

Document Citation

Title	Borderline
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	synopsis
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Borderline, MacPherson, Kenneth, 1930

BORDERLINE

(SWITZERLAND, 1929-30)

DIRECTED BY KENNETH MACPHERSON. WITH PAUL ROBESON, ESLANDA ROBESON, H. D., GAVIN ARTHUR, AND CHARLOTTE ARTHUR. 5 REELS.

BORDERLINE is one of the forgotten experimental films of the Anglo-Saxon avant-garde movement centered around the film journal **CLOSE-UP**, which thrived in the late twenties and early thirties. **CLOSE UP** bemoaned the set-back to film artistry brought by sound, and one suspects that its editor Kenneth Macpherson made **BORDERLINE** as a defiant gesture in defense of the purity of silent images. Aside from its charm as a visually inventive experiment, **BORDERLINE** remains of interest for its progressively nonchalant treatment of blacks, as indicated below in this passage from **THE NEGRO IN FILMS** by Peter Noble, who is wrong in calling **BORDERLINE** Paul Robeson's first film (he appears in **BODY AND SOUL**, a 1925 film by Micheaux showing in this series Oct. 25):

... it was in the following year, when he was in London, that Robeson was persuaded to make his first film appearance. This was in an experimental silent film, **BORDERLINE**, produced in Switzerland, for Pool, by Kenneth Macpherson, editor of the well-known cinema journal *Close Up* and an enthusiastic theoretician of film production and technique. Paul played a leading part in this film (in which Eslanda, his wife, also appeared), as Pete, a half-vagrant, young giant Negro. He enacted the leading role in a mixed cast; director Macpherson allowed no distinction to be drawn between the Negro and the white characters. In fact he was so deliberate about this that one film reviewer at the time remarked, "The white folk of necessity, in this film, take subsidiary value. Macpherson has decreed this with delicate irony and ferocity." **BORDERLINE** was about two Negroes who come in their wanderings to a small mid-European town. For a time they cross the backwater of small-town vice and malice, and leave it cleansed and hallowed when they depart. It was delicately played and directed. Macpherson will probably be the last to claim for his film any great importance, since on many occasions he declared himself to be far more interested in abstract film values than in concrete social realities. However, that he wrote, produced and directed **BORDERLINE**, which not only gave prominent roles to Negroes but depicted them in an heroic light, must be accounted a considerable, and certainly an historic, achievement. This Pool film is important not so much in itself as for the fact that firstly it marked the film debut of Paul Robeson, and secondly it was the first of the lamentably short list of motion pictures which have treated the Negro and his problems with sympathy. It is likely that this modest production has now been forgotten ... in any study of the Negro on the screen his gesture, **BORDERLINE**, will not only not be forgotten but will always have a place of primary importance.

Another item of fascination about **BORDERLINE** is that Gavin Arthur, the San Francisco astrologer and underground celebrity, appears in the cast.

SILENT (24 FPS) 35mm