

PUBLIC WOMEN: THE REPRESENTATION OF PROSTITUTES IN GERMAN  
WEIMAR FILMS (1919-1933)

A Thesis

by

MELISSA LEE HOBAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2008

Major Subject: Comparative Literature and Culture

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## ABSTRACT

Public Women: The Representation of Prostitutes in German Weimar Films  
(1919-1933). (August 2008)

Melissa Lee Hoban, B.A., Bryn Mawr College

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This thesis explores the representation of prostitution in German Weimar films between 1919 and 1933. It theorizes that prostitutes are illustrated through characters who are public women. The women who step out of their homes to enter public, or who are somehow introduced to strangers without leaving their homes are public women. The public women in these films, as public women living in Germany, were in danger of being identified as prostitutes and becoming prostitutes. A woman's public position made her vulnerable to the male sexualized gaze. The male sexualized gaze ultimately led to a woman's prostitution.

The thesis analyzes 4 films to demonstrate woman's depiction as a prostitute. The first film, *Nosferatu*, depicts a seemingly virtuous woman whose husband begins to prostitute her, but ultimately she prostitutes herself in exchange for the service of a supernatural law. The film symbolically discusses social issues regarding prostitution, family life, and venereal disease. The second film, *Metropolis*, protects its public female character from the sexualized gaze with religion and motherhood at the beginning of the film. However, as the film progresses the main character, Maria, is unwillingly

prostituted by the head of the society in exchange for a robot that looks like her. The robot employs the male sexualized gaze and her position as a prostitute to overturn society as a *vagina dentata*. The third and fourth films are *The Blue Angel* and *Variety* respectively. Both of these films depict women in public positions who use their sexuality for gain. These women prostitute themselves. They are not victims as Maria and Ellen are in the two previous films. The women in this chapter use their sexuality and prostitution as a way to attain agency. The women in these films I label as *vagina dentata* because they purposefully destroy men for their own gain. These women use public sexuality to find and engage their male prey as patrons before they emasculate them. The thesis views the women of Weimar films differently than other scholars have by making her the focus of the film and interpreting her public exposure as her gateway to prostitution.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my loving mother, Lorraine Downey.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Robert Shandley, and my committee members, Dr. Phillippy and Dr. Golsan, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research. I would like to thank Dr. Hoagwood, who helped me a great deal with this thesis.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On February 10, 1919 the constitution of the Weimar Republic was adopted. This revision enabled the president to be directly elected by the population and gave full suffrage to women. Achieving the right to vote was symbolic of the general independence of women during this time in Germany. Women's suffrage was one among many freedoms that the Weimar Republic created that radically transformed German society and women's place in it.

While the Weimar Republic transformed the political rights of its citizens it was never able to achieve lasting economic stability. The economic crisis in Germany caused a rise in inflation and unemployment. "A substantial section of the pre-war middle class"<sup>1</sup> lost their financial stability and respected position because of this inflation. Many pensions and welfare checks stopped being distributed. People across the socio-economic spectrum were affected negatively by the country's economic instability. Some shopkeepers and craftsmen were able to profit from the inflation by illegally operating on the black market. The economic conditions of the time made it difficult to predict who would be hurt by the inflation. Such uncertainty and financial instability caused a fear that often enabled people to justify criminal actions with a clear conscience.

Indeed, it was precisely through the confusion experienced by individuals and

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This thesis follows the style of the *New German Critique*.

<sup>1</sup>Detlev Puckert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989) 65.

their fears for their social status that the real psychological impact of the inflation made itself felt. A profiteering ethic became common among people who had previously prided themselves on their rectitude. Filmmakers often used the gruesome parts of reality to sell tickets because they were both an object of fear and of fascination to the people. Still other people engaged in these acts to make their money. And yet still others turned to crime out of sheer hardship, justifying their action on the grounds that it was the only way they could survive. Both phenomena, profiteering and poverty-induced crime, showed that the rather rigid social and moral code of the age of the monarchy had at last begun to work loose.<sup>2</sup> As the phenomenon of instant bankruptcy continued, the moral code deteriorated; and prostitution became a common way for women to support themselves and their families.

The effects of prostitution were additionally popular topics among journalists, scholars, and public officials at that time. As prostitution increased outbreaks of venereal diseases increased. All prostitutes were criminalized by German society between 1871 and 1927 because they were believed to be the cause of most, if not all, sexually transmitted diseases. In order to contain sexually transmitted diseases there was a law passed that subjected prostitutes to police regulation and observation. The law required women of the profession to register with the *Sittenpolizei* (Moral Police). At the time, there was no way for a doctor to identify a venereal disease or to treat it. Nonetheless, part of her registration was a mandatory physical examination. The examination was performed in order to reduce the spread of venereal disease, but truly

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<sup>2</sup>Puekert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* 66

was pointless. Additional precautionary measures required prostitutes to live in regulated housing and refrain from visiting certain public places.<sup>3</sup>

The new regulations and emergency law of 1918 to stop the spread of sexually transmitted diseases actually increased the number of prostitutes in Weimar Germany. The Weimar police had almost unlimited powers to arrest, examine, and detain any woman suspected of being a prostitute or carrying a sexually transmitted disease. Once in the hands of the police, a young girl was in effect excluded from bourgeois society for good. Released only under the regulation of the police, restricted in her movements and in her occupation, her reputation lost, she could only survive through prostitution.<sup>4</sup>

The profession as a whole during the time period was glamorized and despised in German society, just as the liberation of women and their active role in society in the form of the *Neue Frau* was. Many traditionalists in Germany saw the *Neue Frau* as a threat to traditional ideas about women's place in society. She combated traditional notions that gave women no way to express themselves sexually and demanded more freedoms for women.

Prostitutes were many times glamorized and despised in society because of their standard of living and the threat that they presented to other citizens. Prostitutes were able to afford many luxuries that women who chose to maintain their virtue were not able to afford due to the inflation. Society as a whole attributed the spread of venereal diseases to the profession and viewed it as the product of moral corruption. Prostitution

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<sup>3</sup> Christiane Schoenfeld, *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature* (Rochester: Camden House, 2000) 162.

<sup>4</sup> Schoenfeld, *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature* 194

was viewed as unacceptable behavior and an unrespectable profession, yet there was plenty of business for these women to sustain themselves.

The new conditions between men and women made for much tension and anxiety between the sexes. “The system of gender and sexuality in Weimar Germany was however under siege. The “shock of modernity” had placed traditional notions of gender in crisis, both male and female, and much attention was paid to both in that culture.”<sup>5</sup> The men of Weimar Germany often subconsciously blamed women for their problems and imbedded their fears in the guise of female sexuality.

[Men had] a complex of anxieties around loss of power, control, and mastery – ultimately issues of social, political, and economic power, not sexuality, yet often as not discursively represented as a type of castration. What do these mainly social anxieties have to do with men’s sexual fears? In them sexual potency and sexual identity are confused with power over women and social power in general (the power over anyone seen as “less” than masculine). Related to this confusion is the tendency to blame women for any lack of social power experienced by men.<sup>6</sup>

But German men did stop at simply displacing social political and economic fears onto women. Female sexuality was also used to embody male fears about technology. “The fears and perceptual anxieties emanating from ever more powerful machines are recast

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<sup>5</sup> Richard McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity”* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 5.

<sup>6</sup> McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity”* 21

and reconstructed in terms of the male fear of female sexuality.”<sup>7</sup> German men seemed to take nearly every opportunity to displace all of their fears about their changing society onto their relations with women and women’s sexuality. And German filmmakers who wished to make a profit likely saw here a fascination upon which they could capitalize.

Many scholars agree that the films and other literature of this period can be a way of gauging the displacement of male fears. Prostitution as a socially prominent outward expression of female sexuality was very regularly depicted in these films. Many of the films representing prostitutes are representations of women in society overall, and masculine disgust at women’s presence in the public sphere because of the danger that they felt it brought to their patriarchal position. Women as a public force thus correlate with the public position of prostitutes, and both public women and prostitutes are usually one in the same in these films. Particularly public women who exhibit sexuality are identified as prostitutes because any overt sexuality during the Weimar period was an undeniable signifier of a prostitute.

Chapter II of this thesis discusses *Nosferatu*. The film upon my first glance did not contain any public women or prostitutes. However, because the film contained a female main character I considered it more thoroughly. The chapter analyzes the film’s use of symbolic sexuality, displaced publicity, and mediators to find an extended allegory about the dangers of prostitution. The analysis of the film elucidates the extent to which prostitution is imbedded in media of the time. The role of the prostitute can be

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<sup>7</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke [England]: Macmillan, 1988) 70.

held by anyone including the women who appear to be the most innocent.

Chapter III embarks on an analysis of *Metropolis*. The chapter identifies both Marias as prostitutes, who depict the duplicity and danger of innocence that is sexualized. It determines that the role of a prostitute can be occupied by an unwillingly participant, as well as, a willing one. It shows that the most sexual, enticing, dangerous woman is the one who uses her sexuality purposefully and publicly. Additionally, the film demonstrates female power in both a society of prosperity and one of economic degradation. The chapter explains that when women are in public they can only protect themselves from being sexualized to an extent because protection can be overcome. The film through the character of Maria presents a representation of the sexual dangers that women could face in German Weimar society.

Chapter IV discusses the prostitute as *vagina dentata*. The *vagina dentata* motif is “the most direct and violent”<sup>8</sup> of the symbols that depict a fear of female sexuality. The *vagina dentata* is simply a woman who has teeth in her vagina that castrate and may even kill the men that have intercourse with her.<sup>9</sup> The legend extends to animals such as snakes, piranhas, crabs, and eels that live in the vagina giving pleasure to the women in their sleep and castrating men who try to have sex with the women.<sup>10</sup> Ben Jackson explains that there is a trans-cultural physiological explanation for the folklore, Cystic

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<sup>8</sup> Solimar Otero, “Fearing Our Mothers’: An Overview of the Psychoanalytic Theories Concerning the Vagina Dentata Motif F547.1.1.,” *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3 (1996): 269.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Jackson, “Vagina Dentata and Cystic Teratoma,” *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971): 341-2.

<sup>10</sup> Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3, 269

Teratoma. “One common form of these teratomas is called ‘demroid cyst.’ Demroid cysts which grow to the size of large grapefruits, develop within the ovaries, and have the anomalous capacity of being able to generate almost any organ of the human body...”<sup>11</sup> including teeth. Despite the medical explanation that Jackson offers he does not discount psychological explanations of the motif.

Now I would not mean to say that someone once saw teeth in the viscera of a gutted woman and from there developed the *vagina dentata* motif; I am enough psychoanalytically oriented to accept the notion that there is in many cultures adequate anxiety about sexual roles and fear of damage to the highly vulnerable penis that such motifs and myths could have developed without any physiological data whatsoever. ... The relation between syndrome and myth is probably not one of causality, but rather one of curious concomitancy.<sup>12</sup>

He states that he believes that this medical condition may have reinforced a myth that was already in existence. He mentions two main points that he believes reinforced the myth “anxiety about sexual roles and fear of damage to the ...vulnerable penis.”<sup>13</sup> Otero takes his reasoning one step further by explaining that it is all of female sexuality that is at issue with the *vagina dentata*. Otero catalogs the various psychoanalytic theories that surround the *vagina dentata* to conclude that it is a symbol of power, but that it is unclear if the *vagina dentata* is a symbol of female or male power. She terms these two

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<sup>11</sup> Jackson, *Journal of American Folklore* 84, 342

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, *Journal of American Folklore* 84, 342

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, *Journal of American Folklore* 84, 342

powers as the power of the mother and the power of the father. The power of the father is something that the woman who has been denied a phallus wants to take for herself and by castrating (feminizing) him she can usurp his phallic power. The power of the mother is one of vengeance. She at having been denied the phallus devours men not only castrating them but killing them to exhibit the power of the vagina. Otero describes many instances of folklore that are variations of the examples that I have provided and that go into much greater psychological analysis of the motif.

As I cannot reproduce her entire essay here, the main fears that the motif embodies seem most pertinent to this essay. The main themes that she discusses include that men and society fear female sexuality. They fear ambivalence, androgyny, and bisexuality displayed in women.<sup>14</sup> They fear overt female sexuality because the woman is usurping phallic power.<sup>15</sup> Men fear being feminized. Feminization can come in many forms: being outwitted by a female, losing the penis, gaining a vagina<sup>16</sup>, being subservient to a woman, and taking on or exhibiting traditionally defined female characteristics or duties. Men fear the “loss of [their] life literally and symbolically...the loss of ‘manhood’ symbolic or otherwise, is a threat to identity, the ego, [and] the ‘I.’”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3, 271,273

<sup>15</sup> The animal theme encompasses this. The animals in the female’s vagina are said to be the female phallus. These animals “reflect the typical castration complex symptoms: penis envy and the wish to castrate the male penis with one’s ‘own’” (Otero 278). Also a woman’s breast is viewed as a phallus because of its protrusion and life giving white liquid (Otero 271-3).

<sup>16</sup> Otero explains that the loss of the penis often means gaining a vagina because the vagina is simply a lack in Freudian psychology.

<sup>17</sup> Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3, 274



Otero's use of the term "symbolic" in the previous quote is noteworthy because my essay will be dealing entirely with symbolic castration/ loss of manhood and women who symbolically are the *vagina dentata*. The films of the Weimar period are not literal representations or gory horror depictions of the *vagina dentata*.

Movies like *Jaws*, *Carrie*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *Alien* contain literal and symbolic distortions of the monstrous feminine. (In *Jaws*, the shark itself can be seen as a form of the *vagina dentata*.) Creed (1986) mentions the *vagina dentata* and the monstrous feminine when analyzing the movie *Alien* in the context of Freud's notion of the "uncanny" as well as in Kristeva's Lacanian framework of the abject.<sup>18</sup>

The more modern movies that Otero mentions depict the *vagina dentata* and fear of it much differently than the films that this essay will explore. The women in Weimar films are not strange creatures from outer space or mass murderers. The films discussed in this essay are not horror/slasher films. They are tragedies, street films, dramas, and melodramas. The depiction of the *vagina dentata* through the women of the films is closer to a femme fatal or a vamp than an alien. The women are somehow realistic and the scenarios seem plausible and possible in nearly any part of the world, unlike mass murdering sharks. Excessive blood and violence were not a characteristic of Weimar films. If the *vagina dentata* induces fear in the viewer of Weimar films it does so because the women and their expression of sexuality are close enough to the reality of

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<sup>18</sup> Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3, 282-3

the *Neue Frau* that it elaborates on an anxiety present in many viewers.

The chapter explores two films, *The Blue Angel* and *Variety*. It details the destructive power that the main female characters have on their sexual partners in the film. The chapter explains that these women are not *femme fatales* or *vamps* because they are very purposefully castrating the men and usurping their male power. One of the most important ways that these men are castrated by the *vagina dentata* is through a loss of the ability to communicate and connect with society. The men are always castrated economically, thus, emphasizing the prostitute's economic status. The chapter expresses the representation of the films that men are in danger when interacting with a prostitute or any woman who expresses overt sexuality and maintains an independent position. The chapter, also, shies away from the notion of a prostitute as a victim. Instead, these films depict prostitutes who create a form of agency and independence for themselves through their position as prostitutes.

## CHAPTER II

### SACRIFICING THE BODY

Lotte Eisner and Siegfried Kracauer both place the film *Nosferatu*<sup>19</sup> in high regard. *Nosferatu* is one of the most compelling and controversial films that supports the argument of this thesis; any woman depicted as a public figure in films of the Weimar era is in danger of being sexualized and becoming a prostitute. Many people would argue that the character Ellen in *Nosferatu* is virginal, private, and innocent; *ipso facto*, she is in no way a prostitute and cannot be included in the above thesis. Ellen may have some of these characteristics, but upon close examination of the film and her character Ellen is a public prostitute. Her husband's sexual escapades with the vampire bring her into the public realm and facilitate her short-lived prostitution.

#### **The Vampire's Sexuality**

Several factors contribute to Ellen's prostitution.<sup>20</sup> The main interpretation that allows my argument to be true is that vampires represent sexual freedoms and threats. The film is an adaptation<sup>21</sup> of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The vampire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is well known in literary interpretations as a symbol for sexuality and the bite as

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<sup>19</sup> I am using Kino video's 2002 restored version of the film for my analysis because it is currently the most complete rendering of the film. This edition seems to be the closest to the original *Nosferatu* that movie goers saw at theaters in 1922.

<sup>20</sup> The details of some of these examples may change with the restoration of the film that is referenced. Of three restorations that I have seen the premise of my argument remains true and the scenes that are referred to convey the same general implicit message. In different adaptations of the film the names of characters, the editing of scenes, and the presence of certain scenes change according to the version. In other renderings of the film Ellen is usually referred to as Mina or Nina (this seems to be closer to the German original than the name Ellen that Kino gives to the main character in their restoration). Hutter is usually referred to as Harker.

<sup>21</sup> This essay is not about adaptation so I will not delve deeply into the issues that are more centrally focused on adaptation.

a symbol for intercourse.<sup>22</sup> Much of *Nosferatu* differs from the book, *Dracula*,<sup>23</sup> but the movie maintains a representation of the vampire as a sexual figure. Count Orlok, the vampire, represents both sexual freedoms and sexual threats.

In some cultures adolescent boys go on a journey to find their manhood, and frequently in literature adventure and travel have to do with male vitality, sexuality, and vigor. Hutter accepts a journey like this at the beginning of the film. He seems to enjoy both the perils of the journey and the possible rewards. He is encouraged by his employer, Knock, to go on the journey. He shows his excitement for the journey and its perils attesting to the fact that, for Hutter, the journey is one that men are pleased with and encouraged by other men to pursue.

The vampire's importance as a sexual figure can first be seen during Hutter's jaunt with him. Hutter puts his family in danger and eventually causes his wife's death

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<sup>22</sup> See C.F. Bentley, "The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Literature and Psychology* 22 (1972); Deirdre Byrne, "The Lure of the Unspeakable: Why Vampire's Don't Have Sex," *Auetsa* 96, *I-II: Southern African Studies* (1996); Anne Cranny-Francis, "Sexual Politics and Political Repression in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Nineteenth-Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle* (1988); Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, "Feminism, Sex Role Exchanges, and Other Subliminal Fantasies in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2.3 (1977): 104-13; Carrol L. Fry, "Fictional Conventions and Sexuality in *Dracula*," *Victorian Newsletter* 42 (1973): 20-22; Gail B. Griffin, "'Your Girls That You All Love Are Mine': *Dracula* and the Victorian Male Sexual Imagination," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 3 (1980): 454-65; Ellis Hanson, "Lesbians Who Bite," *Series Q*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999); Carlen Lavigne, "Sex, Blood and (Un)Death: The Queen Vampire and Hiv," *Journal of Dracula Studies* 6 (2004): 19-26; Elizabeth Miller, "Coitus Interruptus: Sex, Bram Stoker, and *Dracula*," *Romanticism on the Net: An Electronic Journal Devoted to Romantic Studies* 44 (2006).

<sup>23</sup> Murnau altered names and details that are in the book in his film *Nosferatu* in order to avoid copyright infringement; Murnau was unsuccessful and was taken to court by Stoker's widow. She won the court case and ordered all copies of the film to be destroyed. The destruction of the film left no film in its entirety and is the reason that there are so many different restorations of the film today.

by pursuing a sexual being who returns to his home town. The film begins with symbols of sexuality that lead the viewer to its overarching implicit meaning.<sup>24</sup> Hutter accepts excitedly an offer to go to Transylvania. The journey appeals to him because of the sexual freedoms that it will allow him when away from his wife, but these same sexual freedoms are represented as dangers by being equated and masked as “robbers and ghosts.” The *Häusermakler*, local house agent, Knock, tells Hutter the dangers of the journey. Knock sits high on a stool so that he appears more than a head taller than Hutter who stands next to him. In the medium close-up Knock holds Hutter very close in a parental supportive manner. The film then cuts to an inter-title of Knock speaking to Hutter. Knock says, “You will have a marvelous journey – What matter if it costs you a bit of pain – or even a little blood?” Then a close-up of the two men shows them looking into each other’s eyes. Hutter smiles and appears to be very pleased, if nervous, at the prospect of going on the dangerous journey; then Knock laughs violently causing Hutter to stop smiling. Hutter stops smiling when Knock laughs, and it appears as though Hutter may be disappointed that Knock might be joking that Hutter will experience pain and the loss of blood when he goes on his journey. Later in the scene, Hutter realizes that Knock laughs in glee and he laughs with him. The dangers of the symbolic sexual journey are just as attractive as the journey itself to Hutter. Later in the film the dangers lose their appeal to him when they threaten his manhood and his wife.

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<sup>24</sup> David Bordwell, *Making Meaning : Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

In contrast, Ellen fears his journey, but later welcomes the same dangers for herself. In the next scene Hutter expresses to his wife Ellen his excitement and joy of going on a perilous journey. She expresses terror at the prospect of the journey. The film suggests that Ellen is afraid of the “ghosts and robbers” that he might encounter on the journey, but the scene implies that the “ghosts and robbers” are a façade for infidelity and sexual exploration. The scene enables a reading that what Hutter looks forward to and Ellen fears are the same thing. An outward circular wipe opens the scene on Ellen in a dark-colored dress with a light-colored shawl sitting by the window waiting for Hutter. Here the film depicts her innocence and her fidelity to him. The scene begins with a canted frame of Ellen on the left side. She spots Hutter through the window and straightens her shawl. Hutter’s entrance balances out the scene. He bounds through the door on the right side of the frame and meets her in the center. He looks up at her and holds her hands inside his, and then the camera zooms in to make them fill the frame. The film cuts to an inter-title of him speaking. “I may be away for several months, dear Ellen, away in a country of ghosts and robbers.” The statement is odd considering he is simply going on a business trip. The strangeness of the phrasing and specificity of the statement suggests an underlying meaning. Her reaction continues to draw attention to the oddity of the scene. She breathes very heavily and stares past him with a terrified expression. He grabs her forehead and kisses it forcefully, expressing a desexualized and parental form of affection. The film quickly cuts to open up the frame to its original size. In the frame we can see Ellen in the foreground on the right side standing in shock and unable to move except to lower her head in defeat. On the left side of the frame Hutter

proceeds between the rooms. He runs through the room in the background to gather his things for the journey. The scene closes with a circular wipe of Ellen in the foreground of the scene bowing her head. The scene illustrates that Hutter is out of touch with Ellen's feelings; he appears to completely ignore her feelings. It also brings attention to something unnatural that is happening: this attention pertaining to the unnatural prepares the viewer for the next scene that highlights the underlying sexual meaning of the film. In this scene Hutter continues to eagerly pack for his sexual quest.

The next scene offers more evidence of the sexual nature of his trip. The scene opens onto Hutter packing a satchel that in shape symbolizes male testicular virility. The satchel suggests that his virility increases as he packs it fuller and makes it become larger. As he stuffs the bottom of the two-sided satchel tighter he breathes heavily because of his physical exertion. He reaches into one side, looks up in surprise, and crosses the room to retrieve his journal, which will record his adventures, and adds it to the items that are already in the bag. The film cuts to Ellen entering the room by walking very stiffly through the frame with her eyes very wide and her head to the side, emphasizing her fear. She breathes heavily in dazed astonishment. The film cuts to Hutter throwing his arm around her shoulder and giving her a forceful kiss. Hutter's wife's nearly immobilizing anxiety is in contrast to Hutter's overflowing male sexuality. His sexuality responds to her in the physical act of kissing. Both Ellen and Hutter turn their heads toward the camera. Hutter looks out lustfully for an instant before closing his eyes and smiling contentedly, while her head with her eyes closed falls to his chest. This scene directly contrasts the first scene where she is shown as much taller than he.

In the first scene he approaches her as a boy might approach his mother with good news, but in this later scene he is shown as much taller and as exuding sexuality and masculinity. The introduction of sexuality in the film enables the viewer to read the film symbolically and to, later in the film, more easily identify the sexuality of the vampire and the importance that it has on Ellen's fate. The film continues with Hutter comforting Ellen and taking her to his sister's where her sexuality will presumably be contained. His exit leaves a void to be filled by the vampire.

The vampire connects psychically with Ellen while her husband is gone and begins to fill the space in her life that Hutter left unoccupied upon his departure. The viewer first sees her connection to the vampire at the moment of his assault of Hutter through odd editing. Hutter sees the vampire in the other room and tries to hide in his bed under the covers. Count Orlok slowly walks past the door frame, stops and looks slightly down and to the left. The scene then cuts to Ellen lying in bed below where the vampire's head was in the previous scene with her head turned to the left. She raises her head and looks in the same direction that the vampire was looking. The near eyeline match of the two suggests that they have a psychic connection and are mentally watching the same scene because Ellen can see through Count Orlok's eyes. Ellen's first connection with the vampire arises because of her concern for Hutter, but soon Ellen and the vampire form a connection that excludes Hutter.

As the scene continues Ellen beckons the vampire with welcoming arms. As the vampire hovers over Hutter who has become unconscious, his shadow projects on the wall behind Hutter on the left side of the frame. The film cuts to Ellen in bed



surrounded by her sister and brother-in-law and the doctor. She sits up on the right side of the frame and reaches out. If we were to overlay these two images, then the resulting image would be Ellen reaching toward the vampire's shadow. By reaching to the shadow it suggests that she is one with the vampire and possibly seeing through his eyes. Then, it cuts back to her as she continues to reach and cuts back to the vampire whose shadow moves down the wall until it disappears. The film cuts to the vampire in the center of the scene. He stands from a bent position and then slowly turns his body and head to look behind him. If the scenes are overlaid, he is looking at Ellen. The scene cuts to Ellen in bed. She sits slightly to the right of the frame with her arms outstretched to where the vampire was standing in the previous shot. She looks up and raises her body closer to his so that if the two frames were laid over one another she would be embracing him closely, calling him to her to draw him away from Hutter. Thus the film uses an editing technique to depict the vampire succeeding in convincing Ellen to open herself up to him through his sexual exploits of her husband. By the end of the scene she appears to be beckoning him.

Thomas Elsaesser describes the editing of two other scenes in another version of the film that resemble in their juxtaposition of Ellen and Count Orlok my analysis of the above scene. He interprets both of the scenes that he discusses as Ellen reaching out to and welcoming the vampire. He says, "The logic of the imaginary space constructed by the editing... [is]...imitating a fatal attraction and anticipating the final embrace. What Murnau builds up in such scenes is a kind of architecture of secret affinities, too deep or too dreadful for the characters to be aware of, and even for us, happening only on the

edge of the perception....”<sup>25</sup> Elsaesser’s reading of Ellen is that she secretly desires the danger and sexuality of the vampire. It is a well founded argument and I believe does not contradict my interpretation of her prostituting herself. Elsaesser’s idea about her desire fits into my analysis because I interpret any desire that Ellen has for Count Orlok as only making it easier for her to take him on as a customer. Elsaesser’s description of the “secret affinities” that Murnau includes “on the edge of perception” supports my reading depicting the vampire as a sexual figure who compels and gains control first of Hutter and then through him begins to pursue his wife, Ellen, who accepts Orlok only under the conditions of payment.

### **The Threat of the Vampire**

The vampire represents many of the fears of society.<sup>26</sup> The vampire has unlimited economic means and becomes a threat by virtue of this because he can establish material control over the majority of people who had unstable financial situations during the Weimar Era.<sup>27</sup> His overt sexuality threatens conservatism just as it became a threat to many traditionalists in Germany because of the *Neue Frau*/new woman. She threatened traditional ideas about women’s place in society and their sexual agency. The vampire with the death that he brings to Wisborg represents fears of sexually transmitted diseases. Sex, the economy, disease, death, and someone having

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000) 238.

<sup>26</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, and Leonardo Quaresima, *From Caligari to Hitler : A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Nearly all of Germany at this time had an unstable financial position because of the decline of the economy and lack of employment.

control over another person are all fears present in the people of Weimar Germany that are embodied in the figure of the vampire.

### **The Purity of Ellen**

The sexual threat of the vampire is particularly important regarding Ellen because of her chaste and uncorrupted depiction throughout the film. Ellen is explicitly<sup>28</sup> depicted as a wholesome character from the opening scene and is depicted as “innocent” even after her implied attraction to the vampire. For the purpose of the film Ellen must be untainted. The viewers of the film know explicitly of her chastity because *The Book of Vampires* says that only an “innocent” woman can stop the vampire. Ellen stops the vampire without fail, but her virtue can be questioned because she employs it. If Ellen can conceive of using her purity then she is not really pure. Ellen purposefully deceives the vampire, and traditional notions of innocence do not allow for deception. Ellen recognizes that she is “innocent” and in the same moment realizes that she has to overcome her innocence and deploy it for gain. Ellen can gain several things from the deployment of her innocence.<sup>29</sup> She gains the safety of the society that surrounds her, societal recognition, and sex with the vampire. One can read her death in the film as either happening because she contracts a deadly venereal disease or because she is not entirely “innocent.” If for the sake of this reading we follow the logic of the venereal disease interpretation, then the loss of her innocence remain pertinent because it gives her the ability to prostitute herself, rather than simply being abducted.

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<sup>28</sup> Bordwell, *Making Meaning : Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*

<sup>29</sup> The deployment of her innocence is her self prostitution. The following gains are some of the payments that she receives.

Until the appearance of the vampire the film depicts Ellen as ultimately private, pure, virginal,<sup>30</sup> and protected. She is in no way a public figure. The film opens with her playing with a kitten and it continues to show her sadness that Hutter has picked and killed flowers for her. The opening scenes show Ellen fully clothed, but after the appearance of the vampire Ellen is always in her night gown. Ellen is not shown in bed until after Hutter leaves and the most intimacy that they share is a three-second screen kiss. Ellen does not interact with anyone outside of the family until the vampire psychically connects with her. The film always portrays her in the private sphere of their house. When Hutter leaves he cannot even leave her alone in the privacy of their home because she would not be able to take care of herself and remain concealed. In her home life she is removed from the public sphere so far that she does not even come into contact with hired household employees. She only has contact with Hutter who eventually will bring her into the dangerous public space of the vampire's gaze. After she is in the public eye her depiction as innocent and virginal begins to subside.

### **Ellen Becomes a Public Figure**

Hutter, who presumably maintains Ellen's private life through his income, brings her into the public sphere during his real-estate transaction with Count Orlok. Ellen appears to become another item in the transaction. Elsaesser says that the men exchange her image and that her image replaces money in the real-estate transaction.<sup>31</sup> It seems more likely that her image is an additional item that goes along with the house that the

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<sup>30</sup> Despite her marriage to Hutter

<sup>31</sup> Elsaesser, *From Caligari to Hitler : A Psychological History of the German Film* 239-40.

vampire buys with money. The vampire is the one who is acquiring goods in exchange for money and so it does not make sense that Ellen is a substitute for money because she did not previously belong to the vampire; rather she is something that he acquires. In this transaction Hutter shamefully becomes Ellen's pimp.

The scene begins with Nosferatu sitting at a table on the far left of the frame in a high-backed chair inspecting building plans and forms. Hutter, near to the center of the frame, stands next to the vampire's chair. The slightly canted frame puts more weight on the side where the vampire sits. Count Orlok's superiority and power are shown in the scene through the weight of the frame, Hutter's focal attention on him, and his high-backed chair that enables him to maintain his height and to stay at the level of Hutter who stands next to him.<sup>32</sup> During this scene it is important to this reading of the film that the spectator realize that the scene purposefully accentuates Nosferatu's power and control over the business transaction. It appears that Hutter does not want to prostitute his wife, but that he needs the sale of the house. Since Hutter is unwilling to lose the sale, the Count has power over the transaction.

Nosferatu's displeasure with the building and the transaction causes Hutter to risk adding his beautiful wife into the business transaction.<sup>33</sup> Count Orlok with displeasure drops a building plan on the table and expectantly looks up at Hutter and then back down at the forms. Hutter bends down and reaches into his satchel of virility.

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<sup>32</sup> Mary M. Chan, "Insignificant Dwarves and Scotch Giants: Height, Perception, and Power in Jane Austen." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 26 (2004): 89-97; Bruce Robbins, "The Weird Heights: On Cosmopolitanism, Feeling, and Power." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 7.1 (1995): 165-87.

<sup>33</sup> His wife is a symbol of his manhood and virility.

The camera zooms into a spot on the table between the bag and the papers that the Count has cast aside. Hutter waves his hand across the space in a semi-circular motion that resembles the movements of a magician. The picture drops from under the form that he pulls out of the bag for the count. The casing spins on the table, and then it lays flat with the picture of Ellen facing upwards. It appears that the action was done purposefully, but many would argue that it was purely accidental. If the action was accidental then Freudian ideas about Parapraxes<sup>34</sup> can explain the character's intention and desire that may still have caused the action. When the photograph appears it brings Ellen into the public sphere. As soon as Ellen enters the public sphere of the count's gaze she is in danger of being sexualized and identified as a prostitute.

The transaction that follows suggests that the Count mistakes her for a prostitute and her husband Hutter sells her in order to complete his business transaction. He is displeased about prostituting her, and may be terrified at the possible results of his action, but nonetheless he does give Count Orlok access to his wife the moment he shows the picture. This moment is a turning point in the film and the action of the story because this is the first connection between Ellen and the vampire. At this point their connection and Ellen's identification as a prostitute occur because a tangible, physical object brings her into the public business space of the film and only after that do she and the vampire forge any psychic bond. The film cuts to the original canted shot of Count

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<sup>34</sup> Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (London,: Hogarth Press, 1949). The Oxford English dictionary briefly defines the term as “[a] minor error in speech or action, ...representing the fulfillment of an unconscious wish; a Freudian slip.” “Parapraxes,” *Oxford English Dictionary* (2004) Oxford University Press. 6 June 2008 < <http://www.oed.com>>.

Orlok and Hutter. Hutter leans over Count Orlok and unfolds a piece of paper. Meanwhile, the Count's attention was fixated on the photograph. The film cuts to a spotlighted close-up of the photograph. The action and the photograph are highlighted in this scene more than the real estate business transaction because the business that concerns Ellen is actually the point of the scene. Then, the film cuts to the Count and Hutter. Nosferatu scoops up the photograph. Hutter stands next to him in fear and anticipation; his hands are eagerly by his side and he expresses hesitation. The Count turns to him with an inquiring expression. Hutter bows his head in shameful acceptance. Hutter passively accepts the terms of the sale. After receiving confirmation that his terms will be accepted, Count Orlok lecherously comments on his newly acquired possession. He says, "Your wife has a lovely neck... ." The shot opens up on both men. Count Orlok gives the photograph back to Hutter while looking directly at the real-estate forms. Hutter takes the photograph and quickly puts it into his coat jacket. It embarrasses and frightens Hutter to sell his wife. He quickly hides the photograph perhaps in an attempt to pretend that the transaction did not occur. He cannot admit it to himself that he has just agreed to prostitute his wife. Count Orlok's right hand goes directly from the photograph to acquiring a quill to sign the contract. Thereby, he shows the direct relation between the photograph and the sale. He looks at a seemingly terrified Hutter, as Hutter clutches the photograph at his breast, and proclaims with a slight smile, "I shall buy the house...The handsome deserted house opposite yours..." Then Nosferatu enthusiastically signs the bill of sale. Count Orlok's statement is important; he is not buying any house: he is buying a house that is near to Hutter and his

wife. The house gives Count Orlok the opportunity to bring Hutter's wife further into the public sphere. When Count Orlok arrives at his newly acquired house he gains visual access to the private space of the wife's bedroom and thereby makes it a kind of public stage. After Nosferatu signs the real-estate forms he signals to Hutter that he is finished signing the forms. Nosferatu watches Hutter intently as he gathers the forms and puts them into his bag of virility. Hutter stops for a moment and the two men share a knowing glance that confirms the full transaction.

Later in the film we know that Hutter must be aware at least to some extent of the vampire watching his wife because he sold him the house located across the street from them. Ellen even brings the closeness of the vampire to his attention. After the restrictions of the plague have been announced and many homes have been marked as infected, Ellen sits intently in an armchair in her bedroom reading *The Book of Vampires*. She cringes at every passage and when Hutter enters the room she rises to hold him and looks over her shoulder out the window. She points to the window and the film cuts to an image of the abandoned building across the street with Nosferatu standing in the third window from the top. She turns and looks at Hutter and says "This is what I see every night...!" She pulls herself close to Hutter and then the film cuts to the window where Hutter soon appears shaking his head no. The film cuts to a close-up of Ellen holding *The Book of Vampires* to her breast, staring at him in disbelief. She turns from him, puts her head in her arms crying. The film cuts to Hutter with a serious expression and then cuts to a long shot of both of them in the room. Ellen in the foreground leaves by walking towards the camera and Hutter remains by the window.



He turns to look out the window and presumably sees the vampire as he steps backwards until he reaches the bed and throws himself on it. In this scene the viewer can infer that the vampire watches Ellen and that Hutter knows about it. In the final scene the viewer sees that the vampire not only watches her but controls her. The eyeline-matching in the final scene before she agrees to prostitute herself suggests that the vampire watches her. Additionally, her seemingly involuntary movements towards the window and her constant grasping at her chest suggest that the vampire actually controls her to make her more visible to him by bringing her to the window and to public view. The vampire watches and controls Ellen, and her husband knows that he watches her, but does nothing to stop it.

Hutter's inaction to stop the vampire from watching his wife supports the argument that he made a deal with the vampire regarding Ellen. After he returns home, Hutter is often in his wife's bedroom and does not close the curtains even after she has brought the vampire's presence and gaze upon her to his attention.<sup>35</sup> The curtains are continuously left open. No one, including Ellen, closes them in an attempt to obstruct the vampire from watching Ellen or even to stop her every night from having to see the vampire. Ellen to some degree may actually enjoy the vampire watching her, but Hutter clearly expresses displeasure when she tells him that the vampire watches her. Hutter, however, made a deal with the vampire to allow and enable his pursuit of Ellen.

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<sup>35</sup> In an earlier Kino restoration there is a scene where Hutter in an emotional upheaval swings the curtains closed, but even this scene does not suggest that he is significantly trying to stop the vampire from watching because the very next scene that occurs in the bedroom has neatly tied-back curtains.

Hutter even after having been bitten by the vampire does not stop the vampire from watching his wife. Instead he actually enables the vampire to attack his wife. Ellen decides that she will give herself to the vampire, who watches her and who has psychic pull over her. She gives herself to him through the symbolic act of opening the window to him. In this act she gives him admittance into the house and opens her private space to the public street. She then sends Hutter away to fetch a doctor with the little strength that she has. As Hutter runs from the house he leaves the front door open giving the vampire admittance into his home. It is arguable that Hutter left the door open merely because he was in a hurry, but unlikely. Hutter more than anyone else in the town knows the danger that Ellen has to fear because he is the vampire's surviving victim. He knows that she does not need to fear the plague; the vampire's bite is what she needs to fear, and yet, he leaves her alone in the night with the front door wide open to let the vampire enter. This gesture is arguably part of the agreement that Hutter and Count Orlok made during their real-estate transaction. In this scene Hutter prostitutes his wife and Ellen willingly prostitutes herself.

### **Ultimately Ellen Prostitutes Herself**

Up until this point I have described and explained the way that Hutter brings Ellen into the public sphere and pimps her out to the vampire. Here I would like to explain that Ellen is not purely a victim. She ultimately decides that she will be a public figure in three ways and willingly prostitutes herself in exchange for the death of the vampire. The three ways that she willingly becomes a public figure are that she stands in front of the window that she knows the vampire watches her through; she does not

close the curtain to obstruct his gaze, and she throws her bedroom window open in the final scene enabling the private space of her bedroom to connect with the public space of the night street. Ellen, after identifying that the vampire watches her and that she is becoming a public figure, does nothing to try to stop it and ultimately willingly embraces it in her final act of prostitution. The vampire's sexual pull may have helped Ellen decide to prostitute herself to him, but ultimately she knows the payment she will receive because of the book and only enters the sexual act after learning of his payment.

As in many films of the era a woman who willingly agrees to be a public figure must face her doom. Ellen, too, must face her doom as a public figure. Her doom is death because of the vampire bite. Arguably, her death is an allegory for death that can stem from sexually transmitted diseases that are contracted during sexual acts of prostitution.<sup>36</sup> The scene represents the dangers of prostitution. The entire scene in order to be read as a sexual act must be viewed symbolically. The scenes that the viewer sees while the vampire is in the room all occur above the sheets with Ellen and the vampire fully clothed. The editing between the scenes could suggest the presence of moments that the viewer does not see while the vampire is in her bedroom; but considering the common interpretation of vampire bites as a symbol of sexual penetration the viewer need not imagine what occurs between the clearly visible moments. After the bite and the vampire's death Ellen dies as many of the other people of the town have because of his bite. His bite represents sexual intercourse. People will

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<sup>36</sup>Schoenfeld, *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature* 162, 194.

become ill and die from the fatal bite, so the death is symbolic of the death and sickness that follow sexually transmitted diseases.

Contrary to my reading of the film, it can be argued that Ellen is not a prostitute because she does not receive money for her sexual act. My answer to this argument would be that while prostitutes usually receive money in exchange for sex, they can receive goods and services for the product that they supply. Ellen's prostitution is surrounded by the exchange of goods and services. Hutter's contribution to the prostitution transaction involves the exchange of real estate, which has monetary value. Ellen's prostitution of herself is done to attain the service of a supernatural law that saves other people. It is not uncommon that a prostitute does not receive the spoils of her work. Often a pimp or someone else will take the money that she has earned. In this case all of the people, who are still alive in the town, including her husband, receive the benefits of her prostitution. Her prostitution can be read as a form of martyrdom, but ultimately is not because she does not intend to die. She knows that her husband survived an encounter with the vampire and likely thinks she will be able to, too.

### **The Societal Allegory of the Film**

In order to engage in the previous reading of the film I assume the following implicit<sup>37</sup> meaning within the text. The film is an allegory for a scenario that in general was not uncommon to the Weimar era. Hutter is the man who cannot economically support his wife. He, in an attempt to do so, encounters an economically secure man, Count Orlok, who takes an interest in his wife. He gives the man permission to access

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<sup>37</sup> Bordwell, *Making Meaning : Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*

his wife in exchange for a job that will bring some money to the household. After the exchange Hutter still cannot support the household and Ellen sacrifices her body in prostitution to Count Orlok to save and to support Hutter. The vampire who has economic control over both her and her husband is her patron. He represents the threat of sickness and death that can accompany sexually transmitted diseases. People in Weimar Germany did not know how to test or to treat sexually transmitted diseases,<sup>38</sup> just as, people do not know what causes or how to stop the plague in the film. The film through symbolism and slight suggestions that can be found in a close reading tells a common story of economic hardship that leads to prostitution, which is accompanied by danger.

### **Conclusion**

Ellen is a depiction of the prostitute as a sacrificial lamb. She saves her family through her use of other people's sexual desire for her. She is capable of prostituting herself and overcoming her virginal innocence because of newly found sexual desire that the vampire induces in her. According to the film, only the most innocent of women can become the kind of prostitute who has an impact on the entire society of people around her. As in many films of the Weimar era the women who show this innocence have the most power because their deception and destructive abilities are not suspected by those around them. The power of the innocent prostitute continues to be analyzed in the

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<sup>38</sup> Schoenfeld, *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature*; Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Puekert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*

following chapter on *Metropolis*. Because the robot whore has the façade of innocence, she has more destructive power than she would have had as a cunning, sexual woman.

## CHAPTER III

## THE GREATEST DANGER: SEXUALIZED INNOCENCE

Both Eisner and Kracauer have a lot to say about Fritz Lang and the film *Metropolis*.<sup>39</sup> Kracauer is known for saying that “*Metropolis* was rich in subterranean content,”<sup>40</sup> whereas Eisner is more likely to comment on the production of the film and its style. Some of the content of the film may be more implicit rather than direct. One of the main points of interest that is not readily apparent in the film is the connection that the movie has with social happenings of the time. People often are reminded of the technological importance of the film<sup>41</sup> but may overlook the importance of the message that mirrors German women in the Weimar Era and their modernist movement.<sup>42</sup> The dangers that women encountered in public places are latently portrayed throughout the film, alongside the dangers of female sexuality, and the identification of overly/overtly sexual women as prostitutes.

There are several prostitutes in the film: all of the women in the Eternal Garden,

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<sup>39</sup> For this essay I used the Kino 2002 restored version of the film. The restoration was authorized and supervised by the Murnau foundation. It included significantly more footage than the other versions at my disposal and is likely closer to the original.

<sup>40</sup> Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler : A Psychological History of the German Film* 163 cited in both Peter Ruppert, "Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and the Imperatives of the Science Fiction Film," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 37.1 (2001): 21-32; and Barbara Hales, "Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Reactionary Modernism," *New German Review: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 8 (1992): 18-30.

<sup>41</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic visions of Technology and Fear* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000) 198-215; and Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler : A Psychological History of the German Film* 163

<sup>42</sup> Ruppert, *A Journal of Germanic Studies* 37.1; Elizabeth Lambert, "Mrs. Dalloway Meets the Robot Maria," *Virginia Woolf and the Arts: Selected Papers from the Sixth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf* (New York, NY: Pace UP, 1997).

Maria, and the robot Maria. The women in the Eternal Garden are pimped out by society, Maria is pimped out by the head of the society Joh Fredersen, and Rotwang is the robot Maria's pimp. The position of pimp and procurer is an important one in this chapter because all of the prostitutes in this film are controlled by men. From the moment a woman becomes a prostitute in the film she has no agency. Overt sexuality in public and even before another person is a signifier of prostitution within the context of German Weimar film because in German society at that time any woman expressing sexuality could and would be labeled as a prostitute and arrested by the police.

### **Women of the Eternal Garden**

The first women who are shown in the film are representations of prostitutes. The women in the "Eternal Gardens" are not depicted with money or as performing sexual acts, but these women are selling their sexuality in order to maintain their privileged station in the society of *Metropolis*. The scene begins with a man calling many ornately-dressed, topless, and attractive women together to ask them, "Which of you ladies shall today have the honor of entertaining Master Freder, Joh Fredersen's son?" Their costumes imply that they are to sexually entertain the young man. The notion is furthered by the details that can be seen during their promenade. The first woman to turn and model herself wears a satin hat and a wide Victorian skirt with ruffles and a very sparkly belt, but is only covered on her upper half by a sheer piece of fabric that is attached to her hat. The see-through material does not cover her back and makes it clear that she does not have anything under the piece of material. The older man who called the girls together has her turn around twice to model her body. Another woman in



a spaghetti-strapped dress and adorned with many jewels offers herself to entertain the young man and does so with the gesture of cupping her bosom. The women are turning and displaying their best features as a way of marketing themselves. The women want to work that afternoon and exhibit themselves sexually in a way that can be compared to prostitutes on a street corner trying to get their next job. While the other women promenade and offer themselves, another topless woman can be seen in the background. When Freder arrives, there are about ten girls still gathered to entertain him. He runs from them and after them; they try to chase him and to trap him. Eventually he breaks away from the group to chase after one of the girls. The girl whom he is chasing hides behind a fountain. Freder looks for her momentarily until she calls to him. He and the girl run around the fountain in a playful game meant to emphasize the pursuit and pleasure of catching a woman. The game is done purely for enjoyment because she has already consented to sexually entertain him. The previous scene showed his interaction with men his age in a playful athletic competition, but this scene emphasizes the sexual function of women's company to Freder. He catches her and holds her in his arms in front of a fountain leaning her back to kiss her and presumably continue to more intimate acts. They are interrupted by Maria who enters with many of the workers' children and stops their sexual play.

Maria's arrival is a spectacle that causes all of the women and the men whom they are entertaining to stop and stare. Maria clearly does not belong amongst these women. As the women and the men make themselves visible some are in embraces and others standing in huddles. The gathered groups visually confirm, if there was any doubt

in the viewer's mind, that the garden is a brothel where any sexual desire can be fulfilled for the sons of the powerful men of Metropolis. The woman who Freder is with hides behind him in fear of Maria, and Freder upon Maria's exit seems very affected. His companion tries to sooth him by rubbing his hand to regain his attention. When she cannot, she begins to breathe heavily, hyperventilating from anxiety. The scene begs the question "What does the woman fear?" Considering the nature of the garden she might fear not being paid that day because she has not performed her service, but probably she fears the motherly and soon-to-be-shown religious nature of Maria that would likely condemn her promiscuous behavior. The Eternal Garden is a public place of entertainment where the women are public sexualized prostitutes hired to entertain the sons of powerful businessmen.

### **Maria's Protection in the Garden**

Maria's differences compared to the other women protect her from being identified as a prostitute. The women of the Eternal Garden are dressed provocatively in glamorous clothing that is adorned with jewels. Maria in contrast is dressed very plainly. She is not adorned in jewels and she is dressed conservatively. Her clothes are loose fitting and cover nearly all of her skin. Her clothes pragmatically cover her body and do not have the added function of alluring men by making her appear provocative. Maria is partly protected in this scene, from being identified as a prostitute, by the adornment and clothing semiotics of prostitution that the scene and the garden propagate.

Maria, additionally, brings protection from the label of prostitute with her. Maria enters a public space accompanied by children.<sup>43</sup> If her accompaniment in itself is not enough protection from the label, then her choice of accompaniment is. Maria, while surrounded by children, embodies the image of a mother.<sup>44</sup> She is protected by the children because they show that she already serves her function as a nurturer and mother, rather than as an alluring inciter of desire. Her demeanor suggests reprimand and severity that are not shared by any of the other women. Maria upon entering the public garden displays many forms of protection to separate her from the prostitutes and avoid being identified as one.

### **Despite Maria's Protection**

Even through all of her protection Maria becomes an object of desire to Freder. The duplicity of her objects of protection makes it possible for Freder to be attracted to her. The children, while shielding her from being identified as a prostitute, draw attention to her imagined fertility<sup>45</sup> and induce *Mutterliebe*. The children surrounding Maria remind the viewer and Freder that she is a woman, and that with her, sex may not just be a game but a form of production. Considering the importance placed on production and usefulness in Metropolis's adult society, it is no surprise that Freder is attracted to her fertility. Furthermore, her pragmatic clothing, rather than entirely

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<sup>43</sup> Women of the era were in danger of being identified as prostitutes by police if they were seen in a public place unaccompanied. Schoenfeld, *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature*.

<sup>44</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," *Theories of Contemp. Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 206

<sup>45</sup> Huyssen, *Theories of Contemp. Culture* 206.

distracting Freder from her femininity, likely serves to add an element of mystery and desire of the unknown that the other women of the garden do not possess. Her firm and reprimanding gaze that is directed toward Freder serves to entice him because she seems unavailable; whereas, all of the other women are willing sexual partners.

Freder does not mistake her for the type of woman whom he has encountered in the garden. Her sexuality is not offered to him at all, let alone as a plaything. Maria conveys familial desire through her matronly appearance and demonstrated ability to guide the children. The children, we know, are the worker's children, but they appear to be her children as she enters the garden. She leads the children through the door, and they all timidly follow her like a mother duckling leading her babies. As she enters and remains on the platform, that ironically resembles a stage, she places her arms around four of the children to hold them close in a loving, protective manner. In this moment she shows that she is taking on the dangerous role of a public woman by standing on the stage. She does this in order to show the children that there is another sector of society that lives differently. She is depicted as the protector and nurturer not just the activist. As the children look around, one of the boys is pressed against her side with his arms around her in a hug. As she speaks all of the children listen and look up to her with intense interest. The children's responses to her leave no question in the viewer's mind that she is a mother and that she is a good one. She does not incite in Freder the desire to destroy the familial bond; rather she incites his desire to become a part of a family because she represents a strength and a purpose that he has not yet seen.

Maria's public appearance in the garden is set to make her the most public figure there. When Maria enters the garden she stands with the children on a platform that resembles a stage. The editing suggests that all of the people in the garden are coming out of the places that they have found for some privacy in order to watch her. She and the children are a spectacle and a show to all of the other people in the scene. Her motions to show the children their "brothers" in the garden are done with wide expansive motions as would be done on a theatrical stage. On her stage Maria is the focal point. She is in the front and the center of all of the children and towers above them so that visually she is not obscured. She speaks and all of the children direct their attention to her using a common theatrical device to direct the audience's attention to one person on stage. Maria places herself in public view when she enters the garden. At this moment she becomes a recognizable public figure. She draws Freder's attention and (sexual) desire, which he can only express as love and with honorable intentions because her public image was presented in a familial packaging.<sup>46</sup> She endangers her virtue by entering the public arena of the garden. She is in danger of being sexualized and identified as a prostitute, but because she guards herself with children and drab clothing she is only sexualized and not believed to be prostitute.

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<sup>46</sup> The argument that I have read in many feminist texts that marriage can be a kind of prostitution of women who are sold from by their father's to their husbands could well be applied here. The basic argument is that the husbands gain a permanent sexual partner in return for providing her living needs. I choose not to fully explore this aspect of the public woman and prostitution because my essay predominately is not meant to focus on this kind of prostitution. that was rampant in Weimar Germany, on which I think all of the films in this thesis are at some level commenting. E. Goldman, "The Traffic in Women" *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1969); J. Scutt, "The Economics of Sex: Women in Service" *Australian Quarterly* 51.1 (1979): 32-46.

### **The Danger of a Sermon**

The sermon that Maria gives to the workers in the underground catacombs is similar to her appearance in the Eternal Garden because she is presented in the public sphere, without being viewed as a prostitute. Maria is in danger of being identified as a prostitute during her sermon, just as any woman is in Weimar films. She is on a stage in front of all the male workers. Maria is particularly in danger of Freder who upon seeing her in public again might decide that she is not virtuous because of her frequent public appearances. The other men who presumably have seen her give this sermon before would greatly change the scene if their gaze, even slightly, suggested desire, and she were not viewed by them as a revered saint.

### **Again Maria Is Protected**

Maria combats the risk that she takes as a public figure, as she did in the Eternal Gardens, while she is in the catacombs giving her sermon. Maria does not shield herself with children. Her plain clothing seems slightly more extravagant than the workers' and their wives' drab clothes, so that does not protect her. Instead, in the catacombs she preserves herself with religion. Maria on the stage in the center of a large room is dwarfed by large crosses. The catacombs and these crosses are a reminder of religious beliefs and virtues. Maria on the stage speaking to the people as a religious figure does not provoke sexual desire; she invokes reverence. She takes on a saintly appearance with a shawl over her long sleeves and arms stretched towards the heavens. She is not actually a religious figure and is not really there to share God's word with the workers, but as they enter weary from work with their heads downcast in prayer she appears to be

a secular goddess. Maria's message is actually a political message that she shrouds in a biblical story. She suggests that she shares the desires of God with the workers. She propagates biblical virtues of peace and patience through the story of the tower of Babel and is thus viewed as a saintly preacher rather than a political speaker by the workers.

### **Maria's Protection Overcome**

Maria tries to hide her sexuality while she is in the catacombs, but she is not entirely successful because she is sexually desired by Rotwang. Her public position entices Rotwang. He, however does not desire her while she has all of her religious protection employed during her sermon. Rotwang begins to have an uncontrollable desire for her because he sees her engaged in a private moment unprotected by religion and saintly reverence.

Joh Fredersen and Rotwang who spy on Maria's public sermon identify the sexual danger that she could embody. After only having seen part of her sermon Joh Fredersen tells Rotwang to make the robot in her likeness in order sabotage the workers and satisfy his "male anxieties."<sup>47</sup> "Politically his reaction makes little sense since Maria is preaching patience and passivity. But from Fredersen's perspective Maria represents a potential rival to his power, a threat to male domination,"<sup>48</sup> her message does not matter to him. Ruppert argues that it is not simply feminine values that threaten Fredersen's male power, but it is her feminine sexuality that is threatening too. Maria has captivated his son's attention. His son, Freder's desire is so great for Maria that he defies his father

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<sup>47</sup>Peter Ruppert, "Technology and the Construction of Gender in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *Genders* 32 (2000): 10.

<sup>48</sup>Ruppert, *Genders* 32, 13.

and enters the underground city posing as a worker, and he attends a meeting that opposes the way that his father rules the city. Fredersen is unaware of the extent of his son's defiance but he does realize that this woman has a power over the people that, if used against him, could be very dangerous because she appears innocent to them and if sexualized she could cause a lot of damage. Her potential threat becomes more important to Fredersen than her real threat.

Rotwang in contrast knows the extent of Fredersen's son's disobedience. While spying on Maria he sees that Freder desires her and after he sees Freder's desire he seems to have a sexual desire for her himself. She becomes dangerous because of the attractive pull that she has on the two men despite her non-sexual representation. Rotwang watches Maria confidently approach Freder who kneels before her, after her sermon. Her motions are somewhat stiff as she approaches him and covers the neckline of her dress to hide her sexuality as she leans to speak to him. Rotwang is a voyeur who is enticed by the private moment between Maria and Freder that is made public by his spying. Rotwang is enticed by her modesty, by the kiss that he sees her sensuously place on Freder's cheek, and by Freder's pleasure at having received the precious kiss. Here Maria tries to maintain her virtue in Freder's eyes and is successful. However, overall she cannot maintain her non-sexuality because this private moment is made public without her knowledge. Public displays of intimacy with one person are more dangerous to her sexual persona than a sermon to several hundred.

Rotwang expresses his desire for Maria as Joh Fredersen leaves the catacombs. After Fredersen says that he wants Rotwang to make the robot in Maria's likeness, it is



implied that Rotwang must catch her and lock her away, so that the robot can take her place. Only at this point, does Rotwang completely turn away from his spying place in the wall. He displays hidden signs of desire for Maria, and he wishes to possess the public figure intimately in private. As he turns, his eyes are wide with desire and he protectively covers the hole so that Fredersen will not see and desire the woman whom he will soon capture for himself. Even as Rotwang moves his body towards Fredersen to engage in conversation he leaves his arm covering the hole. Rotwang tensely and mysteriously shakes Fredersen's hand and says "Leave me now, Joh Fredersen... You will find the way back without me..." Fredersen must notice the strange mysteriousness that Rotwang expresses as Rotwang's hand slowly feels its way to the hole in order to be closer to Maria. His pull to her shows the strength of the sexual desire that she induces. Fredersen cannot understand this sexual pull because he did not see the intimate moment between his son and Maria that was made public by Rotwang. Fredersen holds Rotwang's other hand for a moment longer and scrunches his forehead, perplexed, before turning to go. Fredersen releases his hand and turns to leave. Rotwang closes his eyes and leans his body against the wall as though he is imagining the desires that he will soon be able to fulfill with Maria's newly discovered sexual being. Fredersen is still leery of his behavior and turns back to him, again expressing that he notices the strangeness of Rotwang's demeanor by pausing for a thoughtful moment before exiting the frame. Rotwang desires Maria and veils his desire in front of Fredersen, because after seeing her private moment in public he desires her so greatly that he wants no one else to know of her sexuality because they would desire her too.

### The Light in a Female Landscape

The chase and the capture of Maria in the catacombs are accomplished entirely with a flashlight. The sexual nature of the scene in the catacombs can be seen throughout the chase sequence. The initial appearance of the light may simply be to foreshadow the coming events that will focus on it, but considering the sexual nature that some scholars have attached to the light when it follows Maria, it seems noteworthy that the light does not first shine on Maria.<sup>49</sup>

The light from the flashlight first appears right after Fredersen leaves Rotwang alone in his spying cavern. The light is held and controlled by an unknown person. Rotwang stands covering the spy hole. The light scrolls across the cavern wall, up Rotwang's arm, over his face, and across the other wall making a diagonal motion to enter and exit the frame. After the light has gone Rotwang turns with his eyes wide and says seemingly to a Fredersen who cannot hear him "You fool! Now you will lose the one remaining thing you have from Hel – your son!" Considering later scenes involving Maria it seems likely that the light is meant to symbolically uncover hidden repressed desires. Rotwang expresses a desire to make Fredersen lose his son. His means is likely to take away and to taint Freder's object of desire, Maria.

The two scenes that involve the light of the flashlight sandwich a scene that expresses physical desire, which enables the viewer to read the light as an object that has some relation to sexual desire. The film cuts from Rotwang to Maria and Freder talking

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<sup>49</sup>Ludmilla Jordanova, "Science, Machines, and Gender," *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000) 187; Huyssen, *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic visions of Technology and Fear*, 208.

below. Their affection becomes more physical; Maria places a hand on his chest and he continuously caresses it. Maria places her hand over Freder's hand in a motion of holding him away, after he leans in closer to her, and she says to him "Until tomorrow in the cathedral!" After the inter-title, a close-up of the two fills the screen. Half of Freder's head fills the top left of the frame and Maria's hands can be seen on his shoulder as she leans close to him. Maria's entire head fills the bottom right of the frame as she looks up at him. The predominance of Maria in the frame gives the impression that she is the initiator of their intimate moment, which displays a small degree of sexuality and sexual desire that she has been trying to hide before this point in the film. In the next few moments the frame shows Maria close her eyes and slightly turn her head to invite a kiss from Freder. Freder, in the next instant, leans down and presses a firm kiss on her lips. The kiss is a rather long screen kiss that lasts over ten seconds. The virginal Maria's sexuality has been unleashed. Maria is shown wanting more by the length of time that she takes to open her eyes. Maria signals to Freder to leave, and he caresses her outstretched arm with his hand and presses his cheeks to her hand before he exits the frame, leaving her standing with an outstretched arm alone. Maria draws her arm back to her chest, and the camera pans with the same speed as the movement of her arm to place her in the center of the frame because her lover is gone and she is now the main focal point of the scene. Maria presses her hand to her heart dreamily, and then stops seriously to look over her shoulder and presumably think of the things that she needs to do and the virtuous nonsexual figure that she must continue being. Maria then allows herself one last smiling gaze in the direction of Freder. Maria's longing for

Freder expresses a physical desire that she has that is unfulfilled. It is very noteworthy that Maria has any physical desire because previously she has represented a woman without sensuality and sexuality.

Peter Ruppert brings attention to the landscape of Metropolis and in agreement with several other scholars<sup>50</sup> identifies the catacombs as “feminized space.”<sup>51</sup> He draws the contrast between the upper regions as male space and the lower region as female. The concept that the catacombs are a “feminized space” is supported by his stated concepts of dystopian landscapes, but the power of Maria there is just as supportive. The catacombs are a place where Maria is the leader and main power. It is a space where she can have agency as a woman and is not repressed by patriarchal society. Here Maria leads the people, and the male workers listen to and want to follow her preaching. Maria in this space can take control. She organizes the workers’ meeting and leads it in every way. Even after the meeting is over Maria is in control of the physical intimacy that she partakes in with Freder. As exemplified in the above scene analysis she initiates nearly all contact, but she stops contact that she would enjoy and represses her female desire, possibly because she still feels tied to the bounds of the male ruled society above the catacombs. Ruppert in his discussion of the “feminized space” quotes Springer who draws a correlation between the ‘feminized space’ and “female sexuality.” “[T]his feminized space exists far below the surface of the earth because, in psychoanalytic terms, female sexuality has been deeply repressed in the city of Metropolis.”<sup>52</sup> It does

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<sup>50</sup> Roger Dadoun and Claudia Springer are both quoted by Ruppert in Ruppert, *Genders* 32, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ruppert, *Genders* 32, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Ruppert, *Genders* 32, 6.

appear that Maria's sexuality has been repressed. In public spaces where her sexuality is likely to be most poignantly identified, Maria tries to hide it. Even when Maria believes she is having a private moment she does not fully express her desire for Freder, but the small desires that she does express can only be displayed in a (believed to be) private moment in her female space. If the catacombs are the female space, then they are also the only place that Maria is able to express bits of her repressed desire.

The difficulty with viewing the catacombs as a safe female space is that the space is not safe once Rotwang and Fredersen secretly enter. Unbeknownst to Maria the men, after secretly entering to see her public display, and staying to make a private moment public, decide to conquer the "feminized space" of the catacombs by conquering Maria. The female space, and its intrusion symbolically offer a reference to rape, as a public intrusion; just as, the "flashlight pinning Maria down in the caverns [is] symbolically raping her"<sup>53</sup> with the public eye of a spotlight. Rotwang as the wielder of the flashlight becomes her sexual predator.

Rotwang clearly can be viewed as a sexual predator<sup>54</sup> during his chase of Maria through the caverns of the catacombs, but Rotwang does not entirely present this image. It is Maria and her reactions to his pursuit of her that illuminate the sexual nature of the chase. The chase and its sexual nature seem to be most dangerous because the flashlight is used as a spotlight to symbolically bring all of Maria's most private moments into public display for an unknown viewer. Yes, Maria knows that she is being watched, but

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<sup>53</sup> Huyssen, *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic visions of Technology and Fear*, 208

<sup>54</sup> Jordanova, *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture* 187

in her panic she touches herself in what can be read as a sexual manner.

After Freder leaves Maria in the catacombs she looks after him longingly, and then the film cuts to Rotwang coming to the exit of a passage. Presumably, he has found a path from his spying room to where Maria is and is watching her from very nearby. The frame shows Rotwang centered between two brick walls. His metal hand, “indicating the threat of the female as castratory,”<sup>55</sup> rests on the wall as the focal point of the frame. It is possible that the earlier beam of light scrolling across him represented a remembrance of the castration *violation* that he suffered from the female robot, and that he intends to take vengeance on another female for his suffering.

Rotwang uses his castrated hand to remove a brick from the wall and to drop it in a pile of stones next to him. The film cuts to Maria turning her head to the left in fear and fondling the top of her right breast. The editing tells the viewer that Rotwang is very close to Maria, and that she does not see him. She only hears him. Maria has a candle that makes her visible to Rotwang, but Rotwang is hidden in the shadows and darkness of the catacombs. The film cuts to the crevice where Rotwang was. The editing suggests that this empty crevice is what Maria sees. The film cuts back to Maria, who pulls her shawl closer to her rubbing her hand over her chest again in a private way, but publically visible to Rotwang. Maria is often read as the virginal figure throughout the film because she is such a contrast to the robot Maria, but she too is a sexual being. Arguably, she is more of a sexual being than the robot by sheer biological parts. She

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<sup>55</sup> Ruppert, *Genders* 32, 15.

shows that she is just as sexual in a physical, enticing, desirous way as the robot Maria throughout the rape/flashlight scene when she touches herself and Rotwang pursues her.

The next cut depicts a long shot of Maria, who turns to take another path away from the noise. She walks out of the frame, and the film cuts to her ascent of a stairway with eerie shadows. As she is about to turn a bend on the stairwell a shadow moves towards her. She walks backwards towards the camera. Then she turns towards the camera and her hand begins a motion towards her chest. Throughout this scene Maria and her touching depict the sexual nature of the chase. The frequency at which she touches herself, and the energy that she does it with increase as the scene progresses. The film cuts to a side view of her standing in another cavern with holes in the walls behind her. She clenches her open hand into a fist and begins to walk with her candle in front of her. She walks out of the frame and the film cuts to her walking into another. She stops to look behind her and continues to walk leaning forward with her arm outstretched to see into another tunnel. The film cuts to medium close-up of Maria quickly turning her head as in response to having heard something behind her. Then she slowly turns her entire body, and first places the heel of her hand on the outer edge of her breast and then places each finger individually around it. The sexual nature of the scene is undeniably illuminated in this action because of the specificity of her hand motion. Her left hand holds her left breast firmly until the film cuts to a long shot of Maria (presumably Rotwang's view) who removes her hand and turns while holding her candle above her in an attempt to see the danger that she hears.

Maria walks toward the wall of the tunnel that she just left. The quick cut of a machine hand over a candle flame extinguishing it preludes a cut to Maria in the darkness of the cavern frantically running backwards until she hits a wall. The resistance of the mechanical hand to fire suggests that Rotwang has become stronger because of his castration. As soon as Maria hits the wall, the film cuts to a medium shot of her pinned against the wall. In the darkness she rubs her right hand over her bosom and her left hand towards the front of her hip. Again the sexual touching escalates so that her southern regions are included in its attentions. Then she stretches her arms down towards the wall. The flashlight scrolls over her and her bodily contortions cause the strings lacing up her dress to open slightly between her breasts, exposing the very femininity that she was trying to hide at the sermon and in the gardens. The light moves out of the frame, and the film cuts to follow it. The flashlight lands on a crevice in the wall where human skulls stick out of the dirt. The decaying human remains signify the destructive capabilities of female sexuality because they are deep in the female landscape of the catacombs and next to a woman who appears to be working her way towards an orgasm.

The cut back to a close-up of Maria portrays her terrified response. She stares to the right with her eyes wide with horror and her mouth appearing to yell. Her hands go directly to her neckline and fondle the tops of her breasts, again declaring her sexuality and sexual desire. The next cut reveals a long shot of the cavern. Maria is on the right of the frame and the spotlight is on the left. The circle of light moves down the wall in back and forth motions and across the floor towards Maria. Then it moves up the wall



next to her and around her in a circular motion twice. The light teases her moving on the ground near her feet. While the light moves rather slowly up her body, Maria rubs her hips and watches the light intently. The sexual nature of the light, as it teases and caresses her body with her own hands helping it, in effect seems apparent. Then the light moves around her in seemingly patternless quick motions and Maria's hands gravitate to her chest to continue the sexual intimacy that the light has abandoned. Maria's facial expressions tell us that she fears the light, but her hands tell us that she desires and enjoys its presence.

The film cuts to a close-up of Maria; her hands are at her waist, and the laces of her dress are pulled tightly open at her chest. Maria stares directly at the camera, breaking the fourth wall. Her eyes are wide in alarm, and her mouth open in astonishment. The camera moves slightly to the left as her hands glide across her stomach and up to her chest. Her arms cross so that she clutches her left breast with her right hand and her right breast with her left hand. Her fingers move frantically in a massaging motion up to caress her shoulders and neck as she embraces herself. She rubs one hand across her neck and down to the side swell of her breast, and the other hand moves clearly across both of her breasts in an oddly erotic motion. The next cut displays a human skeleton lying on its back exposed in the dirt and illuminated by the light. The head is propped on a rock as though it were a pillow. The response cut reveals Maria pointing in what is presumed to be the direction of the skeleton. Again death in the female landscape suggests that female sexuality has the potential to be destructive. However, Maria's response to the skeleton tells the viewer that she may fear several

things regarding sexuality. Maria might fear its destructive potential for others, but she might also fear its destructive effect on herself because if Maria is sexualized and a sexual being she can no longer lead the workers and safely continue her public life.

The following cut is a long shot of the cavern. The light moves across the floor to Maria. The light begins to move up her body. When the light reaches her shin, the film cuts to a close-up of Maria pressing her shoulders against the wall. Her back is arched, pulling the straps of her dress open. Her hands are at chest level and palms towards the camera in a gesture of pushing something away. Her gesture suggests unwanted physical advance and possible rape. Her lips move frantically as she speaks something that the viewer cannot hear and closes her eyes. She straightens her body and arches her back further pulling her dress open more in a strangely orgasmic motion, and raises her hands to shoulder level. Considering her motion of resistance in this scene, it seems to be begging the reading that although she does not want to be raped she nonetheless enjoys the sexual feelings that she has repressed because she is a sexual being. The spotlight reaches her face and she pulls her shoulders back violently, adding another 1/2 inch opening in her dress. Her head juts forward from its leaned back position and her eyes pop open in a startled way. It is almost, at this point, as though she is terrified that her private masturbatory motions are exposed in a public spotlight. The film cuts to Rotwang's eyes peering over the flashlight with skulls on either side of him, and then it cuts to Maria's aghast expression. Her breasts heave with her breaths and she nods her head slightly up and down as though she is saying yes. She opens and closes her mouth as though having a great thirst. This cut when watched separately from the

surrounding cuts is strange because her writhing is reminiscent of great pleasure and desire, not necessarily a depiction of fear. She seems to be overflowing with sexuality and that may be why her robot counterpart is so sexual. The robot sexuality could be her own repressed sexuality released publically.

The next cut shows Maria running from Rotwang and his light. Then the film cuts to a frame of complete darkness, except for a light that illuminates Maria running in the cavern. No matter how dark it is and how hidden she might be, Rotwang's light can find her. He is depicted as revealing her hidden self. He reveals a hidden version of her later with the robot and here he reveals all sexuality that she has hidden. She cannot hide her sexuality from him at all. The film cuts to her flailing her arms in a medium close-up and running into a wall. She turns leaving her shoulders on the wall only to find the light directly on her. She gyrates her hips several times before turning to run suggesting the gyrating motions of sexual intercourse. The next cut displays Maria standing in a slight corner staring at the light rubbing her hand on her head and through hair with her pelvis forward. She turns to run and the camera follows. Her arms are wide, and her shawl dangles from one arm. She runs to a dead end and stops, arms stretched to the sky for a moment. She bends backwards turning until she falls into a wall. The film cuts to a close-up of her arms wrapped around her and her side pressed to the wall, mouth agape, head tilted downward causing her to look up in order to see forward. Her hands shake and she says something. Her shaking hands come to her mouth and as she screams she lets several fingers go into the sides of her mouth.

In several cuts she turns and runs up stairs until she is out of the caverns and in a portion of Rotwang's house. She presses her entire body on several of the doors, in both an attempt to open them and to exhibit sexual motions. The light lands on her back when it appears. Her hands are above her head, and her body is firmly pressed against the door. She slowly glides her hands down the door, the way that she might glide them over a lover. The Maria moves to cower in the corner of the doorway, and turns to face the light. The film cuts to the back of Rotwang, directing the light towards her in the foreground. Maria's arms are outstretched, and she is pressed into the corner of the doorway with the light on her upper half in the background. The image fades so that only the spotlighted portion of Maria can be seen for a second before it goes completely black.

Maria, in this scene, becomes the object of sexual desire and displays her sexuality openly. Her touching and gyrating suggest more than just a chase scene. Maria expresses sexual behavior so many times throughout the scene that it becomes difficult to view it simply as a chase scene. It is difficult to believe that she responds to fear with masturbatory motions. The way that the scenes are edited together makes them unmistakably part of a chase scene, but if they were slightly rearranged they would clearly represent a sexual encounter.

It is very noteworthy that Lang directed his actress to respond in this way for the chase scene. It seems likely that he had an implicit sexual meaning that he wanted the viewer to find. He wanted the viewer to recognize Maria's sexual potential in order to humanize her, by separating her from the saintliness that was illustrated in earlier scenes.

He wanted the viewer to see the similarity between these scenes and the sexual scenes of the Maria robot. The scene is extremely long as I hope to have demonstrated with a full analysis of it. Lang likely made it so long in order to draw attention to it because it is the only scene that Maria expresses outright sexuality and desire. Even if a person is distracted during the film they are not likely to miss this scene.

### **The Threat of the *Doppelgaenger***

Maria's previous goodness and lack of sexuality as a public figure mask the threat that she embodies. The robot, Maria's *doppelgaenger*, demonstrates the threat that the original sexually inchoate and moral Maria with her position as a woman and as a public figure, if sexually developed and destructive minded could engender. "The good Maria's potential to release her *doppelgaenger* also marks her as a potential threat, the danger of nature run amok."<sup>56</sup> The false Maria embodies the danger of sexually public women and prostitutes, and it particularly encompasses the threat of the innocent, pure, and trusted woman, Maria, being suddenly sexualized and demoralized.

Maria's body is sexually titillating, but before the robot uses it, it was not exhibited publicly because of Maria's modesty. The slight sexuality that Maria exhibits is veiled as fear during a chase scene. The robot unveils her sexuality in every motion that she makes. The first appearance of the robot Maria is with Joh Fredersen. The robot Maria's image is exhibited with oval framing. She has an alluring smile, dark eye makeup, darker lipstick, and her hand on her hip. All of which are uncharacteristic of the original Maria, and usually the semiotics of prostitution. The film cuts to a similarly

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<sup>56</sup> Hales, *New German Review: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 8, 25

framed medium close-up shot of Joh Fredersen, who motions her to move forward. The film cuts back to the original frame and the robot Maria slowly sauntering forward to accentuate the movement of her hips. The next shot of Maria and Fredersen has the robot Maria standing fairly close to him, looking him directly in the eyes with an alluring expression. Her posture is sexual; her arms and shoulders are pulled back so that her chest sticks out towards him. The film cuts to a close-up of Joh Fredersen with his hands in a tense position. The inter-title says, "I w a n t you to visit those in the depths, in order to destroy the work of the woman in whose image you were created!" The accentuation on "w a n t" with the extra spaces suggests that Fredersen may "want" more than just that from this woman. He appears attracted to her to such a great degree that he is just barely able to maintain his composure. The scene continues and Freder finds the two in a slight embrace, which causes him to become ill with a fever. This scene shows Maria's sexuality and its ability to entice Fredersen. The power of female sexuality is shown in just these few moments of screen time because in an instant the desire that she induces causes the most powerful man to stumble on his words, and his son to contract a fever.

Nonetheless, the most notable exhibit of the robot Maria's sexuality occurs when Freder is suffering from a fever. The robot Maria is exhibited in a public hall to perform an erotic dance and prove her complete ability to pass for a true woman. Maria is successful and all of the men at the dinner believe her to be a real woman. The level of her sexuality is a danger. The men find her so attractive and want her so much that they begin to fight amongst themselves to attain her. Josaphat explains the effect of the erotic

dance to Freder with a mixture of inter-titles and images. The inter-title begins, "...once the best of friends...because of that woman..." The film cuts to an image of a man furiously fencing and killing another man. The inter-title continues to explain the trail of blood created by men's desire for this woman "...the other man...the same evening..." There is a cut to a man picking up a small gun. The next inter-title explains that men no longer desire to visit the place where there are plenty of willing women for all of them and instead only go to watch the robot Maria and fight amongst themselves for her. "The Eternal Gardens lie abandoned...but night after night in Yoshiwara..." the film cuts to show the robot Maria on stage inciting fights among the men. The statement that the Eternal Gardens are abandoned is poignant because Freder in his initial desire for the original Maria, who tried to hide her sexuality, left the Eternal Gardens and the woman that he embraced immediately. The robot Maria's overt sexual actions on stage in this scene would be the equivalent of showing her prostituting herself during the Weimar era because of social constraints on women's sexuality.

The reminder of the Eternal Gardens gives more credence to the possibility that the robot Maria only exhibits enhanced dangers that the original Maria contained. The robot Maria shows the danger that the original Maria could have released by publicly enticing men. These dangers represent the dangers that Maria would release if she decided to use her feminine wiles for public prostitution. She created so much desire in Freder while trying to hide her sexuality that when Freder sees his father with his hand on her shoulder he goes into a delirious fever and must be bed ridden for several days. If

her entire sexual potential is released in public the men of Metropolis might kill each other because of their desire for her.

The chaos and violence that the robot made in Maria's name can only happen because the people trust and believe in Maria; she is so pure that no one questions her. In the scene before the robot Maria incites the workers to violence, Freder comments that the workers view her as a saint. Then, Josaphat tells Freder that the people are congregating at the moment, but he does not refer to her by her name instead as "a woman who has proven herself as true as gold." Without the people's belief in Maria they might have questioned their actions. If they did not believe that Maria would always look out for them and their children; these people never would have followed her so eagerly and forget their own children. The robot not only uses the people's belief in Maria to incite violence and to convince them to follow her. She uses her sexuality to further lure them into her trap. She, among other things, pulls down the collar of her dress to expose her chest and in the process tears open the lacing of the dress so that the dress reveals a significant amount of cleavage, a very prominent signifier of a prostitute because she is trying to expose skin. Because people believe in Maria and her goodness, Maria's *doppelgaenger* has more unquestioned power for destruction than it would have if people thought that she would ever deceive them. It is Maria's purity that allows the robot, her *doppelgaenger*, to do the most harm.

### **Rotwang as Procurer and Pimp**

The film suggests prostitution of the virginal Maria to Rotwang. Her body is instrumentalized, just like the workers. Maria, because of her public demonstration in



the catacombs, is pursued and captured by Rotwang with Joh Fredersen's permission. The sexual demonstration and Rotwang's potential as a sexual predator in the chase scene suggest that there is some sexual contact for Maria to fear. Maria is locked away as Rotwang's concubine, an antiquated and in this instance unrewarding form of prostitution for Maria because she receives no payment. Maria does not prostitute herself, but Fredersen, who rules over all of Metropolis, gives Rotwang full access to her without prosecution in exchange for the robot. Fredersen makes it clear to Rotwang that he does not care what happens to her, and that Rotwang has complete access to her. Fredersen essentially pimps out Maria to Rotwang in exchange for a united society made possible by the robot. Fredersen is capable of being her pimp because his power over her and everyone in the society makes it possible for him to control individual people easily. The eternal garden shows that he can particularly control women easily because it is the only place in society where women are visible. The business in the instance of Maria occurs between two men, and she is traded. Rotwang does not uphold his end of the bargain, and thus Fredersen denies him access to Maria because he did not pay.

Rotwang's complete access to her is shown to when we see Maria in his chambers after being captured. The bottom of her dress is torn to suggest that someone ripped it, in an attempt to gain sexual access to her. When Rotwang enters the room, she immediately runs from him. When he does get near to her he pins her onto the table and lowers his head into her chest. As he tries to pull her from the window, curiously, he places his hand over her mouth and she instantly collapses and falls limp in his arms, as prey might play dead to try to disinterest the pursuing animal. It is, also, notable that

after this scene the next time that the viewer sees Maria with Rotwang she is naked. Additionally, after the robot Maria is released on the city the captive Maria sits with Rotwang in a bedroom. Rotwang sits on the bed and Maria sits near him on a chair with her head lowered as he tells her of the violence that will fall upon the workers. After Maria is taken from Rotwang by Fredersen because Rotwang does not pay for her, Rotwang pursues her in the cathedral, just as the police would pursue any public women who they would identify as a prostitute. In Weimar society Maria's public presence would identify her as a prostitute to the police. She would be arrested by the police and subjected to a physical examination that might resemble in some ways the image of Maria naked in the laboratory. Her physical exam would doom her to a life of prostitution unless a great change was made in society. When he is able to catch her he reminds the viewer of the sexual motive that drives him to chase Maria by touching her all over her body and burying his head in her chest, but here she is not prostituted she is simply harassed because Fredersen is no longer acting as her pimp. A societal allegory that might fit here is that Maria is captured by police as a prostitute, lives as one, and an important public figure clears her name for his and his son's benefit.

Rotwang not only acts as the procurer of Maria; he is the robot Maria's pimp. The robot Maria upon her creation is a public woman. Rotwang began to make her for his private enjoyment, but she was commissioned by Fredersen for public use. Thomas Byers says that Rotwang "is... the means by which the disturbingly sexual woman is denied an independent subjectivity and made into an object of male control."<sup>57</sup> Byer's

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas B. Byers, "Kissing Becky: Masculine Fears and Misogynist Moments in Science

essay does not suggest that the robot Maria was a prostitute who was pimped out by Rotwang, but his statement about her as a overly “sexual woman” under “male control” is true of many pimp prostitute relationships. The robot Maria is first pimped out by Rotwang when he holds a dinner personally inviting the men of Metropolis to watch her erotic dance. A public display of sexuality during the Weimar Era signals the viewer to the fact that she is a prostitute. He controls her actions by telling her what to do, and she obeys. The fact that all of her actions exhibit her sexuality in public settings leads one to believe that the robot Maria is instructed to coerce and destroy through her sexuality, and thus she is prostituted out to the people of Metropolis by Rotwang.

### **Double Vision of Maria**

Consistently *Metropolis* is referenced regarding its discussion of technology and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*,<sup>58</sup> but the film is not just about technology. It is about “double vision.”<sup>59</sup> Peter Ruppert discusses and defines “double vision” in terms of technology, but the concept can be expanded to include other aspects of the film that are “double vision[s].”

*Metropolis* stages both the wonder and awe of technology – straining to visualize the spectacular, the new, the unfamiliar, the impossible with breathtaking special effects – and then disavows these attractions with anti-technological messages and warnings. The result is a basic contradiction at the

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Fiction Films," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 45.3 (1989): 82.

<sup>58</sup> Anton Kaes, and David Levin. "Modernity and Its Discontents: Notes on Alterity in Weimar Cinema." *Qui Parle: Literature, Philosophy, Visual Arts, History* 5.2 (1992): 135-42; Hales, *New German Review: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 8

<sup>59</sup> Ruppert, *A Journal of Germanic Studies* 37.1, 22

heart of the film, a kind of ‘double vision’ (46), as Telotte puts it that undermines the very faith on which its acceptability depends.<sup>60</sup>

The “double vision” of the public woman who cannot avoid sexualization is a consistent theme in the film. Some signifiers, such as children, religion, and prudent clothing, help the public woman avoid being identified as a prostitute, but they nonetheless draw attention to the sexual nature of women,<sup>61</sup> and how easily that can be shifted to prostitution. The only person who identifies that the robot prostitute is not Maria is Freder. All of the other workers overlook her sexual behavior and the change in preaching. None of the workers appear to be fazed by the fact that their pure, innocent, saintly Maria is tearing open her dress and exhibiting her sexuality in front of all of them. It seems to be that Maria’s purity and avoidance of sexuality do not contrast extreme sexuality for the workers. Both Marias are indistinguishable to the workers despite the drastic differences that an audience viewer sees. The technology of *Metropolis* is shown as magnificent and then as condoned. Maria’s purity separates Maria from all of the other women.<sup>62</sup> As with technology, her sexual difference is praised and her public position leads to the resolution of the film, but the overall all message of *Metropolis* condones public women and sexual difference through the extreme damage of the robot Maria.

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<sup>60</sup> Ruppert, *A Journal of Germanic Studies* 37.1, 22

<sup>61</sup> This is why Freder is initially attracted to Maria in the Eternal Gardens.

<sup>62</sup> Even if it goes unrecognized by the workers.

### **Conclusion**

The film Metropolis condones public women and emphasizes the sexual dangers that they face. The film expresses the danger and the truth in “male anxieties” about public and sexual women. It shows the danger of sexual abduction for public women. The film, also, instills a fear of overtly sexual women who are usually prostitutes in the context of Weimar society and Weimar films as having a castrating power over men. Very sexual public women are depicted as being capable of nearly destroying an entire society, and the condition worsens if the women were very pure before their newfound sexual expression.

## CHAPTER IV

THE PROSTITUTE AS *VAGINA DENTATA*

The robot Maria of the previous chapter represented an extreme form of the prostitute as *vagina dentata* by nearly destroying an entire community.<sup>63</sup> Female sexuality has been expressed as a threat for a long time and in many cultures throughout the world in the folklore of the *vagina dentata*.<sup>64</sup> The *vagina dentata* differs from traditional notions regarding male anxieties<sup>65</sup> because the term and the figure embody the very real dismembering of a man, not just the fear of it. These women are real threats; they are the fulfillment of *male anxieties* about female sexuality. People often have fears that do not have a namable origin and never come to fruition; men who suffer from male anxieties are scared of something that does not and will not necessarily happen to them. This chapter discusses films in which men do not fear losing their manhood, but women take it away. The use of the term *vagina dentata* takes the focus away from the male character and places it on the female character as the acting agent. This shift of focus and agency causes a different line of questioning when interpreting a Weimar film. Instead of asking, how is *he* castrated? and what happened to *him*?, we need to ask, how does *she* castrate him? and what effect do *her* actions have on him? The *vagina dentata* makes things happen around her. Her characteristic dismembering of men may be an undesirable trait for women to claim as their agency, but the *vagina*

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<sup>63</sup> The destructive nature of the robot Maria was discussed in the previous chapter and will not be discussed in this chapter. I trust that the reader will connect the two analyses and the robot Maria's position as *vagina dentata*.

<sup>64</sup> Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3

<sup>65</sup> McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and "New Objectivity"*

*dentata* embodies many desirable traits for women to claim. She is a woman who acts completely on her own exhibiting a sense of independence and authority that women in these films rarely have. Some traits that women may or may not want to claim that are ascribed to *vagina dentata* in folklore include an active sex drive, androgyny, and the exhibition of excessive sexuality.<sup>66</sup> She skillfully decides what she will do and is the cause of what happens to the men of the film for her benefit or enjoyment. She demonstrates strength and pursues her personal happiness. The prostitutes of this chapter are not victims, as they were in previous chapters. The women prostitutes in this chapter prostitute themselves for their own profit willingly.

This depiction of a *vagina dentata* may sound the same as a *vamp* or a *femme fatale* and the reader may ask why I don't use those terms for this chapter instead of *vagina dentata*. There are plenty of readings of Marlene Dietrich as a *vamp* or *femme fatale* in *The Blue Angel*. These readings, as do all readings of *femme fatale* and *vamp* characters, focus on the female character's heartlessness and disregard for other human beings to get what she wants. The *vagina dentata* however does not simply use a man for her motives and not care what happens to him as a *vamp* does. Nor does the *vagina dentata* feed on preexisting male weakness as the *femme fatale* does. The *vagina dentata* cares what happens to him because part of what she wants is to hurt a man in a new way. She does not inadvertently hurt him because of disregard. It is her goal to crush his strength and to take away his manhood to gain some manly power for herself. Lola Lola in *The Blue Angel* has no real motive to hurt Professor Rath after one night of

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<sup>66</sup> Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3

prostitution that leads to marriage except to assert her strength and power by taking his. Berta-Marie in *Variety* uses Boss as a stepping stool after attaining him as a patron, but has no motive to make him think he is more of a man while she undermines his manliness to others because her actions ultimately inhibit her own life. His wife has no motive to ruin his life and take away all his male freedoms because his displeasure inhibits her life. By ruining his life, all that Berta-Marie and Boss' wife gain is to show the male power of dominance that they possess.

As in all of the previous chapters the *vagina dentata* described here are both public figures and prostitutes. In the films of this chapter, however, the women from the onset are public women and prostitutes outwardly expressing their sexuality in public, instead of their public position leading to prostitution as in the previous 2 chapters. The women in *The Blue Angel*<sup>67</sup> and *Variety*<sup>68</sup> both fill the role of prostitute as the *vagina dentata*. The women embody the *vagina dentata* because they dismember men until the men can no longer function in society. They do not hurt the men because of any fear that the men have. And they purposefully hurt the men in order to subjugate their male

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<sup>67</sup> I am using the German version of the film found in Kino's 2001 two disc set. I chose to use the German version because it is the version that was shown in Germany and because upon its release it was given the most international acclaim. The thick German accents of the actors and actresses in the English version of the film made it less popular and for this reason the German version was often shown with subtitles in English speaking countries.

<sup>68</sup> For the purpose of this essay, I refer to many scenes in the abridged, 63 minute, English version of A.E. Dupont's film *Variety* published in Chico, CA by Tamarelle's French Film House because it was the predominant version of the film available to me. I read about another, more complete, German version of the film in Richard McCormick's essay "Carnival of Humiliation: Sex, Spectacle, and Self-Reflexivity in E.A. Dupont's *Variety* (1925)." Where possible and pertinent I try to incorporate a reading of the film using the details given in his essay and a version of the film that I was able to attain on the internet site YouTube to maintain an analysis of the message that was presented to German's of the time.



power and authority. The women of these films are the cause of castration anxiety they are not the effect of it.

### *The Blue Angel*

The film, *The Blue Angel*, is the story of a professor who comes to a wretched end because of a woman. The film begins by showing the professor's simple life at home and in the school. One night he goes to a local cabaret to find his students and meets the dancer Lola Lola. He accidentally comes home with some of her things and goes back to the cabaret to return them to her. When he returns Lola flirts with him. He begins to fall for her and feels compelled to protect her from her job when a sailor wants to drink with her and makes unwanted advances towards her. Professor Rath throws the sailor out, which eventually leads to him spending the night in Lola's apartment. After the encounter the professor decides that he will marry her and is dismissed from his post at the school because of her disreputable job. Immanuel Rath marries Lola. He, because of her job and her treatment of him, is humiliated and degraded from the first day of their marriage. He takes a job in the show at Lola's insistence. He is disgraced in his home town by Lola's outward infidelity, by her insults, and by being forced to perform a degrading act in front of his former students and colleagues. Immanuel goes insane and in the middle of the night returns to his old desk in the school house. The film ends on the image of Immanuel dressed as a homeless person, nearly dead, holding on to his old desk as tightly as possible trying to in some small way regain his past, which he cannot do.

### **Lola as Prostitute**

The first appearance of Marlene Dietrich's character Lola in this film identifies her as a public sexual woman. The viewer is first introduced to Lola, through a drawn poster in a shop window, in the opening scene. The street where the poster is displayed is busy with activity. There are many people working on the street. The poster in the shop window is a drawing of Marlene Dietrich in a can-can skirt raised above the tops of her stockings to show her thighs and allude to what is even higher. The top half of her is partially covered by a low-cut spaghetti-strapped shirt that just barely covers her nipples and exposes the curves of her breasts. Her stance seems commanding and somewhat masculine. Her feet are shoulder width apart, pelvis thrust forward, and hands are on her hips. Her back is slightly arched and her head is looking forward towards the viewer. She appears both innocent with her coy expression and the cherubs that surround her, and she also appears worldly by her assertive stance. The poster draws attention to her sexuality, thighs, and public position just as the postcard in the school house does. The postcard later shown in the schoolhouse might even be slightly more alluring because the cloth of her skirt moves so that the boys can imagine that they might at some point see her full sexuality. Additionally, the postcard images were seen as so alluring that Professor Rath forbade that they be sold after he and Lola were married. These advertisement images of Lola and her public position at the cabaret immediately identify her as a public woman who is selling her sexuality. In the Weimar context a woman selling her sexuality in public is read as a prostitute.

The later scene with the sailor demonstrates that Lola does not just sell images of her body, but actually sells her body to the men who frequent the club. She is a prostitute. The leader of the troop asks Lola what she is doing because she is in the dressing room and there is a sailor in the dance hall who is buying champagne. Lola refuses to drink with the man on the pretense that she is an artist, but the troop leader's anger makes it clear that personally entertaining the customers is a part of the job that she normally undertakes. When the sailor enters he appears to know the protocol of meeting and wooing night club singers. He brings her a pineapple and champagne, and then he kisses her hand. Lola pulls her hand away in a gesture of defiance, rather than offense and tells the sailor to "get out." The night club owner shakes his head slightly at Lola to express disapproval of her behavior. The sailor says "But I haven't done anything," and leans over to wrap his arms around her and begin to nuzzle her. The professor then gets very upset, calls the sailor names and throws him out. Professor Rath continues in his rage to slap the leader of the troop and to call him a "Miserable pimp!" This scene illustrates that Lola entertaining men sexually is commonplace to all the people involved except for the professor. The professor saw clearly that she was not meant merely to talk with the sailor; she was expected to prostitute herself to him. Lola may have been moody about doing it on that occasion, but her reactions clearly indicated that she willingly agreed to fulfill these duties offstage fairly regularly for the male customers because these duties came as no surprise to her and were not met by a great deal of resistance on her part.

### Marlene/Lola as *Vagina Dentata*

Some of the same images that identify Lola as a prostitute also foreshadow her role as *vagina dentata*. Both the poster and the post card image draw attention to Marlene Dietrich's inner thighs. The attention to the thighs of Marlene is pertinent because of the significance of her legs in her star persona. "Film historian James Naremore has also read Dietrich's legs as fetish objects, arguing that they simultaneously displace the anxiety of castration and reinforce the actress's persona as 'cruel woman.'"<sup>69</sup> Nora Alter's essay in full explains the many instances that make Dietrich's legs emblematic of both literal and symbolic male castration. "A number of publicity photographs of Dietrich prominently featuring her legs explicitly represent the female threat of disempowerment after the war. A case in point is an early image of Dietrich performing in 1927, during which she plays a musical saw between her naked calves."<sup>70</sup> The sharp instrument represents the threat of physical dismemberment, and additionally represents the power and danger of women. The saw becomes a psychological *vagina dentata*<sup>71</sup> and by association Marlene's legs embody that threat. Hence, when Marlene's legs are displayed in films they are often calling upon a fear of women and their castration potential.

Marlene's legs are an object of desire at the beginning of the *The Blue Angel*, but they also depict the destructive potential of women and particularly of this woman. Lola

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<sup>69</sup> Nora Alter, "The Legs of Marlene Dietrich." *Dietrich Icon*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2007) 66.

<sup>70</sup> Alter, *Dietrich Icon* 71

<sup>71</sup> Elsaesser "Falling in Love" 347-355

from the very start of the film is shown as a moral danger to the boys who possess her postcard. Her threat as a *vagina dentata* can first be seen through the parallel imagery of the texture of skirt on the postcard of her and Professor Rath's mustache. Professor Rath holds the postcard of Lola and blows through his mustache onto her skirt. The texture of his mustache and the material on the skirt are remarkably similar. As he blows on her skirt his mustache moves in a similar way that the skirt does. Under the cover of Professor Rath's mustache we know that there are unseen teeth and the parallel imagery of her skirt suggests that she too has teeth to make the *vagina dentata*.

As the film continues Marlene's legs remain very prominent. Attention is drawn to her legs at every point during the courting stages of her relationship with Professor Rath, until he spends the night with her and her legs are covered to the knees. At this turning point in the film Professor Rath loses his job and decides to marry her. From this moment on Marlene's legs are covered by longer dresses, coats, and black panty hose except for one scene in which Professor Rath kneels on the ground before her to help her dress by putting on her stockings. Marlene's threat as *vagina dentata* is established at the beginning of the film, and after she begins to castrate him and his self worth there appears to be no reason for her legs to be displayed. The main character no longer needs to lure her victim in with her desirable legs, and does not need to show a symbol of her potential danger because Professor Rath and his decline expresses it better than her legs ever could.

Marlene's legs are not the only things that connect her with the threat of the *vagina dentata*. The women in *vagina dentata* folklore are often said to have several

traits that Marlene exhibits in her star persona. The women of the lore are said to exhibit excessive sexuality, to have an active sex drive, and to exhibit some androgyny.<sup>72</sup>

Marlene can be seen as excessively sexual in the film *The Blue Angel*. The clothes that Marlene wears in the film expose her body more than any of the other woman in the film. Her job in the film is entirely based on her sexuality and ability to induce sexual desire in the men who enter the night club. The lyrics of many of the songs that she sings and the way in which they are performed express sexual pursuit and desire. Her body language and mannerisms in the film definitely exhibit sexuality and the active pursuit of the men she desires. Marlene, in and out of the film, goes against stereotypes regarding normalcy for women and is the active partner in romantic relationships by pursuing those that she desires, rather than passively waiting for their pursuit. Marlene, additionally, as a star, exhibits androgynous behavior through her bi-sexual love affairs.<sup>73</sup> Several of the folklore tales about the *vagina dentata* explicitly identify bi-sexuality as an identifying trait of women who possess a dangerous lower region.<sup>74</sup> Marlene has many of the traits that *vagina dentata* folklore uses to identify women who threaten males.

Marlene's character Lola surpasses being a castration threat/object of anxiety and becomes the *vagina dentata* when she castrates the male character of the film by

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<sup>72</sup> The folklore often uses this idea in correspondence with the concept of androgyny because active sex drives are considered a male trait. Items that might exhibit an "active sex drive" for a woman include actively pursuing any sexual romantic relationships and having any sexual desire for another person. Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3

<sup>73</sup> Alter, *Dietrich Icon*

<sup>74</sup> Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3

feminizing him and usurping his male power. She does this through her job, her sexuality and by pushing him around. Lola begins to show his helplessness and her control over him by blowing powder in his face. The powder makes Professor Rath appear dependent on Lola and unable to do the simplest of things for himself. The act seems premeditated and thus insinuates that she controls him through her plans and schemes. She usurps Professor Rath's male power through the disreputable nature of her job. Lola's job as a cabaret dancer automatically makes the male in the relationship subservient to her because she makes her private sexuality public without his coercion and control as a pimp. She controls her sexuality and makes an industry of it. Additionally, the nature of her job makes it impossible for him to continue in his respected profession. Because Lola does not even consider ending her career for Immanuel he must resign. Immediately Lola becomes the main and only breadwinner (until he joins the troop) of the household taking away his station of male superiority. When Lola is the only breadwinner because he runs out of savings she uses her position and his lack of money as a reason to disregard his decisions and preferences. Lola begins to sell sexually alluring postcards that her husband has strongly opposed because he is no longer bringing in money.<sup>75</sup> She does not stop at simply selling the postcards, but further humiliates her husband by having him sell them to customers. He becomes her doormat as an assistant who dresses and serves her, and later he lets her insult and reprimand him without opposing his treatment. Her castration of her husband continues as she makes him entirely submissive and takes away all of his strength.

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<sup>75</sup> The film actually says that it is because he no longer has a penny to his name.

At times it appears that he is unable to oppose her because her power over him is so great and he has become so weak that he cannot find the strength to even speak. After marrying her he gradually speaks less and less until he has a mental breakdown and becomes completely unable to communicate with anyone in an intelligible manner. The inability to speak and communicate is one of the main ways that she castrates him because it cuts him off from all other people and makes it impossible for him to regain any power over himself. At the point of complete loss of communication, it becomes clear that all of the people of the troop push him around, further emphasizing his loss of social agency.

When she cheats on him she subjugates his male virility and the stereotypical active nature of male sexuality. In many ways Lola is able to symbolically castrate Immanuel by belittling him. She does not give him any respect. When she sees that he is upset on the day that he is to perform an act that he finds humiliating, in a community where he once held a respected position, she parades her adultery in front of him and gives him no encouragement for his performance. She actually attempts to lower his spirits by saying in a mocking tone “What are you waiting for? Go do your little show.” The pointed cruelty of her statement is emphasized by the troop leader and his wife’s high spirits. They make statements regarding the importance of his act and the opportunities that his performance will make for him. The falsity in her statement is shown throughout the scene through of the continuous statements and visual cues that tell the viewer and characters that the dance hall is full with many important guests because they have come to see the professor and his performance.



Lola is partly able to castrate him by breaking his spirits with insults and belittling actions; but predominately Lola castrates him by appropriating his social mobility, economic position as leader, ability to communicate, and sexual prowess; all things that have been predominately considered male privileges and denied to upstanding women throughout history. Her actions lead to the symbolic death of Professor Rath. By the end of the film Professor Rath's demeanor and person are so different from the beginning of the film that it nearly feels as though he has been dismembered. Professor Rath is so unhappy and unable to function in his life with Lola that he tries to return to the school house. His return can be interpreted as either an attempt to regain a piece of his old life or to die in peace. In the following film, *Variety*, the *vagina dentata* dismember a man in a similar way by taking him away from everything that he loves and leaving him a very broken man.

### *Variety*

*Variety*<sup>76</sup> opens on a prison depicted in an expressionist style. The main character Boss is up for release from prison and is asked to make a statement about the incident that caused him to be there for ten years. Boss's wife petitions for his release. The film cuts to a flashback as he tells his story. The flashback begins with Boss living with his wife and son as the leader of an exotic dance troop. A ship "brings [a] young stowaway girl [Berta-Marie] to the carnival in Hamburg's harbor."<sup>77</sup> She is foreign and

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<sup>76</sup> I will follow with an analysis of the German version of the film. See footnote number 68.

<sup>77</sup> Richard W. McCormick, "The Carnival of Humiliation: Sex, Spectacle, and Self-Reflexivity in E. A. Dupont's *Variety* (1925)," *Contemporary Film and Television Series* xxvi (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2003) 49.

exotic and hired by Boss to join the troop. She does an exotic belly dance that is erotic and resembles the dance done by Maria in *Metropolis* because it is “so seductive that one man ...[c]omes onto the stage.”<sup>78</sup> Boss is enraged and he closes the show and it nearly causes a riot, just as the robot Maria’s dance did. Boss leaves his wife and child for the young Berta-Marie and a career as a trapeze artist.

Boss lives with Berta-Marie happily as a carnival trapeze artist. He cooks and cleans and helps her to mend her things. The world famous Artinelli needs a partner to fulfill his contract after his brother falls during a performance. Artinelli hears of the two trapeze artists, Boss and Berta-Marie, at the local carnival and reluctantly goes to see their show. He is impressed by their show and asks the two to join his performance as the three Artinellis. Boss is reluctant, but Berta convinces him that it is a good idea. The three perform at the Wintergarten and are a big hit. After the show Artinelli gives Berta-Marie a diamond ring to celebrate their success and invites them to the after party. During the party, Artinelli steals a kiss from Berta-Marie. As the show continues Boss makes a habit of gambling at a local business with the other performers in the show while Artinelli and Berta-Marie sleep. Artinelli asks Berta-Marie one day to enter his room and close the door on the pretext that it is drafty, but the window is open. Berta-Marie closes the door to hear about their offer to perform in America and has relations with Artinelli.

Berta- Marie and Artinelli make excuses to go out together and continue their

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<sup>78</sup> McCormick, *Contemporary Film and Television Series* xxvi 50

relationship behind Boss's back. Boss is unaware of their deception. One of the other artists sees the deceptive couple and tells all of the other performers through a caricature that he draws on one of the tables where Boss usually gambles. Boss discovers the drawing and flies into a rage and breaks the table. At first he does not believe that it is true and asks the man who drew the picture why he is lying. The man explains that he saw the two together with his very own eyes. Boss then proceeds to the dressing room where he is to perform with Artinelli. He imagines dropping and killing him during the show and decides against it. After the show Boss plans the murder and waits in Artinelli's room for him to return after a night of heavy drinking with Berta-Marie. Boss stabs Artinelli. He returns to his room to wash his hands and fully comprehends what he has done after hearing Berta-Marie's screams. Boss calmly leaves the building followed by a hysterical Berta-Marie. Boss hails a taxicab and goes directly to the police station where he presumably turns himself in. The film cuts back to the scene ten years later. The interviewer tells Boss that he will find "God's mercy" and Boss is released from prison.

### **Berta-Marie Is a Public Prostitute**

Berta-Marie from the start of the film is a public sexual figure. When Berta-Marie arrives at the Hamburg harbor she is a public figure. Berta-Marie entered the ship that she sailed to Hamburg in secrecy and out of the public eye, but was made a public figure the moment that she was discovered. It is probably fairly safe to assume that the ship was filled predominately with male sailors and Berta-Maria became a source of male entertainment long before she joined Boss's dance troop. The ship's captain says

that her name is too foreign and exotic to say and names her Berta-Marie after the ship. Her name is very significant. When she receives her name she is no longer a woman trying to hide; she is a public woman who will only become more public. Her name signifies the foreign trade routes that the ship takes, and she becomes an object of trade when she is named.<sup>79</sup> Her status as a traded item is first explicitly shown when the ship's captain gives her to Boss for his exotic dance show where she is to sell her sexuality. Later in the film, her trade status is again exemplified by her ability to trade sex with Artinelli to find out about their offer in America.

Her name and the way that she arrives in Hamburg are only the first signs that Berta-Marie is a public prostitute. Her exotic belly dance and its effect on the men solidify in the mind of the viewer her sexual pull on males and her ability to use her sexuality for commercial purposes. When she tears apart Boss's family it identifies her as a force that destroys familial bonds and does not create them. The film's depiction of her is in no way motherly and does not suggest that she plans to form a family unit with Boss, but rather that she wants to use him as a stepping stone for her career. He is deceived into paying for her sex and her relationship with him, by protecting her and by making connections for her in the carnival world. He fails to recognize her as a prostitute, and thus Boss does not realize that he is being used. Ultimately for his inability to read her character and to know her price, he loses his family and his freedom for ten years.

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<sup>79</sup>McCormick, *Contemporary Film and Television Series* xxvi

Some of the less important aspects of the narrative (than her dealings with Boss) that help the viewer identify her as a prostitute are evident in semiotics. Her black eye makeup, dark short hair, and dresses that expose her chest and legs separate her from the few other women in the film and identify her as a prostitute. Her behavior in public and the gifts that she accepts further identify her. For example, her behavior at the party after their first appearance at the Wintergarten is very suggestive. At the party surrounded by many people Berta-Marie reclines in a booth with one leg hoisted onto the table; her legs are spread wide open towards Boss, and she is in a dress. She jumps up from this sexually explicit pose to dance on the table as entertainment for the other party goers.

In addition to this display, Berta-Marie enters Artinelli's room knowing that it is a sexual ploy. Even though this scene can be read as rape because Berta-Marie appears so suspicious and cautious when she enters the room,<sup>80</sup> there are other aspects of the scene that suggest she may just have been sizing up the situation and her next sexual prey. Before the encounter Berta-Marie closes the door knowing that Artinelli is planning something that would require him to be alone with her. He makes this clear when he asks her to close the door with the obviously false reason that it is drafty while he has the only window in the entire room wide open and makes no attempt to close it. There is a shot of Berta-Marie standing outside of his room smiling about a possible offer from America. The film cuts to the image of a window with the door pulled inward, extending several feet into the room. The curtains on the window are moving

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<sup>80</sup> McCormick, *Contemporary Film and Television Series* xxvi

rapidly to show the excessive amount of wind coming through the window. The film cuts to a shot of Artinelli holding a letter and speaking. Then it cuts to an inter-title that says “Won’t you please close the door? It’s so draughty –.” The film cuts to Berta-Marie looking warily to her right. The film cuts to the window, which through the editing is expressed as the object in Berta-Marie’s line of sight. The film then cuts back to Berta-Marie, who looks to the left. The film cuts to the object of her gaze Artinelli who glances up from the letter that he is reading. The film cuts back to Berta-Marie who cautiously steps forward. While she continues to stare in the direction of Artinelli, her arm reaches behind her to close the door. She steps back as she closes the door with her eyes wide and her face expressionless. Berta-Marie and Artinelli exchange glances between one another and the window before she closes the door.

After Berta-Marie closes the door she makes no attempt to close the window. The film cuts from Berta-Marie to the open window. Then, the film cuts to a shot of both Berta-Marie and Artinelli. Artinelli is in the foreground of the shot to the far right. Berta-Marie is in the background to the far left. The two are separated by a desk. The film cuts to another shot of Berta-Marie, who looks about the room and then looks towards Artinelli. The film cuts to a medium shot of Artinelli and Berta Marie as he approaches her. He appears to perch on the arm of an unseen chair as she reads the letter, smiles, and runs her fingers through her hair. The film cuts to a medium close-up of the soon-to-be lovers. As Berta Marie finishes reading she moves her hand from her head to her chest and gives the letter to Artinelli. The film cuts to an extended scene of Boss playing poker. It then returns to Berta-Marie and Artinelli when one of his

opponents, who is losing, sourly looks at him and says “You seem to be lucky at cards as well as at love!” Boss smiles and nods pleased with himself. The film then cuts to a close up of Artinelli kissing Berta-Marie passionately. Artinelli is above Berta-Marie and their heads are horizontal. The horizontal position of the two and the immediate fade to black suggest that a sexual intercourse followed. After this first sexual moment with Artinelli, Berta-Marie happily and readily continues the affair. She also accepts expensive gifts such as a diamond ring and a bracelet from Artinelli in exchange for her affections. Berta-Marie knows what these gifts symbolize and that is why she hides them from Boss. She is fully aware that Boss has not identified her as a prostitute. She would like to continue receiving the benefits of him as a patron and knows that she can only do that by hiding her promiscuity.

### **The Threat of *Vagina Dentata***

#### *The Wife*

Boss’s wife possesses a *vagina dentata* in addition to Berta-Marie. Boss’s wife takes him out of his desired career as a trapeze artist to become a father and husband who safely and unhappily leads an erotic dance troop. She makes their relationship such that he must take on many of the responsibilities that usually fall to the mother of the child, such as changing diapers. His new motherly position can be viewed as having a castrating effect because he is no longer shown as the stereotypical hunter and gatherer that his body-build suggests. He becomes the nurturer of the household and likely feels emasculated. Additionally, she takes away his male authority by denying him the freedom to choose his own career. After his stint with Berta-Marie, he is only released

from prison because of her petition. His lack of power over his own freedom is exemplified by his need for her assistance. When he leaves prison he is not gaining freedom he is only leaving one prison and one form of emasculation to return to another undesirable situation where he will be feminized and imprisoned by his wife's authority.

### *Berta-Marie*

If Boss's wife is viewed as a castrating force, then initially Berta-Marie is an attempt for Boss to regain his manliness. Her position as exotic and desirable woman makes Boss feel sexually manly in other men's eyes. Berta-Marie's small stature makes his manly build more prominent in appearance to both men and women. His ability to reenter his desired career makes him feel as though he has regained his male authority and ability to make choices for himself. Initially, she seems to be a means for Boss to reestablish his manhood, but she too emasculates him to fulfill her role as an unforgiving *vagina dentata* who will take away the last shreds of masculinity that man has. There is no folklore that describes a *vagina dentata* who would castrate a man who has already lost his phallus, but this figure would surely be the *ultimata vagina dentata*.

Berta-Marie gives several signals that she is a *vagina dentata*. The most prominent is when she draws attention to her vagina at the after party. In this scene she demonstrates her position as a prostitute and in turn the danger of her vagina. The scene opens with an obscured view of a juggler standing on the table. It then cuts to a clear view. The man in a dark suit stands on a white round table. The table is surrounded by many merry makers. He tosses the plates to his left and someone throws him something else to juggle. The film cuts to a shot of Artinelli drinking a beer. The camera pans past



him and is visually moved along by a gesture that he makes with his hand to his right. A few feet away from him the viewer can see Boss with a high-heeled foot next to his cheek and a leg draped across his body. He playfully strums the leg like a guitar. The camera continues to pan and reveal Berta-Marie as the possessor of the leg. She is reclined with her arm up. Her legs are parted towards Boss and she is watching the woman on the other-side of her. The film cuts back to the obscured view of the juggler. The object that obscures the view of the party is circular with prongs. It resembles many symbols of industry such as a Ferris wheel, a mill, and most likely an old-fashioned microphone. The juxtaposition of this obscuring object of industry and Berta-Marie with her legs spread is reminiscent in both appearance and meaning to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century painting by Jean Veber that Huyssen discusses “Allégorie sur la machine dévoreuse des hommes.”

In the right half of the painting we see a gigantic flywheel which throws up and devours dozens of dwarf-like men. A large rod connected with the flywheel moves to and fro into a metal box on which a giant woman is sitting naked, with parted legs and smiling demonically. Clearly the painting is an allegory of sexual intercourse, of a destructive female sexuality unleashed upon men. It suggests that the woman has appropriated the phallic power and activity of the machine and that she now turns this power violently against men. It is easy to see that the allegory is indicative of male sexual anxieties, of the fear of an uncontrolled female potency, of the *vagina dentata*, of castration by woman. ... [I]n this painting woman and machine are not identical [as in Metropolis], but

stand in a relationship allegorizing a specific kind of female sexuality as imagined and feared by men...<sup>81</sup>

Both the circular industrial image and the depiction of a sexually destructive female are juxtaposed in the film as in the painting to show the destructive nature of female sexuality. The film and the painting also both show the castration fear that men have of women who exhibit their sexuality openly. This scene of Berta-Marie legs spread in public with the microphone in front of them foreshadows and juxtaposes her destructive sexual power, and the destruction that can be caused by being the object of the gaze on stage.

Additionally in this scene Berta-Marie displays the characteristic of excessive female sexuality that many of the *vagina dentata* of folklore exhibit.<sup>82</sup> Her excessive sexuality is shown when she rises from her seat to dance erotically on the table. Her excessive sexuality extends throughout the film. The beginning of her excessive sexuality is shown throughout her erotic belly dance and the effect that it has on the men who watch her. And finally, Berta-Marie expresses excessive desire by having a relationship and sexual encounters with more than one man.

Her character is particularly dangerous to Boss because she is capable of making him feel like more of a man while she makes him less of one. She builds him up so that he falls further, but along the way she hurts him in small ways before his ultimate humiliation. She begins her slow feminization and castration of Boss by having him

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<sup>81</sup> Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* 77-8

<sup>82</sup> Otero, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3

mend her stocking and cook for her in the small trailer that they inhabit at the carnival. Her next step is to flirt with Artinelli behind his back, and then to convince him to join Artinelli against his wishes. She brings him into a more public sphere where he will become just as feminized as Artinelli because he will be the object of the mass gaze rather than the subject.

For all their differences, both men are portrayed in the film as longing to be ‘on the right side’ of the curtain, to be the stars of mass spectacle. Yet, to be the object instead of the subject of the gaze – to be looked at, as opposed to being the one who looks – is to be ‘feminized’ especially in New Objectivity, as Lethen has argued. ... To be exposed to the gaze of others – especially that of the leering, vulgar, and decadent masses – is clearly to lose power (and thus to become ‘feminized’).<sup>83</sup>

The gaze becomes one of the hardest things for Boss to overcome in his final trapeze act with Artinelli, in a comparable way to the way that the gaze was hurtful to Professor Rath in *The Blue Angel*. Similarly, the makeup of his the stage performance becomes a feminizing agent for both Artinelli and Boss just as it was for Professor Rath.

Berta-Marie’s choice of a more feminine man than Boss has a castrating effect because it puts his manliness in question. Her choice of Artinelli also contributes to Boss’s loss of manly stature because Artinelli is able to financially provide for Berta-Marie better than Boss. Another one of the ways that she hurts him is by lying to him. Boss suspects that he cannot trust Berta-Marie, but she lies and looks at him so sweetly

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<sup>83</sup> McCormick, *Contemporary Film and Television Series* xxvi 52

that he actually feels guilty for being suspicious of her. And finally, after her ultimate betrayal is revealed its effect on Boss is the loss of the ability to communicate. Professor Rath too lost this ability during his castration. The most basic connection with society is communication in and out of jail, but that is taken from him. The loss of communication is a much worse fate than prison.

Boss first loses his ability to communicate when he learns of the sexual relation between Berta-Marie and Artinelli. He cannot communicate his distress and instead must lash out and break the table in the bar. The film depicts his initial distress with a medium close-up of him making disturbed faces. Then the film fades to a fast pan of the room to give the impression that he sees the room spinning. Next the film cuts to a medium shot of Boss lifting the table over his head and throwing it down. The film cuts to a shot of the broken pieces of the table on the floor. The film cuts to a quick shot of all of the people who in the gambling club who witness Boss's instinctual reaction. Following this the film cuts to the people who are waiting for him on the stairs, and back to him. Boss runs down the stairs and grabs the man who made the drawing of his wife and Artinelli on the table. He presumably asks the man why he would draw such a lie, but there is no subtitle for Boss. From this point until the end of the movie Boss is unable to communicate verbally. Boss appears to try to communicate once more when he arrives at the dressing room. He opens the door to the dressing room where Artinelli is applying makeup and he moves his lips, but again there is no subtitle to accompany his speech. At this point it becomes established that Boss has lost all ability to verbally

communicate as a movie character. He can no longer reach the movie going audience with words.

Boss does not try to speak again. He goes through his routine of applying makeup and readying himself for the show with Berta-Marie and Artinelli. His anger is only communicated through his facial expressions when Artinelli and Berta-Marie cannot see him. He exits the dressing room and waits backstage to perform. He imagines the way that the two other performers might interact when left alone, and how they might have acted with him there. He imagines performing the trapeze act with them and dropping Artinelli to his death from the heights of the trapeze swings. Artinelli and Berta-Marie join him before he goes onto stage. The three successfully perform the act after a slight hesitation from Boss. During this entire scene Boss never opens his mouth to speak, yet the expression of his anger and feelings are the point of the many minutes of film time.

After the trapeze show Boss is still the primary object for the film and he only speaks once. In the dressing room Boss speaks to Artinelli. He says, "Please tell my wife that I'll get home very late tonight. I'm meeting an old friend." Boss is the focal point of many of the next shots. He goes to the bar where he orders two shots in a medium close-up with the bartender. The camera follows him as he exits, and after a brief interlude of Berta-Marie and Artinelli in the hallway, it reestablishes its focus on Boss hiding in Artinelli's room. Boss never speaks even as Artinelli pleads with him, and Berta-Marie screams at him. He silently hails a cab to the police station where he turns himself in. The viewer must assume that on this day he does not speak to the

police because the film opens on Boss in prison ten years later and we are told that he never made a statement concerning his crime. Boss is silenced for ten years. It becomes a condition of his parole that he must communicate about the event. Significantly, for Boss to be freed from prison he must free himself in part from the ultimate castration, the inability to communicate.

When Boss is humiliated because of Berta-Marie's sexual affair with Artinelli and is forced to question his manhood for a second time,<sup>84</sup> he attempts to assert his manliness by taking another man's life. Artinelli uses the phallic symbol of a knife to protect himself from Boss's unseen weapon. Artinelli's choice of weapon suggests that by killing Artinelli Boss is attempting in part to assert and regain his own phallic power. When Boss confronts Artinelli, Artinelli is very drunk. Artinelli wobbles to and fro and cannot stand erect on his own. Boss stands very solidly on the ground gazing at Artinelli. Artinelli then falls to the floor pleading and groveling for Boss to spare him. While he lies bent on the floor Boss stands erect over him. The last image of Artinelli is of him dropping his phallic weapon of defense. Boss attacks Artinelli and overpowers him making him drop his knife. The knife as a phallic symbol signifies that Artinelli lost his phallic power at the hands of Boss and that Boss has usurped that power. It is important to note that Artinelli uses a phallic symbol to attempt to protect himself rather than his own manliness. From previous scenes in the film the viewer knows that Artinelli is not much of a man and that after sleeping with Berta-Marie he too was castrated. Hence, the weapon must stand for his own lost manhood.

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<sup>84</sup> The first being when he lived with his wife.

Boss continues in a last attempt to try to assert his manliness by turning himself into the police, but does not regain his manhood. This attempt fails because it has the duplicitous effect of showing that he is man enough to admit when he is wrong, and that he is not man enough to fight for his freedom. He is castrated from society for ten years and only reattached because of other people's efforts. Berta-Marie leads to his catastrophic downfall and then disappears from the story so that his wife can retain control over him.

Much of the film reads as a story of Boss's castration and his attempts to regain his manhood. Boss's wife castrates him by controlling him and leaving him to do women's work. Berta-Marie castrates him through humiliation, which is accentuated by her position as a prostitute because other characters in the film can identify her as one, but he is fooled. Berta-Marie, additionally, castrates him by contributing to his loss of communication and separation from society. Both women can be viewed as *vagina dentata* suggesting that both the whore and the virgin can be dangerous to men.

### **Conclusion**

The *vagina dentata* is a mythological figure that has existed in folklore for centuries. She is embodied in destructive prostitutes depicted in films during the Weimar Era, such as *The Blue Angel* and *Variety*. The *vagina dentata* is prominent figure in this character because she literally castrates men with her sexuality, whereas symbolically the women of the film castrate the men with the help of their womanly whiles. The anxiety that existed in real men of the Weimar era about the new freedoms

that women were receiving is shown in the extreme on-screen depictions of the ways that women can hurt men.



## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

If we as scholars accept my initial premise that public women are usually a representation for prostitutes in the films of the Weimar era, then there are many implications that this new step in film scholarship can have. Public women as prostitutes can be problematic if used anachronistically because during other times and in other places it does not mean the same thing to be a public woman. For example there are few people who would say earnestly that all female bank-tellers are prostitutes. But the notion of public women and *vagina dentata* maybe molded to fit into other national cinemas. For example, the women in French films of a slightly later era, such as *La Bête Humaine* (1938) and *Le Corbeau* (1943), could certainly be analyzed using some of the approaches presented in this essay. This essay's consideration of what it means to be a public woman can, also, add to several academic disciplines, including gender studies, cultural studies, film studies, and German studies.

Gender studies can benefit by the consideration of what it means to be a woman in a certain place and time. Prostitutes are important figures in women's studies because they had many freedoms that other women did not have. This essay discusses the anxiety that people had about these freedoms and how they often caused dislike of these women. If cultural studies is to grow from this essay it would do so by the direct expression of popular film as an outlet for social and cultural anxieties in a changing society.

Film studies as always interprets characters, but often the sexuality of seemingly innocent women is taken for granted. The initial observation as a whore or a virgin is

often the last thought that is given to the female characters of films. Sometimes, as in Metropolis when a female character is investigated further she is not what she appears to be. I think that in film studies we need to look closer at the female characters and the conflicting messages that the filmmaker may portray about them.

And finally, what can this study mean to Weimar German Scholars? If we determine public women as prostitutes in the films of the era, then what about in the books, the magazines, the newspapers, and in police reports. Were most women viewed as prostitutes any time they left their house? Might the social anxiety have been much worse than we originally suspected? This essay is not just a new point of interest, but a point that can grow and contribute new ideas in multiple disciplines.

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