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Tomasz Kłys\*

## The Third Reich's Pean of Praise for the November Uprising's Glory: Karl Hartl's *Ritt in Die Freiheit* (1936)

*Ride to Freedom* (*Ritt in die Freiheit* / *Ku wolności*, 1936) is a very surprising film, particularly for the Polish viewer in the context of dramatic experience of Poles with the Third Reich; made for Ufa in 1936, in a way in the apogee of Nazi state, it seems not to contain at all the venom of Nazi propaganda and ideology. On the contrary, for a nowadays viewer this film must appear as even pro-Polish, and with no restrictions or inverted commas. Then, in what context was this film made?

### Context

The Weimar Republic, afflicted with trauma of the lost war, huge war reparations for the victorious allied states, hyperinflation and the lose by Germany of significant part of territory from before 1914 (particularly for the benefit of Poland, reactivated after 123 years of political non-existence), has definitely hostile attitude towards the Second Republic of Poland (1918–1939). This hostility explicitly manifested itself in German films made in the 1920s to which stucked the name of *Hetzfilme* (what could be translated as *instigating* or *inciting films*). It is symptomatic that today this epithet is being used in reference to the infamous German anti-Semitic films, like Veit Harlan's *Jud Süß* (1940) or Fritz Hippler's *Der ewige Jude* (1940).<sup>1</sup> Among authors who were writing about German anti-Polish *Hetzfilme* from the 1920-s are both Urszula Biel<sup>2</sup> and Eugeniusz Cezary Król.<sup>3</sup> They mention such titles as *Kulturfilme* Heine Herald's *Burning Land* (*Brennendes Land*, 1921), Ulrich Kayser's *Land under Cross*:

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\* University of Łódź.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Christian Hardinghaus, *Filmpropaganda für den Holocaust? Eine Studie anhand "Der ewige Jude" and "Jud Süß"*, Tectum Verlag, Marburg 2008.

<sup>2</sup> U. Biel, *Polsko-niemiecka wymiana filmowa w latach 1933–1939*, [in:] *Polska i Niemcy: filmowe granice i sąsiedztwa*, ed. K. Klejsa, Schamma Schahadat, Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, Wrocław 2012, p. 31–50.

<sup>3</sup> E.C. Król, *Nierówne partnerstwo: polsko-niemieckie kontakty filmowe w latach trzydziestych XX wieku*, [in:] *Kino niemieckie w dialogu pokoleń i kultur: Studia i szkice*, ed. A. Gwóźdź, Rabid, Kraków 2004.

*Film from the Hardest Time of Upper Silesia (Land unterm Kreuz: Ein Film aus Oberschlesiens schwerster Zeit, 1927)* or collective film made for the order of municipal council of city of Königsberg *The Island East Prussia (Die Insel Ostpreußen, 1928)*, and also narrative films: James Bauer's short fiction *Fight for Homeland (Der Kampf um die Heimat, 1921)* or Erich Waschnecks's feature fiction film *The Burning Frontier (Die brennende Grenze, 1926)*. Urszula Biel mentions in this context also Emmerich W. Emo's farce *Polish Order (Polnische Wirtschaft, 1928)*<sup>4</sup> which is an adaptation of Jean Gilbert's operette. However, in comparison with the aforementioned titles this film is different in character – intentionally, it is not straightforwardly anti-Polish as for its political significance, referring instead to the fixed stereotype of Poland as “disorderly”, “anarchic” or “lawless” country; the change of title for distribution in Poland for *Involuntary Casanova (Casanova mimo woli)* and removing epithet *polnisch* (Polish) from all the intertitle plates, allowed, as is pointed out by Eugeniusz C. Król, introduction of the film into the Polish theatres.<sup>5</sup> Anyway, political scandals around the premières of these films caused that Polish delegation for the International Congress of Film Exhibitors in Berlin in 1928 presented the project of the resolution against *Hetzfilme*, supported by all other delegations.<sup>6</sup> Generally, during the Weimar Republic era there were no collaboration and almost no exchange between German and Polish film industries, and in German films there were present numerous anti-Polish elements; both these phenomena were result and expression of very cold political relationship between two countries.

Situation after taking of power in Germany by national socialists in 1933 seemed to be even worse, what could be testified by the wire sent 10 March 1933 by the president of Ufa, Alfred Hugenberg, to Gdańsk: “Kein polnischer Film im deutschen Kino” (result of it was the restriction of access of Polish films to the Freie Stadt Danzig / Wolne Miasto Gdańsk),<sup>7</sup> or by the boycott of German films by Polish producers, distributors and exhibitors, among which there were a lot of Jews, what makes it understandable in the light of introduction in Germany of anti-Semitic laws.<sup>8</sup> This situation changed a bit after signing 26 January 1934 German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact: since this moment to, more or less, the end of 1938, both film industries make attempts to create conditions for collaboration within the field of film exchange (although succeeding trials of various arrangements and agreements define those conditions shockingly assymmetrically what in turn resulted from the huge difference of potentials of both film industries). I would not like to repeat here published studies of Eugeniusz Król and Urszula Biel, excellently supported by their

<sup>4</sup> U. Biel, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> E.C. Król, *op. cit.* Król evokes in this place research of Bogusław Drewniak presented in his book *Polen und Deutschland 1918–1939: Wege und Irrwege kultureller Zusammenarbeit*, Droste, Düsseldorf 1999, p. 321–322.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. W. Jewsiewicki, *Historia filmu polskiego: Wprowadzenie do historii polskiej kinematografii*, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna i Filmowa im. Leona Schillera, Łódź 1959, p. 233; and citing this book: U. Biel, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. U. Biel, *op. cit.*, p. 35; E.C. Król, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. U. Biel, *op. cit.*, p. 36; E.C. Król, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

archival research.<sup>9</sup> In any case, one of important aspects of this collaboration are several film productions and the change of image of Poland (for better) in some German films from 1930s. Among these productions are: first German-Polish co-production *August the Strong* (*August der Starke* / *August Mocny*, 1935), having its première in Dresden 17 January 1936, made in two different language versions directed, respectively, by Paul Wegener (German) and Stanisław Wasylewski (Polish)<sup>10</sup>, series of German sightseeing *Kulturfilme* made in Poland for Ufa, like Wilhelm Prager's *The Old Royal Town Cracow* (*Die alte Königstadt Krakau*, 1935), *Warsaw* (*Warschau*, 1936), *Vilnius* (*Wilna*, 1936) and *Polish Peasant Feasts* (*Polnische Bauernfeste*, 1936), or Ulrich K.T. Schulz's *Between Black and White Czeremosz* (*Zwischen Schwarzem und Weißem Czeremosz*, 1936) and *Mountaineers' Land* (*Heimat der Goralen*, 1935), and, finally, series of costume historical films with Polish (or even pro-Polish) accents: film about Chopin distributed in Poland as *Chopin, piewca wolności* (1934), made in two language versions: German *Abschiedswalzer*, directed by Géza von Bolváry, and French *La Chanson de l'adieu*, directed by Albert Valentin and Géza von Bolváry, Carl Lamac's *Polish Blood* (1934), made also in two language versions – Czech (*Polská krev*) and German (*Polenblut*), Georg Jacoby's *The Beggar Student* (*Der Bettelstudent*, 1936) or at last Gustav Fröhlich's *The Adventures of Young Gentleman in Poland* (*Abenteuer eines jungen Herrn in Polen*, 1934).

These films were received in Poland with mixed feelings.<sup>11</sup> Either Polish audience reacted alergically for national and cultural negative stereotypes, or found in their narratives historical and ideological falsehood what together with boycott of German films by Jewish owners of the theatres and restricted range of distribution ordered by the state censorship caused that generally they were not great attendance successes.<sup>12</sup> This lack of book office success is also the case of Fritz Peter Buch's film *The Warsaw Citadel* (*Die Warschauer Zitadelle*, 1937) – made already after the *Ritt in die Freiheit*; this is the third adaptation of Gabriela Zapolska's play *That Other Man* (*Tamten*), anti-Russian drama staged in Berlin theatre already in the first decade of 20 century just as *Die Warschauer Zitadelle*.<sup>13</sup> During the First World War *Die Warschauer Zitadelle* was in 1916 staged in Vienna, and with great success (380 spectacles) in

<sup>9</sup> Cf. U. Biel, *op. cit.*, p. 37–50; E.C. Król, *op. cit.*, p. 71–82.

<sup>10</sup> The context of making of *August der Starke* is described by Karina Pryt in the article *Polsko-niemieckie koprodukcje "August Mocny" i "Dyplomatyczna żona" w służbie nazistowskiej polityki wschodniej w latach 1934–1939*, [in:] *Polska i Niemcy: filmowe granice i sąsiedztwa*, *op. cit.*, p. 75–80. Cf. also: E.C. Król, *op. cit.*, p. 76–77.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. Dębski, *Polskie wątki filmowe w prasie wrocławskiej w okresie polsko-niemieckiego zbliżenia 1934–1939*, [in:] *W drodze do sąsiada: polsko-niemieckie spotkania filmowe*, ed. A. Dębski, A. Gwóźdź, Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, Wrocław 2013, p. 302–303; U. Biel, *op. cit.*, p. 45–47.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. U. Biel, *op. cit.*, p. 45–47.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Z. Raszewski, *Zapolska – pisarka teatralna w latach 1898–1904*, [in:] G. Zapolska, *Dramaty*, vol. II, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Wrocław 1961, p. XI.

Berlin.<sup>14</sup> Also in 1916 was made the first adaptation of Zapolska's play, titled *Der 10. Pavillon der Zitadelle* and directed by Danny Kaden; the second one, from 1930, was made by Jakob and Luise Fleck.

As Andrzej Dębski points out, intention of these "pro-Polish" films from the Third Reich period could be similar to that of German propaganda films from the First World War: their aim was gaining ally – the ally submissive and in fact incapacitated.<sup>15</sup> Gaining Poles as Germany's allies seems to be grounded, first of all, on pointing out the enemy common for Germany and Poland, i.e. Russia – of course, in 1930s this enemy was Soviet Union but tsarist Russia was simply earlier avatar of hostile empire with the same, in fact, identity as the bolsheviks' state. This is the reason of presence of strong anti-Russian accents in such works as *Abschiedswalzer*, *Die Warschauer Zitadelle* or *Ritt in die Freiheit*. One should not to forget that these pro-Polish and anti-Russian titles inscribe themselves into the whole series of films made earlier in the Third Reich, having anti-Russian/anti-Soviet message – like, e.g., Franz Wenzler's *Hans Westmar: One of Many* (*Hans Westmar: Einer von Vielen*, 1933), Hans Zöberlein's and Ludwig Schmid Wildy's *For Human Rights* (*Um das Menschenrecht*, 1934), Gustav Ucicky's *Fugitives* (*Flüchtlinge*, 1933), Peter Hagen's *Friesens' Distress* (*Friessennot*, 1935), Karl's *White Slaves* (*Weißer Sklaven*, 1936). One should remember that 25 November 1936 Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Komintern Pact to which one year later (6 November 1937) join Italy, creating Axis Rome–Berlin–Tokyo. Within the context of such intensive anti-communist and anti-Soviet politics of the Nazi Germany such particular "wooing" or "courting" of potential ally in common anti-bolshevik case should not be surprising at all – the more so that anti-Russian direction agreed with both general historical politics of Poland during all her history and current foreign politics of the Second Polish Republic in the 1920s and 1930s.

Andrzej Dębski discerns one more context for such film as *Ritt in die Freiheit*, *Abschiedswalzer* or *Die Warschauer Zitadelle*. Namely, these are "insurgent" and "pro-freedom" films, affirming struggles for national independence and uprisings or rebellions of certain nations against various oppressors, invaders or colonizers – on the condition that non-Germans.<sup>16</sup> Germans made in the Nazi era (or just before it) more similar films, referring to the history of other oppressed, invaded or colonized countries: Finland [Paul Martin's *Black Roses* (*Schwarze Rosen*, 1935)], Italy [Luis Trenker's and Werner Klingler's *Condottieri* (1937)] or Bayern in the Napoleon era [Luis Trenker's and Kurt Bernhard's *Der Rebell* (1932)<sup>17</sup>]. This last film is pointed out by Goebbels himself

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. XXIX.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A. Dębski, *op. cit.*, p. 303–304; as for the pro-Polish German propaganda from the World War One era, see B. Braun, *Film niemiecki w walce o polskie serca w latach pierwszej wojny światowej*, [in:] *W drodze do sąsiedzi...*, p. 241–257.

<sup>16</sup> A. Dębski, *op. cit.*, p. 303–304.

<sup>17</sup> Co-director of Luis Trenker, when making the English-language version *The Rebel*, was Edwin H. Knopf. During the World War Two Max W. Kimmich – nb. Goebbels's brother-in-law – would make two films about Irish national heroes fighting against English oppressor: *The Fox*

as one of exemplary to be followed at the meeting of Reichspropaganda Minister with the filmmakers and other workers of German film industry at Hotel Kaiserhof on 28 March 1933. Idea of "sacrifice", "devotion" or "dedication" – "for the Case", and particularly resignation in the name of it from love and personal happiness, naturally affirmed in the patriotic art and literature of every nation and country, was easily congruent with the axiology of national socialists, what could be testified by three "brown" heroic epics, inaugurating in 1933 Nazi propaganda cinema: Franz Seitz's *SA-Mann Brand*, Hans Steinhoff's *Hitlerjunge Quex* and already aforementioned Franz Wenzler's film *Hans Westmar: Einer von Vielen*.

### Film crew of *Ritt in die Freiheit*

*Ritt in die Freiheit* was produced by Ufa – then the largest and the most powerful film company in the whole Europe – and its co-producer was Warszawska Kinematograficzna Spółka Akcyjna, in fact the secret representative of Ufa in Poland.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this was the reason that despite German proposition the Poles did not want to recognize officially the film as co-production (this should not be surprising the more so that till March 1937 when Ufa was taken over by the Nazi state with the help of a front, Max Winkler, president of company was Alfred Hugenberg, hostile to Poland). Despite this distantiation Polish Ministry of Military Affairs gave to the German filmmakers' disposal the 5 Regiment of Zaslów Uhlans.<sup>19</sup> This is not unimportant fact – one of the spectacular attractions of the film is, particularly in the introductory part of narrative, charm of the cavalry: picturesque horse exercise, uhlan manoeuvres, rescue with which the river ferry having on the board princess Katerina Tschernikoff is saved by the squadron of Rittmeister Jan Wolski. Location shooting took place on the Narew river banks near Ostrołęka although historical action is situated in Grodno and in places around this town, thus – on the banks of river Niemen. Apparently the film crew made also espionage recognition of the area, utilized later by Germans in September 1939.<sup>20</sup>

Among the crew we find the true celebrities of German cinema in the 1930s. The director, **Karl Hartl**, was one of the most commercially successful German filmmakers during this decade. In 1930 he made his debut, musical comedy *The Boy's Song from Heidelberg* (*Ein Burschenlied aus Heidelberg*), and after it directed such hits of German cinema as historical Bergfilm *Doomed Batalion* (*Berge in Flammen*, co-directed by Luis Trenker, 1931),

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of *Glenarvon* (*Der Fuchs von Glenarvon*, 1940) and *My Life for Ireland* (*Mein Leben für Irland*, 1941). They both intended to persuade Irish nation and Republic of Ireland to support the Third Reich in the Second World War against their "common" enemy: Great Britain.

<sup>18</sup> B. Drewniak, *Teatr i film Trzeciej Rzeszy*, Wydawnictwo Morskie, Gdańsk 1972, p. 207.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, E.C. Król, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. B. Drewniak, *op. cit.*, p. 207.



escapist self-reflexive comedy with Brigitte Helm *Countess of Monte Cristo* (*Die Gräfin von Monte Cristo*, 1932), spectacular action film *F.P. 1 Does Not Answer* (*F.P. 1 antwortet nicht*, 1932) about sabotage at the great floating airport situated on Atlantic, with such stars as Hans Albers, Sybille Schmitz and Peter Lorre, science-fiction thriller *Gold* (1934) with Hans Albers and Brigitte Helm, historical melodrama from the Napoleon era *And So Love Ends* (*So endet eine Liebe*, 1934) with Paula Wessely, Willy Forst and Gustaf Gründgens, operette *The Gypsy Baron* (*Der Zigeunerbaron*, 1935) with handsome amant Adolf Wohlbrück, and intelligent, narratively very intricate, sophisticated and a bit surrealistic crime comedy *Man Who Was Sherlock Holmes* (*Der Mann der Sherlock Holmes war*, 1937), with Hans Albers as supposed Sherlock and Heinz Rühmann as would-be Watson. Till today this is a cult movie of German cinema, often shown in contemporary German television; apparently it belonged to the favourite films of Hitler himself. Karl Hartl, similarly as Willi Forst or Gustav Ucicky, was Austrian, born in Vienna. He was not the member of NSDAP (Nazi Party) nor was compromised by directing overtly propagandist *Staatsauftragsfilme*, thus after the war he could in denazified Austria take position of general manager of Neue Wiener Filmproduktionsgesellschaft and make films until 1961. However, some shadow on his reputation is taking the management of the Wien-Film company after the Austria *Anschluss*, and the fact he was producer of one of the most abominable of Nazi narrative films – anti-Polish *Heimkehr* (1940), directed by Gustav Ucicky and made after the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact. Was this production Goebbels' proposal not to be refused? I ask this question since Hartl's participation in making both the most pro-Polish and the most anti-Polish among German films from Nazi era may testify about his conformism and submissivity to Nazi power.

Among two cameramen of *Ritt in die Freiheit* (**Günther Rittau**, Otto Baecker) – the first one is truly great personality of German cinema. He is author (or co-author) of shooting to such classics as Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* (1924) and *Metropolis* (1926), Joe May's *Coming Home* (*Heimkehr*, 1928) and *Asphalt* (1929), Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (*Der Blaue Engel*, 1930), Robert Siodmak's *Storms of Passion* (*Stürme der Leidenschaft*, 1932) or Paul Martin's *Blonde Dream* (*Ein blonder Traum*, 1932). Before *Ritt in die Freiheit* he collaborated with Karl Hartl as director, making such films as *F.P. 1 antwortet nicht*, *Gold* or *Der Zigeunerbaron*. Rittau gained his fame as cameraman particularly due to invention of very clever optical special effects – e.g. in such masterpieces of picture as *Die Nibelungen*, *Metropolis* or *Asphalt*.

Among the cast with the greatest brightness shine two amants in the roles of two friends, Polish Rittmeister Jan Wolski and count Julek Staniewski. Count Staniewski is played by **Willy Birgel**, Rittmeister Wolski – by **Viktor Staal**. Birgel made his debut in 1934 with the role of English commandant of camp for interned civils in Paul Wegener's patriotic epic from the years of World War One *Towards Germany* (*Ein Mann will nach Deutschland*). Other important his roles are Russian governer Avarov in Paul Martin's *Black Roses*

(*Schwarze Rosen*, 1935), city's commandant La Trémouille in anti-British historical epic about Joan of Arc, Gustav Ucicky's *Das Mädchen Johanna* (1935), agent Morris in anti-English Karl Ritter's spy drama *Traitor (Verräter)*, 1936), conductor going through marriage crisis in Detlef Sierck's melodrama *The Last Accord (Schlußakord)*, 1936). One should also remember about his participation in some important films made already after *Ritt in die Freiheit*, like Detlef Sierck's *Towards New Banks (Zu neuen Ufern)*, 1937), Viktor Tourjansky's *The Blue Fox (Der Blaufuchs)*, 1938) and Carl Froelich's *Queen's Heart (Das Herz der Königin)*, 1940) – in all three he was the partner of Zarah Leander herself: the greatest and the most beautiful female star in the cinema of the Third Reich. He played also in Erich Engel's *Hotel Sacher* (1938), Eduard von Borsody's *Kongo-Express* (1939), and – what a shame! – the most abominable (together with *Heimkehr*) anti-Polish film made after the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, Victor Tourjansky's *Enemies (Feinde)*, 1940).

The other man star, Viktor Staal, although played in films already since 1934 and *Ritt in die Freiheit* is his sixth film, seems to get in it his first really important role in his actor's career. Handsome Aryan-like fair-haired amant after it was partner of the most popular female stars of Third Reich cinema: Swedish beauty Zarah Leander [Sierck's *Zu neue Ufern*, Rolf Hansen's *The Great Love (Die große Liebe)*, 1942], half-English, half-German Lillian Harvey (Karl Ritter's *Capriccio*, 1938) or masterly dancer, Hungarian Marika Rökk [Georg Jacoby's *One Night in May (Eine Nacht in Mai)*, 1938].

Among two writers of the film persona with definitely greater achievements was Walter Supper, author of screenplays to such hits as aforementioned Paul Martin's *Schwarze Rosen* and Hartl's *Ziegeunerbaron*, or to excellent Carl Froehlich's film about school milieu *Ripening Youth (Reifende Jugend)*, 1933). The more important, however, seems to be contribution of Austrian Pole, Edmund Strzygowski, for whom this was the first and also the last-but-one screenplay. It is highly probable that just his sensitivity and knowledge of Polish culture is the origin of genuinely Polish ambience of Hartl's film, evoking great works of Polish literature and theatre. Drama of involuntary treason of homeland, redeemed later with fight and heroic death, evokes dilemmas of Kmicic, the hero of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *The Deluge (Potop)*. The ball at governor's palace resembles both Warsaw Salon and Vilnius Salon from Adam Mickiewicz masterpiece romantic drama *Dziady*, Part III (the more so that both Hartl's film and Mickiewicz drama refer to the November Uprising of 1830). The scenery of night battles of Poles in the uhlan post-Napoleonic uniforms seems to bring to mind historical plays of Stanisław Wyspiański, *November Night (Noc Listopadowa)* and *Warsaw Song (Warszawianka)*, and also great romantic drama of Juliusz Słowacki *Kordian*. And general post-Napoleonic aura (costumes, patriotic fever) for Polish viewer could evoke also classic Polish novels about Napoleonic era: Stefan Żeromski's *Ashes (Popioły)* or Waclaw Gąsiorowski's *Hurricane (Huragan)* and *1809 (Rok 1809)*.

## Narrative and film form

Form of Karl Hartl's film is truly masterly – story, giving impression of national epic, is condensed in 1.5 hour of screen time. Narratively film *syuzhet* comes very close to the “well made play”, in three acts; each of them comprises one day of action. Act I takes place on some day in the beginning of November 1830. Events of act II occur some three weeks later, near the end of November or in the beginning of December 1830 (viewer, having elementary knowledge of Polish history, could easily infer approximate date) and comprise about 24 hours (day and night of governor's ball). During the immediate 24 hours after governor's ball (day and night) the events of act III take place. Act I lasts about 18 minutes of screen time. Act II, the most intricate and the most extended, takes place between 18. and 55. minute of film. Act III is shorter, although longer than introductory act – spreads from 55. minute till the end of film (about 86. minute at the print of film at my disposal). Two main characters are cavalry captains, commanding squadrons of Polish uhlans, being at the Russian service in Polish Kingdom (Królestwo Polskie), founded after Congress of Vienna in 1815 (Polish Kingdom was not Kingdom of Poland – independent state, as before 1795; instead, it was only province of Russian Empire, admitted with certain – not great – degree of autonomy at the Congress of Vienna).

Within the act I take place with a following succession: duel of Rittmeister Jan Wolski (Viktor Staal) with Russian Rittmeister of cossacks, Saganov; Russian colonel's reprimand to the officers of his regiment for incessant duels (he is discontented with fact that again and again they are won by Poles); rescue which Wolski and his uhlans bring to the ferry, carried off by the strong current of the river – on the board of ferry in danger travelled princess Katerina Ivanovna Tschernikoff, sister of Grodno's Russian governor. Wolski tries to flirt with beautiful lady but from her greetings and friend's reaction understands that she is an old flame of count Julek Staniewski (Willy Birgel), his colleague-Rittmeister.

Act II starts some day three weeks later. This day in the evening the governor of Grodno gives ball at his residence. In the morning, however, his occupations are quite different – he destroys the letter with complaint of town councillors against the drunkards' excesses of cossacks, listens to the report informing him about common horse rides of princess and Staniewski, and after it talks with her sister, intending to persuade her to leave Grodno for Petersburg where good marriage awaits her. In the meantime Wolski tells Staniewski that is glad that his friend still has not proposed to Katerina because marrying Russian princess would threaten him with denationalization. To the village some hours of ride from Grodno courier from Warsaw has come to bring to uhlans in Grodno message about the outbreak of November Uprising. He asks Poles for fresh horses and baffling his Russian pursuers. In the evening Wolski exchanges banter with Janka Kozłowska, Polish girl



enamoured with him and very jealous. Julek is disturbing them in order to inform his friend about intention to propose to princess this evening; assures him that despite marrying Russian woman, himself "he will stay Pole" and after it runs in a hurry to the governor's ball. Some time after aforementioned messenger brings to Wolski the order of insurgents' authorities to both Rittmeister to bring their squadrons to Warsaw. Courier immediately leaves further for Vilnius and Janka assures Wolski about her prayer. Wolski arrives at the governor's ball, ordering Polish officers immediately but discreetly to evacuate and appointing them meeting in the pavillon near gate. Some moments after he informs Staniewski about the situation and requests from him to report in the pavillon what Julek promises to do. But feverish after earlier proposal and confused with new state of affairs demanding from him unambiguous choice, Julek is not able to extricate himself from Russian chains and stays at the ball. Wolski and other Poles in vain waiting for him in appointed place decide to leave without him. There is too late, however – on the bridge guarded already by Russians takes place the fight between uhlands and cosacks: four Polish officers are killed, two other arrested, Wolski escapes and in the meantime Staniewski dances with Katerina the last mazurka. Wolski secretly sneaks to Julek's room to accuse him for betrayal of homeland for woman and to blame him for his companions' death.

Act III presents events of the day after ball. Staniewski after his morning arrival to the regiment is the only Pole there – from Russians he learns about death of his four compatriots and imprisoning three other (among them Wolski who let to get arrested after his conversation with the count). Colonel orders to hide from Julek that all Poles will not be shot but hanged – although does not conceal from him that they all are sentenced to death. According to order the next day Staniewski has to leave for Kiev. Colonel informs him also that in the afternoon he has to report himself at the governor's "in the private matter" – suggesting that the reward for his loyalty to Russia may be the princess's hand. Russian officers invite Julek for "breakfast" which transforms itself into a drunken orgy with women. During it he learns from the drunken ensign about the disgraceful kind of death which is prepared to his compatriots. In the meantime Wolski and lieutenant Malinowski conform ensign Milewski despaired by the shame of gallows that this is not disgraceful death – as a death for homeland it makes way for future generations fighting for independence which sooner or later will come true. Staniewski is soon visited by Janka in despair who wants to know about the fate of Wolski. After dramatic conversation during which he revealed to girl his suicidal intention after his shame, Janka persuades him to believe that not everything is lost and that he still could save his friends' lives. At the governor's when he reports himself just after this talk, Julek does not mention at all about his intention to marry Katerina but only asks for pardoning his condemned compatriots. Governor refuses, Julek leaves and the princess suspecting his brother of refusing her hand to Pole could not conceive that her sweetheart has not told even one word about yesterday's proposal... In the evening Staniewski with his uhlands frees the prisoners who

immediately leave for Warsaw, and himself with his men keeping long under fire the gate of barracks heroically holds Russians back from taking the immediate pursuit after fugitives. Finally, staying alone after death of all his men, is killed by the Russian bullet, redeeming by his heroic last battle his earlier fault of indecisiveness between homeland and woman.

I have made such a detailed summary of film's plot with premeditation since both in Poland and Germany (and the more so in other countries) this film is nowadays practically unavailable and unknown, and the only recapitulation of its story in Polish in otherwise excellent and revealing article by Eugeniusz Król<sup>21</sup> makes us suppose that author did not see the film, having only the second hand knowledge of it. As for the form of this work, clearly visible aspects of it are **dualism**, masterly use of **alternate editing** (in the function of both **simultaneous editing** and **parallel metaphorical editing**), and the excellent use of **depth of field** together with the **change of shots within long takes**. Dualism presents us two reciprocally impenetrable worlds: Russians and Poles, what is obviously connected with the idea of the film according to which the conquered nation should keep away from the occupant and colonizer. This topic is already set up in the credits sequence: the background of the credit titles are two plates alternately following one after other – they show, respectively, two-headed black eagle of Russian Empire and white eagle in the crown being the emblem of Poland (two-headed Russian eagle is placed also at the gate of barracks; opening this gate by fugitives – Wolski, Malinowski, Milewski and others – in the film's final is beginning of their “ride to freedom”, the title's *Ritt in die Freiheit*). Russians and Poles are separated ones from the other also in the credit titles: after the title announcing film's cast at first follow plates with the names and portraits of Russian characters and actors playing them, and just after them – plates with the portraits and names of Polish characters, and their players. As film's narration follows in most of scenes we generally see Poles and Russians **separately** (of course, there are some exceptions to this rule, like scenes with Julek Staniewski and princess Tschernikoff or common briefing at colonel's for Russian cossacks and Polish uhlands; later, however, groups of characters of given nationality are shown separately in the alternating editing). Such presentations of both nations separately and alternately, firstly, puts into relief the impossibility of “being together” by Poles and Russians, secondly – inclines to comparisons. And so, for example, Poles in their private lives are characterized by certain nonchalance and carelessness (Wolski's amorosity, easiness to fall in love; his debts), but also by gentlemanly, gallantry towards women (Wolski's action for princess's rescue) and obeying social forms. The expression of cultural Polish “refinement” is also mazurka at the governor's ball – dance of the conquered and occupied nation culturally “conquered” the invader and oppressor. Russians in turn are characterized by the monstrous drunkenness (with pouring out the sea of vodka over great glasses on the table during “breakfast”) and wild orgy with women of dubious *conduite*. Both nationalities are contrasted

<sup>21</sup> E.C. Król, *op. cit.*, p. 80–81.

also by musical motifs – melancholic and nostalgic “dumkas” of cossacks clash with the dignit music travestyng motif of popular Polish song *Geese behind Water* (*Gęsi za wodą*) and with the impetuous dance of mazurka at the ball; and among dances written in the *carnet de bal* there are mazurka, polonaise and polka – this last one, despite its Czech origin, in its name itself has inscribed Polish connotation.

Poles are also characterized by patriotism, love of freedom and persistence in tending to it – it is almost impossible task for invaders to get them russified. We know about this from talks in the arrest between uhlands condemned to death, Warsaw courier's relation about brutal repressions, like sentencing 14-years old boys to Siberian exile just for singing Polish songs, and letter censored by the governer in which uhlan's wife informs her husband that their children hate Russian school. Except Julek who unluckily chose the object of his love, Wolski and other Poles immediately are ready to obey the orders of insurgents' authorities from Warsaw. Russians, quite contrary, do not value freedom high and in the occupied country they suppress it with severe punishments, censorship of private correspondence, numerous death sentences, breaking the Polish unity (colonel says that Polish troops should be divided, separated, sent into different places in order to prevent them from plotting and rebellions). Not accidentally, Julek Staniewski, who as Pole is unreliable to Russian authorities, is to be sent by colonel possibly furthest from central Poland embraced by the battles of November Uprising: far east to Kiev.

Russians and Poles (and particularly women of both nationalities) differ also in their attitude towards questions of relations between the private and the public, particularly between love and Homeland Case. The princess Tschernikoff could not conceive that something like national question could be the obstacle for love, whereas Janka Kozłowska, although terribly jealous of Wolski's affairs with other women (“I'll scratch out your eyes – and theirs as well!”), immediately capitulates when her rival is Homeland: just after getting the news about the uprising's outbreak she promises Wolski her prayers for him, and afterwards, in desperation, just she causes her sweetheart's rescue, persuading traitor Staniewski to redeem his guilt by action.

The alternating editing serves in Hartl's film not only for comparisons but fulfils also the function of simultaneous editing, taking viewer from one scene or line of action to the other, happening at the same diegetic time. Due to it there was possible to contain so much of narrative events so easily in so (relatively) short screen time, and despite merely three days of action drawing the film's plot almost to the neoclassical rule of three unities, the film as well makes impression of **historical epic**, presenting fates of certain characters on the wide background of historical events (although the November Uprising itself seems to be almost absent in the film). The simultaneous editing in a particularly brilliant way collides the last mazurka at the governor's ball with the massacre of Polish uhlands on the bridge, or, in the film's final, runaway of Wolski and his companions with the heroic action of Staniewski and his men at the barracks' gate preventing Russians from pursuit after fugitives. It is interesting that in this – at first glance filmed in classical way – sequence of simultaneous

editing happens something quite reverse than in the final sequence of David Wark Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), analyzed by David Bordwell in his excellent *Narration in the Fiction Film*:<sup>22</sup> cuts to the Julek's action at the gate prolong this action (similarly as they prolong the siege of Camerons' cabin in Griffith's film), but cuts to the uhlands' ride fulfil different function than cuts to the Ku-Klux-Klan in *Birth of a Nation*: there they shorten the ride, in Hartl's film they prolong fugitives' ride, giving viewer impression (and hope) that riders "rode distance as long as possible". The reason for that is that in *Ritt in die Freiheit* characters ride **from** the place of simultaneous action, not **towards** it as in Griffith's film.

## Reception

We have testimony in Goebbels' diary that independently of propagandist efficiency appointed by Reichspropagandaminister to *Ritt in die Freiheit* and similar "insurgent" and "pro-freedom" films, Karl Hartl's film gained his approbation: "Well made. With reasonable story, mise-en-scene, characters and acting. I am glad that I have contributed to making of it".<sup>23</sup> From opinions expressed by Goebbels in different places of his diaries about various films one could come to conclusion that he really was film connoisseur. The all-Germany première took place 14 January 1937 in the prestigious theatre Ufa-Palast am Zoo in Berlin. From the article of Andrzej Dębski one could infer that film's reception in Germany, at least in Schlesien (Silesia) and particularly in Breslau, was excellent.<sup>24</sup> This text mentions also French version of the film titled *La Chevauchée de la Liberté*, apparently, according to the newspaper "Czas", screened with huge success in Paris cinema Gaumont-Palace.<sup>25</sup> However, according to information which I have found at the portal Encyclo Ciné, it results that there were no separate "French version",<sup>26</sup> but screened then in Paris was simply described above German film directed by Karl Hartl, presented in France just under such title – no other source, among them such competent as Filmportal.de, informs about existence of separate French version of the film; it neither does not figure in filmography of Karl Hartl whose other films as *F.P. 1 antwortet nicht* or *Gold* have indeed versions in other languages.

<sup>22</sup> D. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1985, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Sämtliche Fragmente. Aufzeichnungen 1921–1941*, München–New York 1987, Bd. 2, p. 701, note from 19 October 1936; quote after: E.C. Król, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> A. Dębski, *op. cit.*, p. 300–301.

<sup>25</sup> *Filmy o tematach polskich podbijają Francuzów*, "Czas", 24.10.1937 (quoted after: A. Dębski, *op. cit.*, p. 301).

<sup>26</sup> As in the case of certain German films made simultaneously in MLV-s (multi-lingual versions) – as, e.g., George Wilhelm Pabst's *Die 3-Groschen-Oper / L'opera à quat' sous* (1932) or Fritz Lang's *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse / Le Testament du docteur Mabuse* (1933).

As for Polish reception of *Ku wolności* – as Hartl's film was titled in Poland – one could suppose that it could be rather better than other “pro-Polish” films made in 1930s in Germany. Quick research made by Andrzej Dębski – for whom I feel very indebted – confirmed, indeed, such a state of affairs. Short review, strongly recommending Hartl's film to Polish viewers, appeared in Częstochowa daily newspaper.<sup>27</sup> It contains summary of film's plot and interesting information that film was dubbed into Polish. Even more interesting is information published in Warsaw nationalist weekly “Myśl Narodowa”, recommending to Polish viewers film *Ku wolności*, screened in June 1937 in Warsaw theatre “Hollywood”. Author of the note, generally praising “tact” of German filmmakers in presenting Russians in not too black colours (due to it, film is historically credible), is at the same time suspicious that Germans have so keen interest in Polish patriotic topics such as uprising of 1830. It seems that author has clear consciousness of contemporary political situation in which Germans make such pro-Polish historical film in order to persuade Poles A.D. 1936 to join the Third Reich in common anti-bolshevik front. Despite the general tone of praise, review strongly criticizes – not mentioning his name – the leading actor, Willy Birgel, in the role of Polish officer, as completely badly cast, praising instead – not mentioning the film's title – his suggestive role as conductor of symphonic orchestra in “intelligent and good film drama” (the film mentioned here is Detlef Sierck's *The Last Accord /Schlußakord/* 1936).<sup>28</sup>

Andrzej Dębski pointed out to me interesting references to Hartl's film also in “Orędownik”, illustrated catholic and national daily newspaper published in Łódź. Advertisement, placed 26 April 1937 announces “great première in the representational cinema Rialto” with following words: “The greatest hit of the season! Heroic rhapsode of the November Uprising! *Ku wolności*. Heroic, rehabilitating act of Polish uhlan-officer who by his love to the Russian aristocrat woman caused the imprisoning of his comrades in arms”. There follows information that film was made with the support of Historical Bureau in Polish Ministry of Military Affairs and the participation of the Regiment of Zasław Uhlans.<sup>29</sup> Even more enthusiastic is advertising note from the same newspaper four days later: “The great feast of film art in representational theatre! “Rialto”, Łódź, Przejazd 2, has honour to present great super-film *Ku wolności*. The greatest film masterpiece of all times! Drama of Polish officer from the era of Uprising 1831 which must arouse interest of every Pole! Excellent cast of the best European artists: WILLY BIRGEL (count Staniewski), URSZULA GRABLEY (princess Czerkow) [*sic!* – TK], WIKTOR STAAL (Rittmeister Wolski), HANSI KNOTECK (Janka)”.<sup>30</sup> Such emphasis and exaggeration in advertising seemed to be, however, effective, since in other Łódź newspaper we find the

<sup>27</sup> *Na srebrnym ekranie*, “Goniec Częstochowski”, 16.11.1937, no. 263, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Kandyd*, “Film”, “Myśl Narodowa”, 13.06.1937, no. 24, p. 382.

<sup>29</sup> “Orędownik”, 26.04.1937, no. 96, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> “Orędownik”, 30.04.1937, no. 99, p. 6. Original spelling as for polonization of names and capital letters.



information that Hartl's film was still shown in this city, although in another theatre, "Przedwiośnie", almost eight months later.<sup>31</sup>

Such popularity of *Ritt in die Freiheit* among Polish viewers in 1937 could have also another source. In official bulletins of school administration for Lwów and Katowice districts we could find ministerial recommendations of Hartl's film for pupils of secondary schools.<sup>32</sup> It is almost certain that similar recommendations could be found in decrees published by school authorities in other regions of Poland since their source was central, Ministry of Religious Confessions and Public Education. However, the main reason of this unexpectedly good reception in Poland of this unexpectedly pro-Polish film is that despite the country of production (Third Reich) and political intention behind making this film, it inscribes itself very convincingly both in Polish cultural and literary tradition, and the historical politics of Polish state.

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<sup>31</sup> "Echo", 10.12.1937, no. 344, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> "Dziennik Urzędowy Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Lwowskiego", Lwów, 29.05.1937, no. 5, p. 349; "Gazeta Urzędowa Województwa Śląskiego. Dział Administracji Szkolnej", Katowice, 28.05.1937, no. 5, p. 131.