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CITY GIRL [OUR DAILY BREAD] USA 1929 90 mins b/w 16mm

Production Company: Fox Film Corporation. *Director:* F.W. Murnau. *Presented by:* William Fox. *Stage Direction* [in Sound version]: A.H. Van Buren, A.F. Erickson. *Adaptation/Scenario:* Berthold Viertel, Marion Orth. *Dialogue* [Sound version]: Elliott Lester. *Titles:* Katherine Hilliker, H.H. Caldwell. *Photography:* Ernest Palmer. *Musical Score* [Sound Version]: Arthur Kay. *Recording Engineer:* Harold Hobson. *Assistant Director:* William Tummel. *Costumes:* Sophie Wachner. *Sets:* Harry Oliver. *Editing:* Katherine Hilliker, H.H. Caldwell.

Cast: David Torrence *(Tustine, The Father)*, Edith Yorke *(Mrs Tustine)*, Charles Farrell *(Lem Tustine)*, Dawn O'Day [Later, Anne Shirley] *(Mary Tustine)*, Mary Duncan *(Kate, the waitress)*, Tom Maguire *(Matey)*, Jack Pennick, Guinn Williams, Dick Alexander, Ed Brady *(reapers)*, Ed Clay, Marjorie Beebe, Joe Brown.

MURNAU - A Look at his Work in light of his influence on the American Film

Murnau, a tall, angular, diffident man, both shy and superior, is considered one of the world's great film directors.

> Murnau's influence on the cinema has proved to be more lasting than Eisenstein's. Andrew Sarris.

Born Frederich Wilhelm Plumpe in Germany in 1888 of an upper middle class family, he had a childhood of comfort and care. In his father's estate there were horses, gardens, a huge park and all the paraphenalia of a playground. The bright, bookish boy was in love with theatrics, and when, due to a change in fortunes, the family moved to a substantial apartment in Kassel, the little fourth grade student was already dramatizing Grimm and Anderson fairy tales for a family audience.

> By the time he was twelve my brother was already familiar with Schopenhauer, Ibsen, Nietzsche and Shakespeare.
> Robert Plumpe Murnau, from Eisner's Murnau.

As is so often the case, the father disapproved of his son's love for theatre, and when it appeared the youth would not satisfy himself with a professorship from Heidelberg, his father cut off his funds, which then were secretly supplied by his mother's father. Once he became an actor with Max Reinhardt's company, Murnau dropped nearly all connections with his family, except for his mother, to whom he remained devoted all his life.

For those fascinated with the occult, with mysticism and myth, it is interesting to learn that Murnau's family was an ancient one which had emigrated from Sweden around 1000 A.D. and had in 1650 included two women who were burnt as witches, and a third imprisoned for witchcraft. Murnau frequently consulted an astrologer, was highly sensitive to the supernatural, and yet built upon taboo land when filming *Tabu*, breaking ancient island rules. He died (1931) after the making of this film, in a car accident of which he had been warned by his astrologer. He was 42.

From 1919 to 1926, coinciding with Germany's Golden Age of Film, Frederich Wilhelm Murnau made 18 films in Germany, from his early *Der Knabe in Blau (Blue Boy)* which was inspired by the famous Gainsborough painting, to his celebrated version of *Faust* with Jannings and Dieterle.

Renowned also for *Nosferatu*, the Dracula story that remains a classic of horror, as well as *The Last Laugh* (or *The Last Man)* 1924 and his 1925 *Tartuffe*, both with Emil Jannings, Murnau was lured to Hollywood by Fox, where he made his first and most famous U.S. film *Sunrise*, in 1927. His other American productions, *The Four Devils*, a circus acrobat drama of 1928, and *Our Daily Bread* or *City Girl*, are less well known. There is no print of *The Four Devils*, though a negative apparently still survives in the Fox archives, and *City Girl* is seldom shown. Following the lacerations of this movie, which was originally titled *Our Daily Bread*, Murnau split with Fox and, travelling to the south seas, in conjunction with Robert Flaherty, produced and wrote *Tabu*, which is also rarely shown now.

Murnau's work deserves its illustrious reputation. As a form of expressionist cinema it brought to the world of film a concentration of talents and artistry that were revolutionary. Instead of simply being a director of others, or an auteur creating through others his own unique vision, Murnau was able to inspire a creative combination of talents. His works were communal creations where the script, the design and the camera work, with his own creative imaginative interpretations and direction of the performers were synthesized into unique group works of art.

Some writers like to think it was not Murnau but Carl Mayer, his frequent scriptwriter, who was the creative genius behind the brilliance of some of these

films, while others contend hotly that Murnau's talents were crucial. The point is that Murnau attracted brilliant artists and inspired from them their best work, and that finally it was the coordination of their combined efforts that not only made movies that were artistic masterpieces, but that opened up the technical possibilities of film in many directions.

When Andrew Sarris refers to Murnau's influence being more lasting than Eisenstein's, he is considering the moving camera that was freed to swing, and follow, to track and fall and spin, as compared basically with Eisenstein's dialectical montage as a means of exploring the world and the emotional qualities of life in it.

> Under Murnau, the moving camera is never used merely decoratively or symbolically. Consequently every movement, even when his joy at having 'unchained' the camera is apparent, has a precise, clearly-defined aim.
>
> Eisner in "The Haunted Screen"

Among other innovations, Murnau was one of the first to use negative film, as he did in creating the eerie sight of Count Orlok's woods in *Nosferatu*, as well as the one frame - one shot techniques that cuased the Count's carriage to move with wierd jerky effects in the same film.

Much of the camera mobility invented and introduced in such films as *The Last Laugh* depended on the ingenuity of Karl Freund, cameraman, working with the demanding Carl Mayer, scriptwriter, and the set designers Robert Herlth and Walter Rohrig as they worked for months with Murnau over every detail of the conception of the film.

This coordinated creativity was responsible for Murnau's famous *Kammerspiel-Stimmung*, a form of completed work that requires some explanation.

At the time in Germany that Murnau left the theatre to make movies, Max Reinhardt was a great theatrical influence, and the styles of Expressionism dominated in German art.

Defined as a movement that "seeks to simplify or intensify the forms of expression, to achieve new rhythm and colourfulness, to create in decorative or monumental forms" in the preface to a 1912 Sonderbund art exhibition, Expressionism is clarified by Michael Greenwood, writing in the introduction to his recent fine show of German Expressionist Graphic Art at the Art Gallery of York University, as "rather a certain attitude to life, humanity and civilization than any particular style." He notes "it pervaded all the vanguard arts in Germany - poetry, music, drama, cinema and the novel, besides the visual arts."

Greenwood further notes the quasi-religious intentions which were aimed at "the conversion of Western society from materialism" to a spiritual renaissance, the attraction of folk art and primative art with its physical and psychological potency, and the simplification of theme, search for nobility, and obsessions with the agonies of people suffering social injustice and oppression. Above all the Expressionists exalted the "role of elemental instinct in the life of man as a means to preserve the integrity of the individual from the degrading pressures of an impersonal society."

In Expressionist dramas the characters often were referred to as simply "The Man" and "The Woman" for universality, while in film as on stage, all unnecessary additives were eliminated, even to the titling characteristically used in silent films.

> Screen art ought, through its unique properties, to tell a complete story by means of images alone; the ideal film does not need titles.
>
> Murnau
> (in a Theatre Magazine article quoted in Eisner's Murnau)

It is clear, considering Murnau's works, that in many ways he conforms to the description of an Expressionist artist.

The German expression *Kammerspiel-Stimmung* captures the essence of Murnau's films, and like so many German expressions, defies easy translation.

In a German film *Stimmung* can be understood as mood as created, *with* the performer, through the use of atmospheric lighting, decor, stage design, music and so on. It alludes to the "musical conditions of the soul" and "is bound up with physical acoustics and a harmony of vibrations", according to Eisner, in "The Haunted Screen."

Kammerspiel, in theatre terms, were closet plays, small and intimate, particularly advocated by Max Reinhardt. Psychological comprehension was created through interpretive means; inner feelings revealed through *Stimmung*, atmosphere, visual clues.

An example from a script by Haas for Murnau's 1922 film *Phantom* suggests how inner sensations are translated into images:

> The countess Marina enters timidly. The light wavers in the draghts. (close shot) a window is blown violently to and fro, breaking a pot with a palm growing in it. The glass becomes covered with frost.
>
> Eisner

Though Expressionist style does not seem artistically matched to *Kammerspiel*, these two forms could, and did, combine effectively, and the results were peculiarly fascinating films which distinguished the German cinema from all others of that period.

> The antinomy between the Kammerspiel, with its psychological interest, and the Expressionist vision, which excludes all psychology, gives a certain hybrid quality to Carl Mayer's (The Last Man, Tartuffe, Sunrise) scripts. He was at one and the same time an Expressionist writer and a poet of the Kammerspiel.
>
> Eisner: Murnau

Therefore it can be seen that in a *Kammerspiel*-film every aspect was controlled to create a precise atmosphere which permeated the film; everything was blended into a unified, integrated whole. It was possible to use the methods of expressionism in conjunction with psychological interpretations to produce a 'hybrid' perhaps, but one that, like most hybrids, was strong and powerful.

Many people do not realize the overpowering influence these German films of Germany's Golden Period from 1919 to 1926 had on the American film of the day, and of the future.

The powerful German production company, UFA, bolstered by American money, had a steady distribution arrangement for German film in the U.S., and though the general population perhaps found some of these Expressionist dramas and works of *Kammerspiel - Stimmung* rather hard to swallow, some were immense successes and the critics and intelligentsia as well as most filmmakers were heavily impressed, particularly also by the use of techniques that were more inventive than any since D.W. Griffith's..

Lang, Pabst, Murnau, and in a different way, Lubitsch, introduced artistic style and power to a relatively stagnant medium, influencing the films of the thirties and even forties, and in a way fathering *Film Noir*.

There was no language barrier in the days of silent films, and German films, sometimes mockingly referred to as "arty" were a part of the regular movie scene in the U.S.

In 1925 critic Mordaunt Hall, reviewing in the New York Times, called Murnau's *The Last Laugh* a "...highly artistic masterpiece." He accepted the titled humorous ending which Murnau was forced by UFA to put on the end of his tragic story of a demoted doorman, and summed up his review with the emotional comment: "There were tears to the right of us, tears to the left of us, and tears in our own eyes..." (It is interesting for film buffs to note that the next day von Sternberg's *The Salvation Hunters* opened in New York to his unenthusiastic review.

On the other hand, Mordaunt Hall, reviewing in 1929 the 1922 production of *Nosferatu, the Vampire* by Murnau, found it "not especially stirring" and termed it "rather more of a soporific than a thriller." (Sophie Tucker in *Honky Tonk* opened the next day.)

But it was following *The Last Laugh*,and its great critical and popular success that Murnau came to the United States and made *Sunrise*, and for this film Mordaunt Hall's praise was generous. "Mr. Murnau proves by *Sunrise* that he can do just as fine work in Hollywood as he ever did in Germany" he concludes, after complimenting the "intense feeling" and "underlying subtlety" of the work. It's amusing to note his comment that "sometimes Mr. O'Brien appears to be just a little lethargic in his movements" when you know that Murnau had twenty pounds of lead placed in O'Brien's shoes in order to help him simulate the leaden peasant walk required. This film opened the same week as Abel Gance's stupendous *Napoleon*.

The reaction of German critics to Murnau's first American film were mixed, One praised it as "Murnau's best film" which "grips one and makes one happy and kills evil thoughts" and which forced the critic to conclude that"Mr Murnau has learned all kinds of things over there; Fox never before has put out such and original film. So both of them can be satisfied and we can congratulate both upon their collaboration."

A critic at the opposite extreme remarked upon seeing *Sunrise* after reading the lavish American press praise that his "disappointment was bitter. This Murnau film leaves one cold," and felt that the film showed "how poorly he (Murnau) has succeeded in producing a satisfying synthesis of German and American taste."

Hollywood people watched the masters of the German invasion with awe. Clarence Brown (*Anna Christie, Anna Karenina* with Garbo, *Intruder in the Dust, The Yearling*) said:

> Murnau! There was a great talent. When I saw that set he built at Arrowhead for *Sunrise*, I crawled over it for a day and a half. It was wonderful. We all felt he was great.

Murnau's technical demands inspired some typically ingenious American solutions. Charles Rosher, cameraman, said:

> That was a very difficult film, *Sunrise*. We had many problems... For some scenes, such as the swamp sequence, the camera went in a complete circle. This created enormous lighting problems... .For the forest scene, a mile-long track was built out at Lake Arrowhead; the end of the track came right into the city.

Kevin Brownlow typifies an American attitude as he concludes "*Sunrise* is a great film; slow and classical. Photographically it is a work of genius. Its European flavor is very strong, even though it was made in California. But however brilliant the European cameramen may have been, no one could have infused the visuals with such a combination of delicacy and richness as the great Charles Rosher."

After *Sunrise* Murnau made a second American film, *The Four Devils*. As no print appears to exist we cannot judge what modifications were made to suit the ever-demanding commercial interests at Fox, or what Murnau insisted on for his own artistic honour. The film apparently was only a fair success, and this, plus the fact Fox attributed what success it did have to the benefits incurred from their interference, caused the conditions that resulted in Murnau's next film *Our Daily Bread*, turning into *City Girl*.

Our Daily Bread was intended by Murnau as "a tale about wheat, about the sacredness of bread, about the estrangement of the modern city dwellers and their ignorance about Nature's sources of sustenance, a story adhering to the stage play The Mud Turtle."

Always himself torn between city and country, never perfectly "At home" in any one locale, Murnau understood well the separate attractions of both city and country. In *Sunrise* the peasant loves the city girl when she visits the country, but when he takes his country wife to the city and sees her "Madonna-like beauty" through the eyes of city people, he appreciates her more for the contrast.

In *City Girl* it is the waste of pretty Kate (Mary Duncan) in the noisy, dirty city, and her rescue to the country with farm boy Lem (Charles Farrell) that motivates the contrast between city and country life, and people.

But Murnau meant far more than a simple contrast between modes of life. He wanted *Our Daily Bread* to be an eulogy to the country and to those basic country-life symbols that lie at the base of a healthy country. He chose bread, the staff of life, to carry this theme and he envisioned a "Story of Wheat" from the field to the finished loaf for his centre, a realistic, poetic, montage of the whole process.

He had often relied on the inventive genius of Carl Mayer for script and when Mayer's work didn't meet deadline and Fox was able to rid themselves of this "weird" writer, Murnau at least managed to contract German writer Berthold Viertel, though Fox was dismayed at the European peasants which resulted. Gag-men and comic scenes were injected at the insistence of the studio, and the Durer wood-carving effect Murnau strove for was eliminated, along with his "symphony of our daily bread" as the film was generally mutilated in its transition to a talking picture.

There appears to be no review of *City Girl* or *Our Daily Bread* in the New York Times of that period, and since Mordaunt Hall was unlikely to have missed it, we can only conclude that the film didn't open then.

A German critic, according to Eisner, found *City Girl* to be a return for Murnau to the *Kammerspielfilm* of *Sunrise*, not a routine and disappointingly conventional work like his former *The Four Devils*.

Another German critic complimented the film for showing "man at one with the landscape, with everything true and sincere and footed in the earth, and to see the fever of the city and the bustle of the crowd thrown into contrasted relief."

Viewers will seldom forget the sight of the farmhouse almost buried in wheat, the plants growing to the very door. Inside, the molding by light and the heavy atmospheric control of the space once again functions to create an intense physical atmosphere in which the human drama ferments.

But the majestic fields of wheat that thrilled Murnau so, and which he exulted in driving through (he bought a farm in Oregon in order to have cameras on sledges shoot through the oceans of ripe wheat) and his entire montage of the making of bread, are no longer in the print. It is heavily cut and runs either an hour or an hour and a half depending on the print you see, and in any case is far from Murnau's original classical rhythmic treatment, with added dialogue, not well synchronized as well.

Leaving Fox, disillusioned and frustrated, Murnau sought nature and freedom. His homosexual life had been cruelly subverted during his German period due to the incredibly strict German laws, and it may well be that it was partly as a result of this forced restriction that his films of that period so often contained horror, dread, fantasy and perversion. The psychology seems obvious. However his American period allowed him more personal freedom, and following *City Girl*, he no longer seemed willing to settle for anything but a full exploration of the possible joys and pains of a normal unfettered existence on his own terms.

Joining Flaherty, another rebel from the lairs of Fox, they invented a story of pearl fishers, based on Flaherty's observations linked to Murnau's romantic fatalistic conception of a tragedy of lovers who break an island taboo.

The breaking of taboos seems to have affected the whole group. Flaherty, even after Murnau bought out his interest in the film, was plagued with bad luck, there were many accidents during the filming, and following the film, Murnau himself died in a car accident a week before the film was scheduled to open.

Mordaunt Hall wrote of this "last motion picture by F.W. Murnau" that it was "an enchanting piece of photography synchronized with a most pleasing music score...otherwise a silent film with unobtrusive titles or 'inserts'...like a picture poem, with its sunshine and happiness in the beginning and its stormy drama in the end."

Odd how often in Murnau's work that inescapable sense of doom pervades the drama. Despite happy endings added to both *Sunrise* and *The Last Laugh*, the viewer senses the real tragedy of the endings, only briefly lifted by the superficial and pleasant denouement.

Murnau's life itself, begun in sunny comfort, could be said to have ended tragically. However, with a trip ahead, a new contract with Paramount, a potentially successful film, a beautiful friend, and a full and satisfying life ahead of him, his abrupt death cut him off in a glorious moment, and in a way that can be considered a happy ending.

Natalie Edwards

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