

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Burak Sevingen, MA

Themes in Fritz Lang's Films

INTRIGUE

Lang's domineering characters in the 1920's are intriguers—Dr. Mabuse orchestrates the collapse of the stock market and manipulates prices; Joh Fredersen intends to ignite a workers' rebellion with the agent-provocateur robot; Haggi's intrigues are international in scope, and his deployment of agents is on a par with that of secret services. He eavesdrops on the communications of the Japanese diplomats by means of miniature microphones planted in the embassy, and employs female agents to get hold of top-secret documents.

There is a variation of the plotter character in other films. In one of Lang's early films, *Four Around a Woman*, Yquem forges a letter with his wife's signature and sends it to the man he suspects to be her lover. The following year, in 1921, in *Destiny's* Medieval Venice episode, Girolamo does something similar; he intercepts a messenger, reads the letter of his fiancée for her innamorato and replaces it with a fake invitation in order to entrap him. *Die Nibelungen's* Princess/Queen Kriemhild is a devious plotter who is motivated by her passion for revenge. She marries the king of the Huns in order to settle scores not only with her husband Siegfried's murderer Hagen of Tronje, but also her brothers—who refrained from helping her in her vendetta. She uses the Hun army to annihilate the court of the Nibelungs.

In Lang's Hollywood period, intrigue continues to be a major theme. In *Fury*, Joe Wilson schemes to send his would be lynchers to the electric chair by faking his death. In *Hangmen Also Die*, Prague's resistance members conspire to frame a snitch as the assassin of a top Nazi. In *The Blue Gardenia*, a star reporter attempts to catch a murderess by using his newspaper column to trick her. In Lang's last two films in the US, intrigue intensifies—in *While the City Sleeps*, greedy news media figures compete and conspire for power; in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, a publisher intrigues to demonstrate the problem with capital punishment while his co-conspirator has his own cunning agenda.