

The Lodger
A Story of the
London Fog

The *Pleasure Garden* (1925), a German/English coproduction filmed in Munich, was the first film Alfred Hitchcock completed as director. *The Pleasure Garden* of the title is a nightclub, and the film, which tells the backstage story of two dancers, anticipates Hitchcock's abiding interest in theater. No doubt *The Mountain Eagle* (1926) would be equally worthy of study, but no prints survive. Yet however important these films may be, and however closely related to his later work, Hitchcock was not being arbitrary when he spoke of *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (made in 1926 and released early in 1927), his third directorial effort, as the first true Hitchcock film, the one that inaugurates his authorship. When he returned to England fifty years—and fifty films—later to make *Frenzy*, whose protagonist may or may not be a psychopathic killer of women, it was to *The Lodger* that he turned, closing a circle.

By 1925 the basic forms and techniques, and many of the major genres, of the movies were firmly established. A decade after D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, film had become a giant international industry, a powerful medium of mass communication, and a great art. Hitchcock began his career as a director at the height of what he always called the Golden Age of film. The Hollywood studios were astonishingly productive, putting out films so universally popular they were America's principal forum for dialogues on sexuality, romance, marriage, the family and other "private" matters of public concern in an era of social change. The great directors of the German cinema, such as F. W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, and G. W. Pabst, were achieving unprecedented expressive effects with camera movement, set design and lighting. In France, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein, Marcel L'Herbier, Abel Gance, René Clair, and the young Jean Renoir were experimenting with subjective devices and other formal innovations, and referring to themselves as an avant-garde. The Scandinavians Victor Sjöström, Mauritz Stiller, and Carl Dreyer were probing dark, disquieting areas of the human psyche. In the Soviet Union, amid an atmosphere of artistic and intellectual ferment, Lev Kuleshov, Dziga Vertov, V. L. Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein, and others were demonstrating and debating the possibilities of montage.

Hitchcock started with a clear sense of film's traditions and a conviction that film was an art. His achievement, in part, was to create the first films that, fully embracing the medium, reflected seriously on their nature as films. Perhaps we cannot really speak of modernism in regard to an art that was not even born before the modern emerged in painting, music, poetry, and theater. If there is a modernist cinema, however, it begins with Hitchcock, in whose work film attains a modern self-consciousness.

A measure and expression of the modernity of the Hitchcock film is its call upon us to acknowledge, at every moment, not only what is on view within the frame but the camera as well. One of his deepest insights is that no moment in any film can be fully comprehended without accounting for the camera. Another is that, in the camera's tense and shifting relationships with its human subjects, the author's and viewers' roles are intimately revealed. Yet another is that the camera's presence is fundamentally ambiguous. It frames our views: the instrument of our gaze, it shares our passivity. But it also represents the author: it is the instrument of his presentation to us, his "narration," and manifests his godlike power over the world of the film, a world over which he presides. Within the world of a Hitchcock film, the nature and relationships of love, murder, sexuality, marriage, and theater are at issue; these are among Hitchcock's constant themes. His treatment of these themes, however, and his understanding of the reasons film keeps returning to them, cannot be separated from his constant concern with the nature of the camera, the act of viewing a film, and filmmaking as a calling.

Hitchcock did not gradually "find himself," as did Jean Renoir, for instance. Rather, at the outset of his career, he announced his central concerns and declared a position—at once a philosophical one on the conditions of human existence and a critical one on the powers and limits of the medium and the art of film—to which he remained faithful for more than fifty-five years. *The Lodger* is not an apprentice work but a thesis, definitively establishing Hitchcock's identity as an artist. Thematically and stylistically, it is fully characteristic of his filmic writing. By "writing" I mean not what we ordinarily think of as a script but a film's construction as a succession of views, what is technically called its "continuity" and in France its "découpage." The writing of *The Lodger* in this sense is amazingly imaginative and complex. Every shot, every framing, reframing, and cut, is significant.

This is not to say that all we mean when we speak of Hitchcock can be found in *The Lodger*, or that it reveals his full stature as an artist. It is certainly not equal to his masterpieces of the 1950s and early 1960s, such as *Rear Window*, *The Wrong Man*, *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, *Psycho*, *The Birds*, and *Marnie*, or even to the classic thrillers of the 1930s, such as *The 39 Steps* and *The Lady Vanishes*. For one thing, the late films have a sensuality and visual power perhaps unmatched in all of cinema, and barely to be glimpsed in *The Lodger* or any of the other early films. Nonetheless, *The Lodger* amply repays close analysis. When film's "Golden Age" is celebrated, Hitchcock's silent films are never given their due. Yet, as I understand it, Hitchcock occupies a central place in the history of film, a place



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already secured by *The Lodger* and the small but remarkable body of silent films that followed.

The Lodger opens with a view of a woman screaming; then the screen fades to black.

We are not shown what precedes this scream or what immediately follows it, but in a moment we will understand that this shot is a fragment of a scene of murder.¹

This is our introduction to the murderer known as “the Avenger,” who has been terrorizing London, killing a golden-haired woman on the Embankment every Tuesday night. The Avenger has just stepped forward into this woman’s view, provoking her scream. Yet we are given no view of this figure: we do not know who or what he has just revealed himself to be or in what spirit he has stepped forward. The shot is from the Avenger’s point of view, and the woman screams in the face of the camera; this is the film’s first suggestion that the camera and the murderer have a mysterious bond. The mystery of the Avenger—who and what he is—is also the mystery of what the camera really represents.

The opening shot shows us what the Avenger sees, even as it withholds all views of this figure from us (in particular, it withholds the woman’s frightful vision). Within the world of the film, the Avenger is a viewer. The scene of which this shot is a fragment is rooted in our own role as viewers. We possess views of this world, while necessarily remaining unseen by the beings who dwell within it. By stepping forward to be viewed, the Avenger enacts what to us can only be a fantasy—that of entering the world of the film and presenting ourselves to be viewed. This is not merely a personal fantasy, of course; it is built into the role of the viewer of a film. Here that fantasy becomes a nightmare. We step forward to be viewed only to find that our presence engenders horror. And this nightmare is also Hitchcock’s. If *The Lodger*’s opening is a viewer’s fantasy, it also grows out of a fantasy intrinsic to the author’s role. It is as if Hitchcock steps forward from his place behind the camera, only to find that his presence is horrifying.

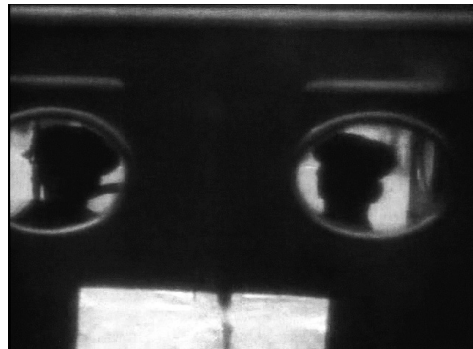
After the opening shot, the words “TONIGHT GOLDEN CURLS” flash three times on the black screen. Then the body of a woman, lying lifeless on the ground, fades into view. This view helps explain the film’s opening: the body is that of the woman who was screaming. The next shot defines this view in turn as from the perspective of an old woman who now clutches her hands in horror and covers

her eyes. When Hitchcock next cuts to a policeman taking notes, the context of the previous shot is disclosed: an eyewitness is relating her story to the police, gathering a crowd.

This passage exemplifies another of Hitchcock's characteristic strategies. Again and again, he presents a view we cannot interpret because he has withheld something about its context, or we misread because we take its context to be other than it really is. Sometimes Hitchcock makes no secret of cloaking his presentations in enigmas and sometimes withholds information without our realizing it. The process of following any Hitchcock film is one of continual rereading or rethinking. By this strategy and others, Hitchcock makes us aware that what we view is presented by an author whose intentions are enigmatic. Here, he specifically reminds us that authors are capable of deception by introducing a prankster who plays a practical joke on the old woman. As she tells her story with dramatic flourish, there is a cut to a man in the crowd who pulls his collar up, mimicking the woman's description of the murderer. When Hitchcock cuts to her point of view—an expressionistically distorted image of the man, reflected off a polished metal wall—we are not frightened as the woman is. We have been let in on this trick, which deflates her self-importance and brings home the reality of her fear. Yet if this prankster does not deceive us but reminds us of any author's capacity for deception, the passage also plants a picture of the Avenger in our minds, and furthers Hitchcock's central strategy for deceiving us. When the lodger first appears in the film, we see him cast in this image, and believe he may really be the Avenger.

A shot of a reporter telephoning the story in to his office provides a transition to a quasi-documentary account of the process by which the newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, is produced and distributed. The main point of this account is that the *Evening Standard* whets London's appetite for violence by invoking scenes Londoners desire to view yet dread viewing, and that what draws newspaper readers to stories about murder cannot be separated from what draws viewers to films.²

The idea that the *Evening Standard's* readers are also *The Lodger's* viewers is underscored by three characteristic touches that punctuate this passage. First, Hitchcock personally appears as an extra in the editorial office. (He appears again at the film's climax.) Second, as a truck carrying bales of newspapers drives into the depths of the frame, two heads, visible through oval windows, swing back and



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To begin the narrative proper, Hitchcock must effect a transition from London in general to the individual characters of his drama. In a brief scene, several women enter what we recognize as a dressing room, apparently after a performance. The camera isolates one whose blond hair marks her as a potential victim. Hitchcock cuts to her point of view, and we see a menacing, knife-wielding figure who rises without warning into the frame. The apparition is then explained: it is a stage hand in disguise, playing a practical joke. This time, however, Hitchcock did not let us in on the prank. We, too, were taken



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forth, as though they were the newspaper van's eyes. Third, a crowd is shown looking upward, all eyes moving in unison—to all appearances, an audience viewing a film. When Hitchcock cuts to the crowd's point of view, we realize that these people are reading a huge electric sign spelling out the *Evening Standard's* report of the latest Avenger murder.

In one of the most remarkable sequences of the film, Hitchcock dissolves from a radio announcer reading the story of the murder to one solitary listener after another: a man who rolls his eyes, an angry woman who yowls like a cat, a man who listens taut with excitement, a woman so aroused that she runs her tongue sensually over her lips.

Each listener appears less an individual than a representative of the London public. All these faces seem to collapse into one, a face with alternating male and female aspects. The series ends with a woman who gazes fearfully about her.

in. Hitchcock has declared his capacity for deceiving us. He has given us fair warning.

A title reading simply "Daisy" is followed by a view of a beautiful blonde, who opens her ermine coat to reveal her elegant evening dress.

We cannot help recognizing Daisy as another potential victim of the Avenger, in part because this framing echoes the film's opening, as though our view were once again the murderer's. Our tension increases when Hitchcock cuts to a news-

boy hawking the *Evening Standard* and then back to Daisy, who gives no sign that she is listening and appears indifferent to the possibility that she is in the Avenger's presence. Showing no fear, she steps toward the camera. Only then does a cut to a longer shot disclose the real setting: this is a fashion salon, and Daisy is a model making her entrance.

What we took to be Daisy in the London night, going about her private affairs, is Daisy in costume, about to display her outfit—and herself—to the wealthy men and women gathered for the show. The next shot shows us this audience—the men who take pleasure in viewing models such as Daisy and the women who hope to buy the ability to arouse men's desire.

We do not know who Daisy really is. All we know is that modeling is her job. Perhaps it is only a way of making a living. Perhaps she models because she dreams of being the kind of sophisticated woman of the world, disdainful of those who would judge her, that we first took her to be. Or perhaps she dreams of a romantic figure who will one day step forward from within her audience to possess her.

Hitchcock next cuts to an unidentified man buying a newspaper on the street and walking into a boarding house. Then two other characters are introduced: a woman we take to be his wife and a police detective named Joe, a friend of the family. As Joe brags about how quickly he would apprehend the Avenger if he were put on the case, a second title reading "Daisy" appears on the screen. Identified as "the daughter of the house," Daisy enters.

Daisy's two introductions anticipate a conflict basic to the narrative. She appears fated for marriage to Joe, but unless there is more to him than meets the eye, such a marriage would be the denial of all dreams of wealth and freedom, of commanding an audience, and of romance. Daisy is a girl on the threshold of womanhood torn between romantic yearnings and the wish to be a good daughter. Not wishing to disobey her parents, she also does not wish to be trapped in a sexless marriage like theirs. She is the first of a long line of Hitchcock heroines faced with this predicament. Daisy's descendants appear in *Blackmail*, *Young and Innocent*, *Rebecca*, *Suspicion*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Stage Fright*, *Vertigo*, *Psycho*, and *Marnie*, among



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other Hitchcock films. Hitchcock's films frequently take the form of narratives about a girl's growing up, and begin with the appearance, as if by magic, of a mysterious man who may have the power to make the girl's romantic dreams come true but who also may be a monster.

Hitchcock elegantly lays out Daisy's dilemma by presenting a scene "directed" by Joe, a passage that also illustrates his characteristic care in differentiating the camera's relationships with its various subjects and his interest in the ubiquity of theater in everyday interactions. Daisy is reading about the Avenger in the newspaper. Joe assumes a blustering stance—the framing exposes his unattractive self-importance—and



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says, "I'm keen on golden hair myself, same as the Avenger is." Under the watchful eyes of her mother, who endorses Joe's courtship, Daisy can only give in to his demand that she participate in this charade. She puts on a look of disdain. He continues the performance by responding with a deflated look. But then Hitchcock presents us a privileged view, unavailable to Daisy or her mother, that discloses Joe's real feelings. In this frame, Joe sighs and looks directly into the camera, revealing both his longing and his feeling of impotence. Frustrated in his desire but unwilling to declare it frankly, he is reduced to playacting that makes a joke of the idea of rejection.

Daisy ignores Joe, her display of indifference part of the charade. Joe then picks up a cookie cutter and presses out a dough heart, which he lays down on the table. When she continues to act uninterested, he presses out a second heart and places it beside the first. Daisy again looks disdainfully at Joe. Hitchcock once more inserts a closeup, this time of Joe's hands hanging limply by his sides. Daisy's hand reaches into this frame, picks up one of the hearts, and tosses it aside. Joe's face registers no emotion, but in yet another close insert, his hands pick up the remaining heart and tear it in two.

Viewed in closeup, Joe directs a forlorn "puppy dog" look to Daisy; this is not the mask of the swaggering braggart but that of the lovelorn suitor.

This expression is part of the charade, although the feeling it caricatures is also real. Joe here casts himself as a clown who has given his all to win his audience's love and casts Daisy as heartless for rejecting his plea.

It is important not to misunderstand this moment. Joe has dropped his bully act and now presents himself as an innocent whose heart has been cruelly broken. But Hitchcock's camera still claims the power to see through him. The image of Joe's hand pressing down on the cookie cutter is an emblem of his capacity for violence. That of his hands tearing the heart sustains the suggestion: Joe depicts the breaking of his own heart, but the heart also stands for Daisy and Joe's gesture expresses a wish for vengeance. However, we attribute to Joe little or no consciousness of the violence in his nature that is transparent to the camera. Thanks to Hitchcock's camera, we know Joe better than he knows himself.

Like Daisy, Joe is the original of a Hitchcock type. *Blackmail's* Frank, for example, is closely related to Joe, and the story of the relationship between Frank and Alice is a variant of that between Joe and Daisy (John Londgen, who plays Frank, is a dead ringer for Malcolm Keen, who plays Joe). It is plain that Daisy does not pine for Joe as he does for her, and, indeed, she will be drawn to the romantic figure of the lodger from the moment of his appearance on the scene. But Joe irrevocably loses Daisy only through his own actions. The process by which he damns himself in her eyes, delineated with great precision, illustrates Hitchcock's recurring theme of the potentially tragic consequences of allowing wishes to influence judgments. He focuses repeatedly on figures like Joe—a police detective—who abuse official powers or break with the discipline of a calling. Joe's conflict reappears throughout Hitchcock's work. For example, in *Murder!* Sir John applies his discipline as a playwright to satisfy his duty as a juror and his personal desires, with mixed results. Ingrid Bergman in *Spellbound* bends psychoanalytic discipline to the leanings of her heart, to happy effect. In *The Paradine Case* Gregory Peck plays a lawyer who fatally mixes his official duties and his love for his client, although his fall, unlike Joe's, has something of the weight of tragedy: Peck's failure is not a betrayal of his humanity, but a devastating consequence of it. *Sabotage*, *Young and Innocent*, *Notorious*, *Rope*, *I Confess*, *Rear Window*, *The Wrong Man*, *Vertigo*, *Torn Curtain*, and *Topaz* are among the other Hitchcock films that take up the implications of Joe's case.

Hitchcock cuts from Joe's glance, which announces the end of the charade, to Daisy.

Joe has not declared himself, and she is not called upon to accept or reject him. The look she gives expresses only a grudging admission of the cleverness of his performance, and does not reveal her



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real feelings toward him. Yet, surely, she has perceived—and resents—the way he forced her to participate in his charade by exploiting her mother’s presence in a species of moral blackmail. On the other hand, for all we know he has the key to her heart and may yet win her. While Joe is no romantic figure, he has one major asset: the ability to make Daisy laugh. Some of Joe’s descendants, indeed, win the respect and even the love of the heroine. It is not

that Daisy hides her feelings or that the camera masks them. A girl such as Daisy, in Hitchcock’s films, does not yet know her own feelings. Only in the course of the film does she come to know herself, to grow up, to become a woman. That we do not know Daisy’s feelings at this moment, then, reflects something about her particular identity as a character, who she is in relationship to others in her world. But, as with all Hitchcock characters, her identity is also a function of a particular relationship to the camera, who she is in relationship to Hitchcock and to us. To the camera, at this moment, she remains who she was when we first viewed her at the fashion show: a creature of beauty whose dreams and desires are inaccessible to us. The camera acknowledges her mystery and power.

Recognizing that an episode is over in what she takes to be a smoothly progressing courtship, Daisy’s mother nods to her husband. But he has been oblivious of the whole scene. She expresses annoyance at his lack of awareness, then beams in condescending toleration of his foibles. He casts her a resentful look, which she gives no sign of noticing. The whole history of their marriage can be glimpsed in this exchange. The scene freezes into a tableau; the situation, completely laid out to our view, is at an impasse. The stage is set for a dramatic entrance.

Signaled by the mother’s gaze, there is a cut to a wall lamp, which dims mysteriously.

There is a plausible explanation: it is time to put a coin in the electric meter. But the shot operates at a number of other levels as well. First, references to light and darkness and to lamps run through the whole film. Second, our view of the



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dimming lamp is the mother’s, linking this moment with her role throughout the film. It registers the beginning of what will be, for her, a nightmare. Third, this shot draws on and parodies theatrical

conventions. House lights go down as the curtain rises on a play, and darkness is associated with the villain of a melodrama. Fourth, this self-consciously melodramatic signal reminds us that our views of this world are presented by an author. The arrival of a stranger at just this moment fulfills Daisy's wish and her mother's fears; it is self-evidently plotted.

Joe tosses Daisy's mother a coin for the gas meter. She hands it to her husband. At this moment, Hitchcock cuts to the front door of the house (suggestively enough, number 13). The camera moves in as the shadow of a man appears and grows larger, and a hand enters the frame and grasps the knocker.

This camera movement—the first in the film—matches the motion of the unseen man as he approaches the door. The shot also represents his point of view. Hitchcock introduced Daisy by allowing us to view her, but the man at the door is introduced by presenting what he views and withholding the sight of his face. He appears in the frame first as a shadow, as though he were an agent of the devil (in a melodrama, the agent of the devil is the villain; in *The Lodger*, the villain is the Avenger; then is this the villainous murderer at the door?). The shot suggests that he has a special bond with the camera, which has assumed his place. The forward tracking movement underscores the camera's identification with him. Whether or not he is the Avenger, he is a viewer who shares something of our relationship to this world. He is also an agent of the film's author: when his hand enters the frame and seizes the knocker, setting in motion the events of the plot, it is as if Hitchcock himself were showing his hand.

The man at the door arrives as if by magic, and his arrival cues a significant development. The mother leaves the room to see who is at the door, while the father goes to put a coin in the electric meter. Seeing that they are now alone, Joe embraces Daisy. Before she has a chance to respond, hence with her feelings still at issue, Hitchcock cuts away to the father climbing a ladder to reach the meter, then to the mother at the door. The first clear view of the stranger is the climax of a series of shots: an extreme long shot of the mother with a staircase at the left of the frame opening the front door to reveal a man framed in



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the doorway; the mother's startled, horrified reaction; and finally, the view that made the mother recoil.

The man at the door, come to rent a room, is the film's star, Ivor Novello. The film's original audience would have recognized him instantly; in the twenties, Novello was a matinee idol of the stage, the romantic lead in a series of popular operettas in which no psychopathic murderers walked the boards. Yet he looks exactly like the Avenger as Hitchcock has cued us to imagine him. Indeed, the face seen in this shot—an expressionless mask half obscured by glare—is so much the picture of mystery that the effect is comic. We do not simply identify with the mother; she is in Hitchcock's hands, and he shares the joke of his power with us. Our laugh is at the perfect appositeness of stimulus and response and at the mother's perfect obliviousness of the author's design. Hitchcock intends the viewer to recognize this apparition as an absurdly conventional vision, yet at the same time to be genuinely shocked. This apparent paradox reflects his wish for us to recognize this face as a kind of mask. The shot specifically alludes, I take it, to the moment in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* when the somnambulist Cesare opens his eyes at Caligari's bidding and stares into the camera. *The Lodger* incorporates *Caligari's* nightmarish events and places them within a world depicted realistically. This somnambulist makes his entrance into an ordinary home in contemporary London.

Throughout the film, our views of the lodger remind us of his introduction as a figure of mystery. This is a central strategy of the narrative, which continually raises suspicions but provides no conclusive evidence either that he is the Avenger or that he is not. From the outset his expressions and actions can be accounted for by supposing that he is the Avenger; if he turned out not to be the Avenger, his appearance

of guilt would need to be explained. Yet Hitchcock does not actually give us false information, as he does in *Stage Fright*'s famous "lying flashback," which presents a character's account of an event without giving any indication that it is not true. Rather, *The Lodger* continually reminds us that its author is withholding crucial information, and that his intentions cannot be taken for granted. We know that the lodger has a secret, but hold back from concluding that his secret is that he is the Avenger, for we know it is within Hitchcock's power to make the lodger's secret be something else.

At one level, the film tells the story of the lodger's revelation of his secret to Daisy, and her response. Until this occurs, he exists in a state of suspense: he does not know his own nature and dreads seeing himself reflected in the eyes of anyone who knows who he really is. He is the prototype of a recurring Hitchcock figure. Laurence Olivier in *Rebecca*, Gary Grant in *Suspicion*, Joseph Cotten in *Shadow of a Doubt*, Richard Todd in *Stage Fright*, and Anthony Perkins in *Psycho* clearly play what might be called "lodger figures." And the characters played by Robert Donat in *The 39 Steps*, Montgomery Clift in *I Confess*, Henry Fonda in *The Wrong Man*, and Sean Connery in *Marnie* derive, in certain essential respects, from the lodger as well. But if the lodger figure represents a type of character, his identity cannot be separated from the form of narrative in which he appears, or from his particular relationship to the camera.

The Lodger is the model for the self-conscious Hitchcock narrative that acknowledges its own indirectness and its practice of withholding information. In it, the author's relationship with the viewers comes to the fore. The film's story about its lodger figure is also a story about the camera; the camera's presentation of the lodger is also its presentation of itself. At one level, *The Lodger* is an investigation of the nature of the camera.

Contrasting *The Lodger* with the Gothic novel helps us to appreciate the camera's central role. Such a novel is typically narrated from the point of view of the innocent but passionate heroine. The troubled, brooding man with whom she falls in love, but whom she alternately fears and pities until she learns his secret, is a projection of her romantic yearnings. The heroine's faith that the man she loves cannot be a monster is, by convention, rewarded. Daisy, too, envisions the man of mystery who enters her life as the fulfillment of her dreams. Though *The Lodger* registers Daisy's point of view, however, the camera retains its autonomy. Nothing in the Gothic novel corresponds to the camera's enigmatic bond with the lodger—and his double, the Avenger. It is the man's view of the woman, not the woman's view of the man, on which Hitchcock's film turns, but the story is not told from the lodger's point of view; the camera stands apart from him as from all its other subjects, in spite of the bond between them. In the Gothic novel, a mystery is explained away. *The Lodger*'s true mystery, which is in the succession of frames that make

up the film, is never explained away. When the lodger finally tells Daisy his secret and that secret is also revealed to us, the mystery of his bond with the camera is not explained but invoked.

The Lodger is also not a conventional detective story. We cannot glean the lodger's secret by careful attention to clues strewn about the narrative. The author has planted clues to the lodger's mysterious nature, but they do not allow us to deduce his story; all they reveal is how well Hitchcock keeps a secret. Hitchcock films are not puzzles to be solved; there is more at stake than matters of observation and deduction. For Daisy, her dreams are at stake; for the lodger, his self-knowledge and salvation; for Hitchcock, his identity as an author. For us, the destinies of characters we care about are at issue, and, beyond this, what we will be called upon to view. *The Lodger* compels us to recognize film's power of showing us what we dread viewing and what we desire to view, and to acknowledge that the lodger's state of suspense is akin to our own. A Hitchcock film provokes us to imagine that our nature, like that of the Avenger, may be monstrous. It conjures this suspicion and this suspense, this anticipation and dread, into wakefulness. If Hitchcock so chooses, his narrative can settle the question of whether the lodger is the Avenger. But at the heart of *The Lodger* are matters Hitchcock cannot simply decide or settle by his own testimony. Who or what the camera's subjects really are, what his role as author makes of him and what it reveals about him, and what the film calls for from its viewers, for example, are central concerns of Hitchcock's reflections, not his secrets.

As the mother swallows her revulsion at the sight of the man at the door, the wall lamp comes back on. At this signal, Hitchcock cuts back to the man, whose face shows life for the first time. A slight, furtive movement of the eyes indicates his alertness.

The man points to a sign reading "room to let." The mother, adopting the obsequiousness of the landlady toward the potential tenant, goes upstairs to show him the room. As the lodger steps forward, there is a quick montage of shots. The father falls off the ladder; a cuckoo springs out of a clock to announce the hour; the lodger springs to attention, his eyes wide; the lodger stands with his back to the camera in the foreground, his figure completely framed by the staircase behind him; Daisy, viewed in closeup, sees something that makes her laugh; the father, seen from Daisy's point of view, lies on the ground, helpless; Daisy laughs; the lodger hears Daisy's laugh, an impenetrable expression on his face.

The keystone of this passage is the fourth of these shots, which echoes the shot of the lodger as shadow looming over the front door and thus reiterates the earlier suggestion of his bond with the Avenger and with the camera.

In this shot, the lodger is given the camera's own position: framed within this space, he also looks in from outside, possessing it with his gaze. If he is the camera's subject, he is also its stand-in in the frame, both a passive viewer and an agent of the author. Riveted by the cuckoo's cry, the lodger stares into the depths of the frame as though a picture held him spellbound. He appears to have lost his grip on the present, as if imagining or remembering a scene we cannot view. But a real scene is taking place at this moment to which Hitchcock does give us access: Daisy discovers her father on the ground and laughs at the spectacle. The sequence suggests a connection between this scene and the one in the lodger's imagination.



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The lodger is aroused by Daisy's laugh, as the Avenger surely would be. Because *The Lodger* never tells the Avenger's story, we do not know what real or imagined acts of violence by what golden-haired woman has led him to his mad acts of killing. But I take it that he calls himself "the Avenger" because he sees himself exacting retribution in a world where women dominate men. Wouldn't the Avenger be provoked by the scene of Daisy laughing at her fallen father? The cuckoo, conventional symbol of madness and a bird that eats other birds' eggs and makes its home in their nests, is a suitable totem for the Avenger. Its cry is linked to Daisy's laugh, which the Avenger would hear as mocking the powers of men.

James Naremore, in his useful *Filmguide to Psycho*, suggests that birds have no special significance in Hitchcock's films before the 1950s³ (Naremore 1973, 62). And yet, it is noteworthy that in *The Lodger* this cuckoo already possesses the metaphorical or symbolic significance—if not the importance—birds will possess in later Hitchcock films, such as *Psycho* and, of course *The Birds*. (This significance will soon be underscored when, in another montage, birds are linked with the unseen, murderous Avenger.) Their significance is partly derived from the idea that birds, with their softness, warmth, and passivity and their knifelike claws and beaks, combine stereotypical masculine and feminine attributes in a dizzying way. Among Hitchcock's British films there are a host of examples, such as the bird in *Blackmail* whose chirping takes on a nightmarishly piercing quality; Handel Fane's feather headdress in *Murder!*; the caged birds and the "Who Killed Cock Robin?" episode in *Sabotage*; and the seagulls that preside over murder in the opening of *Young and Innocent*.

Daisy's mother, showing the stranger the room to let, turns on the lights. The frame is illuminated, and the lodger's face shows the



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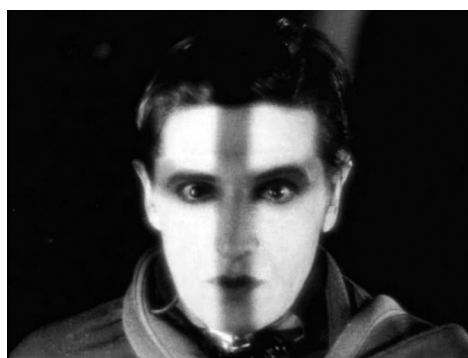
alertness previously triggered by the wall lamp. This echo links what he now views—a painting on the wall of a beautiful young woman with blond hair—to his turning inward when he heard Daisy's laugh.

The camera pans along the wall, following the lodger's gaze, and Hitchcock cuts back to the lodger, then to a second panning shot from his point of view that ends by framing another painting of a golden-haired woman. The pattern is broken by a shot of the mother, who is looking on expectantly. Then Hitchcock cuts again to the lodger and to yet another pan across a painting of a blond woman, but this shot ends by framing a painting that depicts a scene of rape.

This followed by a quick cut to a setup that includes both the lodger and a painting of a woman within the frame.

The abrupt shift from the lodger's point of view at first suggests that his spell has been broken. When the lodger next steps toward the camera, however, revealing that the painting is framed in a mirror, he appears transfixed, back to the camera, reflected in this frame, as if in his imagination he has entered the painting's world.

Suddenly, with a wild look in his eyes, the lodger rushes to the window. The climax of this sequence is a shot that echoes the first view of him at the door. A shadow runs down the center of his face, cutting it in two. His doubleness and look of anguish are emblems of his mystery.



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When Hitchcock cuts to a newsboy seen out the window from the lodger's point of view, the suggestion is that the Avenger's murders are linked to his suffering.

Alone for the first time, the lodger sits and thinks, a look of cold calculation on his face. He casts his eyes at something offscreen, and there is a cut to his view of the black bag he had been carrying. Its contents are a mystery to us. The next shot contains a veiled suggestion that this mystery has an erotic aspect. In this schematic



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composition, the lodger is at the left; the bag is at the right; and the backlit bedroom, the bed framed by the doorway, is at the center.

When the mother comes upstairs to bring him a glass of milk and opens the door to his room, she interrupts the lodger in the act of turning the paintings toward the wall. He asks her to put them somewhere else, without explaining why he does not wish to see them. The mother leaves and calls Daisy to remove the offending pictures, thus setting up the first face-to-face encounter between Daisy and the lodger.

Hitchcock cuts from the lodger, in a prayer-like posture, to a longer view that includes the door to the hall. Daisy enters unnoticed. The sight of a painting turned to the wall makes her laugh, and, once again struck by the sound, the lodger turns toward her. Initially his face is away from the camera, and he turns a full 270 degrees before he meets the camera's gaze and then continues staring. He may be drinking deeply of his view of Daisy or waiting until this intrusion is over. What we might expect to see next is Daisy from his point of view, her reaction to his look, or perhaps the two combined. Instead, Hitchcock shows us the room with the two looking at each other across the frame. Hitchcock withholds the lodger's view, leaving it a mystery how Daisy appears in his eyes. And the withholding of Daisy's reaction suggests that she has not yet formulated a response to his presence. At this charged moment, the mother appears at the door and, characteristically, pushes her daughter across the threshold, while the lodger continues to stare. That an erotic bond has been forged is underscored by what follows. The mother leaves the frame, so that Daisy and the lodger are alone on camera; exactly as the door to the bedroom is about to frame Daisy, Hitchcock cuts to the lodger, whose gaze follows her closely.

Daisy carries the paintings downstairs. Joe opens the door for her, pinches her cheek, straightens his tie, and follows her into the room. Back upstairs, the mother leaves and the lodger closes the door behind him. Hitchcock cuts from the closed door to Joe and Daisy, now embracing. As Joe presses the kiss, however, the door opens and the mother enters, before Daisy responds. The mother, once again chaperone and the author's unwitting agent, tells Joe about the paint-



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ings. He is amused that the lodger is not “keen on the girls.” Then Hitchcock gives us a close shot of Daisy against a black backdrop, echoing our first view of her in the fashion show. When she turns to the camera, looking thoughtful, we take it that she is thinking of the man who has just entered her life.

Suddenly Daisy’s mother grabs Joe’s arm. The three look up at the ceiling lamp, which begins to vibrate. Hitchcock cuts to the lamp, over which a view of the room above appears superimposed; the lodger paces through the frame in front of a dark curtain, yet another emblem of his mystery. The scene fades out with Joe, Daisy, and her mother wrapped in their separate thoughts, ending a major part of the film. The lodger is now ensconced in this home, with consequences yet to be revealed.

The next part of the film begins as Daisy brings breakfast to the lodger’s room. While she pours his tea, he looks up at her.

This shot is followed not, as we might expect, by one from his point of view, but instead by an objective shot, from the perspective of no one in the world of the film, in which he reaches down with his hand as if for a cup. We perceive, however, that he is reaching for a knife.

This privileged view, available only to the camera, leads us to imagine a frightful scene. A close shot of the lodger’s profile increases the tension. We cannot read his intense, absorbed expression. It is characteristic of Hitchcock to frame a figure in profile at the moment of his or her most complete abstraction and absorption in an imagined scene to which we have no access. In such a profile shot, the camera frames its subject in a way that does not allow that figure’s interiority to be penetrated. Indeed, such a shot declares that impenetrability; it announces that we have come to a limit of our access to the world of the film.⁴

The lodger raises his knife to Daisy’s chest, but the suspense is deflated when

he flicks a speck from her dress, an innocent explanation of his apparently menacing gesture. Of course, the explanation does not rule out the possibility that he had the impulse to stab her. And it is disquieting in itself, for it suggests that the speck disturbs the lodger aesthetically, that it spoils a perfect picture, reminding us of his mysterious fascination with the paintings of golden-haired women. The pivotal shot that follows underscores the suggestion that Daisy presents a picture to him. In a soft-focus medium closeup from the lodger's point of view, Hitchcock presents the view of Daisy that has been deferred. In the picture Daisy presents to the lodger's gaze—to the camera—in this frame, Daisy could be one of the women in the paintings that held him spellbound.

Clearly, this shot suggests that, at this moment, Daisy's beauty first fully awakens the lodger's desire. We, however, have beheld Daisy's beauty before; indeed, it was by such a view that we were introduced to her. The present shot echoes our first view of Daisy and invokes the ambiguity of its perspective (was this the Avenger's view or was it only the view clearly identified as the lodger's?). Second, within this frame, Daisy looks invitingly right into the camera: she acknowledges the lodger's gaze and invites him to view her. Third, it is veiled by soft focus. At one level, the soft focus is a conventional indication that the lodger's gaze is animated by desire—a desire that Daisy's look both acknowledges and arouses. The soft focus also indicates, conventionally, that she is melting with passion as well, that she wishes him to look at her with desire. At another level, the soft focus obscures the boundary between fantasy and reality, suggesting that what is viewed within this frame is an apparition. Daisy frankly meets the lodger's gaze as if he were dreaming (although we do not know the whole of the dream—or nightmare—in which she appears). In his dream, she dreams of him, too, and meets his desiring gaze as if she herself were dreaming. In the picture Daisy presents to the lodger, then, his dream and her dream come together. But the status of this picture is ambiguous. We do not know the reality that the soft focus veils. We do not know whether Daisy really presents herself in this way or whether the lodger's picture is only a projection of his imagination; and if Daisy's inviting look is real, we do not know whether it reveals her true feelings or whether she is only acting, as if this were one of her fashion shows.



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The asymmetry of the camera's relationships to these two figures is manifest in the next cut, which does not present the lodger as he appears to Daisy, but repeats the profile shot. Within this frame, the lodger grins, indeed all but leers. We do not know whether this grin is directed to Daisy or is viewed only by the camera, nor whether it is the grin of a murderer contemplating his next victim, a seducer, or an innocent man apologizing for a fright inadvertently caused.

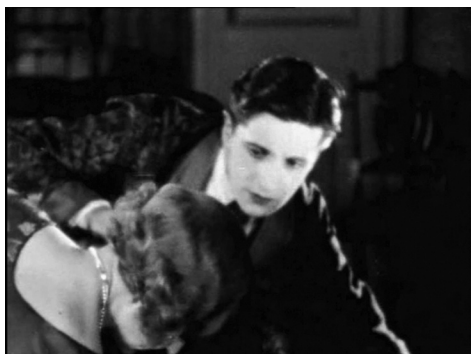
Hitchcock now draws away from the ambiguous intimacy of this scene. When Daisy goes downstairs, we know from her expression that she is in a state of excitement. But when the lodger coolly takes out his newspaper and stirs his tea, we do not know his feelings or intentions. His coldness at this moment is the film's first direct indication that he may be manipulating Daisy in accordance with some design.

We are put further on the alert by a title reading "One evening, a few days later, the lodger made himself agreeable." The scene fades in on the lodger and Daisy playing chess beside a fire. He says, "Be careful, I'll get you yet," a remark that sustains our suspicions. He apparently means that he'll mate her, perhaps not only in chess; but perhaps he also intends to murder her. An air of suppressed violence as well as erotic tension hovers over this scene.

Hitchcock next cuts to a very different setup, in which Daisy's blond hair occupies a conspicuous place.



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She accidentally knocks a chess piece off the table. As she bends down to pick it up, the lodger stares at her hair, once again in a kind of trance.

In a closer shot, he, too, bends down, still staring, and his hand reaches for a poker. Then there is a cut to Daisy's hair, with the poker entering the frame, continuing its motion in the preceding shot. We imagine a frightful continuation. (This series of shots has something of the effect of a zoom in on Daisy's hair. It thus anticipates the stunning moment in *Blackmail* when the camera moves in quickly to a tight closeup of the face of the man murdered the night before, that movement reflecting Frank's horror and exhilaration at discovering that the dead man is his hated rival for the affections of Alice. It also anticipates the moment in *The Birds* when the mother discovers Mr. Fawcett's corpse and a series of jump cuts ends in a terrifying closeup of the dead man's bloody eye sockets. The sequence also