PSYCHO (1960)

Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho has been commended for forming the archetypical basis of all horror films that followed its 1960 release. The mass appeal that Psycho has maintained for over three decades can undoubtedly be attributed to its universality.

In Psycho, Hitchcock allows the audience to become a subjective character within the plot to enhance the film's psychological effects for an audience that is forced to recognize its own neurosis and psychological inadequacies as it is compelled to identify, for varying lengths of time, with the contrasting personalities of the film's main characters. Hitchcock conveys an intensifying theme in Psycho, that bases itself on the unending subconscious battle between good and evil that exists in everyone through the audience's subjective participation and implicit character parallels.

It is with Marion's character that Hitchcock first introduces the notion of a split personality to the audience. Throughout the first part of the film, Marion's reflection is often noted in several mirrors and windows. Hitchcock is, therefore, able to create a voyeuristic sensation within the audience as it can visualize the effects of any situation through Marion's conscious mind.

The terror that Hitchcock conveys to the audience manifests itself once the audience learns that it empathized with a psychotic person to a greater extent than with a rational one when its sympathy is shifted to Norman. The shift from the normal to the abnormal is not apparent to the audience in the parlor scene but the audience is later forced to disturbingly reexamine its own conscience and character judgment abilities to discover why Norman's predicament seemed more worthy of its sympathy than Marion's.

The fear that Psycho creates for the audience does not arise from the brutality of the murders but from the subconscious identification with the film's characters who all reflect one side of a collective character. Hitchcock enforces the idea that all the basic emotions and sentiments derived from the film can be felt by anyone as the unending battle between good and evil exists in all aspects of life.

The effective use of character parallels and the creation of the audience's subjective role in the plot allows Hitchcock to entice terror and convey a lingering sense of anxiety within the audience through a progressively intensifying theme. Hitchcock's brilliance as a director has consolidated Psycho's place among the most reputable and profound horror films ever made.

Anderson, W. (2020). Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho: Theme Analysis. Retrieved from School Work Helper: https://schoolworkhelper.net/alfred-hitchcocks-psycho-theme-analysis/

THE BIRDS (1963)

Starting out as a literature mode in late eighteenth century, the Gothic, a movement that focuses on the struggle of women by using psychological terror, the supernatural, and doubling, has become a staple in film. It is no secret that Alfred Hitchcock routinely dabbles in the Gothic throughout most of, if not his entire filmography by exploring supernatural elements that disrupt character's psyche and induce terror. In particular, one of Hitchcock's most notorious pictures, The Birds (1963), uses the Gothic elements of psychological terror to explore its theme of women's role in society. Over the course of the film, several different species of birds attack a small town called Bodega Bay shortly after a woman from San Francisco arrives. This women's name is Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) and she does not fit the typical conventions of women during sixties. Instead of looking to become a housewife, Melanie chooses to remain independent and often indulges in promiscuous activities such as jumping into a fountain naked. These traits anger the more reserved resident of Bodega Bay, Lydia (Jessica Tandy), who is the mother of Melanie's love interest, Mitch (Rod Taylor). It is in the final attack sequence in The Birds, that the film makes use of several prominent aspects of the female Gothic mode. By utilizing Gothic text elements like psychological terror and doubling, The Birds central theme of Melanie rebelling against the traditional role of women is punished.

Prior to the scene in discussion, Melanie, and the rest of the main characters in the film, have survived an attack by the birds of Bodega Bay and finally are able to rest after a day of chaos. As the scene starts, all of the characters in the house are asleep, with the exception of Melanie, who sits up awake on the couch. Throughout the scene, the lack of film score and dancing shadows on the walls caused by the fireplace puts the audience in the same paranoid state as Melanie. The silence of the scene is broken when Melanie hears a noise upstairs and independently follows the source to stumble upon a room filled with several different species of birds. Inside the room, the first shot of the sequence shows Melanie walking out of harsh shadows, made from low-key lighting, and into the light so the audience can observe the physical features of her face. These same features are the ones Melanie openly uses in the film to trick characters into thinking she is innocent so she can pull pranks. Immediately after allowing the audience to observe these features, in the next shot Melanie is violently attacked by the birds. Over the course of the next 130 seconds, any of the traits that made Melanie independent and unlike most female characters in film at the time become stripped away as she falls paralyzed and is unable to stop the birds from attacking. During the attack, other than the flapping and cawing of the birds, the only other noise that is heard is the sexualized moans of Melanie, as before the eyes of the audience she is slowly regulated to a sex symbol. By using the Gothic approach of centering the scene on the terror Melanie faces, the audience is able to witness the events unfold from the perspective of Melanie in order to realize the horror present throughout the film is directed at her. The overall aesthetic of the scene on a visual level, such as the low-key lighting, and emphasis on negative ideas, such as death, further cements the film's

place in the Gothic. The fall out of the two-minute attack further strengthens the argument that the supernatural attack of the birds was a result of Melanie's willingness to circumvent gender roles.

In the second half of the final bird attack sequence, the audience is able to clearly see how the film explores the Gothic theme of women being punished for having agency and left alone for being submissive. Previously throughout the film, Melanie had agency such as when she followed the lead male character, Mitch, to Bodega Bay, however after the attack she does not impact the progress of the plot in anyway. Seemingly realizing that the birds were angry with her for upsetting the natural balance of gender roles, Melanie goes into a comatose state after the attack where she falls into the common damsel in distress role in film, allowing Mitch to carry her to safety. While Melanie is in this state, Mitch single handily escorts the family to safety, as the birds no longer threaten the group now that the gender roles are not being questioned. In addition, it is in this half of the sequence where the Gothic element of opposites doubling takes place. Throughout the film, Mitch's mother, Lydia, plays the domesticated housewife who is not fond of Melanie's independent, counter-culture lifestyle. After the bird attack, Melanie is put straight into Lydia's care and mirrors her exact docile state. It is in this scene Lydia understands Melanie can be controlled, and finally accepts that Melanie is good enough for Mitch because Melanie is similar to her. The themes and elements used to explore theme in The Birds throughout the film, and this scene in particular, are cornerstones within the Gothic mode.

The Birds central theme revolves around Melanie's willingness to disregard gender roles of women and through the supernatural attack of different birds punishes her for it. During the fall out of the final attack sequence things return to the status quo as the birds cease attacking when Melanie allows Mitch to save the day. By using story and visual elements common in Gothic text; The Birds is easily able to explore the theme of gender roles in society during the film's release. While this may not be entirely Hitchcock's view of how women should be treated, The Birds as a film clearly sets out to punish women.

Thompson, R. (2017, March 13). The Birds (1963) Analysis. Retrieved from Celluloid Cinema: http://www.celluloidcinema.com/post/the-birds

ROSEMARY’S BABY (1968

Rosemary's Baby is a pointed critique of the Catholic Church's restrictive attitudes surrounding a woman's bodily autonomy. The film plays on Rosemary's fears as a Catholic, as well as the Catholic Church's fear of women. Rosemary's Catholicism shapes her way of thinking and perceiving—nuns and priests populate her dreams, and she grows uncomfortable at Roman's suggestion that the Pope is unworthy of respect. Catholic beliefs about reproductive rights pervade the film, such as when Rosemary cries "I won't have an abortion!" despite her sharp pain, as do stereotypes surrounding Catholic families, such as when Rosemary tells Minnie she has over a dozen nieces and nephews. Minnie's more forward, New York-style way shocks Rosemary's more conservative, Catholic sensibilities. Throughout the film Polanski connects the ritualism of religion to the ritualism of theater, such as when Roman calls all religions "showbiz."

Performance, acting, and stagecraft are all central to the film, both literally and symbolically. The Bramford is immediately established as a haven for actors and theater professionals, and it supplies the setting for a story in which a coven with ties to the theater industry work together to cannily manipulate an actor's wife. Rosemary deduces that the coven lures Guy by promising him choice roles in Hollywood—so long as he fulfills his "role" in their plot to have Rosemary conceive the son of Satan. And by collectively deceiving Rosemary about their plans, all of the coven members are essentially actors staging a production for Rosemary's benefit. References to actors and acting abound, such as when Roman mentions Helena Modjeska, or when Rosemary watches a Busby Berkeley-style musical on television. Polanski also frames Rosemary's rape as a spectacle or performance, having a woman with old Hollywood glamour descend a staircase and prime Rosemary for her "role."

Rosemary's Baby adheres to the conventions of Gothic narrative, which often exploit the rift between male and female domains of experience in order to generate thematic dread, terror, and suspense. Gothic narratives often pit curious, intrepid heroines against ambiguously evil men in a mansion or castle-like setting, such as Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca. Polanski shows Rosemary consoling Guy in sulky moods, and enduring his condescending, infantilizing gestures, such as his spanking her. It is not until Rosemary's female friends corner her in the kitchen at her party and block Guy out that she is able to tell her story to a trusting audience. Polanski symbolizes Rosemary's womanhood with flowers and floral imagery, and uses satanism as a metaphor for Guy's marital rape. Rosemary's short haircut likely indicates a desire on her part to flout the gender roles and conventions that have been foisted upon her during the process of pregnancy and childbirth.

Evil is a vital theme coursing through the film, sometimes lurking beneath the surface and sometimes plainly visible. Hutch supplies a kind of abbreviated history of evil in The Bramford, telling Guy and Rosemary about the Trench Sisters (who cannibalized children) and Adrian Marcato, a devil worshipper. In their haste and eagerness to be part of an ultra-exclusive residence, Guy and Rosemary ignore Hutch's

warnings. The Tannis charm symbolizes evil, containing a foul-smelling mold or fungus called "Devil's Pepper." By showing the Pope wearing the Tannis charm in Rosemary's dream, Polanski paints the Catholic Church as evil. Minnie and Roman serve a thick steak to Rosemary and Guy that hints at the blood-and-flesh sacrifice that their coven practices. The black bassinet at the end of the film has an upside-down crucifix hanging inside of it, indicating that it carries the antichrist. The TIME Magazine cover Rosemary reads ("Is God Dead?") suggests a world in which evil has run amok.

Raised Catholic in Omaha, Nebraska, Rosemary has no qualms about being a homemaker and performing traditional wifely duties, like making her husband dinner and renovating their domestic space, making her an avatar of traditional motherhood. The purity and integrity of Rosemary's body is constantly under siege by outside forces. Over the course of the film, she is clawed, raped, sedated, made to drink vitamin mixtures, made to eat chocolate mousse, made to take pills, made to pump breast milk, and made to endure indescribable pain. The coven systematically siphons away her control over her own body, until they can finally ensure that she carries the son of Satan to term. Rosemary's dreams expose her Catholic fears about lapsing from a pure state, such as when a nun berates her, when her breasts are exposed in public, and when she ascends the Sistine chapel. Ironically, Rosemary's passivity and obedience, inculcated in her by her Catholic upbringing, are the traits that leave her vulnerable to the workings of a satanic cult.

Rosemary's Baby is a Gothic tale that exploits traditionally feminine fears about violation and helplessness. Polanski establishes Guy as a playfully dominant husband, flirtatiously spanking Rosemary in public, but waiting for her to initiate sex in their first love scene together. After he joins the coven, however, Guy not only rapes Rosemary while she is unconscious, but blames her for getting too drunk on "baby night." The supernatural horror of the scene (in which Satan himself impregnates Rosemary) disguises what is in fact a very real, violent instance of marital rape. Guy's defenses (that she got too drunk, that he didn't want to miss "baby night") subtly lay the blame on Rosemary's shoulders for allowing herself to be in that compromising position, offering the kind of victim-blaming logic that defense attorneys often use when defending alleged rapists. Rosemary's hallucination in which she confesses to the Pope while being raped suggests that her Catholic upbringing has left her bereft of any meaningful sexual autonomy.

GradeSaver LLC. (n.d.). Rosemary's Baby Themes. Retrieved from GradeSaver: https://www.gradesaver.com/rosemarys-baby/study-guide/themes

THE HAUNTING

The Haunting is a sophisticated ghost story, a class treatment of unseen spectral forces. Robert Wise's production, an MGM release, effectively demonstrates there is no good story that superior talent cannot make better. The Haunting suffers only from attempts to impose 20th Century intellectualism upon ageless phenomena. But where it throws reason to the ill winds and lets the spirits stalk unhampered by plodding reality, The Haunting achieves the best, the basic intent of any ghost story: terror and the unsettled mind.

Nelson Gidding's screenplay is based on Shirley Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House. Miss Jackson has a special facility for these stories — witness The Lottery, The Bird's Nest and others. Gidding's script has the same general tone as Miss Jackson's books; a cold and factual recording of psychic manifestation, ability to talk around it, rationalizing with science, shrewd characterizations, flashes of humor.

In The Haunting, the theme is the ability of ghosts to call to a living human being and bend this human to destructive ends. A group of persons assembles at a haunted house to attempt a solution of its mystery. Its members are sympathetic or sensitive to the unseen. What none of them suspects is that the house is not in their possession but that they have become possessed by the house. One of the group is to be added to the house's collection of vigorous ghosts.

When The Haunting digs into the internals of its story, summons its spirits and lets them play havoc with cold reason, it has a power and fervor unmatched by any film ghost stories. It has a tendency to talk too much, to explain the "whys" of its story instead of letting the "whats" speak for themselves. The screenplay or direction could have let the audience know earlier the final end toward which it was working. As it is, the audience is sometimes confused by what and why it is supposed to be pulling for. When it gets to its ghosts, they are superb and all the talk about "preternatural" explanations becomes vain scientific pretension.

SOURCE: https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/haunting-review-1963-movie-1133377/

THE INNOCENTS

On the surface, the plot of the 1961 film The Innocents is relatively simple. Based on Henry James' novella The Turn of the Screw, a governess (Deborah Kerr) takes care of two well-behaved children named Flora (Pamela Franklin) and Miles (Martin Stephens) in a desolate manor house called Bly. She begins seeing the ghosts of Bly's former governess and valet – Miss Jessel (Clytie Jessop) and Peter Quint (Peter Wyngarde) – who also took care of the children. They were having a sordid affair right under the noses of the children. The governess becomes convinced that the children are consorting with the ghosts. Her mission is now to rescue her charges from the ghosts' influence by getting them to admit that they are haunted by Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. Meanwhile, the children act as though nothing is the matter.

However, nothing about this story is simple. Though in the end the governess, called Miss Giddens in the film, is convinced she has successfully freed her charges, the novel's conclusion is not a happy one: Flora is traumatized, and Miles is killed. The Turn of The Screw has been argued over and analyzed incessantly since its publication. The main topics of contention surround how real the ghosts seem. Can the governess's account be trusted, or is she suffering from some form of insanity that made her the real danger to the children? The screenplay of The Innocents was penned by famous writer Truman Capote and playwright William Archibald, both of whom took the stance that the ghosts in James' story are real.

However, director Jack Clayton was more interested in preserving the story's ambiguity, becoming convinced that James intended for there to be more Freudian aspects to the text and reading Freudian literary analysis of The Turn of the Screw. This reading allowed for more of the sexual undertones of the novel to be explored, and Capote agreed to work Freudian analysis into the script. Even before the film was made, The Innocents was primed to be an exercise in ambiguity. But how did Clayton and company pull off their impressive balancing act?

Looking at it through the lens of Freudian analysis, perhaps the most significant way in which the film preserves The Turn of the Screw's ambiguity is in the way it visually depicts the book's psychosexual subtext. The movie maintains the book's subtlety with this aspect of the story; however, it's clear something is not quite right when a ten-year-old boy is sharing passionate mouth kisses with his adult caretaker. In this Freudian interpretation, the governess suffers from mania due to intense sexual repression. Through an overly excitable imagination projects her intangible fears into a visible antagonist she can defeat — this visible antagonist being the ghosts.

SOURCE: https://collider.com/how-the-innocents-adapts-turn-of-the-screw/