

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Themes in Fritz Lang's Films

Violence

Crowds in *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, *Metropolis*, and *M* are potentially violent. In *Fury*, the residents of Strand reveal their dark side. The crowd in front of the jailhouse includes a man eating a hot dog, a woman with her toddler and older residents. They appear to be in a trance, with expressions on their faces ranging from idiotic amusement to demonic rage.

Lang enjoyed shooting combat scenes and carefully choreographed them (e.g. *Cloak and Dagger*, the brutal fight with the fascist agent, the final battle of *Die Nibelungen*). There are also equally effective scenes that stop short of showing graphic violence.

Rancho Notorious. The murder of Beth Forbes is not shown but a close-up shot of defensive wounds on her gnarled hands hint at the savagery.

Hangmen Also Die! The Gestapo interrogates an arthritic woman, who painfully endures questions. Her exhaustion and struggle to remain standing indicate—without displaying it—that torture has been taking place.

The Big Heat. A crooked police chief commits suicide and Debby ultimately kills his blackmailer widow to have the dead man's testimony released. Besides guns, hot coffee is—twice—used as a devastating weapon. Even more appalling are those scenes when violence is merely implied. An informer named Lucy Chapman is murdered off-screen. The official—neatly typewritten—police report that lands on Bannion's desk states that Chapman had been "beaten and tortured" before being killed. In the next scene at the autopsy room, the coroner informs Bannion that there were several cigarette burns on her body. As he utters it, the sentence sounds like a cold scientific fact. Bannion may be one to rarely show emotions, but his reaction here—putting out his cigarette in disgust—provides an unsettling illustration of facts coldly uttered by a scientist.