

Psycho by alfred hitchcock

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Hitchcock and Dualism in Psycho The characters in Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho (1960) each have a dual nature that is masterfully portrayed through character development and use of mirrors throughout the film. The very first shot in Psycho is zooming in from an open view of the city where it is a bright and sunny day. As the shot zooms in further and further it comes into a dark and shaded room that shows Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) and Sam Loomis (John Gavin) having an affair in a undisclosed hotel. This is dualistic image is just one example of many that Hitchcock has placed in this film.

Marion Crane is the first main character that is focused upon for the first half of Psycho. " All that Marion Wants, after all, are the humble treasures of love, marriage, home, and family. " (Brill 227) [up and down] This is the reason why Marion steals the money in the first place. The money is her first real chance at escaping the life of meeting at cheap hotels in secret. The opening scene shows the lack of money and personal isolation that Marion has while making love in secrecy in a hotel that " aren't interested in you when you come in, but when your time is up. Marion is desperate for any type of companionship with Sam even claiming she would happily live in the spare room at his work. The progress of Marion in Psycho is followed very closely by her appearance and her apparel. "...the bag is a transgressive agent associated with stealing, escape, and independence. " (Gottlieb, Brookhouse 151) [Sarah Street 151] Before any crime was ever committed, Marion wore a white bag that matched her underwear and her clothing. After the money was taken, she made a choice to place the envelope of money in her black bag, rather than her suitcase which would completely hide the money.

Along with the change in bags, Marion also changes her underwear to black, and her outer clothes to dark colors as well. Marion's death is very symbolic and dualistic in a multitude of ways. " The fact that Marion is nonetheless murdered after her self-realization suggests that neither she nor the society that produced her is recuperable" (Gottlieb, Brookhouse 362) [Christopher Sharrett 362] Once Marion had made that fatal mistake to become a criminal, she was destined to die as a criminal, with no chance of salvation. This is very dualistic of the ending of the frontier, which was right around the time Psycho was produced. the movement of the film is steadily downward and inward, away from the feeling of daylight, abundance, and expanse to a nightmarish claustrophobia that exteriorizes the unconscious mind. " (Gottlieb, Brookhouse 362) [Christopher Sharrett 362] The image of the West being a gigantic open expanse was coming to an end and Hitchcock showed that the frontier was finished and there was no chance of it coming back. Hitchcock places a large amount of dualism between the characters of Marion, Sam, Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins), and Lila Crane (Vera Miles). The first couple, Sam and Marion, engenders the second, Norman and Marion: Norman has thus taken the place of Sam. Yet he has actually, diegetically speaking, taken the place of Marion, given the mirror dialectic between the sexes and their psychic structurations. " (Deutalbaum, Poague 357) [Bellour 357] The couple of Marion and Sam never got a chance to be married, but as the film goes through the second half, it is Sam and Lila that are " married" as they go to the motel. Lila doubles as her lost sister as the heroine of the film, following nearly the same actions as Marion.

The look on Lila's face as she finds the mummy is identical to that of Marion's in the shower Hitchcock uses mirrors quite a bit in Psycho to really help express dualism in this film. "... depthless images in mirrors that are used systematically throughout Psycho to prefigure the shattering of its characters' personal coherence. " (Brill 227) [up and down] Brill states how Hitchcock uses mirrors to match up the different characters and to show that there is a lot more depth than what the viewer may first think.

Through use of mirrors, Hitchcock brings a much deeper meaning to certain scenes with different characters than would otherwise be without mirrors. One of the most crucial uses of mirrors in Psycho is when Marion is at the car dealership. " When she takes the damning step of spending some of the money, she is radically bisected by a downward looking shot and a mirror in the washroom where she takes the cash from her purse. " (Brill 227) The image in this scene is extremely important to the dual nature of Marion.

At this point, she passes the point of no return and is cut in half by the mirror. The half image of Marion shows that she has split herself in two, good and evil, and the evil side is the one that has taken over. The second half of Psycho, in which Marion is dead, shows the dualism between Marion and the other characters. When Detective Milton Arbogast (Martin Balsam) first interrogates Norman, his back is to the mirror in the parlor, almost identical to that of Marion when she first entered the motel. Sam appears more than once in the same mirrors while questioning Norman. When Lila is searching the house for Ms. Bates she comes upon the double mirrors in her bedroom. " This moment constitutes Hitchcock's most explicit suggestion that his characters are experiencing-and we are watching- not something weirdly

outside ordinary experience, but the expression of a potential for personal distortion and violence that is the other side, the mirror image, of human normality” (Brill 227) This moment is key for Hitchcock because he shows the viewers that something like this could actually happen.

There are people in the world that are not mentally stable and that do the type of things that Norman Bates does. Hitchcock also shows a large amount of dualism between the characters in Psycho and birds. “...a complex analogy between bird and human that exists in Psycho and is announced in the opening sequence of the film. Over the bird’s-eye view of a city [...] evoke the point of view of a bird who glides down, alights on the window ledge, and slips into the room. (Gottlieb, Brookhouse 295) [Richard Allen] Another sense of duality is present in the last names of Marion Crane and Sam Loomis, both different types of birds and both can be seen as a pair of love-birds. The duality in with birds in Psycho becomes extremely apparent with Norman Bates. When Norman is talking to Marion, he tells her: “ My hobby is stuffing things. You know, taxidermy. I guess I’d just rather stuff birds because I hate the look of beasts when they’re stuffed. You know, foxes and chimps. Some people even stuff dogs and cats but, oh, I can’t do that.

I think only birds look well stuffed, well, because they’re kind of passive to begin with. Norman’s claim that birds are passive to begin with, is a reference to the habits of birds and is implied to being a habit of women as well. His obsession with stuffing birds culminated in the creation of his prized “ stuffed bird”, the mummy of his mother. “ This ‘ stuffed bird’ was created by the act of ‘ stuffing a bird’ in the sense that combines both a sexual act- the implied incest between Norman and his mother- and the act of killing.

The monstrous figure of Norman's mummy is condemned endlessly to repeat this act. " (Gottlieb, Brookhouse 296) [Richard Allen] Marion is the first victim of this sexual and murderous bird that swoops down from the house and attacks her. The knife can be seen as a form of " pecking" that is used to kill her. After being " pecked" Marion Crane eventually ends up slumped over, very dualistic to that of a bird with a broken neck staring blankly upward. The stare of death that remains on Marion's face is a mirror image of the birds that hang in the parlor of the motel, permanently stuck staring out from death.

The angles of the shots when Marion and Arbogast are being murdered are from a very high up view to symbolize even further to create a duality between Norman's mother and a bird. " Hitchcock's camera, initially identified with the love-bird, now comes to occupy the gaze of the death-bird in a series of high-angled shots that accompany the murder of Marion [...] swoops down to murder Arbogast on the landing of the gothic staircase. " (Gottlieb, Brookhouse 296) [Richard Allen] Both murders relate to a frenzied bird swooping down from high above and attacking its prey with its vicious beak.