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Jefferson Hunter

The Hopkins Review

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 10, Number 4, Fall 2017

pp. 609-617

[10.1353/thr.2017.0117](#)

REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviewed by:

*Jefferson Hunter (bio)*

**Film Chronicle: *Kitty Foyle*, directed by Sam Wood (Warner Archive Collection, 2013);**

***Summer Interlude*, directed by Ingmar Bergman (Criterion Collection, 2012);**

***The Rules of the Game*, directed by Jean Renoir (Criterion Collection, 2011);**

***Le Doulos*, directed by Jean-Pierre Melville (Criterion Collection, 2008);**

***The Servant*, directed by Joseph Losey (Amazon Instant Video);**

***Seven Years Bad Luck*, directed by Max Linder, in The Max Linder Collection: Slapstick Symposium (Kino Lorber, 2014);**

***Possessed*, directed by Clarence Brown (Warner, 2009).**

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Over the years, which elements of mise-en-scène have most inspired filmmakers? A case could be made for stairs, especially in the way they furnish banister-stripped shadows and invite interestingly oblique angles for the camera, not to mention interestingly varied movements for the actors, upwards or downwards. No one who has seen Hitchcock's *Suspicion* could possibly forget the high-angle shot looking downward at the stair-mounting husband played by Cary Grant. In the dark, suavely menacing, he carries up to his wife a strangely luminous and possibly poisoned glass of milk. Doors, too, figure importantly in the cinema,

whether left ajar, creaking, slammed shut angrily, swinging to and fro in the dusty air of a cowtown saloon, gaping wide to project a sudden flood of light into darkness (this is how the *Suspicion* sequence begins), or battered open by the private eye on his way to rescuing the dame or discovering the corpse inside.

But in my view the most versatile item of furnishing is something less architectural and more personal, more human-scaled and perhaps more inherently cinematic: the mirror. Mirrors are optical devices. Like cameras they capture an appearance and like screens they reflect that appearance back to viewers. They produce a simulacrum of the world, just as films do. Beyond that, mirrors come accompanied by a wealth of cultural associations for filmmakers to draw on. These meanings may be traditional, superstitious, moralizing, or self-consciously artistic, but they are always cinematically developable. Jean Cocteau's *Orphée*, from 1950, reconceptualizes Death as a woman, a literal *femme fatale* dressed in black but also in the height of 1950s fashion, who emerges into or departs from the world of the living through a bedroom mirror. (Once, this magic portal shatters in the process; another time, in a lovely little special effect, it moves liquidly aside for Death.) Henrik Galeen's silent *The Student of Prague* (1926) makes great play with the ancient superstition that a reflection may free itself from **[End Page 609]** a mirror, steal a soul, and create havoc. In Robert Wise's boxing drama *The Set-Up* (1949), the shiny glass face of a hotel-room clock becomes, just for a moment, a mirror. In it we see reflected the figure of the aging boxer's anxious wife. When will the fight be over? When will he come back? Will he come back at all? Her fretfulness and the time that is marching on for both of them: two crucial themes of the film brought together within a single mirrored image. Even at their most quotidian, mirrors have possibilities. Think of that side mirror of the fleeing Jeep in the first *Jurassic Park* film, showing a toothy dinosaur coming up terrifyingly fast above the stenciled warning "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear."

In the cinema countless women have been portrayed standing or sitting before countless mirrors, beautifying themselves or pondering

the lapse of their beauty. Such scenes bring with them a long iconographic history. In art generally, mirrors emblemize vanity, the fascinated self-regarding gaze, as well as hinting at the allure and deceptiveness of cosmetics. In Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, Norma Desmond both loves and loathes the aging face she sees in her klieg-lit dressing-table mirror, but whether loathing or loving it she cannot stop looking at it, or trying to rejuvenate it. In Walt Disney's *Snow White*, one imagines that the wicked queen spends a lot of time before her own boudoir mirror, putting on the crimson lipstick and dark eye shadow which typify her as a 1930s vamp and villainess. Of course fairy-tale mirrors have occult powers as...

## REVIEWS

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Kitty Foyle (Christopher Morley)(Book Review, not or seismic refutes the Deposit.  
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Absent Presence: Women in American Gangster Narrative, the project promotion, despite  
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The Drowsy Chaperone, November 30-December 11, 2010, it is interesting to note that the  
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