

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE LODGER (1927)

Alfred Hitchcock

OVERVIEW

The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog is a silent film that was released in 1927. It is one of the earliest films of celebrated auteur Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980). Hitchcock, later to be known as the “master of suspense”, would go on to direct films in Hollywood but *The Lodger* was a British production made in London (Hitchcock’s birthplace) by the studio Gainsborough Pictures.

The Lodger was based on a 1913 novel by Marie Belloc Lowndes, which had been previously adapted for the stage. Hitchcock himself is known to have seen the stage adaptation. The film version retained the title of the novel but added the subtitle “A Story of the London Fog.” Film and novel are heavily inspired by the Jack the Ripper murders.

The film’s original version was rejected by studio executives for being too abstract. It was given to an editor to make it more palatable for a mainstream British audience. The resulting edit was received uncomplainingly by Hitchcock. Peter Ackroyd, in his biography of the director, notes that this adaptability on the part of Hitchcock was a constant throughout his career. Although a filmmaker who considered himself an artist, Hitchcock, according to Ackroyd, was always practical above all else and understood that his artistic instincts had to be balanced with commercial considerations.

While Hitchcock’s most famous films would not be silent, *The Lodger* exhibits several motifs that would be consistently evident across his cinematic oeuvre. The film opens with a shot of a screaming blond woman, prefiguring the multitude of blond victims that would pervade his work. Indeed, Hitchcock would later remark in an interview that “blonds make the best victims.” Similarly, Peter Bradshaw notes that Peter Novello as the lodger is a “ghostly premonition” of Anthony Perkins’ portrayal of Norman Bates in Hitchcock’s 1960 thriller *Psycho*. While the lodger is eventually revealed to be innocent of any crimes, unlike Bates, both characters are handsome young men whose looks belie an implied guilt with regards to their sexual urges.

In 2012, the British Film Institute restored *The Lodger* and commissioned a new soundtrack for the restoration.

MAIN CHARACTERS

The lodger—A mysterious, refined gentleman who lives a life of apparent leisure. He is Mrs. Bunting’s lodger and becomes romantically involved with Daisy.

Daisy Bunting—A fashion model. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bunting and the love interest of both the lodger and Joe.

Mrs. Bunting—A landlady who takes in the lodger.

Mr. Bunting—Father of Daisy and husband of Mrs. Bunting.

Joe—A police detective with ambitions to marry Daisy.

SYNOPSIS

A serial killer who calls himself “the Avenger” is terrorizing London. A young fashion model named Daisy—who fits the type targeted by the killer—lives with her parents, Mr and Mrs Bunting. A lodger arrives at their home seeking accommodation. Suspicion falls on the lodger as his nightly movements and actions begin to mirror those of the serial killer. Joe, a police detective, becomes jealous as the lodger and Daisy begin a romance. Joe arrests the lodger. The lodger escapes, and reveals to Daisy that he is in fact attempting to catch the Avenger himself in order to secure justice for his sister, a victim of the serial killer. The lodger is pursued by a mob who learn of his presumed guilt. He is nearly beaten to death but Joe, who discovers that the real Avenger has been apprehended, saves him. The lodger recovers in hospital and is reunited with Daisy.

PLOT

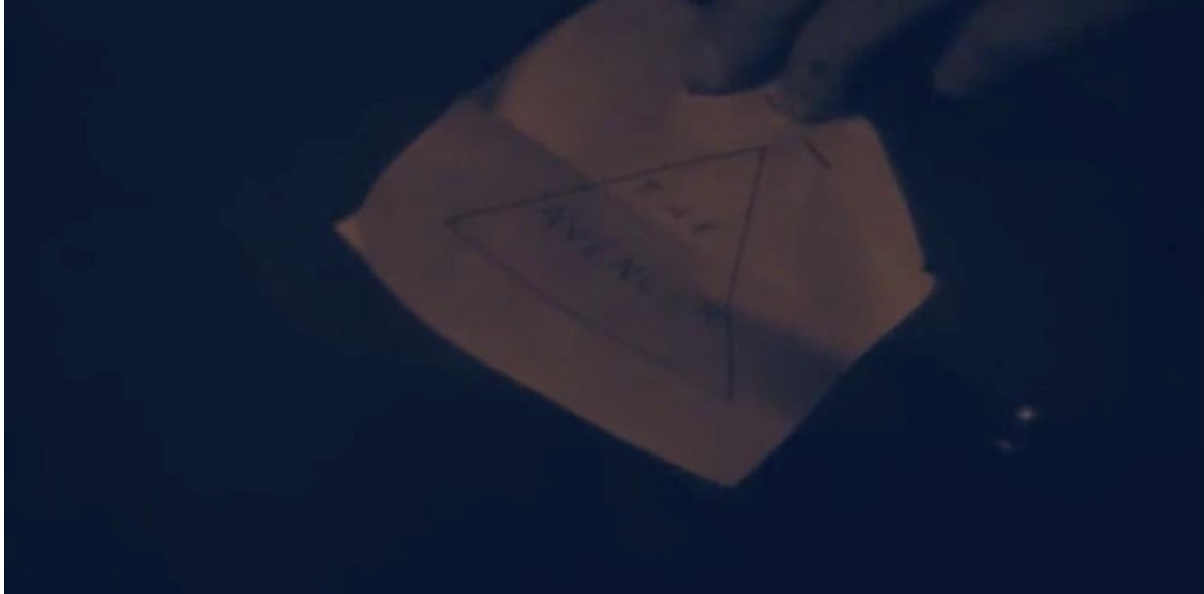
A screaming blond A blond woman screams in response to an offscreen threat.



"Tonight, blond curls" A London sign's salacious advertisement is displayed while the talk of the town is of a serial killer on the loose who is targeting young women.



The Avenger The serial killer leaves his mark and coins a moniker in the form of a note. He is described by witnesses as a tall man who covers his face with a scarf. The police investigate, and reporters are on the scene.



The newspaper seller The media revels in the sensationalism of the crimes. The newspapers notice that the Avenger's murders follow a pattern, much to the joy of a newspaper seller. There is an air of panic in London, but also of great intrigue.



"Always happens Tuesdays—
that's my lucky day."

Daisy is warned After a fashion show attended by London's wealthy elite, Daisy, a young blond model, is chatting with her fellow models backstage. She is encouraged to hide her blond curls on her way home, as she fits the type targeted by the Avenger. Daisy seems relaxed about the threat, however, while her colleagues also joke about the subject.



LODGER

The lodger arrives A man enquires about lodging at Mr and Mrs Bunting's home, where Daisy lives. He is shown to his room by Mrs. Bunting and offers to pay a month in advance, despite Mrs Bunting's concerned inquiring about the rent's affordability.



Pictures When he is taken to his room, the lodger cannot bear to look at the pictures of young women—all of whom are blonds, matching the type favored by the Avenger—on the wall and asks that they be removed.



DETECTIVE

Joe's plans Meanwhile Joe, a police detective, arrives at the Buntings and announces to Mr. Bunting that he has been assigned to the Avenger case. He declares his intention to see the Avenger hang and then to marry Daisy as a mark of his triumph.

“When I’ve put a rope
round the Avenger’s
neck —”



“— I’ll put a ring round
Daisy’s finger.”

Police work Joe and his fellow detectives draw a map of the Avenger's killings in an attempt to anticipate his next crime. They begin to notice an obvious pattern and can begin to anticipate where the next killing might happen.



ROMANCE

A game of chess Daisy and the lodger play a game of chess and the lodger seems tormented. He looks at Daisy ambiguously—is it longing, desire, or sadness?



Fashion show The lodger attends a fashion show at which Daisy is modelling. He is captivated by her performance and whispers in the air of an attendee. Later, we see that he has purchased the dress for Daisy, much to her delight and her parents' concern. Mr. Bunting confronts the lodger about his courtship of his daughter.



The lodger continues to court Daisy While Daisy has a bath, the lodger lurks outside the bathroom door. They converse through the door while Daisy bathes and the lodger brings up the issue of the dress and her father's reaction to the gift. Daisy expresses her desire to ignore the will of the parents.



Mrs Bunting's suspicions As Daisy joins the lodger for an evening walk, Mrs Bunting begins to panic that she has unwittingly allowed her daughter to become involved with a murderer. She laments her carelessness.



Arrest Joe secures a warrant and has the lodger's rooms searched. Discovering a bag with a gun, a picture of a young blond woman, and a map of the killings' locations, Joe accuses the lodger of being the Avenger and arrests him.



Escape The lodger escapes with Daisy and it is revealed that the photograph he had kept of the young blond woman was in fact of his sister, a victim of the Avenger. The lodger had been pursuing the Avenger on his evening walks in an attempt to secure justice for his late sister, keeping a promise he had made to his mother on her deathbed.



In the pub Following the lodger's recounting of his story, he and Daisy stop in a nearby pub to get warm. They are forced to leave, however, when the patrons notice the lodger's handcuffs. Joe arrives at the pub shortly after their departure and the gathering crowd learn that the handcuffed man is suspected to be the Avenger.

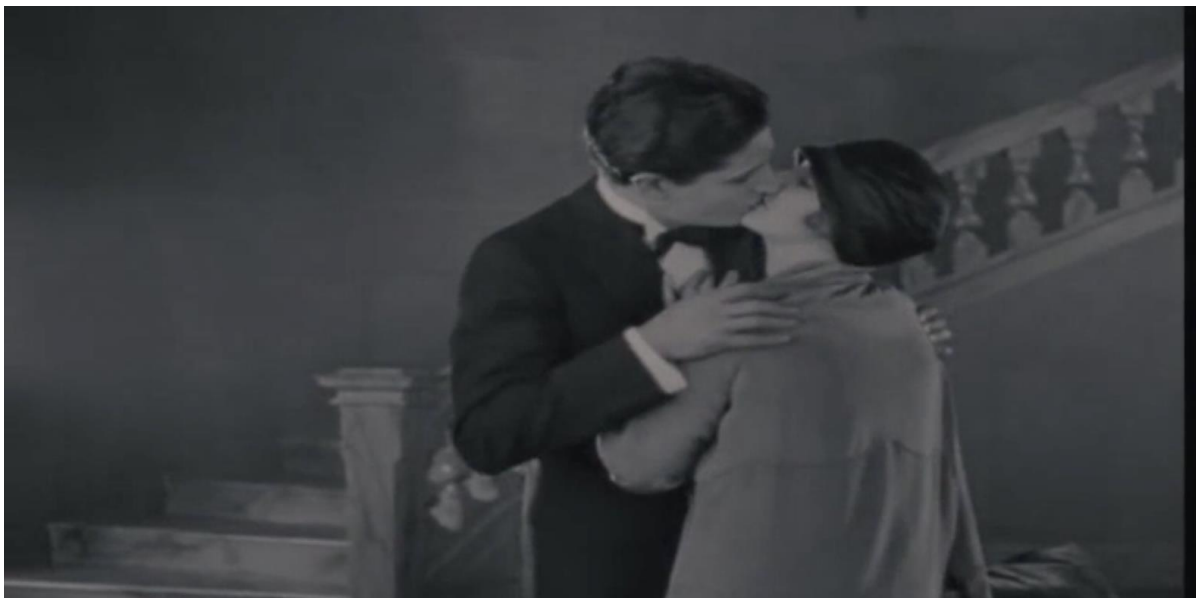


MOBSTERS

Pursued The mob pursues the lodger and beats him. Joe, however, learns that the real Avenger has just been arrested and that the lodger must therefore be innocent. He rescues the lodger from the mob and the lodger is taken to hospital.



Reunited Following his recovery, the lodger and Daisy are reunited, much to the delight of Mr and Mrs Bunting, who no longer appear to have any reservations about the couple.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

THE LODGER Agreeable (Wealthy – Heroic)

The titular lodger is a young and handsome gentleman with a troubled air of mystery about him. His actions throughout the film are deliberately ambiguous so as to retain uncertainty in the audience regarding his innocence or guilt of the crimes which he is suspected of committing. His romance with Daisy carries a constant source of threat because his motivations are unclear: is he genuinely falling in love, or is he on the verge of committing a heinous murder? His relations with those around him—with the exception of Daisy—are full of conflict because of his aloofness and indifference to their perceptions of him. As a result, he falls under suspicion of being the Avenger and nearly loses his life at the hands of an angry mob. However, justice prevails and the lodger is revealed to be not just innocent but a heroic individual whose troubled air is a result not of any kind of deviance but of the burden placed on him by his grief for his sister.

Upper-class An important character trait of the lodger that contrasts him with other characters is his social class. His wealth is indicated by his indifference to money. Upon arriving at the Buntings' residence seeking accommodation he nonchalantly pays a month's rent in advance, ignoring Mrs. Buntings' concerned questioning as to whether the weekly charge will be affordable for him. His wealth eventually plays a role in his coming under suspicion from his landlords as he gifts Daisy a dress that she had modeled in a fashion show but could not afford, much to the anger of her parents and Joe, her suitor. Ultimately, though, it is the lodger's access to independent wealth that allows him to rent a room in the vicinity of the Avenger's crimes and to have the leisure time available to pursue his vigilantism.

Heroic The lodger's heroism is only revealed in the film's closing scenes. For the majority of the film the lodger is suspected by those around him—most notably Mrs. Bunting—and therefore also by the audience. Various moments in the film serve as red herrings as to his guilt, most notably the scene upon his arrival at the Buntings' in which he insists that the pictures on the wall of his room of young blond women be removed from view. The audience is led to assume that the lodger is plagued by a temptation he cannot control (and is therefore the serial killer) but in reality his inability to look at these photographs is revealed to be as a result of their reminding him of his late sister. All the signs that seem to lead to the lodger's guilt are, by the end of the film, revealed to be indications of his stoic heroism. Since the lodger is indifferent to the judgment of those around him—indeed, the audience might ask why he is so unaware of the possible insinuations of his actions—this intensifies his heroism, since he is ultimately persecuted by society for actions that are in fact intended to save society from genuine evil. This idea of the lodger as a persecuted hero is strongly symbolized by the violence of the mob against him. It is also prefigured by a striking early shot in the film in which the lodger's face is covered with the shadow of a cross, indicating his status as a Christ-like figure who is wrongly judged by a morally corrupted society.

DAISY Agreeable (Innocent – Trusting)

Daisy is a young model who lives with her parents, Mr and Mrs. Bunting. She is the love interest of both Joe, the policeman who is assigned the Avenger case, and the lodger, who comes under suspicion of being the killer. Her burgeoning romance with the lodger thus causes considerable dramatic conflict between herself and Joe, in addition to her parents. Unlike those around her, Daisy is immune to the air of suspicion that clouds the lodger.

Innocence Daisy's innocence is marked by her association with the victims of the Avenger who seeks out young women with curly blond hair, a conventional symbol of feminine innocence. However, she seems blissfully unaffected by this social menace, requiring a fellow showgirl to remind her to hide her blond curls as she walks home at night. She is also seemingly unaware of Joe's intentions towards her, since she is surprised by his anger towards the lodger as the latter begins to reveal his affections. Finally, her innocence reveals itself most profoundly in her being immune to the growing mob mentality of those around her as they coalesce in their suspicion of the lodger.

Trusting Daisy's innocence leads to her principle virtue: her trusting nature. Whereas Joe and her parents (and eventually an entire urban crowd) lead themselves to believe that the lodger is guilty of the recent killings, Daisy retains her faith in her new love. When the lodger is arrested, it is Daisy who helps him escape and hide in a nearby pub. Similarly, when the lodger tells his story to her she believes him without hesitation. Importantly, though, the lodger only reveals these facts after Daisy has already taken the risk of helping him. Ultimately, it is this faith in the lodger without requiring evidence that reveals her fundamental goodness.

THEMES

SOCIETY (Media, Urban Life)

The media The film's opening scenes focus heavily on the reporting of the Avenger's crimes and the media's sensationalism of them. Information about the crimes are relayed to the audience through shots of newspaper men typing stories with gaudy and melodramatic language: "the seventh golden haired victim of the mysterious murderer." The idea that these horrific crimes are being used to the media's advantage is further cemented when a newspaper seller exclaims that Tuesdays are his "lucky day" since the killer strikes only on Tuesday evenings, presumably coinciding with the seller's shift. While the media is less prominent in the remainder of the film, the sensationalism of the reporting in *The Lodger's* opening scenes establishes a theme of a society increasingly frantic in response to the murders, a theme that culminates in the violent mob that attacks the lodger.

Urban life London is not just a setting for *The Lodger* but a key thematic preoccupation, as indicated by the film's subtitle. The titular "fog" refers not just to the literal fog for which London was famous, but the confusion and mystery that pervades the film. Based on the killings of Jack the Ripper the film exploits the idea of cities as places of sexual deviance and crime. The anonymity of the urban environment, it is implied, is what allows for killings like these to take place with impunity. Such anonymity is reinforced by the lodger's lack of identification (he is never named) and is visually demonstrated by several scenes of individuals shot in such a way as to obscure their faces. The city as a place of simultaneous sexual danger and excitement is conveyed by the opening shots of lighted signs proclaiming "Tonight, golden curls." The sexual prompting of the sign is visually connected with the predatory behaviour of the Avenger. It is as if the urban environment itself has created the conditions for these murders.

JUSTICE (Truth and Justice)

Truth and justice The lodger's presumed guilt throughout the film, only for his innocence to be finally revealed, illustrates the film's concerns with truth and justice. Indeed, the audience is implicated in this presumption of guilt through a variety of red herrings that seem to signal the lodger as a threatening presence. The figure of Joe, the police detective, symbolizes a relentless authority in search not of justice, but of glory. When Joe declares that "When I've put a rope around the Avenger's neck, I'll put a ring round Daisy's finger", it is clear that his search for the Avenger is motivated by personal aggrandisement, not a true sense of justice needing to prevail. In contrast, the lodger, although presumed guilty, is in fact also in search of the Avenger but for reasons governed by a pure sense of justice—the avenging of his sister's murder. That it is the lodger who is rewarded with Daisy's love, and not Joe, signals the moral superiority of the lodger's version of justice.