Twenty-First-Century German Film Adaptations: Classical Texts And Transnational Media Literacy

Bridget Swanson

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY GERMAN FILM ADAPTATIONS:
CLASSICAL TEXTS AND TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA LITERACY

Bridget Swanson
Timothy Corrigan
Catriona MacLeod

Between 2005 and 2015, German film studios produced an unprecedented number of contemporary classical literary adaptations, including Leander Haußmann's Kabale und Liebe (2005), Uwe Janson's Werther (2008), Rolf Teigler's Penthesilea-Moabit (2009), Philip Stölzl's Goethe! (2011), and others. This dissertation explores the aesthetic practices and industrial pressures that resulted in these films’ emergence and argues that – regardless of style and generic conventions – they must be understood as key players in a more overarching genre: contemporary classical adaptations. This category proves essential for mapping contemporary adaptation practices as they interact with national and international concerns. Close film analysis paired with material adaptation studies demonstrates that the recent uptick in contemporary classical adaptations in Germany has emerged through German cinema's intense dialogical engagement with 1) Hollywood blockbuster adaptations of the 1990s; 2) transnational production and distribution pressures in contemporary Europe; and 3) the vexed heritage of German national cinema. That nearly all of the films in this genre consistently position spectators within the filmic diegesis as self-reflexive viewers of canonical works indicates, however, the importance of a fourth influence that promotes and shapes these films: namely, the nationwide project of Filmbildung in Germany, which since 2003 has been heavily pushed by private and public institutions (such as the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, the Goethe-Institut, and Warner Bros. Germany). This educational mission offers financial incentives for filmmakers to produce literary adaptations and provides instructors and students with didactic materials for their integration into curricular units and thereby undergirds the creation of, alters the aesthetics of, and influences the reception of contemporary classical adaptations. Ultimately, this investigation reveals the educational apparatus as a historically unrecognized “seventh” branch in what Simone Murray has termed the “six branches of the material adaptation industry” and redirects the field of contemporary German film away from the formal experimentation of modern-day auteurs to foreground the transnational circulation and transmutation of popular content.

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Bridget Swanson

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Supervisor of Dissertation

__________________________

Timothy Corrigan

Professor of English and Cinema & Media Studies

Graduate Group Chairperson

__________________________

Simon Richter, Professor of German

Co-Supervisor of Dissertation

__________________________

Catriona MacLeod

Professor of German

Dissertation Committee

Christina Frei, Adjunct Associate Professor of Education

Randall Halle, Professor of German Film and Cultural Studies
TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY GERMAN FILM ADAPTATIONS: CLASSICAL TEXTS AND TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA LITERACY

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Bridget Swanson

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With utmost gratitude to my mother and father, Maureen and Gary West, who ensured I had access to a college education. This was a privilege neither of them had, but the value of which they both knew all too well.

And to Kristin Francoeur and Margaret Strair, both who gracefully supported me through the many stages of this project.
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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Schiller the Thriller: Canonical Literature and Twenty-First-Century Popular Culture

I. Canonical German Literature in Popular Culture

Canonical German literature has been making a distinct comeback in twenty-first-century German culture. Since the early 2000s, the works of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and other classical German writers have been circulating across a wide variety of popular media forms, whether reworked via new literary works and songs, in stage plays and on film, or as motifs in video games and consumer-made mash-ups. This study focuses on one notable trend within this broader postmodern movement: filmmaking practices in Germany that have resulted in a raft of recent adaptations revivifying classical canonical works for contemporary audiences. It is the contours of this genre – its establishment, aims, aesthetics, content, and pedagogical implementation in educational institutions – that this project examines. As I argue, these films champion a non-hierarchical understanding of the literature/film relationship, thereby overturning several binaries that doggedly persist in adaptation studies – the very same binaries that, perhaps ironically, have resulted in these films being discounted in more serious scholarship. Despite these films’ embrace of postmodern projects, the binaries the films seek to explode become reinforced by the educational industry in Germany, an entity that both supports the production of these adaptations (albeit implicitly) and then explicitly frames their interpretation via didacticized materials for use by numerous teachers and students nationwide. The fraught sociological context in which the recent revival of German canonical literature has taken place can best be described by looking at “Schiller” a
satirical, parodic song written and performed by one of Germany’s most famous a cappella groups, the Wise Guys.

From fall 2016 to summer 2017, the popular Köln-based a cappella group the Wise Guys – comprised of Daniel Dickkopf, Edzar Hünecke, Marc Sahr, Nils Olfert, and Björn Sterzenbach – embarked on their farewell tour “Wir hatten eine gute Zeit.” During this tour, the group performed 123 times throughout Germany before officially breaking up. Well liked for their ability to pair catchy tunes with clever lyrics, the Wise Guys played in consistently packed concert halls. Many of the shows for the final tour were entirely sold out many weeks in advance. The seats in these concert halls were filled with attendees of all ages – from young children to senior citizens – many of whom knew the group’s songs completely by heart and sang along gleefully, attesting to the group’s popularity.

The most visually spectacular performance within the group’s two-hour-long set was that of their work “Schiller,” a song that appropriates the melody of the late Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” (1982) but adapts the title and lyrics to comment on the presumed terror students feel when faced with the obligatory study of classical canonical literary works, such as Friedrich Schiller’s (1752–1805). A look at the song’s melody, lyrics, and staging will help us begin to parse some of the impulses underlying this trend.

Creating humor through extreme hyperbole, the song’s lyrics tell of a student’s extreme anxiety about engaging with Schiller’s literary works. For the performance of this number, two of the main factors contributing to the student’s fear were signaled visually via a vividly spooky backdrop created specifically for the song: namely, these works’ outdatedness and inaccessibility in modern times. The backdrop for this song was
a most eerie graveyard scene replete with numerous weatherworn, cracked tombstones and decrepit statues overrun by sharp blades of unkempt grass. Depicted entirely in monochromatic gray scale, audience members were led to quickly associate adjectives such as “old” and “timeworn” with the canonical author mentioned in the song. In addition, throughout the song, a foggy haze of smoke continuously rolled over the floorboards, partly covering the performers in a haze, suggesting “inaccessibility” and “impenetrability” as other aspects the song attributed to Schiller. At the same time, however, the choreography of the group’s dance gestured toward the “enduring” appeal of an artist’s individual contributions, however difficult. Together, the group performed iconic dance moves associated with none other than Michael Jackson. Audience members sang along, laughing at the clever wordplay between “Thriller” and “Schiller” throughout the refrains, and expressing joy at the members’ successful execution of the choreography. Within the song, then, the concept of the “genius” and autonomous artist with staying power beyond his heyday is both derided and cherished.

That the Wise Guys’ “Schiller” was selected for inclusion in the line-up from over two hundred and fifty songs that the group produced during their twenty-five years together speaks to the song’s longstanding popularity among listeners. Produced for the group’s CD *Frei!* (2008), the tune proved well liked upon its release, largely – according to fans – because it referenced a commonplace dilemma: that students across the nation are obligated to read Schiller for school and, oftentimes, find his prose neither entirely enjoyable nor easily accessible. Indeed, it was in part the general stance toward the obligatory reading of Schiller detailed in the lyrics that made the song’s content readily relatable to contemporary audiences, repackaged through comical exaggeration. For
example, immediately in the song’s first stanza, the first-person narrator wakes up from a nightmare, covered in a cold sweat, fearing Schiller’s tome that is in his room, a work that he must read due to its (presumed) edifying potential. The group sings:

Es ist Geisterstunde.
Das Mondlicht liegt ganz fahl auf dieser Nacht.
Mit trocknem Munde
und voller Panik bin ich aufgewacht
Mit einem Tuch
tupf ich mir schnell den Angstschweiß von der Stirne.
Da liegt ein Buch.
Vielleicht macht mir ja lesen etwas Mut.
Denn lesen tut gut.
Doch es ist Schiller.
Schiller schreibt so schrecklich kompliziert
und manchmal geradezu blasiert.
Ja, es ist Schiller.
Schiller macht mir Sterbenslangeweile.
Ich les – jede – Zeile – drei Mal.¹

In Germany today, students are expected to engage with Germany’s classical canonical works at some point in their educational trajectory, most commonly in the Oberstufe. The majority of these canonical texts are received – as overstated by the song but also indicated in anecdotal reports – as obtuse, opaque, and cumbersome because the stories these works tell, the contexts in which they are situated, and the style in which they are written are far removed from the contemporary period. As the song jokingly relates, Schiller’s style can prove dreadfully problematic in an age marked by briefer forms of written communication:

So gut ich kann
kämpf ich mich durch den endlos langen Satz durch.
Doch komm ich hinten an.
Erinnere ich mich leider nicht mehr dran,
wie er begann.²

² Ibid.
In response to a video clip of the group performing the song during a 3Sat concert in September 2007 and later uploaded to YouTube by user R2D2R5, user Elli’s rejoices (perhaps quite jokingly) at the fact that the song expresses her own “fear” of Schiller’s difficult prose. She notes how the tune, which she has heard many times over the years, has become increasingly relevant for her now that she is confronting Schiller in the Oberstufe. She explains: “Bin jetzt in der Oberstufe und es grusselt [sic] mich vor Schiller xD. Dieses Lied begleitet mich seit der Grundschule :D.”

Another user, writing under the pseudonym Slasch Splasch, praises the song for providing an experience more enjoyable than reading the original: “Das Lied ist so viel angenehmer zu hören, als Wilhelm Tell von Friedrich Schiller in der Schule zu lesen xD.”

In addition to these positive remarks, user Mrs4EverTogether points out in her comment the social context for the song’s popularity. She explains, based on personal experience, that Schiller is simply a mandatory part of the curriculum in German class: “wir lesen gerade schiller in Deutsch, ich habe einfach mal die CD mitgenommen und meiner deutschlehrerin vorgespielt, die meinte nur, sie weiß, dass schiller kompliziert schreibt, aber es steht nun mal auf dem lehrplan! XD.”

This song, as she notes, at least goes along with the curriculum as a refreshing addition to the traditional Schiller-related coursework. She adds, “die ganze Klasse hat dann ´beim zweiten mal beim refrain mitgesungen, war echt geil! ;-).”

Although Schiller is the only author mentioned by name in the song, the lyrics indicate that he serves as a synecdoche for Germany’s many classical writers – or, to use

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
the Wise Guy’s satiric words – for every “Schleimer, der scheinbar in Weimar zwei-, dreimal dabei war.”

For this song in particular, Schiller happens to be chosen for special mention in the song because his surname conveniently rhymes with and plays upon Jackson’s “Thriller,” the melody of which is directly imitated in the Wise Guy’s clever parody. Throughout the song, the group continuously drops well-known lines directly cited from the author (namely, Schiller’s ballad “Die Bürgschaft”), inviting readers to re-experience the text anew through a mix of popular music, dance, and contemporary satire.

The song’s release in 2008 – and the enduring enjoyment it still gives listeners in 2017 – demonstrates the efficacy of recuperating Germany’s classical writers through popular culture. Chronologically, it also brings the piece into conversation with the aforementioned movement in twenty-first-century Germany cinema that similarly foregrounds the works of canonical German authors. In this movement, canonical authors and their works become heavily remixed, modernized, popularized, and sometimes even directly parodied. These films, which I group together as a genre and call German contemporary classical adaptations, proliferated between 2005 and 2010 and were in full sway when the Wise Guys created their popular tune. Across these numerous films, classical canonical German literature – including works by Schiller – were adapted for the silver screen for contemporary audiences, in particular students who are or have been obligated to engage with works of German canonical literature. Although these films are often not as satirical as the Wise Guys’ “Schiller,” many have proven commercially successful for a similar reason: they help make the necessary experience of engaging with canonical texts more palatable, accessible, and fun.

7 The Wise Guys, “Schiller.”
In this project, under the umbrella term “contemporary classical adaptations,” I specifically refer to films: 1) whose source texts are considered canonical for and within a particular (national) culture; and 2) that were produced in the late twentieth to early twenty-first centuries. Although my study focuses on works produced in or in collaboration with Germany, the proliferation of films belonging to this genre is not limited to this country: instead, its beginnings can be traced back to Hollywood, and its ripple effect has, since the mid-1990s, spread out to many other nations in recent times, resulting in a rather complex transnational film phenomenon. In short, as I suggest, the genre includes everything from Amy Heckerling’s *Clueless* (1995), a highly modernized and Americanized adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1815) that takes place in Beverly Hills, to films like Philip Stölzl’s *Goethe!* (2010), which is based on Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) and takes the viewer back to provincial towns in Enlightenment Europe. The category is, therefore, an amalgamation of a broad variety of films, from traditional heritage films to author biopics to complete modernizations and beyond, all of which have found firm footing in the cinema in recent decades.

Within the broader genre of contemporary classical adaptations, Hollywood-produced films have received more than the lion’s share of recent film scholarship on contemporary adaptation practices. Adaptations produced by and within other nation-states have received, in contrast, little acknowledgement. On the one hand, the lack of critical work on contemporary classical adaptations is particularly striking when one considers Germany, given the country’s particular vested interest in literature as the self-pronounced “Land der Dichter und Denker.” On the other hand, however, that film scholarship has overlooked the way that canonical literature has again made its way to the
silver screen in the 2000s also is a result of a history of (largely) negative critical and scholarly responses to the genre of adaptations in the nation.

Indeed, despite a tight literature/film connection that has marked German cinema since its inception, the great proliferation of literary adaptations in the 1970s in West Germany, which was a direct result of an increasing intolerance of controversial film topics, was unenthusiastically called the *Literaturverfilmungskrise,* a compound noun directly linking adaptations with cultural crisis. Scholars and filmmakers alike lamented the cessation in truly alternative cinematic fare during this decade. Eric Rentschler, speaking of the situation in West Germany, noted that directors’ adherence to topics deemed safe by alternative filmmakers indicated “how successfully government-sponsored institutions” could “stifle creative and critical filmmaking….” Speaking of a similar trend in the cinematic fare produced in East Germany in this same decade, director Egon Günther confessed that his seemingly politically innocuous adaptations – such as *Lotte in Weimar* (1975) and *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1976) were “only born out of necessity. Between each of these films I dealt with contemporary social issues of contemporary society.” Both individuals’ comments point to the general belief that,

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8 Eric Rentschler, *West German Film in the Course of Time: Reflections on the Twenty Years since Oberhausen* (Bedford Hills, Redgrave Publishing Company, 1984), 129–57. Debates among critics about whether there were too many adaptations being produced during this time period led to the phenomenon being termed the *Literaturverfilmungskrise.* Rentschler estimates that at least 40 adaptations were produced and released in Germany between 1976 and 1978.

9 Daniela Berghahn, “The Re-Evaluation of Goethe and the Classical Tradition in the Films of Egon Günther and Siegfried Kühn,” in *DEFA: East German Cinema: 1946-1992,* eds. Sean Allen and John Sandford (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 222–44. Although the term *Literaturverfilmungskrise* specifically denotes filmmaking practices in West Germany, Daniela Berghahn notes a parallel movement in East Germany that occurred during the same decade, which resulted in a rise in *Erbefilme* in the 1970s, a movement that now also informs united Germany’s adaptation history.

10 Rentschler, *West German Film,* 153.

besides a few notable examples of the genre, a decent portion of adaptations generally—at least in this time period—represented a somewhat uncreative, lackluster fare.

Despite changes in politics and aesthetics since the 1970s, a generally negative appraisal of adaptations in the scholarship in German cinema doggedly persisted well into the early twenty-first century. In the 1990s and 2000s, for instance, one continues to note prejudices against commercial filmmaking, and by extension, the genre of contemporary classical adaptations inherently involved with the commercial turn. The prejudice voiced against commercial cinema in these years was tightly related to the sea change from auteurist to clearly commercial film productions, which many immediately saw as a cultural loss for German national cinema, resulting in nostalgia for past cinematic fare.\footnote{Eric Rentschler, “From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus,” in Cinema and Nation, eds. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 262–76. Rentschler acknowledges the role his own nostalgia plays in his evaluation.} For example, in Rentschler’s well-circulated article, “From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus,” he outlines how German film’s transition from the model of the Autorenkino to the Hollywood model of popular, star-based entertainment cinema has resulted in a bevy of films that can be described as purely escapist entertainment, as they possess neither content nor formal techniques that mark them as identifiably German and aesthetically worthwhile. He writes that films from this time are characterized by a “formula-bound profusion of romantic comedies, crude farces, road movies, action films and literary adaptations . . . situated within an unchartable (unübersichtlich) landscape, a site without signposts.”\footnote{Ibid., 262} Scholars writing in the 2000s have—to some extent—continued to denigrate this trend toward commercial cinema, namely by heralding the emergence of more recent auteur cinema in the nation as a sign
of a newly “legitimate” German film culture.\textsuperscript{14} Even in works that seek to recuperate contemporary German popular cinema within the academy, adaptations are overlooked in the crossfire between numerous articles that either analyze those commercial productions that have garnered widespread international acclaim (often for their (re)imagining of Nazi and East German pasts) and those that explore new auteurs like Fatih Akin and the directors of the Berlin School.\textsuperscript{15}

In this trend in contemporary German film scholarship, contemporary classical adaptations are caught in the interstices and overlooked. On the one hand, these films have not garnered mass international acclaim like Oscar winners \textit{Nirgendwo in Afrika} (Link, 2003) and \textit{Das Leben der Anderen} (Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006). On the other hand, they also do not fit into auteur cinema, which trades in experimental forms. Yet the fact that Germany serves as the largest film-producing nation in the European Union and has released an unprecedented number of contemporary classical adaptations in the last decades demands that scholars take a closer, more nuanced look at the dynamics informing the production and consumption of these films. Drawing from a large corpus of contemporary German canonical film adaptations released between 2005 and 2015, this project aims to rectify the dearth in scholarship by investigating industrial, aesthetic, and pedagogical terms at play in these films.


\textsuperscript{15} Brad Prager and Jaimey Fisher, \textit{The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century} (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), and Paul Cooke, \textit{Contemporary German Cinema} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012). Prager and Fisher structure their book to work against the general tendency to group the two (or more) trends in contemporary German cinema into camps in order to overcome, as the authors write, denotations of what is “good” versus what is “bad.” They thus provide essays across a variety of films, from Berlin School productions to commercial soccer films. This structure also informs Paul Cooke’s \textit{Contemporary German Cinema}, which includes chapters on commercial and auteur cinema productions. Within both works, however, contemporary classical adaptations receive no sustained attention.
In determining which films to include in this study, I have worked with a rather flexible definition. I define contemporary classical adaptations in Germany as those films that – to borrow from the preeminent literary critic Marcel Reich Ranicki’s defense of his 54-volume collection of German novels, dramas, poems, short stories, and essays – are based on German literary works produced between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century and that are generally agreed upon as belonging to the national canon. As such, the list is somewhat flexible. “Ein Kanon,” Reinicki states, “ist nicht etwa ein Gesetzbuch, sondern eine Liste empfehlenswerter, wichtiger, exemplarischer und, wenn es um die Schule geht, für den Unterricht besonders geeigneter Werke.”\(^1\) By investigating industrial emergence, thematic trends, cultural aesthetics, and the pedagogical agenda of contemporary classical films produced by or in conjunction with German filmmakers and production companies, and/or with German funding, this dissertation seeks to open doors for more hybrid, integrated, and non-hierarchical approaches to film history, popular culture studies, canon studies, national and transnational filmmaking, and material adaptation studies.

As a result of new contextual and technological determinants, which range from the German government’s mandate in recent years to integrate film into school curricula to popular German cinema’s imitation of Hollywood film styles and aesthetics, recent adaptations repeatedly underscore the situation through which contemporary viewers engage with, interpret, and understand the canonical works of the past. Thus, I argue that to understand and read an adaptation of a canonical work in Germany today, viewers are asked to reflect critically on their position as spectators who inevitably recreate that work.

as a dialogue between the past and present. By self-reflexively prioritizing acts of spectatorship and education over canonical, historic content, twenty-first-century canon films participate as critical interventions in the longstanding debates surrounding 1) the continued study of the nation’s canonical literature, 2) the development of Germany’s transnational and regional cinemas, and 3) the cultural and educational value of canonical film adaptations.

That contemporary classical adaptations in Germany are created in an economically viable, transculturally rich, and institutionally valuable manner distinguishes them from adaptations made during previous eras of national film production and shed light on the way popular content circulates within the interstices of both transnational and national filmmaking. As such, these films function as part of a larger transnational trend that requires a shift not only in the way we apprehend contemporary German film culture but also in how we understand the production and reception of adaptations at large on the world screen. Although Germany is certainly not the only filmmaking nation with a vested interest in producing viable contemporary classical adaptations in the new millennium, German films prove an essential starting point for studies with a greater international focus that are beyond the scope of this work. My hope is that this project inspires further investigations into national and transnational emanations of contemporary classical adaptations that consider the processes by and contexts within which these films emerge.
II. The Contemporary Classical Adaptation: A Post-Reunification Genre

Given the changes in filmmaking that followed in the wake of Germany’s reunification, the time period explored here proves particularly fertile for exploring the interaction of the national and transnational in and across adaptations. Historically, classical adaptations have played a central role in shaping German national cinema and making it successful both at home and abroad, so their prevalence in the contemporary German film market is nothing new. From F. W Murnau’s *Faust* (1926) to Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Effi Briest* (1977), the continued prevalence and relevance of the genre throughout all eras of German filmmaking allows it to serve as a litmus test for measuring aesthetic, industrial, cultural, historical, political, and pedagogical values and concerns in a given time period. First, the content of these films has been carefully selected from a specific set of renowned cultural products. Second, the narrative sequences that these adaptations draw upon are always transposed for the screen through a contemporary lens that hermeneutically reshapes those works. To take an example from the conclusion of this project, an adaptation of *Jud Süss* (1940) created during the Third Reich for propaganda purposes brings vastly different aesthetic, political, narrative, cultural, and pedagogical connotations to bear than a twenty-first century adaptation of this work, during a time when entertainment films based on events during the Nazi era have found solid footing in Germany. That multiple adaptations of a singular canonical text, like the adaptations of *Jud Süss*, can be compared diachronically across eras in film history to elucidate key changes in cultural perspectives, societal values, industrial motives, filmmaking aesthetics, and pedagogical intent is particularly possible in the
German film context, where adaptations have played an important role in the development and success of the medium.

Adaptations have been so central to German film history, in fact, that film critic Ronald Holloway once succinctly noted that “literature is the backbone of German cinema. Remove that backbone . . . and it appears to be a jelly-fish.” Literature, he contends, must be understood as the centerpiece of much of German film production throughout the ages, as it has repeatedly given the medium stability and structure, especially in times of national and/or economic crisis. Holloway’s statement suggests that without the strong scaffolding literature provides, the film medium would have developed as an amorphous, unstable entity, unduly influenced by external pressures. Classical adaptations, according to this argument, form the heart of German film’s overall development.

Of course, comparing a German film culture devoid of literary precedents to an invertebrate with limited control over its own movement admittedly arises from a tradition that reifies literature to the detriment of film – a biased argument that this project wholly disputes. Nevertheless, despite the implicit hierarchies, Holloway acknowledges a very productive interaction between literature and film that marks all eras of German filmmaking. This is a relationship that I will also draw out in Chapter One, albeit to different ends. In short, already beginning in the pre-classical period of early cinema, adaptations of high cultural literary works, such as George Méliès’s *The Damnation of Faust* (1903) and *Faust and Marguerite* (1904), attempted to lend credibility to the film form so that it could be considered “art.”

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Republic, adaptations and popular culture become even more tightly intertwined with the international success of some of the most lauded films in German history, including Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), G.W. Pabst’s *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929) and *Die drei Groschenoper* (1931), and Josef von Sternberg’s *Der Blaue Engel* (1930). These films secured prestige for the art form and garnered a widespread popularity that has endured throughout the years, largely due to their artistic achievements as well as political interpretations, offered by Siegfried Kracauer in *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film* and Lotte Eisner in *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, that claim that these films exposed the beginnings of the cultural crisis that lead to the rise of Nazism.

During the 1940s, some adaptations were utilized to suture the most perverse ideologies of National Socialism into a presumed lived past, such as displayed in Veit Harlan’s notorious *Jud Süß*. Then, in the direct aftermath of the war, adaptations were oftentimes instrumentalized to explore the new realities of cultural disorientation, disintegration, and aimlessness, such as displayed in Georg C. Klaren’s *Wozzeck* (1947). With the division of the German nation into the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, adaptations created between 1949 and 1989 often served as vehicles for a reexamination of political, historical, and cultural realities that often would otherwise have been censored, perhaps best exemplified in Fassbinder’s *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1978). From the beginning of German film history until the point of reunification, classical adaptation production remained strong, changing its aesthetics, politics, and content in relation to shifting landscapes in the German nation.
After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, film production, distribution, and aesthetics underwent significant changes in the new Federal Republic of Germany. The most notable of the alterations in the film market entailed the immediate dismantling of the East German Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA) and the reordering of German film studios into a largely privatized system. Filmmaking, once largely made possible through government funds earmarked for national art cinema, increasingly had to rely upon its own economic success for continuation. This new economic model led to a more fluid and intermixed approach to film funding across various media branches, including fiduciary support from television and radio stations that could shore up film production now in need of economic assistance. Today, Germany’s film landscape relies upon a robust conglomeration of funding sources in which “independent production companies, international distribution companies, public and private television stations, and regional and local film boards now all work together in developing mixed forms of film financing and moving toward transnational modes of production.”

In comparison to previous decades of filmmaking funded in part by governmental entities, filmmakers and studios now required financial support from national and supranational entities, which drastically altered production and circulation of films. These economic and industrial changes, as Randall Halle traces in *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic*, are also reflected in the film products themselves. Given new transnational modes of production, films produced in Germany after the fall of the Wall are marked by thematic content, looks, and purposes that differentiate them from the national film products of previous eras. Changes, Halle notes, occur across all aspects of film, including “characters, actors, and crew, language, setting, location, the

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film script, the camerawork and editing, in short to what we see and to the way we see it.”¹⁹ The adjustments in German filmmaking practices after the fall of the Wall anticipated alterations that would become even more pronounced with the later establishment of the European Union in 1993.

Cinematic adaptations of canonical literary works, one of the oldest film genres, were particularly affected by the privatization and ensuing Europeanization of film production models and aesthetics in Germany. Unlike adaptations from previous periods, today’s contemporary classical adaptations need to straddle both national and transnational markets. As explored throughout this work, these films intertwine strategies, content, and aesthetic devices that appeal to both domestic audiences well versed in the literature and previous eras of adaptation filmmaking in Germany (such as, for example, the Literaturverfilmungskrise of the 1970s), as well as global audiences familiar with Hollywood-style literary adaptations. I trace how these films problematize the meaning of that ever-slippery term “canonical” as it engages with and becomes influenced by the following:

• the cultural, ideological, and economic centrality of popular culture;
• the current pressures of the transnational within filmmaking in the EU;
• the aesthetic resistance of the national within transnational filmmaking;
• the dialogic engagement between literary authors and film auteurs;
• the pedagogical agendas embedded within and/or created for these films due to new institutional demands at both public and private levels.

¹⁹ Randall Halle, German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 5.
In the 2000s, the time period in question here, adaptations resist attempts at clear-cut disaggregation. In light of the industrial, aesthetic, and pedagogical terms at play in the production and consumption of these films, these adaptations throw new light on the role they play culturally and interculturally in German, European, and – more broadly – transnational filmmaking.

III. Contemporary Classical Adaptations and Questions of Value

Despite the growing production, study, and mass-marketing of film adaptations over the last several decades, German contemporary classical adaptations produced in the 2000s have yet to be brought into careful critical dialogue with one another and studied as a cohesive genre in a manner that acknowledges their aesthetic and commercial similarities as well as their consistent pedagogical treatment by studios and institutions promoting German language and cultural instruction domestically and abroad. Five intertwining prejudices, explored in detail below, account for the devaluation and lack of attention given to these films.

There is first and foremost a longstanding historical suspicion about and/or prejudice against film adaptations in general, which commonly privileges their source texts. The preference for canonical literary works of the past over their often-labeled “derivative” film adaptations has long plagued adaptations and is rooted in a longstanding distrust of the film medium itself that is both culturally and institutionally informed. For instance, in 1936, Walter Benjamin attempted to challenge the belief that the film medium would only corrupt viewers who reveled in the medium’s ability to titillate and stimulate; in contrast, he hailed film as a radical, democratic medium that could position
spectators as judges of artworks, despite acknowledging that the public is an often absent-minded and easily distracted judge. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer exposed flaws in this argument only a decade later. Writing after the horrific (ab)uses of cinema in Nazi Germany, they pointed out that modern modes of reproduction did quite the opposite. According to him, modern media forms – most notably film – instead directly contributed to mass deception and unthinkable barbarism through the manipulations and machinations of the culture industry that directly shaped viewers’ tastes to align with the exigencies of the market and the interests of the producers. This conception of film as a medium that worked upon audiences would later be thrown into question in the 1980s through cultural study theories that focused on the dynamic relationship between the spectator and the film. Yet Adorno and Horkheimer’s theoretical writing concerning film made a lasting impact because it reinforced older notions that separated “serious” and “popular” forms of art, whereby “serious” art belonged to an intellectual elite and “popular art” was simply entertainment for the common individual. As we will see throughout the chapters here, and most prevalently in Chapter Four, when it comes to valuing adaptations, arguments still proliferate that frame the work according to these presumably juxtaposed categories, whereby the canonical is “serious” and the adaptation is simply pitched to the lowest common denominator for enjoyable entertainment purposes (and therefore, profit-making).

The general distrust of adaptations discussed above has also been exacerbated and shaped by adaptations’ institutional history within the academy. Before adaptation studies could become a legitimate scholarly field in its own right, adaptations themselves found an academic home under the aegis of literature departments. In these disciplines, a core, unchanging set of canonical authors and their exemplary writings generally constituted the common language shared by scholars. Thus, it was only natural that, as a result of their location within such departments, literary scholars and their students working with adaptations often clung to the fallacious notion that fidelity to a source text could measure a given adaptation’s value.\(^{22}\) In the early waves of academic criticism, therefore, the denouncements of adaptations were particularly pointed and descriptions rife with moral terminology – including abundant use of the words “betrayal,” “deformation,” “perversion,” “infidelity,” and “desecration” – that besmirched these works vis-à-vis their source texts.\(^{23}\) Although adaptation studies has become more established in recent years, particularly with the emergence of several groundbreaking theoretical works and edited collections in the early 2000s, the longstanding problem of distrusting and devaluing adaptations is still sometimes perpetuated by the very academy whose scholars seek to recuperate the value of adaptations through fidelity criticism, the notion that the value of an adaptation is bound to its faithful representation of the source text. As Simone Murray notes in *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation*, even the critique of fidelity criticism common among contemporary third-wave approaches has unfortunately ossified into a habitual gesture that still places the


source text before and above the film adaptation under discussion. This act results in a bind that prevents critics from valuing adaptations in their own right and reveals that the source text must often still serve as the centerpiece, as the benchmark against which an adaptation is evaluated, regardless of whether the evaluation is positive, negative, or neutral.  

Second, as part of the prejudice that plagues adaptations (and parodies), there is a continual elevation and fixation on the singularity of both authors and auteurs. In short, the author continues to serve as the centering point “among a sea of textuality.” A source text, of course, implies there is an original author. Despite claims about the “death of the author” since the 1970s and strong arguments that adaptations should by no means be evaluated through comparison with a source text, the original author still functions as a main centering, organizing mechanism within adaptation studies and the adaptation industry. One need only to look at the titles of several recent edited collections in adaptation studies to see that the canonical author – whether Austen, Dickens, Flaubert, Fontane, Goethe, Schnitzler, Shakespeare, or Tolstoy, among others – is alive and doing quite well. In many cases, scholarly essays on singular adaptations, even now during third-wave fidelity criticism, are still called for, collected, disseminated, and catalogued in relation to the works’ original author (and in some cases, auteur). 

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24 Simone Murray, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–25. Simone Murray notes that this continual denouncement of fidelity criticism reveals yet another intertwined problem that is worth mentioning but is beyond the scope of this argument: that textual analysis of adaptations, without consideration of their sociohistorical and industrial contexts, leaves scholars with no recourse but to rely upon the source text in some way when constructing an argument or offering an interpretive analysis.

25 Ibid., 4.

26 See, for example, the many scholarly works centered around adaptations of Shakespeare and Austen, such as: Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Daniel Fischlin, *OuterSpeares: Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Claudia Koloszar-Koo, *Literaturtransfer im Medium Film: Die filmische*
and categorical force of the author also influences approaches in the marketing and sales of adaptations. One can easily search for and purchase box sets of film adaptations that visually present the works of a particular author, despite the lack of any relation between the various film adaptations’ time periods, main directors, and/or thematics.

Third, as a product of a modernist assumption about experimentation as a kind of education, an overvaluation of formal experimentation in filmmaking (often considered a specific film’s or a particular auteur’s hallmark of uniqueness) has long inhibited deeper explorations that map the complexity and transmutability of content, for example, the characters, themes, and plot that the film presents. The same centralizing force that the author has often played in adaptation studies has also, at times, been played or supplanted by his filmic counterpart: the film director as film auteur. By definition, like an author, the film auteur is understood as a filmmaker who has a particular, personal “vision” for his films and/or oeuvre. Formally, this work can often be characterized by the specific experimentations with the medium that are distinct and unique to his/her personal, aesthetic style. Although Germany was once the home of major film auteurs throughout the first part of the twentieth century and then again after 1960, shortly after the fall of the Wall (and the ensuing turn to economically driven and commercially successful filmmaking practices), German cinema has found itself criticized for its lack of auteurs of note. I suggest that the lack of rigorous analysis of many films from this era, and of German contemporary classical adaptations in particular, points to the rather pervasive and, as I argue, incorrect understanding in the field that these films are simple derivatives.

of Hollywood models unworthy of scholarly attention. As films that deal in the popular and prioritize content, themes, and characters over expressing a particular formal style, twenty-first-century canonical adaptations fail, however, to live up to – and thereby fail to receive approbation from – academic practices that partly still rely upon traditional measures of filmic worth. Moving toward embracing content over form or the author/auteur as a centralizing force would muddy clean distinctions and require a more integrated approach to analyzing adaptations than previous eras (particularly the 1970s wave of auteur-produced adaptations). This perspective shift has not yet been fully established.

Fourth is the common twentieth-century view that opposes the canonical to the popular. Although the legacy of postmodernism has offered the possibilities of new reading practices and opened up the door for content to circulate as a mode of exchange (content begetting content) rather than looking to “genius” individuals to create content in specific stylistic forms, postmodernism has proven incapable of eradicating hierarchies that align high culture with educated individuals and artists and popular culture with middle-brow appeal. An enduring, privileged assessment of canonical literature, especially as it relates to popular culture, has, in short, led to a continuing underestimation of the value of popular culture as an interpretive framework. Even though canons have been repeatedly taken to task, the academy still relies upon and trades in the canonical. The belief that a core, nearly unchanging set of authors and their exemplary writings should constitute the common language shared by scholars of a

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27 Thomas Elsaesser, "German Cinema Face to Face with Hollywood: Looking into a Two-Way Mirror," in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 299–318. Although Thomas Elsaesser beautifully complicates this model in his essay, the idea that mainstream German cinema often uncritically emulates Hollywood norms still characterizes much scholarship on twenty-first-century German filmmaking practices.
literary/cultural discipline still endures within national, educational, and political institutions, despite the tendency to see the “canonical” as conservative, especially within the academy itself.\textsuperscript{28} The role of the canon, therefore, is unclear – it is both taken for granted and criticized.

This lack of a clear stance on the value, purpose, and educational potential of the canonical in the contemporary climate in part contributes to it not being seen as a category that can organize and center scholarly works less problematically. However, the cultural work these adaptations do by engaging in processes of reading/remembering, interpreting, and creating anew has the potential to rescue the canon from its hierarchical connotations. As Hutcheon explains, many individuals are today likely to experience a popular “version” of the adapted text long before ever encountering the original work itself.\textsuperscript{29} For this reason, as Assmann argues, the canon is essential, not in and of itself as a staid list of unchanging texts, but as a circulating – and therefore somewhat flexible – composite of narratives that creates community and identity and encourages generations to interpret and engage with the texts critically and productively. For her, “the active dimension in cultural memory supports a collective identity…. It is built on a small number of normative and formative texts, places, persons, artifacts, and myths which are meant to be actively circulated and presented in ever-new presentations and performances.”\textsuperscript{30}


In these ever-new presentations, the canonical is often made more relevant and inclusive through circulation and innovation that counters conservative, traditional, and hierarchical interpretations and renderings of a particular text. It thereby offers those involved in film production and reception, readers, viewers, directors, and distributors a more dynamic relationship with the content of canonical texts—both as texts and as spectatorial engagements. Think, for example, of that famous scene in *Clueless* based on Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1816), in which Cher settles a question in her argument about a line from *Hamlet* due to her knowledge of canonical literature as circulated through the popular. “I think I remember Hamlet accurately,” says her PhD adversary, who incorrectly identifies the speaker of the line “to thine own self be true.” Cher, however, knows the film adaptation only and answers correctly because she remembers the Mel Gibson adaptation accurately and the actual source of the line, “that Polonius guy.”

Finally, the fifth prejudice relevant for the study here: despite their popularity, transnational films (a category in which the films in this study belong) have a seemingly murky status and role in Germany, particularly because they circulate in Germany within a culture that otherwise strongly prizes national identity in its art objects. The continued centrality of the author, the auteur, national literary canons, the “original,” and high culture over popular culture even during this “third wave” of adaptation studies reveals the continued pressure older conceptions of the *national* exert in the contemporary transnational era. There is a continued insistence in academic scholarship on studying only those films in Germany that are considered identifiably “German” in either form (art cinema) or content (often recent German history). The tendency to look at the national delimits a broader consideration of how canon adaptations function *between cultures*.
and/or *across* transnational modes of production. New categories and criteria must be consistently employed in order to apprehend the national in an era of transnational exchange. It can no longer be derived from previous romantic essentialist notions of nations, whereby “German” uncritically defines the heritage or origin of films’ producers, directors, themes, content, funding, and transactions in ideas and forms. As Halle explains, the apprehension of what “the national” entails in a particular context requires an examination of transnational representation so that one can recognize national specificity embedded within films – this, ultimately, requires a type of serious engagement with popular, transnational films that to date but a few studies have championed.

Taken together, these five intertwining prejudices are largely responsible for the lack of robust scholarly models that combine theory, textual/film analysis, materiality studies, historical perspectives, and sociocultural intentions, approaches that this work adopts.

As addressed throughout the chapters that follow, contemporary classical adaptations throw into question many of the field’s current assessments of worth, value, and categorization. For this reason, it is not surprising that while adaptation studies have generated a growing body of theoretical works, including Hutcheon’s *Theory of Adaptation*, Thomas Leitch’s *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, Alison Landsberg’s *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, and Julie Sanders’s *Adaptation and Appropriation*, few film histories and even fewer studies of national film cultures engage with canonical adaptation as a genre worthy of its own investigation. Often, these films are considered merely in relation to
films created in the same chronological period, such as *Literaturverfilmungen* of the 1960s and 1970s. There are several specialized anthologies that exist at the intersection of national cinema and adaptations studies; however, these edited collections offer the reader rather disconnected essays in which each individual contribution confines itself to an exploration of one or two separate texts. One important contribution remains exceptional: Eric Rentschler’s *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations* (1986), which served as the “first sustained investigation in any language of the historical interactions between German film and literature.” The volume focuses on the connection between the literary material adapted and the historical period in which it is transformed between mediums in order to parse motives for the turn to various pieces of German literature. Although now dated, Rentschler’s work recuperated German film adaptations for scholarly exploration by championing their historical and cultural value: he contextualized a broad range of adaptations in Germany from Stellan Rye’s *The Student of Prague* (1913) to Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980).

Since Rentschler’s text, only one similar study has emerged that furthers the trajectory of German film adaptations past the chronological borders of the Cold War. Christiane Schönfeld’s collection *Processes of Transposition: German Literature and Film*, which spans early Faustian screen adaptations and Stefanie Zweig’s *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (2001), pushes scholarship two decades beyond where Rentschler’s study leaves off. Nevertheless, only a handful of essays in the anthology focus on works produced during the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, given the nature of the work – an anthology of separate essays like Rentschler’s *German Film and Literature* – there is again no recently

\[31\] Ibid.
published, sustained analysis of trends or connections between the various film adaptations under scrutiny. Each adaptation is studied as a distinct entity, not as a key player in some greater, overarching history of German film adaptation. Only one promising exception can be noted here: in 2016 Bloomsbury Academic Press launched a new series, *The History of World Literature on Film 1895–2015*. The first volume, *The History of British Literature on Film*, has been released, and the second volume, Christiane Schönfeld’s *The History of German Literature on Film 1895–2015*, is slated for publication in 2017.

Important for this study is that these issues result in an academic approach that has, to date, produced a widespread lack of appreciation and insight regarding some of the most important German films of the last fifteen years. And, as a result of the way the prejudices outlined above inform and shape academia, scholarship in film history, national film culture, literary canon studies, and adaptation studies elides investigations into 1) the historical period(s) during which canonical adaptations emerge, and 2) the larger themes, motifs, and sociocultural and pedagogical concerns that collectively characterize adaptations produced within or across periods. Research has still failed to provide a comparative, comprehensive, or contextualized approach to the canon film genre and its development, leaving open questions as to whether and what connections may exist between film adaptations and trans/national film aesthetics.

IV. Contemporary Classical Adaptations and the Disruption of Traditional Binaries

To reiterate, contemporary classical adaptations from twenty-first-century Germany throw into question several of those central prejudices that traditional
scholarship has created and sustained. Close analysis of adaptation practices and their pedagogical treatment by public and private institutions therefore require scholars to forego analytical models based on traditionally hierarchical relationships. They require, especially today, better and more fluid charting of the very dynamic pathways in and through which film and literature, past and present, spectators and producers, and national and international markets interact with one another. The films this project explores thus find themselves situated in the interstices of five binaries prevalent in adaptation studies and, more exactly, within contemporary German film practices and scholarship. To a certain extent, these binaries reflect, parallel, and reconfigure the traditional prejudices discussed earlier, and are admittedly condensations of those prejudices as they are anticipated and reworked by contemporary German adaptations. Specifically, in different ways and with different emphases, these films call into question:

1) the valuation of a source text over an adapting film, which, when questioned, results in a more complicated equilibrium between the two;

2) the privileging of the literary author over the filmmaker, which then shifts the dynamics of the film from authorial or auteurist intention to spectatorial interaction;

3) the aesthetic hierarchy in which high culture is considered superior to popular culture, resulting in a relationship that is often reversed or at least muddled;

4) the overemphasis on experimental and alternative formal strategies in national filmmaking, which neglects the importance of content, particularly popular content. When questioned, popular content reveals itself to function as that which sutures entertainment to today’s educational sphere.
5) the clear distinction between national and transnational texts, which – when questioned – often results in a productive blurring of that distinction.

By noting these binaries that have informed adaptation studies historically and overturning them in the chapters that follow, I join in a larger discussion in current theoretical works on adaptation by Thomas Leitch, Linda Hutcheon, Simone Murray, and Fredric Jameson. Although these scholars speak to the problems of maintaining many of these traditional binaries, essential to my work is that I concretize these arguments through analyses that detail how they are actively dismantled within the film construct and how distinctive types of contemporary viewing emerge from a newly reorganized methodological framework. Each chapter, therefore, centers on a consideration of one or more of these binaries as they become reworked within the context of contemporary classical adaptation film culture. Again, although the films discussed here are largely German films, the tensions and strategies they use to revise current methodologies within adaptations studies have global consequences, as the contemporary classical adaptations produced in this nation, as a small example of a more global phenomenon, point to new aesthetic, industrial, and educational trends in adaptation filmmaking that resonate across much of contemporary European and global cinema.

V. Structural Considerations

Turning to the structure of my approach, my dissertation examines the historical emergence, industrial pressures, transnational aesthetics, and educational agenda of contemporary classical adaptations produced in twenty-first-century Germany over the course of five chapters. Each chapter explores one or more of the disrupted binaries listed
above according to different variables that emerge throughout the close analysis of films, audiences, and/or the institutions involved in the production and consumption of this genre of films.

Chapter One explores three specific disrupted binaries: the privileging of a source text over an adapted work; the primacy of high culture over popular culture; and the focus on national versus transnational exchanges. Here, I trace the narrative of the German national canon as it has engaged with popular culture throughout filmmaking history. I then delineate how the popular influences adaptation practices in Germany today. This chapter draws on Halle’s account of twenty-first-century German filmmaking and research into production, distribution, and exhibition patterns in *German Film after Germany* as well as Simone Murray’s discussion of recent new directions in adaptation studies in *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* to provide a framework from which to begin to investigate twenty-first-century film adaptations as a historically distinct and culturally specific practice. These contextual determinants include, for example, the different subsidy systems that have sustained German film; the distribution networks and platforms across which these films are viewed; transnational marketing strategies; technological changes that encourage certain representational shifts; and various accounts that illuminate the role and importance of certain target audiences and spectator positions.

Chapters Two and Three then explore the greater corpus of contemporary classical adaptations as two interrelated, but distinct, variations on Thomas Elsaesser’s notion of the “two-way mirror” at play in transnational filmmaking. In Chapter Two, I delineate how the hierarchical relationship of the source text over adapted work, high culture over
popular culture, and intention over reception intersect in the early 2000s in German filmmaking to give birth to the contemporary canon film via that most transnational figure, Shakespeare. This chapter establishes the Hollywood foundations and aesthetics emulated (and also adjusted) by many mainstream twenty-first-century German adaptations.

Chapter Three examines the direct confrontations that emerged against the culturally dominant films in Chapter Two in a way that ignores movements toward the transnational and the popular, and instead tries to retrieve national cinema from transnational pressure. Here, I target two disrupted binaries – high culture over popular culture and national over transnational exchanges – to apprehend twenty-first-century German canon films that straightforwardly reject global/Hollywood approaches in favor of more culturally/regionally indigenous filmmaking practices and thematics as an inevitable part of transnationalism. In both Chapters Two and Three, my arguments are concretized through specific case studies, established through close readings of two to three film adaptations along with their source texts, paratextual materials (including promotional posters, reviews, dust jacket summaries, and director/actor interviews), and production information (screenings, profit margins, funding sources, etc.). Through these analyses, I show the theoretical, industrial, and pedagogical positions that surround and inform twenty-first-century German adaptations via their textual and aesthetic dynamics.

Beside the commercial, cultural, and textual dimensions of adaptation, the films in question involve an often overlooked but critical pedagogical dimension that goes far beyond the filmic text itself. Thus, Chapter Four focuses squarely on the fourth disrupted binary – education over entertainment—to show how these two poles, the educational
and the entertaining, combine to drive the production and consumption of contemporary canon film in the twenty-first century. Here, I parse the instrumentalization of many of these films via their pedagogical treatment in *Filmhefte* and other *Unterrichtsmaterialien* created for language/culture teaching and learning domestically and abroad. Drawing on foreign language pedagogy, film pedagogy, and literary and cultural studies, I closely analyze the objectives and methodology informing the teaching materials created and promoted by public cultural and education institutions (such as the Goethe-Institut and the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*), private educational entities (such as Cornelsen and Klett publishing houses), and private film studios and distributors (including Warner Bros. Germany and Concorde Verleih). These investigations are fleshed out through field research, interviews, and production company distribution statistics/data that paint a picture of the objectives, relevance, and cultural value of these materials that, in essence, adapt adaptations for explicitly educational consumption.

In the conclusion, “The Matrix of Twenty-First-Century German Adaptation: A Case Study,” the arguments of the previous chapters are synthesized, condensed, and critically mobilized through a case study of Oskar Roehler’s *Jud Süß–Film ohne Gewissen* (2005), a recent adaptation that reframes and instrumentalizes scenes from Veit Harlan’s censored fascist film adaptation (1940) for the reeducation of today’s transnational spectator. An analysis of the film, its reception, and its ancillary pedagogical materials demonstrates how the canonical, transnational, national, and pedagogical implications of twenty-first-century filmmaking practices can be orchestrated in a distinctively successful way that elicits introspection, critical intervention, and (re)education on the part of the transnational film spectator. Through an analysis of this
film, I also hypothesize as to possible future developments in the genre of German contemporary classical adaptations, which may, like Roehler’s film accomplishes here, continue to broaden out the contours of the “contemporary classical adaptation genre” to include films that increasingly draw from multiple source texts, both biographical and fictional. The mixing and staging of past writings in such works, as I argue, increasingly make viewers aware that all (hi)stories are constructs received through the lens of contemporary ideologies, tastes, and norms.

By investigating the industrial determinants, aesthetics, and pedagogical agendas of film adaptations produced in twenty-first-century Germany, my project intervenes in the fields of German studies and adaptation studies in three ways. First, it redirects German film studies to the often-overlooked area of twenty-first-century commercial cinema rather than the common topic of German art cinema and auteur cinema. Second, it follows recent new critical directions in adaptation studies to integrate questions about how adaptation is an industrial and material process involving numerous pressures outside the so-called film text itself, both domestically and abroad. In this matter, my study will transgress the rather rigid chronological and geographical boundaries that have, unfortunately, been reified even by more innovative works in materialized adaptation studies, such as Murray’s Adaptation Industry. By exclusively focusing on Anglophone advancements in the contemporary sphere, in which she traces only contemporary literary works’ transposition into film, Murray misses the global context within which the film industry deals and trades through extension, influence, and appropriation. She also leaves open to question how and why canonical works still circulate in a massive way across film studios, even though their modes of creation and
production must be drastically different (unlike works by modern authors, these works are not being agitated for by literary agents knocking on film studio doors, for example). Third, it opens up a largely ignored but key dimension of adaptation: how the educational mission of these adaptations shapes these texts as part of a culture of national and international education. I ultimately aim for my project to serve as a model that shows how implementing a sociological turn, which Murray partially establishes in her work, paired with close textual analysis, literary/film criticism, and cultural studies can result in a robust method for the interpretation of filmic texts across the interstices of industry, aesthetics, and politics. Rather than seeking to elevate the status of adaptation studies in academia (which would thereby simply reinscribe hierarchical orders and create new hierarchies in a different manner), I aim with this critique and study to showcase the intricacies of adaptation studies and thus the possibility to gain a more differentiated and complex understanding of the filmmaking industry and its relationship to the creation of national and transnational cultures.
CHAPTER 1

Canonical German Literature at the Crossroads of Transnational Adaptation Practices

I. Forever Faust

What would German film history be without Goethe’s Faust (1808)? The drama’s emphasis on illusion, spectacle, innovation, and autonomous spirit – themes tightly bound to the film form itself – has long enraptured film directors and audiences alike, both within and beyond the nation. Given the legend’s continual recreation in film across eras, any comparative study of adaptations of German canonical texts over the course of time would be incomplete without an examination of this cultural narrative. Thus, to investigate how contemporary classical adaptations intersect with and reconfigure notions of the canonical, the (trans)national, and the self-reflexive through the popular, Sokurov’s monumental adaptation Faust (2011) serves as a prime starting point.

Sokurov’s version of the Faust legend has a long history in cinema studies, one that dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, Faust adaptations first emerged via Méliès’s shorts at the close of the nineteenth century and continued on into the twenty-first century through transnational co-productions. Across multiple eras of filmmaking in Germany, the legend has been continually recast, often modernized to comment self-reflexively on the nature and purpose of the film medium in a given era. From Germany’s first feature-length film, Stellan Rye’s Der Student von Prag (1913), through to Alexander Sokurov’s Faust, the theme has been used to champion many causes. In the pre-classical period, filming Faust countered the newly developing seventh art form’s roots in vaudevillian venues and aligned film practice with the culturally respected traditions of theater and literature. In later years, filming Faust commented
self-reflexively on the history of the filmic appropriation of literature. As an analysis of Sokurov’s *Faust* shows, adapting Goethe’s work today serves to question the continued power such canonical narratives have held and continue to hold over generations of readers and viewers.

Sokurov’s film, like other contemporary classical adaptations explored in this project, problematizes longstanding, assumed binaries in adaptation studies. As the following chapters elucidate, the genre of contemporary classical adaptations champions transnational exchanges that reshape the nationalistic identities of adaptations; the pedagogical power and value of the adaptive text over an authoritarian source text; and the thematization and activation of spectatorial reception as the principal dynamic at work in these adaptations. As we will see below, these characteristics do not suddenly appear out of nowhere in the twenty-first century; instead, they develop out of a long century of German canon film creation that can be charted throughout various eras of filmmaking. These terms and motifs then become most pronounced and distinctive in the twenty-first century, both aesthetically and industrially.

An examination of Sokurov’s film concretizes the assertion that twenty-first-century contemporary classical adaptations place particular emphasis on the transnational, the spectatorial, and the pedagogical. As to the first term under discussion here, Sokurov’s *Faust* quickly marks itself as a product created through transnational exchanges via its economic status as a Russian/German coproduction and its contextualized place within the transnational content of Sokurov’s oeuvre. The film is also transnational in terms of thematic content, as it represents the final installment in “Men of Power,” a tetralogy that investigates the corrupt command of leaders worldwide,
from Adolf Hitler (*Moloch*, 1999) and Vladimir Lenin (*Taurus*, 2001) to Emperor Hirohito (*The Sun*, 2006). Set in an impoverished nineteenth-century German town stricken with famine and disease, *Faust* explores humankind’s creation and exploitation of power in a time and place predating the corrupt leaders his other films explore. These critics agree that, to this extent, *Faust* serves as both a prelude to and a summary of the tetralogy insofar as it maintains that the “Faust syndrome” may be at the heart of mankind’s corruption.

But precisely how *Faust* fits into Sokurov’s oeuvre, which explores the transnational contours of twentieth-century tyranny by bringing to the screen a long-established figure from literary history, has remained relatively unclear. Upon the film’s release, the fact that Sokurov forewent in this film an examination of another notorious twentieth-century leader created many unanswered questions for those individuals expecting a more historically based film. Perplexed critics voiced their queries, but more often than not, declined to answer. Godfrey Chesire, for example, pondered as follows:

The filmmaker describes “Faust” as the culminating capstone of a tetralogy, yet all three previous films – “Moloch” (1999, on Hitler), “Taurus” (2001, on Lenin) and “The Sun” (2005, on Hirohito) – depict real-life 20th century tyrants rather than a Promethean character of legend and literature. Does Sokurov see Faust as the great prototype of the past century’s murderous megalomaniacs, ready to sacrifice his own soul, not to mention the world, to satisfy his ego’s cravings?  

Similarly, Joumane Chahine reflected on Sokurov’s unanticipated subject matter in a short review for *Film Comment*, in which he also raises a question:

In this shift from the historical to the allegorical, the meaning is not entirely clear (and the dialogue itself at times deliberately semi-coherent). Is Faust intended to be a prequel to the cycle, a reflection on the origin of power, on its acquisition? Is human weakness the cause of tyranny or its prey? In the film’s final,

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otherworldly scene in which he confronts the devil, does Faust emerge redeemed or doubly damned, having now internalized the evil he fought?\textsuperscript{33}

Like Ebert, Chahine refrains from offering any answer given the presumed complexity of the film – and its characters. He continues, stating that the exact interpretation would be somewhat superfluous. “In a way,” he writes,

the answer is ultimately beside the point; the outcome is as puzzling and contradictory as human nature itself. Even the devil appears at times as an endearing nihilistic old bastard, while the pure Margarete (Isolda Dychauk) inspires a base carnality at odds with the holiness of her ethereal face.\textsuperscript{34}

However, precisely because of the film’s complexity, the questions raised by critics in relation to Sokurov’s adaptation beg to be answered.

As Chahine correctly notes, Sokurov’s film must be read allegorically.\textsuperscript{35} As I propose, reading \textit{Faust} allegorically allows for a viable interpretation as to why Sokurov decided to include a popular, fictional cultural narrative into his oeuvre on tyrants across various nations. Read as an allegory, the film demonstrates that just as historical leaders can prove to be alluring and yet dangerously corrupt forces, so too can the (often unchecked) power of cultural narratives that continue to influence and hold sway, such as Germany’s beloved \textit{Faust}, a national treasure with international significance that explores the dangerous dynamics of power-giving and power-taking that – as Sokurov’s tetralogy suggests – easily transgress geographic and chronological boundaries. In short, Sokurov mobilizes the legend to critique, metacinematically, the continued hold that longstanding canonical narratives exert in contemporary media in the twenty-first century, and by extension, in society as a whole. He achieves this, as I submit, by

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
foregrounding the spectator and processes of reflection through formal techniques, which are a trait that defines the genre as a whole.

Sokurov’s adaptation allegorically critiques the dogmatic beliefs that arise from a strict adherence to canonical narratives, which echoes criticisms launched in Goethe’s *Faust*. In this work, Goethe attacked the ideological assumptions in Enlightenment Germany that learning, knowledge, and rationalism would undoubtedly lead to the betterment of humanity. Reworking the chapbook *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* (1587), Goethe fashioned his main character as a symbolic mouthpiece against unchecked scientific advancements and radical rationalism. Unsatisfied by his vast stores of knowledge, Goethe’s Faust turns his back on learning, science, and rationalism early on in the play out of the desire to more fully experience the world through emotion and sensuality, aspects of human existence checked by processes of civilization.

To more forcibly emphasize his anti-Enlightenment thematic, Goethe presented Faust’s story in a style that invited readers to go on a whirlwind journey through the entirety of Western cultural memory through numerous literary intertexts. “Faust is a book that interconnects many books in a vast and intricate semantic network,” David E. Wellbery notes. And this network spans from the epic to the Bible epic, from medieval love poetry to Dante, and from doggerel to blank verse. Thus, while its main character broke with societal constraints, the work itself exploded a number of longstanding literary and theatrical rules, with the resultant overabundance of learned allusions combining to form a grand parody of Western cultural development. Throughout this parody, Goethe continually called attention to the seductive nature of illusion (and

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36 Goethe foils Faust most directly through the character of Wagner, Faust’s companion for the first part of the play, who represents the Enlightenment-driven culture that, like Wagner, believes without question in rationality, academic learning, and the moral edification purpose of all art.
ideology). As Jane K. Brown explains in *Goethe’s Faust: The German Tragedy*, through a complex form of parabasis, Goethe’s characters continually transformed on stage to participate in plays nestled within other plays.³⁷ This dramatic device was intended to expose the viewer to the workings of illusion and the overarching allegoricity of the piece.³⁸

In his *Faust*, Sokurov mobilizes Goethe’s way of critiquing the confines of Western ideology and cultural development by revealing Faust as an individual who follows the myth of transcendence until it is too late to correct his course. Similar to the way Goethe reveals Faust to be trapped by the vestiges of learning and reading (and formally places him within a closet play rife with erudite allusions), Sokurov reveals his Faust to be trapped in the film’s shot both in content and form, indicative of the confines of Faust’s world and the ideology he follows.

Faust’s endeavor in Sokurov’s film is to achieve some transcendence from the bodily. From the outset, the main character searches internally and externally for this transcendence. In the establishing sequence, Faust looks inside a body. He is shown disemboweling a corpse in hopes of locating the soul, to no avail. Near the end of the film he believes he finds this soulfulness externally in his beloved Gretchen; however, this is also not the case – she is long dead.

Faust’s belief in achieving transcendence is revealed to be an illusion that he follows dogmatically. The film highlights the falsity of his belief by intermixing verisimilitude with surrealism. Generally, throughout the film, a rather mimetic representation of base, bodily reality dominates. Numerous scenes underscore the

decrepit and disintegrating nature of the human body as the status quo. Within this visceral milieu, a strong focus on the body excludes the metaphysical and foregrounds actions within the film as the result of base bodily drives and limitations. Only occasionally is the filmic palette Sokurov uses in these scenes to paint bodies as grotesque disrupted by the use of bright color, light, and an anamorphic lens that distorts the view of reality to unearthly proportions. Among the whirlwind of constrained bodies, dirtied objects, and caged animals, one individual stands out: Faust’s Gretchen, whose unblemished, youthful visage and sparkling golden hair shine through the dreariness of her surroundings.

Contrasting with the aforementioned, in these scenes, the film suggests that Faust may have found the path to transcendence and experiences outside of the daily grime that he has been looking for by presenting Margarete as a nearly angelic being. However, the viewer is made aware that Gretchen’s appearance is Faust’s own delusion. In these brightly lit, dreamy scenes, Sokurov calls awareness to the fact that the viewer sees Margarete through Faust’s subjective perspective. The camera zooms in upon her face only after aligning the viewer’s view with that of Faust’s objectifying gaze. The disjuncture in visual styles indicates that Margarete’s ethereal appearance is a figment of Faust’s mind. Thus, the film implies that a concerning disjointedness exists between his

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39 After the opening sequence, for example, the film centers on a close-up of the decaying penis of a disemboweled corpse. The ulcerated member here unnerves rather than titillates. Bathhouse scenes with naked characters similarly reveal bodies in various stages of aging, with most bloated, wrinkled, and gassy.  
40 Visually, she reminds one of an angel, like the brightly lit angels from Rembrandt’s biblical scene years, such as in Joseph’s Dream in the Stables (1645) or Abraham Serving the Three Angels (1646). Like Rembrandt’s figures, whose brightness in the paintings draws the viewer’s attention and captures his gaze, so too does Margarete slow the pace of the film down through momentary cinematic arrest.  
41 That the viewer sees Margarete via Faust becomes most apparent in the scene where Margarete wants to confront Faust about killing her brother but refrains, and the two instead simply look at each other in drawn-out silence until the bells toll and break their gaze and the color palette and proportions quickly return to the way they were before.
lived experience (reality) and his desire (illusion). Reversing the idiom “seeing is believing,” the film instead suggests that – for Faust – believing results in him seeing things that are not actually there. Faust’s misconception of Margarete as his path to transcendence reaches a climax when, in the ending scene, Faust believes he hears the deceased Margarete’s voice call out to him after her death, asking him, “Wohin?” Yet, rather than providing him with transcendence from the grime, the physical, the earthly, and societal confines, her communication with him proves sterile. As Sokurov makes clear at several junctions, transcendence here is impossible: in this film, there is no God, no afterlife, and no eternal for which to strive.42

Indeed, in its portrayal of the story, the film negates that anything can be found outside of the frame, despite the fact that Faust (and the viewer) experience an eerie feeling of absence, as if there must be something more. The entire film is composed of 4:3 aspect shots: thus, the image is confined within a box with rounded corners, which leaves a noticeable black margin around the image. The viewer is left feeling that there must be something outside of the frame – something else that could be seen – but this is precisely the same type of false assumption that Faust makes. Props and various compositional elements instead indicate that Faust is literally confined and constrained within the very world in which he is searching. Repeated scenes foreground caged,

42 Stephen Sigl, “Faust and the Abandonment of the Metaphysical,” *Film International* 13, no. 2 (1973): 124–31, here 129–30. Sigl argues that Sokurov’s film is a rewriting of Faust that eliminates all elements of the otherworldly, the godly, and the supernatural. He writes: “Faust’s only escape from a claustrophobic existence occurs at the end of the film when after burying Mephistopheles he is left abandoned in a desolate landscape. This is Sokurov’s most overt reversal of Goethe’s metaphysics, in the sense that it seems to contradict the line most commonly associated with the ethos of Goethe’s tragedy: ‘This worthy member of the spirit world / is rescued from the devil: for him whose striving never ceases / we can provide redemption’ (1984). Is this ending a total rejection of the moral of Goethe’s tragedy? . . . We are forced to ask the unanswerable question of whether or not the desolate isolation foisted upon Faust at the end is not, in actuality, a revelation of ‘the true nature of things’.”
restless animals, a visual metaphor that man is similarly constrained by culture, unable to escape.

One of the main constraints that Faust has had to face throughout the film, as the choreography indicates in the closing scene, is ideology itself. After numerous adventures with the usurer Mauricio that amount to naught, Faust dramatically rips apart his contract and literally shakes the devilish man off of his back, pummeling him with rocks that leave him disabled and dying. Although Faust finally emancipates himself from Mauricio in this way, the violent act leaves him no better off than before. If anything, Faust’s descent into brutality and his overinflated sense of self-importance have reached an all-time high. Accordingly, he is left with no one, no source of direction, and certainly no hope for salvation. Left alone in the middle of a most barren, icy wasteland at the conclusion of the film, it is unclear how and if Faust will survive. Mauricio’s final questions that he croaks out to his aggressor loom large: “Who will feed you?” he cries. “Who will guide you?” The questions, of course, are rhetorical. Just as no one answers these questions, no one is – in fact – the answer. Faust is on his own, having blindly followed the myth of transcendent greatness so far as to damn himself to a space well outside the bounds of civilization.

Faust’s predicament at the end of Sokurov’s film takes on great symbolic meaning within the greater scope of the tetralogy and our study of contemporary classical adaptations. In short, in giving over his power to Mauricio as a guide, Faust gives up his own power out of his ambition to achieve greatness, only to be disappointed and deluded by that which he has chosen. Yet, without the guidance of the dominant cultural figures embodied by Mauricio as a devil or Margarete as an angel, one can easily feel lost, as if
left in the middle of an unknown, barren wasteland without the context of time or place. This is precisely Faust’s position at the end of the film. Although he discards these two figures, and thereby essentially discards the narratives that he has followed, his overcoming of them is not successful because he has nothing else to guide him. As a prelude to a series that explores corrupt leaders transnationally and diachronically, then, Faust demonstrates and critiques how cultural narratives and ideologies are one way in which society hands over power to greedy leaders or undeserving idols. Cultural narratives – including, and most importantly here, dominant film narratives – the concluding scene implies, have often been used to uphold and promote values and political ideology, giving direction and helping sustain various ends. The film critiques the medium’s own history.

For our analysis of the genre of contemporary classical adaptations, two additional points that Sokurov’s film raises must be mentioned: the way it implicates the spectator, and the way it accords contemporary adaptations an efficacy lost to outdated versions. To the first point: Sokurov’s Faust implicates the spectator in this critique of the dogged pursuit of ideology. Throughout, the film configures spectatorship as a force immanently intertwined with the dynamics of power and corruption. Viewing (particularly without intervention) makes one complicit. To note, the visual prologue of the film opens upon a shot of a celestial mirror, reminiscent of the looking glass. This mirror emphasizes the viewers’ position as spectators and aligns them with the many secondary characters within the film, which, as Szaniawski describes, is “teeming with dozens of extras.”

often peer through tunnels, through window frames, from behind crevices, and into dark
holes to spy on Mauricio and Faust as they flit around the city. At several points, it is the
gaze of these “extras” that quite literally turns the primary protagonists into pure
spectacle, at once laughed at by society but also feared by onlookers. The many sets of
eyes that look upon Faust generally increase his bad behavior rather than challenging,
addressing, or minimizing it. The film’s aesthetics imply that spectators and/or
bystanders – and by extension the film’s viewers – contribute to the power dynamics
explored in the film and the tetralogy. Viewers are foregrounded as a force that
contributes to making Faust what he is: a man on a delusional and unchecked search for
greatness.

As to the second point, the film stylizes itself in direct opposition to the (generally
perceived) uninteresting or exclusively high-culture adaptations of the 1970s. Through
this negative juxtaposition, the film claims social currency. In the film, one misfit figure
stands out against the malnourished and impoverished throngs: Mauricio’s plump,
aristocratic, well-dressed wife Agathe. That Sokurov cast none other than Hanna
Schygulla, the most prominent actress of the New German Cinema, for this role
establishes a connection to the era of Literaturverfilmungen during that era. Critics and
scholars have noted the connection, but have largely refrained from explicating its
relevance to an overall interpretation of the film. For example, film critic Godfrey
Cheshire simply notes that the choice is Sokurov’s symbolic announcement that the New

\footnote{For instance, at the bathhouse, half-naked laundresses toil at their washboards as Mauricio disrobes. They view him intensely – he is, indeed, one of the only men penetrating into this all-women space – before laughing among themselves at Mauricio’s bodily deformity: his penis hangs from his tailbone, reminiscent of a tail; he has no belly button; his torso is composed of fatty lumps. Having entered the female sphere and disrobed entirely, the stares are understandable, but Mauricio chooses to react to the giggling by threateningly lunging toward the women, causing them to pull back in fear.}
German Cinema influenced his auteurial style. Scholar Jeremi Szaniawski goes a bit further, noting that – within the film – Agathe represents death, as she only appears in the film during funerals, seemingly a harbinger of demise. He writes: “And whereas in Goethe’s book Faust was saved by committing suicide by an Easter procession, here the merry celebration is replaced by not one but two funerals. In each case, the hearse and score of mourners in black are accompanied by the mysterious figure of Agathe (Hanna Schygulla), a sibylline cameo and an alleged death figure who also claims to be Mauricio’s wife.”

The choice of Schygulla, according to Szaniawski, creates a negative link between the New German Cinema and the contemporary film. If one accepts the film as a commentary on canonical narratives and their continued power in cultural history, the inclusion of Schygulla indicates, as part of my argument, that adaptations of canonical works from the era of the New German Cinema have run their course and are – in today’s sphere – out of place or anachronic, much like the character of Agathe herself. As a stylized “high-culture” representative, the distance from society she embodies in the film parallels the manner in which these films have become (if they were not already at their moment of creation) culturally sterile, unappealing for the general public. Unless classical canonical works, many of which were indeed previously adapted during the time of the New German Cinema, are dealt with anew and rigorously, these storylines – given the outdated “versions” in which they are stuck – will fail to speak to ever-new generations of audiences, as they no longer circulate within popular culture. As we will see, it is precisely in response to contemporary dynamics across political, demographic,

45 Godfrey Cheshire, “Faust.”
II. The Transnational and the Popular in Adaptation History

Of the three terms highlighted in the analysis of *Faust* (the transnational, the spectator, and the popular), two in particular demand specification for our purposes here: the transnational and the popular. As Kathleen Newmann explains, one of the greatest problems facing film studies is the very “words we use to define complex systems and histories.” Both “transnational” and “popular” have a shifting status in that they, on the one hand, elicit advocates and detractors across film, media, and literary studies; on the other hand, however, the products to which these terms specifically refer, the set of practices they represent, and the type of cultural perspectives embedded within these products and practices often prove quite ambiguous.

Over the past years, “transnational” has often been circulated as shorthand for collaborative filmmaking practices that supersede national bounds, such as co-productions between nations or films that bring together an international cast. However, there has been a noted lack of critical engagement with the term, in which, as Mette Hjort notes, “the discourse of cinematic transnationalism has been characterized less by competing theories and approaches than by a tendency to use the term ‘transnational’ as a largely self-evident qualifier requiring only minimal conceptual clarification.” The loose use of this term poses two specific dangers. First, using “transnational” without considering its complexities can lead to prioritizing the transnational by assuming it

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48 Ibid.
works to the exclusion of the national. In this misuse of the term, as Higbee and Lim explain, “the national simply becomes displaced or negated in such analysis, as if it ceases to exist, when in fact the national continues to exert the force of its presence even within transnational film-making practices.”

A second, related issue is that the term ends up being used oversimplistically to describe industrial practices without consideration of the ways in which these practices affect the many registers of the film products and their circulation/reception. As Higbee and Lim further note,

> the term “transnational” is, on occasion, used simply to indicate international co-production or collaboration between technical and artistic personnel from across the world, without any real consideration of what the aesthetic, political or economic implications of such transnational collaboration might mean – employing a difference that, we might say, makes no difference at all.

In the specifically German context under analysis here, Halle offers an insightful and robust model for apprehending transnationalism in all of its complexities. First, he articulately rejects more static theories that situate transnationalism as a modern-day type of cultural imperialism and Americanization. Instead, he suggests understanding the term as a process of Hegelian Aufhebung, whereby “the older more local and concrete experiential forms are conserved and lifted onto the new level. The antecedent forms continue. They are resignified within the field of new possibilities, new relations.”

Halle’s model of apprehending transnationalism thereby sublates that which has often been assumed as two warring poles – the national versus the transnational. The term thus moves away from one extreme end of an overly simplistic binary. Throughout this work, when I espouse “transnational” and “transnationalism,” I follow Halle’s definition of the

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50 Ibid.
51 Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 20.
term, looking at both the processes by which film can be considered transnational and the
aesthetic affect these processes have on the production, aesthetics, distribution, and
reformulation of the national within the text.

Similar to the way in which “transnationalism” has historically been understood
in opposition to the national, the “popular” is also a term that gains currency through its
juxtaposition to other categorical concepts. These “absent others,” as John Storey calls
the concepts that bring the popular into relief, include folk culture, mass culture,
working-class culture, high culture, etc. For the purposes of this project and its
engagement with canonical literary works along with their adaptations, I understand
“popular culture” as a term that refers to those cultural products and practices that appeal
to a large demographic and that are fundamentally more accessible than and
economically more commercially driven than those products traditionally associated with
“high culture.” Whereas “high culture” is traditionally exclusive, conservative, class-
based, and – above all – mostly literary, I define popular culture as an arena where, as
Corrigan notes: 1) reputable literature and canonized names can compete against and
even engage with blockbusters and action films for contemporary movie audiences
around the world, and 2) one can reexamine and reinvent new political or cultural
perspectives within traditional narratives. The objects of popular culture, per this
definition, are in much more dynamic relationship with “the people” than the Adornian
conception of mass culture entails, and more globalized, mobile, and mediated than folk
culture. Indeed, popular culture enables the process by which products flexibly circulate
and interact with everyday cultural aspects, values, or practices across time periods and

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geographical spaces, and – often through intertextuality – increase the pleasure they provide audiences.53

Although contemporary postmodern culture – marked by pastiche, remixing, and recycling – has in recent years blurred the distinctions between high and popular culture in many academic and daily venues, an oppositional relationship between the two terms still dominates critical understandings of German contemporary classical adaptations. This, I suggest, stems from three intertwined factors. First, the battle lines between high culture and popular culture were already being drawn up during the period from which many of the source texts originate; during the eighteenth century, the cult of the autonomous and genius artist was theorized and celebrated. This contrasted with contemporaneous movements that revived stories and conceptions of the lower-class, German “Volk” through ballads and fairy tales. Second, the works written by Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Stifter that inform contemporary classical adaptations were created and received within the realm of “high culture” and did not circulate within the popular culture of the time.54 Third, the literary canon – based on past and current decisions made by cultural gatekeepers who protect the reification/overvaluation of a few works55 —

53 For this definition, I am indebted to cultural theorists, through whose work the “popular” has acquired positive valence and received scholarly attention due to the conviction that an examination of popular products and practices can illuminate a myriad of aspects of social life, and has resulted in positive gains for the study of film – and by extension adaptations, which generally circulate within the popular domain. 54 See Jane K. Brown, “Drama and Theatrical Practice in Weimar Classicism,” in The Literature of Weimar Classicism, ed. Simon Richter (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 133–68. 55 George P. Landow, “The Literary Canon,” The Victorian Web, accessed August 21, 2016, http://www.victorianweb.org/gender/canon/litcan.html. I do not intend for my comments to be read as championing the doing away with canons. I simply contend, much like literary and hypermedia scholar George P. Landow, that when considering the canon, one must be constantly aware of the problematic prejudices that have determined the shape and content of the canon; the way these choices benefit the works that are included in this category and endanger the longevity and relevance of works that do not; and the effect that the canon has on the perceptions, assumptions, and knowledge of generations of audiences. He writes: “One cannot simply proclaim the end of canons and hence do away with their bad effects, since they can no more be done away with or ended by proclamation than the laws of perception or the laws of gravity. Grandiose announcements that one is doing away with The Canon fall into two categories,
thrive within the German educational system. And it is this system that largely promotes the creation and, as we will see in Chapter Four, also shapes the reception of today’s contemporary classical adaptations.


Throughout the twentieth century and beyond, literary works adapted for the silver screen have played a myriad of important cultural roles. Culturally, in the early days of film, literary adaptations helped validate the medium by granting the budding art form high-culture prestige. Adaptations also championed German cultural values and political ideologies that could be spread among a wide range of classes domestically and/or across the globe. Because the genre was considered relatively safe by censoring boards, literary adaptations also allowed filmmakers the possibility to voice not only normalized but also subversive ideologies and societal critiques throughout the history of German cinema.

In the following, I explore the role adaptations played in Wilhelmine cinema, Weimar cinema, Nazi cinema, East German cinema, West German cinema, and post-reunification cinema. I particularly foreground the way in which the popular, the educational, and the transnational are readily evident throughout these various eras of adaptation creation, albeit in different figurations and for different purposes than in the twenty-first century. Just as Faust gave us an introductory glimpse into overarching resembling either the announcements, doomed to failure, that one is no longer going to speak in prose or those of the censor that in totalitarian fashion tells others what they cannot read. Doing away with the canon leaves one not with freedom but with hundreds of thousands of indiscriminate and hence unnoticeable works, with works we cannot see or notice or read. We must therefore learn to live with them, appreciate them, benefit from them, but, above all, remain suspicious of them.”
themes in and concerns of contemporary classical adaptations in the twenty-first century, so too can Faust adaptations, traced across distinct eras of German filmmaking below, help flesh out continuities and disjunctions across film adaptations.

A. Adaptations in the Pre-Classical Era (1895–1918)

The period in which the medium of film emerged in Germany was rife with changes that affected members of the nation’s bourgeoisie, who had long held the position of cultural gatekeepers. Upon the formation of the German nation state in 1871, quickly followed by intensifying processes of urbanization and industrialization, increased insecurity in the self-definition of the upper middle class resulted in a growing emphasis on – and concern about – the role “high culture” played for class self-understanding. In contrast to a quickly growing proletariat (partly fueled by a population explosion), the educated middle class strove for differentiation and elevated status through its accumulation and display of canonical knowledge. As the boundaries of the dominant and upper middle class became more porous during this time of social change, members of the upper middle class clung to education and high culture to maintain their status, while they also worked to impose these virtues upon members of the growing lower classes.56 As we will see here, in early twentieth-century Germany, the bourgeoisie responded to the popularity of the film medium out of their own anxieties and wishes related to their place in the nation. The role that this social group ended up playing in judging and regulating film would, in no small way, influence the form the increasingly popular medium would take as it developed throughout the course of the century.

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As scholars have delineated elsewhere, literature and theater – film’s forebears – played a key role in the emergence and self-definition of the middle class in Germany. It was therefore perhaps only natural that both familiar and established art forms would end up informing the content of many films in the pre-classical era and beyond. That directors included literary and dramatic intertexts helped grant film cultural prestige, making it appealing to the middle class. But the process leading to acceptance of the film medium itself among the middle class was in no way linear or immediate.

Instead, to begin with, film shorts were initially aimed at and popularized among the lower classes. These shorts appeared nationwide as a feature of fairs and vaudeville theaters where other visual spectacles were offered, attracting individuals “with not much education – people who would have felt uncomfortable or out of place at a conventional theater or opera house.” Aimed as well at a transnational audience unimpeded by language barriers, these largely silent films either reproduced scenes from contemporary life, familiar to most viewers, or showed fantastic occurrences, playing upon the medium’s ability to create illusions. Many of these shorts also relied on literary allusions. These were often works that were already commonplace and familiar across Europe, resulting in works such as Méliès’s *Gulliver’s Travels among the Lilliputians and the Giants (1902)* and *The Damnation of Faust* (1903). Although these works were not made by German filmmakers or produced in Germany, they played an important role across Europe, and particularly in Germany, where only 10% of films shown in the nation were of German origin. During this early period, particularly 1906–1910, film was largely

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transnational and international, a “cinema of attractions”\textsuperscript{59} that enthralled audiences by foregrounding the pleasure of looking and viewing through exhibitionism, rather than providing a visualized narrative diegesis.

Due to the medium’s accessibility (across classes and languages) and tendency to enthrall, film was popular from the start. Thus, the upper class, whose identity was closely aligned with literary hierarchy and a sense of artistic sophistication, viewed film culture as a possible threat. It was a medium, they believed, that could prove immoral and revolutionary if not policed, a “commercial enterprise catering to the worst instincts of the masses.”\textsuperscript{60} At first, Germany’s social elites tended to ignore cinema, or looked down upon it. But within a decade, important individuals began penning treatises on the medium, largely bemoaning film, concerned that it would overtake the monopoly on culture that literature had secured.

Competing beliefs in the power and purpose of the cinema resulted in the German *Kinodebatte*, a lively exchange about the role of literature in the 1910s and 1920s that took place through newspapers and literary magazines. Participants in these debates can be roughly classified into two camps based on chronology. Members of the first group, writing in the first part of the 1910s, all agree that the cinema is entertaining, but disagree as to which groups may enjoy the cinema, particularly in regard to the middle class.

Writing in 1909, for example, Alfred Döblin argues that cinema functions as a medium necessary for entertaining the non-educated proletariat after work hours;

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\textsuperscript{59} Tom Gunning, “Cinema of Attractions,” in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 381–88. Here, Gunning explains that, in contrast to the period of narrative cinema that developed after 1907, the cinema of attractions is marked by actors’ repeated look at the camera, the breaking of the “fourth wall” and fictional world to establish contact with spectators, and the loose connections of episodic occurrences.

\textsuperscript{60} Brockmann, *A Critical History*, 22.
however, this form of entertainment is below the standards of the more educated classes, who must simply accept it as a necessary diversion for others less cultured than themselves. He deems the cinema a “Theater der kleinen Leute,” whose function was to satiate the uneducated masses’ more primal desires for visual pleasure via bloody action that modernity and norms of civilization had largely eradicated. Ultimately, he explains, film is not to be taken seriously as an art form but to be considered another form of lowbrow popular entertainment that can successfully supplant more problematic forms of leisure activity, such as alcohol consumption and prostitution.61

Labeling cinema as popular entertainment and not “high art” was common in this era. Following in Döblin’s footsteps, Walter Hasenclever writes in support of the cinema particularly because it is not meant to be a “noble art” form. Again, he cites its function as entertainment. In contrast to Döblin, however, he sees it less as a possible addiction and more as a harmless pastime, with a function similar to a child’s toy or a young woman’s romance novel. Thus, he explains, it is ridiculous to denigrate cinema because it is not as edifying as established art forms; doing so constitutes a comparison between apples and oranges: “Man soll uns diese Naivität nicht mit pastoralem Salbader einer edleren Kunst vergällen.”62

Not all critics, however, believed film would only prove popular among the lower classes. In contrast to Döblin and Hasenclever, Max Brod notes that the visual aspects of the cinema prove enthralling to the educated middle classes, too, who also hunger for cinema. Because he believes the allure of the cinema to be more universal, he

bemoans the threat the medium poses to the dominant print culture. In comparison with the popular film medium, he writes, people now see the book as “nüchtern,” “trocken,” and “anstreng[en].” Brod prognosticates an incontrovertible cultural change in which the image will utterly supplant literature, writing, “Wir sind jetzt mehr zum Schauen als zum lesen gelegt. . . . Das trockene Buch ist jetzt ad acta gelegt; die Zeitung wird durchgeblättert, und abends wird der Bildhunger im Kino befriedigt.”

Questions regarding cinema’s purpose and its popularity among audience demographics continued circulating into the second decade of the 1900s. During this time, debates center less upon whether cinema constituted an art form and more upon cinema’s possibilities, limitations, and boundaries as a separate art form. To a large extent, these debates dovetailed with the advent of narrative feature-length film production, which on the one hand brought with it new film techniques and the creation of a film-specific language, but on the other hand related the medium even more closely to theater performances and narrative prose. Filmmakers had begun to turn to literature for filmic content as it offered the promise of instilling bourgeois morals through the emphasis on high culture, which also alleviated fears. These attempts to lend the medium greater respectability often emphasized film’s similarity to the stage to address middle-class values and tastes. Thus, proponents of the medium worked hard to define the cinema as a popular form of entertainment that is “high art” on equal footing with theater and literature, but inherently different and unique. Herbert Tannenbaum, writing in 1912, reveled in the advances in the cinema that resulted in it being raised to the level of art:

“The movie drama [is] by no means an inferior imitation of the theater.”65 And Hanns Heinz Ewers, who for many years argued for cinema as an art form in its own right with great possibilities, went so far as to write a screenplay (namely, Stellan Rye’s Der Student von Prag) to showcase the way that “film can, as well as the stage, harbor great and good art,” arguing that “good art is also possible without the word.”66

It is worthwhile to note that, in proving cinema’s capabilities, Ewers created a screenplay that drew heavily on Goethe’s Faust. In choosing this motif, Ewers and Rye produced a film that directly reflected upon cinema’s history and current status at the time. Appropriating Goethe’s conscious use of illusion and spectacle allowed Rye to comment on the filmic medium, its abilities, and the concerns individuals had about the medium in Germany.67 On the one hand, the student Balduin, striving for more money and a better social position in order to woo the countess, recalls the theme of Faust, who wishes for more than he currently has. Simultaneously, however, it parallels film’s own desire to move away from its lower-class status to the status of an established, appreciated art form. Through signing away his mirror image to the devil, Balduin does climb the social ladder (he literally, at one point, climbs a ladder to her window). However, his mirror image – still dressed as an indistinctive, impoverished student – continues to haunt him and disrupts any relationship he might have with the aristocrat. Through this savvy use of Balduin and his Doppelgänger, Rye comments on the fear that

67 That the text had the potential to be so self-reflexive goes back to Goethe’s reworkings of the tale, in which he integrated aspects of the chapbook with the bürgerliches Trauerspiel episode with Gretchen, and highlighted the nature of seduction through illusion, as well as the fact that the drama (and art itself) was an illusion by using a complex form of parabasis.
cinema’s vaudevillian roots may continue to loom over and doom the medium.\(^{68}\) That Balduin only shoots himself when he attempts to murder the ghost of his past (his Doppelgänger) leaves these anxieties surrounding film’s possible social climb without a positive answer.

The trend of producing literary films, which helped cinema bolster bourgeois tastes and morals, created yet a third round of debates, during which time critics questioned to what extent the cinema should define itself autonomously from literature. Although many feared that adaptations would take away an individual’s interest in the original printed text, others saw the possibility for literature to be enhanced by cinema’s popularity. Dramatist and theater critic Julius Bab, for example, states,

> die kinematographische Verarbeitung eines literarischen Werks bedeutet für die Buchpublikation einen schweren Schaden, da der rohstoffliche Reiz vorweggenommen wird, und gerade das Publikum solcher Darbietungen kaum Anlaß nehmen wird, im Buch nach dem künstlerisch intimen Sinn des Stoffes zu suchen. Darüberhinaus bedeutet sie aber eine schwere Schädigung für die literarisch-künstlerische Kultur überhaupt . . . \(^{69}\)

Countering Bab from a more economically informed perspective, however, Phillip Reclam notes that films might indeed cause an uptick in sales by those interested in literature. He notes that the slight increase in sales of literary texts in response to an adaptation is “[e]in Beweis dafür, dass doch dieser oder jener Kinobesucher das Verlangen verspürte, zu dem im Kino Geschehene nachträglich auch noch den

\(^{68}\) Friedrich Kittler, “Romantik-Psychoanalyse-Film: Eine Doppelgängergeschichte,” in *Draculas Vermächtnis: Technische Schriften* (Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1993), 81–104, and Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000), 63–65. Both Kittler and Elsässer explore how the hero’s double can be interpreted as a visualization of the film medium itself. Understood in this way, then, the fact that both the double and the “original” die in the end gestures toward the fear of the demise of both the adaptation as well as the original through the work of film/film adaptation.

As we will see, the concern about the popularity of film adaptations, particularly in regard to whether they can prove as edifying as literature and can help rally interest in the text, is one that continues throughout German film history and becomes particularly prominent in relation to formalized educational mandates in the twenty-first century.

Despite the debates, cinema continued adapting works of literature for audiences, and often quite successfully. In the German tradition, two further notable transformations of German canonical works during this period include Stellan Rye’s *Erlkönigs Töchter* (1914), based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s ballad “Erlkönig,” and Richard Oswald’s *Hoffmanns Erzählungen* (1916), based on several novellas from E.T.A. Hoffmann’s collected works.

B. Adaptations in Weimar Cinema (1919–1933)

Given the political, economic, and social upheaval in the aftermath of World War I, Germany, transitioning from an empire to a republic, reached back to the golden era of classicism to support the country’s new beginning as a democratic state. Although Berlin was the capital, the name “Weimar Republic” came about because Germany’s national assembly ratified the new democratic constitution in Weimar’s national theater, given the fact that Berlin was too dangerous a locale for the meeting. The town was chosen, as Stephen Brockmann explains, particularly for its cultural heritage.

Friedrich Ebert, the Social Democratic leader who became the first president of the Weimar Republic, was also hoping that a bit of the national pride and idealism associated with Weimar’s famous citizens Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller – the two primary figures of German classicism at the end

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of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, whose statues stood in front of the national theater where the Weimar constitution was ratified – would rub off on the proceedings. Germany was seeking to invoke the aura of the *Kulturnation* in its re-founding of a *Staatsnation*.\textsuperscript{71}

Thus, already by name, the Weimar Republic itself must be understood as an appropriation of Germany’s literary heritage for the purpose of making legitimate the country’s present.

Similarly, we might consider Weimar cinema – in large part – as a cinema of adaptation. With the narrative feature-length form well established in the previous era, the Weimar Republic saw the proliferation of scores of cinematically distinguished film adaptations, which continued to help the growing medium to gain prestige and legitimacy. During this time in particular, filmmakers in Germany worked to make their films popular (and relevant) for their audiences, particularly for the middle class. They did so largely by moving away from Shakespearean adaptations that dominated the early period to draw instead upon German canonical literary works as part of the effort in bolstering the *Kulturnation*. As Sabine Hake notes,

\begin{quote}
whether through literary references or stylistic choices, many art films and prestige productions used Germanness as both an aspect of the commodity (i.e. a form of self-branding) and a strategy of resistance to the commodification of art associated with Hollywood. . . . [F]or domestic audiences, German film evoked either high culture and humanistic education or nationalist sentiments and ideologies. These references to shared cultural traditions allowed for specific forms of viewer identification that validated the cinema’s role in sustaining national history and culture and that confirmed the leadership role of the educated middle class in sustaining the alliance of cinema and nation.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

To a large degree, literary adaptations functioned not only to reflect the popular tastes and preferences of the educated middle class (the fastest-growing social group of the 1930s and the main consumers of popular entertainment), but they also bolstered the

\textsuperscript{71} Brockmann, *A Critical History*, 47.
\textsuperscript{72} Hake, *German National Cinema*, 53.
nation in the aftermath of crisis. By mixing high literature with popular entertainment, the medium blurred boundaries between the two, leading to commercial successes that were emulated by a myriad of German studios.

The high quality work . . . contributed to the productive exchanges between film and the other arts that transformed cinema into a middle-class diversion and gradually dissolved the hierarchies between high and low culture. . . . After the commercial success of *Hamlet* (1921), which featured Asta Nielsen in the title role, studios scoured nineteenth-century and twentieth-century literature for suitable stories and characters.\(^73\)

Between 1919 and 1933, over 115 notable feature-length adaptations were produced, many of which were based on canonical German works. Favored German authors during this time period included, of course, the Weimar figures Goethe\(^74\) and Schiller.\(^75\) In addition, contemporary writers whose works commented upon the processes of industrialization, capitalism, and female sexuality were also favored, such as Gerhart Hauptmann\(^76\) and Frank Wedekind.\(^77\)

Foregrounding distinctly German characteristics in film adaptations presumably could have resulted in products that did not appeal to external markets; yet, given German cinema’s conscious integration of national and international practices, it flourished during this time, so much so as to cause Hollywood concern about UFA as a competitor.\(^78\)

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\(^73\) Ibid., 39.
\(^74\) F.W. Murnau’s *Faust* (1926) and Leopold Lindtberg’s *Wenn zwei sich streiten* (1932).
\(^75\) Paul Leni’s *Die Verschwörung zu Genau* (1921), Carl Froehlich’s *Luise Millerin* (1922), and Curt Goetz’s *Friedrich Schiller* (1923).
\(^76\) Alfred Halm’s *Rose Bernd* (1919), F.W. Murnau’s *Phantom* (1922), Urban Grad’s *Hanneles Himmelfahrt* (1922), and Friedrich Zelnik’s *Die Weber* (1927).
\(^77\) Leopold Jessner’s *Erdgeist* (1923) and G.W. Pabst’s *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929).
\(^78\) Hake, *German National Cinema*, 33. Hake explores how the positive reception of films in the U.S. provoked fears that German cinema was invading it and encroaching upon the Hollywood market, prompting several studies to eliminate competition by luring major players to Hollywood, including Lubitsch, Negri, and Murnau.
popular appeal, Elsaesser writes, “Expressionism as a label was abandoned in favour of other, more Americanised marketing strategies, associated with big-budget special effects productions on national themes.”

One work particularly relevant here for our exploration of the popular, transnational, and the spectator is F.W. Murnau’s *Faust – eine deutsche Volkssage* (1926). Like other fare produced during the mid-1920s, this film must be contextualized within Germany’s greater industrial effort to produce films that retained an Expressionist style (and thereby its highbrow distinction). Despite Murnau’s status as an auteur – a status that he still enjoys in scholarship today, and rightly so – popular culture left a particular mark on his *Faust*, which makes it categorically different than the remaining works in his oeuvre. As Elsaesser admits, Hollywood productions, which the film was poised to directly challenge, greatly influenced the look of the adaptation. Expressionist moments in this film, he writes, “are rather subdued” in comparison with Murnau’s other German works.

The intermix of Expressionist and Hollywood styles that dominates Murnau’s *Faust* is paralleled by his distinct intertwining of high and popular culture versions of the *Faust* legend. In “Tradition as Intellectual Montage: F.W. Murnau’s Faust (1926),” Matt Erlin identifies a surprisingly broad variety of Faust versions that circulate within and through Murnau’s adaptation. On the official film poster, for example, the main character’s likeness is portrayed via a woodcut similar to what one can find in illustrated versions of the chapbook. In the establishing shot of the film, however, Faust appears

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stylized after Rembrandt’s painting of Faust (1652); these are but a small portion of the versions of Faust that the main character embodies.

Through this postmodernist (avant la lettre) pastiche of Faust motives, as Erlin argues, the film references the adaptive processes through which the legend has and continues to circulate through culture. As Erlin outlines, Murnau’s film traces the medium’s development away from spectacle toward narrative. The opening is dominated by spectacles, such as the carnival shadow puppet show that enthralls the spectators (and evokes the popular Faust puppet shows through which Goethe himself became familiar with the tale) and a spectacular carpet ride above the earth to Parma. Eventually, Faust – like the audience – bores of the mere spectacles and illusions with which Mephistopheles provides him. Faust then voices his desire to go “home,” at which point Murnau’s film focuses on melodramatic Gretchen story from Goethe’s canonical text. Through this transition toward narrative, Murnau shows that film productions must move away from the spectacle of the Doppelgänger films of the Weimar Expressionism period to integrate instead popular themes that have proven successful in Hollywood and that are popular within the target culture. But Murnau’s treatment of the Faust legend remains different from Hollywood in the way it circulates throughout national popular culture.

Because films such as Murnau’s Faust continually sought to balance high culture with popular culture, public intellectuals continued to express concern about the growth

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81 Ibid., 151–71. Weimar critics, as Erlin notes, were troubled by the film’s content. They were not bothered by the audacious attempt to appropriate Germany’s national myth for cinema but by Murnau’s combination of aspects from various sources. Erlin references Kurt Pinthus, who explained that Murnau had had two options: either to film the chapbook or to film Goethe’s dramas, and he believes strongly that Murnau fails in his approach because he settles on a third possibility and therefore makes an unsatisfying compromise. Indeed, Murnau’s film seems a fragmentary montage of various Faust elements: medieval and modern, word and image, technology and scholarship. However, his choice is less arbitrary than critics have maintained according to Erlin, who believes the question “who is this Faust?” is central to the film’s thematics.
of a medium that did not require sophisticated taste, such as literature and theater, until
the end of the Weimar Republic. Even Murnau’s epic film, which directly drew upon the
nation’s most dominant cultural narrative, ended up censored in 1927. At the time, the
Prussian Ministry of the Interior declared the film unsuitable for minors due to the
protagonist’s extreme sensualism, which – they believed – would directly threaten the
moral development of youth.\textsuperscript{82}

The strong reaction the Ministry of the Interior had to Faust illuminates key
concerns about educational value that plagued the medium from its inception until the
Third Reich, during which time film – as we will explore – was actively promoted as a
tool for “education” (via propaganda). That Faust was censored due to sensualism
resonates closely with debates that film incited about education in the years shortly after
the medium’s emergence. Already in 1909, for example, school principal Georg
Kleibömer noted that only those images that represent real nature could serve as a safe
and rewarding pedagogical tool for children, so long as they are screened within
structured spaces like the Kosmos-Theater für Belehrung und Unterhaltung, “an institute
serving public education.”\textsuperscript{83} Otherwise, he noted, children are exposed to such a rush of
cinematic images that, “were it to happen to anyone in real life, [it] would cause so much
emotional excitement that one would need weeks to recover.”\textsuperscript{84} He explained his belief
that children cannot distinguish film from reality, and thus the intensity of the cinema
experience will only overwhelm them: “Children, whose imagination surely transforms
this representation into true life, experience every bit of this intense emotional

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{83} Georg Kleibömer, “Cinematograph and Schoolchildren,” in \textit{The Promise of Cinema: German Film
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
excitement,” thus the “danger is so great that the general public must take it into account.” Kleibömer maintained that the public must insist that cinemas only play educational films for students, and nothing else. In 1924, this argument was repeated again in by Edgar Beyfuss, the director of UFA’s Kulturabteilung and Filmunterrichts-Organisation. He defended only the incorporation of films showcasing the natural environment into students’ curricula. Just as they would continue in a different form in the next century, concerns about how films – particularly entertainment films – promote education were hotly contested during the Weimar era.

C. Adaptations and Fascist Cinema (1933–1945)

Although the question of cinema’s ability to educate was regularly debated in the eras before the rise of fascism due to its appeal to the masses – particularly the lower classes – the potential educational reach of the medium was one of the characteristics that attracted the Third Reich to it (the other being its entertainment value). In attempting to suture Nazi ideology onto popular culture, Nazi cinema resolutely turned to classical literary texts, adapting works that drew from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors – both international and national. Within the overarching practice of creating classical adaptations, works from German canonical writers played a key role in framing völkisch

85 Ibid.
87 Susanne Unger, “Cultivating Audiences: Filmbildung, Moral Education, and the Public Sphere in Germany” (PhD Diss, University of Michigan, 2011), 60. Unger explains that this type of “education” was strongly regulated through state intervention, government funding, and censorship, which strictly determined which films were created and shown to the public, in order to eliminate any art not in line with Nazi ideology.
88 Joseph Goebbels, “Speech at the Kaiserhof on March 28, 1933,” in German Essays on Film, eds. Richard McCormick and Alison Guenther-Pal (New York: Continuum, 2004), 153–58. This turn to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works is unsurprising given that Joseph Goebbels mentions both Love (1927) and Fritz Lang’s Die Nibelungen (1924) as two of four films he finds particularly valuable as models for the cinema of the Third Reich.
ideology as already inherent in Germany’s most famous works. Thus, largely to promote tightly controlled and regulated “education” (via propaganda) through popular appeal, the cinema of the Third Reich can be seen as continuing the tradition of adaptation established in the eras of Pre-Weimar and Weimar cinema. The German writers of these works included Schiller, Lessing, Fontane, Kleist, Keller and Storm. What distinguished this time period from previous eras of filmmaking is that adaptations were no longer created to promote the medium’s legitimacy but rather to suture the policies of National Socialism onto a longer history of German cultural tradition. As Rentschler succinctly notes, “Literaturverfilmungen played an integral part in film’s subservient role under National Socialism as an unquestioning supporter of the state and official ideology.”

The Nazi regime took film seriously – and adaptations, in particular – as ideological tools that could bridge the popular, the educational, and the transnational. Already in March 1933, only two months after becoming the Minister of Popular Entertainment and Propaganda, Goebbels gave a speech to key representatives of the film industry in which he outlined his vision for the future of German cinema and the role it would play in promoting Nazi politics. In his address, Goebbels calls for an ideological and aesthetic revolution that would result in the development of uniquely German film art that would champion National Socialism and prove, as he saw it, broadly popular. Key to this aesthetic revolution, Goebbels stated, would be for film to prove more relevant to its people, drawing from the “Blut und Boden” of Germany. He explained that, as per his understanding, effective cinema must be popular. Film, he argued, must at once address national concerns, but also be fashioned so as to reach an international market. “Film

89 Rentschler, West German Films, 137.
should not fancy itself so above the fates that the German people are enduring," he noted. In fact, he continued, “The more sharply a film reveals völkisch contours, the greater are the possibilities of conquering the world.”

To concretize his vision for German cinema, Goebbels identified four films that he found particularly exemplary for German filmmakers to consider and discussed these works with the hope that they could serve as models for future film productions. Three of the four films he identifies are particularly illuminating to our understanding of how classical works became mobilized within the cinema of the Third Reich. These films included Fritz Lang’s *Die Nibelungen* (1924), John Gilbert and Edmund Goulding’s *Love* (1927), and Luis Trenker’s *Der Rebell* (1931). By mentioning Lang’s *Die Nibelungen*, a film that is a large-scale adaptation of a longstanding cultural narrative in Germany, Goebbels bestows particular value on adaptations of canonical texts considered unique to German history. Then, with *Love*, a Hollywood adaptation of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1877), Goebbels more specifically promotes adaptations that trade in renowned classical texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He again underscores the time period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a particularly desirable setting in contemporary films by citing Trenker’s *Der Rebell*. This is a film that, as Goebbels understood it, delivered contemporary ideological content in the guise of an historical film, which is a genre closely related to that of classical adaptations. *Das Nibelungenlied*  

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91 Ibid, 156.  
92 Felix Moeller, *Der Filmminister: Goebbels und der Film im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Henschel, 1998), 79. As Moeller points out, the additional film Goebbels mentioned was, perhaps surprisingly, Sergei Eisenstein’s *Potemkin* (1925). In contrast to the films discussed more at length above, Eisenstein’s film deserves special attention in comparison with the others because the film 1) deals with a more recent historical event; 2) is quite overtly political in nature; 3) utilizes highly modern aesthetics; and 4) had already been banned by the government before Goebbels delivered his speech. German filmmakers were not even given permission to view the film – or other Soviet films – for study purposes, because it was considered dangerous.
is also set in this time period. Taken together, Goebbels’s suggestions implicitly pointed
towards the production of films that shared traits with the genre of classical adaptations.
Unsurprisingly, films of the Nazi era often did delve into the past, and in particular,
reworked many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical titles (some international,
some explicitly German in origin) for the screen.

Despite the clear call for film to support the political regime, Goebbels prescribed
that films produced during the Nazi era were to be popular entertainment films, first and
foremost, based on genre cinema. The defined rules and structures of genre films
worked to provide emotional release, “while at the same time confirming the powers of
the dominant ideology.” In this conception of film, storylines and plots set in the past
proved particularly rife, in that they distanced themselves from contemporary events. As
Goebbels explained in 1937, films needed to be devoid of overt and contemporaneous
political messages in order for them to prove most effective in promoting the culture of
National Socialism. Marc Silberman, quoting Goebbels in “Kleist in the Third Reich:
Ueicky’s The Brocken Jug (1937)” writes in translation:

I do not wish an art that proves its National Socialist character purely by means
of exhibiting National Socialism emblems and symbols but rather an art which
demonstrates its position by its National Socialist character and by taking up
National Socialist problems. These problems will penetrate the emotional life of
Germans and of other peoples more if they are handled unobtrusively. An
essential characteristic of effectivity is in fact that it never appears to be
intentional. If, however, it remains in the background as propaganda, as
tendentiousness, as character, as position, and only comes to life through story,
plot, action, contrasting individuals, then it will be effective in every way.

93 For a discussion of popular filmmaking in Nazi Germany, see Sabine Hake, Popular Cinema of the Third
94 Hake, German National Cinema, 86.
95 Joseph Goebbels quoted in Marc Silberman, “Kleist in the Third Riech: Ucicky’s The Broken Jug
(1937),” in German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations, ed. Eric Rentschler (New
Again, canonical literary works provided ready-made frameworks for these plotlines. They were already generally known and part of the cultural memory of the nation, and through their re-envisioning in the cinema, National Socialists helped lay claim to these works and further promoted themselves as the ultimate telos of German history.

Indeed, as film scholar Marc Silberman maintains, the German literary canon experienced “vandalism” through processes of “fervent revisionism”\(^96\) that informed the way in which Third Reich directors adapted literary works for the screen. These literary works, to support national socialist ideology, often underwent a radical transformation, as in Ucicky’s film *Der zerbrochene Krug* (1937), which renounces Kleist’s original themes of the problems of autocratic power and need for liberal reform to foreground paternalism and authority as positive concepts. Similarly, Schweikart’s *Das Fräulein von Barnhelm* (1940), based on Lessing’s comedy *Minna von Barnhelm*, becomes the complete antithesis of its original. In this version of the story, as Karsten Witte explains,

> no longer does an individualized character stand at the center of interest, but rather a stereotypical representation of a social class, the noble Fräulein. Minna is deposed as a “lover graced with reason” and graced instead with the Prussian ethos of duty. She must forget the Minna “within her” so that she may become the future lady of the house.\(^97\)

The ideology of an anti-classist society in a paternalistic state in which the woman is to serve as homemaker comes to the fore in contrast to the original, bolstering and disseminating Nazi ideology as part of a larger historical trend, if but fictionalized.\(^98\)

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\(^{96}\) Ibid., 88-89.  
\(^{98}\) Not all adaptations produced during the Third Reich worked simply to uphold the beliefs and ideologies of the regime. At times, the cultural status of literary works allowed for directors to subvert ideology through the use of canonical texts. At other times, the adaptation of canonical texts revealed more about the shortcomings and flaws of National Socialism than those of other groups. This will be further discussed in
After playing a distinctive role in the cinema culture of previous eras, Faust did not receive an explicit treatment in the era of Nazi cinema. The reasons, I speculate, are financial as well as cultural. First, Murnau’s large-scale and expensive adaptation had been produced less than a decade prior and had been unable to recoup its exorbitant production costs. Second, the Faust motif may have proven troublesome to inflect with fascist-positive messages, given how the highly autonomous protagonist constantly pushes against the bounds of society and middle-class values. Third, because many understood Faust (as a circulating motif) as Goethe’s Faust, the storyline was often equated with high culture and – as David Stewart Hull surmises – may not have dovetailed with the Nazi aesthetic principle.

Although the Third Reich created no Faust adaptation per se, as scholars and critics have pointed out, Faust themes permeated some films produced in the era. Indeed, the Faust story seems to have been mobilized not on its own accord but as a powerful intertext in Nazi cinema. This thematic is most readable in highly successful films: Harlan’s Jud Süß and G.W. Pabst’s Paracelsus (1943). In their discussion of Jud Süß, Karl-Heinz Schoeps and Eric Rentschler agree that Harlan draws heavily upon the antagonist of Weimar horror films in creating his main character, Süss Oppenheimer. Speaking of Jud Süß’s widespread appeal, Schoeps writes, it “helped that the film connected to familiar models like the middle-class tragedy and American historical film biographies, and even to well-known villains from horror films of the Weimar

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relation to an analysis of Veit Harlan’s Jud Süß (1940) and Oskar Roehler’s Jud Süß – Film ohne Gewissen (2010) in Chapter Five.  
100 See David Stewart Hull, Film in the Third Reich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).
Republic.”[101] While Schoeps highlights the film’s connection to a specific genre, Rentschler specifically locates the point of this connection in the portrayal of Mephisto, the main antagonist, in Murnau’s *Faust*. In drawing this parallel, he writes that in Murnau’s film,

Mephisto seduces his master by offering him an alternative self, conjuring up an attractive countenance that comes into view in a dissolve: “This is life, Faust, your youth!” Süss is a secularized devil, the spirit of negativity which assumes dynamic and dialectical guises. He grants his master’s wishes for sex, prosperity and diversion by bringing to the court of Württemberg new ways of seeing and lavish entertainments. . . . Like Mephisto, he swears that throughout he remained “the faithful servant of my sovereign!”[102]

While scholars and critics of *Jud Süß* understand Harlan’s film as trading in Murnau, scholars and critics of G.W. Pabst’s *Paracelsus*, produced three years later, also saw this film as tightly connected to the tradition of Faust. Rentschler in fact describes the main figure in terms that could very well describe Faust himself, stating, “[t]he historical Paracelsus was an earthy figure, a man who revolted against convention and authority, a thinker attuned to cosmic and elemental forces, an advocate of nature and the people, someone who preferred his native vernacular to the scholarly Latin.”[103] Rentschler agrees with this connection, too, noting that the film glorifies a figure that can be considered the *Urfaust*. Drawing upon Hermann Boeschenstein’s *The German Novel, 1939–1944* Rentschler writes:

*Paracelsus* honors a genius who intuitively relates to elements, nature, and folk, a thinker who questions academic orthodoxy and bookish learning. Philippus Theophrastus Aureolus Bombastus ab Hohenheim, Emerita, known to his

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103 Ibid., 181.
contemporaries simply as Paracelsus (1493–1541), stood as a forerunner of Faust, a “primordial image” in German cultural history.\textsuperscript{104}

While Faust perhaps proved too complicated for adapting through the lens of fascist ideology, given the legend’s trappings of high culture, ascribing Faust’s heroic traits onto an even historically earlier – and less overdetermined – figure allowed National Socialism to lay claim to Paracelsus as an origin of the German “Genie.” By extension, as Hull notes, postwar critics were already quick to point out how the figure of Paracelsus allowed National Socialists to implicitly lay claim not only to Paracelsus, but to his intellectual descendent: the more well-known figure Faust. Hull also quotes from Boeschenstein’s *The German Novel, 1939-1944*, writing:

[Paracelsus] allows the Germans to rewrite Goethe’s *Faust*, at any rate the titanic Faust of the German commentators, on new terms. This is a classical instance of masked literary imitation, of switching from one national symbol to another without an essential change in meaning. For you can give Paracelsus all the impetuosity and defiance of Faust and at the same time have the satisfaction of planting a new furrow.\textsuperscript{105}

In the Third Reich, Faust – although he had partly gone underground in the cinema – continued to be adapted as a popular and transnational figure, serving as a powerful figure that demands to be framed for and within popular culture at the time.

The changes that Silberman and Witte note in their readings of Nazi adaptations, as we can surmise from Goebbels’s statements on the purpose of film, were undertaken in order to educate individuals as to how to behave and what to believe in the NS state. Indeed, education became an increasingly important aspect of cinema in the Third Reich,


and would become institutionalized via the Hitler Youth Film Works Program, established by Goebbels in 1941, after Goebbels he proclaimed that “the modern cinema is a national educational tool of the first order. The scope of its effect is almost comparable to that of primary schools.”106 And, for the most part, adaptations in this period supported the goal of promoting national socialist ideology among the folk that embedded the movement in the nation’s most illustrious literary (and thereby, high-culture) works of the past.

D. Adaptations in the Divided Nation (1950–1990)

Nazi cinema was hardly the only period in German history in which a political regime created support for its ideology by harnessing the power of canonical literary works through processes of adaptation. Rather, this practice steadily continued in the aftermath of World War II in both the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. Indeed, after an initial period of reconstruction and “reeducation” in the immediate postwar era,107 both East and West Germany produced a plethora of adaptations, with the genre becoming particularly prevalent in both states during the 1950s and 1970s.

With the establishment of two separate German states in 1949, it would seem reasonable that German film history would take two different tracks, split between East and West cinematic productions. Traditional accounts of German film history have often


107 During this time period, the film industry – destroyed by the war – was largely dominated by screenings of Hollywood film that had been censored during the Third Reich. Adaptations that were created by the German film industry after it began filmmaking again were largely drawn from contemporaneous Trümmerliteratur works.
tended to view DEFA and FRG filmmaking as separate entities given their differing political regimes. However, as Elsaesser has argued, this perceived split misses the thematic and stylistic similarities the two share in the (greater) contexts of international art cinema and prevailing genre codes. One area where the two separate industries converge aesthetically – despite their divide across geographical space and political ideology – is the way in which literary adaptations were produced and circulated in both states. These films either establish historical legitimacy for the state as part of an explicit purpose of ideological education, or they question the restrictive, ideologically driven construction of reality in their respective nations through both formal and thematic means.

Particularly in the 1950s, literary adaptations in both East and West Germany championed the respective states’ cultural value by laying claim to past German tradition(s). Thus, the divided nation’s classical writers and philosophers were often claimed and interpreted as either fathers of the Federal Republic of Germany or the German Democratic Republic, cultural ancestors of either one or both states. Film played a key role in supporting and distributing these claims of national culture and literary achievement to each nation’s constituents, and both states gravitated toward the same authors. As Daniela Berghahn convincingly argues in *Hollywood behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany*, cinematic adaptations in the East and West, albeit championing starkly different sociopolitical systems, are often based on the same source texts: canonical texts by Lessing, Goethe, Fontane, Storm, Mann, and even some counter-

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108 Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel, “Defining DEFA’s Historical Imaginary: The Films of Konrad Wolf,” *New German Critique* 82 (Winter 2001): 3–24. As in the West, East German cinema was also involved in the cosmopolitan strategies and other national cinemas, but a longstanding focus on their political differences has prevented appreciation of their aesthetic interrelatedness.
cultural heroes, including Kleist, Büchner, Hölderlin, and Lenz.\textsuperscript{109} Resuscitating these authors and their most prominent works in a way that supported the newly formed republics was part and parcel of the cultural work that had to be done for the legitimization of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as the German Democratic Republic. However, the majority of these films – as Sabine Hake notes – consist of a rather large mass of undistinguished adaptations, serials, and remakes that simply reflect the two states’ strong commitment to claiming high cultural traditions in the arts as their own heritage.\textsuperscript{110}

At times, however, and most pronouncedly in the 1970s, filmmakers in both East and West Germany used the genre to produce controversial films that criticized current society under the safe guise of adaptations, which easily passed through censorship boards. The temporal displacement of these films as well as their direct alignment with high culture allowed directors space in which to critique contemporary society, as political subtexts passed censors because they were camouflaged as quotations from literary sources and because they ostensibly criticized social conditions of the past that had resulted in the construction of the National Socialist society both regimes sought to overcome.

In East Germany, as Berghahn outlines, there was a particularly strong interest in classical adaptations in the 1970s. As she notes, eight such feature-length adaptations were produced during this period, more than in any other decade in DEFA history, largely given the increasingly repressive regime. Thus, for example, director Egon Günther – who directed \textit{Lotte im Weimar} (1975), \textit{Die Leiden des jungen Werthers} (1976),


\textsuperscript{110} Hake, \textit{German National Cinema}, 93.
and *Ursula* (1978) during this decade – felt forced to create literary adaptations because his original films were sparking controversy and often banned. The nation’s artists had been under pressure to strictly adhere to the tenets of social realism in their works since the Eleventh Plenary that took place in 1952 (before which time critical realism had been tolerated in film and literature, but was now condemned as bourgeois). The tightly controlled, centralized state-funding system for film art particularly ensured that directors – more so than authors – met this demand. As a result, films focused nearly exclusively on a positive hero, followed a forward-moving chronology, and eschewed critical reality in order to convey what ought to be: a progressive notion of reality, in which all denizens work toward the realization of the utopian dream. Given the desire to use film to educate the middlebrow public, experimentation in form and content was denounced as formalist and elitist. As Berghahn further observes, Günther’s adaptations – which she calls his “*Erbefilme*” – must be read against the dominant belief that they function as “didactic or even propagandistic period pieces at the service of socialist society.” She provides a close reading of the omissions, added scenes, and reversals of the source narrative in works such as his *Lotte in Weimar* (1975) and *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1976), arguing that the genre often functioned subversively as cloaked critiques of the state. For instance, she reads the conclusion of Günther’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, in which Albert continues with his work normally, unaffected by the news that Werther has killed himself (contrary to how his figure reacts in the epistolary novel), as a critique of how East German bureaucrats act as though all is well and as though they have only the best intentions when it comes to others, when – according to this reading of Günther’s

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112 Ibid.
film – there are nothing more than inhumane conformists, like Günther’s character Albert.  

During the same decade, the adaptations produced in West Germany so strongly outnumbered the production of original films that some deemed the state was experiencing a *Literaturverfilmungskrise* (literature adaptation crisis). This wave of adaptations in West Germany was different than that of the previous decade, which, as John Davidson explains, was more about showing the cultural dominance of the Federal Republic than about dealing with censorship.

In the early 1960s, the FRG sought to adopt the cultural legacy of “Germany” as its legitimation for the full reintegration back into the dominant economic bloc accomplished by the *Wirtschaftswunder*. The state wanted to revitalize film as an industry for its potential cultural diplomacy within the West, towards the South and against the East, rather than for its direct commodity value.  

In the 1970s, however, the state, which provided funds for films through “an elaborate system of subsidies, loans, advances, and prizes,” became increasingly sensitive to subversive films, in response to three interrelated developments. First, student activists openly rebelled against the prevailing institutional codes culminating in the failed student revolution of 1968. Second, second wave feminism was on the rise and challenged the paternalistic structure of the state. Third, the Oberhausen Manifesto, signed in 1962, which proclaimed escapist and non-critical cinema “dead,” helped create a more critical cinema that sought to confront West Germany’s Nazi past. This aesthetic movement in film, which was not immediately embraced in Germany, set itself apart from the escapist

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cinematic fare of the 1950s, which was understood to have been an assimilation of non-political, commercialized American entertainment, to explore contemporary Germany’s national identity in the aftermath of Nazism. In essence, the movement supported the creation of films that sought to educate rather than solely entertain through escapist means, “to provoke rather than entertain.”¹¹⁶ This resulted in a spate of films that attempted to enlighten viewers about the cultural dynamics that had lead to and supported the rise of National Socialism.

As a result of the political tumult that challenged the established order, it became harder to secure monetary support for New German Cinema films because they were seen as being rife with controversial subjects and themes. To escape censorship, directors turned to literature for creative inspiration, as projects based on canonical works were more easily and readily approved. Similar to their East German “Erbefilm” counterparts, some of these films contained criticism of societal constraints through their thematic and formal means. An excellent example of this is Fassbinder’s Effi Briest, based on Theodor Fontane’s eponymous novel. Here, Fassbinder constantly gestures to his main character’s unnatural confinement by revealing Effi to viewers in mise-en-scenes that consistently place her within frames: mirrors, doors, windowpanes, etc. The visual device parallels her inability to express and act upon desires in an accepted manner, which ultimately leads to the dissolution of her marriage and her early death.

Just as both East and West German literary adaptations, both in terms of their production and in terms of their criticism, bring the two film cultures into dialogue, an additional area in which East and West German film culture converges is in the two

states’ cooption of the *Faust* legend. This is an aspect that, albeit relevant to contemporary film scholarship that seeks to locate continuities between the two states’ film cultures and place them into dialogue with one another, has generally been overlooked. In many ways, *Faust* was received similarly in both states as a classical work important to German cultural memory: adaptations were attempted. However, in comparison to adaptations of other classical works that were made for the screen, both East and West Germany experienced a myriad of attempts at adaptations that reworked *Faust* for their national audiences (solely) through the theater. Unlike in the previous eras of Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema, East and West German film cultures seemed to follow instead in the footsteps of National Socialism, during which time *Faust* was often performed upon the stage but did not receive explicit treatment in a feature-length film separate from a stage production.

Writers and dramatists working in East Germany, as Inez Hedges sketches out in *Framing Faust: Twentieth-Century Cultural Struggles*, were inspired to adapt the legend to address the cultural context of life in a socialist state. She first points to Hans Eisler’s *Johannes Faustus* (1952) as a theater adaptation of the legend that recreated the hero Faust as a negative figure that served as “a warning of what can happen if working-class leaders fail to identify with, and cast their lot with, the people.”117 She then discusses Volker Braun’s two attempts: *Hans Faust* (1968), followed by the playwright’s later reworking of this play – which had run into difficulties with the censor – under the title *Hinze und Kunze* (1973).

During the Cold War era, West Germany also witnessed a sizeable number of

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Faust performances and adaptations via the stage. One of the leading stage versions created during this time, directed by Gustaf Gründgens at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus München, was produced as a film in 1960 to the tune of one million marks for the Münchener-Gloria Filmverleih and was directed by Gründgens’s adopted son, Peter Gorski. This is the only known commercial film Faust adaptation produced in West Germany, and – as described in a contemporaneous review in Der Spiegel – was intended to be popular, educational, and transnational. In addition to relying upon Goethe’s high-culture text, the play, as discussed by critics, “demystified” Goethe’s text for audience members through a targeted mobilization of popular culture phenomena. Dressing characters in costumes reminiscent of Dürer’s woodcuts aligned the production with the historically lower-class folk chapbook, and the “Walpurgis Nacht” scene was staged as an orgy set to rock-and-roll music to translate it to current-day modes of interaction.

According to critic Willy Haas, fans formed long queues in hopes of getting a ticket, as if in line to purchase entrance to a rock-and-roll concert. While noting these tendencies, the critic writing for Der Spiegel also pointed to the performance’s aim of education: the title of the review pronounced the film a “Bildungslückenfüller.” Speaking of his decision to create a film version of the theater hit, Der Spiegel quotes the head of Divina-Produktion, Eberhard Meichsner, as stating, “Das Publikum hat ja Freude an der Qualität. Und wenn man bedenkt, daß ‘Faust’ das deutsche Thema schlechthin ist und auch sehr

attraktiv fürs Ausland. . .” Overall, then, rehashing the trifecta intermixing of the popular, the spectator, and the transnational that has grounded our discussion so far, the production of a filmed version of the West German stage hit was ultimately undergirded by the hope that this version would garner international acclaim.

While adaptations in the East and West intermixed popular and high culture with an aim to educate their viewers – whether by democratizing literature and claiming a longstanding heritage of centuries of German literature and culture, or by subversively pointing to the oppression caused by a particular regime – this era also saw the emergence of more structured approaches to film education, another historical aspect important for our study here. The result of this move in film culture was an increased emphasis on, and attention paid to, how films reflected, represented, and framed cultural perspectives. In the 1940s and 1950s, film clubs emerged to help individuals sharpen the critical and analytical skills that had been dulled during the Third Reich. Film criticism, circulated through film journals, was also fostered through these film clubs, which resulted in the increased legitimacy of the cinematic medium, particularly as it was reflected in national funding. Film studies also emerged on the academic scene at this time: in 1954, the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen “Konrad Wolf” Potsdam-Babelsberg opened in the GDR. In 1966, the Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie Berlin opened, followed by the Deutsche Institut für Film und Fernsehen in München, which was founded one year later in 1967. Steadily, film was becoming a subject worthy of serious academic study – a trend that would culminate in the twenty-first century with the

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120 Fehrenbach, 178.
creation of an educational “film canon” for instruction in secondary schools nationwide in Germany that includes – among other films – a number of adaptations.


As a genre that historically formed the core of much of German cinema, classical adaptations would inevitably be affected by reunification, the economic and cultural realignment of two opposed political and cultural systems. And indeed, the interpretation of canonical literature through adaptation would pose a significant sociopolitical task for post-unification Germany, just as it had for the eras of filmmaking preceding this date. Yet, despite the predominance of classical literary adaptations throughout the history of the GDR and the FRG, one notes a distinct lull in the production of these works in the direct aftermath of reunification as adaptations began to favor more contemporary writers and works. Given the longstanding role of the German literary canon on the screen, particularly during periods of crisis and reorganization (such as in the 1930s and the 1970s), one must ask: why would the task of reenvisioning the German canon have been put off during the immediate post-unification years? Why the sudden change in adaptation strategies and content away from older canonical works? The reason seems to have its roots in economic, cultural, and pedagogical concerns.

With the changed funding structure of films in the 1990s, the new need for economic certainty began to drive the production of adaptation making, leading filmmakers – momentarily – away from the creation of classical adaptations to produce big-budget entertainment films derived from contemporary literary works that were proving economically successful on the market. As Murray posits in her analysis of U.S.
and U.K. productions from around the same time period, in terms of industrial determinants, the book-to-film industry markedly changed and proliferated during the late twentieth century, making newly released works a safe bet for economic investment. Book prize culture, in addition to the increased media hype surrounding prize-winning, high-profile literary works, made films of contemporary bestsellers immediately appealing to global audiences. Additionally, a changed model of book marketing, publishing, and contract negotiations helped secure contemporary literature’s transposition to film during this time by making film adaptation part and parcel of an author’s initial book contract. Literary agents began to serve as brokers for media deals, and publishing houses sought to close media contracts with the authors of past, current, and upcoming bestsellers as part of a larger plan to expand their productions and profits. In addition, the increasingly high profile of book fairs, some of which began to pair up closely with film festivals, further helped contemporary writers secure contracts for motion picture versions of their stories. Economically, then, the shift away from the canon in the years immediately after reunification is unsurprising. Adapting texts that were faring well in bookstores and at book fairs and were receiving acclaim through the bestowal of various prestigious literary prizes would ensure the success needed for an economically driven mode of entertainment production.

Thus, instead of seeing a continuation of classical adaptation filmmaking directly post-reunification, during the 1990s the canonical literary works that were once highly popular sources for transposition into the film medium in both East and West Germany fell out of favor. Instead, German film adaptations largely derived from more contemporary authors’ works, bringing to the scene more recent bestsellers, often the
products of authors still living who were able to take part in the creation of the film adaptation of their work.

In 1991, for example, Werner Schroeter directed *Malina*, a German-Austrian co-production adapted into a screenplay by Elfriede Jelinek of Ingeborg Bachmann’s eponymous novel from the 1970s; however, this adaptation only acquired a small number of viewers. Yet, after the large-scale success in Germany of the German, Danish, U.S., and Portuguese co-produced adaptation *Geisterhaus* (1993), based on a novel from the early 1980s by Chilean author Isabel Allende, Germany began more aggressively to produce and market large-scale adaptations from the trove of its own contemporary authors. In the wake of this groundbreaking film, important for co-productions in transnational works, German film studios produced Joseph Vilsmaier's *Schlafes Bruder* (1995), a short three years after the publication of Robert Schneider’s novel, published in 1992. Thomas Brussig’s novel *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* was also quickly brought to the screen by Leander Haußmann in his *Sonnenallee* (1999), directed and shot within the same calendar year during which the book was released. Shortly thereafter, Caroline Link produced *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (2001), from Stefanie Zweig’s autobiographical novel from 1995, which went on to win the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film that year. After this crowning success, which legitimized German adaptations as marketable to audiences at home and across the globe, the trend of adapting more recent literary works continued into the 2000s. Works that should be mentioned here include Michael Haneke’s *Die Klavierspielerin* (2004), based on Elfriede Jelinek’s novel from 1984, Tom Tykwer's adaptation of Patrick Süskind’s popular novel

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121 Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 31. Halle notes that this adaptation in particular broke new ground for German transnational filmmaking in the post-unification era.
Parfüm, also from 1984, retitled Parfüm: Die Geschichte eines Mörders (2006), and Stephan Daldry’s Der Vorleser (2008), based on Bernhard Schlink’s eponymous novel released in 1995. From this exemplary list of adaptations, it is clear that German film adaptations moved away from canonical works to embrace contemporary literature post-reunification.

Culturally, reasons for the momentary hiatus in large-scale classical adaptation filmmaking are multifold and complex, and can be located in the interstices of an ongoing Hollywood-German film dynamic, a lingering, unresolved cinematic past split between East and West German filmmaking, and the emergence of different demographics in the 2000s. National identity – and, indeed, the concept of “German” – greatly changed in the early years of the twenty-first century. Not only did the fall of the Berlin Wall lead to the immigration of individuals from former Soviet bloc countries, but the reform of citizenship in 1999 also made it easier for immigrants and their children to become German citizens, resulting in a more fluidly multicultural society. In addition, youth unemployment in depressed parts of the country, especially the “new” Länder in the East, drastically rose and many individuals postponed childbearing (or decided against it all together), leading to governmental concern that Germany would not sustain itself.

These challenges to national identity, during which time Germans were forced to rethink and reconsider their self-understanding, contributed – in part – to adaptations of canonical works falling to the wayside, as these works spoke to earlier times and

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122 Halle, German Film after Germany, 30–59. Here, Halle discusses what criteria a film must fulfill in order to be considered a co-production.
conceptions of Germanness. During these early years of the twenty-first century, creating new versions of literary works that had often been adapted in previous eras (sometimes ad nauseam) was seen as neither particularly promising economically nor culturally valuable, as the cultural baggage they carried from pre-reunification years proved difficult for innovation in representational strategies. Indeed, as we will see in Chapter Two, great lengths are taken by filmmakers who adapt classical works to distinguish their films as much more entertaining and engaging than adaptations that emerged in previous eras, such as during the 1970s, films with which, quite likely, many older audience members are familiar, given the tendency for schools to integrate adaptations into the curricula in recent decades.

However, beginning in the 2000s, the literary works chosen for the creation of economically viable film adaptations changed and reverted back to the classical canon. In droves, filmmakers began once again to produce adaptations of the literary works of Germany’s most canonical writers, from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and G.E. Lessing to Friedrich Schiller and Heinrich von Kleist, among others. But why, the question must be posed, has there been a quick return to and bountiful resurgence of canon filmmaking at the dawn of the twenty-first century? And what does this (re)turn to adaptation practices that favor the canonical mean for German national and European transnational cinemas?

V. Contemporary Classical Adaptations: the Transnational, the Popular, and the

\[123\] Tobias Hoscherf and Christoph Laucht, “‘Every Nation Needs a Legend’: The Miracle of Bern and the German Postwar Foundational Myth,” in All-Stars and Movie Stars: Sports in Film and History, eds. Ron Briley, Michael K. Schoenecke, and Deborah A. Carmichael (University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 281. As the authors explain, in 1993, the market share of German-made films was under 10 percent; by 1996, the figure was closer to 20 percent.
Educational

At the same time that Germany underwent a period of transition regarding national identity, several related changes were afoot domestically and globally that supported the resurgence of the classical adaptation genre within the nation. First, in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, Hollywood began successfully marketing contemporary classical adaptations based on Shakespeare works, which were received with extremely positive regard in Germany, setting a global precedent for renewed interest in reformulations of older literary works. Second, ZDF established the ZDFtheaterkanal in December 1999, a TV station that broadcast nationwide every day from 9 am until 2 am the following day, offering a massive platform for showing and also financially sponsoring adaptations. Third, and most importantly for both the circulation and aesthetics of the films in question, starting in 2003, film education became a mandated component of secondary school instruction throughout the nation.

Despite the concerns about film and education that arose upon the medium’s emergence in Germany in the 1900s, and despite the increase in pedagogical uses (and abuses) of film throughout later eras of German film history, at the end of the twentieth century, film and media literacies were still not an explicitly targeted component of German public education. As part of a nationwide movement to address concerns about media literacy and its role in the state, Germany’s former chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, established the position of a “Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media” (BKM) in the Federal Cabinet “in order to bring together the responsibility for

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124 The ZDFtheaterkanal existed from December 9, 1999, until its final sending on May 7, 2011, at which time ZDF began to offer ZDFkultur, which allowed for a wider range of artistic programming.
the cultural and media policy of the Federal Government”125 under one roof. As linguistic anthropologist Susanne B. Unger explains, it was not until Christina Weiss, a specialist in childhood visual processing, assumed the position of Commissioner that the government began to promote a more articulated approach to fostering film literacy among its citizens.126

In the earliest years of the 2000s, no federally funded organization worked to determine what films – if any – should be included in the classroom or to what extent media analysis should be incorporated as a school subject. Under Weiss’s leadership in 2003, the Die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Federal Agency for Civic Education) published a mandate for film competence, requesting that elementary and high school students throughout Germany receive training in film appreciation and media analysis. This, in turn, resulted in the founding of the Filmkompetenzagentur in 2005, a separate agency that worked closely with both the Bundeszentrale and the German film industry to standardize film education nationwide. The efforts of this agency and the effects it has had on the production and consumption of contemporary classical adaptations in Germany are discussed at length in Chapter Four. Suffice it to say, in the early years of the 2000s, film, popular culture, and education were coming together in a manner that would make adaptations of canonical texts – which students still needed to read for their Abitur – quite attractive.

The emphasis placed on fostering media literacy throughout Germany is reflected, I suggest, in German contemporary classical adaptations. The educational potential of

films in the genre might be seen as a response to discussions about the need for media literacy; in turn, such canonical films (and their techniques and themes) further promoted the kinds of educational conversations that take place in institutionalized frameworks and helped inform the content of classroom units and even language educational materials produced by Klett and Cornelsen. In short, the foregrounding of spectatorship in these films represents a motif that ultimately mirrors the pedagogical stance the films take vis-à-vis the viewers, and is also a reflection of the greater context of Germany’s government-supported educational practices concerning film and adaptations.

Before extending our analysis of contemporary classical adaptations into the twenty-first century, it is worthwhile to note that parallel introductory sequences from two films produced during the first decade of the twenty-first century make clear what is at stake in contemporary German film adaptations of canonical literature: the affect and education of the contemporary spectator, one who inhabits and experiences the world through popular, global culture, which has persisted from past models. Both Henrik Pfeifer’s *Emilia* (2005), based on G.E. Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti*, and Rolf Teigler’s *Penthesilea-Moabit* (2009), derived from Heinrich von Kleist’s *Penthesilea*, dramatize the implicit spectator of twenty-first-century German adaptations within their very storylines. The spectators within these films exemplify the role that real-world spectators might be expected to play as part of a contemporary education.

Pfeifer’s *Emilia* charts the personal growth of Emilia, the main character, after she views and internalizes a modernized stage rendition of G.E. Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti*. The

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film commences with an extended close-up of Emilia sitting in the audience, attentively watching Lessing’s bourgeois tragedy *Emilia Galotti* play out on the stage before her. In this sequence, we – the film’s audience – are privy solely to Emilia’s position as spectator of the production, much at the expense of the live theater performance before her (and behind us, the films’ viewers). We see and hear nothing but Emilia seeing and hearing, as she unblinkingly views and listens to the play. As dramatic events unfold on stage, the motionless camera registers Emilia’s emotional expressions and physical reactions, particularly in response to the play’s climax. At the moment when the audience within the film witnesses Oduardo stab his daughter to death at her own request, the camera zooms in more closely on Emilia’s visage and maintains a lengthy close-up that focuses viewers’ attention on the empathetic tears cascading down her cheeks. Instead of the staged theater adaptation, the film audience is provided with the spectacle of a thoroughly embodied viewing process of an adaptation via the spectator, Emilia. This opening sequence signals that it is neither the source text nor the way it is staged today that is of utmost importance to the film, but instead the way a canonical work is received and, as we will see, becomes further circulated.

After the curtain falls, the film focuses on the manner in which Emilia returns to her quotidian life. As is normal for her, she goes out dancing with friends, visits her father’s restaurant, meets up with her mother, and discusses wedding plans with her fiancé. However, across all of these interactions with family, friends, and her fiancé, Emilia’s motivations, decisions, and speech acts begin to mirror those she became familiar with through viewing the production of Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti*. Soon the adaptation we witnessed Emilia experience begins to reverberate in all areas of her life.
Eventually her full identification with the main character takes distinct shape: what and how she speaks; the types of situations she puts herself in; how she experiences these situations and her role within them; and the choices she makes that determine her fate.

Having learned from Lessing’s play (via a modern stage version), she takes on the role of an “Emilia” in contemporary society to save herself. Although she does not liberate herself from her own lustful desires for a prince, like her eighteenth-century role model, she does follow the spirit of Emilia Galotti’s suicide. Unsatisfied with her fiancé (whom her parents are strongly pushing her to marry), and taken with another man, Emilia reenacts the suicide scene with her father – over the phone – in order to free herself from having to live with the wrong life partner. For the character of Emilia in Emilia, then, viewing an adaptation of Lessing’s bourgeois tragedy entails her internalization of the moral of the play and her application of this moral in her own life, a life whose circulation through the “everyday” can in this case characterize “popular culture.”

Through the appropriation of the content and themes of Lessing’s text, the work becomes an intertextual currency of exchange in Emilia’s quotidian life.

_Penthesilea-Moabit_ similarly prioritizes the affect and education of an audience member over the content of a modernized play. The film includes a frame story that accentuates the manner in which the circulation of canonical stories and their contemporary relevance to societies occur and are sustained through popular culture. In this film adaptation, a journalist intent on publishing a critical review attends the adaptation of Kleist’s work in an abandoned park in northwest Berlin. During the play, the journalist stands behind a barricade in most scenes, apart from the action, but not unmoved. Numerous cuts break away from the onstage occurrences to register the
journalist’s disgust at the grotesque acts unfolding before him. Though this canonical text was previously unknown to him, he leaves the park determined to produce an article based on his experience of the play, and begins to espouse it as an intertext to question and condemn contemporary cross-cultural violence in the real world. These recurring shots, in which the journalist symbolically serves as a surrogate spectator for the film’s audience, emphasize the critical emotional and pedagogical effect of literature and film on audiences in the film and of the film, making clear that a modernized *Penthesilea* can and should challenge a society of viewers just as its canonical source could. Like *Emilia*, the film points to the afterlife and relevance the canonical work can achieve through restagings and reviews signifying processes of popular culture. Having viewed intercultural violence through the lens of a canonical work, the journalists in *Penthesilea-Moabit* leave the scene of the action ostensibly better equipped to educate their target audience (German citizens, Berlin city dwellers) by relating the contemporary violence among multicultural groups in Moabit to a legendary play. Thus, the film traces how the workings of popular culture can extend the reach and relevance of the canonical.

Whereas Pfeifer’s *Emilia* underscores how an adaptation of a canonical work can intensely color one’s personal life and become a currency of exchange within everyday culture, Teigler’s *Penthesilea-Moabit* pushes this proposition further, suggesting that adaptations can inspire social groups to use the literary canon to represent, think through, and publicly discuss contemporary urban problems. As a result, these films excel at foregrounding the way canonical works circulate and gain relevancy through popular cultural recreations. By self-reflexively prioritizing acts of spectatorship, education, and the popular appropriation of canonical, historic content, these twenty-first-century canon
films trouble that traditional binary and in doing so participate as critical interventions in the longstanding debates surrounding the cultural and educational value of canonical film adaptations, the continued study of the nation’s canonical literature, and the intertwined development of Germany’s transnational and national cinemas.

In addition to serving as critical interventions on an aesthetic, interpretive level, important to note here is that the canon films of the twenty-first century also serve as critical interventions by means of industrial mechanisms that influence and combine with aesthetic decisions to produce, market, and distribute these films. As the directors of *Emilia* and *Pentesilea-Moabit* maintain (and as will be explored further in Chapter Two), the industrial successes of the Hollywood Shakespeare canon films of the 1990s inspired them to create these two canon films. The market precedent that informed the production of these films determined some of the aesthetic decisions that characterize the films. For example, both films intertwine the original, antiquated language of the source text with modernized settings and characters, a stylistic device first championed by Baz Luhrmann in his renowned adaptation of *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*. More importantly, however, this precedent precipitated how these filmic texts were marketed and received by consumers, with advertising slogans, film posters, and additional materials produced by distribution companies that pointed to the important interplay of transnational popular culture filmic styles within the adaptation of national literature. As such, both films show how directly tied twenty-first-century German canon films are to the transnational workings and stylistics circulating via popular culture.

What I hope to have pointed to with this brief analysis of *Emilia* and *Pentesilea-Moabit* is that, in comparison to the previous eras of adaptation filmmaking outlined
above, canon films of the twenty-first century can be differentiated by the way in which they emphasize figurations of the popular, the transnational, and the educational along both aesthetic and industrial lines. The films explored in the following chapters are, categorically, much less confined to geographically and spatially determined stages and audiences, both given their source texts and other intertexts as well as their reception and influence. In terms of the shifting ground of the historical role of adaptations, the canon films of the 2000s explored here, and as I show throughout this project, represent a seismic shift away from questions of fidelity and ideology in their aesthetics and marketing toward questions of affect, spectator interaction, and educational potential.

Today’s German canon films repeatedly underscore the situation through which contemporary viewers engage with, interpret, and understand the canonical works of the past, largely through transactions via popular, transnational culture. At times, this process is emblematized within the film itself (as in Henrik Pfeifer’s *Emilia* and Rolf Teigler’s *Penthesilea Moabit*). However, even when there is a lack of explicit self-reflexivity, these recent canon films also prove to be fundamentally and significantly about the act of adapting itself, and thereby champion the pedagogical values of adaptation as historical, popular, performative, and cross-cultural.

Interestingly, twenty-first-century German contemporary classical adaptations have their origins in Anglophone literary and filmic practices. As explored in the next chapter, shortly before the turn of the millennium, Germany had produced few – if any – large-scale cinema adaptations of canonical literature. However, the success of the Hollywood Shakespeare boom, which proved particularly successful in Germany, resulted in a sea change in adaptation making practices in the nation, and began to change
both the content toward which filmmakers gravitated for adaptations and the aesthetic presentation of these stories. In a way, history seems to be repeating itself in Germany, but in this epoch the stage upon which this cultural tide is occurring has moved from the page to the screen. In eighteenth-century Germany, exposure to Shakespeare’s works once inspired German authors to create texts that are still considered part of the nation’s classical canon. Now, in twenty-first-century Germany, exposure to Hollywood film adaptations of Shakespeare’s works have inspired German filmmakers to adapt many of these same eighteenth-century texts.
CHAPTER 2

The Shakespeare Boom Comes to Germany, or Canonical Literature on the Transnational Screen

I. Germany and the Global Shakespeare Era

The 1990s might be called the global Shakespeare era, given Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), John Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000), and Tim B. Nelson’s *O* (2001), to mention but a handful of the successful adaptations that emerged in this decade. With effective marketing campaigns for these films both domestically and abroad, Europeans – much like their American counterparts – flocked to the cinemas, leaving *Variety* to pronounce succinctly that “Europe loves ‘Shakespeare.’” In many countries, the proven success of the Shakespeare boom of the 1990s quickly led to offshoot productions in the genre overseas, with many national cinemas adapting Shakespeare’s dramas for production on their own silver screens. Indeed, in the late twentieth and into the early twenty-first century, Shakespeare became a “market asset in the global economy,” his works continuously molded according to world consumerism, late capitalist modes of consumption, and local tastes, from Italy to Spain and beyond.

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128 Emma French, *Selling Shakespeare to Hollywood: The Marketing of Filmed Shakespeare Adaptations from 1989 into the New Millennium* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2006), 101-175. In the second half of her book, French outlines the marketing campaigns that were utilized to promote Shakespeare film adaptations for teen and adult audiences in the 1990s in the United States and globally.


131 For a broader understanding of the emergence and circulation of 1990s canon film productions between Hollywood and other nation states, it is relevant to note that Shakespeare was not the only author whose works were revivified and adapted for modern tastes via the silver screen in Hollywood. During this same decade, a related movement can be traced with the works and life of the British author Jane Austen. Beginning with Amy Heckerling’s very successful and nontraditional adaptation *Clueless* (1995), U.K.
While many countries cashed in on the proven success of the Hollywood Shakespeare genre by producing their own regional adaptations of the bard's works, a distinctive model of Shakespearean film appropriation developed in Germany. Rather than adapting Shakespeare’s works for the twenty-first-century screen, as happened in numerous other foreign markets, German filmmakers – many of whom also had flocked to the cinemas – instead emulated the aesthetics, stylistics, and marketing campaigns of the Hollywood Shakespeare film genre to adapt German literary works. With the Shakespeare-boom films freshly popular, German directors channeled them into their own productions to bring Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller to the silver screen, resulting in films that together we might call the “Goethe-boom” films. However, when using this term, we must also keep in mind that Goethe-boom films are but a subset, in my argument; they are directly related to, if not subsumed into, international Shakespeare-boom films.

In this chapter, I trace the distinctive development of German contemporary classical adaptations as they emerge at the intersection of contemporary film adaptation trends and renewed Shakespeare hype. Although the way in which German directors appropriated Shakespeare-boom film aesthetics in the creation of nationally relevant adaptations appears modern, I contextualize this practice in relation to literary developments in eighteenth-century Germany that also centered on appropriative acts (namely, of Shakespeare’s style by the authors Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller). Close productions of Austen-inspired blockbuster adaptations surged, including, for example, Patricia Rozema’s Mansfield Park (1999), Joe Wright’s Pride and Prejudice (2005), and Julian Jerrold’s Becoming Jane (2007). Although tracing canon film production between Hollywood and Britain is beyond the scope of this paper, horizontal relationships of influence and exchange between Hollywood and British-based Shakespeare and Austen films deserve more attention as part and parcel of the same trend of canon film creation that I explore here in the Hollywood/German context.
readings of the Goethe-boom films and their paratextual materials demonstrate how these German appropriative practices disrupt, industrially and aesthetically, the usual binaries that have shaped interpretations of canonical adaptations through much of the twentieth century: these films muddle and merge the hierarchical relation of source text over adapted work, the differentiation of high cultural texts versus popular cultural texts, and the privileging of a transnational rhetoric over a national one. Ultimately, I urge opening up the definition of “Shakespeare films” to include works made in other nations by closely modeling Hollywood aesthetics and marketing practices. Together, these films all participate in an endeavor that supersedes original authorship or national cinemas: the transmediation of classical literature for the twenty-first-century transnational screen.

Before German directors created Goethe-boom films, the Shakespeare-boom films came to Germany and caused a sensation. Of Hollywood’s many foreign markets, Germany was the nation in which several of the most successful Shakespeare films of the 1990s found particular fame and popularity upon their release. Baz Luhrmann’s William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (1996) received prestigious awards at its debut at the 47th Berlin International Film Festival (also called the Berlinale). Leonardo DiCaprio was awarded a Silver Bear for Best Actor for his portrayal of Romeo, and Luhrmann was nominated for a Golden Bear for Best Director. This occurred a full month before the film’s set director and art directors were nominated for Academy Awards in the United States.

As expected, Romeo +Juliet fared best in the domestic U.S. market, where the film grossed $46,351,354. Abroad, however, Germany took the lead in foreign market profits. Here, the film grossed $13,740,194, putting the country ahead of English-
speaking foreign markets in both Australia and the United Kingdom, which followed behind to the tune of $12,594,776 and $12,142,616, respectively.\footnote{132}{“Romeo + Juliet,” Box Office Mojo, accessed October 20, 2017, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=romeoandjuliet.htm.} John Madden’s \emph{Shakespeare in Love} (1998), released shortly thereafter, also received national and international acclaim in Germany. When the film debuted in Germany at the 49th Berlinale in 1999, Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard received a Silver Bear for Best Screenwriting, and Madden was nominated for a Golden Bear for Best Director. Shortly thereafter, the film claimed seven Oscars at the Academy Awards. Upon its release to the German public later on March 4, 1999, the film generated sales of 3,283,106 tickets that year to viewers throughout Germany.\footnote{133}{“Box office/business for: \textit{Shakespeare in Love},” The Internet Movie Database, accessed October 20, 2017, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0138097/business.}

Finally, Almereyda’s postmodern \textit{Hamlet} (2000), another film particularly important and successful within this genre, also found much acclaim among German critics and viewers upon its release. In contrast to Luhrmann’s and Madden’s films, Almereyda’s work proved much more successful in Germany than in the U.S.\footnote{134}{Michael Dobson, “Short Cuts,” \textit{London Review of Books} 31, no. 15 (August 6, 2009): 22.} Reviews praising the film appeared in premier newspapers and magazines, such as \textit{Die Welt} and \textit{Der Spiegel}, and it was featured in several key German internet movie databases, including \textit{Filmrezension.de} and \textit{Cinema.de}. The film’s positive reception in Germany prompted several filmmakers discussed here – including Uwe Janson, Rolf Teigler, and Henrik Pfeifer – to undertake their own contemporary classical adaptations closely following the Shakespeare-boom film styles.\footnote{135}{Pfeifer, interview by Swanson, and Teigler, interview by Swanson.}
Economically – in terms ticket sales, film profits, and the number of continued or repeated showings – Hollywood Shakespeare adaptations in Germany were widely successful. Culturally, they proved even more valuable. Here, directors rerouted hype for Shakespeare’s own works elsewhere – namely, to Germany’s canonical literature, also in need of refashioning for the twenty-first-century screen.

Critical reviews of Hollywood Shakespeare films prove illuminating in this regard. The majority champion one or two core beliefs that helped spur on the productive appropriation of Shakespeare-boom films I have outlined. The first argument heralds the eighteenth-century author Goethe (and by extension his contemporaries) as a writer of not only German literature but also of world literature. Given this fact, his works – like those of the sixteenth-century English Shakespeare – could and should fare well in a transnational age. For example, speaking about the surge of Shakespeare adaptations as early as 2000, German film critic Oliver Hüttmann indirectly suggests that, given similarities between Shakespeare’s and Goethe’s works, along with their similar status as great writers, film adaptations of works penned by Goethe might be a viable possibility.

In an article that otherwise focuses on an analysis of Almereyda’s *Hamlet*, Hüttmann surprisingly ends by moving the emphasis away from the English bard and the Anglocentric films his works have inspired to acknowledge cursorily that Germany has its own world-famous author, although he is currently less globalized and less commonly transposed to the screen. He writes:

> In 100 Jahren Kino wurden von dem englischen Bühnendramatiker gut zwei Dutzend Stücke weit über 400 mal verfilmt. Sogar die Teenie Komödie “10 Dinge, die ich an dir hasse” ist von “Der Widerspenstigen Zähmung” inspiriert und Disneys Zeichentrickfilm “König der Löwen” an “Hamlet” angelehnt. Schriebe Shakespeare heute Drehbücher, dürfte er ein stattliches Millionenhonorar erhalten und mit seinen Stories aus Intrigen, Mord, Rache,
Wahnsinn und Sex für mehr Skandale sorgen als der “Basic Instinct” Autor Joe Eszterhas. . . . Shakespeare ist der globale Goethe.\textsuperscript{136}

By mentioning Goethe and Shakespeare in the same breath, Hüttmann relativizes any great differences between the two authors and hints that Germany should make their beloved national author and, by extension, his contemporaries more visible in current film culture.\textsuperscript{137}

The second argument points to the successes canonical modernizations have had within the vibrant theater scene in Germany to hypothesize that these works could also be transmediated well into film. For example, in 2004, film producer Pascal Ulli opined that English literary works receive continually updated filmic treatment in Anglophone nations while equally praiseworthy German literary works fail to be transposed for the transnational screen. Although he notes the numerous theater adaptations as a positive practice, he laments that this trend has not materialized in film culture, as well.

Ich liebe die deutsche Sprache, sie ist rhythmisch, präzise und elegant. Das deutschsprachige Theater, das ich zu den innovativsten in der Welt zähle, ist meine künstlerische Heimat. Auf deutschen Bühnen setzen sich die Künstler immer wieder mit den Klassikern auseinander, dekonstruieren sie, modernisieren sie, scheitern an ihnen oder wachsen an ihnen. Warum geschieht dies nicht häufiger im deutschsprachigen Kino. Ich habe nie verstanden, daß die Amerikaner und die Engländer „ihren“ Shakespeare rauf und runter verfilmen, mal klassisch, mal modern, mal experimentell, während sich bei uns kaum einer mit Goethe, Schiller oder Lessing beschäftigt. Woran es liegt weiß ich nicht. . . . \textsuperscript{138}


\textsuperscript{137} “Schiller-Kino fürs TV,” \textit{Focus}, accessed October 22, 2017, http://www.focus.de/wissen/mensch/kabale-und-liebe_aid_94370.html. In this article, Leander Haußmann is quoted as making a parallel similar to that of Hüttmann makes. He states, “Mit unserem Schiller müßten wir doch ins Kino, so wie die Engländer mit ihrem Shakespeare.”

Adapting canonical literary works in modern times, Ulli indicates, need not be isolated solely to the works of famous English writers. German canonical works, which already find many successes on various stages, could prove similarly successful.

Across most commentaries, German critics, producers, and filmmakers agitate against creating more adaptations of Shakespeare’s literary works. Instead of creating more “Shakespeare-boom” films, they call for the adaptation of national (German) literary works through the aesthetic means and popular culture paradigms similar to those used in the Hollywood genre. The type of emulation that Hüttmann and Ulli champion here has its roots in Enlightenment Germany, when translators, writers, and thinkers looked to Shakespeare and emulated his aesthetic principles in order to develop a literature that spoke to and of the German nation’s people. In short, the recent outpouring of Shakespearean German canon film creation follows a strikingly similar path to processes of adaptation and appropriation that took place during this period. Given this historical context, today’s Goethe-boom films might be best approached by considering the historical ways in which Shakespeare emulation has, over time, contributed to new impulses in the German cultural landscape. I track this theoretically via essays and treatises, and practically through an analysis of Goethe’s celebrated Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand (1773). The historical parallels I outline testify to, and explain in part, a particularly German dynamic that comes into play with emulation of both Shakespeare and Shakespeare-boom films.

II. Shakespeare and the German Canon: A History of Innovative Appropriation
To whom does Shakespeare belong? As the tagline to an article from the UK version of *The Guardian* reads, “We tend to think of Shakespeare as wholly ours, but Stratford’s greatest son has a rival fan club across the North Sea.” The author here refers to Germany, the country that, outside of Shakespeare’s homeland, has long reigned and continues to reign as the country with the longest involvement with the famed bard and his vast literary output. Channeling Shakespeare to support the creation of German cultural products is not new. Starting in the middle of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare’s works circulated throughout Germany via translations created by Christoph Martin Wieland, Christian Felix Weiße, and others. Through these translations, educated Germans fueled by Enlightenment principles discovered in the bard’s works an indigenous (i.e., non-French) and successful mode of poetic practice that they could emulate to develop a national theater, which would speak to the growing bourgeoisie. One of the first and most notable individuals to champion Shakespeare as a point of inspiration for this project was philosopher, theorist, and dramatist Lessing, who was determined to create a successful national theater that could vie with the leading European theatrical fare of the day: namely, French neoclassicist plays and Italian operas.

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140 Roger Bauer, “The Fairy Way of Writing: Von Shakespeare zu Wieland und Tieck,” in *Das Shakespeare-Bild in Europa Zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik*, ed. Roger Bauer, *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* (Bern, Switzerland, 1988), 142–61. As Bauer notes, Shakespeare translation has a long history in Germany, with the very first translation of one of his works into German appearing in 1741. He also investigates the translators and translation of his works into German during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Lessing’s goals would prove to be no small task. At the beginning of the Enlightenment, German theater drastically lagged behind the national theaters of other Western European countries. This assessment is much softer than Lessing’s own. In his rather scathing seventeenth contribution to Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend (1759), Lessing negates in entirety the existence of a distinctly German theater, proclaiming, “Wir haben kein Theater. Wir haben keine Schauspieler. Wir haben keine Zuhoerer.”142 By “we,” he means his compatriots, who – he contends – rather than working to create their own theater, have fallen into a mindless imitation of the French, who themselves are poor, misguided imitators of the Greeks. Although reforms had been attempted previously by the prolific dramaturge Johann Christian Gottsched, Lessing calls his contributions “wahre Verschlimmerungen”143 because they led German playwrights to mindlessly imitate French theater, an art form that – given their blind adherence to the prescriptive unities of time, plot, and place unique to the sociohistorical context of fifth-century Greece alone – did not fit “die deutsche Denkungsart.”144 Lost in this triangulation of French, German, and Greek identities, Lessing’s compatriots, he notes, have as yet been unable to produce a distinctively German theatrical apparatus that includes not only original works but an original acting style and an original audience, particularly ones that fit the times and people.

Although Lessing’s statement contains harsh criticism of his colleagues working in theater, many aspects of his argument hold true. At the time of his writing, Germany had neither a literary center nor a national, state-supported theater due to the country’s

144 Ibid., 71.
division into loosely connected principalities. Instead, there were two disparate theater cultures – vastly divided by class – which emerged separately as a result of this decentralized mode of cultural production. In terms of the aristocratic elite, Germany remained largely bound to the theatrical content and form of foreign works, such as Italian operas and French neoclassical tragedies and comedies, the performances of which were closed off to the bourgeoisie and lower class, as these production were performed in court contexts. The large majority of Germans had access only to lowbrow theatrical productions offered in the forms of Protestant school theater performances or wandering theater troops that traveled throughout the nation. Although Gottsched had attempted to make high-culture theater available to the growing bourgeois public who clamored for a theater of their own, these plays – such as Der sterbende Cato – largely failed. As Lessing explains, Gottsched blindly appropriated French neoclassicist premises without considering which theatrical style would best fit German audiences’ national, cultural, and/or regional tastes.

To go beyond mere condemnation of the current state of the theater, Lessing proposes a remedy via a concrete course of action. Rather than import Italian or French actors, storylines and/or devices, he argues, German writers should look to the English for inspiration, because they are, in temperament and style, more akin to the Germans than the French or Italians. Because of these similarities, English writers should serve as models for a type of national, poetic creation that can help Germans successfully overcome court-dominated, foreign, and overly rule-laden theatrical fare. Only by imitating works that break with neoclassical constraints and aesthetically represent
national interests can a theater develop that resonates with the current German middle-class.

Shakespeare, Lessing notes, proves a pivotal figure for this task. First, he blatantly disregards constraints mandated by poetic rules; second, he continually mines his nation’s history for themes and characters that provide the content of his dramas. Lessing’s hope is that his German compatriots will emulate this type of national pride by looking to their own past. And, in case any reader is left wondering where one might start with German historical figures, Lessing cites Faust as an example of a national legend that could inspire a “Shakespearesches Genie”145 in the German context.

Despite the advancements Lessing set into motion, German theater did not fully break free from a dominant neoclassical influence until the end of the century.146 Yet change was underfoot, as several other notable philosophers, writers, and theorists quickly joined in and expounded upon Lessing’s claim that the appropriation of Shakespearean stylistics – as opposed to Shakespeare’s texts in and of themselves – would lead to the emergence of modern German works that better fitted the values, experiences, and expectations of the nation’s middle class. A few years later, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, J.M.R. Lenz, and Johann Gottfried Herder took up the project of emulating Shakespeare as part of the Sturm und Drang movement. All three writers built upon Lessing’s argument that German culture was inherently closer to English than

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145 Ibid., 73.
146 Brown, *The Persistence of Allegory*, 183–222. Brown explains neoclassicism continues to shape the allegorical underpinnings of plot well until the late nineteenth century, even in those works that entail a more psychological development of individual characters. Given the time period in which the classical writers in this study are working, allegory and neoclassical influences are thus also legible in the works influenced by the theoretical treatises discussed here.
French culture, and that the use of Shakespeare to further promote its fettered
development was crucial to overcoming current limitations.

In October 1771, Goethe delivered his address, “Zum Schäkespears Tag,” as part
of the Shakespeare celebration at his parents’ house in Frankfurt am Main. Here, the
young author praises the bard for opening his eyes to the constraints of classical
conventions. In a performative speech in which Goethe mimics some of Shakespeare’s
aesthetic principles that he explicitly praises, Goethe declares himself directly at odds
with the constraining three unities of French neoclassicism, which he has only become
aware of through his readings of Shakespeare. After describing characteristics of the
bard’s writing and pointing out Shakespeare’s particular lack of rules by performing a
self-composed text with few restraints, Goethe closes with a statement urging his
compatriots to help him develop a different and more suitable national literature by
following Shakespeare’s lead.

Responding to Goethe’s metaphorical call to arms, *Sturm und Drang* dramatist
Lenz explains in more detail in his “Anmerkungen übers Theater” (1774) how
Shakespeare serves as a better model for Germany than the French. He maintains that
Shakespeare’s autonomous characters are much more appropriate than those in Greek
(and therefore French) dramas, since he and his compatriots no longer live in a time in
which they believe their destinies to be determined by fate, but rather in a time marked by
individual action. In addition to more natural characters, Lenz argues, Shakespeare
reflects nature more clearly, as he intertwines comedy with seriousness, which happens in
real life and is particularly relevant for Germans, who he argues are a mixture: both
cultured and coarse.
Finally, in his “Shakespeare” published in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773), Herder justifies Shakespeare’s breaking with normative poetics by explaining that the context of his art and genius were historically, culturally, and geographically contextualized, just as the Greeks’ art practices, written in fifth-century BCE, were also appropriate to their discrete time and space. Shakespeare lived in a time that did not have a simple set of national customs and socially prescribed deeds and behaviors, which shaped Greek drama into unities. Thus, whereas Aristotle staged one action, Shakespeare – working to the same end of *Mitleid* and *Furcht* – dramatized one event. And, whereas Aristotle offered audiences one musical note, Shakespeare offers his audiences one concerto melody.

For Herder, Aristotle and Shakespeare both offered works that themselves can be considered unified; however, the precise contours of this unity are drastically different between the two historical contexts in question: fourth-century BCE Greece and sixteenth-century England. By finding commonalities between the Greeks and the English that would work for current German theater development, Herder further legitimated the project of emulating Shakespeare. Across all three essays, one warning figures prominently: appropriating Shakespeare’s works slavishly (i.e., through word-for-word translation or the simple transposition of ready-made plot and characters to a German locale) represents an

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expressly false methodological approach for the project at hand. Doing so would be
certain cultural death, as Germans would simply fall into a rut of emulating the English
unreflectively and uncritically. This would be a continuation of the current, problematic
trend of rigidly imitating French works, which is what—these authors argue—the French
themselves had done by strictly following the rules, rather than the spirit, of Greek and
Roman writers. Herder especially raises this concern when he laments that if Shakespeare
is not revived in an original, productive way, the current generation of writers and
dramatists may well be the last to understand the bard’s greatness.

Without innovation, Herder suggests, the following generation will be too removed from
Shakespeare’s time to understand the point and relevancy of his works for their own age.
By addressing the reader, Herder creates a sense of urgency in his project of promoting
Shakespeare—a project that at once is deeply personal (“wo du dich bei diesem Lesen
erkennest und fühlst”\textsuperscript{149}) and nationalistic (“sein Denkmal aus . . . unserm so weit
abgearteten Vaterlande”\textsuperscript{150}).

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
To give readers a sense of how this theoretical mission might look in praxis, Herder and Lenz both point to Goethe’s *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand*, originally written in 1771 (and later revised by Goethe in 1773). They herald the fifty-four-scene play, loosely based on the autobiography of the sixteenth-century imperial German knight of the same name, as a successful emulation of Shakespeare for two key reasons. First, Goethe’s drama shows the appropriation of Shakespearean stylistics by refusing the unities of time, manner, and place, character “types,” and other poetic strictures constraining the development of German literature. Second, with *Götz* Goethe chooses his thematic content in the same way that Shakespeare chose his content: by focusing on those figures and stories that were part of national history, or in Lenz’s terms, by focusing on the “Volkgeschmack der Vorzeit und unsers Vaterlandes.” As such, Goethe’s drama exemplifies the type of stylistic and thematic works that can be achieved by appropriating Shakespeare in a manner that speaks to and of the national audience.

The final lines of Goethe’s play point to the perceived benefits that can be reaped from effectively emulating Shakespeare. In the ultimate scene Götz has been captured and thrown into a tower after staging a fight to maintain his rights as an autonomous feudal lord in response to encroaching absolutist powers. Here, he dies after crying out for freedom. According to Martin and Erica Swales, Götz’s death symbolizes that the autonomy that he fights so hard to maintain, as well as the system that once granted it to him, have become obsolete. While this interpretation comments cogently on Götz’s death within the confines of the play, the closing line also carries important extradiegetic

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meaning for those familiar with the *Sturm und Drang* treatises championing why and how Shakespeare should be appropriated. Read in line with Lenz’s and Herder’s treatises, with which Goethe was well acquainted, Götz’s call for freedom stands as a call to writers to follow his method of Shakespeare emulation, as displayed in this text. This call urges writers to follow his lead by: 1) seeking out themes and figures from Germany’s past for use in contemporary poetics endeavors, and 2) updating these texts in such a way that resonate with current socio-historical concerns, so that these texts and figures maintain (and, possibly, gain) relevancy in contemporary exchanges.\(^{153}\)

In addition to calling out for physical freedom from the confines of the tower in which he is locked away, Götz cries out for freedom from the forward march of time, which carries on without him and leaves him confined to the past, irrelevant to the present. However, what Goethe has accomplished with this text is precisely an act that salvages Götz from fading away into the dust of the past by (re)packaging him into a relevant symbol for contemporary audiences.\(^{154}\)

At the same time as *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand* immortalizes an aspect of German history through productively emulating Shakespeare, the final line of the play gestures toward the consequences that would result from ineffective modes of emulation. After Götz has died, Lerse cries, “Wehe der Nachkommenschaft, die dich verkennt.”\(^{155}\) By referring to the waning of Götz and his legacy over time, Lerse voices

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\(^{153}\) Caroline Weist, “Performance Prosthetic: Figuring *Heimat* in Twentieth-Century German Theater” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2014), 1–40. Weist shows how Götz’s famous prosthetic right hand changes symbolic meaning depending on what Götz determines its function must be in a given scene. My reading of Götz as a mouthpiece of Goethe – perhaps as Goethe’s right hand, in a way – dovetails with the concept of adaptation and adaptability that Weist develops.

\(^{154}\) Important to mention is that Goethe’s play is itself an adaptation of Götz’s autobiographical *Ritterroman*.

Goethe’s own call for other poets to remember and remake for the present their nation’s own heroes and characters of the past, and to adapt them into full-blooded characters that can achieve immortality in poetry by becoming relevant for the present. This must be done, like Goethe did, by productively emulating Shakespeare within the context of the nation – not by simply translating his works or rewriting them with a German flair. Otherwise, Shakespeare’s innovative, autonomous spirit – as well as figures of the past like Götz – will be lost to Germany’s future progeny.

The Sturm und Drang writers, both in theory and in praxis, expressly detail that any successful appropriation and emulation of Shakespeare in Germany must derive from historically German national motifs and address contemporary national concerns. These are, in part, concepts that find themselves echoed again in the twenty-first-century German adaptation culture by critics such as Hüttmann and Ulli, who urge the remaking of German classical literature rather than more adaptations of English literature. It is also, as we will see, echoed by filmmakers who follow Hüttmann’s and Ulli’s suggestions and adapt the Hollywood Shakespeare-boom film genre to refashion eighteenth-century German literary works for the transnational screen.

III. Shakespearean German Films: Marketing the Return of the National Canon

In a recent move that seems to draw upon aspects of Shakespeare adoration and loose emulation in eighteenth-century Germany, multiple German film directors have taken their cue from contemporary Hollywood film adaptations of Shakespeare’s works to create successful, commercially viable adaptations of German canonical literature. These works circulate alongside Hollywood fare on the transnational market and, as
explored here and in Chapter Four, are valued in contemporary German for the role they play in cultural and educational endeavors.

To return to the sociohistorical context of the films in question, let us recall the situation of film adaptations at the beginning of the twenty-first century. At the same time that Germany was producing successful adaptations of contemporary German novels and stories, as outlined in Chapter One (such as Thomas Brussig’s *Am kurzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*, etc.), several of the most popular Hollywood Shakespeare films of the 1990s were winning awards internationally and finding particular renown in the German nation. Thus, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, contemporary film culture had long piqued audiences’ and studios’ interest in adaptations, generally, and in the creation of contemporary classical works based on renowned canonical works, more specifically.

A decade after the onset of the Shakespeare boom, Germany’s film studios and directors responded with the creation of works that addressed viewers’ interest in contemporary classical adaptations. Here, however, they changed the subject of these films to resonate better with German viewers, particular among them – as we will explore in Chapter Four – individuals involved in the German school system. Between 2005 and 2012, German studios produced at least five notable films that clearly incorporate the cinematic techniques and representational strategies characteristic of the Hollywood Shakespeare genre to adapt eighteenth-century German canonical works. Ranging from large blockbuster releases to mainstream Arte co-productions, these films include Leander Haußmann’s *Kabale und Liebe* (2005), Henrik Pfeifer’s *Emilia* (2004), Uwe Janson’s *Werther* (2008), Rolf Teigler’s *Penthesilea-Moabit* (2008), and Philip Stölzl’s *Goethe!* (2012).
Although increasing scholarly interest in charting the dialogic relationship between Hollywood and European cinema would seem to coalesce around such a complex genre and push it forward into the public’s eye, these films – and the geographic and aesthetic boundaries they transgress – have largely been ignored. German contemporary classical adaptations have yet to be brought into careful critical dialogue with one another and studied as a cohesive genre in a manner that acknowledges their aesthetic and commercial similarities as well as their regular pedagogical treatment.

The crux of the problem relates to the longstanding bias against adaptations due to their supposed derivative nature or to worn-out critical judgments about fidelity and classic literature; contemporary classical adaptations produced by Germany are dealt a four-fold blow due to these prejudices. In particular, three assumed binaries work together to result in these films’ complex disavowal: high culture’s formal experimentation over popular culture’s circulation of content; the valuation of the source text over the adapted work; and auteuristic intention over spectatorial reception. Below, these prejudices are explored both theoretically and materially as they are announced, addressed, and in some instances pre-emptively countered already within the marketing materials supporting these films. Throughout, I foreground a distinct triangulation: namely, between contemporary classical adaptations, the contexts in which they emerge, and the audiences they target. My aim is to show that with popular films, and even more specifically with contemporary classical adaptations, the creation and reception of film texts are not sealed off from the public. Quite to the contrary, they are largely influenced and shaped by, as well as aimed at, global popular culture with its many differentiated and local audiences.
To begin with: Haußmann, Pfeifer, Teigler, Janson, and Stölzl. If some of these directors’ names sound unfamiliar, that is precisely my first point in outlining why these films have long been devalued and have not been acknowledged as a cohesive genre. As a group, the directors are a mixed batch, neither a cohesive set of established auteurs nor exclusively popular filmmakers. Haußmann, for example, has an established track record in both the German theater scene, where he has recently directed several productions at the Berliner Ensemble, and contemporary entertainment film scene, with the films *Sonnenallee* (1999), *Herr Lehmann*, (2003), and *Hotel Lux* (2011), among others. Pfeifer, in contrast, is a photographer who has produced a single feature-length film, the one studied here. Although more consistently prolific in German cinema, the other three directors, Teigler, Janson, and Stölzl, are filmmakers who have few commonalities across their oeuvres, other than the fact that they – and this is key – have produced no particularly critically valued subgenre(s) of German filmmaking (i.e., they do not have films that are classified as part of Turkish-German cinema or Hitler-boom cinema), and they belong to no valued groups centered around formal experimentation (they have no ties to the New German Cinema or the Berlin School). Binding them together, then, is neither formal experimentation nor unique auteurial visions, but rather popular content in the form of the Shakespeare Hollywood films with which each deeply engages and imitates. In short, it is the content of their films that bind these directors and their works together.

The second part of the three-fold prejudice lies in the fact that these filmmakers, working in the popular arena, are creating films whose content derives from highly esteemed primary texts by the country’s revered “Dichter und Denker,” including
Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, writers whose works are often perceived to be insurmountable. As mentioned in Chapter One, there have been many instances of culturally successful transpositions of canonical works to the screen, but these specific adaptations were largely created during periods of national cinema filmmaking, which in Germany was often heralded as a cinema of film auteurs. As Corrigan notes, auteurs have often filled the “void” when a canonical work undergoes transposition, because “the vision, style, and signature of the filmmaker as auteur supplants the missing literary author as a controlling and defining agency.”

As he explains further, contemporary film viewers more and more want and need authors and auteurs to embody images, to share and organize those images and texts as expressive positions and performances. If authors like Shakespeare have, for at least two centuries, been the embodiment of texts, auteurs have become, for contemporary viewers, the displaced embodiment of authors within today’s image culture. Just as human agency can represent a solution to the larger excesses and unmoorings of contemporary culture, viewers today may deal with the burden of a culture of lost texts and massively redundant images through identification and interaction with the various expressive agencies provided by auteurs. With auteurs, viewers find the signature needed to replace the dead literary author, to guide the selection and comparison of films, to decipher and anchor adaptations with a visible or invisible original text, to reveal the secrets of a text in the performance of personal expression.

Extending this argument to the German context would entail arguing that Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s adaptation of Theodore Fontane’s Effi Briest proved successful not because of the content but largely because Fassbinder the auteur exuded his style and left his “finger print” on the film, as did F.W. Murnau with Goethe’s Faust, and so on. In the landscape of contemporary popular filmmaking, however, contemporary classical German films have neither the “authority” extended by the deceased author nor that of a living, lauded auteur. They are connected via content and its circulation in the popular

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157 Ibid., 178.
sphere. The lack of an established, historically respected anchoring point within and across these films has thus made it difficult for scholars to acknowledge and categorize these works for analysis.

To grasp how this particular prejudice plays out in the public sphere in relation to these films, let us turn our attention briefly to marketing materials for these films, which call attention to the prejudice I outlined about. A glance at the DVD insert pamphlet marketing materials for Leander Haußmann’s *Kabale und Liebe*, chronologically the first contemporary classical adaptation explored in this study, confirms that the longstanding prejudice against contemporary classical films is alive and real, particularly for those commercial ones that cannot claim legitimacy via formal experimentation and auteurist practices. Here, the introductory sentence seeks to assuage any expectations spectators of *Kabale und Liebe* may have of a less-than-stellar film experience. By beginning with “Es geht also doch,”158 the text announces Haußmann’s film as the embodiment of a new formula that defeats previous disappointments audiences have had with the costume drama genre. The use of the modal particle “doch” in the opening sentence, which serves to negate a false statement, immediately acknowledges that the key dilemma the film must face if it is to succeed is audience expectations: namely, the unpopularity of most literary adaptations in the recent history of German filmmaking that together have led to the general assumption that this genre does not fare well on the silver screen. To note, although the New German Cinema produced numerous adaptations, these films proved highly successful largely in art cinema circuits but – with only a few exceptions – never made the transition into significant commercial successes. Thus, to counter this belief, the

pamphlet assures viewers that it is a successful and entertaining adaptation by underscoring the film’s unique aesthetic value and innovative strategies that differentiate it from the less intriguing literary adaptations of yore. The text specifically highlights Haußmann’s fresh take by claiming that nearly every aspect of the film is top-notch. “Ein deutscher Klassiker liefert den Stoff, ein kongenialer Regisseur findet die richtige Form und ein glänzend aufgelegtes Star-Ensemble spielt mit solcher Leidenschaft, dass Friedrich Schiller seine Freude daran gehabt hätte.”159 The following sentences intersperse a number of adjectives that further serve to quell audiences’ negative assumptions regarding the genre. According to these promotional materials, the film is based on a “rasantes Drehbuch” that nevertheless is “echt Schiller,” but mediated in a way that “wirkt doch aufregend” and therefore has resulted in a film that makes Schiller’s drama “besser verständlich, als Generationen von Schülerinnen und Schülern es vielleicht in Erinnerung haben.”160 The preemptive defensive stance this film takes against possible prejudices can be found across the genre.

Lacking the cultural legitimacy provided by living authors and the hype of contemporary auteur cinema, and coming out of a history of often less-than-exciting national adaptation practices, advertising campaigns for this genre also reach out to Hollywood for legitimacy. This move, although potentially commercially profitable for these films, is the third part of the trifold prejudice that keeps critics and scholars from deep engagement with these films, who consider them to be “knockoffs” rather than informed and thoughtful interpretations and revisions of the Shakespeare-boom genre. Indeed, each of the five films explored here pointedly foreground the amalgamation of

159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
German national literature with lavish Hollywood adaptation stylistics and trends from the 1990s. Even Haußmann’s film, as we will see, participates in this move for increased legitimization, despite the aforementioned claims (“es geht also doch”) that would make the film seemingly self-assured of its success based on its artistic merit alone.

Let us again turn our attention to these films’ advertising materials to better understand how Hollywood becomes a main source of legitimacy for these works. The DVD cover of Henrik Pfeiffer’s *Emilia* (2005) proclaims the work “[e]in Klassiker in neuem Gewand: Unter Verwendung von Lessings Originaltext agieren die Protagonisten ähnlich wie in Baz Luhrmans *Romeo + Juliet* in der Gegenwart.”161 In the book jacket, the director further cites Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000) as a second source of inspiration for the intense interplay of antiquated and contemporary colloquialisms that mark the dialogue in *Emilia*. Similarly, materials promoting Uwe Janson’s *Werther* (2005) note that the film’s success largely stems from the director’s adherence to Luhrmann’s approach of mixing modern visuals with original, antiquated language from the source text. Even critics have rushed to make audiences aware of these films’ connection to Hollywood grandiosity: the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, reviewing *Kabale und Liebe* (2005), declared that, until Haußmann’s film, “[s]o nah an Shakespeare – und an Hollywood – war Schiller nie. *Kabale und Liebe* ist Haußmanns Antwort auf *Shakespeare in Love).*”162 Finally, that Phillip Stölzl’s *Goethe!* (2010) was translated into English as *Young Goethe in Love* also makes a clear nod to this film’s relationship – if not structural and aesthetic similarity – to *Shakespeare in Love*.

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These films also visually underscore their tight relationship to Hollywood: on advertisement posters and DVD covers, iconic images popularized by the Shakespearean films of the 1990s are routinely recycled. For example, the DVD cover of Pfeifer’s *Emilia* imitates that of Almereyda’s *Hamlet*: like the modern Hamlet, who intensely stares out from the frame to catch the eyes of his assumed viewers, Pfeifer frames his modern Emilia in a deep close-up in which she also penetratingly stares into the eyes of those looking at her, as if intentionally breaking the fourth wall. Promotional materials for Teigler’s *Penthesilea-Moabit* refer to its relationship to the Shakespearean genre by mimicking the DVD cover art for Tim Blake Nelson’s *O*, in which the main figures, Hugo and Desi, look out toward the audience, and below them another character seems literally to be lifting them up with outstretched arms. For Teigler’s film, which stages a tale of unfulfilled, complicated love similar to that in Nelson’s *O*, the blocking, sizing, and positioning of main and supporting characters prove comparable. Here, instead of Hugi and Desi, Penthesilea and Achilles are framed in a close-up in the upper half of the film, looking outwards, with their armies portrayed below them, smaller and in action, literally upholding their leader’s orders. In German marketing materials, this visual pattern returns for the marketing of *Goethe!*, the most prominently marketed film discussed here. Like *O* and *Penthesilea Moabit*, the cover for this film also showcases a close-up on the main characters, Goethe and Charlotte, as they look out from the center of the frame, literally underscored by smaller supporting cast members. As if this visual citation would not make clear enough the Shakespearean film-inspired content of *Goethe!* for transnational audiences, the DVD cover on the English-version release of this film more forcefully foregrounds the film’s relationship to the U.S. genre. On this poster,
iconic imagery from the two most successful films of this genre in the USA, Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* and Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*, is recycled. In this advertisement targeting American, British, and other international viewers, Charlotte and Goethe passionately kiss in front of the doorway of a medieval ruin, arms outstretched and heads tilted slightly, recalling the highly-circulated image of Romeo and Juliet standing before an ancient-looking shrine, wrapped in each other’s arms and bending slightly toward one another’s lips. Finally, the background chosen for the DVD cover of Stölzl’s film takes on even more significance when compared more closely to *Shakespeare in Love*, as the mise-en-scène of the image could easily be (mis)read as an advertisement for Madden’s film. The cover, replete with the two pillars framing the space like curtains, allows one to imagine that Goethe and Charlotte are standing on an ancient stage, replete with proscenium and arch, and in front of implicit theater-goers, as is the case with the still image that advertises Madden’s successful film.

Through word and image, the parallels between recent Hollywood and German canon film are unquestionably brought to the attention of the viewers. In terms of economics, referring to Hollywood films that had been commercially successful in Germany increases the market value of these films by raising audience expectations and creating interest in the film products. Such marketing, however, while whetting interest and filling a perceived “void” in terms of adaptations’ legitimacy, also works to the genre’s detriment, resulting in a lack of appreciation for what these film aesthetically, culturally, and educationally accomplish. Heavily marketed and understood as pure imitations of adaptation aesthetics and patterns established by Hollywood, they brush up against arguments that would disregard them as “knockoffs” created for solely
commercial reasons (as if, Murray reminds us, industrial reasons sully artistic developments). The line between being influenced by a genre or type of film and outright copying, in public opinion, seems to be a fine one to tread – and one that these films perhaps seemed to overstep in their self-promotion.

In addition, just as Hüttmann and Ulli created an immediate, horizontal relationship between Shakespeare the English global author and Goethe the German global author when commenting on the Hollywood Shakespeare boom, so too do the materials advertising recent German canonical adaptations: they visually and verbally collapse the traditional hierarchy between transnational and national goods. As a result, Lessing’s *Emilia* as adapted by Pfeifer stands side by side with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as adapted by Almereyda, as if no one story (or film adaptation or interpretation of a national literary heritage) were better than the other; the story of Goethe writing *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* becomes as memorialized and sensationalized as the plotline that traces Shakespeare’s penning of *Romeo and Juliet*; and Haußmann’s reworking of *Kabale und Liebe* stands as the German counterpart to Madden’s highly acclaimed *Shakespeare in Love*. Among these films’ promotional materials, then, both the original author’s works and each filmmaker’s style are highlighted as being adapted from and influencing the further creation of other stories and other film creations. This rendering of adaptation as a horizontal process levels the reigning tension between 1) authors as superior than the filmmakers who transpose their works, and 2) formalistic experimentation as being superior to the transmutation of popular content as it travels around the world. As we will see, making traditionally accepted hierarchies more horizontal is often key to the plotlines of the films discussed here.
This brings us to the fourth – and most systemic – reason for these films being overlooked. Because of the previously mentioned prejudices, much scholarship still prioritizes the relationship between a single author’s works and his/her work’s filmic representations in a particular time period or region (in the U.S., during the 1940s, during the 1990s, in third-world cinemas, etc.). As a result, a vertical hierarchy between literature and film continues to inhibit any consideration that Shakespeare films can go beyond individual representations of the author’s own works and instead participate in the creation of other national literatures on the screen. Successful Shakespeare adaptations, however, do much more than simply foster the creation of even more Shakespeare adaptations by filmmakers working in South America, Africa, China, Italy, France, Germany, or elsewhere. As shown here, Shakespeare-boom films also spur on the creation of modern film adaptations of other countries’ national literatures. Thus, considering Shakespeare-boom films more broadly, into which other categories and national cinema products may be subsumed, would allow for a closer look at how global and local aesthetics, discourses, and values intermix on the transnational screen in a manner that neither prioritizes nor denigrates one, the other, or both. As explored below, important about these films is that they intervene against the type of “Europudding” that Belen Vidal notes has arisen due to the notable increase in heritage drama productions worldwide since the Hollywood trend in the 1990s, given the “the pressures of globalization” and strict adherence to the “generic formula.” Instead, these films work within and against the genre to provide a differentiated, and locally relevant, transnational

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discourse and force a rethinking of categorical standards in the field of adaptation studies. Let us now turn our attention to these Goethe-boom films.

IV. Refashioning the Heritage Drama in Leander Haußmann’s *Kabale und Liebe*

As if answering Pascal’s call to move adaptations of canonical literary works from the stage to the screen, Haußmann – himself a famed theater director – created *Kabale und Liebe*, a modern costume drama that represents the first large-scale attempt in twenty-first-century Germany to rework a canonical text for the transnational screen following Shakespeare-boom aesthetics. With this film, Haußmann begins a new film adaptation trend in the nation that will last for roughly a decade. Clearly intermingling and building upon successful production and aesthetic practices key to both Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*, Haußmann’s film seeks to prove that – like the Shakespearean works and Shakespeare adaptations the English and Americans claim as “theirs” – German canonical works can indeed be recast on the screen in a similarly playful, high-budget, and intertextual manner.

Most notable to this work, however, is that precisely those areas that appear to be rather direct citations from *Romeo + Juliet* often include aesthetic choices that transform the meaning of these citations in significant ways. Through creative camera angles in *Kabale und Liebe* that give audiences a presumably more authoritative viewpoint and sequences of dramatic irony that result from key characters’ mistakes in viewing and reading, Haußmann’s film signals middle-class “knowing audience”\(^\text{164}\) members as his

\(^{164}\) Hutcheon, 120-21. Hutcheon argues that there are two audiences for any given adaptation: unknowing and knowing, and the director forges relationships with both audience types through his/her work. She writes: “If we do not know that what we are experiencing actually *is* an adaptation or if we are not familiar with the particular work that it adapts, we simply experience the adaptation as we would any other work.
ideal viewers, and thereby gestures toward the stakes of his project of reviving German classical literature for contemporary times. They are twofold. To be culturally and educationally worthwhile for twenty-first century culture, contemporary filmmakers must first engage the audience, whether by playing upon the background of “knowing audience” members in some way or by stylizing audience members as “knowing” in some other way, such as by encouraging middlebrow play with high culture (as Haußmann does here by drawing upon the nineteenth-century practice of tableaux vivant). Second, they must prioritize and yet problematize the circulation of content in popular culture by pointing to the increasing emphasis on attaining critical reading and viewing skills that can be implemented when engaging with the postmodern proliferations of texts: from source texts and intertexts to adapted texts and beyond.

To begin our study of Haußmann’s film, we must acknowledge several striking similarities. Luhrmann’s Romeo+Juliet, as we might recall, succeeded in modernizing nearly all aspects of the Shakespearean text. In this film, the setting of sixteenth-century Verona, Italy is transformed into twenty-first-century Verona Beach, a seaside city in the southern U.S. that pulses to the sounds of hip-hop. The award-winning cast includes stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes. Lavish costumes, consisting of Hawaiian shirts and metal-studded leather, complete the modernized visual effect that constantly jars with the spoken dialogue, marked by antiquated phrases and Shakespearean wordplay. The visual and aural opulence on display in this film stands, as critics attest, as a hallmark of Luhrmann the auteur, whose aesthetic tendencies are often defined as completely fantastical.

To experience it as an adaptation, however, as we have seen, we need to recognize it as such and to know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in our memories with what we are experiencing. . . . For an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences.”
With *Kabale und Liebe*, Haußmann follows closely in Luhrmann’s footsteps. Like Luhrmann, he serves as the renowned, over-the-top director, who produces a film marked by lavish aesthetic choices that parallel Luhrmann’s eccentricities. Mirroring Luhrmann’s choice to work with high-profile actors, Haußmann’s star-studded cast includes famous actors Katharina Thalbach, August Diehl, and Katja Flint. With opulent sets saturated with a vivid color palette, detailed costuming, and a bold use of props, the film recreates the look of a Luhrmann-inspired, blockbuster masterpiece. Dramatic, high-paced cinematography complements the modernized and lavish mise-en-scène. Although the spoken dialogue in Haußmann’s film proves much more modern than in Luhrmann’s, we see that a jarring juxtaposition between the contemporary period and the past sill permeates the film, albeit in reverse, with the costumes historical and the speech and visual opulence quite modern. The common trait of a pronounced collision between the historical and the modern across the film’s visual and verbal tracks is most striking, and indicates that – like Luhrmann’s film – Haußmann’s *Kabale und Liebe* largely concerns itself with reinvigorating a canonical story for audiences versed in the source text and older film adaptations produced throughout the twentieth century.

The historical setting of Haußmann’s film – which is one of the few ways in which he diverges from Luhrmann’s precedent – is important for our understanding of Haußmann’s project. At the time of the film’s creation, the costume drama (also known

165 Wilhelm Hortmann, *Shakespeare on the German Stage: Volume 2, The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 466. Hortmann describes Leander Haußmann in terms that echo descriptions of Baz Luhrmann. He writes, “Leander Haussmann is one of the directors whose theatrical instincts are all against the prissy minimalism of the ideologues and the minimalists.”

166 Indeed, *Kabale und Liebe* had been adapted for the silver screen many times between 1913 and 1982. These films include Friedrich Fehér’s *Kabale und Liebe* (1913), Carl Froehlich’s *Luise Müllerin* (1922), Curt Goetz-Pflug’s *Kabale und Liebe* (1955), Harald Braun’s *Kabale und Liebe* (1959), Martin Hellberg’s *Kabale und Liebe* (1959), Gerhard Klingenberg’s *Kabale und Liebe* (1967), Heinz Schirk’s *Kabale und Liebe* (1980), and Piet Drescher’s *Kabale und Liebe* (1982).
under Belen Vidal’s descriptive term “heritage film”) had become increasingly popular elsewhere, particularly in England and the United States, but had not yet become as popular as other forms of adaptation in German filmmaking, paling in contrast to contemporary adaptations. In Germany, the costume-drama genre – also commonly referred to as the heritage drama – had already enjoyed its heyday as a common mode of literary adaptation throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The genre, however, went out of favor due to new production strategies in the 1990s and beyond that gave increased preference to contemporary literary works that easily lent themselves to transposition via more modern film genres, such as romantic comedies, action films, and psychological thrillers. It was not until after the worldwide success of *Shakespeare in Love*, and its resonance in Germany, that this newly popular, overwhelmingly profitable costume drama, characterized by mixing history and fantasy with ahistorical opulence and interspersed modern musical qualities with antiquated dialogue, that attitudes against costume dramas changed.

The costume drama’s resurgence in contemporary Germany relies precisely upon those strategies that Haußmann’s film displays, and which Luhrmann’s film established: an ironic, tongue-in-check stance toward the film’s own genre. As discussed here, an acknowledgement of intertextuality within the film itself constitutes the most prominent trait among those that emerge in the genre. Beginning in Hollywood and traveling abroad, twenty-first-century German contemporary classical adaptations, unlike earlier eras of film adaptation, explicitly play with the layers of knowledge – both domestic and global – that their viewers bring to their encounter with the film. Haußmann, for his part,
frames these characteristics in his foundational contribution to the genre, as critical reading and viewing skills his audience should possess.

Intertexts abound throughout the film, which together point to the film’s obsession with its own project of adaptation. For example, although set in the distant past, Kabale und Liebe repeatedly points toward its modernization through cinematography and self-reflexive references. Similar to the way that Luhrmann draws upon and parodies largely American intertextual references – such as Western music, ghetto film culture, or Hollywood action films167 – Haußmann utilizes the opportunity the genre offers to bring historically national German cultural products into critical relief through a transnational framework that allows viewers various access points to the text. For domestic audiences, as explored below, these cultural products include Schiller’s bourgeois tragedy, the modernized Volkslied that serves as the theme song, and key German national film stars. And the way in which Haußmann presents these to his audience also draws from adaptation practices embedded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but more on that later.

For now, most important to Haußmann’s project is that – through these products – the film directly acknowledges audiences’ experiences with various intertexts commencing with the start of the film. In this way, Haußmann goes far beyond noting audiences’ general disappointment with past German film adaptations of Schiller in its advertisement materials; instead, he also addresses this concern immediately within the very diegesis of the film. The opening sequences of Kabale und Liebe speak to viewers

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and make use of the fact that they, for the most part, are accustomed to past adaptations of canonical works, as they have been and often still are taught side by side with their literary models in schools as a means to invigorate canon-based curricula, or as part of a greater trend in German film history classes. Specifically, Kabale und Liebe’s first two sequences 1) reveal the film as being in dialogue with Hollywood modernization and high-budget filmmaking strategies, and 2) acknowledge the long history of film adaptations of classical literary works in Germany as an important intertext. This is accomplished by Haußmann’s creation of visual, aural, and cinematographic quotations that also note the cultural work that the films sets out to do for the modern German nation: integrating the past into a newly normalized present and fostering critical literacies in postmodern culture. The first intertext we will explore is a visual quotation that links Louise’s bedroom to that of Juliette in Romeo + Juliet. The second intertext we will explore is the historical precedent of German adaptation filmmaking, namely the Literaturverfilmungen of the 1970s.

From the outset, via a modern musical track, a mise-en-scène full of ornate props, and blocking, the opening sequence gestures palimpsestuously to Lurhmann’s film. After the film begins, the viewers experience first the aural track that commences while the screen is still black. This music immediately sets up the adaptation’s premise: a linking of the present with the past. Just as music served to heighten the transposition of Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet into the present while nevertheless making space for the past juxtaposed with antiquated language from the script, Kabale und Liebe uses a musical number for the same aim. This song, which recurs throughout, is “Kein Feuer, keine

168 Luhrmann integrated popular songs ranging from gospel to disco throughout the film and released a soundtrack for the film after its release. By integrating pop music into his film, Haußmann seems to be following in Luhrmann’s steps.
“Kohle” performed by contemporary musician Kim Frank. It is a playful electric guitar rendition of the traditional folksong, with the lyrics directly taken from a popular German Volkslied that was first written down in 1807. Insofar as this song connects a folk tradition in a high literary work transformed for modern middle-class audiences and times, thereby transgressing chronological boundaries and relativizing hierarchical differences, it works to frame this particular project as a work that transgresses cultural boundaries by bringing high culture into the popular realm.

As if to complicate the presumed polarity of past (represented in the historical setting) versus present (represented in the modern musical track), as the song continues to play visual parallels to Luhrmann’s extravagant film abound. The sequence wherein the viewer first hears this tune begins in darkness and silence, permeated first by ringing church bells that transmit the Christian ideology that serves as an important background to the events of the plot. The musical track then begins, seemingly diegetically, as the dancer atop an ornate music box decorating Louise’s childhood bedroom begins to turn. As the camera explores the space, Louise’s childhood bedroom appears strangely similar to Juliette’s in *Romeo + Julia*. Clothes, strewn about the room suggestively, become the focus of the camera, and are quickly juxtaposed with dolls, stuffed animals, and an ornate Victorian dollhouse that results in a mixed mise-en-scène that sets Louisa up to be the German version of Luhrmann’s nubile Juliette: a female on the threshold of womanhood but nevertheless in many ways still a young girl, experiencing her first love in the secrecy of her childhood bedroom (figures 1-4).
The relationship in both texts is outlawed by societal and familial constraints but is nevertheless indulged in through the assistance of an older woman, whether the selfish mother in Schiller, or the kind maid in Shakespeare.

Although the setting of the forbidden sex act in Haußmann’s film visually refers to the locale of the illicit deed in Luhrmann’s film, the camera angle Haußmann utilizes strikingly differs and the result is an empowerment of the viewer. In Romeo +Juliet, the boudoir is framed in a medium-length shot, with the viewer positioned slightly below the fourth wall of the bedroom. Therefore, the viewer must look up at the scene from a slightly low angle. The positioning of the camera establishes a sense of inferiority of the viewers, who must peer upwards toward the scene before them. In comparison, in Haußmann’s opening sequence in which he explores Louise’s bedroom, the camera spins from a high angle, twisting and twirling throughout the room before zooming in to focus on Louise and Ferdinand in bed together, framed from above (figure 5).
The camera movement and placement above the bed immediately locate the audience in a position of authority and knowledge, looking down upon and inspecting the room on display. As we will see, the spinning of the camera around the room alludes to the many twists and turns to come in a film rife with deception, poison, conspiracies, and mistaken identities – yet it assures the audience that they will be “on top of it all,” looking in from a safe position outside of and/or above the plot happenings. In short, Haußmann’s film – from the beginning – sets itself apart from Luhrmann’s film by visually empowering the audience.

The placement of the audience above the events unfolding in the film recurs throughout the many sequences in the film. Through formal techniques, Haußmann repeatedly retracts the viewer’s immediacy and identificatory relationship to the main characters by largely foregoing close-ups on individual characters to emphasize instead playful distance from the story. Slanted camera angles, dizzying zooms, and a particularly notable bird’s-eye perspective throughout characterizes the film from the beginning and situates the viewer in a position of authority and, implicitly, knowledge.
The viewer is put in a position to view, objectively, the dynamics between the nuclear family and greater society, and to come to an understanding of their interrelatedness far more than the individual characters themselves. From the beginning, the viewer is asked to observe – to peer in from above into windows that shed light on the dramatic events of the Miller family as they play out within the greater construct of bourgeois society. On an interpretive level, these camera angles position the audience as a “knowing” party and invite viewers to look at the adaptation afresh – literally from a new angle. When considered in combination with the distributor’s pronouncement, “es geht also doch!,” the cinematography seems to speak to the “Generationen von Schülern und Schülerinnen”¹⁶⁹ who grew up with the less-than-exciting adaptations of the 1970s and may have been turned off by previous unexciting encounters with the play that allowed little – if any – room to piece together information intellectually as Haußmann’s film here permits.

In addition to camera angles and marketing statements, Haußmann also differentiates his work from both the film adaptations of previous decades and Hollywood Shakespeare films through the careful selection of one of his star actors. This is an aspect of the film that Haußmann directly thematizes at the beginning, in the sequence following the establishing shot described above. By choosing the famous Katharina Thalbach to play the key role of Frau Miller, Louise’s mother, Haußmann establishes a linkage with the 1970s Literaturverfilmungen. For her part Thalbach, a well-known actress who in previous decades worked in both German countries during division, was most known for her major roles in the East German literary adaptations Lotte im Weimar (Günther, 1975), Die Leiden des jungen Werthers (Günther, 1976), and

¹⁶⁹ Haußmann, Kabale und Liebe.
Das blaue Licht (Gusner, 1976), as well as the West German adaptation of Die Blechtrommel (Schlöndorff, 1979). Her work after that date generally moves away from acting in film adaptations after this time, with the exception of Peter Sehr’s Kaspar Hauser (1993) \(^{170}\) and Leander Haußmann’s Sonnenallee (2003).\(^{171}\) Notably, Kabale and Liebe marks her first major return to adaptations of classical literary works since reunification.

Haußmann’s casting of Thalbach into a main role places this film into direct dialogue with the many other previous adaptations that the film claims to trump aesthetically, educationally, and economically.\(^{172}\) Moreover, however, Thalbach’s first appearance further imbues the viewer with a sense of superiority. Here, Haußmann casts Thalbach’s role as a known and, by extension, knowing adaptation film star, by having her covertly address viewers during her initial monologue, thereby aligning the viewer with her as a knowing party. Her address sets up a rare identificatory moment between her figure and the audience that supports Haußmann’s ideal viewer as “knowing.” In creating a moment between the viewers and Frau Miller, Haußmann establishes an alignment between them and the only character in Kabale und Liebe who (like the viewer) is privy to the romantic adventures of her daughter and Ferdinand.

The camerawork in this sequence also emphasizes the establishing of this connection. As the establishing sequence fades into this one, the camera zooms and tilts from a high angle, up in the rafters of the house, and spirals slowly down upon the

\(^{170}\) There are two notable exceptions, the first is Peter Sehr’s Kaspar Hauser (1993), which is based on an historical occurrence but became popularized in German literature through Jakob Wasserman’s 1908 novel.

\(^{171}\) The second exception is Thalbach’s role playing Doris in Leander Haußmann’s Sonnenallee (2003); however, this adaptation was based on a rather contemporaneous work from Thomas Brussig and not a canonical text.

\(^{172}\) Haußmann’s decision to cast Thalbach also has notable parallels to Hollywood Shakespeare film casting continuities. For example, Diane Verona plays in both Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet and Almeryda’s Hamlet. Julia Stiles plays in Gil Junger’s Ten Things I Hate about You and Tim Blake Nelson’s “O.”
mother. At this point viewers are then placed directly across from Thalbach, who advances from the background of a long shot into a medium shot, at which point she vocally breaks the fourth wall. \(^{173}\) “Shhh,” she says, “die Kinder schlafen, was sollte ich dir sagen, wo du doch alles weißt. Aber wir sind unschuldig, ich bin unschuldig” (my emphasis). Then, turning her gaze slightly, she finishes her statement and more clearly addresses her husband: “deine Tochter ist unschuldig. An allen unschuldig. . . .” That Thalbach’s eye-line matches the audience’s when she uses the second person singular pronoun visually announces the viewer, from the beginning, as someone who knows what events are transpiring.

Extradiegetically, Frau Miller’s refusal of her own and others’ guilt in this scene, paired with her belief that there is nothing left to say, is yet another way in which Haußmann plays with the figure’s embodiment by Thalbach to reinforce the privileged position of knowing viewers. Indeed, as Thalbach (playing Frau Miller) rightly questions, what else \emph{is} there to say about the events that are about to transpire on screen? The audience members themselves – to a greater or lesser extent – are likely already quite familiar with the characters, plot, and ending of Schiller’s famous work because of its canonical status and the way that it become heavily adapted on the stage and screen in postwar years. Because the film refers to this fact diegetically in a way that also seems directed to the viewers of the film extradiegetically, we can read Thalbach’s questioning

\(^{173}\) The breaking of the fourth wall that happens in this moment also has a clear precedent in Luhrmann’s film and is yet another connection this film establishes to the Shakespeare-boom genre. To recall, shortly after the film begins, TV journalists deliver Shakespeare’s prologue, which works metafilmically to contextualize the scene but also highlights the viewers’ distance from the events staged through various mediated sources, a modernized rendering of Shakespeare’s inclusion of a play-within-a-play. However, the lack of overt mediation (Thalbach speaks directly into the camera and is not framed within a television) signifies something else is going on here, which is – as I maintain above – the alignment of viewer identification, which establishes the viewer as a knowing party, not unlike the role Frau Millerin plays within the diegesis.
as a revelation of the film’s modernization strategy that highlights spectators’ position as “knowing audience members,” unlike their role in more staid, traditional film adaptations of the past (in many of which Thalbach played a key role). Her statement comments on the fact that – in a newly reorganized republic, replete with a newly aligned production and star system – the story being told is not what is of utmost importance, but rather how it is shown and becomes interpreted by contemporary viewers. She admits that the story is not and cannot be anything brand-new; she cannot provide novelty. Yet the film can, literally and metaphorically, provide new angles on the events that take place, giving audience members an opportunity to look at the old in a new and more relevant light.

As the film progresses, a number of scenes enhance viewers’ feeling of being part of a knowing audience and implicitly point to the relevance and cultural capital of critical reading and viewing skills. Slapstick gestures and comedic events, often centered around the principle of dramatic irony, affirm that the viewers already know more than the characters themselves. These moments contribute to viewers’ sense of having interpretive authority and knowledge of the work displayed, and gesture toward the overall importance of interpreting correctly. Before we look at these events individually, it must be noted that Haußmann’s practice of engaging his audience in participating in an interaction rooted on the recognition and critical reading of high cultural allusions, is itself another important intertext in the film. The practice that he transmediates here is not unlike that of tableaux vivant, a middlebrow, canon-based, visual cultural practice rooted in the time period of the source text itself, and which also makes a notable appearance in Schiller’s play, *Kabale und Liebe* (and also appears in both Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti* and Janson’s adaptation of the play).
Tableaux vivants can be understood as a practice of corporeal appropriation of art history and iconography, through which iconic images and pregnant moments live on and circulate through a permanent process of transformation. In social gatherings, particularly in the context of parlors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for example, individuals would perform together to represent a known scene from literature, art, or history in front of a greater audience. The goal was, in addition to entertainment, edification of the audience who would, it was believed, develop a greater appreciation and understanding of art.

Although some tableaux vivants certainly developed from literature, some literature also began to incorporate tableaux vivants in their plot. Such is the case with Schiller’s Kabale und Liebe. In Schiller the Dramatist: A Study of Gesture in the Plays, John Guthrie explains Schiller’s allusion to a gender-reversing pieta in the center of the text. In a telling scene in Schiller’s play, Herr Miller scoffs at the money Ferdinand offers him before sinking into Louise’s lap, silent and weeping, which constitutes a recreation of the pieta in which Mary cries into the lap of her dead son, Jesus, but here Schiller reverses the gendered roles, with the father as the weeping Mary and Louise poised as the savior, Jesus. This reversal of gender roles in the play aligned with the emphasis and responsibility placed upon the daughter in the middle-class family in the eighteenth century as the important locus of maintaining morality and standing. The transmediation in Schiller’s inverted tableaux vivant involves, in this instance as in others we will explore, an intended change to the original that audiences are expected to recognize and read critically, thereby deriving pleasure and satisfaction from their knowing. In other words, it is often in the differences (rather than in the exact similarity) that viewers are
encouraged to both recall the past context of the original, register its changed presentation, and deduce the sociohistorical contexts for the artistic allusion and alteration.

Haußmann draws upon Schiller’s use of tableaux vivant to create moments in his film that also center on the pleasure and importance of knowing, recognizing, and meaning-making out of similarities and differences, particularly on a visual level, all of which links to practices of the tableaux vivant. In the film, Haußmann’s audience watches knowingly, as characters routinely become misled. Like the tableaux, these moments work on the visual level, often through a case of mistaken identity (which recurs throughout the films explored in this genre). The effect of these scenes extends beyond comic relief; on a more serious note, however, they warn viewers of engaging in similarly uncritical reading/viewing practices of that which is, literally, in front of them (the film). As we will see in Chapter Four, the stakes of critical literacies are high in contemporary Germany and represents an educational aim that the government and private institutions go to great lengths to target. For now, however, it is key that the film posits viewers here as audience members with rational skills who likely have knowledge of a variety of versions of Schiller’s play and are therefore in a particularly privileged position to discern events and misperceptions better than the characters within the film.

Also key to our study is – if we return but briefly to our running contention that contemporary classical adaptations dismantle the bounds of high and popular culture – that the cultural capital that Haußmann’s film invites his viewers to embrace can be traced back to the source text (high culture), which itself draws from popular parlor
culture and which Haußmann then – coming full circle – repackages again for consumption by public film audiences.

Central to the tableaux vivant practices and their transmediation in Haußmann’s *Kabale und Liebe* is, however, learning to carefully interpret the visual. To cite one instance of how this becomes thematized in the adaptation, in the middle of *Kabale und Liebe*, Ferdinand – blinded by his passion for Louise – takes his seat in a church pew next to a hooded woman who he believes is his beloved. In a speech, directly lifted from Schiller’s play, he implores this woman to flee with him and give up the binds of society that prevent their love. While Ferdinand speaks, the camera zooms in to reveal that he is mistaken; unknown to him, he is propositioning an elderly woman, whose sense of confusion and wonder grows as he continues to whisper into her ear. Meanwhile, the camera zooms out to reveal to the audience that Louise, seated in a nearby pew, has been eavesdropping on the pair. She rejects Ferdinand’s offer, comically, before Ferdinand even has a chance to realize his mistake. Images, in and of themselves, the scene implies, can easily lead to false interpretation.

However, words – like images – can also deceive, as they often do in *Kabale und Liebe*. In fact, the faulty reverence of and belief in the word above the visual – indeed, one of the prejudices against which contemporary classical adaptations agitate – constitute the crux of the plot. Playing upon longstanding philophilia, Haußmann characterizes stringent belief in and love of the word as utterly comedic and misguided. Across multiple sequences, the film tracks Frau Miller’s obsession with love letters her daughter has received from her beloved Ferdinand. Within the first few minutes of the film, as soon as Louise is out of the house with Ferdinand, Frau Miller quickly dashes
into her daughter’s room to read aloud the letters Ferdinand has composed to her with great pleasure. She is so enraptured as to believe that these letters speak to Ferdinand’s unwavering love of their lowborn daughter and that his undying love will offer the family a chance to improve their social status. Words on paper beguile and woo the mother into supporting her daughter’s disregard of the social and moral norms that will prove the family’s downfall. During this scene, the camera incrementally zooms outward and upward, allowing the viewer to gain a more objective sense of the entire problematic. Beginning with a close-up of Frau Miller, the frame is continually filled with more contextual elements as the camera zooms out. The viewer witnesses not only the mother at her daughter’s desk but also various floors of the house, one upon which the father nervously paces, deeply concerned about his family’s current situation. Viewers then see the house contextualized by a shot that frames it among neighboring houses, indicating that the Millers live in a greater society by whose rules of social conduct they must abide, and which Frau Miller and her daughter are thoughtlessly flaunting. The mother’s intense and skewed relationship with and belief in the written word function ironically for knowing readers, given that the entire “cabal” referred to in the title that causes the lovers’ untimely deaths centers on a letter that Louise is forced to write Ferdinand – a letter that he understands literally, without a second thought. That this particular scene ends with Frau Miller engaging in an awkward slapping match with her husband over the letters and what they actually mean – in terms of their social status – only emphasizes the ridiculousness of blindly believing the word (figure 6).
Fig. 6: an awkward slapping match between Louise’s parents in Kabale und Liebe which viewers witness by peering through a window.

The stringent belief in the reliability of the word and in the indexicality of the image underscoring these comedic moments comment directly on the continual cultural obsession with fidelity. According to the film’s narrative, it is the belief in and obsession with the word, as unchanging and unchangeable, that lead Louise and her mother into confidently bucking social norms, much to the family’s downfall. Likewise, it is an outdated preference for the source text over adapted film, a preference for the author’s work over the filmmaker’s innovation, that results in adaptations that often do not succeed in the market, due to an inability to address contemporary norms and filmic preferences, or to imagine new endings.

The final sequences of the film underscore how this longstanding belief in fidelity – in word and in image (a direct result of uncritical reading and viewing practices) – can limit innovative and interpretative potential, but can ultimately be overcome if one engages in and embraces creativity, openness, and therefore alternate possible endings. Following Schiller’s text, Haußmann’s penultimate sequence concludes the film narrative in a manner that points to the often hermetic and repetitive nature of most adaptations, in which filmmakers are stuck in a pattern of simply visualizing an already completed and
therefore closed-off work. In this scene, Ferdinand’s father and Ferdinand’s rival, Secretary Würm, discover that Louise has died in her lover’s arms and that Ferdinand is also on the cusp of death. The filmic portrayal of this scene, in contrast to the play, returns to the initial setting of Louise’s bedroom and nearly repeats the opening sequence. Viewers, positioned alongside Secretary Würm and von Walther, are addressed by Frau Miller hushing the men and viewers once again – as in the beginning – because “die Kinder schlafen oben.” The camera follows the men up the stairs and into the bedroom, and then searches through the space, finally settling on the bed where Louise lies motionless and Ferdinand takes his last breaths. The framing of the pair perfectly matches the beginning, as if the end were never ending, the ending signifying another beginning. This parallels the fact that, as canonical works, continual retellings and adaptations are part and parcel of the genre.

Although this scene represents the conclusion of Schiller’s work (an ending which the writer himself was somewhat unsure), the film does not end here; circular closure and the promise of pure repetition is not what the film ultimately champions. Instead, before concluding, Haußmann includes a newly created sequence that expands outwards, and gestures away from an ending that delimits the story to the certain death of Louise.

David Hill, “Lenz and Schiller: All’s well that ends well,” in Schiller: National Poet – Poet of Nations: A Birmingham Symposium, ed. Nicolas Martin (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, B.V., 2006), 114. Hill notes that there were possible other endings to Kabale und Liebe. In addition, the ending and content of the play is interesting in relation to Schiller’s other works: in contrast to other Sturm und Drang plays, the location of Schiller’s drama is rather limited and is characterized by unities of time and place (the setting is in one city and the time spans two days). Schiller thereby emphasizes the lack of escape beyond the confines of social reality. Important for our discussion here is that the inclusion of an alternate ending charts a path for breaking out of the binds of Schiller – and by extension the binds of the traditional costume dramas – that are perceived as too closely sticking to and/or being judged in accordance with their presumably faithful adaptive practices. In Schiller’s play, for as much as Ferdinand wants to flee (and indeed, he is the only character to transgress the borders of all three locations of the Miller’s domestic house, Lady Milford’s abode, and the president’s palace), he ends up confined to die in the Miller’s house, indicative of a lack of escape from the system. But in Haußmann’s film, Ferdinand is finally granted his wish.
and Ferdinand. Instead, this sequence points to an uncharted possibility for the pair’s future, in which they actually flee together, as Ferdinand had once suggested. As Secretary Würm looks out of Louise’s room, past the dancing doll atop the musical box—which again begins to play “Keine Liebe, keine Kohle”–the film cuts to a nondescript grassy field, in which an unknown young boy and an unknown young girl dance to the song. The shot interchanges the youths with Ferdinand and Louise, happily dancing before running off into the sunset, hand in hand, laughing. The pair, as youthful and innocent as children, has escaped death.

Just as Haußmann’s newly added scene explodes the constraints inherent in the source text, the final scene also depicts the potential upside of the potential of canonical film innovation: an explosion of precedents that no longer function for contemporary society. If we follow Murray’s conception, cultural reasons pair together with economic desires for opening new doorways, not only for the telling of new spin-off stories, but for the selling of them as well. In signaling the chance for a different possibility, Haußmann and Naujoks opened the door for new novelizations and sequelizations of Schiller’s play, and the pair took advantage of this opportunity. After the film’s success, Haußmann and Naujoks published Die wahre Geschichte von Kabale und Liebe, an epistolary novel that imagines what would have happened if the two had indeed fled. Thus, the film itself, having worked with and made reference to other literary and filmic intertexts of the past, also gestures out to future intertexts, thereby encouraging creative possibilities that move outwards from the original source text itself into a network of new possibilities and influences.

In this version, love doesn’t fail due to intrigues or class differences, but to daily hardships of married life—Louise misses her family in her new relationship and returns to her childhood home.
Haußmann’s reworking of Schiller’s text for a large-scale market, with its reliance on grandiose opulence and clever revising of the story, accomplishes the task of transforming a traditional heritage film into a successful modernization with entertainment value. In addition, given its interpolation of word and image, and self-reflexivity on various intertexts at play, it supports an educational agenda that becomes complemented by teaching materials to be explored in the present study in Chapter Four.

For now, important to note is that Haußmann’s film set the tone for coming adaptations of German canonical works. The next four films discussed below, Goethe!, Emilia, Werther, and Penthesilea-Moabit, also draw from eighteenth-century works by writers intimately concerned with the education of society, particularly in regard to literary masterpieces. Following Haußmann’s lead, they also do so in a way that makes these works more accessible to global viewers today while playing upon the viewers’ palimpsestuous knowledge of national and transnational culture(s).

V. Shakespeare in Love and Goethe!: Education through the Symbiosis of the Literary and the Visual

Literary adaptations and history-based films, particularly those in the costume-drama genre, often suffer from the concern that, as interpretations of a work that seek to capitalize on their entertainment value, they blot out the original source text, ripping high-cultural content from its historical embeddedness and replacing it with an overriding, and as some might argue, potentially navel-gazing, concern for the present. This is generally as true for films in the Goethe-boom genre as it is for those in the Shakespeare-boom genre. Alex von Tunzelman’s review of John Madden’s Shakespeare
**in Love** in *The Guardian* breaks down the polemic quite succinctly by giving the film two separate grades: “Entertainment grade: A-. History grade: C+”; he supported this assessment by quoting the film’s screenwriter as stating, “This film is entertainment . . . which doesn’t require it to be justified in the light of historical theory.” Although Stoppard’s screenwriterly intention may well have been to produce a film for entertainment rather than educational purposes, the juxtaposition here between amusement and history, particularly in relation to questions regarding the film’s value, as explored here, produces a false benchmark of valuation from the beginning. First, is history the only or only worthwhile educational purpose of these films? What if the pedagogical value of an adaptation or history-based film were calculated differently, indicating not how well it transmits historical knowledge but rather how it showcases self-reflexivity and teaches viewers about media’s representational strategies? Or what if the entertainment and historical effectiveness of an adaptation reflected the amount of energy the film creates for a particular text, time period, or historical occasion by prompting audience engagement with the original? Like their Shakespeare-boom predecessors, *Kabale und Liebe, Goethe!, Emilia, Werther,* and *Penthesilea-Moabit* do not simply entertain or transmit historical facts. Instead, they have an agenda that is much more nuanced and complex than clear-cut categories of “entertainment” versus “history education,” even though one might argue that they do achieve both.

Several years after Haußmann’s transmediation of Schiller’s play, Philip Stölzl undertook the transposition of another key canonical German text, *Die Leiden des jungen*...

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177 Ibid.
Werthers. Building upon the cultural work initiated by Haußmann’s *Kabale und Liebe*, Stözl’s film channels a Shakespeare-boom predecessor (Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*), intermixing the genres of biopic and classical adaptation to offers viewers a rather biographical reading of Goethe’s best-known epistolary novel. The work, like Madden’s film, continues a line of argument Haußmann began in *Kabale und Liebe*. It both 1) champions popular culture as inspirational for the very creation of the original work in question, and 2) self-reflexively reveals film, as a mixed medium, to be particularly fit for the task of breaking down the myth of originality that the diegesis contradicts. However, the film notes, part of the intertextuality in which the film trades and upon which it capitalizes requires audiences to (re)read literary works and their multiple adaptations produced across a variety of platforms. Adaptations, the film claims, hold the power to prompt individuals to turn – or in some cases, return – to the text with an eye to the film, in order to question the manner in which history is created, stories are told, and attribution is granted.

Both Madden’s and Stölzl’s films commence with not-yet-successful, uninspired, stymied authors, depictions quite opposite from what one might expect for such esteemed writers. Both prized poets/poets-to-be encounter writer’s block, which throws each into depression until the sudden hope of a romantic relationship with a woman the poet meets at a formal dance sparks his inner muse. Although the desired woman returns the poet’s love with fierce passion, familial circumstances prevent her from fully pursuing the relationship and instead force her to wed a man of more noble birth. Interestingly, then, from the outset, there seem to be few cultural or historical differences between England in 1593 and Germany in 1773. Despite focusing on authors who lived hundreds of years
and miles apart, and on canonical literary works that fall into quite different genres (Shakespeare’s drama and Goethe’s epistolary novel), the storylines of *Shakespeare in Love* and *Goethe!* follow a strikingly similar trajectory: a sure indication that what is actually at the heart of these films is an exploration of the dynamic relationship between inspiration and production. Each film 1) complicates the notion of “originality” that both of these figures – in cultural memory – tend to embody, and 2) parallels the relationship the film director himself has, in certain ways, to the historical figure (and his literary work) upon which the adaptation is based.

After showing the audience unproductive poets, the similarities in the films continue: the fleeting affair in both plotlines – although nipped in the bud in both cases – has not been in vain. As a result of intense passion and painful loss, the poet produces a work that immortalizes his name for the ages, a work that, notably, only gains recognition and renown due to the former beloved’s dedication to and belief in the poet’s success. In other words, that the work develops, survives, and thrives is not a sole result of the author working alone. To recall, in *Shakespeare in Love*, Viola de Lessup – whose relationship with Shakespeare informs the content of the play – steps in at the last minute to play the part of Juliet (ironically, herself). She thus salvages the production, despite having married Lord Wessex only moments prior, and despite being forbidden from acting on a public stage. Similarly, in *Goethe!*, Charlotte Buff saves Goethe’s manuscript from possible destruction and secretly brings it to a publisher, who eagerly accepts the work and, lo and behold, cannot print it quickly enough to satisfy the public’s demand. As if

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178 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). The depiction discussed above aligns well with Bloom’s theory regarding the anxiety writers struggle with when attempting to surpass their literary predecessors, given the fact – as he argues – that all writing is an act in which prior writing becomes assimilated, adapted, misinterpreted, and manipulated.
that were not enough, it is also through these female agents that both poets finally garner the esteem of a most imposing matriarch (Queen Elizabeth) or patriarch (Goethe’s father), who help ensure future successes for both.

In both films, then, we also see a pronounced gender reversal that grants the female a traditionally masculine role as the culturally more valued individual who spurs action and prompts change. The recoding of gender here, in which the individual who is culturally more esteemed (the male poet/creator) is found to be a creation of the culturally less-esteemed (the female love interest), symbolizes the reenvisioning at work in the adaptation, which is none other than a rejection of the value assigned to the concepts of originality, individuality, and genius. As Benjamin Bennett notes in his impactful *Goethe as Woman: The Undoing of Literature*, it is indeed this use of gender difference that Goethe himself utilizes within his works – already as early as his composition of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* – as a form of resistance to the conceptualization of literature, national literature, and classical literature in his time.\(^{179}\) Here, we see it revived for the director’s similar resistance to constraints on originality.

In addition to complicating the value of the terms of originality and genius through a reorganization of gender roles (through which a hierarchy of cultural values is displayed), the films particularly single out originality for further testing. To recall, common across both films’ narratives is that the adaptation (in each, a play) makes possible in the real world things that the original (lived experience) cannot. In

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\(^{179}\) For this connection, I am indebted to Benjamin Bennett’s work *Goethe as Woman: The Undoing of Literature* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001). In his study, Bennett delineates how Goethe the writer attempted to dismantle an aesthetic conception of literature and ultimately agitated against becoming coopted by the nation as Goethe the classical German writer (which nevertheless winds up to be his cultural legacy). Part of this project, as Bennett explains, entails signaling resistance through gender reversals, particularly in his pre-1790 work. This gender reversal and resistance is, I believe, key to the contemporary classical adaptations studied here.
Shakespeare in Love, a wager is made between Queen Elizabeth and Lord Wessex, who bet on whether a play can or cannot successfully dramatize “true love.” The wager becomes rephrased in Goethe! when Charlotte Buff must answer a single question in order for the publisher to agree to accept Goethe’s manuscript. Is the story “true” or not? According to the films, in which both Shakespeare’s and Goethe’s plays are framed as adaptations from their lives, the answer is resoundingly clear: the adaptation portrays possibilities, passions, and experiences better than that from which it derives. “Es ist mehr als die Wahrheit,” Charlotte retorts, “es ist Dichtung.”

If both films show adaptation from life to literature to be the artistic practice through which “true love” can be best depicted (to recall the terms of the wager in Shakespeare in Love), one might conclude that these adaptations support literary adaptations over other media forms, given that the two works central to the films are produced for the page or the stage. Such a reading would align with W.J.T. Mitchell’s understanding of the word-image relationship as rivalrous, inseparably linked to struggles within cultural politics. The culturally created “fault-line in representation [between the two] is deeply linked with fundamental ideological divisions,” he writes, pointing out that although culture pits word and image against one another as though they were opposite, this is not the case. Such a reading would also align with Jameson’s recent theorization that one must read adaptations allegorically as the battleground in which media struggles over autonomy and superiority become staged, and in which the medium of representation is ultimately revealed as grander, more all-encompassing, and more

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180 W.J.T. Mitchell, Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 69. In Mitchell’s work Picture Theory, he questions the division between word and image, along with their valuations, and traces how the presumed differences between the two relate to institutional and cultural struggles. He relates the desire to separate the two to an “ideology, a complex of desire and fear, power and interest.”
immediate through repeated self-referentiality. Indeed, Mitchell’s and Jameson’s conceptions of media warfare help increase our awareness of the intense interplay between the various media in contemporary classical adaptations, particularly in *Shakespeare in Love* and *Goethe!*, in which multiple literary works, biographies, art works, literary quotations, and visual quotations vie for representative space within the films. However, understanding the interplay as rivalrous would reify a dichotomous hierarchy between film and literature, which I believe the films intentionally work against.

Instead, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Goethe!* seem to offer an alternative, a mode of adaptation in which no medium must ultimately usurp the other, but in which all mediums can instead work together symbiotically – pointing out to audiences, in so many words, that they should not only return to sources but also to their circulating versions, without giving one or the other a higher valuation. This also results, as we will see, as a conflation – rather than an extended bifurcation – between high and popular/folk culture in these films. Ultimately, the films capitalize on and put forth the notion that adaptation(s) and intertexts – both understood in the broadest, most pluralistic sense – are essential for the critical exploration of any singular work, theme, or history.

*Shakespeare in Love* and *Goethe!* both incorporate into their plotlines a variety of intertexts, notably from multiple cultural traditions, that the film readily announces as intertexts essential for each author’s work (works that then later serve throughout history as intertexts, themselves). To cite three quick examples: Stölzl’s film traces a somewhat

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intoxicated young Goethe enjoying a puppet production of the Faust legend one evening at a fairground; Charlotte’s own reading of *Emilia Galotti*, which she shares with Goethe, is later shown to be central to its inclusion in *Werther*; and the film intersperses numerous quotations from and allusions to works the audience readily identifies as part of the poet’s oeuvre, many of which are put into the mouths of commoners the poets meet in unexpected places. These allusions in particular belie a sense of authenticity among the audience (who might feel themselves to have an “aha” moment, along the lines of “so this is where Goethe got that famous line”) while ironically dismantling any notion of authenticity and singularity, and potentially questioning whether high culture might be, itself, derivative of lower class or popular cultures.

The films mirror the divergent cultural value given the purportedly “original” literary work (that flows from either Shakespeare’s or Goethe’s pens) and its less-often acknowledged and less distinguished “origins” through contrastive lighting, which in turn mirrors the cultural constructedness of this dichotomy. For instance, the beauty of poetry, which initially draws Viola to the stage in defiance of the law and encourages Charlotte to dismiss her duty as head of a large, motherless family for an entire day, is juxtaposed with visual elements seemingly all too mundane: the awkwardly loud shaking of the floorboards outside the bedroom in which Viola and William enjoy one another sexually; the muddy puddle through which Queen Elizabeth must walk when her men fail to clear the way, which looks similar to the muddy puddle into which Wilhelm Jerusalem mindlessly stumbles when he and Goethe are taken aback by the sight of a lovely noblewoman; the grotesque sickness that nearly consumes Charlotte after she makes love in the rain. These images are not only dreary in and of themselves but are often shot
through a bluish filter lens that signals the lackluster mediocrity society assigns them and stand in direct contrast to a visually brighter palette, chosen when poetry is directly recited from the/a source literary text. When Goethe creates “Wilkomomen und Abscheid,” for example, the film portrays him strolling with Charlotte in a sunny and grassy open field, rendering the writer’s poetry in a technicolor.

This divergence in the films’ color palettes depending on cultural recognition of the moment portrayed contributes to the films’ greater question of how and/or whether “truth” can be represented and in what mode (written or visual, poetry or life), as both the written and visual mediums present themselves to be constructed, if not misleading.

In *Shakespeare in Love* and *Goethe!*, the visual and literary coalesce to represent an indiscernible intermingling of fact and fiction, of poetry and truth. They question themselves, ultimately signaling that meaning-making must come from somewhere else beyond artistic representation: namely, in the work’s interpretation, created through the critical viewing and reading practices of the viewer (a never-ending process, as they are practices embedded within culture). In short, the intense intertwining of fact and fiction, word and image, is precisely the main point and constitutes a greater truth that both films explore for educative purposes. Because these films offer no simple solutions and certainly conflate life with literature and high culture with other cultural traditions, as well as reverse gendered norms, the films serve as a springboard urging individuals to look and read further; viewers should question for themselves what is real and false in the gap between the stories, and to what extent such a simplistic divide even matters. In these films, then, adaptation does not signify a struggle of forms but a method in which film and literature can inform one another while also prompting audiences to engage further
with both media in making their own meaning and interpretation of multiple texts. Indeed, the continuation of canonical literature in a transnational era, and its appropriation in future decades, is in part one of the main pedagogical impetuses that drives the creation and consumption of these films in Germany and abroad. The question posed to Charlotte at the end of the film, “Ist dies . . . hat das sich tatsächlich so zugetan? Ist das alles die Wahrheit?,” is thus turned back upon the viewers: is what one saw and heard truth? Or is the whole thing just art? How and where can one delineate their fault lines? And for what purposes should the boundaries between “Wahrheit” and “Dichtung,” much like the boundaries delineating “word” from “image,” even be drawn in the first place?

VI. Finding Personal Relevance: Modernizing the Canon in *Emilia, Werther,* and *Penthesilea-Moabit*

Both *Kabale und Liebe* and *Goethe!* muddle distinctions and valuations between word and image, high and low culture, and source text and adapted work, ultimately pointing to the constructedness and sociohistorical embeddedness of these notions. However, if one only considers these two examples from the Goethe-boom genre as representative of the whole, questions of chronology – namely, the relationship between the past and present (a relationship that is often thought of on a scale of valuation) – persist. *Kabale und Liebe* as well as *Goethe!* adhere to costume-drama conventions. In both films, the characters are fixed in the context of eighteenth-century German towns and cannot break away from the contention that this historical context (however imagined or fictionally displayed from our contemporary viewpoint) receives heightened
representational value simply by being the sole time period explored in the film. But is this reification of the past true of many other films in this genre? If not, how do other contemporary classical canonical films deal with chronology and relationships between eras? Finally, if they address other time periods than the point of origin of the literary works transmediated, what foothold and relevance do they show canonical works, and their continued circulation in popular culture, to have for contemporary times?

Emerging between Haßmann’s *Kabale und Liebe* in 2005 and Stölzl’s *Goethe!* in 2010 are three additional works part and parcel of the Goethe-boom film genre that directly address this question: Henrik Pfeifer’s *Emilia* (2005), Uwe Janson’s *Werther* (2008), and Rolf Teigler’s *Penthesilea-Moabit* (2008). Taking a different approach than *Kabale und Liebe* and *Goethe!*, the visual and literary collide in these adaptations across disparate periods of history, demonstrating how one might participate in the modern world by refashioning plotlines from centuries-old canonical works. To achieve this aim, these films develop away from the heritage/costume drama of *Kabale und Liebe* and *Goethe!*, instead visually modernizing the setting of their source texts while nevertheless largely retaining the storyline and language from their eighteenth-century predecessors.

The films outlined here similarly delineate that the interpretation of events through literary precedents can be used to one’s personal enhancement or personal detriment. But in the process of appropriation and internalization, as we will see, images (and others’ critical or uncritical readings of them) take on increasing importance in terms of whether the main characters’ internalization of past examples proves helpful to navigating the present or destructive. For our purposes here, we will look more closely at Janson’s *Werther* and Pfeifer’s *Emilia Galotti*. 
Let us recall the source texts of these two films momentarily, as this will prove fruitful in our understanding of the transmediation and recontextualization that both projects achieve. In Goethe’s epistolary novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, Werther can only apprehend the world and his experiences through the lens of literature. Depending on his mood and circumstances, Werther finds himself either relying upon Homer’s steady prose or on Klopstock’s and Ossian’s more passionate verses in order to articulate his internal experiences to himself and others. As such, Werther lives his life largely through quotation, citation, and emulation of literary works – often unsuccessfully. Sadly, his penchant toward literary imitation ultimately leads to his gruesome demise. In response to his unrequited desire for the married Charlotte, Werther shoots himself after reading the final, tragic scene in Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti*, thereby taking upon himself a feminized role despite the fact that he is a male agent. This final act renders Werther a most pitiful character, as he botches the attempt and it takes him hours to bleed out. His suicide is often understood as an escape from a society within which he refuses to or cannot function.

In Lessing’s *Emilia*, in which the main character’s suicide is considered virtuous (in contrast to Werther, whose suicide she inspired), Emilia is kidnapped early on in the play and held captive by a narcissistic and rather ruthless prince who desires her to be his. In order to protect her virtue in light of her own sensuality and desires vis-à-vis the price, she convinces her father to kill her so that she may retain her virtue. The ending scene of Lessing’s famous play – which will become important for our reading below – is itself a modernization of the Roman myth of Virginia; thus, Emilia’s tragic ending can already be read as *her own* internalization of a tragic literary precedent popularized through the
practice of tableaux vivants in the bourgeois culture of eighteenth-century Germany in which the play is set. The visual citationality at the crux of this text, as opposed to the verbal citationality in *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, has particular ramifications in Pfeifer’s adaptation, where much of the film centers on visual citation.

The connection to be drawn between Emilia’s and Werther’s experiences of unruly desires is rather clear; it is something both characters struggle with and, in light of a sensuousness that stands in opposition to bourgeois norms, both Emilia and Werther resort to death as an answer. However, whereas Emilia’s death in the play is graceful and shows her as an ideal representative of middle-class values, Werther’s situation is, ironically given his gender, unimpressive and unnecessary, a result of how he has taken his feelings to the extreme by excessively internalizing literary models into his own life. The crux of the matter that both source texts, and as we will see in the modernized adaptations, explore is (in)appropriate models of appropriation.

The contemporization on display in *Emilia, Werther, and Penthesilea-Moabit* itself relates back to a particular trend within the Shakespeare-boom film genre. The practice of modernizing plots visually while retaining a verbal track replete with original quotations, as I will particularly outline in Janson’s *Werther* and Pfeifer’s *Emilia*, became popular in Germany in the wake of Almereyda’s *Hamlet*. Critics agree that Almereyda’s *Hamlet* set a new precedent for Shakespeare-boom film adaptations, as it successfully combined multiple film genres – romance, action, and drama – while retaining the outdated language of the transposed text, thereby also intertwining aspects of the familiar

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costume-drama trend. This resulted in two distinct changes from previous films in the genre of contemporary classical adaptations of Shakespeare. First, diverging from Luhrmann’s modernized *Romeo + Juliet*, Almereyda’s film specifically engaged with its setting in New York City in the 1990s in a way that directly linked Hamlet to a particular time and place in the modern world. As a reviewer in *The New York Times* explains, Almereyda’s emphasis on the film’s setting heralded a new approach to adaptations of the work that refrained from explicitly foregrounding local specificity:

“It is curious; one never thinks of attaching ‘Hamlet’ to any special locale,” the critic Kenneth Tynan once wrote of Shakespeare’s tragedy, and the director Michael Almereyda has brilliantly seized upon that by rooting his voluptuous and rewarding new adaptation of the play in today’s Manhattan. The city’s contradictions of beauty and squalor give the movie a sense of place – it makes the best use of the Guggenheim Museum you’ll ever see in a film – and New York becomes a complex character in this vital and sharply intelligent film.\(^ {183}\)

Second, within this film’s specified time period and setting, Almereyda’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s text sheds light on the way that “accurate retrieval of the matter of the past is less important than its effective use.”\(^ {184}\) Key to Almereyda’s film is the way in which Shakespeare’s storyline and characters are molded to criticize and comment upon the visual challenges inherent to modernity. For instance, the viewer’s access to Hamlet’s interiority occurs almost solely through the viewing of personal video clips that he, Hamlet, has created. The media allegory evoked here highlights the notion that interpretations based upon visuals – whether of video footage Hamlet has created or Almereyda’s adaptation of the Shakespearean text – are highly subjective and easily

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manipulated. In the Almereyda-inspired German films in particular, as we will see, the visual representation of reality, transmitted through film and photographs, is shown as capable of endowing words and canonical scripts with vastly alternative meanings.

As the production of films in Germany modeled upon Shakespeare-boom adaptations increases, these films—following Almereyda’s example—become more locally and chronologically specified given their visualization and related examination of society. Modern life in Germany becomes underscored in each film as the locale of Berlin plays a main character in all three works, representing life in Germany’s modern metropolitan culture that, like New York City, at times proves dizzyingly commodified, impersonal, and complex. In Werther, the main character burns down a billboard in the very consumerist area of Potsdamer Platz, symbolizing his rejection of contemporary and acceptable forms of social engagement at the outset of the film. In Emilia, the underground routes of the Berlin subway system via which the main character flees at the conclusion of the film indicate a type of (sexual) mobility and freedom the modern Emilia secures in contemporary Berlin that her eighteenth-century predecessor never could have enjoyed. By playing up the metropolis as symbolic of the contemporary moment, both works signal their cultural work as an exploration of whether or not canonical literary works from the past can function as appropriate models for exploring current experiences in contemporary Germany’s capital, and if so, to what extent and how.

To recall, for Goethe’s Werther, adhering to previous models of literary self-expression only contributes to further loosening his grip on his present reality. In Goethe’s text, Werther’s indiscriminate application of literary predecessors and models to
understand his own life is discernible through internal monologues that are based upon an odd mix of quotations from dissimilar authors: namely, Homer and Ossian. Whereas Goethe’s tale thereby charts an individual who does not fit into society and only comprehends his surroundings through a mix of literary allusions that make no cohesive – and thereby socially acceptable – sense, Janson’s Werther translates this story to fit postmodern culture as increasingly centered on and represented by mixed-media forms. His film tells of a disillusioned wannabe photographer living on the outskirts of Berlin whose language usage and visual perspective prove increasingly disjointed and jumbled, resulting in a lack of self-control and suicide, the same fate suffered by Goethe’s main character. Ultimately, as we will see, Werther’s inability to bring images into focus – which we might note as a failure to ascertain correctly and control his way of engaging with images – causes his downfall.

Like Goethe’s Werther, who at the outset cites passionate verses of Ossian and, later, shifts to quote the staid writings of Homer, in Janson’s Werther, Werther’s ways of speaking, as well as seeing, prove similarly indiscriminate and shift from one pole to another. In terms of language, whereas Goethe’s Werther effused a mixture of high literary allusions, Janson’s film marks Werther’s language with linguistic hybridity. Here, however, the mixture spans quotations from eighteenth-century high-cultural works with contemporary colloquialism from popular youth culture. The allusions separate along the fault lines of interior monologue and interpersonal dialogue, which the film differentiates through formal elements that represent these registers of high and popular differently. During most scenes of interaction between various characters, objective camera angles place the viewer at eye-level height with the characters and thereby position the viewer as
a third party to unfolding events. It is here that viewers note a large influx of colloquial *Gassensprache*, such as “Scheiß uff die Liebe” or “Scheiß uff Berlin.” In essence, the film shows Werther’s use of contemporary language as a tool that sutures Werther into society, into relation with his peers, and into the culture of the target film audience.

However, these eye-level, saturated shots of action marked by contemporary slang starkly contrast with pronounced moments of first-person reflective musings with allusions to high culture, something in which Janson’s Werther – like his predecessor – also heavily indulges. In these meditative and slow-moving scenes, Werther’s internal dialogue is represented to the audience in a voice-over. His lengthy monologues reveal themselves to knowing viewers as direct quotations from Goethe’s original. Here, repeated point-of-view shots taken while Werther muses and looks at the world around him show the viewer his distinguished lack of correct perception. In these moments, the film changes texture: grainy film stock dominates and the images the viewer sees (as Werther) all lack focus; many objects even blur into one another. The film signals in these scenes Werther’s internal state of (mis)perception of the world. That he stringently adheres to the eighteenth-century text (reciting word for word in these otherwise modernized scenes) contributes to the viewer’s understanding of his inability to divorce himself from his own disturbed mental states or even past historical contexts to grasp reality and participate within contemporary society.

The director links Werther’s inability to focus to a problem, ultimately, of control and self-control vis-a-vis the external and internal world. Throughout, Janson’s main character attempts to participate in the creation and destruction of images, with the aim of showing himself in control over his surroundings. Within the first several sequences,
Werther tries to exert control over the image by setting a billboard with his girlfriend’s visage on fire after finding her making out with a more refined gentleman, and capturing Lotte in the lens of his camera at a gas station and trying to make her stand still so he can photograph her endlessly. His lack of control in this scene is emphasized not only by Lotte’s escape from his frame, but by the fact that he is—during his photographing attempt—hit by an oncoming car that he fails to see.

Despite being an amateur photographer, Werther cannot bring his view, and therefore his experiences, into correct focus, and as the film progresses, this is something he increasingly fails to do. Eventually, Werther’s internal state and private recitation of Goethe’s Werther begins to infiltrate his public life and interpersonal activities, which Janson reveals through Werther’s increasingly fuzzy visual perception whether alone or with others. Shot from Werther’s point of view, even his social encounters now become blurred. To trace the increase in Werther’s (mis)perception, a few moments stand out. Early in the film, his view of a soldier on the street proves blurry. Then, shortly after he destroys a billboard with a clear portrayal of his ex-girlfriend’s face, he blurs landscapes and storefronts as he rides by. Soon, the blurry point-of-view shots usually reserved for Werther’s perception of nature or objects around him (while he quotes Goethe in his interior monologue) increasingly penetrate his interpersonal interactions, namely with his love interest, Lotte. Eventually, private musings and his lack of focus on reality result in Werther’s inability even to see Lotte, his desired object, as an individual. Like the world around him—such as trees, sunshine, and roads—she too becomes little more than a blurred image he tries in vain to capture and possess her (figure 7).
In short, the film charts Werther’s increasing immersion in a narcissistic, out-of-touch, self-created world and his distanciation from a more objective reality.

Eventually, unable to control his perception of events, individuals, and relationship dynamics, he spirals out of control and kills himself, believing that his life cannot get any better and that it is best if he departs. Werther’s death, per the film, is ultimately a result of being unable to make sense of what he sees in a way that fits into society; unable, in a way, to bring together various registers, various viewpoints, into a cohesive and sustainable whole. In short, Werther suffers from a severe problem of (mis)interpretation – of the world, and of himself in it.  

Whereas Werther explores what can result from a lack of control over images and misperception, Pfeifer’s Emilia details how an individual might gain control over one’s life through images, namely through control over its interpretation, allowing one to escape unsatisfying cultural constraints and to experience personal liberation. For Emilia,

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185 That the film charts Werther’s downfall geographically from the heart of Berlin to a remote outskirt where he eventually dies is itself symbolic: as we will see in a more pronounced form in Schipper’s Mitte Ende August (discussed at length in Chapter Three), this path is indeed one that moves away from normative, commercialized images of German life to unmarked spaces that film culture in contemporary Germany has, in the last decade, come to associate with more experimental forms and new, non-commercialized, less regulated images, thanks to the proliferation of films of the Berlin School.
the constraint is betrothal to a man she does not desire. Her liberation from this constraint allows her engage in a more sexually free lifestyle in Berlin. Although Emilia’s situation in the modern metropolis looks quite different from Emilia Galotti’s experience in eighteenth-century Germany, the two works and time periods are sharply connected. Both Lessing’s and Janson’s works play upon an iconic image, whose staging is the way through which the heroine determines her own fate. Lessing’s Emilia, as critics have noted, not only refashions Livy’s Virginia from his *History of Rome, Emilia Galotti* ends upon a visual citation of Virginia’s death via a tableaux vivant that in turn frames Emilia’s death as a sacrifice.186 Pfeifer’s *Emilia*, as we explore here, ends upon the same tableaux vivant put into motion by Emilia herself, but in a way that opens up possibilities for her future as a female rather than cutting it short. The film reconfigures the play in a way that redirects Lessing’s layered thematization of national identity, class, and morality to instead explore female desire’s triumph (albeit achieved through manipulative ways) in contrast to contemporary social restraints on the expression of female desire.

Janson’s film tells of a modern, middle-class woman living in metropolitan Berlin, who – after seeing a moving stage performance of Lessing’s text – falls in deep infatuation with the famous main actor, Hettore (played by the German actor Felix Lampe and, notably, not identifiably a foreign figure in the context of the film), who plays the part of the prince in the drama. After Emilia and Hettore meet directly after the play and find themselves attracted to one another, Emilia begins to adapt the play she has seen to her situation in order to free herself from her own impending wedding. Whereas

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186 Flax, 39–55. Here, Flax explains that iconography representative of the Virginia myth was popular at the time of Lessing’s writing through embossed coins, painting, and tableaux vivant culture. Thus, readers and viewers of the play would quickly understand the ending scene as a visual citation. That Virginia alludes to the legend via the rose and is stabbed by her father turns the scene into a tableau vivant, a recreation by living actors of a familiar visual motif.
the film opens upon Emilia viewing the stage play with great emotion, once the curtains fall, Emilia begins to stylize herself as Lessing’s Emilia. It would seem, at first glance, that Emilia – after the staged play ends – returns to her quotidian life: she goes out dancing with friends, visits her father’s restaurant, meets up with her mother, and discusses wedding plans with her fiancé. However, across all of these interactions with family, friends, and her fiancé, Emilia’s motivations, decisions, and speech acts begin to mirror those the film’s audience saw her witness onstage during her viewing of the production of Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti*. Soon, the adaptation Emilia experienced in the confines of the theater expands out, via her conscious decisions, to reverberate in all areas of her life. Eventually her full identification with the main character distinctly shapes what and how she speaks; the types of situations she puts herself in; how she experiences these situations and her role within them; and the choices she makes that determine her fate.

Whereas Lessing’s play identifies Emilia’s kidnapper as an aristocratic Italian and who wishes to possess Emilia sexually (all traits that serve as a foil to Emilia’s laudable characteristics as bourgeois, German, and morally upstanding), Pfeifer’s film nearly reverses the ideological core of Lessing’s text. Rather than celebrating and promoting bourgeois morality (namely, of the daughter), Pfeifer’s film champions sexuality, desire, and female choice in a society that, generally, still delimits female sexual expression in certain ways despite great advances since the eighteenth century. That Hettore is an actor with throngs of female fans, a collector of rather explicit boudoir photography, and a fan of sex toys alters the cultural divide between him and Emilia from differences in class to differences in sexual experiences: no longer divided in their social roles as aristocrat and
bourgeoise, Hettore and Emilia are divided by their statuses as sexually experienced and sexually naïve.

Unsatisfied with the fiancé her parents are strongly pushing her to marry, and infatuated with another man, Emilia appears more than discontented on the ride to her own wedding. With her mother and fiancé seated in the limousine next to her, Emilia – dressed raunchily in a short, tight dress and thigh-high velvet boots – slouches against the window as if to pull herself as far away from the two as possible. For over a minute, a static camera records her utter emotional withdrawal from the proceedings as she stares out the window and at times even sings to herself. Suddenly, the journey comes to a halt when a brigade of gunned motorists surrounds the car and fires multiple rounds of shots at the vehicle. While her fiancé retaliates, Emilia jumps out of the limousine, runs toward one of the gunmen, and leaps onto the back of his motorcycle without question or qualm (figure 8), throwing her bouquet to the ground.

![Fig. 8: The abduction scene in Pfeifer’s Emilia shows the main character eagerly running towards her capturer and jumping onto his motorcycle without qualm.](image)

Despite images that belie abduction, Emilia recounts this event in the exact same terms Lessing uses to detail his main character’s kidnapping.
After fleeing from her own wedding to join her love interest Hettore, Emilia further stylizes her life as Lessing’s Emilia to rid herself fully of familial expectations and obligations. Here manipulation through a striking lack of images proves key. In Lessing’s *Emilia*, Emilia dies rather than relinquish her innocence, claiming she would rather perish than be like “eine Rose, bevor den Wind sie entblättert hat.” In Pfeifer’s *Emilia*, Emilia reenacts this famous end scene across a cell phone call with her father, in which his only access point into actual events is through the very phrases that Emilia borrows from Lessing, devoid of accompanying visuals. Her father only hears Emilia perform the speech (figure 9) and hears a gun being cocked before the line ends. His emotional reaction indicates he believes his daughter has killed herself as he slowly hangs up the phone (figure 10).

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187 That Emilia’s family has a rather rigid view of females – and female sexuality – is thematized within the film through photography. The parents house is covered in portraits and headshots of well-known female figureheads, all of which are framed and hanging on the wall. This strongly juxtaposes with Hettore’s collection of female nudes shot in boudoir style, many of which – to make the contrast even more apparent – do not include the female’s face but instead focus on her body. All of these photographs, whether those of Emilia’s parents or her lover, together stand in contrast to Emilia’s ultimate decision to choose her own way of self-presentation to her father, which strikingly lacks any image.
Although neither the father nor the viewer has heard a shot, nor seen Emilia die, the assumption follows the logical conclusion of the play’s narrative.

However, to underscore the problem of taking Emilia’s words at face value (without a corresponding visual), the final scene charts Emilia and Hettore surprisingly running through the Berlin subway system. They emerge joyfully from the exit into the sunset, as birds flock overheard. Emilia has staged her death, like the death that was staged before her on the first night she met Hettore. Having thus unshackled herself from prior expectations and constraints, she is now free to make new choices, to stylize herself differently than either her family has expected or as Lessing’s original play has intended. For the character of Emilia in Pfeifer’s *Emilia*, then, viewing an adaptation of Lessing’s
bourgeois tragedy results not only in her internalization of the play but in its recontextualized application to her own life in a way that allows her to define and embrace her sexuality. Through the appropriation of the content and themes of Lessing’s text, the work becomes an intertextual currency of exchange in Emilia’s quotidian life.

Despite the fact that Janson’s and Pfeifer’s films address rather different contexts and concerns than their sources, one can still consider the two contemporary classical adaptations as extensions of Goethe’s and Lessing’s own attempts to make older works and precedents relevant for their contemporary society. Indeed, that literary models, as demonstrated in the works by Goethe and Lessing in the eighteenth century, can largely frame our present existence is a concern that Pfeifer and Janson extend into contemporary times through their creative adaptations. Through the films’ modernization of the storylines and their explicit emphasis on the main characters’ internalization of canonical works, both *Emilia* and *Werther* allegorically stand as a testament to the power cultural classical narratives have over how one constructs, engages with, interprets, and negotiates one’s existence. This is not surprising, given the fact that both works can be considered didactic to begin with. As a bürgerliches Trauerspiel, *Emilia Galotti* was a didactic genre to begin with, and some scholars have understood Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* as a model of negative didacticism against *Lesesucht*.

Building upon these texts, both films present literary citation as a complex and heavily symbolic process of meaning-making that relies upon an individual’s ability to recall, (in)appropriately apply, and adapt a fictional work from the past in the present. The tight connections between the past and the present not only underscore the manner in

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which these stories particularly target German-based audiences, but also reaffirms that the cultural work these films set out to do involves a reimagining of these works in a reunited Germany, as all of the actions, decisions, and lifestyles of the main characters are influenced by or determined through their relationship to modern life in or on the outskirts of the German capital city. In short, these adaptations reflexively instruct viewers how and how not to adapt to life in twenty-first-century Berlin through adherence and reliance upon cultural precedents. For better or worse, past stories remain in circulation in modern times in a way that notably contributes to the fashioning of the present. That both films forego any inclusion of last names or additional identifying information in the titles that refer to the main characters here is noteworthy. Through this decision, both Pfeifer’s and Janson’s films frame their protagonists as anonymous prototypes of contemporary figures living in a metropolitan world. They succeed or fail based depending on whether they can read critically and apply information to their own context well. The relationship between the educative aesthetic displayed in Werther and Emilia with media literacy education in contemporary Germany school systems (which informs many other contemporary classical adaptations), as explored in Chapter Four, points to the real-world stakes of critical reading and viewing that are only but imagined in contemporary classical adaptation films.

VII. The German Canon and “Kein Ende”

To return to the greater genre of Goethe-boom films here, let me once again state my argument: limiting the scope of Shakespeare film research to cinematic works that represent only this one author’s literary works (or star this one author within the film
itself, such as in *Shakespeare in Love*) is nothing more than an enduring consequence of
esteming fidelity to the text and to the “original author” as the greatest benchmark in
measuring the value of a film adaptation. If one understands the concept of “Shakespeare
films” in the strictest terms (also labeled the “Shakespeare on Screen Canon” by scholars
Cartmell and Whelehan), then Germany – as I have shown here – does not engage in
Shakespeare film adaptation at large, per se. And in fact, for a country that loudly claims
Shakespeare as their own, Germany’s contemporary film culture – particularly when
placed side by side with British and Hollywood cinema – pales considerably. However,
what I hope to have shown is that Shakespeare adaptations, or any other single author’s
adapted works, for that matter, should not be constrained to scholarship on the rather one-
way transmediation of that writer’s works to the screen, but should also entail the
appropriation of plotlines, aesthetic representations, artistic decisions, and
modernizations as constituting a genre that arises around a writer and broadens out to
include other writers’ works. In other words, what should also be of interest to those
working at the intersection of Shakespeare, adaptation, and canon studies is the way his
works are represented in film today, and how these aesthetic practices reverberate in the
successful creation of other cinematic transformations of literary works across the world.

Key to changing the scope of transmutation and influence in adaptation studies
entails a distinctive lessening of the scholarly emphasis on writer and filmmaker in favor
of closer attention to the influence of content. This is a paradigm that has yet to take hold
in film studies, but that I hope to have championed here. Indeed, in his 2003 article, now
over a decade old, “Which Shakespeare to Love: Film, Fidelity, and Performance of
Literature,” Timothy Corrigan hinted that the contemporary filmmaker could and would
take on more importance in the adaptation industry than the literary genius himself. He further suggested that our postmodern age would, by necessity, require a sort of death of the original author in favor of the ascendance of new perspectives, signaling the filmmaker as key to this changed perspective. He writes,

*canonical writers and works have come to represent an illusory and fossilized sense of individuality that can and should be dismantled, while the popular describes a wider social and usually political circulation of a work and author in a way that dissipates their traditional authority. . . . [In place of the genius of the author,] the vision, style, and signature of the filmmaker as auteur supplants the missing literary author as a controlling and defining agency.*

In Germany, it is clear, Shakespeare the author is dead. He is not a market asset in and of himself, but rather stands as metaphor and blueprint for inspiring creativity and producing fresh readings of one’s own literary canon. But today, more attention must be paid to the creation and transmutation of content as it flows across nations and films, regardless of a particular creator. As I mentioned, Shakespeare’s story, as it is formulated in *Shakespeare in Love*, entails overcoming a “block” in one’s own production of cultural advancement and goods by achieving newfound literary success. It is precisely the block in canonical literature interpretations and adaptations in post-unification Germany that the Shakespeare boom in Hollywood helped the German film industry overcome, giving them a readymade blueprint, if you will, for remastering their canon for a transnational marketplace. However, this work – if the films explored here are any indication – is not necessarily always undertaken by those looking to make an “original” mark on film culture, even if the films themselves offer quite original interpretations. Perhaps it is our own culture’s insistence on defining “original” in inflexible ways that is the problem. Indeed, what is originality anyway? The classical contemporary adaptations explored

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here themselves were based a previous model of Shakespeare emulation, as Shakespeare’s works – often read in translation – helped give birth to early modern German literature in the first place. As Goethe prognosticated *in nuce* in the essay “Shakespear und kein Ende,” Shakespeare will always stimulate the soul. According to the popular cultural products explored here, he still does – we just have to be open to looking for that influence, namely in cultural products that point to the same remixing and appropriation still going on today. As demonstrated in the dynamic processes of adaptation outlined here, in addition to “Shakespeare und kein Ende,” one also wants to loudly pronounce, “Goethe und kein Ende,” “Schiller und kein Ende,” and so forth.

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192 For this allusion, I am indebted to Wolfgang Mieder, “Geben Sie Zitatenfreiheit!”: *Friedrich Schillers gestutzte Worte in Literatur, Medien und Karikaturen* (Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2009), 11. Mieder entitles his introductory section “Schiller Zitate und kein Ende.”
CHAPTER 3

National Interventions in Contemporary Classical Adaptations

I. Looking Beyond Shakespeare and Hollywood

Are aspects of cultural heritage compromised when one adapts classical German literary works through Hollywood models? Are there negative consequences that result from continually producing Shakespeare-inspired works in contemporary Germany? Sebastian Schipper’s *Mitte Ende August* (2005), freely based on Goethe’s *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), would seem to suggest that there are. In the middle of this film, the main character’s father gestures toward at least one negative ramification. Via a lengthy monologue, this figure speaks highly critically of the disservice that clinging to literary tales does to society. According to him, an overvaluation and overly dogmatic belief in finding “the one” – a theme he sees particularly foregrounded in Shakespearean works that glorify love – leaves many individuals stuck, unhappy, and ultimately disillusioned. In the context of the film’s aesthetics and themes, his commentary frames this continued cultural dissemination of Shakespearean notions on love as an anachronism that results in widespread misunderstandings about the vicissitudes of contemporary adulthood.

The critique of Shakespeare in Schipper’s film draws upon a scene from Goethe’s text. In the source text, it is the cynical baron who speaks disparagingly of how comedies consistently end with happy marriages and never engage with the realities of marital life – a critique that Schipper’s film maintains. Based on this evaluation, the baron in Goethe’s *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* suggests society replace the concept of “until death do us part” with a marriage contract that dissolves at the end of a seven-year term. As
part of his modernization, however, Schipper changes characteristics of the critic who delivers the criticism and the valence of his message. The tone is thus altered from cynical to realistic, which thereby changes the proposed solutions from bizarre to reasonable.

In Schipper’s film, Hanna’s (Charlotte’s) father, although jaded, functions as the only figure throughout the film who speaks openly of marital strife, something that the main figures – suffering from discord or recent divorce themselves – refuse to discuss. In his commentary, the father not only unveils the main figures’ problem (their avoidance of discussing marital discord head-on), but he also addresses one of its main sources. He traces their approach of silence back to society’s promotion of the concept of finding “the one.” The resulting lack of discourse around such commonplace problems in contemporary society, as he sees it, stems from an adherence to Shakespeare and Shakespeare-based adaptations in contemporary times, which continue to promote illusions of dramatic, everlasting love with one person only. In one of the film’s sole climactic scenes, the father sits at the head of the table and talks nearly directly to the camera. This arrangement positions the viewer at the dinner table as a recipient of his experience-based knowledge. He exclaims:

Diese ganze Romantik, bis der Tod euch scheidet, ist doch ein einzigar schieß und allein dem Terror aus Romanen und Filmen zu verdanken. . . Romeo und Julia, meine Leute, das größte Liebespaar aller Zeiten? Diese Teenager sollen unser aller Vorbild sein? Wie, unser Idole, denen alle erwachsenen Menschen der westlichen Welt nacheifern? Wenn es um die wichtigste…wenn es um die wichtigste Entscheidung in unserem Leben geht. You gotta be kidding. Scheiße, Scheiße, Scheiße! Wer so einen Quark redet, dem kann man nur empfehlen so schnell wie möglich von seinem Hochhaus zu springen. Da kommen sie dann ihren Idolen nach. ¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Sebastian Schipper, Mitte Ende August, 2005.
As the father understands, it is due to *Romeo and Juliet* – and its numerous adaptations over the years – that humankind has idealized love as an ecstatically sublime experience, forgetting that Romeo and Juliet never faced the more mundane aspects of long-term married life. Within the diegesis of the film, the father’s outright critique over dinner validates his new relationship, as he just so happens to be long divorced from the main character’s mother and has brought his new Russian girlfriend to dinner. Symbolically, however, his criticism also supports the film’s aesthetic and narrative mission: by charting the slow summer days of a married couple on the outskirts of Berlin in a counter-aesthetic style, *Mitte Ende August* approaches the genre of contemporary classical adaptations in a manner that starkly contrasts with Hollywood Shakespeare films. The father’s critique of Shakespeare can be read as a distinct commentary against the excessive uptick in Shakespeare and Shakespearean German film adaptations, which were in heavy circulation at the time of this work’s production.

As explored here, Schipper’s film deserves attention for his process of transmediating national literary heritage in a way that allows the film to explore Germany’s present. In direct contrast to the films in Chapter Two that more or less directly channel Shakespeare and appropriate Hollywood aesthetics, Schipper’s film shows that American-made popular blockbusters need not serve as the sole model for reviving literary adaptations. Rather, as this film and other contemporary classical adaptations portray, German adaptations may also employ traditionally German film genres and styles. Such films can rise above the often maligned corpus of contemporary literary adaptations by showcasing Germany’s national literary heritage, which shines

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on its own, as well as national cinematic modes that can help Germany to engage in “self-confident” filmmaking in transnational times, whether popular or not.

In this chapter, I argue that a distinct subset of contemporary classical adaptations becomes mediated through historically national German cinema styles as part of a backlash against the predominance of Hollywood blockbuster adaptation aesthetics. I provide two case studies to elucidate how historically national German film aesthetics, as represented in the Bergfilme of the 1920s, the Heimatfilme of the 1950s, the New German Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, and the Berlin School of the 2000s, have contributed to a refashioning of the aesthetics and aims of twenty-first-century German canon films. The films for these case studies – Sebastian Schipper’s Mitte Ende August (2005), based on Goethe’s Die Wahlverwandtschaften, and Joseph Vilsmaier’s Bergkristall (2004), adapted from Adalbert Stifter’s eponymous novella from 1853 – re-indigenize these German literary classics through past popular cinema forms for the contemporary screen. By doing so they create adaptations for a transnational market that refrains from resorting to Shakespeare, or Hollywood-style Shakespeare adaptations, as necessary intertexts. The stakes of this approach are interestingly ambivalent. On the one hand, the use of more national forms enables viewers to become familiar with aspects of national literary and cinema history concurrently. On the other, however, the filmic codes – and the way that these codes have been understood by general viewers over the years – add a layer of

influence to the adaptation process that can highly influence the way in which adaptors transmediate their source texts.

Espousing film modes traditionally understood as “German” for their adaptations allows Schipper and Vilsmaier to transmediate aesthetic programs of nineteenth-century texts without filtering them through a filmic code from abroad. Nevertheless, the filmic codes the directors choose still have real consequences for the stories’ portrayal. As explored in the previous chapter, Shakespearean German films generally adapt eighteenth-century works, which were themselves heavily modeled upon Anglophone texts; therefore, these works’ adaptation through the lens of a more global Shakespearean Hollywood film aesthetic may be seen as a cinematic hat tip to these works’ Anglophone origins. In contrast, the films explored in this chapter are based on literary works produced in the nineteenth century, a period largely marked by an inward turn that closely parallels the inward-looking cinematic styles chosen for these works’ modernization. For Vilsmaier, this results in a recirculation of popular, if uncritical, readings of Stifter in a way that dovetails with popular understandings of the Bergfilm and Heimatfilm genres. For Schipper, this allows for an exploration of new images in present-day Germany, which have become difficult to envision given a recycling of media portrayals that intentionally exclude numerous experiences, spaces, and peoples.

First, let’s consider the source texts of Schipper’s and Vilsmaier’s adaptations in concert for a moment, as it is in large part the source texts’ own aesthetic programs that lead both directors to mediate these texts through different, and arguably more national, film models. The source text for Mitte Ende August, Goethe’s Die Wahlverwandtschaften (1809), was written in the aftermath of the country’s experience of the Napoleonic Wars
during the so-called “Age of Restoration.” And his novel, not unlike the short story “Bergkristall,” centers on the way that modernity and the “monstrous rights of the present” are creating a new epoch that is changing the social order, in which older forms of being, ways of knowing, and interactions are being reconstructed.\textsuperscript{196} The manner in which modernity is changing the landscape of society is made most visible through the characters’ acts of renovation. The novel largely focuses on Charlotte and Eduard, who have married each other after both of their first spouses passed away and have recently moved to Eduard’s large estate. To this abode, the couple each invites a friend. Charlotte invites Ottilie, and Eduard invites the Captain, and together all engage – to varying extents – in renovating the castle grounds in some form, whether landscaping, gardening, surveying, mapping, planning, building up the space, or reflecting on these acts of alteration. Throughout the course of their time together, the emotional bonds tying Charlotte to Eduard break, resulting first in deepening friendships between Ottilie and Charlotte and Eduard and the Captain, and then finally giving way to increasing desires between Eduard and Ottilie and Charlotte and the Captain that result in several deaths: of Charlotte and Eduard’s infant Otto, of Ottilie, and of Eduard himself.

The emphasis on narratives that happen outside of urban areas, where modernity nevertheless strikingly alters the landscape of emotional and spatial relationships, carries over to Stifter’s “Bergkristall,” a short story from his collection \textit{Bunte Steine}. This work came to exemplify German-language literature’s “provincial realism” movement. In comparison with European realism more generally, German-language realists’ works, such as those by Austrian writer Stifter, often focused on the small and regional: stories

\footnote{Peter J. Schwartz, \textit{After Jena: Goethe’s Elective Affinities and the End of the Old Regime} (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010).}
consisted of tales in villages and peasant areas where individuals were largely cut off from world events, such as in Stifter’s “Bergkristall” where two siblings lose their way in an Alpine snowstorm at Christmastime while traveling between two villages – both to which they partially belong, but neither one of which where they are fully accepted.

Literature is, however, not the only art form that undergoes moments of broadening out globally during times of prosperity and retreating to focus on more regional/local concerns in times of upheaval and strife; media have a similar history as well. Of course, indelible differences between the nineteenth century and twenty-first century complicate any straight parallels that might be drawn between these time periods and forms. However, as I maintain, Schipper and Vilsmaier adapt “Bergkristall” and Die Wahlverwandtschaften, respectively, through national cinema genres to transmediate these texts’ greater programmatic and aesthetic concerns to the screen. As counterexamples of the more dominant mode of Shakespeare-inspired adaptations, these films ultimately advocate a type of even more differentiated (trans)national German cinema for the contemporary classical adaptation genre: an approach that brings to the screen German visual/cinematic culture at the same time it represents Germany literary culture.

To contextualize how Schipper and Vilsmaier mediate German literary history through the lens of national cinema history, I provide an overview of the genres/styles in which each director trades. This discussion is split into two sections, which correlate with the two general trends in European cinema: part one spotlights German popular cinema and part two focuses on German auteur cinema. In part one, I establish a base from which to analyze Vilsmaier’s Bergkristall by discussing the Bergfilm and the Heimatfilm as
interrelated popular genres that are considered distinctly “German” (despite the fact that the genre indeed transgressed/transgresses national boundaries and can include films from France, Austria, Italy, Japan, and – more recently – the U.S.). I then perform a close reading of the film to show how the director employs, and occasionally subverts, codes from both the Berg- and Heimatfilm genres. In part two, I turn my focus to Schipper’s Mitte Ende August and, in doing so, draw attention to Germany’s history of auteur cinema by discussing New German Cinema of the 1970s and the continuation of auteur filmmaking in Germany via the Berlin School of the 2000s (once dubbed the New New German Cinema). I then map the program of the Berlin School onto Schipper’s aesthetic project in his Mitte Ende August. Despite the differences in these films’ source texts and filmic styles, and their separation into popular and auteur cinema trends, both bring German cinematic history to the screen as a part of cultural heritage and thereby provide new images for German adaptations that ultimately help support their broader cultural work.

II. Screening Heritage: Foregrounding the “National” in Contemporary German Cinemas

Whether through geographic, cultural, or historical representations, the national is back in vogue on the silver screen, rather transnationally. Nevertheless, in today’s complex global film economy, genres no longer circulate as strictly national products;

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197 Eric Rentschler, “Mountains and Modernity: Relocating the Bergfilm,” New German Critique, 51 (1990), 137–61, Johannes von Moltke, No Place Like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema (Berkeley: University of California University Press, 2005), and Harald Hobüsch, “Mountain of Destiny”: Nanga Parbat and Its Path into the German Imagination (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2016), 78. As these three scholars indicate, although several international films from roughly the same era that belong to this genre, Bergfilme traditionally have been claimed and understood largely – at least in the context of scholarship on German cinema – as a national German genre. This has in turn reinscribed and promulgated the notion in recent German filmmaking that the genre is unique to the nation and profitable for a cinema that mines its past for contemporary film topics, even if the mountain film genre is not exclusive to Germany.
instead, films are considered transnational emanations in which figurations of the national – whether represented via plotlines, aesthetics, or characters – serve as commodities. The upsurge in media representations of the national stems from both commercial and, by extension, social concerns. On the one hand, foregrounding national aspects within a film creates a sense of “authenticity,” which attracts viewers to the – albeit mediated – cultural/historical tourism experience such works provide. On the other hand, these films also question and problematize questions of belonging and identity in transnational times. Thus, recreating or staging national (hi)stories in clearly definable geographical spaces, which may then be transgressed, takes place, such as in the works of Fatih Akın. These works, as scholarship contends, allow films to establish new cultural or intercultural relationships.

Within the context of contemporary transnational film culture, both recent popular and auteur cinemas in contemporary Germany strongly foreground representations of the national; however, this takes place largely through an emphasis on the historical past and foregoes a recirculation of Germany’s filmic past. As Paul Cooke acknowledges in his book *Contemporary German Cinema*, the similarity between recent popular and auteurist film modes results from economic structures that render popular and auteur filmmaking much less mutually exclusive today, particularly in thematics and styles, than in the 1970s. Given the flexibility of contemporary classical literary adaptations, which can just as readily be created as historical period pieces or contemporary modernizations, canonical texts lend themselves to adaptation by both popular and auteur German cinemas interested in representations of the national. Indeed, across both of these cinemas as I detail here, canonical literary works become once again a source of inspiration,
particularly because they serve as the preeminent cultural product of a rich, longstanding lineage tightly tied to national culture and history. However, important for our study is that they also allow for the return of past genres to the contemporary screen.

Despite the commonalities to which Cooke and I gesture above, the representation of the national and its diegetic role do noticeably vary between popular and auteur cinemas. For its part, contemporary auteur cinema in Germany, namely the Berlin School, is heavily influenced by cinéma vérité and thus prefers depictions of contemporary quotidian life heavily marked by the “employment of realist aesthetic ostensibly intent upon presenting an unmediated image of the world.”198 In contrast to auteur cinema’s exploration of the present moment, popular German films refashion unique German (hi)stories and resurrect historically German film styles. In particular, scholars have noted an upturn in films that drew upon the Bergfilm and Heimatfilm genres in the 1990s and 2000s that will also be explored here. As Robert Reimer maintains, Joseph Vilsmaier first modernized the Heimatfilm for contemporary times in his directorial debut film Herbstmilch (1989). In his later film Nanga Parbat (2010), Caroline Schaumann also sees the director’s resuscitation of the Bergfilm genre, a task in which Philip Stölzl’s Nordwand (2008) also participates. Johannes von Moltke argues that these filmic returns to national genres are part of a much larger post-wall filmmaking phenomenon that undergirds many popular cinema trends, from Ostalgie and Westolgie films to those melodramas centered on twentieth-century German historical occurrences, particularly events during the Third Reich.

Scholars generally place these popular films together under the sign of the “heritage film” genre and see their cultural work as part of greater “postunification efforts

198 Cooke, Contemporary German Cinema, 59.
to redefine the contours of German national cinema and hence revise the history of
German filmmaking itself.” My argument, however, intervenes in this narrative by
showcasing how Schipper and Vilsmaier mobilize German cinema history – the popular
and the auteur – to create a commemorative space for the medium itself alongside its
more readily remembered counterpart, literature. The impetus, I submit, involves neither
a redefinition nor revision of our understanding of German cinema history. It rather
involves calling viewer’s awareness to cinema history as a legitimate part of the cultural
heritage that shapes, drives, and informs contemporary classical adaptations.

III. Historicizing “Germanness” in Popular German Cinema: From the Bergfilm to the
Heimatfilm

Excluding the period of fascist filmmaking in the 1930s, which will be considered
in the conclusion of the project, two popular genres top the list as representative of
distinctly German cinema aesthetics: the Bergfilm and the Heimatfilm. These two genres
reached their climactic peak in different eras, with the Bergfilm experiencing the height of
its production in the 1920s and the Heimatfilm reaching its peak in the 1950s. Yet both
genres share several characteristics important for our exploration of an intermingling of
the popular, high culture, and representations of the national within the context of
contemporary classical adaptations. In what follows, I offer a close reading of
Vilsmaier’s Bergkristall by placing it into a broader historical and cultural context. This
first necessitates a closer look at both the Bergfilm and the Heimatfilm, so as to elucidate
the contours of the two German genres that Vilsmaier appropriates for his work. Indeed,

199 Ibid., 353.
200 As explored in Chapter Five, contemporary German cinema still points to and warns against possible
dangers of the medium by thematizing fascist filmmaking practices.
the characterizations of the *Bergfilm* and *Heimatfilm* genres will prove essential for our analysis of Vilsmaier’s film as it integrates formal and narrative aspects from both to create a German-cinema informed aesthetic for contemporary classical adaptations of canonical literary works.

A. The *Bergfilm*: Mediating Realism and Prefiguring *Heimat*

As discussed in Chapter One, Germany encountered the film medium during an age rife with anxieties about technological advancements and industrialization. In turn, some films diegetically thematized anxieties about the future, most famous among them being Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927), which portrayed the possible negative telos of urban spaces technologically redefined for efficiency. Other films foregrounded the emotion complementary to anxiety about the future: nostalgia for a simpler past. These films concentrated on capturing natural landscapes throughout the nation, preserving and spreading idyllic images at the same time. In addition to visual shorts of landscapes and exotic places that were produced at this time, this era also saw the development of the *Bergfilm* genre – which went so far as to present nature as a main character.\(^\text{201}\)

As a cohesive genre, critics have noted that the *Bergfilm* is characterized by on-location shooting (often in Switzerland and southern Tyrol); a mise-en-scène that foregrounds the landscape by prioritizing panoramic long shots of Alpine vistas and low-angle shots of the majestic mountains; melodramatic plots that revolve around a love triangle between two men and a woman; dramatic, contrastive lighting; the use of somber blue tones that showcase the beauty of the mountains in the moonlight; and, finally,

\(^{201}\) Rentschler, “Mountains and Modernity: Relocating the Bergfilm,” 159. Here, Rentschler connects the figure of Maria in *Metropolis* with Junta from *Das blaue Licht* to comment on the intertwined relationship between nature and modernization.
multiple cuts between experiences in the bucolic village and dramatic events on the mountain face. Despite overgeneralizations of the genre that argue that these films starkly juxtapose tradition and modernity (pitting the presumably “pristine” Alpine landscape against the visiting tourist), these films’ formal elements and plotlines, as recent scholarship has shown, undermine this binary. On-location filming and extreme shots relied upon the most advanced techniques, thus the seemingly peaceful shots are created through dangerous and highly technological means. In addition, the villages in the films themselves are often marked (and marred) by technological advances.\(^\text{202}\) This is an important point that we will return to in our analysis of Vilsmaier’s film, which prioritizes popular rather than critical understandings of both Stifter and, by extension, the Bergfilm and Heimatfilm genres.

To return to our study of the “German” genres: the emergence of the Bergfilm genre resulted from a coalescing of literary precedents, tourist practices, and educational aims. This trifecta, as we will see, proves extremely relevant in light of our exploration of Vilsmaier’s film. To begin with, the portrayal of natural landscapes and village life in films marked by nostalgia during this period largely drew upon descriptions found in German Romantic and realist works, where the sublime and wondrous power of nature often took center stage.\(^\text{203}\) A productive trope for the Bergfilm genre in particular was the Alpenbegeisterung that had been developing across literary and cultural works from the eighteenth century onward. As Nancy Nenno explains, the genre must not only be situated against a literary backdrop, but it must also be contextualized in relation to tourist practices, which themselves led to the emergence of travel films in the early

\(^{202}\) Moltke, *No Place Like Home*, 46.

\(^{203}\) Rentschler, “Mountains and Modernity: Relocating the Bergfilm,” 157. Here, Rentschler highlights the unacknowledged sources for Riefenstahl’s *Das blaue Licht*. 
twentieth century and informed the production of educational travel shorts, exotic adventure serials, and feature-length films set in foreign lands, which all ultimately offered viewers the chance to experience the thrills of tourism right from their seats in the local theater.  

Indeed, enticing audience members to engage in the popular practice of tourism and visit the locations presented in the films was essential to the genre’s greatest contributing director, Arnold Fanck. Fanck, himself an Alpine enthusiast, began his career in cinema by producing comedic ski films in the 1920s that introduced the sport—recently popularized by its use in WWI—to the masses and simultaneously functioned as advertising for his Alberg ski school in the Alps. As Fanck began to add more of a narrative plotline to these films to keep his audience’s interest in the genre, he developed what is now known as the Bergfilm.

Whereas his ski comedies showcase an emerging Alpine sport, Fanck’s Bergfilm narratives—foremost Der heilige Berg (1926) and Der weiße Rausch (1931)—revolve around a core pedagogy: to “inculcate reverence for the mountains as places of adventure and wonder.” To achieve this goal, Fanck formally aligns the viewer’s gaze with that of a city-slicker modern tourist in the filmic diegesis, implicating him in the plot. Informed by desires for visual consumption and physical recreation, this figure’s relationship to the Alpine landscape drastically pales in comparison to the relationship locals and master climbers have developed to the mountains. By creating viewer

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204 Nancy Nenno, “‘Postcards from the Edge’: Education to Tourism in the German Mountain Film,” in Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective, eds. Margaret McCarthy and Randall Halle (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 61–83. In this essay, Nenno demonstrates how popular cultural practices of the time period resulted in the positive reception of the Bergfilm genre within Germany, Europe, and the New World and stresses positive aspects of the genre in order to counter the effects of Siegfried Kracauer’s and Susan Sontag’s negative evaluations of the genre as a harbinger of Nazi aesthetics.

205 Ibid., 64.
identification with the tourist who ultimately learns the worth and value of the Alps, Fanck helps elevate the Alps beyond their status as an object for tourists’ personal pleasure. As Nenno notes, *Bergfilm* narratives chart a distinct change on the part of the tourist, which occurs because the plot “temper[s] his pleasures and historicize[s] his gaze by modeling his perception on the awe-struck, respectful, Romantic gaze of the mountain climber.”

Fanck’s contributions to the development of the *Bergfilm* genre went on to inform the work of other directors, including Leni Riefenstahl (*Das blaue Licht*, 1932) and Luis Trenker (*Der verlorene Sohn*, 1934). Eventually, however, as the German film industry came under control of National Socialists, the popularity of the genre began to wane: the number of new *Bergfilme* greatly decreased in the years leading up to World War II. It has resurged in recent times and, as indicated in Vilsmaier’s film, retains at its core a distinct comingling of literary tropes, tourist practices, and pedagogical aims. However, it often does so, as we will see, in a way that tempers the disruptive technological and violent forces of change that are present in the film’s literary and film genres’ precedents.

**B. The Heimatfilm: Screening Landscapes of Belonging**

While the number of *Bergfilm* productions dwindled after the 1930s, von Moltke locates the genre’s continuation in the *Heimatfilm*, a popular cinema genre that proved so

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206 Ibid.
207 This statement does not mean that the concept and visual representation of *Heimat* (along with its inclusion of landscapes, among them alpine vistas) played no role in films made during National Socialism. In fact, the concept of home, paired with clearly defined gender roles and other traditional *Heimat*-related motifs, can already be seen in Hans Deppe’s directorial debut *Der Schimmelreiter* (1934), prefiguring the *Heimatfilm* genre that he later also helped fully establish with *Grün ist die Heide* (1951), considered by many scholars to be the most representative film of the genre. That Hans Deppe’s debut drew from Theodor Storm’s eponymous novel parallels the contention that much of the *Heimatfilm* genre itself drew not only from nineteenth-century German literature but also from media portrayals of *Heimat* in the film apparatus of National Socialism.
prolific at its high point in the 1950s that it constituted twenty percent of Germany’s annual domestic film production. Although the Bergfilm and Heimatfilm emerged at different times, the impetus behind the development of both is strikingly similar: the tragedies of warfare and ensuing national upheaval. Whereas the Bergfilm reached the zenith of its development in the aftermath of World War I, the popularity of the Heimatfilm soared in response to the tragedies and dislocation caused by World War II. In addition to external events whose origins are classified origins as similar, I wish to point out here how the Heimatfilm – like its filmic forbear – also integrates a tangible trifecta of concerns here: literature, community, and pedagogy.

As in the Bergfilm, depictions of nature that emphasize precise geographies characterize the Heimatfilm genre. This trend is, itself, also derived in this genre from nineteenth-century literary precedents, with Heimatfilme drawing upon many of the same understandings of Germanness in relation to geographic landscapes that informed the Bergfilm. Here, natural landscapes and communities established around them become emotionally encoded spaces: community-driven rural life provides a striking contrast to impersonal and devastated contemporary urban spaces of belonging and to the realities of modern urban life. In this genre, however, the spatial constellation moves away from the Alpine region familiar in the Bergfilm to bucolic villages in the Black Forest and the Lüneberg heath, broadening out the visual representation of home and providing contemporary viewers with multiple representations of the homeland where they putatively belong.

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208 Moltke, No Place Like Home, 53–69.
In comparison with the *Bergfilm*, which stylizes Alpine landscapes as tourist destinations, most unique about *Heimatfilme* is how they construct forests and heaths as geographical spaces of belonging. In constructing images of home, these films refrain from emphasizing melodramatic plots (in contrast to the *Bergfilme*) to create filmic space for spectacle. In these films, the forward movement of melodramatic plotlines occasionally ceases, often receding into the background to focus viewers’ attention instead on the films’ visual and aural tracks.

Visually, the *Heimatfilme* provide viewers with multiple scenes that meditate on nature’s bounty: long takes of panoramic vistas and close-ups of trees, fields, rivers, mountains, and rocks repeatedly fill the screen, causing a cessation in forward movement. Such scenes are categorically awash in color. The emphasis on various color schemes is formally achieved by the juxtaposition of discontinuous shots of the landscape. Such vibrant sights offered viewers a much more lively view of German landscapes that contrasted positively with the otherwise gray and dusty rubble films that were produced en masse in the early years following the war, and greatly contributed to the genre’s popularity. In fact, color became a key trait in bolstering the genre’s popularity, given this technological advancement’s first employment in a film from the genre: Hans Deppe’s *Heimatfilm Schwarzwaldmädchen* (1950), for example, has been considered the first West German film that brought color back onto the screen after the dismantling of German film studios in the aftermath of World War II and spearheaded the sensational use of color throughout other films in the *Heimatfilm* genre. In a way, then, this film...
genre – like the *Bergfilm* before it – also draws upon the most highly technological means in order to present an image of seemingly unadulterated nature to its viewers.

In addition to using landscape and color, *Heimatfilme* also constructed geographical spaces of belonging through sounds and songs associated with these spaces. As Heide Fehrenbach has noted, the emphasis on visual spectacle in these films is often complemented by the genre’s emphasis on aurality and orality. She writes:

*Heimatfilme* also showcased musical performance; indeed, no film was complete without a handful of traditional Volkslieder and sentimental hits. . . . The ever-present folk songs served to cement the bonds of the cinematic community or celebrate the budding romance of the leading stars and thus played a more integral role in the narrative. Folk songs appear as part of oral tradition, passed from generation to generation according to a cyclical calendar of local celebration. Thus they underscore the idea of how *Heimat* grew out of a historic cultural heritage grounded in affective ties of matrimony, family, and community.210

As a result, in addition to panoramic visuals of space that disrupt forward flow of the narrative, these films also often stage moments of musical performance – whether through dancing or instrumentation – that serve mainly to contribute to the establishment of space as the source of longstanding communal ties. By sharing soundtracks with the viewers, the films implicate their belonging within the community along with the protagonists. As Fehrenbach explains, “indeed no film was complete without a handful of traditional Volkslieder and sentimental hits, which were simultaneously marketed on radio and records.”211

Implicating the viewer as a participant in the community on which these films centered represents the films’ overall aim of creating communal cohesion. This aim was supported not only by visuals and sounds, but also by the films’ teleological narratives. For as much screen time as nature receives in the *Heimatfilm* genre, it largely serves “as

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210 Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*, 152.
211 Ibid., 178.
the backdrop for social conflicts and the restoration of the community.”\textsuperscript{212} The villages represent the geographical stage upon which stories of political and personal displacement often caused by a collision between rural and urban spaces, new and old generations, tradition and modernity, concepts of belonging, and the realities of ostracization.\textsuperscript{213} Quite consistently, the plotlines resolve these tensions and thus imply that if one can integrate oneself into one’s community through cultivating respect for nature and tradition, harmony can reign. Given the need to reestablish the West German nation in the aftermath of the war, the community-building project these films undertake works to inculcate their viewers to do much the same.

By the 1960s, however, the project of communal reestablishment in which \textit{Heimatfilme} engaged was understood to be problematically uncritical, if apolitical. Many film historians understand the Oberhausen Manifesto – proclaiming “Papas Kino ist tot!” – as signaling the demise of the \textit{Heimatfilm}. From the 1960s to the 1970s, the German cinema was marked by a young generation of \textit{Autoren} who criticized the quick reestablishment of norms and community in the aftermath of war in apolitical cinema fare and turned to create for the screen more ethical, politically critical encounters with Germany’s present and past. Nevertheless, the genre of the \textit{Heimatfilme} continued to enjoy prominence on the silver screen in Germany throughout the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{214} In

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\item[\textsuperscript{212}] Moltke, \textit{No Place Like Home}, 49.
\item[\textsuperscript{213}] Moltke, \textit{No Place Like Home}, 82. As Moltke summarizes, the master text film of this genre, Hans Deppe’s \textit{Grün ist die Heide} (1951), does the following: “Depending on a critic’s focus, [\textit{Grün ist die Heide}] exemplifies the aesthetic treatment of contemporary legal issues, such as the law to equalize burdens ‘Lastenausgleich’; it demonstrates the function of \textit{Heimatfilme} as films for coming to terms with the present; it illustrates the cinematic treatment of displacement and expulsion; it testifies to the genre’s role in reconstructing a ‘moral masculinity’ and a ‘girlish femininity’ as socially sanctioned genre stereotypes; and it constructs the space of the heath as a utopian fantasy that affords the positive resolution of contemporary social and ideological concerns about territory and identity.”
\item[\textsuperscript{214}] In the 1960s and 1970s, the Goethe-Institut branded films of a select group of German directors for distribution in the U.S. as a filmic movement emblematic of contemporary German cultural products,
\end{itemize}
recent years, scholars have noted that – contrary to popular belief – *Heimatfilme* did not perish, but continued to be reworked in these decades as well, sometimes by the very directors who originally proclaimed the genre dead, and today they continue to undergird the nostalgic representation of history in popular German cinema.\(^{215}\) For our purposes however, important to note is that the production of *Heimatfilme* largely fell by the wayside as film aesthetics shifted towards Hollywood models in the 1980s, but that neither their aesthetic program nor their general reception by viewers and scholars as apolitical and idealistic have disappeared.

III. *Bergkristall*: Mediating German Literary History through Historical German Genres

Although the following decades were marked by distinctively German filmmaking aesthetics, national filmmaking increasingly appropriated Anglocentric cinema styles and models. As discussed previously, this shift resulted in an era of German cinema that Rentschler has dubbed the “cinema of consensus.” During this period, popular films in Germany “looked to appeal to a mainstream audience, adopting Hollywood genre conventions which seemed to deliberately play down their German specificity.”\(^{216}\) This shift and its ramifications for the continuation of a differentiated national cinema were not lost on observant film critics and directors. In an interview in 1985, when German filmmaking had begun to transition from a period of more critical national cinematic works to a string of less critical Hollywood-style romantic comedies,

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\(^{215}\) Moltke, *No Place Like Home*, 32. Given the continual appeal of *Heimatfilme* among mass viewers, they ultimately felt compelled to utilize the genre to attract domestic viewers.

\(^{216}\) Cooke, *Contemporary German Cinema*, 40.
Werner Herzog bemoaned the general discontinuation of the traditional German film genres, pointing to the Bergfilm and the Heimatfilm as prime examples of possibility. He states:

Warum beispielsweise gibt es in Deutschland keine Heimatfilme mehr? Warum gibt es keine Bergfilme mehr? Das ist letztlich nicht logisch nicht eindeutig erklärbar. Trotzdem ist es natürlich schön, dass wir in unserem Kulturbereich ein oder zwei spezifische Genres entwickelt haben und die sollten eigentlich nicht wegsterben.\(^\text{217}\)

As if to provide a possible corrective to the issue Herzog clearly articulates, Joseph Vilsmaier debuted his feature-length work *Herbstmilch* (1988) only three years later.\(^\text{218}\) *Herbstmilch* adapts the autobiography of Anna Wimschneider, providing viewers with a modernized take on the Heimatfilm that recounts the life of the farm girl in the 1930s replete with on-location shooting in Lower Bavaria and Tyrol. With this work, Vilsmaier secured his place in German film history as a director who – unlike other filmmakers in the 1980s – could provide a contemporary and naturalist take on the traditional German genres and still retain popular appeal. His predilection for producing films reminiscent of past popular genres would eventually undergird a number of his other films, including *Schlafes Bruder* (1995), *Bergkristall* (2004), *Nanga Parbat* (2010), and the made-for-television film *Der Meineidbauer* (2012).

Vilsmaier’s oeuvre predominantly consists of adaptations of contemporary literary works; *Bergkristall* represents the only film in which he transmediates a canonical literary work, making it the director’s sole contribution to the overarching


\(^{218}\) Interestingly, this film was an adaptation of Anna Wimschneider’s autobiography published only three years prior to Vilsmaier’s film and is yet another instance of the contemporary adaptation boom that occurred in Germany in the 1980s–1990s, largely in response to close relationships between the book industry and film industry that fostered the success of one another. Indeed, given Vilsmaier’s adaptation, the book quickly became a bestseller in foreign countries.
genre of contemporary classical adaptations. Despite being an outlier in his opus, however, Vilsmaier’s *Bergkristall* shows tight aesthetic continuities with his previous films: in *Bergkristall*, he still espouses cinematography and filmic devices associated with the 1920s *Bergfilme* and the related genre of 1950s *Heimatfilme* rather than latching on to Hollywood adaptation aesthetics like other directors of contemporary classical adaptations in Germany.

Acknowledging the similarities between Germany’s two “indigenous” genres, Joseph Vilsmaier simultaneously resurrects both the *Bergfilm* and the *Heimatfilm* in *Bergkristall* to resuscitate Adalbert Stifter’s novella for the contemporary German screen. His film ultimately presents a differentiated approach to German contemporary classical adaptations that may be considered potentially more layered and nationally representative, and potentially more promising for inclusion in educational curricular programs that still emphasize the national, largely through literature. However, as I ultimately gesture toward, Vilsmaier’s adherence and recirculation of popular and widespread understandings of Stifter and the film genres in which he works create an echo chamber, whereby popular understandings of these works (their reception by general readers and critics) inform their renewed representation in various “versions” that in turn become part of the greater cultural memory of these texts.

In short, Vilsmaier’s transmediation moves away from the poetic realist program of simultaneously repressing and revealing the violence that undergirds the construction of nature and society. The film instead portrays nature (and implicitly, a classical literary tale) as an antidote to hectic, contemporary life. In this regard, the film recycles both popular understandings of the author’s oeuvre as well as clichéd understandings of the
Bergfilm and Heimatfilm genres. As I argue here, Vilsmaier dilutes Stifter’s programmatic aesthetics by filtering the poet’s “sanftes Gesetz” through Heimatfilm aesthetics and ideals.\(^{219}\) Formal choices on the part of the director render visual 1) a presumed aesthetic understanding in Stifter’s works of nature in its quotidian state as peaceful (rather than violent); and 2) a presumed narrative trajectory in Stifter’s story that leads to an unproblematic and full reestablishment of order. Thus, as we will see on the basis of Vilsmaier’s film, Bergkristall shows some limitations of what the dynamics of the popular can provide (or not) when it comes to contemporary classical adaptations.

I ground my reading of Bergkristall by referring to features the film shares with the most exemplary works from each genre: Leni Riefenstahl’s Das blaue Licht\(^{220}\) and Hans Deppe’s Grün ist die Heide. In addition to highlighting visual citations and thematic borrowings, I note how Vilsmaier’s film recycles past readings of the text through the popular genres of the past to create a popular-informed reading of the text for the contemporary period. The result is a rather uncomplicated argument that immersing oneself in nature and literary works of a presumably “calmer” historical past can prove a corrective to the interpersonal disconnection that is seen as a plight of contemporary times.

\(^{219}\) In what follows, I emphasize only those aspects of the Heimatfilm genre in Vilsmaier’s adaptation that attempt to transmediate Stifter’s poetic program. Thus, some key inclusions in the film that even more tellingly announce it as a Heimatfilm remain unmentioned in the argument. However, Vilsmaier’s adherence to the Heimatfilm genre results in notable differences between his adaptation and the source text. These divergences are largely in accordance with transmediating the story into the Heimatfilm genre. For example, Vilsmaier includes of a prolonged scene of folk dancing to traditional instrumentation in the beginning of the embedded story that underscores the looks and sounds of the village in the film, but that never occurs in the source text. Later, the son and the father tell Sanna folkloric stories around the fireplace that have been handed down from generation to generation in the village.

\(^{220}\) Moltke, No Place Like Home, 49. Das blaue Licht announces itself as a Bergfilm laced with proto-Heimatfilm aesthetics and is thus particularly interesting for our study here. As von Moltke notes, Das blaue Licht departs from more staunch representations of nature a la Bergfilme in that it includes “extended quasi-ethnographic sequences of villagers gathered at a local inn or strapping young farmers wielding a plough [set] to the tunes of an Italian folk song,” which he sees as directly prefiguring the portrayal of bucolic life in the Heimatfilm.
Bergkristall readily acknowledges its trade in historical German film genres. The film opens with a sequence that closely echoes that of the Bergfilm genre’s most renowned film, Das blaue Licht. Riefenstahl’s work opens upon a couple of city-slicker tourists who arrive by car to enjoy the sights of the historical village Santa Marie. Likewise, Vilsmaier’s Bergkristall begins with a car filled with tourists: here, four family members drive from Berlin to vacation in the Alps. As if taking his cue from Riefenstahl’s editing, the sequence includes panoramic shots in which the camera lingers upon majestic Alpine peaks as they shimmer in the sun against a bright-blue sky, signaling the peacefully pristine locale as the family’s destination (figure 11).

Fig. 11: A shot of the pristine Alps within a longer opening sequence foregrounding their splendor in Bergkristall.
However, just as traditional *Bergfilme* present the Alps as tranquil and terrifying, the viewer is also made aware in Vilsmaier’s opening sequence that the very peaks that appear beautifully serene during the family’s drive also harbor real hazards. The next cut zooms in on a helicopter, nearly imperceptible in the original shot (figure 12).

![Image](image.jpg)

*Fig. 12: The camera cuts from the Alps to a frontal view of a helicopter flying alongside the mountain peaks, in which two men survey the landscape before dropping an explosive.*

The helicopter flies alongside the slope and, after urgent conversations between the pilots and individuals monitoring the mountain from a weather observation tower, the camera focuses on a close-up of an explosive that is released to produce a man-made avalanche. The billowing snowfall slowly gathers speed and fills the screen, an early sign of nature’s raw force that quickly provides a counterpoint to the previous postcard-like images of the peaks that glorify the Alps and that have resulted in an abundance of modern Alpine tourists.

Given the ability to enact natural catastrophes at will in order to prevent worse disasters, the technology used by the helibombers to prompt what should have resulted in a controlled avalanche would seem to represent modern man’s control of the mountain. However, in *Bergkristall*, modern technologies neither function seamlessly nor improve the quality of life. Trust in technology is quickly thrown into disarray. First, as the family drives along, nearly all of the characters are utterly distracted by various devices and technologies that vie for their attention. As the mother attempts to point out the beautiful
peaks in the distance, her comments and gestures are quickly drowned out by an overabundance of buzzing, ringing, and vibrating personal devices that disrupt any communication among the family members. Second, the plotline itself upends a fully positive interpretation of the manmade catastrophe: once the family arrives in Niedergschaid, they quickly become aware that the planned avalanche has resulted in an unexpected crisis. The entire town has lost electricity and individuals scatter in search of safety, fearing impending doom.

Although nature and technology are portrayed in a similar light in Bergkristall and Das blaue Licht, the symbolic value of the quartz crystals in each work differs. Vilsmaier’s presentation of quartz, in fact, signals the way he dislodges any connotation of violence, technology, or complication with from the concept of “pristine nature” in his reading of Stifter. In Vilsmaier’s Bergkristall, the family encounters the mountain crystal after seeking refuge from the avalanche in a rectory with the town priest. Centered within the priest’s dining room, the large crystal stands prominently placed on the windowsill before the table, as if perched upon an altar. The reverence shown to the crystal object through its placement in the mise-en-scène signifies a grand-scale departure from the more problematic dynamics between man and nature established in Das blaue Licht, where mountain crystals are quickly exchanged for money. To recall, in Riefenstahl’s film village children peddle pieces of quartz crystals to the tourists at the beginning of the film (figure 13), which – as the tourists, and by extension the viewer, later learn in the embedded story – have been violently pillaged from the mountain.

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221 Adalbert Stifter, Bunte Steine (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 7. Here we see the transformation in Vilsmaier’s film of Stifter the writer into Stifter the priest.
Fig. 13: Children gather around the new tourist, each trying to sell him a quartz crystal mined from the mountains in Das blaue Licht.

Whereas the quartz crystals were once revered by Junta in Riefenstahl’s embedded story, in the frame story set in the present, these crystals now only represent a history of villagers exploiting the mountain for commercial and entertainment purposes.²²² As Rentschler argues, the crystals in Das blaue Licht are made into a commodity by an act of violence that directly prefigures acts of violence against nature and mankind perpetrated by National Socialism. He explains: “For all its idealized landscape painting and blood-and-soil fustian, German fascism pursued the domination over nature through a vast technology[,] . . . pressing out of human material every possible commercial gain.”²²³ He sees the film establishing a similar “causality between the ‘terrible injustice’ [done to Junta and the mountain] and the ‘great riches’ that came from it.”²²⁴

²²² The history of mining mountains for quartz began in the eighteenth century and coincided with the rise of Alpine tourism. I am indebted to Catriona MacLeod for alerting me to the following website, “Crystals and Crystal Hunting in the Alps.” Chamonix.net, accessed October 25, 2017. https://www.chamonix.net/english/chamonix/crystals.


²²⁴ Despite her innocence, she represents danger to the village because the blue light that issues from her crystal sanctuary in the mountains lures young men to climb the mountain and eventually fall to their death.
In contrast, the prominent placement of the singular quartz in Vilsmaier’s film indicates reverence for the object and its intact sacredness in a way that decontextualizes the violent mining of quartz throughout history. The priest adoringly cradles the crystal when showing it to his guests, and the crystal even sparkles at one point in the film inexplicably, as if ablaze from an internal source of light (figures 14 and 15). The crystal’s representation indicates how the film turns the dynamics of Riefenstahl’s master text on its head: here, nature will be celebrated, not man’s willful, greed-driven domination over it.

Fig. 14: The family looks up towards the crystal that the priest reverently holds in his hands in Bergkristall.

Fig. 15: The crystal shines brightly from within.

Granted, despite their differing symbolic valences, the crystals in both Das blaue Licht and Bergkristall do stimulate interest in narratives of the past. In both films’ frame narratives, beholding this novel object whets tourists’ appetite for a story explaining the
crystal’s significance. In each film, a towns-person (in Riefenstahl, the innkeeper and in Vilsmaier, the priest) goes on to read an account from an old handwritten book, at which point the film fades and implicates the viewer as a bystander to the events described in the book that happened many years ago. For Das blaue Licht and Bergkristall, the visual (seeing the crystal) serves as a gateway to the written word (reading about the crystal), through which one encounters a supposedly historical story.

Through these embedded narratives from the past that, as both films suggest, hold ramifications for listeners in the present, Das blaue Licht and Bergkristall participate in projects of education. Inculcating reverence for nature, as Rentschler notes, is one key characteristic of the Bergfilm genre. As he observes, at the crux of the mountain film is its educative potential not only to impart a sense of Romantic reverence for nature, but also to train viewers to take on this perspective: to transform the tourist into a meditative individual. He points out that the conclusion of Das blaue Licht includes a visual announcement of the tourist couple’s newfound respect for the Alpine peaks: whereas the couple originally arrived cloaked in androgynous dress, by the conclusion of the narrative, their clothing now reflects the more conventional gender roles that were presented to them in the story and they behave more somberly in the mountains, indicating that they have internalized cultural values and traditions from the inset tale.

In Bergkristall, the educational effect of the embedded tale on the frame’s characters has little to do with inculcating newfound respect for (or fear of) the power of nature. Instead, it looks to provide images of beauty and serenity to stimulate an interest among viewers in stories about “German” geographies and – by extension – works of

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225 Nenno, “‘Postcards from the Edge’,” 72. Here, Nenno shows how the film self-reflexively exhibits and enacts the same type of “heritage tourism” from which the genre developed.
German canonical literature. Only in Vilsmaier’s *Bergkristall* does quartz stimulate interest in a literary work that indeed exists and circulates heavily outside of the film. The book from which the *Pfarrer* reads in Vilsmaier’s version, putatively passed down from generations of priests, in fact allows itself to be identified by knowing audience members as Adalbert Stifter’s “Bergkristall,” given the long quotations that Vilsmaier includes via voice-over narration. Thus, the intrigue that the crystal stimulates in Vilsmaier’s film works as a synecdoche of the film’s greater undertaking: to create a visually stimulating object that can arouse interest among its viewers in canonical literature that they can themselves encounter in reality.

This is one of Vilsmaier’s aims with his film. Granted, Vilsmaier offered his film as a gift for families and young viewers to entertain themselves over Christmastime in a way that parallels Stifter’s own intent that *Bunte Steine* provide his young readers with an entertaining, possibly edifying Christmas gift. After being originally published in 1845 under the title “Der heilige Abend,” Stifter’s “Bergkristall” was later republished in winter 1852 in his collection *Bunte Steine*, subtitled “ein Festgeschenk der Jugend.” The similarities between Vilsmaier’s film and Stifter’s text begin to diverge at this point in a way that can be understood as a division between less and more critical understandings of nature, society, and the family unit. Whereas Stifter’s short stories reveal an ever-present, if nearly invisible, violence, that undergirds nature and society, Vilsmaier’s film fashions the text in a way that deflates Stifter’s critical portrayal to better accord with popular – albeit clichéd and perhaps even whitewashed – understandings of Stifter that make the work more readily acceptable as a family film.
As a school inspector, Stifter thought deeply about and published occasionally on educational processes within school systems and family constellations, and “Bergkristall” can also be seen in this light. Eric Downing expands upon the connection between Stifter’s poetic principle and its representation in society via the order-imposing family unit in his analysis of Stifter’s “Vorrede.” For Stifter, he explains, the family unit, via its “policing, order-imposing function,” represses the socially undesired, disruptive impulses of the individual. He writes, “Perhaps the most important site for the enforcement of these conventions and their concomitant repression of the individual is the family, which is privileged as the truest locus of commonality (of reality) because it is the most forceful sphere of regulation.”

One particular paratext connects “Bergkristall” to a possible pedagogical program on Stifter’s behalf, one that implicitly calls for repression. A paratext, as Gerard Genette explains, is a liminal piece of material included within or ancillary to a book that is not part of a book’s principal narrative. This material, often in the form of forewords, jacket covers, inscriptions, etc., sits at the threshold of the main text and mediates relationships between texts, readers, publishers, and authors. In addition to playing an important interpretive role in literary scholarship, it also proves helpful for film analysis, and by extension, adaptation studies. As scholars have pointed out, one edition of Bunte Steine, inscribed with the following dedication to his stepdaughter, makes direct

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227 Ibid., 36–37.

overtures toward such a reading. Hinting at the desired effect of this text on its young reader, Stifter writes:

> Empfange hier zum ersten Mal ein Buch, dass dein Vater gefaßt hat, lese zum ersten Mal seine Worte im Drucke die du sonst nur von seinen Lippen gehört hast, sei gut, wie die Kinder in diesem Buche; behalte es als Andenken; wenn du eins von dem Guten weichen wolltest, so lasse Dich durch diese Blätter bitten, es nicht zu thun.\textsuperscript{229}

At least in the case of his stepdaughter, if not on a more general plane, one of Stifter’s intents with his text seems to be the creation of a work that functioned as “literature of improvement.” The desire (on Stifter’s behalf) to control a certain unwanted, albeit perhaps quite natural, desire on the part of his stepdaughter that might lead her toward the “bad” instead of the “good” aligns the story closely with Downing’s nuanced reading of an aesthetic centered on a tension between repression and the return of the repressed. Let me take a moment to clarify this reading, as it will help us distinguish the ways in which Vilsmaier’s film recirculates passé understandings of Stifter’s works as ultimately serene.

The prologue to \textit{Bunte Steine}, the collection of stories in which “Bergkristall” was published, served as a manifesto for Poetic Realism. Here, Stifter defined and defended his aesthetic program of focusing on the quotidian. In this oft-quoted text, Stifter maintains that inspiration can and should be found in the slight and trivial, rather than in earth-shattering catastrophes, which happen only occasionally. According to Stifter, the destructive forces of nature have at their source the same law that is constantly at work around us. Thus, “[d]as Wehen der Luft, das Rieseln des Wassers, das Wachsen der

Getreide, das Wogen des Meeres, das Grünen der Erde, das Glänzen des Himmels, das Schimmern der Gestirne” are – for his purposes – much more wondrous events than “das prächtig einherziehende Gewitter, den Blitz, welcher Häuser spaltet, den Sturm, der die Brandung treibt, den feuerspeienden Berg, das Erdbeben, welches Länder verschüttet.”

This is because, per Stifter’s explanation, the former events occur as constant manifestations of a universal law of nature, whereas the latter events are simply intense manifestations of the greater law that can readily be seen at work in the small. This universal law, or the “sanftes Gesetz” as Stifter terms it, has traditionally been understood by critics as a stable world order in which all things fall into place and work in a harmony unperceivable to humans, who are embedded within the grander scheme of things. In these readings, Stifter appears as a tranquil nature poet, whose meditations on nature function in opposition to encroaching modernity and deny change as a result of history, politics, and modernizing forces.

However, as Downing explains (and others, such as W.G. Sebald, have pointed out as being illustrated in Stifter’s stories), Stifter positions these upheavals not so much in opposition to the daily but on a continuum of violence alongside the daily. At its most visible pole, this continuum of violence erupts in full force; at its most discrete, it lies manifest in daily rituals. The connection between these categories happens not only conceptually in Stifter’s “Vorrede,” but also syntactically, within the span of a single sentence: “Die Kraft, welche die Milch im Töpfchen der armen Frau emporschwellen und

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230 Stifter, Bunte Steine, 8.
231 For an illustrative example of this line of argumentation, Sean Ireton speaks of how works in Stifter’s oeuvre tend to be “more disruptive than destructive” and are represented as such via a tripartite narrative structure of order – disruption – reinstated order. See Sean Ireton, “Between Dirty and Disruptive Nature: Adalbert Stifter in the Context of Nineteenth-Century American Environmental Literature,” Colloquia Germanica 44, no.2 (2011): 149–71.
übergehen macht, ist es auch, die Lava in dem feuerspeienden Berge emportreibt und auf den Flächen der Berge hinabgleiten läßt.”

Also tellingly, Stifter does not shy away from including in his narratives “big” natural events (such as the snowstorm in “Bergkristall”). Narratively, these upheavals readily occur alongside meditations and descriptions in his narratives of seemingly more safe and mundane events, and although they may be recuperated to some extent, traces remain. “Die Einzelheiten gehen vorüber,” Stifter writes of such natural events, “und ihre Wirkungen sind nach kurzem kaum noch erkennbar.”

Unlike Stifter’s, Vilsmaier’s pedagogical aim is much less layered. His film, as he explains, seeks to immediately address the continued relevance of canonical works in the school system in a way that recalls the Wise Guys’ “Schiller” song, minus the satire. In a telling interview with Jose Garcia of Texte zum Film, Vilsmaier and his wife (the main actress in the film) respond to a question regarding the characters’ use of high German rather than dialect in this modernized Heimatfilm. The two respond by indicating that they hope it will help young viewers of the film access the literary masterpiece. The desire recalls attempts, by the Wise Guys, Hollywood Shakespeare films, German Shakespeare films, and others, to make these texts more accessible and fun.

José García: Im Vergleich zu Schlafes Bruder sprechen die Figuren hochdeutsch ohne dialektale Färbung.

Joseph Vilsmaier: Ja, aber das tut auch schon Stifter. Er gebraucht eine hochstehende Sprache, aber eben keinen Dialekt.

Dana Vávrová: Trotzdem stellte die Sprache eine Herausforderung für die Kinder dar, die manche Ausdrücke – etwa „in die Hand versprechen“ – gar nicht

233 Stifter, Bunte Steine, 8.
234 Ibid.
As part of the project to make Stifter’s text more accessible to modern viewers through imagery, Vilsmaier attempts to mobilize Stifter’s “sanftes Gesetz” in *Bergkristall* through audio and visual tracks that adhere closely to precise descriptions in the story. Throughout the film, Vilsmaier often quotes Stifter’s original language through voice-over. In a way, Vilsmaier’s attention to the language of the original parallels German Shakespearean films; however, in these films, themselves influenced by Luhrmann and Almereyda, chronological disjunctions are often employed in order to render the source texts more readily understandable to modern viewers through pointing out new societal conventions through jarring images. However, Vilsmaier provides images that precisely fit Stifter’s prose rather than juxtapose or criticize it and thereby remain on the surface level of Stifter’s text. Vilsmaier’s staying on the surface of the text, and the way that this overlooks moments of disruption and daily violence, is compounded formally and thematically through his adherence to the *Heimatfilm* genre, a code that he presents as portraying order and demanding its immediate reestablishment in the aftermath of (natural and personal) chaos.

To begin with, Vilsmaier readily translates Stifter’s provincial and bucolic metaphorical examples – wind blowing through fields, water trickling in a river, shimmering stars, even maidens milking – as though they are written screen directions that foreground natural elements in a manner characteristic of the *Heimatfilm* genre.

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Indeed, by repeatedly including long shots of quotidian nature in *Bergkristall*, Vilsmaier uses formal devices to visualize Stifter’s prosaic descriptions. Throughout the film, Vilsmaier intersperses lingering panoramic shots that mediate Stifter’s metaphors and prioritize the setting at the expense of forward narrative movement. The aesthetics on display here visually echo the problem of description in Stifter, critiqued by Hebbel (and other contemporaries of Stifter), as a problem of detailing visuals in minutia *ad infinitum*.

Commenting on Stifter’s aesthetics, specifically in his novel *Nachsommer* in this case, Hebbel exclaims with disdain,

> Drei starke Bände! Wir glauben Nichts zu riskiren, wenn wir Demjenigen, der beweisen kann, daß er sie ausgelesen hat, ohne als Kunstrichter dazu verpflichtet zu sein, die Krone von Polen versprechen. Wir machen jedoch den Verfasser nur in geringem Grade für das mißrathene Buch verantwortlich; er war sogleich bei seinem ersten Auftreten Manierist und mußte, verhätschelt, wie er wurde, zuletzt natürlich alles Maaß verlieren. . . . Zuerst begnügte er sich, uns die Familien der Blumen aufzuzählen, die auf seinen Lieblingsplätzen gedeihen; dann wurden uns die Exemplare vorgerechnet, und jetzt erhalten wir das Register der Staubfäden. . . Was wird hier nicht Alles weitläufig betrachtet und geschildert; es fehlt nur noch die Betrachtung der Wörter, womit man schildert, und die Schilderung der Hand, womit man diese Betrachtung niederschreibt, so ist der Kreis vollend.236

The temporal stasis and spatialization of time that Hebbel here critiques as boring has persistently informed many general understandings of Stifter, despite the fact that, as W.G. Sebald noted already in the 1980s (particularly in his *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks. Zur österreichischen Literatur von Stifter bis Handke*), this presumed detailing of nature as stable actually superficially conceals underlying textual disturbances. As Markus Zisselsberger describes, Sebald readily noted the fragility of Stifter’s landscape descriptions. He summarizes Sebald’s findings by stating that, in Adalbert Stifter, “Sebald finds narrative strategies that are designed to hide the author’s pathological

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transgressions and control fantasies incompatible with nineteenth-century bourgeois morality. Behind Stifter’s deceptively harmonious landscapes, Sebald discerns signs of both man’s alienation from nature and the psychological deformation of the writing subject.” However, the problematic dynamics and disruptive tendencies that Sebald notes as legible within Stifter’s oeuvre are nullified in Vilsmaier’s film to instead showcase sensationalized images of a pristine nature scape. Thus, for example, to chart the progression of an unusual winter thaw in the village that enables Konrad and Sanna to travel over the mountain to Millsdorf at Christmas, the screen fills with a montage of peaceful images and soothing sounds representative of a calming landscape. Here, Stifter’s text is read in a lulling voice-over narration:

Überdies war an diesem Tage eine milde, beinahe laulichte Luft unbeweglich im ganzen Tale und auch an dem Himmel, wie die unveränderte und ruhige Gestalt der Wolken zeigte.

During this narration, viewers meditate on six discrete shots. In the first shot, water droplets trickle off thawing icicles into a barely visible stream. Then, a visible but thin stream makes its way through banks of melting snow. In the third shot, the camera focuses on a church steeple surrounded by brownish-green grass. In the background are half-snowy Alpine peaks. In a low-angle shot, the camera then focuses on clouds in the sky above mountaintops with noticeably little snow. The camera then returns to the thawing stream, which now moves quickly and forcefully, filled to the banks with melted snow. Finally, the camera gives the viewer a long take of the village – with the church prominently centered in the distance – surrounded by grassy hills, green pine trees, and mountains far in the background (figures 16–21).

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238 Vilsmaier, Bergkristall.
By including so many shots in this slow-moving sequence, Vilsmaier expands the space-time continuum of the film, creating meditative caesuras that mediate the arrests Stifter constructs through his lengthy and precise descriptions of the local landscape. The pleasing serenity of the sequence establishes nature in its quotidian, peaceful state as most desirable and achievable in village locales such as this. By extension, the sequence establishes hope that a similarly calm relationship between the two towns, whose enmity has caused the family great suffering, can be achieved by the conclusion as well.

The achievement of interpersonal harmony, to which the sequences gesture, remains a central characteristic of the Heimatfilm genre. To emphasize this motif,
Vilsmaier alters the family dynamics in his adaptation to suture the narrative more firmly to the *Heimatfilm* tradition. In both versions, after the marriage of the father (from Gschaid) and the mother (from Gschaid’s neighboring, rival town Millsdorf), the couple and their children become ostracized: townspeople no longer bring their shoes to the father for repair; the children are bullied at school; the mother is treated badly at social occasions. In Vilsmaier’s adaptation, however, the mother feels obliged to leave her husband and children in Gschaid and return to her familial home in an effort to help her family financially and socially.\(^{239}\) This alteration underscores the theme of belonging – or lack thereof – central to the *Heimatfilm*’s ultimate goal of reestablishing order of the community. For Vilsmaier, the melodrama is not principally about saving the children caught in the snowstorm, or revealing the possibly dangerous and devastating side of nature, but much more about the town accepting the mother into the community so that the family can be reestablished and can integrate itself into the whole. Nature, the film suggests, is only violent on extreme occasion, like the town’s inhabitants, and can quickly be overcome. When Sanna and Konrad are saved, the townspeople recognize their shared humanity, and the townspeople of both villages accept the mother and her children. The film then narrates and shows how the towns become as peaceful as they were at the beginning, before the marriage of a couple from two rival towns only momentarily disrupted the established norms. All is good, forgiven, and normal again at the end. Stifter’s “sanftes Gesetz” becomes diluted through the *Heimatfilm* genre’s appeal to communal order, and appears to rehash more popular understandings of his work as a paean to the serenity of nature.

\(^{239}\) In Vilsmaier’s film, the children must travel from Gschaid to Millsdorf in order to see their mother, which amplifies the emotional affect of the situation. In Stifter’s text, however, the mother never leaves Gschaid; the children travel to Millsdorf to pay their maternal grandparents regular visits.
Vilsmaier also extends the *Heimatfilm*’s telos of reestablishing order beyond the bounds of the embedded narrative, further eradicating the violent problematics detailed in Stifter’s “sanftes Gesetz,” by drawing here upon the *Bergfilm*. Upon the conclusion of Stifter’s story, the family in the frame narrative, who once disregarded the mountain, as well as one other, has been corrected; they – like the characters in the embedded story – have learned to respect the mountain more greatly, to practice situational awareness based on past contexts and experiences. The inculcation of values displayed in the conclusion, which traces a process from disregard to regard, parallels one of the film’s pedagogical missions: inculcating in modern viewers an appreciation for literary works of the past.

To explore this mission more closely, let us briefly return once more to the intertext of the *Bergfilm* genre, particularly as represented by *Das Blaue Licht*. On a broader scale, the *Bergfilm* traditionally served to spread and promote cultural traditions of the past via a contemporary popular medium with the end goal of educating the modern tourist. As critics have noted, at the crux of the mountain film is an educative mission that goes beyond showcasing a sense of Romantic reverence for nature among viewers; instead, these films set out to train viewers to adopt this reverent perspective, thereby transforming “the consumption inherent in tourism into a thoughtful, respectful gaze.”

For *Das blaue Licht*, as for *Bergkristall*, the frame narratives establish the achievement of this grand goal. As for *Heimatfilme*, the genre ultimately created sounds and images of cultural heritage and inculcated in viewers a certain conception of Germanness closely aligned with a lost, nostalgic past.

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240 Nenno, “‘Postcards from the Edge,’” 69.
The conclusion of Vilsmaier’s film achieves both educative aims of the *Berg*- and *Heimatfilm* genres. However, his project is not only about training the tourist’s eye (although it does achieve that), nor about establishing familial and communal ties in a geographical space (although it does achieve that as well). As the ending sequence indicates, his film is also about rekindling an interest in the long heritage of German literary and filmic culture in a globalized, media-saturated world as a new form of grounding. To recall, upon their arrival in Niedergschaid, the family of four is distracted by technology and barely in communication with one another. In comparison with the family’s disinterest and physical distance from one another during the drive, the blocking and behavior of the family unit at the end of the story reveals that a certain modeling of literature has helped to reestablish their bonds. Whereas the opening sequence is constructed out of a series of abrupt cuts in which only one or two family members are placed within a shot’s frame, the entire family is present within the shot at the end of the film. Here, the father, who was previously tuned out and at times dozing in the car, now sits upright, attentively listening to each word of the priest’s concluding remarks. Sitting across from the father on the couch, the older brother allows his sister to rest her legs upon his lap while the mother strokes her daughter’s hair (figure 22).
In the beginning of the film, the family members were individually portrayed in multiple shots, each distracted by electronic devices. In this final sequence, they are shown together in one shot together.

Through literature, the film indicates, intimacy and community have been reestablished among the family, and by extension, it seems as though the family has rekindled an appreciation for modes of communication beyond the digital.

Through the use of the Bergfilm and Heimatfilm genres as intertexts, Vilsmaier protests the pure emulation of Hollywood models of adaptations without cultural indigenization, and finds in the nation’s filmic past models through which one can override “foreign” Hollywood filmic aesthetics and reterritorialize German film adaptation practices, thereby reclaiming the national in the transnational. Ironically, although his aesthetic approach greatly differs from that of the Shakespearean German films explored in Chapter Two, one of the greater aims of his film certainly resonates with their aims: to point viewers back to (German) literature. Vilsmaier, as I have shown, extends this aim to include a renewed appreciation of popular German film culture as well. Whether Vilsmaier’s project – in its large scope – achieves his aims is, however, debatable: he indeed makes Stifter popular again and accessible, but at the risk of oversimplifying the lively and critical dynamics of his source and intertexts in a way that reinscribes the very understandings that have led these forms to be less valued throughout history.
IV. From the New German Cinema to the *New New German Cinema*

As discussed above, any history of popular German cinema must include the genres of the *Bergfilm* and *Heimatfilm*, both of which Vilsmaier resurrects for his adaptation. However, beyond the popular, German cinema has another long history of filmmaking aesthetics, which has received much attention in scholarship throughout history and which has also seen a renewed interest by filmmakers and scholars working in the twenty-first century: auteur cinema. This cinema, too, delves into canonical literature, creating contemporary classical adaptations for the (trans)national screen that provide yet another counterpoint to the dominant model of appropriating Hollywood blockbuster forms. One such film is Schipper’s *Mitte Ende August*, which offers an alternative possibility for canonical adaptations: his film shows what a contemporary classical adaptation could look like today if a director were to appropriate stylistics from Germany’s treasure trove of auteurist filmmaking practices in an exploration of the present.

Although the history of German auteur filmmaking can be traced to its early days with directors like Lang and Murnau, a more formal auteur cinema movement commenced in the 1960s when more than two-dozen directors explicitly defined themselves as members of a new counter-cinema movement in the country. These directors had been dissatisfied by the filmic fare circulating on nationwide screens, where popular war films painted West German soldiers as blameless victims of warfare (as in *Die Brücke*, 1959) and *Heimatfilme* glorified the nation through pristine images of the German or Austrian countryside that appeared unaltered even in the direct aftermath of the war. Wanting to provide new images for the nation that grappled with the past and
brought the political and critical onto the screen, and inspired by Italian Neorealism and French New Wave aesthetics, these directors came together with a mission. As pronounced in their Oberhausen manifesto, they proclaimed popular filmmaking, or “Papas Kino,” dead and rallied for a new cinema free from economic concerns and generic conventions.

The group’s members succeeded at creating low budget, politically engaged films that rejected Hollywood’s aesthetics of identification and continuity (through editing, lighting, and other formal means). The movement proved prolific well until the late 1970s when the production of auteur films dwindled and general interest in these works declined.241 By the time the movement’s main contributor, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, died in June 1982, critics quickly understood the passing symbolically. In the words of Wolfram Schütte, Fassbinder had served as “das Herz, die schlagende, vibrierende Mitte”242 of the New German Cinema, and with his demise came the death of the movement.

In recent years, the tradition of auteur filmmaking has reemerged in Germany, resurrected largely through films produced by the Berlin School. Although the original members of this group indeed studied at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin, the continued use of the name is a slight misnomer, given the increasing addition of directors to the movement who received their training elsewhere. But, whereas their training and background is now diverse, what the directors – and their film products – do still have in common are their shared counter-aesthetic practices and counter-thematic

241 Around this time, the movement did lose steam: several of the auteurs went to Hollywood or worked in television, and the public gravitated more and more toward enjoying American blockbusters and Bernd Eichinger’s popular entertainment films.
Similar to their New German Cinema counterparts, the main mission of the Berlin School directors is to focus on the present state of the nation that popular filmmaking has refrained from investigating. As Marco Abel outlines in *The Counteraesthetics of the Berlin School*, the goal of this movement is to “counter the ‘history’ of Germany manufactured by the mainstream industry with recourse to a series of microhistories.” Berlin School films focus on present realities in common everyday spaces that often find little to no representation on the silver screen. They reject adding to the throngs of films sensationalizing pre-unification history and instead eke out aspects, or “microhistories” of more mundane realities of quotidian life in post-unification Germany. As a result, unlike the films belonging to either the “cinema of consensus” cycle or popular “heritage film” cycles, these films “unmistakably take place in a specific time and place: in the here and now of unified Germany.”

By rejecting stylized and sensationalized film subjects, settings, and aesthetics to focus on the everyday, these films distinguish themselves from a large variety of other post-wall filmmaking trends. Rather than prioritizing visual spectacle and quick-paced action, the film styles itself on Berlin School aesthetics and structure, characterized – as Marco Abel notes – largely by

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243 Marco Abel, *The Counter-cinema of the Berlin School* (Rochester: Camden House, 2013), 306. Abel argues against understanding the Berlin School solely in relation to the New German Cinema, largely given the more transnational aesthetics at play as well as a changed socioeconomic framework within which these films came into being. He writes, “how they perform their filmmaking as auteurs differentiates them from their Autorenkino predecessors. Bluntly put, the Berlin School directors do not desire to make Autorenkino precisely because the sociocultural conditions of possibility . . . for this historically situated mode of filmmaking no longer exist.” I do not intend, as Marco Abel correctly warns in, to apply to these films a lens of the national, as they are indeed part of a greater transnational, global art film context. However, in the images they produce, and the aesthetics they utilize, the Berlin School does have historical contexts and precedents that are pertinent to this study and that as such will be emphasized.

244 Ibid., 23.

245 Ibid., 15.
long takes, long shots, clinically precise framing, a certain deliberateness of pacing, sparse use of extradiegetic music, poetic use of diegetic sound, and, frequently, the reliance on unknown or even nonprofessional actors who appear to be chosen for who they are [as real-world figures] rather than for whom they could be.246

These films are often set in spaces beyond the heavily trafficked urban centers that are immediately recognizable given their incessant representation in the media, in less marked, more rural areas such as on the far outskirts of Berlin. In contrast to most popular genres, they seek to showcase a view of contemporary life in modern-day Germany “that tourists hardly ever get to see”247 and that the media largely dismisses. Additionally, the stories Berlin School films tell are largely unremarkable, not determined not by cataclysmic or historical events; instead they foreground the more mundane events that individuals experience – or could experience – in routine, daily life.

V. *Mitte Ende August*: Resurrecting a Counter-Cinema Approach to Adaptations

With its commitment to bringing to the screen the underrepresented, the raw, and the quotidian, the Berlin School aesthetic program would seem contradictory for the creation of contemporary classical adaption. As we have seen to this point, the great majority of films in this genre conclude with either darkly tragic events or extremely joyful moments of reconciliation and reunion antithetical to the Berlin School approach. Based on the films discussed previously, viewers of contemporary classical adaptations witness numerous suicides and deaths, often transmitted directly from their source texts: Werther still kills himself in *Werther* as does Emilia in *Emilia* (possibly), and Ferdinand and Luise still die at the end of *Kabale und Liebe* as does Penthesilea in the staged play embedded within *Penthesilea-Moabit*. Joyful conclusions are well represented in this

246 Ibid.
247 Ibid., 55.
cadre as well: Goethe experiences overwhelming success with his *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* in *Goethe!* Emilia (possibly) frees herself from familial constraints in *Emilia* and the family unit in *Bergkrystall* becomes reestablished. Across these films, visual spectacle is often highlighted – whether through opulent settings and costumes, star actors and actresses, and/or special effects. The result is that across all of these films, the mediated images speak of extraordinary stories of intense love, betrayal, and grief and arouse deep affect on the part of the viewer, in turn.

However, it is precisely through a Berlin School–inspired lens that Schipper modernizes Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften*. In contrast to other films in the genre of German contemporary classical adaptations that align themselves with popular cinema, the stylistic choice to espouse a counter-cinema form accomplishes two main goals. First and foremost, the aesthetic principle visually transforms the novel’s central theme of renunciation – particularly of immediate enjoyment and spontaneous revelry – a practice that the positive figures of the novel possess. Indeed, whether renouncing city life for the countryside, renouncing sexual encounters for physical fidelity, or renouncing positive readings of monstrous events (such as a sacrificial understanding of an infant’s death), Goethe’s text foregrounds individuals who practice self-restraint who often run up against the protagonist Eduard, an individual quite lacking in self-control and maturity. Second, Schipper’s visual style also mirrors a leading motif in the story. As scholars have discussed at length elsewhere, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is a text that consistently comments upon acts of seeing and delineating how one perceives the world. This motif reveals itself through descriptions of technical apparatuses and visual representations that

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248 Admittedly, Sebastian Schipper is not considered a Berlin School director per se; however, in his adaptation *Mitte Ende August* he noticeably departs from the Shakespearean German adaptations through cultivated aesthetics and narrative forms largely considered as the definition of the Berlin School look.
punctuate the text, such as the portable camera obscura and the panorama, that fostered new ways of seeing. Following this trope, Schipper presents Goethe’s work in a fresh cinema style heralded by proponents for its ability to make viewers see anew.

Through Schipper’s transformation of themes and motifs crucial to Goethe’s text, *Mitte Ende August* ends up being the sole contemporary classical adaptation explored in this study that notably refrains from a linear telos, intense character identification, and scripted conclusions to embrace instead meditative moments, non-causal occurrences, and undetermined endings. Thus, espousing the counter-cinema practices of the Berlin School is, as I suggest, not only a decision that Schipper makes out of a type of adherence (albeit it through transmediation and modernization) to his source materials. It also enables Schipper to greatly de-dramatize much of the source text and condense characters in a way that allows the text to resonate better with contemporary viewers. To be sure, despite a number of dramatic deaths in Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften*, not one character dies in Schipper’s adaptation; this is perhaps the biggest indication that Schipper programmatically departs from both 1) the tragic course of Goethe’s text, and 2) traditional entertainment cinema themes and forms that trade in tragedy and melodrama.

Key to our investigation, then, is that Schipper’s film meta-cinematically counters the German film industry’s emphasis on the spectacular and extraordinary, which, as we have seen in previous chapters, is legible not only in popular cinema as a whole but also within the smaller field of contemporary classical adaptations. This cultural work of showing a way to create contemporary classical adaptations that deal with the present and

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249 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990). In his study, Crary explains how the figure of the observer – and therefore the concept of viewership – developed in the course of the nineteenth century alongside advancements in optical instruments.
the real rather than the imagined historical or fantastic is nothing less than a project of renovation, which is also the project taken up by Goethe’s – and by extension Schipper’s – main characters. In the following section, we will take a closer look at the presentation of this project of renovation in Schipper’s film, which within the filmic text centers on Thomas and Hanna’s renovation of an old summer house on the outskirts of Berlin and relationship difficulties that emerge throughout the course of this undertaking.

VI. New Images for Contemporary Classical Adaptations in Schipper’s *Mitte Ende August*

The film’s opening at once establishes the film’s plot while also underscoring the director’s aim of finding new images for the telling of contemporary stories. Schipper’s film begins at the Berlin abode of Thomas (Goethe’s Eduard) and Hanna (Charlotte), a husband and wife both in their mid-thirties. On this morning, Thomas and Hanna rise from bed and later finalize their recent purchase of a summer home, after which they leave Berlin behind them. The film begins, then, with a couple escaping the metropolis to spend the summer at an old house in an unmarked spot in the countryside. As Marco Abel explains, the central aim of Berlin School films is to get away from endlessly layering meaning onto the Berlin metropolis as the only symbolically valuable city in Germany. They instead explore spaces explicitly not pre-coded in the media through endless repetition in film, television, and the news. These films work “to get us away from the clichés of reality – to affect us so that we may begin to resee and rehear – that is, to resense and rethink – our own relation to the world we all too often perceive in overly reductive ways.”²⁵⁰ It is to such a symbolically open locale, a nondescript area

somewhere between Hamburg and Berlin, that the couple heads when fleeing the Berlin metropolis, excited to enjoy a long stretch of time solely with one another. The couple’s desire to abscond from the city parallels the film’s desire to get away from the mainstream.

Already in the beginning sequence of *Mitte Ende August*, the viewer is presented with two seemingly disparate modes of engaging in the world that increasingly clash until a breaking point is reached. On the one hand, there is Charlotte, who prioritizes logical thinking, measures her emotional responses to triggers, and has an awareness and ability to address immediate and future needs. On the other hand, there is her partner Eduard, who chaotically jumps from one grand yet illogical idea to the next, leaves important tasks unfinished, and indulges his whims and desires rather spontaneously. In the first two scenes, Charlotte and Eduard wake up, get dressed, and sign the paperwork necessary to complete the purchase of their summer house. However, throughout, Eduard dances around the room with excessive exuberance and cracks jokes at inappropriate times, while – at this early point – Charlotte approaches these same tasks rather staidly.

After the couple leaves Berlin, *Mitte Ende August* charts the renovation of their new abode, a process that briefly brings the pair closer together but then begins to separate them. In the film, the renovation project commences with the removal of outdated and unnecessary furniture pieces from inside the house. Hanna and Thomas tread through the house, removing décor, window treatments, and doors, dragging them out to be burnt. The house is thus rendered quite barren – stripped of details and trimmings that no longer serve their new owners’ purposes – so that it can be reconfigured anew. Throughout this process, the couple is portrayed as joyful and still
rather emotionally connected to one another; the two are often framed together in the sequence’s various shots (figures 23 and 24).

Fig. 23: Eduard and Charlotte empty the house of old furniture in Mitte Ende August. Eduard is in the foreground and Charlotte in the background by the pile of objects. Fig. 24: Together they sit side-by-side and enjoy a bonfire burning the objects they removed from the house.

Just as the house, at this point, begins to undergo changes, so too does the couple’s relationship. Shortly after the couple enjoys their solo evening burning old furniture and fixtures, the two find themselves at odds as to how to renovate the space. Should changes be made to the house based on emotion, imagination, and passion (as Thomas desires and with which Augustine concurs) or based on careful planning, logic, and realizable results (as Hanna hopes and with which Friedrich agrees)? Thomas, viewers quickly note, functions almost exclusively on impulse and emotion, not unlike the much younger Augustine. Throughout the film, he routinely seeks out the next thrill, which leads him to begin large-scale projects with no plan, know-how, or willpower for their completion. He is generally moved to action only when something pleases or excites him, and only for so long as it pleases and excites him. For instance, while shopping at the home repair store, Thomas spends his time playing with the largest and heaviest sledgehammer he can find, while Hanna meticulously gathers the various materials they need to make essential repairs (figure 25).
Thomas clearly purchases this large instrument, because after the trip, he immediately throws himself into the task of breaking down a wall to make a second entrance-way to the house, refusing to take Hanna’s advice about first consulting the building’s blue prints to determine whether the wall is weight-bearing or not. Hanna, on the other hand, consistently concentrates on immediate needs, prioritizing those tasks that can first make the house inhabitable and working on these areas, such as patching up small holes in the internal walls, despite their general mundaneness. Thus, while Thomas indulges in flights of fantasy, Hanna remains grounded and aware of possible effects and ramifications of their renovations. For example, throughout the film, Hanna is the one to remind Thomas of societal rules and physical principles, like the fact that they must have court-issued “Genehmigungen” for several of the changes they seek to make and that they should consult blueprints so as to not destroy essential aspects of the house.

As the couple continues to disagree, dissatisfaction in the relationship grows, which results in breaks between the construction of the filmic shot in the first scenes and the rest of the film. That the differing approaches the pair takes to reconstructing the house tears them apart and propels them toward other individuals (namely, their guests) is formally represented early on in the film through a literal division between husband and
wife. As the couple makes their first attempts to tackle the renovation project together, Hanna and Thomas become cut off from one another: a protruding wall splits the frame into two as if shot in a split-screen, placing Hanna in the bedroom repairing the walls, while Thomas stands in the bathroom leisurely sipping his coffee (figure 26).

The physical split between the two is later exposed in the filmic narrative as an indelible difference between the couple’s life philosophies, which indeed drives them away from one another and toward third parties they have invited: Augustine, Hanna’s spunky goddaughter, and Friedrich, Thomas’s recently divorced brother. Whereas Thomas’s playful and exuberant nature is quickly matched by Augustine’s youthful zest and naivety, Hanna’s ability to determine consequences, prioritize, and create concrete, workable plans makes her admire Friedrich, who – given his career as an architect – values and embodies similar traits.

In a telling sequence, all four characters discuss their understanding of “Wahrheit” over a candlelit dinner. The film formally represents the discussion as essential to understanding its plot: shot in medium distance and without eye-match cuts, the focus here is on the spoken words that convey how Hanna and Thomas cannot find common

Fig. 26: A split screen shows the two in different rooms. Charlotte continues to work on the house repairs, but Thomas idles and drinks coffee.
ground. For her part, Hanna maintains that truth is that which exists and occurs in the objective world, regardless of whether or to what extent one fantasizes about an event. Thomas, however, maintains that all actions in reality stem from first from an initial desire for their manifestation in the world. He explains the role of fantasy to be first and foremost in the construction of truth:

> Was passiert entsteht erst in der Fantasie. Wenn es dann auch wirklich noch passiert, dann ist es letztendlich nur eine Folge des Denkens oder der Fantasie. Erst im Prinzip wie in der Liebe. Wenn ich jemanden küssen will... Entscheidend ist, dass ich mich darauf freue. Denn dann tue ich alles, damit es passiert.\textsuperscript{251}

Thomas’s brother Friedrich concurs strongly with Hanna and counters Thomas by exclaiming that fantasy has little to do with the actuality of events in the objective world, crafting a metaphor that at once gestures to the project the film depicts as well as to the project of the film: “Wenn ein Haus gebaut wird,” he explains, “ist es wahr.” Hanna indicates that Thomas is mixing his understanding of the real with that which he finds enjoyable, stating, “Ich habe überhaupt nichts gegen Fantasie, aber wir reden halt über Wahrheit. Und nicht über das, was wir alle toll und super finden. Wenn wir jetzt alles, Wahrheit’ nennen, ist mit dem Begriff ruck, zuck nichts mehr anzufangen.”\textsuperscript{252} For her part, Augustine quickly sides with and supports Thomas. Unable to find a common ground, Thomas and Hanna grow farther away from each other and toward a more similarly-minded guest.

Thomas/Augustine and Friedrich/Hanna’s nearly incompatible differences represent a situation that, when read in terms of an overarching cinematic critique on Schipper’s behalf, mimics the way that popular and auteur cinemas often fail to fully find

\textsuperscript{251} Schipper, Mitte Ende August.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.
a middle ground they can both tread. Symbolically, the split between Hanna and Thomas occurs along the fault lines of the two main representational modes available for the production of an identifiably German adaptation aesthetic. On the one hand, there is Thomas’s worldview, which works on emotional affect and visual pleasure, much like popular and generic cinema. On the other hand, there is Hanna, whose real-world grounding and exploration of reality seems to represent the art cinema approach of the Berlin School, on display here.

The film codifies Thomas’s penchant for the exciting and pleasurable novelty as irresponsible and dangerous. He frequently separates himself from the group to strum his guitar while his companions follow through on concrete tasks of projects he has initiated. While swimming in the lake one day, for example, Thomas spies an abandoned boat and hurriedly pulls it ashore, gushing about how the four of them will soon be able to take it for a ride. When it actually comes to cleaning up the boat, however, he leaves the large task to his brother, who – we later see – sands down the bottom in the hot sun while Thomas lounges in the shade with his beloved guitar. This pattern of rejecting the responsibility of long-term tasks for short-term indulgence reaches a breaking point, however, when Thomas impulsively sleeps with Augustine, Hanna’s godchild.

Although Thomas’s and Hanna’s disparate worldviews are, in contemporary times, framed as a separation between filmic styles and principles, the approaches they represent also have important historical valences. Eduard’s approach to engaging with the world is the summation of an approach to art and life that is highly criticized in Goethe’s work: namely, dilettantism. When studied in relation to the context here, this aspect of Eduard’s nature, which Schipper also transposes into contemporary contexts, contributes
a more nuanced understanding of Schipper’s careful, if critical, approach to the genre of contemporary classical adaptations.

Readers have long understood *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, particularly the figure of Eduard, as an embodiment of Goethe’s critical analysis of dilettantism. The figure of the dilettante had come under fire at the end of the eighteenth century as a byproduct, according to Hand-Rudolf Vaget, of the concept of autonomous art.\(^{253}\) As explored in previous chapters, the concept of artistic autonomy had crystallized in the German tradition around the understandings of the artist as a standalone “Genie,” and an individual who took his art seriously. The dilettante, an individual who aligned more closely to the playful muse of antiquity,\(^ {254}\) provided a useful foil to the masterful artist. Unlike the master artist, this figure follows his passion for art to the point of blind imitation, foregoing serious study in art contexts and techniques. As Uwe Wirth summarizes,


For his part, Goethe had spent considerable time exploring this figure and had penned “Über den Dilettantismus” (1799) in *Propyläen* in collaboration with Friedrich Schiller. Key aspects of this figure, articulated in this text, reveal themselves in the figure


\(^{255}\) Ibid., 28–29.
of Eduard, who responds with enthusiasm to ideas on landscaping, gardening, architecture, fine art, and literature, but without undertaking them in earnest.

Thomas, in so far as he often finds himself inspired by grandiose ideas, masterful models, and his own fantasies but acts without reflection, seriousness, or learnedness, can be understood as a contemporary dilettante of sorts. Whether in his (self-chosen) roles as house renovator, guitar player, husband, gardener, boater, or even adulterer, Thomas’s behavior follows the same pattern: he finds himself inspired or stimulated to the point of immediately acting but skips the middle step of reflecting and learning that would allow him to aptly apply himself. In his desire to always be doing and to quickly entertain himself, he nearly destroys his marriage. On the night of his wife’s birthday, he sleeps with Augustine. The adulterous act itself is done with little meaning for Thomas; it is portrayed as yet another whim he follows to the extreme, yet another instance of how he rebels against the ennui of normality and the quotidian by seeking out something more exciting to do.

The undergirding desire to seek out entertainment, or to act out of a desire to pass time, as Goethe himself announced, is, however, the true tragic aspect of the film. And, upon completion of the adulterous act, Thomas becomes aware of the ramifications of his rather childish behavior. He immediately slinks away from Augustine’s side to soothe his despair by downing an entire bottle of vodka. He then signals an end to his adventure-

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256 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Über den Dilettantismus,” in Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens: Münchener Ausgabe, eds. Victor Lange, Hans J. Becker, Gerhard H. Müller, John Neubauer, Peter Schmidt, and Edith Zehm (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1988), 153. One of the characteristics differentiating the artist and the dilettante, as delineated in Schiller’s and Goethe’s text, centers on the distinction between work and play in regard to the production of art: “der Künstler der ächte Kenner hat ein unbedingtes ganzes Interesse und Ernst an der Kunst und am Kunstwerk, der Dilettant immer nur ein halbers; er treibt alles als ein Spiel, als Zeitvertreib; hat meist nur einen Nebenzweck, eine Neigung zu stillen, einer Laune nachzugeben.”
seeking behavior by taking his guitar with him down a long walk to the pond, where he
smashes it, the one plaything to which he consistently resorted when uninterested in
completing projects, to pieces. In destroying this object, he renounces his former way of
resorting to pleasure when faced with displeasing duties. He overcomes his tendency to
look elsewhere for excitement when life feels like a series of tasks, chores, and
responsibilities.

Thomas’s final renunciation of looking for and creating excitement instead of
participating more fully in his established reality parallels the film’s aesthetic principle.
Indeed, instead of providing visual entertainment, *Mitte Ende August* consists of long
takes of seemingly mundane events that – through their duration – force the viewer to
look more closely at daily events, to adopt the type of studied gaze that Eduard rejects
until the last moments of the film.

The aforementioned scenes, laced with an undercurrent of tension, are potentially
the most exciting in the film. Otherwise, following the Berlin School aesthetic of slow
cinema, the majority of the film consists of scenes in which cars creep up and down the
long driveway to the summer home several times, slow dinners are devoured by the light
of unromantic camping lanterns because the house does not yet have electricity, walls are
repeatedly patched and painted, and many moments are devoted to the brewing and
drinking of tea. In this unremarkable atmosphere, even disagreements between Thomas
and Hanna, all of which could quickly escalate, reach no greater climax or catharsis in the
film. This filmic aesthetic of renunciation, which parallels the renunciation throughout
Goethe’s novel, forces the viewer to feel a desire for excitement and intensity, only to
prevent the viewer’s ultimate participation in such thrills given the film’s insistence on
the ordinary.

The viewer’s desire for an escalation that remains unfulfilled by the film thematically parallels Thomas’s endless search for excitement. The film locates this desire for visual spectacle and pleasure as a horrific result of the mainstream media’s overblown narratives. Over another rather uneventful dinner at the summer home, Hanna’s father critiques the representation of love in literary and film fiction. By trading in images of grandiosity, he notes, such media corrupt humans’ expectations and understanding of adulthood and long-term relationships. In the longest monologue in a film otherwise marked by brusque dialogic exchanges, the father voices his criticism as follows:

Diese ganze Romantik, bis der Tod euch scheidet, ist doch ein einzigiger Scheiß und allein dem Terror aus Romanen und Filmen zu verdanken. Ja, wenn man so will, der erste Kollateralschaden, der erste Kollateralschaden durch das Medienzeitalter. Für mich ist das Terror . . . dies ist die Wahrheit über Erwachsene und die Liebe. Eine weitere darf ich Ihnen eigentlich nicht sagen, denn sie ist für die meisten Erwachsene zu monströs, um sie auszusprechen. Ich tue es trotzdem. Wer hat uns versprochen, dass es auf der Welt für jeden jemanden gibt, zu dem er passt? Oder den er liebt oder von dem er sogar zurückgeliebt wird.257

In other words, if we are to follow the father’s argument, the malaise and melancholia visualized within this film that Hanna and Thomas need to overcome are aspects of love and marriage that often find little to no representation in the media. As a result, there is a dearth of cultural models in contemporary society.

The father’s critique supports the film’s counter-aesthetic approach of renouncing fantasy and grandiosity to embrace images of “reality,” which in turn is a lesson that Thomas learns in the course of the film. In the concluding moments of the narrative, when all the visitors have left and Thomas and Hanna are left to determine how best to

257 Schipper, Mitte Ende August.
continue with their relationship, Hanna states quite clearly what needs to change. She explains:

Vielleicht ist ja irgendwann der Zeitpunkt gekommen, wo wir nicht mehr blindlings irgendwo hinlaufen müssen, nur um zu gucken, wie es da ist. Wo wir uns lebendig fühlen können, ohne dass immer irgendetwas ganz Neues beginnt. Ich glaub' einfach wir müssen uns entscheiden. 258

Hanna’s closing statement reinforces her father’s critique and confirms the necessity of Thomas finding meaning in life without resorting to constant thrill-seeking. It is this staider approach to adulthood that, as the film implies, the couple will now together embrace. Having been filmed in separate shots since Thomas’s adulterous act, Hanna and Thomas are finally shot standing together in the frame, in front of a window. Thomas quickly turns inward, and after a moment of quiet contemplation, Hanna too slowly turns away. In this motion of turning away lies a turning-in: Thomas and Hanna turn from looking outwards (toward excitement, toward others, toward Hollywood) to focus on themselves, and perhaps, to follow our argument, on their actions, their relationship, and German aesthetics (figure 27).

Fig. 27: The film ends with a shot that frames Charlotte and Eduard together. Turned towards one another, they each listen to what the other person is saying.

258 Ibid.
If we understand Thomas and Hanna’s house renovation project as a metaphor for the process of adaptation that Schipper undertakes, the final turn inward carries an additional layer of symbolic meaning: a greater call to arms for contemporary classical adaptation practices that engages in deep study of the source texts and the medium into which they are transmediating so that the two inform one another. Rather than solely looking externally for inspiration via blueprints for economically successful blockbuster forms, Schipper’s film maintains, contemporary classical adaptations can – and perhaps should – also be made by looking inwards, by espousing those filmic practices and aesthetics that are as much a part of cultural heritage as the literary works adapted. In so doing, perhaps certain “truths” and “realities” of life in contemporary Germany can come to the fore that otherwise go suppressed in the mainstream, which instead still tends to focus on grandiose narratives from pre-unification history.
CHAPTER 4

Adaptation Education? Teaching Contemporary Classical Adaptations

I. Introducing the Seventh Branch of the Adaptation Industry: Education

In previous chapters, I have highlighted how contemporary classical adaptations thematize processes of education. Often, these films chart the personal growth of key figures who develop in response to their engagement with a canonical work. The common thread of education that runs across these films jars, however, with scholarship that contends that the educational agenda associated with previous eras of German filmmaking has, in recent times, been dissociated from the filmic text due to transnational pressures and the pressures of entertainment. Yet this pedagogical drive has not disappeared; it rather remains alive and central in twenty-first-century German film in distinctive ways. Not only do contemporary classical adaptations engage viewers in interpretive acts in a way that juxtaposes with traditional film/literature hierarchies, but these films also have been created in response to nationwide concerns regarding media education. Thus, the genre must be contextualized as circulating within a “reading formation” in part created and shaped by educational agendas, the most principal of which involves a government-backed push in twenty-first-century Germany urging the development of students’ media literacy.

In his analysis of German films produced after 1989, Halle submits that cinematic works produced in the new era of transnationalism – particularly those films dealing with aspects of the German past – aesthetically jettison factual information and historical contexts. In this aesthetic shift, he notes, the main characters’ personal stories become the overriding determinant while the historical context within which these stories
take place diminishes. The reason for this approach is largely commercial: creating melodrama by placing excess emphasis on characters’ emotional lives allows contemporary films to better resonate with and draw in large, heterogeneous audiences. As Halle argues, the cost of this move results in German cinematic fare that distinctly breaks with the “ethical pedagogical goals developed over decades within the national ensemble.” As a result, he explains, the “greater expansive historical context remains external to the stories,” and therefore, the “Enlightenment ideal of moral-ethical pedagogy through art becomes nullified.” Instead of a cinema that supports an ethical, pedagogical agenda focused on educating the viewer, contemporary German cinema purportedly seeks to appeal to and entertain populations worldwide.

This assessment of modern-day German films requires further scrutiny. Is pedagogy within contemporary German cinema completely obsolete when it comes to popular productions? If not, where can it be located? What are its contours and aims? In his argument, Halle notes that pedagogy still remains a goal promoted within contemporary German society when it comes to films; however, education is no longer an aspect embedded within and supported by the filmic products themselves. In contrast to former eras of filmmaking (most notably, the New German Cinema), the educational work of films, he argues, is a goal both created and promoted by institutions external to the film product, which seek to exploit film to foster citizens’ acquisition of historical and cultural knowledge. To support this claim, Halle cites works produced by government-funded institutions that target the educational market in Germany. These works generally

259 Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 114.
260 Ibid., 114.
261 Cooke, *Contemporary German Cinema*, 29. Cooke writes: “It is the apparent circle, to be both artistically worthy – however this is defined – and commercially viable, that drives debate around the funding of German film.”
come in the form of what are called *Filmhefte*. These are small booklets centered on a particular film that offer instructors and their students background information, ready-made lesson plan ideas, and classroom activities that help individuals contextualize the plot and themes in the work. Oftentimes, these *Filmhefte* are created by collaborative efforts between media pedagogues, historians, journalists, and editorial teams; on occasion, film distribution companies also become heavily involved.

Although scholarship is correct to mention these materials, this line of argumentation assumes that the phenomenon of *Filmhefte* confirms a separation between film aesthetics and pedagogical incentives. Envisioning contemporary films’ aesthetic program as wholly separate from the educational agenda ascribed to these works by cultural institutions requires, I believe, the broader and more culturally inclusive perspective associated with intermedial platforms and circulations across social strata today – particularly for contemporary classical adaptations. Considering these films as hermetic products isolated from their development, in part, for use within educational contexts in Germany tends to separate art from economics, as the assessment disregards the role that the educational industry plays by creating and influencing a large market sector for adaptations. The relationship between the film industry and public education is, in fact, robustly dynamic today: film and public pedagogy continually merge and intertwine across multiple platforms. For example, film distributors plan, in the beginning stages of film production, to target the educational market by producing educational materials to distribute with their films. And a government-backed institution rates films based on how “valuable” they are for contemporary viewers and then offers financial
incentives for those that receive distinguishing marks. Thus, instead of viewing Filmhefte as items “extraneous to the film artifact’s orientation,” we should instead understand these materials as actually flagging educational efforts pivotal to the adaptation industry. Indeed, they indicate how the educational market partly drives the creation of contemporary classical adaptations from the beginning, influencing both the shape of these filmic products and their reception. What on the surface appears to be a simple “outsourcing” of education is, thus, actually a part of the industry itself. The educational apparatus reveals itself as a historically unrecognized “seventh” branch in what Murray has termed the “six branches of the material adaptation industry.” At least in the German context, it must also be taken into consideration along with the other six branches Murray outlines, including the author as a transmedial brand; the literary agent and intellectual property rights; book events; the role of literary prizes in the world of film; the screenwriter; and the strategies for marketing adaptations.

The uniquely dynamic relationship between film pedagogy and contemporary classical adaptations results from two correlated socio-historical phenomena. First, during the periods in which many of the source texts were written, education of the bourgeois

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262 David Welch and Roel Vande Winkel, “Europe’s New Hollywood? German Film Industry under Nazi Rule, 1933–45,” in Cinema and the Swastika: The International Expansion of the Third Reich Cinema, eds. Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 6–24, and Julian Petley, “Film Policy in the Third Reich,” in The German Cinema Book, eds. Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, and Deniz Göktürk (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 173–81. The current rating system, its goals, and effects deserve more attention than the scope of this project can provide. Most strikingly, today’s rating system for films in Germany has an eerie historical precedent. Just as films today can be stamped as “wertvoll” or “besonders wertvoll” and receive substantial tax benefits, in 1933, Goebbels changed the way governments rated and labeled film products. From 1933 to 1945, films could receive a rating as “staatspolitisch wertvoll,” “künstlerisch wertvoll,” “staatspolitisch besonders wertvoll,” and/or “künstlerisch besonders wertvoll.” As a result of their exemplariness, these films received substantial tax breaks and at times full exemption from entertainment taxation. Although the rating systems between then and now, as well as the prize-granting institutions themselves, have greatly changed, the fact that films in both eras are still graded for their “worth” remains.

263 Halle, German Film after Germany, 120.

reader/viewer had developed into the main – albeit heavily debated – objectives of literature and drama, the forbears of film culture. As previously explored, in the transformation of these classical works into contemporary films, pedagogical aims remain many times intact, albeit refashioned for modern-day societal needs. Second – and of key interest to the chapter here – these films have been created, rated, and distributed in a decade heavily marked by national concerns about the development of students’ Filmkompetenz. The recent push for the teaching of film literacy in Germany, which we will explore in detail below, has resulted in clear financial and promotional incentives for the production of films that can be used for explicit educational purposes. It has also resulted in a national environment abuzz with concerns about the developments of media literacy, which greatly influences the way in which the educational missions that are part and parcel of these films’ eighteenth- and nineteenth-century source texts are transmediated.

To be sure: the educational industry informs how contemporary classical adaptations look. As we have previously explored, foregrounded in these films are characters – and sometimes viewers themselves – who learn how to see in a new light. Here, we can recall both Emilia, whose life changes after her encounter with Lessing’s play, and the journalists in Penthesilea-Moabit, who are made more aware of intercultural discord in the multicultural metropolis through the modernized performance. That this new way of seeing comes about via engagement with a canonical work is, as I see it, not a coincidence. Rather, these characters embody the very development of a key literacy that the national government seeks to promote in its twenty-first-century citizenry.

In addition to influencing the film narrative and form (items internal to the film),
the educational industry also changes external aspects associated with these films – namely, paratextual materials associated with these films, such as advertising materials, critical reviews, film board recommendations, and the *Filmhefte* – that loudly pronounce these films as perfect for inclusion in classroom settings. Many of these materials are created and distributed, as we will see, by institutions with vested interests in education. Ironically, however, these materials – created largely in response to government-backed mandates for the promotion of media literacy – regularly undermine the development of media literacy in relation to adaptation, something the aesthetics and storylines of the films readily promote. In other words, media literacy, which finds itself modeled within the filmic text, is often not touched upon in student activities created for the film’s instruction, which paradoxically push heavily for students’ engagement with the print medium.

In the following section, I explore the extent to which public and private institutions promote contemporary classical adaptations for integration into the classroom. The palpable connection between educational/cultural institutions stems from growing debates in Germany about media literacy that began in earnest in 2003. Through close readings of institutional materials and statements, I suggest that the contemporary classical adaptation boom in the twenty-first century has been promoted, in part, by changes in state-regulated educational contexts. To determine how these educational and cultural institutions approach contemporary classical adaptations, I analyze a variety of *Filmhefte* produced by a range of institutions, including the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, Warner Brothers Germany, Conrad Verleih, and the Goethe-Institut. I ultimately find that there is a distinct tension between the type of media literacy promoted within the
storyline and aesthetics of the adaptation, and how these films are – in actuality – used in the classroom.

II. Vilsmaier’s Bergkristall and the Education Industry

To get an idea of how the film and educational industries work when it comes to contemporary classical adaptations, we begin with a look at events surrounding the release of Vilsmaier’s Bergkristall. Like many films in the contemporary classical adaptation genre, the release of Vilsmaier’s film occurred immediately prior to an anniversary celebrating the source text’s author. Thus, with the impending celebration of Adalbert Stifter’s 200th birthday in 2005, Bergkristall’s debut in November 2004 positioned Vilsmaier’s adaptation well for integration into many scheduled cultural activities, events, and offerings fêting the Bohemian writer. The release enabled the director to capitalize on the many celebrations planned in Germany and Austria. For instance, already in March of that year, the Oberösterreichischen Nachrichten reported a high number of commemorative events already taking place as part of the yearlong festivities. As reporter Walter Höfer wrote already in March 2005, “130 Veranstaltungen und 30 Ausstellungen stehen im Zeichen von Adalbert Stifters 200. Geburtstag.”

265 Vilsmaier and Vávrová, “Bergkristall: Interview mit Joseph Vilsmaier und Hauptdarstellerin Dana Vávrová,” interview by José Garcia. The book market, in turn, then capitalized on Vilsmaier’s promise of making the text more interesting and, perhaps, accessible to modern school-aged readers, with Insel Verlag producing two new editions of the work. The film’s impact on the book market is worth exploration, given the way that it parallels industrial incentives that undergird the production of contemporary literary adaptations in Germany (discussed in chapter one as another trend in post-war German film adaptation culture). Indeed, contemporary literary adaptations generally enable film and book markets to work in concert to profit off of one another, which indicates a level of commercial success that is more difficult to achieve with older works that are out of copyright. However, film/book productions surrounding highly celebrated anniversaries of canonical authors’ deaths may prove, financially, an ideal moment for collaborations around older texts. This fact further distinguishes twenty-first-century contemporary classical adaptations in Germany, given that many of Germany’s most renowned authors had anniversaries in the early 2000s.
Jubiläumsjahr öffnet den kulturellen Blickwinkel.”\textsuperscript{266} These activities and opportunities ranged from public readings and discussions to short tourist excursions replete with Stifter-related souvenirs, to culinary feasts where one could enjoy a \textit{Stifter-Forelle} and wash it down with a pint of \textit{Stifter-Bier}.

Within the milieu of immense Stifter hype, Vilsmaier’s film quickly turned into an opportunity to immerse viewers into one of Stifter’s most renowned works via a contemporary adaptation.\textsuperscript{267} Public viewings of \textit{Bergkristall} were thus naturally included in the line-up of scheduled public events, such as its showing – alongside Kurt Palm’s documentary \textit{Der Schnitt durch die Kehle oder die Auferstehung Adalbert Stifter} (2003) – at the New \textit{Heimatfilm} festival in Freistadt.\textsuperscript{268} To a certain extent, then, Vilsmaier’s film served as yet another source of public entertainment in line with the consumption of Stifter pints.

In addition to entertainment and commemoration, however, Vilsmaier’s \textit{Bergkristall} served yet another distinct function: teaching German students about Stifter’s works. Vilsmaier and Vartova had expressed early on the direct educational impact they hoped their film would have on school-aged children.\textsuperscript{269} And, indeed, the film was also clearly viewed as and formed into a pedagogical instrument by cultural institutions upon its release. Already in early spring of 2005, the \textit{Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Bildung und Kultus, Wissenschaft und Kunst} sought to integrate the film quickly into secondary education. To this end, they sponsored two separate teacher-training

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\textsuperscript{268} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{269} Vilsmaier and Vávrová, “\textit{Bergkristall}: Interview mit Joseph Vilsmaier und Hauptdarstellerin Dana Vávrová,” interview by José Garcia.
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opportunities aimed at assisting secondary school instructors in weaving Vilsmaier’s adaptation into their educational curricula. As reported by *Blickpunkt: Film* in April 2005:


At these trainings, teachers could expect to learn – as the advertising materials claimed – how to integrate the feature-length film into the classroom and to lead constructive discussions with their students informed by principles of film reception and film analysis.

Other cultural institutions reached out to teachers and their students. In November 2005, for example, the *Sudetendeutsche Stiftung* in Munich offered a “Schulfilmwoche ganz im Zeichen des Schriftstellers Adalbert Stifter.” This institution, which houses the Adalbert-Stifter Verein, runs an agenda that is admittedly less focused on fostering media literacy per se, but – through events such as hosting a film week – nevertheless shows itself to be vested in educating the community on Bohemian authors of the *Sudetendeutsch* areas through means beyond source materials. During this week, instructors were invited to bring their classes of students to one of the daily scheduled viewings, upon which the students would not only watch the film but would also receive a copy of Stifter’s novella, so that students and teachers could together focus on the original work later in class.  

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272 Again, the *Sudetendeutsche Stiftung*’s task is to spread knowledge about and protect *Sudetendeutsche* culture; thus the emphasis on the original is unsurprising. However, it does point to persistent ways, culturally in Germany and beyond, in which adaptations are continuously utilized as an aperitif for
On the one hand, the push to integrate Vilsmaier’s film into secondary education in 2005 reflects the extra emphasis placed on the canonical writer and his works during the commemorative year. On the other hand, however, the quick instrumentalization of Stifter’s film for use in the classroom is not unlike many of the other contemporary classical adaptations discussed here (many of which, it must be noted, were also released during or around commemorative milestones).\footnote{273} As a quick internet search of individual films mentioned in this study plus the keywords “Unterrichtsmaterialien” or “Filmheft” reveals, common to many contemporary classical films is that they are marketed upon release not only as entertainment films but also as pedagogical opportunities that expose students to Germany’s traditional literary canon.

Indeed, the push to integrate Vilsmaier’s film and other contemporary classical adaptations into the classroom is symptomatic of a larger and long-term curricular enterprise afoot throughout contemporary Germany, a curricular project that, as we will see, speaks incessantly of Filmbildung and Filmkompetenz but – especially for films in this genre – often finds itself stuck instrumentalizing these works in service of a relentlessly book-centric, print-dominant educational apparatus. That free, printed copies of Stifter’s novella were given to each individual student who viewed Vilsmaier’s \emph{Bergkristall} gestures toward a persistent dynamic haunting adaptation, whereby – and perhaps particularly with canonical authors, foremost – much greater emphasis is still given to reading over viewing, and to the original book over the adapted film. This emphasis on the original text, as we will see, is not symptomatic of the \emph{Sudetendeutsche Leseförderung} rather than being critically dealt with on their own (or in close conversation with the text) as also representative of this cultural history or in conversation with the text.

\footnote{273} The release of Haußmann’s \emph{Kabale und Liebe} aligned with the 200th year anniversary of Schiller’s death in 2005.
Stiftung alone but is common to even those institutions working heavily on film literacy-oriented endeavors.

Beyond Vilsmaier’s good timing, another reason why cultural institutions so quickly sought out Bergkristall for inclusion in nationwide Filmbildung-related enterprises is because it received a “besonders wertvoll” rating from the Deutsche Film- und Medienberwertung (FBW). The FBW, one of two film review boards in Germany,\textsuperscript{274} concerns itself with determining the worth of particular films, particularly for educational contexts. As they state in their own words, “Die FBW wird . . . anerkannt als älteste deutsche Filmförderung mit wichtigen gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Aufgaben. Im Laufe der Jahre hat sich die Filmbewertung im Sinne eines Wandels des Kulturbegriffes geöffnet.”\textsuperscript{275}

In terms of concrete tasks, the FBW has a panel of jurors who review select films to determine which ones can be considered “wertvoll” or “besonders wertvoll” for media users, and in particular for young citizens. These jurors are associated with the Bundesländer in which they are commissioned and include a crosscut of professionals who work with and within the film industry, from film festival organizers, film program designers, and film museum directors to film critics, university instructors, and media pedagogues. In addition to giving each film a specific rating, the jury members also write and publish a justification in which they describe the film and give specific reasons for announcing it as either “wertvoll” or “besonders wertvoll.” These ratings and descriptions aim to help, among others, teachers and school administrators. Together, they assist these

\textsuperscript{274} The other film review board is the Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft that serves as a voluntary German motion picture rating board determining the eligibility of films for release to various age groups and results in a stamped recommendation on the bottom left-hand corner of DVD covers.

individuals in determining 1) which films are most appropriate and productive for integration into the classroom and why, and 2) what discussions to have about these works. Commenting on the effect of their work in society, the board writes:

Die Prädikate sind Empfehlungen für herausragende Filme, schaffen Orientierung im vielfältigen Angebot. . . .

Die Begründungen der Jury werden als Information für Kinogänger und Medienutzer veröffentlicht. Sie leisten so auch einen Beitrag zur Diskussion um die inhaltliche und ästhetische Qualität und den kulturellen Wert von Medien. 276

The FBW is important to our study because films that receive a distinctive rating do not only benefit from words of praise via the critical commentaries that the board provides possible viewers. In addition, these films also enjoy lowered taxes and access to funds earmarked for their promotion, resulting in financial and commercial incentives that help the films garner increased viewership. For filmmakers, then, receiving a high distinction from the FBW is highly desirable. It is, however, of particular importance for those filmmakers producing contemporary classical adaptations, as these films have a long history of being used in educational contexts and often seek to target the school-age market to begin with. This may be even more so the case today, since the integration of film into school curricula has been made mandatory and takes place most commonly in German literature/culture courses at the Sekundar I and Sekundar II levels. 277

To return to our study of Vilsmaier’s Bergkristall, the FBW awarded the film their highest distinction: “besonders wertvoll.” But for what reason? The set of criteria

276 Ibid.
277 Activities within the Filmhefte analyzed here generally target students at the Sekundar I and Sekundar II levels. These levels, however, correspond to a variety of school types in Germany. For example, activities targeting individuals at the Sekundar I level are created for students at Realschulen, Hauptschulen, Gesamtschulen, and Gymnasien. Activities targeting individuals at the Sekundar II are for upper-class students at Gymnasien.
that the FBW relies upon for their award-making decisions is a bit abstract, and rightly so as the board must consider the film through a myriad of lenses.\textsuperscript{278} Foremost, as they attest, is the matter of whether a film proves itself to be exemplary for its genre.

“Entscheidend ist,” the committee writes, “ob der einzelne Film innerhalb seiner Gattung, des Genres (Komödie, Action, Thriller, Drama, Literaturverfilmung, Kinderfilm, Dokumentarfilm, u.a.) herausragt (wertvoll) oder besonders herausragt (besonders wertvoll) oder nur konventionell und durchschnittlich ist (also keine Hervorhebung verdient).”\textsuperscript{279}

The criteria are notably open; nevertheless, across the genre of contemporary classical adaptations, much can be gleaned by attending closely to the descriptions the FBW publishes. For instance, in justifying \textit{Bergkristall} as “besonders wertvoll,” the board cites the film’s fidelity to both its source text (Stifter’s novella) and its filmic intertext (the \textit{Heimatfilm}) and thereby indicates that these traits make the film easily implementable in a curricular unit on German realism or popular cinema genres – albeit, likely, the former.\textsuperscript{280} Across this particular evaluation, comments emphasizing fidelity, faithfulness, and nationhood serve – at least in this example – as overriding factors in the evaluation process. As the jury writes,

\begin{quote}
Vom Schluss her lässt Joseph Vilsmaiers Film sich ohne Schnörkel so erzählen: Eine alte Legende, 1845 von Adalbert Stifter in eine Novelle gefasst, und jetzt für das Kino in einer gelungenen Gratwanderung in große Bilder und große Gefühle geformt. Konsequent und mit gestalterischer Kraft gibt Vilsmaier dem Genre des Heimatfilms, was des Genres ist. Die Inszenierung ist pur und direkt, die Darsteller bei allen genrebedingten Klischees hervorragend. . . . Im Schnee
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{278} “Bewertungskriterien,” \textit{Die Deutsche Film und Medienbewertung FBW}, accessed October 20, 2017, \url{www.fbw-filmbewertung.com/bewertungskriterien}.
\textsuperscript{279} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{280} Matthias Schönleber, \textit{Schnittstellen. Modelle für einen filmintegrativen Literaturunterricht} (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 84.
The two aspects cited for *Bergkristall’s* receipt of the highest distinction both relate to an idealization of cultural objects from the past. First, as the jury contends, the film achieves a “pur und direkt” transformation of Stifter’s realist novella. The adjectives used to define the work are synonymous, of course, with that slippery criterion *faithful*, and they work to reify the original literary text. In the context here, this evaluation underscores the film’s potential to resonate with students who have read or will read Stifter’s novella. Second, the jury sees the film as strongly adhering to an important genre from German film history, resulting in a visual spectacle that renews the interest in the *Heimatfilm* tradition.

Vilsmaier’s film is not the only contemporary classical adaptation the FBW promotes with words praising the film’s ability to represent its source texts and intertexts accurately. Fidelity – in some shape or form – appears to be a central criterion for films in this genre. Several of the films explored in this study (among many others not explicitly mentioned here) have also received similar approval by the FBW. Across the committee’s justifications for awarding several large-scale contemporary classical adaptations with the distinctions “wertvoll” or “besonders wertvoll,” a given film’s adherence to past national products repeatedly comes to the fore. For example, in their justification for granting Stölzl’s *Goethe!* the distinction of “besonders wertvoll,” the board members emphasize how the film visually represents daily life in the eighteenth century in a rather historical manner and contextualizes the greater literary movement of

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282 Here, I refer only to large-scale films, given the fact that it costs anywhere between 300 to 1,200 euros to submit the film for a rating, thus proving a financial hardship for those films with tight and limited budgets.
the *Sturm und Drang* period in which Goethe began writing. They see these two aspects of the film as working in concert potentially to galvanize students to read Goethe’s original text. The committee writes,


Although the jury notes that the film cannot represent the *Sturm und Drang* movement precisely, it singles out small historical details from eighteenth-century life – such as writing with quills – as one of the reasons for the film’s value. The other reason for the movie’s merit, according to the jurors, is that the film may readily function – as the *Sudetendeutsche Stiftung* expected of Vilsmaier’s *Bergkristall* by representing and returning readers to a work of Bohemian German literature – to instill in students a desire to engage with the original.

In addition to valuing films that adhere to historically appropriate details in the mise-en-scène and costumes, the committee also finds extremely valuable contemporary classical adaptations that alter the dynamics of their source text in a way that sheds light on previously unacknowledged aspects of the original work. Speaking of Hermine Huntgeburth’s *Effi Briest* (2009), for example, the committee praises how the new adaptation draws attention to a crucial element only legible between the lines of

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Fontane’s work. Huntgeburth, they note, brings to the screen an underlying female sexuality that is concealed in Fontane’s work but that nevertheless undergirds character and plot development in the original. However, lest adapted works go too far afield, the committee also lauds how the film smartly refrains from diverging too much from the events in the original.

Running through the FBW’s justifications is the common thread of fidelity, which is repeated in a number of ways. At times, it materializes as praise for the adaptation’s education of viewers in a particular interpretation of a canonical work. At other times, it appears as a commendation for the way in which the film rouses viewers to (re)turn to the original work.

As discussed at length in previous chapters, the comments the jurors often provide for contemporary classical adaptations are as old as the genre itself. However, as I will explore in the next section, in the context of contemporary classical adaptation

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filmmaking and reception, it is a stance that today proves ironic if not problematic for the project of media literacy. This is largely because the very cultural institutions that seek to teach film analysis to students are, as we have begun to note here, largely approaching adaptations in a manner that stands at odds with their intended goal of film literacy. Indeed, if one follows the approaches provided by most *Filmhefte*, the teaching of contemporary classical adaptations ends up being an activity that asks students to heavily engage with the original text. As a result of this bias, the *Filmhefte* diminish the ways in which these films could further provoke students’ reflection on and development of media competency.

To understand how and why films – and, in particular, contemporary classical adaptations – have been so heavily integrated in recent years into curricula for media literacy development, but in ways that often ultimately shortchange media literacy in favor of traditional text-centric education – we must direct attention to two historical events: first, to recent debates and mandates concerning *Filmbildung* in modern-day Germany; and second, to the history of teaching with adaptations in German classrooms.

In regard to the recent context, I provide below a chronology of events that have proven key to the advancement of cultural and institutional work with film across German educational contexts. Particular emphasis is given to how and when government and industry-backed approaches to *Filmbildung* developed, the modes through which film literacy is targeted, and the possible effects this project of fostering film literacy has in the cultural sphere. In short, among the many advances that have resulted from *Filmbildung* in Germany – from the organization of numerous conferences to the establishment of a mandate to integrate film into all core subjects – one particular effect
proves integral for our study: the development and implementation of numerous *Filmhefte*, easily and readily available to any instructor now required to teach through and with film.

III. *Filmbildung* and *Filmhefte* in Twenty-First-Century Germany

Despite conversations about film and pedagogy that took place throughout the entirety of the twentieth century, at the end of the 1990s the medium still had no systematic place within Germany’s school system. Whether an instructor included films in class was up to his or her discretion. Moreover, these instructors had to rely on their hard-earned knowledge of and familiarity with the film medium if they desired to do more than a simple in-class screening. Thus, during this first century, film often remained – at best – a tangential object in school curricula. As Matthias Schönleber, lecturer of pedagogy at the Freie Universität Berlin and instructor at the Gymnasium der Königin-Luise-Stiftung, explains,

Die beinahe hundert Jahre währende Auseinandersetzung von Schule und Deutschdidaktik mit dem Film hat auch nach dem Jahrtausendwechsel zu keinem befriedigenden Ergebnis geführt. Weder hat der Film seinen Platz im Deutschunterricht gefunden, noch zeichnet sich ein übergeordnetes Konzept einer Filmdidaktik für den Deutschunterricht ab.286

The situation began to sharply change after the turn of the century in Germany. Upon securing her position as State Minister for Culture and Education in 2002, media scholar Christina Weiss coined the word “Filmleseschwäche” to describe the putative

285 Natalie Hahn, “Filmbildung im deutsch- und im DaF-didaktischen Handlungsfeld: Eine kontrastive Perspektive,” *Film im DaF/DaZ Unterricht. Beiträge der XV. IDT Bozen*, eds. Tina Welke and Renate Faistauer (Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2015), 20. As Hahn explains, it was only within the context of the media literacy movement in Germany that *Mediendidaktik* was integrated into the curriculum for teacher education programs. In some cases, this training is considered obligatory, in other programs it remains an elective course within the curriculum.

difficulties German schoolchildren had when it came to engaging critically with moving images.\footnote{Unger, “Cultivating Film Audiences,” 8. As Unger explains, the term Weiss coined builds on the German word for dyslexia: “Lese-Rechtschreib-Schwäche.” The neologism proves notable for our study because, already in the term, we again see the foregrounding of print and text medium (reading) over seeing, even by those very individuals working to promote a very different type of competence: the ability to analyze moving images. A different term for this would better push against the consistent reification of the book and print media over images.} Using this neologism as a springboard for a greater platform, she began a movement that would result in a nationwide and multi-pronged government-backed approach to promoting film education in school curricula.

Almost immediately, politicians and educators – responding to Weiss’s speeches and declarations – announced that film education was necessary for the cultivation of interculturally competent twenty-first-century citizens. Public figures noted that the audiovisual medium now dominated students’ experience of the world, and argued that teaching students how to attend critically to moving images was paramount for their success.\footnote{Unger, “Cultivating Film Audiences,” 9.}

Of all the events that ensued, it was first and foremost the work undertaken by the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung in the early 2000s that broke new ground and set the standard for future advancements. To begin with, the organization responded to increasing national concerns about film and video games’ negative influence on youth, and it created a branch specifically devoted to multimedia and tasked it with bolstering and supporting Filmbildungsarbeit throughout the country. The decision to involve the organization so centrally in building media literacy was a response to both internal and external pressures. While researching film literacy models in response to the concerns voiced by Weiss, the organization became aware of the long and, as Katrin Wilmann argues, effective history of film education in Britain, most notably as represented in the
initiative Into Film. These internal concerns and external examples of a more progressive educational framework with film spurred the Bundeszentrale to catch up rapidly with the media age. Rather than reinvent the wheel, they chose to import some of Into Film’s tactics: namely, among others, the creation of pedagogical materials for the teaching of film, referred to as Filmhefte.

The pioneering work for the establishment of a German film initiative took place in the context of the first Federal Film Congress in March 2003, an event organized by the Bundeszentrale that brought together a wide array of professionals with vested interests in film. Attendees ranged from directors and journalists to film critics and public intellectuals. Together, these individuals discussed film competency and methods for its integration into the educational sphere. The 2003 congress proved successful. Several organizers and key participants immediately drafted a ten-point to-do list for educators of film and published a mandate for film competence. Here, in the very first bullet point of the Filmkompetenzerklärung, still prominently displayed on its film portal, the Bundeszentrale announced itself responsible for anchoring film within and across educational institutions “in den Schulen, den Universitäten und den Fortbildungsstätten.” In the second bullet point, it requested that all students be taught how to appreciate and analyze films. And in the third, it particularly stressed that film should be fully integrated into existing coursework and curricular models, with the expectation that it be taught across disciplines.

To help instructors – at this point, often with little to no experience with film – orient themselves in a sea of choices, the agency compiled and published a film canon.

only four short months later, in July 2003. This compilation of world films, thirty-five in total and spanning from 1920 to 1999, was established by a panel of eighteen experts who selected and didacticized what they determined were “Meilenstein[e] der Filmgeschichte” and thereby prime candidates for educational endeavors. The canon, as the organizers believed, would give instructors concrete support for developing students’ film competence by pre-selecting a variety of films that individually represented key movements, genres, and styles in film history and would work in concert as “Wegmarker der Filmgeschichte.” As the Bundeszentrale maintains in the introduction to the compilation,

Ziel war es, bedeutenden Werken der Filmgeschichte auch im Schulunterricht mehr Aufmerksamkeit zu verschaffen und so der filmschulischen Bildung in Deutschland neuen Auftrieb zu geben. Der Kanon erhebt dabei nicht den Anspruch, einen vollständigen Überblick über das umfangreiche Schaffen der schon über 100-jährigen Filmgeschichte zu geben. Vielmehr will er sensibilisieren für die Vielfältigkeit dieser Kunstform, für die Geschichte des bedeutendsten Mediums des 20. Jahrhunderts und für das Verstehen des Films der Gegenwart.

In addition to providing instructors with implementable materials, as editor Katrin Wilmann also explains, another important component involves inculcating teacher.

290 Der Filmkanon,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, accessed October 20, 2017, http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/kultur/filmbildung/filkanon/. The Bundeszentrale lists all the films included in the canon, which consists of both national and international films created between 1920 and 1999. The majority of these films are non-German in origin. Included in the list are thirteen U.S. films, seven German films, five French films, three Italian films, two Soviet Russian films, one British film, one Polish film, one Iranian film, one Canadian film, and one Spanish film. Nearly all of these films are fictional feature-length films – there are surprisingly few documentaries, avant-garde films, or literary adaptations.


292 Katrin Wilmann (media branch director), interview by Bridget Swanson, Berlin, July 7, 2016.

293 Ibid.

294 “Der Filmkanon,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.
autonomy so that instructors would feel confident in integrating other films themselves.\textsuperscript{295} By organizing this conference and following up with published materials and expert suggestions, the Bundeszentrale showed the extent to which the government would invest in Filmbildung, paved the way for the creation of concrete solutions, and became the first entity in Germany to undertake the creation and distribution of Filmhefte for use in classroom instruction.

Several notable developments followed in the wake of the Bundeszentrale’s film congress. In 2005, Weiss founded Vision Kino – Netzwerk für Film und Medienkompetenz, a public-private umbrella organization tasked with streamlining film education programs nationally. One of the most pivotal of this agency’s early contributions was their sponsorship of the translation of film critic Alain Bergala’s theoretical work \textit{L’hypothese cinema. Petit traité de transmission du cinema à l’école et ailleurs} from 2002 into German.\textsuperscript{296} The French initiative for integrating film into school curricula had begun in earnest around the same time as the German initiatives discussed here began. To note, only two years before Weiss assumed responsibility for the German educational sector in 2002, Bergala secured a position in 2000 as advisor to the French Minister of Education, Jack Lang, and was specifically tasked with supporting arts education in schools. Bergala’s worked proved helpful to the film movement in both countries, with educators quickly gravitating toward the work to support their classroom instruction.\textsuperscript{297} In Germany, the book affirmed the country’s increasing emphasis on integrating film into school curricula, provided additional support for film education.

\textsuperscript{295} Wilmann, interview by Swanson.
professionals, and was often passed out for free at film education events. It was also sold (and is still sold) at a reduced rate through the Bundeszentrale, which made and makes the book quite accessible to anyone interested in Bergala’s premise and approach.

A year later, the Bundeszentrale and Vision Kino cooperated on the overhaul of their joint online film portal, Kinofenster.de. The portal had begun in 2000 as a rather stagnant online magazine. The relaunched website, however, now provided educators with timely open-access tools supporting them in selecting and integrating films into their students’ coursework, or in providing a pedagogical framework for a field trip to a cinema event. Today, the website includes updates regarding film-related news stories and an ever-growing database of training events, publications, additional Filmhefte for films beyond the original thirty-five canonical works, and RSS and Facebook extensions that allow the Bundeszentrale to reach target audiences virally. According to Wilmann, this portal will undergo further redesigning that will shape the future of film education in Germany. No longer interested in producing printed Filmhefte, the agency is currently working on offering curricular materials in new ways that take advantage of streaming possibilities and interactive platforms.

The continued development of teaching materials targeting film in the digital age is essential, particularly because film – as a result of the Bundeszentrale’s work – is now a required component of all school studies. In March 2012, the Kultusministeriumkongress published a mandate reinforcing the teaching of media and

298 Henzler, Zur Filmästhetik und Vermittlung, 14. As Henzler explains, in response to the translation, entire departments of study at the post-secondary level were created according to his model, indicative of the growing emphasis on film and media pedagogy nationwide.
299 Should instructors desire to take their students out to a film debut, Kinofenster.de often provides educational materials in time for a film’s theatrical release to the public.
300 Wilmann, interview by Swanson.
film throughout German schools. In this white paper, they declare media education as belonging to the “Bildungsaufträge der Schule, denn Medienkompetenz ist neben Lesen, Rechnen, und Schreiben eine weitere wichtige Kulturtechnik geworden.”\textsuperscript{301} The congress particularly cites \textit{Filmbildung} in order to illuminate the necessity of integrating A/V media forms critically across the curriculum.

Indem Medien Teile unserer Kultur und zugleich ihre Mittler sind, versteht sich Medienbildung als Querschnittaufgabe kultureller Bildung. . . . Einen Beitrag herbei leistet die Filmbildung. In der Begegnung mit dem Medium Film, seiner Sprache und seiner Wirkung wird die Sinneswahrnehmung geschult, die ästhetische Sensibilität gefördert, die Geschmacks- und Urteilsbildung unterstützt und die individuelle Ausdrucksfähigkeit erweitert.\textsuperscript{302}

As the demand to teach film in German schools increased throughout the 2000s, one can note a parallel rise in the number and variety of agencies that began producing materials for this purpose. Often using the \textit{Bundeszentrale’s Filmkanon} and \textit{Filmhefte} as role models, at least three additional types of organizations now produce readily implementable curricular materials for films, accessible through film portals and other online platforms.\textsuperscript{303} The first group of organizations includes private-public organizations, such as Vision Kino and the Institut für Kino und Filmkultur. Straddling the educational sphere and the film industry, these organizations have tapped into the market in a way that benefits the two constituent groups these institutions serve: filmmakers and educators.\textsuperscript{304}


\textsuperscript{302}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{303}Natalie Hahn, \textit{DaF-Filmportal}, accessed October 20, 2017, www.daf-filmportal.de. On her website, Hahn offers an annotated list of film portals targeting students whose native language is German.

\textsuperscript{304}Wilmann, interview by Swanson. Often less robust in their approach, the \textit{Filmhefte} Vision Kino products are viewed by members of the \textit{Bundeszentrale} as watered-down knockoffs of their own work in \textit{Filmhefte}. In addition, the organization’s trade in pedagogy is seen by some members of the \textit{Bundeszentrale} as a diversion from the organization’s main mission of networking and streamlining.
Many distribution companies indeed work in concert with media pedagogues at organizations like Vision Kino, but some film distributors choose to offer pedagogical materials in house. Thus, the second group of organizations that produce Filmhefte today are the film distributors themselves, who have recognized the growing education sector as a demographic worth targeting. In addition, then, to materials offered by public or public-private organizations, instructors can also find a plethora of ancillary teaching materials by going directly to the websites of Concorde and Warner Brothers Germany, among others. Some distributors have even gone so far as to create their own portals in recent years. Noteworthy here is Filmladen’s Kino macht Schule, which offers information and materials quite similar to those available at Kinofenster.de, with the caveat that the materials provided relate solely to Filmladen’s own film products.

Finally, the third category of institutions that create and distribute Filmhefte do so for the promotion of German language and culture learning domestically and/or abroad. This is largely due to a parallel movement for the advancement of media literacy in foreign language education, which now considers mediated communication an essential, twenty-first-century skill. This grouping includes institutions such as the Goethe-Institut,305 the collaborative DaF-Filportal created by Dr. Natalia Hahn and her DaF students offered through the Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg, as well as materials produced by German publishing houses Klett-Langenscheidt and Cornelsen. Although this third category mixes public and private entities – the Goethe-Institut and Klett-Langenscheidt and Cornelsen – they all aim to produce materials for the inclusion of film

305 Here, I broadly refer to the 32 Filmhefte available through The Goethe-Institut Brussels, as well as film projects funded by Goethe-Institut Frankreich (Projekt Cine Allemand) and Goethe-Institut Italien (Projekt Film-Rucksack I und II).
in the foreign language classroom.\textsuperscript{306} Similar to teachers of German for native speakers, these instructors, too, must grapple with how to integrate media literacy given recent advancements in foreign language education standards that now acknowledge media literacy as an essential skill. As Hahn explains,

\begin{quote}
Die Vermittlung der Filmkompetenz ist genauso für den muttersprachlichen wie für den fremdsprachlichen Unterricht relevant, denn Kinder und Jugendliche sind von der Bilderflut nicht nur ausschließlich in ihrer Erstsprache umgeben, sondern werden ständig auch mit Medien in einer fremden Sprache konfrontiert (vgl. Internationale Fernsehsender bzw. Kinioprogramme). Der Einsatz von Filmen im Fremdsprachenunterricht trägt ein enormes Potenzial in sich. . . \textsuperscript{307}
\end{quote}

Hahn’s work in this area – which includes curating an online film canon targeting DaF learners – is related to recent trends in foreign language education, whereby educators are becoming increasingly aware of the need to meaningfully integrate media education into the foreign language classroom. This trend is reflected in and promoted by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR, which has performance descriptors for students’ film and audio/visual comprehension, and by the National Standards\textsuperscript{308} (created by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, or ACTFL), which has established a twenty-first-century skills map that identifies media literacy as an important component of language education. That these leading organizations and rating systems prioritize media literacy makes the Filmhefte offered through the Goethe-Institut’s portal increasingly relevant for our consideration here.

\textsuperscript{306} This crosses from literature to language instruction, which in recent years are two parts of a whole seen as inseparable from one another. Oftentimes language instruction and literature instruction are still separated in praxis, as we will see between those Filmhefte created for German audiences and those for audiences learning German.

\textsuperscript{307} Hahn, “Filmbildung,” 15.

As we will see, however, given the broad variety of approaches *Filmhefte* (targeting both native and foreign language speakers) take, paired with a lack of concrete assessment tools for measuring the efficacy of these materials’ implementation for the explicit purpose of *Filmbildung*, whether these *Filmhefte* help foster students’ critical media literacy remains uncertain, if indeed somewhat unlikely. This is particularly the case with contemporary classical adaptations.

IV. Contemporary Classical Adaptations in the Classroom: Echoes of Fidelity Criticism

In the contemporary German educational sphere, media literacy is generally understood as the:

dauerhafter, pädagogisch strukturierter und begleiteter Prozess der konstruktiven und kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit der Medienwelt. Sie zielt auf den Erwerb und fortlaufende Erweiterung von Medienkompetenz; also jener Kenntnisse, Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten, die ein sachgerechtes, selbstbestimmtes, kreatives und sozial verantwortliches Handeln in der medial geprägten Lebenswelt ermöglichen.³⁰⁹

For students working with the film medium especially, achieving competency requires that they are able to understand and analyze the medium’s historical development, describe its use of formal elements, note symbolism and aesthetic principles, and discuss how the film affects viewers. Building upon this definition, the *Bundeszentrale* explains the concept of *Filmbildung* as understanding the language and grammar of a film in a statement prominently foregrounded on their website:

Wer die Sprache und Grammatik eines Films beherrscht, kann kompetent und kreativ mit unterschiedlichen audiovisuellen Angeboten umgehen – dies ist jedoch nicht selbstverständlich. Hier kommt die Filmbildung ins Spiel. Durch das Erlernen und Verstehen des Films, seiner Geschichte, Sprache und Wirkung wird die ästhetische Sensibilität gefördert, die Erlebnis- und Ausdrucksfähigkeit

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³⁰⁹“Medienbildung in der Schule,” Kultusminister Konferenz.
entwickelt, die Geschmacks- und Urteilsbildung unterstützt. Filmische Zeichen und Symbole verstehen und auch selbst gestalterisch nutzen zu können, ist eine Grundlage, um sich in der Kommunikationskultur bewegter Bilder zu orientieren.\textsuperscript{310}

Despite a decade of discussions about why and how to integrate film into the post-secondary curriculum in Germany, followed by mandates to do so, adaptations in the 2000s are, however, still often dealt with uncritically in the classroom. As German adaptation scholar Klaus Maiwald rather brusquely summarizes, “Im günstigeren Fall dienen Literaturverfilmungen der abschließenden ’Belohnung’ für anstrengende Lektüre; im schlimmeren werden mit Popcorn-Kino die letzten Tage vor den Ferien totgeschlagen.”\textsuperscript{311} Although I take issue with the breadth of this statement, his summary does speak to the rather unsuccessful integration of adaptations into post-secondary curricula even after a decade in which educational and cultural institutions have heavily focused on and funded projects for increasing students’ film literacy. But, given the advancements in education and teacher education over the past fifteen years, why is this the case for films based on literature?

This tendency, I maintain, largely relates to the way that adaptations have been instrumentalized in book-centric classrooms throughout history – which brings us to the second socio-historical context for the way contemporary classical adaptations are dealt with today. As Schönleber succinctly notes, “Leseförderung spielt seit Beginn der deutschdidaktischen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Film eine dominierende Rolle”\textsuperscript{312} in our analysis of the \textit{Filmhefte} produced for contemporary classical adaptations, parallels emerge between these approaches and the way that adaptations were included in curricula

\textsuperscript{311} Klaus Maiwald, \textit{Vom Film zur Literatur: Moderne Klassiker im Medienvergleich} (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2015), 22.
\textsuperscript{312} Schönleber, \textit{Schnittstellen}, 101.
back in the 1950s. In short, the implementation of adaptations in the current era still echoes – to a certain extent – methods promoted by educators of German in German schools for the enhancement of their students’ engagement with literature dating back to 1958, a time dominated by fidelity criticism.

In the *Bundesrepublik* in 1958, primary and secondary German teachers seriously grappled – for the first time – with whether and how to integrate films into their classroom instruction. Approaches articulating how to integrate adaptations in the German classroom can be found as early as 1958. In this year, *Der Deutschunterricht*, one of the leading periodicals for the teaching of German devoted an entire issue to the inclusion of media forms beyond literature. Adaptations played a central role in the discussion as pedagogues, still concerned about the medium’s possible corruption of youths, centered their goals on tapping into students’ fascination with film in order to redirect it appropriately to morally upstanding (and, I would argue, nationalistic) literature and film genres. Here, two particular ideas come to the fore that prove pertinent for our study of contemporary classical adaptations. First, films were considered worthy for the way in which they helped redirect an interest away from popular film genres to more nationally oriented ones. Second, within this context, adaptations were targeted to inculcate reverence toward literary authors. In this volume, Robert Ulshöfer, considered one of the first proponents of film education in Germany, argued along these lines for integrating film into German coursework for two explicit purposes. First, working with film would help discourage students from indulging in popular cinema and instead foster their appreciation for those genres considered artistically (and nationally) valuable, such as the *Heimatfilm*. Ulshöfer explained,

313 Unger, “Cultivating Film Audiences,” 64.
Sobald die Schule das Filminteresse der Jugend anerkennt, kann sie es ohne viel Mühe auf den künstlerisch wertvollen Spielfilm und von da an auf die wenig besuchten Heimat- und Kulturfilme lenke. So wird der Besuch des Wildwestfilms, des Kriminalreißers und des schlüpfri gen Films ohne moralische Ermahnungen seltener werden und schließlich ganz aufhören.  

By helping students develop the competence to understand and differentiate films, he hoped students would develop an appreciation of artistic and morally upright genres – part and parcel of today’s Filmbildung campaign that expects that students who work with film will turn into better citizens.

At the same time, adaptations as a genre were to be included in classroom instruction, but with the explicit purpose of pointing students away from the genre and toward the original literary work. In the same volume, he recommends a lesson plan that incorporates Hans Deppe’s Der Schimmelreiter (1934) into coursework. The aim of his approach involves guiding students away from an appreciation of the film to embrace the text. Ulshöfer writes,

Im Anschluss an die Vorführung des Films . . . findet eine Aussprache über die Qualitäten dieses Films und ein Vergleich zwischen Film und Novelle statt. Das Ergebnis dieser Aussprache wird sein, wie es bei unserem Versuch der Fall war, daß die Klasse geschlossen die Novelle in bezug auf künstlerischen Wert, Echtheit, Unmittelbarkeit und Lebenswahrheit weit über den Film stellt. Die Schüler erkennen, daß die Sinne der Novelle verflacht und um einer vordergründigen Wirkung auf das sensationslüsterne Publikum willen verfälscht worden ist.  

For Ulshöfer, then, only some film genres were worthy of students’ appreciation, and this needed to be explicitly targeted in instruction. In fact, instructional intervention needed to occur in order to dissuade students from viewing media forms considered unworthy. In addition to popular cinema more generally, adaptations particularly came under fire, with the fundamental intention of reifying the high position of literature over

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315 Ibid., 13.
film. They were to serve, through his approach, as a negative example that could lead students to a newfound appreciation of the original literary work – unsurprisingly, as it reinforces and justifies the core curriculum of German.

Although scholarship on the teaching of adaptations has advanced since Ulshöfer published his curricular suggestions, many of the ancillary materials created for adaptations even today forego deep work in *Filmbildung* in favor of promoting *Leseförderung*. This proves particularly true for contemporary classical adaptations, as we will see from the following analysis of six *Filmhefte* that particularly target contemporary classical adaptations.

But before we delve into the individual *Filmhefte*, one thing must be made clear: namely, that the way contemporary classical adaptations are didacticized across the variety of institutions that engage with them is not happenstance. Instead, it is a result of how the greater media literacy project in Germany engages with this particular genre. Part of the problem with Germany’s continued regressive stance toward teaching adaptations has its source in the Bundeszentrale’s overall approach to film pedagogy in the first place, namely through their choice of films for their groundbreaking *Filmkanon*, in which adaptations remain an outlier and, because of this, are not targeted as a cohesive genre.

Despite German film’s longstanding relationship to literature, of the thirty-five films chosen and prepared for instructional use, three films are adapted works – but none of the descriptions or associated *Filmhefte* work with this concept thematically or formally. The term “adaptation” is rather used in passing as describing a historical fact related to the film product. For example, the first of the three adaptations included,
Murnau’s *Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), alludes to the film’s heavy reliance upon Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, published in 1897. The purpose of this allusion is largely to make viewers aware of a historical fact: that the film company was burdened by a copyright lawsuit, initiated by Stoker’s widow, given the many similarities in plot, which the following description – marked by latent fidelity criticism – notes as “getreulich.” The text introducing and discussing the film reads:


Fidelity is a concept that, whether desired or not, permeates the *Bundeszentrale’s* discussion of adapted films. The way the institution portrays the two remaining adaptations in the *Filmkanon* supports this notion. The first film is Gerhard Lamprecht’s *Emil und die Detektive* (1931), adapted from Erich Kästner’s eponymous novel from 1929. Here, the description of the film concentrates largely on Kästner the author (rather than Lamprecht the director). Described are Kästner’s historical time period, his inability to write the screenplay himself, and his ultimate distaste for the final film product despite the film adaptation’s general fidelity to his book. As we can see, by focusing more on the author and little on the director, as well as emphasizing how closely Kästner felt the film represented his novel, we begin to see in the *Filmheft* how the hierarchical binary between the original and the adaptation becomes reinscribed.

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The second adaptation in the Bundeszentrale’s Filmkanon is Disney’s Das Dschungelbuch (1967), based on Rudyard Kipling’s collection of short stories. Unlike its response to Lamprecht’s film, the Bundeszentrale focuses more on this film’s formal characteristics in relation to its classification as an animated film, and particularly emphasizes the difficulty the animators had in personifying animal figures so that they were more “human” than living animals, but not all-too human. Beyond a brief discussion of why the text had not been adapted previously (namely, problems with Kipling’s loosely connected plot and his inclusion of dark nuances inappropriate for children), the film is largely dealt with hermetically – or, to recall Hutcheon’s framework, as a film product that can be understood without its intertext. Between the two adaptations in the Bundeszentrale’s Filmkanon, there exists a blatant disconnect between how one might approach an adaptation: here, one either focuses largely on the text, or one skips the source text to simply focus on the way the film fits into another genre (animated film).

More often than not, contemporary classical adaptations are dealt with according to the former approach, with much emphasis given to the original. To elucidate this trend, in the following section I turn a critical eye specifically to the pedagogical packaging of ancillary materials that invite teachers of German language, literature, and culture to incorporate these adaptations into their curricula. I delineate how these cultural/ educational/entertainment institutions further (re)frame and adapt twenty-first-century German contemporary classical adaptations to promote German literary history for national and global consumption. As we will see, Leseförderung, the importance of the

original author and the original text, and concepts of fidelity still continue to this day through institutional efforts, reified by the very discourse surrounding students’ work with adaptations, all – oddly – in the name of Filmbildung.

V. Integrating Adaptations in Today’s German Courses

Important for our analysis of materials created by cultural and educational institutions for the inclusion of contemporary classical adaptations in the classroom is that the materials all seem to have different underlying aims, even when these materials didacticize the same film. For instance, the majority of activities embedded in the Bundeszentrale and Vision Kino’s Filmheft for Goethe! prioritize students’ knowledge of the source texts (namely, Goethe’s Dichtung und Wahrheit and Die Leiden des jungen Werthers), thereby supporting instructors who seek to use the film in part to inspire students to do their reading. By contrast, the Filmheft for Goethe! produced by Warner Brothers, includes both a set of activities for use with students who have knowledge of the source text, as well as a set of activities for students with little to no knowledge of Goethe’s original works, thereby allowing instructors to focus largely on the film as a hermeneutic object if desired. Nevertheless, despite institutional differences in agendas and goals and the aforementioned general differences, across all six Filmhefte one approach repeatedly recurs: a majority of the activities offered by the Filmhefte for contemporary classical adaptations prioritize close readings of the original and, when they do focus on the film, the activities largely forego encouraging students to perform a formal analysis of the film itself. Instead, such activities call attention to the film’s content/plot (as if the film were a written text), despite claims echoed across the
institutions that students must learn to describe films in the medium’s own language and grammar.

That the Filmhefte can diverge so greatly (even though they still converge around urging students to return to the original literary works) is, I argue, a result of four related issues. First, the quality standards articulated by Vision Kino for the creation of Filmhefte seem to leave few opportunities for students to engage productively in making sense of the film on its own terms – at least for adaptations. These standards require that the film, its origins, and its relevancy should be described in the materials up front; that is, given to students rather than inductively figured out by students. According to the Qualitätsstandards Schulfilmhefte:

Gliederungsraster für SFH und ähnliche filmpädagogische Publikationen sollten folgende Mindestanforderung erfüllen:
- Inhaltsbeschreibung
- Problementwicklung/Fragestellung
- Vertiefende “Filmtext”-Erfassung (etwa mit Hilfe von exemplarischen Sequenzbeschreibungen)
- Analyse formaler, filmsprachlicher und –ästhetischer Besonderheiten
- Angebot einer zusammenfassenden Interpretation und Lern-Integration unter Einbeziehung verschiedener Kontexte sowie (altersangemessener) Methoden (historisch, gesellschaftlich, ethisch-moralisch, biografisch, spielerisch-kreative, etc.)
- Eröffnen von Möglichkeiten zur Weiterarbeit, insbesondere Fördern des Verständnisses des Films als Medium
- Rezeptionsvoraussetzungen (fakultativ)318

Filmhefte that adhere to these standards include, by definition, lengthy descriptions of the plot, main characters, and main themes; their questions often fail to advance far beyond these targeted areas. Although the standards seek to unify the approach embodied by Filmhefte to provide teachers and students with as much interpretative information as possible, the emphasis on providing copious reading on the films’ background, context,

and themes proves disadvantageous for helping students develop autonomy in interpreting media on their own terms. For adaptations, this becomes even more problematic, as these *Filmhefte* also include lengthy descriptions of the author of the original literary work, the time period in which the original author wrote, and information about how the director went about adapting the source text(s). The descriptions provided in *Filmhefte* for adaptations, as a result, almost always describe the work in close comparison to the original text.

The tight linking of the adaptation to the source text in the introductory materials in these *Filmhefte* directs the discussion toward the original text in two ways. This tight linking sets up students – from the outset – to access the film principally through written materials (and not by working with the moving images themselves), thereby reinforcing the verbal and the narrative aspects of the film above the visual. Prompts for comparative work ask students to read about the film to understand it and to prioritize the original source text, instead of asking them to make sense of the film from seeing (scenes from) it and only then embarking on an analysis of the film’s transmediation. Second, perhaps in order to provide an overall cohesive *Filmheft*, the activities that follow these descriptions often ask students to imitate the approach modeled in the introduction: students are asked to take a comparative approach to adaptations with (leading) questions that ask them to consistently look for differences and similarities to the source text and that often frame the discussion of the adaptations in binaries (good versus bad, faithful versus not faithful, etc.).

The second issue is that, given the variety of institutions that produce *Filmhefte* for schools, there are different underlying goals and values that inform how an adaptation
is approached by an institution in the pedagogical materials they make. This relates both to particular agendas (cultural and otherwise), as well as commercial interests and limitations, all of which lead to an incoherent, if not bifurcated, approach to contemporary classical adaptations across the plethora of Filmhefte in current circulation. Culturally, for example, the Studentendeutsche Stiftung may be much more concerned about keeping students engaged with Bohemian authors than in promoting film literacy, which in turn weights their approach to the “Schulfilmwochen” in favor of source materials. Commercially, private distribution companies seem to go to great lengths to keep their film product in the center of the discussion when it comes to adaptations, but there are deep commercial concerns that undergird this trend, as these Filmhefte are intended to promote the film that the company has created. Public entities, in contrast, still seem to underscore the original text, but this may also be a commercial concern, as they have less access to film stills (for which they must secure copyrights to reproduce) but plenty of access to the source texts, which are out of copyright.

The third issue is that, under the aegis of various institutions, each Filmheft is produced by collaboration among a variety of instructors and editors – some who have training in film studies, some who have received their education in teaching political science. For instance, the Filmheft produced for Goethe! by the Bundeszentrale and Vision Kino is a compilation of writings, interviews, and activities stemming from the film journalist Philipp Bühler, the film critic Michael Kohler, the freelance author Burhkard Wetekam, and lecturer in German history, politics, and literature Dr. Tanja Seider. The DaF Filmhefte available from the Goethe-Institut Brussels (also accessible through Hahn’s DaF-Filmportal) are created by various instructors who have
didacticized the materials without standards, and without training, simply for their own
use and for open-access sharing.\footnote{Hahn, “Filmbildung,” 25. As Hahn agrees, “Bei näherer Betrachtung stellt sich heraus, dass die
offerten Filmhefte von unterschiedlicher Qualität (von nicht akzeptabel bis sehr gut) sind (s. dazu Hahn
i.V.). Die Filmhefte entstanden und entstehen zum Teil aus eigener Initiative engagierter DaF-Lehrer, die
zwar begeistert Spielfilme in ihrem Unterricht einsetzen, nicht immer jedoch über notwendige
filmdidaktische Kompetenzen verfügen. Diese Tatsache ist wiederum nicht verwunderlich, da
Filmseminare immer noch keine Pflichtseminare bei der DaF-Lehrerausbildung sind.”}

The fourth issues is that the activities included in Filmhefte are – by necessity of
the school system – largely framed by the overarching subjects within which the film
needs to be taught. In Germany, films must be integrated into a pre-existing core
curricular subject (German, history, science, etc.). As a result, many of the activities
target these subjects, which often leads to activities foregrounding the plot or setting, and
rarely engage students in considering film’s formal properties or cultural complexities.
This may also be one reason why activities ask students themselves to engage in fidelity
criticism, so that students solidify their understanding of the past and past objects (in
history, in German literature class, etc.). Unfortunately, students are led to embrace and
practice text-to-film comparisons rather than learning to unpack the problems associated
with such an approach.

To understand how the Filmhefte look in action, in the next section I turn my
attention to six Filmhefte, one produced by the Bundeszentrale, three by large private
film distributors, and two by the Goethe-Institut. These materials include the
aforementioned didacticizations of Philip Stölzl’s Goethe! (a film discussed in Chapter
Two), and Filmhefte for two blockbuster contemporary classical adaptations not
discussed in previous chapters but also part of the contemporary classical genre studied
VI. Goethe!, Effi Briest, and Buddenbrooks Go to School: The Filmhefte of Adaptations

When it comes to didacticizing adaptations, the Bundeszentrale – which sets the standards for pedagogical approaches to film in the German educational system – works most conservatively. Its Filmhefte for contemporary classical adaptations are characterized by film descriptions and in-class activities that consistently push students to engage deeply with the original texts and learn about these works’ historical contexts, often in contrast to the contemporary film.

In the section “Anregungen für den Unterricht” within the Filmheft for Goethe! produced by Vision Kino and the Bundeszentrale, students repeatedly work with the original text and the historical reality. Of nine possible in-class activities, eight ask students to compare the film with its historical sources in some way. For example, the first activity invites students to work together to compare the figure of Johann in the film Goethe! with Goethe’s autobiography Dichtung und Wahrheit and Werther from Goethe’s Die Leiden des jungen Werther. Authenticity and fidelity to the source texts are, here, an implied benchmark, as students are asked to find that which is kept in the transformation of these texts to film. The second activity prompts students to turn to

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320 I have chosen to analyze the Filmhefte for these three contemporary classical adaptations because multiple institutions have didacticized each film, and the works are easily accessible for instructors online. Analyzing films for which there are open-access materials across public and private sectors allows me to point toward the consistent and pervasive ways in which adaptations are set up from the beginning as derivative of and less important than their originals, regardless of whether these teaching materials are created and promoted for a particular film by the government or the film industry.

321 As we will see, this is perhaps not surprising given the fact that the film needs to be related tightly to course material and curricular trajectories that have already been predetermined without consideration of film integration – thus, natural framing of the text.
Werther again, this time comparing the role letters play in the literary work and in the film. Another activity asks students to discuss in small groups the similarities and differences they see between the “Bildkomposition und Lichtverhältnisse der Stadt- und Landschaftsaufnahmen in Goethe! mit den Gemälden von Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto) und Caspar David Friedrich,”322 who also lived around the time of Goethe, and thereby serves to teach students about artistic trends associated with the era in which Goethe wrote. Another activity prompts students to research out-of-class and later present on either the historical contours of gender relations or the emergence of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century as presented in historical accounts or other literary works written in the same period. Although not explicitly described as such, these presentations would – like the previous in-class activities – encourage students to look for differences and similarities between the original work/historical accounts and the contemporary film.

This approach colors even creative tasks. In one prompt, students are encouraged to compose a fictional letter from Lotte Buff to a friend in which she discusses her limited options in terms of marriage in the eighteenth century. Similar to the individual research presentations, this activity asks instructors to assess how well students understand the social role of marriage in the historical context of the eighteenth century, but does not 1) ask students to engage with how the film chooses to represent Lotte (as a figure who, despite staying with Kestner in the film, consistently acts as a rather active and fiercely independent woman in contrast to her historical context) or 2) ask students to demonstrate how well they can adapt Lotte’s limited options to contemporary situations or dynamics (such as class or race).

One activity in the “Anregungen für den Unterricht,” however, does direct
students to consider *Goethe!* in relation to more contemporary filmmaking trends –
although the debriefing of this activity also resurrects old hierarchies. In an activity that is
slated for inclusion in *Medienkunde* courses, students are asked to describe how the film
presents Johann as a “Genie” and how this presentation relates to depictions of the artists
as “Genien” in related films, such as Miloš Forman’s *Amadeus* (1984), Jane Campion’s
*Bright Star* (2009), and John Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*. This appears to be the sole
activity in which students are asked to engage with the film and describe its manner of
presentation before engaging in research from which they can further analyze the way the
director transforms this concept into a character on the screen. The second part of this
task, however, asks students to create their own skit about one of the main characters that
helps visualize a specific personality trait or motivation – here, the *Filmheft* returns to
questions of authenticity without, however, guiding instructors in how to eliminate the
unproductive dichotomies of right/wrong, true/false, faithful/adulterous. The prompt
reads: “Spielen Sie Ihre Szene im Plenum vor und lassen Sie Ihre Mitschüler/innen die
Aussage erraten. Diskutieren Sie im Plenum, ob Sie erfundene Elemente in Biopics für
künstlerisch gerechtfertigt halten oder ob Sie diese als verfälschend kritisieren.”

The number of activities directing students to the original and presumably more
“authentic” historical sources seems to compensate for disappointment with the film’s
purported inauthenticity. As Bühler warns instructors in the introduction to the *Filmheft*,
“eine tiefere Durchdringung des literarischen Materials erlaubt dieser illustrative Ansatz
nur begrenzt. Ist doch die konventionelle Bildsprache eines Biopic mit Goethes

323 Ibid.
Naturlyrik schwer vereinbar.”  

However, lest teachers be dissuaded from utilizing the film in their classrooms given its artistic representation of the past, he also reminds instructors of those aspects the film portrays well in terms of source materials – largely the general Zeitgeist of the period, stating, “Durch seine klassische Love Story gelingt es dem Film dennoch, Gefühlsüberschwang und Empfindsamkeitskult der Sturm und Drang-Ära ansprechend zu vermitteln. Dazu geben einzelne Textzitate einen Eindruck von dessen Sprache.”  

In this quotation, readers find a defense of Stölzl’s free adaptation – labeled in the Heft as a “Fantasie über eine historische Figur” – for its melodramatic effect on viewers, who can get a “feel” for Goethe’s character. Nevertheless, despite framing this aspect of the film as positive, the activities developed and recommended for in-class use with students forego working with them on this aspect of the film and how it functions on recipients; instead, students are required to parse historical facts from fiction and determine to what extent artistic liberty is allowable or desirable.

Interestingly, despite the contention that understanding how film formally creates meaning is key to media literacy projects, namely by understanding lighting, editing, mise-en-scène, etc., only one in-class task in the Filmheft explicitly directs students to note these characteristics in the film. Here, students are asked to consider how each character is portrayed, both in terms of look (such as costume and appearance) as well as camera distance and perspective. The directions state, for example, “Achten Sie darauf, wie die Figur bei ihrem ersten Auftritt eingeführt wird. Notieren Sie auffällige Mittel, durch die Ihre Figur innerlich und äußerlich charakterisiert (Aussehen, Kleidung,  

324 Ibid.  
325 Ibid.  
326 Ibid.
Habitus, Schauspiel etc.) und filmisch dargestellt wird (Einstellungsgröße, Kameraperspektive, Musik).”

Despite this singular activity, however, the *Filmheft* remains largely text-centric in its approach to students’ engagement with the adaptation.

A variety of industrial and commercial film distributors – in comparison to the *Bundeszentrale* and Vision Kino – seem to be better poised to create educational materials that better engage students with processes of adaptation and the overall look of a film. Unlike the literature-centered *Filmhefte* from the Bundeszentrale, the pedagogical materials created and distributed by these entities often take a decidedly more balanced approach to the literature/film relationship and engage more thoroughly with processes of transmediation. For example, the artistic autonomy granted *Goethe!* and *Effi Briest* in the *Filmhefte* produced by distributors frame transmediation and adaptation in a way that works against comparisons. This approach is, indeed, clearly announced as their main goals in the editors’ prologues. In Warner Brother’s *Filmheft* for *Goethe!*, editor Cornelia Hermann writes,

> **Dieses Heft verzichtet bewusst darauf, den damaligen Kultroman dem heutigen Film untersuchend gegenüberzustellen. Ebenso wenig ist eine Übersicht über den aktuellen literaturwissenschaftlichen Forschungsstand zu leisten wie eine Auswertung der vielen verfügbaren Unterrichtsmaterialien zu Goethes Werther. In den einzelnen Kapiteln wird dagegen aus dem Blick auf den aktuellen Film eine Spurensuche zu einem der berühmtesten Romane aus der Weltliteratur und seiner Entstehung versucht – vor allem aus der Perspektive heute wie damals gleichermaßen existentieller Fragestellung.**

Here, the editor hits the nail on the head by pointing out what makes this *Filmheft* different from others in circulation: it reverses the organizational principle of considering the literature first and the film second. Instead, it follows a process championed by Maiwald (in his aptly titled work on adaptation pedagogy, *Vom Film zur Literatur*) by

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327 Ibid.
asking students to investigate the film itself before taking into account the literary work
upon which the film is based.

A similar emphasis on the present period and the film product can be found in
Constantin Film’s *Filmheft* for *Effi Briest*, which labels the adaptation as “ganz Film” and
thereby affirms an approach that considers the adaptation from a filmic perspective. From
the outset, then, this *Filmheft* directs students and instructors to envision the film as a
film product by justifying it as a legitimate new interpretation, to be differentiated
positively from the original given its creation in a different time period and different form
than Fontane’s original *Effi Briest*. The prologue begins:

Effi Briest, ein Stoff der Vergangenheit? Ja und nein. Ja, Effi leidet unter
Verhältnisse, die inzwischen der Sozialgeschichte angehören. Effis
Lebensprobleme sind uns dennoch nicht fremd geworden, so wenig wie die von
Emma Bovary oder Anna Karenina. Es ist aufschlussreich zu beobachten, welche
Möglichkeiten sich aus dieser Spannung für Drehbuch und Regie ergeben.

Die Neuverfilmung EFFI BRIEST umgibt ihre Hauptfiguren mit einem
sorgfältigen Zeitcolorit, ohne Sie darin zu ersticken. Vielmehr entwickeln sich
die Akteure auf nachvollziehbare, natürliche Weise, wozu die behutsam
aufgefrischte Sprache der Dialoge maßgeblich beiträgt. EFFI BRIEST ist ganz
Film und trifft eine Reihe von dramaturgischen Entscheidungen, um den Stoff ins
visuelle Medium zu übertragen. Fontane darf sich gerade darin bestätigt fühlen,
denn einmal mehr erweist sich sein Roman als herausragend gehaltvoll.329

Notably, the author justifies Huntgeburth’s loose interpretation because the alterations
allow the text to resonate better with contemporary audiences. Here, we see even more of
an emphasis on directing students’ attention towards the adaptation and the present
moment (rather than encouraging them to use the original or the historical context of the
source text as benchmarks).

Considering the adaptation as a film is an approach supported by several student
activities provided in these two *Filmhefte*. For example, in the *Filmheft* for *Goethe!*,

329 Vera Conrad, ed., “Effi Briest: Materialien für den Unterricht” *Constantin Film*, accessed October 20,
students are asked to sketch a few scenes they recall from the film that strongly portray
the external and/or internal states of the main characters.\(^{330}\) As part of this activity,
students must recall and identify the particular camera angles used for these shots.
Likewise, an activity for *Effi Briest* prompts ask students to modernize the dialogue from
either a sequence in the film adaptation or from a text passage.\(^{331}\) This sets the adaptation
and the source text side by side as equals, thereby encouraging students to engage in
processes of adaptation. Additionally, throughout both *Filmhefte*, students are asked to
identify and analyze nonverbal elements of the films. Questions and group work direct
students to attend to the musical track, symbolic and recurring props, and the effect the
visual portrayal of key figures has on them as spectators.

The approach described above, which largely refrains from pitting the adaptation
against the original, is – however – not consistently followed across all *Filmhefte* created
by distributors for contemporary classical adaptations. Even those *Filmhefte* produced by
the same distributors mentioned above and created under the same editorial teams can
greatly diverge from the aforementioned precedent. In these instances, the film adaptation
functions, once again, as an impetus for inculcating students’ interest in literature. Such is
the case with Warner Brothers’ *Filmheft* for *Buddenbrooks*, which – already in the
prologue – quickly refers students and teachers to the Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag’s
*Lektüre-Ausgabe von Thomas Mann, Buddenbrooks. Verfall einer Familie.*\(^{332}\) The
allusion to the source text from the outset and throughout ensuing activities gestures

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\(^{330}\) Hermann, “Goethe!”

\(^{331}\) Conrad, “Effi Briest.” The directions read, “Übersetzen Sie eine der drei Filmsequenzen (siehe unten)
ofder eine ausgewählte Passage der Romanvorlage als Dialog in die heutige Umgangssprache! Welche
Rollen sind zu verteilen?”

\(^{332}\) Cornelia Hermann, ed., “Buddenbrooks: Ein Film von Heinrich Breloer. Unterrichtsmaterial zum Film,”
toward commercial endeavors and collaborations in the production of these materials that must also be taken into account in their evaluation. Here, it may be the case that the film distributor is working to benefit the book publishing company; it is, indeed, Fischer Verlag that published the film’s screenplay, co-written by Heinrich Breloer and screenwriter Horst Königstein.\(^{333}\) In addition, Fischer had also been the one to print a new release of the novel only a year prior to – and therefore, well timed for – the film’s premiere in 2008. The editor confirms that engaging students in the source material constitutes one of the Filmheft’s key aims: “Das vorliegende Material soll Lust machen auf den Film und die Lektüre des Romans.” She even concludes her introduction not with a note about the didacticized film but with a quotation that highlights the benefits of reading Mann’s original work: “Wer Thomas Mann liest, kriegt es mit sich zu tun. Und mit den Chancen und Risiken seiner eigenen Gesellschaft.” The emphasis on reading and the original author seems to indicate that one can gather much (more) by reading Mann than from viewing Breloer.

A majority of the activities in this booklet – quite in contrast to those in *Goethe!* and *Effi Briest* – are text-centric. Students are expected to read passages from Mann’s text aloud in class; provide oral reports on particular themes prevalent in the novel; debate the relevance of reading the novel in contemporary times; create a fictional interview with the author Thomas Mann; and even determine strategies for how S. Fischer Verlag could best advertise a reissue of the novel in 2008. Only much later in the

\(^{333}\) For the screenplay mentioned above, see Heinrich Breloer, *Thomas Manns “Buddenbrooks”: Ein Filmbuch von Heinrich Breloer* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2008). Although beyond the scope of our current investigation, it would be pertinent to examine more fully the collaborations between book publishers, film distributors, and other entities, as the agendas of these various parties, particularly in the commercial sphere, likely inform the materials produced – as argued about the small, single example delineated here.
booklet are students encouraged to work with the film and their impressions of it. Here, however, instead of activities that focus students’ attention on particular scenes or viewing experiences, the questions pertain to the entirety of the film and often ask students to compare the work directly to the original. A few of these questions are included below:

- Merkt man, dass die Filmstory nach einem Roman ist? Woran genau?
- Welche Erzählstruktur hat der Film? Ähnlichkeiten oder Unterschiede zum Roman/zu einzelnen Textstellen? (nur Sekundarstufe II)
- Welche Motive entsprechen deutlich dem Roman? Welche sind ähnlich? Welche sind ganz anders?334

Although directing students’ awareness to differences between the two versions is not in itself problematic, the opportunity never arises for students to go beyond simply noticing and listing differences and similarities to then make meaning of these alterations as part of their understanding of the film. In other words, they are never asked about the stakes of these differences and/or similarities.

Overall, film distributors’ *Filmhefte* often (but, as the example above shows, not always) prioritize students’ work with the film itself. This seemingly more progressive approach to having students engage with contemporary classical adaptations likely stems from a variety of factors, not all of which are purely pedagogical.335 However, even in these venues, possible conglomerations and contract deals between film and book companies may, as suggested in the analysis of *Buddenbrooks*, also skew the approach in a way that prioritizes the original. This is essential to note because the aims of these

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334 Hermann, “Buddenbrooks.”
335 To bring back into focus some of these competing interests and reasons mentioned previously, I will again list them here: the staff members creating these *Filmhefte* may be more knowledgeable about the film medium and the adaptation process itself given their tight relationship to producers, directors, stage managers, etc. It may also be easier and cheaper for them to access still images from the film for inclusion in the *Filmheft* given the fact that the distributor already holds the copyrights. Additionally, commercial concerns may determine the extent to which distributors prioritize students’ engagement with their product – the film – rather than the source text.
teaching materials are often not made transparent to the instructors expected to utilize the
Filmhefte. Thus, it remains incumbent upon instructors to critically analyze these
materials before implementing them. An alternative approach, albeit more complex,
would be to help students take a critical look at these materials themselves. Here,
instructors could ask students to consider what type of information the prompts in the
Filmhefte are and are not asking for, and to hypothesize why a particular aspect of the
text or film is foregrounded. Ultimately, until Filmhefte become more standardized in
their approaches, or at least more explicit about the desired learning outcomes (through
the inclusion of assessment measures and/or specific guidelines for instructors to grade
students on the activities), teaching with contemporary classical adaptations – although
the film plots themselves may champion otherwise – holds the potential to reinscribe the
very binaries that adaptation studies as a field seeks to dismantle.

VII. Buddenbrooks and Effi Briest in the Foreign Language Classroom

In comparison to teaching Filmhefte created for native speakers of German,
teaching with contemporary classical adaptations via Filmhefte that target foreign
language students is an even more precarious endeavor. Whereas government-backed
institutions and private companies adhere to certain (if somewhat loose) standards when
producing Filmhefte, Filmhefte produced by the Goethe-Institut remain unregulated.
Although the Goethe-Institut has gone to the trouble of compiling a variety of Filmhefte
created for DaF instruction, their compilation stems from individual instructors’
submission of self-created units, made without templates, expectations, or guidelines. As
a result, the approach to contemporary classical adaptations runs the gamut, from text-
centric approaches reifying the original author’s work to more balanced approaches that consider filmmaking systems and processes. Again, despite the variety of approaches these *Filmhefte* take, certain patterns emerge; namely, between the *Filmhefte* produced for DaF learners and those *Filmhefte* created by the film distributors themselves. To be more specific, whether a particular *Filmheft* takes a more progressive or regressive approach to a particular contemporary canonical adaptation seems to be, in part, determined by whether the film distributors approached that same film progressively or regressively in their privately made *Filmhefte*. As the following analysis of the Goethe-Institut’s materials for *Effi Briest* and *Buddenbrooks* elucidate, the DaF materials for *Effi Briest* focus much more squarely on Huntgeburcht’s film (an approach we have seen in Constantin Film’s booklet for the same film). The materials for instruction with *Buddenbrooks*, in turn (as if following Warner Brothers Germany’s lead), seek to ground the adaptation in historical contexts and encourage students to engage heavily with the original text.

Like Warner Brothers Germany’s *Filmheft* for *Buddenbrooks*, the film booklet circulated by the Goethe-Institut also begins with a quotation glorifying the original text that gives no reference to the adaptation that actually informs the materials. This *Filmheft* recalls the former president of Germany, Horst Köhler, as stating, “Für uns Deutsche it dieses Buch immer noch wie ein Spiegel unseres Wesens und unserer Kultur – wenn auch aus einer vergangenen Zeit.” The activities then also reify the original: students are asked to read a summary of the novel, work with descriptions of main characters as

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originally penned by Thomas Mann, provide verb conjugations to complete a text about the author and the impact of his novel, and research how Mann influenced other well-known “genius” individuals, such as Richard Wagner, Leo Tolstoi, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Although a number of activities purportedly focus on the film and the director, even these reinscribe the status of the original over the adaptation and preclude students’ own interpretation of the film. Students are asked to fill in the blanks with sentences affirming the way the adaptation remains “werkgetrue” and “folgt dem Episoden-Character des Romans.”

The Goethe-Institut’s Filmheft for Effi Briest, in contrast to that for Buddenbrooks, proves less text-centric. The first several pages of activities ask DaF students to work directly with explicit scenes from the film. Only after this initial work with the film do students then enrich their contextual understanding through a fill-in-the-blank text that provides historical context about Thomas Mann and the impact of his novel. This is the only text-oriented activity in the booklet. Additional activities invite students to learn about the actors that were chosen to play in the adaptation and to weigh critics’ divergent opinions of the film.

Given the disparate nature of the Filmhefte here, as is the case with those by film distributors, teachers must parse the motives and perspectives implicit in the teaching materials. Thus, in determining whether to work with a contemporary classical adaptation and/or deciding which film to integrate in the foreign language classroom, instructors need to reflect on their own aims for including the film and determine whether the goals underlying the Filmheft in question align with working toward those aims.

VIII. Suggestions for Integrating Contemporary Classical Adaptations in the Classroom

The situation in contemporary Germany in which film must now be integrated into various school subjects may be theoretically well intentioned and informed; however, how this mandate actually affects the praxis of teaching through and with film for the enhancement of students’ media literacy can only be highly varied – precisely because the materials the government and other educational entities produce for this work themselves vary so greatly. Despite the fact that Filmhefte constitute a distinct text type readily accessible to teachers needing support, these works – produced by differing entities with differing agendas and expertise – lack cohesion and clearly articulated aims, making it difficult for those teachers who would rely on these texts to know which results they are to glean and for which purpose. This becomes particularly concerning with contemporary classical adaptations, a genre popular for inclusion in a variety of educational settings but which can often be taught under the guise of promoting media literacy when, in actuality, the way in which these films are taught could potentially reinforce notions about the dominance of print literacy.

The lack of standards by which to measure the overall efficacy of media literacy undertakings in Germany is a systemic problem that has been noted most vocally by Susanne Ungar, who spent years doing fieldwork with some of the aforementioned institutions. Although she urges the development of assessment measures that would allow industries and institutions to better understand the gaps between the imagined and actual results of their work, I offer here a rudimentary three-pronged approach directly targeting those institutions, entities, and individuals interested in working with contemporary classical adaptations in the educational sphere.

338 Unger, “Cultivating Film Audiences.”
First, when it comes to adaptations on a general scale: institutions, instructors, and students should conceptualize and work with these materials as a cohesive genre that has a distinct grammar, albeit varied across individual works. In considering adaptation films as a genre, students would be better positioned to learn how to approach films made under this sign; how to analyze adaptations productively (rather than reductively); and how to parse the myriad industrial, commercial, historical, and cultural motives underlying their production and circulation in contemporary society. Interestingly, considering contemporary classical adaptations as a genre in its own right could potentially help increase students’ media literacy because it would allow teachers to broaden out and away from text-to-film adaptations to consider transformations of canonical storylines across a greater variety of platforms, such as video games, comic books, and musical videos also based on these texts.

Considering adaptations as a genre would also allow for those institutions and entities charged with the creation of teaching materials such as Filmhefte to take into consideration that adaptations have, within the greater scope of film history, their own contexts and historical trajectory. This slight change in perspective could help those making the Filmhefte for adaptations begin to embody those “best practices” delineated by scholars working in the field of adaptation studies pedagogy. The second suggestion, therefore, would urge editors of contemporary classical adaptation Filmhefte to study and implement recommendations made by scholars and pedagogues. For instance, a beginning point could entail following Maiwald’s suggestions in his oft-quoted book *Vom Film zur Literatur: Moderne Klassiker im Medienvergleich*, easily available from Reclam. Here, Maiwald distills his general method for teaching with adaptations, which
results in better, more balanced approaches to the genre. Although several of his tactics are, admittedly, already utilized across current *Filmhefte* (such as connecting the film to other subjects like art history and music, or opening up opportunities for students to discuss their enjoyment in addition to providing moments for close analysis), the first four of his nine “Zusammenfassende Empfehlungen für die Behandlung eines Films im Unterricht” could be more systematically followed for work with this genre. They are as follows:

1. Schauen Sie sich zuerst in den Film und erst später in die Vorlage.
2. Präsentieren und bearbeiten Sie den Film nicht zwangsweise in voller Länge, sondern ruhig in lohnenden Auszügen.

These principles, when applied to adaptations, are intended to encourage students and their teachers to break away from the traditional chronological approach, which by necessity of “coming first” often leads to the implicit (or even explicit) prioritization of the original text, as we have seen across several of the *Filmhefte*.

The third and related prong of this suggested approach includes fostering deeper discussion of the socio-historical moment in which canonical works become adapted into the film medium, by contextualizing these works, for instance, not (only) in terms of the book’s history, but in terms of film and media history. For instance, although the *Filmhefte* for *Effi Briest* and *Buddenbrooks* include texts about the context in which each novel emerged, neither includes information about the time period in film history (namely, the 2000s) during which the particular adaptation emerged. A related possibility would be to discuss the multiple eras during which the text in questions was adapted to

339 Maiwald, *Vom Film zur Literatur*, 143.
film throughout the twentieth century. Foregrounding this history as an important context would further allow students to work with the film on its own accord and in concert with the source text, but with information that is balanced in regard to the multiplicity of historical contexts with which the adaptation engages.

Although contemporary classical adaptations may prove to be a trend with a brief shelf life, the stakes of utilizing this genre to help students build up their ability to understand the history, context, and content of adaptations are high. Without an emphasis on the social context into which a text is transmediated, students lose out on the ability to better understand why certain texts resonate with different generations and eras, and/or how they are manipulated to agree with new societal values and – at times – even relativize inhumane cultural values. This latter suggestion – that adaptations can reveal much about the time period in which they emerge, and should be taught in a way that examines the context into which an adaptation emerges – sits at the heart of Oscar Roehler’s controversial *Jud Süß—Film ohne Gewissen* (2010). This work, a mixed-genre film that intertwines a biopic of actor Ferdinand Marion with the Nazi adaptation of *Jud Süß* (1940), adapts and repackages both stories for contemporary spectators today and critiques the enduring fascination the cinema has with fascism, which continues to rear its head in popular film culture.
CONCLUSION

The Matrix of Twenty-First-Century German Adaptations: Jud Süß – Film ohne Gewissen

I. Confronting National Socialist Adaptations in Contemporary Times

Our study thus far has focused predominantly on canonical texts adapted prior to and after the period of National Socialism. As explored in Chapters Two and Three, these films either gravitate toward Hollywood filmmaking trends or resort to mining traditional “German” national cinema characteristics. Here, our study focuses on the culmination of this dichotomy and how it results in the recirculation of a censored Nazi film – Veit Harlan’s Jud Süß – and thereby raises pressing concerns regarding the power and potential of contemporary adaptation practices.

The boom in contemporary classical adaptations explored here has coincided with a distinct uptick in the production of what Lutz Koepnick has called German “heritage films”340 – films that bring the events of the nation’s tumultuous past to the silver screen for mass consumption. Particularly important for our consideration is that fascist films produced in the Third Reich, and which have largely remained at the margins of this study so far, also repeatedly foreground their artificiality in ways similar to contemporary classical adaptations. Just as contemporary classical adaptations assume a notably meta-critical stance towards their source materials and thereby problematize their own creation, fascist films also at times direct the spectator’s attention to the artificiality and spectacle of film. In the postmodern period, marked by remixing and intermingling, it is perhaps only to be expected that these two genres – contemporary classical adaptations and heritage films – would eventually converge. The

result of this intermingling is Oskar Roehler’s Jud Süß—Film ohne Gewissen.

Although stylistically controversial, Oskar Roehler’s film brings the genre of contemporary classical German adaptations into conversation with the more visible and discussed heritage films that mine the nation’s tumultuous history for entertainment and melodramatic purposes. The film details the making of Harlan’s Jud Süß, a film that adapted literary and filmic works that fictionalized the historical figure Joseph Süß Oppenheimer. By drawing upon a classical motif common to eighteenth and nineteenth century classical works, Roehler participates—like Pfeifer, Vilsmaier and other directors of contemporary classical German adaptations—in transposing well-known national German works to the twenty-first-century transnational screen. At the same time, given Roehler’s thematic focus on the most notorious of all Nazi propaganda films, his work must also be situated within the steadily growing genre of recent films that focus on true or fictionalized events of the Third Reich. Indeed, even teaching materials for this film subsume it into this broader category. In the Filmheft “Populärkultur und Geschichtsvermittlung: Aktuelle Spielfilme über den Nationalsozialismus,” FilmABC places it in concert with Quentin Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds (2009), Edward Zwick’s Defiance (2008), and Bryan Singer’s Valkyrie (2009).

Roehler’s mixed genre film—part biopic, part adaptation, and part heritage film—accomplishes two feats important for our study at hand. First, the film heightens the

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341 As a mixed-genre film that trades in a film adaptation from the Third Reich and can be considered a semi-fictional “making of” film tracing the creation of Harlan’s horrific film, Roehler’s work represents yet another twenty-first-century German adaptation that, like the films studied here, draws upon a number of important source texts: the historical event of Joseph Süß Oppenheimer’s execution, Wilhelm Hauff’s novella from 1827, Lion Feuchtwanger’s 1927 novel, and Lothar Mendes’ Jew Süß film from 1933 (a British production that nevertheless starred highly popular German actor Conrad Veidt, who had fled to Britain in 1933 with his wife).

stakes of media literacy, particularly for adaptations that seek to educate viewers about their own processes: in this case, aiming to teach about fascist film through revealing fascist film tendencies. Second, his film requires that we expand our working understanding of contemporary classical adaptations to include adaptations not only of classical literary works but also of classical film texts. The scope of the contemporary classical adaptation genre thus broadens out to include adaptations that are centered upon filmic source texts. By actively transgressing a somewhat clear(er) literature to film paradigm set up by the films discussed thus far, Roehler’s film shakes up – and in fact intensifies – the stakes for how contemporary classical German adaptations engage with national, transnational, and educational markets.

Roehler’s film serves as a powerful example of how contemporary adaptations can and do educate their viewers as to their own power as spectators in the adaptation industry. The film attempts to incite viewers to become more critical viewers of the images and messages conveyed on the screen and allows viewers access to otherwise censored materials through a framework that is both affective and educational (which, for our purposes here, does not align with factuality). Unlike other contemporary German history films that visually represent National Socialism in reunified Germany’s film landscape, and in contrast to many adaptations analyzed throughout my project, Roehler’s disturbingly foregrounds the agency of the transnational spectator as potentially destructive, thereby heightening the stakes of the educational mission undergirding contemporary adaptation filmmaking in Germany. In short, what I argue is that instead of giving viewers an illusion of history through mimesis, as films in the heritage genre often do, Roehler asks spectators to confront, as spectators, spectator
history. As a result, the film points to how German adaptations in the contemporary period begin to dismantle themselves, revealing their secrets and power as they branch out from traditional text-to-film transpositions to include film-to-film adaptations. Retrieving the Nazi past (in particular via the country’s own classical films from this era) is thus a critically and ironically incisive commentary on the strains of adapting classical works in the twenty-first century and the lessons this greater project holds for contemporary society.

II. From Veit Harlan’s *Jud Süß* to Oskar Roehler’s *Jud Süß—Film ohne Gewissen*

In November 1938, Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, masterminded a series of attacks against the Jews in the German media that led to the violent events referred to today as *Reichskristallnacht*. After receiving less than the German media’s full support in regards to these attacks, Hitler concluded that, instead of openly calling for violence against the Jews, the German people needed to be shown events in such a way that the people themselves would call for and condone such attacks. For this purpose, Goebbels launched a large campaign to disseminate anti-Semitic views of the Nazis to the populace via films produced by each of the nation’s three film studios: Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft (UFA), Deutsche Filmherstellungs- und Verwertungs GmbH (DFG) für die Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP, and Terra Filmkunst. These efforts resulted in Fritz Hippler’s *Der ewige Jude* (1940) Erich Waschneck’s *Die Rothschilds* (1940), and the most successful and renowned of the three, Veit Harlan’s *Jud Süß*.

The film story charts the rise and downfall of Süß Oppenheimer, an early
eighteenth-century Jew, who is depicted as constantly ingratiating himself into the favor of the extravagant Duke of Württemberg for Machiavellian ends. Süß’s moneylending enables him to move out of the ghetto and into a position at court, where he quickly proves manipulative, greedy, and power hungry. He exploits his influence to the highest degree when he plans a military coup d’état and violently rapes the counselor’s daughter while having her fiancé tortured. Upon the discovery of his multiple crimes against the German people, Süß is publicly executed and all Jews are henceforth banned from the city of Stuttgart.

Bolstered by a (fictional) claim to veracity and a closing line that urges viewers to consider the film as a warning that must be heeded, the motion picture quickly became an international success. The film was a hit not only in Germany but also abroad, garnering rave reviews and the top award at its Venice Film Festival premiere and attracting more than 20 million viewers across Europe. Because of its propagandistic triumph, the film was banned from German exhibition by decree of the Allied Military Occupation at the conclusion of World War II and has been censored in the nation ever since. Currently, the government-owned F.W. Murnau Foundation holds the copyright of the film and forbids its circulation and commercial distribution. Although the foundation allows for viewings of the film, these screenings must be planned, regulated, and moderated carefully in relation to explicit educational missions. The foundation only permits screenings for an expressly pedagogical purpose and requires a thorough

343 Veit Harlan, *Jud Suss (Jew Suess): The Deluxe Restored Version* (International Historic Films, Inc., 2008). After the opening credits, the film begins with the announcement that “die im Film geschilderten Ereignisse berühren auf geschichtlichen Tatsachen,” which are visually emphasized through a jump cut to a historic map of Würtemburg from the year 1733. The final line of the film, put into the authoritative mouth of the judge, urges that the ban on Jews instituted on this day be upheld by future generations: “Mögen unsere Nachfahren an diesem Gesetz ehren festhalten, auf dass ihnen viel Leid erspart bleibe an ihrem Gut und Leben und an dem Blut ihrer Kinder und Kindeskinder.”
introduction be given in which both the historical context surrounding the film’s creation and its intended impact on audiences is detailed. The screening must then be followed by a closing discussion with the appointed moderator.

That *Jud Süß* has been and remains censored in Germany is not unproblematic. The censorship of this film (and others) symbolically indicates that a film, as an object, can prove dangerous to the public at large, and that this danger can only be mitigated by pushing the object away from the public eye and repressing its presence within society. However, this reasoning only works if one maintains a rather static understanding of the workings of film production and film reception, as aspects of two separate, opposing, and thus binary positions. However, production and reception are intertwined, and are certainly understood within the films studied here as dynamic, symbiotic processes essential for making meaning of a film. Roehler particularly excels and getting this message across to his viewers. Through his artistic inclusion of Harlan’s film, he dismantles any assumed binary of intention and reception in favor of pointing out and asking spectators to consider the effects of their personal involvement with the film object. He thereby shows that it is not simply the object, then, that proves dangerous and in need of containment. Much more dangerous is the untrained public eye that might behold and engage with a problematic object.

Like the other contemporary adaptations explored in this study, Roehler’s film productively questions processes of transmediation and finds itself inextricably linked to the educational branch of the adaptation industry. Like the other films in this study, the stakes here revolve around the education of today’s viewer: an education that, as this film and other contemporary classical adaptations insist, must go beyond the bounds of
pure historical facts to also involve fostering the viewer’s awareness of the powers of media and their ability to produce affect and thereby, change. For a nation still negotiating its dominant presence in the film industry with its tainted (ab)use of the film medium in the past, the stakes of media literacy could not be higher than for a film that revives Nazi propaganda. And, Roehler takes this task quite seriously, ultimately seeking to reveal in his film to how film can manipulate viewers and drastically influence their emotions, thereby spurring on devastating acts. Notably, however, although Roehler’s film points out the possibilities of melodramatic effect, it does so in a way that calculatingly delimits the viewer’s full immersion in the film at hand – a film that has long been deemed too dangerous to be fully available to the public in Germany.

Questions of whether and how contemporary media might examine artifacts from the Nazi filmmaking past in an ethical and educative manner, particularly those products that have been censored since the end of World War II, remain highly contested in twenty-first century Germany. As Annika Orich and Florentine Strzelczyk note in “Framing the Past: Visual Musealization of the Nazi Past in Harlan – Im Schatten von Jud Süß and Jud Süß – Film ohne Gewissen,” there has been a notable upsurge in museum exhibitions, film screenings, and other productions since 2001 that have centered on Veit Harlan’s notorious film Jud Süß. “The question of how to best display and watch Harlan’s Jud Süß,” they explain, “continues to be an ongoing dispute,”344 and no single approach has yet garnered widespread approval.

Of all the attempts to showcase and discuss Jud Süß, Roehler’s film has proved

most controversial, eliciting heated debates and calls for its censorship. When the film premiered in 2010 at the sixtieth Berlinale, loud boos echoed through the room and several film critics dramatically exited the theater.\textsuperscript{345} The style of the film – rather than the film’s subject matter – triggered controversy. The problem was, for some critics and viewers, that Roehler’s film displayed the original material from the Nazi era. This was a stylistic choice that went against the common trends in contemporary German heritage films that visually represented National Socialism in reunified Germany’s film landscape via actors, settings, actions, and props that mimetically stood in for people and objects from the material past. Commingling this fictional film about the Third Reich with a disconcerting film from the Third Reich shocked viewers to a state of dismay. Attempting to describe his own distress about the film, one viewer explains that, despite wonderful techniques and actors, Harlan’s grotesque work simply overpowers by embedding the original. He states: “Die Darsteller sind ausgezeichnet, und der Schnitt ist sehr gut. Peinlich berührt hat mich, dass die Schwarz-Weiß-Clips aus dem ekelhaften Original am eindrücklichsten sind.”\textsuperscript{346}

Although highly contested for screening clips directly from Harlan’s original, Oskar Roehler’s film includes heavy use of stylistic and thematic devices that involve the viewer in exploring the film artifact in a pedagogical manner that is otherwise barred from widespread circulation in contemporary Germany. Although the film includes parts from the censored original, the reproduction of Harlan’s work occurs only within the confines of a double-layered frame that Roehler provides. This double framing enables


\textsuperscript{346} Ibid.
the viewer to engage with the original object, but only to a limited extent. Rather than full immersion, Roehler presents the object in a manner that results in the viewer retaining a level of objective and critical distance from the original work and its purportedly dangerous melodramatic affect.

Roehler establishes this distance in two ways. First, he frames Harlan’s *Jud Süß* by embedding this historic filmic object in a new film about this artifact’s creation. Thus, Harlan’s *Jud Süß* is only shown within the confines of a visual frame that viewers notice and which constantly reminds them viewer to attend to the viewing practices of the audience members within the film, with whom the film aligns—if but implicitly—its own viewers. Second, Then, Roehler dramatically stages the actions in which uncritical spectators participated in after viewing the film in order to showcase the grotesque melodramatic excess generally associated with Harlan’s film as a problem of uninformed viewership.

III. *Jud Süß – Film ohne Gewissen*: Framing Affect

In bringing Harlan’s film into the public sphere once again, Roehler’s film seeks to train critically the public eye—to educate the spectator. Key to understanding the pedagogical mission embedded in Roehler’s film involves a close analysis of how Roehler includes sequences from Harlan’s film within his work. Although the film indeed revivifies and recirculates that “dangerous” original object within his adaptation, Roehler ultimately succeeds at containing it by showing Harlan’s footage not in isolation but by framing it as an object that was publically circulated and frequently viewed, and thereby derived its power not from itself but from the people, like those who now watch the film
at a historical distance or through a different cultural frame.

From the first moments of the opening sequence, the film aligns spectatorship with the power to create and contain. A long shot places us, the film’s audience, among a row of seats near the back of a largely empty theater, upon whose stage Ferdinand Marion rehearses – in his role as the diabolic Iago from Shakespeare’s *Othello*. In the middle of his monologue, the film cuts to a medium shot, tracking Goebbels and Hippler entering and taking their seats in the upper mezzanine. The following eye line match shows the viewer Marion as seen through Goebbels’s eyes: not simply as Iago on the stage, but imagined as the future Süß Oppenheimer, whose representation by the convincing Marion, Goebbels jokes, could even make Hitler more anti-Semitic than he currently is. When Marion catches Goebbels’s judging eye in the audience, he immediately heightens his performance, which the film highlights by means of a zoom in on Marion’s expression of evil delight, much to Goebbels approval (figures 28 and 29). This exchange of gazes between Marion and Goebbels emphasizes Goebbels power as a spectator. This gaze in turn incites Marion to play the devilish lead role to the absolute best of his abilities. This interaction secures Goebbels’s belief that only Marion should star in his planned film, Harlan’s *Jud Süß*. 
Fig. 28: Ferdinand Marion, rehearsing his role as Iago, locks eyes with Joseph Goebbels, who has been watching his performance.

Fig. 29: Goebbels returns the gaze and Marion then heightens the pathos of his performance.

Later in the film we witness the consequence of this exchange, which allow Goebbels to exert power and influence over Marion after having viewed his convincing performance as a villain, and –through this exchange – objectifying him. Having been seen on the stage by Goebbels leads to Marion’s eventual pursuit and coercion by Goebbels. Having viewed Marion’s performance, Goebbels begins to go to great lengths to prevent Marion from refusing to play the part of Joseph Oppenheimer in his upcoming movie. Through Goebbels and his interaction with Marian via objectifying gazes, Roehler has already established for viewers the power that the spectator holds. It is upon this concept of a potent spectator that Roehler centers his film.
The visual constellation highlighting the spectator as a source of power vis-à-vis the materialized image of *Jud Süß* recurs whenever Roehler embeds Harlan’s footage into his film. Throughout these many sequences, the camera consistently positions Roehler’s audience as spectators who watch clips of the film alongside film characters. At times, Roehler’s viewers sit next to or behind members of the National Socialist party to view finished scenes behind the closed doors of the editing room, as if they were party members, too (figure 30). At other times, viewers sit perched up in crowded mezzanines, cramped in among the many international audience members who hungrily consume Harlan’s film at its premieres in Berlin, Venice, and Madrid as if they were attending the premiere as well (figure 31).

![Fig. 30: The camera positions the viewer in the back row among Nazi party members watching clips of Harlan’s *Jud Süß* during a postproduction screening.](image-url)
Throughout these lively scenes, the camera surveys full-house movie theaters through long shots before cutting away from the sea of spectators to present explicit footage from Harlan’s creation, as if Harlan’s *Jud Süß* were playing explicitly for Roehler’s viewers. By implication of this back and forth editing, in which Roehler’s spectators are positioned alongside spectators of Harlan’s film, *Jud Süß—Film ohne Gewissen* aligns its contemporary spectators, rather uncomfortably, with the spectators of the past viewing these images. Like the spectators of the past, viewers in the present are held transfixed to the screen as they experience the finished results of Marion’s (and Goebbels’) artistic labors.

When Harlan’s work is screened within Roehler’s film, the camera occasionally zooms in on the original fascist footage. In these moments, it appears as if the overall context within which Harlan’s film is viewed might fall to the wayside, which would ultimately place the audience outside of the camera’s eye, leaving the film to focus on Harlan’s film as a subject and not as a viewed object (figure 32). In these instances, viewers of Roehler’s film – no longer moored by their visible diegetic counterparts – seem forced into the position of being self-consciously voyeuristic recipients of an image.
that struggles to overcome its larger-than-life, fetishized status. Understandably, this tension can easily trouble the spectator’s position in relation to the object of Roehler’s film, as Harlan’s original seems to usurp its framing narrative. Much like the viewer at the premiere of Roehler’s film, at times the most powerful images seem to be nothing more than the stark original, as if nothing and no one could ever encompass and contain its power.

However, a closer look at the mise en scène during these moments in the film that reveals a critical but often-overlooked aspect of containment at work in the film. Even amidst the camera’s tightest zoom-ins on Harlan’s film, the footage remains framed in a square shot with soft rounded edges that fade into the background. This black background, seemingly of little narrative importance, is actually the unlit portion of the screen upon which Harlan’s film is projected to viewers. Thus, upon closer analysis, Roehler’s film ceaselessly points to the object’s existence (and thereby, its power) solely within the context of the public eye. In short, Harlan’s film does not or cannot exist outside of its context as a viewed object. The original film is never shown outside the construct of a public screening, even when the camera gets up close. The viewers never once see Harlan’s film without this very literal frame of reference, indicating that the film’s power emanates from the very act of others’ viewing it. That viewers of Roehler’s film are always placed among the spectators, who indulge in Jud Süß and are therewith incited to violence, challenges current spectators to acknowledge that transnational audiences – such as those that comprise the market for many German productions today – historically played a key role in promulgating an oppressive and political film culture.

The embedded scenes in Roehler’s film highlight the pivotal role spectatorship
played in *Jud Süß* specifically. The film thereby forces its audience to realize that the spectator retains a high degree of agency within the larger film/adaptation industry, and that this power must be taken seriously and used thoughtfully. Indeed, it is not left up to the director to decide the role a film will assume in the public sphere; instead, it is often bequeathed to the spectators themselves to determine whether or not a film will claim any, and if so what type of, relevancy beyond the confines of the darkened room. To that extent, Roehler’s film gestures towards the likely determinant of future German canon films. The choices of texts and revisions to the canon that film adaptations undertake will be categorically characterized by the evolving needs, desires, and hopes of its (trans)national viewership – whether for better, or worse. For this purpose, *spectatorship history* must be acknowledged and researched, just as post-1945 German directors – through their questioning of the medium and its powers – have come to terms with the problematic medium of film.

Roehler also highlights the problem of melodramatic excess among uncritical viewers by including characters in the plot that – as a result of believing Harlan’s film – engage in unspeakably grotesque acts. For example, Roehler shows men and soldiers who rise up violently against Jewish bystanders after they finish watching the film. He also spends considerable camera time following a wife of a Nazi party member who becomes so obsessed with Marion as Oppenheimer – believing him to be so desirably off-limits and “dirty” – that she convinces him to forcefully penetrate her to the beat of aerial bombs exploding across Berlin. Including scenes that trace the bad behavior of uncritical spectators underlines how the fantasies of spectators are not innocuous, but rather treacherous. If the melodrama here blurs and balances the line between personal lives and
social lives, then the grotesque and excessive reactions to Harlan’s film that Roehler outlines suggests a spectatorship that often fully collapsed that line and uncritically absorbed a social consciousness with an anti-Semitic cinematic fantasy, thus forsaking the role of the critical, active viewer.

As a result, both the framing devices that Roehler espouses and his integration of uncritical viewers points towards the efficacy of appropriating historical and materialized objects, in their original forms, to further support the cultural and pedagogical agenda that undergirds contemporary German adaptations. Gathered around the spectacle of Harlan’s film, Roehler diachronically aligns today’s contemporary spectators (of his film) with the historical spectators of Harlan’s film, resulting in an entertainment film that works pedagogically and uses melodramatic codes to reveal the possibly perverse ways that uncritical viewers might react to melodrama. Roehler’s film takes an approach that directly challenges contemporary viewers to examine their own spectatorial practices and to consider how these practices can and do shape the film industry and the cultural perspectives it circulates.

As a critical intervention in the genres of remakes, contemporary classical adaptations, and German heritage films, Roehler’s film contends that what is most needed in an era of transnational filmmaking are films that actually position these audiences to become aware of the power and agency they have as spectators in an era of transnational film production. Indeed, working with censored objects – and teaching how to engage with these objects in distinctive ways – marks the beginning of offering audiences key information to learn about their own capacity and agency. By uniquely including a historical artifact successfully into a fictional film, Roehler elicits introspection, critical
intervention, and (re)-education on the part of the transnational film spectator. Thus, his film can serve as a model and instrument for the larger project of transnational spectator awareness-raising that sits at the heart of the contemporary classical adaptation boom.

IV. Filmhefte or Censorship? - Questioning the Limits of Contemporary Adaptations

As Jud Süß—Film ohne Gewissen shows, contemporary films dealing with the National Socialist past can and must educate their viewers as to their own power in the film/adaptation industry, incite contemporary spectators to become more critical viewers of the images and messages conveyed on the screen, and – finally – allow viewers access to otherwise censored materials through an affective, educational and at the same time popular framework. Just as Harlan’s film succeeded due to its mass reception domestically and abroad, the film or films that question the very sources and nature of such notorious films’ propagandistic successes must also garner widespread popularity.

As the scriptwriter for Roehler’s film acknowledges, censorship limits productive engagement with spectatorship history. As he notes, it becomes nearly impossible to engage in constructive discourse on a subject with which many are unfamiliar. “Es war ein schwieriger Film, es war ein schwieriges Buch” Klaus Richter notes, “ein Film über einen Film [zu drehen], den niemand kennt, weil man ihn nicht sehen kann.”347 That Charlotte Knobloch, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany unsuccessfully motioned to ban Roehler’s film indicates the deep pushback against even educationally-oriented materials dealing with Harlan’s original, and invites even more

pressing questions regarding: sustained and effective ways one can reach and teach spectators today about media manipulation and the power of spectator engagement; who has the right to do this educative work; and what forms these educational missions may take. With *Jud Süß—Film ohne Gewissen*, Roehler successfully raises the stakes of spectatorship in contemporary society, and he shocking reminds today’s viewers that it is imperative to utilize critical media literacy skills, even when watching purported entertainment films. This film also articulates and amplifies the need to foster the critical and reflective media literacy skills of citizens today. Indeed, the reactions critics and viewers had to the film present us insight on the troublesome ramifications that can be caused by uncritical spectatorship. A responsible and informed approach to *Filmbildung*, particularly an approach that recognizes the important role that contemporary classical adaptations can play, remains an essential part for remedying this problem. With contemporary classical adaptations abounding around the world today, the cultural history of Germany makes those practices especially fraught with cultural, ideological, and social pressures. Classical contemporary adaptations in the German context makes it clear that the genre’s production is intricately bound up with the complexities of transnational geographies and economies, and – perhaps most importantly – with a critical, pedagogical engagement with the audiences of popular culture.


---. “Reframing the Past: Heritage Cinema and Holocaust in the 1990s.” *New German Critique* 87 (Fall 2002): 47–82.


---. *West German Film in the Course of Time: Reflections on the Twenty Years since Oberhausen.* Bedford Hills: Redgrave, 1984.


