

5 'Auf dem Meere, da ist der Mann noch etwas wert'¹

Films about the German navy during the First World War

The battle at sea was an important part of the war. After England had declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914 following the German army's violation of neutral Belgian territory, plans were afoot '(England) in die Knie zu zwingen', to force England to its knees. Two powerful weapons would be deployed to this end, the Zeppelin and the U-boat. Not surprisingly, expectations were high. Even before the war, the navy had gained a special place in the German consciousness. This national pride continued after the war, in spite of the disappointing results that the navy had achieved during the conflict. It should hardly come as a surprise, therefore, that films about the navy have an important place in the overall repertoire of German (post-)war films.

During the Weimar period, there were at least seven navy films that dealt with the First World War.² With the exception of 1928 and 1931, one film was released every year featuring the illustrious adventures of the German high seas fleet: *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE* (1926), *UNSERE EMDEN* (1926), *U9 WEDDIGEN* (1927), *DREI TAGE AUF LEBEN UND TOD* (1929), *SCAPA FLOW* (1930), *KREUZER EMDEN* (1932) and *MORGENROT* (1933). In addition to German navy films, a number of foreign navy films were also released in Germany – the best known are *U-BOOT IN GEFAHR* (1926), *MARE NOSTRUM* (US 1926/27), *DIE SEESCHLACHTEN BEI CORONEL UND DEN FALKLANDINSELN* (GB 1928), *SUBMARINE* (US 1929) and *BLOCKADE ... UND U-BOOTKRIEG* (GB 1930).

The programme for the construction of a high seas fleet had been Kaiser Wilhelm II's showpiece and, as such, it played an important role in Germany's foreign policy. It was Germany's ambition to expand into a 'Weltmacht', a world power. Its arch-rivals were the British, who dominated the seas with their powerful fleet. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Bismarck's policy had mainly been geared towards consolidation of Germany's trading position on the global market. With the exception of a short flirtation in the period 1882-1885, Bismarck had exercised restraint in colonial expansion. Following his dismissal in 1890, Wilhelm II changed his course and began to build a strong fleet to equal or even surpass the British. It was rear admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, the head of the Kriegsmarine, who managed to persuade Wilhelm to acknowledge the importance of a strong fleet. It was not so much his inten-

tion to threaten Great Britain's supremacy as such but rather to force the British into concessions. The fleet should therefore be strong enough to overawe the British. Together with Foreign Minister Bernhard von Bülow, Tirpitz and the kaiser developed ambitious plans to fulfil Wilhelm's provocative pronouncement of 'Unsere Zukunft liegt auf dem Wasser'.³ The resulting arms race between Great Britain and Germany proved to be one of the factors that increased international tensions during the first decade of the twentieth century.

In order to secure funds for a large and strong fleet, it was necessary to gain the support of the German people – i.e. the German taxpayer – for the naval plans devised by Wilhelm II and Tirpitz, as well as state support for new naval legislation. Without massive popular support, and because some political parties in the Reichstag (including the strong social democratic contingent) rejected the plans, various means had to be used in order to influence public opinion. Especially people from right-wing circles felt called upon to take up this task. This did not mean, however, that they did so without any concern for their own interest. For example, wealthy landowners, the so-called Junkers, would only support Tirpitz if they received subsidies for their farms, which had been badly hit by the economic crisis. Besides the Junkers, other representatives of the agricultural sector, captains of industry, senior civil servants and officers supported various propaganda activities. The year 1898 saw the founding of the Deutscher Flottenverein and the introduction of a monthly publication, *Die Flotte*. Membership steadily increased until the association reached a high-water mark in 1913 with more than one million members.⁴

Besides using the existing press channels, pamphlets, books, and lectures with slide shows, the association also recruited new members by organising special film screenings.⁵ Footage of extraordinary sea voyages, exploits on large seagoing vessels, activities in the docks and naval pageants were standard fare at these screenings. Frigates, cruisers and submarines gained in prestige. In spite of the fact that four bills securing government funds for naval construction had been passed, the naval construction programme ran into major financial difficulties on the eve of the war. Some construction plans had to be shelved, which meant that the predicted positive economic effects failed to materialize.⁶ Moreover, the wartime efforts of the navy were not exactly successful. The British fleet proved far superior, especially strategically. The largest sea battle of the war, the Battle of Jutland (1916), was a defeat for both the British and the German navies, but the latter suffered most.⁷ The naval blockade of Germany that was put up by the allies in 1915 could not be broken by the German fleet, which was one of the causes of the famine that struck the home front.⁸ In its turn, Germany began an unconstrained submarine war against enemy shipping early on in the war. Initially, freighters and passenger

ships were given an early warning. If these ships, insofar as they were not sailing under a neutral flag, were armed with guns, the German navy torpedoed them without warning. From then on, the unconstrained submarine war also meant that neutral ships could be attacked. Such actions led to tragedies such as the *Lusitania* disaster in which large numbers of US passengers were killed. The German attack on the ship was one of the reasons why the United States became involved in the war against Germany in 1917. It goes without saying that every successful German navy action received much attention, which contributed greatly to the creation of myths around the German navy.

The lack of success in battle resulted in important loss of prestige for the German navy. After the war, a slimmed-down fleet movement, now calling itself *Deutscher Seeverein*, made efforts to restore the navy's prestige.⁹ Though the fleet movement did not appear to be directly involved in the post-war production of navy films, these films will hardly have hurt the image of the navy – to the contrary. Whatever the case may be, a scandal uncovered in 1927: the navy was actually stimulating the production of navy propaganda films, albeit indirectly. The outrage became known as the so-called *Phoebus scandal*.

Phoebus Film A.G. was the name of a film company established in 1923. It owned extensive facilities for production, distribution and screening. The firm quickly developed into one of Germany's largest production companies. The end came in 1927 when the press revealed illegal and subversive financial transactions. It turned out that captain Walter Lohman of the *Reichsmarine* had siphoned off around ten billion Reichsmark from secret funds to serve as capital for supporting clandestine re-armament and militarist-nationalist propaganda. As a matter of course that *Phoebus* was ordered to produce navy-friendly films. This strategy, however, met with little success. The story, which the government and the military tried to conceal, was covered extensively in the press. It led to heated Reichstag debates and finally brought about the fall of Reichswehrminister, Otto Gessler (DDP). Lohman died shortly thereafter, probably by suicide, while the former managing director of *Phoebus*, E.H. Correll, was appointed Head of Production at Ufa.¹⁰

The *Phoebus* affair may serve to illustrate the right's desire to rebuild an army and navy. Right-wing groups tried to circumvent the Versailles Treaty by using secret funds earmarked for re-armament. This often happened with the Reichstag's knowledge. After all, the treaty had allowed Germany to retain a strongly decimated army with limited equipment and no navy of its own. Especially the absence of a navy was a continual source of aggravation. The huge popular success of some of the navy films should therefore be explained mainly from this context.

The surface ships

In the period from 1926 to 1933, three films were made about the role of battle-ships during or shortly after the war: *UNSERE EMDEN* (1926), *SCAPA FLOW* (1930), and *KREUZER EMDEN* (1932). For many people, these names had a mythical ring. While the historical ship Emden represented the triumphant advance of the German army at the beginning of the war, *SCAPA FLOW* called attention to the honourable defeat of the navy right after the war. These different moments captured on film provide interesting material for comparison. The same is true for the points in time at which the two *Emden* films were shot and screened, 1926 and 1932. They offer an excellent starting point for the comparison of both films and the contexts in which they were shown.

UNSERE EMDEN and KREUZER EMDEN

The story of the German cruiser Emden is based on reality. At the beginning of the war, this ship was moored in the port of Tsingtau, which meant that the ship's wartime hunting grounds were the waters of the Chinese Sea. A programme brochure issued by the Emelka production company, which was responsible for the production of both films, reported the following acts of heroism: on 13 August 1914, the ship received orders to sail, after which it is said to have succeeded in sinking sixteen ships while seizing eight, and causing some 43 million marks worth of damage to the enemy in the three months between leaving port and going down, which was on 9 November of the same year. The Emden is said to have lost 124 of its crew in the last fight with the Anglo-Australian cruiser, *Sidney*. Sixty-five are said to have been wounded and 117 captured by the enemy.¹¹ Present figures deviate only slightly from the figures in the brochure. The Emden, a relatively small and fast cruiser, was pitched against an adversary who was much larger and much better equipped.

The David-and-Goliath-like associations prompted by this sea battle brought the Emden much glory. After the ship had gone down, a new ship was built and given the same name – a ship that would eventually be scuttled off Scapa Flow with the rest of the German navy. A third Emden was built in the mid-twenties, but this one had to be a passenger ship because of the restrictions on building warships. A short documentary, *EMDEN III*, was made about this ship, recording the time when it sailed around the world. The ship continued to catch people's imagination until well into the Nazi era. The director who had been responsible for the *EMDEN* films of 1926 and 1932, Louis Ralph, in 1934 produced the film *HELDENTUM UND TODESKAMPF UNSERER EMDEN*.¹² It

should be clear that the Emden story was the stuff of legends. This is actually confirmed in many contemporary reviews.

Louis Ralph was an important figure in the production of the EMDEN films. It seems that KREUZER EMDEN contains some of the footage that also appeared in UNSERE EMDEN (which is probably also true for the 1934 EMDEN film).¹³ With the exception of Louis Ralph, who appeared as the Emden commander in both films, only the actors and actresses were different. The fact that some actors in UNSERE EMDEN had been members of the crew during the war gave the film special significance. An important contribution was made by Kapitän-Leutnant Von Mücke, who had been the Emden's first officer during the war.¹⁴ The original captain of the Emden, Von Müller, had died in the ravages of the post-war influenza epidemic. His role was played by Louis Ralph himself.¹⁵ Later, people with first-hand experience were used as actors in the documentaries, DER WELTKRIEG and DOUAUMONT, too. Another major difference between the two EMDEN films was the fact that KREUZER EMDEN was a sound-film, whereas UNSERE EMDEN was a silent movie.

UNSERE EMDEN, subtitled *Fliegende Holländer des Ozeans*, was one of the most successful navy films in the Weimar period.¹⁶ It was promoted in a remarkable campaign during the summer months of 1926. Never before had so much attention been paid to a war film in the press. Reviews focused on its authenticity. *Lichtbildbühne* reported that several events in the film were based on a serious historical source, the *Admiralstabwerk 'Kreuzerkrieg', Band II*, von Vizeadmiral H.C. Raeder und Vizeadmiral H.C. von Mantey.¹⁷ Von Mantey himself attended the special press screening, at which he also gave an introduction to the film.¹⁸ In order to give UNSERE EMDEN an official seal of quality, and to underline its uniqueness, producer Emelka published a letter by Reichspräsident Von Hindenburg in *Lichtbildbühne* and *Kinematograph* saying that the Emelka film was the only EMDEN film that had the support of the navy.¹⁹ In addition, the same film periodical published a series of original telegraph messages sent by the Emden and British ships that had made 'contact' with the German ship.²⁰

The film was premiered in two Berlin film theatres on 22 December 1926. Several days earlier, on the 20th of December, the censorship authorities in Munich had announced that after a few minor alterations, the film had been approved and deemed suitable for young people.²¹ UNSERE EMDEN eventually became one of the most popular movies of 1926. It also met with great success when it was released in Great Britain.²²

The story of UNSERE EMDEN can only be reconstructed on the basis of the programme and censorship texts. The film was said to have opened with footage of the Chinese port of Tsingtau. The story then shifts to Germany, where the wife of an engineer posted in Tsingtau receives a letter asking her to join

him there. As she leaves on board an English vessel, war breaks out. The officers of the Emden and the other ships in the flotilla are ordered to mobilise. Preparations are made, the crew say goodbye to the port, and the Emden sails. A short while later, it is decided that the Emden shall be detached from the rest of the vessels. It is the most important order that a ship commander can receive, because from then on, the vessel will be his responsibility and his alone. Only the coal carrier Markomannia will accompany the Emden. After a few days, the two ships reach the Dutch-Indian island of Simaloer, and the crew hopes they will be able to enjoy a short period of rest. However, the stay on the island is short because a Dutch commander orders the German ship to leave the port, to keep Dutch neutrality intact. This is the beginning of the so-called 'Kaperkrieg'. The Emden sinks many an enemy ship, mostly traders. It so happens that on board of one of these vessels, a passenger ship this time, is the wife of the engineer mentioned earlier. She is transferred to the Emden, while the other passengers are taken on board by the accompanying coal carrier. One high point in the Emden's voyage is the night-time attack on a Russian ship in the port of Penang. This is also the last act of war carried out by the Emden. On 9 November, the captain plans to attack an island held by the British. A transmitting station on the island is the only means of communication the British have to reach either their own country or British ships stationed east. In the preparations for the attack, captain-lieutenant Von Mücke lands on the island and destroys the transmitter. However, the Germans are unable to prevent the British from warning their fleet. The result is a heavy shelling of the Emden by the larger and better-equipped Australian vessel 'Sydney'. To prevent things from going from bad to worse, the captain lets the Emden run aground, while the accompanying vessel is sunk by its own crew. The Germans are forced to surrender. The officers of the Sydney receive their German counterparts with military honour and allow them to hold on to their arms. The Australians and Germans watch the Emden go down from the deck of the Sydney.

The remarkable thing about the story is the fact that there is hardly any subplot besides the war narrative. As we will see later on with the early U-boat films, a story involving love or friendship is often a key element of the main plot. Judging from reviews and intervening titles from the censorship report, *UNSERE EMDEN* represented the war action in a historically objective way. Many intervening titles provide factual information about both the situation on the war-torn mainland and the feats performed by the Emden. The texts mostly consist of commands, historical facts, navigational and geographical indications, and information about the number of ships sunk by the Emden. Also, maps and newspaper reports are shown. Very few texts deal with human topics or adventures, and there is nothing at all suggesting a love story.²³ The

situation between the engineer and his wife is explained only briefly. In other words, it is clear that the director chose a detached perspective that was not defined by any of the characters in the story. This ensures an almost documentary-like approach.

Although *UNSERE EMDEN* is similar to *KREUZER EMDEN*, especially where the war action is concerned, Louis Ralph clearly decided on a more frivolous approach for *KREUZER EMDEN*. Having decided not to use any of the historical characters in the second version, he apparently felt he could also adopt a loose approach as far as historical objectivity was concerned. For example, he added two remarkable scenes. *KREUZER EMDEN* opens with quite an extensive scene in which we see three sailors getting drunk while a wedding is taking place in the adjoining room. When the sailors join the party, one of them discovers that the bride is in fact his lover. A fight erupts, and at that very moment, someone announces that war has broken out. Everyone runs outside, leaving the bride alone in the room. The sailor and the groom both turn out to be crew members of *Kreuzer Emden*. Only at the end of the film, on the eve of the final battle, is the groom prepared to make peace with the sailor.

The other addition is more malicious. Whereas in *UNSERE EMDEN* the enemy is probably never really shown, and whereas the British commanders of the *Sydney* are approached in a correct way, *KREUZER EMDEN* makes every effort to display the Russians in a very bad light. While the Russian ship is shelled in the harbour, its officers are shown living it up in a harbour brothel. The scene shows the men being thrilled to bits by a femme-fatale-like singer with a voice not unlike that of Marlene Dietrich's. The director clearly uses the stereotype of Russians as irresponsible drunkards and womanisers who are cheerful and melancholic at the same time.

The rest of the film follows the chronology and factual account of the war action seen by the *Emden*. Large chunks of the film begin almost systematically with a map showing the *Emden*'s position and charted course before actually cutting to the action. This approach was probably also used in *UNSERE EMDEN*.²⁴ Another similarity between the two films is that the chosen perspective can hardly have been connected to any one particular character. It is almost certain, in view of the objective approach, that this was also true for *UNSERE EMDEN*. Since there is hardly such a thing as a consistent narrative based on characters, the ship itself is the protagonist. In *KREUZER EMDEN* this can be seen from the repeated occurrence of footage where the camera has been placed on the side of the bow, producing the effect of an 'over-shoulder-shot'. In other words, we regularly get to see the sea from the *Emden*'s point of view.

There is no reference in the last version to the newly-built Emden ship. In all probability, *UNSERE EMDEN* ends with a shot of the new Emden (III). This is also mentioned by Kracauer in his review: 'Zum Schlusse läuft unter den Klängen des Deutschland-Liedes die neue 'Emden' aus.'²⁵ The last lines of the censor's report say: 'Aus Not und Tod ist sie / Uns neu erstanden / Und zieht hinaus / Ein Ehrenmal den toten Helden! Ende.'²⁶ In films of a more documentary nature, we saw that the historical line was continued in the contemporary present. *TANNENBERG*, shot six years later, ends with the unveiling of a monument with the same name, and *DOUAUMONT* (1931) ends with images of a war cemetery.

Criticism, mythologisation and intertextuality

It should hardly come as a surprise that the critical appreciation of these films varied. This was not only due to the fact that the films were rather different, but also because of contextual aspects. *UNSERE EMDEN* received reasonably positive reviews. This was mainly due to the objective approach to the past, or because it was, as the *Film-Kurier* put it, 'ein sachlich verfilmter Admiralstabsbericht' produced by 'Fanatiker der Sachlichkeit'.²⁷ The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* also judged the film to be historically objective.²⁸ It said the film partly deserved this epithet because of the presence of former navy men in the film. The *Reichsfilmblatt* even opined that these people acted better than the professional actors taking part in the film.²⁹ The objective approach would also earn war movies that were shot later positive reviews.

Some critics did not share this positive view of the films, however. One of them, Siegfried Kracauer, criticized the choice of subject for the film:

Als die verdammenswerte Wirklichkeit dieses Krieges fällt die Episode der Emden heraus. Gerade darum hat man sie vermutlich verfilmt. Das Publikum, die Jugend zumal, soll den Eindruck erhalten, als ob es um den Krieg eine frisch-fröhliche Sache sei.³⁰

From this perspective, he found the film a 'Schrittmacher glorreicher Kriegsstimmung'.³¹ On the other hand, Kracauer also wrote that the events themselves had been portrayed correctly and that the activities of the crew and the officers had been conveyed in a convincing manner.³² The social-democrat publication, *Vorwärts*, undoubtedly concurred with the negative reviews, for its own verdict did not mince words: 'Unsere Emden is nichts weiter als eine langweilige Chronik für ein deutschnationales Heim.'³³ The moderate *Germania* opined that, while the film could indeed in no way be called pacifist, neither did it glorify the war.³⁴

The sheer number of reactions made it clear that the first EMDEN film fulfilled a need to give the war a place among national myths, which, of course, included the heroic deeds of soldiers. Naturally, the story of the Emden, a small but swift vessel roaming the seas like a David, as some said, was excellently suited to become the stuff of myth.³⁵ The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, which later proved a powerful advocate of national myths (see also the discussion of TANNENBERG) considered UNSERE EMDEN the first historical war film and found that its production marked an 'entscheidender Schritt zur bildlichen Geschichtsschreibung des Krieges'.³⁶ And besides, the newspaper wrote,

Deutschland kennt keine Denkmäler des Krieges. Das Denkmal unserer Leistungen war unsichtbar bisher, stand nirgendwo und überall in den sachlichen Berichten des General- und Admiralstabes. Langsam wird es sichtbar: dieser Film legt den ersten Grundstein, um aus den unsichtbaren Denkmal unserer Mannestat im Krieg ein sichtbares zu machen. Es wird weiter gebaut werden müssen...³⁷

This tied in with the motto of the film, which, like so many later war films, wanted to be a 'Denkmal'. The fact that this also meant the continuation of a myth was shown in much the same way by two reviews from different ideological positions, in the right-wing publication *Der Montag* and in the *Film-Kurier*, which had social democratic leanings. Both reviews compared the film to Fritz Lang's 1924 NIBELUNGEN film. *Der Montag* said the EMDEN film was a 'neuzeitliche Gestaltung' in expressing the 'Nibelungentreue' of Lang's film as well as the 'nordische Liebe zum Meer'.³⁸ The *Film-Kurier* wrote: 'Seit den "Nibelungen" wurde kein Stoff aufgegriffen, der das deutsche Volk (...) anginge'.³⁹ The author was clearly aware that the subject was very suitable for visual mythologizing: 'Der "Emden"-Krieg bewies: auf dem Meere, da ist der Mann noch was wert (dagegen unser Schützengraben- und Materialkrieg...)'.⁴⁰ Indeed, the high degree of organisation in the navy was absent in the chaos of the western front. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the war at sea should have been more appealing for the visual representation of heroism than the war at the western front, where death had become almost anonymous because of the huge numbers of casualties.

The EMDEN film was compared not just to the mythological DIE NIBELUNGEN. For many people it also carried associations with Eisenstein's POTEMKIN,⁴¹ which had gone into circulation six months earlier, in the summer of 1926. This Russian film was vilified because of its ideology but also praised for its cinematographic qualities. POTEMKIN was banned for some time because of its outright communist propaganda. Bearing in mind the commotion POTEMKIN had caused, it need hardly surprise us that critics compared German navy films from the same time, UNSERE EMDEN and the U-boat film DIE VERSUNKENE

FLOTTE, to Eisenstein's film. Some saw UNSERE EMDEN and DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE as ideological counterparts of POTEMKIN, while others pointed out the many similarities. Critical opinion was divided: 'Sie will ein deutsches Gegenstück zum "Potemkin" sein'⁴²; the director has succeeded in

filmtechnisch die ganz gleichen Höhepunkte zu erreichen⁴³; Ein Vergleich dieser Bildreportage mit 'Potemkin' ist freilich weder künstlerisch noch stofflich am Platze⁴⁴; Der Vergleich mit 'Potemkin' liegt bei der Gleichartigkeit des Schiffsmilieus nahe. Aber was dort eine Idee war, ist hier nur 'Erinnerungsblatt'⁴⁵; (...) im Hintergrund steht der Potemkinfilm. Keine Einzelfiguren, die Masse, die Besatzung ist Träger der Handlung. Maschinen spielen massgebend mit.⁴⁶

Comparisons between UNSERE EMDEN and POTEMKIN were made mainly in terms of content, because the German film had nothing to do with the aesthetic modernism of its Russian precursor, with its revolutionary editing technique. This is borne out by the reviews, and it also seems a logical presumption looking at KREUZER EMDEN, in which conventional continuity editing is the dominant technique. After all, both EMDEN films were made by one and the same director. The only aspect that apparently corresponded to POTEMKIN is the careful attention to nautical technology, which also fascinated the makers of many other navy films. It is not unlikely that Eisenstein showed them how to bring life to what is essentially the utter lifelessness of modern technology – by creating images that are fascinating in cinematographic terms: moving wheels, pumping rods, steam.

Two interesting reports should be mentioned in connection with the relationship between EMDEN and POTEMKIN. According to the *Lichtbildbühne* and the *Film-Kurier*, rioting broke out between leftists and right-wing sympathisers during and after an evening screening of the film on 27 December.⁴⁷ The *Film-Kurier* said the disturbances were directly related to a Bavarian ban on POTEMKIN. Leftists were said to have taken their revenge on Emelka, the Bavarian production company of UNSERE EMDEN, thought to be behind the ban. The *Film-Kurier* said the rioting had not only been sparked by the obvious irritation caused in left-wing circles by the 'schwarz-weiss-rote Fahne', the 'Kaiserhoch', the 'Flaggenlied' and the 'Kadavergehorsamsgesinnung'⁴⁸, but also by a taste for revenge. However, the reporter who wrote the article said it was ridiculous to hold Emelka responsible. Still, he did not fail to appreciate why the 'Kaiserhoch' in the film should be rejected, regardless of its obvious authenticity: 'Selbst in Münchener Rechtskreisen (oder gerade da) wird man eine Ehrung Wilhelm II als deplaciert empfinden.'⁴⁹

Curiously enough, the *Lichtbildbühne* report refers only very indirectly to the POTEMKIN ban.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it extensively discusses the nature of the rioting surrounding UNSERE EMDEN. Right-wing sympathisers are said to have

expressed their support for the film in a loud voice which, in turn, sparked angry reactions from the leftists. Police then arrested ten persons, who were transferred to the station accompanied by huge crowds. There are no reports in the film periodicals indicating that such rioting ever occurred again. It does, however, prove the sensitive nature of representations of war in images with ideological connotations. Especially at this time, when many war films were made, discussions about the relationship between politics and film gained in importance. The rioting must be seen in this context. The mention of in some of the above quotations the black-white-red flag also appears to refer to the conflict about the new flag regulation pushed through by Von Hindenburg in May of that same year. This regulation required German agencies abroad to fly the imperial colours of black, white and red next to the official black-gold-red flag of the republic, much to the dismay of the social democrats. The issue would soon lead to the fall of the second Lutheran government.

KREUZER EMDEN was premiered in two Berlin theatres on 20 May 1932.⁵¹ In this last stage of the republic, the film industry, like many other sectors of the German economy, suffered from the world-wide economic crisis. While the industry still produced two hundred films in 1931, production went down to 156 in 1932 and, in 1933, it decreased even further to 135.⁵² For this reason, the industry was happy with any film that was thought to be a box-office hit. According to *Lichtbildbühne*, KREUZER EMDEN was such a crowd puller:

Die Bayerische bringt hier den Theaterbesitzern in schwerster, beklemmendster Zeit eine Gabe, für die sie ihr Dank wissen werden. (...) Mit der 'Emden' werden die Filmtheater siegreich durch des Sommers Untiefen kreuzen.⁵³

Emelka's hope for a box-office hit is illustrated by the way it took the promotion of the premiere in Munich in hand. The edifice of the Emelka theatre, the Phoebus-Palast, was lit by powerful floodlights, the interior was decorated with memorabilia, flags and photographs, and a navy band played appropriate music ahead of the screening.⁵⁴ KREUZER EMDEN failed, however, to emulate or even equal the success of UNSERE EMDEN. After about six years, audiences had become very familiar with war films. They had seen objective 'documentaries', romantic war movies and realistic anti-war films. The year 1931 had been a prolific year for German war-film producers, as had 1926.⁵⁵ The question is whether reviews of KREUZER EMDEN were really very different from those of UNSERE EMDEN.

War films were generally reviewed with some measure of subtlety, but the inclusion of archival footage nearly always earned a film much praise. This was also the case with KREUZER EMDEN, where the archival footage mostly came from UNSERE EMDEN. The scenes of dramatic fiction that were added to

the historical images, whether constructed or not, failed to impress the critics. They were thought too much of a 'Hurrah-Geschichte' with 'Hurrahgebrüll'.⁵⁶ Especially the love scenes were considered intrusive, sentimental and superfluous.⁵⁷ In general, reactions in the leftist press were negative. The communist *Welt am Abend* wrote: 'Es hält schwer, sich über diesen Film nicht lustig zu machen. Das grausige, das Furchtbare des Seekrieges, das Absacken und Versaufen wird als Atelierkitsch serviert'⁵⁸, while the left-liberal *Vossische Zeitung* found the film a 'trockenen, eintönigen Bilderbericht'⁵⁹.

All the more surprising was the review in *Vorwärts*, whose critic wrote that the film was 'nicht immer genau aber eine wirksame Antikriegspropaganda'.⁶⁰ No other critic had managed to find grounds for such a statement in the film, and even the right-wing press did not use this argument in its sometimes negative verdict. The *Völkischer Beobachter* said that Louis Ralph should at least have consulted an advisor on military and technological matters. The author had noticed 'falsche Kommando-Reihenfolge, falsche Uniforme, falsche Aussprache usw.'⁶¹ *Tempo* concurred, writing in a manner betraying irritation that war films should really only be shown to former participants in the war!⁶²

Denn nur der Kriegsteilnehmer kann erkennen, was gut und schlecht, was falsch und echt, was nützlich und überflüssig, was klug und dumm ist. Die anderen bekommen falsche Zu- und Abneigungen.⁶³

Whatever the different nuances in the various reviews, the general consensus was less positive than had been the case with *UNSERE EMDEN*. The addition of scenes of dramatic fiction was considered a serious intrusion. Reviews of *KREUZER EMDEN* also lacked the enthusiasm that had been there six years earlier, when making a film about the navy had almost been a novelty idea. The only difference was that, in contrast to the reviews of *UNSERE EMDEN*, criticism of *KREUZER EMDEN* showed an increase in political polarisation, barring a few remarkable exceptions.

SCAPA FLOW and the navy rebellion

In 1930, the year in which *SOMME* and *WESTFRONT 1918* saw the light of day, the year also in which *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* caused such a stir, Leo Lasko made the silent film *SCAPA FLOW*. Two years earlier, he had taken part in the production of *DER WELTKRIEG II*. Leo Lasko worked both as a director and as a writer of screenplays.⁶⁴ At first sight, the title of *SCAPA FLOW* does not appear to give much cause for controversy. It is the name of the British naval base near the Scottish Orkney Isles, where most of the German fleet had been interned after the war. On 21 June 1919, German high command decided that it

would scuttle the fleet. This time, heroism did not spring from braveness in fighting a lost battle, but from an act of self-sacrifice meant to keep the ships from falling into the hands of the victorious allies. In short, an act of material suicide meant to preserve maritime honour. The scuttling of the fleet at Scapa Flow has therefore gone down in the annals of German war mythology as an act of heroism, something to be preserved in national memory.

A reinforcing factor in this mythology was Otto Gebühr's presence in the film. The many times that star actor Gebühr played the role of Frederick the Great in the *FRIDERICUS* films had caused his stature to reach almost mythical proportions. This meant that his presence in a film quickly evoked associations with notions of traditional Prussian morality. There was no question, therefore, that his role must be one of authority. In *SCAPA FLOW*, he played Von Klockow, the captain of a large ship of the line. A picture of Gebühr looking into the distance with an expression of pride and sternness was featured prominently on the front page of the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier*.⁶⁵ Advertisements show his name in bigger print than the title of the film itself.⁶⁶ Claire Rommer – known from *VOLK IN NOT* of 1925 – cast as Marie, was the other star of the film, and Claus Clausen, who had been given the role of agitator, would, several months later, play the role of the lieutenant gone mad in *WESTFRONT 1918*.

Though the historical events at Scapa Flow should have been central to the film, Lasko did not start his film after the end of the war but just before. This meant he introduced a potentially controversial element into his story: the mutiny in Wilhelmshafen and the ensuing November Revolution of 1918. If we are to believe contemporary reviews, the film was not dominated by the events at Scapa Flow but by the outbreak of the revolution.

The following story can be derived from the description of the contents by the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* and the censorship text. The film begins in the summer of 1918. Nothing is known yet about the outcome of the war, and the fleet is languishing in port. Captain Von Klockow's son, serving under his father as a lieutenant, cannot stand it any longer and is granted permission to report for duty with a submarine unit. At that precise moment, the revolution breaks out. The censorship text at first creates the impression that the revolution is provoked by sheer boredom, monotony and the idea that there is no sense of purpose anymore to waging this war.⁶⁷ The bad living conditions on board the ships are not mentioned at all. In the third act, the intervening titles, and probably also the images, become much clearer about what caused the revolution. The text gives two quotations, one by Churchill ('Der Krieg hängt an einem seidenen Faden') and the other by Wilson ('Der Frieden ist die Frage kürzester Zeit'), both showing that the war is coming to an end. Then follows an executive order from the kaiser: 'Kommando der Hochsee-Flotte. S.M.S. Kaiser Wil-

helm II, den 24. Oktober 1918. Ganz geheim. O. Befehl. Vorstoss der gesamten Hochseeflotte gegen den Feind.'⁶⁸ Follows a reaction that could only have come from the crew: 'Die Offiziere wollen mit der Flotte auslaufen!; der Krieg ist doch verloren – mann will die Schiffe vernichten!; Man schickt uns in den sicheren Tod!; Feuer aus!; Revolution!'⁶⁹ The rebel crew takes captain Von Klockow's 'Achselstücke' from him. The captain offers resistance, but he is unable to prevent the hoisting of the red flag on his ship. Von Klockow's son is also attacked, but he manages to escape and also saves his father from a suicidal action. After this, the revolution disappears from the scene. The text does not give any information about its outcome, but it does mention that a truce has been agreed. During the peace negotiations, Article 23 is drawn up, stipulating that German ships must be disarmed and interned in allied or neutral ports. 'Führen wir die Schiffe nicht selbst zur Internierung, holt sie der Engländer mit Waffengewalt und besetzt die Küste.'⁷⁰ For Von Klockow, this is the most humiliating order of his career, but 'Wir dürfen die Schiffe nicht in feindliche Hand fallen lassen – wir müssen unsere Pflicht tun!'⁷¹ However, it is not Von Klockow but a revolutionary sailor who assumes command, 'Ich übernehme das Kommando! Zur Weltverbrüderung nach England! Am Sonntag spielen wir mit den Tommies Fussball!'⁷² The German ships are thoroughly checked by British officers upon arrival in Scapa Flow: 'Wo ist nun deine Weltverbrüderung?'⁷³ For seven months, the German ships wait for the outcome of the peace negotiations. If these should fail, the Germans are resolved to scuttle their fleet. Then the 21st of June 1919 comes along, the negotiations have failed as far as the Germans are concerned (the treaty, however, is not signed until June 28, exactly five years after the fatal shots rang out in Sarajevo). 'Ventile offen!; Die Kriegsflagge wird gesetzt – die Schiffe sollen versenkt werden!; Die Würfel sind gefallen. – Es lebe unser Vaterland!'⁷⁴ Von Klockow's son is at the last moment caught up in a fight with a revolutionary, but he can be saved in the end. The crew has gone into the lifeboats. The text in the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* indicates that the British are now shelling the Germans, injuring Von Klockow fatally.

The description of the story clearly shows that Von Klockow, and with him the actor Otto Gebühr, play a central role in the film. As was said before, the choice of Gebühr was an extreme case of typecasting. According to the social democratic *Der Abend*, Gebühr would certainly have refused the part if the navy officers, whose 'Rangälteste' he was, would have been anything short of 'fleckelose Edelgestalten'.⁷⁵ The spectator was almost certainly encouraged to sympathise with the Von Klockow character. After all, it is the captain who is treated 'unfairly' by both the revolutionaries and the British in the film. He is humiliated by the former and killed by the latter.

The revolutionaries were the perfect foil for the so-called 'fleckelose Edelgestalten'. It is not quite clear from the text how exactly they were depicted. The reviews yield more information. According to the *Film-Kurier*, the rebel sailors were shown as a 'vergnügte Horde bolschewistischer Gauner', as 'dumme Rohlinge'.⁷⁶ The *Vossische Zeitung* rejected the way this film presented the revolutionaries as a 'saufernde und die Frauen vergewaltigende Horde'.⁷⁷ In contrast, it is remarkable how little attention the right-wing press paid to the way the revolution was depicted. They tried to outdo each other in describing the German heroism at Scapa Flow. This meant that they did not criticise the clear tendencies that were discerned in the film by the leftist and moderate press.

It is clear from the reviews that this was the first time that the revolution had been used as the subject for a film. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that some reviewers refer to Reinhardt Goering's 1918 play *Seeschlacht* and Eisenstein's *POTEMKIN*.⁷⁸ With respect to content, there are some striking similarities between the play and film, while *POTEMKIN* appears to have inspired the filmmaker as far as cinematography is concerned. The *Vossische Zeitung* puts it most succinctly:

Es ist interessant zu sehen, wie mit den Mitteln der russischen Bildmontage, mit den Mitteln russischer Photographie und Filmdynamik eine konservative Tendenz durchgesetzt werden soll. Inhalt und Kunstniveau bekämpfen sich gegenseitig.⁷⁹

This statement clearly shows the extent to which the modernistic editing technique was associated with left-wing or progressive ideology. We saw the same combination of conservative tendencies and modernism in *DER WELTKRIEG* (1927/28).

The U-boat films

DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE and U9 WEDDIGEN

DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE premiered on 8 December 1926 in Berlin, exactly two weeks before *UNSERE EMDEN*. It was brought into circulation in no less than fifteen Berlin cinemas, showing the kind of enthusiasm that the producers expected the film to generate with the general public.⁸⁰ Judging from reviews, the screenings were indeed a success. The *Tägliche Rundschau* had serialised the book with the same title on which the film was based in June of the same year.⁸¹ This book by retired Lieutenant-Commander Helmut Lorenz was a heavily romanticised account of his wartime experiences in the Battle of Skagerrak, ex-



Captain Von Liers and two of his men in their submarine (MORGENROT)

pressed in an exciting narrative.⁸² The form in which Lorenz cast this historic event may have inspired part of his readership to go and see the film as well. Besides, Lorenz joined the film's director, Manfred Noa, in the capacity of a technical adviser in navy matters.⁸³ This was not the first time Noa directed a war film, having earlier made the strongly romanticised *FELDGRAU*.⁸⁴

A film similar to *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE*, at least as far as its theme was concerned, was *U9 WEDDIGEN*. This first war film by the then unknown director, Heinz Paul, was premiered one year later on 5 May 1927. The film also marked the debut of the production company Jofa-Produktion.⁸⁵ The *Berliner Tageblatt* reacted to the arrival of the new firm with a sarcastic yet telling comment:

Womit könnte eine neue Produktion besser und segensreicher beginnen als mit einem Kriegsfilm? Und als die 'Jofa' sich auf die Stoffsuche begab, da entdeckte sie, dass 'U9' dem Kino noch unerschlossen ist.⁸⁶

Despite its strongly romanticised character, *U9 WEDDIGEN* did refer to the historical figure of Lieutenant-Commander Otto Weddigen (1882-1915). This hero fell in a sea battle against the British on 18 March 1915, when he was commander of the U29. He commanded the U9 for some time and was responsible

for sinking the British armour-clad cruisers 'Hogue', 'Cressy', and 'Aboukir' in September 1914, off Hook of Holland.⁸⁷ Though this act is depicted in the film, the figure of Weddigen as such is not central to the film. The narrative centres around the adventures of one of the protagonists who was 'on the bridge' under Weddigen's command. Nevertheless, Weddigen must have been the drawing factor, as is also indicated by the title. It is also the reason why the cover of the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* shows an image of Weddigen as portrayed by actor Carl de Vogt.⁸⁸

The narratives of *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE* and *U9 WEDDIGEN* begin before the war. Both films refer to historical characters or facts. Both of them feature personal relationships between the British and the Germans, rivalry plays an important role in both films, and neither one has a happy ending. Nothing has remained of the silent movies except a few written sources from which an outline of the narrative can be derived. The censorship reports are again important as sources for all the intervening titles in the film, giving information about such aspects as structure, 'dialogue' and characterisation. Though both films begin at the same moment, just before the war, *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE* ends in 1919 with a reference to the scuttling of the fleet at Scapa Flow, while *U9 WEDDIGEN* ends in 1915, when the ship under Weddigen's command, the *U29*, is sunk by the British. Both films are chronological in structure and their first scenes, about the short period before the outbreak of war, serve as an introduction of the protagonists and the way they relate to each other. After this, the sea battles are shown, while the films come to a close when one or more characters lose their lives in the fighting. To illustrate this, a brief outline is given of the narrative of *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE*, the first war film to feature the navy, and one that covers the entire war.

In the first scene of *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE*, main characters captain Barnow (Bernhard Goetzke) and torpedo-officer Adenried (Nils Asther) prepare to meet the British fleet during the Kieler Woche festivities. Barnow is looking forward to seeing his British comrade Norton (Henry Stuart) again. In this scene, however, several of the complications that are yet to come are already suggested. The very conscientious Barnow neglects his wife Erika (Agnes Esterhazy) – 'Erika Barnow, seine Gattin (...) im Eifer des Dienstes auch oft vergessen'⁸⁹ – and is not aware of the developing relationship between her and his torpedo-officer Adenried. Much the same complications are developing between some lower-ranking members of Barnow's crew. Petty officer Röwer (Heinrich George) and first engineer Kreuger (Hans Albers) are quite openly fighting for the love of Anna (Käthe Haack). She promises each of them, separately, to marry them if they leave the navy. Apart from being rivals in love, the

men also have entirely different views on politics: Röwer is a communist. One of the texts in a scene depicting the Jutland sea battle between the British and the Germans, probably spoken by Kreuger, says: 'Siehst Du, das ist Deine internationale Solidarität! – Der Engländer hustet Dir was!'⁹⁰ Anna's seeming freedom of choice is ultimately destroyed by the war when a fatally wounded Kreuger asks Röwer to take good care of her. However, Röwer does not come out of the war unscathed either. He loses both legs.

Let us return to the main characters. The complications between them are certainly not just of a social or romantic nature. During the Kieler Woche festivities, Barnow greets his British friend Norton with the words 'Mein schönster Tag ist heute, Norton: ich sehe die Freundschaft zwischen unseren Ländern besiegelt.'⁹¹ After this, the war breaks out. The subsequent intervening titles report the Sarajevo assassination and its consequences. The following exchange then occurs in a dialogue between Barnow and Norton: 'Krieg!'; 'Aber doch nicht mit England?'; 'Was auch geschieht, wir beide bleiben Freunde!'⁹² When the British leave the port of Kiel, the text half-jokingly refers to the superiority of the German fleet: 'Treffst Ihr wirklich mit Euren neuen Geschützen auf 15 Kilometer?'; 'Wetten!'; 'Um eine Flasche Sekt, kredenzt von mir beim nächsten Wiedersehen!'⁹³ The farewell words of the British Admiralty are: 'Friends in past and friends for ever'; 'Freunde bisher und Freunde für immer'. Immediately after this, we see the lines: 'Am 4. August erfolgte die englische Kriegserklärung.'⁹⁴ The order in which these texts appear is crucial, indicating the changing attitude towards the British, who are now presented as breakers of a promise.⁹⁵ The reason behind the British declaration of war is not mentioned. And anyway, the film does not pay any attention to the land war. The slogan about Anglo-German friendship runs like a thread in the story, and it is 'pledged' again in the scene in which the Germans open fire on the British ships. The meaning has then become cynical, of course.⁹⁶ The next few scenes are very dramatic. Erika writes to her husband that she wants to share her life with Adenried. Though at first he considers duelling with Adenried, Barnow ultimately admits that he has indeed neglected her: '... darum wähle ich einen Weg, der Dich für immer von mir freimacht (...); Er opfert sich für mich!'⁹⁷ Barnow is killed, which prompts a guilt-ridden Erika to distance herself from Adenried. She advises him to report to the submarines leaving for Flanders, which he does. Meanwhile, in a Kiel military hospital, a fatally wounded Norton calls for Erika, saying he is the loser of the bet with Barnow. She nurses him back to health as a tribute to her fallen husband. Adenried and his submarine have meanwhile been interned in Spain. The war ends while revolution breaks out at the home front. The censorship text fails to report the causes and suggests that the revolution was not solely the navy men's initiative: 'Am Sonntag ist es in Kiel zu schweren Ausschreitungen

gekommen, an denen leider auch Mannschaften der Flotte sich beteiligt haben'; Das ist das Ende der deutschen Flotte'.⁹⁸ Subsequently, Article 23 of the Versailles Treaty requires the handover of the fleet to the enemy. Adenried, however, refuses to surrender his ship to France and scuttles it. He is killed in this action, the suggestion being that he has died as a result of a conscious choice. 'Besser Ehre ohne Schiffe, als Schiffe ohne Ehre'; Wir wollen dem Beispiel von Scapa Flow folgen, und unser Boot versenken'; (...) 'Klar zum Versenken!'; 'Alle Mann an Bord'; 'Adenried! Adenried!'⁹⁹ At the end of the film, Norton tries in vain to reconcile with Erika. Again the slogan says 'Freunde bisher, Freunde für immer!'¹⁰⁰ However, she has grown very bitter after Adenried's death, which makes reconciliation quite impossible. Norton does not abandon hope, however, and wishes her 'wohl'.

DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE undoubtedly owed its success to the complexity and excitement of the story. Some reviewers said there was 'atemloser Spannung' which made 'Die Nerven des Zuschauers vibrieren', giving them 'Stunden der Erhebung, der Erschütterung und des Schmerzes.'¹⁰¹ Historical events and personal fortunes are always closely intertwined. First and foremost, the characters embody high-minded ideals and suffer tremendous trials and tribulations: duty, sacrifice, honour and reconciliation, patriotism, the agony of death and political struggle. The central ideals that dominate the story, however, are romantic love and friendship. The fact that these are not only shown in a positive light but go hand in hand with rivalry is one of the main ingredients of classic melodrama. It is hardly surprisingly, of course, that rivalry plays an important role in practically all war films.

Another recurring melodramatic motif is the remarkable role that women play in the male characters' death wish. It appears that the death of a male character would be more acceptable if he is a lonely, abandoned or rejected man to begin with. In MORGENROT (1933), we come across the same gesture to the audience; in that sense it is a kind of code. The so-called sacrifice for the fatherland is given an equivocal meaning. We saw this earlier in WESTFRONT 1918 (1930).

The relationship with Great Britain is remarkable. Nowhere is the enemy portrayed with so many nuances as in the navy films. The historical ties forged by royal families and, in a negative way, by the arms race at sea, were not only determined by jealousy and rivalry with respect to the strength of the British fleet, but also by secret admiration. In DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE, this admiration and the desire for reconciliation mainly come from the British side, which serves to lend the film a subtle expression of German superiority.

In UG WEDDIGEN, the above-mentioned themes also play an important role. Anglo-German relations are first defined in personal terms (a marriage and three sons) and then in terms of warfare. Here also, the British 'enemy' is first

shown to have a friendly face, after which amorous rivalry for a woman (Hella Moja) leaves two out of three rejected men (Gerd Briesse, Ernst Hoffmann, Fred Solm) dead. In the end, the woman does not choose marriage but devotes herself to the infirm. As was the case with *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE*, there is no happy end in *U9 WEDDIGEN*.

Critical reviews

The reviews of both films strongly focus on the romantic nature of the films. Reactions to the relations between England and Germany are woven into the reviews. The scenes of sea battles and their historical reliability are dealt with only indirectly. Neither was there much controversy where the political tendencies of the films were concerned.

Reactions in the press indicate that *U9 WEDDIGEN*, in particular, was a rather sentimental film.¹⁰² The female roles especially, including Hella Moja who was married to Heinz Paul in real life, came in for much criticism.¹⁰³ According to one critic, the woman pursued by the three brothers has: 'Als sentimentale, verträumte Pflegeschwester (hätte sie) im Krieg kaum ihren Dienst erfüllen können.'¹⁰⁴ A critic writing for the *Kinematograph* said that films that mixed personal matters with historical events were, in fact, no more than a gesture towards the female part of the audience.¹⁰⁵ He also indicated that this mixture was developed under the influence of American movies.¹⁰⁶ Thanks to an observant critic, we know that the film had indeed moved the women in the audience: 'Am Schluss der Vorstellung weinten viele Frauen'.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the fact that the female characters in both *U9 WEDDIGEN* and *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE* as well as the male characters sacrificed their lives went unnoticed. Except, however, by *Der Montag*, whose reviewer appreciated the fact that, at the end of *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE*, the woman lets the fatherland prevail over her own personal fate.¹⁰⁸ As far as the male heroes are concerned, only this newspaper made an observation that corresponds to the analysis of the film, namely that it was more than just patriotism that motivated the characters in their struggle and of death throes. The critic of this right-wing newspaper writes about *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE* that: 'Offiziere und Mannschaften erscheinen nicht nur als Seesoldaten, als Kämpfer, sondern sie entschleiern ihre Gefühle und deuten an, für wen sie die Kämpfe führen.'¹⁰⁹ Though the author does not immediately reject this attitude, he is glad that the film does not have a happy ending, or rather, a romantic reconciliation between the British and the Germans. Needless to say, he is full of admiration for the steadfastness displayed by German Erika, who does not give in to British Norton's wish and thus remains loyal to her humiliated people. The same critic writes that

Wenn der englische Schiffskommandant gleich nach dem Diktat von Versailles die Witwe des deutschen Marineoffiziers hätte heiraten können, so wäre dies den deutschen Zuschauern als Vergewaltigung der Wirklichkeit erschienen.¹¹⁰

No wonder he considers a happy ending a phenomenon typical of American movies!¹¹¹

Other reviews also show that *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE* only half-heartedly propagated the tendency towards popular reconciliation. For example, the *Film-Kurier* writes that the director of the film chose a compromise for commercial reasons only¹¹² and that he had made a ‘militaristischen Pazifistenfilm oder den pazifistischen Militärfilm’.¹¹³ It is remarkable that critics are generally mild when it comes to the tendencies in both films. The *Film-Kurier*, which usually adopted a fairly critical attitude towards right-wing tendencies in war films, even found that the film shows ‘Ehrlichkeit im besten Sinne nationaler Tendenz’.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, a critic writing for the moderate and widely circulated *Berliner Morgenpost* disagreed completely. In his review, he did not refer to American films, but to the Russian film *POTEMKIN*, which he said had ‘angeregt’ the film. In his view, *DIE VERSUNKENE FLOTTE* was nothing more than a propagandistic reaction to *POTEMKIN*.¹¹⁵

U9 WEDDIGEN also sparked mixed feelings with the critics. As we have seen before, most critics were displeased with the sentimental aspects of the film. However, there were different voices as well. The *Film-Kurier* found the film reasonably diplomatic, saying Heinz Paul had managed to position himself above the parties.¹¹⁶ The *Vossische Zeitung* confirmed this, beginning its review as follows: ‘Mit aufrichtiger Befriedigung sei festgestellt: Dies ist endlich mal ein in der Gesinnung sauberer, keinen Augenblick verletzend wirkender deutscher Kriegsfilm.’¹¹⁷ Even some newspapers with strongly right-wing tendencies agreed with this view, especially where the battle scenes were concerned.¹¹⁸ The only truly atypical voice could be heard in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, which called the film extremely undiplomatic:

Soldaten, die ins Feld ziehen, werden mit fröhlichen Gesichtern photographiert, und wir sollen das hinnehmen, heute, da wir wissen, mit welch’ veränderten Gesichtern sie heimkehrten.¹¹⁹

DREI TAGE AUF LEBEN UND TOD

The film *DREI TAGE AUF LEBEN UND TOD* takes us into the year 1930, the same year that saw the release of *WESTFRONT 1918* and *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*. On the one hand there was a light tendency towards films that were more critical of the war, while on the other hand, there were films with a

strongly realistic and documentary character. The war films also appear to become more radical, that is, there are no longer any sentimental love stories. This did not mean, however, that there were no more roles for women. *DREI TAGE AUF LEBEN UND TOD*, 'subtitled *Aus dem Lochbuch des U.C.1.*', is a film in which war is mostly seen as an adventure.

There are no British characters in *DREI TAGE AUF LEBEN UND TOD*, but there is a French girl (Jacky Monnier) in the film. After *U9 WEDDIGEN*, this is the second war film made by Heinz Paul. The role of commander is again played by Karl de Vogt with 'glaubhaften Führergesten'¹²⁰, and again his image adorns the front page of the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier*. Heinz Paul's wife, Hella Moja, was again involved in the film. She played a small part in *U9 WEDDIGEN*, but this time she wrote the script. She is thought to be responsible for the relatively light touch of the movie, or as critic Georg Herzberg wrote: 'Sie stellt das Lebensidyll neben den Heldentod, die Matrosenfopperei neben die drohende Minengefahr.'¹²¹ The censorship text also shows that humour and seriousness were alternated in the film. Even so, the film was first and foremost meant to be exciting.

In contrast to the two previous films, the story does not begin before but ten years after the war, when a number of U-boat veterans gather to reminisce about their exciting life at sea. The better part of the film therefore consists of a flashback. *DREI TAGE AUF LEBEN UND TOD* was an unconcealed tribute to heroic death. The content texts tell us that the film shows us twice how the lives of a U-boat crew are saved. The first time around by a young naval officer (Angelo Ferrari), who fires the last torpedo at the ship that threatens to ram the U-boat. After firing the shot that saves the U-boat, the officer drowns while the submarine dives to the safety of the deep. He leaves behind a wife and child. In short, a truly heroic deed. In the second action, a young, independent volunteer (Hans Tost) puts his life on the line: 'Ich bin noch jung und allein; auf viele warten Frauen und Kinder.'¹²² He saves the lives of the crew by using a wire-cutter to cut a net of mines that had trapped the U-boat. These scenes of suspense are alternated with light-hearted scenes of a love affair between the German cook (Jack Mylong-Münz) and his maid, a French girl found after the sinking of an enemy ship. The friendly way in which the girl is treated, underlines the sympathetic nature of the Germans. After all, she had been led to believe that they were all savages: 'Hast Du Angst, Jeanette?', somebody asks, to which she replies: 'Man hat mir erzählt, dass die Deutschen Caballeros sind.'¹²³

Generally speaking, the film received positive reviews. The critics especially appreciated the two scenes in which the crew were saved. The love story was generally considered less successful, but again, it was seen as a gesture towards the audience.¹²⁴ According to the *Film-Kurier*, the tendency of the film was in no way pacifist or reconciliatory; at best there was 'demokratisch

gedämpften Hurrahpatriotismus’.¹²⁵ At any rate, the film did not spark any sharp controversies. This would change with the next series of war films.

MORGENROT

The last U-boat film of the Weimar period, *MORGENROT*, was made at the fault line between two periods.¹²⁶ The film shows the adventures of a submarine and its crew. It had been directed by Austrian Gustav Ucicky, who had been working in Germany since 1928. Ucicky had not made any war films before, but he had directed two popular historical films, *FLÖTENKONZERT VON SANSSOUCI* (1930) and *YORK* (1931). During the Nazi regime, he made only popular entertainment without any outspoken National Socialistic propaganda.¹²⁷ *MORGENROT* premiered in Essen on the day of Adolf Hitler’s inauguration as German Chancellor.¹²⁸ Essen was the birthplace of Else Knott, who played the mayor’s daughter and eventual lover of captain Liers. Knott, Rudolf Forster (Liers) and Ucicky were present at the Essen premiere, where they received a thunderous applause after the show.¹²⁹

Two days later, on 2 February, the film was released in Berlin, where Hitler himself attended the premiere. He was accompanied by, among others, Von Papen, Goering, Frick and Hugenberg. They visited the nine o’clock screening. An earlier screening at seven o’clock was attended by representatives of the German and Finnish admiralities, senior Reichswehr officers, and by Hugenberg, who thus saw the film twice.¹³⁰ The prestigious Ufa Palast am Zoo was probably sold out. According to some reports, the film was received with great enthusiasm by the audience. The censorship board said the quality of the film was such that it could be assigned to the category ‘künstlerisch’. In addition, it approved screenings before audiences of minors, despite protests from various reaches of society.¹³¹ The historical context surrounding the production and screening of *MORGENROT* and the fact that Ufa, the largest German film production company, produced the film, contributed to the film’s survival. *MORGENROT* sparked discussions of great historical interest.

Because of the ban on rearmament, Germany had a fleet of very limited strength, without any submarines. This meant that the producers had to borrow some submarines from Finland:

Die deutsche Reichsmarine hätte sicher gern ausser der ‘Emden’ und ein paar neuen Torpedoboote auch ein U-Boot zur Verfügung gestellt, wenn sie es schon gehabt hätte. So liess uns in Freundschaft verbundene Finnland ein Schiff der ‘Vesihäisi’-Klasse, damit der Ehrenfilm für das deutsche U-Boot gedreht werden konnte.

Remarks such as the ones cited above lend the film an almost propagandistic tone, as if the film implicitly supported rearmament.

MORGENROT itself is not entirely based on historical events. Some critics did refer, however, directly or indirectly, to Lord Kitchener's death.¹³² This British general was on his way to Russia carrying important military instructions when his ship, the armoured cruiser 'Hampshire', struck a mine and sank off the Orkney Islands. In MORGENROT, the U-boat crew sinks a ship carrying military advisers to Russia. However, there are no concrete indications. The *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* only writes that the ship carried 'bekanntesten Organisator und Führer der feindlichen Armeen', without mentioning Kitchener's name.¹³³ The reference is clear, however, without being historically true. In addition, the story, and its characters and locations are all fictitious.

Ucicky was assisted by Gerhart Menzel. This Silesia-born cinema-owner wrote many acclaimed pieces of drama – he received the *Kleist Prize* in 1927 – and was Ucicky's right-hand man for many years.¹³⁴ Menzel was responsible for the script of MORGENROT, while the original idea came from one Freiherr von Spiegel.¹³⁵

The title of the film refers to a poem from the 19th century, the period of German Romanticism, by Wilhelm Hauff (1802-1827) whose first lines go as follows:

Morgenrot, Morgenrot,
Leuchtest mir zum frühen Tod?
Bald wird die Trompete blasen.
Dann muss ich mein Leben lassen,
Ich und mancher Kamerad.¹³⁶

The death motif not only dominates in the poem but in the film, too. It is also one of the few times that a German war film deals with death in such an emphatic and reflective way. We have hardly discussed how this theme is worked out in the film, how it functions with respect to the other aspects and how it was received by the critics. Was the film in some way a tribute to German Romanticism and if so, how did this relate to the representation of modern warfare?

As has been mentioned before, the story of MORGENROT revolves around the crew of a U-boat. Not only their mutual relationships are important, but also, as in many other war films, their relationship with the home front. The main character is an elder son of an industrialist, captain Liers (Rudolf Forster), who lives in the northern German town of Meerskirchen with his mother, the Majorin (Adele Sandrock). She is a widow who has already lost two sons in the war. Liers is the hero of the town and takes his leave with two of his crew members to travel to his U-boat by train. During the parting, it becomes clear that the mayor's daughter (Else Knott) is not in love with young lieutenant Fips

(Fritz Genschow), as everyone thinks, but that she loves Liers. He does not find out, however, until in a moment of insight after the first confrontation with an enemy ship. Liers immediately communicates his insight to lieutenant Fips, who can hide his disappointment only with the greatest difficulty.

The first confrontation with an enemy ship involves a British destroyer on its way to Russia. On board are important British diplomats and military advisors. The submarine manages to sink the cruiser. A second confrontation is less successful. A British submarine trap manages to damage the submarine substantially. These ‘bait-boats’ were British ships sailing under a false flag, in this case the flag of neutral Denmark, in order to entice German submarines to surface, only to sink them. The ten crew members have to make do with eight life jackets. Two crew members, including Fips, decide to sacrifice themselves and commit suicide. The others are saved and given a hero’s welcome in Meerskirchen. The film ends with another goodbye. Liers again goes into the battle, because the war has not ended yet. This is the basic story of the film.

One of the main differences with other U-boat films is the way in which the enemy is approached. The balanced attitude of other films is almost entirely absent in *MORGENROT*. As we shall see later on, the Majorin is the main embodiment of this nuance. In contrast to the other U-boat films, *MORGENROT* begins and ends while the war is in full swing. This means that no other situations than those arising directly from the war have to be shown. In this way, the film escapes the need for nuance.

The film is composed along conventional lines, with an alternation of battlefront and home front scenes. Though the emphasis is clearly on the activities at sea, the film also pays attention to the tensions and reactions among the civilian population. However, these scenes in themselves hardly constitute a parallel story line. All events in Meerskirchen revolve exclusively around the adventures of the U-boat crew. For example, we are told nothing about the famine which was ravaging the German home front, partly because of the war at sea. There are only passing references to the trench war in the west. Trains travelling to and from the front are meant to symbolise the ongoing war and the huge losses at the western front. The trains are transporting fresh recruits to the trenches, while at the same time, trainloads of wounded are returning home. The wounded themselves are not shown, we only see the Red Cross signs on the carriages, which is a clear image in itself. In contrast to those of the recruits arriving at the front, these images are not accompanied by cheerful battle songs. Several minutes before the end of the film, we are again shown these images of the trains. We then see the train taking Liers and his men to the war, and the film ends with the image of a U-boat and a last close-up of a flying German flag: another submarine goes to war. The film story ends before the

war has ended, which means that the defeat of the German fleet is left out of consideration.

The two battle scenes and their consequences have a central position in *MORGENROT*. The interaction between the war at sea and the home front brings together motifs of love and (heroic) death. After the long farewell sequence at the beginning of the film – an introduction of the characters and their mutual relationships – we alternately see two short scenes on board the submarine and in the town of Meerskirchen. The crew and the people of the town are in a similar position. The U-boat crew are waiting until they get the British cruiser in sight, while the people in the town are waiting for news from the submarine. Then follows the first successful U-boat action. The people of Meerskirchen are overjoyed at the news of the action. The scene with the U-boat also contains an important change in the love story. While, after the farewell scene, the audience is already aware of Helga's strong feelings for Liers rather than for Fips, the characters themselves only find out what is going on in this scene. At the same time, the scene implicitly prepares the audience for the eventual death of Fips. The fact that he has nothing to live for any more, and that he will leave no one behind, makes his voluntary death more acceptable (his companion Petersen is also alone in the world). Meanwhile in Meerskirchen, Helga tells Grete in veiled terms that she also has a potential marriage candidate on board. After this, less attention is paid to the home front, and the emphasis shifts to the most thrilling moments of the film: the attack on the U-boat, its sinking and the two suicides (which occur off camera).

In *MORGENROT*, the home front is also associated with other things beside love: women, tradition and religion. The worlds of the battle front and the home front are separated along lines of sex. Where Liers dominates the battle-front, the Majorin rules at home. Already at the beginning, during the first farewell, she makes herself count. She tells Liers that she would rather not see him leave for the front. He is the only son she has left and, besides, the factory needs a managing director. She has even gone behind his back and asked the military authorities for dispensation. Liers, however, rejects her efforts and reacts with the level-headed saying that she has always impressed upon him: 'Wie's kommt wird's gefressen.' The dialogue which then follows prompted a number of critics to write that *MORGENROT* has all the characteristics of a Nazi film. The often cited words of Liers testify to a strongly romantic attitude towards death: 'Was ist wichtig? Das Leben? Wir wissen es nicht. Das Unwichtige halten wir für wichtig. Und das Wichtigste sehen wir gar nicht. Vielleicht ist der Tod das einzige Erlebnis im Leben?' To this, his mother answers: 'Das ist wohl so'ne neumodische Religion?' Moments later, he answers his own question, when he says: 'Leben verstehen wir Deutschen vielleicht nicht, aber sterben, das können wir fabelhaft.'



Captain Van Liers and his mother

A statement such as this can be interpreted as a sign of the absolute ideal of sacrifice which was part of the front morality of German propaganda. However, since Liers refers to a general attitude towards life and death, which, in addition, is said to be typically German, his statements go beyond the context of the First World War. They completely tie in with the notion of ultimate sacrifice which was such an important part of the Nazi ideology.¹³⁷ In this respect, the Majorin's reaction is just as interesting. As becomes clear later on in the film, she, Liers's mother, is fully behind the idea that every soldier has a duty towards his fatherland, but she also very clearly rejects the contempt for life or 'Todessehnsucht' that her son embraces. Liers is a typical representative of the 'Stosstruppen'. He is the New Man, who fearlessly flings himself into the thick of the battle. His mother's question whether this is a 'new kind of religion' is telling. She does not call it an idea, ideal or point of view, but a religion, which indicates the perspective from which she looks at life and the world. The dialogue between her and Liers lends the war the significance of being a complete break with the old, with the Majorin representing the old order and Liers representing the new generation. It is a break with a world in which civil morality was based on religious beliefs.

As is shown by the ceremonious farewell, Liers and his mother are two of the most respected citizens of the town. Because of this, they take up a more

prominent position than the other characters. However, it is not so much their attitude towards the other characters that is interesting as the relationship between the two of them. The statements cited above show that both of them take up a certain position in the ideological spectrum. While Liers is committed to doing his utmost to achieve victory, his mother is the one who maintains that there is more to life than sacrificial death. In a scene later in the film, this is expressed again. When the people in Meerskirchen learn that Liers and his U-boat have sunk a British cruiser, they are overcome with joy. When the mayor, hardly able to contain his enthusiasm, brings the news to the Majorin, he is reprimanded by the widow, who says that there can be no triumph this time because it is certain that there must have been casualties on the other side. In her view, the preservation of human life, whether or not it belongs to the enemy, is of the greatest importance and priority. Almost as if the crowds gathering outside her house have heard her reprimand the mayor, they silently take off their hats and start singing 'Nun lobet alle Gott', stressing the religious aspect of the event.

The contrasting positions taken up by Liers and his mother are also expressed in the locations with which they are associated most. Land and sea are not only contrasts in a geographical sense. While the setting of the main location, the submarine, represents an image of modernity in every respect, that is, of technological progress, the small town of Meerskirchen is characterised by traditionalism partly inspired by religion. This image is not only evoked by the Majorin, but also by a scene at the beginning of the film showing a man telling his companion that the stars bode ill. This suggests a traditional society in which superstition still plays an important part. The cardboard sets of the town centre, the prominent church tower, the mayor's carriage, the central communicative function of the square, in short, the striking small-scale nature of a closed community typify a traditional *Volksgemeinschaft*. It is a romanticised world on a small scale. Images of snow falling in Meerskirchen evoke strong associations with the miniature world in a snow glass. The contrast with the interior and exterior of the U-boat could not be any greater. The interior of the submarine is characterised by a profusion of technical machinery to the point where it represents technology itself. The images are dominated by wiring, clocks, periscopes, wheels, torpedo casings, transmitting equipment and other technical devices. These pieces of machinery determine the organisation of space and the room to move which the crew enjoy. However, in contrast to the limited living space on board the submarine, there is the vast expanse of the sea. This landscape is also dominated by technology. There are no romantic images of the surf, rock formations, towering waves, faraway shore or the setting sun – there is only the German submarine and its enemies.

The stark contrast between the romantic motifs and modern phenomena is also noted by the characters themselves. In the farewell scene, showing Fips and Helga in a waiting room, Helga makes a remark about a painting on the wall showing a romantic picture of a ship at sea. When she asks whether life at sea is anything like the picture, Fips answers: 'O nein, gar nicht, viel mehr Dreck und Öl. Gar nicht romantisch.'¹³⁸ In reality, things are much dirtier and rougher. Yet the film does not fulfil its promise of giving a more realistic picture of life at sea. While Fips tells Helga of the oil and grease, the uniforms are never soiled, the engine-room and the cabins are perfectly clean, and the manners are not rough at all. In the same way as the wounded at the western front and the misery at the home front were kept out of shot, so is this reality kept from the audience as well.

The above leads to the conclusion that the film creates an unbalanced view of the enemy, supports radical heroism, subordinates romantic love, creates an ideological contrast between the 'old' and the 'new' in its views of man and the world, that is between tradition and modernity, and finally, that it propagates a pessimistic perspective on the future as being ordained by fate. In addition, most film historians consider Liers's statements as a key to unlock the (National Socialist) meaning of the film. Some critics have called it a typical Nazi film,¹³⁹ others say it is a key film in the period of transition just before the rise of national socialism.¹⁴⁰ Still others, including Kracauer, say the film should not be seen as a Nazi film.¹⁴¹ Contemporary reviews present a somewhat more balanced view of the film.

The press

On the basis of the above, one would expect the film to have sparked controversy in the press. This was not the case, however. Except for some minor points of criticism, the film was generally reviewed in positive terms. The critics unanimously agreed that the film had great technical and artistic merit. The performances by the actors were praised, especially those by Rudolf Forster and Adele Sandrock, and the camera work was also much appreciated. There was lavish praise from the *Völkischer Beobachter* for the fact that Forster finally played the role of a real man: 'Aber du sei willkommen, du Mensch, du Mann, du grosser Darsteller Forster!'¹⁴² *Der Angriff* considered Forster to be 'einer der wenigen deutschen Schauspieler, die Kultur haben'.¹⁴³ Praise was also heaped on Sandrock in all sections of the press. It was remarkable how only the more moderate press reported the audience's applause of approval at her critical words.¹⁴⁴

The combination of exterior shots and interior studio footage of front scenes also brought the makers of the film much praise:

Die Aussenaufnahmen atmen durchweg das Salz der ruhelosen See, die Atelierbilder sind von den vielen Marinemitarbeitern so gut beraten, dass wohl kaum jemand sachlich an ihnen mäkeln wird.¹⁴⁵

There was not just praise for camera technique, the shots of technology also impressed the critics:

Besonders gut ausgearbeitet sind die technischen Dinge: das tauchende Boot, das Zusammenspiel der Menschen und Apparaten im Schiffsinnern, der Vorgang der Zerstörungsstationen. Eine saubere, exakte Leistung, die einen durchaus glaubhaften Eindruck erweckt und ganz unsentimental durchgebildet ist.¹⁴⁶

This last quotation is taken from the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which published the review on its front page. This did not mean that the film captured images of life at the battlefield, or those of life at the home front all that well. The same critic found that the film mainly created 'idealtypischer Bilder'.¹⁴⁷ Herbert Ihering agreed and called Meerskirchen a 'Märchenstadt'. 'Warum wird nicht die andere Heimat gezeigt, die Heimat, die Entbehrungen auf sich nimmt, die arbeitende, hungernde, "durchhaltende" Heimat?', he wondered. Denouncing 'Spiesserpatriotismus' would only enhance the contrast between 'Militär und Zivil', Ihering suggested, while the similarities in heroism between civilians and the military were actually greater than the film makes them.¹⁴⁸

Critical voices were heard mostly, as could be expected, in the leftist press. However, even *Vorwärts* ended its review with the words 'es ist – zur angenehmen Überraschung – frei von jeder kriegshetzerischen Note'.¹⁴⁹ This review and many others like it indicate how much the role of the Majorin, played by Adele Sandrock, contributed to the film's positive reception in the leftist and moderate press. As *Vorwärts* wrote, it was thanks to her presence that 'dem Film jegliche nationalistische Tendenz genommen (wird)'.¹⁵⁰ Well aware of contemporary political developments, *Tempo* also wrote that the film did not present any danger: 'Diese Tage könnten leicht solchen Film missverständlich machen. Sein Kern wird dieser Gefahr widerstehen.'¹⁵¹ The opposite, however, was true for the National Socialist critic of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. At the end of his review, he wished that "'Morgenrot" – möge es ein Symbol sein für den Anbruch einer neuen Zeit – auch in den Filmateliers'.¹⁵²

For many reviewers, the possible danger presented by the film would have been rendered invalid not only by Sandrock's attitude, but also because the film did not display any cheap patriotism. This was confirmed by Herbert Ihering in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier*. He opined that the film steered well clear of 'Hurrahpatriotismus' and even that the film 'Der ganze Spiesserpatriotismus (...) ironisiert'.¹⁵³ Other film reviews had shown that the National Social-

ists did not like 'Hurrah'-patriotism either, and in the case of *MORGENROT*, the *Völkische Beobachter* praised the critical stance taken by the film.¹⁵⁴

The attitudes expressed in the reviews are more negative when it came to Liers's statements about life and death. However, only *Der Film* clearly denounced the 'Todessehnsucht' radiated by the U-boat crew as well as the pessimistic tendencies in the film: 'Wenn das Leben nicht wichtig ist, was ist denn überhaupt wichtig? Und warum sollte man in Deutschland nicht lernen, zu leben, obwohl man so gut sterben KANN?'¹⁵⁵ A more cautious voice could be heard in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*:

Während nirgends ein Wort fällt, das dem Phänomen des Kriegs selber gilt, werden verschiedene Tendenzen geprägt, die den Geist heroischer Pflichterfüllung als einen Grundzug unseres Wesens ansprechen.

Referring to Liers's statements, the author continues:

Damit stimmt überein, dass in dem Film jede Frage nach dem Sinn des furchtbaren Geschehens fehlt, das er zeigt. (...) Indem der Film so die heroische Weltanschauung verabsolutiert, entkräftet er sie aber zugleich. Denn echter Heroismus ist kein Selbstzweck, sondern steht im Dienst des von der Erkenntnis gesetzten Ziels.¹⁵⁶

The author, therefore, thought it advisable to urge a rational attitude towards war rather than to emphasise the heroic.¹⁵⁷ The fact that *MORGENROT* indeed mainly stressed the latter prompted the critic for the *Völkischer Beobachter* to unfold a lyrical dialogue with the war, a dialogue which was devoid of any mind of rationalism:

Der Krieg [in the film, BK] blickt sie mit Medusenaugen an, und in diesem Blick liegt die Frage: Wie, du Mensch, stellst du dich zu mir? Du kannst mir nicht entrinnen! Du kannst mich weder mit pazifistischem Geschrei noch mit papiernen Konferenzen bannen! Ob du mich liebst oder hasst, ob du mich rufst oder ablehnst, das ist mir so gleich wie dem Mond, den ein Dorfköter anbellt. Ich bin ewig, wie das Schicksal; denn ich bin ein Teil des Schicksal selbst. Prüfe dein Herz, du Mensch, ob du reif bist, die Zerreißprobe zu bestehen, die ich für dich bedeute!

Both of the above quotations clearly put two ideological perspectives into words, one which rejects a critical attitude towards heroism and one which applauds such an attitude. Generally speaking, there was appreciation for the subject of the film, the U-boat war, and the technical mastery of those who made the film. But, at the same time, some critics were troubled by the ideological portent of the film. Yet the concern with ideological points of view seemed to be overcome by an admiration for cinematic technique and filmic representation.

The relationship between tradition and modernity is also expressed in the above. Ihering was the only critic to refer literally to the romantic aspect of *MORGENROT*. He believed this romanticism worked on two levels:

Der erfreulichen Abneigung gegen die Phrase steht eine neue Hinkehr zur Phrase, der Abkehr von der Romantik [he means a remark made by Fips to Helga about the painting, BK] steht das Hineingleiten in eine neue Romantik gegenüber, der Polemik gegen den Hurrahpatriotismus die neue Lesebibel.¹⁵⁸

In other words: the new romantic rhetoric was pitched against the rhetoric of the traditional middle class. Ihering overlooked, however, that the Majorin in fact takes up a third position, a bridge function. She clearly belongs to the middleclass world of Meerskirchen, but at the same time she criticises the bourgeois and narrow-minded perspective propagated by her fellow citizens; she supports her son's sense of duty yet criticises his radicalism. Nearly every review notes that it was precisely Sandrock's contribution that enjoyed the massive support of the audiences. Even though her position is rather subordinate in the context of the entire film, and even if the film had been intended to usher in a new age, its reception still proves that it is dualistic and can certainly not be unconditionally branded as a Nazi film. The key position held by Sandrock in the formation of meaning around the film is confirmed by the fact that the National Socialists cut 'her' scene when they released the film in 1939.¹⁵⁹

An analysis of the *MORGENROT* reviews makes it clear that this U-boat film was received differently than the other U-boat films. Not surprisingly, the film does not offer a strong subplot involving love stories or relationships with family and friends instead, it mainly concentrates on the front and those who have to fight at the front. This creates a certain intensity which is enhanced by dialogues in which the protagonists do not mince their words. The delineation of time also strengthens the concentration on war. There are no moments in the film in which the war is not in some way present. This all but precludes moments of reconciliation.