German Life and Letters 53:2 April 2000
0016–8777

NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND LITERARY ADAPTATION: GUSTAF GRÜNDGENS'S *DER SCHRITT VOM WEGE* AND HELMUT KÄUTNER'S *KLEIDER MACHEN LEUTE*

Paul Coates

ABSTRACT

Eric Rentschler argues that 'film production in the Third Reich offers a strikingly concrete example' of the theoretical construct of 'the dominant cinema' ('Hollywood') devised by film theorists. But is the era of 'Germany's Hollywood' ideological in the same way as Hollywood, or in a different way? Consideration of National Socialist adaptations of non-Nazi texts may help one determine the specific meaning of the ideological in the Nazi context. The admittedly small area of National Socialist literary adaptation acquires a disproportionately revelatory potential due to the clearly perceptible disparities between the original, pre-Nazi texts and their Nazi-era reworkings. The adaptations considered here are Gustaf Gründgens's *Der Schritt vom Wege* (1939), based on Fontane's *Effi Briest* – a particularly problematic work for National Socialist ideology – and Helmut Käutner's version of Gottfried Keller's *Kleider machen Leute* (1940), whose admission of its own approximate relationship with the original narrative seems to dismiss the probably irresoluble problem of fidelity to the original, but which is also problematic.

NOTES ON NAZI CINEMA AND ADAPTATION

The cinema of National Socialism has a particular use-value for the film theorist. Writing of it, Eric Rentschler argues that

> film theorists have often speculated about the ideological effects of the 'dominant cinema,' proposing that classical narratives seek to mesmerize and mystify viewers by means of imaginary seductions. Film production in the Third Reich offers a strikingly concrete example of such a theoretical construct put into practice.[1]

Rentschler's pregnant remark nevertheless collapses the general formal paradigms of classical narrative, which is reliant upon exposition, plot rhymes and closure – paradigms both Hollywood and the Third Reich share – into the particular stories delivered within the classical framework, which differ between Hollywood and Hitler's Germany. It thus confuses ideological effects of form with those of theme and content.

It is well known that Goebbels preferred propaganda to mask itself as entertainment (in his own words: 'in dem Augenblick, in dem eine Propa-

[1] Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife*, Cambridge, MA/London 1996, p. 16.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000. Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

ganda bewußt wird, ist sie unwirksam'[2]) and even valued non-propagandistic entertainment for the sense of business-as-usual it diffused. This stated preference may well have resulted from the débâcle of an early Nazi propaganda project like *Hans Westmar* (1933), a hagiographic fictionalisation of the life of Horst Wessel many Nazis felt failed to paint the Communist opposition sufficiently darkly, and which – consequently – was banned. The fact that Goebbels's best-known statement of a preference for *indirect* propaganda stems from 1937 may well indicate a switch in position, recognising that an industry running on propaganda films alone would soon have run aground on intra-Party discord, to say nothing of rapidly running out of subject-matter. *Triumph des Willens* (1936) may well have become the Nazi propaganda film *par excellence* precisely because of its lack of the voice-over commentary that could have invited Party critique. As propaganda becomes emotional massage of the national ego, however, it also becomes – and succumbs to – entertainment. Whatever the motives of Goebbels's preference, and irrespective of whether or not it constituted a swerve from his original purpose, one has to ask whether any ideological effects of potential value to National Socialism inhere in the political unconscious of entertainment *per se* or whether they depend entirely upon bodying forth ideas consciously held – as in, say, *Jud Süss* (1940). Is the era of 'Germany's Hollywood', the period of its most self-conscious, would-be autarkic rivalry with the American film industry, ideological in the same way as that industry – through naturalisation of the cultural, for instance – or is it ideological in a different sense? How, in this case, is the indubitable connection between popular culture and ideology to be squared with their non-identity?

I remarked at the outset on Rentschler's confusion of ideologies of form with ideologies of content. Readers may well enquire, however, how form and content are to be detached from one another. Such an operation may appear impossible, but consideration of National Socialist adaptations of non-Nazi texts allows one to draw the outline of a separation. In other cases the question truly is undecidable: the close welding of *syjuzhet* and *fabula* obscures the extent to which ideology resides in content or in modes of telling. Hence I would argue that the area of Nazi adaptation is potentially of great interest to film theory.

The pervasive binary opposition between an ideological analysis that demonises Nazi-era film and a 'formalist' one that savours its purely aesthetic, often camp pleasures has been described evocatively by Rentschler, whose sympathies nevertheless clearly lie with the tradition of ideological reading dominant within film studies.[3] As Rentschler well knows, only close and specific analysis of the layered audio-visual complexities, deter-

[2] Joseph Goebbels, 'Rede auf dem 1. Jahrestag der Reichsfilmkammer (1937)', in Wilfried von Bredow and Rolf Turek (eds), *Film und Gesellschaft in Deutschland. Dokumente und Materialien*, Hamburg 1975, p. 193.

[3] Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, pp. 7–12.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

minations and overdeterminations of these texts can break the double bind of these alternatives. But for all the suggestiveness of his own analyses, Rentschler offers no justification for his choice of films, and production details and cultural-historical contextualisation too often outweigh the necessary thoroughgoing *close* analysis. Since the extant mass of 1,094 Nazi-era features renders selection urgently necessary, the bases of one's choice also need to be made explicit. The decision here to focus on literary adaptation stems only in part from the quest for an area of manageable dimensions. Karsten Witte has noted that 'if one considers the substantial output of the industry – almost one hundred films a year for the German-speaking and European markets between 1939 and 1945 – the number of literary adaptations seems minute.'[4] Small though it may be, this area is particularly revealing due to the clearly perceptible disparities between the original, pre-Nazi texts and their Nazi-era reworkings. The gradual shrinkage in the number of adaptations may well mirror a growing Nazi will to repress memories of any order other than their own – including that of the historical past deemed to have reached its culmination in its own paradoxical, utopian reconciliation of nationalism and socialism.

Analyses of Nazi-era films need to take account of the role played by the self-censorship that has always indicated artistic opportunism. The (accompanying) preference for the safe can be linked to the considerable distance from contemporary German reality of so many of the era's films: both Goebbels and self-styled 'oppositional' directors tellingly shared the same escapist preferences. *Wille und Macht*, a Nazi youth paper, concluded with dismay that the world seen on screen had nothing in common with the National Socialist one.[5] When ideology speaks, of course, it does so as much through absence as presence: absent realistic images of the present (siphoned off into newsreels) speak as loudly of time-serving as does the lack of any voice-over commentary in Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens*, and the perceptible excision of certain elements of an original text from the filmic adaptation can be equally eloquent. Nevertheless one should remember that filmic reworking of literary texts can be sorted into various categories. Where the original text is a novel, omissions may or may not be significant: they may reflect a need to compress, a desire to entertain, or an ideological commitment. Should the novel be one generally deemed classic, changes are more likely to be significant, for the ascription of classic status can inhibit all but the boldest adapters. Rearrangements of material, transfers of lines from one character to another, may be suspect, or they may not. Both these forms of transformation, together with others, are present in Gustaf Gründgens's *Der Schritt vom Wege* (1939), the work considered first here, a version of Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest*. After considering Gründgens's film I will move on to Helmut Käutner's version of

[4] Karsten Witte, 'How Nazi Cinema Mobilizes the Classics: Schweikart's *Das Fräulein von Barnhelm* (1940)', in *German Literature and Film*, p. 104.
[5] Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, pp. 19–20.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

Gottfried Keller's *Kleider machen Leute* (1940), which openly concedes its own approximate relationship with the original narrative – an alternative form of adaptation which dismisses the vexed and probably irresoluble problem of fidelity in adaptation. Since Gründgens and Käutner are by all reckonings among the most gifted of the German film-makers to remain in the country after 1933, their films embody the best of what National Socialist cinema has to offer; and, each being a man of the theatre who remained in Germany primarily because he saw no possibility of working outside it, in each case that 'best' is primarily an accomplished form of theatricality. Meanwhile, the probably irresoluble clash of ideological and 'formalist' perspectives mentioned earlier may be overcome provisionally by pointing out the shortcomings of the two films in both the ideological *and* the aesthetic senses: after all, camp enjoyment of this cinema – as of others – depends on defining its works as harmless *failures*.

SACRIFICING THE TEXT: *EFFI BRIEST*, IDEOLOGY AND ADAPTATION

Effi Briest may be deemed a particularly problematic text for National Socialism. The novel's saddened critique of absurd Prussian uprightness could hardly be congenial to a regime assiduously tracing its blood-line back to 'der große Fritz'. The novel may also seem alarmingly 'Frenchified', both in its glancingness – Fontane as a Maupassant freed of cynicism – and in its vocabulary, where such words as *gênant, déjeuner, charmant* or – that key word – *apart*, are the small change of everyday discourse, and are not even distanced through italics. Equally disturbing from a National Socialist point of view, Effi's constant positioning in an intermediate space – often described as somewhere between, or somehow combining, opposites – frustrates the binarism that seeks to place consciousness on a war footing. Even a priori, Fontane may be considered a problem. So does this make Gründgens's stance one of covert resistance ? Perhaps, but even if his decision to film it represented a nostalgic desire for freedom from political constraints, they reimpose themselves in the script of Georg C. Klaren and Eckhart von Naso, which seeks to make the novel 'völkisch'.

Both at the time of its release, and also more recently, *Der Schritt vom Wege* earned plaudits that would seem to contradict the image of Gründgens as the self-styled Mephisto whose bargain with the Nazis made him really, sadly, Faustian. Werner Fiedler, writing in 1939 in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*,[6] lauds the 'Gewissenhaftigkeit' of Gründgens's efforts to match Fontane's realism, while Gerhard Schoenberner, in 1981, describes Gründgens's 'Inszenierung' as one 'die sich ihrem Gegenstand mit liebevollem Respekt nähert' (though adding that 'was Fontane mit Mut auf-

[6] Werner Fiedler, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10.2.1939, Ausgabe Groß-Berlin, in Axel Marquardt and Heinz Rathsack (eds), *Preußen im Film*, Reinbek 1981, p. 264.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

deckte, wird hier mit großer Kunst wieder zugedeckt'[7]). Clearly the work is more than just a vehicle for Marianne Hoppe, Gründgens's wife, as Effi. But the degree to which the original's reworking goes far beyond the selection and compression customary in film versions suggests its partial motivation by other – more strictly ideological – concerns.

For instance, if Roswitha first appears as an old Briest family servant and then is shown thoughtfully added to Innstetten's household against Effi's arrival, our sense of Effi's desperate loneliness in the uncanny house, of whose possible ghost Geert almost boasts, is diminished. Roswitha is no longer a belated solace found long after arrival in Kessin, while the question of the possible dependence of her compassion upon a Catholicism unlike Prussia's dominant Protestantism – so crucial for Fontane – falls into abeyance. Rollo is another Hohen Cremmen fixture whose transfer to Kessin eases Effi's passage. Her tardy rising on her first morning at Kessin is not justified by sleepless worry about the Chinaman's ghost. A pattern of greater sympathy for Innstetten – and the patriarchal values he represents – seems to be emerging, something confirmed by the film's early highlighting of his standing with the Bismarck who is a tutelary presence in many Nazi historical films – though this one omits Fontane's worldly gloss on the relation between Innstetten's invitation to court and the Princess's pleasure in his elegance. The changes set the tone for shifting the emphasis from tragic incompatibility to female transgression. In the film Effi may simply follow the 'carpe diem' Gieshübler is made to pronounce, but she has far less excuse than Fontane's heroine. Placing such words in Gieshübler's mouth, meanwhile, is a *Gleichschaltung* of Fontane's tone with the increasing crassness of Nazi cinema, something one can measure by contrasting *Die Reise nach Tilsit* (1939) with Murnau's earlier, American version of the same Sudermann story, *Sunrise* (1927); in the later, Nazi version, the heroine's father takes a whip to his daughter's rival, here identified as Polish, with shockingly casual brutality.

Effi's first meeting with Crampas is prefaced by a scene that both evinces this vulgarity and reduces sympathy for her. Having interrupted Innstetten's office routine and been reminded of the importance of his tasks – a scene from which neither emerges well – she turns on her heel, pertingly informs Rollo that neither of them is wanted and petulantly uproots a plant while marching away. Rollo scares the horses and leads her to the cowboy-like Crampas (Nazi cinema has no need of America, whose Western romanticism it here absorbs). Crampas then proposes a barebacked horse-ride. During Trippelli's concert the film proceeds to attribute its own vulgarity to Effi: old ladies may cringe at the French love song the scriptwriters insert, but Effi perks up. Innstetten looks uncomfortable, and Effi alone starts to clap, a reaction shot having earlier established a special relationship between her and the singer. Culture is German and masculine

[7] Gerhard Schoenberner, 'Das Preußenbild im deutschen Film – Geschichte und Ideologie', *ibid.*, p. 32.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

(a setting of an ode by Brahms precedes this); vulgarity is feminine, French. Perhaps only the casting of the somewhat elderly Karl Ludwig Diehl as Innstetten – who seems more fiftyish than the forty of the novel – generates any sympathy for Effi: the film's omission of the duel contributes to his image as a pen-pusher of dubious sexual adequacy. But although Effi suggests the ingredients of an aphrodisiac (thyme and cooking salt) for herself and Innstetten, the immediate cut to her mother holding up baby knitwear shows him not to be completely hopeless. (Such contradictions in the film's presentation of Innstetten surely indicate a wish both to uphold Prussian patriarchy and to display fidelity to the novel.) Briest, for example, comments that his wife is already working on a uniform for Effi's son and heir: uniforms are clearly important for this film. Particularly significant here is the moment when Crampas remarks that should Bismarck call they will go soldiering again. We are surely meant to second Innstetten's pained response, which deems this too serious a matter for jocularity. (After all, it is 1939 . . .) Alas, he lacks the puckishness of Fontane's Innstetten, whom Trippelli's pretensions amuse.

Although these changes reduce sympathy for Effi, they may simply demonstrate the impossibility in late thirties Germany of imagining her. It is hardly surprising that her insertion into a coarsened public sphere renders her virtually a barmaid: the new model of youthful vivacity is 'Berliner Schnauze'. Nevertheless, Fontane's novel – and the sympathy it extends to Effi – challenge the Prussian militarisation of society which National Socialism eagerly reinstalled. Consequently, Effi's story becomes that of 'a step from the path' – the title foregrounding a transgression for which, fortunately, she pays. The title may be justified in part by its derivation from the amateur theatricals of the novel, but the film courts popularity by replacing the staging of Wichert's play with one more recognisable – *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* – which has the additional advantage of being by another Prussian author. Since Effi's death ceases to be problematic, Fontane's imagery of female sacrifice vanishes. Opening with a shot of her grave makes it inevitable, right, its sentimental fatalism chiming with the circularity of so many 'classical' texts. Jahnke's observation that sacrifice was the work of Aryans from whom present-day Germans are all descended is – like Jahnke himself – too close to the bone to be included. The presentation of Briest's relationship with his wife tellingly blunts Fontane's challenge to patriarchy. Near the end, when the adultery has become public knowledge, Briest and Luise sit together on a bench as the latter reflects on the injustice of excluding Effi from Hohen Cremmen. Luise is given words which belong to Briest in the novel. She wonders if it is right for a child to grow up without her mother, and asks Briest if that matches his notion of order. Conventionally, of course, males stand for order, females for compassion. The ideological division of the sexes is restored by the scriptwriters, who must have been dismayed by Fontane's easygoing, suspiciously 'feminine' Briest.

Equally important in a Nazi culture that asserted its own sole proprietor-

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

ship of the language of transcendence is the treatment of religion. Fontane's opposition between Protestantism and Catholicism vanishes, together with any hint that the latter (associated with Roswitha) might be an alternative to Prussian culture. Moreover, Gieshübler absorbs Pastor Niemeyer's role near the end – an absorption surely more ideological than his earlier fusion with Rummschüttel, which may have resulted from the need to trim the material and respond to the similarities between them (both being avuncular partial stand-ins for Fontane himself). Only inasmuch as religion is not its best subject does the film resemble *Effi*. It is one of the alternatives to the *status quo Der Schritt vom Wege* renders unthinkable.

Although I have mentioned many of the disparities between film and novel, the consequence of the latter's mastication by the Nazi culture industry, any viewer with a knowledge of Fontane's work – and a large proportion of the early viewers surely possessed one – may well watch nevertheless with a sense of *déjà vu*. Passage upon passage of the novel's dialogue recurs, particularly towards the end, which benefits from increasingly close adherence to Fontane's powerful, intricate words (particularly Innstetten's reflections on how much time must elapse before a duel ceases to be imperative, remarks doubtless too classic to brook alteration). Crass changes alternate with direct quotations that create an illusion of conscientiousness. The switchback rhythm both demonstrates the incoherence of the film's project of combining aesthetic fidelity and ideological revision, and arguably displays a persistence of the rebellion/submission movement Siegfried Kracauer discerned in much Weimar cinema, mixing cavalier rewrite and slavishness. The co-opted producers of culture in Nazi Germany suffer memory flashes of what culture once was, though this intermittent awareness is repressed by their identification with the aggressor who desecrates it. Despite some dissenting opinions both then and now, *Der Schritt vom Wege* really does bear Mephisto's fingerprints. No indication here of Fontane's modernist sense of the unsaid, of the problematic status of signs and language, of Innstetten's jealous, Proustian awareness 'daß alle Zeichen trügen'. No sense of Effi as the representative of the poetic and balladesque, destroyed by the world of prose. None of the similarities between Effi and Geert (the weak nerves, the mimic gift, the ambition), those tantalising tragic hints of what might have been. No sense of woman as the object of a sacrificial system that gives the lie to modern pretensions to enlightenment, or of subjects that are 'ein zu weites Feld' (to use Briest's catchphrase), as the gaze fails to grasp their extensions and sentences trail off in dots. After all, National Socialism does not recognise limitations and yet yearn beyond them, but colonises Otherness. In *Der Schritt vom Wege* the object of colonisation is Theodor Fontane.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

SACRIFICING ONE'S CLOTHES: KÄUTNER'S *KLEIDER MACHEN LEUTE*

At first sight, Helmut Käutner's use of Gottfried Keller's *Kleider machen Leute* has an innocent appearance. And yet it can be perceived with some justification as 'a difficult film to read, if only because the viewer can never forget that it was made in 1940'.[8] This version of Keller's story of the tailor's apprentice whose clothes cause him to be mistaken for a Polish nobleman announces at the outset that it is made 'nach Motiven der gleichnamigen Novelle', making no claim to fidelity. Nevertheless, by conceding difference Käutner invites questions about its causes and effects, which may be aesthetic and/or ideological. And since, as Karsten Witte notes, 'once the war broke out, the production of literary adaptations all but came to a halt', the few that were made assume particular significance.[9]

Difference sets in at the beginning, which gives the prehistory in neighbouring Seldwyla of Wenzel's visit to Goldach, establishing him as a long-standing dreamer of social rise. (Keller's Wenzel, by contrast, is merely an eccentric; it is not social aspiration but overwhelming animal hunger and a readiness to be hung as much for a sheep as a lamb that make him fall on mistakenly proferred dainties.) His elevation in Goldach is no simple accident but realises long-cherished aspirations, some of them inherited from German Romanticism and dear to Weimar cinema, as Thomas Elsaesser has shown.[10] The master mocks the dreaminess that prolongs his apprentice's working day, and Wenzel flings a pair of scissors at him with the shockingly casual violence of quite a few Nazi-era films, the Nazi youth-revolution having disinhibited expression of such urges. The scissors thudding into the bannister surely compromise the image of the gentle dreamer, as does the substance of his dreams. On his master's departure Wenzel's thoughts wander. In a sequence whose combination of the uncanny and social climbing recalls Weimar cinema, several dummies come to life and bow to the well-dressed apprentice. The carriage found in such Weimar and pre-Weimar fantasies as *Der Student von Prag* (1913) and *Phantom* (1922) then pulls up at an open door and a topless woman descends. Although, like so many pre-modern images of women, this one may be allegorical, dissolving into a demurely-dressed girl who personifies Domesticity, the tailor reads the pornographic image realistically, his hat levitating with crass lubricity. The ready violence entails an equally casual vulgarity founded upon the simultaneous entertainment and confusion of opposed female images first proposed in the *Metropolis* (1926) of Fritz Lang and that Nazi-to-be, Thea von Harbou, where virgin and robot-whore

[8] Jill Forbes, 'Kleider machen Leute (Clothes Make the Man)', *Monthly Film Bulletin,* 49 (June 1982), 116.
[9] Witte, p. 105.
[10] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Social Mobility and the Fantastic', *Wide Angle,* 5/2 (1982), 14–25.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

share the same face.[11] The mirror-imagery of Weimar fantasy also recurs when, in the Goldach inn, Wenzel's reflection 'magically' makes his tailor's thimble vanish and executes a carefree flourish with his liberated right hand. In what one might deem Käutner's version of the Lacanian mirror-stage – a more explicit restaging of the events of the Seldwyla opening – Wenzel will watch the transformation pensively, then imitate his own false image.

No longer the victim of a firm's 'Falliment' depicted by Keller, Wenzel is dismissed for recutting the mayor's frock-coat to his own measure, appropriates it in lieu of docked wages, then takes to the road cheerily singing 'Ein Schneider, der muß wandern, es kann nicht anders sein'; off and on the film will present itself as a musical. While sheltering from wintry weather he meets a puppet master, Christoffel, another addition to Keller's story, who halts a coach sent to convey a Russian nobleman and whispers to the coachman that Wenzel is the said count, whatever his protestations to the contrary. As the coach trundles away Christoffel chortles over his successful god-like intervention. The image of Wenzel on the road begins Keller's story, and so Käutner's preamble ends here.

On arrival in Goldach the innkeeper regales Wenzel with his finest victuals while fascinated local dignitaries misread his stammers and pale embarrassment as laudable aristocratic restraint. At this point, though, a new plot-line is interwoven with Keller's, introducing several traditional comic motifs, particularly that of the parallel love affair. Shortly after Wenzel's arrival a lady steeped in Romantic pretensions peers down from an upper inn-window. Seraphina, a firm believer in astrology and long-time correspondent of the Russian count, has arranged to meet him at Goldach. One glance at Wenzel confirms his supposed identity and her infatuation. The real count's subsequent arrival prompts expectations of Wenzel's unmasking, but the Russian surprisingly calls himself Stroganoff (the stereotypical name being the sure signifier of populist entertainment, and *his* servant's name – unsurprisingly – is Ivan), identifying himself as Wenzel's manservant. Has the sight of Seraphina determined him against involvement with her, making him seize the chance to palm her off on the tailor? No clear motive is given, and one can only guess. Only much later, after Wenzel's rejection of Seraphina, will Stroganoff reveal that her ability to mistake a tailor for himself had amused and wounded him, leading him to support Wenzel's imposture.

Despite the prologue's establishing Wenzel's vehement desires – for love, and for social elevation – Käutner's *Kleider machen Leute* consistently exonerates him, presenting him as trapped. The puppeteer sets up the

[11] Richard J. Rundell ('Keller's "Kleider Machen Leute" as *Novelle* and Film', *Die Unterrichtspraxis*, 13/2 (Fall 1980), 160) describes this fantasy sequence as 'delightful', seeing nothing problematic in it. Although Rundell's account of the film notes the imprint of historical circumstances in the elimination of Wenzel's Polishness, to my mind it underestimates the presence of ideology, which does not simply determine one or two elements but dictates the entire structure of devices inserted to minimise Wenzel's responsibility.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

initial confusion with a Catch-22 that renders even his denials affirmations, and another puppeteer – Stroganoff – later pulls the strings. On leaving the coach Wenzel finds himself shepherded back in by the coachman; on his arrival at the inn, serried onlookers prevent his escape; attempts to slip away are intercepted by the innkeeper or a barking dog; no-one credits his repeated protestations of non-aristocratic status; and Stroganoff posts a servant outside his hotel door to ensure he stays. Whatever money comes his way – be it won at cards, or bestowed by Stroganoff – he deposits in a conspicuous place to cover his bills, cued in by the musical setting of Goethe's 'Üb immer Treu und Redlichkeit' playing on the soundtrack. Very little of this is in the Keller original. When Wenzel finally determines to play the count to the hilt, it is only after entrapment in the role has rendered him entirely other-directed, engendering expectations he feels honour-bound to fulfil – particularly those of Nettchen, a simple Romantic bourgeois girl whose dreams he embodies. Eventual success in escaping the town is halted by a call from her sleigh, and Wenzel's incipient confession that he is running away is rapidly reworded into a conventional reference to taking a walk. Thus when Wenzel is unmasked, Stroganoff halts the irate crowd by pronouncing him not guilty, describes his own role in the affair, and even offers the classic nineteenth-century melodramatic solution by proposing to adopt the tailor. Stroganoff had told Seraphina that he had controlled Wenzel's life, 'nur vergaß ich, daß der Schneider ein Herz hatte, das er selber vergab'. Wenzel's bride-to-be, Nettchen, seeks him out in the snowy night but – unlike Keller's – does not feel he has any explaining to do. When he suggests flight to a place where neither of them is known, she says 'keine Romane mehr'. As in Sirk's *La Habañera* (1937), the ability to 'live a romance' is the heroine's key attribute (and renders Seraphina her caricature, the double as scapegoat), but in the end her simultaneous status as surrogate for the audience requires the ability gracefully to return to earth. She had once remarked that like belongs with like, ironically echoing the words of her other tailor-suitor, the author of Wenzel's exposure, Melchior Bohni. Unlike Keller's couple, the two will not seek protection in Seldwyla, that inveterately rival town. When Wenzel worries lest the Goldachers mock her, Nettchen says 'was tuts wenn wir beisammen sind'. This ending is clearly steeped still in the fantasy Nettchen says she has left behind, and which the film visually embodies as a thing of the past – Wenzel's frock-coat on a hanger whirling in the wind.

Käutner's film reworks Keller's story – partly for aesthetic, partly for ideological reasons. The addition of a parallel comic plot is doubtless aesthetically motivated – Käutner the scriptwriter may well have felt the misguided need to flesh out the anecdote – but other changes suggest the presence of ideological considerations, complicating the accepted image of Käutner as aesthete and dandy. Keller's story gives Wenzel a Polish identity appropriate to his presumed incognito, conspiracy having been a major pursuit of the disenfranchised nineteenth-century leaders of par-

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

titioned Poland. In suppressing that identity and having Wenzel mistaken for a Russian count the German scriptwriter of 1940 re-enacts the Wehrmacht's recent vaporisation of 'Poland'. It may well be that Käutner deliberately chose a 'free' mode of adaptation precisely in order to be able to remove the work's Polish reference, thereby insulating his film against topical reference and the fate of his earlier *Kitty und die Weltkonferenz* (1939), banned because of its release just after the outbreak of war and Ribbentrop's objection to its Anglophilia. Topicality is present nevertheless. 'Man hört in der letzten Zeit so viel von Rußland', Nettchen's father tells Wenzel. He surely speaks cannily for the common German spectator after the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact and before the invasion of Russia itself. His added 'die einen sagen dies und die anderen sagen das' could have been the Propaganda Ministry's own wary, roundabout acknowledgement and intended defusing of possible divisions in a public opinion recently exhorted to hate Bolshevism but now asked to approve of Stalin, and yet it also seems to encompass Käutner's own possible heavily coded irony about such voltes-face: it is thoroughly Janus-faced. Stroganoff may get Wenzel into trouble, but a local puppeteer has already plotted his discomfiture, and the Russian kindly disentangles the puppet's strings in the end. The friendliness to things Russian may even be read as extending to appropriation of Eisenstein's symbolic montage, as Wenzel's decision to become the count indeed is marked by the juxtaposition of an ordinary field-bird with a peacock. During this particular, albeit brief era in Nazi rule, 'cultural Bolshevism' is not entirely taboo.

The use of Soviet-style montage is nevertheless ambiguous. It may correspond to the work's partial incoherence (the dreamer's murderous throw of the scissors . . .), or may even constitute an example of artistic 'resistance' – a refusal to forgo a device simply because it might be labelled 'Bolshevik'. It is worth noting, though, that such devices can be found elsewhere in Nazi cinema – for instance, in *Das Fräulein von Barnhelm* (1940). If the transparency of entertainment cinema is compromised by reminiscences of silent-film tropes, this may imply nostalgia for twenties cinema – something displayed also in Fritz Lang's first American film, *Fury* (1936), but persisting among those film-makers still left in Germany – or it may indicate the minor artist's epigonal fixation on the past. If the use of montage is indeed resistance, however, it is symbolic and momentary, buried all-but-invisibly in the middle of the film. It is worth remembering that 'Käutner claimed that he played safe in this film, distancing all political implications through humour and costume'.[12] But although the aesthete avoided work with explicitly ideological connotations, declaring his unfitness for it,[13] his own screenplay here may be seen as incorporating concessions to official sensibilities, perhaps to ensure both its filmability

[12] Forbes, p. 116.

[13] See 'Kunst im Film ist Schmuggelware: Helmut Käutner im Gesprächmit Edmund Luft', in Wolfgang Jacobsen and Hans-Helmut Prinzler (eds), *Käutner*, Berlin 1992, p. 131.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.

and continued protection by the Tobis and Terra production from more explicitly propagandistic assignments. Käutner is indeed an aesthete, as may well be apparent in his friendliness towards the words of French derivation *Der Schritt vom Wege* avoids, but if his film is nevertheless indeed 'difficult to read', as Forbes contends, it is because of the near-indistinguishability of the propaganda he offers as tithe to the powers-that-be from the propaganda they themselves purvey. The officially imposed scene of the journalist's happy conversion to propaganda-company man in *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska!* (1940–1) cannot be the sole culpable moment in his Nazi-period *oeuvre*, for all its status as the only one Käutner himself recognises.[14] The use of montage in *Kleider machen Leute*, meanwhile, suggests either artistic opportunism or eclecticism, and the throwback to Soviet montage matches the film's general composite regurgitation of Weimar cinema motifs. The double puppeteering, for instance, redoubles Weimar cinema's fatalism, defining the German as perennially guiltless. Käutner himself may resemble that frock-coat dancing in the wind, his marionettes and papier-mâché figures representing a half-awareness of his own inability fully to control his work in adverse circumstances, the need to bend to the wind in order to survive. It may seem as if Käutner is the National Socialist period figure most closely akin to the Hollywood director of the *auteuristes*, professionalism his sole relief from the weight of enslavement. And yet he entered film-making precisely in order to preserve his own screenplays from directorial alteration. Ironically, he treats Keller's story as cavalierly as other directors had his own screenplays. He may feel some justification for so doing, for some of his additions are quite successful (for instance, the card-playing circle's charmed reaction to Wenzel's use of buttons as stakes, claiming not to possess the coin of a foreign realm). But the preface in Seldwyla gives the game away: the murderously-flung scissors (is it significant that at this moment the master tailor, seen descending the stairs in profile, has a near-stereotypically 'semitic' look?), the pornographic woman – these are not innocent dreams but fascist ones of killing and taking. The innocence is shadowed by experience, and the impatient hunger is of a piece with a desire that no longer tolerates frustration but will lay the blame elsewhere should anything – or everything – go wrong.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 129–30; see also Käutner's own account of the making of this film, *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska!*, *ibid.*, pp. 115–16.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000.