



## Historical Essays

ERICH POMMER

### Writers and the Sound Film

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Film production was always based on collectivism, on a colorful multitude of components coming together from opposing directions. By pushing this principle to the extreme, the sound film rearranged all the relations among those involved in the production, who felt the ground beneath their feet wobble under the initial onslaught. Now the tasks have once again become clear. The screenplay writer, who requires extreme dramatic and technical precision in the sound (in silent films the occasional error could be corrected later in the editing), gained considerably in significance. Dialogue authors were brought in for the first time. There was no lack of material. The central question in sound films as well as silent is, primarily, how?

It remains desirable for *writers* to devote themselves to film production. They should not be put off by the fact that film production has already had rather bad experiences with writers. Outstanding writers have sometimes been capable of giving nothing to film because they regarded the matter as complete once they had lent their names to it, the exploitation of which seemed to them to be the point. So, when they went to work on the black-and-white art, they did not bring to it the same creative energy they accepted as self-evident in their literary activity. Film will belong to writers once they give themselves to it without reservation.

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## KARL VOLLMOELLER

### *Leave it out!*

*Tempo*, Berlin 3. Nr. 76, March 31, 1930, 1. Supplement. Translated by Barbara Kosta

I claim that this definition comes from me. But there are painters who claim that Liebermann said something similar. It doesn't matter. I never argue. The question remains whether today's films are even art. It seems to me that it is enough that they intend to be art. Any permitted form of human expression that is capable of arousing joy or pain in people is art or aspires to be art.

Bad art always comes from "too much," never from "too little." Every new technique brings with it the temptation to overdo it. That was the case with the camera, and now it's the same with the microphone. As soon as all the doors stop creaking, all the footsteps stop clattering, and every actor stops babbling endless theatrical lines, sound film approaches the realm of art.

With *The Blue Angel*, we all tried to speed up this process a little—by leaving things out.

Of course, leaving things out requires substance. *The Blue Angel* had plenty of that.

From the outset, there was Heinrich Mann's novel with its two unforgettable characters, Professor Unrat and the artist Fröhlich; there was Emil Jannings, the greatest and most remarkable actor phenomenon of our time; there was Marlene Dietrich, a unique woman; and there was Erich Pommer, a unique (and prolific) producer. There was Zuckmayer, our cheerful friend and stage poet, and a very special artist of the screenplay, Robert Liebmann. *Embarras des richesses!* It is understandable that I had no choice but to focus on leaving things out. (In Hollywood, this is referred to as "general editor").

Last but not least, there was Josef von Sternberg. I assisted him in a similar capacity on his first English sound film. Pommer, Jannings, and I managed to bring him over [to Berlin].

Josef von Sternberg, who had grown up with film reels and cameras and worked extremely hard, was full of European longing and deeply connected to European art [. . .]

As paradoxical as it may sound, the main advantage of talking films is the ability to express silence. Silent films lack silence as an artistic device because everything was silent.

I believe that some of these new possibilities can be felt in *The Blue Angel*. Do my co-authors mourn the loss of the many beautiful lines of dialogue? I don't know. I never encountered them again during filming. But I will never forget Emil Jannings's dismayed expression as he was demolished sentence by sentence, word by word, torn away... until his genius understood what was going on and how much stronger the rare, essential word was in the vividly driven plot.

Only small people are allowed to babble. But Emil became the greatest of all in *The Blue Angel* knowing when to leave something out.

## Marlene Dietrich



### MARLENE DIETRICH

#### “To An Unknown Woman”

First published as “Marlene Dietrich an eine Unbekannte,” in *Illustrierter Film Kurier* 12, no. 1381 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Wiener, 1930) Translated by Michael Cowan.

Premiering at Berlin’s Gloria Palast on April 1, 1930, Josef von Sternberg’s *The Blue Angel* (*Der blaue Engel*) propelled Dietrich to international fame. After making an appearance at the film’s premier, Marlene Dietrich (1901-1992) left for America the same evening, where she signed a contract with Paramount Pictures

and subsequently starred in a series of films by von Sternberg. Taken from the program that accompanied this early German sound film, the following letter to fans offers an example of the kinds of intimate writing by stars that was popular in film magazines of the time. In discussing the differences between performance in theater and sound film, Dietrich's text also anticipates Walter Benjamin's theorization of stage versus screen acting in his *Artwork* essay.

Most honored friend,

You are a stranger to me, more distant than the nightly audience of any stage actor. For you, on the other hand, I seem very close. You get to know only a part of my person and of my acting ability. You see me; I grow familiar to you, even if it is only a copy of my person that gives you the impressions of a human being. Precisely because you get to know me only through my role, because I can convey to you only a very limited part of myself, I would like to tell you a little about myself and about my new sound film.

*The Blue Angel* is my first sound film. I have already acted in a few films. You might also know me from the theater. Perhaps you think since she has already acted on the stage, making sound films was probably nothing new. However, I must assure you of the opposite. This probably sounds paradoxical. But I have been able to improve my acting by working in sound film, and this for the simple reason that one gets to know oneself better. As a stage actress, one acts, speaks, and moves impulsively. Even if one's role remains the same every evening in its basic idea and overall structure, one's inner disposition nonetheless differs from performance to performance. As a consequence, in its theatrical details, one's performance somehow takes on different nuances every evening, and so the nightly act never becomes a fixed pattern. But in a purely intuitive way, I could also perceive in the audience's reaction whether my performance on any given night was good or bad. The explanation of this inner connection between actor and audience has always remained a mystery to me.

Only after I had finished doing my first preliminary takes in a sound film studio did I understand, on hearing the playback, the enormous difference between work on the stage and in sound film. I noticed right away that I should have spoken differently, more quickly or more pointedly, or that my acting had been too exaggerated. In short, I was a much harsher critic of those sound takes than my director, and the most important thing for me, as I took up sound film, was to learn. I also sat and watched many of the unsuccessful takes of various scenes, driven simply by a desire to observe myself continuously. Perhaps you think that this is the director's job. You are correct. But while the director can and does demand the most intense performance from us, he still has to rely on the talent and sensitivity of the individual to achieve this maximum of dramatic expression. Certain dramatic effects are infinitely more difficult to obtain in sound film than on the stage. In the theater, scenes develop in a continuum; that is, we play characters according to

their inner development. In the sound film, which consists, like the silent film, of a succession of brief shots, we must repeatedly act out only the high points of scenes through words and facial expressions. There is no room—and this is the basic difference between sound film and theater—for any psychological buildup. For you, my honored friend, are interested only in the high point of our performance, not in the process leading up to it.

If I have told you all this, it is simply in order to make clear to you that our career as sound film actors is not as easy as you imagine. It makes exactly the same demands of us that life makes of you, but with the significant difference that we actors must give form to other destinies, while you only have to experience your own.

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**EMIL JANNINGS**  
**Miming and Speaking**

First published as “Mimen und Sprechen,” in *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* 12, no. 1381 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Wiener, 1930). Translated by Michael Cowan.

Sound technology not only reattached actors’ voices to their bodies, but it also shaped their very modes of vocal and corporeal self-presentation, as the tools of “Mimik” (described in the preceding texts of this chapter) no longer seemed appropriate. A celebrated silent film actor like Emil Jannings (1884–1950) had to adapt his manner of speaking and bodily movement to the new technology, toning down his old style of performance. The following text by Jannings was part of the film program for *The Blue Angel* at its premiere in Berlin’s Gloria-Palast on April 1, 1930.

The introduction of sound into film aroused so much opposition, especially among film’s admirers and adherents, because the first talking pictures made the understandable mistake of relying on sound for their entire effect. They thus neglected the image, which remains, after all, the most important factor even in sound film. When the mute child suddenly started speaking, this event threw his parents, the producers, into such a state of frenzy that they totally neglected his

appearance. The fact that film began to play music, speak, and sing so inspired the producers and the public under the spell of exaggerated American advertising that they wished only to hear the sound. Precisely the most valuable and most characteristic element of film—the art of framing, changing, and moving images—fell by the wayside. However, now that the initial excitement and fear are over, the primitive treatment of images in sound films, which dubiously recalled film's beginnings, has also been overcome. Sound film is continuing to develop, even visually, beyond the level that silent film had attained.

The art of film is based on complicated technological developments. For this reason, it lies in film's nature to continually enrich its possibilities of artistic expression through new technological inventions and achievements. Nonetheless, the essential function of film remains constant and overlaps with that of every other art form: namely, to represent, through specific means of expression and methods of artistic construction, real or imagined events.

The film actor must adapt; the mime must become a speaking actor. Being an actor myself, I naturally can't ignore this imperative. Because of the complexity of a film's evolution, the film actor cannot be so independent in his work as his colleague on the stage. In silent films, he is dependent on the director and the cameraman; for unlike the audience before a theatrical stage, the cinema audience does not see the actor's immediate performance but rather a technological reproduction in the form of the photographic image, which only comes about through the artistic, technologically creative, and mediating activity of director and cameraman. In sound film, we must add yet a third mediating agency, on which the reproduction of the actor's acoustical performance depends: that of the sound engineer, the man controlling the microphone. He sits in a soundproof room and hears the actor's words, not as the latter speaks them, but rather as they come over the electronic speakers, reproduced by this technology. The sound engineer can soften and amplify the sound, and he has the final say as to whether or not a sound take is successful. In the ideal case, of course, this technological apparatus would emit the sound exactly as it receives it. This purely technological question will find an answer sooner or later. Nonetheless, the actor, even the stage actor, will have to learn to speak for the microphone; he will have to get used to this odd little box, just as he got used to the camera in silent film.

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EMIL JANNINGS'S CONFESSION

*New York Times (1857-Current file); Apr 20, 1930; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2001)*  
pg. 102

## EMIL JANNINGS'S CONFESSION

ON the eve of the world première in Berlin of what is described as UFA's latest and best talking picture, "The Blue Angel," in which he played the leading part, Emil Jannings wrote an article for the *Vossische Zeitung* entitled "Hollywood and Babelsberg," evidently calculated to put an end to rumors that the great German star had returned to the Fatherland disillusioned. It ran as follows:

"Of course I haven't returned from America disillusioned. I learned a great deal over there. It is no better and no worse in Hollywood than in Babelsberg [the UFA production plant near Berlin]—it's just different.

"First of all, the way of working is entirely different from that of Europe. In the studios of Hollywood one works calmly. Everybody, from the director down to the humblest stage hand, is 'happy.' In fact, one is expected to be happy, to laugh, and not to allow exertion to leave traces. The American actors play more easily, I might almost say more humanly. They exert themselves less. This is because the American actors are not actors in our sense of the word. They play their parts without pondering over them very much. They mostly present the types they are in real life. They would scorn to do some psychological studying as preliminary to any kind of rôle. At 5 o'clock work is over. Then one goes from the studio directly to the golf course and talks about everything except the day's work.

"I really have learned much from the American film actors and also from the American film directors. Above all, I have learned to act more simply. When I saw my last German film over there, 'The Last Laugh,' I was shocked at my exaggerated gestures and postures. I believe I have got rid of them for good.

"And the work of the American directors is quite different from that of the German. The powers of the American director, compared with

those of the German or European, are unlimited. He changes the scenes at his pleasure. He picks out the actors. He arranges the day's work as he wishes. The naïve, unaffected manner of the American director is a cordial for the actors.

"If I may be allowed to talk about myself, I must say that the talking picture naturally offers me great opportunities. Nevertheless, I can't say that my manner of acting in a silent picture is essentially different from that in a talking film. I (and of course most of the screen actors) always have spoken the words and sentences called for by the part taken. Anyway, the change is not so important for the actor as for the spectator.

"Of course, I am very anxious about my first talking film, 'The Blue Angel.' When I heard my voice for the first time from the canvas after the first tryouts I was horrified. But one gets used to everything—and, above all, to learning how to talk during the screening so that one's voice is reproduced in a satisfactory way.

"And if I may be allowed to say something about my rôle of Professor Unrath, I wish to note that I was glad; after so many years, to take again the part of a figure whose essence didn't consist of sentimentality and pathos. Over there in the United States of America I had to open the big hokum chest so often—much too often.

"It's true that I have hard luck again in this film, just as I always have in all my screen pieces. I either die or am murdered, or, at the least, I go to ruin completely in a moral sense. Who could blame me for at last wishing for a film in which there could be a 'happy ending' for me, too?"

Judging from the enthusiasm with which the Berlin public and critics have received "The Blue Angel," Herr Jannings's nervousness prior to the première was quite unwarranted.



Marlene Dietrich

## HANS WEINAND

### Vamp

*Das Magazin* Nr. 68. April 1930. Translated by Barbara Kosta

It was a lifetime ago, at the end of the last century, that Burne-Jones, the Pre-Raphaelite master, exhibited a portrait of a woman at the New Gallery in London, which very soon began to cause a stir. And then, inspired by this painting, Rudyard Kipling wrote those wonderful verses, now long since classic, which went around the world as “The Vampire” — since then printed, read, recited, and reread countless times. With them, the word vampire rejuvenated with new meaning and new color, re-entered the everyday linguistic consciousness of the Anglo-Saxon world. Until film followed suit in the States and Theda Bara, now sunk back into the sea of our quick forgetfulness, became famous as a vampire; and the term came to life for the masses. The American free-wheeling, syllable-saving linguistic conscience quickly created the shortened term “vamp” from “vampire,” and soon, the term “to vamp,” which has become commonplace, will also be used in no time at all.

“This girl is going to vamp that man”—every American knows what that means and that “that man” will have nothing to laugh about.

So, what is a vamp? Thankfully, today's vamp has nothing in common with the bloodthirsty, blood-sucking vampire, the recurring departed soul of Slavic mythology. So, what is a vamp? Thankfully, today's vamp has nothing to do with the bloodthirsty, blood-sucking recurring departed soul of Slavic mythology; or let's say, very little.

Our vamp is the unfulfilled dream of many, indeed, let's say: she is simply a man's dream of a woman. That eternal dream that wants to wed beauty with innocence, and innocence with the sin of thought; or, to briefly borrow the title of a contemporary play: "the woman one longs for."\* The vamp awakens devotion and desire, love and anxiety, hope and fear, longing and dread, passion and mistrust, joy and torment, jealousy and happiness—only happiness alone, happiness without pain, happiness pure and simple is denied to the vamp.

A key characteristic of the vamp is innocence, or rather, unconsciousness. She is there, living, enchanting, enticing; she awakens the deepest instincts, amazement, devotion, faith, the desire to protect; she awakens the desire to sacrifice and greed, renunciation or intoxication—but she herself remains completely untouched, almost as if she were not even involved in the storm of emotions she arouses; she walks, smiles, gazes—and is hardly aware that her gaze enchants and that her smile can kill. We all know the gaze of the vamp, this uncertain blurring, as it were, a vague gaze that entices without meaning, promises without knowing it, vows without fulfilling—and perhaps that is precisely why it magically lures the soul, thirsty for fulfillment, into the ocean of imagined, never-experienced light and dark possibilities. Unconsciousness accompanies the vamp: perhaps this allows her to innocently bear the blame for emerging from the darkness of the unconscious everywhere, eliciting desires, beliefs, and dreams, and—like Wedekind's Lulu—disappointing and destroying them.

The vamp does not want evil. She does not even know it—the fact that she does not know it may explain why she can arouse it. She wants beauty, seeks beauty, she is beauty herself, she is beautiful. She is beautiful and seductive—her beauty is so inevitable, so natural, so self-evident, just as the rest of us are destined to fall victim to her without wanting to. Without wanting to? We want it, we all want it; we tremble secretly at the nightmare that one day the vamp might disappear. We won't let her go, we need her, we love her, she will accompany us until we wither away and are no more. For she is Eve, Eve par excellence, she who has returned home to us, she who drives us to the tree of knowledge, from which we want to eat, sweet fruit and bitter fruit too, if there is no other way. Only the vamp does not want to enjoy it. She is just there, smiling, looking, and will never know or want to understand . . .

\*Before her performance in *The Blue Angel*, Dietrich starred in *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt* (A Woman Men Long for) (1929) based on Max Brod's bestselling novel of the same name. It is Dietrich's last silent film.

**MARLENE DIETRICH: A PORTRAIT (1931)** Translated by Isabel Fargo Cole

*Angels should not die!*

A German girl, a kid from Berlin, has become the film star of New York and Hollywood. Airplanes fly the gigantic letters of her name overhead in the U.S.A. In headlines and page-long columns, the American newspapers trumpet all that can be told of this woman's triumphs, all that can be discovered of her private life, her opinions and adventures. In Paris, the film that made her famous in Europe—in America it was Morocco—is shown in German. And the French, otherwise so reserved toward foreign artists despite their respect, and apt to emphasize what is exotic and un-French in their artistry, worship and exalt this woman as Woman Herself in the contemporary avatar of her primeval being. This sudden, unprecedented worldwide fame mirrors her domestic impact: in the least little provincial German town the gramophones incessantly play the song of the woman "falling in love again," and virtuous and frivolous women alike find their true nature in its word and tune. With other stars of the theater, film or cabaret it is usually easy to isolate a special trait of their beauty and artistry, and often the very best they have to give is "not everyone's cup of tea." It is a difficult and dubious matter to isolate elements of Marlene Dietrich. And in marvelous fashion she has become universal. I have watched the faces of her audience on the Kurfürstendamm and in a fleabag cinema in the suburb of Tegel and have seen the same delight in all classes and kinds of people. The artist has an effect like that of the magical doll in the Persian fairy tale: carpenters, tailors, painters, Brahmans and sundry craftsmen all helped to make her; they fight over her possession, come before the Kadi, and he claims her as his long-lost wife. Whether portraying a lady or a trollop, a conqueress or a victim, Marlene Dietrich always embodies a universal wish-dream; like the heroine of one of her films, she is the woman they long for—they, not he or she, but all of us, the nation, the world, the time. Whatever the fate of the creatures she portrays—and some pay with their lives for their mettle and depravity—they hardly invite sympathy at first. AU of us, the spectators, fall victim to them like their lovers. They become objects of universal desire. You do not think very hard about how they feel. Their effect is too powerful for that.

You have no urge to put yourself in her position; you are in her possession. And this would be a "vamp"? Oh no. A vamp, a specifically Anglo-Saxon term harking back to the vampire of ancient legend, is a woman who sucks men's lifeblood out of sexual need and calling. Like those ancient ghosts, they need this blood for nourishment, and one assumes that those branded murderers know quite well what they are doing.

Marlene Dietrich's dangerous women do not seem to mean such harm. As merry Lola from *The Blue Angel* she takes the schoolmaster's bristling bearded face in her motherly hands, pats the smitten man on the cheek like a child, looks up at her poor victim with a nuptial smile as he makes her (unworthy woman) his wife, smiles his dream of bliss. After the first crucial night she pours him his coffee in the morning like a good little housewife and has gone thoroughly bourgeois for

his sake. And when he starts to go to rack and ruin over her, she is not pleased at all; she tries all sorts of things to train him in her way of life, but in the end, to her horror, the catastrophe is inevitable. The good-natured woman has a face for everyone's needs: for the director and conjurer the cool, trustworthy face of a colleague; for the blustering sea-captain exactly what he longed for at sea; for "Mazeppa," popping in cheerfully with his banal chic, the suggestive wink: How about another go?

She makes no fiendish effort; everything seems to happen on its own. She has a perfectly innocent way of seducing. However dubious the situation, however pert and provocative her costume, she unfolds her gracious smile over dress and world. In this smile is no wish to conquer or be conquered. It is both arousing and appeasing. It is not meant only for the one it snares, though it suits him well; it goes through him, past him out into the wide world. With this smile Marlene Dietrich conquered Europe and America. It is at once more common and more celestial than any of her rivals' smiles. Greta Garbo's is of a frau tenderness; it arouses pitiful compassion even when she herself seems happy; it is Christian, angelic. Elisabeth Bergner's smile is virginally lonely, Asta Nielsen's tragic and fatal. Marlene Dietrich can smile like an idol, like the archaic Greek gods, and look harmless all the while. You cannot reproach her smile. It "didn't mean any harm." And yet it can be an engulfing Astarte smile, an expression of the Venus vulgivaga (the inconstant, roving goddess of love) who—on the side—was the goddess of death. It can be banal, superbly banal like the words of the songs that naughty Lola sings. These words and melodies come from a man with a brilliant grasp of our great Berliner's expressive powers, Friedrich Hollaender. She sings the now famous refrain:

*Falling in love again, never wanted to.  
What am I to do?  
I can't help it.  
Love's always been my game, play it how I may.  
I was made that way I can't help it*

with a composure, a candid nakedness that is much simpler, plainer and more powerful than any deliberate "sex appeal." Here sex takes no pains to lure; it is frankly offered, there for the taking. In his study *So wird heute gesungen* (How they sing today), H. Stuckenschmidt writes that Marlene Dietrich performs her music-hall verses with "grave audacity," marking a complete departure from traditional cabaret style. "The decisive undertone here is shockingly new and characteristic of our time. All aesthetic and moral standards collapse before it. The concept of the beautiful is abolished, superseded by the unmistakably cultic accentuation and glorification of the sexus." This is rather relentlessly histrionic but surely touches on the reason for the great popularity of Marlene Dietrich's voice.

To continue reading see Cole, Isabel Fargo. "Marlene Dietrich and Franz Hessel." *The Missouri Review*, Volume 25, Number 3 (2002): pp. 71-78.



[“Falling in Love Again”](#)

**H.H. STUCKENSCHMIDT**

**This is How We Sing Today. Chorals from the Mud: An Observation**

*UHU* 6.9. June 1930. Translated by Barbara Kosta

When our fathers went to the cabaret, they did so with a dull sense of depravity, of intellectual infidelity. They probably felt very grown-up when the Barrison Sisters bared their legs up to their knees, when couplets that were indecent in their opinion were sung, and the word “frou-frou” contained a world of madness, illicit messiness, and erotic debauchery for them.

The cabaret of that time was very aware of its underground function. It saw itself as the flip side of a world it secretly longed for, yet which remained forever out of reach. Bourgeois stability was the dream of all these *chansonnettes*, the latent refrain of their songs. Highly moral concepts such as love, longing, home, and marriage formed the basis from which even the most lascivious lyrics were constructed. The blue flower always bloomed in the background somewhere. Even the wildest prostitute songs of François Villon were enveloped in the belief in familial divinity. Even the brothel, after the toil and burden of the night, became a tender home sweet home, where the lewd housewife washed and dried stockings. The figure of the longing prostitute, who had not been sung to in her cradle, and her counterpart, the rescuing, redeeming man offering true love, dominated the relevant literature. The bourgeoisie's horror of that sphere, which the governess had

described to him as hell, was reflected in the 'light arts.' Those who enjoyed the pleasures of life too intensely died in poverty and filth. And behind the walls that represented the demimonde, a chorale sounded on muted hurdy-gurdies. In short, it was an extremely tearful genre.

Over. Done. The ethical crutches, worm-eaten for quite some time, have finally collapsed. People have become accustomed to viewing bodies and souls naked. In a socially dysfunctional world, there is no room for moral reflection. The headlines in the afternoon paper are more important than the empty threats of the apocalypse.

Marlene Dietrich, the newest interpreter of art of the gutter, which she represents exceptionally in *The Blue Angel*. She is a bar singer and sings:

Falling in Love again.  
Never wanted to.  
What am  
What am I to do?  
I can't help it.  
Love's always been my game.  
Play it how I may.  
I was made that way.  
I can't help it.

The sentimental coquette has gone to hell in economy class, as she deserves. And from the mud, with a slight variation on the mythical story, the new Venus vulgivaga was born, known as Pandemos in Greek and Nutte in Berlin.

All attempts at moral classification fail with this type, because she lacks any such prerequisite, even that of negation. The hooker in her purest form does not yearn; bourgeois society, morality, God are unknown concepts to her, and even money plays a secondary role. She is sexuality made real. She became vulgar, not out of opposition to another ideal of womanhood, but out of compulsion, because vulgarity is the end in itself because she was made that way. "You can have everything from me except for one thing," was the saying ten years ago. From the hooker, you can have only that one thing, "and nothing else."

This decidedly sexually charged woman has inspired a new form of couplet, a type of art whose characteristics are becoming more vivid from year to year. It is an abysmal glorification of the Venus type that fascinates in its clear exclusivity. As recently as 1910, nuances of vulgarity were used as artistic devices. They were applied sparingly and bashfully. Today, everything is much more direct. The ultimate sexual goal is no longer bashfully embellished. The moral veils have

fallen away, and so the erotic couplet becomes a chorus of sensuality, an almost pagan hymn to what Puritans like to call the lowlands of the world, the mud of the big city.



Dietrich sings in the same sound film “Children, This Evening I Gotta Get a Man just a Man, a Real Man”  
[https://youtu.be/19T2K\\_Zejf0?si=wF46TnwSH7om9N9y](https://youtu.be/19T2K_Zejf0?si=wF46TnwSH7om9N9y)

A few years ago, when the bold and prophetic Valeska Gert discovered this realm of madness for herself, for her dances, and even underscored her dancing with song and spoken lasciviousness, people were outraged. Her “suburban *chansonette*,” her “Titine,” were considered the height of shamelessness, an attack on all the expectations of bourgeois eroticism. She was the first to radically carry out the height of what is repulsive in the conventional sense. And even with Gert, assuming a certain impartiality, one had the feeling of a hellish sacredness lurking ghostly as the artistic driving force behind the sound-dance structures.

A few years later, Kiki sang her obscene popular songs at the Boul' Mich, the most intellectual pub on the continent, in the “Jockey,” her face covered in heavy makeup. It was a friendlier genre than Gert's. But in terms of uninhibitedness, realism, and indifference to any conventional decency, it possibly surpassed it. The charm of the French language could only conceal the pointless, dogged

objectivity of the lyrics superficially. The much-maligned Paris was not fond of these brutalities; Kiki is said to have become respectable.

Meanwhile, Berlin has cultivated the type. Here, where the decline of social morality is most palpable, the intellectual basis and the female material for the evolving cult of prostitution are also present. In 1928, Bert Brecht and Kurt Weill presented the first theatrical version of “Mahagonny” to the public, a play that applies the social-anarchist premises of this new artistic trend in fundamental ways. Shortly thereafter, “The Threepenny Opera” appeared, built from the same elements and the first successful work of art of its kind. Almost simultaneously, Marcellus Schiffer's chamber revue “Es liegt in der Luft” (It's in the Air) appeared, with music by Mischa Spoliansky.

And suddenly there was Margo Lion on stage, giraffe-like and supple, her movements and voice the antithesis of all feminine charm.



Margo Lion

She sang a scene of brutal intensity, a bridal monologue in which any pretense of chasteness, marital reserve, and solemn gestures were stripped away with furious vehemence. It was a moment so clear, so vulgar, so deliberately sexual that Blandine Ebinger's lustful childhood by comparison resembles a tea party of chattering teenage girls from the 1890s. In this sphere, Lotte Lenya most consistently embodies the childish whore type when she babbles songs from "Happy End" or "Mahagonny" with infamous restraint.

Lotte Lenya

However, it was a delicate, blonde woman who gave these chorales from the mud their final form: Marlene Dietrich, with her couplets in "The Blue Angel." The record reflects her style even more clearly than the film. Here, in the lyrics and music of Friedrich Holländer, a new, unadulterated character, a prostitute, is portrayed, a world of acknowledged sexuality, a ruthlessly egocentric sphere of naked erotomania. This woman, who wants nothing more than "the man who still wants to kiss and can," who is not interested in money or looks, takes shape with icy certainty. There is hardly anything more exciting than the vibrato with which Marlene Dietrich spoke the one refrain on the record: "...because that is my world, and nothing else." In these couplets, in the way they are performed with a rough whiskey voice and serious insolence, the departure from any traditional cabaret style is complete. It would be easy to trace the origin of certain nuances, the influence of Claire Waldoff, for example. But the undertone that is decisive here is shockingly new and characteristic of the present. All aesthetic and moral standards fail in the face of it. The concept of "beauty" has been abolished definitively, supplanted by the unquestionable cult-like emphasis on and glorification of sex. Whether we affirm or deny this song is a private matter. But we cannot and must not avoid it. For it is entirely in keeping with the times in which we live.

# MARLENE DIETRICH



Aus dem erfolgreichen Tonfilm

## Der blaue Engel

**ELECTROLA**

ICH BIN DIE FEISCHE LOLA  
Das von Lily Langtrich „Der blaue Engel“  
singsch. (Hilfslied) von Robert Ledwitzer  
MARLENE DIETRICH  
Hilfslied. (Hilfslied) von Robert Ledwitzer  
Aufgenommen am 1. August 1930  
E. G.  
1930

Ich bin vor Kopf bis Fuß auf Liebe eingestellt EG 1770  
Nimm dich in Acht vor blonden Frau'n

Ich bin die feische Lola EG 1802  
Kinder, heut' Abend such' ich mir was aus

Marek Weber  
und sein Orchester EG 1810  
Ich bin vor Kopf bis Fuß auf Liebe eingestellt  
auch gesungen von den  
Comedian Harmonists  
EG 1911

auf **ELECTROLA**

Der UHU schreibt: ... Nach Marer als der Film gibt die Schallplatte ihren Stil wieder. ... Es gibt kaum etwas Aufregenderes als jenes Vibrato, mit dem Marlene Dietrich den einen Refrain auf die Platte gesprochen hat: ... denn das ist meine Welt, und sonst gar nichts. ...

Verlangen Sie unverbindliches Vorspiel

“...DENN DAS IST MEINE WELT, UND SONST GAR NICHTS.”

[https://youtu.be/b8muZbqB6ZU?si=oy\\_iZaLa87BZkYv8](https://youtu.be/b8muZbqB6ZU?si=oy_iZaLa87BZkYv8)



## Reviews

SIEGFRIED KRACAUER

*The Blue Angel*

First published as "*Der blaue Engel*," *Die neue Rundschau* 41, no. 6 (June 1930), 861-863.

It often happens in German public life that something appears on the scene that has been excellently made and has only one fault; namely that it is really nothing at all. It could not be more artistically put together but its trappings are mere ornament. Such empty showpieces are typical of our public life today. The concealed reason for this is that there is nothing behind it.

A prime example of this lack of substance, which it would be worthwhile to analyze, is the film that has been so much praised in the *press*-*The Blue Angel*. It contains details that could not be better; it is built up and cut with undeniable skill. It must be admitted that it is an outstanding achievement; that the alternation between dialogue scenes and silent scenes confers on the film a special power that has never before been so penetratingly realized; that some scenes (e.g., that of the headmaster in the

classroom or of the wedding breakfast) are extraordinarily conspicuous; that Jannings with the assurance of a well-seasoned actor extracts every conceivable effect from anything that could possibly provide one; and that there is a pleasing harmony between Marlene Dietrich's vocal organs and beautiful legs. All this is admitted, but to what purpose the legs, the effects, the technique, the gigantic theater?

For a private tragedy that in this version and today concerns no one very much. The fact that Heinrich Mann's novel is misused is not a decisive factor here. More important is the fact that this prewar book has been chosen at all as a basis. What interest led the film producers, who could equally well have chosen Mann's *Der Untertan*, to the dark psyche of Professor Unrat and his relations with the singer Lola? It was this: the subjects that are nowadays considered to be of interest betray the fact that they are not real subjects at all. The selection that is made of themes and structures may be conscious or unconscious, but nevertheless the aim is, as *The Blue Angel* testifies, to forget reality and to conceal it. The personal fate of Unrat is not an end in itself-much more than this it is just a means to an end-i.e., escape from reality, and in this respect is like the painting on the theater curtain which gives the illusion of the play. Unfortunately, the public never notices that the curtain is never raised.

But do individual destinies and psychology not exist now after the war as they did before? Certainly, and there would be nothing against their legitimate representation. Only our film has nothing to do with the suitable unfolding of its theme. If it were to concern itself with that and nothing else the characters would then form part of a wider society; in fact, the conditions which bring the grammar-school teacher and the *chanteuse* together would of themselves come into the foreground. For if we have learned anything at all from the recent past it is this: that individual destinies where they seem undetermined are in fact determined by the contemporary economic and social situation. This film, however, avoids, with an assiduity that must have been exhausting, any reference that could move us to include present social conditions. It suppresses the social environment that would force itself upon the naive spectator of Unrat's catastrophe, it tears the performers out of any social context in which they would have gained contemporary significance and places them in a vacuum. Neither Lola nor Unrat has enough air to breathe, which confirms the claim that it is less the reality of their existence that is to be demonstrated, than the existence of reality that is to be veiled.

So, what seems to be questioned is not in question at all. But more than this; this futile shadow boxing is inflated to colossal significance. In this too *The Blue Angel* keeps to the rule that is valid here for most public events. One seeks through the use of monumental architecture to raise the illusion that the content which this architecture surrounds is indeed content. One places decorative walls in front of subjects that are only pretexts and claims that they are real subjects. With the same din with which savages drive away evil

spirits, people here want to stifle unpleasant realizations, i.e., realizations which make us conscious of that reality from which we are fleeing.

Whilst in truth Professor Unrat should disintegrate noiselessly, in the film he perishes with a great flourish. The spiritual events, which today more than ever seem to belong in a transparent casing, are dragged into the open and with visual and acoustic close-ups are turned into the main outward events: this has its justifications. If the outer conditions of our existence are to move out of our consciousness, then the inner life must rush to fill out the external world, and develop into an ostentatious facade behind which the real exterior can disappear unnoticed. An inverted glove — the inside becomes the outside so that the outside is made invisible, and Jannings can crow as loudly as he likes. The appearance of lost inwardness which otherwise would serve no purpose is here just right as the substitute for outer reality.

Fortunately, this reversal of the normal order of things avenges itself. Compared with the broad school scenes, Unrat plunges downwards too suddenly and abruptly. This is what happens when one uses spiritual events as decoration: their continuity is not always transferable. Also, the intent desire of the artificial harbor street to be expressive long after expressionism is deceiving. It subjects itself freely to psychic invasion: it is reduced to the level of decor. And finally, the screeching and clattering; the sadism and the battle cries at the end: what a hopeless comparison between hullabaloo and meaning is set up here. But the hullabaloo is required to conceal the lack of meaning.

The success of *The Blue Angel* in covering up our situation by thundering over it, and thus escaping it, is in itself a characteristic of this situation. For those strata that determine the face of German public life, there is nothing left but to cloud reality. They have no viral perceptions with which to counter attacks from the opposition. They find themselves, as I have pointed out in my book, *White-Collar Workers*, ideologically on the defensive. Therefore, in their own interests they cannot permit public debate about the fundamentals of the existing situation. How the dangers of such debate are exorcized is shown by the exemplary case of *The Blue Angel*. It shows too that in the long run all attempts to escape are in vain as they lead to a gaping void.

Reprinted in *The Weimar Sourcebook*. University of California Press, 1994, pp. 630-631.



Von Sternberg and Dietrich

## **HERBERT IHERING**

*Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 62. Jg., Nr. 156, 2.4.1930, Abend-Ausgabe; reprinted in: *Von Reinhardt bis Brecht*, Bd. III, Berlin 1961. Translated by Barbara Kosta

[...] One can talk about poets and sound films for the first time. The spirit breaks into film. Erich Pommer's achievement in this regard cannot be underestimated. Heinrich Mann's theme was responsible for poetry to grow. It was no longer possible to break out into the boundless, into the shallow. At best, epic themes and film drama were not always brought into harmony.

An instructive example. Where film organically develops the theme—the ossified school pedant pursues his students to the harbor dive bar “Der blaue Engel” and is driven mad by the cabaret singer Lola Lola—the film's problem is also completely resolved. Josef von Sternberg works systematically and consistently switches between sound and silence, loud

and soft. He knows that it is not necessary to speak at every moment. He knows that sound only has an effect when followed by silence. For him, sound is not an imitation of reality, but a dramaturgical, formal, stylistic principle.

Professor Immanuel Rath enters the “Blue Angel” for the first time. The door opens, and a whirlwind of sounds hit him. Another door opens, and an even more chaos of voices. A door slams shut, and it is quieter. The second door slams shut, and it becomes silent. Or: footsteps. You hear them sometimes. Other times, you don't. The work is always based on the laws of composition, not on the randomness of reality.

But the filmscript still feels the need to depict the downfall of “Professor Unrat” in accordance with cinematic convention, while changing the theme. Professor Unrat becomes a clown, and just as he is about to make his debut, his wife cheats on him. Again, “Laugh, Bajazzo.” That's enough. Because now convention inevitably intervenes. Now the epic ensemble film becomes a dramatic star vehicle. A solo number for Emil Jannings. A grandiose solo number. Jannings is supposed to crow. And this cry becomes a screeching, raging, shrill cry of madness. Again, and again. Again, and again. This cry is overwhelming because it bursts out of the silence. But: the sound film is a critique of stardom. Jannings is extraordinary when the stunted pedant breaks out of his hardened shell, when his rigidity gives way to a smile for the first time. Later, the film becomes too focused on Jannings. Jannings overacts. He exploits the necessary alternation between sound and silence for his own laboriously prepared effects. This slows down the pace and disrupts the overall composition.

This film is stronger in the composition of the individual situations than in the overall composition. Here, it seems that delays cannot be made up for by subsequent cuts. Some of Jannings' performances seem too much like stage roles. He speaks. This involuntarily evokes memories of his theater roles. What was feared about sound films—competition for the theater—is now becoming a threat to the theater itself. [... ]

The highlight: Marlene Dietrich. She sings and acts in an almost detached, phlegmatic manner. But this sensual phlegmatic style is exciting. She is natural without acting. Everything is film, nothing is theater. For the first time, a woman's voice comes out in a sound film with timbre, tone color, expression. Extraordinary. Otherwise, it is a disappointment:

Kurt Gerron, indistinct, overhasty. Rosa Valetti also does not yet have the courage to be herself. Surprisingly, Eduard von Winterstein has a good voice for sound film.

So: sound film should be even less of a star film than silent film. And silent film retains its special role alongside sound film.



Film Scene with Kurt Gerron (the magician) and Lola Lola. "I am an artist."

## **ERNST JÄGER**

**In: *Film-Kurier*, Nr. 80, April 2, 1930, Literary Choice.** Translated by Barbara Kosta

We have enough poets and writers in Germany — the film industry finally realizes this, and once again it is Erich Pommer who has taken the right path — to engage the best minds for film in its linguistically enriched form, to enter an alliance with the “literary figures” so devoted to the world of film. Plenty of poets and writers in Germany now know it: we possess abundant, imaginative, wise, and strong talents in all the camps and social groups, no matter if they are far from Berlin, even hostile to it, or spiritually rooted in the “Romantic.” They must now strive for a connection that bridges film and literature.

The better film will finally come because key producers need and want it; otherwise, they could open a dance school or something similar. [ . . . ] The intellectual stuttering of the silent films is coming to an end, and education is no longer viewed as a burden in film.

### **Adaptation**

We are still in the early stages with this Pommer-Jannings-Sternberg film. Just as “Caligari” was in the beginning, a revelation, an eye-opener, when it was first released. [ . . . ] Here and there, the “literati” of Heinrich Mann, Carl Zuckmayer, and Karl Vollmöller are working together. Although none of them are infallible, Zuckmayer is particularly a novice in the field of cinema. Vollmöller, on the other hand, is already an “old gent” with lyrical merits from the past and whose name is known in the U.S.A. But who has graduated among the filmmakers? The experienced production manager Erich Pommer, must teach the new authors (continue to seek them out, continue to use them, continue to employ them) one thing: to make the other, the new, clear to the audience for whom they are designing “film” as opposed to stage drama or books. These screens as stages, hung from Paris to Tokyo. This international audience for which the individualistic poet of the “Kakadu” verses must now write.

This new appeal of generalizing individual design naturally carries with it the danger of trivializing the material, however, it plays only a minor role. Professor Rath and his opposite world of Heinrich Lohmann from the wonderfully readable book [ . . . ] has now become the benevolent German Professor Rath. Tracing the adaptation of books written 25 years ago can reveal a critical aspect of the general problem of film. Authors like Heinrich Mann, who wrote *Unrat* 25 years ago, provide a tragic trajectory of all flesh which can be seen in the transformation of the professor to the “last man” [referencing *The Last Laugh (Der letzte Mann, 1924, directed by F. W. Murnau)*]. Although these books may have been thought “modern” when they were published, it usually takes another 10 years for them to be read more widely. On the international film market, it appears that the universal human drama, “The Eternal Human,” is *en vogue* again — especially when it is tailored to the protagonist Emil Jannings — and thus the authors have transformed the misanthrope and nihilist Unrat into a person of virtue who happens upon a blonde vamp. An unsuspecting soul, who once stood for the comedy of overly pedantic teaching, is destroyed; for the woman is blonde, so blonde... (She is a blonde — “nothing more.”)

### **The Task of Jannings’s Film**

Emil Jannings demonstrates his remarkable talent for showcasing the inner collapse of a poor hero through his posture and gait – from a proud worker at 8 o’clock in the morning to a pitiful postcard vendor by midnight. (A figure from a Georg Kaiser play, indeed.) He makes even the more genuine elements just as effective: all the grimaces of decline are depicted perfectly, as well as the splendid wig variations – not even excluding the authentic ones. No one plays the suffering man as unsentimentally as Jannings. He has his special audience moments when he smiles with delight and watches the dancer Lola with physical pleasure.

His face shines as brightly as 20 roast geese in a pan, and he receives huge applause in the box scene. These are classic moments of the greatest mimetic art. He now speaks as well, and that is the main theme of the entire film: how Jannings can be presented in the two worlds. The solution is brilliantly composed, and one can understand why the Americans, who have seen the foreign version of the film, predict its great success abroad. The spoken word in this film has the greatest impact, stumbling into eroticism with a kind heart as *Traumulus*. When he confesses to the chanteuse that she has beautiful eyes, he proclaims “Oh yes...oh indeed...very beautiful...” – or when he proposes a toast to the troupe relying on an old saying, he declares “I allow myself something special!” He paints with words, timidly and uncertainly, and carries his comedy more compellingly than big sighs and tears (which surprisingly flow very little in this Sternberg talkie). Is the labored, heart-sick tone of the dying Rath present in this film? No. He dies silently, all too silently. Until his wedding to the vaudeville girl, Jannings’ career is on the rise. The insanity outbreak still hangs a bit on the mercy of the loudspeakers. There is no doubt about it: the speaking Jannings has a future. He will advance artistic sound film even more when he joins the ensemble even more in his next works. (...)

### ***Sound Film***

This perfectly produced film serves as a testament to the master of filmmaking in the U.S., Josef von Sternberg, who could possibly be one of the twelve greats. Günther Rittau enables Hanns Schneeberger to photograph with a moderate realism, preferring the half-lit atmosphere of the “Blue Angel,” and sending the magician ensemble of Kurt Gerron and Rosa Valetti in front of the steady camera in Otto Hunte’s milieu-true buildings (built with Emil Hassler). Every line in the best episodes is a miniature event. The other characters are also excellent actors: Eduard von Winterstein, Wilhelm Diegelmann, Karl Huzar-Puffy – and if Sternberg were not in Hollywood, and had he had a better understanding of Berlin’s current stage art, he certainly would have depicted the highschoolers’ activities, from the students’ perspective, even more in-depth and without using stereotypes. [...]

Acoustically, everything is masterfully done and deserves recognition for UFA’s creative use of sound film technology. And the sound camera: Fritz Thiery.

### ***Marlene Dietrich***

Marlene Dietrich bestows a strange, pessimistic love upon the unfortunate Immanuel Rath in this film, which is exquisitely portrayed. One can easily believe that she financially ruins and morally drains him, even though this is not shown. While her singing, for which Friedrich Holländer wrote the perfect functional music, was learned at the school of Margo Lion, she

speaks in a charming, casual manner—like no woman in German sound film has spoken before. The voice has achieved complete naturalness. When she says something on screen, the illusion of liveliness is created. “But always think: respect for the predator” – Wedekind has rarely been depicted so realistically in his earth spirit, as in the Jannings-Dietrich scenes of this film.

### ***The Silent Atmosphere of Pommer’s Sound Film***

The tragic transformation of the professor into a cackling of the madman – skillfully handled by Robert Liebmann – is an immense accomplishment. The song transitions are very effective, like the ironic contrast of saying that the professor will soon be selling postcards and then showing him destitute and already doing it. The crossfade between 1925 and 1929 is also well done. Liebmann and Sternberg agree on the style of economy, omitting anything that does not say something directly. The courage to make a silent film in the era of sound films is being reborn. We have long called for this, for when life is silent, the film should not chatter. To be successful, one must be more deliberate when creating a silent film. The iconic ending of the film is bold and daring, and ultimately, frees itself from the melodramatic musical accompaniment. [. . .] Pommer is highly praised for being a seeker, even there. This conclusion, however, appears to lack the presence of sound – even if it were the heavy breathing of the marching. Yet, the vision is strong enough and Pommer will continue to use the potential of the silent film in his upcoming productions of sound films; that is what makes him great –he puts the biggest names and the best artists at the service of his films. Now, one can see and hear it again: it is worth it.



Emil Jannings and Marlene Dietrich at the premier of *The Blue Angel*

### **HANS SAHL**

***Der Montag Morgen, Berlin, 8, Nr. 14, April 7, 1930.*** Translated by Barbara Kosta

Because this film, produced by Erich Pommer Productions at Ufa, bears the name of a poet we love, and because this name gives the impression that it is Heinrich Mann's novel that has been adapted for the screen here—for this reason, and because some of the other additions made by the gentlemen of the dramaturgical “collective” seem questionable to us, this *Blue Angel*, as excellently made as it is in detail, is a disappointment as a representative achievement.

A film against Heinrich Mann. In the novel, Unrat is an unbridled school tyrant who, removed from his post, haunts an entire town with his revenge. In the film: a clown who has become whiny, writhing in a straitjacket, cackling, after his “Krahe, Bajazzo” has added an embarrassing sensation to the stirring mood of these images. But not only that, the whole

character is distorted. It should have been shown how rumors, how gossip about Unrat gradually take hold of the city (what a sound film accusation!); and how Unrat himself now takes revenge on this city by morally poisoning them. A magnificent film subject: the downfall of a petty bourgeois pushed into crime, has been consigned to sentimental clichés by the authors Zuckmayer and Vollmoeller, whose collaboration Ufa triumphantly boasts.

But all this, the twisted and deceitful nature of a fate, is concealed by Josef von Sternberg's concise direction, balanced in every detail. Of course, as a sound film, *The Last Command* was technically more astonishing, acoustically bolder, and more interesting. Bernhardt raised the issue of "sound and landscape" for discussion for the first time; he worked with soundscapes, which Sternberg deliberately avoided, not only because the subject matter is different. In return, *The Blue Angel* is artistically more mature, more precise in its acting, and more balanced.

But the highlight of this film is not Sternberg, nor is it Emil Jannings, who as Unrat once again adds a neurasthenic character to his gallery of humiliated, pathetic, pitiful figures—as overwhelming and magnificent as his performance may be, it is a repeat, just differently costumed, a pattern from which Jannings finally had to free himself. The highlight of this film is Marlene Dietrich. And here Josef von Sternberg's direction is most notable: this is no longer a false Garbo, everything about her is new and provocative; this alluring, inviting gait, this cool debauchery, this sensual aggressiveness in tone and movement—Marlene Dietrich has gone to Hollywood. German cinema is one artist poorer.



DIETRICH WITH FRIEDRICH HOLLAENDER ON THE PIANO AND WEINTRAUB SYNCOPATORS

## FRITZ OLIMSKY

**Berliner Börsen-Zeitung, April 6, 1930.** Translated by Barbara Kosta

Ufa had another big day. Traffic jams formed in front of the Gloria Palace as countless cars arrived, bringing with them everyone who was anyone in the film world and its premiere crowd. It was the usual scene at a big premiere. After all, it was one of the most prestigious films produced by Ufa this year. In industry circles, people were talking about the incredible sums that were supposedly spent on the book, the director, and the leading actor. So, expectations to get something very special in return were high.

Despite the high expectations, no one was disappointed. A select group of individuals achieved an extraordinary performance. The subject matter was based freely on Heinrich Mann's novel *Professor Unrat*, with the collaboration of Carl Zuckmayer, Karl Vollmoeller, and Robert Liebmann. Despite having several contributors, it was a uniform mold. This tragic story of a pedantic, strict high school teacher who, through an unfortunate coincidence, becomes enslaved to a vaudeville soubrette, which leads to his ruin, represents a heightening, one might even say a more heightened dramatization, of the earlier (American) Jannings film *The Way of All Flesh* in terms of content, direction, and performance. The

comparison is obvious, and one would not be entirely wrong in assuming that the worldwide success of that film led to this one.

When the American "Underworld" director Josef von Sternberg was entrusted with the production of this film, it was clear what the intention was; Sternberg worked with his familiar intensity to bring out the harshness of the cabaret milieu in an almost brutal way. His strength lies once again in his subtle emphasis on seemingly insignificant details, which are what ultimately create the lifelike authenticity of the whole atmosphere. He stops at nothing and paints this milieu with the voluptuousness of a man possessed. This explains the special appeal of his films, which exude a unique aura. He had a unique cast of actors at his disposal.

Emil Jannings is impressive as Professor Unrat, first through the art of makeup and then through the simple humanity with which he embodies this character; it was no coincidence that he received applause several times with a simple, touching smile. He does not play any "big" scenes, but is most effective when he appears superfluous and looks as if he would be most comfortable if he could disappear from the scene; This is not at all what we have understood by stardom up to now, and it is precisely through this seemingly unambitious, simplest humanity that he has an incredibly strong and powerful effect on us, who today know something of the meaning of simple objectivity.

Then there is Marlene Dietrich. At first, when she starts speaking in the film, you find yourself slightly shocked, because you wouldn't have thought her capable of such a deep, almost hoarse voice, but a few minutes later you are completely under her spell. Her cabaret soubrette Lola Lola is wonderfully cheeky, a fascinating erotic minx who turns men's heads by her mere presence, but despite all her cheekiness, she is not directly vulgar and even reveals something like a soul here and there. A wonderful mixture, one might almost say, a symbol of the unfathomable complexity of women. Dietrich's cultivated art of performance is simply dazzling. This role is such a tour de force for her that it is no wonder Hollywood immediately signed her up.

Kurt Gerron plays a magician with his familiar brutality. In a few scenes, Rosa Valetti plays a veteran of the stage. Hans Albers plays his role with his usual routine. The actors who play the students, namely Rolf Müller, Roland Varno, Karl Balhaus, and Robert Klein-Lörk, are consistently good, but they unfortunately are only listed briefly in the program. Special praise goes to the actor playing the main student. The remaining roles are played by Eduard v. Winterstein, Hans Roth, Karl Huszar-Puffy, Wilhelm Diegelmann, and Ilse Fürstenberg. The music was performed by the Weintraub Syncopators under the direction of Friedrich Hollaender, which contributed significantly to the artistic creation of the atmosphere. Not to be forgotten is the visual artistry of Günther Rittau and Hans Schneeberger.



**FRIEDRICH HUSSONG - “New Territory”**

***Der Montag, Berlin, Nr. 13, March 31, 1930, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.*** Translated by Barbara Kosta

For years, people have watched the play of shadows on the movie screen with aversion; they shook their heads and said no. Too much kitsch, too much false sentimentality, too much senselessness and heartlessness, stupid sensationalism, emptiness, tasteless clowning—well, we know. People looked away; they looked again to see if it might get better after all.

It will get better.

You spent the whole winter going to the theater; sat in front of ten stages, forty plays. You came back empty, uninspired, disgusted. You went back to the movies here and there, feeling gloomy. And lo and behold, there was something new in the air. New possibilities and—despite all the inertia—a new determination here and there.

The harvest of a long theater winter season was the memory of a few budding joys and the realization of the artistic possibilities of acoustically animated picture shows. The only arena, in which development and progress could be seen was that of sound film. One recalls *Die Melodie des Herzens* (the Melody of the Heart) or *Die Letzte Kompagnie* (The Last Company). Not yet perfect. But more importantly: a step forward, an upward trend:

cheerfulness that is more than hollow fun; emotion that is more than shrill sensation. Improvement and growth. No longer saying no; saying yes.

Now, at the end of winter, a final new height with the latest sound film from Ufa.

The Blue Angel. A really ripe fruit. An almost entirely flawless creation. A thoroughly artistic design. The more skeptical and dismissive one has been toward the tedious antics of filmmakers, the more willing one becomes to acknowledge that the uncharted territory of sound film has already yielded a bountiful harvest. The premiere of this film will be more significant artistically—despite all those who still fail to notice—than anything else that has emerged from the exhausted theatrical soil of Greater Berlin during this entire season. Listen, night watchmen, and let me tell you: the bell has tolled. Unnecessarily, indeed misleadingly, the name of the film's midwife appears next to that of the director Sternberg, the decisive creator Jannings, the manuscript editors (Zuckmayer, Vollmoeller, Liebmann) and also the name Heinrich Mann with his miserable novel *Professor Unrat*. In truth, *The Blue Angel* is not a film *with* Heinrich Mann, but a film *against* him. Mann's book is the dirty revenge of a runaway schoolboy, his "hero" a disgusting sack full of malice; the film is the fate of a man who is deeply lonely. With tragic inevitability, he destroys himself from the moment he inexperiencedly and unsuspectingly pursues an illusion that he mistakes for the love of a woman, but which is nothing more than prostitution.

Apart from a few superficial similarities in the exposition, the novel and the film have nothing to do with each other in terms of subject matter and plot. In terms of their emotional content, they are complete opposites. On the one hand, there is an alleged problem in school that is looked at through cross-eyes; on the other, a true human tragedy.

Once it has shed its last external ties to the foreign, the past, the stale, and the rehashed, sound film, with its almost unlimited technical and artistic possibilities, will be able to dare to attain the highest and strive for the fullest glory. Where it previously had "script editors," it will now have poets; the greatest possibilities that are visibly increasing and reaching their full potential, will place greater demands on directors and actors and force them to deliver stronger performances. A hydrogen peroxide doll's head ("Wasserstoffsuperoxydpuppenköpfchen") and a painted mouth will no longer be enough to make someone a diva; the backstage suppliers of scripts will no longer be able to meet demand; directors will no longer be able to turn black into pink and bitter into sweet with unrestrained arbitrariness, but will have to learn again that they are not masters, but servants of the work and the word; a pretty boy will not be a star for a long time to come, and people will learn once again to distinguish between portrayals of human beings and theatrical grandstanding.

The bankruptcy of the theater is obvious. The only hope that this winter season has brought us is thanks to sound film. What a wonderful gift. Now, with *The Blue Angel*, we have already achieved a high degree of fulfillment. But more importantly, and most importantly: there is no end in sight yet; still unlimited new territory; full of unique possibilities; new forms demanded and presented; Growth and expansion. We no longer throw our hands up in despair at the ocean of tastelessness with which film has inundated us; we no longer have to renounce the cinema three times before every cock crows; we can wholeheartedly agree and say yes.

When else in these days? Where else in this Europe? Why else in this chaos? But there is progress here and upward momentum. That is why *The Blue Angel* will also be surpassed. Fortunately. But today it represents victory and greatness. And it will always remain an important feature on the path to boundless new territory in fertile soil.



### CELSUS\*

“Der Film gegen Heinrich Mann,” *Die Weltbühne*, Berlin, 26, Nr. 18, April 29, 1930.  
Translated by Barbara Kosta

Even though Privy Councilor Hugenberg is currently facing some difficulties as a politician, he has achieved a complete victory as the head of Ufa.

*The Blue Angel* is not only a business venture, but also a Christian-Germanic triumph over the poet Heinrich Mann. Mr. Hussong expressed this with rude clarity shortly before the premiere. Mr. Hussong is right: it is a film against Heinrich Mann. *The Blue Angel* has as little to do with Heinrich Mann's *Professor Unrat* as the American disaster film has to do with the real flood.

It is with regret that we acknowledge this sad outcome. We were well-aware of the natural intellectual limitations of Hugenberg's film empire but nevertheless dared to pin a few hopes on this first Ufa sound film without “Tauberschmelz.” The only appeal of the first German sound films were their technical attractions. But here, more had been expected. Here was a

great story, a significant director, one of our most excellent actors. Here was artistic ambition at work, striving to create something that would define the general direction of the early German sound film for a long time to come. The result is a maudlin, unintelligent, bourgeois piece.

Vollmoeller and Zuckmayer are credited as screenwriters. They will probably tell us that without their involvement, everything would have been much worse. It would have been better if they had left the vandalized distortion of the most spirited German novel to the screenwriter spirits of Ufa. It couldn't have been worse. You don't have to be involved in everything, gentlemen, you have to be able to turn down a job sometimes.

The filmmakers should have focused on saving the intellectual essence of the novel. There are no traces of such efforts. *Unrat* is not a realistic novel, even though it drew its motifs from the bourgeois milieu and an old Lübeck highschool despot had to give up some of his traits. Nor is this Professor Unrat himself a flesh-and-blood human being, but rather a deliberate intellectual construct, a representation of all of the maladies of the school system. This "Professor Unrat" is Voltairean, not only in his sharp, malicious mind, not only in his bold linguistic stylization, but also in his determination to drive events to a level that lies beyond all reality. That is why he has never enjoyed widespread popular success. In the past, he was denounced as heretical and subversive; today, the public wants crude violence. Intellectual humor has never had a home in Germany.

At the Ufa, the sparkling satire has become the sentimental catastrophe of a bourgeois existence, and the ghostly Scholarches has become a watered-down popular edition of "Traumulus." Nothing remains of the stifling atmosphere of the old humanistic high school, nothing of the hatred, nothing of the anxiety, nothing of the musty pubescent lust of the student body. Nowhere is there a motif appropriate to sound film, nowhere a scenic idea, nowhere even a trace of photographic wit. Instead, we are presented with filth "made more human," which now, indeed, presents itself as a whimsical older gentleman in splendor and misery. He is no longer the pedagogical Torquemada, shaped by centuries of school dust, but a thoroughly pitiful, unworldly good man who succumbs to a late passion and is hounded to death by small-town gossip and the semi-unconscious sadism of his senior students. Traumulus. When the glockenspiel rattles out "Ob' immer Treu und Redlichkeit" (Always Faithful and Honest), the good consciousness stirs in the stumbling hero. That's how complicated the means of characterization are. But perhaps that is also Vollmoeller and Zuckmayer's own satirical contribution. The gentlemen should have had this useful melody played to them while they were working. It would have reminded them of their obligation to Heinrich Mann's work.

In this pathetic world, Emil Jannings wanders around like a centaur locked in a two-room apartment, threatening the furniture with every step he takes. What an absurd idea to have the most expressive temperament, the most expansive, the most Dutch of all our film artists play a frantic skeleton. Given the limited scope of the whole plan, character actors such as Falkenstein or Picha, specialists in angularity and uptightness, would have sufficed. The highlight remains solely Marlene Dietrich. God knows whether this woman will ever succeed in pulling this off again, but no one any film studios on several continents can match this. This wonderfully lascivious face, this haughty figure with the shabby silk stockings and the improbable black rubber stockings has made one of the few truly great impressions in film in years.

Here and only here is the wit of the line that justifies the film adaptation of such an immaterial novel. Dietrich alone defends the spirit of Heinrich Mann in this film against Heinrich Mann.

\*Carl von Ossietzky



Film Postcard

### **KA\*. The Elimination of the Combative in Favor of the “Poetic”**

**In *Die Rote Fahne*, Berlin 13. Jg, Nr. 79, 3.4. 1930 Beilage.** Translated by Barbara Kosta

The premiere of the Ufa film *The Blue Angel* documents the ideological and artistic unity between Hugenberg and the "radical" petty bourgeoisie: Heinrich Mann, Zuckmayer, Vollmoeller, Josef von Sternberg, and Jannings. A storm in a glass of water preceded it. Friedrich Hussong, a politician from the Hugenberg concern, declared that the film would be great, powerful, “new territory,” since it was filmed in opposition to Heinrich Mann's novel *Professor Unrat*.

Those directly involved in the film: Heinrich Mann, Zuckmayer, Vollmoeller, and production manager Erich Pommer formally protested against the second part of Hussong's assertion. However, their formal protest revealed that Zuckmayer had “sweetened” Heinrich Mann's socially critical, aggressive pre-war novel *Professor Unrat*, i.e., shifted it from the realm of the combative to the slippery slope of "poetic-fateful," and that Heinrich Mann consented to this shift.

The film has been adapted to suit Hugenberg-Ufa: Professor Unrat is no longer a suspected stickler and schoolmaster who later rebels against his own petty bourgeois milieu; Professor Unrat has become a poor old fogey who is pursued and ruined by fate in the form of a beautiful cabaret singer. He ultimately goes insane -- a clown with Bajazzo tones, whose accelerated activation of the tear ducts in the movie theater serves to guarantee box office success. A "success" of the greatest possible insincerity.

As a film, *The Blue Angel* is very successful. The first artistically designed sound film to be shown in Germany. Josef von Sternberg is a brilliant director. We have never seen Jannings so strong, so overwhelming, so true as here. Brilliant direction, brilliant photography. But the content is kitsch, is 00.

\* d. i. Alfred Kemmeny



The aftermath of his students discovering Rath backstage with Lola Lola at “The Blue Angel” cabaret

**Alfred Richard Meyer, “HEINRICH MANN / A Concept of Change”**

**From the Archive of the Deutsche Kinemathek, *Der blaue Engel* Filmprogramm 1930.**

Translated by Barbara Kosta

In the year this poet wrote his “Professor Unrat” — twenty-five years ago now — he attempted to reveal his true thoughts and feelings in a personal confession: "After we (he and his brother Thomas) had been Hanseatic merchants for two thick volumes, we finally made it to artistry thanks to our Romanic blood mixture — according to Nietzsche, this produces neurasthenics and artists. I went home to Italy as soon as I could. Since nowhere is there a public with completely identical needs, one ends up narrowing one's need for effect, letting it out on a single person, which makes it all the more intense. One takes extreme paths, juxtaposing the animalistic with the dreamy, enthusiasm with satire, coupling tenderness with misanthropy."

“Since nowhere is there a public that knows...” It was out of this oppressive awareness that the novel was written at the time. It was the liberation of self-castigating shadows. This liberation brought about a transformation in the artist himself, who today belongs to the wider public. But time also brought about change—namely, how a novel written twenty-five-

years ago became today's film *The Blue Angel* that involved a wide variety of artistic talents. The concept of this transformation becomes concrete on the screen. If Mann's aim at that time was "to feel his own experiences more richly, to taste his own loneliness more intensely," to use his own words, then today he knows that he has been relieved of this self-imposed loneliness, which was an escape from a hostility towards humanity. The glare of a human and artistic path has dissipated. Today, he walks in the bright light of public life. There is a highly topical Heinrich Mann who takes a satirical and critical view of the satire of the past, who has become both harder and softer, who knows that every creation, like man, is subject to change. The most spiritual aspects of a book are surrounded by other mirrors of knowledge.

This, too, is the richness of life. In that art produces itself every day anew.

## **Mordaunt Hall**

***New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1930**

In a film tragedy titled *The Blue Angel*, which was directed by Josef von Sternberg in Berlin for Ufa, that talented German screen player Emil Jannings, who left Hollywood because of the vocalizing of pictures, makes his first appearance in a talking production. Marlene Dietrich, the attractive Teutonic actress who is to be seen at the Rivoli in Mr. Sternberg's "Morocco," shares honors with Mr. Jannings in this foreign work. The plot of *The Blue Angel* recalls that of "The Way of All Flesh," Mr. Jannings's first American silent film, but in this current chronicle, instead of being a bank employe, Mr. Jannings impersonates a professor of English literature in a German boys' high school. The story is cleverly told in most of the sequences, while penultimate scenes would be all the better if they were curtailed or modified, as the actual ending is quite impressive. The fall from grace of an elderly man is a favorite theme with Mr. Jannings, one that has served him in most of his films since the making of *The Last Laugh*. As the characters here are different, however, the interest is rekindled and the broken English of the persons involved is accounted for with a certain crafty logic. As an actor who speaks his lines, Mr. Jannings is perhaps even better than he was in his mute productions, for the speech to a great extent governs his actions and it stays him from his penchant for unnaturally slow movements. There are times here when no words pass the lips of the characters for uncomfortable seconds, but the final analysis is that it is a decidedly interesting picture with exceptionally fine performances contributed by Mr. Jannings and Miss Dietrich, the latter being much more the actress than she is in *Morocco*. Professor Immanuel Rath's (Mr. Jannings) humdrum existence is ably stressed. The landlady where he lives knocks on his door at the same time every morning and announces that his breakfast is served. As the hour of 8 rings out from the old clock tower the professor always is crossing the street or entering the school building. He, for some reason or other, omits the greeting of "Good morning" to his pupils, who stand when he enters the classroom and only at his bidding take their seats. As a professor of English he insists on English being spoken. He is a man without a sense of humor, careful about his attire and stolidly opposed to the students betraying any mirth or glee. His curiosity concerning the youngsters who frequent the cabaret, "The Blue Angel," is aroused by finding in his classroom picture postcards of the stellar feminine performer at that gay resort. She is known as Lola Frohlich (Miss Dietrich), who is supposed to be an English singer. Lola is a rather taciturn creature, but occasionally she reveals subdued enthusiasm, coupled with a dry sense of humor. It is not unfunny to her to have the professor looking for his students in

her dressing room, particularly when three or four of them flee after being warned that the pedagogue is in the offing. One evening, however, when the youths are hiding in a cellar, Lola, after the professor has resented the conduct of another man toward her, hears that the police are on the scene, and the urbane Rath also takes refuge in the retreat afforded his pupils, who incidentally have lifted the cellar covering and have been watching with keen amusement the professor's admiration of Lola. Once in the cellar with the young scapegraces, the professor is a target for ridicule and blows. The result is that when he, following a night away from his own abode, arrives late at his classroom, the pupils' revolt and the noise they make is heard throughout the building, with the consequence that Professor Immanuel Rath is asked by the school principal for his resignation. But all is not lost for the disgraced professor, for Lola becomes his wife. There follow time lapses in which one perceives the professor turned into a clown, wearing a false nose and a ridiculously large collar. This goes on until he eventually becomes insane, imitating the crowing of a rooster, which he had once done for a laugh in his rational days. While the professor is on the stage as the foil for a conjurer, Lola is enjoying the attentions of a lover, and she is observed by her elderly spouse. It is then that his senses leave him, and he eventually staggers over to his old classroom and dies at his desk as the bell in the old clock tower is striking the hour. Not only is Mr. Jannings's and Miss Dietrich's acting excellent, but they are supported by an unusually competent cast. Having quite a good story, Mr. von Sternberg's direction is infinitely superior to that of "Morocco," and the settings for this film are very effective.

Mr. Jannings and Miss Dietrich. THE BLUE ANGEL, with Emil Jannings, Marlene Dietrich, Kurt Gerron, Rosa Valetti, Hans Albers, Eduard V. Winterstein, Reinhold Bernt, Hans Roth, Karl Huszar-Puffy, Wilhelm Diegelmann and others, based on a novel by Heinrich Mann, directed by Josef von Sternberg and supervised by Erich Pommer.

# UFA FILM WINS PLAUDITS

## Von Sternberg on Return Contrasts Problems of Producing "The Blue Angel" in Germany

BY ELENA BOLAND

Cables are still crossing the Atlantic announcing to Joseph Von Sternberg the success of his picture, "The Blue Angel," which had its premiere in Berlin a few nights ago.

About eight months ago von Sternberg went to Germany to direct for UFA this film in which Emil Jannings speaks for the first time. Two versions were made, a German and an English. The latter is due for a New York opening in the near future, at which time Jannings himself will be present.

Von Sternberg has been back at Paramount, his home studio, only a few weeks. Whether he brought back with him from Germany new ideas or different methods he will not say. He cannot say, for he is an artist and his mind does not follow conventional paths. But he will say, and with enthusiasm, that it was a great personal experience and that in his own opinion "The Blue Angel" is the most artistic and the best thing he has done.

### GERMANY GOES TALKIE

When Von Sternberg arrived in Germany pictures were still silent. Talkies uttered their first timorous syllables one month after his appearance. They are now, then, just about 6 months old, yet Von Sternberg experienced little or nothing that he would not have contacted in an American studio. That is, in a technical way, but he remains unconcerned about mechanical technique. His crew can attend to that and his job is the picture.

As he says, his method of directing "The Blue Angel" was no different from his customary attack.

"The Blue Angel," like the rest of my pictures, endeavors to show people's likes according to the incidents which have brought out either their weaknesses or their strength. My stories start with the characters emerging from a fog, maybe mental, emotional or camera. I show them reacting to circumstances that come their way, growing out of them or sinking down with them. Then, I leave sometimes with a shrug, sometimes with a question mark. No tell the end even on the screen."

The contrast between German and American production is strong. In the matter of scale alone the American output, and naturally, is tremendously larger. Talkies, Von Sternberg states, have given German standards a setback. Germany, and Von Sternberg believes America also, is still too much in awe of the mechanics which make talkies possible. He thinks it will be some time before man catches up to machinery's present perfection.

Moving pictures in Germany are not made for the masses, one big distinction between there and Hollywood. They are made for the intelligentsia and the cultured and, therefore, allow the director and the actor to more nearly approach an ideal.

### DISTINCTION SHOWN

"The premiere of a film, such as the one mine had last week, is the Mecca for the highest society, the biggest statesmen and public personages and the most famous names in the world of art. To go to the movies in Germany bespeaks of intelligence and culture. Pictures are taken with more seriousness and with more dignity than they are here. Criticism is more venomous and much more honest.

"That same attitude of seriousness and culture is apparent in the studio. In Germany the director is all-important, even the biggest star is secondary. While I was working on "The Blue Angel" the set was continually visited by the best-known writers, painters and musicians. One of them painted my portrait, another modeled my head in bronze; all of them were vitally absorbed in the artistic potentialities of the picture."

Von Sternberg relates that in Germany the billing of a film and the signs on a theater always feature first the name of the director.

Comedy and gaiety are prominent in the average German feature. Color has not come in as yet, although negotiations are already under way to procure it.

Because of the fact that the best of foreign talent has been lured to Hollywood, European production, on the whole, does not approach the artistry of the American-made; it is Von Sternberg's opinion.

One of the principal things which he attempted in "The Blue Angel," and a thing which he believes he accomplished, was to establish a sound style.

"I think that the speech and the music are so stylized that after hearing them one could go to another of my pictures, close his eyes and know from the sound that I had directed."

Conferences are now in progress for "Morocco," Von Sternberg's first production since his return. With it he will try to show how Morocco feels to him, retaining at the same time, and as he always does, the inherent mystery of the time and place and the souls with which he deals.

Der Leiter der Film-Oberprüfstelle

Nr. 6625

Berlin NW 40, den . 9. Mai

Abteilungsleiter

Verzeichnis: Nummer 20. A 1. Jäger 1933

1933.

An

das Bayerische Staatsministerium des Innern

München.

Zum Schreiben vom 20. April 1933  
Nr. 2546 h 17- und im Anschluss an  
mein Schreiben vom 25. April 1933  
Nr. 6594-..

Empfang: 11. MA 1933  
1346 h 34

Betrifft: Widerruf der Zulassung des  
Bildstreifens "Der blaue Engel".

Die Universum Film A.G. hat sich mit Schreiben vom 3. Mai 1933  
der Filmoberprüfstelle gegenüber rechtsgültig verpflichtet, die in  
Deutschland noch im Umlauf befindlichen Kopien des Bildstreifens  
"Der blaue Engel" aus dem Verkehr zu ziehen und die von der Film-  
prüfstelle Berlin erteilten Zulassungskarten zurückzuliefern.

Da hiernach eine fernere Vorführung des Bildstreifens in  
Deutschland ausgeschlossen ist, beabsichtige ich, von der Einleitung  
des mit obigem Schreiben beantragten Widerrufsverfahrens abzusehen.  
Sofern mir bis zum 20. Mai 1933 eine gegenteilige Mitteilung nicht  
zugeht, darf ich das dortige Einverständnis mit meinem Vorschlag  
annehmen.

*Wegert*

*Es ist die Aufgabe der Filmoberprüfstelle...*