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Abstract

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Keywords

Weimar Germany, Jewish, silent film, actress

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THE JEWISH VAMP OF BERLIN

Actress Maria Orska, Typecasting, and Jewish Women

Kerry Wallach

"Maria Orska, she is simply the actual embodiment of the human beast.... here, again, she is the man-beguiling Lulu, so vivid in her performance that one can almost hear her words."[1] With these lines in his review of *Die Bestie im Menschen* (1920/21), critic Fritz Olimsky describes Orska as she was widely regarded: a femme fatale Lulu or vamp type known for her tragic, expressive performances, who was often cast in psychologically complex roles involving dramatic love affairs. Orska, like her Hollywood contemporary Theda Bara, rarely moved beyond her reputation for playing this type of character. In addition to exploring the largely overlooked work of Jewish theater and film actress Maria Orska (1893–1930), this chapter takes Orska as the basis for a broader discussion about casting, Jewishness, and gender. To what extent were known Jewish actresses cast in certain roles—including roles that were coded Jewish—in Weimar films? How did widespread perceptions of Jewish women affect the reception of the roles they played?

In early twentieth-century Germany, the circulation of Jewish types and stereotypes extended beyond individual films to actors whose bodies and previous roles established a kind of intertextuality.[2] By studying these types and the actors who played them, we stand to gain a better understanding of how typecasting figured in the construction of images of Jews and other minorities associated with racial or ethnic difference. Gender, too, played a significant role when it came to the depiction of Jews on screen and the casting of Jewish parts. Maya Barzilai's chapter in this volume explores typecasting with respect to several Jewish male actors, including

Henrik Galeen and Alexander Granach. Jewish women experienced typecasting somewhat differently from their male counterparts: notably, Jewish characters and roles that were coded Jewish did not always go to Jewish actresses. For example, although vamp characters were arguably coded Jewish, most of the dark-haired actresses who played these roles were not Jewish.[3] Instead, the actresses themselves were more likely to be taken for Jewish because of their roles, and Jewishness was constructed based on perceived differences. The casting of such roles demonstrates how typecasting relied on both physical profiling and gendered stereotypes.

Maria Orska represents one of only a few female actors in Weimar cinema who was regularly typecast in roles that, although not usually explicitly Jewish, still serve to some extent as ciphers for Jewish otherness. The otherness projected onto Maria Orska was an integral part of her public image, and many of her performances were coded Jewish due to her dark coloring and eastern European background. Orska's characters simultaneously invoke the orientalized beautiful Jewess figure of the nineteenth century, and the seductive, dark-haired vamp of the 1910s and 1920s.[4] Her so-called exotic and bestial presence represents a type that was feared, admired, and even renounced for its difference—and also for its connections to Jewishness.

Always a Lulu or a Salome: Orska's Life and Acting Career

Although Orska's biography was typical insofar as she first worked in Vienna and then in Berlin, Orska spent the first sixteen years of her life in Russia and thus possessed a stronger personal connection to eastern Europe than many of her contemporaries. She starred in fourteen films from the mid-1910s into the early 1920s, though she was better known as a theater actress. By her November 1916 performances of Lulu in Berlin, Orska was marked as a certain type, a vamp who preceded other non-Jewish actresses (Asta Nielsen, Louise Brooks) who later became better

known for their vamp characters in German films. Orska stopped making films in 1923 and died in 1930 at age 37, which prevented her from having as great an impact on the Weimar film scene as others. Still, her legacy is deeply entangled with German performance culture and its many players, and hers is a lesser-known story worth telling.

By most accounts, Orska was born Rahel Blindermann in 1893 in Nikolaev in southern Russia (near Odessa; today Ukraine).[5] She was reportedly discovered by Ferdinand Gregori, who heard her doing a dramatic reading in Russian of Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*. Due in part to political persecution in Russia, she made her way to Vienna in 1909. Several sources claim that when Blindermann arrived in Vienna she was especially wise for her years because she had already participated in such revolutionary activities as an assassination attempt against the governor of Kishinev.[6] In Vienna she studied German, acting, and philosophy. She adopted the stage name Daisy Maria Orska while training and performing in Vienna, Mannheim, and Hamburg. Her creativity also took other forms, and she even tried her hand at writing a short tragedy titled "The Astronomer."[7]

After her arrival in Berlin in 1914, Orska quickly made contacts in the Berlin theater and film worlds, and celebrity soon followed. She became known simply as Maria Orska, a name that did little to mask her well-known foreignness and Jewishness. Orska was a diva par excellence; she was known to be wild, fiery, passionate, and enchanting on stage, but especially difficult to work with backstage and when the cameras were not rolling. In Berlin, she often performed at the Theater in the Königgrätzer Straße (Hebbel-Theater), where she worked with directors Carl Meinhard and Rudolf Bernauer, and in Max Reinhardt productions. Orska often appeared in public wearing fur coats and wraps; she was known for her signature pearl necklace, which was rumored to have such illustrious yet improbable origins as Bismarck or the Grand Duke Nikolai

Nikolajewitsch of Russia. Like many other actresses, Orska occasionally appeared as a fashion model, as in one fashion show for the designers Herrmann Gerson, Regina Friedländer, and Schwabe & Meyer.[8] As her fame grew, she was often featured in such Berlin magazines as *Elegante Welt*, *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, *Der Querschnitt*, and *Die Dame*. She was dubbed the "uncrowned queen of Berlin."[9] On several occasions, photo spreads of her elegant and extravagant apartment were included in these articles. A modern portrait from 1926/27 by the photographer Yva (Else Neuländer-Simon) shows Orska in three different powerful and even triumphant-looking roles (see figure 3.1).

Two of Orska's theatrical roles, as Lulu in Frank Wedekind's *Erdgeist* (Earth Spirit, 1895) and as the title role in Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1891)*,* remained the ones for which she was best known, though her repertoire also included Grillparzer and Ibsen, as well as numerous Strindberg plays. Lulu, an inscrutable and seductive creature who brings about the death of multiple husbands, is forebodingly characterized as a menacing animal, perhaps a murderous snake, in the prologue of Wedekind's play. Orska's performances of Lulu convinced audiences and critics that Orska was "truly authentic" and played Lulu "as no one else would be able to play her again."[10] One journalist argued that even while performing other roles, Orska remained the quintessential Lulu, Delilah, or Pandora-type, "the deliberate vampire, prompted by the inner demon to suck the blood of men."[11] In fact, Orska played Lulu on stage more than five hundred times. Prior to Orska's performance of Lulu, others' interpretations of the Lulu character supposedly closely resembled Salome. In Orska's rendering, Lulu became more reckless, belligerent, and sensual, but somehow more sophisticated in the end.[12]

But, for whatever reason, Orska did not star in any of the Lulu films made while she was still acting. The 1917 film *Lulu* starred Erna Morena, and several other non-Jewish actresses

went on to become far more famous for their Lulu roles in Weimar films. These actresses also became iconic in part for cultivating dark images, though they were neither exoticized nor typecast in the same way. Danish-born Asta Nielsen (1881–1972), who played Lulu in the 1923 film version of *Erdgeist* (dir. Leopold Jessner), was cast in a wide range of roles and was associated not only with the vamp type but also with many others. Similarly, American actress Louise Brooks (1906–85), whose Lulu in *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*; 1929, dir. G.W. Pabst) made Brooks an instant sensation in Germany, played a number of vastly different roles and is known to have condemned typecasting because it did not work for her.[13] Ofer Ashkenazi has suggested that the Lulu of Weimar cinema can be read as an outsider who seeks to become part of a middle-class milieu, but ultimately remains too destructive to combine her distinctive background with a bourgeois identity.[14] If Lulu is at once vamp and outsider, it is not difficult to see how this type—and the women who played her—also stood in for aspects of Jewishness.

As Salome, one of Orska's few overtly Jewish theatrical roles, Orska enchanted audiences with her sinister, bestial demeanor. Oscar Wilde depicts his sought-after heroine as powerful and vengeful; following her performance of the dance of the seven veils at King Herod's request, Salome demands the head of Jokanaan (John the Baptist) in return. Artist Ottomar Starke remembered helping Orska rehearse her Salome role: "She jumped around evilly with my [the Baptist's] severed head."[15] One critic described Orska in an early performance of Salome in Hamburg: "Half-naked, animalistic, with those quiet screams, she made pathos seem melodramatic and emphasized the sense that the word pathos meant nothing other than deepest misery."[16] Repeatedly performing savage, untamable characters only exacerbated perceptions of Orska as the embodiment of a certain type. Even a portrait of Orska by Dietz Edzard

immortalized Orska in what was described as an animalistic style.[17] Orska was not the only notable Jewish actress to play Salome, though Orska's Salome was considered the most bestial. Hollywood film legend Alla Nazimova (1879–1945), another Russian Jewish actress, famously produced and starred in a 1923 early art film version of Wilde's drama. Patricia White has suggested that Nazimova's Salome was decadent, American, and woman-made.[18] Orska's, in contrast, was menacing, inhuman, and evocative of women's presumed suffering and neuroses.

Many recollections of Orska suggest that the tumultuous, scandalous nature of her personal life mirrored and informed the roles she played on stage and screen.[19] Orska had several traumatic love affairs, including a troubled marriage to banker Baron Hans von Bleichröder (1888–1938) that ended in divorce in 1925. She was rumored to have behaved erratically and eccentrically, including breaking glass candlesticks on a Paris street, throwing tureens of hot soup onto waiters, throwing valuable jewelry out of cars, and hitting her chauffeur with the handle of her umbrella whenever he took a wrong turn.[20] Personal crises afflicted Orska throughout the 1920s, particularly when her sister, Gabriele Sera-Manischedda, hanged herself in a Berlin hotel in 1926, reportedly in part due to her addictions to morphine and cocaine.[21] Orska, too, notoriously suffered from a morphine addiction and spent considerable time intoxicated (*im Rausch*), including while performing. It is telling that a striking photograph of Orska with exaggeratedly black-rimmed eyes illustrates the section on cocaine in a 1927 book on the history of vice.[22] Like Anita Berber, a German actress and dancer who was also widely known for her substance abuse and vamp roles and who died in 1928, Orska's life was shortened significantly due to her addictions.

The final decade of Orska's life included many personal and health struggles that took place in the public eye, which only exacerbated associations of Jewish women with mental

illness and suicide. She performed on stage only rarely after 1927.[23] In December 1929, Orska was admitted to a sanatorium near Vienna. Six months later, on May 15, 1930, she died from an overdose of veronal sleeping medicine. Veronal was a common method of suicide at the time, including among German-Jewish women, who had a disproportionately high suicide rate.[24] The medicine was also immortalized in Arthur Schnitzler's novella *Fräulein Else* (1924) in which a Jewish girl from Vienna takes her own life, and in the 1929 film version of *Fräulein Else*, which starred Elisabeth Bergner.[25] Director Carl Meinhard described Orska's death as a "terrible suicide that lasted ten years for all the world to see."[26] One obituary described her transformation from the "nameless, slender, dark-eyed Polish girl...to the actress Maria Orska," who enraptured the public with "a nervous temperament" and "dark timbered Slavic voice...which in the same breath whispered and screamed and chirped and wailed, never surrendering the charm of exotic articulation."[27] Even in death, Orska could not escape her image as foreign, exotic, dark, and seductive. She is supposed to have been buried next to her mother in the Jewish cemetery of Vienna.

Maria Orska as Jewish-Coded Silent Film Star

Performances in fourteen films between 1913 and 1923 established Maria Orska as a silent film actress of note, though it would be inaccurate to consider her mainly as an actress of the Weimar era. Rather, Orska's film career spanned the inflation period and overlapped with only the first few years of the Weimar Republic; nine of Orska's films were made in or before 1917. None of the characters that Orska played on screen were explicitly Jewish, though many emerged in Jewish or Jewish-coded contexts or were shaped by the work of Jewish filmmakers. This suggests that male filmmakers—both Jewish and non-Jewish—did not hesitate to cast a Jewish

actress in roles that reproduced stereotypes about Jewish women. In many of Orska's films, and especially in the melodramas, she played characters reminiscent of Lulu or Salome on some level: an exotic dancer, a lusted-after woman who drives men crazy, a savage vamp who is sometimes also a murderess. Even when she did not play a femme fatale as in the comedy *Die Sektwette* (The Champagne Bet; 1916), she still played a mysterious dancer. While nothing about these types is distinctly Jewish, they nevertheless align with stereotypes about beautiful, dangerous, and foreign Jewish women.

Orska worked with a number of German-Jewish filmmakers, and at least ten of her films had Jewish directors. One of her earliest films, *Dämon und Mensch* (Demon and Man; 1915), co-starred Rudolph Schildkraut and was adapted from Abraham Schomer's Yiddish play *The Inner Man* by director Richard Oswald and producer Jules Greenbaum.[28] In addition, half of Orska's films were directed by Jewish filmmaker Max Mack and were produced by Greenbaum-Film GmbH, including *Das tanzende Herz* (The Dancing Heart; 1916) and a six-film series released in 1916–17.[29] Max Mack (1884–1973), born Moritz Myrthenzweig as the son of a cantor in Halberstadt, was a prolific director who at times even drew on his Jewish background in his writing about film theory.[30] Orska was depicted in several photographic illustrations to Mack's 1916 edited book on screen culture, including in a photo of the diva who quarrels with the director and writer.[31] One early glowing review of Mack's Maria-Orska-Series noted that Orska was a "sensation" with a "decidedly distinctive individuality."[32]

Considered an identifiably Jewish actress mainly because of her striking dark looks, which were associated with Jewishness and eastern otherness, Orska's image was also shaped by body language, make-up, gestures, and temperament. Even though she played very few Jewish roles, she could not escape nominal Jewish associations. The right-wing nationalistic *Deutsche*

Zeitung counted Orska among actors of Semitic origin (Jessner, Kortner, Bergner) whom it alleged should perform as such (i.e. as openly or obviously Jewish) rather than simply performing as German actors.[33] Countless critics reinforced Jewish stereotypes by relying on the same dubious adjectives to describe Orska's presence time and again: dark, exotic, and Russian or Slavic. Director Rudolf Bernauer deemed her especially capable of portraying "an exotic woman."[34] Critic Hanns Brodnitz described a vision of Orska playing Cleopatra (a role she never played) in part because Orska "was not of a Germanic temperament, she would have brought the whole world of Egypt."[35] Actor Hubert von Meyerinck, a friend of Orska's, described her as "a small, dark, very Slavic little person" with "night-black hair."[36] As a Russian-born actress, Orska was depicted as darker and more exotic than her contemporaries Elisabeth Bergner, Fritzi Massary, and Irene Triesch, who were also of Jewish descent and likewise lived in Vienna and later Berlin.[37] Journalist Doris Wittner suggested that Orska used her experience of being a foreign-born Jew to inspire her performance of exotic characters in Germany.[38] This sentiment was shared by other Jewish journalists, who focused on how Orska's intense empathy and the real tears she shed on stage were connected to the oppression she experienced as a Russian Jew.[39] It is worth noting that the terms "Russian" or "Slavic" were often code for "Jewish"; the fact that Orska was both only underscored her Jewishness.

Orska's performance in the title role of *Die schwarze Loo, oder Die Komposition des Anderen* (The Black Dancer, or the Composition of the Other; 1917), the last film in the series directed by Max Mack, offers an especially potent example of the exoticization of the Jewish-coded other, and of the transference of Jewishness onto otherness more generally. This is one of only a few Orska films that is not lost; in fact, it has been digitized and is available online. The film premiered on September 6, 1917, in the Marmorhaus Berlin.[40] The name "Loo" evokes Lulu

on some level, and perhaps also Salome. Even Loo's epithet, "black," hints at her otherness and her eastern coloring. As a *temperamentvolle Zigeunerin* (temperamental gypsy) who dances in cellar bars, the "Black Loo" is subjected to the gaze and whims of rowdy drinkers. Loo's seductive dance moves with scarf and tambourine, paired with her heavily lined eyes and unruly black wavy hair, provide inspiration to Fredo (Bruno Ziener), a composer working on an operatic Hungarian dance scene, who discovers her in the bar. Loo moves in with Fredo and continues to dance for him at home; he credits Loo with a share of his future success. But Loo returns to the cellar bar to dance and, after a scuffle breaks out, is arrested and jailed. Thinking that she has left him, Fredo succumbs to his illness and dies. After Fredo's death, Loo charms her way into an upscale restaurant, where she dances to earn money for the burial. Here she meets another composer and conductor, Erwin Burchardt (Theodor Loos), and she achieves bourgeois respectability as his wife. When Erwin wants to publish Fredo's score as his own in order to be appointed to a professorship, Loo expressly forbids it, and Erwin attempts suicide. Erwin recovers and receives his position after all, and Loo is able to publish Fredo's papers.

The exotic gypsy character in *Die schwarze Loo* can be read as a cipher for eastern Jewish otherness. A short summary of the film in *Licht-Bild-Bühne* described Orska's dance in the cellar bar as "a free, unattached daughter of the vaste steppes."[41] The word "steppes" underscores the character's Russianness, which also stood in for Jewishness. In referencing gypsy otherness, the film also draws on stereotypes of exotic or transgressive femininity that extended beyond a strictly racialized group (Sinti and Roma). The category "gypsy" as it is used here includes those who embraced the fantasy of a Bohemian lifestyle (artists, prostitutes, beggars). This ambiguity leaves the character open to interpretation and circumvents accusations of antisemitic or Jewish-critical representation, while still situating Loo within this milieu.

Hinting at sexual transgression and otherness evokes forms of difference ranging from "gypsy" to Jewish or black; the erotic and exotic are closely intertwined. Indeed, Loo holds erotic power over men thanks in part to her connections to the exotic.

Furthermore, Loo's deeply expressive movements are exaggerated in the typical manner of expressionist silent film, which was often coded Jewish or conflated with Jewishness.[42] Both while dancing and in other scenes, such as her time in jail, Orska uses extreme facial expressions and flings her arms about wildly to conjure up a different type of creature. Yet unlike Lulu, Loo manages to suppress her urges to dance and become respectable. Her upward mobility points to the complex processes of acculturation and embourgeoisement of Jews in Germany and parallels the experience of many other Jewish-coded figures in Weimar cinema. As a femme fatale figure, Loo is more complicated in that she does not wish harm upon men who treat her well. Nevertheless, one could argue that Loo causes Fredo's death through her absence and insistence that she should be allowed to return to dancing, and that she nearly brings about Erwin's demise as well. Although she appears innocent enough, her unconventional and unruly acts serve her own agenda.

After 1917 Orska took a brief hiatus from film, possibly due to poor health, but she returned in 1920 and acted in five films during the early Weimar years (1920–23).[43] Her Weimar-era films included *Die letzte Stunde* (The Last Hour; 1920, dir. Dimitri Buchowetzki), *Die Bestie im Menschen* (The Beast in Man; 1920–21, dir. Ludwig Wolff), *Der Streik der Diebe* (The Thieves' Strike; 1920–21, dir. Alfred Abel), *Opfer der Leidenschaft* (Victim of Passion; 1922, dir. Paul Czinner), and *Sanssouci*, the third film of the four-part epic costume drama *Fridericus Rex* (1923, dir. Arsen von Cserépy). At least two of these films position Orska's character at the center of deathly love entanglements, and in her last film, she played the minor

role of dancer Barbarina Campanini.[44] Reviews of Orska's performances in these films were generally favorable, though occasionally she disappointed. One typical complaint was that, like many other theater actors, she could not properly translate her acting skills to silent film.

As in *Die schwarze Loo,* Orska's Weimar film characters were often seductive, tempestuous, wicked, and/or exotic women who witness or bring about the deaths of their lovers. In *Die Bestie im Menschen*, the film referenced at the beginning of this chapter, which was based on a novel by Emile Zola, Orska played Severine, the wife of a train station manager, Roubaud (Eduard von Winterstein). After Roubaud kills Severine's first lover, she ultimately meets her death at the hands of another lover, Lantier (Josef Runitsch), whom she had seduced in an attempt to persuade him to kill Roubaud. The murderous intent of the vamp is again interwoven with the seductive powers of an emotional Orska character. But in the film, it is Severine who, thanks to Orska, takes on bestial qualities; this stands in contrast to Zola's novel, where Lantier is depicted as the mentally ill human beast. In his review of this film, critic Hans Wollenberg commented on Orska's strange and paradoxical mix of attributes, from love and coquetry, to timidity and criminal instincts.[45]

In *Opfer der Leidenschaft*, Orska's character, Mia, indirectly brings about the death of her husband. Mia falls in love with Raolo Benghatti (Johannes Riemann), an artist who paints her likeness before ever meeting her—the painting is titled *Sehnsucht* (*Longing*). Devastated by losing Mia to the artist, her husband Alberto (Paul Bildt) kills himself. Mia and Raolo are wracked with guilt over the death of Alberto, and Raolo subsequently goes crazy and attempts to poison himself; Mia helps nurse him back to health. Here, as in many of director Paul Czinner's later films, two men desire the same woman, but in *Opfer der Leidenschaft* it is the men who fall victim. Later Czinner films starred not Orska but Elisabeth Bergner, who was far more likely to

play tragic femme fragile types, who themselves died by suicide. In contrast to Bergner, Orska was cast as a femme fatale or vamp type that was bound up with her appearance, her Russian Jewish background and exotic appeal, and her wild personal life. Orska was not the only Jewish woman cast as a vamp or femme fatale, but she was the only major Jewish actress to play numerous roles of this type in German films of this era. A closer examination of the typecasting of Orska as well as two other actresses of the 1910s and 1920s sheds light on how gender and ethnicity worked together to determine potential roles.

Typecasting, Gender, and Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Film casting has always been dependent on the physicality of actors, and typecasting is to some degree unavoidable. Filmmakers use actors who can play certain types in order to help manage branding and minimize financial risk.[46] The use of types establishes a shorthand both for filmmakers and for viewers, who recognize character attributes more quickly when they have already seen an actor play similar roles. Some actors benefit from typecasting and get more work because they can play a type that is in demand, whereas others are denied parts because they do not meet the desired specifications. Jewish actors of the Weimar period fell into one or both of these categories. Although Jewish actresses were cast as different types (for example, Orska as a femme fatale and Bergner as a femme fragile), they were less likely than male actors to be cast as Jewish characters. In general, both male and female Jewish actors who fit stereotypes about Jewish appearance were at times typecast along ethnic lines, which included emphasizing anything that could be considered foreign or other. Gender also played a significant role in typecasting. Whereas perceptions of racialized or ethnic difference often resulted in the casting

of Jewish male actors in stereotypically Jewish roles, the same traits led to the casting of certain Jewish actresses in sexualized and Jewish-coded roles that were not overtly Jewish.

A brief look at the origins of typecasting in early Hollywood—particularly when it came to minority parts—helps contextualize the kind of typecasting that took place in Weimar film. In 1910s Hollywood, typecasting originally took a more literal form, meaning that real people instead of actors were recruited to play parts that they somehow resembled. As psychologist Hugo Münsterberg put it in 1916, "If [the producer] needs the fat bartender with his smug smile, the humble Jewish peddler, or the Italian organ grinder, he does not rely on wigs and paint; he finds them all ready-made on the East Side."[47] With the emergence of the Star System in the late 1910s, the focus turned to individual actors whose fame brought audiences to the theater time and again. Race played a major role in Hollywood casting, and in the 1910s and 1920s, black actors were shut out of mainstream films and found work mainly through small, independent companies. For decades, Hollywood's avoidance of mixed-race love systematically excluded minority actors from lead roles; this exclusion was formalized with the strict enforcement of the Hays code (1934 to the 1950s), which prevented actors of color from playing characters in relationships with white actors. White actors, and especially white women, thus played minority parts in mainstream film with the help of makeup: blackface, brownface, and yellowface.[48] Jewish actors in Hollywood were far more privileged and avoided exclusion according to this racial divide, though they were at times cast in roles that highlighted Jewish or ethnic difference.

In German films in the late 1910s and in the Weimar Republic, a number of male Jewish actors were repeatedly cast in similar roles, including some roles as Jewish characters. Leading actors who were in this situation include Ernst Deutsch, Fritz Kortner, and Alexander Granach. Several others (Siegfried Arno, Fritz Grünbaum) worked as character actors and were often cast

as Jewish-coded characters who were the subject of ridicule or mockery. In general, there were fewer films with Jewish women characters, and a number of non-Jewish actresses were profiled and cast in Jewish roles according to their background and appearance. Many hailed from eastern Europe or had dark coloring, for example: Pola Negri (Lea in *Der gelbe Schein* [*The Yellow Ticket*], 1918), Lyda Salmanova (Miriam in *Der Golem*, 1920), and Elizza la Porta (Rahel Süß, the Rabbi's daughter, in *Leichte Kavallerie* [Light Cavalry], 1927), to name a few. These and other non-Jewish actresses such as Lya de Putti were considered Jewish looking and at times were presumed Jewish.[49] Only rarely did Jewish actresses perform Jewish characters in Weimar film, and in most of these instances their characters displayed Jewishness only in highly subtle ways, if at all.[50] One notable exception is Grete Berger's minor role as the rabbi's wife and mother of protagonist Baruch Mayer in *Das alte Gesetz* (*The Ancient Law,* 1923). It is also worth noting that a few other German-Jewish actresses played bold vamp-like or tyrannical characters that were coded Jewish on some levels: Betty Amman (in *Asphalt,* 1929) and Valeska Gert (especially in *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* [*Diary of a Lost Girl*], 1929).[51]

More than other actresses, Maria Orska provides an important example of the typecasting of a Jewish woman according to a sense of racialized or ethnic Jewish difference. Orska was not only seen as dark-haired, foreign or Russian, and Jewish, but she was also notoriously wild. The combination of these characteristics resulted in the constant exoticization of Orska when it came to casting, which enables us to draw parallels between Orska and others who were perceived as ethnically exotic. Orska's dark coloring made her a natural fit for exotic eastern roles, from Salome to a gypsy dancer. On this level, Maria Orska can be understood as a German counterpart to Theda Bara, or as a Jewish counterpart to Anna May Wong. Like both Bara and Wong, Orska was considered exotically seductive; in several films, she, too, played a dancer. But as a white

actress, Orska was cast in numerous lead roles. Still, it is likely that the roles for which she was considered were limited to some degree by how she was perceived. Although the vamp type for which Orska was known may have prevented her from being cast in different film roles, it presumably also helped her land some roles according to type, and thus was not necessarily detrimental to her career.

In many ways, Orska's career parallels that of her Hollywood contemporary Theda Bara (1885–1955), the very first actress to earn the vamp title thanks to her role as the Vampire in *A Fool There Was* (1915). While Bara's vampire was more human and less otherworldly than other contemporary vampires (for example, Count Orlak in *Nosferatu,* 1922), representations of vampires have long been tied to antisemitic portrayals of Jews.[52] Theda Bara, a Jewish American actress, was born Theodosia Burr Goodman to parents from eastern Europe and Switzerland. Bara never managed to break away from this beautifully wicked type and was repeatedly cast as a vamp or villainess for the duration of her short film career, which fizzled after 1918–19 and ended completely in 1926. Like Orska, she, too, played exotic orientalized and sexualized characters, from Cleopatra to Salome. Thanks to the wide distribution of the (now lost) 1918 *Salome* film, Bara was possibly the best-known Salome actress of the 1910s in the United States.[53] Ronald Genini has suggested that Bara exemplified the psychic vampire—a human whose vampirism related to sexual conquest and did not include actual bloodsucking—which differed from the femme fatale only insofar as the vamp possessed a kind of extreme and quasi-supernatural exoticism. Bara achieved this image through hair dye and makeup that transformed her from a blonde to a brunette and emphasized the "dark and midnight beauty" associated with evil women. Dark eye makeup was used to make her look more exotic and sinful; dark blue costumes accentuated her ghostly whiteness.[54]

In part because Hollywood operated on a much larger scale, Bara was far more successful and better known than Orska—though Bara's stardom ended somewhat more abruptly. The *New York Times* estimated in 1916 that half a million people a day, or 182 million per year, watched Theda Bara films.[55] It is possible that Bara's Jewish background was not widely known until 1918, when an article critical of Bara suggested that her exotic persona was a cover for Jewishness. Some scholars have suggested that it was not a coincidence that Bara's image ceased to appeal once her Jewishness came under public scrutiny, whereas others argue it had more to do with production trends during and shortly after World War I.[56] Regardless of the extent to which Jewishness impacted the end of Bara's career, it is clear that her exotic appeal was part of what enabled her to achieve success as original vamp. But Jewishness was also associated with the "dangerous" influx of eastern European immigrants in both the United States and Germany, and exoticism linked to Jewishness was not always received positively. For Bara, being associated with the vamp type was the path to both celebrity and downfall.

Chinese American actor Anna May Wong (1905–61) offers another example of an actress who could not avoid being typecast—and racially profiled—in both Hollywood and Germany. In fact, it was partly due to Anna May Wong's exclusion from leading roles in Hollywood that she migrated to Germany in 1928. In leaving America for Europe, she joined other performers of color including Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson. Director Richard Eichberg quickly discovered and capitalized on Wong's talents, but perhaps because Wong represented an unknown kind of foreignness—there were not many people of Chinese descent in Weimar Germany—he helped create a "dangerous exotic quality that marginalized [her] characters and doomed their fates."[57] In her first four films in Germany, Wong was cast as a dancer, though unlike Orska's and Bara's femmes fatales, Wong's characters were more likely to perish or be

exiled. For example, in her first German film, *Schmutziges Geld* (*Song*, 1928), Wong played Song, a rescued refugee who entrances audiences with her beauty and in one of the final scenes performs an exotic knife dance, ultimately dying after she falls on the knife. Cynthia Walk has argued that Song and other characters played by Wong posed a "multilayered sexual, racial, and colonial threat" that disappeared with their deaths. [58] Although race and racial profiling accompanied the casting of Wong and shaped the films in which she starred, Wong (like Orska and Bara) benefited to some extent from the stardom that came with repeat roles. Still, the fact that she was considered to be ethnically and racially different certainly prevented Wong from obtaining other roles.

Where typecasting becomes damaging is not at the level of the individual actor or filmmaker, for whom an actor's ability to deliver a certain type consistently has the potential to be advantageous, but rather when it creates and reinforces negative images that are projected onto minority cultures. Female characters coded as Jewish in German cinema were depicted as dangerous, dark, and foreign, which in turn might have reflected poorly on perceptions of Jews as a whole—a complaint that persisted also in Weimar Jewish film criticism with respect to male actors.[59] A Chinese actress whose characters were perceived as a threat was similarly not well positioned to advance the acceptance of Chinese and other East Asian actors in white-dominant contexts. The fact that numerous actresses of the 1910s and 1920s were time and again cast as exotic, sexualized characters only reinforced the exclusion of ethnic and racial or racialized minorities from both cinema and society. In recent years, both advocacy groups and scholars have drawn attention to the fact that twenty-first-century typecasting still disproportionately and adversely affects actors of color and other minorities. Sociologist Nancy Wang Yuen has pointed out that many black actors have won awards for playing slaves, servants, and criminals,

suggesting that stereotypes and racial bias still play a major role in how minority actors are cast, perceived, and valued.[60]

Already in the 1910s and 1920s, typecasting limited the range of parts offered to many actors, thereby preventing them from achieving their full potential. It was not only perceived ethnic difference or eastern heritage that led to the typecasting of such Jewish actresses as Maria Orska and Theda Bara, but these factors certainly played a role. With Anna May Wong, we see an even more extreme version of how typecasting led some minority actors to leave Hollywood in pursuit of lead roles abroad. In Germany in the early twentieth century, many Jewish actors inhabited an intermediate semi-ethnic category for which typecasting did not always apply. Jews were considered other, to be sure, but Jewish difference was not always obvious or known. Yet certain Jewish actors with dark coloring and eastern roots were highly susceptible to profiling and were especially likely to be typecast. In the case of Maria Orska, this took the form of repeatedly playing a femme fatale type who was equal parts Jewish-coded and evil.

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Notes

[1] "Maria Orska, sie ist eben die gegebene Darstellung jener Verkörperung der menschlichen Bestie....auch hier ist sie die männerbetörende Lulu, so plastisch in ihrem Spiel, daß man fast ihre Worte zu hören glaubt." Fritz Olimsky, *Die Bestie im Menschen*, review dated 16 February 1921, folder F12086_OT, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Schriftgutarchiv, Berlin.

[2] Amy Cook, *Building Character: The Art and Science of Casting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 13, 40.

[3] Dark hair was less likely to appear in images of women in the early 1930s due in part to its associations with Jewishness. See Darcy Buerkle, "Gendered Spectatorship, Jewish Women and Psychological Advertising in Weimar Germany," *Women's History Review* 15, no. 4 (2006): 625–36.

[4] S. S. Prawer briefly references the beautiful Jewess (*schöne Jüdin, belle Juive*) type in Weimar cinema. See S. S. Prawer, *Between Two Worlds: The Jewish Presence in German and Austrian Film, 1910–1933* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 63, 198.

[5] Conflicting versions of Orska's biography have been in circulation. For example, one Munich-based magazine reported that Orska was born Rachel Tobusch in Lodz, Poland. "Dämon Morphium (Leben und Sterben einer kranken Künstlerin)," *Illustrierter Sonntag, das Blatt des gesunden Menschenverstandes*, 27 July 1930.

[6] "Daisy – Maria Orska," unidentified typed document, folder 7015, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Schriftgutarchiv, Berlin. On her revolutionary activities, see also "Tragödie einer Tragödin. Zum Tode von Maria Orska," *Israelitisches Familienblatt* 32, no. 21 (22 May 1930).

[7] Hermann Sinsheimer, "Erinnerung an zwei Tote," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 20 May 1930.

[8] Brunhilde Dähn, *Berlin Hausvogteiplatz: Über 100 Jahre am Laufsteg der Mode* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt-Verlag, 1968), 207.

[9] "[U]ngekrönte Königin von Berlin." "Maria Orska und Hans Bleichröder: Tragödie einer großen Liebe." Gerson von Bleichroeder Family Collection. 1878–2002. Leo Baeck Institute, New York. AR 25234 1/6 (Folder 6) Hans von Bleichroeder, undated.

[10] "Daß sie in ihrer Erscheinung und in allem, was sie dafür tut, eine ganz echte Lulu ist, versteht sich von selbst." F.E., "Theater in der Königgrätzerstraße. 'Erdgeist' von Frank Wedekind," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 5 November 1916, 3. "Maria Orska spielt die Lulu, wie sie ihr niemand nachspielen wird." Quote from review by Max Schievelkamp. "Maria Orska und Hans Bleichröder: Tragödie einer großen Liebe." Gerson von Bleichroeder Family Collection. 1878–2002. Leo Baeck Institute, New York. AR 25234 1/6 (Folder 6) Hans von Bleichroeder, undated.

[11] "[D]er bewußte Vampyr, von dem inneren Dämon dazu bestimmt, den Männern das Blut auszusaugen." Gerd Stein, *Adolf Stein alias Rumpelstilzchen. "Hugenbergs Landsknecht" – einer der wirkungsmächtigsten deutschen Journalisten des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2014), 305.

[12] Hans-Jochen Irmer, *Der Theaterdichter Frank Wedekind. Werk und Wirkung* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1975), 257–58.

[13] Pamela Robertson Wojcik, ed., *Movie Acting, the Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 165.

[14] Ofer Ashkenazi, *Weimar Film and Modern Jewish Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 72–74.

[15] "Sie ist mit meinem abgeschlagenen Kopf bös umgesprungen." Ottomar Starke, "Die kleine Daisy Orska," *Der Querschnitt* 10, no. 6 (June 1926), 412–13; here 413.

[16] "Halbnackt, animalisch, mit jenen leisen Schreien, die das Pathos pathetisch machen und fühlen lassen, daß dies Wort Pathos nichts bedeutet als tiefste Trauer." Wilfried Weinke, *"Ich werde vielleicht später einmal Einfluß zu gewinnen suchen..." Der Schriftsteller und Journalist Heinz Liepman (1905–1966) – Eine biografische Rekonstruktion* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 87.

[17] Fritz Stahl, "Otto Müller – Dietz Edzard," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 5 March 1928, 2. Similarly, Oskar Kokoschka's more famous portrait of a smiling Orska emphasizes her wild hair and exaggerates her large eyes.

[18] Patricia White, "Nazimova's Veils: *Salome* at the Intersection of Film Histories," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 61.

[19] See, e.g., [ro,] "Erinnerungen an die Orska," *Der Morgen* 13, no. 6 (September 1937), 265; and Ursula von Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle zwischen gestern und morgen. Begegnungen und Erlebnisse* (Weilheim: Otto Wilhelm Barth-Verlag, 1963). See also Jutta Dick and Marina Sassenberg, eds., *Jüdische Frauen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Lexikon zu Leben und Werk* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993), 301–03.

[20] See "Dämon Morphium"; and Hubert von Meyerinck, *Meine berühmten Freundinnen* (Düsseldorf and Vienna: Econ-Verlag, 1967), 104.

[21] "Ein rätselhafter Selbstmord. Maria Orskas Schwester erhängt aufgefunden," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 11 February 1926, 5.

[22] Leo Schidrowitz, ed., *Sittengeschichte des Lasters. Die Kulturepochen und ihre Leidenschaften* (Vienna: Verlag für Kulturforschung, 1927), 175.

[23] Although some sources suggest Orska's last stage performance took place in 1927, she performed as Lulu in Paris in 1928, and in Barrie's *Medaillen einer alten Frau* in March 1929. See P.B., "Das deutsche Gastspiel in Paris. Urteile der französischen Kritik," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 20 June 1928, 3; and Alfred Kerr, "Orska. Lessing-Theater," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 9 March 1929, 4.

[24] See Darcy C. Buerkle, *Nothing Happened: Charlotte Salomon and an Archive of Suicide* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 163–72.

[25] On Bergner and suicide, see Kerry Wallach, "Escape Artistry: Elisabeth Bergner and Jewish Disappearance in *Der träumende Mund* (Czinner, 1932)," *German Studies Review* 38.1 (2015): 17–34.

[26] "Es war schrecklich, dieser zehn Jahre währende Selbstmord vor aller Welt." Carl Meinhard, "Maria Orska," *Berliner Tageblatt*, May 16, 1930.

[27] "[V]on dem namenlosen, schmalen, dunkeläugigen Polenmädchen Rahel Blindermann zu der Schauspielerin Maria Orska führte. [...] ein nervöses Temperament auf der Klaviatur einer weichen, dunkel timbrierten slawischen Stimme spielte, einer Stimme, die im selben Atem flüsterte und schrie und zwitscherte und klagte, dabei nie den Reiz exotischer Artikulation preisgebend." A.M., "Maria Orska," *Vossische Zeitung*, 16 May 1930, 5.

[28] Louis Lipsky, "'The Inner Man' by Abraham Schomer," *The American Jewish Chronicle* 3, no. 15 (17 August 1917): 407.

[29] The six films in the series directed by Max Mack were: *Das Geständnis der grünen Maske*, *Die Sektwette*, *Der Sumpf*, *Adamants letztes Rennen*, *Der lebende Tote*, and *Die schwarze Loo*.

[30] Max Mack is discussed at length in Irene Stratenwerth and Hermann Simon, *Pioniere in Celluloid. Juden in der frühen Filmwelt* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 2004), 27–35. See also Michael Wedel, ed., *Max Mack: Showman im Glashaus* (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1996). For a theoretical work that references Rabbi Akiva, see Max Mack, "The Conquest of the Third Dimension," in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907–1933*, ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 578–79.

[31] Orska likely provided inspiration for the book's section on the "Kinodiva" with a "demonic nature" as well. See Rudolf Kurtz, "Der Herr Dramaturg" and "Filmweibchen," in *Die zappelnde Leinwand,* ed. Max Mack (Berlin: Eysler, 1916), 57–58, 67.

[32] "[M]it ihrer ausgesprochenen eigenen Individualität." "Die Maria-Orska-Serie," *Licht-Bild-Bühne* 9, no. 27 (8 July 1916), 58. Cited in Wedel, *Max Mack*, 197.

[33] "Berliner Gastspiel eines palästinensischen Theaters," cited in *Der Querschnitt* 4, no. 4 (1924), 257.

[34] "[E]ine Exotin." Rudolf Bernauer, *Das Theater meines Lebens. Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Lothar Blanvalet Verlag, 1955), 310–14, 323–24. See also Kerry Wallach, *Passing Illusions: Jewish Visibility in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 47.

[35] "Die Orska wäre nicht germanisches Temperament, sie brächte die ganze Welt Aegyptens." Hanns Brodnitz, "Schauspielerporträts. 2. Maria Orska," *Berliner Mittagszeitung*, no. 147 (30 June 1919). Cited in Hanns Brodnitz, *Kino intim. Eine vergessene Biographie*, ed. Gero Gandert and Wolfgang Jacobsen (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2005), 176.

[36] "[Ei]n kleines, dunkles, sehr slawisches Persönchen." von Meyerinck, *Meine berühmten Freundinnen*, 100, 103.

[37] As Arnold Zweig noted in *Juden auf der deutschen Bühne* (1928), many of the best-known Jewish actors in Germany—including Orska—were actually foreign-born *austro-jüdische Schauspieler*. Arnold Zweig, *Juden auf der deutschen Bühne* (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1928), 21–26, 137–42, 193–94. Julius Bab argued that a shared blood relationship of sorts was partly responsible for the success of the triumvirate of Jewish women actors—Maria Orska,

Elisabeth Bergner, Fritzi Massary—whom he perceived as representative of the mastery of acting in general. Julius Bab, *Schauspieler und Schaukunst* (Berlin: Oesterheld & Co. Verlag, 1926), 121, 189–90. See also Wallach, *Passing Illusions*, 71.

[38] Doris Wittner, "Maria Orska," *Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung* 10, no. 21 (21 May 1930), 2–3.

[39] See "Tragödie einer Tragödin"; and Martha Wertheimer, "Seelentausch. Zur Begabung der Jüdin für die Schauspielkunst," *Frankfurter Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt* 12, no. 5 (January 1934), 211.

[40] The Deutsche Kinemathek's three-act version of *Die schwarze Loo* is available online at www.europeanfilmgateway.eu. On the film's premiere, see "Der neueste hervorragende Sensationsschlager der Maria Orska-Serie 1917/18," *Licht-Bild-Bühne* 10, no. 36 (1917), 31, 80.

[41] "Die Orska fühlte sich in der Kellerkneipe als freie, ungebundene Tochter der weiten Steppe." "Die schwarze Loo," *Licht-Bild-Bühne* 10, no. 36 (1917), 80.

[42] See Maya Barzilai's chapter in this volume, and Jeanette Malkin, "Transforming in Public: Jewish Actors on the German Expressionist Stage," in *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theatre*, ed. Jeanette R. Malkin and Freddie Rokem (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 151–73; here 165–66.

[43] A letter from Maria Orska to Herr Direktor dated 11 May 1919 suggests she was ill and had canceled all performances at that time. Gerson von Bleichroeder Family Collection. 1878–2002. Leo Baeck Institute, New York. AR 25234 1/6 (Folder 6) Hans von Bleichroeder, undated.

[44] I was not able to view any of her Weimar-era films, though I did work with materials relating to these films. Of these five films, only one, *Fredericus Rex*, is listed as available at the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv in Berlin. With the exception of this film and *Die schwarze Loo*, all of Orska's other films have been lost.

[45] Hans Wollenberg, "Zola im Film. Die Bestie im Menschen," *Licht-Bild-Bühne* 14, no. 8 (1921), 41.

[46] Wojcik, *Movie Acting,* 166.

[47] Hugo Münsterberg, *The Film, A Psychological Study, The Silent Photoplay* (1916; reprint, New York: Dover, 1971), 50. Cited in Elizabeth Ewen and Stuart Ewen, *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 8.

[48] Nancy Wang Yuen, *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 11–12.

[49] See Wallach, *Passing Illusions*, 48.

[50] Take, for example, the casting of Elisabeth Bergner as Fräulein Else and Grete Mosheim as Lucie Dreyfus. See Wallach, *Passing Illusions*, 93–94, 115.

[51] See Prawer, *Between Two Worlds*, 91–93.

[52] On vampire imagery in *Nosferatu*, see Ashkenazi, *Weimar Film*, 85–86.

[53] Gaylyn Studlar, "Theda Bara: Orientalism, Sexual Anarchy, and the Jewish Star," in *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 113–36; here 131.

[54] Ronald Genini, *Theda Bara: A Biography of the Silent Screen Vamp, with a Filmography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1996), 14, 58–59.

[55] Genini, *Theda Bara*, 63.

[56] See discussion in Studlar, "Theda Bara," 134–35.

[57] Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 67

[58] Cynthia Walk, "Anna May Wong and Weimar Cinema: Orientalism in Postcolonial Germany," in *Beyond Alterity: German Encounters with Modern East Asia,* ed. Qinna Shen and Martin Rosenstock (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 137–67; here 144.

[59] On concerns in the Weimar Jewish press about actors who played Jewish types, see Wallach, *Passing Illusions*, 77–81.

[60] Yuen, *Reel Inequality*, 4, 69–78.