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FILMS SAVED: SIX FROM TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

Tuesday, June 9, 1970 (2:00, 5:30)

*CITY GIRL (OUR DAILY BREAD). 1928-1930. Directed by F. W. Murnau. Screenplay by Berthold Viertel and Marion Orth from the play "The Mud Turtle" by Elliott Lester. Photography by Ernest Palmer.

88 minutes.

CAST: Charles Farrell (Lem Tustine)
Mary Duncan (Kate)
David Torrence (Lem's Father)
Edith Yorke (Lem's Mother)
Dawn O'Day ** (Marie)
Dick Alexander (Mac)
Tom Maguire (Matey)
Guinn Williams, Edward Brady, Jack Pennick (Reapers)

CITY GIRL is a major rediscovery. A "lost" film by the great F. W. Murnau, the director of THE LAST LAUGH and SUNRISE, it is an important one for all who are concerned with the development of the medium.

It was made under the title OUR DAILY BREAD, in part on a farm in Oregon, during the summer and fall of 1928. Hindsight tells us that if it had been rushed into release then, it might have had its chance as a silent film. Instead, the producers hesitated too long over it. Sound was on its way, and Fox was in the forefront of the companies moving into the new era. By April, 1929, OUR DAILY BREAD still had not been released, and Murnau was on his way to the South Seas to make TABU. By the time OUR DAILY BREAD was released, with a synchronized score and a dialogue sequence, cut to 67 minutes and retitled CITY GIRL, it was February, 1930, and there was no longer much of a market for such hybrids. The "all-talking" picture had taken over first-run theaters in the major cities, and a film like CITY GIRL could garner only a few scattered bookings. It missed being reviewed by the leading critics, who never saw it.

The version we are showing was never released at all as far as we know. Although it has the main titles and credits of the released version (probably the only titles that ever existed), it appears to be much as Murnau completed it. For purposes of clarity, we really should call this version by Murnau's working title, OUR DAILY BREAD.

Whether OUR DAILY BREAD is a work of the quality of SUNRISE is perhaps speculative until it has had the repeated viewings and close analysis that the latter has had. However, it is interesting to compare them. Both films use the contrasts between city and country for allegorical purposes, but OUR DAILY BREAD rings some changes on the theme, finding at the last that evil exists in country life as it does in the city. OUR DAILY BREAD has lyrical passages quite as extraordinary as those in

SUNRISE. Take, for example, the return of the boy with his bride from the city. Followed by a smoothly gliding camera, they run joyfully through the fields of ripening wheat, the sun shining on them, the fields of grain stretching as far as the eye can see. Then they come to an abrupt halt, as they come within sight of the house. The girl, a former waitress, expects to find the good life in the country, but the boy suddenly sees things with different eyes. In fact, he realizes his father is a suspicious and greedy old farmer who has planted his crop up to the very walls of his house, even under the windows, leaving no space for a blade of grass, a bush or a flower. His acres stretch out of sight, and yet he chastizes the youngest child for playing with a few grains. We understand, as soon as we stop, as does the boy, that the ungenerous father will not welcome the girl from the city.

The earlier sequences in a studio-constructed Chicago are equally expressive. Even if the ending of OUR DAILY BREAD seems rather flat - as though Murnau were pressured to hurry it or to finish it cheaply, since the sound film loomed on the horizon - we must appreciate the great good fortune that saved OUR DAILY BREAD for forty years.

E. B.

*Silent film. Piano accompaniment by Charles Hofmann.

** Later Anne Shirley.