

In a Mirror

'For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known'.

I Corinthians 13:12 (ASV)

A low moon clouds in daylight. A young girl in a red dress sits in a barn, her black horse plaything cradled to her chest. She looks up, sets her childhood aside, picks up a mosaic-mirrored music box and applies precocious pearlescent lipstick and deathly soot-black khol. A black horse, real this time, majestic and breathing cajoles its way past the door left ajar. A woman drives. Wind blows. A corn field rises.

Written and directed by Orson Hentschel, *IN A MIRROR* tells the story, or rather, deconstructed narrative of a girl wandering dreamlike into womanly desire. Past, present and future collide; living and inanimate intertwine; identities entangle and unwind, as lingering shots meditate on the faces of woman and girl. Time and space are suspended yet remain visceral and real. The phenomenology of experience felt and sensually recognised. Each head of corn quivers in the whispered wind of secrets known but universally private. Each moment and velvet sunspot hazes and heaves with significance. Corn fields nestle with electricity pylons as silence sparks and rustles with the innocence of girlhood, and a car glides through hilltop farmland landscapes green and grey.

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This is a film which is impenetrable yet utterly human. It enacts, through shared human instincts of aesthetic perception and emotional response, a strange force which draws you in, pulls you deeper and darker into the familiar confusion of its upside-down world bathed in dusky hues and dusty light. We feel empathy in her confusion. We are compelled, through our own experience of visually enticing sequences of hazy beauty and ambiguous glimpses of stories never to be told, to tread too in her journey, to realise her awakening in horse-blinkered sight.

We see mirrors in water in metal pails, mirrors in bejewelled Pandora's boxes, rear-view mirrors on cars as empty tree-lined roads map avenues and trajectories of moments of her life. Meta-levels of self-observation and an awareness of inner

and outer selves which should be inconceivable for a child seem here at once natural, naïve and unnerving. Who is the watching and who is the watched? Does our protagonist look backwards or forwards? Does our vision mirror hers or intrude upon it?

The atmosphere is unnerving and eerie with a heightened sense of apprehension. Anxiety creeps and gasps. IN A MIRROR's sparse soundtrack, written by Hentschel himself, escalates and purrs, whispers and heaves. The film is devoid of spoken dialogue, presenting only an inner silent monologue between the girl younger and elder — the woman becoming and fully grown, an exchange never voiced or comprehended, a silent diatribe or an inner echo of celebration. Discernment is dulled and the symbolic black horse, the hair of its mane at once repulsive, glossy and alluring, pedigree and abject, points to impulse and shame, desire and destruction. For the girl, in acts and thoughts she herself does not, perhaps never will, understand. Pleasure and pain are awakened, forever reflected one in the other.

Shorts: Connection screens on 28th Aug at 21.00 at the Cambridge Film Festival.

Review by Hannah Clarkson, Take One Magazine