

Commemorating Failure: Unsuccessful Rescue of Jews in German Film and Literature, 1945-1960

Scholars have debated the extent to which German efforts to cope with the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust can be defined by failure. Various disciplinary approaches to the study of memory may be seen as attempts ‘to elucidate the nature of a particular type of failure.’¹ In some cases, such failure refers to the shortcomings of human memory, which unintentionally lead to an unreliable recollection of past events.² Yet studies analysing depictions of Nazism in the post-war Germanys tend to focus on *conscious* efforts to obscure ‘problematic’ parts of this past. They view attempts to conceal, forget, or belittle Nazi crimes as constituting collective *moral* failures.³ In post-1945 Germany, critics such as Theodor Adorno, Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich, and Jürgen Habermas condemned Germans’ continuing lack of empathy toward Jews. By pointing to what Ralph Giordano called a ‘second guilt’,⁴ they argued that Germans not only turned a blind eye to Jews’ fates under Nazism, but also refused to commemorate Jewish suffering in the post-war years.⁵ Studies of the memory of Nazism often adopt this critical stance and depict the first post-war decades as characterized by Germans’ failure to confront the difficult aspects of their past. According to many of these

¹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35.

² Mark Roseman, „Erinnern und Überleben: Wahrheit und Widerspruch im Zeugnis einer Holocaust-Überlebenden,“ *BIOS. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung und Oral History* 11: 2 (1998): 263-279; Daniel L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (Boston: Mifflin Company, 2001); Sina Kühnel and Hans J. Markowitsch, *Falsche Erinnerungen. Die Sünden des Gedächtnisses* (Heidelberg: Spektrum akademischer Verlag, 2009); Alison Winter, *Memory: Fragments of a Modern History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

³ Since remembering plays an important role in the regulation of ethical relationships and identities, it often entails social obligations, and any missed or ‘inappropriate’ remembering may carry with it a moral burden. Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Jeffrey Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴ Ralf Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld oder von der Last ein Deutscher zu sein* (Hamburg: Rasch und Röhring, 1987). For a recent reference to Giordano’s concept see the speech of German Federal President Joachim Gauck on January 27, 2015. <http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Joachim-Gauck/Reden/2015/01/150127-Bundestag-Gedenken.html> (accessed December 9, 2017).

⁵ In a well-known 1959 essay, Adorno wrote: ‘The murdered are to be cheated out of the single remaining thing that our powerlessness can offer them: remembrance’. Theodor W. Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 89-103, here 91. For a discussion of this continued lack of empathy see Aleida Assmann, “Looking Away in Nazi Germany,” in Aleida Assmann and Ines Detmes, eds., *Empathy and Its Limits* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 128-148.

studies,⁶ between 1945 and the early 1960s (if not later), Germans focused on presenting themselves as victims of the war, while intentionally ignoring the suffering inflicted by Germans on others, especially on Jews.⁷ These studies argue that, whereas German post-war accounts did occasionally mention Jews, they did so primarily for apologetic purposes and in order to gain recognition for Germans' wartime misery, rather than to commemorate the Holocaust.⁸

The same appears to be the case in post-war accounts describing Germans who saved the lives of Jews from Nazi persecution. Scholars have so far considered such depictions either as a marginal topic within the memory politics of the two German societies or as apologetic, distorted references to the Holocaust and thus as clear examples of failed memory.⁹ Ruth Klüger, for example, looks critically at two novels that portray Germans rescuing Jews: Bruno Apitz's 1958 *Nackt unter Wölfen* (Naked Among Wolves) from East Germany and Alfred Andersch's 1957 *Sansibar oder der letzte Grund* (Zanzibar or the Last

⁶ Recent studies that present a more nuanced picture include: Anke Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Manuela Gerlof, *Tonspuren: Erinnerungen an den Holocaust im Hörspiel der DDR (1945-1989)* (Berlin: de Gruyter 2010).

⁷ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Thomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* (Rochester: Camden House, 1999); Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Lothar Kettenacker, ed., *Ein Volk von Opfern? Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940-1945* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2003); Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Bill Niven, ed., *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006); Helmut Schmitz, ed., *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007); Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory: Germany Remembers Its Dead of World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁸ See, especially, Robert Moeller, "Germans as Victims? Thoughts on a Post-Cold War History of World War II's Legacies," *History & Memory* 17: 1-2 (2005): 145-194, here 163-164.

⁹ Several German historians claim that postwar Germans almost completely ignored the rescue of Jews and claim that the few exceptions prove that most of the population consciously chose to repress the topic and deny recognition to the rescuers. See Peter Steinbach, „'Unbesungene Helden' – ihre Bedeutung für die allgemeine Widerstandsgeschichte," in *Widerstand im Widerstreit: Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der Erinnerung der Deutschen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), 215-233; Dennis Riffel, „'Unbesungene Helden': Der Umgang mit 'Rettung' im Nachkriegsdeutschland," in Beate Kosmala und Claudia Schoppmann, Hg., *Überleben im Untergrund: Hilfe für Juden in Deutschland 1941-1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 2002), 317-334; Wolfram Wette, „Ein ‚Mensch' in deutscher Uniform: Wilm Hosenfeld und ‚der Pianist',“ *Freiburger Rundbrief* 13: 1 (2006): 37-42. For a superb study of such an ‚exception' see Dennis Riffel, *Unbesungene Helden: Die Ehrungsinitiative des Berliner Senats 1958 bis 1966* (Berlin: Metropol, 2007).

Reason) from West Germany.¹⁰ She shows that these novels depict the Jewish figures as children or passive women, devoid of any real agency and ‘carried’ by ‘good Germans’, whose anti-Nazi attitude appears to be the norm rather than the exception that it actually was. In this way, Klüger argues, the rescued Jew functions as a mere object for German readers, allowing them to deny responsibility for Nazi crimes and to emphasize positive, humane aspects of Germans’ behaviour under the Nazi regime.¹¹ Indeed, in denazification procedures, trials, autobiographies, journalistic and historical publications, and political statements of the post-war years, one occasionally finds instances in which East and West Germans claimed they helped Jews escape Nazi persecution.¹² It would seem, then, that authors in the post-war Germanys, had a clear interest in portraying Germans saving the lives of Jews in order to avoid addressing uncomfortable questions concerning wartime conduct.

And yet, in literary and filmic works produced from the end of the war to the beginning of the 1960s, depictions of successful rescues of Jews are relatively rare. The authors of fictional works usually preferred to draw a picture in which attempts to save Jews fail. How can this be explained?

This article asks why these post-war authors from both German societies chose to present a failed rescue of Jews. I argue that these authors’ main goal was to contribute to the re-education of the German population after the war, and particularly to a moral transformation from the Nazi emphasis on the national community in all moral questions to a humanistic ethic emphasizing the rights of all human beings as the principal ideal of moral behaviour.¹³ The article’s first part will show how post-war narratives of failed rescue pursued

¹⁰ Bruno Apitz, *Nackt unter Wölfen* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1958); Alfred Andersch, *Sansibar oder der letzte Grund* (Freiburg in Br.: Walter-Verlag, 1957).

¹¹ Ruth Klüger, „Gibt es ein ‚Judenproblem‘ in der deutschen Nachkriegsliteratur?“, in *Katastrophen: Über deutsche Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 9-37.

¹² See Kobi Kabalek, “The Rescue of Jews and the Memory of Nazism in Germany, from the Third Reich to the Present,” PhD dissertation (University of Virginia, June 2013).

¹³ On Nazi morality see Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Harald Welzer, “Mass Murder and Moral Code: Some Thoughts on an Easily Misunderstood Subject,” *History of the Human Sciences* 17: 2/3 (2004): 15-32; Werner Konitzer and Raphael Gross, eds., *Moralität des Bösen: Ethik*

this goal by trying to arouse Germans' empathy with the Nazis' Jewish victims – the missing empathy that post-war critics claimed stood at the heart of the reluctance to commemorate the Holocaust. We shall see that stories of failure were particularly suitable for effecting audiences' emotional participation in the fate of persecuted Jews.

The article's second part will concentrate on those fictional works that went further and tailored stories of unsuccessful rescue to publicly confront Germans with their moral failures during the war. I contend that, although these works presented Germans as victims of the war and Nazism, as was common in many contemporaneous depictions, it would be misleading to view them as mere apologetic accounts. The persecution of Jews was an unpopular topic in the German societies in the first post-war decades and was commonly associated with collectively blaming the German population for Nazi crimes.¹⁴ It appears that, for this reason, several writers and filmmakers decided to retain the common image of Germans as victims and distinguished between them and the Nazis in order to avoid alienating their audience. At the same time, maintaining this collective self-portrayal allowed them to incorporate elements that indicted the population for not doing more for the persecuted and against the Nazi regime. I argue that, using narratives of failed rescue, some writers and filmmakers contributed to the critical discourse in the post-war Germanys by exploring new ways to allow Germans to speak about the Holocaust and reflect on their conduct. In other words, fictional works of failed rescue of Jews aimed to rectify what their authors conceived as Germans' failed memory. Attempts to both arouse a moral debate and avoid directly

und nationalsozialistische Verbrechen [Fritz Bauer Instituts Jahrbuch] (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2009); Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Ethic: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Wolfgang Bialas, "Nazi Ethics: Perpetrators with a Clear Conscience," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 27: 1 (2013): 3-25. On the attempts to create a new moral orientation in the postwar Germanys see, e.g., Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson, eds., *The Political Re-Education of Germany & Her Allies after World War II* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ For the public role of collective guilt in the postwar Germanys see Barbro Eberan, *Luther? Friedrich „Der Große“? Wagner? Nietzsche? ...? ...? Wer war an Hitler Schuld? Die Debatte um die Schuldfrage, 1945-1949* (München: Minerva, 1983); Norbert Frei, „Von deutscher Erfindungskraft. Oder: Die Kollektivschuldthese in der Nachkriegszeit,“ in *1945 und wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2005), 145-155; Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943-1949* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

speaking about Germans' collective responsibility might seem irreconcilable from today's perspective, but not for Germans of the 1940s and 1950s. This article thus reassesses the prevalent scholarly focus on apologetic and exculpatory elements in depictions of Nazism in early post-war Germany, even when they were authored by Germans of Jewish descent,¹⁵ and proposes to adopt a more complex picture of Germans' memory of the Holocaust.¹⁶

Each section of the article offers a close analysis of one fictional work produced in East or West Germany, but examines it in relation to other literary, theatrical, and filmic representations of failed rescue from the first post-war decade. I will discuss the works in relation to the public debates of which they were part and trace the responses of the German publics that watched and read them. Of course, there were differences in the shape and interpretation of the memory of Nazism in East and West Germany but, as we shall see, they also had much in common.

Empathy

The depiction of Germans helping persecuted Jews enabled post-war authors to observe personal relationships between Jews and non-Jews and thus to examine human behaviour from up close. A well-known work from the immediate post-war years that presented such a relationship was Kurt Maetzig's debut film *Ehe im Schatten* (Marriage in the Shadows). A production of the East German firm DEFA, the film premiered in all four sections of Berlin on October 3, 1947. It is based on the true story of actor Joachim Gottschalk and his Jewish wife Meta Wolff, who committed suicide together with their son the day before they were

¹⁵ For instance, Michal Bodemann criticizes the differentiated depiction of the German population under Hitler in the published diary of Else Behrend-Rosenfeld, which he sees as a sign of weakness and apology. Y. Michal Bodemann, "Eclipse of Memory: German Representations of Auschwitz in the Early Postwar Period," *New German Critique* 75 (Autumn 1998): 57-89, here 66-67. Behrend-Rosenfeld survived thanks to the help of several non-Jewish Germans and expresses her gratitude to them in her book. Else Behrend-Rosenfeld, *Ich stand nicht allein: Erlebnisse einer Jüdin in Deutschland, 1933-1944* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1949).

¹⁶ Throughout the article, I treat the terms *Germans* (i.e. non-Jewish Germans) and *Jews* (both German and non-German) as collective categories involved in public discussions over the memory of Nazism and the Holocaust, and not as accurate depictions of these populations.

scheduled to be deported to Theresienstadt.¹⁷ While Maetzig did not know Gottschalk personally, his Jewish mother took her own life to avoid the Gestapo, so the topic was familiar to him.¹⁸

The film begins by showing Elisabeth (Ilse Steppat), an acclaimed actress, on stage with Hans (Paul Klinger), a fellow actor who is secretly in love with her. After the performance, a young publisher, Herbert (Claus Holm), approaches her, and a romance develops between the two. The time is early 1933, and the Nazis have recently gained power in Germany. While the two are on vacation with their friends, Elisabeth sees a sign proclaiming that 'Jews are unwanted' and tells Herbert that she is Jewish. Herbert, a Nazi sympathizer who speaks enthusiastically of the upcoming 'new era', is surprised. He says he loves her nevertheless but, upon receiving a position in the Propaganda Ministry, he decides to terminate the relationship. Meanwhile, in response to Nazi persecution, Elisabeth's Jewish friend Kurt (Alfred Balthoff) decides to emigrate. She deliberates whether to do the same, but the non-Jewish Hans offers to protect her by getting married – an offer she accepts.

The film follows the growing isolation of Elisabeth, who is no longer allowed to visit the theatre and hardly leaves the apartment, and the frustration of Hans, who is unsure whether his wife loves him. In a moment of weakness, Hans flirts with another actress, when sounds of shattering glass and screams for help tear him from her. It is the pogrom known as *Kristallnacht* (November 9-10, 1938), and Hans rushes to Elisabeth, thus proving his love and commitment. On that evening, Elisabeth again expresses her wish to leave Germany, but agrees to stay when Hans promises that no harm will come to her as long as they are together.

In the next scene it is 1943, Hans has been drafted, and Elisabeth has been assigned to hard labour with other women from 'privileged marriages'. The fear of deportation governs

¹⁷ Maetzig adapted the script from a novella that Hans Schweikart, a friend of Gottschalk, wrote shortly after the war. See Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), 213-217.

¹⁸ In addition, two Jewish actors who played in the film (Alfred Balthoff and Willy Prager) had experienced the persecution they depicted for the camera. See Peter Reichel, *Erfundene Erinnerung: Weltkrieg und Judenmord im Film und Theater* (München: Carl Hanser, 2004), 185-186.

their conversations. One night, a fellow worker cannot bear the tension any more. She cries out, 'This must end!' (*Schluß machen! Schluß machen!*) and jumps under a train. Suicide is introduced here as a way to end suffering and uncertainty. But in this scene, it is a very violent, dark, and dirty death, and the deadly train hints at the ongoing deportations to the death camps.

When Hans finally returns from the war, Elisabeth's confidence is restored. Their love is stronger than ever. He renews his acting career, but Elisabeth can no longer stand staying in their apartment, which has become a prison for her. She convinces Hans to bring her to the premiere of his latest film. However, Nazi officials discover Elisabeth's identity, and Hans is called to Herbert's office at the Propaganda Ministry. Herbert informs him that he must either divorce his wife and save his career or be sent to the front. But his choice cannot change Elisabeth's fate, as she will be deported the next day. Hans rejects the deal and reproaches Herbert for his opportunism in the service of the cruel regime. On his way home, he imagines SS men taking his wife by force and boarding her onto a freight train. In a lengthy scene, Elisabeth reminisces about their happier days, and he declares, 'We are staying together'. The two lovers drink poison and lie on their bed, she in his arms, as the camera focuses on their faces. Their death is quiet and beautiful, lacking any sign of violence. It equals sleep and follows the ideal of pleasant bourgeois dying, a passing that takes place in private rather than in public and differs greatly from the sudden, horrid death of the Jews in the camps and ghettos that was hinted in the suicide of the Jewish woman in the earlier scene.¹⁹

For German viewers, *Ehe im Schatten* unfolds the tragedy of Jews living under the Nazis by revealing the various aspects of their persecution (discrimination, isolation, forced labour, deportation, and death). What makes it a story of unsuccessful rescue is, first, Hans's repeated promise that he will keep Elisabeth safe and his failure to do so. Such a promise

¹⁹ For this distinction between different perceptions of death in European history see George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 92, 164.

creates expectations among viewers that the protagonist whose fate they follow throughout the film will survive. Since, in reality, intermarried Jews enjoyed a somewhat favourable status and often managed to stay alive, this option was indeed open to the director.²⁰ So why did Maetzig avoid presenting a successful rescue of the Jewish figure? The reason does not seem to be his wish to follow the story of Gottschalk accurately, since the director changed several details of the original story.²¹ Moreover, it becomes clear that the choice of an unhappy ending was neither arbitrary nor based solely on the tragic fate of his mother when one compares *Ehe im Schatten* with two other film productions that premiered in the same year (1947) in Western occupation zones. Both *Zwischen gestern und morgen* (Between Yesterday and Tomorrow, directed by Harald Braun) and *In jenen Tagen* (In Those Days, directed by Helmut Käutner) show an intermarried couple taking their own lives. The decision of these three directors to end such a marriage through suicide is especially curious when one considers that Käutner personally knew of a case in which a Jewish woman survived thanks to her non-Jewish husband.²² Why did these directors opt for a failed rescue in which *both* partners die?

One reason relates to Maetzig's wish to make Germans reflect on their actions under Hitler. In an interview conducted years later, he said that he wanted to address both the couple's mistake in not leaving Germany and the German population's part in the fate of the Jews.²³ Indeed, when confronting Herbert, Hans blames himself for believing that he could keep his wife safe at the same time that he laments the blindness of his social milieu: 'We are

²⁰ On the chances of Jews in 'mixed marriages' to survive the Holocaust see Beate Meyer, "The Mixed Marriage: A Guarantee of Survival or a Reflection of German Society during the Nazi Regime?" in David Bankier, ed., *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism: German Society and the Persecution of the Jews, 1933-1941* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000), 54-77; Nathan Stoltzfus, "The Limits of Policy: Social Protection of Intermarried German Jews in Nazi Germany, in Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus, eds., *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 117-144; Maximilian Strnad, "The Fortune of Survival – Intermarried German Jews in the Dying Breath of the 'Thousand-Year-Reich'," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 29: 3 (2015): 173-196.

²¹ For example, Maetzig ignored the fact that the couple had a son that they killed alongside themselves.

²² See the correspondence between Käutner and film producer Alf Teichs (Hamburg, 20.6.1946), Helmut Käutner Archiv, Akademie der Künste Archiv (AdKA), Akte 59.

²³ Kurt Maetzig, *Filmarbeit: Gespräche, Reden, Schriften* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1987), 54-55.

as guilty as you'.²⁴ Clearly, this criticism would have been less effective had the Jewish character survived the war. However, several reviewers did not consider the film critical enough and expected more than a romantic tale.²⁵ Siegfried Kracauer wrote that the film treats alternatives such as emigration as ineffective (exemplified in Kurt's unsuccessful attempt to leave Germany), thereby implying that the couple had no way to save Elisabeth's life, regardless of what they did, and at the same time hailing the protagonists' loyalty to their German homeland and their decision to die in it. Kracauer argued that these choices hamper a political self-examination, and that the protagonists' escape into emotional privacy neutralizes the discussion of Germans' social responsibility.²⁶

But Kracauer underestimated the Nazi regime's politicization of private life and its efforts to separate Jews from Aryans, marking friendly and intimate relations of Aryans with Jews as breaches of the social and moral order.²⁷ The regime prohibited mixed marriages and denounced the Aryan partners in part because, since the nineteenth century, many Germans had seen such marriages as the apogee of Jews' social integration.²⁸ For this reason, during WWII, anti-Nazi circles, including German authors writing in exile, increasingly depicted mixed couples as icons of solidarity and resistance.²⁹ Within this context, the portrayal of the

²⁴ The film's depiction of the *Bildungsbürgertum*'s failure in the face of Nazism is discussed in Ute Wölfel, "Inverting the Lives of 'Others': Retelling the Nazi Past in *Ehe im Schatten* and *Das Leben der Anderen*," *German Life and Letters* 64: 4 (2011): 601-618.

²⁵ Robert R. Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 81-90; Reichel, *Erfundene Erinnerung*, 185-191.

²⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, „Der anständige Deutsche: Ein Filmportrait,“ *Film und Fernsehen* 1 (1999): 6-8. The article originally appeared in 1949.

²⁷ For the Nazi condemnation and persecution of "friendliness toward Jews" (*Judenfreundlichkeit*), as well as business and intimate relations with Jews see Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans and the "Jewish Question"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Alexandra Przyrembel, „*Rassenschande*“: *Reinheitsmythos und Vernichtungslegitimation im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003); Hannah Ahlheim, "Establishing Antisemitic Stereotypes: Social and Economic Segregation of Jews by Means of Political Boycott in Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 55 (2010): 149-173; Michael Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919-1939* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

²⁸ Kerstin Meiring, *Die Christlich-Jüdische Mischehe in Deutschland 1840-1933* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 1998).

²⁹ Guy Stern, "German-Jewish and German-Christian Writers: Cooperation in Exile," in Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg, eds., *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to the Second World War* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985), 150-163, here 154.

mixed couple's death emphasized the German population's failure to integrate the Jews and keep them safe. It was not a private matter but inherently a social and political one.

But why did Maetzig decide to end the film with a joint suicide and not with the death of Elisabeth (and perhaps Hans) at the hand of Nazis? The depiction of Jews committing suicide was not an isolated choice but a common phenomenon in the early post-war decades. Very different works such as Hans Fallada's novel *Jeder stirbt für sich allein* (Alone in Berlin, Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany, 1947), Gertrud von le Fort's Christian parable *Das fremde Kind* (The Foreign Child, West Germany, 1961), and Günter Grass's novel *Die Blechtrommel* (The Tin Drum, West Germany, 1959) contain episodes in which Jews take their own lives.³⁰ As some scholars have noted, such suicides may serve to obscure certain elements of the Jewish catastrophe and avoid portraying Germans as perpetrators.³¹ But the portrayal of suicide also invites the public's sympathy with the persecuted by bringing them into close proximity. Instead of presenting an alien and, for many, unimaginable reality of ghettos and camps, artists sought to confront readers and spectators with tragedies that had taken place in their own cities.

Suicide also has strong symbolic connotations. It illustrates the Jews' fear and hopelessness under the Third Reich, points to the regime's inhumanity, and offers a way to insert meaning and individuality into faceless mass murder.³² This can be seen in the choice of the films discussed here to portray suicide as a triumph. A brochure for *Ehe im Schatten* declares that the couple's death was 'a path to freedom',³³ a positive evaluation that also

³⁰ Hans Fallada, *Jeder stirbt für sich allein* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2011); Gertrud von Le Fort, *Das fremde Kind: Erzählung* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1961); Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (München: Dtv, 2009).

³¹ See this criticism in relation to Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* and the films *Ehe im Schatten* and *Zwischen gestern und morgen*, respectively: Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 64-65; Frank Stern, „Visualisierung des Jüdischen in Krisenzeiten: Imagination und Ambivalenz von Erinnern und Vergessen im deutschsprachigen Film,“ in Armin Lange et al., eds., *Judaism and Crisis: Crisis as a Catalyst in Jewish Cultural History* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 305-316, here 308.

³² For a fascinating discussion of the meaning that suicide may assign to a death that has none see Jared Stark, "Suicide After Auschwitz," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14: 1 (2001): 93-114.

³³ The brochure is in my possession.

appears in the diaries of German Jews from the 1930s and 1940s.³⁴ This interpretation goes back to European Romanticism, which considered passion and romance superior to ‘plain’ life and portrayed suicide, especially lovers’ joint suicide, as a courageous way to exit one’s troubled existence.³⁵ Suicide as an expression of agency gained further relevance in early twentieth-century Germany, as many individuals felt powerless when facing overwhelming phenomena such as modernization and total war.³⁶ In the crisis period after WWII, this conception seems to have enabled a moral confrontation with the Nazi regime and its values.

The joint suicides in *Ehe im Schatten*, *Zwischen gestern und morgen*, and *In jenen Tagen* also present a humanistic counter-image to the Nazi vision of a heroic death in battle, which required the obliteration of the self for the sake of the community.³⁷ The non-Jewish husband’s decision to commit suicide together with his Jewish wife makes him ‘braver than the bravest partisan’, as one reviewer wrote of Käutner’s *In jenen Tagen*.³⁸ By refusing to succumb to the pressures of inhumanity embodied in the Nazi regime, the lovers maintain a universal morality³⁹ and suggest a path that few Germans took, thereby demonstrating the need for a new moral beginning.

Ehe im Schatten became an immense success in all occupation zones. It drew more than ten million viewers in its first year and an additional two million within five years. The reasons for that seem to lie in its melodramatic features, which were popular among filmgoers in Nazi Germany, as well. Many film melodramas in the Third Reich described a marital

³⁴ Christine Hartig, “‘Conversations about Taking Our Own Lives – Oh a Poor Expression for a Forced Deed in Hopeless Circumstances!’: Suicide among German Jews 1933-1943,” *Leo Baeck Year Book* 52 (2007): 247-265; Christian Goeschel, “Suicides of German Jews in the Third Reich,” *German History* 25: 1 (2007): 22-45.

³⁵ Robert L. Barry, *Breaking the Thread of Life: On Rational Suicide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1994), 73-77.

³⁶ Richard Weikart, “Darwinism and Death: Devaluing Human Life in Germany, 1859-1920,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63: 2 (2002): 323-344, here 337-338; Boaz Neumann, “Weimar – a Case of Suicide,” *Zmanim* 82 (2003): 48-63, here 59-60 [in Hebrew].

³⁷ Jay W. Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

³⁸ „Man traf sich in Locarno: Der zweite ‚Festival internazionale del film‘ am Lago Maggiore“, *Die Tat* 12: 188 (Zürich, 6. Juli 1947): 4.

³⁹ For this point see Fernand Jung, „Das Thema Antisemitismus am Beispiel des DEFA-Films ‚Ehe im Schatten‘“, in Rainer Waterkamp, ed., *Nationalsozialismus und Judenverfolgung in DDR-Medien* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1996), 45-52.

crisis, often involving a romantic triangle requiring that the partners make a morally correct choice.⁴⁰ *Ehe im Schatten* portrays such a love triangle and moral choice, but not the one the Nazis had in mind. Maetzig's film has some similarities with *Die große Liebe* (The Great Love, dir. Rolf Hansen, 1942), the most commercially successful film in the Third Reich. In *Die große Liebe*, love emerges out of the crisis of war when the man demonstrates his heroism as a fighter pilot and turns the woman he loves into a faithful wife and mother.⁴¹ In contrast, *Ehe im Schatten* introduces the Nazi persecution of the Jews as the crisis that enables the love between Hans and Elisabeth, exposes Herbert's true face, and demonstrates Hans's moral heroism.

Maetzig's film employs formal conventions associated with entertainment in the Third Reich but fills them with opposite values. In the debate that took place in the immediate post-war years on how to re-educate the German population, the director stressed the need to reach as many people as possible, rather than address only a small number of viewers with intellectual argumentation and new aesthetics. For that he was accused of producing kitsch and shallow sentimentality.⁴² Yet, all too often, critics forget that sentimentality of the kind that Maetzig's film employs was itself something the Nazi regime wished to eliminate. The regime abhorred and combatted 'sentimental humanitarianism' (*Humanitätsduselei* or *Gefühlsduselei*) and directed all empathy to the racial community.⁴³ Since blocking empathy toward a certain group is essential for governments that persecute and humiliate 'others', the (re)awakening of empathy is a clearly political act. Within this context, love epitomizes and

⁴⁰ Mary-Elizabeth O'Brien, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 160-205.

⁴¹ Stephen Brockmann, *A Critical History of German Film* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 167-179.

⁴² Stephen Brockmann, "The Struggle Over Audiences in Postwar East German Film," *Film & History* 45: 1 (2015): 5-16. Similarly, for the enlightening function of melodrama in relation to the depiction of German soldiers see Anke Pinkert, "Can Melodrama Cure? War Trauma and Crisis of Masculinity in Early DEFA Film," *Seminar* 44: 1 (2008): 118-136.

⁴³ See the use of these and related concepts in a variety of social spheres and media in Nazi Germany in Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*, 110, 166, 186, 253-254, 258, 267. And see also Peter Fritzsche, "Management of Empathy in the Third Reich," in Assmann and Detmes, eds., *Empathy and Its Limits*, 115-127.

symbolizes morality, inducing care, solidarity, and sacrifice.⁴⁴ Focusing on love between Jews and Aryans in Nazi Germany was an affront to Nazi morality and a step toward viewing all humans as equal. Furthermore, since love is an emotion that people may easily embrace, it promotes identification with the fate of others, as one imagines oneself in a similar situation, sharing the same experiences and feelings. Indeed, imagining oneself in others' shoes played a pivotal role in the emergence of human rights,⁴⁵ so Maetzig here drew on a long tradition.⁴⁶ As film studies work has demonstrated, spectators are likelier to identify with fictional characters and to feel empathy toward them when the film portrays attractive actors in beautiful settings, using close-ups – as in the scene depicting the couple's suicide in *Ehe im Schatten*.⁴⁷

Whether the film impacted its many viewers in the manner Maetzig intended remains a matter of debate. Leo Menter, a contemporary reviewer who praised *Ehe im Schatten* for exposing the tragedy of the Jews in a way that pictures of piled bodies in concentration camps could not, was nevertheless unsure that it always worked:

The audience left the theatre with moist eyes, dreading to utter the first words. But after such a film one must ask if this is enough. Does the emotion in the theatre suffice to further make a spontaneous comment? [...] Isn't it nothing more for the people than a moving, but actually foreign, fate that is empathized with?⁴⁸

⁴⁴ On love and morality see J. David Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109: 2 (January 1999): 338-374. Of course, love can also be used to justify hatred and discrimination. See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 122-143.

⁴⁵ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

⁴⁶ Maetzig continued to use romance in later films, convinced of its power to transform and enlighten, and opposed those who described love in film as mere escapism grounded on bourgeois attitudes. See Sean Allan, "Sagt, wie soll man Stalin denken? Kurt Maetzig's *Ehe im Schatten* (1947), *Roman einer jungen Ehe* (1952) and the Cultural Politics of Post-War Germany," *German Life and Letters* 64: 2 (2011): 255-271.

⁴⁷ See Berys Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film," and Carl Plantinga, "The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film," both in Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, eds., *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 200-216, 239-256.

⁴⁸ Menter, „Ehe im Schatten," 897. This and other translations from German are mine, unless otherwise noted.

Recalling that he heard a few laughs during the film and sighs of relief at the end of it, Menter added doubtfully that ‘there is still much work to be done, which even the best art work cannot master alone’.⁴⁹

The danger of temporary, empty empathy, which does not generate deep moral reflection in the audience, was formulated by Adorno more than a decade later regarding the play *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which caused an emotional shock in both Germanys.⁵⁰ No doubt, the audience’s moment of weeping over the murdered girl Anne Frank or fictional characters such as Hans and Elisabeth was far from a self-critical confrontation with Nazism, but its ‘effect nonetheless feeds into the potential for improvement’, Adorno wrote.⁵¹ Depictions of failed rescue represented a humanistic attitude that enabled Germans to go beyond focusing on their own plight, to take on the perspective of the Jews and thereby gradually to reject the lessons of twelve years of racist propaganda.

Not all works of failed rescue from the period under review end with a joint romantic suicide, but quite a few equate love of various kinds with humanistic morality. These works include Luise Rinser's novella *Jan Lobel aus Warschau* (Jan Lobel from Warsaw, 1948) and Günter Eich's radio play *Die Mädchen aus Viterbo* (The Girls from Viterbo, 1952/1958) from West Germany, as well as two novellas that appeared in Czechoslovakia in 1958 and ran in several editions in East Germany: Rudolf Jašík's *Die Liebenden vom St.-Elisabeth-Platz* (The Lovers from St. Elisabeth Square) and Jan Otčenášek's *Romeo, Julia und die Finsternis* (Romeo, Juliette, and Darkness).⁵²

The works that appeared in the 1940s, intended to arouse empathy toward Jews and thereby contribute to the re-education of Germans immediately after the fall of Nazism.

⁴⁹ Menter, „Ehe im Schatten,” 897.

⁵⁰ For the impact of the play *Anne Frank's Diary* in both Germanys see Wolfgang Benz, *Bilder vom Juden: Studien zum alltäglichen Antisemitismus* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001), 86-95; Sylke Kirschnik, *Anne Frank und die DDR: Politische Deutungen und persönliche Lesarten des berühmten Tagebuchs* (Berlin: Links, 2009).

⁵¹ Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 101.

⁵² Rudolf Jašík, *Die Liebenden vom St.-Elisabeth-Platz* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1961); Jan Otčenášek, *Romeo und Julia und die Finsternis* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1960).

Subsequent portrayals of failed rescues, as well as later performances or editions of the earlier works, seem to be directed mainly at audiences that did not experience the Nazi period first-hand or did so only as young children. What the younger generation was expected to learn from these works becomes apparent in a West German review of Jiří Weiss's film adaptation of *Romeo, Julia und die Finsternis*, which describes a love affair between a non-Jewish boy and a 'Czech Anne Frank':

Weiss employed a little love story under terrible pressure as a tactical recipe, to provide a good lesson to the younger ones: They should be able to imagine what horrors took place, with feelings that are as familiar to them as to that Romeo, that Juliette, in the attic.⁵³

Criticism

The portrayals of failed rescue that I have discussed so far focus on arousing empathy with the Jews by illustrating their tragedy. They paint a picture in which the German population had a limited capacity for action and could scarcely do anything to save the Jews. The deaths of the Jewish characters result, accordingly, from the fact that German characters do not know the actual goals of Nazi anti-Jewish policy and are powerless to oppose it. Hans's suicide proves both his morality and his helplessness. However, some fictional accounts of failed rescue from the first post-war decades suggest that their protagonists had a greater ability to act under the Nazi regime. In what follows, I examine works that present failed rescue in order to criticize Germans for not doing more to resist the regime and its policies. Scholars tend to look unfavourably on the fact that most German novels, plays, and films produced before the early 1960s depict Jews as secondary characters who have no influence on their own fates.⁵⁴ Yet this portrayal of Jews as passive turns the spotlight on the actions of the non-

⁵³ Vs, „'Romeo, Julia und die Finsternis' am Olivaer Platz," *Der Abend* (Westberlin) (28.3.1967).

⁵⁴ Christiane Schmelzkopf, *Zur Gestaltung jüdischer Figuren in der deutschsprachigen Literatur nach 1945* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1983); Heidy M. Müller, *Die Judendarstellung in der deutschsprachigen*

Jewish protagonists and thus raise moral questions about Germans' conduct under Nazism. Not many authors directly criticized Germans' behaviour toward Jews. But, as we shall see, some of those who did considered depictions of failed aid to Jews to be particularly enlightening.

I will demonstrate this critical potential by focusing on Carl Zuckmayer's play *Des Teufels General* (The Devil's General) and its film adaptation. Zuckmayer, whose pieces were very successful in the Weimar Republic, wrote *Des Teufels General* during the war while in exile in Switzerland.⁵⁵ At the centre of the play is the Air Force general Harras, a celebrated WWI pilot, who oversees the production of new aircraft for the *Luftwaffe*. The general, depicted as a witty charmer who enjoys his fame as a war hero, makes no secret of his aversion toward the Nazis, although he serves their war aims. But when defects in — and possible sabotage of — new airplanes cause the death of German pilots, Harras is arrested by the SS. He spends some time in custody and is released on the condition that he uncover the saboteurs. After Harras's release, Oderbruch, one of his most trusted engineers, confesses that he is the one who damaged the planes and explains his deeds as acts of resistance against the Nazi regime. In the end Harras neither betrays his friend nor joins his cause, but rather climbs on one of the defective planes and plunges to his death. Zuckmayer described the play in the following way:

It is the tragedy of the 'apolitical person' in general, who avoids a clear political and moral decision for the sake of his profession, his expertise, and his sportive passion [in this case the passion for flying], and for which the pilot-general is only the strongest symbol.

Erzählprosa (1945-1981) (Königstein: Anton Hain, 1986); Anat Feinberg, *Wiedergutmachung im Programm: Jüdisches Schicksal im deutschen Nachkriegsdrama* (Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1988); Shandley, *Rubble Films*; Reichel, *Erfundene Erinnerung*.

⁵⁵ Carl Zuckmayer, *Des Teufels General. Drama in drei Akten* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982 [1946]).

The entire play depicts a conflict of conscience – Harras’s actual ‘adversary’ is [...] his own conscience, which he initially tries to cover [...] with occasional humane [and] decent actions (*gelegentlichen menschlichen anständigen Aktionen*), but [...] which drives him more and more to a corner and eventually brings about his downfall.⁵⁶

It seems that Harras’s ‘occasional humane and decent actions’ refer to his attempt to save a Jewish man, Dr. Bergmann, and his Aryan wife, persecuted for ‘racial defilement’, by flying them out of Germany. But Harras is arrested before the plan can materialize and the couple commits suicide by taking poison. Before killing himself, Dr. Bergmann writes a letter to Harras, echoing the theme of a mixed couple’s suicide examined above:

My dear friend – When this letter reaches you, I will have taken the step toward freedom. This is the only freedom possible for me, after all that I have experienced. We have taken this step calmly, without pain. I haven’t the strength for a ‘new life’ and I cannot buy it with the sacrifices of my friends. I know what you were willing to do for us. You did it for others [...]. The thought that there are still human beings like you--⁵⁷

Harras stops reading before the scene turns into emotional kitsch. Yet when a friend praises his behaviour, he replies:

What noble people we are. [...] Each of us has his conscience Jew (*Gewissensjuden*), or Jews, so he can sleep at night. But one cannot buy his way out of it in this manner. It is self-deception. We are still guilty of what is happening to thousands of people we

⁵⁶ Carl Zuckmayer, „Grundsätzliche und grundlegende Erwägungen über die Verfilmung meines Stücks ‚Des Teufels General‘“ (letter to Helmut Käutner, 20.2.1949). Helmut Käutner Archiv, AdKA, Akte 2070. Zuckmayer made a similar statement in a public discussion in Frankfurt in December 1947. See Karin Weingran, „Des Teufels General“ in der Diskussion: Zur Rezeption von Carl Zuckmayers Theaterstücks nach 1945 (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2004), 54-55.

⁵⁷ Zuckmayer, *Des Teufels General*, 98.

don't know and can never help. Guilty and damned for all eternity (*Schuldig und verdammt in alle Ewigkeit*). Permitting malice to happen is worse than doing it.⁵⁸

Zuckmayer does not portray Germans as perpetrators and, just as in other popular representations of his time, he clearly distinguishes Nazis from the majority population. Thus one could claim that his account does not condemn Germans' wartime behaviour. However, Harras's harsh words concerning Germans' guilt were unusual in the post-war period. Also unusual was his criticism of those who publicly recalled small gestures of everyday humanity toward Jews in order to prove their inward anti-Nazi attitude, even though they were members of Nazi organizations or supported the regime in some other way.⁵⁹ Whereas other works of fiction celebrate these minor gestures as the only thing Germans could have done for the Jews,⁶⁰ Zuckmayer's description of a near-rescue exposes this widespread position as insufficient and self-serving.⁶¹ The play first establishes Harras and his closest friends as 'good Germans' who simultaneously express solidarity with, and empathy toward, Jews, thus encouraging the audience to embrace this moral attitude.⁶² At the same time, Zuckmayer confronts his audience by stating that, instead of comforting themselves with 'occasional humane and decent actions', they should have taken effective action to bring down National Socialism. Implicit in this message is that only uncompromising resistance against the regime itself could have saved the Jews and other victims of the Nazis. To claim this, the play cannot present a successful effort to save Dr. Bergmann and his wife. The rescue attempt had to fail in order to address the moral failure of the German population during the Nazi period.

⁵⁸ Zuckmayer, *Des Teufels General*, 98-99.

⁵⁹ Kabalek, "The Rescue of Jews and the Memory of Nazism in Germany," 80-154.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, the analysis of Albrecht Goes's novellas *Das Brandoper* (1954) and *Das Löffelchen* (1965): Janina Bach, *Erinnerungsspuren an den Holocaust in der deutschen Nachkriegsliteratur* (Dresden: Neisse Verlag, 2007), 271-287.

⁶¹ For similar criticism from that time see Marie Dubois, „Die ‚Große Stunde‘ der ‚Kleinen Leute‘“, *Die Weltbühne* 2: 7 (1.4.1947): 298-300; Willy Brandt, *Verbrecher und andere Deutsche: Ein Bericht aus Deutschland 1946* (Bonn: Dietz, 2007), 181.

⁶² Zuckmayer, *Des Teufels General*, 27, 56, 91-92, 107, 114-115, 123-124.

The connection that the play makes between resistance and rescue is not embodied in the saboteur Oderbruch, but rather in the young officer Hartmann. Hartmann, who early in the play welcomes a 'heroic death' in the service of the Nazi war, later reports in horror how his comrades murdered civilians. His opinion of the war and the regime changes drastically, and Harras helps him embark on a new moral path in the resistance under Oderbruch's guidance. The piece thus implies that Hartmann joins the resistance in order to stop the regime from committing more war crimes.⁶³ Conceived for the post-war reality, Zuckmayer's play rejects the detachment and opportunism that characterized the behaviour of many Germans under Hitler, and presents Hartmann as a role model for the desired moral transformation of German youth after the war.⁶⁴

Zuckmayer wished to present a complex and critical image of Germans' choices and compromises under the Third Reich, but the play itself includes elements that go against these intentions.⁶⁵ Thus, whereas it is easy to identify with the charming Harras, the same cannot be said of Oderbruch and Hartmann, whose characters are underdeveloped and pale in comparison. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the occupation authorities in Germany feared that Harras's figure might rehabilitate the *Wehrmacht* and its generals shortly after they had stood trial in Nuremberg.⁶⁶ When the British and Americans (but not the Soviets and French) eventually authorized its staging in late 1947, reviewers of the play were sceptical that the audience would understand Zuckmayer's complex message and pointed out that the general's suicide might be perceived as atonement or as a tragic end for a figure that had no control over the events – and if powerful generals could not resist the Nazis, what can one

⁶³ A similar explanation for joining the resistance appears in Falk Harnack's 1955 film *Der 20. Juli*, in which a young *Wehrmacht* officer joins the plot against Hitler after witnessing atrocities in a concentration camp.

⁶⁴ Carl Zuckmayer, „Persönliche Notizen zu meinem Stück ‚Des Teufels General‘“, *Die Wandlung* 3: 4 (1948): 331-333; Carl Zuckmayer, *Als wär's ein Stück von mir. Horen der Freundschaft* (Wien: S. Fischer Verlag, 1966), 562.

⁶⁵ Mariatte C. Denman, "Nostalgia for a Better Germany: Carl Zuckmayer's *Des Teufels General*," *The German Quarterly* 76: 4 (Fall 2003): 369-380.

⁶⁶ Reichel, *Erfundene Erinnerung*, 55. One may assume that Zuckmayer made Harras so likable in the play in part because he based this figure on Ernst Udet, a celebrated WWI pilot and Luftwaffe general, who was his close friend.

expect of the ‘little people’?⁶⁷ In a series of public discussions, Zuckmayer tried to guide the public to a ‘correct reading’ of his play.⁶⁸ Yet it seems that what made *Des Teufels General* into one of the most often staged plays in the immediate post-war years was Harras’s wit rather than his admission of a moral failing, and one definitely cannot assume widespread public approval of Oderbruch’s actions.⁶⁹

In the immediate post-war years, many Germans regarded resistance fighters as traitors who had impaired the German war effort. This started to change in the 1950s, when the resistance gained greater legitimacy in the political, legal, and cultural spheres of West Germany.⁷⁰ The 1955 film adaptation of the play, directed by Helmut Käutner, draws on this broader public acceptance of the resistance, and the film itself makes Oderbruch into a more relatable and morally acceptable figure, as some reviewers noted.⁷¹ Moreover, it further emphasizes the failed rescue of the couple, now called Rosenfeld. Since, in the film, both partners are Jewish, Harras (played by Curd Jürgens) stands as the person with sole responsibility for the Jews’ rescue, rather than sharing it with the non-Jewish spouse. These elements enhance the message of the play that the only way to help Jews is to oppose the Nazi regime. However, the play’s criticism of Germans who did not actively resist the Nazis is weakened as the film focuses more extensively on Harras’s arrest and the danger facing him and his loved ones, thus stressing the general’s powerlessness vis-à-vis the regime.⁷²

The film, like the play, performs a balancing act between criticism and apology. As conditions and public discourse changed, so did specific features of the plot, but the core

⁶⁷ Weingran, „*Des Teufels General*“ in der Diskussion, 29-65.

⁶⁸ Zuckmayer, *Als wär’s ein Stück von mir*, 560-563.

⁶⁹ One should also remember that, while the script posits many critical and complex notions, its various stagings often shortened dialogue or cut scenes, thus altering Zuckmayer’s message.

⁷⁰ Norbert Frei, „Erinnerungskampf: Der 20. Juli 1944 in den Bonner Anfangsjahren,“ in *1945 und wir*, 129-144. At the time, several popular films presented the conspiracy against Hitler in very positive terms. See, for instance, *Canaris* (Alfred Weidenmann, 1954), *Der 20. Juli* (Falk Harnack, 1955) and *Es geschah am 20. Juli* (G.W. Pabst, 1955).

⁷¹ See, for example, Dora Fehling, „Quartier in der Hölle: Der Zuckmayer-Film ‚Des Teufels General‘ im Gloria-Palast,“ *Der Telegraf* (Berlin, 31.3.1955).

⁷² Manuel Köppen, „The Rhetoric of Victim Narratives in West German Films of the 1950s,“ in Paul Cooke and Marc Silberman, eds., *Screening War: Perspectives on German Suffering* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 56-79, here 59.

constellation remained the same. In a 1949 letter to Käutner, Zuckmayer explained: ‘The play [...] confronts the German audience directly with its past, i.e., with itself, and forces one to deal with it without offending, hurting or repelling by one-sidedness’.⁷³ Rather than place a resistance fighter or Nazi perpetrator at the centre of the piece, Zuckmayer chose a complex protagonist whom the audience can easily like. A German who tries to save Jews provides a positive starting point, which does not alienate viewers and readers with an accusation of collective guilt. The failure of the rescue attempt in the second part of the piece criticizes the German population for their moral compromises and illustrates the consequences of their attitude. Although the Jewish characters in the play and film are marginal, the description of a failed rescue plays a significant role in the plot and its message.

In other fictional works, such episodes of unsuccessful rescue of Jews fulfil a similar function of balanced criticism. Thus Hans Scholz's novel *Am Grünen Strand der Spree* (On the Green Shore of the River Spree, West Germany, 1955) and the TV film based on it (directed by Fritz Umgelter, 1960) portray *Wehrmacht* soldiers who ignore the plight of the Jews or fail to help them as the result of a lack of commitment, without fundamentally challenging the popular image that portrayed the *Wehrmacht* as taking no part in the regime's crimes.⁷⁴

The main difference between such critical depictions of failed rescue from West and East Germany lies in the reactions they consider desirable in their protagonists and the degree to which these protagonists are able to act. West German works are more reluctant to question the image of Germans as victims, and in them it is not always clear what the protagonists can do against the Nazi regime. Whereas, in West Germany, desertion carried very negative connotations for decades, and even the resistance did not enjoy wide acceptance, East German

⁷³ Zuckmayer to Käutner (20.2.1949), „Grundsätzliche und grundlegende Erwägungen über die Verfilmung meines Stücks ‚Des Teufels General‘“, Helmut Käutner Archiv, AdKA, Akte 2070.

⁷⁴ Kobi Kabalek, „Das Scheitern und die Erinnerung: Über das Nicht-Retten von Juden in zwei deutschen Nachkriegsfilmen,“ in Lisa Bolyos und Katharina Morawek, eds., *Diktatorpuppe zerstört, Schaden gering: Kunst und Geschichtspolitik im Postnazismus* (Wien: Mandelbaum, 2012), 92-103.

works more willingly present the fight against the regime, and even against one's comrades in the *Wehrmacht*, as the right decision.⁷⁵ The more activist attitude of East German works was linked to the claim that the fight against fascism was not over. For example, the East German newspaper *Neues Deutschland* announced the premiere of the DEFA film *Sterne* (Stars, director: Konrad Wolf, 1959), which depicts a series of failed attempts to help Jews, with the following words: '[The film] is a shattering call to all those who still today believe that they can idly watch as the militarists in West Germany prepare for an even more terrible war'.⁷⁶ Presenting Germans standing idly by as the Jews are persecuted and murdered thus not only criticizes past conduct, but also advocates a certain political interpretation of the present. These references to *Sterne* followed East German propaganda campaigns that had been ongoing since the mid-1950s, and which distinguished the Federal Republic (depicted as a state harbouring former Nazi officials and pursuing an imperialist-fascist policy) from the German Democratic Republic (portrayed as an antifascist state and a haven of socialist humanism).⁷⁷

Conclusion

The article's first part discussed fictional depictions of failed rescue that sought to arouse the German public's empathy with the Jewish victims of Nazism. These works depict protagonists who have a limited ability to act. They express their loyalty, love, and humanity toward the Jews but cannot save them. In the second part, we saw that not all depictions of failed rescue demonstrate this kind of powerlessness. Some works demand of their protagonists more

⁷⁵ Helmut Peitsch, „Zur Geschichte von ‚Vergangenheitsbewältigung‘: BRD- und DDR-Kriegsromane in den fünfziger Jahren,“ in Gerhard P. Knapp et al., eds., *1945-1995: Fünfzig Jahre deutschsprachige Literatur in Aspekten* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 89-117; Kabalek, „The Rescue of Jews and the Memory of Nazism in Germany“, 198-207.

⁷⁶ „„Sterne‘: Eine Gemeinschaftsproduktion der Volksrepublik Bulgarien und der DDR. Von unserer Sofioter Korrespondentin Cläre Einhorn,“ *Neues Deutschland* (1.11.58). Konrad Wolf Archiv, AdKA. Akte 345.

⁷⁷ Jutta Illichmann, *Die DDR und die Juden: Die deutschlandpolitische Instrumentalisierung von Juden und Judentum durch die Partei- und Staatsführung der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis 1990* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 136-148.

decisive action against the Nazi regime itself, suggesting that only in this way could the Jews have been truly helped. In these works, failed rescue attempts assert the invalidity of a merely internal rejection of Nazism and expose it as beautified self-deception.

In order to achieve moral transformation in the post-war period, all of the works mentioned here combine critical and exonerating perspectives concerning the Nazi period. In doing so, they opened a space in which it was possible to speak about the Holocaust, an unpopular topic until at least the early 1960s. The picture that these works draw is often complex or implicit, so that viewers and readers did not always perceive or follow the messages the authors hoped they would. But precisely because they contain contradictory tendencies and messages, these works illustrate the diverse inclinations and interpretations of their time.

After around 1960, when public discussions of the Nazi era increasingly focused on the perpetrators, almost no new fictional depictions of failed rescue emerged. As discourse about the Holocaust changed its form, so did the depictions of rescue, a topic that authors of fictional works in both Germanys either completely ignored or framed differently.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ See Kabalek, "The Rescue of Jews and the Memory of Nazism in Germany".