

# VICTIMS AND EXECUTIONERS: THE REPRESENTATION OF GERMANY IN CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA, 1942-1954

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## CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA AND ITS MELODRAMATIC CONTENT

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From its earliest days, classical Hollywood cinema has made use of melodrama in order to maximise the narration's emotional expressiveness and its tendency to be *omnicommunicative* (Bordwell, 1985: 70-72). Despite being very much a product of the twentieth century, Hollywood cinema has managed to adapt a literary tradition like melodrama, which enjoyed its golden age in plays and novels of the nineteenth century, to a wide variety of genres ranging from the war genre to the crime film (Bordwell, 2013: 333-334). The richness of melodrama lies in the fact that it encompasses so many different themes and ideas, and an equally diverse range of temporal and spatial settings. On the thematic level, melodrama introduced a simplistic dualism to classical Hollywood narration, whereby the role of the villain and the role of the victim are always made clear to the

spectator. As Peter Brooks points out, melodrama establishes a rigid moral order based on a bipolar distinction between good and evil. The spectator is not given any room for any kind of moral doubt (Brooks, 1995: 40-42).

In the war films that Hollywood first began producing after World War I, there is one nation that came to represent the quintessential villain: Germany. Films such as *Hearts of the World* (D. W. Griffith, 1919) and *The Four Horsemen of Apocalypse* (Rex Ingram, 1921) portrayed Germans as heartless and cruel monsters, with no qualms about throwing babies out of windows, raping women, or killing innocent civilians (DeBauch, 1997: 33-39). However, in the early 1930s, the disillusion produced by the economic consequences of the war led Hollywood to begin depicting the Germans as victims of historical circumstances, as can be seen in films like *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1930). As William Faulkner (2004: 185) suggested, the Germans had been

defeated in the trenches, but they had proven victorious in the literary field. The success of the many film adaptations of Erich Maria Remarque's novels was proof of this. Nevertheless, this positive change to the image of the German soldier did not prevent Hollywood from continuing to depict war in dualistic terms. From the 1930s onward this dualism would merely be projected onto other cultures, such as Native Americans, especially in films dealing with the early American colonial wars, such as *Drums Along the Mohawk* (John Ford, 1939) or *Northwest Passage* (King Vidor, 1940).

The entry of the United States into World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor compelled Hollywood to revise the melodramatic tradition's depiction of the enemy. This had a profound effect on the content of classical narratives, especially where the portrayal of the German people was concerned. Although Hollywood had already addressed Nazism in films with markedly ideological content like *The Mortal Storm* (Frank Borzage, 1939), the reality was that in early 1941, most Americans viewed the Japanese with hatred and suspicion, while the Germans were considered merely the victims of a totalitarian system rather than merciless aggressors. Moreover, Germany represented civilisation and culture. Thus, while the image of the Japanese people was easily adapted into the dichotomous structure of classical Hollywood narration, this was not the case for the German people and their leaders (Koppes & Black, 1990: 282-284). Indeed, during this period, Hollywood films sought not so much show the sinister side of the German enemy as to engage in dialogue with a culture considered both familiar and threatening.

This article will explore the transformations in the depiction of the German people as enemies in the war from the 1940s through to the beginning of the Cold War. An analysis will be offered of a series of films that make implicit moral judgments about the German people during and after

World War II. Drawing upon paradigmatic studies of 1940s cinema such as those of Sherie Chinen Biesen, Siegfried Kracauer and Alexander Nemerov, the aim of this paper is to explain the ideological transformations in the representation of the villain in Hollywood productions during this period (Biesen, 2005; Kracauer, 2012: 41-47; Nemerov, 2005). This study will attempt to achieve a better understanding of this question based on the cinematic depiction of the German people as enemies in war.

### **FIRST STAGE: 1942-1944. CIVILISED CRUELTY**

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In early 1942, when General George Marshall began training his troops for the occupation of Europe, he realised that many soldiers had no idea what had been happening across the Atlantic over the past few decades. There were many soldiers who had completely internalised the isolationist policy that the United States had adopted following the disillusionment caused by World War I, who viewed Fascism and Nazism as internal European affairs and thought it unfair that they should have to risk their lives for a cause to which they felt absolutely indifferent. Hollywood responded to this feeling of alienation among the American people with a series of films intended to explain the real consequences of these totalitarian ideologies (Michalczyk, 2014: 22-25).

In this sense, *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) is not only one of the most emblematic films of the 1940s, but also one of the most outstanding examples of how Hollywood sought to portray the German people and the Nazi ideology in the early years of the war. Thus we find that the German occupation of Casablanca is not represented with the same intensity and cruelty as that of Japanese occupation of the Philippines in films like *So Proudly We Hail* (Mark Sandrich, 1943), for example, in which Japanese soldiers are portrayed as brutal as bloodthirsty. Similarly, in *Bataan* (Tay

Garnett, 1943), Japanese airplanes dropped bombs on a Red Cross ambulance and even on women and children. Yet although *Casablanca* does not offer depictions of violence as extreme as those shown in these films about the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, a sense of horror is equally present in the film's opening scenes. The German occupation of Casablanca seems to have turned the exotic colonial city into a place of anxiety, fear and despair, in which thousands of helpless individuals seek desperately to obtain travel documents that will allow them to flee to Lisbon. The civilian population look for ways to escape from the horrors of war and to survive any way they can. Subtly, through the enigmatic character of Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), whose mysterious past includes a period fighting in the Spanish Civil War, the spectator is reminded that the fight against the ideology represented by German domination really began in 1936 with the fight against Franco. In this way, the spectator is told that what is happening now on the screen is one of the consequences of the American isolationism that effectively allowed the spread of Fascism in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the German officers under the command of Major Heinrich Strasser (Conrad Veidt) are represented basically as an occupying military force seeking to defend Germany's geopolitical interests in North Africa. Strasser's men might be cruel, but they resort to force only when necessary. Their attitude has none of the brutality of the Japanese soldiers portrayed in *So Proudly We Hail*, who laugh while they slaughter defenceless civilians.

Conrad Veidt's Major Strasser is depicted as a kind of political negotiator. Although he is the conqueror, with absolute power to do as he pleases, he accepts the authority of the French captain Louis Renault (Claude Rains). Moreover, despite knowing about Rick's anti-fascist past, he does not order his detention. And although it is in his power to get rid of a dangerous agitator like the resistance leader Victor Laszlo (Paul Henried),

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he chooses to wait, so that when he finally does give the order to arrest him it is too late. Finally, his excessive trust in the French authorities leads him to commit the mistake of facing Rick alone at the end of the film. Despite symbolising the violence of the State, Strasser embodies a kind of melodramatic villain who is always prepared to negotiate with the enemy and even to hear his point of view. The character played by Conrad Veidt is a long way from being the kind of symbol of absolute evil and perversity he has represented in other films, such as *The Hands of Orlac* (Orlacs Händs, Robert Wiene, 1924) or *The Thief of Bagdad* (Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, Tim Whelan, 1940), where he played characters who closely resemble classical Hollywood cinema's image of absolute evil. In *Casablanca*, however, Major Strasser's body language and manner of dress, together with his capacity for listening and discussing, convey a certain sophistication and social adeptness. This representation of evil bears nothing of the cold brutality with which the Japanese commanders are portrayed in films like *Three Came Home* (Jean Negulesco, 1950).

This image of the high-ranking German officer in *Casablanca* was based on a series of cinematic stereotypes found in earlier Hollywood productions. Conrad Veidt had previously played a similar German officer in *Escape* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1940). In both performances, Veidt projects the image of a kind of German officer who, al-

though somewhat sinister, is also a kind of dandy: elegant, sophisticated and well-spoken. In many instances in the early 1940s, the German officers in Hollywood films resemble precursors to the decadent European aristocrats of later films. The Russian-born British actor George Sanders, for example, received many roles in that decade both as Nazi officers and as decadent Europeans, the latter in films such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Albert Lewin, 1945).

The Nazi officers that Sanders played in films like *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak, 1939) or *Man Hunt* (Fritz Lang, 1941), represent the power and sophistication of Nazism, very similar to the characters played by Veidt. These characters reflected a certain kind of aesthetic and dramatic fascination for Germany, a nation associated with European civilisation, albeit a corrupt and decadent model of that civilisation. This tendency to portray the Nazi enemy with a halo of superiority is evident in *Lifeboat* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1944), a film adaptation of a story by John Steinbeck about a German officer who seizes control of a lifeboat carrying a group of British and American survivors of a shipwreck. Many critics, and even John Steinbeck himself, interpreted the film as a glorification of the Nazis, who are portrayed as better educated and more intelligent than the allies. This interpretation affected the distribution of this complex and sophisticated work by Hitchcock, whose intention was to argue for the importance of unity among nations and ethnic groups in order to bring an end to Nazism (McGilligan, 2003: 350-352).

On the other hand, German officers also symbolised the decadence of a civilised world. It was still possible to engage in a dialogue with such a world, but only to a certain extent, and ultimately it had to be destroyed because of the extreme danger it represented. This idea was already present before the United States entered the war, in films like *Foreign Correspondent* (Hitchcock, 1940), and it would appear again in films like *Watch on the*

*Rhine* (Herman Schumlin, 1943). The latter film tells the story of the Mullers, a family of antifascist German exiles who take refuge in the mansion of the Farrelly family, members of Washington's upper class who move in international diplomatic circles. The presence of violence and decadence in the sophisticated world of German diplomacy is what allows Kurt Miller (Paul Lukas), a symbol of the politically committed European intellectual, to justify his murder of Teck de Brancovis, a Nazi sympathiser staying in the Farrelly family home.

As mentioned above, in many films of the early 1940s the Nazis are portrayed as a dangerous enemy in ideological and geopolitical terms, although they are never depicted as symbols of absolute evil and brutality. However, in 1943 some films began to show the more sinister side of the Nazi ideology. *Hangmen Also Die!* (Fritz Lang, 1943), based on an original screenplay by Bertolt Brecht, tore down the myth of the Nazis as mere geopolitical enemies. The film revolves around the disappearance of Reinhard Heydrich, a high-ranking Gestapo officer who was one of the masterminds behind the final solution. Hitler avenged his death by annihilating much of the population of the Czech village of Lidice in 1942. The producers of the film dropped several scenes in Brecht's screenplay depicting the Nazis abusing Jews and showing various characters with the Star of David on the lapel of their clothes. Nevertheless, the film leaves no room for ideological doubts: the Nazis are nothing more than a vulgar mob of unscrupulous, opportunistic and cowardly gangsters (Koppes & Black, 1990: 297). Their phys-

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**THE NAZIS ARE PORTRAYED AS A DANGEROUS ENEMY IN IDEOLOGICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL TERMS, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE NEVER DEPICTED AS SYMBOLS OF ABSOLUTE EVIL AND BRUTALITY**

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ical and psychological violence is as brutal as it is gratuitous, and goes much further than mere military occupation of a territory (Agee, 1963: 35; Biesen, 2005: 70).

Yet despite the efforts of Lang and Brecht, in the early 1940s the Nazis tended to be represented as a military occupation force that resorted to physical and psychological violence only after considerable negotiation. For example, *The Moon Is Down* (Irving Pichel, 1943), also based on an adaptation of a story by John Steinbeck, tells the story of a group of German soldiers fighting for geopolitical control over a region of Norway. The soldiers try to talk to the population to convince them to cooperate, and finally resort to violence when negotiation is no longer feasible.

### **THE ENEMY AS VICTIM**

*The Moon Is Down* is another example of how World War II introduced new elements in the melodramatic structure of classical Hollywood cinema. Defeating the Nazis did not only mean destroying evil; it also meant laying the foundations for a better world, a world in which there should also be a place for those Germans who had fallen victim to the Nazi ideology.

As mentioned above, many Americans thought of the German people not as enemies but as victims of a perverse ideology. In *The Moon Is Down*, Lieutenant Tonder (Peter Van Eyck) represents the new German generation that had fallen victim to the ideology and could still be redeemed. Homesick and tired of the war, Lieutenant Tonder confesses to one of his companions that he dreamed that Hitler had gone mad, that things were going badly on the front and that there was no sense in the war. Tonder embodies the tragic human dimension of the Nazi occupation. He falls in love with a Norwegian widow, Molly Morden (Dorris Bowdon), whom he courts by reading her the poetry of Heine, while telling her repeatedly that he is not an invader but a hu-

man being looking for someone to talk to. Alone, trapped in a vast existential void, he ends up being a defenceless victim, killed by Molly with a huge pair of scissors while he sleeps. This moment of empathy and compassion for the enemy in *The Moon Is Down* illustrates Hollywood's keenness to avoid stereotypical representations of the younger generations of Germans in a dualistic melodramatic narrative.

For Hollywood cinema, young Germans were the greatest victims of Nazism. *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, Leni Riefenstahl, 1935), a film that had a huge impact on Hollywood producers and directors from its very first screenings in the U.S., showed how young Germans blindly worshipped Hitler, crowding around him and smiling at him, kissing him and fawning over him. This was the greatest ideological triumph of Nazism. *To Be or not to Be* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1943) shows how far young German soldiers will go in their blind obedience to a comically absurd double of Hitler, when they throw themselves off a plane without a parachute on his orders. While the film is of course a comedy, this ending is also a tragedy: a whole generation of innocent men and women condemned to death by an ideology.

In *Hitler's Children* (Edward Dmytryk, 1943), Hollywood depicts the power that Nazism held over its youth, but also expresses the hope that the new generation of Germans might rebel against it. Both Dmytryk's film and Walt Disney's *Education for Death* (Clyde Geronimi, 1943) were based on German Ziemer's novel of the same name. It tells the story of a young German, Karl Bruner (Tim Holt), who internalises Nazi propaganda and becomes a mindless instrument of the Party. Karl is convinced that Germany's geographic expansion and population increase constitute the only solution for the protection of the Aryan race from its enemies. However, he manages to free himself from the Nazi ideology when he begins to grasp its full meaning, after learning that his girlfriend, Anna Miller (Bonita Granville), has been sterilised

by the authorities because she refused to cooperate with the Nazis. This horrific revelation leads to Karl's ideological transformation. Together with Anna, he tries to escape from Germany.

*Hitler's Children* depicts a Germany isolated from the world, dominated by fear, in which there are still some men and women who have not completely lost their dignity. *The Seventh Cross* (Fred Zinnemann, 1944) is a Hollywood adaptation of the novel of the same name by Anna Sechers, which portrays the German people as victims of a malevolent ideology. It tells the story of the manhunt for a group of prisoners who escape from a concentration camp in 1936. The fugitives include a Jew, a musician, a famous acrobat, some officer workers and a newspaper editor, Georg Heisler (Spencer Tracy). Some of the prisoners try to hide out in the city of Mainz, whose inhabitants are depicted as victims of Nazism: isolated, fearful, controlled by the propaganda of a regime that had instilled fear in the population. The city's youth join in on the manhunt with a kind of sadistic enthusiasm, as if it were all just a game. On the other hand, some of the city's residents risk their lives to save the fugitives. The German people, as represented in this film, are merely victims of Nazism, but there is still hope.

## **SECOND STAGE: 1945-1946. A DIFFERENT GAZE AFTER THE HORROR**

In the spring of 1945, British and American troops began taking German territory. When they arrived at Bergen-Belsen and Dachau, they discovered the darkest and most horrific side of the war: the Nazi extermination camps. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, the famous Hollywood director Georg Stevens became one of the first to film Dachau's apocalyptic landscape, an inferno of heaped-up nameless corpses and foul-smelling ashes. The discovery of the extermination camps would have a profound effect on classical Hollywood cinema's representations of the Nazi evil and its victims. Its first re-

action was to help document the horror. Prominent figures of Hollywood cinema, such as Alfred Hitchcock and Billy Wilder, helped spread the images of the Holocaust. They responded to the call of institutions like the Psychological Warfare Division, which, under the direction of Sidney Bernstein, planned the production of an extensive documentary compiling all the images taken in the extermination camps. For many years, neither Hollywood nor the political institutions of the Allied Nations showed much interest in publicly exposing the full scale of the extermination of millions of Jews in Europe during the German occupation, despite repeated calls from organisations like the World Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee (Lipstadt, 1990: 286-288).

In November 1945, some of the footage shot by George Stevens was screened during the Nuremberg trials. From January 1946, part of Sidney Bernstein's project began being screened in Germany, in the form of a documentary directed by Billy Wilder titled *Death Mills* (1945). The purpose of its screening and distribution was to compel the German people to take responsibility for the atrocities of the Holocaust.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, images of the Holocaust were screened for the first time in the United States in a Universal Newsreel documentary (Carr, 2008: 65-68). Hollywood began introducing this horrific reality into its stories with *The Stranger* (Orson Welles, 1946), which includes excerpts from *Death Mills*.

Apart from *The Stranger's* enormous historical importance, Welles' film examines the melodramatic function of Nazism in classical Hollywood narration with a plot that responded directly to the discovery of the horror: Nazism was something more than a short-lived political ideology. Welles shows that the Nazis are not merely an enemy who has been defeated, but an ongoing threat to humanity. At the same time, Welles shows that some of the victims were also morally implicated (Wood, 1975: 121). In *The Strang-*

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**WELLES SHOWS THAT THE NAZIS ARE NOT MERELY AN ENEMY WHO HAS BEEN DEFEATED, BUT AN ONGOING THREAT TO HUMANITY**

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er, Welles exposes the dark side of isolationism through the story of Franz Kindler (Orson Welles), a high-ranking Nazi officer who escapes from Germany and hides out in the small New England town of Harper. Under a new identity as a history teacher named Charles Rankin, he integrates into the local community and marries Mary Longstreet (Loretta Young), a local member of the American upper classes. When the authorities begin closing in on him, Rankin finds in Mary his best ally. Fascinated by her husband's personality, she refuses to cooperate with the authorities and feels uncomfortable when Wilson (Edgard G. Robinson), a government investigator who wants to catch Kindler, shows her some pictures of the concentration camps, pictures that have nothing to do with her life. Mary represents those members of the American upper classes who preferred to turn a blind eye to what was really happening during the war. She is the ambiguous victim of the melodrama that takes place in Harper.

Kindler's arrival in Harper via a complex network of contacts in South America illustrates how easy it is for him to conceal his identity, and how easy it is for the Nazi movement to continue after the war.

Welles' character in *The Stranger* was a foreshadowing of the thousands of Nazis who entered the United States from the Baltic region after 1948, due mainly to the negligence of the U.S. authorities (Ryan, 1984: 5-10). In 1946, another Hollywood film, *Gilda* (Charles Vidor), explored the question of the continuation of the Nazi ideology after the war. The film features the enigmatic character of Ballin Mundson (George Macready), a member of the American upper classes who got

rich in Argentina during the war by laundering Nazi money. When the war is over, Ballin endeavours to replace the Nazis ideologically: he wants to take over the world through a cartel that controls the world's tungsten, one of the most sought-after metals after World War II. After Ballin's mysterious disappearance and death while fleeing his former Nazi collaborators, an American named Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford) assumes control of the cartel. Ballin had saved Johnny's life and turned him into his right-hand man at his casino. Obsessed with Ballin's memory, Johnny tries to follow his mentor's instructions to the letter, and marries Gilda (Rita Hayworth), a woman he despises, in order to gain complete control over the cartel. Both Johnny and Gilda end up being the victims of Ballin's enigmatic personality, and of his geopolitical ambitions, quite apart from the complex emotional triangle depicted in Vidor's film. Above all, *Gilda* shows that the will to power of the Nazi ideology is not dead, but merely transformed.

The survival of Nazism as a geopolitical enemy also appears in another 1946 Hollywood production, *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock). After their defeat in Europe, the Nazis have control of Argentina and Brazil, and are interested in uranium, another metal like tungsten, that could have a direct effect on world peace. In this film, Ben Hecht and Alfred Hitchcock offer a story of international espionage using the elements of classical Hollywood melodrama based around the idea of the possible construction of an atomic bomb (Simone, 1985: 123-126). The characters that personify evil in the film are Alex Sebastian (Claude Rains), his sadistic mother, Anna (Lopoldine Kostatin), and a group of Nazis who collaborate with them. These characters represent the old German upper classes who have managed to survive after the collapse of Nazi Germany, and who show no signs of the slightest remorse over the Holocaust; they are intelligent, elegant and sophisticated, and their will to power remains intact. In opposition to them as

the victim is Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman), who symbolises the new Germany emerging after the war. She has managed to detach herself from her memories, from her emotions, from her friends, and even from her family: she refuses to testify in favour of her father, a member of the Nazi party, at his trial. When asked by T. R. Devlin (Cary Grant), a government agent, Alicia agrees to become a spy because she wants to prove that she is a true American citizen. She agrees to go to Brazil, to infiltrate Alex Sebastian's world and even to marry him in order to uncover his secrets. As Ina Rae Hark points out, in order to redeem herself as an American patriot, Alicia is perfectly willing to degrade herself as a woman by effectively prostituting herself (Hark, 2014: 299).

Trapped in Alex Sebastian's mansion after Alex and his mother have discovered her betrayal, Alicia does not give up her ideals and never repents of her choice. Her democratic identity represents an irreversible transformation for her that erases any emotional ties to her German compatriots. It is also proof of her moral superiority to Sebastian and his mother. This moral superiority is made especially evident in the final scenes of the film, when Devlin manages to get into Sebastian's mansion and find his way to Alice's room, and helps her out of her bed and over to the mansion's main stairway. At the foot of the stairs are Alex, his mother and the group of Nazis, contemplating the scene. Suddenly, Alex leaves the others and joins the couple as they struggle down the stairs. He accompanies them to the front door but is unable to stop the couple from escaping in a car. Alex makes no attempt to reveal Alicia and Devlin's real identity to his German companions, putting the whole group at risk. This is a sign of weakness; his instinct for survival is stronger than his will to power or his fanaticism. Unlike the German officers who unhesitatingly hurl themselves from the plane on Hitler's orders in *To Be or Not to Be*, Alex and his mother seem to have lost their ideals. In 1946, through Alex Sebastian's cowardice clas-

sical Hollywood cinema thus illustrated the decadence of Nazism, but it also showed the danger of its continued existence in different contexts like Brazil or Argentina.

### **THIRD STAGE 1947-1950. A GERMANY IN RUINS**

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The period from the beginning of the Cold War to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 was marked by a new approach in Hollywood to the representation of victims and their executioners. The growing hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union in their struggle for control over Europe had a substantial effect on the representation of Germans in Hollywood films in those years. John Dos Passos (1946: 333-336), working at the time as a foreign correspondent in Germany for *Life Magazine*, noted that the new political reality in America would be one of mistrust towards the Soviet Union. Sidney Bernstein's ambitious project to film the concentration camps had been suspended at the end of the summer of 1945. Due to political pressures, the documentary would never be screened in Germany until finally being released in 2014 under the title *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey* (Sydney Bernstein). Among the reasons given by the authorities for not moving forward with the project was the idea that the German people seemed to have sunk into a state of total apathy after the war. Moreover, the possibility of a war with the Soviet Union had radically transformed the political importance of Germany, which had suddenly turned from an enemy into an important ally. In early 1947, Billy Wilder began work on *A Foreign Affair* (1948), a film that he was going to shoot in Berlin that same year. It is a comedy peppered with melodramatic elements, which the Austrian filmmaker hoped would bring German audiences back into the movie theatres (Shandley, 2001: 15-20). The script, written by Wilder and Charles Brackett, uses a melodramatic motif often found in the novels of Henry James: a clash



between the United States and Europe. America embodies innocence, while Europe, especially its upper classes, represents corruption. In Wilder's film, Phoebe Frost (Jean Arthur) embodies this ideal of innocence. Phoebe is an American senator who visits Berlin in order to inspect the American troops there. While she is there she falls in love with Captain John Pringle (John Lund). Phoebe is unaware that John has fallen prey to the spell of a Nazi survivor, Erika von Schlütow (Marlene Dietrich), who manipulates him in order to obtain a new identity that might keep her from facing political prosecution. In the end, good, embodied by Erika, triumphs over evil, embodied by Erika, who loses her lover and her husband, and whose dark and incriminating past is exposed. Erika von Schlütow represents the immorality of the Reich in a world in ruins, in which the Nazi social and political class no longer hold power. Through Erika, Wilder explores how the Nazis have lost all their ideals and all their power in a new Germany in which they can only aspire to be survivors. Nevertheless, the potential danger of characters like Erika is never ignored.

In *The Search* (1948), Fred Zinnemann analyses the consequences of Nazism from a different perspective. Shot on location, like *A Foreign Affair*, in a Germany in ruins, the film focuses on victims of the war; specifically, the thousands of European children with no homes and no families. Zinnemann's film achieves a highly sophisticated balance between melodramatic and elements and documentary cinema in its depiction of Karel Malik (Ivan Jandel), a Polish Jewish child who lost his family in Auschwitz and wanders aimlessly around the southern Germany. He is unaware that his mother, Mrs. Malik (Jarmila Novotná) has also survived the Holocaust and is trying desperately to find him. Zinnemann's camera offers a close-up view of a world in ruins. It is a Germany with hardly any recognisably German characters. The protagonists are members of the U.S. armed forces or of international organisations

like the United Nations. The real perpetrators of the crimes, the Nazis in hiding in Germany, are physically absent from the film, but the violence of the executioners is present in every scene: in the terror in the children's faces on being placed in an ambulance because it reminds them that the Nazis used these same vehicles to suffocate their victims; in the desolation of the cities after the bombings; in the images of children who drown in a river. Zinnemann sought to show the horror to American audiences, for whom the consequences of the war in Europe were very remote because they had never experienced it directly (Zinnemann, 1992: 59). As Sherrill Grace points out (2014: 10-16), the experience of World War II marks a radical difference in the way Americans and Europeans construct history.

Like Alicia Huberman in *Notorious*, Karel symbolises the possibility of breaking away from the horror of the past. After being picked up off the streets by an American officer, Ralph Stevenson (Montgomery Clift), Karel learns quickly to speak English and begins to internalise American cultural values. If his mother had not found him at the UN refugee camp, he would have gone with Ralph to the United States and become an American citizen.

Finally, *The Big Lift* (George Seaton, 1950) is one of the films that best illustrates the transformations of melodrama in classic Hollywood cinema during this transitional period. Shot in Frankfurt and Berlin in the summer of 1949, the film is an important historical document of everyday life in Germany after the Berlin Blockade (from June 22, 1948 to May 12, 1949). Like *A Foreign Affair*, the script for this film exploits the melodramatic possibilities arising out of the clash between European decadence and American innocence. Sergeant Danny McCullough (Montgomery Clift), an air force pilot who plays a key role during the blockade by transporting coal from Frankfurt to Berlin, embodies American selflessness and idealism. He wants to marry a young German widow, Frederica Burkhardt (Cor-

nell Borchers), who epitomises European opportunism and corruption. Danny doesn't know that Federica has lied to him about her past: both her husband and her father were Nazi collaborators. Moreover, Federica only wants to marry Danny in order to obtain the papers that will allow her to become an American citizen. She plans to divorce Danny once she gets to the U.S. and meet up with an old German lover who has been living there for some time. When Danny discovers that he is the victim of a trick, he breaks off his engagement and returns to America deeply disillusioned.

But Danny is not the only victim in *The Big Lift*. The new generation of Germans are victims as well, as suggested by the character of Gerda (Bruni Löbel), the love interest of Danny's good friend Sergeant Hank Kowalski (Paul Douglas). Gerda lived under the Nazi regime for most of her life and now feels betrayed by her parents' generation due to all the lies they told her. Now she is living under the U.S. occupation and harbours a certain scepticism about the promises of the Americans. When she questions Nick about life in the United States, she quickly realises that although it is trying to pose as a political model to be imitated by the new generation of Germans, it is a country just as rife with male chauvinism, political contradictions and social inequities. Although Gerda is offered the opportunity to go to the United States with Hank, she refuses to leave Germany; her future is in her own country. Gerda's decision and her doubts about the democratic potential of the United States contrast with the ending to other Hollywood war melodramas, such as *Hearts of the World* or *Four Sons* (John Ford, 1928), whose main characters find happiness in the New World, which embodies democracy and the future.

### **THE LAST STAGE: 1950-1954. A RETURN TO THE PAST**

The ideological complexity of films like *The Big Lift* reflects an era marked by big changes and trans-

formations in the relationship between the United States and Germany during the early years of the Cold War. In 1950, with the outbreak of the Korean War, tensions between the two new superpowers escalated. The conflict further exacerbated the ideological gap between Eastern and Western Europe, turning (West) Germany from an enemy into an ally. From that moment, the ideological regeneration of the German people would become a prominent theme in Hollywood cinema, along with the geopolitical danger represented by communist East Germany. *Decision Before Dawn* (Anatole Litvak, 1952) revisits the idea of the German people as victims during the war, while also stressing the importance of democracy as a regenerative power to help the Germans break with the past, an idea already touched on in the analysis of *Notorious* above. In *Decision Before Dawn* the German soldier Karl Maurer (Oskar Werner), who has been taken prisoner by the Allies, proves capable of betraying his own people after having internalised democratic values. Sent on a spy mission to southern Germany, Maurer observes the consequences of the American air raids on the civilian population, and bears witness to the heartbreak of the war widows and the exhaustion of the troops.

Maurer wanders through train stations and along muddy grey roads filled with wounded soldiers and desperate civilians. The German people are portrayed as the necessary victims of the physical violence inflicted by the Allies in order to bring democracy back to the country. Maurer, the traitor, is also a redeemer, a paradox that illustrates the ideological complexity of Litvak's film. In the final scenes, with the Gestapo hunting him down, Maurer hides out in the city of Mannheim, where he meets another German traitor, Sergeant Rudolph Barth (Hans Christian Blench), together with American Lieutenant Rennick (Richard Basehart). They try to hide from the enemy among the desolate ruins of Mannheim, but are betrayed to the German troops by a boy, Sergeant's Barth

nephew. Although Lieutenant Rennick could have killed the boy before he had given them away, he refuses to take the life of an innocent child. The boy comes upon Lieutenant Rennick again among the ruins of a nearby building, but this time does not give him away, and the group is able to escape. This scene suggests that the moral superiority of American values encourages the new generation of Germans to imitate and defend them. Indeed, it is precisely the internalisation of these values that will lead Karl Maurer to sacrifice his life to save Lieutenant Rennick.

*Decision at Midnight* stresses that the new generation of Germans are victims of a cruel ideology, who can be redeemed and rehabilitated through the adoption of democratic values. To convey this idea, Hollywood cinema effectively sought to erase Germany's Nazi past. Litvak's film shows a Germany besieged by Allied troops, stripped of many of the ideological and physical signs of Nazism, depicting only a world in ruins and a people defeated. The Germany in *Decision at Midnight* has little to do with the Germany portrayed in *The Seventh Cross*, whose fear, anguish, paralysis and fanaticism are the direct products of Nazi repression. Litvak's Germany is simply a country suffering the consequences of a war, like any other country that has suffered such a fate.

Whereas *Decision Before Dawn* revisits the Hollywood's depiction of the German people as victims, *Night People* (Nunnally Johnson, 1954) makes it perfectly clear who the real enemies are now: the Soviet troops occupying Eastern Europe and trying to expel the Allies from Berlin. Johnson's film begins with the kidnapping of an American soldier, John Leatherby (Ted Avery), in West Berlin. John is the son of an American tycoon, Charles Leatherby (Broderick Crawford), who arrives in Berlin with the idea that he will be able to free his son by offering the Soviets money. Lieutenant Colonel Steve Van Dyke (Gregory Peck), who is in charge of the military negotiations, must help the American tycoon understand the new

geopolitical context, in which the United States is no longer a nation seeking only to defend its commercial interests, as Calvin Coolidge had declared after World War I. Now, the United States has become the world's greatest military superpower and as such it has a new global role, which means the era of American isolationism is over. In this new paradigm, Colonel Steve Van Dyke is depicted as a capable negotiator who seeks to defeat the enemy in order to preserve the interests of his own country.

In this new geopolitical order, *Night People* presents the German people as victims of the political interests of the Soviet Union. The Nazis are now collaborating with the Soviets and are even more dangerous now that they are thirsty for revenge. On the other hand, the people of West Germany have internalised American democratic values and popular culture, watching American films like *Niagara* (Henry Hathaway, 1953), which is shown advertised on billboards in the streets of Berlin. Moreover, the new generation of German women, like John Leatherby's girlfriend, are no longer trying to take advantage of American soldiers; on the contrary, the film stresses their honesty and loyalty. The danger lies in double agents, in German women like Frau Hoffmeier (Anita Björk) who collaborate with the Soviets, and who must be punished and destroyed.

*Night People* reflects how the Soviets have replaced the Germans as the archetypes of evil, a new ideological tendency pointed out by Siegfried Kracauer (2012: 99-100) in his analysis of 1940s cinema. With the Cold War, classical Hollywood narration returned to a dualistic melodramatic structure of the beginning of the World War I.

*Night People* represents the end of a cycle of Hollywood films produced between 1942 and 1950 which, in their attempt to make sense of the ideological complexities of Germany, not only altered the definition of villain and victim within the classical structure, but also, in works like *Gilda* and *The Stranger*, fostered a new understanding of the

responsibility of certain American citizens during World War II in relation to the Holocaust and Germany's geopolitical expansion in Latin America. This is a series of complex and fascinating films that invite multiple re-interpretations.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is clear from the above that the representation of the German people as a melodramatic antagonist underwent a series of gradual transformations from the early 1940s through to the advent of the Cold War. Between 1942 and 1945, Hollywood sought to differentiate between ordinary Germans and Nazis based on the ideological paradigms established at the end of World War I. Between 1945 and 1946, when the horror of the concentration camps was revealed, Hollywood avoided any analysis of the question of Germany's collective responsibility for the Holocaust. Instead, Hollywood films tried to show that Nazism had not yet ended with the war but that it continued to represent a threat to world peace, although now the threat existed far away from Germany. Between 1947 and 1950, when Hollywood cinema started to depict a Germany buried under the ruins of war, Germany was portrayed as a nation that had left its past behind, which should no longer be considered an enemy, and which could be transformed democratically if the last vestiges of Nazism were purged from it.

Finally, between 1950 and 1954, in the most complex moments of the Cold War, West Germany is depicted as a young nation that has internalised democratic values, while the phantom of Nazism is now transferred to East Germany, where Nazis and communists conspire to destroy America's new world order.

As we have seen in this article, the image of the German people as an archetypal villain was transformed over a short period of time, reflecting Hollywood's extraordinary capacity for adapting the moral bipolarity of melodrama to different historical circumstances and cultures. For more

than a decade, Hollywood sought to explore German culture, the Nazi horror, and the country's contradictions. At the same time, it also sought to rescue the humanist values that still formed a part of the nation's identity. Films like *The Moon Is Down*, *Lifeboat*, *The Stranger* and *The Big Lift* serve as testimony to the rich and complex dialogue established between German and American cultures during a dark and violent decade. ■

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## **VICTIMS AND EXECUTIONERS: THE REPRESENTATION OF GERMANY IN CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA, 1942-1954**

### **Abstract**

Based on an analysis of the most representative films of the 1940s (such as *Casablanca*, *Gilda*, *Notorious* and *The Search*), this article analyses how the representation of Germany in that decade changed the melodramatic content of classical Hollywood cinema with depictions of Germans as corrupt yet civilised, but also as victims of a pernicious political system. Moreover, this research explores how this cinematic representation of Germany transformed the ideological construction of the war enemy that had previously been applied to Native Americans and the Japanese.

### **Key words**

Cinematic Adaptation; Germany; Classical Hollywood Cinema; Cold War; The Other; Melodrama; Second World War.

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## **VÍCTIMAS Y VERDUGOS: LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE ALEMANIA EN EL CINE CLÁSICO DE HOLLYWOOD, 1942-1954**

### **Resumen**

A partir del análisis de algunos de los films más representativos de los años cuarenta (*Casablanca*, *Gilda*, *Encadenados* y *Los ángeles caídos*), entre otros, este trabajo analiza cómo la representación de Alemania en esa década alteró los contenidos melodramáticos del cine clásico de Hollywood al retratar a los alemanes como corruptos, pero civilizados, y también como víctimas de un sistema político pernicioso. Además, esta investigación analiza cómo la representación cinematográfica de Alemania transformó la construcción ideológica del enemigo de guerra que solía aplicarse a los aborígenes norteamericanos y al pueblo japonés.

### **Palabras clave**

Adaptación cinematográfica; Alemania; cine clásico de Hollywood; Guerra Fría; el Otro; melodrama; Segunda Guerra Mundial.

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