Causes of unease: Horror rhetoric in fiction and film

Benjamin Kane Ethridge

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CAUSES OF UNEASE:
HORROR RHETORIC IN FICTION AND FILM

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition:
English Literature

by
Benjamin Kane Ethridge
December 2004
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ABSTRACT

How do artists scare us? Horror Filmmakers and novelists alike can accomplish fear, revulsion, and disturbance in their respective audience. The rhetorical and stylistic strategies employed to evoke these feelings are unique to the genre. Divulging these strategies will be the major focus of this thesis, yet there will also be discussion on the social and cultural background of the Horror genre. In order to illustrate and theorize on particular rhetorical and stylistic strategies, there will be a close reading of Richard Matheson’s I am Legend and Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” in relation to the Horror phenomenon. In addition, the concluding chapter will include rhetorical analysis of Myrick and Sanchez’s The Blair Witch Project and Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho. The findings of these studies will describe cultural, biological and psychological patterns in the interpretation of horrific narrative.
I would like to thank all my professors for all their time, work and advice spent toward the evolution of this thesis. My special thanks goes to Bruce Golden, Renée Pigeon, Mary Boland, and Elenore Partridge.
DEDICATION

To my family, my teachers and to my best friends
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CHAPTER ONE

THE HORROR GENRE AND ITS AUDIENCE

Why Do We Choose Horror?

There are several different means by which one is frightened by story or film. The ways described by this thesis will include methods that rely on personal or general phobias (often related to the fear of the unknown), information deprivation, sudden change or “the surprise,” moralistic contradictions leading to disturbance, “Gothic” atmosphere, and repulsive description. This chapter provides an introduction to some of the Horror genre’s main questions, while the following two chapters will attempt to illustrate some of the rhetorical devices used to horrify an audience through text and film.

Most of us have been impacted by Horror stories or films some time in our life, yet there is a question as to why we would seek an “entertainment” that has the goal of horrifying. The genre offers its audience apprehension, deformation, bleeding, maiming, rape, killing, all of which are presented as entertainment. The strange land of the macabre is where the undesirable is longed for and the helpless are exploited for their mortality. The genre is the irritated vermilion scab we like to pick at, just so
blood might well up from beneath its crust -- a small, subtly painful, yet satisfying disfigurement.

Horror has the responsibility of locating a certain nerve and pulling it. As with any type of fiction, certain audience members will be affected by the visual or verbal rhetoric and some will not. Comedy is similar in that it must achieve success through many varieties of humor, yet its audience will be more forgiving if a joke or two goes by without a laugh-- the fiction can still be successful. With Horror fiction, this kind of audience leniency does not apply. If there are any points at which the frightening aspect of the fiction or film is suspect, the work will be ultimately dismissed or, in the most extreme cases of failure, worshiped instead for its campy attempt to scare.

While sources of fear have their foundation in certain cultural anxieties, a particular phobic response may be more of an individual matter. For instance, a man terrified of spiders may come unhinged watching a movie with thousands of giant, realistic-looking spiders attacking people, but for other audience members, such a movie would provide nothing more than a yawn. Walter Kendrick's The Thrill of Fear elaborates on these different levels of fear:
Uncertainty grows when we consider the varieties of fear, from mild anxiety to out-and-out terror, for which we also have words. Like “fear” itself, these words do not guarantee the existence of any identifiable condition of body or mind. They blend into one another; one man’s frisson may be another man’s stark Horror or a third man’s occasion for belly laughs. (Kendrick xii)

Returning to the spider example, it is possible for an audience member to enjoy the movie and even be frightened by its content, even though he or she has no personal phobia of spiders. Nevertheless, it is the level of fear reached which ultimately makes the film successfully horrific.

The genre’s name causes another problem. What kind of “Horror” do people know? What associations does one make with the word? Many won’t watch a movie or read a story because of these associations. Horror fiction forces an audience to face elements of life most want to avoid. Some Horror writers have even shed the label and renamed themselves as authors of the macabre. Martin Tropp’s

_Images of Fear: How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern_
Culture (1818-1918) illuminates something of the name's duality, as well as the genre's escapist nature:

The term "Horror" itself denotes both fantasy and reality. [...] At the same time, the darkest of inescapable truths—natural disasters, human suffering, and organized depravity—bear the same label. [...] The Horrors of pulp literature and the Horrors of war, the most frivolous and the most cataclysmic of human creations, are each signified by the same word. (Tropp 3)

Some audience members believe this kind of fiction or film glorifies its horrific content. With this belief in mind, it isn't difficult to understand why academics have generally avoided the genre. If academics believe that the genre is mindless and pornographic and capitalizes on the basest content of our existence, it seems that dismissing or ignoring its presence would be prudent.

However, there are those who believe differently, who believe you can grimly appreciate a painting of a decapitation but never choose to change your profession to that of a beheader. This sort of audience member understands the dilemma in morbid entertainment; how can one proclaim him or herself a "fan" of Horror and not, in the same breath, be announcing they enjoy seeing people
suffer and die? Also, "the subject has at times resulted in two extremes of unreliability: abstruse academic excursions into textual and psychological analysis or popular pastiche of inaccurate commentary on fiction and films," (Tropp ix).

The academic lambasting of the genre and the social stigma of being associated with those who enjoy death seems enough to repel audiences from reading and viewing works of Horror. But this has not been the case. Horror fiction and film rise and fall in popularity, yet remain part of many cultures. People like Horror. Most want to conquer their fears with another person important to them. The evidence for this is the archetypical scary-movie date. For some new couples, seeing a Horror movie with a potential sexual partner has become a part of foreplay, a ritual, using the experience of the shared fear as a means of becoming closer to one another, physically and emotionally. It is so inherent in our dating society that it isn’t often thought of as perverse.

Whether it is perverse or not, a truth that can be told about reading Horror fiction and watching Horror films is that this type of entertainment exists so that we may fantasize about unreal situations. Joseph Grixti’s
Terrors of Uncertainty: the Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction suggests:

The reading and writing of fiction are here understood to constitute what Inglis calls “a sociable, heavily conventional means of exploring and defining our private fantasies and their relation to our realities”. (Grixti 3)

In any type of genre writing, the audience, if provoked, will assume the role of the character(s) and place themselves in the imagined situations. Horror allows the audience to become intermeshed with a world that no one, save for the sadistic, would want to be part of. But it is not the discomfort which the audiences long to devour, it is the safety zone beyond the book’s last page or the rolling of the film’s credits that the Horror audience awaits hopefully.

The most effective Horror stories are the ones that twist our ideas of the safety zones established by previous works in the genre. For Horror, this authorial choice delivers a shock or destabilization in the participant, but in other genres this can be devastating. An example of this would be another sequel to The Wizard of Oz in which the author explains what galaxy Oz resides in, what planet Dorothy’s house really fell on, the
intergalactic bartering system munchkins are involved with, etc. This type of intrusion into the genre is one of the most severe, that of another genre imposing itself on an already established reality. The rules of fantasy are not the same as the rules of science fiction, but there are no written summaries, nor are there bibles that indicate these codes for these genres or the Horror genre. Our culture has clearly defined these safety zones. Children and animals are taboo subjects, for example, to use as victims in a Horror movie or film. When this boundary is crossed, the audience becomes too disturbed to enjoy the horrifying effect. Yet, when the victim is not completely innocent, the audience is able to deal with the death more objectively.

[...] We feel a curious thrill, half mental, half physical—a mixture of fascination and revulsion that ranges from the obsessiveness of Horror mavens to the equally emphatic recoil of those who wouldn't look at Night of the Living Dead if their lives depended on it. The landscape persists, but our responses to it have utterly changed—a bizarre development. (Kendrick 31)
Kendrick’s term “bizarre” is appropriate because watching something revolting, tense, or disturbing is equivalent to being unable to avoid images or ideas; it seems if the brain is instructed to flush out everything unwanted, the brain’s user has a compulsion to harp on the unwanted or unsightly image. The mere fact that images or ideas can bother us is cause enough for us to dwell on them; they have a power over us we cannot assuage.

But what of this powerful “garbage?” It would seem an audience member would likely avoid something that will dominate his or her mind in negative fashion. However, one reason Horror is a chosen as a form of entertainment is because the duration of the fear is not excessive. Audiences who go to the slasher films want to be shocked intermittently and do not necessarily want to take Freddy Krueger home with them. For these types, the desire for Horror is the craving of the thrill seeker. “At its topmost pitch, of course, fear cannot last long, in reality or fiction. At some point, if the source will not relent, the frightened one passes out,” (Kendrick 165). Some moviegoers might faint away at the sight of blood, gore, or their own personal phobia, but because Horror is a shared experience with fictional characters, heightened physical responses like fainting or vomiting do not affect
most. There are also the opposites who are completely desensitized to violence, but one can assume that the majority of audience members will be somehow affected by the sight of mutilation and/or death.

The dead, the dying, and the decaying are part of our animal fascination with the organic world. Children poke sticks into road-kill, break off the limbs of plants, pour salt on snails. This animal allure to death and murder may be vicariously lived out through Horror.

A canine trapped in a cage, if provoked or fearing for its life, will raise its hackles and quiver with tension. Both human and canine species share a sense of desperation and the will to do anything in their means to evade death or harm. The image of the terrified and desperate is one we can never ignore, if not for the psychological implications, than that of our innate natural reaction. We wish to be unlike the dead things we've evaluated in our past.

Lastly, the Horror genre functions as a release, not just for an escape but for a biological remedy, similar to what Aristotle calls a catharsis in Poetics. Grixti makes an analogous comment:

Claims about the cathartic or therapeutic properties of fictional violence often also
associate the exercising of the aggressive instincts which are allegedly released by contact with such fiction with the process of growing up. (Grixti 80)

For the most part, Horror is engrossing because we are able to jump in and out of this subconscious animalistic fear. That the Horror of Horror movies and books is not actual terror remains the best explanation for an audience's attraction to the genre.

Terror Versus Horror

It is important to determine what Horror is, in order to better identify what feelings a Horror writer/filmmaker attempts to evoke through his or her work. In trying to achieve a mental state of mind, Horror can actually bring about an emotional response as well. Terror is more associated to the self, whereas Horror is associated with identification.

There is an overlooked difference between the mental states of Horror and terror that psychologist Alexander Lowen clarifies. In his book, Narcissism: denial of the true self, he writes "[u]nlike terror [...] Horror is not an emotion, because there is no feeling quality to the state of Horror" (Lowen 132). The Horror film or text is defined as a separate experience from something that
terrifies a person. Lowen proposes that horrification strictly adheres to spectatorship or voyeurism: "One is horrified at witnessing a brutal attack on another but terrified when the attack is against oneself" (Lowen 132).

There is a coupling, however, of the terrified emotional reaction with the horrified reaction that is caused by identification with the subject. This is why it is possible for some people’s hearts to race while horrified, a biological consequence of identifying with an event, whether true or fictional. The sense of anticipation married with the Horror experience causing this reaction is a response to successful verbal or visual rhetoric. Although the body is not as affected while horrified as it would be when terrified, this seems to be the only discrepancy in Lowen’s theory. His contention about the bodily state is:

In Horror, there is no physical reaction. According to the dictionary, the essence of Horror is a ‘sense of shock,’ but I don’t think that ‘shock’ is the right word [...] In Horror, in contrast to terror, the body is relatively unaffected, for there is no threat of physical danger. The effect of Horror is primarily on the mind. (Lowen 133)
Lowen uses his words carefully. Saying that "the body is relatively unaffected" leaves room for the slightly increased heart beat and sweaty palms, even the potential to bite one's nails—all justified and welcome responses by readers and viewers of Horror fiction or film. 

More interesting is the incubation of the horrified emotion and how it manifests itself in the subject's mind. There is an after-effect of Horror much like a hangover from a night of drinking; one sets out to be scared, and when the Horror film or novel does its job too well, one is left with an undesirable result. A certain level of fear is desired by an audience member. Yet, there is no way of knowing how scary something might be, or, for that matter, how lame and uninspiring of fear:

    It lies in one's mind just as some indigestible food particle might lie in one's stomach, producing a similar sense of disgust and revulsion. One wants to throw it up to free oneself from it. (Lowen 134)

Lowen's simile makes perfect sense and the experience he describes ultimately leads to a purging reaction in the mind, which is to say the mind will take care to eliminate the repulsive thoughts. When the audience is repulsed by something in text or film, this purging is desired but
ultimately unavailable. It is not possible to stick a finger down the throat of one's mind and vomit all of the Horror away. Repressing the disquieting ideas or images, or simply forgetting them seem the only efficient way of eradication. Those who harbor the thoughts after the conclusion of the Horror piece, in my own definition, have reached a level of Horror known as 'disturbance.'

How an audience reaches such a state arises from identification with the characters, interpretation of the plot, and subliminal evaluation of the rhetoric. It is also important to keep in mind that both Horror and terror are self-centered emotions. In other words, terror is the survival response to an actual dangerous situation where the subject fears for his or her well-being. Horror, on the other hand, is a response to a dangerous situation where the subject fears for someone or something else, which, by having harm or death fall upon the endangered fictional character, will nonetheless cause emotional pain to his or her own well being:

To understand the narcissistic disturbance, we have to know that people react to the experience of Horror by denying the experience. We need to know exactly what 'Horror' is and what events in a home give rise to it. (Lowen 129)
Horror is egotistical. The denials of people’s reactions about Horror are common. Some people pride themselves on being unshakeable; furthermore, there is a case of Horror for every individual. Even if it’s not in the confines of a text or film uneasiness can arise in anyone with opinions about the world and how it should function.

Even movies void of the genre label, such as a war movie like *Saving Private Ryan*, persist in painting certain images, horrific images, across our field of vision. The imaginative response to place ourselves in the role of the character(s) eventually works against us:

[Horror] paralyses the mental apparatus as terror paralyses the physical apparatus. One may walk away from a scene of Horror, seemingly unaffected physically, but one may be incapable of thinking about anything but the Horror one has just witnessed. (Lowen 133)

It should be enough to acknowledge the Horror one experiences from an automobile accident where loved ones die in front of one’s eyes differs tremendously from the Horror experience of text and film. In reading or viewing, an audience can identify strongly, but will always be displaced from the mimetic world of the imagination.
Julia Kristeva has by far the most interesting and post-modern explanation of this removal. She argues that Horror is a product of abjection, the amputation of mind from the planes of subject and object, representing an exchange of one object for another. In the state of being horrified, the subject’s emotions become abject and thus he or she is taken psychologically into a limbo reality. The Horror that the subject can express, in other words, is tangible and triggered by an object of fear, but the animalistic fear that follows this voicing is indefinable, elusive to the human eye. Language permits one to tell another, “I’m afraid,” but the internal reactions beyond that expression are subsequent to the subject and the context of the situation. The substitution Kristeva suggests relates to the mind’s mechanism to detect a relative object of fear. For example, if one is locked in a coffin as a practical joke and the experience is a terrifying ordeal, perhaps, later, the sight of a mortician might provoke a response that is not clearly rational, although it may clearly be understandable. This subtle removal from the object remains to be seen as Horror, yet the re-imprisonment of the subject within another coffin would likely lead to absolute terror.

Kristeva’s *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*
discusses fear of the unknown and its relation to this pretense:

[...] The] fear of which one can speak, the one therefore that has a signifiable object, is more belated and more logical product that assumes all earlier alarms of archaic, non-representable fear. Spoken fear [...] is disclosed as the fear of an unlikely object that turns out to be the substitute for another. (Kristeva 34)

Recalling a past disturbance sometimes will indicate a general phobia, but Kristeva’s substitution of the object defines the complexity of the Horror-emotion as more than relating fear to an object. A person may be afraid of heights only because s/he is clumsy and peering over a cliff causes distrust in one’s self because of this knowledge. If well visualized, a fictional character hanging onto a branch over a deep gorge would provoke a horrified response to a person with this fear, whereas being the person hanging over the edge would instill panic and terror.

Similarities to Pornography/Eroticism

Some critics have discussed the similarities between the Horror genre and the erotic or pornographic genres. The basis for the comparison usually lies in the argument
that both genres function only to serve a primitive need. With Horror, "[t]he analogy with pornography is exact. In both cases, evidence of a cause-and-effect link is lacking, yet the desire to find one remains so strong that research goes on unstoppably" (Kendrick xviii).

Erotic fiction has the goal to evoke sexual arousal through its own coded messages, just as pornography has the same goal but tends to be more blatant and self-absorbed with its sexual images. Images of genitalia and intercourse will often provoke a response if the viewer sexually identifies with the actors, or, in the case with erotic and pornographic fiction, identifies by empathy through the prose and the images the textual rhetoric supplies. Horror, on the other hand, has multiple levels of emotional response and doesn’t appear so one-dimensional. Yet, the repulsion at the sight of blood and gore is the most similar of these responses. Social decorum dictates that blood isn’t something a person should want to see, and animalistic response dictates that the sight of blood means two things: danger or victory. Moreover, the appearance of sexual secretions can symbolize victory or defeat, yet many pornographic and erotic films and books indicate that all parties consent mutually to the sex act, and for sexual arousal this
quality must be maintained. Of course there are exceptions of particular fetish eroticism, some of which include acts of rape and violence for arousal, the 1960s “Roughie” movie for one example. In Laura Mulvey’s *Fetishism and Curiosity*, she argues that the pleasure of looking, scopophilia, changes for the voyeur with a fetish, in that the normal sadistic pleasure of watching no longer requires linear events, but only images.

[Fetishistic] scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. [...] Fetishistic scopophilia [...] can exist outside the linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone. (Mulvey 22).

The fetish, in this case, reminds us of phobia because it can trigger an emotional response through sometimes unconventional methods. By those Horror fans who seek blood and gore a case can be made that they have a similar fetish to those who enjoy forms of violence for sexual arousal.

Both types of arousal are biological and linked to humankind’s unavoidable participation with animal. In some ways the arousal through fear and through sex are connected to fertility; fear triggers to protect the
species and allow them to procreate, and sexual arousal triggers to continue population. Fear, if you will, is the defensive mechanism to enable sexual reproduction. Fear is a unique response, however:

Responses to a terrifying object or situation have marked physiological characteristics which can manifest themselves either through 'a fight or flight' reaction [...] or through a state described in the phrase 'frozen with terror'. Both types of response imply the presence of genetically determined biases resulting preparedness to meet real dangers. (Grixti 150)

The body is mortal, is animal. The physical response to explicit sex is a reminder of this, as graphic violence is a reminder of our bloodlust. The animal culture provides that strange blood means food and can also instill a sense of dominance in the viewer; those people are the ones who bleed-- I have survived. Therefore it would be reasonable to assume that seeing one's own blood is the antithesis of this feeling, and additionally, seeing the blood of another whom the subject cares for or identifies with is also akin to defeat.

The body's inside, in that case, shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the
border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one’s ‘own and clean self’ but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. (Kristeva 53)

This state Kristeva writes describes a content, healthy, uninjured animal. With identification we see that mammalian aspect of our species highlighted. Mammals create loving bonds from childhood because generally infant mammals are too weak to go off into the world on their own. If terror is the defilement of one’s “own and clean self,” then Horror is the defilement of one’s emotional attachment, though the two are interrelated; remembering the subject’s egotistical nature, metaphorically, one’s “own and clean self” is defiled if his or her loved one is taken away or threatened. So, the relationship between Horror and pornography and eroticism can be simplified as victory or defeat. Some viewers watch Horror for the grisliness, for the blood, for the gore, for the murder, as one might watch a pornographic film to see the semen, the breasts, the penis/vagina, the sex act. Other viewers, however, watch Horror for the thrill of its suspense, without awaiting
violence due to the fetishistic quality of his or her morbid curiosity. Some fall between these extremes. The differences primarily in the genres, furthermore, are the viewers and their expectations. This is to say that, unless there are particular circumstances, an audience participates in eroticism and pornography for the sake of sexual arousal, but the Horror audience may or may not be engaged simply for the quenching of their thirst for blood.

The Launching Pad: Gothic Foundation

Long before mall bookstores placed a placard above a rack that indicated “Horror Fiction,” the genre was known as Gothic fiction, which was more likely to be books about relationships that also included mystery, darkness, and the supernatural. Some of these stories completely avoided fantastic explanation of its other-worldly phenomenon and endeavored to present loose factual information about the strange occurrences. Ghost and monster stories and their like had been whispered for centuries amongst every socioeconomic class, but the need to be fantastic, yet logical, permeated some Gothic works, like The Castle of Otranto by Horace Walpole or The Vampyre by John Polidori.

The reason for this rational beginning to the Horror field is connected to the audience. Frightened, uneducated
peasants would have little difficulty believing a murderous dragon lived in a nearby woods, but the lower class of Poe’s time, for example, were better read and apt to be skeptical. And skepticism does the most damage to the impact of a Horror story. The suspension of disbelief is necessary for the author to employ effective Horror rhetoric.

Today, as the genre continues to expand its ground, an audience can find some stories situated in a contemporary, realistic setting, yet they include the fantastic. Richard Matheson wrote a short story called “Duel” that was about a crazed truck driver who, without motive, stalks a lone driver, on abandoned desert roads. And Stephen Spielberg, now known for his expertise in manipulating an audience’s response, made this story into his first feature film in 1971. The story is not completely believable, but it is horrific without including dark castles and mysterious lycanthropic murders in the pale moonlight. This separation does not define “Duel” as anything else but a Horror story, or perhaps a suspense story, but the difference defines Gothic fiction.

In examples of Horror there is always darkness and there is always an environmental disturbance caused by an unknown force. Shelley’s Frankenstein, through its
scientific details and methodology, is an example of
gothic logic, though the story also contains a great deal
of darkness, foreboding, and questions. The question on a
reader’s mind would be the heavy speculation about the
motivations of a created being and pondering of what
disruptions such a creation would bring on the world.
Gothic fiction never gives these answers quickly however,
because they are not solely based in animalistic fear but
in their spookiness; the gaps that this kind of Horror
fiction leaves are very effective for those who have
intense imaginative abilities—filling in the blanks with
answers to questions can be very horrific to those who can
define the worst possible scenario. While this property of
Gothic fiction can add to the Horror experience, it can
also detract from it because of failed expectations.
Mystery and suspense are built so intensely in a Gothic
story that occasionally the explanation can never outdo
the culmination of the horrific effect.

What survives today in Horror stories that reflects
the Gothic is the mystery and darkness, and for a work
like Frankenstein, perhaps a disturbance of cultural and
social mores. The ever-present darkness motif presents an
abstraction simply in its ability to hide the truth.
Humans sleep at night and have a keen sense of their
intrusion into a dark realm they do not belong to. This is a natural, animal reaction to night predators and a psychological response to helplessness. Our helplessness surfaces when we cannot depend on one of our primary senses, the sense of sight. Through our eyes do we most likely find answers; furthermore, when we need to rely on our ears, the majority of sounds heard, for example, in a forest at night can be interpreted by the imagination with infinite possibilities. Nighttime, whether described on page or introduced on screen, triggers a response in the mind that suggests something may be beyond our detection, which then makes us aware of our vulnerability. Stephen King comments in his nonfiction work, Danse Macabre:

In Looking for Mr. Goodbar, the final horrible sequence [...] where Tom Berenger stabs Diane Keaton to death, is shot in her dark apartment, with only a flickering strobe-light for illumination. (King 186)

If the premise is that darkness is equated with ignorance and light is defined as knowledge, the strobe-light sequence King uses as an example is an excellent device for horrifying. The images separated by stretches of darkness cause unrest in the audience because the situation does not present its truth all at once. What are
we missing in those brief blackouts? Is the character breaking free of her assailant, or is she being dominated and defeated?

Darkness also takes on a more intense sense of isolation because that which was solid and perceived before is no longer apparent. Being alone is intimidating, and yet being alone in the dark is more intimidating due to our sense of susceptibility to defeat:

In a sense, [we] cannot as yet trust surroundings to remain constant and unchanging when the sharp outlines which can be recognized when the lights are on can no longer be clearly perceived in darkness. (Grixti 156)

Spookiness through atmosphere, tone, and through darkness, has become a device that cannot scare independently. When night falls in a Friday the Thirteenth movie, one realizes that the murders will begin, just as they have in previous movies. Therefore, the only way this movie can achieve its goal to horrify is to present the audience with likeable, identifiable characters and other complications that will take some of the focus away from the typical problem of Jason Voorhees. This is an authorial choice that will be overlooked though, because
many audiences will remain affected by the standard archetypes.

Gothic fiction is trapped in its time and its setting, whereas some Horror fiction is not. It is important to keep in mind that at the time of its creation, Gothic stories were told in known places of the time and considered exotic only because of the limitations of travel. In the present, however, the stories that were born in the time of castles and Victorian mansions adhere to the devices. Hitchcock’s Rebecca (from Daphne deMaurier’s novel) is a wonderful example of a Gothic tale, but there is no supernatural entity revealed, only the ghostly story behind Rebecca’s strange untimely death. Even a skillful modern attempt at Gothicism has to rely on an exotic location and an enormous mansion, because these sorts of symbols are expected by the audience. The effect would be different if the story took place in an ordinary, dull suburban home. This is not to say it would be completely ineffective, nor is it to suggest that such a location could not be made to be spooky, but there would be a general violation of the catalogue of Gothic archetypes.
CHAPTER TWO

THE RHETORIC OF HORROR FICTION

Suspense Pacing and Slow Disclosure in *I am Legend*

Richard Matheson’s character Robert Neville in *I am Legend* represents the human race, a tremendously arduous role for anyone to assume. People generally admire those who can rise above their problems and conquer them, and yet a human side has to be forged in order to see such characters as real people. Neville is a man who has nothing to live for except to secure his house from hordes of vampires and drink himself to sleep at night. The attribute of courage makes readers respect him, and his weakness encourages readers to believe he’s more “real” than just heroic. In *Hitchcock: Suspense, Humour and Tone* Susan Smith quotes Ian Cameron:

> We are more likely to be caught up by the suspense if we are emotionally involved with the heroes. Identification is about the most reliable of the standard methods available to the direction of thrillers. (qtd. in Smith 18)

However, identification with the characters is only one component of suspense and incipient Horror. The reader needs to understand the fictional world and its events given the conventions of the genre, or any new conventions
indicated by the specific piece of fiction. The reader’s understanding of these conventions is of utmost importance in creating successful suspense, which can lead to Horror. Everything in the story must accord with what an audience believes possible. Otherwise, there is no possibility for suspense. (Booth 41)

Lame attempts at realistic behavior will likely conflict with an audience’s acceptance of the fiction. In reading a Horror story, there are times when one questions the validity of a character’s logic: “Why’s she doing that? This is stupid. I’d be a mile away from there.” So for excellence in Horror, a writer must contrive for their characters unwanted, terrifying situations that are inescapable, situations nobody could avoid; few will walk deliberately or knowingly into certain disaster.

Matheson constructs a situation early in I am Legend that forces his character of Robert Neville into a suspenseful encounter with vampires. Neville has been out most of the day investigating the ruins of society, looking for sleeping vampires to kill and any other clues about the vampire-disease that will aid him in his quest to survive. He checks his watch at one point and believes he has plenty of time to continue his search before nightfall. But on his way home, he notices that the hands
on his watch are in exactly the same place as when he checked them before: dusk is upon him. Harkening back to the discussion of identification, it can be said here that this encounter makes an audience aware that Neville is an imperfect being, as we all are — Neville has made a mistake by neglecting something vital, and it could happen to anybody. The security of daylight is at an end for him now, which results in a loss of control of the situation, and "[i]f pre-established identification is useful in building suspense, closer identification is generated by it" (Ian Cameron qtd. in Smith 18).

Matheson builds a long line of suspense at this point at the end of chapter four. In this case, the audience has been under the impression that Neville’s watch is working efficiently as he stalks sleeping vampires during the day. He becomes overly involved in some investigation in the city, and when he departs, he notices his watch has stopped. The stopping of Neville’s watch is a significant trigger to the line of suspense Matheson chooses to build.

The last line of chapter four is: “The watch had stopped” (40). This complication for the protagonist is placed at the end of the chapter, creating a suspenseful cliffhanger ending. Had Matheson written another sentence or paragraph after this last line that described Neville
running to his car and driving off, the effect would not be as intense as leaving the audience with their own questions. At this stage in the novel, if the reader sees the watch’s malfunction as problematic, he or she will be hard-pressed not to continue to the next chapter and thus be engaged in the outcome Matheson delivers in chapter five.

In the second paragraph of chapter five, Matheson inserts a list of questions to prompt the audience. “What time was it?” (41). The italics represent Neville’s bewildering desperation to find the answer. The identifying audience will want to know if the vampires have already awakened and if they await him back at his house.

To add to the suspense, Matheson chooses to intensify the complication by describing other factors of his life that make his situation more precarious and more real: “Suddenly he realized he was almost weak from hunger” (41). Including a bodily function that every human being can relate to, hunger, offsets the disbelief that a man would ever be pursued by vampires. The use of “almost” implies that Neville’s weakness has not dominated him completely, but it will be a factor in how well he avoids danger because the impartiality of the statement leads the
reader to question whether or not this problem will
worsen. Neville’s hunger has decreased the chances of his
survival if he needs to physically fight off the vampires.
These temporary pauses and formation of new questions and
new complications work to delay the answer to the final
question: Will Neville survive?

Matheson employs a parallel structure to add to the
suspense. He uses repetition to simulate a thundering
heartbeat, driving home ideas that otherwise the reader
could forget later in the book. The beginning of chapter
five shows a motif of Neville berating himself: “What a
fool he’d been!” “Fool.” “Shut-up!” “Fine, fine” (41). The
notion of Neville’s foolishness has already manifested in
forgetting to wind his watch and will continue to surface
at other moments in the story.

Another complication ensues as Neville nears his
house, placing him closer to danger, where complications
have twice the normal effect: “He couldn’t get any more
speed out of the station wagon” (42). The reader knows
that the slower his vehicle moves, the less of his chance
to evade the vampires, and once the reader considers the
incipient danger, Matheson chooses to slow down Neville’s
pace even more: “He had to slow down at the corner of
Cimarron” (42).
Here the audience meets the answer to a primary question concerning Neville’s survival and it is a discomforting one. Neville has raced home only to find that “[t]hey were all in front of his house, waiting” (42). There is no relief at this point and the reader is aware that Neville will have a conflict with his antagonists.

The vampires move in toward Neville, yet have not yet converged upon him. The tension is heightening, but Neville still has a buffer of space between himself and the vampires. This is another example of Matheson’s invented security, because as Neville tries to think of a plan, the vampire Ben Cortman, Neville’s old friend, pops up from nowhere and begins attacking him through the open car window that Neville so foolishly left down. The reader’s attention needed to be diverted for this surprise to have effect. The danger, seemingly, was in the pack of vampires, and the random appearance of a stray vampire may not have been considered at this moment either by Neville or by the reader.

As the battle with Cortman continues, Neville tries to start the car and it stalls. This further complicates the matter, but as the car hums to life, Cortman claws Neville across the face. This downplays the success of the
car's revival, so that Neville's safety isn't completely achieved. The longer he is in danger and his survival uncertain, the reader is trapped in Horror.

As an undisclosed plan comes to Neville's mind, another question is asked: "Would some of them guess what he was trying?" (44). He departs from his car, after running down some of the vampires with it. While en route to his garage, Cortman lunges at him shouting only a single word, "Neville!" (44). Something about Cortman's utterance is disconcerting to the reader--the vampire, Neville's old friend, still knows his name, as though he continues to hang on to an old thread of humanity that has been warped and twisted.

The reader feels secure once more, but this is another example of the false security Matheson chooses to employ. Just as Neville reaches the door to his home, he realizes he left his keys in the car: "Oh, God, the keys!" (45). It's unsettling to a reader that Neville has to return to danger because he's been very lucky to avoid his pursuants so far.

After a debacle in his car, Neville manages to reach his front door again, this time with keys in hand, yet Matheson slows his progress again as he has to stop to find the right key. He eludes the vampires and gets inside
the house, but before safety can be reestablished another invasion occurs: "As he slammed it shut, an arm shot through the opening" (45). He breaks the vampire's arm in the door jam and shoves it out. Matheson has kept the suspense building since the end of chapter four and now it seems that it could finally conclude. His stabbing sentences, short and quick and precise, have created a pace to the story that evokes a feeling of frantic flight.

Now that Neville has safely avoided the vampires, an interesting dilemma arises. Matheson uses this moment, a moment where the reader knows Neville has reached his goal, to jump back into a final scene of Horror. Neville becomes fed up with his lot in life, and the rage he feels against the vampires overcomes him and he momentarily breaks down in a spell of anger: "Fury exploded in him. Enough!" (46). The word "enough" is so short, so final, it hardly prepares the reader for what will happen next. Neville's disposition becomes the problem as he runs outside the house shooting and fighting the vampires in a berserk rage. This is perhaps the most horrific of his problems in this suspense line; Neville has been fighting against other forces up until now, and his fight has suddenly devolved into a fit of self-destruction; Neville has become Neville's worst problem. A reader cannot trust
the protagonist any longer. Neville, outnumbered, hungry and exhausted, realizes his error as the swarms of vampires descend upon him on his front porch. He retreats, feeling the need to live return to him, and, after an entire chapter, the suspense line finally concludes.

The audience is left with another question, though. If Neville cannot sustain his sanity at this early point in the novel, what disturbing things await him in the ensuing sixteen chapters?

Betrayal in I am Legend: Causes of the Disturbed Imagination

Disturbance is the level that Horror reaches when it distorts social mores and beliefs. There are some instances in Horror stories where social rules are broken and never fixed, so that an audience will close the book or depart the movie theater with a "dirty" feeling all over. This property of disturbance opposes what most stories try to accomplish, in particular most Horror stories. The task of any story is to work through something, not abandon it with disappointment and disgust.

Nietzsche insisted that "all processes in the organic world are processes of outstripping and overcoming means reinterpretation, rearrangement, in the course of which the
earlier meaning and purpose are necessarily either obscured or lost.  

(Grixti 168)

Most often the case with Horror is one of overcoming some sort of enemy through a protagonist. Disturbing and uncomfortable moments in Horror stories can happen throughout, however. The conclusion of the story is usually a victory. The conclusion of a literary work or a film provides the simple solution to the rest of the presentation, the number at the other side of a long, complicated equation. Matheson's novel, I am Legend describes betrayal and disturbance proficiently and the novel's element of fear, besides suspense pacing, is grounded in the notion of perfidy, which ultimately leads to a disconcerting conclusion, not just for one character, but for humankind itself.

The first case of betrayal is found in the disease that overtakes the world and causes people to become vampires. There is a sense that Nature has turned her back on humankind and has chosen to replace us.

Robert Neville looked out over the new people of the earth. He knew he did not belong to them; he knew that, like the vampires, he was anathema and black terror to be destroyed. And, abruptly,
the concept came, amusing to him even in his pain. (Matheson 170)

This conflict between humankind and nature is prevalent in Horror stories. While we might see nature for its beauty and majesty, we also can be destroyed by it. In other stories Robert Neville’s predicament as the last man on earth would be made heroic and uncompromising, one final chance for humanity to rise against evil and prove its validity in the universe. But Matheson uses helplessness and vulnerability to characterize Neville; he utilizes Neville’s hope for survival and love to prove how weak humanity is compared to darker forces of nature:

A coughing chuckle filled his throat. He turned and leaned against the wall while he swallowed the pills. Full circle, he thought while the final lethargy crept into his limbs. Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever.

I am legend. (170)

Examining the outcome of Robert Neville’s life, a reader feels betrayed that humankind failed. The story points out the notion that we are weak, physically and emotionally. The entire species, when it should have been rallying
against evil, becomes extinct and is no longer remembered save for a legend. To become legendary while alive is something many strive for, but to become legendary posthumously doesn’t appeal to the egocentric mind.

Another manifestation of betrayal arrives in the story when fate betrays Neville; the injured stray dog he has gone to pains to befriend and care for ends up dying. The dog symbolizes Neville himself. When the canine breathes its last breath, there is a sad, disturbing foreshadow of the human breathing his last as well. Hope will die. Most commonly a reader will long to see that the dog lives--but the realism of allowing the dog to perish makes us feel betrayed by the cruel God telling the story.

Reinforcing the innocence of a dying dog, Matheson chooses repetition to drive the emotional pain home: "'You’re a good dog, a good dog’" (110). And then we are deceived by Neville’s own assumption that good will prevail, or that he needs to convince himself and, indirectly, the reader that it will: "'You’ll be all better soon,’ he whispered. ‘Real soon’” (110). The next line is a quick stab of reality, where sadness and betrayal may be achieved in readers who sympathize with animals, or Neville’s sensitivity to them: "Something broke in Neville’s throat. He sat there silently while
tears ran slowly down his cheeks. In a week the dog was dead” (110).

However, the most significant betrayal in the novel is Ruth’s personal betrayal of Neville’s trust. She has led him to believe that she is also human and not a vampire. In the following scene, she ultimately places his head on the chopping block by abusing the trust they have developed between each other:

“Robert, don’t look!” she begged, her voice pleading.
But he’d already seen.
He didn’t realize that his breath had stopped.
His blank eyes met hers.
“Ruth,” he whispered in a shocked voice.
The wooden mallet crashed down on his forehead.
[...] The mallet came down again and he cried out in pain. He fell to both knees and his palms struck the floor as he toppled forward. A hundred miles away he heard her gasping sob.
“Ruth,” he mumbled.
“I told you not to!” she cried.
He clutched out at her legs and she drove the mallet down a third time, this time on the back of his skull. “Ruth!” (153).
In this excerpt we see more repetition. Neville repeats Ruth’s name because the repetition signals to us his disappointment and surprise. She betrays his trust. When the reader witnesses this act they can interpret through this repetition that Neville has become emotionally as well as physically crushed by the woman. The ultimate display of Neville’s severe confusion and abhorrence comes when he locks his arms around her legs, as though he were a child asking to be forgiven for things he hadn’t committed. Even Ruth’s instruction to not look indicates that she has betrayed herself, as well as Neville, for she doesn’t want to give him to the vampires but also realizes that it is necessary.

This kind of exchange should not happen in a story with a protagonist like Neville, because it’s too easy to identify with him. When Matheson continues to portray Neville as spiraling to oblivion, one thinks about humankind’s mortality and the realistic notion that a single person will lose against millions because of misplaced trust. This is a particular effective piece of Horror fiction because it achieves unease by investing in realism and cuts the line of conventional rules where the hero must suffer and live. Robert Neville suffers, and struggles, and loses.
“Cask of Amontillado” and Repulsive Description

There is a human attraction to horrific description. When some people are children, their parents clamp a hand over the eyes during certain scenes of movies, or refuse to allow them to read certain authors. The parents shut the children out from the “bad” things, leaving them with a taste for the unknown. This censorship runs along the same lines for sex scenes in movies or erotic books. From the time we are children, our cultural baggage determines that these things are forbidden.

Once we are unhindered by parental censorship, we read or watch the horrific, as with sex, with one eye lustfully open and the other, closed with shame. Most of us feel uneasy participating in Horror because of early-established mores: however, the desire to see the grizzly, gory, and twisted is a fascination that some indulge and some avoid. This is the repulsion/attraction property of Horror.

In The Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne Booth quotes Anthony Trollope: “It is the first necessity of the novelist’s position that he make himself pleasant” (Booth xx). Edgar Allan Poe’s narrative voice seems pleasant enough in his stories, and sometimes goes too far in being cordial with his readers. But this pleasantness, in Horror
fiction, contributes to the shock produced by the story. "The Cask of Amontillado" is told in a way that is almost conversational in its casual tone. No conventional emotions are described to defend the narrator's attitude—Montresor does not feel ill over what he has done, and he has done a "bad" thing. Though this disturbs us, it also attracts us to the question, why? We want to understand Montresor's convictions, and yet, Poe will not allow such an absolution; he doesn't detail why Montresor feels compelled to plot and follow through with a murder because that could generate sympathy, and sympathy would ruin the effect.

When some use Poe's turbulent life as an explanation for the content of his stories and poems, they skirt their own involvement in Horror discourse. If readers accept the explanation that Poe was attracted to the macabre because of a warped, drug-addled mind, they cannot explain why they are attracted to his obsessions. Knowing the territory and the genre beforehand helps to define and explain the attraction to Horror in the readers' mind. Poe's readers already had a notion of what the underworld of tombs entailed. Therefore, the subterranean setting in "The Cask of Amontillado" prepared them for the possibility of a shocking story.
People then and now are drawn to locations such as
tombs and crypts because of our self-serving interest in
death. Poe created the mood for "The Cask of Amontillado"
from the afterimages of early morbid poems. This is the
first stanza of a 1653 poem by Christopher Burrell,
entitled "Elegie":

The chambers there with Coffins planched sure
Corruptions sap will not let long indure;
These worn and torn, in time renew'd again,
The cost of future Funerals maintain:
The lower floor's of earth, most rooms be ful,
Loe here the dead men's bones, and there a skul.
(Kendrick 12)

The content and descriptive words create associations
and establish morbid awareness in the reader. Coffins are
associated with death and imprisonment; Corruption has
consonance with "coffin" and indicates impurity, as though
death is an unnatural contagion for human beings, rather
than a life process. The poem is not lengthy, but casts a
spell of gloom over readers by the associations its
description make. The poet and reader work together in
making these words and concepts mean something more, but
it is our connection with society and what society has
determined about these ideas that is paramount to these
associations. One example would be our dread of bones and skeletons: merely mentioning the discovery of a bone in a story can be interpreted as a gruesome encounter.

In Horror writing, the influence of adjectives, metaphors, and content conjure images and associations that will repulse and attract. Perceived images and associations lead to specific concepts, as in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," which Nietzsche notes:

In particular, let us further consider the formation of concepts. Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes it origin; but rather, a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases— which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal. (Nietzsche 1174)

In the case of "The Cask of Amontillado," the reader encounters the same macabre images and ideas found in morbid graveyard poems. The bare bones, skulls, and darkness of the story will inevitably be a factor in the potency of its Horror potential, but there must be other
ideas that slowly make an impression on the reader to reach the threshold of disturbance.

Take an early excerpt from the story:

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much.

(785)

_Dusk_ places the story at the threshold of darkness--there is a sense of impending night. *Supreme madness* illustrates a mental state most are uncomfortable with. Poe uses the superlative, "supreme" to describe it as far more chaotic and dangerous than any regular night. And the image of _carnival_ comes into mind as a realm of chaos and freakish nature, a place where everything is possible.

In the description of the human interaction in this excerpt, Poe uses the verb _accosted_ to describe the subtext of the interchange between Montresor and Fortunato as one more violent than the audience can see. _Excessive warmth_ suggests that the friendly behavior of the two is false, and the informational, _drinking much_, further indicates how inauthentic these two men are to each other. The conflict established between Montresor and Fortunato draws in the audience because its cause is unrevealed.
The two characters are immersed in a surreal world of darkness and the chaotic carnivalesque. Because the reader can be expected to assume that structure and reason define ordinary reality, these abstract images of lunacy and the indeterminate relationship of the two characters confirm there something is wrong. Suspicion is aroused in the reader and this suspicion festers and transforms into dread as Montresor's plan becomes clearer throughout the story. Nietzsche defines the character type of a person similar to Fortunado,

They are deeply immersed in illusions and dream images; their eyes merely glide over the surface of things and see 'forms.' Their sense nowhere lead to truth; on the contrary, they are content to receive stimuli and, as it were, to engage in a groping game on the backs of things. Moreover, man permits himself to be deceived in his dreams every night of his life. His moral sentiment does not even make an attempt to prevent this, whereas there are supposed to be men who have stopped snoring through sheer will power.

(Nietzsche 1172)

Fortunato never suspects Montresor because of his need to create false security. Montresor's rhetoric
succeeds well due to his knowledge of Fortunato’s personality. Montresor chooses to constantly lure Fortunato out of the catacombs, highlighting the dampness of the tomb and the health risk. This technique resembles a type of reverse psychology: when Montresor says “Let’s go back,” he wants his suggestion to be interpreted by Fortunato as an unintentional challenge to go further below. Montresor challenges’s Fortunato to showcase his excellent skills in wine tasting and prove better than other wine-testers and authenticate the Amontillado.

“The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge” (784). The story’s opening sentence conveys the message that revenge will be had on Fortunato, but the narrator’s rhetoric does not force us to think immediately of murder as the retribution. The fact that a reader will presumably think of an “eye for and eye” makes this early declaration nothing more than an explanation, and does not foreshadow evil intent. In the second paragraph we learn that this is not simply narrating but rhetoric that exists for justification of murder: “I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation” (784, Poe’s emphasis).
From the word choice, "immolation," we can conceive of the narrator's intentions through one word, and Poe heightens the story's rhetorical impact by placing the word at the end of the sentence. We know that Montresor plans to execute Fortunato for his wrong doings, and will use fire as the murder weapon, yet we have no idea where this will take place and haven't been given any information about the "walling-in" aspect of the murder. When the story finds us in the catacombs, niter on the surface of its walls, one can assume that fire will be especially dangerous in this volatile environment.

Poe uses his metaphors sparingly, though they are blatant when one rereads the story: "I broke and reached him a flacon of De Grave. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light" (787). The "fierce light" foreshadows the fiery death to come, and in addition shows us that it is the alcohol that will inevitably kill Fortunato: his love for fine wines and his drunkenness will hamper his self-defense when Montresor imprisons him.

Poe tells the story in such a way that it is conceivable that it will not end in Horror. He is describing, in plain fashion, a trek below the earth that includes two men, one embittered for some reason, to their
destination, a cask of fine wine. The narrative is successful because the understated metaphors and word choice indicate that this is not all that is happening. The surface of this story has no complications but we know the conflicts, like the setting, are subterranean. Through these descriptions we see Montresor’s soul: his disgust and malice. There is a sense of total control in the story, and not for one moment does the reader suspect that Fortunato (who is said to be “feared” by others) is anything but a puppet. The reader shares the irony that Montresor feels in the story. Through a rereading of the story, it is ironic when he shows Fortunato the trowel he will later use to imprison him, not to mention a second look at Fortunato’s name, which might be better changed to Misfortunato.

Like a lot of Horror fiction, the first read is always the most significant for the effect. The adjectives used in “Cask” establish mood but also intrigue us to determine their meaning to both the author and Montresor. Here, however, is an example of Poe’s writing that does not abuse the adjective for effect. Most of the focus of this paragraph is expository, yet it still affects our senses with gloominess and dread:
At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. (788)

Some words which bring about associations linked with uncertainty and Horror are “remote,” “end,” “crypt,” “human remains,” “thrown down,” and “lay promiscuously.” “Thrown down” as an image can bring to mind an act of violence leading to death and decay, to an “end,” in a “remote” place. These ideas are converging on each other to establish a sense of being within the story and at the same time being without, omniscient, knowing the nature of this particular universe. This passage affects a great deal of somberness just by describing a bone pile.

In “telling rhetoric,” as Booth describes it, adjectives become of great importance when influencing a reader. If Booth is right, then an analysis of Poe’s adjectives would show that he intends a coldly cynical,
dark, and morbid kind of retelling. In *The Power of Blackness*, Harry Levin states:

The final words are 'In pace requiescat.' Of course, the ghost will not rest in peace; he will haunt the author; yet for once it would seem that the murderer goes free, while the reproving voice of his victim is securely interred. (Levin 147)

The shame that Montresor should feel never surfaces in the story. In fact, there is an actual mockery of it in the following description: “My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so” (790). The reader believes that a heart should be ill at ease after the atrocious murder had been committed. But Poe relates that his narrator feels no guilt for what he has done; he is sick only because of the gloomy setting. So the ending note of this story describes a murderer who conceals his evil deed and who feels no remorse. The identification of Montresor has changed from a man who seeks revenge into a man who is nothing more than a bloodless killer. If you kill, you should feel disturbed and wicked by normal standards, but since he feels nothing of these emotions, we are repulsed by his convictions. Our disturbance causes us to search for an answer to his motives that makes
sense. Poe will not give any answers about this character, however; we will never know what Fortunato did to wrong Montresor. If Fortunato had cheated with Montresor’s wife, taken money from him, or killed someone he loved, we would not feel hollow at the story’s conclusion. But since the wrong done by Fortunato is not told in the story, it leads us to believe that its significance to Montresor was small. We deduce that Montresor wanted to kill someone. And that is all.

Fear of Isolation Prose: Matheson and Poe

Looking at a single phobia, monophobia, the fear of being alone, we can further study the effects Horror would give rise to a phobic-specific reading audience. Situations often arise in Horror fiction that place characters in solitude, which also accompanies a large, horrific problem. Solitude, in this case, is not to say that the character is physically alone, but that he or she can also be alone in their moral ideology. We see a larger group of friends slowly reduced to one or two people in a slasher movie, increasing a sense of isolation in the fictive world.

Grixti describes how Matheson’s I am Legend, deals with,
[... the vicissitudes of the last mortal on earth, an anachronistic freak, hunter by day, quarry by night, struggling for survival in a world peopled by the monstrous victims of a technologically precipitated plague of vampirism. The theme of horrific isolation in a once familiar world turned threateningly alien is also at the centre of The Shrinking Man, a novel which Matheson published in 1956 [...]

(Grixti 9)

In Richard Matheson’s *I am Legend* the character of Robert Neville is placed in a world populated by vampires. He is the last of his kind and now, ironically, the human being is a legend and the vampire is reality. Between the two given races, human and vampire, this matter of racial isolation is the most extreme; the typical Horror scenario paints the picture of the hunted protagonist in an hostile environment: Little Red Riding Hood in the forest with the wolf, a young blonde walking through a dark barn while a masked predator waits in hiding, or people swimming in the ocean while Jaws inspects their quadriceps for mealtime. Matheson gives his protagonist the entire world in which to run from his adversaries, which most of the time would be too large a space for Horror to work. The change of
population in *I am Legend* from human being to vampire makes for a very hostile setting and enlarges the concept of isolation in geographical terms.

Neville's scenario is a distinct example for the literature in question, yet Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" presents a much more familiar kind of isolation. Dark, dreary catacombs surround the two characters of Montresor and Fortunato, but there is a sense that the dead have eyes and are always watching. Even more interesting is that entombing in "The Cask of Amontillado" is an example of a micro-isolation contrasted to the macro-isolation of Matheson's novel.

The reaction to isolation is also an example of Horror's link to an inherent animal response to conflict situations: "The idea that some creature would drink human blood may be fantasy today, but it could have been a real phenomenon in man's early evolutionary history when he was vulnerable to animal predators" (Lowen 134). Matheson's text illustrates a predator becoming prey, while Poe's Masonic burial urges the sense of not just claustrophobia, but the howling and baying of an ensnared beast. The indifference and cruelty of the predator, Montresor, makes the capture more disturbing. Daniel Hoffman comments in Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe:
'The Cask of Amontillado' is, whatever else it may be, a screed of psychomachia, in which the calculating intellectual principle cleverly tricks, entraps, immobilizes and extinguishes the body. What were the injuries and the insults of Fortunato upon Montresor to the latter of the transcendence, that beatitude, which cannot be known to the soul still harassed and enslaved by passion. (Hoffman 220)

Beside phobia, information deprivation also complicates the feeling of loneliness in Horror. The question of when and where help will arrive, or if it will ever arrive, is foremost in a participating reader’s mind. This question can be asked throughout *I am Legend* and seems to be answered when Neville finds a fellow human. Then the answer becomes more disturbing when he finds out his friend is also a vampire. The response to the question then transforms our perception of the story’s conclusion: Neville was always alone. Jack Finney’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, published in 1955, a year after Matheson's novel, also employed an ending that disturbed its readers and made them feel the solitude and defeat of the protagonist.
We also find a problem in story perspective. The first person narration often limits and doesn't present enough information for the reader. In a sense, the prose then becomes isolated in one solitary mind. I Am Legend has a third person view limited to the protagonist, and “The Cask of Amontillado” is in first person via an unreliable narrator. If the audience were to become acquainted with every character’s thought, the world would cease to seem as lonesome and desperate. Booth asserts that person and narration in fiction creates these complications in information giving.

Traditional Gothic seclusion is another aspect of isolation in Horror fiction. Being locked in a dungeon or a room in a castle tower, or taken far out into the wilderness reoccur in Gothic tales and Faerie tales. The carnival people in Poe’s story don masks to cloud their identities—chaos reigns in that chronotope where one no longer knows who he or she is, much less who others are. Poe’s choice to make clear the grand joke on Fortunato, but also to make us aware that the carnival participants will not try to find him, nor will they take the time to help him.

Isolation created in Horror stories seeks two conclusions: the world remembers or it forgets. And when
the world forgets the pure, good people, it is then found to be cold and cruel, some might say too realistic, and this leads an audience to a more disturbing conclusion rather than one delivered by a typical rescue from the main problem.
CHAPTER THREE
THE RHETORIC OF HORROR FILMS

Wilderness Spookiness and the Gothic in The Blair Witch Project

Wilderness settings play a crucial role in the cinematic Horror experience as well as in Gothic literature. Modern Horror movies borrow from the old, unwritten theory that the forest or wilderness is the setting where we discover the truth, not just the truth of what is really out there but of our own mortality. External nature, in Horror movies, shows our weakness as animals and our ignorance as inhabitants of the universe. The Blair Witch Project is a meditation on our frailty in the face of unknown forces when image after image of darkened forest landscape drowns the audience's senses, initiating not only a feeling of isolation but of despair and Horror.

In "Documentary Horror: The Blair Witch Project," Jason Middleton addresses the relationship between rural and urban settings as it applies to Horror:

A standard plot device in the Horror cinema [...] is to place characters from an urban context, accustomed to a certain set of social rules and norms, in a rural context in which
these standards no longer seem to apply.

(Middleton 4)

The movie’s three main characters come from a suburban setting and their attitudes toward nature and wilderness are tinged with the subtle indication of elitism. They choose to go into the forest to dispel or further a local myth. These young adults are suburban artists, presumed to be more sophisticated than rural people. Nature exists to invoke the muses, but The Blair Witch Project is interested in proving that Nature does much more. The main characters’ reluctance to address the dangers that lie in wait shows up in the first ten minutes of the movie.

While collecting supplies, the main protagonist, Heather, “funs around” with the video camera, slowly zooming in and zooming out on a bag of marshmallows, and then actually pressing the lens into the bag to demonstrate how soft they are. This lack of seriousness creates a disturbing juxtaposition to the technique and gaze that Heather uses later in the film. In the car you hear loud Rock and Roll music, which further indicates that this trip is a celebration, not a march to face the wild unknown. And the audience absorbs these sounds and images of celebration as humanlike, inwardly agreeing that
this would be the sort of thing that most unknowing people would do.

The film presents urbanites in a human light early on and primarily through images associated by bodily functions and needs. They drink, smoke, and are crass and rude, and even funny at times, so we see them as an ordinary group of young adults, no different than most their age. Heather asks, “Do we have any weed? I hate scotch,” which points to the idea that they are out to have fun, to party. And later they have a brief conversation about somebody’s flatulence in the tent, and we see a half-obscured image of “Heather taking a piss.” Our own bodily needs allow us to acknowledge these characters as realistic and care about, or at least be interested in their well-being. When we are intrigued with the characters, we look to them to support the horrified emotion. Jason Middleton suggests that characters in Horror movies illustrate the horrified emotion by their reaction to monsters:

[I]n conventional Horror cinema, the fear and Horror that the audience is supposed to feel is inscribed upon the horrified faces of the characters as they react to the monster. (Middleton 9)
When times of crisis unfold in the film, we look to the faces of these characters whose point of view has become our own. The Blair Witch Project is innovative because it interprets the environment and the characters through two different cameras held by the main characters. Though most of the time we only hear Heather’s reaction to her environment, we see the looks of hate, dismay, and terror on Josh and Mike’s face, and then Heather’s in her self-shot soliloquy.

The low angle at which the camera is held forces the viewer to look up into Heather’s nostrils, her eyes are filled with tears that occasionally slip out and bead upon her eyelids, and her face is sweaty and dirty. (Middleton 10)

The shot Middleton mentions permits the audience to behold Heather as a physical being, someone who has feeling, who bleeds and agonizes. Hollywood films don’t usually make a point of sharing the nasal canals with their viewers and such an image causes a weekend crowd to pause. The dripping tears first well-up in the eyes and bead up in random places as real tears do when somebody cries. The image of grief, terror, and isolation looks authentic.

The characters are human, and the forest is not lighted for better onscreen visibility. The forest is a
stretching maze of darkness, fallen trees, and curious sounds. Then the supernatural appears, bringing something further undefined into the wilderness. The Blair Witch Project uses limited special effects. In fact, everything that happens could have been real. The group finds stick figurines tied up in the trees, and wake up in the morning to find piles of rock circling their tent. At one point Mike declares that whether the strange event was orchestrated by a witch or not, makes no difference because “backward” people who would be toying with them are no better.

The Witch is a product of the wilderness. One eyewitness describes her as having hair like an animal. And her invisibility in the film gives the audience license to use their imagination to picture her—Horror is more effective if the audience is willing to believe that the Witch is a tangible, dangerous force. The filmmakers purposely leave the Witch or Stalker faceless because they understand the effect, something understood by critics and readers since the sixteenth century. In Sir Philip Sidney’s The Defense of Poesy he contends:

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another
nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, Cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit. (Sidney 7)

Some people don’t care to use their own creativity to “paint a picture,” but this film demands that the audience be willing to do this, to become an artist, at least for the duration of the film, in order to satisfy any curiosity about the wild unknown. What are those “clack, clack, clack” sounds at night? What kind of person or being is this Witch, or is it a Witch at all? At one point Heather screams, while running through a tunnel of darkness and claw-like tree branches, “Oh my God! What the hell is that?” But Heather never tells us and we will never know. Our suspicions of what it might be are more horrifying. This is the impulse poets use to summon entities that don’t occur naturally in our world.

Since Horror is a dark form of fantasy, in our imagination lie the greatest fears because of a connection to our unconsciousness. Thus the creation of outrageous ideas
delivers an uncanny effect on the Horror audience. We replace the unknown with an unsettling idea of Horror, because we have experienced terror of some sort in our own lives and can apply it to characters in a film, or even to victims in a great catastrophe. The greatest advantage nature has over us is our ignorance to its mysterious ways, and what we are capable of imagining will always exist beyond our line of sight.

Rhetoric Within Rhetoric: The Blair Witch Problem

There is a problem with the Horror film The Blair Witch Project. How does one describe its rhetorical strategies? On the surface we can look at the film as an ordinary attempt to induce fear and disturbance, just as any Horror movie might try to achieve. This view of the film is a more straight-forward approach at an analysis, and yet the problem arrives when we take a known genre, Horror, and let it collide with another film genre, the documentary.

To be more precise, Blair is not a true documentary, obviously, but a fake documentary or mockumentary, a sub-genre first established with Rob Reiner’s This is Spinal Tap. Much like Reiner’s film, The Blair Witch Project was originally perceived as a true piece of footage. When audiences watch pseudo-realities they tend to interpret
the film as a truth, although they are already aware that the film is fiction; the documentary format has conditioned them to perceive the media as an actuality:

The Blair Witch Project bridges [conventions used] from reality TV and Horror cinema, featuring the handheld, shaky videocamera image and kinaesthetic sense of motion that viewers have become accustomed to from Police Videos, but here the potential threat is no longer just an earthly “criminal” but now a horrific monster. (Middleton 12)

The quality of filming and the grain of film are associated with images of reality. When we see something shot in this way we liken it to everything else we’ve witnessed that is similar: “The ‘found’ premise behind the footage that we see in the film is intended to contribute to its horrifying quality. The premise that we are seeing raw footage, however, is mediated by the editing of the film,” (10). The Blair Witch Project was manufactured and scripted and many knew this when they went to see it for the first time, but even if we perceive the film as fiction, the “found” footage transforms the movie into an object, something tangible and something that can be held in one’s hands. We know by the opening disclaimer that the
players in this footage most likely perished. But how? How did they?

A great many people went to see the movie thinking that the content was real, and this fact puts an entirely different spin on the film because for these viewers there is no question of the real/unreal dichotomy. Advertising was the prime suspect in this garnered belief. The movie’s tagline read, “‘In October of 1994, three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittesville, Maryland, while shooting a documentary. One year later, their footage was found.’” (Imdb.com, 11-6-03, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0185937/taglines). Another tagline is also convincing, “‘Everything you’ve heard is true.’” The powers of advertising worked in this case for a great number of people, priming them to perceive the film as real. No matter how audience members interpret the film, however, the visual rhetoric is quite convincing. The filmmakers shoot every scene purposefully, yet the film contains moments of seeming amateurism to further the illusion of realistic human behavior. Heather’s monologue is a fine example; we’ve seen this kind of self-shot before because most of us have toyed with a video camera at least once in our lifetime. The shot of Heather is the awkward, self-made shot where she turns the camera around
and looks down into it. If the context wasn’t horrific, this could be a moment in a family movie where a young girl decides to turn the camera around on herself during a family barbeque. But in Blair, “The viewer feels uncomfortably close to Heather’s face, in relation of proximity generally not allowed for in narrative cinema,” (Middleton 10). We are inside Heather’s tears, her nostrils, her physical being, and her moment in the dark, because of a convincing performance. It appears more real than Cops or The Real World because she doesn’t hold back. Somebody suffering might leave a confessional farewell like Heather’s. “I love you mom and dad,” she says, weeping into the foggy lens, and suddenly her head turns to a sound in the forest:

The intended affective response for the viewer remains within the framework of epistephilia—the desire to know—that Bill Nichols has identified as an organizing principle of documentary spectatorship, which distinguishes it from scopophilia that has been analyzed as a central component of spectatorship toward narrative film. (2)

The entire film is based on the compulsion of the audience’s desire to know more about what happened to the
three student filmmakers and also to know more about the Blair Witch. The status of the documentary style begins to shift from an informative, Discovery-Channel type account, to a reality television show, though interestingly before reality-TV actually became popular. The students have run into complications and now they are turning on each other. The attention of the two cameras changes to the human subjects delivering the documentary and not the documentary material itself:

These uses of the camera are retroactively justified by a moment later in the film when, during a period of great crisis for the group, Josh takes the videocamera from Heather and continues shooting with it despite her protests for him to return it to her. 'I can see why you like this videocamera so much,' he tells her with some bitterness, 'it's not quite reality. You can pretend everything is not quite the way it is.' (8)

Josh's line is significant on many levels because it can pertain to our perception of reality and also can address Heather's character. The Blair Witch Project goes to a plane of spectatorship that few stories can. Despite the different interpretations of its structure and
presentation, its imagery persists as a reality of its own. Some authentic documentaries have never been so intense and real.

*Psycho: Horrific Reality and Phobia of the Unknown*

The fear of the unknown has been mentioned in the previous chapter and has, in most cases, been directly tied to narrative information disclosure. The amount that an audience knows can put them in various states of mind, from horrified bewilderment to morbid curiosity. The speed with which interrelated questions pile up generates tension in an audience member, and this is a cinematic expression of Horror, a representation of the confusion that real-life Horror evokes. Hitchcock’s *Psycho* builds, then falls, and builds again, and by this action the film causes its audience to constantly evaluate the next pertinent question. This preoccupation with finding an answer causes the audience to be off-guard and vulnerable to the horrific.

The following is an example of a suspense-tree devised by Susan Smith, concerning Alfred Hitchcock’s *Notorious*:

The overall question:

"Will Alex find out that Alicia is an American agent?"

is dependent upon the question:
"Will Alex discover that the wine cellar key is missing?"
which is in turn dependent upon the question:
"Will the supply of champagne bottles run out and send
Alex down to the cellar for more?" (Smith 28)

As Smith notes, one question is dependent on another and it is the overwhelming pile-up that unsettles the audience. The balance of information disclosure has to be near-perfect and usually stacked in the audience’s favor; if the amount of questions become too overwhelming some audience members might dismiss the movie as “weird” or “bizarre,” which may be a common response to such films as David Lynch’s *Lost Highway* or *Mullholland Drive*, each possibly leaving an audience with a myriad of unanswered questions. But Hitchcock knows where to disclose information and end the suspense, and he pushes it to the very last possible moment:

While all films’ narratives necessarily impose certain epistemic constraints and conditions upon the viewer by virtue of the manner in which and extent to which they structure, process and release information relating to their fictional worlds, Hitchcock’s films are most noted, of course, for their central reliance upon the thriller genre’s own dominant method of
controlling our access to narrative information.

(Smith 16)

In relation to this notion of controlling access to information, take, for instance, a suspense tree illustrating the result of Marion's theft in Psycho:

"Will Marion be caught for stealing the money?"

Depends on,

"Will Marion successfully buy a new car for her getaway?"

Depends on,

"Will the patrolman keep following her?"

Because of the length of screen-time Janet Leigh has, the focus on the questioning centers on Marion Crane, therefore dictating the audiences' perception of her importance and significance to the story; she is the main character, the protagonist, and should probably be alive at least until the end of the movie, especially because this is a thriller and not a tragedy.

Psycho changes this perception quickly, however, treating its main character with cruel death images: a limp body drained of its exuberance and an unmoving, soulless eye. Everything that the audience had seen and knew of Marion has gone blank and now her lifeless body will be the only enduring image. Ironically, her death immediately follows her epiphany. Marion resolves to
return the stolen money and turn herself in, but the next
suspense-line grabs the unsuspecting audience member,
completely belying the initial catalog of questions. The
new suspense-tree suddenly becomes more urgent than ever:

"Will Marion live?"

Depends on,

"Who is the figure coming into the bathroom?"

Depends on,

"Will Marion notice the intruder?"

Depends on,

"Will Marion evade her attacker?"

The answer to these questions disturbs an audience who has
been pulling for Marion to escape the situation. Hitchcock
changes gears rapidly to replace the fallen protagonist,
and, with more irony, he chooses the killer to take the
role of main character:

Such variations in the patterns of suspense
undergo a much more radical development in
Psycho where the opening titles sequence propels
the viewer into a much earlier, more sudden and
far more advanced state of suspense by evoking
an instantaneous sense of dread (rather than
mere suspicion or apprehension) about what is to
follow a state that is reprised late during
Marion’s car journey. The film therefore mixes up and reworks the various stages of suspense in a way that is much more disruptive and unsettling than a gradual, predictable build-up of tension (which at least offers a certain security of expectation). (Smith 27)

The flow of the suspense has been twisted and arranged in an order that perplexes the conditioned mind; audiences may be asking the question, “If she was going to die, what’s the purpose of bringing Marion into the story at all?” The answer to the question reveals itself at the climax of the film where players in Marion’s life show up at the Bates’ Motel, and their appearance shifts the weight again of the protagonist role and puts further strain on the audience’s perception of the story.

In real life questions don’t usually build at the speed or in the fashion as they do in Psycho, but the human problems that surface edify us, and what is questionable about reality has become plausible. The perfect example of this can be illustrated by the image of Marion’s car sinking only part way into the water. After Marion’s murder, Norman needs to protect his mother, so we feel that he’s innocent, to an extent, and we don’t want him to be caught. It’s even possible that we like Norman
Bates. So the subject of our interest changes, but the questions haven't become less numerous at this point.

Smith cites Douglas Pye's observation:

Two of Hitchcock's greatest films, *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960), for instance, depend on suppressive narrative and on the moments of revelation produced by sustained withholding of information from the spectator. Each of the films departs radically from Hitchcock's expressed preference for the methods of suspense, in which the spectator is placed in a position of knowledge, in favor of surprise, in which something previously withheld is suddenly revealed. (qtd. in Smith 35)

Every image introduced to the viewer's eye can be understood as a significant file in a mental database of information. And not every image that exists in our understanding of a movie can be actually seen by all viewers; sometimes that which isn't revealed has just as much relevance to the audience. We deal with this assortment of mental pictures like a pile of cards. We wade through them and try to make sense. A successful Horror film, such as *Psycho*, constantly mixes these pictures up, confusing our senses and maybe even
frustrating us with its wild route to logic, but most of all the film keeps us guessing and questioning and unsure, openly vulnerable for attack.

Images of Lunacy and Normal Norman Bates
An audience will perceive Norman Bates the first time as a humble, perhaps shy individual, a "mama's boy." It is possible that we have met people like Norman Bates. Hitchcock presents Bates in ordinary garb with combed hair and clean skin. When we are presented with someone outrageous in appearance we're more likely to accept the possibility of insanity. Norman Bates is normal in appearance and gesture, and this disturbs our senses of expectation. "Human monsters are characterized by their lack of human feelings. Mass murderers, sex criminals, and muggers are regarded as monsters. Their behavior is incomprehensible to a normal person and evokes a sense of Horror" (Lowen 135). The interesting thing about a character such as Norman Bates is that he has extreme human feelings. In such a case, I would think that the Horror would stem from the disturbing, an over-turning of moral beliefs: how does someone who knows right from wrong do such things?

The audiences' original interpretation of Norman's voyeurism at the time of the film's initial release may
have been different, yet the scene where Norman spies on Marion seems to present a man lusting after a woman, a heterosexual male image, and in Gus Van Sant’s version Norman is clearly masturbating as he watches. At the original film’s release in 1960, just watching alone may have been seen as deviant and therefore led some to believe Norman had mental problems, or was just “no good.” At present we might say that perhaps Norman is lonely and isolated from the world by his mother. But Norman later kills Marion, and the effect of the slaying on a new viewer might be even more unsettling with him or her after seeing the entire film; Norman lusts after Marion and yet he kills her, but he was amicable to her before—the parts don’t add up to the whole and we see Norman as afflicted.

The voyeuristic scene of Norman watching Marion through a hole in the bedroom wall presents him as a disembodied entity, just a gazing eyeball. He has become only a watcher and his personality has been left in limbo. The shower scene presents another likeness to this when the image of an older woman stabs Marion. The image is shadowy, indistinct, between worlds. These moments of information deprivation lead audiences to be much more surprised when Norman barges into the basement at the
film's climax, eyes blazing madly and gray wig askew on his head.

The images in Psycho provoke our senses but the audio track plays an important role in the film's overall effect as well. We are given a shot of the Bates' house with only the indication of Norman moving around and a solitary image of a woman sitting in a rocking chair. These images feed curiosity but the conversation between Norman and his mother can be perceived as another example of disembodiment. We never see the facial expressions or the gesticulations, and have no idea what Norman's mother actually looks like; all we have is the sound of Norman's voice. Hitchcock deprives us knowing, causing our interpretive minds to work at assembling images of our own.

The effect of discovering that Norman and his mother have become one tries all our original conceptions and places us in an unbalanced state. And when we are unbalanced we are more likely to be captivated and controlled by our Horror. This normal man is the monster we thought his mother, but his lunacy goes far beyond what we understood his mother to be: Norman is both identified with and abhorred, an angelic demon.
David Sterritt’s *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* introduces a concept worth contemplating. Norman’s female side, *Norma*, as Sterritt names her, has to be recognized by the audience as an outside force. Norman’s mother has been dead for sometime, and though Norman’s memories and knowledge of her character perhaps help him to assume her personality, this is a side of Norman Bates, not actually his mother:

Norman’s identification with his mother is an entirely internalized phenomenon that a mirror could not capture; even when he belies he is his mother, he would see his face when looking into a mirror. Yet his identification with Mother has become so complete that, on a hallucinatory level, her face is his face. Our fleeting glimpse of Mother’s face over Norman’s is Hitchcock’s way of conveying the impossible mental contortions in which Norma is now permanently engaged – and conveying these through imagery that is as accessible as it is complex. (Sterritt 117)

But where does the real Norman go when his feminine side takes over? Has he gone to that limbo place we’ve mentioned before? The answers to the questions never
arrive because Hitchcock seeks heightened confusion. The common, "normal" person can't understand Norman's mind for the Horror to be effective. They could only be given so much, just a slight opening, a hole in the wall to look inside Bates' head.

Robin Woods contends in David Bordwell's *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*:

That we all carry within us somewhere every human potentiality, for good or evil, so that we all share in a common guilt, may be, intellectually, a truism; the greatness of *Psycho* lies in its ability, not merely to tell us this, but to make us experience it. It is this that makes a satisfactory analysis of a Hitchcock film on paper so difficult; it also ensures that no analysis, however detailed, can ever become a substitute for the film itself, since the direct emotional experience survives any amount of explanatory justification. (qtd. in Bordwell 228)

Woods is correct here, though the answers given are not completely realized. I agree with the first statement regarding the film's extraordinary ability to allow an
audience to "experience" the emotions while watching, and I also agree that defining what horrifies in the movie can be a daunting task for any critic, especially because of the multifaceted nature of Horror--some scare easier and for different reasons than others. However, Woods forgets to address the duality of the film's interpretation. In other words, we know this movie's outcome already, and well.

I had the rare privilege to watch the film with someone who had never seen it, nor did they know the twist of Norman-Mother. The movie's outcome was met with repulsion and sickened, morbid awe. Yet, the film is still successful even for those with knowledge of the ending. The visual rhetoric of the film shifts emphasis according to our insight into the characters. It's possible that a multitude of films follow this rule as well, yet Psycho affects us differently the second time watching and effectively the second time, and for an entirely different reason.

We watch Normal Norman's demeanor and half-smirking smile and think how creepily nice he is, and the notion of his apparent normality dwells inside of us. We need to understand the morbid motivations of a person like this. Hitchcock seems to fully understand that not knowing
drives the audience to intrigue and Horror. We will never fully comprehend the questions that arise from horrific images, just as Norman Bates will continue to puzzle and horrify us, even though we understand where his story leads. But we don't really want to understand him or anything horrifying. We can ignore the horrific if it persists but the answer, if sought after, opens a different door for every viewer. And on the other side of the door, for that specific person, lies the most horrible answer imaginable.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Every text and film genre has its own methods and techniques to bring about a certain response in a reader or audience member. Horror is not unlike the others in this regard. We have seen that personal and general phobias, which can be associated with the fear of the unknown, play an important role in how affecting Horror will be on a participant. Information deprivation can also cause tension and anticipation that leads to "the surprise," and through the content of the Horror work, some writers and filmmakers challenge moral and social beliefs, creating disturbance in those who give credence to such values. The most relevant concern in this discourse, however, should be that of humankind’s tendency to embrace animal impulses and examine the brutal side of our species. We live in a world of imagined rules and civility, yet we need a medium to live through our most secret, savage inclinations and deviant thoughts.
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