



Taming Impulses: **Murnau's *Sunrise*** **and the Exorcism of Expressionism**

It has been claimed that the works of Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau form a coherent and unified *oeuvre*, but it would be inaccurate to ascribe a singular authorial vision to such a heterogeneous collection. Interpretations of Murnau's work tend to note the stylistic markers of the German silent tradition out of which he emerged and consequently allow that tradition's formal characteristics to obscure the specificities of his Hollywood films. In *Sunrise* (1927), Murnau's adaptation of Hermann Sudermann's short story "The Trip to Tilsit," the director turned away from the distinctively "psychological" tradition of German silent cinema and filmed his first of four Hollywood productions. Because the former cinematic style tends to be marked by an explicit influence of psychoanalytic discourse, *Sunrise's* devaluation of the conflicts produced by the unconscious and the libido are all the more noticeable. While this difference between his early and later films can be understood only with reference to their content, the following discussion will underscore the formal consequences of his move to America as well.

Sunrise was expected to be Murnau's breakthrough American film. The German-born

director had been encouraged to work in Hollywood by producers who noticed the popularity of his earlier film, *The Last Laugh* (1924). In a volume devoted entirely to Murnau, Lotte Eisner points out that Murnau himself welcomed the opportunity the move gave him for a substantial stylistic transition in his work. Eisner quotes him as saying, "I accepted the offer from Hollywood because I think one can always learn and because America gives me new opportunities to develop my artistic aims. My film *Sunrise* shows what I mean." The American producer William Fox introduced him as the "German genius" and hoped that Murnau would produce a film that would be, in Fox's words, "infinitely cultured, symbolic, in short, completely European" (*Murnau* 167-68).

The Last Laugh featured a number of formal innovations new not only to American film, but to the world. Among its most distinctive characteristics is the number of sequences in which the camera withdraws from the position of a stable observer and remains in motion throughout the scene. In one sequence, the camera, as though it were disembodied, produces the semblance of sound through following the paths of the voices of the protagonist's neighbors as rumors of his unemployment circulate through his apartment building. Also innovative in this silent film was the virtual though not complete absence of intertitles. Although there are periodic textual interventions such as signs and handwritten notes that provide a small amount of text necessary for an understanding of the plot, Murnau's intention was that intertitles would be eventually completely obviated in his films by what he described as "symbolism."¹

A number of Murnau's innovations were symptomatic outgrowths of the stylistic traditions of German silent cinema, which was notorious for its emphasis on the cinematic representation of subjective psychological states. *The Last Laugh* includes a famous dolly shot in which its main character, portrayed by Emil Jannings, is intoxicated and the camera follows his point-of-view as he imagines himself tormented by apparitions in the form of nightmarishly distorted bourgeois party guests. In the same sequence, we observe a number of ghostly figures attempting to lift a trunk so heavy that only Jannings, who fantasizes that he is endowed with the strength of ten men, can lift it. *The Last Laugh* represents inner psychology in the manner of a cinematic Expressionism that reconstructs its protagonist's vision in order to show the perceptual distortions that are part and parcel of his despair.

These numerous formal innovations may have contributed to the film's warm reception, although it should be noted that appended to *The Last Laugh* is an artificial happy ending that dramatically changes the tone of the film. The protagonist, who has lost his job as a doorman at a luxury hotel, despairs of a life without the dignity brought to him by his uniform. When sunk deeply into despair, he finds himself at the film's end alone and humiliated in the hotel washroom. If the film had been allowed to end in this way it would function as a critique of a merciless capitalism. Instead, Murnau's intertitle explains that, although the film should rightly end here, the author took pity on the protagonist and would now like to provide the viewer with an alternate and improbable happy ending. In the attached epilogue, we see in the newspaper that an American millionaire has left his fortune to a washroom attendant, and we watch Jannings, now a millionaire himself, behave as a benevolent capitalist, tipping everyone at the hotel generously. In spite of the excesses implied by the willful intervention of authorial intention to produce a happy ending, this artificial conclusion potentially gives the optimistic impression of a charitable capitalism consistent with that seductive American fantasy.

Although the film's finale may have been ironic, and the intertitle associated with it is ingeniously conceived, its presence arguably diminishes the film's otherwise powerful critique. Andrew Sarris mentions at least one film theorist who took the change in tone seriously enough that he "would end a showing of Murnau's *Last Laugh* prematurely so that the class would not be corrupted by the ironically happy ending" (9). For some Americans this final sequence may not have been quite so irritating; rather, they might have had the narcissistic pleasure of discovering something American in a director who was otherwise considered "completely European."

This schism between the critical film and its happy final episode is characteristic of

Murnau's style insofar as his work is generally viewed as a synthesis of a number of traditions. Though his film *Nosferatu* (1922) has been labeled an Expressionistic work, his *oeuvre* cannot be said to be characterized by any single approach. Readings that underscore the Expressionistic aspects of Murnau's style primarily emphasize tendencies in his early films. The stylistic markers that suggest that *Nosferatu* is Expressionistic, for example, are often tied to the polyperspectival character of its narrative. In that film, according to Thomas Elsaesser, Murnau, by way of his representation of a protagonist divided against himself, deflects the narrative in a variety of directions (*Sight and Sound* 37). Bert Cardullo has argued along similar lines that *Nosferatu*'s protagonist Jonathan Hutter is an Expressionist hero who witnesses the destruction of "two aspects of himself, each of which he both loves and hates" (31). On the other hand, Murnau, in his later works, often insisted on representing narratives of linear, unified character development. Cardullo notices the shift away from the style of *Nosferatu* in Murnau's subsequent *The Last Laugh*, which contains Expressionistic elements that are "fused to a realistic base" and given a happy ending. Instead of commenting on the world by way of Hutter's inner conflict with the Vampire, Murnau puts Emil Jannings's single character "in a dead end, from which he would be rescued by a dream come true: the inheritance from an American of a large sum of money. For Murnau, the antidote to Expressionistic nightmare was the opposite extreme: realistic fantasy" (32). The phrase "realistic fantasy" should not be understood here as an oxymoron, but rather as a symptom of a film style that presupposes distinctions between the real and the fantasized, and between sleeping and waking, presuppositions that German silent cinema in the style of *Nosferatu* had resisted.

If the narrative of *The Last Laugh* already seems to shift away from the style of cinematic Expressionism, then it should not be argued that *Sunrise* constituted a stylistic break with the tradition of German silent cinema; a tradition in which Murnau, as well as Fritz Lang and G. W. Pabst, is always understood to participate. It may be instead asserted that it was another stop on the same trajectory away from that tradition. This should not be a surprising claim insofar as the Hollywood-made *Sunrise* was produced in an entirely different social and historical context. Elsaesser argues that even though the tradition of German silent cinema has been influential on Hollywood film styles such as the film noir and the horror film, it nonetheless "constitutes a body of films whose textual construction did not impose itself on the commercial cinema, and it has thus remained an 'alternative cinema' so different, in fact, that it has almost become incomprehensible" (*Wide Angle* 15). Elsaesser argues for the specificity of the genre and uses his essay to take a position against the way Siegfried Kracauer forces cinematic Expressionism to yield to a reading "derived from an altogether different paradigm: that of the classical narrative film as it established itself in the late twenties and early thirties, under the increasing dominance of Hollywood." Elsaesser adds that, rather than note the formal features of the fantastic films, which is the key to understanding them in historical context, Kracauer prefers to "ransack" these films "for their most obvious motifs which turn out to be those elements borrowed and quoted from Romantic literature and painting" (16). If one agrees with Elsaesser's methodological claims, it is impossible to ascribe complete consistency to *Sunrise* and Murnau's earlier films without leveling the differences between them imposed by the historical contexts in which they were produced.

It can be then argued that there are a number of Murnaus, one of which is the auteur of films that represented, in the tradition of Expressionism, the distortions that human psychology inevitably imposed upon the external world. The Expressionist Murnau would have to be kept to some extent separate from the one responsible for the later narrative films such as *Sunrise* and *City Girl* (1930). There is a measure of continuity between the two periods including his revolutionary representations of motion on screen (particularly in *Sunrise*'s fascination with boats and trolleys), and his distinctive use of chiaroscuro. One cannot argue, however, that the form and content remained consistent despite his move to Hollywood without doing, to borrow a phrase from Elsaesser, "considerable violence" to his body of work. Though both the early and the later tendencies of the director can be found in any of

his films, one should be careful not to allow the one Murnau or the other to cloud all subsequent readings.

Based on Sudermann's "The Trip to Tilsit," *Sunrise* is the tale of a farmer's affair with a woman from the city. The unnamed woman (Margaret Livingston) attempts to convince the farmer (George O'Brien), who is also unnamed but is named Ansas in Sudermann's story, to murder his wife (Janet Gaynor), who is unnamed as well, but who Sudermann calls Indre, to sell his property, and move to the city. Although Ansas agrees to the murder, he finds that either he lacks the willpower or his commitment to his wife is too great to follow through with their plan to drown her. After the married couple takes the voyage together during which he was supposed to kill her, Ansas and Indre wind up spending a day in the city. She forgives him for his apparently pathological behavior and, upon reconciliation, they fall more in love with one another than ever. The two experience the mutual renewal of their marriage vows as they, among other activities, observe another couple's wedding. On the journey home from the city, a storm sinks their rowboat, and Indre is presumed dead. Ansas torments and blames himself and then attempts to kill the city seductress. As his hands are wrapped around her throat he is called back to the house and given the news that his wife has been recovered alive. In the glow of the dawn, the woman from the city returns to her home, and Ansas and Indre have the chance to start their marriage anew.

The film's cheerful ending is not characterized by a dark combination of Expressionism and Romanticism that, according to Elsaesser, characterize the now canonical German films that preceded it, such as Rye's *The Student of Prague* (1913). In that film, for example, the main character's double stands in for the repressed social and historical situation that "returns to the hero in a horrible altered (disfigured) form, as the nightmare of a split self, as a crisis of identity and a compulsion towards self destruction" (*Wide Angle* 18). Elsaesser sees possibilities for social critique within that genre, arguing that, in *The Student of Prague*, "the internalization and psychologization of [social] forces constitutes a consequence, not an origin, and thus can be seen as a displacement, an abstraction and reification of social and political moments"; a displacement that "irrupt[s] into idyllic worlds and relationships" (20). In the spirit of Wiene's *Caligari* (1919), Lang's *Destiny* (1921), and *Nosferatu*, the German silent cinema can be said to contain a mode of critique that, by way of displacing social contradiction onto the supernatural, attempts to refer the viewer back to the real-existing social conditions from which the distortions within the representation originate.

This does not mean that one should dismiss the more naturalistic *Sunrise* altogether as a simply American aberration as many critics have tended to do.² It retains traces of its Germanic stylistic origins despite its emergence from a cinematic milieu that produced Buster Keaton's *College* and *The General* in that same year. Any evaluation of *Sunrise* would benefit from assessing which aspects of the vocabulary of German silent cinema were carried over and which were not.

Readings of Murnau's work that inscribe him within the terms of art history find a likely analogy insofar as, in the tradition of Bazin's criticism, one can take his films, along with those of Welles and Stroheim, as representative examples of the use of long takes and *mise-en-scène*. Bazin sets Murnau's style in juxtaposition with Soviet cinema, which foregrounded the use of montage, whereas Murnau, unlike Eisenstein, did not rely on editing to communicate content (27). The style of *Nosferatu*, for example, is characterized by low-angle shots, spatial distortions that produce an air of supernatural nightmares. According to Elsaesser, the film is rendered in a style that has "the pictorial qualities of *Stimmung*: the play with light and shadow, the painterly compositions and plasticity of the image" (*Sight and Sound* 35). Particular attention has been paid to his use of Romanticism as well, in light of Murnau's use of the foggy landscapes and *Rückenfiguren* typical of Caspar David Friedrich. Angela Dalle Vacche traces the origins of this tendency to his years spent studying art history at the University of Heidelberg (164).

It is clear that there are specific paintings that resonate with images in *Nosferatu*, although one notes the affinity between German silent cinema and the two art-historical movements of Romanticism and Expressionism in Lang's *Niebelung* films (1922-24) and his

Destiny as well. Because both movements lay claim to the exterior representation of internal or psychic life through obscuring perspective or warping city streets, they had an affinity with German "psychological" cinema. The mutual interplay of the two aesthetic ideologies not only occurs in the pictorial compositions, but in the atmosphere surrounding particular characters, allowing them to function allegorically. Dalle Vacche, for example, maintains that Murnau conjoins nineteenth-century and twentieth-century art in the character of the vampire, who, she claims "is a creature of horror and desire — two psychological states well suited to the emphasis on subjectivity that links Romantic to Expressionist painting and flourishes in Weimar cinema" (168).

Viewers paying attention to the *mise-en-scène* in *Sunrise* will notice that both of these painterly styles are reflected in the film. Robin Wood comments that "several shots in the film immediately suggest paintings," such as "the second-honeymoon image of the boat sailing home by midnight." This particular scene is composed of a black background, a white sail, and the path of moonlight on the water, which "evokes the simplified color blocks (though not the clamorous colors) of the *Brücke* group out of which Expressionism developed." Wood introduces yet a third art-historical category in asserting that one should also note "the unforgettably beautiful shots of boats and lanterns moving across the dark water, as the man and the villagers search for the wife after the storm, which in the use of patterns of light and reflected light suggests an Impressionism offset by the intense emotional-dramatic content of the scene" (11). Although *Sunrise* can be characterized by a number of compositional styles, its Expressionist influences are subdued in comparison with Murnau's darker and more foreboding German works.

If one argues that Expressionism and Romanticism have in common the attempt to exteriorize psychological states, then the presence or absence of either of the two must alter a film's representation of its characters' psychologies. Readings of both film styles generally maintain that they tend toward the representation of inner experiences in the external world, and hence their affinity with any cinema that would define itself as "psychological." Cardullo defines Expressionism similarly in a way that corresponds to the motifs of films such as *Caligari*, arguing that it retreats into the mind while, paradoxically, projecting that mind onto the world. He writes that "Expressionism externalizes, 'expresses,' what is inside the mind, it makes 'outer,' what is 'inner.' If Impressionism could be said to be the subjective rendering of the visible world, Expressionism is the subjective expression of an inner world, a vision" (25-26). *Sunrise* is, however, not a film in which inner psychological states are exteriorized. The film instead takes the position that the subjective inner world is best left internal; in other words, that fantasy can be allowed its own orderly, private domain. In this way, *Sunrise* may be argued to have been an anti-psychological film. Its deferral of Expressionist problematics on a formal level can serve as an indication that the film takes seriously the assertion that one could liberate one's self from the unconscious and the consequential distortions of subjective perspective that come of having one.

It is therefore no accident that one might read the film in the style of Dorothy Jones, who marvels that its achievement is to compel the viewer to "feel the wonder of human relationships — the complex motivations which govern the lives of human beings (even the lives of a simple peasant and his wife)." Moreover, she adds that it presents "the nuances as well as the quiet depths of understanding which exist between a man and a woman who love one another, the subtle moods which color the days of our lives" (261). It is unlikely that anyone would make such a claim about *Nosferatu*. Unlike that film, however, *Sunrise* divides conscious and unconscious life; this division encourages the sort of reading Jones gives it, insofar as human relationships are seen as colored by the unconscious rather than permanently distorted by it. A film that takes the position that to have an unconscious is invariably to have your perspective distorted could never, as Jones claims, plumb "the quiet depths of understanding which exist between a man and a woman." *Sunrise* takes for granted a concept of undistorted perception, rather than taking for granted that perception is distortion. It yields instead to a claim such as Molly Haskell's that it "is about a man losing — and regaining — his mind." She adds, "The oppositions in *Sunrise* (and it is dialectical on every

level) are between sunrise and sunset, the country and the city, good and evil, salvation and sin, divine grace and black magic, natural and unnatural acts, and finally the blonde, beatific wife and the dark sultry city woman in their struggle for the man's soul" (18). Because *Sunrise* allows libidinal life to appear as a distortion of psychological health, it presents an over-determined "dialectic" between "natural and unnatural acts."

A number of distortions of space characteristic of cinematic Expressionism can be associated with the character of the woman from the city. Some scenes look as though they were conceived as Expressionist painterly compositions that integrate psychological with film-formal distortions. In the peasant home in which she stays, a lamp is deformed by its tilted and extremely foregrounded position.³ It simultaneously underscores the degree to which her presence warps the country existence of her hosts, as well as underscoring the relative simplicity of their rural surroundings. In the first moments that we follow Anas as he goes to meet her in the marsh, Murnau tracks him at great length in the tradition of his innovative camera use in *The Last Laugh*. The moon, high in the sky behind him as his journey through the swamp toward her begins, then disappears from the frame. As the camera appears to follow him past fences and trees, it finally reaches the city woman, and behind her, in a seemingly improbable location, is the moon. Murnau apparently had two artificial moons constructed in the studio for this one shot (Wood 13). In order to reproduce the effects of Anas's psychological disorientation, which comes of his association with the woman from the city, Murnau produces a sense of physical disorientation.

Eisner suggests that the character of the woman from the city functions as an allegory for Expressionism, not only because of the formal distortions associated with her, but because of her flagrant sexuality as well. She writes, citing examples from German cinematic history, that when "in *Pandora's Box*, the lesbian, in order to save her girl-friend, is forced to seduce the fat acrobat . . . she does so with the jerky movements of a robot with her head and trunk thrown back at a sharp angle to the rest of her body. In Joe May's *Heimkehr* Dita Parlo stiffens beneath the embrace of Lars Hanson in a paroxysm which can only be described as totally expressionistic. And in Murnau's *Sunrise*, during the great love scene in the swamps, the vamp twists and turns like a willow the wisp, with the exaggerated movements characteristic of expressionism" (*The Haunted Screen* 140). The film's exorcism of her character is, then, simultaneously an exorcism of Expressionism, as well as one of a psychological narrative that appreciates the force of sexual instincts and the libido.⁴ The woman from the city had simply been a cleaning woman in Sudermann's story, but here she is over-determined as the sexualized city vamp.

After Anas heads out to the swamp to betray his wife, Murnau presents Indre kissing their small child in bed. In a moment of Eisenstein-inspired montage, which is unusual for Murnau, he cuts to Anas and the woman from the city embracing in an analogous position in which she takes on the role parallel to Indre. The spatial distortions that accompany this act of inappropriate eroticism are the film's recognition that Anas's drives may be irreconcilable with the otherwise stable external world. The film participates in the belief that Anas can rid himself of desire rather than taking seriously Freud's argument that its sublimation produces a much greater unhappiness. It chooses the position that one could successfully control instinctual life without, as Freud would argue, "an undeniable diminution in the potentialities of enjoyment." In his *Civilization and its Discontents*, only three years after *Sunrise*, Freud provided the economic explanation that "the feeling of happiness derived from the satisfaction of a wild instinctual impulse untamed by the ego is incomparably more intense than that derived from sating an instinct that has been tamed" (28).

The moments in *Sunrise* that contradict its otherwise naturalistic representations are associated with motifs of "untamed" sex drives and the unconscious. The film plays with form only when it renders visible its protagonist's psychological consternation. The distortion of space is not treated in *Sunrise* as part of the unavoidable pathology of everyday life, as it is in German silent cinema; the appearances of Anas's fantasies are therefore taken as aberrations. The film veers farthest from realistic representations only when it presents Anas plagued with guilt about both his desires for the woman from the city and his intention to

murder his wife the following morning. He dreams that he is drowning beneath the same waves under which he intends to drown her. Murnau super-imposes the waves over Ansa's as he lies sleepless. As the camera pans over to his wife in bed, the moonlight illuminates the silhouette of the windowpane in the shape of a crucifix above her head. On the one hand, Murnau is simply representing her enveloped in a holy halo, but on the other, this visual image to some extent turns her into a corpse, reminding the viewer of Ansa's guilt about his desire for her death. The following morning Indre tenderly covers him with a blanket as he sleeps. The compositions imply a parallel between her behavior towards him and his murderous behavior towards her. Her tender gesture of covering him with a blanket contrasts with his concealing, with a blanket, a buoyant pile of "rushes" that were to function as his life-preserver. The juxtaposition implies that reality is more comforting than the corridors of the psyche; this exterior world is a refuge from the dark interiors of psychic life.

When Ansa is overwhelmed and plagued by a sense of guilt, he walks toward the boat as though he were hypnotized. His comportment is noticeably similar to that of the somnambulist in *Caligari* or that of a Frankenstein monster. Murnau insisted that O'Brien's shoes be weighted down to achieve this effect. Like a patient under hypnosis, however, he is called back to consciousness by the sound of church bells from the shore. The bells, which the film at a later point links metonymically to the institutions of the church and marriage, remind him of his duties to his wife.

The moment Indre steps from the boat and runs from Ansa, she finds herself inscribed into a Romantic painting beneath a valley of tall trees. By contrast with the woman from the city, she is most at home in natural settings. She flees into the woods, and the *tableau* looks particularly like Friedrich's *Chasseur in the Forest* (1813-14). By virtue of her happy harmony with nature, not to mention the way in which she repeatedly appears in contact with the film's many animals, Romantic representations become an antidote to Expressionism. Insofar as the film separates its female characters into two distinct clichés, it reproduces the fantasy made manifest in Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) that the nature of woman can be split into the binary categories of maternal virgin and sexualized vamp. As Andreas Huyssen remarks, in the latter film, the vamp character (the robot) in contrast to its virginal antithesis, is represented as a threat to male rule and control that ultimately winds up "unleashing its destructive potential on humanity" (74). The vamp's sexuality in *Sunrise* similarly functions as a prelude to a release of a destructive potential.

The couple ultimately stumbles into a wedding in a metropolitan church in which Ansa is illuminated by a divine light, and has a revelation that compels him to recapitulate his wedding vows to Indre. They renew their oaths to one another simultaneously with the couple at the altar. That Ansa and Indre have been brought together despite the attempts of a dark figure to separate them makes the film, in that respect, thematically analogous to *Nosferatu*. It should be remembered, however, that in that earlier film Nina Hutter dies, which is to say that *Nosferatu*'s project of bringing the two closer ultimately went unrealized. It appears, however, that in *Sunrise*, Ansa has completely subdued his libidinal impulses. As a consequence, the film veers into different formal territory. As the psychological questions become more banal, the form of the film adjusts accordingly. In contrast to Jones's assertion that the film at this point "raises and convincingly answers the even more amazing psychological question of how a woman can accept and forgive her husband after he has planned [her] murder" (245), one could argue that once his libidinal drives have been disavowed by the film it stops attempting to represent them.

If one wants to assert that Murnau was attempting a critique of the compulsive nature of their heterosexuality, one might claim that the slapstick scenes that follow are intended to point to the absurd character of that bond's necessary disavowals.⁵ *Sunrise* becomes a satire insofar as the film represents the lengths to which its characters have to go to re-enforce their commitment to one another as well as the social structure necessary to produce that commitment. In the subsequent sequences, which may or may not have been forced by Hollywood producers,⁶ Ansa and Indre go through a number of rituals that they would have gone through had this been their own wedding day, stopping first at a beauty salon and

then at a photographer's studio. The scenes at the beauty salon have what Eisner describes as an atmosphere "nearer to realism" (Murnau 173) in which they have the opportunity to explore their renewed bond with one another as well as the violence that its exclusionary character enacts on the outside world. A beautician holds Ansas's hand and offers to give him a manicure. He rejects the offer because to let another woman hold his hand would be an implicit betrayal of his wife, and is then compelled to intervene as a man seated next to Indre tries to flirt with her while she waits. The intercutting between the two becomes more rapid until Ansas rises to his feet and threatens the man with a knife. The appearance of his pocket knife and his brutal response to the mild threat confirm the viewer's suspicion that Ansas is ultimately exclusively a country man, unschooled in city graces.

The loving couple ultimately find themselves at an amusement park. In contrast with the future that the city woman had planned for her and Ansas, he and his wife become a spectacle for the city residents. The forward movement of the plot draws to a complete stop when, to everyone's amusement, Ansas pursues and catches a pig that had escaped from its carnival booth. The camera follows the pig as it causes a fright and runs beneath a bench of women who lift their legs in the style that anticipates Busby Berkeley's chorus girls. There is even an extreme close-up of its snout as it laps up a puddle of wine from the floor. When Ansas heroically snares the pig, he and his wife become a celebrated couple at the fairgrounds and are asked to perform an authentic peasant dance for everyone. They had admirably watched city couples dance, and now the city couples want to watch them dance. At this point, the psychological narrative is finally shut down and displaced onto the crude sociological distinction between the city and the country.

After the night on the town, the journey home begins. A storm that had been already brewing at the fairground catches up with them. As a plot device, Ansas's efforts to save her serve, on the one hand, to demonstrate that he has learned the lesson that self-sacrifice constitutes love; on the other hand, the storm's emergence indicates that his simple renunciation of his urges was apparently, in the terms of the film, hardly enough. Wood writes that Murnau's intention is to represent that "incidental forces, once they have been released, cannot be controlled until they have expended themselves in catastrophe, demanding some ultimate sacrifice or penance for their appeasement" (18). The punishment has to be meted out by external authority in the form that can be attributed to an act of fate, which, as Freud remarked, can be understood "as a substitute for parental agency" (82). Murnau, in other words, uses the storm sadistically to enact punishment upon Ansas as affirmation of the inadequacy of his renunciation.

In his despair, Ansas undertakes to bring back Indre through the murder of the woman from the city. As he reaches for her throat, it is clear that, in Wood's words, "every ambiguity of feeling has been purged, every action is unequivocal in its meaning and its motivation" (19). This is hardly the split Jonathan Harker of *Nosferatu* purging himself of those drives; he is willing to murder to expunge himself of the sense of guilt associated with having unleashed dark libidinal forces. In the nick of time, Ansas is called back home and into the arms of his loving wife. In the film's final tableau, he kneels at Indre's bedside after having been forgiven. Less a Romantic painting than a Christian icon, the beautifully framed image assures the viewer that, as Wood writes, every ambiguity has indeed been purged.

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Notes

¹ Murnau did not mean this in the philological sense of the term, but simply to assert that he would get his point across only through pictures. He gives the example that, "by wishing to convey the wealth of a certain person as being extreme, I would show alongside of him a greatly impoverished character" (Quoted in Eisner *Murnau* 184).

² Dorothy Jones asserts at the beginning of her close-reading of the film that "most critics have either ignored it

completely in their discussion of Murnau's work or passed over it lightly as an unfortunate, Hollywood-influenced production unworthy of its talented director (238).

³ Eisner notes that "Sometimes the art-historian in Murnau chose to arrange the objects in a shot like a painter composing a still life. In the foreground, for example, he has a huge hanging lamp cut in half by the frame of the picture. An old peasant and his wife sit at the table eating their soup. In the far background a door opens and the 'woman from the city' appears, quite tiny, coming to have her shoes polished. The remarkable depth of field is increased by the size of the lamp in the foreground" (*Murnau* 174).

⁴ Jones's reading, which is as anti-psychoanalytic as the film itself, associates the blurring of any objective reality in the film with sexual pleasure, arguing that the images of the dance band that the woman from the city summons up to seduce Anas are at a high pitch of excitement and "clearly sexual in their kinesthetic meaning." She adds that immediately following her erotic dance, there is a "blurry long shot of the village as seen from over the lake, with the full moon just beginning to pass behind a cloud. By means of its total imagery, this shot suggests the exquisite sensation of intense sexual pleasure (which, as suggested by this diffuse shot, blurs awareness of objective reality)" (241-42).

⁵ Eisner is quick to point out Murnau's conflicted sexuality. She forgets, however, that not only do heterosexuals often have conflicted sexuality, but that they may sometimes be more conflicted and alienated than homosexuals. She writes in her interpretation of *Nosferatu* that "Murnau had homosexual tendencies. In his attempt to escape from himself, he did not express himself with the artistic continuity which makes it so easy to analyze the style of, say, Lang. But all his films bear the impress of his inner complexity, of the struggle he waged within himself against a world in which he remained despairingly alien" (*The Haunted Screen* 98).

⁶ Wood writes that "it is rumored that Murnau was 'encouraged' by the studio to introduce more comic business than he had originally intended; and it must be admitted that certain of the incidents (the drunken waiter and drunken pig, the slipping dress-strap) are only loosely related to the thematic development and remain somewhat extraneous in effect" (15).

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