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... of the film, seen in its entirety at the National Film Museum. The peasant Johannes finds his simple virtues tested when he marries into a family wealthy from oil-rich land called "the devil's field." Working in a style that compares with the brooding intensity of his Scandinavian contemporaries Stiller and Sjöström, Murnau proved a master both at interior design, with great attention to architecture and tonalities, and at stunning exterior shooting. The fire at the oil-well, "the burning earth" surrounded by snow, is an unforgettable image of hell on earth.

Wednesday, November 5 6:30 p.m.

35MM ARCHIVAL PRINT FROM MUNICH FILM MUSEUM

THE LAST LAUGH (DER LESTZE MANN)

Director: F. W. Murnau Germany 1925 84 minutes Cast: Emil Jannings, Georg John

From the Munich Filmmuseum, a stunning archival restoration of a central work of film history. THE LAST LAUGH was long considered Murnau's masterpiece, and has steadily maintained its position in the pantheon though recent generations have gravitated more towards FAUST, TABU, CITY GIRL and SUNRISE. This poignant tale stars Emil Jannings as an old man demoted from doorman at a luxury Berlin hotel to toilet attendant, who steals a uniform to fool friends and family into thinking he has retained his position. As the humiliated doorman, Jannings gives a performance often ranked with Falconetti in THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC. Revolutionary in many ways, including Karl Freund's use of freely moving and subjective camera (including vertiginous pans to capture Janning's drunken state), THE LAST LAUGH had a transformative effect on world cinema, and helped prepare for the German invasion of Hollywood.

Wednesday, November 5 8:45 p.m.

RESTORED ARCHIVAL PRINT - CANADIAN PREMIERE!

FAUST

Director: F. W. Murnau Germany 1926 92 minutes Cast: Emil Jannings, Camilla Horn

We are extremely pleased to have secured from the Cineteca Española, Madrid their recently restored print of this, one of the most pictorially beautiful films ever made. (Lotte Eisner's description of the supernatural opening sequences—"the most remarkable and poignant images the German chiaroscuro ever created"—is justly famous.) Directors as unlike as Eric Rohmer and Michael Mann consider FAUST, the last film Murnau made in Germany before departing for Hollywood, one of the greatest in the history of cinema. Rohmer wrote a renowned essay on FAUST, calling it Murnau's finest achievement, in its use of space, architecture and the interplay of shadow and light: "It is light that models form, that sculpts it. The filmmaker allows us to witness the birth of a world as true and beautiful as painting, the art which has revealed the truth and beauty of the visible world to us through the ages." Murnau's (homo)eroticized version of the Faust legend evokes the medieval world in compositions reminiscent of Dürer and Breughel, of Mantegna and Holbein, and its eerie atmosphere both recalls NOSFERATU and foreshadows Dreyer's THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC (note the intense close-ups of Camilla Horn's face). "One of the classics of silent film . . . Murnau's masterpiece and one that is just as strikingly powerful when viewed today" (Raymond Murray).

Friday, November 7 8:45 p.m.

TORONTO PREMIERE! RESTORED 35MM PRINT!

TABU

Directors: F. W. Murnau, Robert Flaherty USA 1931 90 minutes Cast: Anna Chevalier, Malani

"TABU is a great work of art" (David Thomson). One of the major cinematic events of the last decade was the rerelease of a sparkling restored 35mm controversial final film of Murnau's career. (It restores over five minutes of footage excised in the Forties, including the nudity.) Disillusioned with Hollywood at the chance to make a film in the South Seas with Robert Flaherty. Inevitably, the two directors clashed; their aesthetics and philosophies could hardly be different, and the perfectionist Murnau balked at Flaherty's naïve approach to making films. Flaherty finally fled the production, and the final film is, the result, mostly Murnau: a headily mystical evocation of doomed love in a tropical Paradise. Among the film's many fascinations is how the story of a young man on their Tahitian island carries strong traces of Murnau's Teutonic fatalism—the spectres of his German films haunt this South Sea Eden; how, though (of course) heterosexual, the film expresses a profoundly homosexual sensibility; and how the imagery, as fluid and sensual as it is, stresses immuring and enclosure (to a degree that Andrew Sarris referred to the world of TABU as an "enclosed cosmos"). Floyd Crosby won the Academy Award for Best Cinematography for TABU. "If you once again see TABU the way Murnau meant it to be seen, it becomes obvious that . . . [it is] a masterpiece" (Scott Eyman).

Monday, November 17 6:30 p.m.

November 1990 - David Thomson

Cahiers du cinéma pronounced SUNRISE the greatest film of the 1920s, frequently voted one of the best films of all time in many of the polls. Van Sant lists it in his Top Ten. Subtitled "A Song of Love," SUNRISE is indeed very musical in its use of light and shadow, night and fog, movement and stillness. A triumph of naturalism and abstraction, of European style with American sensibility, lavishes visual invention on a simple plot: A temptress from the rural Eden of a young couple and convinces the husband to drown his wife (Janet Gaynor). The luminous Gaynor won the Oscar as the imperilled wife. The film also won the Oscars for Best Artistic Quality of Production, and it's little wonder: Murnau's use of the influences of German expressionism and French impressionism, stylized sets, balletic camerawork, and shimmering mise-en-scène. Many famous sequences are O'Brien's trek through a snowy landscape, encounters the city woman (entire articles have been dedicated to the restaurant dinner that is a study in silhouettes, and two too many things in the film do, mirror each other.

Thursday, November 13 6:30 p.m.

CITY GIRL (OUR DAILY BREAD)

Director: F. W. Murnau USA 1929 88 minutes Cast: Charles Farrell, Marjorie

"One of the ten greatest films in the history of cinema"

—Thierry Jousse, *Cahiers du cinéma*

A moral fable often compared to SUNRISE for its lyrical use of landscape, CITY GIRL turned Murnau's style upside down when the Fox studio took control of it away from him and had it retitled. When the silent version of the film was rediscovered in the Seventies, it was treated as a revelation, and several critics elevated it to the Murnau level. Like SUNRISE, on the contrast between city and country, the film's use of the noisy metropolis—Andrew Sarris called these early sequences "the most lyrical expressionism in Hollywood"—and soon moves to the country, subordinating the love story between urban girl and farm boy to the larger natural world, captured in symphonic montages of wheat fields and designed to look like Dürer woodcuts. "CITY GIRL has brought back a major rediscovery, perhaps not something to top SUNRISE, but something which adds much to Murnau's already monumental reputation" (Richard Dyer, *Film Comment*). "It remains an extraordinarily beautiful film" (Richard Dyer).

Thursday, November 13 8:45 p.m.



F.W.

SUNRISE

As well as voyages into the imaginary, Murnau's tenebrous films are also "journeys into the night," as the title of Murnau's earliest extant film suggests. Despite the coerced happy endings of such films as *THE LAST LAUGH* and *SUNRISE*, Murnau's cinema most often inhabits the shadows and obscurities of his much famed chiaroscuro. (Only in *TABU* does full natural light seem the conduit of his mystical vision, but even here critics have commented on "the hostile and sinister quality [of] the idyllic settings" and on the film's "interior world of psychic conflict" and its "enclosed cosmos" with its dim, ghostly boat and grim patriarch.) One can easily overstate the claustrophobia, morbidity and menace in Murnau's work, especially if one concentrates on the early films and on the unnerving details of his "foretold" death in a car crash the week before *TABU*'s premiere. (Again, Fieschi's point about glib generalization is well taken.) The lyricism and humour in his trio of masterpieces—*SUNRISE*, *CITY GIRL* and *TABU*—and the comic elements in such films as *CASTLE VOGELÖD* and *TARTUFFE*, all but repudiate this common rendition of Murnau's tone. (One thinks of Lotte Eisner's comment: "As all his friends tell us, Murnau could be shy, sensitive, and melancholy. But he could also suddenly be as gay and mischievous as a schoolboy.")



THE MYSTICAL POETRY OF Murnau

Along with the "points of transit" which Fieschi identifies, one also finds a formal element which distinguishes Murnau's films from first to last: spatial indeterminacy, which associates him with a contemporary who lived much longer and made films very different from his: Kenji Mizoguchi. Though Murnau has been compared to Ophüls (the love of camera movement and design), Vigo (stifled homo-erotic poetry), Rossellini (see Rohmer's comparison of *SUNRISE* and *VOYAGE TO ITALY*), Pasolini (eclecticism, Third World nostalgia and art historical references) and many others, his affinities with the Japanese master are most marked.

Sovereign among poets of the cinema, Mizoguchi and Murnau, though dissimilar in many ways, share a reputation for their turbulent, searching natures, their precision, arrogance and artistic ruthlessness (pity the actors they terrorized!); a forceful visual style based on highly composed space, painterly composition, and elegant, insistent camera movement that is never merely decorative; an emphasis on atmosphere, what the Germans call *Stimmung* (water, mist and the moon figure prominently, symbolically in both their worlds); scrupulous realism employed to conjure the uncanny and spectral (cf. *NOSFERATU*, *UGETSU*); a sense of fatalism, transience and ineffable beauty. Both directors worked closely with great cinematographers (e.g. Freund, Miyagawa) and are known for their long takes and "all-over," organic compositions which structure space to imply a connection to the world around and beyond the frame. Gilberto Perez Guillermo asserts: "Murnau's cinema . . . is primarily a cinema of empty space. . . . [S]pace becomes the central object. . . . Like Velasquez, Murnau looks past the foreground and into the background. Attention . . . is dispersed throughout the whole, throughout space." The same might be said about Mizoguchi's compositions, but where his style is "objective" and distinct, Murnau's, contrived to envelop and incorporate the viewer, is subjective and obscure. (Ironically, the Prussian perfectionist has a more flowing and indeterminate sense of framed space than does the Japanese genius, whose exquisite designs, with their dynamic diagonals and meticulously deployed objects, organize space as a charged but largely stable unity.)

To read this spatial precariousness, which is conspicuous in Murnau's late films, in psychological terms is perhaps dangerous—it verges on "biographical fallacy"—but is it too much to suggest that it reflects another aspect of Murnau's character: his homosexuality? Uncertainty and apprehension, ambiguity and foreboding—all qualities evoked by the "incompleteness" of Murnau's space—surely are applicable to an artist whose sexuality was reviled, forbidden, punishable. Lotte Eisner writes that Murnau "lived under the ominous shadow which the inhuman Paragraph 175 of the pre-1918 German Penal Code, lending itself to all the horrors of blackmail, cast over him and those like him." She also notes that when Hollywood heard of the handsome 14-year-old valet who, acting as chauffeur, drove Murnau to his death, "not many people had the courage to come and bid the great director a last farewell." (Among the brave dozen was Greta Garbo, who had his death mask made and kept it on her desk.) Robin Wood's readings of *NOSFERATU* and *SUNRISE* make apparent the degree to which this censure of Murnau's sexuality manifested itself in his work. Wood emphasizes how, like most of Murnau's films, both *NOSFERATU* and *SUNRISE* are about a couple threatened by a heinous alien—the vampire and the vamp, respectively—who is associated with darkness, fog, contagion or contamination, and animals (one a rat, the other a cat). These evil outsiders who prey on an idealized couple can easily be interpreted as expressions of Murnau's own repressed sexuality, the hated self made manifest. (In this regard, Wood has called *SUNRISE* "one of cinema's most extreme acts of self-oppression.")

Murnau's homosexuality is apparent from his first film, the lost *BOY IN BLUE* (1919) which is based on the famous Gainsborough painting, through his version of *FAUST* (1926) with its asexual Gretchen and seductive young Faust, to his premature testament *TABU* (1931), with its portentous title and glistening male nudes. Eisner is surprisingly direct about Murnau's homosexuality, granting that his "natural predispositions were as decisive a factor in the subtlety of his art as in his premature death," where many critics have merely ignored the obvious, or treated it with coded distaste and histrionic evasiveness. Fieschi, who condemns most other Murnau critics for their oversights and clichés, manages only this tortuous equivocation: "The details of Murnau's life . . . add considerably to the perplexities aroused by the missing films, and much play is made of enigmatic and unspeakable hints, of anything attesting to parallels, or indeed a fusion, between the man and his work, which may thus be considered as the ghostly reflection of an anguished and unhealthy subjectivity, aristocratic and languishing in exile: 'I am at home nowhere, in no house and in no country.' [Letter written to his mother from Tahiti. . .]. Fieschi cunningly uses code words of recoil to make them seem other than his own. (And well he should. Note how, as it often does, homophobic coding shares the lexicon of anti-Semitism: cosmopolitanism is invoked as evidence of Murnau's moral infirmity.)

John Grierson, the most damning of Murnau's few detractors, uses a similar code: "Murnau was a student product, a manipulator of artificial effects, a manager of exaggeration, introspective, perverse: an artist who never smelt an honest wind in his life." This would be amusing were it not so typical of the puritanical Grierson, whose cramped, reproachful aesthetic mistook verism for virility and the latter for virtue. The "honest winds" of Grierson's "art" blew a straight, bracing gale of North Atlantic rectitude through dozens of documentaries, where Murnau's miasmic mists (*NOSFERATU*, *SUNRISE*) and South Sea breezes fragrant with frangipani (*TABU*) carried hints of darkness, decay, and sensuality. Compare *TABU* with *SEAWARDS THE GREAT SHIPS*, and you'll know which wind blows honest or ill.

— James Quandt

simple, but
requires the gr
Murnau

master"
Murnau

Murnau's influence on the
has proved to be more
than Eisenstein's"
Sarris

Murnau was a passionate
of the mellifluously
moving camera, a visionary, a
theoretician, a maker
of the most
oppressive, lyric,
mysterious movies in
cinema" - Scott Eyman

generally admired
in the entire silent
André Fieschi

by many scholars
man film
Compton