HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Hangmen Also Die! 1943

Fritz Lang (1890-1976)

OVERVIEW

Among 1942's many films about World War II were *Wake Island, Bataan, Mrs. Miniver, Saboteur* and *Casablanca.* The last one had its protagonist forsake his love interest in favor of a hero of the Czech resistance—which also happened to be the subject of *Hangmen Also Die!* that Fritz Lang began shooting the same year. It was inspired by Czech resistance fighters' assassination attempt of Reinhard Heydrich that had left the Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia wounded. Next day, on 27th May 1942, Lang and co-writer Berthold Brecht conceived of a film loosely based on the event (Verma). Shooting would begin not long after Heydrich's death in early June as a result of complications from his wounds.

Reinhard Heydrich. Heydrich's appointment as *Reichsprotektor* in 1941 had made him the military dictator of Czechoslovakia. As the head of the major security services in the entire Reich, he was Germany's top policeman and ranked second to Heinrich Himmler in the SS. His resume included significant contributions to the planning and execution of the Night of the Long Knives in 1934 against the leadership of the SA stormtroopers, the Kristallnacht pogrom against German Jews in 1938 and organizing the false flag provocations on the Polish border in 1939 that gave Germany a pretext for attacking that country. As the architect of the final solution, Heydrich was the founder of the Einzatzgruppen murder squads that followed German armies and the network of extermination camps in the occupied territories.

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Heydrich Assassination. As part of Operation Anthropoid, resistance fighters—a Czech and a Slovak—trained in the UK were airdropped to Prague. They were sheltered by sympathetic locals prior to the assassination and in the days following it. When the commandos were finally cornered in a church, they resisted formidably and were ultimately killed or took their own lives. As part of the Nazi reprisals, many members of the resistance were executed and the village of Lidice was completely destroyed.

In *Hangmen Also Die!,* there are no airborne commandos—the assassin is a local surgeon. Lang also minimizes the role of Heydrich and has him hurl a few lines in German only to get mortally wounded right away and off-camera. The spotlight is on the repercussions of the incident and the predicament of the city's residents—with a focus on the Novotny family's ordeal. The city is torn between the oppressors (and their collaborators) versus the resistance movement which enjoys popular support. German occupiers hold hundreds of men hostage as a reprisal and in order to force the citizens to renounce the assassin. The finale shows executions of civilians but there is a sense of optimism—the assassin evades capture by the Resistance elaborately framing a traitor to be Heydrich's killer.

Brecht and Eisler. As one of his Hollywood era films, *Hangmen Also Die!* has a unique place in Lang's career because of the remarkable contributions of German artistic talent. It is co-writer Bertold Brecht's only credited film project in the USA. Hanns Eisler composed the score for *Hangmen Also Die!* and the "No Surrender" march sang by the Czech underground in the film. Eisler had composed the labor march *United Front Song* and together with Brecht, the revolutionary anthem *Solidarity Song*. For *Hangmen Also Die!*'s music, he would be nominated for an Oscar award. Whereas soundtracks in Hollywood were expected to run parallel to the scenes and "embellish or illustrate" them, Eisler's innovative approach is to have "music run counterpoint" to the visuals (Bick). For example, when Heydrich appears critically wounded in the hospital, an unsettling tune denies an association with heroism (Bick). Eisler would later compose for other films including *Deadline at Dawn* (1946) and Renoir's *The Woman on the Beach* (1947) before being blacklisted and having to leave USA. He would move on to work on films such as Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1956) and compose the national anthem of East Germany.

German Expatriates. The cast also featured a strong German contingent. Alexander Granach (Gestapo investigator Gruber) had played the real estate agent Knock in Murnau's Dracula adaptation *Nosferatu* (1922), Hans Heinrich von Twardowski (Heydrich) had the part of Alan in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and Reinhold Schünzel (Ritter—the sadistic Gestapo investigator) was one of the leads of the first pro-gay film *Different from the Others* (1919) (Bollinger). Anti-Nazi war films emerged as a subgenre in 1939 with *"Confessions of a Nazi Spy"* (Gemünden) and the veterans of Weimar cinema appeared in a few of these films. Following a part as a SS colonel in the latter film, von Twardowski played a stormtrooper and a U-boat captain in others. Schünzel would appear as Heydrich's real life successor Kurt Daluege in *Hostages* (1943). *The Hitler Gang* (1944) brought all three together with Granach as the Nazi publisher Julius Streicher, von Twardowski as a Nazi party doctor and Schünzel as General Erich Ludendorff.

Cinematography. Cinematographer James Wong Howe's other works include *Yankee Doodle Dandee* (1942), *Old Man and the Sea (*1958) and *Seconds (*1966). In *Hangmen Also Die!,* Howe blends realism with noir aesthetics. Examples include the grisly locker room scene in which Investigator Gruber is brutally killed by members of the underground and when Mascha Novotny finds herself in Gestapo's torture 'vault'. Investigator Ritter's interrogation sequences do not actually show torture but imply it with visual cues. In one scene, Ritter's creepy shadow evokes *Nosferatu*'s iconic scene with Count Orlok climbing up the stairs.

Lang's War Films. Within Lang's filmography, *Hangmen Also Die!* is in the company of his other war films. *Man Hunt* (1941) and *Ministry of Fear* (1944) have German villains but their stories share more affinities with Hitchcock's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935) or *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956) with their sinister spy rings. In *Man Hunt*, a British hunter comes close to killing Adolf Hitler but is captured by the Nazis. He escapes and a chase ensues that climaxes in London. *Ministry of Fear*'s protagonist has just been discharged from a mental clinic and unknowingly stumbles upon an espionage network. The post-war *Cloak and Dagger* (1946) was released in the backdrop of the nuclear arms race. The story takes place in the last months of the war with an American scientist enlisted by the national intelligence service. Aided by Italian partisans, he tries to secure the cooperation of certain European nuclear physicists. *An American Guerilla in the Philippines* is a later film released in 1950 in the wake of the Korean War. It is a look back at the war with Japan in the Pacific from the context of the Cold War. A stranded torpedo boat crew organizes guerilla bands from local Filipinos and continues fighting the Japanese. With its bright and sunny shore scenes, visually it is an atypical Lang film but compared to his other war films, it is closer to the conventions of the genre.

Anti-Nazi Film. "Exciting melodrama" wrote a reviewer in 1943 about *Hangmen Also Die!,* but added that it was also "overlong, heavy and obscure" (*Motion Picture Herald*). The challenge Lang faced as an artist was to make a film that would be commercially successful and at the same time contribute to the war effort. Work on the film had begun at a difficult moment for the Allies when the enemy had been achieving successes at multiple fronts. By the time the film was released in May 1943, Axis advance had been checked at Moscow, Stalingrad, Midway, Guadalcanal and North Africa. At the premiere in Prague, Oklahoma, effigies of Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito were burned (*Motion Picture Daily*). Shot while the outcome of the war was far from certain, *Hangmen Also Die!* is one of Lang's most direct attempts to represent history.

CHARACTERS

Vanek / Svoboda. Contrary to historical facts, Heydrich's assassin in *Hangmen Also Die!* is not a commando parachuted to Prague but a local surgeon. We get a glimpse of the Gestapo file for the doctor which sums up his uneventful life. A few days after the assassination, Svoboda himself observes that his hands are still shaking in spite of sedatives. He is not a professional assassin but only an ordinary man who accomplishes a daring feat.

Reinhard Heydrich. Pompous and omnipotent power monger is potentially akin to domineering Lang master villains like Hadji from *Spies* (1928). Instead of further exploring this bossy character, Lang does

away with him after a few minutes. Gestapo chief Haas remains the sole representative of a top level Nazi administrator for the rest of the film with a less exaggerated portrayal that contributes to realism.

Mascha Novotny. Soon to marry music student leads a quiet life prior to the fateful encounter with Svoboda at the marketplace. By providing him with shelter on the night of the assassination, she and her family make themselves targets of the Gestapo.

Stepan Novotny. Mascha's historian father is a former revolutionary who is no longer politically affiliated. He is selected as one of the four hundred hostages held captive as a reprisal for the assassination.

Investigator Alois Gruber. Corrupt and promiscuous alcoholic happens to be a brilliant police detective. He unveils the mystery around the assassination but is killed before he can share his findings.

Emil Czaka. The beer magnet is a collaborator of the occupational authority. Not only does he snitch information about the resistance, he seeks ways to harm it. Once it is certain that Czaka is the traitor, the resistance frames him in an elaborate scheme as Heydrich's assassin.

Investigator Ritter. Unlike Gruber, Ritter wears a uniform and derives sadistic enjoyment from interrogating—and by implication, torturing prisoners. Ritter acts ridiculously and is obsequious in the presence of Chief Haas—but terrifies the detainees when he shows up with his whip.

Jan Horak. Mascha's fiancée is a chemist. He is not affiliated with the resistance and seems to have a neutral political stance. Gruber exploits his jealousy for Mascha in order to reveal the essence of her relationship with Svoboda. Jan eventually ends up picking a side and assaults the investigator.

Chief of Gestapo Kurt Haas. Gruber and Ritter's supervisor is the chief of Prague's Gestapo. Monocled Haas sports an iron cross medal on his SS uniform. The reserved Gestapo chief holds the ropes in the system of oppression but personally displays none of the eccentricities of his subordinate Ritter. As the methodical and ruthless bureaucrat who casually destroys human lives, he is closer to the monstrous administrator personified by Heydrich himself. Historically, the occupant of this post was Karl Hermann Frank who was executed as a war criminal.

Dedic. The leading figure in the resistance dies shortly after being shot by Czaka's bodyguard.

Bartos. With his squinty eyes, Bartos is a somewhat sinister looking mid-level operative in the resistance movement. The actor Byron Foulger had a successful career cast either as respectable officials or slimy characters with dark intentions. Here, he displays bits of both.

Beda Novotny. Stepan takes care to raise Beda as a patriot. Young Beda is loosely based on "Ata" Moravec whose mother provided shelter to the paratroopers prior to the assassination. "Ata" confessed to their place after extreme torture (Lisciotto).

SYNOPSIS

In 1942, Hitler's top henchman and SS bigshot Reinhard Heydrich implementing an oppressive policy as the chief administrator of Czechoslovakia—he is cruelty personified. In spite of the heavy-handed rule and the omniscient Gestapo informants, Czech resistance fighters resiliently organize and deliver a critical blow to the Nazi regime—Heydrich is assassinated in Prague. Vanek the assassin desperately tries to hide while the SS leave no stone unturned to locate Vanek the assassin, who seeks temporary shelter in the home of Mascha Novotny, a young woman he meets at the corner store. Mascha's father is an intellectual sympathetic to the resistance—he is soon arrested by the Gestapo as part of a reprisal policy and placed in a concentration camp, awaiting execution, unless the residents of Prague turn in the assassins. Professor Novotny is killed by a firing squad in spite of his daughter's efforts to save him. Corrupt Gestapo investigator Ritter relentlessly pursues Vanek and identifies him; he is killed as he attempts to apprehend him. The resistance fighters ultimately frame the wealthy brewer and Nazi mole

Czaka as the assassin. He is murdered by the Gestapo, whose officials (the replacement of Heydrich, representing Kurt Delauge in real life) play along with the resistance's version of events to cover up their failure to catch the real assassin.

SCENES



Prague's upper crust has assembled at the Czedrin castle for an address by the protector of Bohemia and Moravia Reinhard Heydrich. As they wait for the Reichsprotector in the reception hall, the subservient elites try to commingle with officials of the occupational authority only to get sharply rebuked. A timid demand for better pay for the workforce is met with racist remarks. A senior Czech general is among the collaborators but he also ends up being a hostage.



A German administrator chides them about instances of sabotage and provides proof with subversive handouts calling for lowering production. Another one criticizes Czech industry leaders for failing to raise sufficient infantry units that would be deployed against the Soviet Union. An industrialist apologetically explains that the workers' pro-Soviet inclinations make the task difficult. At this point SS General Heydrich makes a grand entrance.



Brimming with arrogance, he barks orders, issues threats and humiliates those present. He drops his baton just to watch Czech General Votruba pick it up in ignominy. Heydrich talks in German and parts of his speech are translated by other people present. The core of his message concerns the Skoda Works. He declares that the control of the manufacturing plant will be in the hands of Gestapo. With this, he leaves behind an appalled audience and heads to the factory with his entourage. "Skoda" he gruffly commands the driver and this will be the last word we hear from him. Heydrich, played by Hans Heinrich von Twardowski; Instead of further exploring this bossy character, Lang does away with him after a few minutes.

Next scene shows the town square with a taxi car parked close by. German military police get suspicious about its running engine and arrest the driver for sabotage. A moment later, a man comes running, quickly changes his clothes and starts looking for that particular taxi. The connection with the Heydrich episode will soon become apparent—this is the aftermath of the assassination which has taken place off-screen and the man is Vanek the assassin. A young woman grocery shopping at the corner store tells him what happened to the taxi's driver. He takes cover as a troop of soldiers rush to the scene. To his relief, she misdirects the Nazis.

With his getaway vehicle gone, Vanek seeks refuge in a movie theater where the screening of a naturalist film is in progress. Not before long, the silence of the auditorium is broken, initially by whispers and then by people loudly talking, circulating the news that Heydrich has been assassinated. They start applauding and an individual wearing a swastika armband tries to hush the crowd. Someone knocks the lowly Nazi kommissar out and the cheerful crowd buoyantly leaves the theater. Meanwhile, the occupational authority declares a state of emergency. A curfew will be in effect shortly and Vanek's prospects of finding shelter diminish.

The woman we saw earlier buying groceries is now at her home. Mascha Novotny is a music student who lives with her parents and teenage brother Beda. Her fiancée Jan has dropped by for a visit but has to leave promptly because of the seven o'clock curfew. Mascha's father Stepan Novotny is a former history professor and revolutionary who has been apolitical for years. She tries to converse with him about the encounter with the stranger running away from the police. Stepan advises caution and discourages her from talking about the incident.

Just after Jan leaves, Vanek shows up at Novotny's door. He has been unable to find anywhere to stay and requests Mascha's help. To her parents he blurts out a lie about being an architect and having met Mascha at the symphony. Stepan is alarmed and seems to be well aware of Vanek's real identity but invites him to dinner nonetheless.

The family and their guest tune in to the radio. Much to everyone's distress, the occupational authority's news bulletin announces that anyone aiding the assassin would be executed together with their relatives. It turns out that Stepan is not that detached from politics—he quietly retires to his room and listens to the station of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile. The alternative narrative is celebratory about the "daring execution of Hangman Heydrich" but also augurs that it "is expected to be followed by a bloodbath as savage as only the Nazi barbarians can be".

At the Gestapo headquarters, the ominous tone of the official radio broadcast is received with skepticism by Investigator Gruber. Corrupt police investigator Ritter's office is decorated with artworks and antiques, in this scene, a Venus Pudica statue is seen in the background.



The plain-clothes detective Gruber's appearance is quite distinct from the other two Nazi officials who don SS uniforms. Investigator Ritter is a sadistic torturer with an uncanny resemblance to Heinrich Himmler. The younger Haas is a reserved and menacing bureaucrat. He is the supervisor of both investigators as the chief of the Gestapo in Prague. The trio of Nazi officials scrambles to capture the assassin by whatever means necessary. The taxi driver who was arrested earlier commits suicide in order not to reveal information about Svoboda, which leaves Gestapo without strong leads. Ritter tries to get the greengrocer Mrs. Dvorak to tell what and whom she saw that day.



Chief of Gestapo in Prague Haas is a cold bureaucrat; his assistant Investigator Ritter enjoys torture. These officials (as well as Heydrich himself) are represented as gay or effeminate. In an interview, Lang—referring to a scene with Haas playing with his pimple in the presence of Mascha Novotny—mentions that this was intentional (Bogdanovich, 6).



Occupational authority's threats begin to materialize as hundreds of Czech men are arrested and sent to a concentration camp. They are to be executed daily in groups until someone turns in the assassin. Also, it is announced that a large reward is to be paid to the prospective informer. A group of hostages are taken from the camp barracks to be executed.



Unconnected with his hosting of Svoboda, the name of Stepan Novotny has also been included in the list of hostages. When a Gestapo detachment arrives at the Novotnys' in the morning in order to arrest him, the professor is in the company of students whom he has been tutoring from home. Thanks to the presence of this group of men, Vanek is able to sneak out quietly and Stepan is taken to the concentration camp. In their last meeting in the prison camp, Professor Novoty's daughter Mascha memorizes his message to his son Beda.



Mascha desperately tries to find a way to save her father and starts looking for Vanek who has suddenly vanished. Thanks to a couple of cues, it occurs to her that he might be a man of medicine. When she visits the hospital, Mascha finds out that Vanek indeed works there and he is in fact a surgeon named Svoboda. Although he seems to be genuinely troubled about the lives of the four hundred hostages, Doctor Svoboda offers no help. In her dismay, Mascha decides to report him to the police and heads out to the Gestapo. At the mention of her destination, she is obstructed by the horse taxi driver and hostile civilians who happen to be around. Taking her for a Nazi mole, the crowd tries to lynch Mascha and she is saved by the arrival of the police who escort her to the Gestapo headquarters.

Gestapo interrogation scenes stop short of showing graphic violence and leave it to the imagination. In this scene Investigator Ritter enters the vault—apparently used as an interrogation room—cracking his whip.



Once in the building, Mascha has second thoughts. She attempts to leave but ends up drawing more attention to herself. Not before long, she is associated with the mystery woman at the marketplace who was seen talking with the assassin. The grocery seller Mrs. Dvorak is subjected to torture but does not confirm that the woman was indeed Mascha. Meanwhile, the Novotny home is ransacked and all the family members are brought in for extensive interrogation. No information is revealed and Gruber decides to release them all, speculating that a free Mascha might lead them to Svoboda. The doctor thwarts Gruber's suspicions by the testimony of colleagues stating that at the time of the assassination he had participated in a surgery.

The Gestapo aims not only to capture the assassin but also get the society to condone and betray him. There are traitors—beer lover Investigator Gruber is tipped by the mole and beer brewer Czaka. Meanwhile, the Czech resistance strives to save their comrade besides proving to the world that the entire community stands united behind him.



At the concentration camp, an inmate pens the poem "No Surrender" that the others endorse as an anthem and recite collectively. Not all prisoners share the defiant spirit; nonetheless, coercion does not seem to be bringing about the outcome that the Nazis predicted. In the city, members of the underground gather for a clandestine meeting at a warehouse. Individuals from different walks of life debate subversive methods and share their experiences with industrial sabotage—the cold and realist portrayal of the Resistance fighters anticipates Jean-Pierre Melville's *Army of Shadows*.



Among the participants is the owner of the Czaka beer brewery. Sugarcoating his long speech with appreciative remarks about the assassination, Emile Czaka eventually proposes that the best way forward for the community will be by handing over Heydrich's assassin to the authorities right away.

The strange proposal surprises all those present and the ring leader Dedic "the Uncle" is left pondering whether Czaka is a traitor. The wealthy brewer had been the object of suspicion once again in the past but was cleared of the charges because he did not fit the profile of that particular snitch who knew German. Dedic and his cohorts devise a scheme to test whether Czaka actually understands German. The beer magnet is invited for lunch at Café Kramer where underground figures plan to test his loyalty. The idea is to have him listen to a joke told in German and observe him for any signs that would show he understands it.



Czaka himself is well aware of the animosity he has generated and receives the invitation with apprehension. He heavily bribes Investigator Gruber to secure two plain-clothes police bodyguards to tail him. During the lunch at the café, as Dedic had arranged, a waiter starts narrating “a Hitler joke” in German. With the utterance of the punch line, Czaka bursts out laughing. Now certain that he is the traitor who has been fooling them for so long, his former associates fiercely attack Czaka. A melee ensues and the brewer is saved by his bodyguards who shoot some of the assailants and arrest the rest. Dedic is badly wounded but manages to run away and hide in Svoboda’s apartment. With his identity compromised, Czaka viciously joins the Gestapo interrogations of the resistance members.

Meanwhile, the occupational authority mandates the hostages to address the public with a national radio broadcast. The task sows discord among the inmates. More than a few of them come forward, willing to read the announcement and even offer contributing to it with ideas of their own. The commandant wants to hear none of that and orders that the selected individuals simply read out a text prepared in advance. Overall, the broadcast effectively divides the city. Glimpses of daily life show some citizens arguing in favor of the ‘plain commonsense’ solution of turning in the assassin since only that could put an end to collective punishment. Suffering increases even more when Heydrich finally dies and executions of hostages become more frequent.



Led by the relentless Gruber, the police follow the trail of the wounded Dedic and arrive at Svoboda’s apartment. To their surprise, they find Mascha and Svoboda in what appears to be a romantic rendezvous. Mascha strikes a Venuz Pudica pose, similar to the sculpture in Ritter’s office, when the Gestapo raids her apartment. Mascha and Svoboda cling to the scenario of a secretive love affair to be the exclusive nature of their relationship. To sort things out, Gruber cunningly invites Mascha’s fiancée to come and confront the couple. Mascha and Svoboda continue to frustrate Gruber even in the presence of Jan.



Later, the observant Gruber has a moment of revelation about Mascha and Svoboda’s love affair being a facade staged to mislead him. The investigator ties the remaining knots and realizes that at the time of the assassination, fellow resistance member Doctor Pillar had substituted for Svoboda while the latter was ambushing Heydrich’s car. He confronts the doctor at the hospital but is killed by Svoboda and Pillar after a ferocious fight. This scene is an examples of James Wong Howe’s cinematography hinting at film noir: Gestapo Investigator Gruber cornered by Czech Resistance members in a locker-room.



The resistance mobilizes to frame Czaka as the murderer of Heydrich. The key role in the conspiracy falls to Mascha and she willingly cooperates. She claims that Czaka was the man seeking a taxi on that historic day at the town square. The brewer is bewildered as scores of witnesses show up, only to confirm her allegations and refute his testimony about the day of the assassination. The search of Czaka’s house unearths damning evidence—a gun with the caliber matching Heydrich’s wounds and investigator Gruber’s corpse in the coal cellar. Czaka is decisively framed as the murderer of both Heydrich and Gruber. Mascha is released and Czaka is arrested. Under the cover of darkness, Czaka is shot by the Gestapo and dies on the steps of the cathedral. The street execution of the traitor Czaka scene is another example of James Wong Howe’s cinematography hinting at film noir.

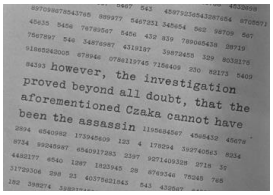


Mascha’s acquittal has no bearing on the predicament of her father. Stepan Novotny is executed by a firing squad with the next batch of hostages. The film’s ending shows masses paying respect to the heroes of the Resistance—*Hangmen Also Die!* stops short of directly addressing the Holocaust)

The finale shows the Gestapo Chief Haas reporting to Heydrich's successor—the real-life occupants of their posts were respectively Karl Hermann Frank and Kurt Daluege. Resistance fighters have successfully framed Czaka for the Heydrich assassination; to cover up their failure to identify the real culprit, Gestapo officials act like they believe that to be the case—that Czaka was indeed behind Heydrich's assassination.



What follows is a Lang motif: parts of the encrypted report are revealed to give an idea about the content of the message. The coded text reveals that the occupational authority went along with the theory of Czaka being the assassin only to save face, since they could come up with no other explanation themselves. An intertitle reads "*Not*—the end" while the choir of inmates chanting the "No Surrender" anthem can be heard.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Mascha Novotny – **Conscientious** (Guided, Politically Engaged, Venus Pudica)
Professor Stepan Novotny – **Conscientious** (Resolute)
Investigator Alois Gruber – **Rational**
Emile Czaka – **Disagreeable** (Laughing)

MASCHA NOVOTNY

The story begins with Mascha saving Svoboda from pursuing soldiers. Her bold action shapes the events and her family suffers the consequences. She also becomes a key player in the conspiracy against the mole Czaka. The historic context aside, Mascha is a complex leading female character.

Guided. She appears a few times receiving supervision and instructions. For example, her father advises Mascha to tell no one about the encounter with Vanek at the town market. When she seems unconvinced, he repeats himself, this time pointing to the entry for *no one* at the dictionary. Later, Svoboda decides to help the Novotny family and visits Mascha for a talk. The problem is that Gestapo has wire tapped her home and the investigators are eavesdropping on their conversation. So Svoboda shows her flash cards indicating the appropriate question or remark. The idea is to make their audience believe that they are in love and that is all there is to it in their relationship. Svoboda prompts her to say "you killed all feelings I had for you" followed by "tell me the truth!", then he proceeds with his response. This way he steers her towards the appropriate dialogue that would keep the Gestapo at bay.

Politically engaged. In the opening marketplace scene, it is her brave decision to misdirect the German soldiers looking for the assassin that saves Svoboda. While Mascha may not necessarily be apolitical, she is initially distant to the Czech resistance movement. She berates Svoboda that he is "a coldblooded coward no better than Heydrich himself. Even the Gestapo couldn't be as inhuman as you are". Her terror at the Gestapo headquarters is on a par with the previous scene where she is almost lynched by a crowd of enraged Praguers. She is gradually transformed, mainly due to witnessing her father's patriotic resolve. In the first days at the camp, Gruber stages a mock execution of the professor and lets Mascha visit him in order to get her to talk. During the visit, Stepan vocalizes a letter for his son—since it would not pass the censor—for her to convey to Beda. The powerful message and oration are intended for Beda but they indirectly transform her. Even though she thinks that the execution would really take place, Mascha firmly rejects Gruber's call for cooperation in exchange for halting it. She subsequently volunteers to assist the resistance in the Czaka conspiracy.

Venus Pudica. One of the life-size marble sculptures in Gruber's office stands in a Venus pudica pose, covering her nude body with her hands. Mascha strikes a somewhat similar pose in a later scene at Svoboda's apartment where Gruber and his men arrive after following Dedic's trail. The wounded Dedic hides behind a curtain while Svoboda and Mascha stage a lovers' scene to draw attention away from him. When Gruber bursts in the bedroom, he finds Mascha standing and holding a robe. She looks embarrassed and tries to cover her body with it. A moment later she briefly moves to reveal that she is in

fact fully dressed—possibly in order to conform to moral codes—but Gruber tells her to stay still holding the robe. He proceeds to question Svoboda while Mascha stands in the background. Her sexuality is abruptly highlighted just as she becomes politically engaged.

PROFESSOR STEPAN NOVOTNY

Stepan advises his daughter Mascha to be discreet but he himself can barely restrain his political criticism.

Resolute. At the concentration camp barracks, pressure from the Nazis soon leads several hostages to switch sides. A newspaper editor and several other hostages energetically argue in favor of the Nazi position that the assassin must be collectively denounced. Most notable among them is Votruba, a senior army general whom we had seen at Heydrich's reception sporting a chest full of military decorations. General Votruba even volunteers to write the text of the hostages' broadcast to the nation. On the other hand, the priest and Professor Novotny emerge as the ones with the highest personal courage. While the operatives of the underground are mostly people of action, Stepan Novotny symbolizes the ideology behind the resistance.

INVESTIGATOR ALOIS GRUBER

Gruber is intelligent and perceptive but he is also corrupt, happily extorts Czaka for bribes, and evidently stashes stolen art in his office where he flirts with female Gestapo clerks. Gruber is seen either drinking his favorite Czaka beer or has already left behind a trail of several empty bottles.

The investigator chooses not to speak German in order to better mingle with the people he polices (in the language regime of the film, this entails that he speaks broken English). A large group photo behind his chair suggests that he may be a veteran of World War I. Gruber doesn't seem to care much about politics and doesn't even bother with the Hitler salute.

<u>Parallels</u>

With his fine black moustache, hat and bowtie, the investigator's appearance may draw a comparison to Agatha Christie's Detective Poirot. He shows traits common with the detectives from Lang's earlier films. Investigator Lohmann in *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* would make effective use of institutional archives and files of citizens. At his disposal, Gruber has a totalitarian version of such a resource, an indexed database of personal profiles compiled mostly with agents' reports. Gruber reminds of Investigator Wenk from *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* who would tour Berlin's nightclubs, gambling and drinking with the objective to spot Mabuse. Gruber is similarly enthusiastic to use atypical methods. After getting Jan to witness the—unbeknownst to him—staged love affair between his fiancée and Svoboda, he reckons that if intoxicated sufficiently, the staggered Jan might divulge something to incriminate her. He takes him out to an evening of cabaret entertainment which continues at his home in the company of prostitutes. Despite his lack of morals, it will become apparent that Gruber is the best detective the Nazis have.

EMILE CZAKA

With his jowly face, the wealthy brewer looks innocuous—except when he does his best to dismantle the resistance and ruin lives. The Nazi mole enthusiastically contributes to the suffering of his compatriots by offering names to be included in the list of hostages. Then, with his large boutonnière and striped pants, the jovial Czaka resembles an evil clown. The actor Gene Lockart's career alternated between playing stately or dignified characters and cowardly villains as he portrayed in *Algiers* (1938).

Laughing. The key moment in film is the underground's set-up at the Café Kramer. Czaka laughs hard at the joke in German and the loud laughter betrays his knowledge of the language. This lets Dedic and the others ascertain that he is the traitor. Then the entire city unites against him and he is faced with a hail of lies. The conspiracy to frame him for the murder is so thorough that at his last moments he

appears as a victim—not unlike Peter Lorre's Beckert in *M* being hunted and persecuted by the underworld.

THEMES

Politics – (Representing History: The Case of Heydrich, Realism, Propaganda, Poetry and Ideology.
Language and Translation, Representing Violence, The Holocaust)

POLITICS

Representing History: The Case of Heydrich. The news of the assassination of a top Nazi engrossed popular culture. Even the comedy duo Laurel and Hardy's "Air Raid Wardens" (1943) made a reference to it in an unrelated story—a small town's magnesium plant is targeted by a German spy ring and Don Costello plays one of the chief saboteurs named Heydrich. While early films focused on operation Anthropoid and the fate of the village of Lidice, throughout the decades unwavering interest in the subject and the historic figure has resulted in a variety of films, with some in unlikely genres.

Parallels

Among the early depictions of the operation and its repercussions was Douglas Sirk's *Hitler's Madman* (1943). It was produced by Seymour Nebenzal who was the producer of Lang's *M* and *the Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. Director Sirk was somewhat faithful to the actual events. The film opens with a Czech resistance fighter airdropped into Czechoslovakia by allied aircraft. The story takes place mostly in a rural setting—the village of Lidice—with the Czech commando indoctrinating and mobilizing the villagers. The assassination is the result of their joint effort and takes place towards the end of the film on a country road. Until he is wounded, John Carradine's Heydrich has substantial screen time. He shows that he abhors free thinking by berating a philosophy professor and then proceeds to select "comfort women" for the troops in the Eastern front from amongst the students. Heydrich also shows his contempt for religion by insulting a priest and then having him shot. Finally he appears in his last moments, fearful, frustrated and in agony. The film ends with the destruction of Lidice. *Hitler's Madman* was inspired by Edna St. Vincent Millay's ballad "the murder of Lidice". The same year, a British short film *The Silent Village* retold the tragedy of Lidice as if it was a village in Wales under German occupation.

Heydrich and his role in the Holocaust have continued to be addressed by works of fiction. The infamous meeting that took place in a Wannsee villa in January 1942 just a few months before the assassination is the subject of *die Wannseekonferenz (*1984). Dietrich Mattausch plays Heydrich presiding over the Wannsee Conference, a gathering of bureaucrats from various ministries, lawmakers, SS functionaries and representatives of government agencies. As Heydrich's subordinate, Adolf Eichmann was the secretary of the meeting. Except for the small talk and occasional bureaucratic infighting, the film's script is mostly comprised of the minutes and it is a real-time reenactment. *Die Wannseekonferenz* is a case study in Hannah Arendt's concept of "banality of evil". Sleek, courteous and articulate individuals chat, joke, laugh and feast while they design the mechanism for murdering millions. The film was remade by Kenneth Branagh as *Conspiracy* (2001)—substantially more dramatized with Schubert's music, an oddly masterful Adolf Eichmann character and an overstated Heydrich by Branagh himself.

Among the actors to portray Heydrich were Martin Held in *Canaris* (1954) a story that focused on the career of intelligence chief Wilhelm Canaris and Siegfried Loyda in *Atentat* (1965) from communist Czechoslovakia. David Warner portrayed him in the series *Holocaust* (1978). He reprised the same role in *Hitler's SS: Portrait in Evil* (1985) which has a remarkable scene with Heydrich orchestrating the Night of the Long Knives from the headquarters while Hitler personally leads the SS on a murderous attack on the SA leadership. A gratified Heydrich sits at his desk and uses name cards to decide which individuals are to be murdered or spared.

In the 2010s, Detlef Bothe was cast twice as Heydrich in *Anthropoid* (2016) and *The Butcher of Prague* (2011) which focused on the horrible atrocities that befell Lidice. Most recently, Jason Clarke played the

part in *The Man with the Iron Heart* (2017) based on Laurent Binet's 2010 novel *HHhH*—acronym for 'Himmler's brain is called Heydrich'.

As an art-house precursor of the Nazisploitation—Nazi exploitation—film cycle, Tinto Brass directed the controversial *Salon Kitty* (1976). Inspired by Heydrich's SD intelligence agency operating a brothel, John Steiner's icy Biondo character orders the wire tapping of Salon Kitty in order to collect intelligence about its prominent patrons.

Among Hitler's paladins, the enigmatic Heydrich was one of the most powerful—he considered himself as a viable successor to the Fuehrer (Read, 749). The idea has fascinated popular imagination, as is evident in alternate history literature. Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) is set in a world where the Axis have won the war and Heydrich leads one of the political factions in Germany in 1962. The 2016 TV series was loosely based on it with Ray Proscia appearing as Heydrich. Robert Harris' 1992 novel *Fatherland* (adapted into film in 1994) is set in 1964. Germany has won the war and seeks to improve relations with USA. Heydrich (never featured) orders the assassination of all the participants of the Wannsee Conference. His objective is to wipe out traces of the Final Solution in order to improve relations with the USA.

Realism. "What are four hundred lives in a war of millions" asks Dedic in order to persuade Svoboda not to surrender to the police. The assassination was "only one battle in the war that they would carry on fighting". He assures the surgeon that "we 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. At times, the resistance fighters look baleful and act ruthlessly. The cold and realist approach anticipates Jean-Pierre Melville's *Army of Shadows* (1969) and its sombre look at French resistance in World War II. When Dedic succumbs to his wounds on the same day as Heydrich, Mascha is struck by the selfless nature of his sacrifice and asks whether his name could now be made public. Svoboda replies that Dedic will remain unknown until "one day school children will honor his name".

Propaganda. Modern communication technologies serve propaganda in *Hangmen Also Die!*. Radio and cinema are powerful media but their impact may be contested. The Novotny family and their guest Svoboda listen to the official narration of the breaking news from the radio during dinner. Moments later, Stepan tunes in to the Czech government-in-exile's broadcast to hear a completely different recounting of events. The following morning, Svoboda and Mascha hear the occupational authority's radio announcer boldly declare that the police are closing in on the suspects. The aggressive tone of the broadcast makes Svoboda think that it is little more than a bluff.

Two scenes highlight the subversive potential of a movie theater. Early on, running away from the police, Svoboda seeks refuge in the darkness of a packed auditorium. The screening of the film *Jarni Pisen* ("Spring Song") with its beautiful pastoral imagery is in progress. As the news of the assassination circulates, the passive audience suddenly transforms into a confident and politically charged crowd. A petty Nazi warden yells "stop the film!" but is powerless to deal with the situation. Later in the film the camera turns to a movie theater once again. The actual screening has not yet begun and the audience is made to listen to the hostages' plea to the public for turning in the assassin. Viewers get restless, stand up and engage in a heated debate, yelling at each other from across the auditorium.

Poetry and Ideology. Czaka accentuates poetry's political potential in a scene at the Gestapo headquarters. Investigator Gruber is busy compiling a list of names to be placed in the concentration camp as hostages. Czaka happens to be around and he jumps in suggesting a poet's name. Gruber is surprised because "he is not political, writes only folk ballads, children's poems and fables". "If it is your intention to Germanize the population" the mole responds, "that's exactly where you should begin—the children".

Czaka's reminder is in accordance with the previous scene showing the Novotny's at the dinner table with their guest Svoboda. Young Beda is worried about a tiny cut on his hand and Stephan wants to hearten him, so he recites lines from child's ballad "Sir Andrew Barton" (Wikipedia Contributors): "Fight on my

men, I am a little wounded but I am not slain". This is one of the instances when we see the professor inspire Beda with his patriotism. Next morning he will be taken to the concentration camp as one of the hostages. At the camp, poetry once again gets the spotlight as an inmate's poem uplifts morale and politicizes the prisoners— ultimately becoming the "No Surrender" anthem of the resistance.

Language and Translation. At one end of the language spectrum, Heydrich's opening monologue is entirely in German and only parts of it are translated by his audience. Some of the other Nazi officials, such as the camp commandant also speak mostly German. There are also some in-between cases. In the opening scene with Heydrich's reception, when he declares that Skoda would be run by the Gestapo, one of the local elites comes forward in panic and asks "gibt es eine better way? das ist not so drastic…". Similarly, the sign of the cabaret reads "Deutsches Cabaret: Czechs and dogs are not allowed". Hybrid use of language also occurs when Stepan Novotny uses German to express his cynicism when he mentions that for him "lecturing at the university is verboten". Primary Gestapo investigators speak fluent English with an accent and only rarely utter a few German words. Gruber explains that he intends to avoid speaking German and learn Czech in order to be more successful as a policeman in the Protectorate. In other words, accented English stands for Germans speaking Czech while lack of German accent implies that it is Czechs speaking their native tongue. Not exactly accent-free—reportedly Lang wanted American actors to use a Midwestern accent (Gemünden, 70) in order to make them more relatable for American audiences.

Representing Violence. "As an educated man, I am sure that you are capable of visualizing the unpleasant experiences ahead of you", Gruber intimidates a resistance fighter about to be interrogated. This could also serve as a tip for viewers. *Hangmen Also Die!'*s violence is by no means tamed—two graphic on-screen homicides (Gruber and Czaka), executions and the suicide of the taxi driver. Still, the Gestapo interrogation scenes stop short of showing graphic violence and leave it to the imagination. Bordwell explores Lang's approach in his analysis of Investigator Ritter's questioning of the greengrocer Mrs. Dvorak (Bordwell). Gestapo knows that she sold vegetables to the woman who exchanged words with the assassin and demands her confirmation that she was Mascha. The arthritic Dvorak stands exhausted before Ritter and places her hand on the back-rest of a chair for support. The piece dislocates and drops to the floor, after which she has to pick it up with great effort. Ritter delightfully watches her suffer—she would soon need to hold on to the back-rest again, it would fall, she would bend over to pick it up and this would continue as a cycle. According to Bordwell, the chair is a strategically placed object for the purposes of "visual-dramatic economy". When other persons enter Ritter's office—Mascha and Czaka—the chair reminds the viewer of this scene with Dvorak and becomes a substitute for a depiction of graphic violence.

The Holocaust. An early scene at the camp barracks shows that the hostages were selected to be representative of the whole society. As the guard calls out their names, he also shouts out identity tags: "Priest", "clerk", "worker", "writer", "general" and "Jew"—only the last one is not associated with the inmate's occupation. *Hangmen Also Die!* does not make any further references to the Holocaust and this an absent theme, which is striking in the representation of an individual like Heydrich who had a central role in the planning of the Final Solution.

Discussion Questions

Hanns Eisler and Bertold Brecht left USA as a consequence of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations. The actor Lionel Strander who had played the taxi driver in *Hangmen Also Die!* was blacklisted for being a communist. Co-writer John Wexley was also questioned by the HUAC particularly for dialogue in *Hangmen Also Die!* and blacklisted (Wexley was recognized as the writer of the screenplay by the Writers Guild and received sole credit [IMDB). Which specific scenes, themes or dialogue could have made the film the target of the committee and its anti-communist agenda?

In his *Mythologies* essay "Romans in Film" (Barthes, 28) Roland Barthes comments on the Roman characters in *Julius Caesar* (1953) and the film's seemingly superficial details. Almost all the characters sweat in the film, observes Barthes, which signifies intensive thinking. Hair style, even a little detail such as a curl on the forehead can come to become an essential part of the representation of Roman identity.

Contemporary popular signs may shape the audience's perception of the historic. How are various Nazi figures represented in *Hangmen Also Die*? How would Barthes' approach contribute to an analysis of the Nazis in *Hangmen Also Die!* and similar films?

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