

A black and white close-up portrait of Romy Schneider, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. Her dark, wavy hair frames her face.

ROMY A Star
Across Europe
SCHNEIDER

MARION HALLET

BLOOMSBURY

Romy Schneider

Romy Schneider

A Star Across Europe

Marion Hallet

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INTRODUCTION

Upon the discovery of her death (aged forty-three) on the morning of 29 May 1982 by her companion in their Parisian apartment, the police found a letter on her desk (she was cancelling a photoshoot and an interview), with a long stroke of ink suggesting that she had collapsed from heart failure while writing, but also red wine and pills, which could suggest that she had, voluntarily or not, overdosed. Yet, public prosecutor Laurent Davenas closed the case and Schneider's body was not autopsied for he did not want 'to destroy the myth' as he later explained (Lelait-Helo, 2017, p. 301). The details of the previous anecdote vary according to the many writers and journalists who have written about the life, career and death of Schneider, but analysing the various elements and meanings constitutive of this particular star 'myth' is the goal set for the present study. Davenas continued: 'Sissi was not supposed to embark on her last voyage to the Quai de la Rapée [the Forensic Institute in Paris]. I could not bring myself [...] to turn her into a carcass' (Bertrand, 20/05/1998). His comments give us valuable information: first, they attest to the importance of Schneider's star status at that point and of her perception as a tragic and 'untouchable' woman to which her early death significantly contributed; secondly, Davenas does not name Schneider but designates her by one of her most enduring and beloved characters – Sissi. Schneider was indeed propelled into stardom with the role of Empress Elisabeth of Austria – also known as Sissi – in the *Sissi* trilogy (Ernst Marischka, 1955, 1956, 1957), the popularity of which firmly and lastingly established her star image. The latter changed significantly over the course of her career, from the Viennese ingénue to the *Parisienne* and later the 'modern' and then 'tragic' woman. Those changes occurred in conjunction with her acting choices, events in her private life and directions within European cinema that led her career into three main paths. The first concerns the early years marked by her mother, the German actress Magda Schneider who influenced her casting as the young and romantic heroine in German and Austrian films. After a few years of decline intersected with

international roles, Romy Schneider reinvented her career and her persona¹ when she relocated to France and became one of the most famous 'French' stars of the 1970s.

Today, Schneider continues to be one of the most popular stars in the history of European cinema and she is still widely celebrated by fans, *cinephiles* and members of the film industry alike. There are numerous indicators of Schneider's lasting popularity throughout Europe – retrospectives, publications, fan clubs, anniversary celebrations, documentaries and so on – and I will return to her legacy in the conclusion. Yet, the starting point for this book is that, despite her popularity and impressive career as a film actress, and despite the fact that her persona raises many important questions about female stardom, European and trans-European identities and exportability, Schneider has been surprisingly neglected in scholarly studies. My aim is to analyse Schneider's career, persona and performance style so as to place her within a range of European female stars, particularly Germanic and French, who defined cultural and ideological images of femininity on European screens. Schneider started working at the age of fifteen and her career spanned three decades of European cinema, while she also worked in the United States. But whereas individual articles and book chapters have underlined some aspects of her significance, no scholarly work has considered the entire trajectory of her career, nor examined the development of her on- and off-screen persona within the context of European cinema history, as well as feminist and gender studies. I am using the case of Schneider and her move (both in terms of production and reception) from Austria, Germany and Hollywood, to France in order to explore questions of trans-European and transnational stardom, hoping to make a valuable intervention in this growing field within star studies. I aim to show how the representations of women stemming from Schneider's star image supported specific and shifting cultural and social agendas regarding femininity, over the three decades of her career. I want to understand the significance of Schneider's image both when she was working and since, within Western European film culture and, more recently, celebrity culture.

My examination of Schneider's trans-European star image is firstly based on close textual analysis. Each of Schneider's films is looked at in detail,

¹On its first publication in 1979, Richard Dyer's *Stars* set new principles and methods of critical and theoretical rigour in the then-emergent field of star studies: he addressed the concept of the star as a sign, a constructed image in the signifying system that is film, as well as an intertextual, multimedia phenomenon. He showed how stars are complex systems made of formal and cultural elements from acting roles, performance style and public image, subsequently identified with the term 'persona'.

with attention paid to performance² and other *mise-en-scène* elements (costume, lighting, composition, production design, makeup and hairstyle), dialogue and music. By analysing the form of Schneider's films, as well as their narrative and character construction, I look at how a feminine image is established on screen, and how Schneider's characters within her films construct different ideologies of womanhood at particular historical moments. The corpus of films analysed in my study consists of Schneider's complete filmography, that is sixty-three films released from 1953 to 1982, which includes two TV films and one documentary. While every film has been viewed, some are briefly considered while others have been selected for deeper analysis as the most representative of the star's evolution. I also refer to films outside Schneider's filmography, from the 1920s to the present day, such as the original versions of the remakes in which Schneider starred in the 1950s, and the films (and star personas) of European female stars contemporaneous with Schneider along the years (in particular Hildegard Knef, Brigitte Bardot, Anna Karina, Jeanne Moreau, Catherine Deneuve, Annie Girardot, Hannah Schygulla, Isabelle Adjani), for comparative purposes in order to historicize Schneider's career and persona within the canon of European film history. I look at other films by European and Hollywood directors with whom Schneider worked in order to evaluate her impact as a performer and as a star on their collaborations, as well as other auteur and popular films to situate and contextualize Schneider's work and representation of femininity over time (the evolution of Occupation films in France since the end of the Second World War, for example).

Beyond the films, the printed media coverage that built Schneider's star image is amply analysed throughout this book (promotional material, reviews, articles and photographs published in the press at the time), with material from Austria, Germany, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, the UK and the United States. I also made use of archival material such as private correspondence, production notes and original drafts of scripts. I have found a substantial amount of such material in libraries and archives in film institutes in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, London and Lausanne and at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. In addition, many radio and television interviews with Schneider, as well as journalistic comments and TV documentaries about her are available on the internet (on video-sharing

²In *Stars* (1979), Richard Dyer stresses how a star possesses a particular performance style that 'through its familiarity will inform the performance s/he gives in any particular film' (1998, p. 142). Following Dyer's analytical methodology of 'performance signs' (facial expression, voice, gestures, body posture and body movement, pp. 134–50) and the development of a systematic methodology by James Naremore (1988), I am, for my study of Schneider, directly concerned with the semiotics and stylistics of film acting. That is the actor's repertoire of gestures, postures, expression and speech that compose a 'field of discourse', an ensemble of signs established by a star over a number of films, that expresses meaning for audience.

and audio-visual archives websites such as YouTube and Dailymotion, and the Ina³ website). Other audio-visual material were only available in archives such as some of her lesser-known films (*L'Amour à la mer*, Guy Gilles, 1964; *My Lover, My Son*, John Newland, 1970; *Tausend Lieder ohne Ton*, 1977, Claudia Holldack). I also examined a plethora of websites dedicated to Schneider and administrated by her fans, but bearing in mind their variable degree of reliability, they were rigorously cross-checked with primary sources when possible.

I have also relied on established scholarship in several academic fields (theories and paradigms developed in Anglo-American film star studies from the 1970s onwards, including German and French star studies, European and transnational film stardom). Considering the importance of stars and films as pillars of identification for male and female audiences and representations of sexual 'norms', one can see the critical importance of adopting a gender perspective when studying stars. I study Schneider in terms of her construction of gender (as well as from a feminist point of view), in the context of the traditional German society of the 1950s and of the rise of women's rights and radical cultural changes in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as notions of female beauty, their historical and cultural anchorage and ideological ambiguities. This is helpful in understanding the appeal of Schneider's image as a woman, as well as the media construction of her as an emanation of the 'eternal feminine'.

Curiously, as already mentioned, there have been very few scholarly studies of Schneider. Yet there has been a lot of published material about her. However, as is common to other major popular stars, large amounts of writing on Schneider consist of biographical and autobiographical material of different value. Those works often lack originality, reliability or analytical perspective and their sources are rarely cited. Nevertheless, they contribute to the promotion and the construction of the star's image. Therefore, these works on Schneider are useful as raw material, for they are symptomatic of discourses on the star.

There is a so-called 'autobiography' by Renate Seydel, *Ich, Romy: Tagebuch eines Lebens* (1988), that has been published several times and translated into French (1989). The book is a compilation of Schneider's own diary of her early life and of second-hand writing; therefore, it is not exactly the 'diary' that the title suggests. It assembles excerpts from a series of articles published by Schneider's mother Magda Schneider in the *München Illustrierte* in early 1957, excerpts from articles published in magazines such as *Abendzeitung* (1958) and *Quick* (1965) and fragments from interviews given by Schneider to the German and French magazines *Stern* and *Paris Match* in 1981 and 1982. Seydel writes that all other comments

³Institut national de l'audiovisuel.

by Schneider come from publications between 1957 and 1982 and are reproduced with the intention to present a coherent autobiography, but she does not provide specific references. While it is a fascinating document, *Ich, Romy* has to be considered with caution regarding the accuracy of timeline, events and the comments on them. As far as possible I double-checked this source with others, such as reviews, and radio and television interviews although these too are not necessarily reliable as there are particular biases attached to specific contexts (for example, in the 1970s, the New German Cinema practitioners' dislike of popular post-war German cinema cemented Schneider's own rejection of the *Sissis*). I try to be alert to exaggerations, contradictions and changes present in those discourses.

Another point of interest in those types of 'memoirs' is the stars' perception of their own image. Several protagonists in Schneider's entourage – friends, parents, celebrity colleagues, the star herself – keep repeating the same anecdotes and stories, using sometimes the exact same words, yet years apart (in that regard the 1983 biography of Schneider by fellow actress Hildegard Knef who alleged she had known and understood Schneider intimately is both fascinating in its details yet patronizing in its tone). The stars' own discourses, however truthful they may aim to be, are inevitably distorted by what they read, saw and have been told about themselves by journalists or agents. As a result, it is not unusual for the stars and those close to them to spread clichés about their life and career. Schneider is no exception to this process and this is the case too for Delon, for instance, who wrote the preface to *Delon-Romy, ils se sont tant aimés* (Barbier, Dureau and Pommier, 2009) and to the second edition (2017) of David Lelait-Helo's *Romy*. More recently, Romy Schneider's daughter, Sarah Biasini (2020), who rarely speaks publicly about her mother, wrote her own memoirs about herself becoming a mother while she grew up without one (Biasini was about to turn five when Schneider died). Although her mother's career and acting choices are briefly evoked, as contextual background, and Schneider's presence (or absence rather) is felt throughout, the book is first and foremost about Biasini's life.

Much writing on Schneider is composed of annotated collections of photographs (Renate Seydel, 1987; Hanna Schygulla, 1988; Will McBride, 2002), biographies and novels (Evelyne Bloch-Dano, 2007; Olaf Kraemer, 2008) – there are even 'astro-biographies' that purport to relate Schneider's life and character through the zodiac at the moment of her birth. Most of the works presented as biographies (Catherine Hermaty-Vieille, 1988; Emmanuel Bonini, 2001; Sophie Guillou, 2006) contain romanticized elements and it is sometimes difficult for the reader to separate fact from fiction. As well as repeating previous accounts, those works draw heavily on the lexical fields of 'passion', 'myth', 'destiny', 'tragedy' and 'death' – as is perceptible in their titles (*La double mort de Romy* by Bernard Pascuito in 2002, *Des lilacs blancs en enfer*, by Christian Dureau in 2010). They are

written in a colloquial or hyperbolic style, and they all rely on and relay the same ‘mythemes’,⁴ the basic elements that once reassembled build the Schneider myth. One extreme example is Marco Innocenti’s 2009 Italian book about twenty-three famous ‘tragic’ women (including Schneider, Marilyn Monroe, Françoise Sagan, Vivien Leigh, Virginia Woolf, Jean Seberg, Janis Joplin and Sylvia Plath) entitled *La malattia chiamata Donna. Erano belle, famose e depresse (The disease called Woman. They were beautiful, famous and depressed)*. Nonetheless, this massive amount of international writing on Schneider and its popularity – most of the books were published more than once, and have been translated into several languages – signpost the actress’s wide impact on audiences and of her continuing media presence.

The best-documented biographies of Schneider, and ones that adopt some critical and analytical perspective, are by Michael Jürgs (1991) and Günter Krenn (2013a) – only available in German. They develop their discussion in a more scientific manner and in a more refined language. Krenn also wrote *Romy & Alain. Eine Amour fou* (2013b), a detailed account of the personal and professional relationship between Schneider and Delon.

I approach Schneider’s life and career chronologically and therefore divide this book into three parts, each one corresponding to a major period in the star’s career. The first part focuses on her Germanic⁵ phase in the 1950s – when she embodied the ingénue and became a screen icon as Sissi in continental Europe. Here, I dissect her relationship with German-speaking cinema and media. The second part is dedicated to what I call her ‘international phase’ in the 1960s when she develops a new identity as a sensual and sophisticated woman. Finally, the third part is on her French career in the 1970s and early 1980s. During this phase, which corresponded to important social and cultural changes in women’s lives and identities with the rise of the women’s movement, Schneider’s persona was constructed in relation to a paradoxical image of ostensibly ‘modern’ yet vulnerable womanhood, crystallized in Claude Sautet’s films; this image then developed into that of a ‘tragic victim’ in *rétro* and Occupation films, and, in turn, evolved into a more extreme, at times morbid identity in a set of films that drew on, and foregrounded, her highly regarded melodramatic performance. Her film roles during this last phase were increasingly perceived as echoing her personal life, at the time and ever since.

⁴The term ‘mytheme’ was coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his 1955 essay ‘La structure des mythes’, edited in his book *Anthropologie structurale* (1958, pp. 227–55).

⁵I will sometimes use the term ‘Germanic’ (as in Germanic cultures) to cover both West German and Austrian cinemas as Schneider moved from one to the other during the 1950s, although those are distinct film industries (I talk about this distinction in more details in Part I, Chapter 1).

Through examining Schneider's changing depictions of femininity – examining what types of gender dynamics and relationships are at play – the figure of the star in terms of her biography and of the social and cultural context surrounding her, I seek to understand how a female star persona such as Schneider's contributes to the history of women's representation. Furthermore, owing to the actress working in various national film industries and being perceived through different national media and acting in different languages, this book deals with the history and experiences of women in Western European cultures from the 1950s to the early 1980s – and brings her legacy to the present day in the conclusion. By studying the historical implications of Schneider's image spanning her filmic and extra-filmic persona and by reflecting through a feminist lens on her career and legacy, I hope to contribute to a critical understanding of a major star who has so far been neglected, as well as to a key period of the post-war European star-system.

PART ONE

Romy Schneider's
Germanic career:
1953–1959

1

Romy before *Sissi*

Introduction

This first chapter discusses the ways in which Romy Schneider's star image developed with regards to three core aspects – an on- and off-screen mother-daughter relationship, her identification with historical costume films and the ideological component of her persona in relation to the context of post-war West Germany and Austria. Throughout these main features runs the notion of submission – to her mother and to a nation – with the important question being how and why the young actress ended up embodying such a successful image of the modern young woman in films that appeared, even at the time, outdated.

* * *

Romy Schneider started as a young starlet in 1953 in mainstream German-speaking cinema. From early on two major themes emerged and shaped her acting career – family and history. Schneider's Germanic phase is mainly associated with a juvenile image that is, beyond her age, related to her family background and her mother's career in particular, and to her portrayals of young and romantic royal figures, the most iconic of which being Empress Elisabeth of Austria, known as Sissi. When we look deeper into Schneider's pre-*Sissi* films period, we see that the Sissi character and what it represented in 1950s West Germany and Austria were the culmination of Schneider's previous character arcs and film narratives.

Between 1953 and 1955 Schneider made five films: *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht / When the White Lilacs Bloom Again* (Hans Deppe, 1953), *Feuerwerk / Fireworks* (Kurt Hoffmann, 1954), *Mädchenjahre einer Königin / Victoria in Dover* (Ernst Marischka, 1954), *Die Deutschmeister / A March for the Emperor* (Ernst Marischka, 1955) and *Der letzte Mann / The Last Man*

(Harald Braun, 1955). These films from Schneider's early career were distributed only in West Germany and Austria, with a couple of exceptions for Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. Therefore, Schneider's star image construction began on a national, even local level. These early films, however, were all distributed European-wide (and worldwide for *Mädchenjahre einer Königin*) after the release and the immense success of *Sissi* (Ernst Marischka, 1955).

Schneider's first films span a large spectrum of genres although some dominate – the musical and the historical film – and because some overlap with others it is useful to consider them in terms of several subtypes. The musical films include *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht* and *Feuerwerk*; yet, they cannot be considered as musicals *per se* – that is according to our understanding of musicals in the sense of the classical Hollywood musical as both the 'backstage' and the 'integrated' type (Altman, 1987; Feuer, 1993). The narratives of *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht* and *Feuerwerk* do not progress through songs or dance. Both are built around musical success though: the eponymous song in *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht* was a popular hit in the 1920s, and 'O mein Papa' sung by Lilli Palmer in *Feuerwerk* was written for a 1939 musical. The operetta film ('Operettenfilm') is also worth mentioning in regard to these two films but also to Schneider's mother's background. Mainly associated with German language cinema, the operetta film (Traubner, 2007) is a subgenre of the musical film whose roots stretch back to the tradition of nineteenth-century Viennese operettas, a genre of 'light' Opera – light in terms of both music and subject matter. Many operetta films are adaptations of stage operettas, as was the case for *Feuerwerk*. With these distinctions in mind, I nevertheless refer to *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht* and *Feuerwerk* as musical films.

Schneider's historical films are *Mädchenjahre einer Königin* and *Die Deutschmeister*, and also cover several subgenres. Natalie Zemon Davis (2000) defines the historical genre as being composed of dramatic films in which the primary plot is based on historical events, or in which an imagined plot unfolds in such a way that historical events are central to the narrative (see also Sorlin, 1980; Carnes, 1995; and Sobchack, 1996). For *Mädchenjahre einer Königin* the historical genre overlaps with other well-established subgenres – the biopic (see Custen, 1992; Altman, 1999; Brown and Vidal, 2014), which includes royalty films (biographically based films about royal families).

As for *Die Deutschmeister*, Schneider's fourth film, it is considered one of the last examples of Wiener film (literally 'Viennese film'). The genre was popular in Austria, especially during the 1930s, and consisted of a combination of comedy, romance and melodrama in an historical setting, mostly Vienna of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century (Kramer and Prucha, 1994). It is also worth mentioning the Heimat¹ film in relation to

¹The German word 'Heimat' can be translated as home, homeland, home soil or fatherland.

Die Deutschmeister, a genre that had an important resonance in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and was popular from the 1920s to the early 1970s, with renewed enthusiasm in the 1950s. Heimat films were noted for their rural settings, sentimental tone and simplistic morality, and centred on love, friendship, family and rural life. Also important to the genre is the polarity between old and young, tradition and progress, and rural and urban life (Von Moltke, 2002 and 2005).

Apart from the popular genres of films that prevailed at the beginning of Schneider's career, another major influence on its direction was her mother. From all the aspects that resonated in the young Schneider's image and later expressed through her Sissi character, the most eloquent one would be the passivist viewpoint channelled through the historical settings of the films (mostly remakes), and especially by the presence of her mother Magda Schneider. The latter appeared in three of the five Romy Schneider films of that period: *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht*, *Mädchenjahre einer Königin* and *Die Deutschmeister*. One of the ways the Schneiders developed their on- and off-screen collaboration was by playing mother (or a related maternal figure) and daughter in eight films. The mother figure is essential to understand the foundation of Romy Schneider's star image. Indeed, Schneider's persona revolved around maternal bonds: the actress began her career as 'the daughter of', and ended it as a wounded mother herself.

1. Magda Schneider's daughter on and off screen

Romy Schneider was born Rosemarie Magdalena Albach on 23 September 1938 in Vienna, Austria, a few months after the capital became a Nazi Third Reich city due to the *Anschluss*. She lived there only a few weeks, as she mostly grew up in the Bavarian Alps, in her parents' isolated property named 'Mariengrund' in Schönau am Königssee, Germany. This was near Nazism's hotbed Berchtesgaden, where the 'Berghof' was located: Adolf Hitler's second residence from 1924 and one of his headquarters during the Second World War. The reference to Germany's modern history comes early in this book because Germany's historical past was and still is omnipresent when one approaches Schneider's star image.

Romy Schneider's mother, Magda Schneider, was an emblematic figure of German cinema in the 1930s as a young starlet with ballet training who sang operetta in romantic, light-hearted comedies. She became popular in 1933 when she starred in Max Ophüls's romantic drama *Liebelei*. She married Wolfgang Albach-Retty, also an actor and son of stage actress Rosa Retty, resident and then honorary member of the Burgtheater in Vienna. Romy's paternal great-grandparents were also itinerant actors. Her parents met on the set of *Kind, ich freu' mich auf dein Kommen* (Kurt Gerron, 1933)

and married in Berlin in February 1936. Magda was German (she was born in Augsburg in 1909) and Wolf was Austrian, and together they starred in several romantic films before divorcing in 1945 when Romy was seven. Being the daughter of two prominent actors with busy schedules, Romy and her younger brother Wolf (born in 1941) were mainly raised by their maternal grandparents in the 'Mariengrund' chalet.

Later in the 1960s it was discovered that Romy Schneider's parents were exempted from tax by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry during the Second World War and that Magda was a close acquaintance of Gerda Buch, the wife of the Nazi Party Chancellery's head and Hitler's private secretary Martin Bormann, whose children played with the little Romy. Hitler himself was an admirer of Magda and they met probably more than once – there is film footage of at least one meeting that was recently discovered and is frequently used in documentaries about the star, especially French portraits. Magda's unclear connection with the Nazi regime impacted her daughter's perception of Germany; it also influenced how Romy Schneider's persona was polarized and differently received in Germanic and Francophone territories.

Magda Schneider's film career suffered from her divorce and the aftermath of the Second World War (it took a little while for the German cinema industry to recover), but in what was considered by the German-speaking press as an attempt to 'revive her success', she became increasingly known from 1953 as the ambitious mother who turned her attention to her beautiful teenage daughter, and decided to focus on promoting Romy in major productions rather than herself. When Magda did not appear alongside Romy on screen, she supervised her daughter's acting choices and negotiated contracts. This control over her daughter's career and wages was considered natural since Romy was still underage, but it continued beyond her majority, and not without tension, as we shall see.

Romy Schneider's first role in *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht*, a West German musical film, was secured by her mother who introduced her to director Hans Deppe. Schneider, who had just graduated from Goldenstein boarding school, a Catholic establishment for young girls near Salzburg, turned fifteen while filming the role of Eva 'Evchen' Forster, the daughter of a character played by her mother. Set in Wiesbaden, West Germany, the film narrates the story of single mother Therese Forster (Magda Schneider) who, after another argument about their financial situation, is left by her singer husband Willy (Willy Fritsch), while he is unaware that she is pregnant. Fifteen years later and crowned with success, Willy comes back on his European tour under the stage name of Bill Perry of whom Evchen is a fan; the two meet without knowing each other's identity. This leads Therese to face the past – should she marry Peter, her best friend who helped her to raise her daughter after Willy's departure, or go back to her ex-husband who claims that he still loves her?

In December 1953 the press described *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht* as Magda Schneider's comeback (her last film had been Jürgen von Alten's *Die Sterne lügen nicht* in 1950), and not as her daughter's 'first breakthrough' as it was retrospectively suggested. At the film's release only a few German-speaking critics pointed out the amusing fact that mother and daughter appeared together on screen, the focus being on Magda's return, and not particularly on Romy's acting ('Magda Schneider back on screen after years', *Österreichische Film und Kino Zeitung*, 19/12/1953). The film was a success in West Germany and Austria.

Romy Schneider first appears thirty-three minutes into the film, as the grown-up Evchen, a supporting role, but nevertheless a pivotal one in terms of both film narrative and star image construction. The notions of purity, naturalness and chastity became key to the young Schneider image, and all of them found their origins in this first film. Evchen is a naive and sweet teenager who has a good relationship with her mother and her mother's fiancé Peter. She is a modern character – a teenager who hangs out with her friends and does not particularly stand out. Schneider appears in the film with a girlish, conventional look. She wears tartan and pastels such as blue (a nightgown with Peter Pan collar and short puffed sleeves, a cocktail dress with floral pattern details and a modest décolleté and a woollen sweater), yellow (a turtleneck sweater) and grey (a calf-length skirt), and wears her curly hair up. In the last sequence, Schneider wears an elegant camel trench coat, but this more grown-up look is cancelled out by her desperate, crying face and farewell gesture to her father ('Vati!'). This weepy moment is emphasized by one of Schneider's first close-ups, a composition that became a pattern used to display her characters' moments of authenticity by emphasizing her tears.

As Evchen is a supporting role, the character's arc is not particularly developed: she is defined through her relationship with the adults on whom she depends and there is no room for a teenage romance. She supports her mother, acts as a groupie vis-à-vis her father, expresses the desire to be a popular singer 'just like him', and once he is gone, she replaces him with the comforting Peter, the 'real' father who taught her how to ride a bicycle. Although Schneider's womanly features were already alluring (her straight posture enhances her chest), in accordance to her character's age in this film she adopted the girlish traits that would influence her acting style for years – talking in a soft high-pitched voice, looking cheerful, giggling and smiling profusely.

Evchen shows nonetheless a great deal of maturity and depth, linked to the film's unusual view, for its time, on divorce – though there is no mention that Therese and Willy are actually divorced. Instead of pushing her mother back into her father's arms in what would be the classic and expected happy ending to a family film, Evchen urges her father to leave for her mother's sake and for the happiness of the real family form with

Peter. Nevertheless, the traditional family model – biological father, mother and daughter – had the press's preference: the photos attached to articles and reviews of the film showed the smiling trio reunited, a choice that had to do with the popularity of major star Willy Fritsch, who embraced mostly paternal roles in his late career.

As previously said, *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht* was not about Romy Schneider's stardom, but about Magda's, especially since Therese's personal narrative strikingly shared elements with Magda's biography: divorce from an actor entertainer, being a single mother and what it implies, such as struggling financially and projecting the forsaken wife image. Fifteen years later, Therese's position has much improved in that regard: she has become a successful fashion designer and runs her own salon, and when Willy asks her to choose him and to quit her flourishing business, she refuses. These elements, mingling fictional narrative and private sphere – in a typical feature of stardom formation – were promoting Magda as an exemplary, courageous and strong woman, the maternal strength behind her daughter. This positive and supporting mother image would recur in all of the films shared by the Schneiders. Romy was credited as 'Romy Schneider-Albach' in *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht*, Albach being her father's name, but by her second film she was credited as 'Romy Schneider', stressing her maternal parentage. The strength of the maternal bond provoked a backlash when Romy Schneider left for France, a point that I will examine later.

Although Evchen was her first and a supporting role, between *Wenn der weiße Flieder wieder blüht* and the release of *Feuerwerk*, Schneider was portrayed on a few magazine covers – alongside her mother, but also on her own – and was nicknamed 'kleine Krabbe' ('sweetheart'; *Mein Film*, 25/12/1953). This term of endearment that refers to a small animal is telling of the way Schneider was presented by the press to the German-speaking public as the face of innocence and unspoiled childhood. Some covers even showed her in the company of pets: a short-haired dachshund (possibly hers that would also make an appearance in *Sissi*) or a white kid goat.

Schneider had another supporting role in her second musical film *Feuerwerk* (1954). Here two further components to the young Schneider's image were introduced: romance (Schneider and her partner Claus Biederstaedt were featured on many magazines' covers) and period setting – *Feuerwerk* is set over the summer of 1909. If Magda Schneider did not have a part in the film she unofficially stepped in as Romy's manager, negotiating her contract and having the right to inspect the script and her daughter's performance. She kept that role for several years, until her daughter moved to France in 1958.

The star of *Feuerwerk* was Lilli Palmer who had just returned from Hollywood (the two would work together again in 1958). Schneider portrays Anna Oberholzer, a teenager from a German upper-class family whose adult members snub Anna's uncle, the long-lost brother of the respectful head

of the family who comes back in town as the director of a circus. Unlike the adults, especially the women anxious to maintain appearances, Anna is more open to her uncle's unorthodox career as an entertainer. Anna is a properly educated young woman of approximately sixteen who develops her skills, notably her 'grace', 'in order to find a husband' (the first scene shows Schneider during a dancing and poise lesson). In honour of her father's birthday she sings a poem of her own composition (as in her first film, Schneider's singing was dubbed) and executes a ballet routine. The character appears so young and innocent dressed up with shimmery fairy wings and a flower crown that it is surprising to see her engaged to a man. Anna is in love with gardener Robert who is eager to start a family with her. Although Anna is brought up in this conservative – and misogynist – environment, her personality is a little more developed than Schneider's Evchen: Anna has a sense of humour, and like Evchen she is cheerful and smiles a lot, but she can also be impertinent and occasionally raises her voice.

Each new role added new elements that constructed and enriched what became, two years later, Schneider's massively successful Sissi image. In *Feuerwerk* that element was her rebel temperament, as Anna wishes to pursue her dream to join her uncle's troupe and leave home. Anna's trajectory is ultimately a conventional one: something is not right with her circus wish (an uncomfortable, almost incestuous relationship with her uncle), and after she has a nightmare in which she fails her act and finds herself trapped in the lion's cage from where Robert saves her, Anna realizes that the circus is not a place for her. Although her fiancé belittles her as soon as she expresses the desire for more than 'what life has to offer' – he calls her 'a young madcap' and feels apparently threatened by her (modestly expressed) sexual potential if she keeps 'exhibiting herself as a ballerina' – she realizes that she 'belongs' to him and returns to her 'rightful place', which is becoming a wife and a mother. In a parallel subplot, her uncle's partner Iduna (Palmer) intervenes to stop him chasing other women, including Anna. Once again, Schneider's character, while displaying a degree of independence, is chaste and righteous, within the narrative in accordance to the puritan social and family values of 1909 Germany but also to those of the time of the film's making, the 1950s' 'reactionary ideology' as Johannes Von Molke rightly puts it (2002, p. 19). 'Conventional' describes well the ideology permeating the 1950s Germanic territories. As Erica Carter (1997) argues, the experience of National Socialism left Germany seeking security in economic stability and family relations,² which was one explanation for Germany's return to models of tradition, propriety and celebration of domestic labour, that had previously risen to the fore only thirty years earlier in the 1920s (see Nolan, 1994).

²Federal Ministry for Family Affairs Franz-Josef Wuermeling (in office from 1953 to 1962), of the Adenauer Chancery, was well-known for his 'strengthen the will for children' policy.

2. ‘Yesterday a starlet, today a Queen’

After these two supporting roles Schneider could have been typecast as the ingénue in operetta films, like her mother on her debut, but the importance of the ‘princess’ roles that she went on to play and the dynamism of the duo formed with her mother would have a greater impact on her whole career.

2.1. From innocent child to submissive wife:

Mädchenjahre einer Königin

Schneider’s first major film role was as a young Queen Victoria in her third film *Mädchenjahre einer Königin* in 1954 in which her mother played governess Baroness Lehzen. This biopic with elements of romantic comedy narrates the early reign of the Queen, from her ascension to the throne in 1837, to her fortuitous love encounter with her cousin Prince Albert in a Dover inn on her way to Paris and their subsequent engagement.

One may wonder why an Austrian film was made about a British Queen. A few elements could provide a response: in 1954 Austria was still occupied by allied troops, including British ones; additionally, Prince consort Albert was German, as was Queen Victoria’s mother, and they all spoke German. It also appears that the British monarchy was a source of fascination at the time: this has in part to do with the collapse of both the Hohenzollern and Habsburg dynasties in Germany and Austria in 1918, and with a nostalgia for the Empire that was displaced onto images of other European monarchies (Giloi, 2011). Thus, the dynastic film families, of which the Schneider mother and daughter duo are an example, could be seen as a republican replacement for the lost Germanic monarchies after 1918.³ Still, Maria Fritsche argues that *Mädchenjahre einer Königin* ‘[implies] Austrianness through the use of Austrian stars and settings, the Austrian mode of speaking and the foregrounding of characteristics such as sensitivity, musicality or sanguinity, which are presented as Austrian traits’ (2013, p. 62). More precisely, the film was redolent of Viennese romanticism (light humour, piano music, waltzes, glorious costumes, soft pastel colours, pastries), thus cementing a foundation in Schneider’s star image construction.

At the release of *Mädchenjahre einer Königin* over the Christmas holidays in Austria and West Germany, the parallel drawn by the press between Victoria’s immature but innocent personality and the ‘charming and graceful performance’ of the actress – is manifest. Putting an emphasis

³For more on this topic, see Rachel Dwyer’s chapter ‘A star is born? Rishi Kapoor and dynastic charisma’ in Shelley Cobb and Neil Ewen (eds.) (2015), *First Comes Love: Power Couples, Celebrity Kinship and Cultural Politics*, pp. 96–115.