

confuse, to offer an explanation and completely debunk it, to begin making one film and finish making another. This is a mischievous Hitchcock who presents us with an interesting question: How do we, the audience, cope with Norman Bates? The scene in the police station mirrors the many attempts made by film critics to analyse *Psycho* in terms of psychoanalysis, and like Dr. Richmond they are unable to offer any satisfactory explanation that is compatible with the evidence within the film. In this essay I wish to explore some of the ways in which Hitchcock disturbs our understanding of *Psycho* through mismatching elements of character, dialogue and *mise-en-scene* in order to undermine Sigmund Freud's theories on anal-compulsive behaviour and castration, and then to show how with the removal of generic logic, and the use of techniques developed for television, the director's devious sense of humour runs riot.

Anal-Compulsive Behaviour

In his book *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, David Sterritt suggests that *Psycho* demonstrates the director's preoccupation with anal-compulsive behaviour.¹

Hitchcock stated, in his interviews with François Truffaut, his desire to make a film beginning with the arrival of food into a city and ending with the sewers, thereby viewing society as a process of digestion and defecation.² Although this single statement appears to be the extent of Hitchcock's "preoccupation" there does appear to be some evidence to support Sterritt's thesis and his starting point, taken from Freud's *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, would seem to be very promising. Freud states that in obsessional neurosis,

regression of the libido to the antecedent stage of the sadistic-anal organisation is the most conspicuous factor and determines the form taken by the symptoms. The impulse to love must then mask itself under the sadistic impulse. The obsessive thought, "I should like to

murder you,” means... nothing else but “I should like to enjoy love of you.”³

Although Robin Wood criticises Dr. Richmond’s explanation as being “glib” and “[ignoring] as much as it explains,” he follows Freud’s outline exactly in seeing, along with Raymond Bellour, the shower sequence as a “symbolic rape”⁴ and Sterrit points to further evidence to support this view of Norman. For example, as Marion Crane and Norman take supper in the motel parlour Norman sits in a position to suggest that he is defecating. Immediately prior to this scene “mother” has chastised her son with references to the process of digestion: “Go on, go tell her she’ll not be appeasing her ugly appetite with my food or my son. Or do I have to tell her because you don’t have the guts? Huh, boy? Do you have the guts, boy?” This dialogue clearly shows that Norman is, in his “mother’s” eyes, still a boy and makes specific reference to his “guts.” Barbara Creed makes the point that Mrs. Bates is still “toilet training her son, that is, teaching him about the clean and unclean areas of the body and mind.”⁵ This image of Norman is reinforced as Lila explores his childish bedroom. She discovers a gramophone recording of Beethoven’s Eroica Symphony: a circular (anus-like) disc with a circular label and a circular hole. The title itself, Sterrit points out,

the same. The link between Marion and anal-compulsive behaviour is much stronger than that with Norman. The several shots of bathrooms in *Psycho* occur when Marion is present: at the Phoenix hotel, at Marion's house, at the car dealership, and at the Bates Motel. Only the latter of these may be associated with Norman. The licence plate of Marion's car reads ANL-709, only a single letter away from "anal" and again the anus-like "O" is present, but as Marion trades this car in for another prior to reaching the motel it has no link to Norman. In the motel parlour it is noticeable that Marion's position mirrors that of Norman: if he is defecating then so is she. Furthermore, in th

substitute for a lover nonetheless. It also seems logical to assume that it was Norman who murdered his mother's lover, and that as a result of this act he was incarcerated in "some place," that is, a "madhouse." In Norman Bates we ought to be able to point to a textbook example of the oedipal scenario. But it is not this typical outcome that Norman aspires to, and although we can identify a positive we must also face up to the fact that we are provided with a negative. "Mother" is presented as the castrating influence of the film that induces Norman's psychosis. Norman's desire to compensate for his mother's lack is not motivated by love, but by fear. It is the fear of castration that Norman can only overcome by becoming the castrator, that is, his mother. However, in Freudian psychoanalysis it is the father who is the castrating influence within the family. Freud did possess clinical evidence that some children

here is represented as male, notably the male who compensates for Marion's lack, and, possibly, a father figure. Just as Norman is castrated by his mother's tongue he is unable to speak before Sam. This stands in contradiction to the image of the castrating mother to which we have become accustomed by this point in the narrative. When faced with an argument such as that of Barbara Creed, which stresses the castrating influence of the mother, it should be remembered that Sam is the only character to restrain Norman. As Lila confronts "mother" in the basement it is Sam who has power over both Norman and "mother," neither of whom can compete with his physical strength. The dominant and castrating male is thus reintroduced to the predominantly female world of the film, and Norman, who has now "become" his mother, is handed

Marion, who represents the symbolic order and the la

stands in direct contradiction to all that psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship tell us about the nature of voyeurism. As Mulvey points out, not only is the woman not the bearer of the look but the man cannot bear the burden of being the object gazed upon,¹³ and devoid of all character the police officer in his uniform and sunglasses presents a purely fetishised figure. Another excellent example of this shared look is when Marion sees her employer after she has stolen the money. We see this scene from two positions, each corresponding directly to the point-of-view of the characters. The two possible alternatives provided by Freud's work negate each other. Furthermore, if we consider the voyeuristic elements of the film we find a second contradiction between the

repeatedly overlooked by those who rush to the final element of this sentence, the castrating mother. The maternal gaze is set up as censoring, castrating, the active, and it is this gaze that Norman comes to fear. The *mise-en-scene* is created around an image of the female and,

once we become aware of the preval

As is apparent from the above comments, the acts of looking and being seen are crucial to psychoanalytic accounts of *Psycho*. This is particularly true of Slavoj Zizek's paper on Hitchcock that derives its title from Racine's *Phaedre*: "in his bold gaze my ruin is writ large." This line, Zizek states, could well serve "as an appropriate epithet to Hitchcock's universe," where the gaze encountered "is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other." Suspense, it is argued, is not produced by a "simple physical confrontation between subject and assailant, but always involves the mediation of what

Hitchcock's delight in ostentatiously displaying an excess of looks. The list of characters that look and are seen comprises almost the entire *dramatis personae*, and includes Marion, Sam, Lila, Norman, Marion's employer, the policeman, Arbogast, Dr. Richmond, and "mother." In the opening scene of the film even Marion's mother is assigned th

scene in terms of male voyeurism. Having created such a narrative image, Hitchcock then trashes the expectations we have formed on information that he himself has released. What first appears to be a foolhardy act, that is, giving away the plot of the film in the trailer, is really a prelude to the biggest practical joke in cinema history. Listening to the text of trailer once we have seen the film reveals just how much the director is laughing at us. For example, we have his description of “mother:” “She was the weirdest and the most... well, let’s go into her bedroom. Here’s the woman’s room, *still beautifully preserved...*” The subtlety of this humour is overwhelming and such effects are typical of Hitchcock, especially in his television work where a single line of dialogue or a final action could transform a narrative into something wholly unexpected in the final reel. The Norman/“mother” scenario is such a “Hitchcock” moment, but one that goes beyond the “MacGuffin” (an object or secret, irrelevant in itself, but on which the whole narrative turns) and stands out as a blatant practical joke.

Can we believe that any director, and especially one so universally respected as

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