

Document Citation

Title	Harakiri
Author(s)	Lenny Borger
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1988 Nov 16
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Harakiri, Lang, Fritz, 1919

Harakiri 11/10/88 (GERMAN-B&W) Variety

A Decla Film-Ces. Holz & Co. production (1919), preserved by the Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv (Coblenz). Directed by Fritz Lang. Screenplay, Max Jungk, based on the John Luther Long and David Belasco play "Madame Butterfly;" camera (b&w, tinted), Max Fassbaender; sets, Heinrich Umlauf, with the collaboration of the I.F.G. Museum Umlauff of Hamburg. First presented in Berlin Dec. 19, 1919. Reviewed at Pordenone (Italy) Silent Film Festival, Oct. 6, 1988. Length (restored print): 5,538 ft. Running time (at 18 frames per second): 82 MIN.

With: Lil Dagover (O-Take-San), Paul Bienfelt (Daimyo Tokuyawa), Georg John (the bonze), Meinhard Maur (Prince Matahari), Käte Küster (Hanake), Niels Prien (Olaf J. Anderson), Herta Hedem (Eva).

■ **Pordenone — "Harakiri" is nothing other than "Madame Butterfly," with a cast of Germans playing mincing Orientals in this 1919 production, which followed by four years the Hollywood version with Mary Pickford.**

Preserved by Germany's Bundesarchiv from an original, handsomely tinted nitrate print found at the Dutch Film Museum, film would go down as merely a quaint curiosity if it had not been directed by Fritz Lang.

It's probably a measure of Lang's budding talents that "Harakiri," 70 years later, is not ridiculous and has a certain charm. Though it would be outrageous to call this an early Lang masterpiece (as is being done in European critical circles), film nonetheless reveals the director's future concern for stylized performance and art direction.

Lang tells the famous tearjerker straight, and future German screen star Lil Dagover takes her first dainty steps as O-Take-San, a pure young thing persecuted by a wicked bonze, who wants to add her to his collection of temple geishas.

The love of a Danish navy officer forestalls the evil design, but Dagover eventually finds herself alone with a child fathered by the Dane. The lover returns to Japan (accompanied by his wife) though not in time to save the despairing Dagover from ritual suicide.

Though the mannered performances leave today's viewer indifferent at best, film has pictorial appeal in Lang's meticulous recreation of Japanese decor and ritual, which are heightened by the often-lovely tints. Lang's future taste for striking setpieces are here evident in such sequences as an autumn festival, complete with lantern-garlanded boats on shimmering lakes.—*Len.*