

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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Themes in Fritz Lang's Films

## **Falseness**

*The Wandering Image* 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.

*Four Around a Woman* 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.

*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* 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.

*Die Nibelungen* 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 competition and subduing her in the royal bedroom.

*Scarlet Street* 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'.

*Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* 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.