**Vicki Baum** (1888-1960) was born as Hedwig Baum to a Jewish family in Vienna. Trained as a musician in her youth, Baum studied the harp at the Vienna Conservatory and played in a German orchestra for three years. She is best known for her novels *Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* (1928) and *Menschen im Hotel* (1929). The English translation of the latter as G*rand Hotel* (1932) inspired the Academy Award winning Hollywood film of the same name. This Hollywood adaptation, along with the numerous translations of *Menschen im Hotel*, brought Baum international fame.

Baum’s first book, *Frühe Schatten, das Ende einer Kindheit*, was published in 1914 and re-released in 1919. She did not have a major success, however, until she published *Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, which sold over one hundred thousand copies within three years. This novel dealt with the very timely issue of the “New Woman,” taking as its heroine a highly educated woman in male-dominated academia and offering a window into the lifestyle of the ‘modern’ contemporary woman in the Weimar Republic. [While](http://movies.nytimes.com/person/216608/Baum) Baum wished to write and be recognized for more serious literary work, financial necessity led her to sign an exclusive contract with Ullstein, where she also worked as an editor from 1920-1931, and to continue to write the type of ‘pot boilers’ the press demanded of her. Consequently, her novels were never taken very seriously by critics. Even when she finally produced what she felt was an important work of literature, her 1953 book *The Mustard Seed*, it was received just as her earlier works had been. Baum referred to herself for most of her career as “a first-class writer of the second rank.”

In 1932, after spending time in Hollywood working on the film version of *Grand Hotel*, Baum emigrated to the United States with her family. This move coincided with the growing anti-Semitism in Germany, and in 1933 Baum’s literary works were banned in the Third Reich. She became an American citizen in 1938; from this point forward, she wrote her works exclusively in English. Over the course of her career, Baum wrote more than 50 novels. At least ten of these were made into Hollywood movies, including *Dance Girl, Dance* (1940*), A Woman’s Secret* (1949) , and the *Hotel Shanghai* (1997). Baum died of [leukemia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leukemia) in 1960. Her memoir *It Was All Quite Different* was published posthumously in 1964.

**Key Works**

Books

—*Frühe Schatten, das Ende einer Kindheit* (1914)

—*Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* (1925, *Helene* 1932)

—*Menschen im Hotel* (1929, *Grand Hotel* 1931)

—*The Mustard Seed*. New York: Dial Press, 1953

— *It* *Was All Quite Different: the Memoirs of Vicki Baum.* New York, Funk & Wagnalls, 1964.

Films

Grand Hotel (1932)

Dance Girl, Dance (1940)

A Woman’s Secret (1949)

Hotel Shanghai (1997)

References and Further Readings

[King, Lynda J. (1988)](http://neworbexpress.library.yale.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?searchId=1191&recCount=50&recPointer=17&bibId=4352174) *Best-sellers by design: Vicki Baum and the House of Ullstein*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

On-line resources:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0022958/> (Grand Hotel trailer)

<http://library.albany.edu/speccoll/findaids/ger020.htm> (Vicki Baum papers)

http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E07E1D7103EE432A25752C1A9669D946193D6CF

http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9D07E4DF1238E333A25757C0A9609C946294D6CF

Images:

