

**NWRPA Newsletter April 2019**  
**Beyond Doubt: Alfred Hitchcock's Lina**  
**Paul Melia**  
**Friday 12 April 2019**

**Summary by Frank Kelley**

This clinically orientated workshop was facilitated by Paul Melia a practising analyst with the School of the Freudian Letter and Chair of the NWRPA.

Paul organised his talk around clips from Alfred Hitchcock's 1941 Gothic romance *Suspicion*. Though filmed in Hollywood the film is set in England in 1938. The romantic leads are Joan Fontaine, playing Lina McLaidlaw, and Cary Grant, playing Johnnie Aysgarth. The plot centres on Lina's suspicion that Johnnie is trying to kill her. There is the thrill of love and the threat of murder.

They meet on a train and she falls in love when she sees his image in the newspaper he is reading. They meet again as she sits on a rearing horse. Paul noted that Johnnie is never much more than an image and we learn very little about him. In the early scene with the horse Lina expresses her thought that if she ever got the bit between his teeth she would not have any trouble handling him. He rearranges her hair and snaps shut her reticule.

Lina is outside her family home and tells Johnnie that if she comes home late and beautiful her father will have a stroke. Standing by an open window she overhears her father say she is not the marrying sort and will always be a spinster. Her parents' views seem unbearable and she turns and kisses Johnnie. At luncheon she is defiant and determined and tells her father that she has met a man and is going to see him again.

Sigmund Freud wrote a case study of *Dora* in *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905). He writes of a slap which, like Lina's kiss, brings an unbearable feeling to an end. This kiss is a bridge to another form of existence.

Following this passage to a kiss Lina McLaidlaw marries Johnny Aysgarth. She compares him to the celebrated Rialto Bridge in Venice. After their honeymoon she reluctantly admits to herself that her husband does not observe the moral law. In the language of the time he is a charming scoundrel. Questions arise, like why did he marry her? As doubts give way to suspicions the image of a broken footbridge appears repetitively.

She finds that their lavish honeymoon and extravagant home have been funded by Johnnie through loans. He has also raised money by selling her antique chairs. Doubt becomes suspicion when she fears that he is going to repay his loans with her

inheritance. Everyday words and images become threatening. At the height of this disturbance she looks at an image of a cliff and imagines Johnnie throwing her off. She fears he is trying to throw her out of their car when he notices her door is unsafely open and closes it.

She hears about Johnnie's debts from his old friend and by seeing her family chairs in an antique shop window. Her doubts are vindicated by discovering that Johnnie has been dishonest. However her deeply felt and disturbing suspicion that he will murder her turn out to be unfounded.

Lina has a neurotic style which means delusions can be used to explain her troubles at life becoming very different. These delusions can become fixated and then always carry this function.

Johnny has always ignored the law but by the end of the film eventually submits to the law, providing Lina – a keen horse rider – with the chance to metaphorically get the bit between his teeth. He decides to face his debtors and Lina's suspicions then fall away.

Paul pointed out that Hitchcock meticulously planned his films, including the symbolic elements. We have repeated glimpses of a landscape picture of the famous Rialto Bridge in Venice and the novel *Murder on the Footbridge*. There are claustrophobic spider web shaped shadows. The background music *Vienna Blood* is played in either a major key or a minor key depending on the mood of the scene.

These symbolic elements, particularly the pervasive claustrophobic shadows are a reminder about Freud's thoughts about dreams. While he recommends interpreting dreams as the royal road to the unconscious there is also something about the tangled thoughts of the dream that cannot be interpreted.

Paul pointed out the importance of Johnnie ignoring and then facing the law in this film. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan emphasised the importance of the third party in the Oedipus complex he called *the place that she [the mother] reserves for the Name-of-the-Father in the promulgation of the law*. He saw this as a vital element in helping each new member of the human race to move from an exclusive, primary relation to the mother to a wider engagement with the outside, cultural world of the symbolic order.

**Thank you to Paul Melia.** This was a skilful bringing together of a clinically oriented presentation and a multi-layered analytic understanding of Alfred Hitchcock's film *Suspicion*.