

# Metropolis: god from the machine



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Fritz Lang's 1927 science fiction epic, *Metropolis*, recalls the Christian creation and apotheosis narrative through a dystopian lens. The main characters in *Metropolis* personify Jesus and his apostles and close associates in a postmodern society. The city of *Metropolis* itself represents the relationship between humanity as God as evidenced in the Christian tradition. The film also employs key figures and myths from the Bible that help cast *Metropolis* as a symbol of the link between God and humanity and the chaos and torment that can characterize that relationship. *Metropolis* grapples with a dystopian and futuristic interpretation of the Christian foundation myth and the theology of Jesus' mission and gospel.

The figure of Maria can be analyzed through a Christian theological perspective. Maria is first characterized as an angelic, virgin figure representing fertility and redemption. She appears in the Gardens of *Metropolis* surrounded by children. These children represented the youthful innocence and latent fertility of the Virgin Mary. Maria also appears to Freder following a controversial tryst he engages in with a whore. This other woman helps solidify Maria's innocence and faith, and perhaps also embodies Mary Magdalene, who originally was thought to threaten Jesus with her questionable and immoral background in prostitution.

Maria's Tower of Babel speech is perhaps the most explicit religious reference in *Metropolis*. In her sermon, Maria preaches the Old Testament biblical story of the Tower of Babel. In the narrative, the peoples of the world come together after the Flood and construct a tower with the aims of uniting humanity and reaching God. However, God is threatened, and He destroys the Tower and disseminates the people, dividing them by language, and

therefore ethnic, cultural, national, and class divisions. Maria argues that Metropolis can act as a modern Tower of Babel, and the working class simply needs unity and leadership in order to conglomerate and come together to construct a new society and reach God by transcending division.

Maria can also be understood as representative of John the Baptist. John was the essential Christian apologist and preacher who articulated the importance of Jesus' life and message. John proselytized Jesus' mission to the masses. Maria, likewise, preaches the need for a messiah in Metropolis, and later describes Freder's compassion and unique position in helping to ameliorate the social condition of the workers in the lower levels of Metropolis. Maria preaches the ' Gospel' of messianism in the same way John the Baptist disseminated and advocated for Jesus' teachings. Maria argues that Metropolis needs a figure to unite the " head and the hands." In other words, the city needs a messiah to bring together the godhead of Fredersen with the larger working class.

Robot Maria symbolizes the demonic and secularized opposite of Maria herself. While Maria symbolizes the divine innocence and youth of the Virgin Mary, her robotic clone embodies the diametric opposites of these virtues. Rotwang, the mad scientist and inventor living in the middle level of Metropolis, created Robot Maria. Rotwang represents the unbridled secular science of the modern era. In Lang's time, German thought had largely migrated from Christian theological tradition to secular and Darwinist narratives. This climate helped provide for the rise of Nazi fascism. The virtues of Christianity have little role here, either in the real German society at large or in the actions and creations of Rotwang in Metropolis. Rotwang is <https://assignbuster.com/metropolis-god-from-the-machine/>

not concerned with Freder or Fredersen and creates the Robot Maria to exercise his scientific knowledge, as opposed to legitimating any moral authority.

Robot Maria symbolizes the opposite of Adam. The traditional first man, Adam, was created by God through direct divine intervention. The notion of the “rib” and the earth used to compose Adam and Eve is also described in Genesis. God using Adam’s rib to create Eve, physically extrapolating a piece of the temporal world to complete humanity, is still directly divine. However, the divinely inspired creation story of Adam and Eve contrasts sharply with Rotwang’s manufacturing of Robot Maria. In his creation of Robot Maria, Rotwang likewise loses his hand, a physical human body part, as essentially a sacrifice to create new life. Rotwang’s loss, however, represents a sacrifice of human creation as opposed to divine inspiration. The notion of secular and scientific innovation versus divine and godly inspiration represents a conflict of virtue versus the unbridled secular knowledge of Lang’s Germany. Robot Maria embodies this binary, which presents a hellish view of science and secularism.

Robot Maria’s composition and symbolism highlights the notion of science and secularism as representative of a less honorable perspective and moral view. The Robot Maria arises composed with the symbol of the pentagram. The pentagram, the five-pointed star, symbolizes paganism. In Christianity, the symbol of the pentagram is also often interpreted as representative of the devil. This association with paganism is often extrapolated to negative connotations, which are largely exaggerated, of devil worship. The Robot Maria also represents the Whore of Babylon. In the Book of Revelations, the

<https://assignbuster.com/metropolis-god-from-the-machine/>

Whore of Babylon harkens the apocalypse and encapsulates the traditional theme of the femme fatale. In historical times, partially due to the story of Eve, the archetype of the femme fatale often reflected religious terms. In the modern era, the femme fatale is best evidenced in film. Robot Maria represents a unity of both of these forms and cultural archetypes.

The structure of Metropolis also reflects biblical and religious motifs. The Eternal Gardens of the wealthy elite at the upper level symbolize the biblical Garden of Eden. It is at these gardens in Metropolis that Maria first meets Freder, illustrating the religious connotations of their characterizations. Maria describes the Eternal Gardens as “ high in the heavens,” representative of the divine nature of the space. On the other hand, the machine that powers the upper city of Metropolis is called Moloch, after the evil Canaanite god associated with child sacrifice and fire. In Metropolis, the working class often perishes in their attempts to operate and maintain the machinery. In addition, Robot Maria threatens an apocalyptic flood in which all the children of Metropolis perish, reflecting the ancient and biblical flood narrative. Freder’s vision of demons feeding workers to Moloch and calling the working class his “ brothers” following apocalypse reflects Jesus’s mission and teachings.

The overseer of Metropolis, Fredersen, is presented as God, while his son Freder represents Christ. Fredersen argues that workers should remain “ where they belong.” This view mirrors the merciless biblical God of the Old Testament. Freder, the son, represents Christ. Freder, as the son of Metropolis’ God, serves as the “ Mediator” bringing together God and humanity. Toward the end of the film, Freder takes the place of another

worker, as Jesus did, suffering for others. When the machine tortures him, he exclaims, “ Father, I never knew ten hours could be so long!” This exclamation mirrors Jesus on the Cross. Like the Bible, Freder is then resurrects and leads a rejuvenation of Metropolis after the flood.

Metropolis represents a dystopian take on the Christian narrative. The characters embody the key figures from Jesus’ time. The composition of the city itself also reflects important figures and myths from Christian theology. Together, these symbols represent Metropolis as a dystopian, postmodern emblem of the Christian chronicle.