Friedrich W. Murnau’s silent film version from 1926 of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s play *Faust* was designed to showcase two of Germany’s most famous cultural exports at the time: the country’s Romantic legacy and cinematic Expressionism. Murnau’s *Faust* was made when the Expressionist style, with its visual distortions, *chiaroscuro* lighting, and preoccupation with terror and insanity was already on the wane in German cinema. But rather than recycle the familiar stylistic and thematic Expressionist elements, in *Faust* Murnau offered a new kind of visual aesthetics, in which the atmospheric play of light and shadow is uniquely combined with the expressive and dramatic use of smoke, fog, mists and clouds. These manifestations of the normally invisible element of the air are dramatically associated in Murnau’s film with supernatural presence, pestilence, terror, moral drama, and human tragedy. An aesthetic category of its own, the “smoky Expressionism” of Murnau’s *Faust* remains a crowning artistic achievement of German Expressionist cinema.