Comparing psycho and the shining movie review sample

Family, Parents

Psychological thrillers have had a long and storied history in film; the ability to capture stories about the deranged and the psychotic, whatever their diagnosis, has led to many intriguing and critically acclaimed films. Two of these are Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 thriller Psycho, in which mother-obsessed serial killer Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) stalks and murders women who check into his hotel, and the 1980 Stanley Kubrick chiller The Shining, where Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) goes insane over a harsh winter in a disturbing hotel he must oversee for the winter. Both films exercise wonderful filmic techniques to convey the shock and terror of these psychological thrillers, depicting madness in innovative and interesting ways.

Psycho is an excellent example of 'pure cinema' - a plethora of filmic techniques are used to great aplomb to elicit feelings of terror and unease in the audience, creating a film that chills to the bone. The use of black and white as a filmic technique is very interesting, as it allows for much starker cinematography, while also playing with the idea of good and evil and the duality of man – Norman Bates, due to his psychotic nature and dual personalities, has these light and dark sides to him, and the black and white informs the viewer subtly as to this duality. Norman's ' mother' is represented as a shadow character, seen only through silhouetted windows and as Norman talks about her/to her; she is a phantom, created entirely in Norman's head as she inhabits him and leads him to murder.

The scene where Marion drives away after stealing $40, 000, trying anxiously to escape, elegantly displays Marion's psychological state and the tension of the situation. We see her hands shift nervously on the steering wheel, while

we hear in voiceover (and presumably in Marion's head) the conversation between her boss and his other secretary about where she could possibly be. As the inner monologue continues, as the camera keeps cutting back to the road (which grows darker), Hitchcock centers some key lighting on Marion's face, obscuring everything else and leaving it in the dark, also pushing the camera even further in on her face as the storm rages and she grows more and more unsure of her driving. Here, the director is simply and effectively placing us inside Marion's head, as we comprehend exactly how paranoid she is of getting caught, and how these actions will affect her day to day life. Bernard Hermann's string-heavy score also screeches imposingly over her face, helping to sell her distress. Throughout the film, the score is used to great effect to play on the viewers' emotions; the screeching strings cause a great deal of tension and the feeling of disorientation and falling, much like the characters in the film experience.

Another scene that shows Hitchcock's ability to chill through cinematic technique is when private detective Arbogast (Martin Balsam) meets his fate at the hands of mother. From the moment he enters the Bates house, it is empty - the camera cuts to all of the areas of the house Arbogast checks. Climbing the stairs, Hitchcock shows a closeup of his feet starting the climb, foreshadowing the danger of falling down them. The mother's true identity as Norman is obscured by never showing the mother's face; first, we see an imposing shot of light shining through the crack in the door Norman opens. Then, we see a chilling top down shot as Norman rushes toward Arbogast and slashes him. The point of contact isn't shown, but the horrific effect is achieved by quick-cutting to a terrified Arbogast's face, which has a red slice

in it. The camera lingers on his face as he falls down the stairs in an almost inhuman way, staring at us in terror as we see the floor rush toward us in the background. This scene is absolutely terrifying, as the mixture of stillness and movement creates a disturbingly elegant depiction of Norman Bates' latest murder.

Meanwhile, The Shining showcases Jack Torrance's descent into madness in a much more patient and claustrophobic way. This is seen throughout the film, as the immense hallways and off-putting scenery of the Overlook Hotel seem to dwarf Jack and his family. The mise-en-scene for the film is most definitely its showcase in the early parts of the film; Kubrick wants to show us how helpless the characters are, Jack especially, in such a labyrinthine and oppressive environment. In one scene, Jack has his typewriter on a table in the middle of a large room, Kubrick slowly panning around the large, opulent ballrooms of the hotel until we finally see him, all by himself. Seeing such a small figure in the middle of such an oppressively large environment makes him feel both small and intimidating; the hotel feels as though it is swallowing him whole and turning him into something else. The use of fisheye lens during many scenes in which the family is being oppressed and haunted by the house alludes to this surrealistic nature of the film, as well as Kubrick's penchant for wide shots and symmetrical framing. Everything is just too orderly, with just a little bit of it seeming off – just like the hotel itself. This vague and nonspecific sense of unease is one of the reasons The Shining works so well as a horror piece.

Both Psycho and The Shining demonstrate experts in suspense using filmic techniques to depict the effects of madness, both on the victims and the

perpetrators. Psycho's use of pure cinema techniques allows the audience to see just enough to convey the story, all while placing them in the terrified perspective of the characters in the film. The Shining, meanwhile, pulls the audience back, forces them to watch from a fishbowl as the characters inside go mad. One does not feels in danger like with the characters in Psycho to the same extent, but we are given a much slower burn, as the bigness of the house and the smallness of the characters begins to take its hold on them (and us). While Hitchcock likes to throw us right in the action, Kubrick is more restrained, showing us the architecture of this madness long before we actually get to the infamous point where Jack is breaking through the door with an axe to kill Shelley Duvall. These vital differences make these two pictures very different in style, but equally effective in execution.

Works Cited

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