

Some
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Laura Mulvey

Outrage (1950) is the product of the very particular combination of circumstances that allowed Ida Lupino, Hollywood star, to become Ida Lupino, Hollywood director. First of all, her unusual desire to direct: Lupino has described how, during the 1940s when under contract to Warner Bros and suspended by Jack Warner for refusing roles that she disliked, she used the time to observe the making of films on the lot – fascinated by direction and also cinematography. However, it was not possible for a woman to direct within the Hollywood studio system. Only one woman, Dorothy Arzner, had worked in Hollywood as a director between the late 1920s and her retirement in 1943. In 1950, Lupino managed to direct *Outrage*, her first film, renewing the Arzner legacy and becoming the exception that proved the rule and the second woman to be admitted to the Directors Guild of America.

Secondly, shifts in the industry. Crises affecting the Hollywood majors in the 1950s opened up windows of opportunity for small independent companies to make films that would not have received studio support. In 1948, Lupino married Collier Young, an executive producer at Columbia Studios. Together, with Young as president/producer and Lupino as vice-president/director, and with the addition of screenwriter Marvin Wald, they created The Filmmakers Inc, an independent production company for which Lupino would direct six films, from 1950 to 1953. With the personal support of Howard Hughes, the company secured much needed access to distribution through a three-picture deal with RKO. The Filmmakers Inc gave itself a very specific brief: to produce extremely low budget pictures about social issues that would have had little or no chance of seeing the light of day in male- and studio-dominated Hollywood. These were women's stories woven around experiences specific to women, films that slipped, at least partially, under the radar of the Hays Code's all-seeing eye. *Outrage*, their second production, is exemplary: the story of a rape, in which the word 'rape' cannot be mentioned, euphemistically replaced by 'criminal assault'.

Ida Lupino co-wrote *Outrage* with Marvin Wald. The story combines a commitment to naturalism, the ordinary and the everyday, with a strikingly schematic narrative structure. Ann (played by Mala Powers) is the central character, whose essential ordinariness and secure expectations are overtaken by a sudden, unpredictable tragedy. In the first part of the film, on the day after she and her long-term boyfriend get formally engaged, she is raped. The aftermath, psychically traumatic for Ann, is aggravated by incomprehension and even hostility from her small-town social environment. Ann runs away – from her parents, her boyfriend, her job, her hometown – creating a pivot point at the story's centre. Her flight is literally halted as she runs through the countryside, twists her ankle in the mud and can move no further. Rescued by Bruce, a benevolent local pastor, Ann rebuilds her life in rural California: a benign couple take her in, substituting for her parents. Bruce presents the possibility of a new relationship, but at an outdoor country dance, Ann is approached by a man whose sexual aggression reactivates her traumatic memory; she hits him, and nearly kills him, with a heavy farm implement. A police investigation then establishes her identity and reveals the story of her trauma to Bruce, who, ultimately, persuades her to return home to her family and her fiancé.

In *Outrage*, Lupino's naturalistic presentation of character and environment are aesthetically affected by her highly schematic patterning of the narrative: the most ordinary and everyday events verge on the emblematic and characters lean towards the archetypal. There is something slightly uncanny but also intriguingly courageous about this clash of styles. When Ann and her fiancé, Jim, are first introduced, Lupino's cinema is supremely naturalistic: she grounds her characters' ordinariness through straightforward, unadorned camera set-ups, and she also uses gestural asides to locate the couple within the everyday. Just as Jim and Ann seal their engagement with a kiss, a shoeshine boy pressures Jim to have his shoes cleaned. In the same scene, as Jim expounds on his and Ann's future happiness, a cutaway registers the response of their elderly neighbour on the park bench and her perhaps discomfiting, but indulgent gaze – as though she were saying: haven't we all heard all this before? Cinematically, actually and conceptually, Lupino evokes a realist world that extends beyond the limits of the film frame and beyond the limits of narrative frame.

Just as Lupino's realist aesthetic reinforces her construction of recognisably ordinary characters and context, so too does she alter the film's style for the sequence leading up to the rape. *Outrage* was shot by the veteran cinematographer Archie Stout. His camerawork gives a nightmarish, otherworldly atmosphere to the equally nightmarish mise-en-scène in this sequence. It builds up over five minutes of film time: high-angle shots of empty streets, expressive lighting and haunting shadows follow Ann as she runs. Close-ups, revealing how aware she is of the danger pursuing her, are intercut with the inexorable advance of her attacker. Isolated sounds – the rapist's whistling, the clattering dust-bin Ann runs into, the horn on truck in which she tries to hide – add to the atmosphere of terror but also heighten a nightmarish emptiness and silence.

These contrasting cinematic styles might, perhaps, imply an overall political message: to convey on the screen how easily an ordinary young woman's security and normality could be taken from her by life-changing sexual violence. Differently but still cinematically, the camera's movement prefigures the second attack at the parish dance in California. Ann is only there reluctantly and is dressed to convey a kind of sexual innocence: her hair in plaits, she walks with her hands clasped behind her back. An extended shot with a slow, tracking camera movement follows her as she moves through the crowd and stops, standing next to a middle-aged woman, to watch the dancing. Retrospectively this shot can be read as the point of view of the young man whose attempts at flirtation will lead to Ann's panic and breakdown; the insistence and duration of the shot implies something predatory about his intentions.

The second part of the film, in California, seems to offer Ann an opportunity for healing. However, with a rather Freudian touch, it is the threat of a second rape that enables Ann to articulate the horror of the first. In answer to the police, and in a displacement that Bruce is able to interpret, when asked to describe what led her to attack the young man at the dance, Ann can only describe the earlier traumatic experience of the rape and the rapist. The film uses this process of speaking the repressed – bringing, as it were, the unconscious to consciousness – to allow Ann to face the past and agree to return to her home, her family and her fiancé.

Ida Lupino might not have had the ambition to move from in front of to behind the camera, had she not come to Hollywood from an unusual background. She was a scion of a famous line of English music-hall performers and entertainers. Her father's first cousin was Lupino Lane, who, beginning his musical hall career as a child, later worked on Broadway and in Hollywood before returning to the UK to direct numerous comic films. Ida's father, Stanley Lupino, always a strong influence on her career, was an extremely successful comic actor, writer and impresario. Any understanding of Ida's career as a Hollywood star and then director is enhanced by awareness of her family history. But her short career as a director for The Filmmakers Inc also looks forward to the future, to television, the up-and-coming medium of the 50s, where Ida Lupino would find a second successful career as actress and director.