

# **Selling the Nazi dream: Advertisement of the anti-semitic film in the Third Reich**

Jennifer Lee

2004

Illumine: Journal of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society

UVic Libraries ePublishing Services

© 2004 Lee. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Original citation:

Lee, J. (2004). Selling the Nazi dream: Advertisement of the anti-semitic film in the Third Reich. *Illumine*, 3(1), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.18357/illumine3120041579>

---

Downloaded from UVicSpace Research & Learning Repository

dspace.library.uvic.ca



**University  
of Victoria**

Libraries

# Selling the Nazi Dream: Advertisement of the Anti-Semitic Film in the Third Reich

Jennifer Lee, University of Victoria

## Abstract

*The anti-Semitic films of Third Reich stand as a vivid illustration of the hatred targeted at the Jews in Germany from 1933 to 1945. Two of the anti-Semitic films in particular, *Jud Süß* (Veit Harlan, 1940) and *Der Ewige Jude* (Fritz Hippler, 1940), have received much attention from academics and the general public. In this paper, however, I will examine two other films that have been largely ignored: *Robert und Bertram* (Hans Zerlett, 1939) and *Die Rothschilds* (Erich Waschneck, 1940). These two films show that anti-Semitism could adopt very different guises in Third Reich film; it could appear in a light-hearted humorous farce film, like *Robert und Bertram* or in a serious historical drama, like *Die Rothschilds*. Just as anti-Semitism took different forms, so did the image of the Jew. Advertisers of the films walked a fine line between displaying the Jew as a repulsive, evil figure on the one hand and displaying him as an attractive, saleable figure on the other. As a result, the character of the Jew, and his counterpart, the Aryan, were often portrayed in very contradictory manners. By examining how advertisers marketed the genre, plot and characters for each of these two films, I will show how conflicting images and messages dominated even this cornerstone of Nazi ideology, the anti-Semitic film.*

## Introduction

Among all the films of the Nazi era, the anti-Semitic film stands out as an expression of Nazi ideology. These films serve as a vivid reminder of the strength of genocidal feelings in the Nazi regime. Historians have extensively studied two such films: *Jud Süß*, advertised as a “true” account of the life of the Jewish finance minister, Suss Oppenheimer, in the eighteenth-century; and *Der ewige Jude*, advertised as a “documentary” film, which depicted Jews in the ghetto – what the Nazis claimed was their natural habitat. I will, however, examine the promotion of two less well-known anti-Semitic films: *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds*.

These two films show that anti-Semitism could adopt very different guises in Third Reich film; it could appear in a light-hearted humorous farce film, like *Robert und Bertram* or in a serious historical

drama, like *Die Rothschilds*. The films were written, directed and acted by very different sets of artists who had strong links to various genres and, as I will discuss, they were often advertised in very different manners. These differences raise the question: to what extent can historians group these films within an anti-Semitic genre? I will argue that while these films certainly contain significant anti-Semitic themes, which can be compared, it is important not to disregard the differences between them. Differences reveal how the National Socialist party and the film industry attempted to balance the political need to indoctrinate with the need to entertain the public.

Even the anti-Semitic themes in *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds* were not straightforward. Commercial pressures, competing ideological agendas, a reliance on old narrative paradigms, and the need to entertain a paying audience all had an impact on the portrayal of Jews in these films. Also, as many historians have pointed out, the image of the Jew in Nazi society was fraught with contradictions and confusions.<sup>1</sup> The films were certainly not immune to this confusion; the National Socialist party and the film industry struggled with how best to construct their image of the Jew so that it both repelled and attracted the German public. They also struggled with how best to portray the Jew’s nemesis, the Aryan. Through a case study of *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothchilds*, I will examine two very different presentations of the Jews. I will address how advertisers marketed the genre, the plot and the characters for each in order to show how conflicting cultural tendencies dominated even this cornerstone of Nazi ideology.

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Albert Lindemann, *Esau’s Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) or Philippe Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989). Also, for a theoretical discussion of the nature of racial stereotyping (although this discussion is based on a study of colonialism) and how stereotypes are inherently ambivalent and contradictory see Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

## Plot Summaries

*Robert und Bertram* is set in the 1820s and details the adventures of two good-natured vagabonds. When we first meet Robert and Bertram, they are behind bars on charges of vagrancy. Jail has reunited these two mischievous friends who soon escape together into the surrounding Spree forest. Robert and Bertram encounter Lenchen, the pretty, blond daughter of a local restaurant owner, who promises them lunch in return for their dishwashing services. She tells them of her father's debts to a Jew named Mr. Biedermeier who threatens to foreclose the family business unless Lenchen marries him. However, Lenchen is in love with Michel, a local simpleton who cannot build up the courage to ask her to marry him. In an attempt to aid Lenchen, Robert and Bertram steal Biedermeier's wallet, but instead of money, they discover inside it a letter that details Biedermeier's debts to a powerful Jewish banker in Berlin named Nathan Ipelmeyer. Robert and Bertram set off to Berlin. Disguised as the Count of Monte Christo and the distinguished music professor Müller, they gain access to a party at Ipelmeyer's house. With the skill of well-practiced pickpockets they relieve the house and all its guests of jewels, which they promptly send to Lenchen's family in the mail. Lenchen is now free to marry Michel, who, on an army training vacation, has been transformed, the story tells us, into a real man. He boldly takes her into his arms and asks her to marry him. Meanwhile, the law has caught up with Robert and Bertram, who, in order to avoid returning to prison, escape in a hot air balloon that takes them up to heaven.

*Die Rothschilds* professes to give a "true" account of the rise in wealth of Nathan Rothschild, one of the first Rothschilds to internationalize the family business by becoming a broker on the London stock exchange.<sup>2</sup> The film opens with Nathan receiving his big break in the London business scene in 1806. The elector (prince) of the Germanic state of Hesse gives Nathan 600,000 pounds, which he invests successfully, buying gold from the East Indian Company for a reduced price and then lending it at high interest rates to the Exchequer (the office of

---

<sup>2</sup> The film does follow the major events of the life of Nathan Rothschild when he first went to London. See Richard Davis' *The English Rothschilds* (London: Collins, 1983) for an account of Nathan's life. He says that there has always been much speculation surrounding Nathan's buying up of stock after Waterloo, but he believes the amount he made off these stocks has often been exaggerated (see pages 35-36).

the British government that deals with public revenue). Nathan tries to ingratiate himself into high society in London through Sylvia, the beautiful wife of a competing banker. However, this plan fails since, although London businessmen and politicians are willing to conduct business with him, they are not willing to break bread with a Jew. The film skips forward in time to 1815; Napoleon has escaped from exile and has gathered an army to challenge the English and Prussians at Waterloo. Financial speculators eagerly await the outcome of Waterloo, and Nathan plans to be the first to know the outcome by posting a secret military courier at the battlefield. When he receives the news that Napoleon has been defeated, he instead sends out the rumor that England, not France, has lost, triggering international stock market panic in which brokers sell all their bonds at the low prices. Nathan buys up these bonds and makes millions, while many English syndicates go under. The film concludes with Nathan peering over a map, showing the branches of his business spreading out all over Europe. The Star of David lights up over the map indicating, in no uncertain terms, that the victory of Britain, through Nathan's underhanded actions, has become a victory of Jewry over Europe.

## Background

Jews in Germany in the late 1930s constituted only approximately one percent of the total population. Their backgrounds were diverse; they were employed in various sectors of the economy and represented very different levels of wealth. Most had resided in Germany for several generations and had assimilated into their communities. Only approximately twenty percent were 'Eastern Jews' or those who had since World War I immigrated to Germany from impoverished parts of Eastern Europe. This group was generally the most visible, wearing typical Jewish clothing and living together in quarters of large cities.<sup>3</sup> The Nazis associated all Jews with this latter group and use them as a basis to form their image of the stereotypical Jew, which was meant to apply to all Jews.

*Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds* were released in Germany only a year apart (in 1939 and 1940). Their timing coincided with the intensification of anti-Semitic laws and policies.

---

<sup>3</sup> Information in this paragraph derived from William Carr, "Nazi Policy Against the Jews" in *Life in the Third Reich*, ed. Richard Bessel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Historians debate when the National Socialists actually conceived the organized mass extermination of the Jews, known as the Final Solution. However, most agree that the years 1938-39 (coinciding with the outbreak of World War II) represented a turning point in the government's policy towards the Jews.<sup>4</sup> Prior to 1938 there had been important anti-Semitic legislation, including, in 1935, the Nuremberg Laws, which forbade marriage between Jews and Aryans and denied Jews their full citizenship rights. In 1938, however, the government began to officially sanction violence towards Jews, and anti-Semitic legislation intensified. *Robert und Bertram* was in production in 1938 when the events of the "Night of Broken Glass" unfolded; on November 9-10, party activists murdered ninety-one Jews, burnt down synagogues and vandalized numerous shops.<sup>5</sup> In 1939, when *Robert und Bertram* was released and *Die Rothschilds* was in production, Germany invaded Poland, exposing the eastern Jewish populations to Nazi persecution. In 1940-41, when *Die Rothschilds* was in cinemas, Jewish movements were severely restricted and Jews were forced to wear a yellow star. By early 1942 construction began on the gas chambers and crematoria in Poland, sites where millions of Jews were murdered. Therefore, *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds* were part of a wave of state-sanctioned moves against the Jews by the National Socialist party.

### A Difference in Genre

Besides the significance of their production and release dates, *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds* also contain several similarities in plot. Both are set in the early nineteenth-century. They contain similar portrayals of the Jew as an evil financier, and they both contain a subplot of a young Aryan couple that must overcome obstacles presented by the Jew in order to marry. Otherwise, *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds* are very different films. The most obvious distinction is that the former is a fantastical, light-hearted musical comedy, whereas the latter is a serious historical drama.

In fact, advertisers for *Robert und Bertram* strongly emphasized the light-mindedness of the film. For example, a reviewer in 1939 wrote that the

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Albert Lindemann, *Esau's Tears*, William Carr "Nazi Policy Against the Jews" or Jackson Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany A History* by (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> William Carr, "Nazi Policy Against the Jews," p. 72-3.

film "play[s] with a lightness that knows how to cast away the bad mood from the minds of even the most depressed visitors...general cheerfulness is guaranteed."<sup>6</sup> The main goal of the film was to provide release to its audience from their everyday responsibilities. *Robert und Bertram's* genre is the farce.<sup>7</sup> It is actually based on a farcical play of the same name composed in 1856 by Gustav Raeder.<sup>8</sup> Although advertisers said that anti-Semitism existed in the original play, they also promoted the portrayal of the Jew in *Robert und Bertram* as something new. For instance, one reviewer wrote, "for the first time in a movie, Judaism is made the target of superior mockery that is certain of its impact. When Herbert Hübner [who plays the Jew Mr. Ipelmeyer] strides, like a Jew, pompously and desirously through his palace...the audience roars with laughter."<sup>9</sup> The film farce, therefore, presents the Jew as a comical figure.

In contrast, the Jews in the *Die Rothschilds* are certainly not meant to invoke laughter. The film was advertised as educational, meant to enlighten its viewers of the serious Jewish and British threat. For instance, Joseph Goebbels, under the penname Dr. G., wrote an article about the film that appeared in *Der Stürmer*, the most infamous Nazi anti-Semitic journal, in which he stated, "Based on historical documents, the film shows the Jew as he really lived and haggled, exploited and enslaved peoples, plotted wars and gained millions from blood and misery."<sup>10</sup> Goebbels' direct endorsement of this film pointed directly to its ideological significance as an anti-Semitic film.

In contemporary discourse, *Die Rothschilds* was most frequently classified as a 'historical truth' film. Articles and press booklets repeatedly pointed out that it was "Based on historical documents" and that

<sup>6</sup> *Tobis Werbedienst* (Berlin: Tobis Filmkunst, 1939).

<sup>7</sup> A farce is quite a broad category, which can include any sort of comedic literature, theatre or film. Albert Bermel, in a study on the farce genre, lists the following identifying characteristics: it is usually a very physical, "knockabout humor"; it is by nature popular, always meant to appeal to a wide spectrum of the public; it promises a release from everyday behavior (including an emphasis on the trance, spell or dream world); and it often includes scenes with men in drag (*Farce: A History from Aristophanes to Woody Allen*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982, p. 21).

<sup>8</sup> Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich* (London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 235.

<sup>9</sup> "Robert und Bertram," *Film-Kurier*, July 15, 1939, Nr. 162, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. G., "Die Rothschilds," *Der Stürmer*, 1940, Nr. 35, p. 7.

“History co-authored this movie.”<sup>11</sup> However, at the same time that the advertisers were praising history as the path to truth about Jews, they also argued that historians did not always tell the truth: “A movie about the criminal ‘rise of the financial dictatorship over Europe! What was treated by the far too considerate historiography as unimportant and marginal becomes overwhelmingly telling and enlightening in the plot of this film created with historical accuracy.”<sup>12</sup> In such cases, films could be trusted to give a more accurate picture. For instance, Goebbels complained that historians downplayed or ignored “the criminal ‘rise’ of the [Jewish] financial dictatorship over Europe” but that *Die Rothschilds* would set the historical record straight.<sup>13</sup> The word most commonly used for the act of showing people the truth was *Volksaufklärung* (the people’s enlightenment), a word that the Nazis considered almost synonymous with the word propaganda.<sup>14</sup> *Volksaufklärung*, as a concept, was utilized repeatedly throughout the advertisements with promises that the film would trigger a collective German consciousness by exposing one of the major atrocities committed by Jews in history.

The stark differences between *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds* in terms of how they were marketed illustrate the extent to which anti-Semitism could take very different guises in Third Reich film. Whereas in the former film, the Jew is meant to invoke laughter; in the latter, he is meant to invoke shock and to enlighten Germans about the ‘true’ nature of Jewish domination. Despite these differences, the image of the Jew in both films serves to invoke derision and hatred. In both films, he is the antagonist or villain, but his villainy does not negate all his attractive qualities, nor did the film advertisers believe it should do so. For instance, one reviewer of *Die Rothschilds* wrote, “all psychological experience shows that sinners are more interesting than pillar saints.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, advertisers sought to portray the Jew as a filmic villain that was repellent enough to fit the Nazi’s anti-Semitic mould, but also attractive enough to intrigue the German public.

### The Jew as Antagonist

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* and Ufa Werbedienst (Berlin: Ufa-Filmverleih GmbH, 1940).

<sup>12</sup> Ufa Presseheft. Berlin: Klang-Film Gerät, 1940.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. G, “*Die Rothschilds*,” *Der Stürmer*, 1940, Nr. 35, 7.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, the Ministry of Propaganda was named the Reichministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Richard Biedrzyński, “*Isreals Waterloo*.”



Caricatures of the characters Mr. and Mrs. Ipelmeyer and Isadora Ipelmeyer emphasizing stereotypical “Jewish” traits. Located in the *Robert und Bertram Tobis Presseheft*. Courtesy of the *Filmmuseum*, Berlin.

There are several components to the image of the Jew in the advertisements for *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds*. One component is the portrayal of the ghetto as being the Jew’s natural environment. This point is made repeatedly in *Die Rothschilds*, since the real Nathan Rothschild and his family did in fact come from the Jewish lane in Frankfurt. Advertisers also frequently depicted the ghetto as being overcrowded, unsanitary and the place of shady business dealings. For instance, a reviewer wrote, “After they were spit out by some Galician ghetto, they were sitting in another small grimy ghetto, the Jewish Lane in Frankfurt am Main.”<sup>16</sup> The historian Baruch Gitlis points out that prior to the Third Reich the ghetto was normally associated only with the east Jewish immigrants to Western Europe; however, during the Nazi regime this association spread to all Jews and the National

<sup>16</sup> “*Die Rothschilds: Zur Berliner Uraufführung*.”

Socialists were particularly eager to tie prominent Jews to origins in the ghetto.<sup>17</sup>

From the ghetto, the advertisements asserted, Jews would attempt to move into and infiltrate high society in the Western nations. In Nazi ideology, the Jew would try to “blend into German society and erase his Otherness.”<sup>18</sup> In both *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds*, while the Jew may succeed in entering the business world, he does not do as well in the social world. This is because although his special, and allegedly inherent, Jewish talent with finances will always appeal to greedy Aryans (like the English in *Die Rothschilds*), even these Aryans will not be able to sufficiently overcome their natural repugnance of Jews in order to socialize with him. The Jew, therefore, while attractive in the business world, is repulsive in the social world and his attempts to enter the latter are thwarted by his inability to hide his innate Jewishness. A scene from *Robert und Bertram* emphasizes this point by comparing the Jew to a fat man who can never hide his belly: the banker Ipelmeyer, “I have a secret...I am an Israelite” to which the robust Bertram responds “I also have a secret...I have a belly.” Several scenes in both films mock the Jew’s imitation of a high society lifestyle; these scenes were prominent in the advertisements. For instance, an article on *Robert und Bertram* describes how when the two vagabonds first approach Ipelmeyer he is sitting in the Café Kranzler, an actual café on the elegant *Unter den Linden* street, attempting to look the part of a member of Berlin high society.<sup>19</sup> Robert and Bertram similarly try to disguise themselves in the café by adopting the personas of the Count of Monte Christo and Müller. In their ridiculous disguises, they mock the Jew’s obvious attempt to disguise himself as a member of German high society.

In the description of the scenes where the Jew imitates the upper class, the advertisements asserted that the Jew could not hide his true nature behind such an appearance. However, advertisements also professed that the ability of the Jew to successfully hide his identity was his most dangerous talent. As already discussed, the Jew was often presented as disguised or masked. The purpose of the film was then to expose the Jew; *Die Rothschilds* was touted as “a great German film about the unmasking of

<sup>17</sup> “Redemption” of Ahasuerus: *The Eternal Jew in Nazi Film* (New York: Holmfirth Books, 1991), p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, p. 238.

<sup>19</sup> “Unter’n Linden, unter’n Linden...Die historische Kranzler-Ecke im Film,” *Tobis Presseheft* (Berlin: Tobis Filmkunst GmbH, 1939).

Judas.”<sup>20</sup> The Jew was also portrayed as a formless or invisible entity – a metaphysical threat. For instance, a *Die Rothschilds* press booklet threatened, “on the sky over Europe a pale, ghostly gleam flashes, radiating from the new alliance, the star of the English-Jewish plutocracy.”<sup>21</sup> The Jew had no boundaries: the Rothschilds were supposedly a “pernicious super-national power” who easily spread their influence from one country to the next.<sup>22</sup> Coinciding with this lack of boundaries was the frequent portrayal of the Jew as a traveler without real roots or a real home.<sup>23</sup>

Characterizing the Jew as a formless and masked being who could blend into any foreign surrounding obviously presented difficulties for portraying his or her physical appearance. Using cartoon caricatures, the Nazis developed a stereotypical appearance for Jews; the Jew was portrayed as short and stocky, with dark, curly hair, an elongated nose and dark shifty eyes. In advertising photographs, the Rothschilds and the Ipelmeyers epitomize this look. In *Robert und Bertram*’s case, caricatures show stereotypical “Jewish” features. However, some of the Jewish characters in this film do not possess the stereotypical look. In particular, the young Jews in *Robert und Bertram*, namely Lenchen’s suitor, Mr. Biedermeier, and Ipelmeyer’s daughter, Isadora, are more attractive, Aryan-looking characters (with lighter skin and fitter bodies), suggesting perhaps that the younger generation of Jews is increasingly able to blend into German society.



Film still from *Jud Süß* depicting Dorothea Sturm and Süß Oppenheimer. Courtesy of the *Filmmuseum*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ufa Presseheft* (Berlin: Klang-Film Gerät, 1940).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ufa Webedienst* (Berlin:Ufa-Filmverleih, 1940).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Several historians discuss the attractive nature of the Jew in Nazi-era films (most often in relation to *Jud Süß*). In *Jud Süß*, the Jew is transformed into an attractive character, able to erase almost all of his Jewishness when he enters German high society. The popular actor Ferdinand Marian was cast in the role of Süß and apparently after appearing in the film, he received numerous letters from love struck fans.<sup>24</sup> Schulte-Sasse compares the Jew in anti-Semitic films to another attractive villain: the vampire in horror films. She argues that both exude incredible erotic energy that allows them to lure in the unsuspecting: "One might say that precisely what makes *Jud Süß* work as a film, with its codified organization of desire, undermines it as anti-Semitism."<sup>25</sup> In *Robert und Bertram*, one can see the attractive nature of the Jew starting to appear in the younger Jewish characters, and even old Mr. and Mrs. Ipelmeyer are attractive in terms of their comical appeal. The Jewish characters in *Die Rothschilds* do not really hold a similar appeal. In fact, Régine Friedman argues that the film did not succeed at the box office quote "precisely because it systematically avoided implementing the process of visual pleasure and identification."<sup>26</sup> The Jew in *Die Rothschilds*, therefore, was not attractive enough for audiences. However, advertisers worried that putting images of the Jew and Jewish symbols on screen and on advertising posters could give the images an unintended significance. For instance, in the press booklet, the industry directed advertisers to use the Star of David on posters for the film, but they instructed them to be careful to clearly delineate this image a negative one:

It is essential to operate very carefully and skillfully with it; this symbol should only be used according to its strict meaning in the decoration of the theatre, so that it does not give the impression of having a purpose separate from the film! Let our respective designs be your sole example and guideline and only bring the symbol into context with typically Jewish picture presentations – meaning for instance with the heads of the Rothschilds – or with texts that describe the typical Jew negatively.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> "Male Gaze and Female Reaction: Veit Harlan's *Jew Süß* (1940)," *Gender and German Cinema: Feminist Interventions*, eds. Sarah Frieden, et al. (Providence: Berg Publishers, 1993), p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> *Ufa Presseheft* (Berlin: Klang-Film Gerät, 1940).

Therefore, National Socialism and the industry walked a fine line between displaying the Jew as a repulsive, evil figure on the one hand and displaying him or her as an attractive, saleable figure on the other.

### The Aryan as Protagonist

In *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds*, the Jewish antagonists are made very obvious to the potential viewer; the Jews have distinguishing names, physical features and personality traits. However, the same cannot be said of the protagonists; they are not as clearly drawn as the Jews. In fact, the advertisers seemed to have made a conscious effort to point out the heroes of the film, suggesting that they were not otherwise readily apparent. The Aryan characters in the two films are actually more anti-heroes than heroes; in *Robert und Bertram* they are two delinquent vagabonds and in *Die Rothschilds* they are the greedy and power-mongering British. In fact, the lack of true heroes may be said to have plagued all the anti-Semitic films; many historians discuss how the Aryan male often appeared insipid and uninteresting compared to his Jewish counterpart.<sup>28</sup>

In both *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds*, the Aryan couple represents the ideal. In the former film, Lenchen and Michel are the ideal couple, while in the latter film, Phyllis, the daughter of an English banker, and George Crayton, an officer in the English army, make up the Aryan couple. In both films, the couples are stereotypically blond and bright-eyed and their love together is portrayed as very innocent and natural. The Jewish characters and their evil plans threaten to come between the Aryan couple. The underlying message inherent in this portrayal is that the Jew threatens procreation and thus the continuation of a pure- blood Aryan generation.

In both films, the ideal Aryan male is a soldier; Crayton is an officer in the English army and Michel becomes a corporal in the Prussian army. It is only as a soldier that the Aryan is truly able to become a man and defy the Jew. For instance, in *Die Rothschilds*, when George Crayton, in his duties as a military courier, discovers Nathan Rothschild's plan to manipulate the stock market by lying about the outcome of the Battle of Waterloo, he rushes back to

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Karsten Witte, "The Invisible Legacy of Nazi Cinema," *New German Critique* 24-25 (1981-1982), p. 252, Antje Acheid, *Hitler's Heroines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), p. 37, or Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, p. 81-2.

London to expose this plan to the English businessmen. In *Robert und Bertram*, prior to entering the army, Michel is portrayed as indecisive, shy and simple-minded. Most importantly, he is unable to build up the courage to ask Lenchen to marry him even though Biedermeier, the Jew, is competing for her attentions. In fact, the press booklet described Michel's character as a *Hampelmänner*, a 'Jumping Jack' puppet, who has no mind of his own: "A real woman doesn't want a puppet for a husband. That is as much a fact as water is wet. But then, some men pretend to be real men and then turn out to be true puppets during the marriage, as weaklings that suffer being hit by their angry wives with a cleaning rag."<sup>29</sup> The article then stated that the army can transform puppets like Michel into real men. It read, "he joins the army and when he returns he is a true man without the psychological and cowardly restraints. Then he doesn't hesitate long, he takes Lenchen into his arms and kisses her. Then, finally, she knows he is not a puppet." At this point in the film, Michel finally stands up to Mr. Biedermeier, telling him to leave Lenchen alone. Through the military drill machine Michel is defeminized and reborn a man. Of course, it is ironic that the Aryan male needs to undergo such a rigorous transformation process in order to become a true man.<sup>30</sup>

### The Jew and the Aryan Mirrored

As a soldier and as the natural lover of the Aryan woman, the Aryan male is the complete antithesis of the Jewish male. However, the Jew and the Aryan do not always counter each other, in fact sometimes they mirror one another. Several historians have discussed this phenomenon. Eric Rentschler, in a discussion of *Jud Süß*, argues that by creating the Jew as a necessary counterpart to the Aryan, the Nazis connected the images so closely that they became co-dependent. Rentschler states: "In fabricating this counter identity, the Nazis constituted a double, a self that they could acknowledge only in the form of a reverse image...under his mask: the Semite is an Aryan."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "Männer und Hampelmänner," *Tobis Presseheft* (Berlin: Tobis Filmkunst, 1939).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, George Mosse, *The Image of Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 158, or Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, p. 242.

<sup>31</sup> Rentschler discusses how the films' cuts and dissolves often create parallels between the Aryan and the Jew: "The repetition of gestures and words by different characters establishes links and dissolves borders between

There are certainly parallels between the Aryan and the Jew in *Robert und Bertram* as the two main characters exhibit many stereotypical Jewish character traits. Like the Jew, Robert and Bertram are travelers, without any home or roots to one particular place. As vagabonds, they are societal outsiders and their escape to heaven in a hot air balloon at the end of the film, reinforces the fact that they cannot be rewarded for their good deeds within any society on earth. Also, like the Jew, Robert and Bertram often don disguises and do so to invade the spaces of others; they disguise themselves as the Count of Monte Christo and the music professor Müller in order to gain access to the Ipelmeier house. Their similarities to the Jew allow them to trick him – they are able to beat him at his own game of disguise. While Robert and Bertram may be similar to the Jew, there is one crucial difference: Robert and Bertram lie outside the capitalist system; they represent pre-industrial artisans or journeymen who are left to wander unemployed as vagabonds because they have no role in a new modern capitalist system. This makes them immune to Jewish seduction since the Nazi regime claimed that the Jew operated by appealing to material greed within a capitalist system. However, this distinction was not sharp enough for some Nazis; Hitler apparently protested against Robert and Bertram's characters, claiming that they were not sufficiently virtuous to represent German Aryans.<sup>32</sup>

Another area of discomfort for advertisers was the Aryan actor who played the Jew on screen. The actor, in general, exhibited some uncomfortable parallels with the Jew. Like the Jew, the actor was a dissembler; both had a talent for adopting the appearance and personality of others. However, the Aryan actor playing the Jew was an obvious area of unease for the National Socialists. Uneasiness was evident in the advertisements for *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds*, which repeatedly mentioned that the 'real' personality of the actor was not Jewish in the least. The advertisements emphasized that it was difficult for the Aryan to play a Jew on screen, involving self-denial on the part of the Aryan actor. These articles stressed that the actors needed to undergo a transformation or a masking in order to hide their natural Aryan traits and adopt those of the Jew. In an interview, Hans Zerlett, director of *Robert und Bertram*, claimed that this transformation

the Jew and his Aryan counterparts." *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 163.

<sup>32</sup> Dorothea Hollstein, *Jud Süß und die Deutschen* (Berlin: Ullstein Materialien, 1971), p.52.

was so complete that on the set no one would recognize his actors as Aryans: “It is obvious that the six Jewish roles in the film had to be played by non-Jews, but the masks – a least to judge after the screen tests – are so real that nobody will doubt the reality of my Semites.”<sup>33</sup> Some of Zerlett’s actors expressed concern with being associated with a Jewish persona. For example, Tatjana Sais, who plays Ipelmeyer’s daughter Isadora, stated in an interview, “You know, it is a somewhat strange feeling to be identified in the consciousness of the public as a Jewish girl. I noticed that in the horrified gazes with which many visitors sized us up during the filming period.”<sup>34</sup> The advertisers made a conscious effort to distinguish the actor and the Jew. What supposedly lay at the heart of the Jew’s evil nature was the purposeful manipulation of his surface appearance, while inside he remained unchanged. The advertisers therefore argued that while the Jew’s act of disguising himself involved craftiness and a conscious effort, the actor supposedly just drew on pure spontaneous emotions:

Oftentimes, the development of the opponent’s personality demands from the author a specific knowledge of the soul and psychological depth, and from the actor the gift of showing a real human face, that, in the moment of creation does not only derive its expressiveness from the brain, but from the re-feeling of emotions.<sup>35</sup>

In this way, the Aryan actor’s ability to become fully immersed in the character was actually seen as far more sincere and honest. Nevertheless, the fact that the advertisers needed to point out this difference suggests that the distinctions were not immediately clear – there was an uncomfortable similarity between the Aryan actor and the Jew.

### Women and the Jew

One final theme that appeared in the advertising for *Robert und Bertram* and *Die Rothschilds* involves gender identities. This theme may be split into two categories: the Jewish woman and the relationship of the Jewish male to the Aryan woman. In anti-Semitic film and in Nazi ideology as a whole, the Jewish woman was a much less prominent figure than the Jewish man. In Nazi ideology, the Jewish male, after all, was seen to be the larger threat; he

<sup>33</sup> “*Das Lokalstück: Die menschliche Komödie.*”

<sup>34</sup> “*Ein beinah genormtes Interview*” *Tobis Presseheft* (Berlin: Tobis Filmkunst, 1939).

<sup>35</sup> “*Das grosse Erlebnis des Schauspielers*” *Tobis Presseheft* (Berlin: Tobis Filmkunst, 1939).

was more likely to enter positions of power in business and politics and he posed a dangerous sexual threat because he sought to actively contaminate the Aryan blood chain. In *Die Rothschilds* and *Jud Süß*, there are no major female Jewish characters. In *Robert und Bertram*, in contrast, there are two: Mrs. Ipelmeyer and Isadora Ipelmeyer. Like their men, they are portrayed as conniving, pretentious and garish. Advertisers especially attributed this last trait to the women, since they, like the Jewish male’s house, represented a physical manifestation of the Jew’s attempt to mimic an upper class lifestyle. Another important aspect of the female Jew is her lasciviousness, as clearly depicted in the two Ipelmeyer women: Mrs. Ipelmeyer makes sexual gestures towards Bertram even when sitting right next to her husband, while Isadora shamelessly flirts with several suitors at a time. The character of Isadora, however, possessed more threatening qualities than her mother. A review of the film stated:

Very skillfully, the generation-problem is treated: Ipelmeyer’s daughter was not born in Lodz, but was raised in Berlin and received an expensive education. She speaks French, is embarrassed by her parents, and is not comical any more, but she is a self-assured and intelligent person that only rarely loses her composure. Therefore, she is the type that contributed directly to the success of the Jews before 1933.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, Isadora represented a new generation of Jews who were supposedly better able to hide their innate Jewishness because they had achieved a degree of acculturation into Aryan society. As the article points out, Isadora was the most dangerous type of Jew because her outer appearance and personality allowed her to more easily infiltrate and spread her influence into Aryan society. Of course, her danger was attributed mostly to her youth by reference to the generational gap between her and her parents, rather than her gender. However, the filmmakers chose to represent a daughter rather than a son. Her gender – her beautiful, exotic appearance as seen in the actress’ press photo – was used to enhance her dangerous seductive qualities.

Unlike the Jewish woman, the Aryan woman is an essential character in anti-Semitic film. As the object of the Jew’s greedy gaze, she is portrayed as the ultimate victim of the Jew’s machinations.

<sup>36</sup> “*Robert und Bertram*” *Film Kurier*, July 15, 1939, Nr. 162, p.3.

Because of this, the Aryan woman, above all else, needs to be protected by the Aryan male because she is the key to racial purity in future generations. Dorothea, in *Jud Süß*, is the ultimate Aryan female: passive, emotionally and physically pure and naïve in her innocence. Her naivety leads her to inadvertently help Süß; he actually enters the town of Württemberg on her carriage after his breaks down. In fact, this scene directly parallels a scene in *Die Rothschilds* when Nathan gives Sylvia a ride in his carriage after her carriage breaks down, an offer that is part of his plans to seduce Sylvia and to gain a footing into London high society. Therefore, she, like Dorothea, is the gateway for the male Jew into the Aryan world. However, the similarities between Sylvia and Dorothea end here. Sylvia is portrayed as a very intelligent and assertive woman. Unlike Dorothea, who is completely ignorant of the Jew's evil plans, Sylvia is portrayed as one of the only Londoners who sees through Nathan Rothschild's wealthy facade.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in *Robert und Bertram*, Lenchen is the one who stands up to Mr. Biedermeier, until Michel becomes a soldier at the end of the film. The image of the Aryan woman was not constant in all the anti-Semitic films; filmmakers wavered between depicting her as naïve and innocent, and depicting her as strong and assertive – sometimes the only one fighting off the advances of the Jew.

## Conclusion

Several historians have argued that the National Socialists were trying to perfect their image of the Jew on screen throughout the years 1938 to 1941.<sup>38</sup> They point to *Robert und Bertram* as being among the first attempts at this endeavor; the film is lighter and less serious than earlier films in its approach, but nevertheless succeeds in “transforming the image of the Jew from comical and grotesque to dangerous and sinister.”<sup>39</sup> *Die Rothschilds* swings to the other side of the pendulum, providing a very heavy-handed approach, detailing every insidious characteristic of the Jew. *Jud Süß* supposedly balances these two approaches, providing enlightenment by portraying the Jew as a serious economic and racial menace to

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ufa Presseheft* (Berlin: Klang-Film Gerät, 1940).

<sup>38</sup> While these historians often fail to mention that the production of these films often overlapped and thus there was little time in between them for one to have an effect on the other, they do capture a sense of how the image of the Jew is constantly transforming on the screen during this period.

<sup>39</sup> Baruch Gitlis, “Redemption” of *Ahasuerus*, p. 109.

Aryan society, and the entertainment aspects by providing a compelling plot and a seductive Jewish character. In Nazi anti-Semitic ideology, there was a great deal of uncertainty, contradiction and confusion over the representation of the Jew. However, the medium of film presented a unique challenge. Its popular appeal and the emotional and physical involvement of the audience offered to intensify anti-Semitism by making the Jew appear as a very real and present danger. However, by placing the Jew on screen and in film advertisements, Nazi-era filmmakers established him as a commodity to be consumed by the German public. His image needed to attract ticket buyers and captivate audiences during the screening, while still repulsing them with its anti-Semitic messages. The image of Jew, therefore, occupies an unstable position in the Third Reich film since it had to both disgust and appeal to the German public.