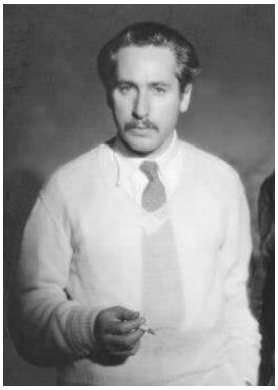
HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
J. Zimmerman, MLIS

Sexuality in Cinema

The Blue Angel (1930)

Josef von Sternberg (1894-1969)

OVERVIEW



Director Born Jonas Sternberg to a poor Jewish family in Vienna, he was only seven years old when he and his siblings joined their father in America. The relationship between his mother and father was strained, and Sternberg would cite these "childhood traumas" as the basis of the "unique subject matter of his films." After receiving his American citizenship in 1908, Sternberg attended only one year of high school before taking on a number of occupations. It was in 1911 that he got his first job with a motion picture company, where he maintained film stock and worked as a projectionist. In 1914, when the company was purchased by William A. Brady, Sternberg received a promotion to chief assistant and began receiving his first official film credits. Between 1919 and 1923, Sternberg cut his teeth as an assistant director. He wouldn't make his directorial debut until 1924 at age 30 with the film *The Salvation Hunters,* and he would work with the likes of Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin before returning to Europe in 1930 to direct what is considered his magnum opus, *The Blue Angel*. He would direct constantly until 1957, when he directed his final film, *Jet Pilot*. Between 1959 and '63, Sternberg lectured on film at UCLA, where he taught Jim Morrison and Ray Manzarek of the rock band The Doors, who credited their professor's influence on their own art. In 1965, Sternberg published an autobiography, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*. After suffering a heart attack in December 1969, Sternberg died in the hospital a week later. His body lies in Westwood Village Memorial Park Cemetery.



Film *The Blue Angel* (*Der blaue Engel* in German) is a musical comedy-drama shot simultaneously in German and English, with actors shooting a scene in one language before repeating it in the other. The English version was thought to be lost for decades, but a reel was discovered in a German archive and restored in 2008-9. The German version is considered superior not only because it exists as a complete film but also because the German actors aren't constantly stumbling over English pronunciations. For that reason, we will focus on the German version in this analysis. Originally employed by UFA studios to direct a film about Rasputin, Sternberg pitched the idea to adapt the 1905 short story *Professor Unrat* (loosely translated as Professor Filth or Garbage) by Heinrich Mann for its critiques of false morality and loose values in the German middle class.

Background *The Blue Angel* is most notable for being the first sound film produced by European Paramount sister studio UFA GmbH. This would be the second foray into sound for Sternberg, who had experimented in asynchronous recording techniques in his 1929 proto-noir *Thunderbolt*, and it made him first choice to the executives at Paramount. UFA producers first pushed singer Lucie Mannheim for the part of Lola Lola, but Sternberg vetoed this decision, thinking she lacked the glamor necessary to sell the role. The director first sought Brigitte Helm of *Metropolis* fame, but she was not available, so a replacement was sought. Käthe Haack was paid for the role but was quickly supplanted when Sternberg saw Marlene Dietrich in a musical review. This would propel the performer into film fame. Heinrich Mann's involvement in the production would slow the film's release, as one of UFA's owners disliked Mann's socialist politics. Mann would produce an essay distancing himself from the "bourgeoisie" film, which portrayed Rath in a more sympathetic light. Upon release in Germany, the film

was an overnight success. At the time of writing, the German version of *The Blue Angel* retains a 96% approval rating on the review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes and a score of 90 out of 100 using Metacritic's weighted average system.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Professor Immanuel Rath – An aging and distant professor
Lola Lola – A young and brash cabaret performer
Kiepert – A magician and troupe manager who produces the shows of Lola Lola
Guste – Kiepert's wife and fellow performer who acts as a sort of madame to the showgirls
Mazeppa – A strongman who lusts after Lola Lola
Pupil Angst – A dutiful student at the Gymnasium often blamed for the other's antics

SYNOPSIS

Professor Immanuel Rath works at a Gymnasium (in many European countries, this refers to a specialized secondary school to prepare teens for college) in Weimar Germany. His class is particularly disrespectful, frequently playing cruel pranks joking about his name being very close to the German word for 'garbage.' Upon punishing a handful of students, Rath confiscates postcards of a cabaret girl named Lola Lola who works at the Blue Angel. Wanting to catch the boys in the act, the professor goes to this cabaret. Seeing the boys and chasing after them, Rath ends up in the dressing room of Lola Lola, and he becomes infatuated. In the confusion, the professor returns home that night with a pair of undershorts instead of his hat.

Returning to the cabaret to return the panties and retrieve his hat, Rath defends Lola from a drunken patron who paid to drink champagne with her. The owner gives Rath a private box seat and drink as repayment, and Lola sings to him, struck by his chivalry. Word of the professor's visits to the cabaret spread through the gymnasium, earning him more mockery from his students and risking his career when he decides to pursue a relationship with Lola. He resigns soon thereafter and asks Lola to marry him. The honeymoon is happy, but the charm wears off quickly, as Rath becomes financially dependent on Lola, whose job is to flirt with men and sell dirty postcards at cabarets.

A few years later, Rath is working as a clown under Lola's boss when they return to his hometown. News of the professor's return spreads through the city, and the cabaret is packed when the show begins. His insecurities lead the other troupe members to mock and cajole Rath, only stoking a fire of rage within him. After seeing a strongman act in the throes of foreplay with Lola while he performs his humiliating sorcerer's apprentice act, Rath loses his mind, chasing down Lola while crowing like a cock and trying to strangle her. He's subdued by the strongman and the others and put in a straitjacket. When he's released later that night, he sneaks out. The old man makes his way across town to the gymnasium, where he breaks in and finds his old desk. The janitor finds him dead, clutching the desk where he once taught.

PLOT



Morning – Life begins in the market of a German town. Chickens squawk as they're thrown into a pen for sale, shops open up for the day, and people sweep the streets. A young woman raises the shutter at her shop and starts to wash the window, but she's distracted by an ad for a cabaret, posing like the woman in the image. In a nearby tenement, a maid enters the room of Dr. Rath, a professor. She complains about the mess in his room while laying out his breakfast. He exits his room and begins putting sugar into his coffee. From time to time, he whistles at a birdcage nearby, hoping for a response. When the bird makes no sound, he goes to investigate, finding it dead. The maid enters the room again and takes the bird from him, saying it hasn't sung in years before unceremoniously dropping the little corpse into the firebox of a nearby stove.



Classroom antics – A bunch of boys make a ruckus in a classroom, gathering around a boy who blows on a postcard, making them all giggle and jeer. One boy stays at the front of the room, cleaning the chalkboard, while another sneaks away, writing rude comments on the professor's notebook and adding an 'un' to make his name read "Professor Garbage." Around this time, Prof. Rath makes his way to the Gymnasium, entering just as the clock chimes. In the classroom, the dutiful student tries to get everyone to settle down, but some boys shove him and bicker among one another until another boy rushes into the center of the room, shouting, "The old man's coming!" They all quickly settle into their seats and quiet down, acting as if they'd been patiently awaiting their teacher. He's disturbed to find his notebook vandalized, blaming the dutiful student, Angst, simply because the boy meets his gaze.



Pop quiz – "Now, gentleman," Rath begins. "Let's see what you've learned. Yesterday we left off at Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1." Seeing a boy obviously not paying attention, Prof. Rath calls on him, and the student stands up out of shock and obedience. "Well?" the professor asks. The boy stammers. With a frustrated tone, Rath leads him into the famous line from Shakespeare's play: "To be or not to be?. That is the question." The boy picks it up and repeats, but Rath stops him in his tracks when his 'thats' and 'thes' come out as "zhat" and "zhe." "You can't even pronounce the English article," Rath scolds, getting into a comical shouting match trying to show the boy the proper pronunciation. Not getting anywhere, he moves the lesson on, giving the class an assignment on alternative literature: "What would have happened if Mark Anthony had not delivered [Julius Caesar's] funeral eulogy?" He opens a window, letting in the sound of a children's choir practicing. After a few verses, Rath notices a few boys not doing their work and confronts them.



Dirty postcards – The professor takes from one boy a dirty postcard before closing the window and blocking out the choir's singing. He scolds the student in front of the class before placing the postcard in a notebook and sliding the book into his breast pocket, saying he's going to inform the headmaster after school. Angst smiles as the screen fades to black. When the scene fades back in, we see two students crouched down by a door, leering in the direction of the students exiting. Professor Rath exits, and right behind him is Angst. The two other students trip him, sending him and the contents of his notebooks sprawling. Among his papers are more dirty postcards. Professor Rath tells Angst to follow him home to talk about where the postcards came from. Angst says they're not his, but the other boys have been getting them from a nightclub called The Blue Angel. After dismissing the boy and making sure he's left, the professor pulls out the card he confiscated from the other student and begins blowing on it. The camera repositions behind him, letting us see the image of a dancer named Lola Lola and a feathery skirt that can be blown away to reveal her garter straps.



The Blue Angel – A group of dancing girls sit on a stage surrounding a slender woman in a black costume who sings a song called "They Call Me Naughty Lola." They all drink deeply from beer mugs as she sings and the audience whistles and shouts. Waiters shout out orders for more beer and food as well. In the streets, Professor Rath wanders, looking for this cabaret. Another woman takes the stage, singing a song called "A Man, Just a Regular Man." Afterward, Lola Lola takes the stage again, dressed like a 1700s noblewoman. She takes over singing, occasionally turning around on stage and showing the audience the rear cutout of her large skirt and her undergarments. Around this time, Prof. Rath makes his way inside the club. The students spot him and rush away into the backstage area. As the professor searches the audience, Lola begins moving a spotlight around the crowd, stopping on Rath as the patrons hoot and holler. He spots another student who makes a break for the backstage and rushes after the boy.



Backstage with Lola Lola – After stumbling around the dressing room for a while, Prof. Rath stumbles down a spiral staircase right into Lola Lola as she prepares for her next act. “What are you doing in my bedroom?” she asks. Prof. Rath introduces himself shakily, and she chastises him for not removing his hat, which he quickly does, meekly. He says he’s looking for his pupils as she begins to undress. Trying to use a screen to do so, she spots the students, slyly pretending they’re not there and undressing in front of Rath to distract him. The old man catches himself staring, but he can’t look away. The other girls shout at him for being in the way when they try to enter their own dressing room, the door frequently opening and closing, letting snippets of music and other performances through. Moving up the stairs, she drops down the underpants she was wearing, and they land right on Rath’s head. An older woman snatches them away from him, dropping them on the floor near the screen where one of his students snatches them, unseen.



Costume change – Upstairs, Lola makes a racket trying to find a specific costume in storage. One of the students in hiding takes this chance to slip Lola’s panties into Rath’s pocket. Lola returns from upstairs in a new outfit and puts on a skirt and hat, posing for Rath for a moment. The troupe’s manager exits the other dressing room, shouting at the girls to forget about art and “move the booze!” After being introduced to Professor Rath, however, he quickly changes his tune, saying he’s a supporter of the arts. When Lola leaves to perform her next act, the manager begins preparing for his own act, a “conjuring” trick. The man begins insinuating that Rath is pursuing Lola, saying he has good taste. Rath pushes back, saying he’s only looking for his students and the manager is hiding them. As they argue, they stumble onto the student’s hiding spot behind the screen, and Rath chases them out into the street.



Beating and a lost hat – Lying in his bed, Angst rouses from his sleep. He sits up, watching someone off-screen approach him, their shadow caught in the moonlight from the window. Two of his classmates jump on top of him, using his blanket like a net to hold him down as they slap and punch him: it’s clear they blame him for Rath’s appearance at the nightclub. Rath returns home, sweating with exertion from running after the boys. He sits on his bed and reaches into his pocket for a handkerchief to wipe his brow, but what he finds instead is Lola’s panties. The next morning, as he prepares for work, Prof. Rath is surprised to find his hat missing, his maid making a comment about it. Entering his study, he retrieves a dress hat, one that is quite too posh for everyday use, and he heads to work. Again, the bell tolls and figures march around the little clock. Prof. Rath enters his classroom and blows his nose as he always does, looking around at the boys. He makes a note in his personal notebook, looking at Angst, who visibly frets.



Return to the Blue Angel – A cat yowls in the dark alleys of the town as Rath makes his way back to the Blue Angel. Two of his students flirt with Lola Lola as she does her makeup, and she does her best to drive them away, insulting their English skills as they tell her about Rath’s behavior that day. One of the boys has seen Rath approaching the nightclub, and they go to flee, but the manager directs them into the cellar. Rath makes his way backstage, and Lola invites him in. “I knew you would return,” a singer coos from the stage. “With me, they all come back…” The professor closes the door, blocking out the music. “I knew you’d be back,” Lola repeats. “They all come back for me.” Rath explains that, in his haste the night before, he left his hat and took a pair of Lola’s panties. He returns the pants, folded and laundered in a piece of paper, and Lola smirks at him before taking his top hat. She asks the professor to sit and enlists his help with her makeup as the boys peek from the cellar. She drops her cigarette case, and—chivalrous as always—Prof. Rath stoops to collect the fallen cigarettes for her. She mocks him for being flustered when he looks at her legs but quickly changing her tune, calling him a handsome man before playfully blowing powder from the tin he’s holding into his face.



Sailor – The professor quickly works to clean his face and glasses, knocking the powder from his tie and jacket in the mirror. The manager enters and scolds Lola for not drinking with the patrons (and making him more money by doing so). They argue for a minute before the manager insists and leads a drunken sailor into the room, a man with a champagne bucket right behind him. The sailor pulls a pineapple from his pocket and gives it to Lola as a gift, trying to kiss her hand. She tells him to get out of her dressing room, but he refuses. The other men stand by as he tries to feel up Lola, but Rath is unable to stand idly by while the sailor outstays his welcome. “You miserable villian!” he shouts as he pushes the sailor out of the room. “How dare you molest the lady!” The manager approaches to try and diffuse the situation, but the professor strikes out at him, shouting, “Miserable pimp!” When the barman complains that he already opened the champagne, Rath snatches it, saying he’ll pay. The other two men leave to deal with the drunken sailor’s angry threats to get the police, leaving Rath and Lola alone.



Champagne with Lola Lola – “Someone defending me?” Lola says with awe in her voice. “That hasn’t happened in ages.” She happily shares a drink with the professor after he toasts to her. A policeman wanders into the rowdy club, making his rounds. He sees the shouting sailor and some fighting nearby, and he walks over to intervene. Thinking on his feet, the manager rushes into the dressing room and tells Rath he must hide. “I have nothing to fear,” the professor says. “You don’t,” the manager quips, passing him his hat, “but we might!” They quickly lead him to the cellar. After the door closes, Lola comments that the should rent rooms down there. Just outside, a crowd gathers around the fighting men and the policeman who seeks out the manager to figure out what’s going on.



Police questioning – “This man claims he was assaulted,” the police officer says, pointing to the sailor in Lola’s dressing room. The sailor shouts and makes a fuss, saying they’ve hidden the man who assaulted him, and the police officer begins to look around the backstage area. The jig is up quickly, however, as in the cellar, Rath has found his students hiding. “He tried to murder me, officer!” the sailor overstates. Rath simply has to state who he is to get the policeman on his side, and the sailor is quickly hauled away to the police station. Rath begins to dress down his students, but they ignore him. One lights a cigarette and only stops when Rath slaps it from out of his lips. “You’ll regret this!” the boys shout as they flee down the alleys. The manager’s wife approaches, slapping the professor on the shoulder, handing him a beer, and telling him, “Well done.” The boys appear in the window, screaming, “Garbage!” The professor shouts after them, soon sputtering and clutching his chest.



Worked up – The professor stumbles into a seat where Lola and the others dote on him, asking if he’s alright. “I feel better already,” Rath says as Lola puts her arms around his shoulders. He starts to shout again, but they tell him not to get “all worked up” about the boys. The barman enters, complaining about the customers leaving when the policeman came in. Lola leaves to perform, hoping to sell a few more drinks. Meanwhile, the manager praises the professor, pouring him a special cocktail to ease his heart problems. The professor accepts, drinking the strong shot and coughing. He grins afterward, already feeling better.



Private seat – The manager quickly leads Rath to a box seat so he can watch Lola perform, announcing the professor’s presence to the crowd as a way to legitimize his business. Lola Lola sits at the front of the stage and begins a warm and cheerful rendition of “Falling in Love Again (Can't Help It).” As Lola sings, she grins up at him. Rath smiles down at her, occasionally being distracted by the nightclub’s garish nautical décor.



“**Do right, and fear no man”** – In the professor's bedroom, we see a placard upon which is painted the German for the old proverb, “Do right, and fear no man.” His maid pounds on the door but receives no response. Eventually, she enters the room and finds it empty. Professor Rath snores in Lola’s bed, clutching a racist doll popular

at the time known as a “tar baby.” He rouses, sitting up and gawking at his unfamiliar surroundings. He plops the doll on the bed, and a mechanism inside plays a little tune, causing him to smile. Lola’s bird chirps merrily as she prepares breakfast nearby in a fashionable nightgown. The professor quickly dresses and straightens his hair before sitting with Lola for coffee. She mentions his snoring, and he blames it on overindulging the night before. He complements her coffee and cooking skills, and Lola says he could have this “every morning.” He agrees, saying he’s not married. A clock tower chimes outside, and Rath realizes he’s late for work.



Chalkboard – One of the boys draws a crude caricature of the professor as Cupid, the musical notes coming from his harp spelling out “Lola Lola.” The other boys hold back Angst, who obviously takes issue with their behavior. Back in Lola’s bedroom, Prof. Rath begins to head downstairs when Lola requests a kiss, which he gives her. The professor rushes to the gymnasium, entering the classroom late. He finds his chalkboards covered in caricatures. “Professor!” one of the boys shouts. “It stinks of garbage in here!” The boys start to riot, shouting garbage over and over again. It seems the whole school takes notice, professors and administrators all making their way to Prof. Rath’s classroom. The administrator enters the room and tells the boys to wait in the schoolyard for him. He then turns his attention to Rath, scolding him for risking his future on “that kind of woman.” Rath can’t help himself, standing up for Lola: "You are speaking of my future wife!” The administrator says he can’t stop him, but he’ll have to report what’s happened. Rath gathers his belongings in solemn silence.



Flowers for Lola – “Get your stuff packed!” the manager shouts at his troupe. “The train won’t wait for you!” A knock comes on the door, and Professor Rath enters with a bouquet. He heads upstairs after suffering a bit of the manager’s abuse. There, Lola shoves her things into hat boxes and suitcases. “How nice of you to come say goodbye," she smiles at the professor. He starts to reply but halts, and Lola takes the flowers. He seems displeased, and she reassures him that the troupe will be back in town next year. Rath says he has something else and presents to her a ring. Lola is speechless, but she slides the ring onto her finger. Rath then asks her to marry him, and she laughs. He scowls, saying he’s serious, and Lola agrees. They kiss, and the scene jumps to their wedding dinner, where they and the rest of the troupe gather around the table to drink in celebration. After his wife insults his profession, the manager does some sleight of hand to entertain the guest, ‘conjuring’ eggs out of Prof. Rath’s ears. Lola begins to bawk like a chicken as a joke, and overcome with her playfulness and joy, Rath crows like a rooster.



Postcards – Prof. Rath paces in Lola’s new bedroom, smoking a cigarette as she fumbles with her wedding dress behind a curtain. She pokes her head out, asking for a case on the other side of the room, and Rath dutifully retrieves it. When he lifts it, it opens, spilling its contents across the floor. To his dismay, most of what was inside were the same dirty postcards he confiscated from his students. He wonders why they must keep them, and she says they’re going to sell them, of course. He tries to make a stink about this, but Lola won’t hear it. Later, Rath smokes a cigarette in the back of a cabaret as Lola performs. He pulls a handful of the postcards out of his pocket and places them on a platter as Lola finishes her act, wandering the tables trying to sell them. Later in the dressing room, Lola and her manager accost him for his lack of grooming, saying it’s to blame for their inability to sell the postcards.



Curling iron – Rath has a breakdown, saying he’d rather leave Lola than live like this before storming out. Lola smirks in her seat for a moment before crossing to the door and lighting the burner for her curling iron. Rath slinks back into her dressing room just as she suspected he would. With a satisfied tone, she simply asks him to fetch her stockings before having him slip them over her feet for her. The warning bell rings, and Lola tells him to fetch the curling iron, which Rath does dutifully. She realizes it’s too hot, and Rath looks around for something to cool it down. He starts using the pull-away calendar pages, burning each with the hot iron and ripping another one off until he hits the end of the pages, the cardboard simply reading “1925.”



1929- A title card reading "1929" appears. In a dressing room, Rath puts on some grotesque makeup, drawing on a scar, putting on a comical bald cap, and squishing a large false nose into place. Lola washes clothes behind him. Lola's manager—now Rath's manager—approaches and gives him an expensive cigar. Rath wonders what it's for, and the manager says they're going back to his hometown, back to the Blue Angel. The manager wants to bill him as the star attraction, and Rath says he'll never go back to his hometown. Lola comforts him, but there isn't love in her voice, only weariness.



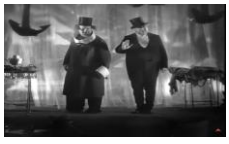
Strongman – A man plasters up a note over one of Lola Lola's posters that reads "Personal Appearance by Professor Immanuel Rath." The camera jumps to the Blue Angel, where the workers shout orders at one another as they ferry luggage and gear inside. Among them is a new man who shows off his strength by carrying more than anyone else. He stops to chat with the directors for a bit, saying he's leaving for good and insulting the director's weight, but he quickly changes his mind once he sees Lola. She, too, makes eyes at him before retreating into the backstage area. He follows, finding a corner to lean on out of the way, allowing him to catch Lola on her way up to her room. He introduces himself as, "Hans Adalbert Mazeppa, Strength Act!" He then says he's staying on just for her before leaning in to kiss her, but she pushes him away. "You have the time, right?" she teases before walking up the stairs. "I can't wait two hours!" he shouts up after her.



Sold-out show – Men clamor outside the Blue Angel as a policeman pushes them back, saying the show is sold out. Mazeppa and Lola seem to be flirting before she has to go onstage. As the dancing girls file out, the men in the crowd shout for the professor, but their shouts are ignored. Lola steps out and begins a rendition of "Beware of Blond Women," much to the crowd's delight. In the dressing room, the manager puts on Rath's makeup and costume, saying this performance will make him rich. The barman rushes in to find some chairs, rejoicing at the number of people and saying the mayor is in attendance. Lola's act ends, and the girls rush into the dressing room. Lola saunters in with a large bouquet and Mazeppa at her heels, bragging that he always moves in on a "beautiful dame." Lola's attention is on Rath, however. She taunts him, saying that he always mopes when she has fun. The bell rings for Rath, and Lola tells him to get going as she and Mazeppa head upstairs with a bottle of champagne.



Laughing upstairs – As he gathers up his courage to head onstage, Rath's thoughts are interrupted by sounds from Lola's room. She and Mazeppa laugh together, saying something that can't quite be made out. He stands, looking up as the laughter continues to echo down. When someone asks what's wrong with Rath, he shouts that he won't go on. Lola saunters down the stairs with a cold expression on her face. She scolds him, demanding he put on the wig. The other performers manhandle the rest of Rath's costume onto him before pushing him out the door and toward the stage. He refuses to look away from Lola, who meets his gaze with strange expressions, something between pity, contempt, and pleasure. The manager steps out to address the crowd, who all cheer when they hear the professor will be the next act.



Apprentice Sorcerer – The manager pulls Rath onto the stage, but he still won't take his eyes off of Lola. He eventually makes it onto the stage, Lola and Mazeppa following but staying backstage. The manager begins the act, and while everyone looks away, Mazeppa kisses Lola's shoulder and neck. The manager goes through the paces, showing the audience the empty hat, stabbing it with a knife, and even shooting a gun at it before lifting it to reveal a pigeon, commenting that the professor is "no longer bird-brained." Rath steps back behind the curtain to look at Lola, who stares at him with a smirk on her face as Mazeppa hangs off of her, caressing her. The manager pulls her back on stage and moves to the next act, where he pulls another bird out of Rath's hat before pulling eggs out of his nose. To prove it's real, he smashes it on Rath's head, causing even more laughter from the crowd. "Lay more eggs!" they shout as backstage Lola and Mazeppa begin to kiss passionately. The manager growls at Rath to crow as the act calls for, cracking another egg across his head. "Go on! Crow!" he shouts. "Cock-

a-doodle-doo!” Again, Rath steps back behind the curtain where Lola locks eyes with him again, this time deep in a kiss with Mazeppa.



Madness – With a look of horror on his face, Rath begins to crow. The audience remains silent as he keeps crowing, stumbling around madly. He pushes through the curtains and locks eyes with Lola, a sinister look on his face. She and Mazeppa step into the dressing room and close the door, but Rath is on them quick as a flash, still crowing madly. “What do you want from me?” asks Lola. “We haven’t even done anything yet.” Rath crows again and again as he begins to throttle Lola, throwing her against bottles and the furniture before Mazeppa can pull him away. Some other performers help to subdue him. The scene fades out and then back in on Rath in a straightjacket in a closet. The manager scolds him as he undoes the straps on the jacket. When the manager leaves, the professor puts on his hat and coat, heading outside. As he leaves, he hears Lola singing another rendition of "Falling in Love Again (Can't Help It).” Unlike the time she serenaded him, she sounds cold and jaded, but the crowd still loves it.



Empty classroom – A train whistle blows in the dark of the night as Prof. Rath stumbles through the dark alleys of his hometown. A thick layer of snow coats the ground. Swaying on his feet from his heartbroken stupor, he finds his way to the gymnasium where he once taught. Rath rings the bell, but there is no answer. After a few attempts, a janitor appears with a lamp, and Rath pushes past him, making his way down the hall to his old classroom. Because of a bad leg, the janitor can’t keep up, but he follows. He enters the room to find Prof. Rath seated at his old desk, his arms outstretched as if embracing it. He tries to pull the old man away, but his grip is steadfast. It’s then that the janitor realizes Rath has died, and he flees to find the authorities. The camera pulls away to the rear of the class, Rath’s body still clutching the desk he left behind for Lola.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Prof. Rath

Professor Rath is a teacher in a Gymnasium. He lives a very simple, solitary life that has left him frustrated. He marries the popular cabaret performer Lola Lola in an attempt to escape his dissatisfying existence.

Trusting Rath seems unusually trusting, especially for a man of his age and education. His trust isn’t based in anything more than appearances, as shown by his mistrust of the dutiful student Angst. He also trusts the manager and Lola when they gush about him after he drives off the drunken sailor. Their motivations are somewhat selfish: they want to distract Rath so he doesn’t catch his students and they can keep spending money in the cabaret. In spite of this, Rath sees Lola’s affection as true and proposes to her. This trust is eventually broken when Lola allows Mazeppa to kiss her while she stares at Rath, driving him to violent madness and his death.

Unobservant This is a minor but important character trait of Rath’s. He constantly misses clear clues or problems in front of him. We see this first in the classroom, where he blames Angst for the antics of the other boys only because he looks at his teacher with a worried expression. Similarly, Rath doesn’t overhear the manager or others talking about him and Lola’s relationship. It also takes him a long time to realize Lola is dissatisfied with their marriage and that she is leading Mazeppa on.

Dissatisfied Prof. Rath’s struggle is that of a man in crisis. He is deeply unhappy with his lot in life: he’s unmarried, working a job where no one respects him, and he struggles to find joy in his daily life. During his introduction, his pet bird is found dead, and his maid simply shrugs it off before tossing the little corpse into the furnace. This shows us how little people around him care for him or his struggles. His dissatisfaction leads him to throw away his life in pursuing Lola Lola, a cabaret performer. Thinking she’ll bring joy and meaning to his life, he resigns from his job at the gymnasium and proposes, becoming a cabaret performer himself. This doesn’t solve his dissatisfaction problem. however, driving him deeper

into despair as time goes on and his job shifts from hawking dirty postcards of his wife to humiliating himself on stage. It's this dissatisfaction that drives him to madness when he tries to strangle Lola. After this, he wanders back to the gymnasium and dies clutching his desk, signifying his regret and how much his dissatisfaction with his life has grown.

Lola Lola

Lola is a cabaret performer in interwar Germany. She is the headliner of the Blue Angel and very popular among the city's young men who purchase and trade her postcards. She stumbles into a marriage to Professor Rath in which she is deeply unhappy.

Playful Lola quickly shows herself to be a playful person. She teases the professor when they first meet, taking off her costume and grinning at his attempt to preserve her modesty. She continues this behavior as they get to know each other, softening almost immediately after he runs off the drunk for her and immediately agreeing to drink and talk with him. She is happy to play a wifely role when the professor overindulges, but it is clearly an act, as we never see it repeated in their marriage. Her playfulness shows clearly in her first interaction with Mazeppa. Instead of mentioning that she's married or firmly telling him to lay off, she simply says, "You have time." This is an invitation for him to try again later and helps him understand the playfulness of her desires in this moment.

Spontaneous Playing into her playful nature, Lola is shown as very spontaneous. She often acts without much thought, shown in moments when she knocks over luggage when searching for costume pieces. It also shows in her relationship with the professor. She at first keeps him around as a sort of entertainment for herself, teasing him as she changes her costume. It's hard to tell if this is because she's playing interference for the boys hiding behind the screen in her dressing room or just because she likes to tease men. When he runs off the drunken sailor, she makes a snap decision to shower the professor with affection in thanks, agreeing to drink with him and serenading him. When he returns with a marriage proposition, she first laughs at him, thinking it's a joke. The marriage happens so quickly we don't even get to see it, nor do we ever really learn why Lola said yes. Similarly, when she decides she's done with Rath, she quickly accepts the advances of Mazeppa, whom she has just met. While spontaneous, it's made clear she's interested in tormenting Rath above just having some fun with Mazeppa; she's taking advantage of him in that way.

Disloyal We see most of Lola's lack of loyalty toward the end of the film, but there are hints laid throughout the production. She only gets close to Rath because she prefers his company to that of the drunken louts the manager presses her to entertain. It's also not clear *why* she marries Rath: she's laughing like he's joking one moment and then sitting next to him at a wedding reception the next. She grows bored quickly, indiscretions we don't see hinted at in her accusations that Rath is overly controlling in her eyes. This is compounded by how quickly she gives in to her attraction to Mazeppa, flirting with him after their very first exchange. In the end, she makes a show of appearing unfaithful in front of Rath, letting Mazeppa kiss her shoulders and neck while she stares at Rath, and even maintaining eye contact with her husband as she kisses Mazeppa deeply.

THEMES

<u>Society</u>



Class/Education Education and class are tied together in their value to society in this film. The cabaret performers are low-class and poorly educated, whereas the upper crust of society is middle class and well-educated. While poorly explored, this creates a dramatic backdrop for the film in a sort of "opposites attract" way.

Illustrative moment One of the clearer moments of this dual theme in *The Blue Angel* happens after Rath discovers which of his students were frequenting the cabaret. They draw mocking caricatures and write 'Lola Lola' all over the chalkboards before creating such a stir all the other teachers

and administrators come to see what's going on. The headmaster chastises Rath for even seeing Lola, saying he risks everything from his job to his position in society just because he's had a few conversations with a cabaret singer.

Relationship

Love/Infatuation There's not a lot of distinction between love and infatuation in *The Blue Angel*. Rath is completely enamored with Lola after a meager couple of visits, and Lola never really shows anything but passing affection. There's not a lot of progression from boyish curiosity about the woman on the dirty postcards to the marriage of Rath and Lola: it just kind of happens. What we do clearly see is a lack of love toward the end of the film. There is no love in their marriage as we see it in 1929. Lola is so unhappy she openly cheats on Rath with Mazeppa in an attempt to make him jealous. This causes Rath to go mad, snapping and attacking his wife. It's likely there was never really any love in the marriage, as we're never shown any truly clear moments of love.



Marriage This theme is surprisingly small given the story is about a marriage between a professor and a cabaret singer. It first arises just after the midway point when, after being confronted by his boss about the rumors about him seeing Lola, the professor vows to marry Lola, calling her his "future wife." The next scene we see is Rath proposing, which Lola—rather surprisingly—accepts. Their marriage quickly sours after a short honeymoon phase. Rath is unhappy selling dirty photos of his wife, and Lola is the breadwinner, likely having expected Rath to provide for them more.

Illustrative moment Strangely for an early sound film featuring a marriage, we're not actually shown the ceremony for Rath and Lola. What we do see is the reception after their wedding. Lola's friends and co-workers gather around a large table, and the champagne flows freely. Here, we see Rath and Lola shown as proper husband and wife for the first and only time. She looks up at him adoringly, and he holds her gently, beaming in pride and happiness.

Psychology



Loneliness This theme is a major drive behind Rath's actions in the story. He is an elderly bachelor with no close friends or family. This makes him a bit more hasty in his pursuit of Lola, moving from drinking champagne to marriage after only seeing her twice. We also see loneliness through the eyes of Angst, who—despite being the only good student in Rath's class—is constantly harassed by his peers and punished by his teacher. While not the most frequent theme, loneliness informs a lot of the character's important decisions throughout the film.

Illustrative moment In one of the first scenes, we see Rath's typical morning. His maid brings in his breakfast, and he exits his bedroom to start his day. Whistling, he looks over his shoulder to catch a glimpse of his pet bird. When no sound arises, he walks over to the cage, finding the little bird dead within. This scene shows us just how few friends Rath has and how lonesome his life is.



Anger Another minor theme, anger comes up often in the presence of Professor Rath. His students mistreat and mock him, calling him 'garbage' and interrupting his class. Rath often takes out his anger on his one good student out of entirely misplaced anger. His anger emerges when the drunken sailor harasses Lola, exploding into the old man pushing the sailor out and creating a scene that attracts the police. We see Lola's anger too, though hers is more of a simmer where Rath's is an explosion. Feeling dissatisfied in their marriage, her anger with Rath overflows, and she takes advantage of Mazeppa's infatuation with her to make Rath jealous, kissing him. In the final scenes of the film, Rath's anger takes hold again, driving him to a psychotic break that leads him to try and strangle Lola.

Illustrative moment Early on, we see Rath's anger emerge. He's already been taunted by a student who wrote "unrat" (German for garbage) on his notebook, blaming the dutiful student Angst, and in this moment he barely contained his rage. When a student can't pronounce "th" correctly after instruction, he begins to shout at the boy, and his anger overflows.



Psychosis This is a minor yet important theme that only really arises toward the film's end. We've seen the instability in Rath before: he's very easy to drive to anger and outbursts. However, Lola pushes him too far in her attempts to make him jealous when kissing Mazeppa. Already feeling humiliated and alienated by being forced to perform for his former peers and students, the emasculation and infidelity of Lola locking eyes with him as she kisses another man drives him into utter madness. While crowing like a rooster, he attacks Lola, attempting to strangle her.

Illustrative moment The moment that makes this theme most obvious is one we do not see. Just after Rath goes mad and begins attacking Lola, the others act quickly to subdue him. In a moment off screen, several men, including Mazeppa and the manager, hold him down and force a straitjacket onto him. We see him coming back around to his sanity in this straitjacket after a quick fade to black, the defeated look on his face the polar opposite of the sheer madness of his expressions as he was crowing like a rooster and trying to strangle his wife. In this moment we see the psychiatric tools of the time in use as well as the after-effects of a psychotic break on the person experiencing psychosis.

Old Age While there isn't a very clear moment of this, we're reminded of Rath's age constantly throughout the film. His manner of dress is clearly outdated, he has few hobbies and no friends, and he is out of touch with the others around him. In a lot of ways, he is in arrested development, and this pushes him towards what we might call a mid-life crisis today. Fearing death and the enfeeblement that comes before, he acts out in an adolescent way, pursuing and marrying a cabaret girl his students fancy. His health becomes an issue early in his relationship with Lola, as he gets worked up at his students who are calling him 'garbage.' He also stops caring about his appearance after being married to Lola. While some of this might be some depression for having to give up his job and status, older people tend to give their appearances less agonizing care, letting ear and nose hairs grow long and out of control or letting a beard grow in unevenly. His age and worsening health begin to frustrate and disgust Lola, though neither had been an issue a few years before, and she starts to use the advances of Mazeppa to make Rath jealous. In his final moments, Rath stumbles into the gymnasium where he worked, dying of a broken heart. This type of frailty becomes more common in old age and further highlights the age gap between Lola and Rath.



Infidelity We only really see this theme at the end of the film. Mazeppa comes on the scene when Rath and the cabaret troupe return to his hometown, and he quickly begins making romantic passes at Lola. She doesn't turn him down, but she does toy with him. They carouse together with champagne in front of Rath, who doesn't want to believe his eyes: it's clear to him his wife is interested in another man. When this apparent infidelity becomes explicit infidelity, Rath is driven into a rage, attacking Lola and trying to strangle her. Lola cheating with Mazeppa drives Rath to despair, causing him to stumble back to his desk at the gymnasium and die, clutching it and all the regret it represents.

Illustrative moment The most important moment of infidelity in *The Blue Angel* comes during Rath's sorcerer's apprentice act. Knowing that Mazeppa is attracted to his wife and Lola acting spitefully, Rath doesn't want to go at first, and he keeps his eyes locked with hers. When he finally makes it on stage, Mazeppa wastes no time in making a move on Lola. She allows this, watching her husband closely. When Rath looks back at them after stumbling to the rear of the stage, she is locked in a deep kiss with Mazeppa, her eyes daring Rath to do anything about it. Here we see her infidelity is from a place of spite more than anything: she wants to emasculate Rath.

Attraction Attraction is the axle on which the story turns. We first see the attraction of teenage boys to a popular cabaret performer, Lola Lola. On a quest to keep the cabaret from "polluting the minds" of his students, Rath ventures there, causing him to nearly collide with Lola. He is clearly smitten immediately,

suddenly stammering and clumsy. Lola admits to finding him handsome for an older man, stoking his ego and causing his attraction to deepen. After spending the night at the Blue Angel, Rath awakes in Lola's bed, happily accepting breakfast from her and wishing he could do that every day. His attraction to the singer doesn't go unnoticed. His students mock him so loudly about it, the entire gymnasium takes notice.



Illustrative moment One of the clearest moments of attraction happens after Rath shares champagne with Lola in her dressing room. She has to perform, and the manager uses this moment to take advantage of the professor's standing in society to legitimize the cabaret, giving him a private box seat and announcing him to everyone gathered there. Rath sits in the booth and is serenaded by Lola. In this moment, save a few instances of the crowd or the ostentatious décor, he shows a clear attraction to Lola, beaming at her from his private seat as she sings about falling in love.



Coming of age This theme plays a fairly major role at the beginning of the film. We see how teenage boys begin to express sexual development in their obsession with beautiful women, especially those scantily clad like Lola. They gather to gawk at dirty postcards, making a fuss over the images. They also sneak into the cabarets, buying the postcards and—presumably—drinks. This sort of energy gets into Rath, who even plays with the feathery dress on one of Lola's postcards in private, and perhaps its this proximity to adolescent sexuality that pushes him to propose to Lola.

Illustrative moment One of the first scenes in the film consists of Rath's students gathering around to watch one boy with a dirty postcard. We don't see what's on it until later in the film, but the boy blows and blows, the boys staring, mouths agape, or laughing with excitement. They hide the card and take their seats when one of the boys warns them their teacher is coming. We later see that this postcard shows Lola Lola in a skimpy outfit with a feather acting as a dress. Blowing the feathers away reveals her garter straps.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is the marriage between Lola and Rath doomed to failure from the beginning? List at least three examples.

2. Would you describe Rath's attraction and marriage to Lola Lola as a sort of mid-life crisis? Why or why not?

3. How does the film portray teenage sexuality? How does this inform the relationship between Lola and Rath?

4. Do you find Rath's portrayal sympathetic or unsympathetic? Why?