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GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST FILM

Der Gang in die Nacht 1920

Director: F. W. Murnau. Scenario: Carl Mayer. Camera: Max Lutze. Sets: Heinrich Richter. With: Olaf Fönss (Dr. Eigil Boerne), Erna Morena (Helene, his fiancée), Conrad Veidt (a painter), Gudrun Bruun-Steffensen (Lily). 60 min.

Dr. Boerne, an ophthalmologist, with his fiancée Helene, visits a cabaret performance. Lily, a dancer, tries to attract him, feigning an accident, and thus is able to seduce the doctor. He asks Helene to dissolve their engagement, marries Lily and moves with her to a fishing village. There they meet a young painter who had become blind. Boerne restores his eyesight through an operation but keeps him in his home in order to watch his progress. When he learns that Helene has become very sick, he rushes to the city, but is refused admission to her bedside. When he returns, he finds Lily with the painter at the beach - he realizes that Lily is lost for him and decides to settle in the city. - Years later, Boerne has become famous, but he is an embittered man, unable to forget Lily. One day, she is in his consultation room: Blindness has returned to the painter and she asks Boerne to help him again. He tells Lily that he would be willing to cure her lover if she did not exist. Then he faints. When he comes to, Lily has disappeared - he rushes after her, fearing something terrible. He comes too late: Lily has taken her life, so that Boerne would help the painter. The latter tells Boerne that he does not accuse him; he had his eyesight restored in order to see Lily; now he does not want it back but prefers to remain blind. The next morning, Boerne is found dead at his desk.

While of Fritz Lang's early films only few are lost and G. W. Pabst's oeuvre has been completely preserved, many of Murnau's early films are no longer available. Only recently, partial copies of Der brennende Acker and Die Finanzen des Grossherzogs have been recovered and shown for the first time - with Polish and Italian titles, respectively! Der Gang in die Nacht had also been considered lost until Henri Langlois found it in the East Berlin film archives, while Phantom, according to Lotte Eisner, has been discovered in Moscow. With Gang in die Nacht - a film without titles - scenarist Mayer is credited with having established the Film-Kammerspiel, "the first attempt at a new genre in film art, an attempt whose success cannot be doubted," according to a contemporary review.

Goethe House New York — German Cultural Institute