Berlin Coquette

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Sex, Money, and Marriage: Prostitution as an Instrument of Conjugal Critique

“As long as marriage exists, so will prostitution,” wrote Georg Simmel in an essay published in the Social Democratic weekly Die Neue Zeit in 1892. As Simmel’s proclamation suggests, turn-of-the-century debates surrounding prostitution were inextricably linked to discussions of the current state of marriage and its possible reform. Although on the surface bourgeois morality dictated that prostitution remain outside the boundaries of respectable society, it was often understood by mainstream society to be a “necessary evil” essential to the maintenance of bourgeois women’s premarital chastity and the guarantee of men’s sexual freedom. The institution of the bourgeois family was considered by critics to be protected by prostitution, which offered bourgeois men an outlet for their sexual desires—desires that, if not transferred to the prostitute, could devastate the sanctity of the family. Bourgeois men’s patronage of prostitutes was treated with discretion within the

2. F. J. Behrend, Die Prostitution in Berlin (Erlangen: Palm & Enke, 1850), 8, 11, 20; Julius Kühn, Die Prostitution im 19. Jahrhundert (Leipzig: Barsdorf, 1871), 71. These are just a few examples; the phrase “necessary evil” is ubiquitous in the discussion of prostitution during this era.
3. Behrend, Die Prostitution in Berlin, 39, 75, 155. See also Hessen, Die Prostitution in Deutschland, 52–54.
middle classes but was publicly aired by various critics of bourgeois culture. Leaders of the burgeoning socialist movement such as August Bebel used prostitution as a polemic device, arguing that it was an integral part of the bourgeois capitalist economy. Portraying prostitutes as victims of a corrupt socioeconomic order on the one hand and as markers of bourgeois perversion and degeneration on the other, socialist and leftist-progressive writers attempted to show that the bourgeoisie had compromised its own doctrine of respectability and should therefore be denied a position of moral, social, and economic power. The image of the working class as unruly and sexually permissive and the bourgeoisie as beacons of respectability was turned upside down, and as the nineteenth century drew to a close, “it was . . . the bourgeoisie who embodied vice.”

With the establishment of a unified German nation in 1871, the state regulation of prostitution was codified under Clause 361/6, and registered prostitutes, while legally sanctioned to ply their trade, were subject to police surveillance and control. The state’s regulation of prostitution was intimately connected to the maintenance of nineteenth-century bourgeois respectability, and yet this connection was supposed to remain a secret. In his examination of respectability and its formative role in the creation of German national identity, George Mosse defines one of the central tenets of respectability as “the proper attitude toward sexuality.” What constituted this “proper attitude toward sexuality” was an emphasis on restraint and moderation over excess, and on strict gender demarcations, which portrayed women as sexually passive and men as active. Manliness and virility went hand in hand, and active sexual desire was a defining characteristic of the male citizen who could create and sustain a strong and healthy nation. As the newly formed German state took an ever more active “regulative interest in the family as the vital site for the health of the national body,” an almost obsessive focus was placed on conjugality and reproduction. The bourgeois conjugal model dictated that women remain chaste until marriage, after which they were to fulfill their domestic roles as wives and mothers. Male sexuality was, in theory, also contained within marriage, but in practice, men’s pre- and extramarital dalliances were tolerated and even regarded as natural. Prostitutes, although outwardly shunned as immoral by most members of bourgeois society, were, by means of the regulatory system, made available to male citizens for discreet and allegedly disease-free sexual encounters. Defenders of regulated prostitution argued vehemently that the existence of prostitution prevented men from seducing and thereby sullying the reputations of their would-be wives. Prostitution’s existence, therefore, was crucial to maintaining bourgeois respectability, one of the pillars of late nineteenth-century civil society.

When studying nineteenth-century gender roles, one of the central paradigms that emerges is the public/private split, commonly understood to refer to men’s access to the public sphere of work, politics, and organized leisure activities, on the one hand, and women’s relegation to the private, or domestic, sphere of home and family, on the other. In regard to sexual self-determination, however, Isabel Hull draws our attention to a different, yet equally gendered, type of public/private split that developed gradually over the course of the eighteenth century and became one of the defining characteristics of the nineteenth-century “sexual system.” Tracking the evolution of German civil society with a male citizen at its center, Hull argues that active, autonomous sexual desire was increasingly gendered as masculine and that men’s sexual transgressions became shrouded in secrecy. The sexual behavior of the male citizen was private; the sexual behavior of women was not, especially if it transgressed the boundaries of marital, procreative sex. Women who “were not circumscribed within an easily recognizable domestic environment,” who “did not keep the secret of their sexual intimacy,” and who were also “economically independent” were defined as “public” women and were often labeled and treated as prostitutes. Their sexual actions were therefore open to public scrutiny, strict moral judgment, and legal penalties.7

How did prostitution, which was not a contested topic during the eighteenth century, become, alongside male homosexuality and venereal disease, one of “the classic themes of nineteenth-century sexual discourse”? If Enlightenment thinkers and lawmakers were, as Hull contends, “preoccupied with laying down the principles of ‘normality’” within the sexual discourse of their time, then those who sought to define the social and sexual parameters of nineteenth-century Germany often did so through a discourse of abnormality or deviance.8 If the new nation was to be a robust and powerful one, then those groups that were deemed to put the national health at risk were viewed with suspicion, if not treated with disdain. The most tangible indicator of the health of the nation was its birthrate, and, much like the birthrate of its European neighbors, Germany’s was steadily declining in the final decades of the nineteenth century. “Abnormal” groups were comprised of individuals whose sexual behavior inhibited their ability to produce healthy offspring; in other words, these were nonprocreative people—homosexuals, prostitutes, single women, and persons with venereal diseases. Their behavior was studied, classified, and publicized by the fledgling discipline of sexual science, and in the case of prostitutes and male homosexuals, it was subject to legal discipline.9 Although the

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7. Isabel V. Hull, Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 391–92, 405–6. Hull defines the “sexual system” as “the patterned ways in which sexual behavior is shaped and given meaning” by social and legal institutions and by thinkers who shape civil society (1).
9. On the declining birthrate and the formulation of a discourse of Bevölkerungspolitik (population policy) that centered on venereal disease prevention and eventually eugenic screening, see Annette
fear of the growing numbers of unmarried women was based less on reality than on “imagined demography,” Catherine Dollard argues in her study of “the surplus woman” in Wilhelmine Germany, the notable public presence of single women was an urban, middle-class phenomenon most easily observed and documented in Berlin. The upstart German capital was the center of debates on public health issues and became the first city in imperial Germany to open a treatment clinic for venereal disease. As public women who were particularly visible in Berlin and who were assumed to be the primary culprits in the spread of venereal infection, prostitutes were associated both with the perceived increase in numbers of unwed women and with the rise in VDs, making prostitution part and parcel of the anxious discussions about public health and especially about women’s economic and sexual independence.

By the early 1890s, the public outcry over prostitution in Berlin reached a fever pitch. The widespread willingness to speak so openly about prostitution was sparked by the 1891 murder trial involving the pimp Hermann Heinze and his prostitute wife Anna, who were charged with murdering a night watchman while attempting to rob a Berlin church of its silver. The extensive coverage of the trial in the urban press and the decision of the judge to open the trial to the public attracted a large crowd of spectators, a gathering that caused well-dressed bourgeois ladies to literally rub elbows with thieves and prostitutes from Berlin’s impoverished north end. The trial even captured the attention of Kaiser Wilhelm II and inspired the parliament’s passage of a slate of restrictive laws—dubbed the *lex Heinze*—meant to curb pimping activities and to censor “pornographic” literature, theater, and visual media. As a result of the myriad social, sexual, and moral issues it raised and the national publicity it received, the Heinze trial “was the most important legal event since the lapse of the Anti-Socialist Law” in 1890, legislation that had banned all public political activity by socialists for more than a decade. In fact, these two legal events—the murder trial of a Berlin pimp and his prostitute wife

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and the lapse of antisuocialist legislation—are connected by more than the “moral panic of considerable proportions” they allegedly unleashed.\textsuperscript{13} Both events signified a growing preoccupation with the social effects of industrialization and the travails of the urban poor. Kaiser Wilhelm II charted a “new course” to improve industrial working conditions, calling for an International Conference on Labor Protection to be held in Berlin in March 1890. In its focus on working women and on issues such as maternity leave, the Kaiser’s “new course” offered state protection from exploitative working conditions by shortening the workday, yet it also expanded the state’s intervention into the familial realm. At the same time, with the resignation of Otto von Bismarck from his post as German chancellor and the contiguous repeal of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1890, new social actors became a vocal and visible part of German civil society, including Social Democrats, members of the women’s movement, social scientists, and naturalist writers, allowing for a multiplication of critical perspectives on social issues, including bourgeois marriage, gender roles, and economic equality.\textsuperscript{14}

Both the \textit{lex Heinze} and the renewed political activity of socialists also significantly affected the dissemination of print and visual media. The censorship laws passed as a result of the Heinze trial represented a tightening of state control within the cultural realm, and yet, as I will show in the case of Otto Erich Hartleben, Berlin theaters devised creative strategies to get around restrictive measures. With the lapse of Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Law, the publication and distribution of socialist writings was no longer forbidden. This allowed for the broader dissemination of ideas, such as those articulated by August Bebel in \textit{Women and Socialism}, a book that he had written in 1879 but that did not become available outside underground socialist circles until 1891. Both Bebel’s book and the Heinze trial, in quite different ways, broke the silence surrounding men’s sexual behavior and the role that men might play in prostitution, be it as pimps in the case of Hermann Heinze or as clients in the case of the bourgeois men that Bebel would take to task. By contemplating the class and gender dynamics that allowed prostitution to flourish in the capital city, critics like Bebel broke through the protective seal that had ensured men’s sexual privacy for most of the nineteenth century.

Challenging bourgeois norms both from the outside and from within, three men helped to shape the turn-of-the-century discourse on prostitution in Berlin: August Bebel, one of the early figureheads of the socialist movement; Georg Simmel, one of the founders of modern sociology; and the bohemian playwright and satirist Otto Erich Hartleben. Their motivations for taking on the topic of prostitution and using it to critique bourgeois mores likely reflected their different sociopolitical

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Evans, \textit{Tales from the German Underworld}, 189.
\end{itemize}
perspectives. To assert the social and political power of the proletariat, Bebel had to discredit the bourgeoisie, and as Hull has so persuasively shown in her work on the early modern period, “sexual argumentation” was “very useful in redrawing social lines.”\textsuperscript{15} Bebel’s method of redrawing the social lines of his time was to demonstrate bourgeois culpability in regard to prostitution and the decline of the family. The public intellectual and social philosopher Simmel’s writings on prostitution read like thought experiments inspired by his observations of social and sexual behavior within urban capitalist modernity. Hartleben’s involvement in the reformist debates of the Friedrichshagen Circle and in bohemian café culture, combined with his early enthusiasm for social democracy, caused him to look at proper society and its moral philistinism with an especially critical eye. However diverse these writers’ perspectives might have been, the approach they took to prostitution is significant for several reasons. In their attempts to explain prostitution’s existence, they diverged from the late nineteenth-century pseudoscientific discourse on prostitution and women’s sexual behavior exemplified by Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s \textit{Psycho-pathia sexualis} (1886) and Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero’s study \textit{The Female Offender} (1894). While the pseudoscientific discourse portrayed prostitution as a physiological or pathological phenomenon inherent to some women, Bebel, Simmel, and Hartleben treated it primarily as a socioeconomic issue. Instead of arguing that women were driven to prostitution by inner psychoses such as nymphomania or “moral insanity,” they located the cause of prostitution in outside forces like poverty, social injustice, and moral hypocrisy.\textsuperscript{16} The purveyors of hypocrisy were located in a bourgeois culture that insisted on morally condemning prostitutes while concurrently using them to preserve the purity of future bourgeois wives. Most markedly, Bebel, Simmel, and Hartleben used prostitution to criticize the institution of bourgeois marriage, arguing that it was based not on love but rather, similar to prostitution, on money.

The idea that bourgeois marriage could or should be based on love began to take root during the German Enlightenment and can be seen as a result of the increased emphasis placed on the individual. Individuation and subjectivity, characterized by a search for happiness and self-fulfillment, introduced an element of personal choice that stood at odds with the “arranged” marriage based on a private, primarily financial, agreement between two families. In early discussions of love-based marriages, love was defined not as a prerequisite for but rather as a result of marriage. It was an emotion defined by the mutual support, affection, and even friendship required for a lasting union; it was rarely equated with sexual attraction between spouses. The primary purpose of conjugal sex was reproduction, not

\textsuperscript{15} Hull, \textit{Sexuality, State, and Civil Society}, 2.
\textsuperscript{16} For Krafft-Ebing’s classification of prostitutes as nymphomaniacs, see \textit{Psycho-pathia sexualis}, 323. In \textit{The Female Offender}, 154, 310–11, Lombroso and Ferrero define “moral insanity” as an inherent coldness or dulled sense of emotion that is characteristic of prostitutes.
pleasure, especially for the bourgeois wife.\footnote{Sources that inform my discussion of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bourgeois marriage and the concept of the love match include Lynn Abrams, “Companionship and Conflict: The Negotiation of Marriage Relations in the Nineteenth Century,” in \textit{Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency, and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century}, ed. Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 101–20; Frevert, \textit{Women in German History}, 31–72, 130–37; Hull, \textit{Sexuality, State, and Civil Society}, 5, 285–98, 409–10; Günther Saße, \textit{Die Ordnung der Gefühle: Das Drama der Liebesheirat im 18. Jahrhundert} (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 18–49.} The clearest visions of romantic love, which did offer some space for sexual desire, were the products of literary fantasy, and one of the most marked examples was Friedrich Schlegel’s novel \textit{Lucinde} (1799). In Schlegel’s work romantic love was defined by its exclusivity. Based on the principle that there is only one perfect partner for each individual, romantic love’s fulfillment, and hence the individual’s, was contingent on finding and remaining with that one particular person. In contrast to marital unions formed through interfamilial contracts, in which the married couple defined itself through class and familial allegiance, the romantic pair was defined by each partner’s exclusive identification with the other.\footnote{Saße, \textit{Die Ordnung der Gefühle}, 48–49.} Was romantic love, however, to be found only in literature? Schlegel may have described true love as an eternal bond that transcended social reality, but by the late nineteenth century, the institution of civil, state-sanctioned marriage made love all the more beholden to social approval. The codification of civil marriage in 1875 under Bismarck further exacerbated the inherent tension between romantic love as a private bond between two individuals and the concept of marriage as a social institution requiring legal validation.\footnote{The 1875 institution of civil marriage was one of Bismarck’s calculated strikes against the authority of the church, particularly the Catholic Church. The law asserted the power of the nation-state over that of the pope by requiring the state’s approval of all marriages but making church weddings optional.} In this tug-of-war between emotion and institution, at least in bourgeois circles, it seemed the institution had won.

Those who sought to challenge the socioeconomic power and moral authority of the bourgeoisie did so by striking at one of the main sources of that power: the family. The family was “an institution which displayed the wealth and cultural capital of the bourgeois” and “provided the means through which dynastic ambitions were realized.” Marriage was thus not only the necessary step toward founding a family but also “the center point around which all discussion of sexual behavior revolved.”\footnote{The first two quotes come from David Blackbourn, “The German Bourgeoisie: An Introduction,” in \textit{The German Bourgeoisie}, ed. David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans (London: Routledge, 1990), 10; the third quotation is from Hull, \textit{Sexuality, State, and Civil Society}, 285.} As staunch critics of bourgeois society, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels bemoaned women’s enslavement within monogamous marriage, which dictated their financial dependence on their husbands and required them to perform an exclusively reproductive role. Using anthropological texts by Johann Jakob Bachofen and Lewis Henry Morgan to bolster their socioeconomic critique, Marx
and Engels argued that, with the advent of patriarchy, women became the first exploited class. This collapsing of gender with class had lasting effects on modern discourses on marriage and prostitution: Bebel, Simmel, and Hartleben, to varying degrees, reflected the influence of Marx’s and Engels’s writings in their works, for they saw prostitution and marriage as mutually reinforcing institutions. All three authors criticized the marriage of convenience (Kaufehe) as a form of prostitution, all agreed that women’s economic dependence on men was detrimental, and all three raised the possibility of “free love” as an alternative to prostitution and marriage. Like Engels, Bebel envisioned a postbourgeois society in which gender equality would be demonstrated by women’s freedom to choose their own partners and also to separate from them as they please. While Bebel prophesied free love, Hartleben and Simmel treated it with skepticism. In his early essay on prostitution and marriage, “Einiges über die Prostitution in Gegenwart und Zukunft” (Thoughts on Prostitution in the Present and Future), Simmel claimed that “truly free love” can exist only in a social utopia—not necessarily Bebel’s socialist utopia—that no longer judges the moral legitimacy of sexual relations so stringently. Nearly a decade later, in his Philosophie des Geldes (The Philosophy of Money, 1900), he implicitly presented free love as an oxymoron and thereby questioned its very viability. Indeed a close reading of the latter text shows that if Simmel acknowledged the existence of free love at all, he equated it not with a freely chosen romantic bond but with the most fleeting of relationships—prostitution.

This chapter analyzes the affinities and divergences between the bohemian playwright, the urban sociologist, and the socialist politician in their assessments of prostitution, gender relations, sexuality, and respectability. While Bebel was certain that a socialist revolution would bring an end to prostitution and give new life to marriage, Hartleben and Simmel were wary of such radical change. All three men expressed sympathy for the prostitute, but it is in this sympathy that the ambivalence of their writings resides. Particularly in the cases of Bebel and Simmel, repeated references to prostitutes as victims of social ills (Mißstände) deny prostitutes


the possibility of agency. The depiction of women as passive objects in the “social causes” discourse shows that it is actually not completely separate from the sexual writings of Krafft-Ebing, who argued that women consistently play a “passive rôle” in “sexual relations…and long-existent social conditions.”

Hartleben’s plays, in contrast, portray female characters who struggle to achieve sexual and financial autonomy. With numerous obstacles to this autonomy placed before them, these characters contemplate choosing prostitution or other forms of commodified sexuality—such as the role of the kept woman—over other seemingly less desirable options. Hence these women take on an active, albeit limited, role in deciding their own fates. Even Hartleben’s texts, however, contain a general ambivalence concerning women’s sexuality. While all three writers delivered a scathing critique of bourgeois marriage and pondered alternatives to it, none of them explicitly or unequivocally advocated women’s sexual freedom. True, Bebel’s text clearly portrays sexual liberation as available to all in the wake of revolution, but his plea for moderation in all areas of life—particularly in the sexual realm—and his definition of prostitution as a form of sexual depravity show how much he clings to a discourse of respectability. Simmel and Hartleben, on the other hand, have difficulty imagining a form of women’s sexuality that is not channeled into marriage, motherhood, or prostitution. Their inability to depart completely from essentialist descriptions of “womanhood,” descriptions that were an integral part of the rigid system of gender roles criticized by their works, reveals just how entrenched traditional ideas of femininity and female sexuality were in Wilhelmine society.

**Prostitution as Bourgeois Institution: August Bebel’s Women and Socialism**

August Bebel’s highly influential treatise *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Women and Socialism) was one of the first books of its time to critically address the Woman Question (*Frauenfrage*), concerning what role the growing number of young, single women were to play in modern German society. However, the book, which

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25. August Bebel (1840–1913) was, along with Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the founding members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1869. Before the SPD’s founding, Bebel was elected president of the League of German Workers Associations, a post that also led to his first election to the German Reichstag in 1867. Between the SPD’s founding in 1869 and the repeal of the antisocialist legislation in 1890, he was imprisoned six times for leftist political agitation, once for nearly three years (1872–75). Before and after serving time in prison, he served as an SPD representative in the federal parliament from German unification until his death in 1913, with only one loss in the early 1880s. Bebel’s text has a complex publication history. The first edition, entitled *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*, was published in Zurich in 1879 and banned in Germany because of the 1878 antisocialist laws. Although Bebel sought to publish the second edition under a less explicitly political title in 1883, *Die Frau in der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft*, this version was banned as well. Still, even before the ban on socialist literature was lifted in 1890, more than 20,000 copies were printed and circulated among readers in Germany, and
reached a wide audience both in Germany and abroad, was just as concerned with married women.\textsuperscript{26} It delivered a damning critique of the current state of marriage, arguing that the division of labor within bourgeois marriage, which defined the man’s role as that of sole breadwinner and the woman’s as dutiful wife and mother, encouraged the spread of prostitution. Although recent studies of prostitution and female sexuality in the German context all cite Bebel’s work, none conduct a close reading of it.\textsuperscript{27}

In one of the most widely quoted passages from his book, Bebel writes: “Marriage represents one side of sexual life of the bourgeois world, and prostitution represents the other. Marriage is the front, and prostitution the back of the medal.”\textsuperscript{28} The “medal” (\textit{Medaille}) is also meant to evoke the image of a coin, for Bebel views both bourgeois marriage and prostitution as business transactions. Marriage guarantees the man a certain social standing, and prostitution caters to his sexual desires. As the legitimate side of bourgeois intimate life, marriage is the visible side of the medal, while prostitution is hidden on its reverse side as the dirty secret that everyone knows. The widespread expectation that bourgeois men accumulate wealth sufficient to support a wife and children prevented them from marrying until quite late in life, at least into their thirties. Potential bourgeois wives were expected to remain virgins until marriage and to become pregnant soon thereafter, yet men’s recreational sex was subtly encouraged and was often undertaken with a prostitute. This double standard that allowed men unlimited access to sex and

26. As Lopes and Roth contend, Bebel’s work was read more widely than Marx and Engels’s writings, including Engels’s \textit{The Origin of the Family}. See Lopes and Roth, \textit{Men’s Feminism}, 29, 61, 73–74. The text also had an immense international impact; for example, Corbin, \textit{Women for Hire}, 235, documents how it shaped the socialist discourse on prostitution in France.

27. For works that cite Bebel as a key figure in the late nineteenth-century discourse on prostitution in Germany, see Roos, \textit{Weimar through the Lens of Gender}, 137, 139–40; Bruggemann, “Prostitution, Sexuality, and Gender Roles,” 31–32; Evans, \textit{Tales from the German Underworld}, 170; Schönfeld, \textit{Commodities of Desire}, 14. Even Lopes and Roth focus more on the reception of \textit{Women and Socialism} and on Bebel’s public and private life than on an in-depth reading of the text itself. For their brief discussion of the book’s analysis of prostitution, see Lopes and Roth, \textit{Men’s Feminism}, 72–73.

barred bourgeois women from sexual knowledge and experience actually corrupted, even destroyed marriage, according to Bebel. Led to believe that marriage would fulfill their romantic fantasies of love, bourgeois women were often gravely unprepared for and disappointed by the realities of sexual intercourse. Once the marriage bond was sealed, women found that their role was mainly reproductive, and yet, as Bebel points out, they were often kept from fulfilling this role by their husbands’ pre- and extramarital affairs, which had as their possible consequences venereal disease and infertility. This exposure of bourgeois men’s sexual transgressions is one of Women and Socialism’s major critical interventions in the sexual discourse of the late nineteenth century. Bebel’s book presents both prostitutes and wives as economically and sexually bound to bourgeois men, wives even more so than prostitutes. The wife is treated like a material possession, a piece of property (Privateigentum) over which the husband has exclusive and lasting control. The prostitute, Bebel contends, enjoys a higher degree of autonomy than the wife, and he asks his readers to ponder this comparison: “Now I ask, is not such a marriage—and the number is great—worse than prostitution? The prostitute is at least to a certain extent free to withdraw from her shameful trade; she has, at least if she is not the inmate of a brothel, the right of refusing to do business with a man whose personality repels her. But a wife is sold into the hands of her husband and must endure his embraces, though she may have a hundred causes to hate and abominate him.” This passage is certainly noteworthy in its attribution of rights and freedoms to the prostitute and its description of prostitution as a relatively pliant trade that women can withdraw from if they please. Still, the main point is not to laud prostitutes but to emphasize the dire situation of the wife. Prostitution is used as a polemic device to show that even a prostitute can reject both the sexual advances of the bourgeois man and his money, but a wife suffers doubly in her sexual and economic dependence on her husband, making her little more than his slave.

Despite the hint of freedom and agency lent to prostitutes in the above passage, more often than not Bebel portrays them as victims of poverty and capitalist exploitation. He clearly connects prostitutes with working-class women when he argues that female factory workers, seamstresses, waitresses, and domestic servants making mere subsistence wages sometimes turn to prostitution to make ends meet. This connection between prostitutes and women workers, however, has its limits. While both underpaid factory work and prostitution are dire consequences of bourgeois capitalism, prostitution is, for the author, a dishonest or dirty trade that

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29. The ideas expressed in this paragraph can all be found in Bebel, Die Frau und der Sozialismus, 94–148, especially 94–95, 103, 118, 135–36, 139–40, 148.
31. Bebel uses the terms Sklaverei and Geschlechtssklaverei to describe bourgeois marriage, in Die Frau und der Sozialismus, 2, 4.
sullies those who engage in it. Try as he might to separate the women (prostitutes) from the institution (prostitution), Bebel's rhetoric of enslavement, oppression, and victimization excludes prostitutes from one of the main objectives of his book: to mobilize women workers to overthrow the bourgeois order. His hesitance to mobilize prostitutes could be explained by the Marxist classification of prostitutes as belonging to the Lumpenproletariat, a group of disparate “underworld figures” including vagabonds, thieves, ragpickers, and procurers. Socialists tended to regard these figures as “politically pliant and volatile” and therefore viewed them with skepticism and even trepidation. Deemed incapable of stable political allegiance, the Lumpenproletariat was seen to be difficult if not impossible to mobilize for revolution.

Bebel's ambivalence toward prostitutes was also an effect of his implicit association of prostitution with sexual excess, even deviance. Just as the text expresses sympathy with the prostitute as a social victim, it also defines prostitution as a clear sign of bourgeois degeneration. Indeed the author repeatedly cites prostitution, homosexuality, and pederasty as examples of an “unnatural satisfaction of sexual desire.” Bebel's criticism of homosexuality may seem odd considering his later political support of Magnus Hirschfeld's campaign to repeal §175, the law that declared homosexuality a criminal act. However, he sympathized only with “born homosexuals”—a concept central to Hirschfeld's campaign as well—and not with those who chose to experiment with what he called “the abnormalities of the ancient Greeks.” Following the logic and terms of Bebel's text, if men who consciously engage in homosexual activity are “unnatural” or “abnormal,” then a woman who chooses to sell her body also commits a “crime against morality.” This makes the prostitute sound more like a culprit than a victim. Indeed if she is an integral part of bourgeois sexual life, and that life is deemed to be harmful, then she, too, might signify danger and disease. Bebel’s copious statistics documenting the high rates of syphilis and gonorrhea among bourgeois men support his diagnosis of bourgeois society as sick, even degenerate. Health, after all, was a central component of respectability, particularly in late nineteenth-century Germany. As Mosse shows, “Vice and virtue became a matter of health and sickness. To remain healthy entailed a willingness to follow the dictates of nature, which supported the new respectability.”

33. Bebel describes prostitution as “dieses schmachvolle Handwerk” (this shameful trade) and laments that the prostitute “geht . . . elend zu Grunde” (meets a dreadful demise) (Die Frau und der Sozialismus, 146–48).
34. Evans, Tales from the German Underworld, 215, 220.
35. All quotations in this paragraph appear in Bebel, Die Frau und der Sozialismus, 158; see also Women in the Past, Present, and Future, 104. The translations, in this case, are mine.
An adherence to respectable norms represented the right to power, and according to Bebel’s text a healthy body politic could be achieved only by socialist revolution. In the future social democratic society, all individuals would be able to develop naturally within healthy conditions, eating a proper diet and living in homes complete with adequate space, heat, and light. The erasure of class difference would end patriarchal rule, making gender equality possible. Marriage would cease to be an institution and would constitute instead a private bond between equals with no need for legal or religious legitimation. Women’s sexual desire would be regarded as a natural, acceptable urge, just as it was in the ancient matriarchal societies described by Bachofen and praised by both Bebel and Engels.\textsuperscript{38} Sexuality as described in Bebel’s text, however, was not to be completely freewheeling: “An excess of sexual pleasure is much more harmful than a deficit….\textit{Moderation} in sexual relations is just as necessary as in eating and drinking.”\textsuperscript{39} If moderation in quotidian life, as Michel Foucault describes it, signifies self-mastery and therewith an avenue to power, then excess reveals a lack of control that undermines power.\textsuperscript{40} The excess and deviance of the bourgeoisie described in \textit{Women and Socialism} serve as reason enough for it to be overthrown by the more respectable, healthy, and robust proletariat. Yet the text leaves readers wondering what life would really be like for women in the new socialist society. Would they follow the model of the intellectual, sexual libertines represented by George Sand, or would their sexuality be domesticated and channeled, whenever possible, into their “natural purpose” (\textit{Naturzweck})—motherhood?\textsuperscript{41} Highlighting the tension between Bebel’s call for women’s emancipation and his domestic agenda, Mosse writes: “Socialism, while championing the rights of women, would strengthen and not weaken a happy family life.”\textsuperscript{42} Would this emphasis on healthy domesticity ultimately yoke women with the double burden of work and family as many women were—and often still are—in bourgeois capitalist society and in “real existing” socialism? And what of the “losers” in the battle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat? If prostitution were to vanish with revolution, as Bebel predicts, how would former prostitutes be integrated into the new socialist order? As markers of past bourgeois moral corruption, might they not still be treated as pariahs, as they often

\textsuperscript{38} See Bebel, \textit{Die Frau und der Sozialismus}, 9, 11–23; and Engels, \textit{The Origin of the Family}, 75–78, 113. For Bebel’s vision of the future under socialism, particularly the aspects I have described, see \textit{Die Frau und der Sozialismus}, 330–42.

\textsuperscript{39} I have slightly modified the translation; the German original reads: “Ein Übermaß geschlechtlicher Genüsse wirkt noch schädlicher, als ein Zuwenig….\textit{Maßhalten} im Geschlechtsverkehr ist ebenso nötig wie im Essen und Trinken.” Bebel, \textit{Die Frau und der Sozialismus}, 158, emphasis in original; \textit{Women in the Past, Present, and Future}, 104.


\textsuperscript{41} On George Sand, see Bebel, \textit{Die Frau und Sozialismus}, 338–40; and for his repeated use of the term \textit{Naturzweck} in relation to motherhood, see 80, 82, 117, 129.

\textsuperscript{42} Mosse, \textit{Nationalism and Sexuality}, 185.
Sex, Money, and Marriage

were in some working-class neighborhoods during Bebel’s time? These questions are left open by Bebel’s text and by much of the socialist rhetoric on prostitution, which gives prostitutes sympathy as victims of the bourgeois capitalist order yet denies them potential identities as workers and fails to address pragmatic questions about social attitudes toward women’s sexuality and domesticity. Sexism was not an alien concept to the working-class world, nor can it be claimed that proletarian men had no use or desire for prostitution. Although Bebel was right to point out the significant rise in middle-class patronage of prostitutes in the nineteenth century, this cannot cloud the fact that men of all classes purchased sex from prostitutes, just at different prices. Examining the French socialist rhetoric on prostitution and the influence that Bebel’s text had on it, Alain Corbin argues: “The socialists … did not explain in detail how the disappearance of any prostitutational demand in a socialist society would occur in practice. Here the discourse on prostitution turns into a utopia whose optimism resulted in a lack of interest in the struggle then being waged by those who were working toward an immediate improvement of the prostitute’s lot.” As hopeful as Bebel’s predictions for women’s sexual and economic equality may have been, they constituted a social utopia that was not realized in his lifetime and that, despite the dramatic increase in women’s autonomy, has yet to come to pass. Whereas Bebel’s text offers few practical considerations for the current or future treatment of prostitutes, Georg Simmel’s early essay on prostitution advocates an improvement in their social and moral status within bourgeois society, and his monumental work *The Philosophy of Money* presents prostitutes as quintessentially modern figures central to the understanding of life within what he called the “mature money economy.”

Free Love or Freedom from Love? Georg Simmel on Money, Gender, and Desire

Georg Simmel was a keen observer of bourgeois life in Wilhelmine Berlin. A prolific scholar and public intellectual, he published numerous articles and essays, both in Europe and abroad, that spanned multiple fields of inquiry, including sociology, aesthetics, gender relations, and philosophy. Many of his contemporaries contended, and recent scholars do as well, that Simmel’s work “could only [have been]

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43. Lynn Abrams’s historical analysis of the poor treatment of prostitutes by many working-class citizens certainly casts doubt on prostitutes’ smooth social integration. See Abrams, “Prostitutes in Imperial Germany,” 198–99. Richard Evans, on the other hand, argues that working-class attitudes toward prostitutes improved in the decades following the publication of Bebel’s book, and that working-class men began to sympathize with prostitutes as fellow “victims of class justice.” Evans, Proletarians and Politics: Socialism, Protest, and the Working Class in Germany before the First World War (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 166.

44. On working-class men’s patronage of prostitutes, see Abrams, “Prostitutes in Imperial Germany,” 198; and Evans, Tales from the German Underworld, 5–6.

45. Corbin, Women for Hire, 238.
written in these times and in Berlin.” Like August Bebel, Simmel did not shy away from criticizing “‘proper’ society” for its moral hypocrisy and its gendered division of labor. Like Bebel, he compared bourgeois wives with household possessions and the financially arranged marriage (Geldheirat) with prostitution. Yet unlike Bebel, Simmel made only vague predictions for the future, and those he made did not include proletarian revolution. Although his early essays on prostitution and gender relations reveal his awareness of class struggle and his criticism of bourgeois men’s exploitation of working-class prostitutes, he plainly states that such a radical overhaul of society via revolution was about as likely as “a sudden miracle from heaven.” Societal change would come only through gradual reform. An acknowledgment of social realities and problems was, for Simmel, the essential prerequisite for reform, and he therefore devoted much of his work to examining the intricacies of social life within urban capitalist modernity. Put plainly, his writings are more descriptive than they are prescriptive, more adept at “capturing the nuances of bourgeois culture” than undermining it. One of his central objects of analysis, through which he studied modern social relations, was money.

By the time Simmel published *The Philosophy of Money* in 1900, money had become both the means (Mittel) and the end (Zweck) of modern existence. In other words, it was more than a means to acquire possessions; it had become a possession and a sign of wealth and status in its own right. With the growing prevalence of money, Simmel’s study argues, quantitative value replaces qualitative

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46. David Frisby, *Georg Simmel* (London: Tavistock, 1984), 34. Georg Simmel (1858–1918) grew up in the center of Berlin and became one of the most popular academics at the University of Berlin, where he worked from 1885 to 1900 as a Privatdozent and then as Ausserordentlicher Professor (an honorary and hence unpaid position) until the beginning of the First World War. His late promotion to the rank of professor was due to the insidious anti-Semitism of the German university system. With high enrollments in all of his lectures, he was also one of the first professors at the university to permit women to attend lectures. Simmel and his wife ran a literary salon that attracted such writers as Stefan George, Lou Andreas-Salomé, and Rainer Maria Rilke. In 1914 he took a Chair (Ordinarius) of Philosophy at the University of Strasbourg, which he held until his death in 1918. Biographical information comes from Frisby, *Georg Simmel*; Gianfranco Poggi, *Money and the Modern Mind: Georg Simmel’s “Philosophy of Money”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 38–52; Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and Klaus Christian Köhnke, introduction to *Schriften zur Philosophie und Soziologie der Geschlechter*, 10–12.

47. Simmel, “Einiges über die Prostitution,” 60.

48. Simmel refers to the financially motivated marriage as “a means of permanently prostituting oneself” (eine chronische Prostituierung), implying that women are bought and used for repeated sexual encounters. Once she enters into such a marriage, the wife becomes an object, a body expected to fulfill her husband’s sexual needs and reproductive demands in exchange for financial support and security. See Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900, 1907; repr., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 522, translated by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby as *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 381.


value, resulting in a devaluation of the individual person (Persönlichkeit) as well as an emphasis on rational over emotional life. Money’s function as a leveling mechanism—as something used to equate things with things, people with people, and even people with things simply by articulating a price—exists in an ineradicable tension with the opposing tendency that Simmel observed in modern culture: the supposedly high value placed on the individual. This tension is present in both the public and the intimate spheres, and it also illuminates a gender divide. Bourgeois society’s proclaimed emphasis on individual fulfillment and achievement compels its members to search for the perfect companion, the “completely sympathetic complement to themselves,” yet the difficulty or even futility of such a search often leads people (presumably men) to simply “buy” themselves a mate. The marriage of convenience allows for a choice of companion based on more tangible, material (quantitative) rather than elusive, personal (qualitative) criteria. Yet, when marriage becomes just another financial exchange, Simmel argues, human relations become increasingly alienated, and the effects on women are particularly detrimental.

Why is it the case, however, that men are less adversely affected by the act of marrying for money? The answer lies in Simmel’s analysis of Wilhelmine gender relations, in which men—as those who work, accumulate wealth, and are allowed access to a variety of activities and social circles—are more capable of “differentiation.” They are able to fragment their selves into various parts, dedicating certain sides or parts of their personality to work and other sides to recreation and private life. As full participants in “objective culture,” which can be defined as the external world of things and ideas, men have the power to attribute value to individuals and objects. Women, whom Simmel describes as oppressed beings confined to the private sphere, have remained more unified, organic beings who cannot divide themselves into multiple subjectivities. The “undivided unity of her nature” allows therefore for the purchase of a woman’s whole being in the marriage of convenience and also implies that when a woman gives herself sexually to a man, she gives herself completely. By equating women’s personalities with their physical bodies, Simmel’s text anticipates what the young Berlin doctor and writer Alfred Döblin went on to argue in 1912—that dominant male culture equates women with their sex organs, whether they are used, in the case of the prostitute, for intercourse, or, in the case of the wife and mother, for reproduction.

52. Simmel, The Philosophy of Money, 381–82.
It seems that Simmel offered women little hope for a way out of this oppressive, essentialist economy. But upon closer examination, his *Philosophy of Money* and his essays on gender do posit the possibility of women’s differentiation between body and personality and identify narrow spaces in modern society for nonalienated, loving relationships. Curiously, it is not in his discussion of “free love” but in that concerning prostitution that such possibilities can be found. Although Simmel briefly explores the concept of free love in his 1892 essay on prostitution, he does not deem it a feasible option within a society that continues to idealize monogamous marriage. He simply cannot fathom a world in which women engage in premarital sex without hampering their own psychological and physical development. Later he implies that the modern sense of freedom automatically makes the terms “free” and “love” incompatible, for the definition of freedom as the very absence of emotional or communal ties is incongruous with the bond of love. Indeed this negative definition of freedom is one of the central concepts of *The Philosophy of Money*: “Freedom seems to possess a merely negative character. It only has meaning in contrast to the concept of bondage; it is always freedom from something and corresponds to the concept by expressing the absence of obstacles.” In a society based on money, individuals purchase their freedom from various bonds by paying taxes in order to free themselves from the responsibility of political engagement, for example, or by paying a prostitute in order to enjoy a “completely fleeting inconsequential relationship” (in the German original, Simmel calls prostitution a “Beziehung, die keine Spuren hinterläßt”). In fact, Simmel describes prostitution and money as analogous, for both are characterized by an inherent “lack of attachment” (*Treulosigkeit*), by their “objectivity” (*Sachlichkeit*), and by a sheer indifference to the personal qualities of the individuals involved in the exchange. It is the indifferent nature of prostitution and the ease of the financial transaction that cause both the client and the prostitute to view each other as means to different ends—sexual gratification for the man and financial gain for the prostitute. Prostitution is a money-based relationship taken to its extreme: absolute indifference . . . and absolute freedom. “The relationship is more completely dissolved and more radically terminated by payment of money.” If money is a means to freedom, and prostitution is equated with money, then prostitution is also a way to freedom. In its tracelessness, prostitution becomes the only viable form of “free love” (albeit not “free” as in *gratis*) found in Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money*.

But if prostitution is the only form of free love found in Simmel’s text, does the prostitute achieve the same degree of freedom as her male client? Proper society, as the book describes it, associates the prostitute completely with the sexual act,

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57. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 400; for similar passages on the negative concept of freedom, see also pp. 342–43.
perceiving her to sell “her most intimate and most personal quality,” and thereby “irredeemably renders [her] déclassé.” In Simmel’s own analysis, however, people not only pay for freedom; they can also be paid for it. One of the examples he gives in the text is that of the peasant who allows his land to be purchased by the state in order to be freed from both labor and property and to acquire new buying power. “Certainly it is possible to experience the transformation of a tangible possession into money as liberation,” Simmel writes. “With money in our pocket we are free.” If the peasant farmer can use money to separate himself from his work and his land, then perhaps the prostitute can do something similar with her body. If she gives her body just for the money, she attains a certain freedom from it, or at least she achieves a sense of distance between body and personality. It could even be argued that the ability of the prostitute to consciously fragment herself into subject and object allows her to bridge the gender gap between differentiated men and undifferentiated women. Fritz Breithaupt draws a conclusion similar to this when he argues that, within the modern money economy described by Simmel, freedom is found in self-objectification: “Objectification offers everyone a possibility of liberation; even the prostitute is emancipated if she succeeds in viewing the act of prostitution as an objective function, which means distancing herself from her body.” The image of prostitution in *The Philosophy of Money* differs in subtle yet important ways from the one offered by Simmel in his 1892 essay, which lends prostitutes a great deal of sympathy but little or no agency in its repeated reference to them as victims. The essay admonishes those who morally condemn prostitutes and fail to concede the crucial role prostitution plays in protecting the sanctity of bourgeois marriage. It places the onus on bourgeois society to remove the moral stigma from prostitution and to raise prostitutes’ social status. In Simmel’s later work, the prostitute is no longer a helpless victim or mere object. If she can successfully separate herself from her body by viewing sex as a physical function that she performs, then she becomes a self-conscious commodity, a subject and object at the same time, an agent who recognizes and capitalizes on the value of her body as an object of male desire. This act of fragmentation—this alienation of the body from the self, and the recognition of that alienation—is what makes the prostitute one of Simmel’s most quintessentially modern figures. She is “the female figure . . . at the centre of the mature money economy,” because she serves as the key to understanding how monetary exchange creates both social distance between people and frag-

mentation within the individual. In contrast to Marx, Simmel does not negatively judge this process of alienation, and he certainly does not define it as a symptom of class oppression; rather, he presents it objectively as a reality of modern social life.

If, as David Frisby argues, “reconciliation with the objectified world takes place within the context of our creation of distance from it,” does Simmel leave his readers with any hope for intimacy? Does the prostitute, as an outlet for male desires, have an outlet for her own desires? Even though he presents romantic love as a virtual impossibility in the mature money economy, Simmel discovers a potential emotional and physical refuge for prostitutes in the lesbian relationship. He explains “the frequently reported cases of lesbianism among prostitutes” thus: “Because the prostitute has to endure a terrible void and lack of satisfaction in her relations with men, she searches for a substitute relationship in which at least some other qualities of the partner are involved.” As a relationship that lies outside the heterosexual economy—outside the division of labor within heterosexual marriage and the transaction between male client and prostitute—lesbianism offers the prostitute the possibility of fulfillment (Simmel uses the word Ergänzung) through a complementary partner who balances out her empty, objectified relations with men. Prostitutes, then, seem to be the only figures that can occupy two different worlds: the world of alienated, traceless sexual relations with men for money and that of intimate, nonalienated (or at least less alienated) relationships with other women. This rare example of a nonalienated coupling in a book that focuses on the alienating effects of money allows the reader a brief glimpse of a loving relationship that seems accessible only to women. But it also leaves the reader wondering if, in Simmel’s work, heterosexual love is always alienated in some way and if women’s desire is always absent from it.

There is, however, a space for heterosexual desire that resides somewhere between the lifelong bond of marriage and the fleeting, mechanical transaction of prostitution; it is the space for playful interaction between men and women that Simmel describes in his 1909 essay on flirtation (Koketterie). Unlike marriage, flirtation requires no commitment, and unlike prostitution (and marriage), it

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64. David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 149. Prostitutes today often identify this type of distancing as a common occupational strategy, as a way for them to separate their professional use of their bodies for commodified sex from their private, personal relationships with their friends, lovers, or husbands. Hydra’s Stephanie Klee describes it matter-of-factly: “Ich gefalle einem Mann, fein, dann gebe ich ihm meinen Körper, bitte, und dafür gibt er mir Geld, also ein Stück Freiheit.” (If a man likes me, great, then I give him my body, here you go, and for that he gives me money, a piece of freedom.) Quoted in Hoppe, “Die bürgerlichen Huren,” 90. See also Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours*, 48–50.


requires no money. It requires instead a subtle form of play that simultaneously promises and withholds sexual fulfillment; “it represents a mysterious interpenetration of consent and refusal, of giving and rejecting.” A game that renders gendered power structures unstable, flirtation often gives women the power to choose their objects of desire and to determine, yet not divulge, the outcome of the game. Flirtation “debasers neither its subject nor its object,” and indeed Simmel deliberately confuses the reader’s sense of subject and object in this essay, making it all the more clear that both parties involved in flirtation assume both roles. They project desire, but they also want and need to be desired in return. The essay argues that those relations that are still saturated with desire carry the greatest erotic value. The pleasure of flirtation is to be found in uncertainty, in the possibility of fulfillment rather than in fulfillment itself. This is perhaps the reason that Simmel refrains from an outright discussion of sex, for the magic of the game disappears as soon as erotic desire is fulfilled. Pleasure resides in the constant tension between having and not-having:

There is a sense in which flirtation lends a positive concreteness to not-having, making it tangible for the first time by means of the playful, suggestive illusion of having, just as, conversely, flirtation intensifies the attraction of having to the most extreme degree by means of the threatening illusion of not-having. And if this fundamental relationship shows that in definitive having, there is still a sense in which we do not have, flirtation ensures that in definitive not-having, there is still a sense in which we can have.

Just as flirtation allows for—albeit fleeting—moments of closeness between men and women, it also retains an element of distance. It still relies on differentiation, on the ability of the individuals involved to engage only partially in the relationship. And yet there is something about the fleeting pleasure of flirtation that Simmel regards as fundamental to “the relationship between the sexes,” for flirtation is “the relationship that conceals within itself perhaps the most mysterious and tragic relation of life in its ultimate ecstasy and most glittering attraction.” By focusing on the transitory, uncertain, yet thrilling nature of flirtation, Simmel entices his readers into an intellectual game that ponders the very ambivalence of sexual desire and gender relations, “but to an end it cannot fathom.” The future of gender relations remains, in both Simmel’s early and later works, unclear—always “mysterious,” possibly “tragic,” but not without a glimmer of hope, an element of play, and a tinge of desire.

70. Simmel, “Flirtation,” 149; see also 145 for the desire to be desired.
71. Simmel, “Flirtation,” 150.
What’s Love Got to Do with It? Prostitutes, Lovers, and Wives in Otto Erich Hartleben’s Satirical Dramas

Arriving in Berlin just as the antisocialist legislation lapsed in 1890, Otto Erich Hartleben waxed enthusiastic about leftist politics in his diary, thrice proclaiming: “Long live international Social Democracy!” By 1896, however, his unbridled enthusiasm had waned significantly. He wrote: “I believed for a while that I had to be a Social Democrat”; but he came to prefer Nietzschean individualism over socialism in the end. Between the years in which these two diary entries were written, Hartleben wrote several satirical dramas that reflect the influence of social democratic thought on his work, as well as his skepticism toward and eventual rejection of socialism. His 1893 play *Die Erziehung zur Ehe* (Education for Marriage) reveals Bebel’s influence in its comparison of bourgeois marriage and prostitution, its critique of bourgeois marriage as loveless and bourgeois morality as hypocritical, and its representation of free love as a chosen relationship that falls outside the bounds of social legitimacy. Written one year earlier and immediately banned by the Prussian theater censor, Hartleben’s drama *Hanna Jagert* also grapples with the issue of free love, yet it provides a stinging critique not of bourgeois society but of socialist male chauvinism. Both plays examine free love as an alternative to marriage or prostitution by featuring a financially independent and sexually liberated female protagonist, and yet neither play allows free love to flourish in the end. Marriage and forms of commodified sexuality—embodied by the prostitute, the kept woman, and the mistress—are the only relations that survive, and, as in Bebel’s and Simmel’s respective texts, prostitution is depicted as a more favorable option than marriage. Hartleben ventures a step further than the other two authors by presenting his audience with women who consciously choose prostitution over other work. In so doing, he challenges the audience to contemplate the limited options available to women who strive for both economic and sexual autonomy. Portraying his female characters—especially the prostitutes—as modern and rational, Hartleben also destabilizes the gender stereotypes of his time and sketches a personality profile that anticipates what would become known in the 1920s as “Neue Sachlichkeit,” a cool objectivity that was deemed the most fitting attitude for modern urban life.

Despite the fact that he was a best-selling author who was, during his lifetime, well known in literary and intellectual circles in both Berlin and Munich, little has

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been written about Otto Erich Hartleben and his works. Likened to the medieval trickster Til Eulenspiegel and to the French chanson writer François Villon by his contemporaries, Hartleben was born in 1864 in Clausthal near Hannover and died in 1905 in Salò, Italy. Orphaned at a young age, he was supported for most of his life by his wealthy grandfather. After completing a law degree, Hartleben worked briefly at the court in Magdeburg, where he developed a greater liking for his defendants than for his bourgeois colleagues. In 1890, he gave up his law career and moved to Berlin to become a full-time writer. He lived the life of a bohemian in the capital city, circulating between various cafés and bars and writing satirical pieces for Berlin newspapers and for such journals as Die Jugend and the Freie Bühne, which later became the Neue Rundschau. His circle of friends, which included the publisher Samuel Fischer, the cabaret artist and composer Otto Julius Bierbaum, and the naturalist playwright Gerhart Hauptmann, appreciated his “brilliant sarcasm,” his cynicism, and his disdain for philistinism, bourgeois or otherwise.

While Hartleben’s early plays drew the attention of the theater censor and hence ensured him a degree of notoriety within Berlin, his theatrical breakthrough and subsequent national success came with the premiere of his tragedy Rosenmontag in 1900. It was through the success of Rosenmontag that a wider German public discovered Hartleben’s earlier plays; until then, they had been performed almost exclusively on Berlin stages. This is not surprising, considering that both Education for Marriage and Hanna Jagert are clearly set in the German capital and make frequent reference to its streets and districts, and their risqué content likely kept them off the repertoire of more provincial theaters. Even in Berlin, playwrights such as Hartleben resorted to creative tactics in order to have their plays performed.

76. The only recent work that analyzes Hartleben’s plays is Karl Leydecker’s article “Prostitution, Free Love, and Marriage in German Drama in the 1890s,” in Schönfeld, Commodities of Desire, 31–45. Otherwise, Hartleben receives passing mention in Repp, Reformers, Critics, 74, and Matthew Jeffries, Imperial Culture in Germany, 1871–1918 (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2003), 149. Because Hartleben is not nearly as well known as Bebel and Simmel, I have chosen to place a brief biographical sketch in the body of the text. I will do the same in subsequent chapters, particularly for lesser-known writers and artists. Biographical information on most writers, thinkers, and artists appears in the notes.

77. Alfred von Klement, Die Bücher von Otto Erich Hartleben: Eine Bibliographie (Salò: Halkyonische Akademie für unangewandte Wissenschaften, 1951), 9. Von Klement’s bibliography begins with an autobiographical segment written by Hartleben and includes quotes by contemporaries written at the time of Hartleben’s death. The quote cited is attributed to Carl Hauptmann, Gerhart’s brother. While the publisher of von Klement’s book may sound like a hoax as Bebel and Simmel, I have chosen to place a brief biographical sketch in the body of the text. I will do the same in subsequent chapters, particularly for lesser-known writers and artists. Biographical information on most writers, thinkers, and artists appears in the notes.

78. Hartleben’s first play, Angele, premiered in November 1890 at the Residenz-Theater in Berlin, a stage run by the Freie Bühne cooperative, and its first performance outside of Berlin took place in 1904 in Vienna. After a lengthy censorship trial, Hanna Jagert opened in April 1893 at Berlin’s Lessing Theater and was performed only in the large cities of Leipzig and Munich before the close of the century. Die Erziehung zur Ehe was first performed in September 1893 at the Neue Freie Volksbühne in Berlin and then again at the Lessing Theater in 1899. Subsequent performances, held in Bremen, Nuremberg, Wiesbaden, and Hannover, took place only after the success of Rosenmontag.
The Freie Bühne (Free Stage), for example, was a privately run theater founded in 1889 by a group of young journalists, actors, and intellectuals and spearheaded by the theater critic Otto Brahm as a way of evading the Prussian theater censor. It was one of the first theaters to stage plays that not only criticized bourgeois mores but also thematized the proletarian plight. The founders’ decision to stage Gerhart Hauptmann’s controversial plays, beginning with Vor Sonnenaufgang (Before Sunrise) in the fall of 1889, scandalized some of their own financial backers and audience members, many of whom were bourgeois citizens. In an attempt to expose the broader public to such plays, Bruno Wille founded the Freie Volksbühne (Free People’s Stage) in 1890. This theater for the working class was also independent of the censor, allowing its founders to choose a repertoire that would provide its audience with an aesthetic education and foster within them a sense of community. Because of political tensions with the theater’s board members, who championed a more radically Social Democratic repertoire, Wille split from the Freie Volksbühne in 1892 to form the Neue Freie Volksbühne (New Free People’s Stage). It is fitting that Hartleben’s Education for Marriage premiered at the Neue Freie Volksbühne, a stage less concerned with reflecting partisan interests in its program.79

What makes Hartleben’s plays so important for this study is their portraits of women, which include a tyrannical bourgeois matriarch, a sassy maid, a level-headed accountant, a savvy businesswoman, a frail wife-to-be, and a seamstress who prostitutes herself on the side. Instead of proselytizing against prostitution by depicting prostitutes as social victims or as monstrous femmes fatales, Hartleben creates prostitutes who are street-smart, cool, and matter-of-fact, who are comic or “sachlich” rather than tragic figures. And yet for all his criticism of bourgeois mores, he has difficulty keeping his female characters from collapsing into the more traditional models of wife, mother, and whore created by respectable society. Still, even if such models remain intact, Hartleben’s juxtaposition of prostitutes with other women struggling to maintain sexual and financial autonomy allows his readers to contemplate alternatives to prostitution and marriage, even if fleetingly.

Education for Marriage

Hartleben satirized the institution of bourgeois marriage and experimented with the concept of a free-love relationship in his 1893 tragicomedy Education for Marriage. The play’s plot centers on the love affair between Meta Hübcke, an accounting clerk, and Hermann Günther, a young law student still living at home and dependent on his deceased father’s money. In Meta, Hartleben offers his audience a character who is, at first glance, both financially stable and sexually liberated.

Although the text hints at Meta’s lower-class background by noting that she lives in Wedding, a distinctively working-class neighborhood in Berlin, her white-collar job seems to give her a level of autonomy that makes her relationship with Hermann more about mutual respect and affection than money. Their love affair comes to an abrupt end, however, when Hermann’s staunchly bourgeois mother, Frau Günther, intervenes. Having already arranged for her son to marry the shallow and waifish Bella König, daughter of a wealthy textile factory owner, Frau Günther commands her son to end his dalliance with Meta immediately, and he obeys. She then calls on her brother-in-law, Onkel Otto, to come to Berlin and educate Hermann on the “virtues” of marriage. In a bewildered tone, she expresses her distress and confusion concerning Meta and Hermann’s affair, telling Onkel Otto: “It really appears as if she [Meta] . . . bound herself to him not simply out of calculation, but rather, how shall I say this—out of love?”80 The question mark that follows the word “love” shows that Frau Günther can barely grasp the concept. Expecting Meta to be a gold digger bargaining for her share of Hermann’s monthly allowance, Frau Günther’s incredulity intensifies when she finds out that Meta is a “solid” and “respectable” young woman who has never accepted money from Hermann. Frau Günther’s solution to the problem is to raise her son’s monthly allowance. This, she explains, will keep his relations with women “on the right level,” for “had he had more money, she would undoubtedly have quickly become dependent on him.” Instead, Meta’s lack of dependence on Hermann allows a “kind of camaraderie” to develop between them, a bond that Frau Günther perceives as a sincere threat to the business deal she is hoping to seal, namely Hermann’s marriage to Bella.81 Although she thoroughly expects her son to engage in premarital sexual relations, she expects them to be purely physical and financial, not emotional, entanglements. In Frau Günther’s view, money creates the desired asymmetry of power needed to keep bourgeois gender relations intact. The “comradely” relationship between Meta and Hermann involves no such imbalance of power; they have chosen each other freely and have formed a romantic bond that, because of Meta’s financial independence, lies outside the bourgeois marital economy. Free love and the working woman, therefore, threaten to undermine the marriage of convenience and hence to destabilize traditional gender relations as Frau Günther understands them. Through the character of Frau Günther, a female enforcer of patriarchal capitalism, the play conveys what Simmel would claim nearly a decade later—that the moment money becomes the basis for a relationship, love is out of the question.

Lest the reader begin to pity Hermann, as the play unfolds, his actions reveal him to be anything but a victim of his mother’s machinations. A playboy to the core, he makes regular passes at the family maid, Jenny, before he breaks off his

81. Hartleben, Die Erziehung zur Ehe, 167.
love affair with Meta. When Frau Günther discovers this, she immediately fires Jenny in order to keep her household “pure” of sexual mischief. Hermann, pockets bulging with his increased allowance, arranges a rendezvous with Jenny on Potsdamer Platz—the location of one of Berlin’s best-known prostitution markets—an arrangement that marks Jenny’s new employment as Hermann’s mistress and her likely entry into prostitution. Despite her firing, Jenny is not a tragic figure. Indeed, when Frau Günther offers to write Jenny an excellent letter of reference so that she may continue to work in domestic service, Jenny flatly refuses. Portrayed by Hartleben’s text as sassy and street-smart, Jenny chooses commodified sexual relations over domestic service, claiming that she would rather “live like a baron” (baronisieren) than work as a maid.82 The text leaves little doubt as to how Jenny will earn her money, for the use of the verb baronisieren insinuates that she hopes to become the mistress of a wealthy baron. Before she finds him, however, she will make do as the mistress of the bourgeois law student Hermann. In the scene in which Jenny agrees to become his mistress, Hermann rips her maid’s apron from around her waist and waves it triumphantly over his head, proclaiming: “It belongs to me now! . . . The symbol of servitude has been taken from you—see: you are de-aproned!” (Hartleben uses the equally awkward term entschürzt.)83 Here the apron is both a sign of Jenny’s domestic servitude and a sexual fetish object that is, to quote Krafft-Ebing, “reminiscent of a female undergarment.”84 Hermann’s gesture of holding up the garment and claiming his ownership of it clearly presents him as a Schürzenjäger (skirt chaser), which translates literally from the German to “apron hunter.” The removal of Jenny’s apron, however, also shows that she has been “freed” in more ways than one: she has been literally stripped of her profession as a maid by Hermann’s antics, and at the same time she has been set free from the moral constraints of Frau Günther’s bourgeois household. And yet Hermann’s possession of the apron also underscores his new role as Jenny’s employer or patron, a role that Onkel Otto applauds at the end of the play as part of Hermann’s appropriate “education for marriage.”

In the final scene, just after Hermann and Onkel Otto leave Frau Günther’s house to join Jenny for a night on the town, it is Bella, the bourgeois wife-to-be, who enters the stage and sits alone, waiting for Hermann and waiting for marriage. In her 1893 review of the play, Lou Andreas-Salomé, a respected member of Berlin’s intellectual circles who also contemplated the issue of free love in her writings, remarks that Bella’s solemn, wordless, and solitary presence closes the play with a scene in which the “specter of marriage” looms largest.85 With Meta’s forced

82. Hartleben, Die Erziehung zur Ehe, 170.
83. Hartleben, Die Erziehung zur Ehe, 172.
84. Krafft-Ebing, Psychopathia sexualis, 223. See also Corbin, Women for Hire, 207, for a discussion of the French maid as fetish figure.
exit from Hermann’s life, Hartleben’s play leaves its readers with two images of dependent women: Jenny the mistress and Bella the wife. In so doing, it criticizes the bourgeois economy of the day, implying, just as Bebel’s work argues, that it fosters loveless relationships based on sex and money. In its depiction of Jenny’s choice to earn her living on the Potsdamer Platz rather than to serve the bourgeois household, it also bolsters Bebel’s contention that prostitutes enjoy greater freedom than bourgeois wives. Jenny chooses both her new way of life and her first client, while Bella gloomily waits for her arranged marriage to commence. Hermann, a man who is free to take a lover (Meta) or mistress (Jenny) while his future wife must wait until marriage, clearly personifies the double standard. The free-love relationship that seems to be a viable option at the beginning of the play is quickly extinguished. Just as Bebel and Simmel argue, in Hartleben’s play love has no place in the bourgeois order.

After her love affair with Hermann ends, even the venerable Meta chooses a loveless yet financially advantageous relationship with the charming aristocrat Herr von Bohling. Although Karl Leydecker claims in his reading of Hartleben’s play that Meta “opts for the security of a marriage to a man whom she does not love,” the text itself implies that she agrees to become Bohling’s mistress or kept woman, a much more likely scenario considering the class difference between Meta and Bohling. Meta’s disillusionment with love and her struggle to remain economically independent lead her to accept Bohling’s advances. She reveals her turn toward pragmatism by refusing to talk with her new suitor about love; she wants to discuss “facts…just facts.” When Bohling mentions that although he is more than willing to offer her money, he had been told that money was of no consequence to her, Meta retorts: “Who told you that?—It all depends!—And one eventually learns…. One evolves.” How is the audience supposed to read Meta’s “evolution?” Andreas-Salomé’s review expresses frustration regarding Meta’s pragmatic turn and reads Meta as a tragic figure who does not develop but rather relinquishes both her freedom and her romantic fantasies. Although Meta’s failed attempt at love does lend her elements of a tragic figure, the interpretation offered by the theater program at the Neue Freie Volksbühne offers greater agency and rational choice to Meta by reading her evolution as a freely chosen turn away from the “moral stuffiness” of bourgeois culture. The play itself leaves little doubt that its main purpose is to offer the audience a biting “satire of Spießbürgertum,” as Hartleben himself put it, and Meta demonstrates this in her statement that bourgeois society “judges life, people, everything…completely wrong. Much too—morally.”

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89. The term Spießbürgertum defies any simple and direct translation, but it refers to a segment of the self-identified bourgeoisie that clings desperately to what it perceives to be bourgeois morals. It usually connotes a certain moral stuffiness, rigidity, and a judgmental nature. This quote appears in a letter.
sense of resignation is palpable as she deliberates whether or not to take Bohling up on his offer. What Andreas-Salomé fails to mention in her review, however, is the socioeconomic critique contained within Meta’s deliberation: “Hard, monotonous work . . . Even harder, more monotonous poverty.—And nothing more?—Nothing more? . . . No! I won’t do it anymore! What for? Whatever for? . . . Now let’s just try this.”90 With these words, she strikes a provocative and flirtatious pose, stretching out her arms and placing her hands on the back of her head, enticing and alluring Bohling. There are no words exchanged between Meta and Bohling about marriage, but it is clear from the quote above that, even as a woman employed in a white-collar job, Meta struggles with boredom and low wages and can barely maintain financial autonomy. Realizing that, for a woman, economic freedom is hard to come by, and sexual freedom has barred her entrance to respectable society, Meta exits the bourgeois economy for good, with the aristocratic Bohling enabling her exit. Trading in the fantasy of free love for a profitable business arrangement with a man who stands outside the bourgeois economy, Meta takes on the role of the kept woman, a form of commodified sexuality that seems to be the only—or, as the characterization of Jenny implies, the better—role available to single, economically vulnerable, and sexually active young women in Wilhelmine society.

Hanna Jagert

Hartleben’s preoccupation with questions of free love and of women’s financial independence is evident in his other major play from the early 1890s, Hanna Jagert. Although the play was scheduled to premiere at the Lessing Theater in Berlin in the spring of 1892, the Prussian theater censor banned it in March of that year. The Lessing Theater’s director, Dr. Oskar Blumenthal, and Hartleben filed a joint lawsuit to have the ban lifted, and after a hard-fought battle that lasted into December 1892, the play opened on Easter Sunday 1893. The censor viewed the protagonist Hanna Jagert’s tendency to follow her “carnal desires” from one man to the next as both morally reprehensible and politically dangerous, for free love was, in the eyes of Prussian state officials, a scandalous product of the socialist movement that threatened “the moral laws that form the basis of our state- and social order.”91 The play itself, however, advocates neither socialism nor free love unequivocally. Through the figure of Hanna, who has abandoned the socialist movement by the

written by Hartleben to his wife, on August 18, 1893; Briefe an seine Frau: 1887–1905, 178. For Meta’s statement, see Hartleben, Die Erziehung zur Ehe, 148.

90. Hartleben, Die Erziehung zur Ehe, 159.

91. The court proceedings and the correspondence exchanged between the state authorities and Hartleben’s lawyers, Richard and Ernst Grelling, are documented in Richard Grelling, “Censur-Prozeß betreffend ’Hanna Jagert’ von Otto Erich Hartleben,” in Streifzüge: Gesammelte Aufsätze (Berlin: Verlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1894), 227–52, here 229. The primary documents pertaining to this case are also available at the Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030–05, Tit. 74, Th 666.
first act of the play, Hartleben’s text delivers a strong critique of the persistent male chauvinism within that movement. In contrast to Meta, the struggling clerk in *Education for Marriage*, Hanna runs her own coat-making business and achieves a comfortable level of financial security that makes a man’s support unnecessary. However, considering that Hanna’s ascent from a working-class seamstress to an entrepreneur is made possible only through her affair with Alexander Könitz, a bourgeois factory owner, this play, too, grapples with the complexities of erotic and financial entanglements. By the end of *Hanna Jagert*, the “specter of marriage” conquers free love and turns Hanna from a successful businesswoman into a wife and mother, causing the reader to wonder if women’s economic independence is irreconcilable with marriage and motherhood.

Set in Berlin between the years 1888 and 1891, *Hanna Jagert* captures much of the political turmoil and gender trouble stirring in the capital at the time. The protagonist Hanna is based on the historical figure Johanna Jagert, a young coat seamstress from a working-class family who was active in both the women’s and the socialist movements in the 1880s but withdrew from the latter before leaving Germany for London in 1889.92 Like her historical antecedent, Hanna abandons her working-class lover for a bourgeois one. In the first act of the play, Hanna is engaged to the hotheaded socialist Konrad Thieme, who has been imprisoned for political agitation. Konrad is released early and returns home only to find to his great chagrin that Hanna no longer belongs to the socialist movement and, even worse, is romantically involved with Alexander Könitz. Once Hanna admits to her affair with the bourgeois Könitz, both Konrad and Hanna’s parents barrage her with insults and throw her out of the house. Blinded by jealousy, Konrad shoots and injures Alexander, who remains with Hanna and loans her the money to set up her own coat-making business. Once she has earned enough money to repay her debt to him, however, she ends their relationship. Over the course of three acts, Hanna climbs the social ladder as she goes from one lover to the next: from her “comrade” Konrad to the bourgeois Alexander to the aristocrat Bernhard von Vernier. Although Hanna is financially autonomous by the end of the second act and repeatedly voices her objections to marriage, her unplanned pregnancy leads her to accept Vernier’s proposal of marriage in the end.93

Three aspects of *Hanna Jagert* merit close investigation. The first is the prostitute figure, Hanna’s cousin Lieschen Bode. Perhaps a prototype for Jenny in *Education for Marriage*, Lieschen is blond and sexy as well as frank and street-smart. Full of pluck and speaking in Berlin dialect, she is clearly meant to represent the so-called *Dirnenmilieu*. The censor indeed described her as “a common prostitute,” especially when compared to her “serious, austere, competent,

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industrious” cousin Hanna.  

Yet the censor’s description constitutes an oversimplification of the character, for Lieschen actually works as a seamstress as well, but her wages keep getting cut, causing her to supplement her income by working as an occasional prostitute. Although Lieschen feigns offense when Hanna’s mother calls her a “Flittjen” (Berlin argot for Flittchen, meaning “floozy”) in the play’s first act, in the third act she unapologetically admits that her fashionable wardrobe is paid for by her various lovers and that she views her lifestyle as “modern.” Her matter-of-fact attitude toward selling herself for clothes and money anticipates Simmel’s description of the prostitute as one who consciously distances herself from her body to gain freedom from the oppressive bonds of modern heterosexual and class relations, while also calling attention to the restrictive nature of women’s work at the turn of the century. Lieschen also serves as a figure of comparison for Hanna, and a closer reading of Hartleben’s play reveals that these two women have more in common than meets the eye. Having recently spotted Hanna riding in a private carriage with Alexander on the central Berlin promenade Unter den Linden, Lieschen hints that Hanna has sold herself to her bourgeois lover, a contention that Hanna does not refute. In fact, she even admits in the presence of her family that she is “just like her” (ihresgleichen). Because she is dependent on Alexander for financial support until the end of the second act, Hanna does see her position as akin to that of Lieschen, who works hard and yet must ultimately rely on her male lovers’ money to make ends meet. This is perhaps the reason that Hanna does not protest when Konrad blatantly accuses her of selling herself to Alexander. At the beginning of the third act, however, once she has paid her debts to Alexander and is truly autonomous, she becomes noticeably irritated when Lieschen asks her how much her new aristocratic lover, Bernhard, pays her. Shooing Lieschen out of her apartment, Hanna closes the door on her, drawing a visible line between herself and her prostitute cousin. This juxtaposition, followed by a clear distinction between the two women, was intentional. As Hartleben’s lawyer explained to the authorities, “There is a difference between the prostitute’s indiscriminate surrender in exchange for money and the free choice of a lover based on affection and made by a woman who demonstrates character and independence in both her thoughts and her economic existence.” The initial blurring of lines between Hanna and Lieschen encourages readers to recognize the difficulties that both characters face as single, working women—difficulties that are nearly impossible to overcome without engaging in a form of prostitution. Hanna’s later act of

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95. Hartleben, Hanna Jagert, 48, 95.
96. Hartleben, Hanna Jagert, 49.
97. Hartleben, Hanna Jagert, 96.
slamming the door in Lieschen’s face, however, slams the door to her own past as a dependent woman and underscores her role as an independent businesswoman involved in a free-love relationship.

Hanna’s break with Lieschen constitutes just one of the family ties she severs during the course of the play; the other break is with her father. The socialist Eduard Jagert represents those working-class men who see emancipated women as a threat. He claims that women’s work drives down wages and therefore has detrimental effects for male workers, a common argument made by working-class men at the time. Konrad, Hanna’s former fiancé, supposedly embraces the egalitarian principles of socialism. He initially praises Hanna’s independence and accuses Eduard of being a tyrannical patriarch and a Spießbürger who clings desperately to respectability. Once he hears of Hanna’s affair, however, Konrad is overcome by possessive rage and joins Eduard in cursing Hanna as a “slut” or “hussy” (Luder). This clear depiction of socialist chauvinism is the second aspect of Hartleben’s play that deserves critical attention. After enduring her father’s and Konrad’s verbal assaults and learning of Konrad’s physical attack on Alexander, Hanna expresses her disenchantment with socialism in the starkest terms. She criticizes the movement’s surreptitious domination of women and its potential for violence by portraying her own experiences in the party as a form of “rape” (Vergewaltigung) and concluding: “I saw how they functioned—these people who laid claim to a better future. The belief that one could save the world one day by replacing an established power…with this fledgling form—that was a belief I surely lost.” Hanna thus raises the possibility that women’s emancipation might be found neither in the bourgeois nor in the socialist order. Her explicit reference to violence—including the sexual violence of rape—classifies both systems as forms of male tyranny, and her description of socialism as a “fledgling form” of power (or violence, as her use of the term Gewalt can also convey) implies that there is much work to be done within the movement before a promising future for both genders is possible. Hanna’s criticism of the treatment of all women within socialist circles has certain parallels to Simmel’s claim concerning prostitution’s place in a hypothetical postrevolution socialist order: “Prostitution’s status depends on the social feelings that it evokes, and we cannot know if or how such feelings will actually shift as a result of the eradication of capitalism and its consequences.” Would political and economic revolution truly change social attitudes toward prostitution, female sexuality, and women’s rights or not? This is one of the critical questions raised by Hartleben’s play.

99. Hartleben, Hanna Jagert, 58. On socialist male chauvinism, see Canning, Languages of Labor and Gender, 70–81; and Evans, Proletarians and Politics, 163.
100. Hartleben, Hanna Jagert, 60, 65.
Although male chauvinism, both bourgeois and socialist, is clearly condemned in the play, this does not mean that Hanna’s sexual and financial autonomy is unconditionally celebrated. In contrast to Meta in *Education for Marriage*, who makes the transition from romantic to realist, Hanna is portrayed until the very end of the play as objective, cool, and pragmatic. For instance, when Hanna explains how she came to take Konrad as her fiancé, she describes her feelings toward him not as love, but as admiration and comradeship. Konrad, on the other hand, is a fiery romantic who claims that he fell deeply in love with Hanna.\(^{103}\) In fact, all of the men in the play are markedly more emotional than Hanna, and while Hanna is shown both at work and at home, the men are relevant only in terms of their private relations with Hanna. This textual gesture could be read to subvert gender stereotypes of the day, which associated the “masculine” with the public realm, with rationality and objectivity, and the “feminine” with the private sphere and emotional subjectivity. This subversion could also be read, in anticipation of Simmel’s works, as a portrait of Hanna as the ultimate capitalist urbanite. Living the fast-paced life of a business owner, Hanna embodies the rational, objective attitude (*Sachlichkeit*) that holds dominion over feelings, a personality type attributed most often to the modern masculine subject in Simmel’s writings.\(^{104}\) Hanna’s “cool persona,” however, is not always portrayed in the most positive light. As a self-employed woman who categorically rejects marriage, Hanna is described as “unnatural” by both Alexander and Bernhard. The aristocratic Bernhard, who lives comfortably off his inheritance, fails to understand Hanna’s desire to work and is uncomfortable in his relationship with her. As he tells Alexander, it’s “really not the appropriate relationship between man and woman,” and he elaborates by saying that he feels that their gender roles are reversed, causing him to feel that he belongs to Hanna, rather than that she belongs to him. Alexander, in turn, criticizes Hanna’s aversion to marriage, saying that it “goes against nature.”\(^{105}\) Bernhard agrees with Alexander’s sentiment and resolves that the only way to ensure “normal” gender relations between him and Hanna is to propose marriage. He does so impulsively, imploring Hanna to be his wife and telling her to show him that she loves him, “warmly and naturally, like we mortals should.”\(^{106}\) Bernhard’s use of the word *Weib*—instead of *Frau*—for “wife” in his proposal marks his desire to transform Hanna into a more traditionally “feminine” woman, for as modernist literary scholars note, the term *Weib* signifies a femininity that is more closely tied to the body.\(^{107}\) Indeed his proposal goes beyond a request

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for marital commitment; in addition he asks Hanna to give up her business, her apartment in Berlin, and what he calls her “terrible independence” in order to become his wife. Hanna, who only moments earlier in the same scene had dismissed any talk of marriage and insisted that she would never consider abandoning her work, suddenly gives in and, to the reader’s surprise, accepts Bernhard’s proposal with all its stipulations. Laying her head on Bernhard’s chest and thereby striking a more traditionally feminine pose of subjugation, she whispers that she would never have come to such a decision on her own, inferring that it is the best decision for their unborn child. When he realizes that Hanna is pregnant, Bernhard gleefully exclaims: “Now you’re really my wife/woman!” (Jetzt bist du erst mein Weib!). He thus insinuates that motherhood has the power to transform Hanna into the more natural, corporeal woman he desires and can finally claim as his possession. Hartleben’s lawyer Richard Grelling cites this very scene in his defense of the play to the imperial authorities and claims that Hanna’s ability to overcome her reservations about marriage and accept Bernhard’s proposal gives credibility to the institution of marriage and restores the “social order.” Hanna’s acquiescence to marriage was in fact one of the primary factors that led the censors to lift their ban on the play, because it signified, in their eyes, the defeat of free love.

Is free love truly defeated at the end of the play, or does Hartleben’s work leave space for the audience to view both free love and marriage as legitimate options? Grelling carefully argues the latter in his final plea to the censor when he writes that those who attend the play might leave the theater with the impression that “a free union of hearts could, under certain circumstances, also be morally acceptable.” If free love is an intimate union between two financially self-sufficient persons, a union that balances out both sexual and economic power, then it exists in the play only briefly—in Hanna’s premarital relationship with Bernhard. Hanna’s decision to give up her job, marry, and become a mother seems to reinforce and privilege the bourgeois marital economy of independent man/dependent woman. This is complicated by the fact that, as an aristocrat, Bernhard stands outside the bourgeois order, at least economically. At first blush Hanna’s marriage to Bernhard seems akin to Meta’s liaison with Bohling at the end of *Education for Marriage*, for both relationships allow the female protagonists to exit the bourgeois economy for good. And yet Bernhard’s essentialist rhetoric concerning what is natural or unnatural in the realm of gender makes him sound much more bourgeois than Bohling, who proudly refers to himself as “sinful” and actually seems to respect Meta’s independence. Hanna’s pregnancy adds yet another dimension to the analysis of gen-

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der and sexuality in Hartleben’s text, for her pregnancy binds her more closely to her physical body, and as the impetus for her decision to marry Bernhard, it causes the reader to wonder if motherhood is the ultimate barrier to women’s autonomy. It is certainly used as a device to remove Hanna from the world of work and place her in the domestic sphere, to warm up what is portrayed throughout the play as her masculine “coldness,” and hence to restore traditional gender relations. Hanna is no longer free; she is bound to Bernhard, his money, and their child. The only form of “free love” that remains intact at the end of Hanna Jagert is the kind that Simmel would outline in Philosophy of Money—the traceless sexual relationships of the occasional prostitute Lieschen.

Elusive Possibilities

Of the three influential writers discussed in this chapter, not one is truly able to imagine a world in which women can be both sexually and economically autonomous. Still, to varying degrees, all three of them criticize the bourgeois patriarchal order and its gendered division of labor within marriage, show sympathy for the social factors that lead some women to enter into prostitution, and support the presence of women in public life through increased educational and occupational opportunity.112 With his vision of socialist revolution, August Bebel comes closest to championing women’s absolute equality, and yet his emphasis on respectability and moderation within postrevolution society casts doubt on his openness regarding sexuality. Would a complete overhaul of the bourgeois order be possible, even after a revolution? Respectability’s continued reign—even placed in the hands of socialists—leaves uncertain the fates of prostitutes, homosexuals, and all those who, in Bebel’s words, engaged in the “unnatural satisfaction of sexual desire.” Otto Erich Hartleben’s plays expose the moral hypocrisy found in both the existing bourgeois order and the burgeoning socialist movement, but they pose only tentative alternatives to both. While they entertain the possibility of an independent, sexually active, working woman, his works do not allow his female protagonists to remain completely autonomous, but rather transition them into marriage, motherhood, or forms of prostitution. It is certainly possible that Hartleben was merely appealing to the Prussian theater censor, and/or that his plays spoke to a prevailing “ambivalent attitude towards free love and the independent woman”

112. For example, for the tension between Simmel’s analysis of gender roles as socially determined—which has been praised as modern by both current and early twentieth-century scholars—and the limits to his vision of women’s rights, see Lewis A. Coser, “Georg Simmels vernachlässigter Beitrag zur Soziologie der Frau,” in Georg Simmel und die Moderne: Neue Interpretationen und Materialien, ed. Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 80–90. For an early twentieth-century reaction to Simmel’s writings on gender, see Karen Horney, “The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity Complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and Women,” International Journal of Psychoanalysis 7 (1926): 324–39.
held by the Wilhelmine audience, even in Berlin.\textsuperscript{113} His most emancipated protagonist, Hanna Jagert, is portrayed as cold, pragmatic, and “unnatural”—read: too masculine—by the men around her. While Hanna’s coldness could be interpreted as the rational, blasé attitude deemed necessary for survival in the modern metropolis and hence a foreshadowing of Simmel’s work on the urban personality, it is important to note that “coldness” and “indifference” are also key attributes used by Lombroso and Ferrero in their description of the “morally insane” woman and the “born prostitute.”\textsuperscript{114} This problematic merger of critical social discourses with those on a pathological form of coldness or on forms of so-called sexual deviance is something that all of the works analyzed in this chapter have in common.

The supposed “coldness” of the prostitute seems, however, to have its advantages in the works of Simmel, for it allows her to achieve a separation or temporary alienation from her sexual transactions with men and to lend her more emotional and physical freedom than the bourgeois wife. While Bebel, too, uses prostitution as an instrument of conjugal critique by granting the prostitute more agency than the wife, Hartleben builds on Bebel’s strategy and uses prostitution as a means to criticize the limitations placed on women’s work. Instead of focusing on industrial laborers as Bebel does, Hartleben depicts women who choose a form of prostitution—that of the kept woman—over two of the other forms of women’s labor prevalent at the time—domestic service (Jenny) and white-collar work (Meta). Indeed Hartleben’s explorations of gray zones between prostitution and marriage, such as the figure of the mistress or kept woman, signify an attempt to offer his audience a “third type of woman, who is unmarried, engaged in sexual relations and yet is still respectable.”\textsuperscript{115} Both Meta and Hanna temporarily embody such a “third type,” yet Meta intentionally exits “respectable” society when she accepts Bohling’s money and his life of aristocratic decadence, and Hanna relinquishes her status as a single, working woman to take on the domestic roles of wife and mother.

Although all of the texts examined here use prostitution to criticize the institution of marriage, only Bebel’s text offers—rather utopian—suggestions for marriage reform, and a firm belief in free love. Aside from revolution, however, it seems that no viable alternative is posed to marriage and prostitution, and certainly no solutions are given that could extricate the wife from the patriarchal family and the bourgeois division of labor. What is perhaps most striking is that these three writers leave very little room in their works for the consideration of women’s sexual desire. In Simmel’s \textit{Philosophy of Money}, the prostitute is able to break out of the heterosexual economy and find intimacy in a lesbian relationship, a possibility neither Hartleben nor Bebel explores. Of the three, Simmel is the only one who

\textsuperscript{113} Leydecker, “Prostitution, Free Love, and Marriage,” 41.


\textsuperscript{115} Leydecker, “Prostitution, Free Love, and Marriage,” 32.
writes of the erotic pleasure of flirtation between men and women and its playful disruption of gendered power relations, but he is also the only one who openly admits how difficult it is to imagine gender equality. At the end of his 1892 essay on prostitution, Simmel himself flirts with the idea of women’s increased intellectual, social, and financial autonomy and its possible effects on sexuality, yet he admits that the future of gender relations confounds him:

If the pressure is taken off of women, if they are encouraged to test their own strength, to exercise their manifold talents, this difference from men might fade away as well, and women would then face a similar choice between either asceticism or premarital physical satisfaction. The consequences of such equality of conditions for both sexes are impossible to envision without getting lost in fantastic speculations; too limited is our grasp of all the changes in society that would have to occur simultaneously in order to affect the shape of gender relations.\footnote{116. Simmel, “Einiges über die Prostitution,” 70.}

As unfathomable as women’s equality and its accompanying sexual liberation may seem to Simmel, he does not deny their possibility. Within the first years of the twentieth century, Simmel was able to witness how some of the more radical members of the German women’s movement dared to call for the abolition of state-regulated prostitution and to challenge the sexual double standard and the gendered division of labor. While some of them shied away from freeing women’s sexual desire and favored premarital asceticism, others such as Helene Stöcker envisioned a “New Morality” that would create a space for women’s sexual activity outside the conjugal model. Feminist writing on prostitution, although it did not necessarily favor prostitutes themselves, became a springboard for moral, marital, and sexual reform.