

4 'Wenn wir Helden wären, wären wir schon längst daheim'¹

Realism and anti-war tendencies in four films

Films such as *NAMENLOSE HELDEN* (1925), *WESTFRONT 1918* (1930), *DIE ANDERE SEITE* (1931) and *NIEMANDSLAND* (1931), like the war documentaries, can be related to New Objectivity. *WESTFRONT 1918* especially showed 'striking similarities to the basic doctrine of the New Objectivity', according to Kracauer.² These four films represent another approach to the war than has been discussed so far. Lacking archival footage, or making only limited use of it – with the exception of *NAMENLOSE HELDEN*, which appeared to have quite a lot archival footage – these films tried to get as close as possible to the western front experience by focusing on the personal experiences shared by a small group of soldiers. The confrontation with the home front was also included in these films. None of these four films were so-called neutral history lessons but representations of different subjective worlds of experience. Another similarity between the films was their anti-war tendency.

If we compare these films to the 'documentary' war films, we may well ask ourselves whether they presented a different perspective on the war. To what degree, for example, were the films different in terms of narration and cinematography? In addition, we may ask whether these anti-war films, in contrast to the 'documentaries', which mostly represented the official perspective on the war, can be considered 'counter-histories', and whether they did, as such, fulfil a demythologizing role.³

Literary context: war literature

New Objectivity is often thought to have reached its high point round about 1929, but *NAMENLOSE HELDEN*, *WESTFRONT 1918*, *DIE ANDERE SEITE* and *NIEMANDSLAND* were nevertheless part of this cultural context.⁴ Perhaps only its tone of voice changed after 1929. While it was an aesthetic practice in principle, realism fulfilled a different function and gained prestige in a time of social, political and especially economic upheaval. According to some commentators, including Michael Gollbach and Modris Eksteins, the 1929 crisis prompted Germans from all walks of life to re-examine and come to terms with their war past for the first time.⁵ In this process, Gollbach says, an impor-

tant role was played by war films and war novels, because of their mass appeal.⁶

In the period 1928-1933, the last phase of the Weimar Republic, a boom occurred in the production of war literature. In contrast to historical belletristic writing, these war novels were a form of 'historical literature of experience', although they had all the characteristics of the New Objectivity. Most war literature reflects the authors' experiences, and most of the directors of the above mentioned films had first-hand experience of the war. For example, *WESTFRONT 1918* was based on Ernst Johannsen's *Vier von der Infanterie* (1929) and *DIE ANDERE SEITE* on the play *Journey's End* by Robert C. Sheriff. Literature has also been the starting point for a number of other war films, which will be discussed later. Since the four films dealt with in this chapter are clearly anti-war films, it seems appropriate also to discuss the Weimar boom in war literature.

The wave of literature about the war is often said to have been caused by the success of Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*. At the end of 1928, Remarque's book was serialised in the *Vossische Zeitung*. Encouraged by the many positive reactions, the author and his publisher decided to publish the work as a novel. The book was finally released on 31 January 1929.⁷ In the wake of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, the genre experienced a huge upsurge of popularity. Between 1928 and 1933, more than 200 novels appeared in Germany that dealt with the First World War.⁸ The first decade of the Republic saw the publication of no more than 100 books about the war, most of them memoirs and diaries by senior officers. Since in later years most attention was paid to anti-war literature – with the notable exception of the work of Ernst Jünger⁹ – the impression may have been created that in the final period of the Weimar Republic, most war novels published had an anti-war tendency. The best known were *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (1927) by Arnold Zweig, *Jahrgang 1902* (1928) by Ernst Gläser, *Krieg* (1928) by Ludwig Renn, *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* (1929) by Adam Scharrer, *Heeresbericht* (1930) by Edlef Köppen and *Des Kaisers Kulis* (1930) by Theodor Plevier. Although the number of anti-war books increased compared to previous years, it is very small set against the production of right-wing pro-war literature.¹⁰

Despite their relatively small number, the anti-war novels spoke in a voice that had not yet been heard so clearly in Germany. Michael Gollbach has described the characteristics of these novels in his study of German war literature of the Weimar period. He lists the following distinguishing features:

- War is pictured as a source of ugliness and disgust, as a perversion and loss of human dignity.
- War is not decreed by destiny, but coincidental and meaningless.

- Comradeship at the front is only a means of survival made inevitable by the war, while in principle, the individual is isolated.
- The front soldier’s psyche is characterised by the following traits: disillusionment, indifference, anxiety, depression, desorientation, concern for the other, psychic deformity and lack of identity.
- The enemy is a human being of equal value, a comrade with whom there is a ‘relation’ of solidarity without hatred.
- The war itself is the main conflict.
- The future is either pacifist or pointless and without any perspective.¹¹

Literature that glorified the war, on the other hand, was characterised by an emphasis on heroism and the willingness to sacrifice. War was a decree of fate that offered the soldier an opportunity to show his true nature. Comradeship at the front was the supreme ideal to be realised, and it was also a prefiguration of a new ideal of national community. The war itself was not the main conflict, most problems were caused by the treacherous Heimat, the home front. The enemy was an inferior creature, an object of aggression and hatred.¹²

The question is whether anti-war films had the same characteristics as anti-war literature and whether the cinematographical representation offered perspectives on the war that were different in terms of content.

NAMENLOSE HELDEN

NAMENLOSE HELDEN (originally called ‘Krieg’) has probably been lost, and there is very little information about the film. The only sources are one programme that has been preserved, several reviews and an exchange of correspondence about a request that the film be banned. What we do know is that the producer, Vienna-based Prometheus-Film, assigned director Hans Ssekely to make the film. Mid-October 1925, the premiere took place in Berlin. NAMENLOSE HELDEN appears to have had an explicit anti-war tendency with communist leanings. This was the main reason for the Reichswehrminister to file a request for a ban with the censorship authorities. The film had already been banned for people under eighteen.¹³ The request was denied, for the simple reason that according to the censorship law, ‘die Zulassung wegen einer politischen, sozialen, religiösen, ethischen oder Weltanschauungstendenz als solcher nicht versagt werden darf’.¹⁴ The film did not contain any elements that portrayed the Reichswehr as ‘verächtlich’¹⁵, or that might cause a disruption of public order or damage German prestige abroad. The communist ten-

dency was thus left intact, making *NAMENLOSE HELDEN* the only German war film of the Weimar period to gain the approval of *Die Rote Fahne*.

The protagonists of the film narrative are the worker Scholz (Erwin Kaiser), his wife (Lili Schönborn) and their two children. The family is living a happy life until the outbreak of the war forces Scholz to join the army and leave his wife and children behind. At the front and at home there is nothing but misery. The woman is destitute and loses her son in a domestic fire. Scholz learns of his son's tragic fate just before an attack. Next, he is blinded in a mine explosion. Returning once the war has ended, he finds his wife dying. He is left with only his youngest son. One day, during the post-war period of revolts and streetfighting, Scholz, who is blind, ignores a warning sign saying trespassers will be shot. Scholz is shot dead, and his youngest son, who had gone to a soup kitchen to get food for his father, is now an orphan.¹⁶

Besides scenes with realistic acting, *NAMENLOSE HELDEN* was 'unterstützt durch Originalaufnahmen (die aus 10.000 m Kriegsaufnahmen der Kriegsarchive aller kriegsführenden Länder stammen, Aufnahmen, welche bisher noch nie gezeigt wurden)'.¹⁷ Since the film has not been preserved, there is little to say about the cinematography, except to repeat what the critics wrote. Most critics focused on the political tendency in the film. The fact that *Die Rote Fahne* praised the film says much about that tendency. The communist critic also lambasted Von Hindenburg, the national war hero who 'desecrated' many a war memorial with his remembrance activities (a national war memorial did not yet exist), while also protesting against obscuring the misery of the war and middle-class pacifism:

Dieser Film ehrt das Andenken der Millionen Opfer des Imperialismus, indem er sich scharf und eindeutig gegen den imperialistischen Krieg und gegen seine Ursachen, den Kapitalismus, kehrt. Nur warum der Titel "Namenlose Helden" für die namenlos Ermordeten? Sie waren trotz ihrer Tapferkeit keine Helden, sie konnten keine Helden sein, da sie betört und betäubt für den Geldsack starben, ihre Brüder und Klassengenossen morden mussten.¹⁸

An important criterion for a favourable review in *Die Rote Fahne* was the attention paid to the (imperialist) causes of the war and the run-up to the conflict. How was this done in *NAMENLOSE HELDEN*? One method was placing the story of Scholz and his family in a broader historical context. According to the newspaper, the film began with the first Balkan war of 1912 and ended with the 1920 Kapp-putsch, preceded by footage of the revolts of the 1918 and 1919.¹⁹ This procedure makes *NAMENLOSE HELDEN* one of the few films to have placed the war in a context that went further than the last 39 days before the war, as was the case with 1914. The use of archival footage played an important role in this contextualisation. *Die Rote Fahne* critic ascribed great value to these images:

‘unbedingte, kontrollierbar absolute Wahrheit’.²⁰ Another method used by director Hans Ssekely was contrast editing. The *Film-Kurier* reported that the film saw big business as the main instigator of the war: ‘Hierfür wird das luxuriöse Leben der Familie eines Munitionsfabrikanten während des Krieges im Gegensatz zu dem hungernden Volk gezeigt.’²¹ To *Die Rote Fahne*, these images spelled the same interpretation of the causes of the war as the *Film-Kurier*, and the communist newspaper appreciated the film very much. It also remarked that the editing rhythm was very high: ‘Wie da schnell nacheinander in wuchtigen Konstrasten die Klassengegensätze immer wieder unwiderlegbar (...) dargestellt (...) werden.’²² According to *Die Rote Fahne*, the emphasis on the class struggle was the main reason why the film showed an anti-war tendency rather than a pacifist tendency. After all, pacifism rejected the violence of the class struggle and the revolution and civil war that went with it.²³ Although the German communists – the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands had been established in 1918 – came out against an imperialist war at the end of the First World War, this did not mean that they rejected the violence they believed was necessary to overthrow capitalist society. This ran against the basic assumptions of organised pacifism.

The archival footage used by Ssekely was mostly of the battlefield. It was important that the director had apparently succeeded in showing not only ‘die furchtbare mechanisierte Eintönigkeit’ of the war, but also its ‘bestiale Dynamiek’.²⁴ A review in the *Vossische Zeitung* indicates that the film did in fact contain horrendous images. The review also refers to Eisenstein and Piscator as precursors of this kind of realism.²⁵ However, the worst images had been banned by the censor. The censorship report about the trailer said that two fragments had been cut: that of a man being hurled into the air by the power of an explosion, and one of a wounded soldier writhing with pain behind barbed wire.²⁶

NAMENLOSE HELDEN must have been unique in many respects, including its radical point of view, its extensive use of archival material, its uncompromising display of misery and by not only showing violence and explosions, but also the monotony of the war. Perhaps it was the most radical anti-war film of the entire Weimar period, which would have fitted Gollbach’s anti-war outline of characteristics very well. Five years later, *WESTFRONT 1918* appeared in the cinemas. Although this was not a communist film, it was a worthy successor of *NAMENLOSE HELDEN*.

WESTFRONT 1918²⁷

The only war film Georg Wilhelm Pabst made, premiered on 23 May 1930.²⁸ The film was reasonably successful. In the commercial rankings for the 1930-

1931 season, the film came ninth – *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* by Lewis Milestone reached sixth place in the next season.²⁹ *WESTFRONT 1918* was also more successful than *DIE ANDERE SEITE* and *NIEMANDSLAND*. It has without any doubt become the best known German film about the First World War. Its fame, however, was overshadowed by the success of *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*. Dubbed in German, and under the German book title, this film went into circulation only months after *WESTFRONT 1918* had opened. While Pabst's film could be shown undisturbed, Lewis Milestone's film created such an outrage that it was banned temporarily.

Yet the films were very similar in tenor.³⁰ Much of the consternation was probably caused by the fact that the film had been made by an American director, a representative of the former enemy. There were fears that the film's successful international tour might smirch Germany's 'good' name abroad. Especially the right-wing press labelled the film as anti-German propaganda. This was not so strange, since a number of films had been made in the U.S. that touched a sore spot in Germany.³¹ The question is whether the different reactions to the films also suggested that a German director could presume more than a foreign (or American) director. Incidentally, *WESTFRONT 1918* did not escape from the censor unscathed. Even though it was approved, it was banned for people under eighteen³², as had been the case with *NAMENLOSE HELDEN*, and although the National Socialist reaction to *WESTFRONT 1918* was more balanced than that to *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*, Pabst's film was nevertheless banned in April 1933 following the Nazi assumption of power in Germany.³³

In the second half of the Weimar period, Pabst had built a reputation as a filmer of social-realistic themes. *WESTFRONT 1918* marked a new high point in his realistic film art. Some months before he began shooting the film in March 1930, Pabst spent some time in London, where he acquainted himself with sound technique for film. *WESTFRONT 1918* was the first result of Pabst's absorption of this new technique. If one reads the reactions and compares the film to other sound films of the period, one is led to conclude that the final result was not altogether positive. One of the main problems was the absence of any facility for mixing the sound. The bad reproduction certainly ruins some of the dialogues, which are barely audible.³⁴ However, the sound accompanying the war is rendered very well, which was an important contribution to the success of the film.

Pabst himself did not have any first-hand experience of the war. He was captured at the beginning of the war and only released from a French prison camp in 1918. However, a number of other participants in the project, including some of the actors, had actually fought at the front line. But the film was

factually based on the front experiences laid down by Ernst Johannsen in his book *Vier von der Infanterie. Ihre letzten Tagen an der Westfront 1918*.³⁵

If we compare *WESTFRONT 1918* with other films from the Weimar period, we may call it radical from a number of perspectives. We will later discuss the particular scenes and sequences that betray this radicalism. Compared to the book, however, the film's point of view is fairly moderate. Without exaggeration, the tone of voice of the book is tough and cynical. As Michael Gollbach comments, Johannsen's book is ‘von einem zynisch-aggressiven Nihilismus geprägt, der auf der ohnmächtigen Wut und dem grimmigen Hass des Autors auf den antihumanen Krieg beruht’.³⁶

Pabst showed the experience of war from the perspective of the individual. Reading the credits, one is struck by the names given to the protagonists. Of the four infantrymen, only one is referred to by his proper name, Karl (Gustav Diessl)³⁷, while the others are designated by intellectual, geographical and military names: the Student (H.J. Moebis), the Bavarian (Fritz Kampers) and the Lieutenant (Claus Clausen). With this choice of names, Pabst presents the viewer with a social cross-section of contemporary German society. This was a conscious choice on the part of the director, since in the book, most of the protagonists do have proper names. In other words, Pabst chose a socially exemplary approach.³⁸ Despite this strategy, the characters are less abstract than those in *NIEMANDSLAND*, where they represented national identities. In both cases, the central interest is the experience of the average infantryman at the western front.³⁹ This emphasis on ordinary characters is enhanced by the fact that most of the actors were unknown to the public.

Although the four characters are the starting point, much of *WESTFRONT 1918* focuses on two protagonists in particular: the Student and Karl. The structure of the film can be seen as the development of two separate trajectories. The first part of the film deals with the adventures of the Student, while the second part concentrates on Karl. Both parts have a nearly equal number of scenes/sequences, but in terms of duration, the emphasis is on the second part, which is one and a half times the length of the first part. Besides the fact that most of the attention in the film goes to Karl's personal life, the film narrative also ends with his death. This makes him the main protagonist, which explains why he is the only character to be called by his proper name.

The narrative hinge between the two parts is a cabaret sequence in which we see a singer and two comedians perform before an audience of German soldiers, which, incidentally, does not include the four infantrymen. In a brief scene that precedes this sequence, we see, as it were, how the narrative perspective is transferred from the Student to Karl. In a vast and empty landscape where everything has been shot to pieces, Karl, who is going home on leave,



Karl and the Student on the edge of a bomb crater

meets the Student, who is returning to his regiment. Just as, earlier, we followed the Student from the first sequence in his love affair with Yvette, we now follow the adventures of Karl and his wife. The front scenes of the two parts also indicate an analogy between the two characters. In the first part, we see how the student reports as a volunteer, which enables him to visit Yvette. In the second part, Karl is the one who volunteers. However, his motive is quite different from that of the Student. He seems bitter by his wife's adultery and the death of the Student, which makes his initiative look like a suicide mission. The relatively optimistic attitude to life that characterised the first part has changed into bitter pessimism in part two. After all, while the characters in the first part manage to survive the horror of the battlefield, death is their reward in the second part. The war wins in the end.

The two protagonists are the main starting point of the narrative, which means that the other characters are developed less. However, they do fulfil an important function in the narrative. The opening sequence introduces the Bavarian as a *bon vivant* who is fond of laughing, and throughout the film, he is the one who puts things into perspective, and even in the thick of the battle, the Bavar-

ian continues to be bright and breezy. Although he is fearless in battle, he is the one who remarks (spoken in a broad Bavarian dialect): ‘Dös, wenn wir Helden wären, täten wir längst scho dahome sein.’⁴⁰ In contrast, the Lieutenant’s character is less stable. Having been incorporated into the structure of military hierarchy, he is responsible for his platoon and he owes those higher in rank unconditional obedience. To illustrate this, Pabst has him stand to attention in an almost comical way when he speaks to a senior officer on the telephone. His fit of madness is not only connected to the military hierarchy and the Lieutenant’s subservience to authority, it also marks the poignant contrast between the generals who pass orders while they are safely behind the front and the Lieutenant, who has to operate in the chaos of the firing line and witnesses his own platoon being hit by friendly fire.⁴¹ As the sole survivor left standing after the battle, we see him amidst a pile of bodies in the penultimate scene, screaming ‘Zu Befehl, Majestät! Hurrah! Hurrah!’ While the Bavarian remains cool-headed, the Lieutenant is not equal to the situation. In the end, however, the Lieutenant survives, and the Bavarian, like Karl, dies.

The characters thus not only represent various social and geographical positions, they also stand for four different psychic conditions: depression (Karl); optimism (the Student); putting things in perspective/humour (the Bavarian); madness (the Lieutenant). They embody some of the psychological characteristics which Gollbach formulated on the basis of war literature.⁴²

The war scene

The enemy in *WESTFRONT 1918* is always portrayed as an anonymous figure. In the fighting scenes, we see him as a group. Sometimes we only hear the enemy, for example when a screaming French soldier is dying a slow and painful death on the barbed wire. While the image of a writhing soldier was cut from *NAMENLOSE HELDEN* by the censor, here sound can create the suggestion of the same image – an effect that is sometimes stronger than the actual image itself. In accordance with Gollbach’s anti-war characteristics, these images present the enemy as an individual of equal value who suffers as much from the war as his counterparts.

The second time the enemy appears as a comrade occurs in the last scene, when a dying Karl takes hold of a Frenchman’s hand. The French soldier says: ‘Moi, camarade, pas ennemie.’ The more poignant are the images in which we are confronted with an enemy who kills one of the protagonists. A French-African soldier attacks the Student from behind and after a fight, drowns him in a pool of watery mud in a bomb crater. This is cruel enough in itself – critics and audiences were shocked – but the scene in the book was even more cruel: ‘Then a tall negro appears behind him, grins and hurls a handgrenade into the



Karl with his wife and his mother

crater.⁴³ The grenade explodes in the hands of the soldier when he tries to throw it back over the edge of the crater. This is a character that does not appear in the film (in the film the Lieutenant is the fourth character, in the book a certain Job). The Student standing next to Job in the crater is also hit: 'The student cries out, spins around like a spinning top, stares at the heavens, stares into the negro's mug, who is bending over the edge of the crater and looks him in the eye. He closes his eyes. Death, yes, this is death.'⁴⁴

According to Pabst, (and according to public opinion and the censor as well) many scenes in the book were apparently too horrific to be translated into film images.⁴⁵ His film would probably have gotten into trouble with the censor (and with public opinion), just like *NAMENLOSE HELDEN*. Nonetheless, he evidently did not have any problem with casting a French-African as the enemy and having him commit such a horrible act. Was it perhaps more acceptable, in this case, to portray the enemy as a 'foreigner', a soldier with whom feelings of solidarity would have been difficult anyway, because of his 'inferior' status? None of the critics say anything about racism, as we shall see later on. Perhaps a film such as *NIEMANDSLAND*, with its sympathetic if slightly ste-

reotypical portrait of its French-African protagonist, and the reviews it inspired offer more insight into this matter.

The war is shown as a succession of tribulations. At the front, there is the constant thunder of exploding shells and the staccato of bursts of machine-gun fire. All conceivable horrors of warfare are concentrated in 90 minutes, though there are several long interruptions (the cabaret scene and Karl's leave, for example). In most of the front scenes, at least one life-threatening situation occurs: being nearly hit by a bomb; the collapse of a trench; being shelled by friendly fire; carrying out highly dangerous patrols; a cruel murder from behind; an attack with tanks and gas; and the inevitable insanity and death of the last scenes. Scenes such as these are the dramatic high points of the film. The physical dangers to which the front soldiers are exposed have been concentrated at the beginning and end of the film. The rest of the film deals with the more subtle social and psychological effects of the war.

As Gollbach indicated in his dichotomy, comradeship is indeed a necessary means of survival. Despite the differences in place of origin, age, status and social background, not a cross word is spoken between the infantrymen and there is not even the slightest suggestion of a conflict between them. They support each other through thick and thin. For example, the Bavarian will not let Karl go alone on a dangerous patrol, they save each other's lives, they stick by each other. There are no conflicts between the comrades, nor between the German soldiers and the enemy (except for the murder of the Student). Besides the struggle of war itself, the film is dominated by the 'struggle' between the home front and the battle front. For example, when he comes home, Karl catches his wife in the act with the butcher's boy. Although his wife explains that she did it for the meat and because she was lonely, Karl will not budge and treats her with cold indifference throughout his leave. When he leaves home again, he does so with a powerful longing to see his comrades at the front.⁴⁶ While in many respects, Pabst knocks warfare off its pedestal, he leaves the myth of comradeship at the front intact.

At first sight, one might call Pabst's approach to heroism ambivalent. On the one hand, he does not present either of the four protagonists as depressed or anxious. They have a clean record and in combat they clearly prove their fearlessness. When volunteers are needed, they are the first to report. It is not they, but the other soldiers who fear most for their lives. The Bavarian's remark about heroism mentioned earlier is aimed at the companion of a recruit who is disgusted by a 'corpse' (the Student's hand sticking out of the mud) and to whom the companion says: 'Reiss dich zusammen, Mensch! Wir sind doch Helden!'⁴⁷ On the other hand, however, the motives for the protagonists' actions are not the motives of traditional heroism, that is, fighting for country

and honour. These more elevated motives are utterly lacking in our heroes. They are not fighting in the name of some national slogan, but to see their dearest, to forget their misery or to help their comrades-in-arms. They are all too human. Pabst has chosen to nuance heroism and anti-heroism in a subtle way, characterising the protagonists as both heroes and antiheroes. They are not clad in the armour of 'die-hards', but neither are they portrayed as scaredy-cats or cowards. This makes the chance of losing the viewer's sympathy for the characters very small.

Despite the strong antagonism between the fighting front and the home front, despite the racist portrayal of the enemy and despite a certain display of heroism, the film evokes and evoked pacifist connotations, if only for the fact that all protagonists die in the war, which leaves the viewer no option but to denounce it. In view of these aspects of the film, *WESTFRONT 1918* would have to be positioned somewhere between the two extremities of Gollbach's dichotomy. However, the end of the film does not leave any doubt about its ideological message. Not only is there a reconciliation between Karl and (the image of) his wife, but Pabst also shows the fate of death being shared by a German (Karl) and a Frenchman. The text that closes the film is quite remarkable. The word 'Ende' is followed by a question mark and an exclamation sign. This is an indirect reference to the contemporary social crisis, the economic misery and the political tensions. The film thus ends with a warning.⁴⁸

Cinematography

One of the first aspects Gollbach mentions in his classification is the way the war at the front is represented. In anti-war prose, war is presented as ugly and horrific. As we have seen, the same is true for the film, but the question remains how the front and the fighting itself were represented. Apart from the *mise en scène* and camera technique, editing and sound were the main filmic means that Pabst used to give expression to the front experience. The question is whether his use of these means is essentially different from the war documentaries discussed earlier, in which the experience of the front was conveyed through constructed scenes.

The first scene that actually shows us an image of the front is in the penultimate sequence, lasting eleven minutes in total. Earlier enemy attacks took place at night, this one during the day. Karl and the Bavarian join two other soldiers on patrol. The camera is positioned over the meandering trench which has partly been covered with barbed wire, and in a long take (36 seconds) follows the soldiers to their next shelter, a crater. The camera increases pace with the soldiers and in the end, its position gets lower and lower. Thin clouds of smoke seep across the edge of the crater and the muffled sound of explosions

can be heard in the distance. The four soldiers see a hand sticking out of the mud and the Bavarian vents his familiar remark about heroism. One minute later, a machine gun is put into position, and helmets can be seen rising above the crater. Next, we see the vast and empty landscape, and despite the fact that the horizon is very low, it is filmed only indirectly from the point of view of the soldiers. The camera is actually at a vantage point above the crater. Then the first explosions occur. In *DER WELTKRIEG*, showing explosions usually meant stepping up the editing pace, in which every shot showed columns of smoke and mud being lifted into the air. However, in *WESTFRONT 1918* we see at least ten explosions in only one shot, with the camera moving about in small jerks. The view is completely obscured. Next, we briefly see another sharp movement (a reframing) of Karl and the Bavarian. Karl shouts: ‘Sie kommen.’ In an extreme long shot from the front, from the indirect high point of view of the German soldiers, we see the French attack. We see them negotiating the obstacles in their way, we see explosions, craters which serve as shelters, we see the barbed wire and how many soldiers are shot. This is all shown in a long take of about twenty seconds. We see the Bavarian firing his rifle while Karl lobbs a handgrenade at the enemy. What follows is the longest take of this sequence (some 90 seconds), in which we see no man’s land from a side view. The French run past the camera in profile. Both foreground and background are clearly visible. After some time, tanks emerge from the trails of smoke.

Again we see images of German soldiers firing a machine gun, followed by footage of a landscape in which the camera appears to have been closer to the action and in which the horizon appears to be higher. In the foreground, we see a fallen soldier lying on his belly, only his legs are visible. Next, we see a tank traversing the picture frontally at an angle, with French soldiers hiding behind it (long shot). The shot that follows is identical to an earlier one (the Bavarian firing his rifle and Karl throwing a hand grenade). Next, there are a number of ‘shot-reverse-shots’ between the Bavarian and Karl on the one hand and the advancing French soldiers on the other. The French are now also shown in close-up. The Bavarian prepares to attack, claspings a knife between his teeth, but is then hit, after which he moans and falls back into the crater. The French and Germans are now throwing hand grenades at each other. The other German soldiers are hit also. The tanks move up further until one of them passes the camera at no more than an arm’s length. An infernal noise erupts and the horizon is darkened by a wall of explosions. In the end, there is also man-to-man fighting in a German trench bulging with dead bodies. Next, we see a thick cloud of smoke spreading through the trenches, and we hear a French soldier warn against poison gas. Germans wearing gas masks come running into shot. It is in this mass of dead bodies that we see the Lieutenant (filmed

from below, with the corpses visible in the foreground) get up and scream out his madness, after which he is taken away.

An answer to the question asked earlier, whether Pabst's representation of the battlefield is essentially different from the representations in films discussed earlier, must be both affirmative and negative. Films such as *DOUAUMONT*, *SOMME*, *TANNENBERG* and *DER WELTKRIEG* contain scenes with long takes and inconspicuous editing. Pabst also pays much attention to the landscape in no man's land by frequently using extreme long shots, as had been done before in many 'documentary' films. In one of the longest takes of this sequence, the camera actually leaves the characters to become a 'neutral' observer.

Pabst deviates in at least two respects. In the first place, he keeps his camera close to his characters. Although there is no direct point of view in the combat scenes, the camera's view is related to their view on no man's land. Such camera positions are less frequent in other films, where there are mostly anonymous protagonists, with the exception of some scenes in *SOMME*. Staying close to the characters enhances the identification and emotional involvement on the part of the viewer. Secondly, for the representation of the horrors of modern war Pabst has chosen a different form in stead of quick-paced editing and other cinematographical interventions (such as the rotating letters in the *Somme* scene in *DER WELTKRIEG*). Long takes and deep focus belong to cinematographical conventions that indicate a realistic approach. Not intervening through the editing is supposed to enhance the illusion of reality. Weighing one thing against the other, we must come to the conclusion that Pabst's approach bears close resemblance to the documentary style of filming. This has been confirmed by recent analyses.⁴⁹

DIE ANDERE SEITE

Nearly eighteen months after the premiere of *WESTFRONT 1918*, on 29 October 1931, *DIE ANDERE SEITE* opened. *DIE ANDERE SEITE* was an adaptation, like *WESTFRONT 1918*. The play *Journey's End* (1928), on which the film was based, marked British bank employee Robert C. Sheriff's debut. This author reaped much international fame in a short period of time, not least in German theatres, where *Journey's End* premiered in August 1929.⁵⁰ In England, the play was filmed by James Whale, and in Germany, it was adapted for the screen by Heinz Paul. On the whole, this director followed the gist of the original play, abridging the dialogue without damaging its essence.

As was indicated in the previous chapter, Paul served as an officer in the

German army during the war. Besides the three ‘documentaries’ discussed earlier, he also made feature films that dealt with the war. In addition to *DIE ANDERE SEITE*, he also directed the films *U 9 WEDDIGEN* (1927) and *DREI TAGE AUF LEBEN UND TOD* (1929). The style of filming shows that creating the strongest possible illusion of objectivity was very important to Paul. At the same time, his films betray a preference for some of the more heroic episodes from Germany’s then recent war past. This aspect, combined with his attempt at (audio-)visual historiography ensured that his realistic style did not have the same ideological implications as that of Pabst, even though in the reception, some of his films were labelled as anti-war films. As will be shown in our discussion of the reviews, *DIE ANDERE SEITE* was a borderline case in this respect. Reactions to the film and the promotion campaign that preceded the premiere show the degree to which the success of the film was determined by the presence and acting performance of Conrad Veidt, an actor who enjoyed great popularity. On the posters announcing the film, his head was shown in a life-size representation. Like *WESTFRONT 1918*, *DIE ANDERE SEITE* was inadmissible for young people.

WESTFRONT 1918 and *DIE ANDERE SEITE* are both set on the western front. Since the protagonists of *DIE ANDERE SEITE* belong to the British army, the front in this film must have been north of the Somme (from 1917 between Nieuport and Amiens). The film is more accurate with respect to dates. The opening text indicates that the film covers the period from 18 to 21 March 1918, the three days before the German spring offensive of 21 March. In a series of thrusts, the German army managed to seize large parts of France, pushing on to the Marne river for the second time since 1915, where the allies halted the German advance in mid-July. It was the last great convulsion of the war. In early August, the Germans were pushed back to their original positions.

There are more similarities between the two films. Besides the fact that they are set in the same region and in the same year, *DIE ANDERE SEITE* also concentrates on a small group of soldiers at the front. And, as was the case in *WESTFRONT 1918*, the war makes victims among the protagonists, while the lives of the leaders (Stanhope and the Lieutenant) are ‘spared’. In both films, the central concern is direct human experience, which is even explicitly mentioned in the opening text of *DIE ANDERE SEITE*. In this film, the psychology of individual personalities is featured more prominently than in *WESTFRONT 1918*, which also makes the film less exemplary.

Not surprisingly, the distinguishing feature of *DIE ANDERE SEITE* is its international perspective. As the title suggests, the film is set in a British camp, and nowhere does the film try to conceal this fact. National identity shines through everything. The names and uniforms are British, in the German dialogue the

protagonists address each other with 'sir', British authors are regularly cited or referred to (including Lewis Carroll), and the Germans are called 'Huns'. Heinz Paul has not changed anything in this perspective. He has also adopted British humour, which in this film is mainly related to food and sexuality. The former is guaranteed by the funny cook (Willy Trenk-Treibtsch) who attracts attention with his lap dog Kitty which he continuously addresses and spoils. The latter aspect is expressed in the erotic prints hanging everywhere in the trench shelter. One of the prints shows the body of a uniformed soldier being mounted and tugged by naked women. A comic effect is achieved when Raleigh repeatedly and without noticing himself is shown in one frame with the prints. The association between him and the prints underlines his (sexual) inexperience and innocence. Besides that, they are a clear reference to the male community which has a central position in this film. Indeed, it has no female characters at all. Incidentally, *DIE ANDERE SEITE* is the only German war film that contains references to eroticism. This must clearly be attributed to the British origin of the drama.

The only thing that really changed was the English title of the play, whose German version, *DIE ANDERE SEITE*, clearly indicates a German perspective. It is another title rather than a translation of the English title, *Journey's End*. Apparently, no one should get the idea that the psychological effects of the war also pertained to German officers. This begs the question whether, bearing in mind the so-called Dolchstoßlegende, such a film, from a German military perspective, could ever have been made in Germany. The officers' debacle at the end of the film would certainly have suggested that the German army was actually defeated in the field. This would have given the film a critical political tendency that would have been quite unthinkable in view of Heinz Paul's other work. Paul's other war films showed him to be an exponent of a more nationalistic approach to the war that was also endorsed officially.

The same is true for his view on heroism, even though, as Pabst had done, he chose two-dimensional heroes. By adding a prologue text to the film (lacking in the play), indicating that the film is about people 'die sich trotz Wirrnis und Qual in Pflichterfüllung aufrechterhalten wollen', he makes clear that the characters' actions are mainly motivated by a sense of duty. It goes without saying that they did their duty serving the fatherland and national honour, in spite of the fact that there is not much emphasis on this in the film narrative itself. Another and much stronger dimension of the film is the other side of traditional heroism. In contrast to *WESTFRONT 1918*, there is a strong emphasis on the psychological effects of the war. Not only because of this psychological approach, but also because of the emphasis on the dialogue, more attention is drawn to anti-heroism, which is thus more subtly rendered than it was in *WESTFRONT 1918*. On the one hand, the film (and Sheriff's play) corresponds to

Gollbach's typology of this particular anti-war aspect, but on the other hand, these tendencies are slightly weakened by Paul's added prologue text.

One could also say that the psychological 'weaknesses' displayed by the characters in *DIE ANDERE SEITE* are more sophisticated than those in *WESTFRONT 1918*, which is dominated by physical danger and discomforts such as makeshift shelters and lice. Also, there is a clear distinction between the two films in terms of class. The officers in *DIE ANDERE SEITE* are representatives of higher social strata, and as such, they suffer less deprivations at the front than the foot soldiers. Their shelters are more spacious and more comfortable, they have a cook at their disposal and their menu is considerably more varied (chicken besides the alleged rat's meat) and more luxurious, including considerable amounts of spirits. On the other hand, however, under certain circumstances, the psychological pressure on the officers is greater than on the ordinary soldiers, for example when they have to lead their soldiers into battle. The Lieutenant in *WESTFRONT 1918* also collapses under the responsibilities of his role, the more so since he does not have the luxury goods to ease the pressure. In *DIE ANDERE SEITE*, fear and the weight of responsibility are washed away with whiskey. Stanhope can only survive when he numbs himself with great amounts of alcohol. Hibbert complains of serious headaches (neuralgia) caused mainly by fear. No wonder one of the fiercest confrontations of the film takes place between these two men. Hibbert releases what Stanhope tries to repress. Hibbert is perhaps the only character in the film one could call a coward. The others may be weighed down by the situation, but in the end they all perform their duty as officers.

Finally, yet another difference between the films is the way the enemy has been portrayed. While the enemy is at least given a face in *WESTFRONT 1918*, he remains physically absent in *DIE ANDERE SEITE*. Perhaps this also played a part in the rather sympathetic reception the film was given in Germany.

The protagonists in *DIE ANDERE SEITE* are a group of five officers who balance each other in terms of character traits and who perform various functions in the narrative. However, they are not unequivocal characters. The most striking of them, captain Stanhope (Conrad Veidt) and Lieutenant Raleigh (Wolfgang Liebeneiner) are each other's opposites, but in due course, they also develop noble feelings for each other. Stanhope, the authoritarian leader who has become brutalized by alcohol and his long stay at the front, is contrasted with the young, well-mannered and naive Raleigh. In the end, the former also turns out to have a sensitive side, and the latter a brave one. In principle, each man has a distorted view of the other, which causes the necessary irritations. Stanhope sees Raleigh as a child who, in his letters home to his sister, tattles on the true nature of his future brother-in-law. He turns out to be wrong. In his turn, Raleigh sees Stanhope as the hero that he himself is not. The other three

characters, Osborne, Hibbert and Trotter, can be summarized as the cautious father figure, the neurotic and the grouser with a sense of humour.

The image that the protagonists have of each other is an essential fact in the film because it relates to the representation of the war in general and the antagonism between the home front and the battle front. While with Pabst, this aspect is not resolved until the very last moment of the film, the change to mutual acceptance between Raleigh and Stanhope in *DIE ANDERE SEITE* is much more gradual.

The development of the narrative takes place along two lines. The first one concerns the changes in the relationship between Stanhope and Raleigh. The second narrative line is related to the increase in tension about the upcoming attack. Both these developments interlock, and in successive scenes, there is a continuous interaction between 'inside' and 'outside', both literally and in a figurative sense, between the battle field and the shelter on the one hand, and behaviour and feelings on the other hand. While the relationship between Stanhope and Raleigh improves and moves from conflict to reconciliation, the battle field changes from a state of peace and quiet (which repeatedly surprises Raleigh) into a state of severe violence. At the end of the film, the relatively safe shelter receives a direct hit and collapses. This removes the distinction between interior and exterior. In the last scene, the war has not only conquered the psychological but also the physical.

In contrast to *NIEMANDSLAND* and, to a lesser degree, *WESTFRONT 1918*, there is no striking camera and editing technique. Heinz Paul made them both subservient to narrative continuity. The many medium shots alternating with several close-ups enhance the intimate character of the film and correspond with the narrative's emphasis on psychological stress and emotional relationships between the characters. Camera movement is tuned largely to the limited space of the trench shelter. The same is true for the lighting. The dark shelters are lit in such a way that a chiaroscuro effect is created. Candlelight appears to be the main source of light. However, contrast has in most cases been determined by strong artificial lighting of faces, while lighting of the direct surroundings is much weaker.

When the camera is outside the officers' shelter, the field of vision is kept very limited. Long shots of the battle field, which we saw frequently in *WESTFRONT 1918*, are hardly to be found in *DIE ANDERE SEITE*. Although the horizon is very low due to the trench perspective, the field of vision is often obstructed by earth spurting through the air because of the explosions. Only once is there an attack in the film that is launched by the British, and the Germans attack only in the last scene, when Raleigh is killed. The sequence of the British attack is composed of 47 shots lasting nearly three and a half minutes. The pace

is considerably lower than in the Langemark combat scene in *DER WELTKRIEG*, which compressed 59 shots into ninety seconds.⁵¹ The emphasis in this sequence is on individual actions. We also recognize the characters on the battle field, even when they are shown only as a silhouette. This is also the case with *WESTFRONT 1918*, but not or hardly at all in the war ‘documentaries’. Also, the camera positions themselves are less independent from the characters. For example, the point of view during the attack scene is regularly determined by Stanhope’s look. In one of the last shots of this sequence (which was not described here), we see the body of his best friend Osborne through his eyes. Heinz Paul has not aspired to Pabst’s realism through long takes and extreme long shots. As a director, he serves the characters, which is in keeping with the rest of the film.

NIEMANDSLAND

Only two months after the premiere of *DIE ANDERE SEITE*, on 10 December 1931, *NIEMANDSLAND* appeared in the cinemas. The film opened in Berlin’s Mozartsaal. *NIEMANDSLAND* was the first film by director Victor Trivas, who had begun his career as an architect. He wrote the script together with Leonhard Frank, the author of a popular war drama, *Karl und Anna* (1929), which served as the basis for the film *HEIMKEHR*, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Victor Trivas gained experience as an assistant to the director Pabst while he was shooting *WESTFRONT 1918* and *KAMERADSCHAFT* (1931). *NIEMANDSLAND* was a very special debut film, and one that conveyed a message of pacifism, which is shown by the fact that it was awarded a prize by the League of Nations’ Peace League. Although the film deviated from other (war) films in terms of aesthetics, it did not receive the designation ‘künstlerisch’.⁵²

NIEMANDSLAND is the most extreme of the four films discussed here, not only in a cinematographical sense, but also as far as its political ideology is concerned. The film is very explicit in its rejection of war and heroism. Its pacifist stance is also illustrated by the international perspective, with four protagonists from four different countries. One might also call the film socialist in its outlook, since the four protagonists together more or less represent the lower classes. The opening text already points in that direction: ‘Völkerstreit, Brüderstreit’. After all, it was the socialists who thought they could prevent the war, in 1914 and earlier as well, by appealing to the international solidarity between the members of the working classes. It is not strange, therefore, that *NIEMANDSLAND* is usually associated with socialism or a pacifist persuasion, even though – as came up in the discussion of *NAMENLOSE HELDEN* – these two

movements are incompatible. *Die Rote Fahne* called the film pacifist, without rejecting it for that reason.⁵³

It is nevertheless true that as far as its political tendency is concerned, NIEMANDSLAND (after NAMENLOSE HELDEN) is one of the most outspoken anti-war films of the Weimar period. The representation of the war is very different from that in WESTFRONT 1918. While the latter emphasises the horrific aspects of the war, NIEMANDSLAND shows a process of realisation in which there is room for optimism and international fraternization. Combat scenes like we saw in the other films are not present in NIEMANDSLAND. Victor Trivas formulated his intention as follows: 'In NIEMANDSLAND ging es mir nicht darum, die Greuel des Krieges, sondern seine grausame Sinnlosigkeit bloss-zustellen.'⁵⁴

NIEMANDSLAND is a film with a well-organised structure. The first part of the film shows the various (national) living conditions of the four protagonists on the eve of the First World War, the second part is mainly set at the front. In a rhythmical and parallel way, the first eleven scenes introduce the protagonists. Stereotypes play an important part. It is worth mentioning that in most cases, the nationality of the characters is the same as that of the actors. The Englishman (Hugh Stephens Douglas) is introduced via an image of the Thames, the Frenchman (George Péclet) via the Eiffel tower, and images of factory machines serve to introduce the German (Ernst Busch). The national origin of the other two characters is less relevant. One of them is introduced as someone from 'irgendwo in der Welt' (Wladimir Sokolow), but he is clearly meant as a personification of Jewry (in the Dutch version of the film he is called a Pole)⁵⁵, while the other is a black actor (Lewis Douglas) of French-African extraction. We see them all in their everyday environment, plying their trade (Frenchman, African and German) or during an important private occasion (a son is born to the Englishman, the Jew marries).

The Frenchman and the Jew are portrayed in the most stereotypical fashion. The carefree Frenchman sports a thin moustache, wears a beret and flirts with an unknown girl. The Jew is shown at his wedding, which is celebrated in the traditional way. Also, there are numerous references to his profession (the sewing machine), so that we know that he practises the traditional (and again, stereotypically Jewish) trade of tailor.

In contrast to these outspoken characterisations, there is the relatively colourless figure of the Englishman. The German, a carpenter, is associated with the war industry when the image of a wooden toy gun he has made for his son rhymes with, and then changes into, the image of a real gun in an arms factory. Although the scene is a critical reference to Germany, this is redressed in a later scene when the German says that he wants his son to take violin les-

sons in the future rather than play with the instruments of war. What all the characters have in common (except for the African) is that they are the head of a family and that they belong to the lower social classes (the Englishman may be an exception). The African is without ties and works in a French cabaret theatre. As an international artist, he belongs to a class of people usually referred to as ‘freischwebend’.

After the introduction, whose images already refer to the threat of war, the various national war proclamations are dealt with in a symbolical way. Introduced by images of various national symbols, pamphlets appear in which we see, successively, the Russian czar, the German kaiser, the French president and the Austrian emperor call their peoples to war. The German part is considerably longer than the other three scenes, which take only seconds. Besides the text of the German proclamation, the scene also shows us loaves of bread, pies and food vouchers, by which it anticipates on the coming famine. In the next sequence, which shows the protagonists making preparations to leave for the front, the German part is again longer than the others. After a transitional scene showing the general euphoria about the war, this time with images of Great Britain, America and Japan, we see the protagonists saying goodbye to their loved ones. The German character is used to convey the way in which the soldiers are stirred up to show more fighting spirit. While the German initially shows a lack of enthusiasm when he joins his future comrades, his zest grows as he hears the marching music. The same is true for his wife, whose face first betrays sadness but later changes to an expression of pride. The initial walking pace also changes into a marching tempo. The images of a festive farewell ritual are not confined to Germany alone. Only the scene in which the Jewish man says goodbye has no cheerfulness at all.

After most of the characters have been given a festive send-off, the front appears. The film is far less fragmentary after that. While in the first part, the relatively short scenes followed each other at a high pace, focusing mainly on the various nationalities, in this part there is an interaction between longer scenes set at the front and short scenes that show the home front. The other scenes have an indicative or commentary function. The scenes at the home front show, in a much more general way than was the case in *WESTFRONT 1918*, that life at the home front was also dominated by the war. The ordinary civilian has also been subjected to military rule. A combination of endless lists of war victims, propaganda posters for war bonds and people queuing in front of a shop is used to convey the sacrifices that have to be made for the war. The next scene, showing a blind war veteran who has lost one leg, a bearer of the Iron Cross who sits begging underneath one of these propaganda posters, can only be understood as a cynical comment on the war. The other home front images mainly concern the fate suffered by the protagonists’ wives: a life of sorrow,

loneliness and hiding in a shelter. Although there is not much dialogue in the film anyway, it is striking that the women in the film should say nothing at all.

By accident, the five protagonists end up in the cellar of a deserted ruin which is right in the middle of no man's land and therefore belongs to none of the warring parties. While at first, they treat each other with suspicion, the African, who speaks more than one language, is the one to reconcile the others with each other. The Jew, however, has become deaf and dumb because of the violence and is unable to say where he is from. In addition, he has lost his uniform during the fighting, which makes him a figure without identity. According to the African, this is why the others all consider him their friend. For instance, no one accuses him when a quarrel breaks out about the causes of the war. During this discussion, the African breaks into laughter and takes off his uniform, which means he also distances himself from his national identity. The others follow his example. Like the Jew, the African's link with national identity is not as strong as that of the others. After all, he comes from a French colony. The next scene refers to this when a voice-over asks to whom Berlin, Paris and the colonies belong: 'Wem gehört die Welt?'

In the following front scenes, we see how the group adapts to the circumstances. Each member fulfils characteristic tasks: the Frenchman is cooking, the African is playing the mouth organ, the Jew is mending clothes, the German is building things and the Englishman, who has been injured, is being looked after by all of them. Gradually, however, the outside world begins to disturb the relative peace in the ruin. After all, no man's land is closely watched by the warring parties. First, there is a gas attack, next they are spotted by soldiers in nearby trenches who have seen the smoke rising from their cooking place. When they come under attack, the African bursts into a lament of madness. He challenges the war, saying that he wants to fight it and throws a hand grenade outside. In the final scene, all of them walk across no man's land, armed and in uniform, except for the Jew. They want to end the war and remove all obstacles that are blocking peace. In the end, they use their rifles to chop their way through the barbed wire and face their fate in the name of peace.

National identities

The characterisation of the protagonists is much more abstract than in *WESTFRONT 1918* and *DIE ANDERE SEITE*. The protagonists are first of all exponents of nationalities, which lends the film a rather exemplary character. As was the case with *WESTFRONT 1918*, in whose credits the actors were only designated by characteristics, the programme brochure for *NIEMANDSLAND* gives the names of the actors in combination with the nationalities that they repre-

sent.⁵⁶ Remarkably, the name of the black actor Lewis Douglas is followed by the epithet African rather than French-African, despite the fact that he wears a French uniform. It is also remarkable that four of the characters in the film increasingly use their proper names as the narrative progresses – Brown, Durant, Köhler and Lewin – with the exception of the African, who remains without a proper name.⁵⁷ The presence of a black character in the narrative may also be connected to the fact that the colour of the skin is a characteristic that divides people but which, in contrast to the national symbols, cannot be ‘taken off’. It seems as if Trivas has tried to solve this problem by presenting the African as a superior human being, by which he tackles the false sense of superiority among white people, who are the most divided at the beginning of the film. In this way he levels the relationship between the races, not only white against black, but also Europe against Africa.

The Jew, who has also been placed at a distance from the other parties, may have been meant as the African’s counterpart. Both of them fulfil a reconciliatory function. The African bridges the gap between the parties because he speaks his languages, the Jew because he has no language at all. In the film, both of them represent those who are oppressed on the basis of racial characteristics or who are considered inferior. This would tally with the anti-imperialist stance shown in the rest of the film.⁵⁸ It is clear that Trivas has the African fulfil a role in his film that was the opposite of the African played in Pabst’s film.

Despite the stereotypical approach, the film emphasises the notion that the differences are only relative. Nowhere in the film are they contrasted, except for the moment when a discussion about the causes of the war develops. Above all, *NIEMANDSLAND* shows that national identity is a construction that manifests itself in exterior symbols. If one discards these manifest symbols, the ‘naked’ man will appear, differences will be erased and motives for waging war will disappear. Trivas solves the problem of language differences via the characters of the African and the Jew. In contrast to *WESTFRONT 1918* and *DIE ANDERE SEITE*, *NIEMANDSLAND* shows us a group of soldiers which is not only composed of various nationalities, but which also actually turns against the war. This last aspect becomes visible especially towards the end of the film. It also becomes apparent in an earlier part of the film, in the ruin, when there is desertion, initially involuntary but later as a result of a conscious choice. The idea of an international brotherhood, the main leitmotif in the film, is connected with an act of pacifism, refusing military service (even though this occurs after they have actually joined the army). Their refusal to continue to take part in the war is motivated by the discovery that the similarities between them are greater than the differences. At the end of the film, the relative passiv-

ity that characterised the situation in the ruin changes into a certain aggression towards the war, which is presented as an abstract antagonist in the last scene.

We can say that *NIEMANDSLAND* is in fact a utopian treatise about war and peace. In this sense, the film is different from the other two films. Although the *mise en scène* is realistic, the narrative has more to do with fantasy than with reality. After all, the director has constructed a kind of model society – Kracauer mocks it as a ‘community that has all the traits of the lamasery of Shangri-La’⁵⁹ – in the middle of no man’s land, where all differences have been resolved to make room for solidarity. The stereotypical protagonists and the idealistic presentation induce a certain distance in the way one experiences the film.

This abstraction of reality is further amplified by the way the director has edited the images. Not only do the shots in the first part follow each other at a very high pace, the film is also characterised by a highly associative style of editing, including rhyming images: the rotating wheels of the horse-drawn tram change into rotating machines; the wooden toy gun changes into a real iron gun, an applause by one audience changes into an applause by another audience; and a ball of barbed wire changes into the road network on a map. In addition, the movement within the images themselves further enhances the impression of velocity and rhythm. They are the representation of life in the large cities that were the starting point for the characterisation of the protagonists. These modernistic forms of representation could also be seen in *DER WELTKRIEG*, while the images of city life evoke associations with Walter Ruttmann’s film *BERLIN, DIE SYMPHONIE EINER GROSSSTADT* (1928).

The images of the country, however, are an oasis of peace and quiet, loneliness and emptiness. Various kinds of associative editing can also be found in the shots that show a clouded sky or a vast landscape of fields. The former prefigures what is coming – after the proclamations, for example, follows a shot of the sun being obscured by clouds and in a later scene the sky is completely overcast – while the fields contrast both with the city and with the lifeless landscape of the battlefield.

Music also plays an important role in the film. The first part of the film is dominated by Hans Eissler’s modernistic music and by songs by Leo Hirsch and Günther Weisenborn. As was said before, dialogue is of secondary interest in the film. The first part of the film, however, makes use of a voice-over. A male voice speaking as if he were dictating a letter for example indicates in what country we are. It is especially this interaction between image, editing and music which reminds one very strongly of the Russian film school.

The reviews

As shown in the analysis, the three front films represented the war experience in different ways.⁶⁰ In *WESTFRONT 1918*, the combat scenes have been represented realistically. The violence of war is less prominent in *DIE ANDERE SEITE*, which is characterised by a psychologically realistic approach, while *NIEMANDSLAND* shows us the war symbolically from a social, national and international perspective, with implicit violence. The question is whether this categorisation corresponds with contemporary reaction to the film. Did people react with more shock to *WESTFRONT 1918* than to *NIEMANDSLAND* and did that imply disapproval of explicit images of the violence of war?

Critics did not only give their arguments for or against a particular film, but also, in a few words, conveyed some of the reactions in the audience. A short outline of audience reactions to *WESTFRONT 1918* presents the following picture:

Während der Vorstellung (...) verliessen viele Zuschauer fluchtartig das Lokal. ‘Das ist ja nicht zum aushalten’, ertönte es hinter mir; und: ‘Wie darf man uns so etwas bieten!’⁶¹; ‘Wie kann man nur so etwas zeigen?’ Das ungefähr war der Text der empörten Kurfürstendammer;⁶² ‘Das kann man nicht mehr sehen’, meinten manche.⁶³ Das Publikum war erschüttet.⁶⁴

According to many critics, *WESTFRONT 1918* had gone beyond what was acceptable. What were the arguments, we may ask, for criticising the film, which, incidentally, also earned much praise? The explicit way of showing the violence of war enabled critics to indicate precisely in which scenes Pabst had overstepped the mark. Their arguments often also suggested by what means, and in what form, the war should be represented. In most cases, the critical appreciation of a film, and of its more violent scenes in particular, depended on the ideological perspective the critic used in his approach to the film. This does not mean, however, that the reactions can be categorised neatly in a left and right typology. Newspapers of the same political persuasion might not agree on some issues, and individual critics sometimes betray a lack of consistency in their reactions. As we will see, the right-wing press presents the best example of this.⁶⁵

The scenes in which a French African kills the Student, in which the Lieutenant falls victim to madness and in which the sorry state in the field hospital is shown, provoked an outrage among the critics. Especially the first of these scenes was considered to go far beyond what was acceptable. According to the *Berliner Morgenpost*, this scene was even hissed at by the audience.⁶⁶ It was not the war of technology, in which the face of the enemy has disappeared and in

which soldiers have become machines, that caused indignation, but the most traditional, archetypal form of war, man-to-man combat. However horrific and visible the effects of modern warfare were, the fact that mechanical weaponry could cover large distances or make the enemy (as a human being) invisible (in tanks, submarines and aeroplanes), made it possible to present the war as a relatively 'clean' war, which was exactly what happened in most of the war films. This meant that the enemy as a human being could be kept out of the picture. More than Milestone did in *ALL QUIET AT THE WESTERN FRONT*, Pabst broke this taboo, at least in Germany. Pabst did personify the enemy in a dark-skinned French-African soldier. Incidentally, none of the critics found this objectionable. The discussion provoked by this scene was related to the acceptability of scenes that contained explicit violence in representations of the war.

A critic for the extremely right-wing *Kreuz-Zeitung* wrote the following about the murder scene after he had determined that it was

eine Geschmacklosigkeit sondergleichen: Kein Frontkämpfer wird es jemals bestreiten, dass der Krieg, das Ringen um Leben und Tod des Einzelnen gegen den einzelnen Gegner viele derartige Szenen aufweist. Es ist aber unerträglich und widerlich, hier die Grenzen der Realistik zu überschreiten. Kämpfen ist kein Kinderspiel.⁶⁷

In the last two sentences, the *Kreuz-Zeitung* critic implicitly accuses Pabst of having failed to take the fighting at the front seriously because he wanted to place too much emphasis on his portrayal of the individual's death agony. This emphasis was said to indicate a certain love for sensation, an argument which was used more often to denounce the film, especially in the right-wing press.⁶⁸ However, the critic's attitude also testified to a certain ambivalence. For example, it is not entirely clear whether the author means that the scene came close to reality or that he believed that the scene did not approach reality at all. He appears to reject the explicitly violent scenes mainly on emotional grounds. At the end of his review, he says that many of the front scenes (and the cabaret scene) have been rendered true to life.⁶⁹

This ambivalence recurs in other reviews in the right-wing press. Almost unanimously, they denounced the pacifism in the film, but as far as the representation of violence was concerned, opinions differed for various reasons. For example, the conservative *Deutsche Zeitung*, associated with Hugenberg's DNVP, rejected the 'Tendenz' of the film, but welcomed the way the front war had been portrayed: 'Soweit der Schützengraben, Trommelfeuer und Frontgeist zu Worte kommen, gelingt zum ersten Mal so etwas wie Erlebnis-Nähe der modernen Front.'⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the film in general was thought to be

much too horrific and coarse. Pabst was said to have tried too much to represent the war as Dante’s hell.⁷¹ A critic writing for the right-liberal *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* found that Pabst had made the war out to be worse than it had actually been. He said that he himself had fought as a front line soldier, and that he had never experienced anything like this.

Vielleicht wird noch einer von dem im Geiste Armen mir entgegen, dass so etwas im Kriege ja tatsächlich vorgekommen sei. Aber da kann man nur darauf antworten, um so schlimmer, dass das Grausen vor diesen entsetzlichen Dingen diese Menschen nicht zurückschrecken lässt, so etwas auch noch zu reproduzieren, noch dazu, damit es in einem ‘erfolgreichen’ Film Effekt mache.⁷²

Although it appears as if the critic admits that such things may have actually taken place, he discredits those who make this claim, or make a film out of it, respectively, by calling them, on the one hand, ‘mentally poor’ and immoral, and sensation-loving on the other. He then pressed home his argument by saying that there were fierce protests from the audience at this particular scene.⁷³

The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*’s rejection of explicit violence in films was confirmed by the newspaper in a review of *DIE ANDERE SEITE*. This film was highly appreciated because, as the paper wrote, ‘seine Wirkung’ derived ‘absolut aus der geistigen Auseinandersetzung von Menschen mit Menschen’. While until then, the aim of war films had been to

die Wirklichkeit des Krieges nachzuahmen und je täuschender die Nachahmung wurde, um so stärker offenbarte sich nur die Unmöglichkeit, das “Erlebnis Krieg” durch naturalistische Filmkopie zu geben.⁷⁴

It is clear that the last part of that remark referred to *WESTFRONT 1918*. This critic would have liked to have seen the few moments of explicit violence cut out. The newspaper was an exception in this matter, because hardly anyone got excited by the minimal violence, while the consensus was that this film, too, showed the other side of the war.

We saw in the previous chapter how one year later, when *TANNENBERG* appeared, this newspaper, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, reiterated its argument for a mythical, emotionally sensitive method of ‘historiography’. The emphasis on the spiritual and the idealistic already shows here. Other right-wing newspapers will also refer to this. The question is really whether and how the front experience should be represented. This was a recurring theme with other war films as well. The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* found it reprehensible that a film such as *WESTFRONT 1918* should represent ‘Sakrosankten der Erinnerung an dieses grösste Ereignis in der Geschichte des Deutschen Volkes’.⁷⁵

For the National Socialist newspaper *Der Angriff*, the representation of the war in *WESTFRONT 1918* was problematic for similar reasons. While the newspaper's rejection of the film is connected to its pacifist connotations (a theme not picked up by the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*), it also has to do with the question whether realism is an adequate means to reflect the 'higher purpose' of the war. According to *Der Angriff*, the war should be represented as a positive struggle for an 'idea': the National Socialists 'überwinden das Grauen, weil ihnen die Idee wichtiger ist als ihr Leben', or so its reaction to this 'unsittliche' film reads.⁷⁶

... es ist der Gipfel der Unanständigkeit, das grösste und grauenhafteste Erlebnis eines Menschenalters, (...) mit allen möglichen Einzelheiten 'realistisch' *nur als Schaustück* vorzuführen und so zu erniedrigen, zu profanieren, zu entheiligen. (...) Es gibt grosse und heilige Dinge, die dürfen nur (...) als Schatten, als Verkörperung und Sinnbild einer Idee in ein Kunstwerk verarbeitet werden.⁷⁷

The author stresses that the National Socialists do not in any way fear a true representation of reality, but '*sie wollen genau Bescheid*.'⁷⁸ This meant that they wanted to see things within the context of a definitive, higher truth; just showing things was not enough.⁷⁹ In similar words, *Der Tag*, linked to the DNVP in much the same way as the *Deutsche Zeitung*, summarized this point of view in its review:

Wer nur die grausigen und furchtbaren Geschehnisse des Krieges zusammenträgt, ohne auch nur den Versuch zu machen, der grossen Idee der Pflicht gerecht zu werden und den höheren Sinn eines so gewaltigen Schicksals zum Ausdruck zu bringen, der hat (...) gar nicht das Recht, etwas über den Krieg zu sagen.⁸⁰

The ambivalence of the realistic on the one hand and the idealistic on the other is clearly there in the right-wing press. There is no fear of realism, but a desire to make it serve some higher purpose, which is clearly not pacifism, which considers war a useless affair that should be stripped of any kind of 'higher purpose'.

Als etwas Sinnloses soll der Krieg [by *WESTFRONT 1918*, BK], trotz höchster Mannesleistung, in den Köpfen der Zuschauer (und Zuhörer) fixiert werden (...) Nicht der Krieg wird mehr verfälscht (...) aber seine Deutung wird aufs falsche Gleis geschoben...,

writes the National Socialist *Völkischer Beobachter*.⁸¹ The relatively favourable reception of a film such as *DIE ANDERE SEITE* by the right-wing press was not only due to the alleged objectivity of the film, but also to the emphasis it placed on the spiritual, the psychological and the inner self, which was supposed to do justice to the 'front line spirit'. The *Deutsche Filmzeitung* places realism and

idealism next to each other and asserts that, since the realistic war novels by Erich Maria Remarque and Ludwig Renn (*Krieg* and *Nachkrieg*), it is no longer possible to represent the war as

rein idealistisch [darzustellen], als Stahlbad, oder mit den Griechen und Nietzsche als ‘polemos pater panton’ zu feiern. (...) Augenblicklich kann also kein Film, der sich das Weltkriegsthema vorgenommen hat, in Idealismus machen. (sic)⁸²

War films released after 1930 would prove this view all too optimistic.

Another attitude towards the representation of violence can be seen in newspaper with mostly leftist leanings. Some of the critics tolerate violent scenes because they believe they will support the film’s pacifist message. For example, Walter Redmann of the *Berliner Morgenpost* writes: “‘Nieder mit dem Krieg’ das ist die Tendenz dieser (...) Filme, und die Tendenz ist das einzige, das die Rekonstruktion des Grauensvollen und Entsetzlichen rechtfertigt.”⁸³ At the same time, however, this critic also found that the most horrific aspects of a war could not be conveyed by images. The murder of the Student was an example of this. This scene ‘überschreitet die Grenze und ist wohl das Gewagteste dieser Art, was den nerven des Filmpublicums zugemutet werden kann.’⁸⁴ Kurt Pinthus, writing for the *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, found that, for this reason, reading war literature might be better than exposing oneself to the horrors shown by the film.⁸⁵ However, in contrast to some of the reviews in the right-wing press mentioned earlier, the leftist newspapers did not reject realism because they believed it was unable to represent the war in a ‘right’ way. On the contrary, according to the critic of the social democratic *Vorwärts*, a documentary style was the best means of representing the war.⁸⁶ Three years earlier, when reviewing *DER WELTKRIEG I*, the same critic had written that a feature film was probably a more appropriate means of representing the war!⁸⁷

In short, the leftist press, like the right-wing press, found the violence in the film nearly unbearable yet germane to what the film tried to convey. The fact that some critics were revolted by some of the scenes in the film probably not only says something about the unique character of the violence that was shown but also about the way it was shown. The critic of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Siegfried Kracauer, remarks that the misery of the war has been included in such a way ‘dass der Abstand, den sonst künstlerische Werke zwischen dem Publikum und dem ungeformten Geschehen setzen, (...) stellenweise aufgehoben ist.’⁸⁸

The only newspaper that had no objections at all to the violence in the film was the communist daily *Die Rote Fahne*. Here, the opposite was true of what the *Berliner Morgenpost* remarked (showing the violence is justified because of

the pacifist message, see above), namely that, in spite of the pacifism in the film,

einige *Darstellungen* des Krieges, Schützengrabenszenen, Trommelfeuer, Nahkämpfe [the Student's murder, BK], die (...) doch *mit mutigem Realismus*, ohne Beschönigungen, ohne Sentimentalität, wirklichkeitsstark und eindrucksvoll gestaltet sind.⁸⁹

As in *NAMENLOSE HELDEN*, the power of the film was contained only in these scenes, *Die Rote Fahne* wrote; the rest was weak, not real, timid.

Comradeship, heroism and nationality

The representations of the violence of war inspired many critics to make political statements, and this was also true for the characters in the films. The analyses of the films showed that the characters, including their actions and motives, represented certain meanings and values. The three main categories of meaning in which these actions and motives were placed – by the critics as well – are comradeship, heroism and nationalism. How these were then judged often depended on the ideological perspective from which the film was viewed. Not all characters turned out to evoke ideological connotations. In the films, some characters were not profiled as sharply as others, and this was also true for the reviews. The reviews of *WESTFRONT 1918* were an exception, in that they commented on practically all the protagonists. Reviews of *DIE ANDERE SEITE* paid most attention to colonel Stanhope, and in reviews of *NIEMANDSLAND*, it was the German, the African and the Jew who were looked at most closely. The other protagonists and minor characters were usually mentioned briefly or perhaps evaluated in terms of their acting capabilities.

The analysis of *WESTFRONT 1918* showed that the characters represented social types. While none of the reviews pays any explicit attention to this point, the exemplary nature of the characters is nevertheless noticed. The critic of *Der Montag*, the only weekly newspaper of the right that wrote very favourably about *WESTFRONT 1918*, said the following: 'Vier Infanteristen, in denen sich das Schicksal von Millionen verkörpert. Vier Männer, in denen sich Hunderttausende von tapferen Volksgenossen widerspiegeln.'⁹⁰ Eugen Szatmari, writing for the left-liberal *Berliner Tageblatt*, remarks:

Vier Menschen verschiedener Abstammung, verschiedenen Charakters, zusammengeschmolzen im fürchterlichen Tiegel des Schützengrabens. Vier Schicksale und doch nur eines. Das Schicksal von 10 Millionen Menschen.⁹¹

The ideological difference between both reviews is expressed in the words 'tapferen Volksgenossen' with which *Der Montag* associates the four infantry-

men. The author refers to national heroism, which is not mentioned at all in the second review. I will return to the associations with heroism later.

The characters were not associated with their social origins, but with specific war or home front experiences. The Student with his death agony, Karl with his homecoming, the Lieutenant with his law-abiding attitude and his madness, and the Bavarian, finally, with his anti-heroic remark. The reactions to the scene with the Student have already been discussed extensively. It is therefore appropriate to discuss the reactions to some of the other characters.

If we are to believe the critics, the premiere of *WESTFRONT 1918* was a lively affair. The audience did not only react strongly to the film violence, but the sequence in which Karl catches his wife in the act provoked a strong response. Apparently, many people in the audience found the sequence hilarious.⁹² According to the critics, the unintended comedy occurred because the scene was trivial⁹³, kitschy⁹⁴, superfluous, old-fashioned⁹⁵, embarrassing and stupid⁹⁶. This sequence was the only one in the film that was set on the home front. It is not unlikely, therefore, that the transition from the realistic and rough front scenes to the homecoming scene, with its overtones of the 'Kammerspiel', was felt to be a stylistic incongruity. The naturalistic acting performances by the front soldiers was a considerable contrast with the theatrical acting style 'des albernen Dialogs, (...) des altmodischen-getragenen Spiels'⁹⁷ of those representing the home front.

Those parts of the sequence in which the food shortages were represented were much more appreciated. The realistic style fitted in much better with the front scenes. According to the critics Kracauer and Szatmari, however, the scene did no justice to the home front situation: 'So bleibt doch insgesamt die Front in der Heimat unsichtbar.'⁹⁸ Bearing in mind the 'Dolchstosslegende', we need hardly be surprised that the *Völkischer Beobachter* found it hard to muster any 'sympathy' for the 'Heimat, die zwischen Jammer und Genuss in Sicherheit dahinlebt'.⁹⁹

Another character that caused resentment was the Lieutenant who fell victim to madness. While some critics found the scene exaggerated or unreal, Szatmari of the *Berliner Tageblatt* opened his review with an extensive description of this scene, which he considered the high point of the film.¹⁰⁰ The dramatic words that he chose to express his feelings leave little doubt as to his appreciation of this scene. What follows is part of a paragraph he devoted to the Lieutenant:

In dem zusammengeschossenen Graben, im Geschosshagel, im Nebelschleier der Explosionswolken der Handgranaten erhebt sich aus einem Haufen verstümmelter, blutender, zersetzter Menschenleiber ein Mann. Ein Leutnant. Greift sich an die Stirn, starrt mit irren Augen in die verpestete Luft, sein vom Grauen verschleierter Blick tastet die aufgewühlte, von Granaten zerpflegte Erde ab, er wirft die Arme in

die Luft, wie einer, der zu Tode getroffen wurde, und brüllt auf. 'Hurra' – schreit er – 'hurra, hurra!' – brüllt weiter, kein Mensch mehr, sondern ein verwundetes Tier, der Wahnsinn zittert in seinem Geheul.¹⁰¹

It was not often that a film elicited such dramatic, almost literary descriptions from a critic. In contrast, the *Kreuz-Zeitung* found this particular scene, as well as many others, the absolute low point of the film. 'Am unerhörtesten ist aber ohne Zweifel die Szene, wo der Leutnant und Kompagnieführer, wahnsinnig geworden durch einen Granateinschlag in Grossaufnahme gezeigt wird.'¹⁰²

These are two contrasting interpretations of one and the same scene. While Szatmari explains the madness explicitly from the Lieutenant's view of the 'field of death', the *Kreuz-Zeitung* says the fit of madness is caused by an exploding shell. This assertion does not correspond with what the film actually shows, but it does fit in with what is described in the book.¹⁰³ No blood is seen streaming from the Lieutenant's head, nor is he hurt in his legs, or he would be unable to stand up, as Szatmari correctly describes. The *Völkischer Beobachter* adopted a middle course, saying the Lieutenant suffered a 'Nervenzusammenbruch' or 'Hirnverletzung'.¹⁰⁴ These are the only two reviews that refer to a physical wound, critics of newspapers that did not belong to the political right only speak of madness. The *Völkischer Beobachter* did not pay much attention to the madness scene, focusing instead on the way Pabst had represented the law-abiding side of the Lieutenant's character: 'Das ist natürlich auch Tendenz, gegen den "Kadavergehorsam" und so!'¹⁰⁵ Although this critic says he is revealing Pabst's true intentions, the *Vossische Zeitung* says the officer in question is the type that would 'heute [be] irgendein rechtsradikaler Jugenderzieher (...) der seinen Jünglingen von einer "schrecklichen Schönheit" des Weltkrieges nicht genug erzählen konnte'.¹⁰⁶ It goes without saying, however, that the National Socialist movement would rather not have any officers with overstrained nerves among its rank and file.

The character of the Bavarian was in a number of cases also interpreted as an expression of the film's tendency. Of course, this pertained to his remark 'Dös, wenn wir Helden wären, täten wir längst daheim sein!'¹⁰⁷ Critics found this 'der beste Satz dieses Sprechfilms',¹⁰⁸ 'ganz verständlich',¹⁰⁹ 'damit sagt der Soldat das Wesentliche'¹¹⁰ and 'höchst bedenklich'.¹¹¹ In the first three commentaries, derived from left-liberal newspapers, the remark is implicitly or explicitly associated with a pacifist tendency.¹¹² It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the right-wing *Kreuz-Zeitung* – the last quotation – should have rejected the remark. Despite the fact that the Bavarian implies that he and his comrades are not heroes, the film is not free from heroism, as I already pointed out in the analysis of the film. Pabst's ambivalence on this issue is borne out by the review in the *Völkischer Beobachter*. While it is true that the critic for this newspaper did not pay any attention to the Bavarian's remark – who, incidentally, was

one of his favorite characters – he closely examines the role of heroism in the film. In the third paragraph of his article, after referring to Remarque, even, the critic asserts that it is no longer possible to ridicule the front soldier or falsify the front experience.

Man muss Konzessionen machen. Selbst der Latrinenschreiber Remarque ist angewiesen worden, seine Zerrbilder mit etwas Heroismus zu vermengen, um eine gute Presse für die Reklame zu haben. So ist es auch hier.¹¹³

With any representation of the trench war, the intention will always be ‘die Widerstandskraft eines Volkes gegen das Schicksal zu zerstören, aber eine allzu tolle Verschiebung der Wirklichkeit kann man sich nicht mehr leisten’. In pacifist film propaganda, the important thing is the conclusion reached ‘während der Darstellung an sich in ihrer Realistik objektiv bleibt.’ WESTFRONT 1918 also gives an ‘im ganzen einwandfreie Wiedergabe der Wirklichkeit’. And in the next paragraph: ‘Die ganz unverhüllte pazifistische Schlussapothese dieses Films [wirkt, BK] grotesk und aufs tiefste unbefriedigend nach der Darstellung von soviel Heldentum!’¹¹⁴

Here, heroism is not ascribed to nationalist motives that are lacking in this film. The fact, for example, that Karl and the Student volunteer for reasons other than honour and patriotism is left out of consideration. Carrying out combat patrols and the courage this requires were enough to speak of heroism. It is striking how much the critic tries to rationalise his own enthusiasm for the film by discrediting Pabst. He is supposed to have made concessions in order to ingratiate himself with the press and the general public, and this means he cannot escape from representing the war in accordance with the views of the political right, meaning an emphasis on heroism. As became clear earlier, *Die Rote Fahne* was not particularly enthusiastic about the film. Here too, but this time in the opposite and very superficial way, the argument of heroism was deployed. The weakness of the film was mainly in the ‘ersten teil, wo ein bisschen in “Heldentum” gemacht wird’.¹¹⁵ Nothing is said about how the film gives shape to this. Although it is impossible to deny, on the basis of the reviews, that Pabst’s attitude to heroism is ambivalent, both newspapers disregard the fact that what he shows in his film is a different kind of ‘heroism’. Remarkably enough, the two newspapers do not mention the Bavarian’s observation. This other kind of heroism was, however, noticed by the left-liberal *Berliner Morgenpost*: ‘Es geht um das Vaterland, um das Stückchen Graben, natürlich, aber das ist dem Frontsoldaten erst zweites Bewusstsein. Das erste ist: es gilt mein Leben, das muss ich verteidigen!’¹¹⁶ The Bavarian’s remark is said to convey this “Wesentliche” (see earlier quotation). ‘Gewiss, man kann sich diesen Ausspruch auch anders auslegen, aber, wer das da mittgemacht hat, weiss genau, wie es gemeint ist.’¹¹⁷ Not as cowardice, of course.

With a number of critics, *DIE ANDERE SEITE* evoked associations with heroism as well, usually through Conrad Veidt in his role as commander Stanhope. Analogous to the film poster, which features his head prominently, the film shows Veidt's face a number of times in close-up. As the *Vossische Zeitung* wrote, 'Man lernte Veidts Stirnadern kennen, Veidts Zähne, Veidts Halsmuskeln, Veidts Pupillen.' It is not surprising, therefore, that the character he played received the most attention. Besides, he had already achieved considerable fame as a screen actor. Critics praised his humanity as well as his valour. About the former quality, the *Berliner Morgenpost* writes: 'Ohne jede Pose, absolut menschlich, zeigt er sein Inneres, und er vermag diesen zerrissenen Mensch glaubwürdig zu gestalten.'¹¹⁸ This humanity was also associated with the other side of heroism, as *Vorwärts* writes:

Der Engländer Sheriff untersucht, durch welche Mittel der Held seinen Mut erkaufte, er deckt die andere Seite des Heldentums auf. Die andere Seite des Helden ist 'Black and White'. Der fürchterliche Unfug des Krieges wird mit Hilfe von Alkohol ertragen.¹¹⁹

True enough, the right-wing *Der Tag* recognises Stanhope's fear ('Kleinmut'), but it stresses his heroic character:

Veidt ist nicht dämonisch, er ist besessen von dem Zwang zur Pflicht, von dem inneren nicht Zurückkönnen, vorwärts, gepeitscht von der Verehrung seiner Untergebenen, die nur das Heldische an ihm, nicht den immer und immer wieder unterdrückten Kleinmut sehen.¹²⁰

In a similar vein, the right-wing confessional newspaper *Germania* describes Stanhope as someone who seems 'hart, brutal, gefühlsroh [erscheint], [but] der mit ganzer Liebe an seinen Kameraden hängt, und der nach dem letzten Schmerz aufrecht den Tod annimmt'.¹²¹

The approach of the communist newspaper *Welt am Abend* is interesting. Its critic compares the stage actor Wiemann, who played Stanhope on the stage, with Conrad Veidt, and notices that a change has occurred in the film character:

Wiemann (im Theater): ein erledigter Mensch, neurasthenisch geworden, mit letzter Energie und mit Schnaps nach Halt suchend. Veidt (im Film): der stahlharte Kämpfertyp, wie er ihn in Hugenberg's 'Letzter Kompanie' darstellte. Schneidig, forsch, gelegentliche Verzweiflung wird rasch überwunden. 'Ein Vorbild'. 'Ein Held'. Ein nationalistischer Propagandafilm also? Nicht ganz. Paul offenbart überhaupt keinen Standpunkt. Aber der Weg weist nach rechts.¹²²

Reviews indicate that the way that Paul, through Conrad Veidt, gives shape to the heroic aspect did not provoke any negative reactions. Although *Die Welt*

am Abend more or less places the film in the right-wing camp, the reactions from social-democrats and left-liberals are not negative. There is an attitude of indecision towards the film. After all, while the film shows the other side of heroism and of the war, it is not unequivocal, as is already clear from the film's motto. Besides the protagonists' overstrained emotions, we see also 'selbstverständlichen Willen zur Selbstbezwungung, zur Pflichterfüllung, zur Kameradschaftlichkeit', as the left-liberal *Berliner Börsen-Courier* remarks.¹²³ Some see a positive side of heroism in this, a heroism in which is done with 'der Erfreulichkeit des Stahlbades, mit den Segnungen des Heldentodes', as the *Reichsfilmblatt* writes.¹²⁴ This aspect is appreciated by the left and liberal press, while the right-wing press emphasises the heroic aspect. Due to this ambiguity, there are few newspaper critics who are enthusiastic about the film without harbouring any reservations (with the exception of the critics of the professional publications, *Germania* and the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, the last two mainly because of the 'spiritual-psychological' aspect). It should be noted that the film clearly suffered from the success of the play.

In the reviews of *WESTFRONT 1918*, the violent scenes and the comradeship were the main starting points in the argumentation, while reviews of *DIE ANDERE SEITE* emphasised psychology, heroism and again, comradeship. This aspect returns in the discussions of *NIEMANDSLAND*. Less ambiguously than in reviews of the other two films, the critics reviewing *NIEMANDSLAND* are divided into two camps. The left (with the exception of the communists) and the left-liberals are favourably impressed, the right is mostly negative. The film itself is unequivocal in its stance against war and in the notion of fraternisation that is part of pacifism. It goes without saying that the right-wing critics were less than enthusiastic. The communist left rejected the film for the same reasons it denounced *WESTFRONT 1918*, namely that, even more so than in *WESTFRONT 1918*, pacifism is the dominant force in *NIEMANDSLAND*. It is self-evident that the arguments used by the extreme left differed from those used by the extreme right. Although *Die Rote Fahne* treats the film slightly more positively than other war films – among other things, because *NIEMANDSLAND* was clearly inspired by Russian film art – the newspaper believed that the imperialist causes were left out of the picture, which for the communists was always an important reason to reject a war film.¹²⁵

In their appraisal of *NIEMANDSLAND*, the right-wing critics in particular aimed at the stereotypical characterisation of the protagonists. The most controversial reactions were evoked by the African and, to a lesser degree, by the German. The way this last character was represented was cause for excitement at Goebbels' party paper, *Der Angriff*:

Der Deutsche ist ein *spiessiger Tischler*, der schmalzige Vereinslieder grölt und mit einer Kinderkanone seinen Jungen unterhält, der natürlich mit Soldaten spielt,

damit doch die Welt darüber aufgeklärt werde, wie sehr in Deutschland bereits die Jugend mit dem Ungeist des Militarismus infiziert wurde. Schliesslich schleicht er zur Kaserne wie zum Begräbnis, bis schmetternde Militärmusik aus ihm einen heroischen Hanswurst macht.¹²⁶

The film was said to make Germans look 'verächtlich und lächerlich' and to falsify a 'grosses geschichtliches Geschehen zur Karikatur'. *Der Angriff* wanted a ban on the film on the basis of these arguments. In contrast to this newspaper, most other reviews praised the representation of the German character. The right-wing *Deutsche Zeitung*, however, did not waste any words at all on the issue.

While *Der Angriff* vilifies the representation of the German, the Jewish tailor and the African get off relatively lightly. The latter is accused of 'Albernheiten' and held responsible for spreading his pacifist ideas to his fellows in misery¹²⁷, but the only argument for rejecting the film is its pacifism. However, the *Deutsche Zeitung* does not mince words when it conveys its loathing for the African:

Und weil man eben ohne Verfälschung der historischen Wahrheit nicht auskommen kann, tritt ein Neger in französischer Uniform als Friedensengel zwischen die vier Versprengten. Nicht ein brutaler Halbwilder, wie ihn die Franzosen als 'Kulturträger' zum deutschen Rhein marschieren liessen, sondern ein richtiger kultivierter Negerartist, der auch in französischer Uniform während der tollsten Trommelfeuer jongliert und steppt und wegen seiner vielseitigen Sprachkenntnisse im Niemandsland zum Dolmetscher und Friedensmittler wird. (...) Ob die Franzosen diesem Film einen Friedenspreis versagt haben, weil ein schwarzer französischer 'Kulturträger' – wenn auch in ungefälschter, günstiger Form – gezeigt wird?¹²⁸

The moment an African is represented in a positive light, racism rears its ugly head, followed by an implacable attitude towards the French. The same combination can be found in the *Kreuz-Zeitung*, which, curiously enough, refers to the African as Swiss, probably because of his linguistic capabilities:

Im Mittelpunkt der Handlung steht ein Schweizer Poilu, der von Menschlichkeit trieft – die nettoyeurs, die die Franzosen in unsere Gräben schickten, um deutsche Soldaten mit langen Messern abzuschlachten, stehen uns jedoch zu deutlich vor der Seele, als dass wir auf so plumpe und verlogene Propagandamätzchen hereinfielen. Nach Schluss des Spiels umarmte der deutsche Hauptdarsteller den französischen [not the African, BK] zum Bruderkuss – man wird von uns nicht verlangen dürfen, dass wir uns an solchem Verbrüderungstheater erfreuen.¹²⁹

The keywords in the right's arguments against the film are racism, hate against France and anti-pacifism. The war seems not to have ended, and resentment predominates. Old myths about 'semi-savages' and soldiers with long knives

are used to discredit the war methods of the French. In addition, the ancient thesis of attack – Germany waged a defensive war – also played a role. To the right, the enemy is only imaginable as a ‘real’ enemy, not as a potential comrade or companion in misfortune.

It is clear that the four films (included *NAMENLOSE HELDEN*) cannot be considered ‘counter-histories’ to the same extent. At any rate, this is suggested by the analyses of the films, as well as by the critical reviews. In both cases, *DIE ANDERE SEITE* turns out to be the most conventional film. Reactions were in keeping with the film, i.e. moderate and not very sensational. Due to its realistic style and because of its uncompromising representation of the violence of war, *WESTFRONT 1918* is the most radical film, provoking the fiercest reactions. The weaknesses that were identified in the analysis (heroic myths, battlefield versus home front, racism) hardly surface at all in these reactions. Some critics were clearly more comfortable with accepting an African character in a negative role than in a positive one.

We can also establish that there was no problem of representation. After all, while documentaries were criticised for failing to represent the reality of war in a sufficiently truthful way (see the previous chapter), the ‘fictive’ reality presented in anti-war films did not satisfy either, as critics found the onscreen violence too much. In addition, the violence in the films was much more moderate than the violence described in war literature, and it was nothing compared to photographic representations such as those by Ernst Friedrich.¹³⁰

