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Can't Get No Satisfaction

The Desexualization of the Jewish Man in Contemporary German Film

Over the last decade numerous German films have as a topic the troubles of the German people in the aftermath of the Second World War – in this context these films dedicate special attention to and highlight German suffering to a point that a whole genre of “German suffering” has been established in the German cultural landscape. Often these films include “a Jewish man” as a marginal character who is – in spite of the historic situation – usually portrayed as absolutely emotionally controlled, of angelic moral standards, and not at all vengeful, but forgiving. This essay will investigate how these Jewish men are often portrayed as “desexualized” men, fractured and insufficient in terms of classical masculinity. In this historic setting the figure of “the Jewish man” is drawn as being overshadowed by the Shoah and remarkably meek in his suffering. He is often shown – in pursuit of love, partnership, and eroticism – courting German women. However, the script never seems to grant him the fulfillment of his amorous or sexual desires, or recognition as a masculine lover: he is portrayed as being outright desexualized. The films that I will analyze in detail in order to trace this phenomenon are Dresden, Hilde and Liebe Deinen Feind.

This article will show the relationship between this modern-day image of the Jewish man as desexualized and the stereotypes of nineteenth century anti-Semitism and the Nazi ideology that claimed the Jewish man to be “effeminized” or sexually perverted. The function of this filmic character in the context of questions of historic guilt and desire for forgiveness in Germany will also be analyzed. The “the Jewish man” character is allotted a function in the genre of the “German suffering” films, namely to fulfill a historic need: to provide atonement and forgiveness for the German “Aryan” characters.

The Film *Dresden* – The Fruit of Germania's Womb and the Jewish Man as a “Side Issue”

The film *Dresden* (Roland Suso Richter, Germany, 2006 television version, 2010 cinema version) is the most expensive German television film production to date and describes the suffering of German civilians as victims of the bombing of

Dresden in 1945. What message was so important that German, publicly funded television stations would invest this record amount? First of all, *Dresden* is one of the films belonging to the relatively young “German suffering-genre”: films and other cultural phenomena dedicated to German suffering during the Second World War, a perspective that only made its appearance quite recently. As discussed in *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, the fact that for a long time, Germans were incapable of mourning their own losses caused considerable psychological problems in postwar German society. The “Ausbleiben von Trauerreaktionen nach einer nationalen Katastrophe größeren Ausmaßes” (the absence of a reaction of mourning after a national catastrophe of such magnitude), was a phenomenon in Germany. This “Störung dieser Trauerarbeit” (disturbed labor of mourning) in turn crippled the “seelische Entwicklung, seine zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen und seine spontanen und schöpferischen Fähigkeiten” (development of the soul, interpersonal relations, and the spontaneous and creative faculties). The authors diagnose the Germans as “hartnäckig aufrechterhaltene Abwehr von Erinnerungen, insbesondere der Sperrung gegen eine Gefühlsbeteiligung” (stubbornly upholding the denial of memories, especially refusing to be emotionally involved.”¹ As the authors make clear, it is a natural reaction to “lick one’s own wounds,” and not to do so is a symptom of psychological trauma. It is remarkable that this refusal to acknowledge one’s damage was, according to Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, a national discipline.

However, the recent countermovement, the new dedication to German victimhood as mirrored in the films of the contemporary “German suffering-genre” is remarkable in its new approach to this chapter of history, as it took the problem from one extreme to the other. For a long time the guilt feelings of historic responsibility, and their uncomfortable implications, psychologically blocked Germans and made deep emotions, such as mourning, impossible. On the other hand the recently expressed mourning seems to overwrite consciousness of historic facts. The original cause of German suffering, that is, that the Germans started the war, is blanked out of the picture and guilt gets redistributed in an effort to legitimize and make room for self-pity.

The onset of this trend was Günther Grass’s novel *Im Krebsgang*, which describes the flight from the occupied eastern territories of the Reich, and that opened up a wide discussion about the fate of German refugees. This topic as well as other dire consequences that Germans had to suffer toward the end of the war, such as the bombardment of German cities and the internment of German soldiers (men), have since become repetitive themes in recent German public debates, and

1 Mitscherlich, Alexander and Margarethe, *Die Unfähigkeit zu Trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*, Munich and Zurich: Piper, 1977, 9.

are also mirrored in film. Some examples of this German suffering-genre include the films *Dresden*, *Die Flucht*, *Hilde*, *Liebe deinen Feind*, and *Die Wilhelm Gustlow*, a film recounting the above-mentioned plight of German refugees.

In *Dresden* the theme of “the German as the victim” is played out and illustrated quite effectively against the backdrop of the bombing of the city of Dresden in 1944. Conveniently, the filmic narrative in cinematic productions of this genre is always set at the very end of the war, in 1945, when Germans painfully began to feel the consequences of the hostilities, those that they themselves had initiated. Yet these films portray German suffering with little indication or depiction of cause and effect. Antonia Schmid writes: “The narrating of authentic world history is based on the ‘cutting-out’ of a piece of a temporal continuum, the framing: a frame is set for a visual image that becomes a mental image. This produces a perspective that limits the cause and reason of events to the framework of the narration.”² In *Dresden* the bombings of the city are portrayed as acts of cold-blooded cruelty against German civilians on the part of the British army. The only mention of German aggression toward the British is a nonchalant, half-sentence reference to the German bombing of Coventry, which is a weak excuse, but serves as a safety valve for the filmmakers. It is neither a sincere recognition of the historical facts nor a truthful cinematic rendering of the German attack on that city, which resulted in British civilian suffering.

Gertrud Koch wrote *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung*³ – the title a German play on words that can be loosely translated as “the standpoint of the camera is equal to the political standpoint, the stance of the filmmaker.” The rearranging, highlighting, and omitting of historic facts is a deception of the *Einstellung* (the attitude) of this film, and it points to the assumed political and psychological *Einstellung* of the audience to which these filmmakers are catering. In this film the German characters are introduced as civilians, nurses, and doctors, whereas the British characters are all shown as members of the military, scheming attack after attack on civilian areas that “will burn easily.” The framing of a film can be chosen to include or exclude relevant parts of the whole historic picture to such an extent that even documentaries or other films seemingly based on his-

2 Schmid, Antonia, *Idoltrische Mimesis oder Wölfe im Schafspelz. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Spielfilms für Repräsentationen des Nationalsozialismus*, paper based on the presentation *Auf schmalem Grat: “Der Spielfilm als Medium nationaler Erinnerungskultur,”* presented on 6 December 2008 at the conference *Erinnerungskultur und ihre Medien* in Dresden, Germany.

3 Koch, Gertrud, *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung*, Suhrkamp Publishing House Berlin, 1997.

toric events become subjective. Ultimately, a film mirrors the subjectivity of its filmmaker.

According to this logic, the film takes place at the end of the war, at which point the bombardment of the city of Dresden occurs, backlash for the suffering that the German state had inflicted on the targets of its self-launched juggernauts. The film's central character is a young female German nurse named Anna, who is fighting for the lives of her patients during an air raid. She is portrayed as a woman of seemingly superhuman goodness, high energy, and irreproachable morals. She thus offers the perfect projection screen for the German audience's compassion; she invites the spectator to sympathize and identify with her. This character functions as a *Germania*, the allegorical woman figure symbolizing the German people. Christina von Braun points out that "Die modernen Nationen werden allegorisch durch weibliche Figuren dargestellt: als Britannia, Germania oder Marianne."⁴ The nurse is a perfect Germania figure in this context; portrayed as free of all problematic implications of the Third Reich, she serves as an angel in white who has come to alleviate the suffering of the wounded German nation.

The next scene of the film introduces the British, reckless pilots cheerfully celebrating in a British bar the results of their bombing mission. Next, they are shown conducting another attack on Germany, reciting a biblical passage of wrath from the Old Testament: "Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven."⁵ This harsh and cruel citation chosen from the "Jewish" part of the bible functions as a subconscious linking of the cruelty of the war with "Jewish" style revenge in this archetypal celebration of sadism against German civilians. In the course of the film, the character of "a Jewish man" is ushered in. As it has so often been presented in recent German films, the Jewish plight is shown as a "side issue," quite as Roosevelt classified it.⁶ This Jewish man, the husband of another German nurse, Maria, is a marginal character. Although they have been married for twelve years, they have no children, presenting their union as infertile. Moreover, his wife

4 Braun, Christina von, *Der schejne Jid. Das Bild des "jüdischen Körpers" in Mythos und Ritual*, Vienna: Picus, 1998. 99.

5 Bible, Genesis 19:24.

6 On 28 July 1943, President Roosevelt received an extensive briefing on the Nazi persecution from Jan Karski, a member of the Polish resistance movement who had repeatedly crossed into Nazi-held areas and, in disguise, had entered a concentration camp in Poland where he witnessed the execution of Jews. When Jan Karski presented the Jewish plight to Roosevelt, making him aware of the crimes being perpetrated in the ongoing Holocaust, Roosevelt gave the famously embittered answer that the United States would have to concentrate on winning the war and could not be concerned with "side issues"—such as the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

remains a sanctified virginal' character, a trait furthermore underlined by her name: Maria. In contrast to this barrenness of the Jewish-German marriage, the German nurse Anna becomes pregnant after a single act of sexual intercourse with an apparently highly fertile British pilot. This British character for a long time goes "nameless" and "speechless," which qualifies him as "a" British pilot, symbolically responsible for the British bombing of the city. The film narrative bends over backwards to explain its fabrication of the encounter between the German nurse and the British pilot: the script has the pilot crash and parachute into Germany, cross through German territory incognito, and end up in Dresden, where he witnesses the bombing together with the German nurse.

On this occasion, the morning after the bombardment, Anna feels entitled to entreat him to, "Say nothing. I love you!" – as if it was his personal fault that war brings suffering even to those who start it. Furthermore her love is shown as mercy, a characteristic traditionally considered as a female quality, which brings atonement and forgiveness for Europeans who come after. In the film this new union is symbolized by their common child. In this figurative arrangement, this woman becomes allegorical for the German nation, a female figure willing to forgive and fraternize with its former enemies. In fact, the historic German women were most willing to engage in carnal relations with the occupying allied U.S. soldiers right after the war, to such an extent that the U.S. ran massive campaigns to warn their soldiers about contracting venereal infections (or VD) from the *Fräuleins*, with their most prominent figure being the cartoon character named Vera D. (VD). Conquering Germany included the conquering of the German *Volkskörper* (the body of the people) through the sexual possession of German women. Women in the east of Germany on the other hand suffered organized, or at least unofficially legitimized, mass rape by soldiers of the Red Army – sexual aggression as a means of warfare and destruction.

The ideology of the Nazis demanded heightened attention to matters of the German womb: after all, the *Reinhaltung der arischen Rasse* (purity of the Aryan race), depended on the sexual discipline and selectiveness of the German woman. Women played a special role in this context: the *Volkskörper* was imagined as the *Gemeinschaftskörper* (communal body). Christina von Braun points out, "daß der Gemeinschaftskörper immer als weiblich repräsentiert wird" (the communal body is always represented as being female),⁷ therefore avoiding *Blutsschande* (shame of blood), code for the "mixing of races," which was policed through the use of criminal prosecution. The "wrong" kind of sex became a matter of high treason.

7 Braun, Christina von, *Der schejne Jid. Das Bild des "jüdischen Körpers" in Mythos und Ritual*, Vienna: Picus, 1998. 98.

In *Dresden* the voice-over epilogue concludes with the moral of the story: the British pilot dies in his plane while on the way to his German nurse. At the moment she gives birth to their daughter, he crashes into the North Sea and is never found. As such, he becomes an unreal, invisible, mystical father, and a symbolical *Wasserleiche* (drowned corpse). He dies a *Liebestod*, a German term for a phenomenon of German cultural history – “to die for love,” a concept central to the era and ideology of Romanticism and Gothicism. The classic hero role demands a self-sacrifice, a heroic death of the fertile male fighter, dying for his ideals, in this case for “European reunification.” This is an idea that clearly does not stem from the year 1944, when the story is set, but from 2006 when the pan-European spirit was at its height and the unifying of Europe seemed sure of success. Out of this enthusiasm, the motif of “Europe” as a new political concept replacing that of National Socialism is “born” in this film, instead of a much less improbable plot like simply showing the enormous suffering of German children in the bombardment, a historic fact, which, without a doubt, would have merited compassion from any humane spectator. Yet in an effort to stress their claim of authenticity, the makers of this fiction film went so far as to add an epilogue comprising newsreel documentary material about the *Weihe* (consecration) of the reconstructed *Frauenkirche*, and a speech that opens with “Peace be with you” in different languages. By stressing the aspect of internationalism, the fear of a rebuilt and reborn German nationalism is overwritten with this celebration of European unity and peace: in the filmic narrative this “unity” is celebrated with the “birth of a child of Europe.” This plot line is as kitschy, schmaltzy, and ridiculous as it is far-fetched. Regarding the kitschy role of “the allegoric German woman,” Gelfert writes: “in kitsch it is not so much sexual satisfaction that is expected of the woman, but much rather redemption in the sense of an almost metaphysical being sheltered ‘Aufgehobensein,’ being sheltered in the motherly womb.”⁸

On the other hand, compared to the virile British pilot, the Jewish man in *Dresden* seems elderly and frustrated; the counterimage of European heroism. He is always shown in the classic female sphere of private life: in the kitchen of the apartment. He is not shown in bedroom scenes, let alone engaged in love making, erotic, or other activities that would demonstrate masculinity. His character is constructed as completely unheroic. Instead of protecting the Aryan woman, his wife, he is portrayed as in fact placing her in mortal danger by his mere exist-

⁸ Gelfert, Hans-Dieter, *Was ist deutsch? Wie die Deutschen wurden, was sie sind*, Munich: Beck, 2005. 103. Translation Wonenberg original text: „...im Kitsch wird von der Frau nicht so sehr sexuelle Befriedigung, als vielmehr Erlösung im Sinne eines quasi-metaphysischen Aufgehobenseins in einem mütterlichen Schoß erwartet.“

ence. His wife's insistence on staying with him instead of going into the air raid shelter, where Jews are forbidden, only highlights German suffering, and again uses a young German woman figure as the heroine, in contrast with the Nazi and war evil, while simultaneously bringing about redemption through her agony. Of course, even though in the film many Germans die in the bombings, even when inside the air raid shelters, the Jewish man miraculously survives. Furthermore, the film portrays him as a collaborator, delivering letters with Nazi deportation orders, an immoral act that creates an emotional gap between the spectator and the figure of "the Jewish man." The film is not interested in showing a Jewish victim. However, the German nurse's willingness to sacrifice herself calls for the spectator's sympathy, and the choice of this character's name is, not surprisingly Maria; her martyrdom is a deeply venerated Christian motif.

Nazi propaganda tried to build the image of the Jewish man as lecherous and obsessively engaged in immoral sexual activities. These common stereotypes were expressed in terminology coined as part of a totalizing, anti-Semitic propaganda, which trumpeted phrases such as *Verführer deutscher Mädels* (seducer German girls), *Rassenschande treibend* (bringing shame to the race by interracial fornication), endangering the *Reinheit der arischen Rasse* (purity of the Aryan race). In their sexual fantasies, anti-Semites got carried so far away as to believe that a single sexual encounter between an Aryan woman and a Jewish man would result in irreversible changes to her blood and soul. In their racist paranoia, the Nazis so demonized Jewish sexuality that their descriptions of allegedly Jewish sexuality sound much like the sexuality of a vampire, whose kiss will change his human victim into another vampire, infect, and irreversibly change the blood of the victim "through a single touch (sic!)... The sperm (of the Jewish man) will dye the Jewish spirit into the (Aryan) girls and this (Jewish) spirit will cause an indelible impression on all (her) later offspring." Replacing the word intercourse with touch only further illustrates that this scene was believed to be so horrendous that it was literally unutterable. "In the course of fornication the male semen is partly or completely absorbed by the *Mutterboden* (womb; lit. mother ground, another example of the Nazi's clumsy inventions of a new vocabulary), and *geht so in das Blut über* (becomes one with the blood). "A single intercourse of a Jew with an Aryan woman is sufficient, to poison her blood forever..." she even absorbs it into her soul..." "afterwards she can never have pure Aryan children."⁹ In his alleged ability to poison the blood and the soul through his semen, the Jewish man is ascribed a demonic fertility of remarkable longevity.

⁹ *Deutsche Volksgesundheit aus Blut und Boden*, edit. by Julius Streicher., 1.1.1935, cited after Hentschel, Gerhard, *Neidgeschrei. Antisemitismus und Sexualität*, Hamburg: Hoffman & Campe. 2008. 41-42.

It seems that contemporary films are eager to build a counterimage to this supposedly corrupted and dangerous Jewish sexuality. Therefore, the Jewish man is now portrayed as decisively desexualized, engaged only in such platonic deeds of superior moral quality as forgiveness and the reestablishment of respect and justice among humanity.¹⁰ The sexual characteristics attributed to “the Jewish man” in the Third Reich’s propaganda were an important factor within the system of anti-Semitism as such, a means to defame the Jewish man as the “other,” the negative foil of Aryan masculinity. To avoid all suspicion of anti-Semitism it seems contemporary filmmakers have chosen to circumvent the mined territory of Jewish sexuality altogether, nobly solving the erotic problem by elevating him to a state of celibacy. In a way, the character of the “Jewish man” is thus “Christened.” In terms of sexual culture, he is made one of the *annusim*,¹¹ that is, a man raped and forced into symbolic conversion to Christianity: he is portrayed as a Christian icon, a Christian saint, pure and untainted by the stain of carnal lust. In this way one could argue that in contemporary films the Jewish man is elevated precisely by being rendered less Jewish.

His apparent desexualization has a logical consequence: the barrenness of this film’s German-Jewish union. Whereas the all-European, carnal unification between the British pilot and the German nurse bears fruit, the German-Jewish relationship remains without a future.

Hilde – It was All a Mere Coincidence

Hilde is a filmic biography of the star German actress and singer Hildegard Knef (her U.S. stage name was Hildegard Neff). This film is another example of the “German suffering” genre. The central character of the film, Hildegard Knef, became the venerated idol of the generation of German women now in their late seventies.¹² A once beloved film sensation, she is another perfect candidate for

¹⁰ Compare the filmic presence of the “weak” Jewish man to Jurek Becker’s Aron Blank, who is described as being like a helpless child, in: Id., *Der Boxer*, Suhrkamp Publishing House Berlin 1998, 113.

¹¹ *Anussim* is the Hebrew term used for Jews forcibly converted to Christianity after the Christian Reconquista of the Iberian peninsula. Another term for *anussim* is *marrano* a derogatory term (it literally means ‘swine,’ someone who pretended to have converted to Christianity, but was suspected of still “practicing” Judaism in secret).

¹² Without going into the difficulties of transgenerational war trauma and transgenerational transmission of guilt feelings, today we are of course facing several spectator groups of different post-war generations. Discussing the emotions occasioned by parents’ or grandparents’ guilt is essentially different from coming to terms with one’s own young adult

representing *Germania*. In the context of this film genre, her Jewish husband is assigned the role of absolving the German woman of her “German guilt.” Other than serving this function, he is merely the boyish first husband, who is later replaced by a “real man,” one who is fully sexualized and appears in numerous erotic scenes in the course of the film. In an intradiegetic conversation with film producer Erich Pommer, the Knief character comments in a sarcastic tone on this first marriage “Armer, alter Kurt. Es war ein Fehler ihn zu heiraten” (Poor, old Kurt, it was a mistake to marry him). To this Pommer replies, “Weil sie ihn aus den falschen Gründen geheiratet haben!” (because you married him for the wrong reasons).

The husband is Kurt Hirsch, a German-speaking Jew from Czechoslovakia who fled to the United States in time to escape the Nazis, and returned as an American GI to Germany, where he met and married Hilde. Later in the film, he comments on their divorce with the proverbial words: “Der Mohr hat seine *Schuldigkeit* getan, der Mohr kann gehen” (The Moor has done his duty, the Moor may go now). This line is revealing in several ways: First of all, Kurt makes clear that he was never really loved and desired as a man, as an individual, but that he merely fulfilled a function – “Mittel zum Zweck, nicht Selbstzweck” (a means to an end; he himself was not respected as a person in the Kantian sense), namely, to help her escape war-shattered Germany for Hollywood, as well as alleviate her of her German guilt complex. As such the film does not introduce him as an individual, his name is not mentioned as long as their marriage lasts, and only when they start to break apart does the spectator hear his name, Kurt Hirsch, for the first time. The namelessness operates as an instrument of deindividuation, he becomes “the Jew.” As such his “function” is to forgive the allegoric figure of Germania its German guilt over the murder of the Jews of Europe. This is shown in the film as the foundation of their relationship; a relationship between a German woman and a Jewish man. On their first date he invites her to join him for a film evening at the allied Russian military base. What seems to be the setting for a romantic date, an evening at the movies, turns out to be a Red Army documentary of the liberation of Auschwitz. On the way home, Hilde sits next to him in the U.S. Army jeep, frozen in historic guilt. He is the one who breaks the ice by stating:

Sechzehn Verwandte von mir sind so gestorben. Sie sagen ich soll dich hassen, weil du deutsch bist, aber das werde ich nicht tun. Ich weigere mich. Es ist doch alles nur Zufall. Ich hätte du sein können und du ich. Die wollen nicht, dass wir so denken, aber sie haben

life. Striving to attain atonement for parental guilt is doomed to fail: one cannot be forgiven a sin that one has not committed. Even so, a new terminology, *historische Verantwortung* (historical responsibility), was introduced into German memorial culture to circumscribe the psychological complexity that still exists for subsequent generations.

Unrecht. Ich weiss, dass sie Unrecht haben. (Sixteen of my relatives died this way. They say, I am to hate you because you are German, but I won't do it. I refuse. It is all a mere coincidence. I could have been you and you could have been me. They don't want us to think this way, but they are wrong. I know that they are wrong).

Kurt smothers Hilde's burning feelings of guilt by conveniently declaring it all a *Zufall* (coincidence). The roles might well have been reversed, he claims. Note the use of the words *Schuldigkeit* (debt) and *Unrecht*. In German, *Schuldigkeit* is very close to and invites an allusion to *Schuld* (guilt), a "guilt that has to be made up for." On the other hand, *Unrecht* (guilt) is the opposite of *Recht* (righteousness). In both conversations the distribution of historic guilt is inverted. It is the Jewish husband who has to make up his *Schuldigkeit* to the German woman, the debt he owes of having caused her to suffer a bad conscience. This psychological mechanism is an instance of "secondary anti-Semitism," the precise definition being hatred against Jewish people, anger as a result of perverted feelings of historic guilt. The one who reminds the person of their guilt is subconsciously seen as the perpetrator, the one inflicting the painful feelings of guilt. The roles of perpetrator and victim are inverted in "secondary anti-Semitism."

The target audience for *Hilde* is the generation of Germans born around 1930. Like their idol Knief, this generation found themselves in the uncomfortable, unenviable position of having their biographies intertwined with the Nazi era. The question of guilt is addressed in *Hilde* but only in order to be resolved in an apologetic way. For example, the Knief character says, "ich war zu jung, um eine Revolution zu starten" (I was too young to start a revolution). Yet in the same conversation she neglects to mention that she was old enough to start an affair with a married man, Dewandowski, a leading Nazi film politician (*Reichsfilm-dramaturg*), in a move to boost her career as an actress in Nazi Germany. She also volunteered for the German army as late as 1945, collaborating in time for the *Endsieg* (final victory), as promulgated by the Nazi regime. Even though the film shows Knief's active contributions to the Third Reich, these activities are portrayed as acts of romantic love for Dewandowski. So again, rather than showing her as a young, yet active Nazi actress and fighter for National Socialism, she is represented as a young woman in love who becomes the victim, persecuted for her lost lover's crimes.

Her Jewish husband does not seem to have a right to his own feelings, let alone satisfaction of his sexual longings. Even while he tells her about the loss of his sixteen murdered family members, he is not entitled to pain, but has to alleviate the pain of his guilt-ridden German date, holding her quite platonically in

his arms.¹³ Whereas the prior relationship with Dewandowski is illustrated with scenes of them both naked in bed or in erotic silk morning gowns, her marriage with her Jewish husband seems to be void of eroticism.¹⁴ If he is shown in bed at all, he is alone there, fully clothed, either weathering Hilde's verbal attacks or waiting for her to come home. When her career as an actress begins to skyrocket, he follows her around like a shadow, jealously watching the shooting of the famous nude scene in *Die Sünderin*, a film that caused a scandal in Germany because it featured a very brief nude scene – the first in the history of German cinema. Excluded from the erotic action, Hirsch is left sitting alone in their apartment while his wife goes out to dine with her producers and male admirers. His sphere is the house; he is rendered effeminate, analogous to the classic female role, he is a “house-husband.” Knef, in turn, is the femme fatale, her space is the public sphere of the spectacle. Furthermore, even his “professional” manliness as her manager is discredited by her words, “Oh Kurt, tu doch nicht immer so, als hättest du die Situation im Griff. Das hattest du noch nie. (Don't pretend to be master of the (professional) situation. You never were). “Armer, alter Kurt” (Poor old Kurt), is her summarizing final judgment of their relationship, hardly an expression of admiration of virility.

In the film *Viehjud Levi* (Didi Danquart) the same set-up is played out. “The Jud,” as he is addressed, is shown courting the German farmer girl Lisbeth throughout the film. She likes him, as is proved in her comment, “Du bist ein

13 Other films such as *The Night Porter* have dared to approach the psychological crossover of sexuality, power, and violence in extreme situations. This film “keeps its legs crossed at all critical times.”

14 From a different point of view, from the standpoint of traditional Jewish religious philosophy, tenderness was expected of a Jewish man as appropriate behavior toward his wife. However, in the Jewish context, tenderness was also understood as an aspect of successful sexuality that would lead to carnal satisfaction. The Jewish text *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* offers the following instructions: “At first speak to her in words that will calm and rejoice her heart and her thinking. In this way, your thinking and your intention will be in harmony with hers. Speak words that will awaken passion, unity, love, longing and lust in her and words that will induce in her the respect of God, piousness and sexual purity.” Note that in Jewish thinking the linking of tenderness, piousness, and sexual fulfillment is the paramount expression of marital harmony. This attitude is lacking completely in *Hilde*. On this point, the perspective presented in the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* is decisively different from the one constructed in the film.

In this context it is interesting that the Torah, the Talmud, and the text of the Jewish marriage contract, the *ketubbah*, each explicitly instruct the man in how to attain sexual fulfillment by making the woman happy. “It is the duty of the man, to give his wife sexual joy,” declares the Talmud. The focus seems to be entirely on providing female erotic contentment, with men receiving actual instructions on how to achieve this. Compare to Levinson, Pnina Nave, *Jüdische Religion*, In: *Ethik der Religionen – Lehre und Leben Volume 1: Sexualität*, Klöcker, Michael, Tworuschka, Udo (Eds.), 22. Göttingen: Kösel, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984.

guter Mensch, Levi!" (You are a good soul, Levi!). But she does not desire him. *Ein guter Mensch* (a good person), is hardly an expression one uses to describe an object of sexual lust. On the other hand, she entertains an erotic relationship with a German man from the village even though she holds Levi in higher esteem when it comes to morality and humaneness. Ultimately, she gives sexual preference to the non-Jewish man. Concerning Levi, she saves him from a Nazi pogrom, but makes him leave his home country when she ushers him out the door, saying "Geh. Geh endlich" (Go away, get going at long last!), instead of fleeing with him as his wife. The Jewish man character again is portrayed as antiheroic, not least by the fact that he does not succeed in winning the heart of the lady he has pursued. His soul mate in the film is not a "bunny," a woman who would grant him sexual satisfaction, but an actual rabbit. In German, the term *Hase* (rabbit) is a way of referring to cowardice, and the standard expression that this filmic image provokes is the proverbial *Angsthase*, literally a "frightened rabbit," the German equivalent of "chicken, a coward."¹⁵ Levi and the rabbit are portrayed as an absurd couple, and over the course of the film, the Jewish man and the rabbit are conflated,: the Jewish man becomes the *Angsthase*.

The film *Mein bester Feind* (Wolfgang Murnberger, Germany, 2011) displays another example of a Jewish man courting an Aryan woman of whom he will become "dispossessed." The central female character in this film is the German woman Lena. In the course of the Nazi's "aryanizing," that is, confiscating Jewish property, not only property in the form of the Villa and the art gallery owned by the main Jewish character, Victor Kaufmann, which pass to his former friend, Rudi, who has joined the Nazi movement. Kaufmann's fiancée is also passed to the Nazi Rudi as a part and accessory of the formerly Jewish villa. The Jewish man is again divested of his love, or to put it more crudely, his sexual satisfaction falls prey to "aryanization."

Even in the film with the promising name *Der Einstein des Sex* (The Einstein of Sex; Rosa von Praunheim, Germany, 1999) the main Jewish character, the sexologist Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld is portrayed as totally dedicated to the scientific research of sexuality. Yet his personal sex life remains surprisingly inactive until very late in his career, when he has left Germany. Within the boundaries of Germany, sexual satisfaction seems to be unthinkable for a Jewish man.

¹⁵ As in English, German also carries a sexual connotation for rabbit: "Sie vermehren sich wie Karnickel!" (They breed like rabbits!). In this respect the rabbit is also a "would-be" erotic signifier, but more one of childish desire than of manly fulfillment. The sexual image of the rabbit is clearly of ridiculous nature. "A bunny" is an erotic joke, not to be compared with the erotic omnipotence of, e.g., "a stud." The "Jew's soul-mate," the rabbit, hints at the idea of sexuality but remains on the level of a nervous undertone in the film.

Liebe Deinen Feind (Love thy enemy; Niki Stein, Germany, 2009) also falls into the new “German suffering” genre. Set in the time immediately after the war, German men are here portrayed as prisoners of war, subjected to foreign guards who deprive them of all their freedom and human needs. The film introduces them as men longing for love, but who are shot for exhibiting such human weaknesses as leaving the prison camp to keep secret dates with their fiancées. As is typical for this genre, the central figure, Gesa, is a young German woman of impeccable moral standards, no Nazi past, practicing an angelic profession – again a nurse in a hospital, fighting against all odds the evils in the world. And again, her filmic function is more than that of an individual figure portrayal: she is yet another allegorical Germania and offers the spectator a positive German role model for sympathetic identification.

The Nazi characters in this film are portrayed as sadistic outsiders, and not as a part of mainstream German society. They are depicted as so stereotypically cruel that they come across more like Nazi puppets than as real characters. They serve to divert, and thus extract and externalize, the guilt of Nazi crimes from the film’s main German characters. The film opens with shots of the sea. This setting for a love story is by no means arbitrary, but stems from a long tradition rooted in the era of German Romanticism: doomed lovers and lonely wanderers on empty, cold shores or bleak mountain tops, reminiscent of the motifs in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. The shots of the landscapes of Romanticism are coupled with Gesa’s voice-over, which introduces the spectator to the film with the words: “Peace had set in six weeks ago. At long last the Wehrmacht had capitulated.” As if all of Germany had been eager to passively give in and let the war end.

Gesa is introduced while she is working among a group of former *Wehrmacht-shelferinnen* (German army assistants), now employed on a British military base. She, however, pursues more noble work and activities than the other *Fräuleins*, performing her duties as a nurse, even under horrible circumstances. To underline her different, morally superior status, unlike the other German women in this film, she is never shown in a uniform, which would be reminiscent of a militarized Germany. Instead, she wears different pieces of clothing, all reminiscent of the red dress famously highlighted in the otherwise black and white film *Schindler’s List*. This key scene, in which Schindler recognizes the plight of the Jewish victims in the Warsaw ghetto, was the original filmic inspiration for a new visual metaphor, an icon even, turning up ad nauseum in recent films to designate a woman character as an allegoric innocent victim in threatening circumstances. The same cameo appears in *Dresden*, as well as in the anti-Israeli, and also anti-Semitic film *Valley of the Wolves – Palestine*, a film popular among German migrants of Turkish origin in Germany today.

In the film *Liebe deinen Feinde*, like in the film *Hilde*, there is a character of a Jewish man, Simon, who fled from Germany and came back as a soldier, British, however, not American. A German Jew resurrected from the murdered Jewish people of Europe, miraculously returning to Germania to haunt the German soul with guilt. As much as the relationship between the German woman and her German fiancée is sexualized, the relationship with the Jewish man lacks any hint of eroticism. The British soldiers go so far as to nickname her “the virgin,” and she shines throughout the film in venerable purity. All the other British soldiers are shown having sexual flings with German Fräuleins. Even married British soldiers are shown merrily impregnating German girls while rolling around with them in the dunes after some juicy fraternization party. But the relationship between the Jewish man and the German woman continues to prove unsatisfactory for the Jewish man, both in marital and sexual terms.

The German fiancée, on the other hand, is presented as a “real man.” In the first shot, he emerges naked from the sea like a Greek God in ancient mythology, having swum across the wild, icy German sea in a heroic effort to have a night of love with his mate on the lonely beach. Again, all the elements of heroic, supreme love of the era of German Romanticism are combined – the lonely shore, the sea, the element of the water – the impending “Liebestod”, the willingness to sacrifice one’s life for love. It is not by coincidence that the element of the water is so closely linked to the problematic love for a woman. Linking the female and the element of the water has a long tradition that peaked in the era of Romanticism, with one of its expressions being the image of the *Wasserleiche*.

The Jewish man, on the other hand, is introduced fully clothed, and although he also courts the German woman throughout the film, he never gets to take his clothes off – a male physique is not part of the image drawn of him. Although he offers her marriage twice, despite the Shoah, and she temporarily seems to give him a positive response, there are no scenes of erotic fulfillment for him anywhere in the film. Instead, he is shown busily resurrecting justice in Germany, assisting in legal courts as a lawyer against judges still ruling according to Nazi ideology. His goal is to uphold morality and justice, even if it gets him into a situation that forces him to advocate for the side of a man with whom he is in competition over the same woman. He is not motivated by revenge nor does he behave corruptly in order to achieve his personal goal of marrying the German woman. He does not abuse his powerful position as someone who is part of the occupying military power. Instead, he subordinates all of his feelings and longings for love while upholding morality, ethical values, justice, and his self-constraint. Daniel Boyarin wrote extensively on the alternative character of Jewish masculinity. He quotes John Ruskin to give an example of how Jewish masculinity was contrasted with classic masculinity. “The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is

eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender.' Women in contrast 'must be enduringly, incorruptible, good; instinctively, infallibly wise – wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation.'"¹⁶ According to these standards, the Jewish man in *Liebe deinen Feind* is not male, but completely effeminized.

Conclusion

The filmic portrayal of “the Jewish man” as first and foremost a Holocaust victim in contemporary films seems to demand his desexualization. Nazi propagated stereotypes claimed the “the Jewish man” to be oversexed, perverted, and as corrupting “Aryan women’s souls and fertility.” In turn, contemporary German film directors have chosen to create a safe distance from the anti-Semitic images of the Jewish man’s sexuality by replacing the stereotype of the “dirty, subversive sexuality” with an almost virginal distance from sensuality, eroticism, or sexual satisfaction. In the process of reinventing the image of “the Jewish man,” he was recoined in a Christian mold. This new image has become an icon revered in German Shoah memorial culture in terms of a cultural value system that operates within an essentially Christian matrix.

Furthermore, this desexualization is symbolic of the wider cultural framework. The fact that the Jewish man is portrayed as desexualized is symptomatic of the fact that in contemporary German culture Judaism is perceived and portrayed as morbid, a culture without a viable future in Germany. In the philosophy of Romanticism and Retro-Romanticism, which remain influential in German culture today, this morbid portrait becomes an image of *die schöne Leiche* (the melancholic, beautified Death). In the sentimental showcase of German memorial culture this construct became a canonical cameo, a trinket asset. It is an icon beautified and elevated to a venerated melancholic status. Its alleged proximity to death bestows the aureole of the holiness of the nether world onto it and as such, “the Jewish man” is drawn as a man remote from anything as life producing as sexuality.¹⁷ However, historic facts point to the contrary. Nowhere in the world were birth rates higher than in the DP camps, the refugee camps for Jewish Holocaust survivors set up by the Americans in southern Germany, in the years 1945–48. The traumatic experience suffered by the mostly young survivors included the realization that with most of their family members murdered, leaving them

¹⁶ Boyarin, Daniel, *Unheroic Conduct. The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of Chicago Press, 1997, 3.

¹⁷ Compare to the dialogue “Morbid Beauty” in this anthology.

deprived of family, they were utterly alone in the world. An immediate and radical reaction to this trauma was their ardent wish to produce new family members; a fact that is well documented in historical data¹⁸ and numerous interviews of survivors.

In a way this historic reaction was a very “Jewish” way of reacting to the Shoah. Christina von Braun reminds us that “Der jüdischen Religion ... war die Sexualität ein ‘Trost für den Stachel des Todes’” (To Jewish religion ...sexuality was a ‘consolation against the sting of death’).¹⁹ Along the same line of thinking, the Babylonian Talmud takes this attitude even further and goes so far as to proclaim, “Whoever does not procreate children is a murderer.”²⁰ The fall into the passivity of melancholia and refusal to take an active part in life is an image ascribed to “the Jewish man” in the films discussed, but it would have been a most “un-Jewish” behavior. Pnina Nave Levinson summarizes the traditional religious “duty of procreation,” as commanded in the Torah, as that a Jewish man: “... should have at least a son and a daughter. Because of ...unforeseen catastrophes it should not be limited to this minimum. Even someone who procreated children already should continue to do so up until old-age. Children are happiness and a blessing, and they guarantee the survival of the community. To Jews – who were persecuted time and again – this was the only possible religious answer. Anything else would have led to the extinction of the Jews, today, after the Shoah, more than ever. The question is not one of a theoretical nature.”²¹ Levinson draws a direct line from the Talmudian wisdom to the historic situation after the Shoah, and indeed the picture she draws concurs with the actual historic situation in the DP camps.

I do not attempt to draw conclusions from the trauma-triggered longing of the Jewish men in the DP camps for children and a new family to the sensual quality and satisfaction of their sexual practices. They may have been numbed and emotionally hollowed out by the shattering experience of the Shoah. Or perhaps they found some relief and healing in their sensual, intimate moments of relief with their new wives. Historically, personal and intimate events tend to be less accurately documented, yet the historically documented fact remains that Jewish men in the aftermath of the Shoah sought to get married and procreate; they were in

18 The exhibits and documentary videos in the permanent exhibition of Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

19 Braun, Christina von, *Der scheinbare Jid. Das Bild des “jüdischen Körpers” in Mythos und Ritual*, Vienna: Picus, 1998. 99.

20 Babylonian Talmud, Jebamot 63b.

21 Levinson, Pnina Nave, *Jüdische Religion*, In: *Ethik der Religionen – Lehre und Leben, Volume 1: Sexualität*, Klöcker, Michael, Tworuschka, Udo (Eds.), 23. Göttingen: Kösel, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984.

actuality, very far from being desexualized. Their adamant will to be husbands and fathers of new Jewish families was a most “Jewish” way to react to death. It points to the paramount demand in Jewish philosophy not to lose hope and to focus on life rather than on the mortal aspects of humanity in any circumstance. These men certainly did not envision themselves as morbid and elevated by proximity to death. To the contrary, they emphasized their life-giving sexuality as a faculty of divine origin and a contribution to Jewish life.

The post-Shoah German consciousness is marked by the enormous tension that was produced by the guilt and shock of what had occurred a generation or two earlier in their home country. It is a tension that to a large degree still cramps and immobilizes German feelings regarding the Shoah, Jews, and Judaism. It is a tension that has not yet found relief. It is a shadow of the past that the German consciousness cannot let go of. In Freudian terms, an orgasm means letting go of a great tension, a release; in this case the guilt complex makes relief impossible. Yet the historic guilt that produces this tension in the German consciousness is oppressive and contingent. The wish to eliminate it triggers its expulsion, its projection onto another object. In this case, the uneasiness of the unbearable tension in the German consciousness is projected onto the film character of “the Jewish man” who in turn is portrayed as the one who cannot find relief. He is made to stand in for the guilty and bear the tension that was so hard to suffer. On the other hand, the love stories fabricated in the films discussed here, and the resulting portraits of “the Jewish men” reflect the psychology and cultural parameters of contemporary German filmmakers. The desexualization of Jewish characters in recent German films is thus grounded neither in historic fact about the sexual lives of Jews as it actually existed in Germany immediately after the Shoah, nor in Jewish philosophy. The stigma of desexualization does not originate in actual Jewish behavior or Jewish thinking. It is a projection of the German subconscious *onto* the Jewish people.

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