

Jews in War Films

- Below are various lists of films referenced in my talk '*Wisecrackers and korbanot: the emasculation of Jews in a century of war films*' given at Limmud UK at 5:40pm on 31 December 2014.
- The films here are grouped mostly by the categories of emasculation to which I referred; I have also included films I mentioned which fit more squarely into other categories I mentioned in passing, such as the pre-1914 'ghetto movie' genre.
- I have provided only brief descriptions for each film and the tropes contained within.
- Please be in touch if you would like me to speak at your community: benjaminvos@hotmail.com
- Website: theteethofbeasts.weebly.com

Ghetto Movies

- *Fights of Nations* (1907): 'Our Hebrew Friends' bicker, squabble, fight comically and bribe a policeman.
- *Romance of a Jewess* (1908): daughter's deathbed reconciliation to estranged father.
- *The Yiddisher Cowboy* (1911): Ikey Rosenthal commercially outwits a group of more physical cowboys.
- *The Jazz Singer* (1927): father's deathbed reconciliation to assimilating son.

Comic, cowardly or otherwise unsoldierly Jews

- *Fights of Nations* (1907): 'Our Hebrew Friends' bicker, squabble, fight comically and bribe a policeman.
- *Cohen Saves The Flag* (1913): Cohen and Goldberg squabble and avoid action; the most martial Jewish character is Rebecca.
- *What Price Glory?* (1926): Private Lipinsky is a gurning fool, played for comic effect.
- *The Lost Patrol* (1934): Ex-boxer Abelson (possibly not Jewish, but played by Sammy Stein) loses his mind.
- *The Great Dictator* (1940): The Jewish Tailor is a bumbling fool; he is rescued from the Nazis by his wife, armed with a frying pan.
- *Sergeant York* (1941): 'Pusher' Ross is the action-averse, face-pulling, provider of comic relief.
- *Airforce* (1943): Engineer Weinberg reacts to events with cracks, not action, and his attempts to fight are laughable.
- *Bataan* (1943): Corporal Jake Feingold is incompetent, whining, vaguely cowardly and dies humiliated.
- *Action In The North Atlantic* (1943): Abel Abrams is a wisecracker and Goldberg is a coward.
- *Gung Ho!* (1943): Leo 'Transport' Andreof is a non-combat wisecracker but dies in action.
- *A Walk In The Sun* (1945): Friedman is a wisecracker and admits to being a yellow draft-dodger.
- *Objective Burma* (1945): Corporal Gabby Gordon makes jokes out of fighting.
- *Command Decision* (1948): Lt. Goldberg wishes himself dead after making a technical error.
- *Stalag 17* (1953): Harry Shapiro is light-fingered, unreliable, totally un-martial.
- *What Price Glory* (1956): Lipinsky is the clerk, fat, unfunny, incompetent, complaining.
- *Attack!* (1956): Private Bernstein is unfit, cowardly.
- *Men In War* (1957): Sergeant Nate Lewis is easily-shaken and trigger-happy, and dies through panicking.
- *Private Benjamin* (1980): Private Benjamin's inability to soldier is the main joke of the film.
- *Memphis Belle* (1990): Lowenthal is a coward, even saving the day 'through' cowardice.
- *The Lost Battalion* (2001): Private Rosen doesn't fight, and vocalises his entirely civilian ambitions.
- *Enemy At The Gates* (1998): Commissar Danilov takes the credit for his non-Jewish comrade's shooting.
- *Inglourious Basterds* (2009): the only seen Jewish survivor is called 'The Little Man'.

Jews who 'just die'

- *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949): A nameless Jew dies saying krias Shema; his sergeant says 'Amen'

- *Charlotte Gray* (2001): refugee Jewish children, and a Jewish artist, die: his half-Jewish son does not.
- *The Crusaders* (2001): Lots of Jews die.
- *Joyeux Noel* (2005): German Lt. Horstmeyer is the only protagonist sent to the Eastern Front (death implied).
- *Inglourious Basterds* (2009): almost all the Jewish characters die.

Jewish death(s) to physically save, impart a moral message to, or spark a moral change in, gentiles

- *What Price Glory?* (1926): The death of 'Mummy's Boy Lewisohn' sparks a moral crisis in a gentile character.
- *Gung Ho!* (1943): Leo 'Transport' Andreof's death seems to spur his C.O.'s speech of post-war idealism.
- *Objective Burma* (1945): Lt. Jacobs dies having passed on a vital message.
- *Command Decision* (1948): Lt. Goldberg wishes himself dead after making a technical error.
- *Destination Gobi* (1953): Carping climate scientist 'Coney' Cohen's death indirectly and comically saves his comrades.
- *The Deep Six* (1958): Frenchy Shapiro dies giving his non-Jewish friend a lesson in courage and soldiering.
- *Tobruk* (1967): Special Interrogation Group men martyr themselves to allow non-Jews to fight on.
- *Anzio* (1968): Corporal Rabinoff dies to draw fire from non-Jewish comrades; inspiring a moral change in a cynical war journalist.
- *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974): louché tailor M. Horn gives up his life to spur action from his Vichy protector.
- *Soldier Of Orange* (1977): Jan Weinberg dies, but only after passing on information to his non-Jewish comrades.
- *Hamburger Hill* (1987): Private Bienstock's 'Dear John' from his girlfriend Ruth Silverman, becomes the defining moral moment of the film when he is killed.
- *Life Is Beautiful* (1997): Guido dies to save his son and wife, who aren't Jewish.
- *Goodnight Mr Tom* (1998): Zach dies, but before and even through death, teaches the gentile protagonist.
- *Saving Private Ryan* (1998): Private Mellish dies, teaching a comrade to 'man up' in the process.
- *The Red Baron* (2008): Pilot Sternberg's death causes moral reassessment by Baron von Richtohofen.

Jews redeeming themselves through death

- *Kapo* (1960): Edith, dying, repents of her kapo career; her German guard admirer removes her Nazi insignia.
- *Enemy At The Gates* (2001): plotting, unsoldierly, unlikeable Danilov dies to expose a German sniper.

Assimilation

- *Since You Went Away* (1944): Lt. Solomon has a Navy Cross but appears only in a Christmas scene.
- *The Young Lions* (1958): unlike the book, Ackerman lives but returns home to a non-Jewish wife and child.
- *Exodus* (1960): a Jewish/non-Jewish couple survive the fighting; a Jewish-Jewish couple do not.
- *Soldier Of Orange* (1977): Jan Weinberg is contrasted favourably with a humiliated *smous-jood*. *Esther's fiancé is not Jewish*.
- *Private Benjamin* (1980): Benjamin's martial improvement goes hand-in-hand with romance with a non-Jew.
- *Shining Through* (1992): the 'Jewish' character isn't actually Jewish.
- *Independence Day* (1996): boffin David reunites with his non-Jewish estranged wife.
- *Life Is Beautiful* (1997): Jewish Guido is survived by his wife and son - but they aren't Jewish.
- *Enemy At The Gates* (1998): Tanya chooses Vassily the sniper over plotting fellow-Jew Danilov.
- *Inglourious Basterds* (2009): Shoshana does not even get to meet the male Jewish characters.
- *Charlotte Gray* (2001): the sole surviving part-Jewish character pairs up with the non-Jewish heroine.
- *The Crusaders* (2001): the sole Jewish survivor of a massacre, Rachel, is absorbed into the Christian ranks.

Jewish women, Nazis, conquerors, sex and romance

- *Kapo* (1960): Eponymous Edith flirts with a Nazi guard
- *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974): a collaborator rapes a Jewish girl, who falls for him, doesn't kill him when she could.
- *Soldier Of Orange* (1977): Esther acquiesces in the collaboration of her non-Jewish fiancé.
- *The Crusaders* (2001): Christians massacre Jews; survivor Rachel pairs off with one of her persecutors.

- *Black Book* (2006): Rachel Stein doesn't cry when her parents die; but does when her Nazi lover is killed.
- *Inglourious Basterds* (2009): Shoshana lures a Nazi to his doom.

Jews shown as sexually eager or promiscuous

- *Stalag 17* (1953): Harry Shapiro with a Slavic fellow-comic relief character, scams his way into a Russian female barracks to ogle then showering.
- *Anzio* (1968): Corporal Rabinoff is shown about to stage a one-man orgy.
- *Soldier of Orange* (1977): Esther spends much of the film naked and sleeping with different men.
- *Pearl Harbor* (2001): cynical nurse Martha is the only character honest about her romantic ambitions.
- *The Lost Battalion* (2001): Private Rosen is introduced as a frequenter of whorehouses.
- *Black Book* (2006): Rachel Stein presents herself as, and is, frequently sexually available to numerous men.

Now?

- Controversial German TV series *Generation War* (*Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*; 2013) features a Jew (with a non-Jewish, rather unpleasant German girlfriend), Viktor Goldstein, who is almost without agency and whose most forceful activity is the hearty eating of a plate of pork. The German characters are as much victims as he is, it seems. Jewish minor character Liliya is a doctrinal Communist and shoots people in accordance with her beliefs.
- *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas* (2008) has a German child dying alongside his Jewish friend.
- In *The Book Thief* (2013), the Jew survives; the German characters largely do not.

Exceptions

- In Renoir's *L'Grande Illusion* (1937), Lt. Rosenthal's patriotism is shown to be largely economic, but he does not die; indeed, explicitly representative of the class changes discussed in the film, aristocrat Captain de Boeldieu perishes to secure the escape of Rosenthal and ex-mechanic Lt. Maréchal.
- *Torpedo Run* (1958) has a one-liner character called Orville Goldstein; he doesn't do or suffer anything and doesn't appear to be a joker or a figure of fun.
- The Jewish children who survive being hidden by Italian nuns in *Conspiracy of Hearts* (1960) do so because of the bravery of their non-Jewish rescuers. A rabbi is killed in the process, but the nuns have ensured the Jewish identity of the children remains intact.
- Czech film *Tobruk* (2008) has a non-Jew dying to save the life of a (admittedly initially physically and militarily incompetent) Jew.

Excluded films

- I have not examined films such as *Europa Europa* (1990) or *Defiance* (2008) because such films are based on true stories, albeit with artistic licence. I wanted to look only at fiction, and what filmmakers 'did' with Jews whose fates were entirely in their hands.
- Similarly, Holocaust films are not looked at, because these too limit what can be implied into the fate of a Jewish character. Israeli films are not considered, because the problems I believe I have highlighted in movies made about Diaspora Jews, are probably Diaspora-specific.
- It is perhaps the case that *Defiance* or *In Darkness* present Jews as 'winning' to some extent because they are made with a Jewish market in mind. Whether that means that the non-Jewish mainstream wishes to see Jews 'losing', I don't know.