Between Identity and Commodity:

Female Urban Experience in Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*

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Abstract

This paper explores the urban experience of German women in the late Weimar Republic as portrayed in the character Flämmchen in Vicki Baum's 1929 novel *Menschen im Hotel*. During the Weimar Republic from 1918 to 1933, Germany's large cities appeared to offer women financial and professional independence outside traditional gender roles. To examine how Baum portrays women's pursuit of success and autonomy in the city, this paper analyzes the text according to feminist theory. Flämmchen faces sexual discrimination that limits her ability to live and define herself independently, and she struggles with the sexualized, objectifying image of women present in modern urban society, which represents the female body as a commodity. While *Menschen in Hotel* breaks from tradition by challenging bourgeois social values, Flämmchen fails to completely break free from traditional definitions of women's roles, reflecting women's disillusionment with the difficult pursuit of emancipation.
Introduction

During the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1933, Vicki Baum was one of the bestselling novelists in the German-speaking world and one of the highest-paid female writers in Germany. The Austrian-born author spent the politically turbulent and culturally vibrant years of the Republic in Berlin, the city that epitomized modernity. Her novel Menschen im Hotel, or "people in a hotel," which first appeared in the Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung from April to June 1929, portrays six main characters who form a cross-section of German society in that time and place. As they encounter one another in Berlin's most luxurious hotel over the course of six days, the protagonists experience turning points in their personal destinies in response to the modern, urban landscape.

Despite its timeliness and cultural relevance, Menschen im Hotel and other novels by Baum have been dismissed as trivial literature, because they were written to entertain readers and achieved commercial success, rather than conforming to the expectations of the literary elite. In recent decades, scholars have taken a new look at Baum's body of work, seeking to recognize female authors' contributions and avoid stereotyping works outside the literary canon as devoid of historical or cultural value. Recent scholarship has demonstrated the complexity and intelligence of Baum's novels, especially apparent in her use of irony, and her insightful portrayal of German society, although her tendency to oversimplify or ignore political themes has been the subject of criticism.

While scholarly discussions of Baum's works have touched on her female characters, a detailed textual analysis of Menschen im Hotel with a feminist theoretical basis has not yet been written. Feminist analysis has primarily focused on Baum's earlier novel stud. chem. Helene Willfüer for its portrayal of a single, working mother who achieves a successful career in
chemistry (von Ankum, "Motherhood"). Lynda King's body of work on Baum briefly discusses what Flämmchen's character communicates about women and gender roles but remains primarily focused on demonstrating the relevance of the author's writing and analyzing extra-textual factors, such as the literary market, Baum's relationship with Ullstein, and the author's own views of her works. Similarly, Nicole Nottelmann includes a brief discussion of the ambivalent role of Baum's female characters in Menschen im Hotel (Strategien 155-57) while devoting the bulk of her work to a narratological analysis. Heather Valencia directly addresses the question of whether Baum is a political author without specifically discussing her political message, or lack thereof, on women's rights. This paper will attempt to address the gap with a primarily intra-textual analysis of Flämmchen's character.

The young stenographer Flämmchen, one of two female protagonists in Menschen im Hotel, provides a revealing focus for such a study. Based upon the liberated New Woman of the 1920s, Flämmchen's character reflects the reality of many young women's experiences as white-collar workers in Weimar Germany. She is unable to achieve prosperity or independence as a professional due to an uncertain economy and patriarchal views of women, which endure despite new opportunities for female workers. Like the protagonists of other works by female authors at the time, Baum's Flämmchen resorts to marketing her beauty. Earning money through the sale of her body rather than her skills, she negotiates within a consumer economy, in which advertising promotes the objectification of women. Faced with the choice between continued hardship or financial and emotional security, she chooses to give up her opportunity for independence and retreat into a traditional female role. This decision shows the disillusionment many women experienced when their pursuit of new, emancipated roles brought only hardship and led them to reconsider traditional roles for the security they offered.
Many elements of the novel embrace modernity and challenge traditional values, but Flämmchen's character represents a retreat into a female identity based on the values of Wilhelmine Germany. Baum's frank portrayal of sexuality, including women's desires, depicts a sexually liberated society and breaks away from the moral code of the previous century. Through the character of the industrialist Preysing, she satirizes these bourgeois mores, painting the upper middle class as hypocritical and weak. The Baron von Gaigern and the bookkeeper Otto Kringelein, who seeks to emulate him, provide an alternative model of masculinity based upon courage and decisive action, which challenges not only bourgeois morality but also the prevailing social order. While male characters achieve empowerment through an embrace of modern forces, Flämmchen finds personal happiness by allowing men to dictate her identity and adopting a mothering role based on her biological destiny as a child-bearer, making her the least progressive figure among a cast of modern characters.

**Vicki Baum's Career in Historical and Social Context**

Dramatic economic, political, and social changes under the Weimar Republic resulted in equally dramatic changes in German women's lives. The First World War resulted in the downfall of the monarchy that had ruled Wilhelmine Germany and made possible the establishment of Germany's first democracy. This breakdown of the old political system also opened the door for challenges to social order of the Wilhelmine era. Many women who had worked in munitions factories during the war wanted to remain in the workforce after disarmament, and women joined the white-collar workforce in growing numbers (Weitz 21, 157-58). Having gained the right to vote for the first time in the nation's history under the progressive constitution of the new republic, women also became increasingly active in the various parties that formed the fractured landscape of Weimar politics (88, 126-27). With economic and
political change came the exploration of new lifestyles and gender roles, symbolized in the figure of the New Woman, the independent and sexually liberated female of the 1920s.

However, the reality of women's lives often made it difficult or impossible for them to achieve the emancipation they perceived to be possible. The turbulent economic conditions that characterized the Weimar Republic had a disproportionate effect on women who, even during prosperous times, were paid only two-thirds as much as men and were often the first to be laid off during a recession (Weitz 157, 352). Their new role in the public sphere was by no means universally accepted, and women who abandoned the traditional values of *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche*\(^1\) faced hostile responses from conservatives who feared the breakdown of Germany's morality and social order. Balancing career and family remained a serious challenge for most women, who were responsible for domestic chores and childcare in addition to their new work in the factory or office (Weitz 153-54). At the same time, what women should be permitted to do with their sexuality was a charged topic and the subject of heated debate between those who promoted traditional moral codes and those who supported revolutionized and emancipated sexuality (298-99).

In this climate, Vicki Baum achieved great commercial success as a novelist in the German-speaking world and internationally. Detailed accounts of Baum's life are available in the author's own autobiography *It Was All Quite Different*, published in German as *Es war alles ganz anders*, and a recent biography by Nottelmann, *Die Karrieren der Vicki Baum*. Born in Austria to a prosperous Jewish family, Baum pursued a career as a concert harpist before becoming an author. She moved to Germany in 1912 and remained there until she, her second husband, and their two sons emigrated in 1932 due to the increasing threat of National Socialism.

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\(^1\) This slogan, which translates as "children, kitchen, church," came into use in feminist discourse around 1900 to describe women's traditional roles in German society (Paletschek).
The family settled in California, which she had visited a few months prior to consult on the set of *Grand Hotel*, the American film adaption of *Menschen im Hotel* starring Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and Lionel and John Barrymore. By the time Baum emigrated to Hollywood, where she remained until her death in 1960, she was already a bestseller in Germany and abroad. Her 1928 novel *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* was a major national success, but it was *Menschen im Hotel* and its subsequent adaptation into a Hollywood film that secured her international reputation and became the work for which she was known the rest of her life (King, *Bestsellers* 12, 154-55).

During her time in Berlin, Baum achieved a level of personal and professional success that eluded many women. She had a steady day-job as a contributing editor in the magazine department and a lucrative career as a novelist with the major publishing house Ullstein Verlag, which serialized her novels in the *Vossische Zeitung* and *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* and subsequently issued them in bound form. Baum did not have to sacrifice family for her professional success; she enjoyed a lasting marriage to orchestra conductor Richard Lert and was able to spend plenty of time with their sons (*Quite Different*, 263, 282-83). However, the ways in which her own life surmounted many of the barriers women faced is not necessarily reflected in her novels' portrayal of women's experiences, which will be discussed in detail in this paper.

Baum's work for Ullstein led to her novels being categorized as trivial literature (*Trivialliteratur*) rather than as works of high literary value. King has documented how Baum's novels, despite her efforts to maintain their quality, came to be excluded from the literary canon and labeled instead as *Kitsch* or *Trivialliteratur* (*Bestsellers*, "Image of Fame"). Baum began her writing career seeking critical recognition as the author of literary books, but signed exclusively with Ullstein in 1926 because writing commercial works for a major publishing house would
provide a better income for her family (King, *Bestsellers* 79, 136). She professed the goal of maintaining high critical standards in her commercial works, calling herself "a first-rate writer of the second order" (Valencia 231-32). However, Ullstein products were generally rejected by Germany's literary elite, not least because it was believed that marketability was mutually exclusive with artistic value (King, "Image of Fame" 383). Because Baum wrote commercially successful novels that did not conform to romantic-classical standards of what constitutes a work of art, her works were dismissed as entertainment rather than literature (385). King makes the additional point that Baum, as a woman, posed a double threat to the literary elite, because she challenged both its definition of aesthetic value and its exclusive male membership (386). A negative view of Baum's works persisted after the Second World War in studies by authors such as Dorothee Bayer, who labeled Baum's novel *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* as *Trivialliteratur* for its lack of literary quality and its potentially harmful effect on naive readers (376-77).

In recent decades, scholars have reevaluated Baum according to new standards, defending the value of serious academic study of her works. Since the 1970s, feminism has prompted a reevaluation of women's contributions to literature in general, and new approaches to literary analysis have challenged traditional methods for defining the value of a written work. Reception theory, which King proposes as an effective methodology for studying Baum's works, suggests that the individual reader's response to a book within his or her frame of reference is a more effective means of evaluating a text than comparing it to an autonomous aesthetic standard ("Image of Fame" 377). King cites positive critical response Baum received in her own time as evidence that her works cannot be dismissed as *Kitsch*. Despite the literary elite's criticism, other reviewers responded favorably to her realistic portrayal of timely social themes (381-82). In the 1970s, Jost Hermand and F. Trommler proposed a new category of "urbane" literature to classify
works by authors such as Vicki Baum, Erich Maria Remarque, Erich Kästner, Lion Feuchtwanger, and others, which occupy a position between high literature and Trivialliteratur (163). Such works represent authors' efforts to adapt to the commercialization of the literary market that occurred during the early twentieth century by producing commercially viable books that combine "entertainment, literary value, and progressive ideals" (King, Bestsellers 146-47).

While Baum's works include elements associated with Trivialliteratur, they also incorporate aspects of influential literary movements of the Weimar era. King links Baum's novels to Neue Sachlichkeit, New Objectivity, to which other authors in the urbane category also belong (Bestsellers). The designation New Objectivity applied to authors and artists who rejected the emotional and subjective aesthetic values of Expressionism and attempted instead to produce works that were rational and objective, "art built on sober, illusionless recognition of reality as it is here and now" (149). King argues that Baum's desire for authenticity and relevance to contemporary topics align her with the aesthetic of New Objectivity, and that the author's perception of her own work as craftsmanship rather than art relates to the New Objectivists' desire to rationalize literature into a utilitarian art form (151).

The novel's portrayal of modern Berlin is one way in which it is culturally and historically relevant. Menschen im Hotel incorporates many elements of the popular New Objectivist Großstadtroman or big city novel (Nottelmann, Strategien 172-75). Authors in the urbane category as well as many literary authors, such as Irmgard Keun and Alfred Döblin, wrote in this genre. Menschen im Hotel portrays a host of recognizable sights and landmarks of modern Berlin, which frequently appear in other novels and films of the era. Images such as the rotating hotel door, the Berliner Funkturm, and the Schupo2 directing traffic also occur in

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2 short for Schutzpolizei, a nickname for the uniformed police officers who were frequently to be seen directing traffic in metropolitan Berlin
Walther Ruttman's 1927 film *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt*. The narrative's constant awareness of modern modes of transportation, including speeding cars, airplanes and hectic pedestrian traffic is also a common theme in Ruttman's film and Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, which appeared in the same year as *Menschen im Hotel*. Details such as Baum's description of the way artificial light reflects on the pavement create imagery that her novel shares with Döblin and Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*.

One recent major study of Baum's work focuses on her effective manipulation of formulas from *Trivialliteratur* to craft successful novels. Nottelmann's *Strategien des Erfolgs* is a detailed narratological analysis of many of Baum's novels, including *Menschen im Hotel*, which analyzes the author's strategies for writing a story that appeals to readers, but also contains complex levels of author-reader communication. *Menschen im Hotel* incorporates genre formulas such as the romance, the melodrama, and the crime novel, but executes ironic variations of each (167-89). Nottelmann also identifies each main character of *Menschen im Hotel* as a contemporary stereotype that is modified by the author in an ironic fashion, a strategy that serves to humanize them, allowing reader identification, but also satirizes them, especially because the characters often believe themselves to be the types that they clearly are not (157-60). Baum's use of irony, one of the most complex ways she communicates with her audience, has often been overlooked by readers, contemporary critics, and even present-day scholars of her works (141-43). This irony, through which Baum establishes critical distance between her readers and her characters, is another characteristic that makes her novels more than simplistic works of *Trivialliteratur* (King, "Image of Fame" 388-89).

While Baum's novels address timely themes and portray social conditions, they stop short of taking a stance on contemporary politics. Baum's tendency to take an ambivalent tone over a
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political or moral stance, beyond reflecting her personal anti-political views, also reflects her desire to write realistic, impartial works (King, *Bestsellers*, 197, 199). Valencia defends Baum's skill as an author and the range of themes she deals with insightfully, arguing that she deserves scholarly attention (249). She shows, however, that Baum "treats complex moral and social issues of her time, but tends not to develop their implications fully, sometimes using an avoidance strategy" (246). In her textual analysis of *Menschen im Hotel*, she points out how Baum renders ridiculous the political implications of the clerk Kringelein's tirade against Preysing, his employer (245-46), echoing King's analysis of the same passage (*Bestsellers* 199). Baum similarly avoids taking a stance on women's rights, forgoing the opportunity to make a statement on class and gender in her portrayal of Preysing's exploitation of Flämmchen (King, *Bestsellers* 193).

**Flämmchen as Sexually Liberated/Sexualized New Woman**

Flämmchen's character is clearly based upon the type of the New Woman. Baum's description of her upon her first appearance in the novel matches in every detail the image of the young, energetic, modern woman who seems to thrive in the urban landscape. Flämmchen moves through the city on her own, arriving unaccompanied at the hotel for a job as a stenographer. This is the white-collar profession through which she supports herself, although her real dream is to become a film actress. She has the slender, athletic build, the bobbed *Bubikopf* hairstyle, the fashionable Flapper clothes, and the smoking habit, all of which characterized the sexually liberated, economically independent New Woman as society imagined her during the Weimar Republic (Weitz 305-7).³ The social life Flämmchen enjoys is full of dancing, flirting and romances that begin and end as easily as one lights and extinguishes a cigarette (Baum,

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³ For further discussion of the New Woman as a cultural construct, see Carstens-Wickham; the scholarly works of Atina Grossmann provide a detailed analysis.
Flämmchen's free attitude toward sex is discussed matter-of-factly in the novel, without the narrator condemning her choices or otherwise analyzing them in moral terms. Baum breaks from Wilhelmine authors such as Clara Viebig and M.I. Breme, who portray young women's urban experience as a confrontation with morally corrupting forces, in which a descent into prostitution is the punishment for giving into the seductive allure of an independent life in the city (von Ankum, "Urban Spaces" 163). Flämmchen's active desire for partners she chooses for her own pleasure is acknowledged in the text and not condemned. When Flämmchen first meets the Baron von Gaigern, her attraction to him is apparent, and she does not hesitate to accept his invitation to go dancing in anticipation of establishing a new romantic relationship. When she learns during their rendezvous that he has fallen in love with another woman, the prima ballerina Elisaweta Grusinskaja, the narrator is sympathetic with her disappointment. Female sexual desire is addressed even more directly in the relationship between young, vital Gaigern and the much older Grusinskaja. Throughout her life, the dancer has inspired passion in her lovers without experiencing it herself, putting on an act in her affairs the same way she does on stage. With Gaigern, however, she finds emotional and sexual satisfaction she has never before experienced, which is openly discussed in a love scene that was explicit for the time. Flämmchen's choices later in the story weaken the novel's affirmation of female sexuality, but the open acknowledgement and discussion of women's desires remain a progressive aspect of the novel.

While Flämmchen's comfort with her own sexual desires is one way she embodies the New Woman, the novel's portrayal of her also captures the erotic element this figure held in the eyes of men. The New Woman was sexually provoking to male observers, including those who regarded liberated women as positive and attractive and those who responded with anxiety to
women operating outside traditional gender roles (Weitz 308-11). The reader's first glimpse of Flämmchen through the eyes of her male employer (Baum, Menschen 80-82), someone who is not at ease with the New Woman, conveys his inability to look at her as anything other than erotic. General Director Preysing, a heretofore successful industrialist, has come to Berlin to secure a business deal that will save his foundering textile manufacturing company and hires Flämmchen to type documents that are crucial for the merger. When Flämmchen arrives at the hotel, the head reception clerk mistakes her for a prostitute, assuming that Preysing has hired her for a sexual encounter. The general director must explain, to his intense embarrassment, that the sexy, fashionable young woman with bright lipstick waiting for him in the lobby is in fact his stenographer. Despite the general director's insistence that he has hired her in a professional capacity, he is immediately aware of her physical attractiveness and is unable to concentrate while he dictates to her because he is so distracted by her sexual appeal. Preysing and the clerk are unable to view and respond to Flämmchen professionally rather than sexually.

Prevailing patriarchal attitudes are a career barrier for Flämmchen, as they were for many women trying to succeed professionally during the Weimar Republic. The men in Flämmchen's professional sphere are unable to accept women in their new capacity as fellow workers or employees and look upon them instead as sexual objects. Sexual objectification of the Angestellte, the female office worker, and the resulting sexual harassment of female employees is a frequent topic in the novels of the era by women authors, such as Das kunstseidene Mädchen, in which the protagonist Doris gives up her office job because her boss sexually harasses her. This attitude toward publicly visible women in the Weimar era was a historical reality with consequences for working women. Von Ankum explains that, "The unmarried working woman or the woman who appeared alone in public was immediately labeled with a

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4 Additional examples include the novels of Christa Anita Brück and Paula Schlier.
reputation for being sexually available" ("Urban Spaces" 166). As von Ankum discusses in context of Keun's novel, the problem stemmed from society's traditional dualistic categorization of women as either wives/mothers or whores. Because of her failure to conform to the former, male onlookers instantly place independent and attractive Flämmchen in the latter category.

Flämmchen's experiences suggest that sexuality and professional success are mutually exclusive for women. Readers learn later in the novel that Flämmchen has been without a permanent position for over a year, not merely due to an uncertain economy, but because she is beautiful, and firms are unwilling to hire women who are too attractive (Baum, Menschen 293). Flämmchen's beauty and sexuality are a liability in the office, where they have the potential to distract men and decrease productivity. In contrast, Flämmchen's older stepsister, referred to more formally as Fräulein Flamm, enjoys a secure position as the secretary at the firm of Preysing's lawyer. A description of Fräulein Flamm, once again from Preysing's perspective, emphasizes the difference: "ein farbloses Wesen: Flamm eins, mit dem Stenogrammblock in der Hand, ältlich und ausgelöscht, dünnem, weißem Mottenflaum auf den Wangen, verschwiegen, pflichtgetreu und in keiner Weise mit Flamm zwo zu verwechseln" (Baum, Menschen 167). The non-sexual spinster Fräulein Flamm is the opposite of young, colorful Flämmchen, who talks about her goals while typing for Preysing and whose obvious sexuality is counterproductive to his work. Instead of the disruptive force represented by Flämmchen, Fräulein Flamm is "eine Meisterin in der Kunst der Privatsekretärinnen, nicht vorhanden zu sein" (169). This contrast links female sexuality to the disruption of men's goals, with implications not only in the office but also in society as a whole, where the sexually liberated New Woman was seen by many as a

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5 "...a colorless individual, Flamm the First. She held her shorthand block in her hand. In appearance she was elderly and faded, with a thin white mothlike dust on her cheeks. She was silent and businesslike and by no means easily to be mistaken for Flamm the Second" (Creighton 160).

6 "Flamm the First, a model of a private secretary, strove to efface herself..." (Creighton 161-62); or more literally, "Flamm the First, a master in the private secretary's art of being nonexistent..." (my translation).
threat to male authority and identity.

While Flämmchen's beauty hinders her ability to make a living with her professional skills, it presents an opportunity to market her body. Unable to earn a sufficient income as a stenographer, Flämmchen often works as a mistress for the men who hire her as a typist and poses nude for photos used in advertising. Like Keun's Doris, Flämmchen faces a choice between miserably paid office work, during which she is already subject to sexual advances by her employer, or earning a sufficient income by accepting money in exchange for affairs with men. Both young women choose the latter, placing themselves more completely in the role of the sex object to improve their precarious financial positions. In this way, they work within a market defined by patriarchal attitudes, taking advantage of men's fantasies of the sexualized female office worker as one of the few viable financial opportunities available. The marketability of the female body is also apparent in the novel's other major female character, Grusinskaja, although in the context of the arts rather than the office. The Russian diva has achieved wealth and fame through her art, dancing, but this stellar professional success relies entirely on her physical body and her ability to maintain her beauty and athleticism according to the requirements of ballet.

As Keun does for Doris, Baum portrays Flämmchen's pursuit of male patrons who will pay her for sex as part of her efforts to survive in the city, rather than as a moral downfall. Flämmchen's work posing nude and her paid sexual relationships are defined in terms of work (Smith 457). This is especially apparent in the way Flämmchen and Kringelein connect and understand one another at the end of the novel. Kringelein, who embodies Weimar Germany's petty bourgeoisie, has endured a miserable existence working as a bookkeeper in Preysing's factory. Not until he was diagnosed with a terminal illness did he find the courage to break out of his provincial existence. Having withdrawn his savings and life insurance, he has come to Berlin
in pursuit of the "real life" he feels he has never yet experienced. When he asks Flämmchen why she would agree to an affair with the exploitive Preysing, her response is, "Wegen Geld natürlich" (Baum, *Menschen* 293). Far from passing moral judgment on this declaration, Kringelein understands it instantly, placing Flämmchen's work in the same category as his own years of demeaning toil for Preysing in order to make ends meet. Prostitution and dehumanizing white-collar work are made synonymous here, again acknowledging that the line between these two often blurred for working women. At the same time, this comparison justifies Flämmchen's choices by relating them to Kringelein's years as a clerk, which society regards as honest work.

It is not Flämmchen's moral character but Preysing's which is called into question. Preysing represents the quintessential bourgeois German man, a successful business owner of Germany's upper middle class who conforms to society's moral expectations. This is who he believes himself to be and whom others believe him to be, but Baum counters his conformity to this type with his inappropriate attraction to Flämmchen and eventual offer to employ her as a mistress. During their first encounter, he is scandalized by Flämmchen's casual declaration that she photographs well and looks good in the nude, but his inappropriate attraction to her reveals the hypocrisy of his insistence that he is a respectable man. The irony is sharpened by the phone call he has made to his wife shortly before his encounter with Flämmchen and the way the young stenographer constantly reminds him of his teenage daughters. The awkwardness with which he experiences and expresses his attraction to Flämmchen disrupt his image as an imposing, influential businessman and turn him, rather than the woman for hire, into a pitiable figure. His scandalous actions contradict his self-image and good reputation, which sheds an ironic light not only on his character, but on the moral code of the social class he represents.

Baum's frank portrayal of sexuality, especially Flämmchen's, pushed the boundaries of

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"For money, of course" (Creighton 283).
what was socially acceptable at the time. This is apparent in the way sexual content from the novel was toned down or removed in various stage and film adaptations of *Menschen im Hotel*, in which Flämmchen frequently appears partially dressed or fully clothed instead of completely nude as in the novel. Elements of the story are often changed to portray her pursuit of paid affairs in a more socially acceptable light, placing her in an even more disempowered position than she has in the novel or completely victimizing her (King, "Sexual Politics"). Such changes show that not only the nudity and sexual content, but especially Flämmchen's free attitude toward sexual relationships was controversial. In the Berlin stage adaptation from 1930, which Baum herself wrote, Flämmchen remains "an unsentimental and ambitious New Woman," but it is made clear that neither her relationship with Preysing nor Kringelein is consummated (188-9).

The 1932 Hollywood adaptation of *Menschen im Hotel* contains numerous examples of how Flämmchen's controversial sexuality was mitigated. The sexual content was toned down even more than in the stage version, suggesting the more conservative nature of American film audiences in contrast to theatergoers in Berlin. Unlike in the novel, Flämmchen is fully clothed while alone with Preysing in his room, and she does not strip at any point in the film, later fleeing to Kringelein's room in a robe instead of completely nude. Scenes present in the film that were not in the original novel place Flämmchen in the position of damsel in distress, instead of that of a young woman trying to survive, who makes an informed choice to enter a bargain with Preysing. By the time Flämmchen and Preysing make their deal in the novel, Gaigern has already fallen in love with Grusinskaja and disappears momentarily from center-stage. Busy raising money to join the ballerina in Vienna, he is unaware of what is going on between Flämmchen and Preysing. In the film, however, the Baron appears while Preysing is making his offer to Flämmchen and again when she is about to move into the room the general director has rented
for her. Both times, Flämmchen looks to Gaigern, the object of her affections, as if for rescue, and he responds indifferently to her plight, preoccupied with his plans to rendezvous with the ballerina Grusinskaja. Because of this interaction between the characters, Flämmchen's deal with Preysing takes on the appearance of a plea for Gaigern's attention, in which she is waiting for the heroic male character to save her from disgrace.

**Woman as a Commodity**

Whether Flämmchen's paid affairs as portrayed in the novel liberate or subjugate her is a matter of debate among scholars of Baum's work. According to Smith, Flämmchen is a "self-conscious commodity" who achieves "autonomy within prostitution" (457, 458). In Smith's reading of the novel, Flämmchen is a liberated sex-worker who is aware of the necessary sacrifices her work requires, such as the suppression of her own sexual desires, and accepts them in order to pursue the best financial opportunities. While the text supports the argument that Flämmchen chooses to assume the role of a commodity and cleverly negotiates the market in which her body is a marketable good, to assume this places her in an emancipated position fails to acknowledge other key elements of the text. Her choice to sell herself to men is influenced by economic and social barriers, such as the tight job market and patriarchal attitudes, which prevent her from pursuing preferred opportunities. She agrees to become Preysing's mistress, she asserts, strictly because of money, and would not consider it for any other reason (Baum, *Menschen* 294). It must also be noted that her status as a white-collar worker from the *Kleinbürger tum* places her, as it does Kringelein, in a disempowered position in relation to Preysing, the wealthy employer from the high middle class.

The impact of Flämmchen's work on her self-image and sense of self-worth must also be considered in order to evaluate her autonomy. Von Ankum's analysis of this theme in Keun's novel, which examines the implications of Doris's work as a mistress, suggests there can be no
such thing as a self-conscious commodity. Quoting feminist theorist Luce Irigaray, von Ankum writes, "Commodities, women, are a mirror of value of and for man" ("Urban Spaces" 163). Von Ankum argues that a woman's *Begehrwert* or desire value is based upon the image of what a man wants, requiring her to adopt the man's image of her. Applied to Flämmchen, this means her dependence upon men's desires for income requires that she adapt herself to those desires, which prevents her from developing her own self-image or becoming fully "self-conscious." King takes this view, arguing that Flämmchen is "one of the many women in 1920s literature who on the surface represented emancipation, but actually were still portrayed as objects to be used by men or as ready willingly to submit to male domination in traditional relationships" (*Bestsellers* 193).

Flämmchen's sexual relationship with Preysing undoubtedly places her in the position not just of a sex object, but of a commodity. After the industrialist lies during a pivotal business meeting to secure a deal that will save his company, the violation of his principles and the ensuing intoxication of success removes his moral inhibitions, prompting in him the desire to partake of more forbidden fruits during his time in the city. This manifests itself as an acquisitive desire for Flämmchen when he stumbles across her nude photo in a magazine. In exchange for a new dress, one thousand marks, and the opportunity to travel, she agrees to accompany him as his mistress on a business trip to England (Baum, *Menschen* 228-30). Flämmchen allows herself to be purchased, reflecting that Preysing's offer will provide her with the capital she needs to start her career in films or on stage.

Once Flämmchen abandons her deal with Preysing, she seems poised to assert her independence, at least on an economic level. When the general director murders Gaigern, making the trip to England impossible, Flämmchen flees the scene and seeks refuge with Kringelein. She describes to the bookkeeper her unhappy home life, her lack of success in film, and the poor
prospects in office work, a narration of her entire experience in the city that culminates in the declaration, "Ich komme durch...Ich brauche den Generaldirektor nicht, ich komme schon durch" (Baum, Menschen 295). Flämmchen expresses her determination to continue forward in spite of the obstacles she has faced and find a way out of her poverty and dissatisfaction without relying on the money she would have received from Preysing.

Kringelein's offer of financial support undermines this opportunity for autonomy. Immediately after her moment of assertiveness and determination, he invites her to accompany him to Paris on the three thousand four hundred marks he has won gambling, an offer that surpasses Preysing's. Flämmchen's acceptance of Kringelein's invitation places her in a position of financial dependence on a male patron once again. At the conclusion of the novel, she and Kringelein leave the hotel together to enjoy what time he has left, an open ending that leaves some room for interpretation of Flämmchen's future. Anything seems possible, even that Kringelein could recover from his illness, which Flämmchen hopes will be the case (Baum, Menschen 312). Readers are left to imagine that Kringelein's life as well as his luck at gambling may continue, extending his idyllic time with Flämmchen indefinitely. On the other hand, his death may be inevitable, in which case Flämmchen must eventually seek another male patron and continue the pattern she has established during the novel. Or perhaps Kringelein may leave her his remaining money upon his death, thus providing her with the capital she needs to begin her dream career in film. Regardless of the outcome, dependence on a man's money remains Flämmchen's only path to accomplishing her goals. She may have to continue negotiating within the same system, finding another Preysing or Kringelein, or she will achieve her dreams thanks to a man's support in the form of Kringelein's money, which he provides in response to her

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8 "I shall get through...I can do without the general director. I shall get through all right" (Creighton 285).
physical beauty, rather than her abilities or inner qualities, as will be discussed in detail in the next section of the paper.

Despite Flämmchen's conviction that she is not selling herself to Kringelein, it is impossible to entirely remove their relationship from the context of economic exchange. Flämmchen's reflections on their relationship emphasize that what they offer one another is not bought or sold, describing their time together as, "Jener einzige und zarte Augenblick, da sie sich nicht verkauft, sondern verschenkt" (Baum, Menschen 311). However, money has made the relationship possible, just as it has made possible Kringelein's entire journey to the city and the self-discovery he has achieved through it. Without the bookkeeper's offer of money and a trip to Paris, it is unclear whether Flämmchen would choose to remain with him. In choosing to remain with Kringelein, Flämmchen is choosing financial security over the insecurity of pursuing financial independence.

Commodity Character and Self-Image

Flämmchen's work posing for advertisements emphasizes her role as a marketable good and suggests the influence of modern technology and advertising upon the commoditization of women. When Preysing sees her nude portrait, he indulges in a fantasy image of her created by the medium of photography and the advertising industry. The advertisement provokes the exact response its authors intend; the fantasy that the photo creates attracts Preysing and prompts in him the desire to experience it in reality, to live out the fantasy image with the real Flämmchen (Baum, Menschen 217). The narrative never reveals what product is being advertised, erasing the distinction between the woman in the picture and the object being sold. For Preysing, the product is irrelevant; it is the woman who is marketed to him through the ad, along with the self-image

9 "It was that first sweet moment of tenderness when she did not sell but feely gave" (Creighton 301), or more literally, "each unique and tender instant, in which she did not sell herself, rather gave herself" (my translation).
he could achieve by possessing her. The image of the woman in the ad becomes the basis for his actions toward the real Flämmchen and alters the context in which they interact. Preysing no longer seeks to pay Flämmchen for her services as a typist; instead he now wishes to use his purchasing power to obtain her as his mistress, which he believes will allow him to live out the fantasy in the photo.

Flämmchen both participates in and resists the way the photo objectifies her, working within the market it represents to achieve her goals. She was willing to pose for the ad in exchange for money, but she recognizes the difference between the fantasy woman in the image and herself. When Preysing sees her nude in person and remarks on how different she is in reality from the advertisement, Flämmchen is unsurprised and explains the role retouching played in creating the finished photo. She does not internalize this image or adopt it as her self-image, but navigates the market dominated by such images in pursuit of economic gain. Ways in which she does not conform to the market's preferred image of beauty are cause for regret because of the obstacle they pose achieving her goals. For example, she cannot pursue a career in modeling because her measurements are not small enough. However, she is aware of the marketability of her beauty for advertising or affairs with men such as Preysing and makes use of her body to pursue those opportunities.

Flämmchen's sale of her body is work that she does, rather than who she is. She refuses to conform to Preysing's fantasy of her, derived from the photo, in her daily life. She will not consent to his request that she wear nothing but her stockings, a sight he finds appealing, nor will she agree to use informal speech to address him, insisting that she continue to use the polite second person pronoun *Sie* rather than the familiar *du*. In her internal monologue, Flämmchen
asserts, "ich bin, wie ich bin" (Baum, Menschen 275), affirming her own identity over the woman Preysing imagines her to be. She argues further, "ich bleib' doch, wie ich bin," despite accepting money from him, because having an affair with him and even being kind to him takes nothing away from who she is (294).

However, Flämmchen's refusal to conform to male fantasies created by the market does not guarantee her an independent identity, because she still bases her self-worth on her market value. Later in the novel, it becomes clear through her relationship with Kringelein that a poor self-esteem has remained hidden beneath Flämmchen's confident exterior. Despite her ability to separate herself from the market's ideal of beauty, she has not broken free of the market's ability to define her self-worth. Her own sense of value is tied to how much money she receives for her services, whether as a typist, a mistress, or a model posing nude for a photo. „Sie kannte ihren Preis,” she reflects, and the result of the meager price her services garner is that she has no great opinion of herself (Baum, Menschen 297).

Kringelein has an entirely different view of Flämmchen than Preysing's fantasy of her, one that nevertheless objectifies her. When Flämmchen flees to Kringelein's room after Gaigern's murder, he sees in her a genuine and transcendent beauty unlike the artificial image of beauty in Flämmchen's photo. This "vollkommenes Schöne," perfect beauty, causes him to experience an intense sense of wonder (Baum, Menschen 297, my translation), which he associates with the few, fleeting moments of true happiness he has known and especially with his desire to truly experience life. Flämmchen is no longer the prostitute figure who must conform to or manipulate a sexualized image of beauty in order to please male patrons. In Kringelein's eyes she is transformed into someone whose naked body represents an abstract ideal of beauty that proves

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10 "I am as I am" (Creighton 266).
11 "I remain just as I was before" (284).
12 "She knew her price" (287).
the existence of real wonders in life. She is removed from sexual objectification and placed upon a pedestal where her individuality disappears within the ideal a man sees in her.

Flämmchen's character development culminates in her adoption of Kringelein's ideal as her self-image. When Kringelein describes her beauty to her, she sees herself truly for the first time "wie einen vergrabenen Schatz" (Baum, Menschen 297). She has actively resisted Preysing's demeaning view of her and now embraces Kringelein's "wonder" as the truth of who and what she is. This is the end result of Flämmchen's experiences in the hotel, the moment in which she learns the lesson the novel has set out for her: a revelation of her own beauty and worth. Flämmchen allows a male character to tell her who she is and what she is worth, rather than achieving this realization on her own, and the self-image she adopts based on his praises is one that idealizes and abstracts her instead of recognizing her individuality.

**Masculine Empowerment through the City Experience**

While Flämmchen's experiences lead her into the role of a commodity, the male characters' experiences in the city turn them into consumers. When Preysing sees the advertisement featuring Flämmchen's photo, it excites his desire to purchase and consume, which is a major turning point for his character. It is through his purchase of Flämmchen that he tries to achieve the sense of empowerment and masculine vitality he craves, although he does not succeed, facing instead the destruction of his career and his marriage due to his indiscretions in the city. Changes in Kringelein's character also hinge on his ability to exercise purchasing power for the first time in his life, thanks to the savings, life insurance, and gambling money he uses to fund his luxurious days at the hotel. Kringelein's spending spree through Berlin is rewarded with self-discovery and a sense of personal empowerment that culminates in his ability to financially support Flämmchen, who accepts a position of financial dependence on him.

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13 "like a hidden treasure" (Creighton 287).
It is not just spending but the decisive, active way of living it represents that divides the characters' experiences in Berlin along gender lines. Preysing craves the sense of masculine vitality he gets from the intoxicating, forbidden experiences the city offers, which is apparent during his sexual encounter with Flämmchen (Baum, Menschen 276-77). His desire to consume represents the desire to reach out and grasp life, to take what he wants and enjoy the sense of excitement such action produces. The Baron von Gaigern is Preysing's opposite, already possessed of the vitality and personal power the general director wishes he could achieve. Gaigern drives a fast car, engages in frequent romances with women in the city, and makes his living as a high-end hotel thief, which for him is an exciting and risky adventure. When he finds himself in financial straits, he refuses to become Grusinskaja's gigolo and resolves instead to take what he needs. Rather than allowing himself to be dependent on her, he chooses an active solution in which he can be the master of his own success or failure. Whereas the novel portrays it as acceptable for Kringelein to financially support Flämmchen, the same action on Gaigern's part would emasculate him.

Through his friendship with Gaigern, Kringelein also achieves a sense of energy and empowerment. During their tour through modern Berlin, the Baron escorts Kringelein to a fashionable tailor and convinces the bookkeeper to spend an exorbitant amount of money on a new suit. Staring at himself in the mirror, transformed by the new clothing from a poor, disheveled Angestellter into an elegant modern gentleman, "spürte er zum erstenmal wie eine Ahnung, daß er lebte. Ja, er spürte sich, er erkannte sich selber, mit einer heftigen Erschütterung wie unter einem Blitz" (Baum, Menschen 191). Spending power brings him to this moment, in which the purchase of a new suit and the physical transformation it makes possible reveal his

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14 "...he had the first inkling that he lived. He recognized himself with a strong convulsion as though by a flash of lightning" (Creighton 183).
true self to him. His new sense of personal power, symbolized by the new suit, enables him to confront Preysing upon his return to the hotel and give voice to a lifetime of grievances against the general director. When Preysing murders Gaigern, it is Kringelein who keeps his head in the crisis, protecting Flämmchen and giving orders to Preysing before the police arrive. Kringelein carries on Gaigern's proactive masculinity after the Baron's death.

The male character's achievement of Kraft and Lebensmut is clearly linked to their ability to cope with the forces of modern life. Preysing is a character out of old Germany who is uncomfortable with the speed, noise and lights of the city and with modern women like Flämmchen. He likes to conduct his business the old-fashioned way, eschewing the manipulative techniques he associates with a modern approach, which represents his general attitude toward life. His attempt to achieve Kraft begins when he adopts a "modern" business strategy by lying to secure his pivotal contract and culminates in his affair with a modern woman and indulgence in sex that goes against his traditional values. Gaigern, on the other hand, is secure in a modern setting and thrives on urban phenomena such as speed and risk. Despite the fact that Gaigern breaks the law by stealing from others, the novel portrays him as a positive and heroic figure because of his courage, passion for life, and decisiveness, in contrast to the unsympathetic treatment of Preysing's ignorant dependence on his employees and family and his bumbling attempts to take charge of his own life.

Flämmchen does not personally interact with and partake of the modern forces of the city, rather she is one of them with which the male characters interact. This is apparent in the narrative in the fact that Preysing, Kringlelein and Gaigern all leave the hotel and personally experience the city, while Flämmchen is only seen within the hotel throughout the course of the novel and has no opportunity to interact with Berlin as a whole. Flämmchen's connection with
modernity as represented by the city is suggested in the scene in which Preysing goes looking for her in the hotel in order to make his proposition. He steps into the Yellow Pavilion, where couples are dancing to jazz music. The modern music, the bewildering colors, the mingling bodies and confusing motion of the dance are reminiscent of paintings by Otto Dix or other expressionistic representations of city life. In the midst of this tableau, which is appealing and uncomfortable for Preysing, he finds Flämmchen engaged in a dance with Gaigern. She is part of this flowing scene, a force of modernity, one with which Preysing is trying to come to terms. As Nottelmann points out, Flämmchen and Grusinskaja are both catalysts for the male characters, bringing either good fortune or doom (*Strategien* 155).

Kringelein, through his friendship with Gaigern, comes to terms with modern forces and emerges with a new sense of personal power. His visit to traditional historical and cultural sites in Berlin in the company of the cynical First World War veteran Doctor Otternschläg does not produce results; he does not find in these symbols of Imperial Germany the real life he is seeking. It is the intense intoxication by modern experiences to which Gaigern introduces him that bring about his transformation: hurtling down the highway in an automobile; experiencing the lights and crowds of the city in an expressionistic, speed-induced blur; flying in an airplane, gambling, binge buying, half-naked revue girls and getting drunk. Facing his fear of these things and mastering that fear empowers him not only to confront Preysing, but also his own mortality. Because the narrator intervenes to render impotent any possible political dimensions of Kringelein’s speech, the scene is made into a moment of personal triumph for Kringelein, rather than a diatribe against society's abuses, showing the little man's ability to stand up to his boss with a sense of his own inner power.

The wonder Flämmchen represents for Kringelein is the final stage in his development
throughout the novel. Despite his impending death, he feels satisfied with his life experience because he has witnessed such a wonder as Flämmchen's beauty. Acting upon the new personal power and aesthetic sense he achieved in the moment when he stood before the mirror and saw himself in a new suit, Kringelein expresses this sense of admiration to her in poetic terms that are unusual for his awkward, inelegant and sometimes pitiable character. He speaks to her "nicht wie ein siebenundvierzigjähriger Hilfsbuchhalter, sondern wie ein Liebender" (Baum, Menschen 296).\textsuperscript{15} It is his confrontation of the realities of life, most of all his courage in the face of his inevitable mortality, which distinguish him from Preysing and turn him into "etwas Männliches und Liebenswertes" (296).\textsuperscript{16} His experiences in the city have enabled him to discover Kraft, that is, energy or power, and Lebensmut, which Baum defines as "the untranslatable German word--the courage to live and get the most from it, come what may" (Quite Different 363).

**The Female City Experience as a Satire of the New Woman**

Flämmchen's self-discovery does not endow her with this active, self-sufficient character. What she discovers in herself is "das Schöne," beauty (Baum, Menschen 297). This is a trait she inherently possesses through no action of her own, in contrast to the active trait Kraft that Kringelein has achieved through his quest for real life. Determined Flämmchen, who has persevered through all the difficulties she has faced in the novel, clearly possesses Lebensmut, but this quality is now completely channeled into supporting Kringelein rather than charting her own destiny. Her new sense of self-worth is based on what she can give to him: "Weil sie zum erstenmal bemerkt, daß es nicht ein kleines Vergnügen, eine unwesentliche Annehmlichkeit ist, was sie zu vergeben hat, sondern etwas Großes, eine Erschütterung, ein Glück, eine äußerste

\textsuperscript{15}"not like an assistant bookkeeper of forty-seven, but like a lover" (Creighton 286).

\textsuperscript{16}"something that was manly and worthy of love" (286).
This self-discovery is an embrace not of modern forces, but of a traditional female role as a nurturer and helpmate. Thus, the role she plays in their relationship is a conventional one, while the relationship itself goes against acceptable social norms. That Kringelein has left his wife and his bourgeois existence and formed an extramarital alliance with a much younger woman is a scandal that goes against the institution of marriage and Wilhelmine sexual mores. In this way, Kringelein and Flämmchen's relationship is founded on old roles for women but takes a nontraditional form that exists within a sexually liberated modern society.

Flämmchen's choice to remain with Kringelein at the end of the novel can be interpreted as a retreat from New Womanhood into a mothering role. The emotional support she provides Kringelein is likened to motherhood: „Sie liegt da wie eine sehr junge Mutter und hält den Mann in ihren Armen wie ein Kind, das sich satt trinken darf“ (Baum, Menschen 311). Von Ankum sees this same pattern in another of Baum's novels, stud. chem. Helene Willfüer ("Motherhood"). At the conclusion of the novel, the protagonist Helene marries Ambrosius, an older man who has been physically weakened by an illness, and devotes herself to his scientific research. Von Ankum reads this as a promotion of what she terms "New Motherhood" over the more subversive model of "New Womanhood," a message she also detects in Keun's Gilgi--eine von uns. She defines New Motherhood as a union of the nineteenth century concept of spiritual motherhood with the rationalized women of Weimar Germany who "subordinate their sexual desire to the requirements of production and reproduction" (178). This argument also applies well to Flämmchen, who gives up her own sexual desire for the emotional satisfaction of

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17 "Then for the first time she learnt that it was not a mere pleasure, a meaningless gratification, that she had to give away, but something great--an ecstasy, a happiness, a complete fulfilment[sic]" (Creighton 301).
18 "She lay there like a very young mother and held the man in her arms like a child that might drink its fill" (Creighton 301).
nurturing Kringelein. Flämmchen's discovery of her special ability to give to another person relates to the concept of spiritual motherhood, which sought to justify women's participation in society by emphasizing the uniquely female traits that women had to contribute based on their role as child-bearers.

Flämmchen's mothering relationship to Kringelein makes a controversial contrast with her role throughout the story as a woman for hire. While she becomes a mother figure who will nurture him during his illness, she is also cared for by him, an older man with financial resources and the desire to protect her who resembles a father figure. Kringelein's physical weakness downplays the role of sex in their relationship, as is the case in Helene's marriage to partially blind Ambrosius. In supporting Ambrosius, Helene unites the three roles of "protected daughter, supportive wife, and caring mother" and thus "assumes the characteristics of the Virgin Mary" (von Ankum, "Motherhood" 179). In her relationship with Kringelein, Flämmchen assumes the same characteristics, which may be one of the most ironic and challenging elements of Baum's novel. Flämmchen, who has alternately challenged and confirmed the whore stereotype, is now transformed into the opposite, a mother; the Mary Magdalene of the novel has become the Virgin Mary. Baum's ambivalent narrator plays with and uses the mother/whore dichotomy, although she never breaks free of it long enough to call it into question.

Evaluating the role irony plays in Baum's portrayal of Flämmchen is necessary in order to understand the novel's full implications regarding gender roles. The end result of Flämmchen's city experience, taken at face value, is that she allows a man to tell her who she is, then places herself in a position of financial dependence upon him in which her body remains a purchasable object. By mothering and supporting a man, she discovers true happiness and self-worth. King, reading the character seriously rather than ironically, perceives the contrast between surface and
actuality, that is, between Flämmchen's appearance of emancipation and her willingness to be objectified and adopt traditional roles (*Bestsellers* 193). Nottelmann suggests that this very contrast between Flämmchen's appearance of being an independent, optimistic New Woman and her underlying need for security is what makes her character ironic (*Strategien*, 158-59). Nottelmann discusses the author's technique for developing characters, in which stereotypes are strategically modified to cast them in an ironic light, in context of demonstrating Baum's skill as a writer and the intelligence and complexity of her works. This analysis, focused on defending Baum, fails to explore the way irony makes Flämmchen's character more, not less, problematic.

Read ironically, Flämmchen's character calls women's emancipation even more thoroughly into question. It is tempting to ask whether an ironic reading of Flämmchen changes her character's problematic implications for women and makes it possible to perceive other meanings in the text. However, irony turns her character into a satire of the New Woman as effectively as it makes Preysing a satire of the bourgeoisie. The novel portrays a young woman striving to become autonomous, then reveals that security is her true desire, suggesting that within every New Woman is a traditional girl who only wants to be supported and cared for by a man. This challenges the modern woman's desire for independence, implying that traditional roles are what bring happiness, which Flämmchen effectively admits to herself at the conclusion of the novel. The irony is not directed at social and political forces which prevent Flämmchen from achieving her goals, rather it is directed at Flämmchen herself. Rather than making use of irony to question prevailing social order, Baum uses it to satirize the woman who strives to break free of that order.

**Women's Biological Destiny**

The transformations that Baum's characters experience are mirrored in, and sometimes
determined by, their physical characteristics. Preysing is overweight, flabby, and prone to high blood pressure, all of which the narrator subjects to irony during his physical intimacy with Flämmchen. In contrast, Gaigern's vitality is obvious not only in his lifestyle but in his handsome, athletic body. His extraordinary physical fitness is emphasized when he does calisthenics in the nude in his hotel room, a scene which was also censored in the Hollywood film and replaced with shots of John Barrymore as Gaigern stroking his pet Dachshund. Kringelein's physical weakness matches his role as the "little man," the underdog who is fighting from a disadvantaged position. More than that, it is his physical illness and its inevitable end in death that is the catalyst for his adventures in the city. Doctor Otternschlag's physical state produces the opposite effect in his life. The disfiguration of half his face during the First World War has caused him to distance himself from other people and abdicate from life. He remarks on how radically different his fate is from Gaigern's, who emerged from the war with only a scar on his chin. Grusinskaja faces the inevitable effects of age on her career as a dancer, fearing both the end of her beauty and her physical fitness to continue practicing her art.

Flämmchen's body is also at the center of her destiny as a character. Her physical beauty determines her career, keeping her out of the office and making possible her work as a mistress, and forms the basis for her fate at the end of the novel, her relationship with Kringelein. Still naked from her encounter with Preysing, she flees to Kringelein's room and faints in his arms. It is the sight of her nude body in a powerless and unconscious state that inspires a sense of wonder in the bookkeeper. Her self-discovery in response to his praises centers on her awareness of her own physical beauty. Some of her personality traits, which the author has lauded throughout the narrative, receive a brief mention, namely her "unbekümmertes Dasein" and "Vorwärtsleben"--her carefree existence and forward living--as well as the somewhat ambiguous quality of "ihre
Frische," her freshness (Baum, Menschen 297, my translation). However, her physical beauty receives dominant attention in the scene. Flämmchen's unsentimental recognition of her physical attractiveness and its potential market value is transformed into a sense of self-worth based on what she represents for Kringelein, however, what makes her a miracle in his life and causes her to recognize her own value is her physical beauty. Her identity and self-worth now centers on her body, as is also the case for Grusinskaja, who defines herself as a dancer, that is, defines herself according to her physical traits.

The impact of one's uncontrollable physical fate on one's personal fate is a common thread among all Baum's characters. Each character confronts physical characteristics they did not choose, whether illness, deformity, age, or beauty, and these factors limit their ability to choose their futures for themselves.19 The novel often sends contradictory messages about whether uncontrollable fate or the characters' own choices are responsible for their experiences, and the text clearly avoids discussing the role played by social, economic or political forces in shaping their lives (King, Bestsellers 169-79). What is clear is that fate, in many cases determined by the character's physical traits, does play at least some role, linking biology with destiny. This is a highly problematic element in the novel. In context of gender, the idea of biological destiny supports the mother/whore dichotomy. Flämmchen's beauty predestines her to be a prostitute, unless she embraces the opposite possibility, her role as a child bearer.

The consequences of this biological destiny for women can be seen in Grusinskaja's character. Having achieved stardom as a ballerina thanks to her beautiful, agile body, she now faces the deterioration of her looks, her strength, and her career. Because the loss of her dancing also means the loss of her identity, she experiences a professional and personal crisis. Her

19 Baum's 1924 novel Ulle der Zwerg (Ulle the Dwarf) deals with this theme in detail, portraying the tragic impact of the protagonist's dwarfism on his relationships with others.
despair is so complete that, after a poorly received performance, she nearly commits suicide, which her first encounter with Gaigern narrowly prevents. Her affair with him renews her creativity, and at the end of the novel she is experiencing a revival of her public popularity. However, it can only be temporary, because her muse, the Baron, is dead, and she will continue to age. This is the fate of the whore, who can no longer survive when her beauty is gone, but not the fate of the mother, who can rely on the family for support in her old age. For Grusinskaja, success has been a substitute for family (Baum, *Menschen* 146). The adoration of her public and the attention of her lovers are necessary surrogates for her in the absence of real love. Now she experiences the consequences of having rejected the role of wife and mother, as the fleeting satisfaction of professional success and renown fade away.

Grusinskaja's fate at the end of the novel can be read as a mirror of Flämmchen's future. Flämmchen's prosperity, also based on her physical beauty, is as inherently temporary as Grusinskaja's dancing career. When she reaches Grusinskaja's age, she will face the same crisis as her beauty begins to fade. The text foreshadows this problem when Flämmchen frets to Kringelein about her effort to break into modeling or film: "Nur alt werden darf ich nicht, ich bin ja schon neunzehn…" (Baum, *Menschen* 294).\(^{20}\) The nurturing role she assumes for Kringelein is a surrogate for motherhood, which is the source of her happiness in the relationship. While Grusinskaja is left alone, waiting for a rendezvous with Gaigern that will never happen, Flämmchen's mothering is rewarded with a happy ending. Even this, however, cannot provide the benefits of the real family. The security Kringelein offers is temporary, and their happiness is ephemeral. In this portrayal of individuals who find themselves isolated in modern society, seeking a surrogate family, Baum affirms the benefits of a traditional family structure and

\(^{20}\) "Only I mustn't get old. I'm nineteen already…." (Creighton, 284).
especially women's traditional role within it.

**Conclusion**

In the character of Flämmchen, Baum's novel portrays the modern woman in a way that at first appears to be progressive within the literary and historical context of the time. In contrast to earlier works of German literature, the author does not cast moral judgment on her female characters for their choices about their sexuality. Flämmchen's comfort with and expression of her own sexuality make her to some extent an emancipated New Woman. The novel also insightfully portrays the obstacles she faces in her pursuit of professional success, authentically reflecting the experiences of many female white-collar workers during the Weimar era. Flämmchen's experiences in the hotel show the sexual politics that surrounded working women, highlighting the question of whether women can bring their sexuality into the workplace and still succeed and exposing the way women often found themselves objectified and harassed by male employers and colleagues. The prescience of the mother/whore dualism is evident in the male characters' inability to reconcile old views of women with women's new role as professionals. Flämmchen finds herself in the position of a commodity due to these prevailing prejudices as well as new forces at work in modern society, namely the marketing of women's bodies in the consumer culture of the 1920s.

However, Flämmchen's choices at the end of the novel undercut the progressive image of women her character represents. Although she appears to be a New Woman, Flämmchen really longs for stability, and she gives up her pursuit of independence for an emotionally and financially secure relationship with Kringelein. In this way, Baum echoes a theme that appeared more and more in the discourse on women's roles in the latter years of the Weimar Republic, as women became disillusioned with the idea of emancipation. The difficulties of life on one's own
in the city, where women faced prevailing patriarchal attitudes and the privations of political and economic instability, led many to reassess the value of traditional roles (von Ankum, "Motherhood" 171). Flämmchen finds true happiness and a sense of self-worth in a traditional nurturing, mothering role, which calls into question the value of an emancipation lifestyle.

The potential for irony in Flämmchen's character only strengthens the novel's challenge against modern women's desires. Flämmchen's real desire contradicts her representation of the New Woman type upon which she is based, another instance in which Baum plays with stereotypes in her novel, satirizing her own characters by showing the reader how they fail to live up to what they appear to be. Flämmchen's character can be interpreted as a satire of the New Woman construct and, at the same time, a stereotype who is humanized by the novel's sympathetic portrayal of her desires and struggles. Through this simultaneously ironic and sympathetic tone, the narrator achieves an ambivalent position toward the character, criticizing neither her goals nor the social conditions which prevent her from achieving them. Because of the author's reticence to make her novel political, Menschen im Hotel addresses only the individual woman's desires and choices in this situation, portraying but not attacking the social forces that influence Flämmchen's decisions. Ultimately the novel suggests that she makes the right choice when she steps back into the traditional role of mother and helpmate and gives up the struggle for autonomy in the Großstadt.

In a cast of modern characters in the urban landscape, Flämmchen is the least progressive figure in the novel. Baum's portrayal of her male characters questions and even subverts prevailing mores. Through Preysing she critiques the moral sensibilities of the bourgeoisie, and the happy ending Kringelein achieves with Flämmchen goes against bourgeois society's moral code. Gaigern's forceful way of living and the image of masculinity it presents, which Kringelein
aims to carry on after the Baron's death, promotes a courageous lifestyle built on action, even when such a lifestyle breaks the structures of society designed to promote public order. Although this paper must remain focused on the implications of Flämmchen's character, a more detailed analysis of the novel's construction of masculinity, embodied in Gaigern's character, and how it subverts bourgeois values and traditional social order would make a valuable study. These elements show that the novel is willing to be controversial and to question tradition, but does not fully do so in the case of Flämmchen's character. *Menschen im Hotel* vibrantly portrays and readily embraces modernity in many ways, but the novel does not affirm the new roles women sought to create in modern urban society.
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