

The Cinemas Third Machine
Writing On Film In Germany
1907 1933 Modern German
Culture And Literature

Cinema's Third Machine:
Writing on Film in Germany,

1907-1933

The period between 1907 and 1933 witnessed a profound transformation of German culture and literature, a period inextricably linked to the burgeoning power of cinema. This article explores the significant role of film – often referred to as “cinema’s third machine” – in shaping German society during this era, examining its impact on literary expression, artistic movements, and the socio-political landscape. We will analyze how film interacted with and influenced existing literary trends, becoming a potent force in shaping *modern German culture* and reflecting the anxieties and aspirations of the time. This exploration will touch upon key themes of *German expressionism in film*, the rise of *propaganda films under the Nazi regime*, and the evolution of *film as a narrative medium* during this pivotal period.

The Dawn of German Cinema and its Literary Influences

The early years of German cinema (1907-1914) saw the emergence of distinct national styles influenced heavily by existing literary currents. German Expressionism, a movement rooted in literature and painting, found a powerful visual language in film. The fragmented narratives, stark imagery, and exploration of psychological turmoil that characterized writers like Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann found their cinematic equivalent in films like **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** (1920). This film, with its distorted sets and unsettling atmosphere, directly reflects the anxieties and alienation depicted in Expressionist literature, establishing a crucial link between the two art forms. The use of **mise-en-scène**, the arrangement of visual elements within the frame, became a powerful tool for conveying the psychological states of characters, mirroring the introspective

nature of much of the contemporary literature.

The influence wasn't one-sided. Film's growing popularity inspired new literary forms, particularly those exploring the cinematic experience itself. Novelists and playwrights began to experiment with fragmented narratives, visual descriptions, and cinematic techniques in their works, blurring the lines between the two mediums. The rapid editing techniques employed in films influenced the pacing and structure of some novels, leading to a more fragmented and dynamic approach to storytelling.

Film as Propaganda: The Nazi Regime and its Cinematic Apparatus

The rise of the Nazi regime in 1933 marked a drastic shift in the relationship between film and literature in Germany. Cinema became a powerful tool for disseminating Nazi ideology, with

propaganda films serving to indoctrinate the population and reinforce the regime's worldview. While some pre-existing literary tropes were co-opted (the heroic narratives, the romanticized depiction of national identity), the regime's control heavily curtailed artistic freedom. The focus shifted from exploring complex psychological themes to promoting simplistic narratives of racial purity, national strength, and anti-Semitism. The films produced during this period often reflected the simplistic, often brutal ideology of the Nazi party, suppressing the more nuanced and complex narratives explored during the earlier years of German cinema.

Literature, too, suffered under Nazi censorship. Many authors were forced into exile, their works banned and burned. The once-vibrant literary scene was stifled, leaving behind a legacy of silenced voices and lost works. The impact on *modern German culture* was profound and lasting, leaving a scar on the nation's cultural landscape.

The Interplay of Genre and Narrative: Exploring Different Film Styles

The period also saw the evolution of different cinematic genres. While Expressionist films dominated the early years, genres like crime thrillers, historical epics, and romantic dramas emerged and flourished, each reflecting different aspects of German society and its evolving cultural anxieties. These genres borrowed narrative structures and character archetypes from existing literary traditions, but they also created new cinematic storytelling tropes that would influence future film-making. This interaction between established literary structures and the emerging cinematic language resulted in a dynamic exchange that shaped both the literary and cinematic landscapes.

The Legacy of German Cinema (1907-1933) on Modern German Culture

The legacy of German cinema between 1907 and 1933 extends far beyond its immediate impact. The stylistic innovations, particularly those of the Expressionist movement, continue to inspire filmmakers worldwide. The rise of propaganda film serves as a stark reminder of the power of cinema to manipulate and control. The period's films provide a window into the complexities of *modern German culture*, reflecting its anxieties, aspirations, and the political turmoil that defined the era. The study of this period provides essential insights into the intertwined history of film and literature, highlighting how the two mediums influenced and informed each other in profound ways. The understanding of this period also provides vital context for understanding the development of German cinema in the

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post-war period and beyond.

FAQ

Q1: How did German Expressionism in film differ from its literary counterpart?

A1: While sharing thematic concerns such as alienation, psychological turmoil, and the anxieties of modern life, cinematic Expressionism primarily manifested through visual techniques: distorted sets, dramatic lighting, and unconventional camera angles. Literary Expressionism, on the other hand, explored these themes through fragmented narratives, subjective perspectives, and stylistic experimentation in prose and poetry. Both mediums aimed to evoke strong emotional responses, but employed different artistic strategies.

Q2: What was the role of censorship in shaping German

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cinema during the Nazi regime?

A2: Censorship was absolute. The Nazi regime exerted complete control over film production, scriptwriting, and distribution. Films had to promote Nazi ideology, portraying an idealized vision of Aryan supremacy and demonizing political opponents and minority groups. Any deviation from this strict ideological line resulted in severe consequences for filmmakers and actors.

Q3: Did any German filmmakers resist Nazi propaganda?

A3: While overt resistance was extremely dangerous, some filmmakers employed subtle techniques to express dissent or critique the regime's ideology. These strategies often involved allegorical storytelling or the use of symbolism to convey hidden meanings, but the risks involved were significant.

Q4: How did the rise of sound film affect German cinema?

A4: The introduction of sound technology revolutionized German cinema. It allowed for greater realism and emotional depth in storytelling, but also brought challenges, especially with regards to dubbing and translation for international audiences. It also heightened the propaganda potential of film, as the spoken word could directly convey ideological messages.

Q5: What were some of the lasting impacts of German cinema (1907-1933) on world cinema?

A5: The stylistic innovations of German Expressionism, particularly the use of lighting, set design, and camera angles to create atmosphere and evoke emotion, profoundly impacted global cinema. The development of complex narrative structures and character studies during this era also significantly contributed to the advancement of cinematic storytelling.

Q6: What primary sources can researchers use to study

German cinema of this era?

A6: Primary sources include surviving films themselves, original scripts, production notes, critical reviews from the period, personal accounts of filmmakers and actors, and relevant archival materials documenting censorship and production processes.

Q7: How did the political climate of the Weimar Republic affect early German cinema?

A7: The Weimar Republic's political instability and social unrest were directly reflected in the films of the era. The exploration of themes like alienation, anxiety, and social injustice was partly a response to the political and economic turmoil of the time. The period saw both artistic experimentation and the rise of political propaganda, foreshadowing the later Nazi domination of the film industry.

Q8: Where can I find more information on this topic?

A8: Extensive research can be conducted through academic journals focusing on film studies, German history, and literature. Books dedicated to German Expressionism in film, the history of German cinema, and the impact of Nazi propaganda are readily available. University libraries and online academic databases offer a wealth of resources for further investigation.

The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907-1933 and its Impact on Modern German Culture and Literature

The emerging German film business of the early 20th century wasn't merely a cinematic spectacle; it was a potent force

shaping the realm's cultural and literary terrain. This period, spanning from 1907 to 1933, witnessed the creation of a uniquely German cinematic style, a “third machine” - distinct from the printed word and the theatrical stage - that profoundly affected the country's consciousness. This article investigates the sophisticated interplay between film, literature, and culture during this critical era, highlighting its enduring legacy.

The early years, roughly 1907-1914, saw the growth of German cinema largely within the framework of existing literary and theatrical conventions. Adaptations of popular plays and novels were commonplace, providing a familiar ground for audiences while concurrently experimenting with the peculiar possibilities of the novel medium. This period saw the ascension of filmmakers like Ernst Lubitsch, who, while often working within established categories, began to explore cinematic methods to enhance narrative and emotional effect. For example, the use of intense lighting and camera angles, foreshadowing the more

radical stylistic innovations to come.

The First World War (1914-1918) acted as a catalyst for change. The war's influence on German society was profound, leading to a widespread sentiment of disappointment and uncertainty. This climate is clearly reflected in the films of the period, marked by a transition towards increased introspective and mental narratives. The rise of Expressionism in film, characterized by its distorted visuals, harsh contrasts, and allegorical imagery, mirrored the turmoil of the time and found a resonance in contemporary literature and art. Films like Robert Wiene's "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1920) perfectly illustrate this style, its unsettling visuals becoming a potent symbol of a shattered psyche and society.

The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) - a period of comparative political and social freedom - witnessed a prosperous age for German cinema. This era saw the manufacture of numerous

revolutionary and influential films, across a broad array of forms. Filmmakers continued to explore with narrative structures, cinematography, and editing techniques, pushing the boundaries of cinematic expression. The partnership between filmmakers and writers was essential during this time, with many films adapting literary works or incorporating literary themes and styles. This period saw the rise of new stars, like Marlene Dietrich, whose image became a symbol of the period's glamour and sophistication.

However, the political environment steadily deteriorated throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. The increase of Nazism resulted to an increasing censorship of films, with political messages becoming gradually prevalent. Many filmmakers fled the country, taking their talents and knowledge elsewhere, while others were obliged to conform to the regime's principles. The end of this period marks not only the end of a innovative flourishing, but also the silencing of diverse voices and the

enforcement of a consistent narrative.

The impact of German cinema between 1907 and 1933 on modern German culture and literature is undeniable. The methods developed during this period, the aesthetic explored, and the topics addressed continue to impact filmmaking today. The legacy of Expressionism, for case, remains potent, motivating filmmakers and artists across the earth. Furthermore, the cinematic style developed during this period contributed to the growth of German literature, with many writers referencing or adapting cinematic techniques and themes in their work.

The study of this era offers a valuable lesson in how art and politics intertwine, how creative expression can be both a mirror of and a reply to social and political transformation. It also highlights the importance of protecting and maintaining artistic liberty in the face of political suppression.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is meant by the "cinema's third machine"? The term refers to the unique power of cinema as a storytelling medium, distinct from both the written word and the theatrical stage, in shaping cultural understanding and expression.

2. How did the First World War affect German cinema? The war profoundly impacted German society, leading to disillusionment and a shift in cinematic expression towards more introspective and psychologically driven narratives, exemplified by the rise of German Expressionism.

3. What was the significance of the Weimar Republic for German cinema? The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) marked a flourishing period for German cinema, witnessing experimentation with new cinematic techniques and styles, and a strong collaboration between filmmakers and writers.

4. How did the rise of Nazism impact German cinema? The Nazi regime introduced heavy censorship, leading to the suppression of diverse voices, the promotion of propaganda, and the emigration of many talented filmmakers.

5. What is the lasting legacy of German cinema (1907-1933)? The period left a lasting legacy in cinematic techniques, styles (like German Expressionism), and thematic explorations, influencing filmmakers and artists globally, and shaping the landscape of German literature and culture.

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