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[Look to the Hills: The Diary of Lozette Moreau, a French Slave Girl](#)

Posted on 14 February 2019 By Irmgard Keun

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Sometimes we happen to come across a little gem of a book that had disappeared, literally, for decades. *After Midnight*, written by Irmgard Keun in 1937 during her exile in Holland, is just one such book. Now translated into English by the admirable Anthea Bell, the first since the original translation in 1938, it belongs into a select treasure collection of recently re-discovered notable German fiction, written either just before or right after World War II. Each novel depicts, in its own way, aspects of ordinary people's daily life during the early years of the Nazi regime. Among these authors we find books by Hans Fallada (e.g. *Every Man Dies Alone*), Hans Keilson (e.g. *The Death of the Adversary*) and Irmgard Keun (e.g. *The Artificial Silk Girl*). To this distinct collection of novels by contemporary witnesses we can now add *AFTER MIDNIGHT*. In some way it can be regarded as a prequel to *Child of All Nations: A Novel*, written in 1938, that tells the story of one family's life in exile, seen from the perspective of a ten-year-old girl. Keun's three novels mentioned above open a window into a time and place that is difficult for us to imagine in detail. Her style is conversational and easy-going, with localisms and vivid images sprinkled in. In this novel, 19-year-old Susanne, with an independent voice and a mind, roams with great ease between recounting what she hears and observes around her and pondering her own inner thoughts that either add humorous commentary on the people she meets, ask questions, or take her mind to past problems in

her young life Some readers might find Keun s writing a bit too casual and seemingly lightweight for the realities she deals with However, there is much irony and depth in Susanne s comments and for us readers with hindsight, a wealth of astute observations. Susanne, Sanna , has recently arrived in the big city Frankfurt to escape the clutches of the Gestapo and to leave her mean spirited aunt who had denounced her to the authorities together with her first love and now fianc , the quiet, diffident Frank With regret she had to leave him behind but, as the novel opens, she has finally received a letter announcing that he is on his way to meet her one time Sanna s new life in the animated society circle of her step brother Alvin, a popular and affluent writer, and his beautiful, luxurious wife, Liska, is exciting Sanna, a pretty young woman, is enthusiastic, naive and trusting She is not interested in politics and can just as easily flirt with a man from the SS, the SA or the Jewish doctor, who is one of her brother s friends Sanna and her close friend Gertie, are often also joined by the funny, sarcastic journalist Heini who is highly entertaining despite, or because of, his falling out of favour with the authorities He is the first to feel the wind of change and his ironic and witty commentary alone would make the book worth reading I used to be a quick witted and humorous journalist , he laments What I believed I had to say, I have said, in my own way and language Now, in this time of widespread word inflation , is it not a pity when a thinking person moves on to total silence Alvin, in the meantime, has also been included in the Nazi blacklist and can no longer find a publisher his existence is quickly reduced to nothing and his mind to despair As the story moves to its dramatic climax after midnight the pace in the narration speeds up, the different strands of the story come together, overlap and Keun s novel is first of all a fascinating document for its time Yet, it is also It is an entertaining story to read that, with her typical light and ironic touch, provides us with a highly perceptive portrayal of a society on the cusp of disaster Keun has filled her story with some memorable characters and their discussions on where the country is headed brings out different points of view, not all presented with the same level of seriousness as the Jewish doctor s consideration of possible exile, a move that does not appeal to Heini poor migr You will become a torment to yourself and a burden to others The roofs that you see have not been built for you The bread that you smell, is not being baked for you And the language that you hear will not be spoken for you all translations are mine. I was expecting After Midnight to be one of those novels that s not that interesting by itself but sticks in your mind later as a reflection of its times I m looking at Mephisto Klaus Mann and A Tomb for Boris Davidovich Danilo Kis here Not so for Keun s novel of Nazi Germany, however I enjoyed the novel while I was reading and still had that feeling of this is great because it expresses pivotal history Keun s narrator, Sanna, is deceptively naive She s young and all absorbed with romance and social relationships and then, boom, she mentions some aspect of Nazi control that s recently come to dominate Keun s characters lives The growing effects of Nazism on everyday German society accelerate quickly throughout the novel, with Sanna s life being turned

upside down within the course of the two days covered by the story Like the  
aforementioned novels concerning authoritarian governments, *After Midnight* very clearly  
expresses the life changing and life annihilating properties of said governments Unlike the  
other novels, the central character of *After Midnight* is one with whom readers can better  
identify because, at least on the surface, she is just like any other young adult *After Midnight*  
also covers a fairly full spectrum of German lives, from intellectuals to children to Nazi  
sympathizers to the average people just caught up in it all The novel even has a satirical  
character who, like Shakespeare's jesters and other jokesters, is there to provide some  
comedic relief along with a clear view of what, exactly, is going on Only this is a book about  
Nazi Germany, so there is very little relief to be found in these scathing, depressed  
denouements that will only end in tragedy. *Past Midnight* Some stars still shine, behind  
cloudy mists Let there be sun tomorrow, dear God This book Written in 1937, set around  
the same time contemporary literature And today Is it still relevant Unfortunately, yes Who is  
going to read it The sane people They already know what is in it The insane people Reading  
is far too exhausting and boring for them Any bet you they have not even read *Mein Kampf*  
from beginning to end, and neither have I Who should read it Keun makes Susanne look  
clueless and naive And then she tightens the screw and The head threatens to burst Too  
many characters Aryans and Jews and those of mixed blood are thrown together at the final  
party German women should have children, but for this a process with feeling is necessary  
And there must not be any mistakes that violate the law Perhaps the safest thing is to not  
love at all As long as that is allowed Idiotic laws govern love Laws not understood and not  
questioned Questions will take you to jail Some fantastic splinters from a keen observer  
Keun knows the situation in Germany She writes from exile When writing a writer must not  
fear his own sentences, or God, or the world in general A writer who is afraid is not a writer  
But apart from that, you're superfluous The dictatorship has made Germany a perfect  
country A perfect country does not need writers There is no literature in paradise A strange  
little great book whose purpose I didn't totally get I want to laugh with hatred I'm crazy, that  
is it I will dance and laugh and sing to the madhouse Where is the madhouse You never  
know the most important things This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution  
NonCommercial ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. This novella length book was first  
published in 1937 and, very much like *Alone in Berlin* Penguin Modern Classics, it tells the  
story of living in Nazi Germany by a German who lived there Irmgard Keun 1905 1982 was  
an author born in Berlin, whose work was destroyed in the infamous book burnings which  
took place under Nazi rule Arrested by the Gestapo, she was forced shortly into exile,  
during which time she had an affair with Jewish author Joseph Roth Much of this novella  
mirrors her life and you can feel the authenticity of experience in every line. Sanna flees  
from Cologne after being investigated by the Gestapo for making unguarded comments,  
and ends up living with her half brother Algin and his wife Once well regarded and  
successful, Algin has found his work banned and is unsure about what he can write under

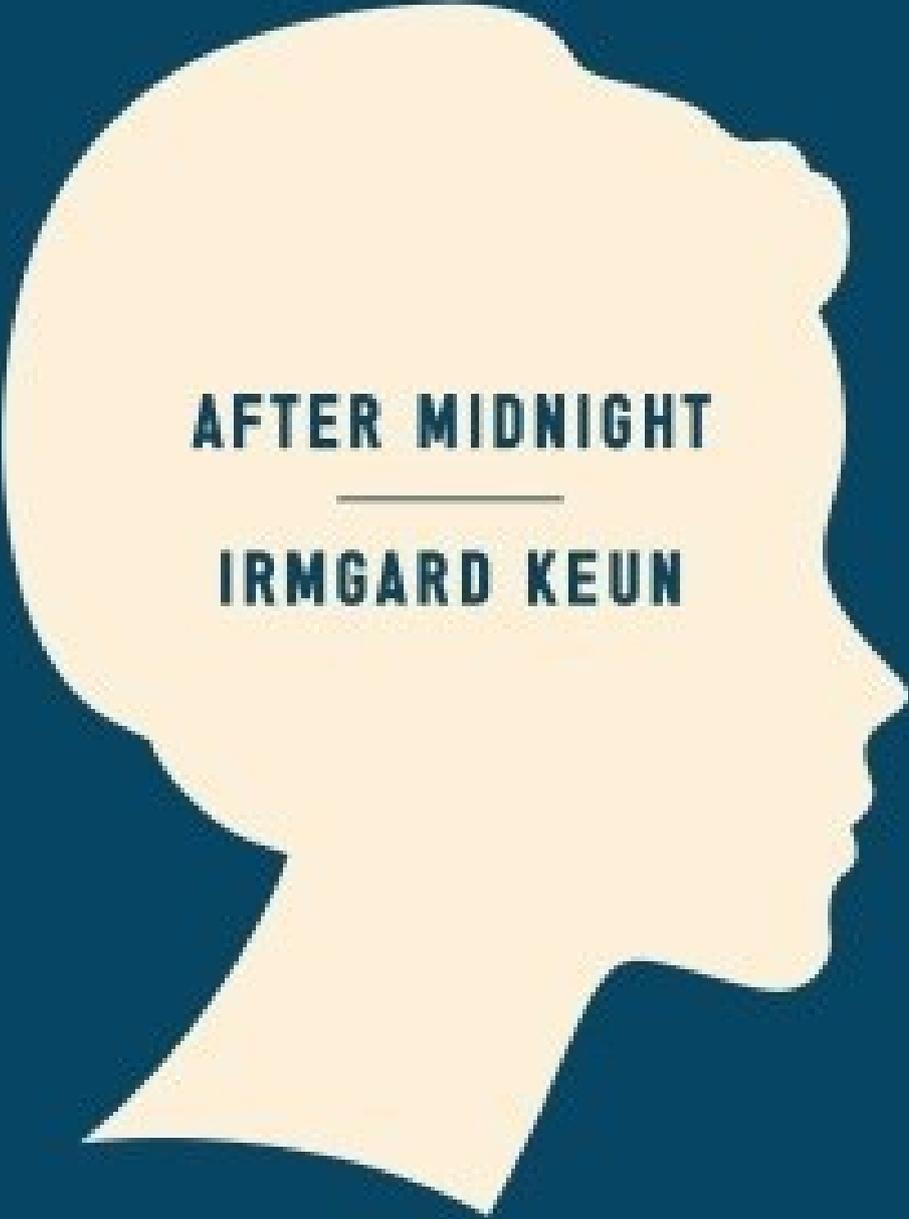
the new political regime For politics are everywhere and can no longer be ignored, even by those who previously had no interest in such things Every word uttered, every opinion expressed, can be used against you We learn of Algin s wife, Leski, who has fallen desperately in love with a journalist no longer able to work Of Sanna s friend, Gerti, having a dangerous relationship with a man of mixed race Of the charming and previously highly respected Jewish doctor, Dr Breslauer, shortly to be forced into exile Events are centred around a much anticipated visit by Hitler to a local Opera House and a party that Leski is throwing, but an air of desperation and fear underpins the entire work Much will change for Senna during this book, but the author cleverly mixes the absurd with the shocking, to show how the unbelievable can become mundane and the ridiculous accepted, as the world the characters once knew and lived in changes around them This is a wonderful read and I am glad I discovered it There is also an insightful introduction to the work, as well as an interesting essay on the author at the end of the book, which gives the reader a greater understanding of the novella.







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**AFTER MIDNIGHT**

**IRMGARD KEUN**

TRANSLATED BY ANTHEA BELL

AFTERWORD BY GEOFF WILKES

StarsAfter Midnight was written and published in 1937 while Keun was living in exile in Europe having left Germany the previous year Deceptively straightforward and engaging on the surface, the novel is actually a very subtle and insightful critique of the Nazi regime, written by an author who had experienced the challenges of navigating the system first hand It s an excellent book, one that draws the reader in from its striking opening line.You can open an envelope and take out something which bites or stings, though it isn t a living creature p 3 To read my review, please click here One of the few instances when I just want to quote the book blurbs review snippets, because all of them are spot on Keun wrote this slim novel, set in mid 1930s Germany, with a tone that is somehow light and devastating Through protagonist Sanna s naive eyes and artless comments, the reader sees everyday Germany where Hitler s fascism has become normal No one is safe neighbors and relatives inform on each other and even a visit to the Ladies Room is fraught with tension about what someone might overhear.Sanna is an excellent observer and, although she is no Nazi sympathizer, is also far from political and does not stick her neck out Her naivete is not always believable and Keun does pack in the melodrama But that is a small matter in such a strong showing of the horror of what is to come and what already is Keun wrote After Midnight in 1937, shortly after fleeing Germany.Very glad I took a chance on this at the Brooklyn Book Festival and plan to explore of The Neversink Library collection from Melville House Publishing There was turmoil around the Opera House People, and swastika flags, and garlands of fir, and SS men The place was in confusion, all excited preparations, much like preparations for the handing out of Christmas presents in a prosperous family with quantities of children You get used to feverish celebrations of something or other going on all the time in Germany, so that you often don t stop to ask what it is this time, why all the fuss and the garlands and the flags page 20 |Kindle ? Nach Mitternacht ? Sanna And Her Ravishing Friend Gerti Would Rather Speak Of Love Than Politics, But In S Frankfurt, Politics Cannot Be Escaped Even In The Lady S Bathroom Crossing Town One Evening To Meet Up With Gerti S Jewish Lover, A Blockade Cuts Off The Girls Path It Is The F Rher In A Motorcade Procession, And The Crowd Goes Mad Striving To Catch A Glimpse Of Hitler S Raised Empty Hand Then The Parade Is Over, And In The Long Hours After Midnight Sanna And Gerti Will Face Betrayal, Death, And The Heartbreaking Reality Of Being Young In An Era Devoid Of Innocence Or Romance In , German Author Irmgard Keun Had Only Recently Fled Nazi Germany With Her Lover Joseph Roth When She Wrote This Slim, Exquisite, And Devastating Book It Captures The Unbearable Tension, Contradictions, And Hysteria Of Pre War Germany Like No Other Novel Yet, Even As It Exposes Human Folly, The Book Exudes A Hopeful Humanism It Is Full Of Humor And Light, Even As It Describes The First Moments Of A Nightmare After Midnight Is A Masterpiece That Deserves To Be Read And Remembered This is such an important book that I wonder how come I had never heard of it before But then again, as Michael Hofman writes in his excellent and informative afterword to Keun s Child of All Nations I ve no doubt that, had she been a man,

her work would have been made available in valourous box sets and collected editions First published in 1937, this is one of the strongest and cleverest indictments of Hitler and Nazism to see the light of print during that decade The story is told from the point of view of Sanna, a publican's daughter, who has moved from the countryside to the city, and is currently living with her half brother Algin, a promising writer, now blacklisted by the regime, and his wife Liska, a vapid beauty In the first paragraph of the novel, Sanna receives a short letter from Franz announcing his imminent arrival in Frankfurt Gradually, we learn that Franz, who is Sanna's cousin, is also her fiancé Sanna is fully aware of Franz's goodness, but is vaguely ashamed of him because he cuts a poor figure in society Sanna once lived in Cologne with Franz and his mother, Aunt Adelheid, but had to flee because her aunt tried to have her arrested by the police Like many around her, Aunt Adelheid has joined the Party, in part because seeing the Führer gesticulating and covered in sweat at rallies arouses her, and partly because only party members have the power to denounce friends, relatives or neighbors whom they wish to get rid of Keun does a brilliant job of showing how many people have been quick to seize advantage of a system where in exchange for your allegiance, you can dispatch pretty much anyone you owe money to, or happen to envy or resent Sanna feels increasingly like a fly caught in a cobweb, trying to help friends who are even less well equipped than she is to survive in such dangerous times The book is perfectly paced and its climax is a long party scene at Algin's apartment, at the end of which a once combative journalist commits suicide, in despair at the hypocrisy and cowardice he sees all around him Simultaneously, Franz finally arrives in Frankfurt, and explains to Sanna why he has to either hide or flee At this crossroads, Sanna realizes just how much Franz means to her, and decides to leave the country with him But she is no heroine, and is terrified of what she is taking on While trying to make a checklist of all they need to stand a chance of surviving, Sanna is constantly distracted by people pouring into Liska's party, which has turned into a crime scene since Heini shot himself At some point, Sanna thinks Perhaps they've already come to arrest Franz Then I can stay here, it's not my fault, I did all I could, all I could I just love this passage where Keun brilliantly shows how contradictory emotions always coexist in the human heart Sanna is barely strong enough to do what extraordinary historical circumstances demand of her, and she'd be only too glad to be let off the hook, even if it meant losing the man she loves This book is full of such marvelous psychological insights, and it deserves to be much widely known than it is at present. Keun's life, who was opposed to the Nazi regime, could be the subject of a novel at some point, she faked her own suicide to be able to live in Germany unbeknownst to the Nazis, who had put her on their black list her books were burned This short novel is, in a very quiet way, absolutely terrifying by describing the daily life of a bunch of ordinary people in Frankfurt under the Nazis, she shows with an amazing eye for the details that matter how unbearable, debilitating, difficult, and suffocating, living under a dictatorship can be Fear reigns, whatever you do, whomever you talk to, even when, like the heroine, you're a young

woman who is not very political, a bit naive, and trying to find your place in society. What is even chilling is how such a regime perversely destroys all that can be positive about a community: jealousies, betrayals, denunciations, hatred, become the rule, and a whole society slowly unravels. Nothing much happens in this book, which is also one of its strengths: it is not a melodrama, nor a thriller. But the banality of evil creeps, finds its way, and permeates the lives of all the characters, turning *After Midnight* into one of the most effective, and devastating, accounts of the insanity that ruled over Nazi Germany. Bell's translation is remarkable.

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