

HISTORICAL REVIEWS

From [*Freiheit!* March 4, 1929, p. 4](#)

“Pandora’s Box”

A Wedekind Film Adaptation

There's a lot going on – in this movie version of Wedekind. All forms of sexual expression are represented, from the kiss in its most diverse variations to sexually-motivated murder [*Lustmord*]. Even same-sex love between women is not missing.

Pabst has even filmed Wedekind's work of the same name – a difficult endeavour – quite skillfully. The individual scenes are constructed with an eye for what is specifically Wedekindian, but also for what is typical and important. With an eye that pushes aside kitschy ideas and the like. Pabst shaped the Wedekindian characters very forcefully. Sometimes even quite intrusively.

And yet the movie lacks a lot. It lacks general humanity. It doesn't sweep you away, it doesn't shake you, it doesn't even particularly captivate you. Even though the roles are superbly cast, even though the director's work is very clean, even though no one could have conjured Wedekind onto the white screen better than Pabst.

The film lacks the forcefulness of the spoken word to make it believable that these people are and must be, as they are in Wedekind's play.

There are no warm-blooded people who play the leading roles in the filmed “Pandora's Box”. None. People, presented with all their passions and weaknesses and their poor hearts.

They are dead illustrations of Wedekind's “Pandora's Box.” She leads a morbid, illusory life in this film. It lacks what forms the core of Wedekind's work: the great poet who was able to portray the monstrosities of instinct in a credible and unobtrusive manner. - R.

„Die Büchse der Pandora“

Eine Wedekind-Verfilmung.

Der begabte Regisseur Pabst hat diesen Film gedreht.

Es geht viel vor — in diesem verfilmten Wedekind. Vom Ruß in seinen verschiedenartigsten Variationen bis zum Lustmord sind alle sexuellen Ausdrucksformen vertreten. Auch die gleichgeschlechtliche Liebe zwischen Frauen fehlt nicht.

Pabst hat das gleichnamige Werk von Wedekind — eine schwierige Aufgabe — sogar recht geschickt verfilmt. Die einzelnen Szenen sind aufgebaut mit einem Blick für das spezifisch Wedekindsche, aber auch für das Typische und Wichtige. Mit einem Blick, der kitschige Einfälle und ähnliches beiseite schiebt. Pabst formte die Wedekindschen Menschen sehr eindringlich. Manchmal sogar recht aufdringlich.

Und doch fehlt dem Film viel. Es fehlt ihm das allgemein Menschliche. Er reißt nicht mit, er erschüttert nicht, ja er fesselt nicht einmal besonders. Trotzdem die Rollen großartig besetzt sind, trotzdem die Arbeit des Regisseurs sehr sauber ist, trotzdem niemand besser den Wedekind auf die weiße Leinwand zu zaubern vermocht hätte, als gerade Pabst.

Es fehlt dem Film die Eindringlichkeit des gesprochenen Wortes, um glaubhaft zu machen, daß diese Menschen so sind, sein müssen, wie sie eben bei Wedekind sind.

Es sind keine blutwarmer Menschen, die die Hauptrolle in der verfilmten „Büchse der Pandora“ spielen. Keine Menschen, hingestellt mit ihren ganzen Leidenschaften und Schwächen und ihrem armen Herzen.

Es sind tote Illustrationen zu Wedekinds „Büchse der Pandora“. Sie führt in diesem Film ein krankhaftes Scheinleben. Es fehlt ihm, was bei Wedekind den Kern bildet: der große Dichter, der Ungeheuerlichkeiten des Triebes glaubhaft und ohne Nebenblicke darzustellen imstande war.

R.

From [*Die Stunde*](#), March 3, 1929, p. 8

Die Büchse der Pandora

The New Wedekind Film

Frank Wedekind's important work has now been made into a film. His "Spring Awakening" and also his "King Nikolo" have already been made into films, but no work is as characteristic of the poet Wedekind as the Lulu tragedy, leaving aside the fact that the stage performances of "Pandora's Box" were met with the greatest resistance from censorship authorities in all countries. Wedekind had to fight particularly fierce battles with the Munich public prosecutor's office, and he did not live to see the complete performance of his work in public. The first part, "Erdegeist," was performed here and there, but although the poet was prepared to modify his drama in many ways, "Pandora's Box" never managed to be performed in full length. This drama, which Wedekind called a monster tragedy, was created between 1892 and 1895 and it took well over 20 years -- with the world war in between -- before the play was allowed to be performed in its entirety. "Erdegeist" premiered in Leipzig, and the first Lulu was Leonie Taljansky. Later, the most famous actresses played the role of Lulu. But the interpretation Frank Wedekind most agreed with was the one done by Tilly Mewes, who later became his wife. She played Lulu as a creature driven by primal urge.

When director G. W. Pabst set about filming "Pandora's Box," he searched around the world for a characteristic Lulu. His choice finally fell on the American Louise Brooks, and, when you see the film, you have to admit that this choice, at least as far as Lulu's appearance goes, was absolutely the right one. At least in the Wedekind sense. The Lulu of Louise Brooks is perhaps not in-depth, is perhaps deliberately superficial, but one can understand that she is highly appealing to men's sensuality.

The adaptor of the Lulu tragedy for the film, the Hungarian writer Ladislaus Vajda, did a remarkable and capable job, for it was certainly no small feat to master the enormous material within the framework of a film of just under 2500 meters. He had to neglect the last scenes of

“Erdegeist” and shift the action so that Lulu is still in Dr. Schön's house at the beginning and is sent away by him because he intends to marry. However, he still allows Lulu to appear in the revue written by his son Alwa. There is a scandal at this revue performance: Dr. Schön falls for Lulu all over again. His bride withdraws and he marries Lulu. The film then follows the final act of “Erdegeist” until Dr. Schön's murder by Lulu. All the characters from Wedekind's drama appear: the old Schigolch, the athlete Rodrigo Quast, the Countess Geschwitz and later also the Marquis Casti-Piani. In addition to the events of Wedekind's drama, the film also features the trial in which Lulu is convicted of the murder of Dr. Schön, but is kidnapped from the courtroom by her friends. And then begins her *Via Crucis* [*Passionsweg*], which leads to a vice house in London, where Lulu, the prostitute, lives together with Schigolch and Alwa, and earns the bread for everyone by working on the street. There, too, she is finally murdered by “Jack the ripper,” while Alwa has meanwhile gone off to an uncertain fate.

This adaptation can be accepted and approved of, especially since the most important lines of Wedekind's composition are to be found in it. Moreover, the director G. W. Pabst has one of the most artistically refined sensibilities, and has given the whole film a strictly artistic line and created magnificent scenes. The characterization of the figures is brilliantly successful. This is due not least to the actors, such as Fritz Kortner, who lends an impressive Alwa an unquestionable youthfulness; Alice Roberts, who makes the Countess Geschwitz into a striking figure; and Carl Goetz, who plays Schigolch in the Wedekind manner. In the smaller roles, Gustav Dießl -- the idealized Jack --, Siegfried Arno, who provides the humour, and Krafft Raschig as Rodrigo Quast are particularly noteworthy.

Not to be forgotten is the atmosphere-heavy [*stimmungsvolle*] work of cinematographer Günther Krampf, who focuses entirely on artistic effects. In particular, the London fog scenes are probably the most grandiose film images of this kind ever seen.

The Wedekind film “Pandora's Box” is an experience not only for those who love Frank Wedekind and his immortal work, but certainly also for all those who, without knowing Wedekind, see the Lulu tragedy unfold before them in such rich film scenes. Perhaps this film

will make "Pandora's Box" so popular that, even after Frank Wedekind's death, the importance of this poet and his main work will be recognized in those circles that did not understand and therefore did not appreciate Wedekind.

K. S.

Die Büchse der Pandora
Der neue Wedekind-Film.

Nun ist Frank Wedekinds bedeutendstes Werk verfilmt. Sein „Frühlingserwachen“ und auch sein „König Nikola“ sind schon zu Filmen geworden, aber kein Werk ist ja so charakteristisch für den Dichter Wedekind wie die Lulu-Tragödie, abgesehen davon, daß die Bühnenaufführungen von „Die Büchse der Pandora“ in allen Ländern größten Widerstand seitens der Zensurbehörden begegneten. Besonders heisse Kämpfe hatte Wedekind mit der Münchner Staatsanwaltschaft auszufechten und Wedekind hat die vollständige Aufführung seines Werkes in öffentlicher Vorstellung überhaupt nicht mehr erlebt. Wohl wurde der erste Teil „Erdgeist“ da und dort zur Aufführung gebracht, aber trotzdem sich der Dichter zu vielen Mäßigungen seines Dramas bereitfand, war doch eine gesamte Aufführung der „Büchse der Pandora“ nicht durchzusetzen. In den Jahren 1892 bis 1895 ist dieses von Wedekind eine Monstertragödie genannte Drama geschaffen worden und es dauerte weit über 20 Jahre — und der Weltkrieg lag dazwischen — bis das Stück vollkommen zur Aufführung gebracht werden durfte. „Erdgeist“ wurde in Leipzig uraufgeführt und die erste Lulu war Leonie Taljansky. Es haben dann später die berühmtesten Schauspielerinnen die Rolle der Lulu verkörpert. Aber Frank Wedekind war am meisten mit der Auffassung von Tilly Mewes, seiner späteren Frau, einverstanden. Sie spielte die Lulu als ein primitives Triebwesen.

Als der Regisseur G. W. Pabst daran ging „Die Büchse der Pandora“ zu verfilmen, suchte er in aller Welt nach einer charakteristischen Lulu. Seine Wahl fiel schließlich auf die Amerikanerin Louise Brooks und wenn man nun den Film sieht, so muß man zugeben, daß diese Wahl, wenigstens was das Äußerliche der Lulu betrifft, die unbedingt richtige gewesen ist. Wenigstens im Sinne Wedekinds. Die Lulu Louise Brooks' ist vielleicht nicht vertieft, vielleicht mit Absicht oberflächlich, aber man kann verstehen, daß sie die Sinnlichkeit der Männer im hohen Maße reizt.

Der Bearbeiter der Lulu-Tragödie für den Film, der ungarische Schriftsteller Ladislaus Vajda, hat bemerkenswerte und tüchtige Arbeit geleistet, denn es war gewiß keine Kleinigkeit, den gewaltigen Stoff im Rahmen eines Films von knapp 2500 Metern zu meistern. Er mußte die letzten Szenen des „Erdgeist“ vernachlässigen und verschiebt die Handlung so, daß Lulu anfangs noch im Hause des Dr. Schön ist und von diesem fortgewiesen wird, weil er die Absicht hat, sich zu verheiraten. Er läßt aber Lulu noch in der von seinem Sohn Alwa geschriebenen Revue auftreten. Bei dieser Revueaufführung kommt es zum Eklat, Dr. Schön verfällt Lulu von neuem, seine Braut zieht sich zurück und er heiratet Lulu. Dann folgt der Film der Schlußhandlung

des „Erdgeist“ bis zu Dr. Schöns Ermordung durch Lulu. Alle Gestalten des Wedekind-Dramas tauchen auf, der alte Schigolch, der Athlet Rodrigo Quast, die Gräfin Geschwitz und später auch der Marquis Casti-Piani. Über die Vorgänge des Wedekindschen Dramas hinaus bringt der Film auch noch die Gerichtsverhandlung, in der Lulu wegen des Mordes an Dr. Schön verurteilt, aber von ihren Freunden aus dem Gerichtssaal entführt wird. Und dann beginnt ihr Passionsweg, der über ein Lasterlokal nach London führt, wo Lulu, die Dirne, mit Schigolch und Alwa beisammen lebt und das Brot für alle auf der Straße verdient. Dort auch wird sie schließlich von „Jack the Ripper“ ermordet, während Alwa unterdessen in ein ungewisses Schicksal davongegangen ist.

Man darf diese Bearbeitung unbedingt akzeptieren und gutheißen, zumal die wichtigsten Linien der Wedekindschen Komposition darin zu finden sind. Überdies hat der Regisseur G. W. Pabst, einer der künstlerisch feinst Empfindenden, dem ganzen Film eine streng künstlerische Linie gegeben und prachtvolle Szenen geschaffen. Die Charakterisierung der Figuren ist glänzend gelungen. Das ist nicht zuletzt den Darstellern zu danken, wie Fritz Kortner, der ein eindrucksvoller Dr. Schön ist, Franz Lederer, der dem Alwa unbedenkliche Jugendlichkeit verleiht, Alice Roberts, die die Gräfin Geschwitz zu einer markanten Figur macht, und Carl Goetz, der den Schigolch in Wedekind-Manier spielt. In den kleineren Rollen sind Gustav Dießl — idealisierter Jack —, Siegfried Arno, der für den Humor sorgt, Kraft Raschig als Rodrigo Quast besonders hervorzuheben.

Nicht vergessen darf die stimmungsvolle und ganz auf künstlerische Effekte eingestellte Arbeit des Kameramannes Günther Krampf werden. Insbesondere sind die Lon-

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doner Nebelszenen wohl das Grandioseste, das man bisher an Filmbildern dieser Art gesehen hat.

Der Wedekind-Film „Die Büchse der Pandora“ ist ein Erlebnis nicht nur für jene, die Frank Wedekind und sein unsterbliches Werk lieben, sondern gewiß auch für alle die, welche ohne von Wedekind zu wissen, die Lulu-Tragödie in so gehaltvollen Filmszenen vor sich abrollen sehen. „Die Büchse der Pandora“ wird vielleicht mit diesem Film jetzt so populär werden, daß, wenn auch nach Frank Wedekinds Tod, die Bedeutung dieses Dichters und seines Hauptwerkes in jenen Kreisen Anerkennung finden wird, die Wedekind nicht verstanden und daher nicht gewürdigt haben.

K. S.

“Pabst and the Social Film,” by Harry Alan Potamkin

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FILM CHRONICLE

PABST AND THE SOCIAL FILM

THE war was over, defeat its German portion; the inflation was still within the raw feel of the *Kleinbürger*. That class looked upon itself pathetically; its cinema plained self-pity in films like *The Last Laugh*, *New Year's Eve* and *The Street*. “Die Strasse” of brothels has been a favored milieu for German pseudo-tragedy, and among its outstanding photodramas is *Die freudlose Gasse* (*Joyless Street*), Georg Wilhelm Pabst’s first film.

Joyless Street (or *Streets of Sorrow*) is a picture of the famine-ridden Viennese clerk class, *die Angestellten*, that fringes on the proletariat, dovetails with it, and ultimately is part of it. Abject in its position, this functionary and small-merchant class could be understood in the terms of Pabst, a middle-class Jew from a middle-class city, Vienna, the head to a nation that has no torso. Pabst set a mood of hopelessness, the descending and enveloping oppression of hunger, of pittance and dread. He was as yet the humanitarian, and not the “psychologist,” in the “*freudlose Gasse*” (the street without Freud). His sensitiveness placed this picture of the stricken above each other such recital by the more typical German directors: he was not moralistic. His Viennese origin substituted delicacy for *delikatessen*; he did not compound the pathos on the recipe of “Mehr! Mehr!” This same delicacy, finesse, becomes, we shall see, a distraction later.

The German artists of this “golden age” made their characters anonymous in the hope they would be universal. The characters eventuated frequently into caricatures, the converse of Peter Shlemiehl—they were shadows without reference. For at least half of his initial film, Pabst preserved the characters from this

deterioration, and maintained a mood of relevance and sympathy. However, he was not working in the isolation of his own attitude, nor was his own attitude resolute and apart. The picture did not support itself on this level all the way, though it held up longer than Grüne's *The Street*. It collapsed into the rampant absolutes of melodrama. The German petty-bourgeois class was contemplating itself pathetically, hardly with stern realism. The stratum above it was holding it away from critical inspection, because that superior stratum needed a buffer between itself and the lower seam. It was a simplistic pathos the artists distilled from the war and the inflation: therefore anonymity, therefore the concoction instead of the experience, therefore the failure to sustain the sorrow and the event of which it was the mood, therefore the romancing among scarecrows with perpetrations of "fate." Merchant, flunkie and *knecht* of the abacus did not dare to be drastic. Despite Germany's awful experience, its films were more fretful than tragic.

Through this period Pabst was gaining his cinema knowledge. He worked within the double-tendency of the German *lichtspiel* toward the real, away from the real. He was around when, through the insistence of the dominant control and the straitjacketed studio-mind, the energies of this sturdy film subsided into "ingratiating virtuosités," billows and columns of light, engineering pomposities, architectural shells, remarkable but vain. Pabst brought into the German stolidity something of the volatility of Vienna. He let his characters unfold their plight without the inquisitorial rack. As compensation, he found in the intensity of German performance, though often it leaped from the frame, a discipline that enforced his finesse, reined it, made him keep his eyes open. The German film was all pillars, Pabst was mainly nuances. There was a blending of the two in the first part of his first film; the latter part was neither pillar nor nuance, the structure had collapsed under the preposterous relations, the routine of the literary closet, a mockery of the tenants in the *Joyless Street*. The director had not been perspicacious or wilful enough to extract and reorganize from this confusion the probable data that might have continued the social drama. He was himself caught in this confusion, an acceptance not limited to Germany nor to the period of *Die freudlose Gasse*. Periods of great stress incite the self-protective will to deceive and be deceived, and melodrama—its absolutes—is servant of this will.

Pabst moved farther into intensive drama. In *Secrets of a Soul* the story of a knife-phobia "complex," he relates the case, rather than renders the *mind* of the case. He is still true to the German pillars, does not convert the case into the flux of images of an *atelier* easel-film like Germaine Dulac's "extra-visuel" *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, or Luis Bunuel's "sur-realiste" *Le Chien Andalou*, films lightly, naively subjective. True, our director did include neurotic fantasies in the stolid case-study—under the guidance of Drs. Abraham and Sachs—but even these were hardly "pure flow." Pabst had no time for tidbits of self-expression, for pictorial *implicit* films; and fortunately he did not yield to the symbol *ad absurdum* of expressionism, he was too substantial for that. But he could not escape, given the fee-simple case of an obsession, a blunt pedantry in recounting the thesis of the knife and the "soul." If the narrative was warmed to more than a formulation that was because of the zealous acting of Werner Krauss. Because Pabst himself was not, evidently, a Freudian fanatic, the film has no self-excitement; it is orderly, clean and without affectation. The public mind was whirlpooling in the individualized neuroses that flattered and satisfied the middle-class: it was having a great, if aimless, time! Pabst had been ricocheted into this vortex, though his own "suppressed desire" was more social than Freudian. *Psychologism* became his preoccupation. In the film *Abwege* (*Bypaths*), Pabst's best artisan-job of the silent days, the finesse of this quasi-psychology gives to a bland and cliché story a suavity and clear-edged composition that for the moment inveigles one into accepting the particular theorem of sexual "crisis" (*Crise* is the apt French name for the film) as true and important. But when one recognizes that the thesis has been organized entirely through short-angles and the convulsions of Brigitte Helm, skilfully manipulated by the director, the whole business is discovered as a setup and, crystallizing a feeling that has been gathering insistence as one has followed the films of Pabst, the observer suspects that gentleman of being unscrupulous, of putting over something exceptionable. In motion pictures like *The Loves of Jeanne Ney*, adapted from Ehrenburg, and *Lulu* (*Pandora's Box*), from Wedekind's *Erdgeist* and *Pandora*, the polishing of surfaces, the feints, the detachment, the rarefied atmosphere of the ineffable—all the qualities that have effected the cult of Pabst—are as distracting as Herr Pabst's scrutinies are to the Herr Pabst of his abstruse days. Here one has to ask the import of the jigsaw

puzzle before one realizes that Pabst has been playing a game. In the effort to put the puzzle together, the client finds many parts missing. Herr Pabst has not been scrupulous, not careful enough of his own integrity and its obligation to earnest witnesses. And this is not surprising: his very sources, if taken "as is," were not profound relationships but only exhibits, more effete than Pabst's earlier ones and therefore more treacherous: they stop Pabst at the surface of his films, entice him into exploits *chic*, pseudo-intellectual, seeming so subtle yet really saying nothing. There is no impetus for him to lift the lid of *Pandora's Box*. Here is a man meant for character and all that he is submitting is a manner. His intensive considerations temporize in skin-grafting, though he has been called an "anatomist"—an anatomist of surfaces! To the troubled charge "unscrupulous" came the answer "super-conscious," a cult inflation that corroborates the ineffable, the cryptic—what indeed was our director hiding? Perhaps his own weariness, for certainly dabbling with effigies and charting their manoeuvres must be enervating. Never content in the rôle of an eclectic, Pabst could not manufacture completely clever films. His very distractedness is not without a sense of perturbed conscience: he would like to travel "beyond desire."

The sharpening conflict in Germany, the polarization of the forces, would naturally touch a man like Pabst. It would intensify and direct his social suspicions and tend to dissipate from his concern the shallow complacencies of the ladies and gentlemen of euphemy. At the point two things occurred: Pabst saw Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion and Death of Joan of Arc*; the cinema enlarged its prospects with the advent of sound. To Pabst the Dreyer film was the deepest experience. When the Anglo-American imagist H. D. interviewed him—cult indeed!—a cynosure of esoteric eyes looks up to a movie director—he would not hear one word against Dreyer's film. A year before, H. D. had compared *Joyless Street* with the work of Kuleshov the Russian and had preferred Pabst because, she said, he "takes the human mind . . . as far as it can go," while "the Russian takes the spirit . . . further than it can go." Her objection to *Joan* was similar, but Pabst would not subscribe to her fear of the maximum, though he was her maximum.

In these films of Pabst, he had been turned away more and more from his own maximum. In his first film there was social plight, but he had failed to establish its base. His environment

was sorrowing, but it did not understand its terror as the resultant of social causes. There were, in the film, starting-points for the dynamic relationship which would have explained the resultant had Pabst extended these points in character and not as the conventions of performance. These conventions became increasingly operative apart from fundamental concrete motivations, until Pabst was sending his camera velvet-like over the scene, veneering the picture, squaring the corners elegantly and rounding circles with grace—being "subtile." In *Joan* he found, if not the historic social base, at least a maximum of intensity of conscience and intensiveness of treatment. He who had dwelt on glossaries encountered an artist devoted to the human text who was not pedantic, not moralistic. His ethical sense was stirred, and consequently his aesthetic sense was revived from specious day-dreams. The artist of keen nerve-ends could no longer yield to his periphery, to topographies that gave neither the lay of the land nor its consistency. He sought and found social material whose complexity the new compound of sound-sight could make articulate. His nuances have become elements of structure; his films are no longer circuitous—he has realized a direct character that transfigures the qualities of charm and grace into the incisive and superb. He no longer dallies with "the woman who has been abundantly charged with sex-consciousness"; she is only a figure of speech. *Pandora's Box* is inconclusive not because "one should not make films of literature"—that is a sophistry—nor unsatisfying because Wedekind cannot be cinematized. It is inconclusive and unsatisfying because the literary source is a network of negotiations and not the experience of people; and the film, in consequence, figures of speech stalking as men and women. Kraszna-Krausz has listed the "seven essential scenes" of these "variations on Wedekind" and has described the non-climactic scene-by-scene construction of the picture. Though the "ideographic chart" is interesting, it merely strengthens the criticism that the picture is an abstraction and that Pabst has wasted on it his talents for the intensive. That he does not include "pauses, stops or interruptions," which Kraszna-Krausz calls "artificial breaks or breathing spaces," may be due to the film's not containing anything to pause over. "Concentrated atmosphere" allows reflective examination, but the film is "atmosphere" without content. It is "too diligent, too tasteful, too beautiful" because its diligence, taste and beauty are errant, refer to no concrete tangible edifice. The film and its

creatures are lustrous, never luminous. Unwittingly appropriate are the film's alternative endings: the lust-murder of the prostitute Lulu or the Salvation Army drum-rally. The latter is truer to the value of the film, though the former is the Q.E.D. of the theorem. The picture is skin drawn over a hollow body, and, though tantalizing contours are etched on the parchment, they are ephemera, illusive momentarily. The cultists beat triumphant tattoos on the drum, they were rallying their own fetichisms.

Pabst broke through this aura. His integrity had been misled, diverted, confused but not undermined. Its positive elements, potentialities, reappeared. They had been visible in his first picture but had been increasingly submerged as his "mastery" had developed. He was more vigilant now, he who had been so close to complete self-betrayal. In *Westfront 1918* (*Comrades of 1918*), he has produced the least showman-like of war-films, a picture intensive in its character-convergence, sharply attenuated in its character-relations, not spreading like valiant steam into an ominous yet compelling universe. True, it is a picture not more than pacifistic, it does not assail or divulge causes, but its pacifism is not flamboyant nor self-delusive, it is on its way to an acute attack upon the war-makers. With more politicalization, Pabst might produce the film of war that would state through the agonies of human beings the sources of war within our society and the means of shattering its domains. His intensive treatment, now that he has sound and speech, permits the back-and-forth reference of the climax, war, to its social scene, competitive society, imperialism. There is almost no Soviet film in which war is the whole picture.

Incidental to his new tendency is Pabst's program-picture, a provincial farce, *Skandal um Eva*. Not important in itself, the film indicates again that Pabst has thrown off the ulterior trappings of skill: the film is executed with proper modesty and good-humor, the charm is qualitative and not weighed and measured. Pabst knows where to reserve his calculations, where to respect the mild *esprit*. The film, despite its incidental character, is present in the movie-goer's reminiscence; and, as a further instance of its director's self-respect, the absence of any eclectic quality, of any sign of touching-up the traits of humor with conceits, is lively proof of maturity.

From the war-film to *Die Dreigroschenoper* (the modern reconstruction of *The Beggars' Opera*), thence to *Kameradschaft*, the

progress of Pabst's conscience has been notable. One has but to compare Pabst's work in the former film with what a Lubitsch, a Clair* or a Mamoulian might have done with an identical material to appreciate this magnificent production in its category of the "musical film." It is a proud work, bold in its vertical structure: the pillars are erect and the nuances firm and structural. There are none of the blandishments of the "musical film," Pabst has not organized the relationships into the insinuations of intrigue, the Lubitsch pattern; nor into the Clair arabesque; nor has he yielded to handsomeness for its own sake to attain a Mamoulian statuesqueness and picturesqueness. He has actually transcended the category of the "musical film"; or better, extended its province.

This victory has been achieved through a diligence that found worthy material. Pabst's directness found a substance for his direction, a substance grand and difficult, but, to the right artist, pliable, conforming. It is quite evident that the operations began at the core of the material and worked outward, for there was a core, the heart that was missing from *Pandora's Box*. Mirthful, sardonic; melancholy, sympathetic—here was whole-hearted largess for a director of great proportions and none less. No conceits, no trailings-off or tangents toothsome but extraneous, not one element of virtuosity—but unified character composed of men and women in various settings, song and episode. The lyrics of Brecht, adult and pungent, are sung, recited and spoken, are molded into the dialogue and the total compound structure. The sound-values of consonants and vowels are realized in condensation and enlargement. "So-ho" becomes a grand and succulent piece in the utterance of the baritone pitchman, whose voice sets and sustains the vocal pitch of the film, a pitch borne by the relative non-inflection of the Kurt Weill music. The gray encompassing tone, with its gradations and harmonies, the bold figures, not merely guilt or innocence stuffed with straw, the selection of prototypes down to the casual physiognomy in the crowd about the pitchman—all going back to the stimulus of the Dreyer film—achieve a motion picture that is perfect construction. If within the joy of this perfection a doubt arises, it is because of dangerous suggestions the cynical or sectarian may draw from the events themselves. The characters of the film are *lumpen*,

* Harry Alan Potamkin's article on René Clair appeared in Volume VI, No. 1 of the HOUND & HORN.

and their chief, Peachem, provokes them, out of personal rancor and revenge, to confront Her Majesty on gala occasion. The demonstrators are ragamuffins and frauds, their demonstration the trick of a mountebank who, on learning he has had no cause for vengeance, calls his army back, but—and here is a redeeming irony!—the beggars become militants, their flood of wrath will not be halted, the leader may shout his compromise, but the rank-and-file demand succor. This is not a revolutionary assertion, simply because it is not asserted by a revolutionary group and is not spoken in revolutionary terms. Still, in its undertones of vibrant social sympathy, and its overtones sardonic in their satire, the picture transforms the raw material of *melodram*—in its original sense—into a very stirring approximation of the revolutionary march—an approximation that is not triumphant, as it could not be, but which is warm and in the direction of the element to whom the victory belongs, as the film itself unquestionably leaves one to feel. The victory is Pabst's, and it is a further step in his progress toward social conclusiveness. Never egregious, his daring is, however, pronounced. Like Dreyer he reaffirms the authenticity of the event by eliminating the obsession of period curlicues, historicism for the sake of propriety. He indulges in extra-territoriality: China is and yet is not China; this is and yet is not Gay's London, it is 19th century and contemporary London—Berlin or Paris, or even New York. Nor does this keep the occurrence on nebulous frontiers, afloat in the air; the film imparts a very concrete, tangible, immediate milieu whose temper becomes all the more trenchant for the structural reasonableness of the décor and the costumes. The German studio has become a creator, in this film, not merely of studio-marvels but of a dominion of baroque laughter that is not satisfied with its own fineries but directs these fineries into tart notes on contemporary society, where the racketeer and his police-chief unite to run the premier bank on the main thoroughfare. The film is lavish but not prodigal: as in the wedding-scene, or in the brothel, Renoir reproduced as a picture-postcard, where the words of the song are pre-raphaelitish with fingers crossed. The film terminates with the wearied beggars, who have sent the demeanor of Queen and police-commissioner into consternation, fading into the shadows where, as the *lied* of the off-screen baritone observes, those in the light will not see them. Is there hopelessness here? No, the tone is too sympathetically bitter to be described as hopeless. And

assuredly this is progress in our Herr Regisseur: and not one tinge of distraction!

Very logically the next picture by this director should have been one explicitly ethical, unambiguous and direct. In *Comradeship* completeness is not attained, but it is progression. The data is not drawn from a literary clinic nor from a robust *melodram*—musical play—it is a matter of actual record, a mine catastrophe at Courrières on the Franco-German border a decade before the war. The movie, like every other art, is, at its highest point, revelatory. It achieves revelation through record, the core of experience, and restoration. Pabst, on the scenario of Vajda, extends his achievement in *Die Dreigroschenoper* by exploiting the studio to remove the studio (an uncommon thing in Germany) and effects a documentary veracity in setting, demeanor and speech. For this he has had the collaboration of the eminent cameraman, Fritz Arno Wagner, and the expert designer, Erno Metzner, himself a director.

To transcend the record, Pabst, with the initial assistance of the scenarist, delays the event thirteen years, until a year after the armistice. This "telescoping" heightens the social import, makes more poignant the biases of the individuals, gives the film a meaning into the future, gains for the film an acuter conscience. A fire in the French sector entombs the miners. The German miners going offshift give up their free time to risk their lives for the French miners, only yesterday foes. The rescuing-party rushes in motor-trucks through the frontier—it is fired upon! the frontier-guard is dutiful. The German mine-superintendent phones the French and receives the gratitude with a "you're welcome!"—the risks of capital! This commentary is rather the reader's than the author's. Three miners on duty in the German mine—the trio had been affronted in a French café the night before—dig their way into the French sector. The leader of the three had, not many months earlier, hollowed the frontier—"goes 800 meters down!"—on a less friendly errand. They are entombed with a boy and his grandfather, who has entered the mine unseen to save the lad. The film is then a record of calamity, vigil and rescue, terminating, when the injured men are freed from the hospital, in a festive departure of the rescuers, where devotions are exchanged in words, French and German, whose spirit if not whose letter is comprehended by German and French: We are workers, with but one enemy, Gas and War!

The film needs a further articulation—what and who is this one enemy whose properties are gas and war?—but that completion could be made only under auspices more drastic. Perhaps Pabst felt this when he said he was through with “ethical films.” However, we need not take this statement as final, for recently he said he was glad to make *Don Quixote* in Paris, because there he could be freer to make a social film, perhaps by the simple removal from too intimate surroundings that restrict him. He had been able to produce his tentative maxima because the Nero company was beyond the field of the Nationalist magnetism of Hugenberg’s U.F.A. But in a *Kameradschaft* success is proportionate to propaganda. Certain flaws will be suspected but hardly substantiated. The quest of the old man will be called too “sentimental” and too “melodramatic,” but only because the judges have in mind spurious attitudes that have maltreated similar episodes. The search in *Kameradschaft* is valid because it is entwined in the development of the film. One of the vigil scenes may seem too deliberately grouped, but its place in the evolving structure is so doom-impending that this very arrangement is at least a possibility. Alexander Granach’s acting as the leader of the triumvirate is traced with a stylization not quite documentary, but he is so potent a player that his presence does not contradict authenticity. A quarrel on these points concerns merely the question: is the beauty-spot a blemish? The real problem of the film is deeper.

The picture is accurate, indeed so accurate as to be a puzzle to those who expect the heroic in the treatment of such a theme. Pabst is never oratorical in his portrayal of the human element in the rescue, never colossal in his depiction of the mechanics of the rescue: he is always close to the ethical fiber of the event, and from this steadfastness emanates the artistry—a significant development in Pabst and the German *kino*, sluggish amid jingo lost-glory and *bockbier* films set to goosestep measures and $\frac{3}{4}$ *takt*. Undoubtedly, Pabst has been stimulated by Soviet pictures; less by those of the “masterful” period of Pudovkin and the “immensities” of Eisenstein than by Pudovkin’s first and most convincing dramatic film *Mother*. There is something of the same imminence, the same throbbing and lyrical truthfulness, the same intensity of personnel. The Pabst film is, quite correctly for its purpose, less histrionic; but it is also less victorious in its assertion, and that is where it lacks in memorableness. *It is too empirical!* does not develop its social tendency.

Sound has allowed Pabst an aid in the double-speech, French and German, very specific values, and a lingering quality—“Georges!” called by the old man—that sensitizes the appeal of pathos. The French girl who has refused a dance to the German the night before beholds the rescuing-party murmurs: “Les Allemands! C’est pas possible!” Here is a speech within the theme, speech that is correlative to the play of the people at the mine-gate. The inflection is contained within a subdued range, allowed to break through at strategic points. Its essence is documentary, its contact revelatory, and along the line of its construction Pabst might have extended his message to its fullness, thereby forestalling the criticism that the film lacks warmth. But for this extension was needed the consummation of Pabst’s own ethical tendency. He has, in the film, urged fraternity, intra-class amity: his sympathies are with the operatives. He sees international accord not as some vague “brotherhood of man”—social salvationism—but as proletarian solidarity. However, the proletariat does not achieve such unity in the continence of its own class, it achieves it in *conflict*, not solely with resultant conditions, but primarily with the causes of those conditions. It is, in brief, inter-class enmity that strengthens intra-class amity. The operators in *Kameradschaft* are too casual to the occurrence, not corporate in an event to which they have given rise. Some observers have thought that all Pabst needed to fulfill his idea was another phrase to the concluding declaration. But that is a crude conception of relationship in society and drama. Indeed, not another word need have been added had the relationship been developed throughout the picture: the end might then have been grimly inferential and persuasive through its very truncation, “pulling the punch.” As the film stands now, to accept the accord which effected the rescue as permanent in proletarian fraternity would be a delusive irony, especially when we recall that the actual vent at Courrières did not prevent the war of 1914. Pabst wanted this film as an “ethical message,” as propaganda—for *future* solidarity. As in his first film, Pabst had possible starting-points for the relationship which would have transfigured the record into its effective revelation. The miners initiate the rescue, the operator is only distantly interested—would not the operator, as well as the more recalcitrant workers, have resisted aid, with his machinery, for a competitive property? The ‘phone call of acknowledgement would then have been, without debate, the film’s rather than the observer’s irony.

The extension (symbol) of the frontier-transgression, above and below, should not have rested too close to the factual; then the episode of the French miner recalling the war-enemy would not have appeared an intrusion. The film would have been built up to such a contrast. And within this heightened structure the intimate details in the café and homes might have been dwelt upon and thereby kindled to more than evidences. Again Pabst should have been more wilful, again he should have been less statistical. He faces, in an inconclusive propaganda, the dangers of social platitudes, and hyphenation. Still, *Kameradschaft*, because it re-establishes the cinema on the firm ground of the concrete record of an event of mass-reference, and that outside the land of the proletarian rule, is of mighty significance.

But will there be a step taken beyond this maximum? * Since *Kameradschaft*, Pabst has made a film from Pierre Benoit's *L'Atlantide*, a spectacle cinematized in the mute days by Jacques Feyder. He has directed Chaliapin, George Robey and Sidney Fox—what a combination!—in *Don Quixote*, Cervantes or the opera? And now he is to film Kreuger upon a scenario by Ehrenburg—here is his opportunity for a further advance, if he can subdue the fantasies of the scenarist and resist the competitive suction of American romance, tang and unction, as expressed with flair in *The Match King* of the Warner Brothers. What Pabst does is important beyond the work itself: he holds a preëminent position in Germany, where he has succeeded the late Lupu Pick as president of "Dacho," the federation of German film-workers, and in Europe, where he has been a cult and whose strongest director he is today, if one excepts the Soviet Union. His centrifugal nature, momentums issuing outward rather than energies stultifying through introspection and egotistic devolutions, is essential to an art that has been held back from its own destiny. To find in the bourgeois cinema, within its commercial realm, as socially conscientious an artist as Pabst is indeed a discovery! The poles of this cinema in Germany are epitomized by a Pabst and an Erich Pommer, the great studio-showman who supervised Murnau, Dupont, Lang and others, a man ready to serve any job of whatever *studio* dimensions, but hardly an artist of the conscience of Pabst. Around these magnetic poles will gather the

* Italy invited Pabst to direct a picture; he suggested *Spartacus* as a theme. The suggestion was spurned, though pre-war Italy, dreaming of "Antica Roma", once filmed the gladiator—he's too hot now.

film-makers of Germany, the poetasters (the ingenious composers of sophisticated kino-doggerel) about Pommer, the poets about Pabst, if Pabst holds to his position of integrity. Somewhere between these two is a Leontine Sagan (supervised by a Carl Froelich): her *Mädchen in Uniform*, meritorious in its actors' work, is sincere but cautious, does not venture upon its own terrain but preserves a respectable distance from its own social implications and aesthetic form (this has been called "dignity"). And there was much less to dare here than in *Kameradschaft*, for a great section of the German people is no longer hospitable to Prussianism: it is of the past. But Miss Sagan was well-behaved, an aristocrat; the film does not fail to leave a sense of faith in the Princess, the benefactress, who had she but known would have changed all that oppression of arbitrary discipline—there is still a nostalgia for the nobility. One thinks of what Pabst might have done with the same drama, where he would be exposing retrogression rather than agitating a progressive act.

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