9. LENI RIEFENSTAHL'S MOUNTAIN FILMS: ECOLOGIZING THE GENRE

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Surely, the genre of the classical German mountain film (the *Bergfilm*) counts as the most well-known exemplar of a mountain cinema. Developed in the 1920s by Arnold Fanck, these films, composed of soaring atmospheric on-location camerawork and melodramatic love triangles, achieved great popularity in the 1920s and 1930s. The history of the *Bergfilm* has often been told. Fanck's need for actors to complement his stunning nature cinematography led to the duo of Luis Trenker and Leni Riefenstahl becoming the stars of the genre. Both left Fanck to pursue their own directorial careers. Several critics have noted that Luis Trenker went on to historicize the *Bergfilm* (cf. Rapp 1997, 159; König 2001, 45–46). By combining the iconography of the Fanck mountain films with historical topics (the first ascent of the Matterhorn in *Der Berg ruft* or the Tyrolean Rebellion against Napoleon in *Der Rebell*, for example), Trenker expanded the genre by widening its historical scope. Less has been said about the generic implications in the mountain films directed by Leni Riefenstahl, *Das blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light*, 1932) and *Tiefland* (*Lowlands*, 1944/1954).[1] While Arnold Fanck created the *Bergfilm* and Luis Trenker historicized it, Leni Riefenstahl "ecologized" it, by which I mean she focuses on the scarce natural resources at risk in both *Das blaue Licht* and *Tiefland* at a time before a broad environmental movement existed. This focus differentiates these two Riefentstahl films from those of Fanck, which were centered around mountaineering and ski exploits, as well as from Trenker's historical mountain films. This essay will examine Riefenstahl's two mountain

films beyond the usual critical attention on her as a pioneering female director or as a filmmaker spreading Nazi propaganda. I will argue that the different endings of the films—one happy, the other one less so—depend on the natural resources at stake in the films: crystals in *Das blaue Licht* and water in *Tiefland*. This ecological awareness is deeply problematic, however, for the changes that come to the village of Monte Cristallo and the Spanish plains rely on economic systems that cannot be easily remedied by the deus-ex-machina endings proposed by Riefenstahl.

Das blaue Licht is the story of the village of Santa Maria in the shadow of Monte Cristallo. Every full moon, the eponymous blue light emanates from a cleft high up on its face. The young men of the town are driven wild by this light. Although restrained by the town's elders, occasionally one attempts to ascend to the mysterious blue light. Invariably, he fails, and his broken body is found at the base of the mountain the next day. The only person capable of reaching the light source is Junta, a reclusive young woman who lives above town in the mountain pastures. Given her seemingly preternatural climbing ability and her outsider status, Junta is despised by the villagers. When the painter Vigo arrives in town, Junta becomes enamored of him. Eventually Vigo follows Junta to the grotto from where the blue light comes. Returning to Santa Maria, Vigo shows the villagers the way. They ascend safely and remove all the crystals in the grotto. When Junta discovers this, she falls from the mountain. Vigo finds her body at the bottom of Monte Cristallo. The entire "Berglegende," as the story is called in the opening credits, is embedded in a framing story in the village. A young couple arrive in town. Children try to sell them crystals. They ask about a picture of Junta in the inn. The innkeeper brings an album telling the story. At the end, the final page of the album says, "This was the sad end of the poor Junta from Santa Maria. Her memory lives on in the village that once so persecuted her and to which such wealth came from the wonderful cave of Monte Cristallo."

The crystals of Monte Cristallo and the act of mining them play a larger role in the film than generally noticed. The mining of the gems in the blue grotto and the consequences of that excavation situate *Das blaue Licht* within a long tradition. While the film may be from 1932, in many ways it is indebted to Romantic aesthetics, as indeed is much of the genre of the classical German mountain films (Peabody 2021). Although the visual economies of the mountain film are perhaps the most obvious links to the Romantic tradition, in *Das blaue Licht* a lesser-known focus comes into view: that of mining. As Heather Sullivan has noted,

> there is a plethora of other German romantic texts filled with references to mineral hearts and lost young men wandering through mines, caves, or mountains whose inorganic qualities lead them away from family or

> culture—and the typical romantic ambiguity often refuses to characterize this clearly as either horrifying decline or transcendence. (2003, 22)

More recently, Jason Groves has argued for a "mineral imaginary" of German Romanticism, seeking to explore how the mine functions within a materialist framework (2017, 248–49). In the naïve epigonic Romanticism of *Das blaue Licht*, the jewel-filled mine beckons, but initially remains out of reach. Junta is the only one with access to it and its function in the early part of the film is aesthetic, only being replaced by the economic at the end. Those who try to reach it are doomed to death, just as the jewels in Ludwig Tieck's Romantic novella "Der Runenberg" (1804) ultimately lead the main character Christian astray.

Although the villagers of Santa Maria do not know it, the mysterious and beguiling blue light, so powerful in its allure that it leads young men to their deaths, is a fictional geological and meteorological manifestation of a cave of crystals high up the slopes of Monte Cristallo. Junta's ability to reach the blue light when no one else can is part of her outsider status. The dichotomy between the village and the crystal cave reflects the larger juxtaposition of city versus mountains often found in the *Bergfilm*. This dichotomy is gender-based, as well. The villagers treat Junta as an outsider. They chase her out of the village, call her a "cursed witch," and the priest crosses himself when he sees her. As Carolyn Merchant has noted, women have often been called witches when associated with "unruly nature" (1980, 132). In this case, the men of the village cannot conquer the rock face of Monte Cristallo and thus ascribe supernatural powers to Junta, who can.

While in many classic mountain films the contrast is between urban residents and the mountain denizens, in *Das blaue Licht* this contrast is between the village dwellers and the local, albeit outsider, Junta. More urbane characters appear in the film, however, and demonstrate the difference between the aesthetic appreciation of the blue light and its economization through extraction that leads to Junta's death. Early in the film, we see a mineral collector look at the small crystal brought to him by the locals. He is obviously not from Santa Maria. His dress is clearly urban and his corpulence contrasts with the gaunt bodies of the villagers. The collector has the money to buy the gems, but only chooses the best one. A few minutes later, Junta comes into town. When her basket is knocked over by children, a much larger crystal falls out. The collector immediately seizes upon it. Junta refuses to give it to him and only manages to wrestle it back from him by biting his wrist, again demonstrating her unruly nature over the civilized manners of the urban visitors. Later in the film, Junta will longingly look at that crystal while at the high pasture where she lives. For her, the crystals are simply a medium that connects the geological and human domains. They have no economic value to Junta, and thus she is not interested in selling them. Junta's downfall comes when she falls for the

other character from the outside world: the painter Vigo. Unlike the young men from the village, he manages to follow Junta to the grotto high on the mountain and, unlike Junta, he grasps the significance of its contents beyond mere beauty: "Diese Kristalle dort sind eine Gefahr für dich und das ganze Dorf und könnten doch ein Segen sein. Das muss man den Bauern sagen." ("These crystals are a danger for you and the whole village and yet they could be a blessing. One must tell the peasants that.") When Junta does not understand, Vigo continues, "Das ist doch ein Schatz. Den müssen wir finden und holen. Dann brauchst du nie mehr in Lumpen und barfuß zu gehen." ("It's a treasure. We have to find and retrieve it. Then you will no longer need to go about barefoot and in rags.") Vigo's thoughts are economic. The crystals will bring wealth and the impoverished Junta can afford new clothes and shoes. As self-evident as this is to Vigo, it is just as incomprehensible to the naïve and childlike Junta.

Vigo will reveal the route to the grotto to the villagers, who will then remove all the crystals from the cave. This extraction is too much for Junta to bear. She will die, climbing, with a remaining crystal in her hand. Whether it is a suicide or not, the proximate cause of death is the plundering of the cave. Junta's fatal fall is juxtaposed with wild celebrations in the village. The residents of Santa Maria have come into newfound wealth. Indeed, Junta will be remembered as a source of that wealth decades later when the innkeeper shows the tourists an album containing Junta's story. And yet, simply viewing the ending of *Das blaue Licht* as endorsing an extractive mentality where the new wealth of Santa Maria is valorized over Junta's death is too simplistic. As Kracauer noted, "To be sure, at the end the village rejoices in its fortune and the myth seems defeated, but this rational solution is treated in such a summary way that it enhances rather than reduces Junta's significance" (2004, 259). Rentschler, acknowledging the accuracy of Kracauer's assessment, adds, "The townspeople of Santa Maria mine the elemental and a female outsider, place them in lucrative ornamental shapes, and create a captivating story that glosses over their instrumental activities' (1996, 43). Indeed, the beauty of the Monte Cristallo has been extracted not only from the cave, but from Junta. She is of no use to the villagers in nineteenth-century Santa Maria, though she functions as an enchanted legend for the present-day tourist industry that seems to have reached the village in the early twentieth century, represented by fashionably dressed visitors in late model cars. *Das blaue Licht* ends poorly for Junta, however, because the natural resource at the heart of the film—crystals—is not renewable. The extractive exploitation of Monte Cristallo's crystals leads to prosperity but the unique blue light—and its keeper Junta—have been destroyed forever. The village's newfound prosperity, however, suggests a model of Western wealth accumulation based on resource extraction.

This wealth is built on an inversion of the pilgrimage to a sacred site typical for the Alps. In this way, *Das blaue Licht* complicates the history of tourism in eco-critical ways. The blue light that turns this place into a pseudo-religious site of modern pilgrimage gives way to mineral extraction. Tourism will no longer be based on breathtaking natural beauty but a life-taking act of mining. In this regard *Das blaue Licht* historicizes and critiques tourism. The frame narrative reinforced this. The old sacral pilgrimage to an unreachable blue light has been replaced by a more materially focused tourism. This secularization corresponds to the quasi-religious attitudes toward mountaineering in the *Bergfilm*. No longer actually seen as the abode of spirits, the mountains have been secularized, and modernity in the form of the couple visiting Monte Cristallo has arrived (cf. König and Trenker 2006, 8).

Much prior criticism of the film has either dealt with its composition or aesthetics. Like all of Riefenstahl's films, the issue of composition is complicated by Riefenstahl's attempts to shape the historical narrative. In the case of *Das blaue Licht*, these revisions began early. Although it is widely known that she co-wrote the film with Béla Balázs, Riefenstahl removed his name from the credits in 1933 after the National Socialist takeover and sought to actively deny him payment for the film (Trimborn 2007, 49–51). Balázs, a Jewish Marxist, will only be credited again in the postwar releases of the film. Riefenstahl will also claim in her memoirs and elsewhere that her inspiration for the plot came from a dream. As Eric Rentschler has shown, however, Gustav Renker's popular novel *Bergkristall* almost certainly served as a source for *Das blaue Licht*. Rentschler and others have also pointed out the similarities between parts of Riefenstahl's film and F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). These similarities begin with Vigo's entrance to the village, which parallels the beginning of *Nosferatu*, and continue through the sacrifice of both films' female leads (1996, 37–38). Other critics have focused on gender relations and the figure of Junta as a "Gypsy" figure (Barker 2010; Wieland 2012). One comparatively neglected strain of criticism has focused on the role of the crystals for Junta and the villagers. Indeed, Sabine Wilke has even downplayed this theme, stating the film "emphasizes plot and character development and diminishes the environmental dimension" (2015, 133).

Alice Schwarzer is probably the person who has emphasized Riefenstahl's environmental bona fides most prominently. In her revisionist essay "Leni Riefenstahl: Propagandistin oder Künstlerin" from 1999, she argues that if not for the Third Reich, "*Das blaue Licht* wäre ein Kultfilm der Frauenbewegung wie der Ökobewegung. Denn die damals knapp 30-Jährige hat die beiden großen Themen dieses Jahrhunderts mit ihrem Film visionär aufgenommen." ["*The Blue Light* would be a cult film for both the women's and environmental movements. The barely 30-year-old prophetically incorporated both

great themes of this century in her film."] Although Schwarzer particularly highlighted the ecological focus of the film, Siegfried Kracauer had already referred obliquely to this theme when declaring that what is left after Junta's death and the plundering of the grotto is "a disenchanted world in which the miraculous becomes merchandise" (2004, 259), a view echoed by Wilke, even if it is not her main argument (2015, 140). Rentschler agrees, seeing the ending of the story as an encounter with modernity (1996, 43–44). *Tiefland* provides a very different ending for the outsider from the mountains, but only because of the vagaries of the weather.

Like *Das blaue Licht*, *Tiefland* features Riefenstahl in the role of an outsider, this time the itinerant dancer[2] Martha. She travels into the realm of Marquis Don Sebastian, whose lands are affected by drought. He decrees that what little water there is should go toward his Spanish Fighting Bulls being raised for the bullfighting arena, and not to the peasants' crops. As a result, famine is imminent, and the farmers cannot pay their rent on the land to the Marquis. Don Sebastian himself is in debt and marries, reluctantly, the daughter of the rich mayor in order to improve his financial situation. He has also arranged a marriage for Martha, who has become his mistress. The Marquis wants to keep her nearby. The naïve Pedro, a simple shepherd from the uplands, does not comprehend that he is part of a court intrigue. When he does, he and Don Sebastian eventually fight, and Pedro kills the Marquis. This plot is based on Eugen d'Albert's 1903 opera *Tiefland*, although, as Riefenstahl notes in her memoirs, she and co-scriptwriter Harald Reinl (of later *Karl May* and *Edgar Wallace* film fame) introduced the critical "social theme: the uprising of the serfs against their lord" (1992, 262). *Tiefland* is a film of various social injustices. Certainly, there is the issue of serfs versus master. There is also the sexual injustice the Marquis perpetuates on Martha (and also on Pedro for his sham marriage). Finally, there is the ecological injustice of the Marquis's actions. This injustice is tied inextricably to water.

Although *Das blaue Licht* and *Tiefland* are the only two feature films Riefenstahl directed, the latter has received much less attention than the former, except for its production history. Partially, this is because the film, although completed in 1944, was only first screened ten years later and then removed from circulation by Riefenstahl, so that it was shown sporadically for many years. More important, however, was the issue of the extras who played Spanish villagers. Although set in Spain, most of the filming took place in Germany, Austria, and South Tyrol. In order to have the villagers look appropriately "Spanish," Riefenstahl used Roma and Sinti from a work camp near Salzburg, a fact she at first denied, then tried to minimize by claiming none of the extras came to harm since she saw them all after the war. This claim, too, has been proven false. Needless to say, the issue of "Hitler's director" using forced labor as extras has overshadowed the response by the press and many

academics. Readers can find the history of the Roma and Sinti extras elsewhere (Trimborn 2007, 189–95, 206–08).

More deleterious to the reception of *Tiefland* have been repeated attempts by both filmmakers and scholars to read the film as an anti-Hitler allegory. Since the villagers are in conflict with the local marquis, the view that he is a stand-in for Hitler is widespread. Most prominently, Helma Sanders-Brahms states in her essay "Tyrannenmord," "Leni Riefenstahls Film ist ein klar lesbarer, nur wenig verschlüsselter Aufruf, die Herrschaft der Usurpatoren zu beenden" ("Leni Riefenstahl's film is a clearly readable, only slightly encrypted exhortation to end the rule of the usurpers") (1992, 250). Riefenstahl herself has contradicted this view, saying the film had nothing to do with Hitler, in long keeping with her custom of claiming her films have no political content. In this case, however, Riefenstahl's words are credible. Perhaps more troubling than Sanders-Brahms's contention—since she is, after all, speaking as a fellow female director trying to rehabilitate Riefenstahl—are those film historians who present implausible readings of the film. Both Gisela von Wysocki and Robert von Dassanowsky also argue that *Tiefland* is a film made by a woman in resistance to the Nazi regime. Indeed, Dassanowsky argues that this film is a sign of Riefenstahl's "inner emigration" (1995, 109). Such claims seem unconvincing given Riefenstahl's use of forced labor in the filming.

Only a few critics mention the water subplot in the film, which, as part of the general emphasis that Riefenstahl and Reinl have added to social issues, barely features in the opera that serves as the basis for *Tiefland* (Ulm-Sanford 2001, 132). Thomas Koebner views the fight over water rights as a theme also found in some Westerns: "[D]en Bauern wird im Sinne des Wortes das Wasser abgegraben von einem Rinderbaron" ("The farmers literally have the water dug out from under them") (1997, 222).[3] Kai Marcel Sicks has focused on the "water symbolism" of the film, but his discussion only hints at the role of water as a renewable natural resource (2009, 127). In what follows, I will sketch out how the role of water and its control allow for an ecocritical reading of *Tiefland*.

Water has always played a political role, especially in arid regions such as much of Spain and the American West (Swyngedouw 2015; Worster 1985). It has long become commonplace to note that the settlement of the American West depended on a water regime of damming, irrigation, and intricate water treaties, that "the region has been shaped by its advanced technological mastery of water" (Worster 1985, 11). The Spanish situation is lesser-known, however. The Spanish politician and writer Joaquín Costa notably declared, "To irrigate is to govern" (qtd. in Swyngedouw 2015, 74). Costa was active in the 1890s, at a time when the beginnings of modernization were coming to Spain. The politics of his movement, *regeneracionismo* (Regenerationism), were, unsurprisingly, opposed by the landed gentry. Indeed, we find the converse of Costa's maxim in *Tiefland*: To refuse to irrigate is to assert control. It is no accident

that the opera is explicitly set in the Pyrenees around 1900 and the film likely around the same time.[4] The nobleman of *Tiefland*, the Marquis Don Sebastian, uses water for his own pleasure at the expense of the peasants who depend on it. Both the peasants and the Marquis live in a state of "hydro-dependency," as Sharae Deckard has coined the complex "relation organising the extraction, production and consumption of water" (2021, 134).

Water plays several roles in the film. Similar to *Das blaue Licht*, there is a stark geographic dichotomy in *Tiefland*. This time it is not the village versus the mountains, but rather the highlands versus the lowlands, the *Tiefland* giving the film its name. Unsurprisingly for a mountain film, the lowlands are the scenes of inequality, brutality, and also scarcity (of water and therefore of food for the peasants). In contrast, the mountains and high mountain pastures where Pedro works as a shepherd are a land of plenty. To be sure, he does not have the fancy clothes, castle, or jewels of the Marquis, but neither does anyone else in the film, except the rich mayor's family. As Pedro declares when he is in the mountains, "Gott bin ich froh, dass ich oben bin" and "Hier oben fühl' ich mich freier." ("God, am I glad that I am up here" and "I feel freer up here.") As Pedro prepares to descend to Roccabruna for his marriage, his shepherd colleague warns him, "Du kennst das Tiefland nicht. Dort sind die Menschen anders, nicht gut." ("You don't know the lowlands. People are different there, not good.") The biggest contrast between the highlands and lowlands is the availability of water. This is shown dramatically twice in the film. First, with Pedro's descent to the plains, and secondly at the film's end.

Pedro's world of high pastures and mountains is flush with water. As he descends to Roccabruna for the first time, the camera follows him with shots of mountain streams and waterfalls. Water is in abundance here. Once in the valley, however, we see a lack of water. The lush vegetation of the highlands is gone, replaced by the parched earth of the lowlands. As David Hinton has noted, the lowlands are "parched and barren," while the highlands are "paradise on Earth" (2000, 72). The highlands are the land of wolves and sheep, the lowlands of cattle and, later, the metaphorical wolf (Don Sebastian). As parched as the lowlands may be in Spain—Swyngedouw as an environmental historian even uses the term "drylands" for the arid plains (2015, 54)—they do not have to be quite so dry. This is an active choice by Don Sebastian, local nobleman and, as such, master over any water rights.

As soon as the lowlands are seen in *Tiefland*—and notably this is only after ten minutes of mountain cinematography demonstrating Riefenstahl's origins in the *Bergfilm*—the issue of water use arises. A group of peasants asks the ranch overseer to destroy the low dam, ensuring there is enough water for Don Sebastian's bullfighting bulls but not enough for agriculture. As the farmers say, "Es ist unser aller Wasser. Es kommt von da oben." ("It is water for all of us. It comes from above.") The overseer's answer makes it clear that some

animals are more important to Don Sebastian than human beings: "Das Wehr bleibt. Der Herr Marquis braucht das Wasser für seine Stiere." ("The dam stays. The Marquis needs the water for his bulls.") The peasants' critique is an articulation for a fair allocation of water rights irrespective of class or economic clout. It is a call often still not heeded today.

Indeed, the bulls are a symbol of Don Sebastian's cruelty to his subjects. He is proud that his animals are the "besten Kampfstiere des Königreichs" ("the best fighting bulls in the kingdom") and that he possesses a very large herd. It is important that these are bulls bred for the bullfighting ring. They will not provide food, but rather entertainment far away from Roccabruna, and with no benefit to the poor peasants, whose harvests are diminished because they are denied access to water so that the bulls may have enough. Don Sebastian's fixation on his prizewinning bulls is counterproductive. When the farmers try to reason with him that without a good harvest due to lack of irrigation, they will be unable to pay their rent to him for their land, he threatens to evict them rather than work with them toward a solution.

The farmers revolt. As they tell Don Sebastian, "Wir wollen unsere Rechte." ("We want our rights.") These rights include the right to an adequate water supply. The farmers destroy the dam that withholds the water for Don Sebastian's bulls. Don Sebastian seeks revenge and evicts the miller. This is symbolic, for, while farmers depend on the water, without it the miller's business literally comes to a stop as the waterwheel stops turning and he cannot mill grain anymore. This eviction suits Don Sebastian well, for it allows him to install Martha and Pedro in the mill so that Martha can always be near the Marquis. This plan goes awry, and when it does, water plays an important part in it.

On his wedding night to the mayor's daughter, Don Sebastian sneaks out to visit Martha. Uncharacteristically, the weather has changed. A storm has arisen, beginning in the mountains before reaching the lowlands. Struggling through the rain from the castle to the mill, Don Sebastian does not find a willing Martha waiting for him. Instead, Martha begs for Pedro's protection against the Marquis. Pedro calls Don Sebastian a wolf, referring to the time at the beginning of the film when Pedro killed a wolf stalking his flock. Don Sebastian seeks to flee but is blocked by the farmers, who force him back into a fight with Pedro, who kills the Marquis. The rain stops, having ended the drought in Roccabruna. Martha and Pedro leave the mill and, in the film's final shots, return to the highlands, where life is lush and water abundant. The mountains, and water, have triumphed.

Like Koebner, Hinton views *Tiefland* as trading in the conventions of the Western and transposing "the cattleman versus the homesteaders" into European social criticism. He continues, "The battle for water is only representative of the struggles of the commoners against their masters through

Europe's history" (2000, 74). Hinton also properly notes the differences in ending between *Das blaue Licht* and *Tiefland*, namely, the tragedy of the former versus the happy ending of the latter. He ascribes the difference to the "triumph of purity" in *Tiefland*, whereas in *Das Blaue Licht* the pure character Junta is ultimately sacrificed. I would like to propose an alternate reason for these different endings.

Das blaue Licht ends negatively because the eponymous blue light cannot be replaced. The nature of the extraction precludes this. The mystery and beauty of Monte Cristallo are dependent on the moonlight falling into the crystal-filled grotto at just the right time. Once the villagers of Santa Maria plunder the cave, that beauty is irretrievably lost. The framing narrative of the film may indeed state that the town came to wealth through the crystals that Junta left untouched, but as other critics noted, the ending feels quite summary. Furthermore, as tourism to the Alps increases, the village of Santa Maria only stands to lose. Indeed, the beginnings of Alpine tourism exist in the film, when the painter Vigo arrives from the big city. The frame shows us a modern man and women coming to Santa Maria to stay. No doubt the town would have enjoyed greater fame if the undisturbed grotto had become the chief attraction and children had not hawked its remains to passing tourists.

Tiefland, in contrast, has what appears to be a happy ending. Unlike the finite crystals, the rain is a renewable resource. Once the unjust feudal structures are removed (i.e. the childless Marquis is dead), the farmers will be able to benefit from the natural flow of water. The highlands will remain lush and a refuge for Martha and Pedro, but life in the lowlands will get better, too. The difference here is that the water from the mountains can be used sensibly in the valley. Indeed, we might say, speaking in terms of this volume, that the chief difference here is the nature of the circuits involved. Whereas mining is a broken circuit unless viewed over long periods of time, the water cycle is one that is renewable. All of this is true, up to a point. While the drought has ended in *Tiefland*, it is only through the deus-ex-machina of a storm. The plains of Spain are so drought-stricken that, as mentioned above, the environmental historian Erik Swyngedouw refers to them as the "drylands." *Tiefland* may appear to present an alternative to the exploitative extraction of *Das blaue Licht*, but a positive resolution comes only by an act of God. Once the temporary bounty of water has been used, the peasants will likely return to the struggle amid the arid plains, no longer supported by Pedro and Martha, who have simply removed themselves from the conflicted environment and headed to the hills.

As scholars have noted, the environmental themes in both these films are not at the forefront. Nevertheless, they are present in a degree unusual for the classic German mountain film. Alice Schwarzer's take on Riefenstahl as a pioneering eco-feminist has more to do with feminist politics at the turn of

the twentieth century than Riefenstahl's time, but a closer look at how the environment is remediated in her films is long overdue. Viewing *Das blaue Licht* and *Tiefland* through an ecocritical lens allows us to add to the complex ways in which humans and the environment interact in the classical German mountain film. Nevertheless, one can and must not ignore the context of Leni Riefenstahl's filmmaking. Environmental awareness in the films, especially *Tiefland*, is juxtaposed with a human cost—namely, the use of forced labor as extras. Exploitation of human capital is very much at odds with an environmentally aware approach to cinema—or life—and thus, as is so often the case with Leni Riefenstahl, the critic and viewer are caught between appreciation for the cinematic innovations of her films and a repulsion to how they were made.

Notes

1. While filming for *Tiefland* was completed in 1944, because of the war and Riefenstahl's ostracized status afterward, its premiere was not until ten years later.
2. Martha is described as a "Gypsy," but in order to avoid using pejorative language, I describe her as an itinerant dancer in the text.
3. A similar plot can be found in the documentary *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (Pare Lorentz, 1936) as well as the better-known drama *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974).
4. While it is not possible to know when *Tiefland* takes place, there are no historical markers of modernity (cars, electricity, etcetera).

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