***Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927)**

*Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* is an American silent film directed by German director Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, who was renowned for his Expressionistic films, such as *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), *Der Letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*; 1924) and *Faust* (1926). Murnau was part of a wave of successful European directors who were lured to America by studio moguls to increase the artistic prestige of American cinema in the 1920s. *Sunrise* was produced by the Fox Film Corporation and starred George O’Brien as The Man and Janet Gaynor as The Wife. The Fox Movietone system made it the first fiction film to be released with an optical soundtrack. Carl Mayer wrote the screenplay for *Sunrise,* which is based on Hermann Sudermann’s short story *Die Reise nach Tilsit* (*The Trip to Tilsit*) published in 1917. The simple story sees a farmer fall prey to the charms of a city woman, who nearly drives him to kill his beloved wife, and pits the hectic modern excess of the city against the reliable calm of country life. The film boasted a stylized aesthetic that had an enormous artistic and critical impact, its carefully construed montage sequences, haunting double exposures, pictorial lighting and impressive tracking shots injected European modernism into classical American cinema. The film won three statuettes at the first Academy Awards in 1929: Unique and Artistic Production, Best Cinematography and Best Actress in a Leading Role.

**References and Further Reading:**

Fischer, L. (1998) *Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans*, London: British Film Institute.

(Fischer provides a vastly detailed analysis of the film on the basis of a number of seemingly contradictory notions that *Sunrise* successfully unites.)

Eisner, L. (1973) *Murnau*, London: Martin Secker & Warburg.

(Eisner’s Murnau monograph first appeared in French in 1964 but is still the seminal work on the German director’s work and style.)

Everson, W.K. (1998) *American Silent Film*, New York: Da Capo Press.

(A solid account of early American cinema that includes a very interesting chapter on European influences, thereby focusing on Sunrise, among others.)

Koszarski, R. (1990) *An Evening’s Entertainment: the Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*, Berkeley & London: University of California Press.

(The third book in the scholarly outstanding History of the American Cinema series discusses the impact of *Sunrise* on Hollywood production techniques.)

Fischer, L. (2006) “The Shock of the New: Electrification, Illumination, Urbanization, and the Cinema,” in Pomerance, M., ed. *Cinema and Modernity*, New Brunswick & London: Rutgers University Press: 19-37.

(Fischer’s essay focuses on shocking instances of modernity in early cinema, with a special emphasis on Sunrise and its dialectic theme of city life versus country life.)

**Paratextual Material**

- Stills from the film and filmographies of F.W. Murnau and protagonists George O’Brien and Janet Gaynor at the British Film Institute (<http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b6b7568ee>)

- Different posters of the film at the TCM Murnau page (<http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/person/137578%7C50585/F-W-Murnau/archives.html#tcmarcp-373347>)

- Watch the film at Open Culture (<http://www.openculture.com/2014/02/watch-f-w-murnaus-sunrise-free-online.html>)

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