

# THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

## *Friday Film Fest Series*



## Revanche

Directed by Götz Spielmann

February 15, 2019

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of PA  
611 Spring Garden St.  
215-627-2332

Support provided in part by the  
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



## Revanche

**Director:** Götz Spielmann  
**Producer:** Götz Spielmann, Mathias Forberg, Heinz Stussak, Sandra Bohle  
**Screenplay:** Götz Spielmann  
**Cinematography:** Martin Gschlacht  
**Release Date:** September 2008  
**Spieldauer:** 117 minutes  
**Cast:** Johannes Krisch (Alex); Irina Potapenko (Tamara); Ursula Strauss (Susanne); Andreas Lust (Robert); Hannes Thanheiser (Großvater); Hanno Pöschl (Zuhälter)  
**Commentary:** A. Krumm



### *Subject Exposure ...*

There is only one subject in the end. Sticking to it can be enervating in the extreme, while changing it has always proven to be veritably Sisyphean. Folks have been oscillating anxiously between these options since Adam and Eve. Artists are often skittish about the subject. Especially directors. In particular European ones. The latter often strive fervently to avoid the subject by dispensing an endless array of diversionary effluvia.

The subject is potent, admittedly, even overwhelming. Some are intimidated by it, some are outraged by it, some contend that it simply has no place in artistic endeavors. Some express a prudish discomfort at the thought of a mixed audience being exposed to the subject. Others have confessed to being secretly fascinated by it, even consumed by its ineffable intensity.

Unlike many of his confreres, Götz Spielmann cannot be said to suffer from Subject Avoidance Syndrome. In fact, he is rather casual and candid in his treatment of the subject. Perhaps he senses, consciously or otherwise, that total abstinence from the subject will leave him with nothing interesting to say. So he gives us Alex and Tamara, through which the subject is explored and (as it were) exposed.

Alex is a particular species of individual known as the hard time losing man. This species was discovered in the 1970s by the prominent anthropologist Jim Croce. Unlike intrepid intellectuals and visionary artists, a hard time losing man is not motivated by peer approval. The essence of a hard time losing man is that he is utterly self-referential. He is the ultimate solipsist: the center of the universe is wherever he is at, and knowledge is whatever he is thinking at the moment.

Alex is also a prime exemplar of the ripple effect, a leitmotif introduced by a striking visual metaphor at the beginning of the film. Most of us, during our brief and biased sojourn, come to the realization that one thing leads to another. Perhaps life would be easier if cause and effect were not so rigidly enforced, but life is massively indifferent to our wishes. Choices and selections and actions and reactions emanate endlessly outward from the center of our exasperating existence.

This is what is known as the ripple effect. The ripple effect can be, and often is, a mighty multiplier in the individual's life, whether for good or ill. These emanations or waves coalesce or collide as it may be with the consequences rippling outward from the existences of other irksome individuals. This subsequent phenomenon is known as wave interference and just as with the ripple effect, this interference can be constructive or destructive.

The hard time losing man never succeeds in grasping the dynamics of the ripple effect, let alone achieving a meaningful appreciation of wave interference. Each time one thing leads to another in his life, the hard time losing man is convinced that his concomitant angle of repose is actually the firm foundation he has been seeking that will enable him to finally push off and escape the misery that dogs his existence.

A hard time losing man never notices that his current angle of repose is only another temporary landing site along the downward spiral which describes the trajectory of his existence. For any such landing site in the sojourn of a hard time losing man, the available horizon is always just another instantiation of *der Blick von unten*. The hard time losing man does notice this view, but he never correlates the frequency of *der Blick von unten* with the constancy of the

ripple effect and the negative potential of wave interference.

Alex is the quintessential hard time losing man. He has been in prison, but currently has found gainful employment in a highbrow *Hurenhaus*. He is the general factotum for the boss of the bordello. He is in love with Tamara, a fellow employee who is an outstanding service provider for the customer base. Ironically, Tamara does not suffer from Subject Avoidance Syndrome. She is very conversant, even intimate, with the subject. In fact, we have considerable warrant for believing that it is the anchor of her existence.



Without Tamara, the cash value of Alex's existence would be precisely zero, but fortunately for Alex, Tamara loves him as well. Their relationship is complicated by the fact that the boss is also sweet on Tamara, in his own gallantly thug-gish and discreetly lascivious manner.

This is a clear case of potentially destructive wave interference.

A hard time losing man always needs a plan and Alex has one. Nothing can go wrong. Through this plan, he and Tamara will achieve the escape velocity needed to propel them into the blissful existence that destiny should have intended for them all along. The view will change then.

Tamara is a very sensible woman, indeed the very antithesis of a hard time losing man. She possesses in abundance what Gadamer would call a non-dogmatic wisdom. Thus she tries her best to disenchant Alex from his plan, but he is importunate in his pleadings, and she finally acquiesces, more for the sake of his self esteem than her own best interests. But as is so often the case with a hard time losing man, the plan goes awry, the ripple effect kicks in and waves of unintended consequences roll over Alex.

In technical terms, *Revanche* is unusual in several respects. Götz Spielmann does not use a sound track. There is no music, neither to animate emotions nor to provoke psychological responses. You hear only the sounds you would expect to hear in a given scene, whether simply silence or human voices, mechanized din, urban cacophony or bucolic harmonies of wind and birds.

When it comes to dialogue, less is more, with the exception of the bubbly Susanne. Spielmann has an affinity for actors who are not well known for being well known. He is also a lean, efficient storyteller. There are no superfluous detours or speculative forays in the script. Shots and scenes and sequences flow together like the sentences and paragraphs and pages of well crafted prose, yielding a narrative velocity that never flags.

Martin Gschlacht's cinematography is beautiful. Much of the shooting was done in the Waldviertel and his photography captures the unique beauty of the region, from the sunlight on the meadows and fields to the gentle presence of the undulating, wooded hills. The shots of the weathered buildings and the barnyard and the cows in their stalls are intensively evocative of the ambience and rhythms of farm life. Gschlacht's technical tactics in terms of lighting and composition lend a clarity and intensity to every shot in the film.

But it is the subject that clamors for our attention. And there is really no hope of resisting or averting our eyes as Spielmann so casually confronts us with full frontal religious motifs and imagery, including but not limited to fleeting scenes of Grandpa and Tamara praying, Susanne and Grandpa heading out to church, Grandpa's lunch time soliloquy about being re-united with a waiting Grandma, and if that is not enough, the omnipresent picture of Grandma on the kitchen wall (complete with a cross no less) and (Heaven forbid) the wayside crucifix at the edge of the forest.

One should be wary of over interpretation here. Perhaps it was merely an impish impulse that moved Spielmann to include such elements in his film. Or perhaps religion in general and Christianity in particular is for Spielmann merely a cultural artifact, a fetching anachronism left over from a spent worldview, something quaintly curious with which to embellish the story.

Whatever his motives, Spielmann seems to have crossed a boundary which must surely violate the sensibilities of more than a few cognoscenti in a post Christian and in some quarters a positively pagan Europe. Imagine the effect that such scenes might have on the tender minds of children. Being curious, they might start to wonder and ask inappropriate questions about ultimate things. Spielmann might even be plausibly accused of giving aid and comfort, however



tangentially, to a Christian *Weltanschauung*.



Spielmann pushes the subject even further (again obliquely) in his instantiation of the lakeside colloquy between Alex and Robert. A director with a decent respect for the dictates of the thriller genre and a modicum of decency would have had Alex shoot Robert forthwith, or

perhaps chop him up with the ubiquitous ax, and then throw in another gratuitous romp with Susanne on the lakeshore for good measure. Spielmann instead allows us to infer from this scene that Alex, having struggled so mightily with the dialectics of revenge, might eventually be moved to receive the gift of repentance, post facto, after much reflection, based on Robert's haunting ruminations.

Spielmann has us take leave of Alex as he picks apples. We hear the wind and the birds as the shifting light announces the threat of rain, and we know that Alex is no longer a hard time losing man, because he has learned a great deal. Alex has learned for instance about Man Eaters, having been chewed up and spit out by one. The charming and disarming Susanne has also given him post-graduate instruction in the labyrinthine architecture of the human heart, an architecture that is often curved in upon itself.

Alex definitely has a firm grasp on the ripple effect and has learned that often, given what is necessary and sufficient "*...each man kills the thing he loves, yet each man does not die.*" Most importantly, Alex has become conversant with the subject, having been made aware of it by Tamara, albeit in absentia. He has negotiated the subject the hard way, which is the usual way, as described by Aeschylus: "*And even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.*"

## Calendar of Events

### February

Sat. Feb. 23 8th Annual Philly Bierfest, 2:00pm

### March

Sat. Mar. 9 Buchclub, 1:30pm

Sat. Mar. 9 New Chamber Ballet presents *Stray Bird*, 7:00pm

Sun. Mar. 10 New Chamber Ballet presents *Stray Bird*, 3:00pm

Wed. Mar. 13 Konversationsabend: Feldmaschall Josef von Radetzky with Hans Mueller, 6:00pm

Fri. Mar. 15 Friday Film Fest: *Winnetou—der letzte Kampf*, 6:30pm

Sun. Mar. 17 "Wister and More!" presents Pyxis Piano Quartet with baritone Grant Youngblood, 3:00pm

Tue. Mar. 19 KA EXTRA: The Effects of Immigration on German-American Politics with Martin Kaiser, 7:00pm

Wed. Mar. 20 Humboldt through our Eyes: Discussion with comments from Prof. Harry Liebersohn, 6:00pm

### April

Sat. Apr. 6 Hamburger Abend, 7:00pm

Wed. Apr. 10 Konversationsabend: GSP Update with President Tony Michels, 6:00pm

Sat. Apr. 13 Buchclub, 1:30pm

Sun. Apr. 14 "Wister and More!" presents the Casimir Trio, 3:00pm

Fri. Apr. 26 Friday Film Fest: *Honig im Kopf*, 6:30pm

### May

Sat. May 4 Spring Luncheon, 12:00pm

Wed. May 8 Konversationsabend: *Mal was Lustiges* with Karl Moehlmann, 6:00pm

Sat. May 11 Buchclub, 1:30pm

Sun. May 12 "Wister and More!" presents EStrella Piano Duo

Fri. May 17 Friday Film Fest: *3 Tage in Quiberon*, 6:30pm

Sat. May 18 500 of Lager Brewing: the German Tradition and the American Dream, 2:00pm

Sat. May 18 Frankfurt in May, 3:00pm