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"CITY GIRL" (Fox, 1929; released 1930) Directed by F.W. Murnau; produced under the title "Our Daily Bread"; screenplay by Berthold Viertel and Marion Orth from the play "The Mud Turtle" by Elliott Lester; camera, Ernest Palmer; Settings, Harry Oliver; edited and titled by Katharine Hilliker and H.H. Caldwell; release length, including added dialogue sequences: 6 reels; Original length (this print): 9 reels

With Charles Farrell, Mary Dumcan, David Torrence, Edith Yorke, Dawn O'Day (Ann Shirley), Guinn Williams, Richard Alexander, Tom Maguire, Ed Brady, Jack Pennick, David Rollins, Werner Klinger, Helen Lynch, Marjorie Beebe, Arnold Lucy, Ivan Linow, Eddie Boland.

The curious fate that befell Murnau's last Fox film has made it not only a "lost" film but a "mystery" film, since it disappeared almost immediately after its release in early 1930 and was never heard of again, and certainly never made available for critical reappraisal. Most references to it in later years, with little information to go on, indicated (incorrectly) that F.W. Murnau never finished the film, and that Fox, afraid of the director's "von Stroheim tendencies", tried to curb his "extravagances" and salvage something from their investment. Firstly, Murnau did finish the film - in its original concept as a silent. Secondly, it seems unlikely indeed that Fox could have been worried about Murnau's extravagances. "Sunrise", if not a profitable film, had been the kind of prestige success that every studio sought, and could afford, in those days. And in any case, "Four Devils" which followed, had been both a critical and a popular success. "City Girl" was a simple and not unduly expensive film, and the only real extravagance - and a justifiable one - had been Murnau's purchase of a farm at Pendleton, Oregon, where he shot much of the film. Fox's losses must have been occasioned not by Murnau's methods, but by the wisdom of shooting such a film at such a time - a (then) familiar and even old-fashioned story, done as a silent when the sound transition was virtually completed. It was their own judgement that was on trial, not Murnau's abilities. The film was, in any case, hastily doctored and partially re-shot in order for it to qualify as at least a part-talkie, and the 9-reel original was cut to 67 minutes. The last 27 of those minutes became talkie sequences, with an abundance of song (harvester songs, a raw bar-room ditty by Big Boy Williams) and an entirely new (or at least, much heightened) melodramatic sub-plot in which one of the hands tries to assault the heroine, and the father attempts to persuade his son that she has been willingly unfaithful. The new dialogue sequences run to some 48 pages of script, and were written by Elliott Lester, author of the original play. (Lester, I understand, died just a few weeks ago).

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

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- Wm. K. Everson