

## Film Techniques Used in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Their Impact on the Movie's Interpretation

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Many literary works can only be fully understood when they are adapted into movies. That is because film techniques used by filmmakers help the audience better understand the plots of such literary works. Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, which is an adaptation of Robert Bloch's thriller novel of the same name, is a clear example of how film techniques play a prominent role in helping the audience comprehend the plot. In fact, Hitchcock makes full use of many film techniques in this movie to show the plot and the characters so vividly on screen and, thus, he best clarifies his ideas according to his own interpretation of the plot. Hence, Hitchcock makes the audience not only understand what is going on but also get involved in it.

In *Psycho*, Marion Crane, a young lady working at a real estate office, steals forty thousand dollars from her boss. Instead of depositing this amount of money into her boss's bank account, as he has instructed her to do, Marion steals the money and escapes. Yet, Marion seems to have stolen this amount of money in order to help her lover, Sam, solve his financial problems so that they can get married. After stealing the money, Marion decides to flee to some place where no one can recognize her in order to hide herself for some time until everything is settled in Phoenix so that she can return to meet Sam and give him the money. However, on her way, Marion stops by a motel called The Bates Motel to spend the night there as it has started to rain heavily while she has been driving.

The Bates Motel is run by a young man called Norman Bates. Bates is apparently tormented by a condition of psychological disorder. He has been too attached to his mother. Yet, his mother has fallen for another man after his father's death, which has caused Bates to think that his mother has thrown him over for that man. Consequently, Bates murders his mother and her lover in bed. Matricide is the severest crime for all, yet it is far too severe for Bates as he has been too attached to his mother. Consequently, his mother's death at his hands causes him tremendous emotional and mental disruption. He has tried to do everything possible to erase this crime from his own mind. At first, he has stolen his mother's corpse from the Green Lawn Cemetery and hid it in the fruit cellar after having treated it very well in order to be capable of keeping it. Then, His personality has split into two parts: the young man part and the mother part. Having felt that stealing his mother's corpse has not been enough to completely erase this crime from his mind, Bates has

started to dress up in his mother's clothes and speak in her voice so that he could feel she is still alive.

This condition of emotional and mental disruption has even aggravated to the extent that whenever Bates meets a young lady and gets aroused by her, he recalls his mother's negligence for him and how she has made him a fool by throwing him over for another man. Hence, thinking that this girl may make him a fool by leaving him for another man just as his mother has done, Bates murders the girl at once no matter how much he has wanted her. In this way, Bates murders Marion while she is taking a shower in the bathroom. Yet, Marion, as the psychologist puts it at the end of the movie, has not been Bates's only victim. Bates has killed two other young ladies in the same way and for the same reasons he has murdered Marion for. He has also murdered Arbogast, the private investigator, who has been about to disclose Bates's crimes.

However, Bates's crimes are disclosed at the end of the movie at the hands of Lila, Marion's sister, and Sam. They manage to enter Bates's house, see his mother's corpse, and take Bates to the police station where everything is revealed to the audience by the psychologist who gets the whole story from Bates, or more accurately as the Psychologist states, "from the mother's half of Norman's mind" (*Psycho* 1:43:27-1:43:34).

In *Psycho*, Hitchcock, the director of the movie, makes use of every single film technique to clarify the plot of the movie. Film techniques are "methods employed by [filmmakers] to communicate meaning, entertain, and to produce a particular emotional or psychological response in an audience" (Quinones, slide 2). Hitchcock employs the music, camera angles, camera shots, lightening, and many other film techniques to clarify the plot and, thus, he makes the audience completely involved in what is going on in the movie.

The movie starts with a wide establishing shot by which Hitchcock introduces the audience to the setting of the movie. This shot starts wide, showing too many buildings as if the director wants to introduce the audience to Phoenix as a whole. Then the camera zooms in on a specific room in one of those buildings, so the audience get to know that it is the characters in this room that will be their main focus, and that it is the action taking place in it that will be their main concern. The camera then takes the audience, one by one, inside the room through

the window, and then the audience is not even introduced directly to what is going on inside this room, but all that the audience see all the way is darkness until the camera reaches Sam and Marion. This is a perfect technique to increase the audience's suspense, and it seems that Hitchcock has used this technique specifically because this long time of suspense perfectly matches the importance of the scene the audience will be introduced to. Now the audience is to be introduced to the romantic scene between Sam and Marion that will be the driving force of the plot. It is due to her love and sexual desire for Sam that Marion has stolen the forty thousand dollars from her boss, which has, in turn, led her to escape, and to eventually meet Bates who puts an end to her life.

In fact, Sam tells Marion that he shall not be able to marry her because he has many financial problems that he has to solve first, and he even encourages Marion to search for someone else more suitable for her. However, being in love with Sam, Marion does not leave him. Instead, she keeps thinking of finding an outlet, and this outlet occurs to her once she sees the amount of money with the real estate purchaser. Here, Hitchcock tries to convince the audience in every way possible that Marion was justified in stealing this amount of money. First, the way the purchaser talks about money and pays this amount of money "in cash" has tempted not only Marion but also her colleague that is not troubled by financial matters as Marion is. This can be seen clearly when the camera moves to Marion's colleague and she appears completely astonished by this huge amount of money.

Here, the audience expects that Marion will steal the money to solve her lover's problems. Hitchcock quickly affirms these expectations by the camera's extreme close-up at the money on Marion's bed, and then the camera moves directly to Marion's suitcase. Now the audience gets to know Marion's intention. She is now preparing herself to flee with the money. This intention is far more emphasized by Hitchcock's use of the mirror reflection technique. Actually, Hitchcock shows Marion's reflection in the mirror along with the reflection with the door behind her, as if he wants to emphasize to the audience that escaping with the money is the only thing the occupies Marion's mind right now. Yet, until the last moment before Marion leaves with the money, Hitchcock emphasizes to the audience that Marion has only taken the money because she has been tempted due to the trouble she and her lover are in. This is seen clearly in Marion's reluctant looks at the money before taking it finally.

While Marion drives her car to some place where no one can recognize her so as to keep herself hidden from the police, Marion's mind is troubled by fears. She is afraid of being discovered. This sense of fear aggravates when Marion sees her boss passing by while she is waiting at the traffic lights. This sense of fear is reflected by the angry music that starts when Marion sees her boss. In spite of the fact that her boss does not talk to her and that she has managed to flee, Marion's mind is still troubled

by fears. This sense of fear is also reflected in the appearance of the policeman who finds Marion sleeping in her car and awakens her to check her papers. Even the way the policeman knocks at the glass of the car to awaken Marion is terrifying. This sense of terror increases by the camera's sudden movement. Actually, the camera moves from Marion's terrified face on seeing the policeman in an extreme close-up to the face of the policeman, which, in turn, fuels the audience's sense of fear. This sense of terror increases with the loud angry music that starts one more time.

Marion manages to change her car and flee from the policeman who has been following her all the way. Yet, the feelings of terror and uneasiness never go away from either Marion's mind or the audience's. That is because it has started to rain heavily which shadows that it will be an awful night and also increases the audience's apprehensions that something bad is going to take place during this night. These apprehensions, doubts and uneasiness are reflected by the fluctuations of the car lights on Marion's way. Then, Marion stops by the Bates Motel.

When Marion arrives, Bates is seen behind the glass of one of the windows, dressing in his mother's clothes and walking. Thus, Hitchcock introduces the audience from the first time they see Bates to the main reason behind Bates's emotional and mental disruption that will lead him to murder Marion and then Arbogast. Marion calls out and honks her car; thus, Bates comes and helps her get into the motel. Now, Hitchcock makes use of many techniques to give the audience the sense that something bad is going to happen. First, the camera focuses on Bates while he hesitates over which room key to give her before he finally decides to give her the key of Room One. Then, when Bates is showing Marion the room's amenities he switches on the lights of the bathroom and points to the bathroom silently, and later on the audience comes to know that it is in the bathroom that Bates murders Marion. Just before leaving the room, Norman gazes at Marion for a long time and smiles this tells the audience that Bates may have admired Marion.

While Bates is inviting Marion to have dinner with him at his house, the audience see not only Marion but also her reflection in the mirror along with the journal in which she wraps up the money. It is a medium shot in which the audience see at first Marion alone while they see her and the journal in the mirror. Then, the camera's direction changes, so the audience see Marion and the journal while Marion appears alone in the mirror. By this technique Hitchcock makes us see Marion and the money from all the directions; thus, it seems that he wants to show the audience that it is only the money with Marion that preoccupies her mind and motivates her actions and nothing else. Additionally, Hitchcock uses the spatial element in the mirror reflection by showing her reflection that appears deep in the mirror to motivate the audience to look deep, not at Marion but, into her.

After Bates leaves Marion, his mother's voice is heard. Her voice is loud and decisive and her words are cruel. She tells Bates, in a directive tone, that she will not let him bring Marion to her house to have dinner with him. This indicates how the mother part of Norman's personality is too dominant. Also, when Norman tells her that he will let Marion in because she is "a stranger", she says, "Mother she is just a stranger! As if men don't desire strangers! As if... oh, I refuse to speak of disgusting things, because they disgust me! You understand, boy? . . ." (*Psych* 32:42-32:54). These are actually Bates thoughts about his mother. It is these words of disgust that Bates has wanted to say to his mother when she has neglected him for her lover. Now, it is Bates who says these words, but through the mother half of his personality.

When Bates brings the dinner to Marion he finds her standing outside the room, she invites him to enter, yet he hesitates and then suggests that it will be better to have dinner at his parlor. It seems that Bates hesitates from entering Marion's room because he fears that he may then develop some sexual relationship with Marion that will weaken his evil intention. In the parlor, there are stuffed birds and some terrifying images on the walls. Such images adds to the audience's sense of fear. In the parlor, Marion and Bates enter into a conversation about his mother and the reasons behind her ill-treatment for Bates. When Marion suggests that Bates puts his mother at "some place," Bates turns wild and responds aggressively to her, which again terrifies Marion and the audience. This sense of terror even increases with the terrifying music accompanying his words.

When Marion leaves Bates and enters her room, Bates appears in darkness surrounded by the stuffed birds, and then he peeps at Marion through a hole in the wall while she is changing her clothes. Now, it becomes clear for the audience that something bad will take place. Then, Bates goes directly to his house, dresses in his mother's clothes, and returns to kill Marion. Hitchcock has successfully employed film techniques to show the murder scene in a completely terrifying manner. First, he chooses that the murder takes place in the bathroom while Marion is taking a shower, which in turn terrifies the audience. To fuel the audience's sense of horror, the camera traces Bates as he enters the bathroom from behind the shower curtain. Then the audience's sense of horror culminates by Bates's sudden opening of the curtain, the angry loud music, the sight of blood in the bathtub and the extreme close-up of the camera at Marion's fixed eyes after having been murdered.

Then, Bates brings some cleaning supplies to remove all the traces of his crime. While he is engaged in cleaning, the camera moves to and from the journal in which the money is wrapped several times, as if Hitchcock wants to draw the audience's attention to the fact that it is this money that has caused Marion to meet this tragic end. Then he takes Marion along with her belongings and puts

her in her car that he drives until the stream where he heaves the car to drown.

Then in a scene transition, the audience is introduced to Marion's sister, Lila, who comes to Sam to ask him about her sister. The audience sees Lila and Sam's conversation through an over-the-shoulder shot that drops the audience into the conversation and makes them share in the tension over Marion's disappearance. Then the shot widens as Arbogast, the private detective, participates in this conversation. Through this wide shot, the audience can see what every one of them is doing and saying and the re-action of the other participants to his/her words. They finally agree that Arbogast will go alone in search for Marion while Lila and Sam stay in case she returns.

With the fast cutting technique, Hitchcock shows the audience that Arbogast has searched for Marion in many places and investigated many hotel owners before he, finally, reaches the Bates Motel. When asked about Marion, Bates tells Arbogast that he has not seen her as no one has registered at the hotel for two weeks. Yet, Bates then, by a slip of the tongue, tells Arbogast that a couple have registered at the motel "the other night." Thus, Arbogast suspects Bates and asks him to show him the register and to look one more time at Marion's picture. Now, Bates seems afraid for the first time in the movie. This is seen clearly by the camera shooting him from a low angle while he gradually gets closer to the camera, which indicates Bates's sense of fear because he thinks that Arbogast may have suspected him. Bates's sense of fear is emphasized by his trembling voice while trying to recount what has happened to Arbogast. Then, Arbogast sees the shadow of Bates's mother behind the window and asks him to let him ask her about Marion, but Bates refuses.

All this seems to have caused Arbogast to suspect Bates; thus, he decides to go back to the Bates Motel in order to meet Bates's mother. He enters the parlor first, but he does not find Bates. Arbogast now sees the terrifying stuffed birds. It seems before each murder, the victim sees the stuffed birds, as if such terrifying birds are the symbol of death in the movie in addition to their vital role in arousing the audience's sense of fear.

Then Arbogast moves to Bates's house and goes upstairs to the room of Bates's mother. Then the door opens and, all of a sudden, Bates appears dressing again in his mother's clothes and holding a knife. Actually, the sudden appearance of Bates increases the audience's sense of fear which is even more fueled by the crane shot of the scene murder.

When Arbogast does not return as he has told Lila over the phone, Sam goes to trace him. As Sam calls out Arbogast's name, the camera moves to Bates who is standing by the stream where he has let Marion's car drown. Thus, it becomes clear for the audience that Bates has thrown Arbogast's corpse in the stream, too. While

searching for Arbogast, Sam sees the shadow of Bates's mother behind the window.

Then, Lila and Sam decide go to the Sherriff and seek his help. When telling him that both Sam and Arbogast have seen the shadow of Bates's mother, the Sherriff says, "Norman Bates's mother has been dead and buried in Green Lawn Cemetery for the past ten years!" (Psycho 1:23:54-1:24:00). As Sherriff says such words, his voice becomes terrifying, which increases the effect of the shock on the audience.

Bates then tries to hide his mother's corpse in some place lest anyone comes to trace Arbogast and finds it. Bates, for the second time, carries on a conversation with his mother, or more accurately with the mother part of his mind, trying to convince her that he must hide her in the fruit cellar so as to be safe. Yet, in order to make the audience believe that Bates is really carrying on a conversation with his mother, Hitchcock makes the audience hear this conversation while the camera is out of the room. Consequently, when the audience comes to know at the end of the movie that it is Bates who has been speaking for his mother in such conversations, they become really shocked and at the same time convinced of to what extent Bates's mind has been troubled by holding two personalities.

Having been offered no help by the Sherriff, Lila and Sam decide to go to the Bates Motel on their own to search for Marion and Arbogast. They register there, and Lila enters the house to talk to Bates's mother while Sam is holding a conversation with Bates at his parlor to keep him away until she returns. When Lila enters the house she does not find Bates's mother. Yet, she sees many terrifying things. She sees some engravings in the mattress as if marking the places of two sleepers on it. This sight adds to the sense of fear of the audience. To fuel the sense of fear in Lila and the audience, Hitchcock makes Lila also see the sight of some stuffed birds. When Bates knows Lila has entered the house and goes back quickly to prevent her from seeing his mother, Lila hides under the stairs, where she sees the door of the fruit cellar. She enters the cellar and sees a woman looking in the other direction. Knowing that this woman is crippled, Lila tries to turn her around. Actually, Hitchcock makes good use of the reverse shot when the mummified mother appears, which increases the audience's sense of fear that reaches its peak

by Bates entering the cellar, dressing up in his mother's clothes and holding a knife to kill Lila and by the light that moves to and from the mummified mother's face.

However, Sam manages to stop Bates from murdering Lila and they take Bates to the police station where Bates tells the whole story to the psychologist. However, Hitchcock does not want to leave the audience even for a single moment at ease. He ends the movie by a terrifying seen of Bates speaking in his mother's voice about how much she has suffered at Bates's hand. Then the image of Bates smiling in a terrifying way dissolves slowly causing an overlap with another image of Marion's car being pulled out of the stream, which leaves the audience in terror.

To conclude, in *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock makes full use of film technique to clarify the plot of the movie. He perfectly employs camera angels, camera shots, lightening, music, and other film techniques to make the audience fully comprehend what is going on unlike many other directors who have depended only on ambiguity and vagueness in producing horror. By employing such film techniques perfectly, Hitchcock helps his audience not only comprehend the plot but also get involved in everything going on in the movie. Additionally, he makes his audience identify with his characters. The audience get tempted, suffer, and tremble with fear just as his characters do. He even gives the audience the opportunity to look deep inside all the characters and understand the motives behind their actions. Thus, in the end, the audience fully sympathize with all the characters, too.

#### Works Cited:

1. Quinones, Johnathan. "Film Technique." November 9, 2007, [slideshare.net/Jquizzle/film-technique](https://www.slideshare.net/Jquizzle/film-technique), Slide 1.
2. *Psycho*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Shamley Productions, Released by Paramount Pictures corp., 1960.