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It is Not Always Black and White

“Alfred Hitchcock was in Hollywood more or less since 1940. His name, his profile, and his lugubrious voice are a trademark around the world for suspense thrillers with a touch of impudence, using techniques which are usually cinematic” (Halliwell, 344). In the movie “Psycho” and the episode “Lamb to the Slaughter” there are many similarities in different areas such as cinematic techniques, stories, and motifs. Some of the similarities are very noticeable while still others are harder to identify. Alfred Hitchcock uses specific details in creating each and every one of his programs. Even though “Psycho” is a movie and “Lamb to the Slaughter” is a television program, Alfred Hitchcock has used many of the same techniques to develop both his story lines. The use of the little details such as black and white and the pictures on the wall throughout “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter” set the mood for the viewers. While paying close attention to “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter” the viewers can start to realize that Alfred Hitchcock wants his audience to look at both programs as more than just a horror movie or television show.

Alfred Hitchcock wants his audience to find a deeper meaning in the movie and really pay close attention to the little details. However, Hitchcock took a different route than most directors, who like to keep their audiences on the edge of their seats trying to figure out who did it. He lets his audience in on the secret long before the movie is over. Then he keeps them guessing as to when and how the villain will be caught (Fleming, 158).
Alfred Hitchcock uses cinematic techniques in his films and television shows to increase the psychological and emotional experience of his viewers. Hitchcock wants his audience to look past the horror aspect of his films and start looking between the lines. In the movie “Psycho”, the famous shower scene where Marion Crane was being stabbed by Norman Bates, makes the viewers feel a part of the scene. Alfred Hitchcock designed this scene to make the audience feel as if they were there stabbing Marion personally. He did this so he could give a different look as to what was happening in each specific scene, oppose to repeating the same classic steps as other movies. Hitchcock makes the audience feel part of the scene by using different angles of the camera, the speed the camera moves, and the distance the characters are from the camera. The camera taped the shot of Marion Crane dead, lying on the ground with her face pushed against the floor and her eyes wide open. Hitchcock, wanted many different angles of this scene and he wanted to be remembered for his uniqueness as a director. “The murder scene in “Psycho, lasting forty-five seconds, has seventy-eight cuts - seventy-eight separate pieces of film – most of them no more than two or three frames long. Taken together, they are profoundly frightening. For Hitchcock it is the essence of the motion picture” (Lloyd, 74).

Hitchcock wanted the viewers to feel part of the scene, as if they were really were there. Making the audience feel as if they are present during the movie grabs more attention then just running through all the scenes. “Hitchcock wanted the camera, being the eyes of the audience all the time, to let them view the action as if they were seeing it with their own eyes” (Rebello, 93).

Cinematic techniques help the viewers get a feel of what the actors are experiencing playing the different roles. Marion Crane in “Psycho” and Patrick Maloney in “Lamb to the
Slaughter” both had to act dead in their scene and by cinematic techniques the audience can understand what they were going through and how they reacted to their own deaths. Cinematic techniques are used more in the movie “Psycho” then in “Lamb to the Slaughter” but they still occurred in both. Patrick Maloney was physically present in the first five to ten minutes of “Lamb to the Slaughter” before he was killed off by his wife Mary Maloney. After Mary hits Patrick over the head with a leg of lamb, he falls to the ground. At this point the camera starts shooting the different angles to show him falling to the ground. This adds to the audience reaction throughout the movie and keeps the attention of the audience instead of just focusing on him from one angle. As he lay on the ground, the camera gets close to Patrick and then backs away showing his position on the floor, this is exactly what happens with Marion Crane in “Psycho”. Alfred Hitchcock also used the same technique when Mary Maloney comes back from the grocery store with groceries and drops them to the floor, then goes throughout the room knocking everything over and making a mess. The camera makes this specific scene very intense and nerve wrecking by the choice of music and angles of the camera. Sound is another technique used to build the suspense of the audience or to influence the audience’s reaction to a character in a particular scene.

Suspense was most important to Hitchcock. Mary Maloney in “Lamb to the Slaughter” cooking the leg of lamb, while the policemen are searching for the murder weapon and then serving it to them is an example of his ticking bomb theory. “The idea is that you want to let the audience in on everything so they know that a ticking bomb is there while the characters don’t know it. That is the suspense, waiting for the bomb to explode; only they are waiting for the leg
of lamb to be discovered as the murder weapon. That’s one murder weapon they will never find” (Chandler, 18).

Attention needs to be paid to all the little details throughout “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter.” Hitchcock paid close attention to every detail of filming whether it was an actor’s hairstyle or color of a wardrobe outfit. “Hitchcock paints a picture in his films, that color is as important to him as it is to any artist” (McGilligan, 552).

In both “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter” their basic story lines follow the same guidelines. In the beginning of “Psycho” Alfred Hitchcock makes his viewers believe that Norman Bates is a nice guy when in reality he is crazy and insane. The audience falls for how helpful Norman is and how he takes Marion Crane in, makes her dinner, and sits down and talks with her for a long time. In the beginning of the movie Alfred Hitchcock wants you to like him so that in the end it is unexpected when revealed that Norman Bates is crazy and psychotic. This appearance that Norman Bates portrays not only leaves for a good story line but makes the ending to the movie very exciting. In “Lamb to the Slaughter” Mary Maloney seems to be the sweet house wife just trying to please her husband, which in the beginning she is, but once Patrick tells her that he is leaving her for another woman something clicks in her head and she goes crazy. She becomes so crazy that she kills her husband just like Norman Bates killed his mother, stepfather, Marion, and other girls. Alfred Hitchcock again tries to make the killer appear good when in reality they are not, but he does this because it leads to a good story line and makes the viewers more on the edge of their seats. “The major theme in Hitchcock’s movies is that we are none of us what we think ourselves to be” (Lloyd, 68).
There are many other appearances in the movie “Psycho” that follow this same storyline. Mrs. Bates appears to be alive throughout the whole movie until the very end when the viewers find out that she is dead and it is just Norman dressing up as her. This is important because of the fact that this leads the audience to believing that Mrs. Bates is the killer instead of the actual killer, Norman Bates. This is a perfect example of leading the audience in a totally different direction by making the viewers think one thing but it totally changes in the end. In “Lamb to the Slaughter” when Patrick comes home after work, Alfred Hitchcock makes the viewers believe he is a good man due to the fact he is a police officer, but in fact he is leaving his wife while she is pregnant and does not seem to have one bit of remorse when telling her. This stages the whole movie since Mary becomes so incensed with Patrick wanting to leave her, she kills him. In the movie “Psycho” Marion Crane appears to be very good and wholesome especially when she is changing out of her clothes and her undergarments are all white, but after she steals the money Alfred Hitchcock shows her changing again and she is wearing all black. These little details might be overlooked the first time you watch the movie “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter” but paying attention to the little details helps set the mood for the viewers.

Another occurring factor throughout both “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter” is the motifs and foreshadowing. “Motif is a subject, idea, object, phrase, musical passage, compositional effect, film technique, or color that reappears throughout a work to form a definite pattern that imposes itself upon the viewer’s awareness” (Konigsberg, 246). The motif is the little details, such as birds, that keep appearing throughout the movie. In the movie “Psycho” birds are a main motif throughout the movie. Norman has walls of pictures in his motel office of birds and he will always make comments like my mother is as helpless as a bird or Marion eats
like a bird. The last name Crane is the name of a certain kind of bird and Norman is very similar to a bird in a cage. Norman Bates is similar to a bird in a cage because it is as if he was trapped in the motel and had to live there forever. The music or screeching violins in the background that were being played sounded like bird noises. Norman eats candy corn like a bird; he almost pecks at his food. During the shower scene when Mrs. Bates was stabbing Marion, the marks were very skinny lines, they looked like a bird scratch and the knife looked as if it was part of a bird claw. Even the voyeur in the beginning of the movie is a bird’s eye view. The camera comes from outside of the window and just perches itself on the ledge like a bird does.

The pictures on the walls in both “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter” play an important role in both movies. In “Psycho” especially the pictures of the birds on the walls followed the story line throughout the movie. The birds in “Psycho” had to do with certain characters, voyeurs, and names. “The owl acts as a symbol in “Psycho”. It belongs to the night world, and since Norman Bates kills at night, he feels the bird’s eyes are watching him. They reinforce his own feeling of guilt” (Lloyd, 70). In the television show “Lamb to the Slaughter” it also had pictures on the walls of birds and other animals, which represented some of Mary’s tendencies which were animal like. Both “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter” have main characters with bird and animal like qualities that are intertwined in their story lines.

Foreshadowing is another important aspect Hitchcock wants his viewers to pick up on. Foreshadowing predicts what will happen later in the movie or show. The foreshadowing of death happens in “Psycho” and “Lamb to the Slaughter”. In the television show “Lamb to the Slaughter” Patrick Maloney says, “Try and stop me,” to Mary and later during the show she was stopping Patrick from leaving so she hit him over the head and killed him. In the movie
“Psycho” Norman Bates says, “Everybody goes a little mad sometimes,” to Marion Crane and later during the movie, the audience finds out that he really does go mad.

The many similarities that have been discussed had to be thought about and reviewed. Paying close attention to the little details is very important. Watching the programs more than once helps especially when Hitchcock wants his audience to look past the horror aspect of his films and start looking between the lines for cinematic techniques, stories, and motifs. The little details might be overlooked, but never by Hitchcock and these help set the mood for the audience. Alfred Hitchcock has used many of the same techniques to develop his story line in the movie “Psycho” and the television show “Lamb to the Slaughter.” There are many similarities especially because “Psycho” was filmed with a lower budget than his other movies and he used his television crew (Chandler, 264).

Hitchcock has many different techniques throughout all of his works that tie in with other movies and make the movie worth watching. His suspense movies are on a whole different level then an audience is used to seeing. Alfred Hitchcock gives extra and that is what makes his movies worth seeing. When an audience leaves a Hitchcock film the mood of the movie stays with them. His extra little touches add suspense and these are the things that leave the viewers wanting to come back for more.
Works Cited


