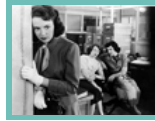




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OUTRAGE (1950)

In the documentary *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* (1995) the influential director singles out the films that best define the dark and menacing genre of film noir. Among them is Ida Lupino's **Outrage** (1950), a film that has none of the usual noir trappings of murder, gunplay and bank heists. It is, instead, a personal tale of one woman's attempts to cope with the psychological effects of having been raped. In Scorsese's words, the film is "a subdued behavioral study that captures the banality of evil in an ordinary small town," not exactly how one normally defines noir.



But film noir is not characterized strictly by armed robbery and spousal murder. Its essence lies more in the psychological fabric of the story, and the visual techniques with which the story is told. And few films captured the post-WWII zeitgeist of noir more effectively than **Outrage**.

Working late to earn extra money for her upcoming marriage, Ann Walton (Mala Powers) is stalked one night by the proprietor of a snack wagon (Albert Mellen), whose previous efforts to flirt with Ann had been unsuccessful. Unable to identify her attacker, Ann attempts to resume a life of normalcy, but is unable to endure the curious stares of her neighbors and co-workers. Utterly alone in her psychological pain, she flees Capital City and wanders to an orange grove community. Finding temporary work as a fruit-packer, she befriends Bruce Ferguson (Tod Andrews), a soft-spoken minister who has suffered his own crises of faith, and who recognizes the need to delicately heal Ann's emotional wounds.

In some ways, **Outrage** clearly bears the earmarks of noir. The stalking sequence is filled with the angular compositions and encroaching shadows that define the genre's visual form, yet Lupino avoids some of the typical methods of generating suspense. Instead of burying the scene under an overwrought orchestral score, the scene is largely silent, which only compounds the tension. At first we hear Ann whistling pleasantly, absent-mindedly... but this is countered by the wolf-like whistle of the rapist, who taunts her from the shadows. The sexual predator at last corners his prey, and the assault occurs amid the nerve-grating drone of a truck horn that Ann accidentally jams during her attempted escape. When the camera cranes skyward to reveal an annoyed neighbor closing his window to block out the truck horn (and any sound of the rape along with it), the steadily-mounting tension of **Outrage** reaches its zenith.

Once Ann is attempting to start her life anew, there is very little attention paid to the search for the culprit. In some ways this is another diversion from the conventions of noir, which tend to focus upon the machinations of crime and punishment. But equally important to the genre is the psychological torment and confusion that [clouds](#) its characters' perspectives. Ann's *inner* turmoil is just as engrossing as any criminal investigation would be, and Lupino clearly wants to show that capturing the rapist would do little to ease Ann's pain and confusion, which is likely to linger well after the closing credits have run.

Lupino's unwillingness to conclude the film with a trite happy ending that magically restores its characters to normalcy is one of **Outrage's** many special achievements. But escaping the conventionality of screen drama was one of Lupino's ongoing objectives as a writer/producer/director.

Beginning her career as an actress, British-born and educated Lupino made her American screen debut in 1934. In the 1940s she became a contract player at Warner Bros. and was (perhaps appropriately) typecast as a smart dame who could hold her own opposite such legendary tough guys as Humphrey Bogart (*High Sierra*, 1941), Edward G. Robinson (*The Sea Wolf*, 1941) or George Raft (*They Drive by Night*, 1940). She was once called "the poor man's Bette Davis" because the roles she often played were initially offered to the tart-tongued A-list actress. But Lupino was not content to accept roles cast off by the Warner Bros. star. Lupino's refusal to accept certain roles caused the studio to suspend her contract as punishment.

Rather than remain idle or accept ill-suited roles, Lupino took control of her own career and formed a production company with husband Collier Young, producing films outside the studio system.

Lupino named her production company Emerald Productions, after her mother, Connie Emerald. Her ambition was to produce films that broached subjects generally avoided by the Hollywood mainstream. In addition to **Outrage's** careful treatment of rape, Lupino's films addressed such unconventional topics as bigamy (*The Bigamist*, 1953), unwed motherhood (*Not Wanted*, 1949), polio (*Never Fear*, 1949) and even the corruption of sports (*Hard, Fast and Beautiful*, 1951).

Because these films were produced outside the system, they lack some of the technical polish of the typical studio film. Lupino was reliant upon actors who had not yet been signed by the studios, so her

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films are largely populated with unknowns. Likewise, the director of Emerald's first film was Elmer Clifton, a veteran of silent movies who was making a living as director-for-hire on low-grade westerns (*The Whispering Skull*, 1944). Clifton fell ill early in the shoot and Lupino, to keep the production alive, stepped behind the camera. The company was renamed The Filmmakers Inc. and the twenty-year career of an influential woman director was begun.

The slightly ragtag feel of Lupino's films, coupled with their often sensational subject matter, has caused Lupino (the director) to be recently dubbed "Queen of the B's."

The nickname Lupino preferred was a throwback to her Warner Bros. moniker: "the poor man's Don Siegel." Siegel (*Dirty Harry*, 1971) was a director of hard-boiled dramas and was known for his strong work ethic and no-nonsense visual style. The parallel is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Lupino's noir classic *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953). As years passed, Lupino became recognized as a remarkably versatile and efficient director, working on a variety of television programs including *Gilligan's Island* (1964), *Bewitched* (1964) and the Boris Karloff series *Thriller* (1960).

Director: Ida Lupino
 Producer: Collier Young
 Screenplay: Collier Young, Malvin Wald, Ida Lupino
 Cinematography: Archie Stout, Louis Clyde Stoumen
 Production Design: Harry Horner
 Music: Paul Sawtell
 Cast: Mala Powers (Ann Walton), Tod Andrews (Bruce Ferguson), Robert Clarke (Jim Owens), Raymond Bond (Eric Walton), Lillian Hamilton (Mrs. Walton), Rita Lupino (Stella Carter).
 BW-75m.

by Bret Wood

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