

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Burning Soil (1922) **F.W. Murnau (1888-1931)**

OVERVIEW

Auteur: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau was a German film director, screenwriter, and producer. Murnau had an obsession with film since his childhood. He studied philology at the University of Berlin; and art history, and literature at the University of Heidelberg. In WWI, Murnau served as a company commander. He joined the Imperial German Flying Corps and flew missions. After the end of WWI, he established his film studio with Conrad Veidt. His noteworthy films are *Der Januskopf* (1920), an adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922), an adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; *The Burning Soil* (1922); *The Last Laugh* (1924); *Faust* (1926); *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927); *City Girl* (1930); and *Tabu* (1931). Murnau died in a car accident in 1931.

Film: *The Burning Soil* (German: *Der brennende Acker*) is a 1922 German silent film. The film is about the struggle over a plot of petroleum-rich land. It is furthermore about the obsessions and greed of a man coming from a peasant background. The film was shot at the Babelsberg Studio in Berlin. It was written by Willy Haas, Thea von Harbou, and Arthur Hosen. The film's sets were designed by the art director Rochus Gliese. It stars Eugen Klöpfer, Vladimir Gajdarov, Werner Krauss, Eduard von Winterstein, Georg John, Alfred Abel, Lya de Putti. The photography belongs to Karl Freund and Fritz Arno Wagner.

Historical background: *The Burning Soil* was made the same year as *Nosferatu*. It was released in the same year as *Nosferatu* and *Phantom*. *The Burning Soil* was released on 3 March, *Nosferatu* on 4 March, and *Phantom* in November. It was overshadowed by the two other films. The film was considered lost until the year 1978 when it was found out that an Italian priest owned it and organized screenings in mental hospitals. It was restored with the assistance of French director Eric Rohmer.

CHARACTERS

Peter Rog: Old Rog's son who is very attached to the land he lives in, Johannes' brother
Johannes Rog: Old Rog's son, an ambitious man who looks down on the peasant's life
Old Rog: A man who owns the Rog's Farm and who dies at the beginning of the film
Count Rudenburg A nobleman, descendant of a man who died while digging a well in the Devil's Field
Helga: The second wife of Count Rudenburg, later falls in love with Johannes
Gerda: A capricious, young woman who cannot make up her mind as to whom to marry
Ludwig von Lellewel: A nobleman who wishes to marry Gerda and is frustrated by her indecisiveness
Maria: A peasant girl who is in love with Johannes and starts to work at the Rog's Farm

SYNOPSIS

Devil's Field is feared as a cursed place where an ancestor of the family Rudenburg died in an explosion as he was digging a well in search of a buried treasure. Count von Rudenburg, the descendant of the victim, also looks for the treasure. He lives with his daughter Gerda from his first marriage and his second wife Helga. In the village nearby, an old peasant called Rog dies and leaves the farm to his two sons; Peter and Johannes. Johannes is a very ambitious young man who looks down on the peasant's life. He becomes a secretary of Count Rudenburg and goes on frequent rides with her daughter Gerda. He overhears one day that there is an oil field under the Devil's Field. The Count prepares his will, he gives his daughter Gerda his entire estate, while his wife Helga will only inherit the Devil's Field. Johannes tells Helga that he loves her. And they marry after the ill Count's death. Johannes goes to the city to discuss the oil field with businessmen. Helga is frustrated with Johannes' obsession with the Devil's Field, so she

sells the field to Peter for twelve thousand marks. Johannes becomes furious as he finds this out, as the field is worth millions of francs. Helga understands that Johannes never loved her and married her only for the money. She drowns herself in a river. Gerda goes to Johannes to ask whether it was her that he loved. Johannes confesses that he never loved either of them and acted only by ambition. Gerda sets fire to the Devil's field to get revenge and dies in the explosion. Johannes finally becomes regretful of his ambitious decisions and returns to the Rog's Farm where he accepts to spend a life with Maria and Peter.

SCENES

The Drama of an Ambitious Man in Six Acts

ACT I

People are sewing The first act begins with a group of people sitting and sewing. Outside, it is winter time and there is a strong wind blowing. One of the girls says to an old woman: 'God help us! This is a night as if the old man from the field was haunting again!' The old woman crosses herself and says: 'God give him peace. Don't talk about such tales in this house.' The girls, however, insist that the old woman tells the tale.



Count Rudenburg's reading is interrupted by his wife

Next, we see a scene from a luxurious room into which a man comes. He looks at a table filled with books and starts reading: 'So he was worried day and night, that he could not disengage his thoughts from the wasteland—as if the devil in person fooled him, and he ordered his peasants and servants to hard socage, to dig a shaft, for he fancied, a treasure lay...' At that time, a woman enters the room. She says to him: 'The old man Rog is on his deathbed. Shall I look in on him?' The man shakes his head in disapproval: 'I don't want you to walk out of the house on such a night...' The woman looks disheartened and sad and leaves the room. The man continues reading.



Old Rog is on his deathbed The Old Rog is staying on his deathbed. He looks very ill and breathes heavily. His son Peter Rog is sitting near him. He holds his father's hand. Old Rog asks about Johannes: 'Has Johannes still not arrived?'



Gerda reads a letter from Lellewel Next, we see a woman sitting on a sofa. Outside the ringing of the bells of the church can be heard. She paces up and down. Then she looks at a letter in which it is written: 'Gerda, for two months, not a single word from you! Anxiety and longing are nearly killing me. Johannes travels to his seriously ill father. I'll accompany him to meet you. Lellewel.' She looks angry and crumples the paper. We see a horse carriage coming from afar. Gerda is looking out the window and looks thoughtful. She tears the letter she had crumpled before. Then she opens the window and throws the letter out. She looks relieved and seems to be enjoying the wind blowing.



Helga asks Gerda to come to the spinning room Count Rudenburg's wife Helga knocks on the door. Gerda immediately closes the window. She looks worried about Gerda. Gerda does not prefer to look at her. Helga says: 'Don't you want to come with me downstairs to the spinning room?' She does not: 'To hear the



fairy tale about the Devil's Field for the umpteenth time?' Helga looks dispirited and leaves the room.

Old Dog does not have much time to live Old Dog does not have much time left to live. Peter goes outside to see whether Johannes has arrived. However, a woman tells him that he still has not arrived. Peter says: 'Could you get the priest, Maria? The end is not far off...'



Johannes is coming Next, we see Johannes on a snow sled. He looks angry and says to the driver: 'Why the hell don't you take the direct route?' The driver answers: 'At night, not even ten horses make me move past the damned chapel.' Johannes cannot accept such an excuse: 'You will drive the straight way. My father dies...!'



Helga insists that the old woman tells the story Helga is downstairs in the spinning room. The girls still insist that the old lady tells the mysterious tale. The old woman resists: 'No, I won't tell it, the count has forbidden it.' Helga enters and says to the old woman who is called Mary: 'Tell it, Mary! I like to hear those old tales!' Mary begins to tell the story: 'On the spot where the expiatory chapel is today...' Then we get a flashback into the past.



A flashback Many men are in a spot where apparently an explosion happened. A man is calling out to the workers. One of the workers says: 'Lord, don't dare too much. Soil that bears no fruit is accursed.' Nevertheless, Lord is decisive to investigate the area. He goes down with fire in his hand. Then an explosion occurs.



Curse of the Devil's Field The old woman Mary keeps recounting: 'While the flames were put out and, in expiation, a chapel was built, no grass, no tree has ever grown on the Devil's field. And whoever has to pass by crosses himself.'



Count Rudenburg's reading An abrupt change to Count Rudenburg's room happens. He keeps reading the material he has been reading before: '...him Satan in person, and he ordered his peasants and servants to hard socage to dig a shaft, for he fancied, a treasure lay under the field, and he would not find peace until he had found it.'



Johannes is too late Old Rog tells Peter that he should take care of Johannes: 'I think he's too ambitious for a peasant. He shall stay on the farm and marry Maria.' A few moments later, he passes away. Peter closes his eyes. Meanwhile, Johannes has finally arrived. He directly goes near his father. Maria comes and says: 'The pastor is on his way.' Peter nods. Johannes leaves the room and goes into his room. Peter tells the news to those waiting in the main room that the peasant is dead. People say that Johannes arrived too late after all.



Death is passing by Helga asks those in the sewing room: 'Why do the dogs howl so loud in the village?' The old Mary says that it is death that is passing by.



Ambitious search Count Rudenberg looks at a letter on which it is written: 'And if I do not succeed to get on the secret, my heirs shall not pause with searching and digging until they have found the treasure of Devil's field and be blessed with its benefit for humanity.'



The Count's vain search The Count goes outside with a lamp in his hand. Helga sees him but he evades her. He goes to a chapel, which is in the Devil's field. He looks at the shaft and sighs: 'Still nothing.'



Pray for Old Dog Peter calls Johannes so that they can pray for their father who has recently passed away. People are all praying for him.



ACT II

Lellewel has arrived A man is sitting by the fireplace. Count Rudenberg comes to welcome the man. The man says: 'Excuse me for bothering you so early. I've just arrived from the city...Gerda's last letters unsettle me a lot. The Count tries to ensure the man who is Lellewel that everything is in order.'



Breakfast time The women are preparing breakfast. The other peasants come and gather together. They all take their seats. Peter comes and looks for Johannes but cannot see him. Then he starts cutting the bread.



Count Rudenberg is frustrated with Gerda's indecision Count Rudenberg is pacing in this room. Gerda comes into the room and says: 'You sent for me, father?' He says that Lellewel has come. She looks uninterested. The father gets angry: 'How much longer do you want to put him off with your whims? I can't stand this any longer. You have to decide whether you want to marry him or not...' She responds: 'Pardon me, my horse is waiting.' Then she leaves the room.



Bread is sacred The peasants are eating. Peter is looking around for Johannes. Johannes comes and sits. He starts playing with the bread. Peter says: 'For the peasant, bread is sacred. Johannes, don't play with it.'



Johannes scoffs at the soil he was born Peter tells Johannes that he wants to talk to him. He says: 'Neither to work nor to meals you come on time. You were born on this soil, but you care less for it than a stranger...or maybe you grudge me the farm?' Johannes looks infuriated: 'I flout the Rog farm.' Peter responds: 'Aren't you ashamed to scoff at the soil where you were born?' Johannes says that he has breathed the big world's air: 'I cannot live as a peasant anymore, in low rooms crushing me, among people as dull as their own cattle.' A peasant enters the room. Peter looks hopeless, desperate, and sad. Johannes leaves the place. The peasant asks Peter: 'Master, shall I hook up the sorrel or the white horse?' Peter does not or rather cannot answer.



Johannes leaves Johannes is leaving the village altogether. Maria sees and stops him. He does not want to talk to her and leaves.



Ludwig's sadness Helga comes to talk with Lellewel: 'You will have to be satisfied with my company for now, Ludwig. Gerda has ridden out.' Ludwig looks sad and remains silent.



Gerda's suggestion to Johannes Johannes is walking among the snow. Gerda riding a horse comes near him. They shake hands. She says to him: 'If you don't want to stay on the Rog farm, call on my father. You always got along well with him.' Johannes looks thoughtful as if he is calculating something in his head.



Gerda is uninterested in Lellewel Lellewel and Helga are speaking. Gerda arrives home. Lellewel looks very pleased to see Gerda. However, she looks uninterested. Lellewel asks her whether she wants to tell them about her trip. She does not say a word.



Johannes talks to Count Rudenberg Count Rudenberg is still reading in his room. Johannes comes to see him. They shake hands. Johannes tells him about his condition and Count Rudenberg seems sympathetic toward him.



Johannes is Count Rudenberg's new secretary Gerda is laughing while Ludwig and Helga are sitting with their heads looking down. Count Rudenberg brings Johannes and introduces him as his new secretary. Then Helga, Count Rudenberg and Johannes leave.



Lellewel wishes to marry Gerda Lellewel tells Gerda why he has come: 'I am here because I can't bear the uncertainty any longer, Gerda. When will you finally become my wife?' Gerda says she does not know. Then she stands up and leaves.



ACT III

Helga is worried about Gerda Helga is ordering the clothes. Gerda comes. Helga asks her whether she is going to ride out with Johannes every day. Gerda asks whether she minds it. Helga does not say anything but she looks worried about Gerda.



Peter sees Johannes and Gerda riding together Peter is sitting with a man. They are drinking. They look out the small window and see Johannes and Gerda riding the horses. The man near Peter laughs and says: 'Johannes knows how to do it, doesn't he?'



The peasants look at Johannes and Gerda The peasants are in a room and are dealing with cloth pieces. One of the servants comes and tells one of the peasants that Gerda and Johannes are riding together again. All the women gather around the window and look outside in an excited manner.



Maria sees Johannes and Gerda Meanwhile, Maria is walking the dog with a snow sled. She sees Johannes and Gerda but they do not look at her. She looks very sad. Gerda laughs while riding near Johannes: 'Jealous—that little bride?' Johannes remains silent.



Maria becomes a housemaid on the Rog farm Maria arrives at the farm. She says to Peter: 'I'd like to ask you, Peter, if you could need me as a housemaid on the Rog farm. That way I could still believe that Johannes will return some day.' They shake hands as a symbol of agreement.

Helga wishes to talk to Gerda Helga is sitting in her room. She looks out the window at Johannes and Gerda who have newly arrived from their riding trip. When Gerda comes inside with Johannes, she says to her: 'If you can spare a moment for me, Gerda, I want to talk a few words with you.' Gerda breaks into a burst of neurotic laughter once again.



Johannes overhears Count Rudenberg's talk Johannes enters the room of Count Rudenberg who is talking with a man, looking excited. Count Rudenberg tells the man: 'But you are convinced, too, that under the so-called Devil's Field, a potent petroleum well is buried?' The man responds: 'Unless all our calculations and investigations are mistaken...yes!' The man looks relieved and excited. Johannes is shocked to have heard this news.



Helga does not want Gerda to ride with Johannes Helga talks with Gerda: 'Are you convinced, Gerda, that your fiancé will have no objections against your daily pleasure rides with Johannes?' Gerda looks very angry.



Helga forbids Gerda to ride with Johannes Gerda paces up and down in anger. She says to Helga: 'I won't be tyrannized and if Ludwig wants it...' Helga looks scared of her. She says: 'As the wife of your father I forbid you to further expose yourself with Johannes to the ramblings of people!' Gerda replies: 'Would you care about the honor of this house so much if Johannes preferred riding out with you?' Helga collapses to the sofa and starts crying uncontrollably. Gerda cannot say anything and leaves.



Count Rudenberg's will Count Rudenberg looks very excited and tells Johannes: 'I must have set up my last will, Johannes. I have no time to lose!' He makes Johannes write his will: 'I, Josef Emanuel, Count of Rudenburg, state in full possession my free will and mental power: In case of my death, my daughter Gerda, being born in my first marriage with Clarisse Rudenburg, née Countess Calas, is to inherit my entire estate including all my properties, manors and castles, to dispose with it at her own will. To my wife Helga I bequeath the plot of ground known as the 'Devil's Field'. Furthermore, I decide that for lifetime she shall retain the right to live in Castle Rudenburg. Josef von Rudenburg.' Count Rudenberg laughs excitedly. Johannes looks at him with wide-opened eyes. He asks Johannes to go outside.



Johannes' secret plan Johannes looks out the window at the 'Devil's Field'. He says to himself that that would be an aim. He seems to be planning for something. Then he goes downstairs and sees Helga sobbing. He starts consoling Helga and puts his arms around her.



Johannes and Helga confess their love for each other in front of everyone Gerda is waiting in her room with a melancholic and wistful look on her face. She looks worried about Helga. So, she goes downstairs only to see Johannes and Helga hugging each other. She runs to her father to tell him about what she has seen. Count Rudenberg can barely walk. But he also sees Johannes and Helga. Helga says to Johannes: 'Even if I loved you more than my life, Johannes, and if I perish from solitude and need of my heart...! Nothing in the world could bring me to betray my husband's honor.' Count Rudenberg comes and asks her whether she loves Johannes. She answers: 'Yes, I love him!' Count Rudenberg looks down in sadness. Gerda looks shocked. The Count asks Johannes whether he loves Gerda. He lies and says yes. The Count replies: 'After you wrote with your own hand how miserly I remembered Helga in my testament, your 'Yes' must come from a sincere heart. According to the doctor, I will live only a few more weeks. Your patience will not be put to a very heavy test.' He asks Johannes to come with him. As they leave the room, Gerda looks devastated and heartbroken. She goes near Helga. She says: 'From now on, you can marry me off at any time and to whom you want. It is all the same to me.' Helga collapses to the ground while crying.



ACT IV

The Second Matrimony Johannes comes back with a lamp in his hand. He has been to the shaft in Devil's Field. He does not look at Helga who has been waiting for him. He reads a fax that has been sent to him: 'If this amount is gained within 24 hours, we are willing to enter into further negotiations with you.' He once again goes to Devil's Field. Meanwhile, Helga stays at home and waits for him hopelessly and desperately. He goes down the shaft and finally finds something. Then he comes back and prepares his suitcase. Johannes tells Helga that he must go to the city.



Johannes talks with business men Johannes is in the city. He talks with business men who are all gathered around a table: 'And the immense treasure that lies in the soil of the Devil's Field only needs to be dug up!



Helga is desperate Helga looks at the chapel and Devil's Field. She says to herself: 'One day like the other. One night like the other. Shall my life perish from the burden of this inheritance?'



Helga sells the Devil's Field to Peter Peter is drinking his pipe and looking at a pet bird. He gives it some food. Suddenly, Helga enters the room. Peter says: 'What can I do for you, Countess?' She replies: 'Why don't you call me Helga? After all, you are my brother-in-law!' Then she sits on a chair. She says: 'Peter, you are the most respected peasant of the village. They all come to you with their worries and desires. Don't you know anybody in this region who would buy the Devil's Field from me?' He replies that hardly anybody in this region would buy the Devil's Field: 'It brings bad luck. And what use would a peasant have for it.' Helga says to him that she must then try to find a buyer in the town. Peter asks how much the lot would cost. She says: 'Twelve thousand marks' in a hesitating way. Peter is surprised: 'That is quite a plenty of money for barren soil. But twelve thousand marks are worth doing for me if I can forestall the townspeople. Then he opens a case and gets some money out of it: 'We're going to put the deal into writing...for better or for worse!' The deal states: 'I confirm herewith that I have sold my lot called the Devil's Field to Peter Rog for the sum of twelve thousand marks. Helga Rog, widowed countess Rudenberg.'



Businessmen agree to give financial help to Johannes The businessmen talk among themselves. Then they call Johannes. They say to him: 'Our company offers you the sum of twenty million for abandoning your rights to the Devil's Field. Johannes does not want to accept this offer. The men talk further among themselves. Finally, they ask Johannes whether he would accept a purchase price of twenty-five million marks. Johannes says: 'As for me, I have no intention at all to sell the Devil's Field. For me, the only point is to exploit the petroleum field with your financial help.' The men finally accept Johannes' offer. One of the men says to Johannes: 'I have the honor of telling you that the Minister of Trade would be pleased to receive you this afternoon.'



Johannes meets the Minister of Trade Johannes meets the Minister of Trade in a luxurious gathering. The Minister expresses his gratitude and recognition to him: 'By tapping this immense treasure you render a great service to the whole country.'



ACT V

Johannes is furious that Helga sold the Devil's Field

The next day Johannes drives back to Castle Rudenberg. He believes now to possess all that he had ever dreamed of: Power and money. When Johannes is back, Helga tries to hug him but he does not want to be close to her. Helga takes out some money. Johannes asks where that money comes from. 'It is what the Devil's Field yielded for me...I have sold Devil's Field for twelve thousand marks to Peter! Johannes gets furious when he hears this: 'Do you know what you have done? You have sold for this paltry sum a lot worth millions and millions! A petroleum field lies below that soil!' Then Helga understands that Johannes had planned everything, including their marriage: 'So, you already knew at that time that I had gained an inheritance worth millions with the Devil's Field? So then, you never loved me!' Johannes does not care about her feelings or what she says. He is too furious about the land being sold to care for anything else. He says: 'You must annul that thing—either way!' Then he leaves the room. She collapses to the ground in despair.



Peter asks Maria to marry him

Peter asks Maria whether she wants to be his wife. Maria says: 'I became a housemaid on the Rog farm because Johannes grew up here. Forget your question, Peter, as I will do it, too. Otherwise, you will drive me out of this house. It seems the one has to suffer about him. I could not suffer about you, Peter. Maybe that's why I am not fond of you.' Peter's head is down in sadness.



Helga comes to unmake the deal

Johannes goes to Devil's Field. While he is on his way, Helga comes to Rog's farm where she sees Maria. Then she sees Peter and begs him to take the money back and return the slip of paper to her: 'Peter if you don't want to make me desperate!' Peter gives the paper back to Maria who tears it into several pieces.



Johannes comes to the village

Peasants are all eating when Johannes comes. Johannes wishes to talk to Peter. Peter says: 'The tureen is not empty. Take a seat and eat! After that, there is still time left for talking.' Maria starts to cry.



Peter gives the Devil's Field back to Johannes

After the meal, Johannes says to Peter: 'My wife has contracted a sale with you that must be annulled.' Peter says smilingly: 'As far as I know, your wife is of age, and she may dispose of her inheritance as she pleases!' Johannes: 'But she didn't know what she sold to you with the Devil's Field.' Then he explains about the petroleum well. Peter asks how he knows that under the Devil's Field, there is a petroleum well. Johannes explains it all. Finally, Peter gives him the pieces of paper that Helga had torn: 'Here, you have your field back! I'll have no truck with you ever again!'



Helga is dead

Meanwhile, a carriage arrives at Rog's Farm. A woman asks whether someone is missing in their village. A dead body is at the back of the carriage. People gather around it. It is Helga's dead body. A man carries it to the room where Peter and Johannes are. Peter asks everyone to get out: 'That man must sort out himself what happened here.' Johannes hugs Helga's dead body.



ACT VI

Johannes confesses his ambition A servant tells Gerda that the general manager Rog is expecting a business visitor and that he has ordered to reject every other visitor without exception. Gerda goes to Johannes' room and asks whether it is true that Helga committed suicide because he did not love her. She asks him to confess: 'Confess it to me, Johannes...it was not Helga, you loved...it was only—her millions! I love you, Johannes! Say to me that you never loved her...She hugs him. Johannes lets go of her: 'I didn't love either you or her! It was only ambition...' Gerda leaves the room in a desperate state.



The news about the Devil's Field A group of businessmen came to the castle to see Johannes. The servant tells him that he has visitors. He does not seem willing to meet them but he goes to see them anyway. The men tell Johannes that the tests with the drilling derrick surpass all expectations. Further exploitation of the petroleum well can be started immediately. Johannes seems like he is not listening to what is being said. He just nods his head.



Gerda's farewell letter to Ludwig Gerda comes to the Rog's Farm and she asks Maria to take a piece of note to Lellewel Castle as fast as she can. Maria goes to Lellewel's Castle. Lellewel reads the letter: 'Forgive me, Ludwig! I was playing with your love. But my love has also been repelled Your kindness will forgive but I cannot do so! I'll revenge myself—and atone at the same time. Gerda.' Lellewel looks sad and heartbroken. But there is nothing he can do. He starts crying.



Pray of the Peasants The bells of the church ring loudly. The peasants pray with gratitude for their meal: 'Our Father which art in heaven. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.' The pray of the peasants continues: 'And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.'



Explosion Meanwhile, Gerda enters the Devil's Field. She puts something there, then she leaves running. An explosion happens minutes later.



Johannes' agony People gather all around the Devil's Field. Johannes eventually comes to and sees the destruction. He leaves the scene. He walks and says to himself: 'Nevermore...nevermore will the hellish fire go out in me!' He cries in agony. Maria goes near him and consoles him.



The fire is getting under control As Johannes and Maria approach the Rog's Farm, Johannes' servant comes near him and says: 'Good news, sir! Help has come from everybody. The fire is getting under control!'



Johannes turns back to his old life

Then Johannes goes inside to talk with Peter and all the other peasants: 'Brother, I'm not worthy of the hand you offer me. Forgive me, Peter, I have sinned against you, because I reviled you and the soil where I was born. Forgive me, Mary! I have sinned against you because I despised your love. Forgive me, all of you! I have sinned against you because I wanted to be superior to you!' Then he starts crying. Peter consoles him. And they hug each other. Johannes goes to his room and looks at his belongings: 'Did you know by any chance that I would get home today?' Maria says: 'We were waiting for you every day. Your room has always been ready for you.' Johannes and Peter shake hands.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Johannes Rog

Johannes is the son of Old Rog. He is an ambitious, young man who scoffs at the soil he was born in. Because of his ambitions, he becomes the secretary of Count Rudenburg. His becoming the secretary of Count Rudenburg is the beginning of tragedies that affect the Rudenburg family and everyone around Johannes.

Proud: He is a proud, young man. His pride makes him think that he is superior to everyone else on the farm and that other people are there for him to use, manipulate, and exploit. He does not try to hide his pride when he is together with people from his village. He explicitly tells his brother how unintelligent he thinks the villagers are.

Greedy/Ambitious: Johannes' biggest vice is his unsatisfiable greed and extreme ambition. Because he is so proud of himself and thinks himself superior to anyone, he believes he deserves and is entitled to a luxurious lifestyle. Therefore, he becomes the secretary of Count Rudenburg. After he overhears the conversation between him and a man about the existence of petroleum oil under the Devil's Field, he calculates things in his head and comes up with a plan to get closer to the family. Thus, he pretends to be in love with Helga and marries her later on. This is all a facade he presents to the outside so that he can exploit the Field. In the end, his greed causes the acts of suicide of two women, both Gerda and Helga. He finally realizes the danger in greed, however, it is too late for the women he hurt.

Peter Rog

Peter Rog is the brother of Johannes and the son of the Old Rog. He is the opposite of Johannes as he is not a greedy person and is attached to the land. He is essentially a modest and hardworking person who does not see himself as superior or inferior to anyone. Rather, he is aware of the importance of land and farming for one's sustenance. He wishes to marry Maria later in the film, however, Maria does not accept his proposal.

Good-hearted: Peter is a good-hearted person. He waits by his father's side as he is very ill on his deathbed. He holds his hand, showing him affection and kindness. His kindness can also be seen in his behavior toward other villagers. Even after Johannes' destructive behaviors, he forgives him at the end of the film and accepts him as his brother.

Modest: In comparison with Johannes, Peter is a modest person. When Helga sells him the Devil's Field, he does not ask for more money. When Johannes learns that the Devil's Field has been sold to his brother, he is infuriated and demands that his brother give him back the signed paper which is the proof of the sale. When Peter learns from Johannes that the Devil's Field has petroleum oil under it, he is unaffected, simply because he is devoid of greed and the kind of ambition his brother has.

Gerda

Gerda is the daughter of Count Rudenburg from his first marriage. She is a lively, albeit capricious, and impulsive girl. Ludwig von Lellewel wishes to marry her, however, she plays with his love and emotions and does not give him a definitive answer. Later on in the film, Johannes courts her and she falls in love with him. Nevertheless, Johannes' courting is not because he has affection for her, rather it is because he wishes to attain a higher position, wealth, and fame in society. When Gerda finds out about Johannes' true intentions, she decides to take revenge on him.

Capricious: Gerda is a capricious girl, meaning she is amenable to sudden changes in mood and behavior. This behavior of hers is first observed at the beginning of the film in the scene where she reads a letter from Lellewel, then suddenly tears it to pieces. Her capricious behavior continues throughout the film and is especially observable in her behavior toward Lellewel whose marriage proposal she neither accepts nor rejects, but simply makes him wait for her own pleasure.

Impulsive: Gerda is an impulsive person. When she finds out the truth about Johannes and the fact he never loved her but simply courted her because he wanted to have wealth and prestige, she becomes infuriated. Because of her impulsive nature, she takes drastic action to make him pay back. She causes an explosion in the Devil's Field and dies in the process. This is her way of both getting revenge and purifying herself from the sins she committed, in particular toward Lellewel.

Helga Rudenburg

Helga Rudenburg is the second wife of Count Rudenburg. She is a modest and honorable woman who tries to build a connection with other family members such as Count Rudenburg and Gerda. However, she fails at her efforts. Later on in the film, she falls in love with Johannes and marries him. Yet, this marriage does not bring her happiness either. When she finds out approaching the end of the film that Johannes never truly loved her, she commits suicide by drowning herself in a river.

Loving: She is a loving person. She builds or tries to build a connection with those around her. She behaves kindly toward the servants who work in the sewing room and listens to the old woman servant about the stories of the Devil's Field. Furthermore, she is passionately in love with Johannes and believes at first, that Johannes loves her too. However, his so-called love turns out to be nothing but a lie so that he could inherit the Devil's Field. Even though she is a good-hearted, loving, and kind person, the fates do not act favorably toward her.

Count Rudenburg

Count Rudenburg is the descendant of the man who died during an exploding as he was digging a well in the Devil's Field. He also has the same ambitions as his ancestor. He searches the Field and finally finds out that there is petroleum oil under it. However, because he is terminally ill, he cannot exploit the Field himself and gives the area of the Devil's Field as an inheritance to his second wife Helga.

Greedy: Count Rudenburg is a greedy man. In the film, we see him greedily and ambitiously reading the documents related to the story about the Devil's Field. It can be said that he is obsessed with the Devil's Field. Moreover, he does not truly care about his wife as he behaves indifferently toward her as can be seen in the scene where Helga interrupts his reading. He also tries to control his daughter and demands that she make a decision about whether she wants to marry Ludwig von Lellewel.

Old Rog

Old Rog is the father of Johannes and Peter. At the beginning of the film, we see that he is very ill, lying on his deathbed, and waiting for Johannes to arrive. He dies before Johannes comes to see him. The responsibility of taking care of the land and village falls upon the shoulders of Peter.

Wise: He is a wise, old man. He knows how ambitious and proud Johannes is and thinks that the best path for him to take is to 'stay on the farm and marry Maria'. It can be said that he foresees how Johannes' pride will cause destructive consequences for him and those around him if he goes after his

greed. Therefore, he has come to the conclusion that for Johannes to let go of his ambitions and extreme greed, he needs to stay where he was born and marry a modest girl like Maria.

Ludwig von Lellewel

Ludwig von Lellewel is someone who wishes to marry Gerda. However, Gerda does not give him a definitive answer about whether she wants to marry him. Therefore, he is frustrated. In the end, he does not find happiness as Gerda dies in the explosion she caused.

Patient: Ludwig is a patient man. He waits for Gerda patiently and always with the hope that she might decide to marry him one day. It can be said that Ludwig and Maria are parallel characters in that they are both patient and loyal to the people they are in love with. They wait for them to come back or make a decision to be with them.

Solemn: Ludwig's outer appearance and his mannerisms give us the impression that he is a solemn or gloomy man. One of the reasons for his low mood is naturally Gerda's indecision and disinterest in him. He waits for an answer from Gerda. However, what Gerda does is play with his love and emotions. Therefore, he is solemn-looking and discontent with the state of affairs.

Maria

Maria is a peasant girl from the village. She is a good-natured and modest girl who is deeply in love with Johannes. She knows that Johannes suffers a lot because of his greed and ambition. Even though Johannes first courts Gerda and later on marries Helga, she still holds on to the hope that he might come back to the village one day and decide to marry her. Her dreams come true in the end.

Loving: Maria is a loving person. She is free from the kind of greed, ambition, and pride that Johannes suffers from. Her deep love for Johannes is what gives her power and patience. Her loving-kindness can be seen in the way she treats other people too.

Patient: She becomes a housemaid on the Rog Farm hoping that Johannes might turn back to the farm one day. Her patience is seen throughout the film from the moment Johannes leaves the farm through his marriage until the explosion occurs and Johannes finally decides to return to the land he was born in. Finally, Johannes lets go of his pride and ambition, in particular, because of the catastrophic events that have occurred, and realizes that Maria's modesty can have the power to heal him for the better.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class One prominent theme in the story is the distinction between the lower and upper classes. Johannes is born as a peasant that is he originally belongs to the lower classes. However, this circumstance is not something he can accept because of his ambitious nature. He thinks that the life of the upper classes is better on many different levels. Peter, on the other hand, is attached to his land. He is proud of being a peasant and working in the land, with the land. So, class distinctions cause a lot of conflicts, in particular for individuals who are not happy with the circumstances and environment they find themselves in.

JUSTICE

Revenge Gerda takes revenge on Johannes. When Johannes confesses that he has never loved either Gerda or Helga, Gerda decides that she cannot accept such dishonest treatment from him and has to make things even between them. As she is capricious, she is driven to destructive behaviors. She is not as kind as Ludwig is. So, she engages in an act that Johannes will never forget and which will wound him forever. She knows that she will be dead because of the explosion but she sees this consequence as an atonement of her own sins, so, she is not afraid of dying as a result of her revenge act. It can be said

that the destructive act she engages in is a harmful and dangerous one, but one effect of the event is that Johannes changes for the better as a human being and his ambitions get lessened.

RELATIONSHIP

Marriage The marriage between Helga and Johannes is not built on true love and respect for each other. Rather than those, Johannes marries Helga only because he sees the marriage as a way to inherit what Helga possesses, that is, the Devil's Field which has supposedly petroleum oil under it. Therefore, Johannes behaves indifferently and unkindly toward Helga throughout their marriage. The marriage falls apart when Johannes finds out that Helga has sold the Devil's Field because she was frustrated with his obsessions about it. Johannes is infuriated and Helga finally learns that Johannes never loved her. Thus, the marriage falls apart as it was not built upon a solid foundation in the first place.

Love Love is another major theme of the film. Unrequited love takes place between Johannes and Maria, Maria and Peter, Helga and Johannes, and Gerda and Johannes. Thus, we can talk about a network of relationships that define the circumstances of the characters. Maria has always loved Johannes, however, Johannes does not care about her because he has his eyes on becoming part of the upper classes. Maria does not accept the marriage proposal of Peter because she is deeply in love with Johannes and his suffering impresses her. Helga is, likewise, deeply in love with Johannes. However, Johannes' reciprocation is nothing but a deception aimed at gaining her fortune. Gerda is also in love with Johannes. But Johannes is incapable of loving as long as he is driven by his pride and ambition toward selfish and destructive behaviors. Only after he lets go of his pride after catastrophic events, does he become able to empathize with others and see how much Maria loves him.

PSYCHOLOGY

Sadness Sadness is a major thread that can be seen in various individuals in the film. Maria, for instance, is sad because Johannes does not seem interested in her in a romantic way. Secondly, Ludwig is sad and frustrated because Gerda does not answer his questions related to marriage and seems to be playing with his love. Furthermore, Helga is sad throughout most of the film as her daughter-in-law does not seem to heed her pieces of advice. After she marries Johannes, she becomes sad because it turns out that Johannes does not truly love her. Gerda also becomes sad and desperate after she finds out that Johannes never loved her and it was all a game of ambition for him. The thread we observe is that people get sad or downhearted when their desires or wishes about other people cannot be satisfied because of certain causes and circumstances.

Regret Johannes has a lot of regrets after he finds out about the deaths of Helga and Gerda. However, there is not much he can do to change past events. As he says: 'nevermore will the hellish fire go out in him'. Therefore, he will for as long as he lives be burdened with the repercussions of what he has caused. His regret is also seen when he asks for forgiveness from Peter and Maria. He wants them to forgive him because he had viewed himself as superior to them. By returning to life on the land, to the life of a peasant, he repays for his bad deed and actions.

Anger Johannes' ambition for money and power causes him to get angry in several instances of the film. Because he sees himself as better and more intelligent than other peasants, he behaves rudely toward them. He is usually late for breakfast and other meals. He plays with bread, thus showing disrespect toward what peasants view as sacred. Later on in the film, when he finds out that Helga has sold the Devil's Field, he is infuriated because the only thing he cares about is money and how he can exploit the field. He does not even recognize that Helga's feelings have been hurt. Thus, his anger clouds his judgment and makes him behave unkindly toward other human beings.

FLAWS

Pride Johannes is very prideful. He scoffs at the soil in which he was born and belittles others. He thinks he belongs to the upper, aristocratic class and should not have anything to do with the lower classes. His pride causes him to have a bad relationship with his brother and act unkindly toward people

from the lower classes. However, his pride is damaged when Helga and Gerda commit suicide because of his actions. He finally understands that pride is a double-edged sword that damages both the person and the ones around him. However, it is now too late. He cannot bring the two women back to life. Nevertheless, he apologizes to Peter and Maria and decides to go back to where he came from, which is the peasant's soil. This shows us the viewers that he has let go of his pride as a result of the unfortunate events that occurred.

Greed/Ambition Greed and ambition are mostly observed in the character of Johannes. As he sees himself as better than others, there is not much he will not do to improve his circumstances even if that means that he deceives and hurts people. He marries Helga not because he loves her, rather he wishes to own the Devil's Field and through his marriage with Helga, he guarantees that. Before marrying Helga, he had courted Gerda and ridden with her. This was likewise a game for him because he had wished to increase his chances of inheriting a fortune whether that be through marrying Helga or Gerda. However, his ambition destroys both of these two women in the end. Thus, the viewers become witnesses to the drawbacks of extreme ambition or greed.

QUEST

Explore The quest of exploring the Devil's Field forms the main series of events in the film. One ancestor of Count Rudenburg also tries to exploit the Field, however, he dies while digging a well. Not the same but a similar fate happens to the descendants of this man. Count Rudenburg searches the field and it is found that there is petroleum oil under the Field. The Count does not live long enough to see what happens to the Field. However, Helga and Gerda both die because of reasons related to the Devil's Field. Johannes deceives both women because he wishes to get all the money he can resource from the field. When the women finally realize his dishonesty, they punish him by committing suicide. Thus, the exploration and exploitation of the Devil's Field results in tragedies for the Rudenburg family.

APPEARANCE

Dishonesty Johannes' ambitions and greed cause him to deceit and exploit others for his own gain. He does not see any problem with playing with others' love and emotions. Thus, he destroys the lives of Helga and Gerda by being dishonest with them. Firstly, he courts Gerda because he thinks he can get more power and wealth by associating with the upper classes. After he learns that the Devil's Field has petroleum oil under it and that Helga will be the inheritor of it, he tells Helga that he loves her even though he does not love her. His dishonesty, however, is found out in the later parts of the film when Helga understands that he only married her so he could exploit the Devil's Field and make a lot of money. Heartbroken and devastated, Helga commits suicide by drowning herself in the river. Thus, Johannes' dishonesty which was born because of his greed and ambition causes Helga to lose her life. Furthermore, after Gerda finds out that Johannes never loved her either, decides to take revenge on him by causing an explosion in the Devil's Field and she dies in the process. Thus, Gerda is the second victim of Johannes' ambition, greed, and dishonesty.