

## Document Citation

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# Verlorenen (Diary of a Lost Girl)

Germany, 1929  
Director: G. W. Pabst

Cert—A. dist—Blue Dolphin. p.c—Hom-Film. p—G. W. Pabst. asst. d—Marc Sorkin, Paul Falkenberg. sc—Rudolf Leonhardt. Based on the novel by Margarethe Boehme. ph—Sepp Allgeier. ed—(not credited). a.d—Ernö Metzner, Emil Hasler. l.p—Louise Brooks (*Thymiane Henning*), Josef Rovensky (*Robert Henning*), Fritz Rasp (*Meinert*), Edith Meinhard (*Erika*), Vera Pawlowa (*Aunt Frieda*), Franciska Kinz (*Meta*), André Roanne (*Count Osdorff*), Arnold Korff (*Elder Count Osdorff*), Andrews Engelmann (*Director of the Reform School*), Valeska Gert (*Director's Wife*), Sybille Schmitz (*Elizabeth*), Siegfried Arno (*Guest*), Kurt Gerron (*Dr. Vitalis*), Speedy Schlichter, Emmi Wyda, Jaro Furth, Hans Casparius. 8,689 ft. (at 18 f.p.s.) 130 mins.

Puzzled by the abrupt dismissal of her father's housekeeper Elizabeth—who is pregnant and later commits suicide—Thymiane, innocent young daughter of chemist Robert Henning, is distracted by the arrival of a new housekeeper, Meta, and by her birthday celebrations. Intrigued by a message written in her new diary by her father's lecherous assistant Meinert, Thymiane keeps an assignation that night and is seduced by Meinert. When she subsequently has a baby, refusing to say who the father is, Meta produces the diary at a family conference. Confronted by this evidence, Meinert refuses to marry her on the grounds that Henning's business is heavily mortgaged, and Thymiane settles the matter by refusing to marry him because she does not love him. The baby is therefore farmed out, and Thymiane sent to a house of correction. Having schemed to this end, Meta then induces Henning to regularise their relationship by marrying her. Chafing under the harsh discipline of the reform school, Thymiane writes to her friend Count Osdorff, a playboy whose stern uncle has cut off his allowance, begging him to intercede with her father. When Meta prevents Henning from relenting, Thymiane escapes with the aid of Osdorff and another inmate, Erika. Finding that her baby has died, she



Innocence through a glass darkly.



A lost girl adrift in a joyless street.

lets herself be guided by Osdorff and Erika to a brothel, where she is treated kindly. At first rebelling against the idea of prostitution, Thymiane sets up as a dance instructress, but this leads to much the same end. To their mutual shame and grief, she is seen by her father one night while she is being 'auctioned' at the Café Sauterelle. Three years later, Henning dies, and Thymiane renounces her inheritance rather than see Meta and her children go penniless. But Osdorff, who has proposed marriage so that they can start a new life on the money, commits suicide. At his funeral, Thymiane is approached by Osdorff's uncle, who blames himself for the young man's fate and begs to be allowed to make amends. As his wife, the Countess Osdorff, Thymiane is invited to interest herself in the plight of wayward girls. She returns to the house of correction and, though recognised, demands reforms with her husband's smiling approval.

The second film Louise Brooks made with Pabst, *Diary of a Lost Girl* has been rather overshadowed by *Pandora's Box*; and quite rightly so, since the contradictory impulses evident in Pabst's career, kept in miraculous balance throughout *Pandora's Box* (no doubt by the exact correspondence between Wedekind's intentions and the Louise Brooks persona), here tend to pull in opposite directions. On the face of it, there is no reason why the almost classical *découpage* of the opening sequences, set in drab bourgeois interiors and echoing the staid social realism of *The Joyless Street* or *Kameradschaft*, should not be followed first by the Expressionist gestures and Russian montage of the reformatory scenes (all eccentric angles, grotesque figures and metronomic movements), and then by the ecstatic dissolves and opulent eroticism of the brothel scenes, which closely echo the tone and timbre of *Pandora's Box*.

The trouble begins when one tries to sort out exactly what the film is saying. Basically, it enshrines an old-fashioned tract urging more sympathy and understanding for the fallen sparrow, taking in some sharp but con-

ventional digs at the hypocrisies of bourgeois morality, and clinching its argument with the old Count's curtain speech as he lends his authority to Thymiane's demands for reform of the reformatory: "A little more love, and no one can be lost in this world". Yet Thymiane herself runs something of a tooth comb through this argument by the extreme ambiguity of her behaviour.

That a certain ambivalence was intentional on Pabst's part is confirmed by Louise Brooks when she writes (in *Lulu in Hollywood*) that "conceiving the seduction scenes in *Diary of a Lost Girl* as a ballet, with me (Thymiane) as the seductress, he directed them as a series of subtle, almost wordless manoeuvres between an 'innocent' young girl and a wary lecher". This exactly describes the effect obtained in the film itself, making it much more interesting than the traditional tale of innocence betrayed; but it also suggests that Pabst was trying to have his cake and eat *Pandora's Box* all over again. In the earlier film, the whole point was that the innocence of Lulu's sexuality was used as a yardstick against which the corruption and depravity of society could be measured. Here, in what amounts to a reverse situation, the sexuality of Thymiane's innocence is never properly acknowledged.

Two marvellous shots straight out of *Pandora's Box*, one of her languorously swooning as Meinert lifts her in his arms and carries her to his bed, the other exactly matching as a client carries her off on her first night at the brothel, imply an ecstasy that the rest of the film contrives to ignore, suggesting that in marrying the old Count she has not only achieved the new life she yearned for, but has restored herself to bourgeois respectability. What price sex now? Having briefly uncovered the Lulu in Thymiane, as it were, the film hurriedly suppresses her so as to preserve its social thesis. A fascinating film none the less, directed with all Pabst's skill and managing the complex twists of its almost novelistic plot with astonishing economy and fluidity. And Louise Brooks, of course, is divine.

TOM MILNE