

A View of the Führer through the Lens of Nazi Popular Cinema

Kyra Walters

Submitted to CEU History Department
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

Supervisor: Constantin Iordachi

Second Reader: Marsha Siefert

Vienna, Austria

2021

Copyright in the text of this thesis rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part, may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.

Abstract

My thesis is about the portrayal of leaders in Nazi popular cinema. It identifies four aspects which are seen in every leader and genius figure in films made during the Third Reich. The surety of the appearance of these characteristics in all movies which center around a leader is due to them being characteristics which Nazi propagandists claimed Adolf Hitler had. Additionally, there are no movies made during the Nazi era in Germany in which an actor plays Hitler, so characters act as stand-ins for the actual Führer. Of the films covered in my thesis, all are either adaptations of previous works or are fictionalizations of real historical characters. The reason for this decision seems partly to be due to a desire to alter creative works and even historical fact so that they too can spout Nazi ideology. By doing this, a sense of legitimacy is given to the regime as well as a feeling of continuity. Another big reason for this choice has to do with inserting propaganda into familiar forms which a German audience may be more receptive towards.

Acknowledgements

Oh, geez, where to start. I suppose I should begin by thanking my parents for their support. Without the encouragement of my mom and stepdad, I would never have even boarded the plane to Budapest. I want to thank my sister Clare for listening to me drone on about history. Additionally, I want to extend my gratitude to my aunt Cate for her enthusiastic interest in my academic career. And although she can't read, I thank my cat Agnes for all the emotional comfort she has given me. I am also so grateful to the friends I made when I first started college. Without Alysha and Michael, I would never have pursued my love of history.

Naturally, I am eternally lucky for the amazing professors at CEU who have been so supportive and kind throughout the insanity of the last year and a half. In particular, I want to single out my supervisor, Constantin Iordachi who has never been anything but positive. Thank you so much Anna for being a wonderful friend and a constant delight. Lastly, I want to thank the Vimeo user, Mundus Pirata for providing me with the *Fridericus Rex* films and their scripts. Without him or her, this thesis would be far different.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Perspectives on Hitler, Nazi Leadership, and Cinema	7
1.1 The Evolution of Hitler as Propaganda	7
1.2 The Leader in Nazi Film Scholarship	10
1.3 Personal Approach to Third Reich Cinema	14
Chapter 2: Das Mädchen Johanna and Der Herrscher	18
2.1 Das Mädchen Johanna	18
2.2 A Tale of Two Rulers	19
2.3 Der Herrscher	25
2.4 Unbound and Alone	27
Chapter 3: Twenty Years of Frederick the Great on Film: 1922-1942	32
3.1 Frederick the Great's Third Reich Connections	32
3.2 Der alte und der junge König	35
3.3 The Rebellion of the Son.....	36
3.4 Der große König.....	43
3.5 The Darkness Before Dawn	44
Conclusion.....	51
Bibliography	53

Introduction

The works concerning Adolf Hitler are innumerable. They cover a vast variety of subjects, each picking apart some aspect of his life, either well-trod or looked over. His personal life has been studied with a magnifying glass, his influences have been tracked down and documented, and his childhood has been dug up. Articles, essays, books, and documentaries have all endeavored to show their audiences what Hitler was *really* like, or, failing that, added their own caricature of the Nazi dictator to a pile of caricatures which, perhaps, almost rivals the size of the pile which contains more true-to-life depictions of him. Yet, the concern of this thesis is not with the man and the truth, rather, it is the image of Hitler and his position as the *Führer*. Specifically, the interests of this thesis lie in the image of the leader in Third Reich era films. Though there are some movies made during the Third Reich which directly addressed the Nazi leadership and the impact of the party on German life, the majority of films produced mostly used allegory and symbolism in order to get their messages across.¹ The Nazi propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels was in favor of a more subtle approach, and so the politics of modern Germany (and later World War II) rarely intruded on the life of the average movie goer.² Over the one-thousand feature-length films which were shown in cinemas during the Third Reich, only about one-hundred-fifty are considered to be overtly propagandistic—the rest are either mostly or wholly apolitical and can be easily accessed by the general public in Germany or viewed on television or as part of special runs in movie theaters.³

¹ For a few films which unambiguously reference the Nazi party, Hitler, and Goebbels, see Hans Steinhoff. *Hitlerjunge Quex*. Video File. UFA, 1933.; Ernst Wenzler. *Hans Westmar*. Video File. Siegel-Monopolfilm, 1933.

² Mary Elizabeth O'Brien. *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in The Third Reich*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006. 7-11.

³ Eric Rentschler. *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

As it stands, there exist no film made in Germany between 1933-1945 in which an actor playing Hitler is seen at all.⁴ Instead, historical figures and characters from previously created works were transfigured in order to better fit with Nazi ideology, and they took on characteristics which were ascribed to Hitler.⁵ It is important to stress the word “ascribed” here. This thesis concerns the portrayal of the pseudo-*Führers* in Nazi cinema, those pre-existing characters and historical figures who were twisted from their original sources or historical conceptualizations to better resemble the Hitler presented in propaganda. Out of the dozens of films which I have seen, there are four main attributes which are shared by the false *Führer* figure in Nazi cinema: adherence to the *Führerprinzip*, being in touch with the common people, being destined for leadership, and being surrounded by enemies and doubters. Different films emphasize certain characteristics more than others, but all attributes are present in every single one.

Adherence to the *Führerprinzip*: “The *Führer* is always right!” Robert Ley, the head of the German Labor Front (DAF) repeatedly declared in a speech on November 3, 1936.⁶ This belief that Adolf Hitler’s will was not subject to established laws and conventional morality (*das Führerprinzip*) was the basis of governance in Nazi Germany.⁷ The *Führerprinzip*, emerged as tangible policy in 1934 following the Night of the Long Knives in which the Nazis murdered unwanted members as well as some who were seen as antagonistic to the party.⁸ The entire Third Reich was dependent upon Hitler as an ideal to guide the behavior of those underneath and as the

⁴ O’Brien. *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment*. 9.

⁵ There are a handful of original films which serve this same function. See Zerlett, Hans H. *Venus vor Gericht*. Video File. Bavaria Film, 1941.; Claudia Koonz. *The Nazi Conscience*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003.

⁶ Der Führer hat immer Recht! Robert Ley. “Schicksal — Ich Glaube!” *Munich: Zentralverlag Der NSDAP*, 1937. German Propaganda Archive.

⁷ Koonz. *The Nazi Conscience*. 96-100.; Nicholas O’Shaughnessy. *Selling Hitler*. London: Hurst and Co., 2016. 53.

⁸ Koonz. 94-97.

head of state who would issue orders which were tempered only by his own the morals and who was solely answerable to the people.⁹

In touch with the common people: Adolf Hitler's humble origins were played up greatly by both him and the Nazi propaganda machine.¹⁰ From his frontline service in World War I to his time spent as a street politician to the way he interacted with his dog, practically every aspect of his life was romanticized.¹¹ From his corporal to chancellor, Hitler was able to assume his position as head of the country through sheer willpower alone—a 1933 postcard which labels “the soldier” Hitler as continuing the legacy of such great Germans as Frederick the Great, Otto von Bismarck, and Paul von Hindenburg exemplifies this message.¹² He understood what the common people wanted because he was one of them and so carried their soul within him. Pamphlets, books, postcards, etc. had photographs of Hitler interacting with children in folk costumes, contemplating mountain scenery, playing with animals, and other mawkish, pandering images.¹³

Destined for leadership: Fate was inordinately kind to Hitler for a long time, and so he had within him the firm conviction that he was to lead Germany to a brighter future and would not perish until he had accomplished this goal.¹⁴ Looking back on his life, one may get the feeling that he might have been correct, at least for a while. He managed to survive four years serving in World War I, escaped his failed putsch in 1923 with only superficial injuries, and dodged dozens

⁹ Ibid. 96-98.; Ian Kershaw. *Hitler: 1936-1945 Nemesis*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Norton, 2001. 170, 172, 181.

¹⁰ Dagobert Dürr, *Adolf Hitler der deutsche Arbeiter und Frontsoldat*. Munich: Franz Eher, 1932.; Joseph Goebbels. *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels*. Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1934. 141-149.; Joseph Goebbels. *Adolf Hitler. Bilder aus dem Leben des Führers*. Hamburg; Cigaretten Bilderdienst, 1936.; Koonz. 76-78.

¹¹ Koonz. 76-78.; O'Shaughnessy. *Selling Hitler*.

¹² Hans von Norden, *Was der König eroberte, der Fürst formte, der Feldmarschall verteidigte, rettete und einigte der Soldat.*, Berlin 1933, postcard., Deutsches Historisches Museum.

¹³ Hoffmann, Heinrich. *Hitler Wie Ihn Keiner Kennt*. Berlin, 1932.; *Das danken Wir Dem Führer!*, 1938. <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/danken.htm>.

¹⁴ Kershaw. *Hitler: 1936-1945 Nemesis*.

of assassination attempts.¹⁵ Suicide rather than a firing squad or assassin's bullet is what finally ended his life.

Surrounded by enemies: Combined with the Reichstag fire which allowed the Enabling Act to be passed and Hitler to rule by decree, the Night of the Long Knives and the liquidation of dissenting members of the Nazi party and politicians was the event which cemented Hitler's position on a national level. Sources vary about how much Hitler actually knew about the plan before it was put into motion, but the story which Nazi propagandists pushed was that Hitler was shocked by the apparent betrayal of the upper echelons of the SA, particularly its leader, Ernst Röhm who had been a trusted, longtime friend.¹⁶ Besides false friends, communists, capitalists, and Jews were threats inside Germany's borders. Potentially hostile foreign powers like the Soviet Union existed without.

Out of the numerous movies made during the Third Reich, this thesis will examine four: *Das Mädchen Johanna* (1935), *Der Herrscher* (1937), *Der alte und der junge König* (1935), and *Der große König* (1942). All of these films are centered around a leader and are adaptations of pre-Nazi era works or concern historical figures. They are also part of popular cinema. "Popular," in this case, means that they are not presented as documentaries, they follow conventional plotting, use non-experimental filming techniques, and have known actors in many of the roles. Besides these two criteria, the other factors which determined inclusion into this thesis is that the film was either underexamined (as with *Das Mädchen Johanna* and *Der Herrscher*) or that the view presented here can place it in contrast most prominent scholar literature (as with *Der alte und der junge König* and *Der große König*). In a way, selection using

¹⁵ Ibid. "Into the Abyss."

¹⁶ Ian Kershaw. *The Hitler Myth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. 84-87.

these methods is fairly arbitrary. It must also be admitted that discovery of these films came about organically from simply watching dozens and dozens of Nazi movies. Through the digestion of so many movies, patterns emerged, but it was only through continued study that the relevance of such patterns was determined. Succinctly, though each film contains aspects which make its messages particularly relevant to interests at the time of its release, as a whole, they present false connections between life in Nazi Germany and the past. These movies insert themselves into history in a way which creates a sense legitimacy for themselves as works of art and for the Nazi regime as a form of government. The specific ways in which each film goes about establishing its own legitimacy varies and will be elaborated upon in the later chapters, though the presence a powerful *Führer* character remains constant throughout.

The first chapter examines the role Hitler played as a piece of propaganda and the relation this presentation has on Nazi cinema. The function of Hitler's image was not a static thing, and it underwent a series of changes from the point he started to become popular within the Nazi party in 1920 until his death in 1945. Certain abilities and characteristics attributed to him by Nazi propagandists were manufactured or stressed depending on a combination of then-current events and his own behavior. Pointing out the changes made to Hitler's myth is important for understanding how the main characters in the films covered in this thesis can be considered *Führer* expies despite their surface differences. Also explored in this chapter are the approaches which several scholars have to discussing the leader in Nazi film and Nazi film more generally. With all of this background explained, the chapter finishes with an explication of the methods I employ when assaying Nazi cinema in this thesis.

The second chapter is an analysis of the movies *Das Mädchen Johanna* and *Der Herrscher*. Though both movies were released around the same time, they each feature their own

distinct take on the *Führer* figure in service of different goals. The two movies alter stories which can be seen as outside of the “typical” Nazi sources of inspiration: the life of the French heroine, Joan of Arc for *Das Mädchen Johanna* and a Weimar-era play for *Der Herrscher*. Their presentations of the leader reveal how the Nazis wanted Hitler to appear during the mid-1930s. Contrasts can be made with the portrayal of the leader in films made during peace and those made during war.

The third and final chapter looks at two movies about Frederick the Great, *Der alte und der junge König* and *Der große König*. Frederick the Great was an inspiration not only to Hitler but to many other Germans as well. The 18th century Prussian king experienced renown in his lifetime and beyond, so there is no shortage of media dedicated to him, but the Nazi interpretation of such an illustrious figure offers a unique perspective. He is perhaps more closely associated with Hitler than any of the other characters noted here. Of significant interest in this chapter is the differences and similarities between these films and the silent ones made in the early 1920s. There is a greater connection between all of these films due to the casting of the same actor as Frederick the Great across the time of the Weimar Republic and into the Third Reich.

Chapter 1: Perspectives on Hitler, Nazi Leadership, and Cinema

1.1 The Evolution of Hitler as Propaganda

In some ways, the concreteness of the real Hitler is a bit disappointing. As Ian Kershaw writes, the actual man had a boring personality and was of little importance, a “weak dictator” who had little to do with the day-to-day running of Germany or the Nazi party.¹⁷ Instead, it is the figure or myth of Hitler is what mattered. Such a conceptualization of Hitler has not gone completely unchallenged, however. Peter Longerich’s 2019 biography of Hitler is an example of one of the more recent and high-profile critics of Kershaw. Though Longerich agrees with Kershaw on many points, he believes that Hitler was not lazy at all times, and when something was of particular interest, he was capable of bursts of enthusiasm and a careful, hands-on approach.¹⁸ Despite Longerich’s insistence that his take on Hitler is significantly different than Kershaw’s, they have more in common than not and certainly contrast harshly when compared to the approach of someone like Joachim C. Fest who credits the rise of Hitler to his remarkable charisma and the receptiveness or indifference of the majority of Germans to a potential dictatorship.¹⁹ His aptitude as a leader, statesman, and military leader can be viewed with a critical eye, but his usefulness as a piece of propaganda is startling and an intrinsic part of the Nazi’s political success.

By design, the real Hitler was never shown to the German people. The unimpressive reality was hidden behind a carefully constructed and opaque shroud, and instead what was seen

¹⁷ Ian Kershaw. *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*. London: The Penguin Press, 1998. 529.

¹⁸ Peter Longerich. *Hitler*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2019. 4.

¹⁹ Joachim C. Fest. *Hitler*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 1973.

was, alternatively, a fiery speaker and a defender of Germany.²⁰ The myth of the *Führer* emerged in the beginning stages of the Nazi party, as early as 1920 or only a handful of months after Hitler joined.²¹ Initially, neither Hitler nor the party propagandists portrayed Hitler as the coming savior of Germany. On the contrary, in the early half of the 1920s, when Hitler spoke of himself, he was humble and characterized himself as the simple man who spoke for the ignored masses humiliated in the aftermath of the First World War and the vindictive Treaty of Versailles. At his most vain, he said that he was the hierophant for the man who would regain Germany's place of prestige on the world stage.²² It was not until after Hitler's failed "Beer Hall Putsch" in November of 1923 in which he and other Nazi party members attempted to seize control of the Munich, and thus the Bavarian government, that the picture of Hitler was altered.²³

It was while serving his sentence of a mere eight months for the attempted overthrow of the government in Landsberg prison that Hitler's conceptualization of himself became mutated. Though it cannot be said with any certainty, it may be argued that the trial in which Hitler was able to grandstand in front of a receptive and more general audience or his writing of his autobiography, *Mein Kampf* which caused him to be promoted from ordinary prophet to messiah. Perhaps it was both. In any event, his time in Landsberg enabled Hitler to create a version of himself carefully laid out in *Mein Kampf* who, despite being Austrian, was tied spiritually with Germany and was gifted with vision and abilities which far outpaced his other political rivals. This myth of an indomitable leader was quickly put under stress, because when Hitler emerged from prison, the Nazi party was in shambles and on the verge of disintegrating. The Nazis

²⁰ Peter Longerich. *Goebbels: A Biography*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2015.; Nicholas O'Shaughnessy. *Selling Hitler*. London: Hurst and Co., 2016.; Ian Kershaw. *The Hitler Myth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

²¹ Kershaw. *The Hitler Myth*. 22-23.

²² Ibid. 23-24.

²³ Ibid. 24-25.

managed to remain as a whole, however, although it would be years before they attained any real power.²⁴ Similarly, it was not long after leaving prison that the Nazis began their foray into the world of cinematic propaganda. Alfred Hugenberg, the leader of the Nationalist Conservative Party (DNVP) bought the largest German film company, Ufa (*Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft*) in 1927 and made sure that the goings on the NSDAP were captured by Ufa cameras and shown in Ufa cinemas throughout Germany.²⁵

From the *Kampfzeit* (time of struggle) until around 1936, the portrait of Hitler remained relatively consistent. He was portrayed as an energetic and youthful alternative to the elderly president, Paul von Hindenburg and was completely clean of the stench of the democratic politics which clung to other Weimar politicians. Compared to the military and political elites, Hitler was a simple man, a modest corporal who, though he was not originally from Germany, wanted nothing more to selflessly serve his adopted country.²⁶ Hitler's position as a passionate servant of Germany gained a harder edge followed the Night of the Long Knives in which the Nazi party violently purged its ranks and killed, according to best estimates, about eighty-five of its dissenting members.²⁷ Various victories in international politics in the late 1930s in which Germany was able to not only gain back lost territory but also annexed Austria (*der Anschluss*) without spilling a drop of blood brought Hitler's popularity to new heights and gave him new prestige as a brilliant statesman.²⁸ It was also in this period of time, just a few years before the Second World War, that the German government gained majority stock in Ufa, and the takeover of the film industry which had begun in 1933 and *Gleichschaltung* (forced synchronization) was

²⁴ Kershaw. *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*. 514.

²⁵ David Welch. *Propaganda and German Cinema 1933-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 5-6.

²⁶ O'Shaughnessy. *Selling Hitler*. 28-30.; Koonz. *The Nazi Conscience*. 90.

²⁷ Kershaw. *The Hitler Myth*. 84-87.; Koonz. *The Nazi Conscience*. 94-98.

²⁸ Ian Kershaw *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis*. London: The Penguin Press, 2000. 669.

complete and total.²⁹ Astounding German military successes in the first couple of years of the Second World War gave fresh ammo to the Nazi propaganda machine, and Hitler was made out to be a genius tactician whose natural ability was unmatched even by his generals. However, belief in Hitler's preternatural abilities were contingent upon continued achievements, and with the horrendous defeat of the *Wehrmacht* at the Battle of Stalingrad, the first cracks in the foundation of the *Führer* cult started to form.³⁰ Faith in Hitler deteriorated steadily until the end of the war and was made worse by the fact that Hitler became more and more reclusive as Germany's suffering grew, however it was never completely extinguished, and even after Hitler's death a certain part of Germany's population still held him in some esteem.³¹

1.2 The Leader in Nazi Film Scholarship

In a 2020 interview for the *Die Welt*, film historian Armin Jäger gave his opinion of the interest in Nazi film in Germany:

In Germany, almost no one is really interested in film history from 1933 to 1945. If you look at the literature on Nazi films, you can easily put the most important works on two not-too-wide shelves. There is probably more published about Goethe in a year than was ever written about film in the Third Reich. For 90 percent of the films made at that time, you will not find any serious, coherent sales figures. Nobody wants to touch the topic, no institution, and no political decision-maker.³²

²⁹ Propaganda was, naturally, important to the Nazis prior to when Hitler came to power in 1933, but the propaganda apparatus was vastly expanded with the establishment of its own dedicated government ministry (lead by Joseph Goebbels) in March of 1933. The Reich Chamber of Culture (*Reichskulturkammer*) was formed in September 1933 and had within it a chamber which oversaw film production. Nazi purging of the film industry took place between 1933-1935 and included the creation of censorship laws, the categorization of films based upon their cultural worth, and the expulsion of non-Aryans. Welch. *Propaganda and German Cinema*. 9-17, 23-27.

³⁰ Kershaw. *The Hitler Myth*. 200-225.

³¹ Ibid. 264-267.

³² In Deutschland interessiert sich fast niemand wirklich für die Filmgeschichte von 1933 bis 1945. Wenn Sie sich die Literatur zum NS-Film ansehen, können sie die wichtigsten Werke problemlos auf zwei nicht allzu breiten Regalbrettern unterbringen. Es wird vermutlich zu Goethe in einem Jahr mehr veröffentlicht, als jemals über den Film im Dritten Reich geschrieben wurde. Zu 90 Prozent der damals gedrehten Filme werden sie keinen seriösen zusammenhängenden Absatz finden. Das Thema will niemand anfassen, keine Institution und kein politischer Entscheidungsträger. Hanns-Georg Rodek, "Mit der Gründung der Bundesrepublik kommen eigentlich alle Nazis zurück," *welt.de, Die Welt*, February 1, 2020.

It is bleak assessment. If Jäger it is correct and current-day Germans have no interest in the subject of Nazi film, this has not always been true, and it certainly is not true of non-German scholars. Initially published in 1975, Erwin Leiser's *Nazi Cinema* is one of the earliest studies of film during the Third Reich. Though Leiser was not a historian himself (rather, he was a critic and later a filmmaker),³³ *Nazi Cinema* has served as the starting point for later scholarly works. The slim volume covers both famous propaganda films like *Triumph of the Will* and more mainstream movies, and while there are not enough pages for Leiser to go in-depth discussion on any one film, the breadth he covers is impressive. The commentary Leiser gives about these movies is sharply critical, and it is clear that he sees Nazi-made cinema as reactionary and a monstrous tool of propaganda.³⁴ An aspect of Nazi cinema which Leiser covers, and which other scholars have covered is the image of the leader. The literature included here should in no way be considered a comprehensive overview of works about Nazi films—they are simply some of the output of respected authors which have been frequently cited and have exerted an influence on the writing of this thesis.

The Dark Mirror, the title of Lutz Koepnick's 2002 book is taken from a 1946 film of the same name. In the movie *The Dark Mirror*, Olivia de Havilland plays two identical twins, one of whom has killed a man, but they refuse to tell the police which one is the murderer. When one of the twins falls in love with a psychiatrist assigned to examine them, the other becomes unhinged due to jealousy and psychotic.³⁵ In addition to providing the title for Koepnick's book, the

³³ Leiser may also be known for his documentary *Mein Kampf* (1960), a film which has a considerable amount of footage of Nazi atrocities.

³⁴ As an example of his occasional melodrama and heavy-handedness, Leiser named his final chapter "Götterdämmerung." Erwin Leiser. *Nazi Cinema*. New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1975.

³⁵ Lutz Koepnick. *The Dark Mirror*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002. 13-15.

movie also serves as an illustration of a part of his thesis: film production in Germany during the Third Reich is a distorted, dark reflection of Hollywood at the same time. An example offered in the book of this is in the form of the Nazi take on a classic American genre: the Western. In this case, the Western is *Der Kaiser von Kalifornien* (1936), a film starring, produced, written, and directed by Luis Trenker. The movie is a biopic of August Sutter on whose land the California Gold Rush started, and though it is Western, it adheres to a fairly standard *Führer* figure in the form of its fictionalized Sutter. In the film, Sutter is divinely chosen and given a vision that he should seek his fortune in America. He flees persecution in Sweden for the American West after printing subversive pamphlets which call for the unity of the Germans. Though in America, Sutter is still a creation of Nazi cinema and so behaves as one assisting his fellow Germans living amongst the epic vistas of the Southwest.³⁶ Koepnick sees Sutter as a hero for Germans living in America because he is resistant towards vice and non-Aryan influences.³⁷ Natural beauty, agriculture, and the wonders of modernity are lovingly displayed, but it is Sutter's charisma which is most astounding. His talent for connecting to people and leading them is the source of his success and the reason why he is able to tame nature.³⁸

In the introduction of her book, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema*, author Linda Schulte-Sasse recounts an attempt she made to conduct an informal interview about Nazi popular cinema. During an extended stay in Vienna, she would frequent a movie theater which specialized in old movies,³⁹ many of which were made in Nazi Germany, and she was amazed at the number of senior citizens who not only regularly attended showings

³⁶ Notably, the movie was filmed on location in Utah and California. The only other film shot in the United States during the Third Reich is *Der Verlorene Sohn* (*The Prodigal Son*) (1934) which was directed by and starred Luis Trenker as well. Sabine Hake. *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*. Austin. University of Texas Press, 2001. 142.

³⁷ Koepnick. *The Dark Mirror*. 115.

³⁸ Ibid. 119-120.

³⁹ She gives the name of the theater as well. Unfortunately, it is no longer open.

of films from the 30s and 40s but also interacted with them, reciting lines or singing. This prompted her to talk to an old man after one of these showings and ask him why he had interest in these films. Confused, the man responded in such a way that it was clear that he did not think that the movies he watched had any sort of ideological message at all. For him, experiences from the World Wars and the movies were two different things with no overlap. Schulte-Sasse's takeaway from this experience was that many of the movies made during the time of the Nazis were not popular because they appealed to fascists, but that they were popular because their appeal was broad.⁴⁰ Her critique is conducted in such a way that it places films within the general context of Nazi aesthetics, as torchbearers of specifically eighteenth-century German culture, and as reflections of audience desire. Nazi propaganda is not just artifice meant to excite the public, but it is something which the public also desires and, to some extent, what they find normal. The logic being that if there was not already a "need" for these types of films then they would not have been as successful or still viewed by people even decades later.⁴¹

Though she is aware that one could identify and discuss a varied group of archetypes fabricated for Nazi propaganda, Schulte-Sasse chooses to turn her attention to only two which she considers the most important: the Jew and the Genius. The figure of *the Jew*, the one to whom all anti-Semitic propaganda is directed is a parasite, vain, greedy, lascivious.⁴² The Genius (or the King or the Leader) is naturally more capable than his fellow man, and it is through his abilities that he is able to triumph, however, he often times has to be molded into his final form through hardship. Using psychoanalytic concepts and language influenced by Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, Schulte-Sasse frames the Frederick the Great seen in *Der große König* as a

⁴⁰ Linda Schulte-Sasse. *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

⁴¹ Schulte-Sasse. *Entertaining the Third Reich*. "Introduction."

⁴² Ibid. "Introduction."

modern-day manifestation of pre-modern thinking which thinks of the king as a quasi-supernatural figure with superhuman abilities.⁴³

1.3 Personal Approach to Third Reich Cinema

Historical fact serves as the foundation for my study of Nazi cinema. This is not to say that visual analysis has no place in this thesis, only that it must be considered alongside facts. It is through these two factors working hand in hand that a more complete understanding of Third Reich cinema is possible. Film is primarily a visual medium, and merely giving it historical context and quoting the script takes away its biggest strength, so some description is required. On the other hand, when facts are not properly examined, the concrete and verifiable reasons for certain things in Nazi films being the way they are is not understood. One may theorize that the eyes of Frederick the Great are emphasized in certain films because they are a representation of phallic power, but this idea ignores that there are multiple portraits of him which make it obvious that a defining physical feature of his were his large, blue eyes.⁴⁴ Similarly, the thought that Germans had a cultural and psychological desire to see the Genius be the hero of various films is proposed rather than the more banal explanation that actors were not allowed to portray Hitler, and so fictionalized depictions of him did not appear on screen.⁴⁵ Instead, leader figures all have the same features, and these features were all attributed to Hitler through various modes of Nazi propaganda. With these considerations, this quirk of Nazi propaganda makes sense.

A point of great importance in my thesis the understanding of Hitler which existed for the Nazi party. Although they would not necessarily have expressed it with deliberate reasoning, a

⁴³ Ibid. "Frederick, the Movie; or, The Return of the King's Body: *Fridericus* and *The Great King*."

⁴⁴ Ibid. "The Eyes as 'Windows of the Soul.'"

⁴⁵ O'Brien. *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment*. 7-11.

significant portion of Germans believed they knew, objectively, what Hitler's personality was, what his strengths were, and what his weaknesses were. Of course, this is not a blanket statement. It merely expresses a general trend. This opinion was reached both by studying primary sources and secondary literature, in particular, the work of Ian Kershaw and his concept of "working towards the *Führer*." The term comes from a speech from 1934 given by a Nazi bureaucrat in Prussia named Werner Willikens in which he said,

It is the duty of everybody to try to work towards the *Führer* along the lines he would wish. Anyone who makes mistakes will notice it soon enough. But anyone who really works towards the *Führer* along his lines and towards his goal will certainly both now and in the future, one day have the finest reward in the form of the sudden legal confirmation of his work.⁴⁶

The rise of the Nazi party cannot be attributed to Hitler alone. Economic factors, the general rise of totalitarian governments during the 1920s and 30s in Europe, the skepticism aimed towards the Weimar Republic which owed its creation to a revolution at the end of the First World War and the abdication of the Kaiser, and the humiliation Germany due to the Treaty of Versailles all contributed to the success of the Nazis.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, a significant chunk of Hitler's success and ability to lead was based upon his charisma and force of his personality, and this personality, though mostly fabricated, had distinct borders and understood set of rules.⁴⁸

As it relates to the perception the German people had of Hitler, the actual man matters little. There were some parts which were played up for the purposes of propaganda like the fact that he was an animal-lover, a teetotaler, and an apparent bachelor, but these specifics are only a small portion of a much larger picture and amount to not much more than trivia.⁴⁹ What is of far

⁴⁶ Werner Willikens in Ian Kershaw. "'Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship." *Contemporary European History*, 1993. 103–118.

⁴⁷ Richard J. Evans. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. New York City, NY, 2003.

⁴⁸ Kershaw. "Working Towards the Führer." 234.

⁴⁹ Hoffmann. *Hitler Wie Ihn Keiner Kennt.*; Koonz. 96-98.

greater importance are the much more broad characteristics already listed: adherence to the *Führerprinzip*, being in touch with the common people, being destined for leadership, and being surrounded by enemies and doubters. The four listed aspects are not overwhelmingly specific, but what makes them interesting is not only that they were constantly attributed to Hitler but that they can be viewed in all of the movies which will be gone over in this thesis and other movies which cover the same ground. Blunt propaganda films like *Hans Westmar* (1933) were often recut or banned, and he said that people did not wish to see Stormtroopers on the screen. What audiences wanted instead, he claimed, were fantasies in which National Socialist ideals could be conveyed. The desire was to release films so that twenty percent would be considered classically propagandistic, while the other eighty percent were lighter: comedies, dramas, musicals, romances, and adventure films.⁵⁰ More important than telling people what to think was the creation of norms and expected behaviors.⁵¹ This means that, in order to be successful propaganda, movies first had to succeed as movies.

Assuredly, the probability of a positive reception went up when audiences were given something to connect to, be it familiar actors, settings, or stories. Unlike some authors, however, I do not think that popular cinema in the Third Reich either intentionally or unintentionally upheld the banner of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Rather, they were tried to assert themselves as a continuation of German culture whereas the movies in the Weimar Republic were part of a rupture, much like the republic itself. In contrast to the Nazi party, a good portion of the public still had affection for Weimar movies, and so a degree of continuity exists between the two eras; movie stars and the star system still existed, and directors were still held above the rest of a crew.⁵²

⁵⁰ O'Brien. *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment*. 11.

⁵¹ Schulte-Sasse. *Entertaining the Third Reich*. "Introduction."

⁵² Koepnick. *The Dark Mirror*. 33.; Cinzia Romani, *Tainted Goddesses: Female Film Stars of the Third Reich*. UK: Spellmount Press, 1994. 2-3.; Welch. *Propaganda and the German Cinema*. 12.

These factors seem more important as influences on Nazi cinema than a psychoanalytic desire to be viewed or belief that certain narrative devices are inherently more “pleasurable.” Familiarity can provide a sense of comfort, and besides this, the Nazis often and merrily pilfered parts of German culture and twisted them to better serve them.⁵³ The fact that all of the movies are to be covered are either adaptations or are about historical events is not random, but it is something which is lockstep with the rest of Nazi messaging.

⁵³ The Nazi treatment of Christian holidays provides a good example of this tendency. The trappings and some themes were kept while they were turned into secular events which glorified Germany. See Hannes Kremer, “Neuwertung ‘überlieferter’ Brauchformen?”, in *Die neue Gemeinschaft* 3. 1937, 3005 a-c.; Wilhelm Beilstein, “Wie wir Weihnachten feiern,” *N.S.-Briefe*, December 1939, 327-328. in *Lichtfeier. Sinn. Geschichte, Brauch und Feier der deutschen Weihnacht*. Munich: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1939.

Chapter 2: Das Mädchen Johanna and Der Herrscher

2.1 *Das Mädchen Johanna*

In a review, English writer Graham Greene describes *Das Mädchen Johanna* (*Joan of Arc*) as “dull” yet “very noisy, rather like the Zoo at feeding-time.”⁵⁴ It is an extremely succinct and apt description of this movie which follows the life and deeds of Joan of Arc (Angela Salloker) from the Siege of Orleans until her betrayal and death at the stake. Immediately after the beginning credits, the audience is placed suddenly in a smokey tent on a battlefield with Lord Talbot (Erich Ponto) and the Duke of Burgundy (Heinrich George) as the pair argue with each other. Burgundy suddenly yells “Traitor!” and stabs one of Talbot’s men to death through the tent fabric. The two men then haggle as Burgundy offers to compensate Talbot for killing his soldier. This loud, baffling scene perfectly sets the tone for the rest of the movie. *Das Mädchen Johanna* is an absolutely bizarre work. The movie, however, is not bizarre in the same way that more aggressive pieces of Nazi propaganda are bizarre, where the strangeness comes from the movie assuming that the audience has a certain worldview which a modern viewer is unlikely to share. No, *Das Mädchen Johanna*’s failure comes from the fact that it is poorly made, suffering from bad pacing, confusing editing, and incompetent directing. The movie is, however, nonetheless of some interest beyond the morbid curiosity one experiences when viewing an utter train wreck. It is one of the few movies which can claim to have a woman as its Hitler stand-in.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Graham Greene. “Joan of Arc/Turn of the Tide/Top Hat/She.” In *the Pleasure-Dome: Graham Greene, the Collected Film Criticism, 1935-40*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1980. 29.

⁵⁵ For another notable examples of a female leader see G.W Pabst. *Komödianten*. Bavaria Film, 1941.

2.2 A Tale of Two Rulers

For a movie about Joan of Arc, the title character spends relatively little time on-screen, and she has her first scene only about twenty-five minutes into to this less than ninety-minute feature. Instead, it is King Charles VII (Gustaf Gründgens) who the audience is introduced to first and who serves nearly as a co-protagonist. A German audience at the time would be most familiar with Gründgens from his role as *Der Schränker* (the Safecracker), the criminal who presided over the kangaroo court in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931).⁵⁶ In *Das Mädchen Johanna*, Gründgens is again cast as a morally ambiguous, Machiavellian-type character in the form of King Charles VII. The character is introduced as he sits in a darkened chamber in Orleans. Clad not in armor but in all black, he is self-pitying and paranoid, believing himself to be at the end of his rope as both the English and his scheming nobles seek to unseat him. He elects to flee the city in order to save himself even if it means leaving the ragged French army at the mercy of his opponents. While this decision is done partly out of self-preservation, Charles also knows that he can rebuild the army if he escapes, living to fight another day.

His plan backfires when he is dragged out of his litter and nearly beaten to death by a mob of peasants who believe him to be a different noble accused of being a traitor. Church bells suddenly ring out, and in awe, the throng of people cross themselves and fall to their knees before they are able to murder their king. Here marks Joan's first appearance. Though dressed in armor, she is clearly a beautiful young woman, and the music swells as there is a soft-focus close-up on her face. Seemingly oblivious of the chaotic

⁵⁶ Gründgens also had a prominent stage career and returned multiple times to play Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*. A book and later film (both entitled *Mephisto*) are loosely based of his life. Rolf Giesen. *Nazi Propaganda Films: A History and Filmography*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2003. 241-242.

scene onto which she was entered, she recounts how she was given a message by the Archangel Michael to find the king of France and rout the English. In a desperate bid to save himself, Charles seizes upon her words and announces to the crowd that she is sent from god and is now coming with him.

The disparity between Charles and Joan is immediately evident in their first short encounter. Every action is performed with disarming sincerity, and she truly believes in god and her mission. She addresses Charles as “All-Christian Majesty, King of France,” and reacts with shock when he bows to her, insisting that she is not worthy. In contrast, Charles sees Joan first and foremost as a tool. When he emerges from his litter, he is stunned to observe that the angry mob is now pacified and wonders aloud to his half-brother if the people really would have killed him.⁵⁷ He realizes that it was Joan who caused the crowd to calm down, and switches from using the informal, more general word *Leute* to calling the people *Volk*, a more specific word which refers to the people of a nation or ethnic group. *Volk* is easily one of the Nazi’s favorite and most overused word, though its popularity predated the Third Reich, and even in *Mein Kampf* Hitler opined that the term was worn-out.⁵⁸ Regardless, usage of *Volk*, *völkisch*, and *Volkgemeinschaft* (people’s community) pervaded the vocabulary of Nazi propagandists.⁵⁹ Here, Charles perverts the word to better manipulate his people and Joan, and, in the same breath, commits casual blasphemy as he compares himself to god.

⁵⁷ The editing here is confused. Charles goes from being snatched from safety by the mob to being back into the litter, apparently unmolested.

⁵⁸ Christopher Hutton. *Race and the Third Reich: Linguistics, Racial Anthropology and Genetics in the Dialectic of Volk*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005. 19, 210.

⁵⁹ Hutton. 149.

It should be noted that the relationship the Nazis had with religion and Christianity, more specifically, was complicated.⁶⁰ Certain leaders like Alfred Rosenberg were Christians and were proponents of the integration of Christianity into the party morality and rhetoric.⁶¹ The Nazis, at least in their early years from 1919-1924 adopted “positive Christianity.” Positive Christianity was the integration of religion and the ideology of the Nazi party which rejected the “Jewish” aspects of the Bible like the Old Testament and the assertion that Jesus was Jewish and stressed the importance of ethnic nationalism and the banishment of foreign elements in religion and the state.⁶² To those who followed positive Christianity, Christianity would guide the morals of Nazism without regard to denomination. The absolute most important belief of positive Christianity was the belief that Adolf Hitler would be the one to modify Christianity into something better, and so his word was to be obeyed without question. The opposite of positive Christianity, according to Rosenberg, was, obviously, negative Christianity which he claimed was responsible for disharmony between Catholics and Protestants. Upon Hitler being made chancellor of Germany in 1933, positive Christianity became the official doctrine of the German Evangelical Church, essentially creating a state-based religion.⁶³

Others like Joseph Goebbels were virulently anti-Catholic, though Hitler himself could perhaps be best labeled as an agnostic, more taken with the concept of Fate than with God.⁶⁴ However singular Nazis viewed belief and Christianity is a bit beside the point as the

⁶⁰ Laurence Rees. *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*. London: Ebury Press, 2012. 135.

⁶¹ Rees. *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*. 135.

⁶² Shirer. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1960. 238-239.

⁶³ Ibid. 239.

⁶⁴ See Roger Griffin “Fascism's relation to religion” in *Blamires, Cyprian, World fascism: a historical encyclopedia, Volume 1*, 2006.; William L. Shirer. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1960.; George Lachmann Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.

existence of both the Protestant and Catholic churches mostly acted as an obstacle to the Nazis controlling all aspects of life in Germany. The various ways in which the Nazis tried to diminish the power of Christianity is known as the *Kirchenkampf* (church struggle) and includes the battle for control of Protestantism in Germany between the German Christian movement and the Confessing Church, the abolishing of Catholic youth organizations, the imprisonment of clergy, and the removal of crucifixes from Catholic schools.⁶⁵ In light of the years long *Kirchenkampf*, the existence of *Das Mädchen Johanna* does make some sense. In the 1930s, 54% of Germany was Protestant, 40% were Catholic, 3.5% said they believed in a god, and 1.5% were atheists.⁶⁶ Seeing the large percentage of Christians in Germany, it is understandable that the Nazis would want to integrate them more thoroughly into the Nazi way of thinking. The movie's essential function is to merge Catholicism and Nazism in a way which appeals to a mass-audience. St. Joan is given aspects shared with the *Führer* but allowed to keep the basic outline of her story, enough to be recognizable at least.⁶⁷ However, god takes a backseat in this film—an odd choice considering its subject matter.

Religion's primary role is to highlight the hypocrisy of the movie's villains. Antagonists are quick to spew out a string of profanities while at the same time claiming that what they are doing is god's will. Supposed heretics are burned or spared in order to cultivate the good image of the nobility. The Duke of Burgundy tells a priest to burn English rather than French subjects because having so many heretics is making them look bad. He

⁶⁵ Doris L. Bergen. *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*. NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. 12.

⁶⁶ Richard J. Evans. *The Third Reich at War*. New York: Penguin Press, 2009. 546.

⁶⁷ While this is the first purely German movie which tackles the story of Joan of Arc, the earlier *La Merveilleuse Vie de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Marvelous Life of Joan of Arc*) (1928) was a French-German co-production. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Oxford History of World Cinema*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 1996. 207.

only acquiesces when he is told that the people being burned were condemned to death because they spoke out against the war. Conversely, the truly pious are treated with immense disrespect. Joan herself is laughed at when she attempts to rally the drunken nobility into battle following the coronation of King Charles. She stands, blank-faced and shocked as her silver suit of armor is pelted with food and wine by the nobles whom she had thought were just as loyal to god and France as she is. It is indeed the commoners who are authentically devoted to her. They are the ones who first spread her legend, claiming that they could see a halo around her head during the Siege of Orleans and that she was protected from the eyes of the English soldiers by a fog which appeared out of nowhere. In an unwavering, pure voice, Joan repeatedly asserts that she is one of the people and that her authority comes from god and the archangel Michael. Maillezais (René Deltgen) proclaims that Joan is “a child of the people.”⁶⁸

There are a few times in the film when Joan reflects upon her modest upbringing. Her goal of gaining peace for France is done, in part, because she wishes to return to her home and see her family again. She mourns the fact that her hands are clumsy from gripping her horse’s reins and that she can no longer engage in the delicate work of making flower crowns. The loss of her former life, however, does nothing to change either her unwavering dedication to the people of France or to god—it merely colors her actions. When King Charles jests that she is vain because she keeps examining her reflection during a feast, she responds back that she is just admiring her crown of flowers, saying that, in her village, if the flowers remain healthy all day on St. Johannis Day, then the girl wearing them

⁶⁸ Gustav Ucicky. *Das Mädchen Johanna*. Online Video. UFA, 1935.
<https://archive.org/details/dasmadchenjohannaquotthegirljohannaquot1935>.

will be married within a year, but if the flowers wilt, then death is sure to come soon. She lets out a cry of terror upon seeing that the flower crown is indeed wilting. He takes the crown away in an attempt to calm her, but Joan is a believer in signs and remains worried. The incident with the flowers provides an illustration of the differences between Joan and King Charles. The former, who has gained her position through the will of the people, is tied to them, and embodies all their features, even the less rational aspects. On the other hand, Charles is a creature of privilege, restraint, and coolness who is apt to ignore omens even if they are correct.

Ultimately, it is because of King Charles that Joan meets her end. He refuses to save her when she is accused of witchcraft, believing that she is better as a dead martyr than as a living potential liability for whom his closest advisors have only suspicion. Charles does not stop in his efforts to cement his power by just leaving Joan to die; he also has a capricious noble called La Trémouille (Willy Birgel) killed. Both of these moves are decidedly cold-blooded, but the film does not portray them as unequivocally evil. Clearly, the viewer is supposed to be moved by Joan's pleas to be saved and her later acceptance of her fate when she is led to the scaffold. Plus, King Charles appears to not quite be in his right mind and makes repeated avowals of the correctness of his choices which come across as desperate self-justification. Though probably not intended as an intentional parallel, with his mercenary actions, Charles behaves similar to how Hitler did during the Night of the Long Knives.⁶⁹ Though the morality of Charles's plotting is left somewhat ambiguous, a flashforward shows France victorious, and he is still on the throne. However, a concession is made by ending the movie with Joan being posthumously reprieved of the

⁶⁹ Koontz. *The Nazi Conscience*. 94-98.

accusations of heresy, and history is ultimately kind to her. Perhaps this conclusion is meant to instill a sense of peace in the audience and leave them with the assurance that good people are eventually get their reward even if they are not around to see it. In practice, it is more of an inadequate indulgence, the cinematic equivalent of throwing a grape to a starving man.

2.3 *Der Herrscher*

Der Herrscher released in 1937, is an adaptation of the play *Vor Sonnenuntergang* (*Before Sunset*) by the German novelist and playwright, Gerhart Hauptmann, although it is also heavily influenced by the novel, *Der Herrscher* by Harald Bratt.⁷⁰ The film begins with a priest giving a eulogy for the recently deceased wife of Matthias Clausen (Emil Jannings), the founder of a large and prosperous munitions firm in the Ruhr. The death of his wife has caused him to sink into a depression and take a break from his work. When he comes back from his hiatus, Clausen's business associates, his bickering children, and their spouses become concerned that he is losing his ability to run his business or take care of himself because of his age and grief. When Clausen falls in love with a much younger woman, his secretary, Inken Peters (Marianne Hoppe) his family unites in trying to get rid of the girl. They are convinced that their father has lost his mind and is being manipulated by Inken who they believe is nothing more than a gold-digger. In order to drive Inken away, Clausen's family engages in attempted bribery and intimidation. Eventually, Clausen's children threaten to have him committed to an insane asylum and relieve him of his business—this is what causes Clausen to cast away his family and for Inken to give up any

⁷⁰ Veit Harlan. *Der Herrscher*. Tobis Filmkunst, 1937.

hope for a romantic relationship with him. By the end of the film, Clausen is once again the sovereign of his factory, though getting there has cost him much. In his darkened office, he calls for a secretary for the dictation of his will. When the secretary turns on a light, it is revealed to be Inken, although Clausen does not realize that it is her until he finally looks in her direction and notices her ring. He pauses, clearly wanting to say something, but Inken, with tears in her eyes, tells him to go on with his dictation. With revived conviction, Clausen finishes by saying that he will give his factory to one of his workers with exceptional talents and not his ungrateful children.

Der Herrscher's script was co-written by the infamous screenwriter Thea von Harbou. Von Harbou was the ex-wife of director Fritz Lang and had a hand in writing all of his Weimar-era movies including *Die Nibelungen* (1924), *Metropolis* (1927), and *M* (1931).⁷¹ Lang, who was half-Jewish, fled only a few months after the Nazis took power, but von Harbou elected to stay and went on to be credited with writing twenty-six films during the Third Reich and undoubtedly assisted in writing many more.⁷² Von Harbou is a sentimental, romantic writer, and her influence can be seen in *Der Herrscher*. The outline of Hauptmann's play is retained for the film, and most of the important plot points remain the same. Whether necessitated by the film's shorter running-time or due to a general lack of subtlety in the script, the characters are drawn a bit more broadly and behave more as stereotypes than their play counterparts. Motivations and backstories are dropped for the movie or half-way jammed into the plot.⁷³

⁷¹ Todd Herzog. "M." In *Weimar Cinema*. Columbia University Press, 2009. 308-309.

⁷² Herzog. 309.

⁷³ As an example of this, in *Vor Sonnenuntergang*, part of the reason why the Clausen children do not want Inken to be with their father is because her father was accused of burning down his own property in order to collect insurance. Rather than go to prison, he killed himself. Though it turns out her father was innocent, Inken is thought

Perhaps the most striking deviation the movie makes from its source material is in the form of its main character, Clausen. Gone is the unassuming privy-consular and art-lover from Hauptmann's play. He is replaced by an iron-willed man of industry whose every word is a command to be obeyed by subordinates and children. Although some of this change is surely due to the film's script, Jannings does much to make Clausen his own. With a film career which started in 1914, an Academy Award, and international acclaim, Emil Jannings was certainly a known quantity within the German film industry, and the Nazi seizure of power did nothing to hurt his fame.⁷⁴ Starting with his role as Friedrich Wilhelm I in the 1935 film *Der alte und der junge König*, Jannings was typecast as a strong authority figure throughout the Nazi-era. Additionally, Jannings was made a member of Tobis's film board in 1936, and in 1938, he was made the board's director.⁷⁵ He was very much a part of the Nazi film system, being named as *Staatschauspieler* (Artist of the State), and whatever acclaim was afforded to him prior to 1933, it was irrevocably blighted by the end of the Second World War.⁷⁶

2.4 Unbound and Alone

Jannings's considerable mass and deep, commanding voice give his Clausen a natural clout. His large movements and highly physical performance (seemingly holdovers

of as the daughter of a criminal by the Clausen family. This is not included in the film, although Inken still gets postcards accusing her of being a thief.

⁷⁴ Giesen. *Nazi Propaganda Films*. 246.

⁷⁵ Contrast this to perhaps Jannings's most famous Weimar-era role as the tyrannical and hypocritical Professor Immanuel Rath in *Der Blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*) (1930).

⁷⁶ Welch. *Propaganda and the German Cinema*. 117.

from his stage career) guarantee that he dominates every scene that he is in. However, Jannings's overwhelming presence can, at points, be to the film's detriment. Being an adaption of a play, the *Der Herrscher* sticks to only a handful of locations and rarely ventures out-of-doors, so that Jannings stocks around every square-inch of the sets which begin to feel akin to a cage. The scenes in which the camera moves outside are, to use a cliché, a breath of fresh air. No longer constrained by his stuffy house, Clausen stands amongst the ruins of Pompeii while on vacation with Inken. Though he knows it sounds a bit odd, he expresses a desire to return back to Germany. Idleness makes him restless, and he feels most at peace when he has something to do and is working—the factory is his natural environment. Pompeii is a distraction, a dead place which had its time. Clausen's home is at his munitions works which is alive with production and the promise of security for his workers. Twice in the film, he walks around massive machinery, spouting flames and sparks. Although the equipment is so dangerous and so much larger than him, he cannot be seen as small or weak, because he is the one who controls it. In such a chaotic environment, he is master, and as he walks silently around the machinery, he is tranquil.

The insertion of scenes with Clausen around his factory are a significant reason why the transfiguration of the bourgeois tragedy of the play to the more streamlined tale of self-reliance of the movie is surprisingly smooth. *Der Herrscher* was directed by Veit Harlan who also went on to directed some of the most infamous works of propaganda in the Third Reich including *Jud Süß*, *Der große König* (covered in the next chapter), and *Kolberg* (1945).⁷⁷ Across the movies which he directed, Harlan shows a preference for static shots and uninteresting, workman-like framing in scenes with heavy dialogue. What Harlan does

⁷⁷ Harlan was also an actor and had a minor role in the other film in this chapter, *Das Mädchen Johanna*.

seem to like (and what he is best at) is filming spectacle. The scenes featuring dramatic landscapes like that of Pompeii, the striking architecture of Clausen's factory, and the masses of extras have the most interesting visuals. In comparison, the scenes which have nothing but long stretches of characters talking to each other feel like they were included out of obligation to the source material and, as a result, drag endlessly.⁷⁸ Like Clausen, Harlan is more suited for action.

In *Vor Sonnenuntergang*, Clausen is driven to suicide when he has to choose between the love he feels for Inken and the pressures exerted by his family, but in *Der Herrscher*, though it is emotional torment, he ultimately abandons his relationships in order to ensure that his workers and the business which he worked so hard to see succeed are protected. His children are nothing but disappointments: his daughter Bettina is neurotic and a spinster, his other daughter, Ottilie, is married to an incompetent boor who is miserable at running the business and only interested in enriching himself at the expense of the factory's workers, Egert, the youngest son, is perpetually flippant, and the eldest son, Wolfgang, has been corrupted by his time at university and wears the beard and glasses of a stereotypical intellectual and is married to a suspicious money-grubber. Not a single one of them deserves to inherit Clausen Works. From a small forge, Clausen has worked forty-years to build up to a factory which employs twenty-thousand people. He is patient, and he is in possession of incredible prescience. When Clausen finds out that his son-in-law, Klamroth, cut the funding to the R&D department while he was in mourning, he lambastes him for his lack of forethought. Does he not realize why his father-in-law has put so much

⁷⁸ Schulte-Sasse calls similar scenes in *Der große König* "tedious" and "talky." Schulte-Sasse. *Entertaining the Third Reich*. "Narrative Space and Misogyny."

effort into research? While there are currently no results, they are expected to create a substance which will free them from dependence on foreign countries and allow Germany to be self-sustaining. Furthermore, Clausen Works is highly profitable, and it should not be crippled in service of short-term greed. Though one board member offers his weak justification for going along with Klamroth, the other men meekly keep their heads down.⁷⁹

Clausen behaves as few successful capitalists do. He has a deep affection for the people who work at his factory, and with every action he takes, he considers their wellbeing as well. In the same scene with Klamroth and the board, he affirms that the success of the factory means the success of the workers and that increased profits translates to increased wages, not just higher bonuses for those at the very top. He explicitly uses that familiar word *Volksgemeinschaft* to describe what he wishes to create for his workers, knowing that he is in charge not only of their welfare but the welfare of their families, and he takes this responsibility extremely seriously. The parallels between Hitler and Clausen are blunt and impossible to miss here. It is also not even the most ham-fisted attempt at allegorical language in the movie. The mayor gives a speech (in a heavy Ruhr accent) marking the anniversary of the founding of Clausen works and conveying honorary citizenship on Clausen. When he hands him a diorama of his original blacksmith shop, he claims that Clausen is connected to his workers because he was once a worker. The fact that Clausen attained his position after working so long in physical labor at a forge means that he is able to be fully appreciative of the wealth and power he now has. The mayor heaps on even more praise and calls him a *Führer* and *Vorbild* (idol) without whom

⁷⁹ Somewhat mysteriously, both David Welch and Erwin Leiser describe Clausen as giving this speech under a portrait of Hitler. Though I admit that the image quality of my copy of *Der Herrscher* is a bit poor, the portrait is clearly of Clausen himself.

the factory would never have been so successful. The view of the crowd cheering and waving bring to mind comparable shots from the films of Leni Riefenstahl and newsreels showing Hitler giving speeches and tie the fictional and real-life *Führer* closer together. Clausen states that he wants a worker from either his laboratory or from the factory floor to succeed him. This successor will be imbued with genius and an inborn ability to lead, and through his natural superiority, he will build upon past triumphs and usher in a bright future. Like the metal that is smelted and being forced into shape, Clausen too has been subject to immense stress yet has managed to find himself on the other side of struggles and hard as steel.⁸⁰ Perhaps this was an inspiring notion at the time, but a modern audience member will look back and note that in 1937 when *Der Herrscher* was released, Germany would see less than two years of peace before the outbreak of World War II. Romantic ideas about hardships would soon become reality, and that romance would vanish. The figure of the omniscient and wise leader would be transformed from a man who built up his people in peace to that of an astute tactician burdened with responsibility.

⁸⁰ Instead of using just visuals to get the metaphor across, Clausen is given dialogue in which explicitly explains it.

Chapter 3: Twenty Years of Frederick the Great on Film: 1922-1942

3.1 Frederick the Great's Third Reich Connections

It is well-known that Hitler engaged in longtime hero-worship with Frederick the Great. In *Mein Kampf*, he lists the Prussian king alongside Martin Luther and Richard Wagner as the greatest reformers of all time.⁸¹ Goebbels wrote in his diary that he would read aloud from biography of Frederick the Great in order to lift Hitler's spirits near the end of the war.⁸² Before he became chancellor, a painting of the monarch was hung on the wall in the *Führer* headquarters in Munich, another portrait was in the Reich Chancellery, and one was in the bunker in which he spent the last few weeks of his life.⁸³ Late in the war, when things were looking exceedingly dark for Germany, he compared his current situation to Frederick in the Seven Years War, and the success of the V2 rockets would mark a turning point as the death of Tsarina Elizabeth had in 1762—he again claimed this belief following the death of President Roosevelt.⁸⁴ However, Hitler was far from the only one in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century who held “Old Fritz” in high regard. Movies about the life of Frederick the Great started to be made in 1920, a full thirteen years before Hitler came to power, and the Third Reich only continued in the tradition of these Fridericus films rather than starting the trend itself. From the first Fridericus movie in 1922 until the last at the end of the Nazi era, forty-four films about the Prussian state were made and many concerned Frederick the Great. Out of these forty-four Prussian movies,

⁸¹ Adolf Hitler *Mein Kampf*. Germany: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1925. “The beginning of my political activity.”

⁸² Joseph Goebbels. *The Final Entries 1945: The Diaries of Joseph Goebbels*. New York City, NY: Putnam, 1978. 780-781.

⁸³ Longerich. *Hitler*. 489-490.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 910, 943.

German actor Otto Gebühr played Frederick the Great in sixteen of them, acting throughout the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich.⁸⁵

The first movie in which Gebühr played Frederick was in *Die Tänzerin Barberina* (*The Dancer Barberina*) (1920), though it is really in the following film in which he played the same role that the genre of Fridericus films took off. 1921-1923 saw the release of an epic, four-part movie about the life of Frederick the Great and helmed by the Hungarian director Arzén von Cserépy. Collectively, the four parts are titled *Fridericus Rex*. The first part, *Sturm und Drang* (*Storm and Stress*) concerns Frederick's late teens under the tyrannical rule of his father, King Friedrich Wilhelm known as "the Soldier King" (Albert Steinrück) and his attempts to rebel. The climax of the movie happens when prince Frederick and his friend, Lieutenant Katte (Friedrich Wilhelm Kaiser) try and fail to flee to England. The pair are captured and imprisoned in Küstrin fortress. The second part, *Vater und Sohn* (*Father and Son*),⁸⁶ picks up immediately after the first part, and starts with Frederick in his prison cell. He is saved from a death sentence, but Katte is not so lucky. Frederick is forced to look out the window of his cell and witness Katte's execution. The prince's spirit is now broken, and he submits to his father's wishes, even marrying Elisabeth-Christine von Braunschweig-Bevern (Erna Morena), a woman who he does not care for. This second part ends with the death of Friedrich Wilhelm and Frederick becoming the king of Prussia. Part three, *Sanssouci*, named after the palace Frederick built in Potsdam, is rather plotless and is mostly just a series of scenes which show Frederick's

⁸⁵ Schulte-Sasse. *Entertaining the Third Reich*. "Frederick as the inversion the 'Jew'"

⁸⁶ The name of this part is, of course, a reference to the German literary movement *Sturm und Drang* which was popular from the mid to late eighteenth century. It emphasizes emotional language and rebellion against older generations and institutions. Apropos considering the content of this part.

interest in art, theater, music, and literature and his hobnobbing with people like Voltaire (Robert Sortsch-Pla) and the ballerina Barberina (Maria Orska). The fourth and final part, *Schicksalswende* (*Twist of Fate*) concerns Frederick during wartime, specifically, it takes place prior to the Battle of Leuthen in 1757. The Prussian king is overwhelmed with his worsening tactical situation, the death of his sister Wilhelmine, and the near mutiny of some of his soldiers. However, he is able to pull himself out of his despair and lead his army to victory in the subsequent battle. This part, and thus this series of films, ends with Frederick sitting by himself, tired, drawn, and contemplative though victorious.

Two of the biggest German publications on film, *Lichtbild-Bühne* and *Film-Kurier*, were, for the most part, highly positive about the films, especially the first two parts and Gebühr's performance as the Prussian king.⁸⁷ Despite their popularity, the Fridericus movies were not without their controversies, at least during the Weimar era.⁸⁸ Frederick the Great was, for some, more than just an eighteenth-century king—he represented Prussian (and by extension, German) greatness, and this greatness could only be properly achieved through the use of arms. It can be understood quite easily why Germans, only a few years after the end of the First World War, would be skeptical about a film romanticizing the life and rule of an undeniable war hawk. A 1922 review of the first two parts in the *New York Times* is extraordinarily scathing towards these movies. The author of the review sees them as blatant propaganda which idolize the military culture of Prussia. He finds the behavior of Friedrich Wilhelm and Frederick to be barbaric and thinks that it

⁸⁷ *Lichtbild-Bühne*. Nr. 43, 22. October 1921.; *Lichtbild-Bühne*. Nr. 6, 4. February 1922.; *Film-Kurier*. Nr. 27, 31. January 1922.; *Film-Kurier*. Nr. 67, 20. March 1923.

⁸⁸ Schulte-Sasse. *Entertaining the Third Reich*. "Frederick, the Movie; or, The Return of the King's Body: *Fridericus* and *The Great King*"

could only appeal to certain Germans.⁸⁹ Criticism of the Weimar era Fridericus movies did not end when the Nazis came to power. In his well-known examination of Weimar cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler*, Siegfried Kracauer dedicates part of a chapter to the Frederick the Great films. To Kracauer, these films were part of a larger inclination of the German movie-going public to be controlled by a firm and steady autocrat.⁹⁰ Such a desire existed on an unconscious level and was expressed through analogy and fictitious depictions of historical figures like Frederick the Great. Whether or not Kracauer's attempts at mass-psychoanalysis are correct is beside the point. What matters is that Frederick the Great was perceived as retaining a certain hold on the imagination of Germans even before Goebbels and his colleagues put their own movies about the Prussian king into production.

3.2 *Der alte und der junge König*

Der alte und der junge König (*The Old and the Young King*) (1935) is the first of the Fridericus movies made during the Third Reich.⁹¹ Notably, it is also one of the movies about Frederick the Great which does not have Otto Gebühr playing the Prussian King. Instead, Werner Hinz plays Frederick as a young man. Emil Jannings, one of the big stars of German cinema, plays his father, Friedrich Wilhelm. The movie starts with Frederick Wilhelm, his wife, and his younger children sitting down for breakfast. The family is cohesive and obeys their patriarch. The only person missing is crown prince Frederick. This is the first of many

⁸⁹ A.M. Emperle "Movie Unmasking of Fridericus Rex." *New York Times*. June 25, 1922.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1922/06/25/archives/movie-unmasking-of-fridericus-rex.html>

⁹⁰ Siegfried Kracauer. *From Caligari to Hitler*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947. 115-120.

⁹¹ *Der alte und der junge König*, however, is not the first Fridericus movie released during the Third Reich as *Der Choral von Leuthen* (1933) was put into theaters four days after Hitler became chancellor of Germany. Leiser. *Nazi Cinema*. 112.

scenes in which Frederick disappoints his father, and much of the first half of the movie is incidents in which the two get into rows. Friedrich Wilhelm becomes increasingly frayed and short-fused with his son, calling him names over his large gambling debts, throwing his son's books of French literature, and going into a screaming tirade when he discovers that he had been playing the flute. Fed up with his poor treatment, Frederick attempts to flee to England with the help of Lieutenant Katte (Claus Clausen), but the two are apprehended and confined in a fortress. Katte is executed while Frederick watches. With the death of his friend, prince Frederick submits to his father's authority and surrenders to learning his duties as the future king of Prussia. The relationship between father and son is cold and impersonal for years. Frederick's tone with his father never rises above icy politeness, and the two only reconcile when Friedrich Wilhelm is near death. Frederick races to his father's side when he hears of his father's steeply declining health and is present for his death. Before Friedrich Wilhelm dies, he tells his son to "Make Prussia great!" The final shot of the movie is a close up of Frederick as the now king of Prussia, his expression firm and eyes wide.

3.3 Rebellion of the Son

The title, *Der alte und der junge König*, sets the expectation that a certain degree in equity will be employed when portraying its subjects, but this expectation is not met. To the contrary, Jannings's Frederick Wilhelm is decidedly the focus of the movie. In part, the reason for the disparity between the impression given by the father and son characters has to do with Jannings's performance. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Jannings can be described as a "ham" with his acting, and as he did with the character Clausen from

Der Herrscher, he throws himself around the sets and shouts a good number of his lines. Though it is his first major film role, Werner Hinz as prince Frederick tries to keep up with Jannings, but he is outmatched in their every interaction.⁹² While they are about the same height, Jannings is much heavier than Hinz, and his size adds to his larger-than-life performance. When Hinz shouts, Jannings shouts louder, and the younger actor's voice lacks the power and the deep timbre to overcome the elder's sturdiness.

More important than the acting choices in creating a sense of disparity between the "old" and the "young" is the script. Friedrich Wilhelm is shown to be somewhat eccentric, but he is also in the right whenever there is a difference of opinions. He is strict, and when he succumbs to anger, he is justified. Unlike his father, Frederick is clearly wrong with every decision he makes, and every initiative he takes is explicitly incorrect. When he argues with his father, his complaints are self-centered and short-sighted. He lies to his father, collects gambling debts, is contemptuous of Prussian history, and engages in unmanly behavior like dressing in French fashion and playing music with Wilhelmine. In the scene where Friedrich Wilhelm storms into his son's room where he is playing the flute, he bellows angrily at the prince for wasting his time on frivolities instead of studying. At first, Frederick stands in a defensive posture in front of his sister, and when she is escorted to her room, he maintains his obstinate stance, but his tough façade crumbles when his father starts tearing up his music. Frederick shrieks when his books are thrown into the fireplace, and briefly wrestles with his father over his flute, but he is flung back against the wall. He shrinks, head down and hands over his mouth, as his father harangues him. The prince manages to get out one barb when he insults the Prussian uniform, stomping his

⁹² In 1941's *Ohm Krüger*, Hinz once again plays Jannings's disappointing son in a historical drama.

foot like toddler throwing a tantrum. As a retort, Friedrich Wilhelm knocks him to the floor with a blow from his cane. Not once during the scene does Frederick seem like an adult with serious grievances, only a spoiled, whining child who is in desperate need of discipline.

It is emphasized that Friedrich Wilhelm's actions are justified because there are always people who are conniving, and a subpar king will be taken advantage of. If he is not a tactician, he will be conquered, if he is not observant, he will be robbed, and if he is not a diplomat, he will be betrayed. Friedrich Wilhelm knows that as the leader of a small state surrounded by larger players who wish to push them around, both father and son are required to have a significant degree of tact and even suspicion towards other nobles and potential schemers. Friedrich Wilhelm proves to be a master at understanding people. In a plot cul-de-sac involving Frederick Wilhelm getting to know his future son in law, the Margrave of Bayreuth (Georg Alexander), the king of Prussia invites him to drink with his friends. The son in law is already at a disadvantage because of him mistaking his future father-in-law for a servant and because Friedrich Wilhelm has let his negative view of his dandy-like attention to fashion be known. To his credit, the margrave does attempt to better fit in with the Prussians, and he swaps his periwig and frilly coat for clothing which is more befitting a soldier. He even salutes Friedrich Wilhelm the next time he sees him. Additionally, in order to keep alert during the party, the margrave pretends to drink, but in reality, he swaps his beer stein for an empty one. When asked by Friedrich Wilhelm his opinions about Prussia and her king, the margrave, fake slurring, first offers compliments, but these soon turn into harsh criticisms. The king leaves in huff, not angry at being

insulted, rather he is upset that his future son in law has to pretend to be drunk in order to tell him the truth.

In contrast to his father, Frederick has little depth. Worse, he is unregulated. Friedrich Wilhelm demands honesty, but Frederick is incapable of being honest as all of his passions are hated by his father, and the son is not even very good at obfuscation either. Although one may debate about the efficacy of such a tactic against the shrewd Prussian king. Because he lacks the strength of his father, Frederick is propped up by his friends and family, and their attempts to help him are always for the worse. Wilhelmine plays music with her brother although she knows that it will upset her father, leading to the most extreme argument in the film. Katte, despite his best intentions and clear ability as a soldier, assists in Frederick's escape attempt and pays for his loyalty with his life. In this way, Wilhelmine and Katte act, in a sense, as antagonists. Though inadvertent, their actions only make Frederick's life and personal development worse. Interestingly, both *Der alte und der junge König* and the silent-era Fridericus films invent a romantic relationship between Wilhelmine and Katte. Playing with history in such way adds more of an emotional blow when Katte eventually meets his fate, but it also ties the pair more closely to Frederick. They work to keep each other's secrets and shield each other from the reality in which Frederick has to eventually grow up and be king, and Wilhelmine has to marry someone who more closely matches her in station. In the cases of all three characters, it is the Soldier King, Friedrich Wilhelm, who forces them back into cruel reality. Even though his father's methods are painful, they are necessary. After all, Frederick is able to put his relationships and interests into perspective and realized that they are not as important as being a good ruler.

Kracauer wrote that he saw the early 1920s Fridericus films as promoting surrendering to authority, but they are far more sympathetic to the rebelling Frederick and far more critical of Friedrich Wilhelm than *Der alte und der junge König* is. If there are times in the 1936 film when Friedrich Wilhelm loses his temper, it is because he has been pushed to that point, and the only reason he demands so much from his son is because he wants to leave Prussia in safe hands after he dies. If he were to be too gentle, Frederick would not make a good king. In *Sturm und Drang* and *Vater und Sohn*, Friedrich Wilhelm is harsh and dictatorial. There is a scene in *Sturm und Drang* which is nearly recreated for *Der alte und der junge König*, in which he has drinks beer with his retinue and is jocular with his future son in law. In the later film, the margrave is made to sit in a chair with a false seat and falls to the floor when he attempts to sit down. It is a minor prank which does nothing more than hurt the margrave's pride. The silent film has Friedrich Wilhelm and his entourage force the margrave to wear a bear skin, and the king rides on his back as though he were a horse. His bullying extends to his wife and Wilhelmine, and there are several points in the first two parts of the silent movies in which they cower in fear of him. Certainly, Jannings's Friedrich Wilhelm can be physically violent, but he never threatens his wife or eldest daughter.

The Friedrich Wilhelm of the silent films is a bully whether he is with his family and friends or conducting official business. After Katte and Frederick are captured after their failed flight from Prussia, Katte is sentenced to life in prison by a military tribunal. Enraged at what he sees as an incorrect decision, the king tears up the judgement and orders that Katte be killed anyway. Neither this scene nor anything similar to it is present in *Der alte und der junge König*. What instead happens instead is that Katte's father, a general, visits

privately with Friedrich Wilhelm. He falls to his knees in front of the king, overcome with emotion. The elder Katte does not beg for his son's life even though he believes that death is an inordinate sentence for his crime. Friedrich Wilhelm responds by saying that he did not give the execution order out of a need for revenge but out of necessity, and it is only through witnessing Katte's death can there be any hope for Frederick to reform. If the prince fails to repent, then he too will be executed. As he says this, he faces the camera straight on so that his eyes and the audience's eyes meet. The lighting in this scene is dim and comes mostly from the fireplace, so when Jannings speaks his lines, his face is half shadowed. The whole mood of the scene, from the lighting to the tone Jannings's voice, is somber. There can be no confusing this Friedrich Wilhelm with the one from the Weimar era movies.

The Friedrich Wilhelm of the silent films often wields his power arbitrarily, and his son is his favorite target. In *Sturm und Drang* and *Vater und Sohn*, the worst of the disdain which Frederick has for his father's love of the military is not shown, and it is not his interest in literature and music which spurs him to run away but the humiliation he suffers in front of a group of guards when Friedrich Wilhelm attempts to arrest him for leaving his room at night to flirt with a girl.⁹³ Frederick's yearnings are more conventional in the silent films and never does he come across as a sissy or delinquent. The only one who ever speaks poorly of him is his father, and his complaints seem mostly unjustified. Frederick's defiance of his father is represented by normal young male activity like sneaking out and seeing a

⁹³ It is outside the scope of this thesis to go into any in depth concerning the debate about Frederick the Great's presumed homosexuality. At any rate, the flirtation depicted in this film is completely fictional. For a wonderful biography of Frederick the Great see Tim Blanning. *Frederick the Great, King of Prussia*. New York City, NY: Penguin Random House, 2015.

girl who his family does not approve of. Even the title *Sturm und Drang* implies sympathy towards the prince, because it frames his youthful rebellion as part of movement of sons fighting against authority. He is not just a Prussian prince but also a young man who wishes for an amount of autonomy and respect despite his age, but his father acts as many out-of-touch fathers act: unsympathetic and uncomprehending. Frederick is also burdened with the fact that his father is especially spiteful and has the all the power of a head of state to make his son miserable. Frederick's life nearly comes to an end when his father, against all good judgement, calls for his death as well. It is only through the intervention of Friedrich Wilhelm's advisors and generals, who threaten to quit en masse rather than serve a tyrant, that the prince does not follow Katte to the grave.

Unlike other heroes in Third Reich era cinema, Frederick is not immediately and obviously able to take on the responsibilities of a leader.⁹⁴ No natural leadership abilities shine through his layers of immaturity and self-centeredness at any point in the film before Katte's execution. The prince's transformation from thoughtless youth to expert leader is just as much of a surprise to the audience as it to Frederick Wilhelm when he visits his son for the first time in years. The prince shows deference to his father, addressing him only as "your majesty." Frederick Wilhelm finds Frederick is now in possession of a multitude of talents which every aspiring eighteenth century leader should have: military knowledge, cartography skills, selflessness, and indifference to personal comfort. Like the main character of *Der Herrscher*, through hardship, Frederick has been molded into a proper leader. However, this is not a consistent message in Nazi propaganda which, again and

⁹⁴ For examples of this, one may merely look to previous films discussed in this thesis, *Der Herrscher* and *Das Mädchen Johanna*.

again, stressed that great men were born, not created. In *Der Herrscher*, Clausen says that his successor would be imbued with abilities which could not be taught. Neither is this message consistent even across the Fridericus movies. Only about a year later, in the film *Fridericus* (1936) Frederick the Great (again played by Otto Gebühr) says that exceptional people are born. Perhaps, the implication is that lesser men would be destroyed by the pressure which shapes those with stronger characters; if prince Frederick did not have a noble soul, then he would not have emerged as a better person after Katte was executed. Nevertheless, this is not clearly stated in the film and remains something which is up to the interpretation of the audience.

3.4 *Der große König*

Der große König (*The Great King*) (1942) is the last of the Fridericus films to have been made during the Third Reich. It once again starred Otto Gebühr as Frederick the Great and marked the last time the actor would play the role. The story begins in 1759 at the battle of Kunersdorf during the Seven Years War. The Prussian army is on their heels following a defeat from the Austrians, and the mood amongst soldiers and civilians is grim. At this same time, a Prussian Lieutenant by the name of Paul Treskow (Gustav Fröhlich) and his comrades come across Luise (Kristina Söderbaum), a miller's daughter who is taking care of wounded soldiers in the ruins of her house. Melancholic and complaining of his inability to get warm, Frederick takes shelter in Luise's home. Not realizing who he is, Luise vents bitterly to the king about the war and the destruction it brings. She is one of the numerous defeatists who see the position Prussia is in as hopeless, but Frederick ignores them—though tired, he knows that what he is doing is correct. The movie jumps forward in

time to the battle of Torgau. During the battle, Treskow saves the Prussian army by disobeying orders and signaling for the cavalry. For his actions, he is given a promotion but also tied to a wheel, and this is just after he is married to Luise. Anger at Frederick festers in Treskow, and he very nearly deserts, but Luise is able to convince him to stay. Treskow comes back into the fold of the Prussian army and dies in the siege of Schweidnitz in 1762. The movie ends with the victory celebrations of the Prussians in 1763 and has Frederick return to the mill from the beginning. Luise is there with her baby though without her husband. She, Frederick, and the Prussian people have sacrificed much, but it was worth it for eventual triumph.⁹⁵ The end of the film is almost identical to the end of the 1923 *Schicksalswende*: after Frederick returns back to Potsdam, he sits with his head in his hand, worn, but his eyes are still full of power, and he sees a clear picture of the bright future for Prussia.

3.5 The Darkness Before Dawn

A definite sense of melancholy pervades much of *Der große König*, and it shows a Frederick and a Prussia who are near their very lowest. The movie's director, Veit Harlan, spoke about his desire to show how lonely and difficult it is to be in charge.⁹⁶ Frederick's advisors as well as his own subjects are critical of his ability to lead them to victory. They see the Prussian king as a power-hungry, perhaps even insane, autocrat who seeks military glory despite the suffering of his country. Naturally, they are all incorrect. The doubters are

⁹⁵ Welch quotes additional dialogue not present in the movie, saying that it was cut in later versions. Though I have found multiple versions of *Der große König* online, none of them contain this extended dialogue, although the editing in this scene does suggest that something was cut. Welch *Propaganda and the German Cinema*. 150-151.

⁹⁶ Welch. 147-153.

unable to see the “bigger picture” if Prussia is successful or the dire position, they will be forced into should she fall. They are unable to look beyond their immediate situation, unlike Frederick, whose vision is far reaching. Yet, both the despondent atmosphere and Frederick’s preternatural genius are visible in earlier *Fridericus* movies as well. There are numerous parallels between *Der große König* and *Schicksalswende* so that, at points, it almost feels like a remake of the earlier film only in with sound and during a different battle, but one thing which separates the two is the way in which Frederick’s subordinates are treated. In *Schicksalswende*, Frederick shows that he cares about the generals under his command, and, more than that, he understands them. He knows when and how they should be employed on the battlefield even better than they do. Even so, the generals are not merely pawns to be moved about a chessboard, and each one contributes to victory due to their own, individual talents. In contrast, it is abundantly clear that victory is attained in *Der große König* solely because of Frederick’s genius and despite the objections of his advisors. This difference can be attributed to Goebbels.⁹⁷ *Der große König* marked another change in the development of the *Führer* image, and this new direction called for even greater trust to be given to the leader. Soldiers and civilians alike were supposed to ignore their reservations should their situation become worse, because success was only possible if everyone did as Hitler commanded. Of course, putting faith in the leader was stressed in earlier Nazi propaganda as well—it is only became more pronounced as the war went on, and the consequences of were more thoroughly discussed. Typical of the lighter touch approach to propaganda which Goebbels preferred, the press was not allowed to make

⁹⁷ Ibid. 151-154.

explicit comparisons between the Seven Years War and Frederick the Great and Hitler.⁹⁸

With that said, the release of *Der große König* was the not first time in which such a propaganda technique was used. Prior to becoming chancellor, Hitler made similar references to Frederick and other great Germans in his speeches, and audiences were supposed to make the connection between these historical heroes and present.⁹⁹

In *Schicksalswende*, there is a gloomy atmosphere is established from the start, and this sense of despair is deepened when Frederick is informed that many of his generals have fallen in battle. The Prussian king is so devastated by the news of so many deaths that he collapses and is temporarily incapacitated. Nothing of the like is seen in *Der große König*.¹⁰⁰ Frederick has his doubts and is melancholic, but there is never any sudden outburst of emotion. Additionally, he never lets his advisors see how truly close he is to breaking down. There is, however, a moment of despair shown by Frederick in *Fridericus*. When he learns of his sister Wilhelmine's death from tuberculosis, he cries out in anguish loud enough for his generals to hear through a door. This occurs shortly before the start of a battle, and is, without doubt, when he is at his lowest point. Even if one is ignorant of the close relationship which Frederick had with Wilhelmine, there is an earlier scene in which the two are able to briefly meet and pretend that they are in the best of spirits and best of health. All the while, their servants gossip to one another about their master's respective problems. It is only towards the end of their visit that the siblings reveal how much they are truly suffering. It is an effective scene and does much to humanize them.

Schicksalswende and *Fridericus* undoubtedly idolize Frederick the Great, but in these

⁹⁸ BA, *Sammlung Sänger, Zsg*, 102/63, 2 March 1942.

⁹⁹ Kershaw. *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*. 277.

movies, he is portrayed as both a person and a leader. Many of his ordeals are human, and even audience members who have not experienced the death of a loved one can feel a sense of personal sympathy for the long-dead monarch due to Gebühr's acting talent.

Frederick's interests in *Der große König* are far more alien, however. His thoughts are on Prussia's wellbeing, and every other concern is a distraction which serves to prevent him from reaching victory. He is worn out and tired due to defeat on the battlefield and the incompetence or defeatism of his advisors. These are not problems which many Germans in 1942 would have to contend with, but they are problems which *Führer* would have to deal with. Yet, as mentioned before, this was never said aloud and left to implication. Necessity makes Frederick hard and an instrument of fate rather than a person. The only scene in the film in which his more human side is shown is when he is watching his nephew sleep, the boy having surreptitiously followed his uncle to his headquarters. Frederick pulls a book of works by Sophocles out of the youth's coat and drifts into a daydream. The camera pans from Frederick's haggard face and closed eyes over to his shadow on the wall. The picture dissolves into a shot of Sanssouci at night. The camera then follows his shadow as it makes its way inside the palace, first to a bookshelf of Plato and Voltaire and then to a flute and sheet music resting on a music stand. The king picks up and plays his flute alongside a handful of other musicians. They are out of focus and in the background while Frederick is lit from behind, almost in silhouette. Slowly, the image of a woman's hands playing a harp and the outside of Sanssouci fade away, and we are returned to reality. It can be intuited that the decision to show Frederick as less emotional than his appearances in 1923 and 1936 has to do with when the films were released. Emotionality may be displayed in movies made during peacetime, but such displays seem more like weaknesses during war.

The disagreements which occur between Frederick and his advisors and generals are typical in the Fridericus movies, and it is rare for the feelings of anyone of a lower station to be investigated. Showing how civilians feel about wars and the often-incomprehensible suffering which comes with them is perhaps more difficult in a movie when the main character is a monarch. For *Der große König*, Luise and Treskow represent all of the “little people” who get caught up in war, and throughout the movie, the pair faces significant trials. Although she is able to find love, Luise has her home destroyed and is separated from her family. She is also forced to see her husband suffer physically and emotionally. Likewise, Treskow is punished for his major contribution to the war effort: creating a situation in which the Prussian army is able to achieve victory. Söderbaum’s petiteness and doll-like features make her Luise seem sweet, and Fröhlich (a common leading man)¹⁰¹ as Treskow are able to form a couple which is immediately sympathetic. They are thrown into events much bigger than themselves, and they try to make sense of it. Frederick’s interaction with the couple is limited to a handful of scenes, and they have little impact on his decisions or psychological state.

The conversation between Luise and Frederick at the beginning of the movie lets him know first-hand how his subjects feel about the war, but her harsh words do not dissent from the general opinion of those around him as he sees a crude caricature of himself drawn on the wall, and his brother echoes her hopelessness later on.¹⁰² Though Luise tries to talk to her king before the final battle, the next and final time they see each other is near the very end of the film at her rebuilt mill. Treskow’s interaction with his king

¹⁰¹ Notable films in which Fröhlich plays the leading man include *Metropolis* (1927), *Asphalt* (1929), *Was Frauen träumen* (1933), and *Die kleine und die große Liebe* (1938).

¹⁰² Claus Clausen, who played Katte in *Der alte und der junge König*, plays Frederick’s brother here.

is also brief, and the only time they meet is when Treskow is being questioned about prematurely signaling the cavalry. Frederick rushes into the room, and prods Treskow's chest with his cane and demands to know why he behaved as he did. Swallowing hard, Treskow replies that he was acting without orders, and he simply took the initiative. Frederick sits down, seemingly satisfied with his response. Nevertheless, he comments that Treskow should be shot for what he did, but he chooses to have him tied to a wheel instead. After Treskow is taken out of the room, Frederick orders that he be promoted after he is punished. Treskow, however, only internalizes his punishment and squanders his promotion, unable to understand the benevolence of his king and patriarch. Due to his innate leadership abilities and understanding, Frederick knows what is correct from the beginning, but it is only through experience that the couple comes to realize what they really need. In the end, what is most useful for them and for Prussia turns out to be the same thing: following what Frederick the Great wants. Luise gets her home back at the end as well as a child, and although Treskow dies, he reclaims his honor and furthers Prussia's ambitions. It is a very Nazi happy ending.

Although Luise and Treskow act as the "normal" people in *Der große König*, they alone do not represent a marginalized viewpoint. Frederick and Prussia also are portrayed as constantly needing to prove their worth on the world stage. At this point in his life, Frederick is a well-established figure who has already proven himself to be a more than capable strategist who is able to utilize the powerful weapon which is the Prussian army, but he is surrounded by hostile foreign powers. Destruction can come at any moment, not through any fault of his own, but because he may be overwhelmed. This movie, *Fridericus*, and the earlier *Schicksalswende* have Frederick explain why he cannot accept peace treaties

which do not favor Prussia. In *Schicksalswende*, he says that all he did for Prussia like improve education, enact justice reform, and support the arts will be in vain and discarded if they submit to another country. In the Nazi-era films, he asserts that Prussia is at war because they have to show that they are strong and should not be pushed around—they are defending their dignity. It is only Prussia's small size which has prevented her from taking her rightful place in Europe, and she is certainly more deserving of this position than her enemies which include the soft, foppish Austrians, untrustworthy French, and the racially degenerate Russians.¹⁰³ Between the strongly insinuated moral and physical degeneracy of the enemy and the blunt pronouncements made by Gebühr's Frederick, it is easy to draw parallels between Prussian during the Seven Years War and Germany in 1942. In both cases, the key to triumphing over seemingly impossible odds required that the German people put all of their faith in irresistible genius of their *Führer* who suffered greatly in service to his country.

¹⁰³ A Russian general played by Paul Wegener informs Frederick that, because of the death of the tsarina, the Russians are now able to help Prussia. Despite being an ally, Wegener's character is treated as somewhat dim, and Wegener's Asiatic-ish features make him look foreign and certainly non-Aryan.

Conclusion

Before Adolf Hitler became the leader of the Nazi party, he was in charge of its propaganda and developed his own theories on the subject which he expounded in *Mein Kampf* and other writings not meant to be shared with the general public. Influence from the work of Gustave Le Bon is plain in his assertions. It was Hitler's opinion that propaganda should be simple, made up of repeated slogans and symbols, and be easily understandable by the dumbest person in a crowd—the larger the crowd, the more basic the message.¹⁰⁴ Concretely, propaganda was supposed to “prime” the people in order to have them accept an idea and later fight for its implementation.¹⁰⁵ The films discussed in this thesis are all based upon well-known stories, a fact which makes them that much easier for them to be turned into propaganda. A foundation already existed. It only needed to be built up. The same malleability is present in all of the propaganda concerning Hitler. From nobody to *Führer*, the messaging was altered at each stage of his career.

Respected German actors, writers, directors, and more lent their talents to the furthering of the cult of Hitler. Some, of course, fled Germany, but many of them did not. Thea von Harbou wrote screenplays as she had done with her now-disappeared husband, Emil Jannings's fame did not take a hit when the Nazis came to power, and Otto Gebühr even continued to play the same character, regardless of who controlled the government. To be succinct, continuity persisted in the world of German film. Continuity between the Third Reich and everything which had come before was further cemented by having many of the propaganda films draw on history for their plots. From 1933 until 1945, a person

¹⁰⁴ Longerich. *Hitler*. 79-80.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 80.

could enter a German movie theater and see historical figures express ideals purported to be held by the Nazis. Perhaps it was a sense of comfort for the audience member, but through the lens of history, the ruptures between the Nazi era and the Weimar Republic seem more pronounced. Any changes made to the source material or the editing of history which came about when they were turned into movies can be explained as part of the synchronization of all aspects of life in order to fit what the Nazis wished. The desire to fit all media into a certain mold. As Hitler said, the masses first needed to be used to ideas before they began to accept them. Trumpeting ideas like the infallibility of the leader and the special destiny of him and his followers was repeated in many different forms and for a long time, and film was clearly no exception.

Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

Films

- Báky, Josef von. *Die große und die kleine Liebe*. Tobis Filmkunst, 1938.
- Bolváry, Géza von. *Was Frauen träumen*. Bavaria Film, 1933.
- Cserépy, Arzén von. *Fridericus Rex*. Cserépy-Film Co. G.m.b.H. Berlin, 1921, 1923.
- Harlan, Veit. *Der Große König*. Tobis Filmkunst, 1942.
- . *Der Herrscher*. Tobis Filmkunst, 1937.
- Lang, Fritz. *Metropolis*. Ufa, 1927.
- . *M*. 1931.
- May, Joe. *Asphalt*. Universum-Film AG, 1929.
- Meyer, Johannes. *Fridericus*. Diana-Tonfilm, 1936.
- Pabst, G.W. *Komödianten*. Bavaria Film, 1941.
- Steinhoff, Hans. *Der Alte Und Der Junge König*. Neue Deutsch Lichtspiel, 1935.
- . *Hitlerjunge Quex*. Ufa, 1933
- . *Ohm Krüger*. Tobis Filmkunst, 1941.
- Sternberg, Josef von. *Der Blaue Engel*. Universum Film A.G., 1930.
- Trenker, Luis. *Der Kaiser von Kalifornien*. Tobis Filmkunst, 1936.
- Ucicky, Gustav. *Das Mädchen Johanna*. Ufa, 1935.
- Wenzler, Ernst. *Hans Westmar*. Siegel-Monopolfilm, 1933.
- Zerlett, Hans H. *Venus vor Gericht*. Bavaria Film, 1941.

Written Material

- BA, *Sammlung Sänger, Zsg*, 102/63, 2 March 1942.
- Beilstein, Wilhelm. "Wie wir Weihnachten feiern," *N.S.-Briefe*, December 1939, 327-328.
in *Lichtfeier. Sinn. Geschichte, Brauch und Feier der deutschen Weihnacht*. Munich:
Deutscher Volksverlag, 1939.
- Das danken Wir Dem Führer!* 1938. Pamphlet.
- Dürr, Dagobert. *Adolf Hitler der deutsche Arbeiter und Frontsoldat*. Munich: Franz Eher,
1932.
- Emperle, A.M. "Movie Unmasking of Fridericus Rex." *New York Times*. June 25, 1922.
- Film-Kurier*. Nr. 27, 31. January 1922.
- Film-Kurier*. Nr. 67, 20. March 1923.
- Goebbels, Joseph. *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels*.
Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1934. 141-149.
- . *Adolf Hitler. Bilder aus dem Leben des Führers*. Hamburg; Cigaretten Bilderdienst,
1936.
- . *The Final Entries 1945: The Diaries of Joseph Goebbels*. New York City, NY: Putnam,
1978.

Greene, Graham. "Joan of Arc/Turn of the Tide/Top Hat/She." In *the Pleasure-Dome: Graham Greene, the Collected Film Criticism, 1935-40*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1980.

Hitler, Adolf *Mein Kampf*. Germany: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1925.

Hoffmann, Heinrich. *Hitler Wie Ihn Keiner Kennt*. Berlin, 1932.

Kremer, Hannes. "Neuwertung 'überlieferter' Brauchformen?", in *Die neue Gemeinschaft* 3. 1937, 3005 a-c

Lichtbild-Bühne. Nr. 43, 22. October 1921.

Lichtbild-Bühne. Nr. 6, 4. February 1922

Ley, Robert. "Schicksal — Ich glaube!" *Munich: Zentralverlag Der NSDAP*, 1937.

Norden, Hans von. *Was der König eroberte, der Fürst formte, der Feldmarschall verteidigte, rettete und einigte der Soldat.*, Berlin 1933, postcard., Deutsches Historisches Museum.

2. Secondary Sources

Bergen, Doris L. *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*. NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Evans, Richard J. *The Third Reich at War*. New York: Penguin Press, 2009.

Fest, Joachim C. *Hitler*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 1973.

Giesen, Rolf. *Nazi Propaganda Films: A History and Filmography*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2003.

Griffin, Roger. "Fascism's relation to religion" in *Blamires, Cyprian, World fascism: a historical encyclopedia, Volume 1*, 2006.

Herzog, Todd. "M." In *Weimar Cinema*. Columbia University Press, 2009

Hutton, Christopher. *Race and the Third Reich: Linguistics, Racial Anthropology and Genetics in the Dialectic of Volk*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005.

Kershaw, Ian. *The Hitler Myth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

———. "'Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship." *Contemporary European History*, 1993

———. *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*. London: The Penguin Press, 1998.

———. *Hitler: 1936-1945 Nemesis*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Norton, 2001.

Koepnick, Lutz. *The Dark Mirror*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

- Koonz, Claudia. *The Nazi Conscience*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *From Caligari to Hitler*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947.
- Leiser, Erwin. *Nazi Cinema*. New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1975.
- Longerich, Peter. *Goebbels: A Biography*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2015.
———. *Hitler*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2019.
- Mosse, George Lachmann. *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. *Oxford History of World Cinema*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- O'Brien, Mary Elizabeth. *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in The Third Reich*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006.
- O'Shaughnessy, Nicholas. *Selling Hitler*. London: Hurst and Co., 2016.
- Rees, Laurence. *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*. London: Ebury Press, 2012
- Rentschler, Eric. *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Shirer, William. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1960.
- Schulte-Sasse, Linda. *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Welch, David. *Propaganda and German Cinema 1933-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

