

SPASMODIC EFFERFESCENCE: OUTSIDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON
REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM IN GERMANY, 1815-1848
THE AESTHETICS OF PROPAGANDA: WEIMAR CONTINUITIES IN FILMIC
REPRESENTATIONS OF FREDERICK THE GREAT, 1933-1945

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Spasmodic Effervescence: Outsiders' Perspectives on Revolutionary Nationalism in Germany, 1815-1848

On a spring evening in 1833 Thomas Cartwright, the British envoy to the Diet of the German Confederation in Frankfurt, scratched off an urgent report to the British Foreign Secretary in London. His concern shone through the lines of official correspondence as he described the violent events of two nights before. On that night, April 3rd, 1833, bands of armed men had overtaken two guardhouses and the cathedral in Frankfurt, and attempted to rouse the citizens to arms. Their goal was the complete takeover of the town and seizure of the treasury of the Diet, with the object of establishing a provisional government for all of Germany.¹ Events like this one, the storming of the Frankfurt guardhouses to establish a German nation-state, are quite obvious manifestations of nationalist sentiment in early nineteenth century Germany. Though it resulted in failure, the action of the Frankfurt revolutionaries demonstrates that nationalist sentiment did not merely lay dormant in Germany between 1815 and 1848.

Naturally, this so called *Wachensturm* was not an arbitrary or sudden event. It required planning and numerous adherents. Like the more widely known Revolution of 1848, the thoughts that resulted in the actions in Frankfurt in 1833 had to come from somewhere. To what extent were desires for national unification present among the German population in the years before 1848? Previous scholars have investigated this problem, but some new sources can give a different aspect to the answer. In all the major capitals of Germany, British diplomats were responsible for reporting back to London on the state of things in their various countries. Quite often, especially considering the

¹ Markus Mösslang, Sabine Freitag, and Peter Wende, ed., *British Envoys to Germany, 1816-1866, Vol II: 1830-1847*, (Cambridge, 2002), 41-45.

turbulent nature of German politics in the nineteenth century, their reports included information about civil unrest and revolutionary movements. Similarly, the American ambassador to Prussia and American consuls in various German cities reported their own interpretations of events back to Washington, D.C., though they did not have an ambassador in Prussia between 1801 and 1835, and most of their consulates were established relatively late as well. Nevertheless, an investigation of these British and American reports, never before consulted on this topic, can clarify to what extent designs for German unification were present among the German population.

This paper will argue that the British and American reports provide clarification to some of the claims of previous scholars, particularly concerning the relationship between national and particularist or state-based revolutionary sentiment and about the groups of people who desired to form a German nation. The first section offers a brief discussion of recent historical scholarship that has dealt with these two topics. The second section presents a chronological discussion of the British and American envoy reports that weaves in these two overlapping themes. My aim is not to explain why the Revolution of 1848 came about, but rather to illustrate how instances of visible revolutionary activity can help explain the development of nationalist sentiment in nineteenth century Germany. From the reports it seems that national revolutionary sentiment was strongest before the repressive Karlsbad Decrees of 1819, though there were important exceptions to this. During the 1820s national revolutionary sentiment waned slightly, but this again had exceptions. From the mid-1830s into the 1840s visible desire for nationwide revolution became predominant again. The reports also show that early on, national identification was most prominent among university students and

professors, and slowly came to be more prevalent among other groups. On the eve of the 1848 revolution, it seems as if much of the educated public had come to support the idea of a united Germany, but some of the envoys still considered a revolution to be unlikely.

A Brief Overview of the Historiography of Nationalism in Pre-1848 Germany

One of the issues the recent scholarship of pre-1848 Germany has investigated is the complicated relationship between national and particular state identity. Abigail Green wrote about some of the less researched German states in her 2001 book *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. In her studies of ‘third Germany,’ or Germany exclusive of Prussia and Austria, Green described differences in public opinion toward ideas about unification. For one thing, she noted that in southern states such as Baden and Württemberg with some level of liberal institutions, subjects were more likely to oppose unification because of skepticism about Prussian or Austrian dominance. Green also raised an important question about the validity of the term ‘restoration era.’ The German states were repressive during this time, but they continued to see administrative reform and state centralization well into the 1820s. This was particularly the case in the southern states of Baden, Württemberg, Bavaria, and Hesse-Darmstadt, all of which emerged from the Napoleonic Wars greatly enlarged. These states therefore found it necessary to establish some form of constitution to integrate their newly acquired territories.² Though she was not the first to question the classic

² Hans Schmitt, “Revolution and Revolts in the Germanies: Goals and Accomplishments During the 1830s” in *Proceedings of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe*, (Athens, GA, 1977), 54-67.

periodization,³ Green's observations help to debunk the image of 1848 as a gathering storm on the horizon of the silent 1820s and 1830s. Nevertheless, her book was partially incomplete because she largely ignored any outbursts of nationalist feeling in the years before 1848, preferring to focus on revolutionary concerns about individual states and to concentrate on the years between 1848 and 1866.⁴

In his introduction to *Nineteenth Century Germany: Politics, Culture and Society 1780-1918*, John Breuilly wrote of the extreme difficulty of even speaking of 'Germany' in the first half of the nineteenth century. He recognized the many internal divisions in the German Confederation, and thus the difficulties that arise in trying to explain developments taking place throughout the region. Important to Breuilly's argument was that supra-national, national, and sub-national categories were not necessarily fixed identities that overtook each other in a chronological fashion. Rather, he argued, these categories should be viewed as "so many fields or frames of action which change their meaning and interrelationships over time." This point of view allows for a nuanced description of public opinion favorable to unification. It establishes that desires for national unification could coexist with desires for revolution on a state level in the minds of nineteenth century Germans.⁵ Other historians have argued this as well. Christopher Clark, for example, noted the simultaneous existence of Prussian and German

³ James Sheehan, *German History, 1770-1866*, (Oxford, 1989), 392. Sheehan wrote in this monumental survey of the nineteenth century that "Hopes and fears, a deeply felt sense of lasting change, and the terror of chaos—these sentiments are close to the heart of the age of restoration." In other words, the 1820s, 30s, and 40s were times of conflict.

⁴ Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth Century Germany*, (Cambridge, 2001), 1-61.

⁵ John Breuilly, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Germany: Politics, Culture, and Society 1780-1918*, (London, 2001), 1-10.

nationalism in the early nineteenth century.⁶ Since agitation for national unification and agitation for government reform in individual states are not mutually exclusive, and because they “change their meanings and interrelationships over time,” it is possible to investigate how this happened in early nineteenth century Germany.

Another important theme in the historiography of pre-1848 Germany has questioned what groups of people held nationalist sentiments. In a detailed study of the Congress of Vienna, Peter Alter accused the congress of restraining the fight against the old order in central Europe that had been initiated by the War of Liberation. The congress, he claimed, primarily took into consideration the “interests of the states and dynasties...not those of peoples or nations.”⁷ Here lay the blame for the reactionary years to come. Though he praised the congress for establishing a system that kept Europe at peace for forty years, Alter levied the accusation that it had consciously and willingly denied the wishes of “the people.”⁸ Intuitively such language seems better suited to a discussion of the Versailles Treaty, but is there any evidence to support the existence of widespread sentiment for “self-determination”⁹ in 1815?

Most historians claim that the answer is a definite no. Joachim Whaley called attention to the myth that the German nation had risen up and driven out the French in the War of Liberation. In reality, one should not overestimate the influence of a few intellectuals whose ideas of German patriotism and a German *Kulturnation* are often misinterpreted as belonging to a larger group of people. Thanks to the work of

⁶ Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (London and New York, 2006), 386-387.

⁷ Peter Alter, *The German Question and Europe*, (New York, 2000), 17.

⁸ Alter, 17, 30.

⁹ Alter, 17.

generations of nationalist historians, it used to be believed that a German national uprising played a large role in driving out the French, but it would be difficult to find an historian who believes this today. For example, the 1809 Tyrolean rebellion did not inspire the widespread uprising that the Habsburg Emperor Francis had hoped for, nor was Frederick William of Prussia's call to arms in 1813 received with any kind of mass enthusiasm. Neither of the monarchs cared much for German nationalism, but they did try to exploit nationalist feeling among their subjects. That they were unable to do so is evidence that this kind of feeling was not very widespread at this time. Whaley concluded that these intellectual ideas about a German nation were simply there to be picked up by later generations, not evidence of a broad based desire for a united Germany.¹⁰

Helmut Walser Smith also understood that conceptions of a German nation were largely confined to an intellectual elite, and argued that a slow spread of these kinds of ideas took place in Germany throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.¹¹ This establishes that ideas about a German nation were potent. They slowly but surely spread into larger groups of people, meaning that despite the repression of the 'restoration era,' the influence of these ideas could still be felt on some level. Similarly, the historian Jonathan Sperber wrote that in the Rhineland, symbolism echoing the French Revolution was invoked at first to justify social unrest based on particular social and economic concerns. It was not until the Hambach Festival in 1832 that these French Revolutionary symbols were invoked in a way that connected them with the need for a national German

¹⁰ Joachim Whaley, "The German Lands before 1815" in John Breuilly, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Germany*, 15-39. For more historians who argue that German nationalism was an elite idea at this time, see Karin Friedrich, "Cultural and Intellectual Trends" in the same volume, and Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1640-1945*, (London and New York, 2006), 356-357.

¹¹ Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2008), 39-73, and Helmut Walser Smith, "Nation and Nationalism" in Sperber, ed., *Germany: 1800-1870*, (New York and Oxford, 2004), 233.

uprising.¹² Therefore, an investigation of British and American envoy reports should try to determine to what degree, if any, the envoys were aware of the spread of these ideas about German nationalism. It should take note of British and American reactions to events that made this undercurrent of nationalism visible and see if it became more visible over time, and among what groups of people.

Before beginning an analysis of the reports it will be helpful to define what I mean by 'visible national revolutionary sentiment.' By this I refer to any demonstration of desire to form a government for all of Germany that was noticeable enough to warrant mention in official diplomatic correspondence. It is important to keep in mind that instances of unrest were not always clear in their goals, so it was up to the diplomats to interpret them. Additionally, when I talk about nationalist enthusiasm or nationalism, it is important to remember that the idea of 'nationalism' can mean many things to many people, particularly in the early nineteenth century. Although intellectuals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had written about a German nation, it is difficult to know exactly what individuals taking part in revolutionary activities thought of these ideas. However, judging by their actions as reported by the British and American diplomats, the revolutionaries' nation-thinking is undeniable.

¹² Jonathan Sperber, "Echoes of the French Revolution in the Rhineland, 1830-1849," *Central European History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, The French Revolution in Germany and Austria (Jun., 1989), pp. 200-217.

British and American Envoy Reports from Germany

One of the earliest manifestations of nationalist enthusiasm in Germany, and one that has often been mentioned by historians, was the Wartburg Festival.¹³ In October of 1817, students and some professors from several German universities met at the Wartburg castle near Eisenach to mark the fourth anniversary of the Battle of Jena and the 300th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Only about five hundred students attended the celebration, which consisted of fiery nationalist speeches and a blessing from the priest of Eisenach.¹⁴ In discussing the festival, historians are generally aware that the event garnered limited participation and was relatively minor in its effect. When they talk about the festival, however, historians usually emphasize its potential for radicalizing German nationalism. They often mention the extreme measures the participants resorted to including the burning of reactionary books. Generally they make a connection to later violent manifestations of German nationalism,¹⁵ but some historians also mention that this book burning was a major cause for concern among the German ruling elite.¹⁶ A young historian at Vanderbilt University has even recently argued that the book burning actually had little connection to the festival at Wartburg.¹⁷ Regardless, unlike historians the British envoys did not pay especially close attention to the book

¹³ Cf. Christopher Clark, "Germany, 1815-1848: Restoration of Pre-March?" in Breuilly, ed., *Nineteenth Century Germany*, 52-53, and Smith, "Nation and Nationalism," 239-250.

¹⁴ Carr, *A History of Germany*, 15 and *British Envoys Vol. I.*, 389.

¹⁵ Breuilly, *Nineteenth Century Germany*, 53

¹⁶ Carr, *A History of Germany*, 15.

¹⁷ Steven Michael Press, "False Fire: The Wartburg Book Burning of 1817," *Central European History*, 42 (2009): 621-646.

burnings at the festival. Much more interesting information in their reports involved the aims of the festival and the makeup of the participants.

Judging from the reports of the British envoys, the Wartburg festival can explain much about particularist revolutionary sentiment in general and how it was perceived. Tellingly, the envoys to Württemberg and the Diet of the German Confederation did not think the festival worth mentioning in their reports to London, while the envoy to Bavaria dedicated only two minimally descriptive sentences to the subject. Since the envoys to Württemberg and the Diet were probably aware of the events as well, their silence provokes an interesting observation about the events at the Wartburg. It is possible that the festival's distance from the three capitals Stuttgart, Frankfurt, and Munich resulted in a lack of interest. It could be that the envoys took no notice whatsoever of the nationalist sentiments of the students at the festival, and simply considered it an instance of domestic unrest. They would have considered this Saxony and Prussia's concern due to their proximity and the fact that the event was mainly organized by students at Jena and heavily attended by Prussians. If this was their opinion, it appears that the divided nature of Germany precluded revolutionary nationalist ideas from being visible in the southern states in 1817. Another possible reason for the lack of interest was the protestant nature of the festival. Because the southern states were predominantly catholic, this festival, dedicated partly to marking the anniversary of the Reformation, would have seemed even more foreign to them than if it had been a purely political festival in northern Germany. As James Sheehan has pointed out, this further emphasizes the divided nature of anything resembling German nationalism at this time.¹⁸

¹⁸ Sheehan, *German History*, 406.

The envoys to Prussia and Saxony were most certainly concerned by the Wartburg festival. In contrast to the Bavarian envoy, who considered the festival to be a scene of “some excesses,” the Prussian envoy called it a “scandalous scene of revolutionary effervescence.”¹⁹ The envoy to Saxony was also convinced that the festival warranted “the serious attention of the German states.”²⁰ What is most surprising about the reports of the north German envoys is their assessment of the festival’s goals. The Prussian envoy readily understood the nature of the events. The “revolutionaries,” he wrote, “excite Germans to form themselves into one free State grounded on the demolition of their present political institutions.”²¹ However the emphasis of the Saxon envoy, John Philip Morier, was different. He placed emphasis not on the national character of the proceedings, but rather on the calls for revolutionary change in general, specifically “for the establishment of a government on principles of real freedom.”²² In one section of his report on the festival Morier described opinions about the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar, who had allowed the festival to take place: “There are certainly great prejudices entertained against him in Germany, principally I should imagine, because he has effected some reformation in his government favourable to the subject.”²³ In other words, the Grand Duke had enacted some vaguely defined government reforms that were considered friendly to the revolutionary cause. Naturally Morier was not accusing the Grand Duke of enacting legislation favorable to German unification. Instead, it appears

¹⁹ Sabine Freitag and Peter Wende, ed., *British Envoys to Germany, 1816-1866, Vol I: 1816-1829*, (Cambridge, 2000), 261, 76.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 389

²¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

²² *Ibid.*, 389.

²³ *Ibid.*, 389.

that to Morier the most scandalous thing about the Wartburg festival was its revolutionary character. Thus, the only British envoy in Germany who considered the nationalist sentiment expressed at the Wartburg festival to be significant was the Prussian envoy, suggesting that the revolutionary tendencies of the festival on a state level were considered most important in this case.

Intriguingly, the envoy in Berlin seemed to be even more worried about the festival's participants, considering them "of particularly evil omen, as indicating the spirit, which reigns to a considerable extent in the German universities..."²⁴ Of course it is nothing new to say that students were heavily represented at the festival, but it is important to note just how much emphasis the envoys placed on this fact. The envoy at Dresden was also particularly concerned about the makeup of the attendees at the festival:

"Looking at this simply as an act of young men of exalted imaginations, it ought not perhaps excite the indignation and alarm which I plainly see it has. But as no less than 30 professors are said to be concerned with the students, and as the Assembly was attended by persons coming from a great distance, one would be inclined to suppose, that what took place at the Wartburg was a preconcerted measure, and on that account as well as in consideration of the influence which these men with such principles may in time acquire over the people thro' their different vocations in life, this transaction may merit the serious attention of the German States."²⁵

It thus appears that, at least to those observing the expression of revolutionary ideas at the Wartburg, it was not so much the radical events that took place there but the participants in the events that shocked the envoys. They seem to have been well aware that although only a small segment of the population was involved, it was a very important segment capable of disseminating revolutionary ideas more broadly.

²⁴ Ibid., 77.

²⁵ Ibid., 389.

Another event which aroused the attention of some of the British envoys was the murder of August von Kotzebue. Kotzebue was a reactionary author whose books may have been burned at the Wartburg festival. He was killed by Karl Ludwig Sand, a University of Jena student, in March 1819. The murder is typically known for giving the immediate pretext for the repressive Karlsbad Decrees.²⁶ One of the most important things to come out of the Kotzebue murder in the reports of the British envoys was a discussion questioning the extent of a revolutionary ‘conspiracy.’ Of the envoys who did mention the murder, the Saxon envoy took the most relaxed view of the event. He understood it as a “mere act of a madman, and unconnected with any plot of conspirators to disturb the public peace of Germany.”²⁷ In the same report, the envoy was inclined to discuss a general spirit of reform existing in the northern states, and that among those with this spirit there were “no doubt men of desperate fortunes, who looking to the success of their compeers in the french [sic] revolution would adopt the same nefarious means for the furtherance of their views...But fortunately the number of these men is small, they are well known.”²⁸ To put it simply, Sand was the most extreme expression of the extreme wing of a generally modest reform party. The Saxon envoy thus perceived a revolutionary movement with a limited membership.

The envoys to Prussia and Frankfurt considered the movement to be more widespread. To the Prussian envoy, Sand may have represented a “single bloody fanatic,” but he was more inclined to speculate on the possibility of a conspiracy existing at the

²⁶ Clark, “Germany, 1815-1848: Restoration or Pre-March?” 53.

²⁷ *British Envoys, Vol. I*, 402.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

University of Jena. Indeed, the effect of the assassination of Kotzebue was to “set revolutionary feelings in motion”²⁹ among the student population and others, a population already inspired by the “ideas of universal German patriotism.”³⁰ Thus, the cause and effect of the Kotzebue murder were much more serious than the Saxon envoy considered them. The Frankfurt envoy as well considered the murder to have a serious effect. When reporting in 1820 on the execution of Sand in Frankfurt, the envoy noticed the crowd’s lamentation, and considered this evidence of “the continuance of a fanaticism which the tranquility of the Country would have led one to think extinct.”³¹

Though it may not have been seriously considered in most of the capitals of ‘Third Germany,’ the leaders of the two most powerful German states considered the Kotzebue murder a serious matter. The envoy to Vienna noted that Prince Metternich was of the opinion that the “whole of Germany” would soon undergo a revolution if nothing was done.³² Accordingly, the representatives of the various German states met at Karlsbad in October 1819 to implement measures for the repression of the *Burschenschaften* (student nationalist fraternities) and of revolutionary opinions in newspapers and the universities. Since they were so effective, the decade following the Karlsbad Decrees is generally considered a quiet time for German nationalist and revolutionary movements. James Sheehan wrote about the loss of energy in the *Burschenschaften* and the breakup of many of the national movements of the immediate post war years, such as Father Jahn’s famous *Turnbewegung*. He noted, however, that

²⁹ Ibid., 92.

³⁰ Ibid., 91.

³¹ Ibid., 24.

³² Ibid., 487.

political discussion about democratic and nationalist ideals continued informally, in coffee shops and the like. Though the social makeup of the political population had not changed much since the late eighteenth century, the ideas silenced from the public sphere by the Karlsbad Decrees continued to be discussed in private.³³ An interesting twist in this perception comes from the envoy reports. These demonstrate that while the repression of the German governments was effective in keeping order, the social composition of the general movement for reform was still a matter of great concern for the envoys themselves, and seems to have significantly influenced the way the German governments dealt with this issue.

In April of 1821, George H. Rose, British envoy to Prussia, wrote anxiously about the current state of domestic affairs: “Everything is quiet here at present; but it would be idle to hope, that the causes of mischief, which have been at work here for years past, are in suspense at this moment of revolutionary infection.”³⁴ Rose was correct; things were indeed quieting down in Prussia. The government, which he had previously decried for being too timid to pursue revolutionaries, was gradually stepping up its counter-revolutionary activity. Compared with his earlier reports, which were filled with discussions of revolutionary activity and the resulting danger to the Prussian state, Rose’s and his successor’s reports of the 1820s were largely bereft of such information.

There was, however, a notable exception. Rose’s successor the Earl of Clanwilliam did note as late as 1824 the continued existence of *Burschenschaften*, which had been officially banned by the Karlsbad Decrees. Both he and the Bavarian envoy

³³ Sheehan, *German History*, 441-450.

³⁴ *British Envoys, Vol. I*, 159.

discussed the fact that around 35 students and professors were arrested in Bavaria in March 1824 for being members of the organization.³⁵ This acknowledgement of their continued existence corroborates what historians have long argued about the nationalist fraternities, that they continued to exist underground after the Karlsbad Decrees.³⁶ It is thus possible to simply say that nationalist sentiment was still present in the quiet 1820s.

The envoys' recognition of the *Burschenschaften* is important for three reasons. First, the *Burschenschaften* may not have been relevant only to their members. If people were still being arrested for membership in 1824, it would have brought the continuing existence of the organization into the public eye, allowing the nationalist ideas of the organization to have at least a limited impact on the general public. Second, the geographical spread of the organization is important. Judging from the British envoy in Bavaria, this appears to be the first time the Bavarian government took serious notice of the *Burschenschaften*.³⁷ It therefore appears that the organization spread geographically during this period of repression, rather than lying dormant inside a few universities. Thus the envoy reports on *Burschenschaften* not only demonstrated that nationalist sentiment continued underground, they also indicate a continuous spread of nationalist ideas.

Finally, the Earl of Clanwilliam's reaction to the *Burschenschaften* movement emphasizes a third important point about the movement. The Earl was particularly concerned with the makeup of the movement and not just its revolutionary character. Instead of thinking it harmless for involving a small number of persons, he considered it more harmful for its composition, not unlike the Saxon envoy who previously warned of

³⁵ Ibid., 202-203, 286-289

³⁶ Clark, "Germany, 1815-1848: Restoration or Pre-March?" 53.

³⁷ *British Envoys, Vol. I*, 286-289.

the potential for university students to spread their ideas in influential circles. Though Clanwilliam and George Rose had often mentioned *Bruschenschaften* to the foreign office, neither described the organizations in detail until October 1824, five years after the Karlsbad Decrees had outlawed the organizations. The Earl's description involved information about the goals of the organization, and significantly he did not know if these goals were nationalist or not: "Revolution, in one way or other, is their object, and at one time it assumed the shape of a wish to reunite the separated parts of old Germany under one head."³⁸ In this dispatch, however, the envoy devoted considerable space to describing three particular members of the movement who had been caught by the government, as if he was trying to give the foreign office an idea of the kinds of men involved in the organization.

The Earl wrote about three specific leaders of the so called 'Union.' One, a man named von Döring, was captured and tried to avoid betraying his comrades by stabbing himself in the throat. Though he lived, he had told his captors nothing. Another, named Salomon, was a miller who had housed Karl Sand on his way to murder von Kotzebue. Finally, the envoy mentioned that military officers were being implicated, among them one Major Fehrentheil. From the descriptions of these three men, it was clear that the *Burschenschaft* consisted of a broad network of extremely dedicated participants stretching even into the high ranks of the army. Indeed, it had stretched beyond the grounds of universities. This seems to be the main message of the envoy's dispatch, since he agreed with the Minister of the Interior that "after the failure of three successive revolutions, the danger to be apprehended from the intrigues of these societies is – to say

³⁸Ibid., 202.

the least – considerably diminished.”³⁹ He doubted, however, that the government would ever be able to completely destroy the organization. In short, the envoy paid the *Burschenschaften* attention in 1824 not because they were posed to overthrow the Prussian or Bavarian government at any moment, but rather because they were a slowly spreading society with committed members who were often persons of importance.

Despite the continued development of the *Burschenschaften*, it seems that desire for revolution in individual states was more prominent in the 1820s. In June of 1821, the Prussian government arrested a Royal Forester named von Hedemann who had planned to arm the peasants around Danzig and demand a constitution from the king. George Rose did not discuss the plot at considerable length, and he noted the lack of importance attached to the event by the Prussian government.⁴⁰ Six years later, a similar but less developed plot was uncovered by the Württemberg government. There a man named Widemann had planned to arm peasants and overthrow the king to establish a republic.⁴¹ Of course these two incidents cannot be taken as a representative sample for the whole German Confederation. Nonetheless, their prominence in the writings of the British envoys at a time when little other revolutionary activity was taking place is intriguing. First of all, it seems as if this era of repression forced reform minded individuals to resort to revolutionary activity of a somewhat older style: fomenting peasant rebellion. However, this does not necessarily mean that revolutionary sentiment was spreading to the peasants, as it seems von Hedemann appealed to particular peasant concerns, like

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁴⁰ *British Envoys Vol. I*, 162-165.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 374-375.

regaining rights of pasturage, to motivate them.⁴² He also promised them freedom from taxes, something sure to motivate anyone gullible enough to believe it.⁴³ Additionally, neither von Hedemann nor Widemann appear to have envisioned a German-wide peasant uprising. Though it is possible they held German nationalist ambitions, their plans bespeak the prominence of individual state revolutionary sentiment in their minds.

More surprising than this lack of national ambition was the utter disinterest the envoys showed in reporting on the failed uprisings, particularly in the case of the von Hedemann Conspiracy. The leaders of the plot included two cavalry officers, and the conspirators, had they been able to implement their plan, may have mobilized as many as six hundred peasants, laborers, and discharged soldiers. The hundreds of participants were to storm the militia arsenal at Prussian Stargard, about 30 miles from Danzig, where there would have evidently been little resistance. From there, their plan was to march on Berlin with the 1200 muskets from the armory and demand a constitution, probably one resembling the liberal Cádiz Constitution of Spain. Although it seems meetings of the conspiracy were infiltrated by royal agents, had it not been for the last minute actions of the chief local magistrate, based in part on discovery of a broadly circulated pamphlet by von Hedemann himself, the planned rebellion would have probably begun.⁴⁴ Although counterfactual historical speculation is impossible to defend with certainty, it is imaginable that such a revolt would have garnered sympathy among the significant segment of the Prussian and German populations holding revolutionary views at this

⁴² Ibid., 163.

⁴³ Ludmilla Assing, *Briefwechsel zwischen Varnhagen von Ense und Oelsner, Erste Band*, (Stuttgart, 1865), 266.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 162-165. Assing, *Briefwechsel*, 266. Rudolf Gottschall, "Neue Tagebuchblätter Varnhagens." Review of *Blätter aus der Preußische Geschichte von K.A. Varnhagen von Ense* by Karl August Varnhagen von Ense. *Blätter für Literarische Unterhaltung*, No. 41 (October, 1868): 644.

time. One thing is thus clear: the von Hedemann Conspiracy could very easily have been a serious uprising. The question therefore remains: why the lack of interest from the British envoy, George Rose? Although he wrote two reports to London on the subject, he took pains to reassure the Foreign Secretary that what had occurred was no cause for concern.

Of course since it was stopped, von Hedemann's planned uprising could be considered unimportant. However when one looks at the significant number of reports describing the *Burschenschaften*, a secret organization that, though much larger than von Hedemann's, never actually caused an uprising either, it seems this could not be the reason for Rose's lack of interest. Another possible reason could be the censorship so recently enacted through the Karlsbad Decrees which prevented public discussion of the event. Though George Rose originally thought the conspiracy might be reported in "false, and exaggerated colors,"⁴⁵ it appears that he was incorrect. A well known biographer Karl August Varnhagen von Ense wrote in his diary about the noticeable lack of coverage of the event and its aftermath in newspapers and was impressed by the effectiveness of the newly implemented censorship. With a lack of public discussion of the event, George Rose would have had no public reaction to report about.

The most likely reason for Rose's relative silence on the event, however, is again related to its social composition. Precisely because he viewed it as a variety of old fashioned unrest, that is, peasant rebellion, Rose did not consider the event to be very important. He noted with a hint of condescension the above-mentioned fact that von Hedemann had led the peasants to believe they would regain their rights of pasturage in a

⁴⁵ *British Envoys Vol. I*, 165.

revolution. Furthermore, he explained away the motivation for the uprising as partially a consequence of the “destructive spirit effervescing every where thro’ Europe,” but also because of “the effects of the stagnation of commerce particularly felt in the neighbourhood of Dantzick as affecting the export both of corn, and timber.”⁴⁶ The envoy described von Hedemann as “a man of wild, and exaggerated ideas & deeply imbued with revolutionary principles.”⁴⁷ In other words, the envoy viewed this potentially serious uprising, stopped only at the eleventh hour, as little more than a peasant rebellion, arising from rural poverty, and led by a madman. Though on the surface it certainly seems like it posed far more immediate danger to the peace of the country, because it consisted mainly of peasants and laborers, the von Hedemann conspiracy received far less attention from Rose than the earlier Wartburg Festival or the *Burschenschaften*, which implicated persons of a higher social order. This seems to be more evidence that the British envoys thought revolutionary activities by the educated middle classes to be more dangerous.

The relative tranquility of the 1820s was shattered when a major outbreak of revolutionary activity took place in 1830. In several states across Germany, revolutions calling for liberal constitutional reforms became a prominent topic of discussion for the British and American envoys. Historians have traditionally viewed 1830 as a turning point marking the acceleration of the spread of ideas about political participation and ideological opposition to the restoration. James Sheehan wrote of a “rising wave of organized political action between the revolutions of 1830 and 1848.”⁴⁸ As we have seen, this wave had already existed in a small form when news of the July revolution in Paris

⁴⁶ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Sheehan, *German History*, 589.

set off revolutionary activity across Germany in 1830, and Sheehan is correct to emphasize the great development of this wave throughout the 1830s and 1840s. However, especially as regards the spread of nation-thinking, it is important not to overstate the intensity of the politicization of the German public between 1830 and 1848. As Jonathan Sperber pointed out, it is significant that the major nationalist festival of the period between the revolutions, the Hambach festival, took place where it did. It happened in the southern Rhineland, because that was an area where the oral tradition and memory of the French Revolution was combined with intellectual liberalism by the bourgeoisie. In other words, though a sign of the further spread of national ideas, the Hambach festival could not have taken place just anywhere in Germany.⁴⁹ The reports from British and American diplomats corroborate this nuanced viewpoint. The desire for national revolution continued to spread both geographically and socially to an ever broader segment of the population during this time, yet this was by no means total, and it seems individual Germans held these beliefs with varying degrees of intensity.

The first thing one notices from reading the reports about the unrest of the early 1830s is that many of the disturbances were not perceived as political at all. The envoy to Frankfurt noted in September of 1830 that food riots were taking place in Hesse-Kassel and Mainz. Of course such incidents could have easily escalated to become more serious, but of these two revolts only the one in Hesse-Kassel had any significant affect.⁵⁰ More important was a disturbance in Frankfurt itself. In November 1831, the envoy described two days of unrest that had taken place at the end of October. Rather than attributing it to

⁴⁹ Sperber, Jonathan. "Echoes of the French Revolution in the Rhineland, 1830-1849." *Central European History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, *The French Revolution in Germany and Austria* (June 1989): 200-217.

⁵⁰ Carr, *A History of Germany*, 18.

revolutionary desires among the participants, the envoy opined that the riots “arose suddenly from...incidental circumstances.”⁵¹ The envoy to Prussia also noted the lack of political motivation for disturbances in his capital, blaming the riots of 16 September 1830 on the overbearing conduct of the police.⁵² Even the envoy in Dresden, the scene of some of the most revolutionary activity in Germany in 1830, chose to convey two possible motivations for the September unrest. He was certain that high municipal taxes played a role, but also reported the opinion of a Saxon General who insisted that the violence was not political in nature, but rather part of “the innate love of Disorder always to be found amongst the lowest Classes.”⁵³ From these reports it seems as if the quiet 1820s had affected how the envoys perceived revolutionary action. Indeed, none of the men who had been envoys during the more turbulent years before 1819 were in the same post by 1830. Could there have been an actual reduction in revolutionary sentiment?

Though several reports from the envoys described a lack of political motivation for disturbances, it is necessary to note that, of course, the motivation for outbursts of violence does not necessarily determine the outcome of such outbursts. Thus, the fighting in Saxony, whatever its root cause, led to the establishment of a constitution in that country in 1831.⁵⁴ In other German states as well 1830 was a tumultuous year, resulting in changes in Brunswick, Hesse-Kassel, and Hanover.⁵⁵ Significantly, aside from the minor disturbances described above, Prussia came through unscathed. One diplomat did go so far as to mention a political motivation for the unrest of 1830, but he did not

⁵¹ *British Envoys, Vol II.*, 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 299 and Carr, *A History of Germany*, 18.

⁵⁵ Carr, *A History of Germany*, 18.

perceive any national thinking. The American Consul in Hamburg, John Cuthbert, actually reported that riots in that city in early 1830 were, though not motivated by ideological or specifically political concerns, a sign of the times. Though apparently spontaneous and motivated mainly by charges of corruption in the tax system, Cuthbert noted that the riots were a sign of a general feeling: “This spirit appears to prevail in every part of Germany and several of the governments have been forced to concede that which they should long since have done of their own free will.” Tellingly, the Hamburg senate felt it necessary to pass a resolution explicitly stating that the riots had “no object or purpose,”⁵⁶ though once the rioting started it was clear that the participants wanted reform. It is not clear which “governments” Cuthbert was referring to, but in any case his and the British reports show that state-based revolutionary sentiment for constitutional change was still prominent in 1830. The envoy reports thus corroborate what Abigail Green wrote, that “outbursts of national feeling” were generally rare in the revolutions of 1830.⁵⁷

Two years later, an explicitly nationalist event took place that shows desire for national unification, though not explicitly expressed in 1830, had not disappeared. The envoys’ reports on the Hambach festival of May 1832 show a perception that nationalist sentiment was prevalent in a larger and more diverse part of the population than previously believed. The festival brought together thousands to the Bavarian Palatinate to agitate for liberal principles and national unity. By the estimate of the British envoy to

⁵⁶ John Cuthbert Report to State Dept., 10 February 1830. National Archives Record Group 59, Publication T-211, Despatches from United States Consular Officials in Hamburg, 1790-1906. (Though the Hamburg riots occurred earlier than other instances of unrest in 1830, indeed taking place before the French July Revolution, Cuthbert’s statement is still applicable)

⁵⁷ Green, *Fatherlands*, 40.

Frankfurt, 20,000 to 30,000 people attended the celebration, an assessment that has been agreed upon by historians.⁵⁸ It appears that most of the envoys were aware of the festival's popularity, but the Württemberg and Frankfurt envoys gave the most complete descriptions. The Frankfurt envoy's report to Viscount Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, described the character of people present at the event: "Of those persons who took a lead at Hambach there was no one remarkable for his station in Society or for property or influence in the Country. Those who did take the lead were chiefly political Traders and Editors of revolutionary Papers..."⁵⁹ The Württemberg envoy noted the influence of these kinds of people for leading the festival, but stressed that the event was "the first great Attempt to bring all Classes together...Persons from Wurtemberg [sic] Bavaria and Baden are flocking to it."⁶⁰ It was this bringing together of various groups that the envoys were interested in the most. As the Frankfurt envoy noted with some concern, prominent liberal leaders from Baden and Hesse-Kassel were not present at the festival, but were known to be closely connected with the events there.⁶¹ The reports on the Hambach festival thus demonstrated that desires for national unification had spread to larger numbers of people of the middle class and potentially peasants and artisans as well. It is intriguing to note how concerned the envoys continued to be about the more elite participants. Even a festival with twenty to thirty thousand people was not as interesting without some representation from someone "remarkable for his station in Society."

⁵⁸ William Carr estimated that about 25,000 people attended the festival. Carr, *A History of Germany*, 20.

⁵⁹ *British Envoys, Vol II.*, 25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

Much more than they had with the earlier Wartburg festival, the British envoys perceived the Hambach festival as a nationalist event. The Frankfurt envoy noted the prevalence of the German tricolor and the nationalist nature of the speeches. He perceived the main goal of this “revolutionary party” to be “the Unity of Germany with republican institutions.”⁶² Like the Wartburg festival, the Hambach festival resulted in calls for repression among many of the leaders of Germany. Prince Metternich considered the festival to mark the moment when they must decide if “the Sovereigns of Germany should descend from their thrones without a struggle, or whether their Authority should be asserted by force.”⁶³

It was about this time that the envoys seem to have begun taking notice of the German liberal movement. In his discussion about the liberal leaders behind the Hambach festival, the Frankfurt envoy noted that in the case of a revolution, the liberal leaders would immediately identify themselves with the nationalists. In Prussia, the envoy talked to a prominent though unnamed liberal about the movement in the north. He described liberal sentiment as “an underground fire, which will one day burst forth, and carry with it the spirit that roused Germany from its lethargy and shame in 1813.” He went on to say that when the opportunity to “burst forth” came about the goal of the Prussian liberals would be to give the King of Prussia “preponderance” over Germany.⁶⁴ Liberalism thus provided a face, and a somewhat legitimate one in the case of the constitutional states, for the national thinking of Germans throughout the Confederation.

⁶² Ibid., 23-26.

⁶³ Ibid., 493.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 158.

The repressive ‘Six Articles’ were passed in the Diet in June of 1832 as a direct response to the Hambach festival. The official British reaction to the events at Hambach and the Six Articles is worth examining because it shows an acknowledgement of the seriousness of the situation and a conviction that the Six Articles would only cause nationalist sentiment to grow in popularity and intensity. The British Foreign Secretary Palmerston wrote that the Hambach festival concerned Britain deeply, and agreed that measures should be taken to prevent a similar event from taking place in the future. He also worried, however, that the Six Articles had gone too far in their repression. He was certain that they would simply cause reform-minded individuals to be more persistent in their agitation:

“It appears...that a strong & general opinion prevails throughout almost all the Constitutional States, that the resolutions of the Diet are an infringement upon their rights, and an attack on their national Independence. Nor is this opinion confined to noisy agitators, declaiming at publick meetings, or acting by means of a licentious press; but in the contrary, as His Majesty’s Government has reason to believe, it is striking a deep root, & is creating serious apprehension & extensive discontent in the minds of all classes, including the most wealthy & the most intelligent.”⁶⁵

Palmerston was particularly concerned with the possibility of French intervention or a German civil war. Most importantly, however, he recognized that there was a widespread movement for revolutionary change. He was concerned that these broadly held feelings could not be held in check for long by repressive measures. The American Consul in Bremen, F.J. Wickelhausen, felt almost the same way, writing that “The liberal and prevailing Ideas, excited by the french revolution of 1830 have taken such deep root, amongst all classes of men, in the different states of Germany, that it will be impossible

⁶⁵ Ibid., 126.

even entirely to suppress them and sooner or later their salutary effects can not fail to show themselves.”⁶⁶

As the 1830s and 1840s passed by, Palmerston and Wickelhausen’s predictions seem to have come true. The storming of the Frankfurt guardhouse in 1833, described above, was one example of revolutionary nationalist feeling thrusting into public view. Indeed since it sought to take over the Diet, it may have been a direct response to the Six Articles. The event is not often discussed by historians, and when it is they describe it as amateurish and bungled from the start. Yet the surprise and dismay of the Frankfurt envoy, Thomas Cartwright, provides an example of how serious the event was perceived to be. Though dramatic, the *Wachensturm* still demonstrated that despite the continuing spread of nationalist sentiment, it was still not strong enough to provoke many people to action. The leaders of the movement are worth examining. Their names were Rauschenplatt, a former university lecturer, Gustav Körner, a lawyer, and Gustaf Bunsen, a doctor. They were thus all members of the educated elite, which is probably one reason why Cartwright was so concerned. Another more unexpected group that took part was a “band of peasants and country people.”⁶⁷ Additionally, Cartwright expressed suspicion that the guards or even the leaders of the town were in on the scheme because of how quickly the two guardhouses fell to the revolutionaries. It thus seems like a slightly more diverse group than merely the educated elite of society took part.

Nevertheless, according to Cartwright the main body of revolutionaries was composed of students from “Würzburg, Heidelberg, and other Univeristies,” a group

⁶⁶ F.J. Wickelhausen Report to State Department, 20 February 1833. National Archives Record Group 59, Publication T-184, Despatches from United States Consular Officials in Bremen, 1794-1906.

⁶⁷ *British Envoys, Vol II*, 44.

whose revolutionary feelings were hardly surprising.⁶⁸ As for the band of peasants, although the recent Hambach festival confirms that revolutionary nationalist ideas may have spread to this group, we cannot know for sure from the evidence if this was the case. Furthermore, though the revolutionaries sounded the tocsin and called the citizens of Frankfurt to arms, the response was apparently negligible and the assailants disbanded when the military was called out. The *Wachensturm* thus brought a wider variety of people to revolutionary action, but the potency of revolutionary nationalism still appears to have been limited in scope.⁶⁹

The reflections of the American ambassador to Prussia, Henry Wheaton, further demonstrate the limited extent of the desire for revolutionary change in the years leading up to the 1848 Revolution. Though he was of course mainly concerned with Prussia, his comments are relevant to all of Germany as well. In June 1840, Wheaton wrote: “The relative importance of the democratic element of the State—the commons—has become vastly augmented with the rapid increase of wealth and population since the peace of 1814-15 and by the wide-spread diffusion of knowledge through the admirable system of elementary and scientific education established by the Prussian Government.”⁷⁰ His use of the term ‘democratic element’ associates this development of the non-noble classes with the development of potential for the spread of democratic ideas. Overall, however, Wheaton was skeptical about the Germans’ ability to fight for democratic institutions, let alone national ones. In 1841, he noted that although public opinion was greatly in favor

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, the US Consul in Frankfurt a.M. wrote in 1838 about seven political criminals being banished to the USA. Three of them were imprisoned for the *Wachensturm* and four were incarcerated for attempting to rescue the three. Ernest Schwendler Report to State Department, 20 November 1838.

⁷⁰ Henry Wheaton Report to State Department, 17 June 1840. National Archives Record Group 59, Publication M-44., Despatches of US Ministers to the German States and Germany.

of the establishment of a representative institution in Prussia, “no sudden and violent popular effort to obtain it is to be looked for. German enthusiasm, though deep seated, is patient and enduring and breaks out only at long intervals, and we must not therefore look for any of those energetic demonstrations such as were manifested by the French and English nations on recent occasions.”⁷¹ One factor that probably contributed to his lack of belief in the possibility of revolution was his experience watching the Archbishop of Cologne affair. In 1837, the Prussian government arrested the Archbishop of Cologne because of his stance on mixed Protestant-Catholic marriages. When the issue was finally settled in 1841, Wheaton opined that had it not been for the cool head of Frederick William IV, the affair might have resulted in a “general conflagration in Germany of which it would be difficult to foresee the final results.”⁷² Catholic and Protestant tensions were still perceived as much stronger than the desire for revolutionary reform. Wheaton had no reason to expect a major outbreak of national revolutionary sentiment only seven years later. He even noted with a hint of disgust as late as February 1847 how well the people received some of the King’s reforms, despite their austerity and limited scope. Thus, in spite of the slow extension of national ideas in the 1830s and 1840s, it remained difficult for some contemporary observers to imagine a revolution taking place.

A final discussion on press censorship will more fully explain Palmerston’s point that repression of already prevalent nationalist sentiment in the 1830s may have had the effect of making it more popular. In the past 25 years, several historians have argued that

⁷¹ Henry Wheaton Report to State Department, 30 March 1841.

⁷² Henry Wheaton Report to State Department, 25 February 1841.

the press is important for the development of nationalism.⁷³ They have argued that the development of newspapers in a general sense was important to the development of nationalist feeling. But it was not the mere fact that newspapers were growing that concerned the British envoys, but rather their political coloring, and the ensuing attempts of the government to censor them. Each state had its own press laws following the Congress of Vienna, but in 1832 the Six Articles required that governments throughout Germany enact a form of press censorship. In 1835, the Prussian Count Bernstorff reported to the King that an essential part of preventing revolution in that state was to allow the free passage of information, but in this regard his words were not heeded.⁷⁴ By 1847, the British envoy in Stuttgart could write about the deleterious effects of the censorship enacted by the Six Articles: “the existing laws...against the expression of public opinion and the operation of the Censorship are ineffectual in preventing the spread of opinions amongst the Masses hostile to arbitrary Government, and which are the most dangerous that they circulate by secret and forbidden channels.”⁷⁵ The events of the next year seem to prove him correct: repression may have served only to help spread the subversive doctrines of nationalism.

⁷³ Benedict Anderson famously argued that “print capitalism” helped people to develop a sense of community by encouraging the development of a standard vernacular language. More specifically, Helmut Walser Smith argued that the growth and spread of newspapers in the first half of the century was a major factor in the development of a sense of German nationhood. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York, 1991) and Smith, “Nation and Nationalism,” 247-250.

⁷⁴ Henry Wheaton Report to State Department, 9 December 1835.

⁷⁵ *British Envoys, Vol II.*, 400.

Conclusion

Abigail Green was correct when she wrote that German nationalist sentiment emerged “spasmodically”⁷⁶ throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, between spasmodic manifestations like the Wartburg and Hambach festivals, the Frankfurt *Wachensturm*, and the Revolution of 1848 there was a continuous development of nationalism. Though revolutionary sentiment was expressed nationally and sub-nationally in various ways between 1817 and 1830, by the mid-1830s it seems that desire for revolution on a national level was more prevalent. During the period following the Congress of Vienna, desire for a united Germany was largely restricted to intellectuals and those associated with universities. Throughout the 1820s, the desire for national unification spread inside the universities, and as time went on students aged and took their political ideas with them outside of these institutions. Thanks in part to the provocation of certain repressive measures, by the 1830s and 1840s national identification became more common among an increasingly diverse segment of the population. Though my argument describes the development and spread of nationalist identity in the years leading up to the Revolution of 1848, I do not mean to suggest that this caused the 1848 Revolution. It was not as if a critical mass of people from various groups desiring national unification was necessary to ignite the revolution, and indeed it seems that in the eyes of some a nationally based revolution seemed impossible. Nevertheless, the reports of the British and American envoys help describe how a broad base of support for a national revolution developed by 1848.

⁷⁶ Green, *Fatherlands*, 5.

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The Aesthetics of Propaganda: Weimar Continuities in Filmic Representations of Frederick the Great, 1933-1945

Four films about Frederick the Great were released between 1933 and 1945: *Der Choral von Leuthen* (1933), *Der alte und der junge König* (1935), *Fridericus* (1937), and *Der große König* (1942). With the exception of *Der Choral von Leuthen*, produced and completed before the *Machtergreifung* but released four days after Hitler became chancellor, these films were made under the close scrutiny of the Nazi leadership. Until very recently, the Frederick the Great films of the National Socialist era have been treated dismissively as part of the well-known body of Nazi propaganda. In his 1983 study, David Welch described the various principles that Goebbels' propaganda ministry emphasized in the Frederick films, including the *Führerprinzip*, the primacy of genius and intuition over reasoned leadership, and the concept that great men make history, with its obvious implications for veneration of Adolf Hitler.⁷⁷ There can be little doubt that the Frederick films were intended as propaganda. Welch's study is, however, incomplete in that it treats the Nazi era films in isolation. There is no investigation of how the Nazi depiction of Frederick fit in with earlier filmic discussions of this pivotal figure in German history. *Der Choral von Leuthen* was the final Weimar era film about the famous eighteenth century king, and few studies make any attempt to analyze the differences between it and the productions from 1935, 1937, and 1942.

A more recent book by Linda Schulte-Sasse does acknowledge that the Frederick films were part of a previously existing German literary, historiographical, and filmic

⁷⁷ David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1983), 147-155.

tradition.⁷⁸ Her book, however, does little to examine how the Nazi era films fit into this tradition, focusing instead on defining a Nazi film aesthetic. Both Schulte-Sasse's and Welch's studies are extremely valuable, but neither examines in depth how the Nazi era Frederick films were a continuation of a preexisting Frederick discourse in film. A more general study of the Weimar era by Lotte Eisner has long been an essential text for film scholars early twentieth century German film. Eisner argues in her book *The Haunted Screen* for continuity between Romantic art and literature and Weimar era film, but sees a significant break in the early thirties as a plain, naturalistic style became the norm and distraction and propaganda films prevailed under the Nazis. In this paper, I will complicate Eisner's arguments as they apply to Frederick films. The first two Frederick films produced under the Nazi regime certainly demonstrate Eisner's aesthetic discontinuity from the Weimar era. *Der Große König*, however, is strikingly similar to the late-Weimar *Choral von Leuthen*, suggesting that director Veit Harlan and the producers incorporated certain Weimar film aesthetic strategies for their propaganda aims. A close analysis of all four films reveals the right wing infatuation with Frederick the Great before and after the *Machtergreifung*, the propaganda aims the Nazis sought to communicate, both through Frederick narratives and by using the filmic medium, and finally the appropriation of Expressionist techniques in Nazi cinema. Even though purely Expressionist films had already largely disappeared from German cinema before 1933,⁷⁹ its aesthetics were one way for propaganda films to communicate their themes.

⁷⁸ Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich, Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 92-93.

⁷⁹ Susan Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 30-31.

Lotte Eisner first published her book in 1952. Along with Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler, The Haunted Screen* is considered one of the founding texts of Weimar film scholarship. In the book, Eisner argues that the 1920s represented the climax of a long-term trend in German art toward the 'demonic.' With the traumatic experience of World War I in their minds, German artists, particularly in film, took to the extreme "the eternal attraction towards all that is obscure and undetermined, towards the kind of brooding speculative reflection called *Grübeleien* which culminated in the apocalyptic doctrine of Expressionism."⁸⁰ Thus, Eisner draws attention to the influence on film of certain aesthetic techniques from painting. Set design and décor, she argues, were influenced by Romantic artists. Certain films even appear to have been directly inspired by the Romantics, as Eisner emphasizes in her discussion of the similarities between Caspar David Friedrich paintings and shots from Fritz Lang's *Destiny* and Henrik Galeen's *Der Student von Prag*.⁸¹ At the center of Eisner's argument is chiaroscuro, the aesthetic technique that draws sharp contrasts between light and dark. This technique was omnipresent in Expressionist films, and is most visible in the frequent use of shadows. Shadows in film, to Eisner, represent "the famous theme of the *Doppelgänger*, the shadow or reflection which takes on an independent existence and turns against its model."⁸²

According to film scholar Thomas Elsaesser, the term Expressionism as used by Eisner has come under criticism for being so broad as to be meaningless. To these critics,

⁸⁰ Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* trans. Roger Greaves (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 9.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 40.

Expressionist cinema is a useless term since it can be applied to anything that departs from strict naturalism, or the attempt to accurately represent reality.⁸³ The term is most useful, however, for ascribing a certain self-reflexivity to films that is apparent, for example, in their use of light and shadow or unrealistic shots. According to Eisner, this tendency in Weimar film, having already lost ground to techniques associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, began to erode completely by the 1930s. With the advent of sound, films became far more expensive to produce. Elsaesser reminds us that they also became much more difficult to distribute to foreign audiences, as translation was no longer as simple as changing the intertitles like it had been for silent films. Eisner argues that the level of expense necessary for the ‘talkies’ became prohibitive for independent producers and ushered in an age of mass production by the four largest German studios: Ufa, Tobis, Terra and Bavaria. After nearly going bankrupt from the production of *Metropolis*, Universum Film AG (Ufa) established itself as the largest film studio in Germany. Because of its wild success, Eisner named the aesthetic techniques the studio and its imitators adopted the Ufa style. Moving away from the chiaroscuro method of the 1920s with its sharp contrasts between black and white, studios adopted a more naturalistic “flat grisaille”⁸⁴ or gray shading, and sought to depict reality in their films.

Eisner mentions the Frederick films specifically, albeit briefly. She argues that historical fiction films were especially subject to the “mawkish perfection of the Ufa style,”⁸⁵ in fact an understandable development considering the charade of accurate

⁸³ Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 27.

⁸⁴ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 329.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

historical depiction upon which such films rely. In addition to criticizing their overly sentimental plots, which interweave gigantic battles with sappy interludes between characters, Eisner disparages the cinematic quality of *Der Große König* and the other Frederick films as failing to avoid “waxwork stiffness.”⁸⁶ While there can be little doubt about the quality of the Frederick films’ stories, my analysis will show that from a purely cinematic point of view the quality of *Der Choral von Leuthen* and *Der Große König* is vastly superior to that of the other two films, and maintains many of the elements that Eisner claimed were tossed out with the advent of the Ufa style. Furthermore, the use of these methods in the two films actually reflects propaganda themes, and the fact that the films are intended as propaganda makes them all the more important to understand, at least from an historian’s point of view. Besides the obvious problems of trying to attribute a ‘national character’ to Germans in general and the German cinema in particular, Eisner’s work struggles in this regard. By dismissing the Frederick films almost out of hand, Eisner misses the important ways in which Nazi era directors coopted certain Expressionist aesthetics for propaganda purposes.

The other essential text for the study of German films of this period remains Siegfried Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Kracauer’s book has become widely known for seeing deeply troubling psychological tendencies in German films after the First World War that seem to foreshadow coming dictatorship, and either willingly or unwillingly lay the groundwork for it. Most famous is Kracauer’s description of *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (1920), in which he sees an inability to question authority figures. At the end of the film, when one discovers that the narrator Francis is in fact insane, Kracauer sees a

⁸⁶ Ibid.

psychological longing for rebellion overcome by the affirmation of authority, represented by Caligari.⁸⁷ Kracauer has been roundly criticized for the teleology of this argument, but other aspects of his book are more useful. Most important for my purposes is his argument that sees the birth of the German cinema in the cauldron of the First World War.⁸⁸ Unlike Eisner's emphasis on aesthetic continuities reaching back to the early nineteenth century, Kracauer's psychological approach focuses on plots and characters. One must also criticize Kracauer for his lack of attention to aesthetics, as other scholars have done.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, the traumatic impact of World War One is blatantly apparent in the plots and characters (in addition to the *mise en scène*) of the first three Frederick films of my analysis. Besides the lack of aesthetic criticism, the main problem with Kracauer's work is thus that he takes the caesura of World War One and looks forward teleologically. When he writes about the four *Weimar* era Frederick films that "the whole series was a thorough attempt to familiarize the masses with the idea of a Führer"⁹⁰ one cannot help but be skeptical. Who was pulling the strings? A more helpful analysis will investigate the Nazi era films and look backward to see the ruptures generated by both the First World War and the Weimar period.

For this approach I am greatly indebted to Anton Kaes and his 2009 book *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*. Kaes argues convincingly that Weimar cinema was profoundly influenced by the First World War. Specifically, cinema served as an artistic outlet for widespread psychological trauma. Thus, rather than seeing

⁸⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film, Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 61-76.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁹ Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, 28-34.

⁹⁰ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 268.

evidence of an authoritarian mindset in *Caligari*, Kaes draws attention to the film's framing device as it relates to contemporary debates about war neurosis. At the time, psychiatrists debated whether to treat shell shock victims as victims or as malingerers. Kaes points to the ambiguities in the narrative about who is insane and who is not, and about who the audience is supposed to believe. He considers this evidence that the film was an outlet for anxieties about the millions of former soldiers with an invisible, taboo, and mysterious wound. While it could be the case that both Kracauer and Kaes are correct about *Caligari*, Kaes' approach is certainly more historical. By looking at what psychological traumas are being worked through on the screen, rather than what tendencies the films portend, Kaes' successful approach yields a better understanding of the importance of Weimar films for German history.

In order to move beyond Weimar and discuss the Nazi era Frederick films, it is first necessary to speculate about what these pictures meant for the Germans viewing them. It appears that although the Frederick legend remained quite strong throughout the Weimar period, criticism of Frederick abounded in both literature and film. *The Life of Frederick the Great* by Heinrich von Treitschke, written in the late nineteenth century, argued for an interpretation of Frederick as a "hero of national rebirth."⁹¹ Writing during and after the unification of Germany in the 1860s, Treitschke and his colleagues of the Borussian School imagined history in the context of a perceived Prussian mission to unify the German nation.⁹² If the history of Germany is simply the history of Prussia writ large, it follows that Frederick's reign, during which Prussia catapulted to prominence in

⁹¹ Jan Herman Brinks, *Paradigms of Political Change—Luther, Frederick II, and Bismarck: The GDR on Its Way to German Unity*, Gordon W. Smith, trans. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 81.

⁹² Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.

Europe, was a time that could be celebrated by all of Germany. This was particularly true in the catastrophic years following World War One.

The conservative historian Gerhard Ritter had a slightly different point of view on Frederick that may not have fit as well with National Socialist perspectives on leadership. His book *Frederick the Great, a Historical Profile* was based on lectures given in 1933 and 1934 and published in 1936. Since the lectures were delivered as Hitler consolidated his power, we may justifiably presume that Ritter could not stray far from the National Socialist line. Indeed, his main point was that while it had its weaknesses, the absolutism practiced by Frederick the Great was largely beneficial to Prussia. Ritter also compared Frederick's preemptive invasion of Saxony in 1756 to Germany's invasion of Belgium in 1914, both of which he considered valid acts of self defense.⁹³ In emphasizing the role of reason in Frederick's statecraft, however, Ritter used the king to make a subtle critique of National Socialism and the frenzied glorification of Frederick by nationalists of the Weimar and Nazi eras.⁹⁴ Rejecting the Nietzschean belief coopted by the Nazis that reason and heroism are incompatible, Ritter emphasized that Frederick's example showed "rational thought does not necessarily have to mean debilitating criticism and skeptical equivocation."⁹⁵ The king's will to act was in fact strengthened by reason, rather than the

⁹³ Gerhard Ritter. *Frederick the Great, A Historical Profile*, Peter Paret, trans. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 105.

⁹⁴ Walter Dorn, review of *Frederick the Great, A Historical Profile*, by Gerhard Ritter. *American Historical Review* LIX, no. 4, (1954), 1006. Quoted in Peter Paret's introduction to the 1968 edition of *Frederick the Great, A Historical Profile*.

⁹⁵ Ritter, *Frederick the Great*, 74.

“intuition” persistently on display in the Frederick films, when he defies the pleas of his subordinates for peace.⁹⁶

Stronger criticism came from one of the co-founders of the German Communist Party, Franz Mehring. No admirer of Frederick, Mehring strictly denied the name ‘great’ to Frederick II in his works on the history of the German workers movement and insisted that he should be no object of veneration for later generations of Germans.⁹⁷ Mehring’s criticism of Frederick falls neatly within a Marxist dialectical view of history. While Frederick II’s father, Frederick William I, attempted to wrest power from the Junker aristocracy, Frederick II increased their power. Frederick William had attempted to centralize the state, whereas Frederick had maintained and even reinstated certain feudal institutions. Frederick could not even be considered an enlightened despot, since in all important areas he countermanded the achievements of his father, who had brought Prussia “a historical advance over the feudal system of the middle ages.”⁹⁸ In this regard, Frederick II acted against the progression of dialectical history and must be considered, according to Mehring, “historically backward” by any Marxist student of history, rather than a great king.⁹⁹

Probably the most direct attack on the Frederick legend was a book by the architect and city planner Werner Hegemann. His critique of Frederick published in 1924, based on a fictional conversation between intellectuals, sharply criticized Frederick’s military impetuosity and his effect on subsequent German history. According to

⁹⁶ Welch, *Propaganda*, 147.

⁹⁷ Brinks, *Paradigms of Political Change*, 72.

⁹⁸ Franz Wilhelm Mehring, *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 5, Zur deutschen Geschichte bis zur Zeit der Französischen Revolution*, 421. Quoted in Brinks, 82.

⁹⁹ Franz Wilhelm Mehring, *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 9, Die Lessing-Legende*, 109. Quoted in Brinks, 82.

Hegemann, Frederick's obsession with attacking rather than maneuvering carefully in the proper eighteenth century fashion actually prolonged the Seven Years War unnecessarily. Even worse, Hegemann argued that Frederick destroyed the possibility of *Grossdeutschland* by laying the seeds for perennial conflict between Prussia and Austria. Though he was critical of *Kleindeutsch* enthusiasts, Hegemann also denounced aggressive pan-Germanism which he claimed only resulted in senseless bloodshed.¹⁰⁰ Professional historians denounced Hegemann's work for taking liberties with his sources, but some, including Veit Valentin, lauded the attempt to reevaluate the reign of the famous Prussian king.¹⁰¹ Even though Hegemann received some support, Kracauer notes that the architect's argument denouncing the glorification of Frederick as a "world tragedy"¹⁰² never caught on in the mainstream.¹⁰³

A discourse about Frederick II existed on the silver screen as well. As mentioned above, four films released before 1933 focused on Frederick: the four part *Fridericus Rex* (1922-1923), the two part *Der alte Fritz* (1928), *Das Flötenkonzert von Sanssouci* (1930), and *Barbarina: die Tänzerin von Sanssouci* (1932). Although copies of these films are extremely difficult to come by, historian Katherine Roper has written an article synthesizing reviews and articles about the films and highlighting the political controversies surrounding the releases of each. With the exception of *Der alte Fritz*, all of the films were very similar and were seen as committing unquestioned glorification of

¹⁰⁰ Werner Hegemann, *Frederick the Great*. Winifred Ray, trans., (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1929), 249

¹⁰¹ Katherine Roper, "Fridericus Films in Weimar Society: Potsdamismus in a Democracy," *German Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Oct. 2003): 501.

¹⁰² Hegemann, *Frederick the Great*, Foreword.

¹⁰³ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 117.

Frederick II and yearning for restoration of the monarchy. As Siegfried Kracauer wrote, the Frederick movies inspired enthusiasm for an imaginary historical king, thus prompting enthusiasm for actual leaders.¹⁰⁴ The left wing press denounced most of the films for contributing to the dominant national memory of the king, seeing the same implications as Kracauer.¹⁰⁵ Some even demonstrated against *Flötenkonzert*, calling for a ban on the same grounds as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the American made version of Remarque's novel that was banned due to Nazi agitation.¹⁰⁶ *Der alte Fritz*, influenced by *Neue Sachlichkeit* trends, was more nuanced than the other films, showing Frederick's harsh treatment of his soldiers and courtiers and his dithering about producing an heir. According to Roper, reviewers were not quite sure what to make of the film's political stance, but one author was certain the movie was "kein Hurra-Film."¹⁰⁷ For the most part, however, *Der Choral von Leuthen* and the later three propaganda films had a well established tradition to draw upon.

The similarities between the Frederick productions extend beyond their political message. In fact, the Weimar films and the Nazi era films, with the exception of *Der alte und der junge König*, drew extensively from the *Fridericus-Trilogie*, a novel by Walter von Molo published in 1918. Several of the films focus either in whole or in part on Frederick during the Seven Years War. Furthermore, almost all of the Frederick movies employed the same actor, Otto Gebühr, to play the role of Frederick. He was the perfect

¹⁰⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, "Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies" in *German Essays on Film* eds. Richard W. McCormick and Alison Guenther-Pal (New York and London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2004), 105.

¹⁰⁵ Roper, "Fridericus Films," 497.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 505.

¹⁰⁷ "Der alte Fritz," *Kreuz-Zeitung*, Abendausgabe, January 4, 1928. Cited in Roper, "Fridericus Films," 501.

fit for the role, bearing an uncanny resemblance to famous portraits of Frederick. There was even a popular joke that the actor would entitle his memoirs “How I Won the Seven Years War.”¹⁰⁸ When observing the massive output of similar Frederick movies in a twenty year period, one immediately wonders why so many were made in such a short time. Of course there must have been a perception that the market would support such films. With the exception of *Der Große König*, a ‘*Staatsauftragsfilm*’ directly financed by the Nazi state, the Frederick films were all privately funded. As Katherine Roper points out, large groups of people wanted to see films about Frederick, though she refuses to speculate about whether this indicated a desire for a real life *Führer*, as Kracauer would suggest, or whether it simply meant that people sought entertainment that lined up with their political views.

Though the National Socialist era films were still intended to be financially successful, there was not a free market for films under the Nazis.¹⁰⁹ Film artists, production, and distribution, among other matters, were supervised by the Nazi-created *Reichsfilmkammer*, and Joseph Goebbels regularly interfered with film production, both officially and unofficially. Furthermore, in order to receive a loan from the Film Credit Bank for production, a studio had to show that its proposed project would make a profit. A potential film that had any risk of not passing the censors would have trouble receiving funds from this new institution, a concern that grew after censorship restrictions were greatly increased in February 1934. Finally, the Nazis introduced yet another financial incentive for film companies to toe the party line when they modified the film rating

¹⁰⁸ Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, 107.

¹⁰⁹ For the information in this paragraph I am largely indebted to Susan Tegel’s chapter on “The German Film Industry, 1933-1945” in *Nazis and the Cinema* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 37-48.

system that had existed under the Weimar Republic. By introducing classifications such as “politically valuable” and “artistically valuable,” and providing tax breaks for the films receiving those ratings, studios were encouraged to produce films in line with Nazi ideology. Furthermore, a film which earned no rating at all could only be shown if the producers applied for permission. The ratings system thus provided an important carrot to complement the censor’s stick. Of the Nazi era Frederick films, *Fridericus* received the humblest rating, only earning the classification “politically valuable.” *Der alte und der junge König* did slightly better, receiving a “politically and artistically especially valuable” rating. *Der große König*, as one would expect from a state-funded film, received almost every classification available, including the then esteemed “Film of the Nation” rating.

Besides their topic, one similarity unites all four of the Frederick films regardless of the political influences on their production: their genre, historical drama. As film scholar Pierre Sorlin wrote, history as used in film “is no more than a useful device to speak of the present time.”¹¹⁰ An historical episode playing out on screen gave to the story a “real-life” quality because films allow for the creation of fantasy among audience members. Since one could easily believe that the situation on the silver screen had actually happened, the “ideological underpinnings” of historical fiction could “pass unquestioned into popular culture.”¹¹¹ In other words, it is not especially problematic to read allegory or allusion to the present into historical films, for they are perfectly suited for propaganda purposes. The nature of film itself also had some advantages for

¹¹⁰ Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1980). Quoted in Leger Grindon, *Shadows on the Past: Studies in Historical Fiction Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 1.

¹¹¹ Grindon, *Shadows on the Past*, 2.

conveying a National Socialist ideological message. A Nazi ethos valuing emotional responses to the world fit well with film, according to historian Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien: "The underlying principles of classical cinema, identification with characters and stars, emotional attachment and affective involvement in narrative outcomes, and the ability to transform reality through a sense of magic and make-believe all contributed to the enchantment of reality essential to the success of National Socialism."¹¹² The director of *Der Große König*, Veit Harlan, was aware of this power, proclaiming his intention to "conquer the hearts of man" when the film was released.¹¹³

Der Choral von Leuthen

Der Choral von Leuthen was shown for the first time in Stuttgart on February 3, 1933, just four days after Hitler was sworn in as chancellor, and had its official premiere in Berlin two days after the Reichstag elections of March 5. Very little scholarly discussion of the film exists, largely because of the lack of critical material generated at the time. Katherine Roper dedicates a few paragraphs to *Leuthen*, but acknowledges the lack of sources to indicate how the film was received, concluding that the film heralded an age when open questioning of Frederick's legacy was no longer possible.¹¹⁴ Though the lack of information on reception is regrettable, we can at least try to 'read' the film closely. Kracauer mentions *Leuthen* briefly in his book, but as usual restricts himself to analysis of the narrative, lumping it in with other preceding and subsequent Frederick

¹¹² Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 4.

¹¹³ Veit Harlan, "History and Film," article released upon the premiere of *Der große König* and quoted in full in Rolf Giesen, *Nazi Propaganda Films, A History and Filmography* (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003), 147-148.

¹¹⁴ Roper, "Fridericus Films," 507-508.

films and paying no attention to the context of its release.¹¹⁵ The context is extremely important, for the Nazi leadership had no direct influence on the film's production as they would on the later Frederick films. Though the film was not made under the Nazi regime, it was produced in a climate of political turmoil and polarization, and can still be considered a kind of propaganda. This final Frederick film of the Weimar era seems to be making the case for the benefits of a strong leader, as both Roper and Kracauer have noted. More interestingly, however, the film appropriates certain Expressionist film techniques, in addition to the narrative, to make this point.

Leuthen opens in a peculiar way that draws the viewer's attention to Frederick II. In a film just shy of 90 minutes, Frederick does not appear until 16 minutes into the movie, and he does not even speak for another 11 minutes. The effect, particularly of the gap between appearance and speech, is to make the viewer anxious for Frederick's presence in the story. Otto Gebühr is the star, after all, and his complete silence for the first third of the film is deafening. This aspect of the film alone could suffice as proof of its propagandistic intent—the viewer is anxious for Frederick's presence, just as Nazis and their sympathizers were anxious for Hitler's ascendance to power. When Frederick does show up, he is accompanied by order and marching music. Upon his first appearance, Frederick crests a hill and is shown atop his white horse from a low angle, making him appear powerful and larger than life. He encounters a large mass of soldiers wandering aimlessly across the screen retreating from the 1757 Battle of Breslau. Cavalry, artillery, and infantry troops indeterminately mixed together form the mass, and a wide shot from a high angle creates the illusion that they spread endlessly toward the horizon. As soon as Frederick appears, however, he merely mutters a few inaudible

¹¹⁵ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 266-269.

orders, marching music begins, and the mass somehow crystallizes into an orderly marching column. This scene, shot with hundreds of extras and introducing the main character of the film, was no doubt meant to be one of the most memorable of the movie. It seems likely that Frederick's ability to turn a disorganized mass into an orderly body was a means of critiquing the Weimar Republic and showing the ability of a strong leader to make a nation work as one. Never mind the fact that real eighteenth century soldiers, in the absence of a leader, would probably have dispersed rapidly in all directions—the soldiers in *Leuthen* cheer Frederick's arrival relentlessly.

This juxtaposition of disorderly mob with ordered unit is a theme running throughout the film. At the end of the movie, with Prussian victory in the Battle of Leuthen, the army marches on. This time, however, their step appears relaxed and their alignment and spacing not as precise. Significantly, marching music is absent from this scene. Instead, the soldiers sing together the well known hymn "Nun danket alle Gott." Now that victory has been achieved, Frederick's soldiers are allowed to slowly transform back into a nebulous mass. The relaxed marching column becomes another intermixed group of soldiers, but this time they walk straight toward the camera. The final scene intercuts this with images of Frederick riding his horse between two rather disorderly rows of soldiers, doffing his cap with his walking stick. Frederick has led the army to victory, and it is implied that they can now go on with their lives. It is not important that the actual Seven Years War had hardly begun at the conclusion of the Battle of Leuthen. Rather, the film reinforces that order and leadership are necessary for victory, and represents this as an end in itself.

For a film so sympathetic to Frederick's relentless pursuit of war against the advice of all of his generals, *Der Choral von Leuthen* is notable for its critical reflection upon the horrors of battle. One could almost describe *Leuthen* as a shell shock film like the other Weimar movies Anton Kaes describes. The opening sequence includes a slow tracking shot through a Prussian army camp. Wounded and otherwise haggard men from the defeat in the Battle of Breslau lie about on the ground, and several voices cry out "Hunger!" A common experience for Germans who had lived through the First World War, hunger's presence in the opening of the film would certainly have inspired parallels in the minds of the audience with the difficult months of 1918. Perhaps this was meant to be instructive, as the text introducing the film makes clear that Frederick was absent at Breslau. Yet the horrors of war arise again in the final battle scene. Most of the fighting actually takes place within a cemetery, reminding the viewer of the violence of battle and the presence of death. At the end of the battle, a soldier dies in his comrade's arms from a stomach wound, and the expression on his face is remarkably similar to that of Adolf Klein's character in Georg Jacoby's *Toward the Light* that Anton Kaes analyzes in the beginning of *Shell Shock Cinema*. His mouth agape, the soldier stares blankly ahead before dying. He seems to remind the viewer of the traumatic nature of war. Though the Prussians win the battle, there can be no confusion about the bloody and unpleasant business necessary to achieve victory. The effect is accentuated after the battle sequence with two long stationary shots focusing on crosses in the graveyard accompanied by trumpet music that reminds one of a military funeral. *Der Choral von Leuthen* may not belong in the ranks of anti-war Weimar films, but it certainly does not present war one dimensionally. Instead, war is an ugly activity that can only succeed under the guidance

of a great leader. It seems that the battle scenes are meant to draw attention to the sacrifices made by ordinary people in wartime, and to highlight the importance of leadership in translating sacrifice into victory.

The most overlooked aspects of *Der Choral von Leuthen* remain the aesthetic strategies used in the film. One significant scene at the beginning shows Hans, a cavalry officer, arriving in his lover Charlotte's room and collapsing on the floor. Charlotte revives him, and the two aristocrats dine on a sumptuous meal while the grubby soldiers outside, juxtaposed with clever cross-cutting, inhale their gruel. Knowing the Austrians are coming, Hans gets up and looks out the window before turning to leave, at which point the pair decide to get married. The prominence of the love story in *Leuthen*, in addition to the lack of screen time given to Frederick, leads Katherine Roper to describe it as an entertainment film. But close attention to this particular love scene justifies viewing the movie as propaganda. According to Lotte Eisner, mirrors were a prominent feature in Expressionist film, leading her to describe Weimar cinema as a "world of shadows and mirrors."¹¹⁶ Mirrors create a double, both literally and figuratively reflecting different parts of a person. In this scene with Charlotte and Hans, a mirror in the background reflects the characters when they are fulfilling their normative gender roles, reinforcing their duties as man and woman. When Hans collapses on the floor and Charlotte rushes to his aid, her lower half is clearly reflected in the mirror behind her. Hans quickly recovers, but while Charlotte is performing her domestic responsibility to tend to a soldier in distress, the mirror's surface accentuates her actions. The mirror reflects Hans' legs as well when he finishes his meal and returns to duty by looking out the window to check for approaching Austrians. His constructed masculine role as

¹¹⁶ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 129-150.

soldier/protector thus shines on the surface of the mirror. In this way *Leuthen* deliberately calls attention to the proper places of both men and women in a manner consistent with propaganda rather than entertainment, and does so with the incorporation of Expressionist film techniques.

Chiaroscuro, one of the most important Expressionist film techniques according to Lotte Eisner, is also present in *Leuthen*, albeit rather intermittently. For the most part, little contrast of dark and light appears in the film, but in Frederick's first speaking scene, the shadows on his face during a prominent close up highlight the importance of his words. As Frederick discusses the recent defeat at Breslau with his Generals, he is confronted with suggestions to make peace with his enemies. A common theme in the Frederick films, noted by several scholars,¹¹⁷ is his refusal to make peace when confronted with overwhelming odds, highlighting the genius and vision of his leadership. The scene in *Leuthen* does just that, but the techniques used to make this point are especially notable. When a general informs Frederick that the army no longer supports him, the king becomes very angry. He approaches the camera directly and snarls "Ich verbiete Ihnen meine Soldaten zu beschimpfen!" His face, the right half of it obscured by shadow, takes up almost the entire frame while delivering the line. This arresting close-up and contrast serve momentarily to deconstruct the illusion created on the screen, and draws one's attention to the meaning of the words rather than their place in the narrative. One cannot help but see a parallel between Frederick's scolding and the *Dolchstoßlegende*. Though he does not indicate who actually holds responsibility for the defeat, as conservatives in Weimar and Nazi Germany did, Frederick's statement appears to have been a message for contemporary audiences. The use of non-naturalistic

¹¹⁷ Cf. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 116; Roper, "Fridericus Films," 498; Welch, *Propaganda*, 147.

techniques pioneered during the Weimar era to make this point suggests that conservative political messages could be conveyed using techniques quite different from the ‘Ufa style’ that Lotte Eisner disparaged. Thus, *Der Choral von Leuthen*, although it was not produced under the Nazi regime, was without a doubt a propagandistic call for a strong leader. Certain scenes reinforce contemporary right wing political points of view, and the film portrays war as horrific for those who have to sacrifice themselves, yet ultimately worth waging if done under the guidance of a great leader.

Der alte und der junge König

In contrast to the other Frederick films, *Der alte und der junge König* does not follow the king through the Seven Years War. Instead, the film charts Frederick’s tumultuous upbringing and his attempt to escape the tutelage of his overbearing father by running away with his friend—some would say lover—Lieutenant Hans von Katte. Clearly intended as propaganda, the movie paints a clear picture of a young, effeminate Frederick’s development into a strong, masculine adult under his father’s iron-fisted rule. In the words of Linda Schulte-Sasse, by the end of the film “the Prussian drill machine has beaten all femininity, weakness, and humanity out of him”¹¹⁸ and Frederick has come to embody the ideal German soldierly male. Throughout the film, the viewer ‘learns’ what this ideal male is, namely someone willing to sacrifice what he wants to do for what must be done, as Frederick sacrifices his music, reading, emotional “softness,” compassion, and desire for individual satisfaction.¹¹⁹ Schulte-Sasse is correct in her assertions about Frederick’s transformation; indeed, the entire film can be read as

¹¹⁸ Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, 144.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126-144.

reinforcing gender roles. She does not, however, analyze the use of Expressionist aesthetic methods in the film. In contrast to *Der Choral von Leuthen*, *Der alte und der junge König* mainly uses such techniques to enhance dramatic action, rather than to directly enhance the film's propaganda value.

In *Der alte und der junge König*, women and men inhabit completely different spheres. Women in the film are powerless and idle. They never leave the palace, and mainly seem to care about the marriage arrangements Frederick William I, Frederick's father, makes for them. In one sequence, cross cuts juxtapose Frederick William's smoking room with the domestic space occupied by Frederick, Katte, and Wilhelmina, Frederick's sister. Katte, a model soldier, is clearly uncomfortable in the room despite his attraction to Wilhelmina, and Frederick wears a floral robe of sorts that almost looks like a dress. The royal siblings play harpsichord and flute music, while Frederick William drinks and smokes with his all-male retinue. The sequence highlights the contrast between the two spheres, and when Frederick William eventually comes in to burn Frederick's books and flute, the weak effeminate crown prince is unable to stand up to him. In her discussion of the Frederick films of the Weimar era, Katherine Roper notes that the films put on display Frederick's allegedly ideal combination of *Geist* and *Macht* that historian Friedrich Meinecke had lauded as a central theme of Prussian/German history in 1915.¹²⁰ In this sequence from *Der alte und der junge König*, the viewer sees the consequences of Frederick's 'feminine' preoccupation with *Geist*. His father, nicknamed the *Soldatenkönig*, emphasizes *Macht* to the point of reading nothing but the Bible. In order to be an effective leader, Frederick must master both of these essential qualities.

¹²⁰ Roper, "Fridericus Films," 496.

Music highlights more than anything else Frederick's transition to masculine maturity. Toward the end of the film, after Frederick has submitted to his father and shed his femininity, he holds a party in his own palace. At the event, Frederick dances with his wife to Baroque music similar to what he and Wilhelmina played in the earlier scene, the only kind of music in the film up to this point. Suddenly, a messenger arrives to tell Frederick that his father is deathly ill. Frederick immediately stops the festivities to fulfill his duties, shouting "Musik aufhören! Der Tanz ist aus!" and riding dramatically to his father's side. When his father finally dies—after making maudlin instructions to Frederick to "mach Preußen groß"—music again becomes central. The film ends with a slow zoom on Frederick's face, lasting almost two minutes, accompanied by the triumphant strains of the Hohenfriedberger March. As the song was not even written yet at this point in Frederick's life, the final sequence foreshadows the rest of Frederick's reign, as if to say "the rest is history." By associating the culmination of Frederick's 'education' with his future military conquests, the film conveys that the ideal leader embodies soldierly masculinity and the perfect combination of *Geist* and *Macht*.

Eisner's Ufa style dominates *Der alte und der junge König* throughout. Naturalistic color and lighting and dull camerawork produce a film with a style as bland as its propaganda message. There is one scene that incorporates the Expressionist style, but the techniques merely enhance the dramatic effect of the scene rather than emphasizing the propaganda message as they do in *Der Choral von Leuthen*. They are in evidence in the climax of the film, when Frederick, imprisoned by his father for attempting to flee to France with Katte, is compelled to watch Katte's execution. When the commandant of the fortress enters Frederick's cell to force him to the window, he

encounters the crown prince asleep on his cot, the bars over the window projecting shadows of crosses onto his body. The technique recalls, though to a far less exaggerated degree, the criminal's Expressionist prison cell in *Caligari*. Like the crosses at the end of the battle in *Leuthen*, the crosses placed in sharp contrast here remind the viewer of death, ominously foreshadowing the impending execution. After some unsuccessful



hysterical pleading for Katte's pardon, Frederick rushes to the window to shout for his forgiveness. With his arms outstretched through the bars, Frederick calls out to Katte, despite Katte's explanation that forgiveness is not necessary.

He will gladly sacrifice himself for Frederick's benefit. As Frederick reaches through the window, a shot of him from the outside contrasts the dark interior of the cell with the bright exterior, and a low angle shot places the tiny window at the top of an imposing blank wall. The striking shot and sharp contrast highlight Frederick's despair, and serve to enhance the drama of the situation. These echoes of Expressionism complicate Eisner's claims about the Ufa style, though they do not change the fact that *Der alte und der junge König* is, for the most part, an extremely naturalistic propaganda film.

Fridericus

Only a year after the release of *Der alte und der junge König*, Diana-Tonfilm released *Fridericus*. Probably the worst of the four films shown during the National Socialist period in terms of quality and production value, Kracauer correctly described *Fridericus* as an even more blunt propaganda film than those before it. The movie returns to the Seven Years War, and follows Frederick as he outwits the Austrians time and again before defeating them, as usual, in the final battle scene. *Fridericus* is alone among the Frederick films for having no discernable Expressionist influence at all, and is shot in a purely naturalistic style. Still, the film is notable for two reasons. First, it strongly emphasizes Frederick's masculinity in the face of feminine enemies, presenting an ideal male as herald of military victory. Second, the abundance of World War One imagery in *Fridericus* reflects anxieties about the war and those responsible for Germany's defeat.

Linda Schulte-Sasse provides an excellent account of the pervasive feminine threat in *Fridericus*. She draws attention to the enemies Frederick must face, including Catherine the Great, Madame Pompadour of France, and a pouty Maria Theresa who insists on referring to Frederick as "der böse Mann" with noticeable emphasis on "Mann." Furthermore, the film juxtaposes the femininity of the Austrians in general with Prussian masculinity, epitomized in a cut from firing Prussian guns to blaring Austrian trumpets.¹²¹ To complement Schulte-Sasse's thesis, one should add that not only does Frederick embody ideal masculinity, but a certain kind of masculinity. At one point, the Austrian agent Graf Wallis convinces Frederick to play the flute with his dinner hosts, in order to distract the king long enough to capture him. Frederick, however, is unable to master the difficult notes. When in frustration he asks who wrote the piece, he is

¹²¹ Ibid., 115-116.

surprised to learn that he actually wrote the composition years before. Dejected, Frederick admits that he cannot play the flute anymore. His wartime duties have kept him away from music for so long that he has forgotten how to play, and he realizes that the middle of a war is not the time to try. The symbolic nature of Frederick's abstention from the flute is made all the more apparent because it foils Wallis' plans to distract him. With the gendered nature of music in the film, it is thus apparent that if Frederick had allowed feminine activities to distract him, it would have jeopardized his military efforts. Later in the film, Frederick weeps in his tent for the death of his sister within earshot of his generals, and at the end of the film he is alone crying in a church. Yet again, the film shows that Frederick's masculinity does not prevent him from feminine gendered activities, but it assigns a certain time and space in which these are appropriate.

The most noticeable scenes in *Fridericus* betray significant anxieties about German defeat in the First World War. Similarly to *Der Choral von Leuthen*, suffering arises as a negative side effect of war. This time, however, the focus is on the civilian population, especially when Frederick encounters a ruined village populated with his starving subjects. He is visibly angered by their suffering and commands his officers to plunder and burn an Austrian city. His subordinate pleads with Frederick that he joined the army as a Prussian soldier, not a murderer (Mordbrenner), and the king comes to his senses and retracts the order. This represents a clear fantasy depicting the Prussians/Germans as the victims of atrocities in war rather than the perpetrators, and defines the enemy as an Other in a way that is not as apparent in earlier Frederick films. Furthermore, in a move that differentiates the Frederick of *Fridericus* from the Frederick

of *Leuthen*, the king explicitly reminds the civilians that their suffering can only be altered with peace through victory.

The film draws a more explicit connection between Frederick's war and the First World War with its images of battle. The film does not employ many extras as soldiers, but in the final battle is able to produce the effect of a long, seemingly endless line of



attacking Prussians. By assembling the formation of soldiers so that they stretch over the top of a small hill, the image recalls the never-ending trench lines of 1914-1918. Perhaps more persuasive is the shot of

the Austrian lines. The *mise en scène* here seems directly inspired by no-man's-land. The foreground is filled with holes, evoking images of the pock-marked moonscapes of Belgium and northeastern France. Additionally, Austrian soldiers crouch behind a wall in the middle ground as if it were a trench or breastwork, and clearly visible in the background are artillery pieces, the worst enemy of a World War One soldier. The whole landscape of the battle sequence is punctuated by clusters of sharp sticks, reminiscent of barbed wire. Eventually, Frederick leads his soldiers to victory on this eighteenth century version of a Great War battlefield. Any doubts the viewer may have had about what this means are destroyed when a shot of advancing Prussian flags dissolves to a tolling bell and the word "Friede" displayed in large letters. A strong leader, the audience can see, would have been able to achieve peace through victory in 1914-1918.

Like *Der Choral von Leuthen*, *Fridericus* presents an obstacle to victory in a scene that parallels the *Dolchstosslegende*. The story of the Bernburgers in the film reflects anxieties about shame, dishonor, and unresolved threats. After learning about the loss of Berlin to the Russians, the Bernburg regiment crowds around Frederick. Unidentified voices from the crowd cry out in despair that Berlin has fallen, culminating with the statement: “es hab’ kein’ Zweck mehr zu kämpfen!” Without any hesitation, Frederick declares that the Bernburg regiment is to lose its flag. As Frederick turns and walks away, the eyes of the Bernburgers sink to the ground, their heads lower, and they slink away back to their posts. The Bernburgers have lost the will to fight, and they pay for their failure with the ultimate dishonor: the loss of their battle standard. The story of the Bernburg regiment remains unresolved in the film. Since it was produced before Germany had fully rearmed in 1936, the enfeeblement of the Bernburgers in *Fridericus* matched a similar unresolved reduction in German military capacity by the treaty (or, to the Nazis, the “*diktat*”) of Versailles. The fact that the viewer does not know who makes the defeatist statements in the scene reveals additional uneasiness about betrayal. The viewer cannot tell who is responsible for defeat, just as the Nazis’ scapegoats the Jews cannot be easily differentiated from non-Jewish Germans. Thus, in addition to reinforcing the *Dolchstosslegende* myth, the film seems to stress a sense of menace from concealed enemies. Though these are intriguing themes, *Fridericus* more or less confirms Eisner’s thesis about aesthetics. Analysis of the film’s techniques emphasizes its deep ideological motivation, but does little to complicate what other scholars like Kracauer have said about it.

Der große König

In 1940, production began on one of the biggest propaganda spectacles of the entire Nazi regime. By the time the film was released in early 1942, *Der große König* was the most expensive German film to date, costing a total of RM 4,779,000.¹²² The filmmakers could afford to spend a lot, as the movie was one of only 96 *Staatsauftragsfilme* directly commissioned by the state.¹²³ It was directed by Veit Harlan, a model Nazi director responsible for such anti-Semitic and fascist landmarks as *Jud Süß* (1940) and *Kolberg* (1945). Produced in the context of war and the intensification of allied bombing campaigns over Germany, the film departs from previous Frederick movies and their anxieties about defeat in 1918. Instead, it calls even greater attention to Frederick and Prussia's ability to triumph against overwhelming odds, and the need to achieve retribution in battle. Besides being remarkable for its lavish production values, grandiose battle scenes, and unparalleled ideological consistency, *Der große König* is also incredibly interesting for its more creative techniques and its use of Expressionist aesthetic methods, even though these still appear only sporadically. For these reasons, it is most aesthetically similar to the pre-Nazi *Der Choral von Leuthen* than to the other Nazi era Frederick films.

As a state-funded film, the propagandistic material in *Der große König* is almost too plentiful to count. Thus, it will be most instructive here to note the major differences between *Der große König* and the pre-war Frederick films. The first is the movie's presentation of Frederick's war aims. As usual, Frederick wages war for peace, but the story of the Bernburg regiment has changed significantly. After losing half of its men in

¹²² Giesen, *Nazi Propaganda Films*, 143.

¹²³ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, 42.

the bloody Battle of Kunersdorf during the film's opening sequence, the Bernburg regiment flees from the Austrians. This time, not only does the regiment lose its flag, but its soldiers must remove their uniform insignia and rank distinctions. Indeed, the disgrace is so great that the commander takes his own life with the words "Es lebe der König" on his lips. The significant difference here as compared to *Fridericus* is that now that the man responsible for defeat is out of the way, the regiment can regain its honor. There is only one way to do this: on the field of battle. At Torgau, the regiment performs well and is commended by Frederick, who forgives them and proclaims that he will never forget them. The regiment has been purged of those responsible for its defeat, and most importantly it has been able to regain its honor in the purifying flames of war, just as the Nazis have done away with socialists, Jews, and other 'enemies' and plunged Germany into a war with all of Europe. Whereas *Fridericus* dwelled on the past, portraying a shamed Bernburg regiment with no reconciliation, *The Great King* allowed the cause of dishonor to be eliminated and provided a path by which honor could be regained.

Despite its exaltation of the benefits of war, *Der große König* does not shy away from presenting the immediate threat Frederick's Prussia faces, a situation with obvious parallels to Germany in 1942. Most striking in this regard is how the film presents the threats and horrors of war, but also illustrates specific paths to victory. In the opening battle sequence, brilliantly shot using thousands of extras both human and equine, the overwhelming effect is disorientation. The ordered lines of Prussian infantry marching in time to the beat of drums and music dissolve quickly once the fighting begins. Prussians charge mainly from left to right, but also from right to left, directly at the camera, and away from it. Furthermore, smash cuts from the battle to the Prussian command post

startle the viewer, and a scene in a burning village is disorienting for the village's unknown relation to the battlefield. Finally, by depicting Prussian defeat in the engagement, the Battle of Kunersdorf, the film shows what previous Frederick films had only alluded to indirectly. Produced and released before the Wehrmacht had suffered any significant setbacks, the film thus reminded German audiences in early 1942 that defeat was possible. The sense of disorientation and threat one feels when watching the opening battle sequence is amplified by the story of Luise and her family that takes place in their destroyed village. In the middle of the battle, the family tries to flee as their home and mill are bombarded by the Austrians. When Luise goes back into the house to retrieve one last load of belongings for the family's wagon, her mother, father, and younger brother are crushed by a burning section of a nearby farmhouse. This direct depiction of civilian death, absent from any of the previous Frederick films, is a further acknowledgement of the German population's personal suffering in the context of ongoing war.

Of course, such a propaganda film would be drastically ineffective if it only showed the negative effects of war. *Der große König* contains several elements that show what is necessary for victory. When observing the Prussian soldiers march, as opposed to the Austrians, one is immediately struck by the size of their formations. The film is famous, thanks to its copious funding, for the massive 'armies' it employed to shoot the battle scenes. The enormous formations of troops in the film's three battles can be considered a slight distortion of the concept of the 'mass ornament' as developed by Siegfried Kracauer.¹²⁴ A particularly modern art form, Kracauer describes the mass

¹²⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75-86.

ornament as an artistic act which relies for its aesthetic value on the overall performance of the mass. As parts of a whole, the individuals of a mass ornament lose their importance. Kracauer famously cites the movements of the American Tiller Girls' performances in stadiums around the world as examples of the mass ornament. One may think that military maneuvers could be covered under this definition, but Kracauer explicitly states that they do not apply since a true mass ornament is an "*end in itself*."¹²⁵ Military maneuvers, he argues, constitute a means of efficient combat, or are meant to please for the purposes of stoking patriotic passions, unlike the purely aesthetic value of a true mass ornament. It could be argued, however, that the mass movements of troops marching on a movie screen do count, or, since I attribute a propagandistic value to troop maneuvers in *Der große König*, that these represent a slight deviation from Kracauer's definition. When watching these giant fantasy armies, it is immediately apparent that the individual means nothing in comparison to the strength of the ordered mass. Watching the film in a movie theater in Germany in 1942, part of a mass sitting in ordered rows like those in the stadiums Kracauer describes, one knows he or she is part of a vast coordinated war effort. The enemy, depicted on screen in much smaller, less organized groups, is dangerous but inferior.

The deaths of loyal soldiers will also lead the Prussians to victory. Sergeant Treskow, who had a chance to desert while being disciplined but decided to remain with the army, is killed in the film's final battle. As he lies dying on the ground, an unusual shot combining two images superimposes the soles of marching boots on his face. Most likely shot from underneath a glass platform, the perspective on the feet makes it appear as if we have taken on Treskow's perspective as soldiers march forward into battle on top

¹²⁵Ibid., 76.

of us. This framing, emphasizing forward movement while simultaneously depicting Treskow's death, literally places victory on top of dead Prussian bodies. A victory parade in Berlin, complete with scenes evocative of an eighteenth century *Triumph des Willens*, immediately follows the battle and reinforces the message that victory will be achieved through heroic sacrifice.



One final piece of eerily creative editing provides another path to victory. In the film's final sequence, Frederick's unmoving, unblinking gaze is superimposed upon images of windmills turning, peasants plowing fields, and wheat blowing in the wind. A clue about what this strange shot could mean can be found in Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien's analysis of another wartime Nazi film, *Die große Liebe* (1942). O'Brien calls attention to the constant surveillance of the characters in the film by those around them. She suggests that this represents the omnipresent gaze of the police state and its citizens, comparing it to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon for its ability to control society by watchfulness alone. The film presents this in a positive light, since the main love story of the film begins when the male protagonist finds his future lover thanks to a tip from an observant

streetcar conductor.¹²⁶ If we apply this argument to the final scene of *Der große König*, Frederick's vigilant eyes, constantly watching the agricultural and industrial production of his state after defeating his enemies, encourage the audience to place their trust in the gaze of their own leader. Only under the king's constant surveillance can Prussia prosper.

In addition to these new departures in propaganda, *Der große König* differentiates itself from other Frederick films with its use of Expressionist filmic methods to enhance these themes. Two scenes stand out above the rest for their use of chiaroscuro and shadows. In one scene after the opening battle, Frederick takes refuge from the cold in a partially destroyed house. Luise, not knowing that the old man in her home is the king, proceeds to collect a few of her possessions while complaining bitterly to him about the war and the madman running it. The dark lighting in the scene is significant, for it produces noticeable contrasts and an uneasy, non-naturalistic *mise en scène*. This is important because of the case of mistaken identity upon which the scene turns: the representation of this topsy-turvy world where an ordinary woman can address the king as "du" forgoes the *grisaille* of naturalistic cinema, thus making no claim to represent reality.

One part of the scene appropriates the Expressionists' infatuation with shadows. As Luise packs portraits of family members, she intentionally leaves behind a portrait of Frederick as a young king. Disheartened, Frederick approaches the portrait. While standing next to it, a silhouette of his profile is projected on the wall as he looks forlornly at his younger self. Linda Schulte-Sasse provides an excellent reading of this scene. Noticing the difference between the transcendent portrait and Frederick's mortal body,

¹²⁶ Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien, "The Spectacle of War in *Die große Liebe*," in *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens: Essays on the Cinema of the Third Reich* ed. Robert C. Reimer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 207-208.

she writes: “The shadow mediates between the two representations of Frederick, suggesting the uncapturable essence of a private man ‘doomed to sacrifice himself’ for history.”¹²⁷ This aligns perfectly with the recurring theme in Frederick films that depicts the king bearing an immense emotional and personal weight for his vision of Prussia’s future. An alternative interpretation would compare the young, idealistic king of the portrait—friend of Voltaire and author of the *Anti-Machiavel*—with the older warrior Frederick of *Der große König*. Lotte Eisner claims that shadows in Weimar films indicate destiny,¹²⁸ so the outline of the shadow and Frederick’s military headgear could be intended to emphasize



the king’s historical fate as paragon of *Macht* over his earlier *Geist* in a manner similar to the theme of *Der alte und der junge König*. Moreover, the supernatural nature of the representation would stress that Frederick’s war, and by extension also Germany’s war, have been forced upon them by forces beyond their control.

The other scene that incorporates shadows takes place later in the film when Frederick’s nephew visits. At one point, Frederick encounters the prince asleep with a copy of Sophocles’ tragedies. As he sits and looks at the book, the camera pans from a visibly exhausted Frederick to his shadow cast over his nephew’s body. A dream

¹²⁷ Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, 111.

¹²⁸ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 130.

sequence follows, consisting of Frederick's shadow moving with a cane along the outside of Sanssouci. The next shot, of the palace's interior, depicts the same shadow approaching a bookshelf with volumes of Plato and Voltaire. Clearly, Frederick is homesick, but the use of shadows in the scene conveys something further. Like the earlier use of shadows, the juxtaposition here of an older Frederick, emphasized by his cane and limping gait, with the artistic trappings of his youth highlights Frederick's supposed destiny as a military leader. Even though he dreams of returning to Sanssouci, the use of shadow implies that forces beyond his control have drawn him elsewhere. 'Heavy lies the crown,' the audience learns, and, as Schulte-Sasse notes, Frederick's tragic isolation makes the viewer sympathize with him. Like all of the films, the effort to stimulate audience identification with Frederick can be easily interpreted as an attempt to get them to identify with great leaders outside of the movie theater. Hardly anyone would dispute this fact, but the use of Expressionist techniques to propagate this emotion is what makes *Der große König* unique among the Frederick films produced under the Nazis.

Conclusion

In his introduction to a collection of essays on Nazi era films, David Bathrick argues that because of the large number of non-propaganda films produced under Hitler, it is necessary to reevaluate the traditional treatment of all Third Reich cinema as overdetermined political and racial propaganda. Considering Goebbels' emphasis on creating non-didactic propaganda and his simultaneous insistence on the development of German cinema as a craft, Bathrick claims that the remaining films of 1933-1945 should be placed in the larger context of the development of cinema as a whole. "The style of the

film,” the Nazis recognized, “expressed the power and vision of those who produced it and controlled its distribution.”¹²⁹ Thomas Elsaesser makes a similar argument when he argues that Nazi era films should be considered above all as commodities aimed at promoting consumerism, or “Lifestyle Propaganda,” in a manner not entirely dissimilar to Weimar films or even movies from other countries.¹³⁰ While they may be correct in asserting the overlooked importance of so-called ‘distraction’ films, Bathrick and Elsaesser should be careful to recognize that direct political propaganda was still an important part of Nazi era film production. Enormous sums were spent to make these films, signifying their worth in the eyes of the regime. Since they are so often dismissed as propaganda, scholars have been slow to trace the continuities from the Weimar period that are evident in the Frederick films released between 1933 and 1945. A close analysis of these productions helps to more fully illustrate their propagandistic themes communicated through conventional narrative and dialogue. Finally, attention to their aesthetic techniques reveals their incorporation of certain Expressionist filmic methods to supplement their propaganda value.

¹²⁹ David Bathrick, “Introduction: Modernity Writ German: State of the Art as Art of the Nazi State” in *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens: Essays on the Cinema of the Third Reich*, ed. Robert C. Reimer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 1-4.

¹³⁰ Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema*, 408-409.

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Select Filmography

Der alte und der junge König

Director: Hans Steinhoff
Script: Thea von Harbou , Rolf Lauckner
Production: Dekafilm GmbH
Released: January 29, 1935

Der Choral von Leuthen

Director: Carl Froelich
Script: Johannes Brandt and Ilse Spath-Baron, based on the novel by Walter von Molo
Production: Carl Froelich-Film
Released: February 3, 1933

Der große König

Director: Veit Harlan
Script: Veit Harlan
Production: Tobis
Released: March 3, 1942

Fridericus

Director: Johannes Meyer
Script: Erich Kröhnke, Walter von Molo
Production: Diana Tonfilm im GmbH
Released: February 8, 1937