

## Document Citation

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An East Prussian triangle involving a peasant, his wife, and the other woman; a film ballad of love rekindled; a study in the wonder, interplay, and complexity of human relationships.

Based on the short story, "Die Peise nach Tilsit" (1917), by Hermann Sudermann [1857-1928]. Scenario by Carl Mayer.

Décor by Rochus Gliese (assisted by Edgar Ulmer & Alfred Metscher).

Photographed by Charles Rosher & Karl Struss. Edited & titled (with only 30 captions, painted rather than printed) by Katherine Hilliker & H. H. Caldwell.

Musical score by Dr. Hugo Riesenfeld.

Directed by Fred W. Murnau [the pseudonym of the Westphalian, Friedrich-Wilhelm Plümpe (1889-1931)], assisted by Herman Bing.

Presented by William Fox. Distributed by Fox Film Corp. 10-11 reels; 90 mts.

Shown in Germany & Austria under the title of Sonnenaufgang and in Poland as Wschód Słońca.

First shown in New York at the Times Square Theatre on Friday, 23 September 1927; in Berlin at the Capitol Theatre c. mid-January 1928; in London at the Marble Arch Pavilion on Monday, 23 January 1928 (at 2:15 p.m.); & in Milwaukee at the Strand Theatre on Saturday, 8 December 1928 (at 10:30 a.m.).

Privately shown to members of The Film Circle in the Recital Hall of the Fine Arts Building, 3223 North Downer Ave., on the uptown campus of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee on Saturday, 8 September 1962, at 8 p.m.

#### [C A S T]

George O'Brien--A well-to-do, gullible farmer, "a slow-thinking son of the soil"

Janet Gaynor--His trusting, taken-for-granted wife, a blonde with dancing eyes

Margaret Livingston--A silky siren, an urban hussy vacationing in the country

Bodil Rosing--The Maid

Jane Winton--The Manicure Girl

J. Farrell MacDonald--The Photographer

Arthur Housman--The Obtrusive Gentleman

Ralph Sipperly--The Barber

Eddie Boland--The Obliging Gentleman

In bit roles: Gino Corrado, Barry Norton, Sally Eilers, Robert Kortman.

#### [PREFATORY NOTE]

"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."--Opening title in the film.

#### [C O M M E N T A R Y]

F. W. Murnau, the German director who was responsible for The Last Laugh and the picturization of Faust, in his first American production, Sunrise,...reveals himself to be a student of psychology, a rarity in the film world. His characters in this brilliant achievement live and they act according to the intelligence they are supposed to possess. Mr. Murnau never permits them to surpass expectations of them, yet they see, hear & think. Unlike most of the characters in motion pictures, these men & women always show that they know what is going on around them. This in itself is a master stroke, for one of the principal weaknesses in film work is that characters are so often deaf, unobservant & lacking in ordinary human intelligence, just because the director wants to carry out some idea. It is seldom indeed that a picture-maker manages to enlist the real sympathy for his characters Murnau does in Sunrise....

Like a musician [working] on a composition, Murnau gave his whole soul to the making of a picture. To this German a picture is very much like music--life is a song, with its doleful strains and its cheery ones, its tears and laughter. The characters in Murnau's Sunrise might easily have their musical themes, & some of the incidents call for the beating of drums relieved by the brighter note of the fifes.--Mordaunt Hall, "Murnau's Drums and Fifes of Life." The New York Times: 2 X 1927.

The distinguishing feature of Sunrise is its flow--the even continuity of its rhythm. It never hops, skips, jumps or limps. It establishes its premise & then moves without interruption to its tremendous conclusion.--Robert E. Sherwood, "The Silent Drama," Life (New York) 90:2345 13 October 1927 - 22



Murnau has a knack or a gift or a genius for broad effects. He can convey subtle meanings by trick photography or by treatment of backgrounds. As instance, for example: \*

The Man, involved in a scarlet affair with The Woman from the City, while his young wife is heart broken, wanders about his farm, revolving in his mind the City Woman's poisonous suggestion that he murder the wife. It is evening. As he strides about the neglected fields, the camera eye roves before him, taking in what must have met his own. Ghostly whisps of white mist swirl about in the desolate, miasmatic marsh. Unkept growths show wraithlike from the ooze. The whole dark prospect is a reflection of the man's distemper of soul.

This gloomy passage over, the young couple, reunited, are in a sort of dream city, spending a dream honeymoon. Where should they wander but into something of a super-Coney Island. Here the background is a confused medley of merry-go-round, toboggan slide, chute-the-chutes woven into grinning clown-faces, laughing boys and girls, booming bass drums and blaring trombones--all helter-skelter in a potpourri of double and triple exposure. This is mere trick photography, but it registers as part of a fine pattern of expression.

Always there is meaning in the background, such meaning as a painter skillfully weaves into his canvases. The young couple come into a big city, she in flight, he in tender and conscience-stricken pursuit. Instead of bluntly labeling it "City," Murnau selects one graphic detail or background to express the idea. The set is a section of an enormous girder of a bridge with a corner of a building and bustling traffic moving back and forth. A panorama of Times Square couldn't have fixed it more definitely.

The picture is full of this technique of crystallizing significant trifles to suggest much. The Woman from the City is characterized in a twinkling by summoning an old peasant woman haughtily to brush off her dainty high-heeled pumps while she holds her skirts above her knees.

At the very outset of the picture the attention of the audience is transfixed with a capital bit of trick photography. A title says it's vacation time, and the screen melts into a Gargantuan railroad terminal in a glass dome, through the sides of which may be seen the rivers of holiday seekers moving from town to country, while a nightmare of trains weaves back and forth. Snack through this bedlam of motion an ocean liner cuts her way through a half-scene ocean; a white sailed yacht ploughs among the rushing railway trains and a unionsuited bathing girl dives from a springboard into the pandemonium. Giddy, hilarious vacation is pictured on the spot.--Rush [Alfred Rushton Greason] in Variety: 28 September 1927, p. 21.

It is not difficult to absolve Murnau from this sin of the softened conclusion by blaming it on ill-advised studio supervision. Nor is it unlikely that the cheap and ancient slapstick comedy in the central portion of the picture was added by some child-minded gag man after the director had turned his back. But there are one or two faults for which the mighty Teuton must himself bear the guilt.

Of course it is true that Murnau's frequently eccentric use of his camera is admirable in showing emotion and mental states and in adding a quality of personal style to his work so often missing from the efforts of rival directors. But in Sunrise I thought that the constant use of these methods and the repeated endeavor to denationalize the scene of his story served, among other things, to make the picture seem self-conscious, upon occasion, and lacking in human sympathy. It seemed to me, too, that it was a mistake to force George O'Brien, as the husband, to hunch his shoulders like Emil Jannings.--Richard Watts, Jr., "Glancing from the Movietone to Herr Murnau's Photoplay". New York Herald Tribune 87:33540 Sunday, 2 October 1927, Section VI, p. 3.

Rather a thin story for so great a length, but its very simplicity permits the deliberate unfolding of the story with a wealth of detail that forms its chief charm. The tale could be told as fully in a single reel or elaborated into five. Murnau has doubled the length without making it seem tiresome. Therein lies its charm.--Moving Picture World (a New York trade journal) 88:312 1 October 1927.



Mr. Murnau's talent as it appears in his direction of Sunrise is a talent that takes the camera on neglected rather than new terms, making it primarily an eye for motion-beside-within-motion, a retina reflecting an intricately flowing world. The camera moves as the eye, and the eye, with the camera, makes journeys, steering gently along the path of the subject it follows, is caught into long perspectives that plunge into the screen, swerves around corners, becomes involved in elaborate fleeing lights and shadows, all the exciting mixture and quarrel of vision. Here is camera technique pushed to its limits, freed from pantomime and parade against a world as motionless as a backdrop. In the same way that a man walking becomes a more complicated and dramatic mechanism when seen from a moving train than from an open window, so the people in this adapted Sudermann story are heightened and realized in their joy and despair by having their action set against action.

Not since the earliest, simplest moving pictures, when locomotives, fire-engines, and crowds in streets were transposed to the screen artlessly and endearingly, when the entranced eye was rushed through tunnels and over precipices on runaway trains, has there been such joy in motion as under Murnau's direction. He slaps down the cramping cubes of sets and makes, whenever possible, walls of glass and steel that imprison in their clear geometry the intersection of long smooth lines of traffic, people walking, trains gathering speed. When the rare shot shows human gesture against a static background, the stillness is an accent, after the rush of a full and moving screen. He knows every complication and subtlety of his method--his people walk over uneven rather than level ground, along paths always slightly devious. The earth has mist over it, and breath comes visibly from nostrils. Distortion he uses but rarely, and then only as the object naturally might be distorted against the eye.

The story of the young peasant who is seduced into the thought of murdering his wife by the woman from the city is given in unbroken sequences, a continuity of the eye, throughout half its length. The husband and the city woman embracing in the dark fields, the wife in her clumsy dress seated in the boat with rocking water behind her, the blind face of the husband as he rows back to the land after his murderous resolution breaks, and, above all, the two agonized young creatures huddled on the platform of the trolley car with the landscape pouring by them through the car windows--all these scenes have a plasticity, a beauty not easily named or described. They have economy as well as reckless daring in presentation, and are, at the same time, completely true to their medium.

The last half of the picture moves more heavily. It has less freshness and more obvious invention. The episodes of the photographer's studio and the barber's shop are ordinary in conception and detail. Fortunately, however, here the emphasis is laid upon the young peasant couple, and the energy and youth of George O'Brien and Janet Gaynor make even the duller moments come alive. Murnau's imagination is whetted by speed and confusion; his camera should always be taxed to its capacity. His real power again comes through when, at the end of their day, the young pair are set against every conceivable effect of light on darkness. Rockets leap upward; bonfires burn on the water's edge; there is monstrous lightning; and, at the last, a crowd of lanterns is held up over still black water. Night and storm revolve behind the frightened man and woman, and the picture springs back to an intensity hardly to be believed.

Sunrise is not fortunate in its art director. It has had contrived for it a village evidently molded from marzipan, artificial trees--one remembers the real tree blowing beyond the prison window in Variety--and a claptrap moon. Mr. Murnau does not need this "art" superimposed upon his reality.--Louise Bogen, "True to the Medium." The New Republic Issue 673 52:263 26 October 1927.

Second Thoughts on Sunrise.--A film of smooth transitions, a good soundtrack (unobtrusive score), a mishmash of a plot mongrel in its style & aesthetics. The whole is a cunning compromise between pseudo-art & commercialism, unlikely to satisfy either the high- or lowbrows except in parts. Margaret Livingston turns in an earthy performance as the flashy temptress from the city out to befuddle a simple country lout with muscles.--Szymon St. Deptuła: Daybook. Entry for Tuesday, 7 May



SUNRISE has dated very little over the years and the effective use of "trick" photography works surprisingly well both as a vehicle for informing the audience of an intended mood or attitude and as a means for pictorially representing the imaginative processes of the main characters. The musical score, containing a number of well-known themes from classical pieces, was synchronized with the film after it was completed and as such is one of the first sound movies. The superimposition of one secondary musical theme on top of the primary theme is used several times and gives the impression of unified movement, unhampered by incidental events.

George O'Brien, who plays the husband, had come a long way since his first real break into films in THE IRON HORSE (1924). Before that he had been an assistant cameraman with Tom Mix, a boxing champ, and stuntman. After a long and successful career in Westerns, O'Brien made his last film in 1951, GOLD RAIDERS. Janet Gaynor still appears on television frequently and also on Broadway. Her most famous film was SEVENTH HEAVEN with Charles Farrell.

Henry Buchtel

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Szymon St. Deptuła: Daybook. Entry for 6 XI 1928. Cited in the Program Notes of the Memorable Films Course at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee for 7 V 1957.

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#### [A CLOSING COMMENT]

The sort of picture that fools high-brows into hollering "Art!" Swell trick photography & fancy effects, but, boiled down, no story interest & only stilted, mannered acting.

F. W. Murnau can show Hollywood camera effects, but he could learn a lot about story-telling from local talent. The only American touch is a fine comedy sequence in a barber shop. The film has its moments. There is a love scene that smokes--literally. And there is a pathetic moment when the "hero" tries to drown his wife.--Photoplay 33:1 December 1927, p. 52.