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Wilhelm Speyer's best-selling novels of 1927 and male responses to female emancipation

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Abstract

The Weimar Republic witnessed significant advances in the professional, political, and social opportunities available to German women, as well as a substantial increase in the visibility of women within the German public sphere. Existing research into the reactions of German men to female emancipation during this period has tended to focus on the fear and hostility that were most noticeable during the early years of the Republic. In contrast, this article discusses two more supportive responses to female liberation: Wilhelm Speyer's best-selling novels *Charlott etwas verrückt* (1927) and *Der Kampf der Tertia* (1927). These novels depict their unconventional and powerful women protagonists in a sympathetic light, but their emancipatory potential is limited by the use of traditional motifs and perspectives within their descriptions of female characters.

The Weimar Republic witnessed a transformation in the public profile of German women, a development that has been described by historian Cornelia Osborne as “one of the most striking and challenging features of Weimar society” (137) and one which represented a central preoccupation of the time.¹ For the first time in German history, women living in the Weimar Republic were entitled to vote, and Article 109 of the 1919 constitution proclaimed the legal equality “in principle” of women with men (54). During the Weimar period, increasing numbers of German girls and women gained higher-level educational qualifications (Boak 154–55), and a wider range of professional careers were opened to women

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(171–72). At the same time, German women became highly visible within the public sphere as employees, participants in a wide range of sporting and other recreational activities, and consumers, as well as in media images of the (superficially, at least) emancipated New Woman (254). In many urban milieus in particular, the popularity of the practical *Bubikopf* hairstyle and less restrictive clothing was accompanied by a relaxation of the social constraints governing acceptable female behavior (Usborne 137).

This progress toward female emancipation was both partial and contested. Weimar women faced considerable discrimination, both within family life and at work. The German Civil Code of 1900, which remained in force during the Weimar period, granted men authority within almost all aspects of married life (Boak 205). Lower wages for female employees were written into contemporary labor agreements between unions and employers (Hung 54), and limited acceptance of the right of married women to work led to a vastly disproportionate number of such women losing their jobs as part of measures to reduce public spending (Boak 163–64). Furthermore, widespread beliefs about women's unsuitability for higher-ranking positions and careers unrelated to traditionally feminine domains combined with male fears of female competition to generate a climate that was extremely unfavorable to women's professional advancement (87, 159, 161, 171). The persistence of such far-reaching discrimination against women in the workplace reflected the enduring conviction that the primary role and responsibility of women was motherhood and the care of their families (Usborne 60). The belief in motherhood as a woman's principal duty represented a broad societal consensus that transcended political and class divisions (57). Consequently, the idea that the New Woman's desire for independence was diverting her from her duty to become a mother was a key element in hostility toward female emancipation, particularly in conservative circles (Boak 4; Sharp, "Gender Relations" 5).

Opposition to female emancipation was also fueled by the threat it posed to traditional conceptions of masculinity (Boak 3; Sharp, "Gender Relations" 5), a central element of which was the subordination of women to men. Indeed, changes in the relationship between the sexes are generally considered an important part of a broader crisis of masculinity, in which the physical and psychological wounds inflicted by the First World War also played a significant role (Tatar 12). It is therefore unsurprising that the most widely studied male reactions to female emancipation during the Weimar Republic are those of fear and hostility. Research documenting this kind of reaction within the cultural sphere includes Beth Irwin Lewis's account of how *Lustmord* paintings by male avant-garde artists in the early years of the Republic reflect anxiety about and aggression toward emancipated women. Similarly, Barbara Hale has interpreted the powers possessed by female trance-dancer characters in Arnold Fanck's film *Der heilige Berg* (1926), Richard Oswald's *Unheimliche Geschichten* (1919), and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) as expressions of a profound fear of modern, sexually liberated women.

However, it is clear such sentiments were not universally held by German men (Kundrus 167–69). In 1929, a point at which modern patterns of female behavior were no longer new, but before the Great Depression had turned the tide of public opinion against women's rights (Boak 167–68), two pieces published in the Ullstein weekly magazine *UHU* expressed the view that many younger men welcomed female emancipation and regarded women as equals (Sharp, "Riding the Tiger" 133–34). That same year, a volume of short essays by 17 male writers appeared with the title *Die Frau von morgen wie wir sie wünschen* (Huebner). The collection recorded a spectrum of male responses to the changing role of women, ranging from outright rejection through ambivalence to a clear support of women's equality with men. Much space in the essays was devoted to the effects of more modern gender roles—and particularly the increasing similarity between women's and men's appearances—on sexual relations, and to the supposedly profound differences in the fundamental character of men and women. Indeed, several supporters of women's equality with men believed that female difference meant that the empowerment of women would have a humanizing effect on society. In a contribution entitled "Die Frau, die Welt und Heute," for example, Alfons Paquet writes that only women—and it is clear from the text that he means emancipated women—are capable of bringing about a much-needed "neues kosmisches Verhältnis des Menschen zum Leben" (134). Such sentiments are echoed in an essay by Walter von Hollander, who asserts that emancipated women are uniquely suited to modeling a humane and meaningful approach to life of which contemporary men are incapable (44).

Expressions of support for female emancipation can also be found in the novels of Wilhelm Speyer (1887–1952), one of the most commercially successful authors of the Weimar Republic. Writing in 1942, Klaus Mann recalled the influence of Speyer's works during the Weimar period: "man ist mit seinen Büchern aufgewachsen" (318). Speyer was well-connected within the Weimar literary scene and maintained friendships with Walter Hasenclever, Franz Hessel, Kurt Tucholsky, Klaus and Thomas Mann, and Walter Benjamin (with whom he collaborated on a novel and three comic plays; Ebert, 10–14). However, modernist literary trends had only a limited influence on Speyer's writing, which Walter Fähnders and Helga Karrenbrock describe as "nicht auf Innovation und Literaturrevolution aus [...] aber auch nicht bloß konservativ" and which occupied a position between mere entertainment and high literature ("Wilhelm Speyer: Eine Wiederentdeckung" 13). Despite Speyer's commercial success and literary connections, his more conventional writing style has led to his works receiving little attention within histories of Weimar literature (Fähnders and Karrenbrock, "Wilhelm Speyer: Eine Wiederentdeckung" 13).

This article will explore Speyer's two most successful novels, *Charlott etwas verrückt* and *Der Kampf der Tertia*, both of which address the theme of female emancipation. The novels were published in 1927, at a time when more conservative images of femininity were regaining popularity (Hung 56). Despite this trend, Speyer's novels offer a sympathetic portrayal of their highly unconventional women protagonists and present their readers with visions of humane and effective female leadership. In

so doing, they can be seen as contributing to the provision of an imaginary in which female emancipation could be envisioned. At the same time, however, this article will argue that the emancipatory potential of the texts is compromised by some of the perspectives, imagery, and characteristics used to construct their protagonists. As will be shown, these features communicate a subtle acceptance of several dimensions of the subordination experienced by Weimar women within a society that remained deeply patriarchal (Sharp, “Gender Relations” 1).

Charlott etwas verrückt

The first of the two novels to appear was *Charlott etwas verrückt*, which was published by Ullstein and is set in contemporary Berlin and Paris. The novel follows the elaborate plot devised by its upper-class protagonist, Charlott, to induce Cornelia Fisher, the British widow of her uncle’s business partner, to pay out her inheritance early. This story is told by an extradiegetic narrator, whose account focuses on external reality and contains much gentle irony. Fast-paced and humorous, the novel contains both comic exaggerations and improbable events (Vollmer 303). It was described on its jacket as “Ein Buch wie Champagner: spritzig, heiter, überschaumend” (Fähnders and Karrenbrock, “‘Ein Buch’” 205) and achieved considerable commercial success, reaching a print run of 60,000 by the end of 1930 (Vogt-Praclik 92).

Charlott etwas verrückt contains three emancipated women characters: Charlott, her adversary Cornelia, and Charlott’s cousin Dr. Camilla Blank, the director of a so-called “kriminalpsychologisches Institut” that provides pseudoscientific materials to overworked expert witnesses in criminal trials. Among these three, it is Charlott who is most clearly identified with the New Woman phenomenon: She is a keen golfer who is described as having the smiling “Knabengesicht” typical of modern women, and she regularly meets elegant and athletic young men to play sports and to socialize (Speyer, *Charlott* 5). Furthermore, at several points during the novel, she features in humorous images of gender role reversal. Following a game of golf, for example, Charlott and her fiancé Justus are described walking arm in arm like an old-fashioned couple, with the small difference that Charlott kept her hands in her pockets and “Justus war es, der sich an ihrem Arme festhielt” (40–41).

Such playful images communicate a nonchalance regarding contemporary concerns about the alleged masculinization of women (Sharp, “Riding the Tiger” 124). They also mirror common representations of the New Woman in the Weimar press, many of which have been characterized as presenting only a superficial version of female emancipation (131–32). However, critics such as Walter Fähnders, Helga Karrenbrock, and Birte Tost argue that the figure of Charlott represents a significant departure from traditional gender roles. Fähnders and Karrenbrock describe Charlott as “eine der erstaunlichsten Frauengestalten der literarischen Männer und Frauenphantasien der Zwanziger Jahre” (“‘Ein Buch’” 219), while Tost refers to her as one of Speyer’s female protagonists who “sprengen [...] das ihnen vorgeschriebene

Rollenkorsett und verlassen den bis dahin eingegrenzten Bewegungsraum” (“Mädchenhänden” 317). Indeed, the construction of both Charlott and Cornelia, who have previously received scant critical attention, enables the novel to offer a vision of female empowerment that goes well beyond the contemporary state of women’s emancipation in Weimar Germany. At the same time, however, the emancipated traits of Cornelia and Charlott are undermined by descriptions of these figures from the perspective of a male gaze that objectifies them and links them to conventional conceptions of femininity.

Charlott has been described by Tost as someone who “tut, was ihr beliebt” (“Mädchenhänden” 325), and many aspects of her characterization reflect a profound freedom from traditional expectations of female behavior. Her far-reaching liberation from convention is signaled by her appearance in the opening scene of the novel, where she is described driving a car—the “ultimate symbol of personal freedom” (Boak 265)—in a manner that reveals little concern for traffic regulations, generating a series of cartoonlike images (Speyer, *Charlott* 5–6). Whereas the pressure felt by Weimar women to maintain an attractive appearance is well-established (Boak 266–67), an early description of Charlott’s make-up during a dinner with Justus and her ex-boyfriend Holk includes the information that “nirgends war eine Verbesserung natürlicher Schönheitsmängel geplant, sondern es wurden im Gegenteil Nachlässigkeiten der Natur eher noch betont als unterdrückt” (Speyer, *Charlott* 15–16). Similarly, Charlott’s rejection of women’s traditional domestic role is indicated by the description that she, like her cousin Camilla, finds it completely natural to seek catering advice from Holk, who is far more accomplished in the kitchen than she (62). The novel also contains suggestions that Charlott’s approach to sensuality is similarly emancipated. Its narration includes a reference to her “kleine Affären” (38), and after Charlott enlists the help of Cornelia Fisher’s son Stanley in her inheritance scheme, we are told how the two of them kissed each other “erhitzt [...] und nicht so flüchtig, wie man denken sollte” (54). Charlott can therefore be associated with the sexually liberated women who provoked the fear of many Weimar men (Hale 534–36).

Also significant is the autonomy that Charlott exercises within her close relationships with men. As Tost has observed, the submissive Justus obeys almost all of Charlott’s instructions without question (“Mädchenhänden” 325). However, he is not the only male character who defers to her will. Holk, for example, is unable to persuade her to drive more carefully and does not attempt to voice his displeasure at her plan to return to her former spouse (Speyer, *Charlott* 5–6). Similarly, Charlott has no trouble convincing Stanley to cooperate with her plans to obtain her inheritance early (51–55). And in a later scene, Holk is reminded of Charlott by Stanley’s description of a female acquaintance who “erlaubte es einem gar nicht, dass man sich schlecht benahm” (109–10). Such commanding influence stands in stark contrast to the subordinate positions to which Weimar women were generally consigned within both marriage and paid employment (Boak 146, 153, 160, 162; Hung 54). It also corresponds to the power of Charlott’s agency throughout the novel: As Tost puts it, Charlott determines “den Gang der Geschichte” (“Mädchenhänden” 311).

Charlott's successful plan to win her inheritance early provides a vision of female agency in a non-domestic and male-dominated sphere. For Charlott plays the leading role in obtaining this money, a project that is linked to the assumption of traditionally male roles through her humorous declaration that she will set "meine Truppen in Bewegung" in connection with the development of her plans (Speyer, *Charlott* 42). It is Charlott who devises the scheme to fake her own death in Russia and to present herself to Cornelia as her cousin and heir Camilla. Similarly, during these meetings with Cornelia, Charlott again plays a crucial part in gaining her inheritance by creating a version of Camilla that wins the British woman's sympathy.

Charlott's construction as a character who exercises the power and agency principally reserved for Weimar men is complemented by the way in which the narration emphasizes her resilience and fearlessness, traits closely linked with conventional models of masculinity. When Stanley and Holk meet for the first time on a train, for example, Stanley tells his new acquaintance that he is carrying the ashes of "die erste Frau, die fast daran gestorben ist, dass sie sich über ihren eigenen Tod so heftig amüsierte" (110). This (false) claim—part of Charlott's scheme—causes Holk to identify immediately that woman as Charlott, a reaction that foregrounds Charlott's resilience. A similar disregard for danger is shown by Charlott's habit of driving at speeds that caused Holk's hair to stand on end, although he is "einer der tapfersten Männer seiner Zeit, Kombattant der größten Schlachten seines Jahrhunderts" (6). The novel's celebration of these characteristics challenges the traditional view that women require the protection of men. Moreover, Charlott's tough and daring personality unsettles contemporary ideas about the essential differences between women's and men's characters (Usborne 64) and thereby subverts ideas about women's unsuitability for male-coded professions and activities (Boak 87, 171, 261).

Charlott's freedom from social conventions, alongside her far-reaching power and agency, and her possession of qualities traditionally seen as masculine, amount to a vision of female emancipation that far exceeded the experiences of most Weimar women. Because of this, it is significant that the novel contains no suggestion that Charlott poses a threat either to men or to society in general. On the contrary, she can be seen to possess the "humanen Instinkte" that the narrator describes as being particularly important to communal life in Berlin society given the political divisions of the day (Speyer, *Charlott* 37). One side of this is the consideration that guides her treatment of other people: After her divorce from Justus, for example, she insists on receiving a lower annuity than he offers because she was the one to end the marriage (8). And although Charlott does have affairs, we learn that she refuses to see any men again "die ihren Frauen, Bräuten oder Freundinnen hätten abtrünnig werden können" (76). In addition, the text contains several indications that, notwithstanding Charlott's earlier decision to leave Justus, she genuinely loves him. One such sign is Camilla's statement to Holk that Charlott decided to remarry Justus "aus einem ganz bestimmten anderen Grund, den du gar nicht verstehen kannst" (Speyer, *Charlott* 35); another is the tears that are described as forming on Charlott's eyelashes when she sends Justus away to sea as part of her plot (70). Finally, Charlott's forgiving attitude toward the

mistakes of others is shown near the end of the novel. When she discovers that Justus had attempted to gain her sympathy by falsely telling her he was bankrupt, her only retaliation is to start a pillow fight (198).

The presentation of female emancipation in *Charlott etwas verrückt* is significantly broadened through its depiction of Cornelia Fischer, Charlott's adversary and the British owner of a large tea business. Cornelia is a stickler for etiquette who does not share Charlott's disregard for social conventions. In other important respects, however, her characterization mirrors that of the novel's heroine, whose combination of power, autonomy, and "humanen Instinkte" she also displays. As is the case for Charlott, Cornelia's appearance is repeatedly compared to that of a boy, and she is frequently associated with the assumption of traditionally male roles, for example, through her wry self-description as "eine Frau, die seit zwanzig Jahren Geschäftsmann ist" (168). Significantly, she is portrayed as being firmly in charge of her thriving tea business (166–67), and this success in the male domain of business appears unsurprising given her substantial intellectual powers: She speaks Russian, requires only 40 seconds to grasp the plot of a French comedy "in allen Teilen" after arriving late to the theatre (151), and rapidly sees through many stages of Charlott's plot to obtain her inheritance. Like Charlott, Cornelia plays a commanding role in her relationships with the men around her (86, 120, 123) and possesses qualities traditionally viewed as masculine: In addition to the businesswoman's impressive intellect, her physical strength is repeatedly referenced by the novel (86, 167).

Cornelia has a severe and intimidating manner, as becomes immediately clear from her first appearance in the text. When her son Stanley picks her up from the train station in Paris, she answers his friendly greeting by telling him that he has let himself go and then responds to his gently ironic retort by sending him a "Blitz aus zwei unverwüstlich lebenswütigen Augen" (83). This prickly bearing, however, not only conceals a genuine concern and sympathy for other human beings, it also throws these qualities into sharp relief. After complaining repeatedly about the "unerzogene Briefe" sent to her by Charlott, whom she barely knew, the (fictional) news of the latter's death causes her obvious distress (87–88). Later, Cornelia's capacity for both compassion and remorse is revealed by her devastated reaction to the (incorrect) report that, because she has refused to pay out the inheritance money early, Camilla has to work long hours for little money: The text describes how Cornelia "sank . . . förmlich in sich zusammen" and shortly afterwards reflected that "Man ist schon manchmal eine Bestie" (156).

Cornelia's benevolence is also demonstrated toward the end of the novel, when she quickly forgives those who conspired to deceive her into paying out the inheritance money early. Although the British woman rapidly sees through many elements of the plot, she is nevertheless distressed by the awareness that she is being manipulated and that her son is involved in the scheming (158). Yet despite the suffering caused to her by the conspiracy, she reflects that Charlott and Camilla "gefallen mir gar nicht schlecht" (169). Her eventual decision to pay out the money appears to be prompted by relief that her friend Cecil Dell was not, as feared, going to marry Charlott

(in disguise as Camilla), but there are no indications that she regrets this move later or that she resents those involved in the plot. After writing Charlott a check for the inheritance money, Cornelia expresses the hope that it will bring Charlott happiness, and shortly afterward she grants Stanley his longed-for allowance.

Cornelia's combination of strength, authority, and kindness seems to embody the quality of being "steinern aber sanft," which the narrator associates with the outlook of Charlott and other modern urban women (17). Such a model of female behavior mirrors the hopes expressed by Alfons Paquet and Walter von Hollander in their contributions to *Die Frau von morgen wie wir sie wünschen* that women's emancipation would have a humanizing influence on society as a whole. The benevolence of both Cornelia and Charlott can also be seen as a reflection of contemporary beliefs about motherliness as a fundamental aspect of female nature. Such views were shared by many who were in favor of women playing a greater role in the public sphere (Usborne 64–65). In *Charlott etwas verrückt*, the superior humanity of women is hinted at during the final scene of the novel, when Charlott is described placing her arm on her former adversary's "wie eine zärtliche Tochter." This harmonious image contrasts sharply with the acrimony of the male conspirators Stanley and Holk toward one another: Stanley beats Holk up for accidentally calling Camilla by her real name in front of Cornelia and thereby exposing part of the inheritance plot, while Holk nearly metes out the same treatment to Stanley when he discovers that the story he had been told about Charlott's trip to Russia was a lie (197).

Furthermore, the passage describing the reconciliation between Charlott and Cornelia can be read as an optimistic vision of women's advancement into positions of power that suggests the wider benefits of such a development. The scene begins with a confrontation between the German Charlott and the Briton Cornelia, two adversaries whose nations had been at war less than a decade before. During this showdown, the narration acquires a gently ironic tone through its descriptions of both women in military terms. Cornelia is characterized as "soldatenhaft" and described striding toward her "Waffenkasten" to retrieve her "tödliche Klinge" (a piece of crucial evidence). Charlott, for her part, is compared to a field marshal and described brandishing a "Marschallstab" made from a rolled-up magazine. Eventually, however, Cornelia asks Charlott for her "Ehrenwort als Gentleman" that she does not intend to marry Cecil, and after this is given, Cornelia simply pulls the "schwörenden Gentleman" toward her and kisses her on the lips. As she does so, the "Marschallstab" is crushed between the two women and falls to the floor, a detail that seems to symbolize the rapid end of hostilities (179–81).

Despite this apparent endorsement of women's empowerment, in other respects, the presentation of the female protagonists of *Charlott etwas verrückt* is rooted in conventional conceptions of femininity that limit the potential of these figures to function as models of emancipation. One example of this is the association of Charlott with childlike behavior, for example, when she is described drumming on the table with her knife and fork (7) or sitting down on the grass "wie ein Kind, das mit Kieselsteinen spielen will" (44). In addition, the narration draws repeated attention to the

beauty of both Charlott and, to a lesser extent, Cornelia (8, 45, 84, 163). The presentation of these characters as objects for the consumption of a male gaze is strengthened by both the limited information we are given—particularly in the case of Charlott—about their inner lives and by the sexualized descriptions of them contained within the novel's narration. Indeed, in several such passages, the strength of the women's bodies is incorporated into descriptions that present them as a focus of visual pleasure. The most obvious example of this occurs when Charlott is described in the shower: "so rieselten die Tropfen über die gerundeten Schultern hinweg zu den Brüsten hin, die sie wie von metallenen Rundschildern abgleiten ließen, von dort zu den trainierten, gedehnten, raubtierhaft schönen Hüften" (46). Similarly, during a discussion with Cecil, we are told of how Cornelia's kimono came open so that she "stand [...] nur gering bekleidet da, prachtvoll anzusehen mit ihren langen, kräftigen Schenkeln, schmalen Hüften, schlank-jungfräulichem und doch machtvollem Rumpfe" (167).

Such descriptions serve to reaffirm women's conventional function of pleasing men with their appearance and would therefore have contributed to the well-documented pressure felt by Weimar women to maintain an attractive appearance in order to hold on to their jobs and marriages in a patriarchal society (Boak 266–67). Moreover, Fähnders and Karrenbrock have characterized Charlott as a "Projektionsfläche für männliche Wünsche" ("*Charlott etwas verrückt*" 299), and the construction of both Charlott and Cornelia as male fantasies is reflected in their freedom from the discrimination experienced by Weimar women as well as in the superhuman status they are granted by the novel's narration. Both women are repeatedly compared to Greek goddesses (Speyer, *Charlott* 84, 115, 116, 133), and such imagery is particularly prominent in the passages that present a sexualized description of Charlott. Stanley's (fictitious) account of the Berlin woman's death, for instance, includes an image of her standing "splitternackt" on the banks of the Dnipro River "wie eine antike Göttin mit den Hüften und Brüsten des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts" (115). The association of Charlott and Cornelia with goddesses not only involves recourse to an older model of femininity ("*Charlott etwas verrückt*" 300) but also underlines the exceptional powers that both women possess. Readers are informed, for example, that Charlott's charm and beauty had led most men in Berlin to fall in love with her (42) and her cousin Camilla to regard her "mit dem Blick eines verliebten Sklaven" (64). Similarly, Cornelia's unusual intellectual powers are matched by her remarkable physical achievements: She looks exceptionally youthful for a woman of 45 (84), and her extraordinary suppleness is highlighted by the humorous description that she has no trouble "derart eine Verbeugung nach rückwärts zu machen, daß sie mit dem Hinterkopf in die engste Nachbarschaft zu ihren eigenen Fersen geriet" (83). Such an unrealistic and idealized portrayal increases the distance between the two protagonists and the experiences of most Weimar women and would have created additional pressures for contemporary women. The emancipated characteristics of the female protagonists in *Charlott etwas verrückt* are therefore undermined by the ways in which they function as male fantasies.

Der Kampf der Tertia

A similar tension between the sympathetic portrayal of powerful modern female figures and the recourse to conventional notions of femininity can also be seen in Speyer's *Der Kampf der Tertia*. In this later novel, contemporary progress toward female emancipation is a less prominent feature of the narrative than is the case for *Charlott etwas verrückt*, but the work nevertheless includes examples of radically unconventional female behavior and addresses themes related to the empowerment of women. *Der Kampf der Tertia* is set in a *Landerziehungsheim*, a progressive rural boarding school that granted its pupils an unusual degree of autonomy (Schmid 78–84). The novel follows the efforts of the school's *Tertia*² to prevent a mass killing of cats in the neighboring town of Maineweh, an action planned by local officials as a spurious anti-rabies measure. A second interlinked strand of action is provided by the estrangement and eventual reconciliation between Daniela, the only girl in the *Tertia*, and the rest of the class.

In addition to its commercial success (Vogt-Praclik 94), *Der Kampf der Tertia* was also popular with contemporary critics, several of whom described various aspects of the novel's content as modern and progressive (Eggebrecht 106; Klatt 248; Müller 25). Following the Second World War, however, a series of literary scholars interpreted the text as an expression of *völkisch* ideology. Writing in 1970, Klaus Doderer cited the hierarchical organization of the *Tertia*, alongside the book's valorization of its rural setting and celebration of the physical attributes of two characters with an "Aryan" appearance, in support of his argument that *Der Kampf der Tertia* anticipated National Socialist dogma (35–51). Several of Doderer's judgments are endorsed by Karsten Leutheuser's analysis of the novel, which appeared over two decades later, in 1995, and concluded that the text is anti-democratic in character. Central to Leutheuser's argument are the charges that *Der Kampf der Tertia* glorifies violence and that the difficult experiences of its outsider figures reflect intolerance on the part of their author (52–56). More recently, both Helga Karrenbrock and Birte Tost have argued convincingly against such interpretations of the work, demonstrating that the charge of latent fascism is not supported by a close reading of the text (Tost, *Moderne* 154–57, 160–61, 255–58, 262–68). Particularly significant for Karrenbrock and Tost is a recognition of the irony that periodically appears within the text (Karrenbrock, "Freies Sparta" 169–72; Tost, *Moderne* 255–56; Dreier 379), a feature that Karrenbrock links to the "Oszillieren der Erzählhaltung zwischen Zustimmung und ironischer Distanz" (171).

The modern element of *Der Kampf der Tertia* that is discussed most extensively by Tost is the portrayal of Daniela. For Tost, the figure of Daniela is clearly linked with the New Woman phenomenon (*Moderne* 299–300), and visual evidence for such an interpretation is provided by the novel's introduction of this character, where she is described as having cropped hair, wearing traditionally male clothing and holding a feather "schräg wie eine Zigarette" in her mouth (Speyer, *Kampf* 69–70). More significant than Daniela's physical appearance, however, are the other attributes

that Tost identifies as constituting her as an emancipated and unconventional female protagonist: She is strong-willed, bossy, combative, better at sports than her male classmates, and prepared to use violence to achieve her aims (*Moderne* 157). Even more so than for Charlott and Cornelia, Daniela's possession of traits and abilities conventionally regarded as male seems to undermine contemporary ideas about essential differences between the sexes (Usborne 64). Moreover, the consignment of women to the domestic sphere (60) appears to be further challenged by the influence that—as Tost notes—Daniela enjoys within the male-dominated *Tertia* (*Moderne* 302–03): Early on in the novel, her classmates feel that the group is incomplete when she is estranged from them, and it is thanks to her intervention in the deciding battle that the *Tertia* emerge victorious and are able to save the cats of Maineweh from extermination (Speyer, *Kampf* 89, 255, 302). Indeed, several passages suggest that Daniela's influence within the *Tertia* was so significant that her classmates felt a sense of dependence on her. In the opening scene of the novel, for example, we are told that the *Tertianer* were unable to carry out a decent prank without Daniela (8). The novel also includes repeated references to her classmates' unease over her absence during the period of her estrangement from them (15, 52, 65, 91), and when the campaign to prevent the killing of cats in Maineweh falters, a group of younger *Tertianer* wish for the chance to elect the still-hostile Daniela as their class leader (91–92).

However, while Daniela's importance to the *Tertianer* may seem to qualify her as a model of female empowerment, her emancipated traits exist in tension with other aspects of her portrayal that serve to construct her as a male fantasy. Even more so than Charlott and Cornelia, Daniela is largely denied a subject position due to the scarcity of information about her thoughts. Instead, she is frequently described from the viewpoint of the adoring young *Tertianer* Borst, a perspective that encompasses periodic appreciative references to her appearance (66, 71, 80) and comparisons between her and various deities (76, 80, 84). Within non-focalized passages, too, Daniela is repeatedly associated with goddesses (Tost, *Moderne* 299; Doderer 47), and during the account of her appearance at the battle between the *Tertianer* and the youth of Maineweh, her outstanding fighting ability reinforces her superhuman status. The *Tertianer* are on the verge of defeat when Daniela arrives at the battle, yet she fights like a “hundertfältige Amazone” (Speyer, *Kampf* 146) to lead her classmates to victory and is the only *Tertianer* still standing at the end of the battle, when the others have all collapsed (146). Indeed, at one point in the battle, her exceptional powers seem to exceed the bounds of realistic portrayal: “Nicht *eine* Gestalt war Daniela, sie war hundertfältig geworden. Ihr mykenisch helles Haar flatterte im Sturm der Schlacht, steil sprang sie vom Stand aus in die Lüfte, und mitten ins Getümmel der Feinde ließ sie sich wie eine speer-schüttelnde Göttin herab” (144–45). Within this passage, Daniela appears as a fantasy figure who has little in common with the non-fictional girls and women of the Weimar Republic.

One further ambivalent aspect of Daniela's construction is her association with nature, another stereotype of conventional femininity (Tost, *Moderne* 157). Within Daniela's first appearance in the novel, this is linked with the violent impulses she

displays. At this point, Daniela is still estranged from her class, and Borst, the youngest and weakest *Tertianer*, approaches her camp in the woods with the aim of achieving a rapprochement (Speyer, *Kampf* 67). During this encounter, Daniela's close connection with the natural world is underlined by descriptions of her reading a book "wie die Tiere im Walde sich dem Schlaf zu überlassen pflegen" (70) and telling the time by looking at the sun (78). She is also associated repeatedly with Native Americans: We are told that she carries a bow and arrows and had "die Augen eines Sioux" (71; see also Karrenbrock 170). As a result, contemporary prejudices connecting both emancipated women and Indigenous people with dangerous alternatives to behavioral norms appear to be reinforced by Daniela's brutal impulses and behavior in this scene. Before Borst's arrival, for example, Daniela is described fantasizing about setting her "leopardähnliche" dogs on her classmates and visualizing the grim consequences of this: "Und mochten die Knaben sich zerfetzt in ihrem Blute wälzen" (Speyer, *Kampf* 71). After she has seen Borst and quickly concluded that he is a spy from the Tertia, Daniela wonders how she can hurt him "am [...] einprägsamsten" before forcing his face against the flames of her fire (75). Borst's submissiveness soon weakens Daniela's hostility to him, but she remains resolute in her intentions toward a group of other *Tertianer*, about whom she declares "die müssen alle sterben" (82).

At first glance, this violence may be seen as expressing a straightforward male fear of the emancipated woman. However, when considered as a whole, the meeting between Borst and Daniela in the woods invites a more nuanced interpretation. For the narration does not include any censure of Daniela's violent impulses, but instead refers to her anger (69) and hints at the sadness that her isolation causes her (71, 81). Indeed, the role of her conflict with her classmates in fueling her brutality is suggested by the fact that she is described as a well-behaved pupil who is held in high regard by the school authorities (92). Passages reporting Daniela's thought processes twice allude to her sense of humiliation (71), and toward the end of the scene, we discover its cause: Daniela suffered a devastating loss in the election to be class leader and was tied to a tree following her violent reaction to the result (82). A link between the degradation of being bound and Daniela's savage aggression toward her classmates is clearly implied by her declaration, "Wer mich an den Baum bindet, muß sterben!" (82). Daniela's belligerence at this stage of the novel is rooted in her experiences of restricted autonomy and powerlessness.

It is true that Daniela's extreme reactions to her perceived humiliations appear to reflect stereotypes about women being highly emotional (Tost, *Moderne* 157). Nevertheless, while the novel's narration does not address the question of whether sexism played a role in Daniela's election defeat, it does provide readers with enough information to sympathize with her sense of grievance. Daniela's undoubted capabilities support her assessment that she has a legitimate claim to be class leader, and we can therefore understand her outrage at receiving only two votes in the election (Speyer, *Kampf* 81). This is particularly the case because the election winner, the ironically named *Großkurfürst* (Dreier 379; Karrenbrock 172), is eloquent but lazy (Tost, *Moderne* 256) and loses the confidence of several *Tertianer* when the campaign to

rescue the cats of Maineweh falters (Speyer, *Kampf* 91). Under his leadership, the *Tertianers'* first step in this endeavor—painting warnings on the houses of Maineweh—is a dismal failure, described witheringly by Daniela as “alberne Schreibübungen” (81).

Moreover, it is noteworthy that Daniela's violent behavior following her election defeat is counterbalanced by the compassion she displays later in the novel. Her empathy for the vulnerable, for instance, is indicated by the special relationship she develops with Borst after her initial aggression toward him subsides. Small, weak, and clumsy, Borst is a recent arrival at the school (17–18) who comes from a poor family and sometimes has difficulty understanding the *Großkurfürst's* figures of speech (86–87). Considerable narrative attention is devoted to his thoughts and experiences (Dreier 374–75), and consequently readers are well informed about his strong desire to be appreciated by his classmates and about the exasperation and disapproval that his missteps arouse from them (Speyer, *Kampf* 36, 37, 41, 43). Daniela's protective stance toward Borst is established following the class's night-time house-painting operation in Maineweh. During this action, the youngest *Tertianer* acted on his own initiative to distract the town's policeman while the house painting was underway. Because of this violation of the class command structure, Borst is subsequently ostracized and summoned to appear before a “Schülergericht” on a charge of disobedience and flight from the enemy (78). However, after Borst informs Daniela of his predicament, she writes to the *Großkurfürst* defending Borst's actions and threatening violence against anyone who participates in a trial against him (89). As a result, the case against Borst is immediately dropped, and he regains the goodwill of his classmates (90).

Following the *Tertianers'* victory over the young people of Maineweh, Daniela is appointed honorary class chief (148), and her solicitude toward Borst contributes to the positive vision of female leadership she presents. During the novel's final chapter, Daniela is described teaching Borst to use a radio (151), including him on a boat trip he could not otherwise afford (152), and putting her arm around his shoulders (153). Now recognized as a leader, the only girl in the *Tertia* displays no signs of her earlier aggression and is instead shown promoting reconciliation and harmony: She tears down the threatening sign that had previously warned passers-by not to approach her camp (151), invites her classmates to visit her tent (151), and expresses admiration at their success in blocking off a road as part of their mission (151). In the novel's closing passage, no mention is made of the *Großkurfürst*—still the *Tertianers'* official leader—and instead Daniela is shown initiating two demonstrations of harmony within the class. After she has put her arm around Borst's shoulders, the pair are gradually joined by their other classmates so that “schließlich stand die ganze Bande insgesamt auf der Hexenkuppe, in einer Kette, die Arme wechselseitig über den Schultern” (153). Shortly afterward, the group listens with little interest to the singing of a male *Tertianer*, before the new honorary chief herself begins to sing and her classmates join in. The novel closes with a description of “die Räuber und die Streiter” singing together in response to Daniela's lead (153). Although several aspects of Daniela's portrayal seem designed to cater to male

imagination, *Der Kampf der Tertia* nevertheless concludes with an endorsement of her authority.

CONCLUSION

Given that Daniela, Charlott, and Cornelia embody traditionally male roles and power to an extent that went well beyond what was generally accepted within Weimar society, it is significant that contemporary critics of the novels—most of whom were male—were generally positive in their responses to these figures. Five reviews of *Charlott etwas verrückt* are known to have appeared in the late 1920s (Fähnders and Karrenbrock, “Ein Buch” 208–11), and none of them expresses disapproval of Charlott’s or Cornelia’s emancipated characteristics. Two reviews do not allude to gender issues at all: One by Heinz Michaelis, which appeared in *Die literarische Welt*, was extremely brief, while Franz Groß, writing in *Bücherwarte. Zeitschrift für sozialistische Bücherkritik*, focused his criticism on the novel’s alleged amorality and the narrow social range of its characters. However, while the three other reviews, which appeared in left-leaning publications, also eschew direct comment on female emancipation, they all voice enthusiasm for the figure of Charlott and acknowledge her relevance to contemporary society. Writing in *Das Tagebuch*, Speyer’s friend Balder Olden calls Charlott and Justus “Kinder unserer Zeit” and describes the multiple men in Charlott’s life without any censure. Writing in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, Felix Langer predicts that female readers will want to imitate her. Similarly, Ilse Ehrenfried, the critic for the *Vossische Zeitung*, calls Charlott “ein Mädchen unserer Zeit” and anticipates that women readers will have every sympathy for her (Tieck).

Reviewers of *Der Kampf der Tertia*, in contrast, voiced a clearer appreciation of the female empowerment embodied by Daniela. The novel is known to have been reviewed in seven German publications in the late 1920s (Karrenbrock, “Freies Sparta” 152–57; Tost, *Moderne* 88, 155–61), most of them literary periodicals. All the pieces expressed enthusiasm for the novel, and all but one mention Daniela. Only Marie von Bunsen, writing in *Das literarische Echo* and citing the female *Tertianer*’s “Selbsterhebung,” is critical of her. The other reviewers, all of them either male or anonymous, enthusiastically acknowledge Daniela’s emancipated attributes. Alfred Kleinberg, the reviewer for *Bücherwarte. Zeitschrift für sozialistische Bücherkritik*, characterizes her as a “wildes, prächtiges [...] Mädchen,” while the description of her as “eine schöne Amazone” by Alwin Müller in *Eckart. Blätter für evangelische Geisteskultur* (25) clearly implies appreciation of the female power she embodies. Another critic who identified Daniela with the matriarchal Amazons was Balder Olden, who reviewed *Der Kampf der Tertia* for *Das Tagebuch*. Olden also celebrates Daniela as the “Heldenmädchen” who wins the final battle for the *Tertianer*, before referring to her male clothing and describing how her fighting ability is superior to that of her male classmates. Similar points are made by Axel Eggebrecht in his review for *Die*

literarische Welt, which compares Daniela to Achilles, a hero of the Trojan War, but also discusses the book's contemporary relevance at some length, declaring that "ich seit dem Lesen dieses Buches in zwanzig Mädels ein Stück von ihr entdeckte" (106). The most extensive coverage of Daniela, however, is provided by a lengthy review in the *Hefte für Büchereiwesen*. This piece, whose author is identified only by the surname Klatt, acknowledges without disapproval Daniela's violence and anger alongside her wildness, boyishness, and superior abilities. It also includes an exuberant celebration of her role in the *Tertianers'* final battle, calling her a "rettende Göttin" who performs "Wunder der Tapferkeit" (248).

Descriptions of Daniela as a goddess, heroine, or "schöne Amazone" by male critics of *Kampf der Tertianer* indicate their enthusiastic response to those elements of her portrayal that cast her as a fantasy character with superhuman abilities. Indeed, it seems likely that the conventional aspects in the depiction of Charlott, Cornelia, and Daniela played an important role in rendering them palatable to both contemporary critics and a wider society that was still permeated by patriarchal values. For on the one hand, Speyer's imagining of female emancipation in *Charlott etwas verrückt* and *Der Kampf der Tertia* appears to advocate for female empowerment through its approbatory presentation of women characters who embody the traits, roles, and power hitherto reserved for men. On the other hand, the emancipatory potential of these novels is curbed by their lack of attention to the discrimination faced by Weimar women and by Speyer's employment of perspectives and imagery that reinforce structures of male domination.

ENDNOTES

¹ I am very grateful to Hester Baer, Karin Schutjer, and the two peer reviewers for *German Quarterly* for their invaluable feedback on this article.

² The narration tells us that this term is used as an abbreviation for Ober-Tertia, the name given in contemporary Gymnasia to the equivalent of today's ninth class (15).

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