HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Woman in the Window 1944

Fritz Lang (1890-1976)

OVERVIEW

A man sends his family away for a vacation and is tempted to have an affair—what follows is a delightful comedy—in Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch* (1955). A similar premise, the adventures of the summer bachelor is deployed in Fritz Lang's 1944 film *The Woman in the Window*. Although it too has its hilarious moments—particularly the ending—Lang's film offers a nightmarish story that involves manslaughter, blackmail and suicide.

An Early Film Noir. In 1946, this term coined by French critics "first appeared in print describing the five crime films first released in 1944" and *The Woman in the Window* was one of them (Leitsch, 33). It is an early film noir and also Lang's first—bearing in mind that he had already influenced the style with such masterpieces as *M* and *Metropolis.* The plot is typical for the genre—the protagonist longing for casual flirtation is enticed by an enigmatic woman; he ends up killing her lover and desperately tries to evade the investigators. Then again, the film's characters deviate from the conventions. The leading man is not a tough guy; he is a man who laments on aging and is anxious about losing his virility. The bored-out character is a change for Edward G. Robinson after playing memorable mobsters (and a shrewd claims investigator in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* that same year).

The Femme Fatale. The protagonist's encounter with a woman's portrait adorning the window of an art gallery kick starts a roller coaster ride. The subject of the alluring oil painting played by Joan Bennett is too nice and honest compared to the typically destructive noir women. The older buddy of Robinson's character jokingly alludes to two of the genre's stars—"I have a date for an idle flirtation with Lana Turner that we worked out … Maybe Lana can dig up Rita Hayworth for you." These actresses would soon play two of film noir's most memorable women in 1946 in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Gilda.*

Adapted for Radio. *The Woman in the Window* was adapted for a live radio broadcast as an installment of the *Lux Radio Theater* (Morrison). This series was sponsored by Unilever Corporation's soap brand and typically featured the same actors that had starred in the film. For *The Woman in the Window*, all three members of the principal cast came together. The actors speak a bit faster and some sequences are not included in order to fit 60 minutes.

Lux detergent boxes would pop up in scenes in *Scarlet Street* and *The Big Heat. The Woman in the Window* doesn't have a comparable instance of early product placement but it showcases a fictitious drug. The news hour on the radio is sponsored by Castola Rex:

> *and the midnight news from station WPQ with the courtesy of Castola Rex, that tangy, bracing acid remedy for that tired feeling". Why suffer when 'Castola Rex, Mother Nature's Own Helping Hand', is available at your nearest drug store? Try it today and everyday. Now for the news.*

Popularity of Freudian Psychoanalysis. It is apt that pharmaceuticals take stage in *The Woman in the Window* since the leading man (a self-declared "crock") is often alternately exhausted, dizzy, tipsy or injured. He is *a* professor of psychology who teaches the theories of Sigmund Freud. The latter places *The Woman in the Window* in the company of films that show a fascination with psychoanalysis—at about the same time, Alfred Hitchcock would feature a psychoanalyst as the main characters of his *Spellbound* (1945) with a Freud lookalike actor. Psychiatry had been a major interest for Lang, beginning with the first Dr. Mabuse film in 1922 and continuing to be so in the 1933 and 1960 sequels with Drs. Baum and Jordan. Lang would revisit the theme of dreams and psychoanalysis in his 1947 film *Secret Beyond the Door.*

A Variation of *Scarlet Street*. According to Peter Bogdanovich, *The Woman in the Window* (and *Secret Beyond the Door*) "are marred by unsatisfactory endings that tend to dissipate the mesmerizing force of anything that has preceded the awakening" (Bogdanovich, 13). A quick survey suggests that many contemporary viewers echo this sentiment by commenting on the ending as "disappointing", "cheap" and "a cop-out" (Carlos M.). On the other hand, the film Lang directed the following year, *Scarlet Street* is generally ranked among his most popular films. This latter film is *The Woman in the Window's* "dark twin" (Gunning, 287)—a variation on the interactions of similar characters. In it, a meek and humble amateur painter (Edward G. Robinson again, as an even more underwhelming middle-ager) is manipulated by a deceitful woman and her conman boyfriend. These two films share the same principal cast reprising comparable roles. David Lynch would pay homage to both films in his *Blue Velvet* (1986).

In contrast to the devastating finale of *Scarlet Street*, *The Woman in the Window* avoids an unsettling ending. Lang told Bogdanovich that the dream narrative was necessary to make the film a story about a man's feelings of guilt. Otherwise, he felt that "there was no plausible reason to show such a thing" (Bogdanovich, 63). The film doesn't seem to share the dark vision of society as *Scarlet Street*—after all, it was all a dream—but perhaps its lighter tone blunts its critical edge. *The Woman in the Window* deserves and rewards repeat viewings with its detailed and fascinating exploration of desire and guilt.

CHARACTERS

Richard Wanley. Professor of psychology at Gotham College is a married with two children. Wanley has a dalliance with the woman of his dreams which turns into a nightmare as he kills Alice Reed's lover in self-defense. Caught between a blackmailer and the police closing in on the culprit, Wanley finally commits suicide—that is, the professor imagines the story in his dream.

Alice Reed. Reed's portrait painting adorns the gallery window where she meets Richard Wanley. She is the one who approaches Wanley, inviting him to a bar and later her home. Reed is the mistress of the wealthy "financier" Claude Mazard whose real name she doesn't know.

Claude Mazard / Frank Howard / Charlie the Hatcheck Man. The radio news bulletin announces him as Claude Mazard "the founder of the fabulous public utilities empire of World Enterprises Incorporated". Mazard attacks Wanley and gets killed in the struggle. Wanley knows him as a promoter and is corrected by his friend Dr. Barkstane who reminds him that "when a man has promoted a giant like the World Enterprises Inc., he is hardly a promoter, he is a financier". Alice Reed doesn't even know his real name; Mazard had lied to her that his name was Frank Howard. Same person appears during the last sequence as the gentlemen's club hatcheck man Charlie—after Wanley's dream is over.

District Attorney Frank Lalor. Wanley's friend is in charge of the investigation for Claude Mazard's disappearance (soon to be tagged a case of homicide). He keeps his friends informed about the exciting developments in the case. Lalor intends to impress and entertain his pals but whatever he says makes Wanley only jumpy.

Heidt / Tim, the Doorman. Heidt is reportedly a former policeman who had been discharged from the force. He was hired by Claude Mazard's associates to tail him from a distance for his safety—and knows that the tycoon never got out of Alice Reed's apartment. He ultimately blackmails her. In the finale, he runs into a random police patrol and gets killed in an exchange of gunfire. Of course, this is the character in Wanley's dream, in real life the same person is the club's doorman Tim.

Dr. Michael Barkstane. The other member of the trio of friends is Dr. Barkstane. He is also Wanley's physician and prescribes him a medication for his dizziness. Wanley uses the strong drug to poison the blackmailer Heidt.

SYNOPSIS

Psychology Professor Richard Wanley's wife and kids leave town for the summer and he joins his friends District Attorney Frank Lalor and Physician Michael Barkstane at their club. Following an enjoyable night later his friends leave and Wanley doses off. Later in the evening, on his way home Wanley has an encounter with Alice Reed, an attractive woman who resembles the figure in the portrait on display at the art gallery.

The woman invites him to her apartment to take a look at other sketches drawn by the same artist and Wanley happily accepts. About an hour later, a man dashes into the apartment and attacks Wanley—who fatally stabs him with a pair of scissors Reed hands him. Reed explains that the man was her sugar daddy and they decide to get rid of the body and to never see each other again. He leaves to get his car and leaves her his vest as as collateral—inside it she finds his pen with his initials "R.W." which she keeps. Wanley dumps the corpse at the park after carelessly leaving behind some incriminating evidence. He returns to his routine. His friend Lalor is in charge of the investigation of the disappearance of the man—now identified as a famous financier. Soon, the body is found and Lalor invites Wanley to accompany him to an official visit of the spot where the body was found. Although he does manage to raise a few eyebrows, no one seems to suspect him yet. Suddenly, the millionaire's bodyguard named Heidt appears and blackmail Reed, who contacts Wanley to ask for help. Wanley instructs her to get rid of the trouble by poisoning Heidt, but the plan fails. Wanley commits suicide by the same pills while Heidt runs into a random police patrol and gets killed. Then, Wanley is woken up by the steward at the club—the whole thing was a nightmare; the professor happily leaves the club, obviously having learnt a good lesson.

SCENES

Introducing Professsor Wanley. Assistant Professor of Psychology Richard Wanley is teaching in the auditorium of Gotham College. The title of the lecture is "Some Psychological Aspects of Homicide". He has chalked "Sigmund Freud" in large letters on the blackboard followed by "unconscious" and other terms associated with psychoanalysis. The (all-male) students listen with interest as Wanley talks about "civilized recognitions of impulses behind homicide … of various degrees of culpability". His last remark before the fade-out is about the need to apply a different set of standards "to judge the man who kills in self-defense".

The Summer Bachelor. Next we see Wanley at the train station with his wife and two kids who are leaving to spend the summer in Maine. They fondly embrace and the wife urges him not to overwork. Wanleys appear to be a model family. After they depart, Wanley walks to his gentlemen's club to meet his two friends, District Attorney Frank Lalor and Physician Michael Barkstane.



*"***The Dream Girl".** Just as he is about to enter the club, Wanley pauses in front of an art gallery. An oil painting depicting a beautiful woman has attracted his attention. That's when his friends hop off a cab and see him checking out the picture with admiration. They tease him a little and praise the unidentified subject of the work of art. After concurring that she is their "dream girl", the trio goes in with merriment. As the three friends lounging at the club and chat about the woman is in the window, the film's spotlight turns to men's infatuations and fears.



Mid-life Crises at the Gentlemen's Club. After having dinner, the men enjoy cigars and couple of drinks in the club's lounge. His friends' next stop for the evening is a "burlesque show" but Wanley is adamant about going home and getting "a good night's sleep". The conversation turns to pondering about being middle aged. Drinks and the charming portrait have triggered a reflective mood in Wanley. He complains about "stodginess" and "solidity"—"we are three old crocks" he concludes. Lalor offers him some consolation based on his experience as a lawman. Mature man who "try to act like colts" he says,

frequently end up in trouble—so it is a good thing to be aware of one's limits. It doesn't look like he succeeds in persuading Wanley who continues musing on the topic. After his friends head out for some entertainment venue, Wanley picks up a book from the club's library—*Song of Solomon*—and makes himself comfortable in an armchair reading. He soon doses off.



Fantasy Becomes Real? As he requested, the steward wakes him up at half past ten and Wanley leaves the club to spend his first evening alone at home. Once outside, he is tempted to take another look at the picture that charmed him earlier. As he stands in front of the gallery, a woman's reflection appears on the glass and it looks eerily similar to the painting. He turns to find her standing behind him. Following their chance encounter in front of the art gallery, the woman—Alice Reed—invites Richard Wanley to her apartment to show other works of the artist. "Clemens, who did the one in the window, did these. Just sketches, but nice, I think" she says referencing the artist Paul Clemens who created the eponymous portrait.

Reed explains that it is her habit to occasionally stop by her portrait and watch the admirers. They have a couple of drinks and a little chat at a bar. The woman invites him to her apartment to take a look at other sketches drawn by the same artist and Wanley happily accepts.

12.10 am—Alice Reed's Apartment. The wall clock near the door clearly shows the time they enter the building. The two get along well, drinking champagne and checking out the sketches. Wanley is obviously enjoying himself.

1.00 am—Nightmare Begins. Wanley cuts his finger trying to open another bottle of champagne and Reed goes inside to fetch him scissors to cut the muselet. Just then, a car pulls by the building and a man dashes for Reed's door. Right after he lets himself into the apartment, the man gets inflamed at the sight of Reed's guest. He slaps her and punches Wanley, furiously locking his hands on the much smaller man's neck. What follows takes only seconds—Reed hands Wanley the scissors with which he repeatedly stabs the assailant until he loosens his grip. The man lies dead; the couple is dazed and staggered.

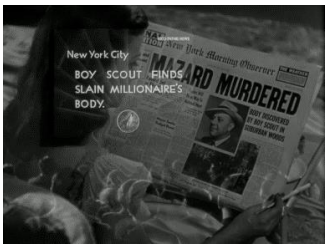
Searching for a Way Out. Wanley's first reaction is to call the police and he reluctantly goes for the phone. His rumination justifies the killing as an act of self-defense. As he trudges, Reed's quick explanation implies that the man was her sugar daddy and their relationship was a secretive one. Presumably out of fear for his social standing, Wanley has a change of heart and decides not to make the call. Instead, he suggests that they get rid of the body and never see each other again. He instructs Reed to clean traces of the crime while he goes to get his car. She demands that he leave behind something personal as a collateral. He obliges and hands her his vest. After he leaves, Reed finds his pen with his initials "R.W." in the vest.

3 am—Wanley and Reed Part Ways. Wanley returns soon and takes back his vest—unbeknownst to him, Reed has chosen to hold on to the pen. He carries the body to his car and heads to the Henry Hudson Parkway. After a long drive, he parks and dumps the corpse over a fence into the bushes.

Incriminating Evidence Left Behind. As Wanley dumps the body, the barbed wire cuts his hand and the fresh wound is exposed to poison ivy. He also loses one of his cuff links at the spot. This will be the last in a series of incriminating evidence Wanley has left behind, including the pen kept by Reed and the blood stains he possibly created as a result of the cut by the cork's wire. To make matters worse, he was seen by a couple of policemen while driving to the park.

Breaking News. Next day, District Attorney Lalor is excited to deliver the news to his friends: The well known financial speculator Mazard had gone missing and his corporation announced a reward for relevant information. Lalor also mentions that if the man were found to be dead, the news would rock the stock exchange. Wanley has a hunch that Mazard could be the man whose body he disposed of.

In *The Woman in the Window*, News is delivered via modern communication channels: The image of Reed reading the newspaper with the headline about Mazard's murder is superimposed with a scene from a movie theater where a newsreel played for cinemagoers announces a "boy scout finds the slain millionaire". It shows the kid making an amusing statement about his accomplishment. Mazard's disappearance was already announced by the radio news.



Claude Mazard. Quite soon, a newspaper headline announces that a "boy scout finds the slain millionaire" and a newsreel shows the kid making an amusing statement about his accomplishment. The body is identified as Claude Mazard, **"**the founder of the fabulous public utilities empire of World Enterprises Incorporated". District Attorney Lalor is placed in charge of the investigation and his club buddies see him clearly exhilarated by the challenge—and importance of the victim. He says that they were able to ascertain that the victim was killed somewhere else and the killer had a female accomplice.

"How the Law Operates to Nail a Man". Lalor invites Wanley to accompany him to an official visit of the spot where the body was found. The district attorney says he will give him a demonstration of "how the law operates to nail a man". The field trip proves to be exhausting for the professor, whose nerves are clearly strained. He keeps blurting things that suggest his first-hand knowledge of the homicide. Although he does manage to raise a few eyebrows, no one seems to suspect him yet.



Enter Heidt—the Millionaire's Missing Bodyguard. An unexpected twist comes with a new character. It turns out that the dead man was assigned a bodyguard by his colleagues and this man followed Mazard everywhere. Heidt is a disgraced former police officer turned conman who is wanted for various crimes. The district attorney speculates that he would be the person to know the identity of the killers and is possibly waiting for the right moment to blackmail them. District Attorney Lalor is obviously exhilarated by his active participation in the investigation. His elaborate explanations about the police's findings unnerve Wanley. Here, he towers above Wanley who is seated. Note Lalor's palms almost glowing with the light from above, making them appear like menacing claws.

Reed Establishes Contact with Wanley. Wanley is appointed as department chair at his college. This otherwise unrelated promotion is apparently important enough to make it to the newspaper. That's where Reed reads the story and learns Wanley's name. She calls him and the two have a friendly chat.

A Deadly Pill. Wanley frequently appears dizzy and tipsy. His deteriorating health draws the attention of his physician friend from the club prescribes him a medicine. Dr. Barkstane cautions him that it is a strong drug and could be deadly unless used carefully.



Heidt's Blackmail. Heidt pays a visit to Alice Reed and accuses her of being the accessory to Mazard's murder. He gives her two days to raise funds so that he would continue to keep quiet. (Dan Duryea plays a bad guy in both films, a slimy conman in *Scarlet Street* and the shady blackmailer in *The Woman in the Window.* Both characters sport a straw boater hat. The popular headgear of the previous decades is eye-catching and looks a bit out of place. Perhaps it was intended to confuse the viewer about the time period



The deceased—the wealthy financier Claude Mazzard is another character who wears a straw hat. The radio news bulletin announces him as "the founder of the fabulous public utilities empire of World Enterprises Incorporated". Wanley knows him merely as a promoter and is corrected by his friend Dr. Barkstane who reminds him that "when a man has promoted a giant like the World Enterprises Inc., he is hardly a promoter, he is a financier". Alice Reed doesn't even know his real name; Mazard had lied to

her that his name was Frank Howard. Same person would reappear during the last sequence as the gentlemen's club hatcheck man Charlie—after Wanley's dream is over.

Alice Reed's lavishly decorated home reflects her economic status. The character Joan Bennett plays is sophisticated too. Her apartment is packed with art objects and a closer look at her book shelf (where she hides her money) reveals her taste in literature—poet Stephen Vincent Benet's Pulitzer Prize (1944) winning *Western Star* and Vita Sackville-West's short story collection *Thirty Clocks Strike the Hour, and Other Stories*.



Reed promptly informs Wanley about the nasty visitor; they meet and conspire to get rid of the blackmailer—Characters are often seen behind bars in Lang's films.



Drink It! Wanley instructs Reed to poisoning Heidt with the heart pills given to him by his physician friend. Later, Heidt comes to Reed's apartment to collect his extortion payment. She acts flirtatiously and tries to get him to take a sip from his drink in which she had diluted a lethal dose of the drug. He is too perceptive to fall into the trap though. After admonishing her and doubling his asking price. Heidt leaves, promising to come back for the money. Reed calls Wanley to inform him about the failure of their plan. The professor of psychology consoles her and subsequently takes an overdose of the same pill himself.

A Happy Twist to the Story? Meanwhile, just outside her building, Heidt runs into a random police patrol and draws his gun (off-screen). He is killed in the exchange of gunfire. Reed hears the gunshots and figures out that they no longer have a blackmailer. She immediately calls Wanley to deliver the good news but evidently the pills have kicked in and it is too late.

The Real Twist: Time to Wake Up. "It's ten-thirty sir—the voice of the gentleman's club's steward wakes up Wanley. He sure looks relieved when it occurs to him that he was dreaming all along. Reed, Mazard and Heidt were all figments of his imagination. This sequence marks the end of his dream—or rather nightmare.

Never Again! The professor is amused to notice that his fantasy was partially grounded in reality. His visualizations of Mazard and Heidt were inspired by the club's hat-checker and doorman. As Wanley happily leaves, he stops by the gallery to take a look at the painting that had made such an impact on him. As he views it in bemusement, a woman approaches him and asks for his lighter. The woman is real this time and bears little resemblance to the one in the portrait. Wanley is terrified, he has learnt his lesson well and runs away shouting "Oh, No. Thank You, Indeed—Never Again! Not for a million dollars!"

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Richard Wanley – Open (Habitual, Adventurous, Indisposed, Understanding, Self-confident)
Alice Reed – Closed, Agreeable (Opaque, Greedy, Docile and Friendly)

RICHARD WANLEY

After (Wanley imagines) killing Mazard, he is driven by fear of getting caught. The fear is not of legal punishment—he is assured that his action was self-defense—but rather the destruction of his social standing.

Illustrative moments

Habitual. “He’s a strictly two-drink man, always has been for years” Dr. Barkstane remarks about Wanley. That evening, Wanley has more than two drinks and that’s not the only way he breaks routine. He would go home and sleep early as he always did—if it was not for the encounter with the portrait.

Adventurous. At the club, Wanley keeps talking about how he dislikes getting older. He admits that he is in a “somewhat rebellious state of mind”. What follows is his imagination of a romantic adventure including the moral implications and grave consequences.

Indisposed. While Wanley is not sickly, he is frequently seen displaying symptoms of some kind of illness or minor injury. He gets giddy twice, at the club and later when he accompanies the investigators on a visit to the crime scene—the bushy roadside where Wanley threw the corpse. In both instances, the vigilance of his district attorney friend is a cause of his panicky dizziness.

Understanding. In his interactions with Alice Reed, Wanley typically says things like **“**well that’s fair enough”, “you are very fair Alice, quite generous” and “I am sure you did all you could”. The two may not be physically compatible but have a considerably flawless relationship. Not surprisingly, the reason for that is her being a creation of his imagination”.

Self-confident. Basically, Wanley is a variation of Chris Cross in *Scarlet Street* (in mid-life crisis and seeking casual romance with a younger woman). Cross happens to be a rather timid and submissive man controlled by a dominant wife and masterful boss. On the other hand, Wanley is remarkably calm and self-assured. Edward G. Robinson would play the hawkish claims investigator in *Double Indemnity* the same year. While Wanley is nowhere near as shrewd and worldly, he has his moments too. For example when he oversees Alice Reed’s cleaning of the crime scene and later when he lectures her about dealing with a blackmailer:

> *“There are only three ways to deal with a blackmailer. You can pay him and pay him and pay him until you're penniless. Or you can call the police yourself and let your secret be known to the world. Or you can kill him.”*

Now this is definitely not something that one can expect to hear from Chris Cross.

ALICE REED

The femme fatale character in film noir is a projection of male characters’ fantasies and fears about women. Alice Reed, on the other hand, is a figment of the imagination of Richard Wanley.

Illustrative moments

Opaque. Reed tends to be nice to Wanley and doesn’t play any tricks on him—contrary to what one would expect from a conventional femme fatale. There are times when she is untruthful—e.g. demands that Wanley leave something personal before leaving and holds on to his pen with his initials. She even acts flirtatiously with Heidt, talking about escaping to South America together.

Greedy. Reed is obviously quite greedy. She says that she would like to keep the money the dead man had on him. Even though she promises to get rid of all self-incriminating evidence, she doesn’t keep her word and keeps Mazzard’s expensive watch.

Docile and Friendly. As soon as Wanley decides to cover the killing of Mazard, Reed obediently follows his instructions. He leaves without revealing his name to her. Once she reads the story about his appointment in the newspaper, she calls to congratulate him like a good friend.

THEMES

Society – (Anxious Masculinity, Health and Modernity)
Justice – (Freudian Psychoanalysis, Faces of Law Enforcement, Crime and Big Business)
Past – (Time)

SOCIETY

Anxious Masculinity. Early on, District Attorney Lalor advises his friends about the virtues of restraint and prudence for men of a certain age. Later, when he takes charge of the investigation for the Mazard homicide, Lalor begins to act differently. He is now always busy, strides and talks in excitement. The action has clearly elevated his spirits; he is no longer in synch with his two middle-aged friends who lazily stroll around the gentlemen's club. When they have their regular coffee, he orders liquor—"get me an old-fashioned" and emphasizes his divergence a little later—"no coffee for me, I've got an old-fashioned coming". Dr. Barstane observes that once their mutual friend is on the tail, his "old head goes up like a bird-dog's". Wanley responds that he could "imagine he'd be pretty terrifying once he got the scent".

Before he committed the—imaginary—crime, what troubled Wanley most was getting old. Now, he is also apprehensive about getting caught. The abrupt display of zest by his friend makes him even more nervous by blending his two fears—of law and aging.

Health and Modernity. "The flesh is still strong but the spirit grows weaker by the hour" Wanley laments to his pals. Notwithstanding all his talk about youthful flirtation, Wanley's body goes through quite a few ordeals—e.g. faintness, minor cuts, poison ivy rash, possible infection, potentially deadly medication. On top of all those, he attempts to poison himself with that drug and is pounded and almost strangled by Mazard.

One evening as Wanley is home alone and obviously restless, the radio can be overheard:

> *and the midnight news from station WPQ with the courtesy of Castola Rex, that tangy, bracing acid remedy for that tired feeling. But first, a word about Castola Rex.Wise Mother Nature has balanced the chemical contents of the gastric juices so carefully that heart burn, acid stomach, or an upset digestive system resulting from over indulgence in food and drink can blight a person's whole outlook on life. But why suffer when Castola Rex, Mother Nature's own helping hand, is available at your nearest drug store? Try it today and everyday. Now for the news.*

It looks like he displays the symptoms. His friend Dr. Barkstane prescribes him something even stronger, "a gland concentrate. Too much of it would hit the old heart like a sledgehammer". With such frequent references to health issues, the viewer may be tempted to recall the cry of a minor character in an early Lang film. *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*—"I can't take this any longer, this pace of 200 km an hour! It's modern-day cannibalism!"

JUSTICE

Freudian Psychoanalysis. Professor Wanley's lecture at Gotham College opens the film. The chalkboard behind him features the title "Sigmund Freud: Divisional Constitution of Mental Life" which has been broken down into two groups: "ego, id, super-ego" and "unconscious, pre-conscious, conscious". This core is flanked by a few Freudian concepts the professor has jotted down such as libido and transference. His last remark before the fade-out is about the need to apply a different set of standards "to judge the man who kills in self-defense". Could Edward G. Robinson's character be hinting at his own predicament? The story that follows—his dream—is his unconscious seeking romantic adventure and getting punished by the super-ego (Gunning, 293).

Parallels This is not the first time Lang is visiting the subject of psychoanalysis. The titular character of *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. Mabuse also doubles as the enigmatic conjuror Sandor Weltmann who is basically a quack specialized in telepathy and "mass

hypnosis" (Weltmann also has a name that recalls psychoanalyst and contemporary of Freud, Sándor Ferenczi. In his final film *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960), the doctor returns and this time he also wears the hat of a mysterious psychic from Ireland. In *M*, an unidentified psychiatrist makes a crucial contribution to the investigation to find the child killer. *Ministry of Fear* (1944) has a shady psychiatrist character who is the author of a book titled "Psychoanalysis and Nazism" and is employed as a consultant to the Ministry of Defense.

Faces of Law Enforcement. "Wanley? What kind of name is that, Polish?" asks the belligerent policeman after pulling him over for driving without headlights. "No, it's American" he meekly responds. Wanley gets a break for being a professor—"assistant professor" he corrects in humility. While police officers are not portrayed negatively, they are not exactly nice guys either. Later, the uniformed toll collector at the parkway's entrance is delighted to hear when Wanley tells him that he can keep the dime that accidentally fell to the ground. As Wanley drives through the park he manages to stop at the last moment at a stop signal. Lurking in the side of the road is a motor officer. With his menacing grin he looks eager to catch drivers who dare to break the law in this secluded spot.

Crime and Big Business. Last but not least is the former police detective—the blackmailer Heidt. "A known crook with a blackmailing record" Lalor asserts. He was the bodyguard of Claude Mazard whom the news had referred to as "the founder of the fabulous public utilities empire of World Enterprises Incorporated". Why would his corporate associates choose Heidt to protect him? The oddity is not lost on the Lalor's friends— "Don't ask me why Wall Street geniuses do anything" the district Attorney sarcastically remarks. The questionably rich rubbing elbows with law enforcement will be a theme that Lang will explore in *The Big Heat* (1953). With *The Woman in the Window* Lang takes a step in that direction—a corporation with ties to a criminal who used to be a law enforcer.

PAST

Time. The concept of time is significant in Lang's films and clocks of all sorts are a common motif. *The Woman in the Window* would rank high among his films that display his interest in the concept of time. Most of the action in the plot is marked in time with precision. Consider for example how the events unfold during that fateful evening.

"It's ten-thirty sir" the steward of the gentlemen's club tells Wanley (he is dreaming). He leaves the club and meets "the dream girl" Alice Reed in front of the gallery. They have drinks at the bar and leave for her apartment. It is now past midnight—a large clock on the wall in front of her building. The timeline of the succeeding events are marked by the same clock:

12.10 Alice Reed and Richard Wanley enter her apartment
01.00 Claude Mazard arrives, attacks Wanley who kills him in self defense
01.20 Wanley leaves the apartment to go to the garage and come back with his car
02.30 He comes back with the car
03.00 Wanley and Reed give the crime scene a look-over and make sure to cover their traces. They bid goodbye, Wanley leaves again, this time with the corpse. He drives to national park to dump it.

Other scenes are carefully marked as specific moments in time—numerous examples are readily available: the district attorney picks up Wanley at 9.30 am; the blackmailer tells Reed to expect him at 8 pm and finally, the club's steward wakes him up at half past ten (this time for real). All this becomes interesting when one considers that the bulk of the story is Wanley's dream. He is dosing in the club's armchair and imagining himself in such situations—all meticulously time-stamped.

Discussion questions

"Didn't the novel end differently?" Peter Bogdanovich asks Fritz Lang, "Why did you decide to make the whole thing turn out to be a dream?" Why do you think he chose to use a dream sequence? How would you end it? What could be the alternatives to the last part?

In her groundbreaking essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Laura Mulvey has argued that patriarchal unconscious shapes viewers' film watching experience so that the audience derives pleasure from film through voyeurism and identification with a male gaze. Considering that Alice Reed enjoys watching men watching her portrait, is *The Woman in the Window* an example that supports Mulvey's theory? Why?

Is *The Woman in the Window* a moralistic tale? Does the film preach family values and fidelity?

Does District Attorney Lalor suspect that his friend is the culprit?

The leading man imagines Alice Reed in *The Woman in the Window* and a comparable character (Chris Cross) fantasizes about Kitty March in *Scarlet Street*. How these two women compare?

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