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Satanas, Murnau, F. W., 1919

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Sunrise: a song of two humans, Murnau, F. W., 1927

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Four devils, Murnau, F. W., 1928

Special Supplement to Sight and Sound

INDEX SERIES NO. 15

AN INDEX TO THE FILMS OF F. W. MURNAU

by

Theodore Huff

AUGUST, 1948

This Index represents virtually all that is known of Murnau and his work. In gathering this somewhat scanty and incomplete material, the compiler wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the following: Herman b. Weinberg, who interviewed Karl Freund and Berthold Viertel for pertinent facts; Kirk Bond, who did some ground work, but was unable to finish the Index because of illness; Rune Waldekranz, Swedish film historian; Seymour Stern, film critic and Griffith biographer; and Kent Munson, motion picture student.

"Real art is simple, but simplicity requires the greatest art"—F. W. MURNAU.

Murnau is a puzzle. Unquestionably one of the great masters of the screen, an artist of sincerity who seemed to work not for money but to express himself, he is difficult to analyse; his work open to conflicting interpretations. To begin with, most of his early films were not seen outside of Germany and are now unhappily lost to us. Any sense of continuity, then, in our study of the man, any thorough understanding of his development, is out of the question.

This ambiguity surrounding the foundations of his art has led more than one frustrated critic to question Murnau's genius altogether. It has been suggested that the so-called "Murnau touch" should really be credited to Carl Mayer, the scenarist; that the greatness of *The Last Laugh* was really the combination of Mayer, Freund and Jannings, and that Murnau's *creative* contribution to the film was negligible. I think we can rule out this possibility at once. Not only is there ample internal evidence in *The Last Laugh* that its most significant cinematic effects transcend the script (or even the acting for that matter), but one need only examine Murnau's last film, *Tabu*, which some insist is his masterpiece, to realize that Murnau's genius did not depend entirely on these collaborators.

But we are still no nearer explaining his genius. The secret lies somewhere between 1922 and 1924. At first thought it seems unbelievable that the directorial mind behind the rather crude *Nosferatu* is the same one that blended story, character and setting so masterfully two years later in *The Last Laugh*.

Nor can we look for a clue in Murnau's personal life, also veiled in mystery.

F. W. Murnau (pronounced Moor-no) was born on December 28, 1889, in Bielefeld, Westphalia. His real name was Friedrich Wilhelm Plumpe. Sensitive about his lowly peasant background, he was reluctant to discuss or introduce his family, which he felt he had outgrown. Even those most closely associated with him in his films can tell us little about the man personally. We know that he studied at Heidelberg, where he directed student plays. At twenty-four he put aside his diplomas and doctorate of philosophy to study music. Then he joined Max Reinhardt's workshop; in the school were Conrad Veidt, Alexander Granach, Lothar Mendes and others who later became famous. Granach, in his autobiography "There Goes An Actor", relates how he and Murnau hid on the floor of the stage box to listen and learn when Reinhardt held his "secret" rehearsals with the leads. Later Murnau directed a production of *The Miracle* and played the role of the Knight. During the war he became an aviator in the German army. At this time he met and formed a close friendship with a young man (name unknown) whose death in action greatly affected him. After the war, the dead boy's mother, a Dresden widow of means, took over Murnau's care for sentimental reasons; he lived with her as her ward in Grunewald.

Murnau returned to the stage briefly in Switzerland. Here he came to the films for the first time in a most peculiar way. When he directed some plays in Zurich and Bern, the German embassy approached him and entrusted him with the assignment to make some propaganda films for them. This activity so interested Murnau that he turned to film work completely. Realizing that he was not cut out to be an actor, he became a director, making two films financed by Ernst Hofmann, a popular screen star of the time (*Der schöne Mann der Leinwand*). Between 1919 and 1923 Murnau made 12 full-length pictures (largely "horror" films) for various small companies until he connected with the great UFA Company.

The Last Laugh, of course, made his reputation, and was given immediate world acclaim. Erich Pommer then planned to have him direct *Variety*, while Ludwig Berger was slated for *Faust*, under the title *Das Verlorene Paradies*. Instead, E. A. Dupont was given *Variety*, because of his experience with a circus picture, and because the story was felt to be "too sexy for Murnau". The story of Murnau's association with Pommer is a complicated one. When, independently of Pommer, Murnau signed a contract with Fox Films which, along with most of the American studios, was raiding European companies for their best talent, Pommer claimed that Murnau had acted not only unwisely but ungratefully. UFA had been carrying him, Pommer insisted, as a prestige figure, allowing him to make intelligent and artistic films without worrying about box-office, and that he owed them something in return. But they were reconciled in time for Murnau to make *Faust* as his last German picture.

In July, 1926, Murnau sailed for America. After the completion of *Sunrise* he returned to Germany in March, 1927, for a visit. Then he signed a five-year contract with Fox which was never completed because of the "talkies" and a quarrel with William Fox.

Tall, slender, dour-faced, and with reddish hair, Murnau appeared more Scottish than German. His voice was soft, he spoke little, he remained to the end a shy, sensitive, lonely man.

Even so, on the set he was an absolute dictator, an untiring worker and a supervisor of every detail. His Teutonic thoroughness was similar to von Stroheim's. A typical story is told of dozens of elaborate, towering birthday cakes spoiled in *Four Devils* because Murnau rehearsed and shot the simple scene of its being cut over and over again, without being completely satisfied, and each time, of course, a new cake was needed.

He was genuinely contemptuous of, and refused even to talk to, Hollywood producers, although they were supplying him with millions of dollars for his elaborate sets. He made everyone serve his ideal. Murnau wanted to make absolute films like absolute music; was interested in form and pictorial effects. A screen painter, his love for the camera is shown in his earliest work. The boundary line between reality and fantasy is very thin even in his "realistic" films, giving them the universality of a fable or ballad.

After breaking his Fox contract, Murnau went to the South Seas to make a film on his own.

> "One of the interesting stories about Murnau's life was his friendship with Walter Spies, who lived on the island of Bali in the Dutch East Indies. Spies was an excellent painter and musician, good-looking, the son of a very fine Baltic family. Civilization at the end of the first World War proved too much for him, so he decided to run away from it and start a new life in the Dutch East Indies. Murnau, however, could never forget Spies, and many, many times attempted to persuade UFA to make a South Seas picture—naturally so that he could again see Spies. While he came quite close to fulfilling that desire during the filming of *Tabu* in Tahiti, I don't think Murnau actually ever did see Spies again.
>
> "Spies, who was known to all the travellers to Bali, including Noel Coward, Vicki Baum and Covarrubias, died as a prisoner when the boat on which he was being transported to a concentration camp was torpedoed during the second World War". (Karl Freund.)

After finishing *Tabu*, Murnau signed a contract with Paramount.

Driving in a new car on the way to Santa Barbara, California, he allowed his Mexican valet to take the wheel, although the boy knew little of driving. The car fell down an embankment; the youth and the chauffeur were only slightly hurt, but Murnau was fatally injured.

His friend, Berthold Viertel, who later delivered the eulogy in German at his funeral, visited Murnau at the Santa Barbara hospital. Murnau was unable to talk anymore. This man, who was one of the most genuine artists of the screen, and whose insight into the possibilities of film technique has seldom been equalled; this man whose innovations in cinematic style had been hailed round the world a few years before, made a final gesture to Viertel such as a director would make to a bad take: "What's the use"?

Only eleven people came to the funeral.

1919

DER KNABE IM BLAU (The Child in Blue)

Produced under the sponsorship of Ernst Hofmann, the actor. (No further information can be found).

SATANAS

Produced for Ernst Hofmann. Photographed by Karl Freund. Featuring Conrad Veidt as Satan.

A close parallel to Dreyer's *Leaves from Satan's Book*, produced two years later, both of which films had an undoubted influence on Lang's *Destiny*. All three, actually, are examples of the enormous influence of Griffith's *Intolerance* on European directors.

1920

DER BUCKLIGE UND DIE TÄNZERIN (The Hunchback and the Dancer)

Released July, 1920, by the Helios Co. Story by Carl Mayer. Settings by Robert Neppach. Featuring Sacha Gura as Gina.
Apparently inspired by, or similar to, Reinhardt's pantomime-ballet, *Sumurun*.

DER JANUSKOPF (Janus-faced)

Released September 17, 1920, by the Lipow Co. Adapted from R. L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Hans Janowitz (of Caligari fame). Photographed by Carl Weiss. Featuring Conrad Veidt, Bela Lugosi, Margarete Schlegel.
A version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* made about the same time as the John Barrymore-Paramount production in America. Swedish film critics of the time found the Murnau production more "artistic".

1921

DER GANG IN DIE NACHT (The Walk in the Night)

Released January, 1921, by the Lipow Co. Story by Carl Mayer. Photographed by Carl Weiss. Featuring Olaf Fönss, Erna Morena, Conrad Veidt, Gudrun Brunn. Distributed in U.S. by Realistic (November 4, 1928) as *Love's Mockery*, with titles by Pierre Arnaud.

The story dealt with a doctor who restores the sight of a blind artist. The latter falls in love with the doctor's wife. The drama comes when the artist's sight fails him again and the wife pleads with her husband to save her lover.

The Film Daily, in a brief review, claimed the film had "some of the atmospheric shots such as distinguished Murnau's work in *Sunrise*". It also mentioned that, although the love angle was "unusual", the action was "slow and draggy". But the work of Conrad Veidt and the other leads made it a "fair program picture".

SCHLOSS VOGELÖD (The Haunted Castle)

Released April 8, 1921, by Decla Co. Story by Carl Mayer and Berthold Viertel. Photographed by Fritz Arno Wagner. Featuring Paul Hartmann, Olga Tschechowa, Arnold Korff, Paul Bildt.

A "horror" picture plainly influenced by the Swedish school. Notable for atmospheric and impressionistic sets which projected the lonely feeling of a young couple living in a deserted castle.

". . . he knowingly used faces to reveal emotional undercurrents and orchestrate suspense. This film moreover testified to Murnau's unique faculty of obliterating the boundaries between the real and the unreal. Reality in his films was surrounded by a halo of dreams and presentiments, and a tangible person might suddenly impress the audience as a mere apparition". (Kracauer: *From Caligari to Hitler*.)

SEHNSUCHT (Longing)

Produced by Mosch Co., 1921. Photographed by Carl Hoffmann. Featuring Conrad Veidt, Eugen Klöpfer, Gussy Holl.

1922

MARIZZA, GENANNT DIE SCHMUGGLER-MADONNA (Marizza, called the Smuggler-Madonna)

Produced by Helios Co., 1922. Featuring Tzwetta Tzatschewa, Hans Heinz von Twardowski, Adèle Sandrock.

DER BRENNENDE ACKER (The Burning Acre)

Released March 8, 1922, by Goron-Deuling Co. Story by Thea von Harbou, Willy Haas and Arthur Rosen. Settings by Rochus Gliese. Photographed by Karl Freund and Fritz Arno Wagner. Featuring Werner Krauss (Stark), Eugen Klöpfer and Wladimir Gaidarow (Stark's sons), Eduard von Winterstein (Count Rudenburg), Lya de Putti (Gerda, the count's daughter).

A realistic drama of peasants and the land, similar to Swedish films of the period by Seastrom and Stiller, in which Murnau is said to have furthered the action through sustained close shots of facial expressions. He also subordinated his customary pictorial or fantastic qualities to psychological conflict.

NOSFERATU, EINE SYMPHONIES DES GRAUENS (Nosferatu, a symphony of terror)

Released March 24, 1922, by Prana Co. Adapted by Henrik Galeen from Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula*. Photographed by Fritz Arno Wagner. Settings by Albin Grau. Released in U.S. as *Nosferatu, the Vampire*, December 1, 1929, by Film Arts Guild. Titles by Benjamin de Casseres.
Cast:

Count Dracula, Nosferatu	Max Schreck
Renfield, estate agent	Alexander Granach
Harker, his clerk	Gustav von Wagenheim
Nina, Harker's wife	Greta Schroeder
Westrenka	G. H. Schnell
Lucy, his wife	Ruth Landshoff
Professor von Helsing	John Sottowt
Dr. Stevens	Gustav Botz
Captain of ship	Max Nemetz
First Mate	Wolfgang Heinz
Sailor	Albert Donohr

Bela Balazs, noted German critic, wrote that it was as if "a chilly draft of doomsday" passed through the scenes of *Nosferatu*. "When speaking of Nosferatu, the critics, even more than in the case of Caligari, insisted upon bringing in E. T. A. Hoffmann. However, this reference to the film's romantic antecedents does not account for its specific meaning. Like Attila, Nosferatu is a 'scourge of God' . . . . looming in those regions where myths and fairy tales meet. It is highly significant that during this period German imagination, regardless of its starting-point, always gravitated towards such figures—as if under compulsion of hate-love." (Kracauer: *From Caligari to Hitler*).

A Student having only such critiques, and not the film itself, to go by, would be very likely to rate *Nosferatu* higher than it deserves, and credit it with a complex symbolism that is not Murnau's or Galeen's. All the talk about Nina's sacrifice being the "solution of Dostoievsky" implies a far more sophisticated approach to the story than any of the film's makers actually had. A "solution of Dostoievsky" implies a Dostoievskian problem to solve. *Nosferatu's* basis is in folk lore, and Murnau unmistakably approached it as legend and fantasy, not psychological study. The characters have the simple, one-dimensional quality of legendary figures; the film is no more 'profound' than the American *Dracula* or *Frankenstein*. Nor are its references modern, in the sense Kracauer would have us believe, illustrating a philosophy which "supplied the Nazis with the basic concept of the 'Third Reich'."

Actually, *Nosferatu* is a rather crude picture. One can understand why it had very limited screenings in this country (late in 1929, and then only to cash in on the Murnau name, apparently). The romantic leads were too Teutonic in appearance, the acting style very heavy, and the production obviously cheap, some of the effects (such as the speeding up of the mysterious carriage by stop-motion, and the jerky opening and closing of phantom-controlled doors) seeming more ridiculous than weird.

On the other hand, the film did show Murnau's flair for pictorial effect in such scenes as the use of negative representing the Carpathian woods as a maze of ghost-like trees, the phantom ship sailing with its dead crew, the unusual angles on the old

castle (a real one, not a set), the close-ups of omniverous plants for symbolism, the long procession of coffins down the silent streets of Bremen (photographed from above), the faces of the townsfolk in their windows, etc.

PHANTOM

Released November, 1922, by Decla Co. Adapted by Thea von Harbou and Hans von Twardowski from a novel by Gerhardt Hauptmann. Photographed by Alex Graatkjär and Theophan Ouchakoff. Settings by Hermann Warm and Erich Czerwonski. Music by Leo Spiess. Costumes by Vally Reinecke.
Cast:

Lorenz Lubota	Alfred Abel
His mother	Frieda Richard
Melanie	Aud Egede Nissen
Hugo, younger brother	H. H. von Twardowski
Starke	Karl Ettlinger
Marie, his daughter	Lil Dagover
Frau Schwabe	Greta Berger
Wigottschinsky	Anton Edthofer
The Baroness	Ilka Grüning
Melitta, her daughter	Lya de Putti
Harlan	Adolf Klein
His wife	Olga Engl
A beadle	Heinrich Witte

"A humble town clerk longs to become a famous poet and marry a charming girl he has seen driving past him in a pony-drawn phaeton. Possessed by his longing, he sleeps with a prostitute resembling the unattainable girl and sinks ever deeper, until in the solitude of his prison cell he learns to renounce all phantoms. Murnau's film reached its pictorial climax with a montage sequence that fused street impressions into a vision of chaos". (Wesse: *Grossmacht Film*; Balazs: *Der sichtbare Mensch*). Contemporary critics mentioned the notable performance of Frieda Richard as the mother.

Simply from an historical standpoint, this is undoubtedly one of Murnau's most important films—possibly the "transitional work" that would explain so much of what puzzles us in our understanding of him as an artist. Its absence is a major loss to film scholarship.

1923

AUSTREIBUNG (Expulsion) (Driven from Home)

Released in 1923, by Decla Co. Adapted by Thea von Harbou from a story by Hauptmann. Photographed by Karl Freund. Settings by Rochus Gliese and Erich Czerwonski. Featuring Eugen Klöpfer, Aud Egede Nissen, William Dieterle, Lucie Mannheim, Ilka Gruning.

A tragedy laid in the snow and wind of the Silesian Mountains. *Film-Kurier* (31/12/23) called it "the first peasant film dealing with nuances rather than mere broad effects".

The absence of this film is another sad loss. For one thing it would probably clear up once and for all the argument of how much the success of *The Last Laugh* depended on Carl Mayer. The brief *Film-Kurier* statement would indicate that *Austreibung* was a definite advance over Murnau's earlier films.

DIE FINANZEN DES GROSSHERZOGS (The Finances of the Grand Duke)

Released late in 1923 by Ufa Co. Story by Thea von Harbou, based on a novel by Frank Heller. Photographed by Karl Freund and Franz Planer. Settings by Rochus Gliese and Erich Czerwonski. Featuring Harry Liedtke (Grand Duke), Mady Christians (Grand Duchess Olga), Alfred Abel (Collin).

A comedy-satire, laid in a small, sunny Mediterranean town, with "intrigues, conflicts and adventures" taking place in a miniature court because of precarious state finances. The film, noted for its "grace and humor", was quite popular. Murnau's

first production for the great Ufa Co., this inclined towards the current of realism gaining momentum at the time in sharp contrast to the fantastic "German school" started by *Caligari*. "At last a film without deeper significance"! (Zaddach: *Der literarische Film*).

1924

DER LETZTE MANN (The Last Man) (English title: THE LAST LAUGH)

Released in U.S. by Universal, January 27, 1925. Original story and scenario by Carl Mayer. Scenic directors: Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig. Photographed by Karl Freund. (Length: 2036 metres, 8 reels).
Cast:

The Doorman	Emil Jannings
His Daughter	Maly Delschaft
Her Fiancé	Max Hiller
His Aunt	Emilie Kurz
Hotel Manager	Hans Unterkirchen
A Young Guest	Olaf Storm
A Corpulent Guest	Hermann Valentin
A Thin Neighbour	Emma Wyda
A Night Watchman	George John

Murnau's masterpiece. And unquestionably one of the authentic classics of the screen. Aside from its unusual theme and magnificent acting by Emil Jannings, it attracted much attention because of its technical qualities. The story is told without subtitles,* largely by the use of expressive images and the moving camera. Of course, there had been other films without subtitles (Charles Ray's *The Old Swimming Hole*, Lupu Pick's *Shattered*, etc.) And the moving camera had been used before.† But *The Last Laugh* stimulated anew Hollywood film makers and those all over the world with the possibilities of the medium, as *Broken Blossoms* and *Caligari* had done previously, and as *Citizen Kane* was to do sixteen years later.

In *The Last Laugh* the camera travels almost continuously. In an opening scene of sheer magic it rides down the elevator and moves through the hotel lobby to the revolving door (a leit motif of the film); it walks through doors and windows; it characterises, emotes, moves as freely as the actors. When the old doorman gets drunk at the wedding feast, the camera bounces around the room instead (the cameraman was actually on roller skates). The subjective use of the camera is brought to a climax in this film. It gave the camera a new dominant prestige.

Mayer used a straightforward, fluid method of narration. A psychological study of human values is rendered simply without subplots, and the technique of "moving in" from long-shot to close-up, rather than "cutting", carried out the spirit of the script—and though picturemakers were to find that imitation of this technique was not suitable for all stories, here it achieved a perfect continuity. *The Last Laugh* is an example of almost pure cinema; in it Murnau broke entirely the stranglehold of stage technique.

Other interesting aspects of the film include the expressive sets of a universal, de-nationalized city with depth achieved by forced perspectives; the lighting (especially in the basement scenes and the 'night-to-morning' effects in the slum

* The Museum of Modern Art prints now being circulated have one controversial title (white letters on black) before the epilogue. In the original version, there was a close-up of the "Author's" manuscript in a typewriter, with black type on white paper, thus eschewing any resemblance to an orthodox subtitle.

† Discounting the primitive turn-of-the-century films where the camera was mounted on a railroad train to take "panorama" scenic views, Griffith seems to have been the first to consciously move the camera. In *The Massacre* (summer of 1912), he preceded and followed Indians on horseback from an automobile. Two years later in *The Avenging Conscience* his camera on a truck swooped quickly toward Walthall in a fantastic dream sequence. In the famous Italian spectacle *Cabiria* (directed by Giovannie Pastrone, 1913-14), the camera, mounted on a carriage, moved in slowly in almost every scene (possibly because cutting and the insertion of close-ups were not yet understood in Italy). The New York Times marvelled that "the scenery is brought forward and moved from side to side" [*sic*]. This type of shot was known for several years as "the Cabiria movement", then it was called a "truck shot". Finally, in the late twenties, it received the name "dolly shot" by which it is commonly known today. In *Intolerance* and later films, Griffith used every type of moving and crane shot. But the device seems to have lain dormant for a time so that many people in the mid-twenties actually believed that the Germans discovered the moving camera!

quarter; the revolving door and swinging glass doors, symbolizing the endless revolution of life and fortune; the famous dream sequence with its multiple exposures, distorting lenses, slow motion and stylized figures, and where, true to dream psychology(?) locales are superimposed (the hotel lobby becomes surrounded and confused by the slum court); the use of ceilings on some sets; and, in general, perfection of detail and composition pervaded by an overall poetic quality. The epilogue, incidentally, contains what would now be known as a "Russian Montage" sequence though it was made before *Potemkin*. It contains a "montage" of laughing faces, of approximately a second or less each (actual number of frames: 20, 22, 24, 21, 16, 19, 14, 15, 22, 29).

From Kent Munson's essay on the film:—

"The plot, of course, is simple. It tells a universal fable of a proud old doorman of a great hotel, and the effect on him of being deprived of his handsome uniform and demoted to the white jacket of the attendant in the men's lavatory. But in this simple action is implied a multitude of truths: the awe man has for uniforms, the almost mystic nature of vestment, for example. Here is a case where it's not irrelevant to consider a film as symbolic—for it is obvious that Mayer intended it to be so considered; and The Doorman is one of the really great allegorical characters of modern drama. If, indeed, as some suggest, *The Last Laugh* was merely the lucky blending of the very best of Mayer, Freund and Murnau, and not part of a recognizable artistic pattern, so be it. It remains one of the monuments to the potentialities of the silent narrative film.

"No silent narrative film so completely exploited all the potentialities of the medium with so few loose-ends, and with so little room for improvement. In a way, this is an unhealthy sign. Even the great Griffith films always anticipated one another; one always had the feeling that Griffith was still growing, still experimenting, in a word, was still dissatisfied. But *The Last Laugh* points in no direction, except back at itself. It is *fin de siècle*, in the sense that it is the end of a whole great cycle that started with *The Great Train Robbery*.

"The years 1925-1928 bear this out. These last years were distinguished only by an increasing artificiality of technique, a rehashing of existing devices, like the meaningless use of soft focus and moving camera. Even Murnau seemed to be imitating himself in, say, *Sunrise*. That progressive film creators like Carl Dreyer realized the need to either strike out in new directions or fall into decay is indicated by his daring experiment, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, which studiously avoids all the established traditions of the period. As for the Russians, they scarcely enter into the discussion; their technique was essentially 'documentary', for one thing, and, too, much of what we've long called 'Russian technique' is apparent much earlier in *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, among other films.

"Much argument surrounds the 'epilogue' in *The Last Laugh*. In the original version, Mayer makes it perfectly clear that the 'happy ending' is nothing of the sort, that it never happened. The tragic ending of the old man is made all the more vivid by that ending, which has the function of a kind of death-dream of the old man in the lavatory. Surely, no concessions to public demand for happy endings forced Mayer to compromise. (The whole German school, as a matter of fact, was noted for the opposite: note, *Variety*, *Nju*, *The Blue Angel*, etc.) In the original version is a close-up of the author's manuscrip in a typewriter, removing any possibility that the ending is the continuation of the life of the Doorman: 'Here at the scene of his last disgrace the old man will slowly pine away—and the story would really have ended there had not the author taken pity on the forsaken old man and added an epilogue in which he made things happen as, unfortunately, they do not happen in real life.' The Museum of Modern Art has seen fit to alter this to a conventional white-on-black subtitle: 'Here the story should really end for, in real life, the forlorn old man would have little to look forward to but death. The author took pity on him, however, and has provided a quite improbable epilogue'. (Note the subtle difference in nuance, implying an editorial comment by the Museum on a weakness in the film.)

"Few will question that *The Last Laugh* is the climax of Jannings's career as an actor;* it may even be the most perfect male characterization of the silent cinema. Offhand I can think of only two performances to equal it in eloquence and subtlety, and they were both by women (Falconetti in Dreyer's *Joan of Arc* and Lillian Gish

* He was but 39 years old at the time although playing with conviction a man about 70.

in Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*). Those, who in their ignorance or because of faulty memories, think silent screen characterizations were limited to broad melodrama or slapstick would do well to study this film and then study it again and then still again. Jannings's performance transcends pantomime, certainly. Without a spoken word, without so much as a printed title, the subtlest transitions are effected—often merely by a change in walk or posture or the disarrangement of the character's carefully cultivated beard".

1925

TARTUFFE

Produced by Ufa in 1925. Released in U.S., July 24, 1927. Scenario by Carl Mayer, based on the Molière play. Photographed by Karl Freund. Designed by Walter Röhrig and Robert Herlth.
Cast:

Tartuffe	Emil Jannings
Elmire	Lil Dagover
Orgon	Werner Krauss
Dorine	Luise Höflich
The old gentleman	Hermann Picha
His Housekeeper	Rosa Valetti
His Grandson	Andre Mattoni

"The prologue reveals a rich, elderly gentleman who is enticed by his hypocritical housekeeper into cutting his young nephew out of his will and leaving his entire fortune to her. The nephew, a handsome, wise young chap, disguises himself as the proprietor of a travelling cinema theatre, and brings his wares to the house of his uncle. There, by means of flattery to the greedy housekeeper, he gains entrance and projects his picture. Here then is unfolded the Molière script. With the epilogue comes light to the elderly gentleman, who sends his housekeeper from his door, and once more renews his affection for the wise young nephew". (UFA Program Notes.)

Tartuffe was not a popular success in the U.S. It was considered interesting for its photography, decorative sets and stylized acting. Jannings was especially amusing and comic in the lead, a role very different from his porter in *The Last Laugh*.
"It is in fact a case of the actors running away with their medium and subordinating the specific art of the camera to their interpretations . . . an actor's holiday . . . Emil Jannings gives a performance which just as a *tour de force* will enthral all his admirers". (National Board of Review Magazine, May, 1928.)
"Considered as a finished film, *Tartuffe* is one of UFA's lesser efforts, its main virtues being admirable performances by the three principles". (N.Y. Sun.)
It may be interesting to note that there were 173 titles in *Tartuffe* as against none in *The Last Laugh*.

1926

FAUST

Produced by Ufa. Released in U.S. by MGM, December 6, 1926. Scenario by Hans Kyser; after Goethe, Marlowe and German folk sagas. Titles by Gerhart Hauptmann. Photographed by Carl Hoffmann. Settings and costumes by Walter Röhrig and Robert Herlth.
Cast:

Faust	Gosta Ekman
Mephisto	Emil Jannings
Marguerite	Camilla Horn
Martha, her aunt	Yvette Guilbert
Her Mother	Frieda Richard
Valentine	William Dieterle
Duke of Parma	Eric Barclay
The Duchess	Hanna Ralph
Archangel	Werner Fuetterer

Faust was one of the most pictorially beautiful films ever made, a supreme example of German studio craftsmanship, at times seeming like a Dürer or Bruegal come to life. The expressionistic medieval settings were beautifully lighted; strange apparitions and weird camera tricks added a mystical atmosphere; low angles and ceilings were again employed. In the famous scene where Mephisto and the rejuvenated Faust fly through the air, the camera, placed on a roller coaster device, travelled over miles of miniature cities and country.

The leading role was played by Gösta Ekman, noted Swedish actor, who was able to project successfully the extreme contrast between youth and old age. Camilla Horn was a beautiful Marguerite, and Yvette Guilbert, the famous French chanteuse, added a touch of comedy, especially in the scene where Jannings gives her a love potion. But again it was Emil Jannings who ran away with the picture, dressed in a long black cape to make him appear more slender, and playing with mischief and subtle humor a very delightful Mephistopheles. In fact, it was a conception and treatment of Mephisto which overbalanced the picture; the main theme of *Faust* was lost, as well as any genuine emotional quality.

Murnau's ingenuity reached new heights in making the camera serve as the eye of Faust and Mephisto, or conversely, in making the audience see the world through the eyes of Mephisto and Faust. Nor was this lost on the critics. Gilbert Seldes, in his *The Movies and The Talkies*, quoted Seymour Stern: "The scene in *Faust* where the lovers pursue each other in a garden is photographed from above. The audience sees Faust chasing Marguerite down a path lined with flowers, the scene is pretty, amorous; but the angle at which it is taken gives it the particular quality which relates it to *Faust*, so that the sequence could not be lifted out of that film and patched into another: the scene is taken from the point of view where Mephisto is watching the two puppets who are innocent of his power over them. The spectators do not see Mephisto; but they see with his eyes; and it is the angle which gives them the sense of impending tragedy, which corrupts the innocence and charm of the little scene played before them".

1927

SUNRISE

Produced by Fox Film Corp. Released September, 23 1927. Scenario by Carl Mayer, from Hermann Sudermann's *A Trip to Tilsit*. Photographed by Charles Rosher and Karl Struss. Designed by Rochus Gliese. Assistant art directors: Edgar Ulmer and Alfred Metscher. Assistant director: Herman Bing. Titles by Katherine Hilliker and H. H. Caldwell. Synchronized score by Dr. Hugo Riesenfeld.

Cast:

The Man	George O'Brien
The Wife	Janet Gaynor
The Woman from the City	Margaret Livingston
The Maid	Bodil Rosing
The Photographer	J. Farrell MacDonald
The Barber	Ralph Sipperly
The Manicurist	Jane Winton
The Obtrusive Gentleman	Arthur Housman
The Obliging Gentleman	Eddie Boland

also: Gina Corrado, Barry Norton, Sally Eilers.

"*Sunrise*—a story of two humans. This song of the Man and his Wife is of no place and every place; you might hear it anywhere at any time. For wherever the Sun rises and sets—in the city's turmoil or under the open sky on the farm—life is much the same; sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet, tears and laughter, sin and forgiveness". (From preface to the film.)*

Murnau, brought to Hollywood at a time when German artists were being imported almost as soon as they were recognized in their native country, was given carte blanche by Fox. The result was a big, if uneven, picture, one of the high water marks in production, resembling in many ways Murnau's better German films. The first half was equal to his best work, with the added values unlimited facilities can bring.

* In the eleven reels there is a total of only thirty titles.

Once again: the stylized sets, the unusual compositions, the lyrical atmosphere, the fluid camera (especially in the swamp sequence). Other notable effects: the travel poster at the railway station which burst into life; the impressions of the city (done by trick effects and multiple exposure), the long trolley ride (before the days of rear projection, the car actually travelling a long distance from the country into the city), the handling of Gaynor and O'Brien (then starting their careers), etc.

However, the picture fell down a bit in the low comedy of the "Coney Island" sequence. The humor is typically "Hollywood", out of keeping with the rest of the film. The ending was melodramatic with a forced happy ending added, all results of Murnau's trying to achieve a compromise between his ideal and Hollywood commercial expediency. However, in spite of the above defects and the rather slow German tempo, *Sunrise* is a great picture—one of the few actual film "ballads" ever made. It was one of the first pictures to have a synchronized musical score added; Dr. Hugo Riesenfeld arranged and composed music which added to the picture's effectiveness, except perhaps in the last sequence where he used a horn to simulate the human voice calling—an artistic mistake, since, at other times, we did not hear voices.

Kent Munson writes of the film: "Here at last, we feel, is what the makers of *Caligari* tried to do and failed: project the setting as a dynamic part of the action. Insanity does not recognize itself; and *Caligari* failed by being artistically schizoid; what we actually saw, in a cinematic terms, was not the world viewed through the eyes of a madman, but an insane world viewed with complete objectivity. We saw, as it were, the hand of the painter on the canvas sets, through which the actors moved somnambulistically, madly. But the first glimpses of the city by the Man and Wife in *Sunrise* is genuine subjectivity, as was the dream sequence in *The Last Laugh*. Here was the feeling every country person gets at his first sight of a great city: that too much is happening, that nothing is co-ordinated, that places are larger than they later seem, once we are familiar with them. (Note the distortion of the city square; the cafe that seems as large as a football stadium. These are psychological phenomena familiar to almost everyone; and we can only wonder at those critics who objected to the city sequences because they were not realistic.)

"The key to a proper appreciation of *Sunrise* can be found in the preface: 'This song of the Man and his Wife . . .' Mayer constructed his scenario after a musical form, rather than a dramatic one. We have not episodes and acts, built for a culminating dramatic effect, but movements, each with its own mood and its own interior construction. If one views the film from this angle, the comedy sequence in the middle, which in a drama is irrelevant and anticlimatic after the dramatic trolley ride, is perfectly natural. It is contrast; it is the *scherzo* of the film. I don't say the musical approach was completely successful; it wasn't; but let's at least realize the new concept Mayer and Murnau were experimenting with, to take the place of the outmoded narrative construction still being used by most film makers. There was a hint of this new form in *The Last Laugh*, whose epilogue, though false dramatically, was cinematically correct in the most profound sense.

"Seen without preconceived ideas and prejudices which make us often criticize films as photographed plays or novels, *Sunrise* displays surprising virtues. Who knows? If Murnau and Mayer had continued to make films another ten years they might have found an answer to the riddle *The Last Laugh* posed film makers. This attempt in that direction indicates forcefully the great loss to the medium in Murnau's untimely death".

1928

FOUR DEVILS

Produced by Fox Film Corp. Released October 3, 1928. Scenario by Carl Mayer, Berthold Viertel and Marion Orth, after a novel by Herman Bang. Photographed by Ernest Palmer and L. W. O'Connell. Dialogue sequence by George Middleton.

Cast:

The Clown	J. Farrell MacDonald
Cecchi	Anders Randolf
The Woman	Claire McDowell

Charles	} *as children*	...	...	...	...	Jack Parker
Marion		...	...	...	...	Dawn O'Day (Anne Shirley)
Adolf		...	...	...	...	Phillipe De Lacy
Louise		...	...	...	...	Anita Fremault (Anita Louise)
Charles	} The 4 Devils	...	...	...	...	Charles Morton
Marion		...	...	...	...	Janet Gaynor
Adolf		...	...	...	...	Barry Norton
Louise		...	...	...	...	Nancy Drexel
The Rich Lady		...	...	...	...	Mary Duncan

Sunrise had not been a great box office success, and Murnau found himself in the familiar position of having to inject more "box-office appeal" into his pictures. Fox had apparently been willing to go all out for art, but enough was enough. Now Murnau attempted a sort of modern version of *Variety**, with the stereotyped vamp part of Mary Duncan "pointed up" after the script was taken away from Mayer and Viertel.

Four circus children grow up together, form a quartette of acrobats, The 4 Devils. The couples are in love until the vamp takes a fancy to Morton, the leader of the troupe. This nearly wrecks four lives, until pure love triumphs in the last reel, after some suspense on the trapezes (the unhappy Gaynor nearly falling, etc.).

As a concession to the late 1928 public clamour for "talkies", the studio added a final sequence in sound. It was bad even for the period; only Mary Duncan spoke effectively, the others painfully revealing their inexperience. The result was the usual transition period "hash." However, the directorial subtlety and finesse of Murnau still showed in spots, and the camera work was excellent, especially the use of a revolving crane in the circus ring.

1929

OUR DAILY BREAD (City Girl)

Produced by Fox Film Corp. Released February 16, 1930. Adapted by Berthold Viertel and Marion Orth from *The Mud Turtle*, by Elliott Lester. Dialogue by Lester. Photographed by Ernest Palmer. Featuring Charles Farrell (Lem), Mary Duncan (Kate), David Torrence (Tristine), and Edith Yorke, Dawn O'Day, Guinn Williams, Dick Alexander, Tom Maguire, Edward Brady, David Rollins.

This was Murnau's swan song at the Fox Studios. In fact, he never completed the film, which was rendered obsolete by the trend toward "talkies". The film started ambitiously enough. Murnau bought a whole farm in Pendleton, Oregon, on which to shoot the harvest scenes, moved his camera, mounted on sleighs, as smoothly through the wheat fields as he had through the studio stages. His desire was to make an epic of our daily bread, a "woodcut" (again the revolt against dramatic terminology) of life in the Dakota grain fields, showing the customs of the farmers, their backgrounds and traditions, with wheat as a symbol. But apparently feeling they had another von Stronheim on their hands and fearful of their dollars scattered to the winds, Fox took a firm hand again. Gag men were dispatched to insert "comic relief" into the picture. Fox, viewing a rough print, objected that the film was "too long and the peasants not American". Anyway, Fox wanted a talkie. So, talking sequences were added and a much shortened and mutilated version (67 minutes) sent out to the hinterlands, in the studio's frantic attempt to recoup its losses.
There are no reviews or records of its playing dates; apparently it died a quick death. The picture never played a New York first-run theatre. (Release title: *City Girl.*) A trade paper calls it "only fair entertainment with an antiquated story", but from other accounts there were splendid "documentary" scenes of farm life.
Story: A wheat grower sends his son to the city to sell the crop. He falls in love with a waitress and marries her. The father, angry because his son didn't get enough money for the crop, accuses Kate of being a prostitute. When Kate's amorous brother-in-law hurts his hand in a threshing machine he goes to her for first-aid. The father finds them together, and insists to Lem that his wife is being unfaithful

* *Four Devils* had been done twice before: in Denmark, 1912, by Robert Dinesen; and in Germany, 1920 by A. W. Sandberg.

to him. But Lem hears the truth and prepares to return to the city with her. The father begs their forgiveness and the couple decides to stay and help the old man with the crop.

1931

TABU

Released by Paramount March 18, 1931. Original story by Robert Flaherty. Scenario: Flaherty and Murnau. Co-directed by F. W. Murnau and Robert Flaherty. Assistant: David Flaherty. Photographed by Floyd Crosby. Additional photography: Flaherty. With Reri (Anna Chevalier) and Matahi. Synchronized score by Dr. Hugo Riesenfeld.

Robert Flaherty, the great documentary director of "Moana" fame, formed a partnership with Murnau in 1928 to make another South Seas film. It was to be the first of a series of films to be made by them, independently, under the banner of "Murnau-Flaherty Productions". Murnau had a yacht, the *Bali*, and they looked forward to happy years of sailing the seven seas together, making the kind of films they wanted to make.

Tabu was a world-wide success, a deeply touching film, with a strange, haunting quality that persisted in the memory and photography of ineffable beauty.

"Filmed in Tahiti and Bora-Bora. Re-enactment of a story indigenous to Polynesia, the consecration of a maiden to the gods, who is, as a result, 'tabu' (forbidden) to all men, and of the woe that follows in the wake of its violation when love tries to break through the old tradifions.

"As if Flaherty and Murnau had, themselves, violated a sacred 'tabu' in filming this story, tragedy swiftly followed in the wake of the film's completion. Shortly after Murnau's return to Hollywood, he was killed in an automobile accident. The beautiful dream of Murnau and Flaherty was over. The schooner, *Bali*, was wrangled over by lawers, appraisers, auctioneers, in the settlement of the Murnau estate . . ." (Herman b. Weinberg: Flaherty Index).

Murnau and Flaherty parted on the story. Murnau, who put all his money into it, wanted more plot, made many changes. So Flaherty retired and Murnau finished it alone. As it was a silent film, he had difficulty selling it. There were few titles in the released version (mostly documents, signs, etc.) and a synchronized score was added. Finally Paramount agreed to release it, and Murnau's estate realized a profit of $150,000. "*Tabu* is in my opinion Murnau's primary masterpiece and is one of the supreme achievements of the screen—a work ranking with the best creations of Griffith, Eisenstein and Dovzhenko . . . immortal and tragic beauty on celluloid. Basically, this is the product of F. W. Murnau, not of Robert Flaherty, who worked on it as an ethnological advisor; essentially it is a German film, in the same sense in which *Que Viva Mexico!* is a Russian film. Like *Que Viva Mexico!* and like *Broken Blossoms*, to which category of lyric poetry and tragedy on the screen it is related, *Tabu* represents a landmark in the exploitation of form, imagery, music and rhythm in the cinema". (Seymour Stern in a letter to the author after a 1948 private screening in Hollywood.)

Murnau himself liked *Tabu* the best of all his films. He never saw the opening performance as he died one week before the premiere. Had Murnau lived to make talkies, one may be sure that he was too capable an artist to betray the camera and the world of images. He might have found a way to solve some of the technical and artistic problems current even to-day, 20 years after the introduction of sound. His death was a definite loss to the medium.

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