



MISE-EN-SCÈNE

The Journal of Film & Visual Narration

From the Shadows: Nosferatu and the German Expressionist Aesthetic

William F. Burns

Brookdale Community College

Abstract:

Nearly a century removed from its genesis, German expressionist filmmaking is still discussed extensively today by scholars and critics. The expressionist aesthetic is perhaps the era's most enduring legacy. Examining what influenced directors like Robert Wiene, Fritz Lang, and F.W. Murnau can identify the factors that helped shape the expressionist "look." Expressionism in German film began after World War I amid a struggling economy. However, the expressionist movement in Germany predates the war and can be traced to the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, the brush strokes of Edvard Munch, and the sketches of Alfred Kubin. All three, who have their own rich legacies, represent the confluence of philosophy and art. On screen, it is how existentialism becomes cinematic expressionism. Of the numerous films made during this era, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) is one of the more enduring. This examination of the film demonstrates how Murnau's work was influenced by a philosopher, a painter, and an illustrator. Murnau would craft a world of shadows that is still horrifying today. His movies in Germany would touch many of the filmmakers who would leave for America to tell their stories in Hollywood.

Throughout history, the symbolism and metaphor of the shadow has long been a part of cultures and discourse. In Plato's *Republic*, Book VII contains the *Allegory of the Cave* where two men sit chained in a cavern. Outside, the movement of their captors is illuminated by a fire, which casts shadows on the cave wall. The men perceive the shadows and the echoes of the voices of their abductors as reality (Plato 514a-517c). Plato reveals that these shadows are not reality, and the men, like all of us, have an "imperfect perception of the universe, of the reality that transcends the sensible world of appearances" (Franklin 177). Plato's symbolic cave would be transformed over time by artisans and philosophers who would recognize the metaphor and meaning that can be hidden in the darkness. In Germany, between the World Wars, filmmakers imbued with disillusionment and fueled

by a revolution in thought would push the boundaries of their relatively new medium and create a style that is still influential today: expressionism. At the core of the German Expressionist movement is the existential philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose effect on art and those who created the films of this era cannot be understated. On the screen, many films exemplify the melding of art and philosophy, but the shadows found in director F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) are an example worthy of further examination.

When Nietzsche's Zarathustra confronts his shadow, at first he states, "What do I care about my shadow! Let it chase after me! I run away and escape from it" (Nietzsche 385). However, Nietzsche eventually comes to grip with the fact that the human spirit must not run away from its shadow, but must

accept it. Nietzsche makes the shadow a symbol of wisdom (Franklin 179). The power of the metaphorical shadow is strengthened in these contexts. In the hands of an expressionist director, who is versed in existentialism, the power of the shadow as a cinematic device begins to take shape. To comprehend the essence of expressionist filmmaking, one must explore the influence of existentialism on the German psyche. To understand the effect German Expressionism would have on the art of filmmaking worldwide, it is critical to examine the origins and legacy of the movement. Cast from the rubble of the First World War with films such as *Nosferatu* at the umbra, German Expressionism used shadow as both a metaphor and as an artistic element. Just like a shadow, German Expressionism would begin with a ray of light.

Referring to light as the “First Aesthetic Field” in his book *Sight, Sound, Motion*, Herbert Zettl states that light is not only essential for life, but is essential for film. He refers to film as a “pure light show.” Zettl contrasts how the “materia” of theatre is people and objects, and how the “materia” of film is light. He further states, “lighting...the deliberate manipulation of light and shadows for a specific communication purpose, [is] paramount to the aesthetic of television and film” (Zettl 19). Zettl adds that the function of light depends on the control of shadows and that properly controlling shadows does as much to create a mood in a scene as does music (32). This belief takes on even more significance when one recalls that the expressionist era was a silent one. In reality, music did play an important part in the exhibition and, in some cases, the filming of a silent picture.

The mood created by the manipulation of light in films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Metropolis* (1927) and *Nosferatu* was only one of the shadows which were cast upon the set. Understanding the dire economic realities of this time will provide context

and perhaps a greater appreciation for the mise-en-scène of *Nosferatu* and other films of the era. The other shadow, looming outside the studio walls, was more ominous than a vampire. Germany has been said to have “discovered” cinema during the war. The German government was the first to grasp the impact that film can have on an audience. Films portrayed the German soldier as a friend of the occupied civilian, or helped recruit Poles to fight the Czar’s army in the East (*Cinema Europe*). A new unit of the Army was organized to make films. This unit captured the events on the battlefield and in the skies with great precision and innovation. The Kaiser and German General Eric Ludendorff were concerned they could lose the propaganda war, especially against the likes of Chaplin. As a result, Ludendorff created a new company, Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft (known as “UFA”), to control the propaganda message. This company had the backing of bankers and the interest of filmmakers. UFA was able to take control of the distribution established by the faltering Danish Nordisk company (UFA/Company History). Though they never created the propaganda films Ludendorff wanted, they did create the escapism the German people craved as the tide of war turned against them. In addition, the creation of UFA would help establish a business model that not only would ensure the company’s survival after the war, but also would put it in position to compete on an international scale. Once the guns fell silent, the German film community no longer looked to Europe as a source of competition, or even a market to make money (Cook 90). The European film industry was in shambles and it would take years before it would recover. The economies of both victor and vanquished were also in ruins. It was in this anguish that the existentialists, who had learned from Nietzsche to question the foundations of their society, found an outlet in film.

The Germany that existed after November 11, 1918 was a very different country than the one that

went to war in August 1914. The minimum estimate of dead has been placed at over 1,800,000, which is equivalent of 12% of the German pre-war population. This number does not include civilian deaths (Gilbert 541). The impact of this loss of population is magnified when coupled with the loss of materials which could have led to a quick post-war recovery. For example, 48% of German iron production and 16% of coal production were lost, as were all pre-war colonies around the world that had provided the nation with natural resources and trade (80). The effect of this loss was devastating to the German nation. Versailles cut those wounds even deeper.

As the cracks were forming in the new Weimar government, the people of Germany were faced with cultural upheaval as well. The expressionist art of the pre-war era was popular only with a small minority of the population and during the war these artists were subject to the Kaiser's anti-culture censorship (Luft 375). After the war, censorship was greatly scaled back and for a period of about eighteen months, films about prostitution, drug addiction and images of nudity were prevalent in the cinema (*Cinema Europe*). This removal of boundaries also led to an increase in experimentation, artistic freedom and a redefinition of the role of art in a culture. As a result, the avant-garde became acceptable by the government through their inaction (Evans 122). All around Germany and in various forms, art was mimicking the unrest and uncertainty of the people. Art, along with theatrical productions, jazz music, and literature, were now becoming outlets for creativity and frustrations. Art was rebelling – and the cinema was the next logical place for artists to express their discontent with society (*Cinema Europe*).

Economic necessity and an infusion of existential theories helped created the expressionist aesthetic in Post-War Germany. German sets and shadows helped to create what was known a “Stimmung,” or “mood,” achieved through the use of “chiaroscuro” lighting (Cook 94). This technique,

which emphasizes high contrast lighting, has its origins in post-Renaissance art of 1530-1610. The Italian term means “light and dark,” and due to his exceptional use of the style is also referred to as “Rembrandt lighting” (Zettl 44). The technique utilizes strong contrasts with deep graduations and subtle variations of light and dark (Barsam 100). This description sounds very much like the shadows cast on the wall of Plato's Cave. Rembrandt's painting, *Old Woman Reading* (1655), is an example of chiaroscuro. The light illuminating the face of the old woman seems to be coming from the book she is holding. Shadows are present in the lines of her face and the farther the eye travels from her brightly lit nose, the darker the image becomes. She is wearing a shroud over her head and the outline of the dark cloth is still visible, but the intensity of the light fades for her image has a fast gradation from light to darkness (Zettl 44).

Embracing this use of lighting, Director F.W. Murnau would use the power of the shadow to create the world of his vampire. Like other works of the era, including the influential masterpiece *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu* would have a connection to expressionist art that was influenced by the existentialist philosophy of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's revolution in thought caused many to question the purpose of one's life (Kellner 10). Existentialism also allowed many to come to the realization that political, religious and governmental institutions were corrupt, leading to the belief that much of what people accepted as truth was, in fact, false. Nietzsche empowered his followers, who ascribed to his notion that “God is dead” and only man, the so-called Übermensch, is to give one's life meaning (Solomon 67). Nietzsche believed art was empowering and that, “Art is to supplant religion” (Flynn 41), and humanity is to be empowered. With this type of powerful rhetoric fueling their passions, it is easy to see how, from the shadows of war, such creativity would emerge.

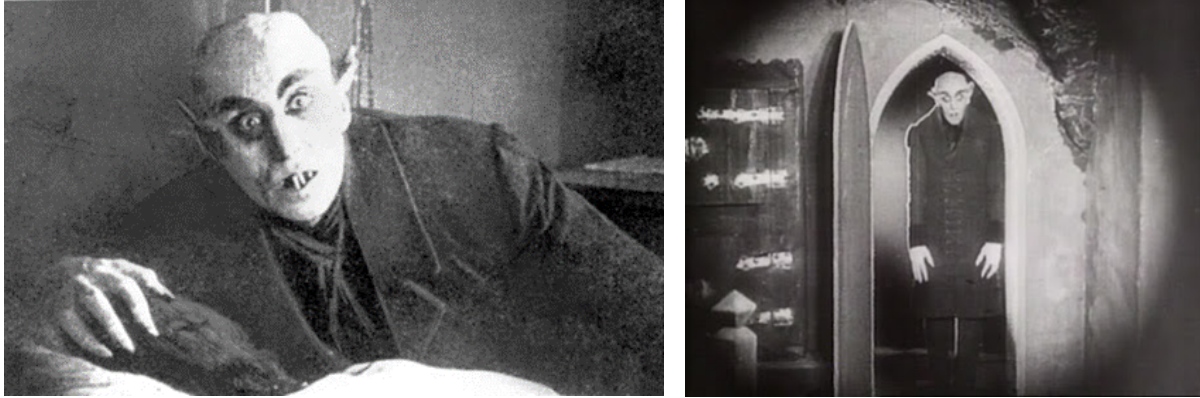


Fig. 1: Count Orlok's animal-like features. Still images from *Nosferatu* (1922), the non-restored version, which is in the public domain.

Nosferatu is essentially an adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, yet with some noticeable differences. The antagonist is Count Orlok, not Dracula, and his demise does not come at the end of a stake like Dracula; instead, he vaporizes in the sun. The reasons for these and other changes are not artistic. Stoker's widow, Florence, refused to give her permission for the film's producers to make *Dracula* and Murnau needed to make changes to avoid a lawsuit. After the release of *Nosferatu*, Florence sued and won. She was able to get most of the copies of the film destroyed (Papapetros 32). Fortunately, prints did survive to give the audience a chilling tale that is the archetype for all cinematic vampires to follow: Bella Lugosi, Christopher Lee, *The Lost Boys* (1987) and "Edward Cullen" from *Twilight* (2008) all, at some level, are connected to Murnau's vampire.

Nosferatu is meticulously crafted; each captured image is carefully constructed. In his 1995 book, *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions*, author Leon Barsacq states the one word that could be used to describe all expressionist directors is "premeditation." He notes that Murnau left nothing to chance; "every aspect of nature, every house front, every view of the castle (all seen at a certain angle), is calculated to evoke anguish and terror" (31). The shadows on the screen that would tell the story of the cinema's first vampire are perhaps so terrifying because of what shadows mean to the human mind.

The film stars Gustav von Wangenheim as Hutter, the protagonist. Gretha Schroder plays Nina, his young bride, and Max Schreck is the Count. The screenplay is written by Henrik Galeen.

At its heart, *Nosferatu* is many things. It is a visual example of the melding of expressionist art influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche's existentialism. It is an allegory about humanity's fear of death (Catania 233). It is also a metaphor for a Germany stuck between two realities. Orlok is the past; he represents a system that fed off of its subjects. The Count has a title, land, wealth, and even servants to blindly do his bidding. He lives in a world that is crumbling around him, and the scenery adds to this feeling. He needs to feed; his current surroundings are no longer adequate, and he must change. Ultimately, this change brings about his demise, but not before the innocent is sacrificed. This powerful message was not lost on the German people, who, like all of us, not only fear death but fear the unknown. The uncertainty of the Weimar Republic, and the decay of the society and culture that had been part of their existence for generations were frightening thoughts. Would their journey parallel Nina's which would lead to their ultimate sacrifice? Alternatively, would they be like Hutter – lost and alone with even more uncertainty ahead? The shadows in *Nosferatu* are like another character. Hidden in the darkness, alongside the

vampire, lurks the paralyzing fear of disorder, uncertainty upheaval, and the unknown.

The film is perhaps one of the more well-known expressionist efforts. Even though most contemporary filmgoers may have never seen it in its entirety, they have seen some of the more memorable images it contains. Much of the terror is due to the work of Art Director Albin Grau. The claws, rodent teeth, and bat-like ears of Count Orlok are the creation of Grau (Fig. 1). The eerie and unsettling quality of the scenery has been attributed to Grau's friendship with one of the founders of the German art group Der Blaue Reiter, Alfred Kubin (Elsaesser 80). The features of Count Dracula in the original novel were not animal-like. Why then would Grau create a "creature?" Perhaps his inspiration for Orlok's look came from his connection to Kubin. The Austrian writer and illustrator had a tendency to create the grotesque in his works. He was influenced heavily by Nietzsche and shared an anguish-filled childhood, similar to expressionist painter Edvard Munch. The Norwegian's work touched many artisans in Germany, some of whom would craft the mise-en-scène of the expressionist movement, most notably the painted sets of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Barsacq 25). In examining the art of Munch and Kubin, it is no wonder the two artists found solace in the philosopher's writings, which also resonated with the German people who, themselves were trying to emerge from the shadows of war. Kubin would frequently have animals as a central element of his writing and distorted figures with ghastly and sometimes animal-like qualities in his artwork. Kubin created an anti-utopian world of his own for his book, *The Other Side* (1909). In the story, animals take over his fictional town when people are unable to overcome pestilence as well as "moral and pathological epidemics" (Gosetti-Ferencei 50). The animals represent devo-

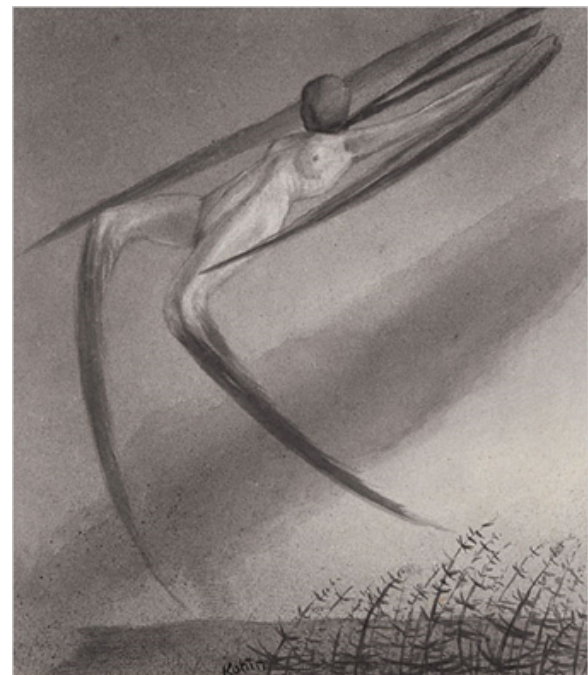
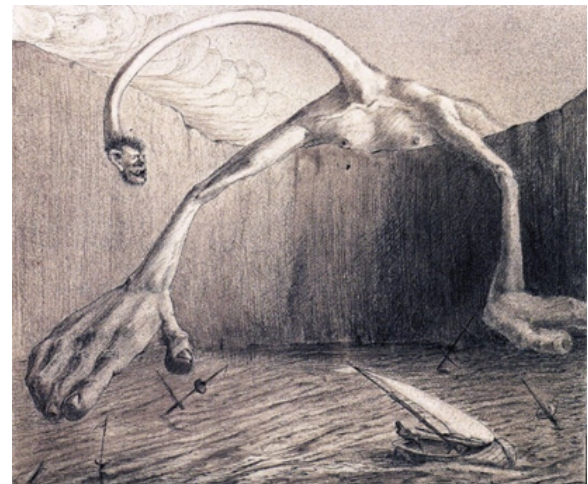
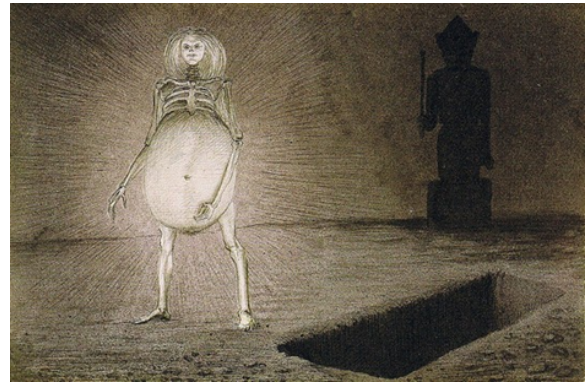


Fig. 2: Examples of the anthropomorphic creatures of Alfred Kubin's illustrations: *The Egg* (1902), *Danger* (1901), *Every Night We Are Haunted by a Dream* (1902-03).

lution of humanity, much in the same way the animal-like appearance of *Nosferatu* is representative of our primeval connections.

Orlok is a parasite feeding to quench an insatiable need for blood. To the German people, he is the necrotic dissolution of the status quo. The symbolism is apparent, similar to what has been described as a “Dionysian insatiability that is revealed to operate beneath the apparent order” in the works of Alfred Kubin (51). The reference to the “Dionysian” is yet another way the expressionists link to existentialism. Nietzsche believed creativity came as result of the tension that existed between the “Apollonian” and “Dionysian” forces that exist in the world. Named after the Greek gods, whose traits are characterized in drama and tragedy, “The Apollonian...stresses the gentle reign of reason and intellect, pushing life to a somewhat unnatural ordering. The Dionysian is its exact opposite—it is governed by emotions and particularly passions, sometimes whipped to a self-destructive frenzy of excess” (“Nietzsche – The Dionysian Impulse”). Nietzsche called the Apollonian and Dionysian dynamic “art forces of nature” (Clegg 433). This tension would give rise to the aesthetic that would characterize *Nosferatu* and the other expressionist films of the era. A number of Kubin’s drawings are the melding of people with animal qualities. Perhaps the illustrator’s friendship with *The Metamorphosis* author Franz Kafka may be at the root of this tendency: “Kubin’s figures of animals incongruously coupled with human figures ... the gesture and physical arrangements of torture, the alignment of violence, fear and senselessness with the visible estrangement of the individual, are familiar to the readers of Kafka” (49). Many of Kubin’s illustrations are black and white with deep shadows and contrasts or have muted tones. *The Egg* (1902), *Danger* (1901), *Every Night We Are Haunted by a Dream* (1902-03), *Murder Scene* (unknown), *The Woman in White* (1902), *Dance with Death* (1903), and *Self Observation* (1901) are just a small sample of the

hundreds of drawings that either anthropomorphize creatures, are a scathing satire of society, are grotesque, disturbing or, in some cases, are humorous (Fig. 2). Kubin’s work has been referred to as, “part of the ‘mental furniture’ of Berlin’s pioneer filmmakers” (Adlmann 121). For the artist, creating shadows and negative space are essential in these types of drawings.

Kubin was no stranger to film; he was under consideration to design the sets for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Eisner *The Haunted Screen* 18). Kubin had also been hired to design the sets for another groundbreaking German film, *The Golem* (1920) (Adlmann 121). However, Kubin never finished the project and quit when delay after delay in production wore down his patience. The preliminary drawings he created for the film would be used in *The Other Side* (Papapetros 11). Some of the images in the book would resemble the film’s scenery, and several scenes in *Nosferatu* seem to resemble Kubin’s illustrations. One scene of note is when Hutter is making his way through the forest into Orlok’s domain. Travelling in a carriage, Hutter is told by the driver he will not go further because they are near the land of the phantoms. Hutter, scoffing, walks on and crosses a bridge. Shortly thereafter, he is met by another carriage: this one with a mysterious driver who orders him to get in. Using trick photography, Murnau speeds up the pace of the carriage, to Hutter’s dismay. As the carriage makes its way into a wooded area, the film image is shown in negative, with the carriage appearing dark in a brightly lit wood. The scene has been referred to as “Murnau’s unsettling journey into the darkest of existential luminal territories” (234). Critics note that Hutter’s crossing scene “provides a possible reference to Alfred Kubin’s fantastic pictures of coaches traveling through the forest...that creates the chaos of light and shadow in which Kubin excels...Murnau’s source could be Kubin’s *The Road to Zwickledt*” (234). In addition to the visual reference, the use of special visual

effects is an example of how the cinematic image can make allusion without dialogue. The motif of jerky, fast movement and the negative image into woods make the viewer aware that the ruler of the land of the phantoms has great power. This technique is an example of how, in a very short time, expressionist filmmaking evolved. This evolution can be further illustrated in how “*Caligari’s* expressionism was mainly graphic, *Nosferatu’s* is almost purely cinematic, relying upon camera angles, lighting and editing rather than production design” (Cook 101). This is not to say that the production design is unimportant to the film. *Nosferatu*, though a fantasy/horror film, has what author David A. Cook calls a “naturalness.” He adds that the composition of shots and the integrating of the characters and the landscape are part of the reason for this “feeling” (101).

Before he made films, Murnau studied art (Petrie 72). There is little doubt that Murnau was well aware of the work of Norwegian painter Edvard Munch. In fact, Munch and Murnau shared similar themes. As the viewer examines a Munch painting or watches *Nosferatu*, a strong sense of voyeurism is present on the canvas and on the screen. “Given Murnau’s training as an art historian, this linking could well have been stimulated by Edvard Munch’s famous *trompe l’oeil* painting *The Vampire*, in which what at first sight is seen to be a consoling caress is seen

at second sight to be the attack of a vampire” (Franklin 181). Munch created several versions of *The Vampire*, as he often did with his work. Some are painted with darker pigments than others, but each makes the vampire’s act almost romantic and erotic.

Murnau, in addition to Grau, also had cinematographer Fritz Arno Wagner behind the camera. This collaboration is significant because Wagner had the ability to shoot films with “realistic” feel. He utilized chiaroscuro lighting, but his palette had a subtle, wider range of greys than many of his contemporaries (100). As noted, the use of shadow is pivotal in the film and is what makes it so terrifying. Though the chiaroscuro lighting dominates most of the film, the climactic end epitomizes how Murnau utilized the shadow as a storytelling and symbolic device.

In the climax, Count Orlok is living in Bremen across from Hutter and Nina. It is late and Hutter has fallen asleep on a chair. Nina, pacing, looks out the window – she sees Orlok watching her through a multi-paned window. Framing Orlok in such a way is symbolic; the panes appear to be bars representing the un-dead prison *Nosferatu* is trapped in for eternity. Though frightened, Nina sends Hutter to get help, setting her trap. Orlok makes his move. He ascends the stairs to Nina’s bed, but he is seen in shadow only (Fig. 3). His features are elongated in shadow and, if possible, he is even more frightening.

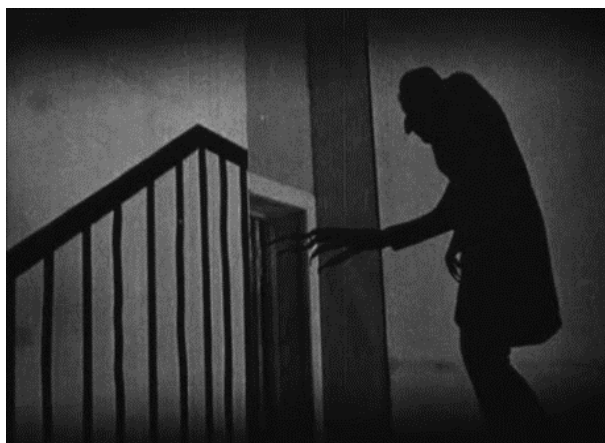


Fig. 3: The silhouette of *Nosferatu* moves towards his victim, but it is the shadow of The Count’s hand that clutches her heart. Still images from *Nosferatu* (1922), the non-restored version, which is in the public domain.

Nina waits, terrified. Orlok's shadow stops by her door, but he does not open it; there is no need. His shadow moves through the cracks in the door frame and as Nina sits in fear on her bed, a shadow appears on her bright white nightgown. It moves slowly, fingers open upward until his shadow grasps her heart. Her face contorts – is she in pain? Or is it pleasure on her face as her body slumps on the bed and she willingly submits. The Count now possesses her symbolically and, soon, literally.

Much like the image thrown on the cave wall in *The Republic*, we don't see the reality of Orlok's movement, just the shadows on the wall and are left to interpret what it means. This scene is so powerful and such a cinematic achievement it is recreated almost shot for shot in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film *Dracula* with Gary Oldman playing the Count and Winona Ryder as "Mina." Shadows again play a role in the end of the scene of *Nosferatu*. The buildings seen out the window brighten as the sun rises and the darkness disappears. Trapped, the Count tries to escape, but the "light" overcomes the "dark." Evil is defeated as he fades away into a puff of smoke. As a result of this film, "the shadow has been transformed from a mere mood setting ornament" (Franklin 181). As if to emphasize the importance of the shadow as a storytelling device, the final title card of the movie tells the audience, "the shadow of the vampire vanished" (*Nosferatu: Symphony of Terror*). This phrase is used in a 2000 film called *Shadow of the Vampire*, which takes a unique look at the filming of *Nosferatu*. John Malkovich stars as Murnau and Willem Dafoe plays Max Schreck. In the film, it is discovered that Schreck is really a vampire, which results in the deaths of Grau, Wagner, and various other cast and crew members at the hands of the Count. In the end, the Count is deceived into exposing himself to daylight on film.

The recurring use of shadows is also apparent in the 1979 remake of *Nosferatu* directed by Werner

Herzog with Klaus Kinski as the Count. Though not a shot for shot re-make, the essence of the original 1922 *Nosferatu* is evident with the Count's shadow seeming to cast a spell over his victim.

Although *Nosferatu* is a frightening figure, his Kubin-esque features and illumination are not the only ways he is able to strike fear in the hearts of the viewer. An additional facet is how he is photographed. Herbert Zettl explains that where the camera is placed in relation to the subject can have an impact on the meaning of the shot. The camera can be subjective and, with it, a competent director knows how to manipulate his or her audience. A subject that is photographed upward, from below eye level, looks dynamic and powerful. A character that is in a high position in the frame, likewise, looks superior and in a position of authority and control. An audience literally "looks up" to a person when they are in a position of power on the screen (Zettl 218-219). Though he only appears on the screen for a total of nine of the film's 94 minutes, *Nosferatu* is "frequently photographed from an extremely low angle which renders him gigantic and monstrously sinister on the screen" (Cook 101 [Fig. 4]). The cinematography of the film also creates a great illusion of depth. These techniques would influence some of the most important Hollywood films for decades to come.

It is noteworthy that many films of this era contain a favourite motif of the expressionist screenwriter: the madman. The reoccurrence of the lunatic in these films has, like the characters themselves, a dual purpose. Count Orlok, much like the narrator and the Doctor in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, are all manifestations of their time. They both live in their own distorted world that seems very normal to them and are both representative of 1920s Germany. However, noted in the book *Passion and Rebellion: the Expressionist Heritage*, "the political implications of much of expressionist works were almost lost amid



Fig. 4: Note how the angle of the camera enhances the dominance and fear factor of Murnau's vampire. Still image from *Nosferatu* (1922), the non-restored version, which is in the public domain.

the finely crafted stage-sets and lighting patterns which earned universal acclaim, but there were occasional links to real authority and actual monarchs, if not to social types prevalent in Weimar Germany” (Rubenstein 367). The audience may not have been aware of symbolism of the characters, but it is very likely their inclusion in the film had both expressionist and existential roots. For example, the image of the madman is also present in several Munch works in his “Murder Series” and in Alfred Kubin’s *The Alley* (1905), where “a madman glides barefoot among cloaked passers-by, evoking more familiar figures of Munch” (Gosetti-Ferencei 49). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche’s madman told a stunned crowd that God is dead by our hands. The lunatic tells us what we believe does not really exist; it has all been a lie, much like the empire that dissolved in 1918. Perhaps it is ironic that the political subtexts of films like *Nosferatu* were lost on viewers. They were like the audience listening to Nietzsche’s mad man who laments that he has “come too soon” (Nietzsche 96). Both audiences, those in the darkened German theatre, and the one imagined by Nietzsche, simply do not see the reality that the madman is presenting them.

Another expressionist connection between *Nosferatu* and *Caligari* is the sets. Compared to *Nosferatu*, from a photographic standpoint, the shooting of *Caligari* was simple. The size of the set was the same from shot to shot, which is significant because the

area that remains in focus never changes. With its multiple locations, the photography becomes more complicated with *Nosferatu*. It was shot on several locations near the studio lot and even in a ruined castle. This freedom from the studio setting allowed Murnau to create “[e]xpressionist stylization through careful shot composition and lighting rather than distorted sets” (Worland 48). However, a careful examination of the sets reveals a distortion that is similar to the artwork of Kubin and Edvard Munch.

The home that Count Orlok occupies in Bremen is actually an abandoned salt warehouse in Lubeck, Germany, built in the beginning of the eighteenth century. This location has a connection to Edvard Munch that links him to Murnau; “While living in Lubeck in 1903, Edvard Munch produced an ink drawing of the warehouse that the ex-art history student Murnau might have seen” (Papapetros 10). The buildings also resemble the structures in some of Kubin’s drawings, some of which seem askew, much like the set piece built to resemble Orlok’s home across from Hutter and Nina that is seen through the window and illuminated by the sun in the film’s climax (Fig. 5). Abandoned mansions and a studio built castle complete the look of the film (Rubenstein 367). This weathered look to the scenery, based on Murnau’s attention to detail, may have been intentional.

By the time *Nosferatu* was on the screen, the motion picture had become as powerful a tool for social commentary as the world had ever seen. The collaborative nature of filmmaking parallels the confluence of ideas that was a part of expressionism. These films were entertainment that challenged people to examine their own perspectives. In his essay in the book, *Passion and Rebellion*, Mark Siberman believes this evolution of film not only moved the creative aspect of the medium forward, it affected the audience:



Fig. 5: Alfred Kubin's Albania (created before 1923) and a screen shot of Nosferatu's view in Bremen. Note the similar slant to the buildings.

The visual dimension of film offered to the expressionist a particularly fruitful means for subverting bourgeois codes of representation. The notion of objectivity and laws of reality defined by bourgeois standards could only limit imagination. Thus stylized architecture of the *Caligari* sets, the blurred distinctions between the real and metaphorical in *Nosferatu*...manifest a refusal to acknowledge the hegemony of “normal” perspective. (379)

In other words, the film was layered with a multiplicity of stylistic elements, and it was also rich in symbolism and sedition presented with a strong expressionist perspective. The metaphorical shadow on the screen, meant to symbolize the changes in the post-war era was replaced by a new, more sinister shadow beginning to loom over Germany. This shadow would make some filmmakers run for the daylight of America.

The migration of Germans to Hollywood began with famed actor, director and mentor to Charlie Chaplin, Ernst Lubitsch, in 1922. By the mid-1920s, the migration to Hollywood became a flood. Directors Murnau and Fritz Lang joined many other directors including Billy Wilder and *Casablanca* director Michael Curtiz, producer Erich Pommer, writer Carl Mayer, and actor Conrad Veidt (Cook 106). However, the visual link between German Expressionism and cinematic style that would impact Hollywood

was cinematographer Karl Freund. With Murnau directing, Freund shot *The Last Laugh* (1924) which helped usher in the “unabashedly nihilistic realism” of the *Kammerspeilfilm*, Germany’s 180-degree reaction to expressionism (Cook 92). *The Last Laugh* was a world-wide sensation; the story of the down on his luck and hapless doorman who strikes it rich connected with audiences and “it was the almost universal decision of Hollywood that it was the greatest picture ever made” (105). Freund’s influence can be directly traced from the origins of expressionism to the films now deemed “classics” of Hollywood’s “Golden Age.” Many other German filmmakers would leave Berlin to work with or influence non-German filmmakers in America. There were hundreds of others in Germany who were not courted by Hollywood, and many suffered a variety of fates. Some, like scenic pioneer Eugene Schufftan, would escape to England (Barsacq 187). Others, like actor and director Leni Riefenstahl would stay in Germany and would make films for the Reich (*Cinema Europe*). Still others would fall victim to hatred, like *Nosferatu*’s Art Director Albin Grau who died at Buchenwald in 1942 (Jacobson 9).

In 1926, Murnau was one of the first who had expressionist roots to come to America (Eisner *Murnau* 167). His first film, *Sunrise* was released in 1927. The story was written by Carl Mayer; Edgar Ulmar was on the art design team, and the film was released

by Fox (Murnau *Sunrise*). The film is about a woman from the city who tempts a married farmer and tries to convince him to drown his wife. It is rich in symbolism and has expressionist tendencies. For example, one scene in the film has a strong erotic feel where the rhythmic moment of a temptress' body "yields in almost an expressionistic manner in the man's embrace" (Eisner *Murnau* 181). Murnau would make three more pictures in America, all working with Edgar Ulmer. His next movie, *4 Devils* (1928), reunited Ulmer with *Caligari* and *The Last Laugh* scenic designer Walter Rohrig (Murnau). One critic would say of *4 Devils*, that Murnau "returned to the sort of Kammerspeilfilm, harsh and heavy which he presented with all his visual genius" (Eisner *Murnau* 200). Not living to see its release, Murnau's first sound film would be his last; *Tabu* (1931) is also filled with strong symbolism and lacks the Hollywood happy ending. Though a familiar city versus country story, it is set in the South Pacific and tends to focus on the pristine natural work of the island dwellers corrupted by the white settlers. Images of "death ships" and close-ups of distorted faces remind the viewer of *Nosferatu* and *The Last Laugh*, respectively (Petrie 105-107). A week before the film's release, Murnau died in a tragic car accident (Eisner *Murnau* 223). Murnau had proven that Expressionist and Kammerspeilfilm techniques would work in America, and the wave upon wave of German filmmakers to follow was just beginning.

With so many creative people emigrating, the expressionist era came to an end in Germany. In her book *The Haunted Screen*, Lotte Eisner writes that the birth of expressionism followed the Germanic tradition where great poetry was born of times of National hardship and that part of expressionism's legacy is tragedy and despair (310). Echoing this sentiment, Siegfried Kraucer states that expressionist films were about the struggle to control one self, yet this struggle was lost on the audience. The German people felt increasingly insecure and a need for authoritarian control began to seep into the masses. The Weimer Republic constricted this need of the people. Kraucer's belief is that the cinema became a part of the German society and its messages created a void that was filled by National Socialism. He notes that this is just one of many factors that led to the rise of Hitler (Cook 111)

The impact of *Nosferatu's* mise-en-scène and that of the expressionist filmmakers is just as significant today as it was during the time between the World Wars. Like the captives in Plato's cave, the shadows still hold our fear, can alter our understanding of reality and allow our minds a chance to run wild. The legacy of Murnau and his contemporaries can be seen in film noir, in horror movies, slasher films, thrillers or any time we let our imagination get the better of us, on film or in real life.

Works Cited

- 4 Devils*. Directed by F.W. Murnau, Fox Films, 1928.
- Adlmann, Jan Ernst. "Mirror to a world Gone Awry." *Art in America*, February 2009, pp. 117-121.
- Barsacq, Léon. *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions*, edited by Elliott Stein, Paris, 1970.
- Barsam, Richard. *Looking at Movies*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- Catania, Saviour. "Absent in Liminal Places: Murnau's "Nosferatu" and the Otherworld of Stoker's Dracula." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 32, no.3, 2004, pp. 229-236.
- Cinema Europe: The Other Hollywood*. Directed by Kevin Brownlow and David Gill. Image Entertainment, 1995.
- Clegg, Jerry S. "Nietzsche's Gods in the Birth of Tragedy." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1972, pp. 431-438.

- Cook, David. *A History of Narrative Film*. 4th ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.
- Der Golem*. Directed by Carl Boese and Paul Wegener, UFA, 1920.
- Dracula*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, performances by Gary Oldman and Winona Ryder, Columbia Pictures, 1992.
- Eisner, Lotte. *Murnau*. University of California Press, 1973.
- . *The Haunted Screen*. University of California Press, 1965.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*, edited by Noah Isenberg, Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. The Penguin Group, 2003.
- Flynn, Thomas R. *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, 2006.
- Franklin, James C. "Metamorphosis of a Metaphor: Shadow in Early German Cinema." *German Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1980, pp. 176-188.
- Gilbert, Martin. *The First World War*. Henry Holt & Company, 1994.
- Gosetti-Ferencei, Jennifer Anna. "Foreshadowing of the Kafkaesque in Alfred Kubin's Drawings." *Hyperion* vol. 3, no. 4, 2008, pp. 47-52.
- Jacobson, Mark. *The Lampshade: A Holocaust Detective Story from Buchenwald to New Orleans*. Simon & Schuster, 2010.
- Kellner, Douglas. *Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage*, edited by Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner, Universe Press, 1983.
- Luft, Herbert G. "Notes on the World and Work of Carl Mayer." *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1954, pp. 375-392.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Portable Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufman, Penguin Books, 1976.
- Nosferatu, Symphony of Terror*. Directed by W.F. Murnau, Prana-Film GmbH, 1922.
- Nosferatu the Vampyre*. Directed by Werner Herzog, Werner Herzog Filmproduktion, 1978.
- Papapetros, Spyros. "Malicious Houses: Animation, Animism, Animosity in German Architecture and Film: From Méliès to Murnau." *The Grey Room*, no. 20, 2005, pp. 6-37.
- Petrie, Graham. *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922-1931*. Wayne State University Press, 2001.
- Plato. *Republic*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Rubenstein, Lenny. *Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage*, edited by Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner, Universe Press, 1983.
- Shadow of the Vampire*. Directed by E. Elias Merhige, Lions Gate Films, 2000.
- Silberman, Marc. *Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage*, edited by Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner, Universe Press, 1983.
- Solomon, Robert C. *Existentialism*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- "UFA/Company History." *UFA Film & TV Produktion GmbH*. www.ufa.de/company/historie/index_html?view=eng. Accessed November 5, 2015.
- Worland, Rick. *The Horror Film: An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Zettl, Herbert. *Sight, Sound, Motion*. Wadsworth, 1990.