

The Holy Gaze of Dr Caligari

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Religious themes and motifs are an inherent aspect of Expressionist films from the 1920s and 1930s. Christian and Germanic metaphors of fate and destiny were among the most frequently used religious motifs in German expressionist cinema. Furthermore, sacrifice, suffering, redemption, and allusions to messianic heroism were central to the cinematic narratives. After the tragedy of the Great War, with its millions dead, wounded, or psychologically scarred, practices such as psychoanalysis, dream therapy, the Occult, and alternative spiritualities became fashionable concerns and interests in European society. Expressionism, which began as a visual arts movement before the Great War, rose in popularity as a cinematic genre after the four-year global conflict. The emphasis on religious symbolism, spirituality, and fable, meant that expressionistic films were appropriately suited to religious themes. German paganism coupled with Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity, made for a rich syncretistic mix of religious symbols and themes that were indicative of post-war Europe. Religious themes were foremost in the minds of writers and directors during this time, with the production of classic expressionistic films such as *Metropolis*,¹ *Nosferatu*,² and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.³

The genre of European expressionism began prior to the commencement of the First World War. Originating as a visual arts movement, expressionism progressively influenced the disciplines of music, architecture, theatre, and finally cinema. German filmmakers began to harness expressionism as a cultural force to revive the nation after the war. In *A History of Modern Germany*, Dietrich Orlow states that the Weimar Republic's leaders were convinced that a spiritual and cultural regeneration would establish a foundation for Germany's 'return to greatness'.⁴ The Great War had considerably weakened the authority of standard practices and methods in the traditional disciplines of visual arts, architecture, music, and literature,⁵ forming a spiritual void in German society. The most pervasive theme in literature was a profound sense of cultural pessimism, which permeated the burgeoning art of cinema. The breakdown of imperial Europe after the Great War was the foundation upon which the expressionist movement flourished. Germany's defeat in the war fuelled the collapse of many social limitations, including the arts. With the abdication of the Kaiser followed the renunciation of the 'sentimental realism' so entrenched in German society during the Wilhelminian years. Expressionistic films of the 1920s and 1930s altered representations of traditional social boundaries.

German expressionist cinema harnessed religious and mythological beliefs to generate imaginary worlds. The experience of watching an expressionistic film in the 1920s and 1930s was an immersive one. Thomas Elsaesser describes his first viewing of Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in 1983 at the Royal Academy London, and subsequent screenings of F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* and *Faust*,⁶ and Fritz Lang's epic *Die Nibelungen*⁷ – commonly accompanied by a live orchestra and occasionally at outdoor venues – as 'an overwhelming visual and audio experience, attracting large enthusiastic audiences'.⁸ Elsaesser explains the effect expressionistic films had on him: 'I was confronted with hyper-real images saturated with sensuous-tactile surfaces, and the sets vibrated with inventive exuberance, flourish and verve'.⁹ The fact that the 1920s and early 1930s was the era of silent film enhanced the allegorical nature of expressionistic films. Silent films omit most, or occasionally all textual

¹ Fritz Lang: *Metropolis* [Metropolis], 1927.

² F. W. Murnau: *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* [Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror], 1922.

³ Robert Wiene: *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* [The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari], 1919.

⁴ Dietrich Orlow: *A History of Modern Germany: 1871 to Present*, Fourth Edition, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1999, 136.

⁵ *Ibid*, 137.

⁶ F. W. Murnau: *Faust* [Faust], 1926.

⁷ Fritz Lang: *Die Nibelungen* [The Nibelungen], 1924.

⁸ Thomas Elsaesser: *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary*, London, Routledge, 2004, 7-8.

⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

communication, as in Murnau's *The Last Laugh*,¹⁰ involving audience members in a more subtle narrative rooted in one's imagination. Consequently, there is an intensification of ambiguity, the extraordinary or mysterious, and a consolidation of the symbolic language between film and audience.¹¹ This figurative landscape was fruitful territory for expressionistic filmmakers' representations of religious and psychological themes such as fate, sacrifice, paganism, somnambulism, and the realm of dreams.

The notion of fate is central to Norse mythological narratives. Germanic religion focussed strongly on fatalism, and the inevitability of one's destiny. Any challenge or defiance in the face of fate, as we see in Greek myth, has no obvious parallels in Germanic religion. In Greek cosmology, a challenge to fate had devastating consequences. In Norse mythology, however, defiance of fate was a laudable attribute, which could be challenged by heroes because it affected the gods as equally as humans.¹² The importance of an eschatological narrative in Norse cosmology accounts for the centrality of fate in the Germanic worldview. Renowned scholar of religions, Mircea Eliade, states that the world's end is the final event in a long process: 'Destruction was already part of the Yggdrasill tree itself, whose leaves were devoured by a deer, whose bark was rotting, and whose root was eaten by the serpent Nidhoggr.'¹³ In the *Poetic Edda*, the 'axis mundi' of the Norse universe, Yggdrasill is 'the glorious Fate Tree that springs 'neath the Earth.'¹⁴ Even the gods cannot escape their destiny on the day of Ragnarök, when they all perish in a cataclysmic war against the giants.¹⁵

German expressionistic films of the 1920s and 1930s liberally employed these narratives of fate and destiny, suggesting how profoundly the belief in fatalism had infused the Germanic socio-cultural landscape in the twentieth century.¹⁶ Moreover, Siegfried Kracauer states that between 1920 and 1924, the German cinema completely neglected the theme of liberty. Instead, there was a persistent stream of films 'depicting the sway of unchecked instincts.'¹⁷ Post-war German society, asserts Kracauer, experienced a political dichotomy: either complete anarchy or absolute tyranny.¹⁸ Either choice appeared fatalistic to many Germans; therefore, the 'contemporaneous imagination resorted to the ancient concept of Fate. ...As an outcome of superior necessity doom at least had grandeur.'¹⁹ Freud argued that Weimar Germany's penchant for fate and destiny over luck or chance resided in the consequences of defeat in the Great War. In his influential work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud states that if death is imminent, then it is more comforting to believe in, and to submit to a 'remorseless law of nature...than to a chance which might perhaps have been escaped.'²⁰ In other words, according to Freud, there is more reassurance and consolation in the acceptance of fate, than to resign oneself to the 'anarchism' of chance.

¹⁰ F. W. Murnau: *Der Letzte Mann* [The Last Laugh], 1924.

¹¹ Paul Coates: *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 22.

¹² Anthony Winterbourne: *When the Norns Have Spoken: Time and Fate in Germanic Paganism*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004, 16-17.

¹³ Mircea Eliade, and Ioan P. Couliano: *The HarperCollins Concise Guide to World Religions*, New York, HarperCollins, 2000, 111.

¹⁴ 'Völuspá: The Soothsaying of the Vala', in Olive Bray (ed. and trans.), *The Elder or Poetic Edda: Part 1 – The Mythological Poems*, volume 2, New York, AMS Press, 1982, 277.

¹⁵ Eliade, *op. cit.*, 110-111.

¹⁶ If cinema in any way mirrors a culture's mindset, then Weimar Germany was enthralled with the themes of fate and destiny. Fritz Lang's 1921 classics *Der Müde Tod* [Destiny], and *Die Nibelungen* [The Nibelungen], were examples of that mindset, exploring the philosophical issues of the inevitability of destiny and death.

¹⁷ Siegfried Kracauer: *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, 88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* By 1932, many feared the political climate in Germany was on the verge of revolution. Most Germans believed their only choice of government was the German Communist Party, or Hitler's National Socialist German Worker's Party. Most feared the perceived anarchy a communist government would bring in its wake, so when many Germans voted for Hitler, they were actually voting *against* Communism.

¹⁹ Kracauer, *op. cit.*, 88.

²⁰ Sigmund Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (trans. and ed.), Peter Gay, London, Vintage, 1995, 616.

Made in 1919, amid the embers of the recently terminated Great War, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* set the standard for German expressionistic film throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Situated in the imaginary German town of Holstenwall, the film centres on an amusement park with rides and sideshows: a liminal place. The enigmatic Dr Caligari presents his sideshow to a passing crowd of 'Holstenwallians', rapidly attracting a gathering of intrigued onlookers. Caligari features a somnambulist named Cesare: a medium whose liminal existence (balanced between life and death) is on display to an engrossed assembly. 'Right before your eyes,' declares Caligari, 'Cesare will awaken from his death-like trance.'²¹ The doctor has confined Cesare in a coffin-like cabinet: imprisoned between life and death in a boundless limbo of homogeneous space.²² Like a ventriloquist, Caligari opens his cabinet and presents his 'puppet' to an enthralled audience. Once awakened, Cesare divines an audience member's future, personifying the wisdom of the dead. Freud formulates an interesting analogy between sleep and reality as he describes Strümpell's theory of the 'sleeping mind'. During sleep, the mind withdraws from the external world, leading to the misinterpretation of external stimuli. The intellect thus assembles an illusory world structured on indeterminate impressions.²³ Since Cesare is immersed in an interminable 'dark night', his perception of the world, according to Freud's theory, would be a distorted world not unlike Holstenwall.

These profound psychoanalytic undercurrents permeate Wiene's film. *Caligari* begins and concludes in an asylum: a framing technique, which, contrary to Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz's original story, was developed by Fritz Lang, and carried through to completion by director Robert Wiene.²⁴ Freud's psychoanalytic theory became a central concern among artists, writers, actors, and filmmakers. Many contemporary German writers and film critics, states Kracauer, 'encouraged the film makers to substantiate the specific possibilities of their medium by rendering not so much existing objects as products of pure imagination.'²⁵ Therefore, the idea of using mythic and imaginative themes for film 'was in harmony with the progressive German film theories of the time',²⁶ with German poets, writers, critics, artists, and even architects influencing filmmakers to incorporate these themes and to represent mystical worlds on camera. It was a general trend in Weimar Germany's creative circles.

The hallucinatory settings in Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* mirror the key theme of madness throughout the enigmatic narrative. The physical world of *Caligari* reflects the internal world of the insane individual. The sheer force of delusion elongates houses and streets. Light and shadow is manipulated until the former mimics the latter, and the audience is essentially disoriented. Even Cesare's figure gives the impression of being forcibly stretched and distorted in his black costume. Cesare does not resemble the inhabitants of Holstenwall; he echoes his environment in his bodily and facial contortions, and interaction with the dreamlike town. According to surrealist artists of the 1920s, Cesare was known as 'the emperor of the unconscious',²⁷ implying psychological associations to *Caligari*, and reinforcing the underlying themes of madness and delusion in the film.

Everything in *Caligari* seems trapped in a liminal dreamscape. There is little, if any, visual distinction between foreground and background elements. Characters occasionally blend into the sets and scenarios; Cesare's black face-paint mimics the jagged outlines of the background scenery and objects in Holstenwall. 'The world created', states Ellis, 'is that of a madman, a paranoid whose fears derive not only from the people and events around him, but

²¹ *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari*.

²² For an excellent study on the religious nature of sacred and secular places, see: Mircea Eliade: *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*, W. R. Trask (trans.), New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987.

²³ Freud, *op. cit.*, 316.

²⁴ Although the writers, Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz, fought vehemently against the inversion of their story, they failed to restore it to its original narrative. The original story was a polemic against the tyranny of authority. Framing the narrative resulted in an affirmation of authority, the exact opposite of the writers' intentions for the story.

²⁵ Kracauer, *op. cit.*, 28.

²⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²⁷ Coates, *op. cit.*, 36.

also from the shapes of nature, the town, a fairground, and an insane asylum.²⁸ The myriad uneven shapes, and distortions of light and shadow, accentuate the audience's sensation of cerebral displacement. Everything in Holstenwall is a distortion of the natural world.²⁹ Trees are malformed shapes against the pale firmament; bright street lamps exude pools of opaque shadow; streets meander and intertwine in a convulsion of positive and negative space, and houses are bizarre clusters of geometrical blocks balanced precariously against one another, which was a common technique in expressionistic films of the 1920s and 1930s.³⁰

The motif of the 'puppet master' and the 'slave-puppet' is not unique to *Caligari*. The theme of the 'puppeteer' is common to many German expressionistic films of the 1920s and 1930s.³¹ In *The Secret Life of Puppets*,³² Victoria Nelson reveals, through popular films and culture, the growing fascination with puppets and puppet masters throughout modern societies. The master-slave concept stems from a distortion and doubling of identity, depicted in films as a twin, or doppelgänger. Originally portrayed in Paul Wegener's influential 1913 film, *The Student of Prague*,³³ the importance of 'doubling' in these films is contemporaneous to the rise in popularity of psychoanalysis and dream therapy in early twentieth century Europe. As Catherine B. Clément states in *Charlatans and Hysterics*, 'identity is dispersed in reflections caught in mirrors... permanence is dissolved in stories that reverse themselves... the truth is fleeting.'³⁴ Likewise, the subject of puppetry and the doppelgänger is central to *Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *Metropolis*, and many other expressionistic films of the era.

Most attempts to define German expressionist cinema begin with the observation that the fantastic and the mythical are the beating heart of expressionist silent films. Expressionism in interwar Europe was not the only movement to convey a penchant for the fanciful and unreal. During the 1920s and 1930s, many echelons of German society expressed an attraction to the concept of the unconscious. The motif of a 'doppelgänger', or twin, was widely appropriated from earlier literature, as well as Wegener's *The Student of Prague*. As Patrice Petro claims, 'Even a cursory glance at the major literature on the Weimar cinema, and on *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari's* place in the history of the German film, reveals a preference for allegorical readings focused largely on the figuration of the split or multiple self and the terrifying double.'³⁵ These expressionist films explored 'the cinema as a medium for hypnotism, sleepwalking, and phantom shadows – as a medium for eliciting the fears and desires of a mass-cultural audience.'³⁶

Somnambulism is a recurring theme in many expressionistic films from the 1920s and 1930s. The religious undercurrent in somnambulism stems from the concept of the somnambulist as a medium, channelling the underworld and the realm of dreams. The somnambulist drifts between life and death, in an indeterminate state comparable to Cesare in Wiene's *Caligari*. For Freud, sleep, sleepwalking, hypnosis, telepathy, and dreams were manifestations of the

²⁸ Ellis, *op. cit.*, 89-90.

²⁹ Evidently, the visual designs for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* were the result of mishearing the name of Alfred Kubin as the artistic style of 'Cubism'. Janowitz, one of *Caligari's* writers, suggested that the settings be designed by a surrealist painter named Alfred Kubin, who was known for his haunting imagery. Wiene liked Janowitz's idea, but preferred three other expressionist painters: Hermann Warm, Walter Röhrig, and Walter Reimann. The miscommunication meant that the sets were designed in the cubist style, forever giving *Caligari* its uniquely recognisable look. See: Kracauer, *op. cit.*, 67-68; and also: Elsaesser, *op. cit.*, 61-62.

³⁰ Ellis, *op. cit.*, 89-90. The architecture in *Caligari* is quite similar to other expressionistic films of the 1920s and 1930, for example; Paul Wegener: *Der Golem* [The Golem], 1921.

³¹ This theme is not unique to early twentieth century cinema. Films such as *The Matrix* and *Ghost in the Shell* have narratives closely associated with the motif of the 'puppeteer'. See Andy and Larry Wachowski *The Matrix*, 1999; and Mamoru Oshii: *Ghost in the Shell*, 1996.

³² Victoria Nelson: *The Secret Life of Puppets*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2001.

³³ Paul Wegener: *Der Student von Prag* [The Student of Prague], 1913.

³⁴ Catherine B. Clément: 'Charlatans and Hysterics' in Mike Budd (ed.), *The Cabinet of Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, New Brunswick and London, Rutgers University Press, 1990, 203.

³⁵ Patrice Petro: 'The Woman, The Monster and the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari', in Mike Budd (ed.), *The Cabinet of Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*, New Brunswick and London, Rutgers University Press, 1990, 207.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 207.

intuitive mysteries of the unconscious mind. 'The state of sleep', argued Freud, 'seems particularly suited for receiving telepathic messages.'³⁷ This theory of telepathy during sleep mirrors the world of *Caligari*, in which Cesare, the somnambulist, seems to be under the hypnotic oppression of his 'puppet master', the eccentric Dr. Caligari, controlling his medium with a 'psychical counterpart to wireless telegraphy.'³⁸ The similar Freudian theory of 'thought transference', however, can perhaps better explicate the subjects of somnambulism and possession, which is so integral to the narrative structures of *Nosferatu* and *Caligari*. Describing both phenomena as implicitly occult in nature, Freud draws a link between somnambulism and religion. The concept of 'thought transference', argued Freud, states that thought processes in an individual, such as emotional states, cognitive impulses, and ideas, can be conveyed to others without employing the familiar methods of verbal and visual communication.³⁹ Hence, the puppeteer, or 'master', would directly control the puppet using 'thought transference'.

Sailing into America for the first time, Fritz Lang recalled the moment he conceived the idea for *Metropolis*. Standing on the deck of his ship as it cruised towards Manhattan Island at night, Lang saw 'a nocturnal New York glittering with myriad lights.'⁴⁰ While *Metropolis* impressed the German public, especially Hitler and Goebbels,⁴¹ many critics – such as H. G. Wells – judged Lang's film harshly, alluding to its supposedly naïve sentimentality and oftentimes-immature narrative.⁴² Nevertheless, *Metropolis* is one of the most overtly religious expressionistic films of the early twentieth century.

Lang's use of religious allegory in *Metropolis* is a layered mosaic derived from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and pagan beliefs. In the film, the city's greatest revelation of technological and scientific power is the 'New Tower of Babel': the 'axis mundi' of the *Metropolis* universe.⁴³ Situated in the centre of *Metropolis*, both as a physical object and the symbolic centre of the world, the 'New Tower of Babel' towers above all other buildings in the mega city. The top of the grand structure is reminiscent of a monarch's crown, indicative of the power wielded by the city's despot, Joh Fredersen. It resembles an 'urban crown', that is, a crown placed atop the largest and therefore most powerful architectural structure in *Metropolis*. This crown alludes to Jesus Christ's 'crown of thorns';⁴⁴ a metaphor that suggests the grandeur and power wielded by Joh Fredersen has been achieved through the suffering and sacrifice of the workers beneath the city. The edges thrust through empty space like the myriad sharp thorns protruding from the crown of the Christian Messiah. There are references to sacrifice and suffering here. Furthermore, an almost identical image exists in Ridley Scott's cult classic *Blade Runner*,⁴⁵ a distinctive homage to Lang's *Metropolis*. During an early scene in *Blade Runner*, Harrison Ford lands his flying car on the roof of a building that is remarkably similar to the 'New Tower of Babel' in *Metropolis*.

Another curious Old Testament motif in *Metropolis* is the inclusion of the ancient Hebrew deity 'Molech', to which humans were sacrificed. During his first expedition into the 'Machine Halls', Freder – the messianic saviour of the workers beneath *Metropolis*, and the personification of

³⁷ Sigmund Freud: *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, James Strachey (trans. and ed.), New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1989, 45.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 45.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 48-49.

⁴⁰ Kracauer, *op. cit.*, 149.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 164. Hitler and Goebbels, after watching *Metropolis*, were so enthusiastic about the film that Hitler approached Lang to tell him that, when the Nazis were in power, Hitler would want him to make the Nazis' films. Lang understandably declined.

⁴² Many film critics have ridiculed Lang's *Metropolis*, none more famously than H. G. Wells's review in *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 April 1927, where he begins his invective with: 'I have recently seen the silliest film. I do not believe it would be possible to make one sillier.' See Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann (eds.), *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, Rochester, Camden House, 2000, 94.

⁴³ *Metropolis*.

⁴⁴ For the Biblical story of the 'crown of thorns', and its reference to Christ's suffering, see *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1986, 807, John 19:1-5.

⁴⁵ Ridley Scott: *Blade Runner*, 1982.

the 'Heart'⁴⁶ – stumbles across a vast machine, manned by numerous workers, which appears in a vision to be the Old Testament god Molech. In his book, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, John Day states that Molech was a divinity 'to whom children were offered up in fiery sacrifices.'⁴⁷ Similarly, Freder's 'prophetic' vision reveals rows of entranced workers marching into the flaming mouth of an insatiable 'machine Molech'; a modern-day sacrifice to a contemporary adaptation.

In many German expressionist films of the silent era, there exists a strong motif of the demonic, satanic, or evil: usually expressed as an underlying theme of iniquity or sin within the overall narrative construct. Lang's *Metropolis* provides one of the formidable representations of the satanic. In writing the story of *Metropolis*, Thea von Harbou appropriated many religious and mythological beliefs and practices from various traditions. The character of Hel (Joh Fredersen's deceased wife, and Freder's mother) embodies a powerful bond to the Norse underworld. In the Norse pantheon, the goddess Hel rules the underworld, and is known as the goddess of death.⁴⁸ Freder's deceased mother was romantically involved with Rotwang, who tries to resurrect her using technology. 'In the middle of Metropolis', reads the inter-title, 'there was a strange house, overlooked by the centuries.'⁴⁹ Rotwang the 'inventor' resides in this peculiar house. On his front door is the symbol of a pentagram: a five-pointed star, which symbolises Rotwang's relation to sorcery and magic. Behind a great curtain in his house, is Rotwang's latest creation: the new 'Hel', arisen from her place in the underworld, in the form of a female robot. On the wall behind the seated robot, is an inverted pentagram, with the tip of the star pointing down indicating an inversion of virtuous powers. Rotwang's robotic creation, therefore, personifies an evil and iniquitous force in *Metropolis*: a reversal of the natural order of the world. This inversion of nature is further enhanced in the film by the narrative allusions to Rotwang's mechanical right hand, revealing that he has been mutated into part machine. He has sacrificed himself to darker powers in order to bring his dreams to fruition; comparable to Murnau's *Faust*.

Rotwang embodies the Occult, which is a major religious theme in *Metropolis*. His presence, however, calls forth a tradition of mysticism and alchemy, as is exemplified by his medieval scientific equipment, his strange and solitary house and existence, and the pentagram on the door to his house.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the film alludes to an explicitly satanic reference during the unveiling of the robot Hel; Rotwang's 'Frankensteinian' recreation of his long-lost love. Hel sits in a chair, with a large inverted pentagram on the wall directly behind her, suggesting malevolent powers, and the 'Faustian' sacrifice Rotwang has made to bring her to life. Mirroring Goethe's *Faust*, Rotwang has made a pact with satanic forces, symbolised by his mechanical right arm. In an attempt to validate his sacrifice, Rotwang questions Fredersen: 'Do you think that losing a hand is too high a price to pay for re-creating Hel?!'⁵¹

Tall, thin, rat-like in appearance, and moving in a slow gait as though possessed, *Nosferatu's* Count Orlok is reminiscent of Cesare in his demeanour. In a pivotal scene, the 'parasitic' vampire Orlok attacks Hutter, a real estate agent who has sold the Count a house opposite his own in Germany. The vampire looks as though hypnotised by an intangible presence; with eyes wide open, he shuffles towards the petrified Hutter. Murnau's measured use of shadow and light in this scene is a critical tool in expressionistic films of the 1920s and 1930s. In *Nosferatu*, shadows symbolise the encroaching evil of the plague: a religious reference to an 'ungodly' darkness seeping into Christian Europe from the dark depths of Eastern Europe's

⁴⁶ In *Metropolis*, Joh Fredersen's son, Freder, is the 'Mediator': a messianic figure that reconciles the Head and the Hands. The film opens with the somewhat naïve, yet pertinent epigram: 'The Mediator between Head and Hands must be the Heart!' – A source of much ridicule by critics claiming the script was immature and undeveloped.

⁴⁷ John Day: *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 29. The Old Testament alludes to the Molech cult originating from Canaanite fertility cults. For Biblical verses on Molech, see the Old Testament: *Lev. 18:21, 18:24-5, and 2 Kings 23:10, 16:3, 21:6.*

⁴⁸ Eliade, *op. cit.*, 110-111. See also: Olive Bray (ed. and trans.), *The Elder or Poetic Edda: Part 1, The Mythological Poems*, volume 2, New York, AMS Press, 1982.

⁴⁹ *Metropolis*.

⁵⁰ *Metropolis*.

⁵¹ *Metropolis*.

Carpathian Mountains. As Orlok's shadow seeps across the wall to Hutter's terrified figure, the threatening silhouette envelopes him completely, eclipsing God from his sight: 'Beware that his shadow weigheth not upon you like a terrible nightmare.'⁵² Concurrently, Hutter's wife, Ellen, rises from her bed. Sleepwalking, she balances on the balcony ledge, apparently hypnotised by the same evil presence manipulating Count Orlok. Ellen's eyes, like the vampire's, stare ahead into empty space as she screams, 'I must go to him. He is coming!',⁵³ with arms outstretched to the full moon, an allusion to the absence of light, or God; and an acceptance of the forces of darkness.

There are distinct Biblical references in *Nosferatu*, taken from the Old and New Testaments. Murnau's religious motif, however, is an inversion of a Biblical narrative. With Count Orlok's arrival in Germany comes an epidemic of plague. In *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror*, Paul Coates asserts that the plague-shedding rats, foreshadowing Orlok's arrival in Germany, symbolise the vampire's grotesque essence; 'The rats may be seen as his emissaries, but they are also the aspect of monstrous (unnatural) nature he seeks to shed so as to enter Western civilisation.'⁵⁴ With the Count's appearance in Germany, many people succumb to the rapidly spreading plague. Crucifixes are hurriedly drawn on the doors of houses infected with the plague. Likewise, the Jewish 'Passover' ritual, as revealed in the *Old Testament*, involves the sacrifice of sheep. The blood was smeared on the doors of houses that enacted the rite, as a protection against Yahweh's wrath. God warned Moses to protect the 'chosen people' from harm with a simple ritual: 'On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn...The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.'⁵⁵ While these Biblical allusions were common themes in expressionistic films, they were also conveying the socio-political and cultural concerns of pre-Hitlerite Germany. National Socialism would harness Germanic fatalism and the cult of the dead to devastating effect; and the world would suffer its consequences.

Expressionist films of the 1920s and 1930s contained various religious themes and ideas. These ideas were interspersed with socio-political and cultural commentary. Christianity and paganism, and themes of sacrifice, suffering, and salvation were fundamental issues in German Expressionist cinema. In addition to these religious motifs, the prevalent (and somewhat fashionable) themes of psychoanalysis and dream therapy were most important to Weimar Germany's expressionistic cinema. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, and F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* utilised a syncretistic mix of diverse religious and psychological themes to enhance their storylines. These films have a common bond in their strong reliance on religious, psychological, and social philosophies. Without these core religious beliefs underlying the cinematic narratives, expressionistic films of the 1920s and 1930s would cease to be expressionistic.

⁵² *Nosferatu*.

⁵³ *Nosferatu*.

⁵⁴ Coates, *op. cit.*, 94.

⁵⁵ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1986, 50, *Exodus* 12:12-13.