying and deepening the understanding of Europe's and Germany's colonial and postcolonial histories, German-African relations, and to discourses on Afro-German or Black German identities. See especially Fatima El-Tayeb, Priscilla Layne, Vanessa Plumly, Tiffany Florvil, Kira Thurman, and Natasha Kelly, among many others.

15. See also scholarship by Susanne Zantop, Susanne Marchand, and many others.

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## CHAPTER 7

# Gender, Sexuality, and the Makeup of Feminine Beauty

## *Viennese Expressionist Ceramics and the Wieselthier Frauenkopf*

Megan Brandow-Faller

The received narrative of the “birth” of Viennese Expressionism remains a familiar litany, rooted in historiographical practices heroicizing canonical male superstars working in the “fine art” of portraiture while marginalizing practitioners of historically feminine handcraft media. Conventionally viewed as an emphatic rejection of the beautiful surface in favor of distortion, inner expressivity, and the psychological interior while representing the unmediated revelations of troubled visionaries, the Viennese Expressionist breakthrough is routinely associated with a younger generation of art students debuting at the Klimt Group’s landmark 1908 and 1909 *Kunstschau* (art shows) regarded as the high point of the Viennese Secessionist movement.<sup>1,2</sup> Most famously, Oskar Kokoschka, whom Secessionist critic Ludwig Hevesi called the “chief wild man” (*Oberwildling*) of the 1908 *Kunstschau*, premiered his Expressionist drama, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (*Murderer, Hope of Womankind*), an archetypal battle of the sexes portraying the perennial antithesis between male and female, love and violence, creation and destruction (313). Informed by the incised tattooing of Polynesian masks displayed in Vienna’s Ethnographic Museum, Kokoschka painted sinews, nerves, and tendons onto scantily clad actors. Much like Kokoschka’s tattoo-like body painting for *Murderer*, Viennese Expressionist portraiture was believed to slice through the facade of feminine ornament to reveal the sitter’s inner psychological essence: a project necessarily entailing the sacrifice of the decorative aestheticism touted by Secessionist mentors like Gustav

Klimt and Josef Hoffmann. Guided by new mentors linking surface decoration with criminality, leading male Expressionists like Kokoschka and Egon Schiele would be encouraged to leave their decorative, applied art roots behind them, in favor of, as Schiele put it, “only the fine arts” (qtd. in Comini, *Egon Schiele’s Portraits* 38). Despite newer scholarship on Austria’s Expressionist foremothers, including painters Helene Funke (1869–1957) and Stephanie Hollenstein (1886–1944), the notion that “oedipal odysseys are entrance criteria for card-carrying Expressionists” remains firmly rooted in the scholarly and popular imagination (Comini, “Gender or Genius” 271).<sup>3</sup>

But an alternative to the familiar paper cutout heroes of Austrian Expressionism is provided by an overwhelmingly female artistic movement, pioneered by the female art students debuting with Schiele and Kokoschka around the time of the landmark *Kunstschau*, in a medium with deeply rooted feminine linkages: the interwar *expressive Keramik* (Expressionist ceramics) movement. Informed by the primitivizing currents first surfacing at the 1908/9 *Kunstschau*, Viennese Expressionist ceramics exploded onto the postwar art scene, attaining expressive immediacy similar to that of the Expressionist easel canvas.<sup>4</sup> In a series of small-scale heads and life-size sculpture playing on women’s supposed fixation with self-decoration and appearances—works portraying the “New Woman” and/or the artist herself—ceramic artist Vally Wieselthier (1895–1945) privileged a seemingly untutored, childlike visual style laying claim to the Expressionist myth of the unmediated creative genius. Sculpting herself into an Expressionist aesthetic while crafting a public persona as an uninfluenced *Kindweib* (child-woman), Wieselthier proffered a subversively self-reflexive critique of the New Woman’s celebrated sexual autonomy and the patently “made up,” commodified nature of beauty culture. Theoretically and methodologically, my paper is informed by feminist analyses of design (especially Pat Kirkham, Penny Sparke, Cheryl Buckley, Rozsika Parker, and Rebecca Houze), a body of literature concerned with not only correcting the marginalization of female designers in design history but also revealing how the tangled threads of modernist theory, craft, and decoration have systematically devalued practices and fields encoded as feminine.<sup>5</sup> To these ends, it is not my intent to insert women into the established canon of Austrian Expressionism: a body of work typically recognized for its subjective, emotionally visionary style of portraiture and self-portraiture, heightened use of unnatural colors, and portrayal of external reality in a distorted manner related to the artist’s emotional state of being. Rather, I wish to suggest how Expressionist protagonists and practitioners systematically excluded the dynamic field of Expressionist ceramics, given its associations with female



domesticity, and to reconceptualize the media, practices, and chronology of the Austrian Expressionist movement to encompass the interwar Expressionist handcraft movement (a field including, but not limited to, ceramics, textiles, toys, and furniture).

Expressionist ceramics emerged out of the collaborative atmosphere of the Wiener Werkstätte Artist Workshops, an experimental design space predominated by female art students during the war. The work of acclaimed ceramic sculptor Vally Wieselthier, head of the Wiener Werkstätte Ceramics Department (1927–28) and the movement’s theoretical spokesperson, defined what critics perceived as the movement’s Expressionistic aesthetic: roughly modeled, spontaneously glazed ceramic vessels and figural sculpture with deliberate imperfections visualizing the process of making. Wieselthier’s trademark ceramic heads, a form informed by a long tradition of ceramic satire and humor, were notable for their formal asymmetries and distortions, with faces painted as so to appear deliberately “made up” in a provocative fashion calling attention to the artifice of visible cosmetics and attendant sexual roles. The Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* (woman’s head) figured the vermilion lipstick, visible eye shadow, mascara, and rouged cheeks of the 1920s New Woman: a sexualized but masklike mode of face painting asserting female autonomy and sexual liberation in a strikingly *sachlich* (sober, matter-of-fact) manner. Like much of Austrian Expressionist painting, these *Frauenköpfe* took the form of emotionally subjective psychological portraiture—collective (self)-portraits of the New Woman and/or the artist herself—inflected with the artist’s feelings at the time of making. But unlike Expressionist painting, which witnessed its peak around the 1908/9 *Kunstschau*, the heyday of Expressionist ceramics came later, part and parcel of the interwar period’s expressive handcraft movement, and provided a uniquely female form of subjectivity on societal constructions of the New Woman.

Lending her work its subversive charge were Wieselthier’s attempts to elevate female “craftiness” into the realm of the monumental, harnessing vessel-based, wheel-throwing techniques linked with functional domestic pottery to create life- and over-life-size figural sculptures. Wieselthier’s boundary-defying work attracted acclaim from pro-decorative critics like Max Eisler, Ludwig Steinmetz, Leopold Rochowanski, and Else Hofmann, who endorsed the expressive use of ornament, gesture, and process. But a cohort of antidecorative, misogynist critics used tropes of sexual seduction to neutralize the threat of these crafty ceramic vessels—hollow and empty like a womb, in a sexist climate in which women were widely believed to be “empty-headed”—to male Expressionism. Although flirting with the expression of significant content, in the eyes of these

misogynist critics such feminine vessels merely collapsed back into the decorative. But far from being mere decoration or uncomplicated self-portraits of the New Woman, the Wieselhier *Frauenkopf* and related figural sculpture reclaimed pejorative stereotypes linking women's art making with her sexual drives to decorate and "make up" herself, constituting a uniquely female—and *feminist*—contribution to Austro-German Expressionism.

Pioneering the postwar explosion of Expressionist ceramics was a younger generation of female art students trained at the Secessionist-dominated Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts) and Wiener Frauenakademie (Viennese Women's Academy) around the time of the landmark *Kunstschau*. The majority of these artist-craftswomen joined the Secessionists' applied arts commercial workshops, the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops, 1903–32), cofounded by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser on the model of British arts-and-crafts workshops. Steeped in the Secessionist valorization of decorative art and handcraft through professors like Adolf Böhm, Josef Hoffmann, Koloman Moser, Otto Friedrich, Franz Čížek, and Michael Powolny, cofounder with Berthold Löffler of the Wiener Keramik (Viennese Ceramics) Manufactory (1906), the core group of Expressionist ceramicists included Gudrun Baudisch (1907–1982), Hertha Bucher (1898–1960), Charlotte (Lotte) Calm (1897–?), Hilde Jesser-Schmid (1894–1985), Erna Kopriva (1894–1984), Dina (Bernhardine) Kuhn (1891–?), Maria Likarz-Strauss (1893–1971), Grete Neuwalder-Breuer (1891–1942), Katharina Rix (1901–?), Reni Schaschl (1895–1979), Hedwig Schmidl (1899–?), Susi Singer (1891–1965), and Vally (Valerie) Wieselhier, the movement's unofficial leader. Many of these artist-craftswomen participated in the same ventures as the celebrated male "heroes" of Viennese Expressionism, including the experimental graphic portfolio *Die Fläche* (The surface, 1902–3); the Wiener Werkstätte postcard series (1907), an enterprise providing critical opportunities to talented newcomers linked to the Viennese Expressionist breakthrough; and the 1908/9 *Kunstschau*. All of these ventures—witnessing the participation of artists like Kokoschka, Schiele, Likarz-Strauss, and Singer alike—served as critical incubators for the child-like, cloisonné style of early Viennese Expressionism, notable for its flattened planes of unmodulated primary colors, dark black outlines evocative of stained glass or mosaic, and expressive contrast patterns. However, while Kokoschka's graphic designs for the Werkstätte, particularly his illustrated fairy tale of adolescent sexual awakening *Die träumenden Knaben* (*The Dreaming Youths*, 1907), shown in the graphic arts gallery of the 1908 *Kunstschau* alongside work of female art students like Ditha Moser, is routinely regarded as "the breaking and crossing points between *Jugendstil* and Expressionism," a related

body of early Expressionist graphic art by female art students has been forgotten (Neuwirth 199). The reason for this historiographical neglect is hardly accidental but bound up in what Sherwin Simmons refers to as Austrian Expressionism's "myth of origins": a counterreaction against the Secessionist valorization of the decorative that sought to establish clearer boundaries between the "major" and "minor," decorative and profound, and masculine and feminine modes of practice (Simmons 271). Indicative of a broader backlash against the Secessionist/Jugendstil elevation of applied art sweeping through the German art world, leading male Expressionists who, much like their female counterparts, had their start in designing postcards, graphic art, books, and fashion accessories for the *Werkstätte* would be steered away from the decorative and applied arts by newfound mentors and Expressionist protagonists.<sup>6</sup> Architect and cultural critic Adolf Loos famously discovered Kokoschka at the 1908 *Kunstschau*, incensed that "he was an employee of the Wiener Werkstätte . . . occupied with painting fans, drawings, postcards, and the like," insisting that such a squandering of Kokoschka's visionary talent was "one of the greatest crimes against the Holy Spirit" (*Sämtliche Schriften* 2:443).<sup>7</sup> But such a transition away from the decorative was not possible for the artist-craftswomen dominating the interwar *Werkstätte*. Rather, artists like Baudisch, Singer, and Wieselthier would explore ideas similar to those of male Expressionists through recourse to handcraft media, giving credence to the idea, as progressive critic Ludwig Steinmetz reasoned in 1920, "that not only is the brush the muse-hallowed tool of high art . . . [but] wood, clay, glass, and mosaic are also capable of artistically embodying an idea" ("Wiener Kunstschau" 199).<sup>8</sup>

A critical venue for Viennese Expressionist ceramics was the Wiener Werkstätte's so-called Artist Workshops, opening in 1916 and equipped with its own kiln and potters' wheels. Predominated by an atmosphere of informal collegiality, creative interchange, and female collectivity given a shortage of male coworkers during the Great War, the Artist Workshops offered talented young art students, who were recruited by their Secessionist professors, the chance to experiment with unconventional materials and techniques, free of concerns of utility. In her memoirs, Wieselthier likened the "women only" space of the Artist Workshops to an arcadian paradise, remembering how she and her colleagues—including the core group of artists listed above, with the exception of Bucher, who sold her works through the *Werkstätte* on commission—had at their disposal "a huge studio": "Each one of us got a key for himself and we had all the workshops imaginable to our free use. We also had the best trained foreman and workers and all of the time and materials we desired" ("Biography" 3). Characterized by an atmosphere of free exchange

and collaboration, members of the Artist Workshops experimented with similar ornamental forms, glazes, and thematic subject matter, much like the shared stylistic tendencies of the *Frauenköpfe*.

Part of the controversy surrounding Expressionist ceramics related not only to their formal and material qualities—how humble materials like earthenware were used for emphatically nonfunctional, nondomestic ends or the seemingly careless spontaneity reflected in the application of brightly colored, dripped glazes—but the sexual emancipation of their makers: real-life versions of “the so-called ‘new woman,’ the partly mythical notion of a sexually emancipated working woman that so fascinated the illustrated press in Germany” (McCormick 2). As Marianne Leisching, a Wiener Werkstätte coworker during the 1920s, recalled, “I believe that the ‘love affairs and frustrated love affairs’ influenced the work of the female artists. . . . They had the ideal of being unconventional, expressing oneself through love affairs, having as many sexual experiences as possible” (26).<sup>9</sup> Paralleling their transgression of the borders of masculine fine art and domestic female handcraft, members of the Artist Workshops were widely known for their unconventional personal habits of drinking, smoking, sexual permissiveness, (including, in some instances, bisexual preferences), and fashionably androgynous modes of self-presentation reflected in the requisite *Bubikopf* (bobbed) hairstyle and unfeminine or mannish clothing.

So pronounced was this violent rejection of middle-class propriety that Wieselthier and her contemporaries inspired the fictional trope of the *Kunstgewerblerin* (craftswoman) in interwar Austrian literature, “a being whose nature. . . . [was defined as] a vicious aberration” (Jonsson 192). When the protagonist, Lieutenant von Trotta, of Joseph Roth’s *Die Kapuzinergruft* (*The Emperor’s Tomb*, 1938, the second of a series of novels narrating the rise and postwar decline of a Habsburg-loyal military dynasty), returns from the eastern front during the Great War, he is shocked to find that his estranged wife, Elisabeth, has exchanged household management for designing furniture, lamps, and decorative trinkets, reflecting the contemporary trend for primitivism, in her newly minted studio, the “Atelier Elisabeth von Trotta.” Compounding this meltdown of normative social values was Elisabeth’s amorous affair with her applied arts mentor, Jolanth Szatmary, an outspoken craftswoman attracted to African art and progressive social causes and a character loosely based on figures like Wieselthier, known for her outspoken personality and sexual permissiveness. When the young von Trotta, not yet comprehending his wife’s reawakening as a craftswoman, cannot make sense of the New Woman personality type unfolding before him, the scion must be enlightened by his mother, a throwback to the prewar order:

A craftswoman. Do you know what that is? She designs, or rather carves, in fact—crazy necklaces and rings, modern things you know, all corners, and clasps of fir. I believe she can also plait straw mats. The last time she was here she gave me a lecture, like a professor, about African art, I think. . . . When people start using worthless material to make something which looks as if it has some value where will it all stop? (Roth 97–98)

Part and parcel of how Elisabeth's emancipation was directly linked to the old order's decline, Frau von Trotta's dismay that such craftswomen harnessed inexpensive materials for artistic ends became an important leitmotif in actual criticism of Expressionist ceramics.

The real-life embodiment of the fiery Jolanth, Wieselthier was a spirited nonconformist who rejected conventional expectations like marriage and child-rearing to seize on the masculine habits satirized in Roth's portrayal of Elisabeth, who, like her real-life counterpart, preferred male attire and chain-smoking. A champion athlete in swimming, diving, skiing, tennis, and hockey while scraping by academically, Valerie, the daughter of Jewish court attorney Wilhelm Wieselthier and Rosa Winkler, hailed from a privileged milieu of servants, governesses, and Austro-German high culture. A drawing teacher encouraged Vally to pursue her dream of attending art school, with the intention of becoming a fashion designer, in defiance of her conservative parents. After extracting a promise from her father that she could forgo marriage for a career, Wieselthier enrolled at the Viennese Women's Academy from 1912 to 1914, studying with Secessionist Otto Friedrich. She then pursued further studies with Hoffmann, Moser, and Čížek at the School of Applied Arts from 1914 to 1918 while volunteering as a war nurse. When Hoffmann recruited her for the Artist Workshops in 1917, Vally possessed no formal knowledge of, or training in, ceramics, much like fellow coworkers Susi Singer and Hilde Jesserschmid, equally untutored in the medium. Wieselthier later recalled that one afternoon she "got by chance a lump of clay" and spontaneously modeled a figure so expressive that Hoffmann declared, "Now at last I know that Vally is a sculptor" ("A Few Dates" 1). Strikingly, even after Wieselthier studied ceramic technique and glazing with Michael Powolny as a guest auditor at the School of Applied Arts from 1918 to 1920, Wieselthier always privileged what Edmund de Waal terms an "outsider" mentality to the medium animated by freedom from technical perfection and the smooth, uninflected surfaces typically defining the history of fine ceramics (9). Influenced by the Secessionist enthusiasm for folk art and untutored children's drawings (the latter category to which *Kunstschau* 1908 organizers devoted an entire gallery), members of

the Artist Workshops cultivated a deliberately naive or even childlike primitivism, playing on their own outsider status and perceptions of female art students' untutored vitality. Heated arguments with the Wiener Werkstätte's new business manager, Hoffmann student Philip Häusler, who instituted reforms to promote greater collaboration with outside firms for serial production, led to Wieselthier's exodus from the Werkstätte in 1922 on the grounds that Häusler's reforms restricted artists' free expressivity.

Operating the acclaimed *Keramische Werkstätte Vally Wieselthier* (Ceramics Workshop Vally Wieselthier) from 1922 to 1927—one of many independent craft workshops informing portrayals of the fictionalized “Atelier Elisabeth von Trotta”—it was Wieselthier who best defined the movement's intuitive approach to the medium, eschewing technical perfection while emphasizing expressivity of gesture and process. Wieselthier's deliberately distorted, seemingly untutored aesthetic—a uniquely female contribution to Austrian Expressionism—can be viewed as both “Expressionist” (spontaneously expressing inner feelings and emotions gripping the artist at the time of making) and “expressive” in nature (using intentional formal choices and deviations from technical perfection to convey subjective emotional states but not necessarily feelings present at the time of making). In a series of articles in English- and German-language art-and-design periodicals, Wieselthier laid out her self-described “primitive” working process, detailing how she used vessel-based methods of construction for expressive ends:

The ceramicist must know his medium to the full and almost by instinct. The real technique for pottery is always the pot. No matter whether it is a figure, an animal, a candlestick, or anything else, it must always grow out of the material: i.e. it must be made in the same manner as the pot, hollow inside, worked from within to the outside. . . . The medium has its own possibilities of expression in its own technique. (“Ceramics” 101)

The artist shunned mold-forming and modeling in the round, which limited clay's expressive possibilities, in favor of the wheel-based, hollow-molding method characteristic of the movement. With a working process based on principles of expressive spontaneity and an emotional connection to the material, the artist admitted that “only when I feel what can be built at the wheel do I design a form” (Wieselthier, “Zu meinen Keramischen Arbeiten” 237).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Wieselthier maintained that, when glazing, “I place absolutely no weight on achieving a smooth, uniform, surface but mix the glaze in all possible nuances and then let the fire reign” (“Reiz” 151).<sup>11</sup> Wieselthier's emotional-

expressive method guided her artistic output, ranging between functional ceramic vessels, architectural ceramics, small-scale sculpture (loosely modeled on eighteenth-century figural porcelain), and monumental ceramic sculpture.

In her *Kleinplastik* (small-scale sculpture), Wieselthier's most important contribution to Viennese Expressionist ceramics was found in her earthenware *Frauenköpfe*, a unique form that became a trademark of Wieselthier and her female pupils. Members of the Artist Workshops including Wieselthier, Singer, Calm, Schaschl, and Schmidl debuted the *Frauenkopf* at the 1920 *Kunstschau*, an exhibition held in the spirit of the Klimt Group's earlier *Kunstschau*en and, like the 1908 *Kunstschau*, predominated by decorative art. Also apparent in large-scale ceramic sculpture, the heads were modeled in the guise of mythological goddesses, nymphs, bacchantes, and vaguely classical figures, which, in their deliberately rough modeling and formal distortions, critics interpreted as participating in the formal distortions and primitivizing currents associated with the broader Expressionist movement (Eisler; Steinmetz). However, by the mid-1920s, the *Frauenköpfe* were stripped of the mythological allusions characterizing earlier models to portray the sexual commodification of the New Woman so celebrated in Austro-German popular culture: a personality type with which their makers were conflated. Much like a 1928 Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* (Fig. 7.1), the heads shared formal traits such as elongated necks and long, languid faces (often featuring indifferent or cold expressions) with almond-shaped eyes and carefully stylized eyebrows; bold visible cosmetics painted in a deliberately haphazard, childlike manner; and, in sardonic emulation of the perfect "porcelain" complexion, white clay slips leaving visible the raw earthenware beneath.

The motivations for the *Frauenkopf*'s stylistic shift were not accidental but a deliberate provocation to misogynist critics charging that interwar Austria's applied art scene had become regrettably "feminized" through its predominantly female practitioners. Undoubtedly, pro-Werkstätte critics including Leopold Rochowanski, Max Eisler, Else Hofmann, and Ludwig Steinmetz lent their unfailing support to Expressionist ceramics and their female makers, praising and defending the expressive handcraft movement. In discussing Wieselthier's work, Steinmetz argued that the expressive possibilities of clay depended on the intensity of subjective emotional impulses present at the time of making that were "born of an exhilarating, imaginative conception imprinted on the object that lives on eternally as an animated energy in the obtained form" ("Neue Kunstwerke" 61).<sup>12</sup> Yet in light of the postwar economic crisis, nonfunctional expressive handcrafts—a field dominated by the Wiener Werk-



Figure 7.1. Vally Wieselthier, *Head with Flower*, polychromed glazed red earthenware, 1928. H: 14.6" (37 cm), L: 7.5" (19 cm), B: 7.1" (18 cm). Photo © Galerie bei der Albertina, Vienna.



stätte's female workers—faced growing condemnation for forsaking masculine functionality in favor of an idiosyncratic expressivity: imbalances directly blamed on artist-craftswomen like Wieselthier.

Coinciding with the visible “makeup” of the ceramic *Frauenköpfe*, the peak of such attacks occurred in response to Austria's alleged commercial and artistic failure at the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels (Exposition of Decorative and Industrial Art) in Paris. The Austrian Pavilion strongly represented “Expressionist” ceramics by Bucher, Singer, and Wieselthier (who won gold and silver medals) and was predominated by the Werkstätte's mostly female workers; no less than ten out of thirteen exhibiting artists were women. Referring to Wieselthier's “X-shaped” ceramic oven, a whimsical interpretation of rococo-era *Kachelofen* (ceramic ovens) and her expressively distorted, quasi-Gothic drip-glazed candelabra (not illustrated), critics found Expressionist ceramics to be indicative of broader, ominous trends in Austrian handcraft: namely, artists like Wieselthier sacrificed function and utility at the expense of an overblown, expressive individualism that was only suited to the tastes of allegedly frivolous female consumers ignoring the social-democratic spirit of the present in favor of neo-Rococo decadence.<sup>13</sup> Worse yet, many critics alleged that the seemingly “naive” or crude expressive formal qualities of much of the decorative art on view hardly reflected the naiveté of their makers but a studied and deliberate dialogue in primitivism, which, ironically, was threatening to harden into its own schoolish form of academicism.<sup>14</sup> Not unlike Austrian Expressionism's canonical male superstars, who were famously drawn to ethnographic sources, Wieselthier and her colleagues took formal and conceptual inspiration from “primitive” design sources like folk art and untutored children's drawings (categories that were hardly as “naive,” authentic, or uninfluenced as their protagonists may have believed).

The peak of the media frenzy following the Paris Exposition came with two highly publicized lectures by architect and cultural critic Adolf Loos and functionalist graphic designer Julius Klinger. Klinger's lecture (5 January 1926) alleged that the only modern object among the Austrian Pavilion's bewildering, bazaar-like display—descriptive language redolent of the feminized space of the department store—was a fire extinguisher, not actually intended for exhibition, and that female art students were to blame for this artistic-commercial disaster (Klinger 10). Reflecting the misogynist critical climate of Secessionist and interwar Vienna—an intellectual network home to the writings of sexologist Otto Weininger, who famously argued that woman's drive to emancipation existed in inverse proportion to her natural female sexuality—Klinger went so far as to rebrand the Wiener Werkstätte as the

“Wiener Weiberkunst” (Viennese women’s art). Here, in using the antiquated term *Weib* for woman, Klinger called attention to the craftswomen’s base femaleness and furthermore lambasted their clipped, singsongy nicknames: like Vally or Susi, shortened versions of formal names. Klinger’s lecture, which eventually provoked a libel suit by the *Werkstätte*, was followed by an even more infamous color-slide lecture by Loos, a longtime opponent of the *Werkstätte*’s attempts to fuse art with craft and the function with beauty. Held in the large concert hall of Vienna’s *Musikverein* (Society of Friends of Music) on 27 April 1927, Loos’s polemics against the interwar *Kunstgewerblerin* provoked shouts and brawls among audience members. Much like architect and critic Armand Weiser in his reviews of the Paris Exposition, Loos’s *Wiener Weh* (Viennese woe) lecture alleged that women were tainting “honest” Austrian handcraft with their impure ornamental drives (Weiser 308–10; Loos, “Bessere Österreicher”). This propensity, Loos maintained, was ultimately rooted in their sexual nature: to decorate and make up themselves so as to transform themselves into an alluring, seductive mystery, as he argued in his famous essay on women’s fashion (Loos, “Damenmode” 127). In no uncertain terms, Loos held artist-craftswomen like Wieselthier responsible for the ornamental-decorative nature of contemporary Austrian handcraft. As he polemicized:

No one needs architects, arts-and-craft school students, or painting, embroidering, ceramic-making, valuable-material-wasting dilettante *Hofratstöchter* [daughters of senior civil servants] or other little misses from good households who regard handcraft as a way of making pocket change or killing time before walking down the aisle. (Loos, “Bessere Österreicher” 100)<sup>15</sup>

Here Loos’s polemics echoed broader currents in modernist architectural theory, like the supposed “feminization” of modernist design schools, a point made by Le Corbusier in his celebrated essay “The Decorative Art of Today” (1925), which called for a distinctly *undecorated* style of decorative art. But with the *Hofratstöchter* epithet, Loos directly implicated the upper-middle-class pedigree of Wieselthier and her colleagues. Fundamentally, however, these male critics failed to grasp how the expressive handcraft movement was the direct result of the uneven educational-institutional playing field facing Austrian women artists: that is, how female creativity was channeled to the applied rather than fine arts. While women were denied admission to the Austrian Academy of Fine Arts until the 1920/21 winter semester on the grounds of their supposedly limited capacity for the monumental, women had been

admitted to the Austrian School of Applied Arts since its 1868 founding, albeit under restrictions limiting them to certain “feminine” fields that, in practice, excluded them from life classes and figural painting (Brandow-Faller, *Female Secession* 73–100).

We can, therefore, understand the increasingly “made up” style of the Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* as a deliberate riposte to misogynist critics, constituting a uniquely female perspective on societal constructions of the New Woman. Wieselthier’s low-fired earthenware *Frauenköpfe* were made using the artist’s trademark method of hand-formed hollow modeling, with applied hand-coiled decoration, elongated wheel-thrown necks, and fashionably bobbed hair (like the styles worn by “Elisabeth” and her real counterparts). Especially from the time of the Paris Exposition onward, the Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* visualized the bright red lipstick, bold eye shadow, mascara, and rouged cheeks of the 1920s New Woman. This masklike mode of face painting “delighted in the display of makeup’s artifice,” in contrast to nineteenth-century beauty standards in which visible cosmetics were viewed as sinful avarice (Peiss 186). While scholarship has conventionally viewed women as dupes of the cosmetic industry’s false promises—or an unfulfilled “hope in a jar”—consumption scholars like Kathy Peiss remind us of cosmetics’ self-expressive potential for emancipated female consumers. That, in a critical climate where women’s artistic abilities were collapsed with their supposed tendency for narcissistic self-decoration, much of the expressive power of the Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* comes from its exaggerated visible makeup, which charges her work with subversive feminist potential. A 1928 Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* (WW Model No. 527, Fig. 7.1) demonstrates how the artist applied the face’s garish “makeup” in a deliberately childlike, distorted fashion, coloring noticeable orange-red circles for rouge and, through an uneven white slip glaze, leaving traces of the unpainted earthenware detectable, invoking an imperfect application of face paint and powder. As was typical, the artist signed her work with hand-modeled interlocking “VW” initials in relief, which served both as signature and an invitation to read the head as her own self-portrait in the guise of made-up New Woman.” Indeed, while Wieselthier sometimes preferred masculine clothing, publicity photographs often presented the artist in a hyperfeminine manner wearing fashionable dresses and silk stockings, with noticeable makeup and jewelry. Lending the form its productive tension was Wieselthier’s chosen medium of earthenware, a type of ceramic associated with quotidian domestic tableware and notably less refined than stoneware or porcelain (the latter of which served as a metaphor for unbridled female sexuality and consumption during the eighteenth-century “China craze”). Simultaneously hiding and revealing its



Figure 7.2. Gudrun Baudisch, *Heads*, earthenware, ca. 1929. Dimensions unknown. Photo credit: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 64, no. 9 (June 1929), 177.

origins at the potter's wheel, Wieselthier's vessel-based technique humorously played on the convention of equating components of thrown pots with parts of the female body (proceeding, from top to bottom, from "neck" to "foot"); yet the *Frauenkopf's* "neck" is in the wrong place, as if standing on its head, suggesting all the more potently the transgression of a pot that was not domestic, a domestic pot masquerading as a glamorous woman. Numerous examples by colleagues like Kuhn, Schmidl, and Singer, sometimes designed and executed in multiples, attest to a collective emphasis on cosmetic artificiality, interrogating how "putting on a face" had become a sign of normative female identity and sexual liberation. Not unlike Wieselthier, Kuhn and Schmidl often left patches of the unpainted red earthenware visible beneath the porcelain-complexion slip and, in the case of several Kuhn *Frauenköpfe* now located in

private collections, reveal noticeable smudging of the painted makeup: as much accidents of firing as deliberate expressive distortions.

While Wieselthier influenced many of her colleagues, it was Wieselthier's protégé Gudrun Baudisch, who joined the *Werkstätte* in 1926 as Wieselthier's pupil, who created some of the most sardonic and biting *sachlich* (objective, matter-of-fact) interpretations of the *Frauenkopf*. While informed by her mentor, the Baudisch heads in Figure 7.2 carry Wieselthier's expressively distorted tendencies to an extreme in terms of the faces' exaggerated elongation; abstract surface and three-dimensional applied ornament; the heads' cropped plasticity (or abrupt vertical slicing, lending the sculptures an unambiguous masklike aura); and the faces' notably cold or indifferent expressions, not unlike the qualities associated with Marlene Dietrich's celebrated performance of Lola Lola in Josef von Sternberg's tragicomedy *Der blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*, 1930). Like her mentor, Baudisch exposed the sexualized mask of face painting, particularly in her garish color palette, often orange and blue, and tattoo-like geometric decorations on the neck. Baudisch's heads were marked by a turbulent formal choppiness and unnervingly *sachlich* facial expression that complicated notions of natural feminine beauty. Indeed, in the faces' noticeably cold or matter-of-fact vacuity, the Baudisch *Frauenköpfe* relate to the "objective" telegram style prose associated with Irmgard Keun's classic 1932 novel of the interwar New Woman, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (*The Artificial Silk Girl*). Similar to the character of Doris, a provincial secretary and aspiring actress moving to Berlin with the hopes of becoming a glamorous New Woman (a goal she associates with the nebulous notion of *Glanz* or shiny glamour), the heads confront the viewer with their unnerving objectivity and cold indifference, constituting a uniquely female take on the New Woman herself. Baudisch's heads were often designed and executed in series, according to an anonymous, seemingly standardized model type of feminine beauty. While, in fact, the *Frauenköpfe* were emphatically handmade and not mass produced, their generically replicated qualities seemed to convey the awareness, much like the protagonist of Keun's novel, that, despite her aspirations as a sexually liberated New Woman, woman was ultimately a commodity whose value declined in each successive transaction (McCormick 132). Altogether, in their distinctly unaesthetic, imperfect formal qualities, the heads seem to mock the elusive quality of *Glanz* that characters like Doris so desperately sought.

Meanwhile, Wieselthier began transposing the stylistic principles of the *Frauenköpfe* into life- and over-life-size proportions. To be sure, other Wiener *Werkstätte* artists such as Baudisch, Kuhn, and Bucher also experimented with large-scale ceramic sculpture; Bucher's ceramic sculpture was featured in

*Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (German art and decoration), where Werkstätte protagonist Else Hofmann praised it as rising above *Handwerk* (craft) (244). But only Wieselthier maintained a sustained interest in large-scale ceramic sculpture and had the means to undertake such ambitious work. While Wieselthier had shown busts and large-scale earthenware sculpture at the 1920 and 1927 *Kunstschau* exhibitions and the 1925 *Deutsche Frauenkunst* (German women's art) show, the period around 1927/28 witnessed an upsurge in her large-scale output. This shift was enabled by the artist's 1927 decision to sell and incorporate her independent workshops into the Wiener Werkstätte. At the same time, Wieselthier accepted a position as head of the Wiener Werkstätte Department of Ceramics, which brought the artist a steady income and access to workspace and materials that eventually enabled her emigration to New York, first provisionally (1928) and then permanently (1932), where she presented herself as a ceramic sculptor, free of the pejorative discourse clinging to interwar Austria's supposedly "feminized" applied arts scene. Marianne Hörmann, author of the only major Wieselthier monograph, believes the artist expressed these ambitions through the large-scale 1927 sculpture, *Look Out* (not illustrated; private collection). Made while the artist was still in Vienna, the sculpture depicts a female figure (expressively glazed in orange and blue) leaning on a parapet, gazing longingly into the distance, which Hörmann reads as symbolizing the artist's passage to the New World (297).

Indicative of this new direction in Wieselthier's output is *Sitting Figure with Flower Pots* (Fig. 7.3, 1928), a work intended as garden sculpture, like much of her large-scale work. Measuring at just under three feet tall, *Sitting Figure with Flower Pots* transferred the artist's interest in expressively dripped glazes and deliberately imperfect surfaces into monumental proportions. Like the impish humor of her ceramic *Frauenköpfe*, the work played on the convention of naming parts of ceramic vessels after the female body, invoking the deeply rooted trope of ceramic imagery as metaphors for birth, creation, and female sexuality, or notions of children/vessels being "born" out of the womb/kiln (Foster 392–93). But the parodic thrust of the large-scale figure was altogether more direct and, indeed, campish. The female figure—constructed from a series of hollow pots thrown at the wheel and assembled with slip glaze—precariously balances a series of pots on her ceramic "body," only differentiated from the pots by body painting and face paint: the imperfectly applied white slip glaze suggesting skin, noticeably smudged eye-kohl, shadow and orange-rouged cheeks, and a brightly patterned orange and green shawl that drapes her figure. Here Wieselthier's preference for bold colors and patterns (which, in the case of the shawl, may have been based on folk-art-inspired



Figure 7.3. Vally Wieselthier, *Sitting Figure with Flower Pots*, 1928, red earthenware, white slip, blue, green, and orange glaze. H: 33" (84 cm), L: 27.2", W: 69 cm. Private collection. Photo credit: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 62, no. 9 (June 1928), 196.

textiles produced by the Wiener Werkstätte) finds a literary equivalent in Roth's descriptions of the garish yellow and orange furniture produced in the Atelier Elisabeth von Trotta. Similar to her *Kleinplastik*, Wieselthier's decorated New Woman exudes an aura of sexual coldness; self-confident and assured, the partially nude ceramic figure denies the viewer any sort of voyeuristic sexual pleasure. Like the *Frauenkopf*, she is nothing but a (series of) pot/s, sardonically and subversively mocking the viewer's desire to covet her fragile body, nothing but painted clay. Contemporary critics found sculpture like *Sitting Figure* notoriously difficult to categorize—whether art, craft, or something in between—a conundrum compounded by Wieselthier's mode of self-presentation as a naive, unthreatening “child-woman” (*Kindweib*) and confession that ceramics, to quote the artist, had “no deep message to give the world save that of their own beauty” (Wieselthier, “Ceramics” 101; see also Brandow-Faller, “Feminine Vessels”). But Werkstätte management considered the work important enough to include in an illustrated spread in the June 1928 edition of *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, connected to the Werkstätte's twenty-fifth anniversary publication, *Wiener Werkstätte: Modernes Kunstgewerbe und sein Weg* (Vienna workshops: Modern applied art and its path, 1928), whose papier-mâché cover, executed in a black-and-orange relief design invoking the primitivizing currents of tribal art, was co-designed by Wieselthier and Baudisch, and included other examples of Wieselthier's life-size ceramic sculpture.

It was through such Expressionist ceramic sculpture that Wieselthier launched a successful career in the United States, becoming the only member of the Wiener Werkstätte, male or female, to do so. First exhibiting at the 1928/29 International Exhibition of Ceramic Art—a traveling exhibition of contemporary European ceramics originating at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in which Wieselthier and other Expressionist ceramicists like Baudisch, Bucher, Kuhn, Rix, and Singer participated—Wieselthier arranged for a series of one-woman and group shows. Her exhibition record included, but was not limited to, solo exhibitions at the New York Art Center (November 1928), New York's Weyhe Galleries (December 1930), New York's Blanche Bonestall Galleries (May–June 1938), New York's Orrefors Galleries (September 1944), and group shows with *Contempora*, a design collective cofounded by her longtime romantic partner, Viennese émigré architect Paul Wiener, and frequent participation in the Ceramic Nationals held at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York, where she frequently placed with medals.

But before she left Vienna permanently to launch her bid in ceramic sculpture, Wieselthier continued her dialogue with female pupils like Baudisch in a manner that defied typical teacher-student dynamics (or at least in the way





**Figure 7.4.** Vally Wieselthier, *Flora*, 1928, red earthenware, white slip, colored glazes. H: 24 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (62 cm). Photo credit: MAK–Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art. Photo: MAK / Georg Mayer.

that the older, more experienced Jolanth was assumed to hold power over Elisabeth). The distinct stylistic similarities between the work of Wieselthier and female pupils like Baudisch and Rix are uncontested in the *Werkstätte's* later period, as seen in the *Frauenköpfe* (Figs. 7.1 and 7.2). Debuting at Wieselthier's first solo exhibition in America, held at the New York Art Center from 9 November to 30 November 1928, were works like *Flora* (Fig. 7.4), animated by a transparent artificiality and expressive distortions that troubled notions of natural feminine beauty. Once again invoking the masklike artifice of face



**Figure 7.5.** Gudrun Baudisch, *Kneeling Girl*, 1927–29, red earthenware, white slip, colored glazes. H 26.1" (66.2 cm), L: 12.6" (32 cm), W: 8.7" (22 cm). Photo credit: MAK—Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art.

painting and the “makeup” of female sexuality, Wieselthier has left patches of the raw earthenware visible beneath the white clay slip and spontaneously applied, free-flowing blue and orange overglazes. As Hörmann has observed, the proportions of *Flora*’s limbs are strongly evocative of the expressive distortions of Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s female figures (296). Hörmann has furthermore assumed that the stylistic and formal influences between Wieselthier and Baudisch proceeded much like the relationship between Elisabeth and Jolanth in *The Emperor’s Tomb*: from the older, more experienced artist (Wieselthier-Jolanth) to the younger, more impressionable protégé (Baudisch-Elisabeth). Baudisch’s only known/extant example of large-scale earthenware sculpture, *Kneeling Girl* (Fig. 7.5, 1927–29), would not seem to disprove such a line of reasoning. Decorated in the orange-and-blue palette both artists favored, Bau-

disch's *Kneeling Girl* bears a striking resemblance to works like Wieselthier's *Look Out* (in its stance and pose) and *Flora* (in its color scheme and overall visual style): so much so that Hörmann calls the similarity "frappierend" (uncanny) (68). But the lack of clarity surrounding the dating of Baudisch's *Kneeling Girl*—the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna dates it as 1927, which would have allowed the pupil to influence the master, but Hörmann dates it as finished in 1929, which would have meant that the pupil was influenced by her teacher—gives us pause.<sup>16</sup> Given that the Wiener Werkstätte Artist Workshops favored a remarkably collective form of artistic authorship, alien to notions of the solitary male genius working in isolation, it is perhaps inconsequential, and I would argue, antifeminist, to settle the direction of influence, or "who influenced whom." After her emigration to New York, Wieselthier fondly remembered her time at the Wiener Werkstätte, the ludic experience of its atelier parties, and its collaborative atmosphere of creative freedom, calling it "the best years of my life" and praising the Artist Workshops as one of Hoffmann's most "genial" [*sic*] inventions ("Biography" 3). I would not rule out the possibility that Wieselthier was willing to learn from Baudisch, the youngest practitioner of Expressionist ceramics, and enliven her own output through Baudisch's more *sachlich* formal principles. But even during her career as a ceramic sculptor in America, Wieselthier never parted with her predilection for insubordinate ceramic humor.

Viennese Expressionist ceramics was an artistic movement predominated by women, in a medium with long-held associations to women and the feminine. In many of the world's earliest societies, ceramics were produced or invented by women both for domestic usage and for cultic purposes. And throughout many historical eras and societies, pottery and ceramics were endowed with strong feminine linkages, given women's special relationship with ceramics as consumers, caretakers, and makers (Buckley). Indeed, as craft theorist Jenni Sorkin rightly argues, the skills used in hand-forming pottery (pinching, coiling, kneading) remain roughly equivalent to those used in domestic cooking and baking (214–15). But it is precisely because Wieselthier's pots were emphatically nondomestic, with clear pretensions to the same expressive power as the easel canvas, that they have their subversive, feminist charge. It is due to ceramics' historically feminine connotations—as feminist artist Judy Chicago put it, how porcelain served as "a perfect metaphor for women's domesticated and trivialized circumstances" (11)—that some of the most important works of second-wave feminism were executed in the medium of ceramics. Chicago's landmark *Dinner Party* (1975–79), consisting of vagina-like place settings for thirty-nine female trailblazers, harnessed the

medium for politically subversive ends, using female body imagery “to assert a feminist presence in an otherwise intensely patriarchal context” (Clare 20).

While, unlike Chicago, Wieselthier’s art was not overtly political, Wieselthier shares with Chicago a use of handcraft for subversive, feminist ends. The Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* and related figural sculpture asserted a uniquely female perspective on the sexual emancipation of the New Woman, the visual and material equivalent of her literary counterparts who seemed remarkably self-assured and, in her haughty objectivity, frigidly disdaining the male viewer/critic. Wieselthier’s last solo exhibition, a memorial exhibition held three years after her premature death to stomach cancer (1 September 1945), was staged at New York’s Galerie St. Etienne from 10 January to 27 January 1948, a commercial dealership (owned by Jewish Viennese émigré Otto Kallir) critical to promoting the American reputations of Austrian Expressionists like Schiele. The exhibition included works like *Look Out* (1927) and a short catalog featuring praise from contemporary artists like architect Friedrich Kiesler and designer Lucian Bernhard.

Before her death, Wieselthier had devoted great energy to crafting a public persona as a supposedly naive, happy-go-lucky child-woman, unconcerned with the broader artistic “isms” sweeping through the contemporary art scene. Staking claims to the myth of the uninfluenced, unmediated creative genius central to Austro-German Expressionism, Wieselthier was just as aware of the power of self-image as other leading Austrian Expressionists. Kokoschka would famously present himself to the public as a sort of criminal outcast, simultaneously suffering and Christlike, while Schiele fashioned himself as a rebellious wunderkind. While such modes of self-presentation were less viable for Wieselthier given her gender, Wieselthier’s persona as *Kindweib*, forged through interviews and memoirs, represented a distinctly female variant of the Expressionist cult of the uninfluenced genius. But, although she was steeped in the same intellectual climate as the celebrated male “greats” of Austrian Expressionism, Wieselthier would be arbitrarily excluded from the history of Austrian Expressionism, pigeonholed in ceramics’ traditionally separatist history due to the gendered hierarchies tethered to the medium. This canon is only beginning to shift through ventures like the long-overdue *Die Frauen der Wiener Werkstätte* (The women of the Wiener Werkstätte), a landmark exhibition in 2021 at Vienna’s Museum of Applied and Contemporary Art (MAK) including the major works spotlighted in this chapter (the small-scale heads and ambitious large-scale figures).<sup>17</sup>

Recognizing, however, how female creativity was funneled into the decorative rather than fine art, much like the direction of the MAK show, puts an

entirely different perspective on the Austrian Expressionist breakthrough, shifting its chronological borders from 1908/9 into the interwar period and from the Expressionist easel canvas to the Expressionist ceramic vessel. While a cohort of antidecorative, misogynist critics likened Expressionist ceramics to a crafty, but ultimately hollow, form of sexual seduction, another group of pro-decorative critics observed that the new ceramics seemed to “breathe the spirit of Expressionism,” as Werkstätte protagonist Max Eisler put it (245), or, as Else Hofmann observed, transcended the borders of art and craft (246; on Expressionist Ceramics as seductive trifles, see Grimme).<sup>18</sup> It is imperative the discipline of art history—a discipline marked by what material cultural studies theorists Michael Yonan and Alden Cavanaugh dub “a fear of the tchotchke” (4) that has traditionally precluded material objects from the same analytical rigor routinely devoted to more “serious” works of painting and sculpture—recognize this possibility as well. Dismantling the gendered hierarchy of art and craft in further studies of Viennese Expressionist ceramics will emerge as a critical way of granting artist-craftswomen like Wieselthier her deserved historiographical status as “card-carrying” Austro-German Expressionist.

## NOTES

1. Schorske 322–44; Werkner 20–21; W. Hofmann 6–7. For challenges to this “conventional” interpretation, stressing Austrian Expressionism’s performative, theatrical posturing, see Smith; Timpano.

2. According to Schorske and his follower, the year 1897 marked the founding of the Vienna Secession, whereby Gustav Klimt cofounded a new league dedicated to creative freedom, originality, and artistic timelines. The Viennese Secessionist motto (“To the Age Its Art / To Art Its Freedom”), emblazoned on its building’s facade, exemplified this philosophy of creative freedom and contemporaneity. Yet as the Secession increasingly acquired the institutional status quo from which it revolted, it fissured in 1905 over disagreements about the value of the fine and applied arts. Contested issues involved the importance of *Raumkunst* (spatial art), the degree to which the architectural presentation of painting and sculpture was as important as artworks themselves, and the affiliations of leading members with the Wiener Werkstätte, the commercial workshops for the applied arts cofounded by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser that operated from 1903 to 1932. The progressive Klimt group carried forth the secessionist legacy in the 1908 *Kunstschau* exhibition, a venture marking the zenith of the Viennese *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). For an overview of the Secessionist movement, see Vergo; Shedel.

3. On Hollenstein, see Kain; on Funke, see Johnson 177–202.

4. In this essay, the term “primitivizing” refers to the attraction of Western artists to the discursive field surrounding construction of the “primitive” and selective emula-

tion of the aesthetics attached to that category. Primitivism is best defined not as straightforward, visual appropriation of a set of static, supposedly ahistorical formal qualities but as a complex set of attitudes toward process, intention, and meaning, based on a selective interpretation both of the discursive field and of the visual, material qualities and practices associated with the “primitive.” What has been variously labeled “primitive” is problematic and historically mutable, inflected by the unequal power relationships underlying Western colonialism and imperialism. The “primitive” has variously included folk art and the tribal art of Africa, Oceania, ancient Egypt, Persia, India, and East Asia, as well as fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian and Flemish art. On primitivism, see for example, Goldwater; Price; Rhodes; Connelly.

5. Kirkham; Sparke; Buckley; Parker; Houze.

6. Cf. Anger; Obler.

7. “Er ein angestellter der ‘Wiener Werkstätte’ sei und mit fächermalen, zeichnen von ansichtskarten und ähnlichem . . . beschäftigt werde. . . . [H]ier eines der größten verbrechen am heiligen geist verübt wurde.” Unless otherwise noted, all German translations are mine.

8. “. . . daß nicht nur der Pinsel der musengeweihte Instrument hoher Kunst ist, daß auch . . . den Holz oder Ton, Glas und Mosaik befähigt sind, künstlerisch eine Idee zu verkörpern.”

9. “Ich glaube dass die ‘Love affairs and frustrated love affairs’ der Künstlerinnen ihre Arbeiten sehr beeinflusst haben. . . . Man hatte das Ideal un conventionell zu sein, sich in Liebessachen auszuleben, möglichst viel sexuelle Erfahrungen zu haben.”

10. “Erst wenn ich fühle, was sich auf der Scheibe bilden läßt, kann ich eine Form zeichnen.”

11. “Ich lege absolut kein Gewicht darauf, ein möglichst glatte, einfarbige, haarißfreie Glasur zu erzielen, sondern mische mir die Töne in allen möglichen Stimmungen zusammen und lasse dann das Feuer walten.”

12. “. . . aus phantasiebeschwingter Vorstellung wurde er geboren, die sich dem Gegenstände mitteilen will, die als beseelende Kraft in der erwirkten Form verewigt weiterleben will.”

13. A complete collection of press clippings regarding the Austrian Pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exposition is preserved in the Wiener Werkstätte Annalen [WWAN] at Vienna’s Museum of Applied and Contemporary Art.

14. Cf. “Nochmals Österreich auf der Pariser Internationalen Kunstgewerbeausstellung,” n.p., WWAN 84/1053; WWAN 84/872, n.p.

15. “Brauchte kein Mensch Architekten, Kunstgewerbebeschüler und malende, stickende, Keramiken verfertigende, edles Material dilettantisch vergeudende Hofratstöchter oder sonstige Fräuleins aus gutem Hause, die sich unter Kunstgewerbe etwas vorstellen, mit dem man sich sein Taschengeld verdient oder freie Zeit vertreibt, bis man unter die Haube kommt.”

16. Cf. Hörmann 102 n. 338 (which dates the Baudisch figure as being completed on 16 December 1929); the online collection database of the Austrian Museum for Applied and Contemporary Art dates the Baudisch figure as 1927, [https://sammlung.mak.at/sammlung\\_online?id=collect-6228](https://sammlung.mak.at/sammlung_online?id=collect-6228) (accessed 16 May 2018).

17. See Rossberg et al.. Not only spotlighting the work of well-known artists like Wieselthier and Maria Likarz-Strauss, codirector of the Wiener Werkstätte’s fashion

department (1922–32), whose prolific textile designs experimented with similar trends to abstraction as contemporary painting, the exhibition excavated the careers of some 180 hitherto anonymous female collaborators.

18. “. . . angehaucht vom Geiste des Expressionismus.”

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## Chapter 8

### The *Ecstasies* of Mela Hartwig-Spira

#### *Between Laughter and Terror*

Aleksandra Kudryashova

In 2001 the Neue Galerie Graz in Austria organized an exhibition of Styrian<sup>1</sup> avant-garde artists who were persecuted by Austrofascists, oppressed, or forced into exile and whose names remain largely forgotten today. The principal idea behind the exhibition *Modernity in Dark Times—Resistance, Persecution and Exile of Styrian Artists, 1933–1945* was not only to rectify the names of those who were banned and banished, deprived of their life and their art, but to confront established narratives that continue to perpetuate and legitimize their invisibility.<sup>2</sup> The exhibition, which included lectures and performances, displayed the works of over thirty avant-garde artists, mostly paintings and drawings along with sculptures, collages, prints, and photographs. One of the exhibited artists was the Austrian actress, writer, and painter Mela Hartwig-Spira (1893–1967). The poet and already successfully published author began to experiment with painting fairly late in her career, in the 1930s, after being rejected by publishers who were reluctant to print the novels of a markedly feminist, progressive, and, by the “new” standards, scandalous Jewish-Austrian writer.

Hartwig’s first literary success came in 1928 with the publication of her first book, a collection of Expressionist novellas under the provocative title *Ekstasen* (Ecstasies). Her short stories centered on female figures who rebelled against their fathers and lovers, against a society that deformed their bodies, suppressed their desires and fantasies, and denied them the right to self-determination—only to be ultimately defeated, condemned, convicted, or burned alive. Today Hartwig’s name, as she herself lamented only two years prior to her death, lies buried under the weight of the years.<sup>3</sup> Her ecstatic, extreme texts—published only recently by Ullstein Verlag and Literaturverlag Droschl<sup>4</sup>—remain absent

from university curricula and discussions of literary modernism in interwar Austria and Germany. And while two recent exhibitions in London (*The Memory Garden*, 2011–12) and Graz (*Der Tempel brennt* [The temple burns], 2013) celebrated the return of the “pioneer of feminist literature”<sup>5</sup> and one of the most fearless Austrian writers, there is still much work to be done.

In an introduction to a recently published collection of Hartwig’s short stories (2004), Margit Schreiner posed a serious question: Why is Mela Hartwig’s *Ekstasen* not a cult classic? In other words, how do we account for the absence of Hartwig’s work from the literary canon? And how do we explain the consistent omission of her name from conversations on German modernism and Expressionist prose in particular? This essay is an attempt to address some of these issues—and to suggest further lines of inquiry. By examining Hartwig’s collection of novellas for recurring images and distinct and dissonant themes, I hope to provide answers to three questions in particular: What qualifies Hartwig’s collection of stories as Expressionist? What aspects of the book appear “off”—off balance, offbeat, or off-color (Boym)—strange or perhaps even difficult to analyze? And, finally, can we identify elements that are novel and original, indeed subversive in their revolutionary potential? The aim of my project is thus twofold: I propose to closely investigate Hartwig’s visual vocabulary in the hope to enrich and challenge our understanding of German Expressionism *and* to offer new perspectives on the (self-)representation and (self-)conception of women in their own works—and in their own words. Following Alessandra Comini’s and Hartmut Vollmer’s (*In roten Schuhen; Die rote Peruecke*) feminist critique of the “maleness” of German Expressionism as well as Sigrid Weigel’s and Barbara Wright’s calls to reassess the role of women writers in the public sphere, I argue that Hartwig dissects the bodies of her protagonists with surgical precision to reveal forces and voices modernity sought to pathologize, conceal, and restrain. A closer study of her texts, as I aim to demonstrate, reveals a socially critical author sharply attuned to avant-garde experiments in literature and the visual arts. Her language evokes the bright palette of Expressionist paintings and the vocabulary of Expressionist filmmakers, poets, and playwrights, thus inviting the audience to contemplate and even reconsider the legacy of one of the most emotion-laden and controversial experiments of the twentieth century.

Born as Melanie Herzl in 1893 to a middle-class Jewish family,<sup>6</sup> Hartwig studied pedagogy in Vienna and later attended the Vienna Conservatory, where she focused on singing and acting. She performed in both capitals, Vienna and Berlin (1917–21), before marrying the lawyer Robert Spira (1888–1967)—a distant relative of Bruno Kreisky<sup>7</sup>—and moving to Graz in 1921. There Hartwig

focused on writing, already having published a few short pieces that she later described as “very poetic and inaccessible” (Fraisl 139).<sup>8</sup> These modest poetic experiments, like the poem “Kleinstadt” (Small town) written in the spirit of Expressionist poets Georg Heym (1887–1912) and Franz Werfel (1890–1945), prefigured many of the themes and motifs crucial for Hartwig’s later career as a writer. In 1927 Hartwig submitted her debut novella *Das Verbrechen* (The crime) for a competition organized by the *Literarische Welt*, a literary magazine for young authors. Alfred Döblin (1878–1957), the celebrated writer and psychiatrist by training and incidentally also the judge of the competition, selected Hartwig’s text—the only one among the winners written by a woman (Wende 32)—and recommended it for publication. Encouraged by Döblin and later reassured by the Austrian novelist and playwright Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) and the director of the International Psychoanalytic Publishing House in Vienna (Hall 176), Hartwig submitted her manuscript to the influential Viennese Zsolnay Press: four novellas in total “driven by a shared idea.”<sup>9</sup> While remaining skeptical whether Hartwig’s polemical, taboo-breaking stories would attract readers, Paul Zsolnay and his editorial director Felix Costa nevertheless decided to take the risk. The book was finally released in February 1928, signaling Hartwig’s first success as a writer—but one that was not to last.

Hartwig’s next book, the novel *Das Weib ist ein Nichts* (The woman is nothing),<sup>10</sup> appeared only a year later in 1929. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer showed immediate interest in adapting the novel to screen with Greta Garbo in the lead role, but the project soon came to a halt. Despite Hartwig’s initial success and consistently positive feedback, Zsolnay Press refused to publish her next three manuscripts<sup>11</sup> due to the incompatibility of the author’s “approach to life” with the new “worldview.”<sup>12</sup> Hartwig’s last publication before the war, *Das Wunder von Ulm* (The miracle of Ulm), a novella that investigated the persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages, was printed in 1936 outside of Austria by the Éditions du Phénix in Paris.

In 1938 Hartwig and her husband were forced to flee from Austria across Europe, leaving everything behind. The couple escaped to England where they soon befriended Virginia and Leonard Woolf, who helped the Spiras procure minor positions as translators and tutors. After the end of the war, with all its devastating consequences, Hartwig’s hopes to return to Austria, to resume her life and her career as a novelist, were crushed again. Unable to write and publish in her own language and with few prospects on the English-speaking market, she began to paint out of “artistic frustration”<sup>13</sup>—and with success. Several galleries exhibited and bought her work, and many paintings were sold into private collections.

The short bibliographical excursus reveals little about the origins of Hartwig's memorable first performance as a writer. Back in 1928 the Austrian novelist was both praised and attacked by her contemporaries for her "unusual talent" and even more unusual, passionate "temperament."<sup>14</sup> *Neue Freie Presse* placed Hartwig's novellas in the tradition of Frank Wedekind's scandalous and by that time celebrated play *Frühlingserwachen* (*Spring Awakening*, 1891). The article with the seductive title "Erotische Frauenbücher" (Erotic literature for women) prophesized that such a "powerful performance" will be read by all women: "by the ugly [as a form of] consolation" and as a "reflection" of their own situation, and "by the beauties in joyful gratitude," albeit not without a pinch of "schadenfreude" (25). The reviewer also couldn't resist the urge to assure his readers that the book clearly depicted "extreme and certainly isolated incidents of a sexual-pathological nature." *Prager Presse*, *Vossische Zeitung*, *Die Literarische Welt*, and *Berliner Tageblatt* were equally impressed by "Mela Soandso's" literary debut: "One reads and reads and—and is shaken and gripped."<sup>15</sup>

A more nuanced review was published by Martha Tausk for *Arbeiterwille*, a local newspaper that appeared in Graz. Tausk lauded Hartwig's sharp, vivid language and the explosive political nature of her text—a mark of a "true," "revolutionary" artist (3). At the same time, she criticized the philistines (*Spießler*) who were eager to use the word "hysterical" as a "value judgment." This move, Tausk firmly insisted, conveniently relieved the reader of all responsibility and allowed the reader to deny agency to "the sickly," "the beaten and broken." Ironically, what revolutionary speeches and satirical articles had failed to achieve, Hartwig's text—"only" a novella, "'only' an artwork"—had accomplished. Her book, which Tausk compared to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), paints a series of "wonderfully sharp" and "mercilessly honest" portraits of people, thereby revealing the violence inflicted upon them (4).

Other reviews were less flattering. *Die schöne Literatur* denounced Hartwig's prose as "nasty erotica of desire and delusion" produced by a "sanious mind" (Vollmer 254). *Neues Wiener Journal* commented on the intensity of Hartwig's language and came to the conclusion that the novelist "went one step too far": "Just as there is a limit to the human psyche beyond which the province of madness begins, there is also a limit for art: a writer who performs a forbidden intrusion into the realm of the subconscious is no longer a poet but a doctor."<sup>16</sup> *Deutsche medizinische Wochenschrift* and *Neues Wiener Abendblatt* agreed that Hartwig "abuses" the psychoanalytic jargon;

that there is nothing human or real about her figures and the “impossible” contortions of their bodies.<sup>17</sup>

The newspapers speculated about the potential profession of the unknown author who dared to identify and examine the wounds of her characters-turned-patients: “probably a medic,” a nurse or maybe a doctor after all!<sup>18</sup> The media were right to pick up on Hartwig’s interest for psychology and psychoanalysis, reflected in the jargon of the book. Hartwig’s debut novella *Das Verbrechen* was indeed one of the first works of fiction to radically criticize Sigmund Freud’s theories of female sexuality and identity. However, by praising the author’s ability to anatomize the hidden desires and indiscrete behavior of her characters, the critics also dispensed with the more uncomfortable aspects of Hartwig’s text which are not explained away so easily. As Tausk rightly pointed out, this reassuring reading followed its own political agenda: its hidden intention was to deflect Hartwig’s attack on society for its treatment of women by safely containing her narratives within an interpretive frame that emphasized the deviant nature of her characters rather than recognizing their condition as an expression of the violence and degradation they had to endure.

Literary scholarship was quick to pick up on Hartwig’s feminist critique of psychoanalytic theory, although only very few scholarly publications on Hartwig’s body of work exist to date. The first lengthy article titled “Der zerbrochene Spiegel: Weibliche Kritik der Psychoanalyse in Mela Hartwigs Novellen” (The broken mirror: Female critique of psychoanalysis in Mela Hartwig’s novellas) appeared in 1979. The author of the essay, Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager, stressed the connection between Freudian psychoanalysis and Hartwig’s collection of “case studies” which, she argued, complement and complicate the former (77). Later publications have tended to follow a similar trajectory by emphasizing Hartwig’s explicit and implicit engagement with psychoanalysis (Painitz; Polt-Heinzl; Boxberger). The most detailed account of Hartwig’s life and work was offered by Bettina Fraisl, whose elaborate study explored the readability and visibility of the female body in Hartwig’s prose from a psychoanalytic, feminist, and poststructuralist perspective. Fraisl’s research demonstrated just how rich Hartwig’s spectrum of ideas and interests was while providing valuable insights into the subversive nature of her texts.

Another common approach to Hartwig’s prose, typical for what Barbara Wright termed the recovery phase of scholarship (287; Werner-Birkenbach 128ff.), involves the reconstruction of the author’s biography in the effort to position and popularize her work. In *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture between the World Wars* (2012) Lisa Silverman discusses the limitations faced

by Jewish women writers in the public sphere, arguing that the conditions of Hartwig's employment may have forced her to avoid "explicitly referring to any of [her] main characters as Jews" (71). In a more recent and rather personal contribution (2017), the artist Julia Rabinowich correlates the lives of Hartwig's characters with the fate of the author herself. *Mela Hartwig: In zerbrochenen Spiegeln* (Mela Hartwig: In shattered mirrors) is the title of her slim volume; the shattered pieces of glass that Rabinowich carefully collects represent the scattered fragments of Hartwig's life and work.

These scholarly publications have been pivotal to the recovery and the study of Hartwig's prose. And while I do agree that it is vital to highlight the fact that female artists actively responded to psychoanalytic theory and practice, I do believe that Hartwig's prose demands a different approach that would do justice to the complexity of her literary texts. Ultimately, a reading that systematically invokes psychoanalytic theory or biographical data runs the risk of reducing Hartwig's work and her psychologically rich, conflicted characters to a set of types and case studies to which, in turn, the psychoanalytic or the biographical approach holds the key. It also runs the risk of explaining away the textual and narrative ambiguities that may have contributed to the exclusion of the texts in the past—or ignoring them altogether. Instead, it is vital that we recognize Hartwig as a modernist author who was eager to experiment with literary conventions in search of a voice of her own and whose career as a writer offers a compelling testament to Expressionism's lasting influence. So far only few publications have sought to uncover the literary origins of Hartwig's unsettling repository of images, although Hildegard Kernmayer's article "Ekstasen oder Das Andere der Vernunft" (Ecstasies or the Other of reason, 1996) stands out in its attempt to formulate and briefly outline Hartwig's complicated relationship with modernity.

In the following segment, I will attempt to briefly explain the omission of Hartwig's name from conversations on German Expressionism, specifically from discussions of Expressionist prose, before proceeding to examine one of the novellas in more detail.

Although during the years she spent in Graz Hartwig did belong to an artistic circle formed around the painter and cofounder of the Grazer Secession Alfred Wickenburg (1885–1978) and the Austrian poet Hans Leifhelm (1891–1947), she was by all means an outsider who acted in relative isolation from literary groups, salons, or circles and had to work hard to establish connections in the literary world—a quality, as Lisa Silverman pointed out (8), she shared with many (Jewish) women writers. Hartwig's first lengthy publication came at a time when Expressionism had already been assimilated and commodified by

mass media and mainstream culture. Critics like Wilhelm Hausenstein, an ardent supporter of the movement at first, declared as early as in 1919 that Expressionism had exhausted its revolutionary potential: “Today Expressionism has its crystal palace. It has its salon. No cigarette advertisement, no bar can get along without Expressionism. It is revolting. Those who did it should have their heads bashed in. They are exploiting the catastrophe—our catastrophe” (280ff.). Others felt that Expressionists’ cry was silenced by the 1925 *Die Neue Sachlichkeit: Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus* (The New Objectivity: German painting since Expressionism) exhibition in Mannheim, which celebrated the advent of a new artistic epoch—and a new aesthetic sensibility. But while some members of the new cultural movement sought to position themselves decisively against the previous generation of artists, many continued to draw considerable strength from Expressionism’s vocabulary and repository of images.

Following art historians, scholars of literature and Germanists, in particular, have chosen to draw a similar timeline—from the early 1900s to 1925 (Donahue). Ingo Stoehr, the author of *German Literature of the Twentieth Century: From Aestheticism to Postmodernism*, even went as far as to describe Expressionism as a “relatively short-lived movement . . . centered in the 1910” (65), and several film historians have persistently argued that only a handful of films released before 1925 may qualify as Expressionist (Scheunemann). According to this time-sensitive definition of Expressionism, Hartwig’s work inevitably falls out of the established tradition with its chronology and governing narratives used to organize and systematize various “-isms.” Nevertheless, this standard periodization always included many exceptions and odd cases that defied categorization, both chronologically and conceptually. In fact, some critics have always insisted on an expanded definition of the Expressionist impulse, which cannot be confined to two short decades, briefly interrupted and fueled by the war. One obvious example is Walter Benjamin’s study of German baroque drama, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*), completed in 1925 and published in 1928—incidentally, the same year as Hartwig’s *Ekstasen*. While Benjamin’s relationship with Expressionism in visual and literary arts was by no means straightforward, he emphatically warned against the temptation to neglect “those features which are common to . . . romanticism as much as baroque” and their successor—Expressionism (176). As “an instance of repetition, a return-and-dislocation of baroque sensibility” (Stewart 16), Expressionism, to borrow Benjamin’s description, is “concerned not so much with providing a corrective to classicism, as to art itself” (176ff.). “Its intrusion,” he continues, “could therefore be described as a



harsh disturbance of the peace and a disruption of law and order in the arts.” It is this disruption coupled with gleeful fascination with the irregular and deformed, with death, decay, and destruction, that distinguished Expressionism and Expressionism-affected art well beyond 1925. Arguably, cinema, of all arts, most successfully carried on Expressionism’s legacies into the 1930s and even 1940s by wandering off into the distorted perspectives, the sinister, paranoid, and fear-infused atmosphere of film noir. Most scholars have thus opted for stressing Expressionism’s predilection for excess and the extreme, its shared tendency to explore intense, conflicting sensations and controversial topics that “encompassed the liberation of the body as much as the excavation of the psyche” (Bassie 7). But even these criteria disclose little about the formal and stylistic characteristics or narrative techniques of individual artists and their original texts.

This is especially true with respect to Expressionist prose, which is notoriously hard to characterize, let alone define (Sokel 69). Nonetheless, scholars have tended to group the names of divergent (the absolute majority of them male) writers under this broad label: Robert Musil and Alfred Döblin, Frank Wedekind and Carl Sternheim, but also Franz Kafka, Paul Scheerbarth, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Their literary styles differ as much as their biographies and cultural and literary backgrounds. An astonishing number of women writers—including Irmgard Keun, Gabriele Tergit, Vicky Baum, Sylvia von Harden, and Mela Hartwig—whose writing styles did not align too well with the established criteria (or never aspired to) were left waiting in the anteroom of the literary hall of fame—or excluded from anthologies altogether, as the two recently republished volumes of Expressionist poetry (*In roten Schuhen*) and prose (*Die rote Perücke*) edited by Hartmut Vollmer have powerfully demonstrated. A similar fate awaited those women writers who survived the war and the Holocaust: in the conservative postwar climate, after years of artistic and aesthetic censorship, few people were willing to listen to voices—women’s voices—silenced so shamelessly with fascism’s rise in popularity and power (Kernmayer 168). And Hartwig’s progressive, feminist books were certainly no exception.

With these reflections in mind, let us accept Jean-François Lyotard’s invitation to “activate the differences and save the honor of the name” (82) by attending to Hartwig’s narratives in the effort to illuminate the strange and the unusual, dissonant, and unexpected aspects of her work as a writer.

Hartwig’s debut novella, *Das Verbrechen*, the first to appear in the collection, is by far her most-discussed work.<sup>19</sup> It tells the story of Agnes, the daughter of a psychiatrist, Dr. Egon Zuba, whose intellectual superiority legitimizes

his cruelty and verbal as well as physical maltreatment of his daughter. In *Aufzeichnungen einer Häßlichen* (Records of an ugly [woman]) the reader is introduced to an unnamed nurse who suffers from her perceived physical unattractiveness and is unlucky to fall in love with Dr. B, a somewhat unappealing yet much more confident and successful individual. The text reads like a confession of a guilty mind and was well received by critics who praised the much less violent finale of the story (Wende 34): the nurse has learned her lesson, and she transfers to a psychiatric clinic to lead a monastic life, fully devoted to her patients. The youngest character in Hartwig's gallery of female portraits is Rune, an abandoned child raised in a Trappist monastery during the Thirty Years' War. The monks follow a strict vow of silence; they deny the girl any access to the outside world and follow and greedily observe her every step, every movement, and every convulsion of her body. During "a feast of Bacchus" (219), organized as a perverse worshiping ritual of Rune, the monastery is raided by Swedish soldiers who castrate the monks, plunder the place, and take Rune with them. The captain of the troops keeps the girl by his side, but as his fixation on Rune grows, so does the hatred of the soldiers and the women in the camp. Rune is branded a witch—something the title of the novella, *Die Hexe* (The witch), already foreshadows—and burned alive on a stake. The image of the flames engulfing her fragile body conjures the painful visions experienced by other women. Her fate seals the future destinies of Hartwig's female protagonists. However, it is Hartwig's more radical (second) novella, *Der phantastische Paragraph* (The fantastic paragraph), that I would like to concentrate on in this essay. It is indeed a curious piece, in many ways exemplary for the book as a whole. At the very start of the story, the reader is introduced to a poor medical student by the name Sabine Seltsam. Sabine's strangeness lies in her somnambulatory behavior: she is "moonstruck" (*mondsüchtig*). Like Hartwig's other characters, Sabine "lives off hopes and chimeras" (69).<sup>20</sup> Every month for three nights in a row she receives the moon in her chamber as Danaë received Zeus in her tomb. The white glistening light magically transforms her bleak room into a space where the desires of her "infertile imagination" ("spröde, unfruchtbare Phantasie," 55) can take shape. It seeps into her brain, arouses her senses, and liberates her from the restraints of reality, norms, and morality. But one ecstatic night is different. Sabine is convinced of being pregnant. She visits a social worker, an abortionist, and a doctor before clumsily attempting to expel the "goblin in her womb" ("Kobold im Leib," 63) at home. She is taken to a hospital, tries to flee, and is arrested on the street—only to recognize that it was all a bad dream: "An alp has fooled me (99)."<sup>21</sup> Her realization comes too late: the authorities have been informed. After days of

imprisonment and “social agony” (“soziale Agonie,” 112) Sabine is brought before the law. The accused dares to confront her prosecutors during the farcical hearing—and is pronounced guilty. “The fantastic paragraph” is reinforced, but Sabine literally gets the last laugh.

What begins as a sensual adventure quickly ends in horror for Sabine. The nightmarish reality she has to face will not tolerate any unruly desires or miracles of imagination. Her world, as she is about to realize, is governed by a monstrous bureaucratic apparatus that seeks control over its subject since the moment of conception and carefully follows its subjects from their birth beds to their deathbeds. The only purpose of this “dictatorial justice” (“diktatorische Gerechtigkeit,” 112) is to discipline, to punish, and to condemn. The dead letter of the law triumphs over human life. Innocence is of no relevance here, for everyone is born guilty before the law: guilty of the crime of unemployment, hunger, and despair. Death, as Sabine is forced to admit, is more merciful than this “orgiastic reality” (“orgiastische Wirklichkeit,” 110). Its grotesque character is revealed not only in Sabine’s confrontations with the representatives of the law, whose gestures and features are described as monstrous masks of malice, horror, and cruelty, but also in the dark and narrow spaces and the stifling atmosphere it produces. At the center of this Kafkaesque world lies a “cathedral of punitive hatred” (“Kathedrale strafenden Hasses,” 119)—the courthouse. Its geometrical shape conceals a labyrinth of endless doors, corridors, and staircases; its underbelly leads to “Inferno,” where human beings are left to decompose alive (101ff.). Hartwig’s heavy imagery is matched by the intensity of her language: ecstatic, vivid and violent, erotic and fervent. Its expressive energy has a liberating effect on her characters, allowing them to hallucinate, accuse, and attack, to scream, gasp, choke, and laugh at the site of the distorted reality.

Like all Hartwig’s novellas, *Der phantastische Paragraph* thrives on conflict: between men and women, doctors and patients, individuals and society; between civilizing forces and inner demons, societal expectations and the all-consuming desires of the famished flesh. As scholars have noted time and again (cf. Anz; Bassie; Donahue; Murphy), Expressionists have always been attracted to contradictions and animated by conflicts, extreme tensions, and intense sensations, whether between reason and madness, nature and culture, the body and the psyche, or the material and the spirit. This infatuation with confrontations and catalytic moments is certainly shared by Hartwig. But the principal conflict of *Ekstasen* is staged on a more fundamental level between the realm of reality and unreality, or what the characters refer to as *Sinn* (sanity, reason) and *Irrsinn* (insanity, unreason). As Fraisl mentioned in her analysis

(153), Hartwig's notion of *Sinn*, or sense, rarely functions as a reliable set of coordinates, for "everything in life has its double meaning: its sanity and its insanity" (*Ekstasen* 186).<sup>22</sup> Instead, Hartwig carefully allows these realms to collapse, to bleed into each other. Furthermore, it is hard to discern where the nightmarish illusions end and the cruel reality begins since Hartwig's protagonists persistently refuse, are unwilling, and even unable to do so: Sabine's "consciousness split into dream and reality, gaped apart opening up an empty, wondering space in her heart" (119).<sup>23</sup> Her prose fluently switches between registers confounding the readers' expectations: from objective, factual speech of the narrator to embodied visions and hallucinations, from sober comments to ecstatic outbursts of emotions and sensations, from lucid dreams to terrifying daily visions that in turn appear genuine and tangible. This constant flow renders dreams more real and genuine in their vivid intensity than reality. On the other hand, it stays true to the principle of "fantastic reality," surreal in the demands it sets up for women of all ages. For the only choice, as Hartwig constantly reminds us, that her characters have is "the choice between a mental asylum and a prison" (52).<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, Hartwig's female figures correspond to types frequently explored in Expressionists' texts: the dangerously mad and infectiously insane, carnal animals and sick beasts, deviant, delirious creatures who need to be tamed, detained, or locked away. The doctors describe these women as "first-rate hysterics" (175);<sup>25</sup> the judges condemn them as "criminals by nature" ("Verbrechernatur," 101) and accuse them of simulating their malaise. The women themselves confess that they are forced to lead "an unreal life" (45);<sup>26</sup> that they are lost in their own lives (189), their longings delegitimized, desires demonized, and bodily functions pathologized. "I have no rights, only duties" (196)<sup>27</sup> is the conclusion they are forced to make: duties as daughters and patients, mothers, and citizens. The question "Why am I in this world, anyway? What do I live for?" (152),<sup>28</sup> posed by one of the women, thus becomes central to all Hartwig's characters in their desperate quest for truth, justice, and the right to self-determination.

Hartwig's reluctance to maintain the dualism, thus reaffirming the divide between the seemingly irreconcilable forces (*Sinn* vs. *Irrsinn*), results in an uneasy reading experience. But the dissolution of binaries is also what makes her prose highly ambivalent, full of unpredictable, tantalizing possibilities that resist our drive for consensus and the principles whereby this consensus is achieved. The resulting uncomfortable ambiguity and the underlying tension are not meant to be resolved, nor should Hartwig's readers expect to be relieved of the unsettling effect. On the contrary, Hartwig's world, full of lurking shad-

ows and frightful encounters, is meant to conjure the dark and uncanny atmosphere familiar from Expressionist films in which the “contours of windows, doors, roofs, and trees act not as representations of the visible world, but as ciphers of ‘sensual experiences,’ ‘inner urges,’ and ‘inner necessities’” (Scheunemann 141). Sabine’s visions invoke the nightmarish images of F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) with their disturbing monochromatic projections of terror and angst. The spaces in which she encounters authorities, where she is imprisoned and abused, are strongly reminiscent of the fantastic, distorting, and distorted sets of Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920). And as with the iconic Expressionist films of the 1920s, the distorted perceptions and nightmarish visions of Hartwig’s characters never appear as mere projections of a “moonstruck” mind, as some critics have reassuringly implied. Such an attempt to rationalize, to tame the narratives and thus avoid the horrors they so vividly describe, reduces the suffering of Hartwig’s women to a mere medical condition to which the doctors and judges may provide a cure. Yet there is more to Hartwig’s haunting and disturbing narratives than this reading suggests.

In their nightmares and daydreams, but also in waiting parlors and interrogation rooms, in the stifling atmospheres of their homes, Hartwig’s women are haunted and tormented by “eerie monsters” (“gespenstische . . . Ungeheuer,” 12)—alps. The demonic creatures, a central motif in Expressionism, take on different forms: the sticky wet spider that crawls over Sabine’s breasts and injects her pores and veins with poison (77–78); the devilish grimace of the police inspector; the monstrous “five-limbed body of justice” (126)<sup>29</sup> described as “devilish masks of malice and horror” with gaping, foaming mouths and empty narrow eyes (123–24).<sup>30</sup> But it’s also the invisible hand that reaches for the women’s throats, the heavy shadow that sits on their chests, presses down their eyelids, stifles their screams, and bites their lips until they bleed.

Hartwig’s evocation of the demonic creature that attacks and paralyzes her female characters is no accident. As the English word *nightmare* and its German equivalent “*Alptraum*” (or “*Albtraum*”), suggest, the elf-like nocturnal beings were early on associated with bad dreams and nightly hallucinations, states of restlessness, disquiet, and sheer angst. Unlike mares, alps were mostly connoted male and often closely associated with the incubus—another vampiric creature that attacks women when they are most vulnerable, drinks their blood and even milk from their breasts (A. Hall 125; Jankuhn 66–67, 172). However, in Hartwig’s interpretation, the dark heavy shadow of the alp does not dissolve together with the dream. On the contrary, the presence of the alps is visible and vividly graphic. Together with the fear they instill, the alps crawl

into the brains of their victims and open up their insides like surgeons or butchers. The paralyzed women are forced to watch passively as their bodies and brains are dissected, hollowed out, and refilled with ghostly paragraphs and protocols and, in the case of *Das Verbrechen*, even semen:

I'm lying on the dissecting table. You're carving up my abdomen and burrowing your bloody hands in my intestines. You're cutting my heart out of my chest, stuffing it into my mouth like a gag so I can't scream, because I'm still alive, and I'm choking on my own heart until I suffocate. You're scratching my brain out of my skull like a fetus and filling the cavity with your semen. (11–12)<sup>31</sup>

These descriptions of fragile and helpless female bodies, their brains and wombs sliced open by alps, kobolds, and doctors, certainly take on the character and the force of Gottfried Benn's Expressionist collection *Morgue und andere Gedichte* (*Morgue and Other Poems*, 1912). But unlike Benn, who portrayed and even celebrated death, decay, and dissolution of anonymous bodies—a nameless girl, a prostitute—displayed on the dissection table of the pathologist whose gaze the reader is meant to follow, Hartwig's crass language never fails to remind us whose voices it is we hear.

Nowhere is this amalgamation of the demonic and the real more tangible than during the farcical hearing of Sabine's case preceded by a terrifying vision—or rather visit—she is forced to experience in her sleep: “The prosecutor covered on Sabine's chest and clutched her by the throat with his sticky, jelly-like fingers, strangling her, hissing and spitting and slavering disgusting paragraphs in her face” (115).<sup>32</sup> While slowly strangling immobilized Sabine, the sneering merciless alp admits that he, unlike other men, is a “sadist ex officio,” authorized by law to torture Sabine until she is convinced of her own guilt:

I want to convince you, not the others: not the judges, not me, *only you!* You have to turn against yourself in disgust; otherwise my victory over you is only partial. . . . I will wrench the brain in your skull with evidence and shrewd subtleties until you are convinced of your guilt and only curse yourself and not me. (116–17)<sup>33</sup>

The next day, during her hearing, the trembling Sabine is confronted by the same phantasmagorical creature(s) she saw in her terrifying vision, which has once again leaked into the menacing and no less frightening reality. Like Franz

Kafka's ill-fated protagonist Josef K. in *Der Process* (*The Trial*, 1925), Sabine has to face a system that has "no medical," "no psychological," but "a different, excessive" (108) kind of imagination that gleefully punishes unruly dreams and hidden desires of the flesh.<sup>34</sup> Innocence is "of no significance" (114)<sup>35</sup> here, and the violence exerted upon Sabine during the farcical procedure is a calculated attempt to overpower and ultimately eliminate her, who dared to rebel against a reality more fantastic than the one she discovered in her dreams.

When discussing Expressionist aesthetics, art historians often observed that Edvard Munch's stunning and unsettling series of paintings known as *The Scream* (1893–1910) has been widely regarded as emblematic of the Expressionist epoch (cf. Vowles 221ff.; Comini 271ff.). The portrait of an androgynous pale figure in a state of sheer terror set against a bloody, almost liquid—screaming—landscape is without question an extreme example (Comini 272). Perhaps it is for this reason that Munch's image, subtitled *I Felt the Great Screaming through Nature* (*Ich fühlte das grosse Geschrei durch die Natur*), continues to resonate with us. But as Thomas Anz pointed out, the Expressionist scream is more than a cry of pain, anguish, or despair (164). For Ernst Cassirer, the prominent German philosopher and the author of *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 1923), the scream signifies an *Urwort*, a kind of monosyllabic proto-word that signaled the birth of human language (91). As part of the "universal glossary," proto-words functioned primarily as expressions of emotions and affect. The scream thus acted as pure, unmediated (through words or signs) expression of "pain or pleasure, joy or grief, astonishment or fear." For the Austrian author Stefan Zweig, whose ideas had an equally lasting impact on the Expressionist movement, the scream constitutes more than a form of communication or expression. Zweig's essay "Das neue Pathos" ("The New Pathos," 1909) begins with a description of the first poem ("Urgedicht")—the first quintessential artwork—"created long before the written or the printed word" (1701ff.). This poem, he continues, "was nothing but a modulated scream that had barely become a spoken word, derived from pleasure or pain, from grief or despair, from memory or incantation, but always from an excess of sensation." Zweig goes on to argue that this passionate nonverbal poem constituted a kind of performance: "an appeal to the crowd, a warning, an exhilarating, ecstatic outburst, a direct electrical discharge from sensation to sensation." The primeval poem in the form of a scream or a series of cries connected the poet and the audience that gathered around him (or perhaps her) absorbed by what they witnessed. The invention of writing gradually erased this profound connection. The poet became infatuated with himself; the written word triumphed over pure expression, pure

pathos. But time has come to revive this lost pathos, for Zweig conceived “in the Nietzschean sense” as a spark that will inflame the crowd by awakening “the desire, the force and the will” (“Lust, Kraft und Wille”) of the masses. A return to the primordial cry is therefore not only a return to pure expression beyond conventional language or a juvenile act of revolt against the stale language of “lyrical” poets but a call for *action*. The scream of the Expressionist poet is a cry for battle against bourgeois sentimentality and passivity, countered by the Expressionists with activism, fervent passion, and ecstatic force.

In *Theorizing the Avant-Garde* (1999) Richard Murphy directed our attention to another aspect of the scream as a means of signification. Its function, he contends, is “to point to a meaning which lies in the realm of the unspeakable and beyond the epistemological grasp of conventional representation” (179). In other words, the scream allows the artist to express the inexpressible, to speak of that which is unspeakable and unrepresentable—the repressed, the terrifying—and to at least temporarily satisfy the urge, as Oskar Kokoschka put it, to “scream into my screwed-up bedclothes just to do something real” (Bassie 56). But as Barbara Wright, the author of “Intimate Strangers: Women in German Expressionism,” has alerted us, the scream is also consistent with Expressionists’ gendered definition of their movement (293). The Expressionist scream, one might argue, is a concurrent expression of angst *and* an assertion of masculinity and aggression (Zweig’s “Lust, Kraft und Wille”) in the face of the experienced terror.

Hartwig’s characters are no strangers to the horrors and the existential agonies of the everyday. Their cries echo throughout the book: screams of anguish, of sorrow and physical pain. But more often than not the women’s screams remain stuck in their throats or are ruthlessly stifled by an (in)visible hand. In either case, the women’s voices are left unheard. Moreover, evocative of Munch’s screams resonating through nature, Hartwig’s women are surrounded by a different but no less threatening and frightening noise. There is a lot of grinning and sneering in the novella, especially what Hartwig describes as *Gelächter*—a kind of gleeful, condescending, malicious laughter shared among the antagonists, both male and female (Fraisl 209). Their amusement at Sabine’s expense betrays their attitude toward unruly women. Hartwig describes this hostile laughter as an ominous sound that gushes and oozes “from the walls, from the floor, from the wounds of Christ on the crucifix, from the bundles of files and the Criminal Code.”<sup>36</sup>

[Even t]he street curled beneath [Sabine’s] feet with laughter. “Help,” she whimpered in her heart. The laughter of the street pierced her pores, pen-



etrated her brain, yelled through her eyes and ears, tumbled after her like a fire. (97)<sup>37</sup>

But the contemptuous grinning and snickering of the alps ceases once Hartwig's characters begin to laugh, once the collective "satanic laughter" ("satanisches Gelächter," 118) is interrupted by the unsettling outburst the women can no longer control:

And then Sabine also began to laugh, with a contorted mouth. But as if it were an agreed-upon sign, all the other laughter in the room broke off immediately. Only Sabine could not stop so quickly; it tickled her intestines and her brain. She laughed. (124)<sup>38</sup>

Sigrid Weigel, whose work builds on French feminist theory but also Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal study of the carnivalesque, discusses this type of subversive "shuddering laughter" ("schaudernde Lachen") typical of (female) feminist writing (170ff.). She goes on to argue that this mode of writing—a mixture of laughing and suffering—aims to undermine prevailing social and political order by exposing its patriarchic foundation. Much like the scream, the uncontrollable laughter acts as an *Urwort*, to borrow from Cassirer, as a disruptive physical and vocal reaction to the surrounding environment and the established norms and rules it is governed by. Through the gesture of laughter, as in the scream, the emotions are reduced to one profound expression, one vivid image of a contorted, quivering body, exposed teeth, deformed features, a grotesque grin. The transition from one expression to the other is fluid, and Sabine often experiences it as such:

She felt her face slowly twist with fear, her mouth burst open as if to scream. But no sound came out, only gurgling and chuckling, whimpering, sobbing laughter, bacchanalian laughter of untamable exaltation. (86)<sup>39</sup>

As women, Hartwig's characters, especially the helpless moonstruck Sabine, are used to being ridiculed and laughed at. In turn, they are expected to smile and thus to uphold the masquerade (Weigel 172; Fraisl 209). Foolish and unrestrained laughter that openly disregards cultural conventions and social hierarchies, on the other hand, is immediately perceived as an alarming sign of hysteria or madness, like an infection that threatens to undermine the traditional, rational order of things. In *Laughter, Humor, and the (Un)making of Gender*,

Anna Foka describes laughter's social function as highly ambiguous, ranging from "disciplining and rebellious" to "repressive and subversive" and even "self-ironic and self-degrading" (1–2). Laughter can serve as an act of reaffirmation of the laws by which a society is governed (Hartwig's *Gelächter*) or as an act of disobedience and even defiance. And the shuddering laughter of Hartwig's women is aimed to achieve the latter effect. Sabine's laughter interrupts the shouting and the snickering directed at her because it is instantly recognized as the ultimate form of transgression that ridicules the law, thereby unmasking the workings of the apparatus.

If there is one gesture, one expression that we can take away from Hartwig's book, a gesture that condenses and epitomizes the conflicts and the (un)reality she sought to uncover and demythologize, it would be this unruly, ecstatic, grotesque laughter of her characters. As an open act of revolt against authority and the oppressive culture that supports this authority, the uncontrollable laughter seals the fate of Hartwig's female protagonists. In the eyes of their accusers the gruesome, shameless laughter only reaffirms the diagnosis—hysterics, liars, frauds (*Simulantin*). Their first instinct, to reinstate the law by punishing the disobedient subject, reveals a strategy pursued and sanctioned by society: "to master the fantastic realities of living flesh and quivering hearts" (122)<sup>40</sup> by banishing them from the world of reason into the realm of delusion and hysteria. But the laughter of Hartwig's characters has already unsettled the well-guarded border between *Sinn* and *Irrsinn*, thus exposing the merciless absurdity of the law. And Sabine's judges sensed it:

The five-limbed body of justice stared at her with an open mouth and dumb eyes. No one reprimanded her. Each of them recognized in their dried hearts that this woman had transcended the limits of reality. Each of them felt that her next word would have crushed them, that her second word would have blown up the courthouse, that her third word would have set the world on fire. . . . But the woman remained silent. (126)<sup>41</sup>

The story ends with Sabine's disillusioning silence. The judges' immediate reaction is to pronounce her guilty. Yet their helpless rage only convinces the jubilant Sabine of her innocence. "This is a revolution" are the prosecutor's final words (127).<sup>42</sup>

What strikes me in this final passage is Hartwig's ability to paint a complex range of emotions, varying from anger, fear, and despair to exaltation and triumphant, ecstatic joy. Her language of extremes and excess appears particularly suited to portray the horrors and distortions of reality and to reflect the

frightful adventures of her female characters, thus validating their experiences. Moreover, Hartwig's Expressionist vernacular stages an intervention by granting a voice to those who have been silenced, objectified, and abjectified. In so doing, her revolutionary stories continue to defy categorization in terms dictated by dominant discourses and to draw our attention to conflicts history sought to suppress, discredit, and even efface.

## NOTES

1. Styria (Steiermark), with its capital Graz, is the second largest province in Austria, located southwest of Vienna.

2. "Moderne in dunkler Zeit—Widerstand, Verfolgung und Exil bildender KünstlerInnen in der Steiermark, 1933–1945." Neue Galerie, Universalmuseum Joanneum, [www.museum-joanneum.at/neue-galerie-graz/ausstellungen/ausstellungen/events/event/1975/moderne-in-dunkler-zeit](http://www.museum-joanneum.at/neue-galerie-graz/ausstellungen/ausstellungen/events/event/1975/moderne-in-dunkler-zeit). Accessed 12 January 2018.

3. Hartwig in a letter to her friend, the Austrian poet and writer Ernst Schönwiese (12 October 1965), cited by Hartmut Vollmer ("Nachwort").

4. *Ekstasen* was published in 1992 by the Ullstein Verlag (Frankfurt am Main / Berlin) and in 2004 by the Literaturverlag Droschl (Graz/Vienna) together with Hartwig's other short stories (*Das Verbrechen: Novellen und Erzählungen*). Droschl also published three of Hartwig's novels: *Bin ich ein überflüssiger Mensch?* (2001), *Das Weib ist ein Nichts* (2002), *Inferno* (2018).

5. Universalmuseum Joanneum, [www.museum-joanneum.at/presse/aktuelle-projekte/events/event/159/der-tempel-brennt](http://www.museum-joanneum.at/presse/aktuelle-projekte/events/event/159/der-tempel-brennt). Accessed 14 January 2018. All translations by author, unless otherwise noted.

6. Shortly after Mela's birth, her father—a writer and sociologist by the name of Theodor Herzl—converted from Judaism to Catholicism and changed his name to Hartwig.

7. Bruno Kreisky (1911–1990) was a prominent Austrian politician and leader of the Social Democratic Party. He is also remembered as the longest-serving chancellor in Austrian history (1970–83). See Eisenhut 424.

8. Hartwig in a letter to Zsolnay Press (13 June 1928). Hartwig's correspondence can be found in the Literary Archive of the Austrian National Library (Konvolut Mela Hartwig, 1927–1934) as well as the Vienna City Library (Nachlass Mela Hartwig).

9. Hartwig in a letter to Zsolnay Press (14 May 1927), cited in Hall 176. Hartwig's fifth novella—*Das Kind* (The child)—appeared a few months later, in June 1928, in the *Neue Freie Presse*.

10. The title of the book is based on a quote from Friedrich Hebbel's 1840 tragedy *Judith*: "A woman is nothing; only through the man can she become something" ("Ein Weib ist ein Nichts; nur durch den Mann kann sie etwas werden").

11. The novel *Bin ich ein überflüssiger Mensch?* (*Am I a Redundant Human Being?*, 1931), another collection of short stories *Quer durch die Krise* (Straight through the crisis, 1932), and the novella *Das Wunder von Ulm* (The miracle of Ulm, 1934).

12. In a letter from Zsolnay Press (16 March 1933).

13. Hartwig in a letter to Wilhelm Sternfeld (20 October 1954), cited in Vollmer 250.
14. Richard Specht, " Erotische Frauenbücher," *Neue Freie Presse*, 26 February 1928; " Kleine Chronik," *Neue Freie Presse*, 16 June 1928.
15. J., L. v., " Eine Frau seziert Frauen"; *Vossische Zeitung*, 18 March 1928; F. L., " Mela Hartwig. Ekstasen." See also W. H., " Kranker Eros"; [Otto Pick?], " Eine neue deutsche Erzählerin," *Prager Presse*, 22 February 1928, cited in Vollmer 255.
16. F. L., " Konnersreuth in der Literatur."
17. See H. H., " Mela Hartwig"; *Deutsche medizinische Wochenschrift*, 54, 1928, 1031, cited in Vollmer 254.
18. *Vossische Zeitung*, 18 March 1928; *Neue Freie Presse*, 26 February 1928; *Arbeiterwille*, 3 April 1928; F. L., " Mela Hartwig: Ekstasen."
19. All citations from *Ecstasies* are taken from the 1992 edition published by the Ullstein Verlag.
20. " Ich lebe von Hoffnungen und Hirngespinsten."
21. " Ein Alp hat mich genarrt."
22. " Alles im Leben hat seine doppelte Bedeutung: seinen Sinn und seinen Irrsinn."
23. " Ihr Bewußtsein spaltete sich in Traum und Wirklichkeit, klappte auseinander und ließ einen leeren, fragenden Raum in ihrem Herzen frei."
24. " Ja, du hast nur mehr die Wahl zwischen Irrenhaus und Gefängnis."
25. " Sie sind ja eine Hysterikerin ersten Ranges."
26. " Hinter dieser Maske lebte sie ein unwirkliches Leben . . ."
27. " Für mich gibt es keine Rechte, für mich gibt es nur Pflichten. Ich muß mich an meinen Pflichten für den unbilligen Mangel an Rechten schadlos halten."
28. " Wozu bin ich denn eigentlich auf der Welt? Wozu lebe ich denn?"
29. " Mit offenem Mund und blöden Augen glotzte sie der fünfgliedrige Körper der Gerechtigkeit an."
30. " Lautlos klaffende Münder und eingekniffene Augen, teuflische Masken der Bosheit und des Grauens."
31. " Ich liege auf dem Seziertisch. Du schneidest mir die Bauchdecke auf und wühlst mit blutigen Händen in meinen Gedärmen, du schneidest mir das Herz aus der Brust, stopfst es mir in den Mund wie einen Knebel, damit ich nicht schreien kann, denn ich lebe ja noch, und ich würgte an meinem eigenen Herzen, bis ich daran erstickte. Du kratzt mir das Gehirn aus dem Schädel wie eine Frühgeburt und füllst den Hohlraum mit deinem Samen an."
32. " Der Staatsanwalt hockte Sabine auf der Brust und hielt sie mit klebrigen, galtertartigen Fingern an der Kehle gepackt, würgte sie, zischte und spuckte und geiferte ihr widerliche Paragraphen ins Gesicht."
33. " Dich will ich überzeugen, nicht die anderen: nicht die Richter, nicht mich, *nur dich!* Du selbst mußt dich in Abscheu von dir wenden, sonst ist mein Sieg über dich nur halb. . . [D]as Gehirn im Schädel verrenke ich dir mit Indizien und Spitzfindigkeiten, bis du von deiner Schuld überzeugt bist und nur mehr dir selber fluchst und nicht mir."
34. " [Die Justiz] hat keine medizinische, sie hat keine psychologische Phantasie, das ist wahr. Aber sie hat eine andere, ausschweifende Phantasie. Sie sieht Tatbestände statt Krankheit, Tatbestände statt Not, Tatbestände statt Irrsinn."

35. “Aber sie erriet mit einem Male hellsichtig, daß in diesem Totentanz der Gerechtigkeit auch die Unschuld unwesentlich ist.”

36. “Lautlos klaffende Münder und eingeknickte Augen, teuflische Masken der Bosheit und des Grauens, bis es endlich wieder feindliches Geräusch wurde, an allen Ecken und Enden zugleich, aus den Wänden hervorquoll, aus dem Fußboden, aus den Wunden Christi am Kruzifix, aus den Aktenbündeln und aus dem Strafgesetzbuch.”

37. “Die Straße bog sich unter ihren Füßen vor Lachen. ‘Hilfe’, wimmerte sie in ihrem Herzen. Durch alle Poren, bis ins Gehirn drang ihr das Gelächter der Straße, gelte ihr durch Augen und Ohren, wälzte sich hinter ihr her, wie ein Brand.”

38. “Da begann auch Sabine zu lachen, mit verzerrtem Mund. Aber als wäre das ein vereinbartes Zeichen, brach sofort jedes andere Gelächter im Saale ab. Nur Sabine konnte nicht so rasch aufhören, es kitzelte sie in den Eingeweiden und im Gehirn. Sie lachte.”

39. “Sie spürte, wie sich ihr Gesicht Zug um Zug vor Angst verzog, wie ihr Mund aufsprang wie zu einem Schrei. Aber kein anderer Laut kam hervor als ein Gurgeln und Glucksen, ein wimmerndes, schluchzendes Lachen, ein bacchantisches Gelächter unbezwinglicher Heiterkeit.”

40. “Eine sonderbare Erregung begann in ihrem Herzen über diese Farce der Gerechtigkeit, über diesen erbärmlichen Versuch, mit untauglichen Mitteln der Logik die phantastischen Wirklichkeiten lebendigen Fleisches und zuckender Herzen zu meistern.”

41. “Mit offenem Mund und blöden Augen glotzte sie der fünfgliedrige Körper der Gerechtigkeit an. Keiner rügte sie. Jeder begriff in seinem ausgetrockneten Herzen, daß diese Frau die Grenzen der Wirklichkeit übersprungen hatte. Jeder fühlte, daß ihr nächstes Wort ihn zermalmen mußte, daß ihr zweites Wort das Gerichtsgebäude in die Luft sprengen mußte, daß ihr drittes Wort die Welt in Brand stecken mußte. Die Maske der Gerechtigkeit fiel ihnen vom erschlafften Gesicht, das Gesetzbuch einer verwesenden Gerechtigkeit zerfiel ihnen unter den Händen in Paragraphen und Staub. Aber die Frau schwieg.”

42. “‘Das ist Revolution,’ murmelte der Staatsanwalt verstört.”

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Sexuality:  
Beyond Mothers and Prostitutes



## CHAPTER 9

# Resituating Lu Märten's Manifesto of Matriarchal Socialism in Expressionist Debates

Douglas Brent McBride

On Wednesday, 11 December 1918, the thirty-third day of the socialist revolution that forced Wilhelm II to abdicate and ended German hostilities in the Great War, the evening edition of *Die Freiheit* (Freedom), the daily newspaper of the Independent Social-Democratic Party (USPD) in Berlin and organ of the revolution, led with a report about returning troops being welcomed at the Brandenburg Gate by one of the cochairs of the provisional government.<sup>1</sup> Other stories related how England's war debt was complicating peace negotiations, discussed the refusal of Allied powers to recognize the workers' and soldiers' councils now governing Germany, and described plans of Norwegian workers to form soviet-style councils like those of the German revolution. Two-thirds of the way down page 2, a thick line separated reports of revolutionary intrigue from the cultural supplement, or *feuilleton*. The only contribution to the rubric bore the cryptic title "Geburt der Mütter" (The birth of mothers) and a byline that identified its author as Lu Märten (1879–1970), a freelance journalist with a fifteen-year record of writing for feminist and Social-Democratic periodicals. If a reader paused to work out the conceit of the title (what makes one a mother is the fact not of being born but of bearing), it became clear "birth" had to be a metaphor. In this case, a metaphor for socialist revolution.

But what about "Mothers"? Was this term, too, a metaphor? Yes and no. "Mothers" could be read literally, in the sense that the revolutionary regime had proclaimed equal political rights for citizens of either sex twenty years and older. For the first time, women possessed the right to vote and to be elected. Märten described the historic moment as the "advent and flowering of a time *that comes with a curse of distress and the sacrifice of its birth*" ("Geburt" 1918, 2),<sup>2</sup> reminding readers how women had fought for the franchise. Equal

voting rights had been so central to the revolution that the provisional government included them in its first proclamation its first day in power, only hours after bourgeois parties in the Reichstag drafted a law to grant voting rights to all adults twenty-four and older in a last-minute attempt to outflank the revolution (Rosenbusch 446–52, 550).

But “Mothers” could also be read metaphorically, in the sense that socialism was widely viewed as a feminine form of social organization inspired by the altruistic, nurturing instinct attributed to mothers. This image served as an ideal foil to the paternalistic hierarchy of Wilhelmine Germany, embodied by the aristocratic Junker who presided over agrarian estates populated by peasants. The father of social democracy, August Bebel, had inscribed this gendered imagery in *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (*Woman and Socialism*, 1879), and Friedrich Engels reiterated it in *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, 1884). Both drew on Johann Jakob Bachofen’s account in *Das Mutterrecht* (*Mother Right*, 1861) of how patriarchal hierarchies and personal property had evolved from a less stratified matriarchal society in which property was held communally. Bachofen believed his history teased from myth proved that bourgeois patriarchy, in which men alone possess economic and political rights, was the result of progress in history. After Bebel, socialists read Bachofen against the grain to give the movement an inspirational horizon rooted in the mythic past: socialism would recreate the ethos of matriarchal communism, a paradise in which property was shared and work accomplished in cooperation.

Märten’s manifesto invoked this horizon and anticipated the conservative critique of a nanny socialism by invoking Bachofen’s image of heroic Amazons and adding cunning to its warrior’s teeth. Märten’s matriarchal socialism was equipped to make tough decisions in a postrevolutionary period of limited resources because its maternal love was a tough love. She called on the new socialist regime to

smother the vanity of the human and the feminine within you. . . . Calculate the individual condition rationally and, instead of planning a monument to the individual, make the weakest well-off. . . . Mind yourself with firm precision, listen to life drip. That teaches us how to measure resources and allocate the excess. (“Geburt” 1918, 2–3)<sup>3</sup>

If the insistent recourse to the imperative voice (“smother,” “Calculate,” “Mind”) evoked the rhetoric of a manifesto, the use of elliptical metaphor (“lis-

ten to life drip”) and alliteration (one line recounted how women had been liberated from “prison and prostitution,” “Geburt” 1918, 2)<sup>4</sup> recalled a prose poem. If the piece read like something that might have appeared in a literary review rather than the daily paper of the revolutionary regime, it was because it was and it had.

The piece had already run in the most widely read monthly of movement Expressionism, *Die weissen Blätter* (The white pages), some two years earlier. If the guarded optimism of a month-old revolution presented the frame for reading the manifesto when it appeared in a party paper in 1918, the context of its previous publication in an Expressionist journal had been a debate about the cultural implications of women entering public life, one facet of a larger debate known as the *Frauenfrage* (Woman Question). Jacques Le Rider has described the two sides in the debate as, on one hand, the reactionary response of an embattled masculinity and, on the other, utopian prophecies of feminine redemption (119). As Barbara Wright concluded in a groundbreaking analysis of Expressionist periodicals, it is the former position, and not the latter, that dominated and set the tone of the debate.

If resituating Märten’s manifesto within the debate necessarily entails the reconstruction of its contemporary configuration, it will also mandate digging deeper to obtain a diachronic sample of how it developed, because the version of “Geburt der Mütter” that was first published in a monthly review of movement Expressionism in 1916 and republished in the organ of the revolutionary regime in December 1918 was not the first to appear in print. A substantially different version had appeared in *Frauen-Zukunft* (Women’s future), a radical feminist monthly published in Munich, in September 1911, at the moment declining birthrates were making the status of women as potential child bearers a contested topic of national debate. It was also the moment a number of currents from a variety of radical sources, including *Frauen-Zukunft*, were joining and coalescing in the pages of two rival weekly newspapers published in Berlin: *Der Sturm* (The storm), founded by Herwarth Walden in March 1910, and *Die Aktion* (The action), founded by Franz Pfemfert in February 1911. If we reconstruct the publication history of Märten’s manifesto, we find it tracks three key moments in the evolution of German Expressionism: its constitution as a countercultural movement in 1911, its canonization as the uniquely German idiom of modernism during the course of the war, and its ultimate arrival in the halls of power on the tails of the revolution it had from its inception promoted.

Märten was among the first contributors to Pfemfert’s *Aktion*, having followed him from *Der Demokrat* (The democrat) a left-liberal political review he

edited before launching his own weekly in February 1911. But the pieces she placed in *Die Aktion* reflected Pfemfert's focus on the worker's movement and materialist questions of art without directly addressing issues of gender or sexual equality. For this reason alone, it might seem apparent she would place a piece treating "the spiritual-social significance of woman" ("die geistig-soziale Bedeutung der Frau," "Geburt" 1911, 516), as her abstract described the piece, in *Frauen-Zukunft*. The choice also makes sense because the first iteration of a piece that would later become an Expressionist manifesto lacked any rhetorical markers that might have identified it as a programmatic text, Expressionist or otherwise. It nonetheless stands out for the literary character of its frequently opaque language. The cryptic tone and dense fabric of the hermetic imagery evoke an aura of prophetic disclosure unlike anything else in *Frauen-Zukunft*, which tended toward earnest discussion of academic questions. In this regard, the piece was also unlike anything else by Märten, who was the review's most prolific contributor. The first iteration of "Geburt der Mütter" is a surprisingly idiosyncratic and poetic text that nonetheless lacks any of the rhetorical or stylistic features that might mark it as a distinctly Expressionist work.

If it neither looked nor sounded like an Expressionist intervention, the version of "Geburt der Mütter" that appeared in *Frauen-Zukunft* did address an ideological controversy that was animating debate in the pages of Pfemfert's *Aktion* and Walden's *Sturm*: the idea of motherhood as a voluntarily chosen vocation that should be rewarded with social recognition and economic remuneration. At the same moment Märten's piece on motherhood appeared in *Frauen-Zukunft*, Pfemfert ran an excerpt from a book by another contributor to *Frauen-Zukunft*, Grete Meisel-Hess, which deployed the idea of motherhood as a vocation to argue for the decoupling of childbearing from the institution of the family. It was titled "Prostitution, Frauenbewegung und Rasse" (Prostitution, the women's movement, and race) and it articulated a critique of bourgeois marriage conventions for institutionalizing a double standard based on the economic inequality of the sexes. Where economic independence gives men the freedom to choose sexual partners through the institutions of marriage and prostitution, women's dependence forces them to accept any partner who will support them economically, be it through marriage or prostitution. Only if women are liberated from the constraints of material necessity and economic dependency will they be free to select partners of their choice under circumstances of their choosing, she argued.

The women's movement is a station on the way to a mothers' movement.  
And the path to a regeneration of the human species passes through this

movement alone. Humankind will have to return to a form of organization that encourages the free play of selection if it wants to avoid the immanent decay of its biological strength. (943)<sup>5</sup>

These lines neatly summarized the premises and program of the Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform (League to Protect Mothers and Reform Sexual Relations), the most radical faction in the German women's movement. The League had been founded in 1904 by Ruth Bré, a radical feminist inspired by Bachofen's account of matriarchal communism, to establish self-supporting mother colonies in the German countryside where single mothers could raise children without interference from men (Evans 120–21). Under the leadership of Helene Stöcker, its growth peaked at thirty-eight hundred members in 1908 (Allen 101), when the Bund für Mutterschutz added "und Sexualreform" to its name and made sexual rights its primary aim. Stöcker's strategy weaponized the cliché of motherhood that bourgeois morality fetishized and deployed it against its sexual double standard. Her argument for motherhood as a freely chosen vocation at once decoupled female sexuality from childbearing and childbearing from the patriarchal institution of the family. The radicality of this strategy, which presented a direct threat to bourgeois morality and marriage norms, led the mainline groups in German feminism to ostracize the League and in 1910 reject its application for membership in the umbrella organization of the German women's movement, the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (Federation of German Women's Associations) (Beuys 210–12).

As the language in the quotation above indicates, *Mutterschutz* advocates had assimilated the vocabulary of social Darwinism and eugenics and were deploying it to link their critique of bourgeois morality and advocacy of women's rights to public alarm over the declining birthrate. A 15 percent drop in the live birthrate in the first decade of the century seemed ominous enough. More troubling was the infant mortality rate, which ranged from one in five for children of married mothers to one in three for children of single mothers.<sup>6</sup> The title of Meisel-Hess's piece, "Prostitution, the Women's Movement, and Race," articulated how bourgeois morality weakened the nation's welfare and presented the women's movement as the syntactic link that could reconcile public morality and national health: a women's movement promoting motherhood as a vocation would lead Germany from degeneration to biological strength. If the nation's welfare depends on its women bearing healthy children, then motherhood should be recognized and remunerated as a public service equivalent to the military service provided by men, *Mutterschutz* advocates like Stöcker and Meisel-Hess argued.



Given that the Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform occupied the radical left wing of the German women's movement, it should come as no surprise that feminists who contributed to *Die Aktion*, which was known for left-wing activism, were its proponents. This group included Meisel-Hess, Stöcker, and Marie Holzer, a less-known Austrian feminist. Hedwig Dohm, the grande dame of German feminism, who was eighty years old when Pfemfert began running her work, was a founding member of the Bund für Mutterschutz. Not surprisingly, all four were contributors to *Frauen-Zukunft*. But where Dohm tirelessly argued for equal rights based on the ideal of a universal human nature, younger feminists like Meisel-Hess and Holzer promoted equivalent rights based on sexual difference. The younger generation of feminists nonetheless embraced Dohm's conviction that socialization shapes gendered character traits, which the new science of sexology was busy naturalizing. As the language quoted from Meisel-Hess indicates, the younger feminists who contributed to Expressionist periodicals accepted the masculinist terms of debate, which were predicated on natural difference. What they disputed was the line where biology ends and socialization begins.

Pfemfert continued to run feminists associated with the *Mutterschutz* movement through the November Revolution and into the Weimar Republic that succeeded it. But the contributions from these authors that directly discussed and promoted *Mutterschutz* ideas are concentrated in *Aktion's* first year of publication, when Märten placed the earliest version of "Geburt der Mütter" in *Frauen-Zukunft*, and the declining birthrate was making headlines. Before Pfemfert published the earliest of the pieces from *Mutterschutz* proponents in June 1911 (a sarcastic critique by Holzer of how the press was whipping anxiety over the declining birthrate into misogynistic hysteria), Walden had already given the *Mutterschutz* movement a platform in *Der Sturm*. In February 1911 he ran a character sketch of Franziska Schultz, administrator of a home for unwed mothers maintained by the Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform in Berlin.

The author was Else Lasker-Schüler, who was married to Walden, although the two were separated. Expressionism was only beginning to take shape in the pages of *Der Sturm*, and Lasker-Schüler was the weekly's most prolific contributor. Her entirely idiosyncratic, free-verse poetry had attracted a fanatical following among the young male writers who seemed to be the journal's most avid partisans, and her extravagantly expressive language became the template for Expressionist poetics as these young poets tried to imitate her distinctive style. Each of the ninety-four pieces Lasker-Schüler contributed to the first 113 weekly issues of *Der Sturm* (poems, sketches,

essays, letters, reviews, and short fiction) was cast in the same ecstatic language, characterized by assonance and alliteration, apocalyptic imagery, hermetic wordplay, and striking neologisms. Her short sketch of Schultz was no exception:

In Berlin there is a woman who knows the suffering of Mary, seven swords in her heart; and yet graciously on the impoverished and afflicted she smiles. . . . Errant Magdalenes enter the gates of her house and rest; recover and rethink things under the love of her mother-roof. Franziska Schultz is the mother of maternal protection. (407)<sup>7</sup>

Two weeks later Walden began running statements by medical, political, and legislative experts in response to a bill in the Bundesrat (lower house) that would criminalize the sale or promotion of contraceptive devices. The rubric was titled “Mehr Kinder” (More children). Over the next six weeks, Walden ran responses from Swiss psychiatrist and eugenicist Auguste Forel, Viennese psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, reform Social-Democratic leader Eduard Bernstein, writer and medical doctor Alfred Döblin, five other doctors and professors, and a literary critic.<sup>8</sup> The only woman Walden included was Schultz, and she was the only respondent who had experience with economically vulnerable mothers, the demographic group that would suffer most from the law. She cited her “*practical work with the League to Protect Mothers*” (“*praktische Arbeit im Bund für Mutterschutz*”), referenced statistics that showed how the high birthrate among poor families was creating an underclass of economically and physically disadvantaged children, and called for social policies to promote fewer births under healthier conditions.

If the overall impression one takes away from studying Expressionist periodicals is of a countercultural movement shaped by young masculinists, this discussion demonstrates that the two most influential gatekeepers of what counted as Expressionist discourse—the editors of *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*—made conscious choices to promote the ideas of the most radical faction within German feminism, the maternalism of the *Mutterschutz* movement. Given the polarization in Expressionism over the Woman Question, it seems fitting that the first manifesto of women as mothers to appear in Expressionist media presented a negative, mirror image of the concept of motherhood that Meisel-Hess, Holzer, and Märten were articulating. When Walden printed “Le Manifeste de la femme futuriste” (“The Manifesto of the Futurist Woman”) by Valentine de Saint-Point (1875–1953) in translation in May 1912 as part of a campaign to promote the exhibit of Italian Futurism in his Sturm Gallery, it

became the first publication of the text in any language. Saint-Point was an established poet, painter, and performance artist with no particular relationship to Expressionism or Futurism when she wrote “The Manifesto of the Futurist Woman” in response to the publication of F. T. Marinetti’s first Futurist manifesto on the front page of *Le Figaro* in 1909. It seems unlikely Saint-Point would have been privy to the debate already underway in Expressionist media, but her statement nonetheless participated in the debate by virtue of the fact that Walden printed it.

Saint-Point began her rejoinder by quoting Marinetti’s scorn for ‘Woman’ (“We want to praise war . . . and contempt for Woman,” 26)<sup>9</sup> as an epigraph and proceeded to articulate a place for herself as a woman in the masculinist discourse of Futurism. “Feminism is a political error,” she stated bluntly, “a mental aberration of Woman, which her instinct will soon recognize” (26).<sup>10</sup> If women were granted rights and responsibilities, she argued, it would only rob them of their true power, which consists in bearing children. This antifeminist conception of motherhood was at odds with that of Märten and the *Mutterschutz* movement. Saint-Point’s identification with the masculinist position led her to elide the trope of motherhood shaped by the instinct to nurture and embrace a misogynist trope that associated woman with nature as a brutally amoral force:

May woman rediscover her cruelty and violence, which drive her to ravage the defeated foe for having lost, drive her so far as to mutilate him. . . . Women, become exalted, as unjust as nature! . . . Be the egoistic, wild mother who jealously protects her children . . . as long as the children physically need her protection. (26)<sup>11</sup>

After that—once the offspring can fend for themselves—she was content to see them become cannon fodder, as long as they died heroic deaths.

Saint-Point’s critique of bourgeois culture for having become soft and effeminate was in line with Marinetti and the masculinists within Expressionism, but at odds with Expressionist proponents of the *Mutterschutz* movement. Saint-Point’s critique of bourgeois morality involved a call for sexual rights, which Märten and other *Mutterschutz* proponents supported. But it also vilified the nanny socialism that was the bogeyman of illiberal conservatives. This put her at odds with the leftist *Mutterschutz* proponents in Expressionism, who, like Märten, had supported the SPD but moved to the USPD after it split in 1917 and subsequently migrated to the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) after its founding only weeks after Märten’s manifesto appeared in *Die Freiheit*.<sup>12</sup>

The next major statement reshuffled the terms of debate by presenting an apology for the goals of the *Mutterschutz* movement from a man's perspective. Like Saint-Point's manifesto, this statement had not been conceived as a contribution to the debate in Expressionist media but as a response to a statement in another forum. The provocation had been a sarcastic review of Freud's *Über Psychoanalyse: Fünf Vorlesungen* (*Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 1910), which Gustav Landauer ran in *Der Sozialist* (*The socialist*), an anarchist monthly he published in Berlin, in July 1911. Landauer had appended a note to the review by Ludwig Berndt in which Landauer ridiculed "one of the worst Freudians, a neurologist who has managed to make a name for himself" (102).<sup>13</sup> Landauer failed to name the object of his scorn. But the caricature sufficed for Otto Gross, a young, charismatic psychoanalyst associated with Expressionists, to recognize himself and demand an opportunity to respond. When Landauer refused, Gross sought a venue elsewhere. Two years later Pfemfert ran the piece "Zur Überwindung der kulturellen Krise" (*On overcoming the cultural crisis*).

Gross began his apology with a statement on the revolutionary potential of the science of psychoanalysis. It neatly summarized the heretical position that had earned Freud's skepticism as well as Landauer's scorn: "The psychology of the unconscious is the philosophy of revolution," he declared. "This is what it is commissioned to become as it foment rebellion in the psyche" (384).<sup>14</sup> In the final lines, Gross's apology for psychoanalysis veered into a call for a revolution to end patriarchy, restore matriarchy, and free the individual from the chains of social inhibition. Where he had previously conducted a discussion of how social authority is internalized through an unconscious mechanism corresponding to Freud's concept of superego, Gross now localized the dynamic in the social institution of the family, where "the collusion of sexuality and authority" ("Verbindung von Sexualität und Autorität") maintains patriarchy's reign. Women will not be emancipated until the family is eliminated, he concluded, and added: "The coming revolution is a revolution on behalf of matriarchy" (387).<sup>15</sup>

For a movement that was of two minds on the Woman Question, a consensus for Gross's call for a revolution to dismantle the family and establish matriarchal rule seemed unlikely. In spite of his sympathy for feminism, Pfemfert gave the antifeminist position equal space. Five weeks after Gross's intervention ran on page 2, just after the front-page editorial he reserved for himself, Pfemfert gave a reply from Ludwig Rubiner the same pride of place. The piece, titled "Psychoanalyse" (*Psychoanalysis*), echoed Landauer's sarcasm. And like Landauer's critique, it neglected to argue its assertions and substituted ridicule

for reasoning. By the second paragraph, which included a joke about feminist taste in fashion, it was clear psychoanalysis served as a surrogate for the women's movement. After voicing skepticism about the critical potential of psychoanalysis, Rubiner conceded it could be useful in therapy. But he dismissed its efficacy for free spirits like himself and ridiculed those who seek help in analysis: "Look at who benefits from psychoanalysis. Not creative (lawgiving) individuals. On the contrary, it is those who can hardly resist nature: impressionable artists, people who love the sea, and women" (483).<sup>16</sup>

Pfemfert printed a rejoinder from Gross in the next weekly issue. Gross used most of the column to address Rubiner's remark that psychoanalysis was better suited for clinical practice than cultural criticism. Freud once gave him the same advice, Gross claimed, quoting Freud as having said, "We are doctors and want to remain doctors" ("Wir sind Ärzte und wollen Ärzte bleiben"). Gross concluded by calling out the misogyny in Rubiner's gratuitous statement about women being in thrall to nature and impervious to spirit: "Ludwig Rubiner makes a fatal error in setting up woman as the antithesis of free spirit. We believe the first, true revolution will be the one that brings woman and freedom—and spirit—together as one" (507).<sup>17</sup>

Once more, it was unclear who comprised the "we" in Gross's call to arms. One gets the impression that the masculinists held sway in Expressionism, setting the tone of the debate and asserting ownership of the movement, while the feminists Pfemfert promoted seem not to have identified as Expressionists—at least not the way Rubiner and other antifeminists emphatically did. In this regard, the movement seems to have remained a men's club. When Gross's father, a famous professor of criminology, had his son arrested and admitted to a psychiatric clinic a few months later (it was neither the first nor last time Gross would be forcibly institutionalized), the entire movement—including Rubiner—lined up in fraternal solidarity. Franz Pfemfert and Franz Jung even conspired to bring out special issues of *Die Aktion* and *Die Revolution*, journals each edited in Berlin and Munich, respectively, on the same date, 20 December 1913, dedicated to the cause célèbre of the son persecuted by the patriarch.

A year later, Pfemfert gave the front page of *Die Aktion*, the one he normally reserved for his editorial, to a dialogue from Hedwig Dohm titled "Feindliche Schwestern." The comic sketch portrayed two feminists puzzling over inane statements about the inferiority of women penned by female antifeminists, the "hostile sisters" of the title. The conceit of the satire hinged on one partner's conclusion that a man must be behind the feminine name in the byline of at least one antifeminist statement. Only a man could be so clueless

about the female psyche, she argues. When one partner reads aloud a passage that claims a woman can only attain intelligence at the cost of her feminine nature (*Weibnatur*), the other comments that antifeminists always call on nature to validate their prejudices. To which her partner replies:

Everyone attributes his opinions to nature, just as man creates for himself a god in his own image. . . . What is natural, what is unnatural? . . . Most intellectual achievements violate what had been assumed to be natural laws. (651–52)<sup>18</sup>

This ironic summation of the antifeminist rhetoric that predominated in the popular press captured the rhetorical point to which every masculinist statement in Expressionist media could likewise be reduced: “Just look at nature!”

Dohm’s fictional dialogue was to have the last word in the debate in Expressionist media, at least for the moment. Ten days later Germany invaded Belgium, and Expressionists—at least the males in the movement—rushed to enlist.

When “Geburt der Mütter” appeared in *Die weissen Blätter*, which editor René Schickele moved from Leipzig to neutral Zurich in September 1916, it formed a coda to the earlier debate in Expressionist media. It reprised the leitmotif of Amazons ruling a matriarchal utopia and resolved its counterpoint in the most fully realized statement—both formally and ideologically—that Expressionism produced on the Woman Question. Not coincidentally, this was the point, two years into the war, that Expressionism, which had always understood itself as a subversive, countercultural force, was being canonized. By 1916 the economic downturn resulting from mobilization had become a boom fueled by undertaxed war profits. With art as a hedge against inflation, the art market boomed as well. As prices for older works became prohibitive, investors turned to Expressionism, and as they invested in Expressionist art they promoted its aesthetic value in order to increase its economic value. By war’s end the acceptance of Expressionism as the authentically German idiom in modern art prepared the way for the postwar success of lyric anthologies like *Menschheitsdämmerung* (*Dawn of Humanity*, 1919) and films like *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920).<sup>19</sup>

As it precipitated Expressionism’s acceptance by establishment institutions, the war also precipitated women’s entry into public life through the conduit of paid labor, transforming the Woman Question from a theoretical to a practical concern. The mobilization of August 1914 had created vacancies in public services—from streetcar conductor to mail carrier—that women had

been called to fill. The result was that women wearing uniforms were suddenly present in public life. “Who in such times does not speak of woman,” Märten asked in the revised, programmatic text that appeared in *Die weissen Blätter*, and she followed with a second question that acknowledged the economic integration of women: “Who would not risk putting matriarchy, the creative force—before the front lines of things” (“Geburt” 1916, 286).<sup>20</sup> Just as men had been deployed to “the front lines” of war, women had been deployed to “the front lines” of industry to produce matériel for the wartime economy. Within weeks of the publication of Märten’s manifesto the Reichstag passed legislation to implement the mass mobilization of the domestic workforce, and women subsequently became systematically integrated into a command economy.

This did not mean women were being reduced to cogs in a war machine. On the contrary, their integration in the workforce gave them “power,” Märten emphasized with an exclamation mark and italics: “Have you never longed for, dreamed of power?! *Power*. The pulse of angels and demons burns in the sound” (“Geburt” 1916, 289).<sup>21</sup> She only hinted at how women’s newfound power might be expressed, evoking “angels and demons.” What we know from history—and Märten may have guessed, given her knowledge of the labor movement—is that women’s employment in industry would give them the power to strike. This may have been what she had in mind when she rattled off a series of commands in the staccato syntax of Futurism, which August Stramm introduced to Expressionism in the pages of *Der Sturm* beginning in 1913: “Superiority and violently imposing being translate into deed. On the vice of vulgar dexterity wage war. From the restlessness of thinking respond to questions of the day” (“Geburt” 1916, 289).<sup>22</sup> In fact, women had already begun demonstrating to protest domestic shortages and the prolongation of a stalemated war, as support for the war effort flagged and unrest grew in the final two years leading to the November Revolution.

But women’s power was not only destructive, in the sense that striking involves an act of economic violence. Märten argued that women were also creating, creating art and something more: life, the future of the species. Women as artists (the terms served as synonyms the way she linked them syntactically) were giving birth to the “most peculiar dream of the future” (“den sonderbarsten Zukunftstraum,” “Geburt” 1916, 285). What would women’s peculiar dream of the future produce? “It need not turn into a book or a picture,” she argued, and added that it had already “turned into the *signification* of a new *social species*, one that begets not people but new worlds, beings like themselves, and not only in verse” (“Geburt” 1916, 288).<sup>23</sup> Let the masculinists have their poetry, Märten’s language suggests. Women were giving birth to “a

new *social species*.” Not the trope of a New Man, which the masculinist poets in Expressionism were invoking, but a new people, one that creates “new worlds” shaped by the social values of mothers: the altruistic, nurturing ethos of motherhood. These worlds shaped by social solidarity would exist not only in works of fiction (“not only in verse”), but in the historical reality of a matriarchal socialism.

When Märten wrote these words, the revolution was still an event prophesied but not yet realized, a tenet of belief kept by the faithful. The time was not yet ripe for its redemption, but women’s entry into public service and industrial production had administered a convulsive shock to the patriarchal order, which heralded the change to come:

There is still too much yearning, and the wedding of things seems timelessly distant—but men and women anticipate the advent and flowering of a time *that comes with a curse of distress and the sacrifice of its birth*. It is the time of creation, it is the time of mothers. (“Geburt” 1916, 285)<sup>24</sup>

These lines portray the birth of matriarchal socialism as a wedding party, which men and women eagerly anticipate. Like the matriarchy of myth, which did not recognize paternity and needed no families, Märten’s matriarchal socialism will celebrate the union of all things male, female, and other, with no use for the institution of the family or fathering as a vocation. For all the mentions of “men” (3), “women” (13), “mothers” (6), and “children” (3), Märten’s manifesto never mentions family or father. Its infrastructure of social solidarity will be built not on the patriarchal institution of the family but on the matriarchal institution of motherhood, realizing Ruth Bré’s dream not in cloistered mother colonies but on a global, hegemonic scale.

The progeny of this wedding of all things under the “sign” (*Zeichen*) of motherhood will be a “person of healthy social strength” (“den Menschen gesunder sozialer Kraft,” “Geburt” 1916, 286), Märten explained: “People of joy from strength, the kind of joy the first woman would have to have with the first man” (“Geburt” 1916, 286).<sup>25</sup> On first hearing, this may sound like the language of eugenics. But the terms one might intuitively categorize as biological—“species,” “health,” “strength”—are in each case conditioned by the modifier “social” (“new social species,” “person of healthy social strength”). The new race of socially healthy individuals, which Märten’s manifesto foresees, will be born not of selective breeding but radical socialization. The atomistic individual of bourgeois society will be reborn as a “person of healthy social strength.”



As the republication of Märten's manifesto in *Die Freiheit* helped clarify, the conceit of mothers being born in "Geburt der Mütter" was never about the physics of childbirth but the metaphysics of cultural revolution: the revolutionary imposition of a radically new moral regime. The socialist revolution that took the SPD by surprise had taken the form of socialist self-governance based in workers' councils organized on factory floors, the very form of political organization, which the gatekeepers of Expressionist discourse, from Walden to Pfemfert and Schickele, had promoted from the founding of *Der Sturm* in March 1910.<sup>26</sup> This socialist form of self-governance undid itself when it called for elections to a national assembly its first day in power. But many of its values survived into the constitution of its successor state, the Weimar Republic, which possessed the most radically socialist legal framework outside the Soviet Union, even if it lacked the resources and political will to translate its legislative decrees into practice.

As Märten's unexpectedly timely manifesto now made clear, the altruistic and nurturing ethos of motherhood, which the socialist regime adopted, represented the negation of bourgeois patriarchy, beginning with its fetishization of the nuclear family and legislation of individual property rights through paternity. Bourgeois morality had always claimed to be grounded in natural law and systematically naturalized its conventions. This included its conception of motherhood—and by extension passive femininity—which it argued was determined by nature. Märten now recalled Dohm's warning of how bourgeois morality limits women's ability to imagine an autonomous existence by referencing physical constraints purportedly imposed by nature:

Do not offer yourself as a sacrifice to nature. Or better: idle talk of nature. Embrace the will to your sex according to your strength and your insight. ("Geburt" 1916, 288)<sup>27</sup>

The line that immediately precedes these announces that its admonition and challenge are aimed at "women whom others' opinions would force into a hostile routine" ("Geburt" 1916, 288).<sup>28</sup> It's an old trick, Märten suggests. There will always be someone eager to define for you who you are, what your nature will allow you to do or not do, be or not be. The mothers who are the protagonists of Märten's manifesto are not natural phenomena. Despite the conceit of the title, they are not born but made, through an act of radical self-willing. Their progeny of "healthy social strength" will not be genetically engineered but morally reborn, to create not a master race but a people of "trenchant, luminous spirituality" ("Geburt" 1916, 286).<sup>29</sup> When the time is ripe and

revolution topples the old order, the regime of matriarchal socialism will not be born at once, of one piece. Women and men will have to build it. "The old world lies in rubble," Märten concluded. "We are homeless and have to begin building" ("Geburt" 1916, 290).<sup>30</sup>

"Geburt der Mütter" is a complex work of art that is open to interpretation. I have read it here in a particular way, based on how it seems to engage with other texts of the day and three distinct historical moments in addition to our own. I feel compelled to insist on the obvious here, because Märten's prose poem-cum-manifesto requires a work of interpretation that sets it apart from the other texts discussed here. Each of the contemporary texts I have cited has a message it wants to communicate unambiguously, even if it employs literary tropes or fictional devices to that end. In contrast, "The Birth of Mothers" demonstrates an entirely different degree of linguistic complexity characterized by radical ambiguity and indeterminacy. Its language demonstrates the specifically literary quality the Russian and Czech formalists of Märten's day sought to define with the distinction between standard and poetic language. To paraphrase Viktor Shklovsky, Märten's contribution to the debate in Expressionist media is the only one that asks us to think not in concepts but in images.

In "Art as Device" of 1917, Shklovsky discussed the peculiar demands that literary art places on readers in terms that aptly describe what distinguishes Märten's contribution from the others in the Expressionist debate:

The purpose of art . . . is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By "enstranging" objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and "laborious." (6)

A few lines later, Shklovsky wraps up this discussion of how literary art makes demands of the reader's imagination and slows the reading process from simple parsing to reflective production by remarking: "*Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant*" (6).

"Geburt der Mütter" enacts this creative process by requiring the reader to work through the "laborious" task of assigning signification to indeterminate language that not only discusses but demonstrates how art is created. This avant-garde conception of art as a social process that co-involves artist and recipient resonates with Märten's argument for the socialization of artistic production and reception in "Sozialismus und Künstler" (Socialism and artists), the feuilleton that ran in *Die Freiheit* two weeks before "The Birth of Mothers." It also echoes her claim in *Die Künstlerin* (The woman as artist), which Märten completed in 1914 but did not see published until after the revolution, that "the

social mother spirit is, after all, the creative principle the new social society needs” (30).<sup>31</sup> She explained that the figure “mother spirit” (*Muttergeist*) refers not to childbearing per se but to an ethos that unites the natural instinct to nurture with the social impulse to enhance life creatively (*Künstlerin* 33).

At this point, it should no longer surprise to learn that “Geburt der Mütter” was not born an Expressionist manifesto. Despite the conceit of its title, the text that first appeared in *Frauen-Zukunft* had to be remade. The revised version René Schickele accepted for publication in *Die weissen Blätter* was just over sixteen hundred words, some one hundred words less than the original. The difference is inconsequential in quantitative terms, but Märten transformed the text qualitatively, keeping the most striking images while paring the language to roughly one thousand words and generating over five hundred words of new material to create an entirely new conclusion. A quick, visual comparison of the two printed texts shows how a dense text of long paragraphs in *Frauen-Zukunft* had become a light, airy text in *Die weissen Blätter*, the visual realization of Marinetti’s telegraphic prose style, as Walden’s *Sturm* had presented it to German readers. This did more than turn plodding prose into poetry. It lifted what had been turgid, purple language into an entirely different register, the one Lasker-Schüler’s poetry inhabited. The language that sounded cryptic in *Frauen-Zukunft* was now “hymnisch” (hymn-like), as Chrissy Kambas puts it (54).

The revision had a particularly dramatic effect in clarifying how one passage in particular served as a rhetorical fulcrum to launch the text in a new trajectory once the language was disarticulated from a belabored paragraph in the earlier version and pared to make its imagery leap off the page of the revision. Here is my approximation of how the passage read in its initial publication in *Frauen-Zukunft*:

Because spirit is motherhood. It is the mystery, to which everything offers its sacrifice. Motherhood is not, however, mindless childbearing, but that which will yield the most powerful existential consciousness for woman. That which kept her from going under, that which constrained her, that which will help her obtain eternity and emancipation. Everything was and again will be. It is up to us to gradually grasp the hidden nature of things. (“Geburt” 1911, 520)<sup>32</sup>

And here is my rendering of the revised version that appeared in *Die weissen Blätter*. Note that one sentence has been cut, and others have been fused into a stream of clauses connected by dashes.

Because Spirit is motherhood. Motherhood! not mindless childbearing but that for which you with every breath strive and yearn—existential consciousness, that which kept us from going under, that which constrained us—that which permits us to believe again in eternity and emancipation. Everything was and again will be—but it is time we brought the hidden nature of things to life. (“Geburt” 1916, 287)<sup>33</sup>

All the essential nouns have been preserved: spirit, motherhood, childbearing, consciousness, eternity, emancipation, nature. What got cut or modified was the language required to form grammatical sentences. This strategy is especially clear in the sentence that begins with the noun “motherhood.” In the second version that sentence has lost its conjugated verb, the one minimal, indispensable element needed to form a grammatical sentence in German or English. But the deletion of the previous sentence, which separated the repetition of “motherhood” at the end of the first sentence and beginning of the third, and the substitution of an exclamation mark for the verb in what is now the second sentence, brackets and highlights the redundancy of the second naming of “motherhood,” which now leaps off the page. The use of dashes to create a continuous stream of language unbounded by full stops creates a counterpoint to the sudden appearance of an exclamation mark to isolate a single word. The insertion of this exclamation mark forces the reader to suddenly pause and dramatically brackets the term “motherhood,” the only lexical item that appears more than once in this passage.

Each of these editorial strategies recalls a point in the “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature,” which Walden published in German in *Der Sturm* in 1912. This is the text in which Marinetti called on poets to liberate words by destroying syntax. If Märten was at all cognizant of Marinetti’s ideas, she only engaged with them loosely, not in the dogmatic terms in which he presented them. These called for creating noun strings without syntax, deploying verbs without conjugation (Märten selectively employed this strategy, as can be seen in the revised text quoted in notes 3 and 22), and eliminating adverbs and adjectives. Had Märten done that, she would have created a Futurist manifesto. What she did instead—alone among the many interlocutors who debated women’s future in Expressionist media—was create a fully realized Expressionist manifesto, one that engaged with Expressionist poetics and translated Expressionist ideas into Expressionist forms.

## NOTES

1. This essay is dedicated to Barbara Wright.
2. "Nahen und Blühen einer Zeit, *die mit Fluch kommt, um die Not und Opfer ihrer Geburt.*" Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German by the author.
3. "Erstickt die Eitelkeit des Menschen und Weibchens in euch. . . . Das Dasein des einzelnen vernünftig berechnen und statt dem einzigen ein Denkmal planen, den letzten Schwachen wohlhabend machen. . . . Mit starker Feinheit auf sich achten, das Leben tropfen hören. Das wägt die Kräfte ab, die wir haben, und lehrt den Überfluss vergeben."
4. ". . . erlöst vom Gitter und von der Gosse."
5. "Die Frauenbewegung ist ein Zwischenstadium zur Mutterbewegung. Und der Weg zur Regenerierung der Menschheit geht einzig durch diese Bewegung. Die Menschheit wird um den drohenden Verfall ihrer biologischen Kräfte zu entgehen wieder zu jener Art von Gestaltung gelangen müssen, die das freie Spiel der Auslese ermöglicht."
6. The absolute birthrate fell from 35 per 1,000 inhabitants in 1902 to 30 in 1912, according to Allen (177). Compare her discussion of infant mortality rates on page 179.
7. "In Berlin gibt es eine Fraue [*sic*], die die Schmerzen Marias leidet, sieben Schwerter im Herzen; und die doch gnadenreich herablächelt auf die Armen und Kranken. . . . Verirrte Magdalenen treten durch ihres Hauses Pforte ein und rasten; ruhen aus und besinnen sich unter der Liebe ihres Mutterdachs. Franziska Schultz ist die Mutter des Mutterschutzes."
8. The six installments of "Mehr Kinder" appeared in numbers 53–58 dated 4, 11, 18, and 25 March and 1 and 8 April. Schultz's statement appeared in issue 56 of 25 March 1911 on p. 444.
9. "Wir wollen den Krieg preisen . . . und die Verachtung des Weibes." German translation by Hans Jacob.
10. "Der Feminismus ist ein politischer Irrtum. Der Feminismus ist ein Gehirnfehler der Frau, den ihr Instinkt bald erkennen wird." German translation by Hans Jacob.
11. "Möge die Frau ihre Grausamkeit, ihre Heftigkeit wiederfinden, die sie auf den Besiegten losstürzen lässt, weil er eben besiegt ist, die sie so weit treibt, ihn zu verstümmeln. . . . Frauen, werdet erhaben, ungerecht wie die Natur. . . . Seid die egoistische wilde Mutter, die eifersüchtig ihre Kinder hütet, . . . solange die Kinder körperlich ihres Schutzes bedürfen."
12. The SPD was the most successful socialist party in history when it chose to demonstrate its patriotism by voting for war credits in August 1914. The controversy over this step led to the founding of the USPD in April 1917. Composed of reformist and revolutionary elements united only by opposition to the war, the USPD became the default vehicle of the revolution, which soldiers' and workers' councils launched without party support. When the SPD and USPD joined forces to form a provisional government and announced elections to a national assembly, the secession of revolutionary forces became inevitable. These forces, led by the Spartacist League, founded the KPD in the final days of 1918, before the elections slated for January 1919.

13. "Einer der schlimmsten Freudianer, ein Nervenarzt, der es verstanden hat, sich so bekannt zu machen."

14. "Die Psychologie des Unbewussten ist die Philosophie der Revolution, d.h. sie ist berufen, das zu werden als das Ferment der Revoltierung innerhalb der Psyche."

15. "Die kommende Revolution ist die Revolution fürs Mutterrecht."

16. "Beobachten Sie, an wem die Psychoanalyse wirkt: Nicht an schöpferischen (gesetzgebenden) Menschen. Sondern an denen, in deren Leben die Natur unmittelbar einfallen kann; an impressionistischen Künstlern, an Personen, die das Meer lieben, und an Frauen."

17. "Ludwig Rubiner verrät einen verhängnisvollen Irrtum, indem er die Frau dem freien Geist gegenüberstellt. Wir glauben, dass jene Revolution die erste und wirkliche sein wird, die Frau und Freiheit und, [sic] Geist in eins zusammenfasst."

18. "Wie der Mensch sich seinen Gott nach seinem Ebenbild schafft, so legt ein jeder seine Anschauungen der Natur in den Mund. . . . Was ist natürlich, was unnatürlich? . . . die meisten geistigen Errungenschaften sind Einbrüche in vermeintliche Naturgesetze."

19. Compare Lenman; Long.

20. "Wer redet in solchen Zeiten nicht von der Frau. Wer wagt es nicht, das Muttertum, das Schaffende—vor die Fronten der Dinge zu stellen?"

21. "Sehntet, träumtet ihr nie von der Macht?! *Macht*. Der Herzschlag von Engeln und Teufeln surrt in dem Klang."

22. "Überlegenheit und heftig drängendes Sein umsetzen in Tat. Das Laster der gemeinen Geschicklichkeit bekriegen. Aus der Ruhelosigkeit des Denkens Antwort auf Fragen des Tages machen."

23. "Daraus muss nicht ein Buch werden, nicht ein Bild. . . . Daraus wurde der *Sinn* einer neuen *sozialen Art*, die nicht Menschen erzeugt, sondern Welten gestaltet, Wesen wie sie selbst, und nicht nur dichtend." Emphasis in original.

24. "Noch ist zuviel Sehnsucht, und die Hochzeit der Dinge scheint zeitlos fern—aber Männer und Frauen sind erregt vom Nahen und Blühen einer Zeit, *die mit Fluch kommt, um die Not und Opfer ihrer Geburt*. Es ist die Zeit des Schaffens, es ist die Zeit der Mütter."

25. "Menschen der Krafftfreude, wie sie die erste Frau am ersten Manne haben müsste."

26. For more on the role these gatekeepers played in promoting syndicalist political methods, see my piece, "Performing the Body Politic."

27. "Lasst euch der Natur, besser: dem Geschwätz davon nicht als Opfer überantwortet werden. Entscheidet den Willen zum Geschlecht nach eurer Kraft und eurer Einsicht."

28. "Ich rede zu den Frauen, . . . die die Meinung der andern in einen feindlichen Alltag zwingen will."

29. "Menschen von schneidender leuchtender Geistigkeit."

30. "Die alte Welt liegt in Trümmern—doch wir sind obdachlos und haben zu bauen."

31. "Sozialer Muttergeist ist es denn auch, den die neue soziale Gesellschaft als schaffendes Prinzip braucht."

32. "Denn der Geist ist Mutterschaft. Er ist das Geheimnisvolle, dem alles Opfer bringt. Mutterschaft aber ist nicht sinnloses Gebären, sondern das, was für die Frau das kraftvollste Daseins-Bewußtsein erbringen wird. Durch das sie nicht unterging, durch das sie gehemmt wurde, durch das sie Ewigkeit und Befreiung erlangen wird. Alles war und wird wieder sein. Es gilt das versteckte Wesen der Dinge allmählich zu begreifen."

33. ". . . denn der Geist ist Mutterschaft. Mutterschaft! nicht sinnlos Gebären, sondern das, danach ihr seht und trachtet in jedem Atem—Daseinsbewußtsein, durch das wir nicht untergingen, durch das wir gehemmt wurden—durch das wir Ewigkeit und Befreiung noch einmal glauben. Alles war und wird wieder sein—aber es gilt, das versteckte Wesen der Dinge lebendig machen."

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## CHAPTER 10

### Emmy Hennings

#### *The Human Being as Woman*

Nicole Shea

Several women have had paramount part in the German poetry of the last generation, and, among them, Emmy Hennings belongs to the most unique and unforgettable appearances.<sup>1</sup>

—Hermann Hesse

While Expressionism and Dada are often—and rightfully—cited for their stunning creativity and challenges to bourgeois complacency, expressing interiority within an increasingly urbanized and mechanized world, such movements maintained, particularly behind the scenes, a traditional patriarchal mindset, marginalizing the contributions of women and excluding their claim as cofounders or even as coconspirators. Men such as Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974), Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) and others who considered themselves key figures of this movement of “greybeards” (Huelsenbeck 32) could claim precedence in naming, diverting attention away from women’s significant participation in the movement. Such a continuation of the patriarchal structure of ownership used the cultural discursive structure that privileged male speech and ownership, categorizing women into supplemental roles of organizers or entertainers among the “founding fathers.” At the center of these patriarchal discourses, Emmy Hennings (1885–1948), typically associated with the Dadaists, found herself discursively manifested, noting that the word *Dada* was her brainchild: “Dada—that word was my idea and I often said it to Hugo [Ball] jokingly when I wanted to take a walk. All children say Dada first” (Ball-Hennings, “Rebellen und Bekenner” 52–53).

This study engages Hennings’s life, as embodied in her autobiographical *Gefängnis* (1919), as an Expressionistic response to patriarchal constructions

of the feminine. As a movement characterized by representing anxiety and the alienation of the self in the urban world, Expressionism, particularly via its *Lustmord* manifestation, exhibited a fascination with and revulsion against the female body as reified by the prostitute's corporality. Taking pleasure in brutality against the female body was man's outcry against the war machine and his revenge for returning home psychologically and sexually deformed while woman had remained rooted (Tatar 12). Whereas artists like George Grosz and Otto Dix portray the murdered and dismembered female and with it the repulsive side of corporality, Hennings, aspiring poet, co-namer of Dada, and cabaret performer, challenges the male Expressionist representation of women and erotic desire and performs a different intervention highlighting the brutal commodification of female bodies and its consequences.

Although Hennings refused to be linked to any kind of "-ism," which she considered an "illness, a kind of sin against the fresh state of mind" ("Rebellen" 80–81),<sup>2</sup> her early works must be counted among the great Expressionist oeuvres and regarded as an important engagement with modernity. The fact that Hennings's literary contributions are largely unknown to the English-speaking world can be attributed to lack of translation as well as to her emergent, yet stifled role in the Cabaret Voltaire, which she founded with her partner, Hugo Ball (1886–1927), but saw her relegated to a mere crowd-pleasing entertainer "on whose success or failure as singer the existence of the cabaret depended" (Memoirs of a Dada Drummer 10).<sup>3</sup>

From an early age, Emmy Hennings dreamed of becoming an actress. With a minimal school education and her parents' belief that a girl should have a solid profession rather than pursue lofty dreams, Hennings served in households, worked as a copygirl, and soon tried her luck in marriage. However, neither marriage nor motherhood could quench her thirst for adventure: the marriage broke apart, and her ill child died. The news of her child's death reached the young mother on the road where she was touring with a theater group. Soon she found herself pregnant again and once more her child had to be given into the hands of the grandmother, while Hennings supplemented her meager acting income with factory work, babysitting, and, ultimately, prostitution. By 1912, Hennings was hired as cabaret singer at the Simplizissimus, an artist bar in Munich. In this bohemian milieu, she became muse and lover to poets and artists and, through this personal contact with them, found the inspiration for her own writing. Up to 1911, Hennings, poet and writer, was completely unknown among literary circles, while Hennings, entertainer, had enjoyed an identity as a cabaret and theater performer since 1905.

As Ruth Hemus and Bärbel Reetz observe, Hennings's role as performer,

her “corporeal identity,” functioned as the guiding principle by which both audience and colleagues defined her (Hemus 18). Such performances, in requiring frequent travel, created the need for additional money, which led to prostitution, since, as Reetz points out, the boundaries between performer and prostitute were often quite undefined (Reetz 55). Such liminality inspired many Expressionist artists, such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938), who, in the Great War, felt “like the prostitutes I used to paint: daubed on one minute, wiped out the next” (83), or Kasimir Edschmid (1890–1966), who saw “humanity in the whores and the divine in the factories” (33). Even for the Expressionists, prostitutes were figures to be represented, a symptom of both repressed sexuality that must be expressed and a consequence of an urbanized context suggesting a woman’s body was her sole commodity, economically and artistically.

While the full extent of Hennings’s colorful life is unknown, diary entries and letters from contemporary literary figures reveal among her lovers Expressionist artists like Johannes Becher (1891–1958), Georg Heym (1887–1912), Erich Mühsam (1878–1934), Ferdinand Hardekopf (1876–1954), and Jakob van Hoddis (1887–1942). Erich Mühsam, in his 1911 diary entries, described Hennings as “sweet” but “hysterical.” “Each and every man and every situation is fine with her. . . . The poor girl gets way too little sleep. Everyone wants to sleep with her and, since she is very accommodating, she never gets any rest.”<sup>4</sup>

Hemus rightly notes that Hennings consciously or unconsciously used this corporeal identity to her advantage, seeing all of the world as a stage where her sex was “performative . . . a social and cultural construction” (20). She was everywhere and nowhere just as much as she was everybody’s woman. Unlike the femme fatale who ensnares men and leads them into compromising and sometimes deadly situations, Hennings’s allure was triggered by her naivete, her fragility, and her childlike erotic genius (Huelsenbeck 83, 35–36).<sup>5</sup> It was precisely that “erotic genius” and sexual playfulness that placed her among the creative luminaries of the day, yet forever anchored her in the sexual and corporeal, preventing her from taking on the identity of writer, a ghost that continues to haunt her. To this day, Hennings remains in the shadow of men, a position that bothered her greatly toward the end of her life: “Nobody wants a literary work by me—only I wish that for me. They only want me as a person” (qtd. in Reetz 319).<sup>6</sup>

While siding with her corporeal nature, Hennings the writer was filled with self-doubt, possibly spurred by contemporary notions that the female intellect is unwomanly (*Mannweib*) or even threatening. Then again, it might be precisely Hennings’s “promiscuity” that made her later want to erase the

earlier portion of her life and instead be known as Ball's devoted wife. Hennings herself alludes to this wishful erasure of her past with the burning of early-life notes and the claim that "I wanted to forget, to bury all that had been" (Hennings, *Betrunken* 78).<sup>7</sup> After Ball's death in 1927, Hennings dedicated her life to recording and archiving Ball's achievements, allowing her own literary contributions and creation to fade. The critic Sabine Werner-Birkenbach ascribes Hennings's hesitation to claim ownership of her confused identity wherein "different facets of her personality" were "forever contradicting one another so that it is virtually impossible to reconcile them into one coherent image" or person (192). Werner-Birkenbach then lists the many names by which Hennings is known: Emmy Hennings, Emmy Ball, or Emmy Ball-Hennings. She is Editha von Münchhausen and Maria Lund. She is also Charmette and Jessie, Helga, or Finny (171). Hennings even celebrated her changing identity in several of her works: "I always played what I desired. Played my ideal . . . played it long enough, and everything became true to me" (*Gefängnis* 25).<sup>8</sup>

Hennings engages the Expressionist idea of performative writing as a reflecting medium, a portrayal of the self from various angles, thereby grounding a literary self-staging of the frustrated energies of an artist in a patriarchal urban setting. Since the reader is not always confronted with the authentic, albeit having been given an autobiographic nucleus and an "I" reference, it is important to distinguish between Hennings the author and the protagonist by the same name.<sup>9</sup> Hennings's "body" of work serves as a point of interrogation of identity, oscillating between physical body and discourse, between the patriarchal demand to name and the free-floating signifiers of an interior Expressionist oeuvre. To this end, Hennings's *Gefängnis* will serve as the focus of my study.

In this text, a young cabaret performer, nervously waiting for her summons for a small offense, is taken into pretrial detention on the grounds of being a "flight risk,"<sup>10</sup> and is finally sentenced to four weeks of incarceration (*Gefängnis* 25). Grippingly and fervently, *Gefängnis* describes the anxieties and sensations contained within tiny cell walls.

Hennings's response to and reconstruction of her own arrests and incarcerations—three in all—center around the problems of identity created by a patriarchal legal system: accusation of prostitution, taking on a female friend's name who had gotten in trouble with the law, and forging papers for Franz Jung so he could avoid being drafted for the war. The problems of representing identity in this discursive context, though, are exacerbated by the effects of technology, further alienating her attempt to assert being. The technology—specifically the automobile—offers the young woman a sense of

escape at first, a liberation from her entrapped self, providing her with such joyous experience that it allows her to take in the surrounding landscape more deeply: “Ah, is that wonderful to ride in a car! And the first green of the trees! How friendly everything looks! Clear and bright. . . . So bright . . . ! That must seduce everyone. How would it be possible not to love in such weather! And to love so passionately that it would last past the rainy season” (*Gefängnis* 14).<sup>11</sup> During her ride to the police station, the surroundings become radiant, and her inner monologue is filled with dual meaning. The German expression *sich zu lieben* conflates the sudden self-love and self-respect the meek protagonist feels via the speed of the ride with the very clear sexual connotation, particularly in connection with the words “verführen” (seduce) and “brennend zu lieben” (to love with deep passion).

All mental and physical bonds are at once released. Dorit Müller notes the mental and sensual intoxication that early Expressionist literature ascribes to the automobile ride, echoing the Futurists’ elimination of moral barriers and the triggering of the automobile’s erotic character and the intimate separation from voyeuristic gazes of pedestrians (Müller 86). For the Futurists, the auto generates a proxy kind of life, where the threat of vehicular death is reason enough to celebrate, and pedestrians and cyclists alike are “inane,” “contradictory,” and in “terror” (27). Thus, the young woman exults in this culture of acceleration, the momentary effacement of a fractured personality, and the freedom erupting from the mechanical abandonment of one’s fate. The auto relaxes her tensions, making room for a heightened sensation and feeling of joy that accompanies the protagonist even after the car has come to a complete stop, a feeling that is further elevated by the fact that she has the financial means to pay the chauffeur with a gold coin—“Money talks,”<sup>12</sup> as she says (*Gefängnis* 14)—that she herself has earned. In fact, the young woman feels so empowered and overjoyed that her destination, the police station, appears to her as the most charming and clean building imaginable; ironically, she even fantasizes how wonderful it might be to “rent a room here” and to get away from her own “filthy” living quarters (*Gefängnis* 15).<sup>13</sup>

These ruminations abruptly come to an end, however, when she realizes that the police building, embodying patriarchal hierarchy, is ready to entrap her once more as a “flight risk”; thus, technology’s liberatory possibility, reflected in the perception of the automobile, turns from empowering to destructive when wielded by hegemonic forces. As Müller notes, the car has a dual function in Expressionist literature: while, on the one hand, automobile rides are seen as stimulating and life-enhancing, they also have the ability to negatively affect the psyche, thereby furthering depression and heightening fear (113).

The sarcastic words of the warder, "Now you will be taken for a ride,"<sup>14</sup> render the automobile a threatening technical force (*Gefängnis* 27). Under the technopatriarchal voice and gaze, the humanity of the young woman disappears, and her behavior suggests an animal resigned to the slaughterhouse. Moreover, her passivity ("I remain standing where I am placed; go with the others when I hear 'Move!' and let myself be pushed through the door" [32])<sup>15</sup> further highlights her feelings of helplessness and impotence, as she is squeezed into a car, akin to a "monstrous cholera transport" for the removal of the ill and dead (32).<sup>16</sup>

Human suffering in Expressionist literature, according to scholar Thomas Anz, is depicted in its "brutal-aggressive ugliness" by means of the figures of the ill, which "degraded and deformed . . . are despised, abused, captured or hunted like animals by society" (Anz 46).<sup>17</sup> Hennings refers to the hunted with their "chivvied eyes" (28)<sup>18</sup> and muses: "Animals are locked up. But human beings?" (22).<sup>19</sup> Just like cattle, the inmates are squeezed into the van, while the cattle drivers, the policemen, are comfortably seated and separated by a polished wooden board. With the car now aggressive and overpowering, all of the young woman's previous happiness gives way to growing insecurity and fear: "Rattling, the car exits the courtyard. We are shaken up. We drive at a fast speed through the main streets" (33).<sup>20</sup> "The car is shaking. The saber of the policeman touches my knee" (34).<sup>21</sup> In place of the erotic fantasies triggered by the earlier ride, the warm hands of the seducer become the aggressive, cold metal of the guillotine that gradually give way to suicidal thoughts, culminating in the feeling that "something inside of me is being executed" (*Gefängnis* 99).<sup>22</sup>

Angst becomes the permanent condition of the suffering and alienated individual, and hence the mental state of the protagonist grows increasingly vulnerable: "What does this insane car ride mean? There must be a sense, a reason. How absurd I find everything and, therefore, uncanny" (35).<sup>23</sup> The protagonist's fear and confusion increase with the speed and duration of the ride: the "uniform" of the official becomes part of an "uncanny masquerade" (35),<sup>24</sup> and the protagonist's world becomes threatening and unreal:

My hands are alien to me. . . . Where is my Scottish childhood dress, my short dress? The days are caving. I close my eyes, and, gradually, everything that I have ever seen slips from my memory. What scared me dwindles down. Dwindles down further. (35)<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, the protagonist wishes to return to ingenuousness, a freedom from social norms, and a unity with self and nature separated from the threatening cosmopolitan life. As Anz notes, a central theme of Expressionism is the

deformation or “alienation of the reflecting human being from his surrounding”<sup>26</sup> and the desire to return to the familiar state of childhood (40). The transport, in which many people are locked up within a tight space, prevents individualization, which is precisely what the protagonist is yearning for (Anz 53).

For all of this control and dehumanization, however, Hennings recognizes a fundamental paradox: while the modern society exists by isolating and thereby creating identities through surveillance and discursive modalities, it conceives of the young woman only as body, as an object of discourse. Where, as philosopher Michel Foucault notes in *Discipline and Punish*, institutions of power used the body as a locus of sovereignty and control, thereby granting the body an inherent and essential identity, incarceration and surveillance locate such identity within sanctioned institutions.

While the young woman experiences an intimate separation from the gazes of the pedestrians and even from that of her chauffeur (who is being paid to keep his eyes focused on the road) during the earlier automobile ride, she fears being on display in the prison car: “Acquaintances could see me from the street; for the car door is a big barred window through which people can see in” (33).<sup>27</sup> This oppression, this feeling of being on display, is also re-emphasized upon the transport’s arrival to the panopticon of the prison cell, where the examining gaze objectifies the young woman further. Her own gaze, on the other hand, leads to nothingness since the peephole in her cell door reflects only blackness.

Foucault considers the gaze, always constructed in the patriarchal name, a reversal of the dungeon. The dungeon’s utter darkness allowed the imprisoned to hide, whereas the panoptic mechanism with spying eye leads to constant entrapment. “Visibility” itself, as Foucault argues, “is a trap” because the young woman never knows when she is being watched and for how long (Foucault 200).

I gaze at this black peephole. It is completely black, heartless in its completeness. I won’t succeed in reviving the dead matter; to conjure a world from nothingness. . . . Consciousness, don’t leave me! I am afraid. I am afraid to go raving mad. An eye must have watched me from outside. The warder’s eye. A black traitor eye is watching me. Phony you are. (*Gefängnis* 37)<sup>28</sup>

It is the same “traitor eye” that had promised the young woman earlier that she would not be arrested. During his unannounced home visit, the official gazes down on the vulnerable protagonist, who is still in bed, as his elevated gaze rests on her and on her personal belongings and photographs.

Soon the young woman's perfect isolation and separation from any communication with fellow inmates provide the individualized "state of conscious and permanent visibility," the precondition for "the automatic functioning of power," male power (Foucault 201). The strength of the machinery is the ability to constantly intervene, thereby keeping inmates and society on guard. As Foucault states, power "is exercised spontaneously" and at all times (206). Surveillance happens not only within the prison walls via the peephole in the prison cell door but also from outside its walls. When an inmate dares to glance outside through the iron-barred window, her offense is immediately discovered: "'Head down!' screams a commanding voice from below. We don't immediately know for whom this is intended. 'Head down up there!' once again, threateningly" (75).<sup>29</sup> Women have no right to actively watch, but are objectified: prostitutes are objects of art, but not sources of their own voices.

Although there are female warders, their limited power is yet another subjugation of the patriarchal system. The "machinery" perfects the power hierarchy in that it can be controlled by anyone who wishes to exercise it. The women who feel empowered by the little bit of power given to them are just as powerless in the grander scheme of the system, which Hennings points out upon the young woman's release from pretrial detention, where the once-intimidating warder turns into a simple "wardrobe assistant" (80).<sup>30</sup> Removed from her position of ascribed power, the female warder remains essentially only a woman and, thus, entrapped by her sex. Hennings also discusses woman's use and abuse of power within an economic context:

A woman cannot be mistaken regarding the essence of her profession. She takes it upon herself to lock us up and to order us around. Why is she doing it? Only to be provided for? For the sake of bread or for the dear soul? . . . "I think she is doing it for money." "Yes, money makes us mean spirited. Oh, that one needs it." (113)<sup>31</sup>

At the end of the day, the female warder is doing her job for economic reasons, just as the prostitute does hers. However, the prostitute is by far more powerful and dangerous within the juridical system, as Foucault points out:

In order to be exercised, this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible . . . mobile attentions ever on the alert . . . the forty-eight commissaires, the twenty inspecteurs, then the "observers," who were paid regularly, the "basses mouches," or secret agents, who were paid by the



day, then the informers, paid according to the job done, and finally the prostitutes. (214)

While the courts might be in the hand of men who assert their power by oppressing and punishing the weaker sex, prostitutes have—over men—a dangerous advantage. They roam the streets filled with men seeking outlets for their oppressed drives and secrets, and they listen to men's unfulfilled desires. It is precisely this ability to listen, as the young woman understands, that makes the prostitute so dangerous:

I wish the raped men could once see the despicably smiling faces of their seducers who, quietly chitchatting in the hallways of the penitentiary, give away the secrets of their plaintiffs. In the courtyard of the pretrial detention center I saw the smiling superiority on the faces of the women and girls who walk the streets; of the girls who are victorious and graceful enough to declare themselves defeated. This kind of politeness appears to be dangerous since they are locked up inside walls several feet thick. (100)<sup>32</sup>

Referred, ironically, to as “raped,” these men, treated as victims by the law, are actually perpetrators seeking outlets for their drives. Lust, a compulsion that society considers taboo outside the safe walls of the marital bedroom, with the intention to produce offspring to keep the male line intact, is perceived as alien, shameful, and threatening but only after the act, when the sated men question the moral decency of women: “Strange that some good number of men tell me that I will perish. They always say that afterward. They could say it beforehand for once. If they think I'm lost, why are they contributing to it?” (Gass 53).<sup>33</sup>

“Raped” as men feel, they lash out by means of physical punishment, or they indict the carrier of their shameful secrets, “the most vulnerable being, a streetwalker” (*Gefängnis* 99).<sup>34</sup> The sex clients, on the other hand, are protected by the judicial system:

One would have to punish the seducer and the seduced, the opportunity and the thief. If I were to concern myself with such futile things as punishing sinners and prescribing penance, I would be more thorough with the composition of laws. . . . If getting paid for sex is prohibited, then buying sex must be prohibited. But experience teaches that the human being cannot live without sex. (100)<sup>35</sup>

Male lawmakers side with the powerful gender and silence the weak one, extinguishing woman's voice. Indeed, throughout *Gefängnis*, the sexes' constant talking past one another distinguishes their mode of communication. The young woman's first attempt to write a letter to communicate her plans about fulfilling a contractual obligation in Paris leads to her arrest as a flight risk and to the snarky comments of the officers: "How can one be so dumb as to write such a letter! Well done!" (*Gefängnis* 17).<sup>36</sup> Her continuous struggles to be listened to ("You are doing me injustice . . . I came here on my own free will" [17])<sup>37</sup> are unsuccessful, as neither her words nor her explanations are heard. Even her plea "Listen!" is met with no reaction, "as if he were deaf" (17, 18).<sup>38</sup> The protagonist's growing impotence and confusion ("I wholeheartedly wish to make myself understood" [17])<sup>39</sup> is heightened by the confiscation of her personal documents, leading to an existential question: "Who am I?" (38).<sup>40</sup> As nameless inmate number 88, her words carry no meaning.

Not even attempted dialogue with health and church officials, supposedly trained to provide comfort by engaging and listening, leads to meaningful exchanges. Ultimately, they only increase her alienation and estrangement. The doctor who is visiting female inmate inquires about the young woman's sanity, stultifies her fear of the dark cell and her hallucinations, "as if the devil were pulling [her] skirt" (109),<sup>41</sup> as "a gentleman caller, so to speak," and recommends "boxing her ears" (121).<sup>42</sup> A priest hidden behind a mesh barricade who is giving the Christmas sermon triggers in the protagonist the uncanny feeling that he is not a "living human being, speaking there, but a construction" (107–8).<sup>43</sup> When, on another occasion, a fellow inmate proclaims her innocence, the priest comforts her with the fact that "our Lord" also suffered innocently and that she should be inspired by his example. The protagonist, however, sees a flaw in this logic: the Lord suffered to redeem humankind, whereas women seek only her own penance, kneeling in church with "broken posture" (44).<sup>44</sup> Essentially, the priest turns out to be just another cog in the system and the church nothing but another patriarchal construction, furthering Hennings's suspicion that "this tabernacle" is "like a prison," (111).<sup>45</sup> "Even God is a prison, which I must enter, for where should I go otherwise? There is no escape" (*Brandmal* 318).<sup>46</sup>

Gradually, the protagonist's "disgust" (*Gefängnis* 19)<sup>47</sup> over engaging with male officials leaves her silent and fearful, a fear so severe that she experiences it as murderous: "Daggers jump from my eyes. My blood sizzles from rage. If only I could knock down the house! Omnipotence my way! I have nothing that could cut . . . no nail scissors, no Lysol, no vitriol" (18).<sup>48</sup> These overpowering fantasies surface also in her prison cell when the young

woman wonders whether she could kill men just for fun: “Could I not get to the point of killing human beings out of sheer boredom and with some talent? *Lustmord* as entertainment? Unpredictable I am to all sides, do I become” (37).<sup>49</sup>

The young woman’s thoughts of *Lustmord*, triggered by her feeling of male betrayal and by the patriarchal system at large, appropriates the Expressionist *Lustmord*, the lashing out against a world that has been uprooted through the Great War. The women’s liberation movement and the accompanying sexual freedom heighten feelings of demasculinization in war-shaken men to such an extent that all mental trauma and blame for the misery endured are projected onto women as instigators of misery and of men’s despised sexual drives. In a world that no longer makes sense, artists like Otto Dix (1891–1969) and George Grosz (1893–1959) kill women and prostitutes on canvas to elide the possibility of real-life murder. *Lustmord* focuses on two areas of the female body: the vocal cords and the female sexual parts. By cutting the vocal cords, man is silencing woman once and for all. The mutilation of the female sex parts (not the womb, however, the site of successful male-induced reproduction) liberates men from his despised sexual drives outside the marital bedroom. Even the seemingly more sympathetic artists see women as symbols whose characteristics could be appropriated by the male. However, Hennings takes a female twist on *Lust* and clearly positions herself in her prose piece *Das Brandmal* (1920), which is filled with inner monologues and thoughts of a young Cologne street walker, Dagny, whose hopes of finding personal fulfillment are crushed by personal hardship and typhus:

I repudiate and say: I did not invent Lust. Such an original and, at the same time, perfidious inventor cannot have been female. Woman is not an inventor. . . . Lust, which I do not share, is painful suffering. Strictly speaking: because I despise Lust, so all to myself quietly despise it. (117)<sup>50</sup>

Hennings acquits woman of the charge of triggering sexual drives among otherwise “innocent” men. Recognizing that *Lust(mord)* functions to create Woman, a patriarchal nexus of representation, reproduction, and dismemberment, Hennings explores the possibility of women’s ability to reproduce themselves, via art that violates the aesthetic traditions that have so long supported patriarchal ideals.

Language, the most accessible aspect of this resubjectification, is imposed upon her, as the young woman hints during the police car ride when one of the

passengers mentions that he should not be arrested since his name is Adam, “the first human being” (34),<sup>51</sup> to whom language was initially given. Hennings’s response is twofold.

First, since woman does not possess language, she does not get to explain herself but has to accept the male verdict as truth: “I myself did not clearly grasp that I wanted to escape. But finally . . . when people approach you and tell you again and again that you are a flight risk, then one must believe it . . . the gentlemen from court must be interpreters of dreams” (49).<sup>52</sup> Other female inmates are intimidated or tricked into confessing: “Had an attack and in that attack I supposedly confessed. Later I could not even remember my confession. Also said as much, but nobody believes me” (109).<sup>53</sup> Even her speech is co-opted.

Second, since woman only exists in relation to man, she can never become human in coexistence with men. In *Gefängnis*, women are not associated with the word *Menschen* (human beings). The young woman, in fact, refers to herself as “nothing special, I am nothing, a human being, no, it is not true. I must be something else” (12),<sup>54</sup> while she acknowledges an inmate as “something Female” (21).<sup>55</sup> Even outside the prison cell, woman is seen as incomplete in her being. As such, the wife of the prison administrator is only “Frau Verwalter” (or “Mrs. Administrator”) (73), which demotes woman further by glorifying man’s social standing and underlining his human completeness. The young woman wishes to “avoid human beings” (101)<sup>56</sup> since “prison is the result of togetherness” and woman is their “victim” (71). Yet, among all the inhumanness and suffering, it is woman who brings us closer to humanity through silence.

Walter Benjamin, in his early essay the “Metaphysics of Youth” (1913), offers further insights into language and silence among women by asking, “How did Sappho and her women friends talk among themselves?” In a characteristic mix of misogyny and materialism, Benjamin argues that language between women does not carry their “souls aloft” since their words lead to “idle chatter,” resisting the continual objectification of women via spiritualization (9). Instead, the strength of women is their ability to listen:

They bring their bodies close and caress one another. Their conversation has freed itself from the subject and from language. . . . For only among them, and when they are together, does the conversation come to rest as part of the past. Now, finally, it has come to itself: it has turned to greatness beneath their gaze. . . . Silent women are the speakers of what has been spoken. (“Metaphysics” 10)

While it appears at first as if Benjamin reduces women to passive recipients of language, he actually elevates them as listeners, locating communication within the body and away from patriarchal speech, an assertion echoed by the protagonist of *Gefängnis*: “We want to communicate. . . . Give me your hand. We do not understand one another with our head . . . with that we don’t even need to start. . . . I hold her hand, and in that I believe. Nothing lets itself be thought. I have lost my head” (25).<sup>57</sup>

Hence, only with woman can woman become human: “We are sitting next to one another, very closely together. She is looking at me. Oh, the poor eyes tearing up and smiling. . . . She is smiling. ‘Now it is good. Right?’ ‘I don’t know . . . don’t know whether it is good. . . . You are good. . . . You are good above all else’” (24).<sup>58</sup>

In the face of such discursive deconstruction of identity, Hennings asserts a fragmented response, adopting a nightmarish persona of the prostitute, the object of *Lustmord* with a voice. While it may have been more tempting to claim full personhood for herself, a mode of feminism that claims a fullness of experience within the same legal context as the patriarchal hegemony, or even to locate an identity within a bodily reality, effectively removed from patriarchal construction (though not definition), Hennings elides both, recognizing the illusion of totality that traditional patriarchy announces. Depersonalization, from technology to the panopticon, calls the whole idea of personhood into question. The response is fragmentary ellipses. Benjamin’s suggestion in the *Arcades Project* that “in prostitution, one finds expressed the revolutionary side of technology” aligns the prostitute with the gambler, most significantly in terms of the denial of the fullness of experience that characterizes the modern metropolis (493). The weight of history, of culture, and of tradition is replaced by the constant pressure of the immediate future. Hennings’s own experiences as woman, entertainer, prostitute, and criminal, which allowed her to focus powerfully and uniquely on marginalized figures, are negated by a series of discursive assertions of power. Where other Expressionist writers struggled against “the forces of oppressive and insensitive authority” as represented by the Father (Sheppard 277), from the priest, to the warders, to the law itself, Hennings’s protagonist is explicitly oppressed by the same Oedipal dynamic that other Expressionist writers rendered figuratively.

However, patriarchal control is exacerbated via technology’s alienating power, as the protagonist’s reaction to the auto indicates, reflecting Expressionism’s concern with the urbanized, industrialized context. What should have been an ominous event of being taken to the police station is replaced by an artificial euphoria that blocks a natural wariness. The potentially redemptive

sense of physical connection and communion in silence occur only within what could be termed a *negative identity*, a dismantling of citizenship and feminine sexuality that makes meaningful communication all but impossible. Instead, fragments of communication and the connection between body parts reflect a nightmarish lack of wholeness that underlines Hennings's Expressionist aesthetic. *Lustmord*, a weapon to be wielded as well as to be subjected to, threatens to reduce her to a series of bodily parts even as her attempts at connection with her fellow prisoners can be effected through the touch of hands—but nothing beyond that. Subsequently, her taking on and casting off identities becomes as much the act of a theatrical persona as that of an artist aware of the impossibility of claiming a coherent self, which made her a primary candidate for the avant-garde, the unique Dadaist, she was to become.

## NOTES

1. "An der deutschen Dichtung des letzten Menschenalters haben einige Frauen hervorragenden Anteil, und unter ihnen gehört Emmy Hennings zu den eigenartigsten und unvergesslichsten Erscheinungen." All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

2. "Die verschiedenen Kunstrichtungen kamen mir stets wie eine Krankheit vor, wie eine Art Sünde gegen den klaren Geist."

3. "Emmy, von deren Erfolg oder Misserfolg als Sängerin die Existenz des Kabarets abhing."

4. Erich Mühsam, diary entry, 28 August 1910: "süß" und "hysterisch." "Sie will immer und jeden Mann und jede Situation ist ihr recht. . . . Das arme Mädchen kriegt viel zu wenig Schlaf. Jeder will mit ihr schlafen und da sie sehr gefällig ist, kommt sie nie zur Ruhe." Quoted in Foster, Pinchon and Riha 72.

5. Huelsenbeck also refers to Hennings's appeal to men as a child: "Hugo suchte aber bei Emmy keine hausfräuliche Sorge, sondern die Unschuld, die Kindlichkeit, das Unbewusste, die Fee und das Übersinnliche; Sie war seine Geliebte, seine Mutter, sein Engel und sein oberster Priester. . . . Sie war nicht nur ein Kind, sie verstand es auch, Kind zu spielen."

6. "Von mir will man kein Werk—nur ich wünsche es von mir, aber die Menschen wollen nur meine Person."

7. "Vergessen, begraben sein lassen wollte ich, was gewesen ist."

8. "Ich spielte immer, was ich ersehnte. Spielte mir mein Ideal. . . . spielte so lange, und alles wurde mir Wahrheit."

9. In order to avoid an all too simple autobiographic identification, I am using the phrase "young woman" and "protagonist" when referring to the figure of the "I," and "Hennings" when referring to the author.

10. "Wegen Fluchtverdachts."

11. "Ach ist das schön, Auto zu fahren! Und das erste Grün der Bäume! Wie freundlich sieht alles aus! Klar und hell. . . . So hell . . . ! Das muss jeden Menschen verfüh-

ren. Wie wäre es möglich, sich nicht zu lieben bei solchem Wetter! Und so brennend zu lieben, daß es bis über die Regenzeit anhält.”

12. “Gold bringt Glück.”
13. “Hier sich ein Zimmer mieten” and “schmuggelig.”
14. “Jetzt werden Sie spazierengefahren.”
15. “Ich bleibe stehen, wo ich hingestellt werde; gehe mit den andern, als es ‘Los!’ heißt und lasse mich durch die Tür schieben. Wir werden in den Hof geführt.”
16. “Hausartiger Wagen” and “monströsen Cholerawagen.”
17. “Brutal aggressiver Hässlichkeit” and “degradiert und deformiert werden . . . wie Tiere verachtet, misshandelt, gefangen oder gejagt werden.”
18. “Gehetzten Augen.”
19. “Man sperrt wilde Tiere ein. Aber Menschen?”
20. “Der Wagen fährt ratternd zum Hofe hinaus. Wir werden durcheinander geschüttelt. Wir fahren in schnellem Tempo durch die Hauptstraßen hindurch.”
21. “Der Wagen schaukelt. Der Säbel des Schutzmanns streift mein Knie.”
22. “Etwas in mir wird hingerichtet.”
23. “Was bedeutet diese verrückte Wagenfahrt? Einen Sinn muss sie doch haben, einen Zweck. Wie unsinning finde ich alles, und darum unheimlich!”
24. “Die Uniform, ein unheimlicher Fasching.”
25. “Fremd sind meine Hände mir. . . . Wo ist mein schottisches Kinderkleid, mein kurzes Kleid? Die Tage stürzen ein. Ich schließe die Augen, und allmählich entfällt mir alles, was ich je gesehen. Was mich schreckte sinkt zurück. Immer tiefer zurück.”
26. “Die Entfremdung des reflektierenden Menschen von seiner Umwelt.”
27. “Bekannte könnten mich von der Straße aus sehen; denn die Tür des Wagens ist ein großes, vergittertes Fenster, durch das man hindurchsehen kann.”
28. “Ich sehe auf dieses schwarze Guckloch. Es ist vollkommen schwarz, herzlos in seiner Vollkommenheit. Es wird mir nicht gelingen, das Tote zu beleben; aus dem Nichts eine Welt zu zaubern. . . . Besinnung verlaß mich nicht! Ich fürchte mich. Ich fürchte, ich verfallende in die natürliche Tobsucht. Ein Auge sah mich wohl von draußen. Des Wärters Auge. Schwarzes Verräterauge sieht auf mich. Falsch bist du.”
29. “‘Kopf weg!’ schreit eine Kommandostimme von unten. Wir wissen nicht gleich, wem es gilt. ‘Kopf weg dort oben!’ noch einmal, drohend.”
30. “Garderobenfräulein.”
31. “Ueber das Wesen ihres Berufs kann die Frau nicht im Irrtum sein. Sie übernimmt es, uns einzusperren und zu kommandieren. Warum tut sie es? . . . Ums liebe Brot, oder für die liebe Seele? . . . ‘Ich glaube, sie tut es ums Geld.’ ‘Ja, das Geld macht uns gemein. Ach, dass man es braucht.’”
32. “Ich wünschte, die vergewaltigten Männer könnten einmal die verächtlich lächelnden Gesichter ihrer Verführerinnen sehen, die auf dem Korridor der Strafanstalt leise plaudernd die Geheimnisse ihrer Kläger preisgeben. Im Hofe des Untersuchungsgefängnisses sah ich die lächelnde Überlegenheit auf den Gesichtern der Frauen und Mädchen, die die Straße machen; der Mädchen, die siegen und graziös genug sind, sich für besiegt zu erklären. Diese Höflichkeit scheint gefährlich zu sein, denn man sperrt sie in fußdicke Mauern.”
33. “Seltsam, daß so manche Männer mir sagen, ich werde zugrunde gehen. Das

sagen sie immer nachher. Sie könnten es ja auch einmal vorher sagen. Wenn sie der Ansicht sind, daß ich verloren bin, warum tragen sie denn dazu bei?"

34. "Das schutzloseste Geschöpf, ein Straßenmädchen."

35. "Man müsste Verführer und Verführte bestrafen: die Gelegenheit und den Dieb. Würde ich mich befassen mit solch zwecklosen Dingen als da sind: Sünder bestrafen und Buße verschreiben, ich waere gründlicher gewesen bei Abfassung der Gesetze. . . . Wenn es verboten ist, sich Liebesstunden bezahlen zu lassen, muss es verboten werden, Liebesstunden zu kaufen. Aber die Erfahrung lehrt, daß der Mensch ohne Liebesstunden nicht leben kann."

36. "Na, wie kann man auch so dumm sein, einen solchen Brief zu schreiben! Das haben Sie gut gemacht!"

37. "Sie tun mir Unrecht!"

38. "Hören Sie!" and "als wäre er taubstumm."

39. "Ich wünschte sehnlichst, mich verständlich zu machen."

40. ". . . wer ich bin."

41. "Als ziehe mich der Teufel am Rock"

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42. "Gewissermassen Herrenbesuch" and "Ohrfeigen."
43. "Kein lebendiger Mensch, der da spricht, sondern eine Konstruktion."
44. "Geknickter Haltung"
45. ". . . dieser Hostienschrein wie ein Gefängnis."
46. "Auch Gott ist ein Gefängnis, in das ich eingehen muss, denn wo sollte ich sonst hin? Es gibt keine Ausflucht."
47. "Dann ekelt es mich, daß ich mit dem Menschen einlasse."
48. "Dolche springen mir aus den Augen. Mein Blut zischt vor Wut. . . . Könnte ich doch das Haus umwerfen! Allmacht her! Ich habe nichts, was schneiden koennte . . . keine Nagelschere, kein Lysol, kein Vitriol."
49. "Könnte ich nicht dahin gelangen, bei einiger Begabung Menschen zu töten aus langer Weile? Lustmord als Unterhaltung? Denn unberechenbarnach allen Seiten bin ich, werde ich dann."
50. "Ich verwahre mich dagegen und sage: Ich habe die Lust nicht erfunden. Ein so origineller und zugleich perfider Erfinder kann nicht weiblich gewesen sein. Die Frau ist keine Erfindernatur. . . . Lust, die ich nicht teile, ist schmerzhaftes Leid. Streng genommen: weil ich die Lust verachte, so ganz für mich im stillen verachte."
51. "Heiß' doch Adam, bin der erste Mensch."
52. "Mir selbst ist es gar nicht klar geworden, daß ich fliehen wollte. Aber schließlich. . . . Wenn immer wieder Leute daherkommen und Ihnen sagen: 'Sie sind fluchtverdächtig', dann muß man es doch wohl glauben . . . Traumdeuter müßten die Herren vom Gericht sein."
53. "Hab' einen Anfall gehabt und in dem Anfall soll ich gestanden haben. Ich konnte mich später gar nicht an das Geständnis erinnern. Hab's auch gesagt, aber das glaubt mir niemand."
54. "Ich bin nichts Besonderes, bin gar nichts, ein Mensch, nein, es ist nicht wahr. Ich muss etwas anderes sein."
55. "Etwas Weibliches."
56. "Es wäre wohl gut die Menschen zu meiden; denn dann kann mir ja nichts geschehen" and "Wäre ich doch allein geblieben! Das Gefängnis kommt von der Gemeinsamkeit."

57. "Wir wollen uns verständigen. . . . Geben Sie mir Ihre Hand. Wir verstehen uns nicht mit dem Kopf . . . damit brauchen wir nicht erst zu beginnen. . . . Ich halte Ihre Hand und daran glaube ich. Nichts läßt sich denken. Ich habe meinen Kopf verloren."

58. "Wir sitzen nebeneinander, ganz dicht beisammen. Sie sieht mich an. Ach, die armen Augen tränen und lächeln. . . . Sie lächelt. 'Jetzt ist es ja gut. Nicht?' 'Ich weiß nicht . . . weiß nicht, ob es gut ist. . . . Sie sind gut. . . . Sie sind über alles gut.'"

## CHAPTER 11

### Writing the Inner Strife

#### *Emmy Hennings's Das Brandmal: Ein Tagebuch (1920)*

Mirjam Berg

The poet, writer, actress, puppet maker, and singer Emmy Hennings (1885–1948) is best known as a founding member of the birthplace of Dada, the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, which opened in February 1916. But in the summer of 1917 she left that avant-garde behind, together with her partner, the writer and philosopher Hugo Ball (1886–1927). They moved to the Swiss canton of Tessin to lead a life devoted to Catholicism. Hennings's literary work seems to be unaffected by the literary innovations of Dada and follows, in style as well as in content, early Expressionism. Before moving to Switzerland in 1915, she was involved with the literary movement of Expressionism. She participated as a performer on the stages at the center of the movement, the Café des Westens in Berlin and the bohemian cabaret *Simplicissimus* in Munich and also began to write poetry.<sup>1</sup> In her early literary productions, Hennings combines traditional themes of Expressionism with the particular situation of women, who live a life beyond the traditional social roles.<sup>2</sup> Thus, her work offers a female perspective on the male-dominated circle of the Expressionist movement, which is, as the literary scholar Barbara D. Wright points out, characterized by an “aggressively masculinist stance” (289).

In this essay, I turn toward Hennings's second prose text, *Das Brandmal: Ein Tagebuch* (The stigma: A diary), published in 1920. Even though Hennings had left the circles of the avant-garde by this time, the traces of her participation in these circles are strikingly present in the content as well as the style of this text. Therefore, I propose a reading of *Das Brandmal* as a retrospective reaction toward the Expressionist movement. I argue that she takes up the trope of the dualistic inner strife, which presents the discrepancy between the inner world and the outer world, a central feeling for the Expressionist movement.

For Hennings, the inner strife is manifested in the tension between a life devoted to Catholicism and a bohemian lifestyle that seeks artistic as well as sexual freedom. As I will show, she turns this inner strife into a fundamental concept in her writing, in which she intertwines such seemingly remote subjects as religion and the new technology of photography. Furthermore, a peculiar female self-conception emerges in this text that offers a different point of view on the most popular female figure in Expressionistic work, the prostitute. Hennings provides an account of a female experience of modernity as well as a female rebellion against bourgeois society, in particular its double standards, by deploying the literary form of religious confession. But how does the juxtaposition of these aspects enable the emergence of a specifically female view of the experience of modernity? What kind of intervention in Expressionism does Hennings offer in this text? These questions guide my engagement with this text. After a brief summary of *Das Brandmal* and a short literature review of how Hennings has found her place within Dada and Expressionism, I introduce my methodological and theoretical approaches, which I will develop in a close reading of the text.

*Das Brandmal* is divided into three parts: it begins with the arrival of the narrator-protagonist Dagny in Cologne after the splitting up of the theater group she was involved with in Münster. In her notes, she recounts her experience of being homeless and working as a hostess in a wine bar and as a peddler selling room fragrances. In the second part of her diary, Dagny turns to sex work, which she declares an honest vocation, and she moves into a “boardinghouse” for women. She contemplates the situations of her colleagues and presents various portraits of women who try to leave sex work but also adapt to the demands of this job. At the same time a moral conflict develops in Dagny: her experience of self-estrangement leads to her feeling of guilt before God. In the final part of *Das Brandmal*, she leaves Cologne, continues her life as a vagabond performance artist, and has jobs in Münster, Gießen, Marburg, Frankfurt, Hannover, and finally Budapest. While she is on the road, her inner strife increases and she confesses how much she feels detached from God. At the end, she wrestles with the death threatened by a serious disease. She finally returns, exhausted and still sick, to her mother’s house in northern Germany to recover.

As the literary scholar Walter H. Sokel claims, the narrative of Expressionist prose “depicts a worldview and seeks to demonstrate a truth that the author wants to propagate” (76). Telling the truth seems to be also at the center of Hennings’s literary project, as she claims in her autobiography *Das Flüchtige Spiel* (The fugitive game, 1940): “Many years ago I already planned to make a

written confession of my life. I took a lot of notes which I each time rejected. Why? What I produced seemed quite entertaining to me in part, but was not sufficiently sincere enough, not honest enough” (qtd. in van den Berg 84). Therefore, I will examine how she crafted a distinctive style within the realm of Expressionist prose by combining the narrative mode of religious confession with the modern aesthetics of photography in order to scrutinize how these narrative strategies enable the writer to get closer to her own demand that her writing be “sincere” and “honest.”

The categorization of the text at hand has troubled scholars. Christiane Schönfeld suggests in her essay “Confessional Narrative / Fragmented Identity” that it seems to be appropriate to leave *Das Brandmal* in a state of limbo (171). But this closes off the opportunity to read this text within the context of other contemporary works. I suggest that the category of the diary novel (as a subgenre of the first-person novel) makes it possible to work productively with the ambiguity of the text. The diary novel promises a narration devoted to the confession of the truth of shared and private life events and even triggers a voyeuristic pleasure. Furthermore, it is awkwardly caught between the real and the literary world, as the literary scholar Trevor Field argues (22). With respect to its structure, the comparatist Lorna Martens characterizes the diary novel as “flexible, open, and nonteleological” (182). The diary novel suits Hennings’s love for role-plays and her vocation as performer: in *Das Brandmal*, she takes up the Catholic demand of confession and performs it in the publication of a diary.<sup>3</sup> But instead of presenting her confession and memories chronologically to a confessor, Hennings engages with a narrator who is conscious about the practices of remembering, perceiving, confessing, and writing. As with most of her works—either poetry or prose—*Das Brandmal* has a strong autobiographical undercurrent and obvious resonances with her own life. But in contrast to a mere recording of her past life, the narrator’s active reflections of the past events offer historical and sociopolitical insights.

Hennings’s contribution to the foundation of Dada in Zurich as well as her involvement with the Expressionist movement as a performer on the stages of the bohemian cafés in Munich and Berlin has been widely acknowledged, also within the English-speaking scholarship. The art historian Thomas F. Rugh examines Hennings’s central role as a performer: she gave voice to the Dadaists’ collective despair and included her own poems as well as dolls and puppets in her performances. Hennings’s performances were described as “dionysiac” (Rugh 2), which stands in contrast to her devotional Catholicism, to which she had already converted in July 1911. Referring to Rugh, the literary scholar and expert on the avant-garde Hubert van den Berg argues for a

consideration of her literary works since they play an essential part in the first public presentation of Zurich Dada. Furthermore, he shows that Hennings was already a member of the inner circle of the Munich *Bohème* thanks to her connections as an important networker among the avant-garde.<sup>4</sup> Van den Berg, however, also acknowledges that it was less Hennings's poetry than her rebellion against the bourgeois-philistine moral attitude that she shared with the Dada movement and which she exhibited, aside from her literary work, in her bohemian lifestyle and her performances (85). The interdisciplinary researcher of the avant-garde Ruth Hemus also examines in her study *Dada's Women* (2009) Hennings's roles as performer and as poet within the avant-garde, but argues that her corporeal identity outweighed her literary creativity (27). In her comment on the significance of the notion of homelessness for both Hennings's life and her work, Hemus points to the issue of placing her into a clearly outlined professional and cultural position (42), an issue that is common in the scholarship. In her recent study *Mamas of Dada* (2015), the comparatist Paula Kamenish composes a biographical portrait of Hennings that presents a life of contradictions, "a battle between the lure of the artist's world of rebellion and the striving for a pious and peaceful, though perhaps less stimulating, existence" (26).

Even though many of these scholars assert that Hennings's artistic works, and in particular her poetry and prose, need more scholarly attention, they also focus on her biography in search of the "real" person.<sup>5</sup> With the publication of the first monograph on Hennings and her contribution to the emergence of Dada, the literary scholar Nicola Behrmann suggests a critical consideration of the common narrative of the avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century by juxtaposing biographical traces with a deconstructive reading of Hennings's prose texts *Das Brandmal*, *Das ewige Lied* (The eternal song, 1923), and unpublished sketches from 1915 to 1917.<sup>6</sup> Following Behrmann's approach, I engage with the text at hand by the practice of a close reading. In addition, I draw on two discourses, religious confession and female *flânerie*, which I would like to introduce to the field of literary Expressionism.

Already at the beginning, the narrative mode of the text resembles a confession: "I want to begin in the name of the Nameless, even though I feel so far from it. . . . It took such a long time, until one day, I finally admitted to myself: I am a person without definition. . . . To illuminate the present, I remember the past. Memory lives on in me for days, months, years; always" (9).<sup>7</sup> The mode of distance is here most striking: the spatial distance from God, the Nameless, triggers Dagny's writing, but it is the temporal distance from herself that enables her self-evaluation. This distance allows the reframing of the experi-

enced events by deploying interventions as well as omissions in order to bring memory into a narrative form. As the scholar of literature, law, and psychoanalysis Peter Brooks claims, “The emergence of the modern sense of selfhood and the individual’s responsibility for her actions, intentions, thoughts and for the acts of speech that lay them bare” is deeply embedded in the concept of religious confession, which the Roman Catholic Church issued as a dogma in 1215 (1–5). The philosopher Michel Foucault coins the term “confessing animal” (59) in his *History of Sexuality*. He defines confession as a speech act, through which the confessant not only comes closer to his or her existence by the allegation of a truth, but also enters a relationship of subjection to the confessor. This power structure situates the individual within the process of forced production of truth. Following Foucault, Brooks suggest that confession, as a form that reveals the inwardness of the person confessing through the articulation of hidden acts and thoughts, allows the person’s punishment, absolution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (2). In contrast to the many so-called novels of prostitution (*Prostitutionsromane*) from the beginning of the twentieth century, *Das Brandmal* neither offers an explanation of the protagonist’s entry into sex work nor seeks a way out. Moreover, Dagny’s fall does not begin with her turn to prostitution, but already with her birth, which she describes as “an angel fallen from God” (9),<sup>8</sup> in which the old Christian understanding of the human as sinner at birth resonates.

When Dagny proclaims that the only thing she feels certain about is her womanhood, she links her gender to a particular narrative perspective:<sup>9</sup> “I am a woman. I suspend control: the question of ‘why’ and ‘where from.’ / I admit only the ‘how.’ / How did it happen?” (9).<sup>10</sup> Hennings refers here to the Expressionist thinking about women that stands in dualistic contrast to the vision of the “New Man.” As Wright points out, the idea is to get to the essence of things, the abstract core elements that reproduced stereotypes of men and women (291). When Dagny declares her womanhood in suspending control, she stands in opposition to the “cultural mission” of the New Man, who has to overcome, as Wright describes it, the physicality and carnality embodied by women, since he is devoted to the force of *Geist* (spirit / intellect) and *Wille* (will) (293). Hennings reduces the male control to the analytic questions “why” and “where from,” which are essential to an interrogation and which she discards. In the protagonist’s devotion to confess only the “how,” Hennings avoids any judgment of the protagonist’s deeds, or rather of the experiences that happened to her, and rejects any psychologizing. Furthermore, she undermines the idea of the nurturing mother when Dagny admits her failure to fulfill her longing: “The urge to comprise everything is a craving, my own longing, nothing more. But

in truth I can no longer understand, hold, grasp. It's as if everything were dissolving" (9).<sup>11</sup> The process of dissolving offers two possible readings: on the one hand it shows the fundamental social and personal disintegration of the narrator; on the other hand it also allows the reading of a dissolution of the static traditions, which enables their replacement by new concepts of community. It is this sentence that marks the fundamental problem of this text, namely the inability to situate the narrative voice.

As the literary scholar of German Expressionism Rhys W. Williams argues, in Expressionism a new mode of perception of the external world was declared in order to arrive at "the essence" and "to heal the sense of alienation that afflicts modern man": the act of seeing frees objects from the web of causal connections in order to constitute them as "objects in their own rights" (91–92). Dagny's comparison of herself to a camera plays with the vision of a new kind of perception of the world and is an attempt to give an honest account of her experience as a woman in the modern world. In this metaphor, Dagny is not just the camera eye, the camera lens, as Nicola Behrmann convincingly argues, but also the light-sensitive film exposed to the experiences and impressions of the surroundings. The camera metaphor is deployed for the first time to recall Dagny's encounter with a customer who leaves the hotel room without paying her:

O, I am agonized, since I am a conscientious Kodak against my own will. Every honest Kodak has to take in the image as it presents itself. I must have been in focus that day. And when an image hits the negative, then it has to show itself. Alas, this sparse mustache, when he laughs . . . and he must have laughed since it is captured on the plate. The freckles are like dark spots, and when he reaches out his hands, they are much bigger than his head and shockingly plump. This is the way it stays with me and never can be erased. (82)<sup>12</sup>

The agency in this encounter is ambiguous due to the strange interweaving of the religious speech act and the self-objectification as technical device that triggers the collapse of narrative time and remembered time: memory enters the present and realizes itself repeatedly.<sup>13</sup> The memory of the customer is presented in an Expressionistic style of fragmented and distorted body parts. The comparison of the freckles to dark spots already hints at the gaps in memory, which contradicts the causal explanation and Dagny's claim that these images stay forever. Her comparison to a Kodak camera is staged as a prayer. She becomes a camera in order to fulfill her vocation to remember, to become



a vessel that holds the surrounding impression and to be able to tell the truth. Nevertheless, a few pages later, she realizes that the comparison of her memory to the functions of a technical device does not generate meaning, but rather presents the recording of traumatic events that are ineffable: “Perhaps I don’t record everything in me. And what I am able to hold is different. Weak and strong, dull and clear. There are things that are ineffable and there are things that one cannot experience, even though one can externally see them” (89).<sup>14</sup> The scholar of philosophy, literature, and religion Eric L. Santner defines trauma “as what escapes both *narrative elaboration* and *reflexive serialization*” and adapts the analogy between trauma and photography: “What produces a trauma might be thought of as what leaves a purely indexical trace, something like a photograph lacking in the iconic dimension that would allow it to enter into a network; . . . in a trauma one’s sense of *what* has happened is always overwhelmed, even wiped out, by the pure ‘facticity’ *that* it happened” (201). In Dagny’s failure to generate meaning in the things she perceives, a resistance emerges against the Expressionist vision to reveal the hidden essence of prostitution. Her failure serves the narrative perspective of the mere “how” and avoids reflecting any reasons for her decision to enter sex work.

Before choosing streetwalking as a vocation, Dagny already walks on the streets and resembles a female flaneur. In her essay “Melancholic Objects,” writer and philosopher Susan Sontag characterizes the flaneur by his joys in watching and calls him a “connoisseur of empathy” who finds the world “picturesque” (55).<sup>15</sup> Dagny also collects different and spontaneous images, but she does not tell us what they depict. In contrast to the gaze of the male flaneur, her gaze is restricted by insecurity and anxiety as well as “by the restrictions erected through the controlling or commodifying presence of another” (171), as the scholar of film and literature Anke Gleber describes it. Gleber outlines a concept of female *fânerie* by turning to the public interior of the movie theater, where women can indulge in “scopic pleasure” and where the desire to “get lost” or “lose herself” can be satisfied (186). As the sociologist and art historian Janet Wolff critically points out, the gaze of the film spectator does not move freely in the movie theater, but watches prearranged images (74). Within this discourse, I suggest a reading of Dagny’s struggle between her urge to fulfill the Christian duty of self-sacrifice and her performance of losing herself.

Dagny’s walking is an expression of being concerned with her environment, but at the same she is “invisible” since women, as Gleber points out, are considered to be absent (72): “I’m walking alone in this city, and nobody is interested in me. That one can walk so alone and can say at the same time:

where something is of concern in the world, wherever something is of concern, is of concern to me. I open my eyes widely and see that a lot is of concern. So many people walk in a city. Yesterday, I probably encountered eighty” (43).<sup>16</sup> Her observations are neither a registration nor an incorporation of the impressions surrounding her. Rather she only perceives the abstract mass that she still tries to grasp in a horrendous number. Furthermore, it is less her body than her thought that is in motion. But even her thoughts do not progress. They are marked by compulsive repetition as if she were afraid to lose what is of concern to her. Thus, she is able neither to organize the world for herself nor to find her place. In contrast to the experiences of the male flâneur, characterized by a freely drifting through the streets as a subversive mode of appropriation of the city, here, the city disappears and is replaced by time as an invisible prison: “Everything I see—the street image, the people, the pavement, the sun—everything becomes background and disappears. I feel only time. I can’t escape” (44).<sup>17</sup> The city, like her memory, presents a place that she is unable to navigate and in which she is stuck. Hence, Dagny’s walk through the city presents a female Way of the Cross (or *via dolorosa*) that integrates the mode of visual perception, which is characteristic of *flânerie*. Her greedy gaze that observes the people surrounding her leads to the paralyzing revelation that she is exposed to the gazes of the other pedestrians:

How can I say so hopelessly, I walk without a vocation. I am still here. I’m here. To become conscious of my life, to sense and feel myself in this space, to compose and maintain myself—that is a vocation. But space is so large. To capture the endlessness of a street upon which so many people walk! Overflowing with greed, I gaze into every eye. My eye flashes back from each eye that I perceive. Is it not my world that shimmers forth from these strange eyes? All that I behold is mine and yet belongs to all. I am thus exposed. To all. Common property and fair game. Whoever wishes can hound me. (70)<sup>18</sup>

Her effort to maintain herself is in the service of losing herself. Her internal world and the external world, her experience as well as the experience of others, collapse. Hence, the self-awareness within the other pedestrians’ eyes, which reflect the image of herself, shows the paradox of the female experience of the modern city: she recognizes herself only through others. Instead of coming to terms with her own existence, this process leads toward self-fragmentation (her image is in *every* eye) and exposure that triggers self-estrangement or even self-loss. She subjugates herself to these gazes that are like cameras taking

pictures of her. In an earlier passage she describes her environment as “the relief of her guilt”: “Within this frame, the picture of myself enlarges” (43).<sup>19</sup> Thus, her exposure as self-abandonment that she performs in her walking repeats the speech act of confession: The maintaining of herself as an act of agency lies paradoxically in her exposure, which is, as I argue, a Christian self-sacrifice.

Right before Dagny turns to sex work, she is depicted as a window-shopper, another form of female *fânerie* as it is discussed prominently by the theorist of modern media culture Anne Friedberg. Friedberg sees the emergence of the *flâneuse* as a city stroller of her own linked to the privilege of shopping alone (32–37). The art historians Elfriede Dreyer and Estelle McDowall read this connection between women and consumerism as restricting women’s freedom to roam the streets, since they are objects as well as subjects of consumerism (30). As I show, Hennings’s protagonist is also presented in this double position. Instead of attending service on Sunday, as one would expect of a pious Christian, Dagny strolls along the Hohe Straße, one of the main shopping promenades in Cologne:

I was standing in front of a shop window at the Hohe Straße. The window was covered, since it was Sunday. A yellow shade covered the window. But it wasn’t closed completely, and one could see the delicate brooches on lilac-colored velvet cushions. A mosaic necklace, colorful, made up of small blue forget-me-nots and roses, appeared to me very pleasant. A small fairy-tale idyll, into which I happily sunk. Suddenly I realized that I couldn’t stand permanently in front of the window, and I wondered where I could turn. I remember: the shop was at an exit of an arcade, as uncomfortable this word may sound to me. (81–82)<sup>20</sup>

Her empathetic observation of the necklace initiates the process of self-commodification. The shop window serves as a medium and allows her to desire as well as to identify with the commodity. She wakes up with the sudden idea that she must move. When she notes the location, the arcade, a central place for streetwalkers, she recognizes the next role she has to enact, namely that of the sex worker. Thus, her turn to prostitution is neither psychologized nor justified. It is also worth pointing out here that she is not waiting for a customer on the threshold of the arcade, but starts to search for a potential customer. A few pages later, Dagny is staged in her own room like the jewelry, which underscores her commodification in prostitution. She lies in bed, and even though the curtains are down, the lower part of the window is uncovered: “Have been lying in bed for two days now. Curtains down. If one were able to

see anything from the outside, it would be only the lower half. My window is at the ground and doesn't go further. When I stand next to the window, I think: the upper part—head, heart, and breast—belongs to God, but the devil can take the lower one" (96–97).<sup>21</sup> Here the window displays the commodity: this time Dagny's genitals. By dividing her body into two parts—the upper, metaphysical one she offers God as a gift, and the lower, material part she gives up to the devil—the destructive effect of sex work on the individual becomes visible.<sup>22</sup> I also would like to point out that the German word for "divide" is *teilen*, which also means "to share." In the act of sharing herself with God and the customer, Hennings presents another way of confessing: in Dagny's confession to God she recognizes her sin of being human. In her confession to the customer, she also reveals the double standards of the bourgeois society. When a customer cautions her against her life as a sex worker, she replies: "How strange that some men tell me I will perish. They always say it afterward. If they consider that I am lost, why do they contribute to it?" (147).<sup>23</sup> By following the sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and the cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) in her essay "The Urbanization of the Body," Schönfeld repeats that often the sex worker's essence has been reduced to the quintessential qualities of a commodity and to an ideal symbol of a dialectical capacity that characterizes modern capitalism (57). Hennings, however, avoids reducing her protagonist to any symbolic or allegorical figure: Dagny serves as an abstract writer who transforms the fate of an individual into a social issue.<sup>24</sup>

In the final part of my close reading, I show how Hennings connects religious confession with the prostituted body as well as with the media of the book and of photography. I argue that Hennings creates through this constellation a unique poetological program that extends the category of Expressionism and in particular of Expressionist women writers. Foucault notes that in Christian confession, the self is like a book that has to be read, decodified, and interpreted. Furthermore, it is the Christian's duty to follow the movement of his or her thoughts toward the most insignificant details and to transfer them through confession into language (220).<sup>25</sup> The subject thus becomes transparent, a metaphor that Hennings also includes in her protagonist's confession:

If I were transparent and one could look right through me—: every human would become very careful. They would see the terrifying image that imprinted itself inside of me. . . . I am writing everything down and alone. How weak everything is. Here one can read what came out of the heart, but the letters are black. And a living human wrote them who could never talk to another human, since there are things on earth that are ineffable. The words escape me when someone touches the stigma. . . . But who

asks for me? I am just one among many. Nobody asks for the many.  
(149–50)<sup>26</sup>

The dash followed by the colon is like the piercing gaze that sees right inside of her. In this programmatic passage Dagny faces the problem of how to communicate: the “terrifying image” that she carries within her consists of—as she describes it—the “sorrows of her whole class” (148), that is, the class of outsiders, vagabonds, stage performers, and sex workers. Hence, confessional writing becomes for her the attempt to perform this transparency and to make these sorrows visible. But she faces two issues: First, the medium of the letter weakens the sentiment, and the blackness of the letter swallows any kind of distinctive feeling. Second, she is confronted with the moment of speechlessness and the impossibility of communication: the words “entfallen” her, which means that they both escape her and fall out of her. In case somebody is concerned about her, or as she describes it “touches her stigma,” she is unable to control the words and can only produce the sound of crying and a physical gesture of resistance. However, this scenario seems almost impossible, since nobody cares about her. Furthermore, the stigma in the Christian context appears not on the outside but on the inside of the body and is less a sign of punishment than a sign of the spiritual experience of love. It is the inside of the body that is described as a bloody flesh wound: “Something inside of me is full of rifts and bloody fringes. I don’t know what. It hurts and is sore, I don’t know how” (232).<sup>27</sup> This wound, as the “terrifying image,” presents a communal suffering as it appears in her prayer to God: “Look at our wounds that the world wants to see concealed. But in front of you, everything is unveiled” (217).<sup>28</sup> The attempt to form a communal suffering and to ally with other women is best seen in her observations of another sex worker: “She is a human who made my life worth living. . . . The girl behind the wall stigmatized me. She connected herself to me without noticing” (107). Here, empathy appears as a physical process through the stigma, which represents not a sign of disgrace but an attempt to initiate community. Nonetheless, the other woman does not notice this connection, and, given the wall between her and Dagny, the idea of a “sisterhood” corresponding to the Expressionist vision of “brotherhood” fails.<sup>29</sup>

Dagny finally transforms herself. As in the writings of the medieval women mystics such as Mechthild von Magdeburg (1207–1282), she addresses God as her “last lover,” who reads her notes: “I’d like to sincerely tell my last lover, who perhaps will read this diary: Hold my heart in your hands. Be careful with it. Perhaps it is fragile” (237–38).<sup>30</sup> The analogy between heart and book presents female sorrow as a physically experienced inner strife. In a note

on *Das Brandmal*, Hugo Ball also emphasizes the corporality of the book and reads the experience of pain as a symptom of their time: “Emmy’s *Brandmal* has come out. There is no debate here. Here is this age, experienced and suffered physically” (196). The narrator disappears and denies herself according to an early Christian principle: the self, as Foucault sums it up, has to sacrifice the self in order to discover the truth about oneself (221).

In *Das Brandmal*, Hennings visualizes the inner strife of her protagonist’s worldly life as a “fallen girl” and her faith in God. By deploying her protagonist as a writer, this inner strife exceeds a mere autobiographical reading and offers a more universal picture of a female experience of modernity. Dagny is stuck in a paradoxical nonposition that presents the social situation of women and in particular of sex workers: they are denied any form of association, as Schönfeld describes it, “For she [the prostitute] always remains directly inside and at the same time entirely outside of modern society” (57).

As seen in the close reading, Hennings employs Expressionist aesthetics and creates something unique. The Expressionist vision is to “cut” through the surface appearance to reveal the hidden essence (Williams 89). In *Das Brandmal*, this is taken to an extreme: the performance of the pious Christian, the figuration of prostitution, and becoming a camera are attempts that all fail as single forms of existence since their essence cannot be located. It is the cut, the wound, or as I call it the inner strife that appears as a pain that is hard to place and which Dagny can only grasp as an unspecified “something” or as the “terrifying image” that she holds inside of her. She does not ask for the why and hence does not search for the essence of things. Only the “how” is of concern: she holds the sorrows of her fellow human beings, she holds herself together, and she holds—or carries—the world on her shoulders like Atlas or even inside of her (as in her womb): “Without me the world is out of joint and collapses. Where something has to be held, I hold. Can’t do differently. I hold what I can hold. I am a carrier and say it, so that everyone knows. I help to carry the heavy world as much as I can carry. I don’t want to shirk. I am not running away” (215).<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES

1. Her first volume of poetry, *Die letzte Freude* (The last joy), was published in 1913 as part of the series *Der jüngste Tag* (The newest day), one of the central organs of the Expressionist movement. Furthermore, her poems appeared in various avant-garde publications such as *Pan*, *Die Neue Kunst*, *Die Aktion*, *Revoluzzer*, and *Die Ähre* (Hemus 35).

2. Among these themes are loneliness, ecstasy, captivity, illness, death, night, and the urban demimonde (van den Berg 82).

3. Contemporaries already acknowledged Hennings's diary novel as a confession and compared it to the confessions of Augustine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. One example is Paul Hatvani's book review of *Das Brandmal* from 11 December 1920 (Hennings, *Das Brandmal* 281).

4. The other founding members of Dada, her partner Hugo Ball, Hans Arp (1886–1966), Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974), Marcel Janco (1895–1984), and Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) were marginal figures in the established prewar avant-garde.

5. In a late diary entry from December 1947 Hennings laments: "They don't want any work from me. It's just me who wishes that of myself, but people only want me the person" ("Von mir will man kein Werk—nur ich wünsche es von mir, aber die Menschen wollen nur meine Person"; qtd. in Hemus 18–19).

6. Behrmann thus offers ways and techniques to discover the influential presence not only of Hennings, but of women writers and artists within these artistic circles. Thanks to the editorial and text-critical work that Nicola Behrmann conducts together with Christa Baumberger from the Swiss national archive, the first two volumes of a collected edition of Hennings's oeuvre came out in 2015 (Hennings, *Gefängnis*) and 2017 (Hennings, *Das Brandmal*).

7. "Im Namen des Namenlosen will ich beginnen, obgleich ich mich so weit von ihm entfernt fühle. . . . Wie lange hat es gedauert, bis ich dahin gekommen bin, mir eines Tages einzugestehen: ich bin ein ungeordneter Mensch." All translations are my own, in collaboration with Sophie Duvernoy and Matt Johnson. Katharina Rout's translation of the text as *Branded: A Diary* was published in March 2022 with broadview press (but could not be considered here due to time constraints).

8. "Meine Geburt war der Fall eines Engels." The fallen angel should not be mixed up here with Lucifer.

9. It is striking that we find here an example par excellence of Judith Butler's social construction of gender through a performative speech act as she develops it in *Gender Trouble* (40).

10. "Ich bin eine Frau. Ich hebe die Kontrolle auf. Die Frage nach dem 'Warum' und 'Woher.' / Ich gestehe nur das 'Wie.' / Wie war es?"

11. "Das Verlangen, alles umfassen zu wollen, ist eine Sucht, nur meine Sehnsucht, sonst nichts. In Wahrheit aber kann ich nichts mehr begreifen, nichts halten, nichts fassen. Es ist, als löse sich alles."

12. "Oh, ich bin sehr gequält, denn ich bin ein gewissenhafter Kodak wider Willen. Jeder ehrliche Kodak muß das Bild aufnehmen, wie es sich ihm darbietet. Ich muß an diesem Tage ganz besonders scharf eingestellt gewesen sein. Und wenn ein Bild auf das Negativ trifft, dann wird es sich zeigen müssen. Ach, dieser schütterte Schnurrbart, wenn er lacht . . . und er muß gelacht haben, sonst wäre es nicht auf der Platte. Die Sommerprossen geben so dunkle Flecke, und wenn seine Hände sich ausstrecken, sind sie größer als sein Kopf und erschreckend plump. So ist es mir geblieben und kann nicht mehr verwischen."

13. Behrmann refers with respect to the repetition compulsion to Friedrich Nietzsche's autobiographical text *Ecce Homo* and stresses the similarities between Nietzsche's and Hennings's texts (308).

14. "Ich nehme wohl doch nicht alles in mir auf. Und was ich bergen kann, ist verschieden. Schwach und stark, matt und klar. Es gibt Dinge, die unbeschreiblich sind, und es gibt Dinge, die man nicht erleben kann, auch wenn man sie äußerlich sieht."

15. Sontag links the popularization of photography also with the figure of the middle-class flaneur. She defines the photographer as "an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes" (55). As notions of the picturesque she applies the poor, the foreign, and the time-worn (63).

16. "Ich gehe jetzt so allein in einer Stadt, und niemand will von mir wissen. Daß man so allein gehen kann und dabei sagen: wo etwas angeht in der Welt, irgendwo etwas angeht, das geht mich an. Ich reiße die Augen weit auf und sehe, es geht viel an. Es gehen ja so viele Menschen in einer Stadt. Gestern sind mir wohl achtzig begegnet."

17. "Alles, was ich sehe, das Straßenbild, die Menschen, das Pflaster, die Sonne, alles tritt in den Hintergrund und verschwindet. Ich fühle nur Zeit. Ich komme nicht heraus." When Dagny arrives in Cologne, time is the only thing she possesses: "At six o'clock in the evening, my train pulled into the Cologne train station. It needn't have been in such a rush to bring me there since I had time, only time, nothing else" (11) ("Um sechs Uhr abends lief mein Zug in die Kölner Bahnhofshalle. Er hätte es ja gar nicht so eilig haben brauchen, mich abzuliefern, denn ich hatte ja Zeit, nur Zeit, sonst nichts").

18. "Wie kann ich nur so hoffnungslos sagen, ich gehe ohne Beruf. Ich bin doch da. Bin da. Daß ich bewußt werde meines Lebens, mich hier empfinde, im Raum fühle, mich fasse, behalte, das ist Beruf. Die Unendlichkeiten einer Straße zu erfassen, auf der so viele Menschen gehen! Voller Gier spähe ich in jedes Auge. Aus jedem Auge, in das ich hineinsche, leuchtet mein Auge heraus. Ist es nicht meine Welt, die aus fremden Augen schimmert? Alles, was ich ansehe, ist mein und gehört doch allen. So bin ich ausgesetzt. Allen. Allgemeingut und Freiwild. Wer will, kann mich jagen."

19. "Die Umgebung ist, die ganze Welt, das Relief meiner Schuld. Innerhalb dieses Rahmens, vergrößert sich nur das Blid meiner selbst."

20. "Ich stand in der Hohen Straße vor einem Schaufenster. Es war verhangen. Es war ja an einem Sonntag. Ein gelbes Rouleau bedeckte das Fenster. Es war nicht ganz herabgelassen, so daß man die kleinen Filigranbroschen auf fliederfarbenem Samtkissen sehen konnte. Ein Mosaikkettchen, ganz bunt, aus kleinen blauen Vergißmeinnicht und Rosen zierlich zusammengesetzt, mutete mich sehr freundlich an. Ein kleines Märchenidyll, in das ich mich gerne versenkte. Es kam mir plötzlich in den Sinn, daß ich auf die Dauer nicht vor dem Fenster verweilen könne, und ich überlegte, wohin ich mich wenden könne. Ich erinnere mich: der Laden lag am Ausgange einer Passage, so unangenehm dies Wort mir auch klingt."

21. "Habe jetzt zwei Tage im Bett gelegen. Die Vorhänge herabgelassen. Wenn man von draußen etwas sehen könnte, wäre es nur die untere Hälfte. Mein Fenster ist am Boden und reicht nicht weiter. Wenn ich am Fenster stehe, denke ich: die obere Hälfte, Kopf, Herz und Brust gehört Gott, die untere Hälfte mag der Teufel nehmen."

22. "I imagine sending only one part of myself out on the streets. I have been able to imagine this for a very long time. . . . But the sensitive part doesn't stay at home, I tried to tell myself for a long time. One day, I said to myself: What can be divided?" (142) ("Ich bilde mir ein, ich schicke nur die eine Hälfte auf die Straße. Das habe ich



mir lange Zeit einbilden können. . . . Die empfindsame Hälfte bleibt keineswegs zu Hause, wie ich mir lange Zeit einreden wollte. Eines Tages sagte ich mir: Was läßt sich teilen?“).

23. “Seltsam, daß so manche Männer mir sagen, ich werde zugrunde gehen. Das sagen sie immer nachher. Sie könnten es ja auch einmal vorher sagen. Wenn Sie der Ansicht sind, daß ich verloren bin, warum tragen sie denn dazu bei?”

24. As Janet Wolff argues within this context, by understanding the city as a discursive construct rather than as already given, women become visible in their own particular practices and experiences. Hence, instead of finding a satisfying definition of female flânerie within the framework of an emblematic reading, this question loses its importance (85).

25. Here, the practice of the psychoanalytical “talking cure” obviously comes to mind.

26. “Wäre ich durchsichtig und könnte man in mich hineinschauen—: wie vorsichtig würden die Menschen werden. Sie sähen ja das entsetzliche Bild, das sich mir eingepreßt hat. . . . Ich schreibe hier nieder und allein. Wie schwach ist alles. Hier steht nun, was aus dem Herzen kam, aber die Buchstaben sind schwarz. Und ein lebendiger Mensch hat sie geschrieben, der mit dem Wort sich noch nie hat an einen anderen Menschen wenden können, denn es gibt Dinge auf Erden, die unaussprechlich sind. Die Worte entfallen mir, wenn jemand das Brandmal berührt. . . . Wer aber fragt nach mir? Ich bin nur eine unter vielen. Niemand fragt nach den vielen.”

27. “Etwas in mir hat lauter Risse und blutige Fransen. Ich weiß nicht was. Es tut weh und ist wund, ich weiß nicht wie.”

28. “Sieh unsere Wunden, die die Welt verhüllt sehen will. Vor dir ist alles enthüllt.”

29. As Wright points out in her analysis of Expressionist poems, “brother” and “fraternity” are frequently used words to assume a community of men, which obviously exclude the participation of women (300).

30. “Ganz innig möchte ich zu meinem letzten Geliebten, der vielleicht dies Tagebuch lesen wird, sagen: ‘Halte mein Herz in den Händen. Gehe behutsam damit um. Vielleicht ist es doch zerbrechlich.’”

31. “Ohne mich geht die Welt schief und in die Brüche. Wo etwas zu halten ist, da halte ich. Kann nicht anders. Ich halte, was ich halten kann. Bin Gepäckträger und sage es, damit man es weiß. Ich helfe die schwere Welt tragen, soviel ich tragen kann. Ich will mich nicht drücken. Ich laufe nicht davon.”

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# Social Issues and Activism



## CHAPTER 12

### “The Time Is Coming”

#### *Women Writers in the Expressionist Journal*

#### *Die Aktion (1911–1932)*

Catherine Smale

Published in Berlin between 1911 and 1932, *Die Aktion* was one of the leading forums in Germany for Expressionist literature, art, and cultural criticism.<sup>1</sup> Edited by the politician and literary critic Franz Pfemfert (1879–1954), the journal was broadly left-wing and aimed to promote political change through a program of cultural renewal.<sup>2</sup> Although the journal was conceptualized as “a platform” for “everyone who has something worth saying” (Pfemfert 24)<sup>3</sup> and included a remarkably diverse range of contributors, scholarship to date has tended to overlook and downplay its considerable breadth of focus. In particular, critics have adopted an overtly androcentric bias, following the literary critic Paul Raabe’s lead in viewing the journal as “a training ground for up-and-coming male authors” (12).<sup>4</sup> Despite extensive research on the male contributors to *Die Aktion*, only one female author—Else Lasker-Schüler (1869–1945)—has received sustained critical attention,<sup>5</sup> which is surprising given the extent of women’s involvement in all stages of the journal’s publication process: in fact, out of approximately three hundred writers, translators, and artists whose work was published in *Die Aktion*, just over eighty were women. Moreover, evidence has recently come to light suggesting that Pfemfert shared many of the editorial tasks with his wife, the writer and translator Alexandra Ramm-Pfemfert (1883–1963), who was also responsible for founding and managing the *Aktion* bookshop and gallery in Berlin that funded the journal and served as a meeting point for its contributors and readers.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, I shall bring to light some of the women writers who published in *Die Aktion* through a detailed exploration of their literary and

journalistic texts. My intention here is not simply to rectify the omission of these women from scholarship, even though such an omission clearly exists and has resulted in the whitewashing of much of their creative production from the literary history of this period.<sup>7</sup> Rather, I aim to show how a consideration of the women writers in *Die Aktion* can alter our understanding of the aesthetic and sociopolitical concerns of the journal itself and, consequently, of the Expressionist movement as a whole. Incorporating these women in our critical discussion of what is often viewed as a “men’s movement” (Anz 34)<sup>8</sup> allows us to move away from considering Expressionism as an aggressively masculinist reaction against the “feminization of art and literature” (Brinker-Gabler 243).<sup>9</sup> Instead, it enables us to recognize women as active, critical participants who helped to shape the direction of the movement, and it sheds light on their self-understanding as conflicted subjects within this movement. How do they negotiate the double bind of being involved in a movement whose rhetoric and ethos so often stigmatize femininity or reduce women to being men’s silent companions? How conscious are they that staking a claim to authorship means entering into a cultural position that many of their contemporaries believe to be the domain of men? And in what ways does their writing interact with other discourses on women’s rights and their emergence as political subjects in this period?

In what follows, I shall address these questions of literary aesthetics, political engagement, and social emancipation by focusing on three key themes that emerge in texts by women writers in *Die Aktion*: namely, women’s agency; their antiwar sentiment; and their attitudes toward revolution. Like many Expressionist writers, these women regard themselves as standing at the dawn of a new era, witnessing the imminent destruction of the old order and the creation of a new humanity.<sup>10</sup> For them, this sense of longing for a better future is frequently bound up with the vision of a world in which women are able to take their place alongside men in the political realm. They regard themselves as contributing to an “emergent” culture, to use a term famously coined by the Marxist theorist Raymond Williams: calling into question the dominant, patriarchal order, they call for the creation of “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship” (123). Their attempts to establish themselves as vocal, political subjects are, at times, reflected in their questioning of established literary traditions and aesthetic forms; as a result, their work poses a challenge, not only to the rigid social structures of the period, but also to the literary conventions that assigned women to fixed gender roles and denied them agency.

## Writing Women's Agency

In her pioneering chapter on women in German Expressionism, the literary critic Barbara D. Wright observes that the movement is radical in its calls for social and political reform, yet paradoxically conservative in its attitude toward gender relations (291). More specifically, she argues, male Expressionist writers tend, in their calls for social renewal, to reinforce existing gender stereotypes: they depict the "New Man" as "the bearer of *Geist* (intellect) and *Wille* (will)," whereas "Women . . . are the embodiment of earth, nature, physicality, and carnality" (292). As a result, "Women represent precisely the forces New Man must conquer if he is to create a new reality" (292). Wright's essay raises questions about how women writers position themselves within this movement if, for their male contemporaries, they represent the very characteristics that need to be overcome in order for social renewal to occur. If, as Wright suggests, women are the "intimate strangers" of the Expressionist movement, objectified by "traditional, stereotypical categories of binary thinking about the nature of masculinity and femininity" (291), then attention needs to be paid to the ways in which female writers respond to the gender roles to which they have been assigned by their male counterparts. How do Expressionist women writers position themselves in relation to such fixed roles, and what strategies do they use to challenge, critique, or undermine them?

Many of the women writers in *Die Aktion* engage directly with women's agency and their representation by male writers.<sup>11</sup> For example, in her 1911 essay "Der Aesthet und die Frauenfrage" (The aesthete and the question of women's rights), the Austrian feminist Grete Meisel-Hess (1879–1922) explores the tendency of contemporary male writers to reduce women to objects of desire.<sup>12</sup> The article opens with a quotation from an article printed in the same periodical earlier that year, whose (male) author makes the following appeal: "Look at the woman. . . . She will make herself and us more contented if she is beautiful and desirable than if she studies medicine, shoots at Russian governors, or campaigns for suffrage" (779).<sup>13</sup> Noting that this antifeminist stance is becoming increasingly common among modern writers, whom she terms "aesthetes," Meisel-Hess takes issue with their judgment of women on solely aesthetic grounds. Such reductive views, she suggests, likely stem less from genuine interest in real women than from "a deficit of masculinity" (Meisel-Hess 781)<sup>14</sup>—an observation that resonates with what the cultural historian Jacques Le Rider terms the "crisis of masculinity" at the start of the twentieth century resulting from "a crisis of modernization, interpreted and



experienced as too-exclusive affirmation of values connected with the masculine element" (90). For Meisel-Hess, the depiction of women in the work of male artists and writers reveals their anxieties about men's social role. Addressing both male and female readers, she points out that society needs to recognize women's economic potential rather than merely idolizing their exterior beauty and passivity: "Only then will she be able to grasp the cultural values that contribute to the enrichment of her character" (779).<sup>15</sup> For it is only by gaining financial independence that women can liberate themselves from the roles that men have traditionally ascribed to them: "Without economic liberation there can be no liberation of any other kind" (780).<sup>16</sup>

Whereas Meisel-Hess advocates women's financial independence as the solution to gender inequality, the 1917 essay "Die Mode und der Bürger" (Fashion and the [male] citizen) by the Swiss author Maria Martin (dates unknown)<sup>17</sup> extols the liberating potential of modern fashion for women seeking to resist the constraints of bourgeois, patriarchal society. Martin's essay appeared following a series of fashion exhibitions organized by the painter and dress designer Otto Haas-Heye (1879–1959) that prompted discussion in Expressionist journals such as *Die Aktion*, *Der Sturm*, and *Die weissen Blätter* about the relationship between artistic representation and the commercial fashion industry, and fueled anxieties about the perceived decline of moral and spiritual values.<sup>18</sup> Whereas male Expressionist writers such as Walther Krug (1875–1955) and Herwarth Walden (1879–1941) viewed these exhibitions as a sign "that Germany was abandoning its previous moral restraint and order" (Simmons 51), Martin's essay sheds a rather different light on the phenomenon. For Martin, prejudice against modern fashion "represents the low point of society" (432–33),<sup>19</sup> and she criticizes those who "happily pose as lovers of art" yet "look down on [fashion]" (435).<sup>20</sup> In her view, those who hold such negative views overlook the fact that fashion is itself a kind of art and, indeed, should be regarded as fundamentally Expressionist: "Like all art, it is governed by the law of movement. Expressionism is its essence and its meaning is expression" (433).<sup>21</sup> She goes on to argue that fashion is a direct expression of *Geist* or "spirit," the Nietzschean principle associated with creative generativity and mystical communion that so inspired Expressionist writers: "The coquette serves *Geist*, and it in turn serves her. When she, smiling, steps across the street, *Geist* is no less present than when the immortal one announces her beauty. *Geist* is wrapped in ribbons" (433–43).<sup>22</sup> Fashion is, for Martin, associated with the processes of artistic transformation and social revolution: it becomes the "revolutionary conscience of humanity" (435),<sup>23</sup> "the seed that will destroy the power [of the powerful]" (435),<sup>24</sup> and "the most destructive"

form of "direct action" "against the bourgeoisie" (435).<sup>25</sup> Martin draws on clearly gendered imagery in establishing the revolutionary, antibourgeois impetus of modern fashion, reclaiming the images of the coquette and the fallen woman that are often depicted "as the physical manifestation of something authentic and primitive" (Wright 293) in texts by male Expressionist writers. In her eyes, the agency of these female figures serves as a "formidable weapon" (435)<sup>26</sup> that undermines the authority of the male bourgeois and challenges the patriarchal norms that he represents.

A similar attempt to reinterpret stereotypical gender roles can be found in Marie Holzer's (1874–1924)<sup>27</sup> short story "Die rote Perücke" (The red wig), which appeared in *Die Aktion* in 1914.<sup>28</sup> The text explores the dreams of a young female student who looks into the window of a hairdressing salon and finds herself drawn to a particular red wig—the "rote Perücke" of the story's title. The image can be read as a variation on the Phrygian cap, part of a visual language running through nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture that evokes the "symbolic politics of Social Democracy" (Hake 117). It symbolizes the protagonist's emergent self-empowerment and alerts us to the radical force of Holzer's class and gender critique. The encounter with the red wig enables the protagonist to envisage another life for herself, one in which she is freed from the "bonds of a . . . harsh and demeaning reality" (Vollmer, "Vorwort" 11).<sup>29</sup> Slipping into a fantasy about her potential future, she imagines herself transcending her student existence and experiencing life as an affluent "lady":

Ah, if only the red wig were mine! If only I could wear it for just one night. At a resplendent ball. Light-filled halls. Gentlemen in black tie and uniform, medals on their chests. Stars, crosses. Ladies in glittering jewelry and elegant dresses, and me, right in the midst of it all, with red hair falling in strands onto my neck. (Holzer 42)<sup>30</sup>

The use of short sentences and paratactic style here signals the extent to which the protagonist is caught up in the vision of glamour. The fantasy offers her the possibility of escaping from her humdrum life and becoming the center of attention:

All eyes are turned toward me, engulfing me in a glowing light. And another life awakens in my blood; my thoughts, my feelings become more fervent under the blaze of red hair. My eyes light up differently, my gaze would become warmer, my words steeped in a curious strangeness. (42)<sup>31</sup>

The references here to fire and light portray the protagonist's vision as a mystical experience that awakens in her the possibility of self-transformation. Indeed, as the passage progresses, she becomes increasingly estranged from herself, experiencing her own voice and body as though they belong to someone else. Holzer continues:

Rising up from the red hair are the thoughts of a maenad, the wishes of a Circe, the memory of a thousand experiences, the allure of a pale mermaid with a fantastical, green-shimmering body. The laughter of sirens. Fervent passion. A longing would rise up, a longing that for thousands of years has pulsed in the hearts of a billion women. Alive. Vast. Laughing. Marvelously profound. (42–43)<sup>32</sup>

The protagonist realizes here that she is connected to millions of other women who have yearned to be liberated from the constraints of their lives. The references to female figures from classical mythology—all associated with strength of will and independence, yet who tend to be voiceless in traditional narrative accounts—situate the protagonist's desire for emancipation in a long history of patriarchal oppression. Many of these figures are associated with an unrestrained female sexuality that has traditionally been feared and maligned by male writers; their allure gives them power over those who succumb to it. It is striking, then, that the protagonist's vision is described in overtly sensual language, with references to "fervent passion" (43), "pulsating hearts" (43), "kissing" (42), and "embracing" (42)<sup>33</sup> that connects the protagonist's burgeoning sense of self with the awakening of her sexual desire.

Holzer's story closes with an expression of defiance on the part of the protagonist. When a nearby gentleman approaches her and invites her to walk out with him, she responds by asking him to buy the red wig for her. He refuses, so she reminds him that the red wig is her purchase price and then "stares past him until he skulks away. Her eyes once again court the red wig, and she knows she will wear it" (43).<sup>34</sup> The shift from subjunctive to indicative mood at the end of the text conveys an expectation that the protagonist's vision will one day become a reality. The protagonist's rebuff of the gentleman can be read as a rejection of the traditionally patriarchal codes of conduct in courtship in which women are supposed to be flattered by the attention of male suitors. Her insistence on the red wig as her purchase price contains an explicit reference to prostitution—the protagonist's body is portrayed as a commodity. Since the wig represents her future emancipation, however, this insistence signals the protagonist's successful attempt to take control of her life. No longer are her

actions shaped by the expectations of men; rather, she asserts her agency and allows her future to be shaped by her own wishes and desires. Holzer's story thereby rewrites the quintessential feminine roles found in many Expressionist literary texts, reclaiming the figure of the prostitute and allowing her sexuality to take on new meanings in the context of women's emancipation. Her writing asserts the link between femininity and sexual desire frequently evoked by Expressionists, but portrays this as a positive force that can be harnessed by women to further the struggle for equal rights.

### Antiwar Sentiment

The outbreak of World War I in July 1914 resulted in a change in the editorial policy of *Die Aktion*. Fearing that the periodical would be banned due to its antiwar stance, Pfemfert toned down its explicitly political emphasis, instead proclaiming its focus to be solely on literature and art.<sup>35</sup> However, the journal managed to maintain its reputation for incisive political and social commentary, as its editor and contributors adopted creative strategies for circumventing the censors, such as including veiled antiwar commentary in their literary and artistic works, and frequently referencing writers and artists from enemy countries.<sup>36</sup> In particular, the wartime issues of the journal reveal "Pfemfert's extraordinary trust in lyric poetry as an effective medium for socio-cultural messages" (Barnouw 228). Poetry does indeed seem to be the favored medium among the female contributors to these issues, and much of their verse engages, either directly or indirectly, with the conflict and women's role in it. Some texts, such as the 1916 poem "De Profundis" (Out of the deep) by Franziska Stoecklin (1894–1931) or the 1918 poem "Feinde" (Enemies) by Hilde Stieler (1879–1965), present a bleak vision of a world in which there is no hope for the future and no possibility of consolation. Others, such as the 1915 poem "Frau von 1915" (Woman of 1915) by Henriette Hardenberg (1894–1993) or "Schuld" (Guilt, 1916) by Mimi Korschelt (dates unknown), lament the loss of an old world order and reflect on questions of guilt, loss, and responsibility. The figure of the grieving mother recurs in several of the poems, revealing the extent to which this figure was inscribed into the iconography of the period,<sup>37</sup> and many also lament women's failure to speak out against the war.

An example of this poetic engagement with women's failings can be found in the 1918 poem "Die Mutter" (The mother) by Margarete Kubicka (1891–1984).<sup>38</sup> Kubicka draws on the Pietà, an image used by contemporary female artists to draw what the art historian Claudia Siebrecht terms "an unam-

biguous visual parallel between the suffering of Mary and that of mothers at the time of the First World War” (119). The poem opens with an image of the bereaved mother:

Wordlessly she holds the dead man.  
 Helpless rigidity.  
 Limbs hang still, solemnly. (264)<sup>39</sup>

Here the speaker draws a link between the silent and inert body of the dead son and the stillness of the mother; paralyzed by her sorrow, she exists in a state of living death. As the poem progresses, the speaker describes the situation as a moment of reunion:

But you, mother of the son,  
 Have your child—once again:  
 Helpless—yours alone—just as in former times. (264–65)<sup>40</sup>

The son’s death is likened to a return to infancy, to a state of helplessness and complete dependence on his mother. However, as Siebrecht notes, “The retrieval of the dead body seems more a penance than a consolation” (126). In the second half of the poem, the speaker turns on the mother, cursing her for failing both her son and other women:

Now—with spirit fled—  
 Oh! A curse on you, mother of the son,  
 Who understood naught.  
 Never showed us a path we could forge with him,  
 Us forsaken women. (265)<sup>41</sup>

The speaker draws on the double meaning of the word *Geist*, which can refer to both “spirit” and “intellect.” The term alludes on the one hand to the Holy Spirit and the sense that the bereaved mother has been abandoned by God; this desolation is further reinforced by the use of the term *öde* (“for-saken”), which, in German, tends to refer to landscapes rather than people and therefore implies that the women in the poem are dehumanized and barren. On the other hand, Kubicka’s use of the word *Geist* implies a criticism of the bereaved woman for her lack of intellect or reason; she thereby takes issue with the very image of unthinking femininity that Meisel-Hess also critiques. The

implication is that this mother has brought children into the world thoughtlessly, without the intellectual skills to protect them from harm. The closing lines of the poem ask how women can move forward with their lives:

Women,  
Leaderless  
Faltering  
Who will show us the way? . . . (Kubicka 265)<sup>42</sup>

The women's uncertainty is reinforced by the final ellipsis: while traditional models of femininity have proved to be inadequate and outmoded, there is little sense in this poem of what ought to replace them.

The poem "An mein Kind" (To my child) by Claire Goll (1890–1977), published in the same issue, presents a similarly dark vision of the future.<sup>43</sup> Each of the poem's three stanzas begins with a series of rhetorical questions. The first focuses on the child's initial experience of loss:

Oh, can you forgive me for the earth, for this earth, my child?  
And for my failings, for my helplessness at the death of your first love?  
At the death of the first person who was really yours: your doll? (265)<sup>44</sup>

Only in the third line do we discover that the loss being referred to here is not that of another human being, but that of a doll, a "lifeless deception" (265)<sup>45</sup> which, to the child, was nevertheless a real person. This loss triggers the child's first sense of "doubt in the goodness of things" (265),<sup>46</sup> a distrust that will be evoked repeatedly throughout her life, each time she loses someone close to her.<sup>47</sup> The child's "knowing look of reproach" (265)<sup>48</sup> pains the speaker, who becomes aware of her inability to protect her child from suffering.

The second stanza of the poem introduces a more explicit reference to its wartime context:

Oh, can you forgive me for the earth, for this earth, my child?  
And for that first sight, yesterday, of the person with no limbs?  
Ah, how tightly we clung to each other in order to bear it! (265)<sup>49</sup>

The description of this encounter with an amputee is significant given the high number of injured veterans returning from the front. As the historian Deborah Cohen notes, there were over 1.5 million permanently disabled veterans

in Germany after World War I (4), and “more than any other group, [they] symbolized the First World War’s burdens” (2). In Goll’s poem, the sight of the amputee marks another stage in the child’s loss of innocence:

And once again your loving heart died through its perception of the  
world.  
The image of good and beautiful people shattered. (Goll 265)<sup>50</sup>

The child’s disenchantment is evoked in violent terms that mirror the violence done to the soldier on the battlefield. What troubles the speaker most is her realization that she has herself contributed to the amputee’s pain and that, as a result, her child will no longer be able to trust her:

Yet the angel in you would never have grasped: “Why?” . . .  
The tender gesture of faith in me that relieved me of an answer.  
The answer: Through me, too. Through my silence he lost his limbs.  
(265)<sup>51</sup>

Through her encounter with the soldier’s disfigured body, the speaker reflects on her failure to oppose the conflict: her silence has led directly to his injuries. Speaking out against the war is associated here with the feminine task of preventing suffering in the world, a task that, though laudable, is ultimately impossible to accomplish.

The final stanza of the poem looks to the future, asking how the speaker’s child will be able to forgive her when she mourns her own beloved:

And will you forgive me for the earth, for this earth, my child?  
One day, when you stand before the shattered body of your beloved?  
And your heart dies forever? (265)<sup>52</sup>

The reference to the beloved’s body being *zerbrochen* (“shattered,” “smashed to pieces”) again evokes the wartime context, also echoing the earlier reference to the child’s shattered beliefs. The speaker goes on to imagine the voice of the child:

What have you done to prevent this, mother, to prevent suffering?  
Your tolerance became a gateway to misery, mother! (266)<sup>53</sup>

The target of Goll’s criticism is women’s passive tolerance of injustice, which opens the floodgates to human suffering. The final lines convey despair, as the speaker realizes she is forever tainted by her guilt:

Oh child, will you forgive me for this earth?  
Where did I find the courage and the authority to bring you to the world?  
One day, I know, you will curse me, my child. (266)<sup>54</sup>

In this poem, the mother and child assume a representative function, highlighting the extent to which Goll regards her generation of women as responsible for the conflict and criticizes the traditionally feminine values of passivity and acquiescence that, in her view, meant that the belligerence of the ruling powers went largely unchecked.<sup>55</sup> However, Goll's position is clearly paradoxical: she seems to be advocating that, in order for women to speak out against the war, they should display some of the very qualities (such as belligerence, ferociousness, or truculence) that she criticizes in male political leaders.

As Frank Krause has shown, the figure of the mother is a common motif in texts by male Expressionist writers: for some, it serves as a "symbol of a creative revolution mainly carried out by men";<sup>56</sup> for others, it is a redemptive figure or metaphor for spiritual renewal ("Zur Problematisierung von Geschlechterpositionen" 160). For female writers such as Kubicka and Goll, however, the mother is often used to highlight the human cost of the war. Their poems can be read as critiques of the maternalism promoted by the mainstream bourgeois women's movements—that is, the view that women's public positions in society should be based on "their capacity to mother" and on "the values attached to that role: care, nurturance, and morality" (Koven and Michel 4). The women depicted by Goll and Kubicka are so disconnected from the political sphere that they turn a blind eye to events in the world; their passivity and naivete are the main targets of the poets' criticism. Goll and Kubicka therefore encourage other women to reflect on the role they have played in condoning the conflict and urge them to find their political voice, thereby moving beyond the boundaries of that which is considered socially acceptable for them.

## Women and Revolution

The defeat of the German army in November 1918 precipitated the onset of revolution, as various radical political groups sought to overthrow the old imperial order. Against this backdrop, *Die Aktion* once again became political in its focus; Pfemfert changed its subheading to "Wochenschrift für revolutionären Sozialismus" (Weekly for revolutionary socialism) and declared it to be the official organ of the Antinational Socialist Party.<sup>57</sup> Much of the content of the periodical in this postwar period focuses on the question of revolutionary politics, with debates taking place around the meaning of revolution, what it



should look like in practice, and how it would bring about the renewal of society. A number of women—including prominent socialist campaigners such as Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), Clara Zetkin (1857–1933), Alice Rühle-Gestel (1894–1943), and Angelika Balabanoff (1878–1965)—participated in these debates, contributing essays on women’s rights and their role in revolutionary politics, while the idea of overthrowing the old order also found expression in a range of female-authored poems and short stories.<sup>58</sup>

The essay “Frauenwahlrecht und Demokratie” (Women’s suffrage and democracy) by Charlotte Klein (dates unknown) appeared in *Die Aktion* in December 1918.<sup>59</sup> Written shortly after women were granted the right to vote, but before the first elections took place, the essay articulates Klein’s hopes and fears about what female suffrage will mean for the advancement of socialist revolution. For Klein, this occasion creates an unprecedented opportunity for women’s voices to influence the political sphere (683). Rather than aligning herself with the bourgeois women’s movement, which argued that political debate could be enhanced by women’s innately caring attributes, Klein positions herself alongside other radical feminists such as Zetkin, who regarded gender difference as socially constructed and intertwined with capitalist structures. In her view, the proclamation of female suffrage is not, in itself, a cause for celebration, since it does not necessarily challenge the underlying causes of gender and class inequality. For Klein, the main problem is that the majority of women lack political experience and therefore cannot be counted on to act as “custodians and promoters of the revolution” (682).<sup>60</sup> Many are likely to vote for reactionary, conservative parties, while others are likely to support the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), which, she claims, misleadingly calls itself socialist despite being antirevolutionary in its agenda;<sup>61</sup> its stance on women’s rights “reinforce[s] bourgeois ideology,” maintaining “a separation of differentiated gendered spheres of politics” (Heynan 176). For Klein, then, the only way to overcome gender oppression is for women to support workers’ councils instead of the national assembly; doing so will help to dislodge structures of inequality and thereby help to ensure the success of the socialist revolution (683).

Despite her apparent condescension toward the “typical” German woman,<sup>62</sup> Klein’s emphasis on revolution as a precondition for true gender equality chimes with the views of other radical campaigners such as Zetkin and Luxemburg. For these women, patriarchy and capitalism serve as mutually reinforcing systems of inequality, and women’s full emancipation can only arise through a revolution that overturns these systems. In their view, the policies of the bourgeois women’s movement are ineffectual because they do not

go far enough in challenging the structural and economic causes of women's oppression.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, as early as 1896, Zetkin put forward the argument that the goals of the bourgeois women's movement did not adequately serve the needs of proletarian women. She points out that the proletarian woman has already achieved economic independence; as a result, her "struggle for liberation . . . cannot be—as it is for the bourgeois woman—a struggle against the men of her own class" (102).<sup>64</sup> She does not need "to struggle . . . to tear down the barriers that have been erected to limit her free competition with men" (102).<sup>65</sup> Instead, Zetkin suggests, "It is a question of erecting new barriers against the exploitation of the proletarian woman" and working toward "the political rule of the proletariat" (102).<sup>66</sup> Such a task demands equal participation of both sexes: "Hand in hand with the men of her own class, the proletarian woman fights against capitalist society" (102).<sup>67</sup>

The sense of solidarity that both Zetkin and Klein evoke is thematized in several female-authored literary texts in *Die Aktion*. For example, the 1919 poem "O wir Träger brennender Lasten" (We, the bearers of fiery burdens) by Elisabeth Janstein (1893–1944) depicts humans coming together to effect social change in the wake of conflict, while Balabanoff's 1926 poem "Bekennnis" (Avowal) portrays an individual striving for the common good and working to create a world in which human beings will no longer exploit one another. Similarly, in "Es kommt die Zeit" (The time is coming, 1919), the Munich-based revolutionary activist Hilde Kramer (1900–1974) evokes the dawning of a new age, depicted as a liberation from captivity: "In this new, beautiful age / You shall see freedom once again" (811).<sup>68</sup> Written from a collective first-person perspective, the poem is addressed to those who are incarcerated "behind ramparts and prison walls" (Kramer 811).<sup>69</sup> These prisoners are addressed using the informal, collective pronoun "Ihr" (you), and are described as comrades (*Genossen*); Kramer thereby attempts to bridge the gap between these two groups of people, creating a sense of commonality between them. The onset of the new age is heralded by thunder and an earthquake, creating a sense of imminent apocalypse, and this quasi-religious connotation is reinforced by a reference to the "resurrection" or "rising up" of a new realm (Kramer 811). The final stanza of the poem asserts the strength of the proletariat in effecting a complete transformation of society:

The time is approaching. The giant fist of the  
 Proletariat rouses the land . . .  
 Comrades, we shall liberate you,  
 With red flags in hand! (811)<sup>70</sup>

The vision of revolution that Kramer puts forward is not explicitly gendered; instead, her emphasis on proletarian solidarity seems to include both men and women, and the implication is that concerted effort can triumph over individual efforts to change society. However, her choice of imagery—particularly her use of the compound noun *Riesenfaust* (“giant fist”)—is strikingly masculine, conveying a belligerence that seems to be out of keeping with the idealized feminine values in the earlier poems by Goll and Kubicka.

While Kramer’s poem focuses on the collective force of the proletariat, the poem “Wir habens geschworen” (We have made a vow) by Maria Benemann (1887–1980) explores the themes of revolution and international collaboration.<sup>71</sup> It opens with a reference to a promise that has been made:

We have made a vow  
 We will not soften  
 Until the hour  
 When the peoples of the earth  
 Join their hands in union. (323)<sup>72</sup>

The title and first line of the poem are rather oblique—it is not clear precisely what promise has been made, nor to whom. The contraction of the verb and pronoun in this line (*habens*) creates a spoken register, lending the poem a conspiratorial tone and thereby strengthening the impression of a bond that exists between the speakers. As these lines progress, it becomes clear that they convey a sense of striving toward a moment when international collaboration is achieved. The impression of unstoppable endeavor is evoked by the iambic rhythm of the lines, which propels the reader forward toward the verb *reichen* (“join,” “reach”), thereby emphasizing the gesture of solidarity that is taking place.

The poem continues with an exploration of the speakers’ authority:

We have the power  
 And the authority.  
 Authority shall be power. (323)<sup>73</sup>

Rather than finding their strength in physical force (as the term “giant fist” implies in Kramer’s poem), the speakers of this poem gain their power from a more abstract sense of justice. Viewed in the context of World War I and its aftermath, these lines can be understood as a reaction against the imperialist belligerence of the Western powers and an attempt to advocate a more reasoned

approach to solving international disputes. The final lines of the poem contain a direct appeal to the reader:

For this sign  
For this union  
Brothers: be ready! (323)<sup>74</sup>

Benemann calls on the reader here to join this movement of international solidarity. Crucially, she uses the word "brothers" (*Brüder*) to make this address, a term that resonates with the calls for fraternization so commonly found in the works of male Expressionist writers. Wright argues that such authors tend to use words such as "brothers" and "humanity" to refer exclusively to a community of men, whereas female authors have a more open understanding of these terms (306–7). Nevertheless, Benemann's choice of the masculine term raises questions about the gender politics underlying her conception of international solidarity.

### Conclusion: Reframing Expressionism

An analysis of the women writers in *Die Aktion* inevitably reframes our understanding of the boundaries and scope of Expressionism as a literary movement: not only have most of these women been hitherto excluded from the Expressionist canon, they also seem, at times, to challenge key features that we would normally associate with Expressionist writing. On the one hand, they share the "voluntaristic, decisionistic and activist traits" that scholars tend to regard as characteristic of Expressionist literature (Rothe 119)<sup>75</sup> and explore key thematic constellations that are equally favored by their male counterparts, evoking visions of a new humanity and exploring issues of social change and utopian transformation. On the other hand, their work intersects with a range of other contemporary discourses on issues such as women's rights, pacifism, and socialist revolution; it thereby opens up new angles on these topics and inflects them with specific questions about femininity and women's understanding of their place in society. Many of the writers discussed here are acutely aware of the meanings attached to the female figure in the work of male Expressionist writers; through their writing, they attempt to occupy these meanings, creating an open textual space in which ideas about women, authorship and agency can be renegotiated.<sup>76</sup>

Almost all the women writers published in *Die Aktion* understand themselves to be standing at the threshold of a new era: from Meisel-Hess's descrip-

tion of women's nascent economic liberation to Kramer's evocation of a new world order, their works convey a sense that change is imminent. Yet the specific shape and form of this new era differs from one writer to another; while some envisage a more gender-equal society, others foresee the complete overthrow of capitalism and the rule of the proletariat. Still others remain characteristically vague in their views about the imminent change, preferring to convey a general vision of a utopian future rather than detailing specifics about how such social renewal will take place. Particularly striking is the extent to which these women writers find themselves caught in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, femininity, in their eyes, is undervalued and needs to be given greater credence in the public sphere. On the other, they regard it as a restrictive and somewhat arbitrary category that they need to transcend altogether. Their work therefore reveals the possibilities that they see in the present—the potential to bring to light “specific relationships, specific skills, specific perceptions” that the dominant culture “neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognise” (Williams 125). Yet it also gives us a sense of the obstacles within that culture that make change difficult and complicate the idea of progress: it brings to light “all the known complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts and uncertainties” (Williams 129) that are “reduced” (129) by traditional literary histories that portray Expressionism as an overwhelmingly male phenomenon or which downplay female agency in shaping the direction of the movement. This, in turn, sheds light on the difficulty of creating what Williams terms “genuinely emergent cultural practice” (126): given the persistent androcentric bias in scholarship on the literature of this period, we might well ask whether we have, even today, managed to move beyond “a new phase of the dominant [masculine] culture” (Williams 126).

## NOTES

1. *Die Aktion* had a weekly circulation of up to seven thousand copies and was therefore second only to Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm* as one of the leading Expressionist periodicals.

2. See Halliday 68–91; McClintock 25–30; and Kolinsky 7–35. Kolinsky argues that, paradoxically, the Expressionists' utopian goal of transforming humanity actually “diverts from forceful intervention in politics” (“den Eingriff des Expressionismus in die Politik . . . niederschlägt”) (167) and prevents their political engagement from having “concrete goals” (“konkrete Ziele”) (166). All translations in this chapter are my own.

3. “Eine Tribüne, von der aus jede Persönlichkeit, die Sagenswertes zu sagen hat, ungehindert sprechen kann.”

4. "Ein Versuchsgelände kommender Dichter."

5. The bibliography of *Die Aktion: Sprachrohr der expressionistischen Kunst* lists four female authors: Hedwig Dohm (1831–1919), Claire Goll (Studer) (1890–1977), Hilde Stieler (1879–1965), and Minna Tobler-Christinger (1886–1936). Kolinsky also mentions a few women writers in her study of Expressionist journals (including Alexandra Ramm-Pfemfert, Claire Goll [Studer], Hilde Stieler, and Sylvia von Harden [1894–1963]), but their contributions are glossed over very briefly. On Lasker-Schüler's contributions to Expressionist journals, see studies by Sigrid Bauchinger and Markus Hallensleben.

6. See the sociologist Julijana Ranc's biography of Alexandra Ramm-Pfemfert. This casts doubt on both the literary critic Thomas Rietzschel's suggestion that *Die Aktion* was "the life work of its editor" (25) and the cultural historian Dagmar Barnouw's claim that "there is no question Pfemfert was always solely responsible for the editorial policy of his journal" (227).

7. Some recent publications highlight the contribution of female authors to the movement (see, for example, the literary critic Hartmut Vollmer's two anthologies of female-authored Expressionist texts, as well as studies by the literary historians Christine Kanz and Barbara D. Wright). However, scholarship on this movement is still overwhelmingly androcentric: even the literary historian Frank Krause's otherwise excellent edited volume entitled *Expressionism and Gender / Expressionismus und Geschlecht* focuses predominantly on male writers.

8. "Männerbewegung."

9. "Feminisierung der Kunst und Literatur."

10. This sense of standing at the threshold of a new era resonates with what the literary historian Ingo Stoehr terms "the Expressionist vision of creating a new humanity by destroying the old" (89).

11. For example, the eighty-year-old feminist Hedwig Dohm (1831–1919) published an essay in the journal in 1911 arguing that men need to regard women not as sexual objects, but rather as "co-thinkers, co-strivers, coworkers" (361). Germany, she suggests, is standing at the threshold of major social change: the existing culture of "one-sided domination" (361) that puts women in a position of subservience to men will soon be swept away, and people will begin to recognize "woman's equal worth" (361).

12. Born in Prague, Meisel-Hess grew up in Vienna, then moved to Berlin in 1908. She published a large number of novels, novellas, essays, and theoretical texts and engaged with questions of women's rights and sexual reform: notably, her 1904 book *Weiberhaß und Weiberverachtung* (Misogyny and contempt for women) takes issue with Otto Weininger's outspokenly misogynist and anti-Semitic work *Geschlecht und Charakter* (*Sex and Character*) (1903). On Meisel-Hess's contributions to *Die Aktion* in the context of her oeuvre as a whole, see Weiss-Sussex 30–34.

13. "Sehe das Weib zu. . . Es kann sich und uns glücklicher machen, wenn es schön ist und begehrenswert, als wenn es Medizin studiert, auf russische Gouverneure schießt oder um Wahlrecht schreit."

14. "Ein Manko an Männlichkeit."

15. "Dann erst wird sie nur nach jenen Kulturwerten greifen können, die zur

Bereicherung ihrer Persönlichkeit beitragen, ohne teilnehmen zu müssen am größten Handgemenge um Brot.”

16. “Ohne wirtschaftliche Befreiung gibt es eben auch keine Befreiung anderer Art.”

17. This is Martin’s only essay in *Die Aktion*. I have been unable to establish any biographical details, other than the fact that she lived in Zurich.

18. On the relationship between Expressionism and the fashion industry, see Simmons 51–55. Simmons’s essay contains helpful discussion of the fashion exhibitions to which Martin’s essay responds. However, his discussion of the essay itself is hampered by significant mistranslations of the original German.

19. “Vorurteil gegen Mode kennzeichnet eines Volkes Tiefstand.”

20. “Er, der sich gern als Liebhaber der Künste aufspielt, verpönt sie [die Mode].”

21. “Wie alle Kunst unterliegt sie dem bewegenden Gesetz. Expressionismus ist ihr Wesen, und ihr Sinn ist Expression.”

22. “Die Kokette dient dem Geist, und er dient ihr. Wenn sie lächelnd über die Straße schreitet, wird Geist nicht minder als wenn der Unsterbliche ihre Schönheit kündet. Geist läßt sich in Schleifen binden.”

23. “Ein revolutionäres Gewissen der Menschheit.”

24. “[Der] Keim . . . , der [die] Macht [der Mächtigen] zerstören wird.”

25. “Die zerstörendste [Wirkung],” “l’action directe.”

26. “Furchtbare Waffe.”

27. Holzer was active in the women’s movement in Prague, writing and publishing articles in feminist journals such as *Neues Frauenleben* and the *Österreichische Frauenrundschaue*. After World War I, she joined the Social Democratic Party of Austria and regularly participated in political meetings. She published numerous pieces in *Die Aktion* between 1911 and 1914. Her contributions include essays on women’s rights and state policies (e.g., the 1911 article entitled “Fortschritt” [Progress], and the 1912 article “Schutzzölle” [Protective duties]), book reviews and theoretical reflections on the purpose of cultural criticism (e.g., the 1913 essay entitled “Vom Wesen der Kritik” [On the essence of criticism]), and reflections on modern society (e.g., the 1912 essay “Das Automobil” [The automobile]). Holzer was murdered in 1924 by her abusive husband after she tried to divorce him.

28. There is surprisingly little extant scholarship on Holzer, although the literary historian Thomas Anz describes her as worthy of substantial critical attention (34). An as yet incomplete listing of her publications can be found on the website of the Austrian National Library.

29. “Den Fesseln der . . . grausamen und erniedrigenden Realität.”

30. “Ach, wär die rote Perücke mein! Könnt ich sie einmal tragen eine Nacht hindurch. Auf einem glänzenden Ball. Lichtüberflutete Säle. Herren in Frack und Uniform, Orden auf der Brust, Sterne, Kreuze. Damen in glitzerndem Schmuck und eleganten Toiletten, und ich mitten drin mit dem roten Haar, das halbgelöst in den Nacken fällt.”

31. “Aller Augen sehen auf mich, hüllen mich ein in Glut und Licht. Und ein ander Leben erwacht in meinem Blut, mein Denken, mein Fühlen wird heißer unter der Feuersbrunst der roten Haare, meine Augen leuchteten anders, meine Blicke würden wärmer, meine Worte trunken von seltsamer Fremdheit.”

32. “Gedanken einer Mänade steigen empor aus dem roten Haar, Wünsche einer

Circe, das Erinnern an tausend Erlebnisse, das Locken einer bleichen Nixe mit dem grünschimmernden Wunderleib. Sirenenlachen. Glutvolle Leidenschaft. Die Sehnsucht, die Jahrtausende geklopft in Milliarden Frauenherzen, stünde auf. Lebendig. Riesengroß. Lachend. Märchenhaft tief."

33. "Glutvolle Leidenschaft"; "klopf[ende] Frauenherzen"; "küssen"; "lieblosen."

34. "Sie sieht über ihn hinweg, bis er fortschleicht. Ihre Augen umwerben wieder die rote Perücke, und sie weiß, sie wird sie tragen."

35. See Barnouw 227–30 and Kolinsky 13–35.

36. See Baumeister 261–62.

37. On the grieving mother in women's visual art from World War I, see Siebrecht 104–29.

38. Kubicka also published two untitled woodcut images in *Die Aktion* on 1 June 1918. These strongly resemble the Pietà and can be read in conjunction with the poem discussed in this chapter.

39. "Wortlos hält sie den Toten. / Hilflose Starrheit. / Glieder hängen still, ernst."

40. "Du aber, Mutter des Sohnes, / Hast wieder—dein Kind: / Hilflos—nur dein—wie damals."

41. "Jetzt!—da Geist fort— / O! fluch über dich, Mutter des Sohnes, / Die nichts verstand. / Uns keinen Weg zeigte mit ihm, / Uns öden Frauen."

42. "Frauen, / Führerlos / Wankend / Wer zeigt uns den Weg? . . ."

43. Goll spent the final two years of World War I in voluntary political exile in Switzerland, where she was active in avant-garde and pacifist circles and wrote—under her first married name, Claire Studer—for Swiss newspapers such as the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the *Internationaler Rundschau*, and the *Freie Zeitung*. Her poetry collection *Mitwelt* (Shared world) and the novella collection *Die Frauen erwachen* (Women awaken), both published in 1919, contain biting critique of the German nationalism and World War I. She published regularly in *Die Aktion* between 1917 and 1924, including several texts about the war and its consequences (e.g., her 1917 prose poem "Totendialog" [Dialogue of the dead] and the 1918 poems "Brennendes Dorf" [Burning village] and "Krankenschwestern" [Nurses]), and texts that reveal her revolutionary political views (e.g., the 1918 prose piece "Fenster in der Nacht" [Window in the night] and the 1919 essay "Die neue Idee" [The new idea]).

44. "O kannst Du mir die Erde verzeihen, mein Kind, diese Erde? / Und mein Versagen, die Hilflosigkeit beim Tod Deiner ersten Liebe? / Beim Zerschneiden des ersten Menschen, der Dein war, der Puppe?"

45. "Leblose Täuschung."

46. "Zweifel an der Güte der Dinge."

47. Though the child is not explicitly gendered in the poem, I presume her to be female since dolls were, in this period, normally only given to girls to play with. Moreover, the later references to her beloved's death on the battlefield imply that this is a female child.

48. "Wissender Blick des Vorwurfs."

49. "O kannst Du mir die Erde verzeihen, mein Kind, diese Erde? / Und jenen ersten Anblick, gestern, des Menschen / ohne Arm und Bein? / Ach, wie wir uns eng aneinander hielten um es zu tragen!"

50. "Und wieder starb da in Ahnung der Welt Dein liebendes Herz. / Das Bild von guten und schönen Menschen zerbrach."



51. “Doch nimmer hätte der Engel in Dir begriffen: ‘Warum?’ . . . / Die zarte Geste des Glaubens an mich, die mich der Antwort enthob. / Der Antwort: Auch durch mich, durch meine Schweigen verlor er die Glieder.”

52. “Und wirst Du mir die Erde verzeihen, mein Kind, diese Erde? / Einmal, wenn Du stehst vor dem zerbrochenen Leib des Geliebten? / Und Dein Herz auf immer gestorben ist?”

53. “Was hast Du getan um zu verhüten, Mutter, um zu verhüten das Leid? / Aus eurer Duldung wurde ein Tor für das Elend, Mütter!”

54. “O Kind, wirst Du mir da die Erde verzeihn? / Woher nahm ich den Mut und das Recht Dich den Menschen zu geben? / Einmal, ich weiß, wirst Du mir fluchen, mein Kind.”

55. This chimes with the stance taken by Goll in her journalistic writing from the period. See Ender 53–58.

56. “Symbol einer hauptsächlich von Männern getragenen schöpferischen Umwälzung.”

57. See Kolinsky 84–91 and McClintick 32–34.

58. Scholarship has traditionally regarded the German revolution of 1918 as a male phenomenon due to the predominantly masculine membership of revolutionary councils and the perception that female actors were “peripheral to the high-stakes contests over governance and political representation” (Canning 110). However, recent research by Ingrid Sharp, Matthew Stibbe, Kathleen Canning, and William A. Pelz has begun to shed light on the involvement of women in the revolution at all levels. The fact that women writers are so heavily represented in *Die Aktion* in this period reveals the extent to which they consider themselves as active participants in these revolutionary events, rather than simply observers or bystanders.

59. Klein wrote several essays for *Die Aktion* from 1918 onward, but little is known of her biography. It is clear from her writing that she supported socialism but opposed the political programs of both the Social Democratic Party and the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany.

60. “Hüterinnen und Förderinnen der Revolution.”

61. The SPD was the largest party of the German labor movement, commanding 35 percent of the vote share in the 1912 elections to the Reichstag. In 1914, the party voted to support Germany’s entry into World War I, which prompted some of its members to break away in 1917, forming alternative left-wing parties such as the Spartacus League and the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD). These had a more radical agenda than the SPD, which favored social reform over outright revolution. For further details, see Jones’s study.

62. As the historian Richard J. Evans notes, radical feminist campaigners often aimed to emancipate women “from the working class,” rather than seeking “the emancipation of the working class” (149).

63. On Zetkin’s understanding of the relationship between socialism and feminism, see Gaido and Frenchia 5–9 and Quataert 107–34.

64. “Deshalb kann der Befreiungskampf der proletarischen Frau nicht ein Kampf sein wie der der bürgerlichen Frau gegen den Mann ihrer Klasse.”

65. “Sie braucht nicht darum zu kämpfen, gegen die Männer ihrer Klasse die Schranken niederzureißen, die ihr bezüglich der freien Konkurrenz gezogen sind.”

66. "Umgekehrt—es gilt, neue Schranken zu errichten gegen die Ausbeutung der proletarischen Frau." "Das Endziel ihres Kampfes ist . . . die Herbeiführung der politischen Herrschaft des Proletariats."

67. "Hand in Hand mit dem Manne ihrer Klasse kämpft die proletarische Frau gegen die kapitalistische Gesellschaft."

68. "In dieser neuen schönen Zeit / Sollt ihr die Freiheit wiedersehn."

69. "Hinter Festungswall / Und Zuchthausmauern."

70. "Es naht die Zeit. Die Riesenfaust / Des Proletariats weckt das Land . . . / Genossen, wir befreien euch, / Die roten Fahnen in der Hand!"

71. Maria Benemann had close friendships with the poets Richard Dehmel (1863–1920), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), and Franz Werfel (1890–1945) and the architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969). She published in both *Die Aktion* and *Die weissen Blätter*, as well as a poetry collection, fairy tales, novellas, and an autobiography.

72. "Wir habens geschworen / Wir werden nicht weichen / Bis zu der Stunde / Wo sich die Völker der Erde / Die Hände zum Bunde reichen."

73. "Wir haben die Macht / Und das Recht. / Das Recht soll Macht sein."

74. "Zu diesem Zeichen / Zu diesem Bunde / Brüder: bereit sein!"

75. "Voluntaristischen, decisionistischen und aktivistischen Züge."

76. As the literary critic Georgina Paul writes, "The author's status as a woman offers her a productive critical platform, that 'alien and critical' stance that sets her apart from a cultural tradition generated by men in the interests of men" (59).

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## Chapter 13

### Expressionism and “Female Insanity”

*The Lives and Works of Else Blankenhorn (1873–1920)  
and Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler (1899–1940)*

Daniela Müller

Female Expressionists, their impact on the idea of insanity within Expressionism, and their influence on the artworks of some of their male counterparts have so far found limited systematic treatment in the historiography on German art. In contrast to much of the existing scholarship, which focuses on individual female artists like Gabriele Münter, Käthe Kollwitz, and Paula Modersohn-Becker, I will discuss and compare the oeuvre of two female artists, Else Blankenhorn and Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, whose artworks have been primarily defined by their experience of mental illness. However, these two women also had a profound impact on Expressionist discourse about insanity, and at the same time, a crucial influence on the artworks of male Expressionists and subsequent artists, who, in contrast to them, found public recognition and widespread fame. While Blankenhorn gained some fame during her lifetime within a small Expressionist circle and is now a prominent artist in the Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg, Lohse-Wächtler’s work was forgotten for a long time and only rediscovered in the 1990s. She has mainly been discussed in scholarly works focusing on her male peers, even though she had played a prominent role in the avant-garde circles of interwar Dresden and Hamburg. Only recently, her own life and work has been considered in several monographs and essays.<sup>1</sup> Blankenhorn’s oeuvre, however, is almost exclusively discussed by scholars associated with the Prinzhorn Collection.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this chapter is to bring these women’s life stories and artworks together, and assess their impact and role in visual discourses in the male-dominated context of Expressionist art and insanity.

Unknown to each other, Blankenhorn and Lohse-Wächtler had no interaction. Nevertheless, their life stories and creativity show affinities: both were diagnosed with schizophrenia, which led to their internment in different hospitals and sanatoriums in Germany and Switzerland. Both dedicated themselves to abundant artistic creation while being hospitalized, resulting in a diverse oeuvre of several art forms, including textiles, watercolors, drawings, and paintings. And both represent institutionalized women, who in one way or another have been marginalized by society. In many ways, they shared such experiences with other women in psychiatric hospitals. Some of them were only recently discovered, like Agnes Richter with her jacket full of stitched text of private content, Maria Kraetzing, Maria Lieb, and Elisabeth Faulhaber, to name just a few. Even though the stylistic forms of female artworks produced in mental asylums are very different, they reflect similar concerns about illness as well as their role as women in a male-dominated society.<sup>3</sup>

While Blankenhorn and Lohse-Wächtler shared the experience of institutionalization, and their works became closely linked with ideas about madness and deviance as a shared modern artistic idiom, it is also important to note significant differences in their artworks and *vita*. Blankenhorn never had the chance to develop artistic agency outside the asylum, even though her work had a significant influence on how an Expressionist like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) thought and reflected on his own practice. By contrast, Lohse-Wächtler was an active participant in Expressionist circles from 1916 onward. While her work defies simple classifications, her artistic language was shaped by and in turn influenced the works of renowned avant-garde artists. Her most important work molded a field of artistic discourse that has alternatively been described with references to Expressionism, Expressionist realism, and New Objectivity. Despite her experience of mental illness, she actively promoted her own work and participated in exhibitions, which also gave her some public exposure during her lifetime. While Blankenhorn was caught and probably felt trapped in a prewar society with fairly rigid gender boundaries, Lohse-Wächtler could, at least to a limited extent, take advantage of a society that provided women with greater opportunities for self-expression.<sup>4</sup> It is these differences as well as their similarities, I would argue, that make their case studies instructive for an assessment of women's experiences and opportunities during the early and later periods of German Expressionism.

### **Gendered Art and Insanity**

Art historians Griselda Pollock, Rozsika Parker, and Renate Berger have identified a gender-specific system of values in art criticism and historiography

from the nineteenth century onward. As a result, the works of women and their personalities as artists were not considered as significant as those of their male counterparts (Muysers 106). These gendered assumptions were also operating in the context of art and insanity in German Expressionism.<sup>5</sup> The artworks of and from asylum inpatients is mostly associated with names of male artists like the Austrian Alfred Kubin and Germans Conrad Felixmüller, Otto Dix, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, while Expressionist "madwomen" are neglected. The emphasis on male Expressionists seems to be informed by older beliefs linking insanity and male creativity that reach as far back as the ancient imagination of a creative divine madness under the influence of Saturn, even though, ironically, one of its most prominent expressions—Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1514)—is feminine. The perception of "male insanity" in art finally culminates in Vincent van Gogh as the prototype of the mad artist. Going from there, the "madman" became an important figure in German Expressionism at the beginning of the twentieth century, either as depicted subject, or as the artist himself. Expressionists portrayed the madman and the madwoman in their artworks and produced authentic portraits of asylum inmates in the tradition of French Romantic painter Théodore Géricault, who had portrayed inpatients in the early nineteenth century (Röske, "Expressionism and Insanity" 32–34). Other insanity-related topics in Expressionist art were the depictions of asylums as an imagined madman's garden, a theme that has also become popular since the early nineteenth century and was taken up in Kubin's drawings from 1910 of asylums and madhouses. The everyday life in asylums also became a focus of artistic depiction, which was still mainly linked with the names of male artists. Prominent examples are the paintings, drawings, and graphic prints by Erich Heckel, which he created in 1914 after visiting the psychiatric hospital Maison de Santé in Berlin Schöneberg, and the works by Christian Schad and Heinrich Ehmsen, who, among other artists, visited asylums to paint "the mad" and to reflect life in the mental hospitals. During and after World War I, more and more artists became patients in mental hospitals. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, for example, stayed between 1915 and 1918 in different sanatoriums as he suffered from the aftermath of his experiences as a soldier. There he depicted his fellow patients, among them the conductor and composer Otto Klemperer and the dramatist Carl Sternheim. His self-portrait *Kopf des Kranken* (*Head of a Sick Man*) (1917) shows features of a mentally ill countenance with staring eyes and absent expression (Röske, "E. L. Kirchner" 25–26, "Expressionism and Insanity" 32–34). Other works of inpatient artists contained a direct reference to the war, for example, the sculptures of Karl Genzel that depict soldiers with helmets, weapons, and iron crosses as references to the Wilhelmine era (Hessling).



The artistic creativity of institutionalized women, however, was significant and distinctive in different ways. While men often processed traumatic experiences of violence, interned women invented their own artistic forms of communication to express their feelings of depression and agony after being committed to mental hospitals against their will. The works by female patients often revolved around the themes of love, nature, and motherhood. While male artworks were often masculine in genre, works by female inmates were characterized by fantasies and artistic expressions that reflected their own gendered experiences and skills. For their creations, they used whatever materials they could find in their surroundings. Artworks by women included crochet work made of hair or mattress filler, biographical embroidery turned into asylum attire—the famous jacket by Agnes Richter—imaginary gardens made of fabric and bed sheet stripes in her cell by Maria Lieb, and the phallic, life-sized doll by Katharina Detzel. Other female inmates explored working with paper as their creative medium, like Emma Hauck with her rigorously systematic and desperate letters, Frau St. with her collages of numerous small pieces of paper, and the paintings of hospital kitchen utensils by Barbara Suckfüll, which only hint at the range of feminine creativity (Hessling; Röske, “Lust und Leid” 173).<sup>6</sup>

The marginalization of women in society in the early twentieth century is clearly reflected in the quantitative discrepancy in preserved artworks by male and female inpatients that can be primarily explained in terms of the biased selection by institutional staff. While works of male inpatients gained greater attention, products beyond traditional female handicrafts made by institutionalized women were deprecated and often thrown away. This explains why, for example, calculating from more than forty-five hundred artworks collected by the Heidelberg psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn (1886–1933) until 1921, only 80 of 450 “artist inpatients” from different psychiatric institutions in Germany and Europe were women (Hessling). Thus, the works of female patients only represented approximately 20 percent in the Prinzhorn Collection, although the numbers of women and men in psychiatric institutions were similar. Such discriminatory attitudes also shaped the perception of creative women in mental institutions, even though this might not have been the case for Prinzhorn himself.<sup>7</sup> He especially admired the works of inpatient Else Blankenhorn, who is nowadays acknowledged as one of the most outstanding artists within the Heidelberg Collection—one of the most important collections of art from mentally ill and psychiatric patients worldwide (Röske, “Expressionism and Insanity” 37).

### **Prinzhorn's Women and the Female Impact on the Idea of Insanity in Art: The Case of Else Blankenhorn**

It is only thanks to Prinzhorn and his favorable attitude toward her artistic work that Blankenhorn received public attention that enabled her to become as prominent as some of the male artists in the Prinzhorn Collection, like Franz Karl Bühler, August Natterer, and Paul Goesch.<sup>8</sup> Blankenhorn has risen to a certain prominence in recent decades from being part of exhibitions Europe-wide as well as one of the few artists of the Prinzhorn Collection mentioned in the database *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon (Artists of the World)* (Röske, "Künstler aus Psychiatrischen Anstalten" 245).<sup>9</sup> Already during her lifetime she had become somewhat famous within a small Expressionist circle. Prinzhorn documented that some Expressionist artists had visited the Heidelberg Collection. One of them was Kubin. He came to see the collection in September 1920 and published an article in which he mentioned more than twelve artists and showed examples of their work. However, nothing is said about Blankenhorn. Familiarity with Blankenhorn's work is only documented for Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, who encountered her oeuvre in 1917, when he became a fellow patient in the same private sanatorium of Bellevue in Kreuzlingen on Lake Constance, Switzerland. Kirchner never met Blankenhorn personally, but euphorically mentioned some of her paintings in letters and diary entries.<sup>10</sup> This proves that she had an influence on her contemporaries, even though the exact nature of her influence—apart on Kirchner's receptivity—is still being debated. Blankenhorn, who led a withdrawn life, refused to show her artworks to others and rarely discussed their content, and many of her works are lost today. According to anecdotes, her maid Berta was a further obstacle, as she sometimes refused the doctors access to Blankenhorn (Röske, "Expressionism and Insanity" 36–37, "From Identification to Research" 43, "Ist das nicht doch recht pathologisch?" 159).

We do not know much about Blankenhorn's life: as the daughter of a wealthy landowner and professor in Karlsruhe in close contact with the court, Blankenhorn enjoyed a traditional upper-class education. In 1899, she suffered for the first time from "nervous exhaustion" and was admitted to the Bellevue sanatorium. Before Blankenhorn, her father had been in the same institution several times, suffering from manic-depressive distress. Blankenhorn left in 1902 but returned in 1906 as the deaths of her grandmother and father in the same year led to a further breakdown. She stayed in Kreuzlingen until 1919, when her family had to relocate her to the Baden mental hospital on the island

of Reichenau due to financial problems, where she died of cancer in 1920. Even though she had followed an artistic path before—she had particularly enjoyed a musical education but also received training as an artist at the boarding school Victoria-Pensionat—Blankenhorn only started to paint in 1908, when she stayed for the second time in Bellevue, where she might have taken some painting lessons (Noell-Rumpeltes, “Vom Projekt der Versöhnung” 77).<sup>11</sup>

Apart from her numerous watercolors, expressive drawings, and paintings, Blankenhorn’s extensive oeuvre consists of sketchbooks, diaries, poems, embroideries, and compositions, thereby defying simple categorization. A precise characterization of the artistic style in her artworks also remains difficult. Some of her colorful paintings show the influence of Expressionism and, according to Röske, perhaps even of the Munich group *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) (“Expressionism and Insanity” 37). But there is no evidence that Blankenhorn has seen artworks by her contemporaries. While some paintings remind one of *art brut* or in some instances even resemble modern abstract art, others seem almost Expressionistic in their use of color and movement, especially in her atmospheric landscapes. Yet the interpretation of her often abstract compositions and enigmatic creatures—among them female hybrid figures, loving couples, religious motifs, as well as symbolic elements of nature (von Beyme 128)—is complicated, as some of her visions and delusions remain unknown, suggesting a discernment of different states of mind expressed in her artworks (Hessling). Blankenhorn’s medical record noted symptoms of schizophrenia and optical and acoustical hallucinations as well as vague conditions such as “bizarre mannerisms” and “emotional stiffness.” However, it is certain that many of her recurring female figures in her paintings were self-portraits or self-projections, like her depiction of a singer, which shows her capable of self-reflexivity. Often mentioned is her delusional belief of being “in spirit” married to the emperor, William II, and therefore in charge of “financing the resurrection of all buried but not dead loving couples”<sup>12</sup> and their nourishment. That is why she painted and drew original banknotes for great sums. After her death, her artistic estate—around 450 works—was transferred to the Prinzhorn Collection (Röske, “E. L. Kirchner” 28, “Expressionism and Insanity” 37).

It is remarkable that Blankenhorn made a profound impression on Kirchner. Expressionists like him were fascinated by the originality and strangeness in the artworks of institutionalized artists and by what they considered an authentic and pure expression of the inner state by mentally ill people. Influenced by the artistic products of people diagnosed as schizophrenics, they felt motivated to develop a new style in their own art. Subsequent artists such as Oskar Schlemmer and Max Ernst had been impressed as early as 1910 by art-

works of asylum patients. The latter was the first of the surrealists who used specific techniques and procedures of "mad art" in his own paintings and collages (Röske, "From Identification to Research" 43).<sup>13</sup> Kirchner's encounter with Blankenhorn's work led to a new dimension of interaction with "insanity" in his own work (Röske, "E. L. Kirchner" 26). Soon after Kirchner's arrival at Bellevue, the asylum director, Ludwig Binswanger, showed him artworks by Blankenhorn. Kirchner's enthusiastic reaction is recorded in a series of letters, such as the one to architect Henry van de Velde from 1917: "I have received much inspiration through . . . something entirely strange, through the images by a sick woman, who paints her visions here with an extraordinarily fine sensitivity for the colors. . . . I am astonished by what kind of forces are sometimes revealed through illness."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in one of his sketchbooks of that time, number 38, Kirchner described and interpreted some of Blankenhorn's works. Though he, like Kubin, did not mention her name, Kirchner described unmistakably Blankenhorn's oil painting *Ohne Titel (Roter Reiter) (Red Rider)*, which is part of the Prinzhorn Collection today (Röske, "Expressionism and Insanity" 38). He praised her technical mastery and her subjects as "dreamlike visionary things, which a sick brain brings to the surface."<sup>15</sup>

According to Röske, Kirchner discerned parallels between her works and his oeuvre, which becomes clear in his sketchbook, where Kirchner's notes on Blankenhorn follow a paragraph titled "Überblick über die malerische Entwicklung" (Overview of the artistic development) of his own style (Röske, "E. L. Kirchner" 29, "Ist das nicht doch recht pathologisch?" 159). New in Kirchner's paintings after his encounter with Blankenhorn's work after 1917 was his conception of landscapes. His mystical mountain landscapes through 1920 show the spiritual ambience of his fellow patient's works, especially in his glaring, high-contrast painting *Wintermondlandschaft (Winter Landscape in Moonlight, 1919)*, where Blankenhorn's influence on Kirchner's sense of form and color is evident (Röske, "Expressionism and Insanity" 38). Further influences on his oeuvre become visible in the simplified forms of clear and short brushstrokes, also implemented in his woodcuts. The opposing of color surfaces and the use of cosmological and ornamental symbols, and also the stylization of facial traits in Kirchner's figures, are reminiscent of Blankenhorn in some of his portraits, as in the painting of Erna Schilling (1917), and in the portrait of Marie-Luise Binswanger (1919) (Röske, "E. L. Kirchner" 29, "Ist das nicht doch recht pathologisch?" 160–61). Kirchner's admiration for Blankenhorn culminated in his description of her work in words that could almost be read as a programmatic statement of Expressionism: her "colors are juxtaposed with an incredible sensitivity, pure and strong, solely originating from



**Figure 13.1.** Else Blankenhorn, *Ohne Titel (Roter Reiter) (Untitled [Red Rider])*, before 1917, oil on canvas. 42 × 46.5 cm. Prinzhorn Collection, Heidelberg.

feeling. They defy any academic doctrine. One sees that they serve purely impulsively the expression of feeling.”<sup>16</sup>

Given the vibrancy that emanates from her paintings, it is astonishing that Blankenhorn has not found wider recognition. Her work is still mainly discussed in relation to the famous Expressionist painter and the possible influence she had on him. A stand-alone interpretation of her versatile oeuvre has rarely been offered. Only recently, the Prinzhorn Collection museum offered the first in-depth retrospective exhibition of Blankenhorn’s oeuvre and her unique artistic signature, as revealed in her numerous painted banknotes. As in her other paintings, Blankenhorn in the banknotes created imaginary worlds full of ornamental and figural compositions and recurring enigmatic symbols. However, the delicate ductus in her banknotes reveals a more fragile and vul-

nerable side of the artist. In her watercolor painting *I. Milliarde Thaler (One Billion Thalers)* one can clearly perceive her distinctive style and imagery. Painted with soft strokes in Indian ink, four asexual, angelic creatures are arranged around a radiating circle in the center. Above, in calligraphy, appears the sum—one billion thalers—that is needed to resurrect the buried couples, a task that the self-proclaimed "Empress Else of Germany" or "Else from Hohenzollern" regarded as her very own life's mission. This might explain her excessive production of notes, often with the value of many billion thalers and sometimes of "centuplons", "quadruplons" and "seidublons of Marks," currencies that Blankenhorn invented (Dammann 16). As a common feature, the banknotes depict the same angel-like, hybrid figures, their faces resembling the artist, as they also appear in other paintings that are thought to be self-representations. Smaller figures seem to be her imaginative guardian angels. Their bodies, however, are not defined. The legs of the winged creatures are closed and either put to one side or grown together to a sort of tail, "so that nothing can happen" ("damit nichts passiert"), as noted on one of Blankenhorn's drawings from 1919 (Noell-Rumpeltes, *Irre ist weiblich* 110, "Vom Projekt der Versöhnung" 79–80). Other notes from the artist suggest that she experienced sexual abuse that she processed in her works (Röske, "Lust und Leid" 173). The angels on the billion-thaler banknote differ in size, as if depicting different stages of being. Their floating bodies seem permeable, almost transparent, with the blue, runny ink intensifying their dreamlike appearance, as if they are lost in reverie. Blankenhorn's watercolor and gouache works are markedly different from the strong and vivid oil paintings like *Roter Reiter*, and hint at the artist's reclusiveness, her self-imposed isolation, and enraptured visions, as expressed in these painted scenes from her imaginary life.

Kirchner could see her paintings only because they had been taken away from Blankenhorn, who tried to keep them secret. Blankenhorn's medical record proves that this was requested by Binswanger so he might analyze and understand Blankenhorn's behavior through her art (Röske, "Ist das nicht doch recht pathologisch?" 159). This opens up a discussion of the former handling of female artists in care, as well as on broader discourses on gender bias in the context of art and mental health. Women in sanatoriums and mental asylums worldwide have been diagnosed, hospitalized, and psychoanalyzed by predominantly male psychologists and psychiatrists (Chesler). The works of female artists have also been mainly discussed by men, who were frequently the collectors and interpreters of patients' art. Traditional, patriarchal structures in mental health facilities have meant that many biographies of women,



**Figure 13.2.** Else Blankenhorn, *I. Milliarde Thaler (Geldschein) (One Billion Thalers [Banknote])*, before 1920, ink on paper. 11.5 × 18 cm. Prinzhorn Collection, Heidelberg.

their histories of mental illness and of their art, are only told from the perspective of men. The case of Blankenhorn also reveals tendencies in pertinent art historiography that consider women's art mainly in relation to their influence on male artists (Berger; Parker and Pollock).

Unlike Blankenhorn, Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler was already a prolific artist in avant-garde circles before she was committed to psychiatric hospitals. However, she only became widely known in the 1990s after it was discovered that she was murdered in the Nazi euthanasia program. Before that, she had received little attention from scholars of Expressionist and Weimar art. The emphasis of her tragic life, including her forced sterilization under the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Defective Offspring (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*), is frequently discussed by scholars. Altogether, the majority of the literature about Lohse-Wächtler seems to focus on her tragic death rather than on the quality of her work, thereby affirming art historian Carola Muysers's point about female artists being often stylized or emphasized as victims in times of existential crisis (107–11; see also Waike-Koormann ch. 5.2).<sup>17</sup>

### Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler: A Victim of Insanity

Born in Dresden in 1899, Anna Frieda Wächtler was the oldest child of a comfortable middle-class family. At an early age, her parents recognized her dexterity with textiles and encouraged her to pursue a career as a fashion and costume designer, which she started in 1915, at the age of sixteen, at the renowned Royal School of Applied Arts in Dresden. However, she soon shifted to her real interest: fine arts and painting, and studied at Dresden's Art Academy in 1919 and 1923. She did not graduate from either institution. In 1916, she left her parent's house because of ongoing confrontations with her father and because she felt too restricted as an artist. She moved into her own apartment at the age of seventeen, which was a very unusual decision for a young, unmarried woman. At the same time, she met Expressionist painter Conrad Felixmüller, at whose atelier she took drawing classes. Soon after, they began sharing an apartment. During her two-year cohabitation with Felixmüller, she came into contact with artistic avant-garde circles, connected to the Spartakusbund (Spartacus Group) in Dresden, which was central to Germany's leftist movement and included such members as Otto Dix. During her formative years in Dresden from 1916 to 1925, a mutual influence both in motifs and in style between her and other artists is evident. However, given her silence on what she saw and thought of others, her work's affinities with that of other artists is still debated (Hertel 50–52; G. Reinhardt ch. 1; Salisbury 25; Waikemoormann ch. 2.3).

In contrast to Blankenhorn, however, one can be certain that Lohse-Wächtler had seen artworks by other artists as well as their representations of 'insanity' as a popular topos. She was a student at Dresden's Royal School of Applied Arts and Art Academy, where Dix and Otto Griebel were students, and Oskar Kokoschka was a professor of painting. Her works from this time show similar depictions of figures in the ambience of mystery, abnormality, and insanity, with her woodcut *Die Nachtwandlerin (The Woman Sleepwalker)* being a prominent example. It depicts a young woman with closed eyes and overly elongated limbs, who seems to stride on tiptoes or float across abstracted forms that remind of rooftops. Her long arms are stretched out diagonally to touch the moon, while she is formally integrated in its concentric frame-filling radiation. With this illustration of "primitivism, somnambulism, pathos, and irrationalism," as retrospectively characterized by Lohse-Wächtler's friend and artist Otto Griebel, a mutual interaction with other artists seems apparent (Griebel 84–87). Thematically, her woodcut exhibits similarities with Lasar Segall's *Die irrenden Frauen (The Wandering Women, 1919)*, showing two



female figures under a sickle moon, while her angular style shows parallels to *Der begeisterte Weg* (*The Inspired Way*, 1919) by Constantin von Mitschke-Collande, in which an asexual figure with stretched limbs jumps diagonally through a vaguely defined urban space (Hertel 51; G. Reinhardt ch. 1). Felixmüller, in particular, encouraged her to produce works in the experimental style of the newly formed *Dresdner Sezession Gruppe 1919* (Dresden Secession Group), which also counted Mitschke-Collande, Segall, and Dix among its members. Some of Lohse-Wächtler's works of this time also show the influence of the edgy sense of forms by the Dresden *Brücke* artists, especially in her hard, angular drawing style and in her woodcuts. But Lohse-Wächtler also had an impact on Felixmüller and his circle. According to Griebel, on the walls of their shared apartment hung different kinds of works by Lohse-Wächtler, which makes it very likely that some of their artist friends saw her work. The admiration of some of them becomes evident in Griebel's unpublished and edited manuscript on the artist and her work, entitled *Erinnerungen an Laus (Frieda Wächtler)* (Memories of Laus), in which he praised the quantity and quality of her work (G. Reinhardt 21; Salisbury 24). Being inspired by her talent, but also by her nonconformist, bohemian appearance and behavior as a *Bürgerschreck* (enfant terrible)—she cut her hair into a short bob, smoked pipes and cigarettes in public, and dressed herself in Russian blouses—Felixmüller published a woodcut portrait of her in a 1917 issue of the journal *Die Aktion* (Hertel 51; Salisbury 24–25). As her relationship with the Dresden art scene developed, Lohse-Wächtler gave herself the name Nikolaus and tended to sign her artworks only with initials or last name to obscure her gender. This might have been a reflection of the ideal of the androgynous women in the Weimar Republic, but it could also be read as a selling strategy in a situation, in which women's artwork was held in lower esteem than men's (Muysers 107–8). In adopting “gestures such as dressing in men's clothing, smoking, and socializing exclusively with men,” it is assumed that Lohse-Wächtler could separate herself from her identity as a woman, and thereby enable herself to be taken more seriously in an artistic environment shaped entirely by men, and to self-identify as a member of this bohemian circle (Salisbury 25).<sup>18</sup>

It was Dix who in 1919 introduced the young Elfriede Wächtler to the occasional artist and singer Kurt Lohse, a member of the same bohemian circle. They quickly started a relationship that was troubled from the start. Nevertheless, they got married soon after, in 1920. As Lohse's acting and singing jobs were not enough to make a living, Lohse-Wächtler was forced to provide most of the income through the sale of her portraits, and craft-based works like batiks, postcards, and illustrations. She eventually followed Lohse



Figure 13.3. Elfriede Lohse-Wächter, *Die Nachtwandlerin* (*The Sleepwalker*), 1919, woodcut on brownish simili-japan paper. 26.7 x 22.7 cm. The Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies, LACMA, Los Angeles.

to Hamburg, where he had a singing engagement, and where the couple soon separated because of ongoing problems and her husband's infidelity. Even though, those years were filled with poverty, restless work, and pressures that led to Lohse-Wächtler's mental illness and hospitalization, her most creative and prolific years were in Hamburg (H. Reinhardt; Salsbury 25–26). During this time, between 1925 and 1931, Lohse-Wächtler depicted herself in several large-scale self-portraits in pencil, watercolor, or pastel, often with a cigarette, and drew veristic harbor scenes and portraits of working women and men. Her versatile oeuvre of those years is—socially and stylistically—close to the work of canonical male artists of the early twentieth century, such as Dix, Felixmüller, Christian Schad, George Grosz, and Rudolf Schlichter, and places her alternately in the contexts of Expressionism, expressive realism, and New Objectivity. Especially in her watercolors, one can detect “the freely flowing and strongly expressive colorism of . . . Kokoschka, whose art she probably saw in Dresden and later in Hamburg” (Hertel 52). In particular her numerous representations of Hamburg's amusement and red-light district St. Pauli can be regarded as examples for a distinctly female approach to the stock themes of Weimar Germany. Mainly in watercolors and pastels, she illustrated street scenes, music halls, bars, brothels, and prostitutes—topics that are usually associated with the work of her friends and former colleagues in Dresden, Griebel, Felixmüller, and Dix. However, while they, as well as Grosz, had viciously caricatured men crippled by the war, the unemployed, and the “petit bourgeois” but also prostitutes, distorting their faces to grimaces and degrading them to grotesque representations, Lohse-Wächtler in contrast preserved a more compassionate view of these people on the margins of society. Stylistically different from the harsh and scathing depictions of such milieus by her male colleagues, Lohse-Wächtler's focus was less on social criticism, and she avoided caricatures and hard-edged portrayals of her surroundings (Hertel 51–52). Her watercolor *Lissy* in particular shows a distinctive side of Lohse-Wächtler and is, according to Salsbury, “invaluable in establishing an alternative vision of Weimar prostitutes that is both realistic and sympathetic to the plight of these women” (29) while portraying their dignity and questioning the prevailing dichotomy of women as either mothers or whores (23). Her work may be a reflection of more accepting attitudes of prostitutes and other social outsiders in the Weimar Republic but goes far beyond that with her mode of representation, showing sympathy and respect for “an aging prostitute somewhat warily asserting herself in a night-café” (Heller 198; Hertel 52).<sup>19</sup> Lohse-Wächtler depicts Lissy—perhaps a prostitute in the St. Pauli district—in a way that

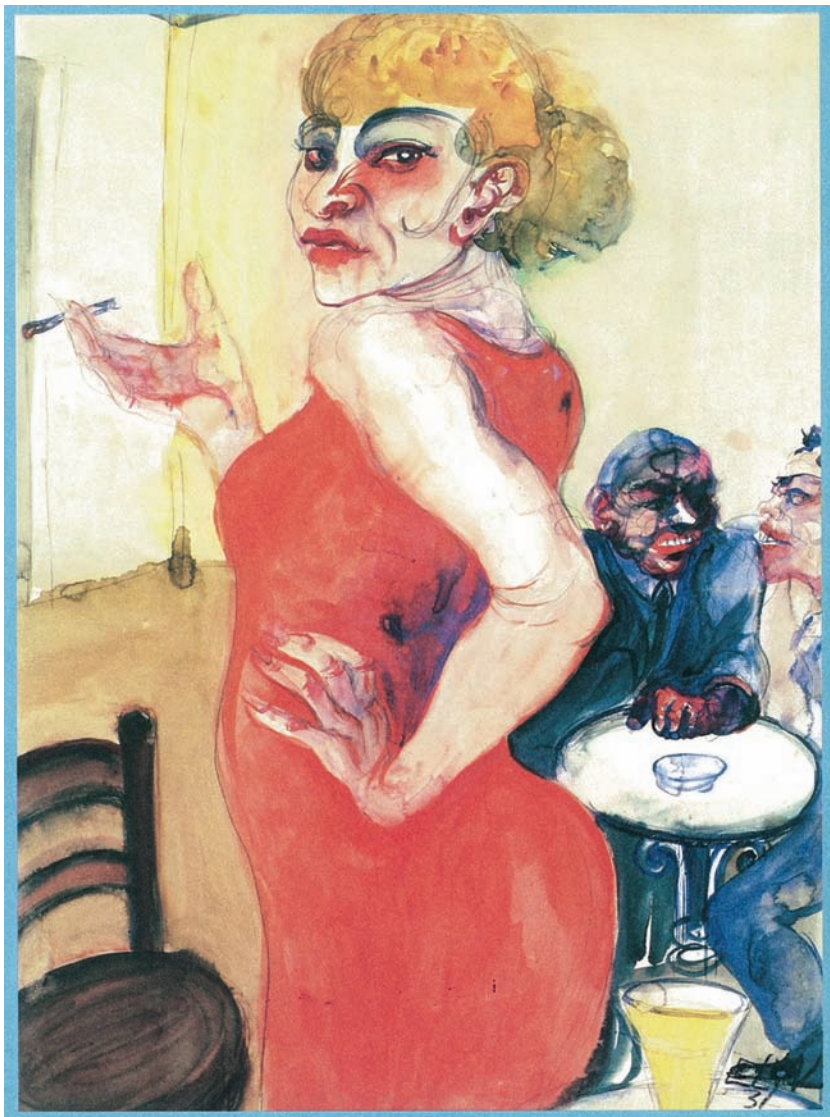


Figure 13.4. Elfriede Lohse-Wächter, *Lissy*, 1931, watercolor over pencil. 49 × 68 cm. Private collection, courtesy Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main.

strongly contrasts with predominant, misogynist representations in the veristic milieu studies of Dix, Grosz, and other canonical male Expressionist and New Objectivity painters (Salsbury 27). Her sympathy reveals itself in the subjectification of someone usually rather seen as an “object,” and in the sublime, respectful depiction of an individual Lohse-Wächtler herself could relate to. Both were social outsiders, and both were facing marginalization and intersectional discrimination—in the case of “Lissy” as a woman and sex worker, and in the case of Lohse-Wächtler as an independent female artist in a male-dominated avant-garde milieu, and as a patient and sufferer from mental illness.<sup>20</sup>

Both self-determination and resilience come to the fore in the appearance of Lissy. Dressed in a striking skin-tight, red dress with matching lipstick and fingernails, her slinky, feminine body dominates the painting. Behind her, the room opens up and gives a view into the interior of a bar or amusement establishment—maybe a brothel—with two men sitting around a bistro table in the righthand corner. Here it is only the male figures who are grimacing, dark, and somewhat disfigured, while Lissy appears vividly, in bright colors, and with a self-confident posture. She is turning away from the men behind her as if ignoring them. New also is their indifference: both men disregard her, neither exhibiting desire nor disgust. In this way Lohse-Wächtler does not show Lissy from a voyeuristic perspective. On the contrary, she lets Lissy present herself in totality while she fixates her observers outside the image with firm eyes, thereby subverting the topos of the direct gaze that typically refers to the viewer as client. Moreover, Lissy’s gesture appears inviting, almost alluring. With one hand resting assertively on her hip and nonchalantly smoking a cigarette, she exemplifies the “New Woman” in the Weimar Republic, with which Lohse-Wächtler identified herself as well. *Lissy* is one of several paintings that the artist dedicated to the depiction of prostitutes, in which a more complex, feminist vision of feminine sexuality becomes visible. With this mode of representation, Lohse-Wächtler clearly stands out from her contemporaries, suggesting “a more empowering discourse for Weimar prostitution” (Salsbury 23–25).

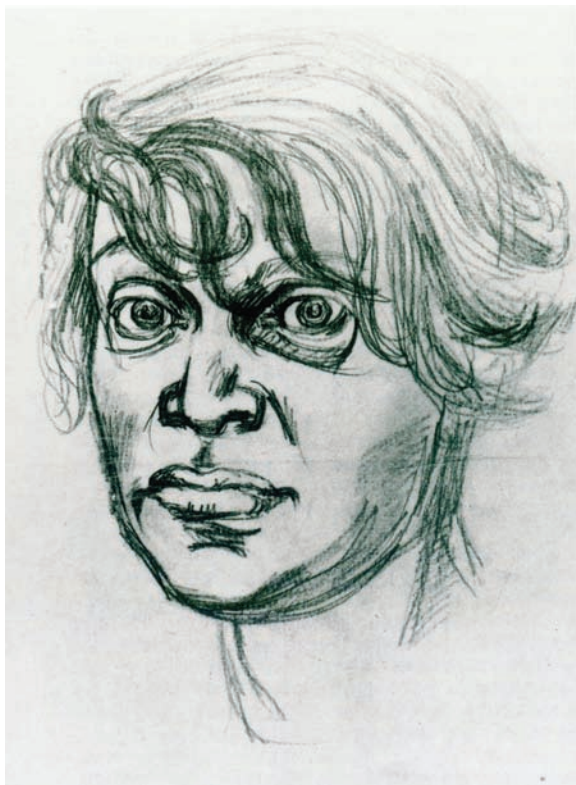
Despite her achievements as a relatively autonomous female artist with a distinctive style of her own, the literature about Lohse-Wächtler likes to dwell on the darker aspects of her life, and the topos of the woman artist driven to insanity continues to be prominent in discussions of her oeuvre (Hertel 50). In this context, she became best known for the work she created while hospitalized for the first time for approximately two months in 1929. Without regular income and betrayed by her husband, the thirty-year-old Lohse-Wächtler suffered a nervous breakdown with symptoms of persecution mania and intense paranoia,

which was soon diagnosed as schizophrenia. Her so-called *Friedrichsberger Köpfe* (*Friedrichsberg Heads*, 1929), which were all created during her short stay and named after the mental hospital near Hamburg, consist of a series of sixty drawings—mainly three-quarters portraits in fast pencil sketches or in pastel chalk—of fellow inmates as well as scenes of everyday life in the asylum with eating, pondering, motionless, or gesticulating patients.<sup>21</sup> Those genre-like impressions, of great artistic sophistication, made her one of only a few artists who depicted interned patients during their own hospitalization. The heads soon received acclaim after her release from the Friedrichsberg hospital in the spring of 1929, when parts of the series were exhibited in the same year at the Art Salon Maria Kunde in Hamburg-St. Georg, followed by a dozen solo and group exhibitions in Hamburg and Dresden through 1932.<sup>22</sup> The veristic portraits of her fellow patients are similar to her earlier works from Hamburg in their intense realism and were praised in the daily newspaper *Hamburger Anzeiger* as an "outstanding, decisive discovery" and as an "outcry of an embattled creature . . . so true and organically grown, so full of soul,"<sup>23</sup> as art historian Anna Banaschewski wrote in her supportive essay for the cultural journal *Der Kreis* (The circle), which also gave the series its name (Hertel 51–52).

The heads also show the stylistic influence that Lohse-Wächtler's contemporaries had on her oeuvre. Her numerous studies, of herself and other inmates, bear the handwriting of artists like Dix and the Austrians Kokoschka and Rudolf Wacker, the latter a founding member of the international artist association *Der Kreis* to which Felixmüller also belonged. Some of her heads are sketched in a hectic ductus of blurry strokes and entangled lines as if representing a nervous state, while other portraits show a more closed and sculptural contour of calm forms, thereby revealing different influences in style. Features of the "insane" are depicted in her study-like pencil drawing *Vier weibliche Halbporträts und gefaltete Hände* (*Four Female Half-Portraits and Folded Hands*), which is a partly colored pencil drawing of patients, with two folded hands in the foreground as if in prayer. The superimposed busts of inmates in different sizes fill almost the whole space, evoking a claustrophobic confinement. Reminiscent of Ehmsen's depictions of patients in asylums and madhouses in their behavior, patients in Lohse-Wächtler's drawing seem petrified, with eyes wide open as if frightened. One of them appears to stare out of the corner, while hands in the foreground seem to move in an uncoordinated fashion. Like Heckel and Ehmsen, she shows the inpatients as poor, isolated, or obsessively acting figures in cold, empty spaces (Röske, "Expressionism and Insanity" 32–34). Her self-portrait—the first drawing of the *Friedrichsberger Köpfe*—depicts the traits of a maniac. In this image, Lohse-Wächtler, who

drew herself in front of a mirror in the asylum, as noted in her medical record from February 1929, reveals the degree of her inner desperation (Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten 11). With eyes bloodshot and wide open and her lips bitterly compressed, Lohse-Wächtler stares at the observer. Those images can be read as expressions of her own feelings cast in the iconography of typical artistic Expressionistic representations of the mentally ill. At other times, she seems to express her own situation by drawing other women's experiences, such as in the colored pastel *Eine Patientin (Frau mit Landschaft)* (*A Patient [Woman with Landscape]*). The female inmate in the bust-length portrait seems both tired and tense. Her dark, sunken eyes are unfocused, her partly undefined lips are turned downward, and her sticky hair merges seamlessly and interchangeably with the tree branches in the background. All this contrasts with her fisted right hand and strong neck, suggesting the determination and perseverance of someone who has not given up yet (Hertel 52). In other works, Lohse-Wächtler puts her focus on the interaction between nursing staff and patients, conveying a rather friendly impression of the psychiatric hospital, while other drawings capture her view out of the window onto buildings within the institutional complex, presumably reflecting her situation of imprisonment (Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten 11–13). Overall, no deliriums or delusions emerge, as in the dreamlike products of Blankenhorn. Only her lost pastel *Liegender Frauenkopf* (*Lying Woman's Head*), in which impressions of psychiatry, illness, men, and the cityscape of Hamburg are woven together, appears as if part of a hallucination (Bruhns 290).

After she left the hospital in Friedrichsberg, Lohse-Wächtler continued expressing her intimate feelings in her work, which shows her fear of relapse, especially the pastel *Selbstporträt und ein Schatten* (*Self-Portrait and a Shadow*) from 1931, "in which the skull-like features of a male face appear in the dark mass of her hair" (Röske, "Expressionism and Insanity" 34). She temporarily lived on the streets of Hamburg, moving in the social circles of the prostitutes. Destitute at the age of thirty-two, she returned to live with her parents in Dresden the same year, from where they had her committed to the Landes-Heil- und Pflgeanstalt in Arnsdorf outside of Dresden, where she would stay interned for eight years. During her institutionalization, Lohse-Wächtler continued to draw, paint, and sketch everyday life and her fellow inmates in an intense realism, similar to the earlier veristic portraits from Friedrichsberg, as well as her negative experiences, which go far beyond the bearable, showing the continuous destruction of her creativity (G. Reinhardt ch. 3). In 1935, Lohse had her declared legally incompetent and then divorced her because of her "incurable mental illness." With passage of the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Defective Offspring,



**Figure 13.5.** Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, *Selbstporträt (erste Zeichnung der Serie Friedrichsberger Köpfe)* (Self-Portrait [first drawing in the Friedrichsberg Heads series]), 1929, pencil on paper. 37 × 24.5 cm. Universitäts-krankenhaus Eppendorf.

the asylum's deputy director requested Lohse-Wächtler's sterilization. Shattered by the forced medical surgery, she created thereafter only a now lost painting of a crucified women and decorative postcards. She was eventually murdered in Sonnenstein near Pirna at one of the killing centers of the Nazi euthanasia program, a fate that she shared with more than two hundred thousand mentally handicapped and psychiatric patients, among them the artists Goesch and Bühler (Brand-Claussen et al.; Röske, "Expressionism and Insanity" 34–35; Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the unique artistic signatures of Else Blankenhorn and Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, their broad spectrum of art as well as their interaction with male artists. Both women had a diverse oeuvre and were pro-



ductive in several art forms. Blankenhorn, who took up art only when hospitalized, is most famous for her numerous paintings, some of which made a deep impression on Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and through him in Expressionist circles. It was not unusual for patients in hospitals or psychiatric institutions to express themselves through art for the first time while institutionalized. The poor living conditions within these institutions fostered the self-processing of terrifying experiences, which might have been triggers for artistic expression. However, while men often processed traumatic experiences of war, interned women invented their own artistic forms of communication to express their feelings of depression and agony after being committed to mental hospitals and left there at the mercy of doctors and warders. This was the case for Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, whose tortuous medical history and life experiences show the social indifference and cruelty toward mentally ill people in the 1930s.

Unlike Blankenhorn, Lohse-Wächtler was already active as an artist before she was committed to a psychiatric hospital for the first time. Her representations of Kiez life in St. Pauli and her *Friedrichsberger Köpfe* had a profound impact on artists variously associated with Expressionism and New Objectivity. After her release from the Friedrichsberg hospital, her exhibitions found a wider resonance and she continued her work, albeit under difficult circumstances, until her tragic death. Despite similar experiences of mental illness, only Lohse-Wächtler could develop her own agency and persona as an artist. Blankenhorn, however, had few opportunities to exercise agency and control over the ways in which her work was represented and received. She most probably never heard about the interest her work raised in Expressionist circles, which shows that women's experiences and opportunities could be quite different during the early and later periods of German Expressionism. Even though Blankenhorn's style and motifs are distinct from Lohse-Wächtler's, she expressed, often in symbols, similar feelings of oppression, fear, and suffering as typical female topoi within the context of Expressionistic art and insanity. Both Blankenhorn and Lohse-Wächtler shared those experiences with many other women in psychiatric hospitals whose artwork deserves greater attention.

To conclude, Lohse-Wächtler and Blankenhorn represent institutionalized women who, despite their profound influences on German Expressionism, have been marginalized by society. Lohse-Wächtler once wrote from Arnsdorf about her "often rising feeling of abandonment" ("das oft aufsteigende Gefühl des Verlassenseins," Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten), a feeling that resonates in the works of other "insane" female artists and creative women in mental institutions at that time, such as in the desperate letters of her contemporary

Emma Hauck. In her letters, Hauck addressed her husband, reiterating the words "come" and "darling" over and over again until fragile columns of lead materialized on the paper, giving them a special artistic quality (Röske, "From Identification to Research" 43). Part of the personal tragedy of these women is that the memory of their artworks has primarily been defined by their experience of mental illness even though their art is about much more than just that.

## NOTES

1. For example, Salsbury; Sondermann; Duda; and G. Reinhardt, which is the first monograph written on her work. Special mention should be made of Waike-Koormann's recent book on Lohse-Wächtler and Grethe Jürgens, in which she offers new perspectives on the biography, oeuvre, and the reception of the artists from a feminist angle.

2. For example, by art historian and current director of the Prinzhorn Collection Thomas Röske and in essays by Doris Noell-Rumpeltes.

3. See Ankele; Brand-Claussen and Michely 45–53 for further details on women's lives and fates in psychiatric hospitals between 1900 and 1940.

4. For further studies, see Ankum; Osborne; Meskimmon and West.

5. For an in-depth analysis of the history and link between German Expressionism and insanity, see Röske, "Expressionism and Insanity." On the broader link between madness and creativity, see Gilman 25–42.

6. For further information on hospitalized women and their creative outputs, see Ankele; Brand-Claussen and Michely.

7. Hans Prinzhorn was assistant doctor at the Heidelberg psychiatry hospital from 1919 to 1921. Being interested in the original and spontaneous expressions of patients, he wrote in 1919 to the directors of psychiatric hospitals, asylums, and sanatoriums in Germany and other European countries and asked for drawings, paintings, sculptures, texts, and textiles produced by the mentally ill (Hessling). This was the foundation of the Prinzhorn Collection. Only rediscovered after World War II, the collection has since 2001 been accessible to the public on the hospital precincts of the University of Heidelberg. With its approximately eight thousand artworks by asylum patients—mainly created between 1840 and 1945, and enlarged by new and contemporary acquisitions (around 40,000 works)—the Collection has become a symbol for the "affinity between creativity of expression and psychopathology" (Mundt 2).

8. These artists were published in Prinzhorn's book *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration*, which was one of the very first attempts to discuss and analyze the artistic creations of psychiatric patients, especially of those being diagnosed as schizophrenic. Even though Prinzhorn's book made the collection widely known in Germany, Switzerland, and France, some of his "schizophrenic masters," as Prinzhorn called his artists, remained relatively unknown until recently. At the time, Prinzhorn's interest in the "art of the insane" had found an ambiguous reception. While his colleagues reacted with reservation, the art scene was enthused and celebrated the book as groundbreaking. The 187 reproductions of selected artworks of patients from his and other clinics were admired as "a testament

to art created outside of regular (bourgeois) institutions and conventions” (Bauduin 1). Many works impressed especially surrealists like Max Ernst, Paul Klee, and Oskar Schlemmer as well as the collectors of *art brut* (outsider art) Richard Lindner and Jean Dubuffet (Hessling; Röske, “From Identification to Research” 43; Zegher 3–8). According to Röske, the fact that Prinzhorn did not include Blankenhorn in his book does not mean he did not value her artworks. Prinzhorn initially planned to dedicate a monograph to Blankenhorn, which he never published (Röske, “Expressionism and Insanity” 37). The current management of the Prinzhorn Collection under Röske continues to pay attention to the representation of artist women in their exhibitions, for example in the 2004 exhibition *Irre ist weiblich (Madness Is Female)*, which showed 170 artistic works by more than fifty female inpatients in Germany and Switzerland (see Brand-Claussen and Michely).

9. Works from Blankenhorn have been exhibited in almost 100 national and international exhibitions since 1929. In 2021, she had her first solo exhibition in the Markgräfler Museum Müllheim, Germany, followed by a comprehensive retrospective exhibition at the Prinzhorn Collection museum in 2022/23.

10. For a detailed analysis of Blankenhorn’s influence on Kirchner and his oeuvre, see Röske, “E. L. Kirchner.”

11. For biographical details and on Blankenhorn’s works, see Beyme et al.; Röske, “E. L. Kirchner” 28; Röske, “Expressionism and Insanity” 37; and the essays of Noell-Rumpeltes.

12. “Die Erlösung beerdigter, aber nicht verstorbener Paare finanzieren,” qtd. in Dammann 16.

13. For further in-depth information on how the “art of the insane” inspired the surrealists, see Beyme and Röske; Zegher 3–8.

14. “Ich habe viel Anregung durch . . . etwas ganz Seltsames, durch die Bilder einer Kranken, die mit ausserordentlich feinem Gefühl für die Farben ihre Visionen hier malt. . . Ich staune, welche Kräfte durch Krankheit manchmal freigelegt werden.” Letter from Kirchner to Henry van de Velde, Kreuzlingen, 30 September 1917, cited after Röske, “E. L. Kirchner” 26. English translation is my own. Subsequent translations are also my own unless otherwise noted.

15. “Es sind traumhaft visionäre Dinge die hier ein krankes Hirn auf die Fläche bringt.” Cited after Presler 407.

16. “Die Farben sind mit einer fast unglaublichen Feinfühligkeit nebeneinander gesetzt, rein und stark, nur dem Gefühl entspringend, spotten sie jeder akademischen Lehre. Man sieht, dass sie rein impulsiv nur dem Ausdruck der Empfindung dienen.” Cited after Presler 407–8.

17. Approximately one hundred works created by Lohse-Wächtler between 1932 and 1935 have been in the estate of her brother and were rediscovered only in 1995. In 2000, the Saxon Memorial Foundation (Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten zur Erinnerung an die Opfer Politischer Gewaltherrschaft) published a catalog in the memory of the victims of political dictatorship and showed some of the drawings from Lohse-Wächtler for the first time. Along with Hanna Nagel, Gabriele Münter, Käthe Kollwitz, and Paula Modersohn-Becker, Lohse-Wächtler was included in the exhibition *Der weibliche Blick (The Female Gaze)* in Aschaffenburg (1993) and posthumously introduced as the great “rediscovery” among female artists of the century, marking the start

of a wider reception of her work. Since then, she has been included in several exhibitions in Germany and abroad. In 1994, the association Förderkreis Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler e.V. (Promotion Group Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler) was founded for the promotion of her work, and there are several memorial places and streets named after her. The emphasis on her tragic life seems inherent in many examinations of her work. For biographical details and discussion of her oeuvre beyond the focus on her tragic life story, see especially Waike-Koormann; Salsbury; and G. Reinhardt.

18. For further information on women's masculinized fashions and appearances during the Weimar Republic, see Sutton.

19. For further in-depth studies on sex, body, and the role of women artists in the Weimar Republic, see Marhoefer; Heynen 290–343; and the studies of Meskimmon.

20. On intersectionality of disadvantage as a term for multiple forms of exclusion, see Crenshaw.

21. Only twenty-nine of the sixty works are preserved in private and public collections, and in the archive of the university hospital Eppendorf, some of them only as photographs, with the majority in the artist's estate in Hamburg. Many of the *Friedrichsberger Köpfe* were destroyed in 1937 as "degenerate art," and several works are untraceable. For more details on the series, see Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten. Some of her drawings and gouaches, especially early and late work, only recently became part of the Prinzhorn Collection, which is now the most significant archive of Lohse-Wächtler's work.

22. The period between 1925 and 1931 was the most critically acclaimed of Lohse-Wächtler's career, even though those years were marked by personal turmoil. In Hamburg she participated in several exhibitions, for example in the Hamburg Women's Club (Stadtclubclub Hamburger Frauenvereine), Hamburg Secession, and the Hamburg Art Alliance. Supported by the League of Women Artists and Women Art Friends, later the Gemeinschaft deutscher und österreichischer Künstlerinnen aller Kunstgattungen, she had her first noticed exhibition in the style of New Objectivity. The Hamburg Museum for Art and Craft also purchased one of her lithographs, which shows that she was successful at that time (Hertel 51; Salsbury 25–26).

23. A[nna]. Banaschewski, "Friedrichsberger Köpfe: Zeichnungen von Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler," *Der Kreis: Zeitschrift für künstlerische Kultur*, May 1929. Her essay is printed in G. Reinhardt 275–77.

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## Chapter 14

# Empathy for Outsiders in Women's Expressionist Literature

Julie Shoults

It is all too easy to see another person as just a body—which we might then think we can use for our ends, bad or good. It is an achievement to see a soul in that body, and this achievement is supported by poetry and the arts, which ask us to wonder about the inner world of that shape we see—and, too, to wonder about ourselves and our own depths.

—Martha Nussbaum, “Cultivating Imagination” (102)

The figure of the social outsider is prominent in Expressionist literature and may take on a variety of embodiments, including the disabled war veteran, the criminal, and the prostitute. These figures are often portrayed via stark, matter-of-fact imagery and are generally employed metaphorically, not meant as social commentary calling for change. Yet, more than just metaphors, these figures also represent very real people and the obstacles they faced due to their status in society. In this essay I explore the figure of the outsider in a variety of Expressionist literature by women through the lens of literary empathy studies and identify ways in which the poetry and prose of female Expressionists convey a sense of empathy toward social outsiders. Writers ask us to consider the humanity of these individuals living on the margins of society, whether it is a war widow spiraling with grief at the loss of her husband or a prostitute expressing a desire for emotional closeness. Some figures are institutionalized, and such texts thematize the confinement and constraint that many of these marginalized groups feel within their society. I argue that these Expressionist texts not only inspire empathy through the authors' employment of particular literary techniques and themes, but also serve a purpose beyond their literary value. Rather than merely depict the plight of the social outsider, these female authors encourage readers to empathize with them as fellow human beings by



illuminating the humanity of such social outcasts. They instill a powerful emotional element through their use of language and imagery, and although they do not provide specific commentary regarding how to resolve perceived social injustices, their texts are an important step in raising awareness of social issues and recognizing the need for change.

After opening with a discussion of the much-theorized relationship between empathy and literature, I then move to an overview of the concept of empathy within Expressionism. Although Wilhelm Worringer famously pitted abstraction and empathy against each other in the early 1900s, I align myself with other theorists who do not view these two modes as necessarily in opposition of each other. Instead, I see rich opportunities for readers to practice a form of “difficult empathy” (Leake) in understanding the experiences of these marginalized figures. In my subsequent analysis of the social outsider in Expressionist literature, I provide specific examples from female-authored texts in order to illustrate ways in which these authors appeal to readers’ capacity for empathy. To conclude, I offer some thoughts on the role of social activism within this literature and the impact that empathy could potentially have in the real world.

## **Empathy and Literature**

While contemplating the link between empathy and literature has a long history, the discussion surrounding this relationship has greatly expanded in recent years and has often been employed in defense of studying the humanities.<sup>1</sup> Literary fiction in particular, which tends to focus on characters’ inner thoughts and feelings, has been the subject of several studies, sparking debates surrounding the notion that certain types of literature may increase readers’ ability to empathize with people different from themselves.<sup>2</sup> Such studies may be inconclusive regarding a clear, causal link between reading and acting empathically, yet there is strong evidence that immersing ourselves in the stories of others allows us to see things from new perspectives, leading us to be more open to the experiences of others and to recognize their humanity.

Although recent scholarship has addressed the growing field of neuroscience and empathy, often making the case that human brains are hardwired for this emotion,<sup>3</sup> my focus here is on literary empathy studies and, more specifically, the notion of narrative empathy as related to women’s Expressionist literature. In the introduction to their collection *Rethinking Empathy through Literature* (2014), Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim clarify, “Literary

empathy studies investigates how 'thinking with' or 'feeling with' another happens within literary texts or because of literary texts. In other words, literary empathy studies considers both how writers represent empathic experience and how they provoke, promote, or prevent it in readers" (1). This can be achieved through a variety of techniques, many of which are characteristic of modernist literature and the focus on inner experience, such as the use of first-person narration, interior monologue, stream of consciousness, or fragmentary narration, among others (see Hammond 4; Keen, "Theory" 213). I chose this route because, as Hammond and Kim state, "While literary and cultural critics have varying opinions on the extent to which neurology shapes empathy, there is greater consensus that historical and aesthetic elements play as great a role—if not greater—than biology in shaping how empathy and literature operate" (10–11). Because of the challenges inherent in measuring the impact of literature when it comes to prompting subsequent action by readers in the real world, my focus here is on analyzing these aesthetic elements and textual constructions rather than attempting to evaluate the direct change they effect(ed).

Empathy does not simply spark as a result of reading literature, even when authors craft their text with such a goal in mind. Suzanne Keen notes that readers respond to texts in different ways, which means that "not all texts succeed in stimulating readers to feel and act as their authors apparently wish" (*Empathy* 4). Furthermore, themes or content alone are not enough to guide readers to a particular (empathic) response (Keen, "Narrative"). Rather, we must also look to literary devices, features, and forms in our analysis. Hammond and Kim observe that "while most discussions of literature and empathy outside literary studies do not consider the question of aesthetics, form and style are critical to understanding the production and reception of narratives" (11). For my focus on literary studies and on early twentieth-century literature, it is also important to delineate what "empathy" means in this context.

Calls for empathy proliferate in today's global society, encouraging humans to connect with others who may be unlike them rather than to build walls around themselves and reject the Other. While the term is used regularly, the definition often depends on the discipline or approach of the author or speaker. For the purpose of my essay here, I employ definitions that correspond with my feminist, literary approach to this topic. In "Becoming Unsympathetic" (2015), feminist scholar Sara Ahmed writes that "empathy, compassion and sympathy are modes of being that are about how we respond to a situation of being with someone whose situation is not one that we are in," and she notes that some of these situations are more relatable than others.<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Keen, one of the foremost scholars in the field of narrative empathy, clarifies in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007),

“Empathy, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading” (4). Keen’s list—witnessing, hearing, reading—draws attention to various modes of experiencing, whether first- or secondhand, and they are each viable means of understanding another’s circumstances more deeply. Meghan Marie Hammond, who focuses on developments in the field of psychology in the early twentieth century and their influence on literature in *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (2014), states, “Empathy is about overcoming psychological distance and establishing intersubjective experience of other minds—which encompasses both cognitive and affective functions. To empathize is, essentially, to bridge psychological distance” (9). Fritz Breithaupt, though, defines empathy as “the coexperience of another’s situation,” noting that “the observer is usually conscious on at least some level of the difference between themselves and the other” (10, 11).

While Hammond’s and Breithaupt’s definitions may seem somewhat incompatible at first, one can still bridge this psychological difference while continuing to recognize the differences between self and other.<sup>5</sup> This is the premise for my use of the term “empathy” in this essay: even as we attempt to understand the emotions and circumstances of another, through reading or real-life interactions, we remain ourselves, only more informed and open to the lives of others. We may learn to “feel into” or “feel with” people unlike ourselves, putting ourselves in their shoes, so to speak, yet we are not truly in their position and may look or walk away.<sup>6</sup> Instead, this sense of empathy serves to raise awareness of social issues and the lives they impact, which may (or may not) prompt action to improve these conditions and lives.

Whether humans are in fact hardwired for empathy or not, this feeling must be fostered by the techniques employed by the author. As Hammond asserts, “The author must envision what the world looks like from her character’s point of view and prompt her reader to do the same. In essence, she must render unknowable minds knowable” (63). This is precisely where literary elements come into play, conveying these experiences vividly and convincingly. If we do not personally encounter another, we may come to learn of their experiences through reading about them.

## Empathy and Expressionism

The concept of empathy at the turn of the twentieth century was evolving. Philosopher Robert Vischer is often credited with introducing the term *Einfühlung*

in his thesis *Über das Optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik* (*On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics*, 1873), theorizing it as an interaction between viewer and visual art form, whereby the spectator “feels into” the artwork through a process of active looking. Others, including philosopher Theodor Lipps and writer Vernon Lee, expanded on Vischer’s ideas, largely maintaining the focus on connections between human subjects and inanimate objects, though sometimes it encompassed interpersonal relations as well. In 1909, English psychologist Edward Titchener coined “empathy” as the translation of the term in his own work.<sup>7</sup> Yet many of these theories focus on aesthetics and the visual arts rather than literature, or on “feeling into” objects rather than people. Susan Lanzoni explains, “At the turn of the twentieth century, empathy was best known as an aesthetic theory that captured the spectator’s participatory and kinaesthetic engagement with objects of art,” and continues, “This earlier conception of empathy entailed an imagined bodily immersion in the shapes, forms, and lines of objects and the natural world” (34). This focus on the visual arts links to art historian Wilhelm Worringer’s 1907 dissertation *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie* (*Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*), one of the primary texts cited when discussing the art of Expressionist era. Immediately in his opening sentence, Worringer states, “This work is intended as a contribution to the aesthetics of the work of art, and especially of the work of art belonging to the domain of the plastic arts” (3), with no mention of literature. In his influential work, Worringer asserts that abstraction is the key to modern art, while empathy is reminiscent of the realism that modern artists were attempting to move beyond, thereby positioning abstraction and empathy as diametrically opposed. Subsequently, as Hammond notes, “The dichotomy that Worringer lays out has some unfortunate effects” when it comes to our understanding of modernism (142). Hammond argues, rather, that empathy and abstraction can and do work together in the realm of modernism in terms of employing abstraction in an attempt to “achieve a fellow feeling that reaches beyond the previously known experience of realist sympathy” and “to create empathic experience” (142). Therefore, the abstraction of modernist and Expressionist art is not necessarily an attempt to push audiences away, but rather to invite them inward, to share inner experiences.

While I do not challenge the significant contribution of Worringer’s work, philosopher Edith Stein’s<sup>8</sup> dissertation from a decade later is more suited to my analysis of Expressionist literature rather than visual art.<sup>9</sup> Stein’s predecessors touched on the topic of empathy as interpersonal experience, but Hammond asserts that Stein’s dissertation *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (*On the Problem*

of *Empathy*, 1917) “was the first major work to treat empathy specifically as an intersubjective, human-to-human, process rather than as an aesthetic, human-to-object, process that might sometimes be applied to human interaction” (150). This human-to-human connection is essential to my discussion of social outsiders in Expressionist literature.

For Stein, empathy is “the experience of foreign consciousness in general, irrespective of the kind of experiencing subject or of the subject whose consciousness is experienced” (11). Importantly, Stein notes that while many other philosophers see a limit to our ability to empathize with others, believing “that our experiential structure limits the range of what is for us intelligible” (114), she proposes that we reach beyond our own experiential structures, such as “age, sex, occupation, station, nationality, generation” (114), in order to comprehend a broader range of experiences. According to Stein, we can in fact empathize with others very different from ourselves. She writes, “If we take the self as the standard, we lock ourselves into the prison of our individuality. Others become riddles for us, or still worse, we remodel them into our image and so falsify historical truth” (116). In this act of empathizing with others in situations very different from our own, we expand our understanding of ourselves and our own values, and this can occur through a personal meeting or via textual encounters (Stein 116, 117). This is particularly true when empathizing with another is not an easy task, but rather requires us to reach beyond our usual comfort level in order to examine values different from our own.

Similar to Stein, but writing almost a century later, literary scholar Eric Leake observes that “easy empathy” may have value in that it confirms that we are caring individuals (177), yet it does not challenge our views of ourselves; instead, difficult empathy “unsettles us” and teaches us about ourselves (175). In his essay “Humanizing the Inhumane: The Value of Difficult Empathy” (2014), Leake states that “difficult empathy challenges social positions, reader identities, and the otherwise prevailing relative comfort of an easier empathy” (176). He defines difficult empathy as “one in which we attempt to reach out based upon our emotional experiences, our understanding of context and character, and our capacities of perception and identification in order to better understand and approximate the otherwise abhorrent feelings and actions of an inhumane character” (177), and he is sure to include the caveat that one “can empathize with a character and not support the decisions that character has made” (177). Empathy is not an endorsement of another’s actions, but rather an effort to understand another’s circumstances and motivations, even when they may be quite different from one’s own.

Empathizing with social outsiders depicted in Expressionist literature

represents a form of difficult rather than easy empathy, but I am not implying here that these social outsiders are “abhorrent” or “inhuman” in the sense of Leake’s discussion. Rather, such figures as prostitutes, prisoners, and the mentally insane are often pathologized and portrayed as dangerous, unhealthy, and responsible for the social and moral deterioration of modern society. Yet we can also find contrary portrayals, illustrating the humanity of these figures at the margins of society. Leake comments, “If we only empathize with those who reassure us and confirm our sensitivities, then we will be unable to understand through empathy a wider range of human actions, many of which are in particular need of greater understanding and address” (184). While it may be unsettling to empathize with an inmate who has committed a violent act or a prostitute who commodifies her body, when we consider these figures as humans worthy of our compassion, we can begin to critique social conditions that contributed to their taking these actions. Characters may resist reader empathy due to their violent actions, yet these are also meant as “works of protest and social critique” (Leake 175). I return to this notion of social activism in the conclusion of this essay.

While there is evidence that we are more likely to empathize with others who are like us than those very different from us,<sup>10</sup> in terms of literature and narrative empathy, Keen observes, “Character identification often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways, but empathy for fictional characters appears to require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization” (*Empathy* xii, see also 69, 70). This means that encountering another via a literary text may leave readers more open to identifying with these individuals than if they were to meet them in real life. Because Expressionist literature does not paint all of the details of characters, often leaving them as vague or ambiguous “types,” I argue that it may be easier to empathize with these characters, since readers do not know how unlike these characters they may be. When authors employ figures who are not fully formed, readers have more space to imagine them and to fill in their own characteristics, potentially in ways that allow them to connect with them more easily. It may leave more of a canvas to paint oneself onto as a reader, or for a reader to flesh out people one knows. These “types” are quite common, particularly in the shorter genres, such as poetry, sketches, and short stories, which are characteristic of modernist literature, leaving ample room for reader interpretation.

Lanzoni also draws important parallels between empathy and modernism in her analysis of “aesthetic empathy” as related to the work of American

experimental psychologist and poet June Downey (1875–1932), who had a deep interest in Imagism. As a minor, short-lived branch of modernism, Imagism called for the use of clear, precise images and language, and as Julian Hanna explains in *Key Concepts in Modernist Literature* (2009), “Imagist poetry demanded that readers be active rather than passive, their minds bridging the gap between juxtaposed images rather than simply receiving impressions” (98). These concepts of active reading and bridging gaps lend themselves to Downey’s work, in particular her notion that aesthetic elements of a text could encourage empathic reading, which served to bridge the distance between reading subject and read object. Although Downey’s writings and theories apply to art objects both visual and written, the connection to literature is most significant to my argument here.<sup>11</sup> In the early twentieth century, Downey conducted experiments regarding readers’ responses to images in a variety of poetry and literary fragments, gauging whether their responses were empathic, meaning that they *felt* themselves *in* the scenes (as in the German term *Einfühlung*) rather than only observing the scenes described in the text. Lanzoni clarifies, “Merely visualizing the self in a scene did not comprise an empathic response; rather, one had to report sensations and movements that placed one *bodily* present” (41). This is precisely where the significance of vivid imagery comes into play, and this includes not only visual imagery but also auditory, tactile, and olfactory (Lanzoni 39). Much like the Imagist poetry so admired by Downey, Expressionists also incorporated vivid images in precise language that appealed to all of the senses in their works.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Lanzoni asserts, “Distance from the everyday enabled aesthetic effects, which could be achieved in part through the formal qualities of literature, including set verse forms, poetic rhymes, meter and other literary techniques that generated a necessary suspension of the real” (43). Lanzoni’s observations here regarding empathy and Imagism are also relevant to Expressionism, another subgenre of modernism that employed vivid imagery in order to appeal to readers’ senses and make them “feel in” the works rather than only observing.

### **Empathy for Outsiders**

Social outsiders appear quite often in Expressionist works in a variety of embodiments: *Kranke* (ill), *Irre* (insane), *Gefangene* (prisoners), *Verbrecher* (criminals), *Dirnen* (prostitutes), *Juden* (Jews), *Künstler* (artists), and *Bettler* (beggars) are all common figures found within Expressionism (Anz 83; see also 82–99). They tend to carry symbolic value, especially when employed

metaphorically, yet they are all figures who very much exist in the real world, largely on the margins of society due to their particular circumstances. For instance, *Kriegsbehinderte* (disabled war veterans) could represent the catastrophic physical and psychological impacts of World War I on the soldiers who fought in it, and also, in the German context, the emasculation of these men and their nation upon losing the war. But these veterans were also real men trying to find their place in post-World War I society, despite debilitating physical and mental injuries. More than reminders of a lost war, they were human beings deserving of dignity and understanding.

Women in (German) Expressionism were also outsiders in a masculine, male-dominated movement. Although there were in fact plenty of women contributing to this movement, their contributions have largely been marginalized, with their romantic relationships—sometimes with male Expressionists—garnering more attention than their actual works in many cases. Some of these women, then, experienced a sort of double layering of marginalization if they also fell under another category of social outsider. This understanding of what it means to be on the “outside” may have influenced such writers’ ability (and perhaps even motivation) to express a sense of empathy for social outsiders. While assessing their motivations is not my aim here, I offer, instead, a textual analysis based in literary empathy studies. Where do we see female authors depicting social outsiders empathically, and how do they achieve this through their literary techniques and talents?

Austrian Expressionist El Hor’s volume of *Prosaskizzen* (prose sketches) entitled *Die Schaukel* (The swing, 1913) contains several short texts focused on such social outsiders, and these brief texts sketch these figures into the social fabric in different ways rather than abandon them at the margins of society. For instance, in “Der Spaziergänger” (The walker), a strange (*merkwürdiger*) man with absolutely no hair on his head and with thin, virtually transparent, skin propositions a woman with a hunched back selling matches and postcards on the street (18–19). The next evening they attend the theater together, dressed magnificently, and at first the others in attendance laugh at this odd pair, but this laughter turns to shame and eventually envy, as they have never seen such pure happiness before (20). “Der alte Bettler” (The old beggar) comprises a single sentence, describing how, every Saturday evening, this man buys two pieces of cake for his grandchildren. Without the title, we would not know that the man has little means, yet he still buys fresh cakes for his grandchildren each week with what little he has. And “Der Saturn” (Saturn) is about an impoverished young woman who believes that she is in a relationship with the king of Saturn. She stops taking care of herself as the relationship becomes all-



consuming, and she loses all connection with her fellow human beings, but once the relationship ends, she sets up her telescope in the city and charges people to look at Saturn while she tells them about it. This brings her to engage with many different types of people, building human connections once again, and leading her to resume her daily grooming habits.

The thematic link among El Hor's sketches is this building of human connections. Although these figures are social outsiders, they are tied to others in ways that give their existence meaning, whether through deeper relationships—romantic, familial, friendship—or simply through an acknowledgment of their value as human beings. Because these texts are so short, her figures are very much “types” with few details provided except to underscore the traits that identify them as outsiders. And while these sketches feature characters who may be easier to empathize with, since their marginalization results from physical deformities and impoverishment, many other texts by female Expressionists invite readers to practice a more difficult form of empathy in understanding the lives of prostitutes or even murderers.

### **The Prostitute**

The prostitute is a key figure in Expressionism and is often portrayed as a carrier and transmitter of disease, both literally and metaphorically, infecting men and contributing to moral decay. As a result, prostitutes were considered social outsiders and generally blamed for social (and medical) ills related to sexual morality. Images of *Lustmord* (sexual murder) depicted by male artists of the time period like Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Rudolf Schlichter convey an extremely aggressive and violent reaction to prostitutes. But beyond their representation on the canvas or the page, real-life prostitutes were more than just the symbolic value they carried and found themselves in this line of work for a variety of reasons. As Nancy Wingfield explains in *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria* (2017), “Despite entrenched beliefs about female sexuality and the ‘fallen’ woman, prostitution, clandestine or regulated, was a viable choice for some women of limited economic circumstances when faced with the alternatives: low-paid, often dangerous employment in a factory, in a night café or tavern, or as a servant” (3). The situation in Germany in the early 1900s was quite similar, meaning that prostitution was not necessarily an indicator of moral corruption, but rather a constrained choice made due to social conditions.<sup>13</sup> Yet many Expressionist images of prostitutes fail to convey this complexity.

Of course, not all portrayals of prostitutes within Expressionist literature are negative or “flat,” and Christiane Schönfeld states that “many Expressionists also depicted in their literature the power and force of the woman of their time and her right to independence and individuality” (“Urbanization” 51). While Schönfeld’s analyses highlight important alternatives, her focus is on texts by men, and even when prostitutes are depicted in a more positive light, they are still envisioned in the service of men—through nurturing and healing qualities.<sup>14</sup> As is characteristic of the time period, women are defined in relation to men, not as autonomous (sexual) beings. And although Schönfeld provides a solid argument that Expressionist representations of prostitutes are multifaceted and challenge a repressive bourgeois morality, missing here are representations by female Expressionists. This is significant considering Barbara Wright’s examination of women’s writings and her assertion that “this shift in perspective [from male to female] appears most dramatically in the treatment of stock female characters such as the *Dirne* or prostitute” (306). To illustrate, Wright discusses poems such as Emmy Hennings’s “Apachenlied” (Apache song, 1915) and Paula Ludwig’s “Die Buhlerin” (Lover, 1920), arguing, “In the women’s poems the prostitute appears far less frequently and then the portrayal is less formulaic and more personalized and empathetic” (306).<sup>15</sup> It is this notion of empathy in women’s representations that serves as the starting point for my examination of these texts and the literary techniques that contribute to this sense of empathy.

Sometimes the appearance of the prostitute is brief yet poignant, as in Emmy Hennings’s “Nach dem Cabaret” (After the cabaret, 1913), in which the first-person narrator catalogs observations at five o’clock in the morning. The poem draws on a variety of senses as we accompany the narrator: we see a light burning in the hotel, hear church bells, and witness other people out at this early hour, including farmers on their way to the market and children cowering in a corner. Among the figures is a prostitute with “wild curls” (“wilden Locken”), who is “tired out and cold” (“übernächtigt und kalt,” 61). In these final words of the poem we feel the physical and emotional coldness of her nightly exploits. And while the narrator is heading home (“nach Haus”), the prostitute wanders about (“Irrt noch umher,” 61), with no clear direction or destination as the sun starts to rise.

Other times the prostitute is the central figure of the poem, as is Martina Wied’s “Die Dirne” (The prostitute, 1919). Wied likens this prostitute to a predator who spends the day resting in the darkness of her cave, but although she appears relaxed with her outstretched limbs, she is actually ready to pounce at any time if necessary (77).<sup>16</sup> The streetlamps beckon her out into the night,

and she wears a mask of makeup as she prowls the streets. Wied likewise draws on various senses: we see the prostitute as a panther, dragging her prey through burned leaves in a tropical forest back to her cave, and hear her piercing laughter like a roar (77).<sup>17</sup> While the predator metaphor itself does not inspire feelings of empathy, it complicates a victim narrative and portrays this prostitute in control of her actions and desires. Furthermore, her prey survives their encounter since she has other intentions in mind. In the final stanza, Wied paints a vivid image of this figure, her chest rising as she breathes heavily, with a damp strand of bleached-gold hair strewn across, and “She rests happily because after an excited game / A soft hand scratches her back” (78).<sup>18</sup> In the end, the sexual act is an arousing game to her, not a violent hunt, and what truly contented her is the gentle touch of a companion.

The first-person narrator of Trude Bernhard’s “Klage einer Dirne” (A prostitute’s lament, 1921/22) also longs for a deeper companionship. The poem opens with the sense of touch as the narrator questions, “Has anyone ever stroked my forehead without causing me pain?” (76).<sup>19</sup> What should be a soothing or sensual gesture is painful for her, and as the poem continues we learn that this emotional pain is a result of her fleeting encounters with men; she explains, “He who kneels before me buries his guilt and forgets it when leaving. / Many do it, it’s not worth checking their pulses” (76).<sup>20</sup> Her morning musings juxtapose her reality with her wishes:

Mornings my arms hang limp  
 And I want to press them toward the sun, full of flowers.  
 Mornings I’m a sung-out song, a man’s derogated night,  
 And want to be thought of, in a young man’s sleep, as the bright  
 ambition of his dreams. (76)<sup>21</sup>

Her words bring to mind Gottfried Benn’s line from “D-Zug” (Express train, 1912): “A woman is something for one night” (“Eine Frau ist etwas für eine Nacht”), and it is clear that she is not satisfied with these empty encounters. In closing she wonders who will help her to escape, questioning, “Who will take me home?” (“Wer nimmt mich nach Haus,” 76). This prostitute’s lament is a reminder to readers that despite her current profession, she is a human being who simply wants to feel loved and cared for.

These three poems by women capture more of the complexity of prostitutes’ experiences. Bernhard and Wied in particular convey the internal conflict of their subjects, as these prostitutes intimate a desire for a more tender relationship. In these instances we see women expressing their own sexual desires

even though such a determination was not common at the time. We do not know why they are currently working as prostitutes, but we are able to see them as more than their “profession” when we learn of their inner desires. Each poem is also set in a specific rhyme scheme, almost lulling readers into the text. As previously quoted, Lanzoni writes that such techniques as poetic rhyme and meter contribute to the “suspension of the real” (43), allowing readers to step away from their everyday experiences and open themselves to other experiences. And while the authors vividly describe sensual perceptions as a means to draw readers into these scenes, their descriptions of physical traits are vague and leave these figures as nameless, relatively generic “types.” All of these features contribute to a complex depiction of the prostitute despite the brevity of each poem.

We also encounter a more complex image of the prostitute in Expressionist prose, but these figures tend to be more developed than their poetic counterparts. For instance, the title figure of Claire Goll’s “Die Schneiderin” (The seamstress, 1918) spends her days laboring in the homes of wealthy people and her evenings at home writing letters to her husband, who is away at war. She is a social outsider in that she is hidden away while she works for strangers, and she then secludes herself at home, even keeping out the sights and sounds of the streets to be alone with thoughts of her husband. Because they are poor, her husband has a more dangerous position on the battlefield than the rich, who could use money and influence to secure safer assignments. When news of his death arrives, we feel her entire body react: “It was as if she had swallowed a piece of ice that slowly spread through her body. First her teeth clattered together, then the hands and body shook, and finally her feet danced a wild dance upon the floor” (35).<sup>22</sup> She then looks at the black torso of her seamstress mannequin, “which was now the substance of her life, and she clung like a crazy person to the unfeeling wood that imitated a person” (35).<sup>23</sup> The narration draws on our senses to help readers understand her visceral response, to feel her world shatter with her. After violently destroying the mannequin, she leaves her home for good, as it is no longer her home without her husband. And while Goll never explicitly refers to the seamstress as a prostitute, she describes the woman’s desire to avenge the death of her husband, which she accomplishes through luring men every evening, eventually contracting and spreading illness to them and subsequently their wives.

While it may be difficult to empathize with a woman who willingly infects those she encounters with a sexually transmitted disease—men who were not directly responsible for her husband’s death and the women who also slept with those men—Goll’s story asks us to consider what brought the seamstress

to these objectionable actions. Most of the narrative is focused on describing the woman's mundane life, her dedication to her husband, and her initial reaction to his death, particularly the immense sense of loss—not just of her husband but of her own will to live. Once readers have an understanding of her agony, it is only in the final three paragraphs that she encounters a young officer on the street, which sparks her plan for revenge and eventually culminates in her death, since her illness ravages her own body as well. And while this text employs the trope of the diseased prostitute infecting others, here it serves as a form of agency for the seamstress, who feels disempowered by her social position. Many of the modernist techniques identified by Hammond are at play in this narrative—interior focalization as we learn of the character's mental and emotional state, fragmentation that reflects her own scattered thoughts, and temporal slowdowns when the seamstress processes the news of her husband's death. In the final words of the story, the title figure is no longer a "Schneiderin" (seamstress), but rather a smiling "Rächerin" (avenger). Readers may experience difficult empathy upon her death, feeling sorry for her sad life even as they try to understand her abhorrent actions. After all, Goll has painted a complex picture of the impacts of poverty and war on the life of this young woman, and the seamstress expresses her agency in the only way she can find within her social context.

### **Institutionalization and Containment**

As a social outsider and subversive figure, the prostitute was to be brought under control, which was the aim of regulation at the time. Regarding this policy of regulation in Austria at the turn of the century, Wingfield explains, "Misogynistic at its heart, regulation encompassed housing prostitutes in brothels, registering them with the police, restricting their movements, inspecting them for venereal disease, and forcibly hospitalizing them when they were found to be infected" (3). Therefore, the brothel represented a form of containment for prostitutes and a means "to stem the spread of disease and protect public morals" (Wingfield 9). Yet when it comes to the portrayal of prostitutes within Expressionism, Schönfeld writes, "The brothel is demolished via pen or brush, and the prostitute is turned loose on the streets of the metropolis" ("Urbanization" 51; see also "Streetwalking" 115 and "Under Construction" 118). Although brothels do appear in some Expressionist works—for instance, El Hor's "Das Glück" (Happiness, 1913), in which a man with a fetish for watching nude women crush live snails while wearing a wooden shoe visits a

brothel in search of willing participants—the Expressionist's prostitute is often out on the streets, as in “Nach dem Cabaret” and “Die Schneiderin.” Yet in other texts by female Expressionists, such as “Klage einer Dirne,” it is unclear where the prostitute is, and she may actually be in a brothel. This uncertainty arises because there is often a sense of confinement and containment conveyed, of feeling trapped within four walls. This same sense of containment is found in works about imprisoning individuals for “criminal” behaviors or institutionalizing those deemed mentally insane, which makes it easier to control these “devious” individuals.

Thomas Anz describes the significance of the theme of mental insanity in the literary fiction of Expressionism, noting that this schema tended to be employed metaphorically—the institution representing bourgeois society, the doctors and attendants as authority figures, and the patients embodying the suppressed individuality and vitality of the nonconformist, social outsiders within society (83–84). Another common metaphorical representation is that of a caged animal, as the individual is locked up in order to protect society. While Anz's analysis is astute, his examples are drawn from texts by males, and I would argue here that if we look at texts by women, we can see more empathy than metaphor at play in many of their works.

An exemplary text is El Hor's “Die Närrin” (The madwoman, 1914), a first-person, stream-of-consciousness short story about a woman who kills a man during the heat of an intimate encounter. While it is unclear whether she is in a prison or a mental institution, the story opens with the narrator's sense of confinement and denial of her insanity:

I want to get away from here! I want to get away. I am not crazy. No, it is not true that I am crazy. . . .

I must think now. I want to write this all down exactly as it was; then the people will see that there is nothing crazy about it, and I will get out of here, that's what I want! Even if I must die then, that is completely irrelevant to me. Just away from here! I must get away from here! (45)<sup>24</sup>

There is a sense of urgency in her words, an insistence on her sanity and normalcy, even though she identifies herself as a social outsider when she admits that she has never understood people no matter how hard she tried (45).<sup>25</sup> She seems to exclude herself from the category of *Menschen* (people/human beings) and sounds as if she feels more at home in nature. Her descriptions of this closeness illustrate her sensory perceptions, such as the smell of springtime, and her intense “feeling with” nature: “I have frozen with the flowers in the fall, and the

thick night fog has made me sick along with the last leaves. I shivered whenever a blooming meadow was mowed, or when a saw slowly ate through the nerves and sinews of a noble tree. I felt its pain when the wind-kissed treetop fell” (45–46).<sup>26</sup> As she continues to elaborate on these senses in nature, she invites her reader into the text through direct address, using the familiar *du* (you) rather than formal *Sie*. After stating that “the language of the earth streams silently and stealthily from their mouths” and that “the earth screams,” she asks, “Can you smell its scream,” describing it as “loud and soft, sharp and sweet” (46).<sup>27</sup> Fixating on this scream of nature, she literally asks her reader to feel along with her: “Do you feel it? It tickles you, it bites your heart, it grazes your skin with soft nails, it burns your tongue, you open your mouth—and die” (46).<sup>28</sup>

Her story continues in a similar style, drawing on various sensory perceptions as she relates the events of the murder: while engaged in a sexual encounter with an acquaintance, she is dissatisfied and cannot feel his body, only his clothes. She bites into his lip to feel something, and, startled, he asks, “Are you crazy” (51).<sup>29</sup> His words are followed by a spatial break in the narrative as she processes what he just said. Although she seems to distance herself from him as a person, referring to him as “der Kragen,” or “the collar,” from which these words emerge, she still knows that he is in fact a human being: “That’s what this strange man here, whom I couldn’t find, said” (51).<sup>30</sup> As he bends over her, she stabs with a knife in the direction of the collar, and she recalls: “I heard a shriek and a weak, gurgling babble—blood flowed over me—hot and streaming” (51).<sup>31</sup> She does not learn he is dead until she is in *Untersuchungshaft* (pretrial detention), and it is possible (though not directly stated) that she has now been sentenced to death for this act.<sup>32</sup>

Her stream of consciousness turns to her feelings of being trapped or buried (*begraben*), and she lists the things she still wants in life since she fears she is facing death (52). She then shifts in both time and persona, claiming, “I want to wear precious robes because I am a princess, a descendant of David” (52), before negating this claim in the very next paragraph: “I know—I am not a princess. I don’t have precious robes and golden sandals. I am poor and tormented, and I want to live” (53).<sup>33</sup> These shifts between fantasy and reality jolt us and lead us to wonder about the narrator’s mental state. After all, when the man questioned her sanity, she reacted violently, even when his question did not seem to be made in seriousness, but rather was a response to his shock and pain. Her constant denials that she is crazy may not be convincing considering the details she shares, yet her insistence makes clear that she understands the deep impact that this designation has on her in her society. In fact, it may lead to her death.

This text is another example of the “difficult empathy” readers may expe-

rience when encountering social outsiders in women's Expressionist literature. This woman has just murdered someone, yet through the author's literary techniques, we are pulled into her perspective to understand her thoughts and emotions. While Frank Krause's analysis of this story takes a different approach, he also sees El Hor's portrayal of this "mentally unstable woman" as sympathetic (133). From the outside it seems clear that a murderer should be locked up and punished for their crime, yet from the inside we can see that there is more to this woman's story than the facts in a police report. And if she is facing death as a result of her crime, is that really fair punishment, considering her mental instability? There are no simple answers, yet that is precisely the point. These Expressionist texts by women do not necessarily propose solutions; rather they prompt readers to look at the lives of social outsiders from the inside, potentially rethinking their initial responses to these marginalized figures.

### **Conclusion: Considering Social Activism**

Although these texts themselves may spark empathic feelings, this does not necessarily mean that readers are or were moved to action. In Paul Bloom's provocatively titled *Against Empathy* (2016), he observes that even if empathy does lead to a greater understanding of other people and thereby improve our "social intelligence" or "cognitive empathy," this does not necessarily lead to positive, moral actions as a result (3).<sup>34</sup> Rather, empathy can be a force for evil as well, which is also the premise of Fritz Breithaupt's *The Dark Sides of Empathy* (2019). For Breithaupt, though, the fact that empathy may prompt negative actions does not mean that we should discredit empathy altogether, since empathy can still lead to altruism (16). His exploration of the dangers arising from empathy do not signal that he is against empathy; while he agrees with Bloom that empathy does not equate to morality, he still acknowledges potential positive outcomes: "Empathy intensifies our experiences and widens the scope of our perceptions. We feel more than we would without it, and it enables us to participate more fully in the lives of others, even fictional characters. This form of engagement can be described in terms of aesthetic experience and the deepening of our emotions, and it provides strong reasons to teach and cherish empathy" (221). These Expressionist literary encounters with social outsiders can contribute to readers expanding their understanding of other experiences, and while such texts may not necessarily trigger a reader's engagement in social activism to support these marginalized groups, they represent a move in the direction of recognizing the need for social change.



Empathy for fictional characters may also translate into greater understanding for their real-life counterparts. Keen has argued that literary fiction is a safe space for appeals to empathy because it is not the “real world” demanding action (*Empathy* 4). And Leake, in his discussion of difficult empathy, notes that “difficult empathy helps us address social issues, identities, and even questions of empathy by unsettling us and disrupting our views of others, the world, and ourselves in ways that move us toward critique” (184). If reading poems about prostitutes by female Expressionists could inspire readers to think about these figures as real-life women making constrained choices while navigating their social contexts, then maybe this could even lead to advocating for social and structural change. If stories of institutionalizing the mentally insane could lead readers to reconsider the necessity of locking such individuals away, which only isolates them from society and condemns them to lives of loneliness, further marking their outsider status, then perhaps this could prompt social reform. Perhaps not, but if these texts spark greater empathy rather than derision, that is an important first step in the direction of potential social change.

As Martha Nussbaum writes in the epigraph to this chapter: “It is all too easy to see another person as just a body—which we might then think we can use for our ends, bad or good. It is an achievement to see a soul in that body, and this achievement is supported by poetry and the arts, which ask us to wonder about the inner world of that shape we see—and, too, to wonder about ourselves and our own depths” (102). The social outsiders in women’s Expressionist literature are more than just metaphors, more than bodies, whether on the page or in the real world. They represent human beings with inner lives and outward struggles. As readers we can open ourselves to their experiences, even those very different from our own, expanding our capacity for empathy and understanding as we imagine other positionalities, other realities.

## NOTES

1. See, for instance, Martha Nussbaum’s *Not for Profit* and Michael Fischer’s “Literature and Empathy.” Paul Bloom notes: “Right now, there are over fifteen hundred books on amazon.com with *empathy* in their title or subtitle” (19). Not all of these books are about empathy and the humanities or literature, but this is certainly evidence that empathy is a popular topic of research and discussion.

2. One prominent example is a 2013 publication in *Science* by David Kidd and Emanuele Castano, entitled “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind.” They concluded in their study that reading literary fiction improves readers’ psychological awareness and, therefore, their ability to understand other people’s thoughts and emo-

tions. Although these findings were initially touted as confirming a causal link between literature and empathy, it was not long before their work was called into question as subsequent studies refuted some of their claims. Furthermore, such questions remain as to which texts qualify as “literary,” which genre(s) are effective, how we even measure “empathy,” and if experiencing empathy actually prompts action on the part of readers. For more on Kidd and Castano’s study and the responses to it, see, for instance, Chiaet; Frankel; Kaplan; Kuzmicova et al.; and Rowe 2018. See also the special issue of *Scientific Study of Literature* dedicated to “Transdisciplinary Approaches to Literature and Empathy” (Sopčák et al.).

3. A thorough discussion of the research on empathy and neuroscience is beyond the scope of this essay; for an overview of some of the current research in the field, see, for instance, Burke et al.; Armstrong; Shamay-Tsoory and Lamm; and Stevens and Woodruff.

4. The terms “empathy” and “sympathy” often appear in tandem, and while they are both forms of “fellow-feeling,” according to Hammond, “The important difference to keep in mind is that while sympathy brings us near another in our understanding, empathy goes a step further, trying to collapse psychological distance and confuse subjectivity” (63). The distinction generally accepted today is that sympathy is feeling *for*, while empathy is feeling *with*. For a more detailed discussion of the evolution of these terms and the relationship between them, see also Hammond and Kim 2–6. While I use the term “empathy” here, others may describe the same emotions or reactions as “sympathy” or “compassion.”

5. This relationship between self and other, and what empathy is supposed to achieve, is still debated: “There have long been arguments about the fundamental nature of fellow-feeling: is it an experience of oneness that obliterates difference, or is it an experience that allows one subject to understand another while maintaining a clearly defined sense of one’s subjective borders?” (Hammond and Kim 3).

6. Indeed, there are dangers in empathy studies in terms of power differentials and hierarchies that may go unaddressed; for instance, Hammond and Kim state, “Empathy can be politically dangerous, constituting a liberal fantasy of knowing the Other without actually understanding histories of structural oppression and violence” (9).

7. This is a simplified telling of a complex term. For a more detailed discussion of the evolution of the term *Einfühlung*/empathy during this time period, see, for instance, Hunsdahl; Nowak; and Mallgrave and Ikonomou.

8. Edith Stein (1891–1942) is an interesting figure herself. Born into a Jewish family, she became agnostic as a teenager and later converted to Christianity and eventually became a Carmelite nun. During World War I, she interrupted her studies to serve as a nurse. She then completed her dissertation at the University of Freiburg in 1916, where she worked as a teaching assistant to Edmund Husserl until 1918, though her gender kept her from advancing in the academy. Her attention was then focused on her religious life, and she was baptized into the Catholic church in 1922. Despite her religious conversion, Stein died in Auschwitz in 1942 because of her Jewish roots. She was declared a martyr and beatified as Saint Teresia Benedicta a Cruce in 1987, and her philosophical works, including her thoughts on women’s rights and education, continue to be relevant today.

9. This is also why I am not examining neuroscience and empathy here, despite the

prominence of current research in the field, as this was not the focus a century ago. Rather, Hammond's discussion of psychology and empathy during the modernist era, which addresses the work of both Worringer and Stein, among others, is better aligned with the historical context.

10. See, for instance, Bloom 30–31.
11. For a more detailed discussion of Downey's writings and experiments on the topic of aesthetic empathy, see Lanzoni.
12. For more on this, see Anke Finger's essay in this volume.
13. For more on the historical realities of prostitution in Germany and the discourses surrounding it during this time period, see Dickinson; Harris; and Roos.
14. Schönfeld expands on these analyses and ideas in other texts, including "Street-walking the Metropolis" (2000) and "Under Construction." In each essay, though, her focus is on works by male Expressionists.
15. Wright's pathbreaking essay "Intimate Strangers: Women in German Expressionism" from 2005 is reprinted in this volume; rather than reiterate her arguments and examples here, I build upon her initial observations regarding female depictions of prostitutes.
16. "Entspannt—und dennoch stets zum Sprung bereit."
17. "Dem Panther gleich, der durch verbranntes Laub / Im Tropenwalde seine Beute schleift"; "Ihr schrilles Lachen wie ein Brüllen klingt."
18. "Sie ruht beglückt, weil nach erregtem Spiel / Ihr eine weiche Hand den Rücken streicht."
19. "Hat mir schon einmal einer über die Stirne gestrichen, ohne mir wehe zu tun?"
20. "Wer vor mir kniet, höhlt Schuld und vergißt sie im Geh'n. / Viele tun so, es lohnt nicht, auf ihren Pulsschlag zu seh'n."
21. "Morgens habe ich die Arme schlaff herunterhängen / Und möchte sie voller Blumen der Sonne entgegendrängen. / Morgens bin ich ein abgesungenes Lied, eines Mannes geschmälerte Nacht, / Und möchte im Schlaf eines Jünglings sein, als leuchtendes Traumziel erdacht."
22. "Es war, als hätte sie ein Eisstückchen verschluckt, das sich langsam in ihrem Körper ausbreitete. Zuerst schlugen ihre Zähne aufeinander, dann schlotterten die Hände und der Leib, und zuletzt tanzten die Füße einen wilden Tanz gegen den Boden."
23. "Da fiel ihr Blick auf den schwarzen Torso der Kleiderpuppe, die jetzt der Inhalt ihres Lebens war, und sie klammerte sich wie eine Irre an das fühllose Holz, das einen Menschen imitierte."
24. "Ich will weg von hier! Ich will weg. Ich bin nicht verrückt. Nein, es ist nicht wahr, daß ich verrückt bin . . . / Ich muss jetzt nachdenken. Ich will das alles ganz genau aufschreiben, wie es war, dann werden die Leute sehen, daß nichts Verrücktes daran ist, und ich werde von hier fortkommen, das will ich! Wenn ich dann auch sterben muß, das ist mir ganz egal. Nur weg von hier! Weg muß ich von hier!"
25. "Ich habe niemals die Menschen verstanden."
26. "Ich habe mit den Blumen im Herbst gefroren, und die schweren Nachtnebel haben mich krank gemacht wie die letzten Blätter. Ich habe gezittert, wenn eine blühende Wiese gemäht würde oder wenn die Säge einem adligen Baum Nerven und Sehnen langsam durchfraß. Ich habe seinen Schmerz gefühlt, wenn der wind-vertraute Wipfel fiel."

27. "Stumm und verstohlen strömt die Sprache der Erde aus ihren Mündern." "Die Erde schreit. Riechst du ihren Schrei?"; "laut und leise, scharf und süß." Her language here calls to mind Edvard Munch's famous painting *Der Schrei der Natur* (*The Scream of Nature*, 1893), more commonly known simply as *The Scream*. The Expressionist *Schrei* is an essential feature of the movement, finding its expression across genres and artists.

28. "Fühlst du ihn? Er kitzelt dich, er beißt dich ins Herz, er streift mit leisem Nagen deine Haut, er brennt dir auf die Zunge, du öffnest den Mund—und stirbst."

29. "Bist du verrückt." See also Frank Krause's analysis of this scene as the narrator's search for closeness to another person in this sexual encounter (139–41).

30. "Das hatte doch dieser merkwürdige Mann da gesagt, den ich nicht finden konnte."

31. "Ich hörte einen Schrei und ein schwaches, gurgelndes Lallen—Blut floß über mich—heiß und gleitend."

32. For an analysis of their interaction as an expression of the narrator's sadomasochistic desire, see Shoults.

33. "Ich will kostbare Gewänder tragen, denn ich bin eine Prinzessin vom Stamme Davids." "Ich weiß ja—ich bin keine Prinzessin. Ich habe nicht kostbare Gewänder und goldene Sandalen."

34. After describing various interpretations regarding what exactly "empathy" means, Bloom clarifies his intention: "The idea I'll explore is that the act of feeling what you think others are feeling—whatever one chooses to call this—is different from being compassionate, from being kind, and most of all, from being good" (4). He also describes the differences he perceives between "emotional empathy" and "cognitive empathy" in terms of their definitions, functions, and potential impacts on human behavior (16–18, 35–38).

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# Index

- Achinte, Adolfo Alban, 153n1  
activism, 15, 31, 49, 64, 86, 199; antiracist, 140; gay rights, 11; left-wing, 216; political, 55n20; and sensory perception, 143–46; social, 320, 325, 335–36; and social issues, 16–19  
Adams, Marion: “Der Expressionismus und die Krise der deutschen Frauenbewegung,” 55n19  
aesthetic empathy, 325–26, 338n11  
Ahmed, Sara: “Becoming Unsympathetic,” 321  
Allen, Ann Taylor, 113n11, 228n6  
Altenberg, Peter, 76n2  
Amo, Anton Wilhelm: “On the Impassivity of the Human Mind,” 154n9  
Andreas-Salomé, Lou, 92  
androgynous protagonist, 9, 83, 92  
Ankum, Katharina von: *Women in the Metropolis*, 56n24  
antidecorative, 13, 160, 180  
anti-Semitism, 95, 102, 104, 105, 110, 111, 285n12  
antiwar sentiment, 270, 275–79  
Anz, Thomas, 7, 21n2, 53n2, 198, 237–38, 286n28; “aktive Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit,” 140; “ästhetische Moderne,” 55n23; “Expressionismus,” 53n6, 55n15; insanity, 333; *Litteratur des Expressionismus*, 2, 53n4, 55n15, 137; “men’s movement,” 270; “zivilisatorische Moderne,” 55n23  
Apollonian: fire, 50; mentality, 9, 97n7; patriarchy, 33, 92  
Arp, Hans, 262n4  
*art brut*, 298, 313n8  
artist inpatients, 18, 295, 296, 313n8  
Art Salon Maria Kunde, 309  
Asenijeff, Elsa (Elsa Maria Packeny), 7–8, 61–78, 76n2; *Aufbruch der Weiber und das dritte Geschlecht* (The women’s Revolt and the Third Sex), 62, 65, 73, 74–75; *Aufschrei—Freie Rythmen* (Scream—free rhythms), 62, 63; “beauty,” 70; biography and career, 61–65; “blossoming,” 70; “Der Schwur” (The oath), 68; diaries, 68; dichotomy, 73–76; *Die neue Scheherazade* (The new Scheherazade), 62; *Die Schwestern* (The sisters), 62; doctors, 72–73; educational institution metaphor, 78n19; *Epithalamia*, 62; “glacial” chill, 66; *Hohelied an den Ungenannten* (Song of songs to the unnamed one), 62; *Ist das die Liebe?* (Is this love?), 62; *Kinobuch* (Cinema book), 62; *Kuss der Maja* (Kiss of the Maya), 62; “Liebe,” 69; “Liebe den Menschen” (Love for Human Beings), 38, 39; metaphysical qualities of color, 68; patriarchy and violence, 69–73, 75; *Neuer Leipziger Parnass*, 62; pregnancies, 78n33; proto-Expressionist, 61, 64, 65–68, 70, 73, 74, 76; proto-Expressionist mysticism, 65–68, 71; public censure, 63; *Sehnsucht*, 62, 65; “Sie” (She), 69–70; spiritualism, 68; *Sprachproblematik*, 65; supernatural, 67; *Tagebuchblätter einer Emanzipierten*, 62, 67, 71, 72, 73; *Unschuld*, 62, 66, 70–73

- Augspurg, Anita, 81
- Austrian Academy of Fine Arts, 169–70
- Austrian Expressionism, 76n2, 159, 160, 162, 165, 168, 179, 180, 180n1, 327
- Austrian Pavilion, 168, 181n13
- Austrian School of Applied Arts, 170
- autonomy, 101; artistic, 55n23; female, 13, 160; sexual, 159
- avant-garde, 12, 25, 26, 35, 51, 52, 82, 87, 91, 117, 118, 119, 122, 129, 137, 142, 143, 149, 186, 225, 245, 250, 252–53, 287n43, 293, 294, 302, 303, 308; French, 121, 125; prewar, 262n4; publications, 261n1; Russian, 121; somaesthetics and the senses, 138–41; Styrian artists, 185
- Ažbe, Anton, 83
- Bachofen, Johann Jakob, 28, 31–35; *Das Mutterrecht* (Matriarchal Law/ Mother Right), 32, 84, 212; matriarchal communism, 212, 215; *Mutterrecht und Urreligion* (Matriarchal Law and Primal Religion), 32; tellurian matriarchy, 33, 92, 94
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, 200
- Balabanoff, Angelika, 280; “Bekenntnis” (Avowal), 281
- Ball, Emmy, 235
- Ball-Hennings, Emmy, 235. *See also* Hennings, Emmy
- Ball, Hugo, 44, 232, 233, 250, 261, 262n4
- Baudisch, Gudrun, 12, 161, 162, 175, 176, 181n16; *Frauenköpfe*, 172; *Heads*, 171, 172; *Kneeling Girl*, 177, 177, 178
- Baum, Peter, 44
- Baum, Vicky, 192
- Baumberger, Christa, 6, 262n6
- Bebel, August: *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Woman and Socialism), 212
- Becher, Johannes R., 42, 44, 234; “Berlin,” 41; “Eroica,” 40; “Mensch stehe auf” (Human Being Rise), 40
- Begriffsbestimmung des Literarischen Expressionismus* (Definition of literary Expressionism), 3
- Behrmann, Nicola, 253, 255, 262n6, 262n13; *Geburt der Avantgarde*, 6
- Benemann, Maria: “Wir habens geschworen” (We have made a vow), 282–83
- Benjamin, Walter, 259; *Arcades Project*, 244; “Metaphysics of Youth,” 243–44; *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (The Origin of German Traic Drama), 191
- Benn, Gottfried, 41, 44; “D-Zug” (Express train), 330; *Morgue und andere Gedichte* (Morgue and Other Poems), 197
- Berg, Alban, 35
- Berg, Mirjam, 16, 19
- Berger, Renate, 131n14, 294–95
- Berndl, Ludwig, 219
- Bernhard, Lucian, 179
- Bernhard, Trude, 18, 49, 53n7; “Klage einer Dirne” (Lament of a Whore), 46, 330
- Bernstein, Eduard, 217
- Bildung*, 106–7, 110, 111, 112, 113n9
- Binswanger, Ludwig, 299, 301
- Binswanger, Marie-Luise, 299
- biological determinism, 30, 31
- blackness, 12, 107
- Blanche Bonestall Galleries, 175
- Blankenhorn, Else, 18, 293–94, 303, 311, 312, 313n8, 314nn9–11; gendered art and insanity, 294–96; *I. Milliarde Thaler (Geldschein)* (One Billion Thalers [Banknote]), 301, 302; *Liegender Frauenkopf* (Lying Woman’s Head), 310; *Ohne Titel (Roter Reiter)* (Red Rider), 299, 300; Prinzhorn’s women and the female impact on the idea of insanity in art, 297–302
- Bleyl, Fritz, 63
- Bloch, Iwan, 14
- Bloom, Paul: *Against Empathy*, 335, 336n1, 339n34
- Blumenthal, Bernhard, 53n7
- body as media, 12
- Bogner, Ralf Georg: *Einführung in die Literatur des Expressionismus* (Introduction to the literature of Expressionism), 3, 4

- bohemian, 82, 233, 250, 253; appearance, 304; brotherhood, 87–92; cafés, 252; circles, 9, 62–63, 81, 83, 86, 92, 97n7; license, 37; lifestyle, 251; Munich, 95–96; outsiderhood, 86; Schwabing, 83, 103; subculture, 86; writers, 85
- Böhlau, Helene, 81
- Böhm, Adolf, 171
- Bosco, Lorella: *Schmerz. Lust. Künstlerinnen und Autorinnen der deutschen Avantgarde* (Pain. Desire. Female artists and authors of the German avant-garde), 6–7
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 106
- Brachvogel, Carry, 81, 84
- Brandow-Faller, Megan, 12–13
- Bré, Ruth, 215
- Breithaupt, Fritz, 322; *The Dark Sides of Empathy*, 335
- Brenck-Kalischer, Bess: *Die Knäbin* (The boygirl), 93
- Brinker-Gabler, Gisela: *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen* (German Literature by Women), 27
- Brinkmann, Richard: *Expressionismus. Forschungs-Probleme 1952–1960s*, 53n6
- Brodnitz, Käthe, 3
- Brooks, Peter, 254
- Brotherhood of St. Luke, 120
- Brücke group, 63, 137
- Bucher, Hertha, 161, 162, 168, 172–73, 175
- Buckley, Cheryl, 159, 178
- Bühler, Franz Karl, 297, 311
- Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (Federation of German Women's Associations), 215
- Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform (League to Protect Mothers and Reform Sexual Relations), 215, 216, 217, 218–19
- Burgard, Peter: *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, 54n12
- Butler, Judith, 103; *Gender Trouble*, 262n9
- Cahnman, Werner: “The Life of Clementine Krämer,” 113n5
- Calm, Charlotte (Lotte), 161, 166
- Campbell, Joseph, 32
- Campbell-Johnson, Rachel, 132n21
- Canning, Kathleen, 288n58
- Cassirer, Ernst: *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (Philosophy of Symbolic Forms), 198
- Castano, Emanuele: “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind,” 336n2
- Catholicism, 9, 83, 202n6, 250, 251, 252, 254, 337n8
- Cavanaugh, Alden, 180
- Ceramic Nationals, 175
- ceramics, 12–13, 159–82; oven, 168. *See also* Ceramic Nationals; *Frauenköpfe*; International Exhibition of Ceramic Art; Keramische Werkstätte Vally Wieselthier; Wiener Keramik; Wiener Werkstätte Ceramic Department
- Chicago, Judy: *Dinner Party*, 178–79
- Christianity, 9, 34, 42, 84, 254, 256, 258, 259, 261, 337n8
- Čížek, Franz, 161, 164
- “civilization,” 30, 106, 145
- Cixous, Hélène, 94
- Claassen, Constance, 142
- Cohen, Deborah, 277–78
- Comini, Alleessandra, 186
- Communist Party of Germany (KPD), 218, 228n12
- community, 34, 39, 87, 129, 255; create, 93; of equals, 90, 96; exclusive, 89, 95; human, 28; initiate, 260; Jewish, 104, 105; lost, 30; men, 264n29, 283; “new,” 83, 92; religious, 105; rituals, 71; spiritual-intellectual, 30, 87
- A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism*, 5, 53n1
- Cosmic Circle, 84–85, 88, 95
- Cullen, Countee, 146
- cultural capital, 90, 106, 113n10
- Daffner, Carola, 8–9
- Dallago, Carl, 35–36
- Darwin, Charles, 75, 215
- Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari), 67, 221



- Däubler, Theodor, 38  
 decolonial aesthetics, 153n1  
 Denkler, Horst: *Einakter und kleine Dramen des Expressionismus* (One-Act Plays and Short Dramas of Expressionism), 52  
*Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), 10, 117, 118, 121, 129, 298  
 Der Große Bär (The Great Bear), 129  
*Der Sturm* (The storm), 1, 15, 22n10, 28, 55n18, 154n10, 213, 216, 217, 222, 224, 227, 272, 284n1  
*Der Tempel brennt* (The temple burns), 186  
 Detzel, Katharina, 296  
*Deutsche Frauenkunst* (German women's art) show, 173  
*Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (German art and decoration), 173, 175  
 Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen), 67–68  
 Deva, El-Shaddai, 147, 148  
 de Waal, Edmund, 164  
 Diaconu, Mădălina, 142  
*Die Aktion* (The action), 1, 15, 17, 22n10, 28, 52, 53n5, 55n18, 213, 214, 216, 217, 220, 261n1, 269–70, 271, 272, 273, 275, 280, 281, 283–84, 284n1, 285n5, 285n6, 285n12, 286n17, 286n27, 287n38, 287n43, 288n58, 288n59, 289n71, 304; sub-heading, 279  
*Die Brücke*, 10, 63, 117–18  
*Die Fläche*, 161  
*Die Freiheit* (Freedom), 15, 211, 218, 224, 225  
*Die Literarische Welt*, 187, 188  
*die Menschheit* (humankind), 28, 40  
*Die Neue Sachlichkeit* (The New Objectivity), 191  
 Dierick, Augustinus: *German Expressionist Prose*, 3  
 Dietrich, Marlene: *Der blaue Engel* (The Blue Angel), 172  
 Dietrich, Stephan, 148, 149  
*Die weißen Blätter* (Leipzig/Zurich/Bern/Berlin), 15, 213, 221, 222, 226, 272, 289n71  
*Die weissen Blätter* (The white pages), 213, 221, 222, 226, 272, 289n71  
 difficult empathy, 320, 324, 332, 334–35, 336  
 disadvantage, 315n20  
 discrimination, 91, 102, 104, 105–6; intersectional, 308  
 Dix, Otto, 18, 26, 233, 242, 295, 303, 304, 306, 308, 309, 328  
 Djilbuti, Jupiter, 141, 144, 145, 146  
 Döblin, Alfred, 37, 55n21, 76, 187, 192; *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, 26; “Die Ermordung einer Butterblume” (The Murder of a Buttercup”), 11, 70  
 Dohm, Hedwig, 52, 216, 221, 224, 285n5, 285n11; “Feindliche Schwestern,” 220  
 Donahue, Neil H., 55n16, 64, 191  
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: *The Brothers Karamazov*, 188  
 Downey, June, 326, 338n11  
 Dreyer, Elfriede, 258  
*Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler), 67  
 dualism, 30, 31, 51, 55n18, 93, 195  
 Dubuffet, Jean, 313n8  
 Dürer, Albrecht: *Melancholia I*, 295  
 Duvernoy, Sophie, 262n7  
 early Expressionism, 22, 87, 162, 236, 250  
 easy empathy, 324, 325  
*écriture féminine*, 94, 148  
 ecstatic sexual lust, 98n23  
 Edschmid, Kasimir, 55n15, 140, 145, 234  
 Ehmsen, Heinrich, 295, 309  
 Ehrenbaum-Degele, Hans, 44  
 Eichmann-Leutenegger, Beatrice, 27–28  
 Eichner, Johannes, 130  
*Einführung*, 322–23, 326, 337n7  
 Einstein, Carl, 138, 145, 149  
 Eisler, Max, 160, 166, 180  
 El Hor / El Ha, 6, 19, 335; “Das Glück (Happiness), 332; “Der alte Bettler” (The old beggar), 327; “Der Spaziergänger” (The walker), 327; “Die Närrin” (The madwoman), 98n23, 333; *Die Schaukel* (The swing), 6, 327; Prosaskizzen (prose sketches), 327; *Schatten* (Shadows), 6

- emancipation, 37, 44, 164, 168, 226, 227, 274; legal, 105; self, 66; sexual, 52, 163, 179; social, 270; women's, 52, 54n8, 275, 280; working class, 288n62
- empathy, 19, 150, 256, 260, 319, 329, 330, 333, 336n1, 337n5, 337n6, 337n7, 337n9; aesthetic, 325–26, 338n11; cognitive, 335, 339n34; difficult, 320, 324, 332, 334–35, 336; easy, 324, 325; emotional, 339n34 and expressionism, 322–26; literary, 8, 19, 319, 320, 321, 327; and literature, 320–22, 336n2; narrative, 320, 325; neuroscience, 337n3; outsiders, 326–28; sympathy, 337n4
- empiricism, 30, 35
- Engels, Friedrich: *Origins of the Family* (Der Ursprung der Familie), 33, 212
- Ernst, Max, 298, 313n8
- ethnicity, 11, 12, 19
- Evans, Richard J., 288n62
- Everson Museum, 175
- exhibition space, 21n9
- Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels (Exposition of Decorative and Industrial Art), 168
- Expressionist literature, 18, 22n13, 25, 26, 27, 30, 55n23, 236, 237, 275, 283, 319, 320, 323, 325–26, 329, 335, 336; German, 2, 269
- Expressionist movement, 3, 4, 5, 17, 20, 55n22, 73, 86, 166, 198, 250–51, 252, 261n1, 270, 271; Austrian, 160; rewriting, 7–10; situating female authors and artists in, 59–133
- Expressionismusdebatte*, 22n10
- Expressionist decade, 5, 22n10, 64
- face painting, 12–13, 160, 170, 172, 173
- Faulhaber, Elisabeth, 294
- Feininger, Lyonel, 71
- Felixmüller, Conrad, 18, 295, 303, 304, 306, 309
- female Expressionists, 3, 4–7, 18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 51, 52, 74, 82, 93, 103, 154n10, 291, 293, 319, 328, 329, 333, 336
- female form, 117, 118, 160
- female protagonists, 31, 32, 193, 201; as social revolutionaries, 9, 101–12
- female sexuality, 14, 37, 168, 170, 173, 177, 189, 215, 274, 328
- Feminist Modernist Studies*, 21n2
- Finger, Anke, 11–12, 82, 87, 93
- First World War, 15, 16, 17, 26, 44, 96, 102, 110, 129, 276, 278. *See also* World War I
- flipping the prostitute, 19, 20
- Foka, Anna: *Laughter, Humor, and the (Un)making of Gender*, 199–200
- Fontane, Theodor, 86
- Förderkreis Elfriede Lohse-Wächter e.V. (Promotion Group Elfriede Lohse-Wächter), 314n17
- Forel, Auguste, 217
- Foucault, Michel, 239–40, 259, 261; *Discipline and Punish*, 238; *History of Sexuality*, 254
- Fraisl, Bettina, 189, 194–95
- Frank, Leonhard, 86
- Frauenfrage* (Woman Question), 213
- Frauenköpfe*, 12, 160, 163, 166, 168, 170, 171, 172, 173, 176
- Frauen-Zukunft* (Women's future), 213, 214, 216, 226
- Freud, Sigmund, 14, 143, 189, 217, 220; superego, 219; *Über Psychoanalyse*, 219
- Freudenberg, Ika, 81
- Friedel, Helmut, 132n20
- Friedrich, Otto, 161, 164
- Froehlich, Jürgen: *Liebe im Expressionismus*, 55n18
- Funke, Helene, 159
- Futurism, 15, 71, 142, 218, 222, 236; Italian, 86, 217
- Galerie St. Etienne, 179
- Garré, Roy, 33
- Gauguin, Paul, 125
- Geist* (spirit/intellect), 30, 31, 32, 33, 37, 41, 46, 49, 67, 83, 93, 121, 254, 271, 272, 276
- gender and the body, 10–14
- gender battle, 102, 105, 110, 111
- gender fluidity, 11, 20
- gender identity, 11, 82, 92, 94, 95, 96

- gender performance, 11, 149  
genderqueer, 92, 94, 95  
gender theory, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 19, 117, 148  
Gennep, Arnold van, 83  
Genzel, Karl, 295  
George, Stefan, 32, 84, 86, 88  
Géricault, Théodore, 295  
Gilleir, Anke: *Schmerz. Lust. Künstlerinnen und Autorinnen der deutschen Avantgarde* (Pain. Desire. Female artists and authors of the German avant-garde), 6–7  
*Glanz*, 172  
Gleber, Anke, 256  
Goesch, Paul, 297  
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 85, 88, 106; *Faust*, 68, 89, 96  
Goll, Claire, 2, 3, 5, 20, 27, 43, 44, 49, 53n5, 53n7, 55n20, 81, 91, 139–40, 146–47, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152–53, 154n7, 282, 285n5, 287n43, 288n55; “An mein Kind” (To my child), 277–79; *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa* (The Negro Jupiter robs Europe), 12, 141–43, 144, 145; Die Frauen erwachen (Women Awake), 52; “Die Schneiderin” (The seamstress), 331–32; “Die Stunde der Frauen” (The hour of the women), 16–17; *Ich verzeihe keinem* (I forgive no one), 55n20, 144; “Noemi,” 42; *Othello*, 141–43; racialization, 140, 142, 143, 148, 153, 154n7; “sense of the object,” 140, 145, 146, 153; translator of Maran’s books, 143–44. See also Studer-Goll, Claire  
Goll, Ivan, 44; “Begeisterung für afrikanische Kunst,” 148; “Noemi,” 42  
Goudstikker, Sophia, 81  
Grazer Secession, 190  
“greybeards,” 232  
Griebel, Otto, 303–4, 306; *Erinnerungen an Laus* (*Frieda Wächtler*) (Memories of Laus), 304  
Grimms, 9, 106, 110–11, 112  
Gross, Otto: “Zur Überwindung der kulturellen Krise” (On overcoming the cultural crisis), 219, 220  
Grosz, George, 26, 233, 242, 306, 308, 328  
Haas-Heye, Otto, 272  
Hall, Stuart, 105  
Hammond, Meghan Marie, 323, 332, 337n4, 337n6, 337n9; *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, 322; *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*, 320–21  
Hanna, Julian: *Key Concepts in Modernist Literature*, 326  
Hardekopf, Ferdinand, 44, 234  
Hardenberg, Henriette, 17, 27, 44, 81; “Abend im Kriege” (Evening in Wartime) 49; “Frau von 1915” (Woman of 1915), 275; “Requiem,” 48; *Südliches Herz* (Southern heart), 6  
Harlem Renaissance, 146  
Hartwig (Herzl), Theodor, 202n6  
Hartwig-Spira, Mela, 13–14, 185–204; “abuse,” 188; artistic circle, 190; *Aufzeichnungen einer Häßlichen* (Records of an ugly [woman]), 193; *Bin ich ein überflüssiger Mensch?* (Am I a Redundant Human Being?), 6, 202n4, 202n11; *Das Kind* (The child), 202n9; *Das Verbrechen* (The crime), 187, 189, 192, 197, 202n4; *Das Weib ist ein Nichts* (The woman is nothing), 187, 202n4; *Das Wunder von Ulm* (The miracle of Ulm), 187, 202n11; *Der phantastische Paragraph* (The fantastic paragraph), 193–94; *Die Hexe* (The witch), 193; *Ekstasen* (Ecstasies), 13, 185–86, 191, 194, 195, 202n4; *Gelächter*, 199, 200, 201–2; haunted women, 196; Herzl birth name, 186; *Inferno*, 202n4; *Irrsinn* (insanity, unreason), 194, 195, 201; “Kleinstadt” (small town), 187; language of excess and extremes, 14, 197, 201; laughter, 199–200, 201; *Sinn*, 194, 195; *Sinn vs. Irrsinn*, 195, 201; visual vocabulary, 13, 186  
Hasenclever, Walter, 8, 61, 62, 63, 87; “Aud den Tod einer rau” (On the

- Death of a Woman), 41; *Der Sohn* (The son), 86; "Kehr Mir Zurück, Mein Geist" (Come Back to Me, My Reason), 41
- Hatvani, Paul: "Versuch über den Expressionismus" (Thoughts about Expressionism), 21n2
- Hauck, Emma, 296, 313
- Häusler, Philip, 165
- Hebbel, Friedrich: *Judith*, 202n10
- Heckel, Erich, 63, 64, 295, 309
- Heckmann, Ursula, 35, 37
- Hegelian belief, 33
- Heidelberg Collection, 296, 297
- Heller, Reinhold, 131n8
- Hemus, Ruth, 233, 234; *Dada's Women*, 253
- Hennings, Emmy, 3, 9, 17, 20, 27, 43, 44, 53n5, 232–49, 250, 258, 262n5, 262n6, 262n13; actress, 233; "Apachenlied" (Apache Song), 46, 329; Catholicism, 250, 251, 252; childlike, 245n5; confession, 259; Dadaism, 232, 253; *Das Brandmal* (The stigma), 6, 16, 242, 250–61, 262n3; *Das Flüchtige Spiel* (The fugitive game), 251–52; *Die letzte Freude* (The last joy), 261n1; *Gefängnis* (Prison), 6, 15–16, 232, 235–37, 238, 240, 241, 243, 244; inner strife, 16, 250, 251, 260–61; *Lust(mord)*, 242, 244; "Nach dem Cabaret" (After the Cabaret), 46; New Man, 254; partner Hugo Ball, 233; "promiscuity," 234–35; pseudonyms, 235; "raped," 240; role-plays, 252; self-doubt, 234
- Hermard, Jost, 64
- Hesse, Hermann, 232
- Hevesi, Ludwig: Mörder, 158
- Heym, Georg, 55n21, 187, 234; "Der Gott der Stadt" (The god of the city), 71–72, 76; "Der Krieg" (The War), 47; "Ophelia," 41–42
- Hiller, Kurt, 11
- Hirschfeld, Magnus, 11, 14, 17, 92
- Hitler, Adolf, 35
- Höch, Hannah, 7
- Hoffmann, Josef, 159, 161, 164, 165, 178, 180n2
- Hoffmann-Curtius, Kathrin: "Frauenbilder Oskar Kokoschkas" (Oskar Kokoschka's Images of Women), 26
- Hofmann, Else, 160, 166, 173, 180
- Hollenstein, Stephanie, 159
- Holzer, Marie, 140, 216, 217, 286n28; "Das Automobil" (The automobile), 286n27; "Die rote Perücke" (The red wig), 273–75; "Fortschritt" (Progress), 286n27; murdered by abusive husband, 286n27; "Schutzzölle" (Protective duties), 286n27; "Vom Wesen der Kritik" (On the essence of criticism), 286n27
- homosexuals, 92, 94; activists, 11; women in politics, 17
- Hörmann, Marianne, 173, 178, 181n16
- Houze, Rebecca, 159
- Howes, David, 142
- Huch, Ricarda, 3
- Huelsenbeck, Richard, 232, 245n5, 262n4
- human suffering, 237, 278
- hysteria, 54n9, 200, 201, 216
- Ibsen, Henrik, 86
- impressionism, 2, 10, 31
- Independent Social-Democratic Party (USPD), 15, 211, 218, 228n12, 288n59, 288n61
- inpatients, artist, 18, 295, 296, 313n8
- insanity, 18, 194, 195, 293, 313n5; and gendered art, 294–96; Lohse-Wächtler, 303–11; male, 295; Prinzhorn's women and the female impact on the idea of insanity in art, 297–302
- institutionalization, 19, 294, 310; and containment, 332–35; motherhood, 15
- International Exhibition of Ceramic Art, 175
- interracial, 12, 141, 145, 148
- intersectionality, 1, 4, 7, 11, 12, 19, 20, 142, 315n20
- Janco, Marcel, 262n4
- Janstein, Elisabeth, 281; "Die Telefonistin" (The operator), 140

- Jawlensky, Alexej, 10, 120, 122, 125, 129, 131n12, 131n15; *Black Tree—Bordighera*, 127, 128
- Jeser-Schmid, Hilde, 161, 164
- Jewish: Austrian, 185; authors, 90, 152; community, 104; court attorney, 164; family, 35, 103, 186, 337n8; German, 102, 104–5, 106, 110, 112; men, 104; people, 42; Polish, 42; publications, 102; Viennese, 179; women, 102, 103, 104, 105, 111, 112, 113n4, 113n8, 190; writer, 9, 101, 185, 190. *See also* League of Jewish Women; Judaism
- Joest, Elisabeth, 140
- Jogiches, Leo, 42
- Johnson, Matt, 262n7
- Jones, Caroline, 142, 153n4
- Joyce, James, 109
- Judaism, 104–5, 105, 202n6; Liberal, 103, 105; Reform, 105. *See also* Jewish
- Jugendstil, 7, 8, 64, 65, 161, 162
- Jung, Franz, 55n21, 220, 235
- Jürg, Britta: *Wie eine Nilbraut, die man in die Wellen wirft* (Like a bride of the Nile one throws into the waves), 7
- Jürgens, Grethe, 313n1
- Kafka, Franz, 192; *Der Process* (The Trial), 197–98
- Kaiser, Georg, 3; *Gas I*, 76; *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts* (From Morn to Midnight), 76
- Kallir, Otto, 179
- Kambas, Chrissy, 226
- Kamenish, Paula: *Mamas of Dada*, 253
- Kaplan, Marion: *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*, 113n4, 113n7
- Kandinsky, Wassily, 10, 77n11, 118, 119–20, 121, 123, 125, 129–30, 130n4, 130n7, 131n8, 131n9, 131n10, 131n12, 131n13, 132n19, 132n20; *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Concerning the Spiritual in Art), 68
- Keen, Suzanne, 321; *Empathy and the Novel*, 321–22, 325, 336
- Kemper, Hans-Georg, 3
- Keramische Werkstätte Vally Wieselthier (Ceramics Workshop Vally Wieselthier), 165
- Kernmayer, Hildegard: “Ekstasen oder Das Andere der Vernunft” (Ecstasies or the other of reason), 190
- Kerr, Alfred, 32
- Keun, Irmgard: *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (The Artificial Silk Girl), 172
- Kidd, David: “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind,” 336n2
- Kim, Sue J., 337n6; *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*, 320–21
- Kindergarten movement, 106, 113n11
- Kirchner, Ernst Ludwig, 15, 18, 55n16, 63, 64, 234, 294, 295, 297, 298, 299, 301, 312, 314n10; *Kopf des Kranken* (Head of a Sick Man), 295; *Marzella*, 117; *Nackte Tänzerinnen* (Nude dancers), 67; *Passagiere in der Straßenbahn* (Streetcar passengers), 67; *Wintermondlandschaft* (Winter Landscape in Moonlight), 299
- Kirkham, Pat, 159
- Klaasmeyer, Katy, 10, 13
- Klee, Paul, 313n8
- Klein, Charlotte: “Frauenwahlrecht und Demokratie” (Women’s suffrage and democracy), 280, 281, 288n59
- Klemm, Wilhelm, 41
- Klimt, Gustav, 37, 158–59, 180n2
- Klimt Group, 158, 166
- Klinger, Julius, 168–69
- Klinger, Max, 61, 62, 63, 64; *Glove*, 76n1
- Knapp, Gerhard P: *Literatur des deutschen Expressionismus*, 53n6
- Kochman, Adrienne, 131n15
- Kokoschka, Oskar, 26, 37, 76n2, 159, 162, 179, 199, 303, 306, 309; *Die träumenden Knaben* (The Dreaming Youths), 161; *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women), 5, 15, 158
- Kolb, Annette, 3, 53n3
- Kolinsky, Eva, 284n2, 285n5
- Kollwitz, Käthe, 7, 293, 314n17
- Kopriva, Erna, 161
- Korschelt, Mimi: “Schuld” (Guilt), 275

- Kosmiker*, 84, 86, 89, 90, 92, 93  
 KPD. *See* Communist Party of Germany  
 Kraetzinger, Maria, 294  
 Krämer (née Cahnmann), Clementine, 9,  
 101–12, 112n2, 113n5, 113n8; *Bil-*  
*dung*, 106–7, 110, 111, 112, 113n9;  
 “Die Grotteske” (The grotesque),  
 101, 102, 108, 109, 111; founding  
 girls’ school, 106; League of Jew-  
 ish Women, 103–4; “Wenn man  
 eine Frau ist” (When you are a  
 woman), 102, 107, 108, 109, 110,  
 111; “Zur Eröffnung der Haushal-  
 tungsschule des J.F.B. in Wol-  
 fratshausen” (On the opening of the  
 League of Jewish Women’s school  
 for home economics), 113n12  
 Kramer, Hilde, 281–82, 284  
 Krause, Frank, 335, 339n29; *Expres-*  
*sionism and Gender / Expressionis-*  
*mus und Geschlecht*, 6, 137, 279,  
 285n7  
 Kreisky, Bruno, 186, 202n7  
 Kröner, Erna: “Der Zug” (The Train),  
 45; “Die Fahne” (The Flag), 48  
 Kubicka, Margarete, 17, 279, 282,  
 287n38; “Die Mutter,” 49, 275–77  
 Kubin, Alfred, 18, 295, 297, 299  
 Kudryashova, Aleksandra, 13–14  
 Kuhn, Dina (Bernhardine), 161, 171–72,  
 175  
 Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied  
 Arts), 161, 164, 170  
 Kunsthalle Bremen, 120  
 Kunstschauen (art shows), 12, 158, 159,  
 160, 161, 166  
  
*la Bohème*, 9, 82, 86, 97n7  
 Landau, Lola, 140; “Geburt” (Birth), 48;  
 “Wiedergeburt” (Rebirth), 50  
 Landauer, Gustav: *Der Sozialist* (The  
 socialist), 219–20  
 Lane, Barbara Miller, 65  
 Langen, Albert: *Simplicissimus*, 83  
 Lanzoni, Susan, 323, 325–26, 331  
 Lask, Berta, 28, 48, 49; “Das Weib”  
 (The Woman), 47  
 Lasker-Schüler, Else, 2–3, 5, 7, 9, 27,  
 38, 39, 43, 44, 48, 53n5, 53n6,  
 54n8, 62, 81, 86, 91, 93, 98n23,  
 140, 226, 269, 285n5; *Der Sturm*,  
 216–17; “Meine Mutter,” 42;  
 “Mein Volk,” 40; “Weltende” (End  
 of the World), 51  
 late Expressionism, 219n  
 Law for the Prevention of Genetically  
 Defective Offspring (Gesetz zur  
 Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuch-  
 ses), 302, 310  
 Lazard, Lulu, 49  
 League of Jewish Women, 103–4  
 Leake, Eric, 325, 336; “Humanizing the  
 Inhumane,” 324  
 Le Corbusier: “The Decorative Art of  
 Today,” 169  
 Lee, Vernon, 323  
 Lehbruck, Wilhelm, 177  
 Leisching, Marianne, 163  
 Le Rider, Jacques, 213, 271–72  
 Leng, Kirsten: *Sexual Politics and Femi-*  
*nist Science*, 14  
 Lewis, Beth Irwin, 26  
 Lewis, Dwight, 154n9  
 liberated: lifestyle, 88; New Man, 86;  
 New Woman, 29, 172; women, 29,  
 86, 213, 214, 274  
 Lichnowsky, Mechtilde, 28, 140  
 Lieb, Maria, 294  
 Liebknecht, Karl, 42  
 Likarz-Strauss, Maria, 161, 181n17  
 Lindner, Richard, 313n8  
 Lipps, Theodor, 323  
 Littler, Margaret: “Madness, Misogyny  
 and the Feminine in Aesthetic  
 Modernism,” 55n20  
 Löffler, Berthold, 161  
 Lohse, Kurt, 304, 306  
 Lohse-Wächtler, Elfriede, 17, 18, 293, 294,  
 302, 313n1, 314n17, 315n22; *Die*  
*Nachtwandlerin* (The Woman Sleep-  
 walker), 303, 305; *Eine Patientin*  
*(Frau mit Landschaft)* (A  
 Patient [Woman with Landscape]),  
 310; *Friedrichsberger Köpfe*, 312;  
 insanity, 303–11, 312; *Lissy*, 306, 307,  
 308; murdered, 18, 302, 311; Niko-  
 laus, 304; *Selbstporträt* (Self-Portrait),  
 310, 311; sterilization, 302, 311  
 Loos, Adolf, 35, 162, 168; *Wiener Weh*  
 (Viennese woe), 169

- Los Angeles County Museum of Art:  
Expressionism in Germany and  
France, 219g
- lost generation of men, 29, 53
- Ludwig, Paula, 50; "Die Buhlerin"  
(Lover), 46
- Lukács, Georg, 22n10
- Luther, Martin, 88
- Luxemburg, Rosa, 42, 280
- Lyotard, Jean-François, 192
- made up, 12, 46, 159, 160, 170. *See also*  
makeup
- makeup, 149, 168, 170, 172, 177, 330.  
*See also* made up
- "madwomen," 18, 295
- male Expressionists, 4, 6, 13, 17, 28, 29,  
31, 32, 37, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49, 51,  
52, 53n3, 54n8, 55n18, 74, 82, 159,  
160, 162, 233, 271, 272, 273, 279,  
283, 293, 295, 308, 327, 338n14
- male insanity, 295
- Malycheva, Tanja: *Marianne Werefkin  
and the Women Artists in Her Cir-  
cle*, 219g
- Mann, Thomas, 86, 92
- Marc, Franz: *Die Gelbe Kuh* (The Yel-  
low Cow), 118, 130n5
- Marchand, Susanne, 155n15
- Marinetti, F. T., 218, 226, 227
- Märten, Lu, 16 "Die Geburt der Mütter"  
(The birth of mothers), 15, 211–30;  
*Die Künstlerin* (The woman as art-  
ist), 225–26; "Sozialismus und  
Künstler" (Socialism and artists),  
225
- Martens, Lorna, 252
- Martin, Maria, 272–73, 286n17, 286n18
- Martini, Fritz: *Prosa des Expressionis-  
mus* (Prose of Expressionism), 3,  
52
- Marx, Rudolf, 32
- Marxism, 22n10, 42, 270
- masculinists, 27, 216, 217, 218, 220,  
221, 222–23, 250, 270
- matriarchal: communism, 212, 215; cre-  
ation myths, 96; law, 32; rule, 219;  
socialism, 212, 223, 225; society,  
212; utopia, 221
- McBride, Douglas Brent, 15
- McDowall, Estelle, 258
- McGowan, Moray, 148
- Meinhard, Elisabeth: "Mädchen" (Girl),  
48–49
- Meisel-Hess, Grete, 52, 53n5, 55n22,  
216, 217, 276, 283–84; *Das Ergeb-  
nis* (The Outcome), 52; "Der Aes-  
thete und die Frauenfrage" (The aes-  
thete and the question of women's  
rights), 271–72; "Prostitution,  
Frauenbewegung und Rasse" (Pro-  
stitution, the women's movement,  
and race), 214, 215; Weiberhaß und  
Weiberverachtung (Misogyny and  
contempt for women), 285n12
- Melander, Ellinor, 55n22  
*The Memory Garden*, 186
- Mendelssohn, Erich, 71
- Menschheit* (humanity), 28, 31, 39, 40,  
44, 46
- men's movement, 2, 270
- Meskimmon, Marsha: *We Weren't Mod-  
ern Enough*, 6
- messianic, 9, 83, 87, 88
- Metzler: *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*,  
53n6
- Metzler, Jan Christian, 154n10
- Mielke, Rita, 154n7
- Mignolo, Walter, 153n1
- Miller, Cristanne: *Cultures of Modern-  
ism*, 6
- Mitschke-Collande, Constantin von: *Der  
begeisterte Weg* (The Inspired  
Way), 304
- Mix, York-Gothart: *Hansers Sozialge-  
schichte der deutschen Literatur*  
(Hanser's social history of German  
literature), 3
- Modersohn-Becker, Paula, 219g, 293,  
314n17
- modernism, 21n1, 29, 55n23, 82, 88, 91,  
93, 95, 96, 123, 142, 153, 323, 325,  
326; German, 2, 186, 213; Vienna,  
63
- Modernist Studies Association, 2, 21n1
- Moll, Albert, 14
- moral purity movement, 37
- Morrison, Toni: "The Color Fetish," 152
- Morton, Marsha, 76n1
- Moscow School of Painting, 122–23

- Moser, Ditha, 161  
 Moser, Koloman, 161, 164, 180n2  
 mother, 4, 11, 15, 26, 31, 39, 42, 44, 48, 49, 50, 81, 89, 92, 93, 121, 122, 145, 149, 155n12, 163, 195, 211, 212, 224, 277, 278, 279; bearing offspring, 34; bereaved, 47, 276; birthing, 47; bourgeoisie, 34; celebration, 33; cloistered, 223; grieving, 275, 287n37; helpmate, 34; love, 33; married, 215; mother/whore dichotomy, 14; nurturing, 254; potential, 36; precursors of justice and civil rights, 33; single, 215; social values, 223; spirit, 226; stepmother, 110; time of, 223; tired, 40; unwed, 216; wild, 218; women as, 3, 31, 21, 217; working-class, 66  
 motherhood, 14, 15, 32, 36, 155n12, 214, 215, 217, 218, 223, 224, 226, 227, 233, 296  
 Mühlen, Hermynia Zur, 140  
 Mühsam, Erich, 32, 86, 234, 245n4  
 Müller, Daniela, 17–18, 19  
 Müller, Dorit, 236  
 Munch, Edvard, 61; *The Scream*, 64, 198, 199, 339n27  
 Münter, Gabriele, 10, 21n9, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 123, 127–30, 131nn8–10, 131n12, 132nn18–21, 293, 314n17; *Lower Main Street, Murnau*, 125–26, 126  
 Murnau, F. W.: *Nosferatu*, 196  
 Murphy, Richard, 55n23; “The Poetics of Hysteria,” 54n9; *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, 199  
 Museum of Applied and Contemporary Art (MAK), 179–80, 181n13  
 Musil, Robert, 192  
 Muysers, Carola, 302  
  
 Nagel, Hanna, 314n17  
 Natterer, August, 297  
 naturalism, 2, 3, 7, 67  
 neo-Kantianism, 28, 30, 31  
 Nestoroff, Ivan, 62  
 Neue Galerie Graz: *Modernity in Dark Times*, 185  
 Neue Künstlervereinigung (NKV), 10, 129; München (NKVM), 131n12, 132n19. *See also Der Blaue Reiter*  
*Neue Mensch* (New Human), 1, 4, 20, 30  
*Neues Wiener Abendblatt*, 188  
*Neues Wiener Journal*, 188  
*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 27, 287n43  
 Neuwaldler-Breuer, Grete, 161  
 new humanity, 44, 49, 86, 270, 283, 285n10  
 New Man, 9, 11, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 52, 55n23, 68, 72, 83, 86, 87, 88, 96, 137, 138, 153, 223, 254, 271; between New Man and New Woman, 92–95  
 New Objectivity, 294, 306, 312, 315n22  
 New Woman, 4, 7, 12, 26, 29, 53, 56n24, 86, 159, 160, 161, 163, 166, 170, 172, 175, 179, 308; between New Man and New Woman, 92–95  
 new world, 33, 39, 49, 51, 84, 173, 222, 223, 284  
 New York Art Center, 175, 176  
 New York Blanche Bonestall Galleries, 175  
 New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, 175  
 New York Orrefors Galleries, 175  
 New York Weyhe Galleries, 175  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 28, 31, 34–35, 36, 84, 88, 159n16, 130, 199; cultural renewal, 117; *Ecce Homo*, 262n13; femininity extremes, 35, 52; *Geist*, 272; “herd,” 35, 92, 118; modern primitivism, 149; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 89, 97n12; transvaluation of values, 34; *Übermensch*, 37; *Umwertung aller Werte* (transvaluation of all values), 8–9, 34, 81; utopia, 130n4  
 nightmares, 13, 196  
 Nolde, Emil, 130n3  
 November Revolution, 216, 222  
 Novero, Cevilia, 142  
 Nürnberger, Helmuth: *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 53n6  
 Nussbaum, Martha, 319, 336  
  
 Obler, Bibiana, 132nn18–19  
 Orrefors Galleries, 175



- “Other,” 105, 138, 152; Black, 145  
 Otten, Karl, 40; *Ahnung und Aufbruch*  
 (Foreboding and awakening), 2;  
*Ego und Eros*, 52  
 outsiders in women’s Expressionist liter-  
 ature, 319–39
- Painter, Corinne, 9  
*Pan*, 261n1  
 Pan, David, 149; *Primitive Renaissance*,  
 54n11  
 Paris Exposition, 168, 169, 170, 181n13  
 Parker, Rozsika, 159, 294  
 Pascal, Roy, 67  
 Paul, Georgina, 289n76  
 Paulsen, Wolfgang: *Expressionismus*  
*und Aktivismus*, 54n8  
 Pehnt, Wolfgang, 66  
 Pelz, William A., 288n58  
 Peredvizhnikis, 122  
 Pfemfert, Alexandra, 28, 269  
 Pfemfert, Franz, 17, 32, 213–14, 216,  
 219–20, 224, 269, 275, 279. *See*  
*also Die Aktion*
- Phalanx, 119  
 photography, 16, 251, 252, 256, 259,  
 263n15  
 Pinthus, Kurt, 8, 61; *Kinobuch* (Cinema  
 book), 62; *Menschheitsdämmerung*  
 (Dawn of Humanity), 28–29, 38–  
 39, 43, 54n13, 63, 82  
 Pollock, Griselda, 294, 302  
 portrayal: contrary, 325; of eternal real-  
 ity, 159; of humanity, 123; of prosti-  
 tutes, 329, 332; of self, 235; sur-  
 roundings, 306; of women, 6,  
 26–27, 28, 29, 46, 109, 164, 165,  
 335  
 positivism, 30, 72  
 Powolny, Michael, 161, 164  
 Priianishnikov, Illarion, 121–22  
 primitivism, 54n11, 138, 145, 148–50,  
 153, 163, 165, 168, 180n4, 202  
 Prinzhorn, Hans, 18, 296, 297–98,  
 313n7; *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*,  
 313n8  
 Prinzhorn Collection, 18, 293, 296, 297,  
 298, 299, 300, 313n2, 313n7,  
 313n8, 314n9, 315n21  
 prostitute, 3, 4, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20,  
 22n11, 26, 31, 32, 33, 36, 40, 43,  
 46, 47, 50, 54n8, 108, 109, 197,  
 234, 240, 242, 244, 251, 261, 275,  
 306, 310, 319, 325, 326, 328–32,  
 333, 336, 338n15; body, 259, cor-  
 porality, 233; objects of art, 239  
 proto-Expressionism, 61, 64, 65–68, 70,  
 73, 74, 76; mysticism, 65–68, 71  
 public space, 104, 105, 111, 112  
 Pukl, Marie: “Mütterlichkeit” (Motherli-  
 ness), 48
- Raabe, Paul, 63, 269; *Index Expression-*  
*ismus*, 4, 28, 53n4  
 Rabinowcuh, Julia: *Mela Hartwig*, 190  
 Ranc, Julijana, 285n6  
 Rathenau, Walter: *Zur Mechanik des*  
*Geistes* (The mechanics of the  
 soul), 67  
 Ramm-Pfemfert, Alexandra, 269, 285n5,  
 285n6  
*Raumkunst*, 180n2  
 redemption, 88, 213, 223  
 Reetz, Bärbel, 233–34  
 Repin, Ilya: *Barge Haulers on the Volga*,  
 122, 124  
 “respectability,” 109, 111  
 Reuter, Gabriele, 81  
 Reventlow, Franziska zu, 8  
 Cosmic Countess, 84  
*Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen*, 9, 81–  
 98  
 between Bohemian brotherhood  
 and secret Germany, 87–92  
 between canon and New Man, 83–  
 87  
 between New Man and New  
 Woman, 92–95  
*Kosmiker*, 84  
 “Viragines oder Hetären?” (Viragoes  
 or hetaerae?), 84  
 revolution and women, 279–83  
 Richardsen, Ingvild, 84  
 Richter, Agnes, 294, 296  
 Rilke, Rainer Maria, 86, 192, 289n71  
 Rix, Katharina, 161, 175, 176  
 Robertson, Eric, 53n7  
 Rochowanski, Leopold, 160, 166  
 Roth, Joseph: *Die Kapuzinergruft* (The  
 Emperor’s Tomb), 163, 164, 175

- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 107, 262n3  
 Rout, Katharina: Branded, 262n7  
 Royal School of Applied Arts, 303  
 Rubiner, Ludwig, 219–20; “Der Mensch” (The Human Being), 40; “Psychoanalyse” (Psychoanalysis), 219–20  
 Rugh, Thomas F., 252–53  
 Rühle-Gestel, Alice, 280  
 Rupperecht, Caroline: *Subject to Delusions*, 6  
 Russian Revolution, 129  
 Saint-Point, Valentine de: “The Manifesto of the Futurist Woman,” 217–19  
 Saito, Yuriko, 142  
 Santner, Eric L., 256  
 Saxon Memorial Foundation, 314n17  
 Schad, Christian, 295, 306  
 Schaschl, Reni, 161, 166  
 Schaumann, Ruth, 28  
 Scheerbart, Paul, 66, 71, 192  
 Schickele, René, 221, 224, 226  
 Schiele, Egon, 37, 53n3, 159, 161, 179  
 Schiller, Friedrich, 88, 89  
 Schlemmer, Oskar, 18, 313n8  
 Schlichter, Rudolf, 306, 328  
 Schmid-Bortenschlager: “Der zerbrochene Spiegel” (The broken mirror), 189  
 Schmidl, Hedwig, 161, 166, 171  
 Schönberg, Arnold, 35  
 Schönfeld, Christiane, 26, 43, 261; “Confessional Narrative / Fragmented Identity,” 22n11, 252; “Streetwalking the Metropolis,” 22n11, 332, 338n14; “Under Construction,” 22n11, 332, 338n14; “The Urbanization of the Body,” 259, 329, 332  
 scholarship of recovery, 25, 26–27, 82  
 Schönfeld, Christiane, 26, 261, 329, 332; “Confessional Narrative / Fragmented Identity,” 22n11, 252; “Streetwalking the Metropolis,” 22n11, 338n14; “Under Construction,” 22n11, 338n14; “The Urbanization of the Body,” 259  
 Schorske, Carl, 180n2  
*Schrei* (scream), 31, 47, 48, 339n27  
 Schreiner, Margit, 186  
 Schuler, Alfred, 84, 88, 98n16  
 Schultz, Franziska, 216–17  
 Schumacher, Fritz, 63–64, 67–68  
 School of Applied Arts, 161, 164, 170  
 Secessionist, 158–59, 161, 162, 164, 168, 180n2  
 Segall, Lasar: *Die irrenden Frauen* (The Wandering Women), 303–4  
 self-conception, 5, 16, 251  
 “sense of the object,” 140, 145, 146, 153  
 sexual difference, 22n13, 37, 216  
 sexual freedom, 37, 83, 92, 96, 242, 251  
 sexuality, 4, 7, 11, 13, 14, 20, 31–32, 36, 37, 81, 91, 96, 140, 153, 219, 275; female, 14, 37, 168, 170, 173, 177, 189, 215, 245, 274, 308, 328; homosexuality, 92; repressed, 234  
 sexual liberation, 13, 160, 171  
 Sharp, Ingrid, 288n58  
 Shea, Nicole, 15–16  
 Shelley, Mary: *Frankenstein*, 75  
 Sheppard, Richard, 55n21  
 Shklovsky, Viktor: “Art as Device,” 225  
 Shoultz, Julie, 8, 18–19, 22n13, 153  
 Siebrecht, Claudia, 275–76  
 Silverman, Lisa: *Becoming Austrians*, 189–90  
 Simmel, Georg, 259  
 Simmons, Sherwin, 162, 286n18; “Ornament, Gender, and Interiority in Viennese Expressionism,” 53n3  
 Singer, Susi, 161, 162, 164, 166, 168, 171, 175  
 Smale, Catherine, 17, 19  
 Smith, Suzanne: *Berlin Coquette*, 14  
 social activism, 17, 320, 325, 335–36  
 Social Democratic Party (SPD), 202n7, 218, 224, 228n12, 280, 286n27, 288n59, 288n61  
 social revolution, 31, 272; female protagonists, 9, 101–12  
 Sokel, Walter, 65, 71, 74, 251  
 Sollors, Werner, 143–44, 145  
 somaesthetics, 12, 138, 142; as medium—“performance,” 146–48; as medium—“primitivism,” 148–50; and senses in avant-garde, 138–41  
*Sonnenknabe*, 88, 93, 95

- Sontag, Susan, 256, 263n15  
 Sorkin, Jenni, 178  
 Sparke, Penny, 159  
 Spartacist League, 228n12  
 Spartakusbund (Spartacus Group), 303  
 SPD. *See* Social Democratic Party  
 Spira, Robert, 186  
 Spreitzer, Brigitte, 63  
 Stadler, Ernst, 41; "Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht" (Ride across the Cologne Rhine Bridge at Night), 45  
 Stark, Michael, 7  
 Steidl, Sarah, 147  
 Stein, Edith, 324, 337n8, 337n9; *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (On the Problem of Empathy), 323–24  
 Stein, Gertrude: *Tender Buttons*, 138–39  
 Steiner, Rudolf, 65, 68; *Die Mystik im Aufgange des neuzeitlichen Geisteslebens* (Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age), 68  
 Steinmetz, Ludwig, 160, 162, 166  
 Sternheim, Carl, 192, 295  
 Stibbe, Matthew, 288n58  
 Stieler, Hilde: "Feinde" (Enemies), 275  
 Stöcker, Helene, 17, 215, 216  
 Stoecklin, Franziska: "De Profundis" (Out of the deep), 47, 275  
 Stoehr, Ingo: *German Literature of the Twentieth Century*, 191, 285n10  
 Stramm, August, 222  
 Strasser, Nadja, 52  
 Strindberg, August, 35, 37  
 Studer-Goll, Claire, 2, 285n5, 287n43  
 subjectivity, 54n9, 78n19, 101, 160, 337n4  
 Suckfüll, Barbara, 296  
 Swope, Curtis, 7–8, 19  
 Symbolists, 121, 123  
 Tatar, Maria: *Lustmord*, 26  
 Tausk, Martha, 188, 189  
 tellurian matriarchy, 33, 92, 94  
 Tergit, Gabriele, 192  
 Titchener, Edward, 323  
 Tobler-Christinger, 285n5  
 Toller, Ernst, 26, 31, 32, 75; "An alle Gefangenen" (To all prisoners), 66  
 Tolstoy, Leo: *Anna Karenina*, 75  
 Trakl, Georg, 35, 37, 44  
 Trommler, Frank, 76n3  
 Turner, Victor, 8, 81, 83  
 Tzara, Tristan, 232, 262n4  
 Uerlings, Herbert, 152–53  
 USPD. *See* Independent Social-Democratic Party  
 Valery, Alma, 141, 144, 145, 146, 149  
 van den Berg, Hubert, 252–53, 262n2  
 van Hoddiss, Jakob, 51, 234; "Der Todesengel" (Angel of Death), 41; "Weltende" (End of the World), 45  
 van Leer, Sophie, "Die Puppe," 54n10  
 Venturelli, Aldo, 55n23  
 Verborgenes Museum (Hidden museum): *Women Artists in Dialogue*, 21n9  
 Victoria-Pensionat, 298  
 Viennese Expressionism, 158, 161  
 Viennese Women's Academy, 161, 164  
 Vietta, Silvio, 3  
 Villain, Robert, 53n7  
 Vischer, Robert: Über das Optische Formgefühl, 322–23  
 vitalism, 88, 138, 146, 153  
 Viviani, Annalisa, 3  
 Vollmer, Hartmut, 6, 44, 45, 47–48, 52, 53n4, 137, 285n7; *Die Rote Perücke*, 3–4, 21n7, 51, 186, 192; *In roten Schuhen tanzt die Sonne sich zu Tod* (In red shoes the sun dances itself to death), 21n7, 27, 29, 38, 43, 46, 51, 82, 186, 192; "Nachwort," 202n3; "Vorwort," 273  
 Voltaire, Cabaret, 233, 250  
 von Braunbehren, Lili: "Stadtnacht" (City Night), 47  
 von Ficker, Ludwig: *Brenner*, 35  
 von Harden, Sylvia, 47, 192, 285n5  
 von Hardenberg, Henriette, 27  
 von Hofmannsthal, Hugo: "Brief an Lord Chandos" (Letter to Lord Chandos), 64, 65  
 von Magdeburg, Mechthild, 260  
 Vormärz era, 110  
 Wacker, Rudolf, 309  
 Walden, Herwarth, 44, 213, 224, 272;

- Der Sturm*, 214, 216, 226, 284n1  
(see also *Der Sturm*); "Le Manifeste de la femme futuriste" (The Manifesto of the Futurist Woman), 217–18; "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature," 227
- Walden, Nell, 28, 44
- Wanderers, 122
- Wedekind, Frank, 37, 61, 63, 94, 192;  
*Frühlingserwachen* (Spring Awakening), 64, 75, 78n19, 188
- Weedon, Chris: "Cultural Studies," 112
- Weigel, Sigrid, 186, 200
- Weyhe Galleries, 175
- Weib*, 15, 16, 26, 29, 35, 36, 39, 40, 47, 49, 55n23, 83, 92, 93, 94, 96, 169
- Weininger, Otto, 28, 31, 35–37, 52, 285n12; emancipation, 37, 168;  
*Geschlecht und Charakter* (Sex and Character), 14, 35; impurity of sex, 37
- Werefkin, Marianne, 10, 21n9, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120–25, 131n13, 131n15, 132n20, 132n21; *Elizabet von Werefkin*, 122; *Lettres à un inconnu*, 121; salon, 129, 130, 131nn11–12; *Sonnenaufgang* (*Sunrise*), 123, 124; "women only" at Artist Workshops, 162
- Werfel, Franz, 66, 74, 87, 187, 289n71; "Hekuba," 42; "Ich bin ja noch ein Kind" (I am still a child), 39; *Nicht der Mörder, der Ermordete ist schuldig* (It's not the murderer, it's the murdered who is guilty), 86
- Werner-Birkenbach, Sabine, 235
- whiteness, 12, 145, 147
- white supremacy, 12, 145, 152
- Wickenburg, Alfred, 190
- Wied, Martina, 18, 28; "Das Gespenst der großen Stadt" (The Ghost of the Metropolis), 50; "Die Dirne" (The Whore), 46, 329–30
- Wiene, Robert: *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari), 196
- Wiender Frauenakademie (Viennese Women's Academy), 161, 164
- Wiener, Paul, 175
- Wiener Keramik (Viennese Ceramics) Manufactory, 161
- Wiener Werkstätte Artist Workshops, 12, 160, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 178
- Wiener Werkstätte Ceramics Department, 12, 160, 173
- Wieselthier, Vally, 159, 164–66, 169, 180, 181n17; *Flora*, 176, 176, 177, 178; *Frauenkopf*, 12–13, 160, 161, 166, 168, 170–73, 175–76, 179; *Head with Flower*, 167; Keramische Werkstätte Vally Wieselthier (Ceramics Workshop Vally Wieselthier), 165; *Kindweib*, 159, 175, 179; *Kleinplastik*, 166, 175; *Kunstgewerblerin* (craftswoman), 163; *Look Out*, 173, 178, 179; *Sitting Figure with Flower Pots*, 173, 174, 175; "X-shaped" ceramic oven, 168
- Wieselthier, Wilhelm, 164, 255
- Wilde, Oscar: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 188
- Wilhelm II, 211
- William II, 298
- Wille* (will), 30, 31, 32, 33, 49, 254, 271
- Williams, Raymond, 270, 284
- Williams, Rhys W., 64
- will to power, 72, 88
- Wingfield, Nancy: *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria*, 328
- Winkler, Rosa, 164
- Wohlmuth, Charlotte: "Wir Utopisten" (We Utopians), 49
- Wolfenstein, Alfred, 44; "Guter Kampf" (The Good Fight), 40
- Wolff, Janet, 256, 264n24
- Wolfskehl, Karl, 84, 88, 90
- woman question (*Frauenfrage*), 33, 52, 213, 217, 219, 221
- women and revolution, 279–83
- women's movement, 9, 31, 32, 52, 54n8, 55n19, 81, 84, 102, 106, 152, 214, 215–16, 220, 280–81, 286n27; Jewish, 113n8
- Woolf, Leonard, 187
- Woolf, Virginia, 109, 187
- World War I, 71, 75, 275, 282, 286n27, 287n37, 287n43, 288n61, 295, 327, 337n8. See also First World War
- World War II, 313n7
- Worringer, Wilhelm, 320, 337n9; *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, 323

- Wotschke, Jean, 26, 32
- Wright, Barbara D.: "Intimate Stranger,"  
1–2, 4, 5–6, 9, 63, 186, 189, 199,  
213, 250, 254, 264n29, 271, 283,  
285n7, 329, 338n15
- Wright, Richard, 145
- Wünsche, Isabel: *Marianne Werefkin  
and the Women Artists in Her Cir-  
cle*, 21n9
- Yonan, Michael, 180
- Zantop, Susanne, 155n15
- Zarathustrian rhetoric, 88, 97n12
- Zech, Paul: "Neue Bergpredigt" (New  
Sermon on the Mount), 40; "Sor-  
tiermädchen," 41
- Zetkin, Clara, 280, 281, 288n63
- Zuckmayer, Carl, 26
- Zweig, Stefan, 187; "Das neue Pathos"  
(The New Pathos), 198–99