



Screenshot of Louise Brooks in *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

This dossier was curated by Shoshana Schwebel (University of British Columbia)

## PREFACE

G. W. Pabst's 1929 silent film *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*) is now considered a classic of Weimar-era German cinema, largely due to the enduring star power of its leading actress, Louise Brooks (1906–1985). But in its own time, the film had mostly negative reviews. Brooks—who was looked upon with suspicion in Germany anyway as an American actress—retired early and suddenly from acting after only a few years in the international spotlight (Brooks; Card). Among various other reasons for her retirement was the change in film technologies and trends: by the early 1930s, “talkies” were more popular than silent films, and

Brooks was neither interested in learning German (to continue working with Pabst) nor in reprising her roles for American “talkies” (Card). The studios cut her out accordingly (Card). According to French film critic Ado Kyrou, she simply “disappeared in 1931 [...] at the age of twenty-four,” and at the height of her fame (Card).

In 1955, however, interest in her was renewed by a major film exhibition in Paris (“60 Ans de Cinema”) organized by Henri Langlois, in which Brooks featured prominently—though she herself was unaware of the exhibition. The exhibit prompted film curator James Card to seek Brooks out in New York, befriend her, [interview her](#), and bring her out of isolation. In 1958, Langlois organized a retrospective at the Cinémathèque Française devoted just to Brooks and her career, which, this time, Brooks attended. During this time in Paris, Brooks met often with Lotte Eisner (co-founder of the Cinémathèque with Langlois), the German-espatrian film critic who wrote about Brooks and Pabst in her authoritative volume on German silent film, *The Haunted Screen* (*L’Écran démoniaque*; 1952) (Gladysz, “Henri Langlois”).

A second wave of renewed interest in Brooks, the film, and the Lulu figure took place in the early 1980s, which was shortly after Kenneth Tynan wrote a long and loving [profile](#) of Brooks and *Pandora’s Box* in *The New Yorker* (1979). In 1982, Brooks published her autobiography, *Lulu in Hollywood*, and in 1983, Thomas Elsaesser published the first iteration of his landmark work on Lulu, “Lulu and the Meter Man,” in *Screen* magazine. In 1983, her Pabst films (now considered “masterpieces”) were again screened in New York, prompting a “new generation” to “discover” her (Mitgang). A few other profiles of Brooks appeared from 1983 until her death in 1985, at which point, tributes and obituaries appeared.

This dossier on *Die Büchse der Pandora* focuses on the reception of the film, especially the figure of Lulu (as played by Brooks), who has sparked much discourse about representations of women in early film. The dossier includes an introduction with details about the film’s restoration and censorship, an annotated bibliography of scholarly work on the film, three contemporary reviews of the film (two translated into English from German), a section on

“concepts and constellations,” a filmography of related titles, and “afterlives” of the film in various media.

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Frank Wedekinds „Die Büchse der Pandora“ wurde bei ihrem Erscheinen vom Staatsanwalt verfolgt und in ihrer ersten Fassung vernichtet

# DIE BÜCHSE DER PANDORA

Ein Film frei nach Frank Wedekinds Lulu-Tragödie

Pandora war das wundervolle Weib der griechischen Sage, dem die Götter ein Gefäß anvertrauten, in das sie alles Übel und alle Sünden der Welt eingeschlossen hatten. Die Unbesonnene öffnete die Büchse, und alles Unheil kam damit auf die Erde . . . . So bringt auch Lulu, das betörend schöne Weib, all den Menschen Verderben, die ihren Weg kreuzen und an ihrer Sünde verbrennen wie die Falter im Licht. Als Blumenmädchen taucht sie irgendwo auf, von dem alten Schigold begleitet. Fühlt ihre grenzenlose Macht über die Männer und steigt empor zu Glanz und Reichtum wie ein Meteor am Nachthimmel. Einer nach dem andern geht an ihr zugrunde. Der energiereiche Gewaltmensch Dr. Schön gibt unter ihrem Einfluß seine glänzende Karriere, seine einflußreiche Verlobung, seine Lebenspläne auf. Er stirbt von ihrer Hand. Sein Sohn, der schwärmerische Alwa, wird rettungslos in Lulus Netz verstrickt. Flicht mit der Frau, die seinen Vater tötete, und verliert den Boden unter den Füßen. Der Muskelelmsch Rodrigo Quast, ein Athlet, wird durch Lulu in den Tod getrieben. Auch eine Frau, die Gräfin Geschwitz, verbrennt an der lodernen Flamme des jungen, schönen Weibes. So bringt sie Unglück über Unglück, bis die triumphierende Jägerin mit jäher Schicksalswendung zum gehetzten Wild wird. Ein Höllensturz ist es, mit dem sie endet. Sie wird zur Dirne, muß sich Männer von der Straße in die ärmliche Dachkammer holen, um für sich und ihre Freunde Brot zu verschaffen. Dabei kommt sie an die ihr innerlich verwandte Mannesbestie Jack the ripper. Unter dem Messer dieses tragischen Unholds endet das Schicksal des bis zum Tode betörend schönen, jungen Weibes, das gleich der sagenhaften Pandora nur Unheil auf die Welt bringen sollte.

Lulu . . . Louise Brooks

Alwa Schön . . . Franz Lederer  
Gräfin Geschwitz . . . Alice Roberts  
Schigold . . . . . Carl Götz

REGIE: G. W. PABST



Dr. Schön . . Fritz Kortner

Rodrigo Quast . . . Kraft Raschig  
Jack . . . . . Gustav Diehl  
Der Inspizient . . . Siegfried Arno

EIN NERO-FILM DER  
SASCHA FILM A.-G.

## AB 1. MÄRZ:

Burg-Kino, I., Opernring 19  
Elite-Kino, I., Wollzeile 34  
Kruger-Kino, I., Krugerstraße 5  
Rotenturm-Kino, I., Fleischmarkt 1  
Schottenring-Kino, I., Schottenring 5  
Eos-Kino, III., Ungargasse 60

Wiedner Grand-Kino, IV., Mittersteig 15  
Schäffer-Kino, VI., Mariahilferstraße 37  
Stafa-Kino, VII., Mariahilferstraße 120  
Flieger-Kino, IX., Liechtensteinstraße 37  
Weltspiegel-Kino, XVI., Lerchenfeldergürtel 55

## AB 5. MÄRZ:

Kärntner-Kino, I., Johannesgasse 3  
Tuchlauben-Kino, I., Tuchlauben 7a  
Kino Lustspieltheater, II., Prater, Ausstellungsstraße

Phoenix-Kino, VII., Lerchenfelderstraße 35  
Votivpark-Kino, IX., Währingerstraße 12  
Schönbrunner Schloß-Kino, XII., Schönbrunner Schloßstraße 4-8



## CREDITS

For the full credits in English, click [here](#) and scroll to “Cast” and “Credits.”

## RESTORATION

*For more on the film’s restoration, see: the Blu-Ray release of the film from UK-based Masters of Cinema (with the British Film Institute), which includes a section on the film’s restoration. See also websites DVDBeaver and the Louise Brooks Society, which have collected thorough information on the history of the film’s versions and restoration. Thomas Gladysz, of the Louise Brooks Society, has written multiple essays outside of his website that touch on the restoration history as well (cited below), and go into detail about the film’s early screenings internationally and especially in the U.S.*

After its initial screenings in 1929-1930, *Die Büchse der Pandora* could seemingly only be found in archives like Henri Langlois’ Cinémathèque Française in Paris, where it was available for viewing by visitors, and where it was screened publicly in 1958 as part of a retrospective on Brooks (Elsaesser, *Screen*; Gladysz, “Langlois”). Eastman House curator, James Card, is considered responsible for the restoration of the film (Elsaesser, *Screen*). In 1943, Brooks had requested that the MOMA film department store a copy of the film too, but her request was rejected (Gladysz, “Troubled History”).

The version that exists today was first restored from three duplications from archival collections: from the aforementioned Cinémathèque Française (duplicated in 1952); from the Národní filmový archiv in Prague (duplicated in 1964); and from the Gosfilmofond in Russia (duplicated in 1970). These duplications were made available by the archives and worked on in collaboration with the Cineteca di Bologna.

The material from the duplicates was heavily damaged. In the mid-1990s, Martin Koerber at the Deutsche Kinemathek led a new restoration project. Intertitles were newly reconstructed by Koerber from lists of the original intertitles, which had been submitted at the time in German to the Swedish Film Censorship Office, and had been found earlier in the archives of the film censorship office in Stockholm (DVD Beaver; San Francisco Film Festival). (Censorship notes in German have been digitized [here](#) (Gladysz, “Filmography”).). However, analog technology was not able to flawlessly restore the film.

In 2005, US-based David Ferguson and Angela Holm began a new restoration project, in collaboration with Haghefilm Conservation, George Eastman House, Cinémathèque Française, Národní filmový archiv, Gosfilmofond, and Cineteca di Bologna. Ferguson and Holm worked with Koerber from the Deutsche Kinemathek. Hugh Hefner was one of the top investors in the project. Ferguson passed away in 2015.

The last decades have seen multiple digitally-enhanced versions released at similar times through different institutions. U.S. based Criterion Collection released versions in 2006, 2018, and 2024. U.K. based Masters of Cinema (run by Eureka Entertainment), in collaboration with the British Film Institute, has released versions in 2006, 2018, and 2023. The BFI version is 135 minutes with a score by Peer Raban. The Criterion version is 141 minutes with a choice of four scores. See [here](#) for a detailed, side-by-side comparison of the 2023 Masters of Cinema Blu-Ray with the 2024 Criterion Blu-Ray versions of the film.

The 2024 release by the US-based Criterion Collection is available on Blu-Ray and for streaming via Kanopy. This version includes commentary by film scholars Thomas Elsaesser and Mary Ann Doane, as well as a 1971 interview with Brooks conducted by Richard Leacock, titled “Lulu in Berlin,” the Hugh Munro Neely documentary *Looking for Lulu* (1998), the Kenneth Tynan article “The Girl in the Black Helmet” (now available under the title “Louise Brooks Tells All”) and Brooks’ essay “Pabst and Lulu.”



The 2023 release by Masters of Cinema is also available on Blu-Ray. This version features commentary by Pamela Hutchinson (author of the excellent BFI volume on the film), video essays by David Cairns and Fiona Watson, a collection of writings on the film, and a feature on the film's restoration.

## CENSORSHIP

Due to differing censorship rules, the film was released under multiple versions. Outside of Germany, it was significantly censored and released as “Jugendverbot” (adults-only). The film's production company, Nero-Film, created an entirely different version for screening in France, titled *Loulou* (Potter). In this version, the lesbian relationship between Geschwitz and Lulu is cut, and Alwa is no longer Schön's son, but his secretary (Potter). Geschwitz's name is also changed to Anna Kerendt (Potter). These changes attempted to remove homosexuality from the film, as well as the incestuous element of having both father and son love the same woman.

The U.S. and U.K. versions of the film were also heavily censored. The U.S. version had about a third of the original film cut. Geschwitz's lesbianism is again omitted, the relationship between Alwa and Schön is again changed, and the film has a different ending (Potter; Elsaesser). In the U. S. alternate ending, Lulu is not killed by Jack the Ripper but instead joins the Salvation Army. The U.K. version has Geschwitz's character cut completely (Gladysz, “Troubled History”). The U.K. version was cut from 131 minutes to just 80 minutes, and was rated as “adults only” (Gladysz, “Sin Lust Evil”).

The film was also screened in South America and parts of Asia. It was screened in Cuba under the title *Lulu la Pecadora*. It was popular in Japan, where Brooks had a large following (Gladysz, “Sin Lust Evil”).

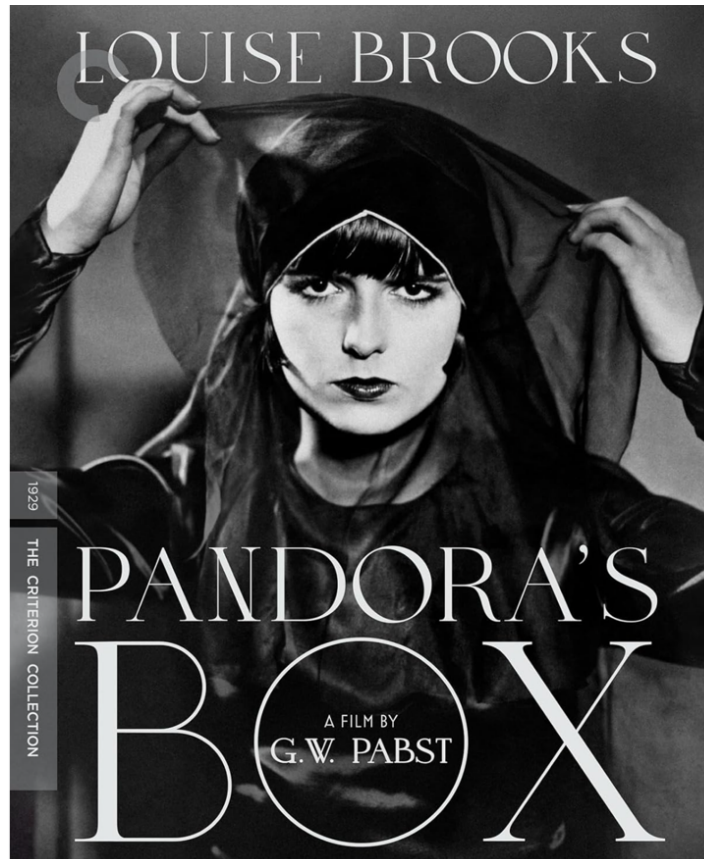
In addition to censorship, the film faced multiple bans. In Europe, after its release in 1929, the film was banned in Finland, Norway, and Sweden. It was also banned in the Netherlands in 1930 (though it was shown in 1935 at one theatre in Amsterdam). Under Nazi rule from 1933-1945, the film was banned in Germany as well. It was banned in Portugal from 1936-1945 (Gladysz, “Filmography”).



Advertisement for film screening, from [Der Tag](#), March 1, 1929, p. 3.



## HOME VIEWING



The most up-to-date restoration of the film is available on Blu-Ray through the Criterion Collection (2024) and Masters of Cinema (2023).

We also recommend watching the film on [Kanopy](#), which is free with an institutional login or public library card. Kanopy has the 2024 Criterion Collection version.

## KEY FIGURES

### FRANK WEDEKIND

Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929) was based on two plays from Frank Wedekind (1864-1918), *Erdgeist* (*Earth Spirit*; 1895) and its sequel, *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*; 1904). The plays were written at the same time as one work, but were separated in order to mitigate censorship (which the plays faced regardless) (Hutchinson, 11). Wedekind was a highly influential figure in German avant-garde culture. His works were considered immoral and were heavily censored and banned. He was part of a circle of anti-Bourgeois German artists, writers, cabaret performers, actors, and playwrights, many of whom would go on to join or found political art movements such as Dada and the Surrealists. Wedekind's Lulu was intended as a direct expression of unhindered, unabashed sexuality. She was meant to be read as inhuman, a reflection of primal urges rather than a real person. Wedekind's *Die Büchse der Pandora* could only be published and performed in Germany in a restricted version until 1918, at which point censorship rules were lifted in Germany under the new Weimar rules (until 1933). The play was performed in Vienna in 1905, with Wedekind playing Jack the Ripper, and Wedekind's future wife, Tilly Newes, playing Lulu.

### LOUISE BROOKS

Louise Brooks (1906–1985) is widely considered to be *the* Lulu, not only the unrivalled version of the character, out of all the genres and remakes of *Pandora's Box*, but also the character herself come to life. In his introductory note to Brooks's autobiography, *Lulu in Hollywood*, William Shawn calls Brooks the “only” Lulu, the one who “haunts” all the others (vii). Brooks was born in Kansas, and trained as a dancer before becoming an actress. She danced with the experimental Denishawn School, in George White's *Scandals*, and in the Ziegfeld Follies. While dancing in the Follies, she was “discovered” by a Paramount producer (then Famous Players-

Lasky), and acted in several films under contract with the studio. She was not infatuated with Hollywood or fame, a fact that made her disliked and looked down upon by some (Brooks, 18). In 1928, unbeknownst to Brooks, Pabst wanted her for Lulu after seeing her in the American film *A Girl in Every Port* (1928). She was still under contract with Paramount, but, in a stroke of good timing, quit Paramount when they refused to increase her salary. She was then informed of the Pabst offer and accepted.

## **G. W. PABST**

Georg Wilhelm Pabst (1885-1967) was the director of *Die Büchse der Pandora*, as well as one other film starring Brooks, *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (*Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1929). From Vienna and working in theatre originally, Pabst switched to film directing in 1923. He continued directing films internationally until 1956. By the time *Pandora* came out in 1929, Pabst was a highly-regarded figure in German-language film circles, and was considered one of the top directors of the emerging *Neue Sachlichkeit* style (Kracauer). However, critics and audiences were not very fond of *Die Büchse der Pandora*, and it was considered a low point in Pabst's career until several decades later, when it was "rediscovered" as a "masterpiece." Many of his other films are now considered classics as well, and many of the women he worked with (and sometimes "discovered") became huge film stars: Asta Nielsen, Greta Garbo, Brigitte Helm, Leni Riefenstahl, and Brooks herself.



“Wer ist Lulu?”, “Wer ist Dr. Schön?” Promotional material for the film in advance of its Vienna premiere. From *Die Stunde*, February 26-27, 1929, p. 2, 3.

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