Not without My Mommy: The New Woman's Mother Figure in Irmgard Keun's Novels *Gilgi—eine von uns* (1931) and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932)

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I. Introduction

In the late 1920's the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* still featured full-page advertisements for *Rahma* margarine that depicted a round-faced, full-figured housewife with a traditional "snail hairdo" (Schneckenfrisur)—a hairdo that allowed women to tame their long tresses and make for a more manageable everyday style. The *Rahma* woman seems to be always baking, either for various festivities or for her children, who encircle and dance around her in some of these advertisements. Nothing about her is modern. The displayed image seems to be anachronistic for the early 1930's because it stands in stark contrast to other ads of the time, which typically present a single, fun-loving, unfettered young woman. An ad like this, it can be reasoned, would never appeal to the rebellious, modern New Woman. It is, after all, much removed from her experience and aspirations. The New Woman is a feminist ideal of the early 20th century who established herself during the Weimar Republic through resisting the traditional restrictions placed on women. She emancipated herself through newly created jobs that were a good fit for women, such as steno typist, sales girl, and secretary.[1] She can be found in many advertisements of the era, usually depicted with a short bob haircut, sporting loose jumper dresses, and enjoying partying, sports, dancing and luxury goods.[2] The *Rahma* ad, then, might seem anachronistic considering this new type of woman. But it is more effective than it first seems. The New Woman, after all, was not born in a vacuum. She, too, is afflicted with nostalgia for simpler times or for her childhood. The woman depicted in the ad is not someone the New Woman is supposed to emulate. Rather, she is supposed to see her mother in her. Katharina von Ankum argued that at the end of the 1920's, the New Woman desired to return to a more traditional role model for women.[3] The ad's appeal, then, is based not on an image it is trying to sell

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Figure 1: *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 1927, No. 18. Courtesy of the Lipperheidische Kostümbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany. Copyright held by Ullstein Verlag, Berlin, Germany.

but on the feelings it evokes in the viewer, and in that it is successful in reaching the New Woman and influencing her buying habits.

A similar return to old gender roles of the nurturing housewife can also be found in Irmgard Keun's *The Artificial Silk Girl*. After struggling to make ends meet as an aspiring star in Berlin, the main character Doris finds herself in a traditional household setting with Ernst, a man who picked her up from the streets. "And I fried him some goose. On Sunday and with my own hands. And goose lard is good for the nerves in your back, my mother used to say" (ASG 147). The transition from the free-spirited, glamorous world of the New Woman to a traditional housewife role in Keun's novel mirrors the disillusionment of Weimar Republic New Women with the limitations of this supposedly emancipating image. German Studies scholars, such as Katharina von Ankum and Susanne Meyer-Büser describe this circumstance in their studies as the New Woman's return to old gender roles. However, neither of them mentions that in both the *Rahma* advertisement and *The Artificial Silk Girl*, the desire is not to return to just any old female role model, but to reconnect with the New Woman's own mother.

While the advertisement and Keun's novel suggest a rapprochement between the New Woman and her mother generation, the New Woman is generally not associated with the traditional role of motherhood. German Studies scholar Barbara Kosta stresses that modernity and motherhood seem to be incompatible "Modernity prided itself on progress and attempted to sever itself from the trauma of war, loss, and the past. For daughters, this meant leaving the sphere of the mother" (Kosta, *Daughters* 272). My argument builds foremost on Katharina von Ankum's study "Motherhood and the 'New Woman,'" in which she proposes that the New Woman's status of motherhood is a redirection of sexual desire (183) but also "the realization of the commonality of women's experience" (183). She highlights the generational similarities between the New Woman and her mother generation but stops short of drawing direct lines between them. To be sure, the article "Unruly Daughters and Modernity: Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi—eine von uns*" by Barbara Kosta analyzes the New Woman's relationship to her mother. However, while Kosta concentrates on the rifts between these two female generations, and assigns a role of minimal importance to the mother generation for the New Woman's development and self-realization, I argue that reading both of Keun's Weimar Republic novels, *Gilgi—eine von uns* (1931) and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932) together allows us to see that the New Woman sees her lifestyle defined by the mother and the socioeconomic milieu she grew up in. Hence, there is a strong connection between the New Woman and her mother, which runs as a subplot through both novels. Although the New Woman disassociates herself from the appearance and lifestyle of her mother, there is still a very close connection—in the form of emotional dependency and social commonalities—between these two female figures. This

study aims to shed a new light on the reading of mother-daughter relationships in the Weimar Republic. My reading of Irmgard Keun's two novels is supposed to be a more pragmatic, exemplary reading, i.e., to provide evidence for a more historical and pragmatic reason for the development of the ideal of the New Woman in the Weimar Republic.

In the 1920s the New Woman established herself in pop-culture, such as movies, advertisements, and popular magazines, and became the center of interest in many literary narratives of the time.[4] The modern woman had "entered the public space of the metropolis and popular imagination as a mass phenomenon" (Grossmann, *Girlkultur* 65). The New Woman's new space in public and her workforce productivity made the role of motherhood less important for her. "[Luce] Irigaray has demonstrated the way in which women's historical lack of access to production placed them firmly in the realm of reproduction, a move which was characterized by their inarticulation in the social sphere" (Meskimmon 84). Instead of by the role of mother, the New Woman could be identified by her age, usually between 18 and 25, her bobbed haircut, and her loose-fitting clothes such as dresses that left arms and legs exposed.[5] Popular magazines of the 1920s and early 30s (especially the Ullstein publications *Die Dame*, *Uhu* and *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*) presented her as a fun-loving party girl. She could be found at the movies, cafés, and dance bars, or shopping for the latest fashions, cosmetics and luxury goods (alcohol, chocolates, coffee, and cigarettes).[6] According to the articles and advertisements in *Uhu* and *Die Dame* the modern woman could drive a car and take part in sports such as ice-skating, skiing, and tennis.[7] The media celebrated the carefree lifestyle of the New Woman, and indeed many aspects of life became easier for the modern woman than they had been for her mother's generation. The New Woman enjoyed the fruits of that generation's struggles, such as the fight for women's rights, the right to vote, access to universities and the workplace, the ability to move freely in public and to make that space her own, and to some extent also sexual liberation.[8] Of course, women's rights and freedom received a significant boost from World War I, which made it necessary for women to venture out of the private sphere of home and hearth and become engaged in public life and specifically the workplace.[9] While many women helped manufacture war machinery during WWI, the Weimar Republic also saw women become clerical workers, stenographers, secretaries, and shop girls. These white-collar jobs were not permanent, however. They allowed young women to earn their keep until they were eventually married off and taken out of the workforce. Husbands had the right to prohibit women from working, and anyway, their professional lifespan depended on their perceived youth and beauty. As social critic Siegfried Kracauer explains, *die Angestellte* (the salaried female worker) was expected not only to work competently, but also to look attractive. Hence at the age of 30, as Kracauer writes, she would be considered too old for the work-

place.[10] And so, while progress had indeed been made, the bourgeois women's movement's goal of making women financially independent was not achieved during the Weimar Republic, but only briefly touched. The New Woman, then, has not completely left her mother's generation's roles of wife and mother behind but rather postponed assuming them. To add insult to injury, the space that women had managed to carve out for themselves in the public realm was taken away by the Nazi party, which came to power in 1933 and relegated women back to "kids, kitchen and church."

Irmgard Keun's representative novels of the New Woman's experience during the Weimar Republic, *Gilgi—eine von uns* (1931) and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), feature two such young stylized New Women, Gilgi and Doris, who try to shape their lives in the aforementioned image by taking their cues from the popular media. Gilgi is a reasonable stenographer and typist who is self-reliant and resourceful. She is highly disciplined, as evidenced by her cold showers and exercises in the mornings—a reference to the body-culture movement (Körperkultur) of the time—and the English, Spanish, and French language courses she takes to improve her chances in the job market.[11] Her life runs like a well-oiled machine (a reference to the American concept of Fordism that became popular in the 1920s in Germany) until Gilgi falls in love with Martin, which causes a "Betriebsstörung" (interruption of operations; Gilgi 106) in her mechanical lifestyle. Keun's main protagonist in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, on the contrary, has only her youth and body to rely on. At the beginning of the novel, we see Doris as a very incompetent typist, who is fired after she rejects the sexual advances of her boss. She believes in upward mobility through sexual relationships with men, who eventually—she hopes—will discover her talents and make her a big star. Because Doris has few skills to rely on she rushes from one relationship to another in that metropolis of modernity, Berlin, and only finds sanctuary with Ernst, who is not sexually interested in her and for whom she plays the traditional housewife. Both women end up alone at the end of each novel because they choose to leave their respective relationships with Martin and Ernst. In the shifting expectations for women of the Weimar Republic, the understanding of gender roles and relationships between women and men were in flux, and thus both female characters are faced with their own as well as the male expectations that their love interests cannot fulfill. They, in turn, decide to leave these men behind.

At the center of these shifting gender relationships lies the question of procreation and motherhood. Topics such as liberal female sexuality, the question of abortion, gender-role expectations, and the financial burden of raising a child determine Gilgi's and Doris' struggle for identity. Much has been said about the New Woman as mother, or her refusal to become one. She has historically been blamed for the decreased birth-rate in Germany after WWI, and for the German nation's consequent demise. However, as Kerstin

Barndt points out, the New Woman had not given up on reproduction altogether—it is merely a myth that social scientists created, thus blaming the modern woman for falling birth rates (76).[12] Katharina von Ankum argues that the New Woman's return to motherhood is an outcome of disillusionment with a lifestyle that was still to a large extent determined by men. "Discouraged by tough competition in the job market during the post-World War I economic crisis and disillusioned by the limitations placed on their professional advancement by patriarchal prejudice, many women by the mid-1920s had begun to fantasize about returning to traditional models of femininity" (Ankum, *Motherhood* 171). Barbara Kosta, on the other hand, sees the integration of the concept of motherhood into the self-image of the New Woman as the "tenuous promise of a new family structure in a modern, secular society that does not bind marriage with maternity. Perhaps [Keun] alludes to the possibility of reimagining the maternal" (Kosta 282). While Ankum sees the New Woman's eventual regression into the mother generation's old gender roles, Kosta argues for her progressive step towards single motherhood, and the reconfiguration of family structures. I agree with both readings, but I see the conscious decision to become a mother (Gilgi decides not to abort her baby) as a return to an old gender role, even if the New Woman raises the child alone. As Kosta explains, "Keun's novel [*Gilgi—one of us*] takes issue with the incompatibility of modernity and motherhood" (Kosta 272), implying that the general image of New Woman and her lifestyle do not allow for her having a child. In turn, for a New Woman to embrace motherhood is then recognition of what the New Woman's mother did for her, as well as an affirmation of the importance of motherhood itself, and a continuation of the mother's lifestyle. In Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Doris wanders around until she finds a safe haven in a traditional home setting that allows her to imagine being pregnant as a logical next step (ASG 175).[13] Gilgi, who actually becomes pregnant, decides to raise the baby on her own, because she realizes that the bond between mother and child is more important than romantic love and the conventions of society.[14] Von Ankum's study on motherhood and the New Woman supports this point: "The single mother represented a singularly convincing new sexual identity for women of the time. Its attraction lay in *the combination of old and new: the familiarity of the traditional mother role as mode of identification*, its at least apparent emancipation, and its promise as antidote to frustrations experienced in the working world" (Ankum, *Motherhood* 173, highlighted by J.F.). Although the New Woman made a conscious effort to distinguish herself from her mother's generation, especially from the image of motherhood, which was a defining factor of the previous generation, she nevertheless finds herself mirroring the mother generation's choices.

Although it is a common perception that only in the 1920s were women in Germany finally able to break from their traditional roles of wives and

mothers, the idea of giving women a socially acceptable alternative to motherhood started long before this. Already in the mid-1800s, feminist Louise Otto raised concerns about the future of old spinsters ("alte Jungfern") in the then emerging trend of moving away from the extended family to a nuclear family model.[15] She lobbied for granting women the right to learn a profession in order to support themselves in case they are not fortunate enough to marry into a stable household setting. The need for women to support themselves became even more prominent at the end of the 19th century, when "both advocates and opponents of the women's movement believed that thousands of females, made surplus by technology in their parents' households, would not be able to count on the likelihood of establishing their own homes via marriage" (Dollard 447–8). Realizing that motherhood was still a defining concept for women's social worth, Henriette Schrader-Breymann, educationalist and a representative of the second generation of the women's movement, disconnected the idea of motherhood from a mere biological role, and expressed that women without biological children can still be spiritual mothers of the community.

> Once a woman has achieved spiritual motherhood, then she is free [. . .] and if she is not married, and if she has not given birth to biological children, then she nevertheless is not to be regarded as 'a disconnected link in the chain of humanity'. We women remain women, if we personally give love, arouse love [. . .] We all must feel as the mother of humanity, as a part of the female principle that completes the male call to action towards a whole. (cited in Sandkühler 244)[16]

The women's movement at the beginning of the 20th century used the term "spiritual motherhood" to point out women's contribution to society; a contribution that a woman could make only if she had the right to be educated and to hold a job in the public sphere. The idea of spiritual motherhood as a justification for women's right to work and support themselves as an alternative to becoming a housewife and mother takes on new dimensions in the Weimar Republic. Keun's character Gilgi attempts to try out a new lifestyle, namely that of a single working mother; someone who distrusts the institution of marriage while still taking on the mantle of motherhood. Up to this point in time, bearing children out of wedlock was regarded as shameful because it meant that a woman had engaged in sexual activities without the consent of society and the church. This is why the practice of abortion, although illegal, was very common, as historian Cornelie Usborne explains in her study on lay abortionists in the Weimar Republic. Gilgi's daring decision to become a "New Mother," a term coined by Katharina von Ankum for the New Woman as mother (Ankum, *Motherhood* 173), was enabled by the political movement of her mother's generation, which made such new lifestyles possible and more palatable to society. Adding to this point, historian Ann Taylor Allen reports

that the original founder of the *Bund for Mutterschutz*, Ruth Bré, already envisioned in 1904 "that unmarried mothers and their children be settled in rural communes [. . .] The members of the commune, she stipulated, would be supported partly by their own agriculture and handicrafts but primarily by a tax-supported 'maternity income,' available to all married and unmarried mothers" (427). Although this idea represents a utopian ideal at the time, it shows that women fighting for women's rights at the beginning of the 20th century advocated for the rights of unmarried mothers, arguing for the legitimization of motherhood that went against social norms. "'Nature knows only motherhood, not marriage,'" feminist Henriette Fürth declared in 1905 (Allen 426), and defined the lifestyle that Keun's character Gilgi is about to explore at the end of her novel.

Many of the New Woman's actions and decisions are a direct reaction to the role model she saw in her mother and disapproved of. But not always is the New Woman's behavior a conscious rejection of an older generation she could no longer identify with. More often than not, the New Woman reaches out to her mother, seeking advice and trying to find support for managing a lifestyle that is new and rapidly changing. This relationship between the New Woman and her mother is a rather neglected area in the New Woman research. As we have already seen, Gilgi's decision to become a single mother was made possible by her mother's generation's fight for alternative lifestyles for women. But on a socio-psychological level, too, the New Woman is dependent on her mother. Concentrating on the various mother figures in Irmgard Keun's novels allows us to understand the circumstances and personal decisions that allow a New Woman to emerge. In the following sections, I will show that the socioeconomic status of her mother had a major influence on the development of the New Woman, and that this status determined her successes and failures as a new breed of independent women.

II. *Gilgi—eine von uns* (Gilgi—One of Us)

In her 1931 novel, *Gilgi—eine von uns*, Irmgard Keun allows us a glimpse into the lives of mothers from three distinct social backgrounds that existed at the time: the proletariat, the new middle class (Bürgertum) and the upper middle class (Bourgeoisie/*gehobenes Bürgertum*).[17] The character that connects the three classes in the novel is the New Woman Gilgi, daughter of all three classes, who begins a quest for finding herself by searching for her biological mother.[18] The catalyst for this journey is a revelation by her mother, Mrs. Kron, who explains to Gilgi, on her 21st birthday, that she was adopted and that her real mother was of the proletarian class. As we later learn, this woman, too, is not her real mother, and Gilgi is in fact the illegitimate child of an upper middle-class (Bourgeoisie/*gehobenes Bürgertum*) woman. During her search, Gilgi visits and reflects on the three mother figures who have

handed her over—as a newborn—from woman to woman. As we will see, with this chain of mother figures Keun sends a message that while motherhood is a universal problem for every woman in any social milieu at the beginning of the 20th century, it is especially true for the unwed mother. Gilgi, who is herself pregnant during her quest, and finds herself at a crossroads in her relationship with her lover Martin, has the natural need to seek out her biological mother in order to understand her own standing in life as a New Woman and to find an answer as to which way she might go in the future. Gilgi's situation is complicated by the fact that Martin, the father of the baby, is a carefree, unemployed-by-choice bohemian, who, as Gilgi feels, will not be able to support her and the baby. Additionally, he keeps Gilgi from fulfilling her aspirations of getting on in life. Gilgi feels she has no choice but to leave Martin.[19]

Given that Gilgi's three mothers come from separate socioeconomic spheres, the following section will examine the historic aspects of class and gender in Wilhelmine Germany (the setting Gilgi's three mothers were born into), and the social changes to these concepts that occurred during the Weimar Republic. As Heidy Margrit Müller explains in her study on the relationship between mothers and daughters in the German literature between 1885 and 1935, the role of women during the Gründerjahre until World War I was confined to the household and to raising the children; even women from the proletarian class, who had to work in the factory or take on other menial jobs were expected to carry the double burden of gainful employment and raising their children (28). In Keun's novel, the proletarian class is represented by the seamstress Fräulein Täschler, who lives in abhorrent conditions. Gilgi's adoptive mother, Mrs. Kron and her husband provide Gilgi with a bürgerliches (middle-class) upbringing. As Müller states, the Bürgertum valued the ideal of a nuclear family, which finds its meaning and contentment in family life itself (28). In this setting, the children and especially the daughters developed an even closer relationship with the mother because the father worked outside of the home. With the dwindling number of domestics, who now found work in factories, it became the mother's sole responsibility to raise the children (Müller 29). Gilgi's biological mother, Mrs. Greif, although not a member of the nobility, seems to come from the *gehobenes Bürgertum* (upper middle-class), which is characterized by material luxuries and a high social standing (Müller 30). Class consciousness in the Weimar Republic is to some extent the result of the Prussian three-class suffrage system, which was in effect from 1849–1918. It provided the land-owning upper class with a political advantage over the proletariat, which made up the largest segment of the population in Germany at the time. Because Keun exposes Gilgi to three mothers from distinct economic and social milieus, Gilgi's reflections on these mothers do not only stand as a political commentary but as a journey towards self-realization. Gilgi herself, as a New Woman, belongs to the new

class of the Angestellten (white-collar workers), and as such she rejects the lifestyle and conditions of all three mothers who represent a social order that was established over centuries under feudal rule.[20] However, when she becomes pregnant, and understands that a bourgeois family life with Martin is not possible, Gilgi decides to leave everyone behind and try to make it on her own as an independent New Mother in the progressive city of Berlin.

Contributing to the decision to leave everyone behind and start anew is also the fear of social decline; Gilgi thinks that Martin, the baby, and herself would most likely drift down to the abhorrent living conditions of Fräulein Täschler and her friends Hans and Hertha. Hence, Gilgi's socially courageous decision to raise a baby on her own is to a large extent informed by her mothers' experiences with a less-than-ideal social situation for women and mothers in Weimar Germany. At first, the revelation of her being adopted leads Gilgi to sullenly denounce her middle-class upbringing. "A little seamstress is her mother. Father unknown. She comes from the proletarian class. That pleases her, because she never valued being a part of the bourgeoisie" (Gilgi 31).[21] However, when Gilgi visits her presumed mother, Fräulein Täschler in the *Thieboldsgasse* (a street in a working-class slum), she very quickly understands that she does not want to be part of the proletarian class, either. She finds Fräulein Täschler living in deplorable conditions: her apartment reeks, the bed is dirty and there are a couple of cold, greasy fried potatoes in a pan on the stove (Gilgi 40).[22] Fräulein Täschler herself appears to Gilgi like the witch from a fairy tale; an old, scrawny woman without a face. "[. . .] and a face she doesn't have, that she has lost" (Gilgi 41). Gilgi's perception of the facelessness of Fräulein Täschler is an expression of her attempt to distance herself from this mother and her class. Fräulein Täschler appears as the faceless mass of the proletariat, whose members cannot be recognized as individuals because their would-be individuality is blurred by the shared poverty and despair of the class. As she tries to connect with Fräulein Täschler, Gilgi becomes aware of her own ignorance about the dire poverty of the proletarian class, and has to grapple with the phenomenon as it personifies itself in the form of a woman she believes to be her mother. "For sure, there are many who don't know what to do anymore; many who have a bad standing in life. Collective misery is something one could always brush off easily. But if this misery reaches out to you in form of a particular case, you cannot close your eyes from it anymore. You become involved" (Gilgi 124). This awareness also shows in Gilgi's changing perception of Fräulein Täschler. When the conversation between the two women turns to the subject of Fräulein Täschler being her mother, Gilgi does slowly perceive a face. This development mirrors Gilgi's psychological reckoning upon the realization that she herself might be descended from this woman, and therefore is also from the proletarian class. Hence, Gilgi feels that she recognizes Fräulein Täschler as an individual, and with that a face emerges. At the same

time, Gilgi feels that her own face begins to age, and one might even say to resemble Fräulein Täschler's. "And Gilgi feels that her face becomes whiter and her eyes recessed deeply into their sockets" (Gilgi 44). "She feels as if she has become a stranger to herself" (Gilgi 45). But then Gilgi learns that Fräulein Täschler was only a paid caretaker and that her biological mother is a wealthy upper-middle-class woman. The Täschler episode then teaches her that one's chances in life are inextricably linked to the surroundings one grows up in. "One should not be such a snob, and think that it is to one's own credit if one is better than others. If the Krons had not adopted her, if she had been raised by the Täschler woman, behind in the *Thieboldsgasse*, if she—better not to think of it" (Gilgi 57).[23] Although Gilgi is convinced of her potential to determine her own life, she realizes that fate and her mother's socioeconomic background had greatly influenced her own standing in life. Furthermore, the threat of social decline is a very real one as Gilgi realizes following the suicide of her friends Hertha and Hans, whose economic situation got progressively worse until the two saw no other way out.

Her former boyfriend, Hans, returns to Gilgi's life in the form of a door-to-door salesman earning a meager income peddling floor polish. He starts telling Gilgi about his former bright future in the transformer factory of his uncle. When the factory went bankrupt, however, he had a very hard time finding any job at all. Also, his wife Hertha, who was a secretary just like Gilgi, had to give up her job when the first child was born. Hence, their social decline stems from the economic depression of the Weimar Republic, as well as the social restrictions on mothers, who had to choose between raising children and supporting their families. Later in the novel we see Gilgi also preparing fried potatoes for Martin in one of the few moments of social idyll, but then she thinks about the baby she is expecting, and the hot fat splashing from the frying pan hits her legs. While Martin and Gilgi are busy performing first aid on the injured leg, the fried potatoes burn to ashes and the apartment is full of smoke (Gilgi 180). This scene allows for several interpretations. First, the image of the fried potatoes links Gilgi back to the lower class Fräulein Täschler. Also, it suggests that her idyllic situation may not last and turn to ashes. The smoke in the apartment seems like a projection of the suicide by gas (also from the stove) that becomes Hertha's and Hans's fate. The scene might suggest that Gilgi and Martin would be going down a similar path should they continue their lifestyle and start having children.[24] Ironically, Gilgi's wealthy upper-middle-class mother, Mrs. Greif, let her decision to give Gilgi away also be guided by the fear of social decline. Mrs. Greif chose the easy way out, to live a life in material comfort. This comes with the price of obeying strict class rules and the unhappiness of a loveless marriage with a cheating husband.[25] While Gilgi understands and dreads the fate of the proletarian class, she cannot understand the ways of the upper-middle-class. She tells Mrs. Greif, "And your world is strange and abhorrent to me. I don't

want anything to do with it" (Gilgi 235).[26] Gilgi outright rejects her mother's world that had made her give up her child. However, at the same time, Gilgi and Mrs. Greif are connected by the threat of a social decline, which is complicated by pregnancy. Mrs. Greif solved this problem by getting rid of it, while Gilgi accepts the challenge and decides to keep the baby.

Gilgi grew up with the Krons, who can be identified as from the Bürgertum (middle class), as the following paragraph will show. However, although Gilgi shares some values with the Krons, she also distances herself from them, because she cannot accept the role her adoptive mother plays in the family setting. At the beginning of the novel, we see Gilgi still complying with the rules of the parents' household. She cares about her parents' opinions and feelings, as is exemplified in the fact that she keeps the "Genrebildchen" (a picture depicting traditional occupations) her mother gave to her. Although she doesn't like the picture, she does not remove it in order not to hurt her mother's feelings (Gilgi 7). Moreover, the idyllic scene of the family enjoying breakfast together in their living room evidences solid middle-class morals, such as domesticity (Gilgi 8–9), which is expressed in the care Mrs. Kron lavishes on decorating her home, and thriftiness—as they drink coffee substitute (Gilgi 9).[27] Despite their thriftiness, an attribute mirrored in Gilgi's eagerness to take note of all her expenses and income (Gilgi 127), the family does not endure any financial hardships. Mrs. Kron does not need to work—her husband is gainfully employed in the Karneval industry—and she can even afford to keep a cleaning lady. In contrast to Doris in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Gilgi needs to neither work nor hand any of her earned money over to her family. And as Ingrid Marchlewitz argues, Gilgi does not work because she has to make money, but because she rejects the traditional female role of an unemployed mother and housewife (Marchlewitz 62–3).[28] I agree with Marchlewitz's point, because the novel clearly states that Gilgi rejects the idea of getting married, and living a life similar to Mrs. Kron's. "Maybe later, she'll open a little fashion boutique in Paris or Berlin, maybe—maybe—well, she is still young, and except for marriage, being an actress, or a beauty queen, she considers every lifestyle possibility" (Gilgi 22).[29] What is more, Gilgi works for gaining independence from a patriarchal system that limits her social and career opportunities. Socially, men expect women to conform to the gender roles of mother and housewife—in her relationship with Martin, Gilgi already tries to conform to these gender roles by quitting her job and doing the household for Martin. Due to her pregnancy, Gilgi is in danger of completely falling back into a traditional lifestyle for women. Regarding her career, Gilgi is aware that her time as a stenotypist is limited, either by her age or by the sexual advances of her boss, which she cannot avert forever. The only way for Gilgi to remain independent from men and the ideas of traditional gender roles these men have, is to become financially independent. Because this cannot be achieved in a job market that is controlled by men,

Gilgi dreams of owning her own business. "'I want to work, want to progress, want to be self-reliant and independent—I have to achieve all of this step-by-step. Now I am learning my languages—I save money—maybe I'll have my own apartment in a couple of years' time, and maybe I will have my own business'" (Gilgi 70).[30] Of course, it is questionable if Gilgi really stands a chance to achieve these lofty goals but her dreams and aspirations speak clearly for a rejection of middle-class values and the traditional gender roles for females linked to these ideals.

Her refusal to have her life determined by middle-class morality and a preordained destiny that relegates women to the role of homemaker leads to Gilgi's immanent distancing from her parents. Gilgi's rejection of the Kron's bourgeois lifestyle becomes apparent in her description of the Kron's living-room. "Primeval world furnishings. Impressive sideboard, manufactured around 1900. Table-mat with cross-stitch-embroidery flowers. Light-green lamp shade with frills made from glass beads. Green plush sofa [. . .]. Something like this was given as a gift in the past. For something like this, people said 'thank you' in the past" (Gilgi 8).[31] The furnishings of Mrs. Kron's house represent the mother's appreciation for bourgeois values, the same values that require of her to be a good housewife and mother.

Gilgi's own little rented room displays a great contrast in style and values to that of her middle-class parents. Gilgi's room is Spartan with no frills or knickknacks to be found, which emphasizes the functionality of the space: this is also where Gilgi works on her translations. Dr. Elsa Herrmann, author of the 1929 study *This is the New Woman* (*So ist die Neue Frau*), explains in her juxtaposition of the old and the new woman, that the old woman defines herself by the standards of the preindustrial age, while the new woman's lifestyle is completely adjusted to the demands of the present day (13). The different tastes in furniture and decorations also find their way into the changing clothing styles. Dr. Herrmann further illustrates the contrast between these two women generations with the functionality of the New Woman's clothing, and the ease of taking care of it versus the old dresses, which featured ruching and valances that restricted women's mobility and were difficult to wash (27).[32] Gilgi, then, does not define herself through the objects in her own space, as Mrs. Kron does, but through the skills that she acquires and puts to use in the job market. Gilgi studies English, French, and Spanish at the Berlitz School, because she believes that with these skills, she will never be unemployed.[33] Getting married and having a husband care for her is an alternative lifestyle for Gilgi, one which she refuses to consider.[34] Gilgi's value as a woman is, in fact, that of a worker, who acquires marketable skills instead of objects that are supposed to reflect her personality.[35]

Futhermore, the Kron's morals and Gilgi's progressive attitude clash when Gilgi comes home only in the morning hours after spending the nights with her lover Martin. Gilgi's mother worries about Gilgi's immoral conduct. She asks her if she did something evil ("etwas Schlechtes") and after Gilgi

admits the sexual intercourse with Martin, Mrs. Kron hopes to rescue the situation by suggesting that Martin marries Gilgi (Gilgi 108–9). Gilgi, who is on the one hand filled with indignation over the mother's inquisitiveness and on the other feeling guilty for overstepping the boundaries of the Kron's morals—the people who selflessly took her in and gave her a good home—sees no other way but to move out. At this point, the Krons are written out of the story. However, Gilgi still expects to have a relationship with them in the future. "And one day, they will not be angry anymore, and one will come to visit them" (Gilgi 114). Gilgi's writing of a letter to Mrs. Kron speaks further of her desire to mend the relationship with her adoptive mother. She expresses in it that she will call her mother in the future and is prepared to do everything for her. Together with the letter, she sends Mrs. Kron's favorite candy and a new nickel-plated coffee pot, because the old one made from china suffered a crack (115). These gifts show that Gilgi cares deeply about her adoptive mother's feelings and wants to maintain this emotional relationship. The cracked china coffee pot became damaged on the same day Gilgi moved out and may thus be a symbol of the crack in the relationship between these two women. The gift of a new nickel-plated coffee pot is then an attempt to replace that which is old and broken with something new and whole. Also, the new nickel-plated pot (which replaces the old china pot) represents the differing styles of the old (Mrs. Kron) and the new woman.[36]

The differences between mother and daughter do not stop at style preferences. While Gilgi's liberal sexual attitude caused the relationship between mother and daughter to turn sour, Mrs. Kron would have been even less understanding of Gilgi's very progressive opinions about a woman's right to choose an abortion had she known about them. When Gilgi herself becomes pregnant, she explains that she would have five healthy illegitimate children but only if she had the means to care for them (Gilgi 175). This position is very logical for Gilgi, who likes to think of her life as a correctly solved arithmetic problem ("eine sauber gelöste Rechenaufgabe;" Gilgi 71). And as she has no money, when she gets pregnant with Martin's baby, her first calculated reaction is to seek an abortion. However, as the gynecologist explains, she has to wait and see him in three weeks' time again. During this time Gilgi's rational thinking gives way to emotions. "But I actually would like to have the child" (Gilgi 180). "The child—maybe it will have such unruly black hair like Martin and such dark eyes with silver lights—I would like such a child" (Gilgi 228). The emotional desire to have a child and become a mother overcomes Gilgi just as it had Mrs. Kron, who was so desperate over being unable to conceive again after a stillbirth that she decided together with her husband to adopt Gilgi. In this regard, Gilgi's actions mirror her adoptive mother's, despite her initial rational position to abort.

But there is more than one reason for Gilgi wanting to keep her baby. Her meeting with her biological mother, Mrs. Greif, also contributes to it. Although Gilgi rationally knows that Mrs. Greif is her mother, she feels no

emotional connection to her. The emotional void expresses itself in a general feeling of loneliness, which is ameliorated by Gilgi's thoughts of the togetherness she will share with her child. "I am completely alone in the world. I will have a child—I am looking forward to that" (Gilgi 231). Also, Gilgi becomes aware of the fact that she owes her being alive to this mother, and although Mrs. Greif had decided to give Gilgi away, she did not abort her like Gilgi intended to do with her own child (cf. Gilgi 234). Based on these observations, we can infer that Gilgi's decision to keep the baby at all costs (despite social stigmatization, possible ostracism and the separation from Martin) is at least partially influenced by the knowledge that Mrs. Greif did not abort her, and Mrs. Kron took her in and raised her as her own. This is less a moral decision but rather an emotional decision based on the appreciation of what these mothers did for her.

Even though Keun's novel concludes with an open ending, and Gilgi's fate—as well as that of her baby—is unknown in a society that shuns unmarried mothers and their offspring, the novel implies that Gilgi might be able to turn to Mrs. Greif for financial support. Not only does Mrs. Greif give her possessions willingly to her newly-found daughter, but she also tries to build a personal connection. She grasps Gilgi's hand and urges her to visit again and tell Mrs. Greif about herself (Gilgi 235). It seems as if Mrs. Greif deeply regrets her past decisions and the way her life turned out, and it is possible to speculate that she would in the future help support her daughter and grandchild. Therefore, although Gilgi's destiny seems bleak at the end of the novel—a life and dreams smashed like the little orange by the train on the last page—she still has a safety net to keep her from destitution.

III. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (The Artificial Silk Girl)

Keun's second novel, about the New Woman Doris, entitled *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932) features a young girl from a low-middle-class setting, whose family shares many of the economic hardships of the proletariat. Doris' father is constantly drunk, and she complains that he makes her surrender part of her salary, with which he buys alcohol (ASG 5; 35). Her mother works in a theater coat check, which implies that the family has financial problems, because Doris' mother cannot be a stay-at-home mother as was commonplace in the middle class during the Weimar Republic. The parents seem to have little time for the upbringing of their daughter Doris, and have conveyed few middle-class values to her. Doris' aim to become a New Woman is limited to the superficial aspects of that image: She dreams of a movie star lifestyle with glamor, luxuries and fun, but does not build up marketable skills that would allow her to join the workforce. To achieve her dream, Doris relies on men who shower her with gifts in return for sexual favors. Essentially, she prostitutes herself, and always lives in fear that the man she is with would

get tired of her, forcing her to start the seduction game anew. In contrast to Gilgi, who approaches her emancipation efforts rationally and builds on her marketable skills in the workplace, Doris lacks the ability and insight necessary for self-reliance. She is aware that she has no acting talent—a miserable failure at playing an extra's role in the theater is proof of that—but never gives any thought to the art of acting. Rather, she wishes her life to be effortless, exciting, and fabulous. These ideas stem from her naïve perception of movies and glamor photographs.

The reader might get the impression that because the New Woman's mother in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* plays a relatively small role in the novel, she is of no importance to the development of Doris. However, although the mother seldom appears in person, she is a constant presence. For example, when Doris does not dare to contact her mother from her hideout in Berlin, out of fear the police might arrest her for a fur coat she had stolen, Doris remembers conversations and interactions with her mother. She creates a clear image of her mother, and compares the mother's actions to her own. She slowly realizes that she and her mother share a similar fate that Doris cannot escape from, and that the promise of upwards mobility embedded in the media image of the New Woman is illusionary.

In contrast to Gilgi, Doris has a good relationship with her mother. She talks about her in an admiring tone, describing her as a fine woman "feines Weib" (DkM 27) and explaining that she had something special about her "She still has a certain something from the old days" (ASG 20).[37] Here, we see Doris' adoration for her mother; an attempt to lift her mother out of the miserable socioeconomic circumstances she is in, maybe in the hope that elevating the mother would also elevate herself and allow for good things to happen to her that are usually reserved for women from a better background. To protect the illusion that she can see "a certain something" in her mother as well as in herself, the father is blamed for the socioeconomic struggles that mother and daughter have to endure. Doris believes that her mother sold herself short by marrying her father. Doris' lack of respect and love for her father culminates in her asking the mother why she married this booger (DkM 28), equating him with disgusting human waste. Later in the novel, the reader learns that Doris' mother's husband is not her father at all, but a man who married her mother despite the fact that she had a child out of wedlock.[38] Her mother's generation had no other option but to find a husband sooner rather than later, settling down and desirably having a financially secure home. Any ideals of grandeur and a love-marriage seem far from Doris' mother's mind. She married the man because women of her generation had to marry. That is what a woman did, what was expected in society.

For Doris, however, different options seem to arise. Popular magazines and movies with glamorous movie stars make her believe that times have changed, and that men have become a shortcut to fortune and fame. In the

same way that Doris sees something special from the past in her mother, she strongly believes in her own specialness as well. Therefore, Doris is disappointed with her mother's choice of a husband, because in Doris' mind she could have done much better. Her mother's dire situation also threatens Doris' vision of a better life. If her mother had the same something that Doris sees in herself, why then did she not act upon it and won a better lot in life for herself? Her mother's choices might worry Doris, because they serve as a painful reminder that she herself might fail despite the special qualities she sees in herself. The novel expresses this realization by having Doris cry over her mother's fate.

The solidarity Doris feels with her mother creates in her the desire to do something for her to better her situation and make up for the things she was deprived of in life. Once Doris decides to flee to Berlin and strike it rich, she promises her mother to make her rich as well (DkM 69). During one of Doris' more promising relationships with the businessman Alexander, she finds herself being able to fulfill some of her mother's smaller wishes. "Once my mother wanted to have a canary. I had nine canaries transferred to her together with crystal flasks and lingerie and the like." (ASG 108). As Marsha Meskimmon observed, "[. . .] Irigaray suggests a [. . .] revaluation of 'positive' icons of the mother–daughter relationship [. . .] a notion of a female genealogy or, as she put it, 'women-amongst-themselves'" (Meskimmon 85). Reading this particular passage together with Irigaray's observation, we see that a similar relationship is established here. Beyond Doris' emotional connection to her mother as her child, she also attempts to understand the mother's needs and desires for luxuries and pretty things, which creates a feeling of solidarity among women. The desire to do something nice for her mother might also stem from a feeling of guilt, of owing something to her mother and having to pay her back for raising her rather than having an abortion—a fact that Doris recounts in a very dry matter-of-fact, even understanding manner. "And [she] didn't want me at first and sued for alimony, a fact that all possible fathers held against me" (DkM 92). Here the love for her mother remains intact, although the mother did not want Doris initially. And just like before, Doris shifts the blame towards the men, the possible fathers, who did not want to pay alimony for Doris. "But it had to have been someone, after all" (ASG 79). Not the mother–daughter relationship is emphasized here but rather the relationship of two women who share similar experiences in a male-dominated world.

Her mother's misfortunes and qualities are never far from Doris' mind. She points out that her mother went through very bad times—hinting at periods of famine—when talking about their neighbor who roasted a cat that Doris loved. Her mother would never have done that; even in dire periods of hunger (ASG 59). On the one hand, Doris wants to achieve more than her mother ever did in life and in that try to find a way to help her. On the other,

she realizes that the socioeconomic structures have not changed much, and that she and her mother share the same limitations imposed by a patriarchal society, which causes her to dwell on them.

> If a young woman from money marries an old man because of money and nothing else and makes love to him for hours and has this pious look on her face, she's called a German mother and a decent woman. If a young woman without money sleeps with a man with no money because he has smooth skin and she likes him, she's a whore and a bitch.
>
> Dear mother, you had a beautiful face, you have eyes that look like you desire something, you were poor as I am poor, you slept with men because you liked them or because you needed money—I do that too. Whenever anyone calls me names, they call you names as well—I hate everyone, I hate them, I hate them—to hell with the world, mother, to hell with it. (ASG 73)[39]

Doris recognizes the double-standards society places on women—only married women can have sex and still be considered decent; men can see women only in terms of whore or Madonna. These circumstances have not changed, and put mother and daughter—then and now—under the same restrictive rules, which view sex outside of marriage to be prostitution—an act that both mother and Doris engaged in—as we learn from the citation above. Doris' great frustration with the present social structures and moral code brings her even closer to her mother, sharing a struggle against a world that is hostile to unmarried women. Hence, Doris' cry addressing her mother, "to hell with the world, mother, to hell with the world" (ASG 73).

Doris' longings for her mother while in Berlin set up the mother figure as the symbol of home (Heimat). In her thought letters to her mother—Doris does not actually send her the letters—she associates the mother with beloved places in her hometown. "There's a void in me from your absence, and there are words and words piling up in my throat that I can't say to you—that instills so much love in me that I feel like I've been put through a meat grinder. With you, I had familiar streets with pavement that said hello to my feet when I stepped on it" (ASG 70–71). Also: "Dear Mom, yesterday was Sunday, and you probably made red cabbage as usual. Did the house stink from vinegar again? But my mother only uses the best vinegar" (ASG 110–1). The feeling of familiarity and comfort with places she had known, traditions and smells she was used to and people she could rely on is not present in cold Berlin. At some point, she even opines that Berlin does not provide any homelikeness (Heimatlichkeit, DkM 88) because it is locked out to her. The mother here is equated with the Heimat, without which Doris feels uprooted and lost. At the same time, the mother and her idiosyncrasies—"using the best vinegar"—are elevated and endorsed as the right way of doing things.

With the labeling of the mother's habits as the right way of doing things, Doris slowly comes to accept that she was born into a lower-middle-class

setting. Although the media promises little shop girls that they could move up the social ladder via marriage to a higher standing man (Kracauer, *Shop-girls*), a dream that Doris also bought into, she realizes that these promises are illusions, and that she lacks the necessary education (Bildung) to engage in a happy relationship with an educated middle-class man, such as Ernst. Furthermore, she understands now why her mother settled for her father, and what it means when she said, "You have to belong somewhere after a while" (ASG 20). As a woman in the Weimar Republic, Doris' options, given her skills and education, are still very limited: marrying someone from her own social class, or working as a prostitute. "I want—I want—I don't know—I want to be with Karl. I want to do everything together with him. If he doesn't want to—I don't work, I'd rather go on the *Tauentzien* and become a star" (ASG 192). The stardom that awaits her is that of a prostitute, a destiny that she might be able to avert by engaging in a relationship with Karl, who is from her own social background. However, this would be similar to her mother's marriage with her father, a relationship born of convenience, without love, and characterized by the daily struggle to make ends meet. "I'm going to look for Karl after all, he always wanted me—and I'll say to him: Karl, let's work together. I will milk your goat and stitch eyes on your little dolls, and I will get used to you with everything that's involved" (ASG 191). Here, Doris' struggle, her being torn between her aspirations to lead a glamorous New Woman lifestyle and her mother's social background that pulls her back into her lower-middle-class background comes to an end. The mold of her mother's lifestyle has taken over, and her former dreams of becoming a star (Glanz) are rejected as something negative, even more negative than the honest work of a prostitute. Keun closes the novel with Doris' thoughts, "But I might just as well turn into Hulla [a prostitute's name in the novel]—and if I became a star, I might actually be a worse person than Hulla, who was good. Perhaps glamour isn't all that important after all" (ASG 192).

IV. Conclusion

Observing the New Woman's mother generation induces us to revise and fine-tune our understanding of the origins of the New Woman, and the path she would choose at the end of the 1920s. While the political and socio-economic, and especially media phenomena of the era contributed greatly to the emergence of the New Woman, this essay demonstrated that the New Women's relationship with their mothers has a significant influence on their success and the direction they choose in life. Yes, young women of the 1920's tried to pursue a modern lifestyle, largely guided by the media, and made a conscious effort to separate themselves from their mothers' generation. However, as this study has shown, the New Women also looked back at their mothers, seeking to understand their own position and opportunities in life in

relation to the fate of their mothers. The New Woman can even identify with her own mother and decide to assume the role of a biological mother herself (Gilgi) or embrace her mother's entire lifestyle (Doris) in solidarity with her. To understand the failures and successes of the New Woman, we have to understand her mother's life and character as well, because it was not the media alone which gave birth to the New Woman, but also actual biological mothers.

The citations and page numbers for *Gilgi—eine von uns* come from the 1979 Claassen edition; Translations into English are mine, J.F. In the article, this book is referred to as "Gilgi." The citations from *The Artificial Silk Girl* (ASG in the article) are taken from Katharina von Ankum's 2011 translation of the novel. However, due to some inaccuracies in the translation, I had to refer back to *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (DkM in the article) from the 1993 Claassen edition at some points in the text; translations of these passages are mine, J.F.

[1] The New Woman is not a class-specific phenomenon, according to historian Atina Grossmann. "The New Woman was not only the intellectual with a Marlene-Dietrich-style suit and short mannish haircut or the young white-collar worker in a flapper outfit. She was also the young married factory worker who cooked only one warm meal a day, cut her hair short into a practical Bubikopf, and tried with all available means to keep her family small" (Grossmann, *The New Woman* 156). Keeping this inclusiveness of different classes in mind, we can nevertheless say, that Gilgi who comes from a middle-class (Bürgertum) background, has better skills as a white-collar worker than Doris, whose parents raised her in a lower-class environment.

[2] For an overview of the different aspects of the New Woman's lifestyle and definitions of the New Woman, see the anthology *Women in the Metropolis*, edited by Katharina von Ankum.

[3] Susanne Meyer-Büser describes the arrival of the Neue deutsche Frau at the end of the 1920s, suggesting a combination of the continuation of the New Woman image with traditional women roles and values. "Gegen Ende der 20er Jahre wuchs das Bedürfnis, das Idealbild der deutschen Frau zu definieren und für künftige Generationen festzuschreiben. Nach einem experimentellen Jahrzehnt [. . .] begann sich im öffentlichen Bewußtsein zunehmend der Wunsch nach Rückkehr zu einer geordneten, 'normalen' Weiblichkeit durchzusetzen. [. . .] Der Wandel des weiblichen Leitbildes von der Neuen Frau zur Neuen deutschen Frau ist exemplarisch für den gesellschaftlichen Wertewandel am Ende der Weimarar Republik" (8).

[4] Australian scholar Liz Conor defines the New Woman in terms of her dependency on and eagerness to appear in the modern visual products, such as photographs and movies. "[. . .] for it was as visual images, spectacles, that women could appear modern to themselves and others" (Conor 2).

[5] For a close analysis of Weimar women's fashions see Mila Ganeva's excellent study *Women in Weimar Fashion*.

[6] The New Woman is often presented with exotic goods, such as coffee and chocolates and cigarettes. See Barbara Kosta's article "Cigarettes, Advertising and the Weimar Republic's Modern Woman."

[7] Consider for instance a collection of anecdotes by Friedrich Kroner, entitled "Das Auto meiner Frau" in *Die Dame* (October 1926). The ability of women to drive a car became another form of emancipation and emasculinization of the husbands who were confined to the passenger's seat. "Manchmal werde ich mitgenommen. Ich darf dann sehr bescheiden neben ihr am Volant sitzen.[. . .] Meine Frau fährt im eleganten Bogen in eine rechte Seitenstraße" (Ferber 141).

[8] "The 'new women'–who voted, used contraception, obtained illegal abortions, and earned wages—were more than a bohemian minority or an artistic convention. They existed in office and factory, bedroom and kitchen, just as surely as—and more significantly than—in café and cabaret" (Bridenthal, Grossmann and Kaplan 11).

[9] A problem that arose for the New Woman at the time was that she was very easily confounded with prostitutes, who also roamed around in similar fashions and makeup to look for male customers. For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, see Jill Suzanne Smith's article "Working Girls: White-Collar Workers and Prostitutes in Late Weimar Fiction."

[10] See Siegfried Kracauer's *Die Angestellten*. "Bei den lochenden Mädchen rechnet man im allgemeinen mit dem ‚natürlichen Abgang'; das heißt, man erwartet, daß sie von selber den Betrieb verlassen, wenn sie das Alter herannahen fühlen. Obwohl die Gekündigten schon über dreißig Jahre zählten, wankten und wichen sie nicht. Hatten sie etwa die Absicht, sich durch fortgesetztes Lochen so lange abzunutzen, bis ihnen die Extravergütung sicher gewesen wäre?" (Kracauer 242).

[11] For an extensive discussion of the popular Körperkultur movement at the beginning of the 20th century, see Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany. A Social History, 1890–1930*, as well as Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe, *Der neue Mensch.Körperkultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik*.

[12] Also consider historian Ann Taylor Allen's study on the "Evolution of a German Idea of Motherhood, 1900–1914." Allen provides data showing that the declining birth rate had been an issue of discussion since the beginning of the 20th century, and thus it was not a problem that newly arose with the New Woman (419).

[13] "[. . .] that kind of street has something in it, it makes you feel pregnant with something" (ASG 175).

[14] That the mother-child bond is of the utmost importance is an idea that Keun incorporates into her novels. It might stem from the bourgeois women's movement's appeal for better support of society's mothers at the beginning of the 20th century. The *Bund für Mutterschutz* established maternity homes for unmarried mothers and insisted that "such institutions must do everything to strengthen the mother-child bond" (Allen 431). Socialists at the time also "hailed motherhood as the highest individual fulfillment and the mother-child bond as the most sacred of ties" (Allen 424).

[15] See also Allen on this point. She writes about Helene Stöcker, who was the leader of the *Bund für Mutterschutz* since 1905 that Stöcker saw the patriarchal system and its limitations for the female sexuality as the root of women's position in society. "To Stöcker the plight of the unmarried mother was just one symptom of the sickness of a patriarchal sexual order in which marriage and prostitution were parallel and complementary institutions. Within a system that catered to every male need, women were condemned to sexual exploitation as wives or prostitutes or to the unhealthy asceticism of the 'respectable' spinster" (426).

[16] "Wenn die Frau die geistige Mütterlichkeit sich errungen, dann ist sie frei; das heißt, sie erfaßt das Leben groß, sie sieht die *Gegenwart und die Zukunft im Zusammenhange*, und wenn sie nicht in der Ehe steht, wenn sie keine leiblichen Kinder geboren hat, so ist sie doch nicht als 'ausgelöstes Glied in der Kette der Menschheit' zu betrachten. Wir Frauen bleiben eben Frauen, wenn wir persönlich Liebe geben, Liebe wecken; aber damit wir bei aller Persönlichkeit frei werden, brauchen wir die Wissenschaft, die Kunst, nicht um ihrer selbst willen, sondern um sie wieder persönlich zu verwenden. *Wir müssen uns alle fühlen als Mütter der Menschheit*, als Teil des weiblichen Prinzips, das dem männlichen Wirken für das Ganze seine Ergänzung gibt" (cited in Sandkühler 244).

[17] Historians and literary scholars sometimes use different terms for these three social backgrounds. Gilgi defines herself as coming from the Bürgertum, because she grew up with the Krons; Fräulein Täschler is identified as proletarian (Gilgi 31) and Mrs. Greif is described as the daughter of an "upscale house" (Gilgi 49), who later lives in an apartment that sports an "intentional elegance" (225), which is an attribute that Frevert sees in the wealthy bourgeoisie with "aristocratic leanings" (Frevert 109). Moreover, Frevert uses in her seminal work *Women in German History* the terms proletarian, bourgeoisie and the 'new middle class' of white-collar workers (Frevert 109–111). Historian David Blackbourn uses the terms bourgeoisie and Bürgertum interchangeably (1). We can then infer that the Krons are a middle-class family with the father being a commercial white-collar worker in the Karneval industry.

[18] Hence, the title of the novel "Gilgi—One of Us" might be read as a question regarding which class Gilgi actually belongs to. This reading of Keun's novel as a question of class consciousness is also confirmed by Kerstin Barndt's article on "Female Readers in the Weimar Republic." In the analysis of the novel's reception, Barndt cites the reader Hanna Herz, "who

quickly relegates Gilgi to the bourgeois faction. [. . .] Too trapped in the narrow horizon of individual needs, Gilgi cannot bring herself to acknowledge the Socialist collective: 'For us, Gilgi is not one of us, not one of the millions who valiantly struggle for the rise of their class and for the creation of a new society'" (109).

[19] The decision to leave Martin, and potentially to lead a lifestyle of a single mother, has been interpreted negatively as well as positively in past research. Heide Soltau evaluates Gilgi's decision as an emancipatory step because she doesn't comply with the "für sie bestimmte[s] natürliche[s] Schicksal des Alles-Erduldens" (VI). In contrast, Doris Rosenstein argues that Keun does not provide a solution to Gilgi's conflict, but only portrays the hurdles in the fight for emancipation. "[Keun] zeigt die geringe Basis für eine wirkliche Emanzipation und die Hindernisse, die sich bei Schritten in diese Richtung ergaben [. . .] sie deutet keine Perspektive an" (58). Ingrid Marchlewitz sees a separation of the novel into two parts, of which the first displays a successful exhibit of the 'Angestellten-Satire' but the second part loses its focus and ends in a dime-novel like confusing love story, which Marchlewitz feels can only be explained by exploring Keun's biography (60). For an analysis of the changing gender roles in the Weimar Republic, which allow Gilgi and Doris more liberty, but also new difficulties in their relationships with men, see Richard W. Mc.Cormick's *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity*; Patrice Petro's study *Joyless Streets*; Maria Tatar's book *Lustmord* and Katie Sutton's study *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany*.

[20] In the *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, reporter Hans Georg describes the white-collar worker as belonging to the *Mittelstand*. The employment terms of the white-collar-worker demanded, that he "had to be given six weeks' notice" in the event of the termination of his contract (182). Georg further elaborates, "The resulting existential security of white-collar employees once again contributed to their adoption of the ways of thinking and life-styles of the higher social classes" (182). "In terms of income undeniably closest to the proletariat, but, just as undeniably, most nearly related to the propertied class in life-style and mental habits—in this way the white-collar employees, along with small manufacturers, occupied the middle; thus the designation *Mittelstand*" (182). Also, consider Siegfried Kracauer's documentary social study "Die Angestellten" about this particular social group.

[21] "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" (Gilgi 31).

[22] "Da ist ein Zimmer mit einem schmutzigen Bett, gegenüber ein Gasherd, eine Pfanne mit ein paar kalten, klebrigen Bratkartoffeln drauf" (Gilgi 40).

[23] "Nur nicht die Nase so hoch tragen, nur nicht immer denken, es wäre so ganz und gar eigenes 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—" (Gilgi 57).

[24] Already in 1988, Livia Z. Wittmann mentioned the destiny of the couple Hertha and Hans as the foreshadowing of Gilgi's and Martin's fate (Wittmann 96). However, I am elaborating on this interpretation by providing textual evidence that connects the two couples in the novel.

[25] As Ute Frevert writes, "Marriages within the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie were affairs less of the heart than of the purse-strings. A match at the right time and place could write off debts, win over loyal members of a firm, create business relationships and cement political coalitions" (109). Mrs. Greif's matchmaking story is a similar one, as Fräulein Täschler explains, mother and daughter came from a "fine house" and the mother wanted somebody with a title, a count or physician (Gilgi 49).

[26] "Und Ihre Welt ist mir fremd und zuwider, ich will nichts mit ihr zu tun haben" (Gilgi 235).

[27] Ritta Jo Horsley argues that in the novel "the narrow moralizing and materialism of the German middle class are sharply satirized" (183). Horsley is right, however, we must remember that Gilgi is in most scenes the eye that sees her parents with the impatience of a young person, who has as a New Woman very progressive ideas about life.

[28] "Gilgi arbeitet also nicht, weil sie Geld verdienen muß, sondern weil sie die traditionelle Frauenrolle der nicht erwerbstätigen Ehefrau und Mutter für sich ablehnt" (Marchlewitz 62–3).

[29] "Vielleicht wird sie später mal in Paris oder Berlin ein kleines Modeatelier aufmachen, vielleicht—vielleicht—ach, sie ist noch jung, und außer Ehe, Filmschauspielerin und Schönheitskönigin zieht sie jede Existenzmöglichkeit in Betracht" (Gilgi 22).

[30] "'Ich will arbeiten, will weiter, will selbständig und unabhängig sein—ich muß das alles Schritt für Schritt erreichen. Jetzt lern' ich meine Sprachen—ich spar' Geld—vielleicht werd' ich in ein paar Jahren eine eigene Wohnung haben, und vielleicht bring' ich's mal zu einem eigenen Geschäft'" (Gilgi 70).

[31] "Urweltmöblierung. Imposantes Büfett, hergestellt um Neunzehnhundert. Tischdecke mit Spachtelstickerei und Kreuzstichblümchen. Grünbleicher Lampenschirm mit Fransen aus Glassperlen. Grünes Plüschsofa.[. . .] So was ist mal geschenkt worden. Für so was wurde mal 'danke' gesagt" (Gilgi 8).

[32] "Denn die großen Rüschen und Garnituren, die Fältchen und Volants, mit denen die Wäsche früherer Zeit so reichlich verziert wurde und deren Herrichtung besonders zeitraubend war, sind in Fortfall gekommen, jedes Stück ist einfach und zweckmäßig gestaltet" (Herrmann 27).

[33] "Wenn man drei fremde Sprachen perfekt kann, ist man gegen Stellungslosigkeit wohl so ziemlich gesichert" (Gilgi 22).

[34] "[. . .] sie ist noch jung, und außer Ehe, Filmschauspielerin und Schönheitskönigin zieht sie jede Existenzmöglichkeit in Betracht" (Gilgi 22).

[35] Naturally, Gilgi's value as a worker brings with it a new objectification, namely that of being reduced to one's work value. Thanks to Harald Höbusch for pointing this out. Ingrid Marchlewitz adds that "Gilgi's Arbeitsethos geht auf die Vorstellung zurück [. . .] daß der Mensch seine Individualität und Eigenart im Produkt seiner Arbeit auspräge [. . .]" (63). And Christa Jordan ascribes Gilgi's work ethos to a notion of bourgeois individualism. "Ebenso wie Leistungs- und Erfolgsnormen der Protagonistin bürgerlichem Individualismus entspringen" (61).

[36] The design of the nickel-plated coffee pot goes along with the simple, clean forms and metal designs of the Bauhaus school, which was initially operated from 1919 to 1933 in Weimar.

[37] In the 21st century, the word "Weib" has mostly taken on a negative connotation of women who are false, silly, hysterical, etc. However, etymologically, "Weib" simply describes a female adult person, and was used interchangeably with the more neutral word "Frau." In this particular passage of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Doris' use of the word "Weib" for her mother takes on a positive meaning, because she connects being a "Weib" with having a "certain something."

[38] "Und mein Vater war eigentlich nicht mein Vater, ich bin nur mit zugeheiratet worden von ihm. Meine Mutter hatte ein Leben, aber war trotzdem solide, denn sie ist nicht dumm. Und wollte mich erst nicht und hat geklagt wegen Alimente, was alle in Frage kommenden Väter mir persönlich übelnahmen. Und Prozess glatt verloren. Dabei muss es doch einer gewesen sein" (DkM 92).

[39] Wenn eine junge Frau mit Geld einen alten Mann heiratet wegen Geld und nichts sonst und schläft mit ihm stundenlang und guckt fromm, dann ist sie eine deutsche Mutter von Kindern und eine anständige Frau. Wenn eine junge Frau ohne Geld mit einem schläft ohne Geld, weil er glatte Haut hat und ihr gefällt, dann ist sie eine Hure und ein Schwein.

Liebe Mutter, du hast ein schönes Gesicht gehabt, du hast Augen, die gucken, wie sie Lust haben, du bist arm gewesen, wie ich arm bin, du hast mit Männern geschlafen, weil du sie mochtest, oder weil du Geld brauchtest—das tue ich auch. Wenn man mich schimpft, schimpft man dich . . . ich hasse alle, ich hasse alle—schlag doch die Welt tot, Mutter, schlag doch die Welt tot. (DkM 85–6)

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