

Prior Knowledge: Your study of **Experimental Cinema** will prepare you for looking at German Expressionism. Your knowledge of **Film Noir** and **Low-Key** lighting (from Casablanca) will help with your analysis which will involve all five elements of **Film Form**. There are also links to **Global** (specifically European) Cinema (Murnau was a German filmmaker).

WJEC Eduqas AS/AL Film Studies:



Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans (Murnau 1927)

Film Movements: German Expressionism:



An artistic movement which emerged in Germany in the early 1900s. **German Expressionism** of the 1920s was a response to the horrors of World War One and the ensuing economic depression in Germany. **Expressionist films** portray a dark, twisted and paranoid world. This is evident in the use of **slanted sets**, **exaggerated performances** and **forced perspectives**, often reflecting the **twisted inner-psychology** of key **protagonists**.

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (Wiene, 1920) is considered to be the first German Expressionist film.

Film critic Andre Bazin critiqued German expressionist films as **anti-realist**. He labelled the Expressionist filmmakers as 'plastics'. Bazin favoured real locations, deep focus, non-professional actors and minimal editing.

Institutional contexts:

Sunrise was a **prestige picture** for Fox studios.

Director F.W. Murnau was hailed as a genius by studio head William Fox and German Expressionist films were admired by **Hollywood studios** and filmmakers for their artistry. As a result, William Fox gave Murnau complete creative freedom and a high budget to produce elaborate sets and special effects. Although Sunrise is considered a classic today, at the time it did not recoup its costs. According to film historians Allen and Gomery, critics found the film contradictory, as it was a Hollywood production with a German Expressionist style. The film was promoted as a **star vehicle** for popular Hollywood stars George O'Brien and Janet Gaynor. Sunrise was released just a few days before the first '**talkie**', The Jazz Singer - this was unfortunate timing as the publicity for Sunrise failed amidst the hype for The Jazz Singer.

"When F.W. Murnau left Germany for America in 1926, did cinema foresee what was coming? Did it sense that change was around the corner - that now was the time to fill up on fantasy, delirium and spectacle before talking actors wrenched the artform closer to reality? Many things make this film more than just a morality tale about temptation and lust, a fable about a young husband so crazy with desire for a city girl that he contemplates drowning his wife, an elemental but sweet story of a husband and wife rediscovering their love for each other. Sunrise was an example - perhaps never again repeated on the same scale - of **unfettered imagination** and the **clout** of the **studio system** working together rather than at cross purposes."

Isabel Stevens

Sound:

Sunrise was produced during the transition period from silent to sound films. Although 'silent', Sunrise has a **synchronised score**. This created a uniform experience for spectators who would all have seen the film with the same score. Bells are a key **sound motif** throughout the film. We hear bells when The Man decides to spare his wife. Bells also sound when The Man and The Wife emerge from the church - here bells reflect the wedding vows and signal the renewal of their marriage.

The Realist and the Expressive: The Marsh Sequence:

- The foggy marsh, lit in a low-key light is used **expressively** to reflect the doomed, immoral nature of The Man's affair with The Woman from the City.
- The **intertitles** are used expressively - 'couldn't she get drowned' functions as more than just giving the audience The Woman's speech. The titles literally drown off the screen then dissolve into an image of a **long shot** of the man pushing The Wife off the boat. This image may be from the **perspective** of The Woman who imagines the scene.
- A **superimposition** is used as The Man and The Woman look into the distance which images of the city appearing. Here the film combines **realism** and expressionism, as the images function to reveal the character's imagination, as they picture the city together. The city is represented as a place of fun and excitement, an opposition to the simple life on the farm.
- The city is presented in an **abstract**, expressionist manner with use of **montage** and **dissolves**. Images of musicians and dancers are expressionistic, as their movements form part of the overall **abstract design** within the frame.

Gender Representation

Wife:



The Wife dresses in more traditional, rural clothing. She is **presented** as innocent and angelic. She is shot in a soft bright light to signify purity. The film suggests that being a wife and mother is the desired role for women.

The Woman from the City:



The Woman Reflects the modern, urban woman of the 1920s. She is not domesticated, is sexual, wears shorter skirts and has bobbed hair. She is the archetypal '**vamp**' - a common villainous woman in silent films and a prototype for the **femme fatale**.

Future Learning: This is the final original unit you will study. It's time to make good use of the Knowledge Organisers, notes Teams resources and the coursebook and start your revision.