

4: Discontented Domesticity: The Melodrama

THE CINEMATIC MELODRAMA of the Third Reich engaged the popular imagination with penetrating images of strong, tormented women and discontented family life. Boasting some of the most successful films produced in Nazi Germany, the melodrama was an immensely popular genre, especially in the waning years of the Second World War. The portrayal of unhappy, dysfunctional families exerted a fascination on audiences altogether incongruous with Nazi ideology concerning the Aryan home as the bastion of social harmony. This disparity between the rosy picture painted in propaganda posters and the pessimistic narratives of popular entertainment has yet to be scrutinized with sufficient vigor.¹

The melodrama emphasizes family conflict, especially women's trials and tribulations, as well as the traditional sphere of the feminine (feelings, domesticity, personal relationships) and is, therefore, uniquely suited to an inquiry into the symbolic encoding of gender difference. In this chapter I will explore the ways in which the melodrama treats sexuality and gender roles within the context of the fascist state. The Nazi-controlled media did not engender a single universal image of woman, rather they presented an entertaining model of social justice whereby the "abnormal woman" is contained and eliminated while the "normal woman" is reintegrated into a joyless marriage. My interest in the fascist melodrama is grounded in the historical nexus of woman, pain, sacrifice, and self-negation coupled with man, taming, domestication, and self-identity as a means to validate the prevailing order. Two films exemplify complementary discursive strategies in Nazi cinema to neutralize subversive energy. *Opfergang* (Rite of Sacrifice, 1944) directed by Veit Harlan and *Damals* (Back Then, 1943) directed by Rolf Hansen employ the two most common and diametrically opposed narrative solutions to the disintegration of the family: the death of the erotic woman and her reintegration into the nuclear family respectively.

At the core of Nazi social policy lies the notion of a "natural" distinction between the sexes that requires the separation of male and female domains into clearly demarcated spheres of influence. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the Reich Leader of the National Socialist Womanhood organization, summarizes the official outlook:

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From the beginning of time man and woman have been two different beings, with likewise different functions. Seen purely biologically, the role of the man in maintaining the human race is relatively short lived, that of woman is an unequally longer one full of sacrifices. She shelters for many months the future of a people in her womb — gives birth amid pain, protects and preserves the future with every fiber of her heart.²

The reproductive difference between men and women is conceived as a fundamental truth that determines the entire social structure of the nation: “This basic truth which cannot be suppressed . . . is the starting point for all further formations of collective life and work in every cultivated people.”³ The polarity between the sexes necessitates a division of labor that allows men to become creative agents and forces women to fulfill their role as guardians of cultural traditions. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink maintained: “The task of the man in a healthy people will always be primarily the creative act, that of the woman the shaping, protecting, maintaining, preserving. These natural characteristic features of woman include, beyond physical motherhood, all instinctive tendencies to spiritual and mental motherliness.”⁴

Motherhood, whether physical or spiritual, is based on a woman’s ability to sublimate her own interests and needs for her family. Guida Diehl, leader of the Neuland movement, advances the prevailing notion that woman can only achieve the status of human being when she ceases to exist as an individual: “If she is a real mother, she loses herself in her familial duties. But wonderfully: exactly therein, she becomes a woman and human being in the deepest sense. The more obvious her surrender, the more so. In losing her life she finds herself, her true dignity, her inherent humanity.”⁵ The valorization of racially and socially “valuable” mothers epitomized in the elaborate Mother’s Day festivities and the awarding of the Mother’s Cross to women with four or more children shrouds the inherently misogynist aspects of National Socialism. Reduced to her biological function in the mother cult, deprived of desire and even identity through self-denial, the individual woman vanishes.

Recent film studies dealing with the Hollywood melodrama are predicated on a basic assumption about the American society that engenders images of discontented family life. At the most elementary level, the United States is seen as a culture “in which the choice of marriage partners is, in theory at least, completely free.”⁶ Nazi Germany, by contrast, was a society in which the individual’s right to marry at will was so severely restricted as to be nearly non-existent. The National Socialist state regulated marriage according to racial, hereditary, health, and behavioral criteria. One of the first intrusions by the state into the “private” realm of the family was the Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases of July 14, 1933, which allowed for compulsory sterilization of those individuals deemed “unfit.” The infamous Nuremberg Laws of September 15, 1935 went further to criminal-

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ize not only marriage but also sexual intercourse between an Aryan and a Jew. According to the Marriage Health Law issued in October 1935, the right to marry at all was contingent on a couple's racial and hereditary "fitness." Only after a medical examination proved their physical health could a couple obtain a certificate from the health department and marry.⁷

The National Socialist government instituted measures to promote marriages between partners who would produce "racially valuable" children. The Law for the Reduction of Unemployment from June 1, 1933, offered interest free loans of up to 1,000 RM to newlyweds on the condition that the wife gave up her paid employment. With the birth of each child the couple was given a 25% reduction of the marriage loan.⁸ State intervention into the realm of procreation was not limited to incentives to encourage the birthrate of "valuable" offspring; it also included draconian measures to prevent the birth of racially "worthless" life and exterminate "hereditarily inferior" children. The Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases was amended on June 26, 1935, to allow for the termination of pregnancy based on eugenic grounds. Those who performed abortions on hereditarily healthy women, by contrast, were punished with imprisonment and, after the outbreak of war, with death.⁹

Individual self-fulfillment, personal happiness, passion, companionship, and affection played no role in Adolf Hitler's concept of marriage in the National Socialist state: "Furthermore, marriage cannot be an end in itself, rather it must serve the one greater goal, the propagation and maintenance of the species and race. This alone is its meaning and purpose."¹⁰ The propaganda campaign directed at the broad masses, while highlighting the biological basis of "proper" marriages, made concessions to socially ingrained attitudes on free choice as illustrated in the "Ten Commandments for Choosing a Spouse":

Remember that you are a German!
 You should keep your mind and soul pure!
 Keep your body pure!
 You should not remain single, if you are hereditarily healthy!
 Marry only for love!
 As a German, choose only a spouse of the same or related blood!
 When choosing a spouse, ask about his ancestors!
 Health is the prerequisite for external beauty!
 Choose a companion for marriage, not a playmate!
 You should wish for as many children as possible!¹¹

The government viewed marriage primarily as a social institution to maintain and perpetuate racial "purity," so it strenuously enforced the selection of spouses according to racial, hereditary, and health criteria with the

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explicit purpose of producing children. The centrality of love in this formulation, the fifth of Ten Commandments, does not attest to the importance of individual emotional needs in Nazi ideology. “The motive here,” as Jill Stephenson rightly points out, “was that a loving couple would be more likely to provide a stable home, and so it was thought, many children.”¹²

The German melodrama of the 1940s shares much with its Hollywood counterpart. Along with classic Hollywood cinema, Nazi film is firmly rooted in the discursive tradition that sets out to expose and contain the inconsistencies evident in patriarchy. “Ideological contradiction,” Laura Mulvey argues, “is the overt mainspring and specific content of melodrama, not a hidden, unconscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes. No ideology can even pretend to totality: it must provide an outlet for its own inconsistencies.”¹³ “As a safety valve for ideological contradictions centered on sex and the family,”¹⁴ the melodrama questions patriarchy’s overvaluation of masculinity in terms of virility, power, and conquest. Melodrama seeks compromise between the sexes in a renewed appreciation of femininity and domesticity.

These basic strategies informing the family narrative not only correspond to the project of Nazi melodramas but are also consistent with statements of early National Socialist women leaders. These party ideologues openly acknowledged the potential threat inherent in a society organized exclusively around male fellowship. Lydia Gottschewski, leader of the League of German Girls (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*) argued in her book *Male Union and the Women’s Question* (1934) that an exaggerated valuation of masculinity could only lead to the destruction of the community: “The idea of male union (*Männerbund*) as a principle of order has saved our people from the chaos of Bolshevism. But the other must be said: the over exaggeration of this idea, its fixation as the exclusive measure of all things tears the community apart.”¹⁵

The fascist melodrama articulates this problem in its construction of gender difference and social integration. Various tropes operate in these films to neutralize any threat to the stability of the nuclear family. In order to survive as a folk, men must make concessions to the domestic order. Men’s transgressions revolve around their inappropriate use of masculine values in their relationships with women. Men threaten stability when they refuse to tame indiscriminate sexual drives and to redirect this energy toward their wives. Good husbands, the melodrama instructs, need to recognize the value of their wives’ sacrifice and the inherent value of femininity, and, especially, motherliness. Women pose a danger to the domestic order when they assert their own female desire, subjectivity, and activity. Aberrant femininity, exemplified in a woman’s mobility, self-interest, and eroticized motherhood is punished with illness, banishment, or death. Women are ultimately judged according to their ability to conform to the ideals of femininity with its apotheosis in motherhood. Good mothers, or potentially good mothers, are integrated into the family while bad mothers are eliminated.

Since it emphasizes paradox and discontent, the melodrama represents a potentially subversive text. Criticism and the call for change, however, are directed inward to the character and not outward to social institutions. In reference to the melodrama, David Bordwell notes that “the characters’ volatility is a structural necessity for the genre’s narrational processes and effects.”¹⁶ The characters adjust themselves to the system rather than look for ways to change society. Those who adapt are rewarded. Those who cannot or will not adapt to the system are conveniently eliminated from the picture. Melodramas, or weepies, as Molly Haskell likewise argues, “are founded on a mock-Aristotelian and politically conservative aesthetic whereby women spectators are moved, not by pity and fear but by self-pity and tears, to accept, rather than reject, their lot.”¹⁷ I would like to expand Haskell’s idea to postulate that the melodrama addresses both men and women in order to maintain the status quo of the patriarchal family unit.

The predominantly female audience widely attributed to the Hollywood melodrama cannot be ascribed to the Nazi melodrama without raising serious problems. The question as to who actually attended the cinema during the Third Reich, more men or more women, and which genres each group favored, is exceedingly difficult to ascertain since the Propaganda Ministry published no statistical analyses of German audiences based on their sex. The few shreds of evidence we can garner from contemporary film journals show us more about prevalent stereotypes than actual audience composition and opinions. Writing in January 1938 for the Propaganda Ministry’s official organ *Der deutsche Film*, Frank Maraun maintains:

Recently we have determined that 70% of all moviegoers are women. Why women go to the movies is clear: they want to see love and have feelings. With one sparkling and one wet eye, feature films never tire of granting them both. Their thoughts also love to circle around human things and ponder psychological conflicts. Here film constantly gives them practice material for life. Moreover, they have naturally a better sense of the arts and a greater inclination to give themselves over to daydreaming. And here too film provides everything needed.¹⁸

Unfortunately, Maraun supplies no details on how the Propaganda Ministry came up with the figure of 70% for the female audience, whether it distributed questionnaires, conducted interviews, or measured ticket sales. In June 1938, the trade paper *Licht-Bild-Bühne* likewise cited that 70% of all moviegoers were women and attributed this statistic to a local study conducted in the city of Hamburg. While not commenting on the narrow scope of the study or whether it could be useful to generalize audience composition throughout Germany, the reviewer for *Licht-Bild-Bühne* disagreed with Maraun’s conclusions and argued that “women and men concur in their demands for artistic, true-to-life films.”¹⁹ Indeed, two conflicting views were

repeatedly voiced on the pages of film journals throughout 1938. In a series of articles addressing what women wanted from the motion picture industry, Ingrid Binné claimed that German women “today no longer watch with disinterest the political process in the Reich and in the world. They actively experience the central events of our time.”²⁰ They do not want fairy tales of riches and ideal love affairs. Instead they want to see films that bring to life Adolf Hitler’s vision of an ideal National Socialist womanhood. Quoting the Führer, Binné asserted that women went to the cinema to see “the eternal mother of our folk and man’s life partner, fellow-worker, and comrade-in-arms.”²¹ Writing for the same trade paper, reviewer Christine Großmann argued along completely different lines. Großmann stated that women “have more imagination, if one understands that as having the ability to dream, the ability to go along with the events unfolding before them on the screen, and the ability to put themselves into these events.”²² Women go to the cinema because they want to fantasize about an exciting and carefree lifestyle and imagine that they could look, dress, and behave like their favorite stars Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, and Joan Crawford up on the silver screen. This debate over what was more appealing and in demand — politically correct role models that reinforced Nazi ideology or amusing escapist fantasies that satisfied emotional needs — tells us less about what ordinary women wanted than about the film industry’s difficulties in fulfilling Goebbels’s mandate for instruction through entertainment. The propaganda ministry called for stirring motion pictures with equal parts ideology and distraction, which would enchant both male and female audiences and persuade them to filter the reality of gender roles in politically acceptable ways.

Recent scholarship on Nazi cinema has rarely addressed the question of audience composition with adequate results. For example, film historian David Welch makes a generalization about German film audiences during the Second World War that demands closer inspection. Welch concludes:

One can reasonably assume that in wartime women and children would make up the majority of the audience. For ideological reasons, relatively few women were employed in Germany during the war compared to Britain and Russia. One reason for this was that the allowances paid to soldiers’ wives were so generous that it was often more economical for them not to work. In times of rationing, hardship, and loneliness, sitting in a warm cinema was an obvious way for such women to spend their time and money.²³

Welch’s statement is misleading on several grounds. First, the assumption that the cinema audience was primarily female during the war years due to military conscription cannot be confirmed with any certitude, and, if we take Hollywood as our model, this assumption seems to work more on the stereotype of the bored housewife than on the facts.²⁴ Second, the Propaganda Ministry

took extreme measures to assure that soldiers at the front were provided with mobile cinemas and that feature films constituted an important source of entertainment and education in Nazi party organizations. Indeed, the need for mobile cinemas in rural areas and makeshift cinemas in bombed-out cities indicates that the filmic experience during the war did not universally take place in a warm theater. More importantly, Welch presents woman as a monolithic category not taking into account issues of social class, age, marital status, labor conscription, and volunteer labor. His female audience seems to consist largely of married, middle-class women with nothing better to do than go to the movies. Already before the outbreak of war, 12.7 million German women were gainfully employed outside the home comprising 37% of the workforce.²⁵ Women also performed a considerable amount of unpaid labor that is generally not calculated in standard employment statistics: volunteer work for Winter Relief, the NS-Womanhood, and the League of German Girls, not to mention housework and childcare. The National Socialist regime initiated legal measures to assure women's participation in the wartime labor force. The National Service Law of May 1935, for example, allowed for the wartime industrial conscription of all women ages 15 to 65 who were not pregnant or who did not have children under the age of 15. Likewise, the Women's Labor Service, compulsory as of September 4, 1939, called for unpaid female service to the state in domestic and agricultural economies for up to a year. While compulsory labor measures for Aryan women were never fully implemented in German society, it would be false to conclude that women as a social group were completely free from duties to the state and could devote themselves exclusively to the pursuit of leisure activities.

Various statements from leading political figures and entertainers suggest that the German melodrama was not conceived solely for a female audience. According to comments by Goebbels, the military high command, and members of the film community, the prevailing view was that the melodrama addressed both male and female spectators. Goebbels, for instance, voiced his concern over the effect that the melodrama *Opfergang* would have on soldiers at the front. He also complained that the High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) created difficulties for him in his film work. In a diary entry for May 23, 1942, Goebbels depicts a widely publicized dispute between himself, the OKW, and Field Marshal Göring over the morality of a Luftwaffe officer who spends the night with a famous singer in the melodrama *Die große Liebe* (True Love).²⁶ The popular star Kristina Söderbaum also acknowledged the great impression her melodrama *Immensee* (1943) left on male spectators. She received numerous letters from soldiers at the front who had found consolation in this "hymn of a loyal wife."²⁷

It seems surprising that the German film community would be concerned with images of men and the reactions of a male audience, since the melodrama focuses chiefly on the lives of women. These female protagonists,

however, are portrayed much less as individuals than as family members. Wife, mother, daughter, lover: these are the primary roles for women. Gerd Albrecht has conducted extensive statistical research on main characters in Nazi films based on their sex and family status and concludes that women are significantly more likely to be defined by kinship than men.²⁸ A woman's place in the family, however, is most often determined by her relationship to a man rather than to another woman. Rarely are relationships between women — sisters, girlfriends or even mother and daughter — so well developed that they become the focal point of these narratives.²⁹ Nazi cinema is conceived on the premise that the audience not only identifies with the film characters but also tries to emulate their behavior. Fashioned by a patriarchal social order committed equally to the conflicting principles of polarity and harmony between the sexes, the Nazi melodrama instructs its audience on how women and men should relate to each other.

Male Conquest of the Female Continent: Veit Harlan's *Opfergang* (1944)

The only Nazi filmmaker ever brought to trial for crimes against humanity, Veit Harlan is best known for his virulently anti-semitic film *Jud Süß* (1940) and his ballad to total war *Kolberg* (1945). A star director in the Third Reich, Harlan was awarded the title "Professor," received some of the highest wages and most prestigious projects, and directed four of the first nine German full-length feature films in Agfa color. However, as Karsten Witte maintains, "Harlan's specific service to the Third Reich was his heavy melodramas . . . which together all seismographically reflect Nazi domestic and foreign policy developments."³⁰ Despite their exemplary nature, Harlan's melodramas have been largely overlooked by film historians. His melodrama *Opfergang* (Rite of Sacrifice, 1944) is a case in point and deserves more critical attention.³¹

The screenplay of *Opfergang*, written by Veit Harlan and Alfred Braun, is based loosely on Rudolf G. Binding's novella of the same name published in 1912. With its color film format and star cast including Kristina Söderbaum (Harlan's Swedish wife), Carl Raddatz, and Irene von Meyendorff, *Opfergang* was clearly conceived as a box office success but did not premiere until December 8, 1944, thirteen months after its completion. Harlan claimed that Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels held the film from the theaters for nearly a year because it mythologized adultery as sublime and emanated "Todeserotik."³² The eventual release of the film and its rating of "artistically especially valuable," however, testify to its general adherence to the dictates of fascist propaganda. Films produced during the peak war years were endowed with two primary functions, entertainment and education, which Goebbels maintained could not be divorced from politics:

Moreover, we do not want to ignore the fact that film as a great and deeply penetrating mass art must also serve as entertainment. But at a time in which the entire nation is burdened with such difficult hardships and worries, entertainment is mainly valuable politically. . . . Additionally, film in its modern development is a first-class educational medium for the nation.³³

Opfergang advances just such a political agenda in the guise of harmless diversion. This melodrama entertains the audience with an archetypal story of a love triangle, while educating the masses to maintain the sanctity of marriage and instrumentalize sexuality in the service of the state. Harlan's film charts the development of a married couple as they learn to overcome socially unacceptable behavior and adopt prescribed gender roles. This narrative development corresponds to a dominant strategy of Nazi entertainment films, whereby deviant behavior is played out only to be reigned in and overcome at the conclusion.³⁴ The pedagogical value of cinematic transgressions and their sublimation lies in their function as a cathartic release and redirection of desire cloaked in an innocuous vehicle, for as Goebbels argued, the best propaganda is invisible and conceals its true intentions.³⁵ Harlan's film conforms to Goebbels dictate by veiling its ideological stance in entertainment. *Opfergang* engages in a discourse about masculinity centered on territorial domination and about femininity that rewards sacrifice, self-effacement, and service while punishing mobility, self-interest, and passion with death.³⁶

Typical of melodrama, the narrative is highly convoluted. Upon returning from a long sea voyage to his hometown of Hamburg, the world traveler Albrecht Froben (Carl Raddatz) marries his cousin Octavia (Irene von Meyendorff), a beautiful but extremely reserved young woman. Despite admonishments from his cousin Mathias (Franz Schafheitlin), Albrecht befriends his strange and adventurous neighbor Älskling Flodeen (Kristina Söderbaum), who rides with him daily through the countryside. In order to distance himself from Äls, Albrecht moves with his wife to Düsseldorf and tries to lose himself in business and parties. At the carnival ball, however, Octavia realizes that she cannot bear the wild, intoxicating festivities and longs for her quiet home on the Alster. The Frobens thus return to Hamburg and learn Äls is confined to her bed with the remnants of a tropical fever. Encouraged by Albrecht's daily greeting on horseback outside her window, Äls recovers and the two continue their rides together. Soon Äls admits: "My friend, we love each other, and it will end badly." She suffers a relapse just as typhus spreads through the harbor district, where her illegitimate daughter is staying with a governess. Albrecht saves the child but is infected himself. When Octavia hears Albrecht's feverish torment over Äls's deteriorating health, she resolves to don her husband's riding habit and perform the ritual greeting to his dying lover. Albrecht learns

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of Octavia's self-sacrifice after Äls's death and finally recognizes his wife's great love. Reconciled, the couple rides along the seashore and bids one last farewell to Äls, whose ashes have been scattered among the waves.

The opening sequence positions Albrecht Froben as an accomplished world traveler with Viking blood, a respected member of an all-male group defined by mobility. After Hamburg has been established as the venue with an aerial shot of the Elbe River followed by shots of the harbor, scenic buildings, and the Bismarck monument, the scene shifts to a large paneled room filled with maritime artifacts. At the head of a rectangular table, where nearly twenty members of the German Colonial Union³⁷ are seated, a man stands next to a large globe and reports on Albrecht's travels to former German colonies in Africa and on to Japan. As a sign of their esteem, the group awards Albrecht "the entire world," the globe.

The strategic placement of colonialism at the beginning of the film, our entrance into the filmic text, suggests that *Opfergang* participates in a discourse of domination. Rudolf Binding's novella of 1912 contains no references to the pre-First-World-War German ambition of a middle-African empire stretching from Togo and Cameroon to German East Africa. Embedded in Harlan's film in the form of the German Colonial Union (a slightly veiled reference to the Reich Colonial Union³⁸) and transported into 1942–1944, colonialism carries striking significance. With its emphasis on geographical orientation and spatial conquest, the film seems to resonate anxieties aroused by the war and the quest for *Lebensraum*. Yet, despite its contemporary setting, *Opfergang* is devoid of any overt references to the war in North Africa, Europe, or Asia.³⁹ The lack of historical specificity invites an allegorical reading of colonialism. *Opfergang* conflates masculinity with exploration and conquest, and femininity with stability of the soil. Herein lies both a central metaphor of the film and a fundamental aspect of fascist mythology. Land and woman stand as interchangeable elements, objects to be subdued by male drives of domination and movement.

This reading is supported in the second sequence. As the camera focuses on the globe and the shot dissolves into the next scene, Albrecht points to the countries of his travels and displays to his cousin Mathias three treasures: a warrior statue, an eleven-headed Kuan-yin,⁴⁰ the Goddess of Mercy that Albrecht mistakes for a Buddha, and a kimono. While Mathias admires the Kuan-yin, Albrecht seductively dons the kimono and boasts of his sexual exploits until he rests upon a portrait of Octavia. At the same time Mathias protests: "Albrecht, Albrecht, you are now a famous, dignified man. You can no longer afford such stories. You are bound by your position."⁴¹

Albrecht's souvenirs and the geography of his travels can be read as the representative elements in the dangerous conquest of the "dark continent." These objects and spaces stand in for the three main characters and embody their essence, foreshadowing the conflicts ahead. The male warrior figure

symbolizes Albrecht, a mighty conqueror who defies the boundaries of political division to re-capture the colonial ideal. The Kuan-yin, the unrecognized Goddess of Mercy, exemplifies Octavia, who patiently forgives her husband for his adultery while he fails to see her virtue and selfless love. The alluring kimono and unexplored regions of Asia and Africa represent Äls, the sexual threat inherent in the erotic realm of forbidden pleasure or, in Freudian terms, the dark continent of enigmatic female desire.⁴²

In the masculine battle for the colonization of woman, virtue and desire stand for the oppositional feminine components of stability and dissolution. This dual vision of femininity is represented in the “heavenly” Octavia and the “earthly” Äls, who are never captured in the same frame.⁴³ Albrecht mediates between the two women and functions as a catalyst for change, compelling Octavia to integrate aspects of Äls’s personality into her own.

Octavia first appears as an objectified framed icon; she is, like her painted image, a constant (“She is what she always was.”).⁴⁴ Timeless and motionless, Octavia’s portrait retards Albrecht’s movement and contains his sexual desires, defined by Mathias as socially unacceptable. When she appears before Albrecht descending the stairs in a flowing white gown to greet him, Octavia literally embodies the lofty realm of ideal femininity, which must descend from its pedestal to meet the rugged earthbound male. Indeed, the original visual stability of her portrait and the subsequent movement of her body mirror Octavia’s development within the filmic narrative from an unapproachable angel to a corporeal wife. Initially staged as stationary, seated, or moving slowly, Octavia only begins to move quickly when her relationship with Albrecht is threatened by her physical passivity. Despite her inhibitions, for example, Octavia glides down the giant carnival slide, and when Albrecht cannot divert his attention from Äls, Octavia runs after her in search of the key to her rival’s magnetism. In the ultimate self-sacrifice, she adopts Albrecht’s persona and rides his horse past Äls’s window to comfort her husband’s dying mistress. Octavia’s development is complete in the final scene, when she joins her husband on horseback along the seashore. Each movement brings her closer to a vital physicality that will satisfy her husband’s desires.

Octavia is a beautiful, artistic, and somewhat fragile woman bound to her family’s dimly lit drawing room, her gleaming white music room, or the garden of her family’s estate. Playing the piano is her entire life, an activity that “signals harmony, cultural refinement and the restriction of women to the domestic sphere.”⁴⁵ Octavia’s artificial environment, and by analogy the homeland, is associated with extreme intellectualism and pending death. The Froben estate is filled with reminders of transitoriness and mortality. The grandfather clock, inscribed with the adage “One of these hours will be your last,” dominates the scene.⁴⁶ Likewise, the table clock in Octavia’s room holds a central position in the middle of the frame, suggesting the overwhelming sense of life’s brevity.

This morbid preoccupation with death culminates at the Froben family gathering. The scene opens on a close-up of orchids on the drawing room table. These tropical flowers are later featured prominently in Äls and Albrecht's sick rooms, creating a link between the extremes of the mind and body. Octavia plays Chopin's nocturnes in a dark room filled with heavy furniture and filtered light, while her father recites Nietzsche's "Todesahnung" from the *Dionysos-Dithyramben* cycle, "The Sun Sinks." Albrecht is deeply disturbed by the changes in Hamburg since his departure three years earlier. Especially bothered by the emphasis on death, he opens the door to reveal the sunlight and thus asserts the life-affirming value of nature: "wind and waves, the glow and pleasure of the sun."⁴⁷ The parallels to Germany in the later stages of the war are clear. As a counter to the pervasive obsession with death resulting from crushing military defeats, the film offers sports and nature as a refuge.

Albrecht exhibits many of the attributes of the ideal fascist male: he is an explorer, active, mobile, and most at home outdoors. While his world travels function as an initiation rite, his road to manhood has just begun. He cannot remain an aimless, restless wanderer, and Octavia activates his return to *Heimat*, the family estate. Although Albrecht becomes anchored in the homeland, he never seems to have a space of his own. While the Froben coat of arms adorns the estate windows and model ship, confirming his membership in the family "empire," Albrecht is always in someone else's space. In contrast to both Octavia and Äls, who inherit large estates, Albrecht has no land of his own. Even his cousin Mathias has a study filled with the relics of the East and, ironically, Albrecht's globe. Far from being alienated, Albrecht dominates indoor space and makes it his own by his sheer presence. An energetic, strong man without his own clearly defined territory, Albrecht embodies the fascist male who needs *Lebensraum* and embraces the Nazi policy of territorial expansion. His situation also illustrates that when a man has no land (read woman) to control, he cannot control himself.

Like Octavia, who must learn to become more physical, sensuous, and active, Albrecht must also change the direction of his life. He must learn to tame his reckless behavior and carnal passions and redirect his libidinal energy toward his wife. His development within the film's narrative consists of recognizing Octavia's virtues and controlling his unproductive sexuality. Albrecht's journey towards social integration is endangered by the erotic woman.

Älskling Flodeen's initial appearance establishes her mythic identity as a water nixie; the audience only glimpses her hands, arms, legs, and blond hair as she grasps onto Albrecht's boat. With her fragmented physicality, Äls is the epitome of the mobile woman defined by a "free lifestyle." Without a definitive homeland (Octavia thinks Äls is from Finland) or even a real name (Älskling was a nickname given to her by her mother), Äls is described as a migratory bird, who travels south in the winter as far as Africa. Her unrestrained lifestyle is inimical to the ideal of the Aryan woman.

Äls negates several essential features of National Socialist ideology. She does not conform to Nazi standards on racial purity, the health of the national body, and the sanctity of motherhood. To begin with, although Äls is outwardly the model of the Aryan woman with her blond hair, blue eyes, and athletic body, she is marked a foreigner of uncertain origins. Her foreignness is emphasized by the fact that Albrecht, Octavia, and Mathias are cousins, blood relatives who share the same name, family estate, and homeland. The question of Äls's racial value in Nazi terms is ultimately linked to her state of health. As she swims, rides, and practices archery accompanied by nearly twenty hounds, Äls appears to be the picture of health. Likewise, her home, filled with plants, parrots, and hounds, reflects the external vitality so characteristic of her being. But Äls suffers from the remnants of a tropical fever and has inherited poor health from her mother, who spent her life in hospitals and vegetated long before she died. Äls shares a fatal connection with her mother.⁴⁸ Both women are described as “foolhardy,” “frivolous,” and especially “irrational.” Moreover, their diseased bodies prevent them from being good mothers and caring for their daughters, and as the governess concludes: “A sick mother? . . . The child suffers the most from that.”⁴⁹ The repeated comparisons between Äls and her deceased mother reflect Nazi concepts of racial hygiene and biological determinism. The diseased female body is passed down from generation to generation and threatens the health of the national body. Even Äls's daughter Susanne is a danger; although she is not infected with typhus, she passes the disease onto Albrecht.⁵⁰

Along with her illness, Äls's mobility and self-interested desire to live to the fullest define her as a poor mother. In response to her pleas to let Susanne live with her, the governess replies: “There would be absolutely no sense in that. You are hardly here, then you close the house up again and move to the south or to the north and then the child has to leave again. That is not good for a child. Or do you want to drag it along everywhere? A child must have an ordered life.”⁵¹

Although Äls's status as an unwed mother might suggest a violation of conventional morality, according to Nazi family policy her physical inability and reluctance to care for her child are a more formidable offense.⁵² Äls's “abnormality” is again written on her body. The film draws a clear connection between femininity and pain in a scene with Äls and her doctor. The doctor characterizes pain and suffering as positive because, as a warning signal, they protect the body from serious injury. Äls, however, does not perceive pain. Herein lies her ultimate transgression against the fascist concept of femininity. Adolf Hitler's formulation of male and female duties can serve as an example of how National Socialism encodes woman:

What a man sacrifices in the struggle of his people, a woman sacrifices in the struggle for the preservation of this people in the individual cases.

What the man employs in heroic courage on the battlefield, the woman employs in eternal, patient devotion, in eternal, patient suffering and endurance. Every child that she brings into the world is a battle that she wins for the existence or nonexistence of her people.⁵³

Defined in the metaphors of battle, woman's essential nature is to bear children, maintain the nuclear family, and suffer pain silently. Äls does not conform to these expectations; pain is alien to her being, and she fails to fulfill her maternal duties.

Whereas Äls and Albrecht are both associated with water — Harlan's recurring symbol of fluidity, passion, boundlessness, and mobility — they negotiate water differently. Äls is inscribed as a siren; a temptress who emerges from the sea and ultimately merges with it as her ashes are scattered among the waves. Äls relates to water physically, in that she becomes the sea itself on both a visual and narrative level.⁵⁴ Albrecht, by contrast, masters the seas as he sails across the globe, just as he masters land that does not belong to him. This dominion is endangered by his relationship to Äls, illustrated by the fact that sailing was his favorite sport until he met her. Thereafter, he no longer commands the waters.

The *Faschingsball* sequence in *Opfergang* provides the main characters with an opportunity to subvert fascist stereotypes, if only momentarily.⁵⁵ As a central metaphor in Weimar cinema for unlimited sensual and social possibilities, the carnival is a relatively rare event in Nazi films.⁵⁶ The carnival, as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, is the freedom that comes from inverting the social hierarchy, suspending moral conventions, and masquerading in new roles. Unlike ritual, which is created and practiced by the elite, "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people." Bakhtin continues: "It is the people as a whole, but organized in their own way . . . It is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of the festivity."⁵⁷ The carnival functions as a safety valve. It gives voice to an alternative conception of reality within a controlled framework. By allowing difference to be played out and affording potentially destructive desires a limited release, the carnival averts any real threat to the system.

In Harlan's film the subversive quality of the carnival is directed towards new sexual identities, which ultimately reaffirm the institution of marriage. Wearing a red mask and black cape lined in red reminiscent of his red kimono and situated in the realm of unacceptable eroticism, Albrecht pursues two blond women dressed like Äls in black riding habit, black top hat, mask and veil covering their faces. The erotic woman is doubled in an optical encoding of her underling enigma and then fetishized in the mask and veil, which function "to visualize (and hence stabilize) the instability, the precariousness of sexuality."⁵⁸



True to the carnivalesque principle, however, this image of woman proves to be false. A fade-in of Äls seated at her desk, dressed in a modest white nightgown, writing in her diary of how she must remain silent about her love for Albrecht, calls the cinematic inscription of the erotic woman into question. Not only is Äls not present at the festivities, she is determined to uphold the sanctity of marriage and renounce her passion. In a similar manner, for the duration of the carnival Octavia seems willing to adopt a more sensual persona to match her golden mask and white dress. Indeed, at the carnival the two women begin to play with roles foreign to their character — in effect they exchange roles in the masquerade. Äls adopts the modesty, virtue, and corresponding physical passivity long associated with Octavia, while Octavia embraces Äls's vitality, sensuality, and movement.

In an attempt to assume Äls's energetic persona, Octavia agrees to go down the giant mouth slide with Albrecht but is soon upset by his public display of passion. When she is voted the winner in the Triumph of Beauty contest and captured by the throngs, Octavia screams, struggles free, and runs away. The scene denotes the symbolic rape of Octavia: alone in a taxi, her mask gone, tears streaming down her face, Octavia is engulfed in a dark red velvet cape covering her white dress resembling a wedding gown. Albrecht is titillated by his wife's pain and humiliation and gleefully reveals: "She screamed bloody murder."⁵⁹ The marriage has been consummated.

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Female desire as sickness: *Opfergang*.

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Whereas Octavia is associated with death on an intellectual level, Äls is preoccupied with her own death: “One is always near him — Death. And its really quite good, if one smiles a little once in a while and says: you are my friend. You come when I cannot go on any longer.”⁶⁰ Äls’s death scene reveals the nexus of excessive female physicality, unbridled passion, and erotic death. The audience witnesses Äls dying on her sumptuous bed in a medium shot. With her hair tousled, dressed in a negligee, her right shoulder and much of her chest exposed, Äls radiates the fever engulfing her life force. The filmic strategies in *Opfergang* correspond to the trope Mary Ann Doane has found in American women’s films of the 1940s: uncontained female sexuality and desires are externalized as a fever that consumes the woman and leads to her death.⁶¹ Äls’s disease also resonates fascist ideas on female desire. Both Albrecht and Äls travel to the tropics, but he returns as the mighty conquering hero integrated into society through male bonding and marriage. She, by contrast, is punished with the remnants of a tropical fever for venturing into places culturally forbidden to woman. The fever that consumes Äls is gender specific. The disease inscribed on her body is related to her mother’s ill health and becomes a hereditary trait transmitted from one infected female to the next. Although Albrecht also suffers a fever from typhus, he recovers in direct opposition to the conclusion of Binding’s novella. According to Harlan, it was Goebbels who insisted on changing the end of the film: “The woman guilty of adultery has to die, not the husband. The marriage must remain intact. Besides, this would be better in a pedagogical sense not only for the front but also for the homeland.”⁶² In the fascist state, the erotic woman must die, so that the marriage can survive.

The focus on voyeurism, exhibitionism, and spectacle in Äls’s death scene illuminates a characteristic function of the erotic woman in Nazi cinema. Äls’s bed is moved to the window so that she can see Albrecht and be seen by him. Woman, encoded as the specular object of male desire, is ironically situated in the role of spectator but deprived of agency and control. Her body motivates the spectacle, but her entrance into the system likewise triggers the containment, physical punishment, and elimination of the female body. Without a body to act out her passion, Äls’s look is disengaging; all that remains is the desire of the gaze.

The parallel montage, whereby both Albrecht and Äls lie in their separate beds engulfed by fever, illustrates the opposing consequences of male and female adultery in Nazi cinema. The soft lighting, choral music, and intimate camera work intent on highlighting the romantic aspects of death culminate in a close-up of Äls’s disembodied face. Divested of the erotic, her body is literally eliminated by the clouds, waves, and lighting. She is contained in a collage composition, where her de-eroticized face is superimposed onto her garden gate and the roaring waves behind it, while Albrecht, in a medium shot (significantly capturing his torso), occupies the left corner of the frame. When the gate

opens and the water rushes into the garden, her face disappears in a fade-out. Äls and the passion she represents are completely extinguished. She becomes the ocean, a flowing space for man to dominate.

The fascist melodrama, rather than directed exclusively at a female audience (Goebbels's insistence on script changes based on their presumed effect on soldiers at the front, should suffice to question this long-held premise), aestheticizes female sacrifice. As the restless embodiment of unbridled passion, the non-conforming woman poses a danger to the warrior male and is cinematically contained in the *image* of pain. Äls, the woman who cannot perceive pain internally, ironically becomes the vehicle for rendering pain visible. Female suffering, rather than portrayed as a "reality," is externalized as an image and becomes an overriding aesthetic principle.⁶³ The act of violence waged against a female body defined as inferior, her erasure from the picture, is rendered beautifully to elicit aesthetic pleasure rather than moral outrage.

The staging of female death in *Opfergang* is typical of how many fascist films deal with a woman whose sexuality is outside the confines of the nuclear family. Äls is condemned to death for her transgressive sexuality. More significant than her adultery is her role as an erotic mother, a mother who fails to raise her own child, who has no husband, and who risks her own health for sensual pleasures while endangering the life of her child. Äls shares much with the figure Hanna from *Ich klage an!* (I Accuse!, Wolfgang Liebeneiner, 1941), a film designed to gain approval for the "Aktion T-4" euthanasia program. Both films present an idealized version of female death from disease. By mapping the deterioration of two protagonists who begin as vibrant young women and turn into bedridden invalids, the filmmakers present death as a solution to suffering that is merciful and readily embraced. When Äls lies in Albrecht's arms, she purrs contentedly, "To die like this would be the most beautiful death!" Likewise, after Hanna's husband has given her poison instead of medicine, she sighs, "I feel so light, so happy, like never before. I wish it were death." What Karl Ludwig Rost writes of Hanna applies to Äls as well: "It is not the fear of death but the fear of dying alone without the beloved husband that appears to be the true horror."⁶⁴

Although much has been written on the glorification of death and aestheticizing of violence in Nazi culture,⁶⁵ the gender issues involved in staging death remain relatively unexplored. Male death, epitomized in films ranging from *Hitlerjunge Quex* (Hitler Youth Quex, 1933) to *Wunschkonzert* (Request Concert, 1940), is most often a heroic act of sacrifice for the good of the community and the fatherland. Young Heini Völker in *Hitlerjunge Quex*, for example, is murdered by the Communists and dies in his comrades' arms with the words of the official Hitler Youth Song on his lips. Heini becomes immortalized as the swastika is superimposed on his dead body and replaced by columns of marching Hitler Youths. Romanticized male death is usually violent but quick and apparently painless (since the man is nearly anesthe-

tized by visions of grandeur), often taking place offscreen. There are few examples of men dying from diseases, but when figures such as Fritz von Hartwig in *Robert Koch* (1939) and Professor Achenbach in *Germanin* (1943) die from tuberculosis and sleeping sickness, their deaths are meaningful because they help find cures for these deadly diseases.⁶⁶

Saul Friedländer has noted that Nazism presents “not real death in its everyday horror and tragic banality, but a ritualized, stylized, and aestheticized death.”⁶⁷ A contemporary critic of *Opfergang* recognized the “decorative” function of female death:

The impetuosity of wanting to die young, to ride as an elegant bride of the wind on the waves and to hunt on the back of a horse, the unbridled, feverish, life addiction is expressed very effectively by Kristina Söderbaum. She knows how to die with decorative grace.⁶⁸

Due to her diseased body and aberrant maternal role, Äls cannot contribute to society and her death therefore corresponds to the Nazi euthanasia measures prescribed for “inferior” people. Beyond this, Äls’s demise also fulfills a significant propaganda function in the waning years of the war. Her personification of Death as a long awaited and helpful friend diminishes the horror of real death.

With the elimination of the femme fatale, the remaining femme fragile must be transformed into a vibrant woman for the picture to be complete.⁶⁹ Octavia, characterized by self-effacement and renunciation of her own desires, manifests many of the pivotal components of the model fascist woman. When Albrecht is disturbed by her family’s bourgeois intellectualism, she consoles him: “But later we can do what we want, or rather what you want, Albrecht.” In a similar vein, when Mathias asks how she is, Octavia replies: “I am as happy as Albrecht is.”⁷⁰ Octavia’s identity and sense of purpose are determined by her relation to her husband and thus she corresponds to Hitler’s dictate: “The world of woman is man. She only thinks about other things now and then.”⁷¹ But Octavia, “in her cool, refined beauty, in her nobility, calmness, and inattentively measured deportment,”⁷² is unapproachable. In order to adopt the masquerade of vitality initiated at the carnival and integrate it completely into her personality, Octavia must again disguise herself. She now dons Albrecht’s riding habit and trots past Äls’s window, participating for the first time in the ritual shared by her husband and his lover. Dressed in her husband’s clothing and performing his ceremonial greeting, Octavia is vitalized in masculine terms or in the guise of masculinity. Octavia, who at the beginning of the film is characterized as distant and effete, successfully transforms herself by adopting Äls’s sensuality and Albrecht’s vigor. The emancipatory potential of the carnival is united with the stabilizing function of ritual to create a unified image of woman in Octavia.

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In the final scene of the film, Octavia and Albrecht embody the ideal married couple as they slowly ride horses along the seashore. Both partners have had to sacrifice a part of their former selves. Octavia has abandoned her restraint and exhibits a new vigor. Albrecht has recovered from his sexual fever and shows self-constraint. Having gone from a gallop to a trot, Albrecht has literally bridled his passion. The couple has not only found a balanced pace on horseback, the arm's length between them has been overcome as they shake hands. Their acceptance of prescribed social roles is symbolized in their handshake, a pact to build a common future together.

Opfergang advances a concept of gender difference and social integration consistent with Nazi ideology in general. Any threat to the stability of the nuclear family is neutralized. Äls is eliminated from the picture because she poses a danger to the domestic order with her assertion of female desire and subjectivity. Octavia, by contrast, proves herself a good wife by conforming to her husband's desires and sacrificing self-identity. Albrecht in turn abandons his quest for forbidden pleasure, reaffirms his commitment to marriage, and conquers himself by taming his own drives. *Opfergang* inscribes gender identities that accommodate and propagate the government's stance regarding motherhood, the family, racial purity, euthanasia, sacrifice, and dominance.

Identity of the Mother Confirmed by the Language and Law of the Father in *Damals* (1943)

The Swedish actress Zarah Leander was brought to Germany in 1937 under contract with Ufa, Germany's largest film studio, in the hope that she could fill the gap in German film left by the departure of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich.⁷³ In the grand tradition of the studio contract system, Ufa created a star image for Leander. Cast most often in the role of the ostensible femme fatale who suffers unbearable pain due to her subversive desires but in the end is vindicated as proper and respectable, Leander masquerades in dual roles. Her celluloid figure engages in non-domestic female occupations: she is a nightclub singer, revue star, or chanteuse, who has the liberty to be different and frequent the exotic and erotic. Featured as a foreigner from Great Britain, Sweden, Hungary, Russia, or Denmark who travels to all the corners of the world, she stands outside conventional norms. Her figure is marked not only by a deep, almost male voice, strong willed nature, and sexual activity, but also by her freedom of movement and function as spectacle. This independent, sensual woman is nearly always constituted as a deviance and danger to the moral order, but surprisingly is rewarded with a husband at the end of the film.⁷⁴

The melodrama *Damals* (Back Then) best illustrates Zarah Leander's masquerade as the good girl everyone thinks is a bad girl. Her last film in the Third Reich, *Damals* was directed by Rolf Hansen and received the rating "artistically

valuable.” The premiere on March 3, 1943, was an overwhelming success, marred only by the fact that during the evening Berlin experienced its most severe bombing raid to date. Six weeks after the premiere, Leander left Germany, and the film was taken out of distribution.⁷⁵ Despite its short theatrical run, *Damals* was included in an unpublished list from November 13, 1944, of the most successful films produced in Nazi Germany.⁷⁶

Damals engages in a popular discourse of disjunctive female identity brought into focus by the authority of language and law. Two opposing images of woman are anchored in the main protagonist Vera Meiners (alias Dr. Gloria O’Conner). The identity of this woman vacillates between a selfless mother and a deceitful, suspected murderess. This opposition represents an allegorical conflict between conformity and degeneracy based on the strict polarity between masculinity and femininity. The ideological work of the film is to criminalize female transgression against male authority while rewarding the suffering and sacrifice of “true” motherhood with the security of the nuclear family. Concurrently, the film assures the survival of the family by demanding that the father eventually acknowledge the value of motherhood. Woman’s relation to law and language is characterized by deception and impotence. The male representatives of the law and social hierarchy narrate the complex, non-linear story, achieve narrative closure, administer justice, and restore order on both the narrative and social levels.

The film begins in South America, where Dr. Gloria O’Conner (Zarah Leander) is arrested for the murder of Frank Douglas (Karl Martell). When the authorities learn that Dr. O’Conner died at a quarantine station in Las Casas, the prisoner refuses to speak, even to reveal her true name, Vera Meiners. Seeking information on this unknown woman, District Attorney Mendoza publishes her photograph and arrest warrant in newspapers all over the world. Vera’s story begins to unfold in a series of four flashbacks as friends and colleagues contact Mendoza with details about her past. In 1920s Lübeck, Vera lives happily with her husband, the attorney Jan Meiners (Hans Stüwe) and their two-year-old daughter Eva until she receives a letter from her former boyfriend Frank Douglas. Fearing her husband’s jealousy, she secretly meets Douglas in Hamburg to end their relationship definitively. When Jan learns that Vera has lied to him about her clandestine rendezvous, he divorces her. Rebuilding her life in Switzerland, Vera becomes a doctor but is dismissed from her position for having performed an operation against the explicit orders of the hospital director, Professor Rigaud. Without economic means and deprived of her medical license, Vera becomes a variety singer in Lisbon and falls in love with the clown Pablo (Rossano Brazzi). Just as she is about to find some personal happiness, Frank Douglas appears again. He secures her a job as a nurse in South America, where she can be with her daughter, who has spent years in a boarding school. Vera renounces her love for Pablo through deceit in order to fulfill her maternal duties. At the quarantine station in Las Casas, Vera meets Dr. Gloria O’Conner, who is dying from typhus. Despite the violent protests

of her fellow travelers, Vera informs the authorities about the infectious disease and is placed under stricter quarantine, thereby losing her nursing position. After months of unemployment, she assumes the identity of the deceased Dr. O’Conner and begins to practice medicine again. Returning to the present time frame, Jan Meiners arrives in South America to regain custody of his daughter. Jan discovers Vera has accepted imprisonment to protect Eva, who is likewise innocent of murder but equally guilty of poor judgment. The womanizer Frank Douglas was murdered by the father of a young woman who committed suicide after Douglas had seduced and abandoned her. At the conclusion, Vera is exonerated of murder, released from prison, and reunited with her daughter and former husband.

Damals contains all the elements of a successful film script that springs the boundaries of any single genre. It is a melodrama of a wife’s defiance, a husband’s jealousy, and the depths to which their bad judgment lead. It is also a crime story of murder, false imprisonment, and suicide. With its musical numbers by Zarah Leander and locales ranging from a bourgeois living room to a nightclub, from Lübeck to Lisbon and Las Casas, *Damals* was a calculated hit.

The film opens with the typical elements of the 1940s film noir or crime film. In a nightclub, a band plays a Latin American melody while a crowd forms on the dance floor. The rhythmic music follows the action to a hotel corridor as a woman wearing a black sequined dress with a lizard brooch on her lapel steals out of a hotel room and disappears into the rain-drenched night. Sailors come out of a dusty bar, a bus passes by, and the mysterious woman kicks the hotel key down the sewer just as a foghorn screeches and the sound of screaming crowds is heard. She enters the bar cast in the moving shadows of an overhead fan. Not reacting to the fact that the bar is closed, she orders an espresso in a deep voice and writes “Everything in order” on a note. Before her drink arrives, the elusive woman has vanished without a trace. The scene cuts to the same hotel room where a man is found shot to death.

The initial sequence sets the stage for the audience to understand the main protagonist as a criminal. The chiaroscuro lighting effects, “degenerate” music, exotic locations on the margin of proper society, and a murder all work to define Vera as deviant. The South American venue displaces the crime from any specifically German context and from self-directed social criticism. Travel to the exotic realm, as Siegfried Kracauer maintains, can serve as an escape from examining one’s own social ills:

Travel is one of the great possibilities of society to keep itself in a permanent state of absentmindedness, which protects it from a confrontation with itself. It helps imagination onto the wrong paths, it covers up the view with impressions, it contributes to the glories of the world so that

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its ugliness is not noticed. (The increase in world knowledge it brings serves to transfigure the existing system in which it was acquired.)⁷⁷

These unfamiliar images build on cultural constructs of National Socialism that posit the exotic as deadly. The beautiful and mysterious woman who inhabits this space, who frequents hotels, bars, and the harbor district at night, is likewise codified as a threat to normalcy and order. The dark imagery of crime is necessary for the audience's misrecognition of Vera as a murderer.

Vera's criminal status is reconfirmed when it becomes evident she has repeatedly lied to the district attorney and adopted a false identity. The mise en scène contributes to a definition of Vera as aberrant. The interrogation room with its honeycombed ceiling, venetian blinds, ceiling-level windows, fans, and sharp lighting contrasts that cast barred shadows on the walls visually imprison this strange woman. Vera, her body partially hidden in the shadows, thus suggesting the partial truths she espouses, obviously lies in her first interrogation. Her claim that she was never at the hotel contradicts what the audience has just witnessed. Confronted with evidence of her lies and false identity, Vera refuses to participate in the legal proceedings. Brought to her prison cell, she passes a woman screaming to be released from this insane asylum while another woman smokes, bares her legs, and plays a screeching blues song.⁷⁸ Grouped together with women who are portrayed as crazy and degenerate, Vera is located among the asocial.

According to the Reich and Prussian Ministry of the Interior in 1937: "Those to be considered asocial are persons who demonstrate through behavior towards the community, which may not in itself be criminal, that they will not adapt themselves to the community."⁷⁹ Individuals who deviate from prescribed social and sexual norms (alcoholics, prostitutes, the physically and mentally handicapped), and those who are "particularly unproductive and unrestrained, and who in the absence of a sense of responsibility do not conduct orderly domestic lives or raise their children to be useful racial comrades" were designated asocials.⁸⁰ "In the Nazis's view of the world, 'asocial' and criminal behavior was not determined by either individual choice or social environment, but was innate, and hence heritable."⁸¹ Based on the genetic threat to the nation, criminal biologists demanded the exclusion of asocials and criminals from the community through preventative custody (*Vorbeugungshaft*), forced labor, or internment in concentration camps where they were marked with black triangles. More women than men were accused of asocial behavior and "social feeble-mindedness," which often resulted in sterilization and inclusion in the euthanasia program.⁸² Set within this discursive context, *Damals* posits aberrant femininity as a crime.

Vera appears as both a mysterious, lying, accused murderess and as a dedicated doctor who cares for her patients above everything. Before she is brought in for questioning, Vera is shown tending to her patients, combating



not only disease but also the incompetence of her assistant. This dual image of Vera, the healer who devotes her life to others versus the asocial woman who transgresses moral and legal conventions, becomes the focus of the four flashbacks. These inner stories show how Vera's life is nearly destroyed each time she lies and defies male authority. The narrative works as much to determine the conclusive identity of this woman as to prove her guilt. Indeed, the film questions the extent to which her *being* is the criminal offense. Vera's disjunctive identity is based on her adherence to two opposing codes, the motherhood principle based on compassion, self-sacrifice, and devotion to others, and the fatherhood principle based on law, authority, and order. The first two flashbacks record the consequences of Vera's asocial behavior, namely her refusal to conform to patriarchal standards. The second two flashbacks illustrate how Vera's sense of compassion is eventually tempered by obedience to a higher order.

The first flashback to Lübeck establishes Vera's former idyllic status as a beloved wife and mother and a respected member of the community. The Meiners's spacious and elegant living room filled with well-dressed guests signals the economic security and prominent social status of the happy couple. Dressed in a modest black evening gown with a white lace collar and sleeves, a rose at her breast, her hair in tight curls, and lighted from above giving her a slight halo effect, Vera exudes contented domesticity. Surrounded by her husband and admiring guests, she is located at the center of the frame and becomes the focus of everyone's attention. Seated at the piano, her body conspicuously hidden, she sings a soft, slow lullaby, while looking up admiringly at her husband:

Tonight, when the Night quiet and fine
steps into my room here,
I wrap myself up in her coat
and say pleadingly to her:
Dear Night, come, let me say to you,
what I wish from the heart.
No clock shall strike today
and time shall stand still,
and the world will not breathe!
When he holds me in his arms!⁸³

Vera's song redefines the night in the context of socially sanctioned environs and institutions. The night, first introduced as a threat, a time of murder and intrigue in some distant land, becomes a blanket of security in the protective domain of the German family. The prosperity, security, and social integration linked to marriage, however, come at the expense of a woman's career and

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public life. Far from illustrating merely the private realm, the Meiners's home has become a public forum where the status of woman is debated:

WOMAN GUEST: You men are such egoists. Say, why don't you let her become a singer?

JAN: That would be the last straw. I am happy that she didn't become a doctor.

DR. PETERSEN: Exactly. That's the way life goes. Finally God invents a creature who possesses every good talent. She can do something. She studies medicine, and besides that has a splendid voice, looks wonderful. And what happens? She falls in love with our good Meiners.

JAN: Hey, you.

DR. PETERSEN: Who is surely my best friend, but overnight, so to speak, all career plans are botched, and she's just a wife.

VERA: Just? Can one be even more?

WOMAN GUEST: No, not when you're happy.

VERA: I'm happy!⁸⁴

Vera's identity centers on the ambiguous term *Frau*, denoting both wife and woman. Her acceptance of a self-definition that links a woman's social being to her biological functions necessitates that she relinquish a public role as doctor or singer in favor of a "natural" role as wife and mother. Conforming to her husband's vision of an ideal woman, Vera devotes her god-given talents to heal, nurture, and entertain her family and circle of friends. Meiner's insistence that his wife eschew an independent role in the limelight is deemed correct because both the women present concur that if a wife-woman is happy then that is all the identity she needs. The debate about female autonomy becomes superfluous when their adorable daughter Eva appears. All attention is directed to the child. As Vera lifts her to her lap, Jan bends down, and they form a tableau of the model family.

Vera endangers her idyllic home life by meeting Frank Douglas in Hamburg without her husband's knowledge. Although it is clear that Vera is a faithful wife and had rejected Frank long ago because he was not a suitable marriage partner, her reckless independence contributes to the dissolution of her marriage. She ventures away from home, defies her husband's authority, and lies to him. Jan learns of her deceit when the train to Copenhagen that she was supposed to be traveling on derails, a less than subtle visual image of male rage and impotency. Vera is punished for her transgression with banishment from paradise. Jan divorces her.

The flashback to Switzerland reveals how the contradictory nature of Vera's personality leads to disaster. She is shown to be a dedicated doctor

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who risks her professional life for the welfare of a young patient. Her compassion for others, however, is at variance with the established order.

Upon examining the young Paulette Gaspard, Professor Rigaud declares that nothing can be done at the moment since the girl's heart cannot withstand surgery. Vera breaks the news to the child's mother, Mrs. Gaspard, who appeals to Vera for help based on a "natural" bond between women, their common struggle to aid a child in need: "Doctor, you have to help me. The professor is certainly a good doctor, but he is only a man. What does such a man know about a mother, even if he's well educated. Even if he's a father. You're a woman. You must understand that. You can't simply say to me, your child's lost. We can't do anything."⁸⁵

Corresponding to the popular sentiment in Nazi rhetoric that "being a woman means being a mother," the two women are defined by their shared motherly instinct.⁸⁶ The solidarity among women established in the dialogue correlates visually as the identities of the two women merge optically. When Vera dresses for surgery, her face is superimposed onto Mrs. Gaspard's face in a dissolve establishing a clear affinity between the two women. Featured often as comrades, photographed in the same frame, side by side in a medium shot, Vera and Mrs. Gaspard face their common destiny together.

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Women as caregivers: *Damals*.

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The impassioned plea of a mother to save her daughter leads Vera to lie and disobey the professor's orders. Surrounded by a glass encasement with latticework resembling a barred cage, the child's mother on the one side, the invisible professor on the telephone occupying the other trajectory, Vera is literally caught between her passive role in the patriarchal order and the dictates of motherhood. The insignificance of women in the male order is confirmed when Professor Rigaud and his male colleague Dr. Lugeon revive the child to health and restore order. Vera then remarks to Mrs. Gaspard: "Now we are both completely superfluous here."⁸⁷

The deadly consequences of self-assertion and disobedience are made clear by the head nurse, who remarks: "Where would we be, if every young doctor meddled with the treatment of his supervisor . . . if he did exactly the opposite of what was strictly ordered? Patients in the hospital would no longer be certain about their life."⁸⁸ Vera's transgression against male authority no longer affects merely the health of her immediate family as in Lübeck; her defiance now threatens the health of the entire community.

When asked why she risked her career and the patient's life, Vera shows a picture of herself with her daughter and harkens back to the motherhood principle: "Don't you understand that I would do whatever it took to save a child for its mother."⁸⁹ Vera's profound sense of motherly duty and selfless actions, while framed in a positive light, are abated by her misguided autonomy and sedition. The value of motherliness is juxtaposed to the law of the father. Although self-sacrifice is deemed an essential quality, one must conform to an established structure under the proper guidance of a "genuine" leader. Since Vera does not submit to the hierarchical system of power, she is again punished with banishment. She is fired and her medical license is revoked.

The flashback to Lisbon shifts the struggle in Vera's life to the level of personal desires versus motherly responsibility. The action begins in a crowded Lisbon nightclub where Vera is engaged as a singer. Her first performance suggests that she has adopted a new, more passionate identity. Her costume, song, gestures, and especially the staging of the gaze all contribute to the portrayal of an erotic woman within acceptable limits.

Vera is photographed alone on an elevated circular stage, the center of attention but disengaged from the protective realm of the *Volksgemeinschaft* she experienced in Lübeck. She is now an eroticized woman on display, surrounded by a demanding public audience. Dressed in a low cut, floor-length black gown with a mantilla, veil, huge dangling earrings, and a tambourine in her hand, and thus properly marked as foreign, she sings of her romantic longings:

Who knows what secretly moves a woman's heart,
for whom it blazes afire?

Suddenly, you ~~for whom it~~ ^{for whom it} ~~blazes afire?~~ ^{blazes ardently for you}



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when it blissfully admits to you:
 I can't say what I like about you so much.
 Is it your laugh, your gaze?
 I don't know, whether it's intoxication
 or love that holds me,
 I only feel — you would be my happiness . . .
 I could love someone like you,
 gentle but full of ardor;
 to belong to someone like you completely
 and to swear to him a thousand vows!
 I could love someone like you
 how good my heart would be for him . . .
 I would like to give to someone like you
 my soul and my life!
 He will be everything for me,
 my sun, my happiness, my world!⁹⁰

Vera's performance begins with a long shot of her on stage surrounded by viewers seated at tables, in slightly raised box seats, and standing in the balcony. Presented as an enticing, available woman singing of her desire to submit to a passionate man, Vera is the source of scopophilia not only for the onscreen audience and the clown Pablo but also for the cinematic audience. The mutual desire evolving between Vera and Pablo is marked by the dramatization of their gazes depicted in intercut tracking shots and close-ups, symmetrical camera movements, and continuity editing. In a medium shot, Vera turns towards Pablo and nods to him while the camera slowly moves in until she is in a close-up. With a cut to Pablo, the same tracking device reveals his yearning for her and grants the audience a privileged glimpse at the affection and intimacy developing between the two characters. However, after Vera looks at Pablo directly and smiles, she lowers her eyes coyly, mitigating the effect of her "unladylike" gaze. As if aware of the distance mandated by voyeuristic pleasure, Vera diverts her gaze from Pablo back to the onscreen audience; her adherence to the conventions of the spectacle is signaled by a long shot that re-establishes the distance between Vera and her audience. Conforming to the concept of women as the un-touchable object of the erotic male gaze, Vera entices a spectator and then hits him with her tambourine when he tries to grab her.

Offstage Vera cautions Pablo that it would be "irrational" for him to love her, but he envisions a romantic future together: "My love is much greater than the greatest castle. Do you want to live in it?"⁹¹ When offered a nursing position in South America, however, Vera is faced with a dilemma. She can opt for either personal happiness with her Latin lover or a life of service as a nurse and mother. She even considers the possibility of

combining the two roles; passion simply stands in the way of a better life. By rejecting Pablo, they can both pursue more “productive” lives. He can fulfill his dream of becoming a bicycle racer, and she can return to her vocation as a caretaker. Vera’s only concern is for her daughter Eva: “It is definitely better for her. She will become much healthier, stronger. I’ll have her with me again.” As the purveyor of truth, the elderly clown recognizes the needs of the child are greater than those of the mother: “A child is much more important than a couple of months of happiness, or a couple of years.”⁹²

Convinced that she must allow Pablo to reject her, Vera adopts a vamp persona and ridicules his sentimentality. Her costume abounds in the accoutrements of the fetishized woman: a black floor-length sequined gown slit down the front with a deep décolletage, black feathers on her shoulders, and a black collar with a rose around her neck, while both wrists are bound by black straps originating at the genitals. Holding a glass of champagne, Vera staggers onto the stage while the old clown paints hearts on the young clown’s face. She leans against a larger-than-life Neptune ship’s figurehead and sings a “filthy song” of wanton lust:

Every night a new fortune
and new flirtations
every night another mouth,
that’s the way it’ll be for me:
Don’t talk about loyalty
or feelings,
I can only play with love!
Today you and tomorrow you . . .
there’s no other way,
there’s no other way,
that’s the way it’ll be for me:
I’m not one of those women,
who only do certain nice things
very quietly and secretly
because they don’t dare to do anything in the light
I don’t care at all
even if the whole world learns about it
I am not a Miss after all
with double standards.⁹³

Playing the temptress, Vera slaps the Neptune figure in the face, wraps the tethers of her dress around her arm, and looks into the audience from left to right, toasting her new men. Pablo watches her from the side stage, resuming his position as the privileged voyeur, but now he is ensnared in an overhanging net. The camera movement and editing in this scene are largely

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the converse of those used in her last musical number and signal the changed state of affairs. They now suggest a closer, more causal relationship between Vera and her audience while denoting polarity between Vera and Pablo. In a reaction tilt shot the camera moves from the balcony down to Vera, emphasizing the cause and effect relationship between the audience and Vera's spectacle while connecting a lewd woman straddling the bars with her bare legs to the equally vulgar woman on stage. By contrast, sharp editing cuts separate Vera from Pablo. When she swaggers over to Pablo, walking directly toward the retreating camera, aggressive, menacing, an animal after her prey, Pablo pulls the net from in front of his eyes, as if he were seeing her unmasked for the first time, and flees from the spider woman. The sound of broken glass accompanies the final close-up of Vera's mournful countenance.

Leander's musical number is reminiscent of Marlene Dietrich's performance in *Der blaue Engel* (1930), from the seductive woman with a deep voice, vampish costumes, and provocative lyrics down to the maritime artifacts, clown motif, and male humiliation. But unlike the siren Lola Lola, Vera is clearly in disguise. Her deception is based on her selfless love for her daughter; she lies to her lover so that she can resume her parental role, adopting the masquerade of promiscuity and narcissistic self-absorption to achieve the status of respectable (meaning chaste) motherhood.⁹⁴ *Damals* participates in the discursive tradition that maintains the impossibility of combining female desire and motherhood. Juxtaposed to a life of entertainment and passion is hard work and virtuous suffering. Vera opts for the difficult life of motherhood with its duties, sacrificing her own happiness for the sake of her daughter. She rejects the "unacceptable" life in the nightclub and embraces the socially "acceptable" role of a woman who devotes her life to others.

The last flashback to the quarantine station in Las Casas establishes Vera's real identity. Confronted with the evidence of typhus and the possibility of mass contamination, Vera refuses to be dissuaded by the pleas of her fellow travelers and attempts to report the outbreak of infectious disease. Nearly trampled by the frantic, swarming masses, Vera sounds the alarm. Without considering how this action will have detrimental effects on her life (namely, unemployment and isolation in a foreign country), Vera finally conforms to social expectations. She subjugates her compassion for individuals to a greater authority for the good of the community, proving herself worthy of rehabilitation.

With its complex narrative structure consisting of four flashback sequences covering some twenty years and four countries interwoven into a present-day framework, *Damals* disrupts linear development and forces viewers to readjust their "reading" of Vera with each new narrator and time frame. The externalization of the storytelling process illustrates how patriarchal discourse tends to exclude and control women. *Damals's* flashback technique neither questions the relationship between an individual's perspec-

tive and objective reality nor does it demonstrate primarily how each point of view is limited. Instead, it highlights who can articulate the story and who must remain silent.

Each flashback is initiated by a man from Vera's past, who assumes responsibility for the narrative in order to clarify and master the complicated events. The male voice is granted the author-ity to narrate a potentially subversive tale and much of his task will be to come to grips with an ideological conflict inherent in Vera's story. If the patriarchal symbolic order, and National Socialism in particular, dictate an active male and a passive female as necessary components for social harmony, how can a film about passive male figures telling the story of a noncompliant, active woman conform in the end to this dogma and simultaneously recuperate the characters? The flashback device in *Damals* requires viewers to re-evaluate events from a privileged point of view, but it does not encourage moviegoers to question the system of gender norms or to adopt a critical awareness of authoritarian structures. Instead the film directs this energy towards a re-evaluation of Vera as a person and her motivations. Vera is such a highly sympathetic figure played by a superstar that the audience seeks means to rehabilitate her. Since she never overtly rebels against the system and her refusal to conform causes her great suffering, the narrative framework provides a possible solution to her personal dilemma and the fundamental ideological contradiction. The men who narrate her story extinguish any trace of female sedition. The male act of narration denies Vera's agency while still allowing for her punishment. Vera is simultaneously penalized for her transgressions in the past and valorized in the present. The male narrators, especially Jan Meiners, determine that Vera's actions were most harmful to her and necessary for the welfare of others, therefore she is exonerated of any grievous wrongdoing.

The elimination of Vera Meiners's voice from the authorial point of view corresponds to her lack of authority in the social order. The contradictions inherent in her position are embodied in Zarah Leander's status as a cultural icon of sexual ambiguity signified in her legendary masculine voice and excessive feminine role as singer of erotic songs. Vera Meiners's unyielding insistence on adhering to the motherhood principle is equally incongruous with her strong assertion of the fatherhood principle. If she is to be rehabilitated, she can no longer convey this paradox. Within the discursive tradition that posits femininity as deficient, woman's normalcy is predicated on her silence. Laura Mulvey summarizes this practice:

Either she must gracefully give way to the word, the name of the father and the law, or else struggle to keep her child down with her in the half-light of the imaginary. Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by

imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning.⁹⁵

Vera's distance from language is illustrated in her altercation with Jan in Lübeck. When Jan confronts Vera with her lies, she replies "If our entire life together until now is not an answer, I can't give you another one."⁹⁶ Vera's existence must speak for itself. Woman, defined as biology, as life itself, cannot reveal her truth through the cultural construct of language. After her identity is questioned, Vera refuses to speak, unable to convey the complexities of her position. Only after her "true" identity has been established in the fourth flashback does Vera speak for herself, narrating how she adopted the identity of Dr. Gloria O'Conner. Woman's distance from language and agency is encoded in the narrative framework in still a different way. Although men initiate the discursive act, the story unfolds without a voice-over narration and reveals information each man could not have known at the time the events transpired. Although it appears that the narrative point of view agrees with Vera's perspective, she is still bereft of agency since she must illustrate her life and give evidence with her physical presence and without the command of narration.

Whereas each flashback works to establish the identity and crimes of Vera Meiners, the present-day frame also explores the extent to which Jan Meiners is guilty. Characterized as a jealous, untrusting man, Jan first appears in Lübeck entrapped by his own coldness; slumped over a desk with his back to the cell-like windows, the howling wind is his only companion in this self-imposed prison. When Jan and Vera meet again in South America, they are both visually confined by prison bars, as if to imply that they are both guilty of transgressions: she for her defiance and deception, he for abandoning his daughter.

Although Vera is always aware of her obligations as a mother, Jan seems oblivious to the fact that fatherhood carries with it responsibilities. Vera can accept Jan's rejection of her but not his neglect of their child. She is especially angered by his refusal to accept a letter in which she pleaded with him to support Eva financially:

We broke up. I was no longer your wife. So, what was I to you? But for me, even if you weren't my husband any more, for me, you were always the father of my child . . . until that moment, that "delivery refused." That was it. That was the end. Something happened in me. You don't exist for me any more. For me you are just a strange man. A strange man doesn't need to know where my daughter is. It is none of his business.⁹⁷

Eva also chastises her father's behavior: "My father never cared about me, not me, not my mother."⁹⁸ Vera's defiance is a mild transgression compared to Jan's crime: he is guilty of deserting his family.

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After reading the documents submitted in Vera's defense, sworn testimony gathered by an official of the law, Jan finally recognizes the value of the motherhood principle:

ATTORNEY: One gets to know a brave life there.

JAN: Yes, and always for others.

ATTORNEY: And she always hurt herself in doing so.⁹⁹

Ironically, Jan, who refused to care for his family financially and emotionally, sits in judgment of Vera and pronounces her a fit mother.

Jan's verdict corresponds to the basic tenets of the National Socialist legal system: "dynamic law" and "intentional criminal law" (*Willensstrafrecht*). Dynamic law, as opposed to an abstract, rigid code of principles, is concerned with the ever-changing "welfare of 'the people' as conceived by the party rather than with the liberty of the individual."¹⁰⁰ Intentional criminal law is based on the notion that proof of criminal activity alone is not sufficient to administer justice. The motivation behind a criminal act is necessary to establish the gravity of an offense and suitable punishment. National Socialism propagates "the myth of a law that is uniquely capable of identifying and justly evaluating the authentic subjectivity of the offender, that which he 'really' is, and of meting out punishment accordingly."¹⁰¹

The charges of asocial behavior levied against Vera are set within the context of her identity as a mother. Although Vera defied authority (and was clearly punished with exclusion from society), she was motivated in each case by the welfare of others rather than individual gain. Most significantly, she has displayed personal and social responsibility in providing her child with an orderly domestic life. Eva provides the most convincing evidence that her mother is not guilty of asocial behavior: "But she can't be held innocently in prison any longer. She did nothing else her entire life but toil, worry, and sacrifice for me."¹⁰² Conforming to the dictates of National Socialism, which posits motherhood in terms of suffering and self-sacrifice, Vera's identity as a good mother is confirmed.

The representatives of the law, District Attorney Mendoza, the lawyer Jan Meiners, and Vera's defense attorney, take control of the situation and discover the true murderer. Gathered at the nightclub, the three men identify the bass player as the offender and speculate on his motivations. Jan reveals that the bass player was the father of a young girl who committed suicide after a man (assumed to be Frank Douglas) seduced and abandoned her. Jan then speculates that when the bass player saw Douglas take another young girl, Eva, up to his hotel room, the musician shot Douglas to prevent a repetition of events. Murder, initially depicted as a crime of passion, is re-evaluated as a harsh necessity to ensure the stability of future families. Since Frank Douglas seduced young girls and belittled women like Vera who were

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“honest, upright, with children,” his death is presented as just punishment. The murderer is also transformed into an avenger with heroic dimensions: “It is terrible what he did, but he did it ultimately for his daughter’s sake.”¹⁰³ Confronted by the three attorneys, the bass player administers his own punishment by committing suicide. The solution to the mystery, the return to normalcy, and the implementation of justice are all carried out by men of the law. The system of law and order, briefly disturbed, is restored.

The final scene visualizes Vera’s innocence and the reconstituting of the family. Accompanied by the earlier melody of “Request to the Night,” which signified Vera’s acknowledged and protected position in the bosom of her family and friends, Jan waits at the sun-drenched prison gate. Eva arrives with a bouquet of roses in her arms, looks at her father, and then quickly walks away from him. Vera is freed from her prison cell and walks from the darkness into the light. Her daughter and ex-husband are now filmed from behind the bars, giving us Vera’s view of them as she leaves the prison, but also suggesting that the entire family has been imprisoned. When she sees her mother, Eva hugs her father in reconciliation. Again Vera walks out from the darkness into the shadows of bars, and finally into the bright light, symbolic of her filmic journey from guilt to innocence. Eva hugs her mother and then turns toward the camera. In a close-up the two women face the camera, Eva’s eyes turned toward the left where her father is standing off, Vera’s eyes lifted slightly toward the heavens in a gesture of looking forward into a common future. The press brochure for the film is less ambiguous: “Vera Meiners is free again. She recognizes the inner change in her husband, who was unjustly jealous back then, and begins a new life together with him.”¹⁰⁴

This reunion is not depicted, most likely because the happy ending is simply beyond belief. *Damals* demonstrates what Molly Haskell identifies as the rotten core of the 1940s woman’s films: “in their sublimation or evasion of adult reality, they reveal, almost by accident, real attitudes toward marriage — disillusionment, frustration, and contempt — beneath the sunny-side-up philosophy congealed in the happy ending.”¹⁰⁵

The Double-Edged Sword

If, as Goebbels contended, film is a first-class pedagogical tool, what lessons can be drawn from these two motion pictures? Does *Opfergang* promote the sanctity of marriage because in the last moments the husband renounces his passionate mistress and recognizes his wife as a gentle and giving soul? By the same token, does *Damals* advocate reconciliation and respect for motherhood because the husband finally acknowledges his own failings and his wife’s sacrifices for the good of their family and community? Or do these motion pictures vent the frustrations of cheerless, unfulfilled marriages and

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reveal a history of deceit, betrayal, and discontent? Ultimately, they tell both stories, one of happy endings and one of prolonged suffering.

The Nazi melodrama presents the audience with a world in which deviant behavior unfolds, and the longing to rebel against conventional morality (to commit adultery, to lie, to defy authority) is satisfied. By identifying with the fictional characters, the spectator can vicariously experience forbidden pleasures without the threat of actual punishment, thus freeing rebellious emotional energy and directing it towards fantasy and away from action. These motion pictures also serve a didactic function by revealing the consequences of such narratives. Since “abnormal” conduct is consistently punished within the filmic text (and in the fascist state), the spectator can conclude that genuine transgressions against societal norms will also be punished in reality. The emancipatory potential inherent in cinematic sedition is tempered by the specter of fictional and authentic retribution. With its double-edged narrative, the melodrama celebrates and punishes transgressions against societal norms. The genre enchants viewers with female suffering and sacrificial death, satisfying the emotional need for romance while sublimating fantasies of domination to the level of beautiful art.

Delving into hidden desires is only one side of the coin. The Nazi melodrama also presents a reality in which even the most serious problems are readily resolved. Despite abundant interpersonal conflicts, these films re-establish the social order and the nuclear family unit. This happy ending offers the promise of a better world in which a woman’s sacrifice of self-identity and self-determination is rewarded with marital stability. Although the image of strong female protagonists might seem to work against prevalent gender stereotypes, it ultimately reconfirms the status quo. Woman may receive extensive attention in these films, but they do not determine the course of their family life. The male characters make the essential decisions about the future of the family and marriage. They decide if the marriage will survive, they judge the truth, and they make the critical choices. Contextualized within the totalitarian state where the majority of families are separated by war, these sentimental melodramas also provide an *Ersatz* emotional life. With their double-edged narratives, *Opfergang* and *Damals* teach moviegoers to embrace Nazi ideology in their everyday lives . . . and even in their dreams.

Notes

¹ See Stephen Lowry, *Pathos und Politik: Ideologie in Spielfilmen des Nationalsozialismus* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1991); and Dora Traudisch, *Mutterschaft mit Zuckerguß?: Frauenfeindliche Propaganda im NS-Spielfilm* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1993). Lowry concentrates on the two most popular melodramas, *Die Goldene Stadt*

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(*The Golden City*) and *Die große Liebe* (*True Love*). Traudisch provides an extensive study of five melodramas under the aspect of anti-natalism.

² “Mann und Frau sind von Anbeginn der Welt zwei verschiedene Wesen, mit ebenso verschiedenen Funktionen. Rein biologisch gesehen ist des Mannes Rolle zur Erhaltung des menschlichen Geschlechts eine relativ kurzfristige, die der Frau eine ungleich längere, opfervollere. Sie birgt viele Monate die Zukunft eines Volkes in ihrem Schoß — gebärt unter Schmerzen, behütet und bewahrt das Kommende mit allen Fasern ihres Herzens.” Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, *Die Frau im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Tübingen: Grabert, 1978), 48–49.

³ “Diese nicht wegzudiskutierende Grundwahrheit . . . ist der Ausgangspunkt für alle weitere Gestaltung eines Zusammenlebens und -arbeitens in jedem kultivierten Volk.” Scholtz-Klink, *Die Frau im Dritten Reich*, 48.

⁴ “Des Mannes Aufgabe in einem gesunden Volk wird primär stets die schöpferische Tat sein, die der Frau das Gestalten, Behüten, Erhalten, Bewahren. Diese natürlichen Wesenszüge der Frau bergen über ihr leibliches Muttertum in sich alle Anlagen seelischer und geistiger Mütterlichkeit.” Scholtz-Klink, *Die Frau im Dritten Reich*, 49.

⁵ “Ist sie eine rechte Mutter, so verliert sie sich selbst in ihrer Familienaufgabe. Aber wunderbar: gerade dadurch wird sie im tiefsten Sinn Frau und Mensch. Je selbstverständlicher sie sich aufgibt, desto mehr. Im Verlieren ihres Lebens findet sie sich, ihre wahre Würde, ihren eigensten Menschen. . . . Sie wird Mutter und damit Vollmensch auf dem Weg der Selbstverleugnung, nicht auf dem der Selbstbehauptung.” Guida Diehl, *Die deutsche Frau und der Nationalsozialismus*, 3d ed. (Eisenach: Neuland, 1933), 92.

⁶ Virginia Wright Wexman, *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 5.

⁷ The Marriage Health Law was amended shortly before the outbreak of war to expedite marriages for soldiers, see Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975), 44.

⁸ After 1937 women could retain paid employment and still qualify for a marriage loan.

⁹ See Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991), 140 and 250; and Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, eds. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review, 1984), 271–96. Angelika Ebbinghaus, ed., *Opfer und Täterinnen: Frauenbiographien des Nationalsozialismus* (Nördlingen: Greno, 1987) examines the role women played as social workers, nurses, doctors, and camp guards, and concludes that women were not just victims but also perpetrators in the Nazi system of racial selection, sterilization, experimentation, and extermination of human beings designated “unworthy of life” (*lebensunwert*).

¹⁰ “Auch die Ehe kann nicht Selbstzweck sein, sondern muß dem einen größeren Ziele, der Vermehrung und Erhaltung der Art und Rasse, dienen. Nur das ist ihr Sinn und ihre Aufgabe.” Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1935), 1: 275–76.

¹¹ “Gedenke, daß du ein Deutscher bist!/ Du sollst Geist und Seele rein erhalten!/ Halte deinen Körper rein!/ Du sollst, wenn du erbggesund bist, nicht ehelos bleiben! Heirate nur aus Liebe!/ Wähle als Deutscher nur einen Gatten gleichen oder artverwandten Blutes!/ Bei der Wahl deines Gatten frage nach seinen Vorfahren!/ Gesundheit ist Voraussetzung auch für äußere Schönheit!/ Suche dir nicht einen Gespielen, sondern einen Gefährten für die Ehe!/ Du sollst dir möglichst viele Kinder wünschen!” Abridged from Hans Hagemeyer, ed., *Frau und Mutter: Lebensquell des Volkes*, 2d ed. (Munich: Hoheneichen, 1943), 290.

¹² Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 41.

¹³ Laura Mulvey, “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama,” in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 75.

¹⁴ Mulvey, “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama,” 75.

¹⁵ “Die Idee des Männerbundes als Prinzip der Ordnung hat unser Volk vor dem Chaos des Bolschewismus gerettet. Aber auch das andere muß gesagt werden: die Übersteigerung dieser Idee, ihre Festlegung als alleiniger Maßstab aller Dinge zerreißt die Volksgemeinschaft.” Lydia Gottschewski, *Männerbund und Frauenfrage: Die Frau im neuen Staat* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1934), 9.

¹⁶ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1985), 72.

¹⁷ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), 155.

¹⁸ “Man hat kürzlich einmal festgestellt, daß siebzig Prozent aller Kinobesucher Frauen sind. . . . Warum die Frauen ins Kino gehen, ist klar: sie wollen Liebe sehen und Gefühle haben. Beides wird der Spielfilm, mit einem heiteren und einem nassen Auge, nicht müde, ihnen zu spenden. Auch lieben es ihre Gedanken, um menschliche Dinge zu kreisen und psychologischen Konflikten nachzuhängen. Hier ist ihnen den Film ein unaufhörlicher Übungsstoff für das Leben. Sie haben zudem von der Natur mehr Sinn für das Musische mitbekommen und auch mehr Neigung, sich Wunschträumen zu überlassen, und auch daran läßt es der Spielfilm nicht fehlen.” Frank Maraun, “Das Erlebnis entscheidet: Der abendfüllende Kulturfilm — von verschiedenen Seiten gesehen,” *Der deutsche Film* 2, no. 7 (January 1938): 189.

¹⁹ “Ein unberechtigter Vorwurf: Ist der Film eine weibliche Kunst? Frauen und Männer sind sich einig in der Forderung nach dem künstlerischen, lebensnahen Film.” *Film-Kurier* 128 (June 3, 1938).

²⁰ Binné considered women “aufnahmebereiter weit zugänglicher und aufgeschlossener als der Mann.” Ingrid Binné, “Was erwartet die deutsche Frau vom Film,” *Licht-Bild-Bühne* 135 (June 11, 1938). She argued further: “Die Frau schaut heute nicht mehr teilnahmslos den politischen Vorgängen im Reich und in der Welt zu. Sie steht lebendig miterlebend mitten im Geschehen unserer Zeit.” Ingrid Binné, “Wie sieht die deutsche Frau den ausländischen Film?” *Licht-Bild-Bühne* 170 (July 22, 1938). See also Ingrid Binné, “Was sagt die Frau über Wochenschau und Kulturfilm?” *Licht-Bild-Bühne* 192 (August 17, 1938).

²¹ “Wir sehen in der Frau die ewige Mutter unseres Volkes und die Lebens-, Arbeits- und auch Kampffährtin des Mannes.” Binné, “Was erwartet die deutsche Frau vom Film.”

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²² Christine Großmann writes of women: “Sie haben mehr Phantassie, wenn man darunter die Fähigkeit zu träumen versteht, die Fähigkeit, mitzugehen mit dem Geschehen, das auf der Leinwand vor ihnen abrollt, und die Fähigkeit, sich selbst in diese Geschehnisse hineinzudenken.” Christine Großmann “Worin besteht die Wirkung des Films auf die Frauen?” *Licht-Bild-Bühne* 78 (April 1, 1938).

²³ David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–1945* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 217.

²⁴ Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987), 4.

²⁵ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 101.

²⁶ Louis P. Lochner, ed., *The Goebbels Diaries 1942–1943* (New York: Doubleday), 230.

²⁷ Kristina Söderbaum, *Nichts bleibt immer so: Rückblenden auf ein Leben vor und hinter der Kamera*, 3rd ed. (Bayreuth: Hestia, 1984), 183–84.

²⁸ Gerd Albrecht, *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik: Eine soziologische Untersuchung über die Spielfilme des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1969), 152.

²⁹ Although Vera Meiners’s concern for her daughter Eva motivates her to sacrifice her own happiness repeatedly in *Damals*, the mother-daughter relationship is never fully developed on screen. *Kora Terry* (1940) features twin sisters who embody the archetypal split of whore and madonna. For an analysis of this film, see Traudisch, *Mutterschaft mit Zuckerguß*, 131–49.

³⁰ “Harlans spezifische Dienstleistungen fürs Dritte Reich waren seine schweren Melodramen . . . die alle insgesamt seismographisch die innen- und außenpolitische Entwicklung des NS widerspiegeln.” Karsten Witte, “Der barocke Faschist: Veit Harlan und seine Filme,” in *Intellektuelle im Bann des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Karl Corino (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1980), 150–51.

³¹ Critical evaluations of *Opfergang*’s artistic merit and ideological content vary widely. Friedemann Beyer considers *Opfergang* Harlan’s masterpiece (*Die Ufa Stars im Dritten Reich: Frauen für Deutschland* [Munich: Heyne, 1991], 232); while Francis Courtade and Pierre Cadars term it “puerile romanticism” (*Geschichte des Films im Dritten Reich* [Munich: Hanser, 1975], 246). Richard Taylor sees it as indirect propaganda (*Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* [New York: Harper & Row, 1979], 165–66). According to Siegfried Zielinski, by presenting an idealized portrait of marriage as a durable institution, *Opfergang* worked to pacify soldiers and their wives separated by the war (*Veit Harlan* [Frankfurt a. M.: Rita G. Fischer, 1981], 33). Boguslaw Drewniak maintains that *Opfergang* enjoyed extraordinary success among the public during its premiere run and in its first month (December 8, 1944 to January 12, 1945) brought in the enormous sum of 10 million RM (*Der deutsche Film 1938–1945: Ein Gesamtüberblick* [Düsseldorf: Droste, 1987], 631–32, 675–78). Traudisch offers an excellent in-depth study of anti-natalism in *Opfergang* (*Mutterschaft mit Zuckerguß*, 150–86). For an earlier version of this chapter, see Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien, “Male Conquest of the Female Continent in Veit Harlan’s *Opfergang* (1944),” *Monatshefte* 87, no. 4 (1995): 431–45.

³² Veit Harlan, *Im Schatten meiner Filme* (Sigbert Mohn: Gütersloh, 1966), 168–69. Friedemann Beyer summarizes Goebbels’s relationship to the film: “Rasch wurde

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Opfergang zu einem seiner Lieblingsfilme, den er sich privat immer wieder ansah, um danach häufig über den Tod zu philosophieren. Freigeben wollte er den Film nicht.” (*Die Ufa Stars*, 235) [*Opfergang* quickly became one of his favorite films, which he viewed privately again and again in order to philosophize about death afterwards. He did not want to release the film.]

³³ “Dabei wollen wir gar nicht verkennen, daß der Film natürlich als große und in die Tiefe dringende Massenkunst in stärkster Weise auch der Unterhaltung zu dienen hat. Aber in einer Zeit, in der der gesamten Nation so schwere Lasten und Sorgen aufgebürdet werden, ist auch die Unterhaltung staatspolitisch von besonderem Wert. . . . Darüber hinaus aber ist der Film in seiner modernen Entwicklung ein nationales Erziehungsmittel erster Klasse.” Goebbels’s speech from October 12, 1941, qtd. in Albrecht, *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik*, 480.

³⁴ For a discussion of how Nazi entertainment films work to sublimate and redirect socially unacceptable desires, see Traudisch; Lowry; and Heide Schlüpmann, “Faschistische Trugbilder weiblicher Autonomie,” *Frauen und Film* 44/45 (October 1988): 44–66.

³⁵ “Nicht das ist die beste Propaganda, bei der die eigentlichen Elemente der Propaganda immer sichtbar zutage treten, sondern das ist die beste Propaganda, die sozusagen unsichtbar wirkt.” See Goebbels’s speech from February 15, 1941, qtd. in Albrecht, *Nationalsozialistische Filmpolitik*, 468.

³⁶ The discourse on femininity in *Opfergang* corresponds to strategies found in the classic film narrative. Annette Kuhn describes how the classic Hollywood cinema attempts to recuperate woman: “A woman character may be restored to the family by falling in love, by ‘getting her man,’ by getting married, or otherwise accepting a ‘normative’ female role. If not, she may be directly punished for her narrative and social transgression by exclusion, outlawing or even death,” *Women’s Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 34–35.

³⁷ I could find no historical reference to any group named German Colonial Union (*Deutscher Kolonialbund*). The closest equivalent is the *Kolonialverein*, a private organization founded in 1882 to help foster colonialism in Germany. See Woodruff Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1978); and Arthur J. Knoll and Lewis H. Gann, eds., *Germans in the Tropics: Essays in German Colonial History* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

³⁸ The *Reichskolonialbund*, founded in 1933 and reorganized in 1936, monopolized colonial activity in Germany until early 1943. See Wolfe W. Schmokol, *Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919–1945* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964). According to Klaus Kreimeier, the Ufa board of directors considered colonialism an appropriate film topic for the 1933/34 production, but the material became politically sensitive when a few months later when the National Socialists expelled Hugenberg from the cabinet for his colonial aims (*Die Ufa Story: Geschichte eines Filmkonzerns* [Munich: Hanser, 1992], 247–48). By 1937 colonial topics were again embraced by the film community because Hitler openly supported the policy of reestablishing Germany’s colonial empire in his Harvest Festival speech (*Die Ufa Story*, 307–8).

³⁹ Filming of *Opfergang* began in August of 1942, see Beyer, *Die Ufa Stars*, 228. Rommel’s troops pushed the British back into Egypt in June 1942 and were within

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fifty miles of Alexandria. By November 7–8, 1942, however, the Anglo-American troops landed at Algiers, Oran, and Casablanca. By May 1943 German troops surrendered and the desert campaign was essentially over.

⁴⁰ Kuan-yin, the Chinese translation of Avalokitesvara, “a bodhisattva especially associated with the principle of compassion . . . watches over all beings and heeds their cries of suffering and distress.” See Raoul Birnbaum, “Avalokitesvara,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 2: 11–14.

⁴¹ “Albrecht, Albrecht, du bist jetzt ein berühmter, würdevoller Mann, darfst dir solche Geschichten nicht mehr leisten. Stellung verpflichtet.” All film dialogues are taken from the videocassette of *Opfergang* in commercial distribution. The censor-cards contain no dialogue and no narrative summaries. Compare *Opfergang*, Censor-Card 59952, Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin.

⁴² Sigmund Freud, “The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953), 20: 212.

⁴³ A press advertisement for *Opfergang* summarizes the conflict as follows: “Es geht in diesem Film um die Entscheidung eines Mannes zwischen zwei Frauen, in denen er das rätselhafte Widerspiel des himmlisch Reinen [Octavia] und des irdischen Begehrens [Äls] zu erkennen glaubt. Fast erliegt er dem fremden Zauber der einen — bis er durch eine an Selbstaufopferung grenzende Tat der anderen und somit von der edlen Größe und tiefen Liebe dieser, seiner Frau zur Umkehr bestimmt wird.” [This film is about a man’s decision between two women, in whom he recognizes the puzzling reflection of heavenly purity (Octavia) and earthly desire (Äls). He almost succumbs to the strange magic of the one — until an act bordering on self-sacrifice by the other one convinces him of his wife’s true nobility and deep love and determines his return home.] *Opfergang: Ein Ufa Farbfilm*, press package (Berlin: Werbedienst der Deutschen Filmvertrieb-Gesellschaft, n.d.), 3, *Opfergang* Document File 12480, Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv Berlin.

⁴⁴ “Sie ist, was sie immer war.” *Opfergang* film dialogue.

⁴⁵ Linda Schulte-Sasse, “The Jew as Other under National Socialism: Veit Harlan’s *Jud Süß*,” *German Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (1988): 28.

⁴⁶ “Einer dieser Stunden wird deine letzte sein.” *Opfergang* film dialogue.

⁴⁷ “Wind und Wellen, Sonnenglut und Sonnenlust.” *Opfergang* film dialogue.

⁴⁸ Beyer recognizes the fatal mother motif as common to all of Kristina Söderbaum’s films in the Third Reich (*Die Ufa Story*, 233). There is an implication that Äls’s mother also bore her child out of wedlock, since it is Äls’s stepfather who bequeaths her the estate and not her biological father, who is never mentioned.

⁴⁹ Both Äls and her mother are described as “waghalsig,” “leichtsinnig,” and especially “unvernünftig.” “Eine kranke Mutter? . . . Am meisten leidet doch das Kind darunter.” *Opfergang* film dialogue.

⁵⁰ Traudisch, *Mutterschaft mit Zuckerguß?* 178–79.

⁵¹ “Es hätte ja auch gar keinen Sinn. Kaum bist du da, da schließt du das Haus wieder ab und ziehst nach dem Süden oder nach dem Norden und dann muß es wieder raus,

das Kind. Das ist doch nichts für ein Kind. Oder willst du es überall mit hinschleppen? Ein Kind muß ein geordnetes Leben haben.” *Opfergang* film dialogue.

⁵² National Socialism exalted the nuclear family as the “germ cell of the nation,” but it tolerated and during the later phases of the war propagated the idea of unwed motherhood for the Aryan select. See “Dem Führer ein Kind schenken: Mutterkult im Nationalsozialismus,” in *Frauen unterm Hakenkreuz*, eds. Maruta Schmidt and Gabi Dietz (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1983), 74–94. For a discussion of sterilization measures taken against women deemed “unfit,” see Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany,” 271–96.

⁵³ “Was der Mann an Opfern bringt im Ringen seines Volkes, bringt die Frau an Opfern im Ringen um die Erhaltung dieses Volkes in den einzelnen Fällen. Was der Mann einsetzt an Heldenmut auf dem Schlachtfeld, setzt die Frau ein in ewig geduldiger Hingabe, in ewig geduldigem Leid und Ertragen. Jedes Kind, das sie zur Welt bringt, ist eine Schlacht, die sie besteht für Sein oder Nichtsein ihres Volkes.” Adolf Hitler’s speech on September 8, 1934, in Nuremberg before the NS-Frauenschaft, in *Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945*, ed. Max Domarus (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1965), 1. 1: 451. My emphasis.

⁵⁴ Äls lacks an individual identity; she is described as being the nature she inhabits: “Albrecht und Octavia reiten am Meer entlang. Im Anblick der Brandung denken beide an Äls, die Wind und Welle war” (*Opfergang, Illustrierte Film Bühne* 1943 [Munich: Verlag Film-Bühne, n.d.], my emphasis). [Albrecht and Octavia ride along the ocean. While looking at the surf both think about Äls, who was wind and waves.] Octavia voices this sentiment in the film with her remark to Albrecht: “wind and waves were her element. She is in wind and waves.”

⁵⁵ From its premiere until today, film critics have termed the *Faschingsball* sequence in *Opfergang* superfluous. Ludwig Brunhuber, a contemporary critic of the film, writes in his film description: “Die Farbe, von Bruno Mondì an der Kamera mit schwelgerischer Lust und Freiheit gemischt, wird zum wesentlichen Ausdruck, steigert sich zu wahren Farbenrausch, wie in dem Karnevalsfest, was auf Kosten des Atmosphärischen, der Filmdichtung geht” (“*Der Opfergang*,” [n.p., n.d.], *Opfergang* Document File 12480, Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv Berlin) [The color, which Bruno Mondì mixes with luxurious delight and freedom in the camera, becomes a fundamental expression, intensifies to a true color-intoxication, like at the carnival festivities, which is achieved at the cost of the film’s atmosphere and poetry]. Zielinski assesses the carnival sequence in much the same light: “Charakteristisch für den dramaturgischen Einsatz der Farbe ist zum Beispiel eine pompöse inszenierte Karnevals-Szene in *Opfergang*, die für den Handlungsverlauf völlig unbedeutend ist, dafür aber eine Fülle optischer Reize vermittelt” (*Veit Harlan*, 34) [Characteristic for the dramaturgic use of color is, for instance, a pompously staged carnival scene which is completely meaningless for the plot development but conveys a plethora of optical stimuli].

⁵⁶ The carnival is a central event in *Barcarole* (1935) and *Carnival of Love* (Karneval der Liebe, 1943).

⁵⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), 7 and 255.

⁵⁸ Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 46.

⁵⁹ “Sie hat geschrien wie am Spieß.” *Opfergang* film dialogue.

⁶⁰ “Man ist ihm immer nah, dem Tod. Und es ist ja auch ganz gut, wenn man ihm ab und zu ein bißchen zulächelt und sagt: du bist mein Freund. Du kommst, wenn ich nicht mehr kann.” *Opfergang* film dialogue.

⁶¹ Doane, *Desire to Desire*, 64–65.

⁶² “Sterben müsse die an dem Ehebruch schuldige Frau und nicht der Ehemann. Die Ehe müsse vielmehr erhalten bleiben. Das wäre übrigens nicht nur für die Front, sondern auch für die Heimat im volkserzieherischen Sinne besser.” Harlan, *Im Schatten meiner Filme*, 164.

⁶³ The aestheticizing of female pain is well illustrated in fascist melodramas such as *La Habanera* (1937), *Zu neuen Ufern* (1937), *Ich klage an* (1941), *Die Goldene Stadt* (1942), and *Damals* (1943).

⁶⁴ Äls: “So zu sterben, das wäre der schönste Tod.” *Opfergang* film dialogue. Hanna: “Ich fühle mich so leicht, so glücklich, wie noch nie. Ich wünschte, es wäre der Tod.” *Ich klage an* film dialogue. Karl Ludwig Rost writes: “Nicht die Angst vor dem Tode, sondern die Angst vor einsamen Sterben ohne den geliebten Mann [erscheint] als das eigentliche Grauen.” Karl Ludwig Rost, *Medizin im Spielfilm des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Udo Benzenhöfer and Wolfgang Eckart (Tecklenburg: Burgverlag, 1990), 46.

⁶⁵ See Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); Jay W. Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990); Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches: Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (Munich: Hanser, 1991).

⁶⁶ The figure Don Pedro in Douglas Sirk’s *La Habanera* (1937) represents a notable exception. He dies from a tropical fever, but his life could have been saved if he had not had the cure destroyed.

⁶⁷ Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism*, 43.

⁶⁸ “Das Ungestüm, jung sterben zu wollen, als elegante Windsbraut auf den Wellen zu reiten und auf dem Rücken der Pferde zu jagen, das Ungezähmte, Fieberhafte und Lebensüchtige kommt durch Kristina Söderbaum sehr wirkungsvoll zum Ausdruck. Sie weiß mit dekorativer Anmut zu sterben.” Richard Biedrzyński, “Liebe, Leid und Luxus,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, Berlin ed. (December 31, 1944).

⁶⁹ Ariane Thomalla, *Die femme fragile: Ein literarischer Frauentypus der Jahrhundertwende* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann-Universitätsverlag, 1972).

⁷⁰ Octavia: “Aber wir können uns doch später so machen, wie wir wollen, oder vielmehr wie du es willst, Albrecht.” Later, Octavia says: “Ich bin so glücklich, wie es Albrecht ist.” *Opfergang* film dialogue.

⁷¹ “Die Welt der Frau ist der Mann. An anderes denkt sie nur ab und zu.” Henry Picker ed., *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941–42* (Bonn: Athenäum, 1951), 326.

⁷² “In ihrer durch Vornehmheit gekühlten Schönheit, in ihrer Größe, Gelassenheit und unachtsam gemessenen Haltung.” Rudolf Binding, *Der Opfergang* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1934), 4.

⁷³ Leander contributed significantly to her own mythic status by portraying herself as an unwanted intruder in the German film world: “Goebbels war durchaus nicht begeistert davon gewesen, daß die Ufa ausgerechnet eine Ausländerin zur leading lady der eigenen Gesellschaft und wenn möglich des gesamten deutschen Films aufbauen wollte. Er betrachtete es als Armutszeugnis, daß das stolze dritte Reich nicht eine eigene Garbo produzieren konnte. Diese Schwedin paßte ihm einfach nicht, und dementsprechend behandelte man mich von oben wie Luft.” Zarah Leander, *Es war so wunderbar! Mein Leben* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1973), 170. [Goebbels was by no means enthusiastic that Ufa wanted to make a foreigner of all people the leading lady of its own company and, if possible, the entire German film industry. He considered it evidence of inadequacy that the proud Third Reich could not produce its own Garbo. This Swede simply did not suit him and one treated me accordingly as if I were invisible.] The conditions of her initial contract with Ufa (choice of screenplays, 200,000 RM a year, 53% of her wages to be paid in Swedish crowns directly to her Stockholm bank account) as well as her personal outings with Goebbels belie Leander’s assessment of her treatment.

⁷⁴ In *Heimat* (1938) Magda does not marry the father of her illegitimate child (he commits suicide), but she is eventually accepted by her father and reintegrated into the family. In *Der Weg ins Freie* (1941) Antonia commits suicide to maintain her former husband’s current marriage.

⁷⁵ See Cornelia Zumkeller, *Zarah Leander: Ihre Filme — ihr Leben* (Munich: Heyne, 1988), 133 and Kreimeier, *Die Ufa Story*, 354–55. Drewniak maintains that Leander’s films continued to be shown in Germany after her departure, but numerous press releases about her were barred from publication (*Der deutsche Film*, 136).

⁷⁶ Drewniak, *Der deutsche Film*, 631. For contemporaneous accounts of *Damals* in the trade press, see Erno Ohlisch, “Mit den Augen des Architekten: Walter Haags Bauten zu dem neuen Zarah-Leander-Film der Ufa ‘Damals,’” *Film-Kurier* 191 (August 17, 1942); Georg Speckner, “Dreimal mit Zarah Leander: Hans Stüwe in dem neuen Ufa-Film ‘Damals,’” *Film-Kurier* 197 (August 24, 1942); Hermann Hacker, “Der Wechsel der Schauplätze: Blick auf den Zarah-Leander-Film ‘Damals,’” *Film-Kurier* 282 (December 1, 1942); “‘Ich habe Sie belogen!’ Dramatische Szene mit Zarah Leander in dem Ufa-film ‘Damals,’” *Film-Kurier* 262 (November 7, 1942); H. S., “In der Quarantäne-Station: Dramatische Szenen aus dem Ufafilm ‘Damals,’” *Film-Kurier* 282 (December 1, 1942); and F. H. “Von der Führung des Schauspielers und ihren Voraussetzungen: Anmerkungen anlässlich der Arbeit Rolf Hansens an dem von ihm inszenierten Ufa-Film ‘Damals,’” *Film-Kurier* 282 (January 14, 1943); “Wer kennt diese Frau?” *Filmwelt* 3/4 (January 20, 1943).

⁷⁷ “Das Reisen ist eine der großen Möglichkeiten der Gesellschaft, sich in einem dauernden Zustand von Geistesabwesenheit zu halten, der sie vor der Auseinandersetzung mit sich selber bewahrt. Es hilft der Phantasie auf die unrichtigen Wege, es deckt die Aussicht mit Eindrücken zu, es trägt zu den Herrlichkeiten der Welt, damit ihrer Häßlichkeit nicht geachtet werde. (Der Zuwachs an Weltkenntnis, den es bringt, dient zur Verklärung des bestehenden Systems, in dem er erworben wird.)” Siegfried Kraucner, *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 288.

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⁷⁸ Michael Kater writes: “jazz’s potential for being identified with ill-suffered minorities or pariahs of German society, the demimonde, the depraved, blacks, Jews, rendered it forever suspect in the eyes of social and racial bigots, even if they were privately tempted to relish the peculiar aesthetics of this music” (*Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* [New York: Oxford UP, 1992], 25). A public campaign against women smoking was launched as early as 1933. See “Frauen sollen nicht öffentlich rauchen,” *Vossische Zeitung*, August 19, 1933, qtd. in Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1938), 105.

⁷⁹ Burleigh, *The Racial State*, 173.

⁸⁰ The directive of the Reich Ministry of the Interior from 1940, qtd. in Burleigh, *The Racial State*, 182.

⁸¹ Burleigh, *The Racial State*, 167.

⁸² Burleigh, *The Racial State*, 168.

⁸³ “Heut,’ wenn die Nacht ganz leise und fein/ tritt in mein Zimmer hier,/ hüllt’ ich mich in ihren Mantel ein/ und sag’ bittend zu ihr:// Liebe Nacht, komm,’ laß dir sagen,/ was ich ganz von Herzen will./ Keine Uhr soll heute schlagen/ und die Zeit soll still stehen,/ und nicht atmen soll die Welt!/ Wenn er mich im Arme hält!” Text and music by Ralph Benatzky, *Damals, Das Program von heute* 1871 (Berlin: Das Program von heute, Zeitschrift für Film und Theater, n.d.). The same song is named “Bitte an die Nacht” in *Damals, Illustrierter Film-Kurier* 3309 (Berlin: Vereinigte Verlagsgesellschaften Franke & Co. KG., n.d.) but includes only the second stanza. When performing the song in this film, Leander changes “ihre Arme” in line three to “ihren Mantel” and transposes “stehen” and “still” in line eight.

⁸⁴ Alte Frau: “Was seid ihr doch für Egoisten, ihr Männer. Du auch. Sag mal, warum läßt du sie nicht Sängerin werden?” Jan: “Das fehlte noch. Ich bin froh, daß sie nicht Ärztin geworden ist.” Sanitätsrat Petersen: “Ja, eben. So geht es im Leben. Endlich erfindet der liebe Gott ein Geschöpf, das alle guten Gaben besitzt. Sie kann was. Sie studiert Medizin, und außerdem eine herrliche Stimme, sieht wundervoll aus. Und was passiert? Sie verliebt sich in unseren guten Meiners.” Jan: “Du.” Sanitätsrat Petersen: “Der zwar mein bester Freund ist, aber übernacht sozusagen, sind alle Karrieren pfuscht, und sie ist nur noch Frau.” Vera: “Nur noch. Kann man denn mehr sein?” Alte Frau: “Nein, wenn man glücklich ist.” Vera: “Man ist sehr glücklich!” All film dialogues are taken from the videocassette of *Damals* available in commercial release. The censor cards include a narrative description but no film dialogue. Compare *Damals*, Censor-Card 58689, Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin.

⁸⁵ “Frau Doktor, Sie müssen mir helfen. Der Professor ist ja bestimmt ein guter Arzt, aber er ist doch nur ein Mann. Was weiß denn so ein Mann, auch wenn er noch so gelehrt ist, von einer Mutter. Selbst wenn er Vater ist. Aber Sie sind doch eine Frau. Sie müssen das doch verstehen. Sie können doch nicht einfach zu mir sagen, Ihr Kind ist verloren. Da kann man nichts machen.” *Damals* film dialogue.

⁸⁶ “Frausein heißt Muttersein.” Paula Siber von Groote, *Die Frauenfrage und ihre Lösung durch den Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Kallmeyer, 1933), 23.

⁸⁷ “Jetzt sind wir beide hier ganz überflüssig.” *Damals* film dialogue.

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⁸⁸ “Wo gehen wir denn dahin, wenn jeder junge Arzt dem Chef bei seiner Behandlungsweise dazwischen pfuscht . . . wenn er sogar bei strikter Einordnung gerade das Gegenteil tut? Die Kranken in der Klinik werden ihres Lebens nicht mehr sicher.” *Damals* film dialogue.

⁸⁹ “Begreifen Sie nun, daß ich einer Mutter ihr Kind retten möchte, um welchen Preis auch immer.” *Damals* film dialogue.

⁹⁰ “Wer weiß denn, was ein Frauenherz heimlich bewegt,/ für wen es lodern entbrennt?!/ Doch plötzlich fühlst du, daß es für dich innig schlägt,/ wenn es dir selig bekennt:/ Ich kann nicht sagen, was mir an dir so gefällt,/ ist es dein Lächeln, dein Blick?/ Ich weiß nicht, ob ein Rausch, ob die Liebe mich hält,/ ich fühl nur, — du wärest mein Glück . . .// Refrain: Einen wie dich könnt’ ich lieben,/ zärtlich und doch voller Glut;/ einem so wie dir ganz gehören/ und ihm tausend Schwüre schwüren!/ Einen wie dich könnte ich lieben,/ wie wär’ mein Herz ihm so gut . . . / Einem so wie dir möcht’ ich geben/ meine Seele und mein Leben!/ Er soll mir alles sein,/ meine Sonne, mein Glück, meine Welt!” Text by Bruno Balz with music by Lothar Brühne reproduced in *Damals, Das Program von heute* (1871), n.p.

⁹¹ “Meine Liebe ist viel größer als das größte Schloß. Willst du darin wohnen?” *Damals* film dialogue.

⁹² Vera recognized, “Für sie ist es bestimmt besser. Sie wird viel gesunder werden, kräftiger. Ich hab’ sie wieder bei mir.” The elderly clown agrees: “Ein Kind ist viel wichtiger als ein paar Monate glücklich sein, oder ein paar Jahre.” *Damals* film dialogue.

⁹³ “Jede Nacht ein neues Glück/ und neue Liebelei’n/ jede Nacht ein anderer Mund,/ so soll es bei mir sein:/ Sprich nicht von Treue,/ nicht von Gefühlen,/ ich kann mit Liebe/ immer nur spielen!/ Heute dich und morgen dich . . . / So und nicht anders,/ so und nicht anders,/ so soll es sein für mich!// Ich bin ja keine von den Frauen,/ die die gewissen netten Sachen/ weil sie bei Licht sich nichts getrauen,/ nur immer still und äußerst heimlich machen/ auch wenn’s die ganze Welt erfährt/ das ist mir ganz egal/ Ich bin ja schließlich keine Miss/ mit doppelter Moral.” Text by Bruno Balz with music by Lothar Brühne reproduced in *Damals, Das Program von heute* (1871), n.p.

⁹⁴ Linda Williams recognizes the same strategy in the Hollywood classic *Stella Dallas* (1937). See “‘Something Else Besides a Mother’: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama,” in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 313.

⁹⁵ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 15.

⁹⁶ Vera maintains, “Wenn unser ganz bisheriges Leben keine Antwort ist, eine andere kann ich dir nicht geben.” *Damals* film dialogue.

⁹⁷ Vera gives her husband an impassioned reckoning: “Wir haben ja Schluß gemacht. Ich war nicht mehr deine Frau. Also was ging ich dich an? Aber für mich, wenn du auch nicht mehr mein Mann warst, für mich warst du doch immer der Vater meines Kindes, bis zu diesem Augenblick, bis zu diesem ‘Annahme verweigert.’ Da war es aus. Da war es zu Ende. Da entstand in mir was. Du bist für mich nicht mehr auf der Welt. Du bist für mich ein fremder Mann. Ein fremder Mann braucht nicht zu wissen, wo meine Tochter ist. Es geht ihn nichts an.” *Damals* film dialogue.

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⁹⁸ Eva reiterates that her father abandoned them: “Mein Vater hat sich nie um mich gekümmert, um mich nicht, um meine Mutter nicht.” *Damals* film dialogue.

⁹⁹ The attorney comments, “Ein tapferes Leben, das man da kennenlernt.” Jan concedes, “Ja, und immer für andere.” Whereupon the attorney concludes, “Und immer hat sie sich selbst dabei geschadet.” *Damals* film dialogue.

¹⁰⁰ J. P. Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975), 120. For a discussion of women in the legal profession, see Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 170–73. In a letter to the Reich Minister of Justice dated August 24, 1936, Martin Bormann, Deputy of the Führer, conveyed Adolf Hitler’s policy towards women lawyers and judges: “Er [der Führer] hat entschieden, daß Frauen weder Richter noch Anwalt werden sollen. Juristinnen können deshalb im Staatsdienst nur in der Verwaltung verwandt werden.” Qtd. in Scholtz-Klink, *Die Frau im Dritten Reich*, 61. [He has decided that women shall neither be judges nor lawyers. Female jurists can therefore be employed as civil servants only in administration.]

¹⁰¹ Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People*, 123.

¹⁰² Eva argues, “Aber sie darf doch nicht länger unschuldig im Gefängnis. Sie hat ihr ganzes Leben lang nichts anders getan, als sich für mich geplagt, gequält und geopfert.” *Damals* film dialogue.

¹⁰³ Vera recognized that Frank Douglas would never admire women who were “brav, bieder, mit Kind.” Jan concludes, “Es ist schrecklich, was er getan hat, aber er hat es schließlich um der Tochter willens getan.” *Damals* film dialogue.

¹⁰⁴ “Vera Meiners ist wieder frei. Sie erkennt die innere Umkehr ihres damals aus Eifersucht ungerechten Mannes und beginnt gemeinsam mit ihm ein neues Leben.” *Damals, Das Program von heute* 1871.

¹⁰⁵ Molly Haskell, 156.