

University of New Orleans  
**ScholarWorks@UNO**

---

Habsburg's Last War: The Filmic Memory (1918  
to the Present)

University of New Orleans Press

---

6-2018

## The Contact Zone: In Search of the Galician Theater of War in German Cinemas of the 1920s

Philipp Stiasny  
*Konrad Wolf Film University Babelsberg*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/hlw>



Part of the [European History Commons](#), and the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

This book and portions thereof are made openly available with permission of the authors, who retain copyright. Other chapters as well as the complete book may be accessed and downloaded at <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/hlw/>

This Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the University of New Orleans Press at ScholarWorks@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Habsburg's Last War: The Filmic Memory (1918 to the Present) by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uno.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uno.edu).

# THE CONTACT ZONE:

## IN SEARCH OF THE GALICIAN THEATER OF WAR IN GERMAN CINEMAS OF THE 1920S<sup>1</sup>

*Philipp Stiasny*

Franz Joseph's Empire can only ever have been an invention of the operetta, of the theater, of the novel, and of the cinema. In Germany, too, it was never only a historical and geographical region and era, but also an emotional one, a place of memory and of longing. This is especially true of the period after the First World War, when films about the Danube, Vienna, and waltzes, complete with dashing lieutenants and jaded princes, jocular musicians and Viennese dames, made up a considerable part of the Weimar Republic's box office offerings and landed high on the popularity charts.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Many thanks to James Straub for translating the text and commenting on it. Many thanks, too, to Mila Ganeva and Cynthia Walk for their comments and help.

2 Cf. the polls for the most successful films of the season in *Film-Kurier*, no. 85, Apr. 9, 1927 (no. 1: *An der schönen blauen Donau* [*The Beautiful Blue Danube*]); *ibid.*, no. 116/117, May 16, 1928 (no. 3: *Das tanzende Wien* [*Dancing Vienna*]); *ibid.*, special edition, June 1, 1929 (no. 3: *Ungarische Rhapsodie* [*Hungarian Rhapsody*]); *ibid.*, special edition, May 31, 1930 (no. 2 of sound films: *Liebeswalzer* [*Waltz of Love*]); *ibid.*, no. 119, May 23, 1931 (no. 6: *Zwei Herzen im Dreivierteltakt* [*Two Hearts in Waltz Time*]); *ibid.*, no. 118, May 21, 1932 (no. 1: *Der Kongress tanzt* [*Congress Dances*]).

These stories almost always took place before the First World War—in the good old days, before everything fell apart, before the battlefields of Europe drank the blood of millions of people, and the Habsburg dynasty was wiped off the face of the earth, along with the Romanovs and the Hohenzollern. Although people in the 1920s wanted to look back at this era with laughter in one eye and tears in the other and to wallow in memories of a now-defunct multinational state, there was scant interest in films about German-Austrian cooperation and its consequences in World War I. Perhaps people wanted this chapter forgotten. In any case, although the memorialization of the First World War was a hotly debated issue, hardly any of the Weimar Republic's films evoked the battles—often fought beside German troops—of the Austro-Hungarian army in Galicia, in Bukovina or Romania, in the Alps and on the Isonzo, or in the Balkans and in the Carpathians.

One such exception was the hugely popular directorial debut by Luis Trenker, *Berge in Flammen* (“*Mountains on Fire*”) from 1931, which depicts the struggle between Austrians and Italians in the Dolomites, complete with spectacular location shooting, in a cross between a thriller and a mountain film.<sup>3</sup>

However, apart from “*Mountains on Fire*”, between 1918 and 1933 only two other German productions dealt with the Austro-Hungarian theater of war at some length, *Leichte Kavallerie* (“*Light Cavalry*”, 1927, directed by Rolf Randolf) and *Zwei Welten* (“*Two Worlds*”, GER/UK 1930, directed by E.A. Dupont). Both of them belong to a small corpus of not exclusively German films set in Galicia that haven't been studied so far. My essay first of all attempts to give an account of the films in question: What narratives

---

3 *Berge in Flammen* was the fifth most successful film of the 1931–32 season; cf. “1400 Theaterbesitzer haben abgestimmt,” *Film-Kurier*, no. 118, May 21, 1932.

do they use in order to speak about the war in Galicia? Are there prevalent patterns, themes, motifs? Are the films in dialogue with each other, or do they stand for themselves? What are the main discourses that the films reflect, produce, partake in? Not least, this essay will try to illuminate some of the contexts of the films' production and their reception by the German press of their day.

### *The War of the Movie Seats*

In the aftermath of the war, not only the production of films about the Austro-Hungarian theater in general and Galicia in particular were insignificant in commercial terms; in fact, this goes for all of German cinema after 1918, including foreign films shown in Germany. Only in the mid-1920s did the production of war films begin getting into gear. This trend was pushed forward by sensational American films like "*The Big Parade*" (USA 1925, directed by King Vidor) and "*What Price Glory?*" (USA 1926, directed by Raoul Walsh). These Hollywood films, the products of massive outlays of technology and capital, had been highly praised in the press for their peerless realism in the portrayal of war. They were also heavily promoted by the production and distribution companies.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, these films failed to find much favor with the German cinema audiences. Faced with the choice between viewing the war from an American or German perspective in the movie seats, the public preferred the latter. On the one hand, the choice betrays a preference for a national, and often nationalistic, interpretation of the war, while on the other hand it attests to a domestic preference for domestic films, despite

---

4 For the role of American war movies within the German film discourse cf. Thomas J. Saunders, "Politics, the Cinema, and Early Revisitations of War in Weimar Germany," *Canadian Journal of History* 23 (1988): 25–48.

American competition and the lack of language barriers in the silent film era.<sup>5</sup>

The German World War films were also shaped by a German perspective. This is evident in the choice of subject matter: melodramatic films, like *Ich hatt' einen Kameraden* (*I Once Had a Comrade*) (1926, directed by Conrad Wiene), about the colonial war in German East Africa, and *Die versunkene Flotte* ("Wrath of the Sea"/"When Fleet meets Fleet", 1926, directed by Manfred Noa), on the battle of Jutland, were marked successes at the box office.<sup>6</sup> Other popular films included *Unsere Emden* ("The Emden", 1926, directed by Louis Ralph) on the near-mythical Cruiser *Emden* and its privateer voyages in the Indian Ocean, *U9 Weddigen* (1927, directed by Heinz Paul) and *Richthofen, der rote Ritter der Luft* (*Richthofen, the Red Knight of the Skies*, 1927, directed by Desider Kertész) on heroic U-Boat commanders and fighter pilots, *Volk in Not* (*A people in distress*, 1925, directed by Wolfgang Neff) on the war in East Prussia and Hindenburg's victory at Tannenberg, and *Heimkehr* ("Homecoming", 1928, directed by Joe May) on German P.O.W.s in Russia and their way back.

In the wake of the scandal surrounding Erich Maria Remarque's bestselling novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and numerous other war novels, *Westfront 1918* (1918, directed by G.W. Pabst), among others, focused on trench warfare in northern France and Flanders. Nonfictional films focusing on particular battles and their official interpretation—composed in part with the help of historical film materials, and in part with the help of re-enactments—also

---

5 For the preferences of German audiences cf. Joseph Garncarz, *Hollywood in Deutschland: Zur Internationalisierung der Kinokultur 1925–1990* (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2013).

6 For these and the following titles cf. Bernadette Kester, *Film Front Weimar: Representations of the First World War in German Films of the Weimar Period (1919–1933)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2003).

met with enthusiastic responses: *Die Somme* (*The Somme*) (1929, directed by Heinz Paul), *Douaumont* (1931, directed by Heinz Paul), and *Tannenberg* (1932, directed by Heinz Paul) were all successful. As these titles indicate, producers and filmmakers were generally interested in events from the war that were familiar to the largest possible audience and allowed for a heroic interpretation.

With the exception of East Prussia and the Battle of Tannenberg, none of these films assign the Eastern European theater any particular significance in the progression or outcome of the World War, an observation that points to the German public's increasingly strong focus on the Western Front. The war of attrition and trench warfare became synonymous with the entirety of the First World War and the embodiment of modern warfare at around this time. Even the two-part, chronological Ufa-Kulturfilm *Der Weltkrieg* (*The World War*, 1927/28, directed by Leo Lasko, 2 Parts) references the Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive, the recapture of Lemberg (Lviv), the Serbian Front, the War in the Alps, and overall German-Austrian cooperation only in passing.<sup>7</sup>

### *Between the Fronts*

In comparison to the war on the Western Front and East Prussia, the war in Eastern Europe and especially the war in Galicia appeared neither as lucrative nor particularly appropriate from a national perspective. This was certainly related to the fact that

---

<sup>7</sup> *Der Weltkrieg* was made in collaboration with the Reichsarchiv, the State Archive; the film's first part was the fifth most successful film of the 1927–28 season, just behind *Metropolis*; cf. "Das Ergebnis der Abstimmung," *Film-Kurier*, no. 116/117, May 16, 1928. The details on the theatres of war mentioned in the film derive from the surviving one-part version released in 1933. Available as "*Der Weltkrieg: Ein historischer Film*" on <http://www.filmportal.de/node/77431/video/1213579>.

Galicia no longer belonged to Austria and no longer existed as a unified territory. That the rapid Russian occupation of the country immediately following the beginning of the War and the aimlessness of the Austro-Hungarian army leadership revealed by this situation were linked to traumatic experiences for the majority of the Galician population certainly did not help. The Jewish population of Galicia especially, traditionally loyal to the Emperor and opposing Russian rule, became victims of outbursts of anti-Semitic violence. The Russian Army leadership collectively believed the Jews to be engaged in espionage and ambushes.<sup>8</sup>

Even if the pogroms in the Galician theater during the first weeks of the war resulted from rampant prejudice and the troops' lack of discipline and not the orders of the army leadership, the consequences for the Jewish population were catastrophic: Jews were the victims of humiliation, depredation, pillaging, rape, and even murder. The atrocities in Lemberg on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, 1914, three weeks after its occupation, earned the city a sad celebrity, as Cossacks rode shooting through the Jewish quarter and killed fifty people. News of such crimes led half Galician Jews, approximately 400,000 people, to flee to the west. The Eastern European Jews ended up in a long, "forgotten war" between the fronts, as Frank M. Schuster demonstrates in his important book on the topic.<sup>9</sup>

---

8 For this and the following cf. Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 181–188; and John R. Schindler, *Fall of the Double Eagle: The Battle for Galicia and the Demise of Austria-Hungary* (Lincoln: Potomac Books, 2015).

9 Cf. Frank M. Schuster, *Zwischen allen Fronten: Osteuropäische Juden während des Ersten Weltkriegs (1914–1919)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2004). In military history, too, the Eastern Front remained a blind spot for a long time. On the German Eastern Front cf. Gerhard P. Groß, ed., *Die vergessene Front – der Osten 1914/15: Ereignis, Wirkung, Nachwirkung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006).

German cinema audiences had already learned of the Galician theater during the World War, through newsreels and propaganda films, though to what extent is impossible to say with certainty based on the currently available and usable sources. Judging from the sparsely surviving editions of the Messter-newsreel, little argues against the idea that footage from Galicia was also shown.<sup>10</sup> This can't, however, be true for the early phase of the war, when the Austro-Hungarian Army suffered terrible defeats and was quickly pushed back by the Russians, leaving Galicia largely to the enemy. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that the loss of such an important territory could have even been mentioned while the cinema was subject to strict military censorship.

On the other hand, just two weeks after the retaking of the important Galician fortress of Przemyśl at the beginning of June 1915, an apparently private film company alluded to the event in advertisements for their film *Przemyśl* (1915); the Russian's months-long occupation of Przemyśl had led only a few months earlier to the surrender of the entire garrison and the imprisonment of approximately 110,000 Austro-Hungarian soldiers. Shortly thereafter, while fighting was still taking place around Lemberg in June of 1915, another company announced a film entitled *Ansichten aus Lemberg* (*Views from Lemberg*, 1915, produced by Max Löser).<sup>11</sup> The longest film on the topic was

---

10 Some of these Messter-newsreels include footage of Austro-Hungarian troops and name the Viennese Sascha-Film as the production company of specific segments.

11 For more data cf. "Przemyśl (1915)," *The German Early Film Database*, <http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de/films/view/31884>; and "Ansichten aus Lemberg (1915)," *The German Early Film Database*, <http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de/films/view/17766>.



produced by the Freiburg company Expreß-Film in 1916, under the title *Die Durchbruchsschlacht in Galizien* (*The Breakthrough Battle in Galicia*, 1916, 7 reels).<sup>12</sup> All three films have been lost. From 1916–17 on, official propaganda films from the newly founded Bild-und Filmamt (BuFa) appeared on the war in Galicia and the neighboring regions, including the two one-reelers *Die Durchbruchsschlacht in Galizien* (*The Breakthrough Battle in Galicia*, 1917, 1 reel) and *Die Befreiung der Bukowina* (*The Liberation of Bukovina*, 1917, 1 reel).<sup>13</sup> It is unlikely that the fate of Galicia's Jewish population played a significant role in these lost films. Following the logic of other newsreels and propaganda films, the emphasis probably lay on the martial prowess of the army and the destruction of the enemy.

The treatment of Galicia's "forgotten war" begins first in the 1920s, with a meager corpus of films, which were screened in Germany. Like the aforementioned films *Leichte Kavallerie* ("Light Cavalry") and *Zwei Welten* ("Two Worlds"), "Surrender" (USA 1927, directed by Edward Sloman), too, connected the Galician location with the fate of the Jews. Also set in Galicia were *Die Beichte des Feldkuraten* (*Confessions of an Army Chaplain*, A 1927, directed by

---

12 Cf. "Die Durchbruchsschlacht in Galizien (1916)," *The German Early Film Database*, <http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de/films/view/20791>.

13 *Die Befreiung der Bukowina* is available here: *filmportal.de*, <http://www.filmportal.de/node/63801/video/1220587>. Another subject, titled *Aus der Durchbruchsschlacht in Galizien*, was apparently shot in July 1917 during the Tarnopol Offensive, available as part of the more accurately dated *Messter-Woche 1916*: *filmportal.de*, <http://www.filmportal.de/video/messter-woche-1916>. After the war, the Reichsfilmstelle (the successor of BuFa) produced the 2-reeler *Von Gorlice-Tarnow bis Lemberg vom 1. Mai bis 25. Juni 1915*, which probably recycled and re-edited older stock material to be shown in the context of military education and gatherings of veterans.

Hans Otto Löwenstein) and, chief among them and most influential, “*Hotel Imperial*” (USA 1927, directed by Mauritz Stiller).<sup>14</sup>

*Tarnów on the Pacific*

In 1926, the Hotel Imperial lay in Madrid, and the former Galicia was a dream built out of Californian plywood as the film of the same title was shot on the sets of the Pola Negri spectacle “*The Spanish Dancer*” (USA 1923, directed by Herbert Brenon), which were still lying around the Famous Players Lasky (Paramount) lot.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the American title, “*Hotel Imperial*”, the German title, *Hotel Stadt Lemberg*, opened up a very particular field of memory: The former capital of Galicia, Lemberg, was part of the Habsburg Empire until 1918 and after that became part of the newly-founded Republic of Poland.

“*Hotel Imperial*” is a Pola Negri film too. The big-budget American production occupies a special place in the context of this essay, not only because it was the first film shown in Germany after 1918 that took place in Galicia during the war years, but also because it paved the way for thematically related films.

If things had gone according to the wishes of producer Erich Pommer, the film would have been made in Germany, before his short 1926–27 Hollywood intermezzo. Ufa, however, rejected the content,<sup>16</sup>

---

14 The films were also released in Austria: “*Hotel Imperial*” was shown under the title *Hotel Stadt Lemberg*, *Leichte Kavallerie* under the title *Die Spionin* (*The Female Spy*), “*Surrender*” under the title *Ergib Dich, Weib!* (*Surrender, Woman!*).

15 Cf. Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade’s Gone By...* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 243.

16 Cf. Roland Schacht, “Das Problem der deutschen Filmproduktion,” in *Kunstwart* 40, no. 6 (March 1927): 416. On Erich Pommer and the production of *Hotel Imperial* cf. Wolfgang Jacobsen, *Erich Pommer: Ein Produzent macht Filmgeschichte* (Berlin: Argon, 1989), 79–82.

although it was based on Hungarian author and screenwriter Lajos (in Germany also known as Ludwig) Biró's bestseller *Hotel Stadt Lemberg*, published in German in 1916 by Ullstein-Verlag.<sup>17</sup> In 1917, the novel was re-worked for the theater, and a now apparently lost film version appeared in the last year of the war in Hungary, under the direction of Jenő Janovics.<sup>18</sup> The subject matter proved popular again in 1929, when Jean Gilbert and Ernst Neubach brought *Hotel Stadt Lemberg* to the stage as an operetta.<sup>19</sup> In 1939 and 1943, Biró's story was again adapted for the cinema.<sup>20</sup>

"*Hotel Imperial*" depicts an episode from 1915, as the Russian Army occupies a large part of Galicia and can only be dislodged by a combined German and Austrian force several months later.<sup>21</sup> Although

---

17 Ludwig Biro, *Hotel Stadt Lemberg*. Translated from Hungarian by Eduard Kadossa (Berlin: Ullstein, 1916). The novel was reprinted numerous times; by 1928, 281,000 copies had been sold.

18 For a short review of *Hotel Imperial* (Hungary 1918, 1,880 m, 6 reels), cf. *Paimanns Film-Liste*, no. 144, Nov. 29–Dec. 5, 1918, 1. In Austria the 1918 film's title was "Hotel Stadt Lemberg." According to Paimann's summary, the story did not differ from the 1927 version.

19 Cf. e.g. the reviews by Edwin Neruda: "'Hotel Stadt Lemberg': Erstaufführung im Theater des Westens," *Vossische Zeitung*, no. 609 (Dec. 27, 1929) and S-e., "Film als Operette: Erstaufführung von 'Hotel Stadt Lemberg,'" *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 599 (Dec. 27, 1929).

20 Cf. *Hotel Imperial* (USA 1939, Dir. Robert Florey) and *Five Graves to Cairo* (USA 1943, Dir. Billy Wilder); in fact, Wilder, born 1906 in Galicia, and his family emigrated to Vienna during the war. For some time, Wilder's father was a hotel owner.

21 Neither the German version of "*Hotel Imperial*" nor the censorship card with the German intertitles have survived. Therefore, my analysis refers to the American version of which a 35mm print (2,160 m) is held in the Library of Congress (Washington). The film has been released on DVD by Grapevine Video (length: 77 minutes), however, the visual quality of this DVD is poor.

the film takes place between March and May 1915 and the specific location of the story is never given, the literary model provides enough topographical and temporally precise details to deduce that it takes place in Tarnów between November 1914 and May 1915. Biró's opening shows the advance of the Russians to the Dunajec River in Western Galicia following the Battle of Lemberg. In fact, Battle of Lemberg meant a decisive defeat for the Austro-Hungarian Army and resulted in catastrophic losses. The film ends with the Battle of Gorlice-Tarnów, which brought about a turning point in the fortunes of the Central Powers. On the heels of the Battle of Gorlice-Tarnów followed not only the recapture of Lemberg, but of all the Polish territories occupied by Russia. In reference to this latter event, tied as it was to important victories in Germany and Austria, the German distribution earned the subtitle: "The Heroine of Tarnow."<sup>22</sup>

#### *The Lieutenant as Head Waiter*

The story follows a noble Austrian Hussar lieutenant, Paul Almasy (James Hall), who's caught behind enemy lines. Pursued by the Russians, Almasy uses his last ounce of strength to flee into the eponymous hotel, where he sinks into a deep sleep. In the hotel, which comes across as extremely provincial despite its name and has no guests, he is hidden by the parlor maid Anna (Pola Negri), the actual hero, the loyal porter Elias (Max Davidson), and the sullen cook Anton, who's in love with Anna. The Russians

---

22 Apparently, the city of Tarnów was directly mentioned in the German version. At least several critics referred to Tarnów in their reviews. Cf. F.D-S. [Fränze Dyck-Schnitzer], "Hotel Stadt Lemberg," *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, no. 9 (Jan. 6, 1927), and Willy Haas, "Hotel Stadt Lemberg," *Film-Kurier*, no. 5 (Jan. 6, 1927), reprinted in Willy Haas, *Der Kritiker als Mitproduzent: Texte zum Film 1920–1933*, ed. Wolfgang Jacobsen et al. (Berlin: Ed. Hentrich, 1991), 192–195.

move into the city without resistance, and their General (George Siegmann) makes the hotel his headquarters. Almasy, whose way back to his lines is cut off, finds himself in the middle of enemy headquarters. He remains unrecognized, and Anna passes him off as the Hungarian head waiter; the real head waiter had fled before the advancing Russians. The General is immediately taken with Anna, who attracts him with her genuine and spirited nature. He makes her the lady of the house and outfits her with fashionable clothes and jewelry. Anna goes so far as to encourage the general's amorous advances in order to protect Almasy from the looming threat of imprisonment occasioned by his lack of papers. She convinces the General that the waiter, whom she obviously likes, is indispensable. In the meantime, the General also sends out his best spy, Petroff (Michael Vavitch), on a mission to sniff out information regarding the enemy's troop deployments.<sup>23</sup>

When Petroff returns during a rambunctious Russian festival covered in mud, but apparently successful, Almasy senses danger. Anna gets the General drunk in his room and ensures that Petroff isn't allowed in, while Almasy runs a hot bath for Petroff—before shooting the unsuspecting spy, who finds himself alone with Almasy in the bathroom. He had to do it, he explains to Anna, to save the lives of thousands. Anna takes the initiative, burns Petroff's notebooks and makes it look like the spy committed suicide. As suspicions fall on Almasy and he's threatened with execution, Anna gives him an alibi: he had spent the time period in question with her. The General then flies into a rage, rips off Anna's expensive clothes and casts her out. Almasy escapes the same night and makes his way back to his regiment.

---

23 In the German version the spy's name is Tabakowitsch—as in Biro's novel.

The great offensive of the Austro-Hungarian army begins the next day and takes the Russians completely off guard. The troops have to pull out in a hurry and abandon the hotel. Shortly thereafter, Almasy enters the city on horseback in his dress uniform alongside the Austro-Hungarian troops, who are greeted enthusiastically by the townsfolk. The soldiers take part in a mass in front of the church; then Almasy is supposed to be honored with a medal for his bravery. From the mass of spectators, he calls Anna forward and introduces her to the Commandant, who greets her like a noblewoman and thanks her for her great service to her country. He grants Almasy a short leave to get his personal affairs in order—that is, to marry Anna.

#### *Transformations and Transgressions*

In the film that takes place largely at night, Galicia is primarily represented by the not particularly elegant, somewhat dusty hotel, which seems cut off from the outside world.<sup>24</sup> The wall around the building and the heavy venetian blinds covering the windows only allow glimpses through narrow slits and bars into the threatening outside world, and not many good things make it through the doors. It's the place of the small, cramped rooms, in which the staircase covers the screen and introduces a rare diagonal. It constantly draws attention to the symbolic passage between above and below. In a short period of time, Russians, Austrians, Hungarians, and other unspecified ethnic groups, (female) civilians, and (male) soldiers encounter each other in this space.

---

24 For a nuanced reading of the film focusing on its director Mauritz Stiller, cf. Arne Lunde, *Nordic Exposures: Scandinavian Identities in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 63–90.

Here, different forms of existence come into contact. Next to the male personnel, Elias and Anton, we meet Anna, whose first scene has her scrubbing the stairs. Later, if she isn't yet a countess, she is nevertheless outfitted like a rich mistress and, finally, in a simple dress, she finds her prince. Anna, too, brings out the sexual motivations of the belligerent men. As she explains to the General, men only make war because their own wives have begun to bore them; men in search of different sexual experiences in the war exercise violence on women.

We meet a noble officer who loses his troops and his military rank, has to disguise himself, suffers under the fear of discovery, and—also in a social sense—transforms into a waiter; a general who first demonstrates independence and a certain masculine strength, and in the end jealousy and overconfidence; a spy who appears in a diverse array of disguises and then, when he tries to climb naked into a bathtub, is shot by another man in disguise. As if he had to protect his true identity, the first thing the murderer does after the crime is to wipe the steam off the mirror and stare in horror at his own reflection; we have already had occasion to witness the nightmares about the war that wake him covered in sweat. Compulsion, and this game of hide-and-seek, characterize Almasy as well as the rest of the film.

The Hotel Imperial is thus a place of transformations, of both the crossing and the blurring of borders, where occupier and occupied live under one roof, and camouflage and masquerades are essential for survival. Not even the hotel's name remains untainted by a loss of meaning and oscillations, because the Habsburg Empire, which the hotel's name obviously points to, fails to protect its subjects from the imperial might of the czar. It seems to express an especially bitter irony when the film equates the invasion or penetration of the various armies—first Russian, then Austro-Hungarian—into the civilian world of the city. It was all the same to the viewer who saw the film in 1927, the year it

was released: Both empires, the Austro-Hungarian as well as the Russian, had long since passed into history.

*A Desire for Reconciliation?*

On the 1 January, 1927, “*Hotel Imperial*” celebrated its premiere in New York, and the film began its run in Berlin only a few days later. The German critics raved about its engrossing drama, the elegant cinematography, and the performance of the actors, with Pola Negri leading the way. At the same time, critics noted a business-minded mixture of romance, adventure, and war.<sup>25</sup> Opinion divided itself according to aesthetic and political sensibilities as to whether or not to criticize *Hotel Imperial* or even flatly dismiss it as a “fairly regular hero film”<sup>26</sup> and a “typically German, Austro-Hungarian film for American palates”<sup>27</sup>—or to greet it as the product of a “pointed desire for reconciliation”<sup>28</sup> and a “worthy and sublime” portrayal of the events of the war.<sup>29</sup> Some saw in “*Hotel Imperial*” mainly an exciting spy movie laden with special effects.<sup>30</sup>

---

25 For a brief overview of the politicized press reception of *Hotel Imperial*, cf. also Saunders, “Politics, the Cinema, and Early Revisitations of War in Weimar Germany,” 39–40.

26 Ernst Blass, “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 14 (Jan. 9, 1927).

27 L.R., “Nationalistische Filme: ‘Hotel Stadt Lemberg,’” *Rote Fahne*, no. 5 (Jan. 7, 1927).

28 E.B. [Erna Büsing], “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Vorwärts*, no. 14 (Jan. 9, 1927).

29 R., “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Neue Preußische Zeitung*, no. 9 (Jan. 7, 1927).

30 Cf. I.E. -L., “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, no. 8 (Jan. 6, 1927); and Dr. Konrad Glück, “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, no. 6 (Jan. 7, 1927).



“The miracle has happened: the Americans, who were still making anti-German war movies two years ago, have created a counter-example here; a more German-friendly version could hardly be thought of,” praised the right-wing, conservative *Börsen-Zeitung*.<sup>31</sup> In the context of the larger controversy surrounding the genre of war films at that time, *Germania*, the journal of the Catholic Centre Party, attacked the film because “all the work spent on peace scatters like so much chaff in the face of these splendidly staged scenes”; thus, for *Germania*, the film is totally unfit to stabilize the will to “No More War!”<sup>32</sup> And in the liberal *Berliner Tageblatt*, they condemn the manner in which “bloody and lewd situations in the guise of a freshly experienced war are exploited for excitement, emotion, and enthusiasm.”<sup>33</sup> According to the social-democratic *Vorwärts*, the film “falls radiantly into the commonplaces of the usual militaristic hype” and in so doing alienates those opposed to national military films: “[If] further cinematic illustrations of the reports of the OHL should follow, then we better prepare for the worst.”<sup>34</sup>

The clearest is the condemnation from the communist press: “This film about 1915 is filmed in such a way as to give 1915 all honors. Imperial and royal through thick and thin. Exactly as it is, it could have cropped up as in Austro-Hungary and Germany in those days as cheap propaganda. Nothing’s missing. Avowals: ‘We are good Austrians.’ Dream-images of God, Emperor and fatherland. [...] One hardly believes his eyes. More than ten years have passed since

---

31 Fritz Olinsky, “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, no. 8 (Jan. 6, 1927).

32 J., “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Germania*, no. 9 (Jan. 7, 1927).

33 Ernst Blass, “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 14 (Jan. 9, 1927).

34 E. B. [Erna Büsing], “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Vorwärts*, no. 14 (Jan. 9, 1927). OHL is short for *Oberste Heeresleitung* (Army High Command).

then—and yet people still dare to bring out such a ‘timely’ piece of trash that rekindles the hopeless Austro-Hungarian militarism!”<sup>35</sup>

Of the public’s reaction after the withdrawal of the Russians, Willy Haas writes in the *Film-Kurier*: “At the entrance of the Austrian troops, thunderous applause rang out and lasted for minutes. But it was no war fever, no nationalism. It was because it achieved a *Bildmusik*, like sunshine blazing forth, exultant and radiant. It’s a very particular film: its equal was, in its way, not yet there.”<sup>36</sup>

It is worth mentioning that, in contrast to Biró’s novel, neither in contemporary reviews nor in the plot of *Hotel Imperial* does it come out that Galicia, where the story takes place, was, among other ethnic groups, home to a significant Jewish population, and that cities like Tarnów and Lemberg were centers of urban Jewish culture.

#### *The Hussar and the Beautiful Jewess*

Ten months after the German premiere of “*Hotel Imperial*”, two more films that take place in Galicia during the war, now lost, came to German theaters within days of each other in October 1927: *Die Beichte des Feldkuraten* (*Confessions of an Army Chaplain*) and *Leichte Kavallerie* (“*Light Cavalry*”). In the meantime, numerous other big war films celebrated their premiere, which is why one can sense a certain tedium regarding the theme in the Berlin Press in the fall of 1927.

The Austrian film *Confessions of an Army Chaplain*, produced by the Viennese Sascha Film-Industrie after a script by Walter Reisch, plays in Germany with the title *The Court Martial of Gorlice* (*Das Feldgericht von Gorlice*), which specifically places the plot

---

35 L.R., “Nationalistische Filme ‘Hotel Stadt Lemberg,’” *Rote Fahne*, no. 5 (Jan. 7, 1927).

36 Willy Haas, “Hotel Stadt Lemberg,” *Film-Kurier*, no. 5 (Jan. 6, 1927), quoted from Willy Haas, *Der Kritiker als Mitproduzent: Texte zum Film 1920–1933*, ed. Wolfgang Jacobsen et al. (Berlin: Ed. Hentrich, 1991), 192–195, here: 195.

geographically. According to the surviving sources, the film depicts the tragic love story of an Austrian officer (Hans Marr) and a Polish countess (Dagny Servaes) who meet again during the war through a present-day frame narrative of the memories of a priest (Ingo Sym).<sup>37</sup> In his function as a military judge, the officer mistakenly condemns a Polish farmer to death for corpse-robbing. He first learns during the Russian attack that the farmer had orders from the Polish countess to bring her daughter to safety—the very same daughter that resulted from the earlier relationship with the officer, of whom the father knows nothing. Although the daughter is brought out of the combat zone early enough, and the Polish farmer escapes the death penalty, the officer and his rediscovered love, the Polish countess, end up Russian prisoners of war and are only reunited—now married—with their child after the end of the war.

No numbers attest to the success of *Confessions of an Army Chaplain* in Germany. Reviews in the Berlin dailies were overwhelmingly negative.<sup>38</sup> The trade journal *Der Film* nonetheless

---

37 For a summary cf. LBB-Kinoprogramm, “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” (Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Schriftgutarchiv). In Germany, the film was released by *Messtro-Film-Verleih GmbH*. In Austria, it was also released as *Das Feldgericht von Uszok*, probably hinting to the small town Uschok, South of Przemyśl.

38 Cf. e.g. W.B., “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” *B.Z. am Mittag*, no. 279 (Oct. 28, 1927); “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, no. 508 (Oct. 28, 1927); “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, no. 505 (Oct. 28, 1927); R., “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” *Vorwärts*, no. 514 (Oct. 30, 1927); -ü-, “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” *Vossische Zeitung*, no. 514 (Oct. 30, 1927); ED-S. [Fränze Dyck-Schnitzer], “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, no. 518 (Nov. 2, 1927). *Der Montag* praised “gripping images from the struggles at the Eastern Front.” Cf. “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” *Der Montag (Montagsausgabe des Berliner Lokal-Anzeigers)*, no. 42 (Oct. 31, 1927). The reference to “true images” from the front line may indicate that historical stock footage was edited into the film.

praised the “war scenes” that came across as “not staged [...], but rather real” and drew attention to the fact that this was the first film to treat the Court Martial theme. The film asks, according to the article: “Is the fate of one man important at a time when thousands are dying?”<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to *Confessions of an Army Chaplain*, where apparently nothing hints at the existence of a Jewish population in Galicia, precisely this Jewish population plays a central role in the Phoebus production “*Light Cavalry*”.<sup>40</sup> Also for this film, all the information we have is from censorship and press materials, but the relationship to “*Hotel Imperial*”, remarked by many critics of the day, is patently obvious, to such an extent

---

39 The answer of the reviewer was (in German): “Gewiß, der Bauer Wojtech ist unschuldig zum Tode verurteilt. Für uns, die wir den Tatvorgang mitangesehen haben, bedeuten die Indizien, die gegen ihn sprechen und das Kriegsgericht zu seiner Verurteilung veranlaßten, nichts. Aber vorne an der Front kämpfen die Unseren, und unser Herz ist mit ihnen, mag auch das Schicksal dieses Einen noch so furchtbar sein”; Fedor Kaul, “Das Feldgericht von Gorlice,” *Der Film (Sonderausgabe: Kritiken der Woche)* (Oct. 29, 1927). The film was banned for young viewers by the Supreme Board of Film Censors, because of “the inappropriate presentation of a trial ending with a death sentence.” This, the censors continued, “appears as a heavy burden in a spiritual sense endangering the mental development of young people”; cf. decision of the board of censorship, no. 86, from Jan. 28, 1928 (Deutsches Filminstitut, Schriftgutarchiv), available here: <http://www.difarchiv.deutsches-filminstitut.de/zengut/df2tb339z.pdf>.

40 The title “*Leichte Kavallerie*” refers to an operetta of the same title by Franz von Suppé and Karl Costa, written in 1866; it deals with love life in a provincial town in Austria that is affected by the arrival of Hungarian hussars.

that one could employ an expression from the time period and call it a *Neuaufgabe*, a new edition.<sup>41</sup> The story takes place in Galicia in October 1914, near the Russian border, where in this case no Russian troops, but rather a squadron from the Austro-Hungarian Hussar Regiment Nr. 9, stops in a small village during their advance: The first lieutenant (Alfons Fryland) finds quarters in the estate of the countess Komaróff (Vivian Gibson), lieutenant count Starhemberg (André Mattoni) is lodged in the house of the rabbi Süß (Albert Steinrück), and the Hungarian sergeant Farkas (Fritz Kampers) by the general store owner Moritz Wasserstrahl (Siegfried Arno), an apparently orthodox Jew with *payot* (sidelocks).<sup>42</sup>

As in “*Hotel Imperial*”, the encounter between the not-entirely welcome soldiers and civilians is intertwined with struggles for love, jealousy, and espionage: The countess Komaróff, who makes a secret pact with the Russians, manages to seduce the first lieutenant and pump him for information that she sends to the Russian army leadership through her husband (Jack Mylong-Münz), who’s living in hiding (and often appears in disguise). At the same time, Starhemberg and Rahel (Elizza la Porta), the Rabbi’s charming daughter, fall in love; but the Rabbi cannot stand Rahel’s relationship with someone of a different creed, and wants to send her as quickly as possible out of the combat zone to live with relatives in Vienna and protect her (sexual) integrity. Starhemberg, on the other hand, confesses his love and tells

---

41 Cf. F.D-S. [Fränze Dyck-Schnitzer], “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, no. 494 (Oct. 19, 1927).

42 Cf. the photography of Arno as Wasserstrahl in *Illustrierter Film-Kurier*, no. 688 (1927) (Deutsche Kinemathek, Schriftgutsammlung).

the Rabbi that he feels strong enough to “overcome outmoded prejudices.”<sup>43</sup>

The melodramatic entanglements of the officers are contrasted in the film with a comical male duo, played by Fritz Kampers (as Farkas) and Siegfried Arno (as Wasserstrahl). Farkas teases Wasserstrahl by constantly mispronouncing his name (he calls him Wasservogel, Wasserkopf, Wasserkrug). In addition, the Hungarian Farkas is a lady’s man; it’s he who constantly repeats the verse of the song that gives the film its name: “Today it’s her—tomorrow she, / Thus kisses the light cavalry!”<sup>44</sup>

The last third of the film sees events following in rapid succession: Farkas, Wasserstrahl, and the Rabbi learn that the countess Komaróff has betrayed an important order to the Russians, who now want to attack the town. The lieutenant is informed immediately, but the Russians have already cut the telephone lines to the next-closest unit. The squadron is surrounded and threatened with capture. At the last second, Rahel manages to sneak through the enemy lines and bring German soldiers to the rescue; the Russians are forced to retreat, and the victors enter the city to the tune of a march. (At this point, the premiere audience clapped loudly.<sup>45</sup>) The commandant thanks Rahel in grand style

---

43 Quoted from the censorship card for *Leichte Kavallerie*, B. 16777, Sept. 28, 1927 (Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin), Akt 6, Titel 2. At the beginning, Starhemberg apparently falls in love with Rahel’s violin playing, which he associates with “so much fervor and desire at the same time”; cf. *ibid.*, Akt 2, Titel 9.

44 Cf. censorship card for *Leichte Kavallerie*, B. 16777, Sept. 28, 1927 (Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin), Akt 3, Titel 13, Akt 5, Titel 3 and 6, Akt 7, Titel 18.

45 Cf. Georg Herzberg, “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Film-Kurier*, no. 243 (Oct. 14, 1927). According to *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, no. 494 (Oct. 19, 1927) the “entry of the victorious army was accompanied by the ‘Radetzky-Marsch.’”

for her “decisive and self-sacrificing actions.”<sup>46</sup> While she devotes herself to caring for Starhemberg, who was wounded in the battle, Wasserstrahl reports to Farkas to volunteer for military service. Although Wasserstrahl wore the clothing of an orthodox Jew at the beginning of the film, at the end he wears an Austro-Hungarian uniform. The viewer can only presume that this should be read as a renunciation of a tradition-conscious Judaism (that Rahel’s father, the Rabbi, stands for) and a pointed identification with the (Roman Catholic) Austrian Empire—even, perhaps, as an act of conversion.

The commonalities between “*Light Cavalry*” and “*Hotel Imperial*” in terms of plot are obvious: They stretch from the love between officer and civilian, a love rendered more complex because of social, religious, and ethnic differences, from the seduction of an officer and the betrayal of a secret, up to the decisive assistance of a woman in the defeat of the enemy and the official recognition of her services at the end. Although the Jewish dimension of Birós’s novel comes through only cryptically, if at all, in the film version of “*Hotel Imperial*”, it is immediately present in the screenplay for “*Light Cavalry*”, by the Bucharest-born Jewish author Emanuel Alifieri. Military success in this latter film depends directly on the dedication of Jewish civilians, which is motivated in turn by a historically conditioned fear of persecution by the Russian Army as well as by romantic relationships that are able to transcend differences between Jewish and Christian beliefs.

#### *Soldiers’ Humor and the Pangs of Love*

Whether transformations, the crossing and blurring of borders were portrayed in “*Light Cavalry*” as they are in “*Hotel Imperial*” must remain an open question. If we follow contemporary critics,

---

<sup>46</sup> Censorship card for *Leichte Kavallerie*, B. 16777, Sept. 28, 1927 (Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin), Akt 7, Titel 14.

the essential difference to the earlier film was that “*Light Cavalry*” possessed neither a unified narrative attitude, nor a unified, appropriate aesthetic mold.

“A war film in a minor key and cushioned very softly. But that shouldn’t be a primary criticism, that reports of funny situations, of soldiers’ humor, or of seductively illuminated pangs of love, also come from the lines, but rather that this is driven by falsehood, kitsch, and cheap showmanship,” writes the *Berliner Tageblatt* after the premiere of “*Light Cavalry*”.<sup>47</sup> Hans Sahl, similarly dismayed, condemns the film in the *Börsen-Courier*: In his eyes, the film completely lacks the “terrifying nearness of the war in “*Hotel Imperial*”, the oppressively real seriousness” and instead presents “a comfortable mess of feelings and militarism.” He continues: “For the German film, the war is still a fun maneuver with colorful flags and agreeable-sounding games.” The result is “a shameful film. [...] Everything is seen skewed, incorrectly, un-psychologically.”<sup>48</sup>

Compared to such general impressions—in no way shared by all critics—the dissatisfaction of several reviewers with the casting of several roles seems largely secondary.<sup>49</sup> The acting of Albert Steinrück as the rabbi and Siegfried Arno as Wasserstrahl are both, however, positively emphasized.<sup>50</sup> “The milieu of the

---

47 Lo., “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 490 (Oct. 16, 1927).

48 Hans Sahl, “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, no. 485 (Oct. 16, 1927).

49 The casting of Elizza la Porta as Rahel and André Mattoni as Starhemberg was particularly criticized for the amount of cliché. Cf. e.g. “Leichte Kavallerie,” *B.Z. am Mittag*, no. 267 (Oct. 14, 1927); and G.H., “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, no. 248 (Oct. 16, 1927).

50 Cf. e.g. E.Cz., “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Vossische Zeitung*, no. 490 (Oct. 16, 1927); and Hans Sahl, “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, no. 485 (Oct. 16, 1927).



Galician village and especially its Jewish community is painted lovingly and with obvious expertise,” praises the *Börsen-Zeitung*.<sup>51</sup>

The “mixture of sentimental, serious, and humorous [aspects]” was simultaneously deemed “skillful” and a recipe for a good box office draw in the countryside.<sup>52</sup> As the secondary plot thread around Farkas and Wasserstrahl shows, the film also wanted to emulate the numerous popular barracks comedies. On that note, Georg Herzberg writes in the *Film-Kurier*: “The author Emanuel Alfieri can be criticized in that he takes the gruesome war and robs it of its horror; turns it into an operetta and sugar-coats it in order to make [the war] carry an entertainment film. These are justified impressions, but no more than Alfieri’s response that the vast majority of moviegoers don’t think much about it, that they still like soldiers’ humor and a tiny bit of the pangs of love, and are completely satisfied if the German troops triumphantly defeat Russia. For that reason, I feel a responsibility to remind critics in their criticisms of the author not to forget the public, who very much like seeing such films, and who, despite everything, don’t want to hear anything about pacifism. And about realistic depictions of war, even less.”<sup>53</sup>

#### *The Prince and the Beautiful Jewess*

Like “*Light Cavalry*,” “*Surrender*” avoids such “realistic depictions of war,” which first become central, if never completely dominant, modes of the cinematic portrayal of war in the wake of “*The Big Parade*,” and in a major way only after “*All Quiet on the Western*

---

51 Oly. [Fritz Olinsky], “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, no. 485 (Oct. 16, 1927).

52 Fedor Kaul, “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Der Film, Sonderausgabe ‘Kritiken der Woche’* (Oct. 15, 1927).

53 Georg Herzberg, “Leichte Kavallerie,” *Film-Kurier*, no. 243 (Oct. 14, 1927).

*Front*” (USA 1930, directed by Lewis Milestone). As before in “*Hotel Imperial*”, a young woman occupies the focal point. And once again the audience encounters romantic entanglements and allegorical elements with regards to Jews and non-Jews, as in “*Light Cavalry*”. Critics also pointed to the close connection between “*Surrender*” and “*Hotel Imperial*”.<sup>54</sup>

The story is set at the beginning of the war in a small town with a majority Jewish population in the Austrian part of Galicia close to the Russian border.<sup>55</sup> At the river that marks the border between the two empires, Lea (Mary Philbin) meets a Russian called Konstantin (Ivan Mosjukin), and the two get to talking. When Lea’s old father, Rabbi Mendel Lyon (Nigel de Brulier), finds the couple holding hands, he attacks Konstantin and accuses him of being an oppressor of the Jews. He demands that Konstantin leave Austrian soil immediately. Konstantin replies, rather arrogantly, that he is not used to following the orders of Jews. A delegation of Russian officers arrives on the scene, and to the surprise of Lea and her father, it is revealed that Konstantin is in fact the commander of a Cossack regiment and a member of the Russian high aristocracy.

---

54 Cf. e.g. Dr. F.K. [Fedor Kaul], “Opfer,” *Der Film (Kritiken der Woche)* (Jan. 21, 1928). Heinz Pol speaks of a “dull extraction” of “*Hotel Imperial*” in H.P. [Heinz Pol], “Opfer,” *Vossische Zeitung*, no. 37 (Jan. 22, 1928).

55 Neither the German version of “*Surrender*”, released under the title *Opfer*, nor the German censorship card has survived. Therefore, what follows is based on an American DVD-version, released by Grapevine Video (length 77 minutes). The length of the DVD differs greatly from the length of the German version from 1928 (2,400 m), which again differed from the American original version (which, according to the catalog of the American Film Institute, was 2,514 m long). The existing 77 minutes DVD release is apparently made from a restored 16mm copy from the National Center for Jewish Film (Brandeis University).

The party splits up, but shortly after, when the war breaks out, Konstantin's regiment occupies the town Lea lives in. He wants to see her again and orders a house searched. He eventually finds her hidden in the Torah Ark, where the rabbi has locked her out of concerns for her safety. That very moment, the beginning of the Sabbath is announced, and Konstantin, the uninvited visitor, joins in the Jewish family's celebration. His power and violent intrusion stands in stark contrast to both his ignorance of Jewish rituals and the rabbi's dignity and him being indomitable. The situation gets worse when the Russian guards bring in a young man, Joshua, who wears the habit of an Orthodox Jew. Joshua has already been engaged to Lea for many years, but it is quite obvious that no mutual bond of love exists between the two. Konstantin asks Lea whether she loves Joshua. As she hesitates to answer, her father replies that it is her duty to do so. Joshua agrees. Coldly, Konstantin puts the party to a test: He gives orders that the guards shall execute Joshua on the spot. He would only change his mind if Lea were willing to ask him for mercy on Joshua's behalf and give him, Konstantin, a kiss. She refuses. Konstantin, now enraged, issues an ultimatum saying that the whole town with all inhabitants will be burnt down to the ground if Lea does not visit him in his hotel room on the very evening. Quickly, the whole community gathers in front of the rabbi's house and begs Lea to fulfil Konstantin's demand, thus following the example of the biblical Esther who sacrificed herself for the sake of her people. However, the rabbi answers to the crowd that according to the law of Moses one is not allowed to commit a sin even if this saves you from dying. Thus, it becomes a question is what is more important: ethical values or one's life.

The Russian soldiers nail up the houses and wait with burning torches in their hands for Konstantin's order. Only then Lea walks down the street to see Konstantin who—as if he were another person—now welcomes her in a sweet and gentle way. He tries his best to make her

forget the previous night's atmosphere of fear and threat. Finally, the two kiss each other, confessing their mutual affection and exchanging a ring as a token of their love. As at the beginning of the film, the couple is interrupted. This time, Konstantin receives the message that the Austrians are attacking, and his regiment has to retreat immediately, but he remains with Lea until the town is taken by the Austrians. They are surprised by Joshua. When Joshua shoots at Konstantin, Lea takes his gun away and thus allows Konstantin to flee.

The town is liberated but the Jewish community—agitated by Joshua—gathers in a crowd and accuses Lea of treachery. Even her father abandons her. He only changes his mind when people start to throw stones at Lea. As the rabbi tries to save his daughter, he himself is killed by a stone. Years later, Konstantin, in the costume of a simple peasant, returns to the small town where Lea is taking care of her father's grave. The couple meets on a bridge, finally reunited.

As in "*Hotel Imperial*", the film's heroine is a young woman who arouses the desire of an enemy officer. Again, a strong social imbalance accompanies this relationship between a simple Jewish girl and the Russian prince. From this relationship there results a conflict within the Jewish family that resembles the one in "*Light Cavalry*": From the first moment on, the rabbi's daughter is enthralled by Konstantin, the foreigner, a feeling her father clearly objects to. In "*Surrender*", as in the earlier films, the young heroine is responsible for saving a community threatened by enemies.

Made by the Hollywood studio Universal Pictures, "*Surrender*" was shot under the presidency of Carl Laemmle, himself a German immigrant; Austro-Hungarian-born Paul Kohner led the production. The film's story, based on the play *Lea Lyon* (ca. 1915) by Hungarian writer Sándor Bródy, had already been adapted into a film by Hungarian director Sándor (Alexander) Korda in 1915. As with "*Hotel Imperial*", the important figures in the film's production, Laemmle, Kohner, and Bródy, were Jewish, which also applies to the

director, the Englishman Edward Sloman. He casted inhabitants of Los Angeles's Jewish quarter as extras and took great care to stage Jewish rituals in his film in an accurate way.<sup>56</sup> By 1927, Sloman had already directed several films set in Jewish milieus, among them “*Vengeance of the Oppressed*” (USA 1916), a drama about a Jewish student who emigrated from Russia to the United States to avenge the murder of his family in a pogrom by a Cossack regiment.

In German cinemas, “*Surrender*” screened beginning in January of 1928. Most of the reviewers disliked the film and criticized the amount of incredible events, weak directing, and poor casting, particularly with regards to the female hero played by Mary Philbin.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, they assumed that the film had a certain box office appeal because of the popularity of Ivan Mosjugin in Germany. They also lauded the accuracy of the images of the Jewish milieu.<sup>58</sup>

Several critics found flaws in the depiction of the film's conflicts which, in their view, appear too trivial, overtly romanticized, and thereby too easily consumable (which should be understood as a blow against the usual Hollywood patterns). The review from *Film-Kurier* notes: “It is an old fairy tale: the blond-haired knight falls in love with the beautiful Jewish mademoiselle. Esther saves the

---

56 Cf. Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence* (London: Vintage, 1991), 407–408.

57 Cf. the reviews by M.K. [Michael Kurd], “Hingabe oder Opfer,” *Welt am Abend*, no. 15 (Jan. 18, 1928); he says “Der Film verdient den Nobelpreis für Edelkitsch. [...] Es trieft von Banalität, Verlogenheit und Unwahrscheinlichkeit”; bon. [Werner Bonwitt], “Opfer,” *B.Z. am Mittag*, no. 20 (Jan. 20, 1928); Bonwitt admits that the film's intention to reconcile various peoples and religions may be praised but appears to be very exaggerated; Dr. F.K. [Fedor Kaul]: “Opfer,” *Der Film (Kritiken der Woche)* (Jan. 21, 1928); H.P. [Heinz Pol], “Opfer,” *Vossische Zeitung*, no. 37 (Jan. 22, 1928); “Hingabe,” *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, no. 41 (Jan. 25, 1928).

58 R., “Opfer,” *Vorwärts*, no. 37 (Jan. 22, 1928).

Jews by dispossessing Haman. Judith was an even more hysterical heroine. And Lea Lyon from Alexander Brody's play, on which this film was modeled, belongs into the same line of heroic Jewish women. However, here she acts in the film's spirit like a child of her Americanized time: She saves her Russian Holofernes instead of killing him, and she marries him after the war. Circa 1924."<sup>59</sup>

### *Surrender Becomes Sacrifice*

Prior to the release of "Surrender" in Germany, the board of censorship (*Film-Prüfstelle*) decided that the original German release title, *Hingabe*, had to be changed, because it was understood as a sexual surrender and the board imputed to it a corrupting influence.<sup>60</sup>

This change of title raises a few questions. While the original title "Surrender" can be understood both as religious devotion and in military sense as capitulation, the new title, *Opfer*, which in German means both victim, victims, and sacrifice, leaves everything open to interpretation. Who or what is meant to be understood as a "victim" or a "sacrifice"? Is the viewer asked to regard Lea's involuntary extradition to the enemy as a "sacrifice"? Or shall we see the civilians, that is, the Jews in occupied Galicia, as "victims" of war and violence? The question is further complicated by the fact that in the course of events "victims" turn into

---

59 Ernst Jäger, "'Opfer' ('Hingabe')," *Film-Kurier*, no. 16 (Jan. 10, 1928). Mordaunt Hall hints to another literary source next to the bible with Esther and Judith, namely Guy de Maupassant's story "Boule de Suif" (1880), which is set to the backdrop of the Franco-German War of 1870; cf. Guy de Maupassant, "The Ingrates," *New York Times*, Oct. 11, 1927.

60 Cf. decision of the Board of Censorship (*Film-Prüfstelle*), no. 17911, Jan. 16, 1928 (Deutsches Filminstitut, Schriftgutarchiv), available here: <http://www.difarchiv.deutsches-filminstitut.de/zengut/df2tb503zb.pdf>.

perpetrators: Not only does Lea sacrifice herself for her community, but in the end Lea is made a victim of this very community when she is expelled and stoned by a fanatic crowd. Indeed, Sloman depicts the upheaval in the end like a pogrom. The erotic relationship between a Jewish woman and a Russian man that is suggested from their first accidental encounter at the river appears as a deadly sin from the Jewish community's perspective—a sin for which the woman has to pay with her life. In this logic, there is no space between the woman as the savior and the woman as a sinner. The film clearly criticizes this rigor in that it ends with the image of the new couple, with the reconciliation of seemingly opposing attitudes.

Compared with the other films about the occupation of Galicia discussed so far, "*Surrender*" stands out for one reason in particular: No other film is so clear and unmistakable about the depiction of rape, of taking hostages, and the extermination of the Jewish population as a deadly threat. Neither do other movies dealing with the First World War in the mid- and late-1920s (that is, after the period of hate propaganda) show so drastically that the regime of occupation goes hand in hand with rape. In other words, war movies hardly ever speak of the violence committed by enemy soldiers against women. In "*Surrender*" Konstantin's actual raping of Lea does not happen, but the threat and its effects equal those of rape: the social pressure on Lea to act against her will, the shutting away of the people in their houses, and the burning torches ready to set the town on fire.

#### *The Lieutenant and the Beautiful Jewess*

The violence against Jewish civilians is also of great importance in the last film set in Galicia shown in German cinemas before the National Socialist Party came into power in January of 1933. The British-German co-production *Zwei Welten* ("*Two Worlds*")

is also the only sound film in the corpus of films discussed in this essay. It was directed by E. A. Dupont and shot in three different language versions (English, German, French) with different casts at the Elstree Studios in England.<sup>61</sup> The German version premiered on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, 1930 in Berlin, only two days after the Nazi party won the national elections and became the second largest faction in parliament. The political earthquake that followed had its roots not least in the politicization of war experiences, in the contradicting ideas of making sense of the war and its effects, and the attitudes towards Jews and anti-Semitism, that is, issues that are also very much present in “*Two Worlds*” and its contemporary reception.

It is hardly surprising that in this case, too, critics pointed to the close relation between “*Two Worlds*” and the 1927 film “*Hotel Imperial*”.<sup>62</sup> The story of “*Two Worlds*” takes place in 1917 in a

---

61 In 1923 Dupont had already directed another film, *Das alte Gesetz* (*The Ancient Law*), that set into dialogue the orthodox Jewish world of the Galician shtetl and the secular metropolis of Vienna. *Das alte Gesetz*, too, was a story of border crossing and transformation, in this case in the mid-19th century. In “*Two Worlds*”, Dupont collaborated with the same set-designer with whom he had worked on *Das alte Gesetz*, Alfred Junge. For an analysis of “*Two Worlds*”, cf. Siegbert Salomon Prawer, *Between Two Worlds: The Jewish Presence in German and Austrian Film, 1910–1933* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 140–142.

62 A “remarkable resemblance” between the story of “*Two Worlds*” on the one hand and “*Hotel Imperial*” and *Lea Lyon* was mentioned, e.g. by Eugen Szatmari, “Zwei Welten,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 439 (Sept. 17, 1930). *Two Worlds* was even regarded as a—rather bad—rip-off of the “unforgotten film by Mauritz Stiller” by Oly. [Fritz Olinsky], “Zwei Welten,” *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, no. 434 (Sept. 17, 1930).



Galician town occupied by the Austro-Hungarian Army.<sup>63</sup> After the end of the Easter service in church, a pogrom occurs in the Jewish quarter. There is shooting on the streets, and attackers break into houses. However, the film leaves it open who the attackers really are. The Austrian commander Oberst von Kaminsky (Friedrich Kayßler) orders his son, Leutnant Stanislaus von Kaminsky (Peter Voß), to take his soldiers, go into the Jewish quarter, and end the upheaval. During the street fights that follow, the completely uninvolved young man, Nathan, who is the son of the elderly watchmaker Simon Goldscheider (Hermann Vallentin), is killed. When one of the attackers tries to rape Esther (Helene Sieburg), Goldscheider's daughter, the Austrian Leutnant shows up in time and saves her. Nevertheless, Goldscheider, when learning of Nathan's death, accuses the officer of not having protected the Jews any better and grabs Kaminsky's collar in anger. For this assault against military personnel, the old man is, humiliatingly,

---

63 My analysis is based on a severely cut, 73-minutes version of "*Two Worlds*" from the Cineteca Nazionale (Rome); the German release version had a length of 119 minutes (3,260 m). The existing version is again based on the German version with German actors; that is, even when the title of the English version is cited in what follows, I am referring to the German version. However, most of the scenes with dialogue are missing (or dialogue has been replaced with music). Instead of the German dialogue, this version has Italian intertitles. Several songs sung in German are still included. Since a number of scenes important for the understanding of the film are missing, my summary is also referring to the information given by Praver, *Between Two Worlds*, 140ff. Another German version of "*Two Worlds*" is held by the British Film Institute (BFI) in London (length: 1,512 m); at the BFI, there also exists an English version (length: 2,459 m). Given this miserable situation, all of my descriptions and deductions are obviously flawed as they relate to a copy that is far from being complete.

jailed for five days, which makes it impossible for him to say the Kaddish for his son.<sup>64</sup>

Charmed by a Viennese Soubrette who performs for the soldiers in a front theater, Leutnant Kaminsky leaves his post and spends the night with the woman. He thus doesn't notice the Austro-Hungarian army's retreat and wakes up the next morning just as the Russians occupy the town. When he attempts to flee, he is injured and collapses in front of Goldscheider's house. Now it is Esther's turn to save him: She carries him in and, when the Russians conduct a search of the house, she makes her father lie and tell them that Kaminsky is in fact his son. Weeks pass. Esther has nursed the lieutenant back to health. The two of them fall in love, knowing that Esther's father opposes their relationship very strictly. In order to end his love affair, Goldscheider writes a letter in his despair to the Russian commander denouncing Kaminsky. But his letter doesn't find the proper addressee. The town is recaptured by the Austrians, and Kaminsky's father, the new (and old) commander, gets hold of the letter. When his son confronts him with his intention to marry Esther and, if necessary, quit the army, the father leaves him an impossible choice: Either the lieutenant end his relationship with Esther immediately, or Goldscheider will be shot for denunciation. At the end, as the lieutenant leaves Goldscheider's house without saying goodbye, Esther suffers a breakdown.

*"Two Worlds"* presents us with several confrontations and contrasts, as Siegbert Praver has shown in his analysis of the film. There is the confrontation of Christian and Jewish religion and rites, of power and powerlessness, of the generation of the sons and daughters and their fathers who are unwilling to accept the

---

64 The scene in which Goldscheider has to appear at the Austrian headquarters and is imprisoned is missing in the existing Roman copy.

new ways of their children.<sup>65</sup> The confrontations and contrasts can be found on various levels of the film: in the narrative construction, in camerawork and lighting, in casting, clothing, make-up, in the use of parallel editing and songs.<sup>66</sup>

Like “*Hotel Imperial*”, “*Two Worlds*”, too, is a film of an overwhelming and telling *mise-en-scène*. Again and again, the protagonist’s movements and the viewer’s gaze are blocked and framed through doors, window frames, and furniture, which make obvious the people’s feeling of entrapment and inability to move about. With its low ceilings, its big staircase, narrowness and meaningful shadows, the watchmaker’s house that serves as the lieutenant’s hide-out resembles an ancient castle and a prison at the same time. The proximity of “*Hotel Imperial*” and “*Two Worlds*” in terms of aesthetic choices are particularly apparent where events are shown in an almost identical fashion. This goes especially for the scene in which the Austro-Hungarian officer wakes up in a bed which is not his own, in a room whose windows are covered with blinds, suddenly realizing that the Russian troops are invading the town to the air of marching music.

*“An Air of Austro-Schnitzlerian Flirtation”*

Some of the early sound films are full of experimentation with the mixture of dialogue, music, sound, and noise. One of the boldest films in this regard was Georg Wilhelm Pabst’s *Westfront 1918*, the first big German World War I movie in sound, which premiered in May 1930. Together with the American production of “*All Quiet*

---

65 Cf. Praver, *Between Two Worlds*, 140–142.

66 For instance, the popular song “*Rosa, wir fahr’n nach Lodz*” (1915) by Fritz Löhner-Beda (lyrics) and Artur M. Werau (music) is juxtaposed later in the film with a Yiddish song.

on *the Western Front*" (1930), Pabst's film opened up a completely new chapter in the cinematic depiction and analysis of war.<sup>67</sup>

Compared with these two masterpieces, "*Two Worlds*" rather marks the end of an earlier chapter. Here, the experience of war is still narrated in the form of a heavy melodrama, complete with individual suffering, tragic mistakes, hide-and-seek, and allusions to a spy thriller. In no way does this film come close to the history of the anonymous mass killing of a whole generation as it is portrayed in *Westfront 1918*. Quite aptly, Ernst Jäger in his review notes a "philo-Semitic essence of the story" and mentions the great distance between the two films, *Ostfront 1917* and *Westfront 1918*. In Jaeger's view, the script of "*Two Worlds*" follows on the tracks of Lajos Biro and Ladislaus Vajda (who wrote the script for *Westfront 1918*), but it is mainly characterized by an appeal to the broad audience and its taste for novels; thus, the viewer will detect "an air of Austro-Schnitzlerian flirtation," "Hungarian sensations," and "the strong tradition of Jewish theater." However, what the script completely ignores is the world of today: "The curtain has fallen over these fairy tale worlds. We are standing in front of an entirely different set of still smoking ruins. Six million Hitler voters—we cannot ignore them (and with epic adventure movies this German labyrinth will not be pacified)." Finally, the weakness of "*Two Worlds*" is, according to Jaeger, that it enters the battle of public opinions without a charge, without a certain tendency, without the courage to fight: "Whoever fights for two worlds must step in in favor of *one* world. From the bird-eye's view of a neutral bystander it is impossible to give shape to confessions and passions in a film."<sup>68</sup>

Not surprisingly the Nazis attacked "*Two Worlds*" as soon as the film entered the cinemas. Two weeks after the premiere,

---

67 In 1933, Pabst's film was banned in Germany.

68 E.J. [Ernst Jäger], "Zwei Welten," *Film-Kurier*, no. 220 (Sept. 17, 1930).

the Ministry of the Interior of the state of Thüringen (in the Southeast of Germany), then headed by the National Socialist Wilhelm Frick, demanded that the film's approval by the Board of Censorship should be annulled. The film, it was argued, was a "hate propaganda film" ("*Hetzfilm*"), which gave the impression that, compared with the officers, the Jews were the better humans. By depicting the Austrian officers as undutiful and lacking discipline, the film, so it was said, might be understood "in Germany and abroad as hateful propaganda against the officer corps of a former German ally, the Austrian army, and thus an immediate threat to the German army and the German reputation in general."<sup>69</sup> This attack was accompanied by a campaign in the Nazi press claiming that "*Two Worlds*" presented "the most evil hate propaganda against the old German army"; it was also said that "the Jews" would spread their "poison" in a new fashion.<sup>70</sup> In this case, the Board of Censorship did not annul the film's approval. However, only several weeks later, the Nazis succeeded when the approval of "*All Quiet on the Western Front*" was withdrawn due to a massive Nazi campaign.

While for the Nazis, "*Two Worlds*" the depiction of Jews allegedly was too positive and the depiction of the Austrian officers was too unsympathetic, the very same film was criticized by reviewers in the liberal and left press for different reasons. For them, the story was too convoluted and full of cheap showmanship; the direction was poor, the acting weak. The *Berliner Tageblatt* lamented a

---

69 Cf. decision of the High Board of Censorship, no. 952, Oct. 16, 1930, 3 (Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Schriftgutarchiv), available here: <http://www.difarchiv.deutsches-filminstitut.de/zengut/df2tb702z.pdf>.

70 M.W., "Zwei Welten," *Der Angriff*, no. 79 (Oct. 2, 1930).

“pogrom story set in an operetta world war.”<sup>71</sup> The Eastern Jewish milieu at least found some praise, as did the actors who played the Jews and the “atmospheric Ghetto images.”<sup>72</sup>

*What is Galicia, and Which?*

Trying to sum up a few of the observations and suggestions made in this essay might be puzzling. Obviously, none of the five films presented here could be properly described as a war movie. Very little is present of the motifs, themes, and elements that characterize so many films of the war film genre: the display of weapons and military machinery, the hierarchies and oft-depicted friction between simple soldiers and higher ranks, the miserable food supply, the sleeplessness, the lice, the mud, the noise, and, of course, the combat scenes on the battlefield, the killing and dying.

Instead, the films set in Galicia are melodramas or, to an extent, spy films that are located in Galicia during World War I. However, Galicia is not depicted as a space that is recognizable because of its geographical features, its landscape or urban topography. In fact, the Galicia that is presented on screen could be anywhere because it is largely studio-made. (And when, in one of the few exceptions, a natural setting is used in “*Surrender*”, the squirrel that catches the protagonist’s attention is for any squirrel expert

---

71 Eugen Szatmari, “Zwei Welten,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 439 (Sept. 17, 1930). Mostly negative reviews can also be found in, for example, Kn. [Kurt Kersten], “Zwei Welten,” *Welt am Abend*, no. 218 (Sept. 18, 1930); Armin Kessler, “Zwei Welten,” *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, no. 459 (Sept. 20, 1930); F.S., “Zwei Welten,” *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, no. 450 (Sept. 24, 1930).

72 Kurt Mühsam, “Zwei Welten,” *B.Z. am Mittag*, no. 254 (Sept. 17, 1930). Cf. also Kn. [Kurt Kersten], “Zwei Welten,” *Welt am Abend*, no. 218 (Sept. 18, 1930); Oly. [Fritz Olinsky], “Zwei Welten,” *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, no. 434 (Sept. 17, 1930).

quite clearly not of Eastern European but Californian origin.) This studio-made space offers a few street scenes from a small country town and otherwise mainly consists of indoor scenes, of old, dark, narrow houses, almost fortresses very much stressing the difference between inside and outside world.

Of course, a main characteristic of Galicia is—according to “*Light Cavalry*”, “*Surrender*”, and “*Two Worlds*”—its Jewish population, which is divided again into the generation of the old fathers and the young daughters. The fathers—religious, bearded, strong in their beliefs and judgements, troubled and shaken by the new situation—appear as embodiments of an altogether orthodox lifestyle and, as such, as embodiments of a long gone past presented as both ethnic and exotic. (It is also a past that is marked by the experience of suppression and violence against Jews, as indicated in “*Surrender*”.) In contrast, the daughter embodies an open-minded generation that doesn’t carry the burden of trauma. She is active, courageous, and reaches out. Eventually, it is she who heroically saves the Jewish community and the non-Jewish Austro-Hungarian soldiers, too. A new generation, raised in ancient beliefs, overcomes prejudice as well as authoritarian and patriarchal rule. In a sense, the daughter represents a generation of post-religious citizens of Austria-Hungary, or, in other, more historically embedded terminology: The Jewish daughter seeks assimilation (a concept and ideology that, within and outside the Jewish discourse, was hotly debated when the films were made). Adding to that, one might also find that these films, with the possible exception of “*Two Worlds*”, paint an affirmative, at times nostalgic, picture of the lost Habsburg empire in a rather astonishing way. And despite the heroine’s attempt to withdraw from the old, male, religiously-shaped order, she nevertheless plays the mythical role of the savior who makes a sacrifice and is a victim.

Of course, this whole scenario is riddled with stereotypes and utopian longings: *“Light Cavalry”*, *“Surrender”*, and *“Two Worlds”* all focus on the love between a noble Christian officer and the legendary Jewish beauty. The films suggest that there is a mutual attraction, and that it is not only the man who saves the woman in distress but in fact it is much more the woman who saves and cures the man. In this concern, the films present a counter-image to those war films that stress that the male, soldierly war experience is incompatible with the experiences of (female) civilians. Here, on the contrary, the war doesn't separate but unites the couple.

Galicia appears as a multidimensional space of erotic and religious encounters, of gender and age conflicts, contrasts and confrontations, movements and attempted reconciliations. Compared with more conventional narratives, the five films discussed in this essay lie on the margins of films from the Weimar Republic that touch on the First World War in some form. Because they give space and voice to the perspective of a civilian population confronted with a military occupation, and because they pay special attention to the trials of the Jewish population in the eastern Habsburg Empire, they place a strong emphasis on, and tell of a chapter of, the First World War that was otherwise ignored by other films from the era.