

## HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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# FRITZ LANG (1890-1976)

### LIFE

Fritz Lang (Friedrich Christian Anton Lang) was born in Vienna in 1890 to parents of Moravian descent.<sup>1</sup> His father Anton Lang was the manager of a construction company; his originally Jewish mother had converted to Roman Catholicism. Young Fritz Lang attended a technical school; he studied painting and was an admirer of the works of Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele. He frequented cafes and cabarets. He was fond of popular fiction, such as the works of Karl May, and was delighted by the touring Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show's performance in Vienna.

When he was 20, Lang left his hometown; he lived in Brussels, Munich, and Paris; travelled to the Middle East, North Africa, and the Far East. He enrolled in the Art and Design Academy in Munich; in Paris, he sold portraits and postcards that he created in his atelier.

When World War I broke up, a patriotic Lang hurried to his home country and enrolled in the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During his brief stay in Slovenia for his officer's training, Lang used his free time to work on sculptures. He subsequently served in the Romanian and Russian fronts as an artillery forward observer; he was wounded and decorated—multiple times—for bravery. While he was recuperating from a battle wound, Lieutenant Lang began working on film scripts. Also, around this time, he began using the monocle that would later contribute to his image as a tough and intimidating director. After he was discharged, he acted in a theater play. This was where he met producer Erich Pommer, who invited him to join him at the Decla film studio as a dramaturg.

At Decla, Lang wrote screenplays for several films including *The Plague in Florence*. Eventually, he was assigned to direct the adventure film *Spiders* in 1919. Due to his commitment to this film, he pulled out of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. *The Wandering Image* (1920) was the first film of a decade-long collaboration with writer Thea von Harbou, who would soon become his wife.

Lang's breakthrough came in 1921 with *Destiny*—whose admirers include Luis Buñuel and Alfred Hitchcock. 1922's *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* introduced the titular master-villain, wreaking havoc during the Weimar Republic's years of hyperinflation. *Destiny* was followed by two spectacular films: a historical fantasy, *Die Nibelungen* (which later earned him praise from Joseph Goebbels), and a futuristic one, *Metropolis*, which came to be a founding block of the genre of science fiction. Its financial failure led Lang to act as a producer for his next two films: *Spies*—introducing the omnipotent master-spy Haghi—and *Woman in the Moon*, a 'serious' science fiction film that pondered about the feasibility of a space expedition.

The following two films, his masterpiece *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* were produced by an independent producer. *The Testament* was banned by the Nazis in 1933 (it could be screened in Germany some two decades later). Lang left the country later that year and spent about a year in Paris, where he directed *Liliom* (1934), and immigrated to the USA.

Lang's first three Hollywood films (*Fury*, *You Only Live Once* and *You and Me*) were social critiques. He became an American citizen in 1939. Next year, he turned to the most American of genres, the Western, and directed the popular *The Return of Frank James*, followed by *Western Union*.

During World War II, Lang directed anti-Nazi thrillers (*Man Hunt*, featuring menacing German spies in London; *Hangmen Also Die*—his only collaboration with Berthold Brecht—was inspired by the assassination of Nazi bigwig Reinhard Heydrich; *Ministry of Fear* was an adaptation of a Graham Greene novel) and films noir (*The Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street* would be regarded as the defining examples of this genre).

Nazi's appeared once again as villains in the post-war *Cloak and Dagger*, which posed a warning against nuclear proliferation in this very early stage of the Cold War in 1946. 1947's Gothic thriller *Secret Beyond the Door* marked his fourth collaboration with actress Joan Bennett. Then followed a

period when Lang did not direct films; The Cold War's icy paranoia and impending red scare had an impact on his career—at least Lang thought this was the reason that he did not get projects.

He resumed directing in 1950 with *An American Guerilla in the Philippines* and *House by the River*—an atypical Lang film, a turn of the century thriller with a rural setting. 1952's *Rancho Notorious*—his third Western—starred fellow émigré Marlene Dietrich; *Clash by Night* was an adaptation of a Clifford Odets play. *The Blue Gardenia* (1953), a film noir highly esteemed by feminist scholars, was based on a story by Vera Caspary. It was followed by the exposé and film noir *The Big Heat*, one of Lang's most acclaimed Hollywood films. This film's star duo, Glenn Ford and Gloria Grahame worked with Lang once again in 1954's *Human Desire*, which was inspired by Italian Neorealism and was loosely adapted from Emile Zola's naturalist novel *La Bête humaine*.

Gothic melodrama *Moonfleet* (1955) would be his only film shot in Cinemascope widescreen. His last two films in the USA both starred Dana Andrews; they were concerned with corporate media, revolving around its willingness to usurp law enforcement in the case of *While the City Sleeps* and its potential to expose flaws in the justice system in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*.

In his two-decade-long Hollywood period, Lang directed for all major studios and as independently; worked with stars such as Barbara Stanwyck, Gary Cooper, Henry Fonda and Edward G. Robinson; collaborated with top-notch cinematographers like James Wong Howe, Milton Krasner and Nicholas Musuraca; worked on scripts written by Berthold Brecht, Alfred Hayes, Dudley Nichols and others; he directed films in nearly every genre.

Last phase of Lang's career took him to India for *Tiger of Bengal* and *The Indian Tomb*—a project that he and Thea von Harbou had to abandon decades before. He directed his final film in 1960, in Western Germany. *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* featured the evil genius once again—and spawned a number of Dr. Mabuse films by other directors.

Recurrent Langian themes include fatalism, revenge, time, mourning, melancholy, commodification and modernity; Lang is known for his controlled mise-en-scènes, light and shadow contrasts, experimental camera angles, exploration of space, as well as incorporating a shot of his own hand in his films.

French New Wave directors and theorists were instrumental in a reappraisal of Lang's lesser known works. In Jean Luc Godard's *Contempt* (1963), he played the director of an adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*, 'Fritz Lang'—who remarks that his favorite among his films is *M.*

## AWARDS

Fritz Lang was awarded the Venice Film Festival International Critics Award in 1946; the honorary German Film Award in 1963; Order of Arts and Letters from France in 1965; Plaque from El Festival Internacional del Cine de San Sebastian in 1970. He was nominated twice for the New York Film Critics Circle best director award, in 1937 and 1943; thrice for the Cahiers du Cinema Best Film Award (1957, 1959, and 1960).

## FILMOGRAPHY

*The Halfbreed*, 1919 (lost film)  
*Master of Love*, 1919 (lost film)  
*The Spiders: The Golden Sea*, 1919  
*Harakiri*, 1919  
*The Spiders: The Diamond Ship*, 1920  
*The Wandering Image*, 1920  
*Four Around a Woman*, 1921  
*Destiny*, 1921  
*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, 1922  
*Die Nibelungen*, 1924  
*Metropolis*, 1927  
*Spies*, 1928  
*Woman in the Moon*, 1929

*M*, 1931  
*The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933  
*Liliom*, 1934  
*Fury*, 1936  
*You Only Live Once*, 1937  
*You and Me*, 1938  
*The Return of Frank James*, 1940  
*Western Union*, 1941  
*Man Hunt*, 1941  
*Moon Tide*, 1942 (Lang left the project early and was replaced by Archie Mayo)  
*Hangmen Also Die*, 1943  
*Ministry of Fear*, 1944  
*The Woman in the Window*, 1944  
*Scarlet Street*, 1945  
*Cloak and Dagger*, 1946  
*Secret Beyond the Door*, 1947  
*House by the River*, 1950  
*An American Guerilla in the Philippines*, 1950  
*Rancho Notorious*, 1952  
*Clash by Night*, 1952  
*The Blue Gardenia*, 1953  
*The Big Heat*, 1953  
*Human Desire*, 1954  
*Moonfleet*, 1955  
*While the City Sleeps*, 1956  
*Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, 1956  
*Tiger of Bengal*, 1959  
*The Indian Tomb*, 1959  
*The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, 1960

## THEMES

### 1. Society

#### Social Class

*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*. The upper class in *The Gambler* is comprised of the nouveau riche, 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”. Brynes’ 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 high class 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.

*Liliom.* Liliom and his friends live at the outskirts of Paris and the carnival community is composed of working class people. Several moments highlight class tensions and inequality: Patrolling police officers harass and try to humiliate Liliom as he sits with Julie on a park bench—they ask him to show his hands to confirm that he is a manual laborer; Julie’s aunt wishes that her nephew would leave Liliom in favor of the carpenter, who represents the middle class.

*Indian Epic.* Sheeva is a disruptive force, not only because she is a woman, but also because of her class. So much so that the conspirators use it as a pretext for a coup—i.e. the Maharaja marrying a temple dancer becomes a scandal in the offing. Interestingly, Sheeva is not only independent; she is also well-to-do enough to employ a personal servant. Her handmaiden Bharani belongs to a lower strata of society; an intrigue gets her murdered and her death is hardly an incident.

### **Commodification and Consumerism**

*Scarlet Street.* Mass produced items are everywhere in *Scarlet Street*. Products of modern life appear mostly as household items. Electrical devices like the toaster in Cross’ dining table and gramophone in the living room (a turntable in the young couple’s apartment) are featured prominently. There are also tokens of consumer goods like the Lux detergent. Another cleaning agent is the Happy Soap which is the sponsor of a popular radio show. Cross’ don’t own a radio set, so the wife drops by the downstairs neighbor to listen to *Happy Household Show*. The field of art is not detached from consumerism. References to art are frequent and they often come with specific dollar tags attached. Kitty recounts her bewilderment at the price of the Cezanne painting. Chris explains that it is normal, “you can’t put prices on masterpieces like that. They are worth... well, whatever you can afford to pay for them”. His cool approach shapes Kitty’s conviction that he must be wealthy.

*House by the River.* Not only does Stephen manage to avoid becoming a suspect in the missing person investigation, he benefits from the publicity surrounding the disappearance of Emily Gaunt. His unsuccessful career as a writer takes off after he uses the sensational story for marketing. Soon, he is signing his best-selling book at the bookstore. The seller mentions that he had prepared to “cash in” from the hype, and rearranged the window display with a pile of Stephen’s *Night Laughter*.

*You and Me.* The shop window is a recurrent sight in Lang’s films (e.g. *M, Fury, The Woman in the Window*). The hot item on display at the department store in *You and Me* is the “Hour of Ecstasy” perfume that Joe buys to gift Helen. The film opens with similarly alluring images of objects and activities—associated with desire as much as need. We are reminded that everything comes with a price tag. There are no shortcuts and frustration is pervasive—after she gets spotted, a shoplifter says that she really wanted to own a satin blouse. While Lang might have wanted to create a didactic film, the result is also a mockery of consumerism.

*American Guerrilla in the Philippines.* American products appear frequently and underscore the beginning of the American century; General MacArthur’s expected and longed for return is celebrated by the leading man and woman—drinking Coca-Cola and surrounded by numerous local extras, who are exhilarated and grateful.

### **Modernity: Space and Time**

The train—that powerful symbol of modernity—is prominently featured in several Fritz Lang films: 1919’s *Spiders* shows passengers enjoying the scenery in an observation car; *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) opens with a well-orchestrated larceny staged aboard a train; the massive railroad sabotage in *Spies* (1928) is staged to assassinate a secret agent; *The Return of Frank James* (1939) has a vicious railroad baron; in 1943’s *Ministry of Fear*, a train gets hit by German bombers during the blitz in wartime England; *Human Desire* (1954) takes place in a railway town and a locomotive driver gets to have the spotlight.

*The Wandering Image.* Main character rejects society and lives outside civilization—or he thinks so, since his hut is not far from a quarry that uses explosives to extract stones for a road construction project. In this film, railways provide access to the lakeside resort and secluded mountains that house the hermit.

*Four Around a Woman.* The modern city is a vibrant background. Narrow streets are almost congested with pedestrians, cars, hand-pulled carts and horse-drawn carriages—couple of bicycles also come into view. The city offers attractions and excitement. On the other hand, its chaos obviously cultivates crime.

*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler.* The notion that time is experienced uniformly at different locations is central to the plot since Mabuse’s entire operation depends on timing, punctuality and coordination. Numerous shots of pocket watches, supplemented by clocks on desks, walls, mantels, etc. serve as constant reminders that the action is anchored at an exact moment in time. Minutes and seconds matter, not only because of the homogeneous experience of time but also the need for speed. The opening train sequence, followed by the episode at the stock exchange, signifies that speed will be a recurring theme and time is of the essence. Railway, automobile and phone obviously excite and inspire—but not always: “I can’t take this any longer, this pace of 200 km an hour! It’s modern-day cannibalism!” cries out the doctor’s henchman Pesch.

*Metropolis.* With its brightly lit, vibrant urban center with aircraft circling a valley of majestic skyscrapers, *Metropolis* is a spectacular city. Then again, there are other spaces. The dismal work space of the workers is matched by the residential area with massive blocks of flats with tiny windows. Efficiency seems to be the only concern in designing these nightmarish spaces.

*Spies.* In a scene, the modern city (unidentified) gets to be the backdrop of a high speed chase. The hero and heroine encounter a cameraman, frantically cranking his wind-up camera and shooting the accident site. This filmmaker predates Dziga Vertov’s experimental film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Vertov’s film projects a belief in progress and so does *Spies*. Not without a reserve though—the breathtaking train scene ends with a terrible crash, turning this great symbol of modernity into wreckage.

*The Woman in the Window.* The concept of time is significant in Lang's films and clocks of all sorts are a common motif. *The Woman in the Window* would rank high among his films that display his interest in the concept of time. Most of the action is carefully marked as specific moments in time. This is interesting when one considers that the bulk of the story is Wanley's dream. He is dozing in the club's armchair and imagining himself in such situations—all meticulously time-stamped.

*Western Union.* Parallel to the transformation of transportation by railways, communications were modernized by telegraph technology. By establishing communication between the East and the West, the line contributed to the nation building process. The optimism about technological progress and belief in 'Manifest Destiny' are echoed in *Western Union*. Its imagery of westward expansion recalls John Gast's painting *American Progress*—depicting "Progress" as a female figure stringing a telegraph line and leading settlers westwards, while indigenous people and buffalos scatter at the sight.

*American Guerilla in the Philippines.* American officers' effort to mold Filipino villagers into a formidable guerrilla force involves modern methods and technologies. Printing currency and a newspaper contribute to a mechanism of civil governance. Telegraph poles are installed, booby traps set, improvised firearms are crafted, Radio communication plays a key role in the guerilla unit's first major success—a Japanese destroyer's position is relayed to the headquarters and aircraft are scrambled.

## **Technology and Progress**

*Metropolis.* In a scene that Charlie Chaplin alludes to in the *Modern Times* (1936), Frederesen picks up a phone to have a two-way video call with the foreman—an astounding concept considering that the composite innovation has become widespread quite recently. Various similar novelties in *Metropolis* amaze us today and we can only imagine how exciting it must have been for Lang's contemporaries to see them on the big screen in the late 1920s. All these inventions hint at technology's enormous potential to transform daily life. In the spirit of Ferdinand Léger's 1924 *Ballet Mécanique* (Mechanical Ballet), the glamour of the city is made possible by the rhythmic movements of the machines of the opening sequence. Alongside such display of confidence in progress and cheerful optimism, same technology can cause anguish. The hands of the arduous 'clock machine' control the body of the worker—not the other way around. The heart machine devours laborers in Freder's daydream; in reality, it leaves them drained to the point of exhaustion.

*Spies.* Like Dr. Mabuse before him, Haghi has a keenness for advanced technology, especially machinery that benefits surveillance. He issues orders and makes executive decisions while seated behind his desk, seemingly immobile. His agents use miniature cameras and microphones to record information which is then processed by clerks and delivered in digests to Haghi. The instruments at his disposal are the pneumatic tube, teleprompter device, intercom, telephone and switchboard.

*Woman in the Moon.* "For the human spirit, there is no 'never', only a 'not yet'" reads the opening intertitle. *Woman in the Moon* is clearly optimistic about technological progress. The rocket launch is a cause for jubilation: "the sirens resound in all the factories, in all the trains and all the ships of the world in honor of the pioneers of the spaceship". Even though the pioneers are portrayed as heroes, the film's focus is on technology.

*Cloak and Dagger.* For the main character played by Gary Cooper, Lang's inspiration was theoretical physicist Robert J. Oppenheimer. According to an alternative (and discarded) ending, the hero would airdrop on a German nuclear research site and find out that the facility had been evacuated. Then, Cooper's character Alvah Jesper would make a pessimistic speech about the nuclear arms race. Even without such a scene, *Cloak and Dagger* makes a statement against nuclear proliferation. Jesper is opposed to the Nazis, but he is also critical of all efforts to use atomic energy and vast resources to build nuclear weapons: "Thousands of Allied scientists are working together to make what? A bomb! But who was willing to finance science before the war, to wipe out tuberculosis? And when are we gonna be given a billion Dollars to wipe out cancer?"

*The Blue Gardenia.* The film begins and ends with a shot of the massive concrete overpass—an imposing feat of modernity. Technological advances are represented positively and telecommunications is featured. Then, a brief reference is abruptly made to the H-bomb. Mayo is sent to the Pacific to cover a test explosion (possibly the “Ivy Mike”, the first full-scale test of a thermonuclear weapon). The bomb is mentioned just in passing, even though everything else sounds trivial in comparison. This subtlety makes *The Blue Gardenia* disturbing, if only for a moment.

*The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse.* Technologies of surveillance are featured in Lang’s final film in 1960. All the rooms and hallways of the Hotel Luxor are bugged with miniature cameras and microphones. The closed circuit television system is controlled in the secret basement where Mabuse/Jordan gathers information about the guests. When he changes hats and becomes Cornelius the seer, he shocks the same individuals with knowledge of their secrets and manipulates them.

The Cold War forms the backdrop of *The Thousand Eyes*, and an international arms deal involving nuclear weapons plays a key part. The plot does not allude to Wernher von Braun, the architect of Nazi Germany’s rocket programs—which is interesting since von Braun had resumed his work on rocketry in the USA following the end of World War II. In any case, the missiles are casually referred to like any commodity. An explosion at Taran’s reactor in the UK leads to the evacuation of residential area within a ten-mile radius. With the news of the accident, American magnate Travers merely cancels his visit to London, sending his secretary to assess the situation. The episode is a timely warning against environmental crises and recklessness of corporations.

*Liliom.* The modern Paris depicted in *Liliom* has a touch of archaic technologies (while Liliom and Julie sit at a park bench, a lamplighter approaches to take care of the street lamp) and traditional professions (the knife grinder played by Artaud). These coexist with the latest technological advances, which promise joy and excitement.

The carefree atmosphere of the carousel owes to the latest technologies of image and sound. Julie’s aunt Madame Menoux operates a photography studio. She obviously loves her job and all the details associated with the early photography technology—her wooden folding camera seems to belong to the time Ferenc Molnár wrote his play in 1909. Other exciting technologies are the music played by a turntable and the wind-up automata of the carnival. These big and charming mechanical toys enhance the whimsical space of the carnival. With Liliom’s death, music stops and the automata come to a halt—consequently a depressed mood sets in.

Technologies of photography and sound are featured, but the star of *Liliom*’s technologies is cinema. At the astral realm, Liliom is presented with an archival film of himself. The point is to ascertain, once and for all, his temper issues and inclination to violence. “Film No. 234” is a film within a film, it is a scene from earlier in *Liliom*. Liliom is so surprised that he tries to touch the screen; he is not eager to accept his mistakes so tries to provide a rationale for the incident. To remove any doubts, the film is played in slow-motion and freeze frame is used at key moments. After the official remarks that they can even provide a person’s train of thought as voice-over to the film, Liliom is resigned and he is escorted to the purgatory for his sixteen year sentence.

## **Corruption**

*Destiny.* The main setting is the 19<sup>th</sup> Century town of the framing tale—and the town’s social dynamics are outlined swiftly. The local elites—mayor, priest, schoolmaster, notary, physician—are simpletons who are not capable of understanding the significance of the presence of the Weary Death. Some of the same characters appear in the town council’s meeting about the sale of a strip of land to the Weary Death. The council is reluctant to sell the lot adjacent to the cemetery—but plentiful gold coins generously offered by the Weary Death easily persuade its members. Overall, the local leaders appear to be weak, uncomprehending and greedy. Such characterization could have been intended to allude to the institutions of the Weimar Republic.

*The Woman in the Window.* Heidt—“a known crook with a blackmailing record”—is a former police detective. He is the bodyguard of Claude Mazard, “the founder of the fabulous public utilities empire of World Enterprises Incorporated”. Why was Heidt chosen to protect Mazard? “Don’t ask me why Wall Street geniuses do anything” the District Attorney Lalor sarcastically remarks. The questionably rich rubbing elbows with law enforcement would be a theme for Lang to explore in *The Big Heat*.

*Rancho Notorious.* Frenchy explains that he originally became an outlaw because of an injustice. "A bullet I put in a rancher, another man who had his own sheriff and cheated me out of a homestead". Dishonest officials are not a rarity in Lang's films and *Rancho Notorious* is no exception. When Vern arrives in Gunsight to hook up with him, Frenchy is in jail and an election is in progress. Vern gets himself detained to befriend Frenchy and subsequently leads their escape. The corrupt local politicians who also happen to be in custody ("you could bribe them with a rusty nail" Frenchy remarks) bribe the incumbent sheriff to let them out.

*The Big Heat.* Lagana represents a new breed of criminals who prefer to operate in the shades and take care to maintain a respectable façade. A police officer explains that "Mr. Lagana kind of runs things, I guess that's no secret". Bannion insinuates Lagana's connection to the murder of the would-be informant b-girl Lucy Chapman. He refers to her overtly violent murder as "prohibition style"—which outrages Lagana, who obviously doesn't want to be associated with the flashy mobsters of previous decades.

## Media

*Fury.* Newsreel crews shoot the mob's attack on the jailhouse, and the footage is later used by the prosecutor as state's evidence against the lynchers. The film screening decisively identifies the involvement of the accused and it is considered to be the "first use of newsreel footage in a courtroom". The film's inspirations, the 1933 San Jose lynching (of the culprits a kidnapping case) and the Lindberg trials (of the alleged kidnapper of Charles Lindberg's toddler) had received massive news media coverage.

*The Blue Gardenia.* The newspaper's printing press gets the spotlight as an impressive instrument of mass production. Newspapers are packed in bundles like other industrial products and eager consumers await their delivery. Norah is subjected to the blinding flashes of reporters' cameras twice: first, after her arrest, and later when she happily leaves the courthouse following her exoneration.

*While the City Sleeps.* Los Angeles is terrorized by a serial killer and we get to have a closer look at how media reacts and exploits the events. The media mogul Kyne Senior (recalling Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*) dubs the murderer the Lipstick killer and tells his underlings that he wants every woman to be "scared silly" when they put on makeup. His success in journalism evidently stems from his ability to exploit sensational news. When Kyne Junior takes over, the news group continues along the lines established by the founder.

*Beyond a Reasonable Doubt.* The focus is on the power of media in shaping the public's perception of innocence and guilt. A newspaper publisher and a writer scheme to demonstrate the unreliability of circumstantial evidence in capital punishment verdicts. Television also plays a key role as the emerging medium. Characters watch a nightly show that plays highlights of Garrett's trial and a TV crew is seen at work in the courtroom.

## Violence and Cruelty

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.

## 2. Justice

### Revenge

*Die Nibelungen.* Kriemhild's thirst for revenge is unparalleled, even compared to the most vindictive characters in Lang's other films—Vern in *Rancho Notorious*, Joe in *Fury*, and Bannion in *The Big Heat*. She marries the Hun king as a way to gain leverage for her revenge mission; to accomplish her objective, she readily sacrifices her entire family. When King Etzel is reluctant to massacre his guests, she has their little son brought in to the dining hall—possibly anticipating Hagen's murderous violence, and knowing that it would ignite Etzel's fury. Subsequently, her two brothers Gernot and Giselher die trying to protect her arch-enemy. This seems to upset her but doesn't slow her down—she orders the execution of her remaining brother, King Gunther.

*Fury.* A small town's residents attempt to lynch a man who was wrongfully detained. He manages to get out of the burning jailhouse and launches a vendetta against the people who tried to kill him. Joe schemes to remain in hiding and stay officially dead so that the lynchers would receive capital punishment for murder.

*Rancho Notorious.* The ballad "The Legend of Chuck-a-Luck" introduces the film as a "story of hate, murder and revenge". Revenge is the driving force of the protagonist. In fact, we barely see any other dimensions of his character. The film—almost—ends with him exacting his revenge and riding into the sunset with Frenchy. The very last moments of the film when the credits roll mention that Vern and Frenchy were both killed that very day. Revenge proves to be self-destructive.

*The Big Heat.* Bannion is the prototype of the rogue cop who is on a crusade against a powerful crime empire. He turns vindictive following the murder of his wife, and cares little about others that might be harmed as a result of his actions. Debbie and the would-be informer Lucy Chapman die as a consequence of getting involved with him.

## 3. 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.

#### 4. Fate

*Destiny’s* heroine struggles with her fate; she finds that nothing she does would change the outcome of events and save the life of her lover. In *Die Nibelungen*, Siegfried fulfills his destiny by slaying the dragon and becomes invincible by bathing in its blood. It is also part of his fate that he has a vulnerable spot—untouched by the magical liquid because of a leaf that coincidentally falls and gets stuck on his back. Fate is not necessarily metaphysical in Lang’s films. Sometimes, it is shaped by a quest for revenge (as in *Rancho Notorious*) and in other cases (e.g. *Metropolis*), modernity and technology are strong determinants. In *You Only Live Once*, the couple’s love seals their fate. During their honeymoon, Eddie and Joan stand by a pond and chat about a couple of frogs. He tells her that if “one dies, the other dies” too. To this she responds, “like Romeo and Juliet”. Later, when Eddie’s execution seems inevitable, Joan asks Father Dolan to tell Eddie that she hasn’t “forgotten about the frogs”—which is meant to let her husband know that she would be committing suicide. The earlier scene prepares the viewer for the ending and suggests that a sort of fatalism is at work in *You Only Live Once*. Eddie keeps fighting anyway—which is what really counts, according to Lang.

#### 5. Politics

##### 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; Haghi’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 inamorato 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.

#### 6. Desire

##### Lust

*The Plague in Florence's* (which Lang contributed as writer) release coincided with the Spanish Flu (the 1918 flu pandemic). It is set in Medieval Italy and tells about the devastation brought by the bubonic plague. A carefree community and its lustful elites indulge in hedonism; ultimately, a female figure personifying the plague arrives to bring infection that wipes out lives. In *Metropolis*, the Master of Metropolis employs Rotwang to give the Machine-Human the appearance of Maria. The faux Maria looks like a caricature of a 1920s flapper and her brazen sexuality is toxic. Fredersen schemes to lure the workers with the agent provocateur, in order to let them ruin the rebellion's reputation themselves. Accordingly, she convinces the workers that the machines are responsible for their misery. When the damage is done at the machine chamber, the femme fatale moves on to Yoshiwara club and seduces the wealthy—consequently, the entire city is thrown into chaos. Lascivious characters continue to appear—as villains or nuisances—in Lang's later films. Examples are Kinch in *Rancho Notorious*, Prebble in *The Blue Gardenia*, and Stephen Bryne in *House by the River*.

## 7. Jealousy and Love Triangles

Several of Lang's films revolve around love triangles: *Four Around a Woman* (Yquem, his wife and alleged lover), *Metropolis* (Joh Fredersen and Rotwang the inventor have a history as suitors of Hel, who died after marrying Joh), *Scarlet Street* (Chris Cross conned by Kitty March and her boyfriend Johnny Prince), *Woman in the Moon* (Helius and Windegger as the best friends who are in love with Friede Velten), *Rancho Notorious* (Altar Keane torn between her old time love Frenchy and the dashing Vern), *Clash by Night* (Kind-hearted fisherman Jerry, the worldly Mae and the sardonic Earl). Tension is sometimes resolved following some form of violence, often deadly.

## 8. Falseness

### Identity and Deception

As early as *The Wandering Image*, deception emerges as a major theme in Lang's work. The radical philosopher turned hermit Georg Vanderheit changes his appearance such that his wife does not recognize him.

In *Four Around a Woman*, Yquem is a banker who is adept at changing disguise. He uses his skills to make transactions at shady inns and also to tail his wife (whom he suspects of infidelity) in the city.

In *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, the titular character upgrades Yquem's skill at disguise and dramatically changes his appearance many times—becoming a sailor, Dutch professor, psychoanalyst, stock speculator, and others). This is one of the villain's major methods (the other being telepathy) to dominate and manipulate the individuals that he targets.

In *Die Nibelungen*, a magical cloak serves to make Siegfried invisible; consequently, he is able to act as King Gunther and trick Brunhild twice—by beating her in an athletic completion and subduing her in the royal bedroom.

Unlike the previous examples, in *Scarlet Street*, characters do not change their appearances. Instead they pretend to be someone else—Chris lets Kitty believe he is a painter and he is led to believe that she is an actress. The deception enables Chris to stay close to Kitty; but it also inspires Kitty's swindler boyfriend's scheme to fleece the 'famous artist'.

The supreme example of deception comes from Lang's last American film, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*. Tom Garrett and his publisher future father-in-law conspire to demonstrate a major flaw in the justice system. Supposedly, Garrett would assume the identity of the culprit to prove that he could be anyone. He is able to do so easily, thanks to the ubiquity of mass-produced items such as the ready-made coat.

## CHARACTERS

### 1. Open

**Siegfried** (*Die Nibelungen*) Kay Hoog in *Spiders* is an adventurer, yet it is with Siegfried that a properly developed action character emerges. The valiant prince acquires magical powers in his journey through the forest. The Prince of Xanten is introduced as an individual, independent of his aristocratic connections. The self-made hero's quest begins with him forging steel and making his own weapon—he is a master blacksmith before he becomes an invincible warrior.

**Freder Fredersen** (*Metropolis*) is curious and compassionate. As a privileged young man, Freder leads an idle existence up until the moment Maria unexpectedly enters the Eternal Gardens. He is moved by the Madonna figure's message of fraternity—the workers' children in her company being the brothers of the upper class youth. Maria points out to him as the messiah destined to fulfill the role of a mediator between the classes. Guided by an understanding of society as a brotherhood of men, he bonds with the workers, as well as the white-collar Josephat. Ultimately, he saves Maria from Rotwang, and facilitates a hand shake between the workers and his father. By the finale, he has matured and acts unlike the jumpy young man at the beginning,

**Friede Velten** (*Woman in the Moon*) is one of the five astronauts to make the journey to the moon aboard the spacecraft named after her—*Friede*. She is as enthusiastic as Professor Manfeldt and as determined as Helius. She is not simply a passenger who joins the flight but the most determined and indispensable crew member. She soon emerges as the de facto leader of the expedition. At the end, when it becomes clear that one of her two suitors would have to be left behind on the moon, she appears as a mediator—recalling Freder in *Metropolis*—and oversees Helius and Windegger drawing straws.

**Mae Doyle** (*Clash by Night*) has spent ten years outside of her home town. The experience has left her depressed and cynical. On the other hand, the worldly character is an inspiration for the younger Peggy, who needs to choose between adopting the free spirit Mae as a role model, and marrying Joe Doyle. Peggy is unsure whether she wants to get married and raise kids—initially she prefers the idea of travelling the country with a trailer. In the end, parallel to Mae coming to terms with being a housewife, Peggy chooses to commit to Joe.

**Celia Lamphere** (*Secret Beyond the Door*) “20<sup>th</sup> Century Sleeping Beauty” is how Mark describes Celia (the more relevant folktale, *Bluebeard* is never mentioned in the film). According to him, she is a “wealthy American girl who has lived her life wrapped in cotton wool, but she wants to wake up”. Celia is driven by a sense of adventure, which lands her in Mexico where she meets Mark. Later at the Lamphere House—in the spirit of the Bluebeard tale—Celia's curiosity is triggered when she is told to never enter a certain room.

### 2. Closed

**Dusy Told** (*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*) is distant and bored; a counterpoint to the passionate and moody Cara Carozza. Countess Told likes to frequent gambling dens and observe players as their emotions intensify during the course of the game. Both Mabuse and Inspector Wenk try to impress Told (known as “the passive one”) and offer her a strategy for exhilaration—one invites her to join him in crime, the other requests her partnership to catch the elusive mastervillain. Told questions her own aloofness when she witnesses the power of Carozza's passion.

**Joh Fredersen** (*Metropolis*) Fredersen is aloof and restrained. He administers the city from his high-rise office, using state of the art surveillance technology—video phones, CCTV screens, and a switchboard control panel whose flashing lights connect him to the nerve centers of Metropolis. Fredersen's omnipotence rests on technology, although his enforcer Slim suggests that a capacity for coercion is not lacking. A similar dynamic shapes the Master of Metropolis' relationship with his son. The affectionate Freder has a hard time communicating with his father, and is obviously intimidated by him.

**Bannion** (*The Big Heat*) is laconic and reserved. Except for the times he is with his family, Bannion is distant and dispassionate. It is difficult to tell what he thinks or feels, at least until the end, when Debbie's death seems to make him slightly more emotive.

**Eddie Taylor** (*You Only Live Once*) is suspicious and bitter. As he is released from prison early in the film, the warden tells him to make good of his freedom. "If they let me", he responds. His experience of social prejudice has made Eddie pessimistic about his prospects, and events confirm his perspective.

### 3. Agreeable

**Jerry** (*Man Hunt*) is trusting and helpful. Twice, she refuses Thorndike's attempts to compensate her. At the end, we learn that Jerry had chosen to die rather than give away Thorndike's location to the Nazis. Jerry's virtue is hinted at before she is engaged by Thorndike. The street singers that he encounters in London chant the chorus part of "She was poor but she was Honest". The song—the only one in the film—hints at Jerry, just before Thorndike's fateful encounter with her. Lyrics loosely parallel Jerry's character—asking for a cheap shoelace (instead of brooch), jumping from a bridge (rather than a window).

**Vince Shaw** (*Western Union*) The reformed outlaw attempts to make a fresh beginning with the Western Union project. Despite his background, Shaw is an agreeable character, well-liked and friendly. He is also merciful. At the beginning of the film, Shaw tenderly releases his horse after it gets injured. A moment later, he sees that the injured Creighton is helpless in the wild, and goes out of his way to take care of him.

**Frenchy Fairmont** (*Rancho Notorious*) is another sympathetic outlaw—in Lang's third Western. "The fastest draw in the West" is quite the opposite of Vern, he is basically a nice guy, pleasant and graceful. Frenchy is a romantic who is dedicated to his long-time, on-and-off love Altar. She remarks that "I met only one man in my life who didn't want something behind this pretty talk". The night they met, Frenchy had offered her protection when it was certain that her casino winnings would make Altar a target. She had accepted and invited him into her cabin, assuming that Frenchy was after sexual favors. To her surprise, he had waited outside until morning to see to it that she left the town safely with the first coach. Years later, Frenchy gets caught when he comes to Gunsight to buy a bottle of perfume for Altar.

### 4. Disagreeable

**Kriemhild** (*Die Nibelungen*) Kriemhild strives to avenge Siegfried and settle scores with Hagen of Tronje. She marries the Hun king to gain leverage for her revenge mission. To accomplish her objective, she readily sacrifices her entire family.

**Hagen of Tronje** (*Die Nibelungen*) is a vassal and advisor of Gunther; a powerful and menacing figure in the court of Worms. He is a sneaky and manipulative killer (also a vicious child murderer). Yet he is also portrayed as a courageous knight who is unflinching in his loyalty to Gunther. He fights to the end—ultimately offers to personally surrender to the Huns in order to save his king.

**Bannion** (*The Big Heat*) is unfriendly and prejudiced; he is not only skeptical about Lucy Chapman's allegations about Duncan's widow, he also treats her with disdain. Soon, Chapman is killed for speaking up. At times it looks like the hard boiled detective is also hard hearted (and quite dislikable). Debby tells him that if he kills Mrs. Duncan he won't be any different than Vince Stone. He may indeed not be very different.

**Maharaja Chandra.** (The Indian Epic) The Maharaja is introduced as a benevolent despot who is focused on building modern infrastructure in his kingdom. Soon, his darker side is revealed; diabolically jealous of Seetha, he demands the construction of a tomb for her.

**Earl Pfeiffer** in (*Clash by Night*) is a sardonic misogynist. He is also patronizing. An extended scene shows Earl repeatedly bullying an older waiter; Uncle Vince dislikes being goaded by him; Joe Doyle is irritated by Earl mockingly calling him "the sardine fleet" and flirting with his girlfriend Peggy. When Jerry asks Earl to lend him some cash to cover his father's bar bill, Mae makes quite a scene trying to prevent him from taking Earl's money. Eventually, Jerry is fed up with Earl's patronizing attitude—one

of the signs is Jerry scolding him for calling him Jeremiah. Despite his obnoxiousness, Peggy says that she finds him attractive.

**Tom Garrett** (*Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*) The exaggerated villains in Lang's 1920s films—*Spies'* Haghi, *Metropolis'* Rotwang the Inventor and Dr. Mabuse—are replaced in the next three decades by more complex figures who are not as flashy, but almost as malicious and devious. Tom Garrett is the prime example: a rational (careful planner and impassive) and disagreeable (dishonest and cruel) character—in Lang's last American film.

## 5. Introvert

**Professor Richard Wanley and Chris Cross** (*The Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street*) Wanley is roughly a variation of *Scarlet Street's* Chris Cross (in mid-life crisis and seeking casual romance with a younger woman). Cross is a timid and submissive man controlled by a dominant wife; Wanley has a slightly larger social circle and—imagines himself to be—self-assured. He is predictable and habitual; “a strictly two-drink man, always has been for years”, his friend Dr. Barkstane remarks.

**Mark Lamphere** (*Secret Beyond the Door*) is quite and secretive. Architecture is not only his profession, but also his obsession; he is a “collector of rooms” that were once scenes of violent crimes. By curating reenactments of actual crime scenes, Mark tries to come to terms with his violent tendencies and troubled childhood.

## 6. Conscientious

**Jerome Morris** (*You and Me*) The owner of the department store runs his workplace guided by his belief that former convicts deserve a second chance. Accordingly, he employs fifty ex-convicts in the store. Even after he finds out about their attempt to rob the store, Morris acts firmly but benevolently.

**Helen Roberts** (*You and Me*) Sylvia Sidney plays honest, intelligent and down-to-earth characters in Fritz Lang's first three American films, which are focused on social issues—lynching in *Fury*; social prejudice and other challenges that ex-convicts face in *You Only Live Once* and *You and Me*. In *You and Me*, She is portrayed as a responsible person who risks her parole status for her love. She educates fellow ex-convicts—her coworkers at Morris' store—that avoiding crime is in their benefit.

**Joan Graham** (*You Only Live Once*) Eddie's girlfriend is a competent clerk and law-abiding citizen working at the public defender's office. She is organized and responsible. Joan has a middle class background, a secure job and (initially) a seemingly absolute faith in the justice system. When that faith is shaken, she shows unflinching resolve. Unlike Eddie, it is her choice to clash with the law—which is a consequence of her love.

**Prague's Resistance** (*Hangmen Also Die!*) Czechoslovak patriots are selfless, brave and unrelenting. Operatives of the resistance—Dedic and Bartos—are also ruthless. “What are four hundred lives in a war of millions” asks Dedic in order to persuade Svoboda not to surrender to the Gestapo. After all, the assassination of Heydrich was “only one battle in the war that they would carry on fighting”. He assures Svoboda that they “will build a ghost army that will hunt them until their blood runs cold”. What could have easily turned into a black and white tale of heroism is complicated by Lang's refusal to glamorize the underground.

**Jeremy Fox (Moonfleet)** The scene that caused tension between Fritz Lang and the film's producer—the ending shows Fox sailing away in the small boat. It is followed by a shot of young Mohune with his new guardian, the magistrate. The boy reiterates a message of hope—his naïve belief that Fox would come back. The heavily-wounded and exhausted Fox had persuaded him that he would return, before he sailed away with the boat. In his last moment, Fox, who had been violent and opportunistic, emerges as a considerate and compassionate character.

## 7. Unconscientious

**Joh Fredersen** (*Metropolis*) Fredersen is a manipulator and prone to using deception tactics. He gets Rotwang to turn the robot into an agent-provocateur in order to create a pretense for crushing the workers' resistance. He risks the destruction of the entire city just to discredit the resistance movement

and turn workers against their leader Maria. Fredersen's indifference is checked by his enforcer Slim, who tersely reminds him that people are distraught because their children are in peril—just like his son Freder.

## 8. Emotional

**Cara Carozza** (*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*) is hopelessly in love with Dr. Mabuse. Although she is an independent and strong character, she chooses to be subjugated by him. Carozza is a popular revue performer and ruthlessly rapacious—which makes her Mabuse's useful agent.

**Vern** (*Rancho Notorious*) The ballad "The Legend of Chuck-a-Luck" introduces the film as a "story of hate, murder and revenge". Revenge is the driving force of Vern. In fact, we barely see any other dimensions of his character. "He sure does gander—he looks straight through a man" observes one of the bandits when Vern arrives at Chuck-a-Luck. Vern suspects everyone (including Frenchy) and is full of contempt.

**Joe Wilson** (*Fury*) Joe is initially cheerful and optimistic. The lynch attempt transforms him into a bitter avenger. As he listens to the radio broadcast of the trial, it looks like he is actually enjoying the unfolding of events. His expressions resemble those of the lynchers as they watch flames engulf the jailhouse.

**Mark Lamphere** (*Secret Beyond the Door*) Mark is a moody and unstable character. To uncover the mystery of the locked room, Celia gets a piece of wax from a twin candle holder to get an impression of the key. Mark suddenly appears and immediately notices that one candle is shorter. "It jars me somehow, it breaks the symmetry", he remarks. While Celia is calm and rational, Mark is erratic and anxious.

**Mae Doyle** (*Clash by Night*) is dissatisfied and insecure. After leaving her hometown ten years ago, Mae had become the mistress of a rich man. Following his death, she returns as an emotionally drained woman. She then marries Jerry D'Amato, hoping that he would be the answer to her search for security. The marriage doesn't make her happy; she ends up having an affair with Earl, which leaves her even more frustrated. Mae isn't the only insecure one—she insightfully identifies the cause of her unhappy relationships as the insecurity of men, who are "nervous like sparrows or big and worried like sick bears".

**Vicki Buckley** (*Human Desire*) Vicki's anxiety and insecurity are tied to her past as the maid's daughter at John Owens' house. However, she is inconsistent with her allegations about being a victim of abuse—ultimately denies them altogether. Gloria Grahame's previous film was Lang's *The Big Heat*. There, her character Debby's face had got disfigured by a brutal attack that scarred one side of her face. Similarly, the two facets of her character were her essential goodness, and her involvement with the immoral world of gangsters. Vicki is also scarred—she shows her bruises to Jeff as proof of her husband's abuse. She is like Debby, both a suffering victim and a scheming femme fatale.

**Liliom Zadowski** (Liliom) Carnival barker is affable and popular; yet he has his flaws—has a quick temper, and is somewhat lazy. As likeable as he may be, Liliom is Liliom—the incorrigible rascal hardly learns from his mistakes.

## 9. Rational

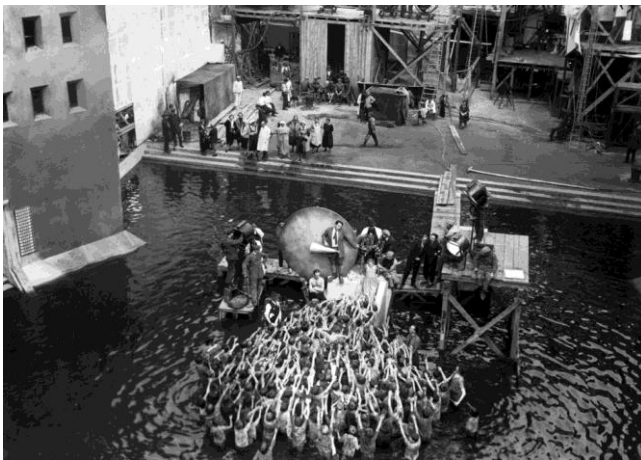
**Friede Velten** (*Woman in the Moon*) is a trained astronomer who is passionate about space exploration. While her fiancé Windegger has fits of jealousy over her, she carefully carries out routine tasks such as keeping the logbook and filming the moon. When things take a turn for the worse, she calms her fellow crewmembers—all four men have obvious flaws: Helius is rather erratic; Professor Manfeldt is an eccentric; Windegger is neither competent nor reliable; and Walter Turner is malicious. If young viewers of the film looked for a role model here in 1929, it would most likely have been Friede Velten.

**Helen Roberts** (*You and Me*) acerbically explains to the would-be robbers of the department store that their scheme was foolish; she proceeds to demonstrate her point on a chalk board. Her knowledge about the expenses and expected profits obviously surpasses theirs. Her conclusion is that

“crime does not pay—enough”. She is logical and persuasive; her audience is quick to accept Helen’s authority.

**Eleanor Stone** (*The Return of Frank James*) is a young reporter who gets acquainted with Frank James during her research about the James Brothers. She is the daughter of the owner of the newspaper, and successfully resists her father’s attempts to keep her away from journalism. As a voice of reason, she persuades Frank James to give up chasing Bob Ford and be present at his own trial—so that he can be exonerated from the charges against him.

**Celia Lamphere** (*Secret Beyond the Door*) is mockingly told by her husband Mark that “thinking is the prerogative of men. And because women are nearer to nature, they don’t think, they feel”. Eventually, Mark proves that he is less than stable, while Celia analytically diagnoses his issues. She maintains that Mark hates women because of a traumatic incident in his childhood that made him resent his mother. Her rational explanation frees Mark from his obsessions.

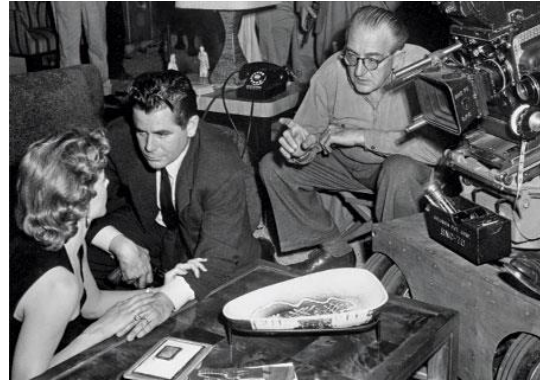


(Shooting *Metropolis*' flood scene; Lang atop the pedestal mimics Rotwang's gesture)

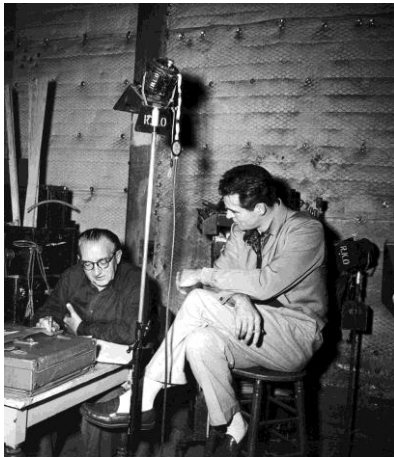


(*Metropolis*, coaching Gustav Fröhlich; on the set of *You and Me* with George Raft)





(*You Only Live Once* with Henry Fonda; directing Glenn Ford and Gloria Grahame in *The Big Heat*)



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(*Clash by Night*, with Robert Ryan; *While the City Sleeps*, with Ida Lupino and Dana Andrews)



(As 'Fritz Lang' in Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* [Contempt, 1963])

<sup>i</sup> Biographic material compiled from the works of Lotte Eisner and Patrick McGilligan: Eisner, Lotte H. *Fritz Lang*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1976. McGilligan, Patrick. *Fritz Lang, the Nature of the Beast*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.