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Themes in Fritz Lang's Films

Social Class

Dr. Mabuse the Gambler. The upper class in *The Gambler* is comprised of the nouveau rich, war profiteers and nobility. They are depicted as hedonistic and indolent. Gambling, cabaret shows, parties, fashionable art, indulgent dining and occultism are pretty much all they care for—their only non-leisure activity appears to be speculation at the stock market. At times, Mabuse's contempt for them may earn him sympathy. On the other hand, a scene depicts members of the working class as radicals prone to violence. Mabuse deceives and manipulates a crowd and turns them into a mob so easily—not unlike the workers of *Metropolis*, who are led astray by the robot Maria.

Metropolis. Classes are explicitly demarcated in *Metropolis*. Workers are segregated from the elites while middle class seems nonexistent (an exception is Fredersen's secretary Josaphat). Above the ground, the city offers all the amenities of modernization with parks, clubs and stadiums to promote the happiness of its residents. There is no question about the source of this wealth: "Fathers, for whom every revolution of a machine wheel meant gold, had created for their sons the miracle of the Eternal Gardens". In stark contrast, the despondent workers down below lead a dreary existence in gloomy settings.

Man Hunt. In an early scene, a troupe of street singers—the pearly kings—chant "She was poor but she was Honest". We get to hear the chorus bit in full:

It's the same the whole world over
It's the poor what gets the blame
It's the rich what gets the pleasure
Ain't it all a bloomin' shame?

Class is an important theme in the story—an example is the notion of "being a gentleman" that is brought up couple of times. Lord Risborough's butler tells Jerry that he doesn't consider himself to be "a gentleman at all". In contrast, Jerry affirms that Thorndike is "a true gentleman". The Lord and Thorndike qualify as gentlemen but there is a distinction. Unlike the self-centered aristocrat brother, Thorndike consistently makes efforts to connect with working class Londoners.

House by the River. Social and economic inequality is a recurrent theme in *House by the River*. Not everyone belongs to the circle of Byrnes and their upper middle class acquaintances. Stephen and Marjorie Byrne employ a maid and a cook. Following his murder of Emily Gaunt, Stephen keeps referring to his victim as "dead servant girl" or "miss good servant girl". Byrnes' comfortable lifestyle was made possible by John Bryne, who had given up most of his share of the inheritance in favor of his brother. John has a smaller house and is served by one maid—Flora Bantam, who is also nasty in her remarks about the murder victim. Instead of sympathizing with a peer, she emphasizes their difference—"I know I am only a servant girl ... but I come from a very genteel family". The annoying character serves as comic relief and her highclass aspirations are mocked by Mrs. Ambrose during the inquest. Nothing comes out of the official investigation and no one—except Gaunt's parents—seems to care.

Human Desire. In Lang's adaptation of Zola's novel, class differences are acknowledged but also played down. Assistant yard manager Carl Buckley gets reprimanded and fired because of neglecting a task in his field of responsibility. Events unfold as he pressures his wife to secure the intervention of a wealthy and influential individual—by whom her mother had been employed as a maid. In Renoir's *La Bête Humaine*, this episode is considerably different. Buckley's counterpart Roubaud has an altercation with a passenger; as a preemptive move, he asks his wife to request the backing of an aristocrat named Grandmorin. In Zola's novel, this episode is laid out in detail and class tension is explicit. When Roubaud addresses the passenger with a dog, he gets angry and blurts that "you others will not always be the

masters". This single sentence jeopardizes his position and the narrator observes that "he was suspected of being a republican".

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt. A variety of products are mentioned with corresponding values in dollars. Examples are Susan Spencer's gift of inscribed lighter for Garrett, ready-made coat and the weekly rent paid by a cabaret dancer who lodged with the homicide victim. One implication of these references is the way they underscore the class difference between Susan Spencer—the heir of the media corporation—and the cabaret dancers.