JULIANE RÖMHILD

Intermodernism and Transnational Modernism: Vicki Baum's Grand Hotel *and the Americanism of New Objectivity*

Vicki Baum's *Grand Hotel*, ironically subtitled "a potboiler with backstories",[1] has long puzzled literary scholars, who seem at a loss when it comes to finding adequate critical parameters for this and other works by Baum. Although her novels have been classed as *Unterhaltungsliteratur* (entertainment literature),[2] a broad category intersecting with the Anglophone concept of the middlebrow, *Grand Hotel* also includes modernist literary techniques. In fact, Sabina Becker hails *Grand Hotel* as an urban novel second only to Alfred Döblin's modernist masterpiece *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and a prime example of New Objectivity.[3] The stylistic hybridity of *Grand Hotel* is typical of New Objective fiction and indicative of a sense of boundary crossing or "in-betweenness" that Kristin Bluemel calls intermodernism. Intermodernist writing engages with the modern in an accessible way and shows a particular affinity with a

[1] My translation. Baum's subtitle, "Ein Kolportageroman mit Hintergründen", appeared only in the first edition of *Menschen im Hotel* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1929), and was dropped from all subsequent German and English editions. For an analysis of the subtitle, see Nicole Nottelmann, *Strategien des Erfolgs: Narratologische Analysen exemplarischer Romane Vicki Baums* (Würzburg: Königshause & Neumann, 2002), 168-72. Jörg Thunecke discusses the effects of dropping the subtitle on the Anglophone reception in "Kolportage ohne Hintergründe: Der Film *Grand Hotel* (1932). Exemplarische Darstellung der Entwicklungsgeschichte von Vicki Baums Roman *Menschen im Hotel* (1929)," in *Die Resonanz des Exils. Gelungene und Mißlungene Rezeption deutschsprachiger Exilautoren*, ed. Dieter Sevin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 132-52.

[2] Nottelmann offers a succinct discussion of Baum's work in the context of entertainment literature and narrative formulas in *Strategien des Erfolgs*, 60-76.

[3] Sabina Becker, "Großstädtische Metamorphosen. Vicki Baums Roman *Menschen im Hotel*," in *Jahrbuch zur Literatur der Weimarer Republik. Band 5. Frauen in der Literatur der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Sabina Becker (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 1999/2000), 179. Becker offers a comprehensive overview of Baum's reception in the context of both entertainment literature and New Objective fiction.

"documentary style and mass media".[4] It broadens the concept of literary modernism to include a left-wing avant-garde that critically described its main readership of white-collar workers as the driving force of modern life. However, in order to explain the "inter" of Baum's intermodernism, we need to read *Grand Hotel* in a transnational context because the novel shows traces of the "Americanism" (*Amerikanismus*) that strongly influenced Weimar culture, contributing significantly to its popular appeal. This adds another, transatlantic sense of "in-betweenness" not just to *Grand Hotel*, but to New Objectivity more generally. Much of New Objective writing, art, and music showed a fascination with American cultural imports, such as girl revues, night clubs, and jazz music, but also technical and engineering feats in the shape of fast cars and sky scrapers. American "cool" made an important contribution to Berlin urban culture in the twenties.

This double sense of the "in-betweenness" of German New Objectivity, which is particularly visible in *Grand Hotel*, contributes to Anglophone modernist studies because it reminds us that "the high/low relationship has taken very different shapes and forms" in non-Anglophone literatures.[5] This is true not just for postcolonial literatures and texts written "outside of the Northern Transatlantic," as Andreas Huyssen points out, but also for writing from Western and Central Europe, precisely the realm that is traditionally considered the core domain of modernist studies. In this context, the prefixes "trans" and "inter" represent "a challenge to the normative dimension"[6] of modernism, and they do so when, following Rebecca Walkowitz's call, we look not just "beyond the country" but "beyond the language" as well.[7] In this sense, the reading of German New Objectivity as a specific, intermodernist expression of European modernism can make a contribution to the ongoing project of literary "deconstruction, whereby

[4] Kristin Bluemel, *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 14.

[5] Andreas Huyssen, "Modernism at Large," in *Modernism*, ed. Astradur Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 58.

[6] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 10-11.

[7] Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "Why Transnational Modernism Can't Be All in One Language," *English Language Notes* 49.1 (2011): 158.

each cultural formation reveals the blind spots or limitations of the other."[8] In particular, New Objectivity complicates our understanding of the relationship between modernism "as adversary culture"[9] and the middlebrow as a gendered phenomena. Unlike the Anglophone middlebrow, which is predominantly studied as a form of women's writing,[10] New Objectivity presented itself as decidedly masculine. Moreover, New Objectivity not only helps us to understand the transnational migration of cultural and literary forms from the United States to Germany, but also opens up perspectives on socially engaged literature from Britain, as I will outline briefly at the end of this article.

When Vicki Baum published her eleventh novel, *Menschen im Hotel* (*Grand Hotel*) in 1929, she was already a literary star and working as a columnist for Ullstein, Europe's largest publisher. Ullstein's aggressive marketing campaigns helped create the "Vicki Baum phenomenon: the aura and expectation of success that became associated with Baum and her novels."[11] The English translation of the novel in 1930, a stage adaptation on Broadway in the same year, and finally a Hollywood adaptation starring Greta Garbo and Joan Collins in 1932 were all overwhelmingly successful.[12] Alarmed by the political developments in Germany and riding on the wave of her American success, Baum, who was Jewish, moved with her family to Hollywood, where she worked as a script-writer and continued to write novels. Throughout the Second World War, Baum remained one of the best-known and highest-selling German writers in exile.

Grand Hotel is set in Berlin and follows six very different hotel guests whose lives intersect over the course of two days. Like the revolving doors of the hotel, the novel moves at a fast pace, offering snapshots of the lives of its protagonists.

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[8] Paul Giles, *Transnationalism in Practice: Essays on American Studies, Literature, and Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 45.

[9] Huyssen, "Modernism at Large," 58.

[10] See, for example, Nicola Humble's seminal book *The Feminine Middlebrow, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[11] Lynda J. King, *Best-Sellers by Design: Vicki Baum and the House of Ullstein* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 73.

[12] For a discussion of the novel's remarkable number of stage and film adaptations, see Lynda J. King, "*Grand Hotel*: The Sexual Politics of a Popular Culture Classic," *Women in German Yearbook* 15 (2000): 185-200.

Dr Otternschlag is a cynical, morphine-addicted war veteran with a glass eye and a scarred face who spends his time sitting in the lobby watching life pass him by. His counterpart is another soldier, the younger Baron von Gaigern. Although equally uprooted, Gaigern is handsome and full of life, and makes his precarious living as a master thief. He is planning to steal the famous pearls of the ageing Russian ballerina Elizaveta Grusinskaya, but his coup fails because the unlikely couple falls in love. Their romance is cut short when Preysing, a textile manufacturer who has come to Berlin to clinch a business deal, accidentally kills Gaigern the next day. Preysing has hired his typist Flämmchen ("little flame") as his escort for an upcoming business trip. Flämmchen is a typical flapper: an independent, cool-headed young woman. She subsidises her meagre income by working as a pin-up model and, occasionally, as a prostitute. In a dramatic turn of events, Flämmchen ends up with the most likeable of all the protagonists, Otto Kringelein, a small accountant in Preysing's company. Terminally ill, Kringelein has decided to spend his final days experiencing all the pleasures Berlin has to offer. Although his death is imminent, the reader may close the book with the comforting knowledge that Kringelein will die in the loving care of Flämmchen.

In keeping with the ironic subtitle of her novel, Vicki Baum described herself as a "first rate writer of the second rank".[13] Her self-deprecatory stance seems to reflect the middlebrow characteristic of being "earnest"[14] without taking oneself too seriously. Baum's novels are extremely well crafted, and her commercial success placed her in the vicinity of writers such as Erich Kästner, Erich Maria Remarque, Stefan Zweig, Hans Fallada, Lion Feuchtwanger, and others. From an Anglophone perspective, these might be referred to as middlebrow writers.[15] Indeed, before the term gained currency, Lynda J. King tried to map out a space for Baum's works between the dreaded epithet of "trivial literature" (*Trivialliteratur*) and "high literature" (*Hochliteratur*).[16] Discussing Baum

[13] Vicki Baum, *Es War Alles Ganz Anders* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1962), 265 (my translation).

[14] Beth Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-First Century*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 40.

[15] Heather Valencia, "Vicki Baum: 'A First-Rate Second-Rate Writer'?" in *German Novelists of the Weimar Republic: Intersections of Literature and Politics*, ed. Karl Leydecker (Rochester: Camden House, 2006), 232.

[16] Lynda J. King, "The Image of Fame: Vicki Baum in Weimar Germany," *German Quarterly* 58.3 (Summer 1985): 375-93.

within the critical framework of the middlebrow enables us to gain a more nuanced understanding of her journalistic approach, her use of melodrama, and her willingness to promote herself in extensive marketing campaigns. However, it does not necessarily help us to understand the modernity of *Grand Hotel*. English critics especially appreciated the "vitality, color, speed [...] and modernity" of the book, as well as Baum's treatment of contemporary themes: "the generational conflict, the alienating effect of urban life, the new world of machines […] and the breakup of traditional values and frameworks,"[17] all of which Baum introduces with a light touch.

The cultural field of the Weimar Republic makes it difficult to transfer the cultural and social patterns of modernist and middlebrow onto German literature of the twenties for a number of reasons. First of all, the 1923 German stock market crash caused not only the financial ruin of much of Germany's highly cultured bourgeoisie, but also a loss of cultural orientation which required a re-evaluation of the hierarchies between high and popular culture.[18] In the politically, financially, and culturally volatile climate of the Weimar Republic, New Objectivity came to be synonymous with "modern."[19] Cool, factual, and easily accessible, it was the artistic expression of "the immediate confrontation with modernity as a freezing shock."[20] Canonical modernist writers like Bertolt Brecht were at the forefront of experimental New Objectivity, and Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* relies heavily on both Expressionist and New Objectivist techniques. Although decidedly anti-elitist, New Objectivity is undoubtedly an expression of German modernism.[21] However, like intermodernism, its allegiance is not primarily to "language," as Bluemel notes with reference to

[17] Ariela Halkin, *The Enemy Reviewed: German Popular Literature through British Eyes between the Two World Wars* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 78-9.

[18] Kerstin Barndt, *Sentiment und Sachlichkeit. Der Roman der Neuen Frau in der Weimarer Republik* (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), 1. See also Johannes G. Pankau, *Einführung in die Literatur der Neuen Sachlichkeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010), 64.

[19] Barndt, *Sentiment und Sachlichkeit*, 1.

[20] Helmut Lethen, *Cool Conduct*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), ix.

[21] Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit,* vol. 1, *Die Ästhetik der neusachlichen Literatur (1920-1933)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 363.

T. S. Eliot, but "to 'the people'."[22] After an initial period of academic neglect,[23] today writers associated with New Objectivity such as Kästner, Fallada, and Joseph Roth are considered part of the German canon.

Secondly, New Objectivity could become synonymous with "modern" because German does not distinguish between "modern" and "modernist", producing a different perception of the cultural field. Accordingly, the scholarship on German literature of the "Weimar years" does not always make a clear distinction between the social, technical, and cultural phenomenon of modernity (*die Moderne)* and the artistic response to modernity in the shape of modernism (*die Moderne)*.[24] The fluidity of terminology is facilitated by the fact that much of German modernist writing can be described as "essentially a compromise formation, seeking to build bridges between a deeply entrenched cultural tradition and more recent industrial advances,"[25] as Tobias Boes notes. Although certainly not all German modernist writing would fit the intermodernist bill, Boes's statement resonates with Bluemel's definition of intermodernism as "a cultural and critical bridge or borderland."[26] The widespread success of Naturalist and Expressionist writing, for example, may partly be explained by the particular affinities the German bourgeoisie felt with the modern, which led

[22] Bluemel, *Intermodernism*, 1.

[23] King, "The Image of Fame," 375.

[24] There is a significant body of research that uses the Weimar Republic as a temporal and cultural frame to discuss the process of modernisation in conjunction with modern/modernist literature by scholars such as Frank Trommler, Jost Hermand, Erhard Schütz, and Sabina Becker. See also Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick's chapter "Modernism and the Experience of Modernity" in their edited collection *Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 1-16. However, while this kind of scholarship is laudable, Walter Erhart and others note that German literary studies need to update their critical paradigms, often still based on Adorno, when discussing modernism/modernity. See Erhart, "Die Germanistische Moderne—Eine Wissenschaftsgeschichte," in *Literarische Moderne. Begriff und Phänomen*, ed. Sabina Becker and Helmuth Kiesel (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2007), 146-166. Barndt credits the inclusion of New Objectivity in the modern/modernist canon as one of the major innovations in this regard (*Sentiment und Sachlichkeit*, 6).

[25] Tobias Boes, "Germany," in *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*, ed. Pericles Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 41.

[26] Bluemel, *Intermodernism*, 2.

to considerable institutional support for modern art and literature at the turn of the century.[27] Moreover, Becker argues that German modernist literature had since its beginnings in the late nineteenth century been building a vocabulary that would adequately represent life in an urban, industrialised world.[28] The fulminant pathos of Expressionism shows a strong preoccupation with the city as a site of both dehumanising mass culture and human individuality. German naturalism, on the other hand, responded to modern life with an emphasis on objectivity, truth, and realism, resulting in a conceptual overlap between modernity and modernism on the one hand, and a form of objectivism on the other.

The resulting nexus between the historical markers of modernity, artistic modernism, and an interest in the city as a site of mass formations was historically reinforced with the advent of the New Objectivity. After the political and emotional upheavals of the Great War and the demise of the Kaiserreich in 1918, the emotional and aesthetic intensity of German Expressionism seemed increasingly out-dated. Accordingly, Jost Hermand considers New Objective writing "not so much an artistic as an ideological standpoint that seems to reject everything idealistic, noble, and grandiose including even bourgeois artistic isms themselves."[29] It is, as Bluemel notes for intermodernism, "an expression of *shared* values,"[30] a democratic response to "high bourgeois art, with its inwardness, elitism, and traditionalism."[31] New Objective literature favours an aesthetic of precision; it is set in the present; it is journalistic, documentary even. Abhorring all depth and psychologising, it often describes types rather than nuanced characters. The tone is unemotional, often ironic. Fascinated with technical progress, New Objective literature adopted filmic techniques, such as

[27] Georg Bollenbeck, "'Gefühlte Moderne' und negativer Resonanzboden. Kein Sonderweg, aber deutsche Besonderheiten," in *Literarische Moderne. Begriff und Phänomen*, ed. Sabina Becker and Helmuth Kiesel (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2007), 44.

[28] Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 1: 360.

[29] Jost Hermand, quoted in Karl Leydecker, "Introduction," in *German Novelists of the Weimar Republic*, 12.

[30] Bluemel, *Intermodernism*, 5.

[31] Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and "New Objectivity"* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 47.

montage, and depicted the world of white-collar workers, who were also its readers. Its intermodernist preoccupation with work was not accidental: New Objective fiction was "working" literature in the sense that it made a point of not being art, but of being written for immediate consumption.[32]

As already noted, New Objectivity received crucial inspirations from American culture, which contributed significantly to its sense of modernity and its popular appeal. Just as the recovery of the German economy after the crash was driven by the Dawes Plan and the investment of American capital, "Europeans appeared to be assimilating to an alien social type characterized by rationalist, matter-of-factness, and a high pace of living."[33] Martin Lindner has summarised the Weimar fascination with America as the love of "sport, film und Jazz."[34] Indeed, boxing, filmic narrative techniques, and music play an important role in *Grand Hotel*. Moreover, the novel also reflects the New Objective attitude towards literature as a commodity and an affinity with reportage inspired by the works of Sinclair Lewis and Upton Sinclair, as well as a Fordist fascination with technical progress and industrial rationalisation.

Baum's own pragmatic attitude towards her work was largely in accordance with Hermann Kesten's views on the goals and purpose of New Objective writing:

> Art should become a craft again […] a production that, like any other, is regulated by what the consumer demands; an occupation reflecting the speed and mobility of our existence; and whose results will usually be used up by the end of the day for which they were created.[35]

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[32] For an extensive overview of the characteristics of New Objective writing on which this list of attributes is based, see Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 1: 97-257.

[33] David Midgley, *Writing Weimar: Critical Realism in German Literature, 1918-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21.

[34] Martin Lindner, *Leben in der Krise: Zeitromane der neuen Sachlichkeit und die intellektuelle Mentalität der klassischen Moderne* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994), 171 (my translation). For a critical and nuanced overview of the different aspects of the Weimar fascination with America, see Erhard Schütz, *Romane der Weimarer Republik* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1986), 70-84.

[35] Hermann Kesten, quoted in Valencia, "Vicki Baum", 229 (my translation).

Baum's first stories were written to help her first husband fulfil a commission for short stories, and were published under his name.[36] Her son Wolfgang later remembered how his mother would sit down in the evenings to write something that would "make money."[37] Baum's self-image as a professional producer of fiction and journalism is characteristic of the New Objective preoccupation with the increasing industrialisation of culture, inspired, among other things, by the hugely popular translation of Henry Ford's autobiography in 1923.[38] Like any other product, books needed marketing in order to find buyers, and Ullstein marketed *Grand Hotel* with "half-page inserts" in newspapers, "a size usually reserved for department-store sales,"[39] reflecting the status of the novel as a commodity.

Expensive commodities like cars and clothes also play a central role in *Grand Hotel* itself, and almost all its characters are chasing money. The financial details of Preysing's business deal and his anxiety over them are discussed at length.[40] Gaigern dies while trying to steal Preysing's wallet, and Kringelein and Flämmchen bond over their shared experience of financial pressures. When Flämmchen explains that she took up with Preysing for money, Kringelein is sympathetic: "His life had been a struggle over pennies, so how could he fail to understand her?"[41] In this context, the melodramatic plot of the novel and its self-ironic characterisation as a "potboiler" place *Grand Hotel* in the vicinity of the American dime novel: a cheap thrill, made for immediate consumption. The association between writing, money, and mass-production is ultimately personified in a cigar-smoking manager of a Hollywood film company, who

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[36] Nicole Nottelmann, *Die Karrieren der Vicki Baum* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2007),45-6.

[37] Katharina von Ankum, "Rückblick auf eine Realistin," in *Apropos Vicki Baum* (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1998), 14.

[38] Midgley, *Writing Weimar*, 23.

[39] King, *Best-Sellers by Design*, 110.

[40] For a detailed analysis of capitalism and gender in *Grand Hotel*, see Moritz Föllmer, "Kapitalismus und Geschlecht in Zeitromanen um 1930," in *Die Kunst der Geschichte. Historiographie, Ästhetik, Erzählung*, ed. Martin Baumeister et. al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 349-71.

[41] Vicki Baum, *Grand Hotel*, trans. Basil Creighton (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1930), 288-9. All subsequent quotations are from this edition, cited parenthetically.

dictates "in a nasal American voice" and makes the "typewriters" rattle "like faint machine-gun fire" (77).

The New Objective preoccupation with facts is also reflected in *Grand Hotel*. Critics noted that this novel did not claim to be a work of art, but that as a novelistic form of reportage—"taken from the day, but still part of it"—it showed the authenticity and immediacy characteristic of all good journalism.[42] Ullstein promoted the story (whether true or not) that Baum had worked as a chambermaid when researching her book. Baum herself considered the boundaries between fiction and journalism permeable enough to occasionally recycle material from her columns in her novels.[43] Although a far cry from the radical, reformist fervour of Upton Sinclair, *Grand Hotel* includes socially engaged, journalistic passages on the life of chambermaids, receptionists, and porters highlighting the inhumane apparatus of the hotel. The porter is anxious to be with his wife at the hospital, but knows he has to hold his post since "the routine of the hotel could not be upset because Hall Porter Senf's wife was expecting a baby" (1). Like the other employees, Senf has internalised the hotel's precedence over matters of life and death.

The novel veers even more clearly into reportage and filmed documentary in its description of Berlin. Together with Kringelein we are whisked away on a tour of all the attractions the city has to offer: the ballet, nightclubs, car races, gambling dens, and various landmarks are introduced briefly and expertly, recreating the tense and dynamic atmosphere of the city and contributing to the fascination Berlin held in the popular imagination as the tantalising centre of modern Weimar. Kringelein throws himself headlong into the experience of the city, becoming "a tiny hurtling comet that soon must burst into atoms" (226). In Baum's depiction of the electrifying atmosphere of a boxing match the reader is drawn into the story by sharing Kringelein's breathless exhilaration:

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[42] Emmy Wolff, quoted in King, "The Image of Fame," 382.

[43] Julia Bertschick, "'Ihr Name war ein Begriff wie Melissengeist oder Leibnizkekse.' Vicki Baum und der Berliner Ullstein-Verlag", in *Autorinnen der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Walter Fähnders and Helga Karrenbrock (Aisthesis: Bielefeld, 2003), 123.

> Kringelein was cooped up no longer in his dilapidated body. Kringelein was one among fourteen thousand, one green distorted face among countless others, and his voice indistinguishable in the one great roar that issued from every throat at once. […] His ears burned, his fists were clenched, his lips were dry. (231)

The boxing scene and the depiction of the city are examples of how the novel blends reportage with filmic techniques like montage, establishing shots, zooms, and close-ups.[44] Baum's sense of rhythm and musicality (she was a professional harpist), as well as her talent as a journalist and future scriptwriter, are reflected in the sharp cuts of the Berlin scenes, which amount to the verbal equivalent of Walter Ruttmann's film *Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927). When Gaigern climbs the hotel façade to reach the pearls in Grusinskaya's room, we share his perspective of the street, as if filmed with a camera: "at this sharp angle the world had a distorted and flattened appearance" (95). In a close-up his gaze later traces the faint scars of Grusinskaya's face-lift. The episodic structure of the book allowed for an easy adaptation to film. Literature, reportage, and film coalesce in the image of Dr Otternschlag's glass-eye. Like the lens of a camera, Otternschlag observes everything with an ironic, detached gaze.[45]

The boxing scene is also significant because, as a combat sport that could lead the successful fighter from rags to riches, boxing represented several aspects of the American dream. At the time, boxing was a still recent import from the United States and was fashionable with the working classes, artists, and celebrities alike. The skinny Bertolt Brecht had his photo taken with the boxing champion Paul Samson-Körner while Baum and Marlene Dietrich both took boxing lessons. "In some ways, the hard-working career woman who rose in society as a writer of best-selling fiction [and] who shaped an independent identity, mirrored the boxer's hard work and determination in his—or her—struggle to rise in society," as Irene Gammel notes with reference to Baum.[46]

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[44] Andrea Capovilla, *Entwürfe weiblicher Identität in der Moderne. Milena Jesenská, Vicki Baum, Gina Kaus, Alice Rühle-Gerstel* (Oldenburg: Igel, 2004), 93.

[45] Capovilla, *Entwürfe weiblicher Identität in der Moderne*, 98-9. For an in-depth analysis of *Grand Hotel*'s ostensibly detached yet implicitly engaged narrative perspective, see Nicole Nottelmann, *Strategien des Erfolgs,* 162-4.

[46] Irene Gammel, "Lacing Up the Gloves," *Cultural and Social History* 9.3 (2012): 372.

Independence, hard work, and the hope of future riches also underpin Flämmchen's American flapper dream of becoming a film star. In Baum's novel, this dream has a gendered inflection because Flämmchen's punctuality, discipline, and entrepreneurial attitude mark her as a New Woman. Moreover, the slender, long-legged Flämmchen is completely emancipated when it comes to sex. Her "taught, elastic" body (272), which secretly disturbs Preysing, who had expected "softness" (272), recalls the "hedonistic 'Girlkultur' of Americanism."[47] Weimar Girlkultur is inseparably linked with the image of American jazz, which permeates the novel. Played in the hotel bar, jazz can be heard in almost every scene and underscores the fast pace of the novel. The "famous Eastman Jazz Band" (215) is a fashionable American accessory of the hotel, and Flämmchen's energetic dancing is suggestive of the jazz routines of American chorus lines, which Fritz Giehse condemned for their "mechanistic attitudes" in his popular book *Girlkultur* (1926).[48] However, the precariousness of the American Dream is highlighted by the fact that in spite of her qualities and optimism, Flämmchen does not manage to rise above the endless chorus line of ambitious young typists.

The association of man and machine is prevalent throughout the novel. Telephones and typewriters highlight the precariousness of communication in the fashionable, fast-paced modern life of the city. At the end of the novel, Grusinskaya will speak sweet words of love into a telephone receiver, but Baron von Gaigern is already dead. She is speaking into a technical void. Kringelein's car race and his airplane trip with Gaigern emphasise speed and mobility, but also symbolise the lack of direction of the protagonists, who, like billiard balls, collide before shooting off in different directions again. Lift noises and the sound of cars infiltrate the lovemaking of Gaigern and Grusinskaya. Under pressure Gaigern feels "the arteries of his neck pulsing like machines" (101), showing the continued dehumanisation of war veterans, further represented by Otternschlag's glass eye.

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[47] McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity*, 57. For an analysis of the disruptive potential of Flämmchen as "a locus of the many discourses on women: modernity, experimental sexuality, emancipation, class," see Vibeke Rützou Petersen, *Woman and Modernity in Weimar German: Reality and its Representation in Popular Fiction* (New York: Berghan Books, 2001), 37.

[48] Midgley, *Writing Weimar*, 22.

Having conducted this brief analysis of the novel, I want now to return to my original question, how can a reading of New Objectivity as intermodernist literature with strong transnational features benefit modernist studies? First of all, such a reading might help us to understand how New Objectivity influenced the documentary films of John Grierson and the writings of W. H. Auden, Thomas Wolfe, and Christopher Isherwood, who "carried back to their own countries a disciplined and socially engaged approach to literature thereby preserving the cultural legacy of the Weimar Republic"[49]. Sara Sullam, for example, notes the influence of Berlin writers and essayists like Kästner, Döblin, Gabriele Tergit, and Siegfried Kracauer on Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, whose famous opening passage shows traces of New Objective detachment when the narrator compares himself to "a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking."[50] Nick Hubble also points out the political and ideological convergences between Kracauer's investigations of German white-collar workers and the British Mass Observation Project in the wider context of the British documentary movement and George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937).[51]

Secondly, the American inflections of New Objective literature may help complicate the implicit gendering of realist middlebrow as feminine. Although there is a growing body of work on the masculine middlebrow and the crisis of masculinity,[52] so far the majority of research has explored it as a literature written predominantly by women for a female audience. In contrast, New Objectivity was a self-consciously masculine phenomenon[53] and is traditionally understood as the expression of the post-war crisis of masculinity in the face of the bewildering onslaught of modernity.[54] More recent research now focuses on

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[49] Boes, "Germany", 47.

[50] Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye Berlin* (London: Hogarth, 1939), 13.

[51] Nick Hubble, "The Intellectual and the Masses," in *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 79-103.

[52] See, for example, Kate Macdonald, ed., *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr Miniver Read* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[53] See, for example, Kurt Pinthus's 1929 essay "Männlichkeit," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 328-33.

[54] See, for example, Lethen's seminal *Cool Conduct*, Lindner's *Leben in der Krise*, and Schütz's *Romane der Weimarer Republik*.

women writers and has revised our understanding of the German New Woman. Moreover, by highlighting melodrama and sentiment, researchers such as Kerstin Barndt, Julia Bertschick, Becker, and others also question the "cool" (self-)image of New Objectivity. Here, a transnational comparison holds potential for precisely that revealing of "the blind spots or limitations of the other" mentioned earlier, because it encourages us to explore and question the gendered perceptions of different forms of literary realism.

Reading New Objectivity in the context of transnational modernism reminds us that the relationship between high and low, modernist and middlebrow is historically and culturally specific and "can be inflected by radically different politics."[55] New Objective novels like *Grand Hotel* explore the historic moment when the tastes of the newly emerging lower-middle class of office workers were both a driving force and a reflection of cultural and artistic expressions of modernity. The historic achievement of New Objectivity was to keep literature relevant as a critical mass medium at time when cinema and radio threatened to supersede the book.[56] This was possible, I would argue, partly because of its fascination with and critical embrace of the popular elements of American culture. Of course, both modernist and middlebrow "scholars have complicated the high-low or art-versus-commodity story in countless ways."[57] The term intermodernism itself is the result of the ongoing re-definition of modernist studies. However, the scarcity of studies that read middlebrow, intermodernist, and modernist writers together is a reminder that a transnational perspective may be beneficial in furthering the exploration of literary reflections on and of modern life.

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[55] Huyssen, "Modernism at Large," 56.

[56] Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 1: 53. For an excellent case study on how New Objective fiction contemporised traditional themes and genres, see Patrizia McBride, "Learning to See in Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*," *German Quarterly* 84.2 (Spring 2011): 220-38.

[57] Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123.3 (May 2008): 744. Mao and Walkowitz offer a brief list of scholars who have done work in this field. For an overview of scholarship on the topic from the perspective of the middlebrow, see Erica Brown and Mary Grover, eds, *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).