

CENSORSHIP DECISIONS



Die Prostitution (2.Teil): Die sich verkaufen

(September 22, 1920)

Zensur, Film-Oberprüfstelle, 22.09.1920,

**Film Review Office
Berlin, Chamber 3**

Berlin, August 7, 1920

Present: Police Councillor Dr. Stüwert as chairman; Mr. Koch, secretary; Police Councillor Haak and Dr. Fassbender as associate members.

Concerning the motion picture *Prostitution*, subtitle: *Those Who Sell Themselves*.

No statement was submitted by the parties concerned. The applicant appeared through its director, Mr. Sternheim. The film was screened and had the following lengths:

Prelude: 350 m

Act I: 315 m

Act II: 320 m

Act III: 428 m

Act IV: 337 m

Act V: 338 m

Act VI: 343 m

Total: 2,436 m

Prostitution Part 1: Die von der Liebe leben

Decision: The film is prohibited.

Grounds

The depiction of human depravity, which this film treats in an extremely detailed and at times morally offensive manner, is liable to create the impression—not merely among isolated individuals but among a large portion of the population—that the events shown are commonplace occurrences in everyday life. Moreover, the viewer is presented, in the most graphic fashion, with a corrupt judiciary and an unscrupulous medical profession—portrayals calculated to undermine confidence in our state institutions and in the medical profession, thereby endangering public order and security.

This denigration of the judiciary and the medical profession; the casual attitude toward marriage; and the efforts of unscrupulous persons to secure a life of comfort at the expense of their fellow human beings—all these elements are liable, when the film is shown abroad, to lower still further the reputation of Germany, which has already suffered greatly as a result of hostile propaganda. Indeed, they may justify the conclusion that, if Germans portray their state institutions and the conduct of their own fellow citizens in such a base manner, conditions in the German state must be profoundly bleak.

The main title, *Prostitution*, is likewise liable to have a morally corrupting effect, since it can only suggest that the film's subject has been drawn from sexual life, whereas in reality the film treats not the prostitution of the body but, so to speak, that of the mind or spirit.

The title therefore serves no purpose other than to attract audiences and lead them to believe that erotic images will be shown in the film.

For the reasons stated The accuracy of this copy is certified.

(Seal)

Film Review Board

Berlin, September 22, 1920

Minutes

Following the appeal lodged by the Leo-Bishop Company against the decision of the Berlin Review Board of August 7, 1920, concerning the film *Die sich verkaufen (Those Who Sell Themselves)*, proceedings before the Higher Review Board were reopened on Wednesday, September 22, 1920, at 10:00 a.m.

Present were Public Prosecutor Bulcke as chairman; Dr. Maasch (film industry); Professor Ebbinghaus, replacing Dr. Hauptmann, who had excused himself in writing (art and literature); and Mr. Lic. Rohn and Dr. von Erdberg (public welfare), as assessors.

The assessors did not issue a declaration that they considered themselves biased.

Director Sternheim appeared on behalf of the applicant.

The grounds for the Berlin Review Board's decision were read aloud.

The film was screened.

The applicant commented on the matter.

After the applicant, at the suggestion of the members of the Board, had removed the main title "Prostitution," Part II, from the film, the following decision was rendered:

In response to the applicant's appeal, the decision of the Berlin Review Board of August 7, 1920, is annulled. The film is approved for public exhibition within the German Reich. Exhibition of the film to persons under eighteen years of age is prohibited.

Grounds

The film *Die sich verkaufen* is the second part of a cycle, both parts of which bear the general title *Prostitution*. Whereas, according to the applicant, the first part depicts the physical harm caused by prostitution, the second part portrays moral corruption. The plot is convoluted and difficult to follow: a man of mature years, the type of the Berlin man-about-town, and a woman no longer young, who has a grown daughter and is presented as a lady of respectable society, have founded a fraudulent company. They claim to be operating silver mines in Argentina, sell shares in the enterprise, and pay dividends of twenty to thirty percent.

A young man, secretly engaged to the daughter of the aforementioned lady, has made it his mission to combat every injustice, wherever he encounters it. At his instigation, the proprietor of the fraudulent enterprise is arrested. The latter's son, who is responsible for representing his father and deciding whether criminal proceedings should be initiated against him, had previously been exposed by the arrested man as a cheat at cards. The arrested man exploits the son's official position and thereby obtains his father's release. The corporation collapses with losses amounting to millions; the proprietor poisons himself; and the son of the official who released his father in exchange for a cardsharp's secret also commits suicide. The proprietress flees abroad.

The Higher Review Board was unable to concur with the preliminary decision, according to which this film presents, in the most forceful manner, a corrupt class of officials and a conscienceless physician, thereby undermining public confidence in governmental institutions and the medical profession and thus endangering public order and security.

The Board was instead of the unanimous opinion that the film deals only with an isolated case and that the tendency of the film is by no means to portray corruption as characteristic of an entire social class. Public order and security could be endangered only if the viewer received the impression that one such isolated case was meant to be generalized as typical of an entire class. There can be no question of that here.

The official concerned—whether a police officer, examining magistrate, or public prosecutor is not stated—experiences the greatest anguish of conscience over his conduct, and his wife makes his torment even worse. The film takes great pains to acquaint the viewer with these torments of conscience. The official is also punished for his actions: his son dies as a result, his young, beautiful wife leaves him, and his case is therefore treated as entirely individual.

The preliminary decision's further contention—that the film would also discredit the medical profession as a whole—is clearly mistaken. The man exposed as a cardsharp is

supposedly a physician, but his father asks him to examine the son and determine whether he is mentally ill. The physician does conduct the examination, but declares, in violation of his professional duty, that he can find no traces of mental illness. The man who asks him to issue this false medical certificate and thus save the son is the director of a private mental institution, a rather objectionable figure who acts in a servile manner toward the proprietor, but who is never presented as a physician.

Nor were there any elements that might have an inflammatory or brutalizing effect. It must be acknowledged that the plot is clumsy, crude, and sometimes awkwardly constructed. Yet this finding alone was not sufficient to object to the film in its entirety. The prohibition of the general title "Prostitution," Part II, was considered justified because a title of this kind, if displayed on the street, would be apt to arouse public annoyance—an annoyance that the film's quite different and rather erotic content would not justify.

The decision was therefore rendered as stated above.

Signed: Bulcke

Berlin, September 24, 1920.

The accuracy of this copy is certified.

(Seal)



December 3, 1920

Blondes Gift

Film Review Office, Berlin

Decision regarding the motion picture "Blondes Gift"

December 13, 1920

Record

Present:

Police Councillor Dr. Stüwert (Chairman)

Miss Gertrud Duchnowsky

Prof. Jäckh

Mr. Weimann

Mr. Curator Wienken

Subject: the motion picture Blondes Gift

No statement was submitted by the assessors declaring themselves biased.

Appearing for the applicant: Mrs. Mellini.

The film was presented in the following length:

Act I: 300 m

Act II: 364 m

Act III: [not listed]

Act IV: 314 m

Act V: 335 m

Act VI: 326 m

Total: 1995 m

The representative requested approval of the film and declared herself willing to accept cuts and alterations.

In a closed session, the following decision was reached and announced:

The public screening of the film within the German Reich is prohibited.

Mrs. Mellini lodged an appeal against this decision.

Reasons

Aside from the fact that several scenes—in which the father of Loni brutally mistreats his wife and ultimately kills her with an axe, as well as the final scene in which Mande drags his beloved back and forth by the hair in order to force her to submit to his criminal will—must be prohibited on account of their brutality, the entire plot of the film is also apt to exert a morally degrading effect.

Loni, the female protagonist, is presented as a prostitute whose entire thoughts and actions are directed toward satisfying her sensual desires. This distortion of female nature runs like a red thread throughout the entire film.

The institution of marriage, which ought to exert a refining influence on the heart and mind of every human being, is here trampled underfoot in the basest manner. In the face of this atrocious distortion, the ending likewise offers no ethical counterbalance. Loni is not seized by remorse or a reflective change of heart when she is informed of the death of her husband—who had hastened to bring about her liberation—but is instead occupied solely with the thought of how she might ensnare the infatuated police lieutenant in her net, in order to continue her debauched life with him and to bring about his ruin—to poison him.

In general, the board found that it was the intention of the producer to imbue the depiction with crudely sensual effects, to suggest sexual acts unnecessarily and insistently, and thereby to provoke the viewer in an immoral manner.

In particular, the board objected that in Act I the female protagonist displays her legs, which her lover kisses. It further objected to the depiction of the backstory, in which the love relationship of the parents of the protagonist is presented. Finally, the board took offense at the concluding scene, in which the protagonist—while her two lovers lie crushed in front of the house—approaches a police officer in a manner that cannot be misunderstood. In this, too, the board discerned a brutalizing effect.

Since it appeared impossible to remove individual sequences from the film without destroying the coherence of the narrative, a ban on the entire film had to be imposed. It is left to the producer to replace the objectionable scenes with other sequences.

Signed: Bulke

Royal Film Reviewfice, Berlin

Die öffentliche Vorführung des Bildstreifens im Deutschen Reich
wird verboten.

Frau Mellini legte gegen die Entscheidung Beschwerde ein.

G r ü n d e.

Abgesehen, dass mehrere Szenen, - in denen der Vater Loni seine Frau in der brutalsten Weise misshandelt und sie schliesslich mit dem Beil erschlägt, ferner die Schlussszene, in der Mandä seine Geliebte an den Haaren hin- und her zerrt, um sie seinem verbrecherischen Willen gefügig zu machen, - wegen ihres verrohenden Charakters zu verbieten sind, ist die ganze Handlung des Bildstreifens geeignet, entsittlichend zu wirken. Loni, die Hauptdarstellerin, wird uns als eine Dirne vor Augen geführt, deren ganzes Sinnen und Trachten darauf gerichtet ist, ihre sinnlichen Gefühle zu befriedigen. Diese Verirrung der weiblichen Dirnen-natur zieht sich wie ein roter Faden durch den ganzen Film. Die Einrichtung der Ehe, die auf Herz und Gemüt eines jeden Menschen einen veredelnden

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veredelnden Einfluss ausüben muss, wird hier in gemeinster Weise mit Füßen getreten. Gegenüber dieser schauenslichen Verzerrung bildet auch der Schluss keinen ethischen Ausgleich. Nicht Reue oder einsichtsvolle Umkehr erfasst Loni, als ihr der Tod ihres Mannes, der zu ihrer Befreiung herbeigeeilt ist, gemeldet wird, sondern nur der Gedanke beseelt sie, wie sie den schneidigen Polizeileutnant in ihre Netze ziehen kann, um mit ihm ihr liederliches Leben fortzusetzen und ihn ins Verderben zu stürzen, zu vergiften.

Aus diesen Gründen war der Film zu verbieten.

gez. Stüwert.

Film-Oberprüfstelle.

Berlin, den 19. Januar 1921.

Niederschrift.

Betrifft den Bildstreifen "Blondes Gift".

Zur Verhandlung über den Bildstreifen "Blondes Gift" waren erschienen:

Staatsanwalt Balcke als Vorsitzender,

Reg. Rat Prof. Dr. Leidig (Filmindustrie)

Dr. Descoir, Univ. Prof. (Kunst und Literatur)

Pfarrer Dr. Krättschell } Volkswohlfahrt

Professor Brunner }

als Beisitzer.

Für den Antragsteller war Regissant Mellini erschienen. Eine Erklärung der Beisitzer, dass sie befangen seien, wurde nicht abgegeben. Der Bildstreifen wurde vorgeführt. Der Vertreter des Antragstellers ausserte sich zur Sache. Es wurde folgende

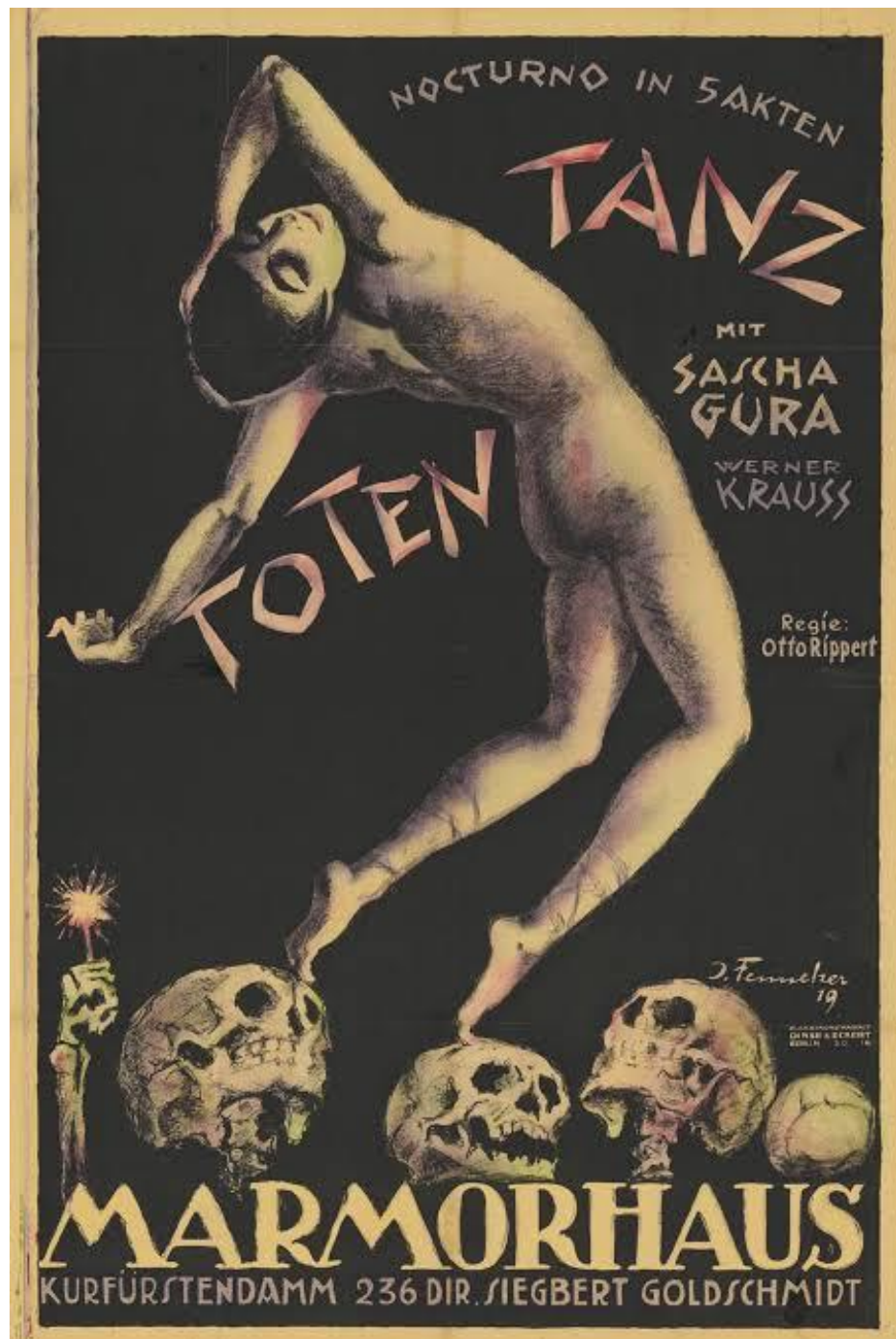
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verkündet.

Die Beschwerde vom 13. Dezember 1920 wird zurückgewiesen.

Entscheidungsgründe.

Der Bildstreifen "Blondes Gift" ist gearbeitet nach einem gleichnamigen Roman von Paul Langenscheidt. Der Roman war der Kammer nicht bekannt, die Kammer hat lediglich davon Kenntnis ~~erhalten~~, dass dieser Roman



TOTENTANZ (LOST)

CENSORSHIP DECISION

Film Review Board

B. 253.21

Berlin, 7 December 1921

Concerning the decision of the Film Review Board regarding the motion picture *Totentanz*

The authorization granted to the motion picture *Totentanz* by the decision of the Berlin Film Review Office of 21 September 1920, No. 558, is hereby revoked. **The public exhibition of this motion picture in the German Reich is prohibited.**

Grounds for the decision

A motion picture, or any part thereof, is capable of producing a morally corrupting effect within the meaning of §1 of the Motion Picture Law if its exhibition can, with sufficient probability, be expected to have a detrimental effect upon the moral feelings and thinking of the average spectator (see the decision of 19 September 1921 concerning *Das Auge des Götzen* [*The Eye of the Idol*]). In the present case, such an effect has been established in two respects:

I. The substance of the motion picture consists essentially of the sadistic activities of a sensualist and misanthrope. This Dr. Sephur, himself consumed by an intense passion for his instruments of torture, takes equally lascivious delight in the death agonies of his victims and in the torments of love suffered by those who, inflamed with passion for a woman, must ultimately follow the path to death. The accumulation of fatal consequences arising from his actions, together with the struggle he himself wages against that woman in order to possess her, are highly likely to exert a detrimental influence upon the spectator's moral sensibilities. This applies particularly to those scenes in which Sephur pursues the woman who remains beyond his reach with continually renewed propositions, gropes her in a corrupting manner and pulls her toward him, as well as to the image in the final act in which he attempts to seize her by force.

II. In addition, a morally corrupting effect is unmistakable in all those scenes in which the woman displays her arts of seduction before the victims of Sephur's revenge and, through her clothing and gestures, inflames the senses of the male spectators. The effect is especially provocative when the woman's dance, and the display of her limbs, turn a man into a burglar and murderer. The same applies to the dancing scene in the tavern, where she dances upon a tabletop before the men crowding around it. The close-ups of the spectators' faces, distorted by lust, their greedy gazes, and their frenzied behavior clearly reveal an inflamed sensuality.

III. No countervailing elements capable of neutralizing or mitigating this effect can be discerned. The tendency claimed by the representative of the original production company—to demonstrate that sensual passion has a corrupting effect—is nowhere expressed with sufficient clarity to exert a balancing influence upon the average cinema spectator.

In view of the finding that the motion picture has a morally corrupting effect, it was unnecessary to examine whether it also produces a brutalizing effect. Pursuant to §1, paragraphs 2 and 4, of the Motion

Picture Law of 12 May 1920 and §3 of the Rules of Procedure of 18 August 1920, the decision was therefore rendered as stated above. **Signed: Dr. Seeger**

Abschrift

Film-Oberprüfstelle.

Berlin, den 7. Dezember 1921

B. 253.21.



Betrifft Entscheidung der Film-Oberprüfstelle
zu dem Bildstreifen " Totentanz " .

Die durch die Entscheidung der Film-Prüfstelle Berlin vom 21. September 1920 Nr. 558 ausgesprochene Zulassung des Bildstreifens " Totentanz " wird widerrufen. Die öffentliche Vorführung dieses Bildstreifens im Deutschen Reich ist verboten.

Entscheidungsgründe.

Ein Bildstreifen oder ein Teil eines solchen ist geeignet, entsittlichend im Sinne des §1 des Lichtspielgesetzes zu wirken, wenn von seiner Vorführung mit hinreichender Wahrscheinlichkeit eine nachteilige Einwirkung auf das sittliche Fühlen und Denken des normalen Durchschnittsbesuchers zu erwarten steht. (vgl. Entscheidung vom 19. September 1921 in Sachen " Auge des Götzen ".) Diese Wirkung ist vorliegend in doppelter Richtung festgestellt worden:

I. Der Inhalt des Bildstreifens erschöpft sich im wesentlichen in dem sadistischen Treiben eines senilen Lüstlings und Menschenhassers. Dieser Dr. Sephar, der selbst von greisenhafter Leidenschaft für das Werkzeug seiner Rache erfasst ist, weidet sich mit gleich lüsterner Grausamkeit an den Todesqualen seiner Opfer wie an den Liebesqualen derjenigen, die ihnen mit einem Tode erhörter Leidenschaft den Weg zum Tode bereiten muss. Die Häufung der Todeserfolge seines Tuns und der Kampf, den er selbst mit jener Frau um ihren Besitz führt, sind in hohem Masse geeignet, die Moral des Beschauers nachteilig zu beeinflussen. Das gilt insbesondere von den Szenen, in den Sephar die für ihn Unerreichbare mit immer neuen Liebesanträgen verfolgt, sie in Geilheit und Lüsterheit nicht verber-

verbergender Weise betastet und an sich zieht, wie von dem Bild im letzten Akt, in dem er mit Gewalt von ihr Besitz zu ergreifen sucht.

II. Zum andern ist eine entsittlichende Wirkung in allen den Szenen unverkennbar, in denen das Weib gegenüber den Opfern der Rache Sephars ihre Verführungskünste spielen lässt und durch Kleidung und Gebärde die Sinne der Männer aufzupeltschen versteht. Es wirkt moralverletzend, wenn schon der Tanz eines Weibes und die Zurschaustellung ihrer Glieder einen Mann zum Einbrecher und Mörder machen. Dasselbe gilt von der Tanzszene in der Kaschemme, als "sie" auf einer Tischplatte zu Häupten der den Tisch umlagernden Männer tanzt. Die von Lüsternheit verzerrten Gesichter der Zuschauer in Grossaufnahme, ihre gierigen Blicke und ihr gelles Tasten verraten deutlich aufgepeltschte Sinnlichkeit.

III. Gegenwerte, die diese Wirkung aufzuheben oder zu mildern vermöchten, sind nicht erkennbar. Die von dem Vertreter der Ursprungsfirma behauptete Tendenz des Bildstreifens, zu erweisen, dass sinnliche Leidenschaft verderblich wirke, tritt nirgends in einem Masse erkennbar hervor, dass sie auf den normalen Lichtspieltheaterbesucher ausgleichend einzuwirken vermöchte.

Angesichts der damit getroffenen Feststellung einer entsittlichenden Wirkung des Bildstreifens bedurfte es keiner Prüfung, ob demselben auch eine verrohende Wirkung innewohne. Bei Anwendung der §§ 1 Absatz 2 und 4 des Lichtspielgesetzes vom 12. Mai 1920 und des § 3 der Gebührenordnung vom 18. August 1920 war daher, wie geschehen, zu erkennen.

gez. Dr. Seeger.

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