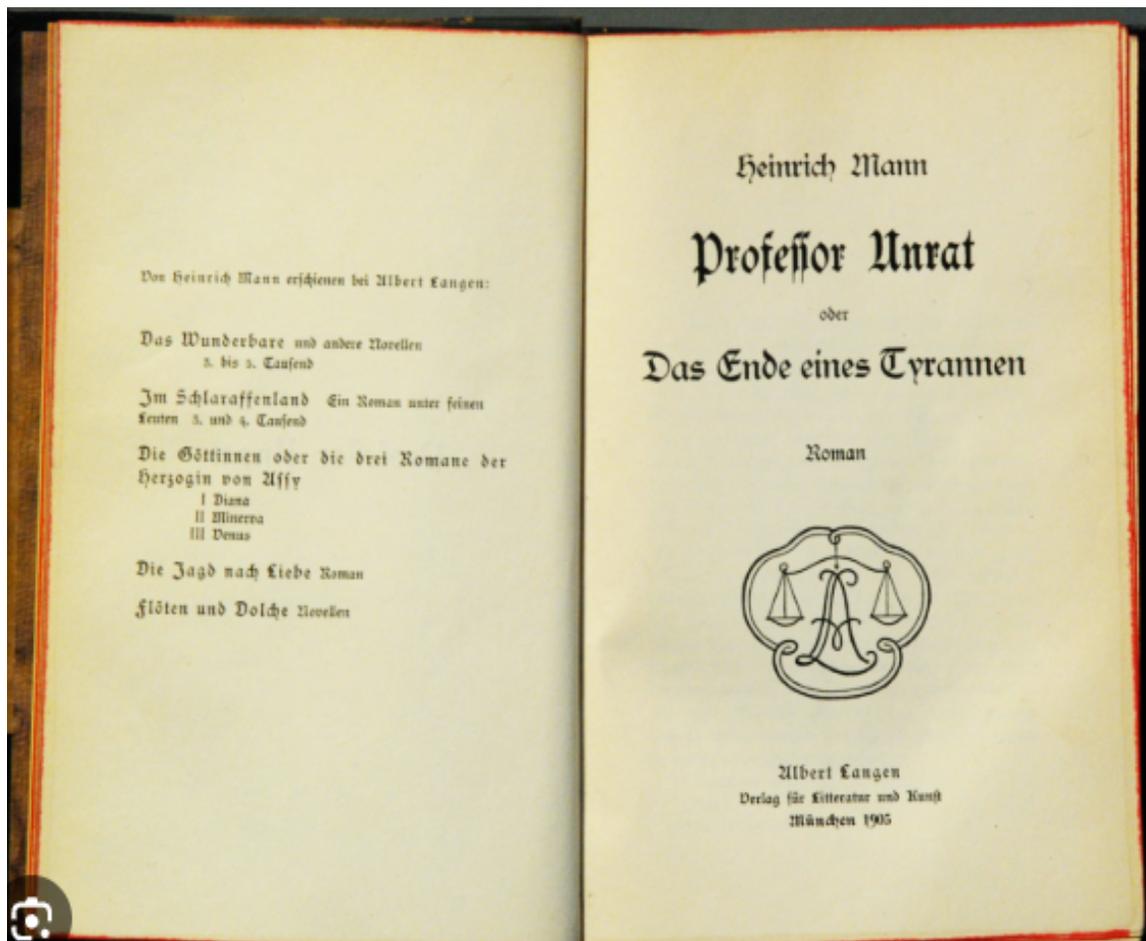


## CONCEPTS AND CONSTELLATIONS



Screen shot from *The Blue Angel*: Dietrich, Jannings, and Hans Albers



## Adaptation

### Heinrich Mann, Two Telegrams

*Neue Berliner Zeitung / 12 Uhr Blatt*, 12. Nr. 77 April 1, 1930, and *B.Z. am Mittag*, 54 der Berliner Zeitung, Nr. 90. April 1, 1930. Translated by Barbara Kosta

To the 12 Uhr Blatt

Suffice it to say that the film was made with my involvement and that *Professor Unrat*, who Jannings was supposed to perform long ago, remains my character.

Yours sincerely, Heinrich Mann

To the B.Z. Afternoon

Hussong calls *Professor Unrat* miserable and the act of revenge of a runaway schoolboy. At the same time, a teacher reminds me of *Professor Unrat* so that I can help him with his reform plans.

The actor Emil Jannings specifically chose this character among all others.

Such facts and the novel itself could evoke some gratitude for me and my work.

One can also learn from it.

Hussong prefers insults.

He is the runaway schoolboy. He slanders the literature of my generation, to which he owes his intellectual existence.

Heinrich Mann

### **Raoul Ploquin**

#### **A Conversation with Heinrich Mann**

*Revue due Cinéma, Paris, 2, Nr. 17, December 1, 1930.* Translated by Barbara Kosta

Sternberg made his film *The Blue Angel* based on the novel *Professor Unrat* by Heinrich Mann. Is Heinrich Mann the only writer who has not been betrayed by a film? He is certainly the only one who confirms this with conviction and appreciation. He considers *The Blue Angel* by Josef von Sternberg, based on Mann's book, to be praiseworthy in every way: "When Erich Pommer showed me a copy of *The Blue Angel* in Nice [France], I had already settled on an attitude of benevolent neutrality. The performance began, and I was immediately seized by the precise visualization of so many distant memories. When the last picture of the dead Unrat, clinging to his desk fading, I found a past that seemed to have been buried by the years completely unmarred."

What greater and more wonderful praise can you give to a film?

How did the idea of making this film took shape? I have to go back to the year 1923, a time when Emil Jannings, who was fascinated by the subject of my book, suggested that I rework *Professor Unrat* for a film. After closer consideration, however, the project did not seem feasible to us. However, with the advent of sound film, six years later, Erich Pommer saw new possibilities.

The differences between film and novel? They are minimal. The director, in complete agreement with me, only made changes to the character Unrat. The extremely wider audience that the film addresses would hardly have been able to identify with a protagonist as unlikeable as Rath. The great artist, Emil Janning portrays a more emotional, perhaps also more human protagonist, than the literary figure does. While in the novel the professor-turned-clown sinks into vice and ends up

in prison, here Jannings gives his soul, now at peace again, back to God in the classroom where he once taught.

But the spirit of the cinematic and the literary work are identical, and Sternberg has admirably recreated the atmosphere of Professor Unrat.

Marlene Dietrich is the living embodiment of Lola Lola. Like you, I lament the departure of this extraordinary actress, who discovered *The Blue Angel* for the whole world. When she sings the famous refrain "Falling in Love Again" for the last time in the film, she condenses the philosophy of the work with a frightening intensity. She embodies carnal love through and through with her lust, her openness; she sings of her own fate and that of the broken man who drags himself through snow-covered streets to his last refuge. I don't think this artist could identify more strongly with the person he portrays."

**Erich Pommer**  
**Explanation**

***Berliner Tageblatt*, 59. Nr. 154, April 1, 1930, morning edition.** Translated by Barbara Kosta

I have never allowed for a film, for which I am responsible as a producer, to be made contrary to the basic guidelines, to which the author agreed at the time of signing the contract.

In the case of *The Blue Angel*, too, we complied with the basic guidelines that were agreed upon in advance with Heinrich Mann, as Carl Zuckmayer, the co-author of *The Blue Angel*, has explained already in detail in the *Berlin Mittagsblatt* newspaper.

To reiterate: Heinrich Mann was in touch not only at the time of the completion of the manuscript, but also during production. I arranged a special screening for Heinrich Mann a few days ago in Nice, after which he stated that he agrees fully with the final version of *The Blue Angel*.

These statements clearly show that *The Blue Angel* was not made against, but with the support of Heinrich Mann, whom I hold in high esteem.

## STARS



**BÉLA BALÁZS**

**“Only Stars!”**

First published as “Nur Stars,” in *Filmtechnik*, no 7 (April 3, 1926), 126. Translated by Alex H. Bush.

The star system is unpopular. It is uneconomic, antisocial, and what have you. It also seems very unjust that a dozen actors monopolize all of cinematic art. And yet this will not change in film. On the contrary, a time will hopefully come soon when secondary personalities will no longer even be permitted. After all, it is a law of nature that there are only a few geniuses in any given era. And it is a law of film art that only ingenious personalities may be considered as performers. On the stage, the situation is not so inflexible. The speaking actor, no matter how mediocre, cannot make the beauty of the text unrecognizable. Even in an incompetent mouth, Shakespeare’s language will

not entirely lose its color. But in film, only the actor's face speaks. The expressions of his visage are the only text. All lyricism is contained therein. No matter how brilliantly constructed the piece, if the actor's gestural and facial pantomime expresses banalities, the "text" will become banal. And vice versa. For how little art depends on its subject. How insignificant is the what, and how vital the *how*.

A distinguished gentleman seduces a simple girl, who kills her child out of shame and despair; this could be the subject of a trashy novel. But when Goethe writes it, it becomes *Faust*. Likewise, film actors are the actual poets of film. They merely create based on determined subjects, but nobody has predetermined their emotional expressiveness.

Do not reproach me for failing to mention the importance of the director and the ensemble cast. I am not ignoring them. But where do we see the life and texture of emotions, the movement of passions that are represented in film as in every other work of literature? Where do they become visible? Only in facial expressions. And the ensemble cast is of no help here, and no director can stage the delicate features around a mouth. What use is it to see the saddest events, if the result—namely, the hero's suffering—does not move me? This can discredit even the most convincing story. *Conversely, any fate can be made believable by the suggestive persuasiveness of its experience.*

In film, everything depends on this suggestive power of personality. Only the truly great are good enough. Only stars! A film must be written on a body, on a meaningful, expressive, and suggestive body. In the theater, it is always the lesser plays that are written for stars. But for the wordless art of the speaking body, everything must be gathered from this body; thus, we must adapt to its expressive capacities, just as all music has to adapt to the spirit of the instruments. We cannot approach film with the ideologies of literature! A good violin sonata, too, is written on the body of the violin. The highest artistic possibilities for film can only be achieved thus: by developing the given, living, and expressive capacities of a personality into a poetic play. I thus dare to go even further and say that such personalities do not have to portray a given film. The film has to portray *them*!

Of course, this does not mean a monopoly for already famous stars! No one is stopping directors from discovering new personalities of similar significance. But let us be clear, the international popularity of certain film stars (to which no popularity ever achieved in the history of culture can compare) is never exclusively a question of pure dramatic ability. There are artists whose creative power is not at all inferior to these world favorites and who can achieve equally or even more perfect artistic heights, but who still do not become the heroes and heroines of the masses. This results from the fact that the popularity of these world stars does not come primarily from their good acting, but rather from the uniqueness of their personality, which *represents some ideal type for contemporary humanity*. They personify a given basic trend of the popular soul. They embody the people's dreams or nightmares; they are like Platonic ideals of the people's own potential. Just as the Greek gods were merely stylized symbols of normal tendencies of the Greek national psyche, our film stars present us with a kind of earthly Olympus for contemporary humanity.

And the question of why this actor could become a world star rather than that one, who is just as good, can be answered only by the cultural historian, not by the aesthete. But that is precisely why it is justified to use these types as the basis for film works, the way the commedia dell'arte worked with the perennial types of Pierrot, Pantalone, Harlequin, and others. Of course, that is not to say that other plays should not also be written.

And another word on the stars! One of the most important social contributions of film is that it does not know the concept of "provincial art." Reproducibility abolishes the value attached to rarity. We can illuminate even the most remote and impoverished backwater with the brightest stars of art. We have no need of the mediocre ones. So why should we use them?

Reprinted in: Kaes, Anton, Nicholas Baer and Michael Cowan, eds. *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907-1933*. University of California Press, 2016, pp. 519-520.

## MASS CULTURE

*On the multiple reproductions of the image of Lola Lola, see Walter Benjamin's 1935 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."*



*Mechanical reproduction, i.e. photography and film, he argues, strips art of its unique "aura." The loss of aura shifts art's value from ritualistic or cultic to political and exhibition-based, making it more accessible but also more susceptible to mass manipulation, fundamentally changing its social and political function. In this same essay, he talks about the "cult of the personality" i.e. the movie star; that stands in for the vanishing "aura" of art. Promoted by the film industry, this so-called cult turns the actor's persona into a*

*commodity, substituting the lost magical, authentic presence of traditional art with the celebration or spell of celebrity (popularity).*

## THE NEW WOMAN



*Marlene Dietrich embodied the New Woman of the Weimar Republic—a symbol of modernity, androgyny, and sexual liberation, emerging from 1920s Berlin's cabarets. Her iconic persona featured tailored tuxedos, top hats, and a cool, indifferent attitude that challenged traditional gender roles, notably as Lola-Lola in *The Blue Angel* (1930).*

*The "New Woman" was popularized through media, film, and fashion, representing a new, consumerist lifestyle. She was often depicted as confident and independent, breaking from 19th-century domesticity. She was defined often by bobbed haircut (*Bubikopf*), short skirts; she was employed and participated in leisure activities in cities. Her presence in urban areas changed the face of the cityscape. Additionally, symptomatic of the Weimar Republic is the crisis of masculinity owing to the trauma of losing World War I, the Versailles Treaty and heavy reparations, women entering the workforce, and economic impotence, among some of the stated causes.*

## THE MALE GAZE

*Professor Rath's obsessive, fetishistic voyeurism is a central theme. He projects his fantasies onto Lola Lola (Marlene Dietrich). She is an object of desire, but she also undermines his gaze through her presence as a powerful, independent woman who manipulates the authoritative male gaze to her own advantage.*



Rath surreptitiously looks at the postcards of the cabaret singer , Lola Lola. His gaze is showcased throughout the film.



The 1930 film poster emphasizes the authoritarian male gaze.



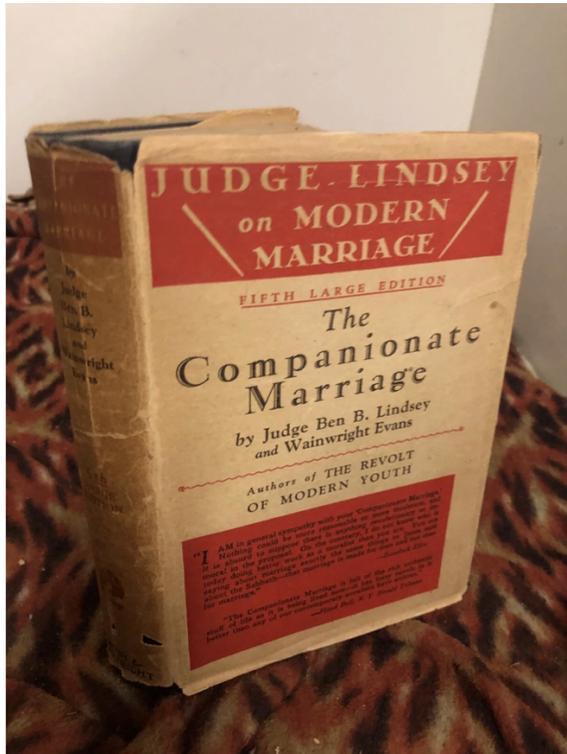
DADAIST  
Hannah Höch *Marlene* (1930)

A **fetish** is a strong sexual interest or attraction to a specific object, body part, material, or situation that isn't typically considered sexual on its own.



Rath has proposed to Lola Lola

## MARRIAGE, SEXUALITY and GENDER



LOLA LANDAU

### The Companionate Marriage

First published as "Kameradschaftsehe," in *Die Tat* 20, 11 (February 1929), 831-835.

Marriage, as the cell of collective life, has always possessed a social significance that raises it far above the happiness of two individuals or the purely expedient consideration of protecting the interests of descendants. That is how marriage as a model in miniature of human community acquired its ethical idea. It became the primal basis of the larger cellular structure and the source of fruitful and constructive forces. [ ... ]

By the end of the previous century the bourgeois marriage had evolved into an economic institution; the family had become a small trust with the earnings and operation of capital. The

magnetic attraction of monetary accumulation, however, led increasingly to marriage for money, which suppressed its original sense of ethical community.

While a hypocritical social morality artificially maintained the old forms and symbols, they had long since rigidified into dead formulas. Venerable words like fidelity, home, and family

lost their incantatory power since their content had become merely apparent. Meanwhile, however, the elemental life force of youth pressed onward under the thin veneer of convention, rooting out new paths for itself. Unnoticed, a mighty revolution in ways of life had already been completed in reality when people first began to discuss openly the crisis in marriage.

At the center of these fermenting forces is the woman of our day. As an autonomous person economically and intellectually independent from the man, the new woman shattered the old morality. The compulsory celibacy of the young woman and the indissolubility of marriage were invalidated by the straightforward reality of life. The independent woman of today, just as much as the man, assumes for herself the right to a love life before marriage, the more so since marital togetherness for the woman can signify nothing but a faint future possibility given the current numerical deficiency of men. In this way, the psychological attitude of women toward marriage changed fundamentally. Women no longer wait for marriage, frequently not even desiring such a tie for themselves, which they fear might hinder their free development. While in previous times the life of a young woman was little more than a period of preparation for marriage, which she then took on as a full-time occupation, the woman of today is scarcely capable of accepting marriage as her life's work. Back then household activities and the never-ending work of motherhood taxed a woman's energies to the utmost. Today there is some relief to be had in the private household from modern conveniences, and birth control, a matter of utter economic necessity, either shelters women from motherhood or interrupts it with long breaks. Certainly, by being able to prevent conception, the woman has escaped from the slavery of her own body; but at the same time she is deprived of the elemental happiness of fulfilled tranquility. The woman-whose natural maternal energies, through no fault of her own, have to lay fallow today, who, just like the man is forced at an early age into the work-a-day grind-searches for a substitute experience of her vitality and finds it in fruitful employment, usually outside the home. The occupational independence thus gained signifies a looser psychological tie as well to the man. The home is no longer the fortified garden of profound and happy rest. Family life is also subject to the effects of the transformation; it is already being replaced, in part, by the self-tutelage of the young, by group life that takes the children out of their parents' house.

Who would want to deny that this reorganization unsettles certain essential emotional values, that it silences a kind of gentle atmospheric music! But development marches to a relentless beat. No wishful romanticism can force woman back to her earlier way of being. The bourgeois woman has also become a worker. Her face, too, is chiseled by the hard

mechanism of our time; she too is subject to the depersonalization and leveling of our age. And she too will slowly have to assume the shape of the new female personality in order to stand beside the man as an equal and complementary companion. If, however, the man of today continues to seek the woman of yesterday, his creature, the pliant helpmate, he will be bitterly disappointed not to find her anymore.

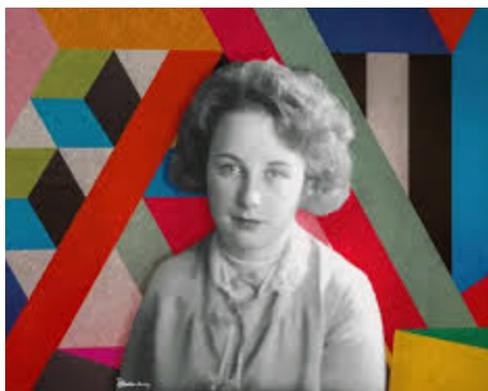
Marriage and its value as the cell of community is threatened with crisis. For new ideas of marriage have not yet caught on. What is permitted today? Nearly everything. But what is truly good? What is bad? The warning signals of inhibition no longer function. Everywhere, however, one notes the confusion, the aimlessness, a tortured seeking, and in between, the impotent smile of flippancy.

In his book, *Companionate Marriage*, Ben Lindsey, the American juvenile-court judge, has attempted to save marriage from this chaos by lending it a new form. As impossible as it is simply to transpose his reform proposals into our European conditions, he nevertheless offers fruitful suggestions from his socially critical point of view. Lindsey would like to introduce, alongside permanent marriage, the companionate marriage as a second legal form of marriage. Companionate marriage in his sense denotes the lawful tie between two young people who, in the first years, use birth control to avoid having children, so that they can check carefully whether their respective characters will match harmoniously in the long run.

If the first rush of love has passed and the young people have been disappointed in their expectations, then the companionate marriage can be dissolved quite easily. All that is required for divorce is a simple, mutual agreement. Nor is there any obligation of support, since they have no responsibility for children and the wife has continued in her occupation. If, however, the two people live happily with each other, then after a certain trial period they can change their companionate marriage into a family marriage and fulfill their desires for children. [ ]

The marriage of the future will perhaps be the companionate marriage, but in a much broader sense than Lindsey's. It will mean not only a childless trial marriage for young people but the ever-maturing challenge to live a full life. It will reestablish in another form its original idea of community and grow into a fruitful cell in the overall cellular state. It will unite the woman, with her informed views and matured heart, to the man as a comrade, and two free personalities will march along the same path toward a great goal, allowing the uniform beat of their steps to blend into a single rhythm.

Reprinted in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. University of California Press, 1994, pp. 702-703.



Irmgard Keun

## **IRMGARD KEUN**

### **The System of Capturing a Man**

First published in "Das System des Männerfangs" *Der Querschnitt*, Heft 4, (1932): 259-261.  
Translated by Barbara Kosta

I. General rule: feed a man's ego. Boost his self-esteem, make him proud of himself. Understand him when he wants to be understood and stop at the right moment—with your understanding. A man does not want a woman to understand the deepest depths of his unique inner life – otherwise he might realize that it is not so incredibly unique, and he would take that very badly. So always allow him a gentle melancholic sigh of being misunderstood, sitting there shaken by his own powerlessness – he will forgive it and lovingly help get over one's own imperfections. Every man basically values being "lonely person." Respect that. Let him be sentimental. Men need that—and can only be that way with a woman. Cynical men are the most sentimental (cynicism like barbed wire around a heart that is too soft)—you have to let him tactfully suspect that despite his veiled sharpness of mind, you see a precious, tender heart. Always laugh with him about the same things— otherwise, the desired common ground is lost. Allow yourself to be politically enlightened. Act very stupid but ask very intelligent questions. Be charming to his friends and acquaintances – praise from others increases your own marketability by a hundred percent. Go out in groups of three or four if possible – sit together – be sweet and nice – and float gracefully over to the phone booth at the right moment to give your acquaintances a chance to say a few approving words. Surround her with a halo of admirers – "who you are very indifferent to." You're not like that. You don't care. Lay the scalps of your conquests at his feet—he will be proud—of himself, of the woman, of himself and of everything. Always give him the opportunity to triumph over his rivals. And don't be yourself—be reflective. Be the mirror image of his desires. Listen to him. And then—

II. Treat the man as a man of his profession. Above all: take an interest in his profession.

## A. Artistic professions

a. Actor. Loving an actor is almost perverse. You don't get your money's worth—that is, a woman's specific vanity doesn't get its money's worth. An actor must be loved by a woman in the same way that a man loves a beautiful woman. His profession is feminine. An actor is often megalomaniacal out of insecurity – like a beautiful woman (both their successes are time-bound and transient). In his presence, one must reject Werner Krauß – he will disagree – but reject him nonetheless. Reject Bassermann, adamantly reject Ernst Deutsch, reject Moissi (unless it happens to be Moissi himself) – reject them all. Find colleagues envious, critics laughable and impossible. Believe unconditionally that he never reads reviews. Listen to him rehearsing roles and cry at tragic outbursts. And admire him. And if possible, cook well. In any case, find the artistic manager (director) mean. Actors like to flirt with the bourgeoisie when they are bohemians – let them. If they are bourgeois, they wish they were bohemians. Let them. It's best to leave them alone.

b. Painters. Be his model—whether beautiful or ugly, teach him that an artist of his rank knows what to do with every human being—yes, that through him that they gain their right to exist. You are exhausted after the session, and the painter is inspired—a truly favorable state. Under no circumstance ever show a desire to conquer, otherwise you will arouse the man's opposition. (Actually, belongs under “General Rules”)

c. Musician. Do not pretend to have an ear for music if you do not – he will find out. Women who are not musical are better off looking for other objects than musicians. You can learn from writers and painters – but you cannot learn to have an ear for music. Otherwise: When attending concerts together, reject what he rejects, find beautiful what he finds beautiful – and in order to avoid making any mistakes lean your head back and close your eyes – which, depending on the situation, can express extreme boredom or supreme delight.

d. Writers. Let them read to you. Don't fall asleep. Be too shaken to speak, for there are no words that suffice. Criticize with reverence, as if you were correcting Faust. Find everything very new and unique. Offer to transcribe the manuscript – be constantly grateful and moved by the wonderful thoughts and words – with each new typewritten page, believe in one more edition. You definitely have the chance to become a muse after completing the manuscript.

e. Publishers. If possible, write successful books. A publisher's sympathy grows with increasing print runs. The less advance payment you need, the more pleasant you are to deal with.

f. Editors. If they write themselves, they should be treated like writers. Pity them for not being able to do as they please (no editor can do as he pleases). Bring them the articles as close to the editorial deadline as possible to create the opportunity to go out together.

## B. PROFESSIONS

a. Doctors. Being well-built is a significant advantage. Otherwise: doctors are used to grief. It is best not to be their patient. In this regard, a doctor has his principles—why make things unnecessarily difficult for yourself and him? Furthermore: Reject Sauerbruch, reject beer,

be ironic about Freud (in the case of psychoanalysts: insult Alfred Adler). Acknowledge Koch, Semmelweiß, Billroth. (Because they're dead.) Don't make yourself look ridiculous by using medical jargon. But pity him for being dependent on the practical exercise of his profession, when he is predestined from head to toe for pure scientific work.

b. Lawyers. They should be treated as failed writers. Have them read their plays and novels to you. Congratulate criminal lawyers incessantly on their wonderful pleas. Congratulate civil lawyers on their mostly unpublished (but certainly existing) literary output.

c. Engineers. Have them explain every mechanism in detail, starting with the bicycle. It comes across as very nice when you stand helplessly and bewildered before their complicated calculations. Feminine uncertainty always suits an engineer. However, familiarity with cars is recommended.

d. Salespeople. Salespeople actually want to “be something else”; salespeople are sometimes lyrical and have missed their calling. Which does not prevent them from clinging to their profession like burrs. Admire their car and don't mention that it's borrowed. Have a former general as a father or one who lost his millions during inflation. Want to get to know his mother and be “not at all modern” – vote for the German People's Party. Better safe than sorry. Salespeople are mostly conservative. You can be his employee without worry – he doesn't have the inhibitions of a doctor with his patient. Working overtime alone with him even offers extremely favorable opportunities.

e. Civil servants. Civil servants often have principles and somewhat rigid morals. Don't follow them. On the contrary. Civil servants are generally not difficult cases. Don't try to empathize with their profession and their views – be the most striking contrast to their average existence. Do everything they reject – it works. Civil servants are sensual by nature and also poetic – but even more sensual. Lipstick in hand does not make you a vamp. But with blue eye shadow, a slightly sophisticated look, well-fitting stockings, and slightly daring gestures, you can give your civil servant a hint of attractive depravity even today. You are at the stage where you can still be saved. Civil servants love to save people.

#### C. NABOBS.

(Are there still any?) One must be indifferent to money, and to the nabob as well – “one doesn't want him at all.” Nabobs are suspicious. A good recipe: pretend thinking he is a fraud and a poor wretch – and what you admire in him are purely his masculine charms and virtues. In the first stage of acquaintance, refuse any gifts.

#### D.

III. This recipe is imperfect and fails completely if the final individual treatment is missing. There is only one rule to follow under all circumstances: don't be in love, because then you'll do everything wrong. where necessary, protected.

In: *Bubikopf: Aufbruch in den Zwanzigern*. Edited by Anna Rheinsberg, Luchterhand, 1988: 115-119. Translated by Barbara Kosa



## **Anita**

### **“Sex Appeal: A New Catchword for an Old Thing”**

First published as “Sex Appeal. Ein neues Schlagwort für eine alte Sache” *Uhu 5* (October 1928), 72-77.

Every generation has a catchword for the ideal of its time. Once the formula has been found it spreads like wildfire, for then the idea will be discussed, analyzed, and enthusiastically defended – until it is worn out.

This time no German work was found for the new ideal. Apparently, there are things between heaven and earth for which only one solitary language can completely capture the deepest meaning and which are therefore taken over into the vocabulary of the world untranslated.

To internationally valid terms like five o’clock, flirt, dancing, and cocktail, a new and extremely important one has been added: sex appeal. For years one called it “that certain something.” What was meant was that magic that emanates from a being that cannot be simply subsumed under the rubric of beauty.

And suddenly it came from American like an illumination – what it was is sex appeal. Until recently the question about a woman was simply: does she have pretty legs? Now the burning question is: does she have sex appeal?

To give the etymology of this word one can only resort to pictures and show those who have “it.” But what do they have? That is where the difficulty of explanation begins. “Une belle laide,” say the French. “She's got something,” in the vernacular. “Not pretty, something more than that.” All of these are rewrites for sex appeal.

It is the perfect incarnation of the sex, whether male or female—for, although one thinks in this connection almost exclusively of women, the idea of sex appeal has to be valid for men too. One simply speaks less of the man—perhaps because successful men by definition have sex appeal. With women other factors, beauty, elegance, gracefulness, etc., still have their special meanings. Every generation has the ambition to take out a new patent on its catchword. Later, with longer use, it becomes evident that exactly the same meaning has been registered under several other names.

Sex appeal existed, of course, in times when no one yet spoke English. And in the Middle Ages people were simply burned for having too much sex appeal—in those times it was called witchcraft. . . .

When a very beautiful woman also has sex appeal—that is when earth-shattering things occur. At the least she will become a film star, the subject of dreams on five continents and the cause of complexes for an entire generation. Our objective era searches for and finds the technical expression and the objective explanation for everything until it comes upon a point where, for the time being, it can go no further. That point is called atom, radio wave, sex appeal.

Reprinted in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. University of California Press, 1994, 667.

## INFLUENCES FROM ABROAD

CHRISTOPH LANGMUT

### Are we still Germans?

First published as „Sind wir noch Deutsche?“ in *Deutsches Volkstum*. Monatsschrift für das deutsche Geistesleben 12 (1928) II, S. 951f. Translated by Barbara Kosta

Criticism of Berliners' Lack of 'Germanness,' 1928

The residents of Dinkelsbühl or Oldesloe will be outraged and ask: "What do you mean?" And I am happy to explain that I was not thinking of them when I asked my question. I am referring to "my dear Berliners," the residents of the imperial capital and cosmopolitan city, who, with their hefty population of four million, tip the scales. After all, one in sixteen Germans lives in Berlin. But what about the [Deutschtum] German identity. Of the Berliner?

It looks bad. How they dress, how they talk and write, and how they enjoy themselves. There's hardly anything left of Germanness. They talk their way out by saying it's the "cosmopolitan character of the cosmopolitan city." But Paris and London are "cosmopolitan cities" too: Are they so dependent on foreign countries because of that? Do they chase after foreigners like you "Balina" do?

It starts with fashion. Fashion, after all, is a cultural barometer. Do we still have a single German term for a female garment? Our women wear "Jumper" and "Complet" and "Combinations" and "Pajamas." The "Dessous" is very important to them. Not only France trumps, but recently England and America have also risen in importance. Two years ago, the sensible and tasteful English military coat, the "Trench Coat," came into fashion. Since then, our young girls have been walking around with epaulettes and more precisely, with reinforced shoulder pads on one side. These were necessary during the war to protect against chafing from rifles. However, our English Amazons have retained them diligently. Now something new has been added to the "Trench Coat," the small white linen cap worn by American sailors. It is called a "Bobby Cap" and is of the highest import for all bathing "Girls" and "Gents" – boys and girls has long since been unmodern

How is it with you, people of Dinkelsbühl and Oldesloe, have you also started to ape English soldiers and American sailors in your hopeful youth?

When you walk down Kurfürstendamm, dear contemporary, you can improve your knowledge of French. Time and again, a French inscription catches the eye. It's not just cleaning companies that think a German company might discredit them and so they call themselves *Maison Angèle* or *Salon Marguerite* or *Maison de Paris* – the owners of such establishments are

not French but German (insofar as one can speak of that): their names are Rixrath, Landeck, and Friedmann, these wanna be Parisians, and *La Corsetière* responds to the not so Gallic name "Wanda Seifert"—there is also a *Maison du livre* and a factory of electric coolers found a no more fitting name than *Frigidaire*. Have you ever seen the English or French using **German** company signs in their home countries? Hardly... Are the French really that far ahead of us? Are you familiar with the department stores in Paris? People haven't learned anything extra in thirty years. And yet they want to open a *Galerie Lafayette* on Potsdamer Platz. It's laughable.

Let's stay with language for a moment. Our newspaper German is so heartwarming! At least the Berlin tabloids are. The "sophisticated" lady does errands in the afternoon in her "Trotteur Dress"? not even: she goes "shopping." She has either a "Soft Spot" or a "Penchant" for this activity. At "Five o'clock," she enters a "fashionable" café, above whose doors one reads "Confiserie" and "Pâtisserie." Then, after enjoying a few "Sandwiches" and reading the latest "Communiquéés" (or "Kommuniquéés" or "Kommuniquéés"), she phones her chauffeur to bring the Chrysler from the "Box." This woman is "charmant": "soigniert" from head to toe. She remembers just in time: she still must get some "Accessories." Not "ingredients," oh no: "Accessories." All these expressions printed in the Berlin tabloids—not even one is made up. If we continue down this path, we soon will be arriving at the language of the late seventeenth century.

After all, what do we have left? Instead of the German book, we have "Reportage"; instead of our music, "Jazz"; instead of our native dances, "tango," "foxtrot," "Charleston." Where chamber music used to be played, the n-word singers now squeak. A well-known wine restaurant advertises a quick lunch as "dernier cri," but it must be called "quick lunch." "Tempo"!

One example may stand for many here to illustrate the **appalling decline in taste**, into which we have slipped. A magnificent cinema has recently opened. The opening program featured the Rosé-Quartet, which played two movements from a later Beethoven, the Rassumoffsky-Quartet, additionally an organist who demonstrated the virtues of the gigantic organ --- showed fantasy with an American popular tune, and an Argentine "Jux-Kappelle" that consisted mainly of accordions and solo numbers, played on a violin equipped with a loudspeaker and a saw. This was accompanied by terrible shouting. This rowdy behavior followed right after a Beethoven string quartet. And the entire Berlin press was enthusiastic about it. Again, the "tabloid press." In German: "gutter press."

That's how far we've come...

## RUDOLF KAYSER

### Americanism

First published as "Amerikanismus," *Vossische Zeitung*, no. 458 (September 27, 1925).

Americanism is the new European catchword. It suffers the usual fate of catchwords: the more it is used, the less one knows what it means. It is certain that in this case the range of meanings is enormously broad, far exceeding particular minor phenomena, and that it applies to the fundamental character of our time. So the remarkable situation has arisen in which, for the designation of a truly radical change in the inner and outer forms of our life over the last few decades, we have no expression other than the name of a foreign continent that previously appeared to us infinitely far away, and not only in the geographical sense.

What is it then with Americanism?

Certainly it has nothing or only little to do with the American, whom we, after all, know less than any other national type. As a literary type, the American is also much less familiar to us than that of the European or the Oriental. The French citizen, the English lord, the Russian peasant, the Eastern sage—they have become palpable realities to us through their literatures, offering perspectives on the spiritual and social structures of their nations. There are those who say we do possess the figure of the American in literature. But what do we know of their writings? Who in Germany reads [Joseph] Hergesheimer, [Theodore] Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, [H. L.] Mencken . . . ? In Eugene O'Neill we became acquainted with our first American dramatist, and—let us be honest—he left us cold.

But we have other things: trusts, highrises, traffic officers, film, technical wonders, jazz bands, boxing, magazines, and management. Is that America? Perhaps. Since I have never been there, I can make no judgment. But I do know that the images of these things come to us from America. But does all this then amount to Americanism? Are these phenomena not much more than the external and revealed symptoms of a more secret, spiritual, soulful essence? Is Americanism not a new orientation to being, grown out of and formed in our European destiny? This is a question that the Viennese writer (who died a year ago) Robert Müller first raised and answered: "Americanism is therefore either a method or a fanaticism." And with this we come much closer to its character and its Europeanness.

In fact, Americanism is a new European method. The extent to which this method was itself influenced by America seems to me quite unimportant. It is a method of the concrete and of energy, and is completely attuned to spiritual and material reality. The European's new (Americanized) appearance corresponds to it too: beardless with a sharp profile, a resolute look in the eyes, and a steely, thin body; and the new female type (explained only minimally by sexology alone): boyish, linear, and ruled by lively movement, by her step, and by her leg. It is altogether fitting to the method of Americanism that it expresses itself very strongly in the corporal, that it possesses body-soul. This in no way implies superficiality, only a clear turn away from abstraction and sentimentality and a transformation of even our noblest capacities into the concreteness and wakeful liveliness best revealed by the body. (Sport is therefore but one symptom of this new inner split.) Concrete and unsentimental, thus in a positive sense naïve—such is the method of Americanism, in the life of the soul and the spirit as in practical affairs. No burden of culture weighs this method

down. It is young, barbaric, uncultivated, willful. It has that free and strong breath we sense in the poems of Walt Whitman and which already enchanted Baudelaire. It follows no abstract or historical ideal, but instead follows life. Americanism is fanaticism for life, for its worldliness and its present-day forms.

Americanism thus appears as the strongest opponent of romanticism, which sought to flee worldliness. It is the natural enemy of all distraction from the present, whether through a backward-looking conception of history, through the mystical, or through intellectualism. Americanism is very northern, clear, and secure; it billows with a seawind. It has a strong and exact relation not only to the exactness of a machine, organization, economy but also to nature. It does not experience nature as a symbol of subjective feelings or as a Rousseauian idyll but as the mightiest and most extravagant reality, which people do not face, but in which and with which they live. This new experience of nature reverberates most strongly in the books by Knut Hamsun, as in the Scandinavian character in general—one thinks too of Johannes V. Jensen—he is very close to Americanism (which Robert Müller likewise emphasized). But it is Prussian in its sober technical methods and reaches down into the Latin countries insofar as clarity of form and rationalism are at issue. Nothing, however, is more foreign and bygone to Americanism than the old Russian East, its fatigue and passivity. Americanism hates unfruitful passions, the unplumbable depths of the soul, and a stifling, deadening religiosity. Only in the world of reality does it find a worthy test for humanity.

Marcel Proust's declaration, "Toute action de l'esprit est aisée, s'il n'est pas soumise au réel,"<sup>11</sup> is easily understood by Americanism (and, incidentally, understood in the sense of the American philosophy of pragmatism). But Paul Valéry's elevation of architecture to an ideal—not in the sense of classical laws of form but by virtue of the experience of building and statics—also contains a recognition, despite the writer's formal strictness and musicality, of reality. Perhaps, though, the proximity of these two Frenchmen to Americanism is controversial. Its literary inroads become clearer in cases of writers who consciously turn away from tradition in their desire to create a new world in a new form out of the radical experience of the immediate present, for example, the epic writers Alfred Döblin and Ilya Ehrenburg. Their novels are carried by the experience of collectivism; they are visions bursting with vitality and monumental legends of the present. Electrical centers explode into action and send their energy waves through the mechanized world. In the most recent Parisian literary fashion, Surrealism, the attempt is made to reduce this new experience of reality—a near total opposite of the old biological-romantic naturalism—to a theoretical formula.

But literature follows Americanism only minimally at first. Its vitality is still too overpowering and uncultivated, so that it is still sensed as nearly antiliterary. Its intellectual potential is still problematic. Perhaps it marks an end or an intermission in the cultural history of Europe; but perhaps as early as tomorrow we will find ourselves confronting a surprisingly new flowering. It would be fruitless to pose and solve puzzles here. On the other hand, it would be wrong to want to recognize the epoch only in the external phenomena of economy and exchange, thereby passing over the new orientations of the spirit. The present clings to reality as the most powerful creative substance, as energy, as mastery of the world.

Now should we complain or rejoice over Americanism? Neither. We sense its vitality and should not measure its manifestations against false standards.

The jazz band, too, is force and sound, magical in the wild brilliance of its rhythm. But why, as we listen to the pounding of its instruments, speak of classical music?

Reprinted in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. University of California Press, 1994, p. 395. For more documents, see chapter 22 “The Roaring Twenties: Cabaret and Urban Entertainment,” pp. 551-567, and chapter 15 “Imagining America: Fordism and Technology” (pp. 393-411) in the *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*.



## Music and Cabaret



Marlene Dietrich and Margo Lion performing “Wenn meine beste Freundin”/ “When my best friend”

Dietrich singing “Falling in Love Again”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hK11UswV6Uk>

(Gramophone Co. LTD. Records 1939)

## FRIEDRICH HOLLAENDER

### Cabaret

First published as “Cabaret,” *Die Weltbühne* 28, no. 5 (February 2, 1932), 169-171.

The cabaret – which those terribly serious, bearded sorts are fond of dismissing as the undernourished half-sister of the verbal arts—is more likely the the happy child of an eleventh muse, conceived in an easy-going love affair with theater, variety shows, and political tribunals. Though no less serious than its three fathers whose sharpest criticism constantly reaffirms its mission, cabaret would nevertheless like to appear more lucid and less weighty but also more unruly. This might be explained by the fact that it often falls into the hands of unqualified pedagogues who from time to time, darken its path with their own frivolous behavior. Thus it happens that the cabaret is always being dragged down from its conquered heights, from its jovial perspective, and sometimes even descends to a level beneath that of the coasters under the beer glasses on the bar.

But we are speaking here of restrained cabaret, which, true to its ironic mission, floats like a soap bubble above the things in our difficult-to-live life, reflecting them wickedly or tenderly, now using the distorting effects of color and light to render their value overwhelming, now screwing them back down to the diminutive status that is in truth their due. In Copenhagen, “cabarets” mean the colorful bowls in the restaurants offering the hurried palate manifold stimuli in concentrated form. Where do connoisseurs begin? How can they secure for themselves a taste for all of them? And before they get to the enchanting taste of all these sophisticated little morsels, the bowls are empty, leaving behind, aside from a symphony of appetizing aromas, that splendid, not quite satisfied desire without which we would not be able to live.

... In the serious *chanson* the potential lies in the tightly arched bow of an instantaneous dramatic flash; in the cheerful *chanson*, in the lethal precision of its pause (which must be one with the verbal joke), the way an arrow fired at the nearest target hits its mark. . . .

Excerpted from *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. University of California Press, 1994, 566-567.



Marlene Dietrich rehearses with the Weintraub-Syncopators under the direction of the Friedrich Holländer, who wrote the music for the *Blue Angel*, including songs such as "Ich bin die fesche Lola" that were also available on records. See [HERE](#)



The Weintraub-Syncopators with Friedrich Holländer at the piano (1929)





Screen shot of Weintraub Syncopaters with Friedrich Holländer. *See also* Jazz in Berlin 1929: Weintraub Syncopaters – “Am Sonntag will mein Süßer mit mir segeln geh'n” [When my sweetheart goes sailing with me on Sunday] 1929. Listen to the recording [HERE](#)..