

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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Themes in Fritz Lang's Films

## Suffering

Loss, Mourning and Melancholy

*Destiny.* When a dark-caped stranger, who personifies death, claims the life of a young man, he gets stood up to by the latter's desperate fiancée. Initially, the Maiden is shocked and bewildered. In despair, she attempts suicide—she survives and struggles to bring back her betrothed. She is given multiple opportunities to reverse the fate of her love. The Maiden never accepts her loss and the process of mourning is not successful.

*Die Nibelungen.* Kriemhild turns into a wrathful avenger after her husband Siegfried is murdered. Her vendetta is a consequence of her suffering and leads to the death of her three brothers.

*Ministry of Fear.* Stephen Neale struggles not only with the loss of his wife, but with his role in her death. It is revealed that he had not poisoned her—which was the conclusion of the official investigation—but she had taken her own life with the poison he purchased. His relationship with Carla not simply distracts him; it helps him overcome his feelings of guilt.

*Scarlet Street.* The tune of the song "My Melancholy Baby" is heard playing a few times. At the end of the film, Chris Cross becomes—in a twisted sort of way—melancholic. He psychotically kills Kitty March and manages to evade punishment; he turns into a wreck who is tormented by thoughts of her.

*Rancho Notorious.* Vern is another vindictive character whose suffering is self-destructive. He befriends Frenchy and woos Altar Keane in order to learn the name of her fiancée's murderer. He is cold and manipulative; his hatred appears to be the main expression of his sense of loss.

*The Big Heat.* Bannion goes after Lagana and his henchmen after the mobster gets his wife murdered. Like Kriemhild, Bannion's loss fuels his thirst for revenge which is marked by his disregard for the lives of others.