

Cowgirling in Thuringia

The German Police Procedural *Tatort* goes Western¹

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1. Introduction

On Jan 1, 2019, German TV audiences were in for a New Year treat: The federal state TV station ARD aired a new episode of *Tatort*, a police procedural series with a 40-year tradition that has arguably become a mainstay in German popular television. *Tatort* kicked off the new year with a Western-style story from a Wild West amusement park called »El Doroda«. Tucked away in the Thuringian woods, a region eulogized as fly-over country or »Germany's green heart« (Rainald Grebe, »Das Grüne Herz Deutschlands«, 2007), El Doroda is a provincial and fantastic crime scene, replete with hobbyists and their utopian community designs. In this *Tatort*-episode, titled »Der Höllische Heinz« (dir. Dustin Loose, writ. Murmel Clausen, Andreas Pflüger), number 1078 of the series, the investigator Kira Dorn discards her policewoman's garb and joins the Western spectacle. As undercover cowgirl agent, she handles the big guns, the male egos, and the German Western myth before riding off victoriously into the sunset.

Tatort (which translates as »crime scene«) is a format which, on any given Sunday night and on national holidays, literally couches German media history as well as public memory and regionalisms: as a police procedural, it raises issues around societal changes as its investigators navigate criminal milieus, ethical issues, and individual challenges to their job and character. As a TV serial, it draws from contemporary popular culture trends and popular cinema aesthetics with reflections on social developments from a conservative bourgeois background (Speck 2023: 339, see also Buhl 2013). Its local detectives investigate in cities around Germany and encounter local color cultures, such as when the Munich team deals with an Oktoberfest-murder (»Die letzte Wiesn«, 2014), or the Frankfurt detectives investigate in a skyscraper among bankers (»Der Turm«, 2018). With outliers in Switzerland's Luzern (2011–19)

1 This publication has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 833574.

and Zurich (since 2020), as well as Vienna (1990-), *Tatort* also covers German-speaking neighbor states and regions. In the history of the German crime series tradition, *Tatort* has been described as a flagship franchise that reflects and forms mainstream tastes, yet its reception beyond German-speaking academia is still lagging behind (Speck 2023: 339–340).

In view of this volume's interest in ladies in arms in popular culture, *Tatort* is particularly intriguing. While a systematic study of the gender dimensions in its long history is still lacking and goes beyond the scope of my article, I want to note the general trajectory of detective figures, which started out with white male lone-wolf types in the private eye tradition in the 1970s and gradually introduced all-male duos with bromance overtones (see the detective couples in Munich, Stuttgart, or Münster). After the first female investigator premiered in 1978, it took another 11 years for the tough cop figure Lena Odenthal to enter the scene in Ludwigshafen. Since the 1990s, more female detectives have been written for *Tatort* worlds. As working women, they are often tasked with feminist hot topics such as motherhood or care work (problems their male colleagues rarely face), next to being evaluated regarding beauty standards and romantic workplace entanglements. For instance, in Hannover and Göttingen, Charlotte Lindholm (2002-) is a single mother who has to rely on her mother for child care in odd hours, only in 2018 was Lindholm joined by the first Black *Tatort* investigator, Anais Schmitz. The first all-female team Karin Gorniak and Henni Sieland took up in Dresden in 2016, and their work is continuously subjected to notorious mansplaining and sexist humor by their misogynist boss.

In turning to *Tatort Weimar* and detective Kira Dorn's dress-up in »Der Höllische Heinz«, my analysis relates this episode to the serial narrative *Tatort* as well as to the carnivalesque of German Western myths, with a special interest in the meanings of Kira Dorn's re-armament as a cowgirl in the fictional German Western community. My argument expands two scholarly tenets on *Tatort* as a TV culture phenomenon, regarding the setting and the investigator figures: First, building on German Studies scholar Moritz Baßler's work, I read the Weimar *Tatort* as inhabitable diegetic world: Baßler (2014) argues that *Tatort's* driving force veers away from the individual whodunnit of the crime narrative towards the fictional world portrayed. In other words, viewers are less interested in the murder cases than in the investigator teams embroiled in local cultures and regional specifics.² The second premise for my assessment of Kira's cowgirling in Thuringia concerns the detective figures: Kira and her colleagues function as decoy for (re)staging and revisiting particular settings;

2 Baßler writes: »[W]elcher Ort ist es denn? Das *personal interest* für Personen des Teams, die wir, wie für Serien typisch, inzwischen schon lange und gut kennen, ist von den eigentlichen Kriminalnarrativen nahezu abgekoppelt. Zugespitzt formuliert wirken diese nurmehr amplifikatorisch bzw. als bloße Lizenz zur immer neuen Inszenierung der Diegese – in Umkehrung traditioneller epischer Verhältnisse«.

they interlink the individual episodes of the serial narration and become potential identification figures (Baßler 2014; see also Stockinger et al. 2015: 321, 323).

Tatort Weimar functions as a specific locus of German (memory) culture that gets a special twist in »Der Höllische Heinz«, with its adaptation of the Western film in the Wild West town, as I explore in the first part of my argument. In the second part, I close read detective Kira Dorn's transition from professional gun carrier/working mom to cowgirl sleuth with a special eye to her performance as gun-crazy cowgirl.

2. Reading *Tatort Weimar*: *Weltliteratur* meets Local Color

Between 2013 and 2021, the *Tatort* franchise released 10 episodes set in Weimar featuring the (first and to date only!) romantic investigator couple, Lessing and Kira Dorn, who share their parenting duties for a young son. The episodes are characterized by a whimsical and absurd overall tone and a plethora of references to Weimar's literary and popular culture. In the sense of Baßler's diegetic habitat, *Tatort Weimar* is a space overloaded with German history and tradition. Weimar is an important German *lieu de mémoire* and has been attributed mythical status in German and international memory culture (Merseburger 2005, Bollenbeck 2001). It functions as a magnifying glass for history at large (Seemann 2012: 10) and entangles the venerated and appalling parts of German history and memory culture. It was home to the classical authors Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller and the origin of the Bauhaus movement; it is the founding place of the Weimar Republic and the neighboring town to Buchenwald, one of the largest Nazi concentration camps, and it was the treasure trove for the GDR regime. With its museums and parks, and its gables bearing quotes from world famous literati, Weimar today attracts visitors with the grandiloquent slogan »Visit Weimar. Discover the world.«³

The crime stories told in *Tatort Weimar* episodes engage the small town's historical and cultural eminence in the German cultural imaginary with a twist towards the absurd. This is tied to a focus on the popular, the mundane, or what might be called low culture; for instance, the crime plots evolve around trademark Thuringian foods, such as bratwurst (»Die fette Hoppe«, 2013) or potato dumplings (»Die robuste Roswitha«, 2018). The local police station is constantly under construction and run by largely incompetent or clueless personnel. Police inspector and side figures Stich (Thorsten Merten), the investigators' talkative boss, and deputy police officer Ludwig Maria Pohl (Arndt Schwering-Sohnrey), or Lupo, often hinder Lessing's and Dorn's work. Lupo functions as a clownish comic relief persona whose nickname puns on the GDR's »Vopo«, the people's police (»Volkspolizist«).

3 See: <https://www.weimar.de/tourismus/weimar-erleben/welt-entdecken/>. Accessed on 07.07.2023.

The casting of the detective figures Lessing and Dorn adds another layer to the absurdity of the diegetic world of *Tatort Weimar*. Comic screenwriter Mummel Clausen (who wrote all 10 episodes) created investigator figures to suit the regionalist tropes and provide tongue-in-cheek commentary on the events and the place. They are played by renowned actors Christian Ulmen and Nora Tschirner, representatives of 1990s German popular culture who both started out as VJs for MTV Germany and worked as reality show hosts and actors in roles that affirmed their public images as witty and self-ironic. Both actor personas engage dominant gender scripts: Ulmen play-acts on tough masculinity while Tschirner is known for her criticism of female beauty norms (Hartwig and Kuehn 2017: n. pag.) and has responded humorously to winning second spot in *Playboy's* rating of the sexiest female *Tatort* detective – in her signature shapeless parka jacket (ibid.).

In *Tatort Weimar*, Tschirner's Kira Dorn is consistently cool and ironic. She navigates her professional and private life wittily, commenting on events and on her exhaustion as caregiver to a young child. Her romantic relation with her partner Lessing remains off-screen, and she is unfazed by Lupo, the police officer who is smitten with her and heroically throws himself into harm's way when he feels she is in need of saving. The opening of »Der Höllische Heinz« deviates from the previous portrayals of Kira Dorn as cool investigator, because it shows her at home: the audience finds her as happy housewife, listening to music on her Walkman (a nod to generation X) and scrubbing away at the underside of the kitchen sink with a toothbrush. When her partner Lessing asks her about this unnecessarily meticulous house cleaning effort, she reminds him of his mother's impending visit. The evil mother-in-law puts Kira's homemaking competence to the test, but she gleefully abandons this task when news of a murder victim arrives (00:03:54–00:04:58). The episode centers on her carnivalesque escape from working mother/investigator to undercover cowgirl sleuth.

After other episodes that dealt with Thuringian sausage and potato dumplings, »Der Höllische Heinz« adds another absurd spin to the diegesis of *Tatort Weimar*, regarding both the story and the discourse levels: the story of the murder investigation takes place in a Thuringian Wild West town, a utopian community for Western hobbyists and dropouts. It is presented in a cinematic Western aesthetic.⁴ For instance, the crime plot focuses on a John Wayne look-alike villain with a soft heart, the »hellish Heinz« from the title, who is frequently shown in the iconizing cinematography of the classical John Ford Western. The Western town scenes are shot with a color filter that adds a sepia tint; the score features songs by country music icon Dolly Parton, and there is lots of tall talk and masculinist cowboy bravado. All

4 In the making-of video supplied by MDR, actress Nora Tschirner reports that she expressly asked for a Western town episode because she is a fan of this subculture. https://www.daserste.de/unterhaltung/krimi/tatort/videos/making-of_tatort_der_hoellische_heinz-100.html.

this points to another layer of Weimar historiography: the Western myth in the former GDR. Hence, to frame my close reading of Kira Dorn's development from happy housewife to cowgirl, I will contextualize the European Western craze and its specific »Wild Eastern« overtones.

3. El Doroda's »Hippies in Tipis«: Hobbyism, Indianthusiasm, and Cowgirling in the Wild East

The crime scene investigation in »Der Höllische Heinz« kicks off with the discovery of the corpse of a middle-aged man in the local river Ilm described by police officials matter-of-factly as »Indian« (»Indianer« in German). Lessing's online research quickly uncovers the murder victim's chosen identity as »Indian Chief Lone Wolf« (»Einsamer Wolf«) in the local Western town of El Doroda. Looking over Lessing's shoulder at the screen (fig. 1), the TV audience encounters the hobbyist phenomenon »Indianthusiasm« (Lutz, Strzelczyk, and Watchman 2020; see also Perry 2019), a dress-up performance of cultural appropriation.



Fig. 1: Lessing researches El Doroda online and discovers the murder victim »Chief Lonely Wolf«
 »Der Höllische Heinz« (00:11:10)

In German speaking cultures, playing Cowboys and Indians is a long-standing cultural practice that builds on carnival culture. Akin to an »invented tradition« (Hobsbawm and Granger 1983), it has very little to do with the historic reality of the North American West and loosely adapts an adventure steeped myth of the frontier. Hence, it is laced with the white supremacist and heteronormative settler colonial narrative of the US-Western frontier myth and its reception in Europe. The ever popular work of Dresden adventure writer Karl May, the creator of Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, was adapted into the *Indianerfilme* phenomenon, which told

ideologically opposed stories in the two Germanys respectively at the height of the Cold War. As film scholar Kathleen Look (2019) has shown, post-unification filmmaking offered a reconciliatory version, in which »Winnetou becomes legible as distinctly German, which in turn foregrounds two competing politics: those of German nation building and Native American representation« (324).⁵

Beyond the German Western/*Indianerfilm* tradition, another reference post for »Der Höllische Heinz« is the Western town amusement park phenomenon. The fictional El Doroda emulates German cowboy clubs and civil gun cultures that mimic the American West and offered escapism from a modernizing and industrializing everyday routine. Germany's oldest among these hobbyist associations, Cowboy Club München (est. 1913), seeks to »link our dream of the Wild West to reality in ›living history‹: being a Cowboy Club member means more than ›playing cowboys and Indians‹. It's the special spirit, the camaraderie and the shared interest in the anthropological study of the North American West, specifically in the 19th century, that unites us« (Drexl 2013: 9). Munich's Cowboy Club' centennial brochure cites as its origin story the arrival of the »outside world to our German home« (Drexl 2013: 14)⁶, naming Buffalo Bill's Wild West spectacle (BBWW), which toured all over Europe in the 1890s. BBWW's outreach and popularity have been described as pinnacle of the Americanization of popular culture (Christianson 2017: 18–21), and the awe it inspired as modern entertainment machine can hardly be overstated.

In small-town Weimar, conversely, the world-famous BBWW's performance in August 1906 inspired superlatives in the press. The *Allgemeine Thüringische Landeszeitung* for August 26 reported »traffic as has never been seen before«. The *Weimarer Zeitung* praised BBWW's execution of the »world famous English motto ›time is money‹« as seen par excellence in BBWW, where »one hundred brains have to combine and test beforehand, one thousand hands have to build, the cogwheels have to click«⁷. In short, the German version of the American Western myth is

5 It bears noting here that the debate around cultural appropriation in Indian dress-up reached a new hysteric high in 2019's carnival season, when it was linked to critiques around cancel culture and even white male German politicians felt compelled to defend their boyhood nostalgia for May's stories.

6 The German descriptions from Drexl's cowboy club brochure state: »unseren Traum vom Wilden Westen und die Realität können wir in Form von ›living history‹ verbinden. Ein Mitglied des Cowboy Clubs zu sein bedeutet für uns mehr als nur ›Cowboy und Indianer zu spielen‹. Es ist der besondere Spirit, die Kameradschaft und das gemeinsame Interesse am völkerkundlichen Studium des nordamerikanischen Westens, insbesondere des 19. Jahrhunderts, die uns verbinden« (9); and »die Welt [kam] von außen in die (deutsche) Heimat« (14).

7 The German original articles state: »ein in einem Grade gesteigerte[r] Verkehr, wie er hier wohl noch nie beobachtet worden ist«, and »Hundert Gehirne mussten da vorher kombinieren und probieren, tausend Hände sich mühen, ein Rad muss ins andere greifen«.

intricately linked to buying into the spectacle and going »Western«, to escape into a carnivalesque world of dress-up and outdoor adventure.

For my analysis of Kira Dorn's cowgirling act in *Tatort Weimar*, the gendering of the Western narrative and its all-male *dramatis personae* is key. In the narrative world of the Western show (and the film, for that matter), women are confined to the domestic sphere while men wrestle with the threats of the wilderness, but both genders work hard to build settlements, infrastructure, and a public sphere, i.e. a civilization in the European sense. In the spectacle of BBWW, which sought to show European audiences the »drama of civilization« that was playing out in the US (see e.g. Blackstone 1986 or Christianson 2017), the figure of the cowgirl or lady sharpshooter had a special part. While the scenes of Western life staged in the program featured women only as damsels in distress, the sharpshooter Annie Oakley was a star in her own right and marked the beginning of American celebrity culture (McMurtry 2010). Traveling with BBWW on the European tour in 1887, she dazzled her European audiences by performing recreational target practice and competing with the best marksmen all over Europe. Oakley visited with local gun clubs, hobby associations which trained sharp shooting and were closely linked to European military and civil armament culture. Oakley's appearance at their marksmanship competitions was sensational due to the heteronormative and exclusionist culture of these associations, which persists in the present day (Hardt 2022). In the masculinist and conservative habitat of European gun hobbyists, Oakley performed the US Western myth in a transgressive gender role; show runner Buffalo Bill described her as representative of American womanhood and »wonder[s] of the world«.⁸

While Oakley arguably created the figure of the cowgirl (Riley 1995), her performance carefully navigated feminist gender transgression and Whiteness scripts at the turn of the 20th century. As Americanist Laura Browder has asserted, »[i]conic women with guns challenge and yet reinforce the connection between firearm and (masculine) American identity« (Browder 2006: 10). Oakley's stage persona was built on enacting girlhood. She performed a non-threatening version of the shooting woman that resonated with the image of the new girl in transatlantic Victorian culture (Rico 2017: 98) and »reinforced conservative ideas regarding the appropriate maturation of Anglo-Saxon women« (Henneman 2017: 113). In Oakley's well-marketed frontier biography, shooting small game for survival legitimized gun usage. Also, Oakley's reliance on a non-provocative girlish dress code endeared her girl shooter persona for admiring onlookers and male shooting competitors. At BBWW, she was placed as opening act because »audiences who felt nervous when confronted with the noise and smoke of gunfire felt reassured when they

8 Jones, Michaela: »Wonders of the World«, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, 19.08. 2017. <https://centerofthewest.org/2017/08/19/wonders-of-the-world/>. Accessed on 08.08.2018. Quoted in *ibid.*

saw a petite, attractive woman shooting first« (Kasson 2000: 112). For European audiences, the American girl who called herself »Miss« (and in German »Fräulein«) and performed girlish pouts with her small gun was a curiosity from overseas. Her girl celebrity persona distinguished her from other women in show business whose image was linked to prostitution (Rico 2017: 104). It also venerated spectacle culture and the alleged ›taming‹ of a country girl to presentable and attractive femininity, as seen in the global success of the 1946 musical *Annie Get Your Gun* (translated into German as »Annie schiess los«) and the 1950 eponymous film version, which launched the song »There's No Business Like Show Business«.

Oakley's coinage of the cowgirl and female sharpshooter perpetuates the heteronormative and masculinist gender politics of the Western show, which resurfaces in »Der Höllische Heinz« through Kira Dorn's undercover cowgirl play. Kira's act works on both levels: as carnivalesque inversion of her everyday life as working mom on the one hand, and on the other hand as performative extension of her part as female detective in the diegetic world of *Tatort Weimar*. To access the Western community of El Dorada, Kira play-acts as would-be Westerner and trick rider. This includes an independent and self-assured femininity coupled with rebel girl fighting. Kira's grand entrance iconizes her as new Western heroine in an extended, one-minute scene (00:21:54–00:22:29) that recalls the classical Western film: She is shown by herself, singled out center frame and walking in slow-motion down main street towards the town villain Heinz, as the Western town characters look on silently from their porches; one dishevelled cowboy tips his hat in greeting. Just after Kira (now as Lotta the cowgirl) has cockily announced she is looking for a job to the town, her partner Lessing arrives by car. His arrival is filmed to mimic Kira/Lotta's entrance to the Western setting, but he is met with antipathy. He closes his window while driving, since the El Dorodans ogle him suspiciously, and to confirm his intruder role, Kira/Lotta walks up to him and kicks him in the crotch for professedly jailing her former boyfriend (»Der Bulle hat meinen Ex eingebuchtet«, 00:24:24–00:24:31). In this scene, the camera gaze is doubled by an onlooker's perspective: we see the figures in extreme closeup and then from a distance with a wobbly camera from behind, through the looking glass of a Western character who grunts approvingly at Lotta's behavior (00:24:32).

Kira/Lotta's grand cowgirl entrance to El Doroda becomes a play in the play: her camouflage is known to all those who watch, including Lessing and the actual TV audience, but disparate audience expectations pinpoint the logic of playing Western: while to the El Dorodans, her performance attests to her anti-police mindset as cowgirl and to her fitness to join their community, the TV audience knows more. We may read her act as professional performance (she has to embody her cowgirl role!) and as retribution to the domestic gender script pressure she feels due to the impending arrival of Lessing's mother. The marketing poster for »Der Höllische Heinz« suggests as much to viewers familiar with the duo Dorn and Lessing (fig. 2): it shows Kira as

strong cowgirl equipped with two guns before the red curtain of a stage, protecting Lessing from harm as both look into the distance theatrically.



Fig. 2: Advertisement poster for »Der Höllische Heinz«
MDR/Wiedemann&Berg/Anke Neugebauer

In the course of the episode, Lessing is ridiculed, beaten up and even tarred (1:01:47) while Kira's role play as undercover cowgirl affords her a double escape: from the job and from motherhood, into her girlhood role in the fantasy world of El Doroda's ›Wild East‹. Notably, »Der Höllische Heinz« does not merely represent the diegetic world of a German Western in which good »cowboys« battle evil »Indians«; instead, the episode interrogates the push and pull between marketing the Western town and protecting its dropout members from poverty. As with any utopian community, the aptly named El Doroda operates on seclusion from the mainstream, neighborly support, and suspicion towards newcomers. Its *spiritus rector* Weber is the murder victim. Weber's Pretendian persona »Lone Wolf« is noticed only by Lupo (»Welcher Indianer heisst Herr Weber?«, 00:10:00), whose question is ignored. Weber's passing threatens the community's survival. In this

constellation, Heinz Knapps, the John-Wayne lookalike and title character, is both a savior and exploiter of El Doroda, with business knack and hawking skills learned in the GDR's anti-capitalist system. Lessing and Dorn's boss, Stich, recalls that Knapps sold fake under-the-counter erotica photos and ran a swinger club. Upon stumbling on El Doroda and its delusional »Hippies in Tipis«, Knapps professes, he »saw the economic opportunity« (00:15:09–00:15:32).

Knapps's description of these »Hippies in Tipis« nods to the anti-capitalist and specific East German articulation of playing Western. The East German reception of this narrative articulated a stance that critiqued the »imperialist class enemy« (»imperialistischer Klassenfeind«, von Borries and Fischer 2008: 8) and embraced a pro-»Indian perspective in a problematic cultural appropriation strategy«. From the 1950s to the present day, East German hobbyists have been »going native« in clubs organized as »Indian tribes«, even though this Indian enthusiasm was shaken with the demise of the GDR, when the concept of the literally »red reserve« gave way to an »capitalist Eldorado« (von Borries and Fischer 2008: 10, my translation), as sketched by *Tatort's* fictional cowboy villain Knapps. Just as Knapps' pseudo-West German erotica, the hobbyists of the Wild East made do with the few resources they had, specifically improvising on guns: while private gun ownership was strictly limited in the GDR, the hobbyists had with self-made guns or US leftovers from WWII that were transformed into Wild West firearms such as Peacemakers, Colts or Winchester guns (von Borries and Fischer 2008: 33). »Der Höllische Heinz« therefore uncovers the politics of the Wild East as pop culture phenomenon: As safe haven for dropouts and hobbyists, El Doroda faces the challenges of economic survival. The hobbyists' dress-up is framed by the necessity to stage a Western spectacle and attract customers. Read in this context, Kira Dorn's cowgirling act gains an additional meaning: next to offering her liberation from her day job and domestic life with Lessing, her cowgirl persona also functions as cash cow-»Fräuleinwunder« in the destitute Western community. As my close reading of her encounter with a cowboy shows, Kira's engagement with a Western colt encapsulates the affordances of her cowgirling in Thuringia.

4. »There's a Cowgirl in Me«: Kira Gets her Gun

»You can't go in old school. These people are Hobbyists! Fundamentalist Western fanatics. In a town full of lawless people, you can't go in without a costume, even as a visitor. [...] Remember carnival three years ago; there's a cowgirl in me!« (Kira Dorn to Lessing, 00:20:02–00:20:29)

When Lessing tells Kira about the new crime investigation site El Doroda, she jumps to analysis mode and declares herself the best candidate for infiltrating the West-

ern community. Her disguise as Lotta the cowgirl marks a transition from state-sanctioned gun carrier, police officer, and working woman to cowgirl hobbyist who deliberately flirts with Western culture. Next to her arrival scene in which she gets to knee-jerk her partner on El Doroda's main street, her self-invention as Lotta is staged in a more intimate encounter with the cowboy Tom Wörtche down by the stables (00:27:34–00:29:20).

In this scene, Tom has an informal job interview with her, checking out her professional riding skills (which Kira quickly invents) as well as her cowgirl mindset. She arrives at the stables drenched in golden light, surprising the half-naked cowboy Tom washing off the dust after a long workday. Throughout this scene, Lotta acts self-assured and in a commanding way, while Tom hastens to keep up his straight face. The atmosphere suggests sexual innuendo when Kira playfully explores Tom's gun. The camera shows her in a half close-up, looking down curiously at the lower part of Tom's body as he girds himself with the holster. »Oh, this one is great« she says, »may I [touch it]?« The cinematography plays with the ambivalence in this scene: »it« might refer to both Tom's penis (i.e. his sexual prowess) or his gun. When he reluctantly pulls his colt out of the holster and places it in her hands, he tells her it is an original American colt, »Army single action from 1871«. We then see her handling the gun in extreme close-up and pointing it at him as she inquires, cheekily: »Does it still shoot?« (00:28:06–00:28:27). Tom's response »Well... Not officially.« brings the scene full circle: He acknowledges that in the Western town, guns (even if they are historical artifacts) are worn only for show, while the dress-up cowboys revel in shooting in secret. At the same time, as only the audience know, Lotta as undercover agent makes an important discovery: She might have found an illegal firearm, and the potential murder weapon. And on the symbolic level hinted at with the playful sexual innuendo and phallic gun talk, Tom's response also invites Lotta to engage in further, off-the-record exploration of his gun (fig. 3).

Contrary to Western film convention, Kira's undercover sleuthing in El Doroda does not come to a shoot-out duel on main street. Instead, her Western stint culminates with a singing performance in the saloon as the »new Lady in town« (my translation, 01:07:19–01:10:05). For a rowdy saloon audience, she sings Marlene Dietrich's song »See What the Boys in the Backroom Will Have« from the 1939 Western *Destry Rides Again*. Dietrich's performance in this Western Americanized her as showgirl in the »bad girl« movie cycle of the 1930s, while her song was also read as ironic commentary on her vamp woman roles in previous films such as *Der Blaue Engel* (Forshaw 2015). For Kira's showgirl performance, this song functions as a meta-narrative reminder of the entertainment industry and its gender scripts: Kira-as-cowgirl cheekily asks to »have the same [drink]« as the »boys in the back room«, claiming backroom access to power and participation in the German Western carnival, just as Dietrich did as German celebrity in the US Western film. Kira-as-detective indulges her professional skills and demonstrates there's more to her character than

meets the eye, namely a cowgirl. For the diegetic world of *Tatort Weimar*, the saloon scene marks Kira Dorn's temporal liberation, and in the format as a whole, we are reminded of the challenges female detectives face on the job.



Fig. 3: Stills: Lotta holds Tom's gun
»Der Höllische Heinz« (28:16 and 28:22)

As the investigation plot thickens and the suspense mounts, Kira's cover is almost blown by the clownish Lupo, who arrives at the saloon in cowboy dress with a historical revolver from the police archives to protect her, but he quickly knocks himself out: He faints from a shot of hard liquor. Kira's cowgirl investigation thus encapsulates her status as sex symbol, horse worker, and feisty character. She indulges the sexual innuendo with cowboy Tom and single handedly does away with the male co-workers who cross her cowgirl path: she watches Lupo keel over and beats up Lessing, her partner in work and in life.

In the end, it is Kira who saves Lessing from a gas explosion, and again, the gun is key: upon arriving on horseback at Knapps' house, she finds Tom's colt in the car, takes it and enters the house to find Lessing bound and tied to the kitchen oven. This scene is a staple in *Tatort* episodes: towards the ending, we often see the detectives breaking and entering dangerous spaces to save other figures from being killed. They do this at their own risk, with their police guns held up to their faces, ready to shoot at villains and attackers. Kira's performance of the breaking-and-entering scene in »Der Höllische Heinz« represents a Western variation that is tied to her choice of firearm: In extreme closeup of her face, we see her brandishing the Army Single Action colt, also known as Peacemaker, as she playacts as cowgirl shooter but carries out her cop job. In the end of the episode, Kira has fused the two personas of detective and cowgirl and becomes the armed heroine who saves the day. Importantly, she achieves this without shooting the Peacemaker: both her cowgirl and detective personas make do with the weapon as object, but not as tool. The Peacemaker carries various meanings in this scene: as ornament or accessory, it completes her cowgirl costume; as prosthesis, it enables her to fight back attackers; as fetishized object, her play with the gun stages her taking over of the phallus and by implication masculine

power. Finally, as symbol of popular culture narratives in the Western and in *Tatort*, the Peacemaker pinpoints the figure Kira Dorn's critical interrogation of these format's gender scripts and the entertainment offered to the audience by her girlish transgression.

5. Conclusion

How does »Der Höllische Heinz« link to *Tatort* as a whole? Cultural Studies scholar Julika Griem has explored the format's seriality to argue that the detective figures's social commentary extends beyond individual episodes, thus preventing narrative closure of the 90-minute films (Griem 2014: 404). In view of this collected volume's interest in the meanings of gun-toting female figures, the detectives can be described as brandishing their weapons in response to the concrete murder case but also to the diegetic world they live in. *Tatort Weimar*, with its absurd figures and weird murder cases that link Goethe's and Schiller's abode to bratwurst capitalism, applies the social commentary to the medium. Weimar as cultural icon becomes a spectacle that only dazzles, as Moritz Baßler (2017: 352) has argued, when both performers and audience accrue meaning to the storyworld and return to *Tatort Weimar*, time and again, as a world they enjoy experiencing.

The carnivalesque world of El Doroda taps into German Western myths and offers nostalgic memories to its viewers, who might recall the playing cowboys and Indians and return to their inner cowgirl, as Kira did. »Der Höllische Heinz« suggests that, by indulging Kira's fantasy, we are allowed to take a long, hard look at the gun, but to solve the murder case and save the day in the world of *Tatort Weimar*, we don't even have to shoot to keep the fantasy alive.

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