

Richard Oswald's *Anders als die Andern* (1919)

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The dossier on Richard Oswald's *Anders als die Andern* (1919) is intended for students, teachers, and scholars interested in the film. It consists of an introductory essay with a brief and authoritative summary of the film often distorted in online venues, translations of representative contemporary reviews of the film, a sample teaching unit, an annotated bibliography, and a filmography of related titles.

Film Synopsis

Since the current version of the film exists in a fragmented form, with many scenes no longer available, this synopsis includes both missing scenes (indicated as such) and the current version.

Anders als die Andern follows the tragic love story of two men, Paul Körner (played by Conrad Veidt) and Kurt Sivers (Fritz Schulz). In the opening scene, Körner is reading newspaper stories about the suicides of young men, and realizes that they are connected to Paragraph 175 of Germany's penal code, which criminalizes homosexuality among men. This law also led to the proliferation of blackmail against gay men, which the film takes up as its central plot. In a missing scene, Körner visualizes a procession of famous men who have died as a result of the same social and legal hostilities facing homosexuals.

Körner is a celebrated violin virtuoso, and after attending one of his concerts, Sivers asks to be taken on as his student. The relationship becomes romantic, but soon faces external challenges. While out on a walk together, the couple encounters Franz Bollek (Reinhold Schünzel), who knows about Körner's homosexuality and begins to blackmail him with this knowledge. After increasingly extortive demands, Körner decides to stop giving Bollek money, which leads Bollek to break into his home and try to rob him. However, Sivers catches Bollek, confronts him, and Körner arrives back home and kicks Bollek out. In a missing scene, Sivers leaves town.

A flashback shows Körner's (Karl Giese) experience at a boarding school, where he was expelled for having an intimate relationship with his roommate. The flashback also shows Körner rejecting the advances of women, leading his peers to consider him unusual. Körner tries hypnosis as a means of conversation therapy, but it does not work. He next goes to a sexologist (Magnus Hirschfeld), who informs him that homosexuality is natural. Still within the flashback, Körner attends a queer masquerade, where he meets Bollek. Posing as a love interest, Bollek goes to Körner's home and blackmails him. Here the flashback merges with the present storyline, transitioning into a missing scene of Körner destroying a letter from Bollek demanding more funds.

In another group of missing scenes, Körner takes Sivers' sister Else (Anita Berber) to a lecture by the sexologist, which is successful in "enlightening" her to the plight of homosexuals. Körner reports Bollek's blackmailing to the police, which sets into action a string of events that lead to him facing criminal charges. Hirschfeld speaks at Körner's trial, garnering him sympathy from the judge. But because of the penal code, Körner and Bollek both face criminal charges. Körner is the subject of a social scandal due to public knowledge of his homosexuality, and he takes his own life. In a missing scene, Sivers returns and grieves for Körner. Hirschfeld encourages Sivers to take up the cause of abolishing Paragraph 175.

Context

Oswald, Hirschfeld, Veidt, Berber

The film is directed by Richard Oswald (1880-1963), and written in consultation with Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), who appears in the film as himself. Hirschfeld was a physician and sexologist in Berlin who researched and wrote on homosexuality as a natural phenomenon. He was an advocate for homosexual rights, especially the abolishment of Paragraph 175 of the German penal code. Oswald was a prolific and highly successful filmmaker working in Berlin, and by the time of making *Anders als die Andern*, he was one of the leaders in the new genre of Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*] films, which aimed to educate the public about health matters, usually to do with sexual health. Oswald approached Hirschfeld with the idea of the film. In consultation with his Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, Hirschfeld agreed to do the project, and saw the popular medium of film as a way to enlighten the public and gain support for his cause.

In addition to being produced by a major filmmaker, the protagonist of the film, Conrad Veidt (1893-1943), was one of the biggest stars of Weimar film. He was beloved by the public and became an icon of gay culture.¹ Anita Berber (1899-1928), who plays Sivers' sister, was also a major star and icon of the era.

Reception, Censorship, and Banning

In 1918, after World War One, the new German republic had removed censorship restrictions. This enabled filmmakers to produce more risqué films, especially under the banner of Enlightenment films.² This lack of censorship laws is how Oswald was able to produce the film in the first place. However, these laws were quickly reinstated, partly due to the uproar surrounding *Anders* and a string of Enlightenment films about sexual topics.

Premiering on May 28, 1919, the film was a huge hit. But many groups were vocally against it. It was widely criticized in the press, and conservative groups worked to get it banned. It was accused by those groups of being "unscientific," and propaganda for homosexuality. Moreover, as both Oswald and Hirschfeld were Jewish, they were additional targets of right-wing antagonism. In antisemitic discourse of the time (which overlapped with anti-gay discourse), homosexuality was considered a specifically Jewish trait, thereby posing a double threat to the German "Volk," or the "Aryan" Germans.³

Within a year of the film's premiere, after local boycotts and calls for its banning from several groups, a new censorship law was passed. Even though hundreds of Enlightenment films were nearly

¹ Elizabeth Otto, "Schaulust: Sexuality and Trauma in Conrad Veidt's Masculine Masquerades." *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema: Rediscovering Germany's Filmic Legacy*. Edited by Christian Rogowski. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010, 134-152, on p. 136.

² James D. Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic. The Case of *Anders als die Andern*." *Film History* (11. 2, 1999), 181-203, on p. 190-191.

³ See Valerie Weinstein, "Homosexual Emancipation, Queer Masculinity, And Jewish Difference In *Anders Als Die Andern* (1919)." *Rethinking Jewishness in Weimar Cinema*. Edited by Barbara Hales and Valerie Weinstein. New York: Berghahn Books, 2021, 152-177; See Cathy Gelbin, "From Sexual Enlightenment to Racial Antisemitism: Gender, Sex, and Jewishness in Weimar Cinema's Monsters." *Monsters and Monstrosity in Jewish History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, 118-133.

pornographic, *Anders*, which does not depict any sexual acts, was singled out by censorship advocates. The film was officially banned to the public on October 16, 1920. After this ban, depictions of homosexuality in Weimar film for the most part became cryptic and subtle.⁴

Following the ban, the film was screened a few times at Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science. In 1927, Hirschfeld made the film *Gesetze der Liebe*, a lecture in five acts, the fifth of which, *Schuldlos geächtet!*, was an extremely shortened version of *Anders*. There were multiple attempts to ban this film as well, but Hirschfeld got the bans appealed. *Schuldlos geächtet!* was exported to the Soviet Union in 1928, and forms the basis of the version available today.⁵

⁴ Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship," 190-193.

⁵ Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship," 193-194.