

Document Citation

Title	Directors in focus : Haunted visions : The films of F.W. Murnau
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Harvard Film Archive</i>
Date	2004 Aut
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	6
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Murnau, F. W. (1888-1931), Bielefeld, North-Rhine-Westphalia, Germany
Film Subjects	Sunrise: a song of two humans, Murnau, F. W., 1927 Der gang in die nacht (Journey into the night), Murnau, F. W., 1920 Faust (Faust: a German folk saga), Murnau, F. W., 1926 Nosferatu - eine symphonie des grauens (Nosferatu the vampire), Murnau, F. W., 1922 Der finanzen des grossherzogs (The finances of the grand duke), Murnau, F. W., 1923 Schloss vogelöd (Castle vogelöd), Murnau, F. W., 1921 Tabu, Murnau, F. W., 1931 Der brennende acker (The burning earth), Murnau, F. W., 1922 Der Letzte mann (The last laugh), Murnau, F. W., 1924

Haunted Visions: The Films of F.W. Murnau

Harvard Film Archive Fall 2004



F. W. Murnau *Sunrise* 1927

Truly a master of light and shadows, F.W. Murnau (1888-1931) created a total of 21 films in his short life, and of these, 12 survive to this day. The Harvard Film Archive, in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut Boston and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is proud to present a retrospective of this influential German expressionist director. F.W. Murnau not only exploited new filming techniques such as the use of negative exposure, stop-motion and low angle camera positions, but also made pioneering achievements in terms of film settings, choosing to film both in studios (*Faust*, *The Last Laugh*) and on location (*Nosferatu*, *Sunrise*). Along with G. W. Pabst, Robert Wiene and Fritz Lang, he established German expressionism as arguably the most significant movement of the silent film era. Working with the best cinematographers and set designers of his time, including Fritz Arno Wagner, Karl Freund, Karl Hoffmann, Walter Rohrig and Hermann Warm, Murnau crafted a body of work which penetrates deeply into the psychic world of his characters and constructs a remarkably distinct cinematic universe.

Program notes adapted from the
Hong Kong Film Archive.

This program is co-presented with
the Goethe-Institut Boston and the
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
(www.mfa.org/film). Special thanks
to Eric Rentschler, Sabrina
Kovatsch, Transit Film, Gudrun
Weiss, Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-
Stiftung, Jutta Albert, Bundesarchiv-
Filmarchiv and Stefan Drössler,
Filmmuseum Munich

◆ October 1 (Friday) 7 pm
Journey Into the Night
(*Der Gang in die Nacht*)
Directed by F. W. Murnau
Germany 1921, 35mm, b/w, silent, 95 min.
With Olaf Fønss, Erna Morena,
Conrad Veidt
German language version
IN THE EARLIEST SURVIVING FILM by
Murnau, a famed doctor strays from his
wife and is seduced by a dancing girl.
The dancer and her new conquest move
to live in a village where their love is
tested by the appearance of a
mysterious blind painter (Veidt in a
Caligari-esque reprise). Working from
Carl Mayer's poetic adaptation of the
original Danish script *The Conqueror*,
Murnau explores the spirituality of his
main characters. Temptation, desire and
isolation among lovers continued to be
favorite subjects for Murnau,
culminating in his 1927 masterpiece,
Sunrise.

◆ October 1 (Friday) 9 pm
The Haunted Castle (*Schloß Vogelöd*)
Directed by F. W. Murnau
Germany 1921, 35mm, b/w, silent, 81 min.
With Arnold Korff, Lulu Kyser-Korff,
Lothar Mehnert
German language version
LONG-HIDDEN SECRETS are revealed one
mysterious day among the visitors of
Castle Vogelöd, leading to jealousies,
disguises, foreboding dreams and
murders. As with much of Murnau's
work, the film shows the influence of
the Swedish school (on location sets,
authentic atmosphere, harsh realism,
and restrained acting). The misty and
dreamy landscapes contrast beautifully
with the castle's indoor architecture,
reflecting the characters' emotional
turmoil, a blueprint for his later
masterpiece, *Nosferatu*.

◆ October 2 (Saturday) 7 pm
The Burning Soil (*Der Brennende Acker*)
Directed by F. W. Murnau
Germany 1922, b/w, silent, 111 min.
With Eugen Klöpfer, Vladimir Gajdarov,
Werner Krauss
German language version
JOHANNES, A FARMER'S SON finds work as
an old Count's secretary. His ambition
leads him to charm Gerda, the Count's
daughter. But when he discovers that
the Count's second wife Helga will soon
inherit a field rich in oil (ironically
dubbed "the devil's field"), he changes
his allegiance. Snowy landscapes and a
meticulously arranged interior
atmosphere give the film its poetic
charm.

◆ October 2 (Saturday) 9 pm
The Grand Duke's Finances
(*Die Finanzen des Großherzogs*)
Directed by F. W. Murnau
Germany 1924, b/w, silent, 82 min.
With Harry Liedtke, Mady Christians,
Hermann Vallentin
German language version
IN THIS FARCE set in a small
Mediterranean paradise, an engagement
letter promising the Grand Duchess of
Russia to a deeply indebted Grand Duke
is mysteriously stolen. The Duke's
creditors are poised to seize his land,
while the Duchess has other plans with
a group of revolutionaries. Written by
novelist/screenwriter Thea von Harbou,
Murnau's venture into the world of
comic irony represents a break from
German Expressionism and a move
towards a more realistic use of locations
and actors.

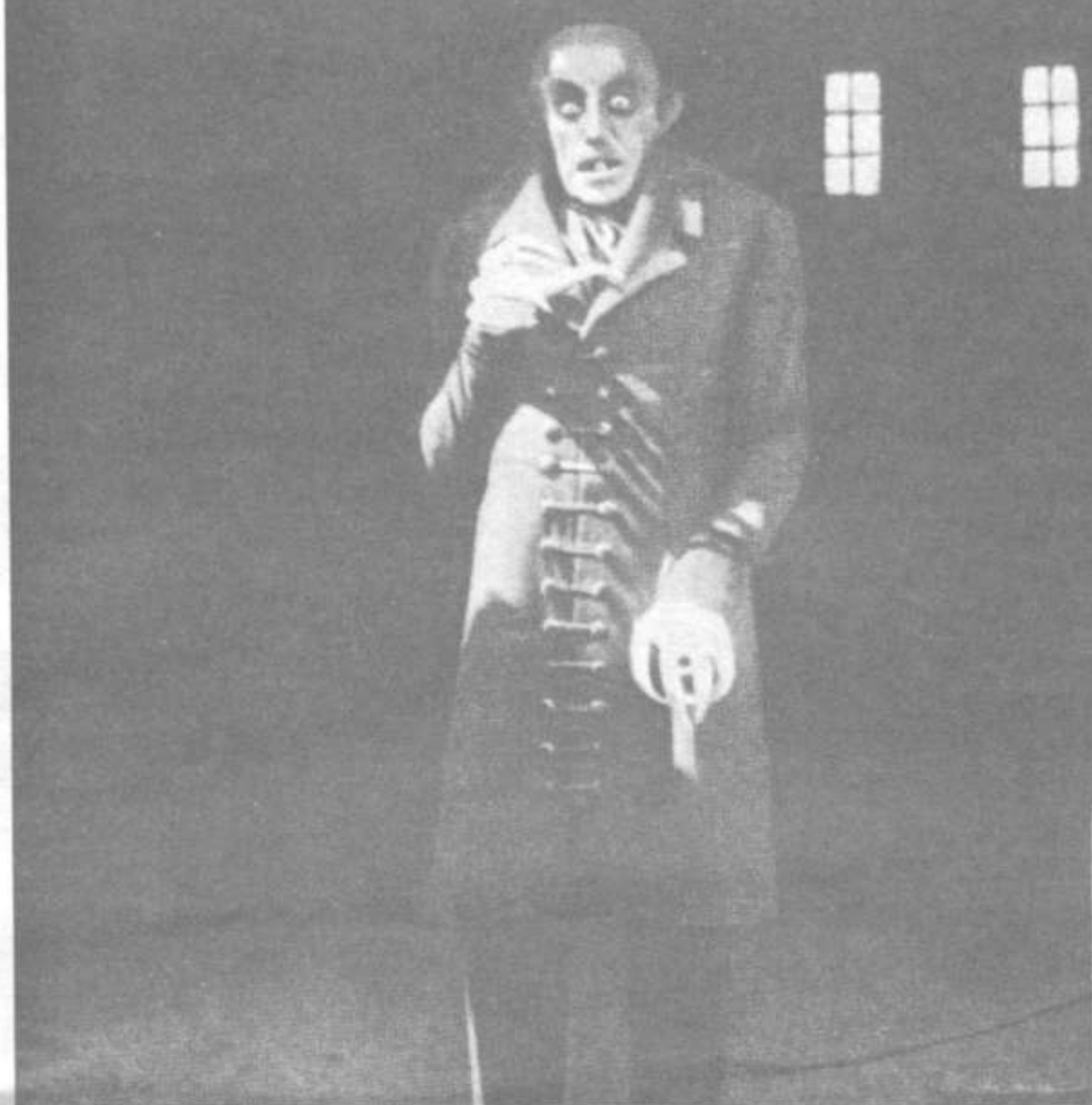
ADVANCE
TICKETS!

Special event - All tickets \$15
Live Piano Accompaniment
by Martin Marks

◆ October 8 (Friday) 7 pm
Faust
Directed by F. W. Murnau
Germany 1926, b/w, silent, 90 min.
With Gösta Ekman, Emil Jannings,
Camilla Horn

TO DETERMINE WHETHER GOD OR SATAN has
control over the earth, the two decide to
wager on the corruptibility of the soul of
Faust (Ekman), a pious alchemist.
Mephisto (Jannings) is sent by Satan to
tempt Faust, to trade his soul for eternal
youth. Murnau's sweeping retelling of
Dr. Faustus is stunning in its visual
brilliance. In production, Murnau made
it clear that mise-en-scène was to be the
most important aspect of the film, and
the metaphorical battle between light
and darkness is not just part of the
grand narrative, but is also a major
inspiration for *Faust*'s complex visuals.

Murnau's Five Fausts
Directed by Luciano Berriutúa
Italy 1995, video, b/w and color, 54 min.
WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT of Project
Lumière, the Filmoteca Espanhola
assumed the project of restoring the
classic *Faust* by F. W. Murnau. Much to
the surprise of those involved in
research, five versions of the
masterpiece were found, each
completely different from the other.
Murnau filmed the movie using two
cameras to produce more scenes and
edited two different versions: one to be
exhibited in Germany, another in the
United States. In addition, he separated
and cataloged material for at least three
other versions. *Murnau's Five Fausts*
compares scenes from all five films,
providing a unique study of film
restoration.



F. W. Murnau *Nosferatu* 1922

◆ October 9 (Saturday) 7 pm

◆ October 10 (Sunday) 9 pm

The Last Laugh (Der Letzte Mann)

Directed by F. W. Murnau

Germany 1925, b/w, silent, 88 min.

With Emil Jannings, Maly Selschaft,
Max Hiller

THIS TRAGIC TALE of an aging hotel doorman who is demoted to lavatory duty features a landmark expressionistic performance by the great character actor Emil Jannings, who imbues the character's wounded pride with near-mythic resonance. The first film to bring German director Murnau to international acclaim, this silent film classic transforms the doorman's humiliation in losing his cherished coat into a parable of the German obsession with the trappings of rank. The story is told without intertitles, relying instead on innovative visual exposition and the groundbreaking camerawork of Karl Freund.

◆ October 9 (Saturday) 9 pm

◆ October 10 (Sunday) 7 pm

Nosferatu (Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens)

Directed by F. W. Murnau

Germany 1922, 35mm, b/w, silent, 84 min.

With Max Schreck, Alexander Granach,
Greta Schröder

THIS FILM MARKED the first appearance on screen of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and remains arguably the eeriest and most magical of the many film versions of this famous supernatural tale. Murnau's use of real locations instead of stylized studio sets to create atmosphere, his deployment of special effects such as negative exposure and fast-speed motion to suggest a ghostly ride, and his casting of Max Schreck as the gaunt, spectral figure of *Dracula* make this one of the director's most formally innovative works.

◆ October 11 (Monday) 7 pm

◆ October 13 (Wednesday) 9 pm

Tabu

Directed by F. W. Murnau

US 1932, 35mm, b/w, 84 min.

With Anne Chevalier, Matahi, Hitu

A YOUNG POLYNESIAN GIRL is chosen to be sacrificed to the gods, only to be saved by her lover who attempts to escape from the fate of their tribal taboo. Germany, Hollywood, Polynesia – Murnau's cinematic journey traversed national and cultural boundaries. His final destination, like Gauguin's, was a spiritual-erotic natural paradise crippled by superstition and gradually consumed by Western civilization. Shot entirely in Tahiti, *Tabu* ranks among the best works of Eisenstein, Griffith and Dovzhenko. Just a few days before its premiere, Murnau was killed in a car crash.

◆ October 11 (Monday) 9 pm

◆ October 13 (Wednesday) 7 pm

Sunrise

Directed by F. W. Murnau

US 1927, 35mm, b/w, silent, 100 min.

With George O'Brien, Janet Gaynor,
Margaret Livingston

RENOWNED FOR HIS USE of moving camera shots to explore three-dimensional space, Murnau arrived in Hollywood as sound films were coming into vogue. His first American film, shot silent but released with a musical track, was based on a melodramatic German novel. Murnau, along with acclaimed cameramen Karl Struss and Charles Rosher, transformed the material by merging the psychological realism of the domestic drama with a lyrical depiction of both the quiet country village and the bustling city—connected by the protagonists' celebrated streetcar journey through the different visual landscapes.