

"the birds" by alfred  
hitchcock essay  
sample



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## **“ The Birds” by Alfred Hitchcock Essay Sample**

The film we are going to be reviewing is called “ The Birds” and was directed by Sir Alfred Jacob Hitchcock. This apocalyptic thriller was distributed in the year 1963 by Universal Pictures, and had been based upon the story written by Daphne Du Maurier. This film is filled of chaotic attacks of ordinary birds, and not of birds of prey, and we are looking at one particular scene, “ The Climbing Frame

Before this scene, you find that the movie is set in Bodega Bay. Melanie (acted by Tippi Hedren) finds out that Mitch (acted by Rod Taylor) lives in this town of water. She goes along to this village and sees him to deliver some lovebirds. As she approaches the port of the lake she is attacked by a gull. This is the first sign in which we establish that the suspense has started. We find out that, “ the birds” is not an ironic title for the film but is explanatory before you have either seen the cover or the whole film. After this part of the movie, Melanie has decided to stay in Bodega Bay with the consultation of Mitch. She has dinner with Mitch’s family and this is when the second attack occurs, as more birds fly in through the fireplace.

This creates tension, because I had never imagined that the birds could come in through the fireplace during a pleasant evening meal. This came as a shock to me as I did not think of that to be possible. I do not think we were expecting birds to attract people as they seem pleasant in real life. Before this designated scene the birds have been used build up to one horrifying attack. Each attack is worse than the other. The birds have been portrayed to give an impression that they are fierce and ruthless. This is shown in one

particular scene; this is when the Lydia goes to see her friend and finds a distressing and horrific image of him lying on the ground, with his eyes exposed without eyeballs, and the blood that leads Lydia to this finding. In my opinion, I think that the tension had begun in the start of the movie and not only in the selected scene.

"The Climbing Frame" scene is divided upon four sections; which are: when Melanie drives up to the school and enters, the actual climbing frame section, back in school and the attack. In the following paragraphs I will be describing how Hitchcock creates tension in the diverse sections.

The first section is when Melanie drives up to the school. This is the shortest section of the scene.

In each of the sections the camera shots are important. At the start of the first section, the camera was at head level. It had been mostly set on Melanie and her car, as she enters the scene and the set of the school. This sets the scene. It gives me the impression that this was going to be the start of a scene as it is a cliché. This doesn't create any tension yet as nothing has happened in the scene yet.

After this the camera starts to zoom in to show Melanie as she goes to keep an eye on Cathy. She is not aware of her fate before the event and so she keeps a straight face. She is doing this because Lydia has asked her to keep an eye on Cathy (she may have been happy to gain a minute amount of Lydia's trust in her). The camera then zooms in at the name of the school to tell us where this is happening, but also to tell us where the scene is setting up from. It sets the scene again as we find out that something may happen

in or around the school. The next camera shot we see is that of a fixed or followed shot. This shows the view as if someone was watching her going to the school but didn't want to go up close.

At this particular time, it follows Melanie as she emerges from the car and enters the school. This may be done to show that she wants to follow Lydia's instructions as full as she can. These camera shots, in my opinion, set the scene most (if not all) of the time at this stage.

The sound in this section also sets the scene. The car engines sound as she arrives at the school just sets the scene again. It clarifies the audience's reaction to the start of the scene. You do not really see Melanie approaching the school; however, you do hear the sound of a car engine. This may give you an outline of how this scene will begin.

Another sound is that of the children singing. This represents the innocence and the naivety of the children; because it could represent that the children do not know anything about if these chaotic birds will bother them. Melanie also has no clue of what may be her destiny. This brings up the point of 'dramatic irony.' This is when the people who are performing a play or something similar towards that do not know anything that is going on around them when the audience clearly do. Nothing had happened as yet but you can sense that something may. Alfred Hitchcock makes it seem as though the scene turns from that of a cheerful one to that of a terrifying experience.

Melanie and Annie have an understanding relationship and it seems to be special. You can tell this by how Melanie rudely interrupts Annie's lesson; and by how Annie responds to this. She simply signs to Melanie to go inside.

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Melanie shows an understanding of this and acknowledges that Cathy is fine. They are polite to each other most of the time. It shows that they have a comfortable relationship.

In section two we look at when Melanie is in front of the climbing frame when she is waiting to get Cathy out of school so that she can be sure that everything will be alright. This is when the birds start to mount on to the climbing framing gradually, one-by-one.

The camera shots in this section are very important. In my opinion, the large emphasis is on the section's camera shots include the climbing frame. It is empty at one stage, but then builds up in to a large flock of birds gradually. The effect that this produces is that we can see the birds lining up behind Melanie but she does not; thus emerging the point of 'dramatic irony' in to concept again.

Close-ups are used a great deal to show all of Melanie's emotions. She is not aware of the situation at the moment and so she is not showing a great deal of emotion. She is the focus of the camera shot and so you can get the idea that she is going to be the main character in this section. When the camera shows Melanie, she is smoking, which gave me the impression that she was either very tired or stressed or was very nervous about everything that may happen next. It may be that she is worried about Cathy as she persists at glancing at the window of the school's classroom.

Occasionally, there were one or two close-ups on the birds as they arrived on to the scene. This may have been done to give the audience a visual image of what is going to happen. This was used to create tension because it was

almost a two featured section. This is because you would see Melanie and then the birds, and this would happen two or three times. It is a contrast between the good and evil. It is almost as if you find a mammal to bird comparison. They are both the focus of the section.

The roaming shot is the next shot that we see; as we find that it follows what is going on from Melanie's perspective. She finds that something must be wrong and for one of the first times she is observant of her surroundings, and as she sees one of them it leads her to all of the other birds. This creates tension and suspense because the audience may have been wondering "What is going to happen next?" You see this image and this is when there is a slight pause in proceedings but then she runs up to the school in shock. Also you feel as though you are watching this happen to you and so it worries you a bit.

A fixed shot is used as Melanie moves towards the school after she realises where the bird she had previously followed went, she goes in to the school. The camera stayed at the place where she had sat and did not move as it was fixed on Melanie and how she reacted to this revelation. This now gives an impression that we (the audience) are these birds and so we are trying to see where she has gone. This is good because it shows her but the camera just stays at the same place, as if there had been a camera in the bench.

Another camera shot used in the second section is that that of a zoom shot. First they show the face of the character and then on the birds. This produces a switch. It is almost as if we expect there to be a kind of interaction with each other soon. This also produces slow danger it builds up

to the section. Again, she does not know of what is happening around her but then becomes aware.

The sound usage is clever in this section. The children's singing produces an image of 'good versus evil'. This is because you hear the innocence of the children as they sing and then you find the birds which are evil. The singing is loud so that it contrasts. The birds do not make a sound in this section as the featured sound is that of the children's.

When Melanie saw this large flock of birds together, it is apparent that she should scream but she does not. By keeping quiet it meant that there was more tension, as they would have attacked if there was to be a sound. This holds on the process of the attack. The audience are on the edges of their seats at this moment.

There are great deals of character expressions in this section. I realise that Melanie seemed to be very nervous as she twitches. Also, she smokes in this section to relieve herself of any stress of nervousness. This could have shown that she may have been worried for Cathy's health. This is good because it shows that she may be suspicious of what could happen next like a jigsaw puzzle.

Melanie tries to walk very slowly after she has just seen the birds. This is done so that she does not attract any of the birds' attention. This creates tension because then you feel as though something may happen at any moment and this is why she walks very attentively at this time.

In my opinion, Annie acts normally here; because, if she was to buckle under the pressure the children would have been liable to think that something is wrong. As a result of this, it may create panic amongst them. Also, Annie, like all the children, does not know herself what is happening.

In section three they are back inside the school. This is just before the attack. Melanie goes in to the classroom and tells Annie to close the doors and look at the climbing frame outside the window.

The only camera shot used here is to show Annie and Melanie all through. By following both of them it shows that they are almost the people in charge of the situation. It shows one shot of the climbing frame, and the rest of the classroom. Annie only just finds out. This camera effect is used to tell the audience of what is happening.

The sound used is minute. We can hear Annie and Melanie in a conversation, and in the background we hear the classes sound in unison afterwards. It is basically silent at this part and so people are wondering of what may happen next. The silence creates a moment of thought. This is used because then the audience can get an idea that the characters do not know what to do exactly.

The dialogue is strange in a way and is not stereotypical to what most school children would do. When Annie tells the class that they would be leaving school, they replied in unison the same line in a sad way. Most children would be ecstatic and overjoyed at this news but however these children were discontent.



Annie tries to hide her fear in this part as she is the lead role in this section. By hiding away this fear it may create doubt in the eyes of the audience. This is because, if the teacher did not know about what may have been going on how the children are supposed to.

In section four the attack occurs and it is almost as if all the other sections just build up towards this.

At the time of the attack, we find a large overview shot of the whole attack. From this shot the attack does not seem to be as brutal as it should be. This may be because then the audience can then see a contrast between not so brutal images to a brutal images. You find out everything that happened.

We find that close-ups are also used in this section. This close-up gives a brutal image and as we see the attack we see the definite output of this attack. The brutal ness shows what these birds can do. When you get up close you find that the suspense is more and this makes the audience think of " what if it was to happen to me?" There is nothing more terrifying than a bird full size on a television attacking others.

One sound is that of the birds flapping. This indicates that they are attacking and that none of the characters expected any of this. This is good because the flapping of the wings creates panic amongst the audience.

Melanie's reaction to the attack was that she was horrified and was surprised of what had just happened. This is because she went for cover in the car nearby and then lowered her head to touch the steering wheel. This shows that she was relieved when it was over. Three people were in that car, Cathy

who was crying, her friend who was also crying and Melanie who tried to get rid of these birds by beeping the horn. This is what causes the birds to vanish off as they go in the same direction as the other children had. I also noticed that they fly off to where the next incident happens. This could lead you to suspicions of what could happen in the next scene.

I think that Alfred Hitchcock does effectively create suspense by using the method of creating the 'good versus evil' effect. He also creates it so that it seems as though you are on a rollercoaster ride and so it builds up and as it slows down the pulse is up again. Using birds to create this suspense is good as you feel as though it could happen to anyone and even you! A modern audience would not feel the suspense as they may be distracted by the fake graphics, and the fake scenery, although it is an old film. I think it is a great film in the way of portraying the way in which you should create the tension and the suspense. Also, when you get to the end of the film then you want to know what is going to happen next. It keeps you wanting more. You can ask yourself questions like "Are they going to attack again?"