

werde, aber ich weiß, was war und werde nichts je wieder vergessen. Ich bin noch jung. Ein neues Jahrhundert hat angefangen. Wohin wird er Sturm uns tragen. Ich weiß nur, dass ich diesen Brief, wenn er fertig ist, ins Meer werfen werde, denn wie kann jemand schreiben, den es nicht mehr gibt. Felix' Geschichte ist abgeschlossen. Ich werde manches sein, werde manchmal Champagner und manchmal Wasser trinken müssen, werde lange diesen Palneten inspizieren. Eines aber bin ich nie wieder, Dein dich hiermit zum letzten Mal und auch in andauernder Verbundenheit grüßender Freund Felix Krull."

Der Film

The movie generates an exuberant mood that is sustained by the performance of Jannis Niewöhner. While Horst Buchholz was perfectly cast for this role, combining a wonderful voice, aristocratic good looks, great sex appeal, and first rate acting skills, Niewöhner holds his own compared to Buchholz. His good looks "*und eine naturgegebene positive Ausstrahlung*" ("*Und viel hässlicher als Buchholz ist Jannis nun wirklich nicht*" – Director Buck) make this latest adaption just as enjoyable as the old one. Niewöhner makes it impossible to dislike this con-artist. His rendition of Krull as Marquis de Venosta enables you to eagerly suspend your disbelief (*mehr Schein als Sein*), and you cheer when he always lands on his feet as the *Glückskind* intended by Thomas Mann.

Ironie

The social ascent of Felix Krull fulfills the dream of any ordinary person to live without financial worries and needs, to be respected everywhere, and to live life with a form of *Leichtlebigkeit* that only seems possible in the upper levels of society. But the fact that Felix (*der Glückliche*) achieves this through deceitful charm also holds a mirror to society, since society itself functions as a codependent enabler (*mitschuldig*) of Felix' success. "*Die Menschheit möchte etwas vorgespielt bekommen. Sie möchte betrogen werden.*" Mann seems to be echoing Shakespeare here: "All the world's a stage. And all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances. And one man in his time plays many parts."

And irony is the main element that prevents his actions from being seen as negative or criminal.

Felix is not an evil person. He really doesn't harm anybody. His dazzling deception is instantiated with *Eleganz und Eloquenz*, and that lifts his character continuously into a positive perception and transforms any tension into something charming and beloved. What makes Felix different from any other *Hochstapler* is that his story is at once a story of human weakness and gullibility as well as a parody of the society itself with its class distinctions, contradictions, and values.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA Friday Film Fest Series



Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull

Directed by Detlev Buck

March 17, 2023

● 6:30 PM ●

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of Pennsylvania

611 Spring Garden St.

Philadelphia, PA 19123

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Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull (2021)

Director: Detlev Buck
Writer: Nach dem Roman von Thomas Mann
Screenplay: Detlev Buck, Daniel Kehlmann
Production: Markus Zimmer
Music: Helmut Zerlett
Camera: Marc Achenback
Editor: Peter R. Adam
Length: 114 minutes
Cast: Jannis Niewöhner as Felix Krull
Liv Lisa Fries as Zaza
David Kross as Marquis De Venosta
Joachim Krol as Professor Kuckuck
Maria Furtwängler as Madame Houplé
Nicholas Ofczarek as Stanko
Annette Frier as Felix Krulls Mutter
Désirée Nosbusch as Madame Kuckuck

Commentary by Karl Moehlmann



Neuverfilmung

This movie is the latest adaptation of the novel by Thomas Mann. The first adaptation of this “Klassiker der Weltliteratur” became a classic itself; it was the 1957 version with Horst Buchholz and Liselotte Pulver. Producer Markus Zimmer explained the necessity for a modern adaptation after all these years as follows: “*Thomas Manns Felix Krull ist eine seiner populärsten und zeitlos-aktuellsten Figuren, deren Charme und Humor nach wie vor Leser und Theaterzuschauer begeistern. Eine Neuverfilmung fürs Kino war längst überfällig.*” Er hoffe, auch ein jüngeres Publikum zu erreichen, da Felix etwas darstelle, was er nicht sei. Das sei gegenwärtig ein großes Thema.

The director is Detlev Buck and the title role is played by Jannis Niewöhner.

Der Roman

Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull. Der Memoiren erster Teil. Roman von Thomas Mann (1875 – 1955), erschienen 1954.

The origin of this book goes back to the year 1910. Thomas Mann interrupted his work on this novel in the summer of 1911 and published the first section in 1922 “*ein Torso des geplanten Ganzen, als Buch der Kindheit*”. In 1937, an edition was published that was expanded by an incomplete second section. In 1943 Mann gave up on his plan to complete the fragment in favor of writing *Doktor Faustus*. In 1951, he took up work on Felix Krull again. It was published in three sections (*Bücher*) in 1954, one year before he died.

“Die Bekenntnisse” are a parody on the *Bildungs-* or *Entwicklungsroman* and are closer to a picaresque novel. Felix Krull writes the fictitious autobiography at the end of his *Weltfahrt* with meticulous honesty and no trace of regret or moral doubt. It can be assumed that he was born around 1870 and that the story takes place around 1890 during the Second Empire with its *Obrigkeitsstaat* and militarism.

Felix (the lucky or happy one) is the son of a bankrupt champagne producer. Already as a child he lets himself be honored as an emperor and is regarded as a child prodigy (*Wunderkind*) in front of a spa audience when he imitates violin playing with “Fiedel und Vaselinebogen” with the help of playback and an orchestra. In another memorable scene, he gains exemption from mandatory military service by convincingly faking an epileptic attack via his extraordinary acting skills.

With the help of his uncle, he moves to Paris to start a career in the prestigious hotel Saint James Albany. He seems well suited for this business. His good looks and manner and his extremely charming linguistic talents get him promoted quickly, while also drawing the attention of several female guests. He meets Madame Houplé again, the wife of a rich toilet bowl maker from Straßburg (in the movie he is a *Gänseleberfabrikant*). Krull had stolen her jewelry box at the border control and sold it at a pawn shop in Paris. After a passionate night with her he confesses the theft. She not only forgives him, but also urges him to take more as part of her *Liebeswunsch*.

The most important event in Krull's life is his *Existenztausch* with the Marquis de Venosta. The latter gives Krull his papers and money in order to start a yearlong worldwide educational trip. This trip was arranged by his parents in order to force de Venosta to escape from his girlfriend Zaza, of whom the parents do not approve. On the train ride to Lisbon, Krull makes the acquaintance of Professor Kuckuck, a paleontology professor and director of the Paleontology Museum in Lisbon. He also becomes acquainted with the professor's daughter Zouzou and wife Maria Pia. In the guise of Marquis de Venosta he gains access to the upper crust of society and is even granted an audience with the Portuguese King, who had met de Venosta five years earlier in Paris. Unable to recognize his old friend at first, Krull (alias de Venosta) uses his charm and eloquence to convince the king that he had changed and that he was a different person five years ago. “*Ich war ein anderer, eine unfertige und vorläufige Ausgabe von Louis de Venosta – eine nun abgelegte Version.*” To which the king replies: “*Ich muss zugeben, diese gefällt mir besser.*” The *Existenztausch* and the acceptance in the society is complete.

Here the book and the movie end. “*So endet die Geschichte in dem Moment, wo sie beginnt.*” Before he embarks on his world tour, Felix writes a letter to de Venosta and reflects on the past and the future:

“*Ich weiß nicht, was noch geschehen wird und ich weiß nicht, wer ich sein*