

A white L-shaped graphic element consisting of a vertical line on the left and a horizontal line on the top, both extending from the left edge of the slide.

# Extension English 1

Metropolis, Fritz Lang

Gabby

# Author Biography

- Fritz Lang was born in Vienna in 1890 and raised in the Roman Catholic Church
- During his young adulthood, he studied civil engineering, but later became enamoured with cafe life and painting and so ceased his university studies
- For several years, he traveled throughout North Africa, Asia and Europe, finishing his sojourn, studying painting in Munich and Paris
- He was conscripted into the Austrian Army in World War I and was wounded severely four times, which resulted in him losing vision in his right eye → he was admitted to the Vienna army hospital
- After he was admitted from hospital, he tried his hand at composing screenplays and even began acting on the Vienna stage
- Despite the fact that he was born into a devout Roman Catholic family, he was an atheist
- Lang however, did note that religion was an important mechanism to teach ethics to society

# Context of Composition

- Metropolis was partly inspired by his first visit to New York in 1924
- Lang constructed the film following WWI and the film reflects various socio-political themes of that era
  - Threat of fascism, industrialisation, rise of communist thought and the value of modernism thought
- Biblical influences are also evident within the text
  - The Tower of Babel → Metropolis becomes a cinematic version of this story
- The film was made during Germany's Weimar Republic
  - This was the country's first attempt at creating a democracy in the period following WWI
  - The economic and political aftermath of Germany's defeat lead to hyperinflation, revolts in the streets and a sense of anxiety and satisfaction with those in power
- Challenging typical German cinema
  - Typically, the purpose of the cinematic experience for Germans was to relax and enjoy a film
  - The fact that Lang made a realistic film that addressed the problems of his country, would have displeased German audiences greatly

# Plot

- The futuristic city of Metropolis in the film is inhabited by two distinct classes → the industrialists (the rich) and the workers (the poor)
- The plot follows the forbidden love between Freder, from the industrial class and Maria, an activist who preaches against the divide between the two classes
- As a result of following Maria, Freder is eventually lead to the worker's city where he is alarmed by the appalling conditions of the poor
- Freder goes to his father (a wealthy man who controls society) to question him about the lack of equality within the city but his father dismisses his questions
- His father does however, enlist an assistant 'Thin Man' to keep an eye on Freder (to ensure he does not disrupt the structure within society)
- Freder goes to the workers' city and switches places with a man named 'Georgy' and the 'Thin Man' (thinking it is Freder) begins to keep an eye on Georgy in the industrialist side of town
- Eventually, Freder finds Maria at last, who is running a peaceful revolution in the workers' city. When Freder approaches her, she declares he is the mediator they need to lead the revolution (as he has connections to the wealthy and the poor)

# Plot Continued

- Frederson (Freder's father) visits an old friend, the inventor Rotwang, who is building a robot woman that he can love immortally
- As a result of his spying and new-found awareness of the revolution, he asks Rotwang to help him undermine the revolution (but Rotwang secretly won't do this despite his agreement)
- Rotwang finishes constructing the robot (which is the image of Maria) and the robot convinces the working class to wage a destructive revolution on the whole city. The workers do as robot Maria says and riot, flooding the workers' city but leaving behind helpless children.
- The real Maria encounters the children, and with Freder and Josaphat's help aid the children's escape from the city.
- After the revolutionaries charge the Heart Machine—the engine that keeps the entire city running—its operator pleads with them that they cannot destroy the machines.
- When more revolutionaries spot the real Maria, she is chased (as they think she is a witch/possessed but it is actually the robot Maria who has caused a revolution that has turned sour).
- She eventually manages to escape to the church but Rotwang begins to attack her.
- Freder goes to save Maria, fighting with Rotwange along the way.
- As Rotwang dies, Freder and Maria embrace before uniting his father with the operator of the Heart Machine, to save the city.

# Characters

## Freder

- Son of Joh Frederson (ruler of Metropolis) who falls in love with Maria and is persuaded by her message of equality
- He is earnest and idealistic, yet naive

## Maria

- A member of the working class who is a maternal figure for many children in the workers' city
- She is viewed by the workers as a prophet and holds 'sermons' about uniting the classes
- She is regarded as gentle, ethical, politically idealistic and pure of heart

## Joh Frederson

- Head of Metropolis and leader of the ruling class → created the machine that runs Metropolis
- He expresses interest in replacing the working class with robots → reflecting his cold personality
- However, he is also very connected to his son and wants to help him and so in the end listens to his sons opinions about the inequality between the two classes

# Characters Continued

## Rotwang

- A reclusive scientist who was once friends with Joh, but their friendship was tarnished after they competed over a woman in their youth - he still obsesses over the woman despite his old age
- He is an inventor and builds 'robot Maria' to undermine Frederson's plan to keep peace in the city
- Can be described as immoral, chaos-loving, who lacks empathy for others suffering

## Thin Man

- Joh's assistant, who spies on Freder and informs Joh of any odd things that happen
- He is dark and mysterious and can be perceived as a 'cog in the machine of the ruling class'

## Robot Maria

- She is originally a metallic object but but is given the likeness of Maria to undermine society
- She is a temptress, sinful and a chaotic entity tasked with leading the rebellion and destruction in the city

# Themes

## Exploitation of the working classes

- The rich live in luxury high rises above the city, while laborers work in the deep underground
- A major tension is the luxury experienced by the rich is at the expense of the working class

## Awakened consciousness

- *Metropolis* is a movie about awaking a consciousness for those who have been blinded by their life
- Freder can be viewed as a Messianic figure whose consciousness is awakened by his realisation that he is privileged while there are those that suffer
- Meanwhile, Maria's consciousness leads her to alert the workers of their exploitation

## The Heart

- The theme of the 'heart' recurs throughout the film and represents ethics within the city - the bridge of logic of the head and the utility of the hands
- Freder is ultimately representative of the necessary heart that balms the tension between the working class and the upper class



# Themes

## Machinery

- The lower class below ground have lost their personality and have become cogs in a machine
- Machinery is what keeps the industry and society running but it comes at the cost of humanity

## Revolution

- In order to combat the dire situation within the city, workers will need to stage a revolution
- The question is frequently raised, can a violent or peaceful resolution improve society?

## Idealism

- Freder and Maria are brought together as a result of their shared idealism for peace within society
- It is their shared idealism that ultimately binds them together as a couple as well

## Revenge

- Revenge is most evidently seen in Rotwang, who is motivated by his bitterness towards Freder
- His revenge creates a robot with apocalyptic taste for devastation and society's upheaval

# Motifs

## 10 Hour Clock

- Lang's world revolves around and is informed by the ten hour clock
- The clock is built according to ten hours as this is the amount of hours the city's workers work
- The clock is shown various times throughout the film and the motif is a reminder that *Metropolis* is ultimately built around the concept of long and oppressive days
- It also reminds us that the narrative takes place in an imagined future (as society functions off of a 12 hour clock currently)

# Symbols

## Workers' City

- The workers' city is beneath the earth, where no natural light can be found
- Symbolises lifelessness where workers' can't experience pleasure and must find purpose in work
- The fact that the city is far beneath the earth similarly reflects the workers' lowly position within society

## The Garden

- The Garden is the opposite of the workers' city → it is situated high above the clouds
- It represents the upper class' life which is free from hardship and how they live a life of privilege

## Robot Maria

- A symbol for sin and indulgence
- Her beauty and manipulation causes the men around her to delve into chaos
- She is representative of society's ills and unbridled desire that ultimately leads to destruction

# Irony

## **Rotwang kidnapping Maria**

- Whilst the viewers know that Maria is being taken hostage by the menacing Rotwang, Freder has no idea of the suffering she is enduring
- The fact that the audience knows what has happened to Maria, whilst Freder is completely oblivious marks a key instance of dramatic irony

## **Robot Maria**

- This dramatic irony for the audience continues with Robot Maria. We as the audience know she is merely Rotwang's creation, yet Freder is oblivious
- When Robot Maria acts out in a sinful, possessed manner, we as the audience are not surprised, yet Freder is horrified and appalled by her behaviour

## **Burning the Witch**

- Mistaken identity continues when the real Maria is chased throughout the city and is threatened with the reality of being burned at the stake

# Imagery

## **Slow March**

- As the city workers enter or leave their shift, they each march in and out slowly
- This is reflective of how they have become so dehumanised as a result of their brutal work
- They have been turned into humans and are devoid of a sense of humanity

## **Brain, Heart and Hands**

- The final scene of the film Freder represents the need for the brain, heart and hands to connect for the sake of humanity
- He himself is the heart and he comes between the brain (his father) and the workers (the hands)
- In the final shot, all three symbolic entities from the film unite in complete harmony

# Study Questions

1. Describe the two worlds present in *Metropolis*, including the vast differences, as well as the links that can be found between the two worlds.
2. Compare and contrast the real Maria and the robot Maria, describing the scenes in which each is most vividly portrayed.
3. How can Freder be compared to Jesus Christ as the saviour in *Metropolis*. How is his character consistent and/or inconsistent with the saviour image?
4. What purpose do the children serve in the movie? Could the movie have been as easily and successfully filmed without their presence?
5. Describe the character of Rotwang, including his house. Include a discussion of his relationship with Johhan Fredersen.
6. *Metropolis* has been called the first science fiction film. How does the movie set precedence for all other science fiction films? What images are repeated or borrowed in other films of this genre?
7. *Metropolis* highlights the importance of our need to challenge conformity. Do you agree or disagree?

# Study Questions Continued

1. What famous story is used in order to open the eyes of the workers in the city?
2. What does the epigraph of the film mean?
3. What is the name of the place Freder is found and what does it represent?
4. How was the film innovative at the time of its release?
5. What is the film's perspective on femininity? Does it have one?
6. In what year is *Metropolis* set?
7. How is your understanding of humanity and inhumanity enhanced through an exploration of the intertextual perspectives in Lang's *Metropolis* and Orwell's *1984*.
8. How has the composer of *Metropolis* explored the exploitation of workers in their texts?
9. In what ways does Lang portray capitalism as something to be both desired and feared? Identify the ways in which these ideas are explored stylistically within the film
10. The film features recurring religious and historical icons juxtaposed with the futuristic image of the modern city and machinery. What is the role of religion in *Metropolis*?
11. From the film, what can be deduced that Lang's predictions for the future of Germany were? Were they hopefully? Or pessimistic? Explain your answer

# Quizzes

Test your knowledge with the links below!

<https://www.gradesaver.com/metropolis/study-guide/quiz1>

<https://www.gradesaver.com/metropolis/study-guide/quiz2>

<https://www.gradesaver.com/metropolis/study-guide/quiz3>