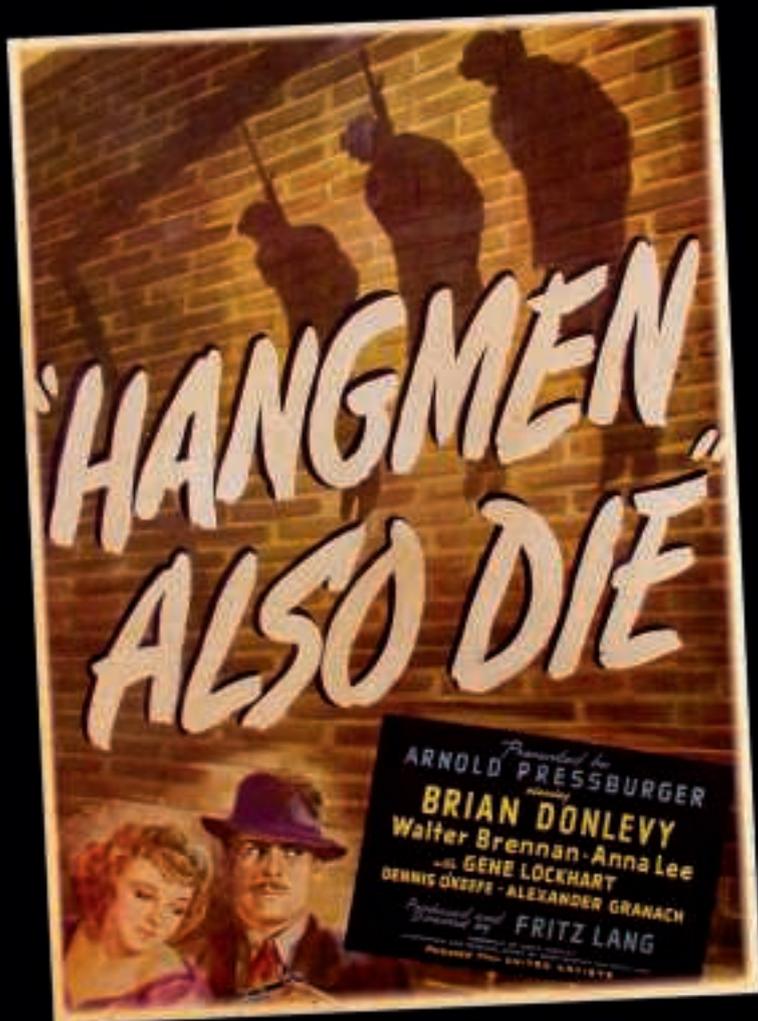


**HANGMEN
ALSO DIE!**

A FILM BY FRITZ LANG



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CAST & CREW

Arnold Pressburger Presents

Brian Donlevy
Walter Brennan
Anna Lee

in

HANGMEN ALSO DIE!

With

Gene Lockhart • Dennis O'Keefe • Alexander Granach
Margaret Wycherly • Tonio Stewart • Jonathan Hale

And

Hans Heinrich von Twardowski as Reinhard Heydrich

Screenplay by **John Wexley**
Adaptation and Original Story
by **Bertolt Brecht** (as Bert Brecht) & **Fritz Lang**

Director of Photography **James Wong Howe**
Art Director **William Darling**
Editor **Gene Fowler, Jr.**

Music by **Hanns Eisler** Conducted by **Arthur Gutmann**
Produced and Directed by **Fritz Lang**

NOT SUCH A MISMATCH AFTER ALL: FRITZ LANG AND BERTOLT BRECHT

by Gerd Gemünden

Between 1939 and 1946, the Hollywood film studios produced about 180 feature-length films that were explicitly made to unmask the anti-democratic aspects of fascism and the negative consequences for those who endure life under a fascist regime. These so-called anti-Nazi films shared a political agenda, certain representational strategies, and stereotypical characters in order to contrast the evils of totalitarianism with the humanistic freedom of American democracy. Message-driven films, they were nevertheless conceived to make a profit and entertain a mainstream audience. One of the most powerful anti-Nazi films that this short-lived cycle produced was *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943), directed by Fritz Lang and written by Bertolt Brecht. Produced by Arnold Pressburger, with a score by Hanns Eisler and starring Hans Heinrich von Twardowski as Reinhard Heydrich, as well as Alexander Granach, Reinhold Schünzel and Tonio Selwart in prominent roles, it was an exemplary exile production that combined blatant elements of propaganda and Brechtian didacticism with a suspense-driven narrative that successfully enveloped viewers. In contrast to most other films of the cycle, enemy characters were handled more ambiguously and Lang's modernist *mise-en-scène* challenged studio conventions. On an ideological level, *Hangmen Also Die!* highlighted the significance of collective thought and action, diminishing America's prized individualism. Equally important was Eisler's idiosyncratic music, which retained political messages that were curtailed in the script.

One of the most interesting aspects of the film's production was Brecht and Lang's contested collaboration. The difficulties between the two men stemmed from their different approaches to the function of film and propaganda in the fight against Nazi Germany. The tension that marked Lang and Brecht's collaboration ultimately resulted in a film that is better for its internal contradictions, its varying representational strategies, and its layered aesthetic registers. By and large, critics have been given greater attention to these altercations than the positive results of their collaboration. It is time to revise this assessment.

The differences between Brecht and Lang arose over a number of issues, some professional and some personal. They became most apparent in Brecht's posthumously published *Arbeitsjournal*, which details with acerbic wit the playwright's misgivings about the film's production rather than any sense of achievement – misgivings that he most

likely had never voiced openly at the time, since Lang (and others) professed disbelief when they came to light. To begin with, Lang and Brecht had a different understanding of what it meant to be a member of the American exile community, circa 1942. Lang had come to the US in 1934, after a short stopover in France, in the hope of continuing his highly successful Weimar career. (A visit to New York in 1924 had already convinced him that the future of filmmaking lay in this country.) In his first American film, *Fury* (1936), Lang demonstrated a commitment to a critique of social injustice in the U.S., an injustice to which he had been sensitised because of his experience of fascism in Germany. Lang sought to alert an ignorant and isolationist American public that racism, xenophobia, and prejudice could easily engender a fascist state. When Lang became an American citizen in December of 1939, he called it “the proudest day of his life” – surely a display of a newly found patriotism, but also a sigh of relief at having escaped Hitler's clutches. By the time the US entered the war, Lang clearly saw himself as an assimilated and naturalised immigrant who fought Nazi Germany as an American.

Brecht, in contrast, did not consider himself an exile or emigrant but rather a refugee, and continued to write in German for his desk drawer. Even after eight years of flight from Hitler, Brecht still thought of exile as a transitory state and was biding his time until it was safe to return to Germany, where he hoped to participate in rebuilding a democratic society. Poignantly summarising the difference between himself, the “*Flüchtling*” (refugee), and the immigrant Lang, who defended the American way of life, Brecht claimed, “[Lang] sees a special life style where i see only high capitalism.”

Unlike Lang, Brecht did not consider Los Angeles an obvious choice of place to continue a successful career, but rather the last stop in a migration that had begun in Denmark in 1933, and that had led him across Scandinavia and the Soviet Union, before arriving in San Pedro in July 1941. Brecht had favoured Los Angeles over the theatre capital New York as his American domicile at the urging of his friend Lion Feuchtwanger, who lured him with the prospect of selling his talents to the US film industry. Despite his misgivings about Hollywood, Brecht continuously wrote scripts, outlines and treatments throughout his six-year stay (more than 50 in all), which he hoped to sell to the film industry. Apart from Feuchtwanger, his collaborators included Salka Viertel and Charles Laughton, and he wrote one screenplay specifically for Peter Lorre. Yet except for *Hangmen Also Die!*, none of them ever made it onto the screen. Most Brecht scholars have considered these scripts and film stories insignificant and much inferior to the plays and poems written during his 15 years of exile. In this verdict they followed Brecht himself, who repeatedly called them bread-and-butter jobs that he pursued while scolding the industry for which they were written.



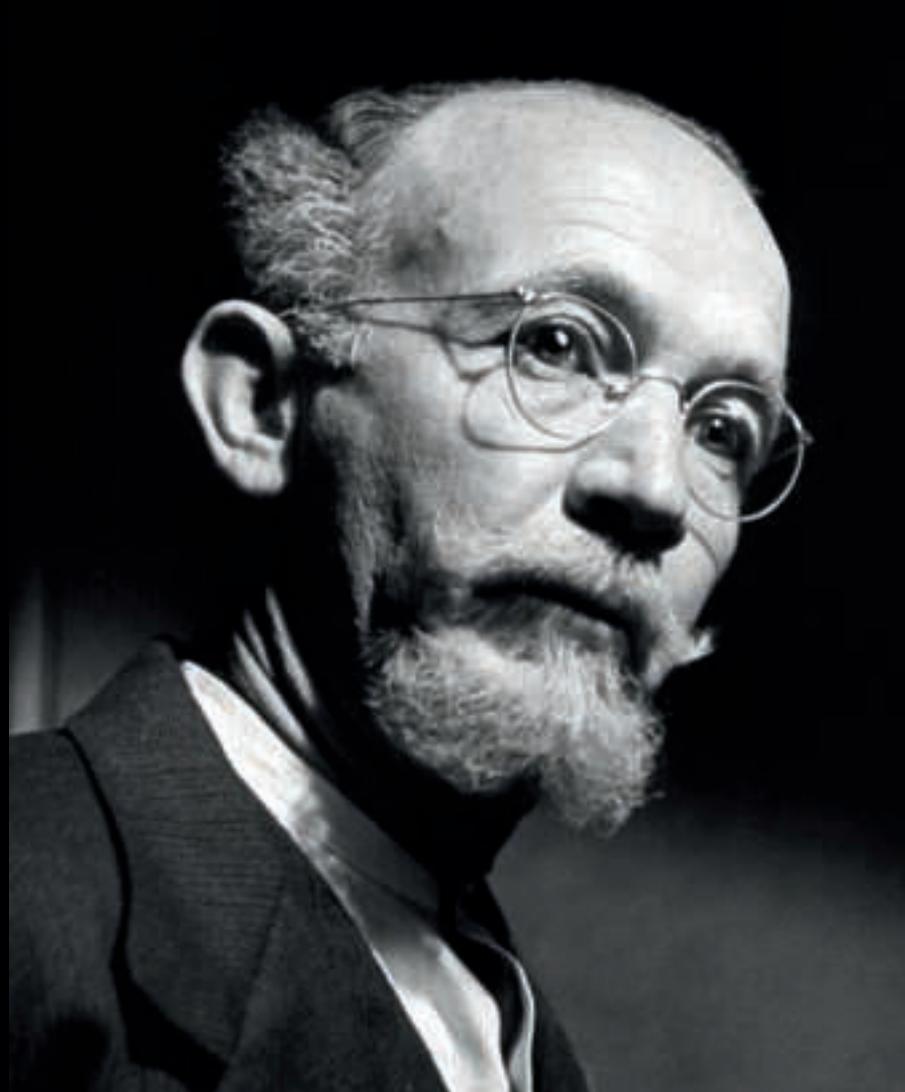
Yet Brecht's aversion to Hollywood has been exaggerated, both by himself and by critics who have followed his lead. When Brecht began writing scripts for Hollywood, he did not change careers but rather returned to his beginnings, which lay as much with film as with theater. Moreover, the German film industry of the late 1920s and early 1930s, particularly Ufa after Alfred Hugenberg's takeover, did not differ that significantly from 1930s Hollywood in ideology, output, product differentiation, the star system, and institutional hierarchies. Brecht's writings about his failed lawsuit in the wake of G.W. Pabst's 1931 adaptation of *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*) perceptively describe the German film industry's capitalist engine; the same engine also drove Hollywood, if in even more cut-throat terms. And while in the German film industry of the 1930s there was still room for a counter-cinema like Slatan Dudow and Brecht's *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), this was merely the exception that proved the rule.

Brecht's experience with the contradictions of the pre-Nazi German film industry prepared him well for what was expected of him in Hollywood, even if he always resisted catering to those expectations. Consider this anecdote from Salka Viertel's 1969 memoir, *The Kindness of Strangers*, in which she recalls working with Brecht on *Silent Witness*, a wartime story that was never produced:

"Brecht drove up one morning in his battered Ford and said that it was utterly ridiculous to have financial worries, when he and I could put our brains together and invent a saleable film story [...] 'Because what the producers want is an original but familiar, unusual but popular, moralistic but sexy, true but improbable, tender but violent, slick but highbrow masterpiece [...]' Brecht bit into his cigar and assured me that we could write our story in such a way that they would not notice what a highbrow masterpiece it was."

It is clear from Viertel's description that Brecht understood the contradictions and hypocrisy of the studio system quite well, and that with the aid of Viertel, a successful screenwriter for Greta Garbo, he hoped to break into the studio system. Brecht's strategy was to get into the belly of the beast without being chewed up in the process, to conform to Hollywood conventions without compromising his artistic integrity. Surely he knew what he was getting himself into when he signed on to work with Lang. More than money was on his mind when he agreed to co-write a script about the Heydrich assassination in Prague, for the didactic and propagandistic elements of the anti-Nazi film were in keeping with Brecht's long-standing interest in breaking down the barriers between art and politics.

Lang's and Brecht's collaboration was marked from the beginning as much by shared commitment as by creative dissent. After reading about the attempt on Reinhard Heydrich's







life in the *Los Angeles Times*, they immediately agreed that the focus of their story should not be on the actual assassination plot, but the reaction of the Czech population under Nazi duress. In a matter of weeks, they completed a forty-page outline entitled *437!! Ein Geiselfilm (437!! A Hostage Film)*, which contained the fully developed plot. A considerably longer version of the outline, a 95-page English-language treatment titled *No Surrender*, which Hans Viertel (Salka's son) translated, provided even more plot detail; its substance was almost entirely incorporated into the final film, except for the treatment's overtly happy ending. These two documents prove not only beyond doubt that John Wexley, an additional writer hired by Lang and Pressburger to help Brecht with his flawed English, contributed few original ideas, but also that Lang and Brecht had early on agreed on major plot lines, characters, settings, and themes. In light of this consensus, the subsequent dissonances diminished in importance.

These dissonances included certain approaches to mass scenes. Brecht's interest was to highlight the resistance of the Czechs as a collective rather than focusing on a single (heroic) individual (which Lang preferred, since it was the standard Hollywood formula), while also allowing for contradictions and unsympathetic traits among the Czechs. In a scene later cut by Lang, Brecht depicted the hostages as showing signs of anti-Semitism only minutes prior to their own execution. This scene, claimed Brecht, conveyed the startling and contradictory impact of totalitarianism on the population. Lang, however, felt that this complexity would be lost on most American viewers, who were not accustomed to mixed messages; indeed, he feared that it might undercut the film's propagandistic force. Lang was also aware that a film that emphasised the collective over the individual could renew suspicions that he was a Communist, which he had confronted a few years earlier. Yet Lang, too, was fascinated by mass scenes. His representations of lynch mobs in *Metropolis* (1927), *M* (1931), and *Fury* recur in *Hangmen*, significantly with a positive twist on mass agitation. Consider, for example, the scene in the movie theater, when the moviegoers break into spontaneous applause after news of the shooting of the Hangman makes its round.

Lang and Brecht also had different perceptions about the film's intended audience. The American population had virtually no knowledge of the nature of fascism, claimed Lang; the film must therefore facilitate an understanding of the terror spread by Nazism, even if that meant endorsing certain stereotypes and simplifying characters and historical facts, concessions that Brecht sharply criticised: "The American film has hardly progressed beyond the state of situational comedy and tragedy. The average lover, the average bad guy, the average hero, the average master mind is moved across certain situations." Instead, Brecht hoped to make a film that could also be used in post-war re-education efforts, a resolve that was of no interest to Lang, who had no plans for returning to Europe.

Serious differences arose over other issues, only some of which actually affected the film. One of them was salary. Brecht repeatedly asked Lang to intervene on his behalf with Pressburger for raises, which the producer considered blackmail and ultimately led him to side against Brecht in the Screenwriters' Guild credit arbitration (which Brecht lost). Casting decisions were another bone of contention. Brecht was banking on roles for exile actors in non-Nazi roles, lobbying on behalf of Oskar Homolka for the role of Czaka and for a small role for his wife, Helene Weigel, but Lang insisted that all Czechs should be played by native English speakers in order to strengthen identification with the citizens of Prague. This personal snub apparently hurt Brecht more than most other points of contention and may account for the derisory tone he adopted *vis-à-vis* Lang in his *Arbeitsjournal*. Yet it is also clear that in Hollywood, as in the pre-Nazi German film industry, casting decisions lay firmly with the director or producer, and never with the writer. For that reason, Brecht's hopes to have a say in the matter were unrealistic and unwarranted.

The final straw for Brecht was certainly Lang's cutting of the lengthy script with the help of yet another writer (after Pressburger moved up production by several weeks), in a procedure that corresponded to industry practice and not personal whim. This led to some of Brecht's strongest accusations against Lang. Lang, for his part, chose a conciliatory approach. Long after Brecht's death, he said, "I personally think that it will not be possible to write the very truth without calling Brecht untruthful and I ask myself if the whole thing is really so important to besmirch the memory of a fine and great writer, who was maybe carried away by his emotions."

Gerd Gemünden teaches Film and Media Studies and German Studies at Dartmouth College (USA). He has written on the New German Cinema, German exiles in Hollywood, and Stegfried Kracauer. He is currently completing a study of Argentine director Lucrecia Martel.





ABOUT THE RESTORATION

The restoration of *Hangmen Also Die!* was carried out by Cohen Film Collection at Pinewood by Philip Lee. The 2K restoration utilised a nitrate 35mm combined Fine Grain, safety 35mm duplicate combined negative and safety 35mm combined print. Additional digital clean-up was done at Modern Videofilm in Burbank, CA.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by Anthony Nield
Executive Producer Francesco Simeoni
Production Assistant Liane Cunje
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Encoding David Mackenzie
Authoring & Subtitling IBF Digital
Artist Vladimir Zimakov
Design Jack Pemberton

SPECIAL THANKS

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