

Title: The sound of loneliness: Rear Window's soundtrack

Author(s): [John Fawell](#)

Source: [Studies in the Humanities](#), 27.1 (June 2000): p62. From *General OneFile*.

Document Type: Critical essay

Copyright: COPYRIGHT 2000 Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Department of English

<http://www.iup.edu/english/default.aspx>

Full Text:

Despite the vast critical attention it has received, one aspect of Rear Window remains underappreciated and under-analyzed: its soundtrack. Elizabeth Weiss went a long way towards rectifying that situation in the chapter on Rear Window in her excellent study of Hitchcock's [soundtracks](#), *The Silent Screem*. Still Weiss tends to emphasize the film's musical score, whereas much of the soundtrack's success lies in Hitchcock's "musique concret," his careful attention (in the tradition of Bresson and Tati) to the rhythm and arrangement of natural sounds and the way he mixes those sounds with snippets of [music](#). Also, though Weiss is alive to the clever construction of Hitchcock's soundtrack, its meticulous counterpoint and clever ironies, she often misses the emotive quality of the sounds. It was Hitchcock's "deep emotivity" that Francois Truffaut most valued in Hitchcock's films (346), and many of the hushed and isolated sounds that punctuate the soundtrack of Rear Window express a deep empathy for humankind with which Hitchcock is rarely associated.

UNITED THROUGH SOUND

Hitchcock's films are famed for their unity, particularly Rear Window, with its single set and its highly focused point of view. Hitchcock also strengthened the unity of Rear Window through his soundtrack. Weiss has noted that Hitchcock's soundtracks were particularly creative in those films (*Lifeboat*, *Rope*, *Dial M. for Murder*, and *Rear Window*) where he experimented with highly restricted space: "Having established such stringent visual limitations, Hitchcock uses sound in a highly creative way, often depending on it to establish tension" (23). In other films, Weiss notes, Hitchcock "creates tension between what is in a frame and what is out of the frame. In the single set films he creates tension between onset and offset space" (23-24). The ingenuity of Hitchcock's soundtrack in *Rear Window*, perhaps the best of his soundtracks, is probably owing to the strict limitations he imposed upon himself in the film. By forcing himself to respect unity of space, by limiting his visual scope, he found himself more dependent on sound and consequently used sound more creatively. Moreover, the sounds he used, all incidental to the set, served to deepen the sense of place.

The soundtrack of *Rear Window* is comprised almost entirely of incidental sounds. The music that we hear in the film issues from the apartment complex in which the hero L.B. Jefferies (played by Jimmy Stewart) resides. Hitchcock cheats a little in the opening jazz theme, which seems to exist outside the action of the film. But, as the action begins, Hitchcock makes the music thinner and tinnier, as though it were issuing from the courtyard, and finally reveals its source as a radio within the apartment complex.

Hitchcock's soundtrack intensifies the unity of his film in several ways. First, by never allowing sounds to enter into the film from outside the world depicted in the film, he maintains his seal over his universe. It is true to itself, self-contained. Second, by only using sounds from the world of the apartment complex he is able to keep using and re-using his material at hand. Aurally as well as visually he weaves the apartment dwellers who live across from Jefferies (nicknamed Jeff) into his life and intensifies the relationships among everyone in the apartment courtyard.

Weiss notes that Hitchcock's use of sound and music "helps integrate the sense of space in the courtyard." This integration, Weiss further argues, "counteracts the effect of the film's editing and mise-en-scene, both of which tend to isolate the neighbors from one another" (11). We spend a lot of time in *Rear Window* peeping with Jeff (who has recently been holed up with a broken leg) through his window at neighbors in the apartment building across the rear courtyard of his building. We view these neighbors in isolation from one another. They rarely interact or even see one another. When they do acknowledge each other, it is usually with hostility, for example when the lonely woman who sculpts is sharply rebuked by Lars Thorwald for offering him some gardening advice, or when the woman who owns the dog, on finding her dog murdered, castigates her neighbors for their indifference to one another. Visually, Hitchcock presents the neighbors like so many isolated animals pacing restlessly in their illuminated cages. The film visually emphasizes the loneliness and coldness of the modern community. But aurally, the neighbors cannot help but be connected. Their music and noises waft into each other's apartments, and into the peeping Jeff's apartment also. The effect is that their busy conscious selves take no note of one another, but on another unconscious level, communicated aurally, they are acutely aware of and involved with one another. The soundtrack weaves their lives together.

So the song that the composer who lives across from Jeff is writing (and which is also the film's theme song), "Lisa's Theme," spreads throughout the entire film, and as it does, it weaves together several stories. It seems to express Lisa's romantic ideals, but it also adds a sad counterpoint to the Thorwalds' marital squabbles, and reaches out to the lonely

spinster, "Miss Lonelyhearts," during her contemplation of suicide. An anonymous record player from somewhere in the complex spins out saccharin love songs, such as "To See You is to Love You" and "Waiting for My True Love to Appear," that comment touchingly and ironically on Miss Lonelyhearts' pathetic pantomimes of romance. A crowd of revelers at the Composer's apartment belts out a boozy version of "Mona Lisa" that offers a sad undertone to Miss Lonelyhearts' struggle with an aggressive young man in her apartment. A recording of a lugubrious organ version of Rodgers and Hart's waltz "Lover," issuing from some neighbor's late-night gramophone, mixed with silence, the sound of distant fog horns from the bay, and the sound of rain falling down the gutter, serves as the ironic backdrop for Lars Thorwald's turgid, bit-by-bit removal of his murdered wife's body from his apartment. A distant recording of hootenanny music contrasts sharply with Jeff's panic when he finds that the murderer is headed over to his apartment. A carnival piano rendition of "That's Amore" accompanies the arrival of the "newlyweds," the young honeymooners Jeff peeps on from his apartment window.

THE EAR GOES WITHIN

Hitchcock does several things with sound in these scenes. Sometimes he uses sound or music to deepen an intended effect. The carnival version of "That's Amore" matches with the scenes of innocent love we see with the newlyweds' arrival. Other times, he uses sound or music as ironic counterpoint, with music that seems opposed to the visual in order to add irony to the scene or complicate our reaction. The romantic idealism of the songs that we hear as we watch Miss Lonelyhearts, for example, contrasts sadly with the pathetic nature of her real-life situation. Weiss refers to Hitchcock's fondness for "asynchronous sound," noting that "less than one-tenth of the time that we are looking at Jeff's neighbors does the dominant sound emanate from the particular window under surveillance." By using sounds that are "contrapuntal to the visuals" (109), by separating sound and image, Hitchcock is able to achieve as Weiss summarizes it, "variety, denseness, tension, and . . . irony" (19). By separating sound and image, Hitchcock complicates and deepens scenes in *Rear Window*. He also taxes the viewers' senses to their utmost.

Hitchcock speaks often of the redundancy of offering the viewer a sound that matches what they are seeing. "It's essential to separate clearly the dialogue from the visual elements," he tells Truffaut (60). To Richard Schickel, he speaks of having the "dialogue counterpoint to the visual," and of dialogue "properly interspersed or overlaid" (286). To fully exercise the viewers, he gives them the vision of one thing and the sound of another. That is a true economy of expression and full utilization of the viewer's senses. It also makes for more active viewers, struggling to incorporate what they see and what they hear, which are not, as they are in most director's films, the same thing.

Robert Bresson, who bears many striking similarities to Hitchcock as a filmmaker, particularly in his meticulous use of sound, emphasized that sights and sounds have very different effects on the viewers' minds. Sounds, he felt, made the deeper impression. Sight he felt to be a more superficial sensation. "When a sound can replace an image," Bresson wrote, "cut the image or neutralize it. The ear goes more towards the within, the eye towards the outer" (51). Hitchcock too had a strong sense of the gravity or power of sound. He often depended on what Weiss refers to as "aural intrusions," sounds from off screen, to convey his moments of deepest terror. So, the murder in *Rear Window* takes place off screen somewhere, communicated only by a scream that is swallowed quickly in silence. The dog owner's discovery of her dead dog's body comes to us in an off screen scream. The arrival of Lars Thorwald, the murderer, in Jeff's apartment comes in aural increments: the click on the phone as he hangs up the receiver, the jarring slam of the elevator doors as the elevator begins its ascent, the exaggerated sound of the footsteps in the hallway, the click of the hall-light going off, the amplified sound of the door opening. Even in moments of lighter shock, as, for example, those scenes where the insurance nurse, Stella, discovers Jeff peeping from his window at his neighbors, Hitchcock has her voice precede her image. Hitchcock is aware, as Bresson noted, that sounds penetrate more deeply, and consequently are a more efficient means of conveying terror.

THE RHYTHM OF SOUND

Another way in which Hitchcock's soundtrack contributes to the unity in his film is by lending his scenes balance and proportion. Many scenes are choreographed, visually, to the soundtrack. For example, Jeff reaches an itch beneath his cast just as an opera singer who lives nearby reaches the top of her scales. Virtually all of the sequences in which Jeff spies on Miss Lonelyhearts represent pop videos of sorts. But, the most haunting rhythms in the film often mix music with other sounds from the neighborhood, creating what Naremore refers to as the "near symphony of sound effects and diegetic music" (239). Hitchcock gave careful consideration to the smallest sounds in his films. Theresa Wright noted during the filming of *Shadow of a Doubt* that "if an actor was strumming his fingers it was not just an idle strumming, it had a beat, a musical pattern to it -- it was like a sound refrain, whether someone was walking or rustling a paper or tearing an envelope or whistling, whether it was a flutter of birds or an outside sound, it was carefully orchestrated by him. He really scored the sound effects the way a musician writes for instruments" (271).

Like Bresson, Hitchcock appreciated the quality of an isolated sound. He often told interviewers that to describe a sound effect effectively one had to imagine its equivalent in dialogue. Hitchcock liked to approach his sounds imaginatively,

sometimes giving them personalities, envisioning them as small characters in his films. For example, the distant, mournful sound of a ship's horn sounds out now and then in *Rear Window*, usually at quiet and poignant moments when we are watching the windows across the way, suggesting nothing so much as the sad exhale of a distant god watching the pathetic struggles of humans.

Hitchcock would isolate sounds which had for him a strong appeal and then weave them, as Bresson and Tati did, into a kind of "musique concret." "Reorganize the unorganized noises of a street, a railroad station, an airport Play them back one by one in silence and adjust the blend," wrote Bresson (43). "Noise of a door opening and shutting, noise of footsteps, etc, for the sake of rhythm" (42). Similarly, Hitchcock spoke of aiming for, in *Juno and the Paycock*, "a medley of noises: the machine guns that were firing down the street; the tinny note of a cheap gramophone playing in the room; the chatter of other people in the room; the tread-tread tramp-tramp of a funeral procession going by" (40).

Rear Window represents one of his most striking "medley" of sounds. Snatches of conversation, foghorns, car horns, sirens, the sounds of children playing in the street, the whistle of the dog owner and the whistle of someone who favors Strauss waltzes combine with the Composer's tinkling of "Lisa's Theme," stray pop tunes, and other varieties of music that issue from radios and gramophone to create an aural cubist work of [art](#), a Godard-like collision of musical and aural fragments and suggestions. Hitchcock's lovely fluid pans around the courtyard in *Rear Window* are often appreciated for their visual sweep, set detail, and cunning timing, but not often enough for the rhythm of sounds that accompanies and punctuates these pans, such as the sound of the Composer striking his piano keys (in the second of the six pans that punctuate the film), which gives way to the woman whistling for her dog and the dogs bark, which is punctuated by the sound of a distant car pulling away, before the whistle for the dog segues into a whistled waltz that floats pleasantly in the night air. What Spoto says of *The Birds*, one of Hitchcock's experiments in music-less sound, applies equally to *Rear Window*, "every noise and effect was orchestrated, every sound filtered and altered to support the feeling Hitchcock wanted in each scene" (487). Weiss too notes that whereas most directors tend to work on the three categories of their soundtrack (music, dialogue, sound effects) separately, Hitchcock "did not conceive of them as separate entities. One distinctive element of his aural style is a continuity in his use of language, music, and sound effects that reflects his ability to conceive of their combined impact before he actually hears them together" (16-17).

Hitchcock's respect for sound was so great that he often found the significance of his dialogue, not in what is said, but in the relationship of what is said to other sounds on the soundtrack. "Dialogue" he told Truffaut, during the discussion of *Rear Window*, "should simply be a sound among other sounds, just something that comes out of the mouths of people" (222). *Rear Window*, in particular, with its distant conversation, gave Hitchcock the opportunity to use dialogue as a sound rather than to convey an idea. As we watch the neighbors with Jeff, from afar, we often cannot make out the words, only the tenor of conversations in the apartments across the way: the bitterness of the unhappily married Thorwalds' fight, the admonitions of Miss Torso and Miss Lonelyhearts as they fend off aggressive suitors in their apartments. We cannot make out the exact words being said here but we get a feel for the tone, which, interspersed with the Composer's piano and other sounds of the courtyard, assumes a musical rather than a verbal significance, a significance all the more poignant for having been communicated through distant sounds rather than exact words. It is the aural equivalent of Hitchcock's visual plan. Just as a distant perspective on the neighbors makes them seem small and trapped and vulnerable, so the sound of marital discord or Miss Lonelyhearts' tears, only partially audible and striking out in an enveloping silence, is sadder and more touching.

THE RHYTHM OF SOUND: ONE SEQUENCE

Perhaps the best example of the meticulous nature of Hitchcock soundtrack, the beauty and complexity of his rhythms, is the sequence of scenes we watch, with Jeff and Lisa, in which Miss Lonelyhearts entertains an imaginary lover, Miss Torso (Jeff's nickname for the limber dancer across the way) entertains several men, or "wolves" as Lisa describes them, and the Thorwald's fight over Lars Thorwald's phone conversation with his mistress. These scenes are interspersed with conversations, back at Jeff's place, between the main characters of the film, Jeff and Lisa, about the status of their relationship -- conversations that often draw specific parallels between Jeff and Lisa and the people in the apartments across the way. This sequence of scenes is memorable enough for its elaborate visual layout and meticulously choreographed tracking shots. But the rhythms of the soundtrack throughout the sequence are also rich, emotional, and complex.

The sequence begins as Jeff and Lisa finish a conversation in which Lisa has tried to convince Jeff, an inveterate traveler, to "come home," to settle in New York. The conversation has been light and comical but has ended on a serious note. "I can see you looking handsome and successful in a blue flannel suit," says Lisa, who wants Jeff to open a [photography](#) studio in Manhattan. "Now, let's stop talking nonsense, shall we," Jeff responds cruelly and in such a way as to show the conversation is over. By this time Hitchcock has made it clear to the audience that Lisa is hopelessly in love with Jeff, who is not only unwilling to commit himself to a relationship with Lisa, but is flirting with the idea of ending the relationship. Lisa's loneliness is central to the film, as Hitchcock takes pains to make the stories of the suffering, lonely women that Jeff watches across the courtyard reflections of Lisa's situation. As the conversation takes this darker tone, we hear the

melancholy orchestral introduction to Bing Crosby's "To See You is to Love You" (played on some neighbor's gramophone) which introduces and serves as the background for the famous scene in which Jeff's neighbor, the spinster he nicknames "Miss Lonelyhearts," has a delusional date with an invisible lover. But, at this early point in the sequence, the melancholy strains of the orchestra have nothing to do with Miss Lonelyhearts. Here they underline Lisa's sadness in her relationship with Jeff.

This is a favorite technique of Hitchcock's, one he uses often in the film. Hitchcock at once summarizes one scene and introduces another, using music to overlap his scenes and hide, from the viewer, the seam that binds them. Only when Lisa has left the room to make dinner do we, and Jeff, turn our gaze on Miss Lonelyhearts, who begins her pantomime, not with the music, but with the song's first words, "to see you is to love you." The music provides an elegant bridge between scenes and strengthens the connection between Miss Lonelyhearts and Lisa that Hitchcock develops throughout the film. This is only one of many times the women are united in their loneliness.

Hitchcock continues to choreograph his images to the song. The music of "To See You is To Love You" begins with, and marks, the sad resolution of Jeff and Lisa's conversation. The words of the song are timed to begin with Miss Lonelyhearts' scene, which also is timed to last just as long as the song's lyrics do. Miss Lonelyhearts' scene finishes with her waking to the reality that there is actually no man with her in the room. She crumbles in despair to the last touching line of the song, "and I'll see you every night," and as the song returns to its instrumental orchestration, we return to Jeff and Lisa.

In the conversation that follows, Jeff continues to be cruel to Lisa, first missing the obvious parallels that Lisa says exist between herself and Miss Lonelyhearts and then insultingly suggesting that Lisa is more like Miss Torso, the neighborhood party girl, to whose window they turn their attention. The later, instrumental portion of "To See You is to Love You" continues to serve as a backdrop to Jeff and Lisa's conversation and then to the scene in which Jeff and Lisa watch as Miss Torso "juggles wolves," or suitors, at her party. The song, which has taken us a long way now, through both Miss Torso's and Miss Lonelyhearts' romantic saga and through two conversations between Jeff and Lisa, is timed to wind down as Jeff and Lisa's conversation does. Lisa tells Jeff that Miss Torso does not love any of the prosperous men she is entertaining. When Jeff asks how she knows, she responds "you said it resembled my apartment didn't you," by which she means to say that she too is surrounded by handsome prosperous men, but only loves Jeff. That Lisa gets the last word here is reinforced by the fact that Hitchcock shuts down the music as she shuts down the conversation. "To See You is to Love You" begins the descent of its final notes as Lisa turns her back to Jeff. There remains only a bit of stray instrumentation which Hitchcock uses as background for Jeff taking a quick look at the newlywed window. Hitchcock has made it clear through earlier scenes what is going on behind that window. The final notes of the song punctuate Jeff's look of nervous humor as he contemplates the newlyweds' activities and the long sequence set in time to the song finally comes to an end.

The song "To See You is to Love You" began at the end of one argument and finished at the end of another. In between, it served as a melancholy background to Miss Torso and Miss Lonelyhearts' sagas, and in the very final notes offered ironic counterpoint to the newlyweds' window. Now silence reigns, and yet one would not say that the line of rhythm that Hitchcock uses to connect several scenes has finished. With the silence, Hitchcock moves Jeff's gaze to the apartment of the soon-to-be murderer, Thorwald. It is notable how often Hitchcock quiets his soundtrack when we gaze through the Thorwalds' window. Hitchcock was aware of the power of sound and the way it could, if overused, dissipate drama. "Another thing to avoid," he wrote, "is using dramatic sound in a scene which is already charged with as much drama as it can hold. It does not increase the drama -- it lessens it." He recognized that the Thorwald apartment, the heart of the film's mystery and suspense, was of maximum interest to the viewer and therefore required the minimum use of sound.

After the elaborate "To See You is To Love You" pop video he has just given us, he retreats to a silence carefully punctuated by neighborhood sounds. "Silence," Hitchcock told Stephen Watts, "is often very effective and its effect is heightened by the proper handling of the music before and after." We do feel the silence more acutely in this scene because of the music that has preceded it, but also because of the carefully chosen neighborhood sounds that punctuate it. The soundtrack here is no less haunting for its lack of music. Hitchcock achieves here what Bresson refers to as a "silence obtained by a pianissimo of noises," a silence that itself seems musical and weighted with significance by virtue of its interplay with sounds. The distant sound of the Thorwalds' voices, only snatches of which we can discern are interspersed with the sounds of a distant siren that approaches and fades and the distant sound of a ship's horn in the harbor.

The small scene in the Thorwald apartment has its own rhythm, scored by a series of distant, melancholy sounds, and ending just as Hitchcock strikes up the music again. When Thorwald's wife catches him on the phone talking to his mistress, Thorwald follows her like a dumb beast into her room where either something he says or his generally foolish look of surprise and confusion make her break into convulsive laughter. Hitchcock chooses this particular moment of hysteria to end the scene and start up the music again, as the Composer in the apartment nearby begins to play "Lisa's Theme," the romantic theme of the film, once again. The effect is a classic Hitchcock contrast: the hysterical dissolution of marriage scored to the rich melody of romance. The result of this contrast is a feeling of sadness and pity for the Thorwalds and for

what happens in marriage, a perfect instance of how Hitchcock often has strong things to say but chooses to say them in sounds and images, not words. In fact, if Hitchcock was most explicit in paralleling the Composer's music to Lisa, who often comments on, and swoons to, the Composer's music, he also uses the music at specific moments to score the tragedy of the Thorwalds' marriage. The same music that serves to communicate Lisa's unfulfilled love is meant to convey Mrs. Thorwald's tragedy of a love gone bad. It is no coincidence that the richest, most heartfelt version of Lisa's theme will take place when Lisa's and Mrs. Thorwald's worlds conjoin, the night Lisa struggles with Lars Thorwald in the recently murdered Mrs. Thorwald's bedroom.

The Thorwalds' scene finishes with Mrs. Thorwald's laughter but the music continues, serving as a backdrop to the third installment of Jeff and Lisa's ongoing squabbles in Jeff's apartment. Lisa, after enduring two or three more insults from Jeff regarding the subject of marriage, sets the gourmet dinner she has prepared down before him, saying "well, at least you can't complain about the dinner." "Lisa," Jeff says with mock fatigue (this time getting the last word himself), "it's perfect," a sarcastic allusion to a previous conversation with his insurance nurse Stella (Thelma Ritter) in which he described Lisa as "too perfect." Hitchcock gives us, as he often does in the film, a shot of Lisa's pained reaction, and as he does so, the Composer's song finishes in sad, halting chords perfectly synchronized with Lisa's feelings. The fade-out, followed by a cut to a scene much later in the evening, marks this conclusively as the point where Hitchcock meant to finish this sequence of scenes. The sequence has encompassed two songs and an intervening piece of "musique concret," and has scored significant and extended scenes in Miss Lonelyhearts', Miss Torso's and the Thorwalds' apartments, as well as three installments of Jeff's and Lisa's fight. The soundtrack here has lent the scenes cohesion and it has decorated them subtly and with some complexity, beginning, halting, resuming, finishing at key moments, punching certain lines of dialogue and dancing counterpoint with others.

SOUND AND LONELINESS

Hitchcock has used sound, in this sequence, as a means of giving his film rhythm. But sound has served a second, more emotive, purpose also. The sounds Hitchcock chooses, and the way he arranges those sounds, add to, or express, the characters' loneliness. Rear Window is in many ways a study of urban loneliness, of how people are more isolated and lonely the more densely packed together they are. The film describes effectively that loneliness Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych experienced, near death, alone on his couch, "a loneliness in the midst of a populous town and surrounded by numerous acquaintances and relations but that yet could not have been more complete anywhere -- either at the bottom of the sea or under the earth." In Rear Window we watch people suffer, but we hear, at the same time, people who do not. All the tragedies of Rear Window play out against a panoply of incidental sounds: children laughing and playing, sirens, cars honking in the street, the sound of rain falling from a gutter, and the vast array of musical sounds: tinkling from the Composer's piano, a woman practicing opera scales, neighbors' record players from which issue, in the course of the film, snatches of country and classical music and pop standards. The effect of all of these incidental sounds is to add a touch of sadness or poignancy to the scenes of loneliness and suffering we witness. We see people suffer while we hear the world humming away indifferently.

The scenes in which we watch, with Jeff, as Miss Lonelyhearts struggles with her solitude, are almost invariably conjoined to music that seems to contrast with her emotions or to comment ironically on them, music that often seems to pity and mock her at the same time. Choosing Bing Crosby's "To See You is to Love You" as a background piece for the scene in which Miss Lonelyhearts pantomimes a date with an imaginary lover is doubly ironic, commenting on Jeff's voyeurism and tendency to have his most intense relationships with women on whom he peeps and also commenting on Miss Lonelyhearts' romance with a man only she can see. The words "and I see you every night" underline her pathology, taking what should be a romantic song and making it comically eerie. The song mocks Miss Lonelyhearts. But, on the other hand, its melancholy melody, mixed with Jeff's sympathetic gaze and Miss Lonelyhearts' subsequent breakdown and realization of her actual loneliness, give the scene a sympathetic quality at the same time. The tune seems to score her grief while the words comment ironically. It both feels for her and mocks her.

Similar alchemy takes place the night she readies herself to go out and pick up a man at a bar across the street from Jeff's apartment complex. The scene is choreographed to the sound of another pop classic, again chosen for ironic purposes, "Waiting For My True Love to Appear." Obviously, this song is related to the first. Both have as their subject the summoning of an invisible lover. The song's lush romanticism and hopefulness contrast with the grim reality of Miss Lonelyhearts' situation, as she belts back a couple of drinks and comically fixes her girdle before heading out, like a soldier to the battlefield. The song seems almost pointed in its commentary on how far our pop fantasies are from the reality of our lives. But, here again, the song is not used entirely for sarcastic purposes. There is a sadness in its melody and hopefulness that does touch on Miss Lonelyhearts's situation.

As Miss Lonelyhearts' situation worsens, the music seems to become less ironic and more sympathetic. There is a lovely, touching contrast between sound and image when Miss Lonelyhearts brings her "true love" home. We hear the large group

of people at the Composer's party singing "Mona Lisa" as we watch Miss Lonelyhearts physically fending off the far too aggressive young man she has brought home. Here again, Hitchcock creates texture through contrast. The sound of the jubilant party crowd contrasts with the tragedy of Miss Lonelyhearts. We get that loneliness amidst a population that Hitchcock specializes in. But, there is less irony now. The words of the song do not comment so mockingly on Miss Lonelyhearts' pathetic life. Just as Miss Lonelyhearts crumbles in grief at her table on the night she entertains her imaginary lover as the song "To See You is Too Love You" winds down, here she flings herself on the couch in despair just as the melancholy strands of "Mona Lisa" wind down.

Finally, on the night Miss Lonelyhearts contemplates suicide, Hitchcock abandons irony and gives full reign to his sympathy. Miss Lonelyhearts begins her suicide by pills to the sound of "Lisa's Theme," which has accumulated a good deal of meaning through Hitchcock's juxtaposition of it with scenes involving Lisa's sadness and unreturned love for Jeff. The plights of Lisa (whose life is also in danger in this scene -- she is just above Miss Lonelyhearts snooping in Mrs. Thorwald's apartment) and Miss Lonelyhearts are joined here. And aside from the cleverness of building the soundtrack into the action of the film, there is no humor distancing us from Miss Lonelyhearts' situation, only fully expressed sympathy.

Despite Hitchcock's reluctance to make statements about the human condition in his films, *Rear Window* comments movingly on certain universal themes, particularly the loneliness and isolation of humans and the even more particularly a certain kind of modern, American, urban loneliness and isolation. The commentary is particularly eloquent because it rarely resorts to words, but is expressed through acute and poignant observation of the sounds and images of loneliness, and a touching counterpoint of the two. There is much in *Rear Window* that runs counter to Hitchcock's reputation (self-promoted to a great degree) as the Grand Ghoul of cinema, the sadistic manipulator of his audience's emotions, the misanthrope who penned Uncle Charlie's speech in *Shadow of a Doubt* about the pigsties that lie behind the facade of people's homes. Hitchcock was less voluble about the gentler aspects of his art but a deep empathy for humanity and a sympathy for its loneliness is evident in *Rear Window*, less in the films' words than in its sad and quietly echoing sounds.

WORKS CITED

Bresson, Robert. *Notes on the Cinematographer*. London: Quartet Books, 1985.

[Hitchcock, Alfred](#). "Life Among the Stars." *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*. Ed. Sidney Gottlieb. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

Naremore, James. *Acting in the Cinema*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

Schickel, Richard. *The Men Who Made the [Movies](#)*. New York: Atheneum, 1975.

Spoto, Donald. *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1983.

Truffaut, Francois. *Hitchcock*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

Weiss, Elisabeth. *The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Soundtrack*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1982.

John Fawell is an Associate Professor at the College of General Studies at Boston University. He writes on film (particularly French film and Hollywood) and world literature. His articles can be found in *American Detective*, *French American Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Literature Film Quarterly*, *French Review*, and other journals.

Fawell, John

Source Citation (MLA 7th Edition)

Fawell, John. "The sound of loneliness: *Rear Window's* soundtrack." *Studies in the Humanities* 27.1 (2000): 62+. *General OneFile*. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.

URL

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA94207317&v=2.1&u=mlln_m_dovershs&it=r&p=GPS&sw=w&asid=f979448e996695d25637712aba5d02f2

Gale Document Number: GALE|A94207317