

Die kleine Frau: Her World in Selected Works of Irmgard Keun

BY

Gabrielle Katherine Frawley

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Chairperson Professor Leonie Marx

Professor Frank Baron

Professor James Brown

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The Thesis Committee for Gabrielle Katherine Frawley
certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Chairperson Professor Leonie Marx

Date approved:

Abstract

The concept of *die kleine Frau*, a notion unique to this analysis, is applied to Irmgard Keun's depiction of young, lower middle class women during the interwar period in her novels *Gilgi – eine von uns*, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, and *Nach Mitternacht*. The common process of societal disillusionment culminating in emotional and physical displacement that the protagonists of these novels experience is explored in the context of the everyday and how it was lived by *die kleine Frau*. As a foundation for the literary analysis of Keun's novels, the socio-economic and –political history of women in Germany from the Weimar Republic through to the prewar NS-Regime is discussed, which further serves to underscore the volatile state of flux that female identity experienced during this time. The concept of *der kleine Mann*, prominent in 20th century German literature, is explored in order to contextualize Keun's *kleine Frau* and her distinction from *der kleine Mann*. Included in the analysis of the common process of societal disillusionment that the protagonists undergo is a discussion of their roles as modern daughters and their consequent incompatibility with the traditional family-unit, which is interpreted as the foundational dimension of their notion of displacement. Finally, the development of the protagonists over the course of the novels, and their common realization of their susceptibility to socio-economic and –political forces is explored. Their inability to establish a satisfying and stable socio-economic position within the social structure culminates in their self-determined flight from their respective situations. This analysis demonstrates that, although each of the novels ends with the protagonist facing an uncertain future, *die kleine Frau* nevertheless exhibits a paradoxical duality; none of the protagonists are willing to conform to the subjugated societal positions available to them at the end of the novels, and thereby in their flight maintain a degree

of self-determination, despite their vulnerability to greater socio-economic and –political forces of the volatile interwar period.

Table of Contents

1.	Identity in Flux: Rapid Change in the Societal Roles of Women, 1920s – 1930s.....	1
1.1	The “New Women” of the Weimar Republic.....	3
1.2	“Liberated from Women’s Emancipation:” <i>die deutsche Frau und Mutter</i> of the Pre-WWII National Socialist Period.....	8
2.	<i>Der kleine Mann</i> and <i>Die kleine Frau</i> : Similarities and Differences.....	9
3.	Modern Daughters: Estrangement between Generations.....	17
3.1	Gilgi: The Incongruity of Assigned Space and Desired Place.....	17
3.2	Doris: Redefining “Belonging”.....	24
3.3	Sanna: Finding a Space Against Political Odds.....	25
4.	The Process of Disillusionment.....	26
4.1	Gilgi: The Tenuousness of Control.....	26
4.2	Doris: The Irony of Empowerment through Manipulation.....	38
4.3	Sanna: The Duality of the Theme of “nicht begreifen”.....	49
5.	<i>Die kleine Frau</i> : Self-determined Homelessness.....	57
	Bibliography.....	60

1. Identity in Flux: Rapid Change in the Societal Roles of Women, 1920s – 1930s

Through the narrative perspectives of young female protagonists, Irmgard Keun's novels *Gilgi, eine von uns* (1931), *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), and *Nach Mitternacht* (1937) provide insight into the fluctuation of women's societal roles and identity in Germany during the volatile interwar period. Published between 1931 and 1937, Keun's novels span the period of transition from the late Weimar Republic to the prewar National Socialist (NS) Regime of the 1930s and capture the eminent historical events of this time from the perspective of the everyday. Through the eyes of *die kleine Frau*, Keun portrays the struggle of the modern woman to determine and secure her place in society during a period in which female identity was in flux.

In all three works, the protagonist, a young woman from the lower-middle class, undergoes a process of societal disillusionment that culminates in her emotional and physical displacement. Despite the great differences in their characters, all three protagonists exhibit a duality at the end of the novels; although they realize – however reluctantly – that they are subject to greater social, political and economic forces, they maintain a degree of self-determination. The protagonists of *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Gilgi and Doris, each attempt to establish identities based on aspects of the *neue Frau*, a financially independent and sexually liberated celluloid notion that dominated the media of the Weimar Republic. The complete independence of the *neue Frau* was, however, unattainable for the vast majority of women in the Weimar Republic, a fact that manifests itself in Gilgi's and Doris' inability to achieve and maintain the social status of the *neue Frau* and their consequent realization of their susceptibility to socio-economic forces. Although *Nach Mitternacht* differs from *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* in its depiction of the pre-war National Socialist (NS) period, its protagonist, Sanna, undergoes a process of societal disillusionment

similar to that of Gilgi and Doris. At the beginning of the novel, Sanna repeatedly notes her inability to understand NS ideology and how it seems to contradict her instinctual sense of societal order and human interactions. As the novel develops, Sanna becomes continually more aware of the chasm between the NS-world-view and her own, a realization that renders her intellectually and emotionally displaced within NS-society.

In all three novels, the protagonist's process of social disillusionment culminates in her sense of displacement within the social construct; she realizes the restrictive influence of socio-economic and –political forces on the individual and the consequent difficulty of establishing a self-determined social identity. None of the protagonists are willing to conform to the subjugated societal positions available to them at the end of the novels, however, and consequently flee their respective situations. The protagonists of *Gilgi, eine von uns*, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and *Nach Mitternacht*, in their self-determined homelessness, thus serve to represent Keun's paradoxical conclusion about the modern German woman of the lower middle class, *die kleine Frau*, of the volatile interwar period; she ultimately maintains a degree of self-determination, despite her susceptibility to socio-economic and –political forces that deny her a sphere of independence within society.

Die kleine Frau and her representation in literature is an original concept not previously explored by scholars. Although *die kleine Frau* is an extension of *der kleine Mann* and *die kleinen Leute*, themes that took hold and found unprecedented expression in the literature of the 20th century, she is not merely the female counterpart of *der kleine Mann* or an indiscernible unit among *die kleinen Leute*; she gives voice to the experience of the everyday in a uniquely female context. Although much has been written on Keun's depiction of female identity in her novels *Gilgi, eine von uns*, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and *Nach Mitternacht* by scholars such as

Katharina von Ankum, Irene Lorisika, Birgit Maier-Katkin, Leonie Marx, Eva-Maria Siegel, Jill Suzanne Smith and Edda Ziegler, these works have yet to be interpreted based on the concept of *die kleine Frau* and her societal experience during the interwar period. Further, this thesis, through its analysis of the common societal-disenchantment of Keun's protagonists and their consequent chosen physical displacement, proves, in direct contradiction to the conclusions of Birgit Maier-Katkin, that Keun's *kleine Frau* paradoxically maintains a degree of self-determination, despite her vulnerability to socio-economic and –political forces (312).

1.1 The “New Women” of the Weimar Republic

World War I, sometimes referred to as ‘the father of women’s emancipation,’ created an enormous momentum in the transition of women’s societal roles. With men away at war, working-class women entered the labor force to replace them, while middle-class women organized their efforts in the form of volunteer social work to help ameliorate the catastrophic social conditions. The result of “women’s heightened visibility on the home front” was the deconstruction of “sexual division of labor and traditional skill hierarchies,” which facilitated women’s continued presence in the work force once men returned from the war (Bridenthal, “Introduction” 3). Despite this, however, demobilization after the war removed thousands of women from their wartime jobs and displaced them into “lower paying ‘female’ areas,” thereby creating unemployment and job competition that “intensified antagonism between the sexes” (7).

The creation of the Weimar Republic in 1919 and its promise of gender equality seemed to acknowledge women’s new visibility and active role in society. Women were granted equal rights and equal pay as men, and, most significantly, the right to vote. In the 1919 elections, 80% of eligible women voted, a percentage slightly higher than that of men. Women were also

elected to office, composing 10% of the National Assembly delegates and between 5-10% of the state legislators (Bridenthal, *Beyond* 35).

Professionally, women also maintained their presence in the workforce and entered occupations normally reserved for men. Panikos Panayi asserts, “women made more progress in the Germany of the 1920s than in virtually any other contemporaneous state,” and “consequently, 112 women were elected to the Reichstag between 1919 and 1932, and by 1929 there were 2,500 women physicians, 300 lawyers and several dozen judges and professors” (10). These gains are strikingly less impressive, however, when put in the context that women comprised only 5% of all doctors, and between .5-1.5% of lawyers during the Weimar Republic. Another telling fact is that even though 30% of teachers were women, a court decision in 1922 placed women on a lower salary schedule than men on the grounds that female teachers were creating housewives, whereas male teachers were creating workmen to restore Germany (Bridenthal, *Beyond* 53). Such insights lead to the conclusion that:

Despite the frequent praise of the emancipated German woman, the progress of women’s rights was disappointing. Judicial decisions upheld women’s legal inequality in family law and property rights. Wages, job security and working conditions continued to be more favorable for men than for women. Even sweeping legislation to protect mothers and improve health care for children failed to pass in the Reichstag. The “woman question” continued to be one of the most controversial topics of the 1920s, but the economic and legal status of women did not improve. (36)

Although Article 109 of the Weimar constitution explicitly promised gender equality, the reality of most women brought this equality into question. For the vast majority of women, higher

education and professional careers were not viable options. The Weimar Republic was plagued by political and economic instability. Forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was unable to pay the astronomical war reparations that the treaty stipulated, which set off a period of hyperinflation and incredible upheaval. It was not until the mid-1920s, with the US implementation of the Dawe's Plan (1924) to help Germany meet the war reparations, that some economic stability was attained. This was short-lived, however, with the US Stock Market Crash in October 1929 devastating the already fragile German economy. By 1933, when the NS-Regime came to power, nearly 6 million Germans were unemployed (Panayi 9). Most women remained in a domestic-based role, entrenched in the patriarchal socio-economic structures that continued from the first German Empire, struggling to help their families survive the economically and politically volatile times.

Despite the many ways the validity of women's emancipation was contradicted by the reality of their experience, there still existed in the Weimar Republic the notion of *die neue Frau*. A celluloid creation with manifestations in film, art, magazines and literature, *die neue Frau*, with her *Bubikopf* haircut, short-hemline and urban lifestyle, was both financially and sexually liberated. She worked, often as a white-collar worker in an office or store, used birth control, and participated in a culture of distraction. She distinctly broke the traditional female mold of mother and wife, and was therefore at the pith of the debate in the Weimar Republic about women's societal role. Although most women did not have the means to attain the independence of *die neue Frau* and many rejected her as a force of moral decay, her ubiquitous representation in media and the consequent debate it incited is imperative to understanding the culture in flux that characterized the Weimar Republic. Some scholars, such as Rüdiger Graf and Reinhart Koselleck, argue that *die neue Frau* was "an anticipation of the future in the present" (Graf 672).

In the Weimar Republic there existed a distinct gap between *Erfahrungsraum*, the experience of one's reality, and *Erwartungshorizont*, what one expected from a future that had not yet arrived (Koselleck 349-375; Graf 672). Graf explains:

The "new woman" was one of these anticipations trying to bridge the transition from the present into the future and, therefore, a distinctively "modern" figure. It would be mistaken, however, to contrast her as the "modern" woman against "traditional" visions of femininity. Rather, she epitomized one of a set of different and competing schemes of gender relations that were all "modern" in the sense that they tried to anticipate and secure the transition from the present into a better future. This temporal structure connected the "new woman" to other beings of the future and made her a paradigm case for Weimar political culture in general.

(672)

Graf's statement provides invaluable insight into the question of women's equality in the Weimar Republic. The physical androgyny of *die neue Frau*, with her *Bubikopf* and lack of overtly feminine curves, paralleled the social androgyny of her financial, social and sexual independence. The equality of *die neue Frau* was thus based on her approximation of the man in the Weimar Republic. Most women, however, conceived of equality as the creation of a separate but equal feminine social sphere, a tradition of thought that originated with the women's movements of the Wilhemine Empire. All major political parties in the Weimar Republic promoted women's 'equal' participation in politics, but female politicians were not to be the same as male politicians. Rather, female politicians were to bring "special feminine concerns and ideals" into politics and to handle issues that were especially suited to their gender. It was not thought that women would abandon their primary social function of wives and mothers

(Bridenthal, *Beyond* 37-38; Koonz 199-202). As Claudia Koonz concludes, “most German women, even those who identified with the women’s movement, accepted gender roles based on biological differences between the sexes and spoke of complementary spheres for women and men, rather than an integrated society with equal access to power and to resources for all” (199). *Die neue Frau* of the Weimar Republic was thus not a ‘modern’ figure in opposition to the ‘traditional’ mother and wife, but rather one that embodied the possible future societal roles conceived of for women. Ultimately, the alternative to *die neue Frau*, the creation of complementary spheres for men and women, defined women’s societal role as German society transitioned from the Weimar Republic to the NS Regime. The fact that women voted for conservative parties that sought to restrict the scope of their rights and keep them primarily in the domestic sphere is not merely a result of their desire to maintain this role of mother and wife. It is also indicative of women’s realization that the lifestyle of *die neue Frau* was not readily available to them. Socially, the Weimar Republic “retained a large body of imperial law, especially relating to the illegality of abortion and the restricted rights of women in marriage and divorce” and “[its] attitude to sexuality was riven with contradictions and ambivalences” (Meskimmon 152). Economically, women were subject to acute hardships that undermined their economic independence. The creation of a feminine sphere, although dependent on the male sphere, would at least secure them a place in society. As Julia Sneeringer explains, “women’s role in Weimar’s discursive conflicts shows that they were not without the power to articulate, prescribe, or refashion identities for women. But their power to do so was ultimately dependent upon structures controlled by men” (282).

1.2 “Liberated from Women’s Emancipation:” *die deutsche Frau und Mutter* of the Pre-WWII National Socialist Period

The NS-Regime capitalized on women’s economic vulnerability and the tradition of separate male and female spheres. The Great Depression from 1929 had “acutely affected women’s socio-economic position. With jobs increasingly scarce, there was resentment when women – and especially married women [*Doppelverdiener*] – were employed; they were, allegedly, stealing men’s jobs” (Stephenson 9). Many believed that the ‘emancipation’ of women in the 1920s exacerbated male unemployment and caused a negative birthrate, thereby threatening the continued existence of the German nation. Women’s return to the domestic sphere, according to NS-ideology, provided a solution to both of these issues.

In 1933 Josef Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, announced the NS-Regime’s intention to “liberate women from women’s emancipation” (Mouton 945). The focus of women’s lives was to shift back to the home and family. By May 1933, the NS-Regime had destroyed the emerging network of birth control, sex counseling and sex reform organizations created during the Weimar Republic, and thereby undermined female sexual liberation; a woman’s body was no longer her own, it belonged to the state (Bridenthal 20-21). The NS-Regime went to great lengths to control the private sphere, especially reproduction and marriage. It encouraged the perpetuation of the Aryan race through the marriage of ‘desirable’ couples and restricted the reproduction of ‘undesirables’ through race-based marriage regulations and even sterilization. Also in 1933, an interest-free marriage loan was made available to Aryan couples, so long as the woman was willing to leave the workforce for marriage. An incentive for reproduction was soon added to the law, which allowed for the cancellation of one-quarter of the loan for each child born (Stephenson 28). Women were not entirely restricted to the home,

however. The rapid economic revival of the mid-1930s brought labor-shortages that necessitated that women enter the workforce (50-53). The NS-Regime was therefore forced to adapt its policies to suit its needs; the encouragement of women to move out of the domestic sphere and into employment reveals one of NS-ideology's numerous contradictions in relation to women.

Fundamental to NS-ideology was the belief that men and women are inherently different. This notion resonated with the tradition of separate male and female spheres, as promoted from the beginning of the women's movement. At the 1934 Nuremberg Party Rally, Hitler addressed the NS-Frauenschaft and stated that, due to women's 'emancipation' during the Weimar Republic, the natural order between men's and women's worlds had become displaced. In order to restore the natural order of things, it was imperative that women return to the domestic sphere, as dictated by nature (142-143). Although many women sought to find a kind of social *Lebensraum* through the promotion of a distinct female sphere as dictated by NS-ideology, this ultimately resulted in a complete loss of autonomy. It was believed that women had no place in politics, and the women's sphere was thus subjugated to that of men.

2. *Der kleine Mann* and *Die kleine Frau*: Similarities and Differences

In her novels *Gilgi, eine von uns* (1931), *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), and *Nach Mitternacht* (1937), Keun employs the narrative perspective of *die kleine Frau* to depict everyday life in Germany from the late Weimar Republic through to the mid-1930s, the prewar National Socialist period. The term *die kleine Frau* is meant to be understood as an adaptation of *der kleine Mann*, a concept that took hold in the early 20th century and found expression in literature, film, and theatre. A representative of the common man, *der kleine Mann* is the exemplar of the masses who live in a world controlled by a powerful minority, largely invisible,

except for figures of authority and their representatives. His survival is dependent upon his ability to navigate through the greater social, political and economic forces that define his world.

During the interwar period, numerous writers depicted great historical events from the perspective of the everyday through the figure of *der kleine Mann*. Erich Maria Remarque's novel, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929), presents World War I through the eyes of young German soldiers. Unlike other books written at the time, Remarque's novel does not glorify war but rather imbues it with the experience of *der kleine Man*, his daily struggles and suffering. When it was published in 1929, *Im Westen nichts Neues* resonated with the German people, with one million copies sold in Germany by June 1930 (Waine 72).

The eponymous protagonist in Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* (1921-1923) is one of the earliest representations of *der kleine Mann* in 20th century European literature. Although the figure of Švejk appeared in Hašek's writings before WWI, it was Hašek's depiction of him after the war in *The Good Soldier Švejk* that later writers used as the basis of their own works. The novel, which Hašek did not complete before his death in 1923, is informed by Hašek's experience in WWI and employs Švejk, a jester-like figure and Czech soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to satirize bureaucracy and military life. Through feigned incompetence and idiocy, Švejk continually frustrates military leaders and facilitates absurd comedic scenarios that illuminate the pointlessness of war and military discipline as well as the failings of the Austro-Hungarian bureaucracy (Knopf 484-485). Švejk's antics form a passive resistance to the socio-political structures, in which *der kleine Mann* is perceived of as insignificant, and thereby suggest that *der kleine Mann*, however subject to the socio-political forces around him, is not entirely powerless.

Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* resonated with the German experience through WWII and served as the basis of works that sought to question the position of *der kleine Mann* relative to the greater social, political and economic forces that determine his existence. As early as 1927, Erwin Piscator produced, in collaboration with Bertold Brecht, an adaptation of the novel that debuted in Berlin at the short-lived Piscator-Bühne entitled *Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schweyk*. Piscator, a proponent of political theatre and stage experimentation, emphasized the socio-political dimension of drama and sought through his productions to influence voters and clarify his political theories and sympathies (43). The theme of *der kleine Mann* in *Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schweyk*, as produced by Piscator, suggests an awareness of not only the plight of *der kleine Mann* and his development into the 1920s, but also of his capacity to resist, thereby bringing into question his assumed complete insignificance.

Brecht perceived his depiction of the common people's experience as integral to his purpose and identity as a writer. In a diary entry dated August 5, 1940, Brecht writes:

...solche dichter wie hajek, silone, o'duffy und mich zögert man oft, bürgerliche dichter zu nennen, aber mit unrecht. wir mögen die sache des proletariats zu der unsrigen machen, wir mögen sogar für eine gewisse zeitspanne die dichter des proletariats sein – dann hat eben das proletariat in dieser zeitspanne bürgerliche dichter, die für seine sache eintreten. wir wiederum mögen uns sagen, daß es weder ein vorteil noch ein verdienst ist, proletarier zu sein und daß der kampf darum geht, dem antlitz der menschheit alle proletarischen züge auszutilgen...freilich, wenn wir die bürgerliche kultur überliefern, so ist es doch eben die kultur. in gewissen phasen der entwicklung, wenn das proletariat gesiegt

hat aber noch proletariat ist, wird die funktion der bürgerlichen vorkämpfer, wie es sich gezeigt hat, eine formalistische... (Knust 288)

In 1943, Brecht, writing in exile from California, depicted the experience of the proletariat and the lower middle class during WWII in his own Švejk drama entitled *Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg*. In the context of WWII, Brecht's drama focuses on the societal role of *der kleine Mann* and the complex interdependent relationship that exists between him and the structure of power. In the prologue, Hitler, in discussion with his cabinet, inquires about the opinion of *der kleine Mann* towards him:

Hitler: ...Wie, mein lieber Chef der Polizei und SS

Steht der kleine Mann zu mir?...

Ist er für mich oder – liebt er mich?

Würde er mir im Notfall beispringen, oder – ließe er mich im Stich?

...Hat er die Opferfreude, Treue und Hingabe

Besonders auch seiner Habe

Die ich brauche für meinen Krieg, denn so gescheit ich

Schließlich bin, ich bin auch nur ein Mensch... (Brecht 7-8)

Although Hitler is a dictator with seemingly absolute power, Brecht illuminates in the prologue his dependence on *der kleine Mann* and thereby sets the tone for the drama. Brecht's *Schweyk* uses a similar technique of feigned incompetence and idiocy as Hašek's to undermine authority figures, underscore the futility of war, and ultimately satirize the power structure and bureaucracy of the National Socialist regime. More so than Hašek, however, Brecht emphasizes the fallibility of the powerful. The drama is framed by the prologue, discussed above, and an epilogue in which Schweyk encounters Hitler outside of Stalingrad. Hitler is lost and unable to

find his way, blocked on all sides by either snow, corpses, the Soviets or the German people. This is a striking final scene in the discussion of the theme of *der kleine Mann*. The epilogue completes the fall of the powerful that Brecht initiates in the prologue and alludes to in “Das Lied von der Moldau,” bringing Hitler below the level of *der kleine Mann*, Schweyk, from whom he now seeks direction. Brecht frames the drama with explicit references to *der kleine Mann* and concludes it with this reversal of power-roles, ending the epilogue with “Das Lied von der Moldau,” which is sung earlier in the work by Frau Kopecka, who owns the Wirtshaus in which much of the drama is set:

Am Grunde der Moldau wandern die Steine
Es liegen drei Kaiser begraben in Prag.
Das Große bleibt groß nicht und klein nicht das Kleine
Die Nacht hat zwölf Stunden, dann kommt schon der Tag.

Es wechseln die Zeiten. Die riesigen Pläne
Der Mächtigen kommen am Ende zum Halt.
Und gehn sie einher auch wie blutige Hähne
Es wechseln die Zeiten, da hilft kein Gewalt. (Brecht 105-106)

Brecht introduces “Das Lied von der Moldau” to the drama through the character of Frau Kopecka, a figure who represents a female counterpart to *der kleine Mann*. As a widow who owns a business, Frau Kopecka approximates a male characterization in her relative financial and personal independence. Brecht does not distinguish her as a *kleine Frau* who faces challenges unique to her gender, but rather includes her with a cast of figures who represent, in their common experience, the *kleine Mann*. With his inclusion of “Das Lied von der Moldau,” Brecht suggests a new power constellation in which both *der kleine Mann* and those in power are subject to time, thereby rendering the political and social structures instituted by the minority in

power as transitory. The survival of *der kleine Mann*, in the short and long term, is a complicated issue at the pith of the drama. Relative to the infinite span of time, all human power structures are ephemeral and will ultimately change; *der kleine Mann* and his female counterpart must still navigate through them in order to survive. The difficulty lies therein that, if *der kleine Mann* conforms to the ideology of a power structure such as the National Socialist regime, he will spiritually perish when the regime inevitably collapses. At the same time, however, if he openly criticizes the regime, he will be physically eliminated. To maintain a sense of self-determination and individualism while simultaneously surviving within the societal framework of a power structure that left little or no room for individualism was the paradoxical challenge that *der kleine Mann* in the German context faced in the first half of the 20th century.

This paradox was especially apparent in the life of *der kleine Mann* of the Weimar Republic. Hans Fallada directly addresses *der kleine Mann* in the title of his novel *Kleiner Mann – was nun?* (1932), which depicts the life of Johannes Pinneburg, a shop assistant in Berlin during the Great Depression. Pinneburg is presented as a good-natured and relatively intelligent figure, a dedicated employee, and a loving husband and father. Despite these qualities, however, he is not able to protect his family from the economic disaster of the Great Depression nor prevent their plummet into poverty. In *Changing Cultural Tastes: Writers and the Popular in Modern Germany*, Anthony Wayne suggests that Pinneburg is “powerless to determine the social conditions of his life because – and this is perhaps where Fallada is indirectly leveling some criticism against him – he is motivated by a desire to be an individual and to acquire the trappings of social success” (74). Wayne’s comment resonates with the conclusions that Siegfried Kracauer made in *Die Angestellten* (1929), a sociological analysis of the lower middle class in Berlin during the 1920s. Kracauer’s work discusses the socio-economic processes of

modernization and their effect on the lower middle class in Germany. The “new middle-class” was a term coined at the end of the 19th century and defined salaried employees as a new center of society. This class “cultivated models of self-definition in terms of bureaucratic rank and professional stratum” and there was “no other Western country in which employees, both in their own consciousness and in that of the public, so early played such a central role as in Germany” (Mülder-Bach 6). The distinction between this new middle-class and the working-class was even legally substantiated in the *Angestelltenversicherungsgesetz* of 1911, which defined them as a higher-class and granted them labor and insurance rights. During the Weimar era, however, the new middle-class became susceptible to economic forces – inflation, large-scale unemployment, lack of job security, the Great Depression – and could not maintain this social distinction. Kracauer states that this process led to a ‘spiritual homelessness.’ With their identity based on a socio-economic status that they can no longer maintain, the new middle-class find themselves socially displaced:

Die Masse der Angestellten unterscheidet sich vom Arbeiter-Proletariat darin, dass sie geistig obdachlos ist. Zu den Genossen kann sie vorläufig nicht hinfinden, und das Haus der bürgerlichen Begriffe und Gefühle, das sie bewohnt hat, ist eingestürzt, weil ihm durch die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung die Fundamente entzogen worden sind. Sie lebt gegenwärtig ohne eine Lehre, zu der sie aufblicken, ohne ein Ziel, das sie erfragen könnte. Also lebt sie in Furcht davor, aufzublicken und sich bis zum Ende durchzufragen. (Kracauer 91)

The paradoxical challenge that *der kleine Mann* faced during the Weimar era is thus that he defines himself in terms of a socio-economic status that he cannot maintain, and yet the solution – a conception and determination of self outside of the social structure – is complicated by the

fact that he is psychologically and economically shackled to this social structure. *Der kleine Mann* is subsequently disillusioned and displaced – as Kracauer describes, he is ‘spiritually homeless.’

Inherent in the defeat of his *kleiner Mann* by the socio-economic forces of modernization is Fallada’s critique of *der kleine Mann* and his existence in the social purgatory that Kracauer describes. This critique acknowledges the paradoxical challenge that *der kleine Mann* faces and indirectly suggests, through Pinneburg’s decline, that *der kleine Mann* must do something to ameliorate his situation. In a much more explicit call on *der kleine Mann* to take action, Margarete Steffin, Brecht’s close collaborator, responds to Fallada’s novel:

Reicht es schon, zu fragen ihn:

Kleiner Mann was nun?

Kleiner Mann hatte bislang

Zeit sich auszuruhen.

Doch jetzt stellt es sich heraus

Daß der kleine Mann

Außer dieser Fragerei

Nichts begann und kann.

Nachdem es stets nötig war

Wird es dringend nun:

Eh es ganz zu spät, mußt du

Kleiner Mann, was tun! (Steffin, *Konfutse* 68-69)

Steffin’s poem underscores the desperation and hopelessness of *der kleine Mann* – he cannot

even begin to answer the question of how to ameliorate his situation – and yet she does not excuse him of his responsibility to himself. Written in April of 1933 when Germany – and especially *der kleine Mann* – was economically devastated and the NSDAP was coming into power, the urgency of Steffin’s appeal is latent.

In light of the literary manifestations of *der kleine Mann* in German literature from the first half of the 20th century, Keun’s contribution to the discourse of *der kleine Mann* from the female perspective provide invaluable insight into the complexity of the concept. In her three novels, *Gilgi, eine von uns*, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, and *Nach Mitternacht*, which span the short but volatile period from the end of the Weimar Republic to the prewar NS period of the 1930s, Keun depicts the futile attempt of *die kleine Frau* to establish a stable and fulfilling socio-economic identity. Although there are many similarities between *der kleine Mann* and *die kleine Frau*, she is not simply his counterpart. She faces a unique set of challenges as the societal role of women, ridden with contradictions, undergoes rapid change. While Brecht does not distinguish between men and women when he works with the concept of *der kleine Mann* in *Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Keun is acutely aware of the differences.

The paradoxical challenge traditionally faced by *der kleine Mann* in the literature of the first half of the 20th century is an integral element of the process of disillusionment that Keun’s protagonists, as representatives of *die kleine Frau*, experience in a uniquely female context. The paradox that Keun’s protagonists face is that they seek to establish an identity that is incompatible with the socio-economic construct within which they live, and yet the solution – to establish an identity outside of the construct – is impossible. Over the course of the novels, each of the protagonists realizes that she is subject to greater socio-economic forces that render her socially and ideologically displaced. Keun’s response to the paradoxical challenge of *die kleine*

Frau lies in the duality of her female protagonist, that, rather than conform to the subjugated socio-economic position readily available to her as a *kleine Frau*, she flees her circumstances for an unknown future in which she hopes to negotiate a more fulfilling social identity, and thereby ultimately maintains a degree of self-determination.

3. Modern Daughters: Estrangement between Generations

A striking similarity among *Gilgi, eine von uns*, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, and *Nach Mitternacht* is the separation that exists between the protagonist and her mother. Although the nature of this separation differs among the three novels and exhibits various physical, emotional and ideological manifestations, it is significant that all three young women, despite the differences in their characterization, share this common experience. When considered in light of the process of social disillusionment that each protagonist, as representative of *die kleine Frau*, experiences, this separation between the protagonist and her mother illuminates a familial dimension of the modern woman's displacement during a period of rapid societal change.

3.1 Gilgi: The Incongruity of Assigned Space and Desired Place

The estrangement between generations is most apparent in *Gilgi, eine von uns*. From the very beginning of the novel, it is apparent that the protagonist, Gilgi, is out of place in her family's home. While getting ready in the morning, she is tempted to remove a bland genre painting from her bedroom.

...ein harmlos umrahmtes Genrebildchen, das – blaß und reizlos wie ein verlassenes Mädchen – endgültig verzichtet hat, aufzufallen. Man hätte ihn schon längst entfernen sollen, diesen sentimentalten Farbfleck. Gilgi hebt angriffslustig

den Arm. Läßt ihn wieder sinken. Ach, wozu? Mutter hat's ihr mal geschenkt, das Ding. Die würde gekränkt sein, wenn man'sforschmisse. Soll's hängen bleiben. Stört ja nicht weiter. Geht einen nichts an, das ganze Zimmer. Man wohnt ja nicht hier, schläft nur in diesem weißen Jungfrauenbett. (Keun *Gilgi* 7)

Gilgi's distaste for the "Genrebildchen" is the novel's first indication of a separation between the generations of modern daughters and their parents. The genre painting, which harkens back to the Biedermeier period, represents the middle-class and its conservative values and therefore does not resonate with Gilgi, a young modern woman. Beyond the painting, the entire room itself is "reizlos." She does not attempt to change the room, however, noting that she does not live in it, but rather only sleeps there. This discussion of her childhood bedroom parallels her experience within the familial construct. Just as her childhood bedroom does not provide her with a space in which she feels that she can live, her family does not provide her a space in which she can fulfill her self-conception as a modern woman. Although her family is kind to her – as the bedroom is harmless – their conservative middle-class values, indicated by the "Genrebildchen" and "Jungfrauenbett," are incompatible with her identity as an independent and sexually liberated modern woman. It is of great significance that she rents a room for herself outside of the family home: "Hier ist sie zu Hause. Dieses Zimmerchen hat sie gemietet, um ungestört arbeiten zu können. Sie bezahlt es, und es gehört ihr. Die Wände hat sie mit braunem Rupfen bespannen lassen. Die Möbel: Diwan, Schreibtisch, Schrank, Stuhl hat sie allmählich Stück für Stück angeschafft. Alles ist eigenst erworbener Besitz" (21). Beyond a place to work, the room provides Gilgi a space in which to live as a modern woman outside of the confines of the middle-class home. The room, with its modern décor that she purchased herself, stands in striking contrast to the childhood bedroom given to her by her parents. Gilgi's creation of a

space for herself independent and outside of the family home represents her sense of self-determination as a modern woman.

Gilgi's sense of physical displacement within the family home resonates with the ideological differences that exist between her and her parents, the Krons. The Krons' marriage is an integral element of the traditional middle-class family structure that they represent and stands in striking contrast to Gilgi's perspective on romantic relationships. At the family breakfast table, it is noted:

Keiner spricht. Jeder ist stumpf beflissen mit sich selbst beschäftigt. Der vollkommene Mangel an Unterhaltung kennzeichnet das Anständige, Legitimierte der Familie. Das Ehepaar Kron hat sich ehrbar bis zur silbernen Hochzeit durchgelangweilt...die Langeweile ist die Gewähr für das Stabile ihrer Beziehungen, und daß man sich nichts zu sagen hat, macht einander unverdächtig.

(10)

Beyond a satirical critique of the traditional marriage, this passage serves to illuminate the juxtaposition between the marriage of conservative middle-class parents and the romantic relationships of the modern daughter. Early on in the novel, Gilgi states that she is still young and, with innumerable opportunities, considers "jede Existenzmöglichkeit" except for marriage, movie star and beauty queen (22). Her rejection of marriage is mentioned early in the novel and persists through to the end, despite the great evolution of her character and world-view. It corresponds to her sense of sexual-liberation and represents the attempt of the modern woman to redefine her sexuality in terms of her personal desires. This redefinition of female sexuality in terms of personal desire and pleasure rejects marriage as the legitimization of a sexual relationship and thereby reconfigures the power structure in a romantic relationship. The

traditional male role of initiating marriage and providing a space within which the relationship can legitimately exist is rendered unnecessary when a woman's sexuality is not defined in terms of the prescribed societal role of wife and mother. In removing the maternal aspect from female sexuality, the woman's physical desires become an element of paramount significance in the relationship.

Frau Kron's traditional marriage therefore represents the conservative middle-class perspective on female sexuality to which Gilgi's sexual liberation as a modern daughter is juxtaposed. Gilgi is confident in her sexuality and in-tune with her physical desires. She notes: *Ich hab' Freunde gehabt – zwei – drei...man hat sich gefallen gegenseitig, man hatte Freude zusammen, und die Haut sagte ja zueinander. Das war natürlich und übersehbar, es hat mir absolut keine Gewissenbisse gemacht und mich nicht beunruhigt. Ich fühlte mich immer sauber und klar...*" (170). The natural affinity that she felt for her romantic partners justified her sexual relationship with them. This represents the modern woman's turning inward and consulting her own feelings in the definition of her sexuality, rather than conforming to the marriage-defined sexuality of conservative middle-class society.

When Frau Kron informs Gilgi on her twenty-first birthday that she was adopted, Gilgi's sense of displacement within the family is heightened. She feels guilty that the Krons provided for her when she was not their biological child and feels that she is indebted to them. Beyond causing this sense of guilt, it is apparent that the news of her adoption intensified her notion of not belonging to the family. She notes, *“Wenn die sie in die Welt gesetzt hätten, na schön, dann könnten sie auch für einen sorgen, solange man nicht für sich selber sorgen kann. Aber so! Ja, wenn man sie lieb hätt' und zu ihnen gehörte, dann würd' man sich eben mit Gefühlen bezahlt*

machen” (Keun 36). The implication is thus that Gilgi does not belong with the Krons – she is biologically, ideologically and emotionally outside of the family structure.

Gilgi goes in search of her biological mother, whom she initially believes is a seamstress from the lower-class: “Eine kleine Näherin ist ihre Mutter. Vater unbekannt. Von Proletariern stammt sie ab. Das freut sie, denn sie hat nie Wert darauf gelegt, zur bürgerlichen Gesellschaft zu gehören” (31). The concept of belonging again comes into play, here in terms of class-distinction. The fact that it pleases Gilgi that she does not biologically come from the middle-class resonates with her rejection of the female role as prescribed by middle-class family values. However, in light of Kracauer’s sociological analysis of salaried workers in *Die Angestellten*, who, like Gilgi, formed a “new middle-class” and sought through work to achieve a standard of living equal to that of the middle-class, the comment here can be read as ironic. Although Gilgi does not value the social status of the middle-class, she seeks the economic status thereof. Ironically, Gilgi discovers that her mother is not the impoverished seamstress but rather a woman from the upper middle-class whose family concealed her pregnancy in order to preserve her marketability for marriage. Thus the multiple levels of displacement that Gilgi experiences become apparent. She is not only biologically and ideologically displaced from her adopted parents, she is also socio-economically ‘rootless.’ Barbara Kosta explains:

Gilgi's search proceeds through various social strata of women. Her journey suggests the modern woman's rootlessness, her dispossession and displacement: an urban nomad. Like the modern woman, Gilgi is "illegitimate," which means born outside of any traditionally sanctioned space and not compliant with the notions of family that Freud was plotting at the time. (Kosta 275)

Interestingly, once Gilgi locates her biological mother, she does not seek to establish a relationship with her, but rather asks for money for a desperate friend. The relationship is not mentioned again after that, “no expectations are aroused, no desire for a resuscitated bond is expressed, no melodramatic reunion staged” (Kosta 276). Gilgi’s dismissal of the mother-figure illuminates the estrangement between generations of mothers and their modern daughters. In consideration of the term “mother,” Gilgi’s response is a mix of indifference and aversion:

Viel merkwürdiger aber ist ihre tiefe, nicht zu erschütternde Gleichgültigkeit für diesen Begriff. Ist doch nicht normal – von Rechts wegen müßte sie doch aufgeregt sein...nichts zu machen – man ist nicht aufgeregt. Ob das denn wirklich sowas Wichtiges ist: Mutter! Ja, und wenn man überhaupt etwas für diese unbekannte Mutter empfindet – dann eine unerklärliche, aber nicht wegzuleugnende Abneigung.” (Keun, *Gilgi* 224)

Gilgi’s disregard for the concept of “mother,” which borders on antipathy, must be understood in the context of her ever-growing sense of displacement. The identity of the New Woman in the Weimar Republic was in flux, a constant negotiation between the conservative culture of the former Wilhelmine Empire and the liberal new social and sexual emancipation of women during the Weimar Republic. Gilgi’s sense of sexual, social and economic independence as a modern woman culminates in the world-view that is irreconcilably incongruous with that of the older generations of women. She is thus not the continuation of any lineage, but rather the first generation of her kind; she has no predecessors and therefore no mother.

The incompatibility of her lifestyle as a modern daughter with the conservative middle-class family home leads to Gilgi’s departure from the Krons. When Gilgi spends several nights away from home, the Krons become suspicious that she is with a man. With pre-marital sexual

relations unacceptable for a young woman as dictated by conservative family values, Gilgi's parents confront her. Much to their surprise, however, Gilgi defends her lifestyle and sexual freedom. When Gilgi's mother asks, "Gilgi, du hast doch nichts Häßliches getan?," she responds, "was du häßlich nennst, Mutter – wird immer und nur häßlich, wenn ein Dritter darüber denkt und spricht" (108). The conversation continues:

Frau Kron hebt den Kopf: "Wer ist es denn eigentlich? Und Gilgi" – ihre Stimme wird hoffnungshell –, "wird er dich heiraten?"

Na, das hat mir noch gefehlt! Gilgi steht auf: "ob – er mich heiraten wird? Weiß ich nicht. Ich werde ihn nicht heiraten – das weiß ich." (109)

In this moment, the values of the mother versus those of the modern daughter form a harsh juxtaposition. Again one sees the reconfiguration of the power structure in the romantic relationship of the modern woman. Frau Kron perceives of marriage as the legitimization of and the premise for a sexual relationship. By asking Gilgi if the man with whom she has been spending nights will marry her, Frau Kron indicates that in the power structure of the romantic relationship, the woman is subservient and subject to the will of the man. The man determines the nature of the relationship, whether or not it will culminate in marriage, which is the only means through which the woman can legitimize her sexuality. Gilgi, however, defines her sexuality in terms of personal desire and pleasure and thereby rejects marriage as a means through which to legitimize a sexual relationship. She realizes that she and her mother cannot reconcile their differences in perspective and concludes that the only option is to leave: "ist die einzige Lösung. Man kann doch nicht hierbleiben, sich als Fehltritt behandeln, großmütig verzeihen lassen, wo's gar nichts zu verzeihen gibt" (110). Confident in her lifestyle, sexuality and right to self-determination, Gilgi permanently leaves the confines of the middle-class family

home. Gilgi's sense of biological and ideological estrangement within the family-structure culminates in her chosen physical displacement from the family home.

3.2 Doris: Redefining "Belonging"

Although separation, whether physical or ideological, between the mother and the modern daughter does not take the prominent role in the novels *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and *Nach Mitternacht* that it does in *Gilgi, eine von uns*, its presence is still significant. The process of social disillusionment that culminates in the protagonist's sense of displacement is common to all three works, and the separation between mother and daughter is a contributing factor to this sense of displacement. In *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, the protagonist Doris has a seemingly good relationship with her mother and holds her in high esteem. What she cannot understand, however, is why her mother, who possesses beauty, talent and intelligence, married her father, who lacks all of these traits. When Doris confronts her mother with this question, she is struck by her answer that, "irgendwo muss man doch einmal hingehören" (Keun, *Mädchen* 16). Doris' desire to belong is a theme throughout the novel, and it is apparent that her mother's statement hit a nerve. She does not necessarily understand why she is moved by these words, however. Despite this affinity that she feels for her mother, Doris does not feel that she is subject to the same socio-economic forces that led her mother to marry her father. She believes that she is special, distinct from other women: "aber ich erkannte, daß etwas Besonderes in mir ist...und ich bin ganz verschieden von Therese und den anderen Mädchen auf dem Büro und so, in denen nie Großartiges vorgeht" (8). Doris flees her family home for Berlin, the iconic city of the New Woman, after stealing a fur coat. Although she does not leave her family for the ideological reasons that Gilgi does, her conception of herself as a sexually liberated woman for whom all

things are possible ultimately necessitated that she leave the family unit, which she perceives as arbitrary.

3.3 Sanna: Finding a Space Against Political Odds

Sanna's role as a modern daughter in *Nach Mitternacht* is not readily apparent. It is striking, however, that she does not have a female role model; her mother died when she was a child, she does not have any sisters, and her Aunt is an NS-supporting "Biest" (Keun, *Mitternacht* 6). Although she has a loving father and brother, Sanna lacks a maternal figure in her life. In consideration of the common theme of the modern woman's societal disillusionment culminating in displacement that connects the three novels, the role of the protagonist as a modern daughter must also be of significance. Sanna is maternally orphaned, a fact that suggests that the modern woman of the NS-period had no predecessors; she lacked a role model and was the first of her kind. Sanna grew up within the Weimar Republic and witnessed Germany's transition into the NS-Regime, a span of time in which the socio-economic identity of women underwent volatile change. From the sexually and socio-economically liberated *neue Frau* of the Weimar Republic to the domestic, institutionalized and politicized *deutsche Frau und Mutter* of the NS-Regime, female identity was in an unprecedented state of flux during the interwar period. Sanna's lack of a maternal figure suggests that she must navigate uncharted socio-economic and -political territory in her attempt to establish an identity within the context of Germany's dynamic society.

4. The Process of Disillusionment

4.1 Gilgi: The Tenuousness of Control

In *Gilgi – eine von uns*, Keun employs the figure of *die kleine Frau* to expose *die neue Frau* of the Weimar Republic as an unattainable socio-economic construct. As a lower middle class salaried worker of average intelligence and without extraordinary qualities, the protagonist Gilgi represents *die kleine Frau* of the Weimar Republic. At the beginning of the novel, however, Gilgi is ironically unaware that she is “eine von uns” but rather conceives of herself as distinct from the masses and immune to the socio-economic forces that repress them. She identifies herself with the concept of *die neue Frau*, a self-determining, financially independent, and sexually liberated figure. As the novel develops, however, Gilgi experiences a process of societal- and self-disillusionment that underscores the tenuousness of her identity as a *neue Frau*; her loss of emotional independence and financial security reveals her socio-economic susceptibility as a member of the lower middle class and ultimately calls into question her power of self-determination as a *kleine Frau*.

Gilgi’s initial sense of autonomy is two-fold; she believes that she is immune to socio-economic forces from without as well as to the powers of human emotion from within. At the pith of her emotional control is her objective perspective on romantic relationships. Although Gilgi is sexually liberated and dates, she perceives the romantic relationship as a form of entertainment that should not encroach on her career. Gilgi’s unwillingness to define herself relative to the romantic relationship is apparent in her view that, “außer Ehe, Filmschauspielerin und Schönheitskönigin zieht sie jede Existenzmöglichkeit in Betracht” (Keun, *Gilgi* 22). Her rejection of marriage illuminates her aversion not only to the traditional female role of wife and mother, but to a self-definition dependent on men as well; “Gilgi rejects both the Father and the Husband, and the patriarchal authority which they represent” (Harrigan 119). Gilgi’s unwillingness to subjugate her life to the opinions and influence of men is further evident in her

rejection of movie star and beauty queen as careers. Both of these roles, based upon female beauty, possess a latent sexual quality, and thus give significant value to male judgment and admiration. Gilgi's preservation of her autonomy relies on her ability to maintain emotional independence from and intellectual perspective on her romantic relationships.

The fragility of Gilgi's emotional control becomes apparent once Martin enters her life. From their first meeting, Gilgi is captivated by Martin, despite the great differences in their world-views. Whereas Gilgi derives great satisfaction from her career and planning her life-course, Martin is a free spirit who avoids work and prefers to wander through life. A natural affinity exists between them, however, which actuates the spiral of their love. Ironically, on their first date alone Gilgi explains to Martin her emotional independence and objectivity: "...sie ist keine sentimentale Gans, sie braucht niemanden, kommt allein durch. Sie weiß, was sie will und kann, was sie will... natürlich ist man verliebt – hier und da – das nimmt man nicht weiter Ernst, gibt Wichtigeres. Männer! Was das schon ist..." (Keun, *Gilgi* 93). Throughout the course of their first date, however, there exists an incongruity between how Gilgi presents herself to Martin and his response to that presentation. Gilgi proclaims her sense of control over her life and her independence from men. Martin does not treat her like a strong, independent woman, however, but rather finds her self-proclaimed strength an endearing quality, as evident in his reference to her as "Mädelchen" and "kleines Fräulein" (94). Although both of these names are terms of endearment, they are also double-diminutive structures that underscore Martin's perception of Gilgi as adorable, not powerful. "Mädelchen" contains both the -l and -chen diminutive suffixes, and the adjective "small" in "kleines Fräulein" is emphasized by the diminutive suffix -lein. The tension resulting from Gilgi's sense of power and Martin's disregard of it represents the incongruity between power and insignificance that recurs throughout the novel. This

incongruity is present from the opening line of *Gilgi – eine von uns*: “Sie hält es fest in der Hand, ihr kleines Leben, das Mädchen Gilgi” (5). The initial statement in the sentence, “sie hält es fest in der Hand,” exudes control and power. It is directly followed, however, by a description that trivializes that which is “in der Hand;” the use of “klein” to describe Gilgi’s life renders it inconsequential. The juxtaposition between power and insignificance creates a tension that is inherently related to Gilgi’s experience as a *kleine Frau*; it parallels her eventual realization of her susceptibility to both repressive socio-economic forces and those of human emotion and her consequent attempt to maintain a degree of self-determination.

As Gilgi and Martin’s relationship develops, Gilgi becomes continually more estranged from her objective, driven and career-focused world-view. She forgoes time with friends and career-promoting language lessons in favor of being with Martin. When she realizes how Martin has influenced her, she feels as if she has been disloyal to her identity: “sie hat ein beschämendes Gefühl von Untreue gegen Olga, Pit, das Zimmer, ihre kleine Privatarbeit, ihr ganzes Leben” (105). He has upset the external and internal rhythm of her life. Prior to Martin, she maintained a harmonious life-balance with her career as the gravitational center around which friends, family and romance orbited. Her growing love for Martin, however, destroys this balance and renders Gilgi incapable of restoring it:

Büro, Zuhause, Arbeit, Liebe – wie hat sie das früher nur vereint? War anders, ganz anders... wenn man sich sah, war’s gut – wenn nicht – hatte man eben Andres zu tun. Beide. Partner und Partnerin. Hauptsache blieb Arbeit und Weiterkommen. Man hatte sich gern auf eine etwas nüchterne, unbeschwerte Art, und daß ein freundlich verliebtes Gefühl für einen Mann sich je zur Betriebsstörung auswachsen könnte, das wäre das letzte gewesen, das Gilgi für

möglich gehalten hätte. Und nun! Der Martin ist eine Betriebsstörung. Und das schlimmste: diese Störung ist ihr lieber als der ganze Betrieb zusammen. (106)

As Martin displaces her career as the center of Gilgi's life, her life-balance is disrupted and she becomes estranged from the *sachlich*, driven person that she originally identified herself to be. With career and personal success as the focal point of her life, Gilgi felt in control of her existence. This control derived from the fact that she made herself the center of her own life. Once her relationship with Martin becomes paramount to all else, Gilgi loses control because the variable of another person is entered into the equation of her identity. Whereas prior to her relationship with Martin Gilgi was secure in herself and her societal position as a young white-collar worker, she now defines herself in terms of her relationship with him. When Gilgi moves in with Martin, he becomes physically "home" for her, and from this physical sense of "home" an emotional sense of "home" dependent on him develops. This emotional sense of "home" and belonging is conveyed throughout the novel with the verb *hingehören*. After she leaves the Krons' home it is noted, "...traurig ist sie nicht mehr, sie ist hier bei Martin, also da, wo sie hingehört" (113-114). There is a mutual quality to the belonging that Gilgi describes; they belong together and to each other. As their love develops, however, this mutuality is lost. Gilgi remarks, "ich gehöre mir ja nicht mehr. Das, was ich im Spiegel seh', hat ein anderer aus mir gemacht, ich kann nicht stolz darauf sein" (135). She tells Martin, "Ich gehöre dir ja, Martin – wünschte nur, ich gehöre – zu – dir..." (136). Here it is apparent that there is something amiss with Gilgi's sense of belonging to Martin. In the first half of this quotation, "ich gehöre dir," Gilgi admits that she belongs to Martin, in the sense that he possesses her. Directly following that, however, is Gilgi's admission that she wishes that the nature of the belonging were more mutual, as reflected in the "zu" of "ich gehöre – zu – dir." In explaining the sudden changes in

her behavior to Olga, Gilgi states: “ich will einen Menschen, einen, einen – gehöre nirgends hin – warum gerade den einen? Weiß ich ja nicht – aber ich will ihn – haben – behalten – will, will, will...” (147). Here Gilgi conveys a sense of displacement. Her statement that she does not belong anywhere reflects the fact that she is no longer secure of her identity. She is estranged from the person who she was in her former life, as well as from the person who she is in her current life – she is displaced within herself. With her love for Martin now as the sole focus of her life, Gilgi comes to define herself by him and thereby entirely forfeits her sense of control and self-determination: “ich habe keine Grenze mehr und keinen Willen, ich kann von heute auf morgen nicht mehr für mich garantieren. Ich glaubte mich unendlich sicher und geborgen in meiner Liebe – jetzt hat sie mich wehrlos gemacht, vollkommen schutzlos...” (171). She has lost her emotional control and thereby her autonomy – she *needs* Martin.

Ironically, it is her love for Martin that facilitates Gilgi’s flight from him. When Gilgi becomes pregnant, she decides to not tell Martin and to get an abortion. Beyond the financial reasons that Gilgi cites for the abortion, at the heart of her decision is the fact that she does not want to change the nature of the love that exists between them:

Vielleicht würde er sich verpflichtet und gezwungen fühlen, sein ganzes Leben umzustellen – todunglücklich würde er dann werden und ich auch...ja, wenn man Martin nur ein bißchen weniger lieb hätte, dann wäre alles viel einfacher. So aber hat man diese sinnlose verrückte Angst, daß irgend etwas diese Liebe zerstören könnte, diese Liebe, an der man hängt, der man ausgeliefert ist, die man sich erhalten will um jeden, jeden, und jeden Preis. (177)

Their love is of paramount importance to her, and she will do anything to preserve it. Here again the theme of juxtaposed power and insignificance manifests itself. Although her love for Martin

has made Gilgi “wehrlos,” in her decision to get an abortion and maintain the nature of their relationship, Gilgi exhibits a degree of power (170). The duality of *die kleine Frau* manifests itself in Gilgi’s relationship with Martin; although in her love for him she seemingly loses herself, Gilgi ultimately does not forfeit all power of self-determination to the force of love. She refuses to allow the romantic relationship to become the foreplay for the traditional domestic relationship of husband and wife, into which their relationship would inevitably evolve were she and a child to become financially dependent on Martin.

Gilgi’s flight from Martin is further instigated when she witnesses how the marriage and consequent interdependence of two friends, Hans and Hertha, destroys their love for each other. Although she once loved Hans, Hertha grows to resent him for impregnating her three times and his inability to support the growing family due to the economic depression of the early 1930s. Gilgi visits Hertha, and upon seeing the destitution and misery in which the family lives she realizes that she and Martin are destined to a similar fate if they were to stay together and start a family. Hertha warns Gilgi, “Hör Gilgi, ich sag’ dir eins – noch ist’s Zeit für dich – und wenn’s dir jetzt noch so gut geht: schaff’ dir Selbständigkeit und Unabhängigkeit – dann kannst du einen Mann lieben und dir die Liebe erhalten. Sorg rechtzeitig, dass du nie eines Tages so hilflos und wehrlos dastehst wie ich...” (209). Hertha’s advice resonates with Gilgi – she does not want to force Martin’s relationship to her out of obligation. Gilgi realizes that if she were to become completely financially dependent on Martin, if he were forced to provide for a family, that it would change both him and their relationship. The impossibility of a future domestic life with Martin is confirmed when Hans and Hertha take their own lives and those of their children out of desperation and hopelessness. After the incident, Gilgi is empowered by the fact that she, her

unborn child, and Martin are all still alive and that there still exists hope for them. Gilgi decides to keep the child and leaves Martin. She explains to her friend Pit:

...auch wenn das Kind nicht wär' – ich müßt' fort von ihm – um meinetwillen und um seinetwillen. Ich kann nicht arbeiten, Pit – mit ihm zusammen. Ich hab's ja versucht und gesehen und erlebt, wie's geht. Ich liebe ihn eben zu sehr...ich muß arbeiten und Ordnung haben – er hat nicht soviel Geld, daß ich davon mitleben könnte – abgesehen davon, daß ich's auch nicht gern wollte, wenn er genug hätte...ein Mensch kann sich wohl von sich aus ändern – aber einen andern ändern wollen, heißt sich und ihm nur das Leben schwer machen. (256)

Gilgi realizes that in being with Martin, she conformed her identity to suit the needs of their love. Her autonomy and emotional independence were incongruous with her love for him – she could not have both herself and Martin as the center of her life. Gilgi's flight from Martin represents not only her attempt to restore her identity as it was before she met him, but also the simultaneous inability of the modern *kleine Frau* to either maintain the status of *die neue Frau* or conform to the traditional female role. As representative of the modern *kleine Frau*, Gilgi must negotiate an identity between the extremes of complete sexual, emotional and financial independence, which she realizes is not feasible, and reliance on a man in a traditional domestic relationship. Her emotional control and objectivity at the beginning of the novel were incongruous with her humanity – love is a force to which one, as a human, is susceptible. The traditional domestic role and the consequent complete reliance on a man is also not an option for Gilgi. She refuses to let their love be defined by the predetermined traditional roles of husband and wife. Foreshadowing the necessity of her flight from him, Gilgi tells Martin that, “das darf

nicht geschehen, daß du eines Tages nur Mann für mich bist – du mußt immer Martin für mich sein” (174).

Beyond her susceptibility to the powers of human emotion, Gilgi also realizes over the course of the novel that she is also not immune to socio-economic forces. At the beginning of the novel it is evident that Gilgi believes that she is entirely responsible for everything that she has made out of her life. Looking into the mirror, she even notes that she has “ein gepflegtes Gesicht” of which she is proud because “gepflegt ist mehr als hübsch, es ist eignes Verdienst” (7). Her career and financial success is the direct result, she believes, of her personal drive and capabilities. She therefore distinguishes herself from the struggling masses who appear downtrodden and trapped as cogs of the economic machine. During her commute she notes of the others in the trolley car:

Die Trostlosen da im Wagen – nein, sie hat nichts mit ihnen gemein, sie gehört nicht zu ihnen, will nicht zu ihnen gehören. Sie sind grau und müde und stumpf. Und wenn sie nicht stumpf sind, warten sie auf ein Wunder. Gilgi ist nicht stumpf und glaubt an kein Wunder. Sie glaubt nur an das, was sie schafft und erwirbt. Sie ist nicht zufrieden, aber sie ist froh. Sie verdient Geld. (15)

Gilgi perceives herself as distinct from the masses; she is driven and feels confident that she can go as far in life as her capabilities will take her, whereas the masses appear to simply be going through the motions of the everyday. Again the theme of *gehören* is present, in this instance in relation to her position in society. The fact that she feels that she does not belong to the disillusioned masses reflects her self-identification as a *neue Frau* in possession of the opportunity of social and economic mobility. Her focus is on herself and she has no sympathy for the struggling masses who are not real to her, as is apparent in her conversation with Pit in

which she states, “ich glaub’s einfach nicht, ich halt’s für eine verdammte Lüge, wenn einer sagt, daß er erst an die Allgemeinheit und dann an sich denkt. Wer ist denn die Masse? Die hat doch kein Gesicht, die ist doch kein Mensch, den man gern hat und darum ihm helfen möchte” (59). The latent irony of her statement lies therein, that she, as representative of *die kleine Frau*, is in fact the “Gesicht” of the masses. Gilgi’s perception of the world is so individualistic that she cannot conceive of wide-scale vulnerability to socio-economic forces. Her experience has proven to her that she can attain her career goals through determination and consistent effort – she therefore concludes that, “jeder ist da, wo er hingehört” – everyone has earned his station in life (56).

Gilgi becomes ensnared in the classic trap of *der kleine Mann* in that she seeks individual success within a societal framework that cannot provide her with a stable middle-class socio-economic position, and yet she does not question the framework itself. In conversation with her communist-supporting friend Pit, Gilgi becomes frustrated when he begins speaking of politics: “und dann fängt er wieder mit seinem Sozialismus an, und was alles anders werden muß, und Gilgi sitzt da und lauert auf einen Augenblick, wo sie ihn unterbrechen und von den Dingen erzählen kann, die ihr jetzt wichtiger und näher sind” (58). Gilgi’s perspective of the world is narrow and focused on her individual experience; she does not conceive of herself as part of the greater picture. When she finally interrupts Pit, Gilgi explains to him her apathy toward politics: “ich bin nicht furchtbar klug, und wenn ich da anfangen zu denken, verlier’ ich den Boden unter den Füßen, ich brauch’ mein bißchen Verstand für mich und mein Fortkommen” (58). At this point in the novel, Gilgi is still oblivious to the greater socio-economic forces at play in Weimar Republic; she views the world through the perspective of her individual experience, which has shown her that a strong work ethic yields success. She rejects Pit’s political discourse as

confusing and irrelevant to her worldview. Gilgi's disregard of politics and her blind acceptance of the societal framework resonate with Maragete Steffin's criticism of *der kleine Mann* in her poem "Kleiner Mann, was tun!" for his initial inaction and consequent inability to ameliorate his desperate situation (Steffin, *Konfutse* 68-69). Gilgi similarly ignores the progressively worsening economic conditions of the late Weimar Republic because they do not immediately affect her; it is not until she too is unemployed and impoverished that she acknowledges that there is something inherently amiss with the socio-economic situation. As a *kleine Frau*, Gilgi seeks upward social-mobility and the lifestyle of middle class affluence and security; she does not question the socio-economic reality and is consequently blind to her entrenchment in the lower middle class.

As the novel develops, however, Gilgi realizes that she is not entirely responsible for her success and begins to acknowledge the profound effect that socio-economic forces have in the determination of one's societal position and quality of life. In conversation with an impoverished woman at a bar, Gilgi realizes that her upbringing in a middle-class home provided the foundation for her professional and financial success:

“ ‘Konnt ich mir noch nicht machen lassen, hach, mieser Beruf, den man hat.’
‘Warum hasten dir ausgesucht?’ fragt Gilgi. ‘Hab’ ich mir eijentlich janich
ausjesucht.’ ‘Dann such’ dir doch jetzt ‘nen bessern.’...Die Nutte zuckt die
Achseln: ‘Jott, man is nu’ mal dabei, was soll man machen?’ Darauf weiß Gilgi
keine Antwort. Nur nicht die Nase so hoch tragen, nur nicht immer denken, es
wäre so ganz und gar eignes Verdienst, wenn man was besseres ist. Wenn die
Krons sie nun nicht adoptiert hätten, wenn sie von der Täschler aufgezogen

worden wäre, hinten in der Thieboldsgasse, wenn sie – man lieber gar nicht dran denken – – – ” (Keun, *Gilgi* 57)

In her acknowledgement of the critical role that luck played in defining her socio-economic position, Gilgi begins to question the power of the individual to determine that position. The phrase “eignes Verdienst” recurs here, except now it is marked by doubt; determination and effort alone cannot guarantee financial security. The opportunity for social-mobility is thereby called into question as Gilgi realizes “wer einmal unten liegt, kommt schwer wieder hoch” (124).

By the end of the novel, Gilgi realizes that she has become part of the masses from which she initially considered herself distinct. Distracted by her relationship with Martin, Gilgi’s career suffers and she loses her job. She is unable to rely financially on Martin, who is also unemployed, and is forced to seek public assistance. While waiting in line to collect an unemployment stipend Gilgi notes:

“...ah, warum gehöre ich zu ihnen? Elend und Armut, das ist vielleicht nicht das Schlimmste. Das Schlimmste ist, daß man den Menschen hier jedes Verantwortungsgefühl genommen hat. Das Schlimmste ist, daß manche sind, die sich beinahe behaglich fühlen in dem “ich kann nicht dafür” – betten sich in den Begriff ausschließlich fremder Schuld am eigenen Elend wie in einen Sarg. Lassen sich das gute, gute Wissen um eigene Trägheit und Fehlerhaftigkeit morden, lassen Lebenswillen und Kraftwunsch langsam in sich sterben – können ja nichts dafür. Und daß tatsächlich fremde Schuld das winzige Quäntchen eigene Schuld mit zudeckt – das ist vielleicht das Schlimmste, das ist das Ende, das ist Gestorbensein” (185)

The concept of *der kleine Mann* and his power of self-determination – to secure for himself a stable and satisfying socio-economic position – is called into question here from the unique perspective of *die kleine Frau*. Gilgi acknowledges the devastating influence of repressive economic forces and how they consequently destroy the role of the individual in the determination of his or her own fate. The slightest notion that one is responsible for one's own misery and impoverishment, that one has failed oneself, is the equivalent of spiritual death for Gilgi.

This moment represents the lowest point in the process of disillusionment that Gilgi undergoes; she has hit rock bottom. Gilgi acknowledges her own inner-strength, however, and refuses to forfeit all control to socio-economic forces. She explains, “ich bin wirklich tüchtig. Und ich habe einen sehr starken Willen. Ich habe so viele gesehen, die Arbeit suchten und nicht fanden – die meisten aber, die wollten nur halb, denen war schon alles egal. Da ist eine ganze Menge, denen ich überlegen bin, weil ich mehr und stärker will” (258). Gilgi's solution to her situation – to leave Martin, move to Berlin and work in order to support herself and her child – represents Keun's answer to the paradoxical challenge of *die kleine Frau* that Gilgi faces. In her self-perception as a *neue Frau*, Gilgi defined herself in terms of a socio-economic status that she could not maintain and extended her emotional independence to the point of infeasibility. With her career as the defining element of her life, Gilgi's repressed her humanity – her emotions and desires – in order to secure independence. Gilgi's loss of emotional control when she falls in love with Martin serves a criticism of the unnaturalness of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement; her vacillation between complete objectivity and engulfing emotional subjectivity represents a call for equilibrium between the two extremes. Gilgi's descent from white-collared worker to unemployment and poverty parallels her emotional evolution and underscores the tenuousness of

her socio-economic standing. In her decision to leave Martin for a new life in Berlin where she expects to financially support herself and her child, Gilgi rejects the socio-economic position of impoverished wife and mother that is readily available to her and thereby maintains a measure of self-determination. As Pit accompanies Gilgi to the train station in Cologne, he notes to himself of Gilgi, “kleiner Mensch...Mensch sein heißt für dich Mensch sein und Frau sein und Arbeiter sein und alles, alles, sein,” acknowledging the difficult task that Gilgi, as a *kleine Frau*, faces of weaving together a multi-faceted social identity against the backdrop of socio-economic turmoil.

4.2 Doris: The Irony of Empowerment through Manipulation

In *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Keun exposes the sexualized, celluloid vision of *die neue Frau* as a media-propagated myth through Doris’ process of disillusionment and consequent social displacement within the Weimar Republic. A lower middle class young woman of self-admitted average intelligence, Doris is representative of *die kleine Frau*. Like Gilgi, however, she is initially unaware of her entrenchment in the lower middle class, but rather conceives of herself as a distinct and socially mobile *neue Frau*. In Doris’ futile quest for fame and subsequent plummet to the verge of prostitution, Keun illuminates the chasm between the reality of *die kleine Frau* and the unattainable socio-economic status for which she strives.

Doris, in her aspiration to become a film star and her aversion to work, embodies exactly that which Gilgi eschews, and yet she too initially distinguishes herself from the masses. She notes, “ich erkannte, daß etwas Besonderes in mir ist...und ich bin ganz verschieden von Therese und den anderen Mädchen auf dem Büro und so, in denen nie Großartiges vorgeht” (Keun, *Mädchen* 8). The nature of Doris’ sense of distinction differs from that of Gilgi, however, in that it is intangible. Both protagonists believe that their future possibilities are limitless, but Gilgi

bases her goals only on that which she can achieve through her own abilities and efforts, she “glaubt nur an das, was sie schafft und erwirbt” (Keun, *Gilgi* 15). Doris, however, seeks to be discovered as “ein Glanz” (Keun, *Mädchen* 45). Inherent in Doris’ desire to become a movie star is her preoccupation with appearances, material possessions and the consequent artificiality of her existence. She considers her life to possess a film-like quality:

Und ich denke, daß es gut ist, wenn ich alles beschreibe, weil ich ein ungewöhnlicher Mensch bin...Aber ich will schreiben wie Film, denn so ist mein Leben und wird noch mehr so sein. Und ich sehe aus wie Colleen Moore, wenn sie Dauerwellen hätte und die Nase mehr schick ein bißchen nach oben. Und wenn ich später lese, ist alles wie Kino – ich sehe mich in Bildern. (Keun, *Mädchen* 8).

Doris’ association of her life with film reflects the superficiality of her existence and the paramount significance of appearances for her worldview. Doris’ projection of what she sees in film onto her perception of her own life underscores the disconnect between *die kleine Frau*’s belief in her social mobility, as presented by the media, and the limited opportunities actually available to her.

As a film is intended to appeal to and be viewed by an audience, Doris calculates her actions and appearance to create a specific impression upon her own target audience. The intentional and constructed nature of Doris’ appearance is evident in a scene in which she attempts to imbue her presence with an element of intrigue by writing in public. At a café, Doris writes in a notebook onto which she has taped a dove, which adds an additional nuance of flair to her stylish clothing and natural beauty. As she begins to write, the image is complete – she is both beautiful and interesting. Her belief that there is “etwas Großartiges” within her is now

projected through her appearance, which she perceives as the only medium through which she can express this inner magnificence (14).

Doris' obsession with appearances is also apparent in her observation of the interaction between a man and woman in the café. The man, she notes, "ist was Feineres – aber nicht sehr" and the woman "hat ein Gesicht wie eine Schildkröte und ist nicht mehr ganz jung und hat einen Busen wie ein Schwimmgürtel" (11). In her evaluation of the woman's appearance, Doris determines her own superiority. This is later confirmed in her mind when the man raises his voice while telling the woman about his boat, which Doris believes he does in order to catch her attention. She comments, "aber ich merke genau, wie er laut redet, damit ich's höre – Kunststück! – ich mit meinem schicken, neuen Hut und dem Mantel mit Fuchs – und daß ich jetzt anfangen, in mein Taubenbuch zu schreiben, macht ohne allen Zweifel einen sehr interessanten Eindruck" (14). This scene provides insight into Doris' world-view on multiple levels. Foremost, it demonstrates the importance that she places on physical appearance. Based solely on a comparison of her appearance with that of the "Schildkröte," Doris concludes that she is a more desirable partner for the man. She takes no other factors, such as personality or intellect, into consideration in her comparison. The implication is thus that she believes that one's value as a woman is fundamentally based on appearance. Further, her valuation of herself and the woman relative to the man indicates the value that she places on male judgment.

Doris' esteem of male judgment is at the pith of the contradiction that she embodies: she is empowered by her beauty and uses it to manipulate men, but by doing so she ultimately subjugates herself to them. This contradiction parallels the paradox of *die kleine Frau*; in her manipulation of men for material gain, Doris ironically forfeits the power to them, just as *die kleine Frau*, in her attempt to secure an elevated and self-determined socio-economic position,

subjugates herself to a social structure that cannot provide her with it. At the beginning of the novel, Doris believes that she is in a position of control in her romantic relationships. Her behavior with Arthur Grönland evidences a duality to her relationships; she is attracted to him, but she also recognizes him as a possible source of material gain. Of their initial dating Doris explains:

Er war bild-schön und hatte Kommandant. Aber ich sagte mir: Doris, sei stark – gerade so einem mit Kommandant imponiert letzten Endes was Solides, und ich brauchte eine Armbanduhr, und besser ist, es wenigstens drei Abende zu nichts kommen zu lassen. Aber ich kenne mich doch und wußte, Arthur Grönland bestellt Kupferberg naß und dabei noch Musik! Ich also an Büstenhalter und Hemd insgesamt sieben rostige Sicherheitsnadeln gesteckt. Ich war mächtig blau – wie achtzig nackte Wilde – aber die rostigen Sicherheitsnadeln vergaß ich nicht.
(12)

In her construction of a public identity intended to make a specific impression upon her target audience, Arthur Grönland, Doris disassociates her desires and her calculating rationale. Over the course of the novel, this chasm widens, but at this point Doris is still in tune with and influenced by her instinctual notions of attraction. It is evident that the premise for her relationship with Arthur Grönland is her natural sense of affinity for him. She also realizes, however, that he represents a lucrative opportunity and restrains herself from fulfilling her sexual desires until she obtains her target-watch. Doris believes that she is in control of the situation; she is with a man to whom she is attracted, she successfully manipulates him into buying her a watch, and she ultimately satiates her longing to be with him. There is an element of female-subjugation inherent in such a relationship, however; despite the fact that she manipulates Arthur

Grönland, he maintains the position of power in that he is the source of the watch and it is ultimately his decision as to whether or not Doris receives it.

Over the course of the novel, the chasm between Doris' personal desires and calculating rationale widens as she relies continually more on men for money, clothing, and food. Her dependence on men is exacerbated when she moves to Berlin, fleeing her hometown after stealing a fur-coat. She falls into the rhythm of the city, and her material standing becomes directly equated with the men whom she dates. Doris thus vacillates between poverty and hunger and brief periods of a decadent lifestyle, depending on the socio-economic position of the man in her life. A distinct shift in the balance between the subjugating and empowering influences of sexual manipulation is thus apparent; Doris now perceives men more as "Geldquellen" than as romantic partners (67).

Despite Doris' use of her body for financial and material gain, she continually refutes the insinuation that she is a prostitute. She conceives of herself as distinctly and fundamentally different than street prostitutes and harshly rejects the overtures of men who mistake her for one of them. Integral to her negotiation of a social identity is her realization of the rampant double-standards and contradictions that exist toward female sexuality in the Weimar Republic. This is evident in the example of her brief affair with the wealthy husband and father, "der Onyx," whom she worked for as a nanny. When Doris sleeps with his friend, to whom she is deeply physically attracted, der Onyx fires her with the justification: "Sie sind eine Dirne, machen Sie sich fort von meinen reinen Kindern" (87). Doris is enraged by her realization that "socially sanctioned sex for money and without desire is...rewarded, while desired but unsanctioned sex meets with scorn" (McCormick 137). Marriage socially validates the exchange of sex for financial gain, whereas sex out of wedlock that is the result of mutual attraction and desire is

disdained, a fact especially true for women. Jill Suzanne Smith explains of Doris' reaction to being called a prostitute, "her expression of rage toward such labels fits well with her repeated rejection of those men on the street who mistake her for a prostitute. Her resistance to this external designation signifies her continued efforts to define her sexuality and her survival tactics on her own terms" (462). The power of self-determination is the existential question that faces *die kleine Frau* in addition to socio-economic survival; Doris uses her body to survive and promote her social standing in a society where female beauty and sex are commodities, and yet despite the dependency on male valuation, she attempts to be in control of the exchange.

Apparent in Doris' refusal to identify herself as a prostitute is her desire to maintain a sense of autonomy. Doris draws a clear distinction between herself and Hulla, a prostitute who befriends her. Hulla commits suicide out of fear of the wrath of her pimp, whose beloved fish she killed. The absurdity that the life of a fish is of tantamount – or perhaps even of paramount – importance compared to that of a human being underscores Hulla's loss of self-worth.

Reflecting on Hulla's death, Doris comments:

Die Hulla war eine Hure, vielleicht hat solche kein Grab, und man macht den Menschen das Leben auf der Erde manchmal wohl zu sehr schwer und darum ist es ganz albern für sie zu beten, wenn sie dann glücklich tot sind. Und wenn es keine Männer gibt, die bezahlen, dann gibt es doch auch keine Hullahs – kein Mann darf Schlechtes über die Hulla sagen. (136)

Doris draws a clear distinction between herself and Hulla, despite the fact that she too relies on "Männer...die bezahlen." Her refusal to acknowledge the similarities between her lifestyle and that of a street-prostitute indicates not only a remnant of her initial belief that there is something

“Großartiges” within her, but her attempt to maintain a degree of self-determination relative to sexual desire as well. Smith explains:

But there is even more at stake for Doris in this distancing gesture, for what Hulla’s life and death represent is a complete loss of self—and with that, a complete relinquishment of desire. [...] By resisting definition as a prostitute, Doris clings desperately to the idea that she can still play an active role in her own fate and that hope for intimacy is not lost. (463)

Prostitution represents for Doris a reconfiguration of the power structure of the sexual relationship in which female desire plays no role; mutuality and the value of the female as an individual are lost. As money replaces desire as the premise for sex, the prostitute reduces herself to a commodity and thereby forfeits an element of her humanity.

Indicative of the economic instability of the late Weimar Republic, it is difficult for Doris to find men willing and capable of providing for her. Despite the precariousness of such a lifestyle, Doris prefers it to steady, white-collar work:

Kommt denn unsereins durch Arbeit weiter, wo ich keine Bildung habe und keine fremden Sprachen außer olala und keine höhere Schule und nichts. Und kein Verstehen um ausländische Gelder und Wissen von Opern und alles, was zugehört. Und Examens auch nicht. Und gar keine Aussicht für über 120 zu gelangen auf eine reelle Art – und immer tippen Akten und Akten, ganz langweilig, ohne inneres Wollen und gar kein Risiko von Gewinnen und Verlieren[...]Da hat eine Hure denn doch mehr Spannung, ist ja ihr eignes Geschäft. (181-183)

The comparison of white-collar work and prostitution forms a striking juxtaposition of the options that Doris conceives of for herself. An expression of Doris' sense of desperation at her lack of education and the monotony of the work available to her, this passage reflects Kracauer's conclusions on the existence of white-collar workers in *Die Angestellten* (Smith 460). Doris perceives white-collar work as a worse form of prostitution than sexual prostitution because one is held captive in the monotony of the position, without hope of socio-economic advancement; ironically, she believes that a prostitute not only leads a more exciting life, but that she maintains a larger degree of self-determination as well.

As Doris' financial situation deteriorates, she begins to conceive of prostitution as her most viable option for survival. In reducing herself to a commodity, Doris' perception of the value of women in general changes; she now conceives of them as interchangeable units of exchange rather than individuals. This is apparent in the scene in which she meets Ernst, a man who is reeling from loneliness because his wife left him. When Doris sees Ernst's apartment and the relative wealth that he enjoys, she cannot understand his emotional distress at the loss of his wife. She comments, "hat da 'ne Wohnung mit Korkteppich, drei Zimmer mit Bad, einen Gummibaum und ein Diwan so breit mit seidiger Decke und so feine stahlene Zahnarzlampen – hat er alles, und heult in seinem Bauch über 'ne ausgerückte Frau. Gibt doch so viele" (157). The value of the woman as an individual is completely lost to Doris as her perspective has narrowed to a focus on mere survival. Von Ankum explains, "Der Besitz der Wohnung verstärkt noch die männliche Machtposition gegenüber der Frau von der Straße. Dabei sieht Doris die Frau, die sie sich wie ein Möbelstück inmitten der modern eingerichteten Wohnung vorstellt, als auswechselbares Objekt" (382). The apartment in this context represents a stable societal space when contrasted with Doris' nomadic lifestyle, her wandering through Berlin in search of men,

who have become a means of survival. When Ernst suggests that they go to bed, Doris instinctually thinks that he wishes to have sex with her. Looking into the mirror she reflects:

“Bin ich das? Jawohl, das bin ich...sowas will ein Glanz werden – sowas will – ist ja zum lachen...und zehn Mark muß er mir geben, lieber Gott, zehn Mark muß er mir geben, ich will ihn nur einmal, er ist mir so widerlich, ich will ihn nicht – zehn Mark...wenn ich noch länger in’Spiegel seh, geh ich im Preis runter...”

(158)

Doris’ self-mockery in this scene forms a jarring contrast with her initial notion that “etwas Großartiges” was within her. Her sense of distinction and individuality is entirely lost; she is stingingly aware that she is simply one of the masses. Ironically, however, Ernst does not wish to sleep with her, but rather seeks her companionship. From this moment of rock bottom where she gives herself a cash value, Doris slowly rebuilds her sense of self-worth and individuality as she enjoys a domestic life with Ernst. Beyond material security, Doris’ domestic partnership with Ernst provides her with a sense of home and belonging that she was unable to secure in the metropolis of Berlin: “Und Berlin ist sehr großartig, aber es bietet einem keine Heimatlichkeit, weil es verschlossen ist” (88). Von Ankum explains that Doris “überwindet...in Berlin nie das Gefühl der Verlorenheit. [...] Um in der Großstadt eine Heimat zu finden, muss Doris ihren Anspruch auf uneingeschränkte Beweglichkeit und freies Ausleben ihrer Sexualität aufgeben und sich in die begrenzte Sphäre der Hausfrauenexistenz zurückziehen” (383). Doris thus forfeits her attempt to establish an identity as a *neue Frau* for the security of the middle-class domestic sphere. This security is two-fold; it not only provides Doris with material stability, but also a social identity as *Hausfrau*.

When Doris realizes, however, that she cannot replace Ernst's wife and that she will never mean as much to him as his wife did, Doris decides to leave Ernst. The novel ends with a dismal scene of Doris sitting in the waiting room at the Friedrichstraße railway station, considering her limited options for the future. She contemplates moving in with Karl, an unemployed man of the lower class who has offered to take her in, or becoming a prostitute. She no longer, however, considers the option of becoming "ein Glanz." Of her choices she explains, "aber ich kann ja dann auch eine Hulla werden – und wenn ich ein Glanz werde, dann bin ich vielleicht noch schlechter als eine Hulla, die ja gut war. Auf den Glanz kommt es nämlich vielleicht gar nicht so furchtbar an" (219). Doris' new perspective on becoming a "Glanz" completes the debasement of the concept of *die neue Frau* as a viable socio-economic identity for *die kleine Frau*; Doris now deems both white-collared work and stardom, the two primary facets of *die neue Frau*, as worse than prostitution. Her changed perception of the "Glanz" figure not only reflects her failed attempt to achieve this status, but it also suggests her realization that, "*Glanz* as an obtained objective may involve an even greater degradation than walking the streets" (McBride 235). The nature of this degradation lies therein, that as a "Glanz," one loses all substance when becoming a one-dimensional image of beauty defined by a predominantly male conception of female sexuality. Thus, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*:

"in evoking the model of the *Bildungsroman* with a character that aspires to bourgeois affluence and respectability while openly flouting the basic bourgeois virtues of modesty, hard work, and cultural refinement...can be seen as painting a symptomatic portrait of the economically fractured and ideologically homeless middle class of Weimar Germany, which, in Siegfried Kracauer's penetrating analysis, responded to the threats of economic proletarianization and cultural

massification by clinging to a notion of bourgeois culture hopelessly out of touch with the new realities of mass culture, modern democracy and capitalist economy.” (223)

Doris’s figure serves to underscore the great disconnect between the lower middle class reality of *die kleine Frau* and the elevated bourgeois social standing for which she strives. Ironically, in her attempt to achieve a higher social status, Doris plummets to the verge of prostitution and thereby debases the Weimar myth of the opportunity for upward social mobility. Keun’s *kleine Frau* possesses another dimension beyond social disillusionment, as evidenced by Doris’ decision to leave Ernst. It is striking and unexpected that Doris, whose entire life is dedicated to achieving an elevated socio-economic position and the accompanying affluence, leaves the comfort of her middle class life with Ernst. Throughout the novel, Doris sexually manipulates men for items as trivial as a watch, and yet she forfeits the stability of the domestic partnership with Ernst when she realizes that he could never love her as much as he did his wife. Although *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* does not end with the same empowered hope as *Gilgi – eine von uns*, a similar sense of self-determination is apparent in both Doris and Gilgi. Doris’ flight from Ernst represents her refusal to conform to a role in which her individuality is subjugated to that of someone else – Ernst’s wife. Her rejection of white-collared worker, the “Glanz” figure and Ernst’s replacement wife as viable socio-economic identities demonstrates not only Doris’ refusal to conform to the subjugated roles available to her, but the power of self-determination that *die kleine Frau*, however desperate, maintains.

4.3 Sanna: The Duality of the Theme of “nicht begreifen”

Sanna's character development in *Nach Mitternacht* is markedly different from that of Gilgi and Doris, and yet she too, as a young woman of the lower middle class, represents a *kleine Frau* who undergoes a process of societal disillusionment that culminates in physical displacement. Set in the pre-war NS-period of the mid-1930s, *Nach Mitternacht* provides insight into NS society from the perspective of the everyday. Unlike Gilgi and Doris, Sanna is acutely aware of her social displacement at the beginning of the novel. Her inability to understand and embrace NS-ideology renders her more and more out of place in a society that is progressively taking on the form dictated by that ideology. From the beginning of the novel, Sanna's inability to understand NS-ideology manifests itself in the theme of *nicht begreifen*, a phrase that she frequently employs in the description of events and circumstances of which she cannot make sense. As the novel develops, however, a transition is evident in the meaning of *nicht begreifen*. Whereas it initially indicates Sanna's sense of confusion and incomprehension, it later represents her realization that NS-ideology, in its contradiction of the natural order and one's ethos, is simply not to be understood.

Ironically, Sanna's naïveté and simplistic world-view ultimately facilitate her realization that there is something inherently amiss with NS-society. Sanna's reactions to the world around her are instinctual and uncalculated. She soon realizes the danger of expressing these gut-reactions, however. Her comments about the radio speeches of NS-leaders serve as one of the most striking examples of her incomprehension of NS-ideology and instinctual reaction of fear to the hate-laced NS-propaganda:

Es wurde dann davon gesprochen, dass heute Abend Göring im Radio reden würde...ohne mir überhaupt was dabei zu denken, sagte ich, ich wollte ihn lieber nicht hören, weil ich immer das Gefühl habe, ausgeschimpft zu werden. Kein

Wort mehr habe ich darüber gesagt, aber selbst das war schon zuviel. Dabei ist es wirklich so, dass so eine Rede ganz harmlos anfängt. Vom herrlichen deutschen Volk, das alles überwindet, wird gesprochen – man fühlt sich gelobt und geschmeichelt, weil man ja auch dazugehört. Und dann rast plötzlich ein wildes Schimpfen aus dem Radio: das alle zerschmettert werden, die sich vergehen an dem Aufbauwillen, dass alle schädlichen Nörgler zerstört werden. Mir bleibt immer das Herz stehen bei solchen Reden, denn wie soll ich wissen, ob ich nicht zu denen gehöre, die zerschmettert werden sollen? Das Schlimmste ist, dass ich gar nicht verstehe, was eigentlich los ist... (52)

Sanna's description of the radio speeches provides insight into the nature of NS-propaganda and the society that it seeks to create by force. At the pith of the NS-attempt to promote a German national consciousness is the notion of belonging, which resonates with Sanna; she feels a sense of pride to belong to the superior German *Volk* that the NS-leaders glorify. This sense of belonging possesses a duality, however. NS-leaders seek not only to engender pride in the German nation, but also to enforce the desire to belong through fear. Integral to NS-ideology is the importance of homogeneity and the danger of the *other*. The homogeneity that the NS-regime attempts to enforce consists of political, racial and social dimensions. Any person or entity that does not fit the homogeneous NS-mold will be destroyed. With her difficulties in understanding NS-ideology, Sanna cannot ascertain her identity relative to NS-society and fears the possibility that she could belong to those who threaten the regime and that she will consequently be eliminated. Sanna's incomprehension of NS-ideology further heightens her awareness of the tone in which it is conveyed; she is instinctually threatened by the "wild" quality of the radio-speeches, which are marked by an animalistic rage that contributes to the

notion of the danger of not belonging to the “pack.” Integral to the creation of an NS-group-dynamic was the manipulation of *der kleine Mann*, whose indoctrination was fundamental in the creation of a foundation for NS-society.

The emphasis on belonging and its association with survival in NS-society initially manifests itself in Sanna’s socialization. At the age of sixteen, Sanna moved from her hometown of Lappesheim to live with her Aunt Adelheid and cousin Franz in Cologne. There she met a group of young people with whom she desperately wanted to fit in, despite the fact that they were malicious and duplicitous. She explains:

Es waren sehr schicke und sichere Mädchen in der Gesellschaft, ich gab mir wahnsinnige Mühe, zu sein wie sie. Und die Junge taten auch sehr großartig – ich hatte Angst, sie würden mich dumm und lächerlich finden. Oft lachte ich mit ihnen, aus Angst, sie könnten merken, dass ich eigentlich gar nicht wusste, warum sie lachten. Ich wollte, sie sollten mich so großartig finden, wie sie sich fanden. Ich wollte zu ihnen gehören aus Angst, denn sie sind immer alle gegen einen. Ich wollte nicht, dass sie gegen mich waren. Darum war ich mit ihnen gegen den Franz und machte bössere Witze auf ihn als sie. (42)

Sanna’s interaction with the group and her desire to belong to them represents a microcosm of the dynamics of NS-society. She does not want to be the outsider because she knows that if she were isolated from the group, that she would become the target of their ridicule. For her social survival, she must secure her position in the group. By joining the group in their mockery of Franz, Sanna secures her place as one of *them* and avoids the role of the *other*. This situation parallels the group dynamic of NS-society. To be accepted in NS-society, one must socially, politically and racially fit in with the German *Volk* as it is defined by NS-

ideology. The danger of not belonging, of being associated with the political or racial *other*, is great. Survival in NS-society thus depends upon one's capacity to belong, which requires one to feign understanding of NS-ideology. This is alluded to in Sanna's comment that she at times laughed along with the group, even though she was not sure why there were laughing.

Throughout the novel, the most enthusiastic NS-supporters are portrayed as not fully grasping NS-ideology. Their political fervor is emotional, not intellectual. The "Biest," Aunt Adelheid, does not admire Hitler for the content of his speeches, but rather for his emotional performance when he delivers them. Sanna explains: "es ist eine Tatsache, dass das Schwitzen des Führers den größten Eindruck auf die Aunt Adelheid gemacht hat" (53). When Sanna is unable to understand a speech of Hitler's, because "er schrie wahnsinnig," Tante Adelheid is not able to explain it to her because she herself did not understand the speech; she was simply moved by the emotional intensity of its deliverance. Aunt Adelheid, in her blind conformity to ideology for which she possesses only a marginal understanding, represents another aspect of *die kleine Frau* in her susceptibility to political forces to which it is easier to conform than to question.

Interestingly, Sanna's susceptibility to the group dynamics of the social circle does not ultimately portend her embracement of NS-ideology as a means to secure belonging within German society. Sanna regrets her exclusion and mockery of Franz and later falls in love with him. The turning point in her character development that marks the transition of her naïveté to her awareness that something is greatly amiss ironically occurs when she is officially isolated from the "group" of NS-society as a possible dissident. Aunt Adelheid reports Sanna to NS-officials for her comment about feeling "ausgeschimpft" when listening to NS-radio programs. Taken into custody by the Gestapo, Sanna watches as countless people come and go from the

Gestapo headquarters, reporting family, neighbors and friends for violations against the NS-regime. Sanna notes:

Und immer mehr Menschen strömen herbei, das Gestapo-Zimmer scheint die reinste Wallfahrtstätte. Mütter zeigen ihre Schwiegertöchter an, Töchter ihre Schwiegerväter, Brüder ihre Schwestern, Schwestern ihre Brüder, Freunde ihre Freunde, Stammtischgenossen ihre Stammtischgenossen, Nachbarn ihre Nachbarn. Und die Schreibmaschinen klappern, klappern, klappern, alles wird zu Protokoll genommen, alle Anzeigenden werden gut und freundlich behandelt. Zwischendurch kommen Mütter, deren Söhne verschwunden sind, Frauen, deren Männer verschwunden sind, Schwestern, deren Brüder verschwunden sind... (56)

Sanna is deeply disturbed by the scene; there is something distinctly unnatural about the loss of loyalty to family and friends. The NS-regime has restructured the natural social order that gives paramount importance to familial and friendship loyalties, replacing them with loyalty to the regime. Here again the manipulation of group dynamics is evident. Whereas the natural social order dictates that the strongest group loyalties be associated with personal, familial and friendship groups, the NS-regime constructs a social-order in which one's association with the national group and its various representative units supersedes all other group identifications.

During her interrogation, Sanna is reminded of the words of her friend Paul, who told her about countries in which people are free and live by the basic law of the Ten Commandments.

She notes:

Da überkam's mich plötzlich. Hier saß ich und sollt bestraft werden und wusst nicht warum. Ich wusst nicht mehr, was gut war – ich wusst nicht mehr, was böse war. Ich dachte an die Länder mit den heiligen Zehn Geboten, in denen gut gut

und böse böse ist. Ich dachte an die fernen fremden Länder, von denen Paul erzählte. Ich musste weinen, wie ich noch nie in meinem Leben geweint hatte.

(57-58)

Sanna is overcome by her realization of her complete ideological displacement in NS-society. Although she is an apolitical figure, Sanna is highly in tune with her ethos, and Keun employs her character to undermine the politics of the NS regime. A duality in Sanna's characterization as a *kleine Frau* is thus evident; although in her inability to understand NS-ideology she appears naïve, Sanna's power as a character ultimately lies in her purely ethical perspective of the political situation, which underscores a loss of basic notions of ethics and loyalty in NS-society. Further, this excerpt calls into question the notion of belonging and *Heimat*. In conjunction with the journalist Heini's response to the Jewish doctor Breslauer's regret that he must flee NS-Germany, that "Heimat ist, wo man gut behandelt wird," this passage "läßt keine Zweifel daran, daß dieser Begriff [(Heimat)] im Roman keine geographisch fixierte Bedeutung hat" (Siegel 74). *Heimat* and the notion of societal place are thus fundamentally psychological. Maier-Katkin notes an intensification of the protagonist's sense of social alienation in *Nach Mitternacht*:

The political backdrop in *Nach Mitternacht* differs noticeably from that in her earlier novels by intensifying the descriptions of marginality, alterity, Otherness and difference. Consequently, Keun's previous themes of dualism between minor and dominant discourse, difference and identity, individual criticism and cultural acceptance receive sharper and more poignant signifiers in her 1937 novel. (300)

The transition from the Weimar Republic and the NS-Regime, as presented in Keun's novels, thus exacerbated the social displacement of *die kleine Frau*.

After the interrogation, from which she is released with a warning and subsequently flees to Frankfurt to live in safety with her half-brother, Algin, a change in Sanna's character is evident. She is now acutely aware of her ideological displacement within NS-society and the dangers of expressing her incomprehension and criticisms. As Leonie Marx explains,

...[es] findet sich hier für Sanna Moder der archimedische Punkt, der ihrer persönlichen Entwicklung eine andere Richtung gibt. Bereits hier erlebt Sanna die Erschütterungen, die ein genaueres Verständnis für die gesellschaftlichen Sachverhalte auslösen. Mit ihrer Flucht nach Frankfurt setzt die achtzehnjährige Sanna den Wechsel in ein anderes soziales und geistiges Milieu durch, leitet damit den Übergang in eine neue Phase ihrer Bewusstseinsweiterung und Charakterentwicklung ein. (181-182)

Despite this awareness, however, Sanna continues to navigate the socio-political climate. Sanna's time in Frankfurt marks a progression in her development as a *kleine Frau*; she realizes her ideological displacement and yet she does not act to ameliorate her situation. She is not compelled to physically flee NS-Germany until she must do so to be with Franz. Although Sanna does not initially appreciate Franz, she eventually falls in love with his gentle and kind spirit. She leaves him behind, however, when she flees Cologne for Frankfurt, and does not hear from him for several months. Franz comes to Sanna in Frankfurt and informs her that he killed a man who had reported him and his friend Paul, who consequently disappeared, to the Gestapo for allegedly being in possession of and disseminating communist propaganda. Franz must flee the country or risk imprisonment or even death. Sanna's decision to escape with him into exile does not come easily; although she initially immediately decides to flee with him, she is soon overcome with doubt. She reflects:

Ich habe Angst, ich habe Angst. Vor meinem Fenster der Magnolienbaum fängt an zu blühen, es ist so schön hier im Frühling. Mein Bett ist weich und warm. Hier könnt ich liegen und schlafen, heute Nacht, morgen Nacht, jede Nacht. Meine Hände zittern, meine Knie sind lahm vor Müdigkeit. Mir ist übel, ich muss mich übergeben. Ich bin krank, ich habe Fieber, ich kann nicht fliehen. Klingelt es? Vielleicht kommen sie schon, um Franz zu verhaften. Ich kann dann hierbleiben, es ist nicht meine Schuld, ich habe alles getan, alles... Oh, ich Schwein, ich Schwein. Gott verzeih mir die Sünde. Franz, ich liebe dich.

(115-116)

This passage underscores the temptation of conformity that *die kleine Frau* faced; to resist meant to forfeit all physical and material security. Sanna realizes that a life in exile will be marked by the unknown, whereas in her current situation she is relatively comfortable and her basic needs are met. As she builds herself an excuse, Sanna suddenly catches herself and is ashamed at her attempt to dissolve herself of ethical responsibility to Franz and ultimately to herself. Sanna's decision to escape with him into exile underscores what Franz represents for her; her love for him is based on his pure and kind heart. He symbolizes a form of humanity seemingly lost in a society where NS-ideology has superseded ethics, familial bonds and loyalty to friendship. As Marx explains, Sanna's flight into exile marks a further and final development in her character: "Markierte Sannas Flucht aus Köln die Trennung von sozialer Abhängigkeit und geistiger Unterdrückung, so verdeutlicht die zweite Flucht mit der Absage an ein Leben unter der Diktatur, dass ein kultureller Wechsel erforderlich geworden ist" (183). Sanna's self-determined exile represents her realization of her ethical incompatibility with NS-society and the necessity of her search for a new societal environment.

Over the course of *Nach Mitternacht*, Sanna becomes increasingly aware of the suffocating and toxic socio-political climate of the NS-regime. Her decision to leave NS-society, although facilitated by Franz' situation, represents the culmination of her sense of displacement. Once Franz comes to her, she plans and leads their escape to Rotterdam. While on the train Sanna notes, "wir fahren durch die Nacht, alle Lichter fahren schwebend mit. Mein Kopf liegt in Franz' Schoß. Ich muss mich schwächer zeigen, als ich bin, damit er sich stark fühlen und mich lieben kann" (120). This statement underscores Sanna's ironic control; although she is following Franz in his escape, she is also the driving force behind the flight into exile. Sanna's self-determined exile underscores the power of *die kleine Frau* to reject a prescribed socio-ideological identity.

5. *Die kleine Frau*: Self-determined Homelessness

In all three works, the female protagonist, a young woman from the lower-middle class, experiences a process of social disillusionment that culminates in her intellectual and physical displacement. In *Gilgi, eine von uns* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, the root of the protagonists' disillusionment lies in the disconnect between *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont*. Both protagonists in Keun's novels seek to fulfill identities based upon aspects of the "new woman," a figure whose image was projected through all media outlets and who represented the modern and its opportunity of self-determination for women. Like Fallada's Pinneburg, who seeks individualism and success within a socio-economic structure that is unable to provide him with either, both protagonists believe that they are distinct from the masses whom they ironically represent. Their ultimate inability to attain the socio-economic status of *die neue Frau* and their consequent sense of displacement within society resonates with the experience of

Fallada's *Kleiner Mann* and Kracauer's observation that the lower-middle class of the Weimar Republic is "geistig obdachlos." Through the process of disillusionment, Keun not only illuminates the contradictions and economic challenges that women faced in the Weimar era, but also criticizes the attempt of *die kleine Frau* to establish her social identity in a gilded socio-economic structure within which she cannot fulfill her expectations for herself.

The process of disillusionment that Sanna undergoes in *Nach Mitternacht* is different from that of Gilgi and Doris. Whereas Gilgi and Doris struggle to achieve a socio-economic status that they ultimately realize is unattainable, Sanna does not actively seek to carve out a specific societal role for herself. Rather, it is her inability to reconcile her ethos with NS-ideology that instigates her progressive disillusionment with NS-society that culminates in flight into exile.

Despite variances in their characterization and the processes of disillusionment that they experience, all three protagonists exhibit a paradoxical duality. In direct contradiction to the conclusions of Maier-Katkin, who states that Sanna's "final decision, is more severe than that of either Doris or Gilgi, both of whom eventually submit to their inferior and dissatisfying position in order to accept a place in society" this thesis demonstrates how Keun's protagonists, as representatives of *die kleine Frau*, maintain a degree of self-determination, despite their vulnerability to greater socio-economic and –political forces of the volatile interwar period. None of the protagonists are willing to conform to the subjugated societal positions available to them at the end of the novels, and consequently flee their respective situations for an uncertain future. The open-ended conclusions of the novels underscore the struggle of *die kleine Frau* to attain a sense of place within a society in flux. The nature of this abstract notion of societal place

differs for each of the protagonists, and yet for all three it represents a sphere of independence in which she can realize and determine her identity.

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