

Greed Encyclopedia Article

Greed

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The bowdlerization of Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* (1924) is almost more famous than the film itself. An adaptation of *McTeague*, Frank Norris' epic novel of avarice, desire, and disintegration, it stars Gibson Gowland as the dentist McTeague, ZaSu Pitts as the wife he murders for money, and Jean Hersholt as the brute Marcus with whom he fights to their mutual destruction in Death Valley. In realizing a cherished dream to do literal justice to the book, Stroheim broke new ground in cinematic realism, both in characterization and the use of actual locations in San Francisco and Death Valley, but emerged with a 42-reel, ten-hour film. Producer Irving Thalberg, the director's nemesis with whom he had previously tangled, ordered cuts and Stroheim tried to oblige. The film, however, was taken away from him and the cuts became a massacre. The final release version was a little short of two hours, with much careful detail lost and the dramatic balance seriously upset by the removal of sub-plots and subsidiary characters. Nonetheless, *Greed* remains a powerful masterpiece of the silent cinema from one of the medium's few geniuses.

Further Reading:

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Koszarski, R. *The Man You Love to Hate*. United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 1983.

Roud, Richard. *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*. London, Secker & Warburg, 1980.