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Trabajo Fin de Grado

Identification and the Figure of the Monster in *Psycho* (1960)

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Abstract

This essay offers an analysis of the shifts in identification, as well as the implications behind the identification with each of the characters, and the construction and meaning of the figure of the monster in *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960). Identification is analysed by means of Laura Mulvey and David Bordwell's theories. For the analysis of the monster I employ Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject together with Barbara Creed and Robin Wood's theories. This essay emphasizes the shift in identification that takes place from Marion to Norman, mainly taking into account the use of the Mulveyan gaze, in order to analyse its effect on the spectator when combined with the construction of the monster and Hitchcock's use of subject positioning. The figure of the monster in all its complexity is analysed as a patriarchal construction, creating what Creed refers to as the monstrous-feminine. There comes a point when, by means of identification, the audience is placed at the same level as Norman, and once his true nature is revealed, this will result in a tremendous shock to the viewer who will be forced to acknowledge their own monstrosity.

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza de los cambios de identificación, así como sus implicaciones, y el análisis de la construcción y el significado de la figura del monstruo en la película *Psicosis* (Hitchcock, 1960). El análisis de la identificación se lleva a cabo mediante las teorías de Barbara Creed y Robin Wood, así como mediante el concepto de lo abyecto de Julia Kristeva. Este trabajo resalta el cambio de identificación que se produce entre Marion y Norman teniendo en cuenta principalmente el uso de la mirada Mulveyana para analizar su efecto en el espectador al combinarlo con la construcción del monstruo y el uso que hace Hitchcock de la posición de la audiencia respecto a la película. La

figura del monstruo en toda su complejidad se analiza como una construcción patriarcal por parte de Norman, creando lo que Creed denomina como el monstruo femenino. En un determinado momento, por medio de la identificación, el espectador queda al mismo nivel que Norman y una vez descubierta su verdadera naturaleza, esto resulta en un tremendo shock en la audiencia que se ve forzada a recapacitar sobre su propia monstruosidad.

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Introduction

Alfred Hitchcock was one of the best known directors of the 20th. "He became one of the first directors to become like a movie star without being an actor" (Kim Newman). He was a great populist artist because his movies were accessible to the public despite their psychological content. Most of his films were of a narrow generic type, the thriller. However, he managed to include many comic elements in them, creating a sort of genre of his own. He also made horror films like *Psycho* (1960), which is the film this essay centres around. According to Yacowar, Hitchcock takes advantage of the insecurity of his audience by means of the use of point of view and identification (26). Classical Hollywood films created what are called subject positions, which are the place inside the fictional stories where the spectator is put by the film, making them identify with a certain character. Hitchcock makes use of this subject position but instead of having the audience identify with the hero or heroine, he often makes them identify with the morally ambiguous character so that the spectator will acknowledge their own morality. As Yacowar said, "our perceptions reshape our world" (29), and making us identify with the evil character completely changes our perception of the film.

As suggested above, *Psycho* is one of the most influential horror movies in the history of cinema. As is the case in *Psycho,* horror films are very much concerned with the loss of one's identity as well as death. One of the central issues in horror films, which is very much present in this film, is the constant "struggle between good and evil within the individual" (Kaminsky 120-22), a feature that can be seen both in Marion Crane and in Norman Bates. The centrality of death in horror films is due to the fact that it is presented as "immediate, violent, bone-wrecking, blood-spilling" (Kaminsky 124), seeking an immediate response on the part of the audience. Horror films are gradually becoming more and more pessimistic, proposing that the evil within the individual

cannot be destroyed or controlled (Kaminsky 126). Humans are doomed to surrender to their deepest, most horrible instincts.

This essay is aimed as an analysis of identification and the figure of the monster in *Psycho*. Through the analysis of how these two elements are intertwined I intend to show how in *Psycho* Hitchcock manages to use something common to all films as is identification to create a complex figure of the monster which in the end is made equal to the spectator, creating a new type of psychological fear.

1.1 Point of view and identification

In her famous essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey explains the centrality of men in the cinema when it comes to point of view and identification, and how women are objectified under the male gaze, including both characters and spectators. She states that the objectification of a person becomes a source of pleasure, usually of an erotic nature. Taken to its limits this produces the so-called Peeping Toms, whose main sexual pleasure comes not only from observing and objectifying the person, but also from controlling them through the act of looking (60).

Mulvey coins the term "to-be-looked-at-ness" as a characteristic of women in patriarchal societies. In their traditional roles women are not only regarded as objects of the look, but are also displayed accordingly so that they will have a greater impact on men. This term could only be applied to women since men could not bear to be objectified. In her essay she quotes Budd Boetticher, a film director from Hollywood's classical period, who said that women in films had "not the slightest importance". At the same time, for Mulvey, it is men who as characters are the vehicle for moving the story forward (62-63). Consequently, the way in which the ideology of patriarchy is reproduced in classical cinema is double: through control of the look and the active role in the development of the story.

The role of the spectator has traditionally been said to be a passive one. The audience is believed to be put in a subject position by the film, so they will identify with and feel what the filmmakers, or the text as an abstract entity, want them to. However, in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell suggests differently. He states that the role of the spectator is a very active one, and that the understanding of the story very

much depends on it. He says that the spectator constructs "perceptual judgement" based on "nonconscious inferences". There are two ways in which these inferences proceed: from "the bottom up" and from "top down", by which they make assumptions and hypotheses which will later on prove to be right or wrong. "Bottom-up" inferences are concerned with drawing conclusions based on perceptual input, and "top down" inferences deal with the spectator applying background knowledge to their viewing of the film, that way making assumptions on how they think the story is going to develop. The clusters of knowledge that guide them in making assumptions and hypotheses are known as schemata. This is important when it comes to identification since cinema counts on the spectator making wrong inferences to create an illusion (31-32). The film plays with the audience by using these preconceived assumptions so they will construct a hypothesis that will lead them to identify with a certain character, and then breaking with that and proving them wrong.

In *Psycho* these two theories go together. Being a 1960s film, certain ideas, especially regarding gender, are bound to come to the spectator's mind. These preconceived ideas based on previous experiences of film watching, as well as on history itself, constitute their background knowledge by means of which they are to interpret this film. These ideas have to do with the fact that, as Mulvey suggests, it is men who carry the narrative forward, which is reinforced by the experience provided by films of previous decades like *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock, 1959), *On the Waterfront* (Kazan, 1954), *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946) and many others. Therefore, when seeing *Psycho* the spectator's first response is to assume that it is one of the male figures surrounding Marion who will be the main character with whom they are to identify. As previously stated, the film plays with the spectator by breaking with these expectations and forcing them to continuously come up with new hypotheses

about how they think the narrative is going to develop. *Psycho* relies on this to shock the spectator when it comes to identification.

1.2 The figure of the monster

The figure of the monster has always been a central element in horror films. It is the embodiment of human fears represented on screen. At first women were mainly seen as victims of a male monster; however, Barbara Creed in her book *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* focuses on the monstrous feminine, which emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of the monster. In Freud's essays we find the fear of the castrated woman, who becomes the other in relation to men, a threat to the male child that, if he does not accept the Law of the Father, will be castrated, like the mother. However, in this book we find the fear of the woman not as castrated but as castrator—the vagina dentata (3).

Evoking the fantasy of the toothed vagina that engulfs and destroys men in the course of the sexual act, Creed finds the origins of this myth in a different image of the pre-Oedipal mother, a very different construction from that found in Freudian theory: the monstrous mother, who is almost always known for being possessive and dominant, especially towards their male child. This relationship between pre-Oedipal mother and son is frequently dealt with in horror films as is the case in *Psycho*, in which we find a psychotic killer son, who is constructed as the product of this twisted relationship. As a result of this relationship, the son feels threatened by the mother (monster) both physically and psychically (139-40).

As one of the central elements in *Psycho*, we find the "eye", the act of looking, which becomes an essential part in the construction of the monster. In her account of

Psycho, Creed connects this with Mrs. Bates's gaze, always fixed upon Norman. It is precisely this gaze that he will later on seek to "kill" in other women such as Marion (141). Creed's concept of the monstrous-feminine is based on Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. For Kristeva the abject consists of those things in ourselves that we find unclean and consequently reject. Yet, this expulsion can never be complete. In a sense, we continue to be attached and attracted to them. In fact, that attraction is so strong that, in an ambiguous way, we are willing to surrender our identity to them. This desired other is a repulsive other but all the more powerful because of that. For Kristeva the abject takes a variety of forms but the one that interests us here is the maternal body or, more generally, the feminine, which means that the abject is still a patriarchal construction. For Kristeva and Creed, the maternal is the prototype of the abject because of its proximity to nature: secretions of blood and milk, changes of shape and swellings, and giving birth as the ultimate act of expulsion (see Creed 122-23). In Christianity, abjection becomes interiorized and is said to be permanent: "The dichotomy of pure/impure is transformed into one of inside/outside", which results in the unpredictability of the figure of the monster who appears to be one thing on the outside, but could be completely different on the inside. The horror comes from within. According to Creed, the womb, and thus the mother, is considered to be the ultimate abject "for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside bringing with it traces of its contamination" (49). This notion is of especial importance in *Psycho* since, as mentioned above, the figure of the monster evokes the mother as well as the son.

At the same time, however, the construction of the monster in *Psycho* bears a Freudian reading, since it could also be linked to the Oedipus Complex. Sigmund Freud first introduced this notion in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). He stated

that it occurs in the third stage, or phallic stage of the development of a child (Wikipedia). In the Oedipus Complex boys regard their mothers as their property but after a period of time, and with the interference of the father's authority, the dissolution of this strong bond takes place and their affection shifts away from their mother, who as Creed said represents the fear of castration, and they become father figures themselves. However, in cases like the story offered by *Psycho* the dissolution of the Oedipus Complex does not take place. The fact that it does not come to an end in the development of the child increases the twisted relationship between mother and son.

2. The Scrutinizing Eye

The first scenes in *Psycho* serve as a model of Mulvey's theory about the objectification of women in cinema and the importance of the male gaze. In all these initial scenes that present us with the setting of the film, Marion (Janet Leigh) is constantly seen through the eyes of different men who play different roles in her life, as well as in the story line.

The first scene of the film shows two people in a room, a man and a woman. Here Marion is clearly objectified, not only by the fact that she is being looked at by Sam (John Gavin), her lover, but also by the fact that she is not fully dressed (fig. 1).

Figure 1: Marion being looked at by Sam

Framing is very important, not only in this scene, but also in the ones that follow. Whenever we see Marion we see her with a man, both framed together in the same shot. This is important because as we can see in this scene, it is Marion that is emphasized by means of a medium shot, while Sam is relegated to the back. This together with the fact that she is in her underwear combine to blur the limits of screen space and have a greater impact not only in the male protagonist, but also in the spectator himself as a male observer. This is an example of the portrayal of women in patriarchal societies; what Mulvey called *to-be-looked-at-ness* (62-63).

With no further knowledge of the film or the characters other than the information provided in this first scene, the spectator automatically comes up with a

hypothesis of the situation based on their previous knowledge, Bordwell's top-down inferences, based on other movies of the period as well as on the social situation of the time. Marion is presented as a woman of questionable morals looking to find a husband, meeting Sam for a few hours at a time in a cheap motel, and Sam is presented as a divorced man who is in debt and flies to be with her every once in a while. The film was made in 1960, a time when women were not allowed as many liberties and rights as men, and so taking into account the mentality of the time, the audience is predisposed to identify with Sam, the male character, thinking that he will be the one who, as Mulvey says, will move the narrative forward (63). This hypothesis is reinforced by the objectification mentioned before, but also by the fact that we are not given the woman's name in this scene--we are only given Sam's. This diminishes her character, making her seem inferior to him.

As the story moves on we are presented with more scenes that, while reinforcing Mulvey's theory, also represent a slight change in identification. When Marion goes to the office where she works as a secretary she is ambushed by another male character, Mr. Cassidy (Frank Albertson). The position of the characters in the frame is very relevant when it comes to analysing the intention of the look (fig. 2).

Figure 2: Mr.Cassidy looking at Marion

Mr. Cassidy's superiority with respect to Marion is conveyed through different aspects. As we can see, he is not just another man--he is a rich, older man whose interest in Marion goes beyond the professional. Therefore, he is staring at Marion from a superior position not just in the physical sense, but also economically speaking. The more the film advances, the more intensified the act of looking gets, and the more it is connected to the erotic nature of objectification (Mulvey 60). Even though the first scene dealt with a sexual encounter, this scene intensifies male sexual desire in Mr. Cassidy's look, but this time, unlike in the scene with Sam, it makes Marion, as well as the spectator, feel uncomfortable.

As the film goes on, we realize that Marion is the focalizer of the narrative and the initial ideas about identification change as we ascertain that we are following Marion as the main character rather than a man. This clash between our expectations when watching the film and the changes in identification is repeated throughout the film and it is one of the reasons for its success: part of the film's fascination lies in the continuous shifts of identification and what they entail. The fact that Marion is the focalizer as well as the character the spectator identifies with means that there is a shifting away from Mulvey's ideas about men being in charge of moving the story forward. When Marion leaves the office there is a turning point in the story and we follow her home after she has stolen Mr. Cassidy's money. By means of a medium long shot we can see how she is once again displayed with one purpose, to give visual pleasure (fig. 3). At the same time, the money becomes a central element in the plot, and it will be the trigger of her running away.

Figure 3: Marion staring at the stolen money

Hitchcock is known for making the audience identify with morally ambiguous characters, and *Psycho* is no different. Once Marion steals the money we are forced to acknowledge our own morality and principles. Just as Marion seems to have fallen into a trap, so have we. As the act of looking gets more intense as the film advances, so does identification. The scene in the car is constructed through close-ups which gradually become extreme close-ups (figs. 4-5).

Figure 4: Marion's close-up

Figure 5: Marion's extreme close-up

When analysing the extreme close-up we can see how the film is trying to make us see more and see deeper into the character's mind by focusing on the eyes (Wood 148), the windows to the soul. A transfer of the look takes place here with respect to previous scenes as it is now her eyes that become the focal point of the scene. The camera movement mimics our getting closer to Marion as a character, and as the camera moves closer we start to hear her thoughts as if they were our own. At this point identification with Marion reaches its peak. We become one with her, and our moral principles become secondary.

3. Birds of prey

We now move to a transitional part of the film, not only because it is the middle section of the narrative, but also because identification again takes a sudden turn and moves away from Marion. When caught in the middle of a storm, Marion decides to stop at a place called “Bates Motel” (fig. 6), which is where we are introduced to the character of Norman (Anthony Perkins).

Figure 6: Marion arriving at Bates Motel

As mentioned several times before, the act of looking and objectification is intensified with every new man that appears in the film, and in the case of Norman it becomes an obsession that, as Mulvey stated, turns him into a Peeping Tom who will not only objectify Marion on the basis of the erotic pleasure derived from looking at her, but who will also take it a step further and attempt to control her (60). At first the spectator still identifies with Marion and it is through her that we get to know Norman Bates. At first he is presented as a shy, respectful, attentive young man who helps Marion and who offers to prepare dinner for the two of them since she is alone and it is pouring outside (fig. 7). However, as the story moves on we get a deeper insight of his personality and soon a feeling of unrest starts to emerge both in Marion and in the audience.

Figure 7: Norman Bates helping Marion

A conversation takes place between Marion and Norman in his parlour and we see that when she mentions his mother, who is in the house, Marion seems to bring out another side of him; glimpses that foreshadow what is later to come. By means of close-ups the film hints these changes in Norman since the focus seems to be solely on his face (figures 8-9).

Figure 8: close-up

Figure 9: a shift in Norman's personality

Norman is a taxidermist who finds pleasure in stuffing birds, freezing them just when they seem more dangerous, thus being constantly ready to attack (Creed 143). A parallel can be drawn between him and the stuffed birds displayed on the walls of his parlour. When those shifts in his personality take place, he looks like one of his birds, ready to jump at any minute to attack his prey, which in this case is Marion. We can see the threat in his eyes when she suggests sending Mrs. Bates away, leaving Marion feeling trapped. He tells her: "We are all in our private trap. We scratch and claw, but only at the air, only at each other, and for all of it we never budge an inch. Birds are a common motif in Hitchcock and will later on be the central element of his film *The Birds* (1964), in which we are also put in an unusual subject position by the film, and we are made to

identify with Melanie, who also shares many physical traits with Marion (and with other Hitchcockian heroines).

By means of camera movements and close-ups Norman comes to be at the same level as Marion as far as psychological insight is concerned. When Marion leaves the parlour and goes back to her room, the situation is reversed. Now we see her from Norman's point of view (fig. 10).

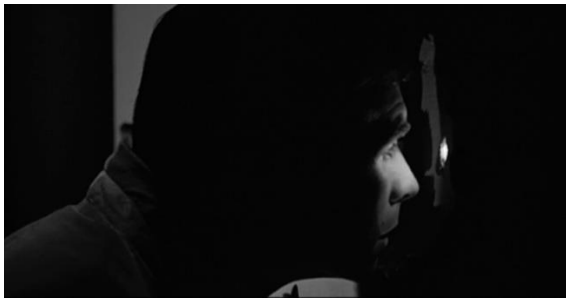

Figure 10: Norman as a Peeping Tom spying on Marion

Another turning point takes place which constitutes the climactic moment of the film: the shower scene. In the course of this scene identification with Marion is helplessly broken and the spectator is forced to "become" Norman. The shower scene has been one of the most influential scenes in horror movies of all times. It has had an impact that goes beyond the society of the time and continues to have an impact on contemporary audiences who still regard it as a point of reference of what horror movies should be like. The scene shows the murder of Marion Crane at the hands of an unknown figure, who is shortly afterwards revealed to be Mrs. Bates, Norman's mother. The scene is structured around a series of abrupt cuts and extreme close-ups, both of Marion and Mrs. Bates, as well as of detail shots of the water running, culminating with Marion dead on the floor, which symbolizes the end of identification with Marion (figs. 11-12).

Figure 11: Mrs. Bates holding the knife

Figure 12: Marion dead on the floor

Robin Wood states that in this scene identification is brutally broken off (146). However, even though the harshness of the scene does convey a sense of brutality, identification with Marion does not end abruptly: it is a gradual process, perhaps at first somehow inperceptible to the spectetor. The previous scenes in Norman's parlour have provided a sense of continuity between Marion and Norman. The shower scene opens the door for a new shift in identification (Wood 145). Gradually, by means of those close-ups the film has put Norman in a similar position to Marion, so that when she dies we automatically attach ourselves to him because we have already become familiar enough wit him.

Going back to Bordwell's notions, this scene disrupts his idea of the active role of the spectator. As said before, Bordwell stated that by means of bottom-up and top-down inferences the viewer formed hypotheses of how they thought the story was going to develop (31). The continuous making of new hypothesis to adjust to the changes of the film up to the point previous to the shower scene have led the spectator to believe that Marion and her stealing of the money are, and will be, the central point of the story. However, this scene shatters this hypothesis leaving the viewer puzzled and lost. The money, which had been the trigger of her running away in the first place, now becomes just a pile of papers (Wood 146). This is known as a McGuffin, which is the way in which Hitchcock misleads us into believing the film is about something which it is not (Duguid). The director takes advantage of this situation and places us in a subject

position close to Norman. After the shower scene we align ourselves with Norman, with everything that this shift implies.

Each change of identification is of great importance since, as we have seen before, our identifying with each character has a different meaning behind it. Therefore, even if as the film moves on we find one more change in identification regarding Lila Crane (Vera Miles), Marion's sister, our identification with Norman, even if temporary, just as in the case of Marion, holds a great relevance in the story. It will be the one which will have the deepest impact on the spectator.

4. The Figure of the Monster in *Psycho*

"*Psycho* begins with the normal and draws us steadily deeper and deeper into the abnormal" (Wood 143). In this film the figure of the monster is related to the castrating mother whose behaviour is possessive and dominant towards her son who, as a result, will become a psychotic killer (Creed 139). The figure of the mother is another one of Hitchcock's well-known motifs and is repeated in several of his films such as *The Birds* or *North by Northwest* and several other narratives in which, in different registers, mothers share this behavioural pattern. Even though the monster acquires the shape of Mrs. Bates's character, Norman's mother, and we are made to believe that she is the one who kills Marion, we never see her face directly. The film does this in order to conceal the true identity of the monster, which is not revealed to the spectator until almost the very end.

By the use of framing, lighting, camera distance and editing, the figure of the monster is constructed around the figure of Mrs. Bates. She is first introduced in the narrative when Marion arrives at Bates Motel. This first contact with the character is not a direct one since we only see her dark silhouette through the window contrasted against the light of the room (fig. 13).

Figure 13: Mrs. Bates's silhouette

The fact that this first introduction of Mrs. Bates is carried out through a long shot denotes coldness and a sense of detachment from all that surrounds her, except her son. The house turns into a prison-like space in which she seems to be trapped. The way she is framed by the window itself with backlighting makes her look like a painting which provides the character with a sense of immortality that will in the end prove to be somewhat true. It is also important to acknowledge that we are looking at her from below, which places her in a superior position with respect to the rest of the characters. The film takes this shot as a basis upon which it will construct the figure of the monster in greater depth.

The shower scene, which was a turning point in the narrative when it came to identification, is also a turning point when it comes to the figure of the monster since, even though we still do not see its face, it reveals the first hints of its identity (fig. 14).

Figure 14: first murder

Once again the film relies on the use of shadows to construct the figure of the monster, as well as on music to intensify the brutality of the scene. Music holds a great power in shaping our experience of film-watching, manipulating our emotions and blinding us into the narrative world (Gorbman 43-47), and therefore it is of great importance in this scene as well as in the other murder since, as said above, it intensifies the act of killing. Once the murder has taken place we hear Norman inside the house talking to his mother

saying: “mother, oh God mother”. It is then that the connection between Mrs. Bates and the monster is established. Just as there was a connection between Norman and the birds, there is also a connection with Mrs. Bates. Norman liked to freeze birds when they seemed most threatening, when they were about to kill; and Creed makes a connection between the beaks of birds and Mrs. Bates’s knife with which she kills Marion (143-144). She proves to be just as threatening as them, and as seen in fig.13, she also seems to be frozen in time. Thus, this creates a cyclic, twisted connection between Norman, Mrs. Bates and the birds to the point where they all seem to be the same person, which again is another way of foreshadowing the ending.

As the film advances and Marion dies, an investigation is carried out by her sister Lila and Sam, with the help of a private investigator called Milton Arbogast (Martin Balsam). Together, they manage to track down the Bates Motel where they start asking questions involving both Norman and his mother. Now another shift in his personality takes place which relates this scene to the one in the parlour with Marion. He begins to feel more and more trapped which provokes his stammering, breaking with his usual external appearance of innocence. The private investigator enters their house to try and find out what happened to Marion and when he is inside he is surprised by an infuriated Mrs. Bates who, again, knife in hand, throws herself on top of Arbogast brutally killing him (fig. 15).

Figure 15: Arbogast's murder

This scene is constructed in the same way as the previous ones. Inside the house everything is poorly lit, creating a ghostly atmosphere. As he is walking up the stairs we see a door opening, letting out a beam of light. This is connected to fig.13 in which backlighting was used to show Mrs. Bates in her room. As the door opens we know that the monster has been unleashed and that another murder is soon to take place. The scene is framed through a high angle shot that, once more, keeps the true identity of the monster concealed. Another important factor in the construction of the monster, which in the shower scene was not so visible, is the fact that it is dressed as a woman, which makes it more believable when the film tries to make us see that Mrs. Bates is the one committing the murders.

When Lila and Sam talk to the Sheriff Al Chambers (John McIntire) they find out that Norman's mother has actually been dead for ten years, but it is too late to warn Arbogast who has already fallen into the trap. At this point we follow Lila who is snooping around Norman's house trying to find out what he is hiding, as well as what happened to her sister. When Lila is inside the house she finds her way to the basement in which she finds Mrs. Bates, only not in the way she expected (fig. 16).

Figure 16: Lila finds Mrs. Bates in the basement

We could say that her presence in the basement represents her being the pillars of the house. She is rooted deep inside the house, as she is inside Norman's mind. Once she realizes that the Sheriff was right, the story repeats itself and we can find a clear parallel between what happened to Marion and what almost happens to Lila. However, this time something is different. It is another climactic moment of the film but this time we finally find out the true identity of the monster. We have already found out that Mrs. Bates is not alive, and therefore, someone else has to be committing the murders disguised as her. It is then that Lila is ambushed from behind (fig. 17).

Figure 17: Norman dressed as Mrs. Bates

At this moment the spectator realizes that Mrs. Bates had been Norman all along, and that because of it, while we have identified with Norman once Marion has died, we have also been identifying with the killer. At the end of the movie Dr. Fred Richmond (Simon Oakland) explains Norman's condition to the rest of the characters as well as to us. Norman's split personality can be related to the non-dissolution of the Oedipus Complex.

Freud's Oedipus Complex: "In psychoanalytic theory, a desire for sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex and a concomitant sense of rivalry with the parent of the same sex, a crucial stage in the normal developmental process"

(Encyclopaedia Britannica). The child has two possibilities of satisfaction: putting himself in the position of the father and have relations with his mother or putting himself in the mother's position and be loved by his father. However, in this second case the mother loses importance. Once the Complex goes to its destruction the boy will become the mother's lost phallus (Freud 318). The father is the one who imposes his authority so the child will turn away from his mother and become a father himself. In the story of *Psycho,* Norman's father died when he was young, so the separation between him and his mother has not taken place. As the doctor explains "for years they lived as if there was no one else in the world". They became inseparable and an unhealthy relationship started to emerge between them. In the Oedipus Complex the boy sees his mother as his property but at a certain point he realizes she loves other men as well, which in this case is not the father but a lover. When Mrs. Bates took up a lover, Norman, who was already mentally unstable ever since his father had died, could not take it anymore and killed them both. Even though Mrs. Bates had died she was not gone. She lived inside Norman's mind as his alter ego (Creed 145), and she exerted a great influence on Norman from beyond the grave (Modleski 1). When he kills his mother he steals and appropriates her corpse out of guilt and tries to give her a half-life by becoming her. From that moment on, Norman no longer exists. He is half Norman, half his mother, and in the end the dominant personality, his mother's, takes over completely.

As said above, Norman regarded his mother as his own property and he could not bear seeing her with other men, and so he assumed she felt as jealous of him as he felt of her. This is what triggered the murders. Every time Norman feels attracted to a woman, his mother side takes over and commits the crimes, leaving him with no recollection of what has happened. When Arbogast tells him: "did you spend the night

with her?" we see the shift taking place. The stammering, the nervous looks, the changing of his story about Marion as he feels more and more trapped. Because Arbogast had insinuated that Norman was attracted to Marion, the Mrs. Bates side of him takes over and kills him. Even if while alive Mrs. Bates had been a controlling woman, living for her son, it is now Norman's conception of her, his conviction that she would be jealous enough to kill them, that causes the murders. However, this conviction is so strong that the murders cannot be attributed to Norman because he has no recollection of having killed anyone. To him it has all been his mother's doing.

In Creed's book *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* we find the figure of the mother not as castrated, as in Freud's essays, but as castrator. It is this aspect of the mother that makes her so threatening both to her son and in this case to young women. When the mother-side of Norman takes over we find both a physical and psychical threat of castration (140). Killing young women Norman is interested in is his mother's way of castrating him. This notion of the monstrous-feminine is based on Kristeva's notion of the abject. In Christianity abjection becomes interiorized and is said to be permanent; it becomes a dichotomy of inside/outside (48). Taking this into account, it is the womb in particular and the act of giving birth that is seen as the ultimate abject since new contaminated life passes from inside to outside (49). When Norman is born part of his mother is within him, which gives as a result this very ambiguous figure of the monster. He perpetuates this contaminated side of him to the point where it takes over completely.

Robin Wood offers another interpretation for Marion's killing in the shower scene. For him it is a symbolic rape on the part of Norman (Creed 147). As Norman says himself, "we are all in our private trap. We scratch and claw, but only at the air, only at each other, and for all of it we never budge an inch." His own thinking has led

him into a trap of his own making from which he cannot escape because, if he tried, he would be immediately repressed by the mother-side of him, which is also his own creation. This is related to what Creed states. She denounces that the mother as monstrous-feminine is a patriarchal construction. The figure of the mother is not monstrous by nature; it is men that turn her into something to be feared not only for being castrated, but also as castrating. The fact that Norman is impersonating his mother and attributing the murders to her is a clear example of this. Norman's unconscious relies on the figure of his mother to commit the crimes and blame her for them and, since we have no previous reference of her character, we as spectators believe her to be the monster and him to be the victim. As the doctor explains at the end of the film, as the murders take place and the mother-side of him takes over, Norman becomes confined inside his own mind, completely blocked away from all the action taking place around him. In spite of this, however rooted this illness might be in his mind, we cannot overlook the fact that it is really he as a man who is killing these young women while blaming his mother for it. He has made Mrs. Bates an example of monstrous-feminine (fig. 18).

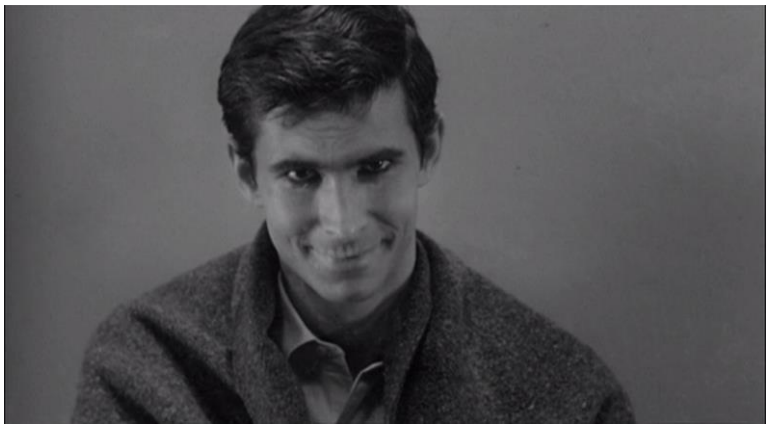

Figure 18: Mrs. Bates's face overlapping Norman's

With *Psycho* Hitchcock takes the use of subject positioning to an extreme. He uses our ignorance as spectators to make us identify not only with the most morally ambiguous but also with the most deranged character to achieve a greater impact. When identifying with Norman, even if for a short period of time, the spectator, without being aware of it, has been identifying with the murderer. “We all go a little mad sometimes. Haven’t you?”

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the fact that the monster is not a monster per se, that is, it is not a supernatural entity as used in other horror movies, has a great impact on the spectator. The monster is what appears to be a simple, kind young man caring for his mother, and it is not until the end that we learn his true nature. *Psycho* creates a type of psychological fear that becomes deeply rooted inside ourselves since the monster could now "be any place, any date, any time, any room: it could be us" (Wood 142). We are in a way forced to acknowledge the darkness within ourselves since we all have within us the potentiality for good or evil (Wood 142-148), and this is all conveyed through the use of identification and subject position. There are two types of gaze that prevail in *Psycho*, the Mulveyan gaze, which is carried out through men, especially Norman, and the gaze of the monstrous mother, which in a way also belongs to Norman. During the film there is a tension between the two gazes that culminates with the subordination of the Mulveyan gaze to that of the monster. This is the moment Norman disappears completely and we discover how truly deranged his character is, as we witness the "irretrievable annihilation of a human being" (Wood 149).

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