

The Rules of the Game (1939)

[Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*](#) is a brilliant comedy of manners, an absurd comic farce that ends in tragedy. The film is now considered not only one of the greatest films in the world but an amazing advancement of lighting and cinematography. Renoir remarkably constructed husbands and wives, masters and servants, and lovers and adulterers, and placed them within a story to commit several unmoral acts with one another. Once Renoir gets his characters to all pair up, the game of love begins and the characters roam through halls and bedrooms, swapping partners and creating new quarrels, while in the meantime trying to portray to the other guests that they are a classy bourgeoisie society. Renoir develops a groundbreaking technique with his style of cinematography as he clashes montage and editing together within several of his shots, creating a unity with space and time with the arrangement of people and objects. With several stories and events being depicted at once, Renoir creates a depth of field which creates different layers of action for the spectator to look at and get involved in.

The Miser-En-Scene in several scenes later in the film allows characters to come and go in the foreground and background, sometimes disappearing in the distance and then reappearing in close-up. It's extraordinary how Renoir gracefully moves a weightless camera from rooms and

corridors elsewhere in the house, effortlessly advancing half a dozen courses of action, so that at one point during a moment of foreground drama a door in the background opens and the spectator can see for a slight second the latest development in another relationship. Because of this depth of field that Renoir creates throughout the composition of the scenes, the spectator gets to decide what to look at which can create several different interpretations with several different viewers. In a remarkable early scene in the film which occurs during the theatre reenactment, Renoir shoots one long tracking shot which consists of the camera gliding through the room and laying out for the audience each main character and their upcoming agenda for the evening.

The Mise-En-Scene use of lighting and shadows projects what seems to be a spotlight as it moves throughout the shot and within the shadows of the audience casting itself upon all the major players of the story. With the use of the spotlight, Renoir is projecting the main players dramas as if their on a stage for the spectator's entertainment; which makes for an interesting contrast to the theatre reenactment that is simultaneously going on in the background for the other guests at the party. This long take and many of the compositions later in the film which covers the action, has the spectator follow the director throughout the estate, forcing some images upon the viewer and also making others much more ambiguous within the structure of the story.

The groundbreaking use of cinematography and lighting has been very influential for several later directors like Wim Wenders and most famously Robert Altman. Robert Altman was so influenced by Renoir's use of montage, editing and the depth of field which gives spectators a personal choice to follow a certain character within the frame; that he brought that style to another level with *Nashville*, *Shortcuts* and *Gosford Park*. Renoir created a new unique form of story structure and gave it an added level of depth and layers with *Rules of the Game*. Because of

Renoir's unique creation of projecting several character's and stories in one scene it can give the viewer a opportunity to catch something new within the foreground or background that their eye didn't catch the first time watching it.