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FILM W3840x: Senior Seminar
22 January 2014

“Inner Landscapes” of the Hallucinatory:
Intertextuality and Rebirth in Herzog’s *Nosferatu*

Though neither knows where lie the nameless things of which the mystic signs give forth such hints; yet with me, as with the colt, somewhere those things must exist. Though in many aspects the visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright.

– Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, “The Whiteness of the Whale” (1851)

While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ear ! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!

– William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1888)

Von Morgen bis Abend,
in Müh’ und Angst,
nicht wonnig ward sie gewonnen!
Es naht die Nacht.

Between dawn and sunset
in toil and suffering
it was not blissfully won!
Night draws on.

– Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold* (1851-3)

If Richard Wagner begins with a hallucination of gestures,¹ Werner Herzog begins with a hallucination of landscapes. Central to these points of departure is a certain tension between the material and immaterial, the notional and sensational, the naturally occurring and possibly inspired—polar distinctions first suggested by the term *aísthēsis* and all revitalized by Herzog’s own film aesthetic.² To experience *Nosferatu – Phantom der Nacht* (*Nosferatu the Vampyre*, 1979) is to feel the seemingly incongruous sense of submersion in an illusory dream concurrent with an unbuckling awareness of the concreteness in what Kracauer calls “the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life.”³ Particularly striking about Herzog’s remake of Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau’s silent film, *Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (*Nosferatu – A Symphony of Horror*, 1922), is the intricate web of formal mechanisms and cross-disciplinary references enabling these polarities to charge with meaning an entrancing filmic world and its landscapes, whose grooves run trickling with water and skylines with mist. Without doubt, water would be the element permeating the cool fabric of the film; the fluidity or mutability emblematic of its very essence mirrors the liminality not only of the vampiric state—“neither dead nor living,” as the saying goes—but also the nature of the film itself as a remake whose conspicuous intertextuality seems to indicate the acuity of a visionary’s consciousness. Moreover, it marks an assured step towards a timely revalidation of the cultural inheritance of a

¹ In the last published critique of his erstwhile friend, “Der Fall Wagner” (“The Case of Wagner”, 1888), Nietzsche describes the way in which Wagner begins by seeking a sign language of sounds (*die Ton-Semiotik*) for his primary hallucinations of gestures: “die Halluzination nicht von Tönen, sondern von Gebärden...” *Friedrich Nietzsche – Werke in drei Bände. Zweiter Band*, ed. Karl Schlechta (München: Hanser, 1954) 916.

² In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1999), Terry Eagleton details succinctly the more encompassing conception of Alexander Baumgarten’s formulation, *Ästhetik*, from the Greek *aísthēsis*, which refers to the whole of human perception and sensation.

³ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) 300.

country whose recent past evinces the shattering consequences of organized man branded by brutality and inculcated with ideology.

History consists no less of a teleologically predetermined chronicle than the precarious result of a blinkered historian's parsing out a single era to overshadow its precursors or yet-to-be-shaped constituents. Keeping a more tentative philosophical account of history in mind,⁴ *Nosferatu – Phantom der Nacht's* tapping into the rich reservoir of Germany's cultural and intellectual legacies is discriminating in the specificity of its selection, namely, German Expressionist film and Romanticist painting and music. Here it is worth mentioning that categorical terms, such as Expressionism in film or north German Romanticism in the visual arts, are used with discretion. A sweeping oversimplification or *a priori* generalization of individual inclinations would be gratuitous, to say the least. As with any other historical movement, German Romanticism entails an array of significations for different thinkers, not to mention different disciplines; definitions are further reworked and reformulated over time, such as Friedrich Schlegel's own conception of *romantische Poesie*, which apparently shifts from the definitive to normative.⁵ Yet in light of the close-knit circle of German thinkers and artists of this

⁴ To be more specific, an exemplary metaphor for a tentative philosophy of history would be that of a "searchlight", as proposed by Karl Popper, as opposed to a Hegelian model of the *Geist's* own actualization. As Hayden White writes, "[Historians of this generation] must be prepared to entertain the notion that history, as currently conceived, is a kind of historical accident, a product of a specific historical situation, and that, with the passing of the misunderstandings that produced that situation, history itself may lose its status as an autonomous and self-authenticating mode of thought." Hayden V. White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1966): 113.

⁵ Friedrich Schlegel initial conception of the literary term refers to the literature of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance written in the Romance languages. This historical use is arguably abandoned in his famous *Athenäum* "fragment 116" (1798), in his positing the term as a "progressive Universalpoesie." See *Kritische-Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe. Zweiter Band*, ed. Ernst Behler, et al. (München: Paderborn, 1967) 182.

era as well as recurring threads identifiable among various works,⁶ the term Romanticism, for instance, will be meant loosely in this examination as a certain enduring *Haltung* (posture, stance, or attitude), rather than a fixed doctrine of tenets, or mere time brackets that roughly denote the late 18th- to early 19th-century period.

The compelling effects and implications of the film's complex grammar will be scrutinized in a closer juxtaposition of the interwoven aspects of Herzog's musical and visual landscapes—the use of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* Prelude in the sequence of Jonathan's journey (and other poignant frames)—with corresponding paintings by Caspar David Friedrich. In what way do allusions to iconographic paintings and musical compositions shed light on or enrich the meaning of the film? To what extent does Herzog's intertextual (musical and visual) vocabulary serve to delineate the continuity between a Romanticist sensibility and Expressionist project? Does the double rhetoric of regression and rebirth, as typified by Herzog's look “back” in his intertextual references and look “forward” in the articulation of a singular aesthetic, reinforce the arguably slippery notion of national identity, following one of the most traumatic events in the history of mankind? Or perhaps the notion of an artwork in this sociocultural context is, as such, untenably grounded on a faulty conception of culture in a totalizing, late capitalist society; as Adorno critically maintained, “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”⁷

Yet Herzog's poetic voice is a unique and uncompromising one, emerging more from an inner realm of dreamlike twilight than the contemporary existence of flat daylight. This is

⁶ Novalis, the Schlegel brothers, and Ludwig Tieck, for example, all remained active in Dresden, the reputed art hub of the time, where painter Friedrich settled in 1798. See William Vaughan, “Friedrich, Caspar David,” *The Oxford Companion to Western Art*, ed. Hugh Brigstocke, Oxford Art Online, 7 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t118/e959>>.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft” (1951), *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I – Prismen. Ohne Leitbild* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977): 30. Original quote: “Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch...”

rendered palpable from the mystical aura of the natural landscape, as first depicted by Jonathan Harker's (Bruno Ganz) journey from the gypsies' inn to Count Dracula's (Klaus Kinski) castle. The sequence's meticulous construction is pivotal to the entirety of the film, for it signals "a definitive crossing-over of boundaries,"⁸ highlighting the motif of the "journey," an abiding thematic preoccupation of the Romantics.⁹ Herzog expounds on the significance of the precision of image construction and assembly:

The images are very, very precisely planned...For *Nosferatu* we did these scenes so precisely because we knew we were working in a very special field—namely the field of a particular kind of 'genre' film which had its own specific rituals and narrative laws and mythic figures that have all been well-known to audiences for at least half a century now...And so one of the reasons for this precision in regard to the images is because the genre of vampire films requires extreme stylization, and you have to work very precisely in order to achieve that exact level of stylization.¹⁰

The tuned balance between conviction in raw intuition and compliance with genre or narrative convention distinguishes Herzog's sensibility. With regards to the sequence's memorable still shot of clouds, Herzog speaks openly of its relevance to the film: "But it is also true that very much of what you think may be stylization and deliberate construction still may have developed instinctively...I simply *liked* those clouds...Now, from the viewpoint of narration, it does not make any sense at all to show clouds that barely move for two full minutes, yet in terms of the overall context it's very beautiful and necessary."¹¹ Accordingly, it makes no more sense to so methodically pursue the cinematic concocting of an image compositionally

⁸ Judith Mayne, "Herzog, Murnau, and the vampire," *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History*, ed. Timothy Corrigan (New York: Methuen, 1986): 123.

⁹ Herzog's preoccupation with notions such as fate, destiny, and redemption, among others, remains inherited from the Romantic tradition, as Sabine Hake explains in *German National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Hake aligns her position alongside that of Corrigan, asserting that Herzog "styles himself as a romantic hero...influenced by Weimar directors such as Murnau...indebted to the legacies of German romanticism, including the sublime." (157)

¹⁰ Werner Herzog, *Images at the Horizon*, ed. Gene Walsh (Chicago: Facets Multimedia, 17 Apr. 1979) 25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

homologous to one painted by Friedrich—strictly from the viewpoint of narration, that is. But from other viewpoints, the sheer deliberateness of the filmmaker’s inclusion of such frames impels critical inquiry, while its exemplary execution produces effects similarly realized by Friedrich’s canvases. The object presented in this two-minute long shot (clouds hovering against a mountainside) reflects one of the chief thematic concerns of Friedrich’s works: the renewed interest in nature and the representation of its transitional phases. Natural phenomena are observed in their purity, physical monumentality, and inscrutable profundity. Time passes; nature unfolds—dawn breaks, clouds hide, or the sky darkens. Aroused is a primordial feeling of awe, whose profundities Melville similarly locates in “the fathom-deep life”¹² of a different natural creation (a whale), and whose source and expressiveness Wordsworth calls “the Power”:

Imagination—here the Power so called
Through sad incompetence of human speech,
That awful Power rose from the mind’s abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;¹³

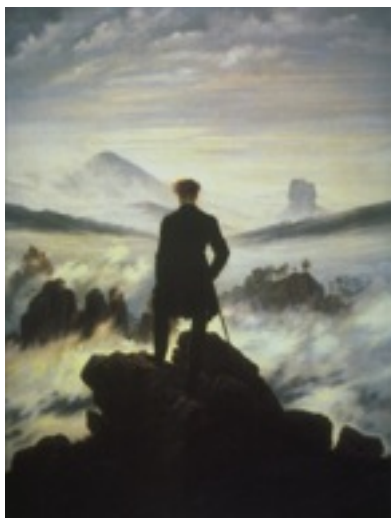


Figure 1. *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*. 1817.

The idea of a “lonely traveller” recalls Friedrich’s famous depiction of the *Wanderer* (Fig. 1), while the mélange of feelings captured by Wordsworth’s verse is just as poignantly elicited by Friedrich’s own pictorial speech. To stand before a landscape painting by Friedrich is to enter a secluded spatiotemporal realm in which the capacity to wonder and ruminate is boundless, and the experience of viewing Herzog’s shot of the mountainside attains heights no slighter. Seclusion fulfills a primary function in

¹² Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 164.

¹³ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, Or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind: An Autobiographical Poem* (London: Edward Moxon, 1850) 159-160.

the contemplation of nature, for it is in meditative solitude that the viewer reflects on nature and, in so doing, his own relation to nature—that is, man’s peculiar situation, *la condition humaine*. In Friedrich’s landscapes, it is as if the essentially Kantian mode of critical self-reflection translates into, above all, an emotive state of subdued melancholy. Upon his visit to the painter’s atelier in 1833, the French sculptor David d’Anger allegedly declared, “Here is a man who has discovered the tragedy of landscape.”¹⁴ The generous feeling of melancholy transpires, in turn, in a sort of Bergsonian homogenous medium of time, *la durée*, in which pure states of consciousness melt into one another. In this ghost of space, only the Self endures, and solitude goes hand in hand with a somber darkness. In one of the scenes added by Herzog, the tragic figure of Nosferatu confides to Jonathan: “I love darkness and shadows. Where I can be alone with my thoughts.”¹⁵



As the “children of the night” wail in the distance, Nosferatu expresses for the first time his existential weariness and sense of longing.

¹⁴ Ulrich Finke, *German Painting from Romanticism to Expressionism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974) 22.

¹⁵ Original quotation: “Ich liebe die Dunkelheit und die Schatten, wo ich mit meinen Gedanken allein sein können.” One of the most pronounced aspects of Herzog’s remake is the humanization of Count Dracula, a feat accomplished by several single shots on the character as well as original lines written by Herzog for Kinski’s delivery, such as the one cited above.

As art scholar Ulrich Finke phrases, “this impregnation of spiritual quiet and full-bodied emotion”¹⁶ in Friedrich’s landscapes involves primarily a turn back to nature—a move mirrored not only by Herzog, but also by Murnau, who decided to shoot on location, as opposed to a UFA studio.¹⁷ In *The Haunted Screen*, Herzog’s mentor and prominent film critic and historian, Lotte Eisner, imparts several perceptive insights on Murnau’s keen interest in nature:

Murnau...saw all that nature had to offer in the way of fine images. He films the fragile form of a white cloud scudding over the dunes, while the wind from the Baltic plays among the scarce blades of grass...Nature participates in the action: sensitive editing makes the bounding waves foretell the approach of the vampire, the imminence of the doom about to overtake the town. Over all these landscapes—dark hills, thick forests, skies of jagged storm-clouds—there hovers what Balázs calls the great shadows of the supernatural.¹⁸

In the mode of viewing Murnau’s depictions of natural landscapes, the tension between the static images of painting and film’s capacity for animating those images serves as a primary motivating force.¹⁹ If “[Murnau] comments on film’s indebtedness to the compositional practices of painting while nevertheless flaunting film’s capacity for movement and hence for storytelling,”²⁰ Herzog “shadows” his predecessor, as it were, but adjusts his lens to that which would seem to elude any depth of field. That is, Herzog’s shots of the same natural objects—clouds, forests, streams—resound from a lower register, lingering more intensely in an unremitting attempt to seize something intangible, or perhaps hypnotic, about the image. In a

¹⁶ Finke, 23.

¹⁷ The locations of Murnau’s *Nosferatu* are the Baltic ports of Rostock, Wismar, and Lubeck, and the High Tatras of Czechoslovakia.

¹⁸ Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 99-100. While Eisner argues that “the German cinema is a development of German Romanticism, and that modern technique merely lends visible form to Romantic fancies,” Thomas Elsaesser deconstructs the art historian’s seminal work, further calling attention to the tenuous notion of nationhood. Still, he concedes to the cogency of her scrutiny on the intertextual links between film, theater and painting, in her tracing the legacy of German Romanticism. See: Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

¹⁹ See Brigitte Peucker, *The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) 24.

²⁰ Ibid.

thorough examination of the employment of Romantic paintings in Murnau's *Nosferatu*, Dalle Vacche maintains that the horror genre "...satisfies Romanticism's tenet that the imagination cannot be limited by a concrete object, as in a sculpture with precise contours, but should float freely on the wings of interiority...in the wake of Romantic painting, in which landscapes become a mental projection, Murnau learns to use the camera to make visible the invisible, while imbuing objects and decor with intangible states of mind."²¹ Wedded to the idea of flight is freedom, and if the Romantic spirit avows itself free from and even inimical to rationalist precepts, this fervent impetus stirs Herzog's own softening of contours. Flight into another world of dreams or even a vague fog does not necessarily connote a self-deceptive evasion of the present reality, however.²² When the inward-turning motion fundamental to the Romantic spirit finds expression in Herzog's inner landscapes, a sharpened edge of horror rekindles the immediacy of the present, pitching us against all of its sensory and emotive planes.

Rarely does the element of horror penetrate the perimeters of Friedrich's canvases. Instead, a quiet placidity of the landscape emanates outwards, conjuring up the immeasurability of "the heartless voids and immensities of the universe."²³ On the other hand, Herzog's frames in *Nosferatu – Phantom der Nacht* emit an impending sense of doom, fracturing the initial repose of the film's beginning. Similarly, Roger Ebert notes, "There is often something fearful and awesome in Herzog's depiction of nature. It is not uplifting so much as remorseless. Clouds fall

²¹ Angela Dalle Vacche, "Murnau's *Nosferatu*: Romantic Painting as Horror and Desire in Expressionist Cinema," *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1996): 168. In her research, Dalle Vacche received transcripts from the University of Heidelberg, enlisting all classes taken by Murnau, several of which were in the art history department under his mentor, Carl Neumann.

²² See Walter Kaufman, *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (London: Plume, 1975) 13.

²³ Melville, 175.

low and drift like water. Peaks tower in intimidation. Shadows hint at horrors.”²⁴ In Herzog’s landscapes, an intimation of imminent darkness pervades the peripheries of the image, calling into question our preconceptions concerning the privileges of spectatorship and limits of perception. Brad Prager characterizes succinctly the discrepancy between the unnerving effect and the viewer’s distilled hope in Herzog’s look at nature: “To look at Herzog’s films, the sky does not suffer with us, but it instead abandons us to our mortal fate. We would like the landscapes to impart something to us or to show compassion, yet they do not.”²⁵ If the bareness of Bergman’s natural landscapes similarly belies emotional suffering or a fraught psychic state, it is noteworthy that his spiritual, symbolic landscapes are, more often than not, anchored to a character and his or her mental state (hence, the prevalence of close-ups in *Wild Strawberries*, *The Seventh Seal*, or *Persona* which all to some extent deal with the theme of a mental journey). Whereas Bergman begins with a face, Herzog begins with a landscape. Even the simplicity of the



The opening shot of the “journey” sequence.

²⁴ Roger Ebert, rev. of *Nosferatu The Vampyre*. *Chicago Sun-Times*, 24 Oct. 2011. Web.

²⁵ Brad Prager, *The Cinema of Werner Herzog: Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007) 13.

opening shot in the same “journey” sequence belies the still surface of things, rupturing expectations of spectatorial safety. For the first time, Jonathan’s figure steadily diminishes in an image akin to Friedrich’s landscapes, whose formal configuration captures the fracture between land and mountain, the periphery dividing the known and the unknown—though with bleaker repercussions.



The deep blue hue of recurring shots of the bat’s flight evokes a feeling of being under water. Furthermore, the use of slow motion exudes a weightiness, which is echoed by Lucy’s gestures in subsequent scenes.

As if to reinforce the spectator’s conjectural impression, the following sixteen-second shot shows, once more, the portentous looming of fog—that is, nature in all of its mystifying aura, unfathomable center, and essentially poetic mood. Signaling a breach with the film’s beginning, the feel of the camera slackens, recoils, and shudders as plainly as the latent terror beneath Jonathan’s vacillating glance behind.²⁶ Tracing a thin cascade of water from above, or

²⁶ The memorable image conjures up another passage from Wordsworth’s *Prelude*: “A backward glance upon the curling cloud / Of city smoke, by distance ruralised; / Keen as a Truant or a Fugitive, / But as a Pilgrim resolute, I took, / Even with the chance equipment of that hour, / The road that pointed toward the chosen Vale.” (7)

the stream below, the camera presents nature—water, more specifically—not merely as a represented object, but further as a potent force. Water arrests Jonathan’s gaze, conquers his step. Seemingly a mere component of the diegetic soundscape, the element of water first seeps into and then immerses the entire audiovisual texture of the film, fulfilling a role analogous to that of a deep riverbed into which the ripples and reflections of impressions converge.

What accompanies the romantic turn to nature is a newly conceived relation between man and nature, as mediated by the experience of phenomenological contemplation. Here the scalar relation of figure and picture plays a meaningful role in indicating the metaphysical significance of the natural phenomenon. Despite the typically diminutive size of Friedrich’s human figure, other formal attributes of a given landscape tend to suggest the prominence of man’s reflective activity. While the relative bareness and symmetry of the landscape serve as stabilizing factors, the specific placement of the human figure along the image’s lateral axis typically confers to his



Figure 2. *Zwei Männer am Meer*. 1817.

earthly activity a prominent position (Fig. 2). Commonly termed the *Rückenfigur*, the recurring image of Friedrich’s human figure assumes the form of a person seen from behind. Standing or sitting at a measured distance from the viewer, the *Rückenfigur*

stands less as an individual character (“Figur” translates either to “character” or “figure”) than a silhouette onto which the viewer is able to project his own contemplative state of the painting. Thus in his famous *Der Mönch am Meer* (Fig. 3), Friedrich paints the sea as a mirror of emotional landscape, whose “...ambivalent connotations...[are] spelled out by the use of the Rückenfigur...[the landscape] as a site of fears and expectations that overwhelm the viewer in the picture, while making the filmic spectators aware of their own projections onto the image.”²⁷



Figure 3. *Der Mönch am Meer*. 1821.



As Prager observes, the screenplay confirms that Herzog had Friedrich’s works in mind when devising specific shots: ‘Lucy stands there, like *Monk by the Sea*, and looks into the distance’.

²⁷ Dalle Vacche, 172.

Joseph Leo Koerner expounds on one popular variant of the *Rückenfigur* as “...an artist who sits at the margin of the scene, sketching the landscape we see...Friedrich’s *Rückenfiguren* are perhaps closest to this conceit, although the event they dramatize is never the actual labor of making, but rather the originary act of experience itself.”²⁸

Insofar as it is preconditioned by the act of looking, the contemplative act of experience would hinge on the notion of the gaze. In Friedrich’s pictorial world, two primary gazes are identifiable, namely, that of the viewer as well as the human figure. In other words, a twofold process of viewing unravels, as time takes shape around the *Rückenfigur* in the form of natural phenomenon (i.e. twilight, dusk, sunrise), and it is only through this layered process that states of mind are projected onto the natural landscape. But in Friedrich’s prevalent employment of the *Rückenfigur*, this second gaze of the “back-figure” is visually muted and finally reified into a medium for projection. The prominent place occupied by the notion of the gaze is, then, displaced by the immediacy of physical contact with the natural event as much as the depth of spiritual contemplation, which is embodied by the range of smooth gradations of the horizon. On the other hand, in Herzog’s tribute to the Romantic spirit, the traditional implications of the *Rückenfigur* are situated in essentially cinematic terms, so that the primacy of the gaze reemerges. After following Jonathan’s four-week long journey through the mountains literally from behind, the camera settles on a static long shot of his sitting on a rock. Rather than sustaining this presentation of Jonathan as *Rückenfigur*, the highly measured camera movement traces the path of his gaze, as if to inscribe it. Just as steadily as Jonathan turns, the camera delineates the trail of his active mode of looking, absorbing the contours of the mountain. The

²⁸ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 163.

sheer magnitude of the mountainside is, in turn, echoed by the overwhelming ascent of the winds in Wagner's Prelude to *Das Rheingold*.



The gaze of Herzog's *Rückenfigur* turns towards the right before the camera follows suit.

At first nearly indiscernible, the winds in E-flat unison produce a “droning” substratum of the astonishing 136-measure long passage consisting only of figurations of the E-flat major chord. By now the liturgic feel of “Brüder des Schattens” (Brother of Shadows), Florian Fricke’s choral composition that accompanies the film’s opening credits, has subsided into a distilled air of looming mystery. The opening low E-flat fuses into an E-flat major triad—all in *piano*, still. The atmospheric tension, cloaked by the tonal harmony yet conveyed by the sheer quantity of instruments and contrasting dynamic markings, escalates before giving way not to *forte*, but rather resistant *piano* arpeggios or “Brechungen”²⁹ of increasing motion (“zunehmender Bewegung”). The tender (“zart”), muted orchestral coloring of the beginning thus yields to a

²⁹ Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, 1853-4 (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1890) 2.

rippling effect in semiquaver figures from a single note, as the avid composer exclaimed in a letter to Franz Liszt in 1854, “Just imagine—the *entire* instrumental introduction to *Das Rheingold* is built upon the single triad of E b !”³⁰ In one sweeping musical phrase—closer to a sweeping gesture, perhaps—the gradual addition of instruments, daring expansion of range, and oscillation of winds realize altogether the engulfing restlessness of “moving water...like a train of clouds”³¹. The utter seamlessness of musical construction incited Baudelaire to profess that Wagnerian musical phrases are simply *nonpareil*, comparable only to the immensity of the sea: “Chaque fragment de chacun des opéras de Wagner est une large et immense mélodie, semblable au spectacle de mer...la mer toujours belle, toujours nouvelle et portant aux grandes pensées... Ce ne sont pas des phrases.”³² Through the use of Wagner’s Prelude in *Nosferatu*, the film’s motif of water now assumes the *grande* form of a musical embodiment of the Rhine River. George Bernard Shaw’s recollection of hearing the Prelude in its original setting is most lucid: “As you sit waiting for the curtain to rise, you suddenly catch the booming ground-tone of a mighty river. It becomes plainer, clearer: you get nearer to the surface, and catch the green light and the flight of the bubbles. Then the curtain goes up and you see what you heard—the depths of the Rhine, with three strange fairy fishes, half water-maidens, singing and enjoying themselves exuberantly...”³³ That the Prelude’s compositional design epitomizes the surges of the Rhine is upheld by the composer’s own exuberant account of the work’s inception:

³⁰ Franz Liszt–Richard Wagner *Briefwechsel*, ed. Hanjo Kesting (Frankfurt: Insel, 1988) 365.

³¹ Wagner, 2.

³² Charles Baudelaire, *Richard Wagner et ‘Tannhäuser’ à Paris* (1864), ed. Robert Kopp (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1994) 116-117.

³³ George Bernard Shaw, “The Rhine Gold,” *The Perfect Wagnerite* (London: Constable & Co., 1898), quoted in *Penetrating Wagner’s Ring: An Anthology* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1978): 86.

Returning home in the afternoon...[The long-desired hour of sleep] did not come; instead I sank into a sort of somnolent state, in which I suddenly felt as if I were sinking in rapidly flowing water. Its rushing soon represented itself to me as the musical sound of the E \flat major chord, which continually surged forward in a figured arpeggiation; these arpeggios appeared as melodic figurations of increasing motion, yet the pure E \flat major triad never changed, and seemed through its persistence to impart infinite significance to the element in which I was sinking. Feeling as though the waves were now roaring high above me, I awoke in sudden terror from my half-sleep. I recognized instantly that the orchestral prelude to *Das Rheingold*, as I had carried it about within me without ever having been able to pin it down, had risen up out of me; and I also quickly grasped how things were with me: the vital stream would not flow from without but only from within. / I immediately decided to return to Zurich and begin the composition of my great poem.³⁴



After Jonathan is bitten in Count Dracula's castle, this shot depicts Lucy's sleepwalking and unearthly connection to Nosferatu. Her bodily reflection visually reiterates the motif of water and produces a highly uncanny effect.

Musicologist John Deathridge maintains that the inception of the Prelude was not as inspired as Wagner's alleged vision.³⁵ Though no other exhaustively corroborated interpretation has been widely accepted, various thematic and metaphorical strands crucial to Herzog's *Nosferatu* strew Wagner's personal account. The tinge of terror, ambiguity of a half-somnolent state, and autonomy of some "vital stream" that rises up involuntarily "from within" bear

³⁴ Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben: Erste authentische Veröffentlichung*, trans. Warren Darcy, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin (Munich: 1963) 580.

³⁵ See chapter six from Warren Darcy's *Wagner's 'Das Rheingold'*, ed. Lewis Lockwood (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 62-86.

particular relevance to the film, especially in light of the other instances of the Prelude's use. First in the "journey" sequence, Wagner's forceful passage forebodes the introduction of Count Dracula, and it recapitulates upon his arrival at Wismar, attaining full volume on an ironic close-up of rats. Musicologist Warren Darcy confirms the primary significance of the Prelude as a musical metaphor that "...depicts the gradual evolution of impersonal natural forces into human consciousness."³⁶ To be sure, Wagner's account is not wholly perspicuous. But if Trilling has a point in saying that a poem does not exist only in itself, but rather attests to a lively existence in its false or partial appearances, so that these simulacra of the actual poem must be taken into account by criticism, a brief consideration of the composer's limpid (and quasi-delusory) prose is not entirely amiss.³⁷ Wagner's visionary gleam, that half-dreamt "infinite significance" of "rapidly flowing water" deepens the tragic timbre of *Nosferatu*, for the vampire's utmost grief lies in his immortality. In Count Dracula's first physical encounter with Lucy Hutter (Isabelle Adjani) before her mirror, Lucy relates the inexorable passing of time to endlessly flowing rivers: "The rivers continue to flow without us. Time flies by [*verrennt*]. Even the stars, they wander towards us in a very strange way. Only death is certain and cruel [*grausam*]."³⁸

In its original context, the Prelude of *Das Rheingold* captures the vestiges of "...the murky darkness before dawn,"³⁹ another transitional phase of nature illustrated visually by Friedrich and Herzog. Yet because it sets into motion not only the four-scene *Rheingold* opera,

³⁶ Ibid., 86.

³⁷ See Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: New York Review Books, 1950).

³⁸ By means of parallel editing, Herzog establishes and develops the spiritual or immaterial connection between Lucy and *Nosferatu*. This consistent use of cross-cutting is a storytelling device employed almost identically by Mumau.

³⁹ John Luis DiGaetani, introduction, *Penetrating Wagner's Ring: An Anthology* (New Jersey: Associated Presses, 1978): 19.

but rather the entire fifteen-hour, four-opera *Ring* cycle, the E-flat major chord decidedly “proclaims the beginning of something vast.”⁴⁰ The evoked depths of the Rhine are inestimable. There emerges in the works of Wagner, Friedrich, and Herzog, a vigorous sense of unbridled vastness, a Romantic excess of feeling that verges on decadence but resolves itself in solemn grandeur. Essentially a sequence of moods, the Prelude itself is, as conductor Sir Georg Solti recognizes, “...such a frighteningly dangerous piece to play that it can often lose its magic through tension and anxiety: yet the mood and dark colour is everything.”⁴¹ Beneath the major key of the passage lurks darkness; beneath the surface of the Rhine’s waves lurks “...the power of evil, the actual poison of loving contained in the gold, which is stolen from nature and abused as the Nibelung’s ring.”⁴² The scene belongs, of course, not to the sphere of the banal and ordinary, but rather the hallucinatory and imaginary. Just as Herzog undercuts our tacit presumptions about the safe appearance of representations by galvanizing his landscapes with flickers of horror and awe, Wagner treats the surface of things as a locus of potential fear and nightmare. Indebted to Schopenhauer’s philosophy of dreams as revelatory images, Wagner not surprisingly regards the dream organ as the root of all art, whose “...visions strip away the veneer of appearances to reveal the truth—and the results are often frightening.”⁴³ In his critique,

⁴⁰ Roger North, “*The Rhinegold – The Music*,” *The Rhinegold – English National Opera Guide*, 35, ed. Nicholas John (London: John Calder, 1985): 15.

⁴¹ Sir Georg Solti, Program Notes, *Das Rheingold*, music by Richard Wagner. Perf. Wiener Philharmoniker. Cond. Sir Georg Solti. Decca, 1984.

⁴² Richard Wagner, Briefe an August Röckel (25 Jan. 1854), trans. John L. DiGaetani, *Penetrating Wagner’s Ring: An Anthology* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1978): 44.

⁴³ Hilan Warshaw, “‘The Dream Organ’: Wagner as a Proto-Filmmaker,” *Wagner Outside the ‘Ring’: Essays on the Operas, Their Performance and Their Connections with Other Arts*, ed. John Louis DiGaetani (North Carolina: McFarland, 2009): 190. Warshaw goes on to explain Wagner’s idea of the scream upon waking from such terrible dreams.

Nietzsche further considers the former friend an innovator for transmuting music into hallucinatory gesture and, above all, language:



Figure 4. *Abtei im Eichwald*. 1809-10.



Herzog's shot is a visual homolog to Friedrich's famous rendition of the Gothic ruin, a Romantic symbol of decay.

...theatrical rhetoric, a means of expression, of underscoring gestures, of suggestion, of the psychologically picturesque. Here we may consider Wagner an inventor and innovator of the first rank—*he has increased music's capacity for language to the point of making it immeasurable*: he is the Victor Hugo of music as language. Always presupposing that one first allows that under certain circumstances music may be not music but language, instrument, *ancilla dramaturgica*.⁴⁴

In Herzog's *Nosferatu*, Wagner's music is nothing less than a vehicle of communication which, in point of subtlety and complexity, expresses the emotionality of infinite yearning in a semi-primal, semi-subliminal state.⁴⁵ Both conscious and conscientious, Herzog is by no means a filmmaker oblivious to the exceptional amount of controversy provoked by Wagner's writings as well as their many interpretations.⁴⁶ Prager contextualizes the particular meaning of Herzog's homage: "While Herzog acknowledges the beauty of Wagner's composition and does not mean to participate in tarring the composer with the dirty brush of German nationalism, the irony



For the last time, Wagner's Prelude accompanies a close-up of teeming rats that symbolize *Nosferatu* as the bearer of pestilence and, as such, a "scourge of God."

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, 918.

⁴⁵ In his extensive 2002 interview with Paul Cronin, Herzog shares that, "My strongest influences come from music...For more than ten years I have been listening more and more to music that goes beyond the Renaissance... and yet it is their music more than anything else that has influenced my sense of timing and my emotionality."

⁴⁶ To further muddle matters, Wagner's biography has been "...drenched with no end of detail, eroticized, vilified, heroicized, and several times filmed." John Deathridge, "Wagner Lives: Issues in Autobiography," *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 3.

comes from its use against this backdrop in what is essentially a genre film. It becomes doubly ironic when one recalls that Herzog's interest in remaking the film was in recovering so-called 'legitimate' film culture from its misuse by over-zealous nationalists."⁴⁷ This type of imagistic irony manifests itself as "symbolic gesture"⁴⁸ in a number of frames, such as the one above. Nonetheless, the shade of irony tinging the remake's final tribute to the Expressionist impulse in Murnau's original silent film proves more nuanced.

If the pioneers of German Expressionism "liked to call themselves apocalyptic adolescents,"⁴⁹ the highly self-aware descendants of the New German Cinema identified themselves as fatherless orphans. On discrete occasions Herzog, along with his fellow contemporaries (most notably, Fassbinder, Wenders, and Schlöndorff), have dubbed themselves members of a "fatherless generation". Thus the director characterizes explicitly his eighth feature film as a conscious effort towards a "re-legitimization" of Germany's *Filmkultur*: "What I really sought to do was connect my *Nosferatu* with our true German cultural heritage, the silent films of the Weimar era and Murnau's work in particular...In many ways, for me, this film was the final chapter of the vital process of 're-legitimization' of German culture that had been going on for some years."⁵⁰ While the candid openness of the filmmaker's own account demands no further elucidation, an old Arab proverb is also worth heeding: *men resemble their times more than they do their fathers*. In short, to probe into the multitudinous genealogy of *Nosferatu* is not to misconstrue it as an elementary, lineal facsimile. As with other works of great artists, Herzog's

⁴⁷ Prager, 107.

⁴⁸ Timothy Corrigan, "Producing Herzog: From a Body of Images," *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History* (New York: Methuen, 1986): 14.

⁴⁹ Eisner, 15.

⁵⁰ Paul Cronin, and Werner Herzog, *Herzog on Herzog*, ed. Paul Cronin (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) 151.

film is not a confluence of erudite references, nor even an insular form of aural discourse. It could instead be said that its existence assumes the form of a rich repository of discordant tendencies not only of his ancestors' times but also of his own, as suffused by his individual personality and by that compulsive, obsessive, primarily *vital* quality that impresses itself on us as "Herzogian".



Both Lucy's slow, affected gestures and the artificial quality of lighting stem from the German Expressionist style of acting as well as genre convention. The dramatic employment of Nosferatu's shadow is another undeviating tribute to Max Schreck's iconic shadow in Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu*.

In his extensive monograph, S. S. Praver specifies the congruities between Bram Stoker's original novel, *Dracula*, Murnau's film adaptation, and Herzog's remake.⁵¹ While detecting similarities in narrative and architectural compositions of certain frames, Praver also notes that Lucy's sacrifice proves futile in Herzog's film. In other words, the Romanticist theme

⁵¹ S. S. Praver, *Nosferatu – Phantom der Nacht*, ed. Rob White (London: British Film Institute, 2004) 42-43.

of “redemption through love” or “*Liebestod*, love-death”⁵² central to both film narratives, involves different consequences. As Wagner wrote, “...We must learn to *die*, and to die in the most absolute sense of the word; the fear of death is the source of all lack of love, and it is generated only when love itself has begun to fade. To an isolated person not all things are possible; many are needed, and the suffering, self-sacrificing woman becomes at last the real, conscious redeemer. For what is love but the ‘eternally feminine’.”⁵³ Engrossed by his own indelible wretchedness, Herzog’s *Nosferatu* attempts to solicit Lucy’s love, asking her rhetorically, doesn’t she know that the most abject pain is the absence or missing of love [*das Fehlen der Liebe*]? But only in a limited sense is the film about immortality and love. An exploration of the divide between the visible and invisible, between the intelligible and impenetrable, *Nosferatu* concerns immortality and love only inasmuch as they, too, stake out remote corners in the inexplicable, hidden recesses of the soul.

What Kracauer calls “The conception that great love might force tyranny into retreat, symbolized by Nina’s triumph over *Nosferatu*,”⁵⁴ is rendered futile in Herzog’s remake, for the spirit of the *Phantom* is resurrected in the *Gestalt* of Jonathan. *Nosferatu*’s existential anguish is, however, relieved through the overcoming of his immortality, parallel to the way “The curse upon [the gold] is not lifted until it is finally returned to nature, until the gold is again delivered

⁵² Stewart Spencer, “The ‘Romantic Operas’ and the Turn to Myth,” *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 69.

⁵³ Wagner, *Briefe an August Röckel*: 44-45.

⁵⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947) 79.

into the bottom of the Rhine.”⁵⁵ Insofar as notions of *Weltschmerz* and Schlegel’s *Sehnsucht*⁵⁶ are intrinsic to the character of Nosferatu played by Kinski, the Romantic spirit carries with it a characteristically modern aftertaste. Thomas Elsaesser formulates this transformation eloquently: “The Romantic project—the transformation of history into inwardness, inwardness into phenomenological and sensuous immediacy of contemplation—has been accomplished by the cinema, but with a vengeance. For it shows this transformation to have been an act of repression, and history returns in the form of the uncanny and the fantastic.”⁵⁷

Here the portrayal of the fantastic suggests dejection as much as vengeance. The primacy of *Stimmung* in the German Expressionist film, as posited by Eisner, is pertinent: “In any



Herzog’s poeticism resonates on several emotional planes, as the viewer is in this scene “with” Nosferatu, the alienated, marginalized, and lonely.

⁵⁵ Wagner, *Briefe an August Röckel*: 44.

⁵⁶ August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, ed. Eduard Böcking, 3rd edition, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1846): I, 16.

⁵⁷ Thomas Elsaesser, “Social Mobility and the Fantastic: German Silent Cinema,” *Wide Angle* Vol. 5, No. 2 (1982): 24.

German film the preoccupation with rendering *Stimmung* ('mood') by suggesting the 'vibrations of the soul' is linked to the use of light...This *Stimmung* is most often diffused by a 'veiled', melancholy landscape..."⁵⁸ The principal melancholy projected outwardly onto Expressionist decorative landscapes, or projected inwardly into the gradations of Friedrich's horizons, approximates novel dimensions in Herzog's creation of virtually a new, composite sort of being. While the Nosferatu character played by Schreck typifies the "undead", Herzog and Kinski's revival of the character incarnates compelling notions of human world-weariness and Kierkegaardian despair. As a distant howling punctures the silence, Nosferatu tells Jonathan, "Time is an abyss, profound as a thousand nights. Centuries come and go. To be unable to grow old is terrible. Death is not the worst; there are things more horrible than that. Can you imagine enduring centuries, experiencing the same futility each day?"⁵⁹ The sinister vein of the Romanticist *Haltung* is reshaped with a "twist"—that is, aggregated with the melancholic and the uncanny—in Herzog's humanizing, more complex portrait of Nosferatu. For Walter Pater, the adding of this uncanniness or "strangeness to beauty"⁶⁰ is *the* canonical quality that distinguishes Romanticism; for Herzog, intense moments of the estrangement of the commonplace seem to further distinguish his individual sensibility, in which the strange, the melancholic, and the beautiful are at one.

To drive conventional practice or idea to the opposite extreme seems decidedly Herzogian, so the degree of fidelity to Romanticist impulses and Expressionist tonalities may

⁵⁸ Eisner, 199.

⁵⁹ Original quotation: "Zeit – das ist ein Abgrund, tausend Nächte tief. Jahrhunderte kommen und gehen. Nicht altern zu können, ist furchtbar. Der Tod ist nicht alles; es gibt viel schlimmer als es. Können Sie sich vorstellen, dass man Jahrhunderte überdauert, und jeden Tag dieselbe Nichtigkeit miterlebt?"

⁶⁰ Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011) 19.

attest to greater significance. The German filmmaker concedes that he never considered his film a remake, but rather a self-standing “very clear declaration of [his] connection to the very best of German cinema.”⁶¹ Herzog articulates his connection to Friedrich’s “inner landscapes”:

If I had to give you the names of the painters who have influenced me, I would name Grünewald, and above all, Bosch and Brueghel. Leonardo da Vinci too...These are the kinds of landscapes I try to find in my films, the landscapes that exist only in our dreams. For me, a true landscape is not just a representation of a desert or a forest. It is an inner state of mind, literally inner landscapes, and it is the human soul that is visible through the landscapes presented in my films...This is my real connection to Caspar David Friedrich, a man who never wanted to paint landscapes *per se*, but wanted to explore and show inner landscapes.⁶²

In Herzog’s filmic cosmos, the poetic evocation of images induces the viewer’s inadvertent slip into a liminal interstice of the mind. It is not so much a neat passing from one order of perception to another, as a slow sinking into the cracks of those untold thresholds between reality and fantasy, as if into ever deeper and darker stages of hypnosis. Almost, it seems, the tactile and audiovisual modalities of the film are enshrouded in a fine mist of hallucination. As Jonathan’s first diary entry discloses, “I had a bad dream, and hope it will pass. The castle is so strange. At times I wonder if it isn’t part of that dream. Everything about it looks so unreal.”⁶³ Jonathan’s diary entry contains hazy and even psychotic elements reminiscent of Wagner’s, which is to say that neither stands in a faithful or so-called “healthy” relation to reality. The sensorily all-subsuming, viscerally hypnotic force of *Nosferatu* is likewise elusive and evidently difficult to tether to prosaic terms. But it would be unsound and frankly uncharitable to dismiss an either willful or unconscious distancing from reality as some sort of

⁶¹ Cronin, 151. For Eisner, Murnau was “the greatest film-director the Germans have ever known, [whose] cinematic composition was never a mere attempt at decorative stylization. He created the most overwhelming and poignant images in the whole German cinema.” (97)

⁶² Cronin, 136.

⁶³ Original quotation: “Ich habe schwere Träume gehabt, und hoffe, dass das vorbei geht. Es ist nur eine Mattigkeit geblieben. Das ganze Schloss kommt mir manchmal so unwirklich vor, dass ich glaube, ich träume es nur.”

impetuous aberration or self-deceptive escape. Instead, the inner landscapes of minds and outer projections of nature's inscrutabilities of Herzog's resonate with coherence, vitality, and, above all, an emotional valency of an intensely meaningful kind. A stirring "substitute for dreams,"⁶ the remake of Murnau's *Nosferatu* is certainly one of the most poignant nightmares portrayed on screen.

In rudimentary terms, a remake would denote a mere "re-doing" of another given work, so that the stress resides in the Latin prefix "re—"—that is, the meaning of "back" or "backward", indicating withdrawal or that backward motion captured at once in words such as "revert", "recede", or "recluse". To exclusively adhere to this meaning of the ubiquitous Latin root would be to *reduce* Herzog's *Nosferatu* to a hollow shadow of Murnau's silent film in an interpretive act characterizing the former essentially by its regressive nature. That is to say, Herzog's 1979 film would encapsulate a mere "looking backwards", at best a purely relational and at worst an infantile regression to the residue of a relic at a certain historical juncture and its *Zeitgeist*, both of which are long gone.

On the other hand, if the plurality of the prefix's meanings was not circumscribed, more encouraging readings of the term (and its uses) could be attained, such as those of repetition and newness. Unlike the first definition, the notion of repetition is neutral, implying neither perfunctory routine nor reverse motion. Though predicated necessarily on something located in the past, the idea of "re-doing" opens a horizon of possibilities in the main second instance of the act, and this is what Herzog's film realizes. While paying a wholeheartedly devoted,

⁶⁴ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Der Ersatz für die Träume," *Reden und Aufsätze II (1914-1924)*, ed. Bernd Schoeller (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1979): 143. "Denn wir haben unsere Träume nur zum Schein vergessen. Von jedem einzelnen von ihnen, auch von denen, die wir beim Erwachen schon verloren hatten, bleibt ein Etwas in uns, eine leise aber entscheidende Färbung unserer Affekte, es bleiben die Gewohnheiten des Traumes, in denen der ganze Mensch ist, mehr als in den Gewohnheiten des Lebens, all die unterdrückten."

meticulously conceived homage to Murnau's 1922 classic, *Nosferatu – Phantom der Nacht* articulates a distinctive “agitation of the mind”⁶⁵ through the multivalent phantasmagoria of inner landscapes. While paralyzing us, the film reminds us of the potential of a reinterpretation that succeeds in both metaphorically refurbishing a dusty negative, and cinematically crystallizing a certain “freshness” likewise sparked by the word, rebirth.

⁶⁵ Cronin, 151.

Filmography

Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens [*Nosferatu – A Symphony of Horror*] (1922)

Germany

Producers: Enrico Dieckmann and Albin Grau

Director: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau

Screenwriters: F. W. Murnau and Henrik Galeen

Music: Hans Erdmann

Perf. Max Schreck (Count Orlok), Gustav von Wangenheim (Thomas Hutter), Greta Schröder (Ellen Hutter), Knock (Alexander Granach), John Gottowt (Professor Bulwer)

94 min.

Nosferatu – Phantom der Nacht [*Nosferatu the Vampyre*] (1979)

Germany

Producer: Werner Herzog, Munich/ZDF television.

Director and Screenwriter: Werner Herzog, based on the film *Nosferatu – A Symphony of Horror* by F. W. Murnau and the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker

Editor: Beate Mainka-Jellinghaus

Music: Popol Vuh, Florian Fricke, Richard Wagner, Charles Gounod, Vok Ansambl Gordela

Cast: Klaus Kinski (Count Dracula), Bruno Ganz (Jonathan Harker), Isabella Adjani (Lucy Harker), Roland Topor (Renfield), Walter Ladengast (Dr. Abraham Van Helsing)

107 min.

Visual Illustrations (in order of appearance)

Friedrich, Caspar David. *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* [*Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*]. 1817. Oil on canvas. Hamburg: Kunsthalle Hamburg.

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